

Swami Vivekananda spent ten weeks at Ridgely Manor in 1899. Marie Louise Burke chronicled his visit—a fascinating in-depth view of Swamiji’s life at Ridgely, his visionary ideas, his activities, his personality, and the ways in which his loving presence transformed lives and created the sublime atmosphere that sanctified Ridgely as a retreat for generations to come. [Reproduced with Advaita Ashrama’s permission from their publication: Marie Louise Burke, “Ridgely Manor: The Great Summer,” *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, vol. 5, ch. 3, 3rd ed., Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1987, 107–143.

CHAPTER THREE

RIDGELY MANOR: THE GREAT SUMMER

1

“Swamiji is starting today Allen Line (Allan State Line). *Numidian*. From Glasgow, a telegram just received says!” Thus Josephine MacLeod wrote to Mrs. Bull on August 17, 1899. Her letter, full of heavy underscorings, continued:

Do what you choose. Come at any hour – *you are always* welcome.
You better meet me in New York & we will go *together* to meet our *Prophet*. He ought to be 10 days en route – but I will write you *definitely* tomorrow the day the ship is expected & you meet me in town.

Do *not* tell Mrs. Crossley a *word*, let her stay in Princeton so we can have our Prophet without *one* thorn or criticism – in all his *holiness*.

I think I may keep Miss Stumm over—she has her worth. I am in *Heaven*.¹

Lovingly Jojo.

(Mrs. Crossley was a London friend of Mrs. Bull’s who had crossed the Atlantic with her in June. She was not well and not, it would seem, in full accord with Swamiji’s views. The more fortunate Maud Stumm was an artist in her late twenties who had met Swamiji once or twice during his first visit to the West and who evidently had admired him. She was now visiting Ridgely Manor.)

Five days later, Miss MacLeod again wrote to “Saint Sara,” telling her, with more underscorings, the exact date of Swamiji’s arrival in New York:

Swamiji’s boat the *Numidian* sailed on August 17th & is due in New York on *Monday August 28th* [double underscore] so a letter just announced. So *you* take the midnight *train* on *Sunday*, arriving at 6. – go directly to 21 [21 East Thirty-fourth Street, the Leggett’s town house] – where a telegram is to be sent me announcing the day & hour of arrival.

Betty [Besse Leggett] goes to East Hampton on Friday & will meet you in New York on *Monday*, and I also will be in town that day by noon.

Our Prophet again with us!

I have invited Mrs. Coulston to go to 21 & to come up here for 3 days visit – not one uncongenial element!

God is kind

If *quite* convenient you might bring up a trunk of blankets – in case 18 single ones aren't enough – *besides* 10 eider down quilts.

What do you think?

I can easily bring a few pairs from our town house & this will be less complicated so do not worry or trouble about it.

I *am* so thankful to know you are coming to us *alone*.²

The word *alone* was underscored five or six times, as though to ward off the uncongenial element. But as things happened, Miss MacLeod's whole exuberant plan for her friend micarraid. Just at that time Olea, spending a week or so at Camp Percy, Mr. Leggett's fishing camp in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, became ill. She returned to her mother's home in Cambridge, where Mrs. Bull could not, or would not, leave her, and thus almost six weeks were to pass before they arrived at Ridgely Manor. Even Miss MacLeod's own long-dreamed-of plan to meet Swamiji's ship, to see him walking with his wonderfully majestic stride down the gangplank, his face breaking into radiance at the sight of his old friends, was not fulfilled, for the *Numidian* steamed into the New York harbor two or three hours earlier than scheduled. Fortunately, three people were at the dock to meet Swamiji and Swami Turiyananda – Maud Stumm, who had come down from Ridgely Manor, Mrs. Coulston, acting treasurer of the New York Vedanta Society (Swami Abhedananda was out of town), and a Mr. Sydney Clarke, to whom Miss Stumm had telegraphed, asking him to be on hand to take care of the Swami's baggage.

He was "tired and ill-looking," Miss Stumm wrote late of Swamiji's arrival. "He was carrying most carefully a big bottle wrapped in papers that were torn and ragged; this precious bottle, which he refused to relinquish before reaching Binnewater, contained a wonderful kind of sauce like curry; brought thus by and from India. 'For Jo!' he said."³

Miss Stumm mentions that "the party from Ridgely" (presumably Miss MacLeod and the Leggetts) did not arrive until ten o'clock that morning, "and so disappointed!" "We all went back [to Ridgely Manor] together," she wrote, but whether "all" included Sister Christine and Mrs. Funke, one does not know.⁴ It is certain, however, that Swamiji spent almost no time in the hot, humid city, but after a stop at the Leggetts' town house was whisked away with all speed.

The train trip from New York to Ridgely Manor, or, more precisely, from Weehawken, New Jersey, to Kingston in Ulster County, New York, eight miles or so up the Hudson, was a lovely ride. On the right lay the broad, deep river, straight almost as a canal, with its traffic of ships and ferries and its lighthouses in midstream, like Victorian dwellings set adrift; on one's left rose the

tall Hudson Highlands pressing close at first to the water's edge, later on flattening out into the wide river valley with its farms and pastures, its orchards, its green, sun—splashed woods, its little towns, its steeped churches and its distant mountains. At Kingston one boarded another train for Binnewater, a tiny station some seven miles West. Here the party was no doubt met by a surrey a spanking pair and driven the four miles to Ridgely Manor along a gently rolling country road, past apple orchards, corn and pumpkin fields, wooded hills, and occasional farm buildings. Most of these last were of the nineteenth century – neat red barns and white houses scalloped along the eaves wooden rickrack called Hudson River Bracketed; but here and there a small weathered stone house, dating back to pre-Revolutionary days, stood half hidden among protective elms and chestnuts. Half a mile beyond Stone Ridge, the small village through which the road passed, the horses turned into the avenue of Ridgely and trotted up to the Manor – a graceful and welcoming house said to have been designed by a pupil of the famous architect Stanford White and as dignified, substantial, and unassuming as its owner, Francis Leggett.

The property that Mr. Leggett had acquired in Ulster County some eight years earlier, three years before he dreamed he would be bringing Besse MacLeod Sturges there as his bride, had consisted of several small farms, so that the estate, when it became all of a piece, included within its fifty acres a number of buildings. There were the “Big Cottage,” also known as “Clematis Hall” – a name more becoming to its size and dignity; the “Little Cottage,” itself something more than a cottage; and the “Inn,” which had been a select boarding house run by two maiden ladies. In a position more or less central to these three houses, Francis Leggett had build the Manor, an imposing mansion of clapboard siding tall-columned porticos and loggia, hip and saddle roofs, and massive chimneys, its architecture reminiscent, on the whole, of the gracious mansions of the old South. In addition, Mr. Leggett had built several small farm buildings, a stable and carriage house, and, for the entertainment of his guests, a large playhouse know as the “Casino.” This last was equipped even to bowling alleys, and was adjoined by a tennis court.⁵ Between the various and widely scattered houses lay some ten acres of sweeping lawns, cool to the eye but in 1899 largely unshaded, for the trees planted by Francis Leggett were still small. Only two old chestnuts, huge and spreading, and an enormous maple (which still stands) gave relief in the hot summer afternoons. Around the house were shrubs of all sorts, but these, too, had been selected by Mr. Leggett and were not yet luxuriant. Indeed the house had grounds still had the bare look of newness, but by the same token one had an unobstructed view of fields and wooded hills and, beyond to the West and North, some twelve to twenty miles distant, of the blue Catskills and, to the South, much closer and clearer, of the Shawangunks. The height of neither of these ranges (Mohonk, the tallest peak of the Shawangunks, rose 1542 feet above sea level) would have impressed Swamiji, for both – particularly the latter – were geologically ancient, honed down and buffed by millennia of rain and snow into mountains barely higher than foothills or Himalayan foothills. But they were lovely nonetheless, with their soft, many-folded contours that seemed to move with the passing day, changing color and form.

