THE LIFE OF SIR PONNAMBALAM RAMANATHAN

M. VYTHILINGAM

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SIR PONNAMBALAM RAMANATHAN

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DEDICATED TO

ALL LOVERS OF HUMAN FREEDOM,

FOR THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM

WAS THE CAUSE

THAT WAS DEAREST TO

RAMANATHAN'S HEART

For, as the highest gospel was a Biography, so is the life of every good man still an indubitable gospel, and preaches to the eye and heart and whole man.

— Thomas Carlyle

A time like this demands
Great hearts, strong minds, true faith and willing hands;
Men whom the lust of office cannot kill,
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honour, men who will not lie.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes

Liberty is not a means to a higher political end. It is itself the highest political end .... A generous spirit prefers that his country should be poor, and weak, and of no account, but free, rather than powerful, prosperous and enslaved.

— Lord Acton

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PREFACE

The present work is an act of piety and justice: piety to a man who consecrated a long and illustrious life to the service of man and God, and justice to his memory, which posterity has so soon and so ungraciously consigned to the limbo of oblivion. Long-term gratitude has seldom been an attribute of our people. Let us, therefore, not waste our regrets over what is not; let us rather seek to find if Ramanathan has anything to teach us yet, teach a distraught and disillusioned generation what constitutes the true ends of life.

The present work is born of the conviction that Ramanathan has much to teach us yet, that his life and work are an enduring example to us, a source of light and inspiration to a benighted and bewildered generation struggling to find its soul. We see in him how much a man can achieve in his lifetime who works with a sincere and passionate dedication to the cause of human happiness and well-being. He taught us that man does not live by bread alone, that man's life upon this planet finds its true meaning and fulfilment not in self-love but in self-denial and service, not in self-glorification but in self-dedication—dedication to causes higher and nobler than his own individual self, the cause of humanity which is also the

cause of God. He taught us that society cannot be reformed except by some law of love and understanding, that hatred and oppression are but poisons without effect but to inflame; that human governments cannot survive the impact of time and circumstance unless they are founded upon the eternal laws of Truth, Reason and Justice in man's commerce with his fellow-men; that in imperialism nothing fails like success.

He taught us that Freedom is man's birth-right, life's sole nutriment. No wonder, then, that his whole life was governed and dominated by one supreme ideal—the liberation of his country from the thraldom of foreign rule—and that in the achievement of that liberation, he fought with a pertinacity, courage and resourcefulness that astounded friend and foe alike. There can be no better testimony to the success of his labours in this field than the fact that when in 1879, he entered public life as a young and blossoming lawyer of twentyeight, he found his people a subject race, prostrate at the heels of an alien master and that when at his death in 1930 he relinquished it, he left them virtual masters of their national destinies.

He loved much and his love was not circumscribed by any narrow domestic walls but embraced all humanity. It was for them that he lived and laboured all his life with an energy and dedication rare in the annals of leadership; and it is in their hearts that he will for ever live enshrined more than in the pages of history.

To attempt to write the life of a man who was in the forefront of national life and played the foremost role in many national transactions, whose years bridged so long a span of time is but to attempt the arduous, the intractable. But when the same person happens to be at once a statesman and scholar of the first rank, a jurist and writer, a philosopher and man of religion, a

patriot and philanthropist of rare distinction, who, in the words of a great Governor, "touched nothing that he did not adorn", a biographer certainly throws himself open to the charge of temerity.

But a biography, however, must needs be written, for posterity can but ill-afford to live in ignorance of the man and his work. The difficulty of writing the life has been further enhanced by the circumstance that Ramanathan left behind no diaries nor any personal records of contemporary events for the guidance of the future biographer or historian. Presumably he had no eye to posthumous fame, for, if he had, he would certainly have left behind such an immense wealth of material as would have defied the efforts of the most patient and indefatigable scribe to sift or sort out.

However, his widow Lady Ramanathan, his sons Rajendra and Vamadeva, his son-in-law Dr. S. Natesan and his nephew Sir Arunachalam Mahadeva—all of whom are, alas, no more—came to my rescue by readily placing at my disposal whatever material was in their possession and helping me with their advice and guidance. I have, besides, drawn freely on the contemporary press, the *Hansards* and other official papers. I have, moreover interviewed considerable numbers of Ramanathan's younger contemporaries, who, though not privileged to have known him in his incredible prime, could yet give some valuable glimpses of the man and his work. All these sufficed to reconstruct and recreate the essential features of the man and his work, for there, happily, were no secrets in Ramanathan's life; he lived and worked in broad daylight and his life was an open book for any man to read.

I have quoted at some length from his speeches and writings and have done so advisedly for one reason, that a man's own words, his *ipsissima verba*, are a truer revelation of the man's personality than any a biographer may hope to pour

forth; for another reason, that Ramanathan's speeches, in particular, have a special quality about them ; they are models of parliamentary eloquence by reason of their complete mastery of the subject, their simplicity, directness and force, their infinite resourcefulness of argument, their freedom from pedantry, their wonderful vitality, their matchless power of words fused with faith and fire. It was by this power of words that he tossed about and swayed at will the whole hierarchy of British administrators, jurists and legislators—men of no mean talent or attainment—sent out to govern this Premier Colony.

I owe an apology to my readers for presenting the work in two volumes. This was unavoidable owing to the great mass of material at my command. The present volume takes the reader to the year 1911 when Ramanathan was elected by the almost unanimous suffrage of the nation to the Educated Ceylonese Seat in the Legislative Council, thus earning the distinction of being the first Ceylonese to enter the country's supreme legislature by popular election.

My gratitude is due in no small measure to a small band of Ramanathan admirers, who have chosen to remain anonymous but without whose aid, both material and moral, this book could not have seen the light of day. However, I cannot resist the temptation to mention some who have helped me at every turn from the time I announced my intention to publish this work to the time of its completion—Messrs S. Sivasubramaniam, James T. Rutnam, C. Balasingam, K. C. Thangarajah, G. G. Ponnambalam, Q. C., Mudaliyar C. Muthuthamby, Senators S. Nadesan, Q. C., M. Thiruchelvam, Q. C., and T. Neethiraja, Messrs C. Ranganathan, Q. C., P. Navaratnarajah, Q. C., T. Sri Ramanathan, K. Satchithanandham, K. Gunaratnam, N. Ratnasabapathy, K. K. Subramaniam and last but not least, M. K. Kanagendran (*Eelaventhan*).

My gratitude is due also to my venerable teacher and mentor Mr. S. Handy-Perinbanayagam and to another great teacher, though not mine, Mr. K. Nesiah for going through the book in typescript and helping me with valuable suggestions and guidance.

In conclusion, I must thank the printers, Thirumakal Press, Chunnakam who undertook the work more as a matter of national service than as a business proposition. Despite several discouragements and setbacks, they have carried the work to completion.

M. VYTHILINGAM

79 B, Brown Road,
Jaffna.
April, 1971.

INTRODUCTION

"I think if I were a Ceylonese, I should feel specially proud of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. He has had a most remarkable career. I suppose there are few instances on record in which a man has touched life at so many points and at every point at which he has touched it, he has touched it with distinction."

Governor Sir Herbert Stanley

"Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan was a national figure with an international reputation. His memory is well worth preserving, well worth cherishing, well worth handing down to our children and our children's children as a precious heirloom."

K. P. S. Menon,
Indian Diplomatist and Scholar.

"THE greatest Ceylonese of all times"—this was the testimony and tribute of our revered leader and first Prime Minister of Free Lanka, the late Rt. Hon. D. S. Senanayake, P. C. to the memory of the man who is the subject of this biography. A distinguished educationist once said, "The term 'Great' is little understood and widely mis-used in this country. It is often applied to persons whose claim to that lofty appellation is by all standards meagre;" and proceeded to add, "If ever in this country there was one man who was truly and indubitably great, it was Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and no other." "He bestrode the political firmament like a Colossus." "The half century preceding the Donoughmore Reforms is indisputably, 'The Age of Ramanathan'"—these and many others have been the judgments passed on Ramanathan by persons who knew him and were competent to judge.

Ramanathan was admittedly one of the greatest and most memorable personalities of his time and

his career, one of the most prolific. Statesman and sage, scholar and jurist, philosopher and man of religion, patriot and philanthropist, educational reformer and benefactor, author and idol of the nation, his versatility was astounding. His was a mind of many dimensions, at once strong and active, tenacious and vigorous. Scion of an ancient and certainly the most illustrious house—for none other has given us names so honoured and so universally cherished—steeped in the splendid traditions of public and political life, of high intellectual and spiritual culture and given to patriotic and philanthropic endeavour, he enjoyed in full measure all the advantages that heredity and environment could vouchsafe to man. Birth and breeding did all they could to fashion the man, the consummate master of political action and the incomparable champion and benefactor of a nation.

Ramanathan's life was one long and ceaseless struggle for the national weal. His is, perhaps, the finest example in all our history of a life nobly and relentlessly dedicated to the shaping of our national institutions. Few other statesmen in our history gave proof of greater sagacity or courage or vision in the handling of high affairs of state or played a more constructive or a more creative role or left their mark so plainly and so indelibily inscribed both in the Statute Book and the life and business of the nation. To his contemporaries, he symbolized patriotism, courage, indomitable will and dedication to the cause of his country's freedom. He was regarded as the embodiment of the dignity, honour and virtue of the Ceylonese nation and expressed, as few others before or after him, the moral conscience of his time. He was a patriot whose patriotism burned with a purer, nobler flame, a patriotism which transcended all narrow domestic walls and embraced in its broad bosom all humankind, regardless of race or creed or clime. K. P. S. Menon once said, " The great thing about Sir Ponnambalam

Ramanathan was that he had a universal mind." Not that he loved his people less, but that he loved mankind more. He imbued our politics with a spiritual emotion and made it less a business or a strategy than a religion. Truth, Justice and Liberty—these were his governing passions and it was loyalty to these ideals that was the key-note of his whole career. Sectarianism, communalism, racialism and a host of other isms which, alas! have become the sole stock-in-trade of the fashionable politician and professional firebrand and constitute the gravest menace to the peace and security of nations, and to civilization itself, were utterly foreign to his temperament. True to his religious instincts, he believed in the fundamental unity and brotherhood of man and felt his kinship with all created things. Hence his broad humanity, his catholicity of taste, his large and warm-hearted sympathies, qualities which distinguished his long and illustrious career. "For my part, I consider," he said, " that when a person is blessed with a human body, he is for all purposes my brother. The one and the same God worshipped throughout the universe has sent souls into different parts of the globe and has invested each of them with a mind that befits it. The soul, gifted with a mental system and a corporeal system, is ushered into a particular country according to its previous works, and it does not matter whether the body is white or black or brown."

In another place, he says, " Take the Sinhalese nation. I have served the race all my life. In my twentyeighth year, I entered the Legislative Council and never once have thought myself to be the member of the Tamil community only. I do not think that any community has said that I did not represent their interests. I supported the European interests also and collaborated with the European members. I supported the Sinhalese interests and every other interest and treated every subject with

the same sympathy and desire to do the best for all communities. Presently, I found I had developed in their hearts a high feeling of satisfaction, and that satisfaction and contentment which was won by work done in the interests of the public was worth winning. I knew through and through the men and women, the boys and girls of the Sinhalese community of all classes. They have all the characteristics of a great people. They are decidedly considerate and peaceful and are just learning the horrors of political controversy."

Ramanathan's genius was pre-eminently a transcendent capacity for taking pains, for vigorous, constructive and disciplined activity. The Editor of "The Indian Mirror" in its issue of 19th June, 1906 made this perceptive observation: "The career of Ramanathan is a fit object lesson to the educated youth of India and Ceylon; for seldom does one come across a man of such phenomenal energy as Mr. Ramanathan, who is as sound an authority on philosophy, arts, literature and religion as he is on law."

Ramanathan was a parliamentarian of the highest calibre, perhaps the greatest that ever graced this country's legislature, and the Hansards of the fifty years during which he dominated the political scene bear testimony to his splendid and copious eloquence, rich in political and philosophic insight, in originality, elevation and depth of thought and suffused with a passion for the service of his country and the cause of Truth, Justice and Liberty. He was in his time the life and soul of the legislature and the sole survivor and most luminous product of the school of philosophic statesmen which his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy had founded and which filled the land with a blaze of political enthusiasm and witnessed a spate of beneficent legislation. Nothing is more characteristic of him than his lifelong conviction that it is the imperative duty of men of light and leading, whose highest personal happiness would be found

in the practice of philosophic thought and the disinterested pursuit of high culture to make the supreme sacrifice of devoting the best of their manhood to the service of their fellows as statesmen and legislators. He imparted strength and vigour, vision and sublimity of purpose to parliamentary deliberation and without him, the ligislature was likened, by contemporary opinion, to a day bereft of the radiant sun. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, owing not a little to his personality and genius, the glamour and prestige of our legislature, already heightened by the achievements of men like George Wall, C. A. Lorenz and Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, reached its meridian splendour.

He had a passion for good government and for competency in high places. By deed and word, he instilled not merely in the people but more, in their White rulers a high sense of their duty and responsibility to the nation and made himself the stern and unrelenting guardian of popular rights against the inroads of arrogant imperialism. While he was in the legislature, official members, largely British, would sit alert and vigilant, lest he should catch them napping, with always a ready and considered reply to his many and far-reaching questions, lest any indication of neglect of duty on their part should bring upon them the shafts of his censure. He dispelled from the mind of the Britisher the false notion then widely prevalent that the Government of a Colony was a sinecure. Duty done to perfection was his watchword through life, and everything he said or did was characterized by an intense and abiding love of perfection. H. A. J. Hulugalle has paid the following tribute to Ramanathan: "Two members of the Council, in particular, stood out as champions of popular rights and protectors of the public against official excesses. The most courageous and eloquent was Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan who fought

inch by inch, as it were, every step taken by the Government to whitewash the mistakes of its officials and give a varnish of legality to arbitrary acts.

"Across the floor of the Council, he was pitted against the Governor himself and some of his ablest officials, notably the Attorney-General, Anton Bertram, who was an impressive speaker and had been in his day President of the Cambridge Union Society."

Courage was ever a sovereign quality of his. It caused him to resist repeatedly and consistently and with all the resources at his command whatever he regarded as wrong or unjust, inhuman or oppressive; to say, irrespective of consequences to himself, unacceptable things to those in power; to refuse even in the slightest degree to compromise with what he held to be wrong, shabby or mean. Where truth was at stake, he was completely fearless and never tampered with it to serve the hour or sheltered behind a half-truth. Early in his career as legislator, he told His Excellency the Governor, "To my last breath, I will resist injustice from whatever quarter it may emanate." On another occasion, he said, "After the expression of opinion which has fallen from Your Excellency, I should, if my personal feelings are consulted, prefer to remain silent. But I cannot do so in the interests of the public. My position today is this. On taking my seat at this Board, I find a bundle of privileges have been entrusted to my safe-keeping, and if I feel honestly and conscientiously that those privileges are in any way trespassed upon, it does not matter by whom, it becomes my duty, however painful it may be, that I should resist the attempt."

He has left us legacies both rich and splendid, tangible and intangible. The stately and magnificent temples of learning he bequeathed to posterity, the massive and exquisitely-wrought temples of worship he reared to the glory of God, though

of immense and enduring worth, are as nothing compared to the priceless example he set for us of character and self-discipline, of heroic courage and an intense and abiding faith in God. He taught us the supremacy of moral and spiritual values over material ones, that man's salvation lies rather in mutual love, goodwill and fellowship than in mutual hate or ill-will. He taught us that man's life here is to express the eternal and not the ephemeral, that man should not smother his consciousness of the infinite by slothfulness or by slavery to his material environment; that life finds its fulfilment when it outgrows itself in the infinite, that man's supreme happiness is not in getting but in giving, not in accumulation but in renunciation, in the dedication of himself and his all to causes larger than his own individual self, the cause of his country, of humanity and of God. He was among us the finest exemplar of the philosophic doctrine of trusteeship taught so eloquently by our ancient sages and seers, and so nobly exemplified in our time by Gandhiji, that all wealth is, in reality, God's own and that man holds it in trust from Him not for his own personal gratification or glorification but rather for the service and betterment of his fellow men, that he has no reason to take more out of it than what he needs for his existence, that he who does, is both a robber and a sacrilegious fiend. It is for this reason that his biography is hard to write and in a sense harder to read, in-as-much as the essence of his greatness lay not so much in what he said or did as in what he thought and dreamed within the inner sanctuary of his soul. Any record of his life that fails to fasten itself upon this aspect of his life misses the real man.

It was his glory as it was his supreme service to the nation that he gave what it sorely needed at a critical period of its history, when it lay prostrate under the heels of an imperial master.

He gave the nation leadership—leadership indomitable, intrepid, self-denying, and wise; leadership that inspired in the people confidence, unity, pride and trust in their national heritage and capacity; he taught his countrymen what Gandhiji did to his own, never to bend their knees before insolent might, but always to stand up to the overbearing foreigner. He banished craven fear and servile submission from the arena of public life, fostered in the people a spirit of sturdy independence and taught the White Sahib that the Easterner was by no means his inferior, and given the opportunity, could well outdo him in many fields. Under his guidance, the pepole learned to hold their heads high and deal with the imperialist Englishman on terms of equality. They watched him through a long span of years and the spectacle of his life and greatness was a great part of the country's education. It ministered to the people's pride to realize that their land too, however poor in many things, yet possessed a man of exceptionally rich and varied talents who could measure up to the greatest in any land, one who gave his life, whole and entire, to their service.

He was our greatest prophet of national unity and solidarity, and his whole life was dedicated to the furtherance of that ideal. "It would be a happy day for Ceylon," he said, "if its medley of inhabitants can stand together independently of religion or of caste or clan." Though early in his political career, he officially represented the Tamil-speaking population of the Island in the country's supreme legislature, he fought the cause of every community as if the cause was his own, championed every humane and enlightened measure and represented more completely than any other man the conscience and intelligence of the Ceylonese nation. His dogged tenacity, his passion for justice and fairplay and above all, his single-minded devotion to the well-being of his people gave him a niche

in their affections, such as was vouchafed to few others before or since.

In the half-century and more during which he was a power in the land and toiled indefatigably in the service of his people, he held the diverse elements of the country's population bound together as if by hoops of steel. Every community in the land acclaimed him its benefactor and leader and looked up to him for the espousal of causes that peculiarly affected its fortunes. He was in his time the symbol, the focus of the nation's unity and solidarity, which until his death in 1930 remained the main hall-mark of our national life and the country's proudest asset. It is impossible to discover in all his long and illustrious career one single instance in which he sought to score a victory for his own people, the Tamils, at the expense of any other community, or made one insidious or unseemly attempt to further their interests by jeopardizing even in the smallest degree the interests of any other, or employed his exceptional power and prestige to secure for them a position of advantage contrary to the demands of Truth, Justice and Fair-play. Many often and bitterly disagreed with him but few ever doubted the sincerity and purity of his motives. Whatever the differences and disagreements, he freed them from all taint of rancour or bitterness and maintained the friendliest relations with those with whom he came into conflict. No man fought with cleaner hands or made greater sacrifice for the unity and well-being of the nation as a whole. He once said in the legislature, "It is true, I represent the Tamils here, but it cannot be said that during any part of my legislative career, I have looked to the Tamil interests only, to the detriment of other interests."

No man reposed a more sanguine faith or reliance in youth, or clung more tenaciously through life to the conviction that national regeneration

could be achieved only through the regeneration and rehabilitation of youth, or made the service of youth the supreme concern of his life. Did he not all through life remind the people and the government that "the boys and girls of a country are its greatest national asset" and that "money spent on education is money best spent ?" Immeasurable, incomparable and manifold were the blessings he conferred on youth. Many a young man found in him the proverbial guide, philosopher and friend. Not the least of his services to youth was his ceaseless efforts to stimulate in them a passion for work and an appreciation of the dignity and sanctity of honest labour. He was one of the earliest pioneers of agriculture in the Wanni and built up a farm of about a thousand acres all of which he donated to his schools and colleges and to public charities. In taking to farming, he was influenced not by any love of material gain or pride of possession but by a genuine impulse to blaze the trail for misguided youth, which in his time, as in ours, worshipped at the shrine of the white-collar job, to demonstrate to them the truth that the land holds out possibilities no less remarkable than any offered by any other field of human activity, that agriculture is not beneath the notice of a man of education and a gentleman. The expansion of agriculture and the development of irrigation, the transformation of vast and extensive tracts of jungle-land in various parts of the country into rich and smiling plains, state-sponsored colonization, the rise to wealth and importance of a new class of capitalist farmers, the emergence of rich and prosperous towns in areas which at the dawn of the century were the haunts of predatory beasts were largely the result of his stimulus and example.

He it was, after his illustrious uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, that first put this obscure little island on the map of the world, made her respected and honoured by the Western world and

won for her in her early career under the British rule the title 'Premier Crown Colony.' They were again in a very real sense' the supreme architects of our national freedom, for, with them, freedom is the very life-breath of a people as of an individual, the *fons et origo* of all that is good and great, of all that makes life worth living. Without it no people can ever grow or expand or develop to their full stature but like a plant bereft of the vivifying nutriment of fresh air, water and sunlight, wither away and ultimately perish. By their prodigious wealth of learning and philosophic wisdom, by their passionate and untiring advocacy of the cause of national sovereignty, by their fiery independence and their firm and fearless espousal of popular causes, by their brilliant powers of oratory, by the stern simplicity of their lives and the splendour of their morals, they left on the minds of imperial administrators and statesmen an impression which may well be called overwhelming. It was after reading one of Sir Muthucoomaraswamy's speeches in the legislature that a staggered Secretary of State exclaimed in the House of Commons that if Ceylonese politicians could rise to such heights of political wisdom and eloquence, they might as well be permitted to manage their own affairs. As founder of the Ceylon National Association, as its President for long years and then its wise counsellor, Ramanathan was on all political matters the nation's oracle. He was the genius behind every movement for national freedom and the many memoranda on constitutional reform which, from his early legislative career, he submitted to the Imperial Parliament fluttered the devecots of Whitehall. The rapid succession of reforms which paved the way for Home Rule and in his time culminated in the Donoughmore Constitution was in large measure the outcome of his labours. Though many of its features disappointed and embittered him, the Donoughmore Reforms marked

a tremendous advance on the road to democratic freedom and national sovereignty, for it effected a substantial transfer of power to the people. But the means he employed for the achievement of that freedom were not the ones commonly employed by subject peoples—means for the most part negative and often destructive—but the more postive, constructive and creative ones, the means of persuasion and conversion by a friendly and persistent appeal to man's nobler instincts, to his reason and good sense, to his innate love of justice, fair-play and kindly-dealing. He was by temperament and tradition a pacifist and his inner nature recoiled from every form of coercion or subversion, from revolt or rebellion. And by so doing he achieved a measure of success seldom vouchsafed to other freedom-fighters. No man had a deeper or a more unbounded faith in man's intrinsic love of the True, the Good and the Beautiful, in the ultimate sway of human reason and justice and in a divine ordering of the universe. Almost his last message, his last political testament to a bewildered and despairing generation was, "Truth will triumph in the end."

He was pre-eminently an idealist, but the great thing about his idealism lay in this that it combined a high degree of practicality and realism. The cast of his mind and outlook was that of a man of action. For half a century and more, he was the principal actor, the master-player on the nation's stage. Whether as statesman or administrator, patriot or philanthropist, philosopher or man of religion, he was the focus of the nation's affection and his services to it were incomparable, indescribable. *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*

A nationalist far ahead of his time, he foresaw with prophetic genius and vision the ruin and disaster that would overtake his people, if in a blind and heady imitation of things foreign, they

became oblivious of their own spiritual and cultural heritage. And no man strove more resolutely or more gallantly through life to inculcate in his people, both by example and precept, a conscious pride in their national institutions, in their great and glorious heritage and tradition, and to impress upon them the imperative duty of conserving them and handing them down to posterity, not merely undiminished but enhanced and enriched. In the later decades of last century, when the sweeping current of the West had all but engulfed our cultural landmarks, when among our youth, there was a craze and a scramble for everything Western, when it seemed certain that the racial and cultural identities of the two peoples would before long be effaced, he told his countrymen in so many words, "A Sinhalese must, first and foremost, be a Sinhalese, and a Tamil, a Tamil." The President of the Senate, the Hon. A. Ratnayake in his Ramanathan Commemoration Address called him the "Father of Ceylonese Renascence", in-as-much as he was in the nature of a sheet-anchor in the shifting tides of his time; a prophet sounding his trumpet-call to a generation adrift on strange seas and in a frantic pursuit of strange gods, and summoning them back to their moorings, to values which should inspire and inform any healthy and progressive society. All his lifelong labours were inspired by this supreme ideal, this great national purpose. Like many a great man, he was an epitome of the finest characteristics of his race, the fine flower of its noblest and most conservative instincts. He was a Tamil of Tamils, despite all his background of birth and breeding in Colombo, despite his varied culture, his high official position, his free and intimate association with peoples of diverse races and creeds. The very spirit of the Tamil race lived in him; their distinctive culture, their glorious tradition vibrated through every fibre of his being and it was for them that he

lived and died. Unlike many of our leaders, who all too easily lose their roots in the glamorous life of the metropolis, in their pride of place and power, and become strangers to their own people and their own homelands, he had his roots planted firmly in ancestral soil. Amid the changing fortunes of a long and illustrious career, it was to the land of his forebears that he for ever turned, and it was in their soil that he chose to lay his bones when he was no more.

Nevertheless he was at home in any human society and showed us, as few other men have done in our time, that loyalty to one's own race and tradition is perfectly compatible with loyalty to world society, that to be a true internationalist, one must, first and foremost, be a true and full-blooded nationalist, that this happy consummation is achieved by the pursuit of Truth in man's commerce with man, and the practice of universal love, by the rejection of all forms of partisanship—provincial, national, political or spiritual. It was our singular good fortune in the past to have been led by men of broader vision and nobler conception, whose thoughts moved habitually on a plane larger and loftier than that of the parish, the province or the country, who in their devotion to their clan or community, never forget the larger or sublimer demands of duty and loyalty to human brotherhood.

Ramanathan's life was one long and ceaseless striving after perfection, and his one prayer to the Almighty, the one prayer that was ever on his lips was, "Grant me, O Lord, that three-fold purity, purity of body, purity of mind and purity of my inward soul." We have reason to believe that he was among us the nearest approach to the ideal of perfect manhood, in-as-much as every moment of his waking life, from early youth until the day of his death at the ripe age of eighty, was dedicated to an intense and unremitting struggle in the service of man, with his eyes ever fixed

on the Eternal, in the furtherance of Truth, Reason, Justice and Liberty, to the exclusion of all things base, ignoble and unseemly. In his early twenties, he won such signal triumphs at the metropolitan Bar by crossing swords with legal giants, many years his senior, as to place him among the immortals of the profession; in his late twenties, he entered the country's supreme legislature in succession to his illustrious uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy and dazzled the governing hierarchy and his colleagues, the Unofficial Members, by the brilliance of his oratory and the maturity of his political wisdom, that before long they elevated him to the office of Senior Unofficial Member over the heads of many of his seniors. Thus, early in his political career, he attained the stature of true statesmanship. During the fourteen years he served his country as Solicitor-General and for long periods as acting Attorney-General, he exemplified in himself the best traditions of the superbly honest, able and indefatigable public servant. He was an educational reformer and benefactor of rare genius and vision, who gave his country's education a national outlook and a new impetus and founded two institutions, among many others, which are an imperishable monument to his memory. He it was who, along with his brother Arunachalam, conceived the idea of a University for Ceylon and laboured indefatigably for its realization. His memorandum on the scope and nature of University education and on education in general, are classics of their kind. He was acclaimed the "Father of Legal Education in Ceylon" who gave students-at-law "a local habitation and a name", a centre of competent and systematic instruction at a time when they had none. America hailed him as a religious teacher and philosopher of genius and insight, who brought a new light and a new hope into the dark horizons of multitudes of men and women who were

thirsting for it. The Riots of 1915 found in him a redoubtable and resourceful champion of the oppressed against the barbarities of an alien and bigoted imperialist. He was a scholar and writer of uncommon distinction who made notable contributions to religious, philosophic, literary and political thought. He was also our greatest prophet of social justice, whose heart bled at the sight of human poverty, degradation and injustice and whose life was dedicated largely to fighting the battle of the underdog. He saw the problem of government from many points of view, but most readily and habitually from the point of view of the poor, the oppressed and the down-trodden. He warned his people, "To place the depressed classes any longer in their present condition is surely nothing less than a blot on our civilization, nay on our humanity." Did he not time and again fulminate against the rulers and the heedless plutocrats in words that deserve to ring through the ages? "We who are feeding fat on our wealth, who roll along in motor cars and fine carriages, can have no conception of the grinding nature of the life which the people whom we have to deal with are labouring under."

If the love and veneration of one's contemporaries is the criterion of one's greatness, Ramanathan's greatness is beyond question. If one's contribution to the sum-total of human happiness and well-being is the measure of greatness, again Ramanathan's title to greatness is hard to deny. If virtue, inherent goodness and sublimity of purpose are the hall-marks of greatness, Ramanathan certainly was great. His name was a household word and the mention of it warmed the hearts and buoyed up the spirits not merely of persons of rank and station, but more, of the humblest peasants of all races and creeds. What wonder then, that many decades ago, a little Sinhalese school-boy in a remote jungle-village,

when questioned by a Government Agent as to who their national hero was, snapped at him the reply, "Ramanathan Unanse." Old men now living might have seen and heard him only when he was old and his powers, though still phenomenal, unmistakably bore the scars of age and he was past his best. But few can imagine the almost incredible magnitude and splendour of his prime. During this period, he displayed all-round parliamentary powers which it is difficult to believe, can ever be quite equalled and which, in one situation after another, simply astounded friend and foe alike. Right with him was might. He did more than any other man of his generation to raise the standard of purity and strength in public and political life, to advance the cause of national unity and well-being, to plead for humanity in the government of the State. He was master in the legislature, he was master on the public platform, unrivalled in the power of his conviction, in his power of convincing not merely the governing hierarchy in his own land but multitudes of men in many lands outside. Far more than genius or renown or political achievement, it was the sense of Ramanathan's moral grandeur which won him the homage of the nation. It may with justice be said of Ramanathan what a great contemporary said of the great Frenchman Fenelon that he was "the cherished model of politicians, the advocate of the poor against oppression, of liberty in an age of arbitrary power, of tolerance in an age of persecution, of the humane virtues among men accustomed to sacrifice them to authority, the man of whom one enemy said that his cleverness was enough to strike terror, and another, that genius poured in torrents from his eyes."

It was by reason of his unflinching moral rectitude and courage to pursue without swerving the course that he regarded was right that he exercised a peculiar and amazing influence on his

contemporaries, an influence unsurpassed or even unequalled in our history. In an age in which traditional moral and spiritual bonds were fast disintegrating under the impact of Western materialistic philosophy, he was to his bewildered generation a great beacon of light. For here was a man who ever stood up for justice and purity in public and private life with a gambler's recklessness and indifference to consequence. It is truer to say that few men who ever lived and laboured in this island were lit by a purer, nobler flame than his or by that flame achieved more in his span of earthly years.

Religion was the chief motive force of his life, the fundamental fact of his history, the main reservoir from which he drew all his solace, strength and sustenance. Religion, he interpreted not in a narrow, sectarian, dogmatic sense but in the broad sense indicated by our great seers. It was with him not so much conformity to current rituals or ceremonies or practices as secret, intimate, loving communion in the stillness and privacy of one's heart and the purity of one's mind with an Eternal All-pervading Being, who answers man's calls and gives him strength and succour in time of need. Absolute, unquestioning surrender to His will was instinctive with him and his life was one long and incessant prayer and supplication for His guidance and mercy. Religion formed the basis, the bedrock on which his whole life and work were founded, the fountain-head from which there welled out all the multitudinous streams of mundane activity, political, social, literary and philosophical. Religion constituted the secret, the master-secret of his unrivalled greatness in the many spheres of life in which he played his part.

