

VIVEKANANDA IN THE NEAR EAST, 1900—I

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

There was in the very air of Paris in that summer of 1900 a feeling of excitement and expectation. For the Exposition Universelle Internationale, more than anything else, displayed Western man's technical progress and held out a promise of increasing comfort and never-ending scientific advance. At last, it seemed—and Swami Vivekananda used the phrase, albeit in a disparaging sense—an age of heaven on earth was imminent, thanks naturally to sound principles of individual initiative and expanding economy founded on the existence of a foreign empire.

The newly invented electric light was used extensively at the Exposition; the reflection in the Seine of numerous bulbs was considered breathtaking. At the Palais de la Métallurgie was displayed among other wonders a forty-foot-high electric generator. The American thinker, Henry Adams, a visitor to the Exposition, commented in his *The Education of Henry Adams* that the dynamo marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. Probably he was right. A philosopher much in the mode in the 1970's, Marshall McLuhan, has called the present period the Electrical Age; the aptness of this term few will dispute.

Thus it was possible to construct a subway in Paris, and this was done. The first line of the Paris underground opened on July 19, 1900, some two weeks before Swamiji arrived for his final visit to Europe. The speed and comfort with which they could now move around in their city created a sensation in the minds of the Parisians, who rushed to try the new facility.

Balloon competitions were held during that summer of 1900, and numerous bicycle races. In the village of Gretz near Paris.

Clément Ader was experimenting with the world's first successful airplane. He had already flown his machine from a field adjacent to the property that in 1948 was to become the site of the Centre Védantique Ramakrichna. And the automobile had made its sputtering appearance in the avenues of the French capital. By the summer of 1900 the first traffic accidents had occurred. There was talk of making claxons on cars illegal so that drivers would rely less on sounding warnings and would consequently drive more prudently. It was also proposed for the first time to put matriculation numbers on autos and send roadhogs to prison.

But the old era lingered on through the presence of the horse, which still exerted the power that moved wagons, trams, and private vehicles. In 1900 there were about 100,000 horses in a city of 2,500,000 inhabitants—one horse for every twenty-five residents. Swamiji may have tried the subway, and even an auto, but he surely went about Paris pulled by a horse.¹

A delirious joy reigned. There were balls and receptions nearly every evening, and 'Venetian nights' on the river. A dinner was given by the City of Paris for all the mayors of France, and 22,000 of them came to dine. Fifty million people visited the Exposition, including many kings, crown princes, and grand dukes; the majority of the high nobility, for reasons best known to themselves, preferred to make the visit incognito. There were eighty-six congresses, one of which was the Congress of the History of Religions, which Swamiji attended.²

1. *Vide Prabuddha Bharata*, Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama, March 1967, p. 134.

2. *Vide Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1969, pp. 108-15.

But Swamiji saw the sensuality behind it all, and also sensed the strong possibility of future war. And sensuality and violence have certainly been the prevailing themes in the West throughout the seventy-five years since. He even foresaw the disillusionment with Science and the concept of Progress that would creep up on Western man, as the bliss they promised proved to contribute unwanted side-effects. Around 1940, Vivekananda's great friend, Josephine MacLeod, told Mme. Drinette Verdier, a French-American devotee, that forty years earlier Swamiji had said to her: 'Europe is a volcano. If India does not come to help her she will blow up.' Whether the advanced nations can keep from blowing themselves up is far from sure. But the widespread support for Eastern ideas of wisdom now current in the West seems to hold out man's best hope of sanity. Less than a century later, the 'solutions' the Exposition promised appear of most dubious worth.

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On Thursday, March 15, 1900, a month in advance of the Exposition's inauguration, *L'Aiglon* (*The Young Eagle*) opened. This is the story of the son of Napoleon and Marie Thérèse, Archduchess of Austria. The boy was called at birth 'King of Rome', but when the fortunes of Napoleon declined he was rechristened Franz, Duke of Reichstadt and was kept at the court of Austria under constant tutelage in Hapsburg traditions. *L'Aiglon* retold the sad history of the prince reveling in the greatness of his lost father, prevented by international considerations from himself contemplating any similar exploits, and dying protestingly of tuberculosis in Vienna at the age of twenty-one. *L'Aiglon* was a drama in six acts, all in verse, by Edmond Rostand, calling for an enormous cast of actors and, before they were suppressed because their hooves made too much noise on the stage, even horses. 'The greatest actress of the cos-

mos', Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, played the touching role of the young eagle that never got a chance to fly. Commenting on this exploit many years later, the French newsmagazine *L'Express* (18-24 August 1969) said: 'And Sarah Bernhardt put over, in her time, the most astonishing impersonation in the history of the theatre. On March 15, 1900, at the age of fifty-six, she made a triumph in portraying a character that could have been her grandson [plate 1].'