This was not Swamiji's first visit to Ridgely Manor. He had been here twice before: once in April of 1895, when he had taken a short vacation from his New York classes, and again in the

Christmas season of the same year, at which time he had been the guest not of Frank Leggett alone but of both Betty and Frank, they having been married in Paris that September. In 1899, the “heavenly pair,” as Swamiji called them, were still just that, rhapsodically in love, regretting the days when Frank Leggett’s business in New York took him from Ridgely to the city, still cherishing their long weekends together. It was all harmony and joy at Ridgely that summer of 1899 – “the great summer,” as it came to be called. And a great summer it was (though strictly speaking, it autumn too), for the group of people that centered around a saint and prophet of the highest magnitude formed a house party such as the world had probably never known before and very likely will not know soon again. Indeed those ten weeks were rare even for Swamiji, for seldom (never before in the West) had he spent so long a time vacationing in one place.

He and Swami Turiyananda were given the “Little Cottage,” which stood about five-minute stroll from the main house – across the generous and open lawns in a northwesterly direction. The “Little Cottage” (afterward always called “Swamiji’s Cottage” by Miss MacLeod) contained five small bedrooms on the second floor, all with pitched ceilings. On the ground floor were two small sitting rooms with fireplaces, sizable dining room, a large kitchen, a small laundry, and a wide front porch. Almost certainly, Swamiji occupied one of the two front bedrooms and Swami Turiyananda the other. The three back bedrooms were not so comfortable and ran, moreover, one into the other, the far two having to alternate means of access. In connection with the Swamis’ sleeping quarters a charming story was told in later years by Miss MacLeod to Swami Kikhilananda, who passed it on to me. Mrs. Leggett, coming to inspect the accommodations in the cottage, found Swami Turiyananda’s mattress and bedding on the floor of his room. “What is the matter, Swami?” she exclaimed. “Is something wrong with the bed?” “No, no,” he assured her; “the bed is fine. But, you see, I cannot bring myself to sleep on the same level with Swamiji – so I have put the mattress on the floor.” One might add here that so great was the love and reverence that Swami Turiyananda always showed for Swamiji that Mrs. Leggett thought (at first, at least) that he was Swamiji’s disciple. Writing to Mrs. Bull on September 2, she commented, “This rest is peace to [Swamiji]. He loves being away with his disciple – who watches every gesture and is interesting in his devotion to his Master.”⁶

The “Big Cottage,” which stood farther from the Manor than the “Little Cottage,” though in the same direction, was a commodious house with ten bedrooms and a curving driveway of its own. It was to be assigned to Mrs. Bull and Olea and very probably Mrs. Marian Briggs, a close friend of Mrs. Bull’s, with a pair of servants to take care of them. But big as the “Big Cottage” may have been, it was dwarfed – in impressiveness, at least – by the Manor, which encompassed several spacious first-floor living rooms, seven second-story bedrooms, and, on its top floor under the roof, quarters for a staff of servants. The Manor accommodated the family – Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett; Josephine MacLeod; Alberta Sturges, Mr. Leggett’s twenty-two-year-old daughter by a former marriage; the baby, not yet three-year-old Frances Leggett, and her nurse, Miss Looker – and at one time or another during the summer and autumn various transient house guests, such as Mrs. Coulston, whom we have already met; Sarah Ellen Waldo from Brooklyn, who was invited for a day in early October; Mrs. Florence (Milward) Adams, an old friend from

Chicago and well-known lecturer on dramatic arts, physical culture, and metaphysics; Miss Florence Guernsey, the daughter of Swamiji's good friend Dr. Egbert Guernsey of New York; Emma Thursby and her sister Ina; and a Dr. Helmer, a practitioner of osteopathy, which science, then coming into vogue, was Miss MacLeod's most recent enthusiasm.* Other guests were more or less permanent – Sister Nivedita, for instance, and a professor Marchand, who had been brought by the Leggetts from France to help the family polish up its French in preparation for the following summer, when everyone, including Swamiji, was to go to Paris for the International Exposition. (An old man, Professor Marchand fell ill during his stay at Ridgely and there died. During his illness, as Mrs. Frances Leggett tells in *Late and Soon*, Miss MacLeod had visited the old man in his room, and he had embraced her and said to her, "This is the house of God!"⁷ And one cannot but thin that Ridgely Manor was indeed that summer a veritable Benares in which to die.)

Over the stables in an apartment of some four or five bedrooms lived Hollister Sturges, Alberta's brother (younger than she by two years), and a number of their friends and cousins – all bursting with high spirits. Francis Leggett's nephew, Theodore Whitmarsh, whom he looked upon as a son, his wife, and their three young children occupied the "Inn" until early September. Housed in the village of Stone Ridge were Maud Stumm, a Miss de Kubel, and a Mr. Goodby, all three of whom came daily, as Miss MacLeod was to write to Mrs. Bull, "to drink deep."⁸

Other guests no doubt came and went, or, in some cases, stayed on for a week or more. Their names, for the most part, are lost to us; but among those whose visits gave Swamiji particular pleasure were the two McKindley sisters, Isabelle and Harriet, cousins of Mary and Harriet Hale and an inseparable part of that family whom Swamiji loved above all others. ("By the by, Mary," he was to write in September from Ridgely Manor, "it is curious your family, Mother Church [Mrs. George Hale] and her clergy, both monastic and secular, have made more impression on me than any family I know of. Lord bless you ever and ever.")⁹ Very probably it was through Swami Abhedananda, who was lecturing at the Greenacre School of Comparative Religions in Maine and to whom Swamiji had sent a telegram,¹⁰ that the McKindley girls, attending the school, learned of his arrival in America and of his presence at Ridgely Manor. Isabelle, the older sister, wrote to him at the end of August. Swamiji's reply, not heretofore published, was immediate:

31st August '99

My dear Isabel—

Many thanks for your kind note I will be so so glad to see you. Miss M'cLeod is going to write you to stop a day and night here on your way to the West.

My love to the holy family in Chicago and hope soon to be able to come West and have great fun.

So you are in Greenacre at last. Is this the first year you have been in? How do you like the place? If you see Miss Farmer [Miss Sarah Farmer, the founder of Greenacre] of course kindly convey her my kindest regards and to all the rest of my friends there.

Ever yours affly¹¹

Vivekananda

Miss MacLeod sent off an invitation to the two girls on the same day. Her letter, interesting, I believe, for its directions and time tables, read:

August 31, 1899

My dear Miss McKinley—

Your letter this morning was a great pleasure to our household.— We should be so pleased if you and your sister will stop over with us a day and night on your way home —If you will let me know the date, I will arrange to have a free place for you and to meet you at the Station *Binnewater*: four miles off. You can take a train to Boston for *Kingston* —changing at Albany—and at *Kingston* take a train to Binnewater —I think the best train leaving Boston is at 11 P.M. Of course if you are in or near New York—we are very accessible, being 3 hours by train from there.

