IMPACT AND ASSESSMENT

One can saw the seed, not the tree. The seed sprouts and turns into a sapling. The sapling grows and becomes a plant. The plant matures and becomes a tree. Each stage constitutes a part of the process of growth. Growth is a matter of time. New ideas take root in the minds of men quite slowly and gradually. The message of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (in Asia Minor) was understood long after he was banished from Athens. Zen Buddhism which originated in the 6th Century B.C. has evoked the admiration of the West only in recent times. The first communist upsurge took place half a century after the publication of Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*. The ideas of Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More and John Colet took a few decades to percolate through the Christian minds before the "Counter Reformation" in the Catholic Church could take place. It took the world more than two thousand years to discard the theologian and return to "the socratic tradition of the philosopher" for getting rational answers to man's queries about God, immortality and the nature of the Universe. Swami Vivekananda's impact may be studied in the light of this historical perspective. Truth is a corrosive substance of Infinite power, said the Swami. "It burns its way in whatever it finds— in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must".

1. Greek philosopher (C.500-428 B.C.)
2. Dutch scholar, theologian and writer (1466-1536).
3. English humanist, statesman and author (1478-1535).
4. English clergyman (1467-1519).
At the time of Swami Vivekananda's visit, the West writhed under the pangs of spiritual hunger. The hegemony of the Church was not being ubiquitously accepted. Moreover, it was "riddled with bigotry and intolerance, sectarianism and denominational exclusiveness". As O.P. Deldoc pointed out in an Open letter to Swami Vivekananda: "Your religion for thousands of years has been one of mercy and love, of humility and truth, of science, logic and law. Ours is one of bigotry, persecution, war, blood and hatred. One of fable and fallacy. Of fraud and hypocrisy....(The Hindus) worship idols in silver and gold. (The Christian) idolaters worship at the shrine of Venus and Bacchus.... Our clergymen are not all saints; they too frequently "fall from grace", but when they lose caste here they can be utilized in foreign missionary service". "Where shall we look for help in this our time of need?" asked Deldoc. "We hopefully turn with anxious eyes to the orient... where the star of Bethlehem arose and where God's bright sunlight ever dawns".

It would be interesting to study the dilemmas faced by Christianity in the 19th Century. Or else, how would one interpret the morbid craze of the West for Oriental thought? When Rene Descartes introduced the method of systematic doubt in metaphysics it revolutionised the mind of the West. Nothing was to be believed until it could be proved. By proof was meant "not mere empirical evidence or commonsense assurance, but rational and incontrovertible demonstration".

7. French philosopher and mathematician (1596-1650).
Broadly speaking, there were three main factors which eroded the foundation of all Christian denominations: the challenge of science which effaced its cosmology; the challenge of philosophy which expunged its anthropology and soteriology and the schism within, which upset the applecart of its ecumenical unity.

The Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) was the first to undermine the church's story of the creation of the world by God. His theory of the Earth's revolution round the Sun and its diurnal rotation upon its own axis signalled the beginning of a break with the geocentric theory originated by Ptolemy and the religious views founded thereon of the special favour bestowed upon the Earth by God and man's privileged position in the Universe. The German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) worked out "a mathematical proof of copernican findings". The Italian physicist Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) used a telescope to prove that the cosmos was not Ptolemaic but Copernican. He thereby invoked the wrath of Christian orthodoxy and was forced to renounce his theories under the threat of torture. Another Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was imprisoned for eight years and later burnt at the stake by the Inquisition in Rome because he strove to give concrete shape to the physical and astronomical aspects of the Copernican theory. Michael Servetus

11. Ibid., p.145.
(1509-53), a French scientist became another victim of the Church orthodoxy and was burnt along with his books.

The most scathing challenge to Christianity came in the 19th Century when scientific researches demolished the anthropocentric view of man so ardently cherished by the western world. Sir Charles Lyell's (1797-1875) geological researches proved incompatible with the Biblical theory of creation. The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* in 1871 posed new dilemmas to the Western world "since the principle of evolution seemed to shatter all the Christian ideas of the origin as well as of the nature of man, of his special relationship to God, of his spiritual destiny, of Sin and therefore of redemption".

Contrary to the view of *The First Book of Moses* commonly called Genesis that the Heaven, the Earth and all living beings were created in six days, Darwin delineated the historical development of the world 'extending over millions of years'.

Genesis said that each species of plant and animal life was created by the will of God. Darwin, however, proved that "the more complex species evolved from the simpler through a process of natural selection". Genesis said that man was anthropomorphised in the image of God and given domination "over every living thing that moveth upon the earth". But Darwin traced...

14. Huxley and others (eds.) p.95.
15. The Holy Bible, Genesis, Chapter 2/1.
16. Ibid., Genesis, Chapter 1/11, 12, 21, 24, 25.
the anthropogeny of man to "a species of the most highly
developed extinct bipedal ground apes". Contemporaries desc-
ribed the theory of evolution as a bomb thrown by the great
scientist into the camp of the clericals'. Approximately at
the same time the French anthropologist Paul Broca (1824-80)
published his treatise on the comparative anatomy of the
primates and anthropogenesis and offered a scientific expla-
nation of the origin of man from animal ancestors. The
renowned English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) not
only corroborated the evolutionary theory of Darwin but
extended its purport to the domain of sociology. In 1874 John
W. Draper published his famous book *Warfare of Science and
Religion* in which he showed how the new generation was out to

20. Darwin was well aware of the anti religious significance
of his work on anthropogenesis, for in 1860 he wrote that
although all people had the right to believe in the cre-
ation of man as a special miracle he could see no need for
it and thought it dishonest to conceal his opinion. Ten
years later, in 1870, he said in a private letter that the
book he was publishing that autumn dealt in part with man
and he was sure many people would condemn it as irreligious.
*Origin of Species*, Tennyson anticipated in his book *In
Memoriam* 'the poignancy of the struggle between faith and
science that convulsed the following era'. Trevelyan, G.M.,
*Illustrated English Social History*, Vol. 4, p. 199. Controv-
ersy raged over the book for many years. In a meeting with
Bishop Wilberforce at Oxford in 1864 Disraeli quipped:
"The question is this: Is man an ape or an angel? My Lord,
I am on the side of the angels". But as T. L. Jarman remarks:
"Neither Disraeli nor Bishop Wilberforce could hold up the
22. Blake, p. 496.
discard the decrepit theories of the Bible. Colonel Bob Ingersoll lashed at Christianity in "The Mistakes of Moses" and in his public lectures which he delivered in America during the seventies of the 19th Century. Some Christian scholars like John Fiske made futile attempts to reconcile Darwinism with Genesis. In *The Idea of God as Affected by Modern Knowledge* published in 1886 Fiske "identified God with the great creative force behind the whole evolutionary process". Such was the impact of the new theory that the famous American clergyman Henry Ward Beecher resigned from his local Congregational Association and described himself as "a cordial Christian evolutionist".