As we know from his 'Memoirs of European Travel', Swami Vivekananda saw *L'Aiglon*, was immensely impressed by Mme. Bernhardt's performance, and talked to the actress afterwards. In his 'Memoirs of European Travel' the Swami refers to the huge success of the play, in mentioning the 'bumper houses' and the fact that tickets could be had only by reserving a month in advance and even then paying double the price.³

Long ago in *Vedanta and the West*⁴ Christopher Isherwood wrote an imaginary description of the encounter, some time in the early autumn of 1900, of Sarah Bernhardt and Swami Vivekananda in the star's dressing room of the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre. Marie Louise Burke has shown⁵ that the two were already acquainted, for Swamiji had seen in New York in 1896 Bernhardt's play with an Indian theme: *Izeyl*. The staging had impressed Swamiji: 'A whole Indian street scene on the stage...an exact picture of India.'⁶ But he found the story silly, concerning the struggles with their mutual passion of the courtesan *Izeyl* and a young nobleman who in some respects re-

3. *Vide The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (hereafter *Com. Works*), Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, VII, (1972), p. 374.

4. *Vide Vedanta and the West* (Hollywood: Vedanta Society of Southern California), July-August 1943, pp. 117-20.

5. *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1972, p. 113.

6. *Com. Works*, VII, (1969), p. 374.

sembles the prince who was to become Buddha. In his recreation of the meeting, Isherwood comments on the dissimilarity of these two extraordinary personalities—one the world's greatest living illusionist, the other perhaps in his time the world's most qualified spiritual leader (hence one might say, dis-illusionist)—but their similarity in the possession of the quality of personal courage.

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The latest edition of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* contains more than five hundred letters—an average of one written every six days of his professional life. But at least two hundred more letters remain to be published—some for the first time, some in their entirety—from the Boshi Sen collection at Almora. A side of Swamiji's character perhaps heretofore insufficiently appreciated—his tenderness—will be revealed when letters from this collection are printed. Nearly half were addressed to Sister Christine; and these particularly, by their tone and their surprising frequency, reveal a compassionate concern for the welfare of a disciple, heretofore inadequately commented upon.

Christine Greenstidel was a poor school teacher, not particularly talented, incapable of aiding Swamiji in any noteworthy way. But as she says, 'His compassion for the poor and downtrodden, the defeated, was a passion. . . . Even after he left America, he still had great concern for those he left behind, who found life a great struggle. Especially did he feel for "women with men's responsibilities"',⁷ of whom, Christine, as the support of her mother, was one.

There had been a distressing mix-up in the autumn of 1899 when Swamiji had proposed to visit Christine in Detroit and failed to do so, then suggested they meet in Cambridge, where she arrived only to find that

⁷ *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama, 1964, pp. 215-16.

he had just left for California. The letters he wrote to her at that time, expressing distress and begging her pardon, reveal to an extent inadequately recognized the tender consideration that existed in Swamiji's character.

And now in Paris on the 23rd of August 1900, he wrote to ask Christine if she was all right. He had spent about a week at her home in Detroit in July just before leaving for Europe; but already, having had only 'one little note' from her in five weeks, he was unquiet (an unpublished letter from the Boshi Sen collection):

6, Place des Etats-Unis, Paris
23rd August 1900

Dear Christine,

What is the matter with you? Are you ill? Unhappy? What makes you silent? I had only one little note from you in all this time.

I am getting a bit nervous about you, not much. Otherwise I am enjoying this city. Did Mrs. A. P. Huntington [probably Mrs. C. P. Huntington] write you any?

I am well, keeping well as far as it is possible with me.

With love,
Vivekananda

And this August 23 communication was at least the fifth letter he had written to Christine since having left her. In the Sen collection there are two others of the period. One is dated 9:00 A.M. Friday morning, August 3, written just as he was coming into Le Havre on the *Champagne*, saying that he had had a rough crossing, and would be in Paris that evening. The other (plate 2) is dated August 14, 1900, and is written from the Leggett residence at 6 Place Etats-Unis. Apparently the seal of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission designed in New York a few weeks earlier⁸ had already

⁸ *Vide* M. L. Burke, *Swami Vivekananda : His Second Visit to the West, New Discoveries*, Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama (hereafter *Second Visit*), p. 674.

been printed on some letterheads, for the August 14 letter is written on a sheet of paper bearing the Ramakrishna Math and Mission seal at the upper left. The letter consists of a brief message followed by a poem of sixteen lines. The poem has been published in the *Complete Works* with a title added: 'Thou Blessed Dream', and the date wrongly given as August 17. A comparison of the original document and the printed text reveals some difference.⁹

14 August 1900
6, Place des Etats-Unis
Paris, France

Dear Christine,

I send you a little poem. I am well and must remain well through [through-out?]. It does not pay to be weak. I hope you are well and happy. V.

