PRESIDENCY COLLEGE
CALCUTTA

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

REUNION 1982

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REUNION SOUVENIR
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FOREWORD

The Reunion of the English Department of Presidency College will, we hope, be regarded as it ought to be, as an act of filial piety. It is really an acknowledgement of the many debts we owe to our Alma Mater, the institution that more than any other made us what we are, shaping our minds and imparting a special tone to our sensibilities.

Presidency College has had a place of its own in the cultural history of this part of India. Many of its former students have achieved great distinction in public life. Its real claim to distinction consists, however, in an unbroken tradition of academic endeavour. This is as much true of the English Department as of the others: famous teachers have taught successive generations how to read English literature and inspired in them an abiding love for the subject.

Perhaps the finest gift that everyone of us who read English here received, is the sense of belonging to a literary society, of being sharers in a common pursuit. And this is how, perhaps, the true ideal of a college, in its original meaning of 'a body of colleagues', has been imperceptibly realized. If any proof were needed, the spontaneous and generous response our proposal for having a Reunion evoked in former students is itself a proof of this sense of brotherhood. In this changing world of ours, few things, I believe, are as touching as the unchanging loyalty of former students to their Alma Mater.

10 October 1982 KALIDAS BOSE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of the Reunion Committee express their gratitude to all those who have given so generously of their time to make the occasion a success : particularly to Mr. Justice Sisir Kumar Mukherjea and Principal B. S. Basak for their sustained help and encouragement, and to Shri Jyoti Basu not only for his presence at the function but for the interest he has taken in the affairs of the Department.

Professor Shanta Mahalanobis, a former teacher of this College, has given invaluable help with the theatrical production, as has Sm. Nandini Bose, a former student. Our sincerest thanks to them.

In connexion with the souvenir, we must warmly thank the old teachers and students who have contributed articles. Thanks also to Shri S.K. Sen Gupta and our former student Sm. Aditi Syam for their unfailing help and advice, to Shri Mihir Kiron Das and Shri Tushar Sen Gupta of Ad-O-Print and to our advertisers. Shri Srirup Guha Thakurta has very kindly designed the cover. We are grateful to Shri Umaprasad Mookerjee for the loan of a letter by Professor H.M. Percival ; to Shri Hem Chandra Ghosh for lending the correspondence between his uncle Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh and Sir Jadunath Sarkar; and to Shri Kalyan Chunder Dutt for providing some rare material from his family archives. The photograph of Professor Taraknath Sen was kindly provided by Shri Saumyendranath Sen, and that of Professor Amal Bhattacharji by Sm. Sukumari Bhattacharji.

We are also grateful for the ungrudging help we have received from the members of our non-teaching staff. We must specially thank Shri Baidyanath Bhattacharya and Shri Prabodh Krishna Biswas of the Library ; Shri Shyamal Mukherji, the College Caretaker; Shri Haripada De of the College Office; and Shri Sunil Barua of the Staff Common Room.

EDITORIAL

A Reunion is a time for nostalgia and fellow-feeling, a pardonable exercise in collective self-congratulation. More deeply, it is the moment to define and assess a tradition. The stronger the tradition, the more rigorous the task of defining it. Besides—a point commonly overlooked—traditions bear upon the future as well as the past. They must be continually redefined in order to retain their vitality from age to age.

Of our Department's record of scholarship, or that of the College as a whole, we need not speak at length. There is much on the subject elsewhere in this volume. A greater achievement lies in the way the scattered pursuits of individuals have been welded into a continuous and still unspent tradition of intellectual discipline. Our predecessors have taught us to make demands upon ourselves that an unexacting world may not require. They have also bequeathed us a departmental organisation that ensures adherence to certain basic skills and standards. 'Though much is taken, much abides.' We have left behind the age of towering scholars, each a tradition in himself ; but even today, a teacher or student here can, if he so chooses, find an intellectual exhilaration unique to our land and age. A quickening spirit ranges through this world of shabby walls, among the pale shades of old-world formality and the darker spectres of officialdom.

We may make a further claim. Again uniquely in our land and age, the Department illustrates the respect and fascination that the academic spirit can still command. Here we have a tradition of service—at its highest, uncompromising service—to an 'irrelevant' and materially unrewarding discipline. The Department has other and more humdrum aspects which may supply the bulk of an old student's memories ; but the vital spirit has always been this rarer devotion. And, in a cynical and temporising world, it has evoked frank admiration from generations of students and outsiders. Conditioned by decades of exposure to the hard world of affairs, people still recall their days in the Department with pride and affection. Much of this is uncritical nostalgia ; but effusion and sentiment aside, such enthusiastic remembrance suggests lasting respect for an intellectual ideal that may grow into a complete ethos. In fact, our entire society has conceded this respect—sometimes readily, sometimes with reluctance —as to a sober, even forbidding but curiously compelling development of Bengali cultural life.

This achievement, however, must be tempered by self-criticism. We need not doubt the sincerity of the respect the Department still commands ; but we have to question its efficacy. A proud aspect of today's Reunion is the gathering of old members from the highest stations of the most varied walks of life. We may assume that they have carried with them the virtues of discernment, dedication and sympathy ; and we may flatter ourselves that these virtues owe something to the training and inspiration of their college days. But nowhere do we find a *collective* scale of values, or the will and confidence to enforce it, born of a positive direction received by our old members in their formative years. This is where our Department, and the College as a whole, loses to the international centres of learning with which they may otherwise be compared. We foster enclaves of decency but not a kingdom of the spirit. Indeed, the skills and values bequeathed us by our tradition seem to leave us more completely helpless against hostile and debasing powers. Our respect for tradition thus becomes no more than a nostalgic relief from reality.

It would be facile to see this as a betrayal of the academic ideal by our alumni in 'worldlier' professions. The ideal itself has been as ineffectual as angelic. One thinks of sullen generations of Indian scholars in British days, doomed to inequality in pay, rank and opportunity ; of Manmohan Ghose, seeking refuge in his poetry and the classics from the blows of life ; of Praphulla Chandra Ghosh with his outbursts of rage at an intractable world ; of Taraknath Sen in a dark library, keeping the scholar's lamp burning through the chaos that had engulfed the College. No doubt these great souls felt more keenly the afflictions common to their colleagues and successors ; but in absolute terms, time has exacerbated our woes.

Of the common stresses and problems of society we need say nothing ; but there are more particular matters as well. Both teachers and students find their morale enfeebled by the tedious and frustrating dictates of officialdom. The paucity of funds is to some

extent understandable ; not so the bewildering array of formalities, the delay in executing approved projects, and the general dispiriting inertia. Again, the dilution of academic standards seems more and more strongly endorsed not only by the educational authorities but by society as a whole. Indeed, the very *raison d'être* of the Department is threatened by a general doublethink about the English language : while unwilling to forgo either its official clout or shallow social prestige, we seem determined to impede every good office it could genuinely perform in our social and intellectual life.

Even at the peak of the Department's glory, in the 1930's or the 1950's, a siege mentality seems to have prevailed beneath the superficial complacence. Today there is a patent conflict between what the Department can best perform and what society demands of it.

The solution does not lie in easy populism. We may well shudder at the thought of surrender to the trivial and unproductive models of education being cried up and down the streets.

> *How should the world be luckier if this house,*
> *Where passion and precision have been one*
> *Time out of mind, became too ruinous*
> *To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun ?*

It is not merely a problem of survival, though that looms large enough. What we are proposing is a wider dissemination and more effective application of the values of our discipline, as nurtured by the Department and the College. Then and then only can we take full pride in having produced 'everybody who is anybody in Bengal'.

There are faint signs of the possibility of such a revaluation. We are profiting today by the blessings of adversity. In a sceptical, uncongenial milieu, traditions have to be scrutinised and redefined with special care, while also being defended with new vigour. Survival itself becomes an active and aggressive process, a successful encounter with external forces and an honest perception of our own shortcomings. It is an uncertain and wearisome exercise, prone to the twin risks of failure and compromise. But the degree of success and enthusiasm remains just high enough to encourage hope for the stable assertion of a humane discipline.

Another source of hope lies with the students. There is no deplorable excess of 'youth power' that the College has not seen over the last twenty years. Students of the Department have taken less than a proportionate part ; but they have suffered as much as any from the consequences. Yet among those who eschew such titillation, we may discern a new and sober rejection of much of their inheritance, coupled with loyalty and protective zeal for the rest. In later life, many will no doubt lose sight of the ideal ; in a few it may survive and prevail. Though much will be taken, something may abide.

At this Reunion, where professions and generations meet, let this cautious hope be exchanged with mutual humility between the old and the young, the men of thought and the men of affairs. It is the best hope we have for the fulfilment of our traditions.

OUR INHERITANCE: THE DEPARTMENT FROM ITS BEGINNINGS TO 1930

On the occasion of the first Reunion of the Department of English, it is natural to reflect on the heritage left us by generations of dedicated scholars and illustrious teachers. The first impetus to English studies was given by the great Derozio, appointed in 1828 Master of English Literature and History in the Hindu College, as Presidency was then known. An inspiring teacher, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was something more—a preceptor and a mentor, instinct with an apostolic spirit, exercising a profound moral influence upon the student community of his time.

Derozio died too young, but the tradition of inspired teaching persisted. The late thirties of the last century saw the appointment of Captain D.L. Richardson, invalided out of the army, to the English staff. Himself a poet and Shakespearean scholar, his reading of drama was itself an interpretation. Macaulay's well-known tribute may bear repeating : 'I may forget everything about India, but your reading of Shakespeare, *never*.' Richardson also compiled a collection of essays entitled *Literary Leaves*.

Charles H. Tawney, who taught English here from 1864 to 1892, was Richardson's worthy successor. A distinguished Cambridge scholar, but one with weak lungs, Tawney was advised to migrate to a warmer climate. Thus fortuitously began a long and profitable association of the College with Tawney. A classicist by training, Tawney's grasp of any subject, whether it was Anglo-Saxon literature, or Shakespearean drama, or Sanskrit poetry, was only equalled by the clarity and precision with which he expressed it. The quality of his scholarship and style may be seen to good advantage in his edition of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (Macmillan, 1888) and their range and variety in his translations of Sanskrit classics, including the voluminous *Kathasaritsagara*. As a teacher he impressed by what he said rather than by how he said it, never looking, it is said, his students in the face. He was not one for any kind of assertiveness and must have been the quietest and gentlest of administrators. His humane understanding and love of the College, his real devotion, his concern for the individual and his liberal, uncensorious nature made him an outstanding Principal (1876-92).

Richardson and Tawney belonged to an age when there was yet no minute compartmentalisation of different disciplines. There were only three broad divisions—the General Department, Law and the Civil Engineering Department. With the transfer of the last-named to the Government Engineering College in 1880, an inconvenient load was gladly shed. The Law classes too languished and closed soon after, so that by the mid-eighties the General Department came into its own. The teaching of English at the M.A. level had commenced long ago, in the 1860's: the first examination was held in 1866. (At this time, and indeed down to the 1910's, M.A. teaching was the exclusive privilege of Presidency College.) B.A. Honours teaching now began in the early 1880's. The first batch of Honours graduates emerged in 1885, with two students of the College taking first classes : Ramprasad Maitra and Purna Chandra Basu.

The 1880's indeed began auspiciously for the College with the arrival on its English staff of Hugh Melville Percival. Percival's thirty-one years (1880-1911)— a period of growth and consolidation for the College —bestowed a new character and depth on English studies. A polymath, Percival had such mastery that he could simultaneously teach English Literature and Economics, History and Political Philosophy at the Honours and postgraduate levels. Breadth and accuracy of erudition apart, his intellectual honesty and indefatigable industry were fully characteristic. The best qualities of his well-known editions of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton and Tennyson were also those of the teacher. Unsparing of himself, he scorned the pretentious and easy path to success and set himself the highest standards in teaching and study. His original contribution was the way he would read difficult texts, never evading obscurities but pondering and grappling with them till they yielded, and then phrase them in an expository style of luminous simplicity.

Along with this quality of exegesis went his sense of the sanctity of the author's text. This intense

concentration on the text to the rigorous exclusion, for the time being, of secondary matter initiated that healthy tradition of close textual reading which has distinguished the teaching of many of his successors. Percival's pupils had other virtues to admire : his fastidious sense of language, the deliberateness and economy of his style, the passionate moral earnestness which informed everything he said. This last trait perhaps gave an ethical bias to his literary studies, as when he discussed the morals of Antony and Cleopatra. But this was only the other side of his rectitude and stoical purity of character. Few men indeed have possessed such unconscious and unswerving integrity and dedication.

Percival was fortunate in his colleagues. There were Professors F.J. Rowe (1879-80, 1883-99) and W.T. Webb (1877-91) ; there was John Mann (1878, 1888, 1892-9) ; and there was the other pair, N.L. Hallward (1897-8, 1901-2) and S. C. Hill (1898-9). Rowe and Webb, household names to an educated Indian, collaborated in producing several editions, most methodically written, of Tennyson's poems in the Macmillan English Classics series, and an excellent grammar which is still useful, *Hints on the Study of English* (Macmillan, 1897). Though engaged in a common pursuit, no two men could be more unlike each other : Rowe, witty, sociable and with a delicate aesthetic taste, Webb staid, distant and scholarly. John Mann, a successful teacher, was all for general lectures. Great thoughts, after all, are always general, and he would not count the streaks of the tulip.

Hallward and Hill, like Rowe and Webb, achieved a fruitful partnership in their admirable edition of Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (Macmillan, 1895). It shows an orderly planning, a far-ranging scholarship tracking the recondite allusions to their source, and an unfailing lucidity of exposition. The method is Percival's, and it shows how at a point of time, under the auspices of this Department, a band of devoted scholars were engaged in fostering a love of exact scholarship in eager young minds.

The twentieth century dawned promisingly for the College and its English faculty, and the rising sun was Henry Rosher James, Professor of English, 1900-01, and Principal, 1907-16. A fine classical scholar, translator of Boethius and author of the famous *Our Hellenic Heritage*, James was great as a teacher, but greater far as a Principal. He possessed that extraordinary quality that can be called vision and faith. It was he who consolidated the Departments of the College as distinct entities : we may thus place the formal institution of the English Department around 1909-10. It was James again who foresaw in Presidency College the nucleus of an advanced centre of study—indeed, drafted a scheme urging the Government to separate it from its sister colleges and give it an autonomous status.

Ironically, it was during this period that the College lost its primacy in postgraduate teaching. A postgraduate department, with several teachers of English, was set up at Calcutta University between 1912 and 1917. After 1917, postgraduate classes were centralised at the University ; but a number of students continued to study 'through Presidency College', as they do to this day, for the benefit of supplementary classes and library facilities. At the same time, teachers from the College continued to play a substantial part in the postgraduate programme of the University itself. To successive generations of students, some of the brightest memories of their M. A. classes are of lectures by Professors M. Ghose, P. C. Ghosh, S. K. Banerjee, S. C. Sen Gupta or T. N. Sen. In fact, when Sir Asutosh Mookerjee first contemplated centralising English postgraduate classes, he invited Professor Percival (then in retirement in London) to take the Chair of English : Percival refused on grounds of health.

Principal James's other reforms included long overdue expansion of College buildings, equipment and staff. The teacher-student ratio improved appreciably, and each subject now came to have its own group of teachers. Tutorial classes, introduced in 1906, were abandoned in 1908 in favour of an individual tutorial system, first tried in English before being extended to other subjects. The wisdom of this move cannot be too highly praised. The birth of the English Seminar in 1909 was another of James's innovations. Occasional references to an English Society under Professor Holmein 1922 and to an English Literary Society under Professor H. K. Banerjee between 1926 and 1929 point to a further extension of Seminar activities. In 1926, under the initiative of Professor P. C. Ghosh, a small library was set up exclusively for Departmental use. This developed later into the English Honours Library.

An interesting aspect of the Department's contribution to general College activities concerns the College Magazine. Of its first fifteen editors, as many as nine

were from this Department, two even before their graduation : Umaprasad Mookerjee and Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta. Furthermore, it was the young Taraknath Sen, Editor 1929-30, who bifurcated the Magazine into an English and a Bengali section, got the well-known artist Mr. Charu Roy to design a suitable emblem for the front cover, and gave it a new look and get-up which it retained till the early sixties.

Taking a wider view, whom shall we name among the generations of students who have brought honour to the Department in later life ? Any selection will be invidious ; but surely we must all share the same pride in such predecessors as Rajendra Prasad (1902-7), Kshitish Chandra Sen (B. A. 1909), Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (B. A. 1911, M. A. 1913), Phanibhusan Chakravarti (B.A. 1918, M.A. 1920), Syamaprasad Mookerjee (B. A. 1921) and Humayun Kabir (B. A. 1926, M. A. 1928).

As the College took giant strides forward under the stewardship of James, personalities emerged who were to take the Department to truly soaring heights. First it was Manmohan Ghose (1896-7, 1903-24) who brought a new element into English teaching. A typical product of the Oxford classical school and himself an accomplished poet, Manmohan approached literature with a kind of sovereign simplicity in which there was, however, nothing of artlessness and much of profundity. A poet, he was happiest when reading poetry with his pupils. Poetry was not 'taught' so much as its essence revealed. His class lectures were felt to be audible musings, a strange communion of spirits, the audience only incidentally invited, as it were, to participate in the ritual.

In College the Professor was an elusive figure, frail and low-spirited ; the struggles of life—recurrent ill-health, family worries and official neglect—had left their scars on him. Yet there was no self-pity, no complaint. He appeared to have put real-life frustrations in their place, for he never seemed deeply involved in things except in things of the mind, his inner eye and ear moving in a world of entrancing beauty and music. Pupils have paid tribute to his musical voice, the finish and clarity and steady elocution of his moulded speech. To this may be added his gift for capturing with a phrase the most fugitive turns of thought and feeling, and sending through it tides of imaginative suggestion coursing through the listener's mind. And he went away from his lectures bemused, hushed in admiration, reluctant to comment, lest the words of Mercury should sound harsh after the songs of 'Apollo' (as Harinath De designated his inspired colleague).

The happy co-existence in the Department of teachers of varied endowments was a peculiar good fortune for students in the first quarter of this century. They had, so to say, a taste of Homeric greatness as well as Shakespearean variety, in literature as in life. First it was Percival and Manmohan Ghose ; next, with Percival's retirement in 1911, it was Manmohan Ghose and Praphulla Chandra Ghosh. Professor of English, 1904, 1906-7, 1908-39, Professor Ghosh has been described as 'the greatest teacher of English in the annals of Presidency College'. Never perhaps has an institution owed more to a single personality. An outstanding lecturer, immensely erudite, gifted with an unfaltering and capacious memory, a remarkably quick brain and tongue, and a genius for communication, Praphulla Chandra was the most stimulating, most brilliant and most creative teacher of his time. Generations of students have felt that they owed to him their first real grasp of the infinite variety of literature and of the character and mind of man.

The tragedy of a teacher is that he deals in such evanescent things as spoken words. Happily, authentic testimony to Professor Ghosh's powers is still available from some of his pupils. Few could rival his range, for he had an attractive tendency to find most things interesting and many things amusing, from Chaucer to Milton, Shakespeare to Gibbon, the Bible to Lytton Strachey, poetry and drama to philology and the languages. Yet he had his preferences : he did not like the Metaphysicals, for example, or Romantics like Shelley, frail and anaemic, a phantom among men. He had a greater relish for literature concerned with the more concrete manifestations of life. In his day few could match his linguistic powers, his command of idiom and feeling for style, his ability to combine the study of language with that of literature. His marvellous reading, modulation of voice, its supple submission to varying demands of mood and character held audiences spell-bound. His Shakespeare classes in particular were an unforgettable experience : like one possessed, he would achieve a complete submergence of his own personality and become another. The intensity of the identification made his histrionics valid and authentic, his pictorial imagination made them vivid, and his meticulous scholarship lent them solidity and depth. The subtlest points of thematic,

textual or linguistic interest would seem to be effortlessly made and carried alive into the heart by passion.

If Praphulla Chandra Ghosh enriched the tradition of Shakespeare teaching, Srikumar Banerjee (1912-35, 1938-46), now in the twenties emerging into the limelight, deepened that of poetry. To the enchanting re-creations of Manmohan Ghose he gave an intellectual direction. Gifted with a perceptive and original mind, Dr. Banerjee revealed the treasures of poetry, especially Romantic poetry, through a method of acute analysis. His critical acumen was such that the mystery of poetic creation and of poetic art would acquire a transparency under his scrutiny. Yet such was his sensibility and concern for wholeness and totality of apprehension that analysis nearly approached synthesis. To be Dr. Banerjee's pupil was to receive a valuable training in literary criticism. It is gratifying to think that in a series of lectures to his students here lay the germ of his research on *Critical Theories and Poetic Practice in 'The Lyrical Ballads'*. If he allowed his vocabulary some degree of inflation, his style in its happy efflorescences has a grandeur all its own.

Of the British teachers in the Department contemporaneous with Dr. Banerjee, T. S. Sterling (1909-27) had the longest tenure and J. W. Holme (1910-23) the highest esteem. Holme edited the Old Arden *As You Like It* (1914) while working here, and partnered Sterling in an edition of Marlowe's *Edward II* (Blackie, London, 1913). Holme was a quiet scholar, grave and grey, careless in dress ; Sterling, polished and debonair, impeccably dressed, his buttonhole seldom without a choice flower. A conscientious teacher, clear and incisive, Holme combined lightness of touch with seriousness of thought; an effective tutor, Sterling had a dry humour and little patience for rhetoric and verbiage. Both men had a deep affection for their pupils. Sterling's generosity became posthumously known as the poor students of the College came to inherit his legacy of a major part of his lifetime's savings.

