



1921

CS

VIDYASAGAR

THE GREAT INDIAN EDUCATIONIST
AND
PHILANTHROPIST.

BY
Ananta Kumar Ray, M. A., B. L.

①

2195

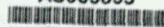
2-12-21

Ray & Co.
38, Panchanon Ghose Lane,
CALCUTTA

1921

(R)

CSL-AS-54
AS003835



B VID -R

All rights reserved.

CS

B V



CSL

VIDYASAGAR



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

THE GREAT INDIAN EDUCATIONIST
AND
PHILANTHROPIST.

BY

Ananta Kumar Roy, M. A., B. L.

①

2195

2.12.24

Ray & Co.

38, Panchanan Ghose Lane,

CALCUTTA

1921

All rights reserved.

CSL-AS-54

AS003835



B VID -R ROY-V

(R)



CSL

Published by
ROHINI KUMAR RAY
of RAY & Co.,
38, Panchanan Ghose Lane, Calcutta.

B
V 67 R

-54

B

Vid ~~HT~~ R

23211

614

2

Printed by S. K. CHATTERJEE,
BANI PRESS
12 1, Choredagan Lane, Simla, Calcutta



CSL



Vidyāsagar



CONTENTS.

Chapter—	Page
I.—Early Years ...	1
II.—Enters Fort William College	18
III.—Principal, Sanskrit College	40
IV.—After Retirement from Service	65
V.—Darker Days ...	91
VI.—Later Life ...	114
VII.—Homewards ...	132
VIII.—Conclusion ...	138



CSL

PREFATORY NOTE.

This monograph is an attempt to depict the life and character of an Indian reformer of the last century whose only worship was silent work. Earnestness was the keynote of all his efforts ; he was no respecter of sham. Mastering as he did the collective wisdom of ages, he set forward to fulfil his mission of rejuvenating old India. Failures he was prepared to brave and turn to account. Difficulties only steeled him. He met bigotry by rishi-like catholicity. That his living personality might inspire others to do likewise is the fervent prayer of the author.



CSL

VIDYASAGAR.

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS.

"The child is father of the man".

Some live for themselves and think of nothing but profit and loss. They pass out of memory the moment they return to dust. There are others who eternise their name by taking up the cause of the friendless and redressing the wrongs of mankind. Some make a veritable hell of this earth, fomenting discord; while others transform it to paradise, promoting peace. The subject of this biography must be ranked with the latter.

Isvar Chandra Bandopadhyaya saw the light on September 26, 1820, at Birsingha, a petty village on the confines of the Hugli



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

and Midnapur districts. His forbears were all poor but vastly learned. His grandfather Pandit Ramjoy Tarkabhusan was a man of sturdy independence and exemplary character. Thakurdas Bandopadhaya, Isvar Chandra's father, a vigorous and sterling nature, had to struggle very hard just to make a shift to live; while his mother Bhagavati Devy was a most admirable woman in every respect, especially noted for the rare qualities of her heart.

Of Isvar Chandra's childhood, a vivid and fairly full account is to be found in his unfinished autobiography. When five years old he was put into the elementary school of the village kept by a sympathetic teacher. The latter was highly delighted to have such a pupil under his tuition, for even at this age he gave clear indications of that keen intellect and remarkable memory which contributed largely to his greatness in later life. Often restive and roguish, he was a terror to the villagers. His parents generally displayed marvellous

in early evening



EARLY YEARS

foresight in not foolishly suppressing all these signs of boyish pranks, perhaps thinking that they would disappear as years roll on and the pent-up energies find a fitting channel to flow out. Nevertheless, sometimes they flew into a passion and wanted to chastise and rate him. On those occasions he fled to the unfailing protection of an indulgent grandmother who, like all grandmothers, idolised him.

After finishing the course of study offered by the village school, he accompanied his father to Calcutta to receive higher education. The lad of eight footed the whole distance of over fifty miles and managed to learn the English numerical figures from the mile-stones. On their arrival they put up at Barabazar in the house of an old and valued friend Babu Jagaddurlav Singha. Thakurdas was always out on his calling from nine at morn till the same hour at night. During his absence the little one was looked after by the ladies of the family, particularly by Raimoni, who was invariably



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

kind and considerate. Isvar Chandra ever after gratefully referred to the sweetness of her disposition. His father had a mind to put him into the Hindu College. The tuition fee was Rs 5 a month, and he himself was but drawing a monthly salary of ten rupees wherewithal to support the growing family. Yet the thought of pecuniary difficulties did not damp his tender hopes. Conscious of his son's abilities, he wished to give him the best education available. For the first three months nothing was actually done in this direction. The boy was then laid up with an acute type of dysentery. This soon proving very dangerous in spite of medical aid, he was removed to the village home where he completely recovered in three months. Thakurdas now changed his plan and wanted to make a good Sanskrit scholar of him, nurturing the idea that he might in his time open a *tole* or Sanskrit school in the village. A near connexion of his, a student of the Sanskrit College, pointed out in glowing terms the many



benefits Isvar Chandra would reap if he passed from his college. A learned professor of that institution also held out dazzling prospects. On the first day of June, 1829 the boy was admitted into that college, which was decidedly oriental in its character. English was in effect excluded from the curriculum. Being but an optional subject, it was taken up with any real keenness by very few. The Government thought that as there was the Hindu College established and maintained by private liberality to impart English education, there should be also some academy for the systematic culture of Sanskrit. This view was shared by many influential members of the orthodox community who saw with extreme uneasiness that most of the youths who left the Hindu College had adopted European manners and customs and abandoned national costumes. To discuss mutton chops and beef steaks, to quaff off glasses of sherry and claret, to garnish conversation with scraps of English,



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

were to them the unmistakable sign of a gentleman. Some audacious spirits even paraded the streets with beef in their hands inviting the orthodox to partake of it. They were mostly the pupils and admirers of Mr. Henry Vivian Derozio, fourth teacher of the College, who had in a short time acquired such an ascendancy over their minds that even in their private concerns they took counsel with him. The first glamour of new ideas, ideas other than those sanctioned by ancient tradition, was so irresistible that these misguided youths fancied that the Europeans were the only cultured nations on the surface of the earth and that their motherland would be regarded "civilised" if they imitated the rulers of the country. It never occurred to them that nations do not rise to supremacy by slavishly treading in the footprints of others. To imbibe virtues is an arduous task. In their hurried efforts to pass for cultured men, the young enthusiasts, instead of finding out the intrinsic and essential worth of a great nation, readily



EARLY YEARS

put on its hollow and shallow externalities. The Government acted wisely when they founded the Sanskrit College in the year 1824. The Governors of the Hindu College, who compelled Mr. Derozio to resign his post for inculcating heterodox principles, did not think it worth while to abolish the college itself, as it was otherwise meeting a real need.

Isvar Chandra was admitted into the Grammar class. In those days the students sat upon mats spread on the floor with their professor occupying the middle, a pillow at his elbow to rest on whenever necessary. They were not required to sit bolt upright for hours together on unpolished or half-polished benches with no backs. Thakurdas used to take the boy to college and bring him back lest he should miss the way or loiter in the streets with idle boys. This was discontinued after some months when he became familiar with the road and knew the set of company he was to shun. Though by his diligence he soon won the admiration



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

of the teacher, he could not escape the rude jests of the school-fellows over his short stature and big head. He had yet another cross to bear. His father generally made him sit up very late at night, conning his lessons or repeating them to him. If he ever made the slightest mistake or was found to drowse, he was sure to receive a good thrashing. Thakurdas belonged to the old school which thoroughly appreciated the value of the rod. He was the last person to spoil his son by excessive indulgence. Sometimes the vigorous application of the ferule and the touching shrieks of pain that followed would arouse the inmates of the house who instantly ran up to his rescue. Once belaboured with a cudgel he decamped to find shelter in the house of Babu Ramdhon Ganguly, clerk of his college. At this stage Jagaddurlav Babu considered it his duty to interfere and read the father a lecture. He even threatened to turn him out of doors if he was again found guilty of such indiscretion. This proved a successful



corrective ; the stripling was left practically unmolested. An occasional slap in the face or a box on the ear does not count much.

Isvar Chandra continued in the Grammar department for three years. At the end of the first session he topped the list of successful boys and took the prizes. During the next year he also attended the English class, but finding grave deficiencies in regard to methodical teaching, gave it up after six months, for which he would rue in after life. He again came out first and carried off all the prizes open to him. The last time he barely passed. As he knew his own worth, his honest pride was touched. Mortified to the quick, he purposed to leave that college. But yielding to persuasion he returned to study with fresh vigour and determination, and in six months worked up the Sanskrit Dictionary *Amarkosh*. ✓

He was only eleven when he entered the belles-lettres class. As he looked younger than his years, the professor at first refused



to admit him, holding that he would not appreciate Sanskrit poems. He let his objections subside, finding him precocious and of great promise. Both in the first and second year classes he was by far the best boy. He wrote a very pretty hand and could speak Sanskrit with fluency. He also composed some Sanskrit poems, thoughtful and elegant for his age ; while his skill in essay-writing was excelled by none.

At fourteen while still in the literary section he, submitting to the will of his parents, took to wife Dinamayi, a charming girl of eight. Her father was endowed by nature with herculean strength of body and was universally admired for his liberal disposition. She proved a capable wife and an affectionate mother.

Marriage did not interfere with his studies and he never ceased to be diligent and painstaking. In the Rhetoric class he worked harder than ever, often reading far into the night. Though he scored a brilliant success, illness seized hold of him. He



was compelled to repair to his rural retreat where Bhagavati Devy soon nursed him back to health. He next attended the lectures on Smriti i. e., Hindu Jurisprudence. This subject, which occupied students of average intellect from two to three years, he fully mastered before six months were out and finally passed. Soon after the post of jurisconsult of Tippera fell vacant. Here surely was a good chance for Isvar Chandra, who applied and was offered the situation. His father, having still in his head the *tole* project, viewed with strong disfavour his going to a far-off place. A scion of true filial devotion, he suffered that opportunity to slip without a demur. Thereafter he pored over Vedanta philosophy. His professor Sambhu Chandra Vachaspati took a great liking to him and treated him with kindness and familiarity on all occasions. The grey-headed gentleman, a widower, was looking out for a bright damsel. One day he opened his heart to the young disciple. The latter, taking in



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

the situation at once and realising that a speedy widowhood was in store for the would-be bride, tried his utmost to dissuade the former from the match. The venerable man had set his heart on it and easily got over all qualms. In due course he married a winsome little girl but it was not his lot to enjoy the longed-for bliss of wedded life. Weighed down with age and sickness he departed the world soon after. And the luckless girl was left a widow just when life was becoming meaningful to her! This unhappy end of happiness made a profound impression on the mind of Isvar Chandra.

After getting up the systeem of Vedanta he dipped into Nyaya philosophy. While a student he officiated as assistant teacher of Grammar for two months. Towards the close of the year 1841 when he completed his studies, he was honoured with the title of *Vidyasagar* (i.e., ocean of learning), by which he is commonly known.

Thus he joined the college in his eighth year and after mastering almost all the



EARLY YEARS

CSL
13

branches of Sanskrit learning quitted it at twenty, radiant with youth, energy, success. The great triumphs of his academic career were not won without great trials. During the whole of this period, he had to dwell amidst the gloomiest of environments. The gentleman with whom he took up his abode gave him an ill-ventilated room, dark and dreary during all seasons of the year. It was a small apartment, furnished in no sense of the term and full of worms and vermin, which were especially troublesome at night. There was hard by a black, uncovered drain, exhaling at all times noisome and pestilent vapours. As Thakurdas had many mouths to provide for out of a narrow income, the food was necessarily insufficient and poor in quality. In general a pice worth of fried rice served as tiffin for four members, and at times even this would not be forthcoming. Iswar Chandra had to attend to all domestic affairs. He did the marketing, cooked the repast, served up the dishes to his father and brothers, scoured



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

the plates. It was amidst these unfavourable circumstances that he prosecuted his studies, sometimes banishing sleep altogether and often working far beyond his strength; yet so remarkable was the progress he made that he was regarded a prodigy both by the classmates and the teachers. Add to these a disposition naturally charitable. Forgoing every personal comfort he spent almost the whole of his college stipend in charity. His tender heart was pervious to the sufferings of others and when he was out of cash he would contract a debt to meet their wants and mitigate their woes. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" may be a good rule for the conventional people. The great have their own ways in most things and often conceive a marked dislike to cold and clear-cut maxims. Whenever Isvar Chandra heard of any cases of illness, he was promptly by the bed of pain. Even contagious diseases, of which everybody fought shy, could not daunt his courage nor chill his



sympathy. To open ragged schools for the street Arabs, to provide better houses for people who dwell in squalid dens of vice and infamy and commit every kind of atrocity without shame or remorse, to reclaim juvenile mendicants from the "Serbonian bog" of corruption "where armies whole have sunk," to find fit work for disabled persons, he spent much of his precious life-blood. There are men so fastidious and conscientious that they never bestow alms lest they should be guilty of indiscriminate charity. They persuade themselves into the belief that mere heartless criticisms would suffice to drain and ventilate the morals of the fallen and the outcast and make for their temporal and eternal welfare. Poor Isvar Chandra had no such worldly scruples and twilight virtues. He was touched to the core of his heart when he saw people in sore straits. The genial current of the soul flowed on unchecked even by chill penury. At times it broke the dam of limited income and inundated the country around,



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

scattering joy, spreading plenty. This serene benevolence, which he inherited in part from his mother, became one of the most salient traits of his character in manhood.

One of his eccentricities, born of latent energy and innate firmness, may be noted here. He was now and then very wayward and intractable, for which Thakurdas gave him a sound beating often enough. Finding him still incorrigible, he had recourse to a new device. When he wished the child should do a thing, he had only to forbid him to do it. For a time the plan answered his purpose admirably but the youngster gradually saw through it. There was in consequence a change in his tactics. What was really desired was left undone. All reformatory schemes failing, the devoted father at last left him to himself. He did not realise that the invincible self-will would in large measure bestead Isvar Chandra in years to come and the apparent blemish might be convertible into a shining merit.



EARLY YEARS

The fact is great men even in their childhood seldom like to be commanded. They are born to inspire, to lead, to rule. The annals of all countries declare that these men were regarded more or less eccentric before they rose to eminence. Their peculiar ways puzzled their contemporaries. But when they came to appreciate the sublimity of their character, they respected their oddities and bowed down in worship.