If you have never taken the [boat] trip on the Hudson River, it is well worth the day given to it—leaving New York at 9 —to Kingston—arriving at Binnewater at 4:30 Swamiji is delighted at the thought of seeing you and your sisters.¹²

He was indeed. “I am dying to see Isabel and Harriet,” he wrote to Mary Hale.¹³ But for one reason or another, the two girls were long in coming. Swami Abhedananda arrived at Swamiji’s call two weeks before them, as attested by his diary, portions of which have very kindly been made available to us by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math in Calcutta. The Swami’s entry for September 8 reads:

Arrived at Kingston at 7:30 P.M. drove to Ridgely and arrived there at 9:30 P.M. Saw Swamis V. and T. and lived with them.¹⁴

The three Swamis lived, of course, in “Swamiji’s Cottage.” In *Vivekananda, a Biography in Pictures*, one finds a photograph (here reproduced) of the Swamis, together with Mrs. Leggett, Miss MacLeod, Alberta, and a friend of Alberta’s whose name is not known. In another photograph of the same people, taken on the same day, at the same place (the circular portico at the back of the main house) one sees Swamiji standing and looking unwell and Alberta with her face in her hands, shielding her eyes from the afternoon sun.

Swami Abhedananda stayed at Ridgely for about ten days, leaving on September 17 or 18 for New York, where (before going on to Massachusetts) he met Sister Nivedita, who arrived from England on September 19,¹⁵ her voyage paid for with money from Joe.¹⁶ As Mrs. Ashton Jonson had predicted, Nivedita had not fared well in England as far as raising support for or interest in her girls’ school was concerned. Nor, it would seem, had she been able to reawaken enthusiasm for Swamiji’s work. “One thing I am sure of, “she had written to Miss MacLeod on September 1: “however little the drones think they worship success, they soon drop off from a cause that fails. One must show life and growth, if one is to keep even the hearts that are won.”¹⁷

In her small 1899 diary (the first 253 days of which are missing) the sole entry (September 10) for this brief England interlude reads, “No use,” from which one might gather a certain despond.

18

Josephine MacLeod went down to New York on September 17 to meet Nivedita’s ship—so one learns, among other things, from the following letter written by Betty Leggett to Mrs. Bull:

19 Sept.

Dear Saint Sara,

The other sanyazin comes today no doubt as Joe went to fetch her Sunday evening.

We are all in waiting—and the week promises a look at you all—including Dr. Helmer. Let naught prevent an early arrival.

I hope Olea is mending rapidly & when she can hold together let her come and be upon the couch in the great hall—or the loggia & listen! How I regret it all—and wish we had sent for her to come when we learned of Swami’s departure from England as we were sorely tempted to do . . . We expect Mrs. [Florence] Adams the 22nd. Swami needs Dr. Helmer badly—he needs to be told the end is not yet. There are many hours when he thinks It is near, as symptoms are graver, in his mind, by heredity.

Joe arrives today. The big cottage awaits you—and is ready.

Swami & Turinada are in yours—to be more cozy. Swamiji is writing a book on Modern Hindoos—to make some independent means —and to keep busy. He is grand in type as ever.¹⁹

It was not until the following day, Wednesday, September 20, that Joe and Nivedita arrived from New York. The day after that they wrote jointly to Mrs. Bull, whose ill luck at being detained for so many weeks is, one cannot help but note, our good luck, for we learn considerably more about events and people through the letters written to her from Ridgely Manor than we would otherwise have known. The letter of September 21 read:

Dearest S.S.

Margo & I arrived at 3 P.M. yesterday after a joyous 24 hours together – I am beginning to feel that I am almost as glad to know her as Swamiji.

Today we decked her in our finery – then came down to Swamiji for criticism – which never came.

He put the decision entirely into Margot’s care and she said “If I may do as I choose, I shall wear my brahma-charini gerrua *always*—while on the platform—black otherwise,” & so it is decided – and tomorrow we will go to Kingston to see what can be bought in the way of tough material.

She *never* was greater, & Betty approves in each detail of *her attitude* to Swami. Not one thing would she have Margot change—& her verdict is final in social matters as Margot’s is in spiritual.

Your telegram was a blow—last night—10 days longer away—but “Mother knows best”

I have no servants for you yet.

Dr. Helmer will decide what Swamiji is to do and in this *his* verdict will be final.

Hearts love to my child [Olea] & her mother.

[Nivedita added a line:] My sweet Grannie—no idea had I that post time had come. It was the desire of my heart to write to you this morning. Here I am – Plans are growing like flowers. I long to see you & begged Y.Y. to let me come & try to carry off Mrs. Vaughan & you! But of course I saw that that was a wrong suggestion – anyway, you will be here directly. Lovingly your Child,²⁰ Margot.

(It is probable that Nivedita’s “Grannie” as applied to Mrs. Bull had a different origin than Swami Saradananda’s “Granny.” The relationship in Nivedita’s case was no doubt through Swamiji, her spiritual father, who looked upon Mrs. Bull as “mother.”)

A day or two earlier Swamiji had written one of his most beautiful poems, entitled “Peace,” and had dedicated it to Mrs. Bull “with eternal love.”²¹ But it was perhaps also meant for Nivedita and Sister Christine, as well, for he handed it to the former on her return from a drive around the countryside and mailed it to the latter on September 21 with a note that read in part:

Do you like my new poem? Miss Noble thinks it is nice. But that is her way with everything I do. Do you also say? I will now send my writings to missionary papers to get a fairer criticism.²²

The reader will perhaps be familiar with Swamiji’s poem, for it has long since published in the *Complete Works*; but here, in any case, are few stanzas:

Behold, it comes in might,
The power that is not power,
The light that is in darkness,
The shade in dazzling light.

* * *

It is beauty never seen,
And love that stands alone,
It is song that lives un-sung,
And knowledge never known.

It is death between two lives,
And lull between two storms,

The void whence rose creation,
And that where it returns.²³

That same week the McKindley sisters at last arrived, much to Swamiji's joy. Of this event, as well as of the arrival and verdict of Dr. Helmer, Miss MacLeod wrote to Mrs. Bull:

Dearest St. Sara.

The two McKindley girls came yesterday. Since which time Swamiji has been bubbling over with boyishness –

Dr. Helmer came at 6—& by 7 we knew that Swamiji's trouble is curable—a spreading of the spine causes the kidney trouble—& though his heart & kidney are affected, Dr. says there is no reason he should not be as strong as he—smoking is gradually to be reduced to nothingness

(Nirvana!)

I still think you better come via Albany—and I think if Olea is here Dr. will come up next Saturday—

He is to say till Monday & is now shooting blue clay pigeons with Hol – who has a new gun.

The McKindleys we drive to Kingston today.
This is only a line to tell you Swamiji speaks of you & Olea daily & would go over to you if we would let him.

Dr. Helmer seems to be happy – & I love him.

Margot is winning all hearts.

I will send Berta [Alberta Sturges] over to bring Olea—if you will allow. She wants to go —& seems to think she is not “au complet” without Olea —

Hearts love²⁴

Jojo

2

Dr. Helmer's diagnosis of Swamiji's illness, it should be noted here, was later to be rejected by Miss MacLeod's next miracle-worker, of whom more in a later chapter. But whatever the cause and nature of his poor health, the cheerful, well-regulated, but informal life at Ridgely was a balm to him from the start. As early as September 2 Betty Leggett had written to the absent Mrs. Bull:

We are having such privileges as only Swamiji can confer. His talks are intermittent —his health improving, his nights restful & he sleeps wonderfully. He is dieting, eating well— & no doubt as you and Joe have said for long – his great work is to come. . . .