Jadunath Sarkar (1898-9, 1901), Harinath De (1904-6), Rabindranarayan Ghosh (1915-16), Birendra Binod Roy (1921-3, 1923-4) and Phiroze E. Dustoor (1922-3, 1923-4) served the Department for brief spells but contributed enormously to its life and amenities, social and spiritual. Jadunath Sarkar and Harinath De, both outstanding ex-pupils, are too famous for any tags to their names. Gifted with a rare literary sensibility, serene and saintly, Rabindranarayan Ghosh elevated his pupils' minds by a revelation of the philosophical depths of great poetry. B. B. Roy and P. E. Dustoor, contemporaries and distinguished alumni, though young in the Department, made their mark as teachers. Erudite, precise and discriminating, Roy made a powerful impact ; Dustoor, a fine scholar and charming personality, carried his distinction lightly about him. Two other noted scholars, Hiran Kumar Banerji and Somnath Maitra, who joined in the mid-twenties, added strength to the Department.

The time around 1930 may be regarded as a watershed in the history of the Department. Professor P. C. Ghosh was still at its helm, ably supported by Dr. Srikumar Banerjee. Manmohan Ghose was long dead, Percival had become a legend. Circumstances were propitious for new advents. And one after another three ex-pupils, ever so deeply attached, returned to serve their nursery : Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta in 1929, Tarapada Mukherji in 1931 and Taraknath Sen in 1934. We had arrived at the threshold of a new era.

ASOKE KUMAR MUKHERJI
B.A. 1956; Teacher 1962-

AFTER 1930: A TEACHER REMEMBERS

In 1930 the Department was dominated by the scholarly presence of Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh. Those who have only read or heard about him would not know the powerful impact of his academic personality on one who saw him in his small first-floor room at the far north-west corner of the building, with heaps of books lying all about, or heard him in Room 23 reading Shakespeare, Milton and Gibbon. And one who had that experience will agree that though our universities and colleges do not have a dearth of fine scholars, it is the times we have now left behind us which had that virtue that produced Praphulla Chandra Ghosh or Taraknath Sen : the teacher who has a commanding presence, encyclopaedic scholarship, rectitude, selfless absorption in knowledge and work, a passionate interest in the good of the institution and of his Department.

The image of the great teachers which their pupils lovingly bore or bear in their minds is the image of erudition and academic idealism, which their imagination had fashioned of humanist scholar-teachers of the Revival of Learning like Chrysoloras, Politian, Grocyn and Cheke, to know about whom had been an exciting experience for them at one time.

In roughly three equal parts of nine memorable decades (1880-1969) of the Departmental annals, H. M. Percival (1880-1911), Praphulla Chandra Ghosh (1908-39) and Taraknath Sen (1934-7, 1942-69) enriched academic life in Bengal with a kind of teaching that had then and has now no parallel, reading drama, poetry and criticism with post-graduate or undergraduate students for hours together, day after day, each week, for whole sessions. But the Department always had teachers who would give more time to their work than the college routine and examination syllabi required them to do ; this dedication has not yet disappeared.

H. M. Percival, Manmohan Ghose, Harinath De, H. R. James and J. W. Holme had all left long before 1930, but their presence in the Department continued to be felt through what our teachers (who had been their pupils) told us about them. How lovingly, and with what reverence and admiration, did Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh speak of Professor Percival; as later Professor Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta and Professor Taraknath Sen would speak of Professor Ghosh ! Generally speaking, Presidency College has bred its teachers in its own class-rooms, one's brilliant pupils in due time becoming one's valued colleagues. The teacher-pupil relationship has usually made the English faculty feel and function like a happy family : given cohesiveness to the work of the Department, ensured continuity in ideas and methods of teaching.

Another circumstance that helped the Department to evolve its tradition of academic discipline was the restricted application of the principle of transfer, giving it a relatively stable staff. This is how the Department came to be identified in successive periods with particular groups of outstanding teachers.

The Department could not for some reason or other retain the services of some brilliant men whom it had on the teaching staff for short periods : A. Humphrey House (1935-6) and R. K. Das Gupta (1945) like Rabindranarayan Ghosh, Phiroze E. Dustoor and B.B. Roy of an earlier age. I have often heard Professor Taraknath Sen mention this matter without trying to hide his sense of loss.

In the thirties Praphulla Chandra Ghosh had with him in the Department Srikumar Banerjee, Hiran Kumar Banerjee, Somnath Maitra (they had all been with him in the twenties) and for a short period Paresnath Ghosh ; and three young teachers, Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, Tarapada Mukherji and Taraknath Sen. Students of the mid and late thirties missed being Professor Srikumar Banerjee's pupils. But it was impossible not to be touched by Professor H. K. Banerjee's moral fervour as he discoursed on Biblical literature, medieval poetry, Malory, Spenser and the literature of the Reformation. He was always immaculately dressed, and his pronunciation was indistinguishable from that of an Englishman : I do not believe that an educated Englishman would speak his own language better or with greater ease. We heard Professor P.C. Ghosh speak of him with respect. He had done in the twenties some primary work on Fielding which, in its particular area, has not been superseded. Professor Somnath Maitra's teaching was marked by Johnsonian common sense,

a dry wit and a remarkable economy of phrase. He was widely respected in contemporary literary circles as a connoisseur, and those who had known him will not forget the sensible observations, the chiselled phrase, the cultivated voice and the truly aristocratic bearing.

The farewell address to Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh on the occasion of his retirement in 1939 aptly spoke of 'a power passing from Presidency College'. Professor H. K. Banerjee and Professor Srikumar Banerjee left in 1941 and 1946, Professor Maitra in 1949. The early and mid forties saw frequent postings and transfers and several short-term appointments from political pressure; but the Government had the wisdom not to go too far, and all those years the teaching staff had a sound core.

The thirties saw the beginning of a long twenty-five years' association of three outstanding men in the work of the Department, an association marked by camaraderie and strong mutual respect. In the fifties, when educational standards started going down in our colleges and universities, people turned to Presidency College as the only institution in the state (there had been till then more than one at the Honours level, in particular faculties or groups of faculties) which could educate the meritorious youth of the community to the right standard. The Department of English was fortunate to have in this difficult period the collective leadership of Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, Tarapada Mukherji and Taraknath Sen.

An internationally acknowledged Shakespearian, Professor Sen Gupta asked me, a newcomer then, to read with the Honours students *Much Ado about Nothing*, which was the only play by Shakespeare he was at that time teaching: a characteristically generous gesture that showed his sympathetic understanding of a young teacher's place in the Department. Professor Sen Gupta's teaching was analytical, and provided insights into literary problems. We learned from him to value clarity. I still recall with gratitude his salutary advice that one has to be very clear in one's mind how one understands a problem, a matter, and then just try to write clearly : when one has done that, one has taken care of matter, form and expression.

Enthusiastic appreciation of literary beauties marked Professor Tarapada Mukherji's teaching. The impression it made on eager minds was strong and deep. Dearly prized by grateful pupils was the first fine rapture of knowing with him this or that play or poem. About two months from the commencement of a session (was it in 1956?), my contemporary and colleague Professor Amal Bhattacharji had asked the Honours students in a class-test to justify their having opted for English studies ; and I remember a student (who later got a First at the M. A. examination) being eloquently indignant in her essay that one who, hearing Professor Mukherji's lectures on *Macbeth*, would emotionally react as she did, should be asked to do so.

Macaulay is reported to have written to Professor D. L. Richardson whom earlier, on a visit to the Hindu College, he had heard read Shakespeare with a class of students : 'I may forget everything about India, but your reading of Shakespeare, *never*.' How I do wish (as I recall my experience as a post-graduate student) that an Oxford Professor of Poetry had heard Professor Taraknath Sen lecture on classical criticism in the early nineteen-forties ! What remains of that teaching now except the memory of it, which his pupils will treasure till they too are all gone !

Taraknath Sen was appointed Professor Emeritus of English, Presidency College, on his retirement in 1969 : exactly thirty years after this distinction had been first conferred on his teacher Praphulla Chandra Ghosh.

Tall, handsome, dignified in bearing, of a stoical temperament, Professor Amal Bhattacharji was a distinguished scholar and one of those very few teachers who shape their pupils' academic outlook. Like Professor Taraknath Sen, whose scholarship could have been the example he emulated (as Professor Sen emulated his teacher Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh), he got to know classical and medieval (besides, of course, Renaissance and modern) European literature at first hand. Professor Bhattacharji's teaching, like Professor Sen's, was marked by a strong awareness of tradition and the broad European context ; many of their pupils, who are now teaching in different universities and colleges, appreciated the benefits of this broad awareness and have cultivated it, sharing the benefits with their own pupils. The Department almost simultaneously lost the services of these two teachers : Professor Sen (by his retirement in 1969) and Professor Bhattacharji

(by his tragically premature death in 1970). About the same time there left a colleague whose association we all had valued : Professor Priyatosh Bagchi, sober, scholarly, contributor to Wordsworth studies.

On the bold initiative of Principal Apurba Kumar Chanda, Presidency College started admitting girl students in 1944. The wisdom of the move has become more and more evident as the decades have gone by. In the fifties and sixties the seats in the Honours classes of the Department and the honours of university examinations were equally divided between boys and girls. Since the seventies the majority of the seats and most of the top places have gone to the girls.

Another wise move was taken much later. The college had its first lady teacher when Kajal Basu, who had just completed university studies at Calcutta and Oxford, joined the Department of English in February 1959. Two other ladies, both her pupils, are now Professor Kajal Sen Gupta's colleagues in the Department of English, and the College has lady teachers in most Departments.

The erratic valuation of work in examinations leading to the degree courses made the Department introduce (in 1956) the practice of holding a competitive admission test at the beginning of each academic session. The Department of History soon did so too, followed by other Arts Departments and, shortly after 1970, by the Science Departments. Judged advisable when introduced, admission tests came to be regarded as indispensable.

The Department's staff strength rose from 6 to 11 in stages, as the work-load increased. In 1952 the Department was asked to hold English classes for the Sanskrit College students, and the introduction of the three-year degree course in 1960 entailed responsibility for three (instead of two) classes of Honours students and three (instead of two) sets of Pass classes.

Postgraduate classes have been (except for a short break in the early seventies) an important part of the Department's work routine. The Department should have full postgraduate teaching: the recommendations of a Calcutta University inspection team (1973-4) and of the UGC's Dr. Udgaonkar Committee (1977) were to this effect.

I shall now borrow a little from what I wrote in the Diamond Jubilee number of the College magazine (1974), and use some of the information I then collected. The Department's Annual Report for 1972-3 explained that the aim has always been 'to enable students to develop the habit of independent thinking and acquiring wide firsthand acquaintance with original works, as far as possible, disregarding the limited requirements of the gradually dwindling syllabus prescribed by the University of Calcutta'. A sense of quality in all academic work is fostered. A magnificent collection of books in the Library, which would be the envy of the English faculty in any Indian university, embodies the wisdom of generations of scholar-teachers. Seminars are regular, there are sessions of drama and poetry readings and record recitals, and tutorials are an indispensable part of the week's work. In 1963 Professor Taraknath Sen introduced the system of arranging separate tutorials for each single student, so that each may have his individual needs understood and attended to, and that honest efforts at self-improvement may be guided at every step.

Teachers and students testify to there being a Presidency College tradition, felt as a compulsive urge to do one's best. The College gets qualitatively better work of a teacher than another institution would, and students show themselves eager to submit to rigorous academic discipline. A teacher of English at Presidency College knows that he has the best student audience he can find anywhere : a fairly homogeneous group, alert, responsive. He can discuss any matter, any problem, at any level.

The Department admits up to seventeen students (a fraction of the large number of good students who enrol themselves in different colleges) each year, but most of the top places in university examinations go to the Department ; besides that, the average is consistently good. Many are admitted in due course to research degrees. Not surprisingly, a statewide survey of the English faculties of West Bengal's universities and established colleges shows that this Department has been a principal source for the supply of teachers.

Consider now some facts in the Indian context. In twenty years, some twenty former students of this Department have graduated with high honours (some with the highest honours) from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge ; eight or nine students have been admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at Oxford, Cambridge or London, and four or five to other research degrees. There is no university or college in India which can boast of an English faculty to match the record of this small Department. I cannot be far wrong when I say that the Indians who, in English literature, have the double distinction of holding from either of England's two oldest universities a First Class Honours degree and the degree of Doctor of Philosophy are all its former students. Students and young teachers of Arts and Science faculties in all Indian universities compete for the recently instituted Inlaks Foundation scholarships. Of the 36 awards made in the first four years, five went to former students of one Department in one college —this Department.

The Department's contributions to English studies have been well received. Its teachers' work has been published by the Clarendon Press (Oxford), Oxford University Press (London and Calcutta), Basil Blackwell (Oxford), Methuen & Co. (London), Routledge & Kegan Paul (London), Calcutta University Press etc. Papers have been presented in international journals including *The Review of English Studies, Notes and Queries* and *The Library (*Oxford), *Modern Language Review (*Cambridge*), Anglia* (Leipzig), *Shakespeare Quarterly* (New York), *Modern Language Quarterly* (Washington), *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (London), and the *Times Literary Supplement*. The Department's contributions have scores of mentions in leading international bibliographies. They have been cited for reference in standard handbooks, and noticed in discussions in standard critical and scholarly works and the New Arden and New Cambridge Shakespeares. Professor S. C. Sen Gupta may be the only Shakespearian now living, all whose three works on the principal divisions of the Canon—Comedies, Histories, Tragedies (and written in that order)—are accepted as contributions to this century's interpretative criticism of the dramatist's work.

The Presidency College *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume* (1966), a collection of studies by teachers and alumni to mark the Quatercentenary, was edited by Professor Taraknath Sen. A collection of Professor Sen's own essays, posthumously published in 1972 under the title *A Literary Miscellany*, was edited by Professor Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta with love and care.

The Department was for a long period, and still can be, the best school of English studies in the country. There are no impossible or difficult 'if's as preconditions. Presidency College needs little done for it if its 120 years' academic status is restored and some policy changes approved (the cost of which in monetary terms would be insignificant compared to what is spent on *each* of India's 100-odd universities).

In a rational academic set-up this great institution would be treated as a national inheritance. Dedicated talent is a scarce and precious resource, in scientific research, industry, administration, medicine, law and social service ; and it is not less scarce in young learners and teachers.

Were there a register of students of the Department with particulars of what they do with themselves in the professions and the services, wherever life places them, even the most sceptical persons would know that the Department has repaid many times over what the community has spent on it. Such a register for the College may be compiled in a stocktaking of what this old institution has taken from the community and what it has given to national life.

How does one feel at the time of retirement as one looks back at a long working life in Presidency College ? The question may seem personal, but the answer would be much the same from person to person. All my twenty-seven years in the Department of English, I had colleagues with some of whom any one would consider it a privilege to work ; and year after year, I had pupils with whom it was a delight to read or discuss the English classics. Each day, as I walked the corridors, sat in the Library or with my colleagues in the Professors' Common Room, or taught in Room 23, I sensed that there was all around, enveloping us, an atmosphere of suggestion, not easy to define, the source of it being tradition and history. The College has the kind of life found only in an academic institution that has been for generations the scene of noble collective endeavour, and it was good that one felt for the moment partaking of that life oneself. Could any other working life give me what I got from Presidency College ?

SAILENDRA KUMAR SEN
B. A. 1939 ; M. A. 1941 ; Teacher 1953-62, 1962-82

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
OCTOBER 1982

Kalidas Bose
(Head of the Department)
Amar Nath Banerjee
Atish Ranjan Banerjee
Sudeshna Chakrabarti
Santiram Chatterjee
Sukanta Chaudhuri
Supriya Chaudhuri
Saroj Kumar Majumdar
Asoke Kumar Mukherji
Sunil Kumar Mukherji
Kajal Sen Gupta

M.A. 2nd Year

Swarupa Basu
Chhandam Deb
Nandini Deb
Indrani Gupta
Chumki Majumdar
Sharbari Mukherjee

M.A. 1st Year

Raj Brahma Bhattacharya
Sujata Chakrabarti
Indrani Ganguly
Arunabha Ghosh
Anushila Hazra
Sharmistha Mitra
Mangala Gauri Ramani
Jayasri Roy Chaudhuri

B.A. 3rd Year (outgoing)

Khursheed Ardeshir
Kaberi Banerjee
Polly Chatterjee
Tapas Sankar Chowdhury
Shanta Datta
Purnima Dhar
Jayanti Ghosh
Sunanda Ghosh
Nilakshi Gupta
Srimati Mukherjee
Purna Patranobis
Susmita Roy
Nita Sarkar
Piyali Sen Gupta

B.A. 3rd Year

Jasodhara Das Gupta
Gargee Datta
Sharmila Datta
Nirmalya Ghosal
Sumita Lahiri
Lily Law
Madhumanti Maitra
Neepa Majumdar
Sharbari Mallick
Leena Mitra
Mita Pramanik
Roma Sarkar
Reena Shah

B.A. 2nd Year

Seemita Auddy
Ranjana Banerjee
Reenkoo Banerjee
Sudipto Chatterjee
Tamali Ganguli
Ralla Ghosh
Rupa Gulab
Arundhati Moitra
Srabani Mukherjee
Gita Patkar
Farzana Quader
Rupa Roy Chowdhury

B.A, 1st Year

Srimati Basu
Nandini Bhattacharya
Subhabrata Bhattacharya
Brinda Bose
Urmi Chowdhury
Mrittika Datta
Bhaswati Day
Ishanti Ghosh
Bishnupriya Ghosh
Malini Guha
Sunrita Hazra
Elina Mukherjee
Nandini Mukherjee
Srilata Mukherjee
Aditi Sahoo
Lapita Sarkar
Piyali Sarkar

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AT HINDU COLLEGE AND PRESIDENCY COLLEGE

[We have made every effort to ensure that this list is complete and accurate, but we apologise for possible errors and omissions. The spellings of Bengali surnames, and to an extent of first names, have been standardised. 'H' indicates that the teacher belonged to Hindu College.]

Ali, Ahmad : 1945-7
Bagchi, Priyatosh : 1947-8, 1949-56, 1960-69
Bandyopadhyay, Ajit Kumar : 1967-74
Bandyopadhyay, Amar Nath : 1979-
Bandyopadhyay, Amulyadhan : 1910-12
Bandyopadhyay, Asutosh : 1965-7
Bandyopadhyay, Atish Ranjan : 1978-
Bandyopadhyay, Bimal Kumar : 1974-8
Bandyopadhyay, Chandi Charan : 1881-2
Bandyopadhyay, Hiran Kumar: 1924-6, 1928-41
Bandyopadhyay, Mahesh Chandra : 1869-74
Bandyopadhyay, Nistaran : ?
Bandyopadhyay, Nripendra Chandra : 1906-9, 1917
Bandyopadhyay, Srikumar : 1912-35, 1938-46
Bartley, James Orr : 1939-42
Basu, Bhupendra Chandra : 1912-21
Basu, Debendranath : ?
Basu, Kajal (Sen Gupta) : 1959-
Basu, Kalidas : 1959-64, 1967-71, 1979-
Basu, Tirthankar : 1960-61
Beauland, J.G. : 1852 (H)
Bellett, G. : 1875-6
Bhattacharya, Amal : 1950-59, 1959-70
Bhattacharya, Girija Sankar : 1942-4
Bhattacharya, Jogesh Chandra : 1962-72
Bhattacharya, Manju Gopal : 1923-33
Carnduff, D. : 1861-2
Chakrabarti, Ajit Chandra : 1937-8
Chakrabarti, Dwarkanath : ?
Chakrabarti, Narendranath : 1918-19, 1919-21
Chakrabarti, Sadananda : 1947-9
Chakrabarti, Sailendra Chandra : 1957-63
Chakrabarti, Sudeshna (Khasnobis) : 1972-
Chanda, Apurba Kumar : 1926-30, 1933-4
Chattopadhyay, Bhabatosh : 1959-60
Chattopadhyay. Mahesh Chandra : 1927-9
Chattopadhyay, Nirupam : 1961, 1963-7
Chattopadhyay, Santiram : 1979-
Chattopadhyay, Sisir Kumar : 1957-8
Chaudhuri, Sukanta : 1973-
Cowell, E. B. : 1861-2
Cunningham, John Richard : 1907-8
Das, Govinda : 1974-8
Das, Praphulla Kumar : 1943-6
Dasgupta, Arun Kumar : 1961-77
Dasgupta, Bijoy Ranjan : 1934
Dasgupta, Jogendranath : 1897-1907
Dasgupta, Kalipada : 1949-59
Dasgupta, Rabindra Kumar : 1945
Dasgupta, Supriya (Chaudhuri) : 1975-
De, Bishnu : 1945-7
De, Harinath : 1904-6
De, Satish Chandra : 1916, 1919-21
De, Sushil Kumar : 1912
Derozio, Henry Louis Vivian : 1828-31 (H)
Dustoor, Phiroze E. : 1922-3, 1923-4
Foggo, D. : 1849-50 (H)
Friend-Pereira, Francis Charles Joseph : 1939-41
Gangopadhyay, Narendralal : 1926
Ghosh, Arun Kumar : 1974-9
Ghosh, Harijiban : 1926-7
Ghosh, Jagneswar : 1907-9
Ghosh, Jayati : 1979-81
Ghosh, Kamal Krishna : 1941
Ghosh, Manmohan : 1896-7, 1903-24
Ghosh, Pareshnath : 1937, 1939, 1951-3
Ghosh. Praphulla Chandra : 1904, 1906-7, 1908-39 ; Emeritus Professor 1939-48
Ghosh, Rabindranarayan : 1915-16
Ghosh, Rakhaldas : 1922-4
Gilchrist, R.N. : 1911-12
Gough, A.E. : 1878-86
Grapel, W, : 1853-6 (H), 1861
Griffith, Willam Edward : 1907-8
Grisenthwaite, J.B. : 1853-? (H)
Guha, Jatindranath : 1921-2
Hallward, N.L. : 1897-8, 1901-2
Hand, Robert : 1852-61 (incl. H), 1875-8
Haye, Abdul : 1942, 1943-4
Hill, S.C. : 1898-9
Holme, J.W. : 1910-23
Hordern, P. : 1861-8
Hornell, W.W. : 1902-3
House, A. Humphrey : 1936-7
Indra, Sunit Kumar : 1946-55
Ives, E.R. : 1864-8
Jackson, A.C. : 1876-7
James, Henry Rosher : 1900-1
Jones, Richard : 1850 (H)
Knighton, William : 1846-7 (H)
Mahalanobis, Shanta : 1962-3
Maitra, Nikhilnath : 1911-14
Maitra, Somnath : 1925, 1926-8, 1929-41, 1942-9
Maitra, Upendranath : 1899-1900
Majumdar, Nilkantha : 1893-4, 1895-7
Majumdar, Rabindranath : 1957-8, 1963-5, 1971-5
Majumdar, Saroj Kumar : 1978-
Majumdar, Saurindranath : 1938-9, 1940-43
Mann, John : 1878, 1888, 1892-9
Masters, W. : 1847 (H)
Mitra, Chandi Charan : 1915-16
Mitra, Sarada Charan : 1871
Montague, C.J. : 1847 (H)
Mukhopadhyay, Asoke Kumar : 1962-
Mukhopadhyay, Bijoy Gopal : 1903, 1924-9
Mukhopadhyay, Phani Bhusan : 1956-7, 1970-72
Mukhopadhyay, Rajkrishna : 1876-8
Mukhopadhyay, Sunil Kumar : 1978-
Mukhopadhyay, Tarapada : 1931-62
Oaten, E.F. : 1909-10
Paulson, W.H. : 1877-9, 1881
Percival, Harrington Hugh Melville : 1880-1911
Poddar, Sailendra Sundar : 1970-72
Pope, John van Someren : 1876-8
Prothero, M.G.D. : 1889-92
Rahman, Fazlur : 1944, 1946
Ray, Birendra Binode : 1821-3, 1923-4
Ray, Karuna Sankar : 1957
Ray, Surjya Sankar : 1967
Richardson, David Lester : 1837-9 (H), 1860-61
Robson, S. : 1868-75, 1878-80
Ross, Edward Denison : 1902-6
Rowe. F J. : 1879-80, 1883-99
Russell, Charles : 1899-1900
Saha, Narayan Chandra : 1965-71, 1973-8
Sanders, J. : 1858-60, 1863-72
Sanyal, Dilip Kumar : 1937, 1940
Sarbadhikari, Prasanna Kumar : 1880-81
Sarkar, Hem Chandra : 1907-9
Sarkar, Jadunath : 1898-99, 1901
Sarkar, Peary Charan : 1874-5
Sarkar, Prabir : 1961-2
Sen, Debdas : 1941, 1943
Sen, Dilip Kumar : 1948-9, 1949-50
Sen, Girish Chandra : ?
Sen, Sailendra Kumar : 1953-62, 1962-82
Sen, Taraknath : 1934-6, 1936-7, 1942-69 : Emeritus Professor 1969-71
Sengupta, Subodh Chandra : 1929-33, 1935-42, 1946-60
Sikdar, Birendranath : 1971-4
Stack, G.A. : 1889, 1890-92
Sterling, T.S. : 1909-27
Tawney, Charles Henry : 1872-6
Tepper, C.W.R. : 1885
Thomson, Ninian H. : 1861
Tipping, L. : 1904-6
Tytler, Robert : 1828-34 (H)
Vaughan, C.T. : 1850 (H)
Vining, Wilton : 1848-50 (H)
Watt, George : 1881
Webb, W.T. : 1877-91

