CHAPTER I

BENGAL IN THE MID-VICTORIAN ERA

It was not long after the suppression of the Sepoy Revolt that the first fruits of a century of British Rule in India, or the results of the impact of the East with the West, began to appear on the surface of Indian life. The first few Governors-General of India had devoted all their attention and energy to the work of conquest and annexation, and to widening the physical boundaries of England's new-founded Dependency in the East. Warren Hastings certainly, as the founder of the Calcutta Madrassa and of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and, after him, Lord Cornwallis and Sir John Shore, to some extent, gave their attention to domestic affairs; but they were more concerned, like most of their successors up to the days of Lord Dalhousie, in deepening the foundation and consolidating the fabric of their Eastern Empire.

It must be remembered that up to Lord Dalhousie's time, Bengal meant a much wider geographical and administrative area than we now understand by the name. Before the Charter Act of 1853, the Bengal Presidency consisted of Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and the whole of the United Provinces, with Delhi and a part of the Punjab thrown in. By the Charter Act of 1853, a new Lieutenant-Governorship was created with Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam as an independent administrative province. The area that thus came to be known as Bengal was not quite the same province as was known by that name under the Sen Kings of Vikrampur, nor the one that came to be governed by the Nawabs of Dacca and Murshidabad in later days; nor again was its political area known by that name after the annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1912.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bengal practically meant India, and it was not till the first few

years of that century had passed that India's Governors-General began to be concerned about their responsibilities to the people of this country. Early in that century, the East India Company began to develop schemes for the education of the people. The Charter Act of 1813 had set apart a lakh of rupees for the " introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences in Bengal ", and this was rightly interpreted as a scheme for the encouragement of Sanskrit and Arabic. In the following year, the Court of Directors instructed the Governor-General to leave the Hindus to the practice, long established among them, of giving instruction in their homes and to encourage talent by the stimulus of honorary marks of distinction, and in some cases by grants of money. It was not, however, before 1817 that the first school was started in Calcutta under official patronage[1] to educate Hindu boys through the medium of English.

From the foundation of the Hindu College[2] in 1817, which was established with the elevated object of giving " tuition to the sons of respectable Hindus in the English and Indian languages, and in the literature and science of Europe and Asia ", up to 1835, when the Medical College was founded in Calcutta, and the first Committee of Public Instruction was established in Bengal, most of the Governors-General of India helped in organizing several schools in and around Calcutta.

Besides the efforts of the East India Company, some of the European Missionary Societies began to divert their work in Bengal from preaching the gospel to teaching the rudiments of a liberal education. In 1816, the noble trinity of Baptist Missionaries—Carey, Marshman and Ward—founded a

[1] Before the establishment of the Hindu College there were several schools run by private enterprise in Sutanati, Govindapur and Kalighat, the three small villages out of which has developed the modern city of Calcutta. There were Archer's School (1780), Mackinnon's School (1789), Brown's Boarding School for young Hindus (1780), Linstedt's and Farrel's Seminaries, Hutteman's School in Boitkkhana, David Drummond's School in Dhurrumtolla (where Derozio, the Eurasian poet, was educated) and schools conducted by Sherbourne, Martin Bowles, and Arathoon Petras.

[2] The Hindu College was developed out of a local " Vidyalaya " established in 1816, and first started its work on 20th January, 1817, in the premises of Gora Chand Basak at Garanhata.

collage at Serampur—then one of the most populous towns on the right bank of the Ganges, about fifteen miles away from Calcutta—and gave a great stimulus to educational and intellectual activities. In 1830, Dr. Duff, a Scottish missionary, founded the Free Church Institution at Nimtolla, subsequently amalgamated with the General Assembly's Institution at Cornwallis Square, which has educated nearly five generations of Bengali youth.

These were the beginnings of a process of civilizing India according to Western standards of life and the results of these efforts were not visible till the boys educated in these schools and colleges had grown to manhood. Men like Michael Madhushudan Dutt, Harish Chandra Mukerjee, Girish Chandra Ghose, Ram Gopal Ghose, Raj Narayan Bose and K. M. Banerjea, were the results of the earliest efforts of English officials and missionaries to educate India according to Western ideals, and their pioneer work in these directions brought in a new phase of Bengali national life. There could be no doubt after these first-fruits had been gathered, that the English language had infused new life into a decaying society.

With the educational awakening of Bengal came a striking change in the spirit of an ancient and isolated people. Again, it was in the early nineteenth century that the English Governors-General of India began to pay attention to the social structure of Indian life. The institutions of *thagi* and infanticide, as well as the pernicious system of burning widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands, were put down by the strong hand of John Company before Victoria had come to the throne. In this matter, however, it was not Englishmen only who tried to lead India along a new path. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, undoubtedly the greatest Bengali of his age, who combined the courage and idealism of Martin Luther and John Calvin, had not only helped to organize a new educational movement in Bengal, but had also helped Lord William Bentinck and Sir Charles Metcalfe to tide over serious Indian opposition against all their attempts at reform. With a select number of friends, the Raja made a brave

attempt to root out the principal evils of Hindu society that had been allowed for centuries to degrade Indian manhood.

It is curious to note that Raja Ram Mohan Roy's reforming zeal hardly made any impression on orthodox Hindu society until many generations of Indians had been successfully imbued with his principles and philosophy. For the better part of the nineteenth century, early marriage and polygamy flourished. Boys were given in marriage generally between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, and girls between six and ten. Thousands of girls became widows before they had once seen their husbands or come to the age of four. A man having more than half a dozen wives was often considered a person of great social rank and position, and a Brahmin having more than a hundred wives as a person of high sacerdotal dignity, merely on that account. Long after Raja Ram Mohan Roy had died, Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, himself a Brahmin of the highest rank and a great Pundit, carried on a crusade against both infant marriage and polygamy, and it was about this time that educated Bengalis definitely turned against these evils, though even to-day early marriage and polygamy cannot be said to be entirely extinct.

The purdah, which had come into vogue in Bengal, and for the matter of that all over northern India, as a consequence of the Mahomedan conquest, remained an outstanding feature of our domestic life. Excepting women of the lowest classes, and those who had become converts to Christianity or Brahmoism, no daughter of Bengal dared to show her face in the light of day or come out of her inner apartments. There the woman lay condemned to a life-long prison, a helpless, prostrate and pathetic figure—with enfeebled health, her naturally keen senses dulled through inaction, without the light of knowledge illumining her vision, steeped in ignorance and prejudice, groping in the dark—a martyr to the conventions of the society in which she had been born.

The complexities of the caste system not only gave daily trouble to the head of the house, but its laws and injunctions dominated the entire social atmosphere to such an extent

that no marriage could be celebrated, no birth announced, no funeral rite performed without the technical advice of the learned Pundits and in conformity with the special caste rules of every class of the people. The laws of caste even penetrated into the kitchen, for no orthodox Hindu could eat certain kinds of potatoes, pumpkins and bananas, as everything brought from foreign countries was religiously avoided. No one could eat a particular fruit on a certain day of the week or in a certain month. Yet, strange to say, every Bengali, including Brahmins, could eat fish and meat, denied to the higher castes of other provinces. Intercaste dining could hardly be imagined in those days.

Railway travelling was indirectly discouraged in so far as no one could eat or drink in the company of a promiscuous crowd composed of different castes. On top of all this there were minute injunctions as to when people could leave home to visit any place outside their native village, and no one could step out of his home on a Thursday or Saturday afternoon or on some particular day of the moon—the Hindus calculating their calendar by the moon.

The cultivated intelligence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy revolted against this low condition of Hindu spiritual and social life. Hinduism since the Middle Ages had degenerated into the worst form of idolatry and meaningless mummeries and dogmas. Among the thirty-three crores of gods and goddesses in the Hindu pantheon were included such strange deities as the round stone called the salgram, the snake, the banyan and pepul trees, the tulsi plant, and the goddesses that control cholera (Ola), small-pox (Sitala) and skin diseases (Ghetu). One recalls with some amusement that when in the famous impeachment of Warren Hastings, his Counsel referred to his having found a niche in the Hindu pantheon, the great Edmund Burke answered that the Hindus dreaded the powers of evil and they included in their pantheon every spirit that might cause them trouble and mischief and sorrow.

However droll his religious and social ideas, the average Bengali of those days was not half so bad or vile as were his

gods and fetishes. The Bengali of the mid-Victorian era, though lacking the higher concepts of an immanent and all pervading divinity, lived a spiritual life, paying to whatever gods he had learned to worship, through tradition and custom, a sincere devotion of soul and heart. He regulated all his life by the fear of his gods, and as a result lived a happy and peaceful life. Generally his honesty, truthfulness, simplicity, sincerity, and integrity of purpose were all inspired by this love and fear of his gods.

In addition, there was in full force in those days the influence of the joint family system, which acted as a sort of national insurance and provided a means of livelihood for every person, no matter whether old, infirm, blind, incapable or incurable. The unity of society was not the individual, but the family, and every man's and woman's position was assured and regulated by ties of blood and marriage.[1]

But from a too close contact with British laws and institutions, and under the influence of the evils of a materialistic civilization, the atmosphere of the happy Bengali home soon changed for the worse. Yet Macaulay's notorious description of the Bengali people was a malevolent libel, and if at all correct, could apply only to that handful

[1] It may not be generally known outside India that the joint family system is an essential part of the wider caste organization of the Hindus. Caste and the joint family may have their very dark sides and the influence of both is retreating before newer ideas. Yet at one time people were deeply impressed with the brighter side of Hindu caste organization. A penetrating observer like Sidney Low has the following in his *Vision of India*:—

> "There is no doubt that it is the main cause of the fundamental stability and contentment by which Indian society has braced for centuries against the shocks of politics and the cataclysms of Nature. It provides every man with his place, his career, his occupation, his circle of friends. It makes him at the outset a member of a corporate body. It protects him through life from the canker of social jealousy and unfulfilled aspirations. It ensures him companionship and a sense of community with others in like case with himself. The caste organization is to the Hindu his club, his trade union, his benefit society, his philanthropic society. There are no work houses in India and none are as yet needed. The obligation to provide for kinsfolk and friends in distress is universally acknowledged; nor can it be questioned that this is due to the recognition of the strength of family ties, and of the bond created by association, common pursuits, which is fostered by the caste principle."

of miserable creatures who hovered round the Courts of Murshidabad and of John Company, and depended on dishonesty, deceit, and cunning to earn their bread and butter.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted to do away with all the idolatry and other evils of Hindu society, and to establish the worship of the true, the indivisible, the omniscient and the omnipotent Creator of the Universe, and socially, to bring back to India the reign of reason and peace and goodwill.

After a long and arduous struggle Raja Ram Mohan Roy found it impossible to retain his connection with orthodox Hindu society, and was compelled to establish a new church in 1830, since known as the Brahmo Samaj, for the purification of religious and moral ideas, and for the propagation of a new faith based on the lofty idealism of the Upanishads.

The seeds sown by him did not, however, germinate till the mid-Victorian era, and only began to bear fruit when a very large number of people belonging to the middle classes had been educated in the schools founded by the English. About this time, Maharsi Devendra Nath Tagore, father of Rabindra Nath Tagore, and Keshab Chandra Sen, perhaps the greatest of Indian orators, became the principal exponents of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's new doctrine of unqualified theism.

After Raja Ram Mohan Roy had started his social reform campaign and founded the Brahmo Samaj, he and his English friends were confronted with a new reactionary wave which put the educational programme of the East India Company to a sharp test. Leading citizens of Calcutta now began to be nervous over the fact that English education was disintegrating their society and making a mockery of their social institutions. They, therefore, raised a campaign for the rehabilitation of the vernacular as a medium of instruction in the public schools and colleges of Bengal. The pressure of this conservative element of society became so insistent that the East India Company was compelled to put its educational policy on a sure and definite basis. Hitherto, unfortunately, the educational programme of the East India

Company had been a haphazard one, lacking all the elements of stability and progress, though a Committee of Public Instruction had been established in 1823 to regulate and look after the course of education in Bengal.

Happily for Bengal, and ultimately for the whole of India, Lord Macaulay, the first Law Member of the Government, threw in all the weight of his authority with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and was determined to keep at arm's length the older ideals and vehicles of public instruction. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord Macaulay believed that the future of India lay with English education, and neither would have any vernaculars re-established as a medium of public instruction; they would have nothing but English for the purpose. In a petition to Lord Amherst, Raja Ram Mohan Roy had urged, " If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislatures."

A bitter controversy continued for some time between the Orientalists and Anglicists, as they were styled in later history, until the Governor-General of the period, Lord William Bentinck, supported the cause of the Anglicists and directed that all the money held at the disposal of the Company for the diffusion of education should be spent in " imparting instruction in European languages and sciences through the medium of English ". Nearly twenty years later, the great despatch of Sir Charles Wood, the grandfather of the present Viceroy of India, and the last President of the Board of Control of the Company, settled this great controversy for good. Sir Charles Wood's despatch enunciated the broad principles of the future educational policy of the East India Company, and recommended the establishment of a University in each Presidency town of India to give effect to his scheme of advancement of learning in this country

through the medium of English. The first batch of graduates of the new University of Calcutta did not make their appearance till the mid-Victorian era.

The policy of educating our people in English and on the basis of a Western culture did not tend entirely to our good. In many cases, the effects of pouring new wine into the old bottles of Hindu society were disastrous. Lord Ronaldshay has summed up the position of the English educated people of Bengal of those days very faithfully in the following passage:

"By the middle of the nineteenth century a period of intellectual anarchy had set in, which swept the rising generation before it like a craft which has snapped its moorings. Westernism became the fashion of the day—and Westernism demanded of its votaries that they should cry down the civilization of their own country. The more ardent their admiration for everything Western, the more vehement became their denunciation of everything Eastern. The ancient learning was despised; ancient custom and tradition were thrust aside; ancient religion was decried as an outworn superstition. The ancient foundations upon which the complex structure of Hindu society had been built up were undermined; and the new generation of iconoclasts found little enough with which to underpin the edifice which they were so recklessly depriving of its own foundations."

