

**THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY. AN  
ADDRESS BEFORE THE GRADUATE  
PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY, MARCH  
25, 1896**

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The Vedanta philosophy. An address before the Graduate philosophical society of Harvard university, March 25, 1896 by Swami Vivekananda

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**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA**

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# THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

**An Address**

BEFORE

THE GRADUATE PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

OF

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

MARCH 25, 1896

BY THE

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

**With an Introduction**

BY

CHARLES CARROLL EVERETT, D.D., LL.D.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE SWAMI VIVEKANANDA was sent by his friends and co-religionists to present their belief at the Congress of Religions that was held in connection with the World's Fair in Chicago. This he did in a way to win general interest and admiration. Since then he has lectured on the same theme in different parts of our country. He has been in fact a missionary from India to America. Everywhere he has made warm personal friends; and his expositions of Hindu philosophy have been listened to with delight. It is very pleasant to observe the eager interest with which his own people in India follow his course, and the joy that they take in his success. I have seen a pamphlet filled with speeches made at a large and influential meeting in Calcutta, which was called together to express enthusiastic approval of the manner in which he has fulfilled his mission; and satisfaction at this invasion of the West by oriental thought. This satisfaction is well grounded. We may not be so near to actual conversion as some of these speakers seem to believe; but Vivekananda has created a high degree of interest in himself and his work. There are indeed few departments of study more attractive than the Hindu thought. It is a rare pleasure to see a form

of belief that to most seems so far away and unreal as the Vedanta system, represented by an actually living and extremely intelligent believer. This system is not to be regarded merely as a curiosity, as a speculative vagary. Hegel said that Spinozism is the necessary beginning of all philosophizing. This can be said even more emphatically of the Vedanta system. We occidentals busy ourselves with the manifold. We can, however, have no understanding of the manifold, if we have no sense of the One in which the manifold exists. The reality of the One is the truth which the East may well teach us; and we owe a debt of gratitude to Vivekananda that he has taught this lesson so effectively.

C. C. EVERETT.

Harvard University.



## NOTE.

THIS lecture and the discussion which followed were stenographically reported. They could receive from the Swami only a cursory revision, owing to his departure for England, but it is hoped no errors have crept in. Professor LANMAN and Professor WRIGHT of Harvard have kindly assisted in the final revision. In the reporting of the discussion, some of the questions were unavoidably lost. The first four notes were added by the Swami. In the original lecture, the quotations from Hindu writings were first given in the Sanskrit, and then translated; these off-hand translations stand as given.

Following the lecture and discussion, are the answers of the Swami to questions at two afternoon talks with some Harvard students, on March 22 and 24. These answers were stenographically reported, but the questions were not. There have also been added a few selections from unpublished lectures. Some of the answers and selections cover the same general ground, but they have all been retained on account of the variety in treatment.

While no adequate exposition of the Vedanta philosophy can be given in a single address, it is hoped that this, with the accompanying answers and selections, will be of value to those interested in the thought and life of the East.

J. P. F.

## THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY.

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THE Vedanta philosophy, as it is generally called at the present day, really comprises all the various sects that now exist in India. Thus there have been various interpretations, and to my mind they have been progressive, beginning with the dualistic or *Dwaita* and ending with the non-dualistic or *Adwaita*. The word *Vedanta* literally means the end of the Vedas,—the Vedas being the scriptures of the Hindus.\* Sometimes in the West by the Vedas are meant only the hymns and rituals of the Vedas. But at the present time these parts have almost gone out of use, and usually by the word *Vedas* in India the Vedanta is meant. All our commentators, when they want to quote a passage from the scriptures, as a rule quote from the Vedanta, which has another technical name with the commentators—the *Śrutis*.† Now all the books known by the name of the Vedanta were not entirely written after the ritualistic portions of the Vedas. For instance, one of them—the *Iça Upanishad*—forms the fortieth chapter of the *Yajur Veda*, that being the oldest part of the

\* The Vedas are divided mainly into two portions: the *Karmakanda* and the *Jñanakanda*,—the work-portion and the knowledge-portion. To the *Karmakanda* belong the famous hymns and the rituals or *Brahmanas*. Those books which treat of spiritual matters apart from ceremonies are called *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* belong to the *Jñanakanda*, or knowledge-portion. It is not that all the *Upanishads* came to be composed as a separate portion of the Vedas. Some are interspersed among the rituals, and at least one is in the *Saṁhita* or hymn-portion. Sometimes the term *Upanishad* is applied to books which are not included in the Vedas,—e. g. the *Gita*; but as a rule it is applied to the philosophical treatises scattered through the Vedas. These treatises have been collected, and are called the *Vedānta*.

† The term *Śrutis*,—meaning “that which is heard,”—though including the whole of the Vedic literature, is chiefly applied by the commentators to the *Upanishads*.

Vedas. There are other Upanishads\* which form portions of the Brahmanas or ritualistic writings; and the rest of the Upanishads are independent, not comprised in any of the Brahmanas or other parts of the Vedas; but there is no reason to suppose that they were entirely independent of other parts, for, as we well know, many of these have been lost entirely, and many of the Brahmanas have become extinct. So it is quite possible that the independent Upanishads belonged to some Brahmanas which in course of time fell into disuse, while the Upanishads remained. These Upanishads are also called Forest Books or Aranyakas.

The Vedanta, then, practically forms the scriptures of the Hindus, and all systems of philosophy that are orthodox have to take it as their foundation. Even the Buddhists and Jains, when it suits their purpose, will quote a passage from the Vedanta as authority. All schools of philosophy in India, although they claim to have been based upon the Vedas, took different names for their systems. The last one, the system of Vyasa, took its stand upon the doctrines of the Vedas more than the previous systems did, and made an attempt to harmonize the preceding philosophies, such as the Sankhya and the Nyaya, with the doctrines of the Vedanta. So it is especially called the Vedanta Philosophy; and the Sutras or Aphorisms of Vyasa are, in modern India, the basis of the Vedanta Philosophy. Again, these Sutras of Vyasa have been variously explained by different commentators. In

\* The Upanishads are said to be one hundred and eight in number. Their dates cannot be fixed with certainty,—only it is certain that they are older than the Buddhistic movement. Though some of the minor Upanishads contain allusions indicating a later date, yet that does not prove the later date of the treatise, as, in very many cases in Sanskrit literature, the substance of a book, though of very ancient date, receives a coating, as it were, of later events in the hands of the sectarians to exalt their particular sect.