SOME TEACHERS OF THE DEPARTMENT

Owing to restrictions of space, this section has to be selective. Few will quarrel with the inclusions; but we share the deep regrets many must feel over inevitable omissions. The entire souvenir is an act of homage to generations of illustrious teachers of the Department. Here we merely focus that homage upon some representative figures, restricting ourselves to those no longer with us.

We have deliberately chosen to reprint passages from earlier tributes—in some cases, by one of these savants to another. It reflects the homogeneity of outlook and mutual respect from which the Department has always drawn its strength.

HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO (1809-31)

Teacher of History and English Literature at Hindu College, 1828-31. Poet: author of Poems *(1827),* The Fakeer of Jungheera.....and Other Poems *(1828)*

He came down to Calcutta from Bhaugulpore in 1826, and hurried his first volume through the press. The reception it met with was most flattering and encouraging. In the following year, he not only reprinted his former volume, but added another ambitious poem entitled *The Fakeer of Jungheera* ..... The two volumes were received by the public with great approbation, and Derozio's fame was supposed by many to be firmly established.....

His career as a teacher was marked with great success. He opened the eyes of his pupils' understandings. He taught them to reason, and imbued their minds with a taste for poetry and literature. His knowledge of moral philosophy was somewhat extensive. With great penetration, he led his scholars through the pages of Locke and Reid and Stewart... He laboured with great zeal for his pupils' interests. He established the first Debating Society among the students of the Hindu College, and delivered a course of lectures on English poetry. He was neither a fluent nor an eloquent speaker, but the little that he said contained bone and sinew, and furnished a large stock of accurate information.

—Unsigned article (ascribed to C. J. Montague) in the Oriental Magazine, *October 1843*

DAVID LESTER RICHARDSON (1801-65)

Teacher of English Literature at Hindu College, 1837-9 (then Principal); Professor of English, Presidency College, 1860-61. Author of Miscellaneous Poems *(1822),* Sonnets and Other Poems *(1825),* Literary Leaves *(1836),* Literary Recreations *(1852) etc.*

For an appreciation see page 11.

CHARLES HENRY TAWNEY (1837-1922)

Taught English, History and Philosophy at the College, 1864-92 (Principal 1876-92). Edited Richard III *(1888). Sanskrit scholar and translator. Later Bodley's Librarian*

A Senior Classic of Cambridge, Professor C. H. Tawney was one of the most scholarly of Englishmen to come out to India. Normally, one of the universities in his own country would have claimed him; but he happened to have weak lungs and was medically advised a change to a warm climate.....

Richardson's legacy of outstanding Shakespearean teaching was well maintained and enriched by Tawney. Some idea of the quality of his Shakespearean scholarship may be obtained from his critical edition of *Richard III*...The introduction contains a rather remarkable study of the character of Richard III, rich in what De Quincey called the sympathy of understanding as opposed to the sympathy of approbation.....

It may be added in this connexion that, while in Calcutta, Tawney rounded off his classical scholarship by learning Sanskrit, which he learnt well enough to be able to translate into English, with critical introductions and notes, Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara,* the *Kathakosha,* Merutunga's *Prabandhachintamani,* two of Bhartrihari's *Shatakas,* Bhavabhuti's *Uttara-ramacharita,* and Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra.*

—T. N. Sen in the Presidency College Shakespeare Commemoration Volume, *1966*

HARRINGTON HUGH MELVILLE PERCIVAL (1855-1931).

Taught English, History, Economics and Political Philosophy at the College, 1880-1911. Officiating

Principal, 1909. Edited Samson Agonistes (*1880*), As You Like It (*1910*), The Merchant of Venice(*1912*), The Tempest (*1928*), Macbeth (*1929*) *and* Antony and Cleopatra (*published posthumously in 1955*)

Of his equipment for the post he held and of the distinction he brought to it, it is needless to speak at length. His scholarship was many-sided and deep. Literature was not his only love. He was, as *The Statesman* in an obituary note on him said, 'a polymath, always ready to help out his colleagues and help students in history, philosophy and other subjects.'.....

In his lectures to his classes, however, he avoided all show of scholarship, never dabbled in -isms and -ities, those labels which, as has been well said, are easy 'devices for saving talkative persons the trouble of thinking'. His incisive comments were pithy and rich in suggestiveness. They often demanded alertness of mind on the part of his listeners.....And what shall I say of his interpretation of poetry and specially of Shakespeare ? It revealed to us a new world of beauty and thought into which the profane herd of critics were never allowed to intrude.....

The best commentary on Shakespeare was according to him the reader's own personal experience of life. Writing in 1926, he said : 'All these years of silence, I have not read much of Shakespeare, but much of other subjects, wholly unconnected with him ; but one result has been, so I fancy, to make me grow older in mind ; and this growth has enabled me to understand him better, so too, again, I fancy.'.....

Rigidly methodical and regular in his habits, he could easily get through an appalling amount of work. When he officiated as Principal of the College for nine months, he did not cut a single lecture from his routine of 18 hours' work as professor.....

He was Indian to the core of his heart. 'We Indians' was a phrase one constantly heard from him. 'With all our English education' , he wrote to me once, 'we are still by nature Indian. The coolness of Western teaching cannot damp the warmth of Eastern impulse innate in us, easterners on this earth. And I hope it never will ; it is a precious gift of nature.....'

-'P' (*Praphulla Chandra Ghosh*), *in the* Presidency College Magazine *vol. 25, 1939*

MANMOHAN GHOSE (1869-1924)

Professor of English at the College, 1896-7, 1903-24. Poet: author of Love Songs and Elegies (*1898*)*and* Songs of Love and Death (*posthumously in 1926*)

A deeper veil of mystery surrounds him than his compeers. Being not merely an interpreter of poetry, but an original poet, he impressed us as clothed in a double halo.....It was a kindred soul which mingled its own fragrance with the poet of his study.....He distilled the essence of poetry not merely through the usual organs of the intellect and the emotions, but through a direct sixth sense of immediate intuition...

[He] was primarily emotional in his approach and was concerned with the creation of an atmosphere which soaked the particular poem. He did not particularly mind the actual words but saw them suffused with a richer suggestiveness, as conditioned and encircled by a wider circle of complex associations..... [He] revelled in Romantic poetry, and Shelley, with his intricate symbolism and rapidly shifting imagery and Keats with his beauty-charged sensuousness provided him with just the stimulus for evoking an atmosphere.....In fact, his accounts of the poems were not so much interpretations as virtually new creations.....

Manmohan was a recluse not from temperament but in response to the shocks of life. He was too sensitive, too delicately attuned, and if I may add, too proud to expose his scars to the public gaze and to invite confidences.....He had, I think, never been reconciled to his banishment to an Indian environment. No part of his soul had softened to the country of his accidental birth and enforced adoption. It was only in the enchanted atmosphere of the class-room, where his Oxford environment could be somehow transplanted to an Indian climate, that he felt at home and was fully articulate.....

It was by his inspired interpretation of others' poetry rather than by creative fulfilment in his own that he is remembered now. .....Manmohan is among the inheritors of unfulfilled renown. His destiny subjected him to this partial eclipse.

— *Srikumar Banerjee in the College Alumni Association's* Autumn Annual *vol. 8, 1968*

PRAPHULLA CHANDRA GHOSH (1883-1948)

Professor of English at the College, 1904, 1906-7, 1908-39 : Emeritus Professor, 1939-48

For an appreciation see pages 32-35.

SRIKUMAR BANERJEE (1892-1970)

Taught in the Department 1912-35, 1938-46. Author of Critical Theories and Poetic Practice in the Lyrical Ballads *(1931)*, Bangla Sahitye Upanyasher Dhara *(1939)*, Studies in the Poetry of Coleridge and Keats *(1965) etc.*

When Srikumar Banerjee joined Presidency College, he had certain initial handicaps. He was young, very young : he was also unimpressive in appearance and halting in speech. But he made an immediate impression on his pupils, and soon came to be regarded as one of the best teachers of poetry, a worthy confrere of the great Manmohan Ghose. His lectures on poetry, particularly romantic poetry, were a revealing experience to all who attended them from year to year. Although a fine scholar, his teaching was less scholarly elucidation than re-creation of the life that is in poetry.....

He was not interested in critical theory ; he liked the finished literary product whose beauty he would analyse and reveal. One day in 1924-5, I had a talk with him about the controversy between Wordsworth and Coleridge on poetic diction, ... and he casually commented on the superficiality of the standard books we read. I was not a little surprised because at least one of the books seemed to be satisfying to us. He did not say anything more then but consulted that deep, silent scholar, the late Professor Rabindranarayan Ghosh, and produced, after two to three years, his *Critical Theories and Poetic Practice in the Lyrical Ballads*.....

Although writing was only one of the Professor's many occupations, his mind worked very swiftly and his output was enormous. Scattered in volumes of journals, some of them ephemeral, are articles of permanent literary value, distinguished alike for thought and expression.....

The outstanding trait of his character was generosity of spirit.....He tenaciously remembered all his friends and would often jeopardize his own interests by trying to espouse the cause of a friend or a pupil. This generosity communicated itself even to his literary work. Although professedly a critic, he would try more to interpret than to criticize. He would reveal the possibilities of a novel or a poem from within rather than judge it from without. There were occasions when this generosity was over-stretched, but it was this quality of his mind that made his interpretations so illuminating.

—*S.C. Sen Gupta in the* Presidency College Magazine *vol. 49, 1972*

HIRAN KUMAR BANERJEE (1886—1965)

Taught in the Department 1924-6, 1928-41. Author of Henry Fielding *(1929)*

For an appreciation see page 15.

SOMNATH MAITRA (1894-1964)

Taught in the Department 1925, 1926-8, 1929-41, 1942-9

We still have vivid memories of that handsome personality, soft spoken, unobtrusive, shy and charmingly urbane. A far-travelled man, he made a beautiful synthesis of the East and the West in him —retaining the best in each culture to strengthen his imperturbable elegance. His lectures undoubtedly strengthened this impression of genial culture that his outward suavity sought to convey. They would keep his students enthralled with their superb arrangement, faultless delivery, their perfect poise, and their unobtrusive scholarship. Reading poetry aloud was his passion, and his splendidly resonant voice would make an abstruse poem that baffled the mind suddenly take on a new meaning in the ear. His keen appreciative faculty, his bon mots, his sensitive erudition, sense of fact and sense of history —above everything else, his non-attachment to any 'ism' and his striking catholicity of taste won the instinctive admiration and homage of all of us. The pattern of everyday life was made for us endlessly wonderful by Professor Maitra's personal behaviour and by his graceful vocabulary.

As the head of the English Department he showed consideration to all, but perhaps displayed his kindness in a larger measure to the junior members. He was a strict disciplinarian and a conscientious taskmaster but there was nothing crabbed, nothing harsh in his method. An enemy of clichés and generalizations, he stood for clarity in expression, originality in thought, correctness of information and detachment

in literary appreciation, and he looked for and often aroused these qualities in his colleagues.

—*Dilip Kumar Sen in the* Presidency College Magazine *vol. 45, 1964*

TARAKNATH SEN (1909-71)

Taught in the Department 1934-6, 1936-7, 1942-69; Emeritus Professor, 1969-71. Articles published in his lifetime collected in A Literary Miscellany, *published posthumously in 1972*

For appreciations see pages 36-41.

AMAL BHATTACHARJI (1919-70)

Taught in the Department 1950-59, 1959-70. Four Essays on Tragedy *published posthumously in 1977*

While teaching at Presidency College Amal Bhattacharji began his spectacular course of intellectual exploration. A voracious reader with an unusual capacity for absorbing what he read, Amal Bhattacharji, like all live students of literature, started with a very deep interest in modern literature. In order to understand the sources from which Eliot, Pound, Yeats and others drew their sustenance, he began to probe backwards. Unlike many Bengali intellectuals of his generation who confined themselves to translations, he actually sat down to do it the hard way—learn Italian, Latin and Greek, read the relevant texts in the original and then write about them. During these years of magnificent preparation he published very little. Once, when accused of being a 'perfectionist', he answered very simply, 'I shall write as a convinced man.'

If it is at all possible to trace the beginnings of the special methodology which he evolved for himself in the mature phase of his life it should be placed around 1965. ... It was a happy accident that just as he had begun to publish again he visited the University of Cambridge with his wife and daughter for a year in 1966-67. ...Within two years of his return he had written three long articles on Greek tragedy and a plan for a book on the evolution of the European tragic form. If completed, the work would have been a landmark in Indian scholarship of European studies. ...

Amal Bhattacharji died at the peak of his creative powers. After his life-long quest he had just arrived at his own approach and method. In 1969 he had taken charge of the Department of English and was full of ideas about its future development. He conceived of an approach to European studies from the modern Indian point of view. His plan was to break away from the tyranny of mere Anglo-centrism and to introduce our own view of European civilization using the modern tools of scholarship and research at our disposal.

A courageous dissenter himself, he always warmed to young independent minds. His memory is both a challenge to forge ahead and a responsibility to do it well.

—*Jasodhara Bagchi in the* Presidency College Magazine *vol. 49, 1972*

As explained above, we have not included tributes to living teachers in this section. But we would be failing in our duty if we did not record, at this point, the gratitude and respect of our old members towards every one of their former teachers. We must pay our particular respects to the four retired Heads of our Department who have honoured this Reunion with their presence or good wishes :

Professor Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta
Professor Tarapada Mukherji
Professor Phani Bhusan Mukherji
Professor Sailendra Kumar Sen

ROOM NO. 23

It is just another of those generously large classrooms that abound in Presidency College, with its share of dust, cobwebs, termites and wooden benches. But to the student of the English Department, Room no. 23 means much more. Not only is it associated with memories special to each person who has been a student here, but there is also something awe-inspiring in the sense of the past which dominates the room.

Presumably, Room no. 23 first came into existence when the Presidency College building was built in 1874, but what purpose the room then served remains unknown.

The rows of ancient benches make it difficult to think of Room No. 23 as ever having been anything other than a classroom. However, in the first quarter of this century, it used to serve as the sitting room of the senior professors of the English Department. Professors J.W. Holme (1910-23) and T.S. Sterling (1909-27) shared the room, although usually one or the other of them was away on tour. In practice, therefore, it belonged exclusively to one professor. The small adjoining room is said to have been a lavatory. An old cracked sink still stands desolately in one corner.

The room was comfortably furnished, with curtains and carpets. It is situated in one of the quietest corners of the College, at the end of the corridor on the western side of the building. Even today, it is undisturbed by the din of traffic. One can imagine the quiet seclusion in which these professors worked.

At that time, English classes were held in Room 18 (the present Bengali staff-room), Room 1 (the room directly above Room 23) and sometimes Room 22. As the reputation of the College increased, so did the number of students, and soon the need for more classrooms was felt. In the early thirties, when Bhupati Mohan Sen was the Principal, a large number of students were admitted to the Intermediate classes. Room no. 23 was converted into a classroom, and the professors were moved to the adjoining room leading from it. In course of time, this became the study of the Head of the English Department. The long wooden partition which is now a prominent feature of Room 23 must have been put up at this time, creating a narrow corridor leading to the professors' room. Until some five years ago, the entrance to this corridor even boasted a curtain, giving greater privacy to the professors and perhaps acting as a reminder of authority to boisterous students. Tutorials once used to be held in the professors' room, though it is now little more than a locked chamber. Professor Amal Bhattacharji was perhaps the last to use the room regularly. Today it is only opened from time to time during Seminar record recitals, as it contains the only A. C. socket at the Department's disposal, put in three years ago.

Since the thirties, Room 23 has been the heart of the English Department, the meeting-place of some of the finest personalities of the College among both teachers and students. Shakespeare's plays have been read by generations of students in this room, taught by professors of great distinction and scholarship. The first illustrious professor to have taught Shakespeare in this room was probably Praphulla Chandra Ghosh, with his unique personality and manner of teaching. After him came such men as Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, Tarapada Mukherji, Taraknath Sen and Sailendra Kumar Sen, all of whom have taught Shakespeare in this room.

In the thirties, the timetable was somewhat different from what it is now. Classes were held continuously from ten in the morning to four in the afternoon, with only seven-minute breaks in between. Room 23 must therefore have seen fuller days, hardly ever remaining empty between the first and last class-hours as it often is now.

Sometimes, compulsory English pass classes were also held in this room. Since these were attended by students of all the other Departments, memories of Room 23 are not confined to students of English alone.

The view out of the four large windows in the room has changed a good deal in the course of time. One of the windows now overlooks a tin-roofed corridor leading to the canteen. From another window can be seen a row of tin-roofed rooms which look as if they have sprouted overnight. But sitting at the benches

during lectures, one can only see the broad green leaves of the trees and the occasional crow, which cannot have changed very much.

The room itself has also changed. There is no knowing how old are the long lines of termite-trails that creep up the walls. They have certainly been there for some decades. The room was freshly painted a few months ago. The dust and cobwebs have not yet reappeared. Perhaps the missing window-panes will be replaced one day.

When the student first joins the English Department, Room no. 23 means little to him. It is a cliché to speak of the footfalls of time and of what these walls have witnessed. But when experienced for the first time, these associations grow real, imparting dignity to the room and generating a feeling of awe. Then, as personal experience is added to this, the room begins to acquire a definite personality which is special for each individual. This is at least partly the reason for the annual tussle over the room between the freshers and the Second Year students, who are sent to Room no. 22. The room which means little to the newcomers becomes something worth fighting over when they enter the Second Year.

NEEPA MAJUMDAR (III YEAR 1982-3)

Editor's Note: We are happy to add that, following a recent reallocation of rooms, the Department of English has been granted exclusive use of Rooms 12B, 22 and 23. This will fulfil the long-felt need for three rooms in which First, Second and Third Year classes can be carried on simultaneously.

THE ENGLISH SEMINAR

Soon after the setting up of the Philosophy Seminar, the English Seminar was instituted in 1909 under the initiative of Principal Henry Rosher James. It was housed in Room no. 18 (at present occupied by the staff of the Bengali Department), the present Seminar room which adjoins Room no. 23 having originally belonged to the Sanskrit and Pali Departments. In the early years of the Seminar, meetings were chiefly limited to sessions of tutorial essays read by the postgraduate students only. During the session 1910-11, an exceptionally brilliant paper on George Eliot was read by Srikumar Banerjee, then a fifth-year student, under the chairmanship of Professor J. W. Holme. Next year, Banerjee followed his earlier outstanding performance with a widely acclaimed paper on 'The Influence of the French Revolution on the English Romantic Poets.'