More formidable than the discoveries of science was the challenge of rationalism to Christianity. The archaeological and historical findings in the second half of the 19th Century strengthened "the hands of science in the strife against orthodox beliefs". The famous British historian Henry Thomas Buckle criticised the theological interpretation of history in his work *History of Civilisation in England* published in 1857. Following Comte, he argued that intellectual rather than religious advancement was the concomitant of historical development. Buckle's work was followed by Lecky's *History of Rationalism* published in 1865 which revealed the alarming extent to which the people were becoming averse to religion.

In England, a successful attempt was made by some liberal

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23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p.497.
25. Ibid.
27. Trevelyan, p.200.
academicians to free Oxford and Cambridge from the bondage of Church monopoly. As an English historian remarked the intellectuals were becoming more and more anticlerical, anti-religious and materialistic "under the stress of conflict". Some scholars had come to believe that Christianity lacked an intellectual basis. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, not merely pointed out the fallacies of The Old Testament like Spinoza, but flung arrows at The New Testament as well. The young hegelians of the 1830's and 1840's mordantly attacked the Gospel and abhorred the attempts to apotheosise Jesus Christ. David F. Strauss argued in Das Leben Jesu (1835) that Jesus was not a messiah but an ordinary human being whose spiritual entity could be interpreted only as a myth. Bruno Baur described "the Gospel dogmas as deliberate inventions and the person of Jesus as fiction". Americans who went to German Universities for theological studies returned iconoclasts. It was denied that "the first five books of the Old Testament had been written by Moses or by any other one man. Internal evidence was held to prove that the Pentateuch was a composite of passages written by different authors at widely different times—usually many centuries after the events which they related. The story of the flood and Noah's ark was explained as a borrowing from Mesopotamian literature, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became folk heroes standing for certain collective experiences, similarly radical scrutiny.

28. Ibid., pp. 201-2.
29. Ibid., p. 199.
30. German Protestant theologian and philosopher (1768-1834).
31. Huxley and others (eds.), p. 93.
'Higher criticism' as the new scholarship was called, caused controversy fully as acrimonious as that about evolution. The Schism in the Church beginning in the period of the Reformation went unabated through the 19th Century and gave rise to multifarious religious denominations which differed from one another in dogmatic or canonical principles. "We are little better than a lot of split peas", exclaimed an American Presbyterian. "If there were in Milton's day 'subdichotomies of petty schisms' wonder what phrase that great master of vivid expression would coin to fit the numberless divisions and subdivisions into which protestantism has fallen subtraction. The American government census of Churches held in 1890 made some startling revelations. For example, "Presbyterian Church in the United States" was found different from "Presbyterian Church in the United States of America". Reformed Church in the United States held a separate entity from "Reformed Church in the United States of America". The Catholics were split into seven bodies, namely, the Roman Catholic, The United Greek Catholic, the Russian Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian, the Old Catholic and the Reformed Catholic. Besides them there were 136 denominations in the United States besides 150 or more congregations which were independent or unassociated with any Church. Of the 136 separate denominational bodies six were Adventist, thirteen Baptist, three (River) Brethren, four (Plymouth) Brethren, two Christian connection, nine communistic,

33. Blake, p.497.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
four Dunkard, four Quaker, two Jewish, two Mormon, sixteen Lutheran, twelve Mennonite, seventeen Methodist, twelve Presbyterian, two Episcopalian, two Reformed, and two United Brethren, with twenty three single denominations, such as the congregationalists, Moravians, Disciples of Christ, Christadelphians, Christian Scientists, and salvation army.

Leon Landsberg who later became Swami Kripananda ruefully remarked, though in a hyperbolic tone, that the United States had become the hot-bed of all kinds of religious and irreligious monstrosities that ever sprang from a human brain. There was no theory "so absurd", no doctrine "so irrational", no claim "so extravagant" no fraud "so transparent" which could not find "a ready market in America". "This morbid craving for the abnormal, the occult, the sensational", he wrote, "has at the end of this nineteenth century of the Christian era practically brought about a revival of the Middle Ages. To satisfy this craving, long forgotten superstitions, of the past have been ransacked, Nostradamus, Agrippa, Paracelsus, Cagliostro, and all the cranks and conscious or un-conscious impostors that ever contributed to retard human evolution, have been unearthed and dressed up in modern fashion, and hundreds of societies and sects have been given birth to, to feed the credulity of the people and, in turn, draw support therefrom. The whole atmosphere is here in some places filled with hobgoblins, spooks and mahatmas.... In this bedlam of religious cranks of all shades and colour, in this devil's

37. Ibid., p.693.
38. The Brahmavadin, February 15, 1896.
kitchen of fraud, imposture and knavery, the Swami appeared to teach the lofty religion of the Vedas”.

It may, however, be pointed out that the flow of Hindu thought in the West did not commence with Swami Vivekananda. He only quickened the process already begun. When the British scholars such as Sir William Jones, John Zephaniah Holwell, and others...

39. Ibid. Swami Vivekananda was not happy over the publication of Kripananda’s letter in The Brahmavadin because it smacked of a hypercritical approach. To Alasinga he wrote (March 1896): "A letter you published from Kripananda in the Brahmavadin was rather unfortunate. Kripananda is smarting under the blows the Christians have given him and that sort of letter is vulgar, pitching into everybody. It is not in accord with the tone of the Brahmavadin. So in future when Kripananda writes, tone down everything that is an attack upon any sect, however cranky or crude. Nothing which is against any sect, good or bad should get into The Brahmavadin”. The Complete Works, Vol. VII, p. 487.