The new educational and intellectual activities of Begnal gave a fillip to the development of the Bengali language and literature. Only a few years previously, it had been the fashion to look down upon Bengali as a local patois of the vulgar and uneducated masses. With the spread of English education the better minds of the province were directed towards their own vernacular, and before long the Bengali language had flowered as one of the most expressive vehicles of thought in the world. Men like Ishwar Chandra Gupta, Akshay Kumar Dutt, Dina Bandhu Mitra, Teck Chand and Bankim Chandra Chatterji brought a new and broad sweep of vision into the life of their people.

They dwelt in their works on highly sensitive doctrines, such as liberty, equality and freedom, broadened our ideas of citizenship, and spoke in a new way about the real relationship of the sexes. Their doctrines and ideas pulverized the conservative orthodoxy which had held sway in Bengal since the days of Raghunandan of Navadwip.[1] From this time forward Bengali thought put on raiment of its own, and drew the attention of intellectual people all over the world.

Economically and industrially, Bengal, like all other parts of the country, was lying helpless and prostrate at the mercy of her rulers and foreign exploiters. The Bengali mind had not yet developed any economic or industrial conscience, and manual labour of all sorts, including the occupation of trade and commerce, was generally tabooed by all bhadralog classes. And the spirit of hoarding of precious metals had taken such a possession of the Bengali mind through centuries of insecurity that no capital could be attracted to any industrial enterprise.

Though economically depressed, the beginnings of a new era of industrialism and prosperity in Bengal were at hand. The establishment of a jute mill at Rishra in 1855, and the foundation of the cotton industry in Bombay in 1856, had set educated men thinking about India's industrial and economic potentialities. The first sod of a railway was turned in Bengal in Lord Dalhousie's reign, and the East India Company first laid a railway line between Ranigunge and Calcutta only a few years before the Sepoy Revolt. This was the beginning of the network of railways which soon made famines less frequent, and the transport of foodstuffs and raw materials easier.

The enormous extension of the Post Offices and telegraph wires quickened communications, and helped in developing both internal and external trade. But those were days when the foreigner generally exploited the resources of the

[1] Raghunandan was a great Pundit and Lawgiver of the sixteenth century, whose *Smriti* remained, till about the end of the last century, the principal code of laws for the regulation of the personal, domestic, and social life of the Hindus of Bengal.

country, both in labour and in raw materials, and the indolent Indian gazed at the situation in blank astonishment and despair. Up to this time agriculture had been practically the only industry. Not till the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1859, and its first amendment in 1885, were the Bengal peasantry anything better than mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. They were very much like the Irish cottiers and the Egyptian fallahin, practically serfs having no right in the land they cultivated and the holdings on which they lived. On top of this, they were more often than not rack-rented, and made to pay special contributions (abwabs) on the marriages and *sradhs* of their landlord's sons, daughters and relatives, whether they had a crop or not. When in a lean year they were unable to pay their rents they were brought in batches to the zemindar's kutchery (office) and were subjected to physical torture. The life of the Bengal peasant was surrounded by a dark cloud and he had no incentive to make any improvements on his land or even to live the natural span of his life.[1] Though the zemindars of this time were mostly bad, there were at least a few who spent money in digging tanks to supply drinking water to their tenantry, opening dispensaries for the free distribution of medicines, and in some cases founding small schools and *maktabs*. Unlike the Bengal zemindars of the present day, they were not insolvent, and used to spend large sums of money on ceremonial occasions, the benefits of which were shared in some measure by their tenants.

But it was not till the transfer of the Government of this country from the hands of the East India Company to the Crown that India entered on a definite stage of political evolution. The dark intrigues behind the earlier conquests of Indian territories, the development of the policy of lapse and annexation, the statutory superiority of European residents in India, the ruthless suppression of the Sepoy Revolt, and the indiscriminate retaliation carried on by Anglo-Indians all over the country to quench the dying

[1] See Lal Behary De's *Bengal Peasant Life* (originally published under the name of *Govinda Samanta*).

embers of the fire raised by the last Peshwa and his lieutenants, had begun to create a general feeling of dissatisfaction.

The earlier notion of a paternal Government making for peace, plenty and prosperity, was giving place to a new sense of suspicion and misgiving, and the placid acquiescence of the people in everything done by the British in India began to be challenged and shaken. Indians were for the first time beginning to realize that it was not in the spirit of trusteeship that India was being governed as a part of the British Empire. If anything was still needed for them to realize their actual situation, the condition of the indigo cultivators of the period so well described in Dina Bandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan*, the conduct and trial of the indigo-planters in Nadia and Rajshahi immediately after the Mutiny, the Torture Commission of 1853, and the placing of the Black Act upon the Statute Book during Lord Canning's Viceroyalty removed the scales from their eyes, and brought them face to face with the dark realities of an alien rule. Indians felt at every step that the white people were their " masters ", who under the velvet glove had a mailed fist, and whose friendship for the people of India was only lip-deep.

Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858, though not conceived by Lord Derby in a " pettifogging spirit ", was not received by the people of India more enthusiastically than would have been the gift of a toy for their delectation and amusement. Just a quarter of a century before this, in the Charter Act of 1833, a similar pious wish had been given to the people of India as a message of hope, only to be disregarded again and again. In anticipating Lord Derby and Queen Victoria's Proclamation, the Charter Act of 1833 had said that " no native of India, nor any natural-born subject of His Majesty resident therein, shall by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent or colour or any of them, be disabled from holding any place, office, or employment under the said Company ". The sickness of deferred hope and continuous disappointment was pressing on the Indian mind and promises made to the ears and broken to the heart became a very common feature of the Anglo-Indian administration. By

the mid-Victorian era, the spirit of distrust of England's professions for our welfare and prosperity had permeated a large class of our people, and when the Indian Councils Act of 1861 gave Indians the right for the first time to enter the legislative bodies dissatisfaction and distrust found expression at almost every session of the Councils.

Between the historic year 1835, when Sir Charles Metcalfe freed the Indian Press from its earlier shackles, and the time when Lord Lytton tried to muzzle the vernacular Press, a few newspapers appeared to fill the void and occupy a large place in the public life of the country. The *Hindu Patriot*, started before the Mutiny, became a terror to authority during Lord Canning's rule, under the very distinguished editorship of Harish Chandra Mukerjee. A self-made man, Harish Chandra wielded a trenchant pen and had a wonderful command of nervous and classical English. He was honest, independent, and sincere beyond measure, and when he threw his weight into any cause, that cause was bound to succeed. He was a terror to the bureaucracy as well as to the white colonists and planters in Bengal. The leaders that he wrote in the *Hindu Patriot* in those days gave a new inspiration to the educated community all over the country, and struck terror into the heart of every wrongdoer. Kristodas Pal, who succeeded him on the *Hindu Patriot* was less courageous and more tactful, and he managed to become, as well as to make his organ, the interpreter of the thoughts and feelings of both rulers and ruled. The *Indian Mirror* had won a very prominent place among the newspapers of the country under the editorship of Keshab Chandra Sen, and later of his cousin, Narendra Nath Sen. The *Bengalee*, started in 1868 by Girish Chandra Ghose, at once became a very independent exponent of public views, and before Surendra Nath Banerjea took it over ten years later, it had become a power in the land. The tiny little Bengali weekly, known as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, started originally in a village in Jessore by Sisir Kumar Ghose and Motilal Ghose, both born journalists, and masters of a quaint archaic style, was transferred to Calcutta,

and some years later was converted into an English newspaper to avert the blow aimed against it by Lord Lytton. Between the *Hindu Patriot*, the *Mirror*, the *Bengalee* and the *Patrika*, all started and maintained as weeklies in those days, a volume of public opinion was created against all un-British methods of administration, and a new life began to stir in the dry bones.

Though the Press became so powerful, it is surprising that the Bar and the platform, the other two principal instruments of modern democracies, had not yet begun to take their legitimate part in the public life of the country.[1]

In such an atmosphere of strife and distrust and of racial antagonism on the one side, and of a newly developed sense of national self-consciousness and of intellectual and political activities on the other, was Chitta Ranjan Das born.

[1] The platform did not become a power in the land till about the end of Lord Curzon's viceroyalty, and the Bar not before the recommendations of the Indian Bar Committee were given effect to in 1925, practically equalizing the position and status of Indian legal practitioners with those of the members of the English Bar.

CHAPTER II

CHITTA RÅNJAN'S PARENTAGE AND EARLY INFLUENCES

CHITTA RANJAN DAS was born on November 5th, 1870, in a house in Pataldanga Street in Central Calcutta. Chitta Ranjan's father, Bhubon Mohan Das, was a solicitor, and had settled down in Calcutta many years before Chitta Ranjan was born. The Das family did not belong to Calcutta but hailed from a well-known Vaidya family of Telirbagh in Vikrampur.

Vikrampur, in the district of Dacca, is renowned as an ancient seat of learning, and is the centre of a growing and intelligent middle class population. After the days of Lakshman Sen and Ballall Sen in the eleventh century A.D., Vikrampur was not only for a long time the headquarters of the government of Gour (the older name of Bengal), but also the centre of the literary, social, political and intellectual interests of mediæval Bengal. Owing to the increase of the middle class population in Vikrampur, land has been parcelled out into very small holdings, with the result on the one hand, that this class of people has been obliged to seek its living elsewhere and in different occupations, and on the other, that Lord Cornwallis's " permanent settlement " has ceased to affect their temperament prejudicially. Unlike the inhabitants of Bombay, the Punjab and elsewhere, the people of Bengal have so far depended more on the land for a living than on any arts or industries ; and in consequence of this dependence, there being no need for much manual or intellectual labour in its cultivation, they have inherited a lazy and unenterprising temperament. Vikrampur is almost the only place in Bengal where land, on account of its minute subinfeudation and its unparalleled density of population[1], has ceased to provide

[1] Nearly 2,151 to a square mile.

an easy living, and the people have, therefore, been compelled to fall back upon their own resources and initiative and seek other fields of enterprise. Here as elsewhere, a spirit of enterprise and of unrest has been created by economic depression, and Chitta Ranjan inherited in a very large measure, through his ancestors, this spirit of unrest, of enterprise, which marks the people of Vikrampur in a superlative degree, and which caused a pro-consul such uneasiness that to restrict and break their influence he propounded a blundering scheme of territorial redistribution.

There is another notable event in the history of Chitta Ranjan's family which must be referred to here. One of Chitta Ranjan's grandfathers, and two of his paternal uncles, had migrated early in life to Barisal and settled there as lawyers. Barisal is well-known in Bengal for the tenacity, doggedness, determination and virility of its people. Its atmosphere and environment, owing perhaps to its peculiar geographical position and to its being minutely intersected by estuary creeks, are peculiar and quite distinct from the rest of the country. From their long residence in Barisal, the Dases had acquired all the tenacity and doggedness of the people of the district. Chitta Ranjan inherited not a little of this temperament, and he combined in his make-up these outstanding characteristics, to a remarkable extent.

Chitta Ranjan's father, a solicitor, was also a journalist. As a highly intelligent and educated member of the Brahmo Samaj, he was chosen to edit the weekly organ of the church known as the *Brahmo Public Opinion*. Slowly and steadily, Bhubon Mohan Das diverted it into a political newspaper, from being a mere weekly record of affairs of his church, and at one time he came perilously near to a prosecution for sedition. The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj took fright at the situation, and parted company with Bhubon Mohan, who, a few months later, started an organ of his own under the name of the *Bengal Public Opinion*. In this enterprise he burnt his fingers and came to grief financially, but the enthusiasm of the journalist was not only a great

inspiration to his son, but remained a guiding principle and passion of Chitta Ranjan till the end of his days.

Bhubon Mohan Das was, however, a man of a quite different temperament in domestic and social life. He was a curious mixture of strength and timidity, and became more conservative in his social ideas as he grew older. He had not that push and go and that enthusiasm of the convert which his brother, Durga Mohan Das, had. Durga Mohan Das, who commenced his practice as a lawyer in Barisal, came to Calcutta on the establishment of the High Court in 1861 and soon built up a good criminal practice. His enthusiasm for the Brahmo Samaj never flagged, even when he became a busy lawyer, and unlike Keshab Chandra Sen, his anchor always held. Such was his faith in the principles of his Church that he refused to marry his eldest daughter to the young Maharaja of Kuch Behar as she had not then come to the age which the Brahmo Samaj had laid down as the minimum for the marriage of girls. Keshab Chandra Sen, then the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, could not however resist the temptation of an alliance with a Native Prince, and though his eldest daughter was under fourteen, he broke the law of the Brahmo Samaj and gave her in marriage to the young Maharaja. It is worth noting here that Keshab Chandra Sen's departure from this canon of his Church was the chief cause of a second schism[1] in that Church. Durga Mohan Das, Siv Nath Sastri, Ananda Mohan Bose and other leading lights of the Brahmo Samaj seceded from Keshab Chandra Sen's party and organized a new Church under the name of "Sadharan Brahmo Samaj", Keshab Chandra being left to shepherd his flock under the name of the "New Dispensation". Of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Durga Mohan Das soon became one of the leading figures, and the principal financial patron. He took his courage in both hands in giving full effect to the new social programme not only by

[1] The first schism occurred when Keshab Chandra Sen and Devendra Nath Tagore fell out on the question of the preservation of Hindu orthodoxy in the social rites of the Brahmo Samaj. On this cleavage Devendra Nath Tagore's rump came to be named the "Adi (Original) Brahmo Samaj".

removing all disqualification of sex in the services of his church, but also in facing the indignation of the whole country by giving his young widowed step-mother in marriage for a second time, an affair which sent the people of Bengal into convulsions. Durga Mohan did not shrink from the social obloquy and opprobrium which assailed him on this account, while his brother Bhubon Mohan escaped the fury of his community as the younger brother, and consequently the less responsible member of the family. This offered him a safe shelter in which he found the peace and happiness of mind which suited his nature and genius.