Not for a thousand years or more has this country produced a man, much less a statesman in whom the religious motive was so paramount or so compelling. Political life was but one facet

of his religious life, for sanctity and service were inseparable with him. He would have agreed with William Blake, "Religion is politics and politics is brotherhood". Politics was to him not expediency nor opportunism nor a struggle for power or for wealth—and in his day it carried no emoluments of any kind—but a holy calling which demanded a persistent and continuous effort to serve man, to enable the hapless millions of his countrymen to attain the good life, to raise the quality of human beings, to train them for freedom and fellowship, for spiritual depth and social harmony.

He was in his time, by the willing suffrage of the nation, the Sage of Lanka, the G. O. M. of Ceylon, the Great Commoner, the People's Friend, the Father of the Legislative Council, the Avenger of the People's Wrongs, the Leader of the Nation and the Uncrowned King of Ceylon. He was in our country the finest exemplar of the Platonic ideal of the Philosopher-Statesman, the Superman envisaged in the Hindu Shastras living the full, active life of man in the world with his inner life anchored in the Eternal Spirit. As postulated by the Gita, he lived in the world merely to save it. The perfection he aimed at and in large measure achieved is the perfection which is the outcome of action done devotedly and wholeheartedly but without attachment to results. When we compare the state of public life in 1879, when he entered it as a young and blossoming lawyer, with the state of public life in 1930, the year in which, at his death, he relinquished it, and when we reflect how predominant or rather overwhelming a share he cheerfully and exuberantly bore in the labours and sacrifices by which the transformation was gradually and painfully effected, we cannot but confess that, besides his unquestioned title to the nation's affection, he has a claim to our unstinted gratitude and esteem. We see in him a man true and great, proud of

his people's past and confident about their future, a patriot courageous and forthright, a born leader of men, one who laid the foundations of our national freedom and while alive, achieved a large measure of that freedom through peaceful, non-violent political action. What wonder then that his younger followers loved him with devotion or that, when his voice was at last silenced, the nation felt as if a glory had departed from their midst.

It is a matter for extreme regret that a small country such as Ceylon is and in his day under the trammels of Colonial Rule, could hardly afford him adequate scope for a fuller exercise of his brilliant parts. Had a benign Providence ordained that his lot should be cast in a larger and freer field, he would, indubitably, have risen to an eminence and wielded an authority which would have challenged comparison with a Pitt or a Lincoln, a Gladstone or a Disraeli.

The closing years of his long and strenuous career were clouded and embittered by disappointments and disillusionments. The fabric of national unity which he had fashioned laboriously over the years, he felt, was being undermined by the evil genius of an alien power which sought to foist on the country a constitution ill-suited to its needs and thus render peaceful, progressive and enlightened government all but impossible. The hydra-headed monster of racialism, communalism, unknown and unheard of in the halcyon days of his prime and manhood, was beginning to raise its ugly head and threatening to disrupt the hard-won unity of the nation. But he was, above all things, a man of God and found solace in the thought that "Truth will triumph in the end."

Among the many virtues that, in early times, distinguished the Tamils from other races of mankind, gratitude was certainly one of the greatest and best. Their ancient prophets and lawgivers, their

poets and moralists gave it a unique place. Navalar, Muthucoomaraswamy, Ramanathan, Arunachalam, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, were admittedly our greatest benefactors of the last century, the brightest luminaries in our firmament. It is from them that we derive much of our national pride and our claim to a place of honour among other peoples. But, to face the question fairly and squarely, what have we as a people done to honour them, cherish them, and commemorate their services to us.

All that we can claim to have done is to consign them to the limbo of forgotten memories. In an age, which, whatever its vices and shortcomings, has not been infamous for want of charity, in which peoples vie with one another in doing honour to the great dead, in raising monuments to their memory, in diffusing their effigies in stamps, pictures and medals, have we not to our lasting ignominy and shame turned our backs on these great benefactors whom any country would be proud to cherish and honour. It was left to a great Indian scholar and saint, Sudhanantha Bharathi to pay his meed of praise to the Navalar by writing an illuminating and notable biography of that saint and Saiva reformer. Eminent Westerners have sung ecstatic praises of these other men. Surely no prophet is without honour except among his own people.

In recent years and after decades of neglect of the memory of the great man, an obscure Village Committee in the North, bitten by an uneasy sense of ingratitude and endeavouring in its little way to make amends for what it deemed a national wrong, named one of its roads after him. That is all the tribute that we, as a people, have paid — and that belatedly and grudgingly — to the memory of a man the like of whom a people see but rarely, whose name would lend lustre to the biggest thoroughfare not merely in this country but in any other, the man of whom K. P. S. Menon said, "The great thing about Sir Ponnambalam Rama-

nathan was that he had a universal mind. A friend of mine who is a veritable globe-trotter, said that if an Indian goes to America, the question put to him most frequently would be, 'Do you come from the country of Mahatma Gandhi?' If he goes to the Continent, the question would be, 'Do you come from the country of Rabindranath Tagore?' If he goes to England, which believes less in poetry and politics than in sport, the question would be, 'Do you come from the land of Ranji?' You can depend upon it, the question that would have been put to a Ceylonese during the last fifty years in any quarter of the globe, the question that would, indeed, be put to him for some fifty years to come, would be, 'Do you come from the country of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan?'"

It is a matter for profound regret that neither Ramanathan's contemporaries nor even posterity could comprehend the true stature of the man. They all acknowledged his greatness but the real measure of that greatness few could gauge, partly for this reason that no serious attempt was ever made to comprehend the man, to study his life and work, and partly for another, that he was too far ahead of his time. With the eye of a born seer, he saw the writing on the wall on many major national issues, saw the dark and ominous clouds and the gathering storm on the distant horizon and with heroic courage announced it to an unheeding generation. Though in later life, many of his contemporaries denounced and even derided him for doing so, accounting him a reactionary, astray and wandering from his mission, time has more than vindicated him.

I am well aware that the work I have set out to perform viz. to tell the story of a very versatile man who held an imposing place in our national life and played an imposing role in many national transactions, whose character and career may be regarded in various lights and whose years

bridged so long a span of time, is one that will tax the resources of the most talented writer and tireless fact-finder. Yet the task has to be undertaken and accomplished, whatever measure of success may follow. Our great men are a great part of our national inheritance. We cannot despise or ignore them and yet bemoan national decline, degradation and decadence. We deplore the bankruptcy of talent and leadership in contemporary society, the extreme dearth of men of genius and vision, men who know their duty and have the courage to do it, who never fail their country in the hour of its peril; we bemoan the absence in our midst, of truly great and magnanimous minds, while we take little pains to cherish and foster them where we find them.

The present work is designed to commemorate a great man, indubitably a very great man, above all things, a great friend and benefactor of the poor and the oppressed, who gave his all that a nation might live, whose memory we have, to our own lasting discredit and detriment, suffered to languish in neglect and oblivion. It is also born of the conviction that the study and contemplation of his life and work will illumine the soul, lift the heart and brace the nerve of every true son of Lanka to noble action, nobler endeavour and yet nobler aspiration. As observed in the Bhagavad Gita: "For whatever a great man does, that very thing other men also do; whatever standards he sets up, the generality of men follow the same."

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND ANCESTRY

"So sired and cradled in the traditions of such a house, Ramanathan would have been a violation of all the laws of heredity, had he failed to follow in the footsteps of his forbears."

"Morning Times"

RAMANATHAN was born on 16th April, 1851 at what is known today as Sea Street, Colombo in the stately home of his illustrious grand-father Gate Mudaliyar Arumuganathapillai Coomaraswamy, the first occupant of the Tamil Seat in the Legislative Council, when it was newly constituted under the British in 1833. He was the second of the three sons of Gate Mudaliyar Ponnambalam and his wife Sellachchi, all of whom were destined to play distinguished roles in the annals of this island. Gate Mudaliyar Ponnambalam, whose memory the children cherished through life with fond affection and even adoration, was, in the early days of British Colonial rule, an esteemed servant of the Crown, a wealthy planter, a man of liberal and cultivated tastes and a gentleman of exceptional nobility and force of character. He was a devotee with whom the love of God was a consuming passion; a friend and benefactor of the poor, who dedicated his life and resources to their service. Sellachchi, the only daughter of Gate Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy, and sister of Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, the great orientalist, statesman, and cherished friend and companion of the choicest spirits of Victorian England, was, as contemporary records testify, a woman of exquisite charm of mind and person who ministered to her husband with unswerving loyalty and devotion during her comparatively brief period of marital bliss. Far from being an empty panegyric, it is a bold truth that the parents were a very uncommon couple and displayed through life very uncommon qualities. Few men escape early influences. Judicious observers hold the view that the father was the preface and foreshadowing of his great son, that Ramanathan in his early and impressionable years imbibed, by loving association and daily converse with his father, the distinctive qualities which were a lasting possession of his life — his passion for religion, his burning patriotism, his fiery independence, his firm and unwavering adherence to Truth, Reason and Justice both in public and private life and, more than all, his commiseration for the poor, the oppressed and the down-trodden.

Mudaliyar Ponnambalam was the lineal descendant of an ancient and illustrious house founded by Mana Mudaliyar many centuries ago, when King Para Raja Sekaran held sway over the Tamil Kingdom. Manipay had for generations been the traditional seat of this celebrated house, and its members had held positions of trust and authority under successive administrations. Piety, philanthropy and heroic endeavour were the ruling characteristics of this stalwart tribe, and Ponnambalam's grandfather was, in popular parlance, styled "Ponnambalam Dharmavan", Ponnambalam, the Munificent, by reason of his unbounded love for the people and his liberal and large-hearted benefactions to them.

These hereditary Tamil chiefs and other principal officers of the Crown were a power in the land, while yet their own kings sat upon the throne. But with the occupation of the Tamil Kingdom by Western powers and the reorganization of the administrative machinery that inevitably followed, the traditional authority and influence of these chiefs progressively dwindled, for it was part of the planned policy of the foreigner to clip the wings of the native chiefs

All that was left to them was merely the semblance of power and the trappings of office. This unhappy change of circumstance disappointed and embittered them to such an extent that the majority of them chose to lay down their office rather than submit to this indignity. They had their extensive landed property to fall back upon and could live the life of affluence and command the prestige and influence that generally go with the possession of hereditary landed wealth. One of such chiefs was Ponnambala Mudaliyar's ancestor. The whole story of the family and its changing fortunes has been traced by Ramanathan himself in a small manuscript meant for circulation among members of his family. The material for this and the two succeeding chapters is drawn largely from that source.

Mana Mudaliyar was blessed in his lot, which enabled him to serve his own king and country at a time when the national life of the Tamils in Ceylon was as independent as it was prosperous. But his son Kadirkama Mudaliyar, who succeeded to the paternal dignity of *Kanakker,* (Accountant) of Manipay and the group of villages around it was less fortunate, for the conspirator Sangili had then succeeded in driving Para Raja Sekaran from the country and seating himself on his master's throne. The folly, caprice and tyranny of the usurper were such as to inspire Kadirkamar and his countrymen with the gravest alarm, for the security of their property and even of their lives, more especially as the Prime Minister was suspected of carrying on treasonous negotiations with the Portuguese traders, whom Sangili had allowed to settle in the neighbourhood of Pannaithurai. The complications which ensued, the battles that were fought are matters of history. It is enough to say that Kadirkamar lived to see his country betrayed into the hands of the foreigners, and the usurper-king taken, tried and condemned to death in the year 1617. The 'Yalpana Vaipava Malai' says the king, after trial,

was executed "on the threshold of the nearest temple." Tennent, however, on the authority of Faria Y. Souza, says the king was carried captive to Goa and there executed. The Portuguese were wise enough to leave unmolested the chiefs who did not take a prominent part in the war against them. During the fortyone years they held possession of the Peninsula, they were concerned mainly with the propagation of Christianity, and did not interfere with the authority of the chiefs except by making them answerable to the executive government. So it came to pass that Kadirkama Mudaliyar was allowed to continue in office and exercise his usual functions till he died.

When Jaffna passed into the hands of the Dutch in 1658, they nursed the headmen for fear of rebellion and effected changes in the administrative machinery in a very cautious, quiet and unobtrusive manner. Lokanatha Mudaliyar, who succeeded his father Kadirkamar, was left to perform the duties of Kanakkar more or less as of old; but in the time of his son Madava Mudaliyar, the importance of that office gradually disappeared, for reasons given below.

Under our own kings, place or preferment of any social importance was attainable only by men of good caste, if not of conspicuous ancestry. As Knox faithfully reports, after several years of close observation of life in Ceylon, "The king, in advancing men to responsible offices of State, regards not their ability or sufficiency to perform the same; only they must be persons of good rank and genteel extraction and they are naturally discreet and very solid and so the fitter for the king's employment." The foreigners, however, held out the inducements of office, as a means of conversion to Christianity. It was only to be expected that the highest classes of the natives, at least those who were in affluent cirumstances, spurned the idea of assuming office or title under such

disgraceful conditions. Other men, on the contrary, saw their opportunity and those, who were intelligent among them, soon got into favour with the new rulers. Public offices passed in increasing numbers, with the progress of years, into the hands of the parvenus, and one could imagine their conceit and arrogance towards the time-honoured gentry of the land. Service under the government thus became an object of ambition only with those who had no other title to esteem. Honorary ranks also were given away promiscuously. Wolf, who became Secretary of State for Jaffna some thirty years after the time of Madava Kanakkar, says in his "Life and Adventures" (1750) that the much-prized European title of Don was sold by the Portuguese to the Tamils for a few hundred dollars, and that on the payment of this money, the Governor took a thin silver plate, on which the name of the individual was written with the title of Don prefixed, and binding it with his own hand on the fore-head of the individual, bade the kneeling Tamil, "Rise Don so-and-so."

"By this contrivance," continues Wolf, "the Portuguese got an enormous heap of money from the Tamils, for every one that could scrape together the amount required got himself ennobled. The Dutch afterwards made still sorrier work of it and sold the title for fifty, twentyfive and even so low as ten dollars." Office for the sake of Christianity and title in consideration of ten dollars were enough in themselves to swamp the gentry and destroy their natural influence with the masses. But the patronizing conduct of the Dutch towards the native chiefs and their undisguised contempt of native habits and institutions had the effect of seriously compromising the dignity of the chiefs in the eyes of the people.

Madava Kanakkar saw the decay of his official importance from these causes. But there were other reasons which reduced it to a still lower level.

From time immemorial, the Kanakkar had many assistants to help him in his work, and as the recorder of the daily transactions of the village and the custodian of valuable information on all subjects relating to land, he was a much-courted functionary.

Bertolacci, who was Auditor-General of Ceylon in 1815, says, "From the information which I have been able to collect, it appears that the Portuguese interfered very little in the civil administration of the country. The different institutions, laws and customs of the natives, their distinctions of rank, their habits of private life and their public ceremonies were not only preserved by their masters with a most zealous care but were even imitated and followed by themselves; yet they interfered greatly in religion."

But about the period referred to here, the duties of the Kanakkar's office, and indeed of other native offices, had been greatly absorbed by the operation of the new official and judicial system of the foreigners. Mr. Cleghorn, in his *Minute on the Administration of Justice and Revenue under the Dutch* bears testimony to the fact that, while the Dutch took care to preserve the designations of the native officers, they "prudently left them only the exterior of power." From his minute and the evidence given by Chief Justice Sir Richard Ottley before the Royal Commissioners of 1831, we know how all the power of the native chiefs was sucked dry, and how, as a consequence, they found themselves the bearers of only empty names, or reduced to the performance of duties formerly performed by their subordinates. A gulf between the Europeans and the natives was thus created, with disastrous effect on the independence and self-esteem of the native gentry, for no one amongst them could possibly enter the Dutch Civil Service. Indeed, there were regulations disqualifying them from even owning property in certain parts of towns occupied

by the Dutch or their descendants. Thus treated, native officials viewed with alarm the results produced by the re-organization of the machinery of the Government. As regards Madavar, the new revenue and land registration systems left him nearly nothing to do. No one deprived him of his title of Kanakkar, but most of his privileges had vanished long ago. One of the civil servants was the head of the department (created in Jaffna about the year 1710) for the registration of titles to land and the taking of a census according to caste and occupation. The volumes in which such entries were made were known as *land-thombus* and *head-thombus*, and the officers in charge of them were called *thombu-holders*. As the divisions of the Peninsula had been sub-divided into parishes and each parish (Kovil pattu) had a Christian school master *Chattambi*, he was also made the custodian of the *thombus*, and Wolf mentions that the *Chattambi* also performed the duties of a notary. Sir Richard Ottley remarks that "though these *thombus* were liable to every species of fraud, they are still (1830) referred to, and where no cause of suspicion exists, they are considered as evidence of property by the persons in whose name the property is entered at any given time." It thus happened that Madavar found that he had been relieved of most of his functions. He was no longer "Accountant" of Manipay, as that office had passed into the civil service of the Dutch and been redistributed with other offices in the new scheme of administration.

When Madavar died about the year 1735, his son Kadirkamar, who was in affluent circumstances wisely avoided service under the government. So did his son Tillaiambalam, who married Kannaki, a daughter of Thiagaraja Mudaliyar and grand-daughter of Pavumannasimha Mudaliyar, who was a scion of the original founder of the township of Manipay, and as such, was held in the greatest esteem by all the

chiefs of the Peninsula of Jaffna. It was from his family that new settlers of social standing obtained *Kudimakkal* or dependants bound in duty to domestic service. It was he, his ancestors and descendants, who performed annually the ceremony known as *er-puttu* which inaugurated the ploughing operations of the season. The best of his oxen would be led in procession to his most fruitful field, where would be assembled the principal land-holders of the place, and being yoked (*puttu*) to the plough (*er*) amidst much music and rejoicing, would be the first to cleave the soil under his guiding hand. The elders next in importance would then take each his place at the plough in turn and drive the team for a minute or two. The company would then disperse, and each man from that day forth would begin work on his own field. It is also worth mentioning that to the present time in Pavumanna-simha's *valavu* or court (which has been gifted away in recent years to a public charity at Annaikkottai) stands a jak tree which still goes by the name of *Kudirai-mal-adip-pila*, indicating the spot where his stable was, which sheltered perhaps the only horse then in Manipay. His son Manuththunga Mudaliyar had a son, Ponnambala Mudaliyar, who was also fond of riding and other manly exercises. He was celebrated for his deeds of charity and was commonly known as *Dharmavan Ponnambalam*, or Ponnambalam the Munificent. He restored and largely endowed the ancient temple dedicated to Bhuvaneswari at Suthumalai, which is between Manipay and Anaikkottai. The descendants of the officers whom he appointed to the temple are still doing service in return for the land held by them. He also presented to the public of Manipay cremation and burial grounds. His son Thiagarajah died without male issue, leaving four daughters, the eldest of whom, Kannaki by name, married Tillaiambalam, the lineal descendant of Mana Mudaliyar, and begot Ramanathan's grandfather Arunachalam, whe died,

comparatively young in 1815, leaving behind him a widow (Tangamma, daughter of Velayutha Udayar) and an only son, Ponnambala Mudaliyar, whom Ramanathan and his brothers revered as father.

Karala Pillai is Ramanathan's earliest maternal ancestor whom we can name. He is his tenth ascendant and belonged to the generation immediately preceeding that of Mana Mudaliyar, already referred to in this chapter as the earliest of the paternal ancestors known to us. Karala Pillai was an *arachchi*.

Under the Tamil Kings, and indeed in much later times, the office of *arachchi* was not the humble one it has now become. In the Rajavali, for instance, we are told that the rank of the ambassador whom Bhuvaneka Bahu, the Sinhalese king, sent to the Portuguese Viceroy at Goa, was that of *arachchi*. We learn also from Ribeyro, a captain in the service of the Portuguese government in Ceylon, that an *arachchi* was equal in status to a captain, and Mudaliyar, to a colonel. Both terms are unquestionably Tamil. *Mudaliyar*, derived from *mudal* (first or chief), was and is a name of respect among a section of the *velalas* of the Tamil race, but in the Kandyan country, it was conferred by the king as a title of dignity upon high officers of state. Thus in the *nalapatta*, or fillet of gold for the forehead given to a Diyawadana Nilame of the Dalada Maligawa at Kandy, appears the following inscription "*Giragama Rajakaruna Navaratne Seneviratne Mudaliya*" (not mudaliyar as it ought to be), under which title or *patabendi* he was raised to the office of Adikar. The Portuguese, however, made it both a titular and an official designation. Under them the chief native official in a district who was entrusted with the guardianship of its peace and the collection of its revenue was called *mudaliyar*. In the Kingdom of Jaffna the corresponding officer

was known as *maniyakaran*. The duties of the office of *arachchi* (derived from, to investigate) were similar to, and in some respects more extensive than, the duties of an English Justice of the Peace. The *arachchi* held preliminary investigations and reported them to the king, if not the *maniyakaran* of the district. The term occurs constantly in Tamil folklore and literature, as for example, in *Manu-niti-kanda Puranam* which is embodied in the *Peria-Puranam* as a bell attached to a royal palace for the purpose of being rung by those who sought justice. It is natural that an officer invested with the power of inquiring into complaints and crimes of all kinds should have also authority over the town watchers or police who formed part of the military. His duties were thus of a judicial and military character.

Karala Pillai's grandson was Paththar Udaiyar. The duties of *Udaiyar* were multifarious. He collected the taxes, supervised the village watchers or police, took care that roads and water-courses were maintained in good order, granted exemptions to those liable to *rajakaria*, that is, personal service at the command of the King etc. He was, in fact, an official whose ubiquity and power of interference with His Majesty's subjects were almost unlimited. One of the earliest regulations of the Dutch in Jaffna, soon after they assumed charge of the Peninsula, provided on pain of fine that *Udaiyars* should not obtain milk and butter by force from those who did not keep cows, sheep or buffaloes; nor *ulunthu*, paddy or peas from those who did not possess cultivated fields; nor oil from those who did not own coconut, margosa or *iluppai* trees. It is clear from this order that he had an enforceable right to have the wants of his household supplied by those resident within his jurisdiction.

Paththar Udaiyar, therefore, could not have known what want was; his living was, doubtless, sumptuous, and his retainers and slaves—for slavery

was then a recognized institution—must have been among the happiest in the Peninsula.

Paththar's son was Chithambara Natha Mudaliyar, in the early years of whose life the Dutch, marching from Mannar through the Vanni districts, invested the Fort of Jaffna and compelled the Portuguese to capitulate in the year 1658.

It was well for the future of the Tamils that the Portuguese rule in Jaffna lasted for only forty-one years. It was characterized by the grossest fanaticism and oppression. When the king of Uva arrived in Colombo and sought in person the assistance of the Portuguese Governor in order to overcome the king of Kandy, a council of high officials sat to consider the desirability of the proposed alliance. The Alcayde of Colombo declared in that council that the kings of Portugal had laid down as a general rule for all their governors, captain-generals, marshals and other officers commanding in India, that if any Moorish or heathen prince or king came within their power even in a friendly manner, and especially any prince of Ceylon, he should not be allowed to depart until he was converted to Christianity and baptized, and that during the time of his instruction, he should be kindly treated and properly maintained. So the poor prince was put on board a sailing vessel and sent to Goa where, we are told, "he listened anxiously to the discourses of his instructors and profited so much by their teaching that he resolved to become a Christian." Though the conversion took place in 1645, he never returned to his country, but died in Goa nine years later. If this was the treatment which a powerful prince received at their hands, one may conceive what persecution the subject Jaffnese suffered. We know as a matter of fact that the Portuguese divided the Peninsula into parishes, known in Tamil as *Kovil-Pattu*, and provided each with a chapel and schoolhouse and, where required, a Franciscan priest who was to

officiate. Mr. Simon Casie Chetty believes that the pressure put upon the population was so severe that even Brahmins had to submit to the ceremony of baptism, and that almost the whole country was converted.

The policy of the Dutch was, happily, of a more tolerant order. De Meuron, a colonel in the service of the Dutch Government, says, "When the Portuguese established themselves in the Island, commerce was not their only subject; they wished to convert the natives to Christianity. Persons of the highest rank became sponsors, when Sinhalese families were to be baptized and gave their names to the converts. This is the origin of the numerous Portuguese names amongst the Sinhalese. The Dutch occupied themselves less with conversion, but employed the more speedy means of making nominal Christians by giving certain offices to men of that religion only. But the instruction given to those official converts was too superficial to root out their prejudices in favour of the idolatory of their ancestors." The maintenance of peace was so essential to the Dutch for the extension of their commerce that their Governors were expressly enjoined to conciliate the headmen, nurse their hopes and secure their attachment by grants of titles.

Chithambara Natha Mudaliyar had a son Karalasinha Mudaliyar, who in turn had a son Raghunatha Mudaliyar. Raghunatha Mudaliyar had a son Vairavanatha Mudaliyar, who married Thanganatchan (the daughter of Edirmannasinha Mudaliyar, who held the office of Governor of the Vanni District under the Dutch), and begot by her a numerous family, a daughter of which was Visalakchi, the mother of Ramanathan's mother, Sellachchi, and of his uncle Sir Coomaraswamy.

CHAPTER II

COOMARASWAMY MUDALIYAR

COOMARASWAMY Mudaliyar, Ramanathan's maternal grandfather, was the younger of the two sons of Arumugam Pillai and was born in 1783 at Garudavil, a village close to Point Pedro. Upon the death of the father, the elder son Varithambi was charged with the responsibility of supporting his family, which he was well-qualified to do, being a far-seeing and energetic man. He arrived in Colombo and soon won the esteem of the leading Tamils in the city by his engaging manners, ability and business acumen. He and his wife lived at Sea Street.

The tranquil life, which they were leading, was interrupted, when Holland became entangled in the great war which agitated Europe between 1792—1801. In August 1795, the English took possession of Trincomalie. Jaffna, Kalpitiya and Negombo surrendered in rapid succession; and the Dutch Governor agreed to cede Kalutara, Galle, Matara and other fortified places to Great Britain. Colombo itself fell in February 1796, but as private property was declared inviolable, the terror and anxiety of the inhabitants were considerably allayed. The capture of the fortresses in the Island having been effected by the forces of the East India Company, the administration of the newly-acquired territories was entrusted to their servants, the Governor and Council of Madras. Mr. Andrews, a civilian of that Presidency, was sent out as Superintendent of the Ceylon revenues, together with a large staff of Tamil officers who superseded the Sinhalese headmen; and the customs duties and

many other sources of revenue were farmed out to wealthy Tamil traders, Parsees and Muhammadans from India. The importation of Tamils from Madras for the performance of official duties suggested to Varithambi the possibility of finding suitable employment for local talent, which in the person of his brother was running to waste. He, therefore, summoned him and his mother from Jaffna and caused him to be instructed in English. Coomaraswamy was at this time about thirteen years old, tall for his age, intelligent and striking in appearance. In the meanwhile, the malversation and incompetency of the officials to whom the Government of the country had been entrusted proved so flagrant and injurious that Mr. Pitt, the Prime Minister in England, advised the King to administer the Colony in His Majesty's name. In October 1798, the Hon'ble Frederick North, was appointed the first British Governor. All the principal officers were also appointed by the King. But the government was placed under the direction of the Governor-General of India, till Ceylon was confirmed to the British Crown by the Treaty of Amiens concluded in March 1802, when it became subject to the legislation of the Crown.

Among the many reforms introduced by Mr. North was the re-establishment, on 28th October, 1799, of the Seminary in Colombo which had been reserved for the sons of the aristocracy of the land, but which was abandoned by the Madras civilians. The Diary of Governor North, preserved in the Archives in Colombo, contain several minutes on this institution. The Revd. Mr. Cordiner was chiefly instrumental in reviving it. The Sinhalese branch of the school, consisting at first of about 18 students, was presided over by the Revd. Mr. Philips, and the Tamil branch, consisting of a much fewer number, by the Revd. Mr. Schroter. This school occupied the site facing the north-eastern corner of the Wolfendhal Church. A year

after young Coomaraswamy joined the institution, the proceedings described in the following official notification (which appeared in the Government Gazette of 16th June 1802) must have stirred him deeply. "Yesterday," proclaims the notification "His Excellency was pleased to invest with swords of honour, as a mark of distinction, Cornelis de Saram Wijesekera Gunatilekaratne, Mohotti Mohandrum of the Governor's Gate and Chief Interpreter of the Provincial Court; Johannes Poules Perera Wijesekera Gunawardhana, Mohandrum of the Attapattu and Interpreter of the Agent of Revenue and Commerce; Don Jacobus Dias Wijeyawardana Bandaranayake, Mohandrum and Second Interpreter to the Supreme Court; being the three senior Sinhalese boys in the school at Wolfendhal; and Gabriel Casie Chetty, one of the Tamil Translators to Government, being the first Tamil boy at the same school; all of whom had been reported to His Excellency as having made sufficient progress in English to act as Interpreters. The best effects may be expected to arise from the pains that are bestowed in bringing up the rising generation of the native nobility in a familiar acquaintance with the English Language."

In 1805 Coomaraswamy was chosen to act as Interpreter to the Sitting Magistrate of the Port of Colombo and earned the good opinion of his superior officer, Mr. Richard Plasket, who (being also Deputy Secretary to the Government) certified that, during the three years Coomaraswamy served in that capacity, he discharged his duties "with the greatest zeal and ability." In May, 1808 he was appointed to act as Interpreter to His Excellency the Governor (the Right Hon. Thomas Maitland), and in May 1810 he was selected to fill the office of "Chief Tamil Interpreter and Mudaliyar to H. E. the Governor", the highest appoinment then attainable by a Tamil. He was 26 years of age at this period.

Unwittingly, he had incurred the jealousy of some of the prominent "Colombo Chetties", who could not bear the idea of the much-coveted office passing out of their own circle into the hands of one so young and new to Colombo.

As observed by Mr. C. Brito, who was himself a member of the Colombo Chetty community, "they (the Colombo Chetties) are a branch of the Tamil race, and are distinguished from the rest of it by their dress and religion. Tradition does not assign a more distant date than the middle of the sixteenth century to their migration into Ceylon. Their original seat was Tinneveli. High caste women never (except from necessity) cross over the sea. The Chetty traders came alone, and occasionally formed matrimonial alliances among the high caste (Sinhalese) natives of the neighbourhood of Colombo, Toppu and Munniswaram. They, nevertheless, kept up their national religion, dress, customs and language, until the conquest of the Portuguese, when they embraced the religion of the conquerors, finding that that was the readiest means to preferment and protection from oppression. At the end of the 16th century, owing to a great famine in Southern India, numbers of new Chetties came to Ceylon, bringing, however, with them their wives and daughters. Many of the new arrivals embraced the religion of the older and more prosperous settlers of their caste, and by family intermarriages soon became one with them. A few families became Protestants during the Dutch period." The Colombo Chetties, whether Catholic, Protestant or Saivite, thus formed a caste by themselves, and were sharply demarcated from other Tamil castes by peculiarities of dress, habits and language, which were all much mixed up with Sinhalese ideals and practices.