40. A renowned British Orientalist and Jurist (1746-94) who was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court in Calcutta in 1783. He founded the Bengal Asiatic Society in 1784 and remained its President till his death. He studied Sanskrit so well that he rendered Kalidas’s Sakuntala into English in 1789. After five years he published the English version of Manusamhita under the title "Institutes of Hindu Law". His other works include translations of Hitopadesha and Gita Govinda, Grammar of Persian Language, The Muhammadan Law of Succession and the Muhammadan Law of Inheritance. In the words of S. Bhattacharya, he was “one of the earliest of the Anglo Indians who learnt Sanskrit and rendered the language and literature of the ancient Hindus accessible to European scholars and thus practically started the study of comparative philology. A Dictionary of Indian History, p. 498.

41. Born at Dublin, Holwell (1711-98) had a highly contentious career, "becoming Zamidar of Calcutta, being incarcerated in the Black Hole, and eventually succeeding to the governorship of Bengal for a brief period in 1760 before he left India". He did not know Sanskrit but had good knowledge of some other Asian languages. In 1765 he published the first part of a work largely concerned with Hinduism and gave it the rambling title of Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan. As also the Mythology and Cosmogony, Facts and Festivals of the Gentoes, followers of the Shastah and a Dissertation on the Metempsychosis, commonly though erroneously called the Pythagorean doctrine. In 1767 & 1771 he published two more parts of this work. Holwell was translated into German in 1767 and into French in 1768. Marshall, P.J., The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century, pp. 5-8/
A famous linguist and oriental scholar who came to India in 1771 to serve as a Writer in the East India Company of Bengal. He is known for preparing "Hindu Law" under the patronage of Warren Hastings. The work was an English rendering of a Persian translation of a Sanskrit version of Hindu laws prepared by ten pundits. Bhattacharya, p.403.

Another English man who served under Warren Hastings. He was a great scholar of Sanskrit and Persian and translated the Bhagvad-gita into English.

Moore, Adrienne, Rammohan Roy and America. Author's foreword.

It was Ralph W. Emerson (1803-82), the chief protagonist of Transcendentalism who is said to have introduced Hindu thought in America. "His attack on historical Christianity symbolized...

42. A famous linguist and oriental scholar who came to India in 1771 to serve as a Writer in the East India Company of Bengal. He is known for preparing "Hindu Law" under the patronage of Warren Hastings. The work was an English rendering of a Persian translation of a Sanskrit version of Hindu laws prepared by ten pundits. Bhattacharya, p.403.

43. Another English man who served under Warren Hastings. He was a great scholar of Sanskrit and Persian and translated the Bhagvad-gita into English.

44. Moore, Adrienne, Rammohan Roy and America, Author's foreword.

45. Ibid.

46. Moore was of the view that Emerson owed his knowledge of oriental philosophy to the works of Raja Rammohan Roy. Ibid.
his distrust of tradition in any form, especially when it failed to conform to the reality of human experience. Against traditional religion he therefore advocated intuition; against formal theology he recognised the authenticity of individual relationship between man and God. If religion meant only Sunday Congregations, it was not true religion unless it permeated our lives from day to day. From 1830 onwards references to Hindu religious texts began to appear in Emerson's *Journal*. His essays "The Over Soul" and "New England Reformers" tacitly revealed his debt to Hindu thought. His lecture at the University of Harvard in 1838 showed that he professed faith in the essential divinity of human nature—a doctrine which forms the kernel of Vedanta. His famous poem "The Brahma" suggested a close parallelism to the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Emerson hoped to see the day when the sluggard intellect of America would "look from under its iron...

48. Ibid., pp.157-77.
49. Ibid., p.392.
51. The poem which delineates the Hindu concept of Soul reads as under:

"If the red slayer think he slays, or if the slain think he is slain, They know not well the subtle ways I keep, and pass, and turn again. Far or forgot to me is near; Shadow and sunlight are the same; The Vanished gods to me appear; And one to me are shame and fame. They reckon ill who leave me out; when me they fly, I am the wings; I am the doubter and the doubt, And I the hymn the Brahmin sings."

-Emerson, Introduction.
lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. In his Journal he boldly observed: "The religion that is afraid of science dishonours God and commits suicide". Though Emerson cannot be classed with indologists such as H.H.Wilson, Johann Hanxleden or William Dwight Whitney he nevertheless influenced the "New Thought Movement" and Mary Baker Eddy's "Christian Science" in America whose roots could be traced to the Hindu philosophy. Henry David Thoreau(1817-62) who was Emerson's neighbour for twenty years glorified Oriental philosophy in unequivocal terms. He, too, belonged to the school of transcendentalists and eulogised Indian philosophical works especially the Bhagavad-gita in "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers". "I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonic philosophy of the Upanishadas and the Bhagavad-gita", he wrote, "in comparison with which our modern world and literature seem puny and trivial. Thoreau exhorted his countrymen to widen their mental horizon. In Walden he wrote: "The Universe is wider than our views of it.... It would be a nobler game to shoot one's self-

Direct your eye right inward and you 'll find
A thousand regions in your mind
Yet undiscovered".

Thoreau wanted to write a "Joint Bible" which would blend the gems of all Oriental scriptures. It is not certain whether the

52. Blake, p.324.
53. Emerson, Introduction.
54. One of the greatest orientalists of 19th Century(1786-1860) He translated the Rig-Veda into English and wrote profusely on Indian History, numismatics, music, drama and law.
55. German Jesuit priest(1699-1732) who wrote the first Sanskrit grammar in Latin. It was not printed.
56. An American scholar(1827-94) who wrote treatises on the Atharva-Veda, philology and Sanskrit grammar.
57. Nikhilananda, Swami, p.133.
American Oriental Society formed in 1842 was inspired in any way from Thoreau's motto *Ex Oriente Lux*—"Light from the East".

Walt Whitman, a contemporary of the Concord philosophers, who died a year before Swami Vivekananda's visit was described by the latter as "the Sannyasin of America". Though there is no reliable evidence to prove that he was directly influenced by Hindu thought, it appears that his ideas were quite akin to "Vedantic idealism". His famous work "Leaves of Grass" was described by Emerson as "a mixture of Bhagavad-gita and the New York Herald". His other two works "Passage of India" and "A backward glance O'er Travel'd Roads" seemed to reveal his passion for indology.

The Schopenhauer of 19th Century America was the famous poet Edgar Allan Poe(1809-49) whose *Eureka* published in 1848 was inspired by the Upanishadas. Perhaps alluding to the Hindu concept of *Maya* he wrote:

"All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream".

