

INDIA'S RESPONSE TO CHRIST

An address delivered at
the Methodist Episcopal
Church, Calcutta under
the auspices of the Cen-
tral Conference of the
Methodist Episcopal Chur-
ches in Southern Asia.



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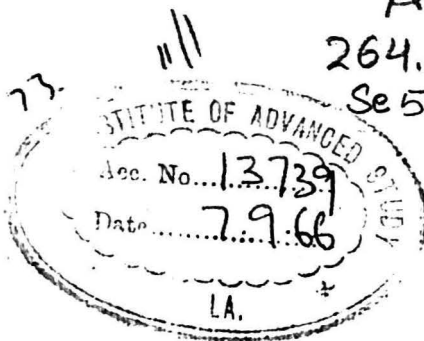


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INDIA'S RESPONSE TO CHRIST

You are now in the midst of your rejoicings and have come from all parts of India to enjoy the blessings of God that descend on those that gather together in his name. How can I thank you for the kind and cordial invitation you have extended to me to join in this spiritual feast? Yet, I must confess that it is with great diffidence and with considerable hesitation that I stand before you here to-night. The question that arises in my mind is :— Why have you asked me—one outside the fold of Christ in the ordinary acceptation of the term—to speak of him crucified? Why have you called a non-Christian to address a conference of Christians, and in this House of Prayer where Christ alone is to you the Light and the Way and the Truth? I do not look upon Christ in the same way as you do. Why then

am I here before you to-night ? The answer that comes to me is this : Perhaps you realise the truth of the fact that no one can escape Christ. Perhaps you realise that it is given to no one—be he a Christian or a non-Christian, a saint or a sinner, an oriental or an occidental—it is given to no one, who happens to be a pilgrim on the path to righteousness, to escape, to steer clear of Christ. This must be the platform common to you and to me. This must be the reason why you have asked me to speak, and it is this consciousness that has led me to accept your kind invitation.

I believe in my heart of hearts that India can not escape Christ. Before I proceed to show you that this belief is well-founded, you will permit me to give you a very brief sketch of my early struggles to understand and discover Christ. Not that it typifies the struggles of all, but it may typify the struggles of a great many. I would rather have avoided this digression to what may appear to be a personal topic. But my apology for doing so is this: I know myself best and can perhaps safely undertake to hold up a true picture as to my own doubts and difficulties. Let me bespeak for a while your patient sympathy, your

imagination and your love, so that I may lay bare before you the secret springs of my own heart's response to Christ.

No one can escape Christ. So has it been with me. I was born and brought up in the atmosphere of the Church of the New Dispensation. I do not know if that means anything to you, or what that may mean to you. To me it means a world of things. I am not sure that you are aware that those who live and move and breathe in that atmosphere endeavour every moment of their lives to draw near to Christ. In their prayers and religious exercises, their practices and penances, their ambitions and aspirations after a higher life, Christ occupies an ample space. The best of them love Christ with a love akin to adoration. Christ is to them an emblem of sonship, of sanctified renunciation, of unified humanity, of the love of man for God as the Father of humanity. The best of them try with the grace of God to know Christ, to love Christ and to live Christ.

I was a thoughtless and wayward child. This atmosphere may have, must have, influenced me greatly. But I was unconscious of it. No spiritual truth is got without seeking.

Great as is the efficacy of environment, the being in us does not develop without doing, without effort. Has it not been said 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you, seek and ye shall find, ask and it shall be given unto you' Hence the Lord ordained that my struggles should begin. Thirst came with growing age and my collegiate life began. I joined a Christian College. There I began to read and to think of Christ. And what a voracious reading it was for my youthful mind! I read and read and read,—thought and thought and thought till I lost myself in a maze. I devoured all that came in my way—lectures, sermons, hymns, literature of all sorts. But Christ, I felt, was far from me as ever. Nevertheless, a formless radiance of glory lured me on to where I knew not. Had I any prejudices or presuppositions—any pre-conceived ideas due to my upbringing? I searched my heart. I scanned and scrutinised my impulses so that I might start with a *tabula rasa*. Did I approach the Bible as a sceptic? No, but as a truth-seeker. Yet my heart was torn asunder with doubts and difficulties that beset me in my path. I could not accept every thing written in the Bible

saying, 'They are all true, for they are contained in the Bible. This was my first and foremost difficulty. My second difficulty was in harmonising the diverse presentations of Christ in different parts of the New Testament—the presentation in the first three Gospels which makes him out as a man and not God, the presentation in the fourth Gospel which sets him forth as the Deity Himself, then the presentation by St. Paul, and again, the striking presentation in the Epistle to the Hebrews. I struggled with myself till, ultimately, I had to run away from these conflicting presentations. I had to seek refuge in Christ himself. For has he not presented himself in his own words in the Gospels? Does he not present himself to us now and here through those utterances of his? I sought to reconcile the conflict in my mind by turning to such sayings and doings of Christ as bring out his true self clearly and unmistakably. I sought the help of God; and it came in ample measure through wonderful channels. The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh, whither it goeth. Mysterious are the ways of Providence. By

searching and by praying I found my Christ. Yes, truly have I found him. I say with all the earnestness that I can put into words that I believe in Jesus. I do not worship him as God. The Heavenly Father—Father alike of Jesus as of all the rest of us—Him alone do I worship. But I believe in the divine mission of Christ. I devoutly believe in the dispensation of God of which Jesus is a part and parcel.

I have said no one can escape Christ. But the question of questions that engages you to-night is not whether a solitary individual like me, outside the pale of the Christian Church, feels that the Christ is a spiritual necessity, nor whether the numerically small communion to which I belong realise their relations to Christ in a similar manner, but whether the heart of India throbs likewise. Does India with her thinking millions feel that for spiritual growth there is no escape from Christ? This requires a little analysis of the forces at present at work in India, in comparison with those at work about a century ago. Time was in the last century when with the impact of English education the old faiths for a while tottered and tumbled, the

social, moral and religious fabric of old received a tremendous shock. Scepticism and agnosticism were rampant among the educated classes. India was as a bark cast out upon a tempestuous sea with no rudder to steer herself and no port where she could find a haven of rest. The old and well-established harbours appeared to have been swept away in the storm that arose out of the clash between the East and the West. The first batch of Christian missionaries in India such as Carey, Marshman and the like—all honor be to them—then came and sought to hold up before the people of this land the figure of Christ. One can well understand what followed. On the one hand, there was a profound impression made upon the few that truly sought a haven of rest. On the other hand, there was bitter opposition and active hostility in the large masses of Indians who began to shun and hate the name of Christ. On the one hand, there was a response in the sense that some of the men embraced Christianity and by their life and example showed what a transfiguration could be effected by contact with Christ. On the other hand, there was much in the Christianity preached and practised which was so

foreign to the best thoughts and traditions of this country that it caused not a response to but a repudiation of Christ. For Christ had come to this country in a foreign garb as an Englishman, as it were ; and the follower of Christ in this country was by sheer force of circumstances torn away from his roots in the land of his birth and transplanted on a different plane of thought and tradition.

The times that I have endeavoured to portray have indeed passed, and with them the widespread animosity to Christ. The hostility to Christ that made itself manifest in the first clash of the East and the West has disappeared. Years have passed, and Christ has slowly and silently entered the hearts of the thinking section of the people. Slowly and surely he will enter the hearts of all. With the spread of education, with the spread of love, with the conquest of power and worldliness, Christ, I truly believe, will claim India as he will the whole world.

Now, why do I say this and what do I mean by it ? They would be mere words of cant if I did not make my meaning clear to you. I would not be true to myself, nor true to you, who have called me here, were I to indulge in

such cant and stop short there. Therefore, I feel that you have imposed upon me the imperative duty of telling you what I mean when I say that India's response to, nay acceptance of, Christ is obligatory.

The more I think, the more I feel that deep down in the heart of India there is a thirst unslaked, a hunger unsatisfied for more light, for more life, for more love. Time was when India said superciliously 'What need have we for Christ? Have we not our own great men, our own prophets—Sree Gautama, Sree Chäitanya, Sree Krishna, Sree Nanak, Sree Kabira and the many sons of God that this country has raised? Why need we another, from a foreign land?' This was undoubtedly the cry of protest many years ago. And when Ram Mohan Roy came forth with his book 'The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness', there was a growl from the Hindu and the Moslem community. "Guide to peace and happiness, forsooth", said they, in anger and abhorrence. Yet Ram Mohan faltered not. Imagine the infinite boldness of the man. A Brahmin by caste, living in the heart of the orthodox community and toward the end of the eighteenth century when freedom of speech

was by no means a common commodity, it meant uncommon courage to proclaim to the people that the precepts of Jesus were the guide to peace and happiness. Then arose another son of India, Keshub Chunder Sen, who went further than the precepts. He clung to the person Jesus, and boldly declared that Jesus was for spiritual existence food and drink. Many there were that followed him to the heights of that communion with the son of God which he preached and practised. Many there were that saw with Keshub that Jesus was the exemplar of that at-one-ment which all men were destined to realise. 'I and my Father are one'—What greater self-effacement has the world ever seen? Every word that he uttered he credited to his Father in Heaven, every work that he did he attributed to Him,—his message was God's message and his power God's power. 'Call me not good,' he said, 'for God alone is good.' Verily, he was the divine son. As he was at one with God, so was he at one with all humanity. 'You are in me and I in you'—this was not meant for his disciples only, but for all the world. For he that has the spirit of true sonship to the Heavenly Father must also have the spirit

of true brotherhood with universal humanity. Even so in Christ was made manifest the true essence of sonship to God, viz., at-one-ment with the Father and at-one-ment with humanity. Great as was the vividness with which Keshub Chunder held up the image of the divine son before India, the time was not yet ripe for all India to respond to him. The larger majority turned away and said 'Behold this man has gone off his head. He preaches allegiance to a foreign prophet and calls him the son of God. Can any good come from outside India ?'

