well-versed in the Vedas; he is sinless; he is not tormented by desire; he is a knower of Brahman; he is super-eminent; withdrawing himself into Brahman, he is ever at peace; he is like a smouldering fire unfed by fuel. The guru is the ocean of unmotivated compassion. He is a friend to the noble who make obeisance to him (Vivekachudamani, 35).

This two-volume sacred treatise may aptly be called Sat-smarana Ratnamalika, a gem-necklace of holy reminiscences. A perusal of this absorbing narrative shows the infinite possibilities of spiritual quest and growth open to any earnest spiritual aspirant and also the astounding altitudes of divinity attainable by the worthy heirs to Sri Ramakrishna's rich spiritual legacy.

The unshakable conviction of the true devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, is that there is, behind all their noble endeavours, his unseen hand. Viewed in this light, it was he who deposited the seed of the lovely rose sapling of this book in the devout mind of the editor who nurtured the sapling with great care and carried out the much needed act of pruning and shaping of the plant with skill and sagacity. And we have this beautiful rose plant smiling with 111 variegated and multi-hued rose flowers of life-sketch, reminiscent essays, collection of teachings, and compilation of essays, dif- fusing their heady fragrance. May the fortunate ones enjoy the exotic fragrance!

The two volumes comprising four parts are a fine hardbound set with precious contents, professionally edited by Swami Satyamayananda, the previous editor of Prabuddha Bharata. This two-volume set should make a prized possession, as it has the double merit of being a sumptuous repast for the mind and a delicious feast for the eyes. While its 111 essays regale the mind with their depth and variety, the 184 glossy photographs, mostly in colour, are nectarine feast for the eyes. On opening the charming book, we are greeted by an array of colourful photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Vireswarananda, the hero of the treatise, and of the nine monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who gave valuable spiritual guidance to Swami Vireswarananda. The thought-ful design and layout of the book is a tribute to the resourcefulness and creative imagination of the people behind it as it is bound to lift the mood of the readers to the requisite lofty level of solemnity and veneration to enable them to be readily receptive to the sanctifying ideas of the sublime narrative. The holy treatise should be possessed and perused by the vast circle of spiritually-inclined readership as it is a spiritual elixir from which they can, at any time, draw copious draughts of wisdom for their spiritual regeneration. This book is certainly a feather in the cap of the enterprising editor. The price indicated for the wonderful book marked by fecundity of thoughts, felicity of expression, and finality of conviction is undoubtedly a measly one.

N Hariharan
Madurai

Living in a monastic community is one of the most self-abnegating tasks that a monk is called to live out from one mundane day to the other. To live amongst strangers and those whom one has not chosen by one’s own free will is a form of self-sacrifice which only a monk can under-stand. Swami Vireswarananda, the tenth president of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, lived in and guided a monastic order that is truly cosmopolitan. We may choose to ignore this fact of linguistic and socio-cultural differ-ences among monks, but if we are to really under-stand the life of Swami Vireswarananda, we have to understand the Ramakrishna Order. This order has amongst its monastic ranks, men of various religions who, while respecting their religions of birth, chose and continue to choose Advaita Vedanta as their raison d’être of existence; striving to experience the supreme Godhead qua Brahman in the here and the now. This order of monks is a sign that cosmopolitanism is possible amidst heteroglossia. Swami Vireswarananda through his own life grounded in the Brahman-experience made the ideas of Brahman simpler for many.
The book under review, compiled and edited by Swami Chaitanyananda and published by Swami Vireswarananda Smriti Committee traces the life-trajectory of Swami Vireswarananda, who experienced the Atman. The pictures say it all. The copious notes accompanying each picture further clarify the evolution of the human to the divine. This book begins by situating Swami Vireswarananda within his religio-historical context or lineage (9–15). Swami Chaitanyananda’s editorial expertise is evident since while he begins by mapping the young Panduranga’s genealogy in page 10, by page 15 we get to see and know the future monk’s real genealogy—his monastic pedigree as it were. A jiva who would be transformed into a knower of Brahman by the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Brahmananda, who mentored the young novice who began his monastic or real life at the Order’s Chennai Math. The ten Mahavidyas had reincarnated as the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. It was Shakti herself, who initiated Swami Vireswarananda (27). Swami Chaitanyananda is careful throughout this book to emphasise the vanity of this world and the importance of the detestation of all that is worldly. For example, we have the anecdote of Swami Turiyananda cautioning a monk against even indirectly appreciating a house, which is meant for worldly purposes (38). Hindu ideas of sannyasa brook no dependence on other humans. Swami Vireswarananda was truly not of his earthly parents, but of the Totapuri gotra of Advaitin sannyasins: ‘In every action, in everything you have to be conscious and get rid of the Vasanas by practice and also by “Vairagya”; dispassion and by spirit of renunciation. ... there is no other way’ (146).

This dispassion and renunciation are the hallmarks of a Hindu monk and Swami Chaitanyananda’s incessant highlighting of these aspects of Swami Vireswarananda’s life is proper since the Hindu monk is not mere flesh but the Atman. Therefore, to highlight any other aspect of Swami Vireswarananda’s life is superfluous and practically useless. His life is worth studying and reflecting upon not just because he became the tenth president of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, but because he embodied the sangha in a way that few could. The photos in this book have been painstakingly retrieved from various archives and—along with the two volumes of Swami Vireswarananda: A Divine Life edited by Swami Satyamayananda, the previous editor of Prabuddha Bharata—should be mandatory reading for those interested in the Ramakrishna Order or Hindu monasticism. The facsimiles of letters with Swami Vireswarananda’s handwriting are of immense value (212–9).