CHAPTER II.

ENTERS FORT WILLIAM COLLEGE.

*"Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes."*

After attaining great proficiency in almost all the branches of Sanskrit Literature taught in the College and manifesting magnificent possibilities of life, Vidyasagar instead of fishing for any job left for Birsingha to enjoy its bracing climate. Opportunities must now offer since he was fully qualified to battle with the stern realities of life and make his mark in the world. For the next half a century (1841—1891) the history of Bengal is the history of his noble achievements.

It came to pass that within a few days the Head-Punditship of Fort William College (an institution set up in Calcutta in the year 1800 for teaching oriental languages



to Europeans in the East India Company's civil service) fell vacant owing to the decease of the previous incumbent. Mr. Marshal, the Secretary, formerly Secretary to Sanskrit College, had early discovered the merits and abilities of Vidyasagar and rightly believed that he would be the best man for the berth. Accordingly news was sent to him and on arrival he was appointed at the close of 1841 on Rs. 50 a month. His principal duty was to examine and correct all the Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi answer papers of the would-be civilians. He did not know Hindi but soon mastered it with the help of a private tutor. And brought thus into frequent contact with the Europeans, he thought it desirable to learn English also and repented of his previous negligence. For some years he studied it under several competent men. His first teacher Babu Durga Charan Banerji was a master of Hare School. He was made Head-Writer of Fort William College on the recommendation of Vidyasagar. Later he



VIDYASAGAR

became the famous medical practitioner of Calcutta and always befriended his patron in his unselfish works of benevolence. Little did he guess at the time that he would be the father of the first Indian orator of to-day, Babu Surendra Nath Banerji.

Vidyasagar's next instructor was his life-long friend Babu Raj Narayan Basu. Then he took lessons under a relative of Raja Radhakanto Deva Bahadur of Shovabazar. In this connection he attracted the favourable notice of the Raja Bahadur who treated him with respectful cordiality. Here, also, he met Babu Akshaya Kumar Dutta whom he encouraged with useful suggestions and who in a few years was to become a writer of taste and erudition. The "Tattvabodhini Patrika," edited by Akshaya Babu, commenced publishing Vidyasagar's translation of the Mahabharata in February 1848. But it was soon discontinued at the request of Babu Kali Prasanna Singha, who was also ably translating the great epic.

While he was performing his appointed



duties at the college and himself receiving private lessons in Hindi and English, he had to teach Mr. Marshal the Sanskrit language. In his own residence he also gave lessons to some. His was a novel mode of instruction which enabled the pupils to learn Sanskrit within a short space of time. To convenience them he composed a small Sanskrit Grammar in Bengal characters. As he became widely known as an expert teacher, the number of learners that flocked to his feet increased in no long time. It need hardly be added that they were all taught free of charge and ever after treated with perfect sympathy.

Neither was he apathetic to the interests of his fellow-students. When a teacher of Hindu Law was required for Fort William College, Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, a classmate of his, was appointed through his influence. On another occasion two of his friends applied for two vacant posts in the Sanskrit College and the Secretary did not dispose of the places properly. Vidya-



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

sagar directly brought it to the notice of the higher authorities. Through his exertions the wrong was righted. He always upheld justice, and stood up for the rights of others as well as his own. Mr. Marshal once telling him to examine the papers of the European pupils a little leniently, he firmly yet respectfully submitted that he would rather resign than do anything which his sense of justice did not approve. An upright and sensible man, Mr. Marshal allowed him to do just as he would rather than lose his valuable services. He always took him unreservedly into his confidence. And whenever Dr. Mouat, Secretary to the Education Council, sought any information about Sanskrit language, he would without hesitation refer him to Vidyasagar. In this way Dr. Mouat came to regard and trust him.

In 1844 Sir Henry Hardinge, then Governor-General of India, paid a visit to Fort William College. He had an animated conversation with Vidyasagar who among other things submitted that the post



of jurisconsult having been abolished the students who passed from Sanskrit College had no opening left ; consequently the number of pupils was rapidly falling off. To provide for them His Excellency promised to start some vernacular schools in different parts of the province. One hundred and one such "Hardinge Schools" were set up in the course of the next two years and the selection of teachers was entrusted to Mr. Marshal and Vidyasagar. It must be said to the infinite credit of the Pundit that in the exercise of his patronage, he showed no bias or favour, but always secured the services of the best men.

Soon after accepting office he had requested his toil-worn father to retire home to enjoy hard-earned rest. After much hesitation he consented. Vidyasagar used to remit him Rs. 20 a month. With the remaining thirty rupees he maintained himself, his two brothers, five cousins and one servant, besides entertaining several guests. He kept no professional cook, all the in-



VIDYASAGAR

mates including himself taking their turn in doing the meals. He also helped many with money. He had to live from hand to mouth, yet he was never unduly alive to his own interests. While he was thus severely pressed for money, the teachership of Grammar fell vacant. The salary attached to it was Rs. 90. Dr. Mouat in concert with Mr. Marshal offered it to him. He declined, commending Pundit Taranath Tarkavachaspati whom he had given his word to provide. Taranath was then keeping a *tole* at Kalna, some fifty miles from Calcutta. It was a Saturday afternoon, and his application must reach the office by next Monday, if it was to be entertained at all. There was no system of railways nor telegraphs in the pre-Dalbousie period; and the dilatory, irregular postal service of the day would serve no useful purpose in this case. Returning from office Vidyasagar began to rack his brain till an idea came. He started afoot that very night and got back on the Monday morning



with the application and the benediction pronounced by Taranath's parents ! His heart gave a leap of relief and joy when his nominee was selected for the place. Their cordial relations were, however, ruptured by some fundamental difference on the question of the abolition of polygamy, as will be seen hereafter.

At this time another thrilling incident occurred, which deserves record. Vidya-sagar's mother wrote to him desiring his presence home at the marriage of his younger brother Sambhu Chandra. When he applied for leave of absence Mr. Marshal did not see his way to grant it. Next day he renewed his efforts, intimating that he would rather give up the post than make his mother unhappy. Considering the depth of his filial devotion Mr. Marshal entered into his personal feelings and was quite agreeable. He set out for home that very afternoon on foot, as usual. Caught in a terrific storm and pelting rain after sundown, he was forced to seek shelter and safety for



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

the night in a wayside inn. At break of day he resumed the journey and after a while reached the shore of Damodar. The river was brimming with monsoon-floods ; the current was rapid and rough. There was no bridge over it and the ferry boat was then on the opposite side. Even in this extremity he kept cool and self-possessed. Not a moment did he lose. Making up his mind to set forward at any price, he plunged into the terrible river and with the greatest difficulty landed on the other bank. On he hurried with breathless speed, soon to sight a second stream swollen and swift. No bridge could be espied. Nor was there any boat in which he could trust himself to the tides. Though assailed with fatigue he again buffeted the waves and swam across safely. The day was drawing to a close ; still he had many miles to cover. He was footing it since sunrise and had put nothing in his mouth. Yet dreading to pass another night of misery on the way, he quickened his pace and



through the gathering darkness made steadily towards home which he reached by nine on that wedding-night of his brother. Bhagavati Devy who had been weeping and fasting on his account was so delighted and excited that she could only burst into happy tears. Those precious drops were more eloquent than words. This devotion, which he retained down to the dying day, was the crown and glory of his life.

Another incident showing his selflessness may be recorded here. Mr. Cost, a pupil of his, once requested him to compose some Sanskrit poems, which he did offhand. Perfectly satisfied the student offered him a reward of Rs 200. On his suggestion the money was deposited in the Sanskrit College and a prize of Rs 50 was announced to be awarded annually to the best essayist for four successive years. He was appointed examiner. Once, among others, his brother Dinabandhu Nyayaratna and another youth Shrish Chandra Vidyaratna by name hotly disputed the "Cost-prize" and fared equally



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

well. Shrish Chandra was struck with wonder to receive the entire amount.

The governing body of his college now desired him to compose a good Bengali text-book for the use of European students. He complied *Vasudeva Charita*, free translation of a portion of *Srimadbhagabata*, a religious book treating of Sri Krishna. This work which was rejected has never been published. The ground of disapproval must have been the religious nature of the theme ; otherwise it was, as a contemporary biographer records, a work of merit written in lucid, easy, graceful style. Up to the close of the first quarter of the 19th century Bengali literature existed only in a debased form. In its earlier phases of development it had struggled to revert to its original Sanskrit element. Subsequently, under the influence of Mahomedan conquest, it had become largely Persianised. When Lord Wellesley established the College of Fort William in 1800 he directed some of the Sanskrit scholars to supply good text-



books in Bengali. The result was that Dr. Carey wrote the Bengali grammar and Mrityunjay Vidyalkar, Ramram Basu, Haraprasad Roy, Rojib Lochan and Chandi Charan Munshi produced several prose works which were studied for some time. The names of other pioneer authors like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rev. K. M. Banerji, Raja Rajendra Lala Mitra, Messrs. Halhead, Forster, Marshman and Ward, also deserve honourable mention. But they were not specimens of chaste Bengali; there were still too many Persian words in them. Their spelling was original; their style rather laboured, lacking precision and directness. In justice to them it ought to be said that they did much to foster the revival of vernacular literature. Vidyasagar's credit lay in assimilating the various works produced for half a century past and improving upon their style. His *Vetala-Panchavingsati* composed in 1847 was the first work in chaste prose to appear in the renaissance period of Bengali literature.



In April 1846 he was transferred to Sanskrit College as Assistant secretary, his salary remaining the same, Rs 50. His next brother Dinabandhu Nyayaratna, who was well qualified, filled the vacant place. This would save him to some extent from an embarrassing situation ; he would soon find occasion to lean on his brother when out of employ.

An unpleasant affair which happened shortly after he joined the new post deserves notice. Once he called on Mr. Karr, Principal of the Hindu College, whom he found lolling in the easy-chair, with his legs resting on the table before him. The gentleman neither welcomed him nor offered him a seat nor removed the legs from the table. Naturally, the caller took the cold, if not unmannerly, behaviour to heart but wisely restraining his rising fury walked out of the room as soon as the purpose of his visit was served. He had the courage to pay Mr. Karr in his own coin when a few days after he came to see him on a matter



of business. The Principal referred the fact to Dr. Mouat who called for an explanation. When Vidyasagar detailed the circumstances of the case, the Doctor saw that the best way out of the difficulty would be to get Mr. Karr settle the matter amicably, which was done. Vidyasagar took offence since it compromised the dignity of Indian professors in general. No man was ever less exacting of forms and ceremonies when he alone was concerned.

To improve his alma mater, he set to work with characteristic ardour. His first duty was to enforce strict punctuality, especially on the part of the professors. It was a delicate task, seeing that most of these venerable gentlemen had formerly been his own teachers. Yet he managed it very easily, by greeting them once or twice at the college gate when they came behind their time. He next initiated the pass system. No student was allowed on any pretext to leave the class during college hours without pass. The system of perio-



dical examination was also instituted by him. To expunge obscene passages from the text-books and to devise a new method of teaching Sanskrit grammar, he took much pains. Gradually other solid improvements were made.

The chair of Literature falling vacant, he was offered it but declined. He saw that though it was better in point of salary, he would lose all opportunity of effecting further reforms in case he accepted it. Through his influence with Dr. Mouat, Madan Mohan Tarkalanker was promoted to fill up the vacancy.

At this time he lost one of his younger brothers who succumbed to cholera. Shortly after this melancholy event he threw up his post, as some of his proposals for reform were not well received by the Council of Education. It was in vain that his friends urged him to retain office. He was soon hard pressed for money. Having no savings of his own to fall back upon and his brothers resources not proving sufficient, he



was occasionally compelled to borrow. He occupied most of his time with acquiring a thorough knowledge of English. For some months he had to lesson Captain Bank in oriental languages at the request of Dr. Mouat. The officer offered him tuition fee at the rate of Rs. 50 per month, when he finished the course. He refused the tempting offer on the ground that he had given lessons at the instance of his friend, not from purely interested motives. This is remarkable since at the time he was in contracted circumstances.

In 1847 asked by Mr. Marshal to compose a Bengali text-book for the use of youths of Fort William College, he rendered *Vetala Panchavingsati* (i.e., the twenty-five stories narrated by the daemon Vetala to king Vikramaditya) from Hindi into Bengali. It was at first rejected by the authorities who, sharing the view of Mr. K. M. Banerji, thought it unfit for a text-book. When Vidyasagar secured the good opinion of Mr. Marshman, a Christian missionary



VIDYASAGAR

of Serampore, it was approved and published. Though this was the first work in pure and undefiled Bengali prose, the literary world was not quick to appreciate its merits. It did not command a large sale for some time. The bright idea now flashed across his mind that if he had a press of his own he might eke out his income by turning author. He set up the "Sanskrit Press" in conjunction with Madan Mohan. The partnership however was soon dissolved, and Vidyasagar became the sole proprietor of the firm. The works of Bharat Chandra, court-poet of Maharaja Krishna Chandra Roy (born 1710, died 1782) of Nadia, were the first to appear in print. The manuscripts were procured from Maharaja Satish Chandra Roy with whom Vidyasagar was intimate.

A brief visit to the historic city of Burdwan followed. Maharaja Mahatab Chand Bahadur, learning that he had not accepted the articles of food presented by him, invited him to his palace. At the close



of a long interview the nobleman offered him a pair of shawls and Rs. 500 in cash by way of compliment. The visitor politely declined the proffered gift, making a suggestion that such liberality would immensely benefit the poor pundits of *toles*. His self-abnegation moved the admiration of the Maharaja who cemented a lasting friendship with him.

Next year he published his *History of Bengal*, a free translation of Marshman's book. It narrates incidents from the time of Nawab Sirajuddowla to that of Lord William Bentinck. Its style is elegant but it falls short of being a reliable history.

In March 1849 he reentered Fort William College as Head-Writer and Treasurer on Rs 80. In September he published his *Jiban-Charita*, a Bengali version of the lives of some learned men of Europe, compiled from Chambers's 'Biography'. There was great rejoicing in the house two months later when his wife presented him with the only son and heir. She afterwards gave



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

birth to four daughters. His joy, however, was soon marred when he lost another of his younger brothers, a darling of eight.