The life and teachings of Gautama Buddha were introduced to Americans by Bronson Alcott(1799-1888) who was instrumental in the publication of an American edition of Sir Edwin Arnold's famous book *The Light of Asia*.

59. Nikhilananda, Swami, p.133.
60. His Eastern and Western Disciples, p.531.
61/ Holland, p.65.
63. The sacred books of Buddhism had been introduced to the Western world by the indefatigable zeal and industry of scholars such as Burnouf, Hodgson, Bigandet, Buhler, Poucaux, Senart, Weber, Fausboll, Alexander Osma, Wassiljew, Rhy Davids, P. Max Muller, Childress, Oldenberg, Schiefner, Eitel, Beal, and Spence Hardy. In 1895, Paul Carus published his famous book *The Gospel of Buddha—according to old records* from Chicago. In the Preface he remarked: "A comparison of the many striking agreements between Christianity and Buddhism may prove fatal to a sectarian conception of Christianity, but will in the end only help to mature our insight into the essential nature of Christianity."
Swami Vivekananda's biographers hold that the infiltration of Hindu thought in the West had prepared the ground for his work. The implication is that the Swami's sojourns might not have left any lasting impact if there had been no Emerson, Thoreau or Whitman. This is not true. No doubt some interest in Hindu thought was generated but it had remained confined to a small section of society. The people were impressed by indologists but not converted to their viewpoint. The Transcendentalists constituted a tip of the iceberg of American population. Emerson sought inspiration from Hindu scriptures but he never exhorted anyone to drink from the spiritual fountain of the East which had given him ecstatic delight and metamorphosed his mind. It is sometime alleged that he never studied any scripture in original but satisfied himself with animating apothegms and anecdotes. If that was true how could he be competent enough to impart the wisdom of the orient to the West? Or should one say that he concealed his oriental disposition in a western garb or that his Vedantic leanings masqueraded in the guise of Transcendentalism?

Thoreau in whom the individualism of the Transcendentalist movement reached its most intense and uncompromising form did not wield much influence during his lifetime. His first book 'A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers' (1849) was received coldly by the public and sold so poorly that Walden—one of

64. Rev. Professor David Swing put the argument in a different way. "An Emerson club is a valuable thing", he said, "but it has not the dimensions of a great nation. A curious science and art may weave a fabric out of a spider's web or spun glass, but what a poor, small art!— capable of making a veil for a princess, but not capable of weaving the clothing for a race". "Building a great religion" in Houghton(Ed.), p. 978.
the finest books of the 19th Century—remained unpublished for five years. Walt Whitman whom Romain Rolland gave the credit for preparing the ground for Swami Vivekananda admitted at the same time that "This Homer of 'En-masse' did not succeed in conquering the masses. The annunciator of the great destinies of Democracy in America died misunderstood and almost unnoticed by the Democrats of the New World. The singer of the 'Divine Average' was only loved and revered by a small group of chosen artists and exceptional men—and perhaps more in England than in the United States?. One may thus refute Romain Rolland's view that America was "more ready than any in the West to receive Vivekananda".

Swami Vivekananda's impact on the West may be studied in the light of four propositions. Prior to his visit Hindu philosophy had poured in the West in drops and not in draughts—and that too in a Westernised way; Hinduism had been grossly misinterpreted and distorted by some Christian missionaries. It evoked interest not admiration; the knowledge of Hindu scriptures had remained confined to intellectuals and did not filter down to the masses; Hindu influence could be traced on some religious bodies in the West but there was no Hindu organisation as such.

Swami Vivekananda was not the first Indian to sojourn the West and receive ovations there. Eminent persons such as Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Keshab Chander Sen and P.C.Mosoomdar had attempted to introduce the light of the East into Western nations.

65. Rolland, pp.67-68.  
66. Ibid.
but they exhibited "a tendency more akin to Christian thought". Whatever influence they wielded evaporated with their departure. None of them left an organisation to keep the torch of their gospel burning!

Swami Vivekananda was the most prominent among those who dispelled the myth of Christian superiority over other religions. It was widely felt that heathendom was not simply a conglomeration of degraded and corrupt superstition and must not be judged by its idolatry and cruel rites any more than apple trees should be judged by their worst fruit. "The proud Churchman of Anglican or Roman garb and color", wrote Professor David Swing, Vice Chairman of General Committee of the Parliament of Religions, "finds his piety equaled by the worshippers from the solitude of the Himalayas. The Christian indeed holds the better religion but the other religions contain great worth and can shape the soul into great moral beauty". Professor Swing prophesied that the Chicago Parliament would hasten the end of sectarian self conceit and make the Christian Minister realise that 'he was only one of a vast brotherhood'. The purport of speeches delivered on the last day of the Parliament showed that the men of the orient had

67. Ram Mohun and Keshab visited England in 1830 and 1870 respectively. P.C. Mosoomdar sojourned the United States sometime before the commencement of the Parliament of Religions in 1893. They were all Bengalis and belonged to the Brahmo Samaj.
69. Ibid.
left a deep mark on Christian priests and theologians. Bishop Arnott, for example, remarked: "While we have truth on our side, we have not had all the truth. While we have had theory we have not had all the practise". One may recall that liberal Bishops like John J. Keane had heartily approved Swami Vivekananda's criticism of Christianity by saying that if by these criticisms he could "stir us and sting us into better teachings" they would remain beholden to the Hindu monk.

The noted historian Marie Louise Burke compares the Parliament of Religions to a huge boulder dropped into the middle of a shallow pond, causing upheaval on all sides. Even without "Swamiji", she says, the Parliament would have created no little confusion, for it was a shock to people to discover that oriental priests were at par "with grotesquely masked medicine men; but with Swamiji the effect was galvanising and permanent". One may well argue that the "Light from the East" would have flickered, if not completely extinguished, if Swami Vivekananda had returned to India like most of his fellow delegates. But he was determined to leave a permanent mark on the West. In the summer of 1894 he wrote to the Hale Sisters that

70. Doctor Alfred W. Momori of England remarked that the people had listened to oriental doctrines--"which they had been taught to regard with contempt"--"with respect, with sympathy" and "with an earnest desire to learn something". Ibid., p.847. Rev.Dr. Frank M. Bristol who represented the American Methodists thanked the representatives of non-Christian religions for bringing to them "fragrant flowers from the gardens of eastern faiths" and "rich gems from the old mines of great philosophies". "We are richer tonight", he exclaimed, "from their contributions of thought, and particularly from our contact with them in spirit". Ibid., pp.855-56.
71. Ibid., p.859.
72. The Chicago Daily Tribune, September 21, 1893.
73. Burke, p.146.
one Miss Phillips had a beautiful place somewhere in New York. "I am going to make a Himalayas there and start a monastery as sure as I am living- I am not going to leave this country without throwing one more apple of discord into this already roaring, fighting, kicking, mad whirlpool of American religion".