Darshana or the act of seeing is a reciprocal event. Swami Chaitanyananda’s book facilitates the act of seeing the veritable body of Sri Ramakrishna—each page of this book demands us to respond to the ancient anthropomorphic call to renunciation that we find in all major and the minor Upanishads. This book modifies our perspective and forces us to become noble and more spiritually inclined. This book’s ‘cultural work’ lies in making us aware of the need for Vedanta in a world wracked with violence and desire. Swami Vireswarananda showed the world that ‘service to humanity is’ not ‘the antithesis of Vedanta ... One who says’ that Vedanta is antithetical to the service of humanity ‘has not realised the essence of Vedanta’ (195). One very important point needs to be mentioned in discussing Swami Vireswarananda. He never pointed to himself as the locus of spirituality and divinity, but always and unfailingly pointed to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda for spiritual sustenance. And thus this book under review does not begin with his photograph, but those of these three personages, who made Swami Vireswarananda abide in Brahman.

If this book is available in an electronic format and may be, free of charge on various e-book platforms, then it will reach the world at large. Devotees of the Ramakrishna Order already know of Swami Vireswarananda; the Swami’s direct disciples know of him, but the sick need unction, not as much as the healthy. There may be many hearts which will change if this book were available online since extremists should know that:

Here is one thing more. We have in India, people of various ethnic backgrounds. There are so many languages and so many social customs, all different in different parts of India ... How will you integrate them into a great nation?
This also has been answered by Sri Rama-
krishna. He found that behind every human
being is the Atman. Deep behind is Atman, whatever the superficial differences. ... So, what-
ever difference may be there between man and
man, this ideal of Atman behind everyone is the
only principle which can unite us into a nation
by removing all the differences.

Not only in India but all over the world, this
ideal of Atman is the new revelation (163–4).
The ancient cynics were right: it is possible
to revel in the oneness of humanity; but their
methods were wrong. Only through renunciation
of sense-objects and the rejection of identification
with the mind and body can we have true
cosmopolitanism. The members of the Swami
Vireswarananda Smriti Committee deserve
praise for publishing this elegant and well-re-
searched book.

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The Praise of Folly
Desiderius Erasmus
Princeton University Press, 41 Wil-
liam Street, Princeton, New Jersey
edu. 2015. 224 pp. PB. $16.95 ISBN
9780691165646.

To understand Hamlet’s exclamation: What
a piece of work is a man!” (William Shake-
peare, Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2), for understanding
‘the swerve’ to modernity (see Stephen Greenblatt,
The Swerve: How the World Became Modern (New
York: W W Norton, 2011)) that men like Marsilio
Ficino (1433–99), Girolamo Savonarola (1452–
98), Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), and Deside-
rius Erasmus (1466–1536) forced upon Europe, we
need to watch first the movie The Name of the Rose
(1986). This should be followed by watching the
movie The Silence of the Lambs (1991). From the
darkness, literally The Name of the Rose is tinted
forbiddingly subdued and dark throughout; of
the Middle Ages we enter into the splendour of
the Renaissance in the tortured world of psychopaths in The Silence of the Lambs. From degener-
ate cultic monastic learning of the Middle Ages
we now enter into a world where everything is
anthropocentric; the movement from Scholasti-
cism to the Renaissance is best caught on camera
when we find Hannibal Lecter in The Silence of
the Lambs listening to Renaissance music; Lecter
even studies and teaches Renaissance art and re-
enacts the murder of Girolamo Savonarola. The
irony of understanding the Renaissance through
The Silence of the Lambs will not be lost on the
Renaissance scholar. Jacob Burckhardt’s The Civil-
ization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860) cannot
anymore compete with the micro attention spans
of scholars and students living their lives as ‘Twit-
terati’ and engaged social media addicts whose
faces are open books for everyone to read. Mov-
ies at least demand lesser attention spans than
Burckhardt’s tome or Erwin Panofsky’s rumina-
tions on Renaissance and earlier art. Akin to this
prescription of getting crash courses on the Mid-
dle Ages and on the Renaissance is the irony of
knowing the Renaissance overreacher through
studying the book under review. For according
to Erasmus, epistemology is folly, as all manner
of things are follies. Everything is just dust. Ham-
let would conclude that man is but only a ‘quint-
essence of dust’ (William Shakespeare, Hamlet,
Act 2, Scene 2). Also, Ficino, Savonarola, and Pico
della Mirandola, along with Erasmus erased re-
ligious fanaticism and xenophobia from Europe.
Today we need these men more than ever since
various ideological beasts slouch towards Bethle-
hem to be born, their hours come around at last
(see W B Yeats, The Second Coming).

Erasmus’s mockery of Thomism and the Vitru-
vian Man has become an uncategorisable classic
indispensable for appreciating the Renaissance
as simultaneously profoundly literary, a para-
digm changing historical epoch, and also as a
theological cusp where Martin Luther’s angst re-
garding the Catholic Church was intellectually
validated as at least permissible. It was Erasmus,
who eventually shaped the Reformation. The dis-
cipline-transgressing nature of The Praise of Folly
is clear when we have a professional historian writ-
ing a foreword to the book and the translation and
commentary is the well-known English version of
Hoyt Hopewell Hudson’s (1893–1944). Hudson
was a great Renaissance literary critic in his own