His interest in female education dated from about this time when he came into intimate contact with the Hon'ble J. E. Drinkwater Bethune, member of the Legislative Council and President of the Council of Education. Mr. Bethune started a girls' school in Calcutta and made him its honorary secretary, which post he filled with exceptional ability for twenty years. There were about fifty other girls' schools in Calcutta at the time, mostly the result of missionary effort; and they followed western principles. People had begun a furious agitation, finding that some of the pupils had embraced Christianity. Responding to popular demands, Mr. Bethune set up the school in 1849 to impart purely secular education. Its original name was Hindu Girls' School, subsequently changed into Bethune School to perpetuate the memory of its founder. Since then it has



been raised to a first-grade college. The college department admits girls of all ages and nationalities ; while the school is open only to girls of Hindu extraction, between six and eighteen years of age. The founder received hearty cooperation from some influential gentlemen, conspicuous among whom were Vidyasagar, Raja Radhakanto Deva Bahadur, Pundit Madan Mohan Tarkalanker, Ram Gopal Ghose, Sambhu Nath Pundit and Raja Daksina Ranjan. He himself contributed largely to the expenses, his sympathy being real and tangible. Hindus in general are exceedingly conservative in social matters and look upon all schemes of innovation with serious misgivings. It was no easy task that Mr. Bethune had undertaken. Yet in the face of opposition he made some genuine progress. He was not to be long connected with his cherished institution. In August 1851 while he was on a visit to a girls' school at Janai, some twelve miles from Calcutta, he was caught in a heavy shower of rain and chilled to



the marrow. This brought on a sharp attack of pneumonia, that before long cut his precious life short. On Vidyasagar devolved the task of making the institution a success. He treated the little girls tenderly, gave them valuable presents and prizes, and had a merry word for everyone.

He was now transferred to Sanskrit College as Professor of Literature. He joined the post on December 9, 1850, upon a clear understanding that he would be allowed to exercise the powers of a principal. At that time the College had no principal; his powers were exercised by the two secretaries. Vidyasagar thought, not without reason, that unless he possessed some real authority he would not be of much use there. He was forthwith asked by the Education Council to report on the working of the institution. There was a considerable falling off in the number of pupils. Knowledge of English becoming a recognised passport to preferment in the public service, there were no prospects for the Sanskrit-



knowing pundits. Before a week was over he submitted an exhaustive account of the existing mode of instruction, also suggesting better methods. His plan was to shorten the period of study by selecting better text-books and discarding useless works and to systematise everything. He it was who first advocated the use of Bengali books and the making of English a compulsory subject of study. All these proposals impressed the Council favourably.

Babu Rassomoy Dutta, the Secretary, was naturally offended when Vidyasagar, his subordinate, was required to draw up the report. Knowing that the time had come for his retirement, he prudently laid down the reins of office. In a few days the two secretaryships were abolished and in their stead was created the post of the principal. Vidyasagar became the first principal in January 1851, when about thirty.



CHAPTER III.

PRINCIPAL. SANSKRIT COLLEGE.

"The path of duty was the way to glory."

The elevation of Vidyasagar heralded the introduction of many salutary reforms. For the second time he set about his work in real earnest to improve the college. One of his very first cares was to enforce punctuality, for the professors had again fallen into their old ways. He had a pleasant way with the students who came to look on him with veneration. By his kind and gentle treatment he won over their hearts. He abolished corporal punishment which he always hated bitterly. Before his time the college was open to Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaidya castes. But under the sanction of the Education Council he began to admit Kayastha boys also. Some of the old, worm-eaten manuscripts of the library were



now printed. He next directed his efforts to better the economic condition. It had been a free institution; but he was soon authorised to charge tuition fee from all but the poor. Prolonged and exhausting mental labour produced brain complaint which afflicted him for years to come.

In April 1851 appeared his *Shishhushiksha Part IV* (subsequently called *Bodhodaya*) compiled from Chambers's "Rudiments of Knowledge" for the use of the girls of Bethune School. He published his famous elementary Sanskrit Grammar known as *Upakramanika* in November. This proved a great boon to all beginners. Along with the above was also printed *Rijupatha Part I*, a selection of easy prose and poetry pieces from Sanskrit works. His *Kathamala*, containing some fables in imitation of those of Aesop, at once attained great popularity. Next year appeared *Rijupatha Part II*, a Sanskrit prose and poetry selection. *Rijupatha Part III* and *Vyakarana Kaudumudi Parts I and II* came out in 1853 and



the third part in the following year. Gradually he introduced all these books into the Sanskrit College. English was soon made a compulsory subject of study in the higher classes.

1853 was lucky for his village Birsingha. It was in that year that he opened there a free day school, a free night school for the sons of tillers of the soil and a girls' school. Soon an infirmary was also set up. The total cost of maintaining these charities came to nearly Rs. 550, which he paid out of his own purse. He was now well off, for the authorities perfectly satisfied with his administrative success had raised his pay to Rs. 300. Besides this, from his writings he earned about Rs. 500 every month,—a tolerable fortune in those times for a gentleman of moderate wishes. But so liberal and open-handed was he that his expenses always exceeded his means.

His *Sakuntala*, a Bengali rendering in pure prose of the famous Sanskrit drama by Kalidas, appeared in December 1854.



By this time his style had considerably mellowed.

Next year the Government contemplating to open some aided English and Vernacular schools in Bengal asked him to outline the method of instruction to be followed and also to work out the details of the scheme. They highly valued the note he submitted and made him Special Inspector of Schools on Rs. 200 a month. He was thus entrusted with the additional task of establishing and inspecting the proposed schools in Nadia, Midnapur, Hugli and Burdwan. Again, agreeably to the instructions of the Court of Directors a normal school for training up teachers was set up in Calcutta in 1856 and he was put in entire charge of it.

One of the many anecdotes in evidence of his simplicity in dress may be inserted here. As inspecting officer he once visited a village school in the interior of Hugli. His renown had spread even to the place and people assembled in numbers to catch occasional glimpses of him. The roads



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

were all crowded, the doors and windows of houses were thronged with women and children. Some of the elderly ladies took their seats on the roofs, while others less lucky were standing by the wayside. They had to wait for about a couple of hours in the blazing sun. Even the intense heat could not mar their irrepressible curiosity. At last they heard repeated shouts of joy, then there was a murmur, succeeded by dead silence. Some men were approaching the institution. The ladies could not distinguish Vidyasagar from among his companions and began grumbling. One elderly lady, bolder than the rest, approached the foremost of the company and asked him whether the illustrious visitor had come. When the gentleman pointed him out for her, she uttered a cry of disappointment and said, "We have almost scorched ourselves to death only to see this coarsely dressed Uriya bearer ! He does not ride a coach ; he has no watch with him, neither does he wear *choga* and *chap-*



kan !' In fact, it was difficult to distinguish him from other people by his clothes. Yet to a discerning eye, his appearance was striking and memorable.

During the tours of inspection through the four districts he induced the leading men of the localities to open new schools. He travelled in palanquins. If he found any sick person on the roadside, he instantly picked him up. To the needy he was always clement.

At this time upwards of a hundred poor people were daily fed by him. This wide liberality, as has been said already, he inherited partly from his mother who was always solicitous for the comfort of others. It was to her the village folk came in all their joys and sorrows, fully assured that she would share in them, increasing the former and lessening the burden of the latter. She was often found walking about the village on her endless visits of charity, bringing happiness to hundreds of homes. No woman could be more hospitable. At noon



Bhagavati Devy took her stand near the gate and watched the passers-by with soulful eyes. Whenever she saw any hungry men, she with unfeigned warmth invited them to dinner and cheerfully set before them the best fare in her humble abode.

Warm-hearted though he was, he enforced strict discipline at college. In general lenient, he never relaxed the cords of discipline. If he saw any sign of insubordination, he checked it speedily, as he was not the man to spoil the boys by his lenity. But his wrath would vanish and he would in most cases forgive them, if the culprits were penitent and strove to make amends. He ruled them more by love than by fear.

He now entered upon what he considered his decisive life's work. It was his successful efforts to give the Hindu widows of higher classes an option to contract a second legal marriage. This is not the place for a detailed account of the movement ; it must suffice to note it with brevity, without inter-



ruption and as a whole, and to state in general outline the part that Vidyasagar played in it. In old days the widows either burned themselves in the funeral piles of their deceased husbands as the glorious crown of a life of self-sacrifice and devotion, or led strictly ascetic lives. Since the abolition of the practice of Sati in 1829, they generally passed a life of asceticism as enjoined by the Shastras. When Vidyasagar saw the hardships that some the virgin widows endured, his tender heart wept and he formed a resolve to take up their cause. The subject had engaged his attention from boyhood. A playmate of his lost her husband while Isvar Chandra was thirteen years old and this led him to determine to mitigate the sorrows of the unfortunate girls. Again, it has been seen how sincerely he grieved when in spite of his dissuasions his old professor married, soon to leave a girl-widow behind. Hence widows and woes were indeiibly associated together in his dreams.

A less authentic but credible report



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

declares that the inspiration came from his mother who once told him to see if a virgin widow could take a new husband under the Shastras. What is really certain is that coming to manhood he bent his mind to that subject and deeply pondered over it for years. He was not, however, the first to move in that direction. Some three or four hundred years before his agitation began, Raghunandana, the jurisconsult of Bengal, had tried to give his widowed daughter in marriage but had utterly failed. Again, a century back Raja Raj Ballav of Vikrampur in the district of Dacca wishing to remarry his widowed daughter had consulted the Pundits of Nadia. When they expressed their strong disapproval, he desisted. Maharaja Krishna Chandra Roy of Nadia, it may be noticed parenthetically, was of the same opinion as the Pundits. A Mahratta Brahmin of Nagpur and a Madrassi Brahmin had separately made like attempts twenty years before without success. Some of Vidyasagar's contem-



poraries—Babu Moti Lal Seal, a millionaire of Calcutta, one Shyama Charan Das, a wealthy ironsmith as well as the Chief of Kota (Rajputana)—had fruitlessly tried to alter that longstanding custom. Some of Mr. Derozio's pupils, who had discussed the question in their paper *The Bengali Spectator*, had also met with no better success. Without surrendering himself to despair at the failure of his predecessors, Vidyasagar devoted every spare hour to the study of the Shastras. One night he suddenly lighted upon a passage in *Parashara-Sanhita* and shouted with transport of joy, "I have found it at last !" He gave it an explanation which supported remarriage. The whole night he composed a pamphlet stating his view of the case, quoting that particular passage and commenting upon it. It was printed and distributed broadcast with the permission of his parents. This excited wide-spread consternation and alarm throughout the city and loud protests from the orthodox were not wanting. Soon



VIDYASAGAR

at the request of Vidyasagar a meeting of the learned Pundits was held in the palace of Raja Radhakanto Deva Bahadur. After some time the assembly broke up in murmuring confusion and no decision was arrived at. The Raja Bahadur publicly rewarded Vidyasagar with a pair of shawls. The people took it as tantamount to advocacy of remarriage. Shortly after they went in large numbers to the Raja to ask him if he was really a favourer of the movement. Now, this nobleman had great influence with the Hindu community and was not particularly willing to impair it. He saw himself in a fix but proved equal to the situation. Plucking up all his courage he put forward an explanation of his conduct. He had rewarded Vidyasagar, he replied in a manner worthy of a Pickwick, for his proved excellence in debate. He would, he continued, convene another meeting for the discussion of the subject, if they liked. The men eagerly welcomed the proposal and an early meeting was called. As it



closed in dismal failure, the Raja, to proclaim his neutrality and simplify matters, gave away a pair of shawls to the leader of the adverse party. It was transparently clear to Vidyasagar that he could expect no valuable assistance from that quarter. The agitation now spread like wild fire throughout Bengal and various protests and pamphlets were issued in no time. Several indignation meetings of the learned Pundits held in various districts declared against the proposed change. The champions of remarriage were not silent. There soon appeared two anonymous pamphlets *Braja-Bilas* and *Ratna-Pariksa*, supporting the newfangled view. Rumour fathered them on Vidyasagar. If this were true, it is to be regretted that he could condescend to scurrility. A third booklet *Vinaya-Patrika* was soon put out anonymously but generally attributed to the same source. A fourth pamphlet entitled "Whether widows ought to be married or not" followed, bearing Vidyasagar's name. This was written in



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

an easy, elegant, powerful style. It was immediately answered by more protests. Even the words of sage Parâshara fixed upon by Vidyasagar as sanctioning remarriage were construed by the learned Pundits in a different way. It seemed to them that he had purposely misread the lines. By then the agitation was not confined amongst the Pundits alone. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, the literate and the illiterate, were all drawn together by a common fear. Most of the vernacular periodicals published sharp criticisms. The famous bards of the day pilloried Vidyasagar. Even the peasants, fiddlers, hawkers, cabmen, all sang at their work ballads despising the uncanonical innovation. The weavers of Santipur (Nadia) wove satirical songs on the borders of ladies' cloth.

✓ An important development followed. When Vidyasagar saw that attempts at persuading his countrymen into his own way of thinking served no useful purpose, he altered his tactics and tried to convince the



rulers of the land. For this end he translated his two pamphlets into English and distributed them among his European acquaintances who were all high officials of the Government. These gentlemen, thinking that the Hindu society had become the hotbed of corruption and that emancipation of girl-widows would add to the glory and prestige of Government, at once instructed him to petition the Government of India. As a result, a petition was submitted on October 4, 1855. It was signed by Vidyasagar and one thousand other persons, including influential nobles, chief among whom were Maharaja Mahatab Chand Bahadur of Burdwan and Maharaja Shrish Chandra Roy Bahadur of Nadia. On November 17 a draft bill was introduced into the Imperial Legislative Council by Mr. J. P. Grant. In the course of his speech the Mover described in pathetic terms the hard life of a widow, who was not allowed to indulge in luxuries of any kind. In most cases, young Hindu widows fell into vice, the Hon. Member was pleased



to assert, and the practice of Brahmacharyya was, according to him, unnatural and absurd. He was, however, prepared to admit that the custom of the country had been universally against the marriage of Hindu widows amongst the higher classes and that the opinion of the Sadar Courts at all the four Presidencies of India was entirely unfavourable to the proposed change. None the less, he assured the public that he desired only a permissive law, as distinct from a compulsory law like that prohibiting Sati. After going through all its stages without difficulty, the bill received the assent of the Governor-General on the 26th July 1856 and passed into law.

