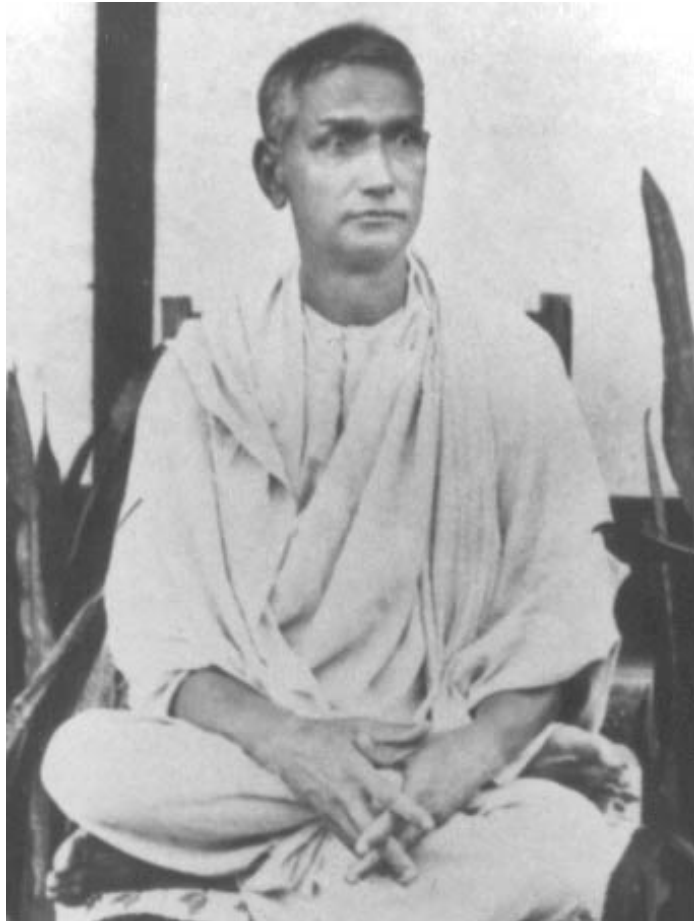


Swami Nirmalananda

His life and teachings

Swami Nirmalananda: (1863 - 1938). A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna



PREFACE

This small volume is our humble tribute to the memory of the Swami Nirmalanandaji. To us and to thousands of others in the Motherland he was a teacher, father, mother, friend and more

than all that, he was life and light – a ray of the Spiritual Sun that shone at Dakshineswar.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was the perfect embodiment of the Sanatana Dharma, the Religion Eternal. Each one of His direct disciples, while giving to the world His great message of the Harmony of all Religions, embodied in himself, a part of the highest ideal of the Master's All-sided Perfection.

Sri Swami Nirmalanandaji embodied the ideal of purity, and he naturally represented the strength and fearlessness resulting from that purity. The Gospel of Strength is what the world in general, and India in particular, needs most at this present epoch. "His Life and Teachings" have therefore a special value now, and the publishers feel confident that the readers will get the needed inspiration from the soul-stirring example and the life-giving words of this Spiritual Hero.

We are fully conscious that the tribute is not worthy of his greatness. It is incomplete and defective in many respects. The present world-situation has affected our labours to a very large extent. We could not collect all the materials which in normal times we could have easily got. We could not visit the many important places connected with the life. We have also had to economise in space and time and energy. Due to various inconveniences certain printing mistakes have also taken place for which we have added an errata. It is with great diffidence, therefore, that impelled by a sense of duty, we place this before the public.

The reader may note that the account of the Swamiji's work in certain places in Kerala is given in greater details than that in other places. The Swami was always intensely active wherever he was. A narration of all his activities will require several volumes. The account given here will give the reader a glimpse of the Swamiji's unremitting work in other places also.

Soon after the Swami's Mahasamadhi, his disciples and devotees resolved, in perpetuation of his memory, to build a

temple to instal his sacred relics and to offer him daily worship.
A committee consisting of the following was formed to collect funds and carry on the work.

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Sri T. V. Krishnan Nair, B.A., B.L., Ottapalam....."

Seth Purushothamdas Iswardas, Bombay....."

Sri A. V. Kuttikrishna Menon M.A., B.L , L.T.,

Retired Principal, Zamorin's College, Calicut....."

Seth Khattawoo Khimji, Alleppey....."

Sri K. J. Chengappa, Retired Deputy Director of Agriculture, Coorg..."

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Sri K. Gopala Pillai, Calicut

Sri Kanoor Madhavan Nair, Cheramangalam

Sri M. S. Reddiar, Trivandrum

The temple was constructed in a very short time. Thanks to the liberal contributions by disciples, devotees and friends the "small building – Octagonal with veranda all-round, ornamental arches, minor ceiling, upper story with decorative domes on the eight corners, ornamental railings of reinforced concrete in between the corners and a minor dome over the upper room" – was ready for opening in December 1939. The temple was consecrated and the relics duly installed on the 25th of December. Worship is being daily conducted.

It was further desired by the devotees and decided by the committee to publish a Life of the Swamiji. The Secretary of the Committee, Swami Vishadananda, was deputed to carry on the work.

While bringing out the book we desire to express our gratitude to all those friends, admirers, devotees and disciples of the Swami who have helped us in this great work. Special mention has to be made of the devoted services of Sri N. Kunhrama Pathiyar B.A., Retired Principal, Sanskrit College, Pattambi, in

editing the book. We have also to record the valuable services rendered to us by the great linguists scholar and devotee, Sri P. Seshadri Iyer, M.A., M.L., Trivandrum. In conclusion we have to mention that it is the munificent donations of H. H. Ramavarma Thampuran, Seth Purushotham Das Iswardas, Seth Khattawoo Khimji, Sri K. P. Parukutty Amma and others of Palat huuse, Sri Ambadi Sankara Menon, B.A., B.L., Professor Nandipathy Mukherji, Sri K. J. Chengappa, Sri T. V. Krishnan Nair, B.A , B. L., Rao Bahadur H. C. Javariah, Sri Shambhu Barhmeswara Prasad, Sri K. Parameswaran Pillai and a number of others that enabled us to bring out the book inspite of the unfavourable circumstances. Our thanks are due to Sri M. Rajagopal Naidu, Proprietor, Rajagopal Photo-Zinco and Power Printing Works, Bangalore City, who voluntarily undertook the printing work at a minimum cost as a sacred duty towards the Swamiji.

The sale proceeds of this publication will be utilised for the upkeep of Swami Nirmalananda Memorials.

SWAMI VISHADANANDA.

Secretary, Sri Nirmalananda Temple Committee,
Sri Niranjana Ashrama,
Sri Ramakrishna Nagar, Ottapalam.

1st May 1943.

(Please Note: Chapter XXV - 'Vivifying the north' and Chapter XXX - 'The field widened', are missing)

CHAPTER I

WORSHIP BEARS FRUIT

"Avatara hyasamkheya

Harsh Satwanidherdwijah"

Sri Bhagavata, III, i-26

(Ye twice-born ones, the Incarnations of Hari, the Treasure-house of Supreme energy, are innumerable, indeed.)

OF all the Avatars of Hari, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna have been, naturally, the most popular. The advent of Rama made an epoch in the history of Avatars itself. The earlier Incarnations were more or less solitary figures; they accomplished their objects single-handed. Their prowess and activities were manifested more on the physical than on the mental or moral plane. Rama made a departure. He had companions and friends to help Him in His leela. They were not all Aryans. Guha, Sugreeva and Vibhishana were some of His best friends. He was the first great cosmopolitan. In Him were blended physical strength, intellectual greatness and moral grandeur in overflowing measures. He was also the first Avatar to go through the whole gamut of human experience. Keen disappointments, bitter struggles and poignant sorrows filled His cup. These were the price he paid for the deliverance of Bharatavarsha from Rakshasic domination.

Coming in a later Yuga with different social, political and religious conditions, Krishna had to be different in many respects. He began life as the playmate of the lowly; even as boy He set His face against and dissuaded His father from performing Vedic Sacrifices to the gods; in His teens He became not a king, but a king-maker which He remained throughout His life; for the intellectuals, He harmonised the different systems of philosophy, and for the unlettered, He unlocked the treasure of life-giving love.

While Rama appeared as pre-eminently human, Krishna, seemed ever to remain on the border-land of Divinity. The two together may be said to have summed up the possibilities of human evolution,

The sphere of action of the old Avatars was, however, limited regionally as well as personally. It was reserved to this age of material science, rationalism and internationalism to lash up mighty waves of conflicting thoughts and to raise world-wide and complex problems for solution. Science opened up all the dead past, and rationalism questioned every settled faith. The very foundations of life and conduct were in imminent danger of being shaken and smashed. A new adjustment was called for. It became necessary to examine all the past, to unearth everything that was of value, buried therein.

The work was no longer local, nor even continental, it was global. A new head, a new heart, a new cosmic-power was the demand of the age. A new Avatar expressing all that was true in the past and all the possibilities of the future, – a Rama and a Krishna combined in one – this was what the world prayed for. A demonstrator of Fundamental Unity, a bestower of Supreme Peace, this was what the age of material sciences yearned for. The prayer was granted. The Power took form. It appeared as a boy born of Brahmin parents in a village in Bengal. The span of his mortal life was but fifty-three summers. Yet, he lived the life of all the Prophets of old. He realised and demonstrated that their lives and words were all true. Like Rama, he struggled and freed Bharatavarsha of Rakshasic culture-domination.

Transcending all limitations and becoming one with Truth, he ever remained in Bhava-mukha. From the heart of Being, he brought out what the world was panting for; Truth and Peace, He distributed them broadcast. To-day He is the world-figure known as Sri Ramakrishna.

To continue the work after Him, to bear His torch to the farthest limits of the globe, he left a few chosen young men, intelligent, educated, pure and strong. Their leader was the Super-man, Swami Vivekananda. He was a Kayastha and Dutta by birth. The only other Dutta disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was Swami Nirmalananda. These two had many a trait in common.

Indomitable Kshatra Veerya was one of them.

The tradition seems to be true that the Kayasthas of Bengal have Kshatriya blood in them. From that community have sprung up some of the most eminent men of Bengal in modern times also – S. R. C. Dutt, J. C. Bose, C. R. Das and S. C. Bose among others.

In the Dutta branch of the Kayastha community there was one Purushothama Dutt of Bharadwaja gotra from whom in the 22nd generation was descended Bhairavachandra Dutt who lived in Bighati village in the District of Hugly. He was a very pious and cultured gentleman. His tutelary deity was Radhakanta with Radha Rani. The very beautiful images of these two are preserved and worshipped in the family to this day. The inscription at the foot of the images bears the Bengali year corresponding to 1770 A. D. The image of Radhakanta with flute; in hand is made of black touch-stone and that of Radha Rani or Ashtaloha (eight metals). Besides these there are Salagram and Banalinga which are also worshipped daily. Although his tutelary deity was Radhakanta, Bhairavachandra was a worshipper of Sakti also having been duly initiated into that cult. Durga puja used to be celebrated in his house with great pomp and solemnity twice a year. All other festivals of the Mother, such as Jagaddhatri puja were also celebrated. The 'Doljatra' of Krishna was an imposing spectacle with display of fire-works and staging of dramas. There was a festival or a feast in the house almost every day. Some family trouble made him leave the ancestral home and migrate to Baghbazaar. Calcutta, where he purchased a plot of land for Rs. 37 and put up a temporary dwelling house. He had two sons, the elder of whom was employed in an English Company. The younger Debnath Dutt was highly intelligent and enterprising. He became an expert in feeling the pulse (Nadeevijnana) of sick persons and accurately forecasting the time of their death. The wide-spread belief that death on the banks of the Ganges confers mukti

brought his services very much in requisition. He became such a favourite with the people that they called him Ganga Dutta. His spirit of enterprise and industry led him to start a castor-oil mill, a flour mill, lac-work and a factory for the manufacture of sulphuric acid – the first of its kind in Calcutta. Success attended all his undertakings. Skilful and successful, rich and charitable, he was loved and respected by all. He also used to celebrate the Durga puja and other festivals on a grand scale. Besides the house in Baghbazaar with its spacious halls and out houses he had a house at Benares atsu. He married Srimati Takamani Devi, a very pious and talented lady who came from Benares. She brought happiness and prosperity to the family. After giving-birth to five sons in succession, she devoutly worshipped Tulasi (the sacred Basil plant) for a long lime. The next child, the fruit of her ardent worship was also a male. He was born in the house at 20, Bosepara Lane, Baghbazaar, Calcutta at about 8-30 P.M., on Wednesday the 23rd of December 1863, Sukla Paksha Chaturdasi Tithi and Rohini Nakshatra in the month of Dhanu. In loving memory of the worship the child was named Tulasicharan, also called Tulasi Das. He was their last son. Some years laier he had a sister. Tulasi's horoscope foretold a very bright future for him, as bright as the powerful moon in exalted position and in its own navamsa. It indicated an extraordinary powerful mind for the native. The youngest son is ipso *facto* the mother's special favourite. More so was Tulasi. The circumstances of his birth, his charming face, his sparkling eyes, his keen intelligence all these and more made him the pet of the family. Fondled too much by one and all he did not grow sturdy. He suffered in health. Medicines did not improve it. Ill-health did not affect his mind and will which were ever dominating and masterful, and his rich voice was naturally commanding, None wished or dared to oppose him even in those early days.

CHAPTER II

MARKED OUT

Tulasi's position as the pet of the family and his ill-health came in the way of his being sent to school. The prosperous family kept two establishments, one at Calcutta and the other at Benares and used to live in Benares for some months in the year. While at Benares his mother passed away at the residence at Ganesh Mahalla, Benares City, on the 30th December 1873, when he was 10 years old. After the period of bereavement the father saw how unwise it was to keep the boy confined to the house. He decided to put him to school at Benares under the protection of his maternal uncle who lived there. Thus after his eleventh year Tulasi began his school education in the Bengali Tola High School, Benares. The precocious child advanced rapidly winning double promotions in the school. There he became the classmate of Hariprasanna Chatterji who was afterwards known as Swami Vijnanananda. At home he was taught Sanskrit in which he soon acquired great proficiency. It was this grounding which he received in this language in the great seat of learning during these early years that enabled him later to teach the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Gita to the Brahmacharins at Belur, and to converse fluently in Sanskrit with the scholars who visited him in South India. During this time he also mastered the Hindi language. In Benares there was then living an extraordinary person, a Mahatma, the living Siva himself, as Sri Ramakrishna described him-the great Trilinga swami. Tulasi had the good fortune to visit him several times. The Swami was a Mouni then, Tulasi and other children would often go near and look at him as a curio or assemble round him in playfulness. He used sometimes

to drive the boys away. On one occasion the Swami singled out Tulasi, beckoned him to go near him and smilingly and graciously gave him some prasad. Though the Swami was a Mouni he was not dead to the world. Once there was a knotty problem which the learned Pandits wanted to solve, but could not. They approached the Swami and explained the matter to him. He ordered for a slate and pencil and gave them a written reply which satisfied them.

Tulasi did not know much of the Swami or of religion and did not realise what it all meant. But he found that the Prasad was very sweet. He used to say in after years that initiation was of different kinds. One of them was through the stomach. This was perhaps his first stomach initiation. While Tulasi was in Benares, his father passed away at his Calcutta residence on Friday, the 23rd November 1877.

Thereafter Tulasi came to Calcutta to study for the entrance examination of the Calcutta University.

As a student he realised how invaluable was sound health. Medical treatment not having helped him to any appreciable extent he decided to help himself by means of systematic physical exercise. He soon mastered the science and art of physical culture, became an expert gymnast, sportsman and athlete and he grew robust in health. Not being content with being healthy himself, he wanted other young men to regain their health and to teach them gymnastics he opened and managed seventeen free gymnasiums in different parts of Calcutta. This great interest in physical culture did not affect his literary studies in the least. In regular course he passed the entrance examination in the year 1883, got a certificate of merit and a medal from His Highness the Raja of Talchar, Orissa, for general proficiency.

In Baghbazaar, the house of Harinath (Swami Turiyananda) was opposite to that of Tulasi. A portion of Tulasi's house was for a time occupied by Gangadhar (Swami Akhandananda) and his

father. These three were fast friends. They and other young men used to meet in the quadrangle of Tulasi's house which was later occupied by the Boses. A portion of their ancestral house was the quarter where Vaikuntanatha Sanyalmahasaya's house was situate.

CHAPTER III

CHOSEN

After finishing his studies in Benares, Tulasicharan came to Calcutta to pursue his studies in the College. The impact of western education and culture had undermined the religions beliefs and faiths of many a College student of those days. Some became rank atheists, some had grown sceptics, others had doubts and misgivings and most of them were restless at heart, pining for a haven of rest. It would seem that, that malady did not affect Tulasicharan. He was born and brought up in a family which was deeply religious for generations, which conducted the daily worship of all its household deities and solemnised the half-yearly annual festivals of most of them on a grand scale. The atmosphere of his family had the religious fragrance. From his boyhood he had a religious bent of mind and practised meditation. His faith had not received any rude shock. His boat was sailing fast on a placid stream. What river was it to join, what was its destination, he did not care to question. He was content to live the religion of his forefathers, in utter purity of thought and action. He laid himself in the hands of the Mother of the Universe. How she led him to the Supreme Goal, how Tulasicharan became Nirmalananda has already been made known to the world through the mass of literature that has grown round the names of the All-Gods, Ramakrishna – Vivekananda. It bears repetition; it has to be repeated by his

chroniclers, in his own words and in the words of those who knew it first-hand – his own gurubhais and associates.

A leader never loses sight of the minutest details in the movement he leads; he leaves nothing to chance. In the vast movement which we see as the universe, there is no chance, there is no place for it. Every small event, every trifling incident, has its purpose and meaning. It was not chance that brought Tulasicharan's grand-father to Baghbazaar – the very dust of whose lanes and bye-lanes has been made holy by the touch of the Divine feet. It was one of the many fine stages where the Yugavatar enacted his leela. It was a rich pond where he had his net, and his catch was superb – Harinath, Tulasi and Gangadhar. In Tulasi's own words this was how he was caught, how his boat was floated on to the Ganges.

"Nivedita lane and the tank on that side formerly belonged to us. The quadrangle in front of the house occupied by the Boses now (1928) in Bosepara lane was tlic place where we boys used to meet. There we were chatting one day when we heard that Paramahamsa had come to the house of the new Kayasthas. Balaram Bose had recently purchased that property from the Banerjees who were Brahmins and so the house was called thus. At once all the boys ran. I also hurried to my house, put on a chaddar, for I was not acquainted with the Boses at that time, went to Balaram's house and found that the hall, – parlour and verandah – was full. In the middle of the hall there was spread a carpet on a cushion with pillows on. Paramahamsa was not there. I was but a lad of 17 or 18 summers and did not venture to go in as many of the elders of that quarter were seated in that hall. On the left side of the room was a verandah and I leaned against the wall there. I learnt that the Paramahamsa had gone in so that the ladies of the house might have an opportunity to meet him. A little later I saw a person clad in a towel of gerua

colour {I think he had gone to the water closet) with leather slippers on coming through the door of the water-closet towards me. His eyes seemed not to observe anything, as if in a state of reverie, they were closed. Behind him there were a few persons. I did not know them. Suddenly he came to the place where I was standing and looked at me. He did not exchange a single word with me. I stood non-plussed and forgot even to salute him. At that moment, O, God, I felt a creeping sensation within my bosom. I felt a thrill from head to foot as if my body was becoming paralysed and I was inclined to weep. Afterwards, he staggered into the hall; I ran away to my house and laid myself on my bed. I said to myself, Oh! What kind of a Paramahamsa, I shall not go that way again. This was my first meeting with the Master, A few days after the above incident one day after finishing my mid-day meals I went to Hari Maharaj's house to see him. He was my friend from boyhood days and his residence was close to ours. I had heard that he used to go to the Paramahamsa of Dakshineswar. But I did not know that the Paramahamsa of Dakshineswar was this Paramahamsa. That day, it was Ekadasi and probably, a Sunday. Turiyanandaji told me 'Let us go for a bath in the Ganges'. At that time Turiyanandaji used to fast during da-y time and take some refreshment at night.' "From there we shall go to meet the Paramahamsa at Dakshineswar". I accompanied him to the Ganges. After bathing he hired a boat and went to Dakshineswar with some others. I returned home, took my meals and walked all the way to Dakshineswar. Turiyanandaji and others were already there. Sri Ramakrishna had gone out. We walked all round and saw the various things to be seen there. At nightfall I went back to Sri Ramakrishna's room to offer my salutations there before returning when I found that there were many pictures in the room. Near the place where the vessel of water was placed was a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna, I pointed it out to Turiyanandaji and asked him as

to whose photo it was. He replied that it was the photo of Sri Ramakrishna. I remarked that I had already seen him. "Where?" he asked. "At the house of Balaram Babu," I replied. "Then it is all right" he said.

"Shortly after this, one day I walked from my house to Dakshineswar alone. It was about half-past eleven or twelve when I reached the Kali temple. Without stopping anywhere I went direct to Paramahansa Deva's room and found him taking his meals. I saluted him and sat on the floor in front of his cot. This was my first bowing down before him. I was so ignorant that it did not occur to me that I should not salute him while he was eating or sit by him. However, he did not mind the breaches of etiquette. He talked to me smiling all the time. When his meals were over a lady came from the verandah near the side of the Nahabat and removed the plates, etc. At that time there was no one else in the room. As I was a mere boy she had no delicacy in entering the room and doing the work. Later on I came to know that she was the Holy Mother. After finishing his meals, he washed his hands and mouth, sat on the cot with placid face and began to smoke and chew betal leaf. After a few preliminary questions he suddenly said something curious which astonished me. He said, "The other day a boy resembling you came here and asked me if I could act as his go-between." I did not quite understand him and wondered why he used that slang expression. As I kept silent, he at once read my mind and said, "No, no, by the word go-between, I mean one who brings about the meeting of a person with his beloved Lord. He is the guru, he is everything. There is no difference between Him and God." I understood that it was a hint thrown out to me to accept him in that light. After a while he came down from the cot and placing his left hand on my shoulder as a mark of favour, stepped out of his room and slowly walked towards the Panchavati. He went to the Javtala to answer the calls of nature. Ramlal or some other

person accompanied him. Returning, with great tenderness he said to me 'come here now and then,' Then my heart was rilled with joy, After reaching the Panchavati, he saluted the spot where he had practised Sadhana and sat on a lower step. Then in an exalted mood, he began to speak with the Divine Mother. I could catch the word Mother at intervals and knew that he was talking to the Mother, I could not, of course, hear the talk of the Muther. I was able to understand bits of the words of the Master. Shortly after, towards nightfall he returned to his room when I prostrated before him and returned home. He told me 'come again'."

When asked as to what Sri Ramakrishna said to the Mother, his reply was "All those things are personal. Why should you want to know them? "The human guru gives the mantra in the ear and the divine guru in the Prana." In the course of the conversation he repeated "Ah! the human guru imparts the mantra to the ear and the guru of the universe to the heart." What all things he said! But what right has the world to know about them? And what do you gain by knowing those things?" At a later date, on the 20th February 1931, in his inaugural address as Chairman of the first religious convention of Nikhil Banga Ramakrishna Mahotsava, he said, "There were a thousand and one occasions when the Great Prophet himself used to remain a mute spectator before a thirsting soul with occasional glimpses of smiles hovering between his penetrating eyes and quivering lips. For verily, it is not the Vaikhari speech alone that speaketh; but the Pashyanti speech that rises in the heart like waves and passes beyond the bounds of the flesh, and falls like breakers on the hearts of the audience like sweet caresses to lull them, to soothe them, to embrace them. I am one of them who has had the good fortune to experience this touch, and I shall fail in my task if I do not carry that touch. May he infuse in me his Shakti".

He was highly reticent regarding personal matters which, in general, only satisfy curiosity and furnish food for talk. It is on the firm foundation of basic principles and eternal truth that man should mould his character and frame his conduct. Personal experiences always differ. They are but experiences in varying degrees of those principles and truth coming through the medium of different personalities. They are as much phenomena as any other in nature. Man should go behind them. But the tendency of the ordinary man is to take delight in the phenomenon and let the noumenon to take care of itself. That seems to be one of the reasons why he was extremely reticent and reserved in such matters. He has said so much regarding his first meeting with the Master on two occasions and for two different reasons. The first occasion was the publication of the Life of Ramakrishna (Mayavati Edition 1924). Swami Madhavanandaji – the present Secretary of the Mission who was in charge of that publication wrote to Swami Nirmalanandaji for an account of his meeting with Ramakrishna. The Swami could not refuse it. The substance of his answering letter is what is published in the life in the chapter 'Hari, Gangadhar, Tulasi and Hariprasanna. The reader will note that the account here given is substantially the same. Translation of the Swami's letter to Madhavanandaji will be found published in Part IV of this book. In it he says 'you have asked me to write an account of how I had the good fortune to meet Thakur, with a view to incorporating it in the new life'. After giving a few details he concludes. "As I have a love for you I write these incidents for your personal information. Do not communicate them to any one else or incorporate them in the new life of Sri Ramakrishna. Omitting these details you may mention in general on what occasions I had the good fortune to meet the Master. The letter is dated P. K. Office, Trivandrum, 23rd November 1923.

The second occasion was in 1928. The Swami was in the

Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Benares, on the 25th February of that year. Swamis Viswarupananda, Heerananda and several others were present. In the course of conversation Swamiji said that he was brought up in Benares during his early years. "If so" he was then asked, "how did you get the opportunity to meet Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda". In answer to them the Swami narrated the above incidents with very little variation and said that he said so much because "fables are gaining currency even while we are still alive". That day's conversation recorded by those present will be found published elsewhere.

After the first meeting, as above described, he used to go to the Kali Temple now and then, sometimes with Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda) and sometimes alone. "After a few visits" said Swamiji at a later date "I was fortunate enough to be blessed with initiation or "upadesa" by him. When he used to come to Balaram Babu's house I would go and meet him. When he was lying ill at Cossipore I used to go there also. On hearing one afternoon the news of his Mahasamadhi the previous night, I went to the Cossipore garden. I bowed down to his form for the last time and placed my head on his feet. Then I returned home from the cremation ground at about 10 P.M."

Thus from about the year 1882 when Tulasi was about 18 years of age, till the Mahasamadhi of the Master in 1886 for nearly 5 years he had the good fortune and the privilege of associating with him, serving him and receiving his Divine grace.

Further details of his visit to his Master and of his association with his gurubhais during this period must, henceforth for ever remain unknown. Their precious memories have all been lost to us with the passing away of one and all of them. The solitary figure who has had access to some information on those points – Srijut Mahendranath Dutt, the revered brother of Swami

Vivekananda – is, he regrets, too unwell to give those details. Although he was not as regular a visitor to Dakshineswar as some of his other gurubhais and although he was not one of the twelve who served the Master day and night at Cossipore, yet that he had Become one of the inner circle and that making his Master, the polestar and refuge of his life he was doing tapasya at home is clear beyond all doubts. Speaking of the twelve, the revered author of Leelaprasanga – Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj says¶ "To satisfy the curiosity of the readers the names of these twelve young men are given below. Norendra, Rakhal, Babiiram, Niranjan, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, Gopal Seniur, Kali, Sasi, Sarat and Gopal Junior, Sarad on account of the persecu- tion of his father used to come now and then and to stay for a day or two. * * * Hari, Gangadhar and Tulasi would come at intervals and practised Tapasya at home."§ All the above were bound together by their common love and devotion to their Master, all were dedicated to him and all were destined to merge their entire selves in that supreme personality and to re-appear as so many of its facets.

Swami Abhedanandaji writes as follows in his Gospel of Ramakrishna (1907) as well as in the revised edition of that book published in 1939 under the title "Memoirs of Ramakrishna" "Among these were a few more devoted ones, like Sarad, Hari, Gangadhar, Subodh, Tulsi, who, afterwards joined the order and were known as Trigunatita, Turiyananda, Akhandananda Subodhananda and Nirmalananda. Bhagavan Ramakrishna received them all with equal kindness and was ever ready to help them."

CHAPTER IV

DEDICATED

After the Master's Mahasamadhi, there were still a few days left before the expiration of the lease of the Cossipore garden. Of the young disciples of the Master, some remained there, the others went back home and resumed their studies. The task of rallying these fell naturally on 'Noren' whom the Master had appointed their guardian. He often visited these young disciples at their homes, dragged them from their studies and injected into their drooping hearts the fiery message of renunciation. To Tulasicharan, these visits of Noren were inexpressibly welcome, for to him 'Noren' was his master himself in another form and Noren loved Tulasi very much. They with other disciples used to spend hours in Tulasicharan's house, conversing, singing, dancing, eating and smoking. The house was a prominent one in Baghbazaar, the inmates were very hospitable and Tulasi was practically the master of the house. Norendra led the party with music and Tulasicharan played on the Packwaj and other instruments. Tulasi would invariably ask the inmates to prepare meals or refreshments for the party, Tulasi's orders would be carried out to the very letter, not only because he was the practical master, but also because the inmates had great regard and affection for Noren and his Gurubhais. Swami Saradanandaji speaks as follows, "One day, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) was singing the following invocation to Gayatri (in the very tone of the old Rishi he had heard in the vision) seated in the house of Tulasi Maharaj. "Ayahi varade devi triakshare brahmavadini, Gayatri Chandasam Matar Brahmayoni namostute." He was so much absorbed that he sang this invocation from 10 A. M. to 4 P. M. that day. After 4 P. M. he bathed and took his meals. In the Math (Belur) also he used to sing this invocation many a time losing all outward consciousness.- But it was in Tulasicharan Maharaj's house the most intense absorption came upon

him." (Sri Sri Saradananda Prasanga, Page 141.) On another day the party discoursed for long on various subjects. Then Noren began to sing and Tulasi followed with the Packwaj. After some time the fervour grew and the party began to dance on a wooden platform. They forgot themselves and their dance became the representation and play of joy divine. Some of the inmates were attracted by the music and dance and wanted to witness them at close quarters. In an adjoining room there was a parapet wall with a water cistern. One of the ladies – a sister-in-law of Tulasi – got up the wall and was peeping through a window. All on a sudden one of the legs of the wooden platform on which they were dancing gave way and the platform tumbled down. The dance was abruptly stopped. Tulasi might at once ask for refreshments. The sister-in-law jumped down in haste from the parapet wall. In so doing her foot struck against a broken bottle which was lying on the floor. The foot got deeply cut; blood flowed in profusion. Without flinching, without making any noise, she ran to the kitchen. The ladies there seeing a profusion of blood, raised a loud cry. Noren and the party hastened to the kitchen and seeing the cut, brought in a doctor immediately. After the wound was dressed they took some refreshment and dispersed.

Some days previously the relics of the Master had been removed to the rented house in Baranagore, the first monastery of the sanyasin disciples of the Master. "Gopal senior, the young lay devotee removed the Master's bedding and other things there from Cossipore and Sarat joined him at night. Gopal senior was the regular inmate. Norendra, Sasi, Sarat, Baburam and Niranjan used to visit the monastery every now and then." It may be mentioned here that Tulasi had to surmount an obstacle. He had a maternal uncle, Nityagopal a spiritually advanced soul who had established a religious sect of his own. It had many centres. Although Nityagopal was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and used to visit him frequently, he kept himself

and his sect distinct and separate. He naturally wished his nephew, in whom he must have noticed great spiritual potentiality, to join him and his sect. An aged and spiritually developed man who also happened to be a maternal uncle could not be lightly brushed aside by a young student. But Noren and destiny prevailed. Noren's influence and Tulasi's determination overcame the resistance. The part joined the whole. One day Tulasi left home, kith and kin and college and all worldly connections behind him and like his Master's homa-bird flew up, and he became an inmate of the Baranagore Math.

CHAPTER V

LIFE AT BARANAGAR

The house which became the first monastery of the Sanyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna "was situated between Dakshineswar and the city of Calcutta. It was a dreary place. For years it had had no tenants. For years it had the appearance of being deserted. It was in fact in a ruined condition and sadly in need of repair. Besides being very old, it had the reputation of being haunted. It was two storeys in height but the lower storey was absolutely useless, being the resort of lizards and snakes. The gateway had long since tumbled down. The verandah which flanked the front part of the upper storey showed signs of decay. The main room at the back part where the monks lived was in a most dilapidated state. Indeed, none others would have lived there for fear of the building giving way. To the east of the building was another house which was used as a sort of chapel where the family God of the owners was

worshipped by a resident priest. To the west was a garden overgrown with weeds and tall brush and undergrowth so that it resembled a jungle. The rooms of the ground floor were never occupied during the time the monks remained there except one in which lived the gardener of the landlord. They were exceedingly damp and dingy and filled with all sorts of rubbish which several generations of landlords had allowed to accumulate and made no effort to remove. The garden was peopled by tall Sovanjan and Mango trees and a Vilva tree giving a sombre aspect to the place. At the back part was a pond which had become overgrown with moss and was the breeding place of mosquitos. The whole place was weird. "There were many thrilling tales current concerning dark deeds which, it is said had been perpetrated in this house and compound, but this was long ago, and besides, the Sanyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had no fear of ghosts. The monks had chosen this dreary retreat not only because of its cheapness, but especially because it was adjacent to the Baranagore burning ghat where the body of the Master had been consigned to the flames. They desired to be near the sacred river also as their Master always did and the Baranagore Monastery was but a few minutes walk from the Ganges. Here the monks were glad to live away from the turmoil of city life in the solitude where few cared to interrupt their days of meditation". It was to this dreary, desolate place that Tulasicharan came. At home there was bitter weeping. The inmates, males as well as females, went to the Math to persuade Tulasi to return home. They wept before him and prayed to him to come away from that haunted house. It was all in vain. Many a time did they go and try all possible means to bring him back. Every time they returned weeping. At last they implored him to visit them once a week. He refused to do that also. But such was their love for him that they used occasionally to go to Baranagore, about 3 miles from their house.