It was therefore, only natural that they should view with jealousy the advent of enterprising and well-to-do settlers from North Ceylon, who refused

to merge with them. They looked upon Coomaraswamy as an interloper. Fancy a man from Jaffna ousting them from their prescriptive right to the prizes obtainable in Colombo. Their chagrin was enhanced by his reserve and exclusiveness, and by the circumstance that the new settlers gathered round him and ridiculed the pretensions of the "Colombo Chetties." In the course of a few years, the breach between the Jaffna Velalas and the Colombo Chetties widened, so that in 1830 when the election of a gentleman to fill the office of Chief of the non-Christian Tamils in the metropolis came on, the "Colombo Chetties" demanded an enquiry into the caste of Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar. They admitted his superior education and integrity of character, but they knew nothing about his caste. They, therefore, called for an investigation. A strict enquiry was held by the government, and it was then conclusively established, by reference to the Dutch *thombus* of Jaffna and Colombo of the last century and other sources of evidence, that he was a pure Velala. Considering that it was only as late as 1843 that the Legislative Council of the Island refused to recognize caste distinction by amending the system then in vogue of impanelling jurors according to the different classes of each caste, the Government of 1830 were naturally most anxious not to thrust on the Tamils, especially non-Christian Tamils, one who could not hold his own as a high caste man. Hence, the official investigation.

When found qualifed by caste, the candidates were allowed to proceed to the poll, and Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar was elected by a great majority. The act of appointment which was, thereupon, issued in his favour under the Colonial Seal by Sir Edward Barnes, under the date 23rd October, 1830, commanded "all person whom it may concern to acknowledge, respect and obey the said Arumugatta-Pillei Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar as the head of

the heathen Chetties of Colombo," or as we would now say, head of the non-Christian Tamils of Colombo.

Gifted by nature with a vigorous mind, Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar had learnt early in life to economize time, labour hard, persevere and be patient. So, too, from the very commencement of his official career, he had opportunities for coming in contact with, and studying men like Governor Maitland, Chief Justice Sir Alexander Johnston and Secretary Rodney, whose acts in regard to the troubles and vices then prevalent in the Island made him thoughtful, good and public-spirited.

Among Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar's first lessons as to how measures of reform and public utility are conceived and carried out, may be mentioned the circumstances which led to the establishment of trial by jury. It is to Sir Alexander Johnston that we are indebted for this institution. From the position of Advocate-Fiscal in 1801, he was appointed Puisne Justice in 1807.

In the course of his official career, he had observed the extreme difficulty which he and other judges experienced in arriving at the truth of the cases presented to them for enquiry. Indeed, it is on record that one trial lasted six weeks, and that ten days for a case was by no means an uncommon period. As a remedy for this state of things and with the object of making the Ceylonese conversant with English methods of administration, Mr. Johnston thought of the jury system. The difficulty of working it in a country which was ridden by caste and other prejudices did not daunt him. He conferred with leading native gentlemen in Colombo and other places, including Buddhist and Brahmin priests, and at length conceived the bold idea of having separate caste panels of jurymen and so making an experiment in Ceylon which, if successful, might be usefully copied in the adjoining continent of India. Having fully digested

his scheme, he left for England early in 1809, and caused a charter to be issued, which sanctioned the introduction of trial by jury in criminal cases. The charter empowered the Supreme Court to issue a mandate to the Fiscal commanding him to summon "a convenient number, therein to be specified, of good and sufficient persons qualified in such manner as shall be regulated by rules or orders established by our Chief Justice" etc. It also provided that the Supreme Court may direct that the "jurors shall consist of Europeans or Natives, or of any such description of Europeans or Natives as shall be specified in any order made for that purpose." Not a word was there about caste in the charter, and yet the procedure admitted of a prisoner being tried by his own caste men and of "high" caste men not sitting together with "low" caste men. Mr. Johnston returned to Ceylon on 6th November, 1811 as Chief Justice Sir Alexander, and two days afterwards, the new Charter of Justice was promulgated. Mr. Pridham's observations on the normal effects of the jury system in Ceylon are evidently those of Sir Alexander Johnston, because the historian acknowledges in his preface that the latter had taken great interest in the progress of the work and had furnished him with valuable information. The exclusion of every person of bad character from the rolls of jurymen had greatly raised the tone of morality and desire for truth among the Natives. By their frequent attendance in the court, they are continually brought in contact with Europeans and have every opportunity of becoming acquainted with their sentiments and profiting by the information contained in the Judge's charge. Mr. Cameron says, "I attended nearly all the trials by jury which took place while I was in the Island, and the impression on my mind is that an institution in the nature of a jury is the best school in which the minds of the natives can be disciplined for the discharge of public duties."

Another lesson of great value to Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar was the annexation of the Kandyan kingdom. Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar, being a member of the Governor's staff, was ordered to proceed with the troops to Kandy in advance of His Excellency. There was no road in those days to that city; the passage lay through malarious swamps and forests, swollen rivers, steep hills and myriads of leeches. He left Colombo in February 1815 and accompanied the army via Hanwella to Avisawella, which marked the boundary line between the British and the Kandyan territories. Passing Ruanwelle, Idumalpane, Hettimulle and Gannitenne, their route lay along the Balana mountains, Galagedera and Girigama to Katugastota, whence they entered Kandy. They were fourteen days doing the journey.

When the King was sent to Colombo in the charge of Major Hook, Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar waited upon him and helped to alleviate the transition from kingship to exile, when he and all his relations were deported to Vellore in the Madras Presidency, where he died in 1832 at the age of fifty two.

The next question which occupied the attention of Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar was the emancipation of slavery in Ceylon. The movement which began in England was taken up in Ceylon by Sir (then Mr.) Alexander Johnston. His best efforts in 1806 failed to persuade the slave owners of the island of the injustice of the institution, and no wonder, because, in the patriarchal state in which Ceylon was, slaves formed part of one's family and were treated with kindness and consideration. They were seldom sold or separated, father from son, husband from wife or mother from daughter. But Sir Alexander Johnston, as an English lawyer, could not brook the idea of slavery. He made it a rule therefore, to address jurymen at the commencement of each session on this subject, pointed out to

them the difficulties they would experience in impartially discharging their duty in cases relating to slaves, and made them familiar with the sentiments then prevailing in England on the question. In the course of ten years, he saw a willingness on the part of the owners to emancipate their slaves. He then suggested to the Dutch and the native owners residing in the maritime provinces that they should unconditionally emancipate all children born of their slaves on and after the birthday of the Prince Regent, the 12th August, 1816. Upon the proposal being approved by Governor Brownrigg, an address was forwarded to the Prince declarative of their disposition to meet the philanthropic views of their fellow subjects in Great Britain in this matter. The address is to be found on page 211 of the first volume of the 1853 edition of the Ceylon Ordinances. It was signed by many. Amongst the Tamils occurs the name of Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar. At this period there were about 28,000 slaves in the Island of whom about 22,000 were in Jaffna and Trincomalee. The average price of a male slave was Rs. 17/- and of a female slave, Rs. 34/-. It will be remembered that the abolition of Negro slavery in the West Indies and Mauritius was effected only in 1833, and that too, at a cost of twenty million pounds sterling, voted by the British Parliament, as compensation to the owners.

At the close of the administration of General Brownrigg, Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar had the honour of receiving a gold medal and chain bearing the following inscription: "This medal has been presented by H. E. Sir Robert Brownrigg to Arumuganathapillai Coomaraswamy, Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate and Chief Interpreter to Government, in proof of His Excellency's satisfaction with his public services during the period of his government A. D. 1819."

Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar was above all things,

a generous and liberal-minded gentleman who found delight in the service of his country and his people. He kept an open house which was largely sought after by every youth who wanted to make his way in the world. A recommendation from him was a sure passport to employment. He not merely procured for them employment but also followed their careers with fatherly solicitude and concern. When his widow Mrs. Coomaraswamy died in 1897, the '*Ceylon Independent*' said in an obituary notice, "To her and her husband, almost every important Hindu family in the city during the century owes its rise. The leading members of these families were brought up by her and him, married and settled in life. Her death deprived the Tamil community of their chief lady, but the poor, of a most liberal and beneficent patron."

In October 1830, as already mentioned, he was elected the Head of the non-Christian Tamils in the metropolis. The election was held at the Kachcheri of the Western Province, when one Tiagappa, a rich renter of the arrack farms of the Colombo District and important member of the Colombo Chetty community, put himself on the opposition and tried hard to head the poll. Nothing availed him, though Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar, always peacefully disposed, begged his friends not to trouble themselves for his sake. They would not hear of it and carried him by an overwhelming majority. Upon the result of the election being made known by the Government Agent to Governor Barnes, an act of appointment similar to that of the Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate was passed in his favour under the hand of His Excellency, as already noted in earlier pages. He also received on that occasion from the Governor a beautiful gold-headed Malacca cane bearing the English arms, as an insignia of this office, the importance of which, socially, may be judged from the circumstance that, besides the usual invitations to guests,

his presence at a wedding could be solicited only in this extraordinary way: the host accompanied by a great number of his relations, friends and dependants would arrive at the Chief's house with music and lights, and invite him in person to the wedding; then a procession would be formed, and Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar, in full dress would be conducted under a canopy and over white cloth spread on the ground, to the marriage house, where he would sit in the place of honour on double carpets decked with spotlessly white linen. He would return home in the same stately manner. All these formalities are now things of the past.

In 1833 the Legislative Council was established by a Supplementary Commission addressed to the Governor, the Right Hon'ble Sir Wilmot Horton, whose wife was the lady whom Byron had immortalized in the lines beginning with "She walks in beauty." The Unofficial Members were not appointed till 30th May, 1835. Before the next session was summoned, he had passed away from earthly scenes.

Governor Horton, in his address to the Legislative Council, delivered on 7th November, 1836, thus deplored the loss:-

"Gentlemen, since I had the honour of meeting the members of the Legislative Council, we have sustained a severe loss by the death of Mr. Coomaraswamy, one of our native members. The conduct and capacity of that lamented gentleman are too well known and appreciated by those whom I now address to render it necessary for me to offer any observations upon the subject, beyond the expression of my sincere regret."

And the Governor added:-

"It is my anxious wish and desire to fill up his place in Council, whenever any native gentleman, duly qualified, shall present himself as a candidate, and I beg to observe that among the qualifications necessary, I consider a knowledge of the English

language to be an indispensable one. I regret that the number of the members of the Council should remain incomplete; but as I do not hold myself responsible for the circumstance, I can only pledge myself to take the earliest practical opportunity of effecting that completion."

Gentility combined with English education, was so rare in those days among the Tamils of the Island that a worthy successor to Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar could not be found for nearly two years after his decease. At length, the Tamils and "Moors" (Mohammedans) of Colombo nominated Mr. Simon Casie Chetty, the Mudaliyar of Kalpitiya and Proctor of that Court, to the vacant seat. He was sworn in on 29th June, 1838, when Governor Mackenzie, in his address to the Council, alluded in these terms to the old and the new Tamil Members:-

"I have thought it advisable to delay calling you together until I could declare the full number of the Legislative Council to be completed, by the accession of the two members this day sworn in, the one Mr. George Ackland, the other member, the native gentleman, whose introduction to a seat in this Council is the consequence of the death of your faithful councillor, Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy, whose high qualities and excellent character my predecessor did not fail to point out to you on the occasion of his lamented death, when among other qualifications, he justly declared a knowledge of the English Language to be a requisite for a Legislative Councillor. *'The Ceylon Gazette'*, compiled by Mudaliyar Simon Casie Chetty, however defective many parts of such a work must necessarily be in our imperfect access to, and acquaintance with, many districts of the interior of this island, while it bears ample testimony to his industry in the acquirement of so much topographical knowledge, affords even yet stronger proof of an extraordinarily perfect attainment by a

foreigner of the English language, a language so difficult to all foreigners. As a native councillor, the birth, character and acquirements of Simon Casie Chetty will not fall short of what is enjoined on me by my instruction."

CHAPTER III

PONNAMBALA MUDALIYAR

PONNAMBALA Mudaliyar was born in 1814. His father Arunachalam having died soon afterwards, his widowed mother Thangam, then about sixteen years of age, was given in marriage by her parents to Ariyaputhira, who had the good sense to entrust the education of his stepson to his brother-in-law Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar. The child left Manipay for Colombo when he was seven years of age, in the company of some poor relations and servants. In the cool hours of the morning and the evening, he rode on the shoulders of Mailan, the slave. On his arrival in Colombo, Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar, who had not as yet been blessed with children, received him with great kindness, and taught him Tamil; and the English he knew, he picked up at the Regimental School held at the Fort of Colombo by one Mr. Mackenzie. One day, the Governor, Sir Edward Barnes, going to inspect the school, found him engaged with his copy book, which His Excellency admired greatly for the clerkly hand in which it was written. It appears that a day or two after this expression of opinion, a boil broke out at the root of the first finger of the right hand and for ever marred his fist, which not unnaturally was attributed to the "evil eye" of the Governor. Neither in English nor in Tamil did Ponnambala Mudaliyar become proficient, but in all else, in worldly learning, as opposed to book learning, he was an adept. His art and skill in managing men and affairs were, indeed, very remarkable.

Through Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar's kindly aid,

Ponnambalam was allowed to serve as a volunteer in the Colonial Secretary's office; but finding that there was no satisfactory opening for him in that department, he resolved to engage in trade. He found this avenue, too, far from tempting. Communication with the inland districts was imperfect and there was no coasting trade worth speaking of. Native traders did a slow business with South Indian ports, principally in food produce and cotton goods. The people of the country had not yet awakened to an appreciation of new things or of articles of foreign luxury. The operations of European merchants were for the same reason limited: they dealt with the purchase and export of spices, coconut oil and what little there was to be got of coffee, and imported, chiefly for the use of the civil and military officers of the Government, wine, beer and other commodities for consumption. Under these circumstances, the circulation of capital in the Island was poor, and profits in trade, scanty. It was not till the spread of coffee cultivation that the Island began to quicken with a new form of life. After opening the Grand Trunk Road to Kandy, Sir Edward Barnes took active measures in 1835 to extend the growth of coffee, which had been found to thrive well in and about the mountain capital. In 1833 the export of this produce was not more than 2,500 cwts. Fifteen years later (1847) it had risen to 174,000 cwts (owing to the formation and successful working of numerous plantations) and had thrown hundreds of rupees into the hands of the natives who had never before fingered as many tens. The influence of the magic touch of money was immediate; desire for better food, newer raiment and higher comforts shot forth at once and maintained for many years in vigour the course of commerce in Ceylon. But this happy state of things did not exist in 1858 when Ponnambalam tried his hand at trade. He therefore abandoned it, more especially as the illness and death

of Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar came upon him with a great shock and a severe setback to his trading enterprise.

Some months after that mournful event, he was appointed landing waiter and searcher at the Customs Department on a salary of £45 a year, but the fees incidental to the office were enormous. In those days fees were payable even to judges, in addition to their salary. Mr. F. J. Templar, Collector of Customs, certified "that Mr. A. Ponnambalam discharged the various duties of his office with credit to himself and to my entire satisfaction", and added, "I consider him a very efficient and zealous public servant and deserving of further advancement in the service." Mr. F. Saunders, who also held the office of Collector of Customs bore additional witness to "his zeal and integrity."

Though in the government service, Ponnambalam did not think that his usefulness should be limited by devotion to official duty only. He sought new avenues to make himself more useful to himself and to society, in the pursuit of which he came in contact with, and made friends of, the leading Englishmen of the day. There was one circumstance which helped powerfully the growth of his general influence, and that was his position as a private banker. In those days, for want of a public bank, Europeans, official and unofficial, were glad to cultivate the acquaintance of native capitalists, and *a fortiori*, native gentlemen of good family and standing who did banking business pleasantly, privately and on fair terms. Ponnambala Mudaliyar's praises were sung everywhere. When, therefore, men like Mr. George Turnour (Colonial Secretary), Mr. Philip Wodehouse (Government Agent, Western Province), Sir Anthony Oliphant (Chief Justice), and the Governor himself came to know him personally, they found the report by no means overdrawn, for one and all of them thought highly

of him. Sir Muthucoomaraswamy used to say that among the Tamils, he knew of no one who impressed men more than Ponnambala Mudaliyar did both at first sight and afterwards. It was only natural that such a general favourite should rise by leaps and bounds in the service. So, when Edirmannasinha Mudaliyar vacated the office of Cashier of the Colombo Kachcheri, by his promotion to the office of Cashier of the Treasury, Ponnambala Mudaliyar was transferred from the Customs to take charge of the vacant post on 11th May, 1845. In February 1847, he was appointed Deputy Coroner for the city of Colombo, and nearly two months afterwards, he had the distinguished honour of being invested with the rank of Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate by Sir Colin Campbell, the highest honour (next to the Maha Mudaliyarship) within the power of the Governor to give to a Ceylonese. The 9th April, 1847 was a day of great rejoicing for him and his friends. After the investiture at Queen's House, he was led in great state to his residence along the Main and Sea streets of Colombo at the head of a most gorgeous procession, and many were the hours spent in joy and merriment. In October of the same year, he was granted a Commission as Justice of the Peace for the District of Colombo, with active magisterial duties. This was a proud position to occupy in these days, being the highest which a native could then occupy outside the circle of the Civil Service.

Sir Emerson Tennent, the accomplished author of the work on Ceylon, writing to Ponnambala Mudaliyar from Bintenne, on 13th February, 1848, says :-

"Your abilities and zealous discharge of your duties have justly entitled you to the consideration of the Governor, and I shall be glad to find that a suitable opportunity may occur for transferring you to a suitable office from your present one."

On 24th January, 1844, Ponnambala Mudaliyar

married the only daughter of Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar. He was by all standards an exceptionally eligible bachelor but the bride on whom he had set his heart was no less exceptional, by reason of her exquisite charm of person, her refinement and nobility of character, Ponnambala Mudaliyar, in his early youth, was a playmate of the girl when she was just six or seven years old. He would carry her on his shoulders and run about to her great glee. The marriage was a happy union "made in heaven," for so it appeared to all at the time.

In this year, the Government experienced greater difficulties than usual in the recovery of taxes in Colombo. The difficulties had been growing since 1848. The Ordinance No. 17 of 1844, clause 58, after declaring that for various reasons it had been found difficult to recover the tax due for that year under the provisions of Ordinance No. 13 of 1843, enacted that such arrears should be recovered in the same manner as the taxes becoming due after the passing of the Ordinance of 1844. Under this Ordinance the taxes, when assessed, were payable into the office of the Government Agent; and in case of default, clause 58 provided that "It shall be lawful for the Government Agent to seize all and singular the property of the owner of every house for which such tax shall be due and to sell such property by public auction etc." The state of the law, therefore, rendered it imperative that the Government Agent himself should make the seizure. And yet owing to the impossibility of the Government Agent's being in many places, far removed from each other, at one and the same time, it was not uncommon for the Assistant Government Agent to perform this function by a stretch of the law. But even this did not relieve the pressure of affairs, and the Assistant Agent was often insulted and ill-treated by the defaulters whose goods he tried to seize. So Lord Torrington appointed

Ponnambala Mudaliyar "Native Revenue Assistant to the Government Agent of the Western Province", in the hope that he would succeed better with the people, and authorized him to enforce the collection of the assessment tax. This was virtually admitting him into the Civil Service proper, the seventh heaven of Ceylon officialdom.

Great was the rejoicing of his friends on 16th May, 1849 at this mark of favour, which by one stroke of the pen dispensed with nominations, examinations and other formidable barriers imposed by the minute of 14th February, 1845, against entrance into the sanctified circle. But the joy was not to last long, for upon the appointment being reported to the Secretary of State, he informed the Governor that he felt unable to confirm it "owing to the obstacle presented by the actual state of the law with reference to the collection of the assessment tax", and the Government were even requested to take measures to amend the Ordinance of 1844 and to legalize the past collection of the taxes by the Assistant Government Agent. The Ordinance No. 4 of 1852, which ought to have been passed much earlier than it was, enacted that "whereas doubts are entertained whether the power vested in the Government Agent by the Ordinance No. 17 of 1844 can be exercised by the Assistant Government Agent, and it is expedient to remove such doubts, it is enacted that all the said powers shall and may be exercised by any Assistant Government Agent and any of the powers heretofore exercised by any such Assistant shall be deemed to have been legally exercised etc."

Ponnambalam was sorely disappointed and found relief in preparing for the long-postponed pilgrimage to India. Though a great servant of the State and to all appearances a man of the world, he was at heart a man of God. Amidst all the tumults and turmoils of a very arduous and crowded life, his heart for ever yearned to

PONNAMBALA MUDALIYAR

come into the living presence of the Almighty Being, to seek light and refreshment from secret and loving communion with him. He had long dreamt of an extensive pilgrimage to the hoary Hindu shrines of South India. In the meanwhile, Mr. Wodehouse had gone on leave to England, and Sir Emerson Tennent was about to follow him in December. Ponnambala Mudaliyar entertained him and his family, together with a few select friends, at dinner on the 8th of that month (1849), and wished him a safe voyage and happy return to the Island. Ponnambalam, of course, was too orthodox to dine with them. He now lost no time in embarking for India. His party consisted of his wife, his eldest son Coomaraswamy (then only one year old), his mother-in-law Visalakshi, his brother-in-law Muthucoomaraswamy, and a host of other relations. The ladies rode in palanquins, while the males rode on horse-back. Railways were not then in existence in South India, and precautions on a large scale were necessary against gang-robbers. Hence, such an expensive and cumbersome mode of travel. The party left Colombo in January 1850 by a sailing vessel and landed at Cape Comorin, where they visited the temple of Kannya Kumari. They then proceeded by easy marches to Tiruchendur, Palayangkotte, (Palancottab), Alvar Tirunelveli, Tirunelveli (Tinnevely), Tiruparankunrum, Madura, Alagar Kovil, Alagar Malai, Varali Malai, Tirisirapalli (Trichinopoly), Akanda Kaveri, Sangu Mukam, Srirangam, Tanjavur, (Tanjore), Tiruvai Aru, Vaidisparan Kovil, Nagapattinam, (Nagapatnam), Nagur, Vedaraniyam, Kodikkarai, Ramesvaram, Gandamadana Parvadam and Jaffna. Ponnambalam was received with much distinction and acclaim in all these places by the leaders of society. Fetes and nautches were the order of the day. This pilgrimage cost him several thousands of rupees. The party returned to Colombo by sailing vessel in May, 1850.

It was during this pilgrimage that Ponnambala

Mudaliyar worshipped at the historic shrine of Rameshwaram, reputed to have been founded in hoary antiquity by Sri Rama on his triumphant return to Ayodhya from Lanka and named after the great founder. As a humble suppliant, he invoked the deity there to grant him another son, one who would dedicate himself to the service of his country and his religion. He also made a vow that if his prayer were answered, he would name the child Ramanathan after the name of the deity there. Accordingly a son was born whom the jubilant parents, in the ecstasy of their joy, named Ramanathan. Ramanathan said at his Golden Jubilee Dinner, "As a boy I was ushered into life in Colombo. My father told me in later years that when he went to Rameshwaram in South India, where Ramanathan, the God Rama, is worshipped eight miles from Pampan, he prayed to God that if he was blessed with a son, the boy shall bear the name, Ramanathan, and the son was born. My father thought very highly of this gift of the Lord to him."

From Rameshwaram, Ponnambala Mudaliyar and his party proceeded to Dhanuskodi. The sea adjoining this hamlet, called in common parlance, *Sethu* is sacred to the Hindus, for according to the epic, the Ramayana, it was in its holy waters that Rama, after destroying Ravana the Titan King of Lanka, bathed for the remission of his sins. *Sethu* has since been esteemed a hallowed spot by the Hindus. Multitudes of pilgrims from all parts of India and Ceylon betake themselves thither on auspicious occasions and bathe in the holy waters to be cleansed of their sins. Ponnambala Mudaliyar found that the absence of a 'Pilgrim Rest' was a source of great hardship and suffering to the pilgrims. Like his son Ramanathan, Ponnambala Mudaliyar never beheld a real want, particularly a religious want, without straining himself and his resources to remedy it. He built a large 'Pilgrim

Rest' and made ample endowments for its maintenance.

On arrival in Colombo, Ponnambala Mudaliyar learnt with much sorrow that Sir Emerson Tennent and Mr. Wodehouse had fallen out with each other in England, in the course of a Parliamentary enquiry into the affairs of Ceylon. When Parliament assembled in February 1849, petitions signed by a large number of Ceylonese had been presented to both Houses of Parliament and a few days thereafter, Mr. Henry Baillie, M. P. for Inverneshire, moved and obtained a Select Committee to enquire into the conduct of the Governor in regard to the suppression of the so-called Rebellion of 1848, or to be more accurate, "to inquire into the grievances complained of in Ceylon in connection with the administration and government of that Colony, and to report their opinion whether any measures can be adopted for the redress of any grievances of which there may be shown just reason to complain; and also whether any measures can be adopted for the better administration and Government of that dependency." The Committee, which consisted of fourteen gentlemen, among whom were Sir Robert Peel and Messrs. Gladstone and Disraeli, after hearing evidence, found themselves unable to arrive at any report, and recommended that a Royal Commission should proceed to Ceylon to enquire into the grievances complained of. A motion in the House to that effect was rejected by a majority of 57 votes, but Lord John Russell promised that the Committee should be reappointed as soon as Parliament met in 1850, and that in the meantime witnesses whose evidence they desired should be summoned to England. Hence it was that Sir Emerson Tennent left Ceylon in December 1849. The other witnesses summoned from Ceylon and heard were Captain Watson, Colonel Braybrook, Sir A. Oliphant, Mr. John Selby, his brother Henry Collingwood Selby (the Queen's Advocate), and Lieut. Henderson.

Mr. Anstruther and three more witnesses who were in England were also heard. The expenses of these eleven witnesses aggregated to £5,526. The oral and the documentary evidence adduced made up no less that 1,500 folios of printed matter, and refer to almost every conceivable subject relating to public and even private life in Ceylon. One of the members of the Committee, Sir. J. Hogg, expressly moved that "as there is so much evidence of a personal, private and confidential nature, the publication of which would create dissensions in Ceylon injurious to the public interests, the Committee is of opinion that it is not expedient at present to report any part of the evidence to the House." The motion was lost by a majority of one. Voluminous as the proceedings were, they afforded most interesting reading.

Ponnambalam's name occurs there in connection with two circumstances, firstly, with a debt of £500 which Mr. Wodehouse owed him. Sir Emerson Tennent had heard of this and thought it his duty to report the matter to Lord Torrington, who of course laid it before the Secretary of State. The despatches were tabled at the instance of the Parliamentary Committee. From these documents we learn that Mr. Wodehouse escaped with a mild censure owing to two circumstances which were in his favour; viz, the common custom in those days of civilians and merchants appealing for loans to men like Ponnambalam who, in Mr. Wodehouse's own words, "could alone command money when the banks withdrew", and the fact that he did not borrow the money from Ponnambalam, but that Ponnambalam had taken up his promissory note for his honour during his absence in England. The other matter in which Ponnambalam's name occurs related to his strong support of Lord Torrington's administration. In order to disprove Mr. Henry Layard's evidence before the Parliamentary Committee that the Ceylonese were dissatisfied with

the Governor, Ponnambalam and others addressed to him a memorial for the purpose of being transmitted to the Secretary of State. This document appeared on page 302 of the appendix to the third report of the Committee on Ceylon. There were many other memorials to the same effect.

It may be of interest to us even at this distance of time to know the nature of the grievances complained of by the Ceylonese against Lord Torrington. The men who organized the attack were principally Mr. Elliot, the proprietor and Editor of the "*Ceylon Observer*", Mr. (afterwards Sir) Richard Morgan and Mr. John Selby, who had been retained as Advocate to defend many of those who had been charged with treason, and who afterwards became the proprietor and Editor of the "*Ceylon Examiner*". They retained Mr. H. Christie, a barrister in London, and through him induced Messrs. Baillie and Hume, M. P's to take up their cause in Parliament. There were several memorials addressed to it, one being signed solely by Mr. Selby as advocate. The complaints preferred by them related to the inefficiency of the Legislative Council and the necessity of giving it an improved constitution; the unsatisfactory working and inaccessibility of the Courts of Justice and the arbitrary administration of the Government by Lord Torrington.

As regards the Legislative Council, it was urged that the presence of the Governor, as president, impeded the free discussion of his measures; that it should not be made a matter of duty on the part of Official Members to vote with the Government on all questions; that the Unofficial Members should be elected by the people; that the overwhelming Official majority checked the action of Unofficials and disheartened them; and that the Unofficials should be allowed to originate measures. In consequence of these restrictions, taxes were imposed and expenditure was incurred without

the consent of the people.

As regards Courts of Law, the people had lost confidence in the administration of Justice, owing to the appointment of civilians and other persons who had no special training in law, to the exclusion of lawyers from Courts of Requests and Police Courts and to increased stamp duties.

As a natural consequence of this state of things, it was alleged, matters attained a climax under the administration of Lord Viscount Torrington. He had imposed several new taxes on dogs, guns, boutiques etc., and had re-introduced Raja-Karia by the Road Tax Ordinance. He had treated riots as rebellions, and had authorized the shooting down of great numbers of men. He had proclaimed without good cause martial law at Kandy, Matale, Kurunegala and Dambulla and was instrumental in causing the judicial murder of several innocent persons and the transportation and rigorous punishment of others. He had prohibited lawful public meetings, which had in view the peaceful representations of grievances to the Government and the British Parliament. He had issued arbitrary proclamations threatening with death and confiscation those who, having information, could not give it to the Government. He had also sanctioned the continuance of Courts Martial, though peace and quiet prevailed, for the purpose of enabling him to carry an Indemnity Bill through the Legislative Council, granting immunity to those who carried out his illegal orders.

The memorialists prayed that a Royal Commission be appointed to inquire into the alleged grievances, that the Legislative Council be constituted on an elective basis, that the Act of Indemnity be disallowed and that compensation be granted to the widows and orphans of those shot, and pardon offered to innocent prisoners.

The Committee of Parliament recommended that a Royal Commission be appointed to "enquire on the spot into the means taken for the repression of the late insurrection in Ceylon, ascertain what changes might be necessary for the better Government of the Colony, unless some were forthwith taken by the Government which might obviate the necessity of further investigation." Rather than grant a Royal Commission, the Secretary of State recalled Lord Torrington, and both Sir Emerson Tennent and Mr. Philip Wodehouse were obliged to sever their connection with the Island.

Ponnambala Mudaliyar was greatly perturbed to see the turn affairs had so unexpectedly taken. To him it was a great personal loss, because he was a favourite of them all. He now began to fear that he had seen his best days. Except perhaps his brother-in-law Edirmannasinha Mudaliyar, who was at this time representing the Tamils in the Legislative Council, there was no Tamil in the whole Island who commanded as much influence as Ponnambalam did. Possessing the car of the leading Europeans of the metropolis, official and unofficial, he was much courted not only by the Tamils and the Moors, but also by the Sinhalese, from the circumstance that the then Kachcheri Mudaliyar of Colombo was known to be of too quiet a disposition to be able to move men and things in general. It thus came to pass that Korale Mudaliyars, Muhandirams and other Sinhalese gentlemen, who cared for honours, place or preferment, sought Ponnambala Mudaliyar's aid and advice more assiduously than the Kachcheri Mudaliyar's. It was, therefore, not surprising that the simultaneous loss of three of his principal patrons should have raised in him gloomy thoughts regarding his prestige and prospects. He believed he had no chance now of rising higher in the public service. Being at this time thirty-six years of age, he debated within himself whether he should remain hampered by the trammels of official life, if neither promotion nor increased pay was attainable; but the settlement

of this question was postponed when he found the new Government Agent, W. P., Mr. (afterwards Sir) Charles Layard remarkably quick at appreciating the merits of his officers and very favourably inclined towards himself.

