CHAPTER XIV

THE SWARAJ PARTY, ITS FOUNDATION AND ITS EARLY LABOURS

WE have already mentioned that Chitta Ranjan first attended the Indian National Congress in 1906 as a delegate. From that year till 1917, he kept outside the Congress, watching its chequered fortune as a mere spectator. In 1917, he took a leading part in the election of Mrs. Besant as its President, and also joined its deliberations as an enthusiastic delegate. From that time forward, Chitta Ranjan threw himself heart and soul into this national movement, and attended every session of the Congress from 1917 up to the one held at Belgaum, under the presidency of Mr. Gandhi himself, in December, 1924. He was elected President of the Ahmedabad session of the Congress held in December, 1921, but as he had been arrested a few days before under the Criminal Law Amendment Act and was awaiting his trial, he was precluded from the honour and privilege of guiding its deliberations.

While he was in prison, his advice was sought for by the leaders of the Congress, particularly by Pundit Madan Mohan Malaviya, when he opened up negotiations in Calcutta with Lord Reading for a round table conference to discuss and settle the terms of the future constitution of India and the fate of the interned prisoners. Unfortunately, Mr. Gandhi, who was referred to by Chitta Ranjan as the ultimate arbiter of the matter, laid down the condition that no pourparlers with the Viceroy could be opened until all the men interned previously for political offences, including Mohamed Ali, the leader of the Khilafat Movement and his brother Shaukat Ali, had been released and set free—a condition which Lord Reading refused to accept. Chitta Ranjan till the end of his

days regretted Mr. Gandhi's conditions and the consequent failure of the Reading-Malaviya negotiations.

During his six months' confinement in the Central Jail at Alipore, Chitta Ranjan was given ample opportunity by the Government to discuss public questions with such leaders and friends as he wished to meet. His room in the jail—a complete and large flat all by itself—soon proved to be a favourite pilgrimage of all political and public men of the Nationalist school, and almost every other day he used to hold a political durbar with his friends and lieutenants, a large number of whom were living on the ground floor as prisoners gathered from every part of Bengal. During this period he took lessons from a fellow-prisoner, Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose, in moral philosophy and metaphysics. He occupied himself also in writing a discourse on the Vaishnov poets of Bengal, a history of Indian Nationalism, and a dictionary of the Bengali language. Unfortunately none of these tasks was ever finished. The Government allowed his wife and his relatives to send his meals to him from their family residence, and friends from outside used to overwhelm him with their hospitality by sending him dainties in abundance. After doing justice to them himself, he would distribute the surplus amongst his fellow political prisoners,[1] a function in which he took a singular delight.

About the middle of his term of imprisonment Mr. Gandhi was clapped into prison by an unhappy prosecution instituted by Sir George Lloyd and his conviction and sentence created a profound disillusionment in the public mind, as it was widely believed that no Government could or would touch the great Indian saint. With Mr. Gandhi's incarceration his influence began to wane all over the country. About this time Chitta Ranjan broached to his fellow prisoners the idea of Congressmen going into the Councils, and men like Syan Sunder Chakravarti, who was also then in the Alipore Jail, entered into a very bitter controversy with him over this matter.

[1] Among those who were in prison with Chitta Ranjan in the Central Jail at this time were Subhas Chandra Bose, Syam Sunder Chakravarti, Jitendralal Banerjea, Badshah Meah, Abul Kalam Azad, and Chand Meah.

SIR ASHUTOSH MOOKERJEE
The Great Educationist of Young Bengal
Born June, 1864. Died 1924

By permission of Messrs Johnston and Hoffman, Calcutta

Chitta Ranjan came out of jail in July, 1922, and in his reply to the many public addresses which he received in Calcutta and elsewhere on his release, he made perfectly clear to the people his intention of going into the Council, though he made no definite or pronounced statements on the matter till he delivered his inaugural address as President of the Congress at Gaya in December, 1922.

In this remarkable address, he first advanced his proposal to depart from Mr. Gandhi's programme on a very crucial issue, and boldly made a bid for entry into the Councils. Unfortunately for the Congress, this part of his message fell on deaf ears, and there did not appear to be more than two dozen delegates at Gaya who could be induced to give their support to Chitta Ranjan's scheme of non-co-operating with the Government from within the Councils. But Chitta Ranjan was not the man to be daunted by opposition or cold neglect. He made Gaya the starting point of a new campaign, and before the delegates dispersed at the close of the session, he had established the Swarajya Party with a few friends for the propagation of his idea of going into the Councils. He started this campaign on no flowing tide; every current was against him. He could not count even on a good Press. But having put his hand to the plough he was not the man to turn back. On his return to Calcutta early in 1923, he made the organization of the Swarajya Party the sole object of his life.

A few weeks after Chitta Ranjan began his first effort in Calcutta on behalf of his newly created Swaraj Party and was arranging to move heaven and earth to get a foothold for his party in Bengal, a rash move of Lord Lytton came to him as a godsend. The differences between the Governor and the Education Minister on the one side, and Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee the Vice-Chancellor and the Senate of the University of Calcutta on the other, over the drafts of an amending University Bill, having come to a head, Lord Lytton in a moment of great indiscretion took it into his head to try and purchase Sir Ashutosh's co-operation with his Government by alternate threatening and cajolery. Lord Lytton offered

him a fresh term of Vice-Chancellorship on certain conditions. The letter in which this offer was made by the Governor was so outrageously insulting and couched in such blunt and indecorous phraseology that it gave a rude shock to the educated public in Bengal when it was published. In this letter, dated March 24th, 1923, Lord Lytton said :

> " The continuance of the course you have followed during the last few months would entirely preclude my favouring your reappointment. Hitherto you have given me no help : you have on the contrary used every expedient to oppose us. Your criticisms have been destructive ; you have misrepresented our objects and motives and instead of coming to me as your friend and Chancellor with helpful suggestions for the improvement of our Bill, you have inspired articles in the Press to discredit the Government, you have appealed to Sir Michael Sadler, to the Government of India, and the Government of Assam to oppose our Bill. All this has been the action not of a fellow-worker anxious to improve the conditions of co-operation between the Government and the University, but of an opponent of the maintenance of any connection between the two. I should not complain of this if you declared yourself an open antagonist and said to me frankly : ' In the interest of the University I am obliged to oppose your policy and cannot co-operate with you '. But in that case, you could not expect the Government to retain you as a colleague and ask you to continue as Vice-Chancellor.
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> " I invite you at this time when the Vice-Chancellor's Office must be filled anew—a time which is also one of momentous consequences to the University—to assure me that you will exchange an attitude of opposition for one of whole-hearted assistance, for in our co-operation lies the only chance of securing public funds for the University without impairing its academic freedom.

> If you will do this, if you will work with us as a colleague and trust to your power of persuasion to get what you consider the defects in our Bill amended, if you can give an assurance that you will not work against the Government or seek the aid of other agencies to defeat our Bill, then I am prepared to seek the concurrence of my Minister to your re-appointment as Vice-Chancellor, and if you cannot conscientiously do this you must make yourself free to oppose me by ceasing to be Vice-Chancellor."

Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, who was at this time thinking of retiring from the Bench of the High Court of Calcutta and devoting the rest of his days to political work, found this a splendid opportunity to enter the lists with his Excellency and show him his real opinion. In spurning Lord Lytton's insulting offer, Sir Ashutosh referred to his unmerited imputations.

> " You complain that I have hitherto given you no help. I maintain I have constantly offered you my help and advice which, for reasons best known to you alone, you have not accepted. I have written to you letter after letter—even in the midst of terrible sorrows —commenting in detail on the provisions of the Bills. You have never cared to reply to the criticisms thus expressed.
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> " Again you do not hesitate to assert that I have inspired articles in the press to discredit your Government. This is a libel and I challenge you to produce evidence in support of this unfounded allegation.
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> ".I notice that you charge me with having misrepresented your objects and motives. I most emphatically repudiate this unfounded charge. On the other hand, it would be interesting to know whether when you stated to the Legislative Council that your ' anxiety to consult the authorities of the University and to obtain

their support as far as possible, was responsible for the delay', you were already aware of the attitude taken up by the Government of India. If you have the courage to publish to the world all the documents on the subject and the entire correspondence which has passed between us, I shall cheerfully accept the judgment of an impartial public.

. . .

"But I claim that I have acted throughout in the best interests of the University notwithstanding formidable difficulties and obstacles and that I have uniformly tried to save your Government from the pursuit of a radically wrong course—though my advice has not been heeded. I am not surprised that neither you nor your Minister can tolerate me. You assert that you want us to be men. You have one before you, who can speak and act fearlessly according to his convictions, and you are not able to stand the sight of him. It may not be impossible for you to secure the service of a subservient Vice-Chancellor, prepared always to carry out the mandates of your Government and to act as a spy on the Senate. He may enjoy the confidence of your Government, but he will not certainly enjoy the confidence of the Senate and the public of Bengal. We shall watch with interest the performances of a Vice-Chancellor of this type creating a new tradition for the office.

"I send you without hesitation the only answer which an honourable man can send—an answer which you and your advisers expect and desire. I decline the insulting offer you have made to me.

Yours sincerely,

ASHUTOSH MOOKERJEE.

"His Excellency the Earl of Lytton, G.C.I.E."

The correspondence, when published, gave Bengal food for thought about the terms on which the Government wanted the people to co-operate with it, and the insolent manner in

which a Governor could write to one of His Majesty's most distinguished Indian subjects. A large volume of public opinion at once veered round to the Swaraj Party, as co-operation on Lord Lytton's terms was found most insulting to their self respect. At this time, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee and Chitta Ranjan Das were concerting a joint measure of opposition to paralyse all sinister attempts to rob the University of Calcutta of its academic freedom. Strengthened by the moral support of Sir Ashutosh and by his undertaking that, on his retirement from the Bench, he would come and work with the Swarajya Party, Chitta Ranjan went about the country with renewed hope and confidence for the propagation of the new gospel and raised a raging agitation on behalf of his new creed. He knew no rest or peace and passed sleepless nights over his campaign, and such was the magic power of his personality and his persuasive tongue that within six or seven months time, he had induced a large number of non-co-operating Congressmen to accept his new programme.

