

LIFE OF
W. C. BONNERJEE
FIRST PRESIDENT
OF THE ²¹
INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS



SADHONA BONNERJEE



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FOREWORD

In the preparation of this brief volume, undertaken by me with great tripidation, as a tribute on the occasion of his 100th birthday anniversary, to the memory of my grandfather, Woomes Chunder Bonnerjee, I have received help and co-operation from so many and in such degree that no adequate expression of gratitude is possible in this foreword.

To all who by their co-operation and willing labour contributed so handsomely to the success of the centenary celebrations, I extend my heartiest thanks. I venture to hope that this book may serve some of them as a reminder of that solemn occasion.

A few I desire to mention by name, without whose assistance this book could not have been brought out. Krishnalal Bonnerjee, cousin of my grandfather, who very kindly gave me some old letters of my grandfather, and from whose biography of W. C. Bonnerjee, I have drawn liberally; Pitt Bonnerjee, who so kindly allowed me to use his memoirs; my cousin Protap Bonnerjee, for advice, fraternally frank, more often than not; my aunt Mrs. Majumdar for valuable material. The above I think, discharges my debt to the family. My true indebtedness, however, is to the following gentlemen :—

Mr. Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, Editor of the *Basu-mati*, for giving me various articles published long ago about the First President; Mr. S. C. Majumdar of

the Hindusthan Life Insurance Co. Bombay, for very kindly sending me the proceedings of the First Congress as recorded in the Times of India ; Dr. Kalidas Nag for invaluable assistance and moral support throughout ; Mr. G. A. Natesan of Madras, who was kind enough to send me his only copy of my grandfather's biography written by the Rt. Hon Srinivas Sastri ; the Hon Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, Vice-Chancellor of the Patna University, for valuable suggestions ; lastly I wish to thank Mr. Debajyoti Burman for very kindly taking on the arduous task of correcting the proofs.

Let me add once more that if all these kind persons had not helped me, by little book, with all its imperfections, would never have seen light.

Sadhona Bonnerjee

66, Lansdowne Road
P. O. Bhowanipur
Calcutta.

PREFACE

The birth Centenary of W. C. Bonnerjee (1844-1906) this year made his countrymen remember afresh with gratitude the grand services rendered by him to the cause of Indian political progress. As a youngman of twenty-three, he made in 1867 in his first public address in England references to "representative and responsible Government of India." He knew that such a government could not be achieved overnight but his prophetic vision led his countrymen to fight for that goal, and when they gathered together to give institutional expression to that goal through the first Indian National Congress in 1885, Mr. Bonnerjee was unanimously elected its first President. Since then till his death in July, 1906, he devoted his juristic and constitutional genius, no less than his enormous earnings as the leader of the Calcutta Bar, to the furtherance of the national cause. The Rt. Hon'ble Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, his first biographer, truly remarked—"India will never know the exact amount of her pecuniary indebtedness to him." The centenary of such a great patriot should mark the beginning of a permanent lectureship on the "Constitutional Progress in India." This 'W. C. Bonnerjee Lectureship' as worthily endorsed by Dr. S. P. Mookerjee, President of the Centenary Meeting, should be created at the University of Calcutta, for he was a member of the Syndicate, President of its Faculty of Law (1884) and the first representative of the Calcutta University at the Legislative Council (1894-95).

The Centenary Committee decided to raise funds to institute the 'W. C. Bonnerjee Lectureship' and began the work of preliminary publicity. As Hony. Secretary of the Committee, I was agreeably surprised to discover in our young pupil, Miss Sadhona Bonnerjee of the Post-graduate Department, as most devoted helper. She was legitimately proud of being the grand-daughter of that "Grand Old Man" of Bengal and she worked incessantly amidst tremendous handicaps to collect materials for this centenary booklet which the Committee considered essential to the success of its project. The nation will have to be re-wakened from the slumber of oblivion, and when we reach the final stage of our Celebration in December, 1944, we may hope to get responses from all over India. With this expectation and hope, we urged Miss Sadhana Bonnerjee to complete and publish this booklet which, we hope which, will develop into 'Volume of tributes' from politicians, patriots and scholars from all over India. In drawing the attention of my countrymen to this significant monograph of Miss Bonnerjee and to the cause it upholds, I beg, in conclusion, to quote the following words from the memorable and touching address delivered by Mr. G. K. Gokhale at the memorial meeting held in London (1906):—

"Mr. Bonnerjee was a man whose death
would leave humanity the poorer in any age
and in any part of the world." * * *

Mr. Bonnerjee's claim to our admiration and
gratitude rested on a much wider basis than

his pre-eminent attainment as a lawyer. He was, in addition, an ardent patriot, a wise and far-sighted leader, an incessant worker, a man whose nobility of mind and greatness of soul were stamped on every utterance and every action of his life. * * * Such a man must tower above his fellowmen wherever he is placed. In a self-governing country he would, without doubt, have attained the position of Prime Minister. We in India, twice made him President of our National Congress and, what was more when the great Movement was started and first Congress ever held in India assembled in Bombay, the delegates unanimously elected Mr. Bonnerjee to guide them in their deliberations. And since that time down to the moment of his death, Mr. Bonnerjee with two or three others, was the very life and soul of that (Congress) Movement."

Kalidas Nag

Calcutta University,
2nd July, 1944.



W. C. BONNERJEE

INTRODUCTION

No adequate history has yet been attempted of the social and political movements of Bengal in the 19th century. Efforts are now being made to unearth the forgotten past, and the more we unearth, the more light is thrown on the origin and development of the social and political movements, not only of Bengal, but of all India.

The origin of all progressive and emancipation movements in India can unquestionably be traced to Raja Rammohan Roy. He was a pioneer of modern scientific education, and fought for freedom of speech and our press, and when the Raja started his social reform campaign against "Suttee" or Widow Burning, there were many who stood out against him on the grounds that it was a challenge to the canons of the Hindu Scriptures. But with the passing of years, their objections have been proved invalid, and posterity has recognised that the Raja's humanitarian move was to protect Indian womanhood by eradicating an obnoxious social custom which had little historical sanction in the Hindu codes and Vedas.

After his death the liberal and progressive movements started by him were carried on by Dwarkanath Tagore and his son Debendra Nath Tagore. Curiously enough, the latter is known as a religious leader

only. In fact, his social, economic and political activities were no less ardent than his religious fervour, but unfortunately this fact is not sufficiently known or stressed. Debendra Nath began his public life when his father Dwarkanath returned from his first European visit bringing George Thompson, M.P. as his guest to start a regular constitutional agitation with Ram Gopal Ghosh and other patriots. Debendranath was aided in his political and social activities by a very powerful group of workers who will be counted as our earliest nation-builders, like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raj Narayan Bose, Keshab Chandra Sen and Nagendranath Chattopadhyaya.

In 1837, when Macaulay was finishing his Education Despatch, the Zamindary Association was founded. It was intended "to embrace people of all descriptions, without reference to caste, country or complexion; and rejecting all exclusiveness, was to be based, on the most universal and liberal principles, the only qualification to become its members being the possession of interest in the soil of the country." Nevertheless, it afforded, according to Rajendralal Mitra, "the first lesson in the art of fighting constitutionally for their rights and taught them manfully to assert their claims and give expression to their opinions."

On the 20th April, 1843, the Bengal British India Society was founded mainly with the support of leaders like Dwarkanath Tagore, Radhakanta Deb Bahadur and others. Its object was to collect and disseminate the "infor-

**The Bengal
British India
Society**

mation relating to the actual condition of the people of British India, and the laws and institutions and resources of the country ; and to employ such other means of a peaceful and lawful character, as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects." At that time the Zemindary Association (then known as the Landholders' Society), and the Bengal British India Society were the only political organisations in the whole of India.

In view of the renewal of the East India Company's Charter (1853), the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society were in 1851 merged into one as the **The British Indian Association**. The first President of this Association was Radhakanta Deb Bahadur and its first Secretary was Debendranath Tagore who held that post for three consecutive years. Its aim was "to secure improvements in the local administration of the country and in the system of government laid down by the Government." In 1853 on the occasion of the renewal of the East India Company's Charter this Association sent a mass petition to the British Parliament. It was also the first political body to act on a truly national basis adopting an All-India outlook and it tried in every way to ventilate the grievances and aspirations of the Indian people as a whole. Branches of the Association were founded in South India at Madras and in the United Provinces at Oudh. The interests of the Bombay Presidency were served by similar organisations founded by

Dadabhai Naoroji and others, while the Muslim community, found its first leader in Syed Ahmed, founder of Aligarh, who would later sail for England where Dadabhai Naoroji and his colleagues were founding the East India Association.

While all this work was going on, storm clouds were gathering and suddenly the Indian Mutiny broke out, putting for a while a stop to all political agitation. All the progressive movements received a violent shock as a result of the terrible policy of repression that followed the Mutiny. But the mal-administration of the East India Company was definitely stopped and when in 1858 came the Queen's Proclamation followed by the final crushing of the Mutiny, India entered upon a new phase in her history. Henceforth she ceased to be a monopoly of trading company and began to be treated as an integral part of the British Empire ; so, for better or for worse, her fate was linked with that of England. The leaders, British as well as Indian, of the 19th century did not fail to realise, if only vaguely, the implications of this political union and cultural collaboration. For in 1857-58 Bengal, Bombay and Madras got the first Universities by Charter, and services were thrown open to merit.

The years immediately following the suppression of the Mutiny were, however, very unhappy for India.

One of the main effects of the Mutiny was to embitter for decades the relation between India and Britain. As a result

The Mutiny

Establishment of Universities

Effects of Mutiny

of the free-trade policy of Britain and the imposition on the Indian and Colonial markets of cheap machine-made foreign goods the indigenous industries of India were ruined and thousands of people were thrown out of work. India was further burdened with the ruinous cost of the suppression of the Mutiny which amounted to 40 crores.

After the Mutiny the British Indian Association changed in character. It shelved for a while its aggressive political views and appeared to lean more and more towards a conservative association with the British Government in order to preserve in that crisis its own vested interests. In short it became somewhat aristocratic and functioned henceforth as the organ of the landed proprietors. However, towards the seventies of the 19th century we find the English-educated middle-class returning from England as Barristers, Doctors and Civil Servants challenging the irresponsible rule of England in India and also the exclusive right of the Conservative Clique of the British Indian Association to represent the majority of the Indian people. In the year 1875 the India League was founded by Sisir Kumar Ghosh (late Editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika), but this body made no progress due to a difference of opinion among the organisers themselves. However, on the 26th of July, 1875, the Indian Association was established chiefly through the efforts of Surendra Nath Banerjea, Anandamohan Bose and Nagendranath Chattopadhyaya. Its main object was

**Foundation of
India League.**

**The Indian
Association**

to voice the progressive opinion of the country. Its aims, as officially laid down, were :

- (1) the creation of a strong public opinion in India towards political questions.
- (2) the unification of the Indian people on a common political programme, and
- (3) the promotion of Hindu-Moslem unity.

Although the Association was started in Calcutta it was intended as an All-India organisation. Surendranath, Anandamohan and Nagendranath

**Surendranath's
tour**

started on a tour throughout the length and breadth of India which "assumed the character of a triumphal progress."

As a result, branches were founded in many of the Provinces. The first Indian Conference was held in 1883 under the presidentship of the venerable Bengali reformer, Ramtanu Lahiri, and a second one was convened in 1885. This year saw also the in-

**The First
Congress**

augural meeting of the Congress. With the establishment of the Congress the

Indian Association lost its prime importance, but, nevertheless, we must always keep in mind that it was the labours of Bengal through the Indian Association for 10 years (1875-1885) which made it possible for us to establish an All-India political body like the Indian National Congress and it explains clearly why a Bengalee, Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee. was chosen to be the first President of the Congress.

EARLY LIFE

W. C. Bonnerjee, the First President of the Indian National Congress, and the great Indian Jurist and Conveyancer, was born on the 29th of December, 1844 at Sonai, Kidderpore, in the picturesque country-house of his grand-father, Pitambar Bonnerjee.

Pitambar Bonnerjee was a descendant of Bhattanarayan, one of the five Brahmans who came to Bengal from Kanauj during the reign of Adisur, King of Bengal, about the middle of the 11th century A.D. At the end of the 17th century, the Bonnerjee family migrated from Vikrampur in East Bengal to the tiny village of Baganda in the Hooghly District, and about a hundred years later, Pitambar Bonnerjee came to Calcutta and settled down there. He had lost his parents when a mere child, but with the help of influential men like Ram Narayan Misra and Uma Charan Banerjee, he rose from the position of a private tutor and schoolmaster to the position of 'Banian' or Managing clerk in the firm of Messrs. Collier Bird & Co. Mr. Collier was then the Government Solicitor to the East India Company. Although the term 'Banian' has somewhat changed in meaning today in the days of Pitambar Bonnerjee, a Banian was a man of considerable importance and influence. In those days English Solicitors were strangers to India, unfamiliar with the language, manners and mode of thought of the people, and they depended greatly upon

**Pitambar
Bonnerjee**

their Indian Banians to help them out of their difficulties. These Banians had a fair knowledge of English (what we ; I dare say, would call Babu English) and a good knowledge of law and procedure ; in fact, they were such important men that people used to court their advice, and they were called 'Law Men.' Pitambar Bonnerjee died in the year 1853 at the age of 72 leaving behind a large family of eight sons and seven daughters. His family may be called a 'legal' family as most of his descendants took to legal professions, and all grades of legal practitioners from the Mukhtear and the Revenue Agent to the Advocate practising in the Judicial Committee of His Majesty's Privy Council, are to be found in his family.

Girish Chunder Bonnerjee, the father of W. C. Bonnerjee, was the eldest son of Pitambar. He was educated at the Oriental Seminary and the old Hindu College, and at home he studied Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian and Latin. Girish Chunder was one of the earliest attorneys of the Calcutta High Court, and his diligent labour won for him the title of "Prince of Attorneys." (National Magazine, Sept., 1904—P. 404). Among his friends was the renowned Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (National Magazine). W. C. Bonnerjee was the second son of Girish Chunder, but the eldest son having died young, Woomesh Chunder naturally stepped into his place.

From his mother's side also, W. C. Bonnerjee inherited vast legal culture, for his mother was a

descendant of the famous Sanskrit scholar philosopher and Juris-consult of the East India Company, Pandit Jagannath Tarkapachanan of Tribeni in the District of Hooghly. It was Pandit Jagannath Tarkapachanan whom the East India Company selected for codifying Hindu law to help the English Judges to administer it. It is called Jagannath's Digest of Hindu Law.

His mother's family

From his birth place in Sonai, Kidderpore, Woomes Chunder was brought as a young child to 28 (now 15), Noyan Chand Dutt's street in that part of the Calcutta which is known as Simla. Simla is in the heart of the great city, within that area in which many great families of Calcutta had their abodes. It is bounded on the North by Baghbazar, on the West by the River Ganges, on the South by Bowbazar Street and on the East by Circular Road. Among those great families were the Tagores of Jorasanko, Pathuriaghata, the Deb-Bahadurs of Sovabazar, the Motilals of Bowbazar, the Bonnerjees of Simla, the Singhees of Singhibagan, the Sens of Colootola and the Lahas (Laws) of Thonthonia.

Birth

Woomes Chunder was first sent to a 'pathsala' of Hararam Gurumahasoy where he learnt his mother tongue. From there he was sent to the Branch School of the Oriental Seminary in order to pick up the English language. From the Branch School he went to the Main School which may be called the *Alma Mater* of many of the distinguished sons of Bengal. From the Oriental

Education

Seminary he was admitted into the Hindu School, but being always an indifferent student, more interested in theatrical plays than in study, he did not even pass the Entrance Examination.

About this time round about the year 1859 when he was fifteen years old he was married to Srimati **Marriage** Hemangini Devi, the daughter of Nilmoni Motilal and a grand-daughter of Biswanath Motilal of Bowbazar. She was a good and kind-hearted lady and was a worthy wife of W. C. Bonnerjee.

Girish Chunder Bonnerjee, not unnaturally alarmed **Early career** by his son's negligence, took him out of school when he was in the First Class, and made him take up his own profession.

In November, 1861 at the early age of seventeen, Woomes Chunder was an articled clerk to Mr. W. P. Downing, Attorney of the Supreme Court of Calcutta. From all accounts it appears that he had some disagreement with that worthy gentleman, severed his connections with him and joined Mr. W. P. Gillanders as his clerk in May, 1862. It was here that he acquired an intimate and perfect knowledge of the art of writing out deeds and pleadings that was to stand him in good stead as conveyancers later on. Although unknown to most people, it was at this time that Woomes Chunder helped his friend, the late Editor of the "Bengalee" Girish Chandra Ghosh to start the newspaper by obtaining help from the eminent patron of letters Babu Kali Prosonno Singh. From

the life of Girish Chunder Ghosh by Monmothnath Ghosh we get the following illuminating account about Woomes Chunder and his connection with the Bengalee.

The "Bengalee" made its first appearance before the public on Tuesday, the 6th May, 1862.

"The late Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee, who had the unique honour of being elected President of the first Indian National Congress held in Bombay in December, 1885, and who was remarkable no less for his single-hearted devotion to his country than for his forensic success, was employed on the staff of the Bengalee, during the first two or three years of its existence, in the humble capacity of compiler of the summary of weekly news, receiving for his duty a small monthly stipend—not exceeding rupees twenty, if we remember aright. This happened when Mr. Bonnerjee was yet in his teens. It is well known to all who, like ourselves, had the honour of his personal acquaintance, how sadly his school education had been neglected, like that of many a great man before him and since, and how amply did he make amends for early neglect by hard study in later life. It was after Mr. Bonnerjee had abruptly closed his school career, that he was taken by Girish Chunder on the staff of of his newly-started paper in the capacity mentioned above; for Mr. Bonnerjee's father was an old and valued friend and neighbour of Girish Chunder's and he therefore took a fatherly interest in the youth. We distinctly remember how young Bonnerjee (who was then familiarly known as "Mutty Babu") used to come to Girish's house every morning and make the

necessary extracts from the various periodicals of the day under his personal direction and advice. This went on for two or three years. Girish used to encourage young Bonnerjee to write short paragraphs and submit them to him for revision. Under such excellent training young Bonnerjee's natural intelligence was gradually directed into the proper channel, till at last Girish Chunder became so highly satisfied with the progress made by his young friend that when in 1864 Mr. Bonnerjee became a candidate for one of several scholarships founded by a Parsee gentleman of Bombay to enable Indian youths to study law in England. Girish Chunder strongly recommended him to the right quarter and got him nominated to the scholarship which put him at once on the high road to his future eminence. Mr. Bonnerjee, who was one of the very few men who are "royal born by right divine", never forgot the kindness shown him in his early youth by Girish Chunder and gratefully cherished his memory to the end of his days."

At this period of his life Woomes Chunder realised the mistake he had committed by neglecting his studies, and worked hard to make up the loss. He must have worked very hard indeed, because two years later we find him winning a scholarship and sailing for England.

In the year 1864, Mr. Rustomjee Jamshedjee Jijeebhoy of Bombay made over three lakhs of rupees to the Supreme Government for the purpose of establishing five scholarships to be competed for by Indian youths to study law in England. Out of these

three to be given to Bombay, one to Madras and one to Calcutta. In order to select a suitable candidate from Bengal, the Government appointed a representative committee having (Sir) George Campbell, then one of the Judges of the High Court as its President, and Sir Henry Sumner Maine, Sir John Rose, Prosonno Kumar Tagore, Nawab Amir Ali Khan Bahadur, and Mr. G. S. Fagan, then Chief Judge of the Calcutta Small Cause Court as some of the members, and Mr. W. L. Heeley as its Secretary. There were about a dozen candidates for this scholarship, and Woomes Chunder was considered the most meritorious.

In those days it was impossible to cross the 'Kalapani' without losing caste. Woomes Chunder knew that he would never obtain his father's permission to go to England. So after the Durga Puja festival he spent some days in his father-in-law's house. From there with the help of Mr. Cockeral Smith, Attorney-at-Law who was a friend of his father's, he departed for England. After his departure it was discovered that he was missing and a hue and cry was raised. After a great search it came to light that he had left for England. Loud were the lamentations which echoed through the old house in Simla but to no effect. On reaching England he wrote to his father who, though he did not approve of the son's action, sent him money when he heard that the scholarship was not available for some time.

In England he studied hard at the Middle Temple under such eminent men as Mr. J. Henry Dart and

**First visit
to England**

Sir Edward Fry. Among his friends were such great and distinguished Indian leaders as Dadabhai Naoraji, Sir Pheroz Shah Mehta and Badruddin Tyabji.

