

Swami Premananda

Teachings and Reminiscences

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PREFACE

“**W**ORDS,” said William Hazlitt, “are the only things that last forever.” Though all else perishes, a man’s utterances remain. We hope this volume of the teachings and memories of Swami Premananda will help to immortalize the words of this saint. We would not, of course, pretend to interpret them—they should speak for themselves. And they do, for they proceed directly from his heart. His overwhelming faith and frank honesty shine in every sentence. He is emotional, but at the same time sturdy as an oak ; he chastizes, and yet the next moment words of love pour from his pen. He was, indeed, a man of God.

“Live an exemplary life,” Swami Premananda wrote again and again to his devotees. “Let your heart expand in love, embracing all. There is nothing higher than love.” How well he mirrored his own teaching! He drew others to him by his extraordinary love and breadth of heart. “We looked upon Swami Premananda as a very embodiment of love,” wrote one of his disciples. And, to be sure, it was this love—generously open and unselfish—which in turn attracted the love of his devotees and bound them to him forever. These are the fortunate persons

who are responsible for the reminiscences in this volume, and to whom we are deeply indebted for granting us a glimpse into the life of a great man

The material appearing in this book was originally published in *Vedanta and the West* magazine, and with the exception of the reminiscences was translated from the original Bengali. All of the selections have been freshly edited and revised.

We are most grateful to Swami Nirvanananda of Belur Math for providing us with the letters written to Swami Ramakrishnananda (as well as two others in the "Miscellaneous" section), the majority of which we have translated and included in this present volume.

We are additionally thankful to Swami Prajnanananda, Secretary of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Math, Calcutta, for kindly granting us permission to translate and publish the three letters to Swami Abhedananda. These were originally printed in the *Patrasamkalan*, a Bengali book published by the publication department of the Math

We are also grateful to Christopher Isherwood for several helpful editorial revisions.

THE PUBLISHERS

PREFACE TO THE INDIAN EDITION

THE wonderful spiritual legacy of Sri Ramakrishna came to mankind not only in the form of his divine person and saving words, but also as a band of illumined disciples who were to bear testimony to his authority, love, and power. These transfigured men and women—reflecting as they did the facets of the Master's being—in the process of their own living and moving brought home to multitudes a closer view and fuller understanding of the phenomenon that was Sri Ramakrishna. Hence it is being increasingly felt as days pass that a thorough-going study of the lives, and teachings of his direct disciples is of utmost importance for effectively inheriting what Sri Ramakrishna has left behind for man.

We are happy in being able to present here the life and teachings of such a direct disciple, Swami Premananda, and reminiscences of him by senior monks and devotees.

In truth a *nitya-mukta*, an ever-free soul, Swami Premananda was as flaming in his holiness as in his love, as amazing in his faith as in his dedication. No one can read his life and teachings without catching the 'contagion of

the holy', for he knew no living except for God, of whom he had direct experience.

This helpful book which was originally published by the Vedanta Press, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, U.S.A., is being reproduced by the Advaita Ashrama in India to make it easily available to the reading public in this part of the world. For giving us kind permission to do so, we are thankful to Swami Prabhavananda, the Head of the Society.

We firmly believe that all earnest seekers of true life will find in this book a perennial source of inspiration, guidance and nourishment.

Advaita Ashrama
Mayavati, Almora
Himalayas

PUBLISHER

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INTRODUCTION

OUTWARDLY, there is very little to distinguish a saint from ordinary men. In most instances, he appears to us a somewhat simple, unobtrusive figure; and with the possible exception of a few, his name remains unknown to the world at large. The greatness of such men lies elsewhere. Perhaps that is why the biographer, should he seek to communicate that greatness, finds his task so difficult; and, if satisfied with only a superficial account, seldom touches the real man. Much of the saint is shrouded in obscurity. The majority of his life is lived within, where the author is barred from venturing. He eludes investigation because the very nature of his saintliness exists beyond the descriptive power of words or the capacity of common understanding. As knowers of God, they contain some of His mystery and profoundness. And like Him they will remain largely incomprehensible to those who are yet un-

fitted to bear the awesome weight of spiritual knowledge.

Swami Premananda possessed to the fullest degree the characteristics we have mentioned. Saintliness shone in him. His purity was irreproachable. In fact, so unblemished was his character that Sri Ramakrishna was once moved to remark: "Baburam is pure to his very marrow. No impure thought can ever cross his mind." Many others also attested to this absolute stainlessness; and, indeed, to the end of his life he evidenced a childlike simplicity and guilelessness noticed by all who made his acquaintance.

He also was of a very loving nature. Many of the young monks who came under his supervision remember that although he could be a stern taskmaster at times and issue severe scoldings, all of his reprimands were suffused with a love which flowed out to them in a hundred different directions.

A senior Swami of the Ramakrishna Order recalls this incident in his own experience:

Just after I had joined the Order at the Belur Monastery, I happened to be present when Swami Premananda was severely scolding another young monk. I said to myself: "Ah, this holy man loses his temper." As soon as this

thought crossed my mind, Swami Premananda suddenly turned to me—and smiled! I knew then that his anger was never a real anger, but only employed as a means to instruct us. From that moment on I could never be upset when he scolded me. On the other hand, I felt a strange undercurrent of joy, and considered his reprimands to be blessings

SWAMI PREMANANDA was born on December 10, 1861 in the prosperous village of Antpur, in Hooghly district of Bengal. His parents gave him the name of Baburam. His sister was married to Balaram Bose, a wealthy devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Both his mother and father were noble and pious villagers, and we may assume they were highly pleased when Baburam began to show evidence of a strong spiritual nature. From a very early age, perhaps five or six, the young boy was prompted toward living a holy life. Even then he was heard to protest if anyone would tease him about marriage. "Don't make me marry, don't," he would cry. "I shall die if you do."

At the age of eight his greatest desire was to live apart from the world in a small hut surrounded by trees. Baburam would often visit the ascetics who lived along the banks of the Ganga, and perhaps it was they who inspired him with the idea of leading a

solitary life. However, these thoughts did not in any way cloud his warm, sweet nature, which drew the attention of his classmates and inspired their affection.

After completing his elementary schooling, Baburam went to Calcutta for higher studies. It was there he entered the Metropolitan Institution at nearby Shyampukur where Mahendranath Gupta ("M"), the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, served as headmaster. By another curious coincidence, it was also there that Baburam made the acquaintance of Rakhai [Swami Brahmaanda], and the two of them soon became fast friends. About this time Rakhai was just starting to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, where the latter was employed as priest of the Kali temple. When Rakhai described the great holiness of Ramakrishna to Baburam, the boy expressed an immediate desire to meet him. Therefore, Rakhai asked his friend whether he would like to spend the night at Dakshineswar. Baburam, at first thinking they were to visit a monk who lived only in a small hut, said, somewhat apprehensively, "But where will we sleep? Is there room?"

"There might be," answered Rakhai.

"What shall we have to eat at night?" asked Baburam.

"We shall manage," Rakhal said, strangely unperturbed.

The two of them left for Dakshineswar the following Saturday, arriving at sunset. It was the month of November 1882. Less than four years remained in Ramakrishna's life, but they were to be immensely valuable years. He was now to begin the final gathering of his disciples, and through the lesson of parable, the weight of philosophic truth, and most of all through the overpowering influence of his own spiritual presence, to mould these young men into fit instruments for his work. Some of them, such as Swami Vivekananda, were to speak before large audiences in the United States and eventually draw the attention of the world, others, like Swami Premananda, would lecture and travel rarely. But all of them, without exception, were to receive the grace of the Master, and carry out his divine instructions according to their own particular capacities and qualifications.

BABURAM'S initial reaction to Dakshineswar was one of delight. He was immediately charmed by its beauty and tranquil atmosphere. And indeed, the high-domed Kali temple, towering like a proud mother over the wide courtyard and rows of smaller tem-

ples below, must have been an impressive sight to the spiritually precocious young man.

Ramakrishna was not in his room when the young men entered it. Rakhal at once sensed that he was needed, for he excused himself and went to the temple in search of the Master. A few minutes later he returned, leading Ramakrishna, who was in a God-intoxicated state, by the hand. Rakhal was carefully guiding his steps, warning him of the high and low places. After entering the room, Ramakrishna sat on the small bed and gradually began to return to consciousness of the outer world.

When Baburam was introduced to him, Ramakrishna immediately said, "Ah, so you are a relative of Balaram! Then you are related to us also!" After a few more questions he caught hold of Baburam's hand and said, "Come closer to the light. Let me see your face." In the dim light of an earthen lamp he carefully scrutinized the features of the young man. Then he examined the boy's arms and legs. Finally, he weighed his forearm by placing it on his palm, then nodded approvingly. Apparently satisfied with these physical tests, Ramakrishna said, "All right, all right." It was not an unusual practice for him to employ this method of assessing a man's character. He had on several occasions

remarked that physical characteristics can be a strong indication of a person's spiritual development or emotional temperament. He would frequently say that the hand of a deceitful person is heavy or that squint-eyed people are often wicked; on the other hand, eyes that are lotus-shaped belong to people with good thoughts and those of a *yogi* have a reddish and upward cast.

That night Baburam slept just outside Ramakrishna's room. No sooner had he fallen asleep than a most unusual thing happened. He was awakened by the presence of Ramakrishna, who was whispering excitedly to Ramdayal, Baburam's companion on the veranda. "Please tell Narendra to come here", Ramakrishna was saying, his voice trembling with anguish. "I feel as though someone were wringing my heart like this—", and he twisted the cloth he was wearing tightly, as though wringing water from it. "Ah, he is as pure as Narayana himself. I cannot bear life without him." Ramakrishna left them, but returned an hour or so later, still upset. This continued at hourly intervals throughout the night. Such unusual behaviour of Ramakrishna, despite its strangeness, deeply touched Baburam. "What affection this holy man has for Narendra!" he thought to himself. But at

the same time, he was puzzled over Narendra's apparent neglect of the Master. (Narendra was later to become Swami Vivekananda).

The next morning he found Ramakrishna seated joyfully in his room, his face peaceful and serene, a sharp contrast to the night before. Baburam took his leave, and Ramakrishna asked him to come again soon. The visit left a strong impression on the young man, and he promised himself that he would return on the following Sunday.

He arrived in Dakshineswar on the appointed day, and Ramakrishna welcomed him with a smile. "It is nice that you could come. Why don't you go out to the *panchavati*? (A small grove planted with sacred trees in a circle and designed as a place in which to practise spiritual disciplines.) They are having a picnic there, and you can meet Narendra." He obeyed the suggestion and walked the short distance to the grove where Ramakrishna himself had planted the five sacred trees with his nephew Hriday and had undergone severe austerities for many years. Almost immediately he recognized this place to be a nearly exact replica of the secluded hermitage he had envisioned in his early boyhood! Within Baburam there was beginning to form the

vague realization that his relationship to Ramakrishna stretched far beyond the limits of his present understanding, and that a number of mysterious and profound links joined him to this gentle holy man—the full significance of which only the years to follow would reveal.

WE HAVE read in the accounts of Sri Ramakrishna's life of his unusual sensitivity to impurity in any form. If a person whom he considered immoral even so much as touched a cup or dish from which he was to eat, he would almost immediately experience an unpleasant reaction. The touch of money or of an impure person could cause him actual physical pain. The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, had similar reactions and is known to have suffered a burning in the feet from the touch of too many worldly persons.

Almost at their first meeting, Ramakrishna seemed to sense Baburam's purity. In time the Master found that when he entered certain ecstatic states, only Baburam was able to touch him. "Such a state comes on me during ecstasy," he said once, "that I can touch Baburam only. If he holds me, then I don't feel pain. If he feeds me, I can eat."

"M" recorded this conversation, in *The*

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, between himself and the Master concerning the latter's opinion of Baburam :

MASTER: "Yesterday I came to know Baburam's inner nature. That is why I have been trying so hard to persuade him to live with me. The mother bird hatches the egg in proper time. Boys like Baburam are pure in heart. They have not yet fallen into the clutches of 'woman and gold'. Isn't that so?"

M: "It is true, sir They are still stainless."

MASTER: "They are like a new pot. Milk kept in it will not turn sour"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "I need Baburam here I pass through certain spiritual states when I need someone like him. He says he must not, all at once, live with me permanently, for it will create difficulties. His relatives will make trouble. I am asking him to come here Saturdays and Sundays."

This took place on June 30, 1884, more than a year and a half since Baburam's first meeting with Ramakrishna; so we may assume Baburam's studies and responsibilities at home were keeping him from any visits longer than week-ends. Sri Ramakrishna had been cautious. He did not want to disrupt family relationships any more than

was necessary. A week earlier he had told "M": "I don't want Baburam to tear himself away from his family. It may make trouble at home."

But despite all remonstrances, even from Ramakrishna himself, Baburam was finding school insipid and uninteresting. He began to neglect his education. However, he was still unsure whether or not to completely abandon his studies. On one occasion, Ramakrishna tested the boy's interest by asking him: "Where are your books? Don't you intend to finish your studies?" Then he turned to "M" and added that Baburam "wants to have both," meaning the world and God. "That is very difficult," Ramakrishna said. "What will you gain by knowing God partially? Vasishtha, though a great saint, was grief-stricken over the death of his son. This amazed Lakshmana, [the brother of Rama] and he asked Rama the reason. 'What is there to wonder at,' Rama replied. 'He who has knowledge also has ignorance. Go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.' If a thorn enters the sole of your foot, you must get another thorn to take it out. Afterwards you throw them both away. Likewise, one procures the thorn of knowledge to remove the thorn of ignorance; then one goes beyond them both."

Baburam smiled and said, "That's what I want."

"But, my child, can you attain it by holding to both? If you want that then come away," Ramakrishna answered.

"You take me away from the world," the young disciple said with a smile.

IN LATER years Swami Premananda would often speak of the motherly concern the Master had for him and the rest of his young disciples. On one occasion Hazra, the witty but calculating skeptic whom the Master indulgently tolerated, said to Baburam: "Why don't you boys ask Ramakrishna for some powers? He gives you sweets to eat and you are satisfied. Don't be such fools! Ask him for something better."

From his room, Ramakrishna noticed Hazra whispering these things to Baburam, and when the boy walked up to him he asked him what Hazra had said.

"He said I should ask you for occult powers," Baburam openly replied.

At once Sri Ramakrishna approached Hazra. "What nonsense are you teaching these boys?" he said sharply. "Why should they ask me for powers? Don't they know that everything I have belongs to them? I am their very own. They know their relation-

ship to me. They won't ask me for just *this* or *that*."

The Master's compassion for his young disciple knew no bounds. One night, while Baburam was tanning Ramakrishna, the latter forced him to sleep on his own bed. Baburam insisted that such a thing would be sacrilegious, but Ramakrishna replied, "Outside the mosquitoes will bite you. I shall wake you if it is necessary." At other times, the Master would come to Calcutta to see Baburam and feed him with sweets that he had brought from Dakshineswar. Sometimes the long separation from Baburam would make the Master cry like a child.

The ecstatic states of Sri Ramakrishna and the holy atmosphere of Dakshineswar began to sharpen Baburam's desire for an experience of God. He importuned Ramakrishna time and again to give him ecstasy. "I'll ask the Divine Mother," Ramakrishna replied. "Does anything happen by my will, my child?" Therefore, he prayed to the Mother, imploring her to grant his young disciple an ecstatic experience. "Please, Mother, give Baburam a little *bhava* [ecstasy]," he cried to her. Later he told his devotees that she said Baburam would not have *bhava*, but knowledge of God instead. This pleased the Master. "At least he will

have that, and find peace. I have been much worried about him.”

DURING THE final months of Sri Ramakrishna's life, he was moved to a garden house in the northwestern suburbs of Calcutta at Cossipore. Because of the distance involved, it was necessary for many of the young disciples to live with the Master rather than commute from their homes as before. Baburam was one of those who served him whole-heartedly at Cossipore. But the days remaining in the Master's life were few. Finally, at two minutes after one o'clock on Monday morning, August 16, 1886, Ramakrishna entered *mahasamadhi*, and passed out of the body.

The grief-stricken young monks, whose lives had been transformed by this gentle, loving God-man, suddenly found themselves terribly alone. And in the days to follow the memory of his unbounded love, the tenderness and unfailing wisdom of his words, and the profound depth of his spirituality came back to them again and again.

Sorrow, however, did not dampen their enthusiasm for a life of renunciation. A number of the Master's disciples soon moved into a dilapidated old house in Baranagore, near Calcutta, where they continued to prac-

tise severe austerities. In December, Baburam was asked by his mother to return home to Antpur and bring Narendra with him. By the time they were ready to leave, however, seven of their brother monks had joined them and together they journeyed to Baburam's village, singing religious songs the entire way.

While in Antpur, the boys spent many hours a day in meditation and spiritual talk. Then one evening they built a large fire in the compound and seated themselves around it. They meditated for a long time together. Afterwards, Narendra spoke to them of renunciation and how Christ's disciples had gathered together to carry on the teachings of Jesus. He quoted to them from St. Matthew: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head." He urged his brothers to renounce the world once and for all, and carry the banner of eternal freedom out among the people as Christ's disciples had done. Later, they realized the evening they had met together had been Christmas Eve.

Upon their return to Baranagore, they received their monastic names at the appropriate religious ceremony known as *Viraja Homa*. Baburam became Swami Prema-

nanda, a name given him by Narendra, who thought it conformed to the remark of Rama-krishna that Radha, the goddess of love, was partially incarnated in Baburam.

During his stay at Baranagore, Swami Premananda's mind was almost constantly immersed in the contemplation of Sri Rama-krishna. In reference to this, we have the following comment from Swami Turiya-nanda, in a letter to his brother-disciple dated November 20, 1915:

In you there is no room for anything else but the thought of the Lord. I remember once that you said everything reminded you of His presence. That day I saw for the first time the truth realized by the Gopis — that wherever their eyes fell, there Krishna was manifest. I do not know if you remember that, but in my own heart it remains impressed forever. I understood that day what it really means to become completely immersed in the Lord.

It was a period of great joy and fraternal closeness for the small band of disciples, and later Premananda was to remark: "At Baranagore we would always see the good in every brother. None of us searched for fault in one another." But they were tested often. In later years, in order to instill discipline, Vivekananda had made a ruling that the

monks must rise at a certain hour in the morning. Those who disobeyed were required to live on alms for the rest of the day. One morning Premananda failed to get up at the appointed time. In jest, Swamiji [Swami Vivekananda] asked someone to ring the bell in Baburam's ear. At the sound of the bell, Premananda immediately realized he was late. He went to Vivekananda. "I was late, brother. You have made a ruling and I am ready for my punishment."

Swamiji's face grew suddenly serious. He looked at Premananda with infinite tenderness and said: "How could you ever think I would be able to administer any punishment to you." As he uttered these words, tears began to roll down his cheeks. Premananda too was visibly moved, and tears also began to form in his eyes.

At that moment, Swami Brahmananda gently intervened. "It is not a question of who is to be punished. But there is a ruling that he who fails to rise on time must live on alms for the remainder of the day."

Swami Premananda left the monastery for alms.

IN 1887, Swamis Saradananda, Abhedananda, and Premananda decided to travel on pilgrimage to Puri. While there, they lived in

a monastery belonging to another order. Their only food was *prasad* from the Jagannath temple. During their stay at the monastery, Premananda suffered an attack of typhoid fever. The careful nursing of his brothers, however, soon assisted his recovery. After a period of six months they returned.

In 1895, Premananda went on another pilgrimage to North India and stayed for many months at Vrindaban, the scene of Sri Krishna's divine relationship with the gopi maidens. While there he remained absorbed in God most of the time, and visited the temples each afternoon and evening. The ecstatic atmosphere of this holy city plunged the Swami into a state of devotional fervour, and he bowed before all women he met as manifestations of the gopis. Then, in 1897, news came that Swami Vivekananda had returned from his first tour to America. Although it pained him to leave Vrindaban, his desire to see Swamiji prevailed and he returned to Calcutta.

During the return journey, Premananda visited the Holy Mother, who at that time was staying at Jayrambati. He remained with her for two weeks. One day, during a walk, he passed by a small pond where he noticed a number of beautiful lotus plants. He was suddenly seized with a desire to

worship the feet of Mother with these flowers. He plunged at once into the pond and picked a number of them. But after he left the water he discovered that numerous leeches had fastened themselves to his body, and he was covered with blood. When he presented himself before the Holy Mother, she expressed much concern about his condition and told him never to do such a thing again.

IN 1902, Swami Vivekananda died unexpectedly at the Belur Monastery. The sudden loss of this great leader stunned the Order. But their recovery was quick. Swami Brahmananda immediately assumed the task of guiding the activities of the Mission, and the heavy responsibility of administering Belur Monastery fell to Swami Premananda. Perhaps no choice was better made. The Swami's affectionate and loving nature, as well as his compassion and strength, were exactly what such a job demanded. And the demands were many. Not only did he perform the daily worship in the shrine, but he trained the young *Brahmacharins*, received devotees and guests, and instructed one and all in various spiritual matters. It was an imposing responsibility, but Premananda assumed his gigantic task with characteristic cheerful-

ness and energy.

Gradually, the loving nature of the Swami and his protective attitude toward the young monks at the monastery earned him the title "Mother of the *Math* [monastery]". Love, of course, can never be wholly or adequately described. It must be felt. And perhaps that is why we can only struggle, often ineffectually, to appreciate the full extent of Swami Premananda's love, through its effect on others. Swami Gnaneswarananda, who served as a young monk under the Swami, recalls these incidents in his own experience:

Because Swami Premananda was so loving to all, he was often referred to as the "Mother of the Math". He could also be quite stern at times, but it was always for our good. I was once severely reprimanded by him. There had been talk about the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and I had said, "Yes, I have read it". Immediately, Swami Premananda said, "My boy, say I *am reading* it. Never say I have read the *Gita*. One can never finish reading the *Gita*."

Another time we were weeding the Math garden. Swami Premananda was watching us and he noticed that one of the boys was not pulling the weeds out by the roots. He called out to him, "My boy, you must pull the weeds out by the roots; otherwise, you are simply

fooling yourself and wasting time. If you do not realize the necessity of rooting out weeds in a garden, how can you weed out your old faults and tendencies? How can you understand the real meaning of spiritual life?" And he added, significantly, "Weed out, boys! Weed out, root and all"

On another occasion, Swami Premananda chastised us for talking too much: "You talkative fools! You talk nothing but nonsense. Let not your tongue talk; let your character speak!" And again, "Why do you buzz so much? You bees evidently haven't yet found the honey."

Swami Premananda taught the ideal of perfection in everything, even the smallest, most insignificant tasks—"from repairing shoes to chanting the scriptures," according to the Bengali proverb. This was one of Swamiji's main teachings, and Premananda obeyed it to the letter. "These boys must learn everything," he once said. "To cut vegetables, perform the worship, book-keeping, lecturing—everything. And in all these things they must be perfect. I am trying to train them thus. If I am harsh, it is only for their own good. But I am never really angry, for I love them deeply." In this way, he taught the young monks to be men of God.

He would often scold the boys if they did not read the scriptures regularly. Once he

approached a young *Brahmacharin* who had been spending much of his time working in the garden.

"You don't study, do you?" Premananda asked him. "Are you here only to do the work of a coolie?"

"No, sir," was the sheepish reply.

"All right, my boy, I am giving you three months to read the scriptures from beginning to end. Otherwise, you get just enough fare for a boat across the Ganga!"

Although it is hardly imaginable that the Swami would consider executing such a threat, it had the desired effect, and the young monk was soon at his lessons.

Sometime after this, another amusing incident occurred. One afternoon, several of the young *Brahmacharins* and Swamis were gathered with Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] in his room upstairs, engaged in spiritual talk. It began to grow late, and when Premananda found that none of the boys had come down, he shouted: "Hello, up there! You boys come down now. The next meal still has to be cooked!"

Swami Brahmananda decided to tease his brother-disciple. He told the boys present: "As you approach Swami Premananda, say to him: 'Holy sir, please give us liberation. Then we will have no more difficulty with

our meditation, prayer, and other disciplines. Surely you can do this for us.' "

Premananda overheard the joke Maharaj was preparing, and shouted upstairs: "All right, all of you can have your *samadhi*. To that I have no objection. I will handle everything. But just once let me find the noise of the market-place arising in your minds, and I'll pull you by the ears and soon put you back to work!"

In a very real sense, however, Premananda taught the young monks that work is a form of worship. At every step he would remind them the monastery is the home of Sri Ramakrishna and that He walks in every room. Therefore, he urged them to keep the buildings and grounds spotless, and regard them always as the abode of the Lord.

ALTHOUGH Premananda was essentially gentle-natured, he was neither emotional nor sentimental. But on occasion he would become God-intoxicated, and his blissful mood would unfailingly draw others into the same state. At one such time there happened to be some devotional singing at the monastery, and Premananda suddenly became filled with divine joy. He urged Swami Saradananda to sing. "Brother, you must! Don't you see how much joy is flowing here? But

unless you sing, it will stop.”

Saradananda protested that he had not sung for a long time. But Premananda would not listen to him. So, to please his brother monk, Saradananda sang and joined in the dancing.

The next day he remarked, “Alas, Baburam made me dance in my old age. But who can resist his entreaties?”