These days are priceless. *Do* come straight on if possible.²⁵

On the same day Swamiji wrote to Sister Chritine, who was now back home in Detroit:

My dear Christina:

I hope by this time you are much better. I am getting physically better every day, though mentally not much.

The London work seems to fall to pieces. The friends over there are all shaky even Sturdy. Anyway in Mrs. Bull & Miss M'cLeod I have very strong friends. They stand by me here, through thick and thin.

Life is a series of fights and disillusionments is it not?

Well I am seeking some quiet if I can, before I plunge into work again. One has to work to gain a livelihood even. Good that it is so, it keeps us straight.

How is Mrs. Funkey? Where are you both now? I am glad though that in this life I have got a number of staunch friends that will stand by me, whether I am in good or bad circumstances, whether I am ill or well, & you are two of them.

I am rather happy these few days. It is so quiet here and everybody is good. Days are passing anyway, and I am learning to be contented.

The secret of life is not enjoyment but education through experience. But we are killed off the moment we begin really to learn. That seems to many a potent argument for a future existence....

I hope soon to be able to come to Detroit. Everywhere it is better to have a whirlwind come over the work. That clears the atmosphere & gives us a true insight into the nature of things. We begin, anew but on adamantine foundations.

I am strong very strong now—I always am when left to stand alone. May you be strong very strong always.

Ever yours with love and blessings²⁶

Vivekananda

Swamiji's hosts and fellow guests at Ridgely well understood his need for rest, for privacy, and for freedom, as well as for congenial, lighthearted company, and they gave him whatever his mood called for. "It was that attitude in our family towards Swamiji that kept him with and near us," Josephine MacLeod wrote years later to her niece. "Days without speaking, days and night continuous speaking. We followed his moods and kept ourselves busy in our own lives and happy when he wasn't about, so that there was no sort of weight put upon him."²⁷ "I feel perfectly at home," he wrote in early September to Mary Hale. And indeed, no sooner had he set foot in Ridgely Manor than his thoughts were flowing out freely (if "intermittently") to the friends who surrounded him. He told of new ideas, of his new message – a message ready for the mission that lay still uncharted and uncertain in the future.

"Swamiji is blessed," Miss MacLeod wrote to Mrs. Bull on September 3, "and has his new message ready – that all there is in life is *character*, that Buddhas & Christs do more harm than

good – for mankind is trying to imitate them – instead of developing its own character! Oh it is grand & thrills one – that ‘in one’s greatest hour of need *one stands alone.*’..... He is indeed a Prophet with a new message!”²⁸ Here was the theme that was to sound forth so often and so emphatically throughout his second visit to America. Once again we hear its announcement at Ridgely Manor in a recollection Maud Stumm’s: “Nearly every day,” she wrote, “Swami was wonderful in a new way; and now it would be music that he dwelt upon, now art, and once he burst into the morning room, declaring for ‘Liberty.’ What do I care if Mahomet was a good man, or Buddha! Does that alter *my* own goodness or evil? Let us be good for our own sake on our own responsibility! Not because somebody way back there was good!”²⁹

In a “New York Letter” dated September, 1899, to the Brahmavadin, “An American Brahmacharini” (possibly Miss Waldo) wrote also of Swamiji’s new message, having heard of it perhaps from Mrs. Coulston or, again, from Miss MacLeod when the latter was in town to meet Nivedita. “The few chosen ones who have heard the Swami in easy home-talks since his arrival,” she recounted, “are deeply impressed with the great message of truth he bears;—a larger and fuller prophecy and vision than any he has yet given to the East or West.”³⁰

But the full development and pronouncement of Swamiji’s new message had to wait its season. In the meanwhile he consciously, purposefully relaxed, keeping his mind from his many concerns, hoping to gain in physical strength. “Do you know what I am trying to do now?” he asked Mary Hale in his September letter, and answered, “writing a book on India and her people—a short chatty simple something. Again I am going to learn French.” He also tried his hand at golf on Ridgely’s private links. “I do not think it difficult at all,” he wrote, “—only it requires good practice.”³¹

There would have been rich hours of talk, or of reading, in the loggia—a wide, open porch on the left side of the house as one faced it from the back lawn—or of undisturbed naps in the quiet afternoons, Swamiji “lying at full length on the green couch in the Hall [Maud Stumm wrote], sound sleep like a tired child.”³² There were solidarity early morning walks around the expansive grounds of Ridgely, generally along a path that let from the “Little Cottage,” passed the Casino, and met a road that led across an open field. At the end of this road was a huge spreading oak, and there Swamiji would meditate—so regularly that the tree came to be known as “Swami’s Oak.” He would then take a path to the right and come to the “Inn,” stopping (in the early days of September before the Whitmarshes left) to play with the three children, who ranged in age from barely two to six, and to give them pennies, as Katharine Whitmarsh, the youngest of the brood, learned from her mother. Then back full circle to the “Little Cottage.” Again, there would have been games of croquet, or, perhaps, of gentle tennis, carriage drives through the lovely countryside or up Mount Mohonk, a favorite jaunt, and in the cool, luminous air of sundown there would have been strolls on the wide lawns, Swamiji making a picture that the enraptured Miss Stumm long remembered: “With his flame-colored robes draped about him, what a figure he was as he strode the lawns of Ridgely! His stride came nearer to the poet’s description of a ‘step that spurned the earth’ than anything I ever expect to see again; and there was a compelling majesty in his presence and carriage that could not be imitated or described.”³³

Dinner, served in the dining room—a room not large, but elegant with black marble mantelpiece, rich wallpaper, and stately, carved sideboards³⁴—was generally more or less informal. Swamiji, sitting always on Mrs. Leggett’s right, was perfectly at liberty to excuse himself for a smoke or a walk. There was, however, a way to hold him. “A very quick word from Lady Betty [how many time! Miss Stumm recalled] that she believed there was to be ice cream would turn him back instantly, and he would sink into his place with a smile of expectancy and pure delight seldom seem on the face of anybody over sixteen. He just love it, and he had all he wanted too”³⁵ “He particularly like chocolate ice cream,” Miss MacLeod related in her memoirs, “because, ‘I too am chocolate and I like it,’ he would say.”³⁶ But at least once (special guests perhaps having come) “a very large and elaborate dinner was given at Ridgely.” “The flowers and lights on the table were wonderful,” Maud Stumm wrote, “and the ladies [were] all in their loveliest gowns and jewels.” (She had been half entranced by all this brilliance and gaiety, and she remembered that Swamiji, nothing her bemusement, had shattered it with a quiet word through “all the noise of other talk.” “Don’t let it fool you, Baby,” he had said)³⁷

And then there would be long gaslit evenings in the great hall—the wide central hall that ran through the house from to back, making a cheerful room with its broad staircase, white columns, big fireplace, sofas, and upholstered chairs. It was a room more lived in than the formal sitting room that adjoined it. Generally, the front and back door would be open, and the pulsating sounds of the summer night would accompany Swamiji’s mellow yet authoritative tones as he talked on, sometimes for hours at a time. Of those evening talks (held on chilly nights around a fire) Miss MacLeod wrote her memoirs:

In the evening . . . he would talk, and once, after he came out with some of his thoughts, a lady said, “Swami, I don’t agree with you there.” “No? Then it is not for you,” he answered. Someone else said, “Oh, but that is where I find you true.” “Ah, then it was for you,” he said showing that utter respect for the other man’s views. One evening he was so eloquent, about a dozen people listening, his voice becoming so soft and seemingly far away; when the evening was over, we all separated without even saying good-night to each other. Such a holy quality pervaded. My sister, Mrs. Leggett, had occasion to go to one of the rooms afterward. There she found one of the guests, an agnostic, weeping. “What do you mean!” my sister asked, and the lady said, “That man has given me eternal life. I never wish to hear him again.”³⁸

(This curious reaction reminds one of Harriet Monroe, the poet, who, after hearing Swamiji at the Parliament of Religions in September of 1893, wrote, “One cannot repeat a perfect moment – the futility of trying of trying to has been almost a superstition with me. Thus I made no effort to hear Vivekananda speak again, during that autumn and winter when he was making converts by the score.”)³⁹

Among Swamiji’s occupations at Ridgely Manor was a pursuit of the art of drawing, which he undertook with all the eagerness and concentration of an aspiring young student, “toiling over

his crayons,” as his teacher wrote, “with as single a mind and heart as if that were his vocation.”⁴⁰ And he did wonderfully well. Maud Stumm’s marveling account of his drawing lessons is included in her memoirs of Swamiji, from which I have been quoting now and then. These invaluable reminiscences were written at Josephine MacLeod’s request and were first published in *Vedanta and the West* (November–December 1953), having been made available by Mrs. Frances Leggett.

One day [Miss Stumm recalled] he told me that he wanted to undertake some sort of work that would keep his hands busy and prevent him from thinking of things that fretted him at that time – and would I give him drawing lessons? So materials were produced, and at an appointed hour he came, promptly, bringing to me, with a curious little air of submission, a huge red apple, which he laid in my hands, bowing gravely. I asked him the significance of this gift, and he said, “in token that the lessons may be fruitful” – and such a pupil as he proved to be! Once only did I have to tell him anything; his memory and concentration were marvelous, and his drawings strangely perfect and intelligent for a beginner. By the time he had taken his fourth lesson, he felt quite equal to a portrait; so Turiyananda posed, like any bronze image, and was drawn capitally —all in the study of Mr. Leggett, with its divan for our seat, and its fine light to aid us. . . .⁴¹

On a hot summer day Miss Stumm and others asked Swamiji to show how he wound his turban—a demonstration he had given perhaps countless times in the West for fascinated children and grownups alike. Now at Ridgely Manor he wound and unwound the length of silk, disclosing the mysteries not only of his own turban but of other kinds as well. “When he arranged it as the desert people do, to keep the neck from the great heat,” Miss Stumm recounted, “I asked him to pose, and he did, talking all the time. that was the day he talked to us of purity and truth.”⁴²

I am able to reproduce here a photograph of Maud Stumm’s drawing of Swamiji *au Bedouin*, which has, at least, historical value. (“The lines of the mouth were so simple and lovely and yet so very difficult!” Miss Stumm wrote of her attempts to draw him.) Unfortunately, Swamiji’s own drawings of Swami Turiyananda, Nivedita, and others no longer exist, or are at present lost to us. He himself, one imagines, would not have destroyed them, for he took immense pride in his new-found talent.

Thus the days slipped by, all of them beautiful, each marked by some special, unforgettable conversation or incident—a long, spellbinding talk on a balmy evening, or so small a thing as the sight of a flaming robe flashing in and out of the shade of the old chestnut trees or of a dark head bend over a sketch book, its owner lost to the world.

In his letter to Mary Hale, Swamiji mentioned that he intended to go to New York to see “the Dewey procession.”⁴³ His reference was to the public welcome to be held on Friday, September 29, for Admiral George Dewey, who almost a year and a half earlier had won a naval victory in Manila Bay. He was still an idolized national hero, and the reception accorded him in

New York, with its wildly ecstatic crowds, fireworks, and parades, and “Welcome, Dewey” spelled out in electric lights on Brooklyn Bridge, would have been worth the trip to see. But whether or not Swamiji went to see it is not at present known. In any event, the excursion would barely have interrupted the flow of summer days at Ridgely Manor—days that glided gently, almost imperceptibly into autumn.

October brought changes to the household. Mrs. Bull finally arrived on Saturday, October 7, followed several days later by Olea. But as things turned out, Miss MacLeod’s plans again miscarried. Two days later “the great summer” came, for her, to an unexpected end. On Monday, October 9 (a date noted in Sister Nivedita’s small diary), a letter came to Ridgely from a Mrs. S. K. Blodgett, a widow, who was then unknown to Joe and Betty, saying that their elder brother, Taylor MacLeod, lay seriously ill, perhaps dying, in her home in Los Angeles, where she was nursing him.

“Within two hours I was packed,” Miss MacLeod wrote in her memoirs, “the horses were at the door . . . and as I went out Swami put up his hand and said some Sanskrit blessing and then he called out, ‘Get up some classes and I will come.’”⁴⁴

She could not have left Ridgely without a painful wrench at her heart; yet she drove off with a characteristic resilience and valiance, an acceptance of everything that came her way, which was indeed one of the traits for which Swamiji loved her. Some two weeks later he was to pay her a tribute during the course of a conversation: She was the only one among the group at Ridgely who had attained freedom, he said, and in this he included himself. She could leave everything and everybody and go out to do her work without ever looking back—a quality won only through thousands of lifetimes. And indeed Miss MacLeod had the buoyancy and wide-heartedness that comes from an innate and true detachment. “Jojo is the same as usual,” she wrote of herself that summer at Ridgely. “I am radiant and happy & don’t want anything on earth but a few more people to love.”⁴⁵

In Swamiji’s parting call to Miss MacLeod—“Get up some classes and I will come”—one finds the first indication that he felt once again the desire to carry his message to far, and perhaps fertile, fields. Yet only in retrospect does one see that call as the announcement of a new and great mission; there were no flourishes, no rolling of drums; indeed Swamiji’s call seemed at the time to have been only a passing thought, rising like a token bubble from some depths where the future was being formed, glinting for a moment, and then floating off.

With Miss MacLeod gone to California—or *Kali*-fornia, as she liked to spell it—and most of the young people gone back to school, to college, or to work, their vacations over, October was a relatively quiet month at Ridgely. Yet it was not a dull one; for where Swamiji was, there dullness was totally precluded. We learn now of his days and his words from Nivedita’s long, detailed, and faithful letters to “Yum-Yum,” which come almost on the heels of the latter’s chatty

but sketchy letters to Mrs. Bull and which have been published in the *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, edited by Sankari Prasad Basu, a rich and absorbing collection in which we find invaluable glimpses of Swamiji through Nivedita's eyes and catch echoes of his voice.* Here we see him at Ridgely Manor "pacing up and down for an hour and a half like a caged loon," warning her "against politeness—against this 'Lovely' and 'beautiful' – against this continual feeling of the external," admonishing her "to get rid of all these petty relations of society and home, to hold the soul firm against the perpetual appeals of sense, to realize that the rapture of autumn trees is as truly sense-enjoyment as a comfortable bed or a table dainty, to hate the silly praise and blame of people."⁴⁶

Or one hears him talking of Shiva: "Even meditation would be a bondage to the free soul, but Siva goes on and on for the good of the world, the Eternal Incarnation. . . . For meditation is the greatest service—the most direct—that can be rendered." He talked of Sri Ramakrishna —"full of gaiety and merriment"—and of his own days of discipleship at Dakshineswar, the temple on the Ganga, where in "perfect silence, broken only by the cries of the jackals, in the darkness under the great tree, [we sat night after night] the whole night through, and He talked to me, when I was a boy."⁴⁷

"I never heard the Prophet talk so much of Sri Ramakrishna," Nivedita wrote to Miss MacLeod in a letter of which only an undated, heretofore unpublished fragment exists and which could have been written from India in early 1899; but the time, one thinks, could as well have been the fall of that year and the place, Ridgely Manor. "He told us what I had heard before of [his Master's] infallible judgement of men," she continued,

finding good and greatness in the least apparent, and judging at once of the bad weight of karma that so and so had yet to work through before he could come to anything. "And so," Swami said, "you see my devotion is the dog's devotion. I have been wrong so often and He has always been right and now I trust His judgement blindly"—and then he told us how He would hypnotise anyone who came to him and in 2 minutes know all about him & Swami said that from this he had learnt to count our consciousness as a very small thing.