During his stay in England he was struck by the vast difference between the life of the English people and that of the Bengalees, and he could not fail to see the degraded state of his own people. His sojourn in Europe wrought a tremendous change in him—a change that was to colour his future life and activities. A letter written to his uncle Sambhu Chandra Bonnerjee from Paris in 1865 will show clearly how much he had changed and what his views were about England and India.

“Hotel De Louvre”,
Paris,
August 18th, 1865.

Dear uncle Sambhu Chandra,

I believe you have heard that I am getting on in Europe as well as my best of friends could wish. Though my arrival in London and my position there after my arrival were beset with innumerable difficulties (the former proceeding from the extremely unreasonable and foolish obstinacy with which everyone in any way connected with me opposed my departure from India and the latter from my being a total stranger), I soon surmounted them and I can now congratulate myself that my life in England has been one of peculiar success and felicity. I have discarded all ideas of caste, I have come to hate all the demoralising practices of our countrymen and I write this

letter an entirely altered man—altered in appearance, altered in costume, altered in language, altered in habits, altered in ways of thought—in short altered and altered for the better too, in everything, I should say in all things, which have contributed towards making our nation the hateful of all others in the world. It will take up more time and space than I have now at my command, to detail how and in what respect these alterations have taken place. Suffice it to say, however ill-bred a person may have been from his earliest infancy, however ruinous the influences around him, however grossly his reason may have been made to pervert, the genial soil and civilised atmosphere of Europe and particularly that of England are enough to make him a man in the truest signification of the term the moment he comes there. I am proud to say that I had not all these enemies to contend with before I left for England. I, however, had my quota of the evil effects of an early Bengalee life and now that I have got rid of them, I can value them at their true worth and especially so when I contrast them with all that I see in Europe. I think it will be a very interesting subject if anybody were to find out the reasons of our nation being so degraded at the present time while even the barbarian Tartar is improving in civilization so rapidly. That we are in a degraded state, I do not think anybody in these senses would attempt to deny. Well, if so, why so? Some of these reasons are so obvious that they at once occur to anybody considering the subject. You doubtless know them. I shall consider them when I next write.

I left London yesterday morning for a two-months' trip on the continent during our long vacation. I purpose to visit Switzerland, Germany, France, of course (as you can see from the place where I write this from) and I am not sure I may pierce into Italy. Paris is such a lovely place and I do not think they exaggerate at all who say that it is the finest city in the world. I have not, as you know, seen the whole world, but my opinion of Paris, I build upon the given fact that London and Calcutta are emphatically (?) the two best cities. Compared to Paris, London is a regular blackhole and Calcutta with its 'Nayan Chand Dutt's Street' and 'Panchee Dobaney Gully' though styled the City of Palaces cannot even stand a comparison. I think it is extremely unjust to compare Paris with Calcutta. The difference between them is as great as between Government House, Calcutta, and the Belvedere Palace and '24 Nayan Chad Dutt's Street' and '19, Nayan Chand Dutt's Street' respectively. I arrived in Paris last night and went out for a walk along the 'Champs Elysee' (Fields of Elysium). Oh! how beautiful it looked. I cannot describe to you all that I saw. It is beyond all description.

But I am afraid I am wearying you. I must therefore conclude. Write to me please as often as you can giving me your candid opinion on Bengali Society generally. My address in England I give below.

Hoping yourself, aunt Sambhu Chandra and the and the little ones not excepting Pundit, are all in the enjoyment of excellent health and spirits.

I remain, Your affectionate nephew,

W. C. Bonnerjee.

Babu Sambhu Chandra Bonnerjee,
Calcutta.

P.S.—Here is my address in London,
W. C. Bonnerjee,
108B, Denbigh Street,
St. George's Road,
London, S.W.

While still a very young man Woomes Chunder was interested in politics, as his help towards the establishment of the famous paper called the "Bengalee" proves. While in England this interest did not diminish and we find that he took part in the establishment of the London Indian Society which later became a powerful factor in Indian politics. The president of this Society was Dadabhai Naoroji, and W. C. Bonnerjee was its secretary for some time, and its inaugural meeting was held in the house of Gyanendra Mohan Tagore. It was later amalgamated with the "East India Association" (Bengal Celebrities—by Ram Gopal Sanyal). From the 158th Journal of the East India Association it appears that in 1867, at the age of 23 Mr. Bonnerjee delivered a "long and admirable" speech on "representative and responsible Government in India" at a meeting held on the 25th July. The late Sir Herbert Edwards, K.G.B., C.S.I. was in the chair. The following is an extract from the memorable speech :—

"There is no time to discuss the particular way in which India should have representation and its details. Many suggestions have been made on the subject, requiring deep consideration. My opinion is that

there ought to be a representative Assembly, and a Senate sitting in India, with a power of veto to the Governor-General, but under the same restrictions as exists in America with perhaps an absolute power of veto to the Crown" (See page 176—Journal E. I. A.).

Then again he says :—

"To understand the people, you must go to them direct ; you will then find that they possess remarkable degree of intelligence. They are equal to any task, but the task must not be imposed on them with a high hand. They must be properly treated. If they are trusted in any way, however slight, their gratitude knows no bounds, and a sense of responsibility so works upon them that they are sure to execute any commission entrusted to them with great care and skill. This sense of responsibility on their part, it is which will ensure representative Government a thorough success in the country. I do not mean to deny that their education is very defective in fact they might be said to possess no education at all, if we measure education by a European standard. But compared to their richer countrymen, they are, there can be no doubt, thoroughly capable of appreciating representative Government, they are not a whit less educated than the lowest householders compared to the educated classes in this country. The common people of India may not be able to understand Sanscrit or explain the bearings of the Sankhya philosophy, but in common walks of life they are as shrewd and careful as possible. They are neither extravagant nor intemperate ; they are neither migratory nor dis-

sipated. They are, as a rule, family men, labouring hard to maintain themselves in comfort, if not, in affluence. These qualities may not be the result of a very extensive education, but they at least shew that the men who possess them, though even unable to read and write, are honest men who have practical common sense, who understand what is best for their own interests, not selfishly but with due consideration for all about them, both high and low, and therefore, who may be supposed to understand the interests of their country. If anybody could be trusted with the franchise, surely these would be the men. If these considerations are not sufficient—I mean if they do not prove that the people of India are not ignorant, I am not afraid to take my stand on their ignorance, and argue in the words of the greatest jurist of modern times in England—I mean the late Mr. Zebebe Austin. He asks—“In a political community, not duly constructed, is not popular Government, with all its awkward complexness less inconvenient than monarchy? And, unless the Government be popular, can a political community not duly constructed emerge from darkness to light? From the ignorance of political science which is the principal cause of misrule, to the knowledge of political science which were the best security against it?” I see no reason whatever why the people of India are not capable of understanding and exercising the functions which naturally inhere in subjects possessing a representative Government” (Vide P. 178—Journal E. I. A.).

In November 1868 after being called to the Bar, he came out to India to practise as a Barrister.

Return to India While on his way back, to his great sorrow, his father died at the early age of 45 leaving two sons and five daughters. The younger son, Satyadhan performed his 'Sradh' ceremony.

When Woomes Chunder reached Calcutta he did not put up in his old ancestral home on account of caste scruples, but lived temporarily in the Great Eastern Hotel.

CAREER AT THE BAR

When W. C. Bonnerjee came out to practise at the Calcutta High Court, the members of the Bar were almost exclusively of British-nationality, and men of great eminence constituted the Bench of the Court.

**The Calcutta
Bar in 1868**

In the early seventies the senior practising barrister was Mr. W. C. Montriou who came out in 1842. The Advocate-General was then Sir Charles Paul who held the office for nearly thirty years until his death in 1900. The younger men, however, who were forcing themselves into the largest practice were James Tisdal Woodroffe, "Tiger" Jackson, J. Pitt-Kennedy, C. P. Hill and others—names long since forgotten but very much in the forefront nearly eighteen years ago. The Indian advocates were only two in number—Monomohan Ghosh and W. C. Bonnerjee.

In the days of the Supreme Court there were Indian attorneys but no Indian barristers. The establishment of the High Court in 1862 introduced Indian Barristers-at-law. The first four Indian advocates of the Calcutta High Court were Gyanendra Mohon Tagore, Monomohan Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and W. C. Bonnerjee respectively.

Gyanendra Mohan Tagore, the only son of Prasanna Kumar Tagore, was called to the Bar by the Society of Lincoln's Inn on the 11th June, 1862 and enrolled in Calcutta on the 28th November, 1865. Tagore,

**Gyanendra
Mohan Tagore**

who lived most of his time in England, would accept no junior brief, and, therefore, made no mark. His name, however, was prominent for a time in Court, when, as a suitor, he contested the Will of his father who had disinherited him on account of his conversion to Christianity.

Monomohan Ghosh, the second Bengali barrister, was called to the Bar on the 6th June, 1866 from Lincoln's Inn and was enrolled on the 18th January, 1867. He had several difficulties to surmount before enrolment and practice. The Judges raised the objection that, though called to the Bar by the Benchers he had not completed the terms in his Inn. The English Advocates refused to admit him to the Bar Library because of his Indian costume. However, the Judges waived their objection, and Ghosh exchanged the 'Chapkan' for the coat. The European dress became the fashion in Courts and offices. Monomohan Ghosh distinguished himself as a great Criminal Lawyer. His practice, however, was largely conducted in the district courts of Bengal where he became a veritable terror to the Judiciary.

The third Bengali barrister was the great poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt. As everybody knows, he was the only son of a very rich man, and many are the stories told of his father's affluent circumstances when he was a boy. Unfortunately for the young man, when he decided to embrace Christianity he was disinherited by his heart-broken father. He was called to the Bar

from Gray's Inn on the 17th of November, 1866 and enrolled after considerable difficulties on the 7th of May in the following year. But Goddess of fortune never smiled on him again; he had very little practice as a barrister, and lived and died a poor man. Death, however, made him great, and he is cherished as one of the great enrichers of the Bengali language.

The fourth Indian barrister was Woomes Chunder Bonnerjee. He was called to the Bar from the Middle Temple on the 11th June, 1867 and enrolled on the 12th November, 1868. Although he was preceded by the three barristers mentioned above, he may be considered as being the leading Indian barrister on the Original Side of Calcutta High Court. As I had said before, in 1868 there were only two Indian barristers in actual practice at the High Court—Monomohan Ghosh and W. C. Bonnerjee. They used to sit at a corner in the Bar Library and it was playfully called "Asia Minor." But as Monomohan Ghosh practised mainly in the mofussil, it was left to W. C. Bonnerjee to establish the reputation of Indians as lawyers in the Calcutta High Court. The young advocate had a hard time before him. Had his father been alive his path probably would have been easier but alas! his father was already dead. However, help came to him from many well-wishers among whom the name of Kamal Krishna Dev Bahadur of Sovabazar ranks first. The English members of the Bar were not at all unsympathetic and men like Mr. J. Pitt-Kennedy and Sir Charles Paul did much to help the young man along. Within a dozen years he reached a position of great

eminence and had the enviable reputation of being the most sought-after barrister of the Calcutta High Court. It is said that on his return from his annual visits to England, the attorneys of the High Court used to wait for him on the quayside and as soon as he landed they used to rush for him with their briefs and fees ready, and there was a scramble to get at him first. There are hardly any other barristers who had a reputation as great as his. In 1861 about thirteen years after he came back to India, he acted as the Standing Counsel, the first Indian to hold that position in Calcutta. In this post he officiated four times. So greatly was his merit appreciated by his clients that in his last years while practising in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, he was often briefed against such eminent men as Asquith and Haldane, even when handicapped severely by blindness. He conducted his last case about three weeks before his death. He was completely blind then and his son Mr. Kali Bonnerjee had to read out his papers for him.

It was the great fame that W. C. Bonnerjee won in his profession that proved the Europeans that Bengali lawyers were as good as any to be found in the world, and paved the way for other Indian barristers to rise to the highest legal positions. At the time of his death the Advocate General of Bengal was a Bengali. It used to be said that "Bonnerjee conquered Europe Major and established 'Swarajya' in the Library." Twice he was offered the position of a Judge, but he was wont to say that he was too poor to accept a Puisne Judgeship, meaning thereby

that he was not rich enough to forego an income of Rs. 20,000/- which he earned as a Barrister for Rs. 4,000/- which was the pay of a Pusine Judge!

Incidentally it may be mentioned here that at present there are only two English advocates in the Calcutta Bar, the rest are all Indian. What a vast change the last 75 years have wrought!

It is impossible here to follow his brilliant professional career in any details. But I cannot help alluding to a few of his cases which **Surendra Nath & Robert Knight** were famous in his times. The best known are, of course, the "Contempt of Court" case of Surendranath Banerjee, the Editor of the "Bengalee," and the famous Burdwan libel case against Robert Knight, the Editor of the "Statesman." A base conspiracy was hatched up against Robert Knight to ruin him. Bonnerjee came to the rescue and saved him from ruin and disgrace. The case against Surendranath Banerjee is too well-known to need repetition here. In these two cases Mr. Bonnerjee rendered valuable service to the cause of journalism in India.

In 1868 before he was enrolled he obtained his first brief from his father's office. A poor fisher-woman was charged with perjury by a **His first brief** civilian who was also an Englishman—Mr. (afterwards Lord) Macdonnel who later became the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces and Oudh. Bonnerjee appeared before the District and Sessions Judge at Nadia (Krishnagore) and secured the acquittal of the poor woman.

Many and varied are the cases that may be cited, but before I conclude I would like to mention another, though less known, case. After the death of his father young Swami Vivekananda, then Noren Dutt, sought legal help from W. C. Bonnerjee. He and his younger brothers were going to be deprived of their ancestral house by various other relatives. Bonnerjee espoused his cause and won it. In this case he charged no fees whatever. It is no small honour for the members of W. C. Bonnerjee's family that their ancestor was instrumental in helping such a great man as Swami Vivekananda.

· CHOSEN OF THE PEOPLE

Although in the last chapter a fairly comprehensive sketch of Mr. Bonnerjee's professional career has been attempted, there are one or two aspects of his legal career which deserve to be considered apart. Now, it is admitted on all hands that in his time Mr. Bonnerjee was one of the greatest lawyers in India and even in later years he was highly successful in the Privy Council. Nevertheless, as such, he did not confine himself solely to the law courts, neither did he work only for those who could pay him fabulous fees. In his capacity as a lawyer he did much good work both for the University Law College as also other educational institutions.

Although no graduate of the Calcutta University, Woomes Chunder was for a time intimately connected with it. In the early eighties he became at the instance of Mr. Justice Pigot, the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, a member of its Syndicate. In 1884 he became the President of its Faculty of Law. In 1894 and 1895, he represented the Calcutta University in the Bengal Legislative Council, the first representative that the University sent.

When in 1893 after Lord Cross's reforms, the University was empowered to send a representative to the Legislative Council, two people came forward as prospective candidates—Woomes Chunder Bonnerjee and Rai

**President of the
Law Faculty**

**Representative
of the Calcutta
University**

Bahadur Rajkumar Sarbadhikari. On the day of voting, that great son of Bengal, Bhudev Mookerjee, declared that Woomes Chunder was the best man in every way deserved to be elected. On the other hand, Maharaja Sir Narendra Krishna Dev Bahadur stood up for Rajkumar Sarbadhikari. However, Woomes Chunder secured the greater number of votes and was consequently elected. A contemporary newspaper illustrated the difference between the two men in the public eye by a cartoon denoting Woomes Chunder as a giant and his opponent as a dwarf. He was the elected member and Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt had been nominated by the Government. Referring to this Mr. Dutt said :

“In 1894 and 1895, Mr. Bonnerjee and I worked together in the Bengal Legislative Council. I had been nominated by the Government, and Mr. Bonnerjee held the higher position of being elected by the people. We seldom differed in our views, and on more than one occasion Mr. Bonnerjee’s manly fight for his countrymen was fruitful of good results.”

**R. C. Dutt’s
Tribute**

His “manly fight for his countrymen” was not appreciated by Mr. Dutt alone. After his death in 1906, at the Convocation held the next year, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee made reference to his death in the following words :

**Sir Asutosh’s
Tribute**

“In Woomes Chunder Bonnerjee we have lost a striking personality, a distinguished lawyer who attained the highest eminence in his profession. As

President of the Faculty of Law, as member of the Syndicate, and as our first representative on the Provincial Council, he gave evidence of his wide and varied culture, of his robust common sense and sturdy independence of character ; and the graduates of this University are indebted to him for his successful efforts in the cause of recognition of their legitimate claims to University appointments."

Apart from the University W. C. Bonnerjee was always interested in educational institutions, and he always held out a helping hand to such institutions as were in need of legal help and advice. This is clearly illustrated by the cases of the Navadwip Hindu School and his own beloved Oriental Seminary. In both cases private individuals tried to make away with public funds but in both cases Mr. Bonnerjee stood up for the public cause and won it. To this day these two institutions treasure an oil painting of their benefactor in their respective schools.

A man of parts then was Mr. Bonnerjee. Not merely intellectually brilliant, but of a tender nature and ever ready to help those in trouble and without the means to pay for expert assistance. It is to his lasting credit that he habitually helped those in need and from this quality of 'Dharma' is deserving of greater than for his forensic triumphs in the 'causes célèbres' which brought him his fortune.

**Help to
Educational
Institutions**

THE FIRST CONGRESS

In the chapter following are described the events that will link for ever the name of Woomes Chunder Bonnerjee with that august body, the Indian National Congress. His election as President of the Congress in the year 1885 marks the climax of his great career, and the consummation of his outstanding abilities, his great qualities as a politician, a lawyer and above all a patriot were brought about by his labour in this great body with which he was to remain intimately connected for the rest of his life.

**Link with
Congress**

A graphic account of the 1st session of the Congress is given by Mrs. Besant in her publication—

**Mrs. Besant's
description of
the First
Congress**

“HOW INDIA WROUGHT FOR FREEDOM”,—and we are indebted to her for the following extracts

therefrom :—

“The first meeting did not, however, take place at Poona, for, only a few days before Christmas, some sporadic cases of Cholera occurred, possibly presaging an outbreak, and it was thought wiser to move the Conference, now called the Congress to Bombay. The Managers of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College and Boarding House placed the whole of their fine building at disposal of the Congress, and all was ready by the morning of the 27th December for the reception of the Representatives of Indian Nation. As we glance over the lists of these who were present,

how many we see who became famous in the annals of India's struggle for Freedom! Among those who could not act as Representatives we note the Reformer, Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunatha Rao, Deputy Collector of Madras; the Hon. Mr. Mahadev G. Ranade, then member of the Legislative Council and Small Cause Court Judge of Poona, later to be a Judge of the High Court of Bombay, and leader honoured and trusted; Lala Baijnath of Agra was there, to be known as scholar and writer later on; and Professors K. Sundararaman and R. G. Bhandarkar. Among the Representatives may be noted Editors of well-known Indian papers, of THE DYAN PRAKASH, THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE POONA SARVAJANIK SABHA, THE MARATHA, THE KESARI, THE NABA-BIBHAKAR, THE INDIAN MIRROR, THE NASSIM, THE HINDUSTHANI, THE TRIBUNE, THE INDIAN UNION, THE SPECTATOR, THE INDU PRAKASH, THE HINDU, THE CRESCENT. How many names shine out, familiar and honoured: Mr. A. O. Hume is there from Simla; W. C. Bonnerjee and Norendranath Sen from Calcutta; W. S. Apte and G. G. Agarkar from Poona; Gangaprasad Varma from Lucknow; Dadabhai Naoroji, K. T. Telang, Pheroze-shah M. Mehta—then, as now—leader of the Bombay Corporation, D. E. Wacha, B. M. Balabari, N. G. Chandavarkar, from Bombay; P. P. Rangiah Naidu, President of the Mahajana Sabha, S. Subrahmana Aiyer, P. Ananda Charlu, G. Subrahmania Aiyer, M. Viraraghavachariar, from Madras; P. Kesava Pillai

from Anantapur. These are among the earliest who wrought for Indian's Freedom, and those yet of earth, are working for her still.

"At 12 noon, on December 28th, 1885, in the Hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, the First National Congress met. The first voices heard were those of Mr. A. O. Hume, the Hon. Mr. S. Subrahmanya Aiyer and the Hon. Mr. K. T. Telang, who proposed, seconded and supported the election of the first President, Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee. A solemn and historic moment was that in which the first of the long line of men thus honoured by the Motherland took his seat, to preside over her first National Assembly.