Swami Premananda's whole life was one of complete self-surrender. He could do nothing without knowing the will of the Lord. Always, at the back of every action was the subtle, but commanding presence of Sri Ramakrishna. And sometimes this presence would become visible and Premananda would be blessed with a vision of his beloved *guru*. However, this did not always occur under the most pleasant circumstances. Once Premananda and Brahmananda strongly disagreed on a particular issue. Grabbing his few possessions, Premananda marched out of the Belur compound, prepared to leave for good. But the moment he reached the gate, the towel he was carrying over his shoulder was suddenly snatched from him, and in an instant tightened about his neck. He turned . . . only to find the figure of Sri Ramakrishna standing in front of him. “Where are you going, my child?” the Master said. “How

can you go away, leaving me here?"

Overwhelmed by the experience, Premananda rushed to Maharaj's room and prostrated himself at his feet.

During the year 1906, Premananda made another pilgrimage to the holy city of Puri. One day he happened to notice a Christian missionary standing before the Jagannath temple, strongly upbraiding Hinduism. The Swami's ire became aroused. He began to loudly chant, "*Hari bol, Hari bol!*" [chant the name of the Lord], and he soon had the crowd of more than a hundred persons chanting along with him. The missionary could not make himself heard above the insistent rhythm of the chant, and was forced to leave. The temple priests immediately approached the Swami and expressed their gratitude, telling him they had been powerless to stop the missionary. But Premananda quickly left the temple grounds, abashed and sad at heart over his impulsive action.

That night he had a dream of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to him: "Why did you break up that gathering? He too was spreading my name and teachings. Tomorrow you must find the missionary and beg to be forgiven."

Early the next day Premananda set out in search of him. After considerable difficulty,

he found the man and humbly entreated his forgiveness.

SWAMI PRILMANANDA'S compassion for the suffering and distress of others was revealed on numerous occasions. This incident is typical. A young man from a noble family of Calcutta had fallen in with undesirable companions and through their influence had taken to drugs. This greatly pained his relatives, who tried their best to correct his behaviour. But all their efforts failed. In desperation the young man's brother, who was a monk at Belur Monastery, sought the help of Swami Premananda. The Swami quietly listened to the story, and then went to visit the boy. After a long talk, he convinced him to come to the monastery for a visit the following day, which he did. He continued to come to Belur many times later. Gradually, the spiritual presence of Premananda began to work a change in his character. "How much tenderness and affection he bestowed on me," he recalled later, "My relatives and friends abandoned me, but his love sustained me. He knew all my misdeeds, and still he loved me!" Eventually he renounced the world and joined the Order as a monk.

The remarkable solicitude which Swami Premananda showed to visiting devotees was

another demonstration of his considerate and loving nature. His affection for these devotees was more than a simple expression of welcome; it was a profound act of devotion. Through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, Premananda had reached that state where he actually saw service to man as a worship of God. For instance, visitors to the monastery would frequently appear at odd—even unreasonable—hours. This would often happen when the monks were having a short rest during the early afternoon. Rather than disturb them, the Swami would quietly go to the kitchen himself and prepare food for the devotees. Once asked about this habit of his, he said: "Housholders have much to do. Is it always possible for them to arrive at the proper time? And what can we do but serve them? This costs only a little physical effort. Through the Master's grace, nothing is wanting here. Should we not be blessed by doing these things for his children?"

The saintly character of Swami Premananda did not go unnoticed, even among some of the most worldly persons. Once an editor of a magazine published in Calcutta, who was noted for being a witty and amusing writer, attended a celebration at the Belur Monastery. Swami Premananda happened to walk in front of him, and as he did so, the

gentleman jestingly asked the Swami what entertainment the monastery offered.

"What entertainment can we possibly hope to offer you, whose lively pen brings such joy and happiness!" Premananda said with a smile.

"It may be true that I have such qualities in my pen," the author quickly rejoined, "but in *all* your actions I see expressed a sweetness—for, indeed, you are the embodiment of sweetness."

HIS LOVE for others transcended any racial or religious barrier. On one occasion a Moslem gentleman arrived at the monastery with several Hindu friends. After visiting the shrine, they were given some food. They finished eating, but everyone in the room hesitated to take away the Moslem's plate. To the embarrassment of all, Swami Premananda came forward and without the least hesitation removed it.

A similar incident occurred many years later, when the Swami was visiting a Moslem village in East Bengal. He was approached by a Moslem who was impressed with the Swami's talk on the existence of God in all things. Thereupon the Moslem asked him if he could eat food touched by him.

"Yes, I can," the Swami replied unhesitatingly.

Immediately some food was brought and he took it from the hands of the Moslem and ate it. (Although this action might seem innocent enough to a Westerner, a Hindu, reared among strict laws regarding the preparation and eating of food, would consider such an act shockingly unorthodox.)

We have mentioned earlier that although Swami Premananda possessed an affectionate nature, he could also be quite stern. Many of the senior monks in the Ramakrishna Order still vividly recall his reprimands and pointed rebukes. But his anger had no sting to it; and if he discovered one of the young men sulking or acting depressed, he would immediately speak to him affectionately and offer him the best things to eat from his own plate. Sometimes he would even follow after a monk with a glass of milk if he felt he had been too harsh with him.

Once, when the Swami was ill, a devotee got into the habit of occasionally bringing delicacies for his attendants to eat. Noticing this, Premananda called one of them to him and said: "The Master often told us that a monk should only take a small meal at night, and restrain his greed. But out of greed, you are doing just the opposite."

The attendant's feelings were hurt. Without anybody's knowledge, he left the residence later in the day. At the next meal Premananda noticed his absence and began to grow anxious. He sent his other attendants to find him, but the young monk had disappeared without a trace. The Swami became heartsick at the young man's absence.

During the evening the attendant slipped quietly in a side door, and when the Swami learned of his return he called him to his room. "My child, I have grown old and weak from illness, and cannot always keep my temper. Do not be angry with me if I say these things in such a condition." As he spoke, tears came to his eyes. He asked that some sweets be brought, and fed the young man with his own hands.

"Others will follow you if you love them and make them your own," the Swami once wrote to a devotee. "A leader, in order to be a true leader, must necessarily be free from egoism." In obedience to Swami Vivekananda, Premananda sought to make the Belur Monastery a centre for the spiritual renaissance of India; and this he did—all in the spirit of loving kindness. He drew others to him through this love. And at the back of it was an unswerving faith in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and a dedicat-

ed, untiring zeal to serve the wishes of his guru. He was firmly convinced that the message of Ramakrishna must somehow reach the minds and hearts of those who will listen, wherever they may be. In another letter he wrote: "To make mankind your own by loving all—that is the real *jnana*, the real *bhakti* of this age. Work and serve with all your heart. . . . The ideas of Sri Ramakrishna are being well-propagated. Let them spread over the whole world. Let the flood of bliss and peace come to all places throughout the world."

Although Premananda was unfailingly anxious and concerned for the health and comfort of others, he had little regard for his own. He would often remove the best food from his own plate and give it to some of the junior monks. He kept few clothes. One time, a devotee gave his attendant four shirts for the Swami's use. When he learned about the gift, he scolded the attendant, "It does not become a monk to have so much clothing." After he passed away, his only possessions were an empty canvas bag, a few books, among them a copy of the *Gita*, and an extra piece of clothing.

AT ONE time, Swamiji had told his brother-disciple: "You must preach in East Bengal.

You will flood the entire country with your love." It was perhaps in partial obedience to this urging that Premananda undertook a tour of both East and West Bengal during the years 1914-1916. Just prior to this, however, he left for Varanasi [Benares]. He hoped to convince Swami Brahmananda to return to the Belur Monastery, which sorely missed his spiritual presence. But despite his entreaties, Maharaj was firm in his desire to stay in Varanasi.

"I do not wish to leave this city of Lord Shiva," Maharaj said with finality.

"But Maharaj, Swamiji is our Lord Shiva, and he resides at Belur," Premananda said.

Maharaj remained silent.

Then Premananda suddenly prostrated himself flat before his brother-disciple.

Maharaj immediately became excited and said, "Brother, what are you doing? Get up! Get up!"

But Premananda remained firm. "I will not. Not until you agree to return to Belur Monastery."

The love and humility of Baburam had conquered again, and Maharaj smiled, "Rise, brother, rise. I will come back."

It was during this trip, while the Swami was travelling in Varanasi, that an incident

of a most remarkable nature occurred. Swami Prabhavananda describes it thus :

It was in Varanasi, in October of 1914. While staying there, Swami Premananda used to visit the temple of Vishvanath and Mother Annapurna after taking his bath in the Ganga. I would accompany him. One day, after we finished worship in the temple of Annapurna, the head priest placed a garland of marigolds around Swami Premananda's neck. When the Swami was about to take the garland off to give it to me, I placed my palms together, bowed before him and said: "No, holy sir, please keep the garland yourself. You look so beautiful!" The word "beautiful" reminded the Swami of God's beauty, and he went into ecstasy. His face flushed, and then a light began to emanate from his whole body. Walking slowly, he left the temple, and I followed him. The temple lane was crowded as usual, but on either side of us people stared at the Swami and made way. It was quite evident that everyone present saw him illumined. We continued to walk through the streets of Varanasi while crowds stood still, silently watching Swami Premananda. He was completely absorbed in the thought of God and oblivious of his surroundings. As we approached the outer gate of our monastery, Swami Nirbharananda, the abbot, saw us from the veranda. He immediately ordered the monks to prepare a special welcome for Swami Premananda. We

entered the monastery grounds to the sound of gongs and conch shells, and the ringing of bells. Then, when we arrived at the veranda, Swami Premananda took the garland off and placed it around the neck of the abbot. For a brief moment he danced in ecstatic joy. Gradually the ecstasy abated, and the divine light disappeared.

The Swami finally embarked on his tour. Despite his quiet and self-effacing nature, Premananda was immensely popular. Crowds of persons, hungry for spiritual food, literally followed the Swami wherever he went, and from morning until night visitors eagerly sought his counsel and blessing.

Many years earlier, Sri Ramakrishna had emphasized to a devotee that before a man can teach spiritual truths he must receive the "command" of God. At the same time, God gives him the power to teach. "The task of a religious teacher," Ramakrishna said, "is indeed difficult. One cannot teach men without a direct command from God. People won't listen to you if you teach without such authority. Such teaching has no force behind it. One must first of all attain God through spiritual discipline or some other means. Thus armed with authority from God, one can deliver lectures!" When we consider the overwhelming response the Swami evoked in

those who sought his presence, we cannot doubt that he had received this command.

In 1915 he went to Dacca, in East Bengal [now East Pakistan], at the invitation of a group of devotees. Finding among them a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the devotees of the Master felt joyful and happy. Even the Moslems joined the Hindus in their enthusiasm. "Do you think he belongs only to the Hindus?" a group of them said, "He is also our prophet."

Premananda was immensely pleased to see that Ramakrishna was so widely worshipped in East Bengal. He lectured whenever and wherever he was asked. But shortly after his return to Calcutta, he was struck down by cholera and little hope remained that he would live. He was unconscious for several days. Then one morning he opened his eyes, and seeing about him the sad, downcast looks of his devotees and monks, he said with a smile: "Do not be afraid. I will not die yet, for my mother is still alive." Very few knew at the time that when Ramakrishna had asked Premananda's mother to give him her boy she had agreed, but with a condition: "Father, I beg of you," she said. "In return for my son, give me devotion to the Lord. And may I never suffer grief at seeing the death of any of my children." Sri Rama-

krishna agreed to the woman's request, and Premananda reminded his devotees of that boon.

Although Premananda recovered, his travel had weakened him, and on a subsequent trip he contracted a deadly fever known as *kala-azar*. He was forced to return to Belur. The physicians who examined him immediately recommended that he be sent to Deoghar, in nearby Bihar State, to recover. While he was staying there at the home of a devotee, a barber, who had come to the house for work, was caught thieving. The host was about to turn the man over to the police when Premananda intervened. "Hunger has driven this poor fellow into such dishonesty," he said. He gave the man a rupee and his own bathing towel and sent him away with his blessings.

During the next year and a half, the Swami remained in the grip of the disease. Then, when apparently beginning a slow recovery, he contracted influenza. He was brought to Calcutta, but despite the efforts of the attending doctors, the Swami entered into Mahasamadhi on July 30, 1918 in the presence of his brother-disciples.

"Let the Lord be ever seated within your heart," Swami Premananda once wrote to a devotee, "and silently work as an instrument

in his hands." The Swami was a mirror of his own teaching. His utter selflessness and love of God in every being never left him, even during his final days. Shortly before his death, he called a young monk to his bedside. "Could you do one thing for me?" he asked the young man.

"Anything, sir," he replied.

"Will you serve the devotees?"

The monk nodded.

"Don't forget!" Swami Premananda entreated.

A Swami of the Order who was closely associated with Swami Premananda for some time as a young Brahmacharin, remembers him thus: "The marble floor in the temple of Vishvanath [at Varanasi] is always wet with water. I used to walk behind Swami Premananda and touch to my heart the muddy marks left by his footprints. When you have the vision of God, you will then understand what it is like to be in the presence of a God-man like Swami Premananda."

CLIVE JOHNSON

**TEACHINGS
OF
SWAMI PREMANANDA**

***A** LTHOUGH Swami Premananda did not initiate any disciples, he gave much spiritual instruction in the form of letters. To the numerous monks and devotees who sought his counsel, he wrote words of courage, wisdom and love. Always his words reminded them of their divine inheritance, urging them onward toward the final goal of God-realization. His letter writing extended over a seventeen-year period, from 1902 to 1918, the year of his passing away.*

1

REMAIN some days in Jayrambati with the Holy Mother. Serve her. Thereby be blessed and realize the object of human life. This is my earnest wish. With what patience, forgiveness, and forbearance does she lead her life at home! Never before has such an ideal life been visible in this world. If such an example does not result in your remoulding your life, then there is no hope for you. Seeing the Holy Mother is equivalent to seeing Sri Ramakrishna. Only in her native village can we perceive the Holy Mother's real nature. What substance she has! You will

learn how large-hearted and loving she is. Seeing her makes egotism and conceit fly away. Try to learn thoroughly her ways and manners. She has infinite compassion for all mankind. We should become full if we were to get but a particle of that compassion.

BRAHMACHARYA means performing the ritualistic worship, doing *japa*, meditating, and studying, with faith and reverence. Austerity means making the lips correspond with the heart. Does this state consist only in uttering a few *mantras* while taking the vows of *brahmacharya* in a formal way?

X has asked whether the picture of Sri Krishna can be kept in the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna. Pictures of all gods and goddesses, of all religions, can be kept there. Sri Ramakrishna was a great leader in all sects of all religions.

Do not see the defects of one another ; see the good, the merits only. As Sri Ramakrishna said, be like the winnowing basket that retains the good grain, while rejecting the chaff: not like a sieve that lets the good material drop through and holds back what is worthless. We should move about freely, seeing the world as the manifestation of Rama. To hate and injure anyone is to hate and injure Rama, who pervades the whole world.

MY DESIRE is to establish in every village and town the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Through his name, may the whole world awaken. May the divinity within all be manifested through the power of that name.

Work hard ; exert yourself. Better to die while doing his work. Never be lazy.

Do NOT agitate yourself, dreaming up all sorts of projects. The Lord does his own work. You be the instrument. If the idea that "I am the doer" gets hold of a person, it will be the cause of bondage ; and no permanent good ever comes out of such deeds. Take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna with your words, deeds, and thoughts, and all will be well.

THE YOUNG men of East Bengal are very enthusiastic about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. May more enthusiasm come ; may indomitable energy grow ! May the whole country be engulfed in a flood of love. May the flood of love come, submerging Hindus, Moslems, and Christians, big and little. May Europe, America, and all other communities, forgetting envy and jealousy, feel the strong current of love and intense devotion to one God, the Lord of all.

Scientific knowledge is certainly not able to provide bliss and peace. To point out the

path of peace, Sri Ramakrishna came in the guise of an illiterate man. He manifested himself to destroy the vain conceit of learned scholars. Be guileless. Make the lips correspond to the heart, and thus sincerely think of him. You must make your lives blessed by realizing God in this very life. Chant his name and you will feel infinite power. Let steadfastness grow in you. Believe that infinite power is in you. I pray to the Lord that he may bless you with real greatness and large-mindedness.

IF A PITCHER has a hole in the bottom, water poured into it will flow out. No water can be kept in it. The holes in a spiritual aspirant are worldly cravings. The materials by which such holes can be repaired and kept closed are: hearing the truth of God, meditating on him, chanting his name, reading sacred books, ritual worship, prayer, and so on. At every step you will be tested. Be careful, very careful.

THE WORLD is the world of relativity. Do not be unnerved in the least by pleasure and pain. Repeatedly convince yourself of the truth that change of condition is the will of God and everything occurs for our good.

BELIEVE THAT any good that is done by you

is by God's power and that you are mere instruments in his hands. Don't think of the work you do as a task at all; try to do it in an unselfish way, not seeking for the results. That will break bondage. The self-same medicine will give different results, according to the type of ingredients taken with it. Thus work is in one sense a bondage; yet if it can be done in a detached way, in a spirit of dedication to God, that same work will give you devotion and liberation. Confusion will arise and bondage result if you keep your eye on name, fame, or some other worldly objective.

Tell X. to consider his work as being equivalent to practising austerities, worshipping God with singing, going on pilgrimages, and fasting. I see that when he tries to sit in meditation he only falls asleep. Is that any good? Is it not better to devote his whole life performing deeds as service to God? On the other hand, to feel one has to do too much, to overwork, is also not good.

Pay some special attention to the body. Regularity in bathing, eating, and so on is desirable. It is necessary to be regular about sleep.

Work should be done smoothly, through love. Hard and fast rules are not good. Let affection be your watchword. Young men

will be moved by affection; they will give their hearts and lives in return.

I have learned through reflection that if the boys of the monastery do any wrong, it is not their fault ; all the fault is mine. If you want things to go well try to reform yourself ; always keep watch on your own character and behaviour. Sri Ramakrishna taught us that if we see any defect in others, it is only our own defect. If you want to become great, see others as great.

Young men, take note. Let the life of Sri Ramakrishna be your ideal. Follow in his footsteps and know for certain that thus you will be imbued with new strength and vigour. He is the embodiment and source of all power.

2

BE VERY careful. Make Sri Ramakrishna your ideal. Follow this ideal and know that you will become strong with a new strength. Our Master was the repository of all powers. The Holy Mother and the Master are one and the same ; and Swami Vivekananda also was one with the Lord.

STUDY scriptures regularly. Mix with everybody freely, seeing Narayana, the Lord, in

every person. You are the children of the Holy Mother ; why should you feel fear or anxiety ? Do you not realize whose blessing you have received ? Do you consider everything as sham and nonsense ? No, my boys, you are already liberated through her grace. On all sides there is a demand for workers. Give your life as a sacrifice to disseminate the message of peace.

THE MISSION buildings which have come up as a result of your exertions are a worthy thing. But at the same time, your faith, devotion, renunciation, and spirit of detachment must increase ; otherwise, such external accomplishments merely cause more and more bondage.

Each of you has received initiation from the Holy Mother ; you have renounced your hearth and home. Your one objective has been to gain faith, devotion, knowledge, and love. Thus, it is a matter of deep regret that you three cannot live together in harmony. Is it merely lip service when we say that the Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, and Christians should reconcile and unite ? Isn't such our heart's desire ? What good then did we achieve, having seen the Holy Mother ? What have you learned from her very wonderful life ?

The vision of God makes all imperfections vanish, as darkness goes when the sun rises. Should not love and devotion arise in our hearts, dispelling ignorance and vain egotism? Have faith and know for certain that since you have seen the Holy Mother you will become perfect. Yet three of you cannot live in harmony! You cannot give up your vanity and conceit; you cannot forget yourselves by plunging into love! You cannot kill your lower selves, and yet you want to realize God! At the same time you claim to be worshipping God and serving humanity as an offering to God. Shame on you! If you have no love in your hearts, then your study, worship, and service are all in vain.

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Devotees of God belong to a caste by themselves." Our ideal is to unite all mankind into that one caste of devotees.

Look, my children, there is the path still open to you. You are young, your minds are not hardened by worldliness. Weep for the vision of the Lord and pray with all your heart to him; he will show you the path and guide you. Give up the sense of "me" and "mine". I pray that you all may be united in mind and heart through the Lord's grace;

I pray that he may grant you the right understanding.

I am writing this letter not for you alone, but for all of you. I am not angry with you, nor am I angry with anybody. I consider you as my own. I write this for your good.

WHEN LOVE arises in the heart, joy fills it. Do not see the faults in others ; see good in all and learn to love and honour all. Thus did we brother-disciples live together at the Baranagore monastery. If we did not see Naren [Swami Vivekananda] for one day, we would run to Calcutta to see him. And what attraction, what unbounded love Naren had for us—until the last moment of his life ! Now all that appears as a dream. And brother Rakhal [Swami Brahmananda] ! Whenever I hear that he wants to go somewhere away from the Math, I feel empty in my heart.

THE MIND will always attach itself to something or other; so it is best to have it fastened to God and his devotees. You have left home; the devotees are now your next of kin. To live like this is to live a life of self-surrender and concentration of mind. Lose yourself in love; be drunk with love. Forget "I" and "mine" by being absorbed in love. When the

narrow little "I" goes, the Real will manifest itself and you will know bliss.

I SCOLD you for your own good, considering you my own. I do not want to keep anyone at arm's length. I wish to make the whole world my own, through love. You, too, must make the whole world your own.

SPIRITUAL practice means to try to know our own defects and to learn how to remedy them. You will certainly become perfect if you make a habit of seeing the good qualities of others and taking on such qualities as far as possible. If you do not manage to become perfect in the present life, it is doubtful whether you will be able to become perfect even in a thousand lives. Take the stand that in this very life you will achieve perfection. Delusion will then be broken and darkness will be removed. All of you must be united in heart and mind through the grace of the Lord. Unity and harmony there must be. There is no other way. Know all to be the Lord's own. Everyone is good; only the little ego is bad. Shun this and you will be freed from all bondages.

THOSE DEVOTEES who have made their homes into *ashramas*, as it were, are indeed blessed.

Such dwellings will become purified through service to devotees and visits of holy men. "God, devotee, and scripture—all one" is a very grand teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. To see the *lila* of the Lord in a human body is a very exalted state.

To GUIDE others is very difficult. Unless you possess a special power from God, you will fail; egotism and conceit will take possession of you. The secret of leadership is to forget the little "I" by firmly holding on to "Thee". "Not I, but Thou, O Lord, art the doer." For "God alone is real and everything else unsubstantial". Realize this truth in your heart of hearts.

Fill your inside and coat your outside with love. I have been made a bond servant by the love of Sri Ramakrishna; by his love he made all of us bond servants. He was love inside and outside. Even his rebukes stemmed from his love.

"Not I, not I; Thou art everything." God is everything. Whom to blame then? He is all. There is difference in manifestation only. If anything went wrong at the Math, Swami Vivekananda used to find fault with me. He would blame me very much. But his love had no limits, no bounds. I used to then wonder why he should blame me, what my fault was.

Now I find that Swamiji was right. This "I" is the root of all evil. The bad "I" must be given up; otherwise there is no rescue, no reformation.

Those who take the name of Sri Ramakrishna will become world-movers. Dedicate yourself wholly to him.

IF ANYTHING wrong happens in the Ashrama, know that it is both our faults. Swamiji was of the opinion that all faults belong to the leader. Try to reform your defects. Weep and pray to Sri Ramakrishna that you may give up your faults. There is no other way. If then anything goes wrong, and there is restlessness amongst the members there, know that it is your own defect. Always reflect why you have taken the vows of *Sannyasa*. Give up worldly madness and be mad only for God! May divine wisdom open to you, through the Lord's grace. To make all mankind your own by loving all—that is the real *jnana*, the real *bhakti* of this age. Work and serve with all your heart, and thus you will receive *bhakti*, *moksha*, *jnana*, and *vijnana*. Know that you are working by divine power; do not fear at all, for God is our help and the source of our wealth. The ideas of Sri Ramakrishna are being well-propagated. Let them spread over the whole world. Let the

flood of bliss and peace come to all places throughout the world!

WE HAVE no other thought except the good of all the world; but our own will is not very effective. Sri Ramakrishna himself does his own work, and we are only instruments in his hands. Wherever any good work is done in the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna, his power and divine light will be given to us.

TAKE CARE of your health, and do the work of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji through thought, word, and deed. Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] says that by your service to God in the poor and the destitute, you have reaped the effect of years of *tapasya*. You are blessed!

If God, the dispenser of the universe, is not generous, people's wants can never be satisfied by man's charity alone. Try to see the Lord's *lila* even in these miseries and sufferings. He is the supreme benefactor, but man is deluded by playing with earthly dolls! He forgets everything by being satiated with lust and greed, and thirsting for name, fame, and honour. That is why the Merciful God has brought famine, plague, and this great war [World War I], eventually for the good of many. See and learn. Sri

Ramakrishna has not sent you merely to distribute one or two handfuls of rice to famine-stricken people, but by such acts he wants you to manifest your greatness, your godliness. Learn how to build a lofty mind and a large heart! You may not get another such opportunity. The *avatara* of the present age has declared that God is before you in many forms. Where else should you go to seek him? Realize this by direct perception; make your human birth a blessing.

