

THE LATE PROF. HARENDRANATH MITRA.

(By Prof. Anutosh Das-Gupta.)

Prof. Harendranath Mitra's sudden and untimely death is felt as a severe loss to our college. It will be very difficult to fill his place, considering his breadth of knowledge and his ripe experience in the training of students whose number is legion. He has served this college for fourteen years, and all his juniors in the staff of Botany were his pupils. I have had the proud privilege of being associated with him as a fellow teacher for nearly twelve years and during this period, I think I have enjoyed his company more closely and intimately and with a greater profit to myself than many of his friends and nearest relations. He mixed and talked with his juniors without an air of superiority and without the least reserve. People outside the circle of his intimate friends knew him to be a little too grave and serious, but he was an extremely jolly fellow, and indulged in humours which made us laugh heartily. We never missed him at our afternoon tea in the rooms of the Laboratory, and all our pleasant gossips, animated discussions and lively debates in which he always took a conspicuous part with his great resources of knowledge and his amazing capacity for bringing conflicting views into harmony left us happier and wiser than ever.

Babu Harendranath Mitra passed the F.A. Examination with credit from T. N. Jubilee College, Bhagalpur where his father the late Dr. Kedarnath Mitra, L. M. S., was a medical practitioner. In his B. A. course he took up honours in Physics and Chemistry; but as there was no Laboratory for Physics in his college, he came to Calcutta and joined the Presidency College. He was a boarder in the Eden Hindu Hostel, and in his college class he gave a very satisfactory account of himself. At the end of the third year course in the Presidency College where he completed a full course of training in the practical subjects, he took his transfer from the

Presidency College and came to Bhagalpur to meet his father who was in indifferent health. He joined the fourth year class of T. N. Jubilee College ; and what he lost in the absence of a further training in the Presidency College he gained by his determination to do his best in his favourite subjects viz., Physics and Chemistry ; and he fitted up a small chemistry laboratory in a corner of his father's bungalow. At the B. A. examination he came out with flying colours, standing first in order of merit in the Honours list of Physics and Chemistry students, and annexing the Woodrow Scholarship of the value of Rs. 30 per month. About this time his father's health was fast declining, and he was anxious to see his son follow his medical profession after him. So Haren Babu came to Calcutta and joined the Medical College. At the Preliminary Scientific M. B. Examination he stood first, and was the recipient of many prizes and scholarships. But his father's health became worse, and fearing that he might not be able to complete a full course of study in the Medical College in the event of his father's death, he accepted a job in the Dacca Jagannath College in the department of science. After one year's service at Dacca he came back to Calcutta, and joined the City College as a demonstrator in science ; and he took up his residence at the National Boarding at Sitaram Ghose Street where he brought two of his brothers next to himself and defrayed all their educational expenses from his own pocket ; and for this purpose he had to augment his scanty income by coaching private pupils at their own residence. He was now twenty years of age. At this time he got enrolled as a student of the Bangabasi College and took lessons in Botany from Principal G. C. Bose, and creditably passed the M. A. Examination in Botany in 1907. He joined the Bangabasi College as a Professor of Botany in 1912, and soon made himself popular with his students and colleagues. His Structural Botany first saw the light in 1913, and made its mark. It was his maiden attempt at writing a text-book and he was eminently successful. His book was perhaps the first of its kind written in English by any

Indian author dealing with Indian plants, and was accorded a warm reception by students of Botany throughout India. It was subsequently replaced by his Elementary Botany which was decidedly an improvement upon his original work. He wrote profusely on scientific and philosophical matters; and some of our educational journals were replete with his contributions. His father died at Sibpur leaving an unfinished house and a large family dependent upon him. Fully alive to the responsibilities which devolved upon him he strove to give his brothers the best of education, and finished the construction of his father's house at a cost of ten thousand rupees; and all this money was earned by the honest labour of his educational work when he was only twentyfive years of age. A full-fledged 'Karmayogin', his botanical studies did not completely absorb his time. It was in his spare time that he conceived his great pioneer work—"The Indian Annual Register"—which was first published in 1919. A work of similar type was hitherto unattempted in this country. It is an annual digest of current affairs in India, political, economic, social and educational, together with a resume of what is being written, spoken, or thought of about this hapless country in other lands. It has been rightly called "The Indian Hansard." "The Indian Annual Register" is regularly subscribed by Cabinet Ministers in British Parliament, and other stalwart politicians of independent countries as well as our Viceroy, provincial Governors, executive councillors, ministers, and newspaper editors. And this work alone so far published would cover three feet in thickness. In the midst of the strenuous work for the new venture which kept him occupied sometimes till early hours of the morning he managed not only to obtain his B. L. degree but also to write a work on Indian Evidence Act which became highly popular and commanded a large sale. A word or two about his marriage would not be out of place here. He was a brilliant student, and was much sought in marriage even when he was an undergraduate. His parents like the average father and mother in Bengal became anxious to get him married at

the usual time when they found that he was much in demand at the "marriage market." But his intellectual pursuits, so fully occupied his mind that he hardly found time to indulge in the romance of marriage at an earlier stage. At last in 1916 he persuaded himself to marry the youngest daughter of Rai Bahadur Bhupal Chandra Bose, Director of Agriculture in Assam, and it will be interesting to learn that Sree Aurobindo Ghose had married the eldest sister of Prof. Mitra's wife. As regards his ability and efficiency as a teacher little need be said. He had a profusion of those high qualities of head and heart which make a successful and ideal teacher. His lectures made a deep and abiding impression on young minds. His class-notes to B. A. and B. Sc. students who have scarcely any suitable textbooks meeting all requirements were very much valued by a large number of students besides his own ; and an ex-Dean of the Faculty of Science told me in the course of a personal talk that his lecture-notes were not only of a high order, but would do credit to many of our post-graduate teachers.

Little did we dream that a life so full of hope, and marked with such varied activities with promises of still higher and nobler work in future should come to an end so soon. He fell a victim to pulmonary tuberculosis, and passed away on the morning of the 29th September last at the age of 38 years and 5 months, deeply mourned and sadly missed by a young widow, two little children, several brothers and sisters, and a host of relations and friends.