Chitta Ranjan, as the product of the times, and as the son of Bhubon Mohan, and nephew of Durga Mohan, represented in his life the high water mark of strength and tenacity, as well as the spirit of revolt and unrest, with not a small dose of hesitancy and timidity thrown in.

Chitta Ranjan's mother, Nistarini Devi, also contributed not a little to the making of her son's character. Though belonging to the church of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, she did not share the enthusiasm of its followers or its advanced social and domestic ideas. Perhaps the conservative nature of his mother brought Chitta Ranjan back in his mature age into the fold of the orthodox church, though not exactly as an orthodox Hindu. I have it on the authority of Lady Bose[1] that when on the death of her own mother she and her brothers and sisters were thrown into Bhubon Mohan's family, this lady treated them as if they were her own children, in the spirit of the good old days before the Brahmo Samaj had become too entirely individualistic.

We also learn from Lady Bose that she was of a very benevolent disposition, entertaining a large number of friends, and giving away in charity to the sick and poor all that she could lay by. She was also a woman in whom the sense of duty had been awakened in the highest form, and this along with her strength and conservatism made her a peculiar type of Indian womanhood.

[1] Wife of the eminent Bengali scientist, Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose, F.R.S.

Chitta Ranjan's parents were both of amiable social disposition, and, though belonging to a dissenting church, they found a special delight in retaining an intimate association with people of their own native village and community, in this differing from the bulk of members of the Brahmo Samaj in those early days. Unfortunately for this Church and for Bengal, a large number of Brahmos of mid-Victorian days lived a life of their own, quite detached from the rest of the community. They took everything from the West and hardly anything from the East, and to all intents and purposes were anglicized and denationalized. Chitta Ranjan's parents made a refreshing departure in this matter, and this spirit of close association with their kith and kin of the orthodox church, and a natural sympathy with their habits of life, went a long way in shaping the character of their illustrious son as a true and representative Bengali.

Chitta Ranjan's father was something of a poet and had tried his prentice hand at amateurish verse-making. Bhubon Mohan Das had composed hymns and songs for the Brahmo Samaj, some of which were at one time much in vogue. Chitta Ranjan, certainly, inherited his poetic faculty from his father, but as we shall see in a later chapter, he could not be counted in the front rank of Bengali poets of his day. Prompted by an incipient literary ambition, he had from his early youth tried to keep himself in touch with all the leading literary men of the province.

But the intense emotionalism of which Chitta Ranjan gave such ample and eloquent demonstration in his mature years, was not inherited from either of his parents. He acquired this instinct very early in life from a close contact with men and women of the Brahmo Samaj, whose idealism had almost a family likeness to that of the Pilgrim Fathers of America, the Quakers of England and the Huguenots of France.

When Chitta Ranjan was a mere boy the first throb of political life was beginning to pulsate in Bengal. With the Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon,[1] which commenced when Chitta

[1] See Blunt's *India under Ripon*.

Ranjan was only a boy of eleven, a new flood came over Bengal and deposited a rich alluvium in which the new plant of national self-consciousness found congenial soil.[1]

The extreme racial bitterness aroused over the unfortunate Ilbert Bill, which we shall describe in a later chapter, also seems to have made an abiding impression on him, and appears to have given to his political life a peculiar colour and complexion.

It will thus be seen that, instead of being a mere freak, or a chance hero, or a hothouse exotic, he was the natural and legitimate product of the atmosphere and environment in which he was born. He of course developed in his youth and mature life most of the powers, talents and instincts that he had inherited, and nourished and cultivated all that he had received from the world forces of his day.

[1] During the period of this ferment, a number of high-grade colleges were established in Calcutta by non-official private enterprise. Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar founded the "Metropolitan Institution", Ananda Mohan Bose the "City College", and Surendra Nath Banerjea the "Ripon College"—institutions which soon came to fill a great educational need in the province. At this period also, a large number of newspapers were started in Calcutta. Among these, the most notable were the *Indian Nation*, edited by the late Mr. N. N. Ghose, *Hope*, edited by the late Mr. Amritalal Roy, the *Bangabasi*, edited by the late Babu Jogendra Nath Bose, and the *Sanjibani*, edited by Mr. Krishna Kumar Mitter. Of these, the first two have ceased to exist.

Quite a number of credit societies, under the name of Loan Offices, also came to be established at this time in all parts of Bengal making short work of the system of usury which was till that time a great curse throughout the province.

CHAPTER III

EDUCATION AND EARLY LIFE

WHEN Chitta Ranjan first went to school, his parents had removed from Pataldanga Street to Peepulpatty Road in Bhowanipur, a southern suburb of Calcutta. At that time, the London Missionary Society's Institution[1] at Bhowanipur, with Mr. Ashton as its Principal and Mr. J. N. Farquhar as the latest recruit to its staff, was one of the leading educational institutions of the city. In 1878, he joined this school and in every form he led his class-mates, but unlike the general run of boys of his generation, who were mostly staid, sober and bookish, he was truant, bright and vivacious. He passed his Entrance Examination in 1886, after having failed in the previous year.

When he had got through his Entrance Examination he joined the Presidency College. At this time he assisted the present writer to organize the "Undergraduates' Association", the principal object of which was to induce the authorities of the University of Calcutta to admit Bengali as an alternative second language for the Entrance and the First Arts Examinations. Chitta Ranjan and the present writer issued several statements to the Press and went from door to door, imploring every member of the Senate and the then Vice-Chancellor of the University, Sir William Hunter, to take the matter into their serious consideration. Of course, everybody then referred these two young enthusiasts to Dr. Gooroodas Banerjee, long the Nestor of higher education in Bengal, and afterwards the first Indian Vice-Chancellor of the University. He unfortunately took up a very hostile attitude from the outset, for he believed that once Bengali was included in the curriculum of the Entrance Examination, Sanskrit would be neglected, and higher education would

[1] This long standing and very useful institution ceased to exist in 1924.

receive a great set-back. It may be noted here that the "Undergraduates' Association" did not survive many months after Dr. Gooroodas Banerjee had assumed this attitude towards its principal objective, but the dreams of these two young men were more than fully realized, when, nearly twenty years after, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, perhaps the greatest educationist yet born in this country, took up this matter in right earnest, as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta. And yet another fifteen years after, in 1922, the University decided to introduce the vernacular as the medium of instruction and examination for the Matriculation and Intermediate Arts and Science Examinations.

While at the Presidency College, Chitta Ranjan joined, and at once became the leading figure of, the Students' Association, which had then been recently established as the principal organization of the young men of Bengal. Surendra Nath Banerjea, who had a few months before been dismissed from the Indian Civil Service, was its first President and he used this new platform to inspire young students of Calcutta with patriotic ideals. Here Chitta Ranjan Das sat at his feet to take his first lessons in public service and elocution. What an irony of fate that Chitta Ranjan should have devoted the last years of his life to humbling this teacher and master of his early youth and to pulling to pieces whatever reputation the Grand Old Man of Bengal had left to him in the last few years of his public life. The stories of Mazzini and Garibaldi, of Washington and Kossuth, were then in every Bengali student's mouth, and Chitta Ranjan certainly was inflamed by them. Yet this new love of country remained with most a mere academic sentiment and did not burn in their souls as an active passion and motive power in that formative period of their lives.

Chitta Ranjan's connection with the Students' Association, however, was cut short by his graduation in 1890. But he had failed to obtain Honours; he had never taken his academic studies very seriously, having idled through his college days.

Within a few months of his graduation he was sent by

his father to England to compete for the Indian Civil Service. After a couple of years' coaching under Wren and Gurney, he sat for the examination in 1892, but failed to get a place in the list of successful candidates. Before he sat for this examination, however, he had made several political speeches in England, repudiating an ugly insinuation of James Maclean's and supporting the candidature of Dadabhoy Naoroji for a seat in the House of Commons for Central Finsbury. It seems strange that Naoroji's success at the polls on this occasion was due in no very small measure to the support which such a young admirer could give him on the one side, and, on the other, from the adventitious aid which one of Queen Victoria's favourite Prime Ministers, the late Lord Salisbury, had unconsciously given to him by calling him a black man. Dadabhoy Naoroji happened to have a whiter skin than Lord Salisbury had, and the affront was therefore taken not as a personal one, but as an exhibition of racial arrogance. This set on edge the nerves of the electors of Central Finsbury and Naoroji easily walked into St. Stephen's.

In refuting the charge made by James Maclean that India was " conquered by the sword . . . and retained by it ", young Chitta Ranjan flared up and retorted in the following manner at a meeting in Oldham, held under the presidency of W. E. Gladstone.

" Gentlemen, I was sorry to find it given expression to in Parliamentary speeches on more than one occasion that England conquered India by the sword, and by the sword must she keep it ! England, Gentlemen, did no such thing ; it was not her swords and bayonets that won for her this vast and glorious Empire ; it was not her military valour that achieved this triumph, it was in the main a moral victory or a moral triumph. England might well be proud of it. But to attribute all this to the sword and then to argue that the policy of sword is the only policy that ought to be pursued in India is to my mind absolutely base and quite unworthy of an Englishman."

Some Indian biographers of Chitta Ranjan have suggested

that he was rejected by the Civil Service Commission because of these speeches. I think, however, that Chitta Ranjan failed to get into the Service only because in those days the Indian Civil Service had still the reputation of being a career for the heaven-born, so that some of the best students of Oxford and Cambridge, not as in these post-reform days, sought admission into it in very large numbers. Not being able to get into the Indian Civil Service, Chitta Ranjan, who had joined the Middle Temple some time before, turned his attention to the study of law and was called to the English Bar in the same year.

In 1893, he returned to India and got himself enrolled as a Barrister of the Calcutta High Court. Unfortunately for him, his father had then almost retired from active practice as a solicitor, and none of his friends could give him the backing which he so badly needed to make a good start in his profession. When he joined the Bar at Calcutta, it was crowded with great personalities. Among the celebrities of the Bar in those days were such men as Charles Paul, John Woodroffe, Griffith Evans, Monomohan Ghose, W. C. Bonnerjee, T. Palit, C. P. Hill, T. A. Apcar and M. P. Gasper. Lord Sinha has told us[1] in a very piquant recollection of his earliest days at the Bar (six years before Chitta Ranjan joined it) "that among the juniors were Raj Narain Mitter and Lal Mohon Ghose, William Garth and Arthur Dunne, all of them doing a fair amount of what was called junior work, besides a large number of unemployed juniors, mostly Indian, who had been trudging to and fro between their homes and the Bar Library for years, but had not succeeded in making any impression." Chitta Ranjan, like Lord Sinha, during the first few years of his legal practice, went the " daily round of almost hopeless waiting at the Bar Library in company of more than a hundred equally hopeless members of the learned brotherhood ". His prospects at the Bar began to look desperate as years rolled by, and he at last found an agreeable occupation in the cultivation of letters. In 1895 his first book of poems called *Malancha* was

[1] In an article in the *Bengalee* in December, 1925.

published, and brought down upon him the hatred and dislike of the whole of the Brahmo Samaj. For some years afterwards he did not try his pen again at verse-making.

On the 3rd of December, 1897, he married according to Brahmo rites (Act 3 of 1873) Basanti Devi, the elder daughter of the late Mr. Barada Nath Halder, Dewan of the Bijni estate in Assam. The leading missionaries of the Brahmo Samaj refused to conduct the service at his wedding because of his pronounced atheistic and bohemian views of life.

From this time to 1905, Chitta Ranjan was ploughing a lonely furrow, making no headway either as a lawyer or as a man of letters. On top of this in 1906, he fell a victim to very cruel circumstances. His father, who was not then in the best of health, had, in addition to the debts he had been compelled to incur in previous years, stood security for a friend of his for nearly Rs. 40,000. This friend not having redeemed the security, Bhubon Mohan Das had to pay it himself, and this plunged him headlong into ruin. Not being able to pay this amount he and his son Chitta Ranjan, who had also taken up the responsibilities of his debts, went into the Insolvency Court together in June, 1906, for whatever relief such procedure might give them. Chitta Ranjan was very much distressed by these untoward events, but he lost neither nerve nor heart over the situation.

Though he kept himself behind the scenes at this time, he joined hands with Aurobindo Ghose, the flaming apostle of the extreme Nationalists, in starting the English weekly known as the *Bande Mataram*. In those fateful years, which saw the close of Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty and the beginning of Lord Minto's, the *Bande Mataram* with its vernacular newspapers called the *Sandhya* and the *Yugantar* made history in Bengal.

About this time an unexpected windfall came to him. One of his younger brothers, Basanta Ranjan Das, who had been adopted by a rich uncle, died early in life and left by a testament all his real property to their mother, who in her turn left this property to her two surviving sons Chitta Ranjan and Prafulla Ranjan. Prafulla Ranjan's share of the

property was sold to his brother Chitta Ranjan nearly twenty years ago, and, with this sale, Chitta Ranjan became the sole owner of the property known as 148 Russa Road, in which he lived like a prince for the better part of his life, and which he bequeathed a few months before his death to the country for the medical education of Indian women.

Chitta Ranjan had inherited from his parents one conservative ideal of the old Hindu home—a love for the joint family. In spite of his individualistic training in the Brahmo Samaj and in England, he pre-eminently retained his domestic affections, unlike W. C. Bonnerjee, Monomohan Ghose, Ananda Mohan Bose, T. Palit and other Indian leaders of the Bar of his time, who detached themselves from the joint family as soon as they had set up an independent practice. He looked and cared for the interest of every member of his father's household, and showed particular solicitude in meeting the wants of almost every one who was in difficulty. Of his two brothers, Basanta, who had been adopted by Kali Mohan Das, had ample resources of his own. His youngest brother Prafulla he took under his wing, and had him educated in England to qualify him for the Bar. He had five sisters, three of whom lived with him after their parents and husbands died, and he ministered to their earthly wants as long as he lived. Besides his own brothers and sisters, Chitta Ranjan extended financial help when he could to all friends, relations, and hangers-on of the family who looked to him as their earthly providence. Later on in life, when success came to him at the Bar, he extended his benevolence and generosity to a much wider circle of friends and admirers, and not infrequently even to chance applicants for his charity.