3

Do you NOT understand that we, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, are only the instruments in the hands of the Lord? It is his power that is manifest in this monastery, and you are enabled to do these good works by Divine Power. Believe that the fetters of *karma* can be severed, that you will get *parabhakti* [supreme devotion] and that you will be *jivanmuktas* [free while living in the body]. What! Are you ordinary persons? Have you forgotten that you have the grace of Holy Mother, the Primal Power? How many in the world have this opportunity and good fortune? "Not I, but thou, O Lord"—this idea appeals to me most. "I am the instru-

ment. Thou art the operator. I am the chariot, Thou art the charioteer." This is what the supremely merciful Lord makes me understand day by day. Holding to the feet of Lord Hari, by the power of Lord Hari, serve Lord Hari in all mankind.

Know that his grace is on you. You have the grace of illumined souls also. God is the inner ruler; he sees and knows everything. Pray and tell him all your wants with a guileless and sincere mind. He is more yours than you yourself. He will certainly listen to your prayers. Taking refuge in him, engage in your *sadhana*. With his grace, your life will be blessed.

IS A PERSON worthy to be called a human being if he cannot give up selfishness, if he cannot give up his pleasures of the senses? To take the name of Sri Ramakrishna, and at the same time to be selfish! Is there any progress for such a hypocrite? Think wisely and firmly; and act accordingly.

I AM SORRY to hear of your poor health. I now and then sing the following songs:

In whatever state you keep me at any time
It is all for my good, if I do not forget you.
Whether you keep me besmeared with ashes,

Ornament me with gems, jewels or gold,
 Place me under a tree or on a throne,
 It does not matter.
 Only let me not forget you.
 Remain within yourself.
 Mind, do not go to anyone else's house,
 Remain seated where you are,
 And seek within the recesses of your heart.
 Whatever you desire, you will find there.

RULES and regulations can govern behaviour; but they cannot control the mind. Worship Sri Ramakrishna with all your heart and soul and you will gain good results. In time there will be harmony between you and others. Devotion and faith are unique. Man is always intent on outward things—name, fame, honour, and so on. We want intense, maddening love for God, firm and unshakable faith, and infinite confidence. Away with all quarrels and factions. We have come here for only a very short time; why such anxiety for tidying things up? Let others do as they like.

I heard from Sri Ramakrishna the following song:

I will go with my burden to Ayodhya
 Where Rama will be crowned king.
 I will give my burden to Rama.
 Taking refuge in him,

Clasping his feet to my heart,
I shall say to Rama:
"I have given back the burden you gave me;
Give me no further burden on earth."

Seek refuge in the Lord. Under all circumstances keep recollectedness of him. Never forsake him.

TAKE REFUGE in Sri Ramakrishna and hold fast to him. Why think merely of your disease and ill health? Know always, and under all circumstances, "I belong to the Lord. The Lord is my eternal treasure; he is the one Reality, the source of my well-being." Always think, "*naham, naham*" (not I, not I, but Thou, my Lord). Chant the name of God as much as you can, and you will have no fear. We are the children of Mrityunjaya, the conqueror of death. Remember this always.

You want to open a school for the boys. It is a very fine idea. Swamiji also wanted to spread education. On the last day of his life, until the last moment, he talked to me, emphasizing the need of education for our people. The gift of learning benefits the giver as well as the receiver. Know for certain that it will be a great boon to the country. Live exemplary lives. The students will

become blessed by moulding their lives according to your example.

Be pioneers in spreading education. The prosperity of the country will return, and the students will be steadfast in their goal, if they acquire learning from *sadhus*. They will not only become real men, but gods and *rishis*.

4

[To a devotee] INITIATION from a guru is very necessary. You can receive the holy Name from anyone in whom you have faith and for whom you feel reverence. I have heard Sri Ramakrishna say, "One may have the grace of the guru; the grace of Krishna [God], and the grace of his devotees, but without the grace of one's own mind, one may be completely ruined."

What is this grace of one's own mind? It is that one must desire God and struggle to realize him. He must struggle to purify his mind. Have firm faith in your own self. "I will surely find God, I can never fail." This self-confidence and firm determination are needed. Let the field be ready; then, if a good seed falls upon it, the seed will sprout and grow into a tree. Increase your love for

God. Let strong renunciation and intense yearning possess you. Then only will you experience God's grace and receive peace. Call to him in secret. You must pull him to you with your mind and heart. Then only will he appear before you.

[To a monk] IT IS BEST not to have any authority over others. When you do not know how to use it, it may be the source of great danger. The *Gita*—as well as our own living *Gita*, Sri Ramakrishna—has expressed the real meaning of unattached, pure, unselfish work.

Alas! You are made restless by anger on account of a few words from that gentleman. Yet look what bad treatment, what insults Sri Ramakrishna bore so patiently and uncomplainingly—from an ordinary gate-keeper! Is this not a lesson for us? Like worldly people, have we only come to exercise authority over others? Work or service is of no use unless it helps you to achieve purity of heart. Otherwise, work will be in vain. Who can really benefit another? By doing unselfish work and serving others, we do good to ourselves. Our minds become pure; we learn to have patience and forbearance. Is that only a small step toward solving the problem of life? Be like the thresh-

ing machine. Keep the good [see good in others] and discard the evil [see no evil]. You will enjoy much fun that way. How much Sri Ramakrishna is teaching me by placing me in various circumstances! I thought that I had escaped university examinations by taking refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, but I now find that at every step I face examinations. When I have finished learning, I think that probably He will release me.

Though you are the head of that monastery, live as if you were nobody. Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] has impressed this truth on me. I often remind myself of it.

The Sannyasins and Brahmacharins who join this Ashrama we consider as our own brothers, and love them as our very children. Sri Ramakrishna made Maharaj and others his own by his infinite love. Maharaj in turn made the children of others his own by that same love. So, at his word, these children go wherever he says, and work hard. All this they do because of love! In Swamiji's words: "If you want to be a leader, you be the first to sacrifice yourself for the good of others." Empty words are of no avail. Selflessness is the secret of work. Love intensely your fellow man, and he will not hesitate to give up his life for you.

I read your letter and gave it to brother

Tarak [Swami Shivananda] to read also. He said: "Write him that the work performed without desire for the result of action is not done either for oneself or for anybody else, but it is done as worship of God." Be completely desireless, but act. You will then be pure, eternal devotees of the Lord. I pray that Sri Ramakrishna may bless you by granting you unbounded patience, infinite forbearance and forgiveness. Hold on to the truth and move onward with enthusiasm. Let men learn by your example the virtues of forbearance, toleration and compassion—and not men only; let the gods in high heaven learn also.

By taking refuge in Sri Ramakrishna you have received a new light. Many others also receive this light by seeing your wonderful lives. By delivering lectures or quoting his teachings, you cannot preach Sri Ramakrishna. Mould your lives in his cast, and let people see your exemplary lives. Do not be swayed by words of praise or blame, or let your actions be influenced by the opinions of others. Keep your eyes always fixed on Sri Ramakrishna. He will assuredly look after you. Most people are blind, wandering about hither and thither, deluded by *mahamaya*. Have no fear. The Lord is your helper and your saviour.

To be disturbed in mind by petty incidents is not worthy of selfless workers. You are spiritual aspirants, chosen devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Do not pay any heed to the criticisms of others.

Know for certain that in this world of relativity, there will always be good and evil, pleasure and pain, praise and blame. We love those who come to us not because of their merit or demerit, not because they are good or bad ; but because our very nature is to love, no matter what they are, and we consider them as our very own.

It is good that you are going to Varanasi. There you will find the society of the holy. With all your heart, call upon the Lord, the delight of the soul. He will give you the right state of mind. Keep the attitude, "Not I, not I, but Thou, My Lord." Repeat over and over again: "Not I, not I, but Thou, My Lord." Pray: "Whatever I may be, Lord, thou hast to accept me as I am, for whom else do I have? Lord, I am thine, and Thou art mine." Know that we are eternally related to him.

5

I AM SORRY your brother is dead. There is nothing more certain in this world than

death. In order that we may transcend death, the scriptures advise us to keep the company of the holy. But it is not enough to listen to advice. We must practise it. Do not ever doubt that those who have even once in their lives taken the name of Sri Ramakrishna will come to him. You are regularly engaged in the service of the Lord ; you need have no fear. Know that you belong to the Lord, and that the Lord is your eternal treasure. It is natural that your mother will grieve at her son's death. But by the grace of the Lord, who is the ocean of mercy, she will find relief. He is the pillar, and if a man holds on to him he becomes immortal.

The Holy Mother is now in Calcutta. She bestows her grace equally upon all.

To perform *japa* with a rosary is very good. Repeat the name of Sri Ramakrishna. We need not observe forms of religion. Let them do so who care for them. We need ecstatic love—the love that the *gopis* of Vrindaban had for Sri Krishna.

“Friend, mine is not merely lip service. Mine is the anguish of the heart. I must reach my Beloved.” Yearn thus for him like the *gopis*. Drink deep of that love. Be mad for him. This is following the path of love. With the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, there

has come a flood into the river of love. Jump into it ; fear not. You will become immortal. You will be born anew. Move forward.

It is not easy to meditate. There are some who cannot possibly meditate. Everyone finds difficulty. Only some admit to this ; others keep silent. Call on Sri Ramakrishna mentally. Pray to him. Consider him as your very own and affectionately plead with him. In time he will do everything for you. Do not worry. He is supremely merciful. Give your mind to the Lord and you will attain him.

Initiation is necessary. You have to pursue a path. The guru shows you the path by initiation. The scriptures speak of the need for a guru, and one must follow the injunction of the scriptures. Everybody cannot find God independently of the guru. But remember, the great secret is the yearning for God. To have this yearning is a great good fortune.

[To a young devotee] IF YOUR mother has an independent income, and you have no desire to marry, it is better that you remain free from worldly bondages as long as possible. If ever you become drowned in worldliness, your relatives and friends will give you only a disdainful smile. No one will come to your

help. Where is there any power in them to help? They are themselves ignorant and in bondage, and they love to see others in the same condition.

Look, son, you will not listen to our advice if we ask you not to marry. If after looking around you and seeing how your friends and relatives are miserable in their bondage to marriage, you still wish to be caught in the trap, what good will our advice be? Nobody seeks any remedy until he knows he is sick. When a man feels that he is diseased, then he calls for a doctor and follows his advice. If you feel that life in the world is a great bondage, and that the world is an abode of misery, there will come distaste for worldly enjoyments and your love for God will increase. You will then be interested in taking the remedy, which is to think of your Chosen Ideal and to repeat his name. In the beginning you need to force yourself into the habit of repeating his holy Name. Gradually you will find joy in it, and then you will not be able to live without chanting his name. Have faith, have self-confidence. Convince yourself, "We are devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. We are free souls. Assuredly we shall realize God." Have this firm conviction, and then alone you can overcome the furious enemies, lust and anger and greed.

Sri Ramakrishna's grace, to be sure, is with you. Will to attain him and you will find him.

[To a disciple of Holy Mother] IF MENTALLY you hold on to the blessed feet of Holy Mother, in your heart, and happen to enter the abode of Yama (the king of death), know that poor Yama will run away in terror of you.

The children of Sri Ramakrishna have their homes everywhere in this world. Our Lord does not remain bound within any limited space. And know wherever he may place his devotees, that becomes his abode.

[To a devotee] CALL UPON the Lord, and he will take away all falsity from the heart and give you the strength to hold on to truth. But you also must exert yourself. Let your prayer arise from the heart; then alone you will get the answer.

Learn to see your own faults and weaknesses. If you know that the ideal is to make the lips correspond to the heart, what are you doing to achieve that? Will you be healed of your sickness if I take the medicine for you? If you realize that it is ruinous to indulge in sexuality, have you tried to find means to overcome it? Find out your weaknesses, repent and promise not to repeat, but

struggle to achieve purity of heart. God's grace does not rain from the sky. But that you are thinking of improving yourself—this is his grace.

6

[To a monk] **MAKE AN** effort to live in love and harmony with all. Live an exemplary life. Let your heart expand in love, embracing all. There is nothing higher than love. May the world receive peace and bliss by witnessing your life. Let not any mean selfishness ever enter into you.

Do you remember the parable of two kinds of farmers, the amateur farmers, and the ones who are farmers by birth and profession, who persevere and never give up farming? In the same way, a real devotee does not despair and give up his devotion to the Lord and his practice of meditation just because he is unable for sometime to become absorbed in his meditation. He holds fast to the Lord at all times, under all circumstances, in happiness and in misery, in disease and in health, in peace and in unrest. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The human guru gives the mantra through the ear of the disciple, and the guru of the universe reveals

the mantra in his heart and soul." If you hold on to God, the guru of the universe, he will give you right understanding, love for him, and pure devotion to his lotus feet. There will be nothing lacking for one who always keeps recollectedness of God.

Always bear in mind that you are a child of the Lord and his servant, and live accordingly. May there be no envy, jealousy, or hatred in you. Patience and forbearance should be our guides in life. Sri Ramakrishna's own life is a wonderful example of this patience. "He who bears and forbears lives," he used to say. "He who does not, is destroyed. O men, learn forbearance ; if you do not, you too will surely be destroyed." We have come to Sri Ramakrishna to learn this truth: "See God, who is present before you in manifold forms ; where else could you find him? Love him in all beings and thus you will be serving and worshipping God."

We are born to serve all *jivas* as Narayana [God]. This is our sadhana. We have no time to look into the goodness and badness of people. It is against our *dharma* [religious duty].

We must make our own those who are poor, weak, ignorant and fallen. This, however, does not mean that because we must

love the poor, we have to hate the rich and the fortunate. Remember Swamiji's words, "The Beloved Lord dwells in all beings, from Brahma to worms and atoms." You must learn to live in love and harmony with all. Such is the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji.

You wish to stay there until the monastery is established on a sound basis. That is very good. Without steadfastness, nobody can progress in spiritual life, nor can anybody do good to his country. What is my country? My country is the "three worlds". India alone is not our country. We must know that this whole world is our own country. We must pray for all mankind. The root of ignorance and delusion is the sense of little "me" and "mine". Give up this attachment to the "little self". "This world belongs to you, Lord. You are the Master. I am only one of your servants." Learn to be large-hearted, not in words only, but in deeds. At the same time, like the digger of the well in Sri Ramakrishna's parable, we must continue to dig in one and the same place.

It is my earnest prayer that you may succeed in your effort to establish the monastery. It is not good to leave anything half-finished. Do not be afraid of anything. Call

on Sri Ramakrishna with all your heart and soul, and he, out of his abundant grace, will grant you devotion, courage, and strength.

You can meditate and chant the name of the Lord very well sitting on a chair. There is no rule regarding time and place for meditating on the Lord and repeating his holy Name. What is needed is to remember our Chosen Ideal always and in all circumstances. Always bear in mind you have received, by God's grace, *siddha* [perfect and effective] mantras from the Holy Mother. Believe this always. How can you take a wrong turning? You will always walk the right path through the Lord's grace. "I have the Holy Mother's grace. How can I perform any wrong action?" May you have the firm conviction that you are pure, that you are the devotees and servants of the Lord. Know that all the people of the world are your own. Consider no one a stranger to you, no one your enemy, no one bad. You have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, and can wander about the world fearlessly. Wherever the devotee may be, he is always in the presence of God.

What real harm can result to the Ashrama from the remarks of the Governor-general? If the Ashrama has no internal defects, what anxiety or fear should you feel? No one

can harm pure, unselfish work. March forward with pure bodies and pure minds, holding on to the truth. Who can hinder us? Always bear in mind that our one and only goal is to attain devotion to God. Be certain that the Lord himself is our guide in the path. My constant prayer is that Sri Ramakrishna may grant you strength, patience, and courage.

[To a devotee] TRUE IT IS that man is a slave to worldliness ; but pray: "Lord, bless me with right understanding." I see no evil in you. Who knows but that you may be a saint tomorrow. God plays with us by putting on various masks. We act under the control of our *samskaras* [tendencies]. We are all toys in the hands of the good Lord, and he is our refuge.

[To a woman devotee] YOU HAVE received Holy Mother's grace. Know for certain that it is not ordinary good fortune ; it is most certainly the result of your *tapasya* of innumerable lives. Iron becomes gold at the touch of the touchstone. Whether you know it or not, the iron of your body and mind has become gold by the touchstone of the lotus feet of the Mother. By that touch you have become eager for devotion, abandoning the desire for worldly, sensual

enjoyments. Blessed is your birth, whether you know it or not. She, the Mother of the Universe, has assumed a human form as her divine play for the good of all beings. I am convinced that you have become liberated, knowing that her grace has fallen upon you.

Those who are guileless and devoted to truth, self-controlled, and lovers of God, are the living gods, the rishis and siddhas; even though they wear human bodies. Know that it is the infinite grace of God that you can meditate on the form of Sri Ramakrishna. Mother, I tell you what I have known all my life. As you meditate on Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother, you will receive all that is needed for your spiritual unfoldment. The saviour of the fallen, Sri Ramakrishna, took a human body for our sake; he is still living in a spiritual body, blessing eager and yearning souls; and he reveals himself to many who call on him with an earnest heart. Being indifferent to pleasure or pain, meditate with an undivided mind on Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. The Lord is the witness, the fulfiller of the wishes of his devotees. He thinks of our welfare more than we. That is why I say he will do everything needed for your spiritual unfoldment. Have no fear. Only look to him day and night, and pray

and weep. The only way to receive love and devotion is by the means of truth and purity. Be pure. Increase your faith and devotion and you will get everything. You will become perfect.

My heart's prayer is that Sri Ramakrishna may protect you and fill you with devotion and faith. Since you have received human birth, make this life blessed by having the vision of Sri Ramakrishna while living in the body. Then only may you turn to other work.

It is good for the families of devotees to love one another. Where is peace in this world? Only those who can make the Lord their own are happy. They alone are blessed.

7

[To a student in school] Do NOT allow yourself to be restless and distracted. Give your whole attention to study. That will do you much good. Avoid evil company. Keep your body and mind absolutely pure. Have no fear. God will give you strength and grant you devotion.

[To a monk] FAITH and devotion—these are the greatest treasures in life. Material prosperity oftentimes may bring ruin to an individual.

Always remember, the Lord is the “doer”.

If ever the idea that "I am the doer" enters into your head, the Lord instantly flies away. All efforts then will be in vain. Therefore I say, be careful, holy man. Let not the "un-ripe" ego ever enter your heart. Pray that you may only be an instrument in the hands of the Lord, through his grace. Then only will you become a real *karma-yogi*. Then work will no longer bind you. Because the disease of ignorance is so severe, it requires the greatest of all physicians. By merely taking His name, the disease is cured. Sing His glory with your entire heart and soul.

Trust in the Lord and act. You will then succeed. If you depend on men, you will meet with failure. If you understand in your heart of hearts that the Lord is the "doer", and you are his instrument, what can you fear?

My prayer is that the Lord may grant you strength and devotion. What fear is there for the worshippers of God? Tormented by fear are those who are immersed in worldliness.

[To a woman devotee] WE BELIEVE Sri Ramakrishna is a world teacher. If by God's grace you can be absorbed in meditation on Sri Ramakrishna, devotion to your own guru will also grow. However, the Lord, the

creator, is alone the true guru and he is the goal.

How many are there in this world who can give their all--who can surrender their bodies, minds and hearts? And who but God or the guru, the knower of *Brahman*, can accept such an offering? How many people are there who are complete masters of their bodies and minds? Those who have such mastery are not ordinary souls. But those who are attached to their bodies, who have body consciousness, who are subject to feelings of happiness and misery, who have the sense of "I" and "mine", cannot have the power to accept and help those who may surrender to them. If it were easy to surrender one's heart and mind or easy to accept such an offering by anybody and everybody, there would have been an end to the sufferings and miseries of the world. This world would then be a heaven on earth.

If really you have offered your all, your mind and heart to God, then you are beyond all duties; you are no longer "you", neither have you anything that is "yours". On the other hand, if you still have the sense of ego, the sense that you are the "doer", then you have not really surrendered yourself to God, nor has he accepted your offering.

Your guru has quoted the words of the

scriptures. And none but those who practise spiritual disciplines can understand the spirit of the scriptures.

Keep yourself engaged in the practice of the disciplines. He who meditates on Sri Ramakrishna overcomes the world.

[To an aspirant] EVEN amongst the spiritual aspirants who are more advanced, distractions arise during the hour of meditation. It is not merely true of you alone. You must therefore pray to God and keep watch over the vagaries of your mind. Also whenever the mind may wander about, whatever distracting thoughts may arise in the mind, learn to feel in all those distractions the all-pervading presence of your Chosen Ideal. Never be discouraged, but practise with perseverance. Through God's grace, when your mind becomes concentrated, samadhi is attained.

See no difference between the guru and God. Don't bother about thinking of the lotus. Meditate, within the heart, either upon the guru or the Chosen Ideal, depending upon the mood at the time, and know that he who is the guru is also the Chosen Ideal. Have unswerving devotion to guru and God.

To control the passions, to keep the body and mind pure, and to hold on to truth steadfastly are practices of Brahmacharya.

Fear not. Call on Sri Ramakrishna and right understanding will come.

[To a monk] THE TRUTH as taught by Sri Ramakrishna will be appreciated and accepted by the world in course of time. Man will come to know what real happiness is. The Lord is the doer of good and by his holy name all that is evil will disappear. The *jiva* [individual man] will become Shiva [God]. The ignorant will become wise. The sinner will become a saint; and there will come peace on earth in His name.

[To a devotee] FORGET the goal of life and you ruin yourself. Hence always keep the ideal before your eyes and struggle to reach it.

Some there are who know what is right and what is wrong and yet act sinfully. They sin knowingly. They are worse than those who do evil through ignorance. They become purified through knowledge. No teaching can help one who is not in earnest.

God dwells in all. He is within your heart. Pray to him, weep before him, and you will find energy and strength. Your mind will come under control. Evil thoughts are to be driven away by good thoughts.

[To a woman devotee] ONE MAY have devo-

tion to God. That does not mean that he may find happiness in the life in the world. This world is the play of *maya*; who can understand this play? A devotee must depend entirely on the Lord. He must accept the Lord's will, whatever that may be. "Whatever condition you may place me in Mother—whether under a tree, with ashes to adorn my body; or on a royal throne, adorned with silver, gold and diamonds—it is for my good, provided I do not forget thee."

One finds no peace without devotion to God. Material wealth does not make a man happy or peaceful.

Be absorbed in the thought of Sri Ramakrishna, imbibe his spirit—such is my heart's desire for you. Always cultivate pure thoughts. Purity is strength, and purity is God. Live such a life that no one may be an enemy to you.

Read the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna regularly and try to absorb them.

[To a monk] OTHERS will follow your lead if you love them and make them your own. A leader, in order to be a true leader, must necessarily be free from egoism.

It is not good for everybody to do as he pleases. There must be some restraint. In order that devotion to God may arise and

right understanding may come, there has to be a fence around a spiritual aspirant in his early days ; just as a fence needs to be erected round a young plant to protect it from wild animals.

[To a devotee] Do NOT pay much heed to dreams. Sometimes dreams may come true, but most of the time they are mere dreams, and not true. But to dream of holy men is good, auspicious. You must not, however, speak of such dreams to anybody and everybody.

Live and act and mould your character in the waking state. It is good to discuss Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings amongst friends.

Pray to Sri Ramakrishna, and he will give you the right understanding and you will be strong in his strength.

Swami Turiyananda is at present living at the Belur Math. He is well-versed in the scriptures and an illumined soul. Correspond with him. He answers every letter. Do not tell him, however, that I asked you to write to him. Miss MacLeod, an American devotee of Swami Vivekananda, will be leaving for England by boat at this terrible time [during the First World War], when we hear reports of ships being sunk by the enemy. I

received a letter from her today, saying, "When I am going with the blessings of a brother disciple of Swamiji, not only I, but all the passengers of the boat will reach the destination safely." See, what faith! Faith and devotion transform a man into a god, a saint, a free soul. This American devotee lived in our guest house at Belur Math for nearly four months. She is very good and large-hearted.

8

[To a devotee] Do NOT be discouraged, but continue to practise meditation. You will soon succeed in freeing your mind from distractions. He who keeps his mind in God, finds His grace, and through His grace becomes absorbed in meditation. Through His grace he finds holy association, his mind becomes purified, and he becomes endowed with right understanding. The mind itself will then become the guru and lead you by the right path.

Those who have faith in God cannot be harmed by lust and anger, though these may arise occasionally. Think that you are servants of God, children of Shiva, the Lord of the Universe, the destroyer of passions. Passions will no longer assail you.

Meditate within the shrine of your heart

on any aspect of God that appeals to you. Struggle hard to control the vagaries of your mind. As you continue to practise meditation upon God, you will find joy and sweetness; and then you cannot live without thinking of God. May you attain faith and devotion is my earnest prayer. May the Lord protect you always.

[To a monk] KEEP your thoughts on Sri Rama-krishna, surrender yourself to him, and work for him. Seek not for the results of your actions—such is the teaching of the Lord. Your heart will thus be purified. One can have the right understanding only through the Lord's grace.

Mere lectures cannot help to preach the truth of God. Show it by your life. Live exemplary lives and people will follow you.

Sects and sectarianism have always existed in this world and will continue to exist. Only by the grace of God can they be removed from man's heart. How many are there who can hold lofty ideals and live exemplary lives? Man achieves greatness, large-heartedness, and guilelessness by the *tapasya* [practice of austerity] of many births and only through the grace of God.

May you attain devotion and knowledge. May you dive deep into the ocean of bliss.