In the following year he wrote to Alasinga that he intended to create 'a new order of humanity' who were sincere believers in God and did not care for the world. He was not satisfied merely with "newspaper blazoning". "I ought to be able to leave a permanent effect behind me when I go and with the blessings of the Lord it is going to be very soon". At times Swami Vivekananda felt that some people were trying to injure his cause but he remained undeterred and firm. "The Lord is always protecting me", he wrote, "My coming to this country and all my labours must not be in vain". He assured Kidi that his mission would succeed: "I am not giving to failures, and here I have planted a seed and it is going to become a tree and it must. Only I am afraid it will hurt its growth if I give it up too soon.... Rome was not built in a day". To the Maharaja of Khetri he wrote that he had a few hundred admirers and disciples in the West. "I shall make several Sannyasins,

77. Ibid., p.84.
and then I go to India, leaving the work to them”. Swami Vivekananda meant what he said for he not only trained a band of disciples but also founded an organisation to spread the message of Vedanta.

The most formidable task of Swami Vivekananda was to remove the gross misconceptions about Hinduism which had blurred the mind of the West. It was believed that the Hindus were something like a “fiendish race” who burnt their widows, threw their children to crocodiles in the rivers and committed other horrible atrocities and that their religion consisted of many gods, of idols, of puerile and sometime immoral mythologies, of mechanical and endless rites, of thorough-going and often cruel caste. “What is styled 'Hinduism'”, remarked Rev. T.E. Slater on the third day of the Chicago Parliament, “is a vague eclecticism, the sum total of several shades of belief, of divergent systems, of various types and characters of the outward life each of which.... bears little resemblance to the other beliefs”. Rev. Slater went to the extent of saying that no literature, not even the Jewish, contained so many words relating to sacrifice as Sanskrit. “The land has been saturated with blood”. Rev. George T. Pentecost and other orthodox Christians actively participated in this tirade against Hinduism. But Swami Vivekananda turned the tables on Christian priests and theologians. He dispelled such widespread beliefs and raised Hinduism in the eyes of the West. He argued that the Hindu philosophy and religion stood unrivalled—“Whether

79. Swami Vivekananda to the Maharaja of Khetri, July 9, 1895, *Ibid*. p. 91
for subtlety of thought or sublimity of sentiments” - and there was much that the materialistic nations of the West could borrow from this ancient faith. The superiority of Hinduism over other religions consisted in the fact that it recognised the existence of various methods for “attaining the unknowable”. The renowned indologist Sir Monier Williams (1819-99) admitted that the strength of Hinduism lied in its infinite adaptability to the infinite diversity of human characters and human tendencies. “It has its highly spiritual and abstract side suited to the philosophical higher classes. Its practical and concrete side suited to the man of affairs and the man of the world. Its aesthetic and ceremonial side suited to the man of poetic feeling and imagination. Its quiescent and contemplative side suited to the man of peace and lover of seclusion”. The Hindus, he said, were Spinosists 2000 years before the birth of Spinoza, Darwinians centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the Huxleys of our time and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world.

By establishing harmony between science and Hinduism, ratiocination and faith, mysticism and logic, and by delineating the essential divinity of human nature, Swami Vivekananda succeeded in evoking admiration and gaining converts for his

81. The Mahratta, September 13, 1896.
82. Sir Monier Williams’ view of Hinduism was found quoted in a hitherto unpublished letter of Swami Vivekananda to Mrs G. W. Hale dated July 1, 1894; see Prabuddha Bharata, October 1979, pp. 433-434.
religion. Never before had so authoritative a representative of "genuine" Hinduism— as opposed to the emasculated and anglicised versions of it so common in the 19th Century— been accessible to the West. His audience consisted of all sections of society— Bishops and Clergymen, Rabbis and Professors, Judges and opera Singers, Students and the common people. The Unitarians and Congregationalists were swayed by his oratorical skill and philosophical depth. Perhaps none of his predecessors received so many invitations to speak from their pulpit as Swami Vivekananda. Rev. Reed Stuart who heard Swami Vivekananda's lecture on "The Divinity of Man" at Detroit on February 17, 1894, got so much inspired that he preached a sermon entitled "The Gate opening Toward the East" at the Unitarian Church on the following day. He pointed out that there was no need for any nation "to send missionaries half around the world merely to point out the defects of another nation". He ruefully remarked that the Christian missionaries "told us only of the vices of the East". The books they wrote abounded in illustrations of "the car of juggernaut and the deluded mortals casting themselves under the wheels; of widows burning themselves upon the burial pyre of their husbands; of devotees torturing themselves in many ways; of aged parents exposed to die of neglect; of mothers flinging their babies into the jaws of hideous Crocodiles". Rev. Stuart concluded by saying that there was growing disposition to remedy that mistake. "Men are looking through the Gate which opens toward the East, and see streaming

83. Merwin— Marie Snell to the Editor of the Home, January 30, 1894, facsimile in The Indian Mirror, March 9, 1894.
84. The Detroit Tribune, February 19, 1894, facsimile in Burke pp. 250-53.
through it the glory of the Ideal, of the Infinite— the splendor of that universe which lies beyond sense". It is well known that the liberals among Catholics and Protestants lauded the Swami but the bigots— especially among Presbyterians and Methodists— opposed him tooth and vail. Some distinguished clergymen espoused his cause, answered his critics and urged him to do likewise. But he replied: "Why should I attack in return? It is not the monk's place to defend himself. Besides, Truth will have its way, believe me, Truth shall stand".

Swami Vivekananda had many friends among the Christian Scientists including the Hale Sisters of Chicago. Though he did not quite agree with the occultism of Mary Baker Eddy he was once invited to attend their session at the Greenacre inn. "I teach them Shivo'ham, Shivoham", he wrote, "and they all repeat it, innocent and pure as they are and brave beyond all bounds". Besides Christian scientists, hundreds of enlightened and liberal-minded persons— Emersonians, Transcendentalists, Neo-Christians, Theosophists and Universalists— either hearing him personally or reading the glowing accounts about him felt that "the Swami was, indeed another oriental Master come to them with a new message".