In this year (1851) the arrival in Colombo of Lord Stanley, the eldest son of the Earl of Derby who had been Secretary of State for the Colonies between 1841 and 1845, enabled Ponnambalam to get up a grand entertainment in the name of the Tamils of the city to His Excellency the Governor (Sir G. Anderson) and Lord Stanley. As the Earl of Derby had been the patron of Sir Emerson Tennent, Ponnambalam was naturally anxious to honour his son, who though only five and twenty years of age, was already a public man, possessed of a seat in the House of Commons. The entertainment took the form of a garden party and dinner, at Muthucoomaraswamy's gardens at Korteboam, next to the Cathedral. A huge circular pandal was erected and beautifully decorated in the northern part of the gardens, and a special entrance opened to it from the high road. Invitations to the fete were issued in the names of Edirmannasinha Mudaliyar (Tamil Member of the Legislative Council), Muttukrishna Mudaliyar (Interpreter to His Excellency the Governor) and Ponnambala Mudaliyar. The Governor and his suite with Lord Stanley arrived a little before 6 p. m. on 8th October, 1851, and were greatly fascinated by the various forms of entertainment and amusement provided in the gardens. The illumination and fireworks contributed not a little to the success of the occasion. Neither Edirmannasinha Mudaliyar nor Ponnambala Mudaliyar participated in the dinner, being too orthodox to do so, but their place was well-filled by Muthucoomaraswamy, then in his eighteenth year. He had completed his course of studies at the Colombo Academy and was at this time reading privately with the accomplished Dr. McIver. It was wisely arranged

that young Muthucoomaraswamy should appear as the spokesman of the Tamils. So when the Governor gave the toast of "Prosperity to the Tamil Community", Muthucoomaraswamy made his maiden speech before the distinguished assembly in a way which did credit to him and the race he represented. The Governor was evidently pleased with him, for shortly afterwards he appointed him as a "writer" (Cadet) in the Civil Service and attached him to the Colombo Kachcheri.

Worthly leaders they were of the Tamil Community— Edirmannasinham, Muttukrishna and Ponnambalam — to have readily conceived, and as readily carried out, the idea of entertaining Her Majesty's representative and Lord Stanley, without seeking the help of the British or any of the native communities.

Ponnambala Mudaliyar's career as a Government servant may be said to close with the entertainment to Sir George Anderson, for, though he did not resign the cashiership of the Colombo Kachcheri till 1854, he had lost interest in that work as early as 1851. The successes of some of his friends in the coffee enterprise induced him to ship coffee to England. When he found it a paying business, he grudged the time he gave to his duties at the Kachcheri and became everyday more and more dissatisfied with the trammels of official life. He longed for independence, and people who found out the bent of his mind, told him in flattering accents that a man so able and so powerful as he should not waste his energies at the Kachcheri. In March 1854 he took leave and proceeded to Madras. The leading men there showed him every attention and by their encouragement and words of exhortation, soon strengthened him in his resolve to quit the service of Government. Returning to Colombo in May, he had the misfortune to lose his wife after a short illness, on 8th September, 1854. He tendered his resignation on 30th November following and

set himself up as a merchant engaged in import and export trade.

He was much too good for the appointment he held. There was no career open to him in the service of the Government. The authorities were anxious to help him up the higher rungs of the official ladder, but the rules were insuperable, as the Secretary of State himself had pointed out to the Governor. In these circumstances Ponnambala Mudaliyar's resignation was understandable.

Ponnambala Mudaliyar was shaken to his depths by the tragedy that overtook him in the loss of his beloved wife. Though young and only nineteen at the time she took leave of him, she was all in all to him. Born in the hey-day of her father's career and bred in the best traditions of Hindu womanhood, and denied none of the accomplishments the age could give, she was, if one may employ a hackneyed term, the beau ideal of a Hindu wife. A terrible void had opened in Ponnambala Mudaliyar's life and it was one of the sorest moments of his life. Only a supreme and philosophic sense of the inevitability of human mortality and the ruthlessness of man's destiny could have steeled him to put away the crying sorrow of his heart. The intelligent and devoted up-bringing of his three little children was certainly an arduous business but the task was cheerfully undertaken and admirably accomplished by his mother-in-law, Mrs. Coomaraswamy, an indomitable lady full of that old-world piety, simplicity, courage and candour.

Widowed though she was in early life, burdened with the responsibility of bringing up her two children and managing the extensive properties left her by her great husband, surrounded by enemies who coveted her immense wealth, and overtaken by all manner of domestic misfortunes, her singular tenacity and courage, her firm faith in the guiding hand of Providence and her unbounded devotion to her family enabled her to

tide over the manifold hardships and impediments that beset her path through life. Hers was an intense and ecstatic faith in God and her one dominant passion was feeding *adiyars* or devotees of God, and making annual pilgrimages to Kataragama for the most part on foot. She would go accompanied by a large retinue of servants and retainers carrying a large store of provisions which she would cater all along the way for pilgrims bound for that sylvan shrine. The story goes that on one such pilgrimage, she met a saint whom she treated with customary hospitality and reverence. The saint blessed her and foretold that from her womb would issue forth a man child who would shed lustre not merely on her house but on the whole country. Accordingly a son was born and he was the future Sir Muthucoomaraswamy.

Sir P. Arunachalam her grandson makes the following reference to the religious side of his grandmother's life, in his book, *'The Worship of Muruka or Skanda'*: "In the thirties of last century, when good roads were scarce even in Colombo, my grandmother walked barefoot the whole way to Kataragama and back in fulfilment of a vow for the recovery from illness of her child, the future Sir Muthucoomaraswamy." Her grand-children used to recall in after years with touching gratitude and affection how deeply and irredeemably indebted they were to their grandmother who ministered to every detail of their comfort and who, when on occasion they had gone to bed too early for their meals, would wake them up and feed them and put them back to sleep with more than a mother's fondness and solicitude. With the aid of a few elderly ladies, she filled admirably the void created by their mother's premature death Arunachalam in one of his letters to Edward Carpenter, his lifelong friend from his Cambridge days, pays the following tribute to the sagacity and courage of his grandmother: "I often think of my old grand-

mother, left a widow with two children, surrounded by enemies thirsting for her blood and her wealth, of how alone she did it and she could not read or write a word of her own language." In another place, he refers to the intensity of her passion for religion and her devotion to her religious Guru. He says, "During the last years of her life, she (grandmother) lived in her house, attending to her domestic duties and to the Master's (Saint's) wants as far as she could from her house. Ten days before his (Master's) passing away, she obtained her relative's consent to go to the Swamy's monastery and nurse him, and stayed there till the end and till all the ceremonies were over and then she lay down and died. She is buried in *Samadhi* next to the Master and receives the same divine worship."

About his early life and upbringing, Ramanathan once said at a public dinner, "And it happened that my mother died when I was a boy of about four years of age and I was left in the hands of elderly ladies who brought me and my brothers up. Being members of an important family, my elder brother was called 'Big Rajah'; I was called 'Middle Raja' and my brother Arunachalam 'Little Rajah'. We were all Rajahs like, *Loku Banda, Madumma Banda, Punchi Banda* among the Sinhalese. All these things would inflate us with ideas of our importance, and my father, who recognized only one power in the universe, did not care for all these things. He often sent us with three or four servants to the well-side to take our baths. I am depicting to you the kind of society in which we were brought up many, many years ago. Well, one servant undresses us, another would take us safely to the tank, and then pour water on us and we had to bear it all quietly. Then they dried us and brought us back to the house and delivered us to the hands of those elderly ladies. Then we were surrounded by a number of people who used to praise us abundantly. We could not open our

mouths without hearing them say 'Here is Rajah speaking; long life to him.'"

Mrs. Coomaraswamy died in 1897. *'The Ceylon Independent'* in her obituary notice called her the descendant of a long line of chiefs in the Northern Province and added, "To her and her husband, almost every important Hindu family in the city during the century owes its rise. The leading members of these families were brought up by her and him, married and started in life. Her death deprived the Tamil community of their chief lady but the poor of a most liberal and beneficent patron."

Ponnambala Mudaliyar continued to remain in the export trade, in conformity with the bent of his mind and the advice of his friends. But success was hard to come by, for trade, like any other branch of human activity, demands of its votaries, as a condition of success, a long period of zealous apprenticeship. Moreover, tycoons of trade were and are notoriously cold, calculating, hard-eyed, hard-grained men. Ponnambala Mudaliyar was, unhappily, none of these. No wonder he failed and failed disastrously. In later years, when steadied by age and sober experience, he owned to his son Ramanathan his "want of judgment" at this critical period of his life and added ruefully, "I was spoilt by prosperity, and felt myself irresistible. The consequence was discontent. I hoped to succeed in trade but I miscalculated my powers and lost more than I dreamt."

He now felt that the hey-day of his success and prosperity was past and never to return. Misfortune dogged his footsteps at every turn. Defeat, disappointment and anguish of mind were his portion during this period of his life. His three principal patrons—Lord Torrington, Sir Emerson Tennent and Philip Wodehouse—who were never weary of singing his praises and were always on the look-out for an opportunity to elevate him to high

office, had left the Island for good. He had in the prime of life thrown overboard a successful career in the public service; his trade in coffee had proved a failure and to crown all these, came the tragedy of his wife's death at the tender age of nineteen.

The sage of Rameswaram whose aid Ponnambala Mudaliyar sought during this period of spiritual travail urged him to abandon all worldly pursuits and take refuge in God. Once again, he went on pilgrimage to India and returned home more resolved than ever that what was left of life for him should be dedicated to the worship and glorification of God. His mercantile interests which, in spite of failures and set-backs, continued to engage him—for he had none other—he left in the care of his assistants. It was a period of real spiritual awakening for him. A new light and a new vision illumined the hitherto dark horizons of his soul. He now woke up to a new reality, a new truth dawned upon him, that man's life here is to express the eternal and not the ephemeral, that life in God is the only end worthy of man's higher nature, the only end he should seek and strive to attain; that the frantic pursuit of material things and the base passions it engenders lead man nowhere but to the pit of ruin and destruction. He now set up a shrine in his home and found in it a place of contentment and an anchorage for his soul. He would spend long hours in fervent prayer and meditation. His little son Ramanathan for whom boyish sports and amusements had little fascination would fill his father's shrine-room with flowers and attend to other requisites of parental worship. This done, he would sit in some corner of the shrine and listen with rapturous attention to the soft strains of music that flowed from his father's lips.

Speaking of his father, Ramanathan once said, "My father was a very pious man and was a

very important person in his day, and he delighted in having a shrine in his own house amidst a flower garden which yielded to him all the sacred leaves and flowers necessary to consummate worship. I was a little boy then; my father would sing hymns in Tamil and I for my part had no idea of running with the other boys and enjoying myself, as they say, by exercising my limbs and kicking about as other boys do. But I was drawn to his worship in his shrine. I used to lean against the wall of the shrine, and fix my attention upon the soft strains of music which came forth from his mouth and I used to wonder what these words may mean." We may well believe that Ramanathan's love of religion as well as his love of music was hereditary in its origin, was fostered by his close and affectionate contact with his father in the impressionable years of his life. In religion and philanthropy, the father, and in public life and heroic endeavour, the uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy were probably the most potent and formative influences upon his life and character.

Ponnambala Mudaliyar's house became the resort of sages and saints whom, as a man of religion himself, he regarded with reverential awe and devotion. He received them with the customary warmth and cordiality and lavished on them the hospitality and devout attention traditional with Hindu devotees. Ramanathan too, though a boy, would in his small way minister to their comforts.

Ponnambala Mudaliyar would sit at their feet and listen to lengthy and learned discourses on the abstruse problems of philosophy and religion. At such moments as these, the boy would steal into their presence and listen in patience. One cannot but marvel at the precocity of the lad who in boyhood eschewed boyish amusements and found delight in listening to sages expatiate on the most recondite problems of life and religion. Ramanathan makes the following reference to his early acquaint-

ance with Hindu saints: "Then, what I saw in the case of father was this; that sages and saints used to come to him continually from India and other places. Now I did not keep the company of my fellow boys but I would quietly enter the rooms where my father met the sages, and listen to their conversation silently without interfering with the continuity of the talk, simply listening and delighting in their childlike ways. Then one of these sages would come to me and stroke the head of this little boy and say, 'Ah, this is indeed a saint worth having'; and my father used to call me when I was seven, 'Old Man' because I was oldish in my ways and did not love the things that were commonly loved by other boys."

Thus we see the great statesman whose supreme ideal of life was spiritual freedom and selfless endeavour nurtured in an environment permeated by religion. From the first, he displayed a calm, sober, meditative turn of mind and kept himself aloof from boyish games and frivolities. All through life, the children of Ponnambala Mudaliyar entertained the most affectionate regard and esteem for their pious father. It was from him that they inherited all the piety and passionate devotion to God, all the implicit and unquestioning trust in His goodness and guidance—qualities which characterized their lives and constituted perhaps the master-secret of their unrivalled greatness and pre-eminence.

Ponnambala Mudaliyar secured the services of distinguished teachers from India to educate his children in Tamil and Sanskrit and to instil in them a love for religion. Among the many duties enjoined on these teachers was instruction in the precepts and practices of religion. They were required not merely to instruct them in the Hindu Scriptures and the principles of good living but to take them to temple both morning and evening, demonstrate to them every form and detail of worship and explain to them its hidden significance. Such

was the sort of education, such the training the, devout and solicitous parent procured for his children in the impressionable and formative period of their lives; and they remained a lasting possession. It was upon these early foundations that they built for themselves in later life a reputation, equalled by few of their time, not merely for Oriental learning and scholarship but for the comparative study of religion and philosophy.

We now come to another phase, perhaps the most momentous and enduring of Ponnambala Mudaliyar's life—his dedication of himself and his immense material wealth to the cause of promoting Hinduism and the Hindu way of life in South Ceylon. It would be impossible to exaggerate the magnitude and splendour of his services in this sphere. In the South, he stood for all that the great Navalar, the apostle of Hindu revival, stood for in the North. The cause of Hinduism, he felt, was his own cause and strove to the utmost of his resources and to the end of life to promote Hindu religion and Hindu ideals of life in an age when they were seriously threatened by the impact of alien religions and influences.

At the time that we are speaking of, the Hindus of Colombo were greatly handicapped in matters religious. They had no temple which conformed to the strict Agamic tradition. Being immersed in the rampant materialism of a commercial city and exposed to the fierce onslaughts of Western religion and culture, they were fast losing their individuality and becoming oblivious of their own spiritual and cultural heritage. To forget God and stray from His path was easy enough in the circumstances and none felt the plight of the Hindus more poignantly than Ponnambala Mudaliyar. With firm faith in the guiding hand of Providence, with unflinching courage and boundless tenacity—qualities which no less characterized his son Ramanathan—this indomitable man set about the task of building a

temple single-handed, a temple dedicated to Lord Siva, for the worship of the Hindus. It was obviously a stupendous project, one that would cripple the material resources of any man. But once he had put his hand to the plough, it was not with him to look back. Ramanathan says, "After my mother's funeral, my father went on a pilgrimage to India, and returned home more firmly resolved than ever that the energies of his life should be devoted to the glorification of God. With a resigned heart, he continued in the newly-found occupation of trade, having nothing else to do, when out of his chapel, where he was found to tarry longer than before. In the course of a year or two his religious thoughts took complete hold of him. He grudged to think of anything else. He allowed his mercantile affairs to pass into the hands of his assistants and began active measures to supply a long-felt want of the Hindus of the metropolis. They had no temple in which the full complement of six daily services and periodical festivals were celebrated in stately and orthodox form. There were several small temples conducted in poor style and in a manner so little in harmony with the prescribed law that persons who knew the law could not well resort to them for devotional purposes. His great aim, therefore, was to offer to his co-religionists in Colombo a temple with endowments large enough to maintain it in splendour according to the rules of their faith. He bought about five acres of land from one Captain Foulstone at Sea Street, one of the most populous centres of the city, employed expert architects and craftsmen from India and laid the foundations of the temple on an auspicious day. For more than two years he used to pay daily visits to the works, often spending hours together in the supervision of the different buildings that were being raised. I was then about six years of age, and remember very well the morning levees of my father, which several persons would attend, to

state their grievances or obtain redress or favour; and how, at the close of the levees, he would proceed on foot from his residence at Sea Street to Kochchikade, attended by a large retinue—if I may say so, like Julius Caesar of old on his way to the Roman Senate—the way-farers anxious to make way for him, and whispering to each other 'Ponnambala Mudaliyar'.

"When the holy edifice was well-nigh finished about the end of 1857, arrangements were made to establish the different deities carved in stone or moulded in gold and other metals. The *Bala Yantram* which had been the means of his daily devotion for years past at his private chapel, was transferred in great state to the Temple and constituted the base of the Principal Goddess therein enshrined and named Sivahami. His *Sri Chakkram* was placed behind the same Devi. The *Mahalingam* in the *Moolasthanam* was named Ponnambala-vana-Isparan, the Lord of the limitless region of Holiness.

"The great consecration ceremony was over in November, 1857 and my father verily thought his earthly labours would also be over soon, according to the common belief that founders of temples seldom survived the event. But he did not die. He, however, fell ill of a dire disease that dragged its course of untold misery for nearly seven years. In addition to this misfortune came heavy losses in the coffee trade and consequent suspension of payments, so that he had to give up all he had to his creditors and retire to an estate, some forty miles from Colombo, which in his palmy days he had gifted to the Temple. There he found a haven of rest. Nay more; he told me that, after all the best doctors of the Island had one after another abandoned him to die, for so they thought, the remedy for the disease was suggested to him in a dream, and that it cured him in three days! Great is the power and mercy of God!"

Ponnambala Mudaliyar employed learned priests from India to officiate at the temple ceremonies and provided for them commodious and well-built quarters within the precincts of the temple. Nay, he endowed the temple with five-hundred acres of highly productive coconut land at Natandiya and a row of shop-buildings in Colombo. In making these endowments, he was animated by an earnest desire to ensure the proper maintenance of the temple and the regular performance of the daily *poojas* and the periodical festivals even after he was no more. By a deed, he provided for the management of the temple to devolve on the eldest surviving male member of his family. He thus gave the Hindus of Colombo what they had for so long and so sorely needed, a well-built, well-equipped and richly-endowed temple for the worship of God in the manner prescribed by their religion. Moreover, Ponnambala Mudaliyar built a *Chaultri* in the premises of the temple and provided for the feeding of *Sannyasins*—religious mendicants—at noon daily. Obviously, he was distressed by the spectacle of their precarious and uneasy existence. This was, indeed, a real boon to them inasmuch as these *Sannyasins* could now pursue their spiritual work unhampered by physical wants. This was not all. Provision was made for feeding and clothing the poor. It was said that he would supervise in person the feeding and it was only after they had been properly fed that he would dine himself. No needy person ever sought his aid without finding ready relief.

In those days, it was the practice of the Hindus of Colombo to bury their dead for want of a crematorium. This was contrary to the tenets of Hinduism and Ponnambala Mudaliyar, a devout Hindu that he was, felt the need bitterly. He acquired a piece of land and converted it into a crematorium. To enable the Hindus to perform their last rites to the dead, he brought priests

from South India and maintained them at his own expense. Judged by any standard, inestimable, incomparable were his services to the Hindus in general and in particular, the Hindus of Colombo. These and many other acts of philanthropy and munificence had the effect of crippling the enormous financial and material resources of Ponnambala Mudaliyar. His children would have suffered the fate common to children born of selfless idealists and visionaries, had not their mother's properties been, happily, secured to them by being placed in the hands of trustees. Moreover, their grandmother and uncle brought them up in luxury and affluence and left them nothing to desire. Ramanathan continues, "In 1864 my father returned to Colombo and claimed me and my brothers from the custody of my grandmother. For several years she had grown greatly attached to us, and she was grieved beyond measure to give us up. She positively refused to surrender the youngest of us, Arunachalam, who was then about ten years of age. My elder brother and myself went to live with him. There was no difficulty about maintenance, as we inherited a fair fortune from our mother and grandfather, which being in the hands of trustees, did not suffer ship-wreck.

"I found him very companionable. One of his earliest remarks to me was that a child up to his fifth year was the king of his parents; between his sixth and sixteenth year, their slave; and from his seventeenth year, their friend. But he admitted me to this privilege in my twelfth year, for he would now and then state a case and ask what I would suggest and good-humouredly laugh, if I said something very absurd. He always preached to us about education, liberal-mindedness and leadership among men.

"He was singularly liberal-minded. Carping criticism was not in him. He regarded the ideals and practices of other races with toleration, and

good-humouredly looked on, when we, his children, put on shoes and black-coloured coats and trimmed our hair in European fashion. He said nothing, but we saw he was infinitely amused at the ready manner in which we were dropping off our national ideas. I expected a sermon, when in my twenty-first year, I carried him the news that my uncle (Sir Coomaraswamy) had with his own hand cut off my long tresses (*Kudumi*), which were the only indication left about me that I was a Hindu. He heard me and pitifully shook his head and turned his face away for a moment without a word. He must have been much shocked, but he knew that Western civilization was sweeping through Ceylon and had made its way into the bulwarks of our family through the defection of his own brother-in-law (Sir Coomara), that we, who loved to follow him as a shining light, were not to be blamed; and that, if anybody was deserving of blame, it was that great man himself.

"Tolerant as he was, he never swerved from the customs of his ancestors; he never drank wine or smoked; never ate any food that was against caste-law; never sat at table with Europeans or Sinhalese, or Burghers or any other race of people whose ideals and practices were different from those of his own; never put on the dress of foreigners; in fact never attempted anything that was inconsistent with his own nationality.

"Though an orthodox Hindu, he kept himself in touch with the different sections of his own community and with the leaders of the other communities. By courtly manners, indomitable energy, and devotion to friends, he disarmed criticism and became one of the most influential men in the Island. Jealousy, he abhorred. He liked to see his countrymen flourish and took every opportunity to advance to the front men deserving of encouragement and support. He was especially helpful to young Tamils for many of whom he secured responsible offices

in the English banks and other mercantile establishments, and the lead he gave them since 1845 is still being kept up. He often spoke to me and my brothers of the duty of being on the alert, of doing good to others, and exemplified the doctrine in many practical ways. He would take his poor relations and friends with him, when touring India or Ceylon; pay for their children's education; arrange picnics and card-parties for the ladies; have musical and literary entertainments at home; and see the needy fed and clothed in his own house and under his own eyes every Tuesday and Friday. It was a source of great amusement to me, when I was a child, to see two long rows of clean-washed and newly-clad religious mendicants seated from one end of the house to the other end, on the floor and feasting to their hearts' content, blessing my father all the while, as he moved up and down, directing the servants to serve, now this man and now that man. My father would not retire for his breakfast, till the feeding of the poor had progressed almost half way. It delighted him also to arrange marriages. An unmarried girl pining for a husband would not have to wait long. He would find out a deserving young man and make it worth his while to give the poor girl in marriage. He was a great believer in *Kannika thanam*.

"After my brothers and I had come well to the front, he renounced his worldly friends and devoted himself entirely to the needs of the Temple, improving it in a variety of ways and rigidly carrying out the prescribed six daily services and the recurring festivals. These last would in certain months continue far into the small hours of the morning, and we found him in 1879 getting more and more careless of his food and sleep, in his anxiety to discharge the very onerous duties he had imposed on himself. One chilly morning, we heard that he had gone to bed at about 3 a. m., faint and almost benumbed with cold and had

not risen as usual to attend to his morning routine of work. That was his first stroke of paralysis. He recovered soon and continued to manage the temple, but the second stroke disabled him, so that my elder brother was obliged to take him over to his residence and tend him with great care. He regained enough of mental and physical strength to take an interest in what was going on around him without taking an active part in them. He was specially fond of children and talked and laughed with them, and would toddle into the drawing room and sit listening to sacred music, with tears in his eyes. Great was his piety to the very last moment of his life. He died at 10.20 a. m. on Sunday, the 4th September 1887 in his 74th year, on the very same asterism on which my mother's death occured. I was at his bedside at the time and saw unspeakable joy depicted in his face as animation was passing out of the body. It was like a sun-set in a clear sky with radiance left behind to denote that peace reigned when the day closed."

Thus ended one of the noblest of lives, a life so delicately holy, so full of love and compassion for the poor, the needy and the oppressed, so unwearied in doing good and employed in a continual praise and glorification of God.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION

Royal College—Presidency College, Madras—Law in the Chambers of Sir Richard Morgan.

"The law is the best profession for a young man, if he has anything in him."

Sidney Smith

AFTER completing his early education at home, Ramanathan proceeded to Royal College, then known as Queen's Academy, the *Alma Mater* of many of Lanka's distinguished sons. The Headmaster was Dr. Barcroft Boake, a keen scholar with a generous conception of the aims of education. He instilled in his pupils the habits of sound discipline, morality and sustained effort. Of Dr. Boake, the History of Royal College records, "It is his dominant personality which strikes us most as we look back upon Dr. Barcroft Boake. He always despised superficial knowledge, and sought to lay in his pupils the groundwork of a sound and liberal education. As an exemplary Christian, he exercised a wholesome influence over his pupils, and exerted his great abilities to cultivate the moral faculties of students." Among Ramanathan's contemporaries at Royal were his elder brother Coomaraswamy, C. A. Lorenz, the Nells, William Gunetilake and Ramanathan's younger brother Arunachalam, a veritable galaxy of talent and achievement. We have no evidence that he showed any precocity or gave any indication of future promise. His school reports were colourless; but there was one quality that he had cultivated from

early boyhood and that was an intense and abiding love of books. In horse-riding, then esteemed a necessary accomplishment for a gentleman, he is reputed to have shown uncommon skill and agility.

In 1864 Mudaliyar Ponnambalam sent him and his brother Coomaraswamy to Presidency College, Madras, for graduation. Dr. Isaac Thambyah, veteran lawyer, theologian and man of letters, makes the following reference to Ramanathan's career at Queen's Academy: "In 1861, Ramanathan joined the Queen's Academy which he soon left from Mr. Gogerly's class. He confined his reading largely to novels. Happening to come across Madame de Stael's saying, 'Novel-reading bleaches one's mind', the young student betook himself with Oriental avidity to more substantial reading. In his thirteenth year, he left Ceylon for Madras and joined Presidency College."

PRESIDENCY COLLEGE

The pious and solicitous parent, who valued religion and morality above everything else, had a lively fear that Colombo life and morals would exert an obnoxious influence on the unformed minds of his sons. He, therefore, decided to place them in an environment which, he believed, would conduce to a better and more healthy development of their moral, spiritual and intellectual faculties. In one of his speeches Ramanathan throws light upon the circumstances that impelled the father to take this decision: "We had a number of friends from outside our own society coming in and instilling into us ideas that created irreverence and frivolity in our minds. My father looked at these things with sorrow and told me and my brother Coomaraswamy, 'Sons you are in great danger in Colombo. You must go out of Ceylon to a country where many more things are to be learnt than could be learnt in Colombo. Are you willing to go?' We said, 'Yes, father!' I was then about thirteen years

of age, having received my instruction in the Colombo Academy (Queen's College). He had condemned the state of things in Ceylon so many years ago. What did my father do? There was no quarrel about it. He wanted to make us men and he had abundant faith in the mercy of God. There were no railways in those days. He engaged a ship—a sailing vessel—and put us on board the sailing vessel. He gave us a horse to take with us—Persian horse—and coming on board the vessel, he gave us a big bag of rupees. 'This', he said, 'contains rupees 1000/-; children, now spend this money carefully, as you go along.'

"'The captain of the ship has been asked to take you to Rameshwaram, whence you will go to Nagapatinam and there entrain to Madras. There is a banker there who will give you money, and the Registrar of the University there has been appointed your guardian' and so on. After all this advice, when he was about to leave the sailing vessel, we saw tears rolling down his cheeks and he said to us, 'May you be blessed children; if you fail, it will be your fault; if you succeed, it will be for the good of the country.' We looked in blank dismay and my brother said, 'You see I expected him to come with us and he is gone.' I said, 'Very well, it does not matter, brother. He asked us to keep accounts; if you do not want to keep accounts, I will keep them.' But as children we had never had more than a rupee or so for toys and other things and we wondered how he could expect a thousand rupees to be kept by us safely and used. We felt that if we lost the money, we would be completely ruined. On that day, we jumped from boyhood to manhood, because we were asked to take care of ourselves and the money, and then proceed to and fulfil our duty in a foreign country. Well, it is a long story. That was the pious man who believed in guidance from God and he expected his children to live up to

the traditions of the family to which he belonged and not to be misled by wrong thought or wrong speech or wrong action."

Ramanathan makes another reference to this event. He says, "Though by no means proficient in English or in any of the departments of knowledge commonly taught in English schools, he was able to see that the teaching offered in the first educational institution of the Island — the Colombo Academy, where we were reading — was of a poor order. He may have known this to be the opinion of some of his cultured English friends. About this time Mr. C. W. Thamotharam Pillai, the first B. A. of the University of Madras arrived in Colombo, and my father discussed with him the merits of the question and decided that my brother Coomaraswamy and I should proceed to Madras for our education. He put the proposal before us and we assented. Being a man of action, he lost no time in chartering a sailing vessel for our use. Steamers then coming into port were only few and far between. He stocked the barque with good furniture, (calamander and ebony, which were much admired in Madras) for our use, together with a handsome Kandahar horse and put us on board, directing the captain to land us at Nagapatinam and at any intermediate port we liked. I remember his parting words: 'Sons you are leaving home for a distant country. If you learn well and copy good exemplars, you will be ornaments to society and do great service to your country; but if you idle and associate with inferior men, the opportunity which I now give you for improving yourselves will be lost for ever; which will be a great shame. Therefore, do your best.' He stooped and kissed us and great tears rolled down his cheeks. We were delicately nurtured, having been never trusted out of sight of responsible friends or relations, and yet here we were in a sailing vessel on the broad bosom of a monsoon-rocked ocean with nobody to take care of us but a strange

Tindal (Captain) and two old servants who were never remarkable for prudence or practical ability. We were given a lot of money too, and my father asked us to keep and render accounts to him. He was now gone and we felt depressed beyond measure, as the ship was sailing out of the harbour. A daring man was he, full of confidence in God. My grandmother and all the ladies of the family complained bitterly of this 'foolhardy venture' of his, but he smiled and bore up, saying, 'How should women know about the benefits of travel or the value of learning? It is better for a father to have no children than ignorant, ill-bred children.' As for us, being thrown suddenly on our own resources, we had to learn early in life the necessity of thoughtfulness and self-possession."

It is not surprising that the whole family held up their hands in horror at this suggestion; but in the end they gave way to him in this, as in everything else. Perhaps they felt that it was useless to reason with him where any question concerning the future of his children was involved. On 22nd May, 1865, the two brothers left for Madras on board the sailing-vessel.

Thus the Royal College students became the Presidency College undergraduates. There they were placed under the guardianship of the aforesaid Rao Bahadhur C. W. Thamotharam Pillai, B. A., B. L. retired Chief Justice of Puthu-kottai State and acknowledged to be the greatest Ceylon Tamil that had gone out to Madras. Thamotharam Pillai was, moreover, the first graduate and Fellow of Madras University and among the most renowned Tamil scholars of all time.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the services of this celebrated scholar and savant to the revival of Tamil learning and research, which had suffered a severe setback under foreign rule and to the instilling of a passion for Oriental culture and learning in his youthful proteges.

Ramanathan acknowledged only three men as his *Gurus* (teachers), Rao Bahadur C. W. Thamotharam Pillai, Sir Richard Morgan and his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy. In later life he would refer to them all with touching gratitude and affection. Thamotharam Pillai was for long Chairman of the Board of Tamil Studies at the University of Madras and was also Examiner to the University. In recovering from obscurity and oblivion the manuscripts of many great Tamil classics, which would, otherwise, have been lost to posterity, editing them with patient and laborious toil and giving them the light of publicity, he placed the Tamil literary world under a deep debt of gratitude. He was, moreover, a great Hindu leader held in high esteem by the *Atheenams* and *Maths* and a tower of strength to Arumuga Navalar in the revival of Tamil and Sanskrit learning and the reformation of Hinduism in Ceylon.

It was no ordinary privilege for the sons of Ponnambalam to have so eminent a scholar and man of religion for guide, philosopher and friend in the formative period of their lives. Their love of Tamil and Sanskrit learning, Hindu religion and tradition, imbibed in early life, received added stimulus under his inspiring and enlightened direction.

