

“SIR C. P.”

A BIOGRAPHY

By

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PREFACE

THIS is the 'Story of a glorious Indian life'. There is no mistake about this description. Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer's sixty years of life has few parallels in India for its colour, romance, legal eminence, adventure, statesmanship and glory.

His life and activities have fascinated me for long. I have admired him from a distance. Now and then I used to casually hear about him from friends. I studied all the news pertaining to him in the papers. The material gathered that way, has been put together and shaped into this book.

I am not a friend of Sir Ramaswamy Aiyer. Had I been privileged to know him closely, I feel, I could have done my job better. But I have spared no pains to do my best.

I have purposely avoided details. The Plan of this book is to make the figure of Sir Ramaswamy Aiyer move briskly through its pages, so that the reader may have, within two hours' time, a picture of the *humane* man that he is. If I have succeeded in doing so, that is my reward for this not all-too-easy job I have undertaken with a good deal of hesitation.

NEW DELHI,
November, 19, 1939. } A. PRAKASH

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I

ORIGIN

IN the second half of the eighteenth century, the North Arcot District was a centre of many battles. Here, the English and the French fought ceaselessly for territorial expansion in order to build their Empire in the East. One of their famous battles was fought at Wandiwash in 1760. There, the English General Sir Eyre Coote defeated the French Commander Count de Lally, thereby curbing the ambitious dreams of *Marianne* in South India.

Wandiwash is reached in less than three hours from the City of Madras.

The distance is about a hundred miles. To-day it is a big village with a population of Hindus and Moslems numbering five thousand. Set in between mountains and corn fields, it is a historic place and nothing else. A Union Board carries on the local administration.

Exactly a hundred and nineteen years after the famous battle, a pious and learned Brahmin Mr. Venkatasubbier was the chief revenue collecting official here. He was known as the *Tahsildar*. He also exercised judicial functions in office.

Those were days of official glory and pomp. The officials moved about from place to place in palanquins with trumpet blowers marching ahead of them heralding the passage. Silken umbrellas and canopy bearers were seen with them always. Thus, even

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a *Tahsildar* in those days had a regal atmosphere about him.

In Venkatasubbier's house a very happy event took place in the month of November 1879. The date was the twelfth. His seventeen-year-old daughter who was married to a lawyer had come home just then from Tanjore. She gave birth to a boy. Rangammal's child was fair in complexion and remarkable in facial features.

Venkatasubbier's family rejoiced over this happy event. They tendered praise to God for the gift of this baby. They were all pleased with it, for, it had handsome features and a healthy build. The boy was named Ramaswamy, a common name in South India for this uncommon child.

Ramaswamy's father was Pattabhirama Aiyer. He was then a

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practising lawyer at Tanjore, though he hailed from a village called Chetput in the North Arcot District. He was in his thirties when his first and only child Ramaswamy was born at Wandiwash. Pattabhirama Aiyer continued as a *Vakil* in Tanjore until the year 1884. Then he moved on to Madras. He at first resided in the Brahmin quarter of Mylapore and practised in the High Court. He was earning well and was a contented man. In 1887, he purchased a large tract of land in Mylapore and built a palatial home which is to-day famous as *Grove*, the residence of his illustrious son, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer.

Pattabhirama Aiyer was a typical Brahmin in the sense that he was orthodox. He was a Sanskrit scholar who upheld the *Vedic* traditions in great regard. He was, furthermore, a disciplinarian who attached much

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importance to the rules of good conduct in life. He was also accustomed to regular habits each day and was fond of exhaustive reading. As such, he paid particular attention in bringing up his son on model lines.

Rangammal, his wife, was equally religious. She was one with her husband in all that he did to see young Ramaswamy grow up as an ideal boy. At that time, Pattabhirama Aiyer was already appointed a Judge of the City Civil Court in Madras.

The Judge intended to give his son a good education. And he did give. When young Ramaswamy was five, he was taught Sanskrit and Tamil by private tutors at home. The boy was willing and showed a keen inclination for the books and the slate plate. After a few years of training at home, he was put in the Wesleyan High School in Royapettah for English studies.

In those days, Ramaswamy had to get up early in the morning, say by six of the clock, a habit which he retains even now, bathe, recite his prayers and then study. After breakfast, both the father and the son boarded a horse cab and left home, one for the Court and the other for the School. Ramaswamy in those days was a buxom boy, clad in a neat *dhoty*, a close coat, and a velvet cap on the head. He had a tuft of hair on the head, which mother Rangammal oiled and combed each morning and spun it in the style of a Chinaman's que. Even jasmine flowers were tucked up to it at times.

At school, Ramaswamy was exceptionally brilliant. He was always first in every subject that was taught to him. Especially in English and history, he was always a *top boy* in the class. In mathematics, he was a little weak. But, taken as a whole,

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his scholastic record was the brightest in each class he remained.

While a student in the high school, Ramaswamy was married. He was only eleven years then. The bride was Seethammal, a slip of a girl of nine. It was the custom in the Indian society of those days, particularly among the Brahmins, to have one's marriage arranged early in life.

Seethammal was a grand-daughter of the late Mr. Ranganatha Sastriar, the first Indian to become a Judge in South India. She was also a sister of the late Sir C. V. Kumaraswamy Sastriar, for long a Judge of the Madras High Court and the *Chief* for a time.

From the *Wesleyan* Ramaswamy moved on to the *Presidency College* after matriculating. In those days,

he had a separate horse cab for himself. At noon he got hot lunch from home brought by a manservant, and this Ramaswamy took sitting in the cab itself, though the College authorities had provided a separate dining hall for students. It was not because he was very orthodox like his father. Neither was he caste-mad. It was only because he liked a little exclusiveness for himself along with two other dear friends of his.

In the *Presidency*, he enhanced his worth as a brilliant student. He became the pet of every professor, especially of his English tutor, Mr. J. B. Bilderberg. His assistant, Mr. Elliot was equally fond of him. Who won't? For, here was a boy who was thorough with his lessons in the class, clean in dress, clear-cut in manners, pleasing in appearance and perfect in general knowledge.

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Now he was in good company. He moved among two or three fellow-students intimately, though he was friendly with all. Often he figured prominently in the *socials* organized by the Principal Mr. Stewart, to entertain the 'senior students'.

Professor Bilderberg had the supreme satisfaction to see that Ramaswamy, whom he taught English, took a first class in that subject. Professor Rangachari who taught him Sanskrit was equally delighted to see the marvellous scholarship Ramaswamy had attained in that language. He also studied French and proved himself very proficient.

Besides his class lessons, Ramaswamy now cultivated an insatiable appetite to read books on politics. He often went through the volumes his

father had purchased for his own reading. The college students of those days were not politically-minded. They left politics alone as a problem for the elders. But Ramaswamy was an exception. He had a child-like curiosity to know all that was happening in a curious world.

In College he was interested very much in sports. Tennis became his pet game, football next. He played many sets of the game with great enthusiasm. His interest in it was such that once in a while he even ignored a class hour in order to play. One day, he left a history class all to itself and went to play tennis in the company of his intimate friends T. V. Muthukrishna Aiyer (now a lucrative lawyer in Madras) and Mr. Upendra Pai (a Civilian who is no longer alive to-day). It was three o'clock when

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they commenced play. Just then, father Pattabhirama Aiyer passed that way. His keen eyes which darted on everything and missed nothing, observed his son at play in the hot sun. He went away quietly.

That evening when Ramaswamy returned home, he was severely taken to task. The disciplinarian Judge was all hot in words. He could not see the wisdom of his son in choosing to play at a wrong hour. The next day Ramaswamy reported the whole story to his colleagues, Muthukrishna Aiyer and Pai.

While these three College fellows discussed about the incident, Principal Stewart's peon in his white dress and turban made an appearance before them. Would not the 'three' see the *Don* at once? Well, they had to. And they did.

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The bespectacled *Don*, having noticed the arrival of the three students in his presence, pulled out a drawyer of his desk and produced a four-page letter which Pattabhirama Aiyer had written him that morning.

"Now boys," said he, with a look as wise as the owl's and growled enquiring whether they shirked attendance of a class and played tennis the previous evening.

The youngmen looked at each other's face, quite amazed. There was no question of evading the truth. So the answer in chorus :

"Yes, Sir!"

"Very well," retorted the *Don*, "You are guilty and you deserve to be punished."

The Collegians cast grave looks at each other once again. They stood silent.

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“Quite right,” affirmed the Principal, “You are let off free this time. But remember, you should not play tennis again when Ramaswamy’s father passes along the College!”

The three youngmen came out of the Principal’s room in all smiles, while a crowd of students awaited for news about his disciplinary action.

Ramaswamy was very fond of English and Sanskrit recitals. The College *Union* of which he was Secretary, organized them from time to time. The students had debates and no debate passed off without Ramaswamy showing his genius as a speaker. With his clear intonation and tenor voice, with his scholarly arguments and impressive personality, he promised every one that he was a coming Ceceiro in India. Every one then prophesied that one day he would

become a towering leader of thought and action.

Sometimes he acted in the College dramas. When he played a part in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, his Sanskrit recitals and speech marvelled even the most scholarly *Pundit*.

Thus, after four years of College days, he left the *Presidency* taking away with him many honours and colours and leaving behind many pleasant memories which College days impress upon every bright student.

Then, as the family tradition would warrant it, he chose law for a career and graduated from the Law College at the age of twenty-three. By this time, Pattabhirama Aiyer had died. After retiring from Office as a City Civil Court Judge at the age of fifty-five he lived but for very few years. He did not even reach his sixtieth birthday.

II

LEGAL EMINENCE

THE year 1902. Ramaswamy Aiyer was now ready to start a career at the Bar. At this time, the loss of his father depressed him a little. Nevertheless, Pattabhirama Aiyer had already given him a sound training in law when he was at the Law College. This training immensely helped Ramaswamy Aiyer when he commenced his professional work.

One of the leading lawyers in the City of Madras when the twentieth century was born, was the late Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer. He was a remarkable man who later in life rose to the position of a Member in the Governor's Executive Council. Ramaswamy Aiyer went to him for

his apprenticeship in law. Though he was all brilliance in legal knowledge, yet it was essential that he should have some contact with an experienced and mature legal talent. This was fulfilled by his association with Krishnaswamy Aiyer within a year or two. Once he got what he wanted, Ramaswamy Aiyer commenced working independently.

In 1903, he was enrolled as a *Vakil* before the then Chief Justice Sir John Wallace. Krishnaswamy Aiyer himself moved the motion for enrolment. In doing so, he referred to Ramaswamy Aiyer's great family of lawyers and administrators and the youngman's own scholastic attainments and promising qualities of head and heart.

Right from the very start, Ramaswamy Aiyer showed remarkable

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skill as a lawyer. The first year was a bit dull in as much as he took little work in hand. Probably he might have that year, earned about five hundred rupees—a sum not so very negligible when compared to the earning standards of those years. From the second year onwards, he began a great harvest in the field of law. The Original Side in the High Court became his strong hold. Justice Boddam, a British Judge, who besides his official duties was also a welfare worker among Indians, took a great liking for this talented young lawyer who appeared before him with at least one case each day.

Ramaswamy Aiyer in those days was a *Glorious Figure*. Tall and handsome, he wore a *dhoty*, close coat and an *angavastram* around his shoulders. His face was radiating energy, and resembled a Rembrandt

painting. His sharp Roman nose, his sparkling round big eyes, his strong chin displaying his qualities of determination and unwavering will, the glittering diamond ear-rings on his well-spread ears, the white turban—everything presented him a majestic person. Withal that, he had an imperious look on the face, as a photograph taken in those days showed. Still, he had a very kind heart from which flowed the milk of human sympathy.

Clad in his black robes and white collar bands, carrying a flat rattan basket full of heavy volumes on law, he was a remarkable figure in the Original Side of the Madras High Court, presided over by Justice Boddam. Fellow lawyers sat watching this polar star like man when he was on his feet. The subtle legal arguments advanced by him as a result of

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deep learning, the God-given personality, the quick wit which fell from his lips when occasions arose, the dramatic nature in which he presented even a tough Civil suit,—all made his colleagues in the profession whince. But Ramaswamy Aiyer was not having even an iota of assumed ways in all that. He was what he actually was. In that way, there was not a single case of importance in the Original Side of the Court in which he failed to appear either for the one side or the other.

In 1914, C. V. Kumaraswamy Sastriar, his brother-in-law, was elevated to a Judgeship on the High Court Bench. He had been a successful lawyer. Now that he had been given office, he had to entrust all his legal work to some one else. Whom could he think of for it than Ramaswamy Aiyer, who was already

commanding an amazing practice?
That he did.

In any eminent lawyer's life, there comes a case of importance to immortalize him. Birkenhead, Carson, Rufus Isaacs, Marshall Hall,—all had theirs. It was so, with Ramaswamy Aiyer. In 1915, he was entrusted with the brief of a suit in which Mrs. Annie Besant and Bishop Leadbeater were asked to renounce the custody of two children in their care. One was Jeddu Krishnamurthi whom Besant declared a *Messiah*. The other was Nityanandan, his brother, who died in California, years ago.

Appearing for the father of Krishnamurthi, Ramaswamy Aiyer argued his case with the subtleties of a K. C. against Besant. The way he cross-examined the Bishop and Besant could excite even the envy of a Clarence

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Darrow. The case lasted for several weeks. It became a first class sensation in all Madras. The amazing powers of advocacy displayed by Ramaswamy Aiyer, were yet a second sensation.

Madame Besant carefully watched the man who asked her inconvenient and inescapable questions in the witness box. Here was an Indian lawyer who set in motion legal eminence in action by his brilliance and talents. Would she hate him for his powerful brain or would she applaud him for his genius? Herself a great intellectual, she began admiring him.

In the suit, she was her own lawyer. When it came to her for making a final statement before the Judge, she burst forth paying handsome tributes to Ramaswamy Aiyer with all her heart for the excellent

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manner in which he conducted the case on behalf of her opponent.

Chief Judge Sir Arnold White, who heard the case, delivered judgment in favour of Ramaswamy Aiyer. The custody of Krishnamurthy and his brother was removed from the Theosophist chiefs.

Ramaswamy Aiyer became a hero, for the whole case was a sensational affair. Madrasees sang the praise of this young lawyer full-heartedly. He was acclaimed as a legal luminary who would envelop all the glory in the profession in the succeeding years. Such a hope was more than fulfilled.

Madame Besant later preferred an appeal before the Privy Council in London against Sir Arnold's judgment. She won. At the same time, she sought the acquaintance of

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Ramaswamy Aiyer at closer quarters. They became intimate friends. He also became her staunch supporter when she inaugurated the *Home Rule* movement. For rousing up this agitation during the last world war years, Besant was imprisoned. The news was shocking to Ramaswamy Aiyer. He, who had already become the Secretary of the *Home Rule* League as well as the Indian National Congress along with Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, now made many stirring speeches to various audiences. Criminal Intelligence officials followed him to the meetings he attended. The Police pronounced him as *dangerous*. They saw *red* in his utterances. Lord Pentland, the Governor, studied his speeches with dismay. The Police chiefs made up their mind to arrest him. Once with full determination they went to hold him up at a meeting he addressed in

the *Marina*. When they arrived, they found that he had left the meeting after speaking. Then the Police did not persist in their determination to have him. He was left free to go his own way. Still, they continued to keep a watch over his words and ways.

Ramaswamy Aiyer showed remarkable loyalty to Madame Besant in her political activity, for loyalty to a friend is one of the outstanding qualities in this remarkable man. She, a fire brand political leader in the Home Rule days mellowed down her tones and became a *Moderate* in her political creed. So did Ramaswamy Aiyer. The General Secretary of the Indian National Congress under Tilak, soon changed into a *Moderate* politician when the Congress passed under Gandhiji's dictatorship. Both Besant and

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Ramaswamy Aiyer remained steadfast friends throughout that distinguished lady's life time. The story of that friendship could come to clear light only if he could find the time to write about it. But it was a genuine friendship between two intellectuals, each admiring the other. The regard of Besant for this marvellous man is evident when we see that in her final *Will*, she had left him one of her treasured silver caskets as a token of her affection and admiration for him.

III

R E B E L

RAMASWAMY AIYER'S life all these years was blessed with homely harmony. His devoted wife Seethammal was a heaven of retreat to him from his arduous daily duties at the Court and in the political spheres. She looked after him with great devotion. And he was in need of all the care and comfort she could give him. In 1909 their first son Pattabhira-man was born. Again, Seethammal bore him two more sons. They had no daughter. They sat together in his leisure hours, if at all he had any, in those years, and saw the children play and talk. The children were fond of the father who bestowed upon them all kinds of presents.

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Seethammal, like mother Rangammal, was an orthodox type of Brahmin lady. She was deeply religious. She visited temples regularly and performed the religious observances at home daily. She saw that the poor were fed from time to time and the *Pundits* helped. Her piety and religious outlook have attained story book fame in Madras. And it used to be said that her benevolent deeds invoked the blessings of the Gods towards the greater glory of her great husband.

Mother Rangammal lived happily with her son. Life meant to her only religious observances and the care of her grand-children. She, in those days, made it a point of daily visiting her family *Deity* at Conjeeveram and never felt any fatigue at having to travel eighty miles by automobile to do that.

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Now Ramaswamy Aiyer was already in politics. He was active as a member of the Indian National Congress and the Home Rule League. Earlier, he had become a Member of the Municipal Corporation in 1911. In the following year he was elected to the Senate of the Madras University. His name had become popular all over the Province by now. The British Rulers of the land began recognizing his worth, and that is evident from the invitation extended to him to attend the War Conference at Delhi. Secondly, he was invited to give evidence before the India Under-Secretary Montague when he visited this country in 1918 in connection with the Political Reforms.

Ramaswamy Aiyer met Montague in the Government House, Madras. The Madrasee lawyer baffled the

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eminent Jew. They had a lively discussion for an hour and they parted with a great deal of mutual admiration. "One of the cleverest men I have met in life," recorded Montague in his *Diary*, referring to Ramaswamy Aiyer. In similar vein, Montague's statesmanship was praised by Ramaswamy Aiyer in the course of an article he contributed to the Silver Jubilee number of the *Indian Review* in 1925.

In the summer of 1919, Ramaswamy Aiyer set sail for England from Bombay to give evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Reforms. He pleaded with British Statesmen for the grant of the highest political rights for India. His work in that connection over, he visited places of interest in England and France and returned home.

During the War, a novel agitation sprang up in South India. It was sponsored by a distinguished Merchant Prince in Sir P. Theagaroya Chetty and a famous medical man Dr. T. M. Nair. Side by side with the *Home Rule* agitation, Chetty and Nair started a political organization and baptized it the *Justice Party*. They said that the Brahmins, in spite of their numerical weakness, were nevertheless making the Non-Brahmins slaves! The Brahmins had all the vantage positions in the professions and the services and were *en bloc* suppressing the interests of Non-Brahmins. This was a grave injustice to the Non-Brahmins, the Justicites cried out. And in order to get justice, they started the Party, they asserted. The war cry against the Brahmins spread like wild fire and the Non-Brahmins of the Province soon found themselves awakened like

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new Christian converts among barbarians, under the *Justice* flag.

In 1919, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were announced and a general election took place. The *Justice Party* men swore that they would never allow a single Brahmin elected from the City of Madras. Four seats were allotted for the City and the *Justice Party* had put in four influential Non-Brahmins. Party leader Theagaroya Chetty himself was a candidate.

Then the elections came. A vitriolic bitterness against the Brahmins swept over the City as well as the Province. The City's walls were smeared with anti-Brahmin *slogans* and all kinds of obscenities. The Brahmins did not know what to do. They had been leaders of the people and their leadership should go on.

But on the face of such great anti-Brahmin propaganda, no one appeared to be willing to contest a *City Constituency*. At this time emerged Ramaswamy Aiyer, bold as a Roman warrior to take what he wanted. His nerves then seemed to demand the stimulus for a combat. He declared his candidature with a bold stroke and conducted a virulent election campaign in superb fashion. Many friends warned him of possible defeat but he, like Napoleon brushing aside Talleyrand's peevish advice, never gave ear to any prophet of pessimism. Unsigned letters were sent to him threatening his life should he dare to face the electorate. Rattle snakes were taken in clay pots and thrown into the lawns of *Grove*. Ramaswamy Aiyer merely smiled at all these threats and bleak methods of his opponents. He characterized all these as 'simple jokes', for, there was a

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heavy cargo of courage in his powerful hulk.

One day he was to address a public meeting of the electorate in a Madras theatre. He was warned ahead by some rough elements and told that he should not appear at the meeting. Nervous friends gave counsel. They begged of him not to go to the meeting. The riff-raff elements were determined to inflict injuries on his person. But he was not weakened in his plan to go.

As the evening crept in, Ramaswamy Aiyer was getting ready to leave home. He dressed himself in a suit of flawless European clothing and wore his matchless white turban. Then he pulled out a drawer of his desk and picked up his pistol. He put in a cartridge and fired a shot through the window, just to see whether the

weapon was in working order. When the gun-shot was heard mother Rangammal was frightened. She ran over to her son's room, only to find him smiling. "Nothing", he disarmed her fears in a single word and sent her away. Then with his loaded pistol in the pocket, he set out for the meeting.

The *Royal Theatre* in Madras was swarmed by human heads. *Roughs* had come determined for a combat. From the moment Ramaswamy Aiyer appeared before them, jeers, scrapping of feet and cat-calls went ringing in the whole house.

Ramaswamy Aiyer sat quiet for a while on the platform with the calmness of a Philosopher. He gazed at the sea of heads before him and heard the paid voices of the *hooligans* shout catch *slogans*. He was unmoved. His

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curved eye-brows now and then raised, his large eyes glared but all that was over soon. Then the usual genial smile was seen on his lips. He rose to speak. The shouts continued. But he was courageous.

"I have been warned that my life is at stake," said he "but I have come even at that risk. I am ready to defend myself even physically." So saying, he produced the pistol from his pocket and placed it on the table before him. Wild confusion now set in and the meeting had to be dissolved by the police. But the audience, without a single exception, admired the great courage this gifted Brahmin, who is a born leader of men, displayed. On his part he might have felt like Disreali :

"Ah, it is not my politics they dislike, it is myself."

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Then the election day dawned. The City would not let down a brave warrior. Since Gandhiji's Non-co-operation Movement had come in, a large number of his followers boycotted the elections. That way, many Madras Brahmins failed to record their votes. But many did vote for him. Even so, a large number of Non-Brahmins casted their votes for their “C.P.”. When the result of the poll was announced, he was second in the list. Sir P. T. Chetty was of course on the top. The difference between him and Ramaswamy Aiyer was said to be twenty votes.

In February 1920, that great Jurist, S. Srinivasa Aiyengar, resigned his office of Advocate-General. To fill the vacancy, Ramaswamy Aiyer was invited. He accepted this offer cheerfully, though he had refused a Judgeship earlier, saying that he “preferred

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to speak non-sense for a few hours from the Bar than to hear it from the Bench " !

In 1923 when Sir K. Srinivasa Ayiengar vacated office, Ramaswamy Aiyer was invited to fill that place in the Governor's Executive Council. His lucky star must have been then steadily on the ascending plane as astrologers in whom he had faith and whom he often consulted, might have foretold him. Yes, it was the will of a kindly Providence that he should be guided to greater destinies in life. But then, is Providence ever unkind to the deserving ?

IV

CABINET MINISTER

IN 1923 Ramaswamy Aiyer joined Lord Willingdon's *happy family* of Cabinet Councillors with a smile. Besides the European Members there, he found his friend Sir Mahomed Habibulla in it. But the three Justicite Ministers looked upon this newcomer with astonished eyes. That able Statesman the Raja of Panagal was the Chief Minister. With him were Sir A. P. Patro and the late Sir T. N. Sivagnanam Pillai. These Ministers were very much loyal supporters of the British Government. The Justicites somehow felt that the Indian National Congress was much of a Brahmin organization in South India. As such, they joined hands

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with the British officials to curb all Congress activity. South Indian Congressmen often made inflammatory speeches and the Government felt themselves compelled to use the laws strictly against Congressmen. On these matters, the Governor's Executive Councillors had a delicate task in deciding policies. Ramaswamy Aiyer who never wore any party badge at this time, held independent views. He was only concerned with the two sides of a question, the right and the wrong. He was primarily never influenced by communal considerations in any of his actions. But once he found that his opponents viewed a question in a communal light, he never gave way. He then rose to the occasion in fighting fashion and paid them back in their own coin. Though he fought hard with the Rajah of Panagal over administrative questions, they remained very good

personal friends to the last. For, Ramaswamy Aiyer, like Prince Von Bulow, believed that 'the relations of man to man has nothing to do with his political views'. Often these two statesmen disputed over administrative policies and walked up to the Governor with resignation letters in their pockets. Lord Goschen received them both calmly and played the part of 'peace-maker' and asked them to continue their good offices.

Ramaswamy Aiyer held office in a unique style. Since he came from the stern of the same tree which yielded a Napoleon or Bismark, he possessed the governing impulse to a remarkable degree.

In the Legislative Council he played a distinguished role. He was thorough with the problems he handled. He answered questions with ease.

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To have heard him speak in the House was to enjoy a pleasing performance in the realm of public speaking. His musical voice, his distinct pronunciations, his nods and peerings, his ready wit and quick retorts to interrupters, the manner of his delivery gazing at the face of his hearers with the romantic air intent on charming,—all made his listeners plunge into a world of delight. He had also a profound knowledge of the art of debate.

Once he described the British Government in Madras as "My Government of which Lord Goschen is the chief." The Justices rubbed their eyes and cupped their ears to hear that statement. "My Government, Mine! What a term!" they exclaimed. How could the *Government* be Ramaswamy Aiyer's?—they wondered. *Letters to the Editor* on

the subject appeared in the press. Club circles discussed the matter. Ramaswamy Aiyer merely smiled at all these twitters of callow Madras birds.

As a Member of the Governor's Executive Council he acquitted himself very well. To his lasting credit stand two important legislations which benefited mankind in South India. With the wisdom of Abel, he planned out the Mettur Project and the Pykara Scheme. The former irrigates 200,000 acres of once barren land and the latter gives electric power to a large area.

Ramaswamy Aiyer was blamed by his enemies for being pompous as an Executive Councillor. Antiquated doves often cooed that he held office in Curzonian regal splendour. For instance, it used to be said that when this *Flashing Figure* left on tours,

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traffic was held up from *Grove* to the Central Railway Depot in the City. One could never tell whether that was done after his orders or some satarp of a police official conceived the bright idea of pleasing the *Boss* by so doing. Even if the incident was true Madrasees had only to be proud of that, inasmuch as at least one Indian knew how to fill in a dignified office with all the dignity and regard he could command.

In accepting the post of Law Minister to the Government of Madras, he had to sacrifice much financially. With his rise to greater heights in life, he began spending money like water. The sixty thousand rupees he drew every year as salary was barely sufficient to meet all his expenses. At the Bar, he had earned as much as ten thousands per month. But now, his salary of five

thousands monthly proved very inadequate.

Much of his money in those days was spent to keep up the ever-increasing establishment at home. He maintained two or three motor cars, a fleet of servants, clerks and stenographers beside those the Government had allowed him. He was kind to those who served him but he would never entirely depend upon his workers for anything. What he had to do, he always did, in spite of the army of workers under him.

He had with him no objectionable habits. He is a pure vegetarian, teetotaler and non-smoker though he is no visionary to think that, by the stroke of the pen, you could free men from the drink and narcotic habits. He had no monomania for the races or fortunes from the turf.

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On the other hand, he spent a good amount of money to maintain a rich table, entertain friends and to help the needy who approached him. He lavishly gave donations to schools, clubs, social work institutions and presents to friends when suitable occasions arose. All these items of expenditure drained his purse heavily. As such, he had no other go in those days than to spend money drawn from his private fortune as well. Unlike some Justicites who built up their family fortunes by holding office as Executive Councillors, Ramaswamy Aiyer had to even lose a bit of his family fortune in attempting to hold up the dignity of his office as Vice-President of the Governor's Executive Council.

Ramaswamy Aiyer's industry and earnestness of purpose is unrivalled among any South Indian of to-day. He

is a master of the method, the method of thoroughness. Be it an election campaign, a garden party, a public address or a press interview, he would discharge all his obligations in full. Once a very tricky revenue problem came up for discussion before the Executive Council and no one understood anything about it in detail. Ramaswamy Aiyer himself was not so sure about the nature of the problem for ready handling. The meeting was then adjourned. It was noon. Returning home, he sent out his clerks and secretaries to hunt for reference books on the subject. A hundred volumes were produced. Ramaswamy Aiyer sat up in his study room soaring like a lark and went through all the books. He jotted down notes and wrote out a masterly memorandum. The whole night he had sat up to work and it was dawn when he went to bed.

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The next morning, he presented the memorandum to the Governor. The knotty question was after all then easily solved. Such industry, such earnestness of purpose and devotion to duty are exceptional qualities in this remarkable man.

Once a censure motion against *his* "Government of which Lord Goschen is the Chief" was threatened in the Legislative Council. The day the motion was to be moved dawned. From the very early hours a stream of visitors, mostly legislators swarmed his residence. He received them all and bade them sit down in the chairs arranged on the green lawns of *Grove*. They all sat discussing the motion. Just then a writer wanting a 'foreword' for one of his books made his appearance there. Noticing him, Ramaswamy Aiyer excused himself from the gathering, went up to his

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study, called his Secretary aside and dictated a few lines. The typed sheet of 'foreword' was handed over to the writer. Then he went back and joined the gathering within ten minutes' time. The writer who went to see him was quite astonished at the brisk and prompt manner in which he obliged him. "He was that day the usual C. P., smiling, wise-cracking and jocular. In fact, he remained as cool as a cucumber about that censure motion" the writer recorded somewhere.

In 1926, the Justice Ministry went out of office and Dr. P. Subbaroyan came in with a new Ministry. With the Doctor, Ramaswamy Aiyer's dealings were easier, for, he was a sporting type of a politician.

In September of that year, he went to Geneva as an Indian

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Representative to the Assembly of the League of Nations. In the following year, too, he went to Europe on a similar mission.

In 1928, Ramaswamy Aiyer's five years of office as Executive Councillor terminated. He laid down office with the same cheerful heart with which he accepted it. No man ever adorned that office in a more brilliant fashion, wielding special powers within the given sphere than he.

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ONCE again, Ramaswamy Aiyer was back at the Bar. His Law Chamber in the High Court was dusted and cleaned, chairs arranged. He was seen at his desk again chatting with clients and discussing the *briefs* he had taken. His old clients found him the same genial personality and obliging custodian of their interests. Only he had come back to practise law with the enviable distinctions of a knighthood and a *companionate of the Indian Empire*, tacked up to his name.

He started work with renewed vigour, and he started well once again. But then a great calamity soon befell him. It was the death of

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Seethammal, a true participator of his existence. Ramaswamy Aiyer was at Bangalore when she passed away. Their eldest son Pattabhiraman was away in England, having gone there to take up studies in law. Only her two sons and mother Rangammal were at her bedside. This event moved Ramaswamy Aiyer a great deal. She, who had been a sheet anchor to him in his most depressed moments from official and professional cares, was no more. Their thirty-eight years of married life now came on him as a dream of the past.

Ramaswamy Aiyer is a power-worshipper like Napoleon or Mussolini. As such, he might have regarded woman as a sauce to the pudding of life, but never as the pudding itself. He showed the utmost courtesy to women but, as every power-worshipper should be, he was never influenced

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by them in any of his actions. For him, ambition was a stronger sentiment than love. Women who came across him were of course dazzled by his brilliant personality, facial charm and sweet manners as they generally felt before any handsome man. No wonder. Even men were hypnotized by his stirring personality.

1928 was an exciting year in India. The Royal Commission on Indian Reforms under the leadership of Sir John Simon had arrived and the Commissioners were carrying on their duties on the face of mass demonstrations and boycott campaigns. Ramaswamy Aiyer was now a prominent member of the *Liberal* Party which had as its leaders many eminent men like the Rt. Hon. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastriar, Sir Phiroze Sethna and Sir. C. Y. Chintamani.

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These men had denounced the Commission, for, it did not include even a single Indian. Ramaswamy Aiyer also criticized the blunder of the First Earl of Birkenhead, then Secretary of State for India, for selecting the Commissioners that way. But when the Commission arrived in Madras, Ramaswamy Aiyer did not hesitate to honour Sir John Simon, the great lawyer by giving him a grand garden party on the lawns of *Grove*.

The press criticized Ramaswamy Aiyer as a turn-coat in political views for entertaining Sir John. He, on his part, did not explain nor did he complain about the criticisms thus levelled against him. But then the truth is that the *Party* merely meant an honour done to a great lawyer by another legal luminary. It was not the Chairman of the Commission that

Ramaswamy Aiyer chose to honour but the wizard of the English Bar.

He continued to practise at the Bar without break for a time. Then, one day while arguing a case at Nellore, Ramaswamy Aiyer felt a little giddy and walked out of the court hall. The man who had shouldered three decades of strenuous brain work was now feeling that all was not well with his physical frame. He was then forty-nine. Not that any one else was more careful about one's own health than he. He had always maintained regular habits each day, rode on horse-back for several years in the mornings to keep fit, and took all preventive measures to have his health rosy at all times. In fact, he had never been 'sick' in the strictest sense of the term. Still, even to the ablest doctor of preventive medicine, nerves had

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always been a problem. So it was with Ramaswamy Aiyer at this time. Now he decided that he would no more undertake nerve-shattering suits for argument. Instead, he chose to contend himself with the abundant 'chamber practice' he could command.

In the same year, the Butler Enquiry Committee on the Indian States problem was at work in India. In this connection Ramaswamy Aiyer was given the brief to represent the interests of Cochin before the Committee. Two years later, he was chosen as a member of the sub-committee formed by the Government of India to examine the question of inter-relations between British India and the Indian States, in the coming Federal India. He was then nominated to sit in the First Round Table Conference on Indian Reforms assembled in London. For a term, he

was also acting Law Member to the Government of India.

The question of the Indian Federation soon became more important. The Chamber of Indian Princes became very alert now and held periodic meetings. They formed a special Committee to go into the question and had Ramaswamy Aiyer as Chairman.

In 1932, he was invited to fill the important post of Commerce Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council for a few months.

Amidst momentous labours in India itself, Ramaswamy Aiyer had to sail for England in 1933 to attend the meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee. He then represented India at the World Economic Conference also. Back again in India, he

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drafted a new political Constitution for Kashmere in 1934.

In 1931 the Earl of Willingdon, than whom no Briton knew India better, became Viceroy. He and the Countess of Willingdon had been intimate friends of Ramaswamy Aiyer. Now the friendship was once again renewed. For the next five years this distinguished Madrasee was often consulted by the Viceroy in matters of great importance. In 1936, Willingdon laid down office and sailed for Home. Ramaswamy Aiyer entertained him in a brilliant banquet in saying farewell.

Now Ramaswamy Aiyer's gifts both as a man of affairs and lawyer became well known in Northern India. Crowned heads went up to him for legal advice. His palatial suit in the *India Hotel* at Delhi became the

venue of many discussions between himself and many Ruling Chiefs of Hindustan.

Those were days in which the Princes spent millions on eminent lawyers for consultations in connection with the Federation problem. Fat sums were paid to men like Sir Leslie Scott. But the only two Indian lawyers to have a share in the money thus spent by the Princes were Sir Tej Sapru and Ramaswamy Aiyer. Apart from that kind of work, he was also engaged by the late Ruler of Patiala to defend him before a Government of India Enquiry Committee. His prosecution of a Delhi editor on behalf of the Nawab of Bhopal for defamation received wide attention in the Indian Press.

Leisure was alien to him in those years. Political and legal work

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engaged all his attention. Still, he is a man of first class literary taste. The book-sellers hoarded him with the best books published from season to season. He made it a point to continue his reading habits. Artists thrust-ed on him their master-piece paintings and he delighted himself by giving whatever encouragement he could offer them. He devoured journals and newspapers regularly. For this busy man, no work was more important than sparing one or two hours each day to keep himself well informed of everything that is going on under the sun, by reading. He contributed articles to magazines in response to invitations from editors and wrote literary criticisms of the books he read.

One such criticism was seen when he reviewed the Countess of Minto's book on her husband's Viceroyalty.

Ramaswamy Aiyer's review of this important publication was exhaustive, inasmuch as the *Hindu* gave two full columns to print it prominently on the editorial page. The review was eminently illuminative and scholarly.

Besides reading and writing he accepted a number of speaking engagements. A lecture on *Indian Federation* in the Mysore University, a series of *Tagore Law lectures* in the Calcutta University, a *Convocation Address* before the Delhi University, a lecture in Ceylon on the *Origin of the Universe* and how socialistic tendencies would flood Britain in course of time, an address before the Osmania University Union in Hyderabad on *India a hundred years hence*,—all he undertook with unremitting zeal and enthusiasm, moving himself from place to place with the hurry of the wind, often flying in aeroplanes.

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For, he firmly believed with Cowper that the 'best of every man's performance here is to discharge the duties of his sphere'.

In this period of his life, Ramaswamy Aiyer became the most discussed man in India. He was in the news every day. Papers gave prominent space to record his activities. His pictures were regularly flashed on their pages. They printed his 'interviews' and biographical sketches as items of importance. He was delighted to see all that, for, he always loved to hear the echos of his own thunder.

At intervals, this *Glorious Figure* to whom life had been a grand procession from manhood to this date, was subjected to domestic calamities. First his father, then his wife and now in 1934 his beloved mother,—all

passed away. When Rangammal, at her seventy-second year died, he was away in Bombay. The news stunned him.

Like Northcliffe, Ramaswamy Aiyer used to send her telegrams during his European tours. He allotted a lot of money for her to spend on the various religious observances that interested her. In short, he made her life happy in every way. Now that she was dead, he felt the loss keenly. When the news reached him in Bombay, he was amidst cumbersome labours connected with the Princes Chamber. He withdrew at once and attempted to fly to Madras. A 'plane not being available, he had to travel by train to attend the funeral and perform the ceremonies connected with it.

VI

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THE Maharajah Shri Chitra Thirunal of Travancore was eighteen years of age in 1931. He was to be placed on the Throne after a period of five years of Regency by his aunt Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai. In this connection there were certain vital matters which had to be brought to the notice of the Government of India. This task was entrusted into the capable hands of Ramaswamy Aiyer. The manner in which he handled the affair won the appreciation of the Ruler and his mother.

At that time, the question of the Indian Federation was an item of great importance in the Indian

political world. On what terms the States would join the Federation, what rights the Princes would enjoy in a Federal India, these and other questions engaged the attention of every Prince. To help Travancore in these, the Maharaja, soon after his accession to the Throne appointed Ramaswamy Aiyer, a 'trusted friend of the family' as his Legal and Constitutional Adviser. No better man who understood the problem of Indian Princes was available in all South India. As such, it was all to the advantage of Travancore that he accepted the job on a salary of fifty thousand a year.

He who takes a delight in helping the needy, he who has helped many a struggling man to succeed in the world now considered it nothing short of a mission in life to assist a young Prince to rule his country to the admiration

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of all. With that single object only did he accept office.

Ramaswamy Aiyer was no stranger to Travancore then. In the later eighties, Pattabhirama Aiyer took him to Trivandrum whenever he went there to meet his friend Shankar Subbier, who was then Dewan.

In 1913 when Mr. Ashe, a sub-collector was murdered in Tinnavelly, a prosecution was launched against the assassins. In the course of the case, evidence was forthcoming that the murder was committed by anarchists who had plotted the crime at Punalloor in Travancore. In this connection, the late Sir P. Rajagopalachari, the then Dewan, sought the services of Ramaswamy Aiyer to watch the case on behalf of the Travancore Government. He accepted the offer and submitted a memorandum later.

Again, two Syrian Christian sections in Travancore carried on a great ecclesiastical dispute in 1921. The matter was taken to Court. The *Marthoma* and *Patriarch* parties quarelled. Ramaswamy Aiyer accepted a *brief* on behalf of the *Patriarchs*.

Thus, he had a few connections with Travancore even before he became Constitutional Adviser to the State in 1931. He knew the country and her people so well. Such knowledge was all to his advantage.

Soon after accepting office, Ramaswamy Aiyer gave the State a new political Constitution based on the *Joint Electorate* principle. Elections to the legislature was based on territorial considerations. This Constitution was welcomed by the people as a far reaching reform. People glorified its maker. Later on,

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communal feelings developed among the people. Particularly, the Christians and the *Harijans* gave vent to shrill cries of indignation.

The year 1934. Enter Sir Mahomed Habibulla as Dewan. He who had been a very successful administrator in British India was now faced with difficult communal problems. Sir Mahomed with the best of intentions decided to award reservation of a few seats for the minority communities. In theory, the new change which he effected appeared good. But when the elections came, the minorities were exploited by tactical Christian leaders. This was an ugly development which produced unforeseen evils.

After two years of office, Sir Mahomed resigned. Ramaswamy Aiyer succeeded him. The press

paid a tribute to the out-going Dewan and welcomed the new incumbent in glowing terms. Ramaswamy Aiyer told pressmen that he was taking office to solve the communal problem, improve the country's agricultural needs and then, initiate a scheme of industrialization in the State.

Two months after he became Dewan, His Highness the Maharaja issued a great Proclamation, which won him the applause of the whole civilized world. He ordered by it that all the Government temples in the State should be thrown open to the *Harijans*. In brief, His Highness was keen to see that there existed no partial treatment among his Hindu subjects in the matter of religious worship. Ramaswamy Aiyer had the treasure of good sense to advise the Ruler on this great reform.

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This *charity state* had been a hunting ground for new converts to Christianity for centuries. The successive rulers willingly helped missionary enterprises in the name of religious toleration. This aided the missionaries steadily to take in a stream of *Harijans*. They changed their faith only because they were denied equality of social status for centuries within the Hindu fold. Now that the proclamation had given them justice, they were no longer keen to embrace Christianity. On the other hand, the ever increasing converts were welcomed by Christian political leaders in Travancore. They took this feature as a sign of their growing strength in the State. They now viewed the purpose of the Proclamation with feelings of suspicion. They said that Ramaswamy Aiyer was hitting at their interests.

The orthodox Hindus in the state viewed Ramaswamy Aiyer as a smasher of sacred traditions. The Hindu Mahasabha folks hailed him as a 'saviour of Hinduism'. But the truth is that he had to advise the Maharaja to issue that Proclamation only because he was firmly convinced that the *Harijans* should no longer be subjected to indignities on account of social ostracism.

Ramaswamy Aiyer soon set out working in all round directions. He gave relief to the peasants by remission of taxes, systematized the export of Travancore fish abroad, founded a University for the state with *technical education* as the basis, effected reforms to develop the enormous forest resources in the country, established a State Bank, gave a stimulus to the cottage industries, a State transport system, reorganized the secretariat

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working order and a lot of other minor reforms, all in the best interests of the State. He carried on his administration based on reason and resolution.

He then hit upon the idea of providing the State with better irrigational and electricity facilities. At Pallivasal in North Travancore, he initiated a scheme to generate power. Once this scheme is completed, Ramaswamy Aiyer will be thrice blessed as the man who gave the country 'light and energy'.

The Christians in Travancore, particularly the Malayalee Christians have of late become very prosperous. In the North, they controlled plantations, banks, commercial enterprises, educational institutions. Once they had all that, they were after political power. This they hoped to gather by

swelling their ranks with the new converts to their religion. But the Temple Entry Proclamation had given them a rude shock. It also blocked their path from realizing their ambitions. They held Ramaswamy Aiyer responsible for all that. They publicly stated that he was a sworn enemy of Christianity! Then they lost no time to begin a campaign in order to force the resignation of the Dewan. But they never considered for a moment deeply whether Ramaswamy Aiyer was after all the man to be frightened away by primitive methods of attack.

Well then, the Christians were primarily responsible for setting up an agitation in Travancore in 1938. They obtained support from certain 'disappointed' Hindus. They organized a party and called it the *State Congress*. The first thing they then

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did was to present a petition to the Maharaja containing certain vague commissions, omissions and sins of Ramaswamy Aiyer as Dewan. The Ruler calmly ignored the petition. He, a watchful Sovereign knew everything in the correct light. Secondly, they approached Mr. Skrine, the Political Agent of the Viceroy in South India, with a tirade against the Dewan. Mr. Skrine too ignored them. Once these misguided men got a cold reception at the hands of the Maharaja and Mr. Skrine, they changed their designs. Now they began saying that the State Congress wanted '*Responsible Government*' for Travancore! They approached Gandhiji and he began issuing periodic statements supporting the agitators. Ramaswamy Aiyer lost no time in retorting to the Mahatma that he was being misguided in his pronouncements on Travancore. He further reminded the saintly man

all his own *Himalayan* blunders in politics. In short, he asked the Mahatma to keep his hands off from Travancore affairs. No, the old soul would not. He continued to talk vaguely about Travancore in season and out of season. This attitude of Gandhiji was emphatically resented by Ramaswamy Aiyer. His indignation is evident from his words ;

"There are some persons who too often look at Travancore through coloured glasses. One of them is Mahatma Gandhi...I consider it unfortunate that eminent personages who by the saintliness of their life and lofty ideals have earned the just appreciation of the people both within and outside, should listen to the stories conveyed to them by interested narrow-minded doctrinaire and personally malignant and disappointed folk with no following."

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The agitation for Responsible Government started violently in the early part of 1938, though 'non-violence' was the watch word of the agitators. The Dewan adopted a militant policy and suppressed the agitation all too quickly. Then Gandhiji told the agitators that they should either fight for Responsible Government or for the removal of the Dewan from office. The agitators first said that they wanted both. Gandhiji did not agree. He advised his so-called followers to withdraw the petition against the Dewan, presented to the Ruler. Half-heartedly, the agitators did that. They were, in the meantime, imprisoned and released often for breaking the laws. Finally, Gandhiji threw them overboard without ceremony saying that his technique of *Satyagraha* was not being correctly understood by his supposed followers! Then the

whole agitation crumbled down to dust like a pillar of rotten granite.

In July 1939, the agitators' leaders sought an interview with the Dewan to discuss Constitutional Reforms for the State. Ramaswamy Aiyer received them with royal courtesy. He was then the very soul of hospitality to them. He did not refuse the interview as did the Dewan of Mysore to the State Congressites there. The talks were carried on in a friendly atmosphere. But Ramaswamy Aiyer at the very outset pointed out to the leaders that they should, first of all, give up the idea of expecting outside help in tackling Travancore's problems. The talks were inconclusive when the war broke out in Europe in the month of September. Then, even as the Viceroy Linlithgow abandoned the idea of the Federal Scheme, Ramaswamy Aiyer declared that

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Responsible Government was a question to be thought over only after the war came to an end.

The agitators were dissatisfied. They took a pilgrimage to Wardha once again. They told the Mahatma grandiose tales about the administration of Ramaswamy Aiyer. The saintly leader believed them as truthful and pronounced judgment. He said that by postponing consideration of reforms, Ramaswamy Aiyer was ill-serving the State and his Sovereign. The Dewan had his prompt retort to Gandhiji. He said that it was for the people of Travancore to judge the worth of his services to the State and the Ruler and not for Gandhiji!

In principle, the agitation in Travancore and Mysore was said to be for Responsible Government. But Gandhiji who saw 'black spots' in

everything that the Travancore Government did in dealing with agitators, never found anything wrong in the Mysore Government's repressive ways against them. He had not a word to say against Sir Mirza Ismail or his team of officers who imprisoned as many as a thousand agitators in that State. Even a Mahatma was after all a human being with his passionate prejudices and partial likings between man and man!

The agitators in Travancore had no correct idea as to why the Dewan postponed the talks on reforms. So it seemed. Since the war started, his correspondence with the Government of India increased by leaps and bounds, all on the war question. Travancore, along with the other Indian States, had to copy all the legislations the Government of India passed from time to time as war measures. These items

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required a good deal of consideration. He had daily to see visitors, pay surprise visits to the secretariat offices. For all that, Ramaswamy Aiyer had only twenty-four hours in a day to work on. Discussions relating to Constitutional Reforms must be carried on only in convenient times and in a congenial atmosphere. The Dewan could hardly find the time now for such discussions on the face of ever so many other more-pressing duties. Hence, he had to postpone the Reforms talks. The agitators could have better understood all that in the correct light. A little patience on their part could have achieved wonderful results.

The agitators too deserved sympathy. They hastily launched an agitation and excited the masses for no fruitful purpose. Now, if they quietly suspended the agitation, the

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people would pronounce them as *unworthy* and *untrustworthy* for leadership. Therefore, they had to keep on doing something. So they once again commenced a campaign of disorder in the month of November. The Government promptly imprisoned them under the *Defence of Travancore Act*, in the interest of peace.

In November 1938 there was suspicion about Ramaswamy Aiyer's continuance in office as Dewan. That was solely due to the virulent and misleading propaganda of the agitators in the State. But a year later, the vast majority of the people understood him better. A new wave of confidence on him surged over the whole State. They had then nothing but respect and gratitude for him. The people of Travancore, especially the poor people who suffered greatly during the 1914 World War due to increased

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food prices, were now gratified to see the prompt measures he took to control prices when the present war broke out. "Verily, he works only for our own welfare" every one said.

On November 10, 1939 Ramaswamy Aiyer's *Shashtyabdapurthi* (completion of sixty years of life) was celebrated all over Travancore in a triumphant manner. It was perhaps the most moving day of his life. Congratulatory *addresses* were presented to him. He was also entertained in a magnificent garden party. His thousands of friends all over India and abroad sent him telegrams wishing many happy returns of the day.

The citizens of Madras looked at the celebrations in Trivandrum with envious eyes. Madras should have celebrated the event in a more superb

fashion, for it was Madras he served for nearly twenty-five years. But Ramaswamy Aiyer had now stuck himself to Travancore, which he served with all devotion. The reward for all that would be seen only when he leaves the State. But there is not the least shadow of a doubt that he would figure on the pages of history as the boldest, ablest and the most distinguished of all the Dewans Travancore had.

VII

AN ESTIMATE

ONE day towards the end of 1938 there was a mass meeting on the Madras *Marina*. Two or three leaders of the agitation for Responsible Government in Travancore addressed the gathering. The meeting over, a smartly dressed youngman who was seated on the sands with his lovely young wife asked her whether she knew anything about Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer whom the speakers referred to in their speeches. The woman pleaded ignorance beyond saying that she had heard of that name. She then evinced a curiosity to know all about him.

“The Prime Minister of Travancore to-day is the most loved and most

hated of all South Indians" the youngman commenced his narrative.

"He is the type of man born once in a century perhaps" he continued.

"Nature, having moulded a genius breaks the mould, it is said. Truly, C. P. is a genius. As a scholar, administrator, lawyer, politician and patron of the arts, he stands alone in a class all by himself. There are few to be compared with him in India, considered in the light of multifarious labours and magnificent achievements. But the trouble is that he is a rebel. He has the courage to stand up against popular beliefs and opinions. Hence, he is sometimes misrepresented in the Press and on the platforms by his enemies. But even they, in their heart of hearts, know the superb man that C. P. is.

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"You mean that he is a non-Congressman and that he fights out Gandhiji's opinions?" the little thing enquired here of her husband.

"Exactly " he replied softly.

"Gandhiji criticized C. P. often under a misunderstanding. The Mahatma thinks that Travancore should have Responsible Government just now. But he fails to understand that communal feelings in the State are bitter and any change in the form of Government would bring in awful eventualities. Once the various communities are united amongst themselves, C. P. would be the first man to advise the Ruler to grant Responsible Government and thereby earn the greater goodwill of all Travancore.

"It is said that to rule men you should be either superior to them or

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despise them. The wonder is that he, a superior man despises men also. And he is successful!

"That apart" the man proceeded to speak

"You have to understand C. P. the *humane* man. A trustworthy friend, he is large, magnanimous and generous to a foe. I have known him helping his sworn enemies when occasions arose. I have known him helping all sorts of people without in the least considering any social dividing lines. He is also a witty talker who is never bitter. The philosophy of his life appears as 'to enjoy life and help others to enjoy it, without harming any one.'

"Then, as an administrator, his record is unmatched. Suppose he had been the first Congress Premier

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in Madras ? This business of Government here would have been entirely different. People sometimes mistake him for an autocrat. Far from it. He does not at all believe in ruling people with a mailed fist. But at the same time, he is no blind believer in theoretical *ahimsa*.

“There was a mill-strike in Madras during his Executive Councillorship. The Police and the Governor thought that fire should be opened on the unruly mob to maintain order. C. P. protested. Equally he was against the use of the *sedition clause* in the Criminal Procedure Code against any political offender.

“If C. P. is challenged by any one he always accepts the challenge with a smile. The Travancore agitators challenged his office, Mahatma Gandhi challenged his administrative ways

and the Indian National Congress challenged his methods with the agitators. He accepted all these challenges and stood up to them bravely. For, you should remember that he was born in a battle-field. So essentially, he is a fighter. He fought over his fellow students for proficiency in his school days, fought with fellow-lawyers to win the suits he handled, fought elections with the Justicites, fought Gandhiji, the Congress and the Government of India on the question of Federation! In fact, he has been fighting throughout his life. Now he has to fight a handful of agitators in Travancore! Everywhere he has been succesful because he is a powerful man. And he is certain of his course just as an experienced navigator.

"Ibzen said that the 'strongest man is he who stands alone.' In the

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first half of the twentieth century South India has not seen a stronger man than C. P. and he always stood alone. His strength comes from his earnestness of purpose, clear-cut ways and his devotion to duty which he considered as the only way to glory. The tree of life had borne him many rich fruits."

The youngman talked on, his wife listened. Then he stopped. The evening breeze from the Bay of Bengal began blowing hard. The waves struck on the shore line with greater force and roared. The *Marina* road was getting more and more deserted. The early darkness of the evening vanished. And a full-round moon rose above the horizon in the East. The Couple calmly gazed at the cool monster in the sky. Moved by admiration, the woman said pointing out to the moon:

"It is so glorious!"

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"Yes, indeed, C. P.'s life too has been glorious."

They both then rose up and walked away arm-in-arm.