And they did not go empty handed. It was after the lapse of two years that one day he appeared before them in their house. By then, he had become a Sanyasin with gerua cloth and long hair and uncut beard. He spoke to them affectionately and advised them to lead noble lives, They gave up all hopes of his rejoining them, but requested him to give them 'darshan' once in a way. He consoled them saying that he would not only see them, but would mix with them as of old, although only as befitting a sanyasin. He only wanted that they should not interfere with his way of life. He told them that he was about to start on a long pilgrimage and on taking leave of them accepted two blankets from them. The offer of clothes and other things was gently declined.

The other members of the Monastery were not all strangers to them. Some of them had assembled in their house many a time and passing many happy hours there, had endeared themselves to them and had partaken of their hospitality. They were sorry at heart to see the hard life of these young men accustomed, till then, to comforts and luxuries. And what sort of a life they now led! Rice, with or without salt, and boiled Neem or Nimba leaves was the food upon which they subsisted. Sometimes they could not procure even these. Then they would shut the door and spend day and night in song and prayer. One piece of cloth and two pieces of loin-cloth were all that any could boast of in the way of clothing. But what did it matter? They were indifferent to everything except the thoughts of their Master and the realisation, by self effort, of what he had pointed out to them. Said the leader once: "we were carried on by a strong tide of religious practices and meditation. O! the days that we passed! Demons even would have run away at the sight of such austerities. What to speak of men!"

A few months passed in this way. During the latter part of December 1886, the members of the Baranagore Monastery went to Antpur at the invitation of Baburam's (Swami

Premananda's) mother. Here Norendra gathered all the young disciples of the Master, and in the fervour of spiritual enthusiasm which was evoked there, the bond of fellowship among them was distinctly sealed. Before returning to the Monastery they all went on pilgrimage to the famous temple of Tarakeswar Siva where they offered worship to the Lord of Monks.

In spirit they were all monks of the highest order. But they had not taken formal sanyas. M. – says in the 2nd Volume of the Kathamritha (7th edition, page 268) that Sri Ramakrishna did not give formal sanyas to any one and that the devotees called themselves by their old names Dutt, Ghose, Ganguli, etc., and continued their studies living in their homes as before, for sometime after the passing away of the Master. "Sri Ramakrishna did not give formal Sanyas to any of his disciples. Formalism and calculation were not in his nature. He moved wholly by the impulsion of the Divine Mother's Will. * * * He gave the first initiation to his boys, thus laying the foundation of their spiritual life, but he left the second to be given by ' Noren ' who became the leader of the group after the Master was gone (Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples by Sister Devamata, page 98). When the Sanyas was actually given and in what order to the various monks is not definitely known. In Swami Sishya Samvada (Part I, p. 99) of Saratchandra Chakravarty, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, it is stated "We have heard that after the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji (Vivekananda) collected all the passages in the Upanishads dealing with the rules for taking Sanyas and took Sanyas with his gurubhais according to Vedic rites before a picture of Sri Ramakrishna." The Bengali Book 'Kali-Tapaswi' (Life of Swami Abhedananda, published by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Calcutta) gives the following version (pages 38 – 40): "Gradually Norendra brought to the Mutt (Baranagore) Sarat, Rakha), Baburam, Niranjan, Gangadhar, Subodh, Hari, Tulasi, Sarad and others * *

* *. One day Noren wanted to take Sanyas with his gurubhais

according to Vedic rites. Kali made arrangements for performing the Viraja Homa according to the Shastras, and placing the sandals of the Guru (Sri Ramakrishna) in front, officiated as the director, and Noren, Kali, Sasi, Sarat, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, etc., performed the ceremony. Noren called himself Vividishananda and gave names to the others according to their characteristics. * * * Tarak did not join in the above homa. When Jogin and Latu returned from Brindavan, Kali made them perform the Homa and take Sanyas. A few days after, Hari and Tulasi took Sanyas in the above manner." Vaikuntanath Sanyal, a direct disciple of the Master has stated that Norendra took Sanyas himself and gave Sanyas to Brahmananda, Ramakrishnananda, Abhedananda, Adbhutananda, Nirmalananda, Turiyananda * * * and others by performing; jag-yajna (sacrificial fire) before the picture and relics of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. All these took sanyas on the same day."

In a conversation at Benares Swami Nirmalanandaji stated "One day Swamiji (Vivekananda) selected the Mantras necessary for taking Sanyas from Mahanirvana Tantra and gave Sanyas to all of us. Sarat, Sasi, Kali, Latu, Gopal senior, Maharaj and Baburam – all of us received Sanyas from Swami Vivekananda. Later on Mahapurushji, Vijnananandaji, Niranjananandaji and Trigunateetaji took Sanyas themselves in the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji gave us the Sanyas names."

So, Noren who became Vividishananda himself gave Sanyas to his gurubhais and gave them appropriate names. To Tulasicharan Dutt, he gave the name Nirmalananda 'on account of the rare purity of his character,' so wrote Swami Ramakrishnanandaji.

Rare purity of character and the resultant strength and fearlessness were the outstanding characteristics of Swami Nirmalanandaji from his earliest to his last days.

It has been said "Baranagore is synonymous with spiritual

Sadhana." "Indeed, those were memorable days at the Baranagore Mutt. In the reading of the story, one is brought back, as it were to the time of St. Francis of Assisi and his disciples. It was all burning ecstasy and tremendous asceticism. It was the rekindling and requickening of the great spiritual flame which burned at Dakshineswar as the effulgent enlightenment of many souls. Poverty and blessedness intermingled in a strange beauty and loveliness and it was true of the monks that they lived not by bread alone * * Indeed the very atmosphere of the monastery was vibrant with spiritual consciousness. It seemed, as if even the trees, the grass, the birds and the lights of day and the shadows of night had taken up the threnody of their burning renunciation and Vairagya. The world had no meaning for the monks. They had brought the highest freedom of the highest spheres down to the earthly plane. They were aware only of God; and in those days there was lighted a certain fire which nothing has as yet extinguished ; nor can it ever be extinguished because it is the fire of the spirit; and it has swept with hurricane force across the land, spreading the gospel of Ramakrishna. And the monks were like so many leaping tongues of that Fire, and the most soaring flame was the soul of the chief disciple of the Master * * But in truth there was no distinction made as one being greater or lesser than another. They were all equally inhabitants of another world than this, – the world of the monastic consciousness. All laboured side by side in performing the duties of the monastery, and of all, in this respect, Swami Ramakrishnananda was the head and heart," and his right hand was Swami Nirmalananda. The Memoirs of Swami Shivanandaji by Mahendranath Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekananda, describes him thus (page 123 – 126):- "He was young, lean, strong in body, most sweet in speech and always cheerful. He was also an untiring worker. He was, as it were the right hand of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Whether in cleaning utensils or bringing water from the tank or in any other work,

Swami Nirmaiananda was the first and foremost. For a long time he used to prepare *roti* at night. This preparing of *roti* was a delightful affair. Two or three (monks) would grind the flour and mix it with water. He would sit on a kerosine oil tin and prepare the *roti* one by one and serve it hot to others * * Swamis Ramakrishnanandaji and Nirmalanandaji were the strenuous workers in the Alambazar Mutt also. Everything was under their supervision. During all these years, Swami Nirmalanandaji's life, though hard and strenuous from one point of view, was happy from another point. This was, in a way, the highest period in his early life. He used to do Japa and Dhyana on the one hand, and on the other pursue his studies whenever he got leisure. He was also devoted to work. When necessary he used to sweep and cleanse the whole house and also go to the bazaar and purchase the necessary articles and bring them himself to the Mutt in a basket hanging from his shoulders. He used to cleanse the utensils also. Of course, others would help him. The picture of that wonderful period of Swami Nirmalanandaji's life is still before my eyes. There was a tank near the back-side of the house. Swami Nirmalanandaji used to carry one pot of water on his shoulders and another in his hand and walk down the stairs and then go up to the latrine on the terraced upstairs and cleanse that. (I make my pranam, I make my pranam, I make my pranams to him.) He used also to fill the big earthen pots with water. This continuous work produced a scar on his left shoulder. Along with all this he used to attend to the kitchen work. Further, he would tend the sick. There was not the least feeling of hardship or tiresomeness. He was always cheerful and smiling. In truth, Swami Nirmalananda gave his heart's blood for the work and progress of the Baranagore and Alambazar Mutts."

How the writer of the above memoir was impressed by the Swami at first sight is described by him in his book. "The Incidents in the Life of Swami Vivekananda." (Part I, pages 200

and 201.) "One hot day in 1887 the present writer went to Baranagore Mutt to see Norendranath. Norendranath had gone to the house of Nabhoy Chaitanya at Konnagar on the banks of the Ganges. The old Nabhoy used to go to Sri Ramakrishna and was doing Sadhana in a hut in Konnagar. So, Norendranath made frequent visits to that old Nabhoy. The present writer saw that a youth of about 20 or 22 years whose body though lean was strong on account of the practice of physical exercise, with shining eyes and piercing, clear and commanding tone and words, was then at the Mutt. Swamis Shivananda and Saradananda were also there at the time. When the youth was asked to go and bring Norendranath, he ran at once and went by boat to Konnagar. Both returned at nightfall. This. was the first meeting of the present writer with Swami Nirmalanandaji." Again in Part II of the same work the author repeats his impressions and feelings and adds "when the Alambazar Math was started, Swami Nirmalanandaji was considered one of the leaders there. * * He did everything as the helpmate of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. He himself used to cleanse the latrine and bring water from the tank, one big pot on his left shoulder and another in his right hand and fill the vessels that were placed in front of the latrine. He himself did the shopping. He used to do everything with all his heart and soul. And whenever he got a little respite from work, he would devote himself to his studies. Sadhana and Bhajana were also pursued with great zeal. He was always cheerful, humble and sweet in speech. His allsided power began to manifest itself during this period. He would serve and satisfy all. That has been his nature always. His love and kindness towards all was unlimited. To cite one instance: In 1899, on one of the hottest days in May or June all of us went to bathe in Lochanghose's ghat. Engrossed in conversation, it was late in the noon when we returned. The road was sandy and burning. All were bare-footed. The heat was intolerable. Everyone felt his feet burning. The feet of the present writer got

swelled and blistered as we neared the east of the bazaar. Swami Nirmalanandaji was also bare-footed. But he took up the present writer on his shoulders and conveyed him to the Mutt, not minding the trouble and his own feet. There are very many such instances in his life. * * In learning and scholarship also his reputation was established. He had studied carefully the different Shastras in Sanskrit and was a specialist in Sanskrit grammar. He could talk as freely in Sanskrit as in Bengali and Hindi. He used to teach Vedanta, Vyakarana and other Shastras to the new members in the Mutt. One particular characteristic of his was that the places and things he used were kept scrupulously neat and clean. He was an expert cook and used to cook many dishes much better than professional cooks." During the course of a recent interview, the revered writer spoke as follows. "I am very glad to know that you have preserved the remains of Swami Nirmalanandaji in a memorial temple. I am also very happy to hear that you are going to publish a life of that great soul. We are related in many ways although we do not belong to the same family. He was a noble soul and I am indebted to him in many ways. Please express my respectful pranams and also gratefulness in every line of the book. Baranagore and Alambazar Mutts were established by his sweat-nay-by the drops of his life-blood. Financially and physically he used to serve those institutions in an unimaginable way. Those old faces who have seen and known those facts – all have passed away. I am also dying. He did not want to enjoy anything for himself. He only wanted to serve others. I request you to quote whatever I have mentioned about him in my books " Swamijir Jeevanerghatanavali" and "Mahapurusher Anudhyanayana." Please express my respectful pranams in the book."

When S.J. Rajagopal Naidu, a devotee from Bangalore, visited the birth place of Swami Vivekananda in 1911 he met S.J. Mahendranath Utt. He went on talking with the devotee for

about an hour and all the while he talked about Swami Nirmalanandaji's greatness only. In the course of the conversation he said: "You are fortunate in having the great Swami in your midst. He is a moon amidst stars. He is such a *tyagi* that he would give away even his 'Koupina' if others are in need."

The Swami Vivekananda himself once pointed to him as an ideal Sanyasin. "Look at Tulasi," he said, "a sadhu should be like him. He has got a very fine head, and a very strong body. He works indefatigably days and nights, he can also immerse himself in meditation for long hours. He can sing well and play on musical instruments. He can expound Shastras, hold conversations, give lectures and cook well. You should be all-round like him."

CHAPTER VI

PARIVRAJAKA

Thus growing and perfecting themselves in the glory of the soul, in holiness and ecstasy, these children of the spirit of Bharatavarsha felt even the spiritual atmosphere of Baranagore constricting. The world was calling out to them; all the holy places of this ancient land, were inviting them, the hoary Indian ideal of Sanyasa was urging them to leave their last moorings in the world, the monastery and the spiritual brotherhood and to let themselves adrift on the wide world under the canopy of heaven, to tear themselves away from all limitations, to become one with humanity, with life with the all and the unlimited. Responding to the call and following the urge the monks took to the larger life of the Parivrajaka. It was in 1888 that the Swami Nirrnalanandaji first got out on his long pilgrimage.

Before setting out he who had now become established in the self was yet human to remember the loving souls who had prayed to him to give them darsan occasionally. Now he was taking a step which, for aught he knew, might deprive them of that solace for all time to come. He therefore went to them, told them of his intended pilgrimage and took leave of them, consoling them as best as he could

He with Swami Abhedanandaji and others first followed the Holy Mother to Kamarpukur and Jayarambati and stayed there for a few days. Then with the blessings of the Holy Mother and accompanied by Swami Abhedanandaji he started to Haridwar, Rishikesh and other places. They had as their possession only their kashaya, koupina, kashaya cloth and kamandalu.

Reaching the Grand Trunk Road, they began their march bare-footed. They would not use shoes, shirts or coats, they would not touch coin, they would not sleep under a roof, they would live on Madhukari Bhiksha which they would beg at noon and from four or five houses only; they would eat but once a day. This was their resolve and vow. Covering a distance of about 30 miles, they reached Ghazipur, where lived the sage Pavaharibaba, They held conversations with him. There they met an old friend of theirs, Hariprasanna Chatterji, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. It was he who later became Swami Vijnanananda. He was then employed as an Engineer. He took them in his carriage and entertained them. Leaving the place they walked on and reached Kasi, Ayodhya and Lucknow in succession. At Lucknow, a Hindustani bhakta desired to give them the railway fare to Haridwar. They would not accept coin. He then purchased for them railway tickets to Haridwar and also gave them some food. After visiting Haridwar, they again went on foot to Rishikesh. It was during the days of their tapasya on the banks of the Ganges that they witnessed the soul-stirring spectacle which they narrated to Swami Vivekananda and to which he alluded in one of his lectures in America. A Mahatma

who had realised his identity with Brahman was sitting on the opposite side of the Ganges repeating 'Shivoham Shivoham.' A tiger from the adjacent forest came down and sprang upon him. He was unaware that he was in the jaws of the tiger, but went on repeating Shivoham. The tiger marched away with his body, while all the time, the Mahatma's 'Shivoham, Shivoham' was reaching their ears. From Rishikesh they passed through the old rope bridge of Lakshman-jula and visited Uttara Kasi, Devaprayag and other places. Finally they reached Badarika. After doing tapasya there, they resolved to go to Gangotri through Kedarnath. The long route, the wild animals, the impassable snow, did not awe them. They went bare-footed through the snow-capped mountains to Kedarnath. In a cave there, they practised hard tapasya. Thence they proceeded to Gomukhi and saw the source of the Ganges. From there they returned to Uttarakasi and through the impenetrable jungle tracts they reached Jamnotri. From there, through Dehra-Dun they returned to Rishikesh, There Swami Abhedananda fell ill. The Swami took him to Haridwar in a bullock carriage, purchased for him a ticket to Benares, saw him off and returned to Rishikesh. In this journey, Nityagopal, the maternal uncle of Tulasi, was a companion of the Swamis for some time. He had become a Sanyasin and was known as Jnanananda Avadhuta, It was while he was in Rishikesh that he met Swami Vivekananda and other gurubhais and they all spent a considerable time there, dwelling in a hut raised by their own hands and living on Madhukari Bhiksha. "Again the resolve to perform severe sadhanas came upon the Swami, (Vivekananda,) but as ill luck would have it, hardly had he proceeded with them for a few days then a severe illness frustrated all his intentions. One day the gurubhais went into the jungle to cut bamboos for the purpose of extending their huts, and returning, the Swami (Vivekananda) was suddenly attacked with high fever and diphtheria. He grew worse and worse until

his brethren were in terror. One day his pulse sank lower and lower, and the life-blood turned, as it were, into perspiration. His body became cold, his pulse seemed to have stopped. Indeed, it appeared as though the leader's last moment had come. He lay unconscious on his rude bed composed of a couple of coarse blankets on the ground. His brothers, overwhelmed with grief and anxiety, were at a loss to know what to do. In those days no help could be found within a great distance. While they were thus in the utmost agony of mind, praying that his life be spared and theirs taken in its stead, they heard a faint rustling sound caused by a movement in the grasses outside. And before the entrance of the hut stood a sadhu. They invited him in, and when he heard the case he brought out from his wallet some honey and powdered *pichul*, and mixing them together, forced the medicine into the Swami's mouth. This seemed to be the one remedy, a god-send as it were

After a while the Swami opened his eyes and attempted to speak. One of the gurubhais (Swami Nirmalanandaji) put his ear near his mouth and heard him utter in a feeble almost inaudible voice, the words, "cheer up, my boys! I shall not die." Gradually he recovered and later he told his companions that in that unconscious state of his body, he had seen that he had a particular mission in the world which he must fulfil, and that until he had accomplished that mission he would have no rest. After he had recovered he made his way to Handwar." The company broke up. Swami Nirmalanandaji remained at Rishikesh for some time more, growing, developing his powers and ascending the heights of spirituality.

After a time he returned to the plains and formed one of the party of the Holy Mother when she was taken to Koilwar on the Sone river. Swamis Saradanandaji and Yoganandaji were also of the party. They with the Swami Nirmalanandaji returned to Baranagore while the Holy Mother stayed at Koilwar. Oft and on the monks would go out when the Parivrajaka mood seized

them. Again they would come back to the Mutt, drawn thereto by the Presence which it enshrined and the great purpose which had to be accomplished by their organisation.

The monks had visitors also at times. Their own kith and kin of the previous ashrama, the householder disciples and devotees of the Master, and Pandits and scholars who came to argue and discuss with the monks. And what contributed most to their merriment was the visit of madmen "who considered us," said the Swami in fun "as their own brothers."

"Days passed on in Baranagore, every day making the atmosphere holier and the monks richer with the experiences gathered and narrated by the several monks in their pilgrimages and the realisations they had by their Tapasya. They drew inspiration, each from the other. But this first home, the nursery of the brotherhood "had to be abandoned, for the landlord thought of its rebuilding. There was one monk, however, Ramakrishnananda by name, who would not leave the ashes of their Master but vowed with rock-like determination to keep a roof overhead, come storm, come shine so to speak for them and his brothers, till they should all foregather in their worship room once more. He then with Nirmalananda removed to a house some distance away but still in the neighbourhood of Dakshineswar and the monastery which had previously been at Baranagore was now known as the Alambazar Mutt."

Life continued here as in Baranagore under the supervision of Swamis Ramakrishnanandaji and Nirmalanandaji.

Nirmalanandaji had a room for himself in this Mutt. "Kali Tapaswi" had another. But from here again these two set out on another pilgrimage and visited many places. Now and then the brothers would separate to rejoin again in the Mutt or elsewhere. Those who had taken independent routes would be gladly surprised to meet one another in some unexpected places. Swami Nirmalanandaji never kept any diary or record of his travels or activities and he seldom spoke of them even to his

disciples or devotees. The thread of the story of this period is, therefore, broken at many points and chronology becomes a matter of surmise. Published memoirs of his gurubhats make reference to him in many places. It is seen that once he was met by Swami Akhandanandaji at Brindavan and accompanied him to Atowa. There Akhandananda fell ill for a few days. Swami Nirmalanandaji nursed him. Then there came Swami Trigunateeta with whom Akhandananda went to Agra. Again at Jaipur they were met by the Swami Nirmaiananda, who was this time accompanied by Swami Abhedananda. "At their pressing request I (Swami Akhandananda) returned to Alambazar to witness the Birthday festival of Sri Ramakrishna."

Mahendranath Dutt has recorded his experience that Swami Nirmalanandaji used to attend on the sick. One such instance may be cited. While at Alambazar Mutt an inmate of Balaram Babu's house was attacked with a virulent type of T. B. The Swami nursed him whole-heartedly. The patient passed away. The Swami caught the contagion and began to spit blood. Fearing that it may catch others and unwilling to give trouble to any other, he left the place immediately and went on up to Hingraj, one of the extreme ends of pilgrimages in the Himalayas. He returned in perfect health. During his long stay in the Himalayas the Raja of Chamba and his family became his devoted friends.

Many and varied, interesting and instructive were his experiences in the Himalayas and elsewhere. As occasions arose he narrated some of them. Himself an ideal host, he spoke of the wonderful hospitality he had received at the hands of a host of monkeys in the Himalayas. In the sparsely populated parts of that father of mountains, hamlets are far removed from one another and the jungle paths from one to the other seldom trodden and hardly distinguishable. One after noon the Swami started from one hamlet to another. The sun set, it was dark, no hamlet or sign of human life was visible anywhere.

Unable to proceed further, he sat down under a tree in that dense forest, in enveloping darkness. After a few minutes he saw that a huge monkey had leaped to the tree from somewhere. He had a stick in his hand. The Swami thought that the monkey meant mischief and intended to attack him. But very soon he disappeared. Shortly after he heard the chatter of many monkeys and noises that any how made the forest alive. The monkey reappeared, this time with a retinue and a lighted piece of wood. At a sign from the leader, some of the monkeys surrounded him in a distant circle, some brought twigs which were placed near the Swami to light a fire. The Swami caught their meaning; he knew that fire was a protection against wild animals in a forest. Fire was lighted, he felt sure that the monkeys not only meant no harm, but were warm friends. He wondered at it. But what exceeded even that feeling of wonder was the next act of hospitality. Again at a sign from the leader, a few of the retinue left and came back with some fruits. They were also placed before him. He did not take them, not knowing whether they were edible or not. Reading his mind, the great monkey came down, took one or two of the fruits and ate them himself before the Swami. He had no more doubts. It was the host's assurance and invitation to partake of them. The Swami thanked them heartily and silently and partook of what might undoubtedly have been regarded as Prasad. The monkeys surrounding him kept awake the whole night and dispersed at the break of dawn.

Once he could not come down to the plains before winter. He had to pass his days in a cave up the mountains along with some inhabitants of the place. Here the inmates stored all the necessaries for the winter months. For food they had no rice; but some flour and meat, not dried but raw or frozen. Animals were killed and then hung up. The meat would not rot on account of the snow and cold. Pieces from them would be cut up and cooked. For water they would bring a block of ice which

would have fallen in from and around the caves to a depth of six or eight feet and heat it in the cave. On being asked why the animals were slaughtered so early, he explained that they could not feed them during those months.

Once he travelled in the Tibetan hills where no village was come across for 3 days. He lived on fried solang mixed with currants that he got on his way.

Another time he passed about six months in a place living on ragi rotti alone without any vegetables or any curry or anything else to taste or eat.

His powers of endurance were tested to the extreme in several ways. Once reaching a sacred spot he observed Kshetropavasam (fasting at night and lying on the bare floor.) The cold was so intense that his legs were almost benumbed and became bluish in colour.

Enlargement of the thorax glands was another experience. It was after coming to the plains and seeing it reflected in water that he knew of it. It continued for about a year and subsided without any medical treatment. Blisters and swellings, cuts and bruises and bleeding from the feet on account of long continued walks was a matter of every day occurrence. Sometimes he had to bandage the feet to place them on the ground. Illness of a serious nature too he had on a few occasions. A carbuncle on the head had to be operated on after he came down to the plains. The doctors in attendance were about to administer Chloroform. The Swami said that it was unnecessary, as he could stand the operation retaining his consciousness. Though they had misgivings, they yielded to Swamiji, but for his safety and the success of the operation they wanted his hands at least to be firmly held in position. Laughing, the Swami said, he would not be fettered and asked them to proceed with their own work. The Swami sat unmoved, not a muscle or nerve quivered and the operation was gone through successfully.

In the course of these journeys he met Hariprasanna Chatterji

(Swami Vijnanananda) on several occasions. Every time the chief topic of their conversation was the Master, Renunciation and Realisation. The Swami again and again urged him to give up his work and enlist himself in the Master's service. During his visit to South India (Bangalore) the Swami Vijnananandaji said to one of the devotees: "you do not know how much I am indebted to Tulasi Maharaj. We were classmates in the Bengali Tola High School, Benares. Not only that, Tulasi Maharaj alone knew the details of my visit to Gurumaharaj. While I was in service as an Executive Engineer, he used to frequent my place and stay with me for long. He used to inspire me and press me to give up that kind of life and to take up the cause of Sri Gurumaharaj. I was unmarried and I was thinking deeply of the course I was to take. When the thought was working within me, one day Sri Gurumaharaj appeared before me and asked me to give up that kind of life and to take up his banner. The next morning I wired my resignation, handed over charge to my subordinate, ran away to Alambazar Mutt and became a Sanyasin. That is our relation."

CHAPTER VII

PERFECTED

Alambazar was the continuation and extension of Baranagore except for the absence of the leader. The Swami and the gurubhais were diving deeper into and soaring higher up the spiritual realms and their own selves, unfolding their potentialities and measuring their growing strength. They were gathering knowledge of men, manners, customs and habits which was to stand them in good stead when they went out as Acharyas of the world. The leader had left them before the Mutt

was removed to Alambazar. The next year he sailed for America and at a single leap had become world-renowned as Swami Vivekananda. The monks were glad. They began to see the predictions of the Master coming true. They spoke of him, thought of him and his greatness, unconsciously raised them to greater heights consciously made them strive for greater perfection more perhaps to gladden his heart than for their own sake, more as tribute and service to the Master than for the sake of the world, the East or the West. Their mission in life, the great purpose for which they were born was perhaps yet unknown to them. But the Master's hand was shaping them and directing their course to that end. After the leader's success and renown they intensified their sadhana. All the knowledge, all the ideas which had been given them by the leader while he was with them were now seen against a new, broader and clearer background and began to be more thoroughly assimilated. Unknown to them, undreamt of by them, a new world, a world larger than that of Japa, Dhyana and pilgrimages was opening itself to them. As it was, the Master's touch that opened their eyes to the old world, so it was the leader's touch that was to open them to the new. The touch came in 1897. Electrifying Bharatavarsha from Colombo to Almora the leader returned to the shrine which was then at Alambazar. For days together, it was simply ecstasy, the bliss of Brahman, unalloyed. The Swami's duties now took a new turn. Service to the leader was now his special privilege and spiritual sadhana. From the very earliest times the Swami had endeared himself to the leader. His rare purity of character, his strength and manliness and his all-round dexterity had been noted, appreciated and dearly loved by him. And Tulasi had made Noren his Ideal even from his youth. All the gurubhais loved and respected Noren beyond measure and acknowledged him as their guardian appointed by the Master himself; they marvelled at his genius and his powers; they believed him a superman who in virtue of

the power given by the Master had to fulfil a special mission in life. All this, they saw and believed. But in those days none saw more clearly or believed more firmly than Tulasi that Noren was Ramakrishna in another form. His special attachment and devotion to the leader was therefore, natural, spontaneous, and whole-hearted. And the leader's attachment to Tulasi was peculiar. He was a man after his own heart. They used to smoke together from the same hooka, they cut jokes at each other. Tulasi was also his unofficial Private secretary.

In later days the Swami delighted to describe himself as 'Swamiji's Butler.' That also was true to the very letter. The Swami was a cook of the very first order. His purity, neatness and cleanliness were unsurpassed. Often, therefore, he cooked for the leader who greatly relished his dishes. Once the leader was put on diet by the doctor. He was to take only a prescribed quantity of meat. That much was prepared and was served by the Swami. But the preparation had been so nice and tasty that the leader like a veritable child, said: 'Tulasi, just one piece more, won't you?' The leader was so persuasive that the Swami had not the heart to refuse him. He gave one more piece. When the leader had enjoyed it, like a born actor, he turned round and asked vehemently: "when the doctor has prescribed the diet, how could you violate it and over-feed me?" Nothing daunted the Swami retorted: "When he who has the universe under his thumb becomes a supplicant for a piece of meat who would refuse him?" There was hearty laughter over it. Another time the leader decided to go to Darjiling with nine or ten followers. At about 9 A. M., the leader informed his 'butler' that they would start at 10 A. M. To prepare meals for the great Swamiji and party of ten in an hour's time! The Swami was equal to the occasion. In a few minutes he had nine or ten stoves burning, in an hour he had a number of dishes well cooked and served. It is no wonder that he had more freedom with the leader than many of his other gurubhais. It was he who with Swami

Ramalsrishnanandaji asked the leader to explain to them the meaning and significance of the Hamsamudra, the symbol of the Mission. It was he who requested him, all on a sudden and without any preparation to initiate Swami Suddhanandaji, the late President of the Mission. Swami Suddhanandaji himself speaks of it thus in his work "Swamijir Katha." "It was in April 1897 that I took refuge in the Alambazar Mutt. Of the Senior Sanyasins Swamis Premanandaji, Nirmalanandaji and Subodhanandaji alone were there at that time Swamiji (Vivekananda) returned from Darjiling along with Swamis Brahmanandaji, Yoganandaji and some disciples of Swamiji. One morning I was engaged in my room. Suddenly Tulasi Maharaj entered my room and asked me if I desired to take initiation from Swamiji. I replied in the affirmative. I had not taken initiation from any. Although I had read Swamiji's works I had not received any spiritual instruction from him nor did I try to get any, mainly because I dared not ask him for it. I was also under the impression that he would do whatever was beneficial to me since I had taken refuge at his feet. Moreover, I did not know how spiritual instruction was given. It was at such a period that Swami Nirmalanandaji invited me to take initiation. I therefore felt no hesitation. Straightway I followed him to the shrine. I had no information that S. J. Sarat Chandra Chakravarti was being initiated that day. I think I waited some time outside the shrine as the initiation had not been over. When S. J. Saratchandra came out, Swami Nirmalanandaji took me into the shrine and told Swamiji that I should be initiated. Swamiji asked me to sit down and after initiation spoke to me as to how I should lead my life in future." Such was his freedom with the leader and such was his heart. After the initiation of the two disciples Swamiji remarked to the Swami with evident delight, "Tulasi! two sacrifices have been offered today."

He was not all the time a butler, he was also a pandit, scholar, a teacher of Brahinasutras and other Vedantic scriptures to the

new inmates of the Math. With his great heart and well-fed intellect, he had a fund of fun also. A disciple of Swami Vivekananda was discussing the Vedantic scriptures with him. "When Swamiji himself came downstairs and addressing the disciple said "What were you discussing with Nirmalananda?"
Disciple:- Sir, he is saying "the Brahman of the Vedanta is only known to you and your Swamiji. We on the contrary know 'Krishnastu Bhagavan Swayam' – that Srikrishna is the Lord incarnate.

Swamiji:- What did you say?

Disciple:- I said that the Atman is the one Truth, and that; Krishna was merely a person who had realised this Atman. Swami Nirmalananda is at heart a believer in the Vedanta, but outwardly he takes up the dualist side of the arguments, His first idea seems to be to moot the personal aspect of the Iswara and then by a gradual process of reasoning to strengthen the foundations of the Vedanta. But as soon as he calls me a 'Vaishnava,' I forget his real intention and begin a heated discussion with him.

Swamiji:- He loves you and so enjoys the fun of teasing you. But why should you be upset by his words? You will also answer, " you, Sir, are an atheist, a believer of Nihilism" (Complete works of Swami Vivekananda 1922, Part VII, page 188.) The Swami loved him and encouraged him to write notes of conversations with Swamiji, In the appendix to the 'Swami Sishya Samvada' in Bengali, the author who is the disciple referred to above says "It may be mentioned here that Sri Nirmalananda Swami of the Belur Math encouraged the disciple very much to write these notes of the conversations of Swamiji." The disciple expresses his gratitude to these two Mahapurushas – Master Mahasaya and Swami Nirmalanandaji. To be with the leader was to be educated, enlightened and uplifted. In those days it was particularly so. He was, so to say, re-shaping them to work out his mission. He was making them

also torch-bearers of the Religion Universal. The need of the day, he said to them, was "to create a new order of Sanyasins in India, who would fling away their own mukti and would go to hell, if needed, in order to be of help and service to others." The idea was quite new, too revolutionary and staggering. Not all could readily fall in with it. But Tulasi was one of those who could and did readily accept it. Knowing him to be a brilliant conversationalist, the leader desired to bring him out as a lecturer also. And this was how he effected it. While he was in Calcutta, he had been invited by an association to deliver a lecture and he had accepted the invitation. On the appointed day, however, the leader asked Tulasi to represent him and to deliver the lecture as he himself was indisposed. The Swami pleaded inability and said he would not go. "Well, then I shall neither eat nor drink anything," said the leader and he refused to take anything when Tulasi set his breakfast before him. 'If he had ordered me to get away for disobedience, I would have gone out' said the Swami afterwards, 'but I could not bear the idea of his fasting. I would have done anything to make him eat and so I agreed to go and deliver a lecture. He was so glad.' The Swami went to the Association and began by saying that he was not a lecturer, as they all knew, but had gone to speak to them a few words at the bidding of the Swamiji who was indisposed and regretted his inability to speak to them himself. When he ended he had given them a very good lecture. He had proved himself a forcible and fluent speaker. The report of his lecture was immediately carried to the leader even before the Swami returned to him. He was immeasurably pleased. He patted Tulasi on the back and said "Well done, Tulasi, I knew, the power is in you." 'That was his way of training' said the Swami to his hearers.