In this infinite creation of the Lord, let us also contribute some kind of play. Make this world your own by loving all. Let there be no stranger, let there be no foe or enemy. Let there be no pride or egotism in us. Let the world be united in love as one race. Know that love alone is true—all else is fleeting, false.

[To a woman devotee] IF YOU had met Miss MacLeod, you would have seen what faith, what devotion she had. People like her are born in every age to do the Lord's work. She is our very own.

Man attains God by purity, guilelessness, and steadfast devotion to him.

Study regularly *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It will be the same as the study of the *Bhagavatam* and the *Gita*. Read also Swamiji's letters and his lectures. There is an innate power in them to inspire all those who read them.

With the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, a new age has dawned. Let all find the way of peace. Whoever walks His path will be immersed in bliss. We must make all the people on earth our very own. Let none be a stranger or an outsider. If there must be an outsider, it should be this "I", "me", and "mine". This "me" and "mine" is the

greatest enemy. We must crush this enemy, we must kill all selfishness. Then only will the whole world become our own ; then only will we see this world as belonging to God ; then alone will there be peace and happiness on earth.

He alone is the teacher of mankind who is free from all sense of ego. If one has faith in God's hallowed name, all delusion will be destroyed in him by God's power. With God's power all is possible. May He through His grace remove the bandage of ignorance from our eyes.

9

[To a monk] HAVE firm faith and conviction in your heart that Sri Ramakrishna is always looking after you ; then you will find that "the world's great sea in its wrath seems shrunk to the puddle that fills the hoofprint in the clay".

In a pure body and a pure mind, the power of God becomes manifest. Think and think of God ; the impurities of the mind will be washed away. Always keep in mind that you have the grace of the Holy Mother, you are her children, and you are free forever ; and thus live and act accordingly. Know that knowledge, love, and purity belong to our very nature ; fame, honour, and glories are

foreign to our nature. Let not our minds ever run after such.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in this age. His words will spread all over the world and thus there will come peace on earth.

Pray to the all-knowing, omnipotent Lord, and all weakness will fly away. Blessed will be your life and you will find joy.

Through the grace of God, a sinner becomes a saint. We may have been just so many pieces of iron, soiled by the dirt of ignorance; but Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother are touchstones—their touch has turned us into gold. Blessed are we through their grace. Blessed is the human birth—blessed, blessed are we.

Have faith. You have taken the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna, you will be free, you will attain perfection in this very life—have this firm conviction. Never harbour any doubt. Chant the name of the Lord and fear will leave you. Your heart will be filled with joy.

Never give any thought to the idea that you are bound souls. You are free! You are free! Chant the name of the Lord and even the king of death will be afraid to approach you.

Take your refuge in truth. Surrender yourself to the Lord. Make your heart and

lips the same, and the Lord, who knows the innermost thoughts of our hearts, will protect you. Fear, worries, and anxieties dwell where there are hypocrisy, evil motives, and selfishness. He who holds on to the pillar of God has found the compass to direct his path ; he cannot be destroyed. He is victorious everywhere and he is free forever.

Read the letters of Swamiji, and courage and strength will come. There is such a wonderful, superhuman example before you, and still you have fear! Those who call on Sri Ramakrishna are not even afraid to meet Yama, the king of death. What do you worship that you are still beset with fear? Is it a spook?

This Ashrama belongs to our Lord. He is the leader and he will conduct his work. Has the Ashrama been created by your wish and do you think you can carry on by your own exertion? The Lord does everything. "My Divine Mother dwells in all beings, and they do as she wills."

Man by himself has no power to do the Lord's work. What good work you see done is the manifestation of the divine power, it expresses the glory of Mother's power, beyond thought's compass. Be strong in the strength of God and engage yourself in work as an

instrument in his hands. That will bring peace and joy.

OVERPOWERED by ignorance, man remains subject to anger and egoism. To be dispassionate means to be freed from passions and from egoism. To achieve that end man practises spiritual disciplines. If you harbour anger and passions, it will be your ruin; especially lust and anger—they are demonic. If they arise in your heart, weep and pray before the Lord. By his grace they will fly away. And egoism—it is truly hellish! It is this egoism that has kept the whole world under delusion. Only with the greatest austerity can one be completely freed from ego.

The one ideal of human life is to attain faith and devotion, without which this world is like a desert. Move onward. I pray that you may gain faith and devotion and live for the good of all, for the happiness of all.

I AM SORRY to learn of the death of your brother. What embodied being can escape grief, disease, and death? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Even Brahma weeps when caught in the net of the five elements." Man's life becomes fruitful only if he struggles to break out of this net of ignorance. Take

refuge in Him who is the Indwelling God ; he will awaken strength, right understanding, and vigour in you.

DISMISS vain fears. What fear can there be for those who are children of the Lord, his servants? Practise meditation and japa with your whole heart, even the terror of death will fly away. My prayer for you is that each one of you may be great spiritually and of immense service to mankind.

WHAT nonsense you have written—likening me to Sri Krishna! We are the dust of the dust of his feet. Never write a thing like that. How could there be any comparison between the sun and the glowworm? Fie! I feel disgusted. I wish to remain as the servant of the servant of his devotees. May Sri Ramakrishna graciously give you a truer understanding. Do you know what will happen if you speak or think in that way? A sect will form and fanaticism will grow. The followers then will rot within the narrow circle of a sect. Be like the fish playing happily in the ocean and not like the fish in a narrow ditch. Let your consciousness expand into the infinite and limitless. Live in the society of the holy, chant the Lord's name,

and go beyond all limits. Be watchful, be careful ; move onward, forward.

IF YOU give a person responsibility for the performance of any work, he learns to think independently ; his understanding grows, and he succeeds. He stands on his own feet.

MAKE the mind one-pointed and practise japa and meditation. You will then gradually overcome restlessness. You are now living in solitude. Practise the spiritual disciplines with your whole heart and mind. Struggle to engage yourself vigorously in worship and meditation ; you will then find that the Lord will pave the way to the goal.

MISERY is a great teacher. Unless a man goes through misery and suffering himself, he cannot feel sympathy for others' sufferings.

[To a monk] **HOW CAN** you conduct a Home of Service unless you receive help from the public? Surely you could appeal to the public for help. It is not proper to depend entirely upon one man's help.

Surrender all desire for name and fame to the Lord. If some little name or fame comes your way, it won't harm you. The devotees of our Lord are free-while-living. Be and move like heroes—strong in the strength

of the Lord. If any weakness arises, pray to the Lord in solitude. He will give you strength and right understanding and will lead you to himself.

Think of the Lord before whatever work you may undertake to perform ; and try to do it as an instrument, depending upon him. Always keep in mind that the Lord is the doer of good, and no evil can befall if one depends upon him. I also bless you that through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna you may perform all work as worship and only in order to please him. Let there be no other motive behind any of your work.

Only the Lord's will is done. But how can an ordinary individual know and understand his will? To keep recollectedness of him is the one duty of man.

Well or ill—all depends upon him. We must remain contented under all circumstances. Let Him do as He wills with us, for we belong to Him.

10

YOU HAVE spoken of some misunderstanding that has arisen between brothers in the Ashrama. That will clear up. If you have no ill feeling in you, then there is nothing to

fear. Hold on firmly to truth under all circumstances. "Truth alone triumphs, not untruth." Know that if you harbour no ill feeling towards anyone and hold on to truth, Sri Ramakrishna will grant you infinite strength to serve mankind.

[To a householder devotee] YOU SHOULD find a job that will give you more income. As long as you have to live in the world, you will need money. But earn money by honest means—that does one good. Never stoop to dishonest means. To be dishonest is the one root cause of all misfortune and suffering.

Be not self-seeking ; try to be desireless, and take your refuge in the Lord, who is the doer of all good. You will then have no fear. The world's great sea will appear like a puddle that fills the hoofprint in the clay. Make your heart and lips the same and call on the Beloved Lord earnestly. All fear will vanish. You will experience ecstatic joy. Peace will reign in your heart. The source of all joy is the name of our Lord.

Hold on to him ; let nothing daunt you. He is the operator, we are his instruments. He is the master ; we are his servants, his eternal companions.

Always remember, purity and steadfastness in truth make a god out of a man.

[To a monk] **THOSE** who renounce everything lack nothing. We must be large-hearted ; let our heart and mind embrace all beings with love, the dwellers in high heaven as well as those of the nethermost regions. "Spit out name and fame." Thus did Sri Ramakrishna teach us.

There are those who are attached to worldly enjoyments and consider them to be all in all ; they are intoxicated with money, name, and fame. They have no faith in God, nor can they devote themselves to him. Furthermore they wish to drag everybody down to their level.

Sri Ramakrishna taught us to bear and forbear. He used to say, "He who bears, endures forever ; he who does not bear is lost." So learn to bear and forbear. Have infinite patience. To live in the world we need to cultivate these two qualities—patience and forbearance.

Give your mind to Sri Ramakrishna. He is the ocean of mercy, he will protect you forever under all circumstances.

God is love. Have faith and conviction that he protects those who take refuge in him. Call on him in the secrecy of your heart. He will grant you strength ; he will grant you right understanding.

Hold on to truth. To make your heart and lips the same is to become truthful. Hold on to truth and you will achieve everything. May God bless you.

RITUALISTIC worship may be performed by anyone who has received initiation. He who has received initiation has his body purified. Perform worship with devotion to the Lord. As you continue doing the worship, your mind will attain the power of concentration and you will be able to meditate.

If you worship with devotion in your heart, there is no need to observe all the external formalities of worship. You need only faith and devotion.

Associate with all. Live in love and harmony with all. However, though you may associate with everybody, see that you never forget your own ideal. Hold on to your ideal steadfastly.

He who is a devotee of God is the life of our lives. He is our very own. This world would be enveloped in total darkness if there were no devotees of the Lord.

You are a devotee. The Lord has protected you and will always protect you. For you there is nothing to fear. May you progress more and more in your spiritual life. Go forward further and further, bliss will be yours.

[To a householder devotee] THE DEVOTEES of God are our only friends, relatives, children and everything. In happiness or misery, you are our very own. It is no small wonder that you, though living worldly lives, seek to attain pure devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. Look at the general run of people! Most are delirious; intoxicated by wealth, fame, or the pride of learning. In this terrible desert of a world, the Lord is the only source of peace and bliss.

You have nothing to fear, for you have held on to the pillar, the Lord. You have your goal fixed. Seeing your example, many will try to set their feet on the path.

Oh, devotees of the Lord, display exemplary lives; let others learn from you how to live pure, selfless lives, desiring nothing else but the love of the Lord. Usher into the world a new age, in which people will learn to love the Lord and find peace and strength in him. Let your deeds speak—not mere words, not theories. May the Lord help you and give you strength. Have faith in him. He is ours and we belong to him.

PRIDE, vanity, or egotism cannot touch those who are true devotees of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The devotees belong to a class of their own. They are neither

Brahmins, nor Sudras, neither Hindus nor Moslems." The devotees belong to God's caste. They are his relatives, they are his own. The devotees seek nothing but the grace of the Lord.

[To a student] IT DOES not matter where you live ; only do not forget the goal of life. Then you will have nothing to fear. It does not mean, however, that I am asking you to renounce the world.

You have received the grace of the Holy Mother. Hence you must be good. Have faith that you are endowed with *sattva*. But the tree does not bear fruits except at the right season. Nothing is gained by being impatient.

You are young, and you will live to see how the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna will permeate the world. Now the world is full of envy, jealousy, hatred, and so forth. Soon will come a flood of love that will wash away all these and everything that is selfish.

[To an aspirant] WORLDLY people will advise you to follow that which they have understood as good. You are to discriminate and find the path that is good for you and that will lead you to your goal. The best path is the path trodden by men of God.

You desire to follow the path of renuncia-

tion. Naturally your relatives will not like it and they will try to dissuade you. Nevertheless you must not be angry at them, nor should you speak harshly to them. If you want to be a holy man, learn to bear and forbear. If you want to be good and happy in this world, have patience and forbearance. Infinite patience, unlimited forbearance, and forgiveness—these alone bring peace and happiness.

You are young. Your passions are naturally strong, and desires for enjoyment will arise inevitably. You need to be very careful. Think that you are the servant of the Lord, that you are strong in the strength of the Lord. How could lust overcome you! You have to be strong and a hero, and at the same time calm and tender. If you have faith in Sri Ramakrishna, you will have no fear. You will remain undaunted in the midst of dangers and difficulties. You will experience and see for yourself the truth of this. You will have a new birth as you take the name of Sri Ramakrishna. Man becomes God in his name.

Devotees should converse about the Lord with one another. Our lives become vain if we have no love for devotees of the Lord. Devotees are our own—there should be no consideration of caste or race, for they have

none. To love the devotees of the Lord brings no attachment, it creates no bondage. Which ever church or temple you visit see the presence of your chosen ideal; everywhere is the one Lord, your own beloved. That is what is meant by steadfast devotion to your Chosen Ideal.

Meditate on the Lord and chant his name as much and as often as you can. Also converse about him with like-minded people. That helps everyone.

Continue your studies at the college. Do not be afraid that you will be drowned in worldliness. Always keep your mind and heart pure.

Pray to Sri Ramakrishna for whatever you feel you need. He dwells in the hearts of all and he listens to the prayers of all.

Be sincere, let your heart and lips be the same.

Read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the works of Swamiji. Try to understand what you read and mould your life accordingly.

[To one who is repentant] GOD DWELLS in every being, and he knows the innermost thoughts of all. Pray to him with your whole heart, weep before him. He is the one who

can direct your mind toward the path of good, he is the one to give you the strength to follow the path. If you vow to yourself that you will follow the path of righteousness, you will be able to do so by the grace of the Lord. But pray to him day and night, weep before him; you will gain strength and you will attain devotion. He is the ocean of mercy, he is full of compassion and he is the embodiment of forgiveness.

Remember sincerity counts before him—not hypocrisy, nor a show of piety.

11

NOTHING real can be achieved in the field of religion by mere talk. It is a thing to be practised—with all the intensity of life and soul. We can never hope to attain even a bit of religion if we rest contented by simply making a verbal reproduction of the teachings of our scriptures like a talking machine and make no further move. He alone has spirituality who has the internal realization of it. To him alone who has the seed of religion comes its gradual unfoldment. Just as a seed of a banyan is necessary to bring forth a mighty tree, so there must be the seed of spirituality in us first. Then we must rear the

tree; in other words, mould our thinking by one thought only. No one can become spiritual by simply filling his head with stock phrases and now and then making a parade of them before others. Of course, one can pass for a great scholar. But he will never be spiritual. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that pundits are like vultures that soar high in the air, but whose eyes are fixed on the charnel pits below—on lust and gold.

The first thing needed to be spiritual is truthfulness. Never forsake truth, even for the sake of your life. God is truth itself; hence he is at the command of one who is devoted to truth. Spirituality is impossible for him who does not cherish truthfulness in thought, word, and deed; without this, all attempt is in vain. So, first of all try to be unflinchingly truthful with all heart and soul. Truth is ever victorious, in all times—past, present and future.

MANY know theoretically much of what spirituality is; but, alas, how few are there who put their knowledge into actual practice. The achievement will be only *his* who would follow up truth. We hear many say that it is impossible to be truthful in business, but I do not believe it. Where truth reigns there the Lord himself abides. If the man of

business carefully enshrines truth in his house, he will be looked upon as the greatest of all virtuous men and his business is destined to thrive. Nag Mahashaya [a householder-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna] was greatly devoted to truth. Once he went to buy something in the market, and the shopkeeper charged him four annas. As he was truthful, he took the shopkeeper at his word and did not haggle with him. A bystander, seeing him pay the four annas, thought to himself, "What sort of a man is this? He did not even bargain!" But when he learned that the man was Nag Mahashaya, the saint, who believed no one would dupe others, he took the shopkeeper to task for charging four annas for what was worth only two annas. The shopkeeper took this to heart. The next day, when Nag Mahashaya came to buy something, the shopkeeper charged him only two annas for an article worth five annas. With folded hands Nag Mahashaya addressed the shopkeeper: "Why do you act like this with me? This is worth more than two annas. Please charge me the right price." Deeply moved, the shopkeeper fell at the feet of the saint.

You will never lose if you adhere to truth. Hold fast to truth and divine grace is sure to flow to you through all channels. You will

prosper not only in worldly affairs, but in spirituality as well.

If you have truthfulness, every other virtue is sure to come in its wake—even self-control. But we have lost this truthfulness, and that is why we have come to such a pass—groaning under the crushing weight of misery and degradation. Now all our efforts must be directed first to retrieve it; not by mere empty speech, but by sincere action, pledging all our heart and soul to it. The principal element in spiritual practice is this sincerity—making the inner life tally with the outer, thought with speech. At present we are hypocrites, for we think one way and talk another. We are not sincere. This is delusion and ignorance. He who wants to be spiritual must give up talk and take to practice. God's grace descends upon such a person and he is sure to prosper here and hereafter.

IN THE *Bhagavad-Gita* Sri Krishna urges us to perform work without attachment, to attain freedom even in this life. This is neither a myth nor the fabrication of a morbid brain. We have actually seen such lives with our own eyes. We also must attain the same freedom, in this very life. We must attain it—even if it means total sacrifice. Otherwise, all our talk of devotion and

religion will remain confined to speech and unrealized in actual life. Unless we attain freedom, we will not get pure devotion. In whatever station of life we may be, let us all say with the force of our soul that we must become *jivanmuktas*, the "living-free". But we will have to sacrifice our entire lives. Many like to hear of devotions; indeed, it is very pleasant to discuss. But it demands one's very life-blood, as it were, when one goes to practise it.

Once a man wanted to have *prema* [intense love] for God. Just then he saw a vendor passing in the street with a basket on his head, crying, "Ho, here is *prema*. Who wants it? Who would buy it?"

Hearing this, some boys cried out, "O, let us eat *prema*!" Some older ones also called out. "Indeed, we want *prema*!"

At this, the vendor lowered the basket from his head and said, "Come, let me know how much *prema* each of you will have. I sell it by weight. How much do you want, a pound you say?" With this he drew out a sharp knife. "Here! Give me your head and I shall return you as much *prema* as your head weighs!"

If you want *prema* this is the price you must pay—your head! Verily, never has

spirituality been attained by mummery—by empty words! Sacrifice, terrible sacrifice of one's own life is the price for it. Have you not heard of Sri Radha? She gave up everything; everything that one considers dear in this life and so she got him [Sri Krishna]. We have also seen such lives ourselves. The sublime lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Nag Mahashaya, and others are ever shining brightly before our eyes. If you want spirituality follow such examples. It is impossible to have the world as well as religion. When you give up everything, then alone will you win spirituality.

SEE GOD, know the Atman, then will the book of infinite wisdom be opened to you. He who is infinite wisdom and infinite Being dwells within you. The experiences of the seers and prophets of old are recorded in the scriptures, but the mere study of the scriptures is not enough. In order to gain the true knowledge of God you have to have the experience yourself. Then alone will the door to all mysteries be opened. It is written in the *Gita*: "That Brahman is beginningless, transcendent, eternal. He is said to be equally beyond what is, and what is not."

The key to the knowledge of God is in His hands. Therefore, pray for His grace.

Make Him your Chosen Ideal. Yearn for Him, for to a loving heart He stands revealed. That is what our Master taught us.

While it is true that every divine incarnation and Godman embodied all the great ideals, yet each one emphasized one particular ideal. For instance, Sri Chaitanya was the very embodiment of love. Just as congealed water takes the form of ice, so congealed love took the form of Sri Chaitanya. In the same way, Shankara was the embodiment of knowledge, Buddha the embodiment of renunciation, and Sri Krishna the embodiment of selfless work.

The harmony of the divergent philosophies and creeds is found in the *Gita*, as taught by Sri Krishna. He emphasized the truth that selfless work, meditation, knowledge, and love are but different limbs of spiritual disciplines. But in his own life he exemplified the discipline of selfless action. Such selfless work leads to purity of heart. Dispassion can arise only in a heart that is pure. In his own life, Buddha exemplified dispassion. He asked for nothing for himself, not even liberation. All his struggles were for the good of mankind. Out of dispassion springs knowledge. Shankara was the embodiment of knowledge. Knowledge leads to love, and Sri Chaitanya came that mankind might

bathe in this love. Yet man in his ignorance thought that these ideals differed one from another, and out of this ignorance divergent creeds and sects were formed. But with the coming of Sri Ramakrishna, these differing opinions were harmonized. The divergent streams met in him, the ocean of harmony.

Even as rivers spring from different sources
Yet mingle in the ocean,
So all the Vedas, all scriptures, all truth,
 though of diverse origin,
Come home to Thee!

12

SRI RAMAKRISHNA practised the disciplines prescribed by all the different religions, and through each one of them he realized God. He saw God in all beings, and to him there was none hateful. We have seen him living most of the time drunk with the love of God. The very idea of a sect being formed around him was abhorrent to him. And, after all, how is it possible to hedge about a God-man, a knower of the Atman, one who was the very embodiment of divine love and had probed the very depths of every religion? Sects are

formed when religion degenerates and its followers become weak, jealous, and fearful. It is the water of a pond which stagnates, never the waters of a flowing river. Guard yourself against fanaticism. Never disturb the faith of another. Never say, "We belong to the sect of Sri Ramakrishna! He is the only saviour, he is the greatest avatara; therefore, all people must worship him!"

Sri Ramakrishna had absolutely no sense of egoism. He lived by giving power of attorney to the Divine Mother. To do that means to surrender one's own power to act entirely to that of another. Girish Ghosh gave the power of attorney to Sri Ramakrishna. Such complete surrender is difficult, even impossible, so long as there remains even the least trace of ego. Sri Ramakrishna used to say it was like living as a dry leaf before the wind.

HE WHO feels neither elation nor affliction in the presence of pleasure or pain, but keeps his mind poised in God and lives as an instrument in the hands of God, is one who truly follows the teachings of Sri Krishna in the *Gita*. "Lay down all duties in Me, your refuge," he said. And truly the Lord does fulfil his promise: "Fear no longer, for I shall save you from sin and from bondage."

See and feel God's grace. All else is vain. "The Self is not known through the study of the scriptures, nor through subtlety of the intellect, nor through much learning. Whom the Self chooses, by him is he attained." And it is when his grace descends that infinite knowledge unfolds. Then one no longer cares for the study of the scriptures. Direct knowledge is one thing and "book" knowledge is another. This, however, does not mean that one should give up the study of the scriptures; for, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The fan is needed until the spring breeze blows."

BE Merged in God. Dive deep. God is not a mere word to be uttered. He is the Reality to be attained. Attain Him even in this very life. There is no other way to cross this vast desert of worldliness, the abode of suffering and death. Nothing other than devotion to God can bring peace to the arid heart.

Be selfless. Be free from vanity. Practise your spiritual disciplines with earnestness and enthusiasm. Thus shall you reach God. Consider the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever he undertook to practise some particular spiritual discipline, he became completely absorbed in it and followed the practice through to its conclusion with great earnest-

ness, perseverance, and single-hearted devotion.

Be active also. Free yourself from all sense of ego, and work selflessly. Be very careful that no sense of leadership or any trace of selfishness enter into you. Whatever you do, do as the servant of the Lord. Offer all the fruits of your actions to Him, then shall your work be turned into worship.

Dispassion, renunciation of ego, love, devotion, and living faith—these are the signs of a true monk. No garb ever made a monk. For a householder to neglect his duty, for a Brahmacharin to give up his vows, for a monk to be restless with passions, these are hypocrisies. The *gerua* robe is the sign of renunciation: to one who is dispassionate it is merely an ornament. But if the mind runs after woman and gold and is made restless by the passions, then the wearing of the robe becomes a farce. Colour your mind and heart with the colour of renunciation, dispassion, and devotion to God. Then only will you become a true monk.

The general may win the battle ;
The king may subdue his kingdom ;
But he who rules his own mind
Is the greatest of them all !

Let the strong wind of dispassion rise in your minds, that the trees of desire be uprooted. Then, even as birds fly from the shelter of trees before a strong wind, will the ignorance of selfishness, jealousy, hatred, and egoism take flight from your hearts. Then shall peace follow and fill your lives, even as calm follows the storm.

Mould your lives so that, wherever you live, be it under a tree or in a meadow, Ashramas will be founded and many spiritual aspirants will gather around you. No real work is done by merely lecturing; your lives must exemplify the ideals you preach.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was the living example of dispassion. Make him your ideal, and mould your life after his pattern. While the goldsmith is melting gold, he works with his hands, his feet, and his mouth. With his feet he operates the bellows, with his hands he operates the fan, and with his mouth he blows the fire, so that the gold will melt more quickly. When it is melted he pours it into the mould; only then does he relax and smoke his pipe. In the same way you must strive with all the might of your body, mind, and heart to love God, to be melted into his love, and to become absorbed in him. Keep alive the fire of dispassion and renunciation

within you, and let your mind be renewed by the deep impression of purity. "Everything in this world is fraught with fear. Renunciation alone is fearlessness."

As you grow older it will become impossible for you to control your mind. Therefore you should practise now. Sri Ramakrishna used to liken the mind to a packet of mustard seeds, which, when once scattered, are difficult to collect again. In old age the mind loses its strength. A white cloth can be dyed any colour, but it is difficult to dye a cloth already coloured. In the same way, the mind that is coloured by worldliness is difficult to change. Your young minds have not been coloured by the world; that is why I am urging you to struggle hard now. Even though, in youth, the passions are strong, the mind is still stronger. Therefore strive to dye your minds in the colour of God's love.