Below is given the official report called from the **Report of the "Times of India"** dated 29th December, **"Times of India"** 1885.—

A National Congress composed of delegates from all parts of India was held yesterday, i.e., 28th December, 1885, in the premises of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, Gowalia Tank Road. Upto the present, 71 delegates representing the following places have arrived Bombay, Poona, Surat, Ahmedabad, Veerangaum, Karachi, Madras, Ganjam. Masaulipatam, Chitngulpet, Tanjore, Kumbakonam, Madras, Coimbatore, Cuddapah, Anantapore, Bellary, Calcutta, Benares, Agra, Allahabad, Lucknow, Ambala and Lahore. Besides these a number of native gentlemen, mostly officials arrived to attend as visitors and act as *amicus curiae*.

The Congress having assembled, it was proposed by Mr. A. O. Hume (Bengal) seconded by the Hon.

S. Subrahmonia Iyer (Madras), supported by the Hon. K. T. Telang (Bombay) and unanimously carried that Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee (Bengal) be invited to assume the office of the President of the Congress.

The President elect in rising to acknowledge the honour done to him said he might well be proud of being thus called on to preside over the first Indian Assembly ever yet convened in India. Looking around he saw the representatives of all the important centres of the Bombay Presidency, Karachi, Ahmedabad, Surat, Poona, Bombay itself, and other less populous though still important towns, almost every district in the Madras Presidency was represented, as well as towns of Madras, Salem, Coimbatore and others. Of Bengal his friends and himself ought, to a certain extent, be accepted as representatives, although owing to a series of misfortunes, deaths, illness and the like, of which the meeting were already aware. Bengal was very inadequately represented so far as the numbers actually present were concerned, though as the delegated exponents of educated native thought in Bengal, they might claim a consideration to which their numerical strength would hardly entitle them. Then there were the representatives of Lahore, Lucknow, Agra, Allahabad, Benaras each representing political associations collectively of very widespread influence and besides these representatives who would take an actual part in these proceedings, he rejoiced to see present as it were as *amicus curiæ* several of the most distinguished native officials of this country whose presence would materially enhance the weight and dignity of the proceedings. It was

not merely Provinces that were represented ; almost all the political associations in the Empire were represented by one or more of the gentlemen present, while as regards the press, the proprietors, editors or delegates of the Mirror, the Hindu, the Spectator, the Tribune, and others showed conclusively the universality of the feelings which had culminated in this great memorable gathering. Surely never had so important and comprehensive an assemblage occurred within historical times, on the soil of India. He claimed for it an entirely representative character. It was true that judged from the standard of the House of Commons, they were not representatives of the people of India, the sense of the member of the House were representatives of the constituencies. But if the community of sentiments, community of feelings, and community of wants enable anyone to speak on behalf of others, they were representatives of the people of India. It might be said that they were self-elected, but that was not so. The news that this Congress would be held had been throughout the year in the different Provinces of India and they all knew that everywhere news had been received with great satisfaction by the people at large. And now it seemed a fitting occasion for answering a question that had continually been asked in the world outside during the past few weeks, viz : as to what the objects and aim of this great National Congress really were. He would not pretend to reply to this question exhaustively ; the ensuing proceedings would, he believed, do this more effectually than any single speaker could hope to do, but he might say

briefly, that the objects of the Congress could for the most part be classed under these following heads :—

- (a) The promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in our country's cause in the various parts of the Empire.
- (b) The eradication, by direct friendly personal intercourse, of all possible race, creed, or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country and the fuller development and consolidation of those sentiments of national unity that had their origin in our beloved Lord Ripon's ever memorable reign.
- (c) The authoritative record, after this has been carefully elicited by the fullest discussion, of the matured opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing of the social question of the day.
- (d) The determination of the lines upon and methods by which during the next twelve months it is desirable for Native politicians to labour in the public interests.

Surely there was nothing in these objects to which any sensible and unprejudiced man could possibly take exception and yet on more than one occasion remarks had been made by gentlemen, who should have been wiser, condemning the proposed Congress, as if it were a mere nest of conspirators and disloyalists. Let him say once for all and in this they knew well after the long informal discussions that they had all amongst them on the previous day, that he was only expressing

the sentiments of every gentleman present, that there were no more thoroughly loyal and consistent well-wishers of the British Government than were himself and the friends around him. In meeting to discuss in an orderly and peaceable manner questions of vital importance affecting their well-being, they were following the only course by which constitution of England enabled them to present their views to the ruling authority. Much had been done by Great Britain for the benefit of India, and whole country was truly grateful to her for it. She had given them order, she had given them the inestimable blessings of Western education. But a great deal still remained to be done. The more progress the people made in education and material prosperity, the greater would be insight into the political matters and the keener their desire for political advancement. He thought that their desire to be governed according to the ideas of Government prevalent in Europe was in no way incompatible with their thorough loyalty to the British Government. All that they desired was that the basis of the Government should be widened, and that the people should have their proper and legitimate share in it. The discussions that would take place in this Congress would, he believed, be as advantageous to the ruling authorities as he was sure it would be to people at large.

Telegrams of sympathy with the object of the Conference were read from the British Indian Association and the Conference recently held at Calcutta and also from the public meeting at Assam. The questions of the appointment of a Royal Commission

of Inquiry into Indian administration, of the abolition of the India Council, and of the constitutional and functions of the Legislative Council were discussed and the following resolutions passed in reference to the former two.

The first asked for a Royal Commission to enquire into the working of Indian administration.

The second for the abolition of the India Council.

The third dealt with the defects of the Legislative Councils in which then all the members were nominated, and asked for the admission of elected members, for the right of interpellation, for the creation of Councils in the N.W.F.P. and Oudh, and in the Punjab, and for a Standing Committee in the House of Commons to consider formal protests from majorities in the Councils.

The fourth prayed for simultaneous examinations for the I.C.S. and the raising of the age of candidates.

The fifth and sixth dealt with Military expenditure.

The seventh protested against the annexation of Upper Burma and the proposed incorporation of it with India.

The eighth ordered the sending of the resolutions to political Associations, and they were discussed and passed all over the country by political bodies and public meetings, an admirable plan which has fallen into desuetude, they were carried with much enthusiasm, and here and there amended on minor points.

The final resolution fixed the next Congress at Calcutta, on 28th December, 1886.

Resolution I :—

Proposed by Mr. G. Subrahmania Iyer
Seconded by Mr. M. M. Mehta and supported
by Mr. N. N. Sen

“That this Congress earnestly recommends a Royal Commission into the working of the Indian administration here and in England, the people of India being adequately represented thereon, and all available evidence taken in India and in England.”

Resolution II :—

Proposed by Mr. S. Chiplonkar.
Seconded by Mr. P. Anandacharlu, and
Supported by Mr. Ghosal

“That the Congress consider the abolition of the council as at present constituted the necessary preliminary to all other reforms.

The conference concluded its sittings on the 29th after unanimously passing the above resolutions.

After the resolutions were passed, a cordial vote of thanks with three cheers was accorded to the Chairman for his able conduct in the Chair.”

In this way the first session concluded, but one addition before I close this chapter. Since so much confusion has persisted regarding the origin of the Congress, I think it may not be inappropriate to give the account recorded by the first President himself. The following is the account given by Mr. Bonnerjee :—

**The Origin of
the Congress**

It will probably be news to many that the Indian National Congress, as it was originally

started and as it has since been carried on, is in reality the work of the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava when that nobleman was Governor General of India. Mr. A. O. Hume, C.B., had, in 1884, conceived the idea that it would be of great advantage to the country if leading Indian politicians could be brought together once a year to discuss social matters and be upon friendly footing with one another. He did not desire that politics should form part of their discussion, for there were recognised political bodies in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and other parts of India, and he thought that these bodies might suffer in importance if, when Indian politicians from different parts of the country came together, they discussed politics. His idea further was that the Governor of the Province where the politicians met should be asked to preside over them and that thereby greater cordiality should be established between the official classes and the non-official Indian politicians. Full of these ideas he saw the noble Marquis when he went to Simla early in 1885 after having in the December previous assumed the Viceroyalty of India. Lord Dufferin took great interest in the matter and after considering over it for some time he sent for Mr. Hume and told him that, in his opinion, Mr. Hume's project would not be of much use. He said there was no body of persons in this country who performed the functions which Her

Majesty's Opposition did in England. The newspapers, even if they really represented the views of the people, were not reliable, and as the English were necessarily ignorant of what was thought of them and their policy in native circles, it would be very desirable in the interests as well as of the rulers as of the ruled that Indian politicians should meet yearly and point out to the Government in what respects the administration was defective and how it could be improved ; and he added that an assembly such as he proposed should not be presided over by the local Governor, for in his presence the people might not like to speak out their minds. Mr. Hume was convinced by Lord Dufferin's arguments and when he placed the two schemes, his own and Lord Dufferin's, before leading politicians in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and other parts of the country, the latter unanimously accepted Lord Dufferin's scheme and proceeded to give effect to it. Lord Dufferin had made it a condition with Mr. Hume that his name in connection with the scheme of the Congress should not be divulged so long as he remained in the country, and this condition was faithfully maintained and none but the men consulted by Mr. Hume knew anything about the matter.

WOOMES CHUNDER AS A CONGRESSMAN

The people of India will never realise what a great debt they owe the President of their National Congress. To-day his name is obscured, **India's debt to W. C. Bonnerjee** overshadowed by the names of younger men, stars which gleam brightly on our immediate horizon, but there are very few who realise that the greatness of the Congress to-day is a direct result of the endeavour of a few men who were its originators; and among them the name of W. C. Bonnerjee looms large. In the modern world no undertaking can be successful without adequate funds, and the Congress was no exception to the rule. There are great leaders of the Congress who have done much for its furtherance, but there are very few who have financed it in the way W. C. Bonnerjee did. As the Right Hon'ble Mr. Srinivasa Sastri has remarked: "India will never know the exact amount of her pecuniary indebtedness to him." In fact he spent several thousands a year both in India and in England to make known the grievances of his country. But his motto was "Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth", and the extent of his contribution will never be known. As long as he lived he worked untiringly for the Congress, first in India and afterwards in England.

The Second Congress was held in 1886 in Calcutta under the Presidentship of the "Grand old Man of

**Tribute by
Dadabhai
Naoroji**

India", Dadabhai Naoroji. In the opening lines of his presidential address, Dadabhai Naoroji paid a high tribute to the first President of the Congress :

"I need not tell you how sincerely thankful I am to you for placing me in this position of honour. I at last thought that I was to be elevated to this proud position as a return for what might be considered as a compliment paid by us to Bengal, when Mr. Bonnerjee was elected President of the First Congress last year at Bombay. I can assure you, however, that that election was no mere compliment to Bengal, but arose out of the simple fact that we regarded Mr. Bonnerjee as a gentleman qualified to take the place of President, and we installed him in the proper place." At this Congress Mr. Bonnerjee moved two propositions, The first was in connection with the Jury System in India. As a matter of fact this subject was one of his specialities throughout his Congress career, and when he was re-elected President at the Eighth Congress, held at Allahabad, we find him warmly denouncing the Jury System in India. The Second proposition that he moved was with regard to standing Congress Committees, which should be established in all the provinces, because without such "it is quite impossible to keep up a regular correspondence between the different parts of the country, and so arrived in due time at a general agreement as to the various questions on which action is to be taken at the Congress."

The Third Congress was held in Madras in the year 1887. On this occasion Mr. Bonnerjee proposed

**The Hindu-
Muslim Problem
in 1887**

the name of the President, his old friend and fellow-student in England, Mr. Badruddin Tyabji. The following speech which Mr. Bonnerjee made while proposing the President throws much light on the early Congressmen's attitude towards the Hindu-Muslim problem. This is what he says:

“ But in this connection, it is necessary for me to remind you that he is also a Mahomedan gentleman. I am very sorry, indeed, to say it, but there is no disguising the fact, that in Bengal, in some quarters, amongst our Mahomedan friends, some misapprehension as to the scope and objects of our National Congress still exists, and it is absolutely necessary that that misapprehension should be removed, and that we should be in fact, as we are in thought, one community and one country, owing allegiance to one Sovereign. The misapprehension under which those Mahomedan gentlemen (some of them at least) labour, who do not cordially sympathise with us, is due, I believe, to an apprehension that the question of “Representative Government” which was presented to the Congress of the year 1885, which was again pressed by the Congress of the year 1886, and which, I believe, will be once more urged by us here will not, if given effect to, practically prove to be conducive to the interests of the Mahomedan population of this country. I am very

glad to hear these murmurs of dissent from this assembly of delegates, a large number of whom, I see, are Mahomedans, because, I was just going to say that this apprehension was perfectly unfounded. There is nothing in the objects and scope of this National Congress, which can, directly or indirectly be in any way inimical to the interests of our Mahomedan fellow-countrymen, or of any other section of the community. We want a representative Government in its truest and best sense, and I, for, one,—and I am speaking in this matter on behalf of, I believe, the whole of the Hindu delegates do not desire a hole and corner representation, but a representation of every community in the country, so that the whole of India may be perfectly represented to the governing authorities—so that their grievances may be remedied—so that everything necessary to take the nation contented and happy, may be done by the governing authorities. It is not necessary for me to detain you at any length upon this subject, as I see we are all agreed upon it.”

In the next year Mr. Bonnerjee spent a part of his time in England. Here he carried on arduous campaign for the good of his beloved india. Unfortunately, although we all know that he carried on vast propaganda for India in England, we know very little of what he actually said.

**Propaganda In
England in 1888**

However, we are lucky enough to get the text of three of his speeches which he made in England in 1888—from the book “Eminent Indians on Indian Politics” edited by C. L. Parekh.

SELECTIONS FROM THE SPEECHES OF

MR. W. C. BONNERJEE

I

THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT

(Before a public Meeting held in August, 1888 at Wainfleet (England), the chief speakers on the occasion were Dr. Aubery and W. C. Bonnerjee).

After the speech of Dr. Aubery, Mr. Bonnerjee said :—

I am afraid, after the speech you have just listened to, may be thought presumptuous on my part to claim your attention, even for a few moments. But I come from a very distant part of the dominions which, together, form the great British Empire, and it is my desire to draw your attention to some of the things which take place in that great dependency of yours, in the hope that I may be able to arouse some interest in India, and to get some sympathy from you for the 250 millions of your fellow-subjects who are resident in that country. As you are aware, the Government of India is in the hands of an officer of the Crown, called the Secretary of State for India, who is assisted by a number of gentlemen who form his Council. When the Secretary of State for India gets up in the House of Commons to introduce any measure affecting the welfare of all his vast number of people how many of your representatives, do you think, are present to listen to him? I should have thought that the weal or woe of such people would induce all the

members of the House to be present on an occasion like that I have described, but when the Secretary of State for India rises, he frequently addresses empty benches, not more than four or five members being present. The largest number that has ever attended or manifested the slightest interest upon such an occasion in recent times was, I believe, thirty. (Cries of "Shame"). The late Professor Fawcett, whom you will remember as being one of the most prominent members who interested themselves in the affairs of India, knew the subject of the great country of India as thoroughly as the Indian people themselves. He used to go on endeavouring to draw the attention of the House of Commons to the affairs of India, but even he, with his great talent, used to find it difficult to arrest the attention of honourable members. My object in addressing you to-night is to ask you to use your influence as electors to put a stop to such state of things. For weal or for woe this great dependency is in your own hands. You, the individual electors of Great Britain, have a great responsibility to Providence in connection with that country. If you do not insist upon your representatives in the House of Commons devoting themselves, to the affairs of India ; if you do not yourselves, when opportunity offers, and when you have leisure at your hands, pay attention to the affairs of my country, you will not, I feel sure, be doing your duty. How do you think the affairs of India are managed, seeing that those who are charged with its government are responsible to no one ? The controlling body is the House of Commons, and that body pays no attention whatever to the affairs of

India. The master pays no attention to the work, and the servant quietly sits in the kitchen doing no work whatever. At the present moment there is great poverty in India, and by reason of the poverty the vast majority of the people of India do not often get two meals per day, and the meals they get consist of a little boiled rice with a little salt without any meat or vegetables. One would have supposed that salt, which is almost the chief necessity of life, would be untaxed. But the Government wanted money, and they raised the tax on salt—the necessity of the people ("Shame"). Why did the Government want money? Because they are frightened that Russia will some day come down on India and deprive Great Britain of her rule. This has been a great scare for the last half century. When Russia was thousands of miles away from India, and was gradually civilising Central Asia, it used to be the cry, that as soon as Russia came to a place called Merv, she would seize India. Russia reached Merv many years ago, and India still remains an English possession; and I am in a position to say on behalf of my countrymen—I am a Native of India and belong to one of the various castes, which caste is the caste of Brahmin—in a position to tell you that they would no more allow Russia, notwithstanding the neglect with which they have been treated, to take India, than they would allow the Hottentots to do so. (Applause) My countrymen are loyal to England to the backbone. (Renewed applause). They will, when necessity arises, fight shoulder with Englishmen for the purpose of retaining English rule and sending away any intruder. Your

Tories do not understand that ; they wish to keep everybody down with a firm hand. Your Tory does not believe it is possible to rule by affection, and to claim the goodwill and the willing service of the people. He only believes in his big army, with its big guns, some of which, as you have heard tonight, cost £200 to fire one shot. I do not believe that Russia has the slightest inimical intention towards India. For the purpose of preventing Russia going to India money is being wasted in the way Dr. Aubery has referred to, and in order to provide money for this purpose the Government of India has actually risen the tax upon salt which, as I have before said, is one of the necessaries of life of the people. We say : we understand our country a little ; but the Tories say that we, the Natives of the country, do not understand it at all, and that they, Tories, can govern us much better by themselves, and without the slightest help from the people of the country. The Liberals have given us education ; they have taught us the principles of civil and religious liberty, and we have learned from the Liberal party* that taxation without representation is tyranny—we have learned that thoroughly. (Applause) At the present moment we have councils in India, which Councils consist of members appointed by the Government. Sometimes the Government put upon the Councils Natives of India who do not understand one word of the English language, and yet all the proceedings are conducted in English. People who understand the English language are not appointed on these Councils, because, if they were, the Government would not

be able to do just what they please. They have got a constant majority, and with the exception of these members, who are called non-official members, the Council consists of official members, that is to say, the members who are in the service of the Government, and one of the conditions of service which the Government require from them is that they should always vote in a body, right or wrong, with the Government. The non-official members are always in a standing minority. The result is that nothing but what the officials want carrying out is carried out, notwithstanding the protest of the people at large. This is a state of things injurious to the best interests of the country. There has been for many years in India a great deal of education imparted to the people, and the people now understand thoroughly the affairs of their country. Before railway communication was completed throughout the country, the people met in their own districts for the purpose of bringing their grievances to the knowledge of the Government and asking for redress, but for the last three years organisation have grown up amongst us, from which representatives meet together once a year from every part of India—representatives of two hundred and fifty millions of people gather together to discuss the position of the country, to see what is required for the government of the country, and pass resolutions upon those subject and send those resolutions to the Government. We call these meetings the National Indian Congress. The third meeting of this body took place in Madras in December last, and at this meeting we, for the third time, repeated a resolution asking that the Councils

in India which make the laws should be so broadened as to introduce the representative principle. That is to say, allow the people to select their own representatives for the purpose of taking part in the making of laws, which governed the country. (Loud applause) This we have been crying for a long time, and there is not a person in the country that is not anxious that representative institution should be introduced into India. The officials say to us: "You are not fit for the representative Government." That has always been the excuse of those who did not wish to extend freedom. You are not fit for the Reform Bill of 1832: Colonel Sibthorpe said if that Bill were passed England would go to the bottom of the sea. It is the Tories who always tell you they can govern you better than you can govern yourselves. They remind me of the parent who would not allow his son to go to the water because he could not swim. How can a person learn to swim if he never enters water? (Laughter). How can we learn to be fit for representative Government: how can we prove we are fit for it, if they do not give us representative rights? (Cheers). Give us representative Government, and if we are not fit for it then take it away again. (Cheers). If there had been one representative on the Council of the Viceroy he would not have allowed, without a stern protest, a rise in the duty on salt. The whole country is up in arms against the iniquitous proposal, but the Government would not pay the slightest attention. It is from the Government of India that we appeal to the people of England, and we ask the Liberal party to take a little interest in the affairs of this great country, and in the

words of your motto, "Honour, Justice, and Liberty," I call upon you to instruct your representatives who go to the House of Commons, to act towards my country with honour, with justice, and show to my country the same principles of liberty, and to act towards my country in the same spirits of liberty as you would expect them to act towards you. (Loud cheers).