Vidyasagar had now the enactment he sought, but his labours were not over. For four months none came forward to take the initiative. While the Rulers were with him, the sympathy of the general population was against him. The one thousand persons whose signature he had procured must have signed from love of novelty or



under a belief that nothing would come of it. Most of these signatories deserted him one after another, and tried to make a scapegoat of him. Whenever he was out in the streets, coarse abuses and savage threats were freely hurled at him. Some even went the length of attempting at his life, and he had a narrow escape from their violence. Without uttering a single complaint, and buoyed up by firm resolve, he continued to persuade and encourage the people. Joy filled his whole being when the first widow marriage was celebrated in Calcutta in December 1856, while the streets were lined with sergeants by way of precaution. He with some of his adherents was present at the ceremony, while others held back. One of them, Babu Rama Prasad Roy, the youngest son of Raja Ram Mohan, had promised his presence and purse. A few days before the marriage Vidyasagar had called on him to remind him of his word. The latter hesitatingly said, 'Doubtless, I favour the movement. You shall have



VIDYASAGAR

the money. What harm is there if I absent myself?" Vidyasagar's temper was up. His voice failed him, his heart swelled with indignation, his eyes flashed fire. But no desertion, no ingratitude, ever stirred him to vindictive measures. After a few minutes' silence of disdain he pointing to the portrait of Raja Ram Mohan, hanging on the wall, replied in a tone of bitter scorn, "Throw it away at once!" With that he left the house of the seceder, never again to set foot in it.

In this case, as in all subsequent cases, he had to pay the piper. To complete what he considered the noblest and most sacred work of his life, he ran heavily into debt. Luckily he lived long enough to pay it up.

Whilst other things had thus engaged his attention, he had been busy off and on with his pen. *Varna Parichaya*, an elementary reader, had appeared in April 1855, followed two months later by the second part. To him belongs the credit of having first classified the Bengali alphabet into



vowels and consonants. Now in July, 1856, when the Widow Marriage Act was passed, he printed his *Charitavali*, a collection of short biographical sketches of famous men of the West who had risen from poverty and obscurity to opulence and power.

His friend and patron Dr. Mouat, Secretary to the Education Council, now left for home on leave. Mr. F. J. Halliday, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1854—'59), entirely recast the educational policy of the province and abolished the Council of Education. In its place he was desired by the Court of Directors to constitute a Department of Public Instruction. Vidyasagar requested him to select a man of special distinction and great experience to control and direct the department. A young, untried civilian, Mr. Gordon Young, was finally chosen in 1855. Mr. Halliday stated that Mr. Young would be the nominal head of the department, while he himself would do everything ; and asked Vidyasagar to



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

oblige him by training up the new officer. He felt reassured and willingly met his wishes, for he was on terms of the most friendly intimacy with Mr. Halliday. On Thursdays he waited on His Honour who then conversed on various topics, political or otherwise. If he ever failed to turn up, he was sent for. He used to visit the Government House in his ordinary attire. A plain *dhuti*, a *chadar*, a pair of slippers, constituted his full dress. Being pressed, he put on the official costume for a few days. Once he said to Mr. Halliday with due deference but with decision, "May it please you, sir, this is my last visit. I feel myself ill at ease in this garb." His Honour knew that there was a noble soul under his usual crude garment and allowed him to call in any dress that suited him.

In January 1857 Lord Canning, the first Viceroy of India under the Crown, established the Calcutta University. Of the 39 members at its inception, only six were Indians and Vidyasagar was one of them.



Shortly at a meeting of the University a motion was brought forward for the exclusion of Sanskrit from the curriculum and the abolition of Sanskrit College. Vidya-sagar vigorously opposed the scheme and the motion was ultimately lost. He was appointed examiner of Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi and Urdu. He had also to examine the vernacular papers of the students of Fort William College.

For some time after the appointment of Mr. Gordon Young in 1855 all went on smoothly ; but soon difficulties began to spring up. When English was made a compulsory subject of study in the Sanskrit College, two vacant rooms in the Hindu College were required to hold the new classes. Vidyasagar saw Principal Sutcliffe who refused him the use of the spare rooms. He appealed to Mr. Young who, in turn, told him to call on the Principal of the Hindu College. As he did not like to be tossed to and fro like a tennis-ball, he left off his efforts. This rendered him obnoxious to the Director.



VIDYASAGAR

As Inspector of Schools Vidyasagar was called on to submit periodical reports of the institutions under him. A persistent tradition asserts that Mr. Young once told him to handle facts and figures in a way to present them in the most favourable light. He is said to have given nothing save a plain, unvarnished statement.

In the summer of 1857, again, when the Sepoys on a sudden mutinied and shook the authority of the Rulers to its foundation, the Sanskrit College was urgently requisitioned for quartering troops. Vidyasagar closed it for a few days and made over the building to the military authorities. This was done to safeguard the interests of the State and meet a political emergency. No slight was intended. Yet Mr. Young required him to explain why the college had been closed without his permission ! Perhaps he expected the pundit to act like the dutiful porter at an out-of-the-way railway station in India, figuring in one of Kipling's after-dinner yarns. This man



was told never to act without orders. So when a tiger entered the station, he promptly wired to head-quarters : "Tiger on platform ; eating station-master. Kindly wire instructions." The head of a college ought to have possessed some powers, as happily he now does, to act for himself in affairs of sufficient urgency.

Further, the Court of Directors in London in the memorable education despatch of 1854, rightly called the Charter of Education in India, had expressed a desire to sanction a considerable increase of expenditure for the spread of education. Agreeably to purport of that despatch, Vidyasagar had erected several schools in the districts under him, in his capacity of Special Inspector. Mr. Young called him to account for presuming to know the intentions of the Home Government better than he himself did and ordered him not to open any more seminaries. He, however, continuing to do so, the matter was referred to Mr. Halliday, who asking him to defer



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

his activities, submitted it to the Home Government. Their decision was in favour of Vidyasagar. With fresh zeal he went on founding new institutions. His triumph was but short-lived. A change of ministry at home led to a change of educational policy with regard to India. The Whig ministry under Palmerston which succeeded the Aberdeen ministry were constrained to curtail educational grants ; for the increased military establishment in India entailed a permanent additional expenditure of ten crores of rupees. Quite unaware of this and unconscious of the trouble that was brewing, Vidyasagar actuated by sincere desire for the national well-being set up several girl-schools in 1857 after speaking about it to Mr. Halliday. When Mr. Young refused to pass the bills Vidyasagar reported the matter to His Honour who referred it to the judgment of the Home Government. Shortly after a despatch of the Court of Directors dated 22nd June 1858 reached India. "We desire", wrote the



CHAPTER IV.

are now exposed, and that any account sanction any increase in any part of India with education without our previously obtained." This complication and necessitated. Long voyage greatly delayed the reply; meanwhile Vidyasagar had to pay the bills from his own purse, to get out of the tangle.

These and several other petty annoyances nearly took the life out of him. In spite of remonstrances from Mr. Halliday and other well-wishers, both European and Indian, he while still in the full vigour of his working powers, demitted his posts in November 1858, with an undisguised sense of relief. Thus ended the unfortunate duel, and Destiny apparently gave the victory to mediocrity.

Yet to the end of his days Vidyasagar continued to be an expert unofficial adviser



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

Two such men, who have lived and died for the Government of India, with all his short-
comings, lives in the thoughts of
the people, surviving the obliteration
of his name. Men should be treated with
dignity and respect. They are always con-
scientious and are of higher and nobler
type of humanity. This invariably develops
in them a refined sensitiveness of feeling.
They work night and day to benefit the
world and naturally expect that people of
weaker individuality should be amenable
to their superior force of will and decision of
character. Besides, the experience of many
ages proves that the free play of genius is
stifled under pressure of dull office routine.



CHAPTER IV.

AFTER RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE.

*"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite ;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or
night ;
To defy Power which seems omnipotent ;
To love, and bear ; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent ;
.....
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory."
P. B. Shelley.*

Now that he gave up service under Government, he had to work out his own destiny. Encumbered with heavy responsibilities, with incessant calls of charity upon him, he must task to the utmost his best energies to preserve the even balance of his mind and continue in the strict path



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

of duty. He had already more than his full share of the crosses and cares, yet he must pass through sterner trials. A man of popular sympathies as he always was, he must now shoulder the still heavier burden of his fellowmen's sufferings. Men of his stamp have no private life. To know what he was it is necessary to consider how he manfully met the manifold miseries of human life.

Sir James Colville, Chief Justice of Bengal, with whom he had formed a close friendship, advised him to pass the Law Examination and enrol himself as a pleader. Though in his youth he had taken a dislike to the bar, he deemed it well to revise and, if necessary, correct his opinion. For some days he studied his friend Babu Dwarka Nath Mitter, a rising practitioner of the time. But finding that his capabilities did not lie that way, he gave up the idea altogether.

Misfortunes do not come single. A calamity befell him in the death of his dear



old grandmother. The sradh ceremony was performed at Birsingha in orthodox fashion and in spite of his being the originator of widow marriages, nearly three thousand people assembled to partake of the sumptuous feast. The expenditure was necessarily heavy.

His only source of income was the Sanskrit Press and the Depository, where at first his own books were kept for sale, but soon the works of other authors were stocked as well. He turned to the firms to see if they were properly managed and if they could yield better profits. Dissatisfied with what he saw, he made his associate Raj Krishna Banerjee manager of the book-shop in December 1859 on Rs. 150 a month. Under his watchful eye the business prospered. But no income however large could satisfy the needs of one so charitably disposed. He bore the major part of the expenses on widow marriages and provided for the married couples and their families, who were generally excom-



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

communicated from society. His intimates realised his difficulties and hit upon a device for lightening the burden. A Bengali play *Bidhava-Bibaha Natak* (i.e., widow-marriage drama) was composed and staged for the first time early in 1859. Babu Keshab Chandra Sen, a prominent leader of the Brahmo Somaj, was the stage manager and his friends Babus Narendra Nath Sen, Protap Chandra Mozumdar, Krishna Vihari Sen along with others played the different parts. Vidyasagar, though he regarded the theatre with no friendly eye, was present on more than one occasion. By the charitable performance, however, he made no substantial gain.

He had yet another virtue, or rather *failing* as the unfeeling wiseacres would term it. He paid off the debts of other people. Whenever any person deep in debt appealed to him for relief he lent his aid. Thus he befriended the distressed to the extent of several thousand rupees, often getting into debt for it.



In June 1861 Harish Chandra Mukherji, founder of the "Hindu Patriot," died and its new proprietor Babu Kali Prasanna Singha, after conducting it at a loss, transferred it to Vidyasagar. The latter requested Kristo Das Pal, a youth of great promise, to take the editorial charge and handed over the proprietorship to a body of Trustees in July 1862. They made over the management to the willing and capable hands of Kristo Das who in a short time raised the paper to a position of great influence and prestige.

Here is another instance of Vidyasagar's talent for choosing the right person. Two years before he retired from official life, Sarada Prasad Ganguly, an ex-student of Sanskrit College, had solicited him for some means of subsistence. He had started for the sole benefit of this youth, who was hard of hearing, a Bengali weekly *Soma Prakash*. It came out on Mondays. Sarada Prasad was made publisher, while Vidyasagar wrote most of the articles. Madan



Mohan Babu was also a valued contributor. At the instance of Vidyasagar Sarada Prasad was later appointed Librarian to the Burdwan Raj, and as he himself could not issue the paper regularly and punctually he handed the editorship as well as the proprietorship to Pundit Dwarka Nath Vidyabhusan. He made it a complete success. It not only dealt with social and religious topics, but discussed in full all important political matters in chaste language. It was the first Bengali journal to criticise the measures of Government and educate public opinion. The earliest vernacular paper, "Bengali Gazette," had been started in Calcutta by Pundit Gangadhar Bhattacharji in 1815 and several others had soon followed. But for about forty years politics did not occupy any prominent place in them. It was reserved for Vidyabhusan to assist the rulers as well as the ruled by thoroughly ventilating the needs of the people and the intentions of the Government, thus promoting mutual knowledge.



AFTER RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE

In January 1860 Vidyasagar published in pamphlet form his contributions to the "Tattvabodhini Patrika" regarding the Mahabharata, but it did not prove profitable. Then in April next year appeared his *Sitar Banavas* (i.e., the immortal story of the banishment of Sita), a Bengali version in pure prose of Bhavabhuti's Sanskrit drama "Uttara Charita." It was written in four days and had a good sale. *Vyakarana-Kaumudi Part IV* was printed in 1862.

He sat on the committee appointed in August 1863 to consider the expediency of introducing the study of Sanskrit into the secondary schools of Bengal. The scheme received his whole-hearted support.

Towards the close of the year (November 1863) the Government appointed him visitor to the Wards' Institution. It was a hostel, under the direct control of the Board of Revenue, founded by Government for the residence of the rajas and zamindars' minor heirs who prosecuted their studies in the public schools of Calcutta. The report and

G. S. Sanyal



memoranda submitted by Vidyasagar were highly illuminating and almost all his suggestions were carried out. As regards one of them, the infliction of corporal punishment, he differed from Dr. (afterwards Raja) Rajendra Lala Mitra, Director of the institution, as also from other members of the committee appointed to investigate the matter. As he could not enforce his views, he resigned the visitorship in 1865.

His *Akhyanamanjari*, a Bengali reader for the use of young children, came out in 1864, followed four years later by the second and third parts.

It was mainly through the noble exertions of his friend Prof. Pyari Charan Sarkar of the Presidency College that the Bengal Temperance society was formed in Calcutta early in 1864. Vidyasagar along with many men of light and leading warmly supported the scheme. Many a brilliant youth of the land had contracted a love for drink. The inauguration of the Society was therefore hailed with rapture all over the



province. Spirituous liquors which were eating into the vitals of the people were entirely forbidden to the members of this institution. At the first meeting several gentlemen spoke bitterly against the vice. Vidyasagar was also requested to say something, but he declined with a negative shake of his head. He was not accustomed to make a speech in public.

On February 26, 1864 the Government put forth a proposal to remove the burning ghat from Nimtala and set up an engine crematorium outside the town. It appeared to Vidyasagar that Babu Ram Gopal Ghose, the renowned orator of Bengal, was the man to oppose the scheme. Knowing full well that Ram Gopal was devoted to his mother and never disobeyed her, he interviewed the old lady and convinced her of the inexpediency of the proposed measure. She then extracted a promise from her son to oppose it by all means. Though personally he felt no religious scruples against the scheme, he thus sided with the orthodox



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

and delivered an eloquent speech in the Town Hall. It was finally decided by Government that the ghat should remain where it stood, on the condition of its being remodelled upon a plan consistent with the requirements of sanitation.

