CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

I have some recollection of the first breath of new life Bengal sought to breathe into the pages of History in the first decade of this century. So many years have passed by and visions of childhood only wake up fond sighs. The fleeting moments leave no impress except in longings and regrets that float by in shapeless desires. But still, as I listen to the yet a babel of confused tongues and thoughts, it is not difficult to discern a golden link that knits them in as much as there is the desire to read and reread the History of India to assess if the conditions that fostered our being enslaved to a handful of foreigners of remote lands have any way changed to justify a change for the better.
Pilgrimage to freedom bristles with pitfalls. It is particularly so in India which has more often than not bowed down to any force that has come from outside. It has been so for the one paramount reason that India is split up into numerous countries of different outlook and rival dogmas—each aloof and hostile to the other. But the Indian National Congress has achieved what Asoke and Akbar dreamt. It has unified the divergent creeds to the extent of evolving a common plank of nationhood. The contribution of Surendra Nath Banerjea to this glorious consummation is the crowning achievement of a national leader who entered the unknown and the untrdden politics to work for the freedom of India when it was not even in the air.

There is undoubtedly a tinge of hero-worship in the writing of this book, but there is nothing of that idolatry which may glide to a bib-porringer effrontery. It will be evident that I have not spared Surendra Nath at some vital points; but, I would
nevertheless consider the tendency to ignore him inspite of what he has done in the great task of the reconstruction of this nation as nothing short of suicidal meanness.

The difficulty of compressing a long, eventful life comprising so many questions is great. It has been all the greater to me because the book all through has been written at fitful moments and at different places; access to books of reference being sometimes of necessity and sometimes of choice eschewed: for, after all, it is neither a history nor a biography, but only what I should say, a ‘Snap-shot.’ Still I thought of waiting to consult a few books, but it seems that to wait to perfect may mean putting off for good at least my own tribute of honour.
Dr. Pattavi Sitaramayya in writing the official History of the Indian National Congress exposes himself to the charge of some flagrant omissions and commissions with regard to Surendra Nath Banerjee. Public memory is short; but, to be so pitifully short is tantamount to ingratitude.

Dr. Sitaramayya has thought fit to convey the impression that Surendra Nath was a "Loyalist". What it exactly imports is not difficult to divine. But can it with any sense of fairness be over contended that Surendra Nath loved British supremacy in India more than what he desired Indians to be in India, what Englishmen are in England? We would not gainsay the proposition that he had faith in the bona-fides of England, and, as in England, Constitution has broadened down precedent to precedent, he liked the very same in India. He held that the conditions of our country
in the incipient stage of growth did not justify any violent outburst or disruption. Expediency or Creed he did not desire that India be cut adrift from British moorings. If this is loyalism, what Leaders of the Indian National Congress who have so untiringly built up this great Institution would escape the stigma? Even then, there was a pronounced difference between Surendra Nath and the other Elders of the Nation. The venerable Grand Old Man Dadabhai Nourajee went down the absurd length of saying as President of the Congress “Were it not for the blessings of British Rule, I could not have come here to-day, as I have done without the least hesitation and without the least fear that my children might be robbed and killed in my absence; nor could you have come from every corner of the land, having performed, within a few days, journeys which in former days would have taken months”. When could India be singled out as the land of the untutored, always on
the look-out to hack and hew their fellow beings? Was it suggested that the vast discoveries of science by which distance is being annihilated would sweep over the world without stirring up ripples of thought in India? Was she culturally so impervious? Still such utterances passed muster. The reason is not far to seek. The days were so backward and our people were overawed by the skilfully-paraded majesty of British prowess. But even in those days Surendra Nath towered head and shoulders over his other compatriots and said "Yes, we want peace, but we do not want peace of the grave". The expression is strikingly note-worthy because of the bitterness howsoever mellowed against alien-rule and stands in bold relief to the effusions of loyalism and other puerile stuff copied from text books and which were the stock-in-trade of the early Congress leaders to dress up their platform orations. In fact, they viewed this "dismissed government servant" ask-
ance and did not like to give him any quarter before he elbowed his way in. Dr. Sitaramayya himself, in extolling the services of Gokhale, observes, "Gokhale's great constructive work is the Servants of India Society being an order of political workers pledged to work for the Motherland on a pittance and subject to rigid rules of discipline as well as loyalty to the Empire (Italics mine)". Age considered, was not Gokhale expected to be a bit modern in his patriotism? But the fact is that the slogan of the Congress, before it was completely recast by the N. C. O. movement, was, in the words of the Chairman, Reception Committee of the Lucknow sessions of the Congress in 1916, "Our patriotism is the best guarantee of our Loyalty". Nearer home, Mahatma Gandhi, than whom there has not been a greater Indian to cry halt to British Imperialism, avowed in his famous letter to the Viceroy his erstwhile faith in England and how he translated it into acts of sincere service to
the Empire. As late as 1925, we find Deshbandhu Das delivering, in presence of Mahatma Gandhi, his now historic Faridpore Speech (Bengal Provincial Conference) in which he preferred Dominion Status within the Empire to complete Independence. The elaborate thesis of "Within the Empire" grates upon sensitive nerves after both the leaders had run the whole gamut of a movement that has made India gallop over the scent creek to corner. Still it would be uncharitable for the future Historian to characterise it as loyalty.

There are certain too broad facts in the life-history of Surendra Nath Banerjee which constitute landmarks in the history of our struggle for freedom. He had to resign from Civil Service; a service if only less alluring was offered to him from a Native State. He did not accept the offer, but was content to be a humble teacher, because it would give him the much desired-for scope 'to organise a
disorganised people’. This clear-cut choice for the nation as early as 1874 is an event of our national life. In 1876 he founded the Indian Association that transferred the political influence from the land-holders basking in official sunshine to the middle class. Imbued as he was with the idea of Matsini, he nursed the ideal of an All-India Federation and refused to be influenced by his patron Pandit Vidyasagar to christen it ‘The Bengal Association’. He initiated the move against the Civil Service Regulations of Lord Lyton and toured all over India to unite her to a common purpose province to province. “These tours”, says Sir Henry Cotton in his ‘New India’, contain in them the seed of the Indian National Congress”. May be somewhat irrelevant to the strain, but a factor of some pith and moment to illustrate how Surendra Nath has influenced the making of Modern India is what Lala Lajpat Rai and Sreenivas Sastry have openly acknowledged that they felt inspired in the plastic period of
youth to live for the nation because of the irresistible appeal Surendra Nath made during these tours. In 1883 he convened a National Conference in Calcutta which was attended by representatives from all parts of India. "This Conference" says Wilfred Blunt in his 'India Under Ripon', "is the first stage towards National Parliament". It was at any rate the coming event—Indian National Congress—to cast its shadow ahead.