Come with me now to Sabarmati—to the man who at the present day again holds up Christ before the people. What is his non-violent non-co-operation but an echo of Christ's non-violent non-co-operation against all forms of unrighteousness ? You and I may not agree with his political creed. But that does not prevent us from appreciating the springs of his actions and his life of service and self-abnegation. What is his self-effacement but avowedly a lesson learnt at the feet of Jesus ? What his love but a lamp lighted from the all-consuming fire of the love of Jesus ? He makes no secret of his loyalty to

Christ. And yet what man is more national, more Indian than Gandhi ? Even in prison Gandhi is as deeply immersed in the study of the *Geeta* as of the Bible and of the *Quoran*.

Verily, Christ is now nearer the heart of India than ever before. Slowly and silently, but surely, the attitude of the people has changed or is changing. Not to speak of active antagonism, there is not even a repugnance to Christ to-day. That he is one of God's chosen sons, that he is a messenger from heaven, that he is a great man having a special message to deliver to this world, that this message is not only for one country to the exclusion of another, or for some countries or peoples to the exclusion of the rest; nay more, that this message is for India as much as for any other land—is being dimly realised by the sons of India. But alas, the message lies shrouded in mystery. What with the doctrines and dogmas, and rites and rituals, and churches and creeds that divide the body of Christ,—for such is the name given by St. Paul to the Christians,—the sweet soul of Christ Jesus seems hidden from the heathen eye. I know not how many hundreds and thousands whom Christ would gladly have

welcomed are sent away perturbed in spirit, as I was once, feeling that the door is barred against them by iron bars of dogmas and doctrines. For, surely, Christ is not a hard dogma or a doctrine, but a veritable person—such an one as cannot but be accepted. Does it require much effort to draw near to the real Christ? O what a picture of simplicity, reality, holiness, sweetness and love! I see him on the banks of the Jordan go up to John the Baptist asking to be baptised of him and saying, ‘Suffer it to be so now.’ I see him come out of the water with his innocence washed into holiness. I see him all aglow with heavenly radiance go forth to minister unto the men of Galilee. I see the multitudes that come to listen to him and hang on his words listening. The mothers bring their babes to him that he might touch them, and the child-like Jesus says, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’. Tenderly he ministers unto the sick and the sorrowful, the poor and the forlorn, the publican and the sinner. I see him in the temple purging his Father’s house of money-changers and the buyers and sellers. I see him go to the wilderness often to pray. I see him go

to the mountain to pray and there transfigured, past all recognition. I see before my eyes the weeping Christ,—weeping tenderly like a mother-heart over Jerusalem. I see the serving Christ washing the feet of his disciples. And then I behold him on the cross in Calvary giving up his life, and with his last breath asking his Father to ‘Forgive them for they know not what they do.’

Is all this a hard doctrine or dogma ? Or is it not a living person ? One sees him and simply cannot escape him. One is awakened to a sense of true, living, loving sonship, of the truth embodied in the Lord’s Prayer, of the eternal verity of universal brotherhood, of the light and radiance of the kingdom of Heaven. His life as lived on this earth is an embodiment of these spiritual truths. For, verily, he was sonship to God manifested in the flesh, the divine son, the spirit of unified humanity, humanity gathered together at the feet of the common Father.

India is waiting to respond to this Christ, not the Christ of Western theology, not the Christ of many miracles and signs, not the Christ that proves himself by the print of the nails on his hands and his side, not the Christ

of dogmas and doctrines, but the simple, natural, homely Christ whose voice is a song of glory and whose doctrines are the simple utterances of a Fatherhood which hugs to its bosom all the children of men, and a brotherhood which makes all humanity one great family.

And now, my brothers and sisters, before I close I wish to touch upon one more aspect which appears to me of paramount importance. Jesus Christ said, 'I come not to destroy but to fulfil the law and the prophets'. Looking at Christ from a local or national point of view, as a Jew born in Bethlehem, one would say that by 'Law and the Prophets' he could only have meant the Mosaic Law and the prophets of the Old Testament. But there is an universal aspect of Christ. Christ came not only for the Jews but for the whole world. From this point of view by the 'Law' is meant the law enjoined by any other religion of the world, and by the 'Prophets' must be meant the prophets of all times and of all countries. Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. The Christ, therefore, that India is waiting to respond to is not the Christ that would remove all else from her heart before he could enter,

but the Christ that would wipe out nought that was before, nay, fulfil and complete all. Is it necessary for the sake of accepting Christ to abjure or renounce all the other prophets of India or of the world? No. No. For then would Christ come to destroy. Gautama Buddha and his message, Yogacharya Krishna and his message, Sree Chaitanya and his message of Bhakti, the Prophet of Arabia and his message of iconoclastic zeal for the one True God,—all came in the Divine Dispensation of Heaven, and came to stay. So did all the other prophets of the world. And Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil. So did all the other prophets and dispensations. They came to fulfil each other and thus to complete the scheme of Divine Providence. It is in the harmony of these that the salvation of the world consists and not in the destruction of any. Hence I cannot help feeling that Jesus came not to destroy that harmony of faiths which the world longs to see but to help towards its fulfilment. It is the Christ that fulfils all that India is waiting to respond to.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for inviting me to address you and also for the very kind and patient hearing you have given

me. My standpoint may be different from yours, but let me assure you that whatsoever I have said I have said from deep and earnest conviction. I trust, therefore, that you will forgive me for giving expression to ideas and sentiments with which you may not find yourselves in perfect agreement. For, whatever our differences may be, we agree in one particular, namely, that we are fellow-pilgrims on the path to Life.*

*Address delivered on the 13th December 1923 at the Methodist Episcopal Church, Calcutta, under the auspices of the Central Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Churches in Southern Asia.

Keshub Chunder Sen

AND

The Cooch Behar Betrothal

1878

SEN

Keshub Chunder Sen
AND
The Cooch Behar Betrothal, 1878.

PROSANTO KUMAR SEN,
M.A., (CAL), M.A., L.L.D. (CANTAB

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PREFACE

It was my father's injunction that I should write a full and true account of the Cooch Behar Betrothal of 1878. In writing this booklet I am carrying out that injunction to the best of my ability. From the very initiation of the negotiations my father Rev. Bhai Prosunno Coomar Sen was privy to them. He was also intimately associated with all the later stages. The particulars of information which I had the privilege of receiving from him direct have since been supported by documentary evidence incorporated in this booklet. Other authentic accounts have already been published, notably Rev. Bhai Protap Chunder Mozoomdar's 'Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen,' Rev. Bhai Gour Govind Roy's '*Acharya Keshub Chandra*' in Bengali, and Prof. Dwijadas Datta's 'Behold the Man'. But the above works deal with other matters no less important. The Cooch Behar Betrothal being only one of the many important incidents in the life-history of Keshub has not received in those treatises the individual treatment which it otherwise might have. Moreover, the larger biography being written in Bengali is accessible only to the Bengali-knowing public. Rev. Bhai Girish Chunder Sen's booklet '*Cooch Behar Vibaha : Smritilipi*' also being written in Bengali-labours under the same disadvantage. Miss Pigot's booklet 'A Brief Reminiscence of Keshub Chunder Sen' was intended for private circulation and has seen little or no publicity. Hence the necessity for a separate treatment on full authentic materials.

BARIPADA,
MAYURBHUNJ STATE,
INDIA.

PROSANTO KUMAR SEN

There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all argument and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is condemnation before investigation.

HERBERT SPENCER

Keshub Chunder Sen

AND

The Cooch Behar Betrothal, 1878.

To appreciate the significance of the negotiations that led to the Cooch Behar Betrothal we have to raise up a mental picture of a type of officials that has passed away in the course of the last fifty years. They might have had their shortcomings, but they were pre-eminently suited to the stage of transition through which British India and the Indian States were then passing. The spirit of self-reliance had not yet grown among the people to any appreciable extent, and what they needed and looked for was fatherly guidance and sympathetic control. This remark applies with special force to the Indian States where education had not at all progressed and factions and intrigues were the order of the day. The better class of high officials in those days possessed qualifications which were suited to the handling of a situation caused by these conditions. They were well-born and aristocratic, paternal and patronising, deeming themselves the *paterfamilias* of the country committed to their care.