In July 1864 Vidyasagar received a piteous letter written by his protege Michael Madhusudan Dutta from France. He had gone out with his family to England to study law two years back and after some time his Calcutta agent discontinued all remittance. His letters too remained unanswered. Alone with his family in a foreign land, surrounded by clamorous creditors, he was on the threshold of a French prison when it struck him to write to Vidyasagar for immediate assistance. Evidently he did not rely on rotten reed. By the end of August he received Rs 1500 from Vidyasagar who had procured this amount by loan. Rs 4500 more had to be sent to Europe on Mr. Dutta's account. He was called to the bar on November 18, 1866, despite all



malicious obstacles thrown in his way by a mean Bengali who would remain nameless. Baffled in his attempts he patiently awaited a more favourable moment to machinate against him. When Mr. Dutta returned from abroad in February next year and applied for enrolment at the Calcutta Bar, he again encountered serious difficulties. With the help of some influential patrons, especially Vidyasagar, he at last got himself enrolled as an advocate of the High Court.

Before his arrival Vidyasagar had kept a house furnished in European style for him. Inured to the plenty and comfort of restaurants abroad, he preferred the Spence Hotel. By and by his family returned from Europe, which increased his financial embarrassments. He had no good practice at the bar. He was, beyond doubt, a poet of no mean calibre, being the first to introduce blank verse in Bengali poetry, and his books fetched him good return. This did not suffice. Nursed in the lap



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

of luxury from childhood, he had early formed intemperate habits. Besides, he was extravagant in the extreme and lived beyond his income. Vidyasagar had to advance him Rs 4000 more. He had raised the whole amount of ten thousand rupees by loan on behalf of Mr. Dutta and as the latter did not repay a pice he was compelled to dispose of two-thirds of the 'Sanskrit Press' to satisfy the importunate creditors. Over and above this sum, the poet borrowed money from several other sources, which in time came to about Rs 40,000. At last the liberating angel Death came to his rescue in June 1873. The Milton of Bengal breathed his last in the General Hospital at Alipur.

This was not the only time when Vidyasagar ran into debt to relieve others. Once he borrowed Rs 7500 from Maharani Swarnamayi of Cossimbazar. Another time he secured a loan of Rs 25,000 from a member of the Paikpara Raj family. On several other occasions he raised thousands



of rupees by loan to save many insolvents from being driven out of their hearth and home. Most of them were never famous for their sense of gratitude. They never paid him back nor cared to see him again in their lifetime. Instances are known of persons who throve afterwards and could have easily paid him off, which really they never did. Paying back is double labour !

Vidyasagar's extravagant credulity sometimes made him a dupe. A book-seller of Uttarpara regularly and systematically took him in once a year by representing himself as a poor student of the Uttarpara school. For five years he wrote begging letters and working upon his feelings received by post all the books he wanted, which he sold off directly. It fell out that the Headmaster of the school paid Vidyasagar a visit and the latter took occasion to ask the former how that boy was faring. Of course the teacher could not tell him anything but promised to enquire into it on return. In a few days Vidyasagar was



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

undeceived. He could only scratch his head, finding his compassion misplaced.

Not content with satisfying the needs of those who prayed help, he would enquire of his neighbours whether all was well with them. If he came to know that they were in any way incumbered, he used his best endeavours to succour them. Whenever he went out he took the purse with him and if he came across any deserving person, he instantly helped him. Once while returning from a friend's at an advanced hour of the night he chanced upon an unfortunate loitering in the streets. When he learned that she had nothing to live upon on the morrow, he gave her some money, at the same time telling her with paternal solicitude to retire to rest. On another occasion when he was taking a turn with a friend of his in the Cornwallis Square, he found a Brahmin slowly coming back from his morning bath in the Ganges with a clouded face and weeping eyes. Stopping him, he began to interrogate. The Brahmin,



who had in vain applied to many people of substantial means, was naturally loath to speak to a man clad in coarse dress. Pressed hard, he replied that he had run into debt to give his daughter in marriage and had been sued by the creditor in the Court of Small Causes, and that he was too poor to repay the amount. His name, the number of the suit, the date for hearing the case, as well as other particulars were gradually drawn out of him. Finally dismissed without any visible sign of aid, he departed, feeling all the flatness of frustrated hope. Yet he had at last appealed to one who never disappointed anybody. By sending his friend to court Vidyasagar learnt that the man had been sued for Rs 2400. He deposited the amount in favour of the creditor, telling the court officials not to reveal his name. He further promised them that if the Brahmin offered any reward for the name of the benefactor, he would himself pay that sum if they respected his secret. On



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

the appointed day the unhappy man trudged his weary way to court. To his surprise and delight he found that the debt had been cleared. His utmost efforts failing to unearth the name of the rescuer, he poured forth his blessings and went his way with a light heart.

Vidyasagar having no other source of income than his publications was often saddled with heavy debts. As already noted, his expenses on widow-marriages and girls' schools started by him were considerable. Some of his friends, Indian as well as European, remained staunch and true and forwarded their promised contributions regularly. Even Sir Cecil Beadon, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1862-'67), sympathised with his noble efforts and sent liberal subscription. But all this was not enough to meet his ever-growing needs. Sir C. Beadon seeing his difficulties enquired whether he was willing to reenter Government service, but he replied in the negative. A year later the situation grew so grave



and critical that he requested His Honour to provide him with a suitable post. As no place could be found for him just then, he was told to bide his time. After some months he abandoned all thoughts of public service and during the next five and twenty years that he lived he never again tried for any appointment.

The Metropolitan Institution—now deservedly named Vidyasagar College in compliment to the illustrious person whose handiwork it is—merits especial notice. In 1859 the Calcutta Training School was founded by six gentlemen. A few months after Vidyasagar's retirement from official life he was made a member of the committee of management. He became secretary of the new committee formed in 1861. In the year 1864 the name of the school was changed into the Hindu Metropolitan Institution. Owing to the decease of the other members Vidyasagar became the sole surviving manager four years later. He took up the burden cheerfully and did his level



best to make the school a success. At the outset he had to spend some money of his own ; but under his able management it soon became self-supporting. The University results were also brilliant. In January 1872 Vidyasagar again formed a managing committee with himself, Dwarka Nath Mitter and Kristo Das Pal as members. The institution was affiliated to the Calcutta University up to the First Arts Examination in the same year, though not without great difficulty and bitter opposition. It was the first private enterprise of the kind and people harboured doubts whether a college entirely managed by Indian professors could impart higher education efficiently. The guardians of the boys perpetually vexed Vidyasagar with numberless questions. Losing all patience he told the students point-blank that they might all leave the college if they so desired. When they with one voice declared that they were best where they were, he assured them that he would go all lengths to make the college



AFTER RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE

as serviceable as possible. The boys shared his confidence ; they knew he was not a braggart. The best Indian professors were engaged on fair salaries. At the First Arts Examination of 1874 the college stood second in order of merit, which was doubtless an agreeable surprise for many. In 1879 it was raised to a first-grade college and three years later affiliation was granted for teaching the Law Course.

The successful working of the college under the direction of Vidyasagar was in no small measure due to the fact that he recognised merit at once. He chose the best teachers and professors and inspired them with his own zeal and tenacity of purpose. 'As he sought no personal profit, he could afford to pay them handsome remuneration. Corporal punishment was absolutely prohibited and teachers were instructed to try the effect of kind and gentle words. Those boys who did not yield to rectification were expelled. Once he was under the painful necessity of dismissing a teacher for flogging a boy, in defiance



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

of his express injunctions to the contrary. No tuition-fee was charged from the poor students. Some taking advantage of the fact defrauded him. Backed by the recommendation of a man of condition who testified to his indigence, a lad entered the school as a free student. Some time after his expensive, handsome clothes attracting Vidyasagar's notice, he learnt that he was a near relative of that rich man. Blazing up, he expelled the culprit, to make an example of him.

He often paid surprise visits and walked into the classes, deadening his footsteps, to listen to the teachers and to see if the boys were attentive. This had the beneficial effect of keeping them all mindful of their work. Nothing that could contribute to the happiness of his men was too trivial for his notice. When the old porter of the institution died of carbuncle and Vidyasagar came to know that no medical aid had been given him, he engaged a doctor for the college to prevent future negligence. Under his personal



supervision the institution flourished in no time and spread its branches in different quarters of Calcutta. Students flocked from all parts of the province and the classes were always full. The teachers drew the highest salary they could expect anywhere, the students received the best kind of instruction available in Bengal, the guardians had the satisfaction of seeing their boys progressing steadily, the public with admiring eyes watched his career with an interest which never slackened for a moment, the Government paid homage to merit by granting certificate and title of honour, and the founder enjoyed supreme peace and bliss emanating from conscientious discharge of duty. It is pleasing to record that the college has ably maintained its fair fame and upheld its salutary traditions to this day.

No less intimate was his connexion with the success of the Bethune School, reference to which has already been made in general terms. It has been seen how he acquitted himself with credit and distinction as hono-



VIDYASAGAR

rary secretary. A few more facts remain to be noticed. Vidyasagar always encouraged the pupils in divers ways. Early in 1865 Sir John Lawrence, Governor-General of India, and Lady Lawrence while distributing prizes to the successful and meritorious girls were highly delighted to award one of them a gold necklace, being a present from Vidyasagar. On this occasion the Hon'ble Justice Sambhu Nath Pundit also gave away a pair of gold bracelets.

Vidyasagar's fame had already reached abroad. So when Miss Mary Carpenter, daughter to a clergyman of Bristol, came to Calcutta, she was eager to cultivate his acquaintance. He was introduced to her by Mr. Atkinson, Director of Public Instruction, in November 1866, when she paid a visit to the Bethune School. The large-hearted lady had come in contact with Raja Ram Mohan when he was putting up in her residence at Bristol and had listened with rapt attention to the impassioned eloquence of Babu Keshab Chandra Sen. She had



imbibed from childhood a sentiment of love for the women of India and had resolved to give up her whole life to further the cause of female education. When she met Vidya-sagar she was charmed and they soon became fast friends. Whenever she went to the neighbouring girls' schools she requested him to bear her company. In accommodating her he once met with a sad accident. While returning from a visit to Uttarpara Girl-School the buggy he was riding overturned by chance and he was thrown violently to the ground, where he lay senseless. A crowd gathered round. Nobody stretched a helping hand. Miss Carpenter's vehicle which was following soon made its appearance and drew up close by. She promptly alighted to furnish necessary aid. By fanning the fallen man with her handkerchief and sprinkling water over the face, she brought him back to consciousness. But the injuries sustained were of a more serious nature. His liver was permanently affected and henceforth he constantly



VIDYASAGAR

suffered from weak digestion and poor appetite. He often resorted to healthy places but derived no appreciable benefit. This trouble ultimately carried him away from the world.

Next year (1867) a movement was started by Miss Carpenter to found a female normal school to train up lady-teachers for school and *zenana*. Sir William Grey, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1867—'71), Babus Keshab Chandra Sen, M. M. Ghose, Dwijendra Nath Tagore along with some other Europeans and Indians of light and leading declared for the scheme, while the Hon'ble Seton-Karr, Mr. Atkinson, the Hon'ble Justice Sambhu Nath Pundit, Vidyasagar, Raja Kali Kristo and others stoutly opposed it. The opposition held, and with good reason, that the project would speedily and hopelessly collapse as respectable Hindus would never allow their grown-up females to leave the *zenana* in order to work as teachers. The prophecy came true. The Government ultimately opened the



AFTER RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE

normal school, which had to be abolished after a year and a half for want of a sufficient number of pupils. Differences of opinion on this head as well as on others drove the Pundit to resign the secretaryship in 1869.

A brief account of the noble private library he possessed may be given here. It contained a valuable collection of books, all beautifully bound and arranged with studied care. His friends had free access to it and could take away books home. But some of them never cared to return them and shamelessly denied having taken any, when questioned. Once a rare and useful Sanskrit work, missing from his library, was found exposed to sale in a book-stall. The keeper innocently revealed the name of the seller. This happened to be the very acquaintance of his who had once removed the book but never returned it. Vidyasagar paid down the price demanded and from that time forward never trusted anybody with books. A particular friend of his once begging a loan of some historical works



VIDYASAGAR

from his library, he purchased a brand-new set for presentation.

Once a plutocrat of the city called on him while he was in the library. The visitor was surprised to see so many books all beautifully bound and exclaimed, "Sir, you must be crazy to spend so much in getting those books bound in morocco!" Vidyasagar simply smiled and passed on to other topics. After a while he began admiring the splendid shawl which the gentleman had on and inquired about the price. Highly flattered, the unsuspecting visitor replied that it being of real Benares make had cost him Rs. 500. "Why did you expend so large a sum," came the hard but happy retort, "when a common blanket might have kept you warm as well? Why wear that gold watch-guard when a strong thread might have alike served the purpose?" The caller realised that the tables had been turned upon him and had not a single word to say in reply. With a profound bow he retired in silence.



CSL

CHAPTER V

DARKER DAYS.

*"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."*

—Cowper.

Vidyasagar's troubles now came fast upon him. He felt the full bitterness of domestic sorrow. His iron constitution, which had carried him through so many hardships, also gave way and his strength failed. Despite his living the life of a chronic invalid ever since that accidental fall, his mind never ceased to grow and was always busy with plans for the active service of man. To soothe another's sorrow and further another's joy were the chief end of his purposeful life.

His doors were always wide open to all comers. He gave strict injunctions to the household not to prevent anybody from



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

visiting him. One day while he was resting after breakfast a stranger with an angry face came up to him and inquired after the master of the house. Business had taken him to Calcutta from his home in East Bengal. That morning he had been to some persons of mark and position, who had all indignantly repulsed him. Now he wanted to see if Vidyasagar was also a great man of that stamp. The host asked him if he had taken any food, but the man demanded an immediate interview. The host promised that as soon as he had partaken of the breakfast his prayer would be granted. Giving him a good meal, Vidyasagar revealed his identity and astonished him. He had expected to meet a self-important, purse-proud, matter-of-fact man, a grandeur, a pomp, a sham. He was agreeably surprised and shocked to find a really remarkable man worthy of veneration.