II.

INDIAN GRIEVANCES.

(Before a great public meeting held at the Town Hall in Northampton, England—on Tuesday evening the 21st August, 1888, to consider "India's wrongs and English Remedies," the chief speaker being the Junior member for the borough (the late) Mr. C. Bradlaugh, Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji and Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee. The Hall was filled to excess, and chair was taken by the Mayor.)

Mr. Bonnerjee who was cordially welcomed said: Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,—You have come to-night to hear Indian grievances discussed before you, and I shall not therefore, follow my friend, Mr. Naoroji in stating to you the great benefits which most undoubtedly you have conferred upon my country. My task is to lay before you the grievances of that country in order that you may consider them and see for yourselves whether there are no means by which to redress them.

NOW THE FIRST GRIEVANCE

that we labour under is that there is no responsible Government for India at all. ("Hear, hear" from Mr. Bradlaugh). The Government of India is in the hands of one of Her Majesty's principal Secretaries of State called the Secretary of State for India, who is assisted by a Council, but would you believe it, that this gentleman, the Secretary of State and his Council, are sometimes ignorant of things which private members of Parliament are in possession of fully? (Cries of "Shame" and laughter). The other day I had the great privilege of listening to your

respected representative in the House of Commons—(loud cheers)—and in the course of his speech he was able to tell the Under Secretary of State that he knew a good deal more of what was going on in connection with the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company than the Secretary and his advisers did in this country (Cheers). When any question is asked in the House of Commons of the Under-Secretary the answer invariably is—"The Secretary of State has no official knowledge of the matter"—(laughter)—and unless the honourable member putting the question is persistent, and after a short time again puts the question, it seems to me that the Secretary of State never has any official knowledge of anything under the sun in India. (Laughter and cheers). Then the Secretary of State entirely dependent upon the advice he receives from India and he does not seem to have in his possession any machinery by which it is possible for him to check what the officials in India, send to him as a true account of what is taking place. ('Shame'). I need not go further than just across St. George's Channel to remind you that the official information sent over is very different from the information given from other sources you are getting daily. (Cheers) I don't for one moment mean to say that the condition of India is like the condition of Ireland. Thank goodness, we are ever so much better off than the people in Ireland (hear, hear), but I bring forward the case of Ireland for the purpose of showing you that

OFFICIAL INFORMATION

is not in every instance true information. (Cheers). In India the supreme rule is in the hands of the

Viceroy and his Council. They act from the information which they receive from the district officials. However clever, however able, however well-meaning, however inclined to do justice the Viceroy may be, he is more or less in the hands of those who have to administer the country in the districts, in the places where the people congregate, where the people lead their daily lives, and it is the officials who are entrusted with the charge of these districts who have the weal or woe of the country in their hands, and when you appeal against any action of theirs to the Viceroy you do not get any reply for months and months, and as a matter of fact the only reply vouchsafed is that the Viceroy sees no reason to interfere. (Cries of "Shame"). To a certain extent this state of things must be so, but it need not be so in the hard and fast way in which it is being carried out, and if we had some voice in the Government of our country there is no doubt we should be able to put questions of administrative details to the officers responsible in the Council for the Government, and we should be able to stir the members of the Government up to do, what I have no doubt they conscientiously wish to do—namely, good to the people of India (Cheers). Now, I will give you two instances to show how the present system of Government has

INSTEAD OF ADVANCING THE COUNTRY done very much to retard it for a certain time. The Legislative Councils, as my friend Mr. Naoroji has told you, pass laws—the local Councils for the Provinces represented by them, the Supreme Council for the whole of India. Now, these Councils, particularly

in the Viceroy's Council, seem to be a sort of hothouse for English gentlemen going out there to carry out their own views. They try their theories in this country, and absolutely fail, but somehow they manage to get seats in the Indian Council in Calcutta, and the things that had been scouted in this country are carried out there, notwithstanding the position and clamour and protest of the people ("Shame"). From 1861 to 1872 we had in India a Criminal Procedure Code which had been drafted by no less an authority than the illustrious Thomas Babington Macaulay. It had been looked over very carefully by no less an authority than Sir Barnes Peacock, whose name you may have heard as being Chief Justice in Bengal for many years, and as now being one of the members of her Majesty's Privy Council. Several other persons well acquainted with the law had perfected this code. Under this code we were allowed trial by jury in such districts the Local Government considered we were fit to have trial by jury (Cheers). I may mention there is no single district where trial by jury may not be safely introduced at the present time (cheers), but that is, by the way. The verdicts of juries were final

THE PRISONER HAD THE RIGHT

of carrying his case, if convicted, to higher courts if there were any points of law to be urged on his behalf. That remained the law, and worked very well indeed to a very considerable extent. In the year 1870, to our very great misfortune, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen was appointed law member of the Viceroy's Council. He went out to India and the first thing he took in hand was called "The Amend-

ment of the Criminal Procedure Code." That amendment consisted in this—that he took away the finality from the verdict of the jury ; he gave the power which no judge in India had ever possessed before, of enhancing sentences on appeal ; and he made the Criminal Procedure Code almost Draconian in its severity. (loud cries of "shame.") You have, no doubt, heard that the people of India are as law-abiding as any people on the earth—(cheers)—and yet in a country like that the Criminal Procedure Code has been made the severest of any in the civilised world. ("shame" and sensation.) I will tell you what happened under this law. This is an instance, you may call it an extreme instance, but it took place, and there are others which take place everyday, to the great oppression of the people of the country, who protest, but nobody listens to their protest. ("shame") A man was tried in one of the districts in Bengal for murder. The trial took place, not before a jury, but before what are called assessors—two assessors and a judge. The judge concurring with the two assessors, found the man

NOT GUILTY OF MURDER.

but found him guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced him to hard labour for five years. He appealed against his conviction—he had right of appeal, the trial having been held with the aid of assessors and not with the aid of a jury. The case came before the High Court of Calcutta. He was a poor man and could not be properly represented. The judges upset the conviction as regards manslaughter, found this man guilty of murder, sentenced him to be hanged, and

notwithstanding petitions for mercy from nearly the whole country that man was hanged (great sensation, and loud cries of shame). He had in the meantime undergone nearly two months of imprisonment, so that he was kept in rigorous imprisonment for two months, and at the end of that was hanged ("shame"). Now this created such a shock in the minds of the people that it is impossible to describe the sensation in the country at the time; everybody wept aloud almost, but there was nobody to take any notice of that. Our district officers thought that the prestige of the High Court would be lost if the Government interfered and allowed that man to live. The High Court had the power, and could have sentenced him to transportation for life; but no—the man was

SENTENCED TO BE HANGED,

and hanged he was accordingly ("shame", "shame"). There are many instances where a man has been fined; after Sir James Fitzjames Stephen's law he has appealed, and the result has been that the judges, instead of affirming the fine, have sent him to hard labour for many months ("shame"). How I saw the scenes created in this country when it was reported, and truly reported, that some Country Court judges in Ireland had enhanced the sentences on appeal. There was a tremendous outburst (cheers), and the result was that even Mr. Balfour was obliged to send instructions to his Country Court judges not to enhance sentences on appeal (cheers). But a thing like this goes on in India almost every day. The people cry aloud against, but there is nobody to pay heed to their cry ("shame"). The way in which legis-

lation is conducted in India is such that if I gave you instances you would cry "shame." This very Sir James Fitzjames Stephen passed what is called the Evidence Act for India. It is the substance of Pitt Taylor's book boiled down considerably. Well, one clause he has introduced is that at a criminal trial the previous conviction of any prisoner may be given in evidence at any stage. That is to say in the year of grace 1888 a man is charged with picking another person's pocket,

YOU MAY GIVE EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM

that in 1830 he was guilty of bigamy (laughter). And what do you think is the reason given for this. Sir James Fitzjames Stephen says in his report to the Legislative Council: "It is said that evidence of this description may prejudice the prisoner. My answer is that if the prisoner is guilty"—mark the logic—"if the prisoner is guilty I do not see why he should not be prejudiced, the object of giving evidence against a man being to shew whether he is guilty or not." And laws of this description have been passed, people have protested, but there is no heed paid to these protests. Representative institutions and other things which go to make up a civilised country, only exist for the happiness and well-being of the people. If without giving us representative institutions you can discover something by which the people will be able to lead a happy and contented life, have all their aspirations humanly speaking satisfied, I am perfectly certain that my countrymen would rejoice at the idea: but at present no one has been able to discover any-

thing better than such institutions as are possessed more or less by other countries in the civilized world. But it is

NOT EVEN REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS

in the form that exist in this country that we want. We say whether you admit it or whether you do not admit it, you are dependant for the good government of our country upon the advice you must necessarily seek from the people themselves (cheers). Officials in India do not admit it, but they do it. If they have a difficult question to deal with, they call together this man and that man and they call together a third man, being natives of the country, with whom they discuss the matter. These persons, as has been pointed out to you, are not responsible to anybody and they may give such answer as may chime in with the views known to be held by the district officer; and instead of getting good advice from responsible persons, the district officers generally gets advice that leads him to take action not in accord with the will of the country. The subject of India, like the country itself, is a very vast one, and I am afraid, if I were to detain you from now till the morning, I should not be able to exhaust it (cheers and a voice, "go on"). You will have, I am glad to say, the opportunity of hearing my friend Mr. Bradlaugh (loud cheers), and he will make that clear to you which, I probably, have not been able to do.

FOR GOOD OR FOR EVIL

India has become bound up with you (cheers). You cannot, having carried her so far, turn her adrift,

and of her own will India will never ask to be allowed to go adrift (loud cheering). It is necessary for the peace of both countries—this great country as well as her great dependency—that some method should be devised by which the people will be more contented, the people will get more to eat (cheers), the people will be able to discharge the duties of citizenship (cheers). You are a superior nation, you are governing the country, and it behoved you, one and all, to take pride in measures which will be a blessing not only to India, but to this country (renewed cheering).

III

REFORM FOR INDIA.

(Before a very largely attended public meeting, convened by the Croydon Women's Liberal Association, held on Tuesday, October 14th, 1888, at the Skating Rink, Croydon, for the purpose of listening to addresses on the subject of Reform for India. The Chair was taken by Dr. Aubrey, Liberal Candidate for the Horncastle Division of Lincolnshire, and a well-known leader of political opinion in Croydon. The platform was crowded with ladies and gentlemen of political and social influence in Croydon).

Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee : Ladies and Gentlemen, I appear before you tonight in a double capacity ; first as a citizen of Croydon, and secondly, and for the nonce I will put my second capacity in the background, as a native of India. I have much pleasure in seconding the resolution which has been so ably proposed by my friend, Mr. Street. You know the Government of India has been, and naturally has been from the beginning,

A GOVERNMENT OF EXPERIMENTS.

When the English people first went there, and tried to understand the people and govern the country, their work was, more or less, a work of experiments. Various experiments were from time to time tried until the year 1861, when the experiment on which the system of Government which at present obtains in India is based hit upon. From 1861 to the present time is a period of about twenty-five years and the experiment to which I have referred has had full time to develop itself. But I think that anyone who has paid the slightest attention to the Government of India knows that it has not been a success, and even the India Office feels that it is necessary that some new experiment should be determined upon. Our idea of what this new experiment should be differs from that of the permanent officials. We want the one which Mr. Bradlaugh, whom in India we are proud to call the member for India (cheers), has brought before the House of Commons in his India Bill, and which he will again produce when the House next meets. The permanent officials want to give us Lord Cross's Bill. I said that

**THE EXPERIMENT OF 1861 HAS
NOT BEEN A SUCCESS,**

and I will tell you why. I will give you one instance, and I think that will shew you that what I am stating is no exaggeration whatever. Now the language in which the proceedings of the Legislative Councils of India are conducted is English. Very often there are appointed to the Viceregal Legislative Council Indian gentlemen, no doubt of high position and great wealth, but who unfortunately do not understand

English, and who, therefore, are incapable of taking active or intelligent part in the proceedings before them. One of these gentlemen was a very constant attendant at meetings of the Viceregal Legislative Council, and was one of the supporters upon whom the Government relied. One of his friends asked him how it was that he did not understand a single word of what was taking place. His answer was: "It has been the pleasure of the Viceroy to install me in this place as one of his councillors, and it is my duty to vote for him on all occasions." He was then asked how he knew the way in which the Viceroy wanted him to vote, and his answer was: "When the Viceroy lifts up his hand one way, I know he wants me to say 'Yes', and I say 'Yes'; and when he lifts up his hand in a different way, I know he wants me to say 'No,' and I say 'No,' (laughter). That is the sort of thing that goes on in this Council. Gentlemen, I make bold to say that the presence of Indian gentlemen in the Legislative Councils at present is nothing more or less than a mere makebelieve. The experiment which Mr. Bradlaugh wishes to introduce will not have that character. It will ensure the presence in the Councils of men elected by their own countrymen and not nominated by the Government. If you wish honestly to govern the country according to its wishes and aspirations, say to the people: "Give us those on whom you rely, who represent your true views, and we will associate ourselves with them for the Government of the country." (cheers). It is no use telling the civilised world that you have the people of India with you in your Councils. You know that these people

of India are dependent for their position in the country upon your good will. If they do not support you, you never re-appoint them ; you have things reported against them, and their life is a burden to them. Anyone now appointed to these Councils by the favour of the Government comes there with his life almost in his hand, because if he is found to be in any way independent he is not only not re-appointed but his position in the country is made intolerable for him. I say, therefore, either do away with

THE FARCE OF HAVING ANY OF THESE
INDIANS IN THE COUNCILS,

or, if you wish really to govern the country with the aid of the people take them into your confidence and give them an opportunity of sending their representatives to the Legislative Councils. You have heard a good deal about India from Mr. Caine and Mr. Bradlaugh, and as the time is far advanced I will not detain you by going into the matters which have been dwelt upon so eloquently by them. I will only say that the objection which has been raised by some persons in this country and also in India of a conservative turn of mind that the people of India are not fit for the kind of Government Mr. Bradlaugh has in view, is of no force whatever. Anyone who is acquainted with the village system of India knows that at a time when civilization was unknown in this country representative institutions of a kind obtained in that country. Representation is ingrained in the minds of the people. From the time the East India Company first obtained ascendancy in the country they have not had many opportunities of giving effect to

the principle, but it cannot be said that they have forgotten it. The village system, which is based upon representation, is still to be found in the country, and in some parts it is still in full operation. Anyhow, the experiment is well worth trying, and I am confident that it will be a success. Therefore, it is that I ask you to adopt the resolution and petition now before the meeting. One word more and I have done. Some of the Indian officials say that you, the English people, do not understand these questions, and ought not therefore to interfere with them. So far as the details of the questions are concerned I believe they are right. It is a misfortune to India that you do not understand the details. But I do not ask you to go into details at all. The resolution does not pledge you to any details : it simply asks you to say that in any measure which may be passed by Parliament for the reform of the Legislative Councils of India the elective principle safeguarded in such a way as may be thought proper, should be recognised. You are only pledging yourselves to the principle. The details you leave to the wisdom of Parliament. As has been well said by Mr. Bradlaugh,

YOU ARE NOW INDIVIDUALLY RESPONSIBLE

for the Government of India. It is for you to lay down the principles on which that Government should be conducted, and in insisting that India shall have representative institutions in a modified form you are giving to that country nothing that is new, but merely restoring and revivifying an old principle (cheers).

From England he came back in time to take part at the Congress held in Allahabad under the Presidentship of Mr. George Yule. From Mr. Bonnerjee's presidential speech at the Eighth Congress, we learn that it was he who persuaded Mr. Yule to accept that office :—

**George Yule and
Pundit Ajudhia-
nath**

"When it was time to select a President for recommendation to the Congress of 1888, It was suggested to me, I being then in England, that I might ascertain the views of Mr. George Yule, and ask him to preside. I accordingly saw him at his Office in the city, and had the same kind of conversation with him as I had had, the year before, with Pundit Ajudhianath. He also listened to me kindly, courteously and sympathetically, and asked me to give him all the Congress literature I had. I had only the three Reports of the Congress Meetings of 1885, 1886 and 1887, and I sent these to him ; and to my great joy, and as it afterwards turned out, to the great benefit of the Congress, Mr. Yule came to see me at my house and told me that he entirely sympathised with the cause, and that, if elected to be the President of the Congress of that year, he would be proud of the position and would do what he could for us. Those who had the good fortune to attend the Congress of 1888, know how manfully and how well he sustained the duties of his position ; how he pointed out that

the chief plank in the Congress platform—namely, the reform and reconstitution of Legislative Councils of this country—was by no means an invention on the part of the Congress; that that point had received the attention and had been favourably considered and spoken of by that marvellous English statesman, Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. He told us that we were treading on the footsteps of that great man, and that if we perseveringly stuck to our colours, some time or other we should get what we wanted. From that time to the day of his death, Mr. Yule worked with us, gave us his valuable advice and helped us considerably as regards our working expenses.”

From the same speech we learn that it was he who persuaded Pundit Ajudhianath to “espouse the Congress cause.”

We reproduce below the whole of the speech which he made at the Congress Session of 1888. The last paragraph is one which shows clearly the aims of the early Congressmen, and its heartening message is one which every Congressman today should read when he feels that everything is going wrong.

**Speech at the
Congress of 1888**

THE NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND ENGLAND.

(Speech made before the sitting of the Fourth Indian National Congress at Allahabad on Saturday, on 29th December, 1888,—in proposing the Resolution XI).

W. C. Bonnerjee said : Mr. President and Gentlemen,—We have hitherto been hewing some of the many stones which are still required to crown the splendid the unique, the marvellous edifice (cheers) which the statemanship of Great Britain has reared up in this country (cheers). It is now necessary that these stones should be submitted by us to the chief superintendent of that edifice in this country, and to his official superior in London, in order that they may consider their merit and fitness (cheers). Accordingly I have to present for your acceptance the following resolution :—

“That the foregoing resolution be submitted for the favourable consideration of His Excellency the Viceroy, and for transmission by him to Her Majesty’s Government, with the humble request of this Congress that the reforms suggested in the said resolutions, based as most of these are on Her Gracious Majesty’s Proclamation of 1858, may now be effected, and that should it be deemed necessary first to institute any enquiry into any matters forming the subjects of these Resolutions, such enquiry may be made as speedily as possible by a Parliamentary Committee.”

I may say, that this resolution is as of course, and it would not have been necessary for me to detain you

a single moment if it had not been for the fact that the concluding portion of it, the portion that is which asks for an enquiry by a Parliamentary Committee, might seem, at first sight, inconsistent with one of the resolutions which we passed at the Congress of 1885. You will remember that at that Congress we asked that the enquiry into the administration of India, which had been promised by the then Secretary of State for India by means of a Parliamentary Committee, should be made by a Royal Commission consisting of representatives both of England and of this country, and taking evidence both in England and India (cheers). But, as the late Lord Benconfield once said, many things have happen since then (laughter and cheers). It has become unnecessary for the purposes of the resolution which we have passed here to ask for a Royal Commission. On this occasion we are only asking that if any of the propositions which we are going to lay before the Government requires any further inquiry—in our judgment no inquiry further than what has been already made it necessary—then such inquiry may be made by a Parliamentary Committee, A Parliamentary Committee, as you all know, must come to an end with the Parliament that appoints it, and it must conclude its labours before any very long time has expired. On the other hand, a Royal Commission may go on sitting for years and years, hanging up reforms which have been felt and declared by you all on behalf of the country to be absolutely necessary (cheers). Many of the resolutions which you have passed deal with matters which may be disposed of in this country by the Government of India,

if only the Secretary of State so desires ; and the only thing you have asked for which requires the consideration of parliament is the expansion of our Legislative Councils. That subject has been before the country now for many years, and it is not necessary that any further inquiry should be made.

I hope that, should these proceedings come under the eye of Mr. Bradlaugh (loud prolonged cheers), who has so kindly interested himself in matters connected with India, he will see that we are not in any way throwing overboard the notice of motion which he has given, and which he has promised to bring forward at the next sessions of Parliament. We are only asking him to modify his motion to a certain extent. I hope you will not think that, in asking for a Parliamentary Committee, and not for a Royal Commission, we are guilty of any inconsistency, or are in any way unappreciative of his great efforts on our behalf (loud cheers). I know I speak the sense of this vast assembly when I say that we are unfeignedly grateful to him for his masterly and able advocacy of our cause (cheers) ; and we hope that he will be pleased to help us in the future in the direction of the resolution which I have submitted to you (cheers).