The State of Cooch Behar has glorious traditions of the past. The rulers come of a

**The then type
of British
Officials.**

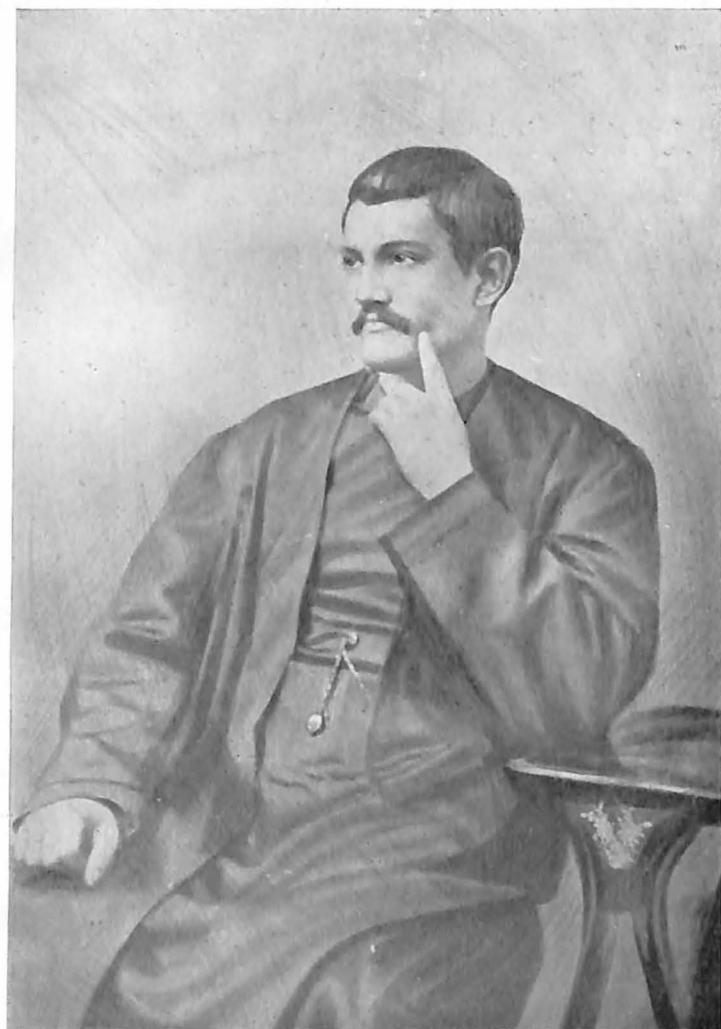
**Rulers of Cooch
Behar.**

The young Maharaja — his education during minority.

noble and warlike race which proved its prowess in the field of battle for centuries past, and even on the eve of the British advent. In the seventies of the last century the State was under Government management, the young ruler, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, being a special object of fostering care of the authorities in charge. He had shown great promise and the Government wanted to bring him up as a model ruler.

The influences of the Palace often are notoriously unfavourable to a sound and wholesome education. The Government wisely resolved that the Maharaja should be removed to a freer atmosphere. When five years old he was taken to the Ward's Institution, Benares, and removed thence to Patna in Bihar when he was eleven. Five years at Patna completed the period of education in this country which the Government had in view for the young Maharaja, and then arose the question of sending him to England for giving a finish to education and enabling him to have a wider knowledge of men and affairs. This caused consternation amongst the ladies of the Raj household who expressed great concern at the prospect of the young Maharaja being Europeanised. Sir Richard Temple, the then Lieutenant Governor on discussing the position with the Raja's mother wrote :

"During my interview with the Raja's mother and grandmother these ladies expressed anxiety regarding the Raja's visiting England, which they deprecated on the ground that after



KESHUB CHUNDER SEN, 1870

seeing Europe he would never care for such a place as Cooch Behar nor such quiet homely people as his relatives. I explained that it had not been decided whether the Raja should visit England ; but that if he did, it would only be for a short time, enough indeed to enlarge and strengthen his mind but not enough to forget his home and kindred ; and that while giving him the benefit of an English education, we should take every pains to train and prepare him for the duties he would hereafter have to discharge as the head of a State."

The above arguments conciliated the Palace ladies to a certain extent but they maintained that the surest method of riveting his attachment to his country and kindred was to get the Maharaja married before he left India. It thus became the duty for the Government to look for a suitable bride of the Maharaja, an educated and accomplished girl who would be his true partner in life. It was by no means an easy problem. The customs and practices that prevailed in the Raj family from time immemorial were such as would make it truly difficult for an advanced and enlightened parent to think of an alliance with it. The Raja though quite young was a striking personality, and captivating in his simplicity, sagacity and native generosity. Yet the custom of polygamy prevalent in the Raj family and the many pernicious palace influences had to be reckoned with by any parent who might be approached for giving his daughter in marriage to the Maharaja. The Government hoped so to shape

**Proposal to find
a bride.**

matters as to put an end to the old order of things and, with the accession of the new Maharaja to the throne, make a bright beginning for Cooch Behar. His education and his marriage were only parts of a well thought out programme for bringing about this devoutly wished-for consummation. Ordinarily, as is well-known, the British Government is loth to interfere in matrimonial matters in India, and especially in the States, for marriage in India is a sacrament and not a social contract. But be it said to its credit that in this particular instance the British Government was actuated by the noblest of motives to make somewhat of a departure for the future welfare of the Ruler and his State. The officials from Sir Richard Temple downwards were unconscious instruments in the hands of Providence for the carrying out of a purpose fraught with momentous results.

**Then and Now—
a retrospective
review.**

Looking at it across the space of fifty years one cannot help marvelling how slowly and imperceptibly it has fashioned the fate of Cooch Behar by inaugurating a new era, making it possible for the Maharanis to take their rightful place in society by stepping out of the seclusion of the Zenana, and for the Rulers to steer clear of caste not to speak of polygamy with all its attendant evils in Indian States. Can it be denied that the Cooch Behar-Baroda alliance has been made possible, only because of the new order of things inaugurated in 1878? Can it be gainsaid that Cooch Behar affords the first and last instance of an Indian State in which intercaste



JADUB CHANDRA CHUCKERBUTTY

and inter-racial marriage has become a reality through the help of the British Government?

With the object of securing a suitable bride the authorities deputed Mr. Jadub Chandra Chuckerbutty as special agent for carrying on matrimonial negotiations. He travelled on this mission over different parts of India, and made strenuous endeavours but found none that came up to expectation. At last with great diffidence he turned for advice and help to one of Keshub's close friends and disciples, Rev. Prosunno Coomar Sen, and broached the proposal of a match with Keshub's daughter.

The proposal came as a great surprise to all. To Keshub it was not only unexpected but somewhat unwelcome. He had not thought of his daughter's marriage yet. High-born and brought up under aristocratic influences, Keshub's heart was essentially humble and shrank almost instinctively from anything that savoured of pomp and circumstance. He straightaway declined the offer. But the Government and the Cooch Behar authorities would not be silenced. They had set their heart upon an enlightened alliance, and who was more suitable than Keshub's daughter? The details were thrown into the background. It did not matter that they had not as yet seen the girl, nor judged of her accomplishments. They were bent upon obtaining first of all Keshub's provisional assent so as to make the way ready for further progress. Accordingly, they pressed on with the negotiations, inspite

Negotiations

of repeated refusals,* urging upon Keshub the desirability of such an alliance and pointing out that every endeavour would be made by the Government to conform to the requirements of a non-idolatrous marriage. It appears, however, that after a couple of months or so the Government changed its mind, and gave up for a time the idea of arranging for the Maharaja's marriage. Thus the negotiations broke off and Keshub was left in peace.

- Renewal of negotiations.

In January 1878 negotiations were resumed, correspondence and interviews again commenced, and the proposal was again pressed by the Government with great vehemence upon Keshub. An appeal was made to him as a public man, a social and religious reformer, and the urgency and importance of the alliance was pressed upon him in all its aspects. Keshub quietly heard all, considered all. But with Keshub arguments had little force. The still small voice within was all that he cared for, all that he lived for. One who reads the inner history of his soul can easily realise that neither the persuasions nor the expostulations of friends

*"When the marriage was first suggested my father was very surprised. He never gave a thought to worldly or family affairs : his mind was too full of his religious work, and he refused the offer. But the Government and the representatives of the State would not be discouraged. They continued writing to my father, interviewing him and sending messages urging that the marriage of the young Prince and myself was most desirable. My father repeatedly refused. In one of his letters he said that I was neither very pretty nor highly educated, and, therefore, I was not a suitable bride for the young Maharaja." 'Autobiography of an Indian Princess' by Maharani Suniti Deves : John Murray, London 1921.



PROSUNNO COOMAR SEN

or foes made any impression upon his mind. As the worldly advantages of the match made no appeal to his mind even so the unknown dangers and difficulties, all the might-be's or the would-be's of the worldly-minded raised no spectre before it. He went straight to the source from which he drew all his strength and power and acted up to the injunction that he received. He did not reject the proposal outright as before, but agreed so far this time as to allow of the negotiations being entertained.

**Keshub agrees
that the essen-
tials may be
discussed.**

Correspondence ensued, and the essentials above mentioned were taken up for discussion. On the 24th January, 1878, while Keshub was immersed in the Maghotsav celebrations, the special agent of the State arrived at Calcutta. Evidently, the preliminaries had already been discussed and many of the essentials pressed for by Keshub had already been acceded to. This will appear from the facsimile letters (A and B).

The letter marked B practically set matters at rest by first of all giving a solemn assurance that it would be no more than a betrothal, and secondly by assenting to all the essential points regarding the ceremony so as to make it conform to theistic ideals. There was only one concession asked for, namely that Keshub was not to give away the bride himself, but one of his relatives, a brother or an uncle. The negotiations thus came to a head and an agreement was reached on February 4, as the following telegram will show :

"To

Babu Keshub Chunder Sen,
72, Upper Circular Road
From Deputy Commissioner

Cooch Behar.

Your telegram received. Anticipate no further difficulty. Pundit started yesterday for Calcutta to arrange formula of ceremony on basis heretofore approved by you viz., Hindu form idolatrous portion omitted and in addition brother to give away bride. Arrange details betrothal with Jadub who has instructions".

4. 2. '78.

**Maharaja's
avowal of
faith**

On February 8, the young Maharaja in response to Keshub's inquiry made an avowal of his faith in Theism as also on monogamy. (Facsimile letters C and D).