There were people, however, who took undue advantage of his leniency and called on him at all unseasonable hours. The



DARKER DAYS

story goes that certain men of Uttarpara once came to secure his recommendation for some vacant posts which they hankered after. He was then by the sick-bed of his youngest daughter, keeping watch over her. The medical attendant downstairs told the visitors of the critical condition of the child. Solicitous to promote their own interests, they would take no warning. The servant, through whom they sent him word, announced on return that his master was unable to receive them that day. Still they were not satisfied and, without further ado, began to ascend the stairs. Hearing the footfalls, Vidyasagar hurriedly left the sick-room and rebuked them roundly. "You know only to consult your own convenience," he went on with a sternly condemning accent, "but I cannot indulge this demand for an interview when I am so busy; better come at a propitious moment." At this chilling rebuff the roisterers hung down their head in abashed silence and dropped off pell-mell.

In 1866 a bill was introduced into the



VIDYASAGAR

Legislative Council for the alienation of *Devatra* (or Hindu religious endowment) property. The Board of Revenue sought the opinion of Vidyasagar on the head. He argued with great cogency that the general practice of the country as well as the spirit of the Hindu Law were against the proposed legislation. His sound and elaborate defence of the existing system convinced the rulers who suffered the bill to drop.

Towards the middle of the year Raja Pratap Chandra Singha of Paikpara, one of the principal supporters of girl-schools established by Vidyasagar, fell severely ill at Kandi (Murshidabad), his ancestral home. Vidyasagar hurried up to that place with Dr. Mohendra Lal Sarkar. The patient was removed to Paikpara where he expired on July 19. Vidyasagar was overwhelmed with sorrow, for he loved the Raja very dearly. On his demise the condition of the estate was deplorable. It was going to be put up to auction for arrears of land revenue.



DARKER DAYS

CSL
35

Taking the minor sons of the late Raja with him, Vidyasagar called on Sir Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant-Governor, and earnestly prayed him to save the property. His Honour had the generosity to place it under the Court of Wards.

About this time a fearful famine broke out in Orissa and the southern part of Bengal. It was but partly due to scarcity of rainfall. Myriads died for want of a morsel of rice. Those who left their homes to avoid starvation succumbed to hunger on the way. The Government strove hard to alleviate the sufferings but their measures fell far short of the requirements. Vidyasagar promptly left for the scene of devastation, opened several relief camps and fed about one thousand people a day for months together. His strict injunctions to the workers were to see that the sufferers wanted for nothing. He grudged no expense, however large, to lend a hand to the needy. Such unselfish exertions attracted the notice of Government. They warmly



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

acknowledged the value of his signal services in a letter addressed to him some months later.

Early in 1867 he visited Birsingha and provided separate houses for his brothers, sisters as well as his only son Narayan Chandra and settled monthly allowances in proportion to their wants. They had been constantly quarrelling and Vidyasagar having failed to keep them peaceful and united, was at last compelled to arrange for their separate board and lodging.

On January 6, the Hon'ble Justice Sambhu Nath Pundit, the first Indian judge of the Calcutta High Court, passed away. Vidyasagar was deeply affected as he was one of his best comrades and a staunch advocate of widow marriage and female education. Again, on April 19 Raja Radhakanto Deva Bahadur died at Brindaban. Though he was for all practical purposes against the marriage of Hindu widows, he was a firm supporter of female education. He did his utmost to revive



Sanskrit learning and the Sanskrit Dictionary *Sabdakalpadrum* is his supreme claim to enduring fame. His death moved Vidyasagar sincerely.

In July he married his eldest daughter Hemalata Deby to Gopal Chandra Somajpati of Nadia. About this time appeals were put forth in the Hindu Patriot as well as other papers inviting public contribution to indemnify Vidyasagar for his heavy debts on account of widow marriages. He was then at Birsingha and knew nothing of the appeal. When he returned to the city and heard of the fact, he at once notified that he himself would be able to settle his debts in course of a few years.

Babu Ram Gopal Ghose, the renowned orator of Bengal and an indefatigable social and political reformer, departed the world on the 21st January, 1868. Vidyasagar felt the loss keenly. Two months later B. Sarada Prasad Roy, Zamindar of Chaudhary (Burdwan), breathed his last. This man, who was issueless, had once



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

take an adopted son. Following the advice of Vidyasagar, whom he venerated, he laid aside the desire and established an infirmary and a charity-school, thus earning the heartfelt gratitude of the villagers. His loss was deeply mourned.

About the middle of the year the residents of Ghatal (Midnapur) wishing to set up a High School there applied to Vidyasagar for donation. He paid the whole amount of Rs. 500 for which they had appealed to the public. His purse was always open to applicants in any good cause.

There was now a family quarrel when Dinabandhu laid claim to a lion's share of the Sanskrit Press and the Depository. Vidyasagar was in favour of getting the matter settled amicably, but his brother wanted to take it to the law court. After strenuous efforts they came to an agreement to submit their dispute to arbitration. Here an unexpected happened. Dinabandhu agreed relinquishing all claims—claims of the simplest kind—to the property. He



did not dismiss the matter from his mind so soon. He would not any more accept the monthly allowances from his elder brother ; but the latter continued to help the family in secret. In this connection it is worth noting that it was for this brother that Vidyasagar had once most unwillingly approached the Lieutenant-Governor. Dinabandhu wanting a deputy-magistracy requested him to do the needful. Overcoming his reluctance he went to the Governor for the purpose. Several times he came back without speaking a word. At length pressed hard by Dinabandhu he one day said to the Governor, "I have something to say ; on many occasions I tried to speak out but failed owing to bashfulness." Despite his efforts His Honour did not succeed to draw him out. When next he called, His Honour said, "You must open your mind to me or I shall confine you." Vidyasagar spoke slowly with downcast eyes and in a week Dinabandhu received the berth he wanted.



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

Next year Babu Hara Chandra Ghosh, a judge of the Small Causes Court, passed away. As he was one of the staunch supporters of female education, he was keenly missed.

About this time Vidyasagar induced his personal friend Dr. Mohendra Lal Sarkar to try the efficacy of homeopathic drugs. Dr. Berigny, the celebrated homeopathist, had arrived two years before and had Dr. Rajendra Nath Dutta, a pupil of Dr. Tonnerre, for his coadjutor. The two drove for some time a roaring practice. Dr. Dutta healed Vidyasagar of his painful brain disease. Raj Krishna Banerji was also successfully treated by him. These two cases in particular, which allopathy had pronounced incurable, convinced Vidyasagar of the superiority of the new science and he began to persuade Dr. Sarkar, who had a few years before openly denounced homeopathy as a system of quackery, to adopt this treatment. A few other cases cured by Rajendra Babu, as also a careful perusal of

Morgan's *Philosophy of Homeopathy*, at last made him a convert to the new system. He was soon to become the best Indian homeopath of the day. Vidyasagar himself acquired a tolerable knowledge of the science and used to treat simple cases. He purchased several volumes of works and studied them. Many poor people received medical aid at his hands. He wanted to popularise these drugs since they were cheap, yet potent.

In later years he used to repair to Burdwan to recuperate his health, it being then one of the best sanatoriums in Bengal. Several times he was an honoured guest of Babu Pyari Chand Mitra ; afterwards he lodged in a rented house. His cook, to whom he was warmly attached, generally accompanied him. Once he took a beggar woman to task for coming so often to ask charity. Vidyasagar, being within earshot, accidentally overheard this and forthwith pensioned off the old servitor. He never suffered anybody to turn a beggar out of doors.



VIDYASAGAR

In 1869 when the malarial fever first made its appearance in Burdwan and decimated it, he opened a charitable dispensary in his house and those who could not come were supplied with medicines at their own doors. He was sorely hurt when he saw that though the disease was causing great havoc among the people, the civil surgeon turned his back to appeals for help and ignored the prevailing distress. A violent hater of apathy and *laissez-faire*, he at once came down to Calcutta and interviewed the Lieutenant-Governor who was pleased to remove the callous surgeon and post a sympathetic medical officer in his place, directing him to take action for coping with the epidemic. Returning to his work, Vidyasagar did all he could to prevent further ravages of the fever. He took medicines with him from door to door, and supplied the patients with diet. Clothes to the value of Rs 2,000 were freely distributed by him. Vigorous exertion, both on the part of the rulers as well as the



DARKER DAYS

CSL
103

ruled, at last brought the disease under control.

In one of these periodical journeys to the town he paid a rupee to a famished but intelligent-looking beggar lad who wanted just a pice to buy food. With the greater portion of the rupee he began to deal in mangoes. By degrees he had some capital and opened a small general store. Two years after when Vidyasagar alighting from the railway train was proceeding towards his quarters, he was hailed by a lusty boy who invited him to his shop. Seeing him hesitating, the child blind with grateful tears, narrated how his timely generosity had placed him in the way of gaining an honest and independent livelihood and changed the whole current of his life.

While he had been engaged in saving the lives of the poor from the clutches of malarial fever, he had composed *Bhranti-Bilas*, a beautiful rendering of Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors. The gay, lively humour of the original has lost nothing of its force



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

in the translation. Shortly he sent *Ramer Rajyabhisheka* (coronation of Rama) to the press. While a portion was printed he heard that another book on the subject by Babu Shashi Bhusan Chatterji had already been put forth. He directly stopped the publication of his own work. During the same year he brought out a correct edition of Kalidas's *Megha-Duta* with the annotation of Mallinath.

In March 1869 his house at Birsingha with everything in it was destroyed by fire. Fortunately no lives were lost. He hastened home to provide for the rebuilding of the place. Shortly after he was again there, intending to celebrate the marriage of a widow. The bridegroom had implored his aid which he had gladly promised. But when some respectable men of the locality pointed out to him the impropriety of that particular union, he assured them that the arrangement would not be carried out. At dead of night two of his younger brothers along with a few other people performed the



ceremony without giving him any notice of their intention. As he could not keep his word though through no fault of his, he left the village with an aching heart vowing never to return again. Some twenty years after he received by post a pamphlet describing the pitiable condition of the old, familiar place. So moved was he that he purposed to visit it and even gave orders for the repair of his house. But his dangerous illness prevented him from breaking his resolution. Sickness is sometimes sent to us to stand us in good stead.

In August 1869 he gave away the Sanskrit Press Depository to Babu Braja Nath Mukherji under circumstances worth noting. Dissatisfied with its working, he gave out that he would make a free gift of it to anybody who came forward to accept it. Braja Nath, one of the audience, expressed his willingness and the next moment the property was his. The news spread quickly and the following day somebody offered him Rs 10,000. Vidyasagar who



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

had once plighted his word would not lightly break it even for a crore of rupees.

In February next year Dr. Durga Charan Banerji, with whom he had many ties of comradeship and old association, left the world. As the doctor was a great help to him in relieving the sufferings of the distressed, so he, on his part, got him out of many difficulties. A few months before his death, for instance, he sought the assistance of Vidyasagar when his son Surendra Nath Banerji was declared unfit to enter the Indian Civil Service on the alleged ground of having exceeded the age limit. Acting on his counsel he sent Surendra Nath's horoscope to England, which solved the point. After his death when the family quarrelled with bitter acrimony over the heritage and went to the law court, Vidyasagar stood up as an umpire and made up the dispute to the entire satisfaction of all parties. Again, when Surendra Nath lost government service, he provided him with a professorship in his own college.



On August 11, he availed himself of the first opportunity of celebrating a marriage in the family under Act XV of 1856. His only son Narayan Chandra aged 21 years was wedded to Bhava Sundari Devy, 16 years old. After the death of her first husband, her mother had taken her to Birsingha for remarriage. Vidyasagar having fixed upon a bridegroom wrote to his brother to send the bride to Calcutta. Shortly he received a letter from his son expressing an eager desire to marry her himself. Though some members of the family opposed the proposal, Vidyasagar stood by his settled convictions. The alliance was early solemnised.

Towards the end of the year Bhagavati Devy made a halt at Benares on the way back from a pilgrimage. Thakurdas, who had been residing there since 1865, asked her to keep him company. "I must now return home," she replied, "to look after my poor acquaintances. Wherever I live I shall turn up in time and die here before



you." Her words were prophetic. Serious illness of Thakurdas hastened her to the sacred city before five months were over. He soon struggled back to life, but of a sudden she was attacked with cholera and died at his feet in a few hours. Vidyasagar, who was at Calcutta and could not attend the death-bed, experienced the most poignant grief and led a secluded life for months together. The mourning was observed for full one year.

About this time Maharaja Satish Chandra Roy Bahadur of Nadia passed away. Like his father Maharaja Shrish Chandra, he too revered Vidyasagar and joined in all the social movements of the time. On his part the Pundit also gave sound and sincere advice whenever any knotty problem had to be unravelled and the Nadia Raj called for assistance.

Next year (1871) he published new editions of Uttara-Charita and Abhijnana-Shakuntala with his masterly prefaces and annotations. Besides these he issued correct



editions, without annotation, of Shishupala-Badha, Kadambari, Kiratarjjuniya, Raghu-Vansa and Harsa-Charita. Three selections from standard English authors were also put out by him.

It was about this time that the holy saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa with some of his devotees came to visit Vidyasagar. Two of the greatest souls of the age met and rejoiced in each other's company. They entered into an entrancing conversation and the audience thoroughly enjoyed "the feast of reason and the flow of soul," which they had naturally anticipated from such a meeting. After partaking of some light refreshments which opportunely arrived at that instant from Burdwan, the sage took his departure.

Contemporaneously with the widow-marriage movement Vidyasagar had organised another agitation to alter the custom of taking a plurality of wives as a means of subsistence. This practice of unrestricted polygamy among the Kulin Brahmins of



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

Bengal gave rise to many evils. Vidya-sagar's attention was first drawn to the subject by the sorrowful tales of a female relative of his, who had been ruthlessly deserted and neglected by her nominal husband wedded to several other wives. He assured her that he would do his best to root up that custom. On the 27th December 1855, about a month after the introduction of the Remarriage of Hindu Widows Bill into the Imperial Legislative Council, he submitted to the Government of Bengal a petition signed by 25,000 persons who were headed by Maharaja Mahatab Chand Bahadur of Burdwan and other leaders of the community. In the course of the next year several other petitions were presented, subscribed by the highly respectable Pundits of Nadia, Calcutta and other places as well as by Maharaja Shrish Chandra Roy Bahadur of Nadia, the Raja of Dinajpur, and several other influential persons. But no legislative measures were adopted by Government



as they were busied with the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny. The subject was revived early in 1866 when things had resumed their normal course. Twenty-one thousand persons under the leadership of Maharaja Satish Chandra Roy Bahadur of Nadia, Raja Satya Saran Ghosal of Bhukailas, Raja Pratap Chandra Singha of Kandi and other nobles, memorialised the Government of Bengal. Two months later a deputation of the reforming party waited on Sir C. Beadon, the Lieutenant-Governor, who promised his best support. The Imperial Government, however, suggested that some further expression of public opinion was desirable before having recourse to legislation and that a more exhaustive inquiry should be prosecuted. Sir C. Beadon appointed a committee to mature a scheme which would stamp out the evil without, on the one hand, affecting the general liberty possessed by all Hindus of taking more than one wife, or on the other, giving express sanction to that liberty



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

by an enactment. The committee found it impossible to suggest a workable scheme. Further, a despatch from the Secretary of State urged caution and carefulness, as a large majority of people had not yet committed themselves to any opinion.