In September, 1923, a special session of the Congress met at Delhi under the presidency of Mr. Mohamed Ali, the President-elect of the Cocanada Congress, to discuss what attitude the Congress should take regarding the new dogma of entering the Councils. Mr. Mohamed Ali was easily won over by Chitta Ranjan to give his qualified support to the Swarajya scheme and to get for it from within the stone walls of the Poona jail the occult assent of Mr. Gandhi.[1] The whole of educated India was surprised to find the special session of the Congress at Delhi giving Mr. Das's scheme its tacit acquiescence, and allowing him and his friends to go into the Councils if they liked. The exact wording of the Delhi resolution runs as follows :

> " While reaffirming its adherence to the principle of non-co-operation this Congress declares that such

[1] In his address to the Congress Maulana Mohamed Ali informed his audience that though he had had no opportunity of consulting Mr. Gandhi personally in this matter, he had received a psychic message from the Poona jail intimating to him Mr. Gandhi's assent to Das's proposals.

> Congressmen as have no religious or other conscientious objection against entering the legislatures are at liberty to stand as candidates and to exercise the right of voting at the forthcoming elections, and this Congress therefore suspends all propaganda against entering Councils. The Congress at the same time calls upon all Congressmen to double their efforts to carry out the constructive programme of their great Leader, Mahatma Gandhi, and by united endeavour to achieve Swaraj at the earliest possible moment."

With this permission in his pocket, Chitta Ranjan returned to Calcutta, and made arrangements to capture as many seats as possible in the local council for his party at the general election of November of that year. In this effort he was greatly helped by the advocacy of the *Bengalee*[1] which of all newspapers in the province had taken up his cause with a singular enthusiasm, and later on by his new organ *Forward* which was founded only a few weeks before the general election. He put forward as many as fifty-seven Hindu and Mahomedan candidates for the seats open to election, and raised and borrowed more than thirty thousand rupees to defray the expenses of his nominees. As a result of the election, Chitta Ranjan came into the Bengal Council with forty members, the Swarajya Party having been returned as the largest single party in the new Council. The most striking feat of Chitta Ranjan in this election was not, however, the return of so many Swarajyst candidates, as the signal defeat he was able to inflict on the late Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea, an ex-Minister, and Mr. S. R. Das, Chitta Ranjan's first cousin and now the Law Member of the Government of India. In the Central Provinces the Swarajya Party was returned with a majority in the Council, but failed to meet with good luck in Bombay, Madras, Assam and Lahore. In the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh the

[1] The *Bengalee* was at this time being edited by the writer of this memoir, who succeeded Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea in that office on the 1st January, 1921.

party met with slight reverses at the polls, though some of its leaders had easy walkovers as candidates for the local council and the Indian Legislative Assembly. But the successes of the Swaraj Party in Bengal, the Central Provinces and elsewhere, gave Chitta Ranjan a unique position in the country as the leader of the new Party.

As the constitutional head of the new Government in Bengal, Lord Lytton sent for Mr. Das and requested him to form the Ministry for the administration of the " transferred " departments. Das took a little time to consider his Excellency's proposal and to consult his party. On December 16th, 1923, he sent the following refusal to Lord Lytton.

" 148, Russa Road South,
" Calcutta.
" 16.12.23.

" Your Excellency,

" I placed before our Party the position as explained by your Excellency and they have just decided not to accept your Excellency's kind offer. The members of this Party are pledged to do everything in their power by using the legal right granted under the Reforms Act to put an end to the system of Dyarchy. This duty they cannot discharge if they take office. The Party is aware that it is possible to offer obstruction from within by accepting office, but they do not consider it honest to accept office, which is under the existing system in your Excellency's gift, and then turn it into an instrument of obstruction. The awakened consciousness of the people of this country demands a change in the present system of Government and until that is done or unless there is some change in the general situation, indicating a change of heart, the people of this country cannot offer willing co-operation. Under the circumstances, I regret I cannot undertake responsibility regarding the Transferred Departments. My Party, however, wishes to place on record their

appreciation of the spirit of constitutionalism which actuated your Excellency in making the offer which they feel bound not to accept.

"I have the honour to be,

"Your Excellency's most obedient servant,

"C. R. DAS,

"President, Swarajya Party."

With this refusal, a new chapter in the history of the Swarajya Party began. Chitta Ranjan tried, and succeded almost at once, in forming a coalition with the "National Party", which was formed for the first time as an Independent group, taking its place between the Liberals on the one side, and the Swarajists on the other.

In the meantime, Das was organizing a large volume of opinion in his favour for the acceptance of his creed at Cocanada. He realized that if non-co-operating Congressmen, who still formed the predominant party and voice in the Congress, threw out his scheme, he would be nowhere and lose all the influence and position that he had so far been able to acquire. Here again, as good luck would have it, he was able to carry the President of the Congress with him, and thanks to his support and friendly interest, Das was able to secure the indirect blessings of the Congress. The Congress at Cocanada decided to take up a negative course in this matter and not to offer any opposition to the Swarajya Party or to put any obstruction in its way. With this changed attitude of the Congress the public realized that Chitta Ranjan had completely wrested the rudder from the helmsman of the Congress and was beginning to steer the craft into the charted waters of well-defined public life. From this time forward, the Swarajya Party began to absorb public attention and command the respect of all groups of political Parties in and outside the walls of the various Council Chambers.

Thus strengthened, Chitta Ranjan began his new crusade against the bureaucracy by voting against the salaries of Ministers, and against the principal items of the Budget of the year. Twice in 1924 and once in 1925, Chitta Ranjan

was able to throw out all the proposals for either the appointment of Ministers or the payment of any salaries to them. In June, 1924, after the first motion for the demand of a grant for Ministers' salaries had been thrown out the Governor sought to give the Bengal Legislative Council another opportunity to reconsider its decision on the appointment of Ministers. Chitta Ranjan and his friends took the wind out of the sails of the Government and obtained an injunction from the High Court of Calcutta to restrain the President from putting the proposed official resolution to the Council on the appointed day, with the result that the statutory rules of the Legislature were revised by a special modification from the Government of India to allow of a second application for a vote. This motion, after the necessary change in the rules had been made, came for discussion in the Council in August and was defeated by a large majority. In a speech in the Bengal Legislative Council over a similar motion in March, 1925, Chitta Ranjan defined the position of the Swarajya Party very clearly. He said :

" It has been said that our cry is Destroy, destroy. That our only point is destruction betrays such an utter ignorance of the Swarajist position that it is difficult to reply to it. Why do we want to destroy ? What do we want to get rid of ? We want to destroy and get rid of a system which does no good and can do no good. We want to destroy it, because we want to construct a system which can be worked with success and will enable us to do good to the masses. Can you lay your hands on your breast and say that you can do anything for the masses under this system ? What have you yourselves done ? It was tried for three long years with Sir Provash Chunder Mitter as one of the Ministers. May I ask in what way the condition of the masses has been improved ? Has there been more education ? Have they grown into anything ? Has the province been better off financially ? No. You have not got the power. And not having the power, you know that you can do no good in the present circumstances. It is a sham business altogether. On the one hand, the Ministers are Ministers endowed with responsibility and power

and so on, but without funds they cannot do anything. So these nation-building departments are made over to the Ministers, but the question of funds is in the hands of the reserved side, which can starve the nation-building departments just as it likes, and when the people say that nothing has been done for them in the way of nation-building schemes Government can always turn round and say, 'There are your Ministers'."

Early in 1925 again, when he was lying very seriously ill, he went from his sick bed to the Council Chamber to drive the last nail into the coffin of dyarchy and write an epitaph on it. His presence in the Council Chamber, where he was carried in the arms of his friends, brought round to his fold all the waverers, and created an electric atmosphere within the walls of the Council. When the Chairman declared the result of the voting it was found that the Government had suffered the defeat of the season, and as a consequence of this vote, Lord Lytton was compelled to divide between himself and the member of the Executive Council the administration of the Transferred Departments. And from this time forward Chitta Ranjan Das became an awful portent of danger and a lion in the path of the Indian bureaucracy.

In 1924 Chitta Ranjan Das had set out on another big enterprise. The new Calcutta Municipal Act, passed in the Council in 1923, was to come into operation in April of this year with a largely widened franchise and an entirely new constitution. Chitta Ranjan set his heart on capturing the Corporation with members of his own party and his nominees. This was a tremendous venture, as Calcutta, like all metropolitan cities, was an extremely conservative place, and hardly likely to fall in with extreme views of any kind. Yet Chitta Ranjan's organization was so complete and the conservative elements were so disorganized that at the polls, on the day of election, Calcutta was found to have been converted to his views. At the first election of the new Corporation, out of seventy-five elected members nearly fifty-five were returned from the Swaraj Party, and at the first meeting of the new Corporation Chitta Ranjan Das was

elected its first Mayor. This capture of the Municipal corporation of the premier city of the province gave a unique position of power and authority to the Swaraj Party as well as to its founder and leader.

In 1917, in his address to the Bengal Provincial Conference, Chitta Ranjan had put forward an eloquent plea against Bengal being drawn into the meshes of modern industrial and factory life. He then laid down the dictum that " if we seek to establish industrialism in our land we shall be laying down with our own hands the road to our destruction ". But in 1923 and 1924 Chitta Ranjan had forgotten this and placed himself at the head of the Trade Union movements. For the first time in the economic history of India wage-earners and factory operatives were organizing themselves to protect and defend their interests against capitalistic tyranny.[1] At the All-India Trade Union Congress held at Lahore, in 1923, he acted as the president of the session, and, in his address to this body, he enunciated very clearly his views regarding factory legislations and industrial organization. Next year, the Workmen's Compensation Act was passed in the Indian Legislative Council, guaranteeing some sort of an insurance against the risks and dangers of factory life. The following year he presided over the session of the Trade Union Congress in Calcutta, but, unfortunately, got mixed up with a faction which for some time paralysed the activities of the movement. The Swarajya Party and some of its prominent leaders helped to widen the breach in the ranks of this nascent organization, with the result that Trade Unionism and Labour organizations have failed so far to act as an instrument for the amelioration of the condition of the labouring class in Bengal.

From early in 1924, Chitta Ranjan had also engaged in a crusade of a very different kind. A great deal of discontent had found expression among the orthodox Hindu community against the maladministration of the shrine of Tarakeswar, in the district of Hoogly, and the iniquities of its head,

[1] The first Trade Union Congress of India was held in Bombay in 1921, and the second in the heart of the Tharia coalfields in 1922.

Mohunt Satish Giri. At the persuasion of friends from many parts of Bengal, and at the instance of Swami Viswananda, Satyagraha was declared at Tarakeswar, and Chitta Ranjan put himself at the head of this movement. Hundreds of young students from different districts of Bengal volunteered to break the law and trespass into the Mohunt's compound and interfere with his arrangements for the daily worship of the deity. Most of these young men, including Chitta Ranjan's only son, Chira Ranjan, were clapped into jail as trespassers and the fight was continued for several months. Before the year had drawn to a close, both parties were tired, and Chitta Ranjan came to an understanding with Mohunt Satish Giri by which the latter was to retire from the shrine and put all his property at the disposal of a trust, in the administration of which it was hoped Chitta Ranjan and the Swaraj Party would have a controlling hand. In this matter, Chitta Ranjan secured a Pyrrhic victory, as only a few weeks later, in consequence of a law suit, the whole property and shrine of Tarakeswar passed into the hands of an official receiver, both Satish Giri and the Swarajya Party retiring from the field.