**Developments—
February 10th,
11th, 19th, and
20th.**

On the same date an assurance having been obtained through the Raj Pundit that the ceremony would be absolutely free of idols or idolatrous rites, Divine Service was held at Lily Cottage, Keshub's residence at 78, Upper Circular Road, Calcutta, and after service the Maharaja was formally introduced to the bride. The rest of the main incidents before the marriage are briefly told. On the 10th February was the ceremony of the Juruni and the Maharaja sent presents to the would-be bride and her relatives to signalise the establishment of relationship between the two families. On the 11th February was solemnised the formal ceremony of engagement accompanied by Divine Service. On the 19th February a reception was held at Lily Cottage at which the Maharaja was intro-

My dear Proprius Babu

Such has been the pleasure
of God and I am ^{amused} ~~amused~~ you
again to reopen the question
of marriage. Mountains and
Oceans stood as barriers before
us-but thanks to the Great
Remover of all difficulties-
we have managed to get over
them all. Should we not

See in all this the
hand of Him who
disposeth of every thing
human? We have done all
we could, it now rests
fully with you all to do
the remainder. I have
just now arrived here;
I left Cooch Behar at
mid-night day before
yesterday and have come in
at one. I am impatient

to see you; kindly come over
at once: My present
address is 6, Bhojani
Chauri Bhatti Lane.

My man will lead you
to my house. I hope
you know that our
Maharajah is here.

Yours sincerely
Jadub Chandra Chatterjee

24.1.78.

(B)

Copied

Cordoba -

January 22nd 1898.

My dear Sir -

The Lieutenant Governor
has at last decided that
Mr. Rafeah is to go to England
in March next, and, looking
to the desirability of perfecting
his higher education, that it
is better that he should be
married before he starts.

Mr. Eden at first saw diffi-
culty in the way of a
match with your family

but our arguments
in favour of the proposal
have at length found
length with him and he
has given his assent. Mr
Rafah had expressed his
distaste to being married at
all, as I told you in a
previous letter. Principally
~~because~~ ^{because} he was averse to being
worried about the matter. I
saw that because he knew
that he was not to be permitted
to live with his wife at
once, & wished to remain

Single until of an age to do
But he has come to see
an educated bride is not
to be procured at will
Mrs. Eager for the alliance
with your daughter, the name
of which was always pleasant
to him. provided he could
secure his mother's consent
This consent I have at length
secured with great difficulty
on terms which Bala Jeeva
Chunder Chunderbally will
explain to you & which, I
hope you will agree to.
I know it will seem desirable
to you to arrange for a wedding
on the 15th March & will
that the idea of money

Your daughter before she has
Completed her fourteenth year in
reputation to you. But
Consider the circumstances and
that in fact the marriage
will not be a marriage in
the ordinary acceptation of
the term but a solemn betrothal
in the Papal proceeding &
Europe immediately after the
ceremony. I have read through
your memo. There are some
paragraphs which I think
he can hardly consent to in
their integrity - but if a
little concession on both sides
I have no doubt that if
you are really well disposed
towards this marriage, he

May come to an arrangement which will suit both parties. One of the Rance's conditions is that one of your relatives, not yourself, should give away the bride. The objection to you is principally based on the fact that you have been to England!

I imagine that, as you will be actually present (or may be if you like) it will not make any great difference to you should a brother or uncle actually

Repeat the formula.

This is a condition on which
great stress is laid - and
hope you will not arrest
negotiations, "in limine" by
refusing to accede to it.

Remember that we on our
side have had great
difficulties to smooth away
and that we have already
conceded almost all
that we have the power
of conceding. Remember

also, that if you care
about this alliance, it
is a question absolutely
of now or never, for nothing
short of the urgency of the
case. (Mr. Raleigh goes to
England in March & Mr.
Raines in despair at the
idea of his going unmolested
would have brought Mr.
Eden to change his mind -
a thing he rarely does.

With my regards to yourself
Believe me
Yrs truly
Frederic D. Dallas.

(C)

Calcutta

8. 2. 78

My dear Sir -

I have been asked
to let you know what my honest
opinion is on the subject of bigamy

In reply I beg to
inform you that it has always
been my opinion, that no man
should take more than one wife
& I can assure you that

that I hold that opinion
s till

Yours truly
W. F. Crook
Bishop

~~Original~~

Baboo

Keshub Chander Sen

Lily Cottage

Calcutta

M. K. S. }

(D)

Calcutta

8. 2. 78

Strictly Confidential

My dear Sir

I give below a
statement of my religious
views & opinions - I believe
in one true God and I am in
my heart a Theist. -

Yours truly

Kupendranath Ray
Bhattacharya

duced to the *elite* of Calcutta and Keshub's numerous friends and well-wishers. By this time the Maharajah, by his striking simplicity and charm of manners had almost become a member of the family and a deep and abiding attachment had sprung up between him and Keshub, not to speak of the would-be bride. Meanwhile, the Raj Pundit who had come from Cooch Behar for the purpose of settling the details of the ceremony had had several consultations extending over a week with Pundit Gour Govind Roy, one of Keshub's trusted friends and fellow-workers, and a clear programme had already been drawn up setting out in elaborate detail the ceremony to be gone through. It was agreed that the ceremony so settled was to be printed in Sanskrit as well as in Bengali. and that the priests who had to officiate on behalf of the two parties were to be guided in their conduct of the ceremony by the printed ceremonial. On this explicit undertaking the ceremonial was put in the press. The following points were laid down for the guidance of the priest who had to officiate on the occasion :—

1. Neither at the time of the marriage ceremony nor before or after was the bride or bridegroom to take part in any idolatrous ceremony.
2. No image of any god or goddess, nor fire, nor any sacred water-pot (Ghat) was to find place at the marriage *mandap*.
3. *mantras* other than those set down on the programme of the marriage ritual were to be recited.
4. No portion of the *mantras* so written down was to be omitted or modified.

To all this the special agent of the Government and the chief State Pundit from Cooch Behar, specially deputed for the purpose, cordially consented, and thus there could be no occasion for doubt that the essentials insisted upon by Keshub from the very outset had been more than secured. Thereafter, on the 20th February the Maharaja left for Cooch Behar.

A few questions raised as moot-points by Keshub's adversaries may here be disposed of. It is worth remembering that for about four or five years prior to the Cooch Behar betrothal differences on fundamental points of faith and discipline had been agitating the Brahmo fold. In regard to these Keshub's views were naturally the views of the spiritually-minded in the community. This caused irritation and discontent to some young politicals who had raised the cry of republicanism in Church government. They had declared that Keshub's power must be crushed and the rule of the majority established even in such matters as spiritual doctrine and social discipline. Much of the bitterness of the Cooch Behar controversy is traceable to this unfortunate personal factor. The opponents demanded Keshub's adherence to the views of the so-called 'majority' even in regard to his daughter's marriage. They made hostile representations and served threatening interrogatories : Why did Keshub agree at all to the betrothal or the marriage ? What were the essentials as to rites and ceremonies ? Were these essentials secured ? If so, to what extent ? Was the Maharaja a Theist ? What about Act

III of 1872 ? Would it govern the case ? They asked these questions but did not wait for an answer. Yet the answers were so obvious.

First, why did he agree ? Again and again has this question been asked, and as often the identical answer has come from Keshub—"Because the spirit-voice within me said, 'Yes, go forward'". He could not say 'No'. It was not up to Keshub to be anything but an *instrument* in all he said or did. It was not in his nature to set himself up as an independent actor. He could not, he would not, he did not. But, alas, the explanation so simple, so natural, so characteristic of Keshub did not appeal to many of his so-called comrades. Talk about Inspiration, the Categorical Imperative within ? They would not have it. What about their shibboleths,—the rules and the constitutions, the vote of the majority, Brahmo public opinion and the bogey of democracy,—all these loomed large before them. Keshub, they said, must act on the voice of the majority which to them was the conscience of the community, and, therefore,—the conscience of their appointed minister !

Could the two view-points be reconciled ? Indeed they were the antithesis of each other. As Miss Cobbe, the celebrated thinker and author, put it :

"The Cooch Behar marriage is one more notable instance in history of the ethical error that gives social duty preference before personal duty. In other words, it is a result of the mis-

Keshub and Miss
Cobbe.

take of thinking that it is possible for us to do good in any more effectual way than by being good to the summit of our moral ideal".

This simple interpretation based on the verities of higher life, coming as it does from one who knew and understood Keshub and truly recognised the inner springs of his life, character and activities throws a flood of light on the Cooch Behar question which, unhappily for us, owing to the organised misrepresentation of malcontents, has proved a serious stumbling-block to many in the way of a fuller and truer acceptance of Keshub's ideals. For Keshub to have acted according to any authority but the inner one was not only to have acted from a lower plane of life and come down to the level of his opponents, but to have thrown over-board all those high ideals he stood for, in fact to have turned his back against *Brahmo Dharma* as he understood it.