Baffled twice, Vidyasagar now entered on a new course of action. He strained every nerve to check the evil by force of education and social opinion. With this view he published a pamphlet in July 1871. Pundit Taranath Tarkavachaspati, of whom we have already caught a glimpse in a preceding chapter, and other inflexible opponents of reform, soon issued a booklet to refute Vidyasagar's arguments. In answer to this the latter published another paper against polygamy. This was followed by some satirical pieces from both the angry parties. Tarkavachaspati and Vidyasagar parted company, nevermore to meet during the rest of their days. Thus ended a friendship that had once bid fair to be lasting.



The inevitable controversy that raged for some time had important and far-reaching results. It drilled the mind of the community for the gradual abolition of the practice. Like other great men, Vidyasagar was partly the child of his age and partly its creator. While he fell in with the temper of the time, he did what in him lay to give a new direction to the thoughts of men and prepare a field for the work of reconstruction.



CSL

CHAPTER VI.

LATER LIFE.

*"Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of Misery ;
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on."*

P. B. Shelley.

A man who girds up his loins for noble action would scarcely find much respite even towards the fag-end of his checkered life. Even in advancing years and declining health, he has to stick manfully to his work and do the battle of life with unbroken spirit, sustained by the consciousness of compassing his country's good. Vidyasagar was no exception to this general rule.

In January 1872 his second daughter Kumudini Devy was married to Aghor Nath Chatterji of Rudrapur (Twenty-four Pargannas). About this time Narayan



LATER LIFE

CSL
115

Chandra so much offended him that he was compelled to cut up all connection with the erring son. Dinamayi Devy felt the unnatural separation most keenly and tried to effect a reconciliation without success. The offence must have been serious seeing that it dried up the fount of paternal affection from such a large heart as that of Vidyasagar. He whose eyes brimmed over with tears at the slightest distress of strangers must have had good reason when he became so severe towards his only son. Yet he always gave willing aid to the wife and children of Narayan Chandra.

On the 15th June of this year the "Hindu Family Annuity Fund" was established with the object of giving people of small means an opportunity of making provision after their death for their near relations. To start with it received liberal donatives from some men of substance. The Paikpara Raj, for instance, contributed Rs 2500. For the first two years Vidyasagar and the Hon'ble Justice Dwaraka Nath Mitter



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

were trustees to the fund ; but on the death of the latter in February 1874 Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore and the Hon'ble Justice Romesh Chandra Mitter filled his place.

Vidyasagar was connected with the Annuity Fund till the end of 1875, when he severed his connection finding that certain irregularities had crept into the system. Seeing that his colleagues were indifferent and neglected the true interests of the subscribers and his advice was flouted, he resigned the thankless post. In a long letter, which was afterwards printed, he communicated his reasons to the other Directors. The style of the note is spirited, vigorous and highly argumentative and evinces much originality. A little later the two remaining Directors also gave up their office and the company had to ask help of Government.

A most heart-rending calamity overtook Vidyasagar when his eldest son-in-law Gopal Chandra Somajpati died of cholera



early in 1873, leaving behind a widow and two little sons. He made the widowed daughter mistress of his household and the two boys were educated by him with loving patience and tender care. His teaching fell on fruitful soil. The elder of the two, Suresh Chandra Somajpati, was the capable editor of the well-known Bengali monthly *Sahitya*, and was also distinguished for his powers of oratory.

A disagreeable incident took place early in 1874. On the 28th January Vidyasagar went to visit the library of the Asiatic Society in company with two of his friends who wanted to see the Indian Museum. Both these institutions were then located in one and the same building. Vidyasagar, after his custom, wore plain *dhuti*, *chadar* and a pair of Indian slippers. The other two were dressed in the fashion of the day and had on shoes of English pattern. When they reached the gates of the place the porter told Vidyasagar to put off his shoes, while his friends were let in with shoes on.



He felt so much affronted that he returned home with his companions, without a word of remonstrance. A few days later he wrote to the Secretary of the Indian Museum enquiring whether they had made any rules in respect of Indian shoes and remarking that any such petty regulation would fetter the usefulness of the Society, discouraging the resort to it of those eminent persons who preferred wearing Indian shoes. It is to be regretted he received no satisfactory answer.

About this time he had a difference with Sir George Campbell, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1871—'74), concerning the educational policy. Giving effect to the measures inaugurated by Lord Mayo, the Viceroy, His Honour after introducing thoroughgoing changes in all other departments under him turned his attention to the seats of learning. His aim was no doubt commendable, but in some respects he was rather moving too fast. Precipitate changes and drastic reforms bring nobody any good. He lowered the status of the Berhampore,



Krishnagar and Sanskrit Colleges from the first to the second grade, thinking that public opinion did not demand colleges of higher grade. The opening of primary or indigenous schools cannot be a sufficient reason for curtailing high-class education. Next, by abolition and absorption of certain professorships he wanted to make a monthly saving of Rs. 650 from the establishment charges of the Sanskrit College. With this view he invited the opinion of Vidyasagar and other leading men. Vidyasagar opposed the revolutionary measures but while publishing a notice in the Calcutta Gazette of May 1872 regarding the proposed changes, the Government stated that Vidyasagar had been consulted. From this people naturally argued that he had given his support to the policy of retrenchment. He requested His Honour through the Private Secretary to remove the erroneous impression from the public mind. In reply he received a letter from the Private Secretary in which he was completely exonerated. Nothing beyond



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

this was done. He was therefore compelled to write in the columns of the "Hindu Patriot," clearly explaining the parts he had played. At this the Government took great umbrage and some of his publications were forthwith excluded from the list of prescribed text-books for schools in Bengal. This decisive and vengeful action involved him in heavy material loss. The fact that he gave his opinion frankly and independently ought to have told in his favour rather than against him.

Extreme brain-fag combined with too numerous bereavements that he suffered considerably telling on his declining health, he was advised to resort to some healthy place and lead for a few months at least a strictly secluded and retired life. He rented a plot of land very close to Karmatar (Santhal Pargannas). It wore a somewhat jungly appearance and the savage Santhals were the only people who lived near about. He erected a snug bungalow and planted some fine trees in the compound. His



Santhal neighbours were very honest and truthful and delighted in his company, finding him benevolently disposed. Kind and gentle treatment conquers even the savages and it is not surprising that they should reciprocate his feelings. As he supplied them with food and clothes and helped them with medicines in their sickness, so they too gave expression to their sense of gratitude. Sometimes they made him presents of cucumber, brinjal and gourd. A poor man having nothing else to offer brought in a cockfowl. He produced the sacred thread and gently told him that as he was a Brahmin by caste he could not accept the gift. The man burst into tears. Finding him disconsolate and profoundly touched by the cordiality of his intention, Vidyasagar received the bird, only to set it at liberty after he had sent the Santhal away satisfied. Spending a few happy months in this abode of sunshine and peace, he returned to Calcutta.

Such halcyon days never last long.



VIDYASAGAR

Early in 1874 the Hon'ble Justice Dwarka Nath Mitter, one of his best friends and compeers, left the world at the age of 41. The loss of such an intimate weighed upon his heart. Towards the middle of the next year his health continuing to decline he thought it high time to draw up a will in which disinheriting his first-born he settled the property on other lawful heirs. The disposition which he made of his belongings is indicative of his large-heartedness inasmuch as we find that very few were forgotten. He must have had grounds for severity towards his son, for his whole nature was opposed to caprice and injustice. However this may be, Narayan Chandra afterwards came into the estate agreeably to the decision of the Calcutta High Court where he had preferred a suit.

A month later Vidyasagar solemnised the marriage of his third daughter Vinodini Devy with Suryya Kumar Adhikari, a graduate of the Calcutta University and teacher of Hare School. Vidyasagar soon



made him Secretary to Metropolitan Institution and afterwards he had the fortune to occupy the chair of the Principal.

Towards the latter part of the year death struck down another of his dear friends Prof. Pyari Charan Sarkar, founder and soul of the Bengal Temperance Society. The sense of isolation was deepened by another calamity. On the 11th April 1876 his old father, Thakurdas, who had been residing in Benares for years, gave up his mortal life. It was a terrible shock to him and tears rolled down his worn cheeks for months together. He observed the mourning and performed the last rites of the departed strictly in accordance with Hindu custom.

It was during this year that he contributed Rs 1,000 to the Indian Association for the cultivation of Science established by Dr. Mohendra Lal Sarkar. The construction of his new house at Brindaban Mullick Lane was completed by the end of the year. The new building with the large compound



full of shrubs and trees cost him a large sum. Early next year he removed there with his library, intending to rent a desirable house in the vicinity to accommodate other members of the family. Failing to find out a suitable lodging he at last took them all in. Shortly he married his fourth daughter Sarat Kumari Devy to Kartic Chandra Chatterjee, both of whom henceforward boarded and lodged with him. It was in this year that Sir Richard Temple, the Lieutenant-Governor (1874-'77), was graciously pleased to grant him a certificate of honour, "in recognition of his earnestness as leader of the widow-marriage movement, and position as leader of the more advanced portion of the Indian community."

His health now broke down altogether, and he was reduced to skeleton. He frequented some healthy places, Karmatar being his favourite resort. Wherever he was a kind of restless, heart-eating anxiety about his educational institutions never left him. Neither could he refrain from



his usual acts of charity. In this way three long years rolled away.

On the New Year's day of 1880 he was invested by Government with the Companionship of the Order of the Indian Empire. He had always been averse to titular distinctions but in deference to the wishes of his friends he accepted the honour.

His *Rijupatha Part III*, which had been a text-book for the last sixteen years, was excluded from the list in 1882 and he suffered heavily. Two years later one of his closest friends Rai Kristo Das Pal Bahadur, the great orator, politician and journalist of Bengal, resigned his being. He now left for Cawnpur to seek change of air, but returned to Calcutta only after a few days' absence. He was in the highest of spirits when a student from his college topped the list of successful candidates at the B. A. Examination (Philosophy, Honours) of 1885. A branch Metropolitan School was opened at Burabazar next year and another at Bowbazar the year following. A branch



VIDYASAGAR

CSL

school had also been started at Shyam-pukoor some years back. The new college building was ready for use by the end of 1886 and was formally opened in January next. The purchase of the site and the erection of the stately edifice cost him a lac and a half of rupees.

In 1885 he sold his remaining one-third share of the Sanskrit Press to his friend Raj Krishna Banerji for Rs 5,000. The money went a great way to pay off old scores. In monetary concerns he was always strict and honest. While Principal of the Sanskrit College, the Government had advanced him about Rs 4,000 to publish some books on Arithmetic, History and other subjects and sell them at popular prices. As owing to several causes he failed to perform the task, he reimbursed the money with interest when they had forgotten all about it.

Towards the middle of the year Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore and his younger brother Raja Sourindra Mohan



Tagore quarrelled over the patrimony and executed a deed of arbitration in favour of Vidyasagar. The latter examined all the papers in connection with the property, but finding it difficult to adjust the quarrel informed the disputants of his inability to put things straight.

In December he took away all his publications from the "Sanskrit Press Depository" and started a shop of his own called the Calcutta Library in Sukea Street. About this time he came in contact with Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutta, of the Civil Service, who was then translating the Rigveda. Mr. Dutta was a frequent visitor during his illness. Once Vidyasagar promised him assistance in that great work if he got a little better. This desire was never gratified.

On August 13, 1888 his beloved wife Dinamayi Devy ended her earthly career. The old man thus lost his last comfort in life and was inconsolable. Constant grief told on his health and his temper. He



was not to survive her long, as his days were numbered. Two months before the mishap he had received a moving letter from his son craving forgiveness but had remained as cold and relentless as ever. After the death of his mother, Narayan Chandra addressed a second letter to him which also failed to mollify his heart. During the last few days of his life, however, Vidyasagar allowed him to put up in the same house and attend his sick-bed.

It was about this time that his son-in-law Suryya Kumar Adhikari, Principal of the Metropolitan Institution, was relieved of his office. The post was then offered to Dr. (afterwards Sir) Gurudas Banerji who respectfully declined on the ostensible ground of inability. Vidyasagar now visited the college personally, often in a palanquin when too weak to walk.

In April 1890 he refounded the high school at Birsingha and named it after his departed mother. His bowels complaint from which he had been sorely suffering for



LATER LIFE

CSL
129

the last six years now grew very serious. Incessant hard work and the loss of his beloved friends and kinsfolk aggravated the malady. He was advised by his medical attendants to leave the town and its surroundings. In December he left for French Chandernagore where he showed signs of improvement. From time to time he paid flying visits to places in the neighbourhood. Once he with his younger brother Sambhu Chandra rambled to the house of a Brahmin of Bhadreswar. The host's son, a leper, offered him tobacco prepared by his own hands. Without a moment's hesitation he accepted the *hooka* and began smoking with undisturbed serenity. On the way back his brother remonstrated with him on his objectionable conduct. "God forbid," interrupted he, in an accent that savoured of reproach, "suppose you or I were a leper ; how would we act ?" A cynic might have smiled at the simplicity of his reasoning. Sambhu Chandra, having nothing to



VIDYASAGAR

say in reply, maintained a respectful silence.

Early in 1891 he was requested by Government to give his opinion touching the age of consent on the part of females. A bill had been introduced in the Legislative Council to modify the law on the subject. Vidyasagar came down to Calcutta for a week and after consulting the *Shastras* submitted a scheme of his own which would give adequate protection to child-wives without in any way running counter to religious usages. There is no need to pursue here the details of the movement ; suffice it to state that his suggestions which aimed at discouraging child-marriage were not acceptable to Government. They passed the bill without materially modifying its provisions.