Swami Vivekananda established this monastery with the idea of producing ideal characters. True, there is no lack of monasteries and temples in India, and Swamiji's purpose was not to add yet another to the existing thousands. The sole purpose of this place is to inspire the youth of the country in the ideals of renunciation and the harmony of all religions. From this monastery monks will go out and teach these ideas throughout

the whole world. Sri Ramakrishna did not come to found another sect. He came to bring new life, new impetus, into the spirit of all religions. And it was to produce young men of selfless character and purity to broadcast the Master's ideal of universality that Swamiji founded this monastery.

You have come here inspired by the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna. Now mould your lives accordingly. The ideals of renunciation and purity must be so embodied in your lives that people of all countries will look to you, and pattern their lives after your example. The ideal of a monk's life is not merely to wear the garb, memorize scriptural passages, and wander about to places of pilgrimage. No! It is far better to remain in one place and engage yourself intensely in the practice of spiritual disciplines than to wander aimlessly about from one place to another ; especially for a beginner. He should stay in one place and practise meditation and *japam* with great regularity. Like the bird in the fable, he should hold fast to the mast of the ship.*

* This refers to a parable told by Sri Ramakrishna in which a bird, perched on the mast of a ship, discovers that the ship is heading out to sea. The bird flies off to all four quarters of the earth searching for shore. At last, unable to find land, it settles down on the mast. The parable illustrates the vain search of worldly people for happiness. Finally, exhausted from the pursuit of pleasure, they resign themselves to God.

13

TEACH others by the example of your lives, not by mere words. Combine in your lives the ideals of the four *yogas*—*karma*, *jnana*, *bhakti*, and *raja*. Blessed are you that you have taken refuge in the Lord. "Do or die!" Make this your motto. Rome was not built in a day, neither can the ideal character be formed in one day. It is the sum-total of your every thought and action that makes up your character. Remember this and every moment guard well your thoughts and actions.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that as long as one fibre was loose it was impossible for the thread to pass through the eye of the needle. In the same way, so long as there remains one desire in the heart, it is not possible to attain Samadhi. However, the desire to know God and to love Him cannot be considered a desire in the ordinary sense. The only desire a monk should have in his heart is the desire to realize God. It is not possible, however, for the householder to strictly follow this path of desirelessness. The golden mean is his rightful path. But as I said before, you, as monks, must uproot the very tree of desire with the strong wind of dispassion. Free your minds from all desires,

and peace will reign in your hearts. To be liberated means to be desireless.

Desire, again, is of two kinds—good and evil. That desire which tightens the bonds of ignorance is evil; that which loosens the bonds is good. Therefore, the desire to associate with the holy or to serve them, and the desire to work selflessly for the good of others are good desires. In the *Bhagavatam* we read how the great devotee Prahlada prayed: “May I never be attached to wife, nor children, nor home, nor wealth; but may I be ever attached to those who are the devotees of God.”

Attachment is bondage; yet again, attachment opens the door to liberation to one who becomes attached to God or the guru or to illumined souls.

There are desires also of a gross and subtle kind. Gross desires are the desires for wealth, pleasure, and enjoyments. Sometimes it happens that after a man has succeeded in freeing himself from these gross desires after great struggles and hard spiritual disciplines, he succumbs to the subtle desire for recognition, name or fame. These, too, have to be overcome by the practice of spiritual discrimination. The root cause of all desire is the ego and our identity with the physical body. “When the ego dies, all troubles cease.” Then

alone a man attains immortality. Then is he liberated while living.

Through the practice of *japa*, meditation, and selfless works, the mind gradually attains to subtlety. This subtlety of the mind arises from purity of heart. With such a mind it is possible to detect and root out the subtle desires that lie hidden within.

IN ORDER to attain wisdom of God and liberation for one's own self, one need only to receive the sacred mantras from an illumined guru and, with complete faith, become absorbed in the practice of *japa* and meditation. But in order that one may help and teach mankind, it is necessary also to equip oneself with knowledge from the study of the *Gita*, the Upanishads, and the other scriptures of the world.

In their greed for power and conquest, the Western nations are at war with one another [World War I]. But so long as they have the greed for power they will never know peace. Do you realize that it is upon you and those like you who will follow the path of renunciation that Swamiji placed the responsibility of showing the world the way to peace? He himself went to Europe and America to prepare the soil. It is for you to sow the seeds and reap the harvest. In its

search for peace, the West has reached the summit of material enjoyments. But where is the peace? How can peace be found in the pursuit of material object? Sri Ramakrishna has shown the way of peace in this age. You are his children. You have consecrated your lives "for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many". Raise then the standard of renunciation and the harmony of faith, and go forth. "Time is short, and the obstacles are many." Since death is certain for all, let us die for a sacred cause. Waste no more time. Struggle every moment to reach the goal and move onward and upward. People keep an account of their dollars and cents, but how many keep account of the valuable hours and moments they waste?

I can assure you that you will attain liberation and peace if you but free yourself from lust and greed. There is no doubt about it. How many are there who really seek to find God? If a man prays at all, he prays for health, for wealth, for success. How many seek God out of their love of Him? Who can say, "God is my own. I love Him, and without Him I cannot live!" He who can exemplify these ideals in his life, be he monk or householder, shall be called great. Peace will follow him. He will taste the bliss of immortality; having tasted which, will every

other thing appear tasteless. Furthermore, just as certain as this is true in the case of the individual, so also is it true in the case of a nation. That nation which can make God the ideal of life and follow that path, shall find peace. Only such a nation can survive, and only such a nation can be truly called civilized.

REMEMBER your body is not made for personal pleasure or enjoyment. It is for the purpose of spreading the devotion, knowledge, ecstasy, and rapturous revelations that were expressed through Sri Ramakrishna. Indeed, yours is a life of challenge, very great challenge. Live very carefully and pray to him, "Lord, protect, protect me." That great-souled, heroic devotee, Shashi Maharaj [Swami Ramakrishnananda] asked Swamiji [Vivekananda] after the latter's return from London how one could be a good preacher of Truth. "First one must be brilliant," he said. Then touching his face, he remarked, "Grace is necessary"; then he touched his lips and said, "One must be sweet-speaking". Then, putting his hand on his chest, he exclaimed, "Heart, heart, one must have an expansive and liberal heart; otherwise no one will pay attention to spoken words. What could not be accomplished through the brain I fulfilled

through the heart, and a great deal more. Our Lord too did the same." Then he said, "Self-mastery, self-control, this is a preacher's chief support." Beware, holy man, beware!

May the Lord protect you and grant you strength—that is my prayer.

THE WORLD is full of selfishness; that is certainly true. But as we have to live in the world, it is not right to simply fall in with this conclusion. After thinking about the world's selfishness and accepting the fact of its existence, we have then to get to work. What we should aim for is to remain unselfish ourselves, even though the world is selfish.

The world cannot go on without selfishness. As long as the world exists, selfishness is bound to remain. There is no one to blame for this. It is God who created the world; it is his Maya that produces selfishness. The essential thing is to keep ourselves unselfish.

We should, first of all, see our own defects and not the defects of others. Parents may be expected to be selfish. How can they understand high, unselfish ideas? These people have been thinking selfishly all their lives. They are not to be blamed. They may be selfish; but that does not justify our feeling no respect or devotion for them. If we act like

that, how can we consider ourselves unselfish? If a man is selfish, that should not make me selfish and hence wanting in respect for him. That is totally wrong. The idea is to put up with all the selfishness of the world and remain ourselves without even a trace of selfishness. If this idea is followed strictly, no one can move a person in the least from the path of righteousness.

Advance in the religious path with all your heart and soul. Try to make your mind very strong, so as to surmount all hindrances and obstructions that may come on the path. Pray always that you may have strength, vigour, and energy in your heart. Without energy, nothing can be achieved. If *rajas*, in the form of energy, does not come into your heart, *sattva* will not follow. And unless you are *sattvik*—that is to say, pure in heart—Brahman will not be revealed in your consciousness. Learn to believe in yourself, consider yourself to be a divine child, and think that bad qualities such as selfishness will never manifest themselves in you. If bad qualities come, arouse yourself and throw them out. Do your duties and place your mind and heart in God. In time he will make everything all right for you. If you are sincere, everything will be accomplished. Meditate deeply on one of the many aspects of Sri

Ramakrishna, understand its true significance, and try to reflect the same aspect in your life.

14

TO RESPECT Sri Ramakrishna means to work in accordance with the example he set. No one can become spiritually great by just offering a few flowers to the Lord and showing a little emotion. Have intense devotion and be immersed in the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. Be discriminative. Exercise and cultivate your intellect. To this end Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Be a devotee; but don't be a fool." Ponder the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and make them your own; then and then alone the inner meaning of his teachings will become clear to you.

Why should you fear? Do not be disheartened by the thought that you have not attained your goal. Considerable patience is required. Without patience no one can walk in the spiritual path.

People will walk many paths. Pay no attention to the paths that they may follow. But know that: "Even as rivers spring from different sources, yet mingle in the ocean, so the many paths, straight or crooked, that men

follow—all lead to thee, O Lord, the one goal of all.”

How should we understand? Various kinds of people act upon the stage of this world’s theater; let us watch them only—without becoming involved.

WORSHIP and serve Sri Ramakrishna with your whole heart. Repeat his name and be absorbed in meditation. If you cannot surrender your mind to God, what is the use of visiting places of pilgrimage? Call on him with your whole mind and you will find him, no matter where you may be. Do not quarrel with anyone. Love everyone as you would your closest relatives, knowing them all to be children of Sri Ramakrishna. Pay no heed if one praises you or another blames you. If you have anything to offer, give, but expect no return. All are good, very good. I do not see a single person who is not good. You have been born for the purpose of setting examples of ideal lives in the *lila* of Sri Ramakrishna. Always remember this.

KEEP THE MIND at the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna. Why should you care where your body may be? “Meditate within your heart, in a corner, or in a forest”, said Sri Ramakrishna. Quoting scriptures or spiritual pre-

cepts, just to make a show, will not help you, or even merely spending your time with Sadhus living in holy places. What is needed is the utmost sincerity, to make the heart and the lips the same.

Fie on you! Why should you fail? Do not allow such thoughts to enter your mind. That you have gained the refuge of the Holy Mother is the result of the good deeds of many births. Having obtained her grace, how can one be lost? Hold the conviction that you will help many. You are the chosen children of our Lord; otherwise, how could you have obtained the grace of the Holy Mother? Drive away all depressing thoughts. Know for certain that by Mother's grace you are immortal, pure, free, divine.

IF A FEW people are of one mind, they can transform the thought process of the world. Nothing is gained by having a crowd of people and creating a sensation. But if there is even a handful of persons with heart and faith—believers, earnest, heroic, and fearless—your work will progress very well. May each one of you become a hero of righteousness, work, and charity. Take delight in chanting the name of God. Do not allow the mind to yield to gloominess or want of faith. Be up and doing and serve the Lord with

your whole heart and mind. Do not let vanity enter your heart.

15

THERE ARE many of you now gathered in Rishikesh. See that you do not waste your time in idle gossip. See especially that you do not lose sight of the ideal. May all of you become illumined, worthy to bear the names of Sri Ramakrishna and the supremely large-hearted Swami Vivekananda. Mould your lives in such a way that you may be the ideal men of renunciation. You were not born for the purpose of going on pilgrimages in luxury, or to make a display by giving out preachments. Apply yourselves to hard austerities, destroy your egotism, attain God, and then return. If you do all this, not only India but the whole world will look at you with wonder and accept you as real teachers. Only then are you the Sannyasins and devotees of the Belur Math. As for others, who take the garb to eke out their living, there are plenty of those in India.

Be pure and sincere. Pray from your heart: "Lord, have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me." The supremely merciful Lord will give you strength, faith, and confi-

dence. Call from the very bottom of your heart, and he will certainly hear and respond.

Be not vain. We are born to learn and there is no limit, no end, to the things to be learned. Let us pray that the Lord may give us good minds and right understanding. My earnest prayer is: May all learn to take the name of God and be awakened. May all be born anew. May all their delusions cease, and may they gain bliss.

“Service, worship, and obedience will easily make a person attain to Sri Rama.” Is service something ordinary? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “He who attains devotion to me is honoured and served by many. None can equal him. He conquers the three worlds.”

WHY SHOULD you fear? Having taken your refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, you are also on the way to become the conqueror of the three worlds. Give your whole heart to the service of Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees. Be blessed and thus realize the aim of your life. Let fear and worry remain at a distance. Let people say, after seeing you, that you are real gods on earth. It won't do to be merely humble and lowly. Be like Hanuman, whose life and soul were devoted to Sri Rama, who in his inner and outer life knew only Sri Rama. Sri Ramakrishna has taken upon him-

self all your burdens and responsibilities. You have also laid all your responsibilities upon the Lord. So be fearless.

CAN ONE become a lover of the Lord, just by jumping and shouting "Hallelujah" or by mouthing quotations from the scriptures? Be humble, be selfless—that's what is more important. This is an age when we need workers who seek no results for their actions—and are completely devoted to God. No talk, but action; show by the example of your life. We need silent workers. We need preachers who by the example of their lives can silently transform the lives of others.

HOW DIFFICULT it is to throw off the bewitchment of Mahamaya! Weep and pray: "Merciful Mother, be gracious to me and show yourself to me. Open the path to me. I am devoid of austerity, devoid of devotion. I am your weak child. Save me, save me."

God is the God of all; His grace is upon all mankind. But the so-called devotees of God fail to transcend the narrow bounds of hatred, jealousy, injury to others, and sectarian quarrels. God incarnates to break such barriers. But, again, his followers create boundaries, claiming to preach new and marvellous ideas, proclaiming that such a liberal

spirit has not existed before; condemning all other forms and sects of religion as narrow, superstitious, and wrong—theirs alone being eternal, true and right.

I SEE Sri Ramakrishna's special grace given to you. You are fortunate, very fortunate, in being in a solitary environment. Call upon the Lord with all your heart. Be perfect; be free while living, be mad—immersed in devotion and intense love for God. Do not pay any attention to the opinions of others, good or bad. What is necessary above all is to see God—in this life, in this very body. Then, from your mouth will come forth the word of God; egotism and conceit will have left you.

Do you not see what man wants? He wants only the pleasures of this life—wealth, enjoyment, and power. How many really believe in their hearts that God exists? Even among those who believe, how many are eager, restless to see him? How many heroes are there who can renounce, can rise above the obsession for name, fame, fleshly enjoyment, and money?

CREATION is infinite: manifestations are also infinite. When we go on noticing the defects

in others, those very defects gradually infect us. It is not for us to see faults in others or to reform them. It is for us to live and learn. Let us constantly examine ourselves to see what we have learned.

Do you not see that outlandish, unethical, unspiritual ideas flourish everywhere? Have you the power to reform the entire world? You have come to eat mangoes, not to count the branches and leaves. Eat mangoes to your heart's content; that is to say, realize God first within yourself, and then be blessed.

You want to preach, to do good to mankind. But who will listen to you? 'The blind leading the blind! First attain knowledge and freedom. Don't you see that the world burns with suffering and man also burns? Blessed are we that we are born in this age. Salvation is easily attainable by taking refuge in Sri Ramakrishna.

If you can but gain pure love, you will know bliss and peace.

A LOVER of God seeks no praise for himself. His heart is forever full. If people speak ill of him, he is not disturbed. Even if the world is destroyed, he would then build a house in the sky! The nature of the lover of God is indeed unusual and special. Brother, he cannot tell the difference between "his own"

and the "own" of others. He lives and dies, loving others, not looking at the merits or defects of others. Ah! But he does not die. Love confers infinite life, immortality. At Vrindaban, Radha manifested prema—pure and unselfish love—toward Kṛishna; hence, she became immortal. Prema is an invaluable, supreme treasure. Let us steal this treasure and make ourselves wealthy. No brute force is necessary to obtain this fortune. Strength of conviction, faith, and reverence are all that are needed.

In front of us is the ideal life of Sri Ramakrishna. You are indeed fortunate in having such an example to follow. But Mahamaya makes us forget; she makes us confused. This is the great danger—delusion. But the Divine Mother also saves those who take refuge in her, by granting them pure minds, right understanding, and holy association.

It is excellent to see only the good. From a pile of mixed sand and sugar, the ant extracts only the sugar. What do we have to do with quarrels and disputes?

Do your duties, but do not imagine for a moment that you are the doer. Be the instrument and Sri Ramakrishna will help you. You have written to me about worship of Ramakrishna, lamenting that you could

not follow the ritual according to scriptural injunctions. Do not worry the least bit on that account. The Lord does not concern himself with the details of your mantras; he looks into your heart. Perform the worship with your heart and soul absorbed in it. That is all that is wanted. Do your work unselfishly. Know God to be your only goal. He will grant you his vision and help you.

CALL UPON the Lord with a deeply yearning heart. God sees inside us. He will be gracious if you will importune him earnestly. He is the sole refuge for us all. If you will call upon him continually, the impurities of your heart will gradually be removed, and you will feel his grace tangibly.

STUDY the scriptures and other spiritual books with competent instructors. If you devote all your time to work, life will seem dry. Devotion is necessary, as well as discrimination and knowledge. Be completely pure, and hold on to the truth.

FROM NOW ON, try to do spiritual practice regularly. Have tremendous perseverance, steadfastness. Love the Chosen Ideal with all your heart. Plunge into the name of your Chosen Ideal. What point is there in

swimming on the surface? Have faith in the words of your guru, faith in other holy men, and faith in the scriptures. Then you will reap the harvest.

It is not a lazy man's job. Be up and doing! Have strong discrimination. Think like this: "I will be perfect in this very life. I will be unattached. I will become a jivanmukta—freed while living. Why should anything be impossible for me?"

Read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* daily, regularly. Learn by heart the songs printed in the *Gospel* and try to sing them. Banish fear and worry. Consider yourself the child of God. If this is done, no weakness can find any way to approach us. If you think good thoughts, bad thoughts will fly away.

Away, you soldiers of the King of Death.
I am the son of the Divine Mother
I can become king of your king
If I meditate on the radiant form of Mother.

Awaken such thoughts; then ignorance will vanish.

WHAT other Upanishad would you teach when there is the living Upanishad? The life of the Master is the living, flaming Upani-

shad. None could understand the meaning of the Radha-Krishna cult if Sri Chaitanya had not been born and demonstrated it in his life. Even so the Master is the living demonstration of the truths of the Upanishads. . . . He never read the Upanishads or any other book. Yet how is it that he could explain those subtle and complex truths in so simple and straight a manner? If you want to read the Vedas, you have to commit its grammar to memory and read various commentaries, in which every commentator has sought to explain the texts in his own way. Innumerable scholars have been arguing over the texts without coming to any conclusion. Our Master, however, has in very simple language explained all those truths and his words are extant. When you have such a living fountain before you, why dig a well for water?

**REMINISCENCES
OF
SWAMI PREMANANDA**

Selected Memories

by

Various Devotees

IN THE following memoir, Swami Nikhilananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York, relates an incident in which he received the touch of Swami Premananda in an unusual manner.

DURING the winter of 1915-16, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Premananda visited Dacca, now the capital of East Pakistan. There were in the party, besides others, Swami Shankarananda, Swami Madhavananda, and Mahendranath Datta, a younger brother of Swami Vivekananda. At that time I was a student in the third-year class of Dacca College.

One evening we arranged a meeting of students in the dining-room of the Dacca College Hostel. Aswini Kumar Mukherjee, the Professor of History at Dacca College, was asked to preside.

I went to the Agnes Villa to bring the speakers to the meeting. Swami Premananda

asked me to accompany him to the roof of the building, where Swami Brahmananda was enjoying the evening air. As Swami Premananda took leave of Swami Brahmananda, he saluted him, touching his feet, and asked his blessing. Swami Brahmananda felt embarrassed and said: "Brother Baburam, what are you doing? Everything will be all right through the Master's grace." Although he tried to stop him, Swami Premananda prostrated before his spiritual brother and in a voice choked with emotion again asked his blessing. I was immensely impressed by the high regard in which Swami Premananda held Swami Brahmananda.

Aswini Babu, the chairman of the meeting, had an idiosyncrasy which we forgot to mention to the speakers. He had a habit of looking at his watch every few minutes. This he did even while conducting his college classes. Swami Premananda was the first speaker. Hardly had he spoken a few minutes when Aswini Babu took out his watch and looked at it. The Swami quite naturally thought that it was a warning to him to stop. But he was just warming up. He asked the chairman if he wanted him to resume his seat. The latter apologized and asked him to continue. A few minutes after, the chairman again looked at his watch. This

happened several times. At last Swami Premananda said: "Sir, I am not one of your Western-educated speakers who time their lectures by the watch. I am an illiterate man. I speak as our Master speaks through me. I cannot follow your English etiquette. As you are impatient, I shall not speak any more." The chairman repeatedly told him to ignore his watch and continue the talk, but Swami Premananda remained silent. As he had been speaking with great fervour, the interruption of his speech suppressed his emotion and afterwards he became physically ill.

One morning, when our usual meeting with the Swamis at the Agnes Villa broke up, Swami Premananda was coming downstairs, and I followed him. Finding him alone, I said: "Sir, I would like to speak to you privately." He turned towards me and said excitedly: "Are you a revolutionary?" Completely taken by surprise, I asked him how he had come to know of it. The Swami said: "We understand all this. This is not the way to serve the country. You are following the wrong method." Becoming more and more excited, he continued: "This will not do. Come tomorrow and bring some of your revolutionary friends. I shall take you to Maharaj."

The next morning I went to the Villa with two members of our revolutionary society. Swami Premananda took us to a small room in which there were two beds. Swami Brahmananda was seated on one of them. Swami Premananda took his seat on the other. The personal attendant of Swami Brahmananda was asked to leave the room, and the door was bolted from inside. After saluting Swami Brahmananda we sat on the floor.

Swami Premananda introduced us to Swami Brahmananda and said to him: "Maharaj, look at these young men. They are all fine boys, but completely misguided. They have become revolutionaries in order to serve India. Please give them the right advice." Usually very reserved, Swami Brahmananda asked us in an earnest voice to give up the method of violence and follow in the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda. He said that we must first build our character and only then take up the service of the country. On account of the presence of quite a few misguided people in the revolutionary society, he warned us, our efforts were not producing any results, and this showed that our characters were not yet formed. By way of illustration he said: "If gunpowder is damp it will not explode. However you may

try to ignite it, you will only be wasting match sticks. But if the powder is dry, one match will be enough to produce the explosion." He emphasized that Swami Vivekananda was a real patriot and that we should follow his instructions.

"But, sir," I said, "you have not understood Swami Vivekananda. We read in his books that he wants us to shed our blood for India's freedom. That is what the revolutionaries are doing. You have not understood Swami Vivekananda's teachings."

That was too much for Swami Premananda. "You idiot!" he exclaimed. "You do not know with whom you are talking. We knew Swamiji for over twenty years. We ate together, played together, talked together, and discussed our plan of work together—and we have not understood him! And you fools have read a few pages of his books and understood him completely!" Then, addressing Swami Brahmananda, he said: "Maharaj, did you hear that? He said that you did not understand Swamiji. Do you think he has the intelligence of a horse? Let me see if he can carry me on his back!"

Suddenly he left his bed and asked me to go down on all fours. Sitting on my back, with his feet hanging down on both sides, he asked me to take him round the room, as if

I were a real horse. I did as I was asked. After a minute or two he dismounted and said to me that everything would be all right. Swami Brahmananda looked at the whole affair benignly and again advised us first to mould our character. We left the room—and that was the end of my connection with the revolutionary society.

Swami Brahmananda and his party left Dacca and went to Narayangunj, a few miles away. There they were put up in a devotee's house. One evening I went there with two friends to pay our respects to the Swamis. We sat there till suppertime. On account of our staying so late, the host showed his dissatisfaction and hinted that he could not feed us. At this, Swami Premananda became angry and said to him that we were devotees of the Master and that if he could not give us food, the Swami himself would go without it. The host then apologized and we ate supper.

In 1916, during our summer vacation, I visited Belur Math with Swami Premananda's permission. I told him that I wanted to join the Order. But he asked me to get my B.A. degree first, and sent me to Jayrambati to receive the Holy Mother's blessing.

In August 1916, I was arrested in Dacca for my past association with the revolution-

ary society, and was interned for two years. After my release towards the end of the First World War, I went to Belur Math and was told that Swami Premananda was very ill. Shortly afterwards he passed away.

My contact with him came at a crucial point in my life. The memory of my few meetings with this exalted soul has given me courage and reassurance during many trying periods later on.

IN THIS account by Swami Satprakashananda, head of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, we see Swami Premananda as teacher and spiritual mentor for the young monks at Belur Monastery—as well as a warm and affectionate host to devotees visiting the monastery.

FEW great men were as accessible as Swami Premananda. I saw him for the first time in February 1910, at the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math, near Calcutta. I was walking up the steps from the Ganga towards the original monastery building, when I met a Swami in ochre robes coming down. I bowed to his feet and inquired, "Where is Baburam Maharaj?"

"Here," he said, pointing to himself. He then asked me, "Why do you wish to see him?"

“Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] has told me to see you,” I answered.

Then Swami Premananda inquired where I had come from and what I had been doing. From this first meeting until his passing away in July 1918, I had the privilege of seeing him at different times, and I cherish the memories of his unique personality as a source of great joy and inspiration.