"If my conscience acquits me", said Keshub "none can convict me. Of this I am sure, that I never sought a Raja. I never coveted filthy lucre. As a private man I should not probably have acted as I have done. But I was acting all along as a public man, and one course only was open to me". Again, "the Government, in presenting these views before me, seemed to ask me whether I would give my daughter in marriage to the Maharaja and thus help forward the good work so gloriously begun in that State by our benevolent rulers in the interests of millions of the subject population. I could not hesitate but said at once under the dictates

of conscience, 'Yes'. You have justly said that a grave responsibility would have rested upon me had I refused the overtures of the Government. In fact I wonder how you have so clearly realised the position and grasped the real secret of the whole affair. I have acted as a public man under the imperative call of public duty. All others considerations were subordinated to this sacred duty. All other considerations were subordinated to this sacred call, this Divine injunction. I saw, I felt that the Lord had Himself brought before me in the strange ways characteristic of His Providence, the young Maharajah of Cooch Behar for alliance with my daughter. Could I say No ? My conscience bade me obey. And there I was, an enchained victim before a strange overpowering dispensation of the living providence of God. I did not calculate consequences, though most beneficial results I could not fail to foresee. I did not go through elaborate logical processes of thought. I did not refer to others for advice, though I saw clearly that the contemplated step involved risks and hazards of a serious character, as the Raja was an independent chief and might fall back upon the evil customs prevalent in his territory I trusted, I hoped with all my heart that the Lord would do what was best for me, my daughter, and my country. Duty was mine ; future consequences lay in the hands of God."*

It is refreshing to see the truth bursting

*Keshub's letter to Miss Cobbe dated 29th April 1878. This private letter did not come to light until the betrothal had become an accomplished fact.

forth, as late as 1903 despite the cloud of misrepresentations :

"Though pre-eminently a man of prayer, the deep moral life of Keshub felt forcibly the conflict in which personal and social claims meet in the higher regions of ethics. A man cannot serve two masters. Whether to obey the light in us or conceding a little to the weakness of our bretheren help them to see the light has perplexed many a noble soul. But to the spiritual man this ethical problem has no meaning. It is our want of deep spiritual perception that makes two rival masters of fidelity to the God in us and service to our brethren. And Keshub Chunder Sen had that deep spiritual conviction. To the man who sees deep and has mastered the very mysteries of life, faithfulness to God and service to man mingle into one harmonious self-dedication. The whole question thus reduces itself to this. Has Keshub Chunder Sen in serving his brethren always stood up to the full height of his moral stature? A perusal of the letters* published puts it beyond doubt that he did. If, therefore, as he says in one of his letters, conscience acquitted him none can convict him". @

Thus feeling that he was an instrument in the hand of Providence Keshub proceeded to make sure of the essentials. The first thing

*Letters published by Miss Cobbe in her article on Keshub Chunder Sen in "East and West" Bombay, September 1903.

@See Subodh Patrika, Bombay, Sep. 1903, quoted in the World and the New Dispensation Nov. 5, 1914.

needful was that the Government should be prepared to make good its undertaking that *it would in reality be a solemn betrothal* and no more. Next, the ceremony to be gone through was to be perfectly unidolatrous and was to be clearly set out in writing beforehand, so as not to leave any occasion for misunderstanding.

What were the essentials, and how were they safe-guarded ?

The Brahmo marriage ceremonial is really the Hindu divested of its idolatrous portions. It was so at that time, and it is so even to this day. Indeed, there is no stereotyped Brahmo ritual. It is elastic enough to admit of certain characteristically picturesque variations such as by introduction of the Saptapadi (the seven steps) or other symbolic ceremonials of venerable associations. As regards the use of turmeric, puffed rice, cocoanut, the shuttle, the 'Shree' and other similar ancient symbols it is a matter of common knowledge that they are welcomed at the most up-to-date Brahmo weddings when introduced as auspicious by Hindu relations, without the slightest apprehension of any idolatrous taint in them.

From what has been said above it is easy to gather whether the essentials were not amply safeguarded. The special agent, the Raj Pandit, the Commissioner and the Lieutenant Governor all having agreed to these essential factors of the ceremonial, the Maharaja having declared his faith in Theism and the Government having given a solemn undertaking that it was to be treated in fact as a betrothal, there was nothing left to be fought for. As for Act III of 1872, it had no application outside British

territory, and therefore the marriage as a sacrament was to constitute the only sanction for its validity.

**Final
Preparations.**

The bridal party now started getting into readiness for proceeding to Cooch Behar. By way of greater caution Keshub Chunder sent a telegraphic message to the Deputy Commissioner, Cooch Behar, giving the warning that in religious matters there must be no departure from strictly monotheistic principles and a reply was duly received reiterating the assurance that the ceremonial to be adopted would be as already arranged. Accordingly, arrangements for a special train were made for the party to leave Calcutta on February 25. But suddenly events seemed to take a different turn pointing to sinister influences at work. On Saturday, Feb. 23, there came a telegram from Cooch Behar to the effect that whereas Brahmo ceremonies had been introduced into the marriage ritual it was not acceptable to the Cooch Behar authorities. On February 24, Keshub sent a reply to the above telegram protesting against the objection raised at such a late stage and reminding the authorities that the marriage ceremonial had been settled in detail in consultation with the accredited agents of the Cooch Behar Raj and with the Government of Bengal. To this a favourable reply was received from Cooch Behar conveying the assurance that the ceremonial which had been decided upon in consultation with the Cooch Behar agent purporting to be the Hindu ceremonial divested of idolatrous rites would be followed. Accord-

**Start for Cooch
Behar.**



H. H. MAHARAJA
NRIPENDRA NARAYAN BHUP BAHADUR, 1887

ingly, on Monday the 25th February the bridal party left Calcutta and arrived at Cooch Behar at 11 A.M., on Wednesday, February 27.

Considerable confusion has been caused by the omission, conscious or unconscious, of the fact about the last telegram from the narrative of the Cooch Behar Betrothal. The confusion has originated in this way. It happened to be omitted by inadvertence from the original statement that appeared in the column of the Supplement to the *Dharmatattwa* on Chaitra 16, Saka 1799, corresponding with 28th March, 1878, under the heading *Sadharan Brahmodiger prati nivedan*. The mistake was promptly corrected in the next issue of the *Dharmatattwa* (See *Dharmatattwa* of 1st Baisakh, Saka 1800). But the English rendering of the original statement which was published in the column of the *Indian Mirror*, dated April 7, 1878, was never similarly supplemented by the later correction. Hence the correction never saw the light in English. Apparently, when the Rev. P. C. Mozoomdar wrote about the Cooch Behar incident in his 'Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen' (First Edition, 1887, p. 327), he repeated the statement that appeared in the *Indian Mirror*, and fell into error by observing that Keshub betrayed a singular lack of sagacity in having started for Cooch Behar in the face of an unfavourable message such as the one he received on Saturday, February 23, the fact being, on the contrary, that having received the reassuring telegram of Sunday 24, Keshub could not possibly have had any reason for

A much needed
correction.

entertaining misgivings as to the unidolatrous character of the ceremony. The misapprehension of Mr. Mozoomdar above referred to was not publicly pointed out till Pundit Gour Govind Roy's work *Acharya Keshub Chunder* was published in Bengali, in the year 1895. In that book the matter has been dealt with in great accuracy of detail with reference to the particular numbers of the *Dharmatattwa* in which the original statement and the correction above referred to appeared. Thus there is no room now left for any confusion on the part of any one who undertakes to chronicle the events of the period, less so on the part of one who writes with Pundit Gour Govind's work actually before him. Unfortunately, that is what has happened with the author of the 'History of the Brahmo Somaj'. He takes from Pundit Gour Govind's *Acharya Keshub Chunder* the fact about the previous telegram dated the 23rd February, but omits all about the reply telegram of the 24th February. He writes :

"We learn from Pundit Gour Govind Roy's account that upon receipt of the Cooch Behar telegram, a telegram in reply had been sent by Mr. Sen reminding the bridegroom's party of the previously settled conditions, but no satisfactory results ensued."

Pundit Gour Govind, only four lines below, makes marked reference to the reply telegram from Cooch Behar and states that upon receipt of that reassuring telegram Keshub and the bride's party started for Cooch Behar. This

should never have escaped the notice of the historian. It is to be hoped that the mistake will be corrected in the next edition.

**New difficulties
and dangers,**

To resume the narrative. On arrival the bridal party met with a cold reception. Everything tended to show that while the Government of Bengal and the agents of the Cooch Behar Raj deputed by them to Calcutta for carrying on the marriage negotiations tried to stand by their promise, the machinery of the Cooch Behar State had been set agoing by some other party against the fulfilment of that promise. There seemed to be a well-planned programme of campaign against Keshub calculated to thwart him at every step in his efforts to solemnize the marriage, as arranged, according to theistic ideas and principles. The Ranis of the royal household made up their minds to carry out this plan of obstruction by setting up various objections. Thus a three-cornered tussle ensued, Keshub resolutely adhering to the Brahmo position, the Government in silent sympathy with him, but appearing to stand up for the principle of religious neutrality, and the third party aiding the ladies of the Palace on the one hand and Keshub's enemies on the other with the object of making it appear to the outside world that the marriage was to be nothing but a pure Hindu marriage.

Nothing of consequence, however, happened till Monday the 4th March when a number of influential persons including the chief Raj Pundit came to the bridal quarters and for the first time made specific proposals constituting a

departure from the marriage ritual already agreed to. The proposals were: 1. That Keshub would not be allowed to be present in the marriage *Mandap* (pavillion). 2. That no non-Brahmin, nor a Brahmin who had renounced his sacred thread would be allowed to officiate at the marriage ceremony. 3. That no public Divine Service was to be allowed. 4. That the bride and the bridegroom were not to be allowed to declare their marriage vows at the place of marriage. 5. That both parties must perform Homi. Keshub resolutely opposed these new proposals. The whole day was spent in fruitless disputations and *pour parler* and although some of the points were seemingly settled no final solution could be arrived at on that day. On the following day, that is, Tuesday, March 5, the bride was taken to the Raj palace for the ceremony of *Varan* to be performed according to the rituals settled. What passed in the inner apartments of the Palace is so vividly described by the Maharani in her Autobiography that we can do no better than describe it in her own words. The only *eye witnesses* to what happened there were the Maharani, her grand-mother Sreemati Sarada Sundari and Miss Pigot who have all added their testimony in support of such portions of the narrative as came within their direct knowledge. Maharani Sunity Devi thus describes her experiences :

“I found myself in the midst of a great crowd of women. I stood, the observed of all, and listened to the various comments on my appear-

The Varan at the
Raj Palace.