The reforms, however, for which we have pressed in the preceding resolutions are not by any means the only reforms which are essential for the welfare of India. They are perhaps the simplest ; and in regard to them the country is now, most completely, of one mind as to the exact steps that it is necessary for the Government to take. But there are other

great and vital reforms which will sooner or later have to be dealt with if India is to be justly administered, and if even the ultimate interests of the British Empire, as a whole, are to be considered. Such, for instance, as the reduction of military expenditure, and its re-apportionment on a juster basis between England and India, and various other matters with which I need not trouble you now. These are extremely complicated questions, in regard to most of which we, ourselves, lack the detailed practical knowledge essential to the suggestion of definite action, and in regard to these we shall have later to press once more for that Royal Commission which we prayed for in 1885. But at the present moment what we first want is, that those simple and clear reforms, which are now fully ready for practical embodiment, should be carried out.

Now brother Delegates, one word more and I have done. Do not be cast down, do not be disheartened, if immediately you put forward a request it is not granted by those who are responsible for the good government of the country (cheers). Be patient, be moderate, be true to your cause and to yourselves. Remember that even now there are many reforms about which large majorities are agreed, which the English people are themselves asking for and which they have not yet got. ("hear hear"). If you are true to yourselves, if you are moderate, if you are reasonable in your demands, and if you go on agitating, loyally and constitutionally, believing that the British public—and in that public I include our Anglo-Indian friends in this country—is a truth-loving and a justice-loving public, you will be sure to get what you

are asking for in the end (cheers). Give a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, and you will reach the shores of victory in no time. (loud cheers).

At the Congress of 1889 it fell to Mr. Bonnerjee to propose the President Sir W. Wedderburn, and he **Speech proposing the President of 1889** "did, so in a neat little speech which contained one of the few instances of humour to be discovered in his utterances"—

If you look back to the Presidents that we have had from 1885, you will see that the selection Sir William Wedderburn has been arrived at by a sort of logical process. The first Congress in 1885 was comparatively an insignificant one, and you were presided over on that occasion by an equally insignificant individual. The Second Congress had the honour of being presided over by one who had devoted the whole of his life to the cause of his country and who, even in his old age, is at the present moment appealing to the electors of one of the constituencies of England in order that, if returned to the House of Commons, he may be able still more effectively to serve that country. Can I name Dadabhai Naoroji without calling from you enthusiastic applause? The third Congress was presided over by a gentleman of the Mahomedan persuasion, who, having distinguished himself at the Bar and in public life, was thought to be the fittest man to contradict the rumours that had been sedulously cast abroad that this was a Hindu Congress and that Mahomedan gentlemen had

no sympathy with it. The next President ought, according to the process which we followed, to have been a gentleman belonging to the Eurasian community ; but at the time when it became necessary to select a President, *the* man amongst the Eurasian community whom the whole of this country would have hailed with one voice as President of the Congress, Mr. D. S. White, was lying ill in bed ; and while he was in that condition it would have been improper for us to ask any other Eurasian gentleman to take his place. Now, unfortunately, he is no more ; and India has lost one of her brightest sons and best patriots in Mr. D. S. White. Failing Mr. White, we had to go to that other community in India—the Anglo-Indian community—and there we found our late respected President Mr. George Yule. Of him I need to say no more than this, that having retired to England he is still devoting his time and his money to the furtherance of the cause of the Congress. From the non-official European community to the official European community is but a slight descent, but unfortunately it is impossible for us to get a gentleman at the time actually belonging to the official classes to guide our deliberations. However sympathetic they may be, however much they may wish success to the Congress, the rules of the service to which they belong prevent their publicly joining us and taking a prominent part in our

proceedings. But ex-officials do not occupy such a restricted position : they are able to exercise their judgment in matters political. And we have in Sir William Wedderburn an ex-official who has throughout his career in this country, extending over 25 years, shown the deepest sympathy with the aspirations of the people of this country, and is one of the few men in the service who have had the eye to see and the heart to feel that the Government of India, conducted though it may be upon generous principles, is not all that is required for the best interests of the country, and that its institutions require to be liberalized in order that they may harmonize with the conditions of the present day.

In 1890 the Congress session was held in Calcutta but illness and the death of his third son prevented him from joining in the Congress activities. It is apparent from the speeches made by the various delegates that his presence was sadly missed.

In 1891 at Nagpur Mr. Bonnerjee moved some important propositions ; and one among them was to record the Congress's "high estimate and deep appreciation of the great services of Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji and thanked the electors of the Central Finsbury and all others that had furthered his candidature." The entire speech is here :—

**Dadabhai
Naoroji's
Candidature**

Is there anyone amongst you who has not heard the name of Dadabhai Naoroji, or, having

heard it, does not revere it, does not love it, does not carry it about with him as a household word ? From the time when he was a young man to the present day when he is over three score years old, he has devoted himself, his fortune, his talents, his life, one may say, to the cause of the country. There is no publicist among us who knows the economical condition of India so well as Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji. He has fought, and, in my opinion, fought successfully, many a tough battle with the adversaries of India. Chief amongst them was that very superior person Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant-Duff, who, when he was in India, only corresponded with such high personages as Prince Bismarck and the Emperor Frederick. Now Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, not for any personal advantage to himself, but only for the sake of his country, has been trying for some years to get into the House of Commons, so that there, in the midst of the representatives of Great Britain herself, he may plead the cause of his native country. You know how difficult it is even for Englishmen to get into the House of Commons. He has failed once, but the spirit which led him to devote his life to his country is still in him and stirring him on to do the best he can to get a seat in the House of Commons. All that I ask you to do by this resolution is to say that you have your old confidence in the old man, and that you will

be sincerely grateful to any constituency in Great Britain that will do itself the inestimable honour of sending Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji to the House of Commons.

In 1892 he was re-elected President and his activities in that session will be recorded in the next chapter.

V

THE EIGHTH CONGRESS AND AFTER

In the year 1892, W. C. Bonnerjee was re-elected President a second time, the first among the few **President once more** presidents on whom this honour was conferred. Of all our Congress Presidents very few have been elected twice, and only one, the "Grand Old Man of India," Dadabhai Naoroji was elected thrice. The eighth session of the Indian National Congress was held in Allahabad, and fortunately we have the full text of the President's speech. It will not be possible here to reproduce the whole of it, but a few extracts should suffice to show the President's general opinions.

The establishment and the growth of the Congress have been often attributed to the efforts of one man, **Establishment and growth of the Congress** Allan Octavian Hume, and most people believe that this "Father of the Congress" was its founder, and that its subsequent success was largely the result of his efforts. Mr. Bonnerjee in his Presidential address categorically contradicts this assumption in the following words :—

“ There can be no doubt—say what those who do not view our proceedings with friendly eyes may—that the Congress movement has been a success and a conspicuous success. The persons to whom I have referred have been troubling their brains from almost the very commencement of the movement to find out how it is that this movement, which they are pleased to call only a “native” movement, has been such a success. And they have hit upon one of the causes, which they have iterated and re-iterated, in season and out of season, as the cause of the success of the Congress, namely the influence over us of that great man Allan Octavian Hume. (Loud and prolonged cheers). That Mr. Hume possesses and has exercised a vast amount of influence over the Congress movement, and over each single Congress which has met, is a fact. We are not only ashamed to acknowledge it, but we acknowledge it with gratitude to that gentleman, and we are proud of his connection with the Congress (cheers). But the movement is only to some extent, and I may say, only to a limited extent, due to the influence which Mr. Hume has exercised over us. It is not the influence of this man or of that man or of any third man that has made the Congress what it is. It is the British professors who have discoursed eloquently to us on the glorious constitution of their country ; it is the British merchants who have shown to us

how well to deal with the commodities of our country ; it is the British Engineers who have annihilated distance and enabled us to come together for our deliberation from all parts of the empire ; it is the British planters who have shown us how best to raise the products of our soil ; it is all these, in other words, it is all the influences which emanate from British rule in India that have made the Congress the success it is (cheers). The Congress is a mere manifestation of the good work that has been done by all those to whom I have referred, (and I ought also to have referred to the British Missionaries who have worked amongst us) ; and all that we wish by this movement to do is to ask the British public, both in this country and Great Britain, that without any strain on the connection which exists between Great Britain and this country, such measures may be adopted by the ruling authorities that the grievances under which we labour may be removed, and that we may hereafter have the same facilities of national life that exist in Great Britain herself. How long it will take us to reach the latter end no one can tell ; but it is our duty to keep the hope of it before us, and keep reminding our British fellow-subjects that this hope shall always be with us."

At this Congress again Mr. Bonnerjee propounded his views on the subject of social reform vis-a-vis the Congress. Briefly stated he was of the opinion that only political

**Social Reform
vis-a-vis the
Congress**

matters should be discussed by the Congress, and that social matters should remain the province of the different religious communities.

“Some of critics have been busy in telling us thinking they knew our affairs better than we know them ourselves, that we ought not to meddle with political matters, but leaving politics aside devote ourselves to social subjects and so improve the social system of our country. I am one of those who have very little faith in the public discussion of social matters; those are things which, I think, ought to be left to the individuals of a community who belong to the same social organisation to do what they can for its improvement. We know how excited people become when social subjects are discussed in public. Not long ago we had an instance of this when what was called the *Age of Consent Bill* was introduced into the Vice-regal Legislative Council. I do not purpose to say one word as to the merits of the controversy that arose over that measure, but I allude to it to illustrate how apt the public mind is to get agitated over these social matters if they are discussed in a hostile and unfriendly spirit in public. But to show to you that those who organised the Congress movement had not lost sight of the question of social reform, I may state that when I met in Bombay for the first time, the matter was discussed threadbare with the help of such

distinguished social reformers as Dewan Bahadur Raghunatha Rao of Madras, Mr. Mahadev Govind Ranade, and Mr. Krishnaji Lakshman Nulker of Poona, Mr. Norendra Nath Sen, and Mr. Janakinath Ghosal of Calcutta and others. The whole subject was considered from every point of view, and we at last came to the conclusion with the full consent and concurrence of those distinguished men that it would not do for the Congress to meddle itself, as a Congress, with questions of social reform. At the same time we also came to the conclusion that those gentlemen who were anxious in a friendly spirit to discuss their own social organisations should have an opportunity of doing so in the Congress hall after the business of the Congress should be over. The principal reason which actuated us in coming to that conclusion was that at our gatherings there would attend delegates following different religions, living under different social systems, all more or less interwoven with their respective religions, and we felt it would not be possible for them as a body to discuss social matters. How is it possible for a Hindu gentleman to discuss with a Parsee or a Mahomedan gentleman matters connected with Hindu social questions? How is it possible for Mahomedan gentleman to discuss with Hindu and Parsee gentlemen matters connected with Mahomedan questions? And how is it possible for a Parsee gentleman

to discuss with Hindu and Mahomedan gentlemen matters connected with Parsee social customs? We thought, and I hope you will agree, that we were right that under the circumstances all we could do was to leave it to the Hindus and the Mahomedans, Parsee, and other delegates to discuss their respective social matters in a friendly spirit amongst themselves, and arrive at what conclusions they pleased, and if possible to get the minority to submit to the views of the majority (cheers). I may point out that we do not all understand in the same sense what is meant by social reform. Some of us are anxious that our daughters should have the same education as our sons, that they should go to Universities, that they should adopt learned professions; others who are more timid would be content with seeing that their children are not given in marriage when very young, and that child-widows should not remain widows all the days of their lives. Others more timid still would allow social problems to solve themselves. It is impossible to get any common ground even as regards the members of the same community, be it Hindu, Mahomedan or Parsee with respect to these matters. Thus it was that social questions were left out of the Congress programme; thus it was that the Congress commenced and has since remained, and will, I sincerely trust, always remain as a purely political organisa-

tion devoting its energies to political matters and political matter only. I am afraid that those whether belonging to our own country or to any other country, who find fault with us for not making social subjects a part of our work, cherish a secret wish that we might all be set by the ears, as we are all set by the years by the Age of Consent Bill, and that thus we might come to an ignominious end. They mean us no good and when we critics of that description talking of the Congress as only fit to discuss social problems, I think the wider the berth we give them, the better (cheers).

RELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS

I, for one, have no patience with those who say we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two. Let me take, for instance, one of the political reforms which we have been suggesting year after year, viz : the separation of judicial from executive functions in the same officer. What possible connection can there be between this, which is a purely political reform and social reform? In the same way, take the Permanent Settlement which we have been advocating, the amendment of the law relating to forests and other such measures; and I ask again, what have these to do with social reforms? Are we not fit for them, because our widows remain

unmarried and girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries?—because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends?—because we do not send our daughters to Oxford or Cambridge ? (cheers)”

After having paid a suitable tribute to the Congressmen who had died within the year, he gave an interesting account of Dadabhai Naoroji's return to the House of Commons.

Dadabhai Naoroji's return to the House of Commons.

mons :—

“Another cheering event to which I have to call attention is the return of our leader, our revered leader, Dadabhai Naoroji (three cheers) to sit in the House of Commons as member for Central Finsbury. You all know it had been hoped that he would be able to come out from England to occupy the position I am now occupying. We all looked forward to his presence amongst us with hopefulness and trust and with great satisfaction, because, if he had been with us we could have shown to him, face to face, that our confidence in him is just as high as it ever was. We could have told him, by word of mouth, of the great joy which spread throught the length and breadth of India when the news of his return to the House of Commons was received, if the anxiety with which we watched the fate of the election petition which was presented against his return, and how glad we were that it was

at least withdrawn. And he could have carried back with him to England our message of gratitude to the electors of Central Finsbury (cheers), and have shown them that in electing him as their representative they had also elected a representative for the people of India in the House of Commons (cheers). Unfortunately, his opponent, Captain Penton, had presented that hateful petition and just at the moment that Mr. Naoroji was to have made his preparations to come out to India, it was fixed to be heard. Mr. Naoroji had to stay. There was a hand to hand struggle, and it was at last found that the number of votes for the two candidates was on a level. Captain Penton must have felt that if he went on any further his number might come down and then Mr. Naoroji would retain his seat and Captain Penton would have to pay all the costs. He thought discretion is the better part of valour, and prudently withdrew his petition, each party paying his own costs, and the seat of Mr. Naoroji is now perfectly safe. And as long as this present Parliament lasts, he will remain our member (cheers), and we shall get all the help it is possible for him to give us in the cause of Indian reforms. But we must not expect too much from him. He is but one in a House of 670 members, and though he will do for us all that prudence, good sense, vast knowledge and great eloquence can do, yet he is single-handed. To

be strong, he must receive all the support he can from this country, and backed by that support he may be able to put our case convincingly before the House. But what we really want is not that our countrymen generally should sit in the House of Commons, Englishmen themselves find it extremely hard to find seats there, how much more must we who are "black men." What we want and have a right to get is that our countrymen should have the opportunity of really representing to the Government the views of the people of this country in this country. What we want is that there should be responsible Government of India. I have always felt that the one great evil of the Indian administration is that our rulers are responsible to no one outside of their own consciences. That they conscientiously endeavour to do what they can for the good government of our country, may be accepted as an undeniable fact and accepted with gratitude. But it is not enough that our rulers should only be responsible to their own consciences. After all they are human beings, with human frailties, and human imperfections. It is necessary that they should be responsible to those over whom they have been placed by Providence to rule (cheers). In making these observations I have not lost sight of the fact that that the Government of India in India is responsible to the Government of India in Westminster, and that the

Government of India in Westminster is responsible to the Cabinet of the day, of which he is invariably one of the members.

BRITISH CABINET RESPONSIBLE
TO THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nor have I forgotten that the Cabinet of the day is responsible to the House of Commons. But when you come to consider what this responsibility really is, I think you will agree with me that I have not overstated the case in the slightest degree. Unless the Secretary of State for India happen to be a personage of exceptional force of character and of great determination, such as the late Prime Minister proved to be when he was in charge of the Indian office, he generally, to use Burke's language, save "ditto" to the Government of India in India. The Cabinet is so troubled with the affairs of the vast British Empire that the members really have no time to devote to India as a body, and leave her to their colleague the Secretary of State for India. When any Indian question comes before the House of Commons, what do we see? The Cabinet of the day has always a majority in the House, and it always finds supporters among its own party, whether they are would-be placemen or whether they are country gentlemen who go to the House of Commons as the best club in England (cheers). And in

non-party matters—and they make it a pretence in the House of Commons to regard Indian affairs as matters non-party—in all non-party matters, the Government of the day can always rely upon a large amount of support from the Opposition (hear, hear). There are a few members of the House of Commons who make it a point to devote a portion of their time and energies to the consideration of Indian questions. But they are only a few ; they have hardly any following ; and if they press any matters on the attention of the House with any degree of zeal, they are voted down as bores by the rest of the House of Commons (Hear, hear). Of course the case of Mr. Bradlaugh (cheers) was entirely different. He was a most masterful man, and by his mastery over his fellowmen, he attained the position for himself which he occupied in the House of Commons at the time of his death. There are but few in England like Mr. Bradlaugh. I am sorry to say that since the death of that great man we have not been able to find one who possesses his capacity, possesses his knowledge, or possesses the influence which he exercised over the House of Commons. Therefore, when you consider what the responsibility of the Government of India is to the Government of England and the House of Commons, you will not, I think, be able to come to any other conclusion than that it is nil (Hear, hear)."

Before concluding his speech, Mr. Bonnerjee spoke a few moving words on the attitude of aloofness of the Europeans living in India towards Congress matters, and the patronizing attitude of the Government towards the great national movement.

**Aloofness of
European
in India.**

"I am afraid, Gentlemen, I have detained you longer than I should have done (Cries of 'No, no, and go on). I have but a few more words to say, and these I shall say as briefly as I can. I said at the outset that the Congress movement has been a great success, but it behoved us all to make it even a greater success than it is. During the Jury agitation in Bengal, I was greatly pained, more pained than I can describe, by one of the apologists of the Government saying openly in his paper that the agitation against the Jury Notification was of no account because it was only a "native" agitation and that no Europeans had joined it. As a matter of fact, I know from personal knowledge that a great many very respectable and independent gentlemen in Calcutta joined the movement and cordially sympathised with it. But supposing it had been otherwise? This same apologist has, day after day, pointed out that the withdrawal of Trial by Jury, in these seven Bengal districts, in serious cases does not in any way touch Europeans or European British subjects. If he is right in this, it is a matter of surprise

that Europeans have not joined the movement. But because Europeans have not joined the movement, is a movement of the people of this country to be despised? Is our voice not to be listened to, because forsooth to that voice has not been added the voice of our European fellow-subjects? (Hear, hear and cheers). We would welcome, with open arms, all the support which we can get from our European fellow-subjects. I believe that so far as the non-official Europeans are concerned, their interests and ours in this country are the same; we all desire that there should be a development of the country and that there should be enough for all who are here, whether for a time or in perpetuity. (Hear, hear). But apart from that, why is our voice to be despised? It is we who feel the pinch; it is we who have to suffer, and when we cry out, it is said to us; "O! we cannot listen to you; yours is a contemptible and useless and a vile agitation, and we will not listen to you." Time was when we natives of the country agitated about any matter, with the help of non-official Europeans, the apologists of the Government used to say triumphantly: "This agitation is not the agitation of the natives of the country, but has been got up by a few discontented Europeans; don't listen to them, it is not their true voice; it is the voice of these Europeans." But now we are told: "Don't listen to them,

it is their own voice and not the voice of the Europeans." (Shame) It is said that such reflections should be published by responsible journalists pretending to be in the confidence of our rulers. I hope and confidently trust that these are not the sentiments by which any administration in India is actuated."

In the closing lines of his speech, Mr. Bonnerjee urged all Congressmen to keep up the zeal and interest which they had shown in coming to the Congress session even after they went back to their respective provinces, and not to leave all the work to the Secretary. Lastly, he exhorted them to help those people in England who were willing to help India's cause by raising the necessary funds to pay their expenses.

BRITISH SUPPORT TO THE INDIAN CAUSE.

"You all know that our cause has the support of some distinguished men in England, who form what is called the Congress Committee in England. They are willing to give us their services unstintingly, but you cannot expect them to give their services to us at their own expense. You cannot expect that the necessary expenses required for the hiring of rooms, for the printing of papers, for the despatch of telegrams, and all the thing necessary for carrying on the great cause, shall be paid out of their own pockets. We must do our best to support them ; we must do our best to support the cause ; and if we are true to ourselves, if we are true to our principles, if we are true to our country, be assured that in the

fullness of time all that you require from the benign Government of the British nation, all that you seek from them to make you true citizens, will be given to you by that nation (Loud and prolonged applause.)"