There is some evidence to suggest that Swami Vivekananda influenced a considerable section of Jews. He spoke twice at the Jewish platforms— first at the Young Men's Hebrew Association Hall in Memphis on January 21, 1894 and secondly at the

85. Ibid.
86. His Eastern and Western Disciples, p.319.
88. His Eastern and Western Disciples, p.313.
Temple Beth El in Detroit, sometime in the middle of March 186.

It was natural that the Jews should develop a liking for Swami Vivekananda because he had denounced the religious bigotry of Christians and pleaded for religious tolerance. The Jews who had suffered at the hands of missionaries for thousands of years saw in the Swami a man of Universal vision. Rabbi Grossman, for example, delivered a Sermon entitled "what Vivekananda has taught us" on February 18, 1894. "We westerners", he remarked, "We have a God in the sky. Kananda has a God on earth.... Let us learn from the Hindu the lesson that God lives and reigns now and ever that God is in every flower of the field; in every breath of the air; in every throb of our blood".

When Swami Vivekananda remarked at Memphis and Detroit that the Christians could not crush the Jews because bigotry and intolerance never triumphed over Truth, he was echoing the voice of Rabbi K. Kohler of New York who observed at the Jewish Church Congress of 1893 that 1600 years of persecution had not been able to destroy Judaism, which remained a living vital force in the world, because, it was founded on an indestructible...
One of Swami Vivekananda's first two disciples in America—Leon Landsberg—was a Russian Jew.

Swami Vivekananda left a deep impression on the cultural and intellectual circles of the West. After his success at the Parliament of Religions, he was invited by the rich and taken up by the literary clubs, prominent among them being the Peripatetic Club of Minneapolis, the Nineteenth Century and the Tennessee Clubs of Memphis, the Unity and the Witenagmore Clubs of Detroit, the Lynn Club of New York, the North Shore Club of Lynn, the Ethical Association of Brooklyn, the London Hindu Association, and the Woman Clubs of America. At some places he was given a hero's welcome and hailed as "the social lion of the day". When Mrs. John J. Bagley gave a reception in honour of Swami Vivekananda, The Detroit Journal of February 14, 1894, commented that it was one of the most important social functions that had taken place in Detroit 'this season'.

He was known as "the Cyclonic Hindu", "An orator by Divine right", "The high priest from India", "The many sided intellect", "a sensation of the World's Fair Parliament" and "Indian Yogi". At many places he was induced to extend his stay because of the incessant demand of his admirers. For example, Swami Vivekananda intended to deliver a series of three lectures during his first visit to Detroit but he was compelled to give

91. The other disciple was Mme Marie Louise—a French woman who had been a resident of New York for twenty-five years before she met the Swami. She became known as Swami Abhayananda.
two more lectures. The Detroit Journal of February 21, 1894 wrote that if the Swami could be induced to remain for a week longer the largest hall in the city would not hold the crowds which would be anxious to hear him. Another press report said: "Many of those who have already heard him and many who have failed to do so have put in a special request for another opportunity to listen to his interesting and eloquent discourses."

Swami Vivekananda's sociable nature was everywhere praised. The contemporary newspapers described him as "gentle in manner, deliberate in movement and extremely courteous in every word". Modest in his demeanour he was inclined to be diffident until aroused by some query that affected "his mission, his religion or his people". The Northampton Daily Herald remarked that it was "a liberal education" to meet him socially. The renowned orientalist Max Muller was among his fast friends and frequently corresponded with him. The German indologist Paul Deussen invited the Swami to his house at Kiel and found in him "an original thinker and a spiritual genius". The famous opera singer Madame E. Calvé was delighted to meet the Swami whom she described as "a man who truly 'walked with God', a noble being, a saint, a philosopher and a true friend."

The famous American actress Sarah Bernhardt is said to have

93. Ibid., pp. 280-81.
96. Appeal Avalanche, January 22, 1894, Ibid., pp. 185-88.
98. His Eastern and Western Disciples, p. 425.
99. His Eastern and Western Admirers, p. 264.
sought an interview with the Swami and expressed "her admiration and intense interest in the sublime teaching of the philosophy he so eloquently and truly represented". The American poetess Sara Bard Field became an ardent follower of Vedanta.

The famous American electrical engineer and inventor, Nicola Tesla, after hearing Swami Vivekananda's exposition of the Sankhya system candidly admitted the superiority of its cosmogony, to all other accounts and declared that its teachings as to "Kalpas", "Prana" and "Akasa" offered the only rational theory modern science could take to explain the cosmological problem.

Swami Vivekananda's intellectual attainments were recognised when he was invited to lecture before the Harvard Graduate Philosophical club and offered the Chair of Eastern philosophy—an honour which he declined being a monk. He was called upon to address the Dixon Society of New York many a time. Swami Vivekananda made many friends outside the circle of his followers. Helen Huntington wrote that "he has met all phases of society on equal terms of friendship and brotherhood; his classes and lectures have been attended by the most intellectual people and advanced thinkers of our cities; and his influence has already grown into a deep strong under-current of spiritual awakening. No praise or blame has moved him to either approbation or expostulation.... He is altogether such a man as 'kings delight to honour'.”

100. His Eastern and Western Disciples, p.350.
103. Romain Holland says that he was also offered the chair of Sanskrit at Columbia University. p.82.
104. Helen Huntington to the Editor of The Brahmavadin. April 11, 1896.
Swami Vivekananda had become so popular that his name was selected for inclusion in the National Encyclopaedia of the United States of America. His impact was no less significant in England. Even the Queen is said to have been drawn towards him. The famous ecclesiastic Rev. Canon Wilberforce held a levee to honour the Swami. It was indeed a rare sight, remarked the London correspondent of The Indian Mirror, "to see some of the most fashionable ladies... seated on the floor cross-legged, of course for want of chairs, listening with all the bhakti of an Indian chela towards his guru".

The Swami's influence was not confined to the higher echelons of society; he was popular with the common masses too. The large crowds of people that went to hear him at a Unitarian or a Congregational Church, an opera house or an auditorium did not belong to the elite. But with the passage of time curiosity evoked interest not only in his physiognomy but also in his philosophy.