Surendra Nath conceived for the first time the spirit of withholding co-operation as the only weapon for the people when the Government is bent upon flouting public opinion. He and twenty seven other members of the Calcutta Corporation resigned in protest against the Mackenzie Bill. He and his coadjutors refused to participate with Bengal and East Bengal-Assam Legislatures as a mark of non-recognition of the official dismemberment of the province. He is again the first to start direct action. As he failed to stop the degrading 'Out-
still system' in the district of Hoogly, a system by which the price of country liquor was reduced to half, by memorials to the Government, he straightway appealed to the people to resist this beaurocratic fiat, picketed liquor shops and moved about village to village till the entire people rose to a man to stand by him; the Government yielded. He defied the police order and led the ever-memorable procession of Barisal Conference. His is the epic leadership that ushered in the political Renaissance of India in the wake of Partition of Bengal, the magnitude of which made Gokhale so feelingly observe,—“What Bengal thinks to-day, India thinks tomorrow”. To him virtually India owes the Boycott of British goods. He it was who laid the first corner-stone of the modern Congress at Poona in 1902 by raising it up from the stage of 'Prayer' to one of 'Demand'.

The pages of History by the evening of his life were strewn with the wreckage of
heated controversy. But it is a pity if at this distance of time the official History of the Indian National Congress should allow itself to be befogged in its judgement as to fail to do justice to the man, who even if he too “bungled and mismanaged” * has done so much to build up this Nation. No praise is possibly too high for the bold front of some of our present-day-leaders and the moral elevation they have wrought in our outlook. But to try to belittle those who have paved the way, is as amusing a feat as that of a boy, lifted on the shoulder of his father, to cry “I am taller than papa”.

*Deshbandhu C. R. Das accused Mahatma Gandhi of having “bungled and mismanaged” at a psychological moment of our History.
Surendra Nath Banerjee died on August 6th, 1925. One could not help the sigh of a vast contrast. What deep, agonising feelings his death would have evoked if he had died only a few years ago! Had he then outlived his usefulness?

"Contemporaries," says Goethe, "are ill-fitted to judge their great men; peculiarity decomposes them and the swift current of life disturbs their points of view". This is so astonishingly true in politics. Views about those who deal with it always touch extremes. Cromwell is "a blood-stained, hypocritical usurper" and again "a transcendental hero and one of the liberators of mankind." To some, Burke is "a mere resplendent rhetorician", to others, "a profound political philosopher". Gladstone is "a demagogue inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity", and in the next breath the "Guardian-angel of the Nation" so lovingly called "The Grand Old Man".
This is Nature's revenge. Superstitious adoration goes hand in hand with sullen repudiation. Popularity in politics is so frail a reed to lean upon.

The Punjab outrage, so singularly sinister for its imbecile savagery on a comprehensive scale, shattered our faith in the bonafides of England. It changed the character and complexion of our political movement with a cyclonic abruptness. Mahatma Gandhi, who originally urged working the Reforms, inadequate and unsatisfactory even though they were, placed before the country his N. C. O. programme. He was instantly hailed as a Messiah bringing in new light and vision. In him, people writhing with anguish and smarting under a sense of an excruciatingly painful humiliation, sought the last ray of hope. There was an unprecedented upheaval such as was never witnessed before. The Government, of which Surendra Nath was now a member, pursued, as of old, the policy of steel whips and
iron bars to stamp out the new spirit. The nation was convulsed to the very depth. Surendra Nath was completely hurled down; so was Mirabeau.

But if it is true, as Bryce says, that, "Posterity fixes a man's place in History by not asking how many tongues buzzed about him in his life-time, but what factor he was in the changes of the world," there is hardly a more striking figure in the field of Indian Politics. Government dismissed him from service; he strenuously applied himself to influence the conditions of this country as to bend the Government to admit him and his countrymen to an ample share of power. At the stormy sessions of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Barisal, Emerson, the District Officer, bade him stand a prisoner at Bar, he made this Emerson dance attendance in his anti-chamber. Government flung to his teeth an officialised Calcutta Corporation, he made the Government sanction a Corporation democratised fibre
to fibre and he sponsored the Bill as the Minister-in-Charge. In his hey-day wherever he went, he was received with open arms, but as Minister when he passed through the same districts, he found the streets deserted, the shops closed and a vast section of his countrymen turned against him. Very few have cut their way through such strange vicissitudes, none so glowingly edified, yet so violently misunderstood.

Near about fourteen long years have rolled by. The heat and passion of party politics are supposed to have died out with respect to those of the dead, whom, however, we cannot afford to cast to the bin of forgotten worthies. The "cauldron" is still boiling hot: the fate of India is still in a flux. But we are to-day in the grip (?) of a change in the shape of Provincial Autonomy making it possible for the Congress to guide the administration of a major part of India. This may not be far enough, but enough to justify an attempt to take
stock. The moment may not therefore be altogether inopportune to pause to clarify the issue so as to try to preserve the milestones in our onward march. No nation that ever aspires to be great, should ever feel slow to acknowledge the debt of gratitude it owes to its great men. In the following pages an attempt is being made to read Surendra Nath Banerjea at a glance. May it not be devoutly hoped that at least the uncontrolled worth of the subject of memoir will invite attention for a few brief moments?
CHAPTER II

Life’s Morning March :—

Surendra Nath Banerjea was born in November, 1848. It was the period of impact of civilizations of the East and the West. His family was orthodox, but his father had the inestimable advantage of being under the tutelage of men like Derozio and David Hare. Hindu society, in those days, was a cob-web of rank superstitions and bigotry. The pupils of those two great teachers were in one sense the first band of social Protestants. They heralded the dawn of a new era. But, in the illuminative pages of Raj Narayan Bose’s autobiography, we get an idea of the militant zeal of the new converts that glided them to the revolting excesses of beef and beer. It is possibly an immutable Law of Nature that Freedom in all spheres — religious, social or political — is the
same in its infant stage, seedy and boisterous. Though the ruling note of Surendra Nath's family was conservatism, the temper outside and particularly in the school was for liberty of thought and action. The innate liberalism of his father, who, however, could not completely disyoke himself from the habits of the family, helped him to form a correct estimate on questions social. Thus we find that he always steered clear of extremes and much as he desired the structure of the society to be the same, he never fought shy of a fermenting vintage from the West.