They believe on grounds of this sort in the Math that Swami is Arjuna – and that there in the Garden at Dakshineswar they have once more seen Krishna talking with His Disciple, giving him, as it were, a new Gita.⁴⁸

And there was the time Swamiji started Mrs. Leggett and Olea with his denunciation of the rigid laws and conventions of society by means of which the strong oppress the weak and with his admiration of individuals strong and courageous enough to break through those laws. He did not hesitate to uphold the dark side of individual sovereignty, facing and embracing the Terrible, seeing even the criminal as an essential, indeed glorious, part of humanity's great surging drive toward freedom.

Or he might spend an hour or so writing a poem. One of these, only recently made known to us, might well have been written for his hosts, who were finding happiness and renewed youth in their life together:

One circle more the spiral path of life ascends,
And Time's restless shuttle—running back and fro
Through maze of warp and woof—
Spins out a strong piece.*

Hand in hand they stand—and try
To fathom depths whence springs eternal love,
Each in other's eyes,

And find no power holds o'er that age
But brings the youth anew to them,
And time—the good, the pure, the true.⁴⁹

At times Swamiji was in a “great mood of devotion,” at other times he would extol the path of the jnani, “he who likes nothing and witnesses all.” Again, “he spoke of Kali, and grew full of worship.”⁵⁰ Or he spoke prophetically of social problems, of “the mixture of races, and of ‘the great tumults, the terrible tumults’ through which the next state of things must be reached.”⁵¹ He pointed out the hidden meanings of ancient Hindu myths and epics, of their bearing on modern life, of the ideals they depicted, the lessons they taught. And he told charming Indian stories, two of which have come down to us through Maud Stumm and are given in the Appendix. Indeed, Swamiji talked, it would seem, of everything under the sun, and upon everything he cast the clear, brilliant light of another sun, the sun of *Brahmavidya*, infinitely more lustrous, more revealing.

Very often after Miss MacLeod had left Ridgely, Nivedita and Mrs. Bull's friend Marian Briggs had Swamiji to themselves for hours at a time, the rest of the household being occupied elsewhere or kept away by a tactful hostess as “he just went on and on—and on.”⁵² Those hours were heaven for the two who sat in his company – Nivedita absorbed, self-forgetful, Mrs. Briggs listening “exquisitely, without a word or a look.”⁵³ But whether Swamiji spoke to one person, or to two or to the whole group, nothing he said was not laced with riches. Even the most airy of conversations could call forth from him some jewel to savor and pass on to Yum. One day at lunch his friends teased him for his pride in so relatively minor a talent as his poetry of his painting:

Mrs. Bull turned [Nivedita wrote on October 18] and pointed out how his poetry had been the weak point on which he had beguiled to the loss of honour. And

she said her husband was never sensitive about criticism of his music – that he expected, he knew it was not perfect. But on road-engineering he felt deeply, and could be flattered! Then, in our amusement, we all teased Swami for his carelessness about his religious teacher-hood, and vanity about his portrait-painting (he had produced three or four portraits of me which others say are a libel even on me, but which just delights himself—sweet King!)—and he suddenly woke up and said, “You see there is one thing called love and there is another thing called Union. And Union is greater than Love.

“I do not *love* Religion. I have become identified with it. It is my life. So no man loves that thing in which his life has been spent, in which he really has accomplished something. *That which we love is not yet ourself*. Yours husband did not *love* music for which he had always stood. He loved engineering in which as yet he knew comparatively little. This is the difference between Bhakti and Gnan [Jnana]. And this is why Gnan is greater than Bhakti.”⁵⁴

At other times he could be hilariously funny. “He described the effect of Boston beans and other Boston food one day,” Nivedita told Miss MacLeod: “ ‘You look at a face and if it is not quite flat you cannot tell anyway whether it is coming toward you or going from you.’ Did not ever hear anything so funny? And he solemnly declared that if you live on baked beans and other things common in that city you will presently find yourself with the Boston face!!!”⁵⁵

But even while Swamiji was full of fun, of poetry, and of sheer radiance of being during those summer and autumn days at Ridgely, the dark period (if one may call it so) of his life was not yet over. One cannot even imagine the quality of his suffering, no more than one can imagine the quality and magnitude of his joy. One only knows what he once or twice revealed to those close to him. Telling Yum of those heart-wrenching revelations, Nivedita wrote:

On Thursday evening [November 2] Swami came down for a cigar or something, and found Mrs. Bull and myself in earnest talk. So he sat down too—of course. One could see that he was troubled and for the first time he talked of the two years foretold to him, of defection and disease and treachery – and of how it was growing thicker today than ever. Laughingly, he said he supposed the last month would be the worst. [Nivedita had long since determined on astrological grounds that the coming December 6, now a month or so away, would mark a decided upswing in Swamiji’s fortunes.] He spoke of E.T.S. [Edward T. Sturdy] and of the Indian trouble—and he said he found himself still the Sunyasi – he mined no loss—but he *could* be hurt through personal love. Treachery cut deep. S. Sara [Saint Sara, Mrs. Bull] had almost tears in her eyes when she came into my room after, and sat talking of it for an hour. She prays that we may be able, during this last month, to surround him with Peace. . . .

He had said something to S. Sara, and indeed again in that night-talk, of the fact he is guided and protected in his work, but all that is personal is turned to ashes.⁵⁶ . . .

The next day Swamiji was “radiant,” and that night he slept well. But the following day he spoke so impassionedly of a deeper anguish that Nivedita “fled to her room to cry.”⁵⁷

Then he followed me [she wrote] and stood at the door a minute and revealed still more of the awful suffering. . . . He was talking in the old way about escaping from the world—he has been reciting the hatred of Fame and Wealth all his life, but he is only now beginning to understand what it really means. It is becoming unbearable. “Where am I now!” he said, turning to me suddenly with such an awful look of lostness on his face. And then he began to repeat something – “And so to Thou—Ramakrishna—(with a pause) I betake myself. For in Thy Feet alone is the refuge of man.”. . .

“This body is going anyway. It shall go with hard tapasya—I will say 10,000 OM’s a day—and with fasting. Alone, alone by the Ganges—in the Himalayas—saying Hara Hara, the Freed One, the Freed One. I will change my name once more, and this time none shall know. I will take the initiation of sannyasa over again—and it shall be for this—and I will never never come back to anyone again.”

And then again that lost look, and the awful thought that he had lost his power of meditation. “I have lost all—lost all for you Mlechas!” And with that a smile—and a sigh—and the turning to go away.⁵⁸

Only this (though this is enough) and the lines of a poem entitled “To My Own Soul” give glimpses into Swamiji’s continuing sense of suffering during this period. “Hold yet a while, Strong Hearts,” he wrote, “Not part a life long yoke / Though blighted looks the present, future gloom.”⁵⁹ And to be sure, his heart held strong, his courage never deserted him.

