BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR.

Raja Rammohun Roy, the founder of the Brahma Samaj or the Theistic Church of India, was born at Radhanagar, Bengal, in May 1772, of an ancient and honourable Brahman family. His father gave him a good education; he learnt Persian at home, Arabic at Patna (where he studied Euclid, Aristotle and the Koran), and Sanskrit at Benares. Although a devout idolater in boyhood, he early began to doubt and speculate, and at fifteen left home to study Buddhism in Tibet, where his criticisms on Lama-worship gave much offence. After some years' travel he returned, but, his anti-idolatrous sentiments obliging him to leave home, he lived at Benares until his father's death in 1803. "After this, he spent about ten years in the East India Company's service, latterly as Dewan or head officer in the collection of Revenues. During this period he first began to assemble his friends together for evening discussions on the absurdities of idolatry, and he also issued his first work, Tuhfat-al-Muwahhiddin ("A gift to Monotheists"). This treatise was in Persian, with an Arabic preface, and was a bold protest against superstition and priestcraft. These proceedings brought on him much hostility, and even persecution, and in 1814 he retired to Calcutta for greater safety. Here he soon established a little Friendly Society (Atmiya Sabha), which met weekly to read the Hindu Scriptures and to chant Monotheistic hymns. In 1816 he translated the Vedanta into Bengali and Hindustani, following this by a series of translations from the Upanishads into Bengali, Hindustani and English, with introductions and comments of his own. These works he published at his own cost and disseminated widely among his countrymen. His writings excited much opposition and gave rise to numerous controversies, in which his ability, tact and learning rendered him fully a match for his antagonists. But the deadliest blow he inflicted upon Hindu superstition was his effective agitation against the rite of Suttee, the burning of living widows on the piles of their deceased husbands.
In 1811 he had been a horrified witness of this sacrifice in his elder brother's family, and he had vowed never to rest until he had uprooted this custom. He exposed the hollow pretences of its advocates in elaborate pamphlets both in Bengali and English, and pressed the matter in every possible way, till at last the tide of public feeling turned, and on December 4, 1829, Lord William Bentinck issued a regulation abolishing Suttee throughout all the territories subject to Fort William. Rammohun was an active politician and philanthropist. He built school-houses and established schools in which useful knowledge was gratuitously taught through the medium both of the English and the native languages. He wrote a suggestive Bengali Grammar, of which he published one version in English (1826) and one in Bengali (1833). He wrote valuable pamphlets on Hindu law and made strenuous exertions for the freedom of the native Press; he also established (1822) and mainly conducted two native newspapers, the Sambad Kaumudi in Bengali, and the Mirat-al-Akhbar in Persian and made them the means of diffusing much useful political information. Becoming interested in Christianity he learned Hebrew and Greek in order to read the Bible in the original languages, and in 1820 he issued a selection from the four Gospels entitled the Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and happiness. This was attacked by the Baptist Missionaries of Serampur, and a long controversy ensued in which he published three remarkable Appeals to the Christian Public in defence of the "Precepts of Jesus." He also wrote other theological tracts (sometimes under assumed names) in which he attacked both Hindu and Christian orthodoxy with a strong hand. But his personal relations with orthodox Christians were never unfriendly, and he rendered valuable assistance to Dr. Duff in the latter's educational schemes. He also warmly befriended a Unitarian Christian Mission which was started in Calcutta (1824) by Mr. William Adam, formerly a Baptist Missionary, who, in attempting to convert Rammohun to trinitarianism was himself converted to the opposite view. This Unitarian Mission, though not a theological success, attracted considerable sympathy among the Hindu Monotheists, whose Atmiya Sabha had then become extinct. At last Rammohun felt able to re-embody his cherished ideal, and on August 20, 1828, he opened the first Brahma Association (Brahma Sabha) at a hired house.
A suitable church-building was then erected and placed in the hands of trustees, with a small endowment and a remarkable trust-deed by which the building was set apart "for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the universe." The new church was formally opened on the 11th Magh (January 23), 1830, from which day the Brahma Samaj dates its existence. Having now succeeded in his chief projects, Rammohun resolved to visit England, and the King of Delhi appointed him envoy thither on special business, and gave him the title of Raja. He arrived in England on April 8, 1831, and was received with universal cordiality and respect. He watched with special anxiety the parliamentary discussions on the renewal of the East India Company's charter and gave much valuable evidence before the Board of Control on the condition of India. This he republished with additional suggestions ("Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue Systems of India") and also reissued his important "Essay on the Right of Hindus over Ancestral Property." He visited France, and wished to visit America, but died unexpectedly of brain-fever at Bristol, September 27, 1833. - The Encyclopaedia Britannica.