H. H. MAHARANI SUNITY DEVÉE, 1887

ance. I was outwardly calm, but in reality I was a very scared miserable little girl. Then a lady came forward bearing lights and flowers. It was the Maharaja's mother, and she was performing *Varan*, or welcoming the bride. After the *Varan* the crowd of women made way for us and we were taken to a reception room. The next morning we were up early. It was my wedding day, and I had to go through a good deal before the ceremony. After my bath, my grandmother was told that a Hindu priest wished to recite the usual prayers. When we came out on the veranda, we saw the Brahmin waiting, surrounded by relations of the Maharaja. Some one put a gold coin into my hand which I was requested to give to the priest of the Raj family.

The so-called
Prayaschit, or
expiation.

My grandmother interposed, "No, No", she said, "our girls don't do this".

"What nonsense!" replied the Maharaja's grandmother. "Why? it means nothing."

But we were firm, and I placed the coin on the floor. This was only one of the petty annoyances which occurred during the day.*

In the evening of the marriage the Maharaja's mother came and spoke to my mother most harshly. One of her remarks I still remember: "Do you mean to say you love your daughter? How can you when you do not wish her to marry a Maharajah? If she does not marry my son according to Hindu rites, she will not be the Maharani!" My mother answered gently but very firmly: "I

* See *Life of Greemati Sarada Sundari*, p. 91.

shall be sorry if my daughter does not marry your son, and I shall take her away from Cooch Behar; but my daughter shall never marry any one according to Hindu rites”.

Meanwhile, the controversy raged and the disputations went on as to the proposed alterations in the marriage ritual. Neither party was inclined for compromise and Keshub held fast to the essentials. Telegrams were despatched to Government. Keshub called upon the Government to redeem its promise. The auspicious hour (*lagna*) fixed for the marriage passed and yet there was no sign of settlement. In dire distress and tribulation of soul Keshub communed with the Dispenser of all things for the light and the strength he so greatly needed. At last relief came, and it came through two avenues, firstly, the determination of the Maharaja and secondly, the fiat from the Government of Bengal.

Cutting the
Gordian knot.

“While these disputes and discussions were going on in the palace, my dear father must have suffered a great deal silently in his house. There was much hot argument. Both sides were obstinate. Telegrams were despatched to Government. Cooch Behar waited. Sunset came. It was the auspicious hour fixed for the marriage, but no word went forth that it was to take place.

“Gradually, silence reigned. The music and the sound of the conch shells ceased. The voice of the crowd was hushed. All on a sudden everything stopped. The musicians left the platforms and the town became per-

fectly quiet, the illuminations were extinguished one by one.

"Then the unexpected happened, and the Gordian knot of caste and creed was suddenly cut. The news of the final dispute had been conveyed to the Maharaja. When he realised that the religious obstacles might prove insurmountable he became so strangely quiet and serious that his people felt rather nervous and wondered what their young master would do. He took very strong measures.

"Looking at those near him, with determination in every line of his set young face, the Maharajah, said: 'Now give good heed to my words. I am going to bed. If I am to marry this girl, wake me up. Otherwise, have my horse in readiness, for I shall ride away from Cooch Behar for good and all to-morrow morning. If I cannot marry this girl, I will marry no one'.

"A great hush fell on those who heard, and there was general consternation. Never before had Nripendra Narayan Bhoop so asserted himself. His councillors saw that their Ruler intended to have his own way.

"It was now midnight. My father was alone in his quiet house, as one and all had left for the palace. His soul was far beyond all earthly things for he communed with the God who had never forsaken him. I believe that in that solemn hour he found the peace so healing to his soul.

"Suddenly the sound of carriage wheels broke the stillness of the night. Steps hurried

upstairs. The door was flung open, and Mr. Dalton, pale and breathless, stood before my father."

" 'Mr. Sen' he cried, 'the wedding must and shall take place to-night. The service shall be exactly as you wish. I'll be there to see that it is not interfered with. Come quickly. We have not a moment to lose. There is another auspicious hour at 3 A. M. Let it be then.'

"As he spoke he handed my father a written agreement confirming his words, and told him that the Lieutenant Governor had telegraphed : 'Let the marriage be performed according to the rites as settled in Calcutta'.

"Mr. Dalton almost dragged my father to the waiting carriage, and followed by some of our friends they made their way with difficulty through the crowded streets."

The 'written agreement' referred to was the final undertaking given by Mr. Dalton on behalf of Government and in pursuance of the telegram received from the Lieutenant Governor ; and it ran thus ; "I consider that we are bound by terms of my telegram and letter—void of idolatrous mantras ; and I cannot say conscientiously that the *Hom* is not in a manner idolatrous.....In return for this concession I insist on everything in the marriage being purely Hindu, keeping of course to the original agreement *Ishwar* (God) for Bishtoo (Vishnu, Hindu diety)". What more could Keshub require ? What could any sane, unbiassed, Brahmo demand but that the best of the Hindu ritual should be retained and the idolatrous

The final
undertaking—
The written
agreement.

portions expunged ? Indeed, the Brahmo ritual such as it was then, such as it is now, and such as it will be in India, let us hope, forever is that and nothing else. True, there is overzealousness in every communion, so was there in the first flush of non-conformity amongst the militant in the Brahmo Somaj. They would fain prescribe everything that savoured of Hinduism. In their estimation even this last undertaking would appear unsatisfactory. But the whirligig of time has brought with it changes that have altered the angle of vision of even these ultra-nonconformists. Those that demanded that Keshub should be hounded out of the Brahmo Somaj for having Hinduised it, have seen the error of their ways and now they out-Keshub Keshub himself. They now complain that Brahmoism has cut itself adrift from the moorings of the mother religion, and demand that Brahmo ceremonials must absorb more and more of the Hindu, that the *Saptapadi* and other ceremonies purified of their idolatrous associations must be retained to enrich the poetry and picturesqueness of the Brahmo ceremonials. Nay, cases are not infrequent of refusals to comply with the provisions of Act III of 1872 because of the declaration "I do not profess the Hindu religion" etc., necessary under the Act on the part of the bride and bridegroom.

Incidentally it is interesting to contemplate the present controversies on Brahmo marriages in the light of past history. The original Bill submitted to Government and known as the

**The Brahmo
Marriage Bill
recalled.**

Brahmo Marriage Bill did not render any such declaration necessary. The declaration therein ran as follows : "I, A. B., am a native of British India. I do not profess the Christian religion, and I object to be married in accordance with the rites of the Hindu, Muhammadan, Buddhist, Parsi or Jewish religion". But owing to accidents of legislation and on grounds of expediency the Government substituted for it the so-called Civil Marriage Bill which made the present declaration essential. The Committee appointed by the Brahmo Somaj for advising on the Civil Marriage Bill consisted of lawyers of the stamp of Mr. A. M. Bose, Mr. D. M. Das, Mr. B. M. Das and other men of affairs to whom Keshub left the details to be settled as might seem to them fit and proper. It was not in Keshub's grain to dabble in matters unfamiliar to him. The main objective before him was the legalisation of Brahmo marriages which though Hindu in the highest sense of the term were hardly Hindu in the usual acceptance of the term as they were unidolatrous, and hence lacked legal sanction. Looked at in this light the declaration "I do not profess the Hindu religion" seems to be not only innocuous but perfectly true for it means 'I object to be married in accordance with the usual rites of Hindu religion'. Thus "I do not profess the Hindu religion" is as true a declaration for a Brahmo as "I do not profess the Christian, Parsi or Muhammadan religion". Yet it cannot be doubted that it would have been much more in harmony with the genius

of Keshub and with the catholic spirit of the Navavidhan he daily preached and practised if there were none of these negations but one ample all-embracing affirmation necessary for legalising Brahmo marriages. Whatever the history, one point is clear, namely that the Civil Marriage Act (Act III of 1872) has no application to Cooch Behar, it being outside British India, and, therefore, the question of compliance or non-compliance with it is quite beside the point in the present case. How Keshub's opponents could have used it as one of their weapons of attack against him seems incomprehensible.

On arrival at the marriage *mandap* the bridal party noticed *ghats* (earthen vessels) placed there by the authorities in charge, as also two other things covered with red cloth. The sceptically inclined members of the bridal party apprehended that the latter might turn out to be Hindu deities, surreptitiously introduced into the *mandap* and kept obscured to elude detection. A reference was made to the Deputy Commissioner Mr. Dalton who promptly sent for the Raj Pundits and questioned them on the subject. They stoutly denied the charge and assured Mr. Dalton and the bridal party that there was no image, nor any object of worship in the *mandap* and that the *ghats* and the two other articles objected to were mere auspicious tokens. The assurance emphatically given and the explanation so furnished through the Deputy Commissioner was enough to quiet all apprehensions and the parties addressed

themselves to the solemnisation of the marriage ceremony.

At this point it would be convenient to dispose of the questions which some captious critics have asked about Keshub's conduct? Why did Keshub believe the statement that they were only auspicious signs and symbols? Why did he not reject the assurance and the explanation given and have the symbols removed out of sight? Need we answer for Keshub? Why, because he could believe and did believe that they were auspicious symbols only.