However, the earliest available written record of Seminar activities covers the session 1914-15, under the presidentship of Professor Manmohan Ghose. The topics selected for the essays are worth recording for historical reasons. They include : Marlowe as the predecessor of Shakespeare, The Sonnet in English Poetry, Tennyson's handling of the Arthurian Legend, Carlyle's social and political teachings, the epic and allegorical elements in Tennyson's *Idylls,* Dryden's *All For Love,* and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* As is evident from this list, the papers read at the seminars usually covered a rather wide field, and often could form the nucleus of aspiring research work.

However, from the several records of 'revivals', one can safely conclude that Seminar activities during the early years were rather fitful, if one ignores the purely social gatherings, farewell parties and the like. With the introduction of critical discussions on the papers read, and admission of Honours students into the prestigious fold in the early twenties, Seminar activities gathered a fresh momentum. The paper-reading continued to be limited to the promising students of the Department, with the professors taking the lead in the discussions. Down the years, the speakers of note have included P. C. Ghosh, Srikumar Banerjee, J. W. Holme, Phani Bhusan Chakravarti, Umaprasad Mookerjee, Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, Humayun Kabir etc. Apart from these acknowledged 'greats', no mean contribution was made by such men as Birendra Binode Roy. Prafulla Kumar Roy, Phiroze Dastoor, Tarapada Mukherji, Ranjit Kumar Roy, Ardhendu Bakshi, Asok Mitra etc.

In the sixties, the Seminar extended invitations to renowned Professors teaching at other colleges in Calcutta, and their lectures have been rewarding experiences. Following the success of this innovation,

the programme has been further widened in scope, and a distinctive feature of recent years has been the visits from foreign scholars touring India. During the last two decades, the eminent foreign poets and scholars who have addressed the Seminar include Stephen Spender, H. J. Oliver, Ian Jack and Michael Holroyd. Adding the spice of variety, Seminar activities have now come to include play-readings, arrangement of film shows at the British Council auditorium and elsewhere, and record recitals (for which the British Council has often generously lent tapes and records from their collection). The Seminar acquired a record player some twenty years ago. A cassette tape recorder was added in 1977.

In 1964, Taraknath Sen, then Professor-in-Charge of the Seminar, issued a circular containing a set of novel instructions. It made provision for the use of the Bengali language in literary discussions for the benefit of students who felt they could express their views more cogently and fluently through that medium. Most important of all, it expressly stated that no member of the staff should be present at Seminar meetings where papers were read or discussed solely by students. This was done with a view to promote uninhibited discussion, for even students who wax eloquent at informal discussions tend to freeze into stubborn silence in the presence of their teachers.

Nevertheless, it has usually been the Professors who have provided the guiding spirit in the organisation of seminars. It would be interesting to recount an anecdote here about an illustrious professor who was once in charge of the Seminar. Protesting against the late-afternoon Seminar sessions, Professor Manmohan Ghose is supposed to have jocularly remarked to his colleague, Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh, that these seminars were nothing but 'afternoon hothouses for the forcing of academic plants'—adding, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, his customary tag that this definition was to be found in 'the *first edition* of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary'! But jesting apart, the tradition that he initiated of working silently behind the scenes has been upheld by his successors like Professors Srikumar Banerjee and Taraknath Sen, down to the present day.

A Seminar Library was established in 1948 with books on long-term loan from the main College Library. (Earlier, the name 'Seminar Library' had been applied to what is now known as the English Honours Library, set up in 1926.) In recent years, the loans from the College Library have been supplemented by books bought with the help of special grants from the U.G.C. With a Professor nominally in charge, the Library still remains the preserve of the students, being almost wholly managed by them in true democratic spirit. Likewise, electing its own Secretary, the English Seminar has survived down the years, with the usual history of alternating periods of hibernation and enthusiastic activity. One only hopes that its successful functioning in the years ahead may encourage a liberal exchange of ideas, foster a taste for public speaking (Seminar Secretaries have eternally bewailed the timidity of the students in this respect) and, most important of all, widen the literary horizons of students confined to a cramping University syllabus. By organizing talks on recent literary trends as well as such earlier works and authors as have not been included in the curriculum, the English Seminar has not only aided in the understanding and appreciation of literature, but has also rescued it from the anatomisation of fossils to the study of a living, growing phenomenon.

May the mantle fall on capable, enterprising students who will carry on the good work in the days to come !

SHANTA DATTA (III YEAR 1981-2)

WE ARE AMUSED

H. M. Percival, an austere and taciturn man, seldom smiled in the classroom. When he did (while teaching Shakespeare's comedies, for example) it is said that his more diligent pupils would make a marginal note against the passage in question : 'Here Mr. Percival smiled.'

THE ENGLISH HONOURS LIBRARY

The English Honours Library is a relatively late addition to the Department's history, being only fifty -six years old. The Library, consisting of three cupboards and a table in the Seminar Room, presents an encouraging aspect of student activity in the Department, for it is managed by the students themselves.

The idea of a handy source of books independent of the main library was conceived by Professor P. C. Ghosh. Sympathetic towards a common complaint among the students of books in demand being 'out' in the main library, he suggested that they should form a small library of their own to supplement their needs. The Honours Library was established in 1926 with a few books. Today, though it retains its informal character, its modest stock of 550 books includes texts of well-known works, biographies, critical commentaries and histories of literature.

While the Seminar Library is maintained by U.G.C. grants and loans from the main library, the Honours Library is funded entirely by the students. A student Secretary responsible to the Professor-in-Charge has the responsibility of buying, maintaining and issuing books, keeping records and collecting fines from defaulting students.

A considerable part of the collection consists of books donated by both professors and students. The catalogue mentions Professor P. C. Ghosh's present of a number of books. Of special interest is a set of books ranging from Aeschylus, Virgil and Shakespeare to books on the elements of pronunciation from the personal collection of the late Abanikumar Sarkar. The name may mean little to those who use the library today, but the yellowing labels pasted on his books describe him as 'formerly Lecturer in English, City College, and a brilliant ex-student of the English Honours class of Presidency College, Calcutta, who died prematurely on December 6, 1946.' These labels were personally printed by Professor Taraknath Sen.

There is also evidence of effort and enterprise on the part of the students. Two years ago, some students discovered a dust-covered exercise book in the Seminar Room which proved to be a diary maintained by some students of Professor T. N. Sen. The book records how they scouted the stalls lining College Street for books to be added to the library, and their elation at having secured several good bargains.

The Honours Library remains popular among the students because they have free access to its cupboards. Students appreciate the informal procedure, and the friendly exchange of views made possible. While student enthusiasm is not lacking, some measure of discipline is needed to preserve the older and more valuable books such as the collection of Abanikumar Sarkar. A greater effort could also be made towards inviting contributions in cash or kind from the professors. The rate of subscription should also be increased if books are to be added regularly. Today the library seems to be collecting more from fines than from subscriptions : the fee of six rupees a year works out to a meagre fifty paise per month. No effort should be spared towards the well-being of the oldest and most successful instance of co-operation and enterprise in the Department.

REENA SHAH (III YEAR 1982-3)

PROFESSOR PERCIVAL : AN ANECDOTE

It is said that Professor Percival took a fortnight's holiday and left for Darjeeling. However, he was back in College on the twelfth day, because of a miscalculation. He had timed his holiday by the rate at which he completed the books he had taken with him to read—and failed to allow for the additional hours of studs he would get by being free of his college duties.

PAGES FROM THE PAST

c. 1827 : The English books used in those days were such as Tegg's 'Book of Knowledge', Enfield's 'Speaker', Goldsmith's 'Geography', and Murray's 'Grammar'. Dr. Wilson urged that the scholars should be made to peruse the best English authors instead of feeding on mere extracts.....During these years the study of English made great strides. In 1827 the First Class were reading Pope's poems, 'The Vicar of Wakefield', 'Paradise Lost' and Shakespeare's plays.

—College Register, vol. 1.

c. 1830 : As to the textbooks in use, in the department of English we find Richardson's Selections,—Shakespeare, Bacon's Advancement of Learning, Bacon's Essays, Bacon's *Novum Organum* (Calcutta Edition), Milton's Poetical Works, Addison's Essays, Johnson's Rasselas and Rambler, Goldsmith's Essays, Hallam's Literary History of the 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries, Campbell's Rhetoric, Schlegel's History of Literature.

—College Magazine, vol. 3.

c. 1831 : From a report of the Committee of Public Instruction :

'A command of the English language and a familiarity with its literature and science have been acquired to an extent rarely equalled by any schools in Europe. A taste for English has been widely disseminated, and independent schools, conducted by young men reared in the Vidyalaya [i.e., Hindu College], are springing up in every direction. The moral effect has been equally remarkable.....'

—Quoted in the College Magazine, vol. 3.

c. 1885 : The academic atmosphere of the College was largely 'examinational'. The more cynical and lazy spirits deemed it sufficient if they 'attended' the required percentage of lectures. The heroes were those who had secured the first three places in a University Examination. Those who had not obtained a place in the first 'Division' were hardly known to the rest of the class. The first class men occupied the front rows, took full notes of the lectures, and a few among them were even known to some of the professors by name and to them occasionally questions were put.....The professor would come punctually to time, get into his chair, usually placed on a small platform,.....pour forth his lecture on the prescribed textbooks often without looking to the right or to the left, and instantly as the hour closed would hurry away to another class to repeat the same process of inculcation.

—From the reminiscences of Abdur Rahim, College Magazine, vol. 3.

c. 1890 : When I joined the Presidency College, there were no arrangements for games, but this want was soon removed. We had a Professor of English, Mr. G. A. Stack. He was a fine journalist but never took kindly to the drudgery of teaching. Naturally, we were dissatisfied, and to placate us he presented the class with a football. The boys took up the game with avidity and thus football was introduced.

— From the reminiscences of H.N. Datta, College Magazine, vol.25.

c. 1898 : A little good physical exercise for 4 or 5 minutes at the end of every period (=55 minutes) was compulsory. The professors had their own rooms—and we had to shift from one room to another at the end of every lecture. A rush at the door and then a run—up or down the stone stairs by the entire population of the College—could not be carried out (even by saints) without simultaneous exercise of the vocal organs. When our Professor of Milton was at a fix to explain what a pandemonium was, he found entire relief by referring to the condition of our seat of learning at every 55 minutes.

—From the reminiscences of Mahendra Nath Gupta, College Magazine vol. 11

1911 : Professor Percival's routine in the year of his retirement :

	11-12	12-1	1-2	2-3
Monday	4th Year English Hons.	3rd Year English	6th Year English	5th Year English
Tuesday	3rd Year English Hons.	5th & 6th Years Political Economy	4th Year English	6th Year English
Wednesday	4th Year English Hons.	3rd Year English	6th Year English	5th Year English
Thursday	5th & 6th Years Political Philosophy	5th & 6th Years History	4th Year English	5th Year Political Philosophy
Friday	3rd & 4th Years History Hons.	5th & 6th Years Political Economy	4th Year English	5th Year English
Saturday	.....	.....	5th Year History	.....

Total : 21 classes.

—Taken from the College Magazine, vol. 25

c. 1915 : Letter to the Editor in Presidency College Magazine, vol. 2 :

Dear Sir,

Will you please allow me to ventilate a general grievance through the columns of your journal ?

It is probably known to you that we, English Honours students of the Third Year Class, have to attend lectures in Room No. 13 which overlooks College Street. Now it is almost impossible to attend properly and appreciate the lectures that are daily delivered there in the midst of the terrible noise that constantly makes itself heard in that room. .....The voice of the professor...far from rising above them, becomes almost inaudible. We lose half the benefit of our attendance on account of the Babel of noises. I do not know what the Third Year English Honours students have done to deserve this punishment.....

I am, etc.,
ONE OF THE POOR LOT

[Editor's note : Room No. 12B, which similarly overlooks College Street, has just been allotted to the English Department. We leave it to our readers to compute the rise in the level of traffic noise during the last 67 years.]

1917 :

PRESIDENCY COLLEGE MEN ON WAR SERVICE

Below we give a provisional list of those members of our College who have responded to the call for men for the University Corps of the Indian Defence Force and the Bengal Light Horse. It will be noticed that some members of the staff, too, have joined the ranks.....

1. Professor Sreekumar Banerjee, M.A. (English) .....
3. Professor Bhupendra Nath Basu, M.A. (English) .....

—College Magazine, vol. 4

1919 : Professor P. C. Ghosh of our College lectures to the University classes in Bengali. His subject is—'The Influence of the West on Indian Vernaculars'.

—College Magazine, vol. 6

1920 : An attempt has been begun to give first-year students a preliminary course of English in preparation for their lectures. A chief defect in our school education in Bengal is that comparatively few boys have a fluent and accurate knowledge of spoken English. This defect is inevitable, and the college has begun to attempt remedies. It is hoped to develop the scheme, and in future years to give all new students a short intensive course in pronunciation, reading, precis-writing, colloquial idiom.

—From Principal Wordsworth's Foreword to the College Magazine, vol. 7

1934 : An unsavoury hint which appeared in one of the popular dailies of Calcutta about the time of the publication of the B. A. gazette this year requires attention. The paper noted that for the last few years the results of our College in the English Honours Examination have not been what they ought to be. The inference drawn from this was that the English staff of the College was a batch of do-nothing people pampered at an enormous cost. We are sorry for these men who judge from outside without any knowledge of the actual circumstances. .....

—College Magazine, vol. 21.

1936 : According to suggestions made by the recent College Enquiry Committee, there has been a separation of Honours and Pass teaching in English in the Third Year Class, and arrangements have been made for tutorial work in English in the First Year classes from the very beginning of the session. All this, however, has entailed a large amount of additional work on the English Department ; a new hand is sorely needed ; we hope Government will do something about it.

—College Magazine, vol. 23

1937 : From a review of Stephen Potter's *The Muse in Chains :*

India, that loves English literature, and sets its teaching in the front place in its universities, has ample acquaintance with literature, its notes, keys, summaries, criticisms. It knows how much a youth can learn about a great author and how little about his soul, fire, power to excite or cleanse. For is not this the land where possible examination questions and answers are sold in thousands for an anna or two, and where the majesty of Shakespeare may be reduced to such explanatory notes as 'father : the male parent'?

—Reprinted from The Statesman in the College Magazine, vol. 23

1937 : In passing, we might just point out yet another defect which seems peculiar to Indian universities only. Our students and our educational mentors appear to be under the dangerous spell of what may be termed pseudo-romanticism. We are given too much of soft stuff to feed on. This is specially true with regard to the kind of poetry we are given to read by our universities : too much of flowers and rainbows, of dreaming loves and yearning moths.....Young learners require hard stuff occasionally to sharpen their teeth on ; and it would be good for universities to give us more of reading that requires intellectual exercise—poems, for instance, like Milton's, more of the classical poets, something of modern intellectuals, too, like T. S. Eliot ? Most of the literary contributions that reach us for the Magazine disclose a grievous softening of the brain...

—*College Magazine, vol. 24*

1937 : In the last issue we reported the resignation of Prof. [Humphrey] House ; we only refer here to a striking remark he made at the meeting where he was bidden farewell, viz. that he thought he was being paid more than he ought to have been. This sets at rest certain rather silly speculations on the subject of his resignation, and also should act as an eye-opener to those who fondly believe that fat salaries are essential for attracting *bona fide* teachers to this country.

—*College Magazine, vol. 24*

C. H. TAWNEY : TWO ANECDOTES

When the M. A. syllabus was weighted by the addition of compulsory Philology and Anglo-Saxon, Professor Tawney always took the Anglo-Saxon class. He would call upon the students in the order of their names to read and construe a paragraph of the extracts at the end of the *Anglo-Saxon Primer*. As will be imagined, most of the doomed men for the day absented themselves from the class, though attending regularly on 'safer' days. On calling up a student from the register and finding him absent, Tawney is said to have produced a caustic adaptation of the Hostess's words in *Henry V*: 'He has got the Anglo-Saxon fever. It is a quotidian—a quotidian tertian. It comes every third day.'

'I remember the first day he (Tawney) came to our class and took up Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. "I come no more," he began, "I come no longer", "to make you laugh, to amuse you with a comedy"—and so he proceeded. One could hardly realise from this paraphrase of little things that it was the M. A. class.'

—From the reminiscences of Bisveswar Bhattacharya, *Presidency College Magazine,* vol. 11.

PROFESSOR P.C. GHOSH

SUBODH CHANDRA SEN GUPTA
B.A. 1924; M.A. 1927; Teacher 1929-33, 1935-42, 1946-60

When Professor P. C. Ghosh retired in 1939, he had become a living legend; now, I am told, he has been attenuated to a name. 'I should have built churches then,' that supreme analyst of *Hamlet* might quip from the shades. I feel shocked because Professor Ghosh was so full of vitality and had such a commanding presence when, just sixty years ago, he first entered our class with a copy of the First Folio—yes, the original First Folio of 1623. He loved books, collected books, built a splendid library which was donated to Calcutta University and is now in ruins, I am told. But above all, he read books and assimilated what he read, using his scholarship with as much grace and facility as a bird uses its wings.

When I say that he loved to 'read' books, I should like to explain away a myth that gathered around his name. Dr. Srikumar Banerjee gave memorable expression to the sentiment of later generations by saying that to the three Aristotelian unities Professor Ghosh added the fourth unity of reading. When reading Shakespeare and Chaucer, particularly Shakespeare, he could hold his class spell-bound by his recitative and declamatory power.

I demur to the legend in so far as it makes elocution an integral part of Professor Ghosh's exegesis, and also to the notion that he was partly indebted to accounts of great actors for his interpretation of Shakespeare. He positively refused to be guided by actors—here he was in agreement with his teacher H. M. Percival—and he also shared Lamb's view that Shakespeare's tragedies could not be adequately presented on the stage. In London, Percival would listen to music regularly but avoided the theatres. Professor Ghosh, who would exclude nothing, read about the great actors, but his point of view was derived from meditation and observation and nourished by his extensive scholarship. It was compounded of many simples, but was essentially his own.

2

The Professor's power of assimilation was matched by his capacity for forgetting what was irrelevant or pointless. In the fly-leaf of his copy of Allardyce Nicoll's book on Shakespeare, he wrote that he was sorry for having spent money on such a book. When, on reading Quiller-Couch's *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, Percival wrote that the author had the ways of a butterfly, P. C. Ghosh's face beamed with approbation. He chastised us in our undergraduate days for not having heard of Croce, but I later discovered that Croce's theorizing had made little impression on a mind that revelled in the concrete realities of literature. After reading Bradley's essays on *Coriolanus* and 'Feste the Jester', he icily commented to me, 'Here is fine writing for the sake of fine writing.' He knew all that was worth knowing about his subject. If he came across a detail that was superfluous, he would never touch on it; and if it came up, he would reject it with a sneer. This self-restraint, I now realise, was a remarkable accomplishment.

Another aspect of this adequacy was that his vast linguistic scholarship was matched and nourished by his exceptional literary sense. When he retired in 1939, we organized a large farewell meeting at which Sir Jadunath Sarkar, one of the principal speakers, recalled with gratitude how in course of his long career, whenever he was at a loss about language or literature, he would write to his pupil Praphulla and was never disappointed. Once, in Symonds' *Sidney* (E. M. L. series), Professor Sarkar came across a quotation from Camden on 'the best of authors' writing about 'that best Governor of Britain':

...whatever we loved in you, as the best of authors speaks of that best governor of Britain, whatever we admired in you, still continues, and will continue in the memories of men, the revolution of ages, and the annals of time.

Who, pondered Professor Sarkar, was this best of authors, writing about the best Governor of Britain? On 8 December 1922 he wrote from Cuttack to Professor P. C. Ghosh, thinking that Presidency College Library might have Camden's works to supply a possible clue. The letter reached Professor

Ghosh on 11 December, and on the same day he wrote back to say that although the College Library did not have Camden, he had by 'a lucky hit' traced the reference to Tacitus' Agricola. The 'best Governor' provided the clue. Was it, I ask, a 'lucky hit' or a matchless combination of impeccable scholarship and uncanny literary insight ?

On another occasion, Professor Sarkar came across a Spanish passage of which he could make out nothing because he did not know Spanish. He passed on the passage to Praphulla and soon got it back with a full translation. Professor Ghosh modestly told me later that he did not know Spanish. He knew good Latin, and as Spanish was a low Latin language, he read the passage a number of times, especially noting the words which were indubitably Latin and of which he could make out the sense. In this way he could guess the drift of the passage. It seemed to him to be from *Don Quixote*, and one or two further readings gave him an idea of the context. He located the passage in the original Spanish version and then copied out the relevant translation, which he sent to Professor Sarkar. Now what would you admire more here : the transparent modesty, the knowledge of language and philology, or the instinctive literary sense which led him to the right passage ?

3

I felt the full impact of the Professor's scholarship when I read Chaucer in the M. A. class. His teaching of Chaucer was as exceptional as his teaching of Shakespeare. Indeed, I often felt that it was even more remarkable. Shakespeare's men and women are very near us, but Chaucer's poetry takes us to a distant world. The gulf seems to be unbridgeable, though chronologically Shakespeare was nearer to Chaucer's time than we are to Shakespeare's. The Master saw this difference, and that is why his teaching of Chaucer was very unlike his teaching of Shakespeare.

Knowing that Chaucer's Monk and Friar and Prioress and his Wyf of Bath belonged to a world half-alien and spoke a language far removed from modern English, he transported us as if by magic to this unfamiliar land and then revealed all that was human and delectable in it. This transformation he could effect first of all, by means of a wonderful mastery of Middle English—both grammar and literature—and secondly by an equally intimate acquaintance with life in the medieval age : history, geography, topography, religious orders and organizations, social strata and even roads and pilgrimages. When reading the account of the Prioress, he came to the class with a 'peire of bedes, gauded al with grene' made especially for our edification. He would not deliver any lecture on medieval literature or on Chaucer's humour, but Chaucer's characters lived in his lectures as they have never lived outside Chaucer's poetry. We could vividly see the majestic Prioress with her pretensions and limitations as though she were a close neighbour, fluently speaking the French of Stratford-atte-Bowe, but ignorant of the more respectable French of Paris. The combination of familiarity and distance in Chaucer was reflected even in the slightly sing-song tone in which the Professor read out Chaucer's verse. But the large and robust significance of the poetry, full of humour and vitality, was brought out chiefly by his impeccable scholarship and luminous understanding of literature and life.