Presidency College was a great seat of learning, then in the hey-day of its success and pre-eminence under the able direction of its Principal Dr. Thompson. Though founded, built and financed by the Government of India for the purpose of imbuing the Indian people with a love for the learning and culture of their rulers, and generally for the propagation of all that was good and great in the civilization of the West, it did not ignore the claims of indigenous Indian culture. The study of Sanskrit, the Indian Languages, Indian History, Philosophy and Religions was encouraged. Professors from British Universities and Indian scholars of repute were appointed to the staff. The College, thus, represented a synthesis of all that was best in

the culture and tradition of both India and the West. Among its finest products were Professor Renganathan, Justice Subramania Aiyar, Professor Nevins, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and a host of other men who in their time were among the brightest luminaries of Indian public life. Special prominence was given to physical education in a land which for centuries was steeped in intellectual and spiritual culture to the neglect of the physical. Athletics, gymnastics, rugger, football, cricket, horse-riding, club-swinging, wrestling, boxing and other forms of sport were much in fashion. The youthful and energetic mind of Ramanathan suffered itself to be carried away by the surge of Western ideas and ideals of life. He who had spent a sheltered boyhood in an exclusive, old-world society whose dominant note was religion and orthodoxy, which frowned on all forms of boyish sport and diversion, must have been startled to find himself transported into a wholly new environment. On every side he saw the undergraduates engaged in sports and gymnastics and their talk for the most part centered upon prowess in these fields.

The youth could not escape the contagion. The gymnast whose broad chest and strong muscles resembled those of *Hanuman* captivated his fancy. Solemnly he asked himself the question, "Why is it not possible for me to develop my body similar to his?" In answer, he made a pious resolve to go through a course of gymnastics and other forms of manly exercise calculated to secure for him the highest possible development of his physical powers. From that day onwards, he was passionate in the pursuit of his objective. Horse-riding, wrestling and club-swinging virtually monopolized his attention. Two years of unrelenting effort brought him very near to his ideal, a body brimming with health and strength, vitality and vigour, capable of sustaining the stupendous strains

his subsequent life was destined to impose on him. His dress and his manner of life, conformed to the best patterns of Western fashion.

We catch a glimpse of his life at Madras, from a speech of his: "We entered the Presidency College of Madras, and we found ourselves nowhere by the side of the men who were reading there. They flew to us and their talk was about gymnastics. We never knew anything about sports. They took the Indian club and went through with it all kinds of exercises, and said, 'Now, you try.' I tried with one hand and could not succeed. The club simply went about in all directions and they laughed and said, 'Try with both hands.' We could not do it; we had not been properly trained. We regretted it very much and I asked, 'Who taught you these things?' They said the 'The Gymnast.' I said, 'I want to see the Gymnast.' I saw him. What a figure he was, like *Hanuman* with a broad chest and strong muscles! A kindly man, he put us through gymnastics and in the course of two years we became strong. He taught us wrestling and all other forms of sport. In the pride of my strength, my one idea was to encounter every man and turn him down. Then a voice spoke within me and said, 'You want to throw that man down because you are proud, because you are given an opportunity to strengthen your mind and body. Is that right?' and out of that strength a great pity arose for the weak and so from day to day, I learnt from association with sages and very important men in the country, that the correct view of life is very different from the ordinary conceptions of duty as generally understood by the people."

He is said to have been active in the debates of the Union where by his native powers of speech and his fearless espousal of unpopular causes, he made an early reputation as a forceful and persuasive speaker. He was one of its leading lights

and in debates the weaker side generally looked up to him for support, which was readily given.

Love of music was a passion of his early life. Here he developed that faculty which proved to be at once an ornament and a solace of his later life.

But in his intellectual pursuits, he displayed neither the brilliance nor even the enthusiasm shown by his brother Arunachalam at Cambridge. He had little flair for Mathematics, but in English and Logic he was reputedly proficient. He won the English-Essay Prize and elicited from Dr. Thompson the remark that no other Indian undergraduate, so far as he knew, wielded the English Language to better effect than he.

The years rolled on and the brothers, having completed the Intermediate in Arts found themselves admitted to the Degree Course when the father is said to have received disturbing reports of the elder son Coomaraswamy's youthful excesses and saw no choice but to recall both the brothers home. Their uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy set them both on their professional studies. Thus ended prematurely the academic career of the man who is our chief concern here, who in later life was to hold spellbound academic audiences in many lands and in many reputed seats of learning with his learned discourses and make an impassioned plea for the diffusion of high university culture in his own land.

Presidency College did not give him a degree nor did she inscribe his name in the roll of conspicuous scholastic achievement. But she gave him something that is not in the power of every university to give, namely a well-exercised and highly-developed physique that did not, through a long period of strenuous activity, fail to answer his persistent and resolute calls. Moreover, it was this early association with India in the impressionable period of their lives that strengthened the brothers' passion for Indian culture and learning, Indian religion

and philosophy and for Indian ways of life, a passion which distinguished them from other leaders of the country.

Ramanathan's life gives the lie direct to the theory propagated by educationists that academic failure necessarily connotes failure in life. In the purely intellectual sense Royal College gave him little, but Presidency College gave him less. It is, indeed, remarkable that a man whose collegiate education fell far short of the ideal, should have achieved eminence in many spheres of intellectual life.

STUDENT-AT-LAW

Sir Muthucoomaraswamy now took upon himself cheerfully and nobly the responsibility of educating and bringing up his nephews. Wise judges have ascribed much of the future greatness and pre-eminence achieved by the nephews to the wisdom and energy shown by the uncle in the discharge of that responsibility. He obtained for Ramanathan an apprenticeship as Student-at-Law under Sir Richard Morgan, Attorney-General (Queen's Advocate as he was then called) a Burgher gentleman of high repute and "the most profound lawyer Ceylon produced." J. R. Weinman says of him, "Undoubtedly, Sir Richard Morgan was one of the most distinguished of our Attorney-Generals. He was equally good whether as a lawyer, legislator or diplomatist. No Member of the Government commanded such influence as he did for many years."

Obviously fortune had now begun to smile on the young apprentice, for it was no ordinary privilege to learn the art and craft of law under so great a master. In later life, paying tribute to the memory of his adored teacher, Ramanathan said, "It was my good fortune to become a law-student under Sir Richard Morgan, a most amiable man, one of the finest characters of Ceylon. He taught me not merely the law but all the principles

that a jurist should know. He gave me judicial knowledge and not petty-fogging legal knowledge which is the pride of ordinary lawyers."

It should be remembered that at the time we are speaking of, there did not exist in Ceylon an institution for the education and training of would-be lawyers. It was the practice with aspirants to forensic fame to article themselves to lawyers on payment of a fee and on completing their apprenticeship, to pass an examination held by the Legal Council. Ramanathan resolved to make the best use of the opportunity now afforded him and to make a man of himself. It is true that as an undergraduate at Madras, his chief preoccupation was physical culture to the detriment of his intellectual pursuits; but when he returned to Colombo, the focus of his interests changed completely. The towering example of his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, then in the hey-day of his illustrious career, was before him. And Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* which the uncle had judiciously placed in the hands of the nephew did the rest. He felt that his proper calling was law partly because then, as how, it afforded the best scope for talent and was the surest passport to social esteem and political advancement. Moreover, his innate love of independence would not thrive in any other field; the lusty wild fowl languishes in the official cage, as the saying goes. He betook himself to the study of Law with an energy and enthusiasm which belied his care-free life at Madras, with a grim determination to carve out a brilliant future for himself, and to maintain the glorious traditions of his family. Never in after life did he falter or swerve from the path that he had mapped out for himself.

Sir Richard Morgan's influence was potent upon his intellectual and moral development and his whole subsequent career, for Sir Richard, besides being a great exponent of law and a born teacher,

was also a great exemplar of manly virtue and goodness. His character in public and private life was unblemished. In practical life he exemplified the high and noble qualities of truthfulness, unremitting industry, and devotion to duty, qualities which could not have failed to leave their imprint upon an earnest and impressionable youth aiming at self-advancement. Of him J. R. Weinman says, "Sir Richard Morgan was the most profound lawyer Ceylon produced and as a legislator, he was unequalled. For years, he practically ruled the Colony and shaped the wisper of Queen's House. He was a broad-minded man of most liberal views."

Dr. Isaac Thambyah says, "Sir Richard Morgan was Ramanathan's good angel. Ramanathan has always spoken of his master in terms of great gratitude and affection. Sir Richard's extensive library was ever accessible to the young student who soon became a very voracious reader of the most solid literature so readily available. He read not only such ponderous works on law as Dormat, Austin and Maine but also works on political economy and other heavy literature." Speaking of his training in law, Ramanathan said: "In olden times, we had very superior men amongst us who thoroughly deserved the names 'Honourable' and 'Learned' and we were glad to go as apprentices to them, as we were given opportunities of being present at consultations and learning how to hold aloof from circumstances which mislead the judgement, how to question persons as to the discovery of the proper situation of affairs, and how to select right principles for the adjudication of a case; they reasoned these things thoroughly in the presence of the law-students. Then again, the students had the use of the master's library, which among other books, contained reports of the decisions of the House of Lords, the Court of Inquiry, and the American Courts. At each meeting, he would give us references and we read up the cases, made

notes, and presented them at the next meeting; and so we were trained as to the selection of principles to the particular cases.

"It was hard work and what was dreaded most were prejudices, likes and dislikes, and going off at a tangent. By constant association with our masters, our reason became habituated to the use of equitable principles and the attainment of right judgement. It was not enough merely to proceed to right judgement. We had to learn the art of expressing our judgements in the clearest possible terms. Our exposition had to be lucid, and we had to leave nothing unsaid that ought to have been said in the proper manner. In this manner, we were trained from day to day, and when we were admitted to the examination, we necessarily passed it. There were no deplorable failures such as we see at the present time." It was in this happy atmosphere of profound learning and expert direction that Ramanathan passed his legal apprenticeship, ever hungry to see and to hear, learning his craft, making acquaintance with the legal fraternity as he began to feel his feet under him. No wonder that, with a teacher of such singular distinction and a pupil of such exceptional aptitude, zeal and receptivity, the results achieved were startling.

In 1873, after two years' study instead of the prescribed three, Ramanathan was examined by Sir Edward Creasy, a scholar and historian of great distinction, who was Chief Justice of Ceylon between 1860 and 1877, and Mr. Justice Charles Stewart. His fellow-candidates were Mr. Joseph Grenier, later Puisne Justice, and Mr. Henry Creasy, a son of Sir Edward Creasy, who later became a well-known solicitor. He was called to the Bar as an Advocate and commenced his career, which was destined to leave its imprint on the legal history of the country.

CHAPTER V

LAWYER — MARRIAGE

"There is no doubt that of all studies in the world, the only two which make directly for the uplift of humanity from passion and low desire are Divinity and Law."

Ramanathan

"He was always a great champion of the rights of the Bar. It was more as a student of the Law, its science and theory, of which he had a profound knowledge, that he was famous rather than in its practice. I have heard him speak with enthusiasm of the value of the study of Law as a training for good citizenship and the higher responsibility of life.".

Justice T. F. Garvin

IN 1873 Ramanathan was sworn in as an advocate of the Supreme Court. He had received the best legal education that the country could provide. This education was further reinforced by the expert counsel and skilful guidance given in the theory and practice of law, and what is more, by the vigilant and unceasing interest taken in the nephew's career by his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy the first non-Christian or non-Jew to be called to the English Bar. Sir Edward Creasy, then Chief Justice of Ceylon had also his contribution to make. Dr. Isaac Thambyah says, "Sir Edward Creasy, Ramanathan thinks, was a great exemplar. He was, he says, one of the finest speakers in the world, not alone for the manner in which he rounded his sentences but for his impressive delivery, chasteness of diction and earnestness of purpose. Ramanathan was one of the rapt listeners to the eloquent lectures on International Law which Sir Edward

Creasy used to deliver from his seat on the Bench to lawyers and law-students gathered round the Bar-table and there is no doubt that Sir Edward Creasy was the young lawyer's model of a speaker. To Sir Edward Creasy, Ramanathan may be said to be indebted very largely for his chaste and cultured style of speaking for which he is so famous. There are many effective speakers at the Colombo Bar, but in respect of oratory, brilliant without being burdensome, elegant without signs of effort, Ramanathan may be said to stand very high." Sir Edward's lecture on *Studies that Help for the Bar* evidently left a deep and lasting impression on the eager and receptive youth, for it was in every way a classic. Among many other things, the Chief Justice stressed the importance of learning, both secular and divine, ancient and modern and the pursuit of Truth for Truth's sake (*verum propter verum*). He exhorted them to study religion and philosophy, for jurisprudence is knowledge of things human and divine and imparts to its votaries a true understanding of right and wrong.

No better equipment could be found for a youth who sought to scale the ladder that would carry him to professional eminence. Besides, nature had endowed him with rich and varied talents. Gifted with a voice of incomparable fulness, a steady and spontaneous flow of words, a handsome and imposing presence and brought up in an atmosphere of purity and high thinking by his noble father and his great uncle and trained by the most eminent lawyers of his time, he commenced his career at the Bar under the happiest auspices. It was then evident that this young man would, in the fulness of time, be not merely a leader of the Bar, but also a leader of men.

Ramanathan once made the following reference to his career at the Bar; "I was called to the Bar in my twenty-second year. I held my ground there and pleaded the cause of all communities and

won their confidence as a lawyer who does his duty properly, without fear or favour, ill-will or affection." No wonder, his success was instantaneous. He had not to wade through the lower courts to come up to the higher ones.

It was said by competent judges that the laurels that Ramanathan won in the profession of law were in themselves sufficient to place him among the Immortals of his Country's Fame. And lawyers of those days were a formidable race possessed of deep and varied learning, endowed with extra-ordinary subtlety of intellect, given to florid and long-winded eloquence and ingenious cavil, terrors to witnesses and even to judgess. A contemporary has left the following record: "Sir Ponnambalam practised as an advocate at a time when there were giants at Hulftsdorp, his doughtiest opponent being the late Mr. Frederic Dornhorst. Those were great days at Hulftsdorp; Mr. Ramanathan, as he then was, appeared for the prosecution as Solicitor-General in all celebrated cases and almost invariably Mr. Dornhorst defended. What forensic battles used to be waged, Mr. Ramanathan calm, cool and suave, Mr. Dornhorst vehement and forceful! The Solcitor-General, however, with his apparent calmness and suavity of manner, could retort with a sting when he thought the occasion demanded it, and not infrequently, his replies were crushing. At the same time, nothing seemed to ruffle him."

Dr. Isaac Thambyah says, "For the retort courteous and yet caustic, Ramanathan is remarkable. In a big Crown case, not long ago, he was at his best in his polished but pointed parryings of Mr. Rudra's heavy, sledge-hammer onslaughts. In point of style, the late Mr. Dumbleton had much in common with Ramanathan, and the style of both was markedly different from the crushing rhetoric of Mr. Dornhorst or the compelling forcibleness of the Chief Justice."

He was never a victim to the fatal fallacy

which has been the bane of many noble and talented natures, that genius alone does everything. His energy while at the height of his forensic success was astounding. He would often work till the small hours poring over his briefs, mastering intricate points of law, searching for authorities and then be back at his desk before the rest of the world was up for the day. Toil and sweat were his portion through life. While even men of the toughest breed would have succumbed to such amazing strain, it was surprising that he maintained glowing health and vitality to the end of life. J. R. Weinman says: "In industry Ramanathan was not surpassed." When to native talent is superadded vigorous and unremitting industry, you produce the consummate master.

In the sphere of civil law he was in the very forefront. He dazzled his contemporaries by his superb mastery of every feature of a case of appalling complexity, by the brilliance of his forensic eloquence, his firm grasp of the law, his daring and intrepid advocacy and his adroit skill in the art of the thrust and parry.

A very remarkable quality of his as a lawyer, was his fearlessnes in advocacy. He was as fearless in the practice of his profession as he was in every other walk of life. He took up only cases in the justice of which he firmly believed and in their advocacy he displayed the most dauntless courage and fought with supreme tenacity, undeterred by the fear of wounding the susceptibilities of his colleagues or the judges

No judge did with impunity attempt to browbeat him or treat his views with scant respect. The story goes that an Englishman, one Mr. Smith instituted legal proceedings against the Medical Department on the ground that Mrs. Smith had died at hospital as the result of burns she had sustained owing to neglect and indifference on the part of the medical officers. The action was dismissed

but again came up in appeal before Sir Charles Layard, the Chief Justice and Mr. Justice Moncrieff, the Senior Puisne Judge. Ramanathan, then Solicitor-General, appeared for the prosecution. Between the Bench and the Prosecuting-Counsel, there ensued a heated exchange of words, for there never was any love lost between Ramanathan and the Chief Justice. Ramanathan was not the man to give in but hit back with all the resources at his command. An eye-witness, reporting the incident says, "A historic occasion was the celebrated Hospital Case in appeal before Sir Charles Layard, Chief Justice and Mr. Justice Moncrieff, the Senior Puisne Judge.

"The Crown was fighting a peculiar case, the principal witness, the Surgeon-in-charge of the patient, not having been called. Scarcely a half-hour passed without exchanges between Sir Charles and Ramanathan. His Lordship insisted on being enlightened on certain points; the Solicitor-General was obdurate. Matters came to a crisis one morning when the Chief Justice was of opinion that the Court was not being fairly treated. A storm seemed imminent when the luncheon interval came round. When the court re-assembled, the Attorney-General, Sir Alfred Lascelles was seen within the 'horse-shoe'. The explanation was made, but not by the Solicitor-General. The case was sent back for the omission to be supplied. It was the last occasion Mr. Justice Moncrieff came on the Bench. He retired a few days later." It was said that during this memorable trial, Ramanathan settled all scores with Chief Justice Layard.

It was common knowledge that Ramanathan rarely got on smoothly with judges. What they could not relish in him was his ruthless propensity to prick through their vanities and pretensions. Ramanathan, when Solicitor-General, was on one occasion a few minutes late to Court having been held up in the Law-Library. But an unfriendly judge drew his attention to it. Subsequently, every

occasion (and that was far-too-frequent) on which the judge in question came to the Bench late, Ramanathan would pull out his pocket-watch and hold it up for some seconds, look at the watch and then at the judge, aggravating the misery and the discomfiture of an unpunctual judge.

In an action for maintenance, which came up in appeal, Ramanathan was counsel for the aggrieved woman. He submitted that the husband was rich and prosperous and could, therefore, pay an enhanced amount. An unfriendly English judge interposed in tones of arrogant superiority, "Mr. Ramanathan, I receive a salary of a thousand and more. Can you honestly call me rich or prosperous?" "My Lord," returned the Counsel, "here in this land, you own a carriage and pair. In your own, Heaven knows, if you could afford a horse."

Ramanathan was once arguing a case and the judge, refusing to accept the many arguments he put forward, sought to know his authority. The Counsel, in exasperation, cried out, "Authority! Authority! All that your Lordship cares for is authority and nothing more."

There can be no higher tribute to Ramanathan's genius for advocacy than the fact that in a sensational legal action wherein Ramanathan appeared for one side, the other found it imperative to retain Sir Eardley Norton, the "Lion of the Madras Bar" if it was to have a comparable chance in the action. The two giants in combat were masters of repartee. When Sir Eardley let slip a remark that the learned Counsel was singing like a nightingale, the other promptly retaliated, "True, My Lord, but my learned friend was soaring heavenwards like a lark and is now dropping down to the earth, again like a lark." None other has enriched the annals of our legal history with a greater fund of anecdote than this relentless exponent of law.

No wonder his clients reposed confidence in

him and his judges respected him. It is said that Ceylon had great lawyers, but Ramanathan stood on an eminence all his own. Clients flocked to him from every quarter. Litigants from the North travelled to Colombo to retain him. And that was long before the advent of the railway or the motor-vehicle, when a journey to Colombo was both arduous and expensive.

Young and inexperienced lawyers, struggling to gain a foothold in the profession, found in him a friend and ally ever ready to help and guide them forward, for it was one of his life-long convictions that it is part and parcel of an elder's duty to help aspiring youth and guide them along correct lines. He was ever a great friend of youth. The late E. W. Jayawardene, K. C., paying a tribute to his memory, said, "He was a great friend of the younger generation, always ready to proffer advice and guidance to all who sought it."

Ramanathan clung to the view that a sound knowledge of the law, apart from its professional and monetary advantages has a higher value as a training for good citizenship and the higher responsibilities of life. It is as a "tremendous spiritual and moral force guiding and regulating human thought and action" that he regarded Law. "It is," he said, "as thought that the great 'Spiritual Power' known as Law operates on men's minds. This thought of neighbourly love linked with the thought of punishment in the event of violated love moderates selfish thoughts and actions." Elsewhere he says, "The law is holy; the law is spiritual, and we must abide in the law and if we do not abide in the law, we shall go wrong. I took that for my creed and I have never departed from the behests of the law. Likes and dislikes of the body had no chance with me. What we want is law to guide us, to take us straight on." Such a 'Spiritual Power' should not be tainted or desecrated by unholy hands.

The true function of a lawyer is to help in the administration of justice and the vindication of truth but not in their perversion. Ramanathan had little sympathy with that brand of lawyers who prostituted their gifts merely to make money or to please their clients. He defined the true functions of a lawyer in the following terms: "I assure you that there is many a fine spirit in the legal profession as certified by judge after judge from the Bench of the Supreme Court. Such lawyers do not care to make scandal out of trifles, or to earn a cheap reputation as a great lawyer in the country. These men are the gems of the legal profession in Ceylon. They despise the prostitution of their talents in a place so sacred as a Court of Justice; they will never be tyrannical in their cross-examination. They will not put to a witness a question which they will be ashamed to put to their brother or sister, father or mother, if they were in the witness box. They would treat honest suitors and witnesses as tenderly as possible, because they feel that they themselves are ministers privileged to be engaged in the administration of justice under supervision of the judges of the Island. But unfortunately there is also another type of lawyers to be found occasionally in Ceylon, who, disregarding the noble traditions of the Bar, as we have them from ancient Rome and from high-bred Englishmen, misuse their talents from morning till evening and fancy that they are great lawyers — that they are leaders of the profession. Yes, leaders in scandal-making, leaders in tyrannical cross-examination, leaders in the art of making black white, leaders in everything except the successful maintenance of the traditions of the Bar, which they had been carefully taught during their student-ship in the Inns of Court." The popular conception of law as a means of making easy money was foreign to him. The purpose of the study of law is not to make money but to make one

good. He said, "It is said that law is learnt to make money, but I said to myself, 'Oh dear me, that is not meant to make money, but to make me good.' They say, we are practising the law, that is to say, applying legal principles to cases of persons who had got into difficulty, but many put that man out of that difficulty by what is called a species of legerdemain. They do not apply the law in the right and proper way. When I entered the profession, I was disgusted when I heard a leading man of the Bar say with a grin, 'I bamboozled the Magistrate and got him off.' I said to myself, we are officers engaged in the administration of justice and work under the very eyes of able and honourable judges and surrounded by honourable and learned men, learned in the law. I said that bamboozling a judge cannot be right. In that way I kept myself out of harm's way, believing that my endeavour from early morning till late at night should be to do justice, to do right, and help others to move on the just and right path."

He was most courteous and gentle towards his clients, most polite and considerate towards his colleagues and most respectful and genial to judges who did their duty. He fought many a legal battle in which he was pitted against the foremost lawyers of his time and often emerged with victory in his hands. He carried with him his philosophic calm and equability of temper into the practice of the law. When his judges or his colleagues attempted to snub or browbeat him or even make him the target of unseemly and disconcerting attack, in the most trying moments when lesser minds would lose themselves in wrath or discomfiture, he would maintain a perfectly cool and unruffled head and when his time came, deal his adversary a knock-out blow. Messrs J. R. Weinman and E. W. Jayawardene, K. C., throw a flood of light on this trait of Ramanathan's

character as an advocate. Weinman says, "Ramanathan used to appear in the District Court and judge Berwick vainly tried to squash or snub him. Layard, when Chief Justice tried the same game and failed. He always came up smiling and the judge lost his temper. These were days of great lawyers whose personalities greatly weighed with judges and commanded the regard and respect of the public. Among them were Sir S. Grenier, Van Langenberg, Dornhorst, Sir Layard Brown, Joseph Grenier, C. Brito, Ramanathan, Sir James Peiris, and Sir Thomas De Sampayo. Those who knew him or saw him only at the end in his declining years when his steps were feeble, his eyes dim, and his voice husky, can have little conception of him in his prime. Calm and collected, he would listen to his opponents' sneers and jibes with closed eyes as in profound sleep, but he would note any slip and reply with deadly effect. Dornhorst, who was a master of invectives and jibes and sneers, once went for Ramanathan quite forgetting that he (Ramanathan) had the right of reply. A weak judge on the Bench did not interfere and stop the personalities. Ramanathan bided his time, got up and indulged in the fiercest of invectives against Dornhorst who was powerless to reply. He could only lose his temper."

On one occasion, Ramanathan was completely bowled out. He was appearing for the defence in a memorable trial before the Chief Justice Sir Bruce Burnside. On the day of trial, Sir Bruce caught him in a tight corner. The parties had been called and the trial was announced. Ramanathan stood up, sporting his resplendent turban, as was his wont in the Legislative Council and informed Court that he was appearing for the defence. Sir Bruce, who was an authoritarian and no respector of persons, told him firmly and decisively that he would not hear him thus arrayed. The only course open to the defending counsel was to repudiate

his turban or his client. And characteristically, he chose to repudiate his turban and save his client.

It was a liberal education for any young lawyer who wanted the elements of his business to listen to the great counsel expounding the law of the land. His forensic speeches were in every way excellent, lucid, vigorous, closely argued, exquisitely tactful, often rising to considerable heights of sober eloquence. Contemporary testimony shows him to be a prince of cross-examiners. If anything damaging were to be got out of an adverse witness, Ramanathan would get it, and that, without resorting to any of the traditional brow-beating tactics. There was never a more affable or a more deadly cross-examiner, while no man knew better how to bring out his own case without offering points of attack to the enemy.

A contemporary has left on record, "His cross-examination was refreshing to watch. He affected an air of gentleness with his 'victim' and wormed things out of him, which harsher methods might have failed to do, by putting the witness on his guard. His re-examination also was very damaging to the other side. He seemed to have a remarkable way of undoing all that a cross-examiner had gained for his case and showing the evidence off in a very different light.

"His manner of speech always arrested attention. He had a quaint way, which often proved effective, of mixing up philosophy with his arguments. Even where his speech seemed to be irrelevant, there was always something behind it. A clever brain was working out a line of argument the necessity of which had been unforeseen. Ramanathan would remain seated while an adversary was crose-examining a witness or addressing the court and seem to be absorbed in thought, giving the impression that his mind was at work on quite a different plane. As a matter of fact, he

was taking in every detail, and from an appearance of perfect complacency, he would suddenly intervene with all the fire of the fighter in him to correct or clear the air. Many were the occasions on which there were sharp exchanges between the Bench and Ramanathan, whose calmness never forsook him and even his sharpest retorts were made in those gentle, studied tones so characteristic of him."

E. W. Jayawardene, K. C., in one of his tributes to the memory of Ramanathan said, "He was a dangerous rival to me. He was a perfect master of the parry and the thrust and in repartee he was unexcelled. There was a certain calmness in his advocacy which appealed to everybody." Sir Stanley Obeyesekera, K. C., said of him, "After Sir Ponnambalam joined the Bar, by diligence and force of character and by thoroughness in his work he achieved a position in which he was regarded as an outstanding member of the Bar of Ceylon. His arresting characteristics were an unruffled calm, an unrivalled diction and capacity for self-expression."

Ramanathan had a high conception of the part that lawyers had to play not only in the administration of justice but also in the public life of a country. Of the contribution of lawyers to public life, he said, "Broad-minded lawyers gave tone and direction to public affairs in Parliament and in Municipal Councils, and were sought by the people as their natural advisors in all their difficulties throughout the length and breadth of England. No one there dared to speak of them with disrespect, much less as pest of the country. It would seem that in Ceylon they were to be likened unto the pestiferous snails of Kalutara. Those of a learned, liberal and honourable profession must be greatly depressed to hear themselves compared to the slimy, destructive creatures which everybody longs to crush under his feet. The truth was that in

Ceylon many a Chief Justice and other judges of the Supreme Court had borne testimony publicly in Court to the fact that without the aid of the Bar, they could not administer justice satisfactorily. The members of the Bar were the colleagues of judges in the administration of justice, and the natural advisors of the country in all matters of law and legislation. They were devoted to the safety and well-being of the public and how galling it was for these men to be spoken of so lightly. If a joke was needed to divert attention from the prevailing heat of the day, it need not have been cracked at the expense of men who were doing their very best to serve the public under the direct supervision of the judges of the Supreme Court."

Another faculty that served him well not merely in the profession of law but in every other walk of his life was his prodigiously tenacious memory harnessed to a powerful, clear intelligence and his capacity for rapid thinking. The story goes that in the hey-day of his career at the Bar, he appeared as the Chief Counsel in one of the sensational cases of the day, one in which scores of witnesses gave evidence. It is said that in his summing up, he was able to refer to everyone of those witnesses by name and quote the evidence of each, all from memory. It was reckoned a very great feat of memory.

The lawyers of those days were stalwart giants, well-versed in the theory and practice of the law and Ramanathan stood on an eminence all his own by reason of his lofty conception of the duties and responsibilities of a lawyer, and by reason of his astonishing industry, his supreme courage and his remarkable ability for lucid and persuasive exposition. He practised at the Bar until 1886 when his preoccupation with political life and his growing interest in the study of religion and philosophy made him give up a brilliant and lucrative practice.

MRS. RAMANATHAN

The fates had marked him for a higher sphere of usefulness in the offices of the Solicitor-General and the Acting Attorney-General, which he filled for fourteen years with the greatest possible distinction.

MARRIAGE

In his twenty-third year, a year after he commenced his practice at the Bar, Ramanathan's marriage with Chellachiammal, second daughter of Nannithamby Mudaliyar, took place in 1874 at 56, Ward Place, Colombo. Nannithamby Mudaliyar was one of the wealthiest and most influential men of his time. A leading ship-owner engaged in export-trade, particularly in the export of coffee, and moreover, a broker of Messrs Shand & Co., he had amassed a vast fortune and was a power in the land. He was no stranger to Ramanathan, inasmuch as his sister Visalakshi was Ramanathan's grandmother and wife of Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy.

The marriage was a great social event in Colombo, for it meant the alliance of two leading and influential families in the city. Ramanathan was then a most eligible bachelor, singularly endowed with high character, uncommon talents and an extraordinary charm of manner and person. Chellachiammal was one of the most accomplished and charming young women of her time. Her father had denied his daughter none of the refinements that the age could give.

The marriage was solemnized according to Hindu rites amidst great pomp and splendour and was attended by the greatest in the land. Among the distinguished guests on this occasion were members from the Royal Houses of England and Russia, who at that time were on a visit to the Island. The Maharajas of Ramnad and Thethipura, Rajah Sir Salavai, Ramaswamy Mudaliyar and Sri la Sri Paramaguru Deshigar also specially arrived there as wedding guests.

The route from Queen's House to Cinnamon

Gardens was richly spanned by arches of palms, green foliage and hill-country flowers. The bride and the bride-groom were taken in a magnificent car drawn by elephants. It was preceded by bands of expert musicians specially engaged from India. An abundance of fireworks added colour and zest to the procession almost unparalleled in the country.

The *Oonchal* ceremony on the fourth day was conducted exclusively by a party of wedding specialists from Madura.

CHAPTER VI

SIR MUTHUCOOMARASWAMY

"The foremost man of the twenty millions or more of the Dravidian race."

Ferguson, Editor of "The Ceylon Observer."