If things go ill or well
If joy rebounding spreads the face,
or sea of sorrow swells
It is a dream, a play.

A play, we each have part
Each one to weep or laugh as may
each one his dress to don
alternate shine or rain.

Thou dream, O blessed dream
spread far and near thy veil of haze
tone down the lines so sharp
make smooth what roughness seems.

No magic but in thee
thy touch makes desert bloom to life
narsh thunder, sweetest song
fell death, the sweet release.

9. *Vide Com. Works*, VIII (1971), p. 168. This poem was first published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* of 1929 (pp. 521-22), from where it appears to have been incorporated in the *Complete Works*. The original document not being available then, the editors had to depend upon the copied version and the date deciphered by the contributor. Necessary corrections are, however, being made in the next edition, from the photostat of the original document, which was made available to us recently by Mrs. Boshi Sen of Almora. We are very much thankful to her for the same.—*Ed.*

A second letter to Christine, again from the Sen collection, written on the same day, acknowledges the receipt of her 'little note'.

6, Place des Etats-Unis
14th August 1900

Dear Christine,

Your letter from N.Y. reached just now. You must have got mine from France directed to 528 Congress.

Well—it was dreary-funeral like time. Just think what it is to a morbid man like me!

I am going to the exposition, etc. trying to pass time. Had a lecture here. Père Haycynth [sic] the celebrated clergyman here, seems to like me much. Well, well what? Nothing. Only—you are so good—and I am a morbid fool—that is all about it. But 'Mother' she knows best. I have served her through weal or woe. Thy will be done. Well. I have news of my lost brother—He is a great traveller, that is good. So you see the cloud is lifting slowly. My love to your Mother and Sister and to Mrs. Funkey.

With love,
Vivekananda

Two months later one of the choicest and most intimate letters Swamiji ever wrote was addressed to Christine, his letter in French of October 14. This has been published, as has still another letter to Christine of that period, dated August 28 and containing the well-remembered line: "When the dream is finished and we have left the stage, we will have a hearty laugh at all this—of this I am sure." The October 14 letter contains the famous passage: 'I have found the pearl for which I dived into the ocean of life.' If one compares the very careful handwriting of this letter (it is in the Boshi Sen collection) with the rapid scrawl of many others, one may conclude that Swamiji spent considerable effort on that letter to perfect the French, quite likely copying the final text from a carefully prepared first

draught. The reader is referred to my study of Swamiji's knowledge of the French language in *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1969 (p. 193). The tenderness and sense of intimacy in the numerous letters to Christine composed at this time show us a Swamiji not always apparent.

There is another unpublished letter in the Sen collection, written to Sara Bull, from which we learn something about Swamiji's thoughts and movements as he prepared to leave Paris and travel to the Near East. Dated October 22, 1900, it suggests that at the end of his Paris stay Swamiji resided at the home of Gerald Nobel, as he had done on his first night in the city two and a half months before.¹⁰ For the letter is headed, 66 Rue Ampère, Nobel's home. Mrs. Frances Leggett says in *Late and Soon* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968) that Nobel was always generous about meeting visitors to Paris and seeing them off. Also it was Nobel, a long-time resident of Paris, who had pushed the arrangements that made it possible for Swamiji to participate officially in the Congress of the History of Religions. What more considerate gesture could Swamiji have made than to stay with this kind person on his last day or two in the French capital?

In this letter Swamiji speaks clearly of his 'original plan' that his work should be international in character—the only time, as far as I know, that he mentioned this objective so outspokenly. Of course, he often visualized a desired interchange between East and West and he said in a letter to Alasinga Perumal, dated November 20, 1896, from London, that his interests were international and not Indian alone.

It is clear from the October 22, 1900, letter, as from others, that Swamiji expected to return to Europe from the Near East tour

and carry on his work. This was to be in English with an interpreter, as he was to declare later to Christine in yet a third (published) letter dated October 14, 'I have not the time anymore, or the power, to master a new language.'