As abbot of the Belur monastery he did not stay very much within his room. He went about the premises several times during the day. It was his practice to observe the young monks at work and give them instruction, supervise the gardens, the orchards, and the cowsheds, and meet the visitors, who were mostly strangers and came without notice. He received the newcomers as cordially as old friends. He sat among them very informally in the living room, or on either of the porches, and spoke to them with great fervour on spiritual ideals and practices, as exemplified in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and other illustrious personages. All listened to him with rapt attention. He would hardly talk on anything but God and religion. As pointed out by Sri Ramakrishna, a distinctive mark of a saint is that he shuns all vain talk and speaks only about God. This was quite evident in Swami Premananda.

His mode of living was exceptionally simple. A *dhoti*, a wrapper, and a pair of brown slippers constituted his complete dress. He seldom wore any seamed garment. In deep winter—if I remember rightly—he occasionally used a woollen jacket. He had only a few belongings. During his tours his attendant had to carry no suitcase for him but just a bundle. The spirit of renunciation was manifest in all his ways. He would hardly allow himself any luxury whatsoever.

Swami Premananda was very loving by nature. With motherly feeling he instructed and guided the young monks and novices, and was ever attentive to their needs. Not only did he urge them to practise meditation at regular hours, but he also insisted on the right performance of their respective duties, be it the worship of the Deity or the paring of vegetables. Even such minor tasks as sweeping the floor or the removal of weeds from the yard was to be done with due attention and accuracy, as an act of worship. While pouring ink into the inkpot not a drop was to be spilled.

Once I was peeling a special kind of vegetable. Swami Premananda said, "Much substance is going with the skin." He was opposed to waste, no doubt, but he disliked the wrong way of doing things even more.

He tried to impress on our minds that the test of character is not in performances under the public gaze, but in the faithful discharge of ordinary duties which generally go unnoticed.

He was equally affectionate towards the lay devotees. Not only did he care for their spiritual enlightenment but for their material well-being also. When any one of them became sick, he would often inquire about his health. Occasionally he presented them with fruits, vegetables, and other produce from the monastery garden. He found great pleasure in feeding the devotees. All those who visited the Belur monastery around noontime were served lunch. To feed the late-comers, mostly strangers, sometimes fresh meals had to be cooked even after the kitchen had been cleaned and the servants had gone to rest. On such occasions Swami Premananda would himself go to the kitchen and offer his services.

What impressed me most when I first lived at the monastery was the great esteem and veneration that everyone, senior or junior, had for Swami Premananda. He was looked upon as the very embodiment of divine love and purity. "He is pure to the marrow," Sri Ramakrishna had said. His very touch was considered sanctifying. I had

no idea before that man could revere man so highly.

The devotees assembled wherever he went. Not only the Hindus of all classes and communities, but the Mohammedans also gathered around him. Even persons who were not avowedly religious and who rarely came to the local Ashrama would invariably come to see Swami Premananda when he visited the place. I often wondered who invited them. Besides the grown-up men and women, young students were drawn to him. Several of them entered into monastic life. Their devotional ardour, as far as I know, was mostly the result of their contact with Swami Premananda. He accepted none as a disciple in the strict sense. Whoever approached him for initiation was directed to go to the Holy Mother or Swami Brahmananda. Such was his veneration for them that he did not think he should play the role of a Guru while they were alive.

I knew a schoolboy who was very eager to receive initiation from Swami Premananda and had looked upon him as his *guru* for several years. One day in our presence he implored the Swami for initiation. We too appealed on his behalf. But Swami Premananda was adamant. So with his approval we arranged for the boy's trip to Jayrambati,

where the Holy Mother was at the time.

But though he was reluctant to give initiation, he was ever anxious for the spiritual awakening of all who came to him. By exhortation, by blessing, by touch, by thoughts, by any one or more of these methods he tried to arouse their dormant spiritual potentialities.

One morning after deep meditation, in a rapturous mood, his eyes and face radiant, he came forward to me, put his hands on my shoulders and shook me. A thrill passed through my whole being. On another occasion, he held me with his arms and blessed me.

At the time of worship or meditation his countenance flushed with devotion, even his chest reddened. I noticed this not only in the shrine at Belur, but also in other temples which I had the privilege of visiting with him.

One day, at Dacca, Swami Premananda was invited to a dinner at a devotee's home. All the *Sadhus* of the local Ashrama, many devotees, and some friends of the host participated in the feast. We were all seated in the living room before dinnertime. Swami Premananda was speaking to the group with his usual fervour. In the audience was the

curator of a museum, who was a sceptic. In the course of the talk the Swami said, "Pray to God for spiritual treasures, such as devotion, knowledge, power of discrimination, dispassion, and so forth."

The gentleman interrupted: "Why should we pray to God? Does he not know what we need?"

The Swami answered, "Yes, if you feel that why—if you are convinced that God knows all your needs and will fulfil them, then you don't have to pray. But many pray to God for the fulfilment of their worldly desires, for material things. Is it not wise to pray to him for the eternal instead of the evanescent? Who but a fool will approach the King of kings for a trifle? If you pray to God, pray to him for the highest."

On several occasions Swami Premananda addressed public meetings. I heard him a few times. He always spoke extemporaneously. Stirring words flowed from the depths of his heart and moved the audience. He stressed the idea of serving God in man. Any work done in this spirit is veritable worship, as pointed out by Sri Ramakrishna and expounded by Swami Vivekananda. To carry into practice the sublime truths of Vedanta is the main objective of the Ramakrishna

Math and Mission. This Swami Premananda always held in view and exemplified in many ways. Once in a remote village in East Bengal he initiated some sanitary work at the risk of his health. In his solicitude to serve others he put himself under severe strain. As a result, his health broke. He contracted fever, from which he did not recover.

C. C. SEN is a retired customs official who lives in Barlowganj, in the foothills of the Himalayas. In the reminiscences which follow, Mr. Sen tells how Swami Premananda used to encourage the lay devotees to live a spiritual life.

IT WAS between 1912 and 1915, when I was a boy in my teens, that I had the rare good fortune of meeting several of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. I used to go to the Belur Math attracted by their love, which was like the pull of a magnet drawing a needle. They never preached high philosophy to us. I was a worker and was trying to mould my life according to the teachings of Swamiji. Swami Premananda used to encourage us to do village work, and so we did. We founded a school, a dispensary, and a gymnasium. A few of us joined together and bought land

for farming in order to support the school. The same band of boys opened a grocer's shop in Calcutta to help the school and the farm with cash. But this kind of work was dangerous in those days. The British government did not want to impart education to the masses and suppressed mercilessly any physical culture centre. When our house was searched by the police, Swamiji's letters and *Gita* were among the books confiscated, and I was marked by the police. We reported every incident to Swami Premananda. He told us: "As long as you have no bombs and revolvers, what do you care? Go ahead and give your life for the country! You are doing Swamiji's work." Thus the contact became closer.

We also did voluntary work at Belur Math on festive occasions. One day I was setting places for midday dinner below the old shrine-room when I heard the sound of a melodious voice accompanied by a *mridanga* coming from the guest-room. I left my work and went there unnoticed. A young boy was singing a classical song and playing the *tanpura*, while an older man accompanied him on a *mridanga*. The whole place was surcharged as if by electricity. I was enthralled by the music. Then I felt a tap on my shoulder. Looking around, I saw Swami

Premananda standing beside me. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Listening to the music," I said.

He also listened for a few minutes and then said: "Swamiji's voice was sweeter than this, and Thakur's [Sri Ramakrishna's] was sweeter than Swamiji's. Come, let us go. There is much work to do." I followed him meekly, wondering how sweet Swamiji's and Thakur's voices must have been when singing devotional songs. I could not imagine it because the song I had heard seemed perfect to me.

Another day, when the noonday sun was blazing, we all sat down to our meal. A man was standing under a tree across the Belur Math courtyard. We had not yet begun to eat. Swami Premananda asked me to invite the man to dinner. I did as I was told. The man explained that he was a plain-clothes man on duty and so could not come and join us. When I informed Swami Premananda accordingly, he ordered me to go and fetch the officer. He came and Swami said to him: "Have some prasada [food offered to the Lord]. That will cleanse your body and mind. Sit with us, eat with us, listen to our conversations; then you will be able to do better work." During the meal the Swami treated the man as a special guest. I heard after-

wards that this police officer became a great admirer of Swami Premananda.

We looked on Swami Premananda as the very embodiment of love. Yet one day he said to us: "What love can I give you? Not one-hundredth part of the love that we received from Sri Ramakrishna. Oh, how he loved us!"

One day I made a request of Swami Premananda. He graciously said: "Ask Sri Ramakrishna whatever you want. He will fulfil all your needs. Know that he is our living Lord." Then the Swami blessed me and prayed for me. He was standing with his eyes closed repeating the name of the Lord when I got up from prostrating at his feet.

BOSHI SEN, head of the Vivekananda Laboratory in Almora in the Himalayas, formerly assistant to Dr. J. C. Bose, is a devotee who knew many of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He tells the following incident.

DURING his last illness, when Swami Premananda was staying at Deoghar, his attendant, Kanai Maharaj [Swami Anantananda] wanted to see him take more nourishment, and tried to conceal the extra pints of milk offered him by boiling the milk down. Swami Prem-

ananda, who was very austere about his diet, must have suspected that he was being given more milk than usual, and one day he suddenly asked how much milk was being purchased for him. Of course, Kanai Maharaj had to tell the truth, and answered, "Three quarts".

"How is that possible!" exclaimed Swami Premananda. "You must have been making sweets or drinking the milk yourself!"

Kanai Maharaj felt deeply hurt, and made up his mind to leave the Ashrama that night. After attending Swami Premananda as usual, he quietly slipped away and walked off as fast as he could. He walked many miles, but all the time he was thinking: "Which attendant is taking care of him now? Will he get proper service? Suppose his mosquito net has accidentally got loose?" His feet began to drag, and it was just as if someone were pulling him irresistibly back. Finally he turned around and reached Swami Premananda's bedside just as dawn was breaking. "So you are back, my child!" Swami Premananda said in a tone of infinite love. "I couldn't sleep all night after you left." Kanai Maharaj felt as if he were walking on air!

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA, head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, had the privilege of associating with Swami Premananda

and of serving him on a number of occasions. In his memories, which follow, he recalls one of his first lessons as a novice and gives an insight into Swami Premananda's relationship with his brother-disciples.

THERE is a saying that only a jeweller can know the value of a jewel. Similarly, only illumined souls can really understand and appreciate another illumined soul. This was evident in the great love and affection the disciples of Ramakrishna had for each other.

When Swami Turivananda and Swami Premananda met after not having seen each other for some years, they prostrated before each other. Swami Turivananda was the first to get up. He said: "Brother, no one can surpass you in humility."

One day I was present when Swami Premananda said to Swami Brahmananda, who was known as Maharaj: "Let us get rid of this gerua cloth. It advertises that we are monks." He was in such a mood of renunciation that even the traditional monastic dress seemed to him a barrier to complete self-effacement.

Maharaj had a great sense of fun. He used to tease Swami Premananda through me in an affectionate way. Once, while I was massaging him, he whispered to me: "Go to Brother Baburam in the next room and give

him a massage." Now Swami Premananda was not in the habit of accepting personal service from anyone and never let himself be massaged. But as long as Maharaj had given me this order I meant to carry it out. (I was then eighteen years old.) I went to Swami Premananda's room and opened the door. The Swami was lying on his cot, covered with a sheet. I took one of his feet and began to massage. Swami Premananda got up and said: "Go away! I don't want a massage. Go to Maharaj!" But I did not listen to his protest. Again I pulled his leg toward me and began to massage, explaining: "Maharaj asked me to do it." This continued for some time. Every time the Swami objected. I told him that I had to carry out Maharaj's order. Finally he relaxed, and I gave him a good massage. I was blessed to serve him.

I remember a board meeting of the Ramakrishna Order's trustees early in the year 1915. Swami Saradananda, the Secretary, arrived from the *Udbodhan* Office and asked: "Where is Brother Baburam?"

"He is upstairs in the shrine room," I informed him. Swami Saradananda tiptoed upstairs. I followed him. In a corner of the room Swami Premananda was seated, absorbed in meditation. Swami Saradananda was a big, strong man. He lifted the slight, motionless

figure of his brother-disciple and carried him downstairs, dropping him in the courtyard. Swami Premananda landed on his feet and began to dance in ecstasy. Maharaj, Swamis Turiyananda, Saradananda, Shivananda, and Subodhananda all joined him. Maharaj danced in the centre and his brother-disciples circled around him. The whole place vibrated with their spiritual fervour. They danced and sang for about an hour. It seemed as if they were calling all mankind to come to be liberated and to share in the bliss of God.

During my last visit with Swami Premananda he was very ill. He was then living at the *Udbodhan* Office in Calcutta. He asked me to stay there with him and to assist Swami Saradananda in the secretarial work of the Order. Of course I was very happy at this suggestion. But within an hour I received a letter from Maharaj at Puri asking me to come to him immediately. So I went to Swami Premananda and read the letter to him. He said: "Write to Maharaj that you can't come, that you are staying here."

"How can I do that?" I asked him. Maharaj was my Guru.

Swami Premananda's temper was rising: "What, you won't obey me?" he asked.

"But sir, when it comes to obeying you or Maharaj, I must obey Maharaj!"

This answer irritated him all the more: "Get away from me!" he exclaimed. "I can't look at your face!"

Somehow Swami Premananda's anger did not affect me. Deep in my heart I knew that he was just acting, and that his plans for me had been prompted by his love. But I left him, because he was sick and I did not want to excite him unduly. I went downtown to do some errands before my trip to Puri. In the meantime Swami Premananda had sent for me. As soon as I returned to the *Udbodhan* Office I went to his room. He had ordered my favourite sweets and asked me to sit before him and eat. He would not let me go. Then he inquired: "Are you angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry with you, sir?"

"Because I scolded you."

"But sir, your scolding was a blessing!"

Then Swami Premananda said: "Well, this is the last time you will see me. We shall all be gone; you boys will have to take charge of the Mission work. I wanted you to learn these duties from Swami Saradananda, but it seems that Maharaj has other plans for you. So go!" His mood changed. Like a little boy he said: "But don't tell Maharaj that I scolded you!" Then he asked me to send him some holy water from the Jagannath temple in Puri.

As soon as I came to Maharaj he inquired about Swami Premananda's health. I told him that he was very sick. Maharaj talked for awhile about how his brother-disciple had contracted his fatal illness in East Bengal in his desire to serve others. Suddenly he inquired: "Did he ask anything of you?"

"Yes, Maharaj, he asked for some holy water."

Maharaj became excited: "What, such a great soul asked such a small thing of you, and you kept quiet so long! Do you know how great he is? In whichever direction he looks, that whole direction becomes purified!" He immediately ordered Swami Shankarananda, his secretary, to send some holy water to his brother-disciple.

In the Society of The Holy

SWAMI OMKARESWARANANDA

IT WAS the afternoon of a beautiful spring day in March 1916, when a young girl came to the monastery to see Swami Brahmananda, the president of the Ramakrishna Mission. Forced into marriage by her parents, she had run away from her husband and come to the monastery. As soon as she was brought into the presence of Swami Brahmananda, she fell at his feet. "O father, I have no desire to live a worldly life. I wish only to spend my days here at the monastery under your guidance. My one desire is to worship God and realize Him. To Him alone I would surrender myself—body, mind, and soul."

Deeply touched by her evident earnestness and guilelessness, the Swami replied: "My child, this is a monastery! How can you stay here? Go back to your parents; they are worried about you. Stay with them; study the

scriptures and read the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Pray to Sri Ramakrishna. He knows the yearnings of your heart and will answer your prayers. Later on you may go to the Nivedita School for Girls or to the Ashrama of Gauri-Ma. You have the true understanding. Vain indeed is this human birth unless one has love for God!" But the young girl was adamant and refused to return to her parents' home. Therefore, Brahmananda blessed her and sent her to the Ashrama.

After she had left, the Swami walked slowly into the library where he found Swami Premananda writing a letter. He sat down beside him. Almost immediately Brahmananda went into a highly ecstatic mood. Those who watched him could catch only a glimpse of the ecstatic joy which shone through his radiant face. His expression and behaviour were indescribable. Swami Premananda watched him for a while; then, turning to the young monk who was also present, he said: "Observe Maharaj! That mood which you see in him is known as the *paramahansa* state!"

In a little while Maharaj returned to normal consciousness and said to Swami Premananda, "Who can understand the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna? Swami

Vivekananda wanted to see a convent established for young women, and now I see that some day soon his desire will be fulfilled. Young women are becoming imbued with the ideal of renunciation as taught by our Master. That girl who came today was like a goddess in her beauty, her purity, her earnestness, and her guilelessness!"

Later in the day Swami Premananda was seated in meditation under the *vilva* tree in front of Swamiji's temple. With him were several young monks also meditating. At the close of the meditation period a young monk broke the silence: "Revered sir, why is it that the earnestness and enthusiasm which we feel at the beginning of spiritual life is not sustained? Why does it not continue always the same?"

The Swami answered: "Three things are necessary to strengthen our enthusiasm: association with the holy, devotion to the Chosen Ideal, and purity of conduct."

"But, sir," replied the boy, "here at the monastery we have the holy association of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna!"

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'A water vessel made of bitter pumpkin skin may travel to every holy place in the company of holy man, but it still remains bitter'," replied

the Swami. "What do you understand of holy association? You have to watch their lives, see their purity, their devotion, love and compassion, and imitate these things in your own lives." Then, turning to the young monk who had witnessed the ecstatic mood of Swami Brahmananda, he continued: "Did you carefully study and observe the blissful state of Maharaj? That is the Paramahansa state. Sri Ramakrishna experienced that quite frequently. With your whole body and mind serve the holy. Question them and follow their teachings with faith and reverence. Only thus may you be cleansed of the impurities and worldliness accumulated from many lives. By imitating the holy, devotion increases and the heart becomes purified. The association of the holy is the only remedy for worldliness, for a holy man is the living manifestation of God.

"When the heart is purified the mind becomes one-pointed, subtle, and pure; one attains the vision of God. Retire into solitude occasionally; practise discrimination and self-analysis, and to discover the subtle obstacles that obstruct your path to spiritual progress. You will find that there are many subtle impressions, habits of thought and action lying dormant and hidden in the subconscious regions of the mind. Analyze yourself in

solitude, find out the obstacles and then struggle without compromise to remove them."

He continued: "Craving for sense objects is like the green algae that obscures the clear water of a pond; association of the holy is like the stick used to remove it, that the water may shine through. However, cravings are never entirely uprooted until the *Atman* is realized. It is written in the *Gita*: 'When a man enters Reality, he leaves his desires behind him.' It is also true that unless the desires are left behind you cannot have the vision of God. Desirelessness and the vision of God are like the opposite sides of the same leaf.

"Sometimes dispassion arises suddenly in a man, due to frustration. Sense objects become like bitter poison to him. But such dispassion is like the fire kindled in a heap of straw. It soon burns itself out. In order to become stabilized in renunciation and dispassion one must try to become absorbed while repeating with single-minded devotion the name of God. Sri Chaitanya used to pass the whole night practising *japam*. Practise! Struggle! Struggle hard. Nothing is ever achieved without a struggle."

"But, sir," protested one of the boys, "I don't like practising *japam* for a long period

at a time. It becomes tiresome. It seems to force me out of my seat!"

The Swami smiled. "It is the restlessness of your mind that forces you out of your seat," he answered. "Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'the thread cannot pass through the eye of the needle as long as there is one fibre out of place.' Worldly desires and past habits are like that. They are the distractions. If you cannot practise *japam* long, study the scriptures, chant, pray, and engage yourself in unselfish works. Through the faithful practice of discrimination and spiritual disciplines the mind gradually comes under control. Yet to try to force the mind under control all at once may prove disastrous. It must be done gradually and with patience. The angler has to sit patiently and wait. Cling to the pillar of patience whenever the mind is drawn toward the whirlpool of delusion. Even when a large fish swallows the bait and is caught on the hook, the angler still plays awhile before drawing his catch to the bank. To land it forcibly might break the line. Sri Krishna says, 'The mind is restless, no doubt, and hard to subdue. But it can be brought under control by constant practice, and by the exercise of dispassion.' Little by little, and with untiring patience a man must free him-

self from all mental distractions. This can be done with the aid of the intelligent will.

“Love one another. Watch yourselves and see that your love for one another never lessens. Remember, the Ramakrishna Mission has been founded on the rock of love.

“Never think that this Mission,” he went on, “has been established to create a new sect. There must never be sectarianism; that would be its downfall. This again, does not mean indifference! Indifference is a lack of one-pointed devotion to the Chosen Ideal. Never be indifferent. Be broad-minded and liberal; and at the same time, hold fast to your Chosen Ideal. My arms are ever open to embrace all who come here, be they Hindus, Mohammedans or Christians.

“Because you have become monks is no reason why you should scorn householders. Never make a *sect* of monks. Whoever loves God and prays to Him, whoever has made Sri Ramakrishna his own, him I regard as my very own, whether he is a monk or a householder. Vain is this world to one who has not learned to love God.

“The ceremony of renunciation and the wearing of the *gerua* robe are not enough. Sri Ramakrishna was the soul of purity and renunciation. Hold fast to him as your ideal, and so make your minds pure. Let not the

thoughts of lust, hatred, jealousy, or selfishness ever enter the doors of your mind. Whenever such thoughts try to creep in, pray, pray earnestly, and remember the ideals set before you by Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, and struggle unremittingly to free your mind of all impurities. Repeat occasionally this prayer of purity:

“May my flesh and my blood be purified;
 May my skin and my bones be purified;
 May the marrow of my bones be purified;
 May all my body be purified.
 May I be free from attachments.
 May I be free from impurities!
 May my organs of sense be purified;
 May my organs of action be purified;
 May all my actions be purified;
 May I be free from attachments
 May I be free from impurities!
 May my mind be purified;
 May my vital energy be purified;
 May the earth and the air be purified;
 May fire, ether and water be purified.
 May I be free from attachments.
 May I be free from impurities !
 May I be pure! May I be pure!
 I am verily the Atman!
 I am pure! I am free! I am blissful !”

As Premananda finished the prayer, deep silence fell upon the group. No one spoke for some time. The words of the Swami seem-

ed filled with power, and the minds of all those present were elevated. After a while the Swami himself broke the silence: "May you all be purified. Brush aside all hatred, jealousy, selfishness, and egotism. Let discrimination guard the doors of your mind, and let not any evil thought enter therein.

"With the fire of dispassion, burn away all the impurities of the unregenerate mind. Then only will you realize God and feel his grace. Then only will you see the One, infinite, omnipresent, blissful God dwelling within your own hearts and within the hearts of all beings.

"Ah! I see Him! The Blissful One! Alas, the vision of the unregenerate man is upon the vanities of lust and gold! He cannot see the Blissful One—so blind is he!

"If you wish to become holy, you must sacrifice all ego. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'When the ego dies, all troubles cease'. The holy man is a teacher of mankind. To preach religion one must be pure in heart. Mere lecturing is not enough. If a man preaches religion who has not first purified his own heart, he merely feeds his own ego. There are many such but they can never touch the heart of man.

"Preach by the example of your own life! Let your life, your actions show that you are

indeed children of Sri Ramakrishna. That is what I want to see. Worldly name and fame! What are they? Consider them as things that have been spat out. Whether people speak well of you, or ill, what does it matter? Let the Lord be ever seated within your heart, and silently work as an instrument in his hands."

IT WAS the evening of March 14, 1916, the day following the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. Swami Premananda and Swami Akhandananda were seated on a bench on the eastern verandah of the Belur Monastery, overlooking the Ganga. Several other Swamis and young Brahmacharins were seated on a bench nearby. Presently a member of the group addressed Swami Premananda:

"Revered Sir, please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna. To hear of him directly from you is far more inspiring and uplifting than to read of him and his teachings in the *Gospel* [*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*]."

"Very little of the Master's teachings is recorded in the *Gospel*," replied the Swami. "There is too much repetition. "M" [Mahendranath Gupta—the author] used to visit the Master occasionally and would note down his teachings as he heard them. But Sri

Ramakrishna taught his disciples differently, according to their different temperaments and their capacity of understanding. His teachings to the monastic disciples were given in private. As soon as the householder disciples would leave the room he would get up and lock the door and then speak to us living words of renunciation. He would try to impress upon our young minds the emptiness and vanity of worldly enjoyments.

“In his great mercy he would point out to us how dry and hot the world is—like a desert; and how, like a mirage, it burns the heart but never slakes the thirst. He taught us how to discriminate and analyze the body of man, made up as it is of flesh, blood, and bones, so that our minds would not run after the enjoyments of the flesh. He would tell us of the great power of the all-bewitching Maya, and how man, forgetting his divine heritage, has fallen again and again into her clutches. Deep within his heart man knows full well there is no lasting happiness to be found in the mad pursuit of worldly enjoyments; and yet, like the camel who chews thorny bushes even while his mouth bleeds, man still stirs up his lust for enjoyment—even while he suffers. To satisfy his lust, man needs gold. Lust and gold! These are the chains that drag a man into the pit of worldliness. He

alone soars high who shakes himself free of these chains. He who renounces sexual appetites—not only outwardly, but also of the mind—has renounced all worldly pleasures. He alone is a man of true renunciation. Renunciation is not in the garb of a monk nor is it in the renunciation of fish and meat.