Later, in January, 1926, Satish Giri obtained from the High Court of Calcutta a reversal of the judgment of the lower Court which had appointed a receiver over the entire property belonging to the estate. In this appeal, the High Court held that a large portion of the property in question belonged to Satish Giri personally and not to the shrine. So the Tarakeswar property is now owned by two proprietors, Satish Giri and the Public Trust in charge of the shrine now controlled by the official receiver. The Congress or the Swarajya party have now no locus standi anywhere in the affairs of the Tarakeswar shrine.

Chitta Ranjan's triumphs over the local Government on the issue of dyarchy, and the success of his earlier crusade against the Mohunt of Tarakeswar, and his capture of the Calcutta Corporation, gave the Swaraj Party a new accession of strength in the country ; and while still riding on the crest of this wave another gust of favourable wind came to his

sails. Early in 1924, at a riot occurring in Char Maniar, within the jurisdiction of the Madaripore subdivision of Faridpore, some police officers had been openly charged with assaulting and outraging Indian women, and a Congress worker belonging to the Swarajya Party was prosecuted by the Government for bringing this charge against the police. In November of the same year, at a Police Durbar held at Dacca, Lord Lytton attempted to put in a defence on behalf of the police in connection with the alleged Char Maniar outrages, and asumed that some of these women had stooped to cast aspersions on their own character just to spite the police.

This unchivalrous reference to the character of the women of Bengal gave the Swarajya Party an occasion to carry on a fresh political agitation in the country. Its leaders arranged for a monster protest meeting at the Town Hall against Lord Lytton's ugly innuendos, and they had excited such passion over the matter that nearly fifty thousand people assembled to attend this meeting. Instead of one meeting at the Town Hall, its organizers were compelled to improvise half a dozen overflow meetings on the steps and on the Maidan facing the Town Hall. Lord Lytton was compelled to offer an apology and an explanation, and a few days later Rabindra Nath Tagore came forward on behalf of the Governor with another quibbling statement which could neither explain nor justify Lord Lytton's unhappy suggestion. This outburst of national sentiment against the accredited representative of the Crown in Bengal won for the Swarajya Party a large place in the affections of the people, and secured for it a foremost and abiding place in the political and public life of the country.

CHAPTER XV

REPERCUSSIONS

THE murder by Gopi Nath Shah, a young Bengali in his teens, of Mr. Day, a European, in January, 1924, in a crowded and central thoroughfare of Calcutta, once again called attention to the festering sore which so far from having healed was infecting the whole body politic. Towards the end of Lord Curzon's vice-royalty a number of young Bengalis had raised a spectre of anarchy which could not be laid to rest. From its beginning the revolutionary movement had never been quite dormant. Right through the period, from 1905 to 1922, its leaders, failing to stir up trouble in India itself, were trying to secure the active sympathy and co-operation of foreign countries in engineering an armed rising. Some of these attempts have been described in a former chapter; a more detailed account of the activities may be found in the Report of the Rowlatt Committee of 1918.

After 1919 this movement received a set-back from Mahatma Gandhi's new campaign of non-violent non-co-operation. In the first three years of this new activity the revolutionary party was losing ground in Bengal, but after the Mahatma's incarceration in 1922 and the consequent decline of non-co-operation, some young men of Bengal once more began to dream that their national destiny could be realized only by following the methods of the Fenians in Ireland and the Nihilists in Russia. The collapse of Mahatma Gandhi's movement strengthened revolutionary tendencies in some Bengali minds, and in less than two years revolutionaries were again busy among the people of the country. There were murders in Calcutta and elsewhere; the bomb and the revolver were used to get rid of enemies and spies in

the revolutionary party. Sir Charles Tegart, Commissioner of Police in Calcutta, regarded by the revolutionaries as one of the greatest detective heads in the world, was at the time the object of Red Bengal's vengeance, and fortunately for him Gopi Nath Shah, who had been "commissioned" to murder him, took Mr. Day for him. The murderer was tried, but offered no defence, merely asseverating that though he had failed in his object someone else would succeed. The public, both European and Indian, was shocked both by the murder and by the indifferent and nonchalant attitude of Gopi Nath in the dock.

After he had paid the penalty of his crime, many of his friends and sympathizers, assembled at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Serajgunge in the summer of 1924, inspired a resolution extolling his patriotism and self-sacrifice. What is more, they managed to persuade Chitta Ranjan Das to support it. The entire country was startled at this bare-faced approval of murder, and even Mr. Gandhi found himself drawn into the controversy to extenuate the language and spirit of the resolution, and to come to the rescue of the Swarajya Party, whose founder and leader had closely identified himself with the unfortunate wording and spirit of the resolution.

By this time, Chitta Ranjan Das had become aware of the fact that the revolutionary movement in Bengal, instead of being scotched, was burrowing underground far and wide, and, in one or two of his speeches at this period, he had taken the public into his confidence regarding his knowledge of their activities.

In October, 1924, the Government of Bengal found it no longer safe to ignore the recrudescence of revolutonary activities in the province, and had obtained the sanction of the Viceroy for the promulgation of an Ordinance to deal with crimes of this nature. Nearly eighty young men,[1] a large number belonging to the Swaraj Party, were interned without any definite charge or trial for suspected complicity with

[1] The number of persons arrested and detained under the Ordinance Law rose to nearly two hundred by the end of 1925.

revolutionary activities. Three of these men were very closely associated with Chitta Ranjan as his chief lieutenants in the Swaraj Party, one of them being Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose,[1] the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation. Chitta Ranjan at once realized that this blow had been aimed at his growing influence in the country, and as a sort of vicarious punishment for the defeats he was able to inflict on the Government over the issue of dyarchy. He put up a strong fight at once against the new policy of repression, and did his best to defend his interned comrades from the cruel suspicion of the Government.

Speaking to a resolution in the Corporation of Calcutta against the unlawful arrest of its Chief Executive Officer, Chitta Ranjan made the following observations in his capacity as the Mayor of the City. " But the time has come now to condemn not only the violence of the people who are addicted to violent methods, but also the violence of the Government. This is a clear illustration of what I consider to be a violence on the part of Government. They have passed a law which is a lawless law.

" We protest against this Act, because it is destructive of the fundamental rights of man. To be taken and kept in custody for an indefinite period of time, without being told what evidence there is and without being brought to justice according to the law of the land, is a denial of the primary rights of humanity. This is ' lawless law '. Laws such as these were enacted in England in the days of the Stuart tyranny. And I am sorry to say that the Government of India to-day is not able to govern this land except by the use of violence. I really do not think that, when a revolutionary, in the enthusiasm of his heart, fires a pistol or throws a bomb, he is guilty of more violence than the Government. Violence begets violence. It is because of these acts of violence from the year 1907 down to the present day, acts of legislative violence, that I say, and I repeat it again, that revolutionary crimes have increased."

[1] Released for reasons of health by Sir Stanley Jackson, the new Governor of Bengal, on May 17, 1927.

After disclaiming any sympathy or faith in the dogmas of Red Bengal, Chitta Ranjan proceeded to observe :

" But so far as their enthusiasm for liberty is concerned, I am with them. So far as their love of freedom is concerned, I am with them. If my suffering or struggle or every drop of my blood is necessary to achieve this freedom, I am ready.

. . .

" Every honest man in this country is bound to say, ' I love my country, I love my freedom, I will have the right, the birthright, to manage my own affairs.' . . .

" If that is a crime, I plead guilty to the charge. If that is a crime, I am willing to be hanged for that rather than to shirk the duty which I feel to be the only duty of every Indian of the present day."

The local Government, in the meantime, in anticipation of the automatic expiry of the period of the Ordinance at the end of six months, transferred its main provisions into a Bill entitled the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Bill, and Sir Hugh Stephenson, on January 7th, 1925, sought leave of the Bengal Legislative Council for its introduction. The necessary leave for the introduction of the Bill was refused by the Council by sixty-six votes against fifty-seven ; but Lord Lytton came to the rescue of the Government, and by exercising his powers of certificate put it on the statute book, on January 18th, for a period of five years.

A similar Bill was introduced into the Indian Legislative Assembly by Sir Alexander Muddiman, the Home Member, on March 23rd, 1925, as certain provisions of the Bengal Ordinance on the subject lay beyond the scope of the Bengal Legislature, such as those affecting the jurisdiction of the High Court and the territories outside Bengal. The Bill was thrown out by the Assembly, but was ultimately restored with the consent of the Council of State and the Viceroy.

When the Swarajya Party was being assailed from every quarter, both in England and India, for its open sympathy with political assassinations and murder, and when Chitta Ranjan Das found that this revolutionary movement was spreading, he took courage to come out with two strong and

definite statements against this movement in March and April, 1925. In a manifesto issued by him on March 29th, 1925, he made a bold attempt to remove the grave misapprehension created in the minds of Englishmen at home and Anglo-Indians in this country regarding the attitude of the Swarajya Party towards political assassinations and revolutionary activities. After strongly repudiating violence of any kind for the attainment of their political objective, the leader of the Swaraj Party went on to lay down the following broad principles :

" I have made it clear, and I do it once again, that I am opposed on principle to political assassinations and violence in any shape or form. It is absolutely abhorrent to me and to my party. I consider it an obstacle to our political progress. It is also opposed to our religious teaching. . . .

" As a question of practical politics I feel certain that if violence is to take root in the political life of our country, it will be the end of our dream of Swaraj for all time to come. I am, therefore, eager that this evil should not grow any further, and that this method should cease altogether as a political weapon in my country."

Lord Birkenhead, the new Secretary of State for India, took this statement of Chitta Ranjan seriously and accepted this as a first step towards the beginning of a new era of co-operation. At this time, Chitta Ranjan had gone to Bankipore to recoup his health, and issued his second statement[1] in connection with the propaganda of violence and intimidation. In this statement he said :

" Lord Birkenhead has invited me to go forward and to co-operate with the Government in repressing the violence which I deprecate. I entirely agree with him that never will freedom be reached by violence, and, if I may say so, I devoted a considerable portion of my speech at the Gaya Congress to demonstrating that freedom has never come through acts of violence, and, as I value freedom, I am not only willing but anxious to devote a few years of life that yet remain to me in carrying on an active propaganda against an evil which is a

[1] April 4th, 1925.

standing menace to the establishment of Swaraj. But I would be wanting in my duty as a conscientious citizen if I did not point out clearly and unequivocably that all my efforts in this direction are bound to be ineffective unless a favourable atmosphere is created by the Government.