What happened in the next month to make him change his mind we do not know. Burke has studied this question in her *Second Visit*, pages 752-755. But he need not have been anxious; the international work had already been started and would grow. Mother knew, as he said, 'how to work up my original plan.'

66, Rue Ampère
22nd Oc. 1900

Dear Mother,

I am sorry to learn you are not well. Hope you will soon be better. Things seem to turn out better for me.

Mr. Maxim of the gun fame is very much interested in me and he wants to put in his book on China and the Chinese something about my work in America. [This was done, although the book was not published until 1913. See *Second Visit*, page 685.] I have not any documents with me; if you have, kindly give them to him. He will come to see you and talk it over with you. Canon Hawes [Haweis] also keeps track of my work in England. So much about that. It may be that Mother will now work up my original plan—of international work—in that case you will find your work of the conference [sic] has not been in vain.

It seems that after this fall in my health physical and mental, it is going to open out that way—larger and more international work. Mother knows best.

My whole life has been divided into successive depressions and rises—and so I believe is the life of everyone. I am glad rather than not these falls come. I understand it all. Still, I suffer and grumble and rage!! Perhaps that is a part of the cause of the next upheaval.

I think you will be in America by the

¹⁰. Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1967, pp. 129-30.

time we return. If not I will see you in London again. Anyhow adieu for the present. We start day after tomorrow for Egypt etc. and all blessings ever be on you and yours—is as always my prayer.

Your son
Vivekananda

PS: To Margot my love and I am sure she will succeed. V.

As long as he was in Paris, Swamiji attended the exhibits of the Exposition conscientiously, as in Vienna, Istanbul, Athens, and Cairo, he was faithfully to 'do' the museums.

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The Exposition kept open a week beyond the announced closing, till Monday, November 12. The plaster buildings were already faded, and soon nearly everything would be broken down and carted away: the 'display of wood and rags and whitewashing—just as the whole world is.'¹¹

Swamiji escaped what he called this 'big affair' on Wednesday, October 24. With Emma Calvé, who paid his fare, Josephine MacLeod, Jules Bois, and Père Hyacinthe Loyson and his wife, he moved toward the Near East and ultimately home, on the luxury train the *Orient Express*.

In the final chapter of *Second Visit*, pages 741-755, Burke gives a summary of what happened during the days from October 24 to November 26, when Swamiji left Port Tewfick by steamer for India. Port Tewfick, or Tewfik, is the large docking area at the southern terminus of the Suez Canal, some five kilometres from the city of Suez. Ships frequently put in there before moving up the Canal, or after having come down that waterway before moving out into the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea. Passengers sometimes embarked or disembarked here. In Swamiji's time there was a daily train which left Cairo at 11:30 in the

morning and reached Suez at 18:30, a trip of 148 miles or some 250 kilometres. Swamiji spent from October 30 to about November 10 in Istanbul, from about November 11 to November 13 in and around Athens, and the rest of the time in Cairo and environs. I shall not duplicate the account of this month, but only add to it where research has revealed new facts.

A few years ago (October 11, 1959) the house organ of the French national rail system *La Vie du Rail* published a retrospective number on the *Orient Express* (plate 3). This confirms the interesting description of the train given on page 741 of *Second Visit*. From the magazine article we learn also that before the *Orient Express* was put in service in 1883, long trips in Europe by train were difficult, since passengers had to get down at the frontier of each nation and transfer to the interior service of that nation, on to the next border. But through using the *Orient Express* one could traverse the six countries from France to Turkey without getting down—a marvel for that age—although nationalism still asserted itself, as Swamiji has remarked, through the need to submit to formalities at every frontier (plate 4). By 1900 the journey from Paris to Istanbul took sixty-seven and a half hours. Since the distance was 3,185 kilometres, the train's average speed was about twenty-eight miles or forty-seven kilometres per hour.

The schedule was as follows :

Paris	dep. from Gare de l'Est	15h	14
Vienna	arrival next day	16h	00
Budapest	"	23h	05
Belgrade	" second day	8h	01
Sofia	"	19h	27
Istanbul	" third day	11h	00

The train went twice a week, arriving at the terminus on the third morning. The party which left on the 24th (with the exception of the Loysons who went straight through to Istanbul) halted at Vienna, where

11. *Com. Works*, VII, (1969), p. 381.

Swamiji went to the Schrönbrunn Palace to see the actual rooms where the poor Aiglou had lived and died. They caught the following *Orient Express* which left Vienna Sunday evening and arrived in Istanbul on Tuesday, October 30.¹²

We know a good deal about what Swamiji did during the ten or so days he stayed in Istanbul. It is to be believed that he had a good time there, for Istanbul is a city of rich historical interest. Also, Istanbul stands astride two continents—Asia and Europe—like Swamiji himself.