4

Professor Ghosh confessed to an ignorance of the moderns and would often say that whenever he heard of a new book, he read an old one. But he loved to browse among books, and whatever he read would enrich his understanding, so that he could juxtapose apparently unconnected literary beauties and add a new flavour to familiar things. We have all read Shakespeare's *Othello* and Bankimchandra's *Chandrasekhar* ; but when he drew a parallel between Emilia and Kulsom, these favourites seemed to acquire a new significance.

This brings me to Professor P. C. Ghosh's teaching of Shakespeare, which was the most memorable experience for the majority of his pupils, and through them, I hope, it has been and will be handed down to later generations of Shakespeare lovers. I read four entire plays with the Professor, and had occasion to discuss bits of others during our long and intimate association. Although he was a complete scholar, it was not his learning that weighed with us but his unique insight, which could throw new light on hackneyed ideas. Most critics have dwelt on the corrupt and vulgar court of Elsinore. Professor Ghosh illuminated this by drawing attention to the bad taste of Polonius

who had no scruples in exhibiting his maiden daughter's love-letters as if they were state documents ; I do not know of any other interpreter of Shakespeare showing such an awareness of the deadened sensibilities of a hard-boiled statesman.

The Professor venerated his teacher H. M. Percival ; of the critics (whom as a rule he disliked) he just tolerated Bradley. But his own interpretation was larger and more incisive than Percival's, because he could rise above his teacher's narrow didacticism ; and he was never lured by Bradley's quest for a Hegelian reconciliation in Shakespeare. He took the plays as they are—stories of men and women who live more intensely than we do but are essentially like us—and he thought it was his duty only to reveal the intricacy and depth of Shakespeare's thought and language.

Here I use the word 'thought' more or less as a translation of Aristotle's *dianoia*, arguments used by the dramatis personae in support of a proposition, for such argnments reveal nuances of their speaker's character and also provoke the persons addressed.

I shall take just one instance to illustrate my meaning :

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls :
Who steals my purse steals trash, etc.

I read this first as a schoolboy and felt elevated. Seven years later, when I found that the speaker is not Shakespeare but Iago, I was confused ; but soon the Professor came forward with the explanation that the key-word in this somewhat irrelevant sermon is 'woman'. 'Man' here would normally include woman, as we do not exclude women when we say that men are mortal. The point is that in trying to poison Othello's mind against Desdemona, Iago is venturing to tread very dangerous ground. So he proceeds daringly and yet with caution. Delivering a platitudinous lecture on good name, he utters the word 'woman' with special emphasis, thus leading Othello to exclaim, 'By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts.' Iago can now proceed with confidence to the task of 'practising upon his peace and quiet/Even to madness.'

The question has been asked how, if Othello was a loving husband, he could become murderously jealous in course of a few minutes. These problems, about which Professor Ghosh himself would not bother, he would answer with Othello's own words : 'One not easily jealous, but being wrought/Perplex'd in the extreme'. That was his method : explaining Shakespearian problems with quotations from Shakespeare, all minutely analysed and lucidly explained. If I could formulate a theory, for which he with his eyes fixed on the text would not care, it might be thus enunciated. Although life imitates literature, literature does not imitate life. The pole-star guides the navigator tossing on the seas, but the navigator's movements do not influence the pole-star. The stages in the development of a Shakespeare play are well-marked, but they are not determined by our clocks and calendars.

This is a faint summary of the way Professor P. C. Ghosh taught—his own word was 'read'—Shakespeare. Shakespeare, he was never tired of telling us, is his own best commentator. It was his way of dealing with other aspects of Shakespearian scholarship too. Quite recently I was busy exploring the principles underlying the construction of Elizabethan playhouses, and I at once remembered how when explaining Hamlet's instruction to the players, he also read 'Pyramus and Thisbe' as enacted by Bottom and his friends in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. No other book I have read makes this juxtaposition, which shows how Shakespeare's multifaceted playhouse tried to hold the mirror up to nature as the Prince of Denmark prescribed, and also caricatured the illusionist theatre which was then coming into existence. Professor Ghosh's teaching of *The Comedy of Errors* convinced me that it was because the Elizabethan theatre had an upper and an inner stage that Shakespeare dared introduce an additional pair of twins, whom Plautus could not think of accommodating in the Roman street-theatre. Again, his reading of the encounter between the Ghost and Hamlet is my principal ground for thinking that the topmost storey did not merely serve as a music-room but could also be used to present spectacular action.

Professor Ghosh had an intimate knowledge of all the modern editors from Rowe to Steevens and Malone, but he disliked them all. If occasionally he had a good word for Theobald, it was only to spite Pope, for whose editorial work he entertained a very poor opinion. I need hardly say that he was a very competent Elizabethan scholar but when he 'read' Shakespeare with us, he would keep the Elizabethans out ; rather I should say he put them in their proper place. I shall just mention the way

in which he read *Richard III* in the B.A. First Year class, where for three busy months from July to September, he did not even open the book. He first made us read Marlowe, for *Richard III* is a Marlowesque play; but he kept clear of the 'disintegrators' who would see Marlowe's hand in it, and never even spoke of Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare. He himself read out, with appropriate comments, *Henry VI* Parts 1 and 2 and a part of *3 Henry VI* from Quiller-Couch's *Historical Tales from Shakespeare,* and began Shakespeare at *3 Henry VI* II. iii, where Richard as Duke of Gloucester makes his first appearance. Then he read both *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* line by line, of course devoting nore minute attention to the latter play than to the earlier.

Could anyone suggest a better approach to *Richard III* or a better method of studying early Shakespeare? More than sixty years have passed since I ceased to be Professor Ghosh's student in the class-room, but somehow or other he comes to my mind in all my studies—reading as well as writing—especially when these have anything to do with Shakespeare.

After Professor Ghosh's retirement, I collected a handsome amount of money to hold a farewell meeting and raise a suitable memorial to the master. The first suggestion, approved by the Professor himself, was for the publication of a volume of essays in his honour. But the majority of donors opted for a statue or a bust, so that—the words are still ringing in my ears—'generations of students who will not hear his voice should be able to see his face.'

The bust was raised, and befittingly unveiled by Syamaprasad Mookerjee; but it met with a disastrous end. When Dr. Praphulla Chandra Ghosh, for a year Professor of Chemistry at the College, was installed as Chief Minister for the second time in 1967 in the teeth of determined opposition from the Left, a procession of furious young men marched through College Street in protest. Entering Presidency College, they saw the bust, pulled it down and triumphantly departed, thinking that they had taken rightful revenge. Thus was Cinna the poet torn to pieces in mistake for Cinna the conspirator.

After retiring from Presidency College, Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta was Head of the Department of English at Jabalpur and Jadavpur Universities. He is the author of *The Art of Bernard Shaw* (1936), *Shakespearian Comedy* (1951), *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* (1964), *Aspects of Shakespearian Tragedy* (1972), and many other well-known critical works in English and Bengali.

Editor's Note: We are glad to report that, thanks to the interest taken by the Chief Minister of West Bengal, arrangements have been made to have Professor Ghosh's bust repaired.

TARAKNATH SEN: TWO TRIBUTES

I. BY AMAL KUMAR DUTTA (B.A. 1945, M.A. 1948)

We had heard about him even when we were in school. He was known as the epitome of what an ideal student should be : standing way ahead first in all the examinations in which he had appeared. His tally was over 90% marks in the matriculation examination in 1925, securing 'letters' (distinction marks over 80%) in all the subjects and setting up an unbeatable record from Khudi Ram Bose Academy, North Calcutta. In the subsequent examinations up to his M. A., he was so far ahead of others that he almost dwindled in the distance. He was the favourite student of the legendary Professor Praphulla Chandra Ghosh, whose oceanic scholarship in literature and the arts he was to match, and perhaps excel, in the years ahead. By the time one was qualified to enter the precincts of Presidency College, Calcutta, he was already a formidable legend to reckon with.

I attended my first ever lecture by Professor Taraknath Sen on the 16th August 1943 in our Third Year English Honours class. On the very first day, when he told us that he would be doing Shakespeare (*Twelfth Night*) and Milton (*Samson Agonistes*) with us, he wanted us to write an essay on 'Your Favourite Book'. Fresh from my first exciting sojourn in the sombre world of Thomas Hardy, I wrote a piece on *The Return of the Native*. I also remember (with amused embarrassment now replacing the smug romanticism of those days) that I let my pen go self-indulgently wild over the menacing presence of Egdon Heath hovering over the tragic protagonists like impending, implacable Fate. In the next class, some scripts were returned with the compelling advice : 'Change Honours immediately' ; some were simply marked 'Yes' ! Only two of us were lucky enough to be considered 'Promising'. The initial euphoria was later tempered substantially by his affectionate cautioning, delivered in person within the hallowed sanctum of the Professors' room. While it seemed I had a feeling for, and some critical awareness of, good literature, I was regrettably fond of 'purple patches'. This, according to him, was a phenomenon described as 'Benglish', quite contrary to the inherent grace of good, supple English prose. I still remember the prescription he gave me for improving one's style of writing English :

—Any book of essays by Bertrand Russell

—Novels and short stories by W. Somerset Maugham

—The Prefaces to the plays of George Bernard Shaw

—The satires of Dryden and Pope

—The poems of Thomas Gray

—The longer poems of William Wordsworth

—The editorials of *The Statesman*, Calcutta

This was, however, only to start with. He had also, I remember, confidently presumed that I had already read in the original all the 37 plays of Shakespeare ! I was gulping for an abashed negative reply, but fortunately, like jesting Pilate, he would not wait for an answer.

Doing Shakespeare with him was quite an experience. For the first seven days, after prescribing some book on Elizabethan England to be read immediately, he spent the time entirely in showing us pictures and diagrams from the fat volumes of *Shakespeare's England*. How could we otherwise know how the numberless folds in Malvolio's smiling face reminded the Elizabethan audience of the mariners' maps in those days ? How could we ever know about the 'groundlings' unless we knew with visual precision the structure of the Elizabethan stage ? Without some acquaintance with the so-called Italianate costumes and manner of speech, we could never appreciate the pretentiousness of Duke Orsino and its intended caricature in the greetings of Sir Toby Belch ('Castiliano Vulgo', etc.).

After treating ourselves to a fairly heavy dose of Shakespeare's England, we spent the next three weeks running through the complete works of Shakespeare, including all the plays at different phases of his artistic development, his narrative poems and his sonnets. The idea was to give us a foretaste of the manner in which the poet, initially enthralled by the music of words, was gradually transformed into a contemplative adult coping agonisingly with the elemental problems of life and finally into a mellowed sage with all-accepting, all-forgiving, all-understanding wisdom. We were made to realise how rhymed couplets made way for majestic blank verse under metrical discipline, and

the dramatic significance of Shakespeare's famous short lines.

After thus initially grazing in limitless pastures, we were guided into the pleasure-house of *Twelfth Night*. We were initiated into the Italianate upper crust of society with Duke Orsino, Lady Olivia and Viola as well as into the hilarious and raucous underworld of Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste and Maria, with Malvolio somewhere in between with his ingratiating smile and yellow stockings. The classroom became intensely alive with characters moving about in the flesh before our very eyes.

That was Shakespeare.

Before we went anywhere near *Samson Agonistes,* we were first acquainted with the glory that was Greece. We were treated to quite a bit of Hellenic history : the festival of Dionysus, the origins of Attic tragedies and comedies with masked actors, the open-air theatre, Haigh, H. R. James, Gilbert Murray, Aristotle's Poetics, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. We were told all about the Greek Chorus, with its crucial role in interpreting Attic tragedy and acting as an emotional bridge between the dramatis personae and the audience. We were explained the immutable law of the gods, the implacable rule of Ate, the self-destroying phenomenon of *Hamartia,* the inescapable writ of Nemesis and the concept of Catharsis in its therapeutic, physiological and emotional aspects.

After this we had to know something about Puritanism in seventeenth-century England, about Milton's dilemma in adapting the pagan world of Hellenic culture to the cosmology of Christian ethics, his preoccupation with justifying the ways of God to men, his contempt for rhymed verse and his misogyny. We waded through *L'Allegro, IL Penseroso, Lycidas, Comus, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained* and his sonnets to know about the development of his poetic genius and the sonorous music of his words which made him the 'organ-voice of England'. We were allowed to arrive at the door of *Samson Agonistes* only after this painstaking pilgrimage and after going through a bit of the Old Testament. The excruciating physical agony and mental restlessness of Samson hit us with tremendous impact with Prof. Taraknath Sen's rendering of this Miltonic tragedy. And, at the end of the turmoil, it was also made immensely clear to us what Catharsis was all about : 'And calm of mind, all passion spent'.

These memories remain vividly fresh even after nearly forty years : the smile lighting up his face when we were together with him before Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the sombreness of his voice reading out Samson's reflection on his blindness, the gestures of his slender and tapered fingers that created Viola under our very eyes.

One remembers his oddly instructive manner of correcting our tutorial exercises. We were required to write these on one side of the exercise book, leaving the other side blank. He used to make various remarks on our scripts (*Pl., Beng., Taut.* etc. standing for Pleonasm, Benglish, Tautology, etc.) and, after noting his remarks, we were required to re-write the maligned portion again in the blank page in our exercise book. The result was not always an improvement. Sometimes we got less marks for the revised attempt than for the original. And there were some absolute gems of comments. When a friend of mine started his dissertation on Marlowe's *Edward II* with the sentence : 'Marlowe's *Edward II* is, like Shakespeare's *Othello,* a tragedy', he was greeted with the comment : 'There is a river in Macedon ; and there is also moreover a river at Monmouth' !

Here was one who set great store by meticulous attention to detail, unrelenting discipline in thought and composition, and attempted perfection in everything. Like the ancient Greeks, he was averse to anything in excess. Economy of effort and expression was his credo. He preferred the Doric pillar to the Ionian or the Corinthian because it was functionally the most adequate and beautiful, without any dispensable frills. For our English composition, he used to say : 'Do not use a word too many. If you feel like saying something in five sentences, the first attempt should be to examine whether the same thing cannot be said in two simple sentences.' He was a great stickler for a methodical approach to any problem. I remember once I submitted to him what appeared to me an impressively comprehensive bibliography of all critical literature (including articles in literary magazines) on the various papers for our Honours examination. He returned this exercise with a brief comment : 'Perfunctory' (in red ink). I had to re-do the exercise all over again. When this magnum opus was submitted to him, he took a whole week over it and, when it came back, I found punctilious

notations made against each entry in the voluminous compendium. The entries were 'M', 'S', 'D' and 'O', standing for Must, Should, Desirable, and Optional. He had given thought to each item and classified its priority in his organised scheme of things. I preserved this over a long time, but cannot lay hands on it any more.

I found the same careful and comprehensive analysis, so dear to him, much later during the last years of his life. He was so perturbed by the Naxalite disturbances in Presidency College that he started examining in depth all the publications brought out by different groups of Naxalites. One evening in his house, he gave us a detailed two-hour-long history of the growth, development and schisms in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh with reference to the respective group leaders, their declared brands of ideology, their respective modi operandi and their published papers. This was the most fascinating exposition of the Naxalite agitation in the country I have ever come across, analysed in great objective detail and tinged by an over-all feeling of regret that so much pent-up energy of talented youth was being drained away in a waste of frustrated desperation.

Presidency College has so many facets in one's fond and nostalgic memory. One of the most enduring experiences will certainly be, for me as well as for so many others, Prof. Taraknath Sen. 'Others abide our question. Thou art free.'

Amal Kumar Dutt is a member of the Indian Administrative Service. He is currently Secretary (Textiles) in the Union Ministry of Commerce and Textiles.

II. BY ARUN KUMAR DAS GUPTA (B.A. 1951, M.A. 1953, Teacher 1961-77)

As I look back on the years I spent at Presidency College as a pupil of the late Professor Taraknath Sen, I am overawed as I was when I first saw him. Yet I confess a difference. That awe had then melted into something akin to passion as the hours in the classroom came more and more to assume the likeness of moments that swiftly glide as they forge one's soul. Now, with the irremovable shadow of death between us, this awe can but fade into something akin to oblivion, as the years advance and the gulf becomes wider in one direction and narrower in another.

Rarely one comes across a teacher who reveals the secret of a great work of art. His teaching constitutes an experience parallel to that of what he interprets. A great artist works in the same way as nature. It is in that sense that he imitates nature. Professor Sen enjoyed a like independence in his total absorption in the work itself, in his mastery of every detail. Others are slavishly dominated by what they have to teach. Their servility is often plainly written on their faces. Few indeed can shake off the fetters of learning merely acquired. But here we felt the mind that interpreted was a parallel power. He looked steadily at the work as a painter beholds what he has to paint, and gave us a likeness that had an independent authority.

The method he applied was parallel to the use of light and perspective which revolutionized the representation of nature in Renaissance painting. I should like to locate it in the importance he attached, in a unique manner, to the role of short lines in Shakespearean drama and of sound-patterns in poetry, as also to the infinite subtleties of diction and imagery, of metre and rhythm that reveal a master's hand. On the first he has written himself, though that article contributed to the *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume* published in 1966 by the Department of English, Presidency College was only the beginning of a full-scale work he contemplated on the basis of the evidence he had accumulated during a lifetime of study and teaching of Shakespeare. It was, like everything else that he taught or thought about, all written out in his brain, but he died before he could publish it in the form of a book. In this brief article I shall attempt, in spite of limitations more severe than mere lack of space, to speak about the rest.

The very conception of literature in Sanskrit reflects an attitude to the word that we find consistently in Professor Sen, in whatever he taught. The word for literature is *Sahitya*, i.e. union (of word and meaning). His exegesis of poems was faithful to the tradition of our aesthetics, and it was an added distinction that his lectures provided an admirable example of the perfect convergence of the finest strains of thought, Indian and Western, on this matter. They never failed to make the philosophy of meaning beautifully concrete.

Let me give an example. When expounding the identity of thought and meaning in poetry he cited these lines in Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* :

Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves ;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

In the first of these four lines, he said, we have Beauty dying and in the lines that follow, Beauty nascent. He went on to show how the sound-patterns convey these opposite sensations transmuted into poetic facts. The f's and v's, which are spirants, i.e., sounds of escape, are admirably suited to bring out the fugitive nature of beauty in marked contrast with the warm m's that 'come' in rich profusion : with the prodigality of summer, as one might say—with the 'coming musk-rose'. This, by the way, is the central enigma in that poem. Volumes can be, and have in fact been, written about its meaning in Keats's poetry without, perhaps, making the reader any the wiser about what it all means. But one who has listened to those four lines as Professor Sen made us listen, can never be in any doubt about what this pattern of joy alternating with grief, sleep with waking, birth with death meant to John Keats.

Professor Sen's genius lay in seizing such configurative moments. Let me give an example now from his treatment of prose like Charles Lamb's. I remember how he paused when we came upon the line 'Fantastic forms, whither are ye fled' in *Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*. Taking that word 'fantastic', he stepped into it as if it were some magic bark and led us back to the whimsical, half-wistful conclusion of *The South Sea House*, where we found the same word with its Shakespearean kin, the word 'insubstantial', anchored close : '.....—peradventure the very *names* which I have summoned up before thee, are fantastic —insubstantial.....'

An example now from critical prose: the tremendous claim that Sidney makes towards the end of *An Apology for Poetry* that the English language before any other vulgar language is fit for both 'the sweet sliding' of the quantitative metre and the strength of the accentual beat. Professor Sen quoted again from the *Ode to a Nightingale* an example of this synthesis of accent and quantity:

.....thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless.....

The vowel play is clear, the accent also pronounced. Tennyson, Keats's disciple, abounds in lines like

The moan of doves in immemorial elms.

Such verses exploit the essential advantages of both systems, of the North as well as the South.

Professor Sen's lectures on literary criticism, whether they were on Oscar Wilde's *Intentions* or an essay like J. Isaacs' *Shakespeare as Man of the Theatre,* were often embellished with illustrations from the fine arts, especially painting and sculpture. It was an unforgettable experience when he took us on an excursion into the realm of European painting, unfolding its successive phases in the light of the implication of the sentence quoted below from Isaacs' essay. Referring to his preceding discussion of the material side of the Elizabethan stage, Isaacs says: 'All these things..... can be regarded as the mere subject matter that a Signorelli or a Cézanne forces to his own ends, whether of design or of significance.'

I remember Professor Sen's lucid exposition of the evolution of naturalism into impressionism, with its interesting offshoot, *pointillisme*, and the gradual movement towards the static through the successive phases of post-impressionism and cubism. The entire discussion was illuminated with apt illustrations that clearly revealed how the artist 'forces the mere subject matter to his own ends, whether of design or of significance.'

Much later, when reading the *Byzantium* poems, he showed by referring to Byzantine painting how, for Yeats, artifice is superior to nature. Only when the artist can discover the form behind the form does his art achieve imperishability. It is not that art is more spiritual than life. It is more formal, and therefore purer than life. The artist reduces form to such a quality that it becomes incapable of change. In art, form is changeless not on account of any organic incapability of change. The quality of changelessness, unlike change itself, comes not from the material, but from itself, its very nature. The truth of art, therefore, as Wordsworth put it (without quite realizing the implications when dogmatizing about the language of poetry), is 'truth which is its own testimony'.

The quest in these poems is for absolute artistic purity, for freedom from flux, for the world of abstract forms, of linear pattern. The contrast between the rich gold and the linear austerity should

not be missed. In stanza 3 of *Sailing to Byzantium* 'standing' does not denote a physical movement, but a formal: a movement arrested and made immune from change. The figures in Byzantine painting are all encircled by spiral designs. The spiral is a linear shape. It is the final development, the ultimate perfection of the line as line. The bodily form Yeats longs for is the form of Byzantine art which, being design only, is distinct from Grecian art, which is representational.