"Sir Muthucoomaraswamy was certainly fit to occupy a place of honour in the British Parliament. To him we owe many a privilege of speech and criticism in Council and many a noble example of fearless independence and earnest advocacy of public interests. Sir Richard Morgan, on the side of Government and Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, for the people, were such giant champions, that when they met in debate, no inch of ground was left unfought. The sittings of the Legislative Council were made so lively, earnest and interesting that the council board of today presents a tame figure in contrast to the tournaments of those days."

"The Ceylon Review"

NO biography of Ramanathan can lay claim to completeness, which does not comprise a brief sketch of the life and work of one who, more than any other, exercised a most potent and abiding influence on him and gave a clear direction to his extraordinary talents. Sir Muthucoomaraswamy was Ramanathan's maternal uncle, acclaimed by contemporary opinion one of the foremost personalities of his time. Ferguson, the celebrated editor of the "*Observer*" described him as "the foremost man of the twenty millions or more of the Dravidian race." Statesman and scholar, philosopher and man of religion, patriot and idol of the nation, admired guest of the salons of Paris and the cherished friend and companion of Victorian premiers,

poets and philosophers, and lovingly depicted as '*Kusinara*' the hero, by Disraeli, Viscount Beaconsfield, in his unfinished novel published posthumously in "*The Times*", London, by the sheer force of genius and the charm of a masterful and magnetic personality, he gained for himself among the elite of Western society a vogue that was not vouchsafed to any other Oriental before or after, and shed on his country a lustre and a radiance that time has not dimmed.

Ramanathan has immortalized his indebtedness to his uncle in the following words: "The greatest and the most enduring influence on my life was my uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy." It has rightly been said that no great man ever escaped a touch of hero-worship. From early life Ramanathan conceived for his illustrious uncle the intensest affection and admiration and never ceased to regard him as his guide, philosopher and friend. He drank in every word that fell from his lips and learned from him the secret of political action and popular oratory. No disciple deserved more of his master nor did any master serve his disciple better. It should in passing be remarked that to few other men did the Gods grant so brilliant a galaxy of teachers and mentors to guide them and to mould them in the formative periods of their lives as they did to Ramanathan. Ponnambala Mudaliyar, the father, Dr. Boake C. W. Thamotharam Pillai, Dr. Thompson, Sir Richard Morgan, Sir Muthucoomarasamy and then, his spiritual *guru* Arulparanandha Swamigal were men far removed from the common run of humankind, men who lived for certain ideals, men who achieved the highest possible distinction in their respective fields of active life.

Born in 1833, the year that saw the birth of our parliamentary institutions under British tutelage, in the meridian splendour of his father's illustrious career as the first representative of the Tamil-

speaking population of the Island in the country's supreme legislature and acknowledged leader of the non-Christian Tamils, Muthucoomaraswamy was marked out for a great destiny.

The boy entered Queen's Academy, now Royal College, in 1842, and remained there until 1851. While there, he gave clear evidence of his extraordinary talents. A contemporary remarked, "Wanting in neither riches nor intelligence, young Coomaraswamy's school and college career was exceptionally brilliant. The Academy may well be proud of having trained for Ceylon one of her greatest sons." On leaving Queen's Academy, it was his singular good fortune to be placed under the instruction and guidance of one Dr. McIver an accomplished scholar, well-versed in classical, and modern learning and imbued with a genuine love for the Orient, her people and her distinctive culture. Having discerned in the lad a wealth of promise, he spared no pains not merely to set him on a course of intensive and systematic instruction in classical and modern languages but more, to stimulate in his pupil a genuine thirst for all liberal culture. The success achieved was amazing. Muthucoomaraswamy became one of the foremost scholars of his time, proficient in all that was accounted best in ancient and modern learning.

The arrival in Ceylon in 1851 of Lord Stanley, the eldest son of the Earl of Derby, the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1841—1845, and the grand reception and entertainment accorded to him and the celebrities of the Island by the Tamils gave Muthucoomaraswamy a splendid opportunity to give proof of his remarkable talents and attainments. As the sole spokesman of the Tamils at the age of eighteen, he created such a dazzling impression on the distinguished assembly that Governor Anderson appointed him a Cadet in the Civil Service and attached him to the Colombo Kachcheri, even before he had attained the legal

age of majority. Soon after, he was made a Police Magistrate and was commonly styled the "Boy Magistrate."

Had Coomaraswamy remained on in the Civil Service, he would undoubtedly have scaled the topmost heights of the Public Service, but the career of a bureaucrat, however cushy and glamorous, could not long sustain a youth of talent and ambition. He, therefore, resigned his magistracy and proceeded to England to study law and to gain for himself whatever accomplishments the West could offer an aspiring Oriental.

In those days, the practice of Ceylonese youth proceeding to England for higher learning, so common and so fashionable in our own day, was virtually unknown. Muthucoomaraswamy was a pioneer in this field. On arriving in England, he sought admission to one of the Inns of Court but was refused, because no one who was neither a Christian nor a Jew could gain entrance to that charmed and exclusive circle. This was, indeed, a formidable and apparently insurmountable barrier. The regulations against those professing religions other than Christianity or Judaism were extremely stringent. But the youth was not to be baffled or overawed. And now began the first of his many onslaughts against privilege and exclusiveness. With resolute energy and intrepid courage and backed by the reputation of his family, he hit hard at the frontiers and finally succeeded in prevailing upon the authorities of the Inns of Court to set aside this harsh and invidious rule. He thus earned for himself the distinction of being the first non-Christian or non-Jew to be admitted to the Inns of Court and called to the English Bar. Few men ever made their stay in Europe so fruitful and so productive of good to themselves and to their country as he. Few men enriched themselves so fully with the intellectual and moral wealth, with the political wisdom and experience of the West

as did this Oriental. Few established such intimate and enduring friendships with the choicest spirits of Victorian England as he, friendships destined to be so beneficial to the future of his country.

Lord Houghton (Monkton Milnes) one of his dearest friends, wrote of him in a letter to his nephew Sir P. Arunachalam : "I held him in great esteem and he has never received due credit for the energy with which he opened the Bar of England to all Eastern subjects of the Empress of India." According to Lord Houghton, Muthucoomaraswamy was greatly assisted by Lord Brougham in this matter. Of his life in London, J. R. Weinman says, "His career was a remarkable one. He was the first non-Christian Barrister, and after his call, starred it in London as an Eastern Prince. Princes in London were not as common then as they are now, and at the time, he was the solitary representative of the clan. He knew how to do it with Oriental magnificence and show and was taken in hand by Monkton Milnes and trotted through the best London drawing-rooms. He was made more of a lion than within recent times was Sir Pertab Singh or even the great 'Ranjit'. All the Mrs. Leo Hunters in London sent him their cards, and he was often seen at Lord Palmerston's 'At Homes'. Jowett of Balliol took him in hand when he visited Oxford, and Whewell of Trinity, when he visited Cambridge. He was a guest at Cliveden for sometime and was duly pictured in the *Illustrated London News*, then the only illustrated paper in England. His perfect manners, handsome presence, and good English and Monkton Milnes carried him through. Milnes had a habit of picking up and taking in hand celebrities of all kinds and dumping them at his breakfast or dinner table. Coomaraswamy was a special favourite of Milnes and stayed at his country place for sometime. Milnes records in his diary that Coomaraswamy fell very ill there and describes vividly and not without humour the various

speculations as to what should be done in case the worst happened."

Frequent references to Muthucoomaraswamy occur in Lord Houghton's letters to Governor Sir Charles MacCarthy. Lord Houghton's biographer Sir Wemyn Reid says, "The Hindu Barrister was Mr. Coomaraswamy, a member of the Legislative Council, Ceylon, of good family, broad education, and great intelligence. Milnes received him and was for sometime an honoured guest at Pryston (Milnes' home). Milnes' son (late Viceroy of Ireland) and daughter still retain the pleasantest recollections of the accomplished Hindu who was their father's guest in their early days. It happened that during his first visits to Yorkshire, Muthucoomaraswamy suffered from a very serious illness which at one time threatened his life and through which he was assiduously nursed by the family at Pryston. A lively recollection is still retained of the anxiety which Milnes showed at the time when Muthucoomaraswamy was at the worst. He had given his guest a promise that if the illness from which he was suffering ended fatally, he should not be buried in English fashion but should be cremated. Those who knew Lord Houghton will understand how, having given that promise, he was eager for the fulfilment, should the necessity unhappily arise; and the legend is still extant of the way in which he wandered about the broad domains and the umbrageous woods at Pryston until he had at last fixed upon the spot which was, in his opinion, entirely suited to what would have been the first cremation on English soil in modern times. Fortunately for the object of these delicate attentions, the good nursing at Pryston proved effectual, saving him from the fate to which he had been dedicated. No one, it need hardly be said, rejoiced more heartily than Milnes at the recovery of his interesting friend; but mingled with the rejoicing was a droll sense of disappointment at the thought

of the distinction which had been lost to Pryston for ever.

"Not the least signal of his public services was one which is little known but which is mentioned by Houghton and that was the opening of the English Bar to those who were neither Christians nor Jews. This was, according to Houghton, a task of such difficulty that it could not have been accomplished but for the zealous support of Lord Brougham and Lord Cairns, who were good enough to interest themselves in Coomaraswamy."

'*The Ceylon Review*' in its issue of October, 1894 says, "He found friends and gained admirers among the most leading men in England. In 1863, he spoke at a meeting of the British Association in Aberdeen referring to which Mr. Abernethy of that city wrote to Mr. A. M. Ferguson, 'The best speaker present was a native gentleman from your Island.' His versatility made him for the season the Lion of English society. Having moved in the highest circles of English society, he was a good judge of what position should be accorded to Colonial Englishmen. He never lost the distinctive characteristics of his nationality, but he was broad-minded enough to appreciate keenly many of the ideas of Western civilization.

"Meanwhile, he was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, being the first Non-Christian (not being a Jew) who obtained the privilege of being registered in the rolls of the Inns of Court. He was also elected honorary member of the Society of Arts and was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical and the Royal Geological Societies. He was likewise a Member of the Athenaeum Club. In politics and literature, Mr. Coomaraswamy gained the most coveted distinctions. Well-informed in every branch of polite learning, he found no difficulty in winning the respect of many a high-born and high-bred European gentleman."

On his return from the West, Muthucoomara-

swamy began practice at the Colombo Bar but not with the ardour and enthusiasm so essential to success in that sphere. Born as he was to immense wealth, rank and influence, success at the Bar as a passport to fame and fortune had little lure for him. His passion was to serve his country in keeping with the tradition of his forbears. He was nominated to represent the Tamil-speaking population of Ceylon in the Legislative Council in 1862, in succession to his uncle Mudaliyar Edirmannasingham. He served his people there with the greatest possible distinction for an unbroken period of seventeen years until his death in 1879, when his resplendent mantle descended on the shoulders of one who was destined to render it doubly resplendent. A great contemporary said, "His remarkable talents, his close attention to the study of political history and legislation, early developed in him the tendency to active political life, and in a few years after entering the legal profession, he was summoned to the Legislative Council as the representative of the Tamil-speaking population of the Island on the retirement of the Hon. Mr. Edirmannasingham. His immense wealth and resources did not necessitate an active practice at the Bar. With a command of English such as few Englishmen could boast of, he was a speaker of no common order. He combined grace of diction with fluency of speech. With hardly a taint of foreign accent, he ranked the best amongst the speakers of his time. Exhaustive on any subject on which he delivered himself, his addresses were often open to the charge of extreme length; but he never rose without propounding important sentiments in well-chosen language. No question came before him but he was most painstaking in studying it. Whenever it was necessary, he visited different parts of the Island and conferred with persons likely to furnish him with information. His experience and knowledge were, therefore, undoubted, and

in Downing Street, Coomaraswamy's dicta were much esteemed."

Muthucoomaraswamy was at any rate our first great patriot, who inaugurated the tradition of a man of exceptional talents and culture, a gentleman of independent means and high family tradition, brought up from his boyhood in the atmosphere of public life, devoting the whole of his working life to the service of his people in the country's supreme legislature, in an age in which politics was only a secondary and part-time pursuit. For him, it was primary, full-time employment and he gave of his very best ungrudgingly to the service of his country. Such men, alas, were rare in his day and all too rare in our own. Nurtured in the best traditions of Victorian statesmanship, having learnt the art and craft of good government by intimate and loving association with its choicest exemplars, Muthucoomaraswamy did more than any other man of his time to raise the tone, the standard of purity and competence in public life, to infuse into our people a high sense of patriotic duty, to advance the cause of democratic freedom and national sovereignty. The quality of his leadership was clearly reflected in the next seventy-five years of Ceylon politics.

There was hardly any question of national importance on which he did not bring to bear his tenacity and fearless independence, his immense learning and political experience. It was a source of great strength and comfort to the nation to know that their political fortunes were being guarded and advanced by one who could cross swords with the highest in this or any other land.

J. R. Weinman continues his memoirs of him: "Muthucoomaraswamy's forte was politics, and when he entered the Legislative Council, he was well-equipped with all the qualifications for a public man. He was a hard student and kept himself abreast of political and social questions. He

devoted practically all his time to public life. He studied carefully every question that came up for debate or discussion. He was a master of every Ordinance under consideration, and his criticism was always helpful and never carping or ill-natured. Perhaps, there was no other member, except perhaps Mr. Ramanathan, who spoke so frequently as he did. The motion for the disestablishment of the Church of England in Ceylon, which was carried by the help of some Officials, was by him. The speech was a magnificent one, and Sir M. E. Grant Duff, then Under-Secretary for the Colonies remarked during the course of the debate in the Commons that if people in Ceylon could make such excellent speeches, they might well be left to manage their own Church.

"The debate for disestablishment, that is the stoppage of religious grants to the Christian Church was started by Coomaraswamy who opened it in characteristic fashion. 'Sir, I am not a Christian. Yet I cannot forget here what a very worthy and eminent man, Professor Jowett, told me at Balliol ten years ago in the course of a discussion I had with him, that for ought he knew, I might be one.' The speech was lengthy and an able one, but consisted mainly of extracts from the opinions of various eminent persons As the '*Ceylon Times*' of the day remarked, the Colombo Library was despoiled of its books to furnish material for the debate. The main argument was 'that it is impolitic, unjust and, I must ever say, unchristian, to spend any portion of the taxes obtained from Buddhists, Mohammedans and Hindus for the maintenance of the churches and ministers of one section of Christians.'

"He wound up a speech of considerable length with a stock quotation from 'An old pagan writer, a pagan like myself.', '*Omnibus in terris quae sunt a Gadibus*' — and so on and came down to Dr. Norman Maclead,

'Perish policy and cunning,
Perish all that fears light,
Whether losing, whether winning,
Trust in God and do the right.'"

"Muttu Coomaraswamy," to quote Weinman further, "devoted practically his whole life to the service of his country, and was unsparing in his labours. There were few men who took such a keen and active interest in public affairs." A great contemporary described the speech on Disestablishment as "A magnificent effort for religious liberty and the most brilliant ever delivered in the Legislative Council, which in argument and oratory equalled the masterpieces of eloquence. All that human genius and giant effort could do for any cause was that day performed by Sir Coomaraswamy for the cause of religious liberty.....When all his public acts shall have been forgotten, even when the Legislative Council shall have been superseded, Sir Coomaraswamy's giant effort for the cause of religious liberty in Ceylon will be remembered as the grand model of earnest work for a great cause which all who seek to benefit their people and their country should strive to attain. His speech on this occasion has been universally acknowledged as a model of argument and oratory." Muthucoomaraswamy was on occasions a caustic and intemperate critic of the Official Members of the legislature and lost no time in pin-pointing their errors and shortcomings.

With a view to extinguishing polygamy and polyandry in the Kandyan Provinces, Governor Sir Henry Ward passed Ordinance No 13 of 1859 whereby all marriages among Kandyans were required to be registered. Subsequent events proved that he had strangely miscalculated the inclinations and tendencies of the Kandyans and that they were wholly unprepared for such a change.

Sir Henry, therefore, brought in an Ordinance in 1869 to counteract the evils of the legislation of 1859.

Muthucoomaraswamy failed to see how an amended ordinance should be found necessary, if the legislators had enacted the Ordinance of 1859 after careful thought and scrutiny.

At the conclusion of a long speech, he passed some severe strictures on the Official Members who were responsible for such hasty and ill-considered legislation. He said, "I feel it my duty to state that the Ordinance of 1859 should serve as a warning against hasty and ill-considered legislation. The Ordinance was enacted in the belief that the people were prepared for such a measure and that they fully understood and appreciated its provisions. Experience has proved that such is not the case. They should take note of this and be more cautious and less hurried than unfortunately is the tendency now in enacting our Ordinances. I also avail myself of this opportunity of dispelling a sophism propounded somewhere, that the Unofficial Members of this Council are irresponsible members, whilst the Officials were the really responsible members of the Council. This Ordinance of 1859 was introduced by the so-called responsible members. Death, promotion and the pension list have removed nearly all of them from Ceylon. Where was the responsibility attached to Official Members, when, if soon after enacting ill-considered ordinances, they were removed from the only sphere in which they could be made responsible for their shortcomings? Which of the responsible Officials who assisted in the enactment of the Ordinance of 1859 was there that day to answer the question, 'Why was such an Ordinance passed?' "

The strictures may seem a little too harsh; nevertheless, it shows how high was his conception of the responsibility of a Councillor's office.

Muthucoomaraswamy was a man of wide scholarly interests. He was a master of twelve languages including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Pali, Arabic and Sanskrit and the literatures enshrined in them.

SIR MUTHUCOOMARASWAMY

Such an accomplishment may not appear very remarkable in a modern, provided as he is with competent teachers and an abundance of authoritative books. But in his time, it was indubitably a singular achievement. Nothing short of a genuine passion for knowledge, of unflagging energy and an indomitable will combined with a prodigious intellect could have accomplished this feat. He was a pioneer in the revival of ancient Oriental learning and culture and an impassioned student of Eastern religions and philosophies, in an age when, under the impact of Western materialism, these treasures lay discarded and entombed in dusty and musty shelves. His translation from the Pali, of the Buddhist Scriptures, the *Sutta Nipata* and *Data Vamsa*, anticipated the work of the Pali Society. His translations of the great Tamil classic Harichandra and the *Hymns of Thayumanavar* opened up to the West new vistas of spiritual and philosophical thought.

It would not be an overstatement to say that to few Orientals was such privilege accorded of living on terms of the closest intimacy and friendship with the choicest spirits of Victorian England. His wealth of learning, his mastery of the thought and wisdom of both the East and the West, and his capacity for brilliant and persuasive exposition linked up with a handsome, genial, and lovable personality, opened up for him the homes of the elite of English society. "It was impossible," said a great contemporary, "to come in contact with him even for a short time without learning to love him." During his stay in England, he delivered several courses of lectures at various institutions on Eastern religions, philosophies and cultures, which were widely acclaimed by enlightened Western thought. He was to the West the best interpreter and exponent of all that was best in the East. All the proverbial mysticism and obscurity in which Eastern culture, religion and

until his death in 1953. He was, besides, a scholar of international repute and perhaps the finest exponent of Indian art, religion and culture. His many volumes are among the most authoritative works on these subjects. To him a great contemporary Dr. P. K Gode paid a tribute of praise in his Presidential Address to the All-India Oriental Conference: "I am sure the All-India Oriental Conference will co-operate whole-heartedly in any scheme organised by Indian scholars to commemorate the name and fame of this great patriot who, by his forceful, penetrating vision and unparalleled love of the beautiful kept the banner of Indian art flying in the remotest parts of the world."

As an orator Muthucoomaraswamy was unrivalled. He was popularly styled the 'Silver-tongued orator of the East' and the legislature rang with his rich and copious eloquence. As a wise and fearless champion of popular rights and as one who brought inexhaustible intellectual resources, a passion for justice and a philosophic outlook to bear on the business of politics and good government, he was without a peer. No wonder, schooled in the finest traditions of Victorian statesmanship, having learned the art and the craft of governing a country by loving and day-to-day association with the greatest exemplars of statecraft, with men like Gladstone, Disraeli and Palmerston, with such learning tempered by the philosophic wisdom of the East, he was, one may venture the opinion, a near approach to the Platonic ideal of the philosopher-statesman. Under his influence, the legislature became a hive of beneficent and vigorous activity. Ramanathan pays a tribute to this aspect of his uncle's work. He says, "When I entered the Legislative Council, in succession to my uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, I found the country sparkling with public spirit under the inspiration of his example and that of James Alwis."

Muthucoomaraswamy, like his nephew Rama-

nathan, was an educational thinker and reformer of genius and vision who gave his country's education a new strength and a new impetus. When the Government desired the appointment of a Director of Public Instruction who was to be an autocrat in educational matters untrammelled by any interference from outside, Muthucoomaraswamy pleaded for the establishment of a Board of Education fairly representative of the different races and religious denominations of the pupils to advise the Director. He argued strongly on this point. "In this matter of education", he said, "*vox populi* is *vox dei*. This Board will, therefore, be a graceful concession to those who are alarmed at the action of a sole Director. Then after all, as Your Excellency put it the other day, this Board is nothing but an experiment. Let us try the Board and the Director together. Should we find the connection bad, we can easily drop the latter and retain the former." He bemoaned the absence of scientific and technological education in the country and contended that Ceylon should keep pace with the spirit and trend of the times. As a result of his persistent and impassioned advocacy, the Science Laboratory was opened at Royal College and the Ceylon Technical College, established.

As early as 1865, he brought up the subject of education before the Council and succeeded in having a Select Committee appointed to inquire into the working of the School Commission and the educational wants of the country. The Committee with Sir Richard Morgan as Chairman sat for two years and at last about the end of 1867, presented an elaborate report wherein were embodied some far-reaching recommendations. They recommended, inter alia, the abolition of the School Commission, the establishment of a State Department of Education with a responsible Director at the helm and the revision of the Grant-in-aid Scheme.

"The effect of this reform," says Ramanathan,

"on the educational system of the country was most remarkable, for in 1869, the last year of the existence of the School Commission, there were 120 Government Schools attended by 1595 scholars, making a total of 140 schools and 8751 scholars. In 1870, the year following the abolition of the School Commission, the number of schools and scholars ran up to 385 and 16,927 respectively. In 1874, the statistics of the Department were rising still higher; there were 838 schools and 47,278 scholars. Two years later in 1876, the number of schools and scholars had steadily risen to 996 schools and 60,537 scholars. In 1878, the number of schools increased to 1128 and scholars, to 67,750."

This stupendous increase in the numbers of schools and students was largely the result of Muthucoomaraswamy's vision and foresight and his labours in the cause of his country's educational advance.

When Muthucoomaraswamy was a name to conjure with in British political circles, the deposed Maharani of Tanjore looked far and near for some one who could intercede with the British Parliament on her behalf and secure for her grandson the throne of Tanjore rendered vacant by her husband the late Maharajah's decease and now held by the British. Muthucoomaraswamy was deemed the obvious choice and the Maharani commissioned her *Guru*, Arulparanandha Swamigal, to meet Muthucoomaraswamy in Colombo and prevail on him to undertake this mission of peculiar difficulty. Arulparanandha Swamigal, the grand-father of Dr. S. Natesan, Ramanathan's future son-in-law, was a religious teacher of rare insight and had in early manhood seen active service as Principal Advisor to the Maharajah of Tanjore. The Maharajah, having no male issue to succeed him, nominated his grandson by his eldest daughter for the succession. But on the death of the Maharajah, the British annexed the State of Tanjore to their Indian Empire, availing

themselves of a law they had enacted in Dalhousie's time that in the event of a native ruler dying without a male heir to succeed him, his State would *ipso facto* pass into their hands. The annexation of Tanjore by the British was a severe blow to the surviving Maharani who had looked forward to her grandson's accession.

Muthucoomaraswamy, appreciating the justice and nobility of the cause, acceded to the Maharani's request and brought her grievances before the Parliamentary board. In the meantime, bitter dissensions and disputes between the elder Maharani and the younger resulted in the latter's making counter representations to the British Parliament against the proposed succession. The Imperial power snatched at the opportunity thus afforded and turned down the Maharani's proposal. Nevertheless Muthucoomaraswamy succeeded in securing for the Maharani and her royal household a host of privileges and handsome pensions and bringing her a large measure of redress. An exquisite image of Nadarajah, the Cosmic Dancer of the Hindu pantheon, wrought in ivory and gold, a marvel of Indian art, is said to have been the gift of the grateful Maharani to her intercessor. The image preserved in its pristine beauty and splendour adorns the home of S. Sivasubramaniam, Proctor, Colombo. In this connection it is noteworthy that it was this same Arulparanandha Swamigal who was later destined to become the religious *Guru* of Ramanathan and Arunachalam and to transform their lives.

It was during one of his visits to England that Muthucoomaraswamy translated the great Tamil classic '*Harichandra*' into superb English prose and dedicated it to Queen Victoria. The play was also staged at the Royal Court under the patronage of the Queen. The cast included some of the noblest characters of English society whom Muthucoomaraswamy had trained for their respective roles. He took on himself the role of Harichandra. On the

day the play was enacted, the Court was full to overflowing. There were assembled princes of royal blood, the flower of the nobility, great statesmen, poets and philosophers of repute. At the head of them all sat the great Queen. The drama was a brilliant representation of the life-story of a great king, Harichandra, who could not be prevailed upon to tell a lie, no, not even when the penalty for the refusal was his loss of a glorious kingdom and the reduction of himself, his wife and his only child into irredeemable servitude. The Queen was shaken to her depths of emotion by the singular spectacle of a king's selfless and passionate devotion to truth. In the course of the play, when Harichandra, kicked by the wily and unrelenting Visvamitra, fell prostrate upon the stage, the great Queen was so far overpowered with emotion that she is reported to have rushed up to the stage and lifted up the fallen king.

The play created a profound impression in the minds of the Queen and her courtiers. She held the great Oriental in high esteem and admiration and often invited him to her palace to converse with him on subjects of diversified interest, particularly matters relating to India's hoary past, her religion, philosophy and culture. In fact, it is said that she had at her bed-side only three books which she read and pondered upon both morning and evening; they were the Holy Bible, and the English versions of the *Thirukural* and *Harichandra*.

She made him a Knight of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George. This was an unprecedented honour, for he was the first Asiatic to be dubbed a knight. Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield, accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Muthucoomaraswamy to the Palace for the dubbing ceremony. The great Conservative statesman grew so fond of him that he urged him to settle down permanently in England and assured him of a seat in the House of Commons; but the latter declined,

for service to his own country was primary with him.

The Athenaeum Club did him signal honour by making him the first Asiatic to be received into its confraternity. This institution, one of the most exclusive clubs in England, extends the privilege of membership only to persons of indubitable culture and renown.

It was no small part of Muthucoomaraswamy's greatness that he shaped and moulded the careers of his three nephews, Coomaraswamy, Ramanathan and Arunachalam who, in their day, were the pride and glory of their country. Incomparable, inestimable were his services to them. Bereft of a mother early in life, and faced with all the implications of that loss, with a father whose preoccupations were predominantly spiritual and other-worldly and who had drained away all his worldly wealth in religious and philanthropic activity, Ponnambala Mudaliyar's children would have suffered the fate of many in similar circumstances, had it not been for the prompt and dutiful interest taken in their education and upbringing by their solicitous uncle. Muthucoomaraswamy recalled Ramanathan from Madras and launched him on his legal studies under Sir Richard Morgan. He appointed him his Private Secretary — no small privilege and no mean discipline for one destined for political leadership. He directed his reading, legal, political, religious and literary. It is said that he got him to write a synopsis of every leading article in the '*London Times*'.

Both by example and precept, he instilled in his protege the habits of steady and sustained work, that passion for liberal culture, that selfless devotion to the service of his country, qualities which came to abundant fruition in one of the most astounding careers of modern times. No finer training was ever accorded to an aspiring and talented youth. Muthucoomaraswamy's endowments to his nephews were not merely spiritual but even material. *Sukhastan* the stately home of Ramanathan and *Ponklar*, of Arunachalam, were among his legacies to them.

Ramanathan was never wearied of proclaiming his indebtedness to his uncle. In one of his speeches, he said, "There were men in Ceylon who were remarkable for their public spirit, whose lives were worth reading and meditating upon, men like the late Lorenz, James De Alwis and Sir Muthucoomaraswamy. They were most painstaking men in and out of the Legislative Council, devoted to the welfare of the public, staunch and independent, real leaders who were not afraid to speak, who did not back-slide and who maintained a high standard of work to the very last. Their example was worth copying."

Unfortunately for Muthucoomaraswamy, as for Ramanathan, Ceylon, by reason of her smallness and her subjection to alien rule, did not provide sufficient scope for a fuller and freer exercise of his transcendent abilities. Nevertheless his and his alone is the peculiar glory of having placed this obscure little Island on the map of the world, of having raised the quality of Ceylonese politics and of serving as a stimulus and an inspiring example to many who came after him. He had decided to spend the latter half of his life in England, there enter the British Parliament and fight the cause of Ceylon and India's freedom. In pursuance of this decision, he sent his wife and child in advance and was getting ready to follow them. But the Gods saw otherwise. A fell disease seized him, which defied the ingenuity of medical men and killed him. He died in 1879 at the age of fortyfour. Whom the Gods love die young. At this distance of time, we can but sadly speculate on how much we lost in his early decease what wealth of promise it killed, what plenitude of power it quenched. Within the short span of four and forty years the niggardly Fates alloted

to him, he rendered his country such signal service and won for himself such widespread renown as Time can never efface. At a century's remove, we little realize how much we owe these early benefactors. Sir Muthucoomaraswamy's memory, though not perpetuated in bronze or marble, has every title to be engraved in the hearts of posterity. It is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which Muthucoomaraswamy advanced the cause of national freedom by the dazzling impression he made on the West, by the warmth and cordiality he evoked in the breasts of British imperialists. He it was who first opened to the Oriental the society of the greatest and the best in Western lands, when in the early days of Western imperialism, it was closed against him by the narrow walls of colour and creed, and by notions of presumptious superiority. He it was who first taught the Westerner that the Oriental is by no means his inferior, who first dispelled the view then widely held that the East was yet the home of primeval darkness and ignorance, of feudal barbarism and servitude, that the East stood in sore need of the long-drawn tutelage and civilizing influences of the West to qualify herself for self-rule and a place in the comity of nations. To have fought single-handed and ultimately succeeded in throwing open the gates of the various Inns of Court to the Non-Christians, to have lived and moved on terms of the closest intimacy and friendship with the elite of Victorian society, to have been the hero of one of Disraeli's novels, to have been dubbed a Knight by the great Queen herself was no small achievement for an Oriental hailing from a subject land. He it was who first impressed on the Westerner that the Oriental is a man of like affections as himself, that he is heir to a cultural and spiritual tradition superior to his, that the art of government was better known and more widely practised among the peoples of the East than among those of the West, that, granted the

opportunity, the Oriental could outdo him not merely in the realm of politics but in every other art of man's civilized life. It was on reading one of his speeches in the legislature that the Secretary of State for the Colonies exclaimed in Parliament that if Ceylonese politicians could rise to such heights of eloquence, they might as well be allowed to manage their own affairs. No wonder that Ceylon earned the distinction of being the Premier British Colony and enjoyed far speedier measures of constitutional reform than any other.

During the seventeen years that Muthucoomaraswamy served at the Council board, our Statute Book was enriched by a spate of beneficent and far-reaching legislation affecting every aspect of national life, which it would be impossible to enumerate here. Suffice it to say that he outshone everyone of his colleagues, both Official and Unofficial, that he lent to that august assembly a new dignity and a new importance, strengthened the position and privilege of the Unofficials and engendered in them a spirit of sturdy independence and a devotion to national ends. Under his leadership, they stubbornly refused to subscribe tamely to Official opinion or be overawed by gubernatorial frowns, and learnt to submit everything to the touch of reason and free discussion. Frank and fearless criticism of governmental actions which ran counter to national interests, became the order of the day; every question of national import received the most anxious and searching scrutiny at the hands of the legislators and no pains were spared to rid the country of its many ills.