Volume III of the original four-volume *Life of Vivekananda*, published in 1915, summarizes Swamiji's activities in Istanbul. To this we may add the insights gained from entries in Père Hyacinthe Loyson's diary, published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1971, pp. 113-25. Emma Calvé in her autobiography and in some unpublished notes which I will present later, amplifies our knowledge of the Istanbul stay. And two unpublished postcards from Swamiji himself give further details.

'The Swami made his stay in Constantinople useful in various ways,' says the *Life*. 'Every centre of interest was visited; he saw the museum, the sarcophagi, the charming scenery from the top of the place where the daily gun was fired [Seraglio Point, crowned by the old palace of the sultans, on the European side of the entrance to the Bosphorus], the foreign quarters, and the old wall within whose compound was the dreadful jail.' These ancient fortifications must have impressed him, for on November 1 he sent a postcard (Sen collection) to Christine at 528 Congress Street, Detroit, picturing the old decayed fortress walls of Istanbul (plate 5). His message was: 'I am having good time here. I hope you also are having in Detroit. Yours Vivekananda.'

The *Life* tells of an exciting boat ride on the Bosphorus with Josephine MacLeod. They were bound for Scutari on the Asian side to pay a call on Père Hyacinthe (plate 7). It seems to have been a disquieting trip; there was too much wind, and the landing was made at the wrong place. In a description given by an American traveller of the same period (*John L. Stoddard's Lectures*, Boston, Balch Brothers Co., 1897) we obtain a first-hand picture of how it must have been.

Making our way to one of the boat stations on the shore we found a multitude of little barges crowded together like logs in a lumberman's boom.... A sail in one of them is quite exciting: first from their lightness, which permits the boatman to send them skimming over the water with exhilarating speed; and also from the fact that they possess no seats or benches, and one must sit on cushions in the bottom of the boat, as motionless as a Chinese idol. If not, a careless movement, or misstep, may give the tourist an impromptu bath among the fishes of the Bosphorus.

'They saw on their way [to Scutari],' the *Life* continues, 'the home of the Sufi monks, who were also healers of disease. Their method was to chant... by swaying backwards and forwards, then dance until they fell into a trance, and in that mystic state they would trample on the body of the diseased persons, and thus effect a cure.'

Whether on that day or another, it is clear that Swamiji saw a demonstration of whirling dervishes. He sent Nivedita a postcard showing dervishes, and Calvé in her autobiography gives a vivid description of their visit to a monastery where they witnessed a ritual of dervishes, ending with this:

I feel dizzy, my heart pounds, I sense a growing sickness, and my companions and I have but one idea, which is to escape as quickly as possible from that hallucinating sight.

¹². Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1971, p. 121.

The postcard sent to Nivedita (Sen collection) was dated 1 November and addressed to her at 29 Dover Street, Sesame, London. The card shows dervishes and local fish merchants (plate 8). On the postcard, below the illustration, Swamiji wrote :

Dear Margo, the blessings of the howling dervishes go with you. Yours in the Lord, Vivekananda. P. S. All love to Mrs.. Bull. V.

The *Life* states that on the day when they made the perilous boat crossing of the Bosphorus 'he had his meal in the Scutari cemetery, no better place being found.' The great Mohammedan cemetery is situated at Scutari, but I had always been puzzled by this particular decision until I read, again in the travel book by Stoddard, the following enlightening explanation:

Moslem cemeteries are almost invariably shaded by a grove of cypress trees. It was the custom of the Turks when they first came to the Bosphorus, to plant beside each new-made grave a cypress tree. To some extent this admirable custom still prevails. Hence many of their cemeteries, especially in the Asiatic suburb of Scutari, are veritable forests, miles in length, which spread above the dead a canopy of leaves. These, to the Turks, are favourite places for promenades, and even picnics; and on a pleasant day one may see hundreds of them here, walking about beneath the trees as if in a vast cathedral.

The diary of Père Hyacinthe records the fact that on Friday, November 2, he, with Swamiji, Emma Calvé and Jules Bois, attended the selamlik, a weekly Moslem prayer service led by the Sultan. In her autobiography Calvé records the event as having been impressive: massed troops outside the mosque and a big crowd. 'From his carriage the Sultan rises to respond to the cheers of the people. He is not at all handsome, with his anxious face, pallid, his nose like an eagle's beak. He enters the mosque, comes out ten minutes after, sur-

rounded by his ministers, and hastens to his carriage with frightened eyes.'