The 4th stanza of *Sailing to Byzantium* is itself an embodiment of the poet's yearning for fulfilment in design. Having denounced nature and 'once out of it', how will he exist ? In the world of forms something is missing to complete the design. The poet offers to fill in that void by becoming a song-bird himself: not a physical bird, of course, but formal—a bird of gold. Nevertheless there is something lacking in *Sailing*.

Reading the other poem, *Byzantium*, Professor Sen started by pointing out that its extra stanza (stanza 5) gives the fulfilment wanting in *Sailing*. Byzantium has become Hades in this poem. We are to remember that in *Sailing* the hope and prayer in stanzas 2 and 4 seem to suggest some kind of fulfilment, but it all really comes to the 'golden bough' illuminating a dark hell. The Emperor, too, must be the Emperor of Hades. The flame is flitting, yet undisturbed by the storm, indifferent to all external force. The flame shining above all disturbance takes us back to the first stanza of *Sailing*. An example of basic human movements turned into art is the dance. To others the dancer seems to be moving, but in his soul he is steady. Here the dance is the ecstasy: the dance of, or rather after, death (or, let us say, of afterlife). The dance of the spirits has a purpose: to change the body's compound into soul. After the dance of death, after all impurities are purged away, is born life. This is the birth through dance of the imperishable linear form.

In stanza 5 the three lines

The smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor !
Marbles of the dancing floor

describe the imperial workshop where nature is turned into art. The attractions of love, immortal to others, are to Yeats only mire and blood. The bitter furies must be broken, i.e., transformed into soul which is self-begotten and changeless. The 'gong-tormented sea' makes us realize the contrast between sea, that image of troubled complexity, and fire, image of pure form. After the sea there is the fire.

The image of Hades' bobbin (stanza 2) suggests the same mode of progress: layer after layer is unwound till one reaches the ultimate. The direction in which we are moving may be revealed through certain meaningful associations: the mummy, the Sibyl of Virgil, Dante's guide. The adjective 'superhuman' (stanza 2, line 7) is abstract. 'Death-in-life' refers to the concept of the dance of death as explained above. The bird is songless, even as the mouth is breathless : it is painted, ideal, petrified. The sacrifice or effacement of all traces of life reduces all physical complexities to the simple soul, transforms the perishable into the imperishable, into pure incandescence (stanza 4). Even the very diction and metre in

Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve

symbolize the complexity settling into formal stability. The biblical allusion (Daniel 3 : 27) makes Yeats's meaning clear. The word 'break' (stanza 5, 1.2) is more important than 'dance' (stanza 4, referred to above). The process comes first, then the end.

Form, therefore, is 'fantastic'—'insubstantial'. The sense of 'the tears of things', in the Virgilian phrase, reveals more than an elegiac sense of the impermanence of things. In a scheme of things doomed to impermanence, speaking substantially, this sense or intuition of the insubstantial or spiritual strengthens our faith in human endeavour or art. I am reminded here of his exposition of the Aristotelian concept of imitation and of the truth value of art, the reality of the shadow-making that form-making or imitation is. The truth of art lies in the making of the poet, which rivals that of his Maker in having its origin in an idea in the mind : in its being true to itself, in a form or shape held together by its own logic, the inviolable nexus of intricate relationships subtly blended and fused into one whole to tie up that 'knot intrinsicate', a work of the human spirit, secure from the ravages of Time and the bitter questioning of our time-bound mundane existence by being placed, like the Soul in Neo-Platonic thought, as the spiritual midpoint of a universe divided against itself.

His emphasis on the equivalence of thought and form, meaning and style was, however, not quite Crocean. For him it was subordinated to the question of values, anchored securely in evaluation through comparative study. He possessed in full measure that gift of assimilation which marks the true humanist, the ability to unify segments of experience flung far apart on the literary globe with the subtle thread of the spirit that continually reveals an affinity only 'half-understood', or as Petrarch put it, 'intelligible rather than describable'. With an incredible appetite for detail, for what he called the minutiae of the text, he had an innate repugnance for the otiose, for random assemblage of unrelated particulars. Moving amidst these minutiae like a graceful, albeit cunning median spirit, he always revealed a meaningful pattern, relating everything to a scale of values formed by an impeccable judgment.

I have tried in this brief space to convey what it was like to be taught by Professor T. N. Sen, but I admit I have attempted the impossible. This is but a shadow of 'all those beauties' now 'vanish'd out of sight'. He alone had the gift of enclosing 'infinite riches in a little room'. Besides, no one can reproduce the splendour of the luminous median garment he wove for the soul of the play or poem before it could descend and inhabit the minds of his pupils. He gave us all, I believe, a twin gift : of confidence and of despair. The confidence we badly needed was born in the class-room, and lingered for some time as the words with which he bound the spell haunted us and gently disseminated a desire to handle the things he taught us, to love and find a tongue of our own with which to interpret them ; but it had to do all it could to fight back the despair that cast its lengthening shadow as the interval between one long session and another lengthened. Over the years I have lived between these shadows : a shadow of confidence and a shadow of despair. I must confess I still find the latter much the stronger of the two, but I acknowledge with gratitude the genesis of either in the days when I was a pupil of Professor Taraknath Sen at Presidency College.

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PROFESSOR MANMOHAN GHOSE : AN ANECDOTE

Manmohan Ghose cherished a great contempt for the examination system. Once a batch of pupils visited him to ask for his blessings and advice on the eve of an examination. When they were about to leave, he casually declared, 'Well, I shall show you something which might interest you. Here is the paper I have set for your examination next week.' He was about to hand them the paper when they stood up, cried with one voice, 'Sir, we must not look at it,' and rushed out of the room with a bow.

HENRY ROSHER JAMES : AN ANECDOTE

Principal James was so impressed by an M. A. candidate's essay on More's *Utopia* that he not only awarded it 95% marks but kept the answer-book with him, instead of returning it to the University to be sold as waste paper. Ten years afterwards, when going home on leave, he returned the book to its astonished author with the following note : 'My dear * * * Babu, I kept this paper with me because it struck me as an outstanding production. I now return it to you; it may interest your grandchildren.

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN CALCUTTA

RABINDRA KUMAR DAS GUPTA Teacher 1945

Their very memory is fair and bright—Vaughan

When we were undergraduates in the early thirties, Calcutta had become an important centre of English studies ; and although we knew nothing of the city's intellectual history, we fondly imagined that there was no other place in the country where the English language and its literature would be taught more worthily than by its eminent teachers of the subject. For one thing we thought that our Headmaster Narendranath Bhattacharya was capable of correcting the English of a well-educated Englishman. We thought he could do so both in grammar and idiom. When about a quarter of a century later I had a chance to tell an eminent don of Oxford about our Headmaster's style of teaching—incidentally asking him not to judge its quality from my use of the language—he said, 'Such headmasters are now rare even in England, a country reputed for her excellent headmasters.'

This encouraged me to tell him an anecdote about our headmaster's care for good English and for saving his pupils from errors in grammar and idiom. In 1928 there was an epidemic of cholera in the city, and when we were in the midst of the pestilence I met my Headmaster somewhere near our school. Failing to avoid an embarrassing encounter, I soon met with the dire fate of having to translate a Bengali sentence about the city's terrible misfortune. 'How do you put what is happening to Calcutta in English ?' he asked me. In my fright I even forgot the word 'epidemic', and when the word came to my mind I muttered what I thought would be a fairly grammatical sentence : 'An epidemic of cholera has broken out in Calcutta.' 'But it is a very flat sentence,' he said, and asked me to recast the sentence as 'Cholera is raging in Calcutta.' He did not forget to add to my trouble by asking me to spell the word 'raging'. When he was sure that I had learnt the sentence, he asked me to pass it on to my brother, who was in the same class with me.

Actually in our boyhood days we never asked ourselves why the English language was so important for us. Perhaps we enjoyed learning it. When I was put on English I was four plus, and I now recall our private tutor was a supporter of the Non-cooperation Movement. When I now reflect on our attitude to English in those days, I think we had no inhibition about the language of our political masters as the Romans had none about Greek, the language of their political slaves.

It may not be easy to trace the history of English studies in this city and it may not be a long history either. English teaching in Calcutta is now about two hundred years old. But even when academic studies in English literature began at Hindu College in the second decade of the last century, there was no Indian teacher of the subject who was known for his literary scholarship. Nor do we know anything about Derozio's literary learning, his reputation as a teacher mostly resting on his capacity to inspire his pupils with new ideas. Captain D. L. Richardson (1801-1865) was a successful Professor of English at Hindu College, but his literary essays published in several volumes were more popular than scholarly, and his verse survives only in obscure anthologies like Theodore Douglas Dunn's *Poets of John Company* (1921). It is said that Macaulay once told him, 'I can forget everything about India, but your reading of Shakespeare, *never*' ; and it was on Macaulay's recommendation that a captain of the Company's infantry was appointed a Professor of English in 1836. But while he rose to be Principal of Hindu College in 1839, his appointment as Principal of Presidency College was disallowed by the Secretary of State in 1859.

Macaulay admired the Bengali lawyer's command of the English language. But in the last century studies in English in Calcutta University and its colleges did not develop into any kind of literary scholarship. Professors of English like Captain D. L. Richardson, James Kerr and Hulford created among their pupils a profound interest in the literature, and their response to it was reflected in public speaking (which was mostly in English) and in Bengali writing.

For English was then more than a language ; it seemed to bring to us a new world and we wondered at it like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken. That spell cast its influence on the English eloquence of Ramgopal Ghosh and the Bengali blank verse of Madhusudan Datta. Since the New Learning was yet to produce a large learned profession there was no initiative in literary research. Scholars of English were therefore known for their ability as teachers.

Even in London early Professors of English, men like Thomas Dale, R. G. Latham, Tom Taylor etc. were not known for their literary research. Ruskin, who attended some of Dale's classes at King's College, said about his Professor's lectures on early English literature that of that subject he thought himself 'already a much better judge than Mr. Dale'. Henry Morley, who succeeded David Masson in the English Chair at University College in 1865, and whose teaching made a profound impression on Rabindranath when he was his pupil for four months in 1879, was more a popular teacher and popular writer on English literature than a scholar.

When Henry Stephen became Calcutta University's first regular Professor of English in 1913, there was very little interest in literary research in the Department of English, although it had then already produced a Ph.D. During the fourteen years that Stephen held the Chair of English, he was adored by his pupils for his good teaching and kindliness of temper : but his only published work on English literature, *Syllabus of Poetics* (1923), was not intended to be an original work. When Joygopal Banerjee succeeded Stephen in the English Chair in 1927, the University's Postgraduate Department of English was ten years old, but as one of his pupils I thought he valued eloquent teaching more than research. His own lectures were superlatively eloquent. His rolling sentences rich in fine phrases were exciting ; I cannot remember if they were also illuminating.

It was, however, in the twenties and thirties that some distinguished scholars of the university established a reputation for themselves in literary research. Three Ph.D. theses on English literature pnblished in the thirties—Srikumar Banerjee's *Critical Theories and Poetic Practice in the Lyrical Ballads* (1931), Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta's *The Art of Bernard Shaw* (1936) and Mohinimohan Bhattacharya's *Platonic Ideas in Spenser* (1935)—gave a new dimension to our English studies, although it was not until many years later that Sailendra Kumar Sen produced a thesis of comparable merit.

Our scholars of English still excel in teaching, and our best teachers may be the equals of the best teachers of English anywhere in the world. Presidency College was known for its eminent teachers of English for over a century. Several of my teachers were taught in that college and were pupils of H. M. Percival, Manmohan Ghose and their successors. Professors P. C. Ghosh, Srikumar Banerjee, Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, Tarapada Mukherji, Taraknath Sen, Amal Bhattacharji and others taught with an uncommon ability, and that ability was rooted in an uncommon learning.

I was a student of Scottish Churah College, where five of our eight teachers of English were native speakers of the language. But not even the best amongst these five, the Rev. Arthur Mowat, was as able a teacher as B. B. Roy. Mowat did not look like a cleric, far less like a cleric of Celtic stock. He had the striking appearance of a firm and disciplined Prussian soldier, and his lectures too were remarkable for their organization rather than for their sensitivity. His erudition was unmistakable, and I remember how, lecturing on *Hamlet*, he was determined to take us beyond Dowden, Stopford Brooke and Bradley, and insisted on our reading up Stoll and Schucking. But B. B. Roy was an incomparable teacher. He was short, dark and rotund, but he looked impressive in his elegant European clothes. He had a mannered style of speaking, but we were so used to it that it seemed natural in him. His crisp, shapely sentences flew like sharp arrows decked in light feathers, and we admired their steady movement. While lecturing on *Samson Agonistes* he made an apology for his ignorance of Greek and Latin ; but we thought his strength was made perfect in weakness and he could glory in his linguistic infirmity. I remember how he argued that Mark Pattison was wrong in criticising the style of *Samson* as the style of an exhausted poet. I now teach *Samson Agonistes* in my fashion in one of the universities of this city. When I repeat to my class some of the immensely quotable sentences of B. B. Roy I heard fifty years ago, I love to disclose my source. Susil Chandra Datta was handsome and had a beautiful voice, which made his reading of English verse a treat for his class. Perhaps he did not like to spoil the effect of that reading by going too deep into the niceties of annotation.

How one could annotate finely and thoroughly without breaking the spell of his lectures, we could see in P. C. Ghosh's class. We listened to his reading of parts of *Othello* with wet eyes, and we would literally roll with laughter when we read with him *Henry IV Part I*. But he would never miss taking us into the technical questions of Elizabethan English and dramatic blank verse.

In the best of university teaching in English in the Anglo-Saxon world, we have formal lectures of a high order, and it may not make much difference for students if they just read those lectures in print or in typescript. I have heard such spoken papers in some of the finest universities of England and America. But P.C. Ghosh gave us some thing in the intimacies of his class teaching which one cannot expect from the best of formal lectures. I do not think Rabindranarayan Ghosh was a specialist in seventeenth-century English, and he never claimed to be one. But he could create in us a feeling for the kind of English prose which Sir Thomas Browne wrote in his *Religio Medici*.

It seems now very important for us to consider whether the art of teaching does not necessarily decline as learning advances. It may still be possible for us not only to save the art of teaching, but to make it the breath and finer spirit of literary scholarship. We thought it was so while attending the classes of our best teachers. We knew no scholars who would 'wear the carpet with their shoes'.

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PROFESSOR P. C. GHOSH : AN ANECDOTE

Azizul Huq, sometime Education Minister of Bengal, was due to visit Presidency College, and the teachers were waiting to receive him. Professor P. C. Ghosh, however, prepared to leave for home at his usual hour. When his colleagues nervously suggested that he should wait, he declared imperiously: 'I don't covet the distinction of being introduced to my old pupil.'

Once Professor P.C. Ghosh wrote to Frederic Harrison about the meaning of a passage in Ruskin, and received a long letter from that eminent authority on how Ruskin should be approached, what kind of English Indians should read, etc., etc. The passage at issue was given only passing mention. When Professor Percival saw that letter, he commented acidly, 'A four-page lecture, because he has not understood the passage !'

STRUGGLING WITH ENGLISH

ASOK MITRA B.A. 1936, M.A. 1938

Editor's note : It was our intention to present a debate on the extent and effects of English education in India. Unfortunately, the plan fell through. This provocative article represents one side of the controversy.

In the introductory note to a new edition of his *Letters of a Sojourner to Europe* (1878) Rabindranath recalls how he was put through several months of grooming with his elder brother at Ahmedabad before he set sail for England at seventeen. Having arrived at Brighton he made friends with physicians P and M, both highly regarded as educated men in local society. Dr. P had heard of Shelley but not of his *Cenci* or *Epipsychidion*, which Tagore knew by heart. Dr. M was surprised that Tagore should know his Shakespeare so well but not what a muff was or what orange blossom in the hair of a young woman at a wedding stood for.

That great amphibium in two cultures, Satyendranath Bose, knew and spoke about half a dozen European languages besides Greek and Latin. He told me an amusing story in 1952. He was visiting a famous British physicist at his home in Hampstead Heath, when it got too late for the last tube. He walked up to the taxi-stand and explained where he wanted to go. The bewildered cabman called out to his mate to find out where Professor Bose wanted to go, as 'he seems like speaking French'.

Speaking of lesser mortals, I had the inestimable privilege of being a student of P. C. Ghosh, Rabindranarayan Ghosh, Srikumar Banerjee, Apurba Chanda, T. N. Sen and Humphrey House. They would think nothing of spending four to five hours a day year in and year out, outside of class hours, struggling to initiate me into the mysteries of the English tongue. These were great teachers of English Language and Literature on any showing anywhere in the world. At the end of a year's stay at Oxford, my closest friend told me very shyly one day that he had found it very difficult to follow my speech when I first came into residence. And yet I believe my great professors at Calcutta did succeed in putting into me a good deal more understanding and appreciation of the beauty of English literature, and the sound values of English speech, than most British students of their own literature could hope to acquire.

I do not doubt for a moment that knowledge and use of English literature and speech and, for that matter, of any other language, enhances the appreciation of and power to use one's own language more deftiy and precisely, with a greater feel for its syntax, rhythm and sound values. This holds even more for creative writers and scholars. But, thank heavens, a nation is not made up of creative writers and scholars alone. A nation is made up of millions of human beings with an infinite variety of vocations, pursuits and aims in life. But all have a common purpose : communication. If one does not know a language well enough to communicate with reasonable felicity in personal intercourse or on paper, or if one cannot make oneself understood, even profound book-knowledge of that language must in that case be held at a discount.

Let me be quite unequivocal right at the start. I would not like to give away my knowledge of English for anything. I have travelled in most parts of India, and everywhere English has been the language of communication in my social class. One can make do with English anywhere in the world today, which was not possible in 1939. Besides, at a time when we are busy putting up chauvinistic walls against our neighbours and the outside world, English is almost our only window to the world : the technological world and the world of knowledge. English has been with us for the last two hundred years. It is part of our national being. We cannot afford to give it up. We shall make ourselves infinitely poorer if we did.

We like to cite the case of children in Central Europe in defence of introducing English in primary school. Children in Central Europe use three European languages or more right from childhood almost as freely as their own tongues. But then they acquire this felicity passively and instinctively through life around them. They do not have to learn them by rote from the book at school, from teachers who are not to the language born. A child sets about consciously acquiring insights into a second or third language usually at the age of ten or eleven.

To communicate quite successfully in all practical situations—even in the pursuit of professional, technical or scientific skills—all that is required is a vocabulary of roughly 2000 words, a working knowledge of syntax and a dictionary at hand. Nowhere else in the world do they weigh accent and its minute inflexions on such delicate scales as we do, and yet much of our accent and use of words turn out wrong. Other people think nothing of the mistakes they make. They could not care less. At the slightest fault we wish we could sink into the earth. This is because of our sense of inferiority as former British subjects. We still seem to imagine our British masters watching over our shoulders, trying to catch us at our mistakes.

We are a people of about 700 million, not less than 600 million of whom will have no use for English, either spoken or written, all their lives. All that they will need at the most is a second or a third Indian language. No two Indian languages are entirely alien to each other. But English certainly is. To try to perpetuate the teaching of English at the primary stage is to continue an inexcusable drain on national teaching manpower and an unpardonable abuse of the learning ability of very young children. The entire teaching and learning process thus becomes more unreal than it need be, and unsuited to the mental furnishings of the majority of our countrymen. What is more, when one contemplates the state of teaching of English language and literature even in our top universities today, one can hardly escape a sense of alarm and despair. The time and energy bootlessly wasted on English at the primary stage would fetch far more worthwhile national returns if spent on the teaching and learning of other branches of knowledge at that age.

In very few places in the world does the serious process of learning a language begin earlier than ten. A child of ten or more picks up things much more quickly for purposes of consciously comprehending and learning. Learning a language at that stage becomes fun : a skill to be acquired and wielded for practical use and not primarily as a measuring rod on the social scale. At Nehru University I have every year observed with pleasure how young men and women from remote corners of India, who did not have much of a working knowledge of English when they started their M.Phil. course, invariably picked it up fairly well before the year was out.

At the moment there are almost impenetrable barriers in our society between the illiterate and the literate, the non-English-knowing and the English-knowing. Among the last or top class there is again an impenetrable barrier separating the English-speaking child in the English medium school. How much further must we atomize our nation and decimate its strength ? What is more, a two-century-old tradition has transformed the acquisition of English into a potent engine of oppression and domination by the few over the many, a fact accepted without the slightest demur as a divine dispensation.

Lastly, I often wonder whether we have as a nation produced as much original thought and writing in the humanities as we have contributed to the natural sciences or technologies, where we are apt to be less terrified by the bogey of a foreign tongue. The great bulk of our scholarly contribution in the humanities is derivative, to say the least. The cases are very few of our own scholars relying on our own scholars or drawing from our national intellectual resources for judgment, methodology or taxonomy. We never feel so happy as when we succeed in tying ourselves through elaborate footnotes and quotations to the apron-strings of foreign scholars, most of whom are of no great merit. Pleasant was my surprise when in 1939 at Oxford I found Srikumar Banerjee's book on the *Lyrical Ballads* widely used by British students of English literature. But few at home in India would be willing to pay Banerjee that homage. The domination of English may have worked like the proverbial Chinese clogs on our intellect and on our teaching and learning in the humanities.

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THE PRESIDENCY CONNEXION

AMALENDU DAS GUPTA B.A. 1943

My formal association with Presidency College was brief and undistinguished, and the distinction of the college impressed me only partially at the time. Possibly I was not quite equipped to make use of all that it had to offer, but I am still not persuaded that it was merely my own deficiency which made me distrust some of the Presidency mystique. I was aware of a celebrated tradition, but could not bring myself to believe that it informed everything I encountered. On the contrary, it seemed to me that the burden of that tradition self-consciously borne by some of its less worthy inheritors had a constricting effect on young minds.