In an obituary notice, '*The Ceylon Independent*' said, "By his ability, learning, independence and high character, he added lustre to that Assembly (the Legislative Council) and his services in Council were rendered fruitful by friendship with men of high official position in England. He was a staunch champion of the rights of Unofficial Members and

a severe but discerning critic of Government and no Unofficial Member was more respected or feared by Officials. He rendered signal service to the cause of general education in Ceylon, and the Science Laboratory at Royal College and the Technical College were fruits of his vigorous and persistent advocacy of scientific and technical education as indispensable to Ceylon to enable us to keep in touch with the spirit of the age. He was a good English speaker and writer and his command and mastery over the language were specially referred to by Sir William Gregory."

On 17th August, 1879, when the Legislative Council met after Muthucoomaraswamy's death, Sir James Longden paid a tribute to him: "I cannot conclude my address upon this occasion without expressing publicly my regret for the loss which this Council and, I may truly say, the Colony has sustained in the death of the oldest Unofficial Member of this Council. Sir Coomaraswamy has attracted the attention of distinguished men in Europe by his learning and ability. He had been specially honoured by the distinction conferred upon him by our Sovereign and he had won the respect of his colleagues in this Council by his talents and by the unwearying attention he paid to every measure brought forward. After his death, I received in numerous petitions, proofs of the esteem in which he was held by his countrymen, by whom his name will long be had in remembrance."

'*The Ceylon Review*' of October, 1894 said of him, "Sir Coomaraswamy was fearless in his opposition to measures which seemed to him detrimental to the interests of the people; of the privileges of debate in Council, he was exceedingly jealous and never throughout his whole career was he found subservient. His station and title he owed to sincere, honest and disinterested service he had done to Government. He never swerved an inch from his duty to enhance the regard due to him

from Government or to secure for himself anything to which, otherwise, he would not have been entitled. He was not unconscious how advantageously his position may have been employed for political chicanery, and Government would have always been ready to buy over his opposition at the highest price. He rather preferred to merit the honours of his Sovereign by serving righteously the cause he had espoused. Of few other Ceylonese living or dead can it be said that 'such and such a one was truly independent'. All his public acts bear the stamp of unbending rectitude. Those who would serve the people in the Legislative Council may well take a leaf from Sir Coomaraswamy's life.

"Sir Coomaraswamy had noble ideals and lived up to them. Power and riches and greatness were also his, and truly of him it may be said with the poet:

'*And thou art worthy; full of power;*
As gentle; liberal-minded, great,
Consistent; wearing all that weight
Of learning lightly like a flower.
I would the great world grew like thee,
Who grewest not alone in power
And knowledge, but by year and hour
In reverence and charity.'"

And it was under the sheltering wing and the guiding hand of this ministering angel that Ramanathan grew to maturity, to intellectual depth and moral fulness, to political wisdom and patriotic passion.

CHAPTER VII

ENTERS THE LEGISLATURE

"And as among farmers, the best are those with a natural turn for farming, so, if we want the best among the Guardians of the State, we must take those naturally fitted to watch over a Commonwealth. They must have the right sort of intelligence and ability; and also they must look upon the Commonwealth as their special concern — the sort of concern that is felt for something so clearly bound up with oneself that its interest and fortunes, for good or ill, are held to be identical with one's own."

— Plato

"Statesmanship is the noblest way to serve mankind."

— Gladstone

"Politics or the art of good government of the people is one of the noblest of human arts and an instrument of self-culture into the bargain."

— Ramanathan

"At the early age of twentyeight, he was selected by His Excellency Sir James Longden to represent the Tamils in the Legislative Council. Then and from that day to the ripe old age of seventynine years, whether as the masterful lawyer at the Bar, the silver-tongued orator on the platform or the undisputed leader of the Council board, he bestrode the public life of this country like a Colossus."

— Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara

The year 1879, is memorable in the annals of Ramanathan, for it marked his first entry into the stormy and turbulent waters of his country's politics, wherein Fortune had decreed that he should serve his people with the greatest possible distinction for more than half a century. It is no less important

in the annals of our country, in that it marked the advent into the arena of political life of one who was universally acclaimed its greatest and most consummate parliamentarian. Ramanathan was nominated by his Excellency Sir James Longden to represent the Tamil-speaking peoples of the country in the Legislative Council in succession to his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy. Nothing is more characteristic of the man than his lifelong conviction that it is the imperative duty of a man of talents and independent means to devote the best of his manhood to the service of his fellows as a statesman and legislator, if the opportunity offers itself. The emphasis he lays on it is largely explained, when we remember that from the first he grew up in a family with traditions of public life and accustomed through several generations to play a prominent part in the public life of the State. Few men, therefore, entered it with better credentials or a clearer title.

The death of Sir Muthucoomaraswamy in 1879, was deemed by contemporary public opinion as the greatest loss ever sustained not merely by the Tamils but by the whole country. Everyone felt that the gallant Knight and veteran statesman was irreplaceable, that his death had left a void which none could adequately fill. When the question of finding a successor was mooted, all discerning eyes turned to his nephew Ramanathan, who was then a youth of only twentyeight years but with a reputation too precocious for his age. He bore an honoured name, a brilliant career at the metropolitan bar, a reputation for fearlessness and fiery independence, a mastery of law superb for his age and equalled by only a few of his time, a rich store of varied learning, a fascinating presence and the gift of incomparable speech, all so combined and suffused with a young and chivalrous enthusiasm for the service of his country that they drew all men's hearts to him. These and

many more constituted the firm foundation upon which he reared the stately edifice of his renowned leadership.

He was no stranger to legislative work. His grandfather Gate Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy was the first occupant of the Tamil seat, when the Legislative Council was newly constituted in 1835. His granduncle Gate Mudaliyar Edirmannasingham held it from 1846 – 1861, and then followed his uncle Sir Muthucoomarswamy who held it from 1862 — 1879. His was then a family steeped in the proudest traditions of public and political life. It was as if he came into his own inheritance.

Since the inception of the Legislative Council in 1835, the Tamil Seat had been the virtual preserve of this family. During Ramanathan's tenure, under the impact of his potent political genius, the preserve gradually widened and embraced the entire Island, when in 1911, he was elected by the enlightened and almost unanimous suffrage of the nation to represent the educated population of Ceylon. And that for the most part explains that political precocity and that long parliamentary ascendancy which he enjoyed more than any other in our annals.

The advocate becoming a legislator is in the very order of things. While he was winning laurel after laurel in the profession of law, he was hailed as "The rising star in the political firmament of Ceylon". He was singularly fortunate in the splendid training he received at the hands of his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy and his birth in a family saturated with glorious traditions of public and political life. Few of our political leaders have entered the arena of political leadership with such signal advantages. It was an unquiet and tumultuous time. The people had begun to chafe under the trammels of foreign rule. The demand for constitutional reform, for transfer of power to the representatives of the nation was insistent;

political sagacity and popular parliamentary eloquence staggered the rulers; there was a rapid expansion of economic activity, an increasing extension of modernized roads and railways, a beginning of state-aided education; statutes were framed to promote hygiene and a fiscal system which bore lightly on the poor; there was the emergence of a new professional class and an increasing absorption of the people into the executive service. It was upon this scene of intense national activity that Ramanathan embarked upon his parliamentary career.

When some leaders of the Tamils appealed to him to serve them in the legislature, he willingly consented, inasmuch as one of the outstanding traits of his character was never to refuse a popular request but always to place his country before self, though he was well aware that he could not do so without detriment to a brilliant and lucrative practice at the Bar. There was another reason equally compelling and conclusive. While as a youth in his teens he chanced to attend the ceremonial opening of the legislature, his youthful fancy was so far captivated by the pomp and splendour that he saw around him that he wondered within himself if ever the Gods would vouchsafe him a role in that gorgeous pageantry and a seat in that august assembly. In 1892, the year in which he relinguished his seat in the legislature to fill the office of Solicitor-General after thirteen glorious and eventful years culminating in his elevation to the office of Senior Unofficial Member — the foremost position which one outside the Government Service could ever occupy—his colleagues in Council feted him. Relapsing into reminiscent mood, he said, "I confess my attention was drawn to the greatness of such a position by the pomp and ceremony associated with the opening day of the year's sessions. Returning from abroad some four and twenty years ago, my youthful imagination was fired by the more than usual splendour which Sir

Hercules Robinson took delight in imparting to the proceedings of the day. I did not get near enough to hear the distinguished Governor clearly, but by gentle nudging, I gradually came abreast of the first line of hearers who were standing, only to find that his address was drawing to a close and the time had arrived for the breaking up of the assembly. That was my first experience of the Legislative Council."

The tradition of public service undertaken by well-educated and well-principled men, men of easy means and high family connections, not for reward nor for honour but solely out of a sense of patriotic duty had already been set by his predecessors and had reached its climax in his uncle who dedicated the whole of his working life to the service of his country for no emoluments whatsoever but purely through a sense of national duty and obligation. Whatever present-day politicians may say in dispraise of these men, the high standard of honour, integrity and talent which flourished for a long time was something very exceptional and rare in our history. We owe it chiefly to the tradition set by these men.

But there was another candidate who fiercely coveted this honour. He was no other than Mr. Christopher Brito, an eminent advocate of Colombo and brother-in-law of Ramanathan, for both Brito and Ramanathan had married two sisters, the daughters of Nannithamby Mudaliyar.

Brito was no mean rival. He was one of the foremost men of his time. A contemporary described him thus: "Mr. Brito graduated in the Colombo Academy, obtaining the Mathematical and Classical (Turnour) Prizes in 1860, and entered Queen's College without a blot or blemish on his moral character. After going through the prescribed course of study there, he obtained his B. A. degree in 1864 in the Calcutta University. He was Professor at the Agra College, and afterwards Mathematical Professor of

the Colombo Academy. He was admitted as an advocate of the Supreme Court in 1867 and has practised with success here, in Jaffna and Batticaloa, and was held in such high esteem by the late Sir Richard Morgan that upon his recommendation, he was appointed Acting Deputy Queen's Advocate and District Judge, Batticaloa, which place he filled with credit to himself and satisfaction to the Government and the public. He is thoroughly conversant with the Tamil and the Mukkuwa Laws and customs as well as with the literature of the Tamils and the Sinhalese. He is a Greek, Latin, English, Tamil, Sinhalese, Sanskrit and Pali scholar.

"His private means amounting to between twentyfive to thirty thousand rupees per annum, added to his professional income, will afford him ample leisure for legislative duties and place him above the necessity for sacrificing the interests of his constituents for subserving his own."

Brito had age in his favour, and what was more, he employed every weapon in his armoury to achieve his end By long years of residence in Colombo and of professional contacts with a great mass of people, by vigorous propaganda and ingenious wirepulling, he had contrived to ingratiate himself with his constituents. But in Ramanathan's case such contacts were comparatively few. He who had made professional eminence his life's guiding principle and had set little store by premature political advancement, spurned at the base methods which were the main resource of his adversary. Mr. J R. Weinman says in his Reminiscences: "On the death of Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, there was a warm contest for the seat between Mr. Ramanathan and Mr. Brito. Ramanathan was backed by '*The Observer*', and Brito, by '*The Examiner*'. Brito was the more popular of the two, and would without doubt have been returned, if the choice lay with an electorate. The issue hung upon the balance for sometime, but unfortunately for Brito,

an implacable and unscrupulous enemy of Ramanathan's helped to turn the scales in his favour. A notorious ex-advocate from the North, who had been convicted of forgery of a will, was making himself very obnoxious in Colombo and maligning the best of men. He smuggled into the pages of '*The Examiner*', a vicious and vile attack on Ramanathan, and made it appear that Brito was his nominee. This sealed Brito's fate, and Ramanathan was appointed and continued in Council till, at the instance of the Home Government, he was given the Solicitor-Generalship."

Wading through the voluminous and vitriolic correspondence and the reports of political meetings, that poured through the popular press of the time and disfigured its pages, seeing the dust and heat that was raised, the animosity and rancour that was engendered, the open abuse and vilification that befouled the air, we cannot escape the conclusion that, much as we suffer from the excesses and horrors of political controversy, our people of an earlier generation fared no better, that the epithet 'dirty' as applied to politics is no recent invention.

One vital reason why the occasion became so sensational and begot so much passion and bad blood was that the prize for which the combatants vied was nothing less than the mantle of that prince among men, the great Sir Muthucoomaraswamy.

Jaffna and her entire press were unanimous and clamorous in their support of Ramanathan's candidature. '*The Observer*' denounced Mr. Brito so strongly and so vehemently that he was obliged to appeal by wire to his friends in Batticaloa to support him in spite of what he considered, "the lies of '*The Observer*'." The great Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar who with the eye of a born seer and controversialist discerned in the youth the germs of a true nationalist and worthy successor to him threw

all the weight of his enormous prestige and influence on the side of Ramanathan and by so doing earned for himself in the pages of '*The Examiner*' the distinction of being branded "the notorious demagogue of the North". In fact, the last public act of the Navalar was the summoning of a meeting of Tamil leaders at his Saiva Prakasa Vidiyasalai at Vannarponnai to move for Ramanathan's nomination. An eye-witness has recorded that the occasion created a tremendous and widespread upheaval throughout the country and attracted a mammoth crowd representing every shade of Tamil opinion. Navalar was at the time in the grip of a severe attack of asthma, and could not, therefore, preside over the assembly.

At his request Visvanathapillai, one of the first graduates of Madras and renowned scholar and mathematician, took the chair, while he himself was seated on the dais below. Brito was not to be caught napping. He knew what the Navalar was about and had contrived to ensure the presence and active participation in the meeting, of many of his ardent and vociferous camp-followers, who, true to expectation, waxed eloquent on the merits of their chief. Ramanathan's case seemed to suffer by comparison. The Navalar who was watching the proceedings, grew indignant at the unexpected turn things had taken, and could not restrain himself. His spasms of asthma momentarily disappeared as if by a miracle, and he looked like one inspired. He mounted the platform and spoke words charged with high emotion. He called out to his assistants, "Bring me my file of letters, my file of telegrams, bring them up immediately." The audience looked aghast at this unwonted temper on the part of this sage and wondered what he was up to. It should, in this connection, be explained that the ownership of the Kandaswamy Temple at Nallur was, at this time, the subject of bitter and prolonged litigation between the

Brahmin priests and the hereditary claimants. The Navalar espoused the cause of the former while Brito was Senior Counsel for the latter. Brito, knowing the Navalar's exceptional hold on the Tamils, had written to him words which implied that if he (the Navalar) withdrew his opposition to his candidature, he would not press his client's claims. The Navalar was so far outraged at such shameless breach of professional trust that he stood up and flung a challenge in the face of Brito's supporters to come foward in singles or in groups, if they so desired and state their case. He read out extracts from these letters and telegrams and cried out, " Is this the man whom you want to be your representative at the country's supreme legislature, the custodian of your political fortunes, the upholder of our national honour, the man who has shown himself so utterly corrupt and untrustworthy in little things ? " It was a knock-out blow to Brito's henchmen who now crawled away one behind the other, leaving the meeting free for the supporters of Ramanathan. Navalar did not live to see the fruition of his labours in this field, in the elevation of Ramanathan to the Seat, for the fell disease soon ended him. But it could, with justification, be said that the patron had bequeathed to his protege the mantle of religious and cultural leadership, which in his own hands had stemmed the tide of irreligion and proselytism that ravaged the Tamils and which, in the hands of his successor, helped reclaim much of the ground that had been lost.

The nomination was made in the teeth of strenuous opposition from interested quarters, and at an age when many yet struggle to gain a foothold in their profession, Ramanathan had already achieved spectacular success at the metropolitan bar, and what was then regarded as a notable achievement, found himself installed as the sole representative of the Tamil-speaking population of

the Island, in an assembly which he was to charm, to move, to dominate for fifty memorable years. The length and distinction of his wonderful career are surely a vindication of his choice.

It was a moment of extreme despair and anguish of mind for Brito who would not accept the Governor's choice but was determined to fight the issue at a higher level. He despatched to England an emissary of his draped as an Eastern Prince to challenge before the Imperial Parliament the choice of the Governor. But nothing came of it.

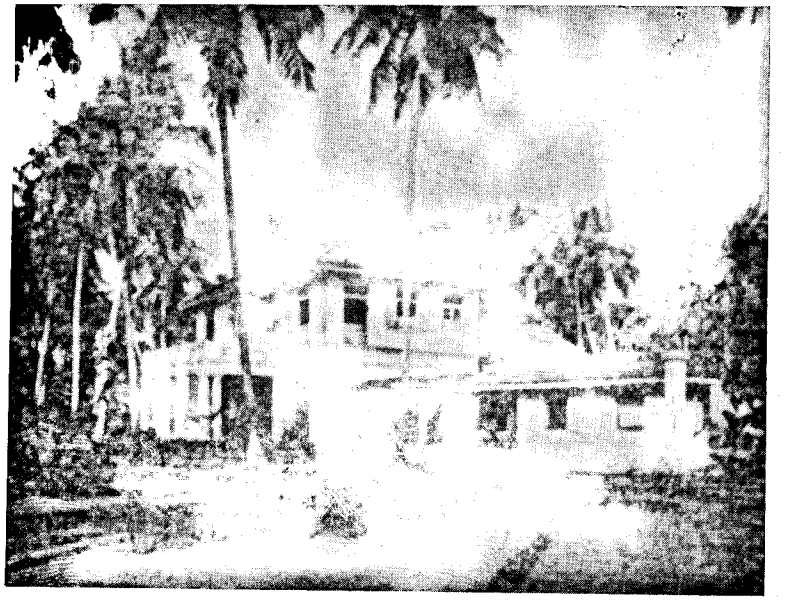
There were some who entertained doubts and misgivings about the wisdom of the choice on the score of Ramanathan's immaturity and inexperience and the intellectual superiority of the Official element in the Council. That these doubts and misgivings were absolutely ill-founded was proved beyond all doubt by the magnitude and brilliance of his services and achievements in Council during an unbroken period of fourteen years during which he held the seat. He exhibited an industry and independence, a talent for political leadership and a mastery of legislative matters which amazed the public and more, the rulers. Indeed, it was widely acknowledged that these fourteen years alone of a most, fruitful and strenuous career would suffice to place him among the Immortals of his Country's Fame.

The Legislative Council was, at this time, no parliament of free men. It was in the nature of an advisory body. It comprised Officials who were in the Governor's pay and were there to vote solid for Government, whatever their private views, and Unofficials who were his nominees and was presided over by the all-powerful Governor himself. It was the age of gubernatorial absolutism, of the Governor's Government. The Governor was the central, all-blazing, all-powerful luminary round which all the great host of satellites, both Official and Unofficial, moved, each in its own orbit and

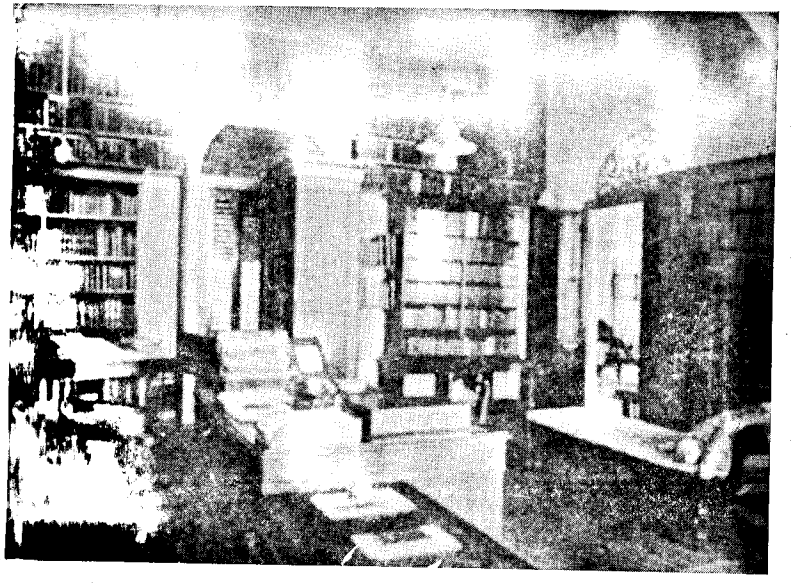
from which they borrowed their light and radiance, whose supremacy and over-riding authority they were expected to acknowledge gleefully, for, if they failed, they were either scorched or burnt. Both the Officials and Unofficials were content to be His Excellency's most loyal and obedient servants, take his orders and do his bidding. All freedom of speech and action was taboo. Speaking of Official Members of the legislature, Weinman says, "The Official Members of Council consist of certain Heads of Departments and Government Agents, some of whom are of the Executive Council..... They are there to vote solid for Government. They are not there to make speeches. Mr. Bowes may be called up to explain something about the plague or the port; or Mr. Senior, about finance; or Mr. Fraser about Local Government; and they will do it so confusedly that everyone will be satisfied. Not to be able to comprehend what an Official Member says is a reflection on the intelligence of his auditors.

"Any Civil Servant may become a Government Agent, Member of the Legislative Council, and in his retirement be made a C. M. G., provided he lives long enough, never shows any originality, is utterly unfit for judicial work, and never has made a speech unless in reply to the illuminated address presented by the Kachcheri Mudaliyar and staff on his transfer to another district or province..... .....It would be considered treason for an Official Member to make a better speech than the Colonial Secretary. Such a thing is unthinkable. The least that could happen to such a one is he would be deprived of his C. M. G.-ship on retirement.

"Future ages will consider it extraordinary why Heads of Departments should leave their Provinces for Colombo merely to record their votes. Why should they not send down their Office Assistants or chief clerks? If the Government Agent is summoned to produce a document in court, he does not carry it himself. He sends it by a clerk. In the



SUKHASTAN—RAMANATHAN'S HOME IN COLOMBO



LIBRARY AT SUKHASTAN

same way, when the Member of the Legislative Council is summoned to Council, why cannot he send down his vote by a clerk who could be most spared? Or why should not his vote be taken as read or rather recorded in favour of Government?"

Of the Unofficial element, Weinman says, "Its characteristic feature is its oppressive respectability and its immaculate goodness. The aim of every member is to be more good than his predecessor, and the aim of every Governor is to reward goodness. The major aim of every Councillor is to keep the thing going in his family..... The Governor sometimes spots the biggest fool in the community and appoints him, and the dissatisfaction is not so intense. Governors have nothing but praise for the Unofficial Members; and the praise usually takes a negative form. They were so good; they never unnecessarily opposed; their criticism was always fair; they were so helpful to Government; they wasted no time in speech-making; they never asked unnecessary questions; their relations with the Government were always most cordial and pleasant; no harsh word fell from their lips; they caused not a moment's anxiety to Government, and so forth and so forth."

This, unhappily, was the scene on which young Ramanathan's labours were cast and that, the role he was meant to play at the outset of his political career. But nature had not cast him for that humble and ignominious role. She had fashioned him for a different role, that of the nation's watch-dog, a spokesman of shattering, withering force. The story of Ramanathan's political career of half a century from 1879 to 1930 is also the history of the nation's struggle for freedom and its ultimate attainment.

To equip himself for this weighty and self-imposed task, he resolved to embark upon a course of intensive study and reflection. There is extant today a letter written to one of his friends soon after his elevation to the Seat, wherein he gives

a long list — too long to be reproduced here — of books, acknowledged masterpieces of their kind, on a wide variety of subjects ranging from politics, economics and sociology to religion and philosophy and tells him of his solemn resolve to master them and make himself worthy of his new responsibility. He mentions with commendable pride a manuscript copy of the Tamil classic, the *Thirukural* and its English translation which had come down to him from his grandfather Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy and which he treasured as a precious heirloom and a guide to life. The present writer was privileged to see it preserved in the superb handwriting of the great Tamil leader.

From the first, he was determined to be his own man, never to be overawed by authority nor permit himself to be its docile and submissive agent. Absolute fearlessness, utter intrepidity of spirit was the keynote of his whole career. He was more than abashed to see how obsequious and even servilely acquiescent in public life was the conduct of the people's representatives who, in private life, displayed extraordinary character, capacity and independence. The conduct of the Officials too repelled him. He says, "When I entered the Legislative Council in 1879, I saw with great regret that some of my Official friends whom I knew to be just, independent and loyal were treated like machines to register the wishes of the Governor of the Island. I could not understand how intelligent men who had gathered experience in the country after many years of contact with the people of the country could be expected to sit with gagged mouths in an assembly where, it was generally believed, every member had a right to speak. I think it is a desecration of humanity to expect the Official Members to sit silent in their Seats." The emancipation of the Official Members of the legislature was, henceforth, one of the supreme objectives of his life.

He proved himself a worthy upholder of the lofty tradition of public spirit, tireless industry, staunch independence and fearless criticism, set by Sir Muthucoomaraswamy. He said in one of his speeches, "During the fourteen years which followed 1879, public spirit never declined. It was always to the fore." In another, he said, "In my legislative experience of about eleven years (1879–1890) I found almost invariably that the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council were unprepared for effective discussion, either through remissness or pressure of other engagements, or want of papers. Having found the deficiencies of my Unofficial brethren, I thought it my duty to apprise them in time of the details of all complicated subjects, giving them the results of my study and reflection.

"We used to assign to each other the different parts of the play on our side and were thus able to meet the Official Members with courage. Sir Arthur Gordon (now Lord Stanmore), who was one of our strongest Governors, found our union so telling that he said publicly that the influence of the Unofficial Members acting in concert was out of all proportion to their numerical strength."

Nevertheless, it was for Ramanathan a war on two fronts, the arrogant and arbitrary authority of an imperial power armed with a steam-roller Official majority on the one, and on the other, the apathy, indifference and cowardice of his Unofficial brethren who were more concerned about winning gubernatorial plaudits and patronage to insure their continuance in office than about their duty and responsibility to the people. Ramanathan was then in the very prime of life. His superb health, his astonishing powers of work, his never-failing intrepidity of spirit, his combination of impetuosity and ardour with easy self-command, his immense and varied learning — these and many more made him from the start of his career a dazzling parliamentarian and left a startling impression

on all who knew him. His contemporaries noted his fine appearance and fine manners. The pale, expressive, intellectual face, the deep-set flashing eyes, the strongly marked features, the easy, erect, dignified bearing, the free and graceful gestures, the voice of incomparable flexibility and strength gave him a natural equipment such as few orators have ever possessed. And to this he added a rare mastery of the subjects which he spoke on and a rare capacity for moving, persuading and inspiring men. Moreover, there burnt within him, like an undying flame, a passion for the service of his country and the liberation of his people from the thraldom of foreign rule. No politician ever set a higher store on the responsibility that was cast on him nor was there ever one who was readier to learn. He would spend sleepless nights in his library which was a rich storehouse of varied learning, in a supreme endeavour to master the manifold problems that came up before the Council board. It is remarkable that during a legislative career of more than fifty years, there was not a single occasion when he entered the Council Chamber without a complete mastery of legislative matters. He traced every question to its very source, cited numerous authorities, both past and present, who had had their say on these matters, examined ruthlessly and meticulously the possible consequences of the proposed measure upon the fortunes of the nation, applied first principles to questions of the hour, while it was customary with many of his colleagues to deal with them on the grounds of expediency or emotion. In the whole history of our legislature, he is indubitably the finest adept in the grand dialectic of public debate which, as has been said, is the sovereign method for the discovery of practical truth as it is also the sovereign principle of all genuine democracy. Nor did he rely on pathetics or heroics or high-flown sentiments, which have been the traditional stock-in-trade of

the professional politician.

His was statesmanship, constructive, and creative. There was no trace of the amateurish or slipshod in it, no unseemly attempt at vote-catching or canvassing. He relied solely on the strength and solidity of argument, on the intensity and force of his convictions to carry conviction to his colleagues.

Mr. J R. Weinman says, "There could be no question of Mr. Ramanathan's usefulness and qualifications as a Councillor. He thoroughly mastered every subject under the discussion. He was a keen and merciless critic of government, and his criticism was generally just and fair. He was fearless in debate, and always kept cool and unruffled. Governors and Colonial Secretaries stormed at him; but in vain. He kept his head packed in ice. G. T. M. O' Brien, the greatest Colonial Secretary we had, tried to squash him, but in vain. Ramanathan was received in London as the greatest Unofficial of Ceylon."

He took particular care not only to be present himself at every session but very often urged his Unofficial colleagues also to do so, whipped them up out of their indolent and unthinking acceptance of Official lines of thought, infused into them a new energy, vigour and manly independence, instilled in them a new sense of their duty and responsibility, infected them with a new patriotic passion, impressed on them the importance of the legislature as the supreme instrument of national regeneration, educated them in the tangles and intricacies of every question and led the discussion with such masterly ease, energy and confidence as to ensure that the interests of the country were not in the smallest degree compromised. It was one long struggle, on the one hand, against the intolerance and self-will of a bureaucracy largely inured to having its own way, and on the other, against the lethargy and indifference and even self-interest of his camp-followers. A contemporary epitomized

his career in Council thus:

"He was matchless in eloquence, unrivalled in debate, sound in judgement, profound in scholarship and diligent in the study of every important question that engaged public attention. His conspicuous merit and outstanding ability placed him high above his fellows and he soon became the leader of his people and the fearless champion of their rights." Sir Stanley Obeyesekera, in paying him a tribute, said, "The pages of the Hansard will show exactly what he has done for this country and in the interests of the public. Suffice it to say that he proved himself in the Council to be a debator of the highest quality. Speaking personally, I have had the advantage of listening to some of the leading politicians in England as well as India, and I certainly have come to the conclusion that Ramanathan, as a debator, could hold his own against any of them."

Dr. Isaac Thambyah said of him: "A man of outspoken fearlessness, great independence and consummate ability, he was ever dreaded in Council. A valiant champion of the people, he would fight long and lustily without asking for quarter or giving any. He would lash with his powerful tongue severely and without scruple and the gazing multitude would rejoice to see the bleeding back of opposing Officialdom."

He was in short the main bulwark, the sheet-anchor of the Unofficial element in the legislature. In an atmosphere charged with corruption, venality and subservience, he created a body of Unofficials whom he inoculated with a genuine spirit of liberty, of fervent patriotism and fearless self-reliance and before whom the British Officials quailed. He did more than any other Unofficial to interest the country in parliamentary discussion and placed before the legislature a programme of reforms which gave a direction and an impulse to public opinion.

Though young, he was elevated to the office

of Senior Unofficial Member of the House in 1886, over and above many other Unofficial Members who were much his seniors both in age and in the service of the legislature. So rapid an elevation was seldom heard of and proved a command of the legislature by ability, eloquence and force of character, such as few men of his age and standing could have achieved. It was inevitable in the case of one who was not only loved and esteemed by his colleagues but also greatly respected and admired by the Official section. From the very outset, his political life bore a religious quality, and was dominated by noble aims and ideals. He viewed every question not from the narrow, communal or racial or religious angle but rather from the broader standpoint of national interest. He saw the problems of government from many points of view, but most readily and habitually from the point of view of the poor, the friendless and the inarticulate. He fought the cause not merely of the Tamils, the Sinhalese, the Muslims and the Burghers, but also of the Europeans residing in the Island. It was this largeness of view, this concept of humanity as fundamentally one and indivisible, though subject to superficial and extraneous differences, that the needs of one community are as paramount and imperative as those of any other that raised him high above the general run of politician, and in due course, earned for him the title, "Member for Ceylon".

The words of Dr. Isaac Thambyah are worth quoting: "A worthy successor of his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, a close reasoner, eloquent speaker and man of war, he soon earned from Sir (then the Hon. Mr.) G. T. M. O'Brien the just title of 'Rupert of Debate.'"

