

## THE TEACHERS AND THE TAUGHT.

(Prof. K. C. Sircar.)

Some years back, on the occasion of a farewell entertainment in honour of a retiring Head Master of a high School in this city, there was a free flow of flowery rhetoric. Gentlemen spoke on various phases of the character of the worthy gentleman. The treatment of the subject seemed to all in the meeting as exhaustive, and none could discover any flaw. But suddenly, a Journalist, famous for his witticism, stood up and said, "I rise to supply a significant omission. None of you, orators, mentioned what was the crowning virtue of our hero: It was that, though he has a brilliant record of about forty years' service as a teacher, none of his boys has given him a thrashing, a sound beating."

There was a boisterous outburst of laughter. But I would not laugh the matter off; I would rather attach great importance to this phase of the gentleman's character. What is it that makes a teacher popular with his boys? What is it that endears him to them? What is it that even though the teacher happens to be sometimes harsh, the boys do not resent his harshness? Men of the teaching profession are a sacrificing lot. Every one of them does his duty, which is to train young minds and build up the young hopefuls of the country. Then how is it that popularity does not fall to the lot of each? Knowledge of the subject that one teaches is always there. The power of exposition in view of the mentality of the student, his ability or inability to receive and assimilate knowledge, of course makes a great difference. All teachers may not have the same piercing intellect to penetrate out and out the mind of their pupils, but that defect never raises any feeling of hatred or hostility; nor does it exasperate the pupil to such a pitch that he should forget the lofty tradition of India. Where else is that tradition? Even when a single

letter is received from a person, there is nothing in the world with which the debt thus contracted can be paid back. How is it then that beating of the teacher by the student is reported now and then?

In European countries the relation between the teachers and the taught is being sought to be placed on a basis of affection and friendship. In Germany, there are frequent social functions, in which teachers and students mix on terms of friendship. These occasions reduce the tedium of academical rigidity almost to a vanishing point. In that country, students are given concession at places of amusement, where they go in a body under a professor. They hold picnics, musical soirees, outings, and in this way is made student life as pleasant as can be thought of. Music is a subject of study there and the citizens in the making develop a soft, sweet side of their being by acquiring and practising that mollifying agent, want of which in the constitution of man makes him fit for treason, stratagem and spoil.

In France and other countries, a similar line is followed. In spite of all this, unpleasant events happen. In France, where oral examinations form a large part, a student did very badly. The professor, who examined, was off his head and calling out to the assistant said, "Just go and bring a course of fodder for the saddled ass." Retaliation was immediate. The student said at once, "Wait, gentleman," and saying this, he threw out of his pocket a few francs, and shouted out, "Another course please, my professor will give me the honour of his company at the dinner." In Germany, a professor of Mathematics was a little late in coming to his class. Panting as he came, he saw on the black-board written in bold clear type,— "Professor Braun is an ass" The mathematician took from the black-board the chalk pencil and added 'Driver' to 'ass'. So it read, "Professor Braun is an ass driver."

Stories of this nature are reported almost from every land though everywhere there is the tradition of a sweet and pleasant

relation between the teacher and the taught and of regard and reverence surrounding the position of a Teacher. But India beats every country in this respect. Here, the relation of a teacher to a student is no less sweet and affectionate than of father to a son. Still, there is abroad the picture of Ichabod Crane, of Washington Irving, of the School-master described by Charles Lamb who offered to teach him Grammar and Handwriting, description of the teacher immortalised by George Eliot, a pedagogue, who was a woman-hater and went the length of saying that he not only cooked better but, if necessary, could even bear a child better than a woman, and there is the story of the village School-master of Goldsmith, who, as is known to every student, 'though vanquished could argue still'; there are besides at home the teacher 'Sandwipani Muni, the Khonra Gurumahasay and other specimens, putting the Fool's cap on the head of the teacher where there should be the crown of the glory. These types of teachers did exist in the past, and do exist in the present all the world over.

Let me relate to you my personal experience of school-boy days. Providence, I should say, most cruelly threw me in the way of a teacher whom I shall never forget. I was placed under him when I was, as one would say, in swaddling clothes, while my fellow students were much bigger boys. The Pandit Mahasay, as we called him, was the lowest teacher in an M. E. School. His only stock-in-trade in the occupation of Teaching was deafening shouts and a dazing slap which was a miniature thunder clap. The most endearing way that he addressed a student was—বান্দর ছেলে—*Bander Chalay*. This was employed in and out of the class. If he met a student on the way his affectionate greeting was—Bander Chalay, whither are you going? The result was palpitation of the heart in the youngster, however stout-hearted he might be. For my poor self, my heart beat violently; not only at his sight, but even in dream, when I saw that he was in the class and dealing out his slaps liberally and was proceeding towards me. But when