“Spiritual aspirants of many different sects [he continued] would come to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. All of them found great satisfaction in talking to him. To each he was able to show the way to further progress along that person’s own particular path ; thus, each thought the Master was a perfected soul belonging to his own particular sect. They did not know that Sri Ramakrishna was as broad as the sky and as deep as the ocean and thoroughly acquainted with all the different sects and paths. For he had followed them each in turn, and by each path he had reached the one and the same goal.

“Never forget that the ideal of life is to realize God, to gain his vision. You have renounced the world to reach that goal. Struggle hard to have love and devotion for Him and you will attain Him. He is the very life of our life, the soul of our soul. He is the Lord of our heart, He is our very own. Yearn for Him with a longing heart. How blessed

you are that you have the privilege of serving and associating with such ever-free souls as Swami Brahmananda and others who were the associates of God incarnate! Do not neglect this opportunity. You are men. Be gods! Teach others by the examples of your own lives."

Swami Premananda remained silent for a while, then continued:

"I see very clearly that after we are gone multitudes will come to learn from you young men."

A young Swami: "But revered Sir, how can that be? If multitudes are to come, they should come while you are still living."

Swami Premananda replied: "Do not think that you are any less great than us! You have received the grace of the Holy Mother. Do you think we have become great just because people have come to take the dust of our feet? No! We first saw Sri Ramakrishna and then renounced the world; you are great indeed because you have renounced the world without seeing him!"

Young Swami: "But revered Sir, Sri Ramakrishna made you great."

Swami Premananda: "No! Sri Ramakrishna did not make us great, he made us 'no-bodies'. You also have to become 'no bodies'. Wipe out all vanity and all ego sense.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'When the ego dies, all troubles cease.' 'Not I, not I, but Thou, O Lord.' Look at the life of Nag Mahashaya! There was not the least trace of ego in him. Girish Ghosh used to say, 'Maya tried to bind Nag Mahashaya and Vivekananda in her net; but Nag Mahashaya became smaller than the smallest, so that Maya's net could not hold him, Vivekananda grew bigger and bigger, and became one with the Infinite; the net was too small to bind him.'

"Do you know what comprises this net of Maya? Sense objects, lust, gold, name, fame, ego, vanity, selfishness and so on. With all these, Maya binds the mind of man. Come out of this net, and the mind will run straight to God. All bondage is in the mind. All freedom is in the mind.

"The worldly man is drunk with the objects of sense, with name, with fame, with lust, with gold. Be you also drunk, but be drunk with selfless works, with love of God, with ecstasy, with Samadhi!"

At Belur Monastery
with
Swami Premananda

SWAMI APARNANANDA

TODAY is the celebration of *Shiva Ratri* (the night of Shiva). We arrived at the monastery after a long absence. The shrine was not yet opened. We saw Swami Premananda standing by the tea table on the veranda and prostrated before him. He said, "Hello there, you haven't been at the monastery for a long time. How are you?" I answered his question, and he remarked, "Tonight there will be an all-night worship of Shiva in the shrine-room. Why don't you stay?"

"I came here without letting my family know about it," I told him. "If I am not home in the evening, they will worry."

Swami Premananda said: "*Shivam, Shantam, Sundaram*. He is all Good, all Peace, all Beauty. *Satyam, Sundaram*. He is Truth, he is Beauty. Lord Shiva is so easily pleased!

"Taking vows and fasting on special days

like this help us to develop discrimination and dispassion. They are aids in purifying the heart and thus prepare us for God-vision and realization. It is important for every spiritual aspirant to observe such vows, to perform worship, and to pray. Lord Shiva is all Good, all Peace, all Beauty. And he is so easily pleased!

“This time Sri Ramakrishna came as Shiva united with his Shakti [his divine Power]. He granted faith to the doubting Mathur Babu and gave him ecstasy by revealing to him the form of Shiva and Shakti in himself.”

Then Swami Premananda asked us, “Have you read the *Lila Prasanga* [*Sri Ramakrishna: the Great Master*]?

“One day, after his midday rest, Mathur Babu was sitting on the porch of his cottage. Suddenly he noticed that Sri Ramakrishna was pacing up and down on the northern veranda. Whenever the Master walked in the eastern direction Mathur Babu saw him as Mother Kali, and when he walked back towards the West he saw him as Shiva. Mathur Babu kept watching, and he wondered if his eyes were deceiving him. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Once more he saw the Master walking back and forth. From the back he again appeared as Kali and from the

front as Shiva. Then Mathur Babu ran to the Master, fell at his feet, and wept. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly tried to console him, but Mathur, weeping, exclaimed, 'Father, now I know who you are!'

"The Master said to him, 'If people see you like this, what will they say? Control yourself!'

"Once Sri Ramakrishna told his devotees, 'The Divine Mother revealed many visions in this [pointing to his body] to Mathur. That is why he devoted himself so greatly to my service.'"

The devotees were listening eagerly to the words of Swami Premananda. The Swami, absorbed in devotion to Shiva, sang a song. Then he continued: "Tonight we will have an all-night worship of the great god Shiva. There will be singing and dancing. The whole monastery will vibrate.

"Swamiji once dressed Girish as Shiva. Ah, those were wonderful days! They are gone with the passing away of Swamiji. Swamiji himself was Shiva. What joy he used to give us all! Just remembering him our hair stands on end, and we feel an ecstatic thrill."

TODAY is the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. We arrived at the Math early in the morning

to attend the special worship and to stay at the monastery for the rest of the day.

Swami Premananda seemed to be in an ecstatic mood the whole day long. The worship began. Today all the other divine incarnations are worshipped along with Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Premananda was supervising the devotees who were working in groups. Occasionally he chanted, "Hail Sri Guru Maharaj," and the devotees chanted with him. The cooking had begun the night before.

We were seated at the door of the shrine room and watched the worship, which was finished at noon. There was a wonderful spiritual atmosphere. The Master's picture was decorated with a yellow cloth and wrapper, and fragrant garlands were offered to him. Vases with roses and tulips adorned the room. The shrine and the whole monastery compound were pervaded with the fragrance of flowers and incense, and all the devotees were supremely happy. In the visitors' room downstairs they were singing *Kali kirtan* [devotional music to Mother Kali]. When the food offering to the Lord was finished, lights were waved to the accompaniment of gong, bells, and the blowing of the conch shell, which filled the devotees with an extraordinary spiritual mood. After the waving of the lights, all chanted the hymn to Sri Ramakrishna,

beginning, "Breaker of this world's chain, we adore thee, whom all men love." Preparations were made for the *homa* fire [a religious rite in which the deity is worshipped as fire and oblations are poured into the flames] and for the distribution of prasad [sanctified food]. Seats, leaf plates, and earthen cups for water were arranged under the mango trees. When the prasad was brought, the devotees chanted "Hail, Guru Maharaj," and the sound of the chanting echoed through the monastery grounds.

While they were eating, Swami Prem-ananda stood before the devotees with folded hands, as if he was seeing the Lord in them. And with the same devotion with which he performed the worship of Sri Ramakrishna he supervised the serving of the devotees. Words fail to express his ecstatic mood. "Every devotee is God"—this was the feeling he conveyed. The feeding of the devotees to him was the same as feeding the Lord.

Maharaj had arrived the evening before from Balaram's house in Calcutta, and his presence during the worship and *homa*, increased the spiritual atmosphere a hundred-fold. More than a thousand devotees had prasad. That night worship of the Mother Kali was performed. After the vesper service we returned home. I was not fortunate enough

to attend the Kali puja that night.

THE FOLLOWING Sunday was the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. From early morning on, the monastery grounds had turned into a forest of people with the multitudes who had arrived by steamer and hundreds of boats. Bookstalls and shops selling sweets and fruit punch dotted the compound, and a huge canopy was set up. A small replica of mountains, waterfall, and forest had been modelled. In the centre of this miniature landscape there was a lake with a lotus in bloom. Sri Ramakrishna's large oil painting was placed on the lotus, and the devotees offered worship to the picture with flowers, vilva leaves, garlands, sweets, and fruits. In various places on the compound there were singers; and a poetry competition and a Kali kirtan party were going on. On the bank of the Ganga a group played instrumental music. Volunteers from different societies were looking after the devotees' comfort. And Swami Premananda seemed to be everywhere, with Swami Dhirananda and others assisting him.

Swami Saradananda arrived at the Math and sat with Maharaj on the veranda facing the Ganga. About eleven o'clock in the morning Maharaj with many devotees who

had known Sri Ramakrishna—Sannyal, Kishori Rai, Mahendra Kaviraj, and Ramlal Dada—came downstairs and began to walk around the monastery grounds. When they arrived at the place where the devotees were eating, Swami Premananda and all who were present began to chant. Then Maharaj's party visited all the places where there was singing and dancing. When they came to the mango trees where Kali kirtan was held, some devotees brought chairs for Maharaj, Swami Saradananda, and Ramlal Dada, and they listened to the music. In the evening there were fireworks, and after the fireworks we returned home.

WHEN we arrived at the Belur Math this time we found Swami Premananda seated on the veranda facing the Ganga. He was talking to the devotees: "Today is the birth anniversary of Sri Chaitanya, who was the embodiment of love [the great fifteenth-century Vaishnava saint who was famed for his ecstatic devotion to Krishna]. Today at Navadvip, his birth-place, there is a mart of joy. We did not have much respect for the religion of Sri Chaitanya because those who lose their caste become Vaishnavas. But what have we learned? Sri Ramakrishna saw in Sri Chaitanya's faith the truth of the Eternal Religion. He had the

ecstatic vision of Chaitanya and Nityananda [Sri Chaitanya's first disciple], and thus he raised the religion of the Vaishnavas to new heights.

"The Brahmani came to Sri Ramakrishna and read the Vaishnava scriptures to him. She made him attain the supreme goal through the practice of the spiritual disciplines of the Vaishnavas. The Master followed the paths of many religions and sects, and having reached the highest spiritual experience through each of them he made Swamiji preach this truth to the world: 'As many religions so many paths'.

"Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji are the two sides of the same coin. Among us [the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna], Swamiji alone truly understood the Master.

"One day there was a discussion about Chaitanya's religion in Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master quoted Chaitanya's teaching: 'To take delight in chanting the name of God, to have compassion for all beings, and to serve the devotees of God—when these conditions are fulfilled one realizes Krishna.' Uttering these words, the Master went into ecstasy and exclaimed: 'Compassion for beings? Compassion? Nonsense! Who are you to have compassion? Service to Narayana [the Lord] in the form of creatures!' Swamiji

heard this, came out of Sri Ramakrishna's room, and said, 'Today the Master has revealed a new truth to us. If ever I am given the opportunity, I will proclaim this truth to the world.' That is why Swamiji established homes of service in order that one may see and worship Narayana in all beings. Hail Swamiji!"

Swami Premananda folded his hands and bowed down repeatedly, thinking of Swamiji. Then he continued: "Swamiji is Nara-Narayana [Narayana as man]—one of the Seven Seers. Lord Shiva himself took his form for the good of mankind. He incarnated himself for the good of many, for the happiness of many. Don't you see in what a short time he created a tremendous sensation in the world? As the days pass you will understand that everything he taught is true. He sowed seeds which will sprout and grow into a huge tree, and in the shade of this tree the world will find peace. Hail Swamiji, the incarnation of Shival!"

TODAY begins the new Bengali year. Many devotees have come to the Math to get the blessings of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. My friend and I arrived at the monastery, and after prostrating in the shrine room we went to see Swami Premananda. He

was seated in the visitors' room surrounded by devotees. A little while earlier, the monks and Brahmacharins had been singing. Now they left to attend to their respective duties.

Swami Premananda sang in a low voice: "O Lord, when I behold Thy face and see love beyond compare, what fear have I of earthly sorrows, what calamities can befall me? As the rising sun dispels all darkness, so when Thy holy light lights the heart of the devotee all woes disappear, and sweet peace reigns. . . ."

The Swami did not finish the song but began to talk again: "How can there be any sorrow or suffering if one beholds the face of the beloved Lord? The Master used to say, 'Don't waste your human birth. Life is evanescent. Somehow or other attain the vision of the Lord and make your life sweet. Blessed is he who accomplishes this!'

"Of course everything depends upon His grace. But again, as the Master used to say, 'The breeze of His grace is always blowing. Set your sail to catch this breeze of grace, and surely you will feel it.'"

A FEW days later I went to the monastery again. It was half-past five in the afternoon. Swami Premananda was seated on a bench

under a mango tree, and many devotees were sitting in front of him.

Swami Premananda: "Swamiji preached Karma Yoga for all mankind. In course of time that will become the religion of the age. It means to work selflessly, offering the fruits of one's actions to the feet of the Lord. By performing selfless work, the Karma Yogins will be blessed in attaining the same result which the followers of the paths of knowledge and devotion reach by practising their spiritual disciplines. In name, the Yogas differ; but they all lead to the same goal. Many people think of work as the cause of bondage, but any Yoga may be the cause of bondage if it is not followed correctly. In the *Mahābhārata*, the examples of a hunter and a chaste wife show how Karma Yoga leads to the attainment of God.

"The truth is, it is not possible to realize God unless one becomes completely desireless. Ramprasad used to sing: 'Burn all your desires, and the ashes will purify you.'

"Sri Ramakrishna came in this age. He was a shining example of renunciation. He is the ideal of the age. We must cross the ocean of worldliness by making him our ideal.

"You are all young boys. Your minds are still like soft clay and can be moulded the

way you wish to mould them. 'By renunciation alone immortality is attained.' The Master used to say, 'If you repeat the word *Gita* twelve times it will become "*ta-gi, ta-gi,*" which means one who renounces the world for the sake of God.' He who has renounced all cravings has become ever free and blissful.

" 'Hear all ye children of immortal bliss! ' You are the children of immortality. Where is death for you? Hail Guru Maharaj! Hail Swamiji! *Hari Om!* "

LETTERS

Letters
to
Swami Abhedananda

THE following letters, somewhat informal in tone, were addressed to Swami Abhedananda, who had been writing and lecturing in the United States since 1897. The first letter is a beautiful and graphic description of the passing away of Swami Vivekananda—perhaps one of the most intimate accounts ever written of Swamiji's final day in earthly form.

In the second letter, composed thirteen years later, Premananda assumes an entirely different tone. With the exception of a visit in 1906, Abhedananda has been gone from India for eighteen years. Has he forgotten them? Why does he remain so silent? "It is our fervent wish that you come back to us. . . .", Premananda writes. Abhedananda did return, but not until 1921, three years after his brother-disciple's death.

The third letter was written in April of the following year (1916), and in it Premananda informs Abhedananda of some of the

happenings at home, wishing him success in his American work.

Belur Math
August 20, 1902

Dear Brother Kali,

We are still living in a daze, as it were. The spiritual power which emanated from Swamiji, those words that were spoken with authority which urged us to move onward and forward, those discussions we used to have which broadened our vision—they all seem to have disappeared.

Under *ayurvedic* treatment Swamiji was practically cured. He was not ill at the time he passed away. He gave up his body of his own free will in Samadhi.

For about two months before his death Swamiji encouraged the young monks to meditate regularly and he himself joined them. For some time I noticed that a strong dispassion had arisen in him. Often I heard him chant, "For what purpose and for the satisfaction of what craving should this body continue to breathe?" He would ask me, "Do you remember the two songs which Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] loved to hear

during the last days of his life?" Then Swamiji would sing, "Oh Mother, Enchantress of the universe, how Thou hast deluded the beings of this universe," etc. And again he would sing, "Oh, when shall I be completely absorbed in Samadhi at the feet of Mother Shyama," etc. These became his favourite songs.

But as you know, he continued to lay stress on the ideal of Karma Yoga, and about ten or fifteen days before his passing away he sent Brother Tarak [Swami Shivananda] to Varanasi to open an Ashrama there. For some days he strongly desired to found a college for the study of the Vedas at the Math [Belur]. Even on the day he died three letters were written to publishers in Bombay and Poona asking them to send their publications on the Vedas. That day he told me many of his ideas concerning the Vedic college. I asked him what good would result from the study of the Vedas. His simple answer was that people would thus be freed from the superstitious ideas that had attached themselves to Hinduism.

Sharat [Swami Saradananda] and Rakhal [Swami Brahmananda] were away for a few days in Calcutta on business. Of all the older brothers only two of us, Gopaldada [Swami Advaitananda] and myself, were

at the Math at the time Swamiji passed away. He was not ill at all. Do you understand?

That morning after his meditation, as was his custom, he teased me, joked with me, and made us roar with laughter. He ate fruit and drank warm milk as usual, but that day he showed great eagerness to feed me. Later, the first shad of the season from the Ganga was bought. Swamiji joked with me about the price I had paid for it. There was a young disciple of his from East Bengal [now East Pakistan] visiting the monastery; and he told him, "I understand that you people offer worship when you get the first shad of the season. Offer worship the way you do in your part of the country."

While we were walking together, Swamiji remarked, "Don't ever imitate me. Thakur forbade anybody to imitate another. Don't be extravagant like me." Then he talked in detail about the Vedic college. He said also that he had consulted the Vedas on what they say about the *sushumna* nerve [the central channel of the spine], and he remarked that the commentary is not correct. So he asked us to try to get the meaning of the original texts ourselves.

About half-past eight in the morning he went to the shrine to meditate. At half-past nine I went to the shrine in order to

perform the worship. When Swamiji saw me, he asked me to have the mat on which he used to sit in meditation placed in the room adjacent to the shrine, where Thakur's photo is kept on a bed during the night—it is known as Thakur's bedroom. I put his mat there, and he asked me to close all the doors and windows. On other days he used to sit in a corner of the shrine-room to meditate while I performed the worship. That particular day he changed his plan. At about eleven o'clock he got up from meditation and sang to himself, "Who says my Mother is black? The Black One with flowing hair lights the lotus of my heart, etc."

Swamiji ate with great relish the shad which had been prepared in a variety of ways—fried, pickled, and stewed. He remarked that he was very hungry as he had fasted the previous day which was *ekadashi* [the eleventh day after the full or new moon, when he observed a fast].

After his lunch Swamiji talked with me on various subjects and then rested for a while. At one in the afternoon he woke me up and said, "Come, let us read something. I couldn't sleep today. I got a headache after meditating. My brain seems to have become weak." We sat in the library, and for three hours he explained

Panini's Sanskrit grammar. At four o'clock he asked me to accompany him and we walked outside the Math garden on the road for a while. As he noticed a garden on the side of the road, he described what a beautiful garden Mr. Leggett had in America. He told how in that country people easily keep their gardens clean and beautiful through the help of machines.

We returned to the Math after five-thirty. Then Swamiji explained to me in considerable detail the history of European civilization. He also spoke of the history of colonialism.

At dusk, when I went to the shrine-room to perform the vesper service, Swamiji talked with Shashi's [Swami Ramakrishnananda's] father for a long time. Then he went upstairs. In those days he had an attendant named Brajendra, who came from East Bengal. Swamiji said to him, "I feel very light in body. I feel very well." Seated in his room, Swamiji asked Brajendra to give him his rosary. Then he wanted to be left alone. He told Brajendra, "Come when I call for you."

After about an hour Swamiji called for his attendant and asked him to fan him for a while and then to massage his feet. While his feet were massaged, Swamiji dozed for

nearly half an hour. Then his hands trembled for a few seconds. The next moment he sighed a deep sigh and went into Samadhi. Brajendra became very worried and called Gopaldada to see what had happened to Swamiji. Within a couple of minutes I came to Swamiji's room. I realized that he was completely absorbed in Samadhi. I sent for Shashi's father and requested him to chant into Swamiji's ear the holy name of Guru Maharaj [Sri Ramakrishna] to bring him back to normal consciousness. I saw how luminous Swamiji's face was. His eyes were open and they had a heavenly expression emanating spiritual power. He was clad only in a loin-cloth, and I noticed how effulgent and beautiful his body was.

The next day the others who saw his radiant face forgot their grief. It was as if Lord Shiva were lying there. Swamiji's body retained its lifelike appearance. Of his own free will he had given up his body.

That night Dr. Majumdar was asked to come and examine him. Sharat, Rakhal, and Sannyal also came. The doctor examined Swamiji but could not diagnose the cause of his death.

Sri Ramakrishna used to tell Swamiji, "The day you come to know who you really

are you will leave the body." And so it happened.

We want to build a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and a pillared hall facing the temple at the place where Swamiji's body was cremated. The people of Calcutta are arranging a memorial meeting. In Madras such a meeting has already been held. Funds are forthcoming.

Brother Rakhai would have written to you himself, but he is suffering from a bad cold and fever. Sharat has gone to Calcutta. Brother Hari was ill when he arrived. He feels a little better now. Sarada [Swami Trigunatitananda] will soon be leaving for America to replace Brother Hari. Swamiji had arranged this before his death. We shall try to continue Swamiji's work to the best of our ability. Thus have we resolved.

Write to me how you are. Please accept our loving greetings. Revered Holy Mother is doing well in Jayrambati.

We learn that S— is going to America. He always speaks ill of us. Be careful of him.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

Shashi Niketan, Puri
August 15, 1915

Beloved Brother Kali,

We have not forgotten you, only felt a little hurt by your long silence. I could not sustain that feeling any longer, so I am writing you today. Give me your loving embrace. I have wondered how you can live without communicating with us; it seems that you have completely forgotten us. You are dear to our Lord, and he admired your intelligence. Please do not misunderstand me, Brother, I am writing this way because I consider you as our very own. Please understand, I bear no ill feeling towards you, neither do I have any selfish motive in writing to you like this.

Imagine if ever we were to forget the infinite grace of our Lord toward us, where should we go and what would be our support? Tell me, what else makes our Lord great and superhuman except his love and his grace for his devotees? Our Master's living room is within the shrine of his devotees' hearts. He still lives and dwells within the order that he founded. And you do not care to know how his devotees are! That is why we worry. "Lord, what is this play of yours?" Do you consider us as fallen

ones? Have you become so great that you feel it beneath your dignity to keep up your relationship with us? But dear Brother, howsoever great or wise you may become, you cannot either surpass us or leave us behind. We think of you as our Kali, the hero; Kali, the austere one, our very own kith and kin.

Do you remember when you and I were together at the Cossipore garden house, and the Master remarked, "Your relationship is between Self and Self." Do you remember what else he said? He said, "You are monkeys: and I am the leader of the monkeys. I hold in my palm the rope that binds you. If you try to make too much trouble and get out of hand, I, your leader, will tighten the rope." That is why I tell you, Brother, always remember we are monkeys and he is holding us in his palm. In his divine incarnation as Rama, we had tails; this time the only difference is that we are bereft of tails. Do not ever think that this time our wisdom and intelligence have become any greater than they were at the time when we came to earth as monkeys. Such are the words of our Lord!

God, the embodiment of divine, wisdom, the Lord of his devotees, made himself a

body. Love divine, not flesh, dwelt amongst us, his unworthy children, in order to help us ascend towards the Godhead. How can one forget this truth?

How can you live in the West away from us for such a long time? What are you holding on to?

Tell us, Brother, you are a learned scholar, tell us, for what reason and to embody and teach what particular truth did the Lord come wearing the mask of an illiterate man? What was lacking in his creation that He incarnated himself?

You must be witnessing how Mother is playing in the West. Do you see or feel that man finds greater happiness by increasing his knowledge of science?

Why did the Lord keep us alive so long? Why did he teach us to discriminate, to renounce the ephemeral and to be dispassionate? And we, how far are we able to follow his ideal life and teach others to follow it?

See to it, Brother, that we do not fall away from his ideal. That is my earnest prayer at the feet of the Lord.

It is our fervent wish that you come back to us and stay here for some time. Supreme

bliss is in tasting the sweetness that is in the Lord—could any fame and glory bring such joy or happiness? Greater bliss is realized only when we free ourselves from adjuncts, such as name or fame.

Do you remember how we danced at the Baranagore Monastery, becoming God-intoxicated, uttering loudly the name of the Lord, "*Hara, Hara, byom byom*"? How we spent our days, dancing, singing the praises of the Lord, and discussing spiritual matters. You have now been in the West for such a long time. Why stay longer?

I was almost at death's door suffering from cholera. Now I am well, as our Lord willed.

Maharaj is at Bhadrak [District of Orissa], doing well. Tarak and Brother Hari [Swami Turiyananda] are in Almora. Brother Hari is suffering from diabetes, so he had to go to a cold climate.

We learned how Sarada [Swami Trigunaita] suffered greatly before dying, because of the mishap. [A madman threw a bomb at him while he was holding services in the temple in San Francisco—*Ed.*]

It is not good for a holy man to undertake too much work. But one is always safe if one undertakes work after consulting the headquarters.

All are doing well here. It will give us great joy if we learn from you that you are doing well physically and mentally.

Please accept my deepest love.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

Belur Math
April 4, 1916

Beloved Brother Kali,

Perhaps by this time you have received my answer to your last letter ; though I am afraid it may not have reached you because of the conflagration that is going on in the world [World War I]. It is even difficult for human beings to reach the other shore, not to speak of letters! What a terrible war this is, which is wiping out millions of people!

All scriptural truths seem to have been completely forgotten by mankind. If men lose their faith in the very existence of God, if they do not have dispassion and wisdom, if they do not learn to see Narayana [God] dwelling in the hearts of all, if there be no love and if their hearts do not respond to love, surely there will only be jealousy,

hatred, competition, and fighting. Heaven is to be found in this very world, and this world again can be turned into hell—that is what I see happening, Brother! Self-control, whole-souled devotion to truth, dispassion for the ephemeral objects of the world, and sincerity—these make up the Golden Age. Selfishness, egotism, and pride—these verily make up hell.