The Congress sessions of 1893 and 1894 Mr. Bonnerjee did not attend. The 1895 Session **Trial by Jury.** was held at Poona under the Presidentship of Surendranath Bannerjee. At this Congress Mr. Bonnerjee moved an important resolution on the system of trial by Jury, condemning in scathing terms the proposal of Sir Alexander Miller to empower District Judges to call upon juries to give special verdicts. This is what he said :

"Suddenly early this year Sir Alexander Miller introduced a Bill in the Supreme Council, one of the provisions of which is that juries should be called upon to give special verdicts. Juries should be called upon to give a general verdict, and if the Judge is not satisfied with it, he may ask questions and get answers to those questions in the shape of special verdicts. In other words, I cannot help feeling that it is intended to allow a Judge, if he differs from the verdict of juries, the power of cross-examining jurymen and putting them into a corner. Now, we may well say whether a person is telling the truth ; we may very well arrive at a conclusion whether a case made against a prisoner is a true case or a false one. Five men, perfectly indifferent to the prisoner and perfectly indifferent to the Crown, may be expected to arrive at a right verdict ; but unless they are trained lawyers, unless they have the logical faculty of assigning

reasons for their opinions in taking a shape, you cannot expect the jurymen to give such verdicts as would be acceptable to everybody ; and if a jurymen gives reasons which are not acceptable and which appear on the face of them to be foolish, the Judge would go to the High Court and say, "Look at the verdict, look at the reasons which these men have given for the verdict ; they are foolish and their verdict must be upset, though their verdict may be perfectly just under the circumstances

I was trying with the help of a friend of mine, whom I am glad to see present here, to find from Cox's Criminal Reports whether in England there is such a thing as special verdicts in criminal cases. We find hundreds of special verdicts in civil cases, but we could not find from the beginning of the existence of the English nation down to the present time a single case of a special verdict in a criminal case. When you consider, gentlemen, that in this country we are almost free from serious crimes, and when you consider that the percentages of crime is as low as it is possible to imagine, and when you consider, on the other hand, that the percentage of crime in England is as great as can imagine—while you have in England no such special verdicts in criminal cases, we have special verdicts in criminal cases in this country ! Therefore, I say, we all ought to unite in protesting against those changes in criminal law that are being made, and what is worse, are being threatened almost everyday. We, from this Congress, ought to send up a strong protest against a thing of this description. For, after all, as my friend Mr. Ghose has so well put

it, the real popularity of British Rule and the real reason of the loyalty of the people are the belief on the part of the people that justice, criminal justice is being administered in a fair and impartial way. If, you interfere with these things so often, and interfere needlessly, and interfere with the view of putting more power into the hands of District Magistrates and District Judges, that confidence in the impartiality of British justice will be destroyed and we shall be brought to a position which I fear to contemplate”.

The last few years of Mr. Bonnerjee's Congress activities in India are given fully in the little biography **The last years in India** written many years ago by Mr. Srinivasa Sastri and published by Mr. G. A. Natesan, and I can do no better than quote Mr. Sastri in full :

“At the 1896 Congress in Calcutta, Mr. Bonnerjee moved a proposition expressing the country's confidence in Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji and wishing his re-election to Parliament. His speech on the occasion must be given to our readers entire :

“This reasolution was entrusted to me without my consent and in spite of my remonstrances. I believe myself that our Subjects Committee were, at the last moment when they made up their minds to force this upon me, under fatalistic influences. I remember I moved a similar resolution in the Congress of 1891, which was received as enthusiastically as this has been received by you today. In 1892 there was a General

Election in England, and Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji was returned at the head of the poll as member for Central Finsbury. I suppose the Subjects Committee thought if this resolution was again brought before you, and brought before you by the same individual who presented it to you in 1891, a similar result might follow. At any rate, here is the resolution, and I can only say that it does not require any words from any one to make it acceptable to you. The example that Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji has set us all is perfectly unique. Here is an old man, over 70 years of age, working, you may say day and night, night and day, for the benefit of his countrymen. He has had to banish himself from his own country and live in a foreign land, away from his old friends, only for the sake of this country. Some little ago our only Member of Parliament, that is to say, the only Indian gentleman who succeeded in finding a seat at the last election—Mr. Bhownagri—came back to this country, and some foolish friends of his wanted to get up a demonstration in his honour to equal the demonstration which Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji received when he came to his country to preside over the Lahore Congress. I have no quarrel whatever of Mr. Bhownagri. I am very proud to know that a native of this country is a Member of the House of Commons. You cannot expect everybody to be of the same as yourself. I should have been very pleased if, instead of being a Conservative, Mr. Bhownagri had been a Radical. But then I am sure that if he had been a Radical, he would not have obtained a seat in the House of Commons at the last election.

So there is perhaps, some advantage in his having been a Conservative. But for any friend of Mr. Bhownagri to consider that is the Member for India, or that he possesses the confidence of the people of India that Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji possesses, is an absurdity. Very few people had heard of Mr. Bhownagri outside the Bombay Presidency; and although we all rejoice that he is in the House of Commons, and although we all hope that he will be of service there, we cannot but hope and trust that we may find our Dadabhai there before long. Nothing will content us but to have the old man sitting again in the House of Commons doing his duty to his constituents, and doing his work for his country. One reason why he failed to secure his seat in the house of Commons this time was that, while he was discharging his duties night after night, his opponent, who has now been successful, was canvassing the constituency, and trying to take away support from him, and obtained it for himself. I hope you will carry the resolution with acclamation and carry away a hope that Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji will soon obtain a seat in the House of Commons."

The Sedition Law of Mr. Chalmers, of which the occasion was Mr. Tilak's conviction, was on the legislative anvil in 1897, and the delicate duty of moving the Congress Resolution on the subject was entrusted to Mr. Bonnerjee.

"Mr. Chalmers, to make his proposed amendment of the law palatable to us, says that his only object in proposing the amendments is to assimilate the law

of sedition in this country with the law on the same subject as it exists in England. Well, I have no objection at all to the law of sedition in this country being made the same as the law of sedition in England, provided, of course, Mr. Chalmers gives us in this country the same machinery for the administration of the law here as exists in England. In England, as we all know trial for sedition are held before a judge, who is a countryman of the prisoner, and by a jury, who are also countrymen of the prisoner, and no trial can take place unless a true bill has been found against the prisoner by a grand jury, who are also countrymen of the prisoner. Let Mr. Chalmers give us this mode of trial, and we shall hail him, however severe he may make of the law, as the greatest law-giver that has ever come to this country. But does he intend to do so? No. So far from doing so, he is trying in his amendments of the Criminal Procedure Code to empower district magistrates to try cases of sedition—district magistrates who are officers of Government in the strict sense of the term and whose promotion entirely depends upon the goodwill of the Government for the time being. The present machinery for trial of cases of sedition in this country is bad enough in all conscience. In the Presidency towns such trials must be had by jury. But so far as Her Majesty's British Indian subjects are concerned, that jury may consist entirely of Europeans, and not a single one of them need know the language in which the seditious speech is alleged to have been made or the seditious article to have been written. That is appalling enough, but to

entrust trials for sedition to district magistrates is still more appalling. I do not think,—I say so with all submission to Mr. Chalmers,—that his bill proceeds on the lines of the English law of sedition at all. He is entirely mistaken in thinking it does. But assuming it does, Mr. Chalmers is prepared to give us the poison in the shape of his amendment, and not the antidote to the poison in the shape of the English machinery for its administration.”

Then in his concluding paragraph, he touched a deeper chord of feeling than ever he had done before and assumed a tone that he had never been compelled to assume,—betraying that even his calm head and tranquil heart had been sorely agitated.

“I should have thought that seeing that the country has just been passing through the last of a very severe affliction in the shape of famine, that there has been a recrudescence of the plague in various parts of it, and that other circumstances, notably the press prosecutions in the Bombay Presidency, have stirred the mind of the people to its very depth, this is just the time where a wise legislator, even if there was necessity for it, would hesitate long before embarking on a process of action which is sure to give rise, as Mr. Chalmers' Bill has undoubtedly given rise, to great terror on the part of the people. But we, of course, according to our rulers, have no idea of the proper time and occasion for changes of law. Lord Elgin's Government are all wise, and I am afraid that, notwithstanding our protest, and I make bold to say the protest of every right-thinking person in the country

which will go to the Government, this Bill will be forced into law. All the protests will be vain. We must, however, carry our protest before a higher authority than even Lord Elgin's Government. We must go before the British public. We must explain to them how the agents they have sent to govern the country on their behalf and in their name are dealing with the people; that is, dealing with in a manner wholly unworthy of the British name and British love of freedom. And if we can convince them that we are right, I have no doubt that the British nation will rise in their wrath and free us from the trammels which Lord Elgin and his Councillors are forging for us."

HIS FAMILY LIFE

Before I pass on to the last years of Mr. Bonnerjee's life which he spent in England, I would pause for a while and give a brief sketch of his family life. Much has been said about Mr. Bonnerjee's Europeanised ways, many have regretted that he should have so completely given up the habits of his countrymen, some still are under the delusion that he went so far as to change his religion and embrace Christianity.

But that is not so. Mr. Bonnerjee despite his English habits and mode of life, remained always true to his people and his religion ; he lived and died a Hindu Brahmin and was always proud of the fact. Nevertheless, some may argue that he was far more Anglicised than was necessary. However, there is an explanation.

**Woomes
Chunder a
Hindu**

When W. C. Bonnerjee came back to his native land in 1868, his father was already dead. The youngman knew that he would have no position in the Hindu Society of the times. He was among the few outcastes who had dared cross the Kalapani and visit the land of the Mlechhas! Having no way of going back to the conservative fold of his family he adopted the European way of living, and his scandalised countrymen dubbed him a "Sahib" and a Christian. We of 1944 forget that although nowadays a man is

hardly thought to be qualified unless he is "England-returned", in 1864 conditions were very different, and the man who crossed the Kalapani was outcaste and the stigma of untouchability was laid on him. However, Mr. Bonnerjee was not completely outcaste ; his mother went so far as to invite him to live in his ancestral home, but knowing the innumerable difficulties that would arise, he refused to encumber his mother. To begin with, the servants would refuse to wash any dishes that he used.

For his mother Saraswati Devi, Mr. Bonnerjee always had the greatest devotion and respect, and her slightest wish was a royal command that

His Mother was obediently carried out. There are people yet living who still recall Mr. Bonnerjee's love for his mother. One of these veterans is the Rev. Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee, a cousin of W. C. Bonnerjee. Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee has sent me his recollections about W. C. B. (as he calls him) and in one place he says :

"My recollections of W. C. B. are quite vivid and distinct. He was a handsome man and would be distinguished in any company of men, British or Indian. I think the outstanding trait in his character was his profound respect and deep affection for his mother, whom I first remember seeing when she was in middle-life. She was a gracious, dignified and aristocratic lady, and even in middle-age was beautiful. Even in his busiest days as an outstanding barrister he never failed to go and see her every week, on a Saturday evening.

I remember well his announcing her death to us in these very simple but moving words : "I am now an orphan." His father's old friend, that great man who, in my opinion, was the Ideal Bengalee, Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidya-sagar, greatly loved the young man on account of his love for his mother. As is well known the learned Pundit himself was renowned for love for his mother and it must have delighted his heart to see the same trait in his dead friend's son. A few days before Saraswati Devi died, she had herself weighed against gold and silver in Benares. After her death Mr. Bonnerjee spent thousands of rupees to perform her Sradh ceremony. Brahmins from various provinces were invited to come, and lands were given away to them. These practices are out of date now, but in those days such a ceremony was supposed to mark orthodoxy and the wealth of the man who performed it.

W. C. Bonnerjee had five sisters (some of them step sisters since his father married twice) and one brother. His eldest sister, Mokshoda Devi was a talented lady who wrote both in prose and in verse. In the biography of her grandson, she gives a glowing account of her brother's wife, Hemangini Devi, who was also a cousin of her husband's. From her book we understand that Mrs. Bonnerjee was indeed a good and kind lady and was loved by all.

**His Sisters
and Brother**

Woomes Chunder and Hemangini Devi had eight children, four sons and four daughters. They were in order of age :—

His Children

Kamala Krishna Shelley,
Nalini Heloise,
Sushila Anita,
Kali Krishna Wood,
Sara Krishna Keats,
Pramilla Florence,
Ratna Krishna Curran, and
Janaki Agnes.

The two elder sons were named after Maharaja Kamal Krishna and Maharaja Kali Krishna of Sovabazar. It is said that several people refused to attend Mr. Bonnerjee's father's Sradh, because he had gone abroad, but the two Maharajas of Sovabazar came to the ceremony, and to show his gratitude, Mr. Bonnerjee named his sons after them.

After the birth of the first four children, round about the year 1875, Hemangini Devi became a Christian. As the Rev. Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee remarks in his recollections. "It is a tribute to W. C. B.'s tolerant spirit that he raised no objection, and always said that he was quite willing to let his family follow any religion they wanted." Two of his daughters, Sushila Anita and Janaki Agnes were converted to Christianity, but none of others. He himself was inordinately proud of being a Brahmin, and so were his two sons, Kali Krishna and Ratna Krishna.

Although in their childhood Mr. Bonnerjee's children went to school in India, it can be said that they were educated in England ; they received most of their education there. About this Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee says :—

“W. C. B. brought his whole family to England for their education, when his success at the Bar was bringing him a large income ; and he bought a large mansion in Croydon, naming the house “Kidderpore House.” They lived in great affluence, mixed with the best English society, and the sons went in due course to Rugby and Oxford, and the daughters to Newham and Girton. My wife's cousin was at Newham with one of the daughters. I have met on several occasions people here in England who knew them, and they were all held in high regard.” (For the enlightenment of the reader it should be mentioned here that Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee's wife was an Englishwoman).

According to his wish all Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee's sons were lawyers ; and his two elder daughters specialised as doctors. His eldest son married an Englishwoman ; the third son died when he was a mere boy of eleven, ; the other two sons were married in caste.

Of the daughters the eldest was married to Colonel G. A. Blair, the second remained unmarried, the third married to Mr. A. N. Chaudhuri and the youngest to Mr. P. K. Majumdar. As fate would have it, all his

sons-in-law were lawyers ; the eldest Colonel Blair also served in the Army during the last Great War. At present, of Mr. Bonnerjee's family, only the two youngest daughters are alive. He has also several grandsons and grand-daughters living, but they need no enumeration here.

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to make mention of Mr. Bonnerjee's charitable nature.

His Charities His whole life was a life of charity. But, unlike some people whose 'graze for publicity and love of basking in the limelight impel them to advertise their charities, however big or small, his motto was "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" and all his life he acted upto this noble precept. For this reason, although we hear from everyone who knew him that he was a very charitable man, we have very few concrete instances of his charity. Hence I am obliged to quote one or two anecdotes that I have heard from the "Family" meaning thereby his cousins, nephews and nieces, who looked upto him with great reverence. He once released a mortgaged property in Bowbazar which belonged to two helpless Hindu widows who came to him and told him that if he took action against them, they would be rendered homeless. The "Family" still recall that he tore several handnotes in the presence of the sons of friendly debtors when their fathers were dead. He was always ready to help those who needed money to perform their parents' 'Sradh' ceremony, but never would he a farthing pay if anyone approached him to help him to get his

daughters married. Mr. Bonnerjee was always against child marriage and he specially hated the "dowry" system that was and still is so common in India. He also willingly helped college students and junior members of the Bar. From Michael Madhusudan Dutt's biography we learn that Mr. Bonnerjee and Manomohan Ghosh came to the assistance of the poverty-stricken poet, paid for his treatment, bore the funeral expenses of Michael and his wife, and paid for the education of his only son after his death. This is really the only concrete instance we have of his charity.

From Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee, we learn that "W.C.B. was a man of generous heart," and he substantially helped many members of his own family. It is needless to add that he spent money like water for Congress propaganda, both in India and in England, and he financed for years the Parliamentary Standing Committee as well as the noted journal "India" which rendered valuable services for the Indian cause in England.

No account of Mr. Bonnerjee's life will be complete without the following paragraph about his literary tastes from Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee's recollections :—

"He had a moderate sized library of some 2,000 books largely historical and biographical, and while it cannot be said that he has a deep knowledge of the English classics, he was never-the-less an all-round well-read man, with

a cultivated and well-stored mind. He was fond of quoting the great passages from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but Shakespeare and Dickens were his two favourites, because of their profound knowledge of human nature. He had a profound admiration for the authorised version of the English Bible as the greatest literary gem in the English language, and the Book of Common Prayer had peculiar fascination for him, because of its chaste diction and exquisitely-phrased prayers, some of which I have myself heard him quoting. So familiarised was he with English that he thought in English rather than Bengali.

I have heard him say how glad he was that his birthday was on the same date as that of the great Liberal Statesman, William Ewart Gladstone, viz :—29th December. His respect and admiration for Gladstone were almost reverential, and as his own birthday came round there was always a reminder of his political hero." On one occasion while presiding over the prize-distribution ceremony of a village school, he held out the life of Mr. Gladstone as an ideal one and exhorted the students to emulate him.

Before I end, I would like to illustrate by a few of Mr. Bonnerjee's letters that he was not devoid of "family pride" as some people are apt to think. The two following letters are,

**His "Family
Pride**

I think, sufficient to justify my opinion :—

“Kidderpore,
Bedford Park,
Croydon,
July, 1st, 1904.

My dear Krishna Lall,

I thank you for your offer to send me the copy of the National Magazine containing my father's life by you. Could you not write a life of our grandfather? He was indeed a great man for he educated himself and rose to great eminence amongst our countrymen. What you say about him in my father's life does him scant justice.

Hoping this will find you well and getting on well in your profession,

I remain,
Yours affectionately,
W. C. Bonnerjee.

Krishna Lall Bonnerjee, Esq., B.L.

Llanduduo,
August 24th, 1904.

My dear Krishna Lall,

Your kind letter of July 28th was delivered at Croydon by the Indian Mail of August 4th and has been forwarded to me here where I have come for a rest and change in the expectation that my health may improve thereby. * * * * * If I am not there your letter will be forwarded to me wherever I may be.

I am glad to learn that you are ready to undertake to write the life of our grand-father. He was in every

respect a wonderful man and rose from a small beginning to a position of influence, usefulness and dignity, and though he died a poor man he earned large sums of money which he gave away in charity which, if truth must be told, was sometimes indiscriminate. I was just completing the ninth year of my age when he died on the 10th day or the light side of the moon in the month of Agrahayana in the Bengali year 1260, My earliest recollections of him go back to the time of the death of my eldest brother when I was about 2 or 3 years old, and after his death I learned a great deal about his early life and struggles from a friend of his who lived in his house for many years having lost all his property which was considerable. His name was Prem Chand Pal. I will on my return to Croydon write out what I remember of him personally and what I have heard of him and send it to you. I cannot do so from here as I wish to be as quiet just now as possible.

Hoping this will find you well,

I remain,

Yours affectionately,

W. C. Bonnerjee.

Krishna Lall Bonnerjee, Esq."

THE LAST YEARS

In May, 1902, W. C. Bonnerjee left the land of his birth for reasons of health and settled down in his Croydon House in England. Who knows what thoughts filled his mind as the shores of his beloved India faded away in the horizon? Did he bid her farewell for ever, or did he dream of coming back once more? He had a partial attack of Diabetes, the curse of his family, in 1888, and since then his health had begun to deteriorate. In 1909 he returned to England hoping to conquer the terrible disease, but alas! Fate decreed otherwise and he died four years later.

**Farewell
to India**

While in England he did not give up his legal career, but continued to practise successfully in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Here, as mentioned before, he was briefed against such eminent lawyers as Lord Asquith, Lord Haldane and Mr. Isaac (later Lord Reading).

**Practice in
the Privy
Council**

Apart from his practice he spent a great deal of his time lecturing to the English public on the condition of India. Of this part of his activities we know very little, but from one or two stray references we can form a fair opinion of his work. In 1903, Mr. Bonnerjee delivered a lecture at the Westbourne Park Sunday afternoon conference regarding the admission of Indians into

**Congress
Propaganda**

Executive Councils in India. In reply to a congratulatory letter sent to him by the National Reading Society, this is what he wrote back,

“Kidderpore, Bedford Park,
Croydon.

March, 27th, 1903.