chance placed him under me as my subordinate in practical life and when he was glib in his talk about me as one of his best pupils there were hard heart-beatings. This Pandit Mahasay was a curious man. The Inspector of Schools while inspecting the 'Teachers' Attendance Register was struck by his initials in Bengali and asked, "What does this jingling mean?" What language is this? Is it Chinese?" It was "*Tang, Shung, Shung*", standing for Tarinishankar Shaha, for that was his name. The Inspector made him on pain of dismissal learn the three English letters, "T. S. S.", and stopped the ridiculous ring of music in the Register. This teacher was nevertheless a very religious man and never slapped a student who was a Brahmin. I say "slap" so often, for he did nothing else but slap not only on the face but on the back. When he became angry, and his anger was quite handy, the whole brunt of his slapping fell on us, poor non-Brahmins. Every one desired to avoid them, but none could, except Brahmins. He was extremely reverent to Brahmins, even to Brahmin boys. Once he created a scene. At the sight of a Brahmin youth he stood up and welcomed him. The Headmaster also rose, the whole school rose then. A chair was handed to the visitor. But all this fuss vanished and a sense of injured innocence mixed with amusement prevailed when the visitor looked abashed and said in all humility, "I am a student and come to be admitted".

One day we had a holiday through the grace of the Pandit's slapping. We had a fellow student named *Chetan*, which means, 'conscious'. The Pandit's slap on the cheek was so severe that he at once became—'*Achetan*', i.e. unconscious on the floor. The scene thus enacted beggars description. "Water, Water" was the shout, first, from the Pandit, then from us, then from the other teachers who came to the scene. Chetan was made 'chetan' again, but making a survey of the swooning boy and his surrounding the Headmaster shrieked out, "Sweeper, sweeper! Remove the boy. Sweep the

place, disinfect it". But the school servant refused to do anything. So a *Methar* had to be brought in. Turning to us the Headmaster said, "You all go away". Oh, the joy that followed in the track of this tragi-comedy. While going in a procession we began to shout—*Jai Tang Shang Shaki Jai*.

Without a single exception, all boys, good or bad, were burning with a desire for vengeance. A plot was hatched. A small hut close to the main building of the school was set apart for the Pandit where he ruled as the Czar of all the Russias. There was recreation for one hour at this school from twelve to 1 o' clock. The Pandit went home at this time for his meal, and when at 1 o' clock he was back to his class he sat in his chair and fell into a sleep. To curry favour with him, some boys officiously kept fanning his head. I never did so. So he had his evil eye on me. We heard that the Inspector of Schools was coming on a visit. And as a naughty boy, that I was, I put into the head of my comrades the idea that it was just the time to take revenge. The visitor with the Secretary came first to the main building. It was one o' clock. The Pandit began to take his nap with his mouth wide open, his favourites fanning him. His strict injunction was that before the Inspector and his party should come to the small hut we should wake him up; but it had been arranged that we should not. It was a custom of the School that when a distinguished visitor came all students should stand up in a body and shout "Good morning, Sir." We all screamed out in a falsetto as loud as our lungs could permit "Good morning Sir." The Pandit started up, his head struck violently against the door, his chair was put upside down, and he almost precipitated at the feet of the Inspector when the Secretary held him up. We looked at the Inspector; he was laughing to his heart's content. The inspection and the examination passed off as a matter of formality; but as high waves linger after a storm and sink many a boat, the after effect of this drama was tremendous. For, hardly was the Inspector gone,

when the Pandit visited, his humiliation on our backs, this time with a cane. We thanked God that his iron palm did not distribute the sense-robbing slaps of which Chetan had a full dose.

Now as I conclude, I must revert to the point with which I commenced. Why is this unpleasantness visible now and then between the teacher and his pupil? The days of school boy birching are gone. The rule of the Ferule is a misrule now. Froebel's Kinder Garten system is the model. Education should be imparted as the French say "*Comme a la danse*", in a pleasant way as if the teacher and the student were singing and dancing. The Kinder Garten, the garden of children where the teacher and the student meet as it were in a picnic on a pleasant pleasure-trip, is nothing but that. The main spring of a teacher's machinery forming sweet relation between him and his pupil is love for his boy, his affection for him, his sympathy for him, his fellow feeling, his thought that the boy is his own, with his weakness and his strength, with his boyish freaks, his wanton mischievousness, he is but his own. He should be treated as a son ought to be treated by his father. The teacher should be more kind and considerate when there is weakness. The real success of a teacher lies in his ability to make a man of a weak boy; for a naturally strong boy can take care of himself with but the usual attention of the teacher. Education means leading in the direction whither the student's mind tends. When it is imparted with sympathy, the students overlook the teacher's shortcomings. *Chhatra* means one who covers the faults of the teacher. When this act of covering is reciprocated, the relation is bound to be sweet and pleasant. It is too late in the day to bring back *Brahmacharyya* in its entirety. Attempts may be made, but I have grave doubts about their perfect fruition. 'The past never returns' is a truism. But a midway between the spiritual past and the materialistic present can certainly be found and the glorious traditions of India kept in tact in the supremely important matter of Education.

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