CHAPTER IV

CHITTA RANJAN DAS AS A POET

AMONG the many aspirations of Chitta Ranjan Das, some of which were destined to be fulfilled, was his life-long aspiration for self-expression in poetry. There is in the mental and moral atmosphere of Bengal life a certain emotional quality, almost Celtic in its sensibility, which has for several centuries touched fine spirits to fine issues. Bengali poetry has been during recent times introduced to the world through the lyrical achievements of Rabindranath Tagore. But the most essential and characteristic of his lyric productions, though deeply influenced by the culture and learning of the West, affiliate themselves in their essential tone and temper to the poetry of the sixteenth-century poets of Bengal—those Vaishnava singers, who struck the deepest notes of human passion in the somewhat technical terminology of a mystic devotional cult. We observe the same yearning for the mystery of a love that lives not in the flesh, the same Shelleyan note of failing and "falling upon the thorns of life", the same interweaving of the influences of Nature into the passions and emotions of the human breast and all "the tongueless vigil and the pain" of delicious emotional abandon. Chitta Ranjan was born an heir to the rich legacy of the emotional poetry of an earlier age and was temperamentally fitted to enjoy his spiritual heritage.

To say that Chitta Ranjan was a Bengali poet of the first rank would be to say too much. He had perhaps not a sufficient gift of originality. He introduces no novel themes; he originates no new poetic forms; he has no new message to deliver through his poetry. But an idealist by nature and temperament, he seizes on the essential qualities of Bengali poetry and breathes them through his poetical works like a delicate perfume. His work is small in volume, but even

within its small compass, an attentive reader may observe growth and evolution and gain sufficient insight into his mind and art. His earliest productions are somewhat imitative, dealing with the usual stock-in-trade of poetry, except perhaps here and there, as in the remarkable poems on Atheism and the *Life of a Harlot*. But he gradually sheds this imitative style, becomes more direct, clear and forceful in expression, and approaches closer to the spirit of old Vaishnava poetry. Along with it, there is an expansion of imagination and a widening of his outlook on life. As he comes nearer to the Vaishnava spirit, his poetry takes on a devotional ring, and, in his latest productions, which date down almost to his dying day, it becomes a free up-welling of tender religious emotion in the true Vaishnava spirit—a complete offering and surrender of self to the Divine Lover.

Chitta Ranjan's earliest production was a collection of lyrics, published in 1895, entitled *The Garden* (*Malancha*). The poet was at that time a young man, fresh from England, filled with new ideas and a new zest for life. A passionate delight in beauty, a restless joy of life, an insatiate yearning to probe the pleasures and pains of existence to their deepest depths, invest these lyric pieces with an exaltation and excellence which raises them far above the average. But the fermentation of a new wine seems to be diffused through these lyrics. The happiness of a mind at peace with itself and the outside world is conspicuously absent. The following for example is the young poet's conception of love :

> Thy love, O Beloved, is a keen-edged sword !
> It drinks my life-blood night and day ;
> Each new day,—with a new delight !
> It dazzles by daylight and darkens at night.
>
> Thy love, O Beloved, is like to a serpent,
> It coils round and enfolds for aye my life.
> Each breath,—a shower of death,
> Each passionate kiss bites into the soul !

The poet loves to dwell on images of unhappy passion, blasted hope and disappointed love. The pale and pathetic

figure of mad Ophelia disturbs his soul with pity : she is a living tragedy of love :

> Come, O crazy woman, come with the flowers in thy hands,
> Ask her not—for love's tragic story is writ in her eyes.

But of the lyric poems in this book those which created a furor among contemporary readers were the poems on Atheism and the poem *The Harlot.* The former represent the painful self-questionings of a mind adrift from the moorings of settled faith and conviction, while the latter is the glorification and idealization of the life of a harlot, girt round as it is with cruelties, disenchantments and shame. The poem entitled *My God* is the poignant cry of a soul in revolt against creation with its voiceless, insoluble mysteries. Says the poet :

> This reinless, fiery, infinite revolt,
> Burdened with all the mystery of the world,
> Floats up like horrid poison in my heart,
> Diffusing poison through all life.
> The stricken soul lays down its burden at thy feet,
> O Mercy Infinite !

But God is dumb and dead—to all eager questions his only reply is eternal silence. For such a god, dead and dumb, the poet has no use. He would create his own God—the Beautiful God who loves and responds—in the solitude of his own stricken soul. The poem on *The Harlot* is as intense in its passionate pathos as it is bold in the complete rejection of conventional morality. The Harlot is the eternal Lady of Pain, Dolores, slaying herself by inches that the starved lust of the world may appease itself on her flesh and blood. Her life is one long and strenuous self-sacrifice—her shame is the world's pleasure, her sorrow the world's delight. The charge of downright immorality was levelled against this poem which was condemned by a very large section of his community. But what Edmund Gosse said of Swinburne's *Dolores* may be said of this poem also, viz. that it becomes one of the most poignantly moral poems in our literature by its very rejection of conventional morality.

Chitta Ranjan's next production was another collection of lyrics called *The Garland* (*Mala*), published in 1904. In these lyrics the tone is graver and the thought deeper. The spirit of restless intellectual revolt that characterizes the first production and runs to the extreme, to the rejection and denial of God, is here at rest. The poet feels on the other hand the influence of a Presence " that disturbs his soul with the joy of elevated thoughts ". He has just emerged from the labyrinth and maze of an atheistic philosophy and is yet a long distance from the conception of a loving personal God—the Vaishnava God—to whom the song-offerings of his last years are all dedicated. This new light of spiritual experience shines through the following lines in one of the lyrics :

> In the surrounding twilight, thou hast put
> A lighted taper on thy window-sill :
> All my mind takes light
> From the golden light of thy taper !

Further on :

> The dream-like charm of evening enfolds the sky,
> A pale enchantment sheets all the earth :
> But Truth there amidst springs suddenly to light,
> In the light of that taper !

Unto this light-giving Presence the whole soul of the poet turns with an ineffable yearning, such as could be paralleled only by the essential spirit of some of the loveliest devotional lyrics of Tagore's *Gitanjali*. In the lyrics of this collection again, the delight in beauty is of a mellower tone, and the sensuousness of love is attuned to a longing for self-immolation at the feet of the Beloved. Says the poet :

> All the songs that fulfil my life
> Take life from thy life ;
> Let my senses swim in the touch of thy life,
> Drown me in its delight.

Again :

> I shall throw wide the doors of my heart
> Spread out for thee all my beauty, all my dream ;

I shall lay as a carpet 'neath thy feet
All that is soft and tender in me,—
O make, O make my life thy footstool!

The sensuousness of the love-poems in this work is so highly refined and rarified as to border almost on a devotional attitude; the Beloved becomes almost divine. This collection fitly ends with a quiet invocation to silence—silence that fills the soul with its still harmony and unperturbed majesty, such as broods over the Himalayas, over all the creepers and trees, and over the splendid birth of the sun in the lap of the silent sky. The note struck in *The Garland*, the quiet, pensive note of peace, contemplation, devotion and yearning, is intensified and fulfilled in a later collection of poems entitled *The Heart-Reader* (*Antaryami*), published in 1915; while the expansion of the poet's imagination, of which it bears proofs in his higher reach of thought and profounder conception of human passion and emotion, is fully reflected in *The Song of the Sea* (*Sagar-Sangit*)[1] published in 1913.

This latter work, which on its publication took the Bengali reading public by storm, is a collection of poems in which the changing aspects of the sea in the varying lights and shades of day and night are exhibited in relation to the ever-changing moods of the poet's mind. Between the soul of the poet and the sea there is a sort of pre-established harmony, and, as the poet's moods take colour from the aspects of the sea, so do the latter take colour from the poet's moods, till the objective and the subjective seem to blend and mingle and become as one. The keynote is struck at the very beginning:

Unhoped for, wondrous one, ever elusive,
Wait awhile that I weave thee in my song.
. . . . . .
Stay yet awhile
And with the melodies of the sea and the free
Soundless rhythm of my heart,

[1] The *Song of the Sea* has been beautifully rendered into English by Aurobindo Ghose and recently by J. A. Chapman.

I will thee enrhythm in manner yet passing beyond all rhythm.
Bound then thou wilt be in the enduring solitudes of my heart.[1]

The light-encircled dawn, the fresh and bright morning, the dazzling moon, the fading twilight, the gentle evening with braided hair, the mystery and silence of night—thus pass by day and night in rotation, but the poet and the sea stand face to face, locked in a steadfast, mutual gaze. The ripples laugh with the fresh breeze, the clouds float up from the horizon, the long shadows envelop the sea, and the storm comes striding along, lashing waves to foaming fury—and still the poet and the sea are face to face in an inviolable communion. This is the attitude in which these wonderful sea-songs, for which English poetry has no parallel, are composed.

Inset in this collection of sea-songs are descriptions of natural phenomena like the dawn and the storm at sea which seem to be instinct with the mythopoeic power of singers of Vedic India or of Homeric Greece. For congregated power of description, few storm-scenes can surpass the following :

The myriad serpents of infinitude
Their countless hoods above thy waves extrude.
I hear 'mid the loud storm-winds and the night
A voice arise of terror infinite ;
Death's shoutings in a darkness without shore
Join like a million Titans' angry roar.

The personification of death in the following couplet reminds one of similar personifications in Vedic poetry :

O high, stark Death, ascetic, proud and free,
Draw back thy trident of eternity.

Or the lofty sublimity of the following conception :

The lotus of creation like a rhyme
Trembling with its own joy and sorrow long
On the harmonious ocean of old Time
Has floated, heaven above the infinite song.

[1] All quotations from the *Song of the Sea* are given in Aurobindo Ghose's translation.

Or the following description of dawn, the *Ushas* of Vedic mythology :

> Behold the perfect-gloried dawn has come
> Far-floating from eternity, her home,
> Her limbs are clad in silver light of dreams
> Her brilliant influence on the water streams.

An expansive imagination that can seize simultaneously upon the delicate details of sea-scenery with all its variegated tracery of light and shade and gather them up into one vast sweeping view, bounded only by the crescent line of the horizon, is characteristic of these sea-songs, which close upon a supreme note of mystic suggestiveness :

> Burns on that other shore the mystic light
> That never was lit here by eve or dawn ?
> Is't there, the song eternal, infinite,
> None ever heard from earthly instruments drawn ?
> Sits there any like myself who yearns,
> Thirsting for unknown touches on the soul ?
> Is't there, the heart's dream ? Unsurpassable burns
> The shadowy self we seek, there bright and whole ?
> My thirst is great, O mighty one ! deep, deep,
> The thirst is in my heart unsatisfied.
> Ah, drown me in thy dumb unfathomed sleep
> Or carry to that ungrasped other side.

We have said that a new note—of peace, contemplation, devotion and spiritual yearning—is struck in *The Garland*. In the surrounding darkness, the poet espies a taper lighted for him on the window-sill. The light steadily gains strength for him till he discovers by its gleam the beckoning figure —the personal God he has created in the solitude of his own soul—God the lover, the dweller in the human heart, for the love of Whom the whole soul of the poet thrills with a rapture hitherto undreamt of and unknown. The next work, *The Heart-Reader* (*Antaryami*) is thus significant of the growth of the poet's soul. The spirit of the lyrics in this small collection seems indeed to be double-faced. One aspect is turned towards the philosophy of the cultured neo-Vaishnavism, popularized by the greater teacher and reformer

of our time, Vijoy Krishna Goswami, while the other is turned towards the simple human passions and emotions, directed to spiritual objects, that make up the peculiar tone and temper of Vaishnava poetry of the sixteenth century. Devotional ecstasy centring round an intensely human and personal God is the keynote of these poems. The poet's God is the Beloved one, the Playmate and Companion, the Charmer, the Joy of Life, the very apple of the eye, one who comes with his flute to charm away all idle fears and apprehensions. The conception of the Vaishnava God—the external playful Boy who ravishes the heart of the world with mystic music on his flute—has not yet emerged. But the poet finds himself in the vestibule of the Vaishnava temple —he has distant glimpses of the Holy of Holies and thrills with the ecstasy of it. In some of these lyrics, the poet slides almost unconsciously into the very style and language as well as the vein of thought of the Vaishnava poets of old.

This Vaishnavic strain is the predominant note of *Budding Youth* (*Kishore-Kishore*). The poet does not indeed employ the terminology of the Vaishnava cult, but he catches up its intense lyric cry. The thrill of a love, human in its essence but divine in its object, plumbing the depths of passion and soaring to the heights of ecstasy, strongly pulsates through these soulful lyrics. The idea that animates them is that of the eternality of love. Love fulfils itself in a moment, but to that moment's fulfilment do the countless ages roll on; the flower blooms forth of a morning to receive the kiss of the sun, but the whole cosmic life has wrought to bring the little flower to bloom. So, asks the poet, " This our meeting beneath the twilight sky—could this ever be a passing phase of the hour ? See I not in the light of thine eye the gleam that has haunted me from life to life ? Have I not known and loved thee through all the ages, through all my births and rebirths, through time and eternity till this moment of meeting again under this twilight sky ? The yearnings of a hundred births have found therein their crowning consummation." This idea is a characteristic

Vaishnavic idea which finds its most poignant expression in the cry of Vidyapati, the first Vaishnava poet of Bengal: "During countless births, have I fed on thy beauty and the eyes are not satisfied yet; for a million years have I placed my bosom on thine, yet my thirst is not quenched."