What Swamiji meant by saying (if he said) that he may have “lost his power of meditation” who can tell? From what depths, or heights, of spiritual consciousness was he speaking? To what unimaginable levels of Samadhi was he referring? One remembers that on his return to India after his first visit to the West he felt that his power to grant the highest realization had become exhausted by giving lectures in America and England. “If I put on the lion cloth and become absorbed in spiritual practice, . . . then perhaps the power to grant Nivikalpa Samadhi may come,” he had said.* To be “alone by the Ganges in the Himalayas,” to become absorbed in the Absolute was still his longing. To the extent that he molded and channeled his power and love into a form that the world could comprehend, to the extent that he lived and worked as a human being among human beings, to that extent, to that very great extent, suffered. His effort, moreover, to awaken humanity to its own spiritual reality was in the very nature of things bound to meet with resistance and betrayal. Yet his sacrifice, one must suppose, consisted not so much, if at all, in the suffering of body and mind as in the assumption of any limitation at all, and the heights of consciousness on which such limitation was felt as pain, as longing, are, again, unimaginable; for on such heights that thin veil of limitation was also felt as unutterable joy. Swamiji suffered; and yet he did not suffer; he could turn with “an awful look of lostness on his face”; and yet he was ever an ocean of bliss. Through all his talks at Ridgely Manor on any

subject, in any mood, came “flashes of the inner divinity”⁶⁰ (Nivedita wrote to Yum), and if one looked at him steadily as he spoke (as his disciple could never help but do), one seemed, she wrote, “to be gazing through open portals straight into the Infinite.” “Is this because he is so little conscious of himself?”⁶¹ she asked. Or, what may amount to the same question, was it because neither the joys nor the pains of life could cloud or clutter those portals? The Infinite stood open to full view, ever accessible to him and through him to others. In two letters written from Ridgely to Mrs. George W. Hale Swamiji spoke of the predominant evil of life, of the untouched sovereignty of the soul, and of renunciation as the means—the only means—to freedom. These were perhaps thoughts that were going through his mind at Ridgely, the detachment he recommended to “Mother Church” only different in degree from that total Aloneness that he himself desired.

Ridgely Manor. 5th Oct. '99

My dear Mother Church

Many many thanks for your kind words. I am so glad you are working on as ever. I am glad because the wave of optimistic has not caught you yet. It is all very well to say—everything is right but that is apt to degenerate into a sort of laissez-faire. I believe with you that the world is evil—made more hideous with a few dashes of good. All our works have only this value—that they awaken some to the reality of this horror—and [make them] flee for refuge to some place – beyond—which is called God—or Christ or Brahma or Buddha & c. Names do not make much difference. Again we must always remember ours is only to work—we never attain results—How can we? Good can never be done without doing evil. We cannot breathe a breath without killing thousands of poor little animals. National prosperity is another name of death & degradation to millions of other races. So is individual prosperity the beggaring of many. The world is evil—and will ever remain so. It is its nature, and cannot be changed—“which one of you by taking thought & c.” Such is truth—the wisdom is therefore in renunciation, that is—to make the Lord our all in all. be a true Christian, Mother—Like Christ renounce everything and let the heart & soul & body belong to Him & Him alone. All this nonsense which people have build around Christ’s name is not His teaching. He taught to renounce, He never says the earth is an enjoyable place—And your time has come to get rid of all vanities even the love of children & husband and think of the Lord and Him alone. Ever your Son,⁶²

Vivekananda

23rd Oc. '99

My dear Mother —I was taking a few days complete rest and so am late in replying to your very kind note. Accept my congratulations on the anniversary of your marriage. I pray many many such returns may come to you. I am sure my business [previous?] letter was coloured by the state of my body—as indeed is the whole of existence to us. Yet

Mother there is more pain than pleasure in life. If not, why do I remember you and your children—almost every day of my life and not many others? Happiness is liked so much because it is so rare—Is it not? Fifty percent of our life is mere lethargy, *ennui*, of the rest forty percent is pain, only ten happiness—and this for the exceptionally fortunate. We are oftentimes mixing up this state of *ennui* with pleasure. It is rather positive, though not positive. Pleasure and Pain are both *feeling* not *willing*. They are only processes—which convey to the mind excitements or motivates of action. The real positive action is the willing or impulse to work of the mind—begun upon [when?] the sensation has been taken in (pleasure or pain) thus the real is neither pleasure nor pain. It has no connection with either. Quite different from either. The barking of the dog awakens the master to guard against a thief—or receives his dearest friend. It does not follow—therefore that the dog & his master are of the same nature or have any degree of kinship. The feelings of pleasure or pain similarly awaken the soul to activity—without any kinship at all. The soul is beyond pain, beyond pleasure, sufficient in its own nature—and no hell can punish it nor any heaven can bless it. So far philosophy—I am coming soon to Chicago—and hope to say Lord bless you to you & your children. All love as usual to my Christian relatives—scientific or quacks.⁶³

Vivekananda

Whatever suffering Swamiji may have known, whatever its nature of quality, his compassion and concern for others never lessened in the slightest; indeed, it was to serve their spiritual needs that he remained on earth. To those who needed his help he would talk sometimes for hours. There was, for instance, Olea, Mrs. Bull's "fretful"⁶⁴ and generally ailing daughter, who was divorced from her husband in those days when divorce was looked upon askance and whose child had died the previous years. "On Sunday during lunch [Swamiji] came [to the "Inn"?] and spent three hours alone with Olea and left her a different woman," Nivedita wrote to Yum on October 18 and continued, "On Monday about 10 he came again and spent the morning. He brought the Vedas and Upanishads with him and gave her what was really a class on Gnan – all to herself – though many of us were present. Wasn't that fine?"⁶⁵ In Nivedita's diary one finds another indication of Swamiji's concern for Olea. On Friday, October 27, there is the entry: "[Swamiji] to Olea— 'nightmares always begin pleasantly—only at the worst point [the] dream is broken – so death breaks [the] dream of life. Love death.' "⁶⁶

(It may have been because of Olea's unhappy marriage, among others, that Alberta asked Swamij, "Is there no happiness in marriage?" He replied, "Yes, Alberta, if marriage is entered into as a great austerity—and everything is given up even principle!"⁶⁷ He did not minimize the difficulty of the householder's lot. "I don't want to be a monk," Hollister once protested, "I want to marry and have children." "All right, my boy," Swamiji answered. "Remember only that you choose the harder path.")⁶⁸

He had a word or a blessing for everyone, even for the baby, Frances. One morning, as Alberta told it in later years to her sister, the child came in from the garden, some flowers in her

hand. She gave them to Swamiji, who said gravely, “In India we give flowers to our teachers.” And he pronounced over her some Sanskrit words.⁶⁹

Seeing anyone depressed or worried, for whatever reason, he would go out of his way to dispel that persons’ particular nightmare – at least for the time being. “I had a worriment that bothered me a good deal,” Miss Stumm wrote in her notes, “and though I said nothing of it to anyone, it was constantly in my thoughts.” She went on to tell how Swamiji had asked her to go for a walk with him to watch a threshing machine in a nearby field, and how, as they walked, he told her of the wonderful party that had been held the night before at the Manor: “Wonderful affair,” he exclaimed, “stringed instruments and such a supper! Pheasants!” Where had she been? *Everybody* was there and “they danced and danced,” everything moved out of the house. “Wonderful party!”⁷⁰ This gala affair, to which Maud Stumm had not been invited and which had somehow been kept secret from her until now, was, of course, all Swamiji’s fairy tale, conjured up to divert her mind. And divert her mind it did, like shock therapy dealt with a magic wand.