In February, 1898, the Math was transferred from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukerjee's garden house. Here "the days of old in Baranagore were often times lived over again. The same old fire

was present, the same intellectual brilliance shone forth, the same spiritual fervour was always uppermost." Song and Sankirtan, reading and study, Japam and meditation mingled with philosophical discussions, question-classes in which the leader would invite the members to raise philosophical doubts and he would give illuminating solutions of the problems at issue. The Swami shone at these discussions and it was admitted on all hands that, next to the leader, the Swami was the best in giving ready, lucid and fitting answers to all sorts of questions. In this connection it may be interesting to cite the words of Jnana Maharaj of Belur Math, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda: "I know Tulasi Maharaj and I have associated with him for a very long time in those old days. He had a very strong body and mind. He was very healthy in those days. He used to take exercise and teach others to do so. He used to play on the 'Dugi Tabla' and also 'Pakhuaj' generally whenever Swami Vivekananda used to sing. He knew how to play these instruments pretty well although he was not an expert. Swami Vivekananda was very friendly with him and used to like him very much. Swami Vivekananda used to complain to Tulasi Maharaj if any of us committed any mistake. Tulasi Maharaj used to play with Swamiji and also with us. We used to play All-today, Hudududu, Football, Badminton, etc. Swami Vivekananda could not play with us always, as he used to do, due to his bad health, but his presence was an encouragement for us, Tulasi Maharaj used to work with us in the gardens and fields. He was very hardy and knew the secret of work and how to work. He never tried to please or satisfy others. He was top to bottom an upright man. He liked frank and upright men. He was very loving and at the same time very strict. In the Mutt and outside he used to mix with select friends only who were of his type. We have attended his classes in the Mutt and outside. His explanations of high and hard philosophies were so very clear and easy to understand. He was a specialist in conversation classes. His question and

answer class was unique. Any question put to him used to be taken in a way quite different from that of ordinary people and would be answered in an unexpected way so as to convince and silence the questioner. He would cut jokes with us and also with Swamiji. He used to encourage us in singing and dancing, but never joined us in dancing. He knew how to sing well and liked music. But, I do not remember any occasion when he joined us in singing. He was very neat and clean and his nature was very sweet, but some, inspite of the sweetness, take it as bitter on account of his uprightness. When he returned from America he was found healthier and stronger. He used to perform worship in the shrine here in those days, but not always. He managed the Math here for some time. If he found anything against his liking he used to express his frank views and dissociate from that. He was very frank Some of us used to like and love him much. He made long pilgrimages."

It was while the Math was in Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house that the leader boldly conceived and executed the idea of Brahminising the nun-brahmin bhaktas by giving them the sacred thread and the Gayatri Mantra, an idea which the Swami often advocated in the south and carried out at Ottapalam in Malabar. It was here again that the unique and unprecedented ceremony of initiating at the chapel in the . monastery Miss Margaret Noble, a foreign woman – a mlechha in orthodox Hindu eyes – into the order of Brahmacharya took place, according to Hindu Vedic rites. The consecration was momentous in many respects. Not less, perhaps even more momentous was the Holy Mothers receiving of European lady disciples in audience and of the most orthodox Brahmin woman's (Gopalarma's) eating and living with them. It was here again that the leader introduced plague-relief measures and said that he was prepared to sell the Math property to relieve the distress of thousands. From here again it was that for the consecration of the newly bought Math grounds at Belur, the

great leader followed by his gurubhais, disciples and followers carried on his right shoulder the hallowed urn containing the sacred earthly remains of the Master to the new grounds and performed the solemn consecration ceremony. The Swami was one of the chief participators in these movements and ceremonies. He was an alert witness of the doings of the leader. Every word, every act, every idea of the leader was carefully noted, deeply studied, well digested and assimilated by the Swami. He became imbued with the leader's spirit. He became moulded in that pattern. He was transformed into a replica of the leader, the Swami Vivekananda. In the intellectual sphere of work in the Mutt, his main duty was to conduct, along with Swami Turiyanandaji, question classes and classes for the study of the Sanskrit language and of eastern and western philosophies. After the departure of Swami Turiyananda to Kathiawar and also to the West the work fell mainly on his shoulders. In the diary of Swami Saradananda it is stated that Swami Vivekananda returned from Calcutta to Belur Mutt with Swami Shivananda on 4th Feb. 1899 and that he asked Swami Nirmalananda to take charge of the Math. Two days after the Swami's assumption of charge from Swami Saradananda Swami Vivekananda. sent Swamis Saradananda and Turiyananda to Guzerat and Kathiawar respectively to preach the message of the Master.

In 1899 the Swami went to Rajputana for famine relief work. That same year the leader sailed for the West a second time. He came back the next year incognito. He arrived at the Belur Mutt late at night on the 9th of December 1900. The inmates were at their meals when the gardener came running for the key of the gate as a Sahib had come! There was, of course, much excitement at the news. While they were speculating as to who the Sahib was and what his business might be, the Sahib himself rushed into their midst. In boyish fashion he had climbed over the gate, not waiting for the keys, for 'hearing the bell ring

for supper he feared nothing might be left for him if he did not hasten.' What was their surprise and their joy at the discovery that the Sahib was none other than their unexpected leader, their Noren, their Swamiji! Immediately a seat was spread for him and he was served with a large helping of Khichri, the food for the night. He partook of it with great zest. The whole night passed in excitement, conversation and song and joy. One present on the occasion, Sj, Nareshchandra Ghosh of Balaram Mandir says: "The Swamis were talking and enjoying throughout the night. I then witnessed The love and affection between the Swamis. Swamis Vivekananda and Nirmalananda sat chit-chatting and smoking together. After talking for a very long time, Swami Vivekananda began to sing and Swami Nirmalananda assisted him by playing Pakhwaj".

On the 10th of February 1901 the Trustees of the Math held their first meeting in the presence of Swami Vivekananda at which Swami Saradananda and Swami Nirmalananda were unanimously made the Secretary and Assistant Secretary, respectively, of the Math and Mission. The Swami discharged this additional duty also with characteristic efficiency and thoroughness. Next year when the leader was perhaps at Mayavari, Swami again retired to his favourite Himalayas for Tapasya. Seeing that he was not returning even after long time the Swami Vivekananda called him over to take up the work of preaching. Swami replied that he wanted to continue his life of tapasya. Swamiji wrote back: "There is no dearth of wandering Sanyasins in India. But I do not wish you to be one of them." A little after, one day, a telegram was put into his hands. He perhaps thought that it was an urgent call. But as he read it he was unnerved. It announced the most unexpected - the most unbearable - news, the Mahasamadhi of his brother, leader, refuge, his All-in-All. It was more than a severe shock. It was almost a death-blow. He fell ill immediately. His life hung in the balance. One night, however, he had a vision. His leader, his

Siva, went to him, sat by his side on his bed. 'Tulasi,' he called him in his silver voice and endearing tone, 'Tulasi, you think I have left you! No, my boy, cheer up, I am always with you.' That comforted him and he recovered very soon. Then again without returning to the Math he proceeded to Kashmir where he had a serious attack of pneumonia. The then Dewan of Kashmir was S.J. Neelambar Mukherjee to whose garden it was that the Alambazar Math had been removed. His wife made arrangements for Swami's treatment and wrote to Swami Brahmada who immediately sent him ninety rupees by wire and wrote to him asking him to go to Calcutta, leaving Kashmir immediately as it was the cold season there, He came back. After some months he was unanimously elected a trustee of the Math and Mission. But he did not accept the trust. He continued, however, attending to his work in the Math. Some time after his return from Kashmir Swami Abhedanandaji desired to have the Swami sent to America to help him in his work, which was growing day by day. Complying with the request and seeing his fitness, the President Maharaj sent him to America.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE NEW WORLD

The Swami left Belur on the 13th of October 1903. He sailed from Bombay on the 15th, went by way of Naples and reached New York on Wednesday, the 25th of November. During the seven years that Swami Abhedanandaji was in charge in New York the work grew rapidly. It became many-sided and enormous. He could not cope with it alone. Moreover, he had calls from many other cities in America to deliver lectures and to establish Vedanta centres there. Europe also claimed his

presence; for several months at a stretch he had to be away from America. To assist him in his work in New York and to take his place there, while he was away, was the function allotted to Swami Nirmalananda. Setting himself to work in his own masterly way, he won the esteem and affection of all who met him. Every one was confident that he would prove an invaluable addition to the work in that country. (The Prabuddha Bharata, Vol. IX, p. 34.) More practical than the practical American he introduced the practice of daily meditation. He also organised a Sanscrit class. The earliest available report of his actual work was in connection with the annual memorial service in honour of Swami Vivekananda, held by the Society in January 1904. It has the following: "Swami Nirmalananda next read a paper, especially interesting to all who listened, because it gave many facts concerning: Swami Vivekananda unknown to his American friends and described in a picturesque manner some of the events of the Swami's early life as a Sanyasin when he was preparing for the great mission later achieved by him." (P. B. IX 93). He also read some of Swami's (Vivekananda's) favourite passages from the Vedas. Winding up the day's proceedings Swami Abhedananda spoke of the value of the work of the Swami Nirmalananda and of the new impetus he had already given in certain directions. At the celebration of the Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna he led devotional exercise from half past three to five in the evening.

Soon after his arrival in New York he assumed, in a great measure, the direction of the Yoga class at the Society and left Swami Abhedananda free to accept invitations to lecture elsewhere. In 1904 "for the first time since the Society's establishment, there was no break in the work throughout the summer, as Swami Nirmalananda remained constant in charge and carried on the Yoga classes without interruption. This was a source of great help and satisfaction to the students who were unable to leave the city and still more to those who, residing

elsewhere, were in New York only for short periods " (P. B. X, 16). It resulted in a "visible quickening of the community spirit among all the members, manifest in an increase of activity and enthusiasm on the part of every one".

Early in 1905 Swami Abhedananda was invited to Canada to deliver lectures. During his absence the Swami took the charge of the New York work. It was then that he "delivered his first Sunday lecture. The subject chosen by him was the 'Vedic conception of God' and the clearness and force of his thought as well as the ease and fluency with which it was expressed disproved conclusively the claim he had always made that he was not a public speaker". (P. B. X, 76.) Eminent Scientists also used to attend his classes. Professor Parker of New York was one such. He had the greatest admiration for Kapila. With great enthusiasm he would tell Swami: "What a wonderful man was your Kapila, Swami. In fact he was the father of science as well as of philosophy." In course of time a new Vedanta Centre was established in Brooklyn. The Swami assumed the direction of that centre also. A room for the meetings of the Yoga classes was engaged in the building of the Historical Society and the work grew rapidly. He was always ready to give help and advice to all members and friends and to all seekers after Truth. All who came into contact with him felt themselves benefited thereby. Besides holding Yoga classes, giving lectures and teaching Sanskrit, he also taught the Upanishads as he was doing at Belur, He also spoke to them of the life of his Master, of His children and of India in general. They listened to every word of his with "intense interest", writes this correspondent, "for, the Swami Nirmalananda seemed to transport us to India, so clearly and so earnestly he spoke." The impression which he made on his hearers students and friends was so fast that time could not fade it. After thirty years' silence Mr. Charles F. Gray A.I.E.E., writes to him for spiritual help. As he was ready to teach, so was he ready to learn. Once when a nurse brought him his diet, he

said he did not *like* it. "You mean, Swamiji, you do not *care* for it" said the nurse. He caught the difference in the expression and thanked her for the correction.

The teacher of Vedanta wore no solemn mien; the master of yoga had no mysterious air about him. Simple and mirthful as a child, free and joyous as a school boy, he shed genial sunshine wherever he went. But deep beneath the plain exterior lay the austere ascetic and fiery monk. One glance of his pierced the thickest mask, and the cleverest fraud stood exposed. In New York there was a Psychic Research Society which called up and exhibited ghosts. The Swami was taken to it by some friends. Its proprietor was a lady, Miss Miller, who herself had a ghostlike face. She asked which ghost they wanted to see. The Swami said that he would like to see the ghost of a Red Indian. The host led him to a room where there was only a pale bluish light. A ghost appeared. All on a sudden the Swami, the dare-devil, as he described himself, sprang forward and caught hold of the ghost's hand and shook it heartily. Instead of being aerial and intangible it was as hard as iron. The Swami then led the ghost three times round the room. It had no power of locomotion by itself. The fraud was thus exposed. A scientist friend who had accompanied the Swami wanted to see the ghost of a famous scientist. A ghost duly appeared. When asked about a well-known scientific formula, the ghost blushed. It was a clear case of false personation. Many such interesting experiences he had in America. He remained there for about three years working so whole-heartedly and giving so much satisfaction that his devotees, students and friends were very sorry to lose him. 'But,' in the words of Swami Ramakrishnananda, "urgent calls from his native land made him come back for the regeneration of his own mother land.'

CHAPTER IX

BACK IN THE MOTHERLAND

The Swami reached the mother-land healthier and stronger. Direct contact with the New World added to his experience of men and things, broadened his outlook on the world, enabled him to see for himself how true the words of the leader were concerning the immediate problems of the future and the part which India had to play in their solution and how slow the work was going to be, and it also made him fully conscious of his own powers.

On his return, he was given a fitting reception. The Anatha Bandhu Samiti, Salkia, Howrah, presented him with an address of welcome. Thanking them he said that he had not done anything special to deserve that honour at their hands. He had simply followed the foot-steps of his guru, the Swami Vivekananda. He did what lay in his power to further the cause of the Universal Religion of Vedanta which is the backbone, the very life of India. He brought out that Jnana and Karma did not contradict, but complemented each other and he emphasised on the necessity for work, 'To serve Humanity is to serve God, for it is He who dwells within every soul, nay, every being in the Universe.'

It will be noted that this first public utterance of his after his return contains the keynote of all his future activities. Spreading the gospel of the Vedanta, as interpreted by his Master and the Swami Vivekananda, and serving humanity as God were the objects for which he had dedicated his life. Faithfully and untiringly he worked for these ends unto his very last days. He knew no fatigue, he took no rest. He worked, his work was worship.

It is interesting to note that he, like his other gurubhais, regarded

the Swami Vivekananda as his Guru. In an interview given to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, H. H. the Maharaja of Mysore expressed that it was a rare privilege to greet a disciple of Swami Vivekananda in Swami Ramakrishnananda. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji said later on to a devotee that in a sense he was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda (Mysore and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Number, published by Dr. P. Venkatarangam, page 5). His "Gurubhais looked upon him (Swami Vivekananda) as their leader, both because the Master had taught them to do so and because his personality unconsciously dominated every thought and desire of their inmost nature. Some of the monks even regarded him as the mouthpiece of the Master. Some thought that by obeying him they would please the Master himself, whilst others attached themselves to his person in a manner even as they had done to Sri Ramakrishna himself. * * It was all an unconscious growth and understanding, and as the days grew older, the more they came to understand him, the more they saw in him verily the spirit of the Master himself incarnate as it were". (Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western disciples, 1st Edition, Mayavati, Vol. II, page 12). It was the Swami Vivekananda who gave Sanyas to most of his gurubhais and it was largely due to him that they eventually gathered in a brotherhood and resolved to work as a new type of Sanyasins. To Swami Nirmalanandaji in particular the Master appeared in the form of Vivekananda (see the letter to Swami Madhavanandaji). The Swami did not consider him an Iswarakoti, but an Avatara – the Iswarakotis being Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Yogananda and Niranjanananda in whose memory he founded four Ashramas. Sri Guru Maharaj, he said was not an Avatara. He was the Mother herself. After staying for some days in the Math at Belur, the Swami with Swami Premananda went to East Bengal and Assam for spreading the Master's ideas. He also visited Kashmir. Again the

call came to him from his favourite "Mountain caves and glades of forest deep". He obeyed it and spent some time in the Himalayas. Perhaps he was testing himself and proving that he was still an ascetic, that after long residence in the luxurious West, he could still live like a wandering Sanyasin, that he was still the unspoilt child of his Master, To take up Sanyasa is to give up, to forget the body idea. But that forgetfulness comes as the result of long years of hard and steady practice. The Swami must have now realised, once for all, that he was something far, far higher than the clump of earth which he was carrying as his instrument; his realisation must have been so real and deep that he could not henceforth identify himself with the body, even for a moment. He had become a real Master.

CHAPTER X

BANGALORE

Now came to him another call, that of his motherland. Through the exertions of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, a religious centre had been opened at Bangalore about the year 1904. An Ashrama had been built and opened there in 1909 (20 – 1 – 1909) by Swami Brahmanandaji. The charge of the centre had passed several hands in such quick succession that it became apparent that no permanent good could come out of it unless it was placed in very strong and capable hands. The President Maharaj had returned to Madras after opening the above Ashrama. In consultation with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, he wrote to the Swami to come to the South and take charge of the Bangalore Ashrama. The letter reached him at Chamba. It may be interesting to state that while the Swami was at Chamba, he was seen by a fortune teller who predicted that the Swami would

soon leave the place and go to the south. Although he knew nothing of South India, he described the place to which the Swami was destined to go. Swamiji was surprised to find that his description was accurate. On receipt of the letter the Swami came to Calcutta and went to pay his respects to the Holy Mother. With her blessings he came to Madras, and from there Sri Maharaj sent him to Bangalore along with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. He took charge from Brahmachari Narayana Rao in April 1909 and set himself to work. His first lecture was in Hindi. It was much appreciated.

He began to hold classes for religious instructions in the Ashrama and in many parts of Bangalore, in the City, C. V. S. School, Cantonment, Ulsoor Vivekananda Ashrama and other places. At the Math he began to hold regular classes on Rajayoga on every Sunday. He had also to attend to the work in the kitchen. Linguistic, financial and other difficulties stood in the way of the Swami's getting a cook or assistant for long. He did all the work himself. Later on Swami Visuddhananda was sent to assist him. The Swami soon came to be widely known as a great scholar and a powerful speaker. Having an assistant in the Ashrama he was now free to accept invitations to visit distant places. In the month of May he was invited to preside over the Annual gathering of Sadhus (Sixth convention of the Sadhu Sangha Maha Sabha) at Kurukkudurai, He accepted the invitation and delivered his inaugural address in English on 'The general aspects of Hinduism'. The next morning, he addressed the large assemblage on 'Who is a Sadhu'. It was very interesting, as it pointed out the real characteristic of a Sadhu as distinguished from quacks and charlatans that pass for such. In the evening, he discoursed, in a very impressive manner, on Karma and Upasana. The next day, he delivered a lecture on the symbolism of the caste marks adopted by the different Hindu sects and explained the origin and significance of Tirunamam. In the evening the Swami lectured in English on the human soul.

On the 4th day, the 2nd of June, he left for Madras and was given a hearty send off by the elite of the place. He resumed his work in Bangalore on the 6th of June. His work here covered a period of over a quarter of a century and left a deep and lasting impression on the land and its people. Bangalore was the centre from which he radiated his wonderful influence in all directions. He took no credit, he claimed no originality for his work. He held himself as an instrument in the hands of Sri Guru Maharaj and the Swami Vivekananda. He spread their ideas, he followed their line of work and in his own person he demonstrated the truth and practicableness of their teachings. In all fields of activity he was a master. In religion as well as in secular work, he was a teacher, an example beyond compare. To begin with religion, his religious classes became a great attraction. He supplied as much food for the head and the heart as the students could digest. Almost all the high officials partook of it. Swami Srivasananda (then Mr. M. A. Narayana Iyengar, who retired from service as Deputy Commissioner), Messrs. N. Venkatesa Iyengar (Head of the Meteorological Department), C. S. Balasundaram Iyer (Member of Council), Rao Sahib H. Chenniah (Judge), K. H. Ramaiya, (Registrar, Co-operative Societies,) B. Puttiah (Superintendent, Government Press), V. R. Kausik (Assistant Chief Electrical Engineer), V. Gopalaswami Iyengar (Registrar of University), M. Rajagopal Naidu (of the Survey Department), K. Narayanaswami Iyengar (Superintendent of Comptroller's Office), Devarao Shivaram (Managing Director of Maharaja's Mills), Rao Bahudur H. C. Javariah (Director ,of Horticulture), Appadurai Mudaliar (Director of Industries), K. Sankaranarayana Rao (High Court Judge), S. Venkatapathiah (Advocate), M. Ramachandra Rao Scindia (Merchant and Mill Owner), S. K. Narasimhiah (Merchant), S. N. Appanna Iyengar (Survey Superintendent), M. K. Govinda Pillay (Superintendent, Government Engineering School, Bangalore), and Murugesam Pillay were some of these. These and others

who came out of curiosity not only remained his students but also became his devoted friends. The members of their families also became Swamiji's devotees. He was considered their family friend, guide and teacher. Family ceremonies used to be celebrated in the Ashrama itself. Many of them invariably went to the Ashrama for celebrating special occasions such as Birthday, Annaprasana, etc., in their families. Each devotee felt that the Swami's love for him was unequalled or unsurpassed. The devotees sought his advice and instruction on all family matters, they laid their troubles before him unreservedly. To them he was their best, noblest friend, who loved them without the slightest tinge of self. Not only on these, but on all devotees and, wherever he went, he exercised the same magnetic influence. Men, women and children, high and low of all castes, of diverse tempaments, felt the same attraction towards him. Many a devotee on being approached for information touching Swamiji's life said: "Oh, what do I know about him. He loved me, he gave me everything for nothing in return." Others said: " He simply conquered us by his love. We became his children." Whether in South India or in North India, this was the feeling about him.

Of the several devotees in Bangalore Mr. Narayana Iyengar (Swami Srivasananda) was, from the very first, the most devoted. He supported the Ashrama and lavishly spent for its upkeep and development. Mr. K. Narayanaswamy Iyengar became the Swami's personal Secretary and remained so to the very last. Mr. Rajagopal Naidu was a boy when the Swami went there. The Swami loved him very much, and he became practically an inmate of the Ashrama. Mr. Chenniah was deeply devoted to the Swami and remained steadfast throughout. These were some of the upper middle or high class devotees. The lower middle class also came under his influence. The relationship to the Swami was as fast and near, if not nearer. Financially not so well off as the upper class gentlemen, these

laboured for Swamiji and the cause indefatigably. They did not spare themselves. Mr. Venkataramanappa, Mr. Nanjappa, Mr. Pappanna, Mr, Siddappa and others spent Rs. three hundred for making a Ratham to instal the image of Bhagavan to be taken in procession during the Birthday and other festivals.

There was a third group which was the Swami's special object of love. It consisted of the socially lowest class – the Panchamas.

On all festive occasions the Swami invited them personally, visiting them in their dwellings in dirty quarters! If any one of them was unable to turn up, the Swami would reserve and keep apart prasada for him and visit him again. One of them, P.

Adimujam, would simply shed tears at the mere mention of Swamiji's name. Another, Madhuras Pillay, used to live in the Ashrama and serve the Swami in a number of ways. So did others whose names are too many to mention. His love could overlook faults, condone all mistakes, pardon all offences. But insincerity, hypocrisy, he could not tolerate. Neither could he shut his eyes to the householders' spirit of domination over Sanyasins and Ashrama matters. Leave him free in his own sphere and he is your friend and Saviour. Try to interfere in his affairs or dominate over him, you are at once pushed out, however big or serviceable you are. That was the ideal of freedom logically worked out. 'Be free yourselves and give freedom to others, A place for every one, and every one in his place.'

If living the life is the best form of preaching and propagating ideas, the Swami was the best preacher and propagandist. His every little act, his every movement, his very being was profound preaching – but to those only who had the capacity to read that language and understand them. Such were of course, not many in number. The ordinary man wants articulate words, explanation of sacred texts, discussion and arguments. These also he gave in plenty.

He conducted regular classes bearing on all the different Yogas,

– Jnana, Karma, Bhakti and Rajayogas. He delivered eloquent and impressive lectures, he held conversations and he had the Ramakrishna literature translated and published in the local Vernacular, Kannada. For the illiterate masses who want more concrete things, there were regular worship and Bhajana and processions. The Birthday anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna and the Swami Vivekananda were celebrated on a very grand scale. Several Bhajana parties from different quarters of the city came to the celebration in large numbers and thousands of people were fed. One or more of the Bhajana parties went to the Ashrama every week and conducted Bhajana. All the important Hindu religious festivals such as Navaratri, Shivaratri and the various Jayantis were all duly celebrated. All these went on on a progressive scale and thousands felt themselves blessed. South India as a whole has long been in the grip of ritualism and taught the people not to give it undue importance. Don't-touchism had an even harder shell. None but a person of the Swami's spiritual power could have it broken to pieces in South India and that was a unique achievement. What a grand sight it was to see the highest and the lowest castes freely and publicly intermingling and interdining in the Ashrama on the days of the celebrations! Besides being a religious teacher of the highest order, he was also a radical social reformer without assuming the reformer's role.

Coming to matters which are generally considered secular he directed his energies firstly to the Ashrama itself. He wanted to make it self-supporting, strong and useful, beautiful and graceful. It had no independent means. Mr. M. A. Narayana Iyengar and, after him, other devotees contributed money for its upkeep. But contributions fell short of the actual needs. Swamiji had sometimes to cook his own meals and wash his own dishes. He did not consider it a bother and below his dignity, but such work took away much of his usefulness in other more important and vital matters. To be able to exert his influence far

and wide, it was necessary that he should be relieved of such minor work. Funds should be collected. He took up the Sanyasin's begging bowl and collected about six or seven thousand rupees. Mr. Narayana Iyengar contributed about ten thousands, Mr. G. Venkataramaniah gave rupees three thousand and twenty-five acres of land. With the interest on these amounts deposited in bank as a Permanent Fund and contributions and subscriptions from devotees, the Ashrama was at last able to meet all its ordinary expenses.

Along with the collection work, Swamiji turned his attention to the Ashrama site and compound which was then three and a half acres in extent. It was a part a jungle overgrown with wild, thorny plants and trees. Swamiji had it cleared and with his own hands made a very beautiful garden with various flower plants and trees. Gentlemen from the city and other parts used come to the Ashrama specially for enjoying the sight of the beautiful garden. Rao Bahudur Javariah, Director of Horticulture, loved it very much and on several occasions had flower plants taken from the Ashrama to Lalbagh Flower Show. Mr. K. V.

Anantaran** (Member of Council) and others used to visit the garden very often. Europeans too admired it. Swamiji was nature a lover of art and beauty. He had not simply seen but studied the garden at Dakshineswar. He had examined and studied many gardens in America and other places also. In fact, he had almost mastered horticulture. And he had a pair of strong and skillful hands and a variety of useful and necessary implements. Additions were then made to the Ashrama building and new buildings also were put up. With these and the superb gardens the Ashrama looked beautiful and lovely. Even the compound was too small for it. About 20 acres more of adjacent land were purchased, cleared and cultivated. Two wells were sunk, one for the Ashrama and the other for the use of the poor villagers closeby. An interesting incident in connection with the sinking of the well must be mentioned. Mr. Rajagopal Naidu was

in need some money. He could make it easily by selling bricks if he could get the necessary materials. Swamiji advised him to dig a well and use the earth for making bricks, fuel for which was given by Swamiji gratis. On one auspicious day Mr. Naidu went to the spot and was preparing to make puja and find out the exact spot which promised water. The Swami went there casually. Being told of the nature of the proceedings he pointed out a spot and asked Mr. Rajagopal Naidu to dig there. Water was struck at a depth of about 25 feet. It was deepened further so that at all seasons of the year it has water to a depth of 35 feet. Over 500 people use it daily.

Besides extending and beautifying the Ashrama building and compound, the Swami had the Ashrama amply furnished with various utensils and furniture. Special mention has to be made of what was added at a later date (1930) – Coir mattress worth rupees one thousand five hundred, sent to the Ashrama by Seth Khatawoo Khimjee of Alleppey, a great devotee of the Swami. Over and above all these was the most important addition of a Library of about four thousand volumes bearing on religious and other subjects in Sanskrit, English, Hindi, Bengali and the South Indian languages. In short, what was a shrine in a jungle was transformed into an ideal Ashrama satisfying all modern needs and all temperaments.

CHAPTER XI

INVITED TO KERALA

The fame of Bangalore and the name of the Swami spread to Kerala. One day there came to the Swami a call from distant Haripad, a small, out-of-the-way village in the southernmost State of Travancore. This is the State which owns and in which

is situate the Holy Shrine of Kanyakumari – the southernmost Thirtha of Bharatavarsha Sages, ascetics, pilgrims and devotees of all sects of Hindu hold the Thirtha dear to their hearts. They have poured their hearts' devotion there at the Mother's feet. They have had consolations and revelations from them. Dearer it has become to us of this age because of its association with the Prophet-Saint of Modern India, – Swami Vivekananda – because of the deep meditation and the vision he had there and the inspiration he drew from it.

One of the ancient rulers of the State, Kulasekhara Perumal, was a devotee of a rare type. He was a contemporary of Sri Krishna Chaitanya. They had met and embraced each other and wept together, taking the name of their Beloved Lord. This Dharmarajya (Land of Righteousness), the most orthodox, the most priest-ridden in India, the mother-land of Sankara has ever had great devotees in humble positions. And it is a strange fact that whenever there has been a religious revival in any part of India, Kerala has been stirred by it, has shared in it and contributed to its growth. It was so at the time of Chaitanya; it is so even now. There is some connection between Bengal and Kerala, deeper than what is apparent to the eye. That Parasurama peopled Kerala from Bengal may be a myth: nevertheless Bengal and Kerala have many features in common. Ever since the Swami Vivekananda woke up the note of Vedanta in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, he has had ardent devotees and admiring listeners in Kerala. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, at the invitation of Babu Kalipada Ghose, a great Grihastha disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, came to Trivandrum in 1904 and stayed for some months. He roused the latent spirituality of many by his inspiring talks, learned lectures, Gita classes and above all, by his unsurpassed devotion to Sri Guru Maharaj and supreme Nishta to the ideal. Religious associations had been formed in many places, Haripad being one among them. The members met regularly to study the

words of Swami Vivekananda. Desiring to be further enlightened and inspired by the direct disciples of his Master, the Haripad Association requested the Swami to bless them by his presence at Haripad on the occasion of the Masters' Birthday celebration in February 1911. Mr. Padmanabhan Tampi, the President of the Association, had already met the Swami at Madras when Swami Ramakrishnananda had introduced him to Swami Nirmalananda and told Mr. Tampi that the Swami was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and was mentioned in the Gospel as 'Tulasi.' The Swami readily consented to be present on the occasion. The association desired to present him with a welcome address. For particulars regarding the activities to be embodied in the address, the Secretary of the Association (the late Mr. Subba Raya Iyer, a Vakil) wrote to the Swami Ramakrishnanandaji at Madras. The latter replied, as follows :—
"My dear friend,

Many thanks for your kind letter. The Swami Nirmalanandaji is a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who took Sanyasa from Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda named him 'Nirmala' on account of his rare purity of character. He travelled far and wide all over India, spending most of his time in the Himalayas for a period of nearly 12 years. He made the Maharaja of Chamba one of his greatest admirers. Our President, the Swami Brahmanandaji, sent him over to America. Swami Nirmalananda worked so well in America that the people there did not like to leave him. But urgent calls from his native land made him come back to work for the regeneration of his own mother-land. He worked for some time in eastern Bengal and Assam. Then he was sent over to Bangalore whence you have invited him.
Yours affectionately,
RAMAKRISHNANANDA."

The Association sent him Rupees forty for the expenses of his journey. The Swami arrived at Ernakulam (The Railway

terminus) on the 15th of the month. He was met by the Secretary and another member of the Association. They had expected the Swami to travel second class and to have an attendant. But to their surprise, the Swami stepped out of a third class compartment, he was alone, and they were more than surprised when he returned the unspent money to them. He was then escorted to Alleppey by steamboat. "There the vakils, Government officials, teachers and students of the Sanatana Dharmavidyalaya received him at the landing and took him to the Vidyalaya. A request being made to him then and there, he delivered a very eloquent and inspiring lecture on Bhakti. He dwelt on it under three heads, sakama bhakti in the beginning, developing into Nishkamabhakti and culminating in jnanamisra Bhakti or Parabhakti. From the time of landing at Alleppey to the moment of his departure from Haripad he was given strenuous work.

The next morning the Swami started for Haripad by country boat. At the landing he was received by a large party composed of the members of the Association, the Vakils of the local bar, the local officials and other gentlemen. He was presented with two addresses, one in Sanskrit and the other in English.

Thanking them for the address the Swami said that "he viewed the addresses not as presented to his humble self, but as indicating their spirit of bhakti towards Sri Guru Maharaj."

Swamiji, when speaking of his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, was choked and actually burst into tears which moved the audience deeply (P. B. XVI 95). The following day was the day fixed for the anniversary celebration. The whole morning was spent in Bhajana at the local temple. After procession "the poor of all classes were fed to the number of nearly 2,500, three centres being specially set apart for feeding the Pulayas and other so-called unapproachables." (P. B. XVI 95). This was followed by a public meeting at which Swamiji delivered a soul-stirring speech on the 'Inherent strength of

Hinduism.' Swamiji's address was translated to the audience, the majority of which did not know English. "After the evening bhajana the Swami held a conversation which was full of life and spirit."

Next morning he gave a few words of advice to the students of the Shanmughavilasam School, discoursed on various spiritual topics, gave a lesson to the Association on Bhagavadgita and held a meditation class. In the evening, he paid a visit to the S. V. High School where he addressed the students on their duties. After giving the members of the Association some valuable advice about the line of work to be followed by them, he took leave of them and returned to Bangalore via Quilon.