This may seem an odd note on which to begin a few recollections of my two years at Presidency College. But I would be less than honest if I said that I cherish the memory of everything that I was taught at the college as a B. A. student during 1941-3. There had been at least two teachers in the lowly college where I had done my I. A. who had made a powerful impression on me. Not every teacher at Presidency was of that class, but even the unworthy had their pretensions fed by an ostentatious sense of belonging to its tradition.

I am not talking of any particular department, but of my experience of the college as a whole. The Pass classes were mostly routine. Even the English faculty was not unfailingly enthralling. About all I remember of the Head of the Department, a Briton, is that he made us write English verse and was most generous in awarding marks. Another teacher, whose name I cannot recall, used often to say, apropos of nothing : 'Presidency College is Presidency College.' The affectation was irritating when it did not seem merely comical.

There surely are memories of the college warmly and gratefully preserved, but it will do no harm to come to terms with one's entire experience. Uncritical reverence can only be a sterile burden. If Presidency has maintained a distinguished tradition, as everyone would agree it has, there can be no greater tribute to its vitality than the fact that it has survived even some mushy myth about it.

I think its strength lay, at least in my time, more in its ability to attract most of the brighter students than in the general quality of the teaching it offered. It had some outstanding teachers ; so had at least a few other colleges. And, thanks to the system of transfers between Government colleges, its staff was not without its share of mediocrity or worse. But it did seem to inspire greater dedication than the others, which was another source of strength. This dedication was possibly reinforced by a sense of belonging, and induced in turn greater academic discipline than obtained elsewhere. That may explain why Presidency has been able to maintain its standards while other colleges have sadly declined in recent years. That is also why it deserves to be insulated from the general decay.

But, as a student, I was not willing to submit myself to this discipline, nor inclined to see any inherent merit in it. Perhaps I reacted the way I did largely because of a natural bias. I was much happier during my two postgraduate years at Calcutta University, where the teachers did not seem to expect to be taken very seriously. They could hardly be ; the pillars of the university establishment did not themselves take their academic concerns with any degree of seriousness. But this gave me a freedom from the constraints of prescribed goals and norms. The university seemed, even then, not to care about any tradition.

It is this freedom which enabled me to recall and examine what I had learnt at Presidency College, and I found much of it both relevant and valuable. At the college, perhaps the only teacher of English I had got to know well outside the classroom was Somnath Maitra. I was drawn to him largely by temperamental inclinations. He seemed not to disapprove of my limited interest in rigorous scholastic application ; and I was encouraged in the easy belief that it was more important to enjoy literature than to know a great deal about it. This cannot have been an entirely healthy influence, for it excused my neglect of systematic learning. But Professor Maitra did try to make me acquire a taste for civilized English prose, though I think of him more for what he did to improve my taste in Indian music.

Of the eminent teachers of English at the college, Srikumar Banerjee excited some irreverent comment

by his distinctive language. Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta left the college for Rajshahi soon after I came to it, though I have been in fairly close, and immensely valuable, contact with him since the end of my university studies. But we had Tarapada Mukherji as a teacher for the full two years I was at the college.

I knew that both Professor Sen Gupta and Professor Mukherji, as well as Taraknath Sen, had great respect for Professor Banerjee's scholarship and judgment ; and it was during my postgraduate days that I realized why—not only from his writing in both English and Bengali but also from my recollection of his lectures at Presidency College. It has always seemed a pity to me that such an incisive mind should have chosen to express itself in so ponderous a manner.

It was to Taraknath Sen, more than anybody else, that I am indebted for my first awareness of the virtue and nature of clear and precise expression. I could have learnt more from him if I had a greater aptitude for diligent and careful study. He did teach me something important : not to be impressed by everything written and published by literary critics, even if they be well known and fashionable in England and America, and to return to the text as often as one could. But I profited most (which may not have been much because of my own inability) from his ceaseless insistence on clarity and precision.

Yet this influence, too, was more useful after I left Presidency College than during my two years in it. At the college, Professor Sen had made me aware of my deficiencies ; during the postgraduate years I received more valuable help in trying to improve. Although I was not affiliated to the college as a postgraduate student, he was unfailingly generous in personal guidance. The kindness I received in later years from some of my other teachers, especially Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta and Tarapada Mukherji, must also be traced back to the Presidency connexion. If I began this article on what may have seemed a churlisn note, let me try to make amends by grateful acknowledgement of this debt to my association with the college.

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DR. SRIKUMAR BANERJEE : AN ANECDOTE

Dr. Srikumar Banerjee had a remarkable capacity for serious work even in the midst of noise and distractions. Seated at the table nearest the tea-club in the Professors' Common Room, he would be engaged in writing an article, a review, or even a chapter of a critical work. When a colleague expressed his wonder at this feat of concentration, he replied, 'Don't forget I was a room-mate of Sisir Bhaduri in my college days !'

SHADOWS

KETAKI KUSHARI DYSON B.A. 1958

As I sit down to write these words, I am visited by the ghosts of impossibilities. Who are these coming to the sacrifice ? I mean, who are those who are going to read these words ? Presidency College in Calcutta lies over two decades away in time—I haven't been back for many a day—and several thousand miles away in space, the shorter route to it, I remind myself, being through the east, the longer through the west. And yet I know that I am bound to the spirit of that place as I once knew it, and by links which, though invisible, are nevertheless powerful subtle, and resilient. For it was in that locale that I came of age, began those relationships, experimented with those modes of being and doing, learned those methods of study, those values and standards which mark off adulthood from childhood and adolescence, and constitute an intellectual foundation for a lifetime.

I have been asked a pertinent question : what connection do I perceive between my present life as a full-time writer and my academic training in the past? The honest answer to which is that there is a hell of a lot of connection, really. And these connections are not anything new : they have always been there.

I have never believed in a rigid division between the academic and the creative worlds, a division which is, I think, detrimental to both worlds. In my life both dimensions have been so thoroughly intertwined that I don't know where one ends and the other begins. By the time I arrived at Presidency College at the early age of sixteen I was already very much in love with languages and literatures.

Calcutta in the late fifties was a wonderful nurturer of literary ambitions, and the College Street campus (to belong to which was a privilege in every sense of the word) an excellent location in which to begin those activities. Several poems written during my Presidency College years have been included in my first book. I remember one poetry-reading session at the Physics Lecture Theatre : I had been allowed to read one of my poems, and who should I see but the great Sudhindranath Datta himself sitting in the front row! I was thrilled when he joined in the applause : surely, I felt, this was the beginning of the ascent of Parnassus! It was also during those years that I learned the joys of editorship, the toils of proof-correction, the pleasures of reviewing writers as various as Buddhadeva Bose, whose magazine *Kobita* was a potent literary influeuce on my formative years, Sunil Ganguli, then a promising young poet, and Boris Pasternak, who had just been awarded the Nobel Prize.

Presidency College, once the illustrious Hindu College : in my days we were still haunted by the aura of that past. I think the majority of us knew, implicitly or explicitly, that it was our duty to carry on the torch of the Bengal Renaissance. In all those heady discussions in the Coffee House, drugged by the aroma of the excellent coffee and phenomenal doses of the boys' cigarette-fumes which we girls passively inhaled, I don't think I ever doubted that the ultimate purpose of studying 'foreign' books in a land such as ours—the phrase 'The Third World' wasn't in vogue yet—was to enrich oneself so that one could, with increased cunning and expertise, enrich one's 'native' tradition. This is what the Elizabethans had done in England, what the worthies of the Bengal Renaissance had done in the nineteenth century, and what the important post-Tagore Bengali writers were still doing around us at that time. The trips across the street to Sanskrit College to attend my Sanskrit Pass classes were just as meaningful to me as the classes where I studied Jespersen or *King Lear* or *Samson Agonistes*. The knowledge of Sanskrit is a stone in my educational foundation I wouldn't be without for anything under the sun. For anybody who wishes to pursue a literary vocation in the Indian context it is an invaluable asset : apart from its role in explaining our classical heritage to us, it is, for someone writing in a modern Indian language, *the tool* which, because of the exigencies of vocabulary, enables one to write with confidence in an intellectual and analytical style.

In those days, under the combined influences of Buddhadeva Bose, Sudhindranath Datta, the ghosts of Kalidasa, Baudelaire *et al.*, I used to write in a dense, cryptic, metrically structured style, my attachment to which was strengthened by the way we

were taught our prescribed English texts. A person sensitive to the ways of language could not emerge from those close, intense, line-by-line, word-by-word examinations of Shakespeare and Milton, Donne and Keats, without becoming very aware of the *power* of words; and this awareness was heightened in me by my love of philology and later, at Oxford, by my study of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English and Hopkins and the historical development of the English language. My mind being, in any case, the kind that tends to echo with lines and phrases from what has been heard or read, the influence of texts I have loved and studied must be obvious in what I write; in addition, my classroom experiences have been workshops which have taught me the powers of root-meanings and nuances, of alliteration and onomatopoeia.

The connections between my academic training and my literary life can be seen in the fact that I have written in Bengali on Shakespeare and Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and Anne Stevenson, or in the fact that I have translated Anglo Saxon poems into alliterative Bengali. It was my combined English-Sanskrit-Bengali background which gave me the confidence to undertake this last task. My post-graduate researches not only gave birth to some poems directly, but also led me to consider the literary potentials of the letter/diary genre and to cast my first novel in the shape of letters and diaries written by a Bengali woman living in a small English town. Right now I am writing a book which will have both academic and creative dimensions : I am deliberately breaking down the barriers between those two worlds.

I am sure my academic training has taught me to be self-critical as a writer, to know when I have written a good stanza, when a chapter needs to be revised, when a page needs to be scrapped. It has widened my range of literary appreciation, teaching me that there are many different kinds of good writing, not just one or two. It has taught me perspective : that serious literature is written not just for contemporaries but even more for posterity, that profoundly innovative work may not have an immediate impact but may have a powerful delayed action. Therefore it has also taught me patience : that it is more important to have unpublished manuscripts of good quality in one's files than a string of published frivolities.

At the same time, not being actually tied to the professional academic world in a full-time capacity not only allows one to devote more of one's time and energies to one's writing—serious writing *is* a full-time job, soaking up virtually all of one's time and energies, a fact not widely appreciated in modern India, though it certainly was in the past, in the days of courtly patronage—but also makes one freer to experiment and innovate without worrying too much about those formal categories which often come to dominate academic critical thinking. It took me two years of disciplined, full-time work to write my first novel : I simply couldn't have done it if I was also preparing lectures and marking scripts at the same time, and I have a hunch that I would have been inhibited in my experiments and innovations, my rule-breakings and hybridizations, if I had discussed my work with academic friends. I think the creative artist benefits from an academic study of the history of art, but at the same time needs to maintain a certain detachment from academic arguments.

In the seventies I began to write poems in English, and I think I shall continue to write some of my poems in English, whether they get published or not. One reason is that they just come from time to time. Poetry is like music in this respect. Lines, like tunes, just come and possess one : they choose us before we choose them. Given the circumstances of my life, this branching out was inevitable. I have enough friends who are close to me but do not know Bengali, to whom I sometimes have to speak at a level deeper than ordinary conversation. Writing poems in English is a good way of doing this. I enjoy it, and they encourage me in it.

Will I ever try to write a novel in English ? I don't know yet. Poems can be written for a small group without much trouble. They can be easily copied and circulated among friends, read out at small gatherings, discussed at workshops. The feedback is instant. Novels, being more bulky, do not lend themselves to this kind of dissemination : they need to be in print before they can be passed from hand to hand. I would have to write in a way which is authentic for me, which adequately expresses my complex identity, but if I try to do this through the medium of English-language fiction, I might fall between the devil and the deep sea when I come to face publishers.

On the other hand, I can be fully myself—modern and humanistic, East-West and cosmopolitan, neither

ultra-Indian nor ultra-British—when I write a novel in Bengali, and I can persuade some sympathetic editor or publisher to sponsor me. I am sure that whatever else I may do, I shall keep writing in Bengali. Among other things, it is a way of saying thank-you to my roots, an unequivocal way of showing that I haven't joined the Indian braindrain but am still committed to enriching the Indian cultural scene even though I may be geographically far away from it.

Deeply interested as I am in continuing to be an Indian-language writer, I feel very sad when I hear about the widening cultural gap in India among the younger generations, between those who are educated in English-medium schools and those educated in the medium of the regional languages. This trend, if not checked in time, will be disastrous for India in more ways than one. Already there are signs that writers interested in enriching the Bengali heritage with modern and cosmopolitan values, in the Renaissance tradition, are losing a potentially receptive audience among the younger generations because of an absurd language-barrier. Precisely those young men and women who, by virtue of their close contact with the English language, could have appreciated such Western and cosmopolitan dimensions, are being lost to me because although they may speak Bengali, they are not literate enough in it to follow the nuances of the language. When readership declines, publication is inevitably threatened, and it is no secret that the publication of serious writing in Bengali faces a crisis such as Calcutta has never known before.

It is the people with money, the middle and upper classes, who are educating their children in this way and withdrawing their patronage from writers in the regional languages. But can we afford to lose this patronage ? Can a Third World country afford the growth of a rootless, alienated elite ? Please think about these issues.

Ketaki Kushari Dyson is a poet, novelist and free-lance writer.

TWO UNFORGETTABLE YEARS

HIREN GOHAIN B.A. 1959

The two years I spent at Presidency College were a period of the most intense, almost hectic, intellectual activity for me, and the atmosphere of the college at that time (1957-9) had a lot to do with that. Looking back, I wonder if I should not call it a time of intellectual awakening. There was such an exhilarating experience of sudden expansion of mental horizons, of the space for interest and exercise, and such awe-inspiring glimpses of intellectual depths for a young provincial like me, that the time had all the characteristics of liberation. The quality of the staff and the students, their proud sense of a heritage to maintain, the pressure of a tradition still alive, and the fact that the values the College stood for so impressively had not yet been challenged, contributed to that extraordinary impact. But the draught had already begun to creep inside, and if I did not hear the skeletons rattle in the cupboard, faint creaks and groans were already audible.

To me the experience of Presidency is still symbolised by the memory of the imposing flight of broad and steep stairs right at the entrance. The long climb represented to my imagination the higher standards for the attainment of which one really had to struggle. Eminent scholars and teachers would stomp up or down them with abstracted or alert gaze, and admiring students would plump down to touch their feet in flurries of homage. While the reverence for learning would touch me, something within me rebelled against what seemed to me a relative degradation of the status of the students in the gesture.

I had come from a fiercely puritanical and relatively unstratified society of a small town in a neighbouring state, with a strong sense of community but jealous of all individual claims to excellence and distinction except hereditary ones, with a lively concern for the weal and woe of all its members but hostile to all expressions of variety. At that time people with a love of the arts or learning had to go to desperate lengths there to prove that they were as normal as everybody else.

In Calcutta—Presidency College that is—a commitment to high academic standards was affirmed in a way that fairly took my breath away. There was no escaping the impression that the training I had the privilege of receiving there was far more purposeful, refined and thorough than anything I had ever known before. The seriousness with which academic pursuits were taken by the people at Presidency took away the insecurity I had always felt in Assam for my love of books. At the same time the dilettantism of the auto-didact received a severe jolt before the sceptical smile of my fellow-students and under the stern gaze of learned teachers.

In our department T. N. Sen's learning was scrupulous, rich and immense, and it overwhelmed. He was not one to neglect fundamentals and elementary questions, though at times he seemed given to labouring over pedantic and trivial points. While on certain days his classes were feasts of the intellect, on other occasions we felt like robins and finches struggling against a heavy and enormous net for hours. His attitude was austerely academic, and there was no claim to serve in any way the larger interests of life. While he made us forcefully aware of the 'thereness' of the text, he dismissed the views of the *Scrutiny* critics with withering disdain. Though Amal Bhattacharji also discouraged familiarity, we somehow felt more personally involved in his classes. He used to refer to Leavis as a powerful mind and penetrating critic. Teaching Keats he would dwell on the wonderful tactile qualities of the epithet 'tender' in the line 'Tender is the night', rendering the presence of the night into a sensuous experience. He also referred to Spengler, Toynbee and Ortega y Gasset, and on rare occasions to Marx, making our young minds drunk with gleaming glimpses of such far perspectives. What foxed us, however, were his sudden and unannounced changes of position, so that one month's idol might be unceremoniously knocked down in another. Bhabatosh Chatterjee told us about Croce and made us labour over the cryptic remarks of Keats in his letters. I regret that we lacked the maturity at that time to appreciate Professor S. C. Sen Gupta's trenchant intellect and originality of mind, and remained blandly unimpressed by his terse language and uncompromising East Bengal accent. At that time Burke's rhetoric had intoxicated me, and I remember the shock I felt when Professor Sen Gupta casually referred in a lecture to the mundane interests behind that high-flown rhetoric.

I had Philosophy as a Pass subject, and attended classes by Gopinath Bhattacharya with his defiantly orthodox hair-cut and his *Vidyasagari choti*, his severe personality and unrivalled clarity. One day I raised a question whether his positivistic definition of science as wholly inductive was not debatable, and received in response a stolid reiteration. At that age it was not possible for me to realise that behind that apparent dogmatism there were years of hard and strenuous thinking. I found the atmosphere easier to breathe in the classes of Professor Amiya Majumdar, who was a sound teacher but not above cracking a few jokes with his pupils. Sushobhan Sarkar, suave and distingulshed in a grey suit, sauntered past us in corridors, and he carried for us the aura of Oxbridge. I heard my friends mention Bhabatosh Dutta, Amalesh Tripathi and Dilip Biswas, though I was not taught by them. As for the Science teachers, I am afraid my memory fails to register a single name, though there were undoubtedly outstanding teachers and scientists on the staff.

While Presidency College certainly looked up to Oxbridge, there was a notable absence of that donnish informality and wit among the professoriate which characterise Oxbridge. The preferred manner was solemn formality. The erring student was not easily forgiven unless he went into sack-cloth and ashes, and he was made to feel that acquisition of high standards was like initiation to a mystery or guild.

Not that some of the teachers did not show us some affection, but the formality tended to stifle it. The students sought relaxation from the weight of solemnity in the Bengali Pass class, and even the teachers of that class were resigned to the various pranks, spoofs and clowning acts the students played in that class. I attended some periods of that class and wondered at the amount of serious teaching that still got through.

It is easy enough to be ironical at the expense of one's youthful fads and follies at a distance. But those follies were helping one's real growth at that time. However snobbish and superficial our discussions of Marxism, Existentialism, Bradley and New Criticism, Toynbee and Universal History, we were at least not lacking in genuine enthusiasm. The teachers, it must be said, encouraged such interests by references in the class-room. A noted teacher in our department would make it a point to dismiss the class ond ask us to attend whenever there was a public debate between Amlan Dutta and Kalyan Dutta or some other votary of Marxism on a vital issue. Debates were very much part of that ethos, and the British Council sponsored them often, thus training an elite corps of star debaters. But I did not find them congenial and kept away. Bhudeb Chaudhuri of the Bengali Department organised memorable functions which made learning a pleasure. I still remember an evening of modern Bengali poetry attended by almost all the stalwarts. I was dazed and deafened by Sudhin Dutta thundering his ironical passages in an impetuous and imperious voice :

Modhye modhye pechakera purish nikshep kare.

Rabindra Sangeet had lost its popularity among the young, though the revival was just round the corner. When we prevailed upon the 'dadas' of Hindu Hostel to forgo *Adhunik* for the annual musical night and invite Suchitra Mitra and Debabrata Biswas, they were both reportedly pleasantly surprised.

Considering the achievements and the vigour of the 'system' it is hardly surprising that I became a fanatical supporter and decided to worship the academic pantheon for the rest of my life. Unlike the other students, to me it was not a real institution with known advantages and defects, to be used with a certain degree of resignation. It was a shrine to worship at. But before a year was out I discovered that the professoriate was the highest rung only within the walls of the college, that the giants also deferred to ridiculous representatives of crude matter, to powers outside the cloisters — high-ranking I.C.S. officers, magistrates, police officers and ministers. Among students those who combined 'a good background' with academic promise got the greatest respect. I too pretended to a social rank at home which I did not possess and barely escaped deadly exposure. But others were also doing the same thing. The power of the bureaucrat was nastily driven home by the transfers that sometimes took away successful teachers to remote corners of the state and, once in my memory, deprived a respected senior Professor of the principalship which he eminently deserved.

Lower down the scale we students were not immune to similar snobbery. We looked down upon the other colleges, even the sister college Sanskrit College. Though it might sound a little presumptuous, students from many of those colleges quietly accepted this class-distinction. One day representatives from some of those colleges came up to our college to discuss

a projected strike in educational institutions. We not only patronised them with excessive courtesy but lectured them against that proposed strike with a staggering assumption of superior wisdom. However, during the immersion ceremony of the Saraswati Puja, *hoi polloi* used to get even with us every year with a memorable demonstration of physical prowess, forcing many of us to take first aid.

The inbuilt snobbery and potential for injustice in the system began to irritate me more and more, while I did not cease to appreciate its merits. I began to detect a hitherto unsuspected nexus between social power and wealth on the one hand and academic excellence on the other. I had a vague notion that the undoubted excellence had something to do with propping up privilege and power. When I tried to communicate this relevation to friendly teachers or fellow-students, I found it had been known to them for a long time. A fellow-student whom I shall here call Sudhanya, an invincible clown and gifted mime, turned the oppressive system into a farce by caricaturing all the received values. He would recite ribald parodies of the most solemn Rabindra Sangeet, and touch the feet not only of the professors but of the meanest menials and bearers of the college with ecstatic reverence. In fact the latter held him in such terror that they would scatter and make themselves scarce the moment he appeared on the scene, with the desperate alarum : 'Oire Sudhanya Babu aschen ! ' (Here comes Sudhanya Babu). But in the end his Falstaffian wit did not go unpunished.