This was Abdul Hamid II, the last supreme ruler of the Ottoman Empire, who was deposed in 1909. A despot, he had a pathological fear of assassination, so much so in fact that it is not at all sure that the person Swamiji saw was actually the Sultan. Abdul Hamid often sent to the selamlik a substitute whose likeness to his own was uncanny.

Later that same day¹³ Swamiji gave a lecture in the chapel of the American College for Girls at Scutari. Further research at Istanbul and at Millau in southern France, Emma Calvé's home base during her adult life, throws more light on this incident.

The American College for Girls was absorbed by Robert College, and the campus at Scutari abandoned in 1914, when the institution moved to the European side of the Bosphorus, at Bedek. The photograph published in connection with 'Swami Vivekananda and Père Hyacinthe Loyson', *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1971, page 119, shows the newer campus, never visited by Swamiji. Through the help of Herbert H. Lane, Alumni Secretary of Robert College, I have now succeeded in obtaining a photo of the building on the Scutari campus—Barton Hall—which contained the school's assembly hall (plate 9), and a photo of the hall, or chapel, itself. These were first published in the spring, 1964, *Alumni Bulletin* of the Istanbul American Colleges. It is undoubtedly here that Swamiji gave his talk on November 2. Barton Hall burned down in 1905.

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By the late 1920's the Nobel Prize winning French author Romain Rolland had become intensely interested in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Several

¹³. Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1971, p. 124.

visits from Dhan Gopal Mukerji, whose *The Face of Silence* had already appeared, and who offered to help Rolland find source material, galvanized Rolland into action. As we know, publication of his books *La Vie de Ramakrishna* and *La Vie de Vivekananda*, appearing in 1929, was the outcome.

One of Rolland's most useful sources of information was Josephine MacLeod, who visited the author frequently at his home in Villeneuve in Switzerland in 1927. He encouraged her to recount everything she knew about Swamiji for eventual use in his books.

Rolland set down resumés of these conversations with Josephine MacLeod in his diary. These entries, along with a great many more on Indian subjects recorded by the author between 1915 and 1943 were brought out in published form in *Inde* (Paris : Editions Albin Michel; 1960) in the original French. Those sections which pertain to Swamiji in the Near East are appropriate for consideration here.

An entry in Rolland's journal related to our present study appears on page 201, set down in 1927:

It is deplorable that on his visit to France in 1900 he didn't meet any really first-class representative of French intellectuality and religious feeling. The people who monopolized him were Jules Bois, Père Hyacinthe, and Emma Calvé. (Despite the fact that Miss MacLeod makes an exception for her, who showed herself sincerely touched by the thought of Vivekananda and paid for him most of the costs of his sojourn in Europe and his return to India from Egypt, where Miss MacLeod visited with him the Great Pyramid.) I find it absurd that Vivekananda should have got that kind of an idea of France.

Rolland allowed himself to publish this thought, somewhat recast, in the text of *La Vie de Vivekananda*:

It is too bad that an observer of the moral life of the Occident as acute as he was, seems to have had in Paris as guides and daily examples of the French character nobody but Père Hyacinthe and Jules Bois.

Bois, Père Hyacinthe Loyson and his American wife, and Emma Calvé, he characterized in a footnote a little farther on in the book as an 'odd retinue for a sannyasin, who had withdrawn far from the world and from life! Perhaps it was his detachment itself that made him more indulgent, or more indifferent.'

From his own point of view, Rolland's criticisms are no doubt justified. And yet we are faced with the fact that Swamiji lodged with Bois for several weeks, during which he wrote in his letter to Christine of October 14, 'we have many great ideas in common and feel happy together.' He shared a compartment with Bois on the *Oriental Express*, mixed with him in Istanbul, sent him through Josephine MacLeod in a letter to her dated December 26, 1900 'all love to dear Jules Bois', and entertained him at Belur Math in 1901.

Swamiji's genuine love for the pitiful Loyson was expressed in his 'Memoirs of European Travel' and testified to by Loyson himself in his diaries.

As for Calvé, although he was surely aware of the tempestuous life she led, Swamiji spoke of her (November 26, 1900) as a 'good lady' and offered her his 'everlasting gratitude and good wishes'. Only six weeks before he died he took the time to write Calvé a beautiful letter of condolence on the death of her father.¹⁴

But we have sufficient knowledge of what a holy man is, to understand behaviour that Rolland found disturbing. Writers of hagiography would wish away or suppress inconvenient facts, as likely to be misunder-

14. Vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1974, pp. 94-95

stood, likely to mislead the faithful. Scribes and Pharisees are appalled at Christ's eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. But those who know what spirituality is, see such as evidences of equal-mindedness. 'Now I am going to be truly Vivekananda. . . . I was Jesus and I was Judas Iscariot; both my play, my fun.' (Swamiji to Mary Hale, March 28, 1900.) That is how a holy man thinks and acts.