My dear Sir

I am greatly indebted to you for your postcard of the 5th and beg to thank you and the the committee and members of the National Reading Society for your own and their kind appreciation of the views I expressed at the Westbourne Park Sunday afternoon conference. There is a vast field of work in this country for the benefit of India, but it is not easy to carry on our propaganda without money and money we have none. You will see from the journal INDIA what we are doing and any help your society can give to the British Committee of the Indian National Congress will be thankfully received by them and honestly used in the cause of our country.

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

W. C. Bonnerjee

Krishna Lall Bonnerjee, Esq., B. L.,
Vice President,
National Reading Society”

Twice he tried to get into Parliament, not for any personal glory, but in order to serve his Motherland better, he failed, the second time, as he himself writes, because his health had become impaired and his eyesight defective. About his Parliamentary Candidature, Mr. Pitt Bonnerjee writes :—

**Fallure in
Parliamentary
Election**

“W. C. B. was I think the first Indian to contest a seat in Parliament, and in this he was thus the pioneer. He contested Barrow-in Furness before Dadabhai Naoroji or Bhowanagree won their seats, one as an advanced Liberal and the other as a Conservative.” Thus his first attempt must have been made before 1892, the second attempt was abandoned in 1904.

While in England the Swadeshi Movement had begun in India. There are many today who are of the opinion that he disapproved of the later nationalistic movements, but his own letters show that he was a warm supporter of them. The following letter to Krishnalal Bonnerjee is illuminating :—

**Attitude
towards
Swadeshi
Movement**

“Kidderpore,
Bedford Park,
Croydon,
November 3, 1905.

My dear Krishna Lall,

Thank you much for your letter of October 12th. I look upon the Durga Puja as the autumn harvest thanks giving festival. It's

an important festival and according to the Ramayan was introduced by Ram as distinguished from the Basanti Puja festival in the spring. The true significance of these Pujas lies in the continuum of Phallic worship which appears to me to be as old as any worship that ever existed in this world. We in Bengal, have invested the autumnal festival with a halo of romance which gives the Bijoya greeting its most enduring charm. I reciprocate your greetings and hope that you and all the members of your family will have a prosperous and pleasant year until next Bijoya day and many more of such days,

I keenly sympathise with the Swadeshi movement. It shows that the spirit of nationality still animates us and, I am sure, if properly persisted in it will end in doing great good to us, not only in exciting proper attention to Indian affairs in this country but in knitting us together and reviving our own industries and industrial life.

I am sorry I was not able to reply to your last letter. I was away at Wesbaden at the time I received it and somehow it escaped attention.

Give my obeisance to your mother, and with kindest regards to you all.

I remain,

Yours affectionately,

W. C. Bonnerjee.

Krishna Lall Bonnerjee, Esq., B.L..”

His health meanwhile was gradually declining. In 1904 his eye-sight became defective and he had to dictate his letters to his children and in the Privy Council his papers were read out for him. Towards the end he came completely blind, but he carried on his work till the last day of his life. He conducted his last case in the Privy Council about three weeks before he died.

**Loss of Eye-sight
in 1904**

On the 21st July, 1906—the end came, and the great soul that had sacrificed and endured so much for the good of the Motherland was free at last of all mortal agony. W. C. Bonnerjee passed away no doubt, but he left behind the priceless heritage of his work. He died at a time when Bengal was plunged into misery ; and the Antipartition agitation was reaching its climax. Sir Surendranath Banerjea in his book "A Nation in the Making" refers to the death of Mr. Bonnerjee with these words :—

Death

**Sir Surendranath
Banerjee's
Tribute**

"This session of the Congress was the last in which Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee took part. Ill-health compelled him to leave for England in 1902. Though stricken down by disease, he never lost his interest in the Congress. He stood as the Liberal candidate for Walthamstow ; and all accounts say that he had a good chance of being returned. But Providence had willed otherwise. His failing health compelled him to withdraw from the parliamentary contest ; and soon after his countrymen learnt with a

sense of profound sorrow the news of his death in England.

Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee was one of the leading members of the Calcutta High Court Bar in his time ; and though enjoying a wide and lucrative practice, he took a keen and active interest in the work of the Congress. In his time, it would be no exaggeration to say, he was the leader of the Congress movement in Bengal. He was not an agitator in the ordinary sense—and the word stinks in the nostrils of some of our officials. His association with the movement gave it a dignity and an air of responsibility in official eyes which otherwise it would not perhaps have possessed.

It cannot be said that Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee was throughout his life a public man. Immersed in the engrossing work of one of the most exacting, and, be it added, one of the most lucrative, of professions, he had not, in his early days the time nor perhaps the inclination, to turn to public affairs. But the Ilbert Bill controversy was to him, as to many others, an eye-opener, and revealed, in its grim nakedness, our real political status. No self-respecting Indian could sit idle under the fierce light of that revelation. It was a call to high patriotic duty to those who understood its significance ; and Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee enthusiastically responded to the call. He had closely identified himself with the Congress since its birth,

and the Bar felt the impulse of his lead in this matter. As a speaker he was perhaps outdistanced by some of his contemporaries; in point of enthusiasm some of his colleagues might be said to have been fired with the warmth of apostolic fervour; but in the calm, clear recognition of the situation in the adaptation of means for a given end, in wise and statesmanlike counsel and guidance, he was without a peer amongst those whose privilege it was to work with him. His place in the Bar as a public leader today remains void. Mirabeau is dead. There is none to fill his chair; and Bengal mourns in silence the loss of one of the worthiest of her sons. The death of such a man was a heavy loss to the country, and especially at a time when Bengal was in the throes of the greatest agitation that convulsed the province since the establishment of British rule.

The year 1906 was a year of heavy misfortune for Bengal and India. W. C. Bonnerjee, Badruddin Tyabji, Ananda Mohan Bose and Nalin Behari Sircar, followed one another in close succession to that land from whose bourne no traveller returns; and Bengal was then in mourning over the partition of the province.

After Mr. Bonnerjee's death a Memorial Meeting was held in London, and Mr. Gokhale addressed the meeting with these words:—

“Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,
We are assembled here today to give public

**Mr. Gokhale's
Tribute**

expression to our grief that the hand of death has removed from our midst our illustrious countryman,—Mr. Woomesh Bonerjee. The event, it is true, has not come upon us as wholly unexpected. For some time past it was well known that Mr. Bonnerjee's health has been completely shattered, that there was no hope of recovery, and that continued existence in that state was to him only a prolongation of agony. However, now that the end has actually come, and we are forced to realise that our great and trusted leader, whom, it was a joy to love no less than to follow, is no more with us, the mind feels as completely bewildered and overwhelmed as though the great Destroyer had come with stealthy and noiseless steps and had inflicted on us our loss without warning, and with the shock of a sudden blow. Ladies and gentlemen Mr. Bonnerjee was a man whose death would leave humanity the poorer in any age and in any part of the world. To India, in her present age of transition, with difficult and complicated problems arising on all sides, his passing away is a national calamity of the first magnitude, and we indulge in no exaggeration when we say that our loss is truly irreparable. It is not my purpose today to attempt here an estimate of the character and career of our great countryman. Our loss is still too fresh and our sense of it too acute and poignant to permit of my undertaking any such task in a

meeting of this kind. And all I beg leave to do in commending this resolution to your acceptance is to say a few words expressive of my profound admiration of the noble qualities, both natural and acquired, of our departed leader, and of my humble appreciation of the great, the signal services which he has rendered to our national cause. Ladies and gentlemen, we all know that Mr. Bonnerjee was one of the most distinguished, as he was one of the most successful lawyers that our country has produced. Now, if he had been only that and nothing else, even then his title to a public expression of our admiration and respect would have been unquestioned. National life, to be complete, must be many-sided ; and a man who brings honour to the Indian name, no matter in what field, advances thereby our national cause and deserves to be honoured by us on national grounds. But Mr. Bonnerjee's claim to our admiration and gratitude rested, on a much wider basis than his pre-eminent attainment as a lawyer. He was, in addition, an ardent patriot, a wise and far-sighted leader, an incessant worker, a man whose nobility of mind and greatness of soul were stamped on every utterance and every action of his life. His intellectual gifts were of the very highest order. Endowed with an intellect at once critical, vigorous and comprehensive, a truly marvellous memory,

luminous powers of exposition, captivating eloquence, great industry, and a wonderful habit of method and discipline, Mr. Bonnerjee was bound to achieve, in whatever field he chose to work, the most brilliant success. Then he had a passionate desire to devote his great gifts to the service of his country. And added to these were a fine presence, an extraordinary charm of manner, and that combination of strength and restraint which made him one of the most manly men that one could come across. Such a man must tower above his fellow-men wherever he is placed. In a self-governing country he would, without doubt, have attained the position of Prime Minister. We in India twice made him President of our National Congress, and what was more, when the great movement was started 21 years ago and the first Congress ever held in India assembled in Bombay, the delegates unanimously elected Mr. Bonnerjee to guide them in their deliberations. And since that time down to the moment of his death, Mr. Bonnerjee with two or three others, was the very life and soul of that movement. He ungrudgingly gave to the cause his time and his resources and this far more than is generally known. He cheerfully bore all its anxieties, his exertions for its success were unwearied, and no man's counsel was valued higher by his countrymen, where the Congress was concerned. His courage was splendid, and it rose

with difficulties, and his nerve and his clear judgment were a theme of constant admiration among his countrymen. With Mr. Bonnerjee at the helm, everyone felt safe. His was the eloquence that thrills and stirs and inspires, but his was also the practical sagacity that sees the difference between what may be attained and what cannot, and when the need arose no man was firmer than Mr. Bonnerjee in exercising a sobering and restraining influence. I can recall at this moment more than one meeting of the Subjects Committee of the Congress, at which really all important deliberations take place, where Mr. Bonnerjee's far-sighted wisdom and the great weight attaching to his personality steadied the judgment of wilder spirits, and established harmony where discord was apprehended. The loss of such a leader, no words that I can employ can adequately describe. and he has passed away at a time when he was more indispensable than ever, in view of the signs one sees of the vessel of the Congress being about to encounter somewhat rough weather. Ladies and gentlemen, it is really superfluous that I should dwell at any length before an assembly composed so largely of my own countrymen on the distinguished services rendered by Mr. Bonnerjee to our national cause. And, if I refer briefly to one or two of them, it is because they are not very widely known, and they illustrate how immense is the debt that we owe

him. You are aware that no Englishman has ever served India more nobly or more zealously than the late Mr. Bradlaugh. Now, it was Mr. Bonnerjee who enlisted Mr. Bradlaugh's sympathies on our side and secured his powerful championship for our aspirations. Then the part Mr. Bonnerjee has played in keeping together all these years the British Committee of the Congress and in maintaining unimpaired its activity in this country, will always constitute one of his best claims to our affection and gratitude. Very few, indeed, of our countrymen have any idea of the difficulties that have had to be overcome from time to time in this connection, of the worries they have involved, and of the sacrifices they have required. But, if our great friends, Sir William Weddèrburn and Mr. Hume had been here today, they would have told you, as, indeed, our venerable chairman may, if he speaks a few words at the end, how invaluable have been Mr Bonnerjee's cooperation and assistance in this matter. Ladies and gentlemen, I do not wish to detain you longer. Many of us lose in Mr. Bonnerjee not only a great leader, but also a warm generous friend. Who that has ever enjoyed the hospitality of his beautiful home at Croydon-now alas, plunged into the depths of grief-will forget the singular charm of his personality, the charity of his judgments, his touching devotion to those around him, or the kindness he

loved to lavish on all whom he admitted to the privilege of his friendship. And, speaking in this connection, may I say how our hearts go out today to the bereaved family, whose loss is beyond words, and especially to that stricken lady whose life has now been rendered desolate and to whom the world will never be the same again ! One word more and I have done. Mr. Bonnerjee has now crossed the line of which there is no recrossing. But he is not altogether gone from us. He has left us the precious inheritance of noble example. He has left us his name to honour, his memory to cherish. Above all, he has left us the cause—the cause he loved so dearly and served so well. Our very sorrow today speaks to us of our duty to that cause and no tribute that we can offer to the memory of the departed will be more truly fitting than a resolve to recognise and an endeavour to discharge this duty according to the measure of our capacity and the requirements of our country."

The news of his death was sent, of course, to India. In Calcutta the Court-room of the Chief Justice was crowded on July 23, with barristers, attorneys and vakils before the regular business of the different courts had commenced, to hear expressions of regret at the death of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee which took place in England on Saturday.

On the acting Chief Justice, Sir Chunder Madhab Ghose and other Judges taking their seats, in the Chief

**The Advocate-
General's
Tribute**

Justice Court-room, Mr. S. P. Sinha (afterwards Lord Sinha of Raipur) the officiating Advocate-General addressing the Chief Justice and other Judges said :—

“It is my painful duty to announce to your lordships the melancholy intelligence which reached Calcutta yesterday morning of the death in England of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee who for many years had practised as an Advocate of this Court. Born in the year 1844, Mr. Bonnerjee was called to the Bar by the Society of the Middle Temple on the 11th June, 1867, and about a year afterwards he was enrolled as an Advocate of this Court in November, 1868. From that time onwards, almost continuously he practised in this Court until the year 1902. His career at the Bar was one of exceptional brilliance. Within a few years he almost reached the top of his profession. On the Original side, I venture to think, there has not been, for at least many years, a practitioner in whom the Judges, the Attorneys and litigating public had the same amount of confidence as they had in Mr. Bonnerjee. After having attained the highest practice possible on the Original side, Mr. Bonnerjee commenced to practice in the Appellate side and his success on that side was as rapid as on the Original side of this Court.

“A sound lawyer, a perfect draughtsman and a brilliant cross-examiner, Mr. Bonnerjee was to many of us the ideal of a perfect Advocate of this Court. His merit was appreciated both by the public and the Government of this country, and in 1883* he

was appointed to act as Standing Counsel to the Government of India, which appointment he held for more than four years. He was also a fellow of the University of Calcutta, and, as a fellow of that University, he sat in the local Legislature for nearly two years. And in every phase of life, Mr. Bonnerjee displayed equal prominence. To us whom he has left behind, his name and example will always be one which we shall try to emulate. We can only express to the bereaved family the deep sympathy which the Bar feels for them in their great loss."

Babu Ram Charan Mitter, senior Government Pleader and Babu Kally Nath Mitter, the senior Attorney, also pitiably expressed the regret of their colleagues.

The Chief Justice's tribute.—His Lordship the Chief Justice said :— I need hardly assure you that I and my brother Judges have heard about the death of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee with very great sorrow. Speaking for myself, I may tell you that every word that has fallen from you finds ready response in my heart. The death of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee is indeed a great loss to the great profession to which he was an ornament, and I may say one of the highest ornaments. By his industry and perseverance, and aided by the natural thoroughness with which he always discharged his onerous duties, he won for himself the admiration both of the Bench and the Bar, and I may say also, of the public generally ; and he attained for himself a most prominent position at the Bar of the Court, a position which I think had never been attained

before by any Indian gentleman. He also filled the high office of Standing Counsel to the Crown with great credit to himself for some years. Amongst Indians he occupied, I may say so, a unique position. He was held by his countrymen in the highest esteem and I am always certain that his death will be deeply regretted by most of our countrymen as a national loss. After he retired from this country he practised for several years before the Privy Council, and there also he achieved a prominent position. Even while practising before the Privy Council he always interested himself in matters which concerned India, and, what I value most, he took the liveliest interest in those who went to England for their education. Indeed, to some of them he acted as their kind guardian. I have no doubt, gentlemen, that the death of Mr. Bonnerjee will be mourned by all. I, on my own behalf and on behalf of my brother Judges desire to express our deepest sympathy and to offer to the family of the deceased, and to everyone of them, our sincerest condolence."

Thus passed away the First President of our National Congress. Even in his last mortal hour his thoughts turned to India, and according to his instructions, his ashes were collected in an urn and buried in a corner of his house in Croydon with the following inscription :—

Here lies W. C. Bonnerjee, a Hindu
Brahmin, who on his way home fell a
victim to Bright's disease, etc. etc.

APPENDIX—"A"

LIFE OF GIRISH CHUNDER BONNERJEE

Girish Chunder Bonnerjee, the eldest son of Pitambar Bonnerjee, was born in the month of July, 1823. Girish Chunder was early sent to the Patsala of the eldest brother of Hararam Gurumahasoy, that "redoubtable pedagogue", who shape the character of three generations of men in Simla. Girish Chunder was a boy of calm disposition, his serenity was seldom disturbed. This trait was afterwards fully developed when he became a great Jurist and Conveyancer.

After his Patsala life he was admitted into the Oriental Seminary, and later on to the Old Hindu College. All along he applied himself to his studies with great diligence. His private studies were even greater, and at home he studied Sankrit, Urdu, Persian and Latin.

At the early age of 16 he was married to the great great-grand-daughter of Jagannath Tarkapanchanan of Tribeni. This lady had and still has the enviable reputation of being loved and admired by all. At the bidding of his father, Girish Chunder married a second time.

About his father, Bonnerjee wrote as follows :—

In the year 1850, Grees Chunder was articed to Mr. George Rogers and in the ordinary course he would have appeared for the

Attorney examination in 1855. But his father having died in 1853, the burden of a large family fell on his shoulders, and as his salary from his employers was not very large, he had to work both mornings and evenings to earn money and he used to attend office rather late. Mr. Archibald Grant, the head of the firm, objected to his coming late and said he would increase his salary to Rs. 150/- a month but he must come early. Grees Chunder was only able to attend office early for a short time and again fell into the old habit of going there late. This displeased Mr. Grant who informed him that unless he came to office in good time his services would be dispensed with. At this time a heavy suit of the Sobhabazar Raj family was pending in the Supreme Court in which Messrs. Grant and Rogers were attorneys for some of the defendants and Messrs. Allan and Judge for other defendants. The case of Messrs. Grant and Rogers' clients was in the hands of Grees Chunder who had drawn an answer for them and this answer as drawn was sent to one of their clients who was Maharajah Bahadoor Kamal Krishna, a great friend of Grees Chunder and his family. Mr. Allan happening to call on the Maharajah Bahadoor saw the answer and was so struck with the ability with which it had been drawn that he asked what counsel had drawn it. He was told that no counsel but Grees Chunder, an articled clerk

at Grant and Rogers had drawn it. Mr. Allan at their time was contemplating practising in the Sudder Dewany Adalat and was desirous of having a competent man in his firm to whom he could entrust the bulk of his business. He asked the Maharajah if he could not get Grees Chunder to join him (Mr. Allan). The Maharajah said that differences had arisen between Grees Chunder and Mr. Grant and that the former had received notice of discharge from Mr. Grant. On this information, Mr. Allan saw Grees Chunder and at once engaged him at a salary of Rs. 250/- a month. But Mr. Grant did not like to part with Grees Chunder and raised so many objections to his joining Mr. Allan that for two months he sat at home doing no work but drawing Rs. 250/- a month from Mr. Allan at Mr. Allan's special request. The dispute between Mr. Grant and Mr. Allan over the devoted head of Grees Chunder was referred to the attorneys' association who decided in favour of Mr. Allan and Grees Chunder was then able to attend Mr. Allan's office. Mr. Grant however, would not allow Mr. Rogers to transfer Grees Chunder's articles and so these articles were cancelled and Grees Chunder in 1854 entered into fresh articles with Mr. Allan. Mr. Allan had made it a condition that Grees Chunder should attend office early and for a time he did so. But as Rs. 250/- a month was found to be insufficient to enable

Grees Chunder to meet the expenses of his family, he had to resume the morning and evening work he could not go to Mr Allan's office in time. At last Mr. Allan having ascertained from Grees Chunder that Rs. 400/- a month would enable him give up his work in the morning and attend office early. Mr. Allan raised his salary to that sum he drew it until the retirement of Mr. Longmuir, who had made him a partner in the firm in 1856, from the firm. Grees Chunder became a partner shortly after having passed the attorney's examination which he did in January, 1859, and the firm was called Allan, Judge and Bonnerjee.

When the High Court was established in 1862, a rumour was set afloat that the attorneys would not be allowed to plead on the Appellate side of the Court. This frightened Mr. Allan who then withdrew his name from roll of attorneys and confined himself to practising as a Vakil. His interest in the firm was taken over by his partner, Mr. W. J. Judge and Grees Chunder, and the firm was afterwards conducted under the style of Judge and Bonnerjee.