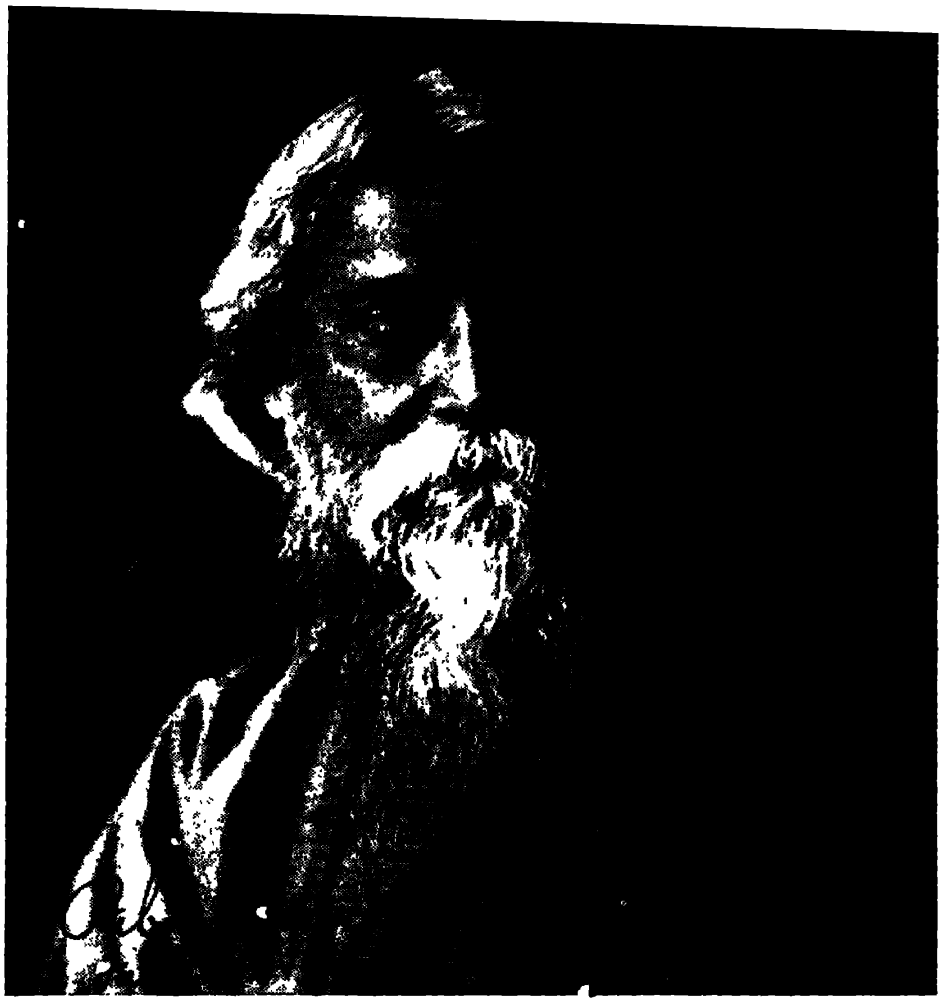
In the poems written towards the close of his life, the poet's Vaishnavic trend grows more pronounced. The theme is the same—the yearning love the most poignant pain whereof is the most thrilling pleasure. But it becomes more real and vital in those last productions and breaks through all shackles of art, as it were, by its very vital force. In truth they approach nearest to the lyrical effusions of the Bengali poets of the sixteenth century in the artlessness of their presentation and intensity of appeal. Most of these lyrics thrill into song and have been set to music. In these songs emerges at last the God the poet had long searched for in the trackless wilderness of atheism—the human personal God, the Eternal Boy who makes and breaks creation in play, He with the lovely braided hair and the mystic flute, standing in the shade of the ever-green Tamala tree. With this Boy-lover, the Beloved of the world, the poet keeps his tryst, eager yet fearful, yearning yet hesitant, with the soul aflame with a love in which "pain melts in tears and is pleasure, Death tingles with blood and is life". There is little colour in these poems, little of imagery, almost no attempt at artistic effect, but the appeal comes straight from the bare, sheer, penetrating power of sincerity. Besides, an enchanted atmosphere, replete with reminiscences of Vaishnava lyrics, seems to hang round and brood over them.

Chitta Ranjan was not a poet by profession. His life, short as it was, was a constant strain and stress between law and politics. But the dust of daily life never choked the hidden springs of idealism in his soul. This profound, pristine idealism sought to express itself, sometimes in humanitarian work, sometimes in philanthropic charities, sometimes in patriotic endeavours in which also idealism got too often the better of practical considerations, and sometimes in poetry and *belles-lettres*. That is how Chitta Ranjan

Das came to be a poet. It was but the inner urge of an idealistic longing that " having seen, must ever be ".

His Bengali poetry is certainly not the work of a dilettante. It was not with him a diversion or relaxation from the more serious labours of the day, as cultivation of literature sometimes is with busy lawyers and politicians in Europe. Through his poetry, his soul speaks to us, his personality is reflected in his art, and the lyric cry that we hear is not in the least play-acting or mimicry, but a reverberation from the very depths of his being. No imitative poetry can ever hold the mirror up to the poet's life, and the poetry of Chitta Ranjan Das reflects with startling clearness all the various phases of his life, from the first faltering utterances of his youth in *The Garden* to the enraptured lyrical ecstacies of his last years.

During the period that Chitta Ranjan Das wrote poetry, the literature of Bengal was, as it perhaps still is, under the spell of the genius of Rabindra Nath Tagore. It is next to impossible for a Bengali poet of to-day to escape the subtle influence in matter and style of this masterful figure in modern Bengali literature. The early poetry of Chitta Ranjan Das is touched by this influence, though not dominated by it, while in his later poetry, specially in the songs composed during his last years, Chitta Ranjan breaks almost completely away from it. He introduces a new tone, old-new and new-old, which had been quiescent in Bengali poetry since the enchantingly sweet and intensely emotional lyrical outbursts of Vidyapati and Govindadas. The influence of Western poetic art had served to suppress this poetic tone and introduced certain artificialities of thought and style into modern Bengali poetry. Chitta Ranjan aimed at piercing through all these artificialities, acquired from foreign sources, to the large primitive simplicities of an earlier era, and in a profound and penetrating critical essay on the *Lyric Poetry of Bengal* (written in Bengali) he dilates on the essential differences between the tone and temper of the old Vaishnavic lyric school and the new lyric school of Rabindra Nath Tagore. In Chitta Ranjan's view, it is the older school that is more



RABINDRA NATH TAGORE

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typical, more representative, of the soil, of the peculiar genius and mentality of Bengal. How far Chitta Ranjan has succeeded in calling back the spirit of this school into Bengali poetry, it is for the future to decide. He had not worked out the vein struck in the poetry of the closing years of his life, before he was called away from his earthly labours. But he has surely pointed to the way along which some future lyric poets of Bengal will doubtless travel.

CHAPTER V

THE STORM BURSTS

IN 1905, Bengal entered into a new chapter of her political life. The late Marquess Curzon, then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, had decided in that year, and secured the sanction of the Secretary of State, to re-distribute the jurisdiction of the lieutenant-governorship of Bengal, and carve two different provinces out of it. The Eastern districts of Bengal belonging to the Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi divisions were taken from the province of Bengal and amalgamated with the Brahmaputra and Surma Valley districts of Assam, to form an independent province under the name of Eastern Bengal and Assam, placed under a lieutenant-governor; and the remaining districts of the Presidency and Burdwan divisions, with the whole of Bihar and Orissa, were allowed to continue under the old name of Bengal, with a lieutenant-governor at their head.

Lord Curzon took this unusual procedure under the specious plea of administrative convenience and efficiency, but the people of Bengal regarded this *coup d'état* as a deliberate attempt to break up their solidarity, and to paralyse their united efforts to offer a common front of opposition to the Government. The Partition of Bengal set the Ganges on fire, and Bengalis in all parts of the provinces joined together in an attempt to undo this great administrative blunder.[1]

Immediately after the official announcement of the Partition scheme, on August 7th, the Hon'ble Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandy of Kasimbazar, presiding over

[1] The agitation against the Partition of Bengal was principally conducted by the Indian Association of Calcutta, founded by Surendra Nath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan Bose in 1876. From 1880 to 1920 this Association remained the most active and prominent centre of public and political life in Bengal.

an enormous gathering of the citizens of Calcutta, inaugurated the movement for the boycott of all foreign goods as a measure of retaliation. This movement came to be known in later days as the great Swadeshi movement. The day, October 16th, when this measure came into operation,[1] was observed by the Bengali people all over the two provinces as a day of fasting and mourning, and came to be known as the Federation or the Rakhi Bandhan Day,[2] at the suggestion of Rabindra Nath Tagore. Ananda Mohan Bose, an ex-President of the Indian National Congress, and perhaps the most respected son of Bengal of his time, was carried from his sick-bed in an arm-chair on this occasion to lay the foundation of a hall in Upper Circular Road, Calcutta, which was to symbolize the federation of Eastern and Western Bengal.[3] Meetings were held all over the two provinces to cement the union between the divided districts. Cartloads of British cloth were stacked in the market places throughout the provinces and burnt to incite popular indignation. Bands of young men left their schools and colleges and dissociated themselves from the education given by the University of Calcutta, which came to be described under the sobriquet of *Golamkhana*, meaning a factory for the output of trained slaves or ministerial officers on the model of London city clerks. A nucleus was formed for devising the syllabus and organizing the courses of a system of " national education ",

[1] The Bengal Partition Bill was passed into law at Simla on the 29th of September, 1905.

[2] Rakhi is a coloured thread which is generally bound on the wrists of friends and relations as a symbol of unity and good wishes.

[3] On the day when Ananda Mohan Bose laid the foundation of the Federation Hall in Parsee Bagan (Upper Circular Road in Calcutta), a National Fund was organized in Baghbazar for the purpose of giving necessary help and stimulus to the indigenous weaving industry of Bengal as a sequel to the propaganda of the boycott of Manchester goods. Nearly one lakh of rupees (about £8,000) was collected on this occasion. But this was not the first National Fund raised in Bengal under that pretentious name. A sum of twenty thousand rupees was collected by Surendra Nath Banerjea during Lord Ripon's Viceroyalty for the purpose of carrying on political agitation in the country. The first fund still lies at the disposal of the Executive Committee of the Indian Association, and the second has been entrusted to the charge of a Committee appointed for its administration.

which, in due course resulted in the establishment of the "National Council of Education of Bengal".[1]

When the agitation about the Partition of Bengal had reached its height there was hardly any Bengali town or village where meetings were not held to condemn the measure, invoke divine aid, and to maintain the union of all the districts in the new and the old provinces. At these meetings the National Proclamation used to be read with great ceremony and decision and the Swadeshi vow administered to all the audience almost with a religious ceremonial. The National Proclamation was framed in the following words:

"Whereas the Government has thought fit to effectuate the Partition of Bengal in spite of the universal protest of the Bengali nation, we hereby pledge and proclaim that we as a people shall do everything in our power to counteract the evil effects of the dismemberment of our province, and to maintain the integrity of our race. So God help us."[2]

The Swadeshi vow ran thus:

"Invoking God Almighty to be our Witness, and standing in the presence of after generations, we take this solemn vow that, so far as practicable, we shall use home-made articles and abstain from the use of foreign articles. So God help us."

The authority of the two Lieutenant-Governors was openly challenged everywhere, and the orders and notifications of the Governments were openly defied and broken. British prestige lost all its charm and spell, and British Civilians, once regarded as almost *in loco parentum*, now came to be looked upon as so many real and active enemies of the people. People snapped their fingers at the policemen whose red turbans and batons had inspired fear in the hearts of several generations of Bengalis. In the district of Backergunge, in Eastern Bengal, the instructions of Aswini Kumar Dutt in all public affairs were so loyally followed that even the visit of

[1] Established in August, 1907.

[2] Before Lord Curzon's Partition scheme was given effect to, there was a general lack of sympathy and solidarity between Eastern and Western Bengal. The people of Western Bengal ridiculed the dialect, accent, and customs of the people of Eastern Bengal, who returned the compliment. Lord Curzon's Partition, like a magic wand, removed all this misunderstanding and ill-will.

SIR SURENDRA NATH BANERJEA

By courtesy of Messrs. Thacker, Spink & Co. (1933) Ltd., Calcutta

Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the first Lieutenant-Governor of the new province, was tabooed, and the importation of Liverpool salt and Manchester piece goods was completely suspended. The tables were so completely turned in the course of a few months, that, instead of the people caring any more for the sahib and the paharawallah, it was the European civilian and the white birds of passage out in this country who now began to dread the sinister looks of the once very docile Bengalis.[1]

Indian feeling ran so high, that to do away with the semblance and symbol of a foreign rule, Surendra Nath Banerjea, then the accredited leader of the Bengali people, was crowned as the head of Bengal—a ceremony which Anglo-Indian critics and candid friends not unjustly interpreted as an act of treason.

One of the most noticeable features of the new national awakening was the development of Bengali literature to a high pitch of patriotic expression. Bamkim Chandra Chatterji's *Ananda Math*, though written many years previously, now became the most widely read book in the province, and several translations of it appeared in English and other Indian languages. The famous song *Bande Mataram* in this book became so popular that it came to occupy the place of a national anthem.[2] Some of the dramas of Dwijendra Lal Roy[3] reflected the national spirit in a most inspiring manner, and there was hardly any important town or village in Bengal in which one or other of his works was not put on the stage. When acted on the stage these dramas led to considerable popular excitement, so much so, that the Government thought fit to suppress some of them. The national songs composed during this period by Dwijendra Lal Roy, Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mrs. Sarala Devi Chowdhurani, Mr. A. F. Sen and the late Rajani Kathna Sen "smote on the heart of the people as on a giant's harp, awakening out

[1] This look became so threatening to the European that a District Magistrate of Backergunge named it the "Barisal stare", and Anglo-Indian journalists used the phrase as current coin for some time.

[2] See Appendix A.