As a student Surendra Nath was both regular and assiduous. He was never the goody goody bookish type of a fellow, though, 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' had been his motto from boyhood. As a teacher he never tired of repeating to his students the somewhat pedestrian definition of genius by Carlyle. Even his oratory, the 'God-gifted organ
voice’ he attributed to his capacity for taking infinite pains.

The illustrious trio Surendra Nath, Romes Chandra Dutt and Behari Lal Gupta sailed for England to compete for I. C. S. in March, 1868. W. C. Banerjea received them in London and rendered all possible assistance to make them settle down. After passing the competitive examination Surendra Nath found that there was a discrepancy between his Matriculation age and the eligible age for the Civil Service. The Civil Service Commissioners removed his name from the list of successful candidates. Difficulties make the man. The fighting spirit that characterised Surendra Nath all through and which won for him the sobriquet “Surrender Not” was there and he fought out the issue involved successfully in a court of Justice.

The three friends came back to Calcutta in September 1871. Keshab Chandra Sen amongst others received them at Howrah Station. Pundit Iswar Chandra
Vidyasagar and Keshab Chandra Sen organised a public reception for them.

Surendra Nath was posted at Sylhet as Asst. Magistrate. We would fain draw a veil over the silly squabble that led to his estrangement from his immediate superior the Dist. Magistrate. Much of it is not definitely known, but it is, however, enough to say that he was a man of stout bearing and could not possibly trim his sails to the wind that blew. The boss fished out an irregularity — signature with back date. Ridiculously enough, the Govt. was moved, and a commission appointed to enquire into the matter. He was dismissed from service, it is sickening to recall, for an offence, at least with reference to the particular case in question, for which an officer of even subordinate magistracy is not openly censured. ‘More is meant than meets the ear’, is what irresistibly springs up in one’s mind as he reflects upon this incident. According to one Lieutenant Governor of Bengal it was
“a wicked proceeding”, according to another it was “a grievous wrong”; but Allen Hume found in it the jealous, determined attempt to fight Indians invading the sacred pale of Indian Civil Service.

Surendra Nath moved about, but failed to evoke any sympathetic response in India. He went straight to England, knocked at every conceivable door, but all in vain. On the ground of dismissal, the Benchers of the Middle Temple refused to call him to Bar. To all intents and purposes he was now a ruined man. The dreams of life broken to pieces and amid encircling gloom a new Vision dawnd upon him. “I felt” says he, “I had suffered because I was an Indian, a member of a Community that lay disorganised, had no public opinion and no voice in the counsels of their Government. I felt with the passionate warmth of youth that we were helots, hewers of wood
and drawers of water in our land of birth. The personal wrong done to me was an illustration of the helpless impotency of our people. *Were others to suffer in the future as I had suffered in the past?* They must, I thought to myself, unless we were capable as a community of redressing our wrongs and protecting our rights, personal and collective. In the midst of impending ruin and dark, frowning misfortune, I formed the determination of addressing myself to the task of helping our helpless people in this direction." This is a noble resolve and he stuck to it unflinching to the best of his light and knowledge. True it is that no man in the dispensation of Providence is possibly indispensable, but again, humanly speaking, there shall not be the faintest breath of murmur when, History, in assigning the place of Surendra Nath in the calendar of our Nation-Builders, will declare in no uncertain voice that his dismissal from
service is a historic turning-point of our National Life.

We propose to digress: Surendra Nath used to tell us that he never felt dismayed, come what may. He ascribed it to the two things he imbibed from his association with Englishmen as teachers in schools and colleges. It is firstly his painstaking habits and secondly his capacity for never feeling unnerved in the midst of complexities. There was another thing he divinely stressed upon—it was his good health for which he always disciplined himself unremittingly by regular habits, some sort of physical exercise everyday and attending to one thing at a time and never making a jumble of all things. These things apart, the ‘original fund of stamina’ as he delights to call it, is to him a factor of no mean importance. The Kulinism, an untranslatable word conveying the idea of pedigree, that prevailed in Bengal in those days fraught as it was with
evils of other kinds, exercised a salutary check upon early marriage. He used to say that he and his brother Captain Jiten Banerjea were so healthy, strong, determined and obdurate—the expressions are his—because his parents were fully grown-up before they entered the nuptial bed. It was with him an obsession. In all meetings on social questions, whenever the topic of early marriage could be dragged in, he used to harp upon the same string of illustrations to demonstrate the evil effects of early marriage. Ram Gopal Ghose, Kestodas Paul, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda and a host of other luminaries died so young because they were the off-spring of early marriage. He bewailed that Indians do not live the age when statesmen in England do the greatest service to the Nation. As youthful effervescence is shed off and people settle down to strong conviction tempered with
experience and judgement, they are snatched away. Captain Banerjea, however, used to dwell upon a different aspect. In his old age, too often as we met him in his solitary walks in the Calcutta Maidan he used to narrate with a boundless glee how the Calcutta Wellington Square was the favourite resort of the Anglo-Indians, who resented the intrusion of Indians into the enclosure. Not unoften as Indians strayed into the Park, they were roughly handled. Jitendra Nath took it into his head to put an end to this. But he failed to enlist the sympathy of his brother and friends. He would nevertheless venture alone and promenade in the Park with an obtrusive freedom. In the tussle that ensued, he made his opponents feel that he was built of a different metal. He was gradually re-inforced by his brother and friends and the Anglo-Indians gave way. The old man as he narrated this, beaming
with joyful recollections, moralised, “There is a thing like speedy Justice akin to the maxim—Law only helps the vigilant.”