What deep and lasting impression he created in the hearts of some at his very first visit and how the course of their lives was permanently changed will be clear from a few interesting incidents. One among those present uttering the words "Nilakandha Bhakta makes his Pranama" leapt up to the Swami at one bound and fell down near him lost in devotion. The Swami took him up, saying "he is a Bhakta of Neelakandha, I am not worthy to accept his Pranama." Swamiji spoke highly of him and called him Bhakta, a name by which he was known afterwards till he took up Sanyasa. He became a Brahmacharin, got initiation from the President Maharaj and is now Swami Purushotamanandaji, living in the Vasishtaguha, Rishikesh. Another devotee wept bitterly and Swamiji called him his 'weeping boy.' In his subsequent letters from Bangalore he used to ask the Association to take particular care of 'my weeping boy.' This devotee gave his property as a site for the first Ramakrishna Ashrama in Kerala. He lived as a Brahmacharin in that Ashrama, got initiation from Swami Brahma- nanda and became one of Swamiji's Sanyasin disciples. He is the Swami Chitsukhananda.

Mr. Subbaraya Iyer who was a Vakil desired the Swami to accept a donation of Rs. 1,000 for the Mission. Swamiji asked

him to reserve it, as 'Haripad itself may have use for it.' That came in as the first donation for the Haripad Ashrama. It is clear that the Swami felt the atmosphere there as spiritual, and that it was going to have a shrine for Sri Guru Maharaj. When Sri Maharaj visited it, he spoke very highly of the spirituality of the place. Mr. Subbaraya Iyer was then issueless and had given up all hopes of having any, but after getting Swamiji's blessings he became the father of three children. The first born was named by him Ramakrishna.

From Haripad Swamiji went to Quilon where he held a discourse, A visitor asked him why, in spite of his great efforts he had not succeeded in realisation, Swamiji said "A candidate may fail 6 times in the matriculation examination, in the 7th he may come out successful. This is the case in religion also." As a matter of fact the questioner had failed six times and passed the seventh time only in his matriculation. All marvelled at the reply. At the time of parting, those present and those who had escorted him naturally wanted to make pranamas at the feet of the Swami. But before they realised what he was about to do, he fell prostrate before them all, quietly got into the railway compartment and shut the door. He had made his mark in Kerala.

CHAPTER XII

BANGALORE SANCTIFIED THE HOLY MOTHER'S VISIT

Under Swamiji's fostering care, the Bangalore Ashrama had strength and beauty, dignity and usefulness added to it. But he

wanted something more enduring, vivifying and holy. Early in the year 1911, the Holy Mother with a few women devotees of Sri Gurumaharaj started on a Pilgrimage to Rameswaram. Swami Atmanandaji, who was in charge of the Bangalore Ashrama during its construction and who had left it abruptly, accompanied her. He did not like to go to Bangalore again. It had therefore been agreed that the Holy Mother and party would not go there. The party reached Madras. Devotees from Bangalore – Messrs. Narayana Iyengar, Rajagopala Naidu and several others – went over to Madras with Swami Vishuddhananda, had darshan of the Mother and returned to Bangalore. They confirmed the news that the Mother would not visit Bangalore. Swamiji thought of the hundreds of devotees, men and women in Bangalore, who yearned for Mother's darshan but who could not afford to visit her in Madras or elsewhere. He was moved and said 'we must get the Holy Mother to bless Bangalore.' He left for Madras, stayed there for a couple of days and, in his own words "prayed to Her to bless Bangalore with the dust of Her Holy feet. She was gracious enough" to grant the prayer. Accordingly the Holy Mother with her party except Atmananda arrived at Bangalore on the morning of Friday the 24th of March 1911. The decorated route from the Railway Station to the Ashrama was literally packed with thousands upon thousands of people eager to have her darshan. The Swami escorted them to the Ashrama, on his head he carried the Holy Mother's box containing her Puja materials. The party stayed in the Ashrama for 4 days, unforgettable days of spiritual joy and fervor. There used to be a steady flow of devotees to and from the Ashrama. Those who had visited Madras and returned – Mr. and Mrs. Narayana Iyengar and their children Mr. Rajagopal Naidu and several others – were, at the Swami's instance, graciously blessed by the Mother with initiation at Bangalore. On the day of the Mother's return, all the devotees naturally felt intense sorrow. But none felt it more than Her own child, the Swami, who

actually wept and wept for hours together in the presence of thousands. That lion among men was a veritable child before his Divine Mother. After the Mother left Bangalore, the Swami went up to Madras on the 1st of April to accompany her up to Calcutta.

CHAPTER XIII

TRIVANDRUM

After his return from Calcutta, the Swami paid his second visit to Kerala in September of the same year. This time it was in response to the invitation of the Vedanta Society, Trivandrum, of which Dr. Raman Tampi was the President. This was his first visit to Trivandrum, the capital of the State, which, thereafter he visited at least once every year with wonderful results. Although he had left Kerala in March only, he was keeping regular correspondence with his friends over there, making enquiries of all and the progress of their activities. He did not lose touch with any of the vital elements in his work. Some of the members of the society who had invited him went to Quilon to meet him. From there they proceeded to Trivandrum by a country boat, the only available conveyance, the railway to Trivandrum not having been opened then. The members were surprised to find that the Swami would accept no kind of personal service. He said he was not butter to melt at the slightest touch, and that he was strong enough to serve others. In the boat, he insisted on a light being kept up at night, 'dark thoughts, he said 'come in the dark.' He did not take any food that night, but smoked and referring to it remarked to his companions humorously, 'You are taking food

in the material plane, while I am in the astral plane.' At the landing place in Trivandrum, he was given a royal reception and was taken in procession through the decorated streets. Replying to the address presented to him he said: "There is an American saying 'Love me, Love my dog.' It is your love to Sri Ramakrishna that makes you honour this dog of His."

Swamiji made a pretty long stay in Trivandrum. Dr. Krishna Pillai, an eminent physician, placed his spacious house at the disposal of Swamiji. The Doctor was a good Sanscrit scholar with a religious bent of mind and he and his family became staunch devotees of the Swami. He held conversations in the Native High School on almost all the days. He also delivered three lectures. For his lectures, he said, no chairman was necessary. Yet, following the ordinary practice, Presidents were proposed for the two lectures in the Jubilee Town Hall. The subjects were 'The General ideals of Hinduism' and 'The Message of Sri Ramakrishna.' Usually he spoke again after the President's concluding speech, so that the audience may not go away with the misconception or wrong ideas emanating from the chairmen, usually tyros in religion, uncorrected. Referring to the unimpressive manner in which a well educated devotee made a speech on one of those occasions, the Swami remarked " You look for fine phrases and come prepared with manufactured, artificial rhetoric; it falls fiat on the hearers, produces no effect If you have some vital tiling to give, phrases and proper words, will come of themselves on the spur of the moment. Style will mould itself as you proceed with your discourse. I had something tangible to give, by the grace of Sri Gurumaharaj and so I had no hesitation in speaking before Western audiences consisting often of the pick of the Society in their own language and they listened with all attention." He was also invited to the Cosmopolitan Club. The President remarked that the Swami must be a cosmopolitan, as he was a Vedantin who believed in the dictum 'Tat Twain Asi.' The Swami fully subscribed to the

view that a Vedantin is a cosmopolitan. He then launched a powerful attack on the so-called cosmopolitan who only practised promiscuous eating and drinking. He also rated the so-called social reformers, who were pulling down and degrading the higher classes instead of elevating the lower ones by giving them proper education and culture. He spoke of the methods of Swami Vivekananda for the uplift of India. As a result of that talk the Vedanta Society began to hold night classes for the benefit of the poor.

In the Gita class one day he took up the 12th chapter and spoke on the Swarat and Virat forms of the Lord and explained the meaning of Upasana as sitting near. 'Love', he said 'made one approach the beloved nearer and nearer. There is a rose-flower outside. We like it, we pluck it, smell it, place it near our hearts in the button-hole of our coat.' That was one of the illustrations he gave.

The next day when he was about to take the Gita one among the students desired some practical instructions in meditation. Swamiji was very pleased and began a meditation class which was regularly conducted during the remaining days of the Swami's stay there as well as on subsequent occasions. In the early, hours of the morning all would assemble in the room. After placing flowers and burning incense before the photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Swamiji would sit in Yogic posture and teach others to sit straight. He would ask them to close their eyes, send a current of good thoughts to the whole world, pray for the happiness and well-being of all; then to salute all the Mahapurushas, Gurus, Gods and Avataras and to crave their blessings. Afterwards they were to imagine a lotus in the heart, full of light inside and outside, and to think of the Ishta-Devata as seated on it. The Devata should be thought of as a living reality. By sincere and steady practice, the Devata can be made to talk to the devotee, clearing all his doubts. One of his ardent devotees and students

says: "Thus we were initiated in practical spirituality, and many count that as one of the greatest treasures laid open to us by the great love and mercy of Swamiji. He would often urge us to practise whole-heartedly and regularly, and encourage us by saying that we cannot now conceive of the immense benefit we would derive from it. On the first day of his teaching, he prostrated before all present, saying 'you are all the living temples of God.'

One present had bathed before he sat for meditation. Swamiji remarked: 'The leech always remains in water yet it is not regarded as holy, what is wanted is purity of heart, and not mere external cleanliness.'

Another time he spoke on meditation as follows:— "There will be no great progress if you meditate for a short time only every day and spend all other time in wordly thoughts. The little time you thus devote everyday will have to be spent in trying to remove the impressions which will have crowded into your minds at other times. And this is repeated every day. So to make real progress in meditation, a part of the mind should always be given to God, whatever be the work you are engaged in. If you are able to do that, your mind will get concentrated as soon as you sit down for meditation. The thought of God can be kept continuously under all conditions, by a little practice. Suppose you have a tooth-ache. Are you not able to attend to all your daily duties in spite of the continuous pain. Similarly by a little practice you will reach a state in which you cannot give up the thought of God even for a single moment.

It was during this, his first visit to Trivandrum that a plan for an Ashrama there was discussed. A subscription list was immediately opened. Swamiji in his clear and beautiful hand wrote on it 'Om Namō Bhagavate Ramakrishnaya' in Nagari Character and headed the list with a subscription of Rupee One which he at once paid remarking humourously that he should not be born again for paying it. He was followed by Dr. Tampi

and other friends with sums of three and four digits.

Some friends suggested to the Swami to pay a visit to the Maharaja. Swamiji demurred, but the friends urged it again and cited the examples of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda. Swamiji reluctantly agreed to the suggestion and asked the friend who-had proposed it, to draft a letter. It was done in the usual stereotyped form. 'As I desire to pay my respects to your Highness etc.' Swamiji turned round on him and said 'you do not know, what a Sanyasin should say. Though humble, he should not lower the ideal.' Forthwith he dictated 'I am a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. As I have come to your capital, I think I should convey to you my blessings in person, etc.'" The Maharaja was indisposed at that time and could not receive the Swamiji just then. Swamiji never cared to visit Royalty thereafter.

Hearing of the passing away of the Sister Nivedita, he became solemn for a moment and prayed 'May her soul rest in peace.' Someone asked him about her conversion to Hinduism. He said 'She was never converted. She was made a better Christian. The Ramakrishna Mission is not a proselytising body; it helps all to realise their highest ideals.'

It was quite a new type of man that the public of Trivandrum saw in their midst. He towered head and shoulders above them all in all respects immeasurably, infinitely he was superior to the best and highest of them, yet how humble, how kind, how loving, how utterly devoid of self! He returns to them the unspent passage money which was his by all standards of right, he does not accept even big donations, he prostrates himself before them! A wonderful personality, a true son of Sri Ramakrishna, they say to themselves. They fix their gaze on him, they are captivated by him.

It may be mentioned that a devoted group of disciples gathered round him during this first visit among whom were Mr. Rama Warriar, a constant supporter of the Ashrama, Mr. Nilakanta

Pillay, Mr. Shivarama Pillay, Mr. Sankara Pillay and others who remained steadfast throughout.

Haripad was the stepping stone to Trivandrum. From Trivandrum he shook not Trivandrum only but all Travancore and all Kerala. The fire that he lighted there, the energy which he let loose there, the current which he there set in motion was not to be extinguished, not to be spent out, not to be stopped or obstructed.

Inwardly satisfied that the foundation was well and truly laid, the Swami set out to Kanyakumari to worship the Mother, 'to charge his battery,' as he expressed it, a practice which he adhered to on all occasions of his visit to Trivandrum. Kanyakumari seemed to have been, in fact, his spiritual destination whenever he went to the south. After worshipping the Mother and resting himself for a short time, he returned and touching Trivandrum proceeded to Thiruvella, the third centre in the State to invite him. On his way he got down at Varkalai, a health resort and a very sacred place of pilgrimage, famous in Upper India under the name of Janardhanam. There he was presented with an address of welcome in Sanskrit verse by the great poet, the late Kumaran Asan, on behalf of the disciples of Sri Narayana Guru. Proceeding thence he went by way of Haripad from where he was escorted by the public of Thiruvella in a beautifully decorated 'Snake boat' and taken in procession to Thiruvella. At the request of the local public, the Swami laid the foundation stone of the Ramakrishna Mandiram on the 28th of October 1911. In the evening of the same day he presided over the annual meeting of the local Sri Ramakrishna Sangha held in the M. G. M. School Hall. After his brilliant presidential address, he held a conversation with the elite of the Town. Here he was the guest of Mr. M. R. Narayana Pillai. who was then the local District Munsiff, with whom he was corresponding ever since his first visit to Haripad. After a short stay in the place the Swami left Travancore enroute to Bangalore

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLAG HOISTED IN MALABAR

Early next year (1912) the Swami was invited to Ootacamund in the Nilgiris to preside over the third anniversary of the Vivekananda Association, Kaity. He accepted the invitation and delivered a series of lectures and discourses between the 28th of April and the 1st of May. The subjects of his two lectures were 'Life of Swami Vivekananda as an ideal for Young India' and 'Reasons for the Study of Vedanta.' The third and the fourth days were devoted to answering questions put to him by the audience. "The Swamiji's answers to all of them were clear, definite and immensely instructive. In the end he explained the position of the Ramakrishna Mission in the field of philosophical work." (P. B. XVII 1912, p. 120.)

On the last day of his stay he paid a visit to the Gaekwar of Baroda who was then at his summer residence at Fernhill. The Gaekwar had wanted to see him a few years ago, somewhere in Central India. He could not meet him at that time. He thought he could visit him now if the Gaekwar was so inclined. He wrote to the Gaekwar, and receiving his reply went and saw him at the palace. The Gaekwar received him with sincere cordiality, talked with him for half an hour on various matters relating to the Ramakrishna Mission, and promised substantial help if the Mission would open a centre of work in his State.

There was something specially providential in this visit to Ooty, for in the journey he casually met with a devotee of Ramakrishna (Mr. T. Kunhiraman Menon, Vakil, Parapanangadi), who introduced him to Malabar and Ottapalam. The story of that meeting which had far-reaching effects may

best be told in his own words.

"It was in April 1912 that I met Srimat Swami Nirmalanandaji for the first time. It took place, one pleasant morning at the Mettupalayam Railway Station, and was quite casual. I was then keenly desirous of coming across a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna at some place or other. An extraordinarily powerful voice, the like of which I had not heard before, addressing the luggage clerk of the Station, attracted my attention; and, when I turned round and looked up I thought I saw a Malayali Sanyasin, between 45 and 50 years in age, retaining, yet, the exuberant energy of his manhood, soldierly in gait and scholarly in his English. Wondering who this personage might be, I accosted the younger of the two Malayali gentlemen who were accompanying him; and this younger fellow-passenger, who was no other than Bhakta Neelakandha (now Swami Purushothamanandaji) informed and corrected me, saying that it was the Swami Nirmalananda, a Bengali and a disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji was going to Ooty to preside over the anniversary function of a Vivekananda Society that was working there at that time. I was going to Fernhill, a mile this side of Ooty to remain there with a friend for a few days to recoup my health. "Reaching Fernhill, I lost no time in taking my dinner and then started off to the little cottage on the edge of a beautiful valley which had been arranged by the members of the Vivekananda Society for Swamiji's temporary stay. I saw him alone at the gate of the cottage with a woollen wrapper round his body and a tobacco pipe in his mouth. We greeted each other and I introduced myself to him.

"When I saw Swamiji quite close, I realised that the most remarkable feature of his physical person, next to his voice was his brilliant and penetrating eyes. It seemed as though they were looking into the very soul of the person before them and not at the outward human form. I also saw that the Swamiji was very muscular and strong in body. Thus his voice, eyes and

body – all of which bespoke strength – gave me an impression of a mighty mind inside. The teachings of Swami Vivekananda that strength was religion, strength was virtue, strength was life, etc., had a great appeal to me. I was myself a strong, young man with an athletic and healthy body at that time. I thought that Swamiji was a perfect embodiment of that gospel of strength preached by his illustrious brother. Was not the gospel of Ramakrishna also a gospel of strength, sakti in essence? Our Swamiji in his person was a constant reminder of this gospel. "In the course of his first talks with me he said that he had not stopped anywhere in British Malabar, and that he had no friends or acquaintance there. At once I invited him to the place where I was then practising – Badagara in North Malabar. Swamiji readily accepted the invitation and said he would be glad to come to my place in September – October that year, either on his way to or back from Travancore. After a brief pause he added that he felt as if Sri Guru Maharaj told him that something of His work could be done through me, in my part of Malabar. While demurring to that statement that something could be done through me, I assured him that whatever services I was capable of rendering to His cause would be ungrudgingly placed at his disposal.

"When I was about to depart Swamiji told me that the meeting at which he was to preside was coming off the next day and that if I could go to his cottage in time, all of us could go together in the carriage that would be arranged for him. I agreed and I arrived in time the next day. The carriage was ready, but there were six of us to be carried where there was room only for four. I offered to walk, but Swamiji would not allow it. He dragged me in and made me sit on his lap, in spite of my protest. Thus huddled together, we travelled a distance of about three miles. Swamiji was quite merry and laughing all the while.

"The meeting was largely attended. Swamiji made an eloquent and inspiring speech on the 'Life of Swami Vivekananda as an

Ideal for Young India.' He stayed two more days at Ooty and we left the hills by the same train on the third day. I had thought of making a longer stay but having met Swamiji I could not forego the pleasure of travelling with him down the hills. Before leaving Fernhill, my host and relation who was the Station Master there, had given me a good quantity of boiled milk, sweetened with sugar, and some fruits to be offered to Swamiji on the way. It was English cow's milk. At Mettupalayam which was very hot, Swamiji felt thirsty and wanted a cup of coffee. But there was hardly time. Thinking that was the moment when the English cow's milk would be relished best by Swamiji, I took the vessel containing the milk and said "why coffee, Swamiji here is plenty of excellent milk boiled and sweetened. My host told me it is nice English cow's milk specially got for thee." So saying, I was about to offer a cup when he gave me such a stare of displeasure and disapproval as I would not forget all my life. The repetition and emphasis on the word 'English cow's milk' had evidently displeased him, I felt that like his world-renowned brother, the Swami Vivekananda, he was an out-and-out Indian patriot first, and next only a humanitarian. Without speaking a word, Swamiji softened down, and said; "You see, I do not drink milk by itself. When I feel awfully thirsty, a good cup of coffee relieves me." At Podanur I got him the good coffee that he wanted. Then taking leave of him we (the two Travancore friends, Bhakta and Mr. M. R. Narayana Pillay and myself) made our salutations to him. He blessed us all and he asked me to write to him now and then.

"I went back to Badagara and told my friends that a real Swami, a disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, would come to Badagara in a few months. They seemed enthusiastic over the coming events. Most of the English educated gentry of the place, Mr. Karunakara Menon, Sub-Registrar, in particular, had come to know something of the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through some efforts made by me to

scatter the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature among them. With their co-operation, it was easily decided that Swamiji's visit must be made a concern of the public of Badagara. A letter of invitation signed by a few of the leading gentlemen of Badagara representing the public was sent to him at Bangalore. He replied that he would be glad to visit Badagara on his way back from Travancore and wrote to me that he would let me know the date and time of his arrival some days ahead, after reaching Travancore."

It was not enough to make the Swami's visit a local affair. There was in Malabar a lot of activity and propaganda and exploitation – all of a morbid type – in the name of religion. Various persons of various parts, men and women, had set themselves up in various parts of the District as teachers of religion, distributing their blessings in person, or by post, in return for the monies the seekers were able to pay. There was, besides, the activity of an imported body having psychoreligious claims, greedy for a following and adhered to mostly by English educated members, among whom were some good, intelligent and influential gentlemen. These teachers and societies could never quench the real thirst of the souls struggling for the life-giving waters of the spirit. The ancient religion of the Vedanta as realised and vitalised by Sri Ramakrishna and as restated by Swami Vivekananda alone, could satisfy and was sure to appeal to the sincere seekers of truth, in this land of Sri Sankara. Here are worshippers of all forms of God: – Of Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Skanda, Ganesha and the supreme Brahman, of all forms of the personal as well as the Impersonal. Members of the same family, children of the same parents have different Ishtas. They view the differences as quite natural and inevitable and not only do they tolerate, but respect one another's faiths and Ishtas. The children of Kerala have gone further than that. They have gladly welcomed not only Buddhists and Jains, but also Jews, Christians and Muhammadans and helped them to build their

respective churches and to propagate their faith. To them, therefore, the advent of an accredited messenger of Sri Ramakrishna was all the more welcome.

On the appointed day Swamiji came by train. He was alone. A large and distinguished gathering received him at the station, garlanded him and took him in procession to the accompaniment of music and devotional songs to the local Theosophical Hall where he was presented with an address. He gave a brief but inspiring reply. Never before had Badagara given such a grand and whole-hearted reception to any visitor. Not only some of the leading gentry of the neighbourhood but also men of culture and influence from Tellicherry, Quilandy, Calicut and other places had assembled to welcome Swamiji. He was glad at the sensation created, for as he said, it meant enthusiasm in Bhagavan's name. Swamiji had a fellow passenger in the same compartment. He was a leading citizen and an influential member of a religious body. His face reflected a strong dislike for the Swamiji's visit. Swamiji noted it. He enquired of the identity of the gentleman and when told who and what he was, he laughed outright and shook his head as if to say that he understood what the gentleman's fears might be. The next day there was a conversazione when the assembly was larger than that of the previous evening. Many and various were the questions put. He was also asked about the Ramakrishna movement – its aims, objects, attitude towards other religions, methods of work and so on. Questions designed to elicit criticism on the suspicious and commercial methods of work of some other organisations were not omitted. Swamiji while he was guarded in his answers to the latter class of questions, was at his best in the exposition of the various subjects raised. The conversations lasted full four hours. The first interpreter, Mr. Kollangode Gopaian Nair, Pandit, got tired and Mr. Kunhircaman Menon had to take his place. Very little remained for the audience to know to be fully enlightened on the

Ramakrishna Mission and on the fact that it was the foremost though youngest religious organisation in the land.

The remarks of two individuals of different types concerning the Swami whom they met for the first time and for a few moments at Badagara, are worth recording. They show how the plain and ordinary looking Swami impressed some of the discerning men at first sight. And they also show that in Kerala there were some who could instantaneously see something of his greatness, cleverly and deliberately concealed as it was. One of them, Mr. K. P. Krishnan Vaidyar, – a leading Medical Practitioner saw Swamiji at the railway station just for five minutes. He then observed: "I am incompetent to judge of the spiritual work of the Swami. But he appears to be a man of extraordinary capabilities. If the Viceroy of India were to vacate his place and the Swami were asked to take it up, he would at once do so without any hesitation." The other, Mr. K. P. Kurup, a Rajayogi, observed. "This is a great Yogi, but a Gupta Yogi. There is every sign of the Raja Rishi about him."

The next morning he started for Tellicherry on the invitation of Mr. Kannan Nambyar, a leading member of the local bar. There also a conversation was held, the audience putting many intelligent questions. Swamiji's answers were received with great satisfaction. The next day a messenger came from Calicut with a letter from Dewan Bahadur V. Rajagopalan Tampan of Kollangode, later District Superintendent of Police, who was then at Calicut, requesting Swamiji to visit Calicut. It was his father who had given the first Bhiksha to the Swami Vivekananda when he met him as a Parivrajaka at Shoranur. Swamiji was kind enough to accept that invitation.

There was an incident on the day previous to the Swamiji's departure from Tellicherry. A Tiyya young man of a neighbouring village was on his death-bed with a fell disease. He sought Swamiji's blessings in his last moments. Swamiji was touched by the sincerity of the request and he at once went in

the conveyance brought by the messenger. At the approach to the patient's house Swamiji warned Mr. Kunhraman Menon not to accompany him to the house as the disease was virulent and infectious. Swamiji went alone and on his return said to Mr, Menon "Poor young man. He is dying. I have blessed him. He was insistent on my touching him. It was good that I stopped you. The disease is, indeed, very malignant. May God save his soul."

The next day the Swami went to Calicut. The Tampan's desire and request was that Swamiji might be pleased to visit his Palace at Kollangode where his aged mother was desirous of meeting a gurubhai of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji graciously consented. One of Mr. Tampan's relations who was then living with him was so much attracted by the Swami's personality that he became the Swami's disciple after a few years. He (now Swami Srikandhananda) was the first monastic disciple of the Swami from British Malabar. In the afternoon, while Swamiji was at his tobacco pipe he suddenly said: I shall have to go on an outing just now. Somebody may come here to take me." A few minutes after, Mr. Rarichan Moopan, the aristocratic leader of the Tiyya community and a follower of Sri Narayana Guru, came and requested the Swami to visit their temple. He agreed and visited the temple. He made enquiries as to the method of worship carried on there and he observed many things of which he spoke very interestingly and instructively in later days. From Calicut he went to Kollancgode and stayed there two days as Mr. Tampan's family guest.

Swamiji had invited his Badagara friends to Bangalore. Mr. Menon with three other friends went to Bangalore during Christmas. A young devotee (Mr. Rajagopal Naidu) rceived them at the railway station and took them to the Ashrama. The Swami received them with all love and he was all attention to every item of their comfort. The season was cold and the guests were short of warm clothing. Swamiji gave them each a woollen

banyan which, Mr. Menon says "served us for years. The warmth and joy of Swamiji's hospitality were striking and uncommon." After a very happy stay of four days Mr. Menon's friends returned to Malabar and with his blessings he left for Benares where the Holy Mother, Sri Maharaj and party were sojourning at that time.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST ASHRAMA IN KERALA HARIPAD

In the meantime, the Bhaktas and the public of Haripad were all astir. After the Swami's visit they did not allow grass to grow under their feet. The foundation stone for the Ashrama had been laid by the Swami during his third visit to the place on the 11th of September 1912. Brahmachari Venkatasubramanya Iyer (Now Swami Chitsukhananda) had given a piece of land for the building. Mr. Subbaraya Iyer (Vakil and Vice President of the Ramakrishna Association) had donated Rupees thousand – the amount which he had presented to Swamiji on his first visit but which Swamiji had asked him to be reserved for use in Haripad. With contributions from devotees and through the untiring efforts of the late Mr. Padmanabhan Tampi (Swami Parananda), the President of the Association, the construction of the building went on vigorously. Just then Mr. Tampi, who was also the 1st Class Magistrate of the place, received an order transferring him to a distant station. The leader's absence would have much hampered the work. The devotees were greatly disheartened. Swamiji was then on the spot. They informed him of it. That night Swamiji had a dream in which the Swami Vivekananda appeared to him and asked him not to be worried over the

matter. He said: "it is Sri Gurumaharaj's work and it will go on without any hitch or hindrance." The next morning the Swami encouraged them by narrating his dream. Within a few hours of it Mr. Tampi got another order cancelling his transfer. Then with redoubled energy they worked and the Ashrama was ready for opening on the 4th of May 1913, the day they had originally fixed up. The Swami with Swami Vishuddhananda arrived on the 27th of April to direct and supervise the arrangements. Many Bhaktas came from distant parts of Travancore and Malabar. On the appointed day proceedings commenced at 6 A.M. with recitation of Sri Rudram, Chandi, and Gita. All Vedic rites were duly performed. And all other usual items such as Bhajana, procession, etc., were also gone through. All considered it a special occasion, for it was the first Ashrama in Kerala, the first to be opened by the Swami.

After the solemn ceremonies, the Swami must have felt himself on his own ground. Within the Ashrama premises, in the house of Sri Gurumaharaj, he would not allow any social tyranny, he would have his own way, the way of love and same-sightedness. Till that day the untouchability and unapproachability of Kerala, denounced by Swami Vivekananda as befitting only lunatics, was nowhere more vigorously kept than in the house of God and before Him. The Swami today permitted all Hindus without any distinction of caste or class to enter the Ashrama and worship Bhagavan. Deep-rooted, age-long prejudice raised its ugly hood and protested that in that case many of the Bhaktas would withdraw themselves and their support. Thundering came the Swami's instantaneous reply: "Every one of you may desert me. But I cannot lower my ideal. If you make me starve, I know that Sri Gurumaharaj will come and feed me." All bowed down. But after the Swami's departure, the inmates of the Ashrama were made the victims of tyranny with a vengeance. Even barbers and washermen boycotted the inmates. The Brahmacharins were often stoned by their own

castemen. But they stood firm and helped themselves. Prejudice and superstition did not, however, die out. It lingered on and exhibited itself in another form at the next celebration. There was a very big gathering to take prasada. Here again for the first time on a public occasion in Kerala the distinction of high caste and low caste was obliterated and all castes sat together. The first batch was served. When they rose, those engaged to remove the leaves refused to do the work on the ground that the low castes had polluted everything. The Swami who was all alert and observing everything, saw the situation and rose equal to it. "They are all the devotees of Bhagavan. I am their servant. I have no caste. But you should all maintain yours." So saying, he began to remove the leaves himself. None, assembled there had ever thought of that. No sooner had the Swami touched one or two leaves than there was a rush by all to do the work themselves, in a few minutes the place was clean for the next batch to sit. Haripada was one of the citadels of Brahmin orthodoxy. The Swami stormed it without firing a shot. But the Swami's love for and sympathy with the lower classes was not the sentimentalism or the so-called reformers. He did not pander to their vanity, nor did he tolerate their weakness. Once a carpenter, representing his class asked Swamiji why they, the descendants of Viswakarma, were now treated as low class people. The Swami replied: "One of the monkeys asked such a question. 'We are the descendants of the Great Hanuman, the hero of many exploits, the servant of Rama, the terror of Rakshasas. He is worshipped by men. But we are slighted, and ill-treated by them. Why is it so?' They were told: "Be Hanumans yourselves and you too will be worshipped. Mere vaunting of the greatness of one's ancestors will not make you great. Acquire that quality which made Viswakarma great. Then you will rise in the estimation of all."

After the feeding of the Daridra Narayanas at noon on the day of installation, Swamiji held a brilliant conversazione. In the

evening there was a public meeting which was very largely attended. There were many speakers, Mr. Tampi (the President of the Association,) Mr. Kunhiraman Menon from Parapanangadi, Mr. M. R. Narayana Pillai, Munsiff, Dr. Tampi, Mr. C K. Krishna Pillai and others. It was the Swami who dragged Mr. Menon to the platform to make his maiden speech. It had a telling effect on the audience. It may be noted here that it was the practice with Swamiji to invite Bhaktas from distant parts to participate in such functions thus giving them opportunities to make new and renew old acquaintances and to form a sort of brotherhood among the devotees of Bhagavan. In making Mr. Menon to speak on the occasion the Swami was following another practice of his bringing out the latent possibilities of devotees.

THE SECOND ASHRAMA.

From Haripad the Swami and party proceeded to Thiruvella, touching Mannar, Mavelikara and other places. The construction of the Ramakrishna Mandiram having been completed, the Swami performed the installation ceremony on the 9th of May 1913.

On being asked as to how the Puja was to be conducted Swamiji said: "There is no need of any formalism or ritualism. Conduct yourself as you would in the presence of Bhagavan. Feel his presence and serve him as you would serve a person in the usual ways."

A devotee of the orthodox type asked him about the Manasa Puja. He replied: "Say with all your heart "O! Lord, all the flowers that bloom in the world are for you, graciously accept them. The fruits in the whole creation are Thine, deign to accept them. The daintiest dishes anywhere on earth are for you. Pray accept them." That is Manasa Puja. Along with that you should do

some Manushapuja. How many are ill-clad! Feed them, clothe them to the best of your means. Without this Manushapuja, mere Manasapuja is of no effect.

On his way back, he visited Tellicherry, Calicut, and Parapanangady (where Mr. KunhIRaman Menon was then practising); some new devotees and friends were introduced to him. It was at this time that the great devotee, Sri P. Parukutty Amma (the mother of Swarni Tapasyanandaji) first saw him at Calicut.

CHAPTER XVI

OTTAPALAM BLESSED

It was now nearly 6 years since the Swami had come to Bangalore. Under him the Ashrama had grown considerably in its usefulness to the public. The visit of the Most Holy Mother had invested it with a special sanctity; its attractiveness had been enhanced with the additions and extension to the buildings, the compound and the garden; its activities had extended far beyond the limits of the city and the State and had reached up to the southernmost point of India. The State and its people were glad and rightly proud of such a spiritual centre in their midst. H. H. the Yuvaraja of Mysore with the Dewan attended the Fifty-second Birthday Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda celebrated at the Ashrama. He was so highly gratified at its conduct and activities that he associated himself with the public in offering thanks and grateful appreciation for the Swami's noble work. He was also pleased to promise an annual contribution of a hundred rupees for the upkeep of the Ashrama.

