

## REMINISCENCES OF MY SCHOOL AND COLLEGE DAYS

HOOGHLY College with me is still a name to conjure with and will remain so till the end of my days. The College in my days had and, I believe, still has two schools attached to it; one on the ground floor of the College building itself, and another about three miles off in the town proper of Hooghly (The schools referred to by the writer no longer form part of the College under the present University regulations.—Ed.) I was transferred from my village pathsala and entered in the rolls of the latter school in one of the lower forms in January 1863, and after matriculating from the school in 1870, naturally passed on to the College from which I graduated in January 1876. Two or three small incidents of my school days unchequered as they were in other ways may be of some interest.

Many fruit-trees sepcially litchies grew in large numbers in the school grounds. From year to year we used to look with longing eyes at the litchi-trees bending in season under their load of rich crimson tempting fruits, meant for our eyes and not for our palate. Gradually the temptation grew too strong for our boyish mood, and one fine morning long before the school sat, about a dozen of us scrambled on to the top of a litchi-tree and, certainly with the connivance of the durwan, robbed it of its riches, and made a hasty meal of the spoils. Soon after the bell went, the school sat, in came the Head Master, and in no time we, the culprits, were hauled up before him trembling in fear from head to foot. But what was quite unexpected, he took the whole affair in lighter spirit and gave us free pardon for what he said was a natural boyish prank. Since that date the Head Master rose a hundred degrees in our estimation.

On another occasion I reached the school as usual a little before 10, and found a Saheb rather shabbily dressed standing in one corner of a room which was then under repairs with goodly number of boys jeering and making faces at him and showering upon him complimentary epithets and, what was more real, a lot of lime and surki from a safe distance. When this has gone on for sometime, the bell rang, and we all hastened to our respective classes, leaving the Saheb dusted all over, red and white. Shortly after this, the Head Master came with the Saheb to show him round the class to which I belonged. Looking the way in which he was talking with the Head Master and the

respectful attitude which the latter bore towards the former, we had no difficulty in inferring that our loafer-looking Saheb must be a big personage and that our fate was sealed. But the demeanour of the Head Master plainly shewed that till then he knew nothing of our gross misconduct towards the stranger. When the Saheb left and the school regained its usual composure, we were all very nervous about the consequences of our misdeed ; and the Head Master to whom evidently the incident had been narrated by the Saheb at the time his departure, came to us in a towering passion and took us severely to task for what we had done, but strange to say at the end gave us full reprieve, telling us that he was specially requested by the Saheb at the time of his departure not to take any penal steps against our boyish freak. Subsequently we came to learn that the Saheb was no other than Mr. Woodrow, the reputed educationist and Inspector of Schools, who afterwards rose to be the Director of Public Instruction.

The third episode which was more of a personal nature is perhaps worthy of brief notice as instructive of the very cordial relations existing in those days between the teacher and the taught. Those were the days of the notorious Burdwan Fever and at the time of the Test Examination, I was laid up with a severe attack of the fell disease. When I came back to the school from my village home in Burdwan after recovery, I found the time to apply for permission to sit for the Matriculation Examination then known as the Entrance Examination,—a much more appropriate and expressive term than the new-fangled modern imported article—had long been over, and the Head Master on enquiry from my uncle with whom I used to reside was told that I was not fit to go up for the Examination that year, notwithstanding his assurance that I was sure to get through if I sat for it. However I was able to persuade my uncle to take me to the Head Master who gladly in his turn took me to the Principal of the College and the permission to sit for the Examination was secured by wire from the Registrar at Calcutta.

When I entered the College I found Thwaytes was the Principal, Parry Professor of English and Philosophy (those were not the days of the present-day divorce in the teaching of cognate branches of learning). Lethbridge (afterwards Sir Roper Lethbridge), Professor of English and History, Ishan Chandra Banerji, Professor of English, Gopal Chandra Gupta, Professor of Sanskrit and two other school teachers who assisted in teaching Mathematics

and Sanskrit (school teachers were not then looked upon as contaminating the college with their touch). Subsequently Dr. Watt, afterwards Sir George Watt, joined the College as Professor of Botany and Chemistry when the College curriculum was split up into what was then known as the "A" Courses and the "B" Course, Mr. Rowe replaced Mr. Lethbridge, gone on transfer, and Mr. Lal Behari De replaced Professor Banerjee, retired on pension. To leave out the name of the Head Clerk will perhaps be an act of sacrilege ; he was one of the most important personages in the college hierarchy—he was the right-hand man of the Principal, the court of appeal for the students and perhaps also of the professors. He was JEEBAN of the Principal, the JEEBAN KERANI of the students. Mind you, there was not a tinge of disrespect in the appellation thus given to the greyheaded and greybearded old gentleman ; it was a tradition which we had inherited from our predecessors for transmission from generation to generation of students who passed through the portals of that Institution of learning.

To return to our narrative. Thwaytes was an ideal Principal. I cannot conceive of a more inspiring and lovable personality than him who presided over the destinies of the College for nearly a quarter of a century. He was familiar with many a father and a grand-father of the students who came to sit under his feet. He was not simply respected but adored all over the district of Hoogly and neighbouring districts wherever English education had made its way. Over six feet in height, of massive build, with ample flowing grey beard and penetrating eyes, his was a towering figure before whom all others were pigmies, and all truants quailed. Punctually at 10 every morning he came out of his quarters in the College after breakfast, smoking a cigar, and walked across the spacious hall to take readings of the barometer fixed against its wall and then walked straight in succession to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year classes, called the rolls of each class, and ultimately settled down to teach the 4th year class. Mathematics was his subject and his method of teaching was to make his pupils work for them. I do not remember to have ever seen him go to the black-board to solve a problem or explain a knotty point ; all that was left to the best boy in the class.

Parry, Professor of Philosophy, has left not much impression on me. I cannot conceive of a more unattractive and uninteresting book on which he had to lecture than Reid's Enquiry into the

Human Mind, an alternative text-book prescribed in our time for the First Examination in Arts, now known as the Intermediate Examination. My dislike for the book, and from the book to the subject then imbibed, has persisted through my life. The Professor was a very quiet sort of man, short in stature, and bald in the head, with no marked personality.

Lethbridge, our Professor of English, was a universal favourite. His teaching of Milton's *Paradise Lost* coupled with the suavity of his manners, and pleasant address, has left a lasting impression on my mind. Walking back from his morning bath with an umbrella in one hand and leading his boy of about eight by the other, he often stopped in the way to exchange a few kindly words with us as we used to wend our way to the College.

Ishan Chandra Banerjee, well known all over Bengal along with his brother Mahesh Chandra Banerjee, Professor of Presidency College, for encyclopædic reading and ripe scholarship, was our Second Professor of English. His talk—I won't say lecture which was more of books than on books,—created even in the dullest among us an appetite for reading and using the library, the most potent instruments with which to attack the stronghold of literature. He used to direct us individually to take selected books from the library and exacted from us proofs of reading them. No pupil pleased him more than one who could give him a good account of himself in the use of the library. To illustrate his point, he once gave us an interesting account of the capacity for reading books and using the library, of Justice Dwarka Nath Mitra of the High Court of Judicature Calcutta, who was an old pupil of the Hooghly College-school and College :—

"Allison's History of Europe in 14 volumes was then recently published and bought for the Library. Pupil Dwarka Nath borrowed from the library the first volume one day and returning it the next day borrowed the second volume. On the third day when he came to the library to return the second volume and borrow the third, the librarian with whom he was a great favourite refused to lend him the volume till he questioned him on the contents of the volumes returned as read and was surprised to hear him quote almost verbatim pages after pages of the volumes in answer". Prize-essays of Dwarka Nath written for the Library Examination of the pre-university days are still to be found, I believe, in the College library bearing eloquent testimony to his wide reading.



Dr. Watt was our Professor of Botany. Short in stature with chestnut flowing beards, and long bushy hair hanging down in careless curls, he had altogether the dreamy look of a philosopher. His teaching created among his pupils an enthusiasm and earnestness which could be better felt than described. It has left on my mind the impression that he was the true type of a genuine teacher of young men. He made study real and work a pleasant pastime. He used to take us on boat-trips on the Hooghly to the neighbouring villages and jungles in order to study plants in their natural environments. During these trips he heartily partook of and relished *murhi*, and took sweets only under persuasion tantamount to compulsion. Vividly do I remember our trip to the Paresnath Hills in Chhotanagpur, one January, where we got a foretaste of what English cold weather means. We were about a fortnight there enjoying and profiting by our daily excursions to study how the flora of the Hills differed from the flora of the plains. While I was preparing myself for the M.A. Examination, he made me live in his house for over a month as his guest, where I enjoyed the comforts of an English home and the hospitality of his table presided over by Lady Watt. The methods of collecting, drying, preserving and drawing plants as preliminaries to form a herbarium and studying them in their various aspects, systematic, microscopic and ecological then learnt, have stood me in good stead in after-life. The days of Sir George Watt was the hey-day of the Hooghly College just as the days of Sutcliffe, Tawney, Beebee and Croft were of the Presidency College.

Lalbehari Day, the reputed author of Govinda Samanta and editor of the Bengal Magazine came as our Professor when Professor Banerjee retired on pension. A black flowing gown almost kissing the ground and tied round the waist by a band, a broad-brimmed flat-topped head-gear which was a hybrid between a skull-cap and a hat, gave him a distinctly weird appearance. He was known in the College as an incisive critic, inexhaustible story-teller, and versatile conversationalist. When I was in the 4th year class, certain specimens of the so-called "Babu English" were culled out from the Bengal Magazine and exposed in the pages of Rowe's Grammar, then newly published. The critic in the Bengal Magazine brought out from his armoury of invectives a chain of choice epithets and showered it on the head of the Grammarian by way of retort, one of which, if my memory

fails not, was that the author of the Grammar "may sit as a learner of English composition at his feet, the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose".

Rowe came to us when Lethbridge left, on transfer, much to our regret, and we thought, our loss was irreparable. We were, however, told by the Principal that we had no reason for disappointment in as much as the new Professor will more than compensate our loss. Thus assured, we took kindly to him and he fully justified the assurance given on his behalf. His teaching of Shakespeare and specially of Bacon was exceptionally instructive and interesting. His notes on Bacon were in great request among the students of all colleges, including the Presidency, but he declined to teach Burke and referred us to the notes of Tawney of Presidency College fame.

Last but not least stands the figure of the venerable Pundit Gopal Chandra Gupta, our Professor of Sanskrit, successor of Babu Nilambar Mukherjee, the late financial adviser of the Kashmere State and later on Vice-Chairman, Calcutta Corporation. Though brought up under the *tol* system, he was more modern in his methods than many a modern. He did not delight in grammatical dilettantism, nor subordinated teaching to the domination of examination. He had what I may call plenty of poetic imagination for the elucidation of the classical poetry of Kalidasa and Bhababhuti.

About twelve years ago, I had an occasion to pay a visit to my old College. I knew the old place, but alas! the place knew me not! and spontaneously brought to my memory the almost forgotten couplet of my schoolday-reading,

"Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,  
Swells at my breast and turns the past to pain".

The old familiar faces were all gone excepting the solitary figure of the library-bearer in the person of Kshetra looking very much like his old self. Our mutual recognition was ecstatic and our talk reminiscent of the old youthful happy College-days.

I have lingered on the scene of my youth perhaps longer than reasonable, but we are all creatures more of sentiment than of reason. I loved the place, though the place, it seemed, loved me not,, but

"It is better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all."

I cannot more fittingly close this narrative than by repeating the passage with which I began it—Hooghly College with me is still a name to conjure with and will remain so till the end of my days.

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*By courtesy of the Hoogly College Authorities.*

I believe in work much more than in talk and I ask you all to sharpen your swords and be ready to smite the Dragon of uninstructed prudery and blatant loudness and deliver the Fair Captive of Sound Education from her suppressors. —G. C. Bose.