A New leaf:—

Surendra Nath came back to India in June 1875. “The man who wants to get on” says Bernard Shaw, “is the man who gets up and creates his own circumstances”. If there is a Divinity that shapes our end, it is equally true that that Divinity yields to the man of such stuff. Fortunately for Bengal there was living at this time that princely-hearted Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, always a name to conjure with. He was the moving spirit of every beneficent activity—the man who pinched his stomach and bared his body so that others might live. He came forward and provided the ways and means for Surendra Nath to work to the fulfilment of the mission dreamt anew in difficulties that gathered round him thick and fast. Vidyasagar made him a
professor of English in the Metropolitan Institution. Years ago, it was Vidyasagar again who made Surendra Nath's father Durga Charan, a clerk in the Fort William College and gave him at the same time all possible facilities to read in the Medical College and thus smoothed down the way for his future greatness.

Just after being a professor, the first thing Surendra Nath did was to become a member of the Students' Association so as to be in closer touch with the students. He exhorted them by a series of lectures to rise above the dead commonplace and yearn for a noble order of things. These lectures have suffered much in print. But, from all accounts to hand, they 'galvanised' the then student-world. He was made a hero. In those days one who could speak sonorous English was looked upon as a prodigy. Fluent and sonorous Surendra Nath undoubtedly was. To crown it, the rolling period and the driving rhetoric of Burke, which he made
his own and which render some of the most purple passages of Burke drab, kept his audience spell-bound. The one lofty idea underlying all these lent them a peculiar fascination to transcend the bounds of platform oratory. "The benefits of English Education," "The Unity of the Indian People," "The life of Mazini and Chaitanya" complete in a nutshell the cycle of his discourse. The English Education giving us a lingua-franca, the Indian unity is within the range of practical politics. But then, we have to be inspired with the ideal of a Mazini. Chaitanya was requisitioned to heal up the differences of castes and creeds. The intention of the speaker was transparent in beams of crystal radiance and he touched the secret chord of human craving for Liberty with the fervour of an apostle. The great wrong done to him by the Beaurocracy contributed its due quota of an additional halo round his name.
Surendra Nath was now exceedingly popular; his reading of Burke was so catching that students from other colleges flocked to his class. It was at this time that he was offered a post of Rs. 700/- to start with from the Tripura State. He declined the offer and was content with Rs. 200/- in fulfilment of his ideal for the country. This point is hardly noticed by those who down him on the score of sacrifice. Judged in point of time and the backwardness of the day this choice of Surendra Nath is second to none from the standpoint of sacrifice.

From 1875 to 1912 Surendra Nath was a teacher. We can best sum up this aspect of his life in his own words—"I regarded my vocation (that of a teacher) as a sacred calling. My other duties were multitudinous, but to those of the classroom I accorded a special preference. I never came to my class without being thoroughly prepared." That element of personal touch, which Cardinal Newman
so eloquently expatiates in his ‘Ideals of University’ has always been feelingly referred to by Surendra Nath. In season and out of season, he gave vent to an expression of delight he felt in the contact of students and would trot out the trite old saying of Jesus Christ, that wore bare with repetition, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me’.

A. M. Bose:—Closely associated with Surendra Nath in his propaganda work was Ananda Mohan Bose, the founder-president of the Students’ Association already referred to. Ananda Mohan’s academic career here and in England was uniformly brilliant. He was a success in the Calcutta Bar, but the music of Lucre could not engross him. He threw himself heart and soul into public works in collaboration with Surendra Nath. His untiring humanity and winsome manners made him a friend of all who came to deal with him. By character and attainments he was the model of what Gokhale desires
a national servant to be in whom the love of the country must grow to the height of religion.

The Indian Association:

The Indian Association of Calcutta was founded by Surendra Nath and Ananda Mohan in July, 1876. It soon transferred the political influence of the Landholders to Middle Class. The British Indian Association had undoubtedly championed the peoples’ cause, but it was more or less for the leadership of men like Kestodas Paul. It was clear that with the growing national consciousness, there was bound to be a conflict between the Government and the people, and the B. I. A. would not be able to safeguard the interests of the people. Hence Surendra Nath and Ananda Mohan started a separate Association. Vidyasagar pressed Surendra Nath to christen it ‘The Bengal Association,’ but a federated India being his dream he did not. On the day of the inaugural ceremony Surendra Nath lost his son at
11 A.M. Stunning as the blow was, he was at his post in the afternoon to pilot the foundation ceremony. They had apprehensions that this would not pass off quietly because of the opposition of men like Kestodas Paul, Sisir Kumar Ghose and others equally eminent. People wondered the following morning as they read of Surendra Nath’s bereavement how under the shade of this calamity he did not flinch, but managed his business with perfect equanimity. His place in the heart of Bengal was assured once for all.

Two outstanding things in the development of Surendra Nath deserve more than a passing notice. It is first his schooling under Missionary teachers of General Assembly (now the Scottish Church College) and the fact of his being so profoundly influenced by Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar—the great Bengalee who was ‘of the earth but never earthly.’ The benefits accruing to the students from the contact of Englishmen in schools
and colleges cannot be overestimated. Their virile outlook and smart bearing are priceless points of elevation for the taught of responsive susceptibility. Besides the Missionary teachers to whom he pays a handsome tribute were animated by the ideal that can be epitomised in one sentence "Man thou art not born for thyself, but thy kind." But as we say this, we cannot help feeling that English have lost their old affability even in the Temple of Learning. They too betray themselves too much a link of the one mighty chain. The trader with scales in hand in his obsequious droop, the soldier-politician with 'mailed feast' concealed in velvet gloves and the teachers of flowing robes addressing themselves to weaving meshes of silver illusion are leavened with the same lump. They are out to explore, to conquer and to consolidate that conquest. But for Raja Ram Mohon Roy this cultural conquest would have been so far complete as to leave very little
chance for a re-born India to rise out of the ashes of old. The other contributory factor as stated above is Vidyasagar. Any one walking by the sea-shore must have witnessed the familiar sight of children picking up shells and holding them to their ears. To the children, brought up in the cradle of mystery, the shells repeat the murmurs of their ocean-home. It is the hymn of rolling waves floating in lyrical ebullience. Some such scene flashes across our mind as we contemplate young Surendra Nath entering public life—altogether new and an extremely sensitive ground—under the benign patronage of Vidyasagar. Surendra Nath too often dwelt upon the unparalleled ferment in the country over the question of widow-remarriage. The orthodox school was ransacking with a truculent zeal vocabulary for abuse in the matter of defending the enforced widow-hood. But Vidyasagar stood firm. This left such lasting traces upon his
thought and outlook that in whatever spheres of life he must have roamed, he was drawn unawares to the kindred points of Heaven and Home. The ocean transmitted to the shell its eternal music.