This was the last public act of his eventful life and though he toiled in vain to convince the rulers, he was certainly not to blame. Protracted illness and the infirmities of old age prevented him from setting on



CSL
131

LATER LIFE

foot a wide-spread agitation. Still it must be generally admitted that he did all that could be reasonably expected of a man out of health and devitalised. He rendered an essential service to his country by pointing out the best path to follow.



CSL

CHAPTER VII.

HOMEWARDS.

"A Power is passing from the earth."

—Wordsworth.

The great are never born to die. Their works, their teachings, their character, make them immortal. Dust returns to dust. Death cannot lay his cruel hands on the soul; the dissolution of the body cannot cast it into the limbo of oblivion. Death does not level or equalise all. Men possessing no personality go the way of all Shams. The inspiring influence of a master spirit does not cease with the shuffling off of this mortal coil. Though Vidyasagar passed away after he had lived out his threescore years and ten, his grand personality remains behind to inspirit people for ages to come.

After submitting his note on the Age of Consent Bill the septuagenarian reformer



returned to Chandernagore where he felt comparatively better for about two months. Then he gradually became worse and towards the middle of June was attacked with a severe pain in the sides. Finding no cure there, he returned to Calcutta. The eminent physicians were called in one by one. None could give him permanent relief. Their tender care and the ceaseless attendance of his devoted kinsmen only served to prolong his life up to the 28th July. Intense as his sufferings were, the fortitude that he displayed was marvellous. His calm and serene countenance sometimes deceived the watchers awakening fresh hopes, only to scatter them in a few days. As he could not bear the rattle of carriages, straw was spread over the adjacent streets. The municipal corporation was sympathetic enough to prohibit the passing of heavy scavenger carts by that lane. All these noble efforts could not check the progress of the fatal malady, the symptoms of which constantly changed. The patient at last



CSL

VIDYASAGAR

became unconscious. On Tuesday the 28th July 1891 all hope of recovery was given up. He had been speechless and in a stupor for four days past, yet he suddenly turned his head from the north to the west in order to face the portrait of his mother hanging on the eastern wall. Tears streamed down his withered cheeks as he intently gazed at the picture, the last object he saw in life. All perceived that the end was drawing nigh. A few minutes after two on the morning of Wednesday the 29th July he ceased to breathe and entered into rest.

First outburst of grief over, friends and relations of the deceased hastened to prepare against the funeral. The body of the lamented Pundit clad in pure white was placed upon the bed he used to sleep on. A large crowd soon assembled to accompany the *cortege* to the Nimtala burning ghat. Before daylight the melancholy procession started slowly, the bier being borne by the family mourners. On the way it



halted for a few minutes before the Metropolitan Institution. By five o'clock it reached the cremation ground. Meanwhile the heavy news had spread from end to end of the town and men, women and children of all classes flocked in thousands, eager to obtain a coign of vantage to catch a last glimpse of the departed. There was scarcely any dry eye in that vast concourse of people. At length the remains were washed with the holy waters of the Ganges and slowly laid on a pyre of sandalwood. Narayan Chandra with tearful eyes set fire to it. By mid-day the mourners collected the sacred ashes and while returning home distributed alms to the beggars.

The sad tidings travelled fast through the length and breadth of India and the public grief was universal and profound. The press, both English and Vernacular, appeared in mourning, giving a sketch of the life and career of the lamented Pundit. The journals of Europe and America also published obituary notices in terms most



appreciative of his merits. The schools and colleges in Bengal and elsewhere closed in honour of the deceased. The students of Metropolitan Institution, among others, went into mourning. The merchants and shopkeepers closed their places of business. Various condolence meetings were called in all important towns of India, the foremost men of the time taking the chair. It was decided to award prizes and found scholarships for students and open libraries and hospitals to do honour to the memory of the great man.

A month after a grand meeting was held in the Town Hall of Calcutta presided over by Sir Charles Elliott, the Lieutenant-Governor (1890'-95), to give expression to the general sorrow and to consider the best means of keeping up the name of the Pundit. All orders of the community were present. It was decided to erect a public monument of the first Principal of the Sanskrit College. The statue in spotless marble, which so long decorated the vestibule of the



Sanskrit College, has now been placed in the College Square, facing the university buildings.

It is also gratifying to note that the Hindu ladies of the town convened an early memorial meeting and raised a sum of over sixteen hundred rupees from among themselves. With this they established an annual scholarship tenable for two years and awarded to a girl who after passing the annual examination in the third class of the Bethune School desired to prepare herself for the university examination.



CSL

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

We preserve the names of those who render their services useful to humanity at large. Vidyasagar's noble exertions to forward the cause of education, his never-ceasing endeavours to better the condition of society, his sincere efforts to mitigate the sufferings of people, and his majestic and magnetic personality have earned for him a fame that posterity would not willingly let die.

As an educational officer he strained every nerve to perform his duties faithfully. He was true to the students, true to the professors, true to his own self. A stranger to cold insincerity and patronising manners,



CONCLUSION

CSL
139

he never played false with anybody ; double-dealing was foreign to his nature. Great was his capacity for work. He was more than equal to every position he occupied. As Principal of the Sanskrit College he was largely instrumental in re-organising that institution during eight years of office. He earned a still higher title to our gratitude by the generous and strenuous support he gave to Bethune School. The Metropolitan Institution was a happy thought of his own, conceived and materialised at a time when the project of a first grade college entirely manned by Indian professors was generally scouted as a wild enterprise. It sprang fully armed and equipped as it were from his keen and versatile brain and was destined to certain and durable success. He loved the students committed to his care and took an unselfish interest in their progress. Though a rigid disciplinarian, he was indulgent and placable whenever possible. His impartiality was beyond suspicion. He would not examine

VIDYASAGAR

the papers of the youths of Fort William College with undue leniency, even to win the favour of his official chief. He was the patron of struggling merit and unpretending worth. Possessing as he did a clear insight into the educational needs of his countrymen, he set up at his own charge many free schools both for boys and girls, and for the children of husbandmen started free night schools. In order that the lessons might be made easy and impressive he composed many useful books. Bengali translations of English and Sanskrit works, selections from standard English authors, editions, annotated or otherwise, of Sanskrit classics, formed the bulk of his literary composition. His Primers did immense service to the literature of the province. The classification of Bengali alphabet into vowels and consonants was of his own devising. The *Upakramanika* was a work of far greater originality; the method of treatment followed being quite new. It went far to popularise the culture of Sanskrit. The



occasional pamphlets issued by him displayed wonderful command over language. Everybody who reads the papers on widow-marriage or on polygamy would be struck with the elegance of style, the idiomatic ease, the range and depth of his ideas. In an age when Bengali language was still in its infancy, when standard books for children were in great request he thought that the writing of primers would bring about profound and lasting results. There were others to produce works of the highest ability and interest. The memory of authors like Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Dinabandhu Mitra would remain fresh through the ages. To do the greatest good to the greatest number was Vidyasagar's main object. He created a style of his own, lucid, chaste, sweet, laconic, and is regarded by qualified critics as the father of Bengali prose.

He was a man of letters as well as a man of action, taking an active and intelligent interest in the affairs of people around



VIDYASAGAR

him. Had he spent his days in quiet and taken no part in public matters, his educational services alone would have undoubtedly kept his name alive. But he was not born to lead a recluse life. The clash of Eastern and Western ideas and ideals had already begun. Society was in a state of transition. People there were who fascinated by a civilisation entirely new to them were for breaking away from the past and making a clean sweep of all ancient and time-honoured customs of the country. To these iconoclasts nothing was sacred but crass materialism. There were others who ran into the opposite extreme and hated to inaugurate a new order of things. Intensely fossil, they venerated all old and mouldy usages. Side by side with these ultra liberals and conservatives, there was another party which attempted to follow the golden mean and work gradual reforms by wise and well-considered means. Vidyasāgar was doubtless one of these conservative reformers. He wanted to readjust old institutions just



to meet altered conditions. It would be an amazing perversion of truth to say that his policy was destructive. The customs, which though old were yet serviceable, he would retain. Even when he became Principal of the Sanskrit College he dressed himself in the scrupulously simple garment of an orthodox pundit. The food of Hindus accorded best with him and he strictly abstained from wines and spirits. The same rational conservatism permeated the higher concerns of life. Opposed as he was to the projected removal of the burning ghat from Nimtala, he supported the alternative proposal of effecting necessary improvements. He successfully contended against the alienation of Hindu religious endowment property ; yet he believed that there was much room for reform in the management of religious trusts. He was in favour of educating the Hindu girls, but mainly in accordance with the indigenous system. As he was dead against their career of a professional teacher, he opposed Miss Carpenter's



scheme of female normal school. The deepest thing in him was his reverence for womanhood and he devoted much earnest thought to problems touching their welfare. Even those who do not look with complacency on widow marriages, have nothing but the highest praise for his memorable efforts to suppress polygamy and his noble though belated exertions to banish child marriage. He fought an ineffectual fight, it is true; but his failure, besides throwing considerable light on the subject to guide and beacon future reformers, paved the way for the gradual abolition of the practices resulting from the wider diffusion of liberal education and enlightened views.

He did not simply chalk out for his countrymen a certain line of action. He could sympathise with the sorrows of others since he himself had laboured under afflictions. Possessing no extraneous advantages of wealth or family connections, he rose to the acme of note by dint of his unaided



ability, but did not look with an eye of condescending favour upon his less cultivated brethren. Neither did he fail them in their supreme hour of need. He was a munificent donor and subscriber to many educational institutions. The monthly allowances he granted the poor students enabled them to prosecute their studies, thereby qualifying them for a noble and useful career. In times of dire distress and scarcity, when the country was visited by famine or malaria, he promptly held out a strong hand of help to the sufferers and gave them the comfort of his presence and active sympathy. In all practical measures of relief he took the lead. He fed the hungry, clothed the nude, watched and tended the sick with the utmost care and when occasion needed opened charitable foundations for their benefit. Liberal stipends were paid to many a poor but respectable family; but this was done in secret to avoid notice and remark. To the disinterested service of man he devoted his entire life. It would be an impossible



VIDYASAGAR

task to recount all his benefactions ; all that he earned with the honest sweat of his brow he spent freely in augmenting the wellbeing of his fellowmen. He never desired fame. Duty to all mankind for duty's sake was his guiding principle. All persons, without any distinction of colour, clime or creed, benefited by his gifts. He could have heaped up and left behind a princely fortune, but he preferred to live in voluntary poverty. His liberality was not posthumous. Giving away money with his own hands to the destitute he rendered his bounty most advantageous. Since he untied his purse strings with good-will, and not from a spirit of cold calculation, he really wiped away the tears from many eyes and experienced a feeling of expansion.

Behind these many-sided activities there lay the engaging individuality of the man. His broad and intelligent forehead, his beaming face, his open manners, always inspired confidence. He was affable, un-



CONCLUSION

CSL
147

assuming, without a particle of conceit or affectation about him and possessed keen sense of humour. This rendered him a desired and delightful companion. A silent worker and a man of lofty patriotism, he shrank from the jangle of current politics and stood aloof from political meetings. Destitute as he was of oratorical power, he made no speech in public. Though he earned a large sum of money by literature, he was not softened by prosperity. Nor did he ever live in clover; his habits were austere and sober. Even in his palmiest days he would not waste a piece of thread. Necessity early taught him to work hard and live frugally; and he ever continued "to scorn delights and live laborious days." Though he could keep a coach and pair, he deemed it a luxury. Pressed hard by his friends he once purchased a *gharry* but soon disposed it of in disgust. Almost the whole of his income was dedicated to charitable purposes and this justly gained him the honourable title of *Dayasagar* (i.e., ocean of

VIDYASAGAR

charity) and the abiding reverence of his countrymen. He was a father to the poor and many a time raised money by loan to aid them in their helpless and pressing need. His intimates grew alarmed at his heavy debts, but he was able to discharge all in time. The hand of God protects those that prop the unsuccessful in life's struggle. His personal integrity was unimpeachable; he had no price, and was above all corruption. Essentially a seeker of truth all his life, his sole aim was to bring the light of hope, the torch of knowledge, to the doors of the poor. To relieve the physical wants of his countrymen and to remove their mental darkness, he sacrificed his all. Worldly honour or power had no attraction for him. It was this stability of character that engendered in him a strong sense of independence and enabled him to hold his own against the first magnates in the land. But he seldom overstepped the bounds of courtesy. His unflinching sense of honour prompted him to respect others. He revered



CONCLUSION

his parents and was ever eager to do all that would make them happy. Questioned by some Brahmins of Benares whether he believed in the god of the city, he candidly answered in the negative, adding that his living parents were the only deities he cared to worship. With him this was no blasphemy. He considered it a sacred duty to serve his parents. While that new-old doctrine of the sanctity of all work was writing in another land, in India there was at least one who was silently and unwittingly carrying out that principle in practice. No man more thoroughly understood the dignity of labour than Vidyasagar. That ancient tenet of Karma he followed by instinct. He was as much at home with the lowest as with the highest and took equal delight in being eminently useful to them all without parade of noble intentions. India mourns the loss of the son who embodied her spirit and glory. Can such a blameless life be without value in the sight of the Lord?



CSL

OPINIONS

Principal G. C. Bose M. A., of the Bangabasi College writes :—"The manuscript copy of Babu Ananta Kumar Roy's 'Vidyasagar' was shown to me for my opinion on it. I have read it with interest and profit and found it to my knowledge a correct transcript of the life and work of the great philanthropist and scholar. There is an air of freshness about the style which makes the matter a pleasant reading."

J. R. Banerji Esq. M. A., B. L., Vice-Principal, Vidyasagar College and Fellow, Calcutta University says :—" 'Vidyasagar' by Ananta Kumar Roy M. A., B. L., is a well-written biography of one of the greatest sons of India.....the special feature of work under review is that it has a distinct literary flavour about it....

Dr. Mohendra Nath Sarcar M. A., Ph. D. Senior Professor of Philosophy, Sanskrit College, writes :—"The life-history of Pundit Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar, C. I. E., of revered memory has an intrinsic value and a spontaneous attraction in itself, which in the present volume have been enhanced by the freshness of style and the ease of expression with which the author has developed the story.....One cannot fail to perceive the simple and the unique presentation of the chief features of the life, which speaks of a sympathetic understanding of, and reveals an intuitive vision into the sublime beauty of Vidyasagar's life".