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The subject of Jules Bois (plate 10) has been dealt with in the *Second Visit*, pages 700-706. Burke pictures Bois, as the detailed studies I have made on the writer's life and actions prove him to have been, an uncomfortable character. But I shall add to this published treatment only such additional facts on Bois from my researches in France that are of primary interest.

We see Swamiji happily settled in the writer's Paris apartment in September and October of 1900. But where that apartment was, no one ever knew. I set out to try to find its location.

From the epilogue of Bois' *Visions de l'Inde* (Bois' somewhat imaginative travel book on his 1901 visit to India) one learns that this lodging was located on the Rue Gazan (plate 11). Both Swamiji and Bois spoke of it as facing a park. I found in a Paris directory of 1900, preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Bois' residence listed as 19 Rue Gazan. Rue Gazan runs alongside the Park Montsouris. It seemed clear thus that a correct identification at least of the building in which Bois had stayed and had entertained Swamiji would be easy to make.

The Rue Gazan is at the very southern extremity of Paris, close, in 1900, to an old series of city fortifications; close, today, to the Cité Universitaire, built on land freed when those fortifications were razed.

Picture postcards dating from the turn of the century show that at the time when

Swamiji and his host gazed down upon it, the Park Montsouris looked very much as it looks today. In the epilogue of *Visions de l'Inde* Bois referred to the 'little Switzerland' (plate 12) in the park visible from the flat. This arrangement is still there—an artificial waterfall falling from a miniature crag, forming a small lake.

The opposite side of the Rue Gazan is lined with apartment buildings, mostly constructed recently. Going to number 19, I found a large apartment house with the name of the architect and the date of construction engraved above the entrance: A. Delforge, Architecte, 1908. This was a disappointing discovery. I concluded that the building where Bois and Swamiji had stayed had been demolished shortly after they had lived there and had been replaced by this newer structure.

But I reasoned that some reference to, or perhaps even a photograph of, the former building might exist at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, and I went there to investigate. To my surprise, I discovered that the existing structure at 19 Rue Gazan is the first building to have been erected on that plot of ground. In 1900 the site was vacant.

The mystery of how this could be was cleared up when I discovered that in 1904 there had been a renumbering on the Rue Gazan. What in 1900 had been 19 had become after 1904 and is to this day, number 39.

At 39 Rue Gazan I found a large apartment building dating, I guessed, from the turn of the century. My hopes rose once again that we should, after all, find the flat described so pleasantly by Swamiji in his letter of September 1 to Swami Turiyananda:

...has his room filled with books, and lives in a flat on the fifth floor. And as there are no lifts in this country, as in America, one has to climb up and down.

... There is a beautiful public park round the house.

I made contact with the present owner of 39 Rue Gazan, a M. Derin. He said that the building had been constructed in 1897 by a M. Daveau, from whose widow he had bought it around 1940. M. Derin had heard that Jules Bois had once lived in his building—or rather, that the writer Joris-Karl Huysmans (whose name is much better known than that of Bois) had sometimes visited Bois there. M. Derin referred me to a resident of the building, a M. Coudray, who had lived there ever since the building had been constructed. M. Coudray might be able to provide additional facts.

M. Coudray proved to be a quiet elderly man who lives with his sister in the ground-floor apartment. His family had moved into the building upon its completion, and he had continued to live there, in the very same flat, ever since. In 1900 he had been ten years old. M. Coudray said that he could not recall ever having seen Jules Bois—and he had no recollection of anybody that could have been Swami Vivekananda—but he remembered clearly the day that Bois moved out of the building, probably in 1901 or 1902, because of the astonishing number of books Bois had had. They had been brought down and placed in the hall outside the door of the Coudray apartment, pending the arrival of the mover.

Swami Vivekananda wrote to Swami Turiyananda that the apartment was on the fifth floor; Bois referred in an article he contributed to the *Forum* magazine in 1927 to the balcony from which he and the Swami viewed the Park Montsouris. There are two apartments on the fifth floor of 39 Rue Gazan, each with a balcony facing the Park. Each has a living room, a dining room, and kitchen, and a bathroom. The one to the north has three bedrooms, that to the south, two bedrooms. How to determine which of the two apartments was the one leased to Bois? Concerning this, M.