Why symbols?

Who does not know that there are symbols, apparently puerile, that lend poetry, sanctity and sweetness to what would otherwise be dull matter-of-fact? The blowing of conch shells, the placing of *ghats*, the burning of *dhup* (incense), the ringing of bells, the lighting of candles for *varan*, the garlanding with flowers and the exchange of garlands, what are they but symbols after all? To one foreign to Indian life and traditions these may appear unmeaning and unprofitable—nay even pernicious. But to the son of India and to the manner born such sights and sounds are fraught with an inexpressible meaning and have an unconscious influence on the mind by reason of their age-long associations.

But, says the critic, the matter does not end there. Had not Keshub himself stipulated, while settling the details of the marriage ritual, that there was to be no *ghats* at the place of marriage? Why had he done so? Was there not here a breach of that condition? The

answers are simple and come promptly to the unsophisticated mind, though many wise critics have waded through mud and yet found them not : Keshub had so stipulated *ex majore cautela* ; because he knew it was better to err on the side of strictness and caution than to let in anything that might ultimately prove to be the thin end of the wedge. In this view, it is clear the so-called breach was not a breach and even if technically so, it did not matter.

Now to the ceremony itself. The *Upasana* (Divine Service) at the *Mandap* was conducted by Keshub Chunder himself. The ritual followed was the unidolatrous one which had been prepared at Calcutta in consultation with the Raj priest by no less a non-Brahmin iconoclast than Pundit Gour Govind Roy. It was the same non-Brahmin that presided over the ceremony.

The features of
the ceremony.

There was nothing in all this that could afford the slightest justification to call it a Hindu wedding. Who does not know that the British Government is proverbially anxious to preserve its reputation for religious neutrality, especially in Indian States ? But notwithstanding its great solicitude in this behalf, it had to enter in its official records that the ceremony was void of any idolatrous *mantras* and free from the presence of idols. "The rites observed were Hindu in all essential features though, in deference to the religious principles of the bride's father, idolatrous mantras were omitted and the presence of an idol was dispensed with." But jealous of its declared policy of religious

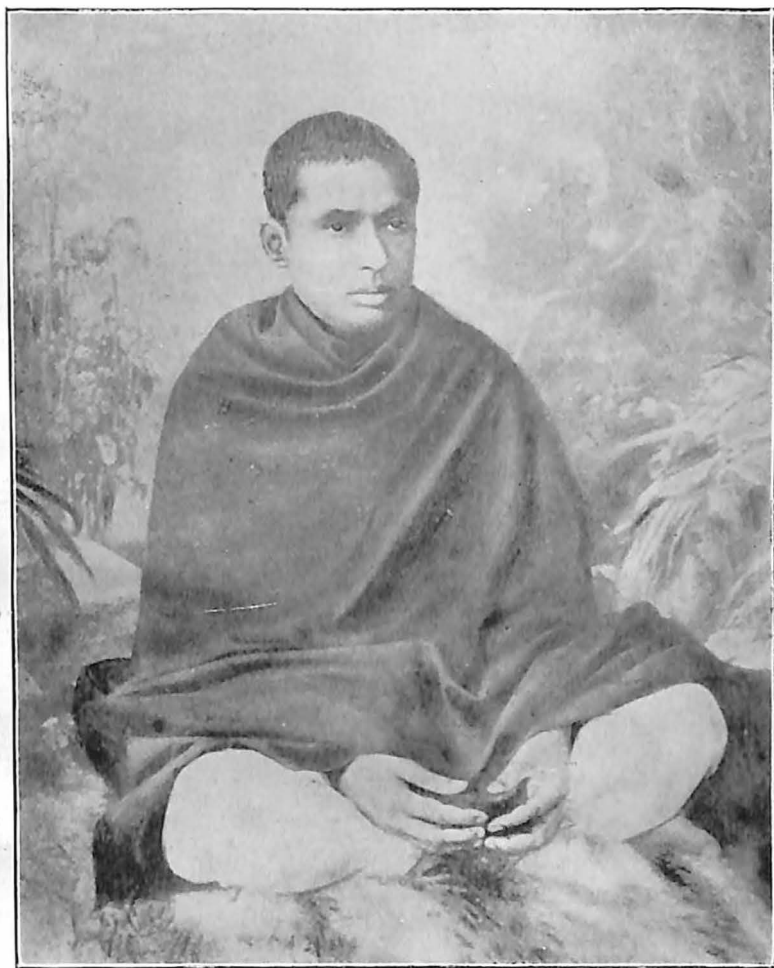
The Government
Report.

neutrality the Government adds, "Care was, however, taken to retain whatever the Brahmins considered essential to the validity of the marriage". Again "the ordinary Hindu ceremony was modified so as to meet the wishes of Babu Keshub Chunder Sen ; but the fact that Brahmins consented to perform it shows that the marriage was recognised by the Hindoos as orthodox".*

This last statement of the Government has become the sheet anchor of Keshub's enemies. They will not look facts in the face but proceed upon anything that will afford them the semblance of justification for their campaign of misrepresentation. Not an eye witness, not a single person who was present at the ceremony can testify to anything idolatrous having been done or countenanced. But Brahmins consented to take part in it,—and a subordinate part too under the direction of a non-Brahmin (Pundit Gour Govind Roy). Hence it must be regarded as orthodox ! Strangely enough, the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses like Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, Gour Govind Roy, Prosunno Coomar Sen, Girish Chunder Sen, Sreemati Sarada Sundari, Miss Pigot, not to speak of the Maharani and even Keshub himself are easily brushed aside.

What then, it may be asked, forms the basis of the attack ? Only a few anonymous writings from a person in Cooch Behar, belonging to the camp of the disaffected Dewan. It seems

*Administration Report of Bengal, 1877-8.



PUNDIT GOUR GOVIND ROY

incredible but it is none the less the fact, that up to now there has not emerged from the protesters' camp one heroic figure who can give his name and say he saw idolatrous ceremonies performed. It is the anonymous effusions of a certain individual going under the pseudonym *Saraspahshi* that the enemies of Keshub have made the basis of all their attacks, seeking to make out that the ceremony was idolatrous.

Now who were the Brahmins that took part in it and what was the part they took? Two Raj Pundits had to take part as representing the bridegroom's party in conjunction with Pundit Gour Govind Roy who acted on behalf of the bride's party, the latter unquestionably presiding over the ceremony. The very fact that the two Brahmin Pundits accepted a subordinate position under a non-Brahmin is in itself proof positive against the orthodox character of the wedding. But that is not all. The mantras in an orthodox Hindu marriage must *necessarily* recite the names of the Vedic gods and goddesses, otherwise the whole of the proceedings would be void *ab initio*. These were removed *en bloc* from the ritual prepared by Pundit Gour Gour Govind, the word Ishwara (God) being substituted for them throughout. When one remembers this is it possible for any honest right thinking individual to come to any other conclusion than that the Brahmins knowingly lent themselves and their services to a ceremony which was revolutionarily unorthodox? In fact they had no alternative but to do so, having regard to the solemn undertaking given to

Babu Keshub Chunder by Mr. Dalton and, later on, by the Lieutenant Governor himself and particularly in view of the strong attitude taken up by the young Maharaja. Try as the Government may to save its face at the expense of Keshub and conveniently whitewash the incident with the brush of religious neutrality, to one who possesses even a rudimentary knowledge of Hindu rituals the fact is as clear as daylight that the ceremony followed was heterodox beyond all hope of redemption. The Divine Service conducted by the non-Brahmin Brahmo reformer himself, the ritual presided over by the non-Brahmin iconoclast Pundit Gour Govind Roy, the mantras purged of their idolatrous character and devoid of all names of Vedic gods and goddesses, and the Raj priest submitting to all this procedure, leaves no room for doubt as to the utter rout of orthodoxy.

But there is still one refuge left to which the critic fondly clings. It is the so-called ceremony of *Hom* performed by the Raj priests. The marriage over, the bride left the *mandap* and the priest are said to have performed the *Hom* ceremony in the presence of the minor Raja. Let us consider what justification there may be in this charge.

It will be remembered that on the day previous to marriage, it was maintained by the Raj officials and the Palace ladies that the ceremony of *Hom* must be performed by both the bride and the bridegroom. But the written and verbal undertaking given by the Deputy Commissioner Mr. Dalton on

behalf of the Government and of the State was unambiguous in its terms and made the ceremony of Hom, according to orthodox rites, impossible. Keshub Chunder's daughter could be no party to such Hom. Two years later Keshub himself inaugurated the Encharist, the Hom, the Flag ceremony and Baptism, revivifying and transfiguring those rituals. But the mantras and the spirit with which they were performed were far different. "O thou blazing Agni, great great art thou, great among the forces in creation. We shall honour thee and magnify thee because of thy greatness and majesty. *Thou art not God. We do not adore thee.* But in thee dwells the Lord, the Eternal inextinguishable Flame, the Light of the Universe, the Immanent Fire, Fire of fire whom fire doth reveal and glorify. O thou brilliant Agni, in thee we behold our Resplendent Lord." Such was the invocation and so were the new mantras of the new Hom of the New Dispensation. Knowing full well the different character of Hom that the Raj officials and the ladies of the Raj household wanted, Keshub had carefully stipulated that there should be no Hom at all. The priests however were determined to retrieve the situation as far as possible and they proceeded in a hole-and-corner fashion to hold a make-believe of a Hom with the bridegroom only and in the absence of the bride. Who does not know that nuptial Hom depends for its validity on the presence of both the parties to the union? Indeed, without the bride the nuptial Hom is no Hom at all. Even in the case of

those other than the twice-born the union is not valid unless the nuptial fire be lighted and the *laj* (fried grain) offered by the hand of the bride. The Hom performed without the bride being a party to it was, therefore, useless and failed of its purpose. The only purpose it did fulfil was to afford a handle to Keshub's enemies, all too ready to accept any version suitable to their requirements. In particular, it came handy to *Saraspakshi*, the anonymous and unscrupulous correspondent of the 'Brahmo Public Opinion', the paper newly started for propaganda against Keshub—for reporting to that paper that the ritual was out-and-out Hindu !