Miss Stumm’s “worriment” may have been connected with a breaking heart, for she was suffering at this time, and later, from an unrequited love of long standing. Yet even so, Mrs. Frances Leggett remembered, she was tremendous fun, always highly entertaining and amusing.

Sometimes Swamiji would join those who escorted her home in the evenings to the little village of Stone Ridge. We learn of one such walk in Nivedita’s diary-entry for Sunday, October 15, in which, after nothing Swamiji’s talk with Olea, she continued: “Afternoon, Swami drew me while I wrote. Read Sch [open-hauer]. Walk home with Miss Stumm by moonlight.” And of this same evening (which was Maud Stumm’s last at Ridgely) Nivedita wrote to Yum:

As we left her, I whispered to Swami that I couldn’t bear even the sound of our feet in the dead hours at night. It was wonderful moonlight, and we walked on up the avenue in silence – a sound would have been discretion. Then he said, “When a tiger in India is on the trail of prey at night, if its paw or tail makes the least sound in passing, it bites it till the blood comes.” And then he talked of the need we Western women had to absorb beauty quietly, and turn it over in the mind at another time.⁷¹

Two days later (on Tuesday, October 17) Nivedita went into retreat, intending to remain secluded for fifteen days, or until November 1. “You see,” she wrote to “Yum,” “I have to finish [*Kali the Mother*, a small book, which as early as October 2 she had been “deep in writing on,” as Miss MacLeod had reported],⁷² and there are other things I have to do—and I have always longed to try a retreat anyways, and my great obstacle was the Master.”⁷³ Nivedita’s retreat, for which she had finally obtained Swamiji’s permission, does not seem to have lasted long. On Friday, October 20, she wrote in her diary “went down to supper,” and from subsequent entries it would appear that thereupon the retreat had come to an end.

But however that may be, the weeks sped by. November came, bringing chilly days, and with it came the season of activity and work. One morning after breakfast Swamiji turned suddenly and fiercely to Nivedita and demanded how much longer she was going to hang on.

“He was quite abusive,” she told “Yum,” “—and then he uttered a relenting word – you know how. . . . Then he waxed glorious. If he had my health and strength he would conquer the world. I was a Kshatriya. Did I know that I belonged to his *family*? I was not a Brahmin. Austerity was the path. . . . It was tremendous—and he ended with a blessing in which Guru was lost and it became all Father—as he told me to go out into the world and fight for him—the only thing that he wanted—before he could pass away from the world into peace or death.”⁷⁴ “Oh! Yum!” Nivedita exclaimed, for tremendous indeed was the mandate she felt she had received. It was decided then and there that she would leave for Chicago with Olea and Alberta on November 7. On the same date Mrs. Bull would leave for Cambridge, Swamiji for New York. (Swamiji Turiyananda had already left Ridgely at the end of October and had gone on to Montclair, New Jersey.)

But before the last partings came, an extraordinary event took place, which seemed at the time to be of great import to all concerned. I quote here Nivedita’s account of the incident in a letter to Miss MacLeod, dated November 11, 1899, a facsimile of which is given in Sankari P. Basu’s book *Lokamata Nivedita*. The day of which the letter tells was the previous Sunday, November 5. (The place, to judge from a memo, here reproduced, that Nivedita scribbled on the back of a photograph, was the “Inn.”)*

On Sunday afternoon Swami insisted on my coming and packing with him, & as I worked he took out a couple of silk turbans to give the girls. Then two pieces of cotton cloth—gerrua colour—for Mrs. Bull. He called me to my room, where Mrs. Bull sat writing, to give these, & left the turbans on one side.

First he shut the door—then he arranged the cloth as skirt & chudder round her waist—then he called her a sannyasini & putting one hand on her head & one on mine he said: “I gave you all that Ramakrishna P[aramahansa] gave to me. What came to us from a woman [the Divine Mother] I give to you two women. Do what you can with it. I cannot trust myself. I do not know what I might do tomorrow & ruin the work. Women’s hands will be the best anyway to hold what came from a woman – from Mother. Who & what She is, I do not know, I have never seen Her, but Ramakr[ishna] P. saw Her & touched Her, like this (touching my sleeve). She may be a great disembodied spirit for all I know. Anyway I cast the load on you. I am going away to be at peace. I felt nearly mad this morning, & I was thinking and thinking what I could do, when I went to my room to sleep before lunch. And then I thought of this & I was so glad. It is like a release. I have borne it all this time, & now I have given it up. . . .”

Were these exactly the words he used? I think they were. It seems to me that it must have been about 3 o’clock or shortly after, for I think it was daylight still, & then I went back with him to the packing & very long after, as it seems now, he seemed surprised when I told him to go downstairs to the fire—I could do the rest of the work alone—& went like a relieved child. Just before he called me to “the Robing” he had said: “Oh! I feel so gay!”

(We both thought of you at that moment Darling—& I for one was glad that you were away—for your life is his personally—& you are still to be the Good Star which could not be if you were entangled in all that has been so hard on him.)

And so, Yum, happened “the event of my life”—the great turning-point—and the dear St. Sara’s.⁷⁵

In her diary, Sister Nivedita wrote of this unforgettable day more briefly, making the entry on November 5: “Our wonderful Sunday. Swami’s release.” Her letter to Miss MacLeod continued:

Next morning he came over to Ridgely, and Mrs. Leggett managed to throw Mrs. R. Smith with him, knowing that she was hungry for a word. It seems that she asked him what his message was. And he answered “I have no message. I used to think I had, but now I know that I have nothing for the world—only for myself. I must break this dream.” It sounds so limp and forceless, when I repeat it! And it was so great and stern as he told us of it.⁷⁶

As far as is known, Mrs. Bull never made public (or, for that matter, private) claim to the title of sannyasini, which she clearly received in that spontaneous, brief, and informal ceremony at Ridgely. In her diary for Sunday, November 5, 1899, one finds only the quiet entry: “Swamiji gave the Sanyasi cloth and charge of work under S.R.K. and the Mother.”⁷⁷ As for Swamiji’s bestowal upon her and Nivedita of his powers—or, at least, it would seem, of the power to carry out certain aspects of his mission—he did so in all solemnity. Many months earlier, at the close of 1898, as Mrs. Bull was leaving India, Swamiji had written to her, “Ere this I had only love for you, but recent developments prove that you are appointed by the Mother to watch over my life, hence, faith has been added to love! As regards me and my work I hold henceforth that you are inspired and will gladly shake off all responsibilities from my shoulder and abide by what the Mother ordains through you.”⁷⁸ During the months that were to follow the ceremony, he was often to remind Mrs. Bull of her role in his work and of his implicit faith in her judgment. But what actual and practical effect his bestowal of power upon these two disciples had in the implementation of his mission, what effect it had on Mrs. Bull’s life, in what sense it constituted “the great turning point” for her and Nivedita, what “release: it actually gave to Swamiji—these are questions which would, I think, be hard to answer.

Two days later Swamiji left Ridgely Manor for New York. And thus the “great summer”—so restful that it may have added almost three years to his life—that golden time, never to be repeated, came to an end.