Our gracious Master showed us a new path, the way to peace by the living example of his own life. Preach before the world this way to peace. You all came as his associates, as bearers of his immortal message. Men will gain faith by seeing your exemplary lives, and thereby will realize the blissful consciousness. Come, let us follow the path shown to us by our Lord.

To me, jealousy and quarrels seem like poison. Resolve to drive them away—far away from the world.

I conveyed your *sashtanga pranams*¹ to Revered Holy Mother. She is now at Jayrambati. It made her very happy to learn that you wrote to us at long last. She wants me to convey her blessings to you.

A large three-storied house has been built for her at Baghbazar in Calcutta. But she

¹ Salutations by full-length prostration

prefers to live in the old thatched house at Jayrambati and labours hard to serve the devotees. She is the most wonderful ideal in this world. But how few accept her ideal life, and how few even try to understand what she is and what she has to offer. The Master lived and demonstrated a superhuman life, and the same superhuman life is seen in the Holy Mother.

Brother, when I am unable even to understand the divine play of the Master and Mother, tell me, how could I understand anything of God the absolute, the infinite, the Supreme Self? Now, I take my only refuge and shelter in the Master's grace, his boundless grace, which knows neither rhyme nor reason.

I am glad to learn that you wish to build a temple in America. But I wish a temple could be built at Kamarpukur.² There is the root of everything. No one takes care of the place. Nothing has been done in the Master's birth-place. This also is his play! Lately some devotees have wanted to do something there. Keep this in mind if you wish to help in any way. A few years hence that place will be considered a place of pil-

² Many years later a beautiful temple was built at Kamarpukur. It has become a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of devotees.

grimage. Whosoever does anything to help in building the temple will be remembered forever.

Our Master's ideas and ideals are spreading in many parts of Bengal, and also in other parts of India and in Burma.

The Lord has equipped you with wisdom and learning. It is my prayer that you yourself may be divinely intoxicated and that you may spread that divine intoxication among all the people of the world. Be absorbed completely in the Spirit of our Lord—in God-intoxication. Seeing you, others will attain new life in God. Preach the message of peace and bliss. Thus be blessed yourself, and your mother who gave birth to a son like you will also be blessed.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The devotees of the Lord are beyond all caste and race." Come, brother, let us try to form a heavenly race, uniting all mankind in that caste which is beyond this earth. Let there be only the play of love, unselfish love, God-intoxicated love, amongst this unique caste.

The Western nations want to rule over the world by the power of the sword. Come, let us bind this world with our love, intoxicating love, and peace, and unite all nations as one race. Let all selfishness go, let name, fame and glory go ; cut the bondage of Māyā.

Please accept our love and convey our love to all the devotees there.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

Letters
to
Swami Ramakrishnananda

In obedience to the universality of their Master's message, many of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna found themselves teaching his pure and noble truths in various corners of the world. Swami Ramakrishnananda, to whom the following letters were written, spent the greater part of his life working and lecturing in southern India. Intellectually brilliant, energetic, and staunchly orthodox, Ramakrishnananda was ideally suited to work in the traditional atmosphere of the South. "I will send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox brahmins, and more learned than your pundits," wrote Swami Vivekananda to a group who were eager to have a centre established in Madras. Therefore, at the request of Swamiji, Ramakrishnananda went to Madras in March of 1897 to begin his life's work.

Shashi Maharaj—the less formal name of Ramakrishnananda—was a man of great energy, who tirelessly sought to bring others

closer to God. The Madras devotees were astounded at his output. The Swami, however, considered himself only an instrument in the hands of the Lord. Does a pen complain, he would say, because it is forced to write too many letters? And then he would add, "If we look upon our bodies only as instruments of a higher Power, and surrender to that Power, we shall feel no fatigue."

Swami Premananda's letters to his brother-disciple are mostly informal ones, apprising the Swami of the activities at Belur Monastery as well as the comings and goings of the other monks.

Belur Math

May 9, 1897

Brother Shashi,

Please forgive me for this delay in replying to your affectionate letter.

Perhaps you are already aware of the rules and regulations for the conduct of the monastery here. The day begins with meditation in the morning from six to seven. Then chanting of the praises of the Lord. The boys take turns to do the chanting. Afterward some physical exercises according to Delsarte. Then *halwa* for breakfast.

I take my bath early in the morning and perform the ritualistic worship in the shrine. I realize what a difficult task it is to do the worship of the Lord properly.

Brother Hari [Swami Turiyananda] takes the *Gita* class from five to six in the afternoon. Shankara's commentary on the *Gita* is being studied ; tomorrow he will begin the third chapter. After vesper services, there is meditation for an hour and then a question and answer class. Often disciples tell their memories of our Lord. Singing is held one evening a week. On the whole, the work in the monastery is running smoothly.

Narendra is at present living in a solitary garden house near Almora. For the first few days he did not feel well. Now he is doing very well. He has written to say that he is gaining back his old strength. Achyutananda, Girish Ghosh, Shivananda, Niranjanananda, Adbhutananda, Goodwin, and two or three brothers of Badri Sha are living with Swamiji.

Abhedananda is conducting lectures and classes in England successfully. Received a letter from Saradananda by yesterday's mail. He seems to be conducting the preaching work in America splendidly.

Bhavanath is ill. He is in Calcutta for medical treatment. Swamiji is helping him financially.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

Belur Math
March 6, 1898

Brother Shashi,

Our beloved Narendra felt very happy to have received your letter, learning in detail about the work you are carrying on so successfully in Madras. He has written to you expressing his joy, which you may have received by now.

Narendra's health is not keeping so well. He has not completely recovered from his illness. But he seems to be on his way to recovery. He has not become too weak, and he is always full of fun. Brother, his heart is overflowing with compassion for all mankind and he is forever thinking how to introduce good to all the people of this world.

On the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, Sushil [Swami Prakashananda] did the worship and Shuddhananda was the *tantra-dhāraka* [one who reads the mantras to be uttered during the worship]. .

Narendra has composed a beautiful *ārātrika* song [vesper song], which runs as follows:

Breaker of this world's chain, we adore Thee,
 whom all men love.
 Spotless, taking man's form, O Purifier,
 Thou art above the Gunas three.
 Speech cannot hold Thee, nor mind,
 Yet without Thee we think not nor speak.
 Come to the heart's black cave,
 And illumine, Thou light of the light.

We all joined in the *ārātrika* song. Narendra had a wig with matted locks, ring on his ears, and ashes besmeared over his body. He looked exceedingly beautiful, like Lord Shiva himself. Most of us dressed like him. Worship with *homa* [offering into a sacrificial fire] continued until midnight.

Last Sunday the celebration was performed in the garden of the Daws. Narendra himself carried the photo of Sri Ramakrishna to this new place and performed the worship and *homa*. Only yesterday the land was bought for Rs. 39,000. Arrangements are being made to build a marble temple for the Lord and a large house. Work will soon begin.

We have a large gathering of monks now in the monastery. Saradananda, Turiya-

nanda, Shivananda, Vijnanananda, Sadananda, Prakashananda, Shuddhananda, Nirbhayananda, Virajananda, Nanda, Ajoy [young novice], and Nityananda are residing here.

Preaching work will soon begin in Calcutta. Narendra wishes to create some sensation there. Next Friday Miss Noble [Sister Nivedita] will lecture at the Star Theatre. Next will follow Sharat [Saradananda].

Two Swamis will soon be going to preach in Hazaribagh and establish some centres there.

Next Sunday Narendra will be going to visit the garden house of Ram Babu.

With my love to you, and convey the same to the others.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

Puri
November 27, 1907

Brother Shashi,

I came here last Saturday as Maharaj wanted me here. Most probably next Sunday we shall all be leaving for Calcutta. On our

way back we shall pass some days in Bhubaneswar and Bhadrak.

We were very happy to learn of your detailed description of the monastery building there. What great joy it gives us to learn that our Lord's monasteries are being founded in so many countries. It was a great desire of Swamiji that the Lord's temple should be established in every country, in every home, and in the hearts of every man and woman in the world. May all boys and girls, all men and women in the world be imbued with the ideas and ideals of Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna]. My one inner desire and prayer is that all mankind may accept as their ideal his universality, his dispassion for worldliness, his self-control and his intense love of God. Let every one come to know the encouraging words of Thakur: "Onward! Onward!"

Not only in southern India but all over India there are huge temples [no lack of them]; nor is there lack of wealth connected with those temples. The country is flooded with religious sects. But do you find anywhere dispassion for worldliness? Do you find anywhere that intense longing, that great earnestness to attain God, the real treasure of life? When you come to that, you find emptiness in the hearts of people.

Brother, bless me, and I pray to you earnestly that I may imbibe a little of the faith and devotion that you have. May I never sink into the delusion of *Māyā*. May my mind never be contaminated by the egotistic ideas of "me" and "mine". May I never be one-sided in my spiritual life. Such are my prayers to you, the devotee of the Lord. Who knows in how many ways delusion finds inroads into the hearts of man? Hence I pray, "Lord, protect me, protect me from your bewitching *Māyā*." The Lord and his devotees are one. So I pray to you, "Brother, protect me against any darkness or ignorance."

Girish Babu, the great devotee, celebrated Durga puja in his house. Holy Mother attended the worship. So I went there. What I witnessed struck me with great wonder. Girish Babu is only comparable to Girish Babu. He is indeed unique.

At about half past two in the morning, the palanquin that was sent to Balaram Babu's house for the Holy Mother to attend the *sandhi* puja [the most important hour of the worship] came back empty. Five minutes later, at just the moment of the *sandhi* puja, the Holy Mother arrived by herself. [She walked just one block from Balaram Babu's house to the house of Girish]. We all were

struck dumb. Girish Babu was overwhelmed with joy at seeing her. Now again, imagine the presence of an array of girls in the worship hall, girls who are despised by society [prostitutes who were dancers and actresses in the theatre of Girish], and the Holy Mother, who is worshipped as an embodiment of purity, seated in their midst. This was indeed a unique sight. Girish is the only one who can make the impossible possible.

With my love.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

The Math
Sept. 20, 1908

Brother Shashi,

Glad to receive your affectionate letter with your warm invitation to me to come to Madras. But brother, I have no desire at present to go south. When you come to Puri, if you will kindly visit here, it will give us great pleasure.

The Western devotee, who is at present with you, wrote me a letter saying that she found great strength and encouragement when she heard from me. How is she at present? Give her my affectionate greetings.

Whosoever offers his or her mind and heart to the Lord's work and takes refuge in Him will always be taken care of by our Lord under all conditions and all circumstances. Of course, we become worried when we learn of any difficulty of a devotee of the Lord. Those who have renounced their friends and relatives, especially the devotees of another country who have taken shelter at the feet of the Lord, are sure to be protected by the Lord Himself; he has taken their burden, there is no doubt about it. Brother, I am only a servant of the devotees of our Lord; bless me that I may always remain so.

How are you? Tarakdada [Shivananda] is now in Darjeeling. Give my love to all the Brahmacharins there.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

The Math
Dec. 24. 1908

Brother Shashi,

As we received the different offerings from Rameshwaram [the temple of Lord Shiva in southern India] sent by Sri Maharaj, [Brahmananda], we placed them on our heads with reverence and then distributed them

amongst the devotees. A thrill passed through us on hearing that Maharaj felt great joy visiting the deity. We are also gratified to learn that Maharaj's health is keeping well. We pray and it is our earnest wish that Maharaj may keep well in health and live amongst us for a long time to come. Your earnestness and your devotion have made it possible for him to visit the temples of gods and goddesses in the south, which gave him such delight and joy. And for that we offer you our hearts' sincerest gratitude and thanks. Only a truly devoted person like yourself could have made it possible to take Maharaj to such distant lands, and for which we again offer you our thanks and our loving greetings. And you showed wonderful discrimination by limiting his visits only to a few important places of pilgrimage. You remember how Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] returned from the zoo after only visiting the lion, the king of beasts? It would have been difficult and tiring for Maharaj to visit all the places of pilgrimage in the south. If Maharaj visits Kanchi, be sure to ask the Brahmachari priest to chant the thousand names of Divine Mother. I shall never forget the spiritual atmosphere I breathed there while the chanting went on.

Nowadays crowds of devotees are visiting the monastery, and everybody has been in-

quiring when will Maharaj return there. When will you also give us the *darshan* here in company with Maharaj?

Please convey our love and prostrations to Maharaj.

With my love and salutations to you, and my love and best wishes to the boys.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

The Math
Feb. 14, 1909

Brother Shashi,

I have not been able to write to you for a long time ; and because of my ill health I was unable to answer Maharaj's letter. Kindly let me know how is Maharaj's health. Has he forgotten us entirely? His birthday is approaching. Unless he is here, we find no inspiration. His august presence is keenly needed. Everyone is eager to know when he will be coming here.

With my love and prostrations to Maharaj and my love and salutations to you. My love and best wishes to the devotees there.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam.

The Math
Dec. 29, 1909

Brother Shashi,

Yesterday, on December 28, Gopaldada [Swami Advaitananda] gave up his body at 4-30 p.m. and has gone to Thakur, his real abode. He was slightly indisposed and nobody ever thought he would die so soon. At the last moment before his death, his countenance looked most beautiful. The divine play of our Lord's devotees is indeed something wonderful. Dr. Mati happened to be near him at the time. The Swami drank a little milk, took final leave of Dr. Mati and then with a smile on his lips gave up his body.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

The Ramakrishna
Advaita Ashrama
Varanasi
Dec. 4, 1910

Brother Shashi,

About a month ago Hari Maharaj [Turiyananda] arrived here and is keeping well. We learned that Maharaj is now at

Belur Monastery. He may be coming here. If he does not, then we shall be going to the Monastery.

Girish Babu is also here in Varanasi. His health has improved greatly. We go to visit him often. Ah! What a great transformation has come upon him! Thakur remarked about him, "Seeing your wonderful life, people will some day be struck with wonder." That is what is to be seen in him today. We hear the most wonderful spiritual truths coming from his lips. He has intense and one-pointed devotion to Thakur and at the same time he is so broad-minded and holds on to the universal ideal of religion. He is completely egoless. To him name, fame, and glory are meaningless, and in a way he looks upon them as despicable. We have witnessed how, before our eyes, he has turned into gold, as it were, touching the philosopher's stone. What great love and affection he bestows upon us. He is sixty-eight years old, but he has become as pure and simple as a child. If you were here you would have enjoyed his company immensely. He becomes divinely intoxicated when he begins to talk about Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. How I wish you all to be present here to join him in becoming inebriated with love for God. The moment we approach

him, he becomes God-intoxicated. Anyone associated with him, even the servants and maids, have become devotees of Thakur. All this manifests the glory of our Lord. And we are witnessing this through the grace of the Lord.

Brother Purna came to visit us here. It was a happy occasion. Hari Maharaj stayed with him for two months and he is all praise for Purna's great spiritual attainments. Glory to our Lord.

With my love.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

Miscellaneous Letters

The Math
Sept. 3, 1916

Revered Hari Maharaj,

I have not been able to write to you for a long time, due to my laziness. Furthermore, I was not feeling so well after our return from Dacca.

While we were travelling in East Bengal [now East Pakistan] Maharaj's health kept well, and he lived in a blissful consciousness. Maharaj had a wonderful vision in Dacca. He saw Sri Ramakrishna dancing in the centre of the city of Dacca with both arms uplifted, absorbed in bliss. And Maharaj bestowed his grace upon many aspirants without any reservation, by giving them initiation. I have never seen Maharaj so liberal in initiating disciples at any time before this. It struck me with wonder to see his unbounded grace manifested there. We know how he would accept only a few disciples after months and years of testing their patience. But in Dacca his grace fell upon one and all, whomsoever I brought to him. How very much pleased you would have been

to see Maharaj thus if you had been with us. Our only prayer is that Thakur may awaken the spiritual consciousness of all mankind.

What happened there was indeed a miracle. What many other preachers and teachers could not have achieved even with great efforts, Maharaj achieved through the power of our Lord by simply laying his hands upon the heads of the aspirants. Those who received his grace are born anew. The Lord does his own preaching, but fools think they can do His work.

I remember, you went to visit Nag Mahashaya about twenty-five or twenty-six years ago while he was living. We went to visit his Ashrama where he lived an illumined life in God. And as we visited his abode for a day, we felt ecstatic joy. Maharaj danced there while in ecstasy and it was a sight for gods to see.

Maharaj is no longer the same Maharaj, the one who was so strict in initiating disciples. Today he initiated two disciples. His grace descends upon everyone, whoever approaches him. I have never seen him like this before.

Please accept my salutations.

Yours affectionately,
Baburam

The Math

June 23, 1914

Dear —,

Do you remember what a happy time we spent once in Vrindaban, the land of the divine play of Sri Krishna, the land where the Lord manifested only his sweetness and not his supernatural powers? Supreme joy, peace, and bliss can be had only by not desiring supernatural powers. Our Lord [Sri Ramakrishna], from the very beginning of his life until its end, manifested only sweetness in his divine play. He never displayed any supernatural powers. Just think, he, the Lord incarnate, was walking the lanes and alleys of Baghbazar in Calcutta to meet his young disciples, like Purna and others! Will the world ever witness again such sweet divine play, where there is not the least trace of supernaturalism? When we, his young disciples, gathered round him, he remarked, "Could you explain what is happening to me, that I cannot be happy unless I see you? You have not a penny to offer me, yet I long to see you. You have not come from rich families, so that multitudes of people will honour me because you come to me, yet I seem unhappy if I cannot see you. What is the meaning of this, can you

tell me?" Thakur's divine play, from the first to the last, is a play in which was manifest only sweetness; he was the embodiment of sweetness.

Was it not our luck that he did not come as a learned, intellectual man? Otherwise, we could not have found our place at his feet. Grace, grace, he was full of grace, grace without any cause or rhyme or reason. Has the world ever seen any one like him? Swamiji had to manifest some supernatural powers in order to preach the truth of God, but with us, and in our presence, he was sweetness itself. Ah, how wonderful it was to be with him! Now only the memory is left. And you, his disciples, are helpmates in Swamiji's divine play.

Onward, forward, you all must attain the Lord. After Thakur passed away, you were the first monastic to join the Baranagore monastery. Say, how many many years have passed away since then! How are you practising your *japa* and meditation? Never deviate from the ideal of renunciation. Beware, beware, holy man! Be always on guard. Remember always, renunciation is our mantra, our strength, our wealth, and our only help. Renunciation is Karma Yoga, and the yogas of love and knowledge. Under all conditions and circumstances, renuncia-

tion is our only support. Always be careful and let not any desire for name and fame come. Pray to the Lord, "Save me, protect me."

I visited the Āshrama of Nag Mahashaya. I am sure you visited it once. What a peaceful abode that is. It has now become a place of pilgrimage. Many devotees visit the Ashrama regularly. What a great man of renunciation he was. Our Lord's divine play is unique. Nag Mahashaya, his disciple, is unique. What austerity, what dispassion, he expressed in his life! Beyond human comprehension.

Think of our Mother Sevier! Unique indeed is her renunciation of worldliness, as well as that of her late husband's. Then also think of Nivedita, and of Goodwin who was like Ganesha to our Swamiji. What a marvellous ideal of renunciation they showed in their lives. To tell you the truth, whenever I perform worship of the Lord, I always offer flowers to him in their names. I consider myself as a servant of the devotees of Swamiji. Just think, these men and women, born in free countries, sacrificing their all, dedicated their lives to the service of our people, who are slaves to a foreign rule! Isn't that something unique and miraculous? I think this is the most marvellous thing that has happen-

ed in this age. We need to learn from these great ones coming from the West the ideal of true renunciation. What did we have that we renounced? Instead of living in a dilapidated house, as we should have had to if we had remained in the world, we are now living in palatial homes. Just think, if we had to make our living in the world, we should have had to flatter others to get some work in an office. Is this what you could call renunciation? Or, is this not a life of enjoyment for us? The real men and women of renunciation are those Western disciples.

The other day I heard a rumour that you are building an Ashrama for yourself. I can hardly believe that a monastic disciple of the Holy Mother could want to build an Ashrama for himself. Do not go to build a house for yourself. It will bring you nothing but sorrow and unsurmountable difficulties. It is nice to dream such dreams, but if you want to be happy and find peace and true comfort in life take complete refuge in the Lord. From what little experience I have gained in my life, I know that the root cause of all suffering and misery is this sense of "me" and "mine". You have read the teachings of Tl:akur. How can one find peace and happiness? By enjoyment of sense pleasures or by their renunciation? Through the Lord's

grace, prove the truth of his teachings by following them in life. If we are the devotees of Thakur and the Holy Mother, we must show in our lives the true ideal of renunciation. Are we born to live lives of enjoyment for ourselves? Should we run after sense pleasures? Should we own anything of this earth that we can call our own? Our Lord came to earth to show the ideals of perfect knowledge, supreme devotion, and complete renunciation. We must inherit fully those ideals in our lives. Let this whole world be your Ashrama. Our Lord's Ashrama cannot be limited to a few acres of land. No, no, our Lord's place cannot be on only a small plot of ground. Our Lord is greater than the greatest, covering the whole universe. How could he live within the limits of walls? Our relatives are all mankind. "There is no happiness in the finite." Our hearts must grow big, and bigger to include all mankind; then only will the Lord be seated in our hearts.

If our Lord had any aversion, it was only to one-sidedness, to any form of sectarianism or jealousy. Shame on us if we attempt to form a sect of our own. Don't you realize our Lord is the head of all sects, the head of all the thousands of sects that exist in the world?

We must learn to take delight in the

Atman-Brahman. We must assuredly become free while living. If we fail, our nation and our religion will surely die out.

Sit in solitude and earnestly pray to Thakur and Swamiji with all your heart and soul. They will guide you on the right path, you who have taken refuge at their feet. Our Lord is the embodiment of infinite grace.

I should like to see you. Couldn't you come here for a few days? Try and come to have *darshan* of the Holy Mother's feet. As you visit her all your delusion will pass away, ignorance will disappear. Do not ever think that wearing a *gerua* robe alone makes you a holy man. Give up all sense of "me" and "mine"; then only you shall find peace and happiness. It is my one desire for you that you come here even for a short while to have the *darshan* of the Holy Mother's feet.

With my love to you.

Yours affectionately,
Premananda

Dear Surendra,

Who can really understand the greatness of the Holy Mother? True it is there have been great holy women in past ages—such as Sita, Savitri, Sri Radha. You have heard of these great ones. But in this present age,

before our very eyes, we see the Holy Mother surpass them all by her exemplary life.

She is difficult to understand because she keeps her superhuman powers hidden. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we have seen these powers expressed. Many times during the day he would go into ecstasy and Samadhi. We saw him always God-intoxicated. But Mother holds these powers suppressed within herself. How much greater her superhuman power must be! Hail Mother! Hail Mother! Hail Mother, the embodiment of *Shakti*—the Divine Mother.³

Don't you see how many people are coming to her to receive her grace? People who are so wicked we are unable to help them we send to Mother, and she holds them on her lap, as it were, and wipes out all their weaknesses. She is the embodiment of infinite power. She has boundless grace and toward all. When then shall *we* say we have seen such grace toward all—even from Thakur! He was selective in accepting disciples. Once he told Keshab Sen, "You are having troubles in your organization because through lack of

³ We should not, however, think of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother as distinct from one another in the mystical sense. They are as inseparable as fire and heat. They are like two sides of the same coin.

discrimination you allow black sheep into your fold.”

Thakur used to accept disciples after testing them in many ways ; he did not even spare Swamiji. He was versed in physiognomy and so he used to examine the shape of his disciples' eyes, hands, feet, and so forth. He knew different ways to judge if one were truly a spiritual aspirant.

We have noticed that if any person of impure character carried food to him he could see the character of the person from a distance, and he would remark, “that is not food. but dirt”. He could not bear the atmosphere of worldly people.

And now in the Holy Mother, what do we see? She is indeed performing miracles, sheer miracles! She gives refuge to all. She eats food offered by anybody and she digests it! Hail Mother! Hail Mother!

Don't you people realize that our Mother, who is the empress of this universe, has assumed the mask of a poor woman, washing dishes, husking paddy, and performing all sorts of tasks?

Mother lives at Jayrambati and labours hard to teach the householder devotees their duties. She has infinite patience and unbounded grace, and above all—how completely self-effacing she is!

Look at her life, try to understand her. You are all children of the Holy Mother—try to be worthy of being her children. Then you will find fulfilment.

Just to see her and accept her *prasad*—that is not enough. Be absorbed in contemplation of her. If you can't do that, what good are you ?

Can't you see the effects of thirst for worldly pleasures and enjoyments? People are "burning with the mighty forest fire, worldly lust, raging furiously within!"

You are Mother's children. Watch and learn. Know that worldly pleasures end in ashes. What great responsibilities are yours! People of the world must learn to see how frustrated they can become in running after worldliness. At last let them learn to turn toward God and become united with him.

Mother has shown you the path. She is the example before your very eyes. Know that you have touched the philosopher's stone and have turned into gold. Now it is your duty to turn others into gold. Try to attain that power of spirituality. Be the worthy children of Mother.

Always and forever remember that unbounded grace of Mother in happiness or misery, in good or bad times, in wars and

famines. Feel that boundless grace of the
merciful Mother. Hail Mother! Hail
Mother!

Yours,
Premananda