CHAPTER III
Laying the Foundation:—

It was a deep-seated conviction of Surendra Nath and a shibboleth of the Congress of the early days that the substitution of Englishmen by Indians in the cadre of Civil Service is a step forward in our pursuit for self-government. Amongst others Motilal Ghose was opposed to this view. They held that an India I. C. S. is a loss to the Nation. Sir Henry Cotton also struck a similar note.

Marquis of Salisbury, whose racial bias was of such an aggressive character that
he called Dadabhai Nourojee "the black man" and whose sense of trusteeship led him to lay the dictum 'bleed India white to enrich England', reduced at the instance of Lord Lyton, who characterised Indian Universities as "educational hot-beds and forcing-houses", the maximum age-limit for the competitive Civil Service Examination from twenty one to nineteen. They thought that this retrograde step would prove a fatal handicap to the Indian students. Surendra Nath felt that this was the opportunity for the Indian Association to vindicate itself. A huge public meeting was held in the Town Hall of Calcutta on the 24th March, 1877, to protest against this Government measure. Representative men from the mufiasil joined this meeting to answer a question that touches all. This attempt to answer 'a question that touches all' is the coping stone upon which a republican form of government is built up. Bengal spoke in one voice. Surendra Nath sought to
determine if it were possible to unite India to a common issue. He availed himself of the summer vacation and toured over Northern India—Bankipore, Benares, Allahabad, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Delhi, Aligarh, Meerut, Lahore and Amritsar and addressed crowded meetings everywhere. Next summer vacation he visited Bombay and Madras over the same question. This visit of Surendra Nath has been spoken of in very glowing terms by Sir Henry Cotton in his book 'New India'. He considers it to be the first attempt of any Indian under British Rule to unite the vast congeries of Indian people politically and characterises it as 'the seed of the Indian National Congress.' There is no gainsaying the fact that it cohered the slip-shod forces and people came to realise that a common platform for the whole of India was the one thing needful.

An all-India memorial was prepared, but, instead of addressing it to the House of Commons by post, it was thought
advisable to send a delegate to England. The Choice of the Elders of the Nation fell upon Surendra Nath. From the stand-point of influence and publicity, which, stripped of verbiage, is a fruitful urge in a public man, it was an opportunity for Surendra Nath. But, he held the interest of the country dearer than his own and argued that his dismissal from service would stink into the nostrils of Englishmen at Home and frustrate the very object they had in view. Lalmohon Ghose was deputed to speak for India. Lalmohon was not the rage of the day, but barring Surendra Nath, no better selection could be made. A scholar of English Literature, versatile and ruthlessly point-blank with picturesque phraseology, Lalmohon's visit was an instant success. A meeting was held at Wills Room, John Bright presiding. Within 24 hours, was laid on the table of the house of Commons, the Rules creating the Statutory Civil Service.
The Arms Act and The Vernacular Press Act:

The mischief of Lord Salisbury’s whim was thus undone. But close upon the heels, Lord Lyton enacted the Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act. Maharaja Jatindra Mohon Tagore, who had hitherto identified himself with every popular movement now voted for the Government. The British Indian Association could not disavow Maharaja Tagore. Here was again the 2nd occasion for the Indian Association to justify itself in an all-India question and Surendra Nath rose equal to the surprising emergency. The Government of Lord Lyton, forewarned and forearmed at the success of Surendra Nath in the matter of Civil Service Regulations, began insidiously to draw away some men of light and leading from the popular cause. But Surendra Nath was not to be cowed down: not even the impending threat of
outbreak of war with Russia deterred him from carrying out an intensive propaganda. On the day fixed for Town Hall meeting to protest against the Government measure, news somewhat of a definite character reached Calcutta that war with Russia was well-nigh inevitable. Everyone was alarmed at the news and Ananda Mohon was persuaded by his friends in the Bar Library, people whose voice counted very much in public matters in those days, to prevail upon Surendra Nath to postpone the meeting. It was openly hinted that this might entail the promoters in criminal proceedings rather the only thing possible for the reactionary Lord Lyton. Closeted together, the two stalwarts of Bengal decided not to flinch. The protest meeting was held and Surendra Nath as the principal speaker sounded the note of warning which is as true to-day, if not true with vengeance. "The true scientific frontier" said he, "against Russian invasion does not lie
in some remote inaccessible mountain, which has yet to be discovered, but it lies deep in the hearts of a loyal and contented people." Many an Indian Leader, whom the Beaurocracy has pooh-poohed as an idle visionary and again skied up as the embodiment of sobriety when it suited its purpose, has spoken in the very same strain. British statesmanship has not taken any note of it and possibly it will not before it is too late. Aias for the shade of Edmund Burke,-'Reasons may be exhausted, but obstinacy is not conquered.' Arguments there have been enough and to spare. Even in that infant stage of political consciousness Surendra Nath said, "The peace the British Government boasts of having given us is the silence of the grave." Sir S. P. afterwards Lord Sinha gave a crushing reply as Congress President to the cheap taunts that some Englishmen indulge in that if they leave our shores not a virgin, not a rupee is
safe. No man altogether bereft of a sense of elementary fairness will hesitate to pronounce that to deny a people the right to arms and then to characterise them as powerless against foreign aggression is an act of melancholy cowardice. The result is that the inexorable Nemesis works with an unerring precision. To-day it is Russia, tomorrow it is Japan and the next day it is a what-not, that, we are told, threatens to swoop upon us.

The Indian Association made, what we shall call to-day, frantic attempts to appraise Englishmen at Home of the situation in India. Gladstone on his accession to power signalised the Liberal ministry by sending Lord Ripon to India, repealed the Press Act, but while he condemned the Arms Act in his election speeches he allowed it to remain where it was, possibly on the plea his biographer Morley found handy later on to justify himself on his novel theory that if a fur
coat is good for Ireland it cannot be equally good for India etc. etc.

The small concession in the matter of Press Act and the Municipal franchise inaugurated by Lord Ripon and other small things carried the people off their feet and the cry against the Arms Act died out. Surendra Nath and the then Leaders displayed a deplorable lack of vision in allowing a glorious opportunity to educate the people politically slip by. Robbed of the weapons of defence, the people smarting under an immediate wrong could be stung to the quick. To-day the salt has lost its flavour and the necessary feeling and determination to possess arms as an inalienable right of citizenship can not be successfully worked up. There is really a tide in the affairs of a Nation as well, which, if taken at the flood leads on to fortune. The opportunity gone, the reactionary forces stiffen and it may take ages to work the boat up the stream.
The Bengalee:—

The Indian Association adjusted the political leadership of the country. The success it achieved in the matter of Civil Service Regulations made it an all-India factor. But then it needed an organ of its own to reach all the Provinces. Surendra Nath took up the charge of the Bengalee then in a moribund condition, the Indian Association having, of course, nothing to do with it financially. Hardly three years had elapsed before he came to stumble upon an unsuspected rock. Justice Norris of the Calcutta High Court brought in a Saligram stone-idol for identification into the court-room. To bring a deity into the mundane atmosphere must have given a rude shock to Hindu susceptibilities. There were severe comments in newspapers. Justice Norris, who was otherwise an independent judge as is evidenced in his judgment in the
O'hara case*, betrayed such leanings for the rabid opponents of the Ilbert Bill, that Surendra Nath flew up into an unwonted rage over this matter and compared Norris with notorious Jeffrys of the Restoration period. He was hauled up for contempt of Court and imprisoned for two months.

There was a rowdy demonstration in the precincts of High Court. Some of the youths smashed the window panes and pelted stones at the police. One of those to figure prominently, was Ashutosh Mookherjee then a student. The Indian shopkeepers closed their shops; the students went into mourning; those of the Bethune College put on black badge. Meetings were held all over Bengal; meetings in Calcutta were so largely attended that open-air-meetings had to

* O'hara, a private of Leinster Regiment stationed at Dumdum entered the house of an Indian one night. He was asleep, was awakened, asked for toddy, was dragged into a tank, shoved into water and shot dead ali for his offence that he could not supply him toddy.
be arranged for. It is interesting to recall that 'The Statesman' of the day wrote some trenchant articles denouncing the sentence of imprisonment. Robert Knight the editor used to escort Mrs. Banerjea to zail to interview her husband.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjea observed on the death of Michael Madhusudan Dutt when the whole country, plunged in grief, gave vent to an expression of piercing sorrow—'It is hopeful for Bengal that she has learnt to weep. There is no virtue in weeping unless he meant 'weeping together'. It is an unfailing symptom of the growth of a Nation's solidarity that people instinctively rise above their immediate and personal concerns to bewail a common loss. If the blood of the martyr is the cement of a church, tears constitute the mortar for the foundation. There are three acid tests to judge whether the people can unite:—Do they pray together, eat together, weep together? The out-
burst of feeling evoked over Surendra Nath’s incarceration was an index that not to speak of Bengal, but the whole of India was on its way to unite. Referring to this, Ananda Mohan Bose said, "It has been demonstrated that people of different provinces have learnt to feel for one another; that a common bond of unity and fellow-feeling is being rapidly established”.

Another sequel of no less glorious import was the increasing popularity of vernacular newspapers in Bengal. The number of English-knowing people was infinitesimally small. There was a great stir over Surendra Nath’s imprisonment and the desire of the vast bulk of the people to keep abreast with the events of the day increased the circulation of the ‘Sanjeebani’ and ‘Bangabashi’. The difference of these two papers in their view-points on social topics was bitter and acrimonious, but, they agreed to render unto Surendra Nath an unqualified
allegiance. The 'Bangabasi' had lapses, but 'Sanjeebani' stood by Surendra Nath to the last.

Passive Resistance:—

In lonely moments of enforced leisure in the Zail, Surendra Nath could not help feeling that whatever might be his success in rousing the educated, vocal section of the people to a sense of political consciousness, he had but touched the fringe of the Nation;—the entire mass was groping in darkness. How to inspire them must have been one absorbing question and that he must have sleeplessly thought out ways and means is clear from the fact that soon after his release, he seized with alacrity the opportunity to approach them straightway. The history is interesting and is the following in a nutshell. The government introduced into the District of Hoogly what was known as the out-still
system. By this the price of country liquor was reduced to half, because the increased sale, the Government thought, would increase the revenue. Surendra Nath having failed to stop this degrading traffic by a memorial to the Government, appealed to the people to give up the drink. He requisitioned the services of volunteers to carry out an intensive propaganda, had meetings held in every important mahallah, led procession village to village with songs specially composed to explain the gravity of the situation and had the liquor shops picketed. The Government realised the awkwardness of its position and abolished the system.

The Indian National Congress:—

The one other thing that outdistances others in its far-reaching effects is what Surendra Nath did immediately after his release. He convened an Indian National Conference in Calcutta in 1883. Ambica Charan Mazumdar gives us a glowing
description of the Conference in his book 'Indian National Evolution' and speaks of 'the immense enthusiasm and earnestness which throughout characterised the three days' session of the Conference and at the end of which every one present seemed to have received a new light and a novel inspiration'.

Dr. Sitaramayya in his monumental production 'The History of the Congress', a book that will always bear an eloquent testimony to his vast erudition and a facile, scholarly pen, slips into a confusion of ideas when he says, 'It is shrouded in mystery as to who originated the idea of an All India Congress'. If it be at all a moot point that this "who" can not be fixed up with any distinctness, it is equally incontestable that in the conglomeration of circumstances that, he may think, baffle splitting up, Surendra Nath Banerjee is a figure of such arresting prominence that popular belief feels no hesitation to seize upon him as the master-architect.
It is this feeling that made Sir G. N. Chandravarker once a president of the Congress observe half in zest half in disgust “If a father be found out for the Congress, let us not hesitate to admit that Surendra Nath is the grandfather; he is the father of our political consciousness”. Dr. Sitaramayya himself says later on “It is believed that the idea of organising a vast political gathering was first conceived by Surendra Nath Banerjea”. This halting statement bears scrutiny with reference to some dates which are very important. The following four factors leading to the birth of the Indian National Congress are also recounted by Dr. Sitaramayya. 1. The Indian National Conference of Surendra Nath, 2. The first International Exhibition held in Calcutta, 3. The Private meeting of Seventeen Members after the Theosophical Convention of Madras and 4. The Indian Union started by Hume. The mist clears up at once when we recall that number (1) is dated
1883 and the three others are dated 1884. This viewpoint gains additional strength from the observations of Henry Cotton and Wilfred Blunt referred to in Chapter I, Introductory B.

In 1884 and 1885 were held in Calcutta the 2nd and 3rd Indian National Conference, but by 1885 Surendra Nath's idea had made such a considerable headway outside Bengal that in Bombay was held a similar meeting called the Indian National Congress presided over by W. C. Banerjea and, also in Madras a conference conceived in the same line of thought under the leadership of Allen Hume. The next year (1886), these three coalesced in the name of the Indian National Congress and met in Calcutta, Dada Bhai Nourojee presiding.

It has become a fashion these days to call Surendra Nath and other leaders of the past generation timid. But it will be ungracious to think for a moment that they had not the courage of conviction. In
1889, on the occasion of the visit of Prince Albert Victor there was a public meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall, presided over by the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to form a reception committee and to arrange for other incidental matters. To the chagrin of official cum European group and the consternation of Zeminders, Surendra Nath flung upon the L. G. the amendment that money raised for the purpose must not be spent in festivities, but in works of permanent utility and carried the House with him. The Government of Stewart Bayley betrayed a melancholy meanness by asking the Government of India to delete the name of Surendra Nath from the list it had sent nominating the Fellows of the Calcutta University.

In pursuance of a Resolution of the Bombay Congress, Surendra Nath was one of those deputed to press upon the English people at Home the urgency of some immediate reforms. It would cost
him at a modest computation something like Rs. 4000/-. What Surendra Nath had been able to lay by, were Govt. Securities to the extent of thirteen thousand face value. Some of his friends volunteered to bear the expenses, but thanks to the broad shoulders of his wife, he declined the offer and came to the neighbourhood of savings nil for what he conceived to be his duty to the Nation.

Those who talk glib of Surendra Nath not having made any sacrifice for the country in terms of Rupee, Anna, Pies, should pause to reflect upon this. It is good to lionise one for the sacrifice of external possessions, but no man has ever attained any transcendental greatness on this score alone. It is again worth while to remember that those, who have fought for the freedom of their country, are not those chiselled in history in letters of gold for any such crude sacrifice. Far less should it ever be a commodity of bargain. Surendra Nath
Banerjea appeared for the last time before the public in the Indian Association Hall to plead against the wisdom of the Hindu Moslem Pact of C. R. Das; because, as he said, it was hatched in darkness and it would only inflate the communal zeal without at the same time having behind it that sanction which alone could make it operative. It was not enough to cry him down—a shoe was hurled at him.

However, to pursue the old thread:—Eardley Norton gives us in his Reminiscences an idea of the wonderful impression Surendra Nath produced in England. The British Press rang with his applause. Parliamentarians of weight and standing freely expressed the opinion that Self-Government should be conceded without any delay. These opinions are jejune and void of any interest, but they were assiduously cultivated in those days.
CHAPTER IV.

The Listening Senate :—

In 1885, Surendra Nath was elected a member of the Bengal Legislative Council to represent Calcutta Corporation. He was again an elected member from 1893 to 1901, there being year to year election. In 1897, he was returned unopposed when he was away in England to give evidence before the Welby Commission. In 1913, the Partition of Bengal being annulled, he felt free to offer himself again for election and was returned at the head of the poll to both Bengal and Indian Legislative Councils.

In the election of 1916, he lost his seat in the upper house and for this Bhupendra Nath Bose, one of the other two successful candidates came in for a good deal
of hard knocks from a large section of his countrymen. There were angry meetings all over Bengal denouncing Bose and demanding his resignation. In 1920, he was elected without any contest to the Montague-reformed Bengal Legislative Council and was appointed a minister. In the general election of 1923, he was literally floored by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, who, his distinction as a physician notwithstanding, was altogether without any political past, but it was the hey-day of Non-Co-Operation and he was the nominee of C. R. Das. There was a chorus of jubilation in the country. What start, what finish!

In the Legislative Council, Surendra Nath was not as great a success as a Gokhale. When Lord Curzon referred to Gokhale in terms of high praise such as he never entertained of any Indian member, he was thinking of Gokhale's storing up and marshalling of facts and figures. "Widely as I differed", 
said Curzon, “I always felt the weight of his blow.”

To such praise Surendra Nath could not lay any claim. He avoided details in his speech, not, as is undoubtedly true, the audience do not like to follow the speaker to any good length, but because he had not the time and leisure to probe deep into the labyrinths of discourse. It is equally true that though at times he was quite good at debate he lacked the cool circumspection of a debator. His speech was like the

* In December 1905, Gokhale as President of the Congress attacked Lord Curzon’s policy, his aims and objects in “acrid language” and within six months he wrote to Lord Curzon on his resignation that he (Lord Curzon) lived “for lofty ends” and “made a religion of all his works”. In this country of multiplicity of religions one can reconcile to a new religion, religious of works, but one finds it difficult to swallow “loft ends” when according to Ronaldshay, his biographer, “Lord Curzon had wounded Indian Nationalist sentiments too deeply to admit of an early reconciliation”. But still nobody has ever scented in it, and rightly so anything of weak-kneed loyalty.
torrent of a mountain-stream sweeping everything before it. If people wondered as they heard Gokhale, how he grasped every item of his subject and dressed them in due proportion, Surendra Nath was brilliant in his own way; 'his ardour infected those who heard him' and much as the speech suffered in print the following morning, for the moment he was irresistible. Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson told him on one occasion—"Mr. Banerjea, if I had two votes, one official and the other personal, I would have given you my personal vote". Possibly Wilson was in a diplomatic mood and wanted to please—in any case it may mean a lot—it may mean nothing: but such was in fact the general impression. The lute however was not without its rift. Vincent, a Home Member, once characterised his eloquence as turgid. But we only discern in it too much of spleen, because pompous Vincents could not help feeling on the floors of
Legislative Assembly that they were no match for these Indians either in dialectical skill or the fervour of eloquence. But closely analysed, we miss in Surendra Nath’s speeches that literary flavour and rapier thrusts that make Rash Behary Ghose’s speeches so pleasant reading. But, he was vigorous and free from cant. The more he advanced in years he gained in lucidity and a spontaneity of expression. Mannerism there was, but never an awkward straining after effect. Some of his historic speeches—even presidential address of Congress, he used to deliver extempore—were well-prepared, but it never smacked of midnight oil. Even if it be true that there is much in his speeches which can be said to be trite and of jaded interest, no body can ever dispute his title to being called one of the best orators India has produced. There is no Indian whose orations have so wonderfully contributed to rousing
a vast, disintegrated people that have slumbered ingloriously long to a sense of one indivisible nationhood. In fact, nothing said about Surendra Nath in the official History of the Congress is so appropriate as the following:—"For command of language, for elegance of diction, for a rich imagery, for emotional heights, for a spirit of manly challenge, his orations are hard to beat; they remain unapproachable".

Roseberry in his monograph on Pitt the Younger and Curzon in his British Parliamentary Eloquence observe that the art of oratory declines in proportion as the art of printing speeds on. As a statement of fact the view is unassailable. But, there is one thing to be observed in Surendra Nath that he swam abreast with times. He shed off with a remarkable adroitness the rolling periods and circumlocution of eighteenth century orators. His presidential address in the first Moderate Conference in
Bomday is an illustration to point. He was now over seventy and spoke for three hours without any note before him.

Local Self-Government:—

As a member of the Legislative Council Surendra Nath addressed himself to liberalise the Bengal and Calcutta Municipal Act. He cherished the municipal franchise as an inestimable boon—an earnest of Self-Government under the aegis of the British Crown. He was a member of the Calcutta Corporation ever since the elective system was introduced in 1876—the very next year of his dismissal from service. He was chairman of Berrackpore Municipality for a long stretch of years.

In 1899, Lord Curzon turned his reforming zeal to the Calcutta Corporation. So deepety attuned he was to a patriarchal form of Government that he could not at all anticipate that events in India
had moved apace. This was, however, the first of that clash of outlook which has overshadowed a verdict upon all his good points. The authorship of the Mackenzie Bill is unfortunately ascribed to him, but the finishing touches do really disclose the Roman hand. If Curzon held that the elective system was to answer for the maladministration and its curtailment was the one remedy that could be suggested, the Indians likewise held that the Calcutta Corporation was avowedly designed to be a close reserve of British interests for contracts and fat salaried service. Surendra Nath Banerjea led the opposition to the Bill in the Bengal Legislative Council and attacked it clause by clause with such a painstaking thoroughness that he told us that though a staunch advocate of ‘early to bed and early to rise’ all throughout his life, he used to sit up to the early hours of the morning to prepare for the work of the Council during the passage of
the Bill. The Bill was passed. We have it on the authority of Lord Ronaldshay that Mr. afterwards Sir Edward Baker who was in charge of the Bill urged Surendra Nath (was it at the instance of Lord Curzon?) not to burn his boats by saying anything that would commit him to an absolute refusal to take part in the work of the reconstituted body. He replied, 'that is impossible!' With twenty seven other members of the Corporation he resigned in protest. But the invisible Hand so decreed that it was left to Surendra Nath to scotch this official measure in toto and nationalise the Calcutta Corporation lock, stock and barrel.

Refusing to Co-operate:—

From 1901 to 1913, he refused to participate in any council as a protest against the reactionary policy of the Government one after the other culmina-
ting in the Partition of Bengal. He only offered himself for election when Government had undone the mischief of riding rough shod over the feelings of the people and unsettled the settled fact. He considered it to be a point of honour with the Nation. This non-co-operating with the Government is no doubt fraught with great possibilities, but he never placed it before the country for general acceptance; because he thought that the country was not prepared for the crucial stand. To accelerate speed beyond potency is to court paralysis. "Would not" the trend of his view point was, "the policy of repression the Government was bound to pursue spell disaster to the newly formed national consciousness?" He chose not to blink at the rude fact that in the responsible conduct of our daily life, it is unwise to ignore the imperfections that cling to flesh and blood. But nevertheless he practised it himself and tried to impose it upon his coadjutors.
Ambica Charan Mazumder repeatedly asked him to challenge the Beaurocracy on this issue. "What", cried Surendra Nath in the stillness of one of the evening walks at Simultala where the two friends had retired for the Poojah recess, "to declare our impotence? Just wait and see if it is successful in the circle of friends that swear by me". Ambica Charan, those who knew him intimately will bear us out, had a lionine dash. He grew restive and besought Surendra Nath, to consider it over again. "What if we fail?" urged Surendra Nath, "A single unwary step will land us to a setback". So it was a prophetic irony of fate. Only a few months later, Ambica Charan received a letter from Surendra Nath that a leading member of their group was hooked in by nomination to the Indian Legislative Council. "What if you or I can break loose from restraint!" is how he concluded. This incident so deeply coloured his outlook that he could never rid himself of the
seamy side of Non-co-operation without having sufficiently educated the country for the attendant risks. But as against this, there is the classic warning of Dr. Johnson "He who waits for the precise moment waits for ever!"