After that year's celebration of the Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna in March, Swamiji proceeded to Travancore. On his way, he broke journey at Ottapalam – Blessed Ottapalam! Thy name is ever associated with the sweet name Nirmalananda! Of his first visit, his host, Mr. V. K. Narayanan Nair, a vakil of the local bar, writes as follows:

"Blessed indeed is the day on which I bowed my head at his sacred feet. It was in the year 1914 that in response to an invitation from me the Swamiji blessed Ottapalam with his holy presence. We had started a Vedanta Society here, and under the auspices of that Society we had, the previous year, celebrated the Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The Swami Sharvananda from Madras was kind enough to preside on the occasion. His address was very much appreciated by the public. I was, however, longing to meet a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The opportunity was not long in presenting itself. I was informed by my friend, Mr. KunhIRaman Menon, that Swamiji would be passing Ottapalam on his way to Travancore in connection with some work there. Our little place with its quiet atmosphere and attractive natural scenery might serve as a good halting place for the Swamiji. So, I made bold to request the Swamiji to break his journey here and to take rest for a day or two. I introduced myself as a humble devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and wrote to say that myself and the people of the place would feel happy if the Swamiji would alight at Ottapalam and stay here for a couple of days. Though I had been forestalled in my invitation, as my good fortune would have it, the Swamiji accepted my invitation and consented to be my guest. "A teacher, a father, a protector, a friend, what indeed is not the Swamiji to us is the feeling the Swamiji has inspired in the hearts of myself and all the people of Kerala who have had the good fortune to come in direct contact with him. But when I first rested my eyes on him, he looked to be quite an ordinary Sanyasin. He talked, laughed and behaved just like other men.

'Religion is not abnormality, I heard the Swamiji once remarked to a certain gentleman. In fact there was nothing abnormal about the Swami, and but for that majestic voice that carried conviction with it and those sparkling eyes that seemed to penetrate into the innermost recesses of your souls, there was nothing about the Swami to mark him out from the ordinary run of sadhns. A peculiar light ever shone in those vigilant eyes, the scrutiny of which nothing could possibly escape. They were indeed the eyes of a spiritual detective. No wonder, therefore, that hypocrites trembled before him. On the very day of the Swamiji's arrival at Ottapalam, we had an instance of how his piercing eyes could at once see through the mask of hypocrisy. A young man had come to pay his respects to the Swamiji. He could discourse on religious subjects with fluency which compelled admiration. The public were quite enamoured of his speeches and thought that there was a brilliant spiritual future in store for him. That was the first time, however, that the Swami had set his eyes on him, And yet immediately the man took his departure, the Swami said, 'that young man did not impress me at all', and reminded us of the saying of Gurumaharaj, 'beware of him whose words flow like water.' Sufficient to say that the subsequent conduct of the man justified the Swamiji's observation and the public had occasion to see the real nature of the man revealed in all its sordidness.

"The Swamiji appeared to be a born leader. He looked imperious and carried himself like one in authority. But there was not the slightest vestige of false pride in him. When the Swamiji's arrival was announced, by me, many people asked me who he was. I told them that he was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. A leading Vakil of the place came to see the Swamiji and greeted him thus:— 'I hear, Swami, that you are a Sabrahmachari of Vivekananda.' At once; came the reply, 'Sir, I am a devoted servant of his – a servant of his servants.' The Vakil turned to me in blank astonishment, and of course, I had to

explain to him what the Swamiji meant. Such was the Swami's humility and devotion to Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

"A bolder Sanyasin than the Swami I have never been able to meet. He did what he thought was right, and never paused to consider what people would say or think about it. The true mettle of the monk exhibited itself in the supreme indifference with which he regarded what worldlings said or would say about him. Never would he pander to the whims or crotchets of others so that he might have a larger following. A Brahmin teacher of the local High School who had a high opinion of his own spiritual attainments and who thought it an honour to entertain Sanyasins came and invited the Swami for bhiksha. He began by saying that Swami Sharvananda was his guest when he visited Ottapalam. There was a merry twinkle in the eyes of the Swamiji, but he simply said: "I am at the disposal of so and so, I can think of other invitations only if he is tired of me." I understood the hint and the gentleman went away disappointed. The next day, however, he came again. The conversation turned upon orthodoxy and the gentleman said something, I forget what, insinuating that it was not proper on the Swami's part to have declined the invitation of a man belonging to a caste superior to the Swami's host in myself. The Swami thought that it was a good opportunity to give the gentleman a piece of his mind. He said he cared a rotten reed for caste, he cared for sincerity only. He asked why the Lord Krishna preferred to be a guest of Vidura, a Sudra, when so many Kshatriya Chieftains had invited him. In winding up the topic the Swami remarked that according to the ancient Shastras, a Brahmin could not stoop to cook his own meal, it had to be done for him by others. The Kshatriyas of old entertained Sudras as cooks and the remnant of the old custom is still seen in some old kshatriya families still retaining a barber as head-cook.

"The Swami was nothing if he was not bold and fearless, as bold in words as in action. If religious cranks came to him he

snubbed them without remorse. A so-called spiritual enthusiast came to see him. I then happened to be engaged in some work. The man knew only Malayalam, but some how signified his desire to have a talk with the Swami. I was sent for to act as interpreter. There stood the young man before the Swami, his eyes rolled up, his lips moving, presumably the outward manifestation of the process of uttering some Mantram. The Swami looked amused at first. After a while, when he had given the Swami a detailed account of how he was spending his life, how he could go without meals for days together, how he had conquered sleep and felt no need for it, he wanted Swami's advice as to how he should proceed further with his Sadhanas. 'My advice to you, young man' said the Swami, 'is to go home, apply some nice cooling oil to your head, have a good bath in cold water, eat nutritious food and sleep well at night. That is the Sadhana you now require.' The man was evidently disappointed and after he had taken his departure, the Swami observed with pain in his voice: 'I am really sorry for that young man. He is heading for the lunatic asylum and if he does not do as I suggested, he would ere long be the inmate of a Mental Hospital.' Would you believe it, reader! That young man is now a roaring lunatic.

"Yet another enthusiast came. His crotchet was Pranayama. He requested the Swami to give him instructions as regards breathing exercise. The Swami said gravely: 'My friend, religion does not consist in inflating the lungs with air. If that were so, footballs would be the greatest Yogis in the world,' This is only one instance of the summary way in which Swamiji dismissed persons who sought instructions with ulterior motives or went in quest of shortcuts to heaven without performing the difficult task of character moulding."

Such were some of the incidents which enlivened the days of the Swami's stay at Ottapalam. And such days were many. Every year, on his way to and from Travancore, Swamiji used to

halt at Ottapalam and be Mr. V. K's guest. From the very first he felt that there were some pure souls in it. The quiet atmosphere and the charming scenery with the winding Bharata river close by and the hills overlooking it, must have appealed to him as reminders of his favourite forest retreats of old. He liked the place, he loved his host and the inmates of the family very dearly. Every time he used to stay with them for three days, if not more. Theirs was one of the houses where he loved to stay, and during his many happy sojourns there from 1914 to 1926, till the opening of the Ashrama, it made itself holy and rendered meritorious service as a meeting place for the Swami's disciples, devotees and friends. The local Vedanta Society had its meetings, classes and other services conducted in the spacious hall on the upper story of the 'Kamalalaya Press' building. During his annual visits, the Swamiji used to be invited to this place also. The society used to celebrate the birthday anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, during the Swamiji's visit to this place. The visit to Ottapalam in South Malabar was one of the most momentous incidents in the field of the Swami's activities in the south.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHIVA DANCE: GURUBHAI'S LOVE

After his return to Bangalore it became necessary for him to go to North India to see the Swami Brahmanandaji. In dealing with the land on which the Ashrama was situated, there arose a technical difficulty. The land was registered in the Bangalore Revenue and Municipal Records in the name of the "President, Ramakrishna Mission Institute, Bangalore." Though the Swami was the President for the time being there was no formal deed

of trust or appointment in his own name. The Public of Bangalore had placed the Ashrama at the disposal of Swami Brahmananda when he opened it in 1909. And it was Swami Brahmananda who sent the Swami to Bangalore. The Swami therefore held himself as an Agent of the Swami Brahmanada. To make his position clear and to give it a legal status, it became necessary to get the Swami Brahmanandaji either to execute a Power-of-Attorney in his name or to make other disposition. With this end in view he left Bangalore.

Two of the Swami's devotees at Mavelikara (Mr. Madhuran Pillai, now Swami Ambananda and his brother Damodaran Pillai) had expressed a desire to visit the Belur Mutt and the northern Thirthas. The Swami graciously asked them to accompany him. They joined him at Madras. Reaching Calcutta early, the party stayed there for the Dasara Celebrations. The Swami's love for the devotees who had followed him made him request the most Holy Mother to bless them with initiation. The Mother consented and on the day of the Mahalaya Amavasya both of them were initiated by her. They were also fortunate enough to have her Holy feet washed and the Charanamritham taken home. All of them stayed in the Belur Mutt. On the Vijaya Dasami day the devotees witnessed an extraordinary spectacle, one which ever remains green in memory – a Shiva dance by the Swamis of the Mutt. It was first proposed that Swami Premanandaji should take the place of Shiva. But he insisted on Swami Nirmalananda's taking that place. All agreed. The Swami was installed as Shiva. Swami Premanandaji garlanded him and all the Swamis danced the Blissful dance. It was a sight for the very gods to see!

Regarding Swami Premanandaji and the other Iswara-Koti disciples of the Master, Swamiji once said: 'Oh, they are all gods who have come down to the earth taking human bodies. Ah! This D – was telling that they were of the – party. So Premanandaji called them over one day to his room at Dacca,

closed the room and tried to make them realise their folly. But they would not be convinced and they began to discuss with him. Then Premanandaji told them: "You have become learned by studying English, is it not so?" So saying he pressed the shoulder of D – who was one of those discussing hotly. At once, his arguing attitude left him and his life was completely changed, trans- formed. Is this the work of an ordinary man?"

And was it a mere fancy of Swami Premanandaji to instal Swami Nirmalanandaji as Shiva and dance round him? Did not Premanandaji actually see the great Shiva – Rudra – Hara – Mahadeva – manifest in him ? Was any heart more tender and larger than his? Had it not a corner in it even for the worst sinners.

One day – a Rathayatra day – the Swami was sitting in the Verandah of the first floor of the Belur Mutt, facing the Ganges. Boats were passing up the river with passengers going to attend the Rathayatra festival at Mahesh. In one of the boats were some persons of ill-repute and public women, singing and making themselves merry. The boat was passing quite close to the Mutt. One of the devotees who were near Swamiji remarked: "Look at these young men! They have no respect or reverence for the Mutt and no sense of shame to pass close by it in such company and in such profligate manner. They ought to have behaved better in front of this sacred place." At this Swamiji said: "My child, you know very well, how full of misery this world is! If they contrive to forget their misery and woe even for a short time in this manner, they are to be pardoned and congratulated." Vast and pure as the heavens, his heart had not a single harsh fibre in it. It loved all, it blessed all.

Swami Premananda's love for the Swami was such that in all the days of his stay there he had the Swami's favourite dishes carefully prepared for one and all in the Ashrama, The Swami's love for his gurubhai took the shape of ardent devotion. Most touching was the scene of his taking leave of his brother. The

Swami, his face glowing with emotion and tears running down his cheeks, fell prostrate before Premanandaji. Rising they exchanged a few words. Then again the Swami made his Sashtanga Pranama. He rose, Then Premananda said something. Immediately the Swami fell down at his feet again. It was as if both of them were unwilling to be separated from each other, as if the Swami wanted nothing else for the time being, but prostrate himself before his worshipful brother again and again. The devotees present have recorded that it was only after the sixth Pranama that the Swami could be induced to tear himself away from that Iswara-Koti.

From Calcutta they came to Benares and paid their respects to the Swami Brahmanandaji. Spending a few days with him, the devotees desired to proceed to Rishikesh and other Thirthas. The Swami also had programmed to go with them. When this intention was communicated to Sri Maharaj, he set his face against the Swamiji's leaving him. "You have seen those Thirthas many a time. Now you have come to me. Your friends can go and see the places without you. They will come back safely. The season is not quite good and you may fall ill if you go." So the devotees had to go alone. Swamiji, of course, made all possible arrangements for their convenience and safety and he remained with Maharaj. Regarding the Bangalore Ashrama, Maharaj, thinking over the matter and taking legal advice, gave a general Power-of-Auorney in favour of the Swami. "I, Swami Brahmananda, Chela and disciple of Thakur Paramahansa Ramakrishna of the sect of Sanyasin, at present residing in Ramakrishna Adwaita Ashrama, Mohalla, Luxa in the City of Benarey x x do hereby nominate, constitute and appoint Swami Nirmalananda, Chela and disciple of Thakur Paramahansa Ramakrishna, at present in charge of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore City, to be my true and lawful attorney for me and on my behalf x x to carry out the full purport and intentions of these presents for the due and proper management

of the said Ramakrishna Ashrama Bangalore City and properties standing in my name for the benefit of the said Ashrama or any other Ashrama which may be established in any place in South India x x ". With these words the power was drawn up, signed and delivered on the 25th of October 1914. The two devotees went up to Rishikesh. Swami Turiyanandaji was then residing there. On the day of their arrival, he had gone somewhere and returned late in the night. They could not meet him that day, but hearing of their arrival, he went to their residence at 5 o'clock in the morning, and called out to them "who is it that has come from Tulasi Maharaj?' The devotees approached him and made their pranamas. "Where is Tulasi Maharaj? Why has he not come with you?" They explained the circumstances which detained him at Benares. Then with glistening eyes he asked "should I not also see your Swamiji?" The devotees were themselves greatly moved seeing the expression of love and longing in the Swami's face. He was very kind and helpful to them during their stay. Taking leave of him they returned to Benares via Allahabad and other places. But before they reached Benares Swami Turiyanandaji had arrived there. Though in weak health, he had come all the way down just to meet his beloved brother, the Swami Nirmalanandaji. That, alas! was their last meeting. Staying there for a few days more, the Swami and party took leave of Swami Brahmanandaji and Turiyanandaji and returned to Bangalore.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL KERALA AWAKENED

Although the Yoga Mutt at Quilandy had been gifted to the

President Maharaj in June 1914, and the public was expecting the Swami to go over there immediately and consecrate it as an Ashrama, the Swami could not do so. After his return from Benares, he turned his attention to that centre. The usual Birthday Celebration at Bangalore being over, he started for Quilandy. The Swami had in the meantime given instructions for the arrangements to be made for the consecration. He had his friends and devotees invited from different parts of Kerala. He had also brought down Bhakta Neelakanta from Thiruvella to be in charge of the Ashrama to be opened at Quilandy. The Swami, accompanied by Swami Vishuddhananda, broke his journey at Ottapalam, stayed there for a few days and reached Quilandy on the 30th March 1915. The next day the first Ashrama in British Malabar was duly consecrated. All the usual rites and ceremonies such as Homa, etc, were performed. The poor were sumptuously fed. Devotees from Travancore and all parts of Malabar and South Canara had mustered strong. Public meetings and speeches and Swamiji's illuminating conversations followed, The function really looked an all-Kerala affair. The Swami remained there for a few days giving interviews and instructions and making arrangements for the future conduct of the Ashrama. On his return he touched Tellicherry and Calicut, halted for a few days at Ottapalam and reached Bangalore on the 1st of April.

The Swami had now seen Kerala, from North Malabar to South Travancore, had visited not only the important towns, but also small villages in the interior with no roads or water communication, had met many of its leading men and a very large number of literate and illiterate men and women who did not know any of the languages known to him, but whose eager faces revealed a thirst for knowledge and information. He saw the thirst could be quenched and the teachings of Sri Gurumaharaj and Vivekananda disseminated broadcast only by an organ in the local vernacular and not by preachers alone,

however large in numbers they might be. With this idea in mind, he came to Kerala again and discussed the matter with his friends and devotees at Quilon. It was decided to publish a monthly journal devoted to the cause of Gurumaharaj. Swamiji gave it the name 'Prabuddha Keralam' (awakened Kerala). Dr. Tampi, one of the earliest devotees and one of the staunchest supporters of the movement was there in service at the time. There was a very good local press. The first issue was launched on the Vijaya Dasami Day, in 1915 and it became widely popular. The organ has all along been serving its purpose. Almost all the important Ramakrishna Literature has also been rendered into the vernacular of the District.

During this tour the Swami visited Kottayam, a great Christian centre, on the 7th of August. At the southern entrance of the town, he was received by the members of the local Ramakrishna Bhakta Jana Sangham and several gentry of the place and escorted with a bhajana party to the residence of Sri K. Padmanabhan Tampi (the Divisional Superintendent of Police, later Swami Parananda). The Swami blessed the students of the Ramakrishna Sunday School, who had taken part in the Bhajana. The same evening he gave a discourse on religion to the members of the Young Men's Hindu Association. Next day there was a public discourse given by the Swami in the Rama Varma Union Club where tough religious questions were put to him by the Hindus as well as by the Non-Hindus and the Swami answered them all with his usual eloquence and brilliance. Informal talks also were held by the Swami. The next morning he left for Alleppey.

Since his first visit to Alleppey, a small body of educated men, Messrs. G. Krishna Pillai, Krishna Menon, P. G. Govinda Pillai and others, had been congregating regularly for religious worship and the study of religious books, Swamiji used to visit them on his journeys encourage them in their activities and help them in their studies.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TIDAL WAVE OF SPIRITUALITY

After a short stay at Alleppey he left for Trivandrum. The devotees had all these days been on the look out for a proper site for an Ashrama. About five miles to the north-east of the town, at Nettayam, there is a hilly, jungly tract in which Mr. Arunachalam Pillai (Retired Telegraph Master) owned about 300 acres. He came forward with an offer of 5 acres for the purpose. It then seemed to the devotees that an Ashrama there would be something like a forest retreat. The Swami inspected the site and agreed to accept it. On the 23rd of December 1915 the gift deed was signed and delivered.

Now, the Swami set his heart on the work of building a first rate Ashrama on the hill top, far removed from the town's maddening crowd. The magnitude of the work had been hardly thought of by any of the enthusiasts and no one had any idea as to the final shape the Ashrama was going to take. The devotees' original estimate of the cost was Rs. seven thousand. Very soon it was found out that it would not fall short of Rs. twenty thousand. Then it went up to fifty. Finally it came to over a lakh of rupees. It was the Swami himself and his friend, Mr. Hrisheekesh Banerji, Assistant Engineer, that made the design and also alterations in it from time to time.

The Swamiji probably knew at the very outset that that Ashrama in the Capital of the State was destined to be in point of location, design and structure, the finest and strongest in India. He desired to have the foundation stone laid by His Serene

Holiness, the Swami Brahmananda.

To request him to do it, the Swami decided to go to Calcutta. Before starting, he busied himself in Travancore with the work of collecting money and materials, and of supervising the clearing and levelling of the ground. He was constantly on the move, attending to every detail of the work as it proceeded and also ministering to the spiritual needs of the devotees.

In May 1916, he started for Calcutta. This time he took two of his dearest devotees, Dr. Tampi and Mr. Kunhiraman Menon with him to get them initiated by the President. Such was his love for his devotees that he had felt sorry that Mr. Menon had not asked Maharaj for initiation at his first visit. He had therefore asked him to accompany him to North India during his previous trip. When he pleaded inability, Swamiji admonished him for pulling off such things. This time, however, he took both Mr. Menon and Dr. Tampi with him to Calcutta. They were initiated by Sri Maharaj.

During their stay there, they were privileged to witness the holy mutual love of such of the children of Sri Ramakrishna as were present there. They had grown up into spiritual luminaries of the highest order as had been foreseen by their Master and foretold by their Chief. "They are each a centre of religious power and in time that power will manifest" (C. W. Vol. VII, page 256). So had the Swami Vivekananda said about them. The two devotees also saw the high esteem in which the Swami was held by his gurubhais. One day, there was a conversation class at the Belur Mutt. A large number of devotees had come from Calcutta. Quite unusually Sri Maharaj also came down to the class. The other senior Swamis were all present. Sri Maharaj said: "Tulasi will lead the class. If any one had any further doubts, I shall put in a word." There was hardly any necessity for it. The Swami's answers were so clear and convincing.

After a long stay, when the devotees were ready to return, the Swami told them of his desire to take Sri Maharaj to Kerala. Sri

Maharaj had just then returned from a tour in East Bengal. He was saying that he felt tired. He could not therefore be then approached with the proposal to visit distant Kerala. The Swami said, he would remain there until he found a favourable moment to move the matter. So the devotees returned, mentally praying for the fulfilment of Swamiji's desire.

To accompany Sri Maharaj and to serve him in any journey which he undertook of his own accord was itself an onerous work, though, at the same time, a coveted privilege. But to request and persuade him to undertake a journey up to the southern most point of India and to take up the entire responsibility for his convenience, comfort and safety on one's shoulders was a burden which a superman alone could afford to bear. Swamiji dared to bear it cheerfully, because of his unlimited love for the Master's children in the South and also because of his unsurpassed boldness and unbounded self-confidence.

Some months passed. Swamiji made the request and Maharaj was graciously pleased to grant it. The joyous news was transmitted to Kerala, All were alert and astir to receive the Fountain of Bliss unalloyed into their midst. The Swami with unerring knowledge of men and things apportioned and allotted to different devotees the sacred work of serving Sri Maharaj and party at the several places he was to touch or visit. Maharaj and party reached Bangalore on the 12th of August 1916.

They were given a grand reception at the Bangalore City Railway Station. Maharaj was also presented with an address of welcome. Reaching the Ashrama, he was so very pleased with what he saw that he asked Sri Kumuda Bandhu Sen who had accompanied him to write to Swami Premananda giving a full description of the Ashrama. The Swami's work for the untouchables was also highly appreciated by Maharaj who used to praise him during his absence. The holy spiritual vibrations of the place were attuned to Maharaji's nature. The Swami

attended on him, sometimes as Lakshmana on Sri Ramachandra, at other times as a disciple on his Guru and yet at others as Yesoda on her Krishna. Maharaj was quite happy there. Swamiji felt even happier. Three months and more passed. The season of the south-east monsoon was over in Kerala. The party started on 26th Nov. 1916. It included Swami Sankarananda, Bhumananda, Durgananda, Nityachaithanya (Yateswarananda), Gopal and others.

Swamiji had written to Mr. Kunhiraman Menon to take charge of the in-coming party at Ottapalam and lead it to Alwaye. On its return he was to take it from Ernakulam to Podanur.

The 26th of November dawned – the day on which the dust of Kerala was to be made holy by its contact with the blessed feet of the spiritual son of the Avatara of the age. The Mail Train conveying him and the party reached Olavacode, the first Railway Station in Kerala where the Mail Train from Madras halted. A young man known to the Swami had been sent there to inform him in advance that Ottapalam was ready to receive them. Mr. Menon had gone there the previous day. A rich Malabar dinner for the party, prepared at the hospitable hearth of the Swami's host at Ottapalam, was carried to the Railway Station. The train steamed in. The hearts of the devotees leapt with joy and beat in anxiety at the same time – joy, that they were about to see and serve the Mahapurushas and party and anxiety that the many vessels containing the dinner may not all go into the train intact in a minute's time the train halted there. The Swami, with a joyous smile on his face was peeping out and greeting them. The devotees saluted them and got themselves and all the vessels intact into the train, and prostrated before Sri Maharaj. He was in a very happy mood, serene, majestic and with a gentle smile playing upon his countenance. The Swami was also in the same compartment. There were also some big guns of Malabar talking incessantly of Legislative Councils and other matters. Reaching Shoranur, the

party changed to the Shoranur-Ernakulam Train. With the help of the friend of Mr. Menon, who was a railway servant, permission was obtained to serve the dinner in the spacious upper class compartment.

Sri Maharaj was served first by Mr. Menon himself in a First Class Compartment. He seemed to relish the dishes very much, asking for more and more. When he had finished and begun to take rest, all the others were served and all of them did full justice to the preparations. The Swami was highly pleased that the party felt satisfied, and he congratulated Mr. Menon on his having served Maharaj with his own hands – for Maharaj could not take cooked food touched by all.

Several devotees had come to Shoranur just to catch a glimpse of Sri Maharaj. Leaving Shoranur, the party reached Alwaye – a famous river resort where a halt was made. Mr. Tampi (Swami Parananda) and other devotees from Travancore accorded the party a filling reception. A fine and spacious river-side bungalow had been engaged for the party's stay. Maharaj seemed to be in high spirits. In the evening he took a short excursion to the river. He was merry like a child. Every one felt comfortable and happy. The next day, people assembled in large numbers to pay their respects to Maharaj and Swamiji. Maharaj was in a mood to speak and he spoke for long on various subjects such as pilgrimages, sacred places, Japa, Dhyana, Samadhi, etc. As it was very rarely that Sri Maharaj spoke in public, the substance of his talk, as reported in the Prabuddha Kerala, is given below. "Pilgrimages are beneficial in many ways. The chief advantage is that we are enabled to meet holy men and see them. Another advantage is that worldly thoughts tend to decrease and there is constant remembrance of God. No doubt these will aid us in our spiritual progress. We will gain much spiritual knowledge also. "Kashi (Benares) is a very sacred place. Many Sadhus (holy men) live there. Thus we get the opportunity to be in their company. A spiritual current is always flowing in Kashi. House-

holders have many facilities for the worship of the Lord there. It would be good if you could stay there for a time.

"Vrindavan is another sacred place. There are many Sadhus there immersed in the contemplation of the Lord, day and night. You ought to go and see those places. Work, you will have always. But in spite of this, find time to visit these places at least once. So far as work is concerned, there is some which will lead you Godward. Unselfish work belongs to this class. But selfish work will never help you in your spiritual path. Know that your wife, children and all, which you now call yours, belong to the Lord. If you have this firm belief, everything will go on all right for you. The contrary belief will bring about a contrary result.

ii

"Repetition of the Holy name of the Lord is very good. The mind will become pure through it. While repeating the name of the Lord you should keep remembrance of the Lord in your mind. Such repetition and remembrance will do much good. Mere repetition without the remembrance of the Lord will not be of much use. I do not say that this is easy. To do it, one must have Upadesha, or initiation by the Guru.

"The Guru will determine your Ishta-Devata (form of Ideal) and other things necessary for your spiritual progress. According to the difference in the nature of each individual, there are many Ishta-Devatas. One cannot suit all. Until spiritual knowledge dawns upon you, you have to follow the direction of your Guru. The more you work, the purer you become.

"To practise without the aid of the Guru is always very difficult. A few rare souls of exceptional strength of mind might be able to realise without any such external help. Yet, it is better to work under the guidance of a Guru. Then there is no possibility of your committing any mistake. Still you should not remain idle, because you have not got a Guru. Begin at once and the Guru will come in proper time.

"The Guru must select the Sishya (disciple) and the Sishya must

choose the Guru, Otherwise, if one alone selects, it is not so good. Only a perfect soul (Siddha-Guru) can really help the disciple. Such a Guru alone can give initiation according to the differences in the nature of the disciples. An ordinary Guru can do no such thing. This latter is ready to give Upadesha to any one at any time. When the proper time comes, God will send you your Guru. Until you get such a Guru, your duty is the worship of the Lord. If not, your days will be spent in vain. Hence have regular meditation, Japa and Bhajana (singing the praises of the Lord) every day.

iii

"As you proceed with meditation you will see that you are, getting more and more realisation. There is no use in merely reading the Shastras (Sacred Scriptures) and discussing about them. By meditation the mind will become pure, and when the mind becomes pure, realisation of God follows as a matter of course. Ordinarily, we hold our mind on wordly matters. No result worth the name comes out of this. But if you fix your mind in the pure thought of God, you will feel a taste of real bliss.

"All your energy is spent in wordly things. Exert yourself a little in the worship of God. You should not spend your life in vain. Begin at once. Worship the Lord. Our span of life is very short. The most important duty for us in this short life is the worship of God. If we waste our time, we can never regain it. Whatever work you may be engaged in, think of the Lord always. It is not enough if you merely sit in a corner for a short time at a certain period of the day and shut your eyes; for then you will see the whole world coming before your mind's eye.

"It is best to start from Dualism. If you proceed a little along this path, you will find that you are naturally led to non-dualism. To see God outside of ourselves is a right path. Afterwards you will be able to see God within yourself. This is the highest form of meditation. Is not God all-pervading? Until you get the taste of bliss, you should practise meditation. Until then, Dualism is

necessary. In the state of Samadhi, you will see God alone. None can describe the nature of self-realisation. So long as you have the thought of God in you, sin will not affect you."

After Maharaj, the Swami also spoke and answered questions. In the evening, the inmates of the Adwait Ashrama founded by Sri Narayana Guru presented Maharaj with an address in Sanskrit. On the 3rd day, the Swami visited the local market. After midday meal the party proceeded to Kottayam by a soocial Motor boat. The boat encountered a storm in the Vempanad backwaters and it could reach Kottayam only at midnight. The night was spent in the boat itself. Many of the devotees who had come to receive the party at 6 P.M., and were waiting on the shores stayed on there throughout the night. The party landed at 6 A.M., and proceeded to the town by car. After a very pleasant stay of 2 days, the party left for Haripad where a grand reception had been arranged with Poornakumbha, music, palanquine, etc. Seeing all this Maharaj smiled and playfully asked Swami, "Am I going to be made a bridegroom?" He got down from the Motor Car in front of the Temple of the Mother and walked to the Ashrama. As already observed, Haripad is a small out-of-the way village and it was thought by some that Maharaj need not be taken there at all. But the Swami thought otherwise. That he was perfectly right was made clear by Maharaji's observation as he entered the Ashrama, "Ah! what a fine place," he said. He stayed there four days and initiated a few devotees. Among them were Swami Purushothamananda, Mr. Subbaraya Iyer and others. Quilon was reached next. Dr. Tampi was in charge of the arrangements there. A new two storeyed house, the biggest building at Quilon, had been engaged for the party's stay. Spending two happy days there, Maharaj and party left it for Trivandrum. On the day of departure 2,000 persons were sumptuously fed. Trivandrum was reached on the 8th of December. Amongst those who took the lion's share in making arrangements for receiving the President Maharaj may be

mentioned Dr. T. Padmanabha Pillai who was initiated by Maharaj at the Cape, Mr. M. R. Narayana Pillai, Mr. D. K. Ghose, Mr. Rama Warrior and others.

All arrangements for the laying of the foundation stone had been completed. The top of the hill was the spot selected by Swamiji for building the Ashrama. A road was newly constructed to take the Maharaj there by car. Devotees from all parts of Kerala had come early enough to partake in the ceremony. Maharaj was seated upstairs apparently established in and enjoying his own glory. By his aide was Mr. Ghosh – the son of the late Kalipada Ghosh, a great house-holder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, then in the employ of Messrs, Dickinson and Co.

Early morning on the 9th of December 1916, Maharaj with the party of Sanyasins, Brahmacharins, devotees from all Kerala motored to the top of the hill. A Pandal had been specially put up at the place and the photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda set up. After worship at 8 A. M., in great solemnity and with the due rites, Maharaj laid the foundation stone of the Ashrama which was to rise head and shoulders over all other Ashramas. It was well and truly laid. When asked about what all things must be made ready for the foundation ceremony Maharaj remarked "Tulasi, you remember what Swamiji did at the Belur Math, A few flowers and Ganges water. With these, if we invoke the Lord, He will respond and remain here permanently for the good of all."

Maharaj was presented with 3 addresses, one in English and two in Sanskrit. He had said before: "I am too old to change into the European fashion by receiving and replying to addresses." So he remained absolutely silent, immovable as a statue. The Swami Nirmalanandaji replied on his behalf in most appropriate terms.

The next day the party proceeded to the Cape where also a spacious and beautiful upstairs bungalow had been engaged for his stay. Maharaj reached the Cape by car in the evening. The

next morning after ablution the Maharaj and party went to the shrine to worship the Mother. Maharaj made offerings of money at her feet. Various other offerings were also made. Standing before the Mother, beads in hand, he fell into Samadhi. His extraordinarily powerful eyes which were usually half-closed opened wide, became steady and motionless and shone like two brilliant stars. Slowly coming down to the plane of the senses, he circumambulated the Mother, came out and sat in the entrance hall, facing the east and made Japa. Afterwards he returned to his residence. Then followed a course of Tapasya for the party for nine days. On one of these days Maharaj spoke on the last days of Sri Gurumaharaj and Samadhi. Maharaji performed Kumari Puja, feeding some unmarried girls and giving them clothes, etc.

Whenever Maharaj went out, a lot of poor people approached him. Seeing them Maharaj would look for the Swamiji who was always by his side with an open bag of money. Maharaj would put his hand into the bag, take out the money and distribute it most lavishly and most graciously.

During his stay at the Cape Sri Maharaji used to go to the temple both morning and evening. Often, he would ask the monks of his party to sing while he would be seated before the Mother in ecstasy. Sometimes; he would talk to the Devi in Bhava, accosting Her by clapping his hands and saying "Ma, Ma" Mother, Mother.

The day before he left the Cape, Maharaj initiated many fortunate souls like Swarm Sukhananda, Mr. Krishna Iyer who had served the cause, heart and soul and many others. For the first time, Sri Maharaj is said to have scattered his blessings without himself looking into the merits of the recipients. The choice of the person was entirely left to the Swami. Whoever passed by him standing downstairs at the foot of the staircase was led in by the Swami Sankaranandaji to Sri Maharaj upstairs and he was initiated. It was as if the accession of strength

vouchsafed to him by the Mother was being freely distributed, as desired by his beloved brother Tulasi. Ordinarily Maharaj was loth to initiate disciples. When he did, it was after proper exercise of his own discrimination and judgement. The recommendations of such highly spiritual companions as Swami Premanandaji are said to have been futile, sometimes. Usually he did not initiate more than one at a time. But here without even any personal knowledge concerning the persons, mostly house holders, he was blessing them by the score. There need be no other testimony to Maharaji's love for and trust in the Swami and in his power of judgement. Maharaj told some of his initiated disciples to receive instructions from Swami in case they found any doubt or difficulty in their Sadhana. He must also have been highly pleased with the most excellent tour arrangement made by the Swami. No Emperor could have had more loving service or greater comfort in such a long journey. It was as if the dearest child was being gently carried in the hands of the mother. So smooth and pleasant was the whole journey from the first to the last day. In fact, the Swami was for the time another man. He openly said: "This time service to Maharaj is my Sadhana. To look to his convenience and comfort is my sole concern". Swami was every moment wide awake. He lived and moved and had his being for the service of Maharaj. "Here is the living God; worship him by service," he said to a disciple. Swami's sadhana was indeed rigorous. The desired result was more than achieved. Maharaj was perfectly happy throughout the journey, the foundation stone had been laid, the spot was rendered a holy place for pilgrimage, there was a happy family meeting of the Mother and Her children and a score of them was baptised at Her altar. Thousands were blessed by the Darsan of the Son of God. The land of Parasurama itself was blessed. Thus did the Swami labour hard and subject himself to Tapasya again, not for himself, but for his flock, for the poor, ignorant and helpless men and women of the South.

Maharaj and party left the Cape on the 3rd Dhanu, halted at Nagercoil and proceeded to Quilon where he again spent a few days.

As an illustration of the extreme love of Swamiji to the Bhaktas and the regard with which his words were heeded to by Sri Maharaj the following incident may be mentioned. It was settled that a few Bhaktas would be initiated by Sri Maharaj on a certain auspicious day at Quilon. On the appointed day, Swami Sankarananda informed Swamiji that the initiation could not take place as Maharaj was indisposed. At once Swamiji became very grave. Remarking "it is only the initiation of a few sincere souls and Maharaj shows reluctance", he went to his venerable gurubhai to persuade him to bless the devotees. In a few minutes, Maharaj came out accompanied by Swamiji, proceeded to the room where arrangements had already been made and gave initiation to all those proposed by Swamiji. They were Mr. Krishnan Nambiahiri (later Swami Agamananda), Mr. Chandrasekharan Pillay and Mr. P. Seshadri Iyer, a student devotee. On the 30th December 1916, the party started from Quilon touched Ambalapuzhai and Ernaculam, then entrained for Bangalore.

As stated before, the Swami had made perfect arrangements for the return journey also. Mr. Kunhیرaman Menon was to meet and attend to the needs of the party from Ernakulam. The Swami had wired to him the date and time of arrival at Ernakulam. The party stayed there a night and started by the mail train early next day. Mr. Kunhیرaman Menon travelled with the party up to Podanur. Swamiji played a practical joke on him which was also a blessing in disguise. He had a fine little basket in his hand. It caught Swamiji's eyes. After the train left Shoranur, he would look at it and then at Mr. Menon's face alternatively. This went on for some time. Then calling the attention of Maharaj, he said: "Maharaj, Kunhیرaman has a fine basket here." Maharaj who was reading something looked up

and said 'Kunhiraman, we want this basket.' 'Yes, Maharaj', he said, emptied the contents and placed it before him. Maharaj was amused and Swamiji laughed.

The train reached Ottapalam where disciples and devotees had come to pay their respects. One of them (Mr. C. Kunhiraman Nair) had brought for Maharaj some ricecakes puffed with sugar, cocoanuts and spices. Maharaj asked what it was, and like a boy took one – a pretty big one – and ate the whole of it. This was what he tasted last in Kerala. Thus it happened that of all places Ottapalam served him his first and his last Bhiksha in Kerala. The Swami accompanied Maharaj to Bangalore. After a few days' stay there, Maharaj and party returned to Calcutta *via* Madras. Before leaving Bangalore Ashrama in January 1917 Maharaj graciously gave initiation to Rao Sahib H. Chennaya, Retired Sub-Judge, who has long been a worker in the cause of the Ramakrishna movement in Mysore and Coorg.

CHAPTER XX

THE MOVEMENT GROWS

The Swami carefully prepared the ground, elevated and beautiful, and collected valuable materials for the proposed Ashrama at Trivandrum. Sri Maharaj laid the foundation stone. From now onwards the one thought dominant in the mind of Swamiji was to raise the superstructure on the foundation laid. The building must have the grace, the dignity and the grandeur befitting the person whose name it was to bear and whose hand it was that laid the stone. It must stand every possible storm and it must stand for several generations. Posterity must look upon it

as a monument of the activities of a child of Sri Ramakrishna, as a towering light-house shedding spiritual light to the mariners in the dark ocean of Samsara.

Hitherto the building of an Ashrama in any place was the sole concern of the public. The Swami had no responsibility in the matter. In the case of the Trivandrum work; however, it was different. It was at his request that Brahmanandaji Maharaj had consented to lay the first stone. Now, therefore, he owed it to Maharaj to see that the work was carried on to the very end. He set himself to the task whole-heartedly. The few thousands which were originally estimated as the cost of the building for the Ashrama had to be got from the middle class people. There were no millionaires to donate large sums. By twos and threes and even in driblets it took years to collect the necessary amount. And the Swami had himself to go about for collection. In this he was ably assisted by his friends and devotees among whom special mention has to be made of Mr. Subramania Iyer, Conservator of Forests, Dr. Tampi, his brother Mr. Padmanabhan Tampi (late Parananda Swami) Messrs. M. R. Narayana Pillai, C. K. Krishna Pillai, K. Raman Menon, P. G. Govinda Pillai, K. Sankara Menon (Swami Amalananda) and others, who helped him in the work of construction in various ways. The Swami's presence on the spot also became necessary for long periods. In the previous years he usually visited Kerala only once a year. But now it became necessary to visit it twice or thrice a year.

At the same time he could not forget or neglect the other centres and the devotees in other parts. We see him therefore constantly on the move from one place to another, from Bangalore to Trivandrum from Trivandrum to Bombay to Benares and Calcutta and back to Bangalore. All-India became his field of activities, the South being his Head Quarters. The nature of his work differed in the North and in the South. The North had already become familiar with the names of

Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and the Mission; the Swami's special work in that region was therefore limited to the fostering of the spirit already generated and to the enlightening of special individuals. In the South, he had to create an atmosphere to start and maintain centres, to train individuals and to rouse the people. He had to keep his eyes on the entire field at one and the same time, he had to run his practised hand on the many keys of his complicated and delicate machinery.

Accompanying the Maharaji's party to Madras and returning to Bangalore he fell ill with influenza, and it was in July 1917 that he came back to Trivandrum. He stayed there till about October, occupied mainly with the Ashrama work, side by side with it went on spiritual talks, meditation classes and teaching of scriptures, and visits to villages. Many and interesting were the incidents relating to these and succeeding periods; his talks were sometimes soul-stirring, sometimes mirthprovoking, always interesting. He had a fund of stories, anecdotes, folklore and fun. Now a Bhakta, then a Jnani always a Karmayogin outwardly, but inwardly always a perfect Rajayogi.

On one of such days at Trivandrum, a visitor who had leaning's towards Yoga practices asked the Swami how lost-Brahmacharya can be recouped. "Sri Ramakrishna used to say," said the Swami, "If you want to separate yourself from the west, you need not have to wrestle with it, but simply move eastwards." 'So also if you want to get rid of evil, march towards the good. Fill your mind with good thoughts, speak about pure and holy things and do only good.' The visitor pressed his point and wanted the Swami to tell him how he might regain his lost Ojas. 'I know what you want,' rejoined the Swami, "some prescription to bring about a physical change. That won't be of any avail. The mind will still be hankering after the pleasures of the senses. Further such medicines or practices as incapacitate the bodily organs bring on incurable diseases also. So make the mind pure.

Speaking of Brahmacharya, Swamiji was put in mind of the great Brahmacharin and Bhakta Hamunan. The thought moved him to warmth of feeling and he proceeded:

'What is the power of Yogin compared to the Virya of a Bhakta like Hanuman, the greatest and wisest of Brahmacharins? At one bound he crossed the ocean! The Lord Himself had to build a bridge to reach Lanka. See what power he had! Did he practise this sort of Yoga? Was it any Yoga-siddhi or was it Premabhakti?

"Rama, with Sita was seated on the throne after his coronation. All his brothers and Bhaktas – Hanuman included – were in attendance. He was distributing costly presents to all his followers. Hanuman's turn came last. Rama took the most precious garland of pearls which adorned his own breast and gave it to Hanuman.

"How can this unpolished monkey appreciate this gift?" thought Lakshmana. As if in consonance with that thought Hanuman began to bite and break the pearls one by one and after looking into them throw them away as worthless. Lakshmana's blood began to boil. Rama noted it and asked him to question Hanuman what his strange conduct meant. To Lakshmana's question Hanuman replied. "Why! I am looking for Rama in these pearls; and not finding him I am throwing them away. Where there is no Rama, there is no worth. I don't care to keep it.' Then, with a sneer, Lakshmana asked: "Why then do you keep your body? Does it contain Rama?"

"At once in the presence of that august assembly, before Rama and Sita, Hanuman ripped open his breast and said 'Look and behold!' And Lo! there in the lotus of his big heart was seen seated the self-same Rama with Sita in all his Divine splendour." Swamiji had suited action to the words and as he narrated it, his audience saw not the Swami, but Hanuman, and in the bared breast of Swami they seemed actually to behold Rama and Sita. So completely had the Swami transformed himself and became

one with Hanuman, that all Hanuman's love suffused through Swamiji's person; tears trickled down his cheeks; he was overpowered by a rare feeling. As soon as he came to realise that the heart's treasure had been revealed, he got up, hurried to his room and shut the door. After a long while he came back, shedding peace and benignity. And he quietly said 'Sri Swamiji (Vivekananda) is the modern Hanuman. Don't you know, before going to the West he wrote to the Holy Mother that he felt like Mahavira going to Lanka with the ring, the Message of his Master?'

What ocean of Love tossing up mighty waves was there in his large and mighty heart. And how rarely did the fortunate few catch a glimpse of one of those waves. While he was taking Swami Brahmanandaji to Kerala, one of the party was Kumudabandhu Sen, an old devotee who knew the Swami from the Baranagore days. They were travelling in the same compartment. "We talked of the old days of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda', said Mr. Sen, 'and when we were alone he sang a song about Radhakrishna composed by Ginish Ghosh. Singing with great fervour and devotion, tears began to flow profusely from his eyes. I wondered that a man of such great control as I knew him to be, could be so full of devotion as not to be able to suppress his tears of joy."

Spending a few months in Trivandrum and giving an impetus to the work in all its phases, the Swami left the place for Malabar on the 26th of Oct. 1917. By the year 1917, in the words of Mr. Kunhraman Menon, "Swamiji had come to know where to concentrate and where not in his work in Malabar. Tellicherry, one of the three important towns, he liked and continued to visit almost every year, but the conditions there were such that he did not expect any tangible and permanent results. Calicut, he saw as dominated by the commercial spirit, where religion either would not grow or would grow but slowly. Yet it being the centre and the head-quarters of the District, he wished to do something

there. Not finding, however, the right man for the time being, he postponed the work and waited for propitious days. They came later on. Palghat, another important town, appeared to him as dry as dust. Ottapalam, he liked from the very beginning, after two or three visits he remarked that he scented an Ashrama there just as a hound would scent a game. He visited these and many other places in Malabar." Wherever he went he left an indelible impression which in course of time wrought a permanent change in the lives of many. Everywhere he was received with great enthusiasm. But nowhere was it more markedly displayed than in North Malabar, where he visited Ryroth, the family house of the great Poet Kuttamath, four miles up the Mahe River. His arrival there from Mahe by boat was always timed at the hour of dusk and he was always received with royal pomp, caparisoned elephants, illumination, fire works and all other paraphernalia. The head of the house, Mr. Krishna Kurup, was, strange to say, not in the least interested in religion. He could not understand it, he said. It was not as a religious man and Sanyasin that he honoured and loved Swamiji. Himself a bold, upright and a highly intelligent man of great business capacity, initiative and power of direction he saw in the Swami the perfection of those manly qualities which he loved and admired most. Though he was not religiously inclined, this contact with Swamiji awakened the religious spirit and emboldened his younger brother, Kesava Kurup, to leave the house all on a sudden without informing any one."

Finishing the round of visits in Kerala he returned to Bangalore by the end of the year. The activities of the Bangalore Ashrama were being extended and carried on regularly. The religious classes, weekly bhajanas, celebrations of Birthdays and other religious festivals, went on as usual. At all times Swamiji was keeping himself in touch with all the important centres and the prominent devotees. He had a large volume of correspondence to attend to. To acknowledge and reply to all letters was an

invariable rule with him. He had to do it all himself. It speaks volumes for his character that, to the very last, he kept up the school boy's hand, – neat, round and beautiful; each letter in each word was perfectly legible. Neither age nor overwork did affect it in the least.

The next year again he set out on his tours. The annual visits became a regular feature in his programme. Refreshing and nourishing as, the monsoon showers were his visits. This year he visited Coorg also, attended the Birthday Celebration at Quilandy and some other centres and by the time he reached Quilon, he felt so tired and worn out that he returned to Bangalore via Madras in the month of June. In September again he visited Trivandrum. He invited Dr. Tampi and family to spend the Christmas at Bangalore. Dr. Tampi accepted the invitation. The Doctor was never tired of describing the Swami's love and solicitude for the comfort of his guests, what an ideal host he was. This has been testified to by one and all who had the good fortune to be the Swami's guests at one time or another. Swami Yatiswarananda once said that it was from the Swami that he learnt what hospitality was. With his own hands, without the help of any cook, the Swami prepared coffee for his guests. He knew their likes and dislikes and prepared dishes to suit their tastes. He did not talk of or lecture on Atithi Puja. He set an example to the householders and Sanyasins as well, as to how they should treat their guests. Hospitality was in his very blood. How the young disciples of the Master met at his house and how they were entertained by the members of his family have already been touched upon. For two months he got on without a cook or even a dish-washer. But he did not allow that to interfere with his other works.

He left Bangalore in the month of May 1919. One notable event in this tour was the retaking of Mr. Sankara Warriar, B.A., into the Hindu fold. He had become a Christian but desired to be re-admitted to the Hindu Community. Swamiji was approached by

Mr. Warriar. He had the proper ceremonies with Vedic rites and he was taken back. This time his visit extended up to Mangalore in South Canara. He halted at important centres. He also laid the foundation stone for the Ashrama at Salem on the site donated by Mr. B. V. Namagiriy Iyer on 13th June 1919 and returned to Bangalore.

On the 3rd of August a students' home was opened at Bangalore providing true lodging, boarding and religious instructions to about 13 students attending schools. Some of the boarders attended the National Culture Institute. Swamiji had parallel and horizontal bars put up at the Ashrama itself and he was personally instructing the students in physical exercises. He was also doing kitchen work. On the 12th August he wrote as follows: "As regards the request of the lady Bhaktas of Ottapalam, I am very sorry that at present and in the near future there is hardly any possibility of my getting out of Bangalore. The reason is this: For nearly three months we have no cooks here. We are only two Swamies. One is conducting worship morning and evening, besides doing all outdoor works, such as marketing, shopping and various other duties of the Ashrama, too many to mention. I am myself doing all the works of the kitchen such as cooking, dressing, cleaning, etc., from 8 A.M., to 12 noon and again from 7 P.M., to 9 P.M., daiiy * * * I hardly find any time even to drop a few lines in reply to so many letters that I receive every day and further, now, in Calcutta influenza fever, famine, floods and various other disturbances such as looting, etc. are rampant and as such, it is not advisable that a party of ladies should travel over there. Write to them clearly. Explain the whole situation and reasons. It is not that I am unwilling, but the present circumstances do not permit me to leave Bangalore. Cannot write any more. Quite tired."

It was in October that Mr. Kesava Kurup, the brother of his host at Ryroth near Mahe, left the house for North India, Swamiji only heard of it. He thought of the old Mother, her grief and anxiety.

He at once wrote to Bhaktan (Purushotamananda): "You write to his old mother on my behalf, with my blessings that there is no cause for anxiety. Sri Gurumaharaj will bring him back to his house before long. He had a keen desire to visit the Belur Math and pay his respects to the President Maharaj, and I believe that goaded him to take this trip". It came out as Swamiji guessed and predicted. He returned soon after getting initiation from President Maharaj. Of course, Swamiji wrote to Belur all about him.

By the end of October Swamiji got a cook and felt much relieved. Early next year (1920) he reached Travancore halting, on his way, at Salem, Ottapalam and other centres. After staying some days in Trivandrum he visited Haripad, where he spent about a week. Instructing the Bhaktas and training the Brahmacharins was his main work there. Regarding worship, he impressed upon the minds of the Brahmacharins that worship was not dry ritualism, but feeling the presence of the Lord and serving him as one would serve one's object of love. He stressed again and again on the need of practicality. He taught them even cooking and domestic economy and how to make the best and most out of what little was available. Some times, when the disciples were preparing to go to the market to purchase vegetables. Swamiji would say: "Wait, let me see what vegetables you have in your garden at this moment". He would then go round the garden and collect many things, green leaves included. He would himself cut them for varieties of curries: "See, all this was here and yet you wanted to spend money in the market for these or other inferior things", he would say. Another time he forcibly pointed out the evil of fault-finding. "Why should you consider yourself as good and satwic and the others as of baser stuff. Are they also not the children . of God? We must pray for them. Never wound any one's feelings even though you are to be open and straightforward, at all times." By words as well as by example he held up the ideal of love and

boldness, strength and foresightedness. Even to those who were impure, his message and advice was one of hope and strength. Think this way, he said; 'If I am very impure, that gives me all the more right to call upon my Mother, that is all the more reason why she should come to my help. Feel that you are the Mother's child.'

How he enabled the devotees and Brahmacharins to get over deep-rooted caste prejudices is illustrated by an incident. Swamiji, the Brahmacharin at Haripad (Brahmin by birth) and others were returning from Cherthala to Haripad. They had provided nothing for dinner. When Swamiji came to know of it, he rebuked them severely and ordered them to stop the boat near a bridge where he noticed a few dirty shops. Swamiji got down. Rice cake baked by a Muhammedan woman and jaggery water stored by a Tiyya were all the provisions there. Swamiji had a little of both purchased. The cakes were tied up in the Brahmacharin's upper cloth. Coming to the boat, Swamiji asked the Brahmacharin to eat the cakes and to drink the water, while he himself fasted that night. The Brahmacharin's caste prejudice was completely broken. He insisted on all Brahmacharins having their own water pots and beddings. 'Using another's bedding destroys Virya', he said. He also showed them by example how to avoid useless talks and vain disputes. In the course of these journeys in the interior of the villages, they happened to go to a Warrior's house. The Warrior asked if Swami knew English or Sanskrit. The Swamiji made him understand that he did not know anything and that he was a poor Fakir going about to earn his bread. He gave a somewhat similar reply to a Christian Missionary – a fellow passenger travelling to Quilandy.

As usual, he visited all the old centres in Travancore and Malabar, renewing old and forming new contacts, tending, nourishing and incessantly adding to his flock.

CHAPTER XXI

SOMBRE SHADOWS: BEREAVEMENTS

By this time the Holy Mother had fallen ill and was confined to bed. Her condition grew worae. Fearing the worst, Swamiji started for Calcutta. The Mother was in her last stages. The Light was gradually flickering; at last it went out. How Swamiji grieved! How dearly, devoutly, he had loved Her. When she travelled in a conveyance, he walked by its side, stick in hand; he, the President, of the Bangalore Ashrama, carried Her puja materials cm his head; he, the apostle of strength, sobbed and wept like a child when she was leaving Bangalore to Madras. He might have felt the need for some solace. He visited holy Benares, the favourite city of his boyhood. Then the remaining object of his great love and adoration, the Swami Brahmananda, was away at Bhuvaneshwar. Swamiji decided to visit him. He went there, made his pranamas to Maharaj and drew consolation from him. Some days later he came to Bangalore. On 22nd September 1920 he wrote to Bhaktan:

"I returned here only 3 days ago. I was laid up with fever and influenza at Bhuaneswar. I am better now, but very weak. The President Maharaj said that the lady Bhaktas should wait till December next. He will then come over to Madras and then they can come to see him. He is not in good health. If he comes to Madras in winter, it will be every way convenient for all of them to come to Madras and see him."

That the President Maharaj was coming so near as Madras was an opportunity too good to be lost by the people of Kerala. The Swami pointed it out to the Bhaktas. In a letter to Mr. M. K. Narayana Pillay, dated Bangalore, 29th October 1920 the Swami wrote:

"The Madras Students' Home building is nearing its completion. Our friends over there are very keen to have the new home opened by our President Maharaj. The opening ceremony will most probably take place in the beginning of the next year. So, they propose to bring him over there either in December or January next. The President Maharaj told me that he would come over to Bangalore to spend the summer after the opening ceremony was over. I suggested to Mr. Tampi and others that if we could, in the meanwhile, finish the building of our Trivandrum Mutt, we would have it blessed and opened by him. It is a rare opportunity that we can hardly afford to lose. So discuss the matter, please, with all our interested friends at your earliest convenience. I got a letter from Mr. Tampi some time ago. He writes to say that he is very busy making arrangements in connection with the Governor's visit. I think it is all over now and you can conveniently arrange a day in the near future to meet all together and discuss the question. The President Maharaj is ageing and is in consequence growing less and less strong. If we lose this opportunity, I dare say, there would be very little probability of his visiting this side again. I shall be very anxiously looking forward to the result of your discussion in the matter * *

*"

The result of the discussion was to seize the opportunity and to request the President Maharaj to open the Ashrama and bless it. Construction work was therefore pushed on vigorously. The President came to Madras with Swami Shivanandaji, and others. Two Brahmachanns from Haripad had proceeded to Madras to pay their respects to him. A few days afterwards Swamiji also went there to pay them his respects. On the day of Swamiji's coming, Maharaj asked the two Brahmacharins to wait outside to receive their Guru. He had arranged for a car being sent to the Railway Station to convey Swamiji. Not being satisfied with all these, Maharaj himself issued forth some time before Swamiji's arrival and remained pacing up and down the

garden to be the first to greet his beloved and devoted Tulasi. What infinite love! Swamiji approached him with offerings of fruits, etc. and fell down at his feet and was received most affectionately.

Maharaj opened the Madras Students' Home and reached Bangalore where he had decided to spend the summer. The Swami was glad beyond measure. He was given another opportunity to serve him. As before, he was engrossed in service; for the time being, he had no other aim in life than to see that Maharaj was happy. His routine of work in those days has been described by an eye-witness. Early morning the Swami would open Sri Maharaji's room, make pranamas, take the dust of his feet and enquire as to whether he had slept well and how his health was. Then he would ask, 'Maharaj, what will you take today?' Maharaj would reply 'Whatever you give me, I shall gladly take.' Then the Swami would rejoin 'I wish to offer what you like best, Maharaj and take your prasad.' Maharaj would smile benignly on him. After attending on Maharaj in the morning, the Swami would himself go to the market, purchase the best available things and carry them to the Ashrama himself, and cook the daintiest dishes for Maharaj and all the other members of the party. He would himself anoint Maharaj with oil and wash him and then; after serving Maharaj with food, he would take his Prasad. Swamiji's face would be suffused with great tenderness and humility when he approached and talked, with Sri Maharaj. 'He belongs to the type of the old Rishis', he once said of Maharaj 'and you should approach him with deep devotion and humility. Maharaji's love and regard for Swamiji was such that he often advised devotees to go and hear what Swami Nirmalanandaji was saying. That will do you good', he would say. He was also so considerate as not to go by the front door while Swamiji was discussing there, lest he should be disturbed, but went out another way to take his usual walk. One day Maharaj told him 'Brother, I hear that you go to the

market and carry things to the Ashrama yourself in the sun. And you attend not only on me but on every one of the party. Why should you take all this unnecessary trouble on yourself?'

Swamiji replied 'What Maharaj, is it a trouble? It is my good fortune that I am privileged to serve you to this little extent. Pray don't be worried over it. Let me be happy and make the best use of this opportunity.' Maharaj would then look on him with infinite tenderness and love. Days passed in this way. Maharaj consented to go to Trivandrum and open the Ashrama. The news was communicated to the devotees in Malabar. Mr. K. Sankara Menon (Swami Amalananda) wrote to the Swami inviting the party to Ottapalam. Accepting the invitation the Swami wrote to him:—

Bangalore City.

Dated 25th July 1921.

My dear Sankara Menon,

Many many thanks for your very kind letter of the 18th instant, and also for your kind invitation. We shall very likely start from here for Travancore by the first week of September next. We shall certainly be very happy to halt at Ottapalam on our way for a couple of days and enjoy your kind hospitality. The date of our starting; is not definitely settled. I shall be very glad to intimate to you in time as to when and by what train the President Maharaj and party would arrive at Ottapalam * * ".

Yours affectionately,

Nirmalananda.

Again in reply to Mr. Sankara Menon, he wrote to him as follows:—

Bangalore.

7th Sept. 1921.

My dear Sankara Menon,

Many thanks for your kind letter of the 3rd instant. The President

Maharaj x x x will stay here till the end of this month and then he will go over to Madras to spend the Navaratri days. If by that time the disturbance in Malabar (the Mopla rebellion) is quieted down, he will go to Travancore via Ottapalam; but if the present state of affairs continues for another month, he will have to take the other route via Madura, and then on his way back he will take the Shoranur line and halt at Ottapalam x x ."

The Swami wrote to his friends and devotees in Travancore regarding the arrangements to be made there. Every effort was made to make the journey and stay of Maharaj quite comfortable and the function an unprecedented success. But Maharaj's indisposition caused the programme to be altered. On the 28th of September, the Swami wrote to Mr. Sankara Menon, "The President Maharaj being indisposed and also on account of the Mopla disturbance, he has, for the present, postponed his trip to Ottapalam. He will go over that side after the Navaratri festival is over. I shall timely inform you as to the date of his departure later on "

Before Maharaj left for Madras for Navaratri the Swami had written to Mr. Kunhiraman Menon to look up the arrangements made at Ottapalam and go to Bangalore so that he might give further instructions in person as to what remained to be done. Mr. Menon went there. Maharaj was glad to meet him and asked him "Kunhiraman, when we go to Malabar, will you arrange a nice bungalow for us?" 'Yes, Maharaj' he replied, "everything has been made ready. Only thou hast to-come there." 'Very well,' said Maharaj and then, pointing to a side room (Swami Baradananda was there) and with a playful smile he said, "Go and tell him that you will give him nice things to eat." Was it mere fun and playfulness or was it not also a novel method of teaching 'beware of attachment to nice things, however innocent they look! Pleasures are snares, beware and discriminate!'

Mr. Menon received instructions from Swamiji and took leave of

Swamiji and Maharaj from both of whom he had the assurance that Ottapalam would be visited. The final words of Mahapurushji, however, were: "If it be the will of God, we shall come."

That very day, the Swami requested Sri Maharaj to give Sanyas to Brahmachari Santa Chaitanya. That was done the next morning and Santa was given the name Sukhananda.

Brahmachari Veeresh (Swami Shambhavananda) was also given Brahmacharya initiation that day.

The party left for Madras. After the Navaratri puja which was performed there in a grand scale and in the Bengali fashion, something or other made Maharaj change his mind. He decided to proceed to Calcutta forthwith and the trip to Kerala stood cancelled.

Swamiji was never so disappointed in all his life. All the high hopes of himself and the hundreds of devotees and all the careful and elaborate arrangements made in Kerala were dashed to pieces at a stroke. Soon after he came to Kerala, news reached him at Trivandrum that Sri Maharaj was indisposed. He came to Ottapalam. On the 10th April, 1922 he received a wire from Bangalore intimating that Maharaji's condition was declared hopeless. Immediately he started for Calcutta. At the Railway Station another wire: 'Saradananda wires, Maharaj entered Mahasamadhi, 9 Monday night' was handed over to him. He read the heart-rending news. Calm and grave, he said "now let us get back" and returned. He reached the house of his host (Mr. V. K. Narayanan Nair), threw himself into his easy chair, uttered the Mother's name and burst into tears. Very soon he composed himself. He gave up the idea of proceeding to Calcutta and decided to return to Trivandrum. The disciples of Maharaj were instructed what they should do in connection with the Mahasamadhi and Swamiji left Ottapalam the next day. He stayed two weeks in Trivandrum where after offering special puja and feeding a large number of the poor he

went back to Bangalore.

CHAPTER XXII

NO REST

Towards the end of the year 1922 Swamiji visited Coimbatore on the invitation of Mr Karunakara Menon who was the Sub-Registrar of Assurances at Badagara at the time of Swamiji's visit to that place in 1912. From there he came to Malabar, visited all the old centres and went back to Bangalore on the 2nd January 1923.

According to the request of the bhaktas at Quilandy, the Swami consented to preside over the Birthday celebrations there on the 30th of March. There was also a legal matter in connection with the Ashrama. Besides the compound and garden which contained the Ashrama building, there was another garden which had also been given over to the Mission. The landlord of the garden wanted to recover possession of it and had sent a registered notice demanding surrender. Swamiji asked Mr. KunhIRaman Menon to settle the matter out of Court and he also wrote to the Brahmachari: "If it is the Will of Sri Gurumaharaj, everything will come off all right. If not we quit the place and we shall try to start a centre at Ottapalam or Pattambi.' Swamiji came and presided over the functions. Quilandy was a centre from which Swamiji could and did, by his visits, year after year, extend his influence and contacts with the devotees throughout North Malabar and South Canara. He was invited by and was the guest of the Second Raja of Kadathanad at his Purameri Palace more than once. The Raja is a descendent of the old Kshatriya Kings who ruled over North Malabar. Both the Raja and his consort were much attached to the Swami.

He also visited Coonoor on Invitation by the Chempolly brothers of Ottapalam who were running the Coonoor Central Stores. There was also a proposal to acquire a site for an Ashrama there. While there, a body of panchamas came to the Swami to pay their respects. He was gracious enough to visit their village and temple where he was agreeably surprised to see the photos of Sri Gurumaharaj and Swami Vivekananda. The Swami also gave them some religious instructions.

Quite a new place visited by the Swamiji this year was Gobichettipalayam, in the Coimbatore District. Mr. T. V. Krishnan Nair (Retired Judge) was the District Munsiff of the place. He had been introduced to the Swami by Mr. Kunhraman Menon sometime ago while he was District Munsiff in Malabar. Swamiji was invited to preside over the Annual Celebrations of the local Vivekananda Society. Mr. Menon who had delivered a lecture there the previous year was also invited to deliver another lecture on the occasion. "The audience" writes Mr. Menon" was greatly impressed with the Presidential address and the precise answers to questions solving all their difficulties. Although the Swami left the place pleased with the enthusiasm of the workers of the society and the hospitality of his good host, he expressed to me on our return journey that he did not entertain much hopes about the future of the society as * * no work could be done without a fair amount of pecuniary support." From Gobichettipalayam he went to Kerala. After visiting the centres in Malabar and accepting the invitation of several bhaktas, he proceeded to Trivandrum where the Ashrama work was nearing completion. From there again he returned to Bangalore on the 15th of June.

What strikes even a very superficial observer as wonderful is the Swami's travels. How frequent, how long, how wide they were! What power of endurance and adaptability it demanded of him! Heat or cold, wind or rain, day or night, he was almost always on the move. Rarely was any trip a comfortable journey in the

Second Class. We have seen how he surprised the Haripad Bhaktas by his travelling alone and passing a night in a third class compartment and returning the balance passage money to them. Strange places, strange faces, strange language, strange and unaccustomed diet which was often unpalatable and unsuited to his constitution, none of these stood in the way of his carrying on the work of his Master. He lived as he actually expressed: "Let Sri Gurumaharaj's Will be done. I am to work and obey His Command to my last breath. No question, no flinching. Absolute submission. Wah Guru Ki Fateh!....." He had no rest anywhere. He went to give something, to spend his own energies in the task of uplifting others. Like his great chief, he also was overdrawing his draft. Nature protested.

Towards the end of the year 1923 he went to Kerala, put himself under the treatment of Dr. Tampi and recovered his health. At the same time he attended to the work of the Ashrama building. To his great sorrow the designer of the building, his personal friend and devotee who had worked heart and soul to make the building stately and strong, Mr. Hrishikesh Banerjee, passed away before its completion. Swamiji himself continued to supervise the work. The progress, though slow, was satisfactory. He saw that the Ashrama could be opened early next year. The door of the shrine room and the throne he wished to be made artistically. It took months to make them according to his design and he was pleased with the work.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIRE OF SANYASA LIGHTED IN KERALA

Swamiji's thoughts now turned to the young men who had of their own accord left their homes and taken shelter at his feet.

They had worked hard and served the cause all these years. Several of them desired to take up Sanyasa formally. The practice till then was for the President of the Belur Mutt to give Mantra-Deeksha or Sanyasa. While the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji was in Bangalore last time he had told the Swami that devotees need not be sent up to him for initiation, and that the Swami himself might give it. To take upon one's shoulders the whole life burden, the aggregate of the age-long karmas of another was a responsibility at which several perfected ones shuddered and which they quietly shirked or tried to avoid. It is well known how Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna himself had to suffer for taking up the responsibilities of many, how some of his immediate disciples were reluctant to initiate disciples and how discriminative they were in their choice of disciples. But to the large loving heart of Swamiji any such feeling was foreign and repugnant. It knew no fear either in this world or the next. He, the free, was commissioned to go from place to place and help all out of darkness. And here were his own children who had clung to him forgetting themselves from the very beginning. He decided to take all their burden upon himself, to give them Sanyasa. They may have many faults and weaknesses. No such thought or vision deterred him from following his own path. He may have to suffer the consequences, what of that? Was he not the true son and follower of Him who bore the Cross for the sake of man? On the 22nd of December 1923 were gathered eleven Brahmacharins at the Aahrama at Haripad. The occasion was unique. That was the first house of God in Kerala where God's children could feel themselves perfectly at home, free from the shackles of social customs, where they could mix with one another in joy and fearlessness; that was the first occasion when, in the history of all Kerala, birth did not debar a man from entering the freedom of the last Ashrama of life; that was the first occasion again when a child of the Prince of Tyagis lit the

literal fire of renunciation in Kerala when the perfected one spoke of his own state and experience.

To raise their minds to a higher level, to make them fully conscious of the greatness of the step they were going to take, the Swami asked the Brahmacharins to speak on Sanyasa. After they had spoken, Swamiji who was in an exalted mood spoke a few burning words. "Real Sanyasa is not giving up, it is taking in. Instead of a few acres of land and other finite things, the Sanyasin takes the whole universe as his heritage. He who was the son of man becomes the child of God. In exchange for a small family of men, he gets the entire creation as his relations. It is not also a flying away from misery. That befits only a coward. It is daring to see God and Bliss in everything. The Sanyasin gets the vision of God and lives in perpetual joy, conveying peace and happiness to all."

In the auspicious Brahma Muhurta, the next day, the eleven Brahmacharins duly performed the Viraja Homa under the directions of the Swamiji and took the vow of Sanyasa according to Vedic rites; they were given Kashaya robes and new names by Swamiji. They are: Swamis Chitsukhananda; Nirvikarananda; Niranjanananda; Sekharananda; Chidambarananda; Naishtikananda; Chitprabhananda; Chitbhasananda; Subbrananda; Vageeswarananda; and Dheeswarananda. After, the ceremony was over Swamiji said to a visitor devotee "I have merely entrusted them to Sri Gurumaharaj. They have been dedicated to him. I have no more concern with them. Sri Gurumaharaj will lead them." How true! Again he said 'I am a mere tool'. Regarding his teaching work he used to say; 'I am a mere gramophone, reproducing the ideas of great minds. Swami Vivekananda was the great pipe through which the ideas of Sri Gurumaharaj flowed. We are all small pipes fitted for the same purpose.'

After the initiation some of the disciples were discussing as to how the new Sanyasins were to live in the world. Swamiji

overheard them and said: "Be like the postmen. Haven't you seen the postman delivering letters? The letters may be very important, but the post man who delivers them is not considered an important person. You are to deliver the ideas of Gurumaharaj and Swamiji. Be their postmen, give out the ideas, not as teachers but as delivery peons.'

Regarding food he said, let what you take be anything. If you use your energy for good purposes, your food will become satwic. Otherwise even good food becomes tamasic.

Swamiji left Kerala for Bangalore via Coonoor. This time also he visited all the Kerala centres. In Bangalore he gave Sanyasa to two Brahmacharins and named them Deshikananda and Shambhavananda.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN MEMORIUM

The most important and urgent work then was the opening of the Trivandrum Ashrama.

It took seven years to complete the Ashrama building, a magnificent granite structure, situated on a retired hill-top commanding extensive views of inspiring landscapes on three sides.

"So much money need not have been spent on the building", observed Sir Puttanna Chetty of Mysore who visited the Ashrama while Swamiji was in Bangalore. "The Ashrama is finely situated and commands a very charming view, but so much money need not have been spent on the building. A smaller building costing much less would have been sufficient.

The surplus amount collected could have been invested for carrying on the work of the institution." These words of his were reported to the Swamiji. His comment was: "Yes, yes, men are of different views. A pucca granite building in the name of Sri Gurumaharaj will stand for years and will serve as a source of inspiration and means of spreading his ideas to many. Do you not see the grand old temples in South India? They remain intact to this day, while hundreds of smaller ones have all perished. Don't think that the Ancients were wasting money on temples. That also has its use.

"Further, I do not want to make the Sadhus Babus. If they find the Ashrama well endowed, they naturally turn Babus and become victims to the evils of wealth. That is why I did not try to provide funds for future management. The Sadhus must lead ideal lives and command the hearty support of the people and then the institution will run smoothly. If they are unfit and fail to get such support let them starve."

The plan of the work was elaborate and many thousands of rupees were spent upon it. Thanks to friends and sympathisers and the indefatigable exertions of the Swami, the construction of the main building was completed in March 1924. The consecration was fixed for the 7th of March, the 89th Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The ceremony was imposing. Early that day, Bhaktas flocked from all parts of the land and spiritual fervour permeated the atmosphere. At the appointed hour, amidst prayer and music the Swami within closed doors solemnly installed the portraits of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda on the altar prepared in the worship room. The doors were then opened and he performed the arati. All those who wanted to worship at the feet of the Lord were allowed to do so. Vedic Homa was also performed. The festival continued up to Sunday the 16th March, when the Ashrama was publicly opened in the presence of a large gathering. At the meeting held

in the evening, the Swami presided and delivered a stirring speech in the course of which he referred to the munificence of Mr. Kulakkunnath Raman Menon in constructing the worship room floored with marble slabs in memory of his patron, A. R. Rajaraja Varma, and sinking a well in the Ashrama compound in memory of his deceased mother. He also referred to the sacrifice worthy of record, of a poor woman who, having nothing else to give, sent her nosering as her offering for the worthy cause. The Swami dedicated the Ashrama to the memory of Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna. Just after the installation of the Ashrama at Trivandrum, the Prabuddha Keralam Office (the Vernacular Organ of the Centre) had to be shifted to another place. The late lamented P. G. Govinda Pillai (Sirkar Vakil), who had fought many an intellectual battle with the Swami and had at last become deeply convinced and devoted, gladly placed a garden and building of his in Alleppey at the disposal of the Swami. The P. K. Office was transferred and Sri Ramakrishna was installed there by Swamiji in June of that year. The Swami dedicated the Ashrama to the memory of Swami Yogananda.

Coming under the influence of this Ashrama, certain Bhaktas of the fishermen caste of the neighbouring village founded a Sri Ramakrishna Chaithanya Math and began to conduct Bhagavat-seva regularly. They too invited the Swami. He was so pleased with their work and devotion that he heartily invoked the blessings of Bhagavan on them.

It was here that the Swami had the great devotee, Seth Khatawoo Khimjee, who supplied thousands of rupees worth of coir mats to several Ashramas in Kerala, Bangalore and Calcutta.

In this trip the Swami also laid the foundation for the Ashrama at Muttom. It was formally opened on the Purnima day in October 1925 and named Premananda Ashrama in memory of one of the great Iswara-koti disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

CHAPTER XXVI

HITHER AND THITHER

Returning from Calcutta he visited Bombay where the business magnates, Sir Iswar Das Laxmi Das and his son Seth Purushotam Das Iswar Das, were his friends. They had gone to Bangalore in the year 1922 and resided there for about a year and a half in a bungalow opposite the Ashrama building. An acquaintance was then formed which ripened into close intimacy. The Swami became their family friend and teacher. Many of their relations and friends also came into contact with him and were blessed by him. Accepting their invitation, he visited them almost every year. They were most happy to entertain him, serve him and spend most lavishly for any cause which he had in mind. It was they who enabled him to instal electric lights in the Ashrama at Trivandrum at a cost of nearly four thousand rupees. They supplied him with ample funds to help numerous poor students and helpless widows regularly. Neither the Swami nor they desired the public to know anything of these acts of charity and benevolence. They abhorred being advertised or even mentioned in any such connection. The Swami respected their feelings in the matter so scrupulously that he refused to disclose the source even when he was questioned about it. Spending some days in Bombay he reached Bangalore in the month of May (1925). The movement there was spreading and growing stronger every day. For the Students Home, the Government of Mysore sanctioned the free grant of a building site 15,000 sq. feet in extent. Supervising the Ashrama works, putting things in order and making enquiries as to the progress of other centres the Swami remained there till

July. He then proceeded to Kerala and visiting the centres on his way reached Trivandrum in August 1925.

The Ashrama building stood in need of extension, the hilly ground all round had to be cleared and planted with useful trees and plants. Planning and executing and spending his own pocket money for these works, the Swami stayed there for over a month. This time he gave Sanyasa to seven Brahmacharins and named them Swamis Nrisimhananda, Ojasananda, Oorjasananda, Puranjanananda, Balakrishnananda, Arjavananda and Umeshananda. Mr. K. Raman Menon who had contributed handsomely for the construction of the shrine room and well having passed away, his nephew, Mr. Sankara Menon (Swami Amalananda), donated rupees three thousand in his memory, for the daily worship of Thakur. Swamiji next opened the Premananda Ashrama at Muttom and returned to Bangalore via Madras.

For the third time Swamiji visited Coorg in the year 1925. Hearing that Swamiji had arrived at Virajpet Mr. Chengappa (now Retd. Dy. Director of Agriculture) invited him to Ponnampet. The invitation was accepted and Swamiji went there by car. Many leading gentlemen of the place had assembled to meet him. As usual, there were questions put to him on a variety of subjects. His answers and conversations so impressed the audience that the idea of having an Ashrama there took deep root.

Some of the questions asked touched upon the simplicity of life advocated by Mr. Gandhi. Swamiji replied in naming words: "This sort of advocacy is a set-back to progress. Are not the Indians, as a whole, leading a simple life – a life of contentment? That contentment is not the result of enjoyment of life to the full; but is a result of indolence, helplessness, inability to achieve better and higher things. It is morbid contentment from which people should be roused and raised. That contentment is a sign of death, not of life. It is not a sign of the

Satwa state – a state reached after incessant struggle. Our people have not enjoyed life as it should be. Our standard of life is to be raised, not lowered. People must have enough enjoyment before they can think of giving up." At the same time he spoke very strongly against our people imitating western manners and ways of living. Elsewhere also he used to speak feelingly of the low standard of living of our people. Before departing he asked Mr. Chengappa and two of his relations to go to Virajpet the next morning. They went there as directed and were initiated by him.

It was now four years since the great 'President Maharaj,' Swami Brahmanandaji, passed away. The Mission and its activities continued to grow, only his benign, farseeing eyes and controlling touch were not on them. Their absence resulting in the necessity for some sort of comprehensive control over the working of the organisation must have been felt by the authorities. A convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was proposed to be held in Calcutta in May 1926. Swamiji was invited and Swami Saradananda lovingly pressed him to go to Calcutta at that time. Responding to the pressure Swamiji arrived in Calcutta on the 2nd of December. Then again he made a tour of all the centres and went up to Haridwar. He returned and was present at the convention. A report of the same by an observer published in the Prabuddha Bharata of May 1926 (page 223) has the following:–

"In a series of conversazione held generally in the evening after the day's work was over, the senior Swamis of the order gave opportunities to the representatives and visitors to have their doubts solved regarding the various problems of work and religion. Swamis Shivananda, Saradananda, Vijnanananda, Abhedananda, Subodhananda and Nirmalananda – all of them had sat at the feet of the Master for longer or shorter periods – created, each in his own way, an impression upon the minds of the younger members which has surely proved of inestimable

value to them. These informal meetings were a prominent feature of the convention; and many confessed that they might not have a similar experience in their life-time again." After the convention was over, the Swami returned to Bangalore in time to receive the President, Swami Shivananda, who arrived there on the 22nd of October and accompanied him to Madras on the 18th of November, As reported by the Vedanta Kesari (February 1927), the Swami stayed for four days at the Ramakrishna Mutt, Mylapore. On the 20th of November he gave a class talk to the students of the Ramakrishna Mission Students Home. He also held a very eloquent conversation at the Ramakrishna Mutt on the 21st and returned to Bangalore on the same day.

CHAPTER XXVII

NIRANJAN ASHRAMA AT OTTAPALAM

In December 1926, the Swami went to Kerala again to open the Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama at Ottapalam. To the south-east of the Ottapalam Railway Station is a village named Palapuram. Certain Nambudiri Brahmins of the locality had put up a small building on the eastern bank of the Bharata-River. Their intention was to raise a temple on the land. When they came into contact with the Swami, they felt that an Ashrama founded by him would better serve their spiritual needs than the proposed temple, The Swami was approached and he consented to open an Ashrama there. Accordingly, the owners of the property – the Palathol Illom people – and its occupant – A. K. T. K. M. Vasudevan Nambudiripad – made over the land

and building to the Swami by a deed of gift in 1925. Close upon this, a Vishnu temple which was in a dilapidated condition was also gifted to the Swami. Contributions of Rs. 1,000 from Srimathi K. P. Parukutty Amma of Palat house, Rs. 500 from Sri K. Sankara Menon and Rs. 500 from Quilandy Ashrama were received just to start the work of constructing necessary buildings. These and other devotees and the sympathising public co-operating, other building and a separate shrine room were put up. On Friday the 10th December 1926, the Swami duly consecrated and opened the Ashrama naming it the Niranjana Ashrama, in memory of a great Iswarakoti disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The fine image of Vishnu which was in the old temple was also installed in the shrine. It is a strange and happy coincidence that the image is of Gadadhara Vishnu. A Shivalingam was also brought over from the old temple and installed, later on, in a separate shrine. This lingam was subsequently converted by the Swami into a Panchamukha (five-faced) Murthi of Shiva. Additions and extensions to the Ashrama buildings and compound were made from time to time. The garden with its luxuriant growth of flower plants, cocoanut palms and mango trees extends over four acres of land. The broad and winding river, the extensive paddy lands and the numerous gardens reaching up to the high and ever-green hills on the west and south west present a scenery which for picturesqueness and suggestiveness is hard to equal.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FROM COORG TO TRIVANDRUM

Soon after, the Swami went to Ponnampet in Coorg and selected the site for the Ashrama. He laid the foundation stone

on Monday the 7th February 1927, and returned to Bangalore. He came back to Ponnampet on the 6th of June to see to the completion of the Ashrama building and the arrangements for the opening which came off on the 10th of June. He stayed there till the 12th idem. During these days he held many talks with Mr. Kalamaiyah, the foremost worker, and other gentlemen. Regarding the future work in Coorg he said: "Now, by the grace of Sri Gurumaharaj you have got an Ashrama. This will be the premier Ashrama in Coorg. Hereafter other small Ashramas may be started in other parts of the District. Thus the ideas of Sri Gurumaharaj must be spread. In course of time, every house must become a temple of His. I am old. I shall not live to see all that. But I see that is going to take place."

Referring to his own Presidential address Swamiji said to Mr. Kalamaiyah: "Perhaps your M. L. Cs. and others and you yourself are displeased at my not having thanked you. Am I benefited by the thanks-giving, or are they?" "They are to thank you, Swami," replied Mr. Kalamaiyah. "No," said Swamiji, "they are to thank Sri Gurumaharaj. It is His grace that has brought this Ashram into being. Through His grace I have got an insight, a peculiar sense, whereby I can smell the places He likes. Did I not tell you when I first came here that this is going to have an Ashrama? It is involuntarily that I smell it, without any effort. If I make an effort, I may go wrong. It is not for my good that this Ashrama has been built. I may stay here for a day or not. It is not my work also. It is His. So the Ashrama will go on."

Here again he expressed the idea that it is not by means of lectures but by personal talks that ideas can be given and people influenced and instructed. 'Don't you see the life of Sri Gurumaharaj, he asked and added: "Read M's Gospel to see how he visited various persons. Even Swamiji could influence people only by personal contact * * So, meeting people and giving them ideas is the work needed in India."

Returning from Coorg via Malabar Swamiji reached Tellicherry

on the 12th of June 1937. Here he was the guest of Mr. Gopala Menon. Ottapalam was reached on the 14th. Three days were spent at the Ashrama, Swamiji himself being engaged in extending the flower garden and other works. On the 17th he left for Trivandrum. When Swamiji got into the train at Ottapalam Railway Station a Nambudiri Brahmin who was in the train asked him what his caste was. 'Sanyasins have no caste,' replied Swamiji. 'What caste did you belong to in your Poorvaashrama,' pressed the Nambudiri. 'According to the Hindu Shastras it is wrong to ask a Sanyasin anything about his Poorvashrama' was the Swami's reply. This same question had been put to him by others also and he had given other answers. To one he said that he was born a Pariah. To another his answer was that he underwent training under his Brahmin father. The Nambudiri's pride of birth did not assert itself again. Rightly had the Swami said about the Ottapalam Ashrama that at Ottapalam he had made a breach in the Nambudiri fort. In Trivandrum town, the Swami had a large number of women disciples and devotees. He advised them to meet regularly every week to exchange ideas, discuss religious subjects and compare notes. They used to meet in the houses of devotees by turns. Gradually they formed a Hindu Vanita Sangham. They invited the Swami to one of their meetings. On the evening of the 9th July they mustered strong in the Museum Lecture Hall. Swamiji arrived at 4-30 p.m. The meeting began with prayer and music and Swamiji delivered an inspiring address in English touching upon the various problems affecting the welfare of women in general and of the women in Travancore in particular. These meetings of the devotees in their own houses had salutary effects not only on themselves but also on the other members of their families, on their relations and the public generally. This was one of Swamiji's original methods of training and uplifting women.

CHAPTER XXIX

DEEP VOID

News reached Swamiji by wire that Swami Saradanandaji was ill. The Swami then had a carbuncle on his leg, there were breaches in the Railway lines on account of heavy floods, the route was therefore round-about. Not minding any of these, he started at once for Calcutta. The journey was not broken at Ottapalam – it was the first and the last unbroken journey since 1912. He reached Madras on the morning of the 14th of August 1927. Religious classes used to be held at the Mutt every Sunday evening. The students requested the Swami to hold a religious conversation instead of the class. He acceded to the request and spoke on what must have been the uppermost feeling in his heart at that time – Love – Love for the Lord and His children. He said: "The Bhakta is prepared to take any number of births and undergo all kinds of sufferings in order that he may serve and enjoy the presence of the Lord within and without.' The same night Swamiji left for Calcutta via Bombay. Six days of continuous travel took him to Calcutta. When he reached the Udbodhan Office the Swamis received him, and offered him refreshments. Declining all offers and unmindful of any other thing he went straight way to his beloved Gurubhai, a mighty Karmayogin and heroic Jnanin, lying on his death bed, waiting for the arrival of his dear Tulasi, a Bheeshma lying on his bed of arrows waiting for Uttarayana. The Swami approached him and announced himself. Slowly Saradanandaji opened his eyes and beheld the form of his beloved brother. Tears rolled down the eyes of both. What unfathomable depths, what infinite love; what exquisite spiritual forms did they see in each other's eyes ?

Slowly the eyes of Sri Saradanandaji closed; joy and a beatific smile overspread his face; very calmly and quietly he entered into Mahasamadhi! The solemn chant 'Hari Om Ramakrishna' announced the heart-rending event to the outside world.

Swamiji felt a deep void in his heart. The passing away of Sri Maharaj had itself made life insipid to him. But he had to carry out the Maharaji's wish to complete the Trivandrum work. Then Saradananda Ji was alive. Now he had also disappeared from view, Swamiji felt as he expressed it 'a deep cut', in his heart. Yet there was work to be done and he literally carried the burden of his body as a tool to do that work.

CHAPTER XXXI

I AM NOT GOING TO DIE NOW

After more than a quarter of a century's exemplary work, both spiritual and temporal, the like of which few have ever shouldered, the like of which was never attempted or accomplished by any other son of the Lord in Bharatavarsha, the Swami quitted Bangalore. In June 1935 he repaired himself to the Brahmananda Ashrama in Trivandrum. Here he offered to Sri Gurumaharaj the last batch of Bramacharins who had taken refuge with him; six were initiated into Sanyasa. They are:— Swamis Ramananda, Parananda, Sachidananda Amalananda and Krishnananda. After a few days stay in the Ashrama, he left for Calcutta via Bombay. He toured in Bengal for some time and returning to Calcutta fell ill. The devotee, Dr. D. P. Ghosh, was ever attendance on him. So also were Jivanmukta Kiran Chandra putt and the members of his family, Jatindra Krishna

Dutt and a host of other ardent devotees. His condition grew worse. Many eminent Doctors such as Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Sir Nilratan Sircar were called in. All of them were unanimously of opinion that the illness was fatal. The Swami had grown too weak to move or even to speak. There was no hope of recovery. Somehow he got to know what the Doctors thought. He called his own Doctor and told him, "Don't be anxious. I tell you I am not going to die now. There is some more work to be done for Sri Gurumaharaj and I must live to finish it. Let the big Doctors say anything. I don't want any of their treatment. I am a poor Sadhu; I shall take your medicines only. Give me whatever you think best. If you think necessary to give injections, give even 3 or 4 a day without fear. I shall not flinch." The spirit in which these assurances were given was indeed strong and bold, but the words which expressed them were hardly audible; so weak, he had grown. In spite of his assurance, every one thought that the end was near. The eminent doctors advised the devotees attending on him to wire to his bhaktas far and near.

Accordingly, without consulting the Swami and without his knowledge they wired to all important centres. Devotees from all parts of India and Burma flowed in. Though glad to see them, he was yet deeply sorry that they had been put to the trouble and expense of long journeys. He was wroth with his attendants for having informed them that his condition was critical.

His physical powers were at their lowest ebb and life was trembling in the balance. Even in that condition his spirit retained all its old vigour; his intellect shone in all its keenness and clearness; his views of right and wrong and his sense of duty were exhibited in all their fineness. This was fully illustrated by his treatment of his disciples from Travancore and elsewhere. When he was informed that they had arrived, he ordered them to be rested and refreshed and when they were taken to his presence his first question to them was: 'who asked

you to leave your posts and come here?' True disciples as they were, they answered: 'We received telegraphic information that Swamiji's condition was very critical. So we thought it our duty to come here. We could not wait to apply for and receive Swamiji's permission. Now we have seen Swamiji, if so ordered, we shall start back this minute.' He turned to his immediate attendants and in clear, ringing tone asked them how they dared to drag them all to that distant place and give them so much trouble without his knowledge and consent. They replied that the doctors advised them to inform all. "So you and your doctors have settled between yourselves that I should die now? No, no!" In this strain he continued for about half an hour as if he were in enjoyment of robust health. He was so moved and sorry that his disciples, monks as well as householders had been put to so much anxiety and inconvenience, trouble and expense. Then he addressed the disciples and said: 'I see you were not at Fault. You need not go back just now.' Only one of them was made to return soon as his absence from the station might have caused the work to suffer.

All the days they remained there, he was himself giving directions as to how they should be looked after, what food should be given them at each meal and what places they should be taken to for them to see. One day they were sent sight-seeing with instruction to return by noon. But the tide in the Ganges delayed their boat by some hours. He remained fasting till their return. Such was his love for his disciples, his sense of duty and hospitality. 'A sadhu's sole concern should be for others and not for himself', he would say and he acted up to it in health and in sickness. The doctor in attendance on being asked by the disciples as to what Swamiji's condition was, would only say: "All eminent medical men have pronounced it as hopeless. But the Swami says he is not going to die now. Who can say anything about these supermen. They form a class of their own. When he talks forcibly, I am reminded of the Swami

Vivekananda. He resembles the great Swami in many respects. He is also his ideal!" The doctor was a friend of the Swamis from early days. When the doctors confirmed his view that there was no present danger to life, he saw that the climatic and other conditions at Calcutta would not suit him and he decided to go to Trivandrum. The doctors pressed him to stay on for a few days more and also to take the steamer to Madras instead of undertaking a long railway journey. His health, they thought, was still in danger. But the Swami's strong will and 'iron resolution' prevailed. He went straight to Trivandrum by train and remained there about 5 months, recouping his health, training his disciples and improving the Ashrama, He next went to Ottapalam arriving there on the 31st of May 1936.

CHAPTER XXXII

LIFE AT OTTAPALAM

One of the first striking acts there was a Kumari Puja (worship of girls) in which he actually worshipped twenty girls with all Upacharas, gave them money and made sashtanga pranamas before them. Thereafter 9 of them were his constant companions and he was a mother, father, teacher, friend and guide to them to the end of his days. (Those fortunate children are Bhuvaneshwari, Sarala, Sushila, Sarojini, Parvati, Savitri, Meenakshi, Padmini and Dakshhyani. Rukmini and Sarada of Adur also used to frequent and stay with them.)

He wanted to give them sound education and efficient training. Looking around he saw that lots of children in Palaparam were roaming about unlettered, their parents being too poor and ignorant to give them even the knowledge of the three R's. He then established two schools in the Ashrama compound, one for

girls named, Sarada Vidyalaya, and the other for boys named, Niranjana Vidyalaya. Teachers were employed for both. Pupils joined in large numbers and from all classes and communities, from the highest Nambudiri Brahmin to the lowest Pariah. Most of them could not afford to buy books or slates and many were ill-clad. The Swami was moved to pity. He went to his devotees at Bombay and soon returned with about a thousand rupees worth of things for the use of the pupils, – books, slates, paper, pencils, note-books, picture books, etc, and cloths of various sorts – and distributed them to one and all according to their needs. Some of them were also fed in the Ashrama itself. On most of the days there used to be feasts on some account or other and all the boys and girls took prasada there, seated together in the meditation hall without any distinction of caste or class. The parents of the children also attended them. Both the schools had gymnasiums, where the Swami himself taught them various exercises, They were also taught Keertan: Japa, Bhajana and Meditation. Pupils with home near the Ashrama spent most of their times in the Ashrama itself. Thus they had an all-round education and almost all the benefits of gurukulavasa, The Swami declined to apply to the educational authorities for recognition of or grant in aid to the institution. In this also he was setting an example to the people.

To popularise the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and to make it entertaining even to illiterate men, women and children, Swamiji conceived the idea of making them the subject of katha prasangas (kalak-shepas). To this end he had portions of the life written in the Malayalam and got it performed twice in the Ashrama,

Not content with setting up means for the uplift of the people in general, his divine love flowed to make individual lives fuller and happier. In that poor village the Nambudiri Brahmins – their women in particular – were the worst sufferers. The community had been groaning under a senseless, heartless social tyranny.

The women, specially with their old ghosha system still adhered to, were 'confined, cabined, cribbed' and kept in ignorance. His heart wept for these unfortunates whom no one on earth thought of or cared for, who had not the narrowest means of escape or uplift. Without uttering a single word about them, without even once referring to their plight, the Swami worked for them slowly. Gradually he made breaches in the walls of their ancient customs and superstitions and let the light of the Lord fall upon them. He gave them nourishing food, both material and mental, and had new habitation built for them. They grew naturally, the growth was from within, it was healthy, peaceful and vigorous. They raised their heads, became men and women, the children of Sri Ramakrishna. With their eyes opened and hearts enlarged they began to think of the wide world and the holy Tirthas and they longed, once in their life, to get out of the confines of their little homes and village and to visit one or more of the great Tirthas. He encouraged them, gave them money, and sent them to Rameswaram and Kanyakumari. He himself took many of them to Kanyakumari a few months before his passing away. Some of them he sent to Trivandrum for medical treatment for a long period, in all this he exercised his natural care and thoughtfulness and made detailed arrangement for their safety, comfort and convenience throughout the journey.

From the day of his Kumari puja, even the dullest and the purblind could see that his life was one continuous worship of the Virat, that it was not the life on the surface that he led, but that he lived and moved and had his whole being in the Self, in the Mother. Once while the children were all engrossed in all sorts of plays, running, jumping and wrestling in the Ashrama and in his presence, he went near them, took up a girl and placing her on a high stool, asked the other children to see the Mother, in her and worship her. He also asked the adults present there to do so. Some of them thought that it was one of the Swami's many jokes and kept laughing. The Swami was

serious. He worshipped her and prostrated himself before her. Instantly all the others followed. What to the others was mere imagination was to him a stern reality.

Among the group which had come to the Ashrama for cooly work, one day the Swami noticed a young girl. 'She is a very pious soul,' he said at once and asked her to be made a permanent servant-maid of the Ashrama. Unasked he gave her initiation. She was one of those whom he took to the Cape at his own expense. He made no distinction between the high and the low, the educated and the uneducated. The spirit of the words of the Gita that were often on his lips "Pandithah Samadarsinah" – the wise are same-sighted was always in his heart, was at all times illustrated in all his actions.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CASTING INTO THE MOULD

"Like the gentle dew that falls unperceived, yet brings into blossom the fairest of roses" was his influence and teaching, for the most part. Of precepts he had very few, his life was the shining example to all, In the training of his disciples, his own children who had forsaken everything else and clung to him, however it was not the unnoticed dew alone, but reverberating thunder also had its part to play. He was not very sparing in its use. Little did he care if it frightened any. He wanted his children to be bold and fearless. For a following; for name or fame or for the goodwill of men, he never cared. A monk to the very core of his being, he had dedicated himself so completely to his Master that long long ago his self had ceased to exist. The Master's spirit flowed through him for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many. It had moulded him into an expert

spiritual Doctor, not a physician alone, but a surgeon as well who did not hesitate to apply the knife when necessity arose. But such occasions were very rare. 'See and learn', 'observe and understand,' 'exercise your body and mind in useful and healthy ways', this was the teaching of this master of philosophy and Yoga. He only wanted them to be men, bold and strong. He knew that knowledge could not be imparted or infused from without. It was there, within all, covered by veils. To help the uncovering was alone the teacher's function. This he did by giving them hard work to be done as tapasya, as worship. He did not lay down any University or other educational qualification for his would-be disciples. Had they character – purity and steadiness, that was enough. Even here he was so kind and indulgent as to put up with a good deal of insincerity and waywardness in the hope that ultimately the man will come up all right. He considered hard manual labour done in the right spirit as good tapasya. The harmonious development of all faculties and cleverness in doing all works – from digging and tilling up to Samadhi – was the goal he set up before his devotees, Bookworms he simply pitied. To live with him, to see him work, to hear even his stray remarks and jokes was sound education. Once he was engaged in uprooting a big tree in the Ashrama compound in Trivandrum. The roots were firm and deep and many sided. "Asanga Sastrena Dridhena Chitva." Cut them asunder with the axe of dispassion, said the Swami, impressing upon the disciples how hard it was to get rid of old samskaras. Tamas and Rajas should be worked out, he would say. In every little act he would demand close attention and concentration.

One day at Bangalore he had asked a disciple: "Why don't you cut and keep the lily flower in the shrine"? 'Which flower, Swamiji?' enquired the disciple.

S.– Haven't you seen the lily plants on the road side near the gate?

D.– Yes, there are some plants there.

S.– Did you pass along that road today?

D.– Yes, many times.

S.– Yet, you did not see a flower on any of those plants?

D.– Some how I failed to see.

S.– You do not see the things that are before your naked eyes! I went there only once and I noticed it. Are you so absent-minded and non-observant when you walk. I wonder how you will practise meditation if you are incapable of observing things before your very eyes. Meditation requires the keenest perception and an extremely alert mind. Perhaps, you sit down to meditate, throw your mind and senses into a lethargic condition, a sleepy mood and after sometime get up satisfied that you went into deep meditation. If you practise that way, you will never be able to meditate. That is quite a different thing. For meditation you have to control your senses and direct your energies inward. The mind must be extremely active, I mean alert, in perceiving the finest objects. It must be well concentrated. If your nerves get blunt, how will you perceive fine objects? Cultivate the faculty of close observation and perception. Otherwise you cannot even form a mental picture of the object of meditation. Perhaps, you don't require any such picture or you have no capacity to picture an object in your mind. How else could you fail to notice that flower? Now go and see if it is there. Such silly matters are unworthy of a Paramahansa! That is what you might think.' The disciple went and brought the flower.

Another day, clothes were put to dry on the terrace. Suddenly there was drizzling rain. The disciple was engaged in some other work. He forgot all about the clothes. Swamiji called and asked him "what are you doing? Don't you see it is raining and the clothes will get wet?" "Yes, Swamiji I will take them down immediately, I forgot it," said the disciple and brought them with him. Then Swamiji asked again: "How will you get on with the

work, if you are so absent-minded and careless?"

D.— I say sincerely, Swamiji, I forgot it.

S.— I don't say you are insincere, lint you are so careless. You do not attend to things whole-heartedly. I had the good fortune to see and serve a greater Paramahansa than any of you. He was so immersed in God that he could not notice if his cloth was blown away. Yet, he was very particular in attending to the details of every work whole-heartedly. He used to take us to task for negligence or carelessness in matters however small. But you people go about doing your work half-heartedly and carelessly. That is your notion of sanyasa spirit. When you do a thing, do it with the greatest care and whole-hearted attention. Non-attachment does not mean carelessness, indifference or half-heartedness in work. Work with one pointed attention, give up without a single thought.

A garden tool had been lent to a friend who did not return it in time. After some days Swamiji asked for that particular tool. It was explained to him that it had been taken away by such and such a friend. "Then why did you not get it back in time?" asked the Swami vehemently. "This also is your Sanyasa spirit perhaps. It is not that I want these things with me or as my property. I am pointing out your defects and shortcomings to you so that you may become men. You know I have many friends with whom I can live in ease and comforts without any worry or botheration. Yet you see, I live a most simple life in your midst, and I work like a coolie. Do I want anything from you, do I require your service? Even at this advanced age I can walk away to the Himalayas with Kamandalu in hand as I uaed to do in my youth. I do not want anyone to attend on me. I do not want a smooth and easy life. That is my strength and that is why I am bold. Yet I suffer all sorts of worry and undergo all sorts of difficulties for your sake, to make you better men. And you people feel hurt at my pointing out your defects. In western countries I have seen, if one's defects are pointed out, he feels

grateful and he thanks you for it. But here it is otherwise. At once they raise their hood. Those who receive instructions in a spirit of humility and gratefulness will improve; others, in whom the devil raises his horns will never improve.

Above all he wished his disciples to have faith, intense faith in Sri Ramakrishna. While he was talking on the future work of the Ashrama, one of the disciples asked him: "Where is the personality like you, Swamiji. Unless there is such a personality behind us how can we carry on such works?" The question was no sooner asked than Swamiji's eyes flashed and thundering came the reply: "Personality! indeed! you depend on personality? Have you faith in Sri Gurumaharaj? If you have faith in Him and if you hold yourselves as mere instruments in His hands and carry on the work that comes to your hands, personality and such other things will come on their own accord. This is the mistake with you all. You have no faith in Him. Don't you see various Christian organisations working wonderfully well for the same cause. Christ is the personality, the power behind. His is the cause; with faith in Him, all those organisations work successfully. If you also have that faith in the Power behind you, if you have surrendered yourselves at His feet, then work on boldly, success and other things are sure to follow."

Who can measure the height and girth of his faith, of the depth and vastness of his devotion. Extremely undemonstrative, he hardly ever spoke of Sri Gurumaharaj except as one whose greatness he was unable to understand. He described himself as Ramakrishna's dog. In all these years only once or twice was he seen glowing with emotion at the mention of his Master's name in public. Another touching incident of a very private character may also be mentioned.

Sri Gurumaharaj's Birthday was being celebrated. Swamiji felt that the morning offering was not very satisfactory. He called the disciple in charge (Swami Vishadananda) and asked him what the morning offering was. Such and such sweets, fruits and

other things were offered, explained Vishadananda. Swamiji felt sorry; "Devotees have contributed liberally for worship on this special day. But you have made improper arrangements and offered such poor things." The disciple began to explain. "There will be hundreds of devotees attending the morning service. They have all to be given prasad. Similar attendance may be expected in the evening also. Arrangements have been made so as to make both ends meet." "I did not ask you anything about the devotees and distribution of prasad. I asked you about the offering to Gurumaharaj. Could you not have offered something better? Did you not see varieties of fruits in the market?"

D.— Yes. I did.

S.— Why did you not buy a few annas worth of them and offer them to Him this day. Have I asked you to feed all the devotees with all the offerings. Is it not due to your lack of devotion that you did not feel the need?

D.— Yes, Swamiji, it is my lack of devotion.

By this time Swamiji's face became red with emotion, tears began to flow from his eyes. He could not control them. Bitterly he said: "Sri Gurumaharaj is starving; I do not want any food today." His feelings began to rise. The disciple, had not witnessed such a mood before. He was non-plussed, puzzled and struck with remorse. 'I shall make better arrangements at once' he said and withdrew. By the time of the noon-service everything was done as desired by Swamiji and he was satisfied.

Asked about the puja paddhati (method of worship) Swamiji said: "There are two kinds of pujas. One is in an established shrine where a regular system is followed and the other a devotee's worship of his Ishtam when and where he finds it convenient. Our's is a systematic puja in an established shrine. But that should not be followed like a lifeless machine. What would you do if Sri Gurumaharaj was alive and you were attending on Him. Do likewise now also. Feel His presence and

feel that you are attending on Him. Such faith and such service will make Him present here always. Attend on Him with faith, purity and devotion."

"Devoted service to Sri Gurumaharaj is tapasya. What we gained by our pilgrimages and tapasya, Shashi Maharaj attained by his constant and devoted service ", he used to say. And in making pilgrimages or leading parivrajaks life, complete self-surrender and dependance on God must be firmly established. But that cannot be if one carries money with him. Once Swami Vishadananda went as far as Rishikeah and spent some days in meditative life. Some friends had supplied him with money for his expenses. When he returned Swamiji said: "with plenty of money in pocket even the Maharaja of Mysore can go and live in the Himalayas. That will not be tapasya. Depending on friends is not surrendering yourself to God. In my young days I used to travel thousands of miles on foot without a single pie with me and without asking for anything from anybody. If we surrender ourselves at His feet, He will look after us. But, if we depend on ourselves or we rely on our friends there is no surrender to God. We foolishly think we can help ourselves that we are powerful and so forth. God is the source of everything. Have that conviction, surrender yourself and then practise tapasya. Such self-surrender made heroes of men, made them fearless, perfect workers. It is casting away the dross and taking up the gold. Renouncing the lower little self you become identified with the supreme self. That is yoga, and yoga is dexterity in action. Be dexterous in action; no matter what the action is." This was a theme which he was never tired of harping on: work, work, teach yourself to do every sort of useful work in the best, easiest and quickest possible way. In this, he himself was the grand example. On all days except when he was seriously ill, he got up at 2 A.M., and did Japam and meditation till 5 A.M. Then commenced physical works of all descriptions till he retired for rest: at 10 P.M. He did gardening – digging, planting,

transplanting, weeding and cutting and he taught how such little details were to be done, he taught music; he taught various methods of constructing ovens and of cooking, he taught carpentry and mason's work. Much of the work of additions and alterations to the Ashramas was done by him and his disciples without the help of professional workers.

At Ottapalam he was once engaged in improving the Shiva temple and the hall in front of it and also the kitchen to the south of the Ashrama. The Swami Muraharananda was doing carpentry work, and Swami Ramananda was building the walls of the kitchen, and Swamiji was giving instructions and leading a helping hand. A devotee, Mr. Chengappa, who was staying there as Swamiji's guest and who was standing near, thought within himself: "Why is the Swami making the Sanyasin disciples do this sort of work? Scarcely had I finished thinking", says Mr. Chengappa: "When Swamiji got up and before anything was said on either sides he went on to say 'you know every art must reach its perfection in a monastery. In Rome even brewery reached its perfection. The best wine was made there. That wine is there for sale even now, it is priced very high. Perfection in every useful art must be reached here. That is why I am making these young Swamis do carpentry, masonry, painting and other works' I was simply stunned by the illuminating answer to my unasked question. I know of several such instances related by devotees in Coorg."

One special characteristic of his work was that it was always artistic. He demanded beauty, grace and loveliness and also durability in all tilings, however small or trivial they may be. And he had a talent for making everything artistic. He would cut a piece of bamboo or a small branch of a tree and make a beautiful walking stick with an animal's head. An ordinary mud-pot would be made to appear a beautifully painted China flower vase. A granite Shivalinga was transformed into a benign and meditative Mahadeva with matted locks, five faces and blue

necks. The various tools and implements kept by him in all the Ashramas, his hukhas and pipes of different fashions and materials, everything connected with him bore the stamp of Art, had the touch of beauty and bliss, concentration and perfection. He stressed the importance of work for women also and he used to hold up the Holy Mother as the ideal for all women. She used, he said, even to wash and dry and keep in their respective places the clothes of the young devotees of the Master without their knowledge. It was in the uplift and worship of womanhood that he saw the salvation of the Mother land. Here also he set the example by the worship of Kumaris. In his last days he made that worship take the form of whole-hearted service to them and their all round training. He trained their body by teaching them gymnastics and dances and plays of different styles and methods. He bathed them, fed them, combed their hair, put sandalwood oil on their heads, taught them even such little things as how to cut mangoes evenly; he taught them folk songs and stotras.

Strangest of all, although most of them were under 7 or 8 years of age, he initiated them all with Mantras, taught them meditation and enforced regular sadhana both morning and evening and they were also directed to circumambulate the shrines with bhajana songs every evening after arati. He encouraged and helped them to have their own Ishtadevata and worship, and himself took part in it, "In course of time you will see my spirit in them", he said once.

His sympathy for the poor, love for the lowly was beyond compare. Feeding of the Daridra Narayanas was not a formality with him. – It was dead earnestness. He never ate anything until their feeding was over. And then he took something as yajnasista, as he expressed it. Once on a Birthday, unexpectedly large numbers had gathered. All cooked food was exhausted; the Narayanas remained to be fed; rice in the store room was also exhausted. The workers gave out that nothing was left and

that they might return. The Swami heard it. That set him on fire, roaring rage and weeping compassion flowed out of his person, words and acts. Terrible and Majestic he looked. None dared to approach him – not even his nearest and dearest disciples and friends. None had seen him so awe-inspiring as on that day. He took out and threw at them a bundle of currency notes. "Go, purchase rice, cook and feed them", he ordered. Rice was immediately collected from many houses and the poor were fed. That was an object lesson to all present.

It was a day of Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday Celebration. Many devotees assembled in the morning. Swamiji spoke at length on the regeneration of India, on the need for starting industries and other matters, and then asked the devotees to take breakfast. Children of the neighbourhood had also come to take prasada. All were served and the cry "Sri Gurumaharaj ki Jai" went forth. Swamiji went to the dining hall and found that all had begun to eat. A poor girl was standing outside. He went and brought her in and took the Swamis to task for having neglected her. "She is a poor orphan, he said, "why did you not go and see who all were waiting outside? (Pointing to some boys) You invited these, could you not have asked this poor girl also? How heartless you are! How much so ever I may point out your defects and try to rectify your ways, you will not care to learn and improve. Your hearts do not soften." He referred to this incident many times that day. He was so much moved at the sight of a neglected orphan.

In this and other ways, by example, advice and admonition, he laboured to mould the character of his monastic and lay disciples and devotees, men, women and children. Till the year 1936 the Swami had not remained at Ottapalam for more than a few days at any time and those occasions had been mostly availed of by the English knowing devotees and visitors. All the time, at a distance had stood a large body of ardent souls who could not approach him freely and directly on account of the

language difficulty. This time, in the last act of the drama, he brought the direct method of teaching and the language of the heart into current use. Mere children of five or six and illiterate persons were now made able to understand his words and imbibe his ideas. They could easily follow his directions. Each individual received the training suited to his nature. Each had his shortcomings or defects pointed out and each one received his full share of his attention and blessing. This was perhaps his greatest work in these days, the least public but the most abiding and vital, the transformation of character of several individuals.

Since his return to the south after his serious illness in 1936, he had not visited Bombay. His many devotees yearned to have his darshan. He went there early in the year 1937 and after a stay of few days returned to Ottapalam, breaking journey at Salem. Although much worn out and shattered in health by long strenuous work and illness and journeys, the Swami, then aged 74, appeared, as the correspondent of the Indian Express who interviewed him described "a quiet, but dignified figure, well nigh answering to the physical and mental attributes of the magnanimous man of Aristotle, a tall, handsome strong personality with a keenly intellectual face." He again visited Salem during the Ramakrishna Centenary Celebration. The citizens presented him with a welcome address which was read by Rao Bahadur C. S. Bhaskar, M A., Bar-at-Law., Swamiji thanked them and he delivered the centenary address. He visited Calicut also twice the same year. The local Vedanta Society, blessed by Swamiji, was thriving and making its beneficent influence felt. The Swami Sekharananda (a disciple of the Swami) in charge at Quilandy proposed that, under the auspices of the Society a home of service, be started at Calicut. Swamiji's permission was got and a Home was started for supplying a crying need, viz., the free medical treatment of children. The merchant prince Seth Nagji Purushotam, opened

the Home. It proved to be the one thing, the town wanted most. Children of all castes and religions receiving expert treatment every year number many thousands as may be seen from the Annual reports. Swami Sekharananda instituted religious worship of the Sevashrama, reading of scriptures and religious classes also in the Sevashrama. That also proved to be of very great help to many. The Vedanta Society's work also was taken over by Swami Sekharananda. Swamiji was pleased to see that the Sevashrama was doing very useful work and had become very popular with all classes. It was the only Hindu Religious Organisation in the principal town of the District. Swamiji wanted something more there than a Sevashrama for medical treatment. There was much scope for work of different kinds. The many influential gentlemen who met him there agreed with him in that view. He prepared the ground and returned. In this trip to Calicut Swamiji took with him the girl disciples of Ottapalam. They were all the guests of Swamiji's ardent devotee and disciple, Sri T. V. Krishnan Nair, who was the Subordinate Judge at Calicut at that time. For the first time in their lives the poor girls saw the historic town of Calicut, the sea and the wide world.

His one last wish with regard to these children and his other female devotees seemed to have been to take them himself to the lotus feet of the Mother. As its external symbol, he decided to take them to Kanyakumari. With a large party including them he left Ottapalam in July 1937. Perfect arrangements were made for the journey and the halts and for the stay in the Ashrama at Trivandrum and also at the Cape. How he thought of the needs and comforts of every one of the party was worth study. No mother would have felt such solicitude for her children. He looked to every little item of their wants, even for hot-water baths for them. Every one felt supremely happy. He gave many nice little presents to the children, chains, lockets, etc. which he himself selected and purchased from the

bazaar. During Dussera days he gave new clothes to all, he sent Vijaya greetings and presents to his devotees in North India; he had new and pretty frocks made for children of the Ashrama servants (Panchamas). It was a sight to see him call the three year old daughter of the Panchama servant-maid and give her grapes, sugar candy and other fruits and sweets of which he always kept a stock for distribution to the children. He got a tailor to the Ashrama to stitch garments for his disciples and devotees. He explained to them various methods of stitching and several fashions of shirts, coats and caps prevalent in various parts of India. He brought a cap from his wardrobe and asked them what cap it was. They said Gandhi-cap which it was not. He then pointed out to them where the difference lay. Thus did he instruct on various subjects; of amusement he gave them enough, with many stories, humourous remarks and jokes. He also often transported them into far-off realms, sometimes by means of his words, sometimes by melodies and sometimes by his abstracted moods and far-away looks. Thus, in those elysian heights he kept them for months. The trip to the Cape was joy intoxicating. From Trivandrum many local Bhaktas with their families joined the party to the Cape. It was a very large and happy family with the Swami as its head. Excepting perhaps at the visit of Sri Maharaj, no other party was so led to the presence of the Mother of the Universe. It was indescribable felicity. In the surging sea, on the Purnima day Swamiji was both the playmate and the protector of the children. He played with them in the waters, he took them in his hands and on his shoulders and advanced further and further into the roaring and surging sea. Rising above the waves with his devoted children, he was actually playing in the ocean of the phenomenal world. Those days at the Cape and at Trivandrum will ever remain an ineffaceable and blessed memory with all who had the good fortune to be with him then.

After their return from the Cape, some of the elders of the party found it necessary to go back soon to attend to their family affairs. The children had to be sent back with them. Ashrarna matters detained Swamiji. How could the children go away without their Swami. They wept loudly for hours together. Not the children alone, but all felt the pang of separation though they knew it was for a few days only. Tears rolled down every cheek in profusion! Somehow they departed, kept crying till they reached the residence of Dr. Tampi where Mrs. Tampi comforted them.

At times, during those days, Swamiji referred occasionally to the past, to the days of Sri Gurumaharaj and of his own travels. After the children left him, his thought seemed to go back to those days oftener. He spoke of some of the places he had visited, of the language, manners and customs of many people and once of his own father. He referred to many religious teachers whom he had known and who had passed away, thought of himself as having outlived them all and humourously described himself as Sri Ramakrishna's Kakabhusundi (the old being, mentioned in Yoga Vasishta). It was all an indication that he was withdrawing himself and preparing to go back to the Supreme Abode.

Yet there was some more work to be done for Kerala. He had started only religious centres and made provision for their management by a deed of trust. He had made them all autonomous; independent of each other, but working in co-ordination for the cause of Sri Gummaharaj. In all Kerala there was no organised secular body to carry on charitable and philanthropic works for the uplift of the masses. And no one had deemed it worth his while to try to create one. He would supply that want; he would create a body in the State of Travancore and one in British Malabar also and leave it to the people and to posterity to work it and carry it on if they cared. In the name of the re-generator, the Prophet-saint, of Modern India, in the

illustrious name of Narendra, he created a Mission in Travancore.

Following up that idea and wishing to make Calicut a centre of activities, Swamiji next proceeded to Calicut. The cultured Zamorin Raja of Calicut had just then ascended the Masnad. He invited the Swami to his palace and received him very cordially and respectfully. Swamiji blessed him in appropriate terms and particularly wished him long life. At the time of parting the Zamorin enquired if there was anything he could do for Swamiji then. "Nothing, replied Swamiji, 'I shall let the Zamorin know when I need anything.' There is no line of Kings in Modern India older than that of Zamorin at whose port the first European trader to India (Vasco da gama) landed and at whose feet he went as a supplicant. The meeting between the Zamorin and the disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna reminded the spectators of the meetings of the Royal-sages with the Brahmarshis of ancient Bharatavarsha as described in the Puranas. Both were highly pleased, the Zamorin the more so at his having got the Swami's blessings at that time and particularly on that day on which he had received news of the birth of a prince in his family. Swamiji was there able to organise a very influential and representative body of men for the great work he had in mind. The Zamorin was pleased to be its Patron and the body was duly incorporated.

He returned to Travancore and giving finishing touches to his work then left it for the last time in December 1937 and reached Ottapalam. The children and the devotees were glad beyond measure that their Swamiji was again in their midst.

LAST DAYS AND MAHASAMADHI

After the last severe illness at Calcutta Swamiji never regained his former health. On the other hand he was slowly but steadily growing weaker. But quite unmindful of his bodily condition he went on working. When he reached Ottapalam he looked worn out, although his voice, his words and his actions all exhibited the same old vigour and strength. Once more he went to Calicut to make arrangements for the Association to start work. But bad season and his indisposition did not permit him to stay there many days and he returned to his beloved Ashrama and river side at Ottapalam.

Now, at any rate, the Swami seemed to have felt within himself that his main work was over. All his subsequent utterances suggested that he was about to lay down his body. 'I shall depart shortly and then you will all be free,' he would say to his senior Sanyasin disciples. Then pointing out to them he would ask a friend: 'Who will look after these children of mine, when I am gone?' One day he called the monastic disciples and told them: 'I have made myself ready to start. Now tell me what I should do with these Ashramas. Each one of you should tell me separately what each has to propose. Don't consult each other.' Then each one expressed his views. To one of them Swamiji asked "Then, won't you allow me to retire at all." No, replied the disciple. 'You do not understand anything' remarked the Swamiji and asked 'How will you live.' "Obeying' Swamiji," replied the disciple. "That is now, but how in future?" he again asked. He put questions to the girl devotees also suggesting that he was about to leave them. "Who will give you Shambhu-Chutney when I go away," was one such question. Many were the hints he threw out indicating the nearness of his final departure. On the 5th of March, five weeks before his Mahasamadhi, he was

conversing with a number of devotees. The Editor of Vivekavani was also present. Towards the close, Swamiji said 'I may give up the body shortly, at any time - who knows?' [Vivekavani – Vol. II, p. 709.] All the same, he was never a stricter disciplinarian or a more severe task-master than at that time. The least negligence, carelessness or remissness on the part of any disciple was treated as a great offence. Not a day passed without their having some lesson instilled into their minds, it was as if he was now smelting them and putting his own mark upon them – mark indelible and divine, mark which was to give them admission to the world of freedom and bliss. More and more work he was giving them, more and more was he showering his grace upon them and more and more was he withdrawing into his self. One day an Ashrama servant met with an accidental death. Swamiji felt very sorry for him and prayed for the peace of his soul. He also paid a handsome amount of money to his bereaved mother with instructions as to how she should invest it. Not long after, Swamiji became indisposed.

Not feeling well, he took a purgative on the morning of the 20th of April 1938. But the bowels did not move. So at about 4 p. m., a Doctor was called. He examined Swamiji, gave an enema and thought the temperature could be brought down by a quinine injection. But that injection being a muscular one, he was doubting within himself if he should inflict that pain and whether Swamiji could stand it in his then bodily condition. Reading his thoughts, Swamiji said, "Don't feel nervous, Doctor, you may do what you like with this body; it is not mine." The injection was therefore given.

The next day (21st of April 1938) his temperature fell from 103° to 99.5°; but the upper arm where the injection was given became a little swollen. It was also giving pain. Then another Doctor, an M.B.B.S., who was known to the Swamiji, was called. He prescribed certain medicines for external application also. Addressing him, Swamiji said "Docior I have some very costly

lint and medicines with me. You take them and use them for poor patients, not for the paying ones." They were collected and properly packed and set apart to be given to the Doctor. The treatment continued, but neither the pain nor the swelling abated. Swamiji, however, continued giving instructions regarding the construction of the guest house, and other Ashrama works.

On the 22nd there came a letter from the Ashrama at Palai. When it was taken to the Swami he asked whether it was for him. 'No,' said the disciple. "Then, why do you bring it to me" asked Swamiji. "Certain Ashrama matters are desired to be communicated to Swamiji" was the disciple's reply. Oh! said the Swami "I have nothing to do with Ashramas and their affair. I have no more connection with them. Let each Ashrama be looked after by its residents and let me lie down peacefully.' He did not care to have the letter read out.

On the 23rd, a slight swelling appeared on Swamiji's feet also. Referring to it, he remarked to one of his house-holder disciples, who was standing by, "you see, the children are looking intently at my swollen feet. That swelling is not like this (pointing to his arm). It is something quite different," To the little girls who were always near him, he taught some new songs, himself singing them very sweetly. He played with them, laughed with them and playfully showed them how to cry, "Who will give you mangoes nicely cut when I am gone," he is said to have asked them on that day. Poor children! They did not in the least comprehend the import of those words. To the Sanyasin disciples attending on him he said: "Don't give me any more medicine." Later on he said "I don't want anything from tomorrow forward." He added 'Let me lie down peacefully.' In spite of these significant words, the disciples did not, in their excess of love for Sri Swamiji; believe that the great end was so imminent.

His bodily condition was no better on the 24th. Growing anxious, the disciples wired to Dr. Tampi of Trivandrum that afternoon

(Sunday). More than once Swamiji enquired if a book post had come to his address. It would appear that it was the Bengali almanac for the new year that he was expecting. Not getting it, he referred to the old one and also to the new Malayalam one. That night he was heard to say "Some one will have to go back to-morrow." It was the next day that His Holiness Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj attained Mahasamadhi. He was also constantly calling on the Mother "Ma, Ma, Oh Ma." He was also beared to say: "Yes, Trivandrum work is finished." It may here be mentioned that Swamiji had regarded Trivandrum work as a charge entrusted to him by Sri Sri Maharaj (Swami Brahmanandaji). The moment Swamiji read the telegram conveying the sad news of Maharaji's Mahasamadhi he expressed that he had lost all interest in life. He wished to retire. "But" he had said "it was his wish that I myself should complete the Trivandmm work and I must do It. His least wish is a command to me." That seemed to have been the main-spring of. all his subsequent activities there.

The night of the 24th passed. Till morn on the 25th Swamiji was his old self, a stupendous personality, a great master, alert, acllve, teaching, testing and directing his disciples. From now onwards, he was the embodiment of Peace. He hardly spoke anything. True to his words, he took neither medicine nor food except few drops of soda-water or orange-juice which the disciples lovingly pressed him to take. When once a few drops of Panopepton were mixed with soda-water, Swamiji reprimanded the attendant. He was physically very weak and lay absorbed in contemplation. Dr. Tampi (with Mrs. Tampi) arrived at 10 P.M., on Monday and examined Swamiji. As there was nothing to be done immediately, doctor said, he would examine him again the next morning. "That will do", said Swamiji.

The night passed very quietly. At 4 A M., one of the attending disciples went to his side and said: "Swamiji, soda". Swamiji then asked quite audibly: "What is the time"? "4 A.M.", the

disciple replied. Swamiji again became silent. Ekadasi – Harivasara – had begun. At day-break, the children had their bath as usual, assembled by his side and began Bhajana and Keerthana. Doctor Tampi came and examined Swamiji. The worst fears were then almost confirmed. At about 7 A.M., Swamiji was seen attempting to get up. One of the disciples slowly raised him and kept him resting on the disciples breast. Then in low tones Swamiji said, "Yes, yes, yes, that's all right" – the last words that came out of that mouth from which had flashed forth Divine messages and commands in those thundering tones. After a while he again lay on his bed, a deep calm and holy peace settling on his benign countenance. Bhajana continued. Ganges water and Thirtham were administered. The children sang:–

Nirmalam hridayam yasya,
Gurorajnanuvarthine,
Nirmalanandapadaya,
Tasmai Sri Gurave namah.

The last words of the chant went forth; to greet them, as it were, went out the very last and supremely peaceful breath of the Beloved Master.

Then in solemn yet anguished tones, from the host of disciples and devotees assembled, arose the spontaneous cry,
"Jai Sri Gurumaharaj Ki Jai.

Jai Sri Swanuji Maharaj Ki Jai."

The heart-rending news of the Mahasamadhi soon spread and devotees poured in from all quarters. By about noon, the Ashrama was packed with mourners. The doctor who had been attending on Swamiji and Doctor Tampi again examined the body and declared that *rigor mortis* had set in. Preparation for the cremation then began. At about 3 P.M. – Ekadasi being over – the body was bathed, dressed in silk and profusely garlanded with flowers. Arati was performed, and all the disciples and devotees – men, women and children – offered worship and fell

prostrate at the Holy feet, In the meanwhile, a funeral pyre had been constructed with Sandalwood and other appropriate materials on the banks of the holy Bharata River. Thither the body was taken by Dr. Tampi and other devotees and disciples in procession headed by a Bhajana party including Swamiji's children. The pyre was duly lit and the fire blazed forth verily like the spirit which had inhabited the body, glowing, pure and free. By sunset, the fire died out leaving the host of devotees plunged in grief and gloom.

On the 7th day (the 2nd of May) the disciples and devotees gathered the sacred remains and deposited them in the Ashrama after due and proper ceremonies. Special puja was offered on the 13th day when about 2,000 Daridra Narayanas were sumptuously fed.

CHAPTER XXXV

RETROSPECT

A life of seventy-five summers, pure, strenuous and exalted and wholly dedicated to the service of humanity!

Ordinarily a man or a woman is viewed as an individual having a separate entity and living a life of his or her own as distinct from that of any other. It is natural and no life is viewed otherwise.

But there is a class of men who come into the world or who manage to step out of it as extra-ordinary. They wear the cloak of humanity to enable them to move amidst and serve human beings. Their tabernacles are but vehicles and channels through which super-human energy and light percolate and pass to the earth to strengthen it, enliven it into heaven. They partake more

of the nature of eternal principles and powers than of human beings tied to the wheel of Karma. To that class did the Swami Nirmalanandaji belong.

The great Incarnation of the age, Sri Ramakrishna spoke of four of his disciples as Iswarakotis. They come down with the Avatars to the world of men. His chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda, was not one of them. He was a class by himself, high above the others. The other Sanyasin disciples were styled Antarangas. The Swami Nirmalanandaji is said to be one of them. And that is an added reason why he is so dear to our hearts. By his example he showed us the highest possibility of man as man. Incarnations of Iswara and Iswarakotis are exceptions to the rule. In the world of Maya, they are eternally different from men, they are of a different species and they must ever remain so, although for love of man, they sometimes put on the human garb. It is in their very nature to shine, in time, as spiritual luminaries, to show themselves as Divine and to shed Divine love and benediction on earth. But for one of the human species (though perfected as a sage in by-gone kalpas) to grow to his fullest limits, to break the bonds of humanity, to emerge free out of the prison of the ego is an achievement which humanity may well be proud and glad of and profited by. That is a rare event. Krishna himself says, "Manushyanam Sahasreshu Kaschid Yatati Sidhaye." Of millions of men only one tries to reach perfection and of those who try one in a million attains it. And that was what the Swami did. That was not only the highest achievement of man for himself, but also the highest good that he can point out to the world – Man becoming Brahman!

Of those rare souls who become knowers of Brahman, all do not get dissolved in the ocean of Brahman. The lovers of the Lord, it is said, prefer to retain their Satwic and attenuated Ego to enjoy the sweetness of the Lord, to be His servants or help-mates in His Leela on earth. Such were the Antaranga disciples of Sri

Ramakrishna. In the words of Swami Vivekananda "Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the perfected Sages of a previous Kalpa (Cycle) take human bodies and come on earth with the Avatars. They are the associates of the Lord. God works through them and propogates His religion. Know this for a truth that they alone are the associates of the Avatars who giving up all sense-enjoyments with repugnance spend their lives for the good of the world, for the welfare of the Jivas (C. W. Vol. VII. p. 259.)

Referring particularly to his gurubhais, the Swamiji said: "Know each of these who are here of great spiritual power. Because they remain shrivelled before me, do not think them to be ordinary souls. When they will go out, they will be the cause of the awakenment of spirituality in people. Know them to be part of the spiritual body of Sri Ramakrishna who was the embodiment of infinite religious ideas. I look upon them with that eye x x x. You may go round the world, but it is doubtful if you will find men of such spirituality and faith in God, like them. They are each a centre of Religious power and in time that power will manifest." (C. W. VII, p 256.)

It was that power, that strength and fearlessness, that love and spirituality that was revealed through Swami Nirrnalanandaji. The measure of power manifested and the objects to which it was directed and applied varied with time and place and the varying physical and mental characteristics of the people he was brought into contact with. But in the physical plane none worked harder, none exhibited greater power of endurance and resistance and none turned out more work than the Swami. In India at any rate, no other disciple of Bhagavan travelled so widely and so often, visited and revisited so many places from Chamba in the Himalayas to Cape Comerin in the South, from Kashmir in the West to Burma in the East, propogated Bhagavan's and Swamiji's ideas so much, founded so many Ashranms and in his individual capacity made so many lay and

monastic disciples as the Swami Nirmalananda.

Success of life as viewed from the stand-point of the individual was thus complete and perfect. Humanity was replaced by divinity.

Such a one has nothing to gain for himself, nothing to fear from in all the worlds. The individual becomes the instrument of God, the channel for the outflow of the Cosmic power. It uses him for its own ends. The Adhikarika Purushas, its agents, infill him and work for the evolution of the human and the manifestation of the Divine. And so was he infilled.

When asked about his visit to Southern India the Swami Vivekananda is reported to have said that he would certainly visit the south and that he would burst in upon it like an avalanche. Truly did he revisit and burst in, but it was in the form and person of Swami Nirmalanandaji, his beloved Tulasi, 'the servant of his servants.' Any one taking pains to compare the two can hardly fail to note that the one is perfectly modelled on the other. The bright intellect, the large heart, the democratic spirit, the towering strength and boldness and above all, the unlimited love for the fallen and the down-trodden are all seen in the one as a clear reflection of the other. It has been admitted on all hands that in the sweeping' grasp of subjects, in readiness in answering any question, in brilliance in conversation, in the harmonious combination of all the different Yogas in oneself – in all these Swamiji was next only to Swami Vivekananda. And the Swami on his part "used to look upon Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as one and the same." He also used to say that none can understand Sri Ramakrishna except through the Swami Vivekananda who was, so to say, the interpretation and commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. All the activities of the Swami as well as his character were moulded on those of Swami Vivekananda. Was it not this identity of spirits that prompted Trilinga Swami to single him out and give him prasad; and the Swami Premananda to instal him as Shiva? and was it not

because of this sameness of heart, of love for the lowly, that the Swami came to be sent to the South? 'My heart is in Kerala', he said to a visitor at Benares. Not that he had any greater love for his devotees there than elsewhere, not that it was a more comfortable place to live in, but that the inhuman custom of untouchability and unapproachability and the tyranny of priests and castes were nowhere more cruelly at work in India than in this land of Parasurama. And no other but the bold Swami Nirmalananda with the spirit of Swami Vivekananda could have faced it and dealt it such deadly blows that it is for ever fallen and will never again raise its head. The most priest-ridden and orthodox country in Kerala was Travancore. It was there that the Swamiji laboured for a quarter of a century. The result of his labours, as assessed by the Government of the State and published in the report on the Census of India 1931 (Travancore Part I, pages 356 and 357) is worth reproducing. Referring to the inception and growth of the movement since 1911, the report proceeds to say: "Though the movement is entirely spiritual, it is having indirect social effects also.

Indirect Social Effects in Travancore.

As Sanyasins are above caste, no distinctions of caste are observed in the Ashramas and members of different castes of Malabar can be seen living as members of one happy family in these Ashramas. At all important functions in these Ashramas, people of all castes down to the lowest Pulayas, Parayas, etc., take their food together, and, as the food served is invariably prasad, orthodox Hindu doctrine also supports this practice. The Sanyasins spend most of their time in meditation and in practical work; attending to the various needs of the Ashramas, the annual visits of the Swami Nirmaiananda giving them the requisite training's. Philanthropic work is also undertaken whenever necessary in the spirit of pure service, the poor and the needy being treated in a spirit of worship. Just after the floods of 1924, over Rs. 14,000 were distributed in the most

inaccessible places in the interior by the Sanyasins."

This great revolution in the deep-rooted habits of the people was not effected by propaganda, jathas or news-paper articles, but by love and example, The reader might remember how the Swami stormed the orthodox citadel at Haripad by merely touching a leaf or two.

The social influence went further. As observed by the citizens of Salem in their address to the Swami, his "labours for over twenty years in Kerala towards the uplift of the depressed classes.....paved the way for the Historic Proclamation of His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, throwing open the State Temples to all Hindus," It must also be mentioned here that in the long and glorious uplifting work he did for the people, he did never ask for or receive any help from the Governments concerned.

Ashramas are spiritual centres influencing social habits, dissolving superstitions and caste prejudices and creating human brotherhood. The Swami established 18 such centres in the South. To these may be added many institutions of a purely philanthropic character, schools, dispensaries, etc.

But he did much more than that. Creation of institutions and destruction of caste-prejudices were the bye-products of his main work which was spiritual. To spread the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna as interpreted and amplified by the Swami Vivekananda, to sow the living seeds of spirituality over the length and breadth of the land, to turn the minds of men, women and children to Light and Truth, this was his real work. To make Man and to knit them into a brotherhood was his main objective. In this also the result of his labours went far beyond the most sanguine expectations of his devotees. Hundreds upon hundreds – men, women and children, all over India and Burma – were given refuge and taken by him to the feet of his Master. Sanyas he gave to 35 young men. Many of them are experts in various kinds of arts and crafts. The beautiful Temple, the first of

its kind in the South, built as his memorial in the Niranjan Ashrama, Ottapalam, was mainly the work of his Sanyasin disciples. That such a temple could be built in so short a time after his Mahasamadhi is proof positive and eloquent of the hold he has on the heart of Kerala. That Temple itself is, so to say, a standing monument of the greatness, beauty and durability of his work. The disciples are enthusiastic and thoroughly self-denying in relief and other works of service also. Appreciating their work in the Flood Relief of 1924, the Government of Travancore invited their co-operation in the campaign against malaria in 1935.

It may well be hoped that his work is going to yield a very rich harvest in the near future. Far greater than the number of his disciples is the number of young men, women and children who have seen him and loved him; him they can never forget; their minds he has influenced deeply; to them were vouchsafed the inestimable boons of Satsanga and Mahapurushasamsraya. In all places which he has made holy and sanctified by his presence, the name Ramakrishna has become a house-hold word. Wherever he went, he introduced Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. For truly, in him was Vivekananda, in him was Ramakrishna.

"Verily, the Sun is He, His the ray,
Nay, the Sun is He and He is the ray."

(Hymn of Creation)
Swami Vivekananda.