One thing to be noted with regard to his practice was his transparent honesty and his averseness to foment litigation. In this respect, Girish Chunder is an example to be followed by other legal practitioners. He never gave false hopes to his clients where there

was no chance of winning a case. He dissuaded his clients from launching from into the turbulent sea of litigation where the result was very doubtful. He studied day and night, night and day, the records and precedents to throw light upon his case his instructions were of invaluable service to the advocates he engaged. So energetic, so enthusiastic an attorney could hardly be found. Indeed he has been rightly called the 'Prince of Attorney'

Heavy work soon told upon his constitution. Hard study, excessive thinking without due exercise of the body gave birth to that fell disease, Diabates, which cut short his life. His habit of night study on account of the ordinary plea of quietness and a supposed favourable state of the brain, left pernicious effect upon his health. The laws of Health cannot be broken with impunity. In August 1868, there appeared a small swelling on the sole of his right leg which was attributed to his wearing hard shoe, but which like a small cloud no bigger than a man's hand proved fatal by which Grees was snatched away in the full bloom of life and prosperity. Like the greatest men in Bengal, Grees Chunder was gathered to his fathers at the comparatively early age of 45. Like Keshab Chunder Sen, Kristo Das Pal, Harish Chunder Mookerjee, Justice Dwarka Nath Mitter—Grees Chunder died early. The swelling abscess proved to be gangrene sore, which was diagnosed by Ram Narain Doss (afterwards Rai Bahadur), and Dr. Partridge (the first surgeon in the Calcutta Medical College) was called in and he performed the

operation. Grees Chunder patiently bore the operation without chloroform. Dr. Partridge himself admitted that even soldiers could not bear operation as calmly Grees Chunder did. The operation drained his blood considerably from his body. He became pale for want of blood. He was exhausted by Diabates and further loss of blood after an operation ultimately brought about his death. He was in full possession of his senses to the last. The supreme moment arrived. Not a muscle was strained, not a feature was rigid, his face retained his original brightness. Amid the loud lamentation of the household, Grees Chunder's immortal spirit flitted away leaving behind him a family of two sons and five daughters, the youngest being Satya Dhon Bonnerjee afterwards an Attorney of the High Court.

PITAMBAR BONNERJEE

Pitambar Bonnerjee was born in the year 1781 in the village of Baganda, seventeen miles west of Howrah, of a poor but respectable Brahmin family. He was unfortunate enough to lose both his parents before he was ten years old. His mother's sister, taking pity on the helpless orphan, took him to Calcutta where he grew up in the family of Ram Narayan Misra. At that time Ram Narayan Misra was banian to the Government Solicitors.

Here Pitambar was initiated into the mystery of the three R's and began to learn a little English. In those days there were very few Bengalis in Calcutta who knew English, and Pitambar used to go to them to learn English. It is said that so great was his zeal that, having no pen, he collected some vulture's feathers's from the Nimtolla Cremation Ghat, and used to practise writing English with them on a wooden board.

Having learnt his mother tongue and English, a little Urdu and less Persian, he entered into the arena of life. About his career his grandson, W. C. Bonnerjee writes—"I may say here that he was inducted into the law by Babu Narayan Missry, the grandfather by adoption of our late uncle Babu Rajendra Missry. Narayan Missry was the Banian, as managing clerks were called in those days, of Mr. Collier, a solicitor of the Supreme Court and on

his retirement from the position introduced our grandfather, to Mr. Collier, as his successor and the latter remained in the service of Mr. Collier and the firms that succeeded him, namely, Collier ; Collier and Bird ; Collier, Bird and Grant ; Bird and Grant ; Grant and Remfry ; Grant Remfry and Rogers. Our grandfather died while in the service of Grant, Remfry and Rogers, His death took place as I have already told you on the tenth day of the light side of the moon in the month of Agrahayan in the year 1260 B.S."

This little extract is taken from one of W. C. Bonnerjee's letters to Krishnalal Bonnerjee—dated September 8th 1904. W. C. Bonnerjee was always very anxious that a biography of his grandfather should be written. In an earlier letter dated August 24th, 1904 he says—"I am very glad to learn that you are ready to undertake to write the life of our grandfather. He was in every respect a wonderful man and rose from a small beginning to a position of influence, usefulness and dignity, and though he died a poor man he earned large sums of money which he gave away in charity which, if truth must be told, was sometimes indiscriminate. I was just completing the ninth year of my age when he died on the 10th day of the light side of the moon in the month of Agrahayan in the Bengali year 1260. My earliest recollections of him go back to the time of the death of my eldest brother when I was about 2 or 3 three years old, and after his death I learned a great deal about his early life and struggles from a friend of his who lived in his house for many years having lost

all his property which was considerable. His name was Prem Chand Pal. I will on my return to Croydon write out what I remember of him personally and what I have heard of him and send it to you, I cannot do so from here as I wish to be as quite just now as possible'

There was some controversy about the exact year of Pitambar Bonnerjee's birth. According to his grandson, he was 72 years old at the time of his death. Since it is certain he died in 1853, he must have been born in 1781. The sketch of his grandfather's life which W. C. Bonnerjee wrote is unavailable now ; but one more extract is found in a letter dated December 1st, 1905. In it he says—"In the meantime let me point out to you that our grandfather died not in 1855 but in 1853 on the 10th day of the light side of the moon in Agrahayan 1260 B. S. (10th December, 1853). I have got English date from a date book in my possession. Narayan Missir was not, I think, a Justice of the Peace for if I remember aright no countryman of ours was made a Justice of the Peace while Narayan Missir lived. When our grandfather joined Mr. Collier as his Banyan in succession to Narayan Missir, the firm belonged to Mr. Collier alone. Subsequently he admitted Mr. Bird as the partner and afterwards Mr. Archibald Grant. This latter, I mean Mr. Grant, was appointed solicitor to the East India Company. When Mr. Grant gave up the solicitorship, Mr. F. C. Sandes became his successor, Mr. Collier's successive firms were these, viz., Collier ; Collier and Bird ; Collier, Bird and

Grant ; Bird and Grant ; Grant and Remfry ; Grant, Remfry and Rogers ; Grant and Rogers ; Remfry and Rogers ; Rogers and Remfry ; Remfry, Remfry and Rogers ; Remfry and Rose ; Remfry and Son and now Remfry. During the X'mas vacation I shall write my reminiscences of my grandfather. These are not many as I was not quite nine years old when he died."

Pitambar Bonnerjee married three times, and had a large family of eight sons and seven daughters. It is said that he was much respected in the society of the times. His career was a most interesting one, but unfortunately we know almost nothing in detail. The little that we know shows clearly the typical career of a respectable Bengali in the days of "John Company".

A MESSAGE FOR THE CENTENARY COMMEMORATION

Had I been well enough to undertake so long journey, I should assuredly consider it my duty to be present on such an important occasion to pay my tribute to the memory of Woomesh Chunder Bonnerjee whose centenary we are commemorating.

It is but right and seemly that we who are the heirs and beneficiaries of his brave and noble labours should tender due honour to this great Patriarch of the national renaissance, who brought to the service of his country the varied and splendid gifts of his vigorous intellect, his dominating personality, the breadth and clarity of his political vision, the course and sanity of his political wisdom. Alas, no longer in our midst have we that remarkable band of pioneer patriots who were immediate contemporaries and intimate comrades, and helped to create the powerful organisation which, today, is the authentic and accredited symbol of the Nation's political ideals and freedom.

But there are many amongst us of a younger generation who cherish vivid recollections of this redoubtable fighter, who in his private life was so kind a friend and so genial a dispenser of hospitality.

My first meeting with him and the gracious little lady who was his wife took place nearly half a century

ago when I was taken by an English friend to their hospitable home near London—a shy reluctant girl of sixteen—somewhat alarmed by the rumoured brilliance of the sons and daughters of the house! That was the beginning of a delightful and progressive friendship with their children, which later, extended to their grand-children and now includes some tiny and bright-eyed great grand-children to whom this world of ours is still “all a wonder and a wild delight”!

I have, therefore, a dual pleasure in associating myself with their Centenary Celebrations, both in my personal capacity as an old friend of the family and in my representative capacity as one in the long line of his successors in that high office to which he brought such lustre, as the First President of the Indian National Congress.

Sarojini Naidu
Hyderabad, Deccan.

13th January, 1944.

AN APPRECIATION OF MR. W. C. BONNERJEE

BY

MR. G. A. NATESAN,

Editor, Indian Review' dated, July, 1906

THE LATE MR. W. C. BONNERJEE

A venerable political leader and patriot has passed away in peace. The sad news of the demise of Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee in England on the 21st instant, has thrown the entire country into mourning. It was known that, for some months past, Mr. Bonnerjee had been in indifferent health and the letters that were from time to time being received from London gave very hopeful accounts of his recovery. The news of his death will, therefore, be a shock to all. The Congress movement, of which it might be said he was one of the founders, has lost in him one of its tried friends and its great pillars of hope. He presided over the first great national gathering of the people held in Bombay in December, 1885. He placed his time, his talents and his large fortune at the disposal of his countrymen and availed himself of every opportunity to advance their interest. So dearly did he love his independence and the interests of his people that thrice he declined the offer of a Judgeship of the Calcutta High Court.

We used his undoubtedly eminent position as a lawyer, his high status in society and his great influence with the authorities, always for the benefit of the

people and never once for his own personal advancement. During the memorable trial of Babu Surendra Nath Bannerjee years ago and of the late Mr. Robert Knight of the 'Statement', Mr. Bonnerjee rendered magnificent services to the cause of the freedom of the Press in India by his able advocacy of the cases. When Pandit Ajudhyanath passed away and the office of the Secretaryship of the Indian National Congress fell vacant, all eyes were turned to Mr. Bonnerjee. It was a critical period for the Congress and Mr. Bonnerjee undertook the office with cheerful readiness. He always protested against the statement of mischievous and malevolent critics of the Congress that its members were seditious. "No charge can be more absolutely devoid of foundation than this." These are words taken from his Introduction to "Indian Politics." And he emphatically wrote : "The mistakes notwithstanding, the Congress stands before the world as one of the marvellous successes of British rule in India."

It is perhaps not widely known that the "Bengalee" newspaper owes its existence to the public spirit, among others, of Mr. Bonnerjee. His strong personality and his severe impartiality made their impress on all who came in contact with him, and in all matters in which there was a difference of opinion among leaders of Calcutta society, Mr. Bonnerjee's decision was final. We have heard it said by more than one of the oldest of Congressmen, that Mr. Bonnerjee's presence at a Congress and more especially at the meetings of the Subjects Committee, always made itself markedly felt.

We the keen insight and shrewdness of a politician Mr. Bonnerjee realised long ago that for any appreciation changed to be effected in the administration of India, it was essential that attempts should be made to enlist the sympathy of the British public on behalf of India. With this plan in view Mr. Bonnerjee worked hard for the establishment of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, and the starting of the Congress organ 'India', Mr. Bonnerjee utilised his constant and long sojourns in England in attempting to open the eyes of the British public to the condition of India, and we owe to him, in some measure, the existence today of the many English friends, in and out of Parliament, who are devoted champions of Indian interests. It is melancholy to think of the fact that Mr. Bonnerjee had to abandon the idea of entering the House of Commons owing to the failure of his health. Mr. Bonnerjee always held the view that it was the liberal party that was inclined to help India in her onward march, and that it was to them we must look for sympathy and help. He rejoiced with others at the accession of the Liberal Party to power and the appointment of Mr. Morley to the office of Secretary of State for India and it is sad to contemplate that just at the moment when Mr. Morley has held out hopes of ushering a new era of liberty and reform for this country, Mr. Bonnerjee who worked hard for years in that direction and longingly looked forward to the "golden day", should have closed his eyes on the world which he so dearly loved and in which he so strenuously sought to live well and nobly.

Extract from an article Contributed to the Indian Review of
September, 1906, the by late Rai Bahadur P. Anandachari

Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee was a true patriot by acting on a dictum that words were but leaves but deeds were fruits ; with an appearance of the "most English of Indians", he was the "most Indian of Indians" in his feelings, affections and sentiments. Without professing to lead, he virtually led and had a commanding influence, owing to his keen insight into conditions when disintegrating forces operate and when personal rivalries are rampant. His charities were not only many but secrete, as though he blushed to be caught in performing them, thereby observing, in all rigidness, the Aryan injunction that one's charities should be included in one's nine secrets ; and he adhered to the very letter to the Vedic mandate *Matru Divo Bhava* (may one pay divine reverence to one's mother). He gave his unrestricted confidence and laid his heart open, when amid his bosom friends. * * *

It was my good fortune to correspond with Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee at the commencement of my career. In 1908, I published a book called "Indian Politics" and I approached Mr. Bonnerjee for an introduction to the same. I remember how readily he complied with my request. I met Mr. Bonnerjee for the first time in Madras at the office of the late Mr. Eardley Norton, Barrister-at-Law, and I had the good fortune of a conversation with him. I can never forget the deep impression he made on me as a gentleman, quite of a superior order. I know and I have read a great deal of the profound influence he wielded in the inner circles of the leading Congressmen of those days and of his untiring efforts to present the case for India in England. Next only perhaps to the late Dadabhai Naoraji, almost every Indian who went to England, sought his assistance in some form or other, and that, I was told, was always cheerfully given.

I remember very well as a young man attending a great public meeting in Madras held in the Pachayappa's Hall soon after his death, presided over by the late Rao Bahadur P. Anandacharlu. Many appreciative speeches were made about him, but the most noteworthy tribute paid to him was by the late Mr. Eardley Norton, who almost burst into tears when referring to Mr. Bonnerjee's kindness and hospitality.

MESSAGE FROM SIR TEJ BAHADUR SAPRU.

“I am really glad to hear that Calcutta is celebrating your grandfather's birth. ‘W. C. Bonnerjee’ is not a name which can perish from the history of India. He was the first President of the Congress and one of half a dozen pioneers of the national movement in India. As a young man I remember having heard him at the Congress at Allahabad in 1892. What a magnificent speech he delivered and what a wonderful presence and personality he had. In the domain of law he had few equals and none as his superior. As a lawyer I feel proud that our country has produced a man of his distinction and achievements. If he had been born in England I have no doubt that he would have risen to be Lord-Chancellor. Above everything else was his remarkable character and forceful personality. I join everyone in Calcutta in paying my humble and reverential tribute to his memory.”

MESSAGE FROM
THE HON. DR. SACHIDANANDA SINHA,

Vice-Chancellor of the Patna University
and

ex-Finance Member, Government of Bihar and Orissa.

Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee, the first President of the session of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay, in 1885, was one of the greatest political that nineteenth century India produced, and I am gratified to learn that the celebration of his birth is being organised. I had the privilege of being well known to Mr. Bonnerjee from 1893, when I returned home from my call to the English Bar, till about the time of his death. He was not only one of the greatest advocates of the Calcutta High Court; but a commanding and towering personality in our public life. He took the keenest interest in the progress of the country, and devoted considerable time and attention to its well-being. He was deeply interested in the higher education of his countrymen, and in social progress in general. But his greatest claim on his countrymen was his devotion to the work of the political advancement of India. He presided over two sessions of the Indian National Congress at Bombay, in 1885, and at Allahabad in 1892. During his stay in England, each year, for a certain period, he used to tour about the country, delivering speeches on Indian problems, and doing all that he could to secure the co-operation and support of prominent British

friends of India to advance the cause of this country. He has thus left us not only mantle of inspiration, but, a name and fame amongst our greatest political leaders which the present generation would do well to emulate. It is but fit and proper that the memory of so great a patriot, and so sturdy a champion of the cause of the country, should be cherished by us in the highest esteem and regard.

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The inestimable services of the late Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee, the first president of the Indian National Congress, in the cause of his country were gratefully recalled at a public meeting held in connection with the centenary of his birth yesterday (Wednesday) at the Oriental Seminary (Upper Chitpore Road) where Mr. Bonnerjee received his early education. Dr. Kalidas Nag presided

Sj. Hemendra Prasad Ghosh said that the many-sided activities of the deceased's life for the advancement of the cause of his country bore eloquent testimony to how deeply he felt for and loved his country. When the full history of the Indian National Congress would be written the speaker had no doubt that this illustrious son of Bengal would be given a high place among those who fought for freedom of India. The speaker regretted that Mr. Bonnerjee had not been given the recognition which was his due in the official account of the History of the Indian National Congress as published some years back.

Prof. Tripurari Chakravarty of the Calcutta University said that perhaps there were people today who might think that stalwarts like Sir Surendranath Bannerjee and Mr. Bonnerjee were moderates but it must be admitted that the contributions of these illustrious sons of India towards the growth and evolution of the Indian National Congress were solid and enduring.

Dr. Kalidas Nag said that Mr. Bonnerjee felt very strongly on the question of India being given a representative form of Government while he was quite young. A document which was recently discovered in the archives of the East India Association, London, recorded a statement of the 23 year-old law student, Mr. Bonnerjee, putting forward a forceful plea for a representative form of Government for India and, incidentally controverting the arguments that were advanced against granting self-Government to India. That was in the year 1867, that is, about 18 years before the Indian National Congress was born. Therefore, the speaker thought that an account of the Indian National Congress would not be complete unless it properly assessed and evaluated the activities of those great Indians who worked for the country some years before the birth of the Congress. And the late Mr. Bonnerjee was one of those great pioneers of the Indian National Congress.

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the chair and the Centenary Celebrations Committee moved by Sj. Protap Chandra Bonnerjee, a grandson of the late Mr. Bonnerjee.

Extract from the 'Hindusthan Standard' dated 14th February, 1944.

The extent of modern India's indebtedness to the pioneer work done by the late Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee in the field of freedom movement of the country was emphasised by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee presiding at a crowded public meeting held in celebration of the centenary of his birth at the University Institute Hall, Calcutta, last (Sunday) evening.

In a message regretting her inability to be present at the meeting Mrs. Sarojini Naidu said: "It is but right and seemly that we who are the heirs and beneficiaries of his brave and noble labours should render due honour to this great patriarch of the national renaissance who brought to the service of his country the varied and splendid gifts of his vigorous intellect, his dominating personality and the breadth and clarity of his political vision."

She associated herself with the centenary celebrations both in her personal capacity as an old friend of Mr. Bonnerjee's family and in her representative capacity as "one in the long line of his successors in that high office to which he brought such lustre as the first President of the Indian National Congress."

Messages were also received among others from Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir N. N. Sircar and Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha.

In paying his tribute, Hon'ble Sir Bejoy Prasad Singh Roy, President, Bengal Council, said that Mr. Bonnerjee was one of the creators of modern India. He set up a very high standard in their public life and worked for the salvation of their motherland.

Sj. Santosh Kumar Basu said that Mr. Bonnerjee was the foremost among those who conceived the idea of building up the Indian nation by bringing different elements to work together, and to the last day of his life he strove for the materialisation of this conception. His work was enshrined in letters of gold in the annals of the Indian National Congress.

Mr. W. C. Wordsworth said that Mr. Bonnerjee was admired and remembered greatly by Europeans as well as Indians. As the first President of the Congress, and President for a second time a few years later, Mr. Bonnerjee had a large place in the political history of India and the political history of India had its proper place in the history of England. Mr. Bonnerjee never allowed his passions to sway his judgment and he never allowed the passions to sway the judgment of those whom he led. He set up a lofty ideal for himself in private and public life and he never swerved from it. They paid their respects to him as a great citizen of this city, a great Bengalee, a great Indian, a great lawyer and a great politician. He could assure the gathering that Mr. Bonnerjee would be remembered greatly in two places in England, namely the India Office and the Privy Council Bar.

Sir Baron Jayatilaka of Ceylon said that pioneer work of men like Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee had created political consciousness among Indians and Ceylonese. In the wake of India Ceylon was marching along the path of freedom.

In paying his homage, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee said that the courage with which they were pressing their demands today had been derived through the exertions of men like Mr. Bonnerjee who proved to the hilt that this consciousness of racial superiority was a myth and that given the opportunity Indians were able to compete on equal terms with Englishmen. They were grateful to men like Mr. Bonnerjee inasmuch as they had realised that it was necessary to wrest powers of administration to be able to mould successfully the destinies of the nation. Through the efforts of her able sons Bengal aroused the political consciousness of Indians and she could well be proud of her contributions in the political field. The salvation of their country could not be far off if, inspired by the ideals of service of men like Mr. Bonnerjee, they worked for the furtherment of the cause of the country. The Calcutta University had arranged to perpetuate his memory he disclosed by founding lectures after his name on 'Indian Constitution.' The memorial Committee had also undertaken to bring out an authoritative book on his life and times.

Pandit Asokenath Sastri, Prof. Tripurari Chakravarty and S. J. Bejoy Behari Mukerjee, also addressed the meeting on the life and work of Mr. Bonnerjee.

LIFE OF
W. C. BONNERJEE
FIRST PRESIDENT
OF THE
INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

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SADHONA BONNERJEE