105. In his usual hyperbolical style, Swami Kripamanda wrote to the Editor of The Brahmavadin, March 28, 1896: "The time may come when, even as seven cities disputed with each other for the honor of having given birth to Homer, seven countries may claim our master as theirs, and thus rob India of the honour of having produced one of the noblest of her children".

106. The Indian Mirror, June 25, 1896.
107. The Indian Mirror, January 18, 1896.
108. Ibid.
109. Prominent among his admirers and disciples were Mr and Mrs John B. Lyon, George W. Hale and "the four cousins"—Harriet M'kindley, Mary Hale, Isabelle M'kindley and Harriet Hale of Chicago; Mr L. Brinkley, Col. R.B. Snowden, Bishop Thomas F. Failer and Justice R.J. Morgan of Memphis; Mrs John J. Bagley, Christine Greenfield, Mrs. Mary Funk, Miss Marguerite Cook, Rabbi Grossman, and T.W. Palmer of Detroit; Martha Brown Fincke of Northampton; Mrs Francis W. Breed of Lynn; Dr. and Mrs Guernsey, Miss Emma Thursby, Miss Phillips, Mrs Arthur Smith, Mrs Constance Town and Leon Landsberg of New York; Mrs Julia Ward Howe and Miss Katherine Abbott Sanborn of Boston; Mrs Ole Bull of Cambridge; Dr. Lewis G. Janes of New York; Miss Henrietta Muller, Miss Margaret E. Noble, E.T. Sturdy, Mr. and Mrs Sevier and J.J. Goodwin of England.
"It will always be a marvel to us" wrote Hellen F. Huntington, "that an oriental could take such a firm hold on us occidentals, trained as we have been by long habit of thought and education to opposing views". Swami Vivekananda's message was meant as much for the common masses as for the urban intellectual class. One may recall that he made side trips to some unimportant towns such as Evanston and Streator while in Chicago, to Ada and Bay city while in Detroit. The contemporary newspapers show the strenuous and selfless efforts he made to spread the message of Vedanta. The New York Herald, for example, remarked: "Having gained for his teachings and himself a certain vogue in society, he now aims to reach the common people and for that reason is giving a series of free lectures on Sunday Afternoons at Hardman Hall".

The establishment of Vedanta society in New York in November 1894 set Swami Vivekananda's work on organised lines. To begin with the Vedanta society managed the financial affairs of the Swami, organised his lectures and classes, carried on the work in his absence and printed pamphlets and books for distribution among the public. But it could not be called "a full-fledged religious organisation", much less a Church. Though the society had its office bearers it did not enrol members till 1900. Swami Vivekananda got it registered under the laws of the state of New York in 1898 after Swami

110. Hellen F. Huntington to the Editor of The Brahmavadin, November 21, 1896.
111. Facsimile in The Indian Mirror, March 25, 1896.
Vivekananda had returned to India. Whatever the form of the society in the beginning, gradually it became a nucleus of Vedanta movement in America. It was followed by similar societies in San Francisco, Southern California and Pasadena. Though Swami Vivekananda did not found any organisation in England he left a good number of disciples to keep alive his message.

Swami Vivekananda thus proved to be India's greatest emissary to the west in modern times. He subdued the storm of missionary criticism against Hinduism and raised the image of India in the eyes of the World. "There is infinite humiliation in this spectacle of a pagan priest" remarked an American daily "reading lessons of conduct and of life to the men who have assumed the spiritual supervision of Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand...." The converts to

114. In an article entitled "The Swamis in America", published in *Arena*, October 1899 (pp.482-88), Miss Anna Josephine Ingersoll appreciated the work being done by the New York Vedanta society "since 1894, sustaining a teacher and giving a course of eighty lectures during the winter months". The Society, wrote Miss Ingersoll was being recognised as an important factor "in the thought movement of the day".
115. Burke holds that although Swami Vivekananda "clearly recognised the practicality of having a centre where Vedanta would be taught and from which it would spread, he remained throughout his first visit to the West opposed both to organization and to the founding of anything like a Church". Second Visit, p.636.
his mission were few— but was not a beginning made? Against
the backdrop of more than a hundred Ramakrishna Vedanta
centres in the world at present, one could safely sug­gest
that the Swami did not carve his work in sand but upon gran­
ite. He laid the foundations of Neo-Vedantism which captivat­
ed such eminent scholars as Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley and
other well known literary figures. With the growing interest
and research on Hinduism it became evident that there was
very little of "high thought" in Christendom which could not
be traced to one or another of the successive influxes of
Hindu ideas— either to the Hinduised Hellenism of Pythagoras
and Plato, to the Hinduised Mazdeism of the Gnostics, to the
Hinduised Judaism of the Kabbalists, or to the Hinduised
Mahomedanism of the Moorish philosophers; to say nothing of
the Hinduised Occultism of the Theosophists, the Hinduised
Socialism of the New England Transcendentalists and the many
other new streams of orientalising influence which were
fertilising the soil of contemporary Christendom.

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When Adam plucked the forbidden fruit from the Garden of
Eden he was punished for his misdemeanour. But it proved to
be a blessing in disguise for mankind. The fall of Adam signi­
ified "a fall upward". It marked the birthday of civilisation.
Swami Vivekananda too plucked a fruit from the Garden of the
East. It was not an "Apple" to satiate one's palate but a

119. Snell to the Editor of the Hope, January 30, 1894,
facsimile in The Indian Mirror, March 9, 1894.
system of thought—the quintessence of the wisdom of sages, a palliative for the enervating mind and a tonic for the forlorn soul. Tradition enjoined the Swami to taste the fruit in his own land. But the Swami defied the admonition, travelled to the West and disseminated the seeds of the fruit he had relished. The mythical Prometheus stole the fire from Olympus and gave it to mankind in defiance of Zeus. Swami Vivekananda carried the torch of Indian spiritual wisdom to enlighten the West in defiance of a tradition. It was a gargantuan task superbly performed.

The threefold challenge to Christianity in the 19th Century made the intellectual sceptic and left the common man in bewilderment. The attitude of society to religious dilemmas was threefold: Those who found faults with Christianity but did not forsake it for fear of losing their identity; those who developed an empathy towards Christianity but maintained a religious outlook and groped for an alternative; those who dubbed religion as redundant and sought refuge in the agnosticism of Ingersoll or the sensualism of Epicurus.