" Lord Birkenhead begins by saying that the repression which the Bengal Act contemplated is the repression of crime, and he concludes that nobody who is not a criminal is entitled to express a grievance against that legislation. When I speak of repression, I mean it in the sense in which that term is used by constitutional lawyers—the exercise by persons in authority of wide arbitrary or discretionary powers of constraint. English writers of constitutional law have expressed the view that, whenever there is discretion, there is room for arbitrariness ; and discretionary authority on the part of the Government must mean insecurity for legal freedom on the part of its subjects. . . . My grievance against the Bengal legislation is that it has empowered the persons in authority to usurp the functions of the court of law and to exercise wide arbitrary and discretionary powers of constraint.

. . .

" This, to my mind, is conclusive of the situation before us. I therefore venture in return to invite Lord Birkenhead to cause a searching enquiry to be made into the causes which have brought about the revolutionary movement in India and then to set about applying the proper remedy, so that there may be a radical and permanent cure of the disease, It is no use treating merely the outward symptoms. I appeal to the Government to treat the disease itself and to apply the proper remedy.

. . . .

" The Government should recognize that, however mistaken the revolutionaries may be, however wrong and futile their methods and however criminal and reprehensible their acts, the guiding principle of their lives is sacrifice for the attainment of political and economic freedom for their country. The moment they feel, that at any rate the

foundation of our freedom is laid by the Government, I venture to assert that the revolutionary movement will be a thing of the past. I suggest in all humility that there should be a distinct and authoritative declaration by the Government at the earliest opportunity."

In no country in the world has the monster, revolt, once raised, ever been laid to rest. That is not the nature of this monster, it is never born to die. Neither in Russia, nor in Ireland, Persia, Egypt, nor anywhere else, has it been possible for any power to crush it. Nothing that the Government of India can do now will ever kill or scotch it. Everybody realizes that all the best efforts of Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford to reconcile the Revolutionary Party to British rule have been vain. Neither the Government of India Act, nor King George's Proclamation of 1919, nor the appointment of Lord Sinha to the Governorship of an important Indian province, nor the frequent requisitioning of the services of one or two Indians to the Imperial Conferences, nor the Rt. Hon. Srinivas Shastri's royal progress through the Dominions of the British Commonwealth, nor the throwing open of some of the King's Commissions in the army to members of respectable Indian families, nor the lure of a new Territorial Force, nor the placing of the Secretary of State for India's salary under the British estimate, nor the appointment of two additional Indian members in the Viceroy's Cabinet, could placate the spirit of revolt which had become a grave cause of anxiety to rulers and ruled alike.

Chitta Ranjan had hoped that a searching enquiry into the condition of the people and bold remedies to palliate their distress would soothe this spirit. But as he himself once said, " this spirit is closely associated with the hunger of the human heart for freedom ". Only he forgot that " freedom's battle once begun " is " bequeathed by bleeding sire to son ". So long as this hunger lasts—and it is bound to last till the realization of our national destiny—all impatient idealists will follow revolutionary methods as the shortest cut to their objective.

While, therefore, Chitta Ranjan was evidently wrong in his palliatives, no one can question the accuracy and truth of his interpretation of the Indian mind regarding the genesis of a revolutionary mentality in this country. But for some obvious reasons, British rulers of India want either to side-track the issue or put the world on a wrong scent over this outstanding question. And with this view several ingenious theories have been started in tracing the genesis of Indian unrest. At one time, when the revolutionary mentality was confined to Maharastra and had not crossed over to the Gangetic valley, this nascent aspiration for freedom was interpreted by a clever theorist[1] as an anxiety of the mind of a certain section of the Maharastra Hindus for the re-establishment of the sway and influence of the Chitpavan Brahmins all over India. This theory, however, did not survive a searching scrutiny, and Sir Valentine himself has lived to see how inaccurate was his reading of the Indian political upheaval. At a later date, a more ingenious theory was started by one who had something to do with the suppression of revolutionary crimes in Bengal.

In his recent works, *A Bird's Eye View of India* and *The Heart of Aryavarta*, Lord Ronaldshay, an ex-Governor of Bengal, finds a new and different theory of the origin of Indian unrest. Lord Ronaldshay explains it as the refusal of the Indian mind to accept the dominance of Western culture and thought in public and political affairs; or to use his own words, "the revolt of the rising generation of Western-educated Hindus against what it regards as the subordination of the soul of India to the cultural and political outlook of the West". Lord Ronaldshay has quoted chapter and verse in these books as evidence that we people of India want to go back to the traditions and habits of life of the ancient Vedas and Purans and that our national pride and race consciousness have prompted us to revolt against a hybrid culture that has resulted from the impact of the east and west.

In support of his interesting thesis, Lord Ronaldshay makes the following extracts in his *Heart of Aryavarta*

[1] Sir Valentine Chirol in *Indian Unrest*.

from the writings of a doughty champion of the Hindu revival.[1]

> " Among all the divisions of mankind, it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is to harmonize all religion . . . and make mankind one soul."
>
> . . . .
>
> " Was India to deform herself from a temple of God into one vast inglorious suburb of English civilization ? " —so runs a very interesting Indian explanation of the new ideas.
>
> " India must save herself by ending the alien dominion which has not only impoverished her body, but was also strangling her soul. It was only in an independent India, with the reins of self-determination in her own hands, that the ideal could be re-enthroned in its integrity of high thinking and holy living.
>
> . . .
>
> " The nation felt ", to quote the same writer, " a quickening in the beating of its heart, a stirring in its blood, the vibration of chords long silent in its race-consciousness."

Chitta Ranjan also sang at one time in the same tune. In one of his earlier speeches we read :

> " Mimic Anglicism has become an obsession with us ; we find its black footprint in every walk and endeavour of our life."

A Bengali of a quite different temperament, but a virile representative of his race, has echoed the same sentiment in a quite different manner in the following passage :

> " Western civilization, however valuable as a factor in the progress of mankind, should not supersede, much

[1] Aurobindo Ghose.

less be permitted to destroy, the vital element of our civilization."[1]

Lord Ronaldshay has also described how the new devotion to India has meant a new antagonism to England. Lord Ronaldshay appears to me to be about half-right. He expresses a great truth but not the whole truth. The idea of the Hindu revival came to life at a time when British rule in India had already become gall and wormwood to the people. The revivalist idea was therefore a sequel and not the genesis of Indian unrest.

The Indian may still be inspired by the traditions of the past more than any other people on the face of the earth—even more than the Chinese—but it is insulting to the educated community of India to-day to be told that it finds nothing good in modern life or culture, or that it can assimilate nothing from the virtues and lessons of the West. There may be men like Mr. Gandhi in whose nostrils everything Western stinks—Western science, Western medicine, Western education, and even Western courts of justice. However much we may declaim against Western education and thought, the Indian mind of to-day is shaped more by the currents of Western thought than by the currents of thoughts which lie embedded in ancient tomes and in the outworn Shastras. Lord Ronaldshay's explanation diverts us from the ugly reality of our present-day conditions to an atmosphere which is more imaginary than real.

The education that the Indian mind has been receiving for the last two centuries has not been absolutely in vain. It has given a new orientation to our view of life, and has impelled us to find a new earth and heaven in a new condition of things. The old philosophy of life, the old dependence and resignation to *kismet* and *karma*, to the inevitable and the indispensable, have all but been blotted out of our intellectual outlook, and we have begun to look on our conditions of existence from a different standpoint, and in terms of modern life. We have now learnt that most

[1] Sir Ashutosh Mukerjee in the Report of the University Commission.

of the sufferings of our life—political, material and economic —are due to the faults of omission and commission of our rulers, that most of the conditions in which we now live are removable, and it is only a foreign bureaucracy that stands between us and our rightful place in the sun.

The poet who hazarded the statement in the Victorian era that "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet", wrote himself down as an inaccurate observer, for, within less than a century, the East has changed its character and risen to the position of an undeveloped Europe. As in China and Japan, so also in India, the recluse has been forced out of his cloister, and though looking around to the world abroad and to the culture and civilization of the West in a spirit of bewildered amazement, he has come out into the open air and has decided not to go back to the cloister again. Young India has drunk so deep of the new and heady wine of modern materialism that the metaphysics of quiescence and the philosophy of fatalism can no longer drug or dope her into a life of somnolence or slumber, and "he of the mystic East" is no longer "touched with night". The East is no longer she who "bowed low before the blast in patient deep disdain", whilst "she let the legions thunder past, then plunged in thought again". The prophets of reaction and revivalism are considered back numbers to-day among all classes of our people, and their wild denunciations of modernity carry conviction nowhere.

It is neither a return to the "golden age" of India, nor a life of self-contained isolation, that the Indian mind now yearns for. Nor is it in the academy of Daulatpur or the Visva Bharati of Bolepur, or the Gurukul of Hardwar, that young Bengalis gather in their thousands to-day. Vedantism and Eastern culture may be good, but freedom, political and economic, is better. Not what the past can offer to us, but what the future holds for us is what troubles the average Indian to-day. Young India does not want to tear itself away from the hopes and ambitions of the other modern nations of the world, only to seek consolation and happiness in sublime metaphysics which had become slowly petrified

in immutable formalism and in the dignified lifelessness of Vedantic and Tantric rites.

It is on freedom first and freedom last—freedom from foreign rule and yoke—that the young revolutionaries have set their heart and eyes and not on freedom from distractions of a modern life, or freedom from commercialism or industrialism either. No Royal Commission or declaration of British purpose in India, no palliatives or remedies of any distemper of the body politic, no removal of grievances, can check the hopes of these impatient idealists who can find no way to win their freedom but by making short work of the existing system of government in this country.

Poor revolutionaries! What a pity they do not see that so long as we do not put our own house in order and look facts in the face, realize our own responsibilities for the development of a greater and a more united civic and national consciousness, and practice to a larger extent the virtues of forbearance and self-restraint, short cuts will be of no use and their heart's desire for freedom will recede further and further, as does a mirage in the desert.

CHAPTER XVI

DESHBANDHU'S LAST DAYS

LIFE would lose all its dynamic force and incentive if its mysteries could be revealed by human calculations and prophecies. Creation would have been robbed of all its interest and curiosity, if man were gifted with prescience to know his future. Yet, in the unending mysteries of life and creation, coming events at times cast their shadows before. And these shadows are realized by man's sixth sense in the midst of his biggest triumphs or his deepest tragedies.

Chitta Ranjan had, by the end of 1924, realized that he had reached the zenith of his glory, and that the shadow of death was falling on him. He was himself getting tired of life, particularly of the strife and struggle with which his later years were crowded. His soul was well knit now and all its battles won. Though a broken machine, he still hoped that the end would take long in coming.

After attending the Belgaum Congress, he returned to Calcutta on January 3rd, 1925, seriously ill. The physicians who attended him on this occasion suspected his case to be one of food poisoning. He was so ill that no visitors were allowed to see him, nor was he permitted to leave his bed. When still not considered to be quite convalescent, he allowed himself to be carried a distance of nearly three miles from his house at Bhowanipur to the Town Hall of Calcutta, where the meetings of the Bengal Legislative Council are held. He went there not merely to record his vote, but for the set purpose of inflicting another defeat on the Government—the most signal defeat ever suffered by the alien bureaucracy in this country. The result of the vote on the Ministers' salaries in March infused a new hope and vigour into his life and was the crowning triumph of his short-lived career as a member of the Bengal Legislative Council.

A few days after this event, he had drawn up and executed a trust deed, giving away to the nation all his real property for the medical training of Indian girls and for a hospital for Indian women. This gift, which included the residence at Russa Road in which he had lived for nearly twenty-five years, recalls to mind the notable endowments of two other patriotic Bengalis of an earlier day. Rashbehari Ghose, a most distinguished lawyer and jurist of his time in India, gave to the University of Calcutta a donation of over Rs. 20 lakhs for the promotion of higher scientific education in Bengal, and his own residence at Alipur to the Bengal Technical Institute. Tarak Nath Palit, another eminent lawyer, similarly gave away his palatial residence at Ballygunge and a large sum of money to the University of Calcutta for the same object. It is, however, a great pity that, though Chitta Ranjan earned no smaller fortune than either of them, he had hardly a tenth of the money to leave to his people when he drew up this trust. At that time, he had only thirty-five thousand rupees to his credit in his bank. He had spent all this money as he had earned it, and at the end of his life he found himself almost on the brink of poverty.

In March and April, 1925, he issued two manifestoes, repudiating the revolutionary activities in Bengal. This open condemnation of revolutionary mentality and activities won for him at once the unstinted admiration of Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, who took the earliest opportunity to bring these views of Chitta Ranjan to the notice of the English public. From his place in the House of Lords, Lord Birkenhead wanted Chitta Ranjan to move a step further in order to enable him to extend to him the hand of co-operation.

A few weeks before the Faridpore Conference, a common friend had opened a triangular negotiation between Chitta Ranjan Das, Lord Lytton, and the Government of India, in the hope of finding some way out of the tangle and deadlock which had come about in Bengal through the vote of the local Council over Ministers' salaries. Early in April, Chitta

Ranjan had no doubt gone beyond the preliminary stages of settling the terms which the common friend had been discussing between the three parties. It is well-known that in the course of these negotiations Chitta Ranjan met Lord Lytton, the then Governor of Bengal, in the Ram Krishna Mission at Belur[1] at the invitation of an English lady, who was staying at the Mission house at the time. In the absence of any direct evidence or written words from any party, it is difficult to lay hands on the exact terms proposed and discussed in these pourparlers. For some reason or other the negotiations proved abortive, but Chitta Ranjan still remained expectant.

In his Inaugural Address at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Faridpore on May 2nd, Chitta Ranjan defined his new position as one of willingness, under certain conditions, to accept the gesture from Whitehall. In this address, he struck altogether a new note and invited the Government to meet him half-way on terms of honourable co-operation, a gesture which surprised both his friends and his enemies. But beyond declaring his change of heart, he did not commit himself to any details, for he believed that after his pronouncement the onus lay not on him, but on the Government. At Faridpore a section of the delegates of the Conference gave him a very unquiet time and his new attitude towards the Government on the one side and the revolutionaries on the other had brought him to the point of breaking with his party.

He came back to Calcutta from Faridpore suffering from fever, and his health again became so impaired that his doctors wanted him to proceed to Europe at once and settle down for a few months at some health resort. But Chitta Ranjan shrank from a visit to Europe, lest it might be misinterpreted as a political mission for the purpose of entering into pourparlers with the Secretary of State. Then he thought of going either to Shillong or to Octacamund,

[1] Belur is a small town about four miles from Calcutta on the other side of the Ganges and contains the grave (samadhi) of the late Swami Vivekananda.

but at last he made up his mind to go to Darjeeling, against the advice of his physicians.

After a flying visit to Pabna[1] where he had gone to meet his latest spiritual guide, Chitta Ranjan arrived at Darjeeling with his wife on May 16th, and took up his residence at a house known as " Step Aside ", just below the Mall. From the day he arrived there, he began to take very long walks up and down the hills. Though he was gradually picking up, the weekly fevers appeared with a persistent periodicity. He would not heed these attacks, but went about on foot for several miles every morning and evening. There appeared to be two things on which he had set his heart at this time. He was under the impression that a few days' stay at Darjeeling had done him immense good, and this encouraged him in the idea of buying a small house there and passing the remaining days of his life away from the turmoil and worries of a busy political life. He told me that, out of the small amount of money he had still left to his credit in the bank, he intended to spend two-thirds in buying a house and to keep the balance to enable him to carry on for the rest of his days. A house was selected for him by a friend, and preliminaries were gone into. This house, known as " Kathleen Cot ", is situated at the top of the Jalpaiguri Spur, just below the Auckland Road, nearly three miles away from the heart of the town, and commands a most picturesque view of the eternal snows. He had recently formed the habit of visiting this house now and again.

In April, Lord Reading had gone to England at the invitation of Lord Birkenhead to discuss with him the Indian situation and to concert measures for putting the Indian constitution on a working basis till the appointment of the Statutory Commission in 1929.[2]

Chitta Ranjan believed, on what appeared to be very inaccurate information, that the Viceroy had gone to London

[1] A sort of a " math " (place of worship) had been started in the suburbs of the town of Pabna by Anukul Chandra Bhattacharya and his mother, to offer spiritual ministrations to such people who seek light at their hands.

[2] As provided for in Sec. 84A of the Government of India Act of 1919.

to get the Minority Report of the Muddiman Committee accepted by the Secretary of State, and hoped that he would be wanted by Lord Birkenhead to talk over with him the new situation in India. He was, therefore, expecting a message from England to that effect, and he was confident that no finality could, or would, be reached without some consultation with him. This message, however, did not arrive, and he was very disappointed. Hope deferred made his heart sick, and, in his broken health, it perhaps proved too much a strain for his shattered nerves.

At this time also, he was anxious to get all political parties to act and think together, and to make this objective feasible, he was even prepared to retire from politics himself. Early in June, while he was in this frame of mind, Mr. Gandhi paid him a visit at " Step Aside " and for the better part of a week, they conferred with each other on the future of the Swaraji Party, the Congress, and the Charter and non-co-operation movement. Mrs. Besant paid him a flying visit, to consult him about her Commonwealth of India Bill. After two days of discussion Chitta Ranjan refused to give his assent to her Bill, as he did not intend to anticipate the decision of the Congress in the matter. Personally, he had no quarrel with anybody regarding the lines of a future constitution of India. For forms of Government he would not enter the lists with anybody ; nor was he very anxious to get complete provincial autonomy all at once ; all that he desired was a declaration by Parliament of a definite date for the realization of our Swaraj and an automatic advance stage by stage to that goal.

About two weeks before his death Chitta Ranjan called on me one morning at my lonely retreat far away from the town and in the course of a conversation frankly confided to me his anticipations of the Birkenhead-Reading conversations. If I remember correctly, he gave me the impression that, given the gesture he was looking for, he would even be prepared to accept the task of forming a Ministry and administer the transferred departments from a constructive point of view. On terms of " honourable co-operation "

he was even prepared to work the Montagu Act, provided only that the Ministers in charge of the transferred Departments were made masters in their own houses, with independent powers of purse and without the risk of interference from the head of the administration. He would be content with this though, at the back of his mind, he would have liked such Reserved Departments as Police and Justice to be handed over to Ministers. Unfortunately these questions haunted him like a nightmare, and would give him no rest or peace. He was always brooding over them till his broken constitution could bear the strain no longer.

Writing to a friend from Darjeeling three days before his death, Chitta Ranjan stated with reference to the Reading-Birkenhead conversations in London and the triangular negotiations carried on by an "intermediary": "Something may come in July or August, or even later. I believe something may come out of the Birkenhead-Reading conversations. . . . Something tells me that they will make some kind of a proposal to us. Whether it will be of any real value to us is another matter. But I do not wish to complicate the issue by any Commonwealth Bill or any such thing in the meantime. If nothing acceptable comes the next Congress must give a clear political lead."

He, however, did not live to see the lead which the Congress at Cawnpore, under the presidency of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, gave to the country over this matter.

In the meantime, a mellowed softness came upon his life and temperament. He had now become one of the sweetest tempered men I had ever seen in my life, and the spirit of bitterness and hatred of his enemies, which was such an outstanding characteristic of his earlier manhood, had altogether disappeared. He was now all suavity and sweet reasonableness. I often asked him, at this time, his opinion regarding Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea, Lord Lytton, and other men placed in high office against whom he had fought so keenly during past years. He had not a word to say against them now, either in sorrow or in anger.

Nearly six weeks before he died, he invited the present

writer to review for his organ, *Forward*, Surendra Nath's book, *A Nation in Making*—a publication over which writers in the Anglo-Indian Press had gone without sufficient cause into ecstasies. Two days after this invitation had been sent out to me, a telegram came to me from Patna over his name asking me not to be "too hard on Surendra Nath". On another occasion, he had prompted me to publish in the *Bengalee* (a paper which I was then editing) something about a political enemy of his having accepted a cheque for five thousand rupees from a government official with a view to carrying on a campaign against the Swaraj Party. When a disclaimer came to me personally from this party, he would not allow me to tender an apology to him, for Das repeatedly assured me that he would be able to satisfy me about the truth of the story. Only a few weeks before he died, when I referred to this matter, he told me how sorry he was for having maligned this enemy on the authority of thoroughly unreliable persons. At this stage, he would often speak to me in the kindest of terms of men with whom he had fought hard and whom he had sometimes hit below the belt. Even his earlier dislike for Rabindra Nath Tagore gave way, at this time, to a spirit of intense admiration for the life and work of the great Poet Laureate of Asia ; for he had asked me to see the author of the *Gitanjali*, on my return to Calcutta, and press him to organize an Asiatic Confederation in India, as he believed that no other Indian than Tagore could successfully take the initiative in such an important matter.

On the evening of June 13th, I and two of my daughters (the Misses Lina and Bina Ray) were sitting in one of the shelters facing Lebong. Chitta Ranjan approached on foot with a rickshaw behind him. He quietly came near to us and addressed one of my daughters and congratulated her on my restored health. I returned the compliment to him, as he was looking quite fresh and fit. All on a sudden he looked apprehensive and prophetic, and told me that the time for hallelujah had not yet come. He could not say how his health was until the following Tuesday had come and gone. That was the last time we met, for on Tuesday afternoon

June 16th, before I could see him again, the great Bengali warrior had gone to his eternal rest. I did not know, and most of his friends at Darjeeling were not aware, that on Sunday the periodic fever had come on, this time with fatal consequences. On Monday morning, his temperature had risen greatly, and throughout the whole day he was restless and in acute pain. Early on the morning of Tuesday, June 16th, the fever subsided, and, with this decline of temperature, his pulse began to sink. A little after 1 P.M. his heart was sinking fast and he became unconscious. At 5.15 P.M. he quietly passed away.

As soon as the news spread in the little town of Darjeeling, streams of visitors began to pour into " Step Aside " to take a last look at the earthly remains of this great Bengali leader. Within half an hour of his death, I and my youngest daughter (Bina) visited the chamber where he lay, as if in natural, peaceful slumber, his face transfigured by the hand of death into an image of what was best in him. From half-past five to midnight, the house was packed with visitors drawn from all classes and communities of the people of that remote hill-side station, a large number of them shedding tears and sobbing as if one of their dearest friends had been torn from them. As seven o'clock on Wednesday morning, under the purest cobalt of a Himalayan sky, his body was carried on a bier from his house to the railway station, covered with flowers brought by friends and strangers alike. When the cortège arrived at the middle of Mackenzie Road, a large crowd of the hill folk joined the procession, and at the railway station several thousand people had gathered to pay their last tribute and farewell to the departed hero. A few minutes before 9 A.M. the bier was placed in a parcel van, as there was no room for it in an ordinary passenger bogey. From Darjeeling to Calcutta, at every important station, enormous crowds had gathered to take their last glimpse of the mortal remains of the greatest and most dynamic leader which young Bengal has ever known or seen. At Sealdah, where the train arrived three hours late, a sea of human heads was waiting to receive the funeral cortège. When the bier was brought out from the

train a marvellous scene was witnessed in which a procession over two miles long was formed to pay Calcutta's last homage to its Mayor. Nearly three lakhs of men and women with Mr. Gandhi at their head, came out into the streets and followed the bier from Sealdah to the burning ghat. The procession took nearly six hours to arrive at its final destination, and at 4 P.M., amidst a shower of rain and with the prayers of a whole nation, the funeral obsequies were performed.[1]

The scene not only astounded all European residents in Calcutta, but also proved to be a demonstration of affection and loyalty for a leader unparalleled in the East.

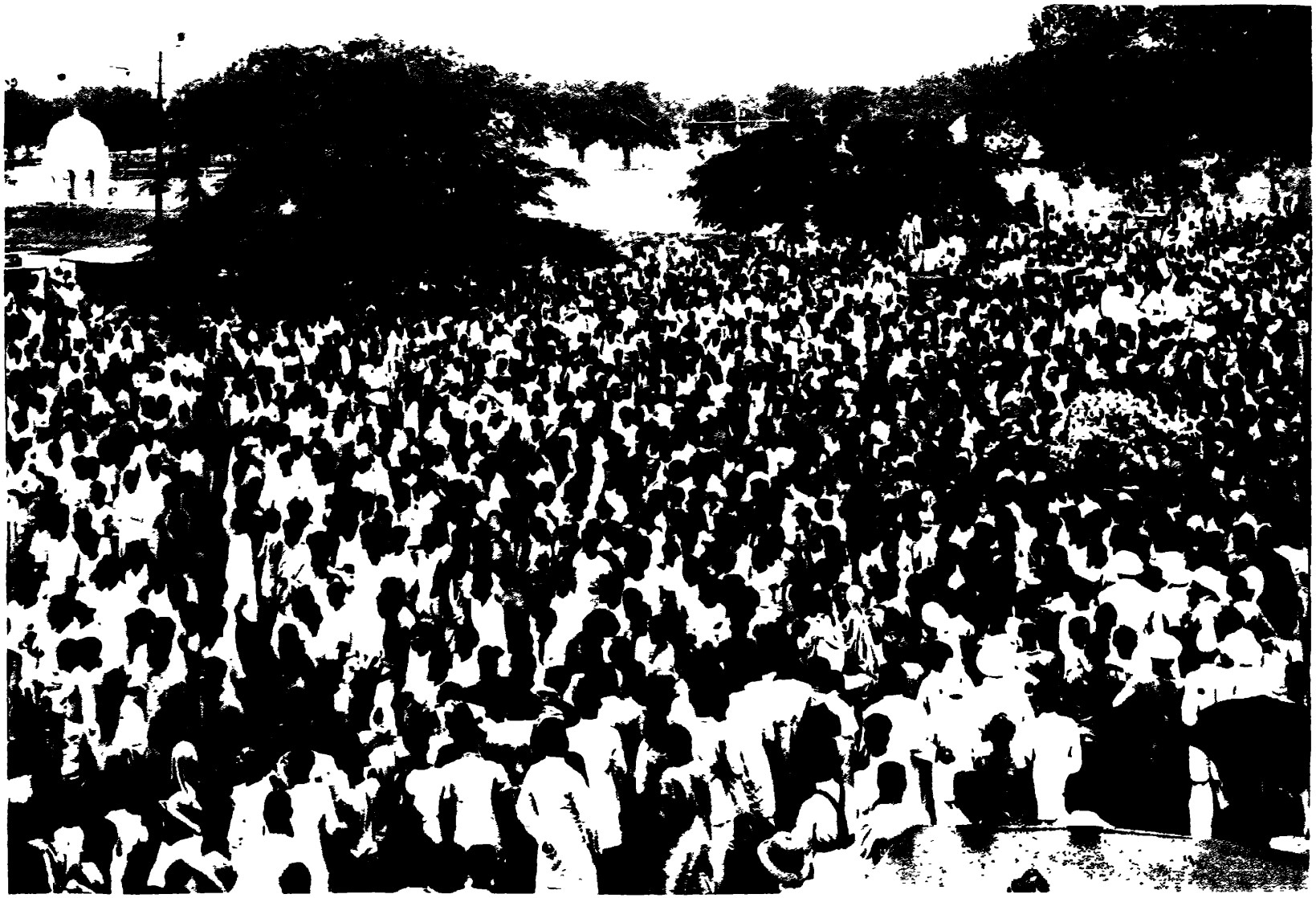
All places of business, mercantile offices and firms, schools and colleges, theatres and cinemas under Indian management were closed for the day, and the premier city in the Empire went into deep mourning and remained inarticulate with grief.

Mr. Garvin has beautifully described the funeral of this great leader in the following eloquent and expressive words :

" Unless you have had even a momentary glimpse of Asia, no imagination will enable you to conceive it. The first days in Bombay or Calcutta create a fresh sense of the multitudinous complexity of the human swarm, and between the cities the primitive spaces of the land are as unexpected. No amount of reading or hearsay beforehand had enabled you to visualize these scenes, and you know in your turn that you never can suggest them by description. To pick out vivid details gives no sense of the whole, any more than a visit to an aquarium by itself can convey a true idea of mid-ocean.

" Amongst us only a few in a million can realize that the funeral of a popular leader in Calcutta last Thursday was the greatest and strangest scene witnessed anywhere in the British Empire for many a day. Covered with flowers, the body of Mr. Das was borne in procession through vast crowds

[1] On the second anniversary of his death, June 16th, 1927, the foundation stone was laid for a cenotaph at Keoratola on the spot where he was cremated.



to the burning ghat with the drumming and clanging and wailing of music and cries that are not as ours. Mahatma Gandhi, clad only in his loin-cloth, was carried shoulder-high to the place of fire and ashes. Grief for the dead leader mingled with enthusiasm for the living saint to spread a delirium of emotion. No hero-worship in the West compares with the vehement though often fugitive idolatry devoted in India to any conspicuous man who can magnetize the religious or racial sentiment of the people. We must look on a mourning like this with sympathy and respect apart from any reasoned difference of ideas about the future of Indian Government."

Nor was this the last nor the most picturesque of all the funeral demonstrations. The Hindu believes in the transmigration of souls and in a cycle of births and re-births. To prevent an undesirable birth after death, the sons of the deceased generally perform a ceremony which is called *Sradh* or a memorial service. This takes place after a definite period after the decease of every Hindu, and consists of a worship of the departed spirit along with the worship of some of the principal gods of the Hindu pantheon, done with a view to induce the gods to be kind and merciful to the departed soul during the crossing of the bar and its voyage from one world to another and also for a happy and peaceful life on its re-birth. Not exactly a service like the requiem which is in vogue among Christians ; the *Sradh* is something more—much more vocal, demonstrative and spectacular. The *Sradh* not only is a ceremony performed for the peace of the departed soul, but contains long prayers with offerings of various kinds to the gods for providing for the comfort and happiness and peace of the dead person in the next world. Usually it is performed with great ceremony, large numbers of friends are feasted, and alms are given to the poor. Learned Brahmins are invited to take part in the ceremony for the recital of scriptural incantations and discourses on abstruse metaphysical problems. On the occasion of Chitta Ranjan Das's *Sradh* on July 1st, 1925, Calcutta wore the appearance of a holiday, and thousands of people gathered in and outside

his residence to pay their last tribute to his memory. His son performed the ceremony before a full-sized portrait of Chitta Ranjan and in the presence of a very large number of Brahmin savants gathered from all parts of Northern India and all the prominent men of the city of Calcutta irrespective of caste, colour and creed. Silver, copper and bell-metal plates and household necessaries were presented to a very large number of the invited Brahmins, and to some selected brahminy bulls and cows. In the afternoon nearly fifty thousand poor men were treated to a sumptuous feast, thus bringing to a close the funeral ceremonies of the greatest Hindu born in Bengal in his age.

CHAPTER XVII

CHITTA RANJAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS, FAILURES AND UNREALIZED DREAMS

CHITTA RANJAN was a visionary, a dreamer, and an apostle of revolt. Yet, in practical politics, he suffered many things and refused to move onwards in many matters. He had little sympathy with existing conventions of life or social or political institutions of any kind. In his private and domestic life, he was as strong a destroyer of social usages and conventions as he had constituted himself in the last years of his life an enemy of the Government established by law. Though born of Brahmo parents, he treated lightly certain cherished ideals and conventions that the Brahmo Samaj held dear and sacred. As we have noticed in a previous chapter, he wrote and published several poems in which he defied the orthodox cult of Brahmo theism and puritanism. In his habits of life he had marked out for himself new principles and laws of conduct. In a later period of his life, he returned to Hindu orthodoxy, but had cast to the winds its principal corner-stone—the caste system. Against the fundamental Hindu usage of marrying within one's own caste, he had married both his daughters to bridegrooms chosen from castes other than his own ; and he got neither of these marriages registered, taking upon himself the risk of their validity being challenged in a Court of Law. Yet, in the *Sradh* ceremony of his parents and in his daughters' marriages, he had followed Hindu ritual to the letter. In fact, when he grew to mature age, he neither remained a Brahmo nor became a Hindu, according to the current and accepted interpretation of the term.

He lived like a prince during the better part of his life, indulging in epicurean habits to the full ; but when he turned his back upon this chapter of his life, he renounced them as

probably no one in modern India has done. Even before he had turned over this new leaf, in his laborious days he had given away in charities, mostly indiscriminate, what he had earned by the sweat of his brow. Though living in the midst of a materialistic age he never acquired a love for money except as a mere instrument for the demonstration of his altruistic instincts.

Through all the various stages of his life, revolt marked him as his own ; and he went on breaking with the zeal of an iconoclast all images and fetishes that came in his way, no matter whether religious, social or political. He represented in all his life and ideas the spirit of revolt, and of Prometheus unbound ; and, when he became the evangelist of Indian traditionalism, he did so, not with a view to paying homage and worship to the ideas of a bygone and remote past, but with a view to breaking away from the bondage of the present, and demolishing the gods, fashions, and conventions of modern life. We have no doubt in our mind that he renounced his splendid practice at the Bar, not from the spirit of mere sacrifice, as he never loved money for money's sake, nor to make himself an example to others, but to turn his back on the beaten track of the law, which he had never regarded as a noble or inspiring profession.

In politics, he was not in love with any form of bureaucracy ; nor had he much love for Western Parliamentary institutions either. He was a democrat, but he did not subscribe to the main shibboleths of modern democracies, and his whole temperament, by nature and training, was that of a great autocrat who could bear no criticism nor forgive anyone who challenged his authority and position. He was a Vaishnav by spiritual affinity and culture, but he did not believe in the cult of static calm or spiritual resignation which is the very essence of Vaishnavism. He was a socialist, particularly in his academic sympathy with Marxian doctrines ; but he did not move even his little finger to destroy the permanent settlement of Bengal, a pernicious institution which has for nearly a century and a half stood effectively between Bengal and progress. Nor in his

coquettings with Trade Unions, could he rise above capitalistic influences and go in for a wholesale scheme of better conditions of life for all labouring classes, or for any scheme to put down sweated labour and sweated wages.

Chitta Ranjan had given his attention to journalism at various stages of his life, but not until his retirement from the Bar did he become a full-fledged editor of a newspaper. Just a few days before the general election of 1923, he had started *Forward* as the daily organ of his party. As the editor of this journal he was eminently successful in organizing the public opinion of Bengal in support of his own doctrines and ideals. As a propagandist journal, *Forward* more than fulfilled the expectations and hopes of its founder, yet it cannot be said that it ever attained the high standard and reputation which such journals as the *Dandhya*, the *Yugantar*, the *Atmasakti* and the *Bande Mataram* had succeeded in establishing for themselves nearly twenty years before as the messengers of the fiery cross to young Bengal. But perhaps the times were different and he was not the absolute master in his own house.

Though he was gifted in a very high measure with the powers of persuasion, he failed to reach the first rank of public speakers of Young India. Keshab Chandra Sen, Lal Mohan Ghose, Kali Churn Banurji, Ananda Mohan Bose and Surendra Nath Banerjea might well be reckoned as heroes of a hundred platforms, and could any day hold their own against English or American orators of the front rank of this and the last century. Chitta Ranjan certainly spoke very well and with an earnestness and candour that almost bewitched his audience, but his oratory lacked the classical dignity and the rounded periods with which the eloquence of Burke and Chatham are associated on the one side, as well as the terse condensation, directness, and the simple phraseology of a Lord Rosebery or a Joseph Chamberlain on the other.

Intellectually he exhibited in all his later public activities an extraordinary subtlety and nimbleness, but he failed to

apply his splendid gifts to any work of enduring good or benefit to his country. He had practically abandoned his devotion to literature as soon as he became a busy lawyer, and had ceased to contribute articles to the newspapers and reviews as he had done as a free lance in the days of the *Bande Mataram*. Towards renaissance and spirituality in India he contributed very little to which subsequent generations of Indians may look for inspiration. In this matter probably, Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghose's contributions will be worked in the future for valuable ore. Chitta Ranjan's whole time, from the date on which he suspended his practice in the Bar to the last day of his life, was absorbed in the task of laying truly and faithfully the foundation of his party and keeping his flock together. He had little leisure to think of leaving behind him anything in the nature of a permanent landmark in art, politics, philosophy, or literature.

He was so impatient a reformer and so obsessed with an enthusiasm for destruction that he did not even shrink in 1921 from wrecking several hundreds of schools in Bengal, on the plea that they were training and preparing our young men for a life of clerical serfdom. But when he tried to establish an independent University at Dacca, and several schools all over Bengal for the propagation of what is known as " national education ", his efforts met with conspicuous failure, and by 1922-23 the older schools which he had destroyed were again full and busy. A few days before his death he told a friend that " national education was unrealizable without a national system of Government, and the boycott of the University was about the weakest point in the new national propaganda ". How thousands of young men, whose careers were wrecked by his inconsiderate zeal, wish to-day that he had awakened to this reality before he had set out on his work of destruction !

Even in his short career as a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, he stood out more as an apostle of *destruction than as a respecter of persons and institutions. No doubt, he scotched dyarchy, but he was unable to put*

anything in its place. Not that he did not want to but he could not. And as a result he remained a destroyer, and could not become a builder, try as he might.

In his last speech to the Bengal Legislative Council he said :

" My answer to those who ask why I want to destroy is this : I want to destroy because this rotten structure is occupying the place where a beautiful mansion may be erected. May I ask how you can put up a beautiful building without pulling down the rotten structure which had already occupied the place ? You cannot. Therefore there is no sense in that criticism, destruction ! destruction ! We do not want to destroy merely. It is a gross libel on the Swarajist members to say that we want only to destroy. We want to destroy in order that we may be able to build up. If we want to obstruct, it is because we may get the opportunity of constructing. It is to my mind a principle as simple as it can be. Why is it so difficult for my friends to realize it ? I cannot make out. Why ! Look at the history of any country ; look at the history of England ! This sort of thing has gone on there and no power has come to the people without this obstruction. It is a wicked and pernicious system. One thing was good for England because it brought freedom for the English people, but that very thing is bad in this country because it is the wicked Swarajists who apply it."

He completed his work of destruction, but did not live to see any work of construction seriously undertaken, nor could he lay the foundation of the " beautiful mansion " he had in mind. He made a bold attempt to raise a large sum of money for village reconstruction—to spread sanitation, supply pure drinking water, distribute free medicine and establish primary schools in rural areas. Unfortunately he failed to realize sufficient funds for the purpose, and, before his schemes could be put through, the hand of death had fallen on him. It must, however, be noticed here, that, as *the head of the civic administration in* Calcutta for nearly a year, *he was able to induce the Corporation to establish*

primary schools, a good hospital and medical school at the eastern end of the city, and several health associations and depots in different quarters for the treatment of cholera, small-pox, malaria and kala-azar.

Nor as a visionary did Chitta Ranjan confine his mental outlook to a mere reconstruction of Indian life. He cast his eyes on the world abroad and conceived the idea of a Federation of Asia. In his inaugural address at Gaya, as the President of the Congress, he said :

" Even more important is the participation of India in the great Asiatic Federation, which I see in the course of formation. I have hardly any doubt that the Pan-Islamic movement, which was started on a somewhat narrow basis, has given way or is about to give way to the great Federation of all Asiatic peoples. It is the union of the oppressed nationalities of Asia. Is India to remain outside this union ? I admit that our freedom must be won by ourselves but such a bond of friendship and love, of sympathy and co-operation, between India and the rest of Asia, nay, between India and all the liberty-loving people of the world, is destined to bring about world-peace. World-peace to my mind means the freedom of every nationality, and I go further and say that no nation on the face of the earth can be really free when other nations are in bondage."

All his life, before he was recognized as the stormy petrel of Indian unrest, he had cherished beautiful illusions, been obsessed with wonderful visions, and dreamt inspiring dreams. The solidarity of the Indian nation, based on a permanent Hindu-Moslem understanding, of which he had given an earnest of his enthusiasm in the famous Pact of December, 1923, and the Federation of Asia remained to his last day unrealized dreams.

While not believing in any particular faith in his latter days, he rose above the sordid spirit of religiosity and communalism. He became a transcendentalist, and, like Abu'l Fazl, he entered into the spirit of universal religious tolerance. Three centuries ago, in an inscription on a temple in Kashmir, Abu'l Fazl wrote thus :

> " Thy elect have no dealings with either heresy or orthodoxy; for neither of them stands behind the screen of thy truth.
>
> " Heresy to the heretic and religion to the orthodox; but the dust of the rose petal belongs to the heart of the perfume seller."

Inspired by a sentiment of this nature, Chitta Ranjan made some very serious attempts in his life, including the Pact of December, 1923, to prove to both these communities that a change of heart was necessary for them to make a united India possible. Unfortunately for India, his dream never materialized, and, before twelve months had passed after his death, his famous Bengal Pact was abandoned both by the Hindus and by the Mahomedans as a mere scrap of paper.

As regards the Federation of India he could cherish it as a mere intellectual vision, the ultimate realization of which could not, and did not, enter into practical politics during his lifetime. In his last public utterance at Faridpore, he gave expression to his ideas on an Indian Federation in the following manner :—

> " For myself, I have a clear vision as to what I seek. I seek a federation of the states of India : each free to follow, as it must follow, the culture and the tradition of its own people : each bound to each in the common service of all : a great federation within a greater federation, the federation of free nations, whose freedom is the measure of their service to man, and whose unity the hope of peace among the peoples of the earth."

But neither in his address at Faridpore nor in any other public utterance do we find Chitta Ranjan thrashing out this question at any length. Nowhere in his public speeches do we come across any programme for the construction of an eastern structure for the Indian Commonwealth in consonance with the aspirations of the people in British India on the

one side, and the security of the Indian principalities on the other. Nor do we find him anywhere offering any helpful criticism on the two schemes which had been placed before the country on this subject during his lifetime. Mr. Lionel Curtis's idea of building up a Federal Commonwealth in this country on the model of the United States, by dividing India into a large number of small, homogeneous, and autonomous provinces, at one time came perilously near to practical politics. At a later stage, Major Lugard's scheme of parcelling out India into a large number of independent and sovereign states under well-chosen Indian governors, or in other words, the extension of the system of tributary principalities throughout the country, engaged public attention seriously both in this country and England.[1]

The Federation of Man as a social Utopia never captured Chitta Ranjan's imagination, and, at one time he even stood out as a parochial advocate of patriotism, as against the more sublime dogma of an international brotherhood. On this point he once crossed swords with Rabindra Nath Tagore, who had soared to the higher plane of looking at man as a limb and part of the Universal Soul. Chitta Ranjan absolutely lacked the idea of cosmic consciousness and the sense of cosmic solidarity with which the vision of the human race had been widened by the *rishis* of old in ancient India and by seers like Emerson, Walt Whitman, Wordsworth and Tennyson in the West.

Chitta Ranjan's failures and lapses were many, but some of his achievements were striking and he will long live in memory as the man who first gave check to a powerful government like the British, and as a wonderful magician who in the space of a few years changed and broadened the entire political and intellectual outlook of the Bengali people. He not only scotched dyarchy, in spite of the best efforts of the Government to retain and work it out, but he also succeeded in tearing to tatters all the prestige and authority

[1] Yet another scheme of Federalism has been promulgated by Sir Frederick Whyte, the first President of the Indian Legislative Assembly, since C. R. Das's death.

that the Anglo-Indian government had acquired in the two centuries since Robert Clive laid the foundation of England's Empire in the East. He lived to turn the old acquiescence and the placid contentment of the people into a feeling of bitter dislike and hatred of the powers that be. In this endeavour he was not only a destroyer but also a builder, as he lived to organize the most powerful school of political opinion in the country, and made it such a great power in the land that all ambitious men, no matter what their social rank, looked to him and his party for influence and patronage, rather than to Government House, to which so many generations of Indians had turned for all sorts of personal and social recognition.

Taking everything together, Chitta Ranjan's memory will be cherished by his grateful countrymen as that of a builder rather than a destroyer. When he entered Indian politics, he found political ideals and parties in a most nebulous and chaotic condition. The masses generally, and a large portion of the classes, were still sleeping in the long night of mediæval mysticism and inaction. Chitta Ranjan whipped up his people from this deep somnolence, brought them face to face with the gravity of their condition, and awakened them to a consciousness of nationhood. He worked day and night for a few years, spent laborious days and sleepless nights, and left behind him a party which, for the first time in the history of India, knows its mind and can gather courage enough to follow its convictions. This will remain the principal landmark of his political work—a whole people brought under a common standard, inspired by ideals of self-help and determination, and set to work out their own destiny without any extraneous aid or help.

At the same time, as a constructive politician or statesman he fell far behind Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dadabhoy Naoroji or Pheroze Shah Mehta, while in astuteness he was no equal to Bal Gangadhar Tilak. But in his immense sacrifice for political idealism, in risking health and life for the organization of a new political party, and in integrity, doggedness and

tenacity of purpose, Chitta Ranjan had no equal in India, and even Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea, with all his brilliant talents and patriotic devotion, is not to be compared with him. And for moving masses and leading them on from stage to stage, from victory to victory, as a great general, the wizard of Bengal left far behind the prophet and high priest of Young India.

In one very pleasing aspect of his life, Chitta Ranjan bore a striking resemblance to another distinguished Bengali of his day. Like Bhupendra Nath Basu he had great social qualities and had the wonderful power of making friends with all sorts and conditions of people, and turning a large number of politically minded men into loyal and faithful friends. Like Bhupendra Nath Basu again, he was able to keep and hold them together as no other contemporary Bengali had done by his wonderful tact, sweetness of temper and reliance on the loyalty and integrity of his lieutenants. But unlike Bhupendra Nath Basu and very much like Surendra Nath Banerjea, he failed to gather round him many intellectual men and sometimes even repelled them; and also unlike Bhupendra Nath and very much like Surendra Nath Banerjea, he had not the shrewdness to know sincere workers and friends from parasites and flatterers. So long as he was in the saddle things were all right. But as soon as he passed away the flatterers and parasites got the better of the party machine and organization and the real and sincere workers were elbowed and crowded out of public life.

With Surendra Nath Banerjea and Gopal Krishna Gokhale Chitta Ranjan had three things in common. All of them took politics very seriously, almost raising it to the level of a religion, all of them were extremely sensitive to criticism, so much so that not one of them would speak to a man who would not recognize his authority and bow to his decision; and, above all, all these three men were supremely innocent of a sense of humour.

It is now necessary to compare this great Bengali with the leaders of the other national movements of our own times in other parts of the world.

There can be no doubt that in powers of organization and in giving obstruction a scientific orientation, in the abundant and diplomatic use of barbed shafts, and for adroitness, he resembled in a great measure Charles Stewart Parnell. With Michael Collins he had little in common, excepting that they were both good generals and clever masters of strategy; yet in generalship and powers of organization he could not come near to either Kemal or Zaghlul Pasha. Kemal and Zaghlul have made Turkey and Egypt what they are to-day; Chitta Ranjan spent himself in the barest spade-work. But it must be said for Chitta Ranjan that he had not the opportunities of life of either a Kemal or a Zaghlul. Zaghlul and Kemal both had a united, homogeneous and independent nation behind them. Chitta Ranjan had none of these opportunities. Yet he seems to have achieved more than either of them by welding heterogeneous groups of people into a united nation and knitting together hundreds of impatient idealists, political adventurers, and ambitious self-seekers into a well-disciplined party.

With the last leader of the Progressive Party in the United States who also died in June, 1925, Chitta Ranjan had almost a family affinity. Chitta Ranjan, like La Follette, " was gritty and combative, voluble, untiring, abounding in information, terrific in attack, and absolutely fearless ".

A very common charge levelled against Chitta Ranjan during his lifetime, particularly by Anglo-Indian critics, was that he very often stirred up excitement which he could not lay or control. It is a strange coincidence in human history that such a charge has been levelled against almost every great man in all ages, climes and countries. A similar charge was brought against Gladstone by his political critics, and Lord Morley's refutation of it applies almost with equal force in the case of Chitta Ranjan. In defending this aspect of Gladstone's life, Morley says :[1]

" To charge him with habitually rousing popular forces into dangerous excitement, is to ignore or mis-read his action in some of the most critical of his movements. ' Here is a

[1] Morley's Life of Gladstone, Vol. 3.

man', said Huxley, 'with the greatest intellect in Europe, and yet he debases it by simply following majorities and the crowd.' He was called a mere mirror of the passing humours and intellectual confusions of the popular mind. He had nothing, said his detractors, but a sort of clever pilot's eye for winds and currents, and the rising of the tide to the exact height that would float him and his cargo over the bar. All this is the exact opposite of the truth. What he thought was that the statesman's gift consisted in insight into the facts of a particular era, disclosing the existence of material for forming public opinion and directing public opinion to a given purpose. In every one of his achievements of high mark—even in his last marked failure of achievement—he expressly formed, or endeavoured to form and create, the public opinion upon which he knew that in the last resort he must depend."

After he had overthrown dyarchy for a second time, the bitterness of the Government and the Anglo-Indian Press against him reached its climax. The Serajgunge Resolution, extolling the patriotism of a political assassin, was seized on by Chitta Ranjan's political enemies as an opportunity to crush his growing influence in the country, and brought down upon him the wrath of India's white rulers on both sides of the Suez Canal. At this time Lord Peel, a previous Secretary of State for India, was egging on the MacDonald Government to prosecute Chitta Ranjan Das for the part he had taken in the Serajgunge Resolution, which was interpreted as nothing short of incitement to murder. In declining to put Chitta Ranjan on trial or deport him, Lord Olivier, Secretary of State for India in the Labour Government of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, gave a remarkable testimony to the character of Chitta Ranjan on the authority of the Governor of Bengal. Lord Lytton had informed Lord Olivier that "Mr. Das in India had the reputation of being a particularly upright and scrupulous politician, second only to Gandhi himself in saintliness of character".

This statement, made on the floor of the House of Lords, caused considerable surprise, and evoked scornful comments

both in India and England, and was described in some quarters as extraordinarily "wide of the mark". It was openly stated that a man who in his youth was a *bon viveur* and lavish with his money, and unscrupulous in his political methods, who had publicly declared that all means, no matter what, would always justify the end, was hardly a person who could be described in the language that Lord Olivier had used. Chitta Ranjan's political honesty and integrity of purpose may not have been as transparent as those of Mr. Gandhi, but we have no doubt that after coming into close personal contact with the Saint of Sabarmati, he did his best to reach a higher moral and spiritual plane, and, after 1924, he made a supreme effort to justify Lord Olivier's description of his character.

Through renunciation and sacrifice in the later years of his life, he had elevated his emotionalism into a spiritual force, and had touched the right chord in the very soul of India, which has been, and still remains, more spiritual than material. Rabindra Nath Tagore has summed up the life work of this great Bengali in the following beautiful message :

> "Man truly reveals himself through his gift, and the best gift that Chitta Ranjan has left for his countrymen is not any particular political or social programme, but the creative force of a great aspiration that has taken a deathless form in the sacrifice which his life represented."

CHAPTER XVIII

POSTSCRIPT

CHITTA RANJAN died on June 16th, 1925. In order to make this book a complete record of the history of Bengal for the first quarter of the twentieth century, it is necessary to mention here the outstanding events of the remaining months of the year. A few days after the death of Chitta Ranjan, Lord Birkenhead declared in the House of Lords that he was not prepared to broaden the basis of the Indian constitution until Indian nationalists had reconsidered their position in the matter of giving the Reforms a decent trial. On his return to India early in August, and in opening the new session of the Central Legislature, Lord Reading repeated the declaration. About the end of the year a bill based on the recommendations of the Lee Commission was passed by Parliament, insuring greater security for the members of the Superior Services, with generous provisions for overseas allowances, proportionate pension, free passage, etc. In December Lord Reading passed an Ordinance withdrawing the excise duties on the manufacture of a certain description of cotton. The year concluded with a session of the Indian National Congress at Cawnpore, presided over by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, in which it was resolved to give the Government an ultimatum in March, 1926, either to convene a Round Table Conference or to broaden the basis of the Indian constitution, and if the Government failed to respond to it in due time, the Swarajist members of the various Councils would abstain from taking an active interest in the work of the Legislatures. In this Congress also Mr. Gandhi publicly announced his decision to avoid the muddy waters of Indian politics for a definite period.