Though intellectually I felt at home in the company of the brighter students, I lacked the detachment, sophistication and calculated responses of the true city-bred. I found the company of the students from *mofussil* areas, small towns or prosperous villages, more satisfactory in its warmth, simplicity and spontaneity, though I was at times put off by unexpected glimpses of narrowness and prejudice. Life at Hindu Hostel was bliss unalloyed. The sheer friendliness, warmth, vivacity and wit of my hostel-mates kept me spell-bound. Life at home appeared a dreary round in comparison. The endless and tireless *addas*, the elaborate prctical jokes, the occasional gusts of tension and excitement (the clever thefts by a gambling-addict, the fear of an epidemic or the hostilities between two groups vying for leadership) made time fly. Though the hostel-servants did not work too hard at their jobs, they were quite affectionate and good-humoured. The society I had known back at home frowned upon expression of strong feeling or interest as unbecoming except on prescribed occasions, and I was charmed at the way Bengali society permitted the cultivation of sentiment, where risk was turned into play.

Those hostel-mates of mine represented for me all that was best in the purely native traditions of Bengal. My room-mate Nirmalendu, an unassuming slim youth from a small town, easily beat the best Calcutta students in the Philosophy Honours class with the analytical competence and logical rigour of his argument. He had a trained taste for the austere type of devotional songs and an instinctive rejection of maudlin modern songs. Dilip Chakraborty, son of a village priest, with a character of steel beneath his soft feminine features, introduced me to the names and works of such archaeologists and historians as Mortimer Wheeler and Gordon Childe, Marc Bloch and Henri Pirenne, Kosambi and Kosminski. There was Dipankar Sen from Santiniketan, a superb *raconteur* with a fantastic lore of the curious and the exotic in his well-stocked mind. There were others whom I recall with delight, affection and ..... yes, gratitude. Gratitude for giving me two of the best years of my life without making me ever feel it was a gift.

Hiren Gohain is Professor of English at Gauhati University.

"THE HIDDEN LIFE":
A PRESENT STUDENT'S VIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT

ROMA SARKAR (III Year 1982-3)

Approaching the end of the century, watching it merge slowly into the twenty-first, I try to look into its twilight quality, to gain a perspective of the English Department at Presidency College. To eyes that have surveyed its earlier days of glory, the Department may appear somewhat subdued today. Some may cast their reminiscent eyes upwards to survey the motionless college clock and greet it with a knowing glance. They look at the Present with eyes laden with the Past—the rich legacy of learning and academic brilliance.

As a student of the Present, I too acknowledge the Past. It provides the Present with a sense of tradition, a sense of history. We must remember, however, that out of the Past is born the Present and out of the Present, the Future. This brings us to the crucial question: has the immobility of the college clock extended to the Department as well?

If the ill-maintained exterior and the apparent lack of discipline prompts too hasty a judgment, I would request the reader to pause and bear with me as I try to analyse the many-faceted Present. For I would like to believe that the Present throbs with a life of its own.

Admittedly there has been a certain amount of 'decay' in the functioning of the Department. Extra-academic tensions and pressures have undoubtedly played their role in affecting the quality of academic life in the Department. In fact, the awareness of a general fall in standards should help one to make a fuller assessment of the Present as realised in the life of the Department. In an age based increasingly on materialistic values, the entire orientation of life has changed. Today the best students do not necessarily rush to Presidency College. Instead they take up profession-oriented courses in engineering, medicine and business studies. One's choice of one's academic course is often born not so much out of aptitude and interest as out of pecuniary motives. In an age when computers are replacing the human mind, we in the English Department are concerned with the study of the creative being, the philosophic mind. Thus the values of the Department do not necessarily concur with those of the twentieth century. We have to accept separate criteria for assessing the Department today. So the story of the Present should be, I think, an exposition of the 'hidden life' of the Department, pulsating beneath its ambiguous exterior, searching within itself.

Feeling the academic pulse superficially, we may note that it is still our Department that fares best in University examinations. But is this a sufficient criterion for judgment? Is this all the legacy that it offers us today?

George Watson has written, 'To study literature in any sense beyond the elementary is to perform a literary act.' I think our experience in this Department has proved the profound truth of this statement. One need hardly emphasise that, true to tradition, the whole approach to literature in our college is distinctive. Every now and then, a lecture opens up for us a perspective of 'knowledge infinite'. Our very approach to the subject, with the emphasis on literary history and background, seems to suggest the possibility of such knowledge. It is this expanding inscape of the mind, the opening of mental vistas, that provides the motive force of academic work in the Department.

Whereas most colleges aim at proficiency in examinations, in ours one can, if one so chooses, dedicate oneself to a deeper knowledge of one's subject. The fine distinctions and subtle nuances unfolded to our view seem worth the price of years of dedicated study. The easy recourse to ready-made commentaries seems an unsatisfactory substitute. When we renew contact with old school friends who are perhaps doing the same course elsewhere, we find a difference in perspective.

The invaluable system of 'one to one' tutorials gives scope for the individual mind to develop. Most of us would agree that it is during these tutorial sessions that one's perspective is most widened. Whereas in class during lectures, one is a passive listener, it is during one's tutorials that one can give expression to one's thoughts and achieve a finer understanding. In the course of this training, one's

values are moulded simultaneously with one's literary judgment and sensibility. I would like to believe that a perceptive and sensitive student has consequently a finer understanding of life as well.

Thus we see that the criteria for judging one's experience in the English Department are vastly different from the common ones. 'To create is almost necessarily an act of liberty,' Watson writes. A corollary would be the necessity of liberty for any act of creation. If there is 'liberty' anywhere, it is here and in adequate measure, fostered by the widening of mental horizons, giving the mind sufficient scope to grow and to create. Ideally, every tutorial essay is an act of creation, as after having assimilated one's lectures and reference books, one produces something independent, which sometimes may not relate to any of these. Every tutor must also be a 'creator', attempting to mould an amateur mind to a finer perception. Professors guide and advise but, in my experience, rarely stifle. Students have access to an excellent collection of books in exchange for amazingly reasonable fees. The Honours Library, the Seminar Library and of course the Main Library downstairs together constitute a rare collection. There is, I repeat, freedom for the mind here. What could be more conducive to a true development of one's self ?

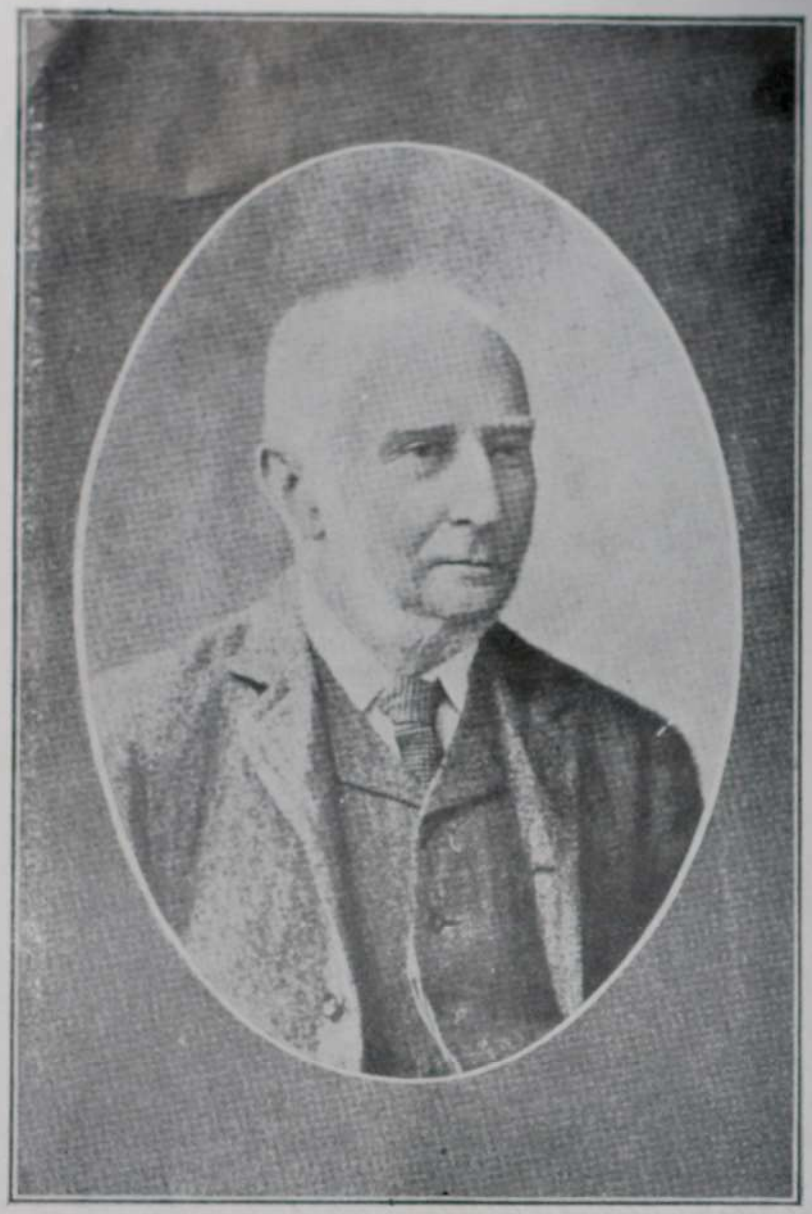
Thus though we may not be equipped with polished classrooms and neon-lit air-conditioned libraries, it is the sincerity of purpose which urges one on. The richness of the accustomed values of the Department draws a sense of commitment from one's self. And among our teachers, there is a fund of generous guidance and moral support in our search for 'the hidden life' in literature and the real one within ourselves.

At the outset, I mentioned the twilight quality of the times. I think I need to explain. In the West, one has already begun to sense a reaction against extreme materialism. People are weary of 'measuring out their life with coffee spoons'. There again seems to be a movement back to fundamental values. In this sense I do not see the Department as an anachronism, but as a possible nursery for the values of the future. Almost a hundred years ago, Hardy too saw 'the Century's corpse outleant', and the song of the darkling thrush seemed to embody for him 'Some blessed Hope'. In our moribund world, the Departmetn may hold out the same promise. Out of the Present is born the Future : I can only pray that 'the hidden life' of this academic centre may flourish and perhaps point to a coming renaissance.

Today it is much easier to criticise the Department than to defend it. In fact, these two opposite alignments reflect a basic opposition in priorities, values and understanding. It is not possible to describe the many facets of the Present in their entirety. A full evaluation of the English Department of Presidency College must include both the spoken and the unspoken. To view its values in their totality one would have to ask for the silent, the unstated to be articulate. I can only write from my view of the Present. The rest is silence, but the silence of a hidden life.

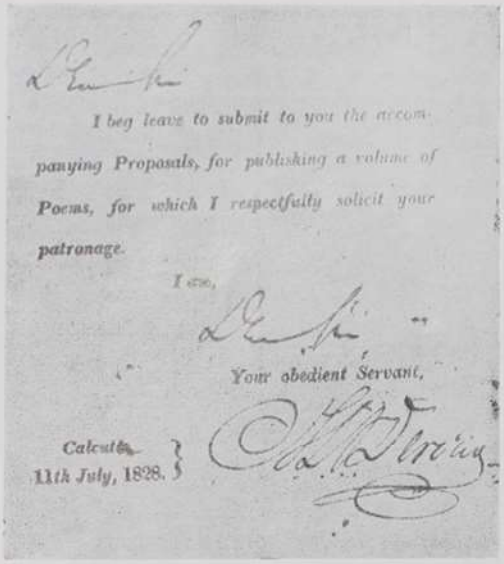
A Departmental group from the session 1933-34. Seated, from left to right, are Prof. Tarapada Mukherji, Prof. Taraknath Sen, Prof. Praphulla Chandra Ghosh, Principal Bhupati Mohan Sen, Prof. Srikumar Banerjee and Prof. Somnath Maitra. Among the students standing in the first row are the Chief Guest (second from left) and President (fourth from left) of the 1982 Reunion.

The English Department, October 1982



Charles Henry Tawney

Manmohan Ghose with his daughters

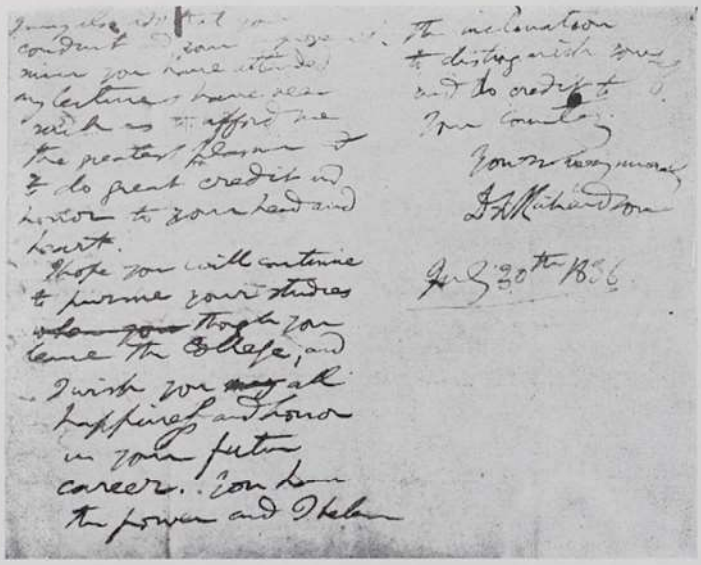


I beg leave to submit to you the accompanying Proposals, for publishing a volume of Poems, for which I respectfully solicit your patronage.

I am,

Your obedient Servant,

Calcutta
11th July, 1828.



Top left : One of the circular letters sent by Derozio soliciting patronage for the publication of his poems

Top right : Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

Centre left : From a letter of recommendation by Richardson to Kylas Chunder Dutt, a student of Hindu College

Bottom : David Lester Richardson

Hugh Melville Percival

THE OPENING OF A LETTER FROM H. M. PERCIVAL TO SYAMAPRASAD MOOKERJEE

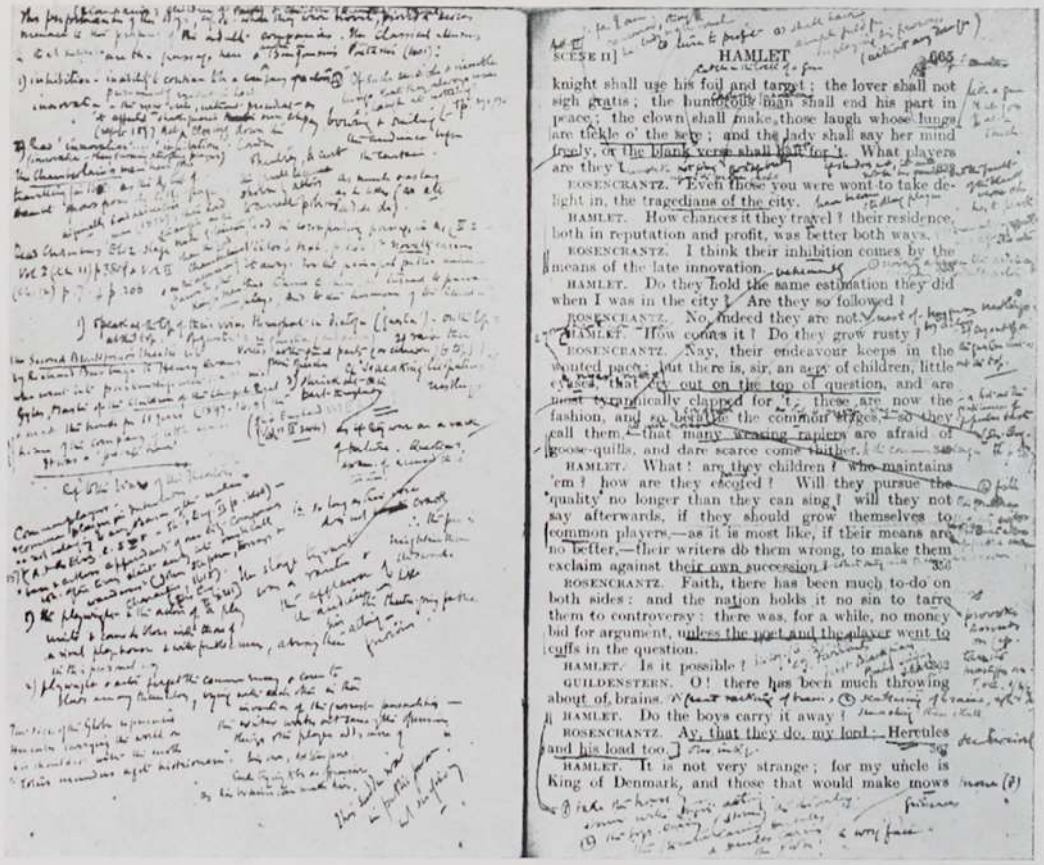
LONDON
31 ALFRED PLACE WEST
SOUTH KENSINGTON S.W.

30th Sept: '20

Dear Syama Prasad.

I received your letter. I have never seen you – that is not possible, for you could not have been studying at the College before I left it, now nine years since – but you are the son of my old pupil, Sir Asutosh, that makes me fancy – it is only a fancy – as if I have known you too as a pupil. It makes me write as if you really had been one. Reading your letter fain we deeply felt pleasure. The present generation of students

Praphulla Chandra Ghosh



SCENE II] HAMLET 105

knight shall use his foil and target; the lover shall not sigh gratis; the humorous man shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o' the sere; and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ. Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city.

HAMLET. How chances it they travel? their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

ROSENCRANTZ. I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

HAMLET. Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

ROSENCRANTZ. No, indeed they are not.

HAMLET. How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ. Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace; but there is, sir, an aery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't: these are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come thither.

HAMLET. What! are they children? who maintains 'em? how are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players,—as it is most like, if their means are no better,—their writers do them wrong, to make them exclaim against their own succession?

ROSENCRANTZ. Faith, there has been much to-do on both sides: and the nation holds it no sin to tarre them to controversy: there was, for a while, no money bid for argument, unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

HAMLET. Is it possible?

GUILDENSTERN. O! there has been much throwing about of brains.

HAMLET. Do the boys carry it away?

ROSENCRANTZ. Ay, that they do, my lord: Hercules and his load too.

HAMLET. It is not very strange; for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mows

A PAGE FROM PRAPHULLA CHANDRA GHOSH'S INTERLEAVED TEACHING COPY OF 'HAMLET'. (The notes were made in inks of various colours)

Taraknath Sen

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a State language or the medium of intercommunication between different parts of a country or among different sections of its population, it is the language (not the literature) which is practical application, that is of more immediate concern for the average learner. The compulsory course in English for the Bachelor's degree of Indian universities must therefore be predominantly a language course with a pronounced practical bias. The suggested practical bias is justified by the further consideration that a language is not really mastered so long as it remains a remote, bookish entity (as English unfortunately does for most learners in this country). Real mastery of a language comes only when it grows to be a living reality for the learner, & it becomes a living reality only when the learner is able to apply it with ease to the varied needs and affairs of practical life. It is surely a strange lop-sided education that makes one write learnedly on Shakespeare & flounder when it comes to the writing of an ordinary letter in English.

Accordingly I propose the following syllabus for Compulsory English for the B. A. & B. Sc. (Pass) Examinations :— (i) Practical English : 100 marks ; (ii) Précis-Writing : 50 marks ; (iii) Prescribed Texts for Rapid Reading : 100 marks.

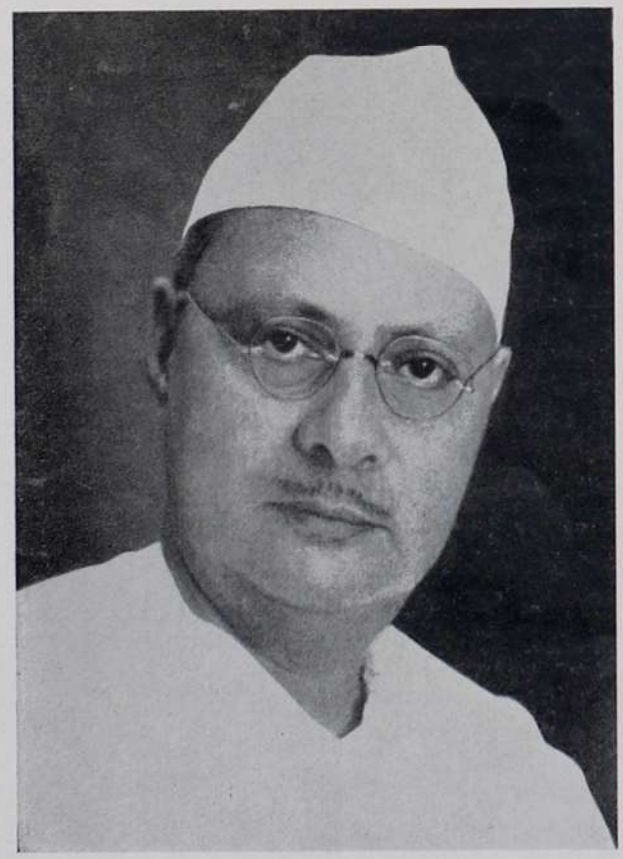
In (i), the questions will all be concerned with the application of the English language to topics of practical life. A wide variety of such questions is possible (e.g., letter-writing on topics of practical life, dialogue-writing in conversational English on matters of everyday life, etc. etc. Room may also be found in this paper for passages relating to everyday life being set for translation from the candidate's mother-tongue into English, alternative questions being provided for those whose mother-tongue is not any of the Indian languages recognised by the university concerned).

In (iii), not less than ten texts should be prescribed for rapid reading. It is important, however, to lay down in the examination regulations what kind of questions should be set on these texts. If the questions are designed merely to test generally the com-

FROM THE DRAFT OF TARAKNATH SEN'S ARTICLE ON 'ENGLISH IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES' (Calcutta Review, 1957).

Hiran Kumar Banerjee

Somnath Maitra



Amal Bhattacharji