Swami Vivekananda's influence penetrated deep into the second layer, mildly affected the third but remained almost impervious to the first. The common man was charmed by his eloquence but not converted. Liberal Christians thanked the Swami for they could gain by his criticism and try to do better. But they stuck to the Church after all. They were converted to his viewpoint, not to his religion. The bigots stumbled on the ground of orthodox beliefs but did not fall.
Some of them hit him below the belt by charging him of moral depravity. Others flung sharp arrows of logic on some of the vulnerable aspects of his description of India viz. the position of women. The only effect on them was that they had all along been offensive—now they learnt to be defensive as well.

A study of the Complete Works and Burke's New Discoveries reveal that what Swami Vivekananda said at the Parliament of Religions differed in tone and content from what he said after it. On the platform of the Parliament he described it as "one of the most august assemblies ever held" (II September) but after about two years he remarked that it was organised with the intention of proving the superiority of the Christian religion over other forms of faith. In his reply to the address of the Hindus of Calcutta, he argued that the Parliament was meant to be a "heathen show". "They wanted a horse and they wanted to ride it... but it was ordained otherwise... Most of them were nice but we have thanked them enough".

Swami Vivekananda's first feeling of attraction and admiration for America also changed soon after the Parliament. In his speeches at the Parliament he had thanked America for the great attempt "to break down the barriers of this little world of ours" (15 September) and hailed it as the motherland of liberty (19 September). But in the speeches that followed

120. Vivekananda to Narasimhachariar, January 11, 1895; Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p.194.
he ridiculed the shallowness of Western civilisation, "its inhumanity, littleness of spirit and fanaticism". Once at Boston he is said to have described the materialistic culture of the West as being "represented by foxes and wolves".

One of the main themes of Swami Vivekananda's speeches at the Parliament was that no one single religion could claim to be a Universal religion. About two years later, he claimed that only the Vedanta could be the Universal religion. Through various conceptions of truth, he remarked, "runs the golden thread of Unity, and it is the purpose of the Vedanta to discover this thread".

A characteristic of Swami Vivekananda was that "he was changing sides when he was speaking to different peoples". He would speak of the awful materialism of the United States, but again turn on to say that no women in the World were greater than the American, and that the plight of women in India was absolutely disgraceful. The same may be said about his view of Hinduism. On the platform of the Parliament he eulogised it, but in his speeches in India he thundered against the monstrous excesses practised in the name of Hinduism, "the cruel caste barriers that shamed the name of Mother India". In other words, he touched both aspects - philosophical and practical - at different occasions adjusting his teaching to circumstances.

122. Rolland, pp.42-43.
It may be too much to assert that Swami Vivekananda "set the Mississippi on fire" though he crossed it to deliver his fiery oratory. It may be equally difficult to believe that he shook the West to its foundations. Even hundreds of Swami Vivekananda would not have accomplished such a task. Moreover, his purpose was not to shake but to build, not to destroy but to construct. Though he gave a staggering blow to some Christian presumptions he could not stem the tide of converts to Christianity. Millions of people continued to go to the Church and partake in the Holy Communion. As before they reverently listened to the tintinabulation of Church bells and the Gospel read by the priests, the Missionaries were perturbed by the Swami's criticism, but not discouraged. Henceforth their seal for work was saturated with caution. Though the demand for oriental literature immensely increased, the Bible remained the most saleable Holy book in the World.

Swami Vivekananda knew his mission well and he performed it to the best of his ability. He could not convince all. But even a Descartes would fail to do that. His presence was felt wherever he went—from lecture platforms to private drawing rooms, in the train or at sea-side. He put Vedic Samagri (herbal incense) into the Homa (fumigation rite) of curiosity for oriental wisdom. He was the first Hindu who could count hundreds of Europeans as his disciples. His success

124. See G.G.Narasimachariar's sketch of the life of Swami Vivekananda in The Indian Mirror, September 6, 1894.
125. See especially the works of Bhupendranath Datta and His Eastern and Western disciples.
lay as much in the musical tone of his voice, in his eyes sparkling with confidence and in his manner, as in his choice of words and his command over the English language. His Indian dress might have contributed in some measure to heighten the effect of his eloquence but what seemed most distinctive was the Universality of his creed. It would be wrong to say with J.N.Farquhar that he personified a conservative and reactionary force "trying to bring back the vanished past", though it may be remarked that he virtually initiated what the late Dr C.E.H.Joad once called the "counter attack from the East". "After hearing him", remarked The New York Herald "We feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation".

Swami Vivekananda made religion look like a science and gave boost to researches on the science of religion. He proved the necessity of religion for mankind and helped in stemming the rising tide of atheism and agnosticism. By delineating the rationale behind the thaumaturgic powers of mind and its ability to communicate without words he prepared the ground for the emergence of Parapsychology as a full-fledged science. By proving the essential oneness of all religions he

127. Cited in The Indian Mirror, December 27, 1893.
128. In an article entitled "Parapsychology: ancient mystery new science" published in Span, November 1972, Pat Tucker quotes Dr.J.B.Rhine, Dean of American parapsychologist as having said: "Man's way with a new concept is first to make fun of it, then to make sense of it, and finally to make use of it". It cannot be ascertained whether Dr.Rhine's view is an adaptation of the famous saying of Swami Vivekananda: "Each work has to pass through the stages—ridicule, opposition and then acceptance". The Complete Works, Vol.V, p.91.
broadened the mind of the West and made a unique contribution to the study of comparative religions. It was not necessary to change one's religion to broaden one's vision or shed one's prejudices.

The West had listened to the "orchestra" of Christianity for centuries. Though all were not getting bored at least some of them wanted to hear something new. The "musical" concerts arranged by Keshab's and Mozoomdar's fulfilled that need to some extent. But their instruments were more or less Western though they tried to produce a sound typical of the orient. (A bass drum cannot sound like a xylophone or a harp like a clarinet). In that they were bound to fail, Swami Vivekananda introduced the "orchestra" of Hinduism in its indigenous form and produced a symphony which excelled all others in rhythm and harmony. The music of Vedanta was heard by the intellectual and the common man alike in cities and towns, in Churches and opera houses. Some enjoyed it at leisure. Others thought it to be the daily food of the Soul. The former became his admirers; the latter his disciples. Swami Vivekananda proved to be a better "musician" than his predecessors— and hence a better religionist. Could one suggest, he was a Beethoven or a Mozart in the domain of religion? A modern Savonarola or a Saint Francis of Assisi? Comparisons may be odious. "None but himself can be his parallel".