Although, however, the ritual followed was throughout unidolatrous, although the *Prayas-chitta* was a myth, the *ex parte* Hom a mere make-believe and the priests were puppets playing their allotted parts under the direction of the Brahmo non-Brahmin priest, the fact remains that there were compromises. The very venue of the ceremony was a compromise and a concession to the custom of the Cooch Behar Ruling family. Ordinarily, the wedding is performed at the bride's place. Here instead the bride and her party had to repair to Cooch Behar for the purpose and the ceremony had to be held in the Raj Palace. The bride's party was necessarily restricted and select, the number and personnel of the party having to be approved by the Government on behalf of the State. Who could have liked to see the numerous friends and admirers of the great Brahmo leader left behind at Calcutta to bless the bride and bridegroom

from a distance ? Much less he himself. The full-limbed Theistic ritual could find no place in the programme in that obviously hostile environment. Lastly, the giving away of the bride (*Sampradan*) by Keshub's brother and not by Keshub himself was a concession definitely agreed and acted up to. All these show that there were compromises and concessions made in deference to Cooch Behar custom, as also to the sentiments of the Raj household. On the one hand there was the strong Brahmo non-conformist sentiment which the leader more than shared, on the other hand there was the rooted sentiment of the bridegroom's party which he felt bound to respect and even to accommodate as long as such accommodation did not countenance any immorality or impropriety, or any departure from essentials of his faith.

Was Keshub Chunder pleased with these compromises ? Did he justify them ? The following extracts will speak for Keshub :

"The principles of Brahmo marriage were barely preserved, but for all practical purposes the majority of our co-religionists present on the occasion were deeply dissatisfied. On the other hand the Ranees, and the representatives of the Hindu element in the Cooch Behar Raj, were equally dissatisfied. They felt that the essential requirements of a Hindu marriage had been set aside, and they were consequently distressed and angry. We felt that our principles did not receive as much prominence as they should have obtained, and we were distressed

accordingly. But we have this consolation. The essential principles of Brahmo marriage have been maintained intact".

[Concluding portion of the article, entitled, "The Marriage at Cooch Behar. Indian Mirror, March 17, 1878]

In the open letter published with Keshub's authority over the names of Rev. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar and Gour Govind Roy, giving a full statement of the case appears the following passage which sets out with transparent frankness Keshub's attitude about these compromises which like all compromises were but half measures calculated to leave one's mind unsatisfied, if not dissatisfied.

"We can state with authority that it is not the intention of the Minister to support all that took place in connection with his daughter's marriage, or that he would even fully defend his own side. There are certain incidents in connection with this marriage, which if they have grieved anybody else, they should be told that his own heart has been more aggrieved about them than anybody else. The forms and ceremonies were not altogether as he would wish, and he never concealed his own dissatisfaction about them. If anything wrong has taken place,—as other people will, for conscience's sake, protest against it, he too is prepared unreservedly to call it wrong*."

Yet when all has been said by Keshub himself, may not posterity see things from a different angle in the light of later experience? May we

* Acharya Keshub Chandra, *Madhyavivaran*, Part V, p. 937.

not be permitted to see in these innocuous compromises a way which, followed with due care and circumspection, may lead us out of the impasse which often presents itself in inter-racial marriages. If Universal Brotherhood is not to remain an abstract dogma, if it is to materialise into concrete reality, then undoubtedly inter-caste, inter-racial and inter-national marriages must be made not only possible but practicable. In such unions between parties belonging to different universes of thought, sentiment, language and custom there must be mingling and commingling of forms and rituals. The problem is becoming keener and keener as every day passes and instances are multiplying of conscientious objectors to this or that little ritual, to this or that little declaration or to this or that language being used for the ceremony. Is the Brahmo Somaj to practise stolid conservatism and even when there is the risk of the party suffering the language or the ritual, with a mental reservation, to force it on him or her? Greater still is the problem when the minimum required for securing legal validity calls for a compromise as to the form. The acid test of all these compromises, is whether there is a departure from the essentials of one's faith, or from the standard of morality approved by the Brahmo Somaj. These latter being safeguarded, the Brahmo Somaj should be ready to accommodate in minor matters of form based on custom and sentiment.

The rest of the narrative is briefly told. On return from Cooch Behar, Maharaja Nripendra

Narayan, agreeably to previous arrangement proceeded to England and Srimati Sunity Devi resumed her life at the Lily Cottage like an unmarried girl. The Maharaja returned to India in February 1879 and joined the Presidency College at Calcutta. When he was eighteen and Sunity Devi sixteen their real marriage took place at Calcutta on the 20th October, 1880. "In quiet ways we had gathered the fragrant flowers of friendship's garden and there we had seen the roses of love which were blooming for us. Our future lay rich and glowing before us and our happiness was perfect. We were married in the Church of the New Dispensation"*

The above is a plain and unvarnished narrative of the Betrothal of 1878. Let posterity judge Keshub Chunder in the light of these facts. They denounced him, they reviled him, they persecuted him for it. They made it the ostensible ground of a Schism in the Brahmo Somaj. They vowed to crush into atoms what they thought to be his Church, forgetting that he only claimed to be the servant of the Church appointed of God. This was later on reluctantly admitted in the Annual Report of the Sadharan Brahmo Somaj, 1881, that the schism was due not to the Cooch Behar betrothal but to differences more fundamental.

Keshub has been called the most misunderstood and misrepresented of men. Perhaps the Cooch Behar Betrothal is one of those events

*"The Autobiography of an Indian Princess". p. 78, John Murray, London 1921.

CONSUMMATION OF MARRIAGE.

Minister.—Dearly beloved brethren, we are gathered together in this house of God to consummate the marriage of this man and this woman, and to complete the nuptial ceremony which was instituted betwixt them on March 8, 1878.

The Lord bless us and direct us!

Nripendro Narain.—I Nripendro Narain Bhup do hereby declare my faith in Brahma Dharma and join the fraternity of the Brahma Somaj of India. May God help me!

Sunity.—I Sunity do hereby declare my faith in Brahma Dharma and join the fraternity of the Brahma Somaj of India. May God help me!

[2]

Nripendro Narain.—I Nripendro Narain take thee Sunity as my wedded wife to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish according to God's holy ordinance; and hereto I plight thee my troth. The Lord bless us!

Sunity.—I Sunity take thee as my wedded husband to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish according to God's holy ordinance; and hereto I give thee my troth. The Lord bless us.

Nripendro Narain.—This ring I give unto thee as a token and pledge of my vow, and with all my

[3]

worldly goods I thee endow. Blessed be the holy and merciful God.

Minister.—Merciful Father, bless this couple give unto them thy holy grace that they may live together faithfully and happily as husband and wife and ever remain in thy service. Good God, vouchsafe unto them faith and love and righteousness and make their home the abode of joy and peace.

Nripendra Narain

Sunity

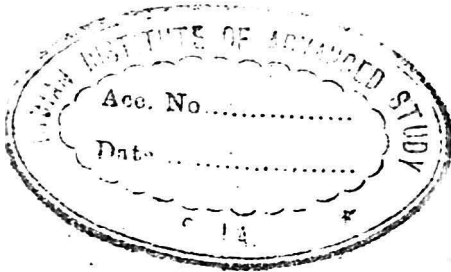
Keshub Chandra Sen Minister.

BRAHMA MANDIR OF INDIA,
The 20th of October 1880.

in his life where the tragedy of misrepresentation has been the greatest. The saddest thing in all human affairs is the ease and impunity with which fiction often takes the place of fact by the cumulative effect of repeated misrepresentations. Repeat an untruth sedulously and diligently, and you find it presently accepted as the truth itself. Then it is reproduced, quoted and commented on, and the untruth spreads. Even so a half truth, for "half a truth is ever the blackest of lies." If it is about one whom you regard not only as your comrade but as your spiritual elder, what havoc does it do to the bonds of love and sympathy that are so essential to spiritual life. Does it not dry up the springs of life and light, impede the current of faith and service, and leave the soul lonesome and dreary? There is nothing that so impoverishes men and movements as untruth, nothing that so deadens finer susceptibilities in individuals or in communions as disingenuous criticism and invective. The tragedy of the Cooch Behar controversy lies not in the mere fact of unjustly and untruthfully maligning Keshub, but in depriving the communion of the Brahmo Somaj and the world at large of the wealth of his spiritual fellowship and of the chastening, uplifting influence of his great personality. "The wrong men do to the noble ones ends in the total ruin of the wrong-doers themselves.*" saith the scripture. If one

**Hanti shreyaangshi sarvani punsho mahadatikramah. Srimadbhagavatam, 10. 4. 46.*

were permitted, one would fain add "and in ruin untold to unborn generations". It is sad to behold the state of many misguided men to-day. They would fain stretch forth their hand and take all that Keshub holds out before them, but alas ! that is not to be. The hand that goes forth to smite cannot embrace.



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