Coudray could not help me; but he referred me to the daughter of M. Daveau, the original owner, a Mme. Lasserre.

Mme. Lasserre, evidently quite aged, lives in Nimes in the south of France. In answer to my letter she wrote that all she knows is that Bois was the first to occupy whichever apartment it was that he occupied, upon completion of the building by her father; but precisely which flat that had been, she could not say.

And so the trail has stopped there. I have not positively identified the flat in which Swamiji stayed with Bois, but I have narrowed the possibilities down to two.

The occupants of both the fifth-floor apartments at 39 Rue Gazan, intrigued by our search, invited me to photograph the interiors. And this I did. I have photographs of the living and dining rooms, which face the Park Montsouris, of both apartments, and of the Park itself from the balcony of each.

I kept hoping that some clue might present itself that would make identification sure. If only one were equipped with a spiritual Geiger counter, as Sri Chaitanya had been, which allowed him to discover the lost sites of Sri Krishna's lila at Vrindaban! But I found nothing to distinguish the one apartment from the other, except their size. I reason that a single man like Bois would have rented the smaller of the two, the flat toward the south. This two-bedroom flat is now occupied by a young philosophy professor of the University of Vincennes, M. François Regnault.

Swamiji mentioned that there was no elevator. It is the same today at 39 Rue Gazan. To reach the fifth floor one still has to walk up.

In trying to determine when and where Jules Bois was born, I was confronted with astonishing discrepancies. Each encyclopaedia and biographical dictionary consulted gave something different. But the obituary of Bois, published in the *New York*

Times, July 3, 1943, stated that the writer was an officer of the Legion of Honour. Inquiries at the Grande Chancellerie of the Legion of Honour in Paris showed that indeed he had been made a chevalier of that body in 1906. The Legion of Honour's dossier relating to Bois, whose data must be presumed to be accurate, gives Bois, as having been born in Marseilles on September 28, 1868. He was the son of a wholesale merchant. His mother was of Spanish origin. His father was forty-eight and his mother forty at the time of his birth.

Bois was in Paris by his early twenties, and the stream of writings on occult subjects which he authored began in 1884. His obituary spoke of his having written forty books.

A picture we have of Bois taken in the early 1900's shows a stoutish looking man, wearing the sombre clothes of the period. His forehead is high, his eyes full of inquiry. The expression of his mouth is obscured by a dark moustache and beard. In 1900 Emma Calvé set down her impression of him, in some unpublished travel notes which we shall examine presently :

He's a nice fellow, sweet, good, obliging, with whom one feels at ease. He's very feminine, a bit like a girl friend in trousers. Much loved by the men and the women of our party.

Bois went to America to live in 1915, where he stayed the rest of his life. An interesting account of his life in America can be read in *Life and the Dream* by Mary Colum (New York : Doubleday, 1947). Mary Colum was an eminent literary critic and the wife of the Irish-American poet Padraic Colum. She and her husband knew Bois intimately for years. Mrs. Colum says that Bois never really adjusted to the

New World, never learned to speak or write English well, and never made any stir there in literary circles. He seemed always a disappointed outsider. Having returned to his Catholic faith, he was critical of Hindu thought.

Through all this, however, Jules Bois seems to have guarded in his heart some devotion towards the guest whom he housed so agreeably on Rue Gazan. In 1925 he contributed an ode ('To A Sage') on Vivekananda to *Prabuddha Bharata* (March, p. 97), in which occur the appellations 'brother' and 'master' and which concludes : 'Hail to You ! My thanks !' In 1936 Bois participated in a celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary organized by the Vedanta Society of New York. The occasion was a banquet held on March 15 at the Ceylon-India Inn. Swami Bodhananda, a disciple of Vivekananda, and Swami Akhilananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, were present, together with about fifty or sixty guests. A photograph was taken on that occasion, showing Bois seated between the two swamis. The beard and moustache are now smaller, the forehead higher due to receding hair, the eyes still inquiring, but kindly. Bois gave a talk about Vivekananda at the banquet, and it is remembered that he spoke feelingly about the Swami. Swami Pavitrana, the present head of the Vedanta Society, says that he understands that Bois in his later years was very close to Swami Bodhananda.

Jules Bois died in Manhattan. His funeral was held on July 6, 1943, at the Corpus Christi Catholic Church, 529 W. 121st Street. His body was interred in the Roman Catholic Calvary Cemetery in Queens. His tomb, located in the 'New' Calvary cemetery, Section 55, range 6, plot P, grave 4, remains unmarked to this day.

(To be concluded)