CHAPTER VIII

MAIDEN SPEECH— EARLY SPEECHES ON EDUCATION

> "We who speak of ourselves as rolling in wealth are the niggardliest in our expenditure on so noble a cause as education. ..... Nothing is more universally admitted than the principle that the Government should provide for the education of the masses. The wealthier classes of Ceylon, absorbed in their own pursuits, do not think of the educational wants of the poor..... The future policy of the Government should be to spend largely on the promotion of vernacular education."
>
> — *Ramanathan*

AT the opening session of 1879, Ramanathan first took his seat in the Island's Legislature. He must have experienced a certain amount of youthful bashfulness, for he was then only twentyeight years old, with no previous experience of legislative work. But none entered it with a firmer resolve to make his stay fruitful of good to his country or with a fuller equipment for the weighty task of statesmanship. The Council consisted of nine Officials and six Unofficials. No more diligent member than he ever sat at the Council board.

In an assembly in which he was one day to rank among the immortals of parliamentary fame, he first opened his lips against the Bill for the prevention of coffee-stealing, by exceptional legislation. The measure was sponsored by the Government with a view to arming the European planters with extraordinary powers, unmindful of the gratuitous misery and hardship it would inflict on the Kandyan peasantry. It was certainly an inauspicious beginning for a new-comer to the Council board

and smacked of temerity on his part to oppose the combined strength of the Government and the wealthy and influential European planters.

Whatever the risk, someone had to be found, who could state the case of the helpless peasantry firmly and fearlessly. While there were many among the older hands to toe the Government line and accept the viewpoint of the European planter, there were hardly any to raise their voice in defence of the masses. The speech gave the first hint of the stuff of which the new recruit was made, of the direction in which he would steer his bark, of the measure of docility and tame acquiescence the governing hierarchy could expect of him. "I regret, I cannot agree to the second-reading of this bill, for many of its provisions are oppressive to the people of this country," were his opening words. They epitomize the whole man, his concept of public duty and parliamentary responsibility. Anything that savoured of oppression, particularly oppression practised upon the helpless masses roused him to passionate indignation. All legislation, all governmental effort should, in his view be to help the masses and not to oppress them. The proposed legislation threatened to be discriminative, to weigh heavily in favour of the affluent and vocal coffee-planters, and oppress the underdog, the helpless and inarticulate mass of the nation. Legislation, he contended, should be harnessed to the service not of the few, but of the many. The measure was directed against the Kandyan peasantry. As the Member representing the Tamil interest, he could, in his own interest, have supported the Bill, or at least maintained a discreet silence, and by doing so, made himself *persona grata* to the European planters and the White Rulers. Such was the course of action then customary and fashionable with the common run of legislators. But that was not Ramanathan's way. Had he not once said, "To my last breath, I will resist injustice and oppression

from whatever quarter and in whatever form it might emanate"? The planters looked askance; so did the Officials, for they had all expected an easy passage for the Bill. It was clear that the new-comer was not to be one of the Governor's yes-men but one determined to be his own man; not to borrow the views of other men but to decide all things for himself. It was also manifest that with him, the claims of the mass of the people far out-weighed all other claims; that the people had found in him a true friend and spokesman who could always be counted upon to speak out his mind without fear or favour. All through a long political career extending over half a century and more, his exceptional talents were dedicated to the service of the poor, the down-trodden and the under-privileged and to the defence of Truth, Reason and Justice against the exercise of arbitrary power and every question was viewed not from the narrow angle of personal or communal interest but rather from the higher standpoint of national well-being.

"I cannot" he said, "help persisting in my opinion that the Ordinance had worked hitherto oppressively. I refer the Council to pages 42–45 of the Hansard, 1873, and to one or two other volumes of it, where my honourable and learned friend on the right, in conjunction with the then Tamil Member, detailed the mode in which the hardships were caused to Kandyan landowners and other classes of natives. I wish now only to impress on this Council that these hardships have the effect of putting a sort of embargo on native enterprise generally, and even on the free use of a common necessity of life, for no other reason, it would seem, than that the coffee belonging to European planters is being pilfered. I do not at all object to the punishment of the thieves, but when the *modus operandi* involved in the punishment presses sorely on the innocent, it becomes our duty to

complain. If I may say so, the lash laid on the guilty cuts not merely the guilty but even the innocent."

He contended that no exceptional circumstances had arisen to warrant this exceptional measure, and proceeded, "I have thus ample reason, Sir, to take it for granted that coffee-stealing does not exist now to any appreciable extent. If, then, the evil does not exist, why then this legislation, I ask? It is admittedly exceptional, and where are the exceptional circumstances justifying it?

"A continuance of the stringent provisions embodied in the Bill would be as unjust as a war-tax continuing to be levied even after the war had ceased and its expenses paid." He wound up the speech by saying, "I do not think it right this protection ought to be given them (the European planters) at the expense of the livelihood and comfort of innocent natives, and that too at a time when coffee-stealing, which this Ordinance is intended to check, does not prevail to any appreciable extent, worth speaking of."

Exigencies of space prevent the reproduction of the whole speech; but in it one discerns clear hallmarks of a born debator and irrepressible watch-dog of the rights of the people. We see him master of his subject, with a wealth of detail garnered with untiring effort from varied sources, conversant with the doings and utterances of his predecessors, marshalling and enforcing his arguments with such singular ingenuity and eloquence as would carry conviction to the most sceptical listener and pleading for justice, fair-play and forbearance. What strikes even the most casual reader, as a quality most conspicuous and admirable in Ramanathan's speeches is that even his earliest ones reveal an artistic finish, a ripeness of thought and wisdom, a richness of resource and a conception both high and noble. They are not the tentative efforts, the groping and the grovelling of an amateur

but rather the exquisite and finished product of the master. To listen to him on any subject was to be educated in that subject. There was hardly any reservoir of information that he had not tapped, no document that he had not laid under contribution, no pronouncement, whether of the past or the present, that he had not mastered. It was impossible for one who had heard him not to be convinced of his case. It was evident to all that a bright luminary had made its appearance in the political firmament of the Island.

The Officials had anticipated an easy passage for the Bill but Ramanathan had set the ball of opposition rolling, and other Unofficials followed it up. An animated discussion ensued. Being in a minority he did not press for a division, for those were days when the Official element preponderated in the legislature. The Bill was then referred to a Select Committee on which he was appointed to serve. It was finally passed in a modified form, with many of its fangs drawn, on 22nd October, 1879, as a permanent measure.

The speech was a brilliant success. It augured well for a youth who had just set his foot on the political ladder that was destined to carry him to dizzy eminence. It was acclaimed with more than the conventional compliments commonly paid by the Council to any good beginner. Even unconvinced Officials who did not agree with the arguments, admitted that the Unofficials had gained in the young recruit an immense accession of strength and vitality.

Mr. George Vane, the Colonial Treasurer and veteran Councillor, who was particularly impressed, congratulated him with more than his customary warmth on his position as one of Her Majesty's Opposition. The youth, though pleased with the compliment, took exception to his being associated with the Opposition. He replied, "No, Mr. Vane, you are mistaken about my position, if you think I am

going to constitute myself as one of the Opposition. No, I am part of the Government of Ceylon and I am come to help them with my criticism, to co-operate with them as much as possible." Such was his conception of his position, a constructive and co-operative agent in the progress of beneficent legislation, not an instrument of obstructive or subversive opposition. The view shared by some that he was in perpetual opposition to the Government is altogether fallacious. No liberal or progressive measure ever found a more valiant or disinterested champion than him.

The chief subject that engrossed his early attention in Council was education. A passionate and lifelong believer in the value of education as a panacea for all national ills, he longed to extend to his people its benefits in as full a measure as the resources of the country would permit. and moved in Council the necessity of placing the Department of Public Instruction on firmer foundations. He asked if the Memorandum of the Director dated 12th May and referred to by him in his Report for 1878, would be acted upon.

In a speech delivered on 19th November, 1879, he traced in close detail the whole history of the growth of education in Ceylon from 1830 following the recommendation of the Royal Commission which was appointed "to inquire into and report on the condition and prospects of affairs in Ceylon". Then, he dwelt on the importance of inspection. He said, " The duty of inspection is of paramount importance in the Department of Public Instruction. Without this duty being properly fulfilled, much of the money annually voted by the Council would be thrown away." Would that our Education Authority realized this appalling truth.

He then proceeded to stress the imperative duty of the Government to educate the people.

"I don't think it necessary to dilate on the obligation of the Government to educate the people. I think that will be conceded, but I do wish to press on you, Sir, that fact that capital invested in education is reproductive. I am able to refer you to men of acknowledged authority in reference to this proposition. Sir Charles MacCarthy, who was Chairman in 1849 of the Sub-Committee of the School Commission, states in his report that 'every shilling laid out in furtherance of the cause of education may well be expected to bring back interest a hundredfold. Every educated youth who goes into the world, is a power and influence amongst the people. The enlightenment he has received at school on matters of religion, of good Government, of morals, and of social progress will not remain sealed up in his brain, but will issue forth from time to time in his intercourse with his less enlightened friends and thus exert an influence over others which gradually and without violence to their feelings or their prejudices will effect a change in their conduct. A learned and virtuous man soon becomes a social ruler and dictator in his village and can by his advice and example do more than many policemen in the discouragement and repression of crime....."

He quoted from a despatch of the Directors of the East India Company dated 1855 on the subject of general education in India, which said that they were prepared not only to spend large sums of money in the cause of education but also to raise more money by taxation, if the existing revenue did not permit an outlay such as they wished.

Then he made a comparative analysis of the amounts of money expended on education by the various British Colonies and concluded: "We who speak of ourselves as rolling in wealth are the niggardliest in our expenditure on so noble a cause as education." Thus we see that his devotion to

the cause of his country's educational advance, far from being a development of his later life, was a passion of his early years.

What strikes the reader of his speeches today as a quality that permeates and suffuses everyone of them all is his stern adherence and unswerving devotion to subjects of enduring national importance and his passionate solicitude for the happiness and well-being of his people. Little that was transitory or ephemeral ever troubled him. A careful study of Ramanathan's speeches would be a political education of immeasurable worth to our leaders today, for, if the speeches reveal anything, it is this one unsavoury truth, that his laurels were won not by claptrap eloquence nor by mouthing easy platitudes but rather by strenuous and unremitting industry, which enabled him to gain a complete mastery of his subject with material drawn from every conceivable source, by the fierce sincerity of his convictions and a selfless and honourable ambition to serve the cause of his people with all the resources at his command. Every utterance sprang from the core of his being, and breathed a fresher, purer air, a deeper sincerity and passion than was ever seen or heard of. Every issue was lifted out of the dust of petty, parochial or party strife and raised to the higher and nobler plane of national interest. If one truth as compelling as it is unpalatable emerges into view from a reading of his speeches in Council, it is that politics is the noblest of human arts; that it is not for the mediocre many but for the exceptional few; that in the hands of a noble, enlightened and dedicated practitioner, it becomes an instrument of immeasurable and lasting good.

Ramanathan was ably seconded by the Hon. Geo. B. Leechman, the Representative of European Commercial Interests and supported by the Hon. J. Van Langenberg, the Burgher Representative. His motion was accepted by the Government and

in consequence, important changes were effected in the Department. He now proceeded to denounce the prevalent passion in our youth to copy the 'external phases' or take on the veneer of Western civilization, while ignoring "those really sound elements of it which make that civilization valuable". He was the first among our legislators to impress upon an alien Government, which strove insidiously to couple political conquest with the cultural, as has been the practice and considered policy of every ruling power from the beginnings of Colonialism to our own day, the paramount duty and responsibility of encouraging the study of the language, the literature and culture of the people over whom it held sway. It is surprising that in early youth, amidst the multiplicity of his labours, he, yet, found time to ponder long and deep upon the eternal verities of life, the fundamental values that give meaning and purpose to human existence and arrive at conclusions which Time has more than confirmed. In an age in which the surging current of Western culture and mode of life swept our youth virtually off its feet and threw into the shade everything indigenous and national, he not merely resisted its impact himself, but more, sounded a note of warning to his people that a blind and heady imitation of everything Western or foreign would not conduce to a healthy, vigorous and progressive national life, and that education, to be constructive and creative, should accord the foremost place to the language, the literature and the traditional culture of the child whom it purports to serve. He said: "At present the great ambition of the Sinhalese youth, who has picked up a smattering of English in the Anglo-Vernacular Schools, is to assume the external phases of Western civilization only, without caring to aspire to those really sound elements of it which make that civilization valuable. When the Sinhalese youth comes to know a little English, his mind becomes unsettled. He

discards the plough, the honourable and useful calling of his ancestors, idles away his time or becomes a petition-drawer or clerk on a miserable pittance. This is not as it should be. The Government has hitherto devoted large sums of money towards instructing the youths of the country in elementary English education and neglected to give them the opportunity of entering upon a higher course of study in their language. The future policy of the Government should be to spend largely on the promotion of Vernacular education."

Ramanathan was in a very real sense, the fore-runner of the Swabasha medium in education which the Government is labouring but with varying results to introduce today. Almost a century ago, when Western languages, both ancient and modern, held oppressive sway over our educational system and were the acknowledged media of higher learning, when the national languages were contemptuously relegated to the background both by the people and their White rulers, here was a youth not quite out of his twenties, who saw the folly and futility of it all and sent a trumpet-call to the nation to take a legitimate pride in its own language and culture, impressed upon it the truth that the national languages are the true and proper media of instruction in our seats of learning and dispelled from the minds of the rulers the false notion that the national languages were not worthy vehicles of higher thought and learning. He deplored the lowering of our traditional moral standards and stressed the enormous importance of moral instruction and the practical development of character, in any scheme of education and the necessity of having selected English classics on Ethics and the sciences translated into the national languages. He said, "What the Sinhalese and the Tamil youths lack most is character. It is the duty of the Government to develop it. The youth of the country ought to be made to think on sound lines, without

prejudice, wayward inclination or caprice. I know of no book that can effect this object better than Smiles' *Self-help*, the like of which does not exist in Tamil or Sinhalese prose. The Government would confer a positive boon on the Ceylonese by obtaining a translation of that book. Another much-needed book, I would mention, is Dr. Fleming's *Moral Science*. There are several works on morals in Tamil literature, and I dare say, in Sinhalese also but they embody a collection of terse texts, very correct and excellent, but something more is wanted. These didactic sayings are not made to rest on a definite theory of morals. At least, readers are not taught the reasons of things. It is based on authority."

The speech bore the impress of an original and challenging mind, deeply interested in first principles and wary of an all-too-hasty acceptance of conventional notions. One sees in it the germs, the clear hall-marks of the future statesman, fastening himself upon subjects of enduring national import. To an age which deemed sacrosanct all things Western and was fast succumbing to a snobbish disparagement of honest labour and the traditional occupations and was in hot pursuit of the white-collar job, however unremunerative and unedifying, he proclaimed with prophetic fire the gospel of the plough, and of pride in one's national culture and institutions and the primacy of spiritual and moral values in education and life. His colleagues were, so to say, overwhelmed by the spectacle of a lad not yet out of his twenties, exploding their cherished beliefs and accepted norms and exhorting them to cling fast to values that should inform and inspire any healthy and progressive society.

On 20th October, 1860, the Hon. Mr. John Douglas (Colonial-Secretary) moved that it was expedient, that the Educational Grant for the year 1881 should be made in accordance with the provisions of the Revised Code for Aided-Schools prepared

by the Director of Public Instruction and said that, if his motion were accepted by the Council after due discussion, he would move the Council to go into Committee of the whole House in order to consider the petitions addressed to the Legislative Council and to have the explanations of the Director of Public Instruction.

Mr. Ramanathan moved by way of amendment that, instead of the Council going into Committee, the Revised Code be referred to a Select Committee, or a Sub-Committee, with power to examine witnesses. This proposal was supported by all the Unofficial Members and by two of the Official Members, the Auditor-General (Mr. Ravenscroft) and the Government Agent for the Western Province (Mr. F. R. Saunders). A Sub-Committee was then formed, with Mr. Ramanathan also as one of its members, to consider and report on the Code to the Council.

The Government desired to restrict the multiplication of rival schools in populous districts and to raise the number of days of average attendance in grant-in-aid schools. As all educational bodies were interested in the expansion of the grant-in-aid system, the subject became a burning question of the day.

As soon as the report of the Sub-Committee was tabled on 6th December, the debate on the subject was resumed. Mr. Ramanathan spoke of the undesirability of restricting the operation of the grant-in-aid system and moved an amendment on the high average attendance required by the Code.

In moving the resolution for amendment, Ramanathan said, "I have always taken a deep interest in the cause of education, and I gratefully acknowledge the readiness with which the Hon. the Lieutenant Governor proposed to me the desirability of calling a special sitting for this day in view of my intended departure from Ceylon to India.

"The motion before the Council involves one of the most important subjects which have come

before it during this session. The enforcement of the principles embodied in the Code will undoubtedly alter the educational system of our Colony, some say for good, others say for evil, and others still say it will work a calamity. Before I state the terms of my motion for amendment, I wish to state my views on the code.

"Nothing is more universally admitted than the principle that the Government should provide for the education of the masses. It cannot, for generations to come, give them anything like culture, but what is expected of it is to instruct them to the extent of enabling them to take care of their own interests in their own stations of life. This was plainly the aim of our past rulers."

He outlined the importance attached to education by the native Kings and the Dutch rulers and deplored the decay into which it had fallen under the British. He proceeded, "The question now is, is this grant-in-aid system to be restricted? Is the time come for limiting its extension? I think not, not to the extent proposed by the Director. The wealthier classes of Ceylon, absorbed in their own pursuits, do not think of the educational wants of the poor, nor are the labouring classes sensible enough or able to help themselves. It is therefore the duty of the Government to urge the masses to educate themselves and also to contribute largely and freely to the cause of such education. The circumstances of the Colony permit of such education mainly by means of small schools, and the withdrawal of the grants from such schools will seriously affect the educational opportunities of the people."

There is another quality of his that forces itself upon the attention of even the most casual reader of his speeches and that is his active and lifelong preoccupation with the wants and needs of the poor. The uplift of the masses, freeing them from the many disabilities under which they suffer, giving them equality of opportunity in education and life, enabling them to live a richer and fuller life is, in his view, the prime concern of any government. He arraigns the rich for being "too far absorbed in their own pursuits, to think of the hardships and misery of the poor" and tells them that they owe these luckless ones a duty which they cannot shirk without detriment to themselves. He was the first among our leaders to place the needs and wants of the poor in the forefront of the country's political programme, to shake up the smug complacency of the rich and wake them up to an awareness of their duty and responsibility to those not so happily placed as they. He was a socialist long before socialism was heard of in this country.

In support of his view, Ramanathan quoted at length from the report of Mr. Arbuthnot, who was then Director of Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency and who, when an attempt was made to restrict the operation of the grant-in-aid system, opposed it firmly and contended that it was the duty of the wealthier classes to contribute to the instruction and education of their poorer neighbours, to make whatever pecuniary sacrifice necessary for the purpose. He concluded, "The policy of the present code is to reduce the number of schools, where superabundant, in the hope, for there is no certainty, of erecting larger schools. I admit that larger schools, with a good teacher, regular attendance of pupils and good discipline are more efficient for purposes of education than small schools. But the hope of Government to erect large schools may prove to be a vain hope. The Director of Public Instruction, for whom personally I have high respect, does not appear to have taken note of the circumstances of the Island. His attempt to develop small schools into large schools would retard the course of education. What is immediately required is a network of small schools throughout the country. It will take years for a small school to become

a large school, as there is no compulsory education in Ceylon. The people of this country do not appreciate education so greatly as to send their children to distantly-situated schools. Even if they appreciate education, they are too timid to trust their children all alone so far."

As a result of Ramanathan's efforts, substantial improvements were made in the educational system of the Island. He had impressed on the Government the necessity of educating the people for citizenship, by liberal expenditure on all possible types of educational institutions. The grant-in-aid system which the Government proposed to scrap was given a new lease of life. A net-work of schools sprang up, bringing education within the reach of every child.

Ramanathan's entry into the legislature is a landmark in our constitutional history, inasmuch as it paved the way for the triumph of democracy in Ceylon. The story of his political life is also the story of Ceylon's transformation from autocracy to real democracy. Entering the legislature in an era of our constitutional history in which the will of a single individual, in the person of the Governor armed with an Official majority, prevailed in the Government of the state, by the sheer force of his political genius and the ardour of his patriotism, by dauntless courage and dogged tenacity, he forced the arbitrary, self-willed, power-intoxicated imperialist to accept the basic, unvarying principle of all Government viz. the will of the ruled as expressed by their accredited representatives, and to renounce that survival of medieval barbarism viz. the iron hand of a despotic ruler. Henceforth every question of national import was brought before the Council board, subjected to ruthless scrutiny and decided on the merits of the case.

CHAPTER IX

GRIEVANCES OF PUBLIC SERVANTS. THE CIVIL SERVICE — THE POSTAL SERVICE

> "If Public Servants appeal to the Legislative Council on a question of pay or promotion or any other grievance, I do not think they could be considered to be guilty of a breach of dicipline."
>
> — *Ramanathan*

> "If the Ceylonese are content with the inequalities of their position, it is not for me to fight their battles. The claims of these gentlemen to the prizes of the service are altogether a minor matter. It is not of much interest to me whether individually they secure higher pay or greater prestige than now. But I am deeply interested in the other and more general phase of the question, viz. whether the best of the natives of Ceylon are, or are not, allowed to take part in the administration of their country."
>
> — *Ramanathan*

IN espousing the claims of the Ceylonese members of the Civil Service to equality of treatment with their European counterparts in the country, Ramanathan had to wage a vigorous and doughty war against entrenched prejudice, convention, injustice and racial discrimination. In the early days of British rule, unlike in later times, an invidious and exasperating distinction was drawn by the Government between the European and the Ceylonese members of the Civil Service. Ramanathan who had never brooked racial arrogance or the pretensions to racial superiority so common and so characteristic of Englishmen in the Colonial Service and had consistently upheld the principle that merit alone and not race or colour or creed should be the criterion of

place or promotion, felt keenly and poignantly the humiliating discrimination practised against the sons of the soil by their alien rulers. One of the greatest and the most abiding services he rendered to the Island lay in this, that he did more than any other man before or since to cleanse the Public Service of the manifold abuses and malpractices that had grown round it over the years and make it a byword for purity and efficiency in the Empire. No dark or dusty corner seemed to escape the watchful eye and vigilant concern of this indomitable reformer. He was convinced that the British rulers, in the exercise of arbitrary power, were insidiously relegating the Ceylonese members of the Service to the more humdrum and less remunerative posts, while studiedly and solicitously reserving the plums of the Service to their own compatriots. He knew that many among the former were no whit inferior to the latter and that, given fairer treatment and equality of opportunity, they too could play their parts worthily and well.

Rooted in this conviction, he asked the Legislative Council why the Ceylonese in the Civil Service were not appointed to revenue offices and moved for a return showing the revenue appointments, if any, held by them during the preceding ten years. In a brilliant speech he set forth their case. He said, "Approximately speaking, there are 43 revenue appointments and 32 judicial appointments in the Ceylon Civil Service, making a total of about 75 appointments. About six of these appointments are filled by Ceylonese gentlemen, but they are all in the judicial line. The relative value of judicial and revenue appointments may be seen from the fact that, out of the fourteen appointments included in the 'first class' and carrying salaries between Rs. 12,000/- and Rs. 24,000/- a year, only two are judicial, one of which is worth Rs. 14,400/- and the other Rs. 12,000/-. The prizes of the Service are, therefore, in the revenue line. It must also

be conceded that, without a preliminary training in the lower grades of administrative appointments, no man in the Service can adequately fill any of the higher offices in the revenue line.

"Looking back during the last twenty years, I cannot think of a Ceylonese who has held a revenue appointment. How, then, could the Ceylonese gentlemen in the Ceylon Civil Service hope to secure any of the prizes of the Service? Europeans and Ceylonese enter the Civil Service upon equal terms, and yet how is this inequality of position to be accounted for? Who is responsible for the exclusion of the Ceylonese from the revenue line? If the Ceylonese are content with the inequalities of their position, it is not for me to fight their battles. The claims of these gentlemen to the prizes of the Service is altogether a minor matter. It is not of much interest to me whether individually they secure higher pay or greater prestige than now. But I am deeply interested in the other and more general phase of the question, viz. whether the best of the natives of Ceylon are or are not, allowed to take part in the administration of their country?".

He expressed his gratitude for the blessings of British rule, for the many institutions founded by them as a means of educating the people in the rudiments of self-government. But, he contended, "the best school for learning how to administer a country is a revenue or financial office in the Civil Service. The details of administrative work in Ceylon are learnt best in the revenue offices, in the Colonial Secretary's office and the Kachcheries." He pleaded that "a fair trial be given to the Ceylonese members of the Civil Service to serve in Revenue Offices". He continued, "The experiment of appointing native gentlemen in the Civil Service to these revenue offices was never fully and fairly tried, not even begun, though their judicial attainments are universally recognized. Their work

as judges is guided by qualities which are also the essentials of administrative genius. The good work they have done as judges is based upon a sense of duty, self-control, firmness, keen intellect, aptitude for details, and a wide knowledge of the Law and the ways of the people of the country, all of which qualities are of the utmost value for purposes of administration. The importance and responsibilities of judicial work are not sufficiently recognized by our Government in Ceylon. The scale of emoluments attached to revenue and judicial offices betrays the opinion of past Governments upon the relative merits of either work.

"Your Excellency would bear in mind that at one time the capacity of the the Ceylonese to do the work of judges was considered a moot point. I do not know if the Government would now deny their capacity for administrative work. If the experiment is made, the Ceylonese gentlemen in the Service will, I have not the slightest doubt, give the most convincing proofs of their ability as administrators, in the same manner as they have shown their ability as judges."

He cited instances of Indians who had shown an exceptional flair for administration. "In the neighbouring continent of India, many a Native State is a standing monument of statesmanship on the part of the natives of India. Sir Salar Jung, the Minister of Haiderabad, raised that State from bankruptcy and the evils which followed in the wake of misrule to a condition which was the envy and despair of Anglo-Indian statesmen. And of Sir T. Madhava Rao, the successful Dewan of Travancore and Baroda, I would say no more than this, that a few years ago '*The Times*' London, while deploring the chaos into which Indian finances had been brought and the ever-recurring misery of Indian famines, strongly recommended that Sir T. Madhava Rao should be appointed Finance Minister of India, and anticipated from his genius the almost magic

changes which he had produced successively in the two great States of Travancore and Baroda. I mention the names of these statesmen to show to our Government the aptitude of some of the natives of India, and therefore of Ceylon, for the work of administration. And it is not to be supposed that these great men could have administered without competent and able subordinates".

He then cited numerous instances of Indians who had been elevated to the highest Revenue Offices by the British Government of India and had more than proved their worth. He proceeded to add, "Well might our Government follow in the footsteps of India, where the policy of allowing the best men of the country to take part in its administration is being carried out. The success which has been achieved there is a guarantee that the appointment of the Ceylonese gentlemen to the revenue offices of Ceylon, where they could learn the art of administration, would produce the happiest results."

He concluded with, "I ask why the Ceylonese gentlemen in the Civil Service are not appointed to revenue offices, and I beg to move for a return showing the revenue appointments, if any, held by them during the last ten years." He had now applied the surgical knife to a cancerous tumour viz. racial discrimination, which had long and grievously enfeebled the Public Service and established once and for all the principle that merit should be the sole criterion of place and promotion.

In response to this motion, the Government furnished him with the returns and said that appointments to revenue offices were made by the Governor according to the fitness of the officers available for the particular posts. Moreover, they gave the assurance that they had no objection to appointing Ceylonese Members of the Civil Service to revenue offices, if they possessed the requisite attainments. Ramanathan thus paved the way for the appoint-

ment of Ceylonese Civil Servants to Public Offices which had hitherto remained closed to them and redeemed them from the many disabilities under which they had for many years laboured. Henceforth appointments were made according to the candidate's merits and fitness, irrespective of race or colour.

THE POSTAL SERVICE

For a number of years the subordinate officers of the Postal Services were subjected to serious handicaps. Though they were men whose efficiency and competence were above reproach, yet they were denied certain advantages which were extended to their counterparts in other departments of the Public Service. With complacency and unconcern, the Government allowed these hapless ones to stagnate in the lower grades with little or no prospect of promotion or of increased salary and pension. Faced with such an unhappy and anomalous situation, they naturally turned to Ramanathan as to one who alone could be counted upon to feel for them and vindicate their claims. Accordingly in January 1885, he presented to the Legislative Council a memorial from certain officers of the General Post Office complaining of their unsatisfactory condition, with regard to pay and promotion. He moved that it be read.

After it was read, the acting Colonial Secretary (Hon. Mr. R. F. Dickson) said, "It is necessary that I should say just one word, that it is a grave breach of discipline for a body of public servants to memorialize the Legislative Council." Even the Governor and other Officials were vigorous and tenacious in upholding that view. Ramanathan said that he would call attention to that position at the next meeting and on the 12th of February of the same year, he gave notice of the following motion: "In the opinion of this Council the claims of the memorialists to promotion in other branches of the Clerical Service deserve the consideration of the

Government, if they cannot be given in their own department a higher scale of salary and pension on retirement."

Speaking on the motion he said, "About a fortnight ago, I had the honour of presenting a petition from the employees of the General Post Office, signed by about fifty of those public servants, and the gist of their grievances is that they have been excluded from the benefits of the clerical scheme during the last ten years, and thereby have suffered great loss in being deprived of promotion in other Government departments as vacancies occur, without any compensation by way of increased salary or pension being allowed to them. Just as the petition had been read, my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary (Mr. J. F. Dickson) testily remarked that the presentation of such a memorial on the part of these public servants was a grave breach of discipline. It at once placed public servants, who look up to the Council for protection as much as others do, and me, and indeed the Legislative Council, in a false position. I had no ground whatever for supposing that our public servants are the servants of the local Executive Government. It is unquestionably true that these public servants are the servants of Her Majesty, and that this honourable Council is the Council of Her Majesty, and not of the Governor, and that this Council, being vested with the power of voting the salaries of public servants, has also the right to enquire into their conditions and complaints. If, under these circumstances, public servants appeal to the Legislative Council on a question of pay or promotion or on any other grievances, I do not think that they could be considered to be guilty of a breach of discipline".

He proceeded to cite precedents in order that he might all the more effectually convince his Hon. friend the Colonial Secretary of the right of public servants in the Colony to present a memorial to

the Legislative Council. The minutes of the Legislative Council of 5th September, 1842 which he had laboriously unearthed, furnished him with one, where the Colonial Secretary himself, who was undoubtedly a Member of the Legislative Council, presented a petition from the clerks in the public service. Ramanathan produced the petition itself to the Council. He cited another instance when on 12th September, 1843, Mr. M. Darley, an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council presented a memorial to the Council which was addressed as follows:

"To His Excellency, the President and Hon. Members of the Legislative Council, the humble petition of the undersigned clerks at Colombo in the service of the Government." Then there was a third petition which was presented by Mr. George Wall, when he was a Member of the Legislative Council in 1858. That was also signed by the clerks of the public service, when Sir Henry Ward was Governor of the Island. All these petitions were for pay and promotion. They were considered by the Legislative Council and their requests were granted."

He continued, "I should have thought, that a liberal Government would have been glad of opportunities of this kind to explain away any grievances which public servants may fancy they have, and it would be very pleasing to the public to feel that the Government which presides over them is ready to answer courteous criticism. I can only express my sincere regret that the presentation of this memorial should have been so much misunderstood by my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary. Even if these unfortunate clerks were wrong, their memorial should have been received in a more kindly and liberal spirit."

He then explained the grievances of the memorialists and the justice of their cause. He quoted from the pronouncements of eminent Officials of State, both past and present, and established the

genