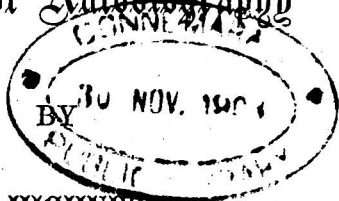


For Private Circulation.

Outlines of Autobiography



HIS HIGHNESS

RAMA VARMA G. C. S. I., F. M. U.

MAHARAJA OF TRAVANCORE.



COTTAYAM :

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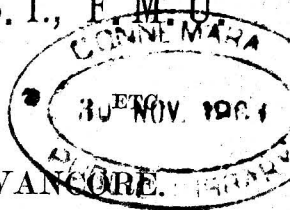
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MAHARAJA OF TRAVANCORE.

THE Native State of Travancore is in subsidiary alliance with the British Indian Government. The Treaty in force is that of 1809, between the Marquis of Wellesley and the then Raja. Two years after that Treaty, the Raja died, leaving no lineal issue. More than 20 years before his death, and in the reign of his predecessor, the celebrated Ram Raja, two girls had been adopted from the collateral branch of the Palli Kovilakam stock residing at Mavelikarāy.

It should be remembered that in Keralam or Malayalam there is no sacred or religious marriage except among the Brahmins, and that the line of descent is through the females. Hence a family never becomes extinct by the absence of males, while it does if no females exist: and hence females are adopted to perpetuate the family. Of the two ladies so adopted, the elder left two daughters and one son. The boy died in childhood, and the two girls survived the Raja who died in 1811. The younger lady and her only daughter had died earlier. Thus, at the time of the Raja's death there were the two daughters named, respectively, Lakshmi Bhye and Parvati Bhye, and a daughter of Lakshmi Bhye, named Rukmini Bhye. Lakshmi Bhye ascended the throne, but after a four year's reign, and after giving

birth to two brothers to Rukmini Bhye, died. Parvati Bhye held regency till her sister's eldest son came to manhood, but she herself was childless. Thus, there was Rukmini Bhye alone to perpetuate the family. She gave birth to seven children, and the subject of this brief Memoir is the last of them. A brother and sister of his died in infancy, and another sister in 1857 leaving two boys. The eldest and the sixth have been settled imbeciles from years past. Thus, the present Maharaja, and his namesake and immediate predecessor, were alone available for the throne.

The Maharaja was born on the 19th May 1837. His age and the reign of Her Majesty the Queen are therefore very nearly coeval. At the end of the eighth week after his birth his mother died; and his grand aunt, Parvati Bhye, tended him with more than motherly care and affection. From his very birth he was of delicate health, and it is said that the shock which his mother received six days before his birth by the death of another child, in a great measure affected his constitution. Probably a delicate constitution, under otherwise favourable circumstances, is not an unmixed evil in a Native Court; and Prince Rama Varma had the rare fortune of being trained chiefly by his father, Koil Thampuran of Tiruvalla, a nobleman of spotless character, great intelligence, complete self-control, and a very strict disciplinarian. He was a ripe Sanscrit scholar, and knew English so far as to understand the substance of any paper read to him. Lord Macaulay's words in reference to the Marquis of Rockingham, that "Calumny itself could not couple his name with corruption" may well be applied to him; and such a man must stand in honorable relief in any Indian society, and far more so in a Native Court. It was under such a parent that Prince Rama Varma received his early training; and in his inner man he bears the vivid impress of that prototype.

A little anecdote may be here inserted betokening the self command and sympathetic heart of which the Prince presented glimpses in his tenderest years. His elder uncle

reigning when he was some 5 or 6 years of age ; and his grand aunt and his uncle's aunt, Parvati Bhye, after her Regency, was living in the residence where the ladies and children usually live. The Maharaja was in the habit of calling and paying his respects to his venerated aunt and guardian once in three or four days. It was on one of such days that the young Prince had a fall while playing, and cut his upper lip badly, which bled profusely. Every effort of his nurse to stanch the blood was fruitless. Just then the State-pipe announced the arrival of the Maharaja; when every child in the family was required to array and do devoir to him. That Maharaja was a miniature of Louis XIV of France, and exacted observance of State etiquette as punctiliously. The bleeding Prince could not be withheld. He could not be presented in that state. The poor nurse was *in extremis* and wept piteously. The Prince told her not to fear, and assured her that he would never remove his hand from his mouth, which according to Travancore manners, must, as a mark of respect, be covered in the presence of Royalty and of other very great men. And the Prince kept his word strictly and the nurse was saved.

As usual in his family, Prince Rama Varma began his Sanskrit—Malayalam instruction in his fifth year, and in his ninth year, his English. As a matter of form it was Ex-Dewan Subba Rao, the whilom Tutor of the Maharaja, that first sounded into his ears the English alphabet. Was not Subba Rao unconsciously sowing the acorn ! His studies in his earlier days were often interrupted by bodily ills. Nevertheless, whenever he did go to his studies he did it seriously. He was perfectly obedient to his masters and never did a thing perfunctorily. He never grumbled unless he reasoned to himself that his masters were unjustly exacting a task from him as compared with his school fellows. No authority galled him—No discipline fretted him—But injustice, in however trivial a concern, was, *from principle*, revolting to him. If he was ever wayward, it was not on account of self, but on account of what he thought to be right or wrong. Besides English and Sanskrit he learn't

Hindi and Mahratta. In the way of physical training he had gymnastic exercise and riding. He was very fond of these manly exercises, but bodily ailments often intervened and incapacitated him. Early in 1849 he was seriously ill, and was pronounced to be decidedly consumptive. But we often see the saving mercy of Heaven just when human hopes die out, and under such an intervention he rallied.

Prince Rama Varma had not completed his tenth year when his elder uncle, the Maharaja, died, and was succeeded by his younger uncle, Martanda Varma, early in 1847. General W. Cullen, who represented the Madras Government in Travancore during very nearly 20 years, did never pull well with the deceased Maharaja, but with his brother and successor was very intimate and influential. He had long perceived and strongly advocated the necessity of giving a superior English Education to the young Princes of the Travancore Royal Family. The then English Tutor to Prince Rama Varma and his brothers, was a native of Travancore, trained in the earlier days of the Church Mission College at Cottayam, by that venerable Missionary the Rev. H. Baker. He was an awe inspiring master, but English education had made such strides since his school days that he had become too antiquated for practical purposes. It was high time to provide in his room a thoroughly qualified man.

In 1842 Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Madras, had inaugurated a new era in the higher education of Natives by the opening of the "High School." This was the outcome of a warm controversy between the secular educationists of the day, headed by the late Mr. George Norton, and the Missionary party with men like the late Rev. C. Anderson in its front ranks. It may be safely said that no single European ever stirred the Madras native society by his powerful eloquence, cheered it in its onward progress by his own exemplary zeal, and guided it by his consummate ability, as Mr. George Norton, then advocate General. It was such a man that took the chief part in shaping Lord Elphinstone's educational policy. The selection of a Principal for the new High School was a most happy one.

Mr. Eyre Burton Powell, then fresh from Cambridge where he had won distinction, was appointed. Events spreading over more than 30 years have proved that Mr. Powell is fully entitled to be called the Arnold of Madras. He was singularly fortunate in the selection of the first batch of students, who have by their after-school lives abundantly justified the thorough intellectual and moral training given by him—a training very different from the modern high pressure cramming of the Indian Universities. It was just when these young men had taken, or were taking their “Proficients’” Degree, that General Cullen’s requisition went forth for a suitable English Tutor to the young Princes of Travancore. The choice of the Marquis of Tweeddale’s Government, with the advice of Messrs Norton, Powell, and others, fell on Madhava Rao, who after having acted for Mr. Powell himself as Principal, was then employed in the Accountant General’s office. The choice of Madhava Rao was as happy as that of Mr. Powell himself. And further, as the son of one and nephew of another Dewan of Travancore, he had claims upon the consideration of that State. With characteristic foresight he accepted the offer, and threw his heart and soul into the noble work before him.

Madhava Rao took up his appointment in August 1849. The late and present Maharajas, and their intermediate unfortunate brother, were placed under him. The late Maharaja was then 18 years old and naturally chafed under anything like control; and had begun to “sow wild oats” long ago. With respect to him Madhava Rao may be considered more as a companion than a tutor. But a man of Madhava Rao’s moral solidity and tact acquitted himself of even this task admirably. The other brother was an intellectual nonentity; and thus Prince Rama Varma was alone Madhava Rao’s scholar proper. The tuition continued for nearly four years; and, while it cannot be said that it partook of the character of a strict school education, it nevertheless was broad and sound, and what is of even greater importance, it well directed and set in motion a naturally studious mind in a course of varied and useful study. It com-

prised literature generally and the elements of experimental sciences. In this tuition the Prince's father co-operated heartily, and Madhava Rao, even to this day, gratefully acknowledges the extreme value of that effectual aid. General Cullen, the Resident, also took a lively interest in the Prince's education, and the Prince still possesses many a book and scientific instrument presented by the good old General. In July 1853 Madhava Rao took up an appointment in the general administrative line of the State, but he never ceased to have a legitimate and beneficial influence on the Prince. That influence saved the Prince from many a well meant indiscretion arising from inexperience of the sinuosities of the world, while in return it supplied the rising statesman with a zealous, thorough-going and steadfast adherent in working out the great problem before him—the renovation of Travancore.

Prince Rama ^{Varma} spent more hours in reading and writing after than before his school days. To composition he had a special bent and aspired to distinction in it. It was during the days of the Crimean war that he wrote an essay on the "Horrors of war and benefits of Peace." General G. Anson, then Commander-in-Chief of Madras, visited Travancore in 1855, and wrote to the Prince after reading the essay:

"Lt. General Anson × × × takes this opportunity of expressing his gratification at the ability with which it is written, and his admiration of the benevolent sentiments embodied in it." Referring to the same paper General Cullen wrote to the Prince, "The concentration of thought and command of language and expression are most creditable to your Highness' abilities, and prove the attention that has been bestowed on your education by Madhava Rao." Along with these observations the good old General presented a Digest of Blackstone's Commentaries. Such kind recognitions could not fail to spur the Prince on to further application to his studies and literary exercise. He was fond of reading newspapers. The best paper of the time at Madras was the "Athenæm," then chiefly conducted by Mr. John Bruce Norton, a gentleman

of very liberal views, winning manners, extensive learning, and versatile abilities. He was a junior collaborateur of Mr. George Norton in the field of high education in Madras, and the mantle of his great namesake had, on that gentleman's retirement, worthily fallen on him. Mr. J. B. Norton was an early and intimate friend of Madhava Rao, and warmly supported him by much that he wrote and spoke. The "Athenæum" of the day was one of the powerful means which Mr. Norton used to mould public opinion. The Prince contributed a paper on the "Education of Native Princes" to that paper, but it was not published. In the "Notice to Correspondents," Mr. Norton briefly observed that it was not worth publishing except as a literary curiosity, and added, "there is no Royal road to literary success." This censure acted as a magic upon the Prince, and he set himself to redoubled exertion; and on the very anniversary of that remark he succeeded in getting another contribution, "A Political sketch of Travancore," inserted in the very journal. Referring to this Mr. Norton wrote to the Prince thus:—"It was I that noticed so savagely, as you thought, your first communication to the "Athenæum," but what might then have struck you as unkind must now I think appear in its true light, a really friendly warning: for I doubt not it has led you to reflect and fashion your style, so as to make your present communication the truly valuable ~~communication~~ which it is." Thus began the Prince's acquaintance with a remarkable man, and it soon warmed into close friendship. Contributions to public prints were more frequently made.

But literary occupation did not impede the Prince from devoting his attention to the acquirement of knowledge in scientific and other subjects. Madhava Rao had taught him the rudiments of Mechanics, Optics, Astronomy, Chemistry etc.; and the Prince ardently loved his microscopes, telescopes, air Pumps, Magic Lanterns, Electric Machines and working models of the steam Engine. The Prince's uncle, the then Maharaja, had in his youthful days picked up a fair knowledge of experi-

mental Chemistry, and possessed a large and neatly arranged laboratory. He very kindly aided the Prince with Chemicals and apparatus and encouraged him.

In 1853 the Prince's grand aunt, who had once held the Regency of the State for nearly 14 years, died. The Prince felt the loss keenly, as she was to him more than a mother. In 1857, his only sister died, leaving two infant sons. This too was a heavy blow. In 1858, his father died, when the Prince had completed his 21st year ; and that worthy parent had left his full moral impress upon him. The death of his only sister and the only female member of the family necessitated again the adoption, with the sanction of the British Government, of two girls from the Mavalikaray branch. These are the present senior and junior Ranis of Travancore, the elder of whom was recently admitted by a Letter Patent from Her Majesty the Queen Empress to the order of the Crown of India.

In October 1859 the Prince married a lady from a family with which more than one of his Royal ancestors had been connected by marriage. The choice was entirely his own. The independence which he rightly exhibited in the matter was disliked by his uncle, the Conservative Maharaja ; but confident in his right the Prince maintained a firm and dignified yet respectful attitude towards his uncle. The momentary displeasure however vanished before long, as usual in such cases.

In December 1857 Dewan Krishna Rao died, and Madhava Rao, one of his deputies, and who had singularly distinguished himself in the administration of the Southern Taluks of Travancore after he concluded his Tutorship, was appointed Dewan. General Cullen had been a thick and thin supporter of his protege Krishna Rao, and shielded him against all co-ners—news-paper-writers, Missionaries, petitioners, sober well-wishers of the State, and even the Madras Government itself. Things had gone on under that effete minister to the very climax of maladministration and financial insolvency, till at last the eyes of the Government of Lord Dalhousie were opened, and under the inspiration of that great Pro-consul Lord Harris, then Governor

letter on State Education in April. In reference to that letter he wrote to the Maharaja ; " I have read with the very greatest admiration, your most interesting letter on the Higher Education, and trust that you will lose no time in publishing it." He added that " the document greatly increases the already strong sympathy and great esteem which I feel for your Highness."

On the 23rd May the Maharaja received from the Viceroy the following telegram: " I have great pleasure in informing your Highness that the Queen-Empress has been graciously pleased to appoint you a Grand Commander of the Star of India × I offer your Highness my hearty congratulations.×" The Maharaja having telegraphed this joyful intelligence to Mr. Grant Duff at Ootacamond, he replied, " Delighted to hear it× I knew the Viceroy had it much at heart × I congratulate your Highness and the order×."

Here we may leave the Maharaja to ponder and treasure the motto, " HEAVEN'S LIGHT OUR GUIDE."

