

## REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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WHEN a man steps from darkness into a very bright light, his eyes are dazed for a while and refuse to work properly for the moment. And when we are asked to speak and describe that great joy which lights our very soul, our answer would be, as it were, but a mere groping in the darkness for words. One may perceive and feel most perfect joy, yet not be able to describe it. It is with such feeling that my thoughts wander back to the great impressions of my life, which I can never forget. Although a number of years have passed, these events live in my memory as if they had occurred but yesterday. I well remember my first meeting with the Swami Vivekananda, that great teacher whose nativity we are commemorating this evening.

Though filled with prejudice by my friends, I went to one of the Swami's classes, not so much to hear his lecture as to see for the first time a native of India, the land which I had learnt to love through reading the Bhagavad-Gita, the Song Celestial. I was seated in the class-room waiting for the Swami's appearance when soon a man came in — one whose walk expressed dignity and whose general bearing showed majesty, like one who owns everything and desires nothing. After a short observation I also saw that he was a very superior man, and withal, one who quickly disclosed a most lovable character. Now I became anxious to hear the words he would speak; and after I had done so but a few minutes, I firmly resolved to be a regular attendant at all his lectures and classes.

That prejudice which was so strong within me when I entered, now seemed to be driven away by his profound knowledge and charming magnetism. It would be too long to describe the great treats that followed. As wholesome food satisfies the hungry and fresh water quenches the thirsty, so my longing for truth was satisfied through the teaching of this wonderful man. And to this very day I have found nothing that gives a better answer and a clearer explanation to the various vital questions which arise in a man's mind than the Vedanta philosophy so ably taught by the Swami Vivekananda. Not only were his words in class-room and lecture-room those of instructive value, but also his conversations, while walking on the street or through Central Park, always conveyed the one message.

Many of our interesting little talks I can readily call to mind; for instance, on one occasion I expressed my regret to the Swami that his sublime teachings had no larger following, and his wise and fitting answer was: "I could have thousands more at my lectures if I wanted them. It is the sincere student who will help to make this work a success and not merely the large audiences. If I succeed in my whole life to help one man to reach freedom, I shall feel that my labours have not been in vain, but quite successful." This remark filled me with the desire to be one of his students. The strong impression which this lovable teacher always gave to his students was that of causing them to feel

that they alone, while with him, had his whole attention and sympathy. Always willing to devote his entire attention to heeding his students' most humble wants and queries, he, by this most pleasing attitude, made them most enthusiastic and faithful disciples.

This created that enduring bond of love between teacher and disciple which is so necessary for any teacher's real success. And how glorious was his success! Today almost every intelligent person is more or less familiar with the literature which like a flower blossomed out of his work. And many are those — the professor, clergyman, and layman alike — who have been influenced to the better through acquaintance with these literary gems. His teaching bore to us the peace of mind of the Aryan rishis of which we are so much in need. It is but recently that an American scientist pointed out how our fashionable and business life is a continuous nerve storm — a literal hurrying to the grave, speeding along every lifeway, exhausting energy, and inviting premature nervous and mental ruin. Through the strong desire for wealth and sense-gratification the nerve energy is exceedingly overtaxed, and no remedy is sought to restore it.

What better cure for this evil could be conceived than the living of that life which the Vedanta philosophy teaches? Not the excessive nervous rushing hither and thither. nor inactive dullness, but *sattva* — equipoise and tranquillity — is what is offered by Vedanta, and this only can bring back to us the calm which Western nations have long lost. In his teachings the Swami has admonished us not to direct the war-spirit in us to win the greatest victories, to the slaying of our fellowman in anger and hatred when he differs from us, but to the transmuting of this energy into a strict practice of self-control. And what better teaching can a man spread than one which contains such original thoughts as: "He conquers. all who conquers self; know this and never yield", or "In books and temples vain thy search. Thine only is the hand that holds the rope that drags thee on.

Then cease lament, let go thy hold." And now, though he has gone into the great Peace beyond, because his work was finished, he still lives in our memory and in his work, as he also lives in the message which he brought to us. He has done his duty as a great, good, and true teacher, and gave us the means, That we may know the Truth. But that is only one part, the other, without which all is in vain, is our duty, That we may live the Truth, and increased knowledge brings this additional duty with it. For that purpose, to help and assist us to better live the truth, Vedanta Societies have been formed, classes and lectures are being held, and his Brother-Swamis and sannyasin disciples have come to our shores.

However mighty nation we may be, he did not seek us for anything but for giving Truth and Wisdom, of which we are surely in need. Let us, by living the Truth of Vedanta, prove that this great Master has not brought his wonderful message in vain to us. (Prabuddha Bharata, June 1911)