[3] The principal works of this writer are *Mewar Patan* (*The Fall of Mewar*), *Shah Jehan*, and *Durgadas*.

of it a storm and a tumult such as Bengal had never known through the long centuries of her political serfdom." A large number of histories glorifying Hindu and Mahomedan rule and condemning England's work in India[1] now appeared in Bengali and were devoured by thousands of enthusiastic men and women who previously had not read a single Bengali book excepting the translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat*.[2] Local ballads were recovered from age-old dust, through the careful researches of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and Rai Bahadur Dinesh Chandra Sen, and published to infuse into the new generation the true ideals of Bengali life such as they were before the advent of the British, and great pressure was put upon the University of Calcutta to admit the Bengali language into the curriculum of all its examinations. The vernacular Press of Bengal also became at this time a great power in the land, and not only did some of the metropolitan newspapers count their circulation by tens of thousands,[3] but even small towns and villages began to publish their own organs as the nerve-centres of public opinion.

Nor was it in the development of a national literature that the new national sentiment found adequate expression. The keen intellectual environment of the Tagores of Jorasanko found about this time an outlet in the foundation of a new school of oriental art where beauty and the technique of art were conveyed in canvas not according to western methods and canons, but according to a purely eastern conception as laid down in the ancient Sanskrit work entitled the *Silpa Shastra*. Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore and his brother Gagenendra Nath Tagore, cousins of the author of the *Gitanjali*, with such lieutenants as O. C. Ganguli, Nandalal Bose and Asit Galder, have given such an impetus to this neo-Indian ideal of painting that it is now recognized all over the civilized world as a magnificent contribution to the world's culture. The new school is consciously and intentionally

[1] Principally Akshay Kumar Maitra's *Shiraj-ud-Dowallah*.

[2] The two most popular epics of the Hindu.

[3] The chief of these papers were the *Basumati*, the *Hitawadi* and the *Bangabasi*.

idealistic. Its masters sought to escape from the photographic vision and secure an introspective outlook on things which take one away from the material objective of life to a rarified atmosphere of beauty and romance.

In science Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose, a brother-in-law of Chitta Ranjan, revived the old Vedic idea of life in everything, and made wonderful researches in plant physiology. When he invented his new machine called the crescograph, to indicate the heart beats of plants, European scientists refused to accept his theory or his experiments seriously. But with his persistent efforts it did not take long to demonstrate to the world that the eastern idea of life in plants and flowers was not a myth or a figment of the imagination. With Sir Jagadis Bose's researches, Bengal's place in the scientific world was established beyond challenge.

The revolutionary atmosphere in India had not been created all on a sudden. In India, as elsewhere, it has passed through three definite stages. The first period was one of unrest, brought about by the cumulative effect of a century of administration, chiefly carried on in the interest of England and the English people. This period of unrest was further continued and intensified from the time when India came under the Crown, in 1858, till the end of the century, covering the better part of the Victorian era. A white and alien bureaucracy administered, all these years, the affairs of this country. This period was principally noted by Bengal public opinion, for the neglect of real Indian interests and for the flouting of the opinion of an articulate and educated people.

A case in point of such flouting may be recited here :

It was not before the end of the nineteenth century, that non-official opinion came sharply into conflict with the ways of the Indian bureaucracy. For some time, the independence of the Indian members of the Calcutta Corporation had been giving trouble to the Calcutta Secretariat, and Sir Ashley Eden, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in the early nineties, described the Municipal Board of Calcutta and all similar representative institutions in Bengal as " a sickly plant in its own native soil ". It was not, however, till about 1897,

that the acute difference between the Government and the Indian members of the Calcutta Corporation came to a head, and, in opening a pumping station in Calcutta, the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, condemned the Calcutta Corporation as "an armoury of talk and an arsenal of delays". Protests were made, meetings held, statistics quoted of work done and representations sent to the Government against the unjust observations of the Lieutenant-Governor. But, instead of admitting the injustice of his indictment, the Lieutenant-Governor introduced a Bill in the Bengal Legislative Council to neutralize the activities of the Indian members by establishing two more co-ordinating authorities independent of their control. After the Bill had passed through the Select Committee, Lord Curzon, then Viceroy, interfered with the measure, and wanted the Bengal Government to give it a more stringent and anti-popular character. The Local Government was directed to reduce the number of elected members and place them numerically on the same footing with the nominated members, giving the official element a standing majority with the help of a Government-appointed President.

At this, Surendra Nath Banerjea, subsequently a Minister of the Government of Bengal, Bhupendra Nath Basu, latterly a member of the India Council at Whitehall, Narendra Nath Sen, editor of the *Indian Mirror*, Malin Behary Sircar, a leading merchant of Calcutta, and twenty-four other members of the Calcutta Corporation resigned their offices and came out of the Corporation as a protest against the flouting of their opinions by the authorities. This was the first open breach between the official mind of Bengal and representative public opinion in the province.

Closely following the agitation over the Mackenzie Act, which gave the Corporation of Calcutta a most reactionary constitution, the public mind of Bengal was greatly exercised by some judicial revelations of an extraordinary nature. Aubray Percival Pennel, an Irishman by birth, had joined the Indian Civil Service in 1885, and, in 1899, was acting as the District and Sessions Judge of Chapra, then a district of

Bengal. In this capacity as the head Judicial Officer of the District, he heard on appeal a case in which one Narasingh Singh had been convicted by a Mahomedan Deputy Magistrate to two months' rigorous imprisonment. The facts of the case may be briefly stated as follows :

Narasingh Singh was a police constable working in the district of Jalpaiguri, and, in July, 1899, came home on leave to his native village of Fulwari, in the district of Chapra. In August of the same year, Mr. Corbett, the Assistant Superintendent of Police of Chapra, and Mr. Simpkins, the District Engineer, came together to Narasingh's village to attend to some repairs in the *bundh* (embankment), and asked Narasingh to give a hand to these repairs. Narasingh refused, and the two officials, provoked by his impudence, fell upon him and assaulted him so severely that he had to be removed to the station hospital at Chapra. After he had been admitted into the hospital, Captain Maddox, the District Civil Surgeon, examined his injuries, and, fearing that he would go to court, reported the matter to the members of the station club. Narasingh was taken from the hospital to the bungalow of Mr. Twidell, the officiating District Magistrate of Chapra, where after a hurried consultation between this gentleman, Mr. Bradley, the District Superintendent of Police, and Captain Maddox, he was arrested on the spot and was sent up to take his trial under sections 353 and 186, I.P.C. Narasingh's case was tried by a Mahomedan Deputy Magistrate, who convicted him as we have seen. On the case coming up on appeal, Mr. Pennel acquitted Narasingh and passed very severe strictures upon the trying magistrate and several of the European officials implicated in the case.

During the hearing of this case, the Mahomedan Deputy Magistrate admitted on oath before Mr. Pennel that he had gone to Mr. Twidell's house to discuss this case, as he had done on many previous occasions. He further stated: " When cases are disposed of and magistrates do not like it, they find fault. And so I settled it beforehand." This was a very broad admission of the evils of the combination of judicial and executive functions in officials of British India.

But while the people were amazed at the revelations, Mr. Pennel was penalized by the Government for this judgement and transferred from Chapra to Noakhali, then considered a very undesirable station for its insalubrious climate and its hopeless distance from the metropolis. But before Mr. Pennel had been many months at this new station, he again found a case where the combination of judicial and executive functions had been conspiring to defeat the ends of justice.

A man named Ismail Jagirdar, who lived within two miles of the town of Noakhali, was murdered one evening while he was returning home, and his dead body was thrown into a pond. Next morning his corpse was found by his son, who informed the police immediately, and one Sadak Ali and three other Mahomedans who were enemies of the murdered man were arrested on suspicion. During the trial it was found that these people had a friend and relation in a police officer named Osman Daroga, who was doing his level best to shield the culprits and prevent the necessary evidence being produced against them. The District Superintendent of Police, Mr. Riley, also got himself enmeshed in Osman Daroga's wiles, and made no little effort to turn the prosecution into a failure. In this case several broad hints came to Mr. Pennel from Government headquarters in Calcutta and the headquarters of the Chittagong division. In spite of all this, Mr. Pennel not only passed sentence of capital punishment on Sadak Ali and condemned his accomplices to transportation for life, but had Mr. Riley arrested on the spot for tendering false witness before him on oath.[1]

Mr. Pennel's judgement was delivered on February 15th, 1901, and, in the course of this portentous document, he spared nobody from Sir John Woodburne, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, to Osman Daroga. He trampled upon most of the prejudices and traditions by which the Indian Civil Service had sworn all the time and exposed with a merciless pen the tricks by which the administration of justice had been vitiated in so many cases. In due course Mr. Pennel paid the penalty of his indiscretions. On the

[1] Mr. Riley was arrested under Section 466/201/196, I.P.C.

6th of March, just three weeks after the date of this judgement, the government of Lord Curzon suspended him and a few weeks later he was dismissed. The curtain fell upon the drama with this drastic interference of the Government of India, but the people of India found in this episode enough food for reflection and bitterness.

It must be admitted, however, that the administration in the country in the latter Victorian era was sometimes punctuated by acts of benevolent despotism such as Lord Ripon's repeal of the Vernacular Press Act, the Rendition of Mysore, the inauguration of a scheme of local self-Government, the Ilbert Bill (a bill intended to remove the disqualifications of the Indian magistracy to try European offenders), the revision of the Indian Councils Act in 1892, during Lord Lansdowne's viceroyalty, and the effort of Sir Andrew Scoble to raise the " age of consent " in India. The punishment meted out by Lord Curzon to certain officers of the 9th Lancers for maltreating some Indians, and the legislative measures passed under the inspiration of the same Viceroy for the preservation of ancient monuments of India, may also be cited as some of the most creditable works of British rule in India.

On the other side, measures like Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act, the contemptuous reference of Lord Dufferin to the growing intelligentsia of India as a " microscopic minority " and his brushing aside of the demand for the separation of judicial and executive functions as a " counsel of perfection ", Sir Charles Elliott's notorious notification restricting the scope and area of trial by jury in Bengal, and the niggardly grants for famine, sanitation, and education, made without exception by Viceroy after Viceroy, with an intermittent increase of the duty on salt, prepared the soil in which the revolutionary mentality of a later day was to flourish.

The persistent economic depression, continued from generation to generation on account of the scarcity of occupations for all classes of people, particularly the middle classes, produced a crisis about the end of the last century; and for the first time young Bengal awoke to consciousness of the heavy toll taken by the white rulers. " Much poverty

and much discontent ", as Lord Bacon had observed three centuries ago, " prepared the ground in which revolutions germinate ", and Bengal proved no exception. At this stage the several triumphs of Boer arms over the British, and of the Japanese over the Russians and the subsequent campaigns of the Irish Fenians and Egyptian Nationalists, had opened a new horizon to impressionable idealists in India and stimulated them to revolutionary activities.

It was Lord Curzon, however, who inaugurated the second stage, that of revolutionary mentality, by certain blazing indiscretions. His twelve administrative problems, with his tortuous and extravagant methods of solving them, his creation of a new Frontier Province as well as of a new Department of Commerce and Industry in the Imperial secretariat, his attempt to officialize the universities, were taken as proof that he had come to India not to promote the welfare of the people, but rather to establish his own fame as the high priest of administrative efficiency. For the first time in the history of British India there was set up the fetish of centralization and the worship of expert scientific and administrative knowledge. Lord Curzon disdainfully ignored the great need of constitutional and administrative reforms and except in trying to promote the interest of agriculture in a certain way and in preserving old and historical monuments, he took no thought for the wishes of the people. He threw all financial prudence to the winds, while at the same time he persistently flouted Indian opinion.

Circulars after circulars[1] were issued, both from Simla and

[1] Mr. P. C. Lyon, Chief Secretary to the new Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, issued two circulars under date November 8th, 1905, directing the attention of the Commissioner of the Dacca Division and the Director of Public Instructions against students joining political movements and the shouting of " Bande Mataram " in open streets and meetings. A similar circular was issued by Mr. Carlyle on behalf of the Government of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, under date October 10th, 1905, and another by Sir Herbert Risley, Home Secretary of the Government of India. To counteract the effect of these circulars, an organization under the name of the " Anti-Circular Society " was established in Calcutta with Messrs. Surendra Nath Banerjea and Krishna Kumar Mitter at its head which carried on a " raging and tearing " propaganda for the boycott of British goods and the shouting of " Bande Mataram " by young students of schools and colleges.

Calcutta, to counteract and stifle the national movements, sometimes interdicting the students of schools and colleges from joining political demonstrations, and sometimes penalizing the shouting of " Bande Mataram ", a salutation to the Motherland. And, above all, he took the Bengali people by storm, at a Convocation of the University of Calcutta (February 11th, 1905), by a sweeping indictment of their love for vile flattery and disregard for truth. In proceeding to elaborate his proposition, Lord Curzon laid considerable emphasis on the fact that the highest ideal of truth was to a large extent a western conception, and that the easterners more often than not paid vicarious homage to truth through tortuous and diplomatic ways. In the course of this sanctimonious homily to the students of the University of Calcutta, Lord Curzon said :

" Untruthfulness consists in saying or doing anything that gives an erroneous impression either of one's own character, or of other people's conduct or of the facts and incidents of life.[1] . . . I hope I am making no false or arrogant claim when I say that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a western conception. I do not thereby mean to claim that Europeans are universally or even

[1] Two days after this statement was made at the University Convocation, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta turned the tables completely against the viceroy by publishing the following extract from Lord Curzon's *Problems of the Far East*:

> " Before proceeding to the royal audience I enjoyed an interview with the President of the Korean Foreign Office. . . . . I remember some of his questions and answers. Having been particularly warned not to admit to him that I was only thirty-three years old, an age to which no respect attaches in Korea, when he put to me the straight question (invariably the first in an oriental dialogue), ' How old are you ? ' I unhesitatingly responded ' Forty '. ' Dear me,' he said, ' you look very young for that. How do you account for it ? ' ' By the fact ' I replied, ' that I have been travelling for a month in the superb climate of His Majesty's dominions.' Finally he said to me, ' I presume you are a near relative of Her Majesty the Queen of England '. ' No ' I replied, ' I am not '. But observing the look of disgust that passed over his countenance, I was fain to add, ' I am, however, as yet an unmarried man ', with which unscrupulous suggestion I completely regained the old gentleman's favour ! "

It must be added that this latter passage, containing the interview of Lord Curzon with the President of the Korean Foreign Office, has been discreetly omitted from the later editions of *Problems of the Far East*.

generally truthful, still less do I mean that Asiatics deliberately or habitually deviate from the truth. The one proposition would be absurd, and the other insulting. But undoubtedly truth took a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East, where craftiness and diplomatic skill have always been held in much repute. We may prove it by the common innuendo that lurks in the words 'oriental diplomacy' by which is meant something rather tortuous and hyper-subtle. The same may be seen in oriental literature. In your epics, truth will often be extolled as a virtue, but quite as often it is attended with some qualification, and very often praise is given to successful deception practised with honest aim. . . .

"There is a thing which we call in English 'a mare's-nest', by which we mean a pure figment of the imagination and something so preposterous as to be unthinkable. Yet there is no country where 'mare's-nests' are more prolific than here. Some ridiculous concoction is publicly believed until it is officially denied. Very often a whole fabric of hypothesis is built out of nothing at all. Worthy people are extolled as heroes. Political opponents are branded as malefactors. Immoderate adjectives are flung about as though they had no significance. The writer no doubt did not mean to lie. But the habit of exaggeration has laid such firm hold of him that he is like a man who has taken too much drink and who sees two things where there is only one or something where there is nothing."

It is difficult to measure accurately after such a lapse of time the feeling of bitterness and disgust which these vice-regal pronouncements provoked in the Indian mind; and this, together with the Partition of Bengal, made Lord Curzon's administration gall and wormwood to the people.

In August, 1905, Lord Curzon put off the panoply of viceroyalty, as the result of his defeat in a bitter controversy with Lord Kitchener, then the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Indian Forces. These two high dignitaries of the state had quarrelled over the retention of a second military

member of the Viceroy's cabinet in addition to the Commander-in-Chief. Lord Morley has summed up the effect of Lord Curzon's resignation in a beautiful passage in his *Recollections*. "A powerful Viceroy had come in the summer of 1905 into open collision with a powerful Commander-in-Chief. Dissension followed between the Viceroy and the home Government; the Viceroy resigned; and the publication of minutes and correspondence diffused a general atmosphere of heat and scandal over a scene where heat and something like political scandal were most sedulously to be avoided. These stormy transactions left a heavy surge behind them, and India watched."

In the meantime, Lord Minto was sent out by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to succeed Lord Curzon and to calm the Indian horse which appeared to have grown restive. Lord Minto, as soon as he donned his new armour, found himself in a most unfortunate position. His predecessor had sown the wind, and he was bound to reap the whirlwind. Only a few weeks after, John Morley came into the India Office as the new Secretary of State; and he and the new Indian Viceroy found it impossible to control the situation in this country. About this time, the Lieutenant-Governor of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam sent out batches of Gurkha troops to many important places to terrorize the people, even going to the length of breaking up the session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Barisal by police action. A graphic account of this incident will be found in Surendra Nath Banerjea's *A Nation in Making*. Mr. Kingsford, then the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, had a young student of fifteen, by the name of Susil Sen, flogged at the triangle for being mixed up in a police fracas, a punishment which sent a thrill of indignation throughout the country.

But shortly afterwards a strange nemesis overtook the Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam. We give the story in Lord Morley's own words.

"The boys of certain schools at Serajgunj had been guilty of violently unruly conduct in the town, and the

Lieutenant-Governor had officially applied to the syndicate of Calcutta University to withdraw recognition from the schools. The Government of India pointed out to him that if he insisted on University taking action, result would be acrimonious public discussion in which the partition and administration of the new province would be bitterly attacked, and they thought it most desirable to avoid such a contingency, and would prefer to rely upon new university regulations to deal with political movement in the schools. For these reasons they suggested withdrawal of his request to university. The Lieutenant-Governor asked that either these orders should be reconsidered, or else that his resignation should be accepted. Lord Minto was quite alive to the objection against changing a Lieutenant-Governor in face of agitation, but it became every day more evident that the administration of the new province was unreliable and might lead to further difficulties. If we persuaded him to remain we should run the risk of having to support him against ill criticism. So the resignation was accepted. I telegraphed concurrence without delay."

The acceptance of the resignation of Sir Bamfylde Fuller was interpreted as the beginning of the end of the reign of terror, and gave a great momentum both to the constitutional national movement and to the revolutionary activities of the new schools at Manicktolla and Dacca.

The third stage was reached when the revolutionary mentality incited some youths to translate their feverish anxiety for retaliation and freedom into overt acts of sedition and treason. A section of Bengali young men attempted to reply to this reign of terror by the free use of bombs and revolvers. A large number of anusilan samities (gymnasiums) were established all over Bengal with headquarters at Calcutta and Dacca, under the leadership of Mr. Pulin Behari Das and Mr. P. Mitter, for the development of courage and physical culture. The worship of Shivaji and Bhawani,[1] previously unknown in Bengal, became the order of the day,

[1] Bhawani, another name for Kali (the goddess of Energy, Force and Strength), was the principal deity of the Mahratta people in Shivaji's time.

and Mrs. Sarala Devi instituted the annual demonstration of sword play, wrestling and jujitsu on the Birastami day, the second day of Durga Pujah.[1] Batches of young men began to train themselves on the teachings of the *Gita* which inculcated the doctrine that life was a mission, and death a *maya* (illusion) which contained no terror and meant only a change of the physical body. Within a very short time the Song of the Lord[2] became the most sacred gospel and the principal text of the Revivalists. The Revivalist doctrine, under the inspiration of Aurobindo Ghose, acquired such a momentum among the youth of Bengal that within two or three years it formed the basis of a revolutionary party in the province.

These new teachings and activities led one class of people to take its courage in both hands and preach sedition both in the Press and on the platform, and another class to practise the use of the bomb and the revolver. In the course of a few months some of the leaders of both these movements were arrested and tried for sedition and treason. And in the meantime, the Government had passed a new act to proclaim and suppress "seditious meetings", and Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh were deported under the Bengal Regulation. It is interesting to recollect that this Regulation, described by Morley as an old and rusty weapon in the armoury of the Government, was restored by Lord Elgin at the end of the nineteenth century. He used it to deport the Nati brothers of Poona for their suspected complicity in the murder of Rand and Ayerst, two officers drafted from the military to enforce some atrocious regulations for the suppression of plague which was raging in a virulent form in that city at that time. In the case of Lajpat Rai, the cry was different.

[1] The Durga Pujahs are the autumnal festival of the Bengali people in connection with the worship of Durga, the Divine mother with ten arms, and correspond very much with the Christmas festivities of Europe. The worship continues generally for four days, on the last of which the image is taken with great ceremony to a river or a pond and immersed.

[2] The *Bhagavad Gita* has been translated by an English writer under this title, while Arnold has rendered it into English under the name of *The Song Celestial*. This book has also been translated into English by Mrs. Besant and several other English writers. But the most scholarly and dependable translation is the one made by K. T. Telang for Max Müller's "Sacred Books of the East" series.

The Government of the time thought that in consequence of some incendiary speeches delivered by him and his friend at Rawalpindi, sanguinary riots had taken place in that city, and, in the words of Lord Morley, " I would not sanction deportation except for a man of whom there was solid reason to believe that violent disorder was the direct and deliberately planned result of his action."

In the case of Bengal, however, the Government did not use the old Regulation III at this stage, but sanctioned a number of prosecutions against its principal suspects. In most of these cases, Chitta Ranjan appeared as the counsel for the defence and made the reputation which brought him to the forefront, both in his profession, and in the public life of the country. With these cases, and Chitta Ranjan's powers of advocacy and forensic skill, I shall deal in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

SUCCESS AT THE BAR

THE first year of Lord Minto's viceroyalty was tense with public excitement. A section of the Bengali Press had cast off all sense of restraint, and begun to indulge in downright and unabashed license. A new Lieutenant-Governor, quite unacquainted with the genius, temperament, and conditions of the Bengali people, had been drafted from the Central Provinces to occupy the *gadi* at Belvedere and administer the affairs of the most advanced province in India. He received such a fright from the writings of this section of the Press, that he wanted the law officers of the Government to make an example of the principal offenders. The first to come under this new official campaign was the *Bande Mataram*, an English daily founded by Subodh Chandra Mallick, Chitta Ranjan Das and another friend, and edited by a committee with Aurobindo Ghose as the controlling chief.

Aurobindo Ghose, grandson of Raj Narayan Bose, previously mentioned, was sent to England for education very early in life. After studying a few years at St. Paul's School in London, he went to Cambridge, and, in due course, got a first class in the Classical Tripos.[1] Sitting for the Civil Service Examination in 1890, he secured a good place in the list, but, not being able to ride, he was not taken into the Service. After some years of literary work and rambling about in England, he returned to India as Vice-Principal of Baroda College. There he remained till 1906, and the beginning of the Partition agitation in Bengal, when he came to Calcutta and almost immediately joined the staff of the *Bande Mataram* which was started on August 6th, 1906. When he joined the *Bande Mataram*, he did not know a

[1] The only other Bengali who has so far got a first class in the Cambridge Classical Tripos was the late Harinath Dey of the Calcutta Presidency College and the Imperial Library.

word of the Bengali language, or anything about the conditions of Bengali life. Yet he did not come here as a sahib,[1] and he kept religiously to the spiritual standard of ancient India—" plain living and high thinking ". At this stage he began to develop a scheme for a Vedantic revival. Though he has been devoting his time to the study of Indian philosophy since his retirement to Pondicherry in 1910, in 1906 and 1907 he knew very little about the Vedanta, but he found in the word itself, and in all its metaphysical connotation, a certain way of enmeshing young Bengal in the nets of an intensive political propaganda. As the *de facto* editor of the *Bande Mataram*, he found the columns of the paper a good medium for the propagation of his doctrine, and, under the inspiring heading of " The New Path ", he frequently descanted on revolution as the way to the promised land. This campaign soon became obvious, and Sir Andrew Fraser's government was ill-advised to try and stem the tide by prosecuting the editor when the propaganda had had a very good start. Unfortunately for the Government, the prosecution failed, as no editorial responsibility of the paper could be fixed by the prosecution on any person, for, in those days, no newspaper was required by law to declare the name of its editor, and no witness was found to attest to the editor's name. While Aurobindo escaped without punishment, his printer was convicted and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. With the failure of this prosecution, Aurobindo Ghose and his counsel, Chitta Ranjan, came prominently before the public, and from the point of view of propaganda the Government's object was completely defeated.

Brahmobandhab Upadhaya, as editor of *Sandhya*, and Bhupendra Nath Dutt, as editor of *Yugantar*, were also prosecuted about this time for sedition. Brahmobandhab, who hailed from a Christian family and himself was a convert to Christianity, constituted himself at this time the most eloquent and forcible advocate of the Hindu revival and of the anti-Government spirit. Bhupendra Nath Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekananda, gathered round him a

[1] In the trappings of a Westerner.

galaxy of brilliant writers, including Barindra Kumar Ghose, younger brother of Aurobindo Ghose, and carried the standard of revolution to the very heart of young Bengal. Both Brahmobandhab and Bhupendra Nath Dutt wrote excellent Bengali, and clothed their ideas in most appealing language. When they were prosecuted, they both were given the advertisement of their lives, and Chitta Ranjan, as the counsel for their defence, took the public by storm by his brilliant powers of advocacy. In both these cases, Chitta Ranjan appeared before the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, and took up a line of defence which startled the Magistrate as well as the public outside. On the instructions of his client, Brahmobandhab, he entered into no defence at all, as his client would have nothing to do with a British Court of Justice. In a written statement, Brahmobandhab said: "I do not want to take part in the trial, because I do not believe that, in carrying out my humble share of the God-appointed mission of Swaraj, I am in any way accountable to the alien people, who happen to rule over us and whose interest is, and must necessarily be, in the way of our true national development." But the case took an unexpected turn when the accused died in the Campbell Hospital in Calcutta before the preliminary stages had been concluded. In the case of Bhupendra Nath Dutt, Chitta Ranjan tried to defend him on the ground that the words and ideas for which he was being prosecuted bore quite a different interpretation from that which the prosecution had put upon it. The defence failed and his client was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment, but all the same, his abilities as an advocate evoked general admiration.

In April, 1908, the effects of the open preaching of sedition came to the surface. On the 30th of the month, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, two young boys belonging to the Revolutionary Party of Manicktolla, threw a bomb at a carriage at Muzzaferpore, which they thought belonged to Mr. Kingsford, the District Judge. They meant to take Mr. Kingsford's life as a measure of retaliation for the severe punishment which in the previous year he had, as the chief

Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, imposed on some editors of newspapers, and for having a young boy by the name of Susil Sen flogged at the triangle.[1] But unfortunately for the two assailants the carriage was not Mr. Kingsford's and the bomb, instead of killing him, killed the wife and daughter of a much respected and pro-Indian European, Mr. Pringle Kennedy. When the news of this atrocious crime was flashed to Calcutta, the police became most active, and, in the course of a few hours, they were able to trace the source of the crime.

It was discovered that at 32, Muraripukur Road, in Manicktolla, a suburb of Calcutta, a bomb-factory had been established by some young Bengalis to paralyse the Government by " direct action ". On the 2nd day of May, Barindra Kumar Ghose, the chief brain of the organization, and some of his associates, were rounded up by the Calcutta police, and, within the next few days, more arrests were made, including that of Aurobindo Ghose, at 48, Grey Street. Altogether thirty-six young men were arrested on suspicion of a complicity with the crime at Muzzaferpore and the bomb factory at Manicktolla, and some of these made admissions which proved very startling to an unsuspecting public. They were sent up for trial under Sections 120, 121, 122 and 123 of the Indian Penal Code, which relate to waging war against the King, and to forming a conspiracy with the same object. The trial commenced before the Magistrate of Alipur on the 19th of May, and was heard by Mr. Beachcroft with two assessors, who sent it up to the Court of Session. During the first stage of this case in the Session Court, which commenced in October, 1908, Mr. Eardley Norton appeared for the Crown and a leading Indian barrister for the defence for a few days only. On their inability to pay this Indian barrister the accused had to find a new counsel. The solicitors for the defence, Messrs. Manuel and Agarwalla, approached

[1] In a letter to Lord Minto, Lord Morley had anticipated the consequences of atrocious punishments. " I must confess to you that I am watching with the deepest concern and dismay the thundering sentences that are now being passed for sedition, etc. We must keep order, but excess of severity is not the path to order. On the contrary, it is the path to the bomb."

Chitta Ranjan, with the permission and advice of Aurobindo, to appear on his behalf, and Chitta Ranjan accepted Aurobindo's brief with great enthusiasm and unlike the "legalized freebooters"[1] of his day, worked incessantly for over six months for practically no fees. This brief gave Chitta Ranjan Das the opportunity of his life for the display of his forensic skill and powers of cross-examination. In this case 206 witnesses were examined, 4,000 documents were filed, and the exhibits, consisting of bombs, revolvers, ammunition, detonators, fuses, poisonous acids, and other explosive materials, numbered 500.

Aurobindo Ghose was charged along with his brother Barindra Kuma Ghose and others with (*a*) waging war against the King (Sec. 120 I.P.C.), (*b*) with conspiracy to wage war against the King (Sec. 12 I.P.C.), and (*c*) collecting arms, etc., for the same object.

The evidence against Aurobindo was of the usual kind, consisting of his letters, writings, speeches, etc., and other facts tending to show incitement to violence and connection with other conspirators. The prosecution attempted to show from his letters to his wife and from his private correspondence in general, that Aurobindo was aware of, and implicated in, a conspiracy to wage war against the King.

From his writings and speeches, it was attempted to show that he had preached complete and absolute independence for India as the political ideal of young men, and this was done with a view to help and further the end the conspirators had before them. Turning to Aurobindo Ghose's writings and public utterances, Chitta Ranjan Das argued that his client was an extremely religious man, and his political views were moulded by his religious ideas, which, in their turn, were based on Vedantism. He said :

"So far as the nation was concerned, he (Aurobindo) preached that lofty ideal of freedom. So far as the individual was concerned, his idea always was to go there himself and look for the Godhead within. It is a familiar ideal of our

[1] This was a phase coined by the late Bhupendra Nath Basu to describe the barristers and advocates of Calcutta of his day.

country. It is difficult for those not familiar with it to understand it.

" The doctrine of Vedantism is that man is not dissociated from God : that is to say, if you want to realize yourself you must look for the God within you. It is within your heart and within your soul that you will find that God dwells, and as no man can attain to his own salvation without reaching to that God that is within you ; so also in the case of nations : without any national question arising—no nation can attain this unless it realizes the highest and noblest and the best of that nation. As in the case of individuals you cannot reach your God with extraneous aid, but you must make an effort —that supreme effort—yourself before you can realize the God within you ; so also with a nation. It is by itself that a nation must grow ; a nation must attain its salvation by its unaided effort. No foreigner can give you that salvation. It is within your own hands to revive that spirit of nationality. That is the doctrine of nationality which Aurobindo has preached throughout and that was to be done, not by methods which are against the traditions of the country. I ask your particular attention to that. It was not Aurobindo's philosophy that salvation was to be attained by methods inconsistent with the whole history and traditions of the writer, and therefore, when you find Aurobindo leaving Baroda and coming to Calcutta you find that the doctrines he preaches are not doctrines of violence but doctrines of passive resistance. It is not bombs, but suffering. He deprecates secret societies and violence and enjoins them to suffer. If there is a law which is unjust and offensive against the development of the nation, break that law by all means and take the consequences. He never asked you to apply force in a single utterance of his either in the Press or on the platform. If the Government thought fit to bring in a law which hinders you from attaining that salvation, Aurobindo's advice is to break that law if necessary in the sense of not obeying it. You owe it to your conscience ; you owe it to your God. If the law says you must go to jail, go to jail. That was the cardinal feature of the doctrine of

passive resistance which Aurobindo preached. Is not the doctrine of passive resistance preached throughout the world on the same footing? Is it peculiar to this country—this movement which has met with such abusive language from Mr. Norton? Have not the people of England done it over and over again? I say that this is the same doctrine that Aurobindo was preaching almost up to the very day when those handcuffs were put on his hands. He was oppressed with a feeling of disappointment, because his country was losing everything, having lost their faith. Therefore, you find, whenever he preached freedom, he brought out that feature clearly. He says, believe in yourself; no one attains salvation who does not believe in himself. Similarly, he says, in the case of the nation. If the nation does not feel that it has got something within it to be free to attain that salvation then there is no hope for that nation. Accordingly we find Aurobindo preaching 'you are not cowards, you are not a set of incapable men, because you have got divinity. Have faith in you and in that faith go towards that goal and become a self-developed nation.'"

Turning to the rest of the evidence, consisting mostly of private correspondence, Chitta Ranjan Das showed successfully that "if you presume Aurobindo Ghose to be a conspirator, there are passages in the letters which may be regarded as evidence of his guilt. But if you start with no such presumption, but make the presumption of innocence, which the law enjoins you to make, these passages are capable of innocent explanations in the light of his religious views."

The most incriminating pieces of evidence under this head was what was known as the "sweets" letter which ran as follows:

Dear Brother,

Now is the time, please try and make them meet for our conference. We must have sweets all over India ready made for imergencies, I wait here for your answer.

Your affectionate,
Barindra Kumar Ghose.

The prosecution argued that "sweets" meant bombs—a supposition not unlikely in itself in view of other evidence in the case. The extremists having succeeded in breaking up the Congress at Surat, Barin thought that the great moment had arrived when they could launch out upon a programme of direct action. He, therefore, wanted the free distribution of sweets (bombs) all over the country. Chitta Ranjan argued that the letter was a forgery—as clumsy as those Piggott had got up to incriminate Parnell after the murder of Lord Cavendish in Phœnix Park in Dublin. He proceeded to point out that no younger brother in Bengal would sign his name in full while writing to his elder brother; and, according to the custom of his people, Barin should have addressed Aurobindo as "Mejda", and not as "My dear Brother", as is the English way. Apart from this palpable evidence of forgery, the spelling of the word "imergencies" by such a clever man as Barin, who had received a good English education, left no doubt as to the origin and authorship of the letter. In addition to the internal evidence of forgery, by adroit and skilful cross-examination of police witnesses, Chitta Ranjan made it appear almost probable that this letter was not discovered at the time of the search, but was a subsequent interpolation by the police.

Chitta Ranjan concluded his defence with the following eloquent words:

"The evidence as is furnished by the confession in this court—confessions, upon which the prosecution relies—you will find that it is childish conspiracy—a toy revolution. It is impossible that Aurobindo could ever believe in his heart of hearts that, by bombing one or two Englishmen or some Englishmen at different places, they could ever have been able to subvert the British Government. If you credit him with intellectual powers and say that he was a brilliant mind, it is open to you at the same time to say that he was the leader of a childish conspiracy and a toy revolution.

"Either drop the suggestion that it is because of the intellectual powers, because of the brilliant qualities with which he is credited, that you want the court to believe that

he was the leader of this conspiracy; or the other theory that he was in fact the leader of the conspiracy and of this alleged revolutionary project.

"If the Government has taken into its head to believe that there is a vast conspiracy which is threatening the stability of the Government, it is common knowledge that you do come across spies who give false evidence. I shall just read a passage from a book written by an eminent judge: 'The Government under these circumstances have spies who wriggle into the case, eavesdrop into families, abstract correspondence and false letters'. Therefore the evidence given before you is evidence that you can expect in a case like this.

"My appeal to you, therefore, is that a man like this, who is being charged with the offence with which he has been charged, stands not only before the bar in this Court, but stands before the bar of the High Court of History. My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism; as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say, that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court, but before the bar of the High Court of History.

"The time has come for you, Sir, to consider your judgement, and for you, gentlemen (addressing the Assessors) to consider your verdict. I appeal to you, Sir, in the name of all the traditions of the English bench that forms the most glorious chapter of English history. I appeal to you in the name of all that is noble, of all the thousand principles of law which have emanated from the English Bench, and I appeal to you in the name of the distinguished judges who have administered the law in such a manner as to compel not only obedience, but the respect of all those in whose cases they have administered the law. I appeal to you in the name of the glorious chapter of English history, and let it not be said

that an English judge forgets to vindicate justice. To you, gentlemen, I appeal in the name of the very ideal that Aurobindo preached, and in the name of all the traditions of our country; and let it not be said that two of his own countrymen (referring to the Assessors) were overcome by passion and prejudice and yielded to the clamour of the moment."

Mr. Beachcroft, who was at Cambridge with Aurobindo and passed into the Indian Civil Service the same year, was impressed with Chitta Ranjan's impassioned plea for his client and acquitted Aurobindo Ghose[1] of the charge with which he was accused by the police, and paid Chitta Ranjan very high compliments for his able and skilful advocacy. This case at once established the reputation of Chitta Ranjan as one of the foremost lawyers of his day, and from this time forward, he had no more any occasion to seek briefs, and solicitors came trooping into his chambers with them, most of which he was compelled to refuse either for want of time or unwillingness to take up more work than he could conveniently handle.

When Chitta Ranjan became a busy lawyer, he had of course to abandon his devotion to literature and journalism, yet he managed during this time (1913-15) to publish two books of poems and edited a vernacular monthly review, principally devoted to researches in Vaishnavic literature. But the money that he earned with both hands at this time, he gave away in open-handed charity to all and sundry. He maintained with extraordinary munificence a nursing home organized by one of his sisters at Purulia, where both his parents had retired in their last years and died. No one who came to him to beg either from personal difficulty, or on behalf of any public institution—no matter whether it was a school, college, library, dispensary

[1] Of the other accused in the Alipore Bomb Case, Barindra Kumar Ghose (Aurobindo's brother) and Ullaskar Dutt were sentenced to be hanged. Hem Chandra Das and Upendra Nath Bandopadhaya along with some others were transported for life. Chitta Ranjan conducted the case in the High Court also when it came before it on appeal. The sentences on Barindra and Ullaskar were reduced to those of transportation. Some of the other accused had also their sentences reduced, and two were acquitted.

or the foundation of a temple, or the excavation of a tank—went away disappointed from his doors. His hospitality was also unbounded, and he was accessible to all, at all times. Even at the height of his practice, and with all the financial difficulties that had overtaken him in 1906, he had not acquired any love for money. And there have been several political cases, particularly the Dacca Conspiracy Case of 1911, in which he accepted the brief for the defence without adequate remuneration.

In 1913, when he had risen almost to the top of his profession, he took the rather unusual procedure of paying his and his father's joint debts, for which they had both gone together to the Insolvency Court six years before. When Lord Sinha (then Mr. S. P. Sinha) applied to Mr. Justice Fletcher, of the High Court on behalf of Chitta Ranjan for the annulment of the adjudication order on the payment of all his creditor's dues, Chitta Ranjan made an impression on Bengal for honesty and probity almost unparalleled in modern times. Mr. Justice Fletcher observed from the Bench that the application was a very proper one, and Mr. Sinha remarked it was not very often done.

After he had become a discharged insolvent, he used to spend the long vacation of the High Court (September to November) almost every other year in England and in these visits he acquired a special love for International Law, arts, letters, and music.

Chitta Ranjan's practice till now was confined principally to criminal cases, but in 1914 he received a brief in a civil case at Arrah (in Bihar) where he displayed the same powers of analysis and hard work that he had displayed in the great Manicktolla Bomb Trial. He practically picked up a beggar from the street and placed him on the *gadi* of Dumraon, getting the claims of an unknown and neglected reversioner of the estate recognized both by the Lower Court at Arrah and by the High Court of Patna. As the Dumraon estate is one of the largest personal properties in northern India, and as Chitta Ranjan had not a very strong brief, his success in this case finally established his place as a great civil lawyer

also, and Rajas and Maharajas all over the country wanted their solicitors to brief him in all their cases.

In 1917, 1918 and 1919, he told me at Darjeeling a few days before his death, his professional income amounted to nearly three lakhs of rupees a year, and in 1920, he was earning Rs. 50,000 (£4,000) every month. When he had attained this position at the Bar, Mr. Gandhi's appeal for non-co-operation gripped him, and in January of the following year induced him to renounce his practice for good and withdraw from all the temptations and lures of his profession.

The secret of Chitta Ranjan's success in the Bar, both in civil as well as in criminal practice, was hard work. It is stated that during the protracted trial of Aurobindo Ghose at Alipore, there was hardly any day when he could retire to bed before the small hours of the morning. He did not accept many briefs at any time of his life, but when he took one up, he was almost obsessed with it. Night and day he would toil over it, and, in his sleeping and waking hours, he would give himself no rest or peace until he could find out the points in his favour and the manner in which he could hammer them out. He would study with punctilious care all the case law on every aspect of his brief, and would work juniors or devils to death to find out for him all that might be urged from the opposite side of the case. Once he had found out the points to fight over, he was almost invincible. To hard work he added the rare qualification of a wonderful power of cross-examination, and there was seldom any person brought against his side whom he did not reduce to pulp in the witness box. To crown all he put his case wonderfully well, in very eloquent language, and with excellent address. One Bengali counsel[1] who had worked as his junior in many cases has given to the world the following impression of his leader.

"Some fundamental qualities underlay his advocacy. He possessed an iron strength and never yielded an inch of ground either to judge or to adversary; and combined with it a driving power of argument before which even hostile

[1] Mr. B. C. Chatterji in *Forward*.

judges faltered, and ultimately fell. There was not the least trace of sycophancy in his pleading, nor the faintest of tremors at the knees in the presence of authority. He stood and spoke like a man to a fellow-man, but gave off all the time that unconscious magnetism which generally over-powered judge and audience. The most noteworthy feature of his advocacy was that its quality impressed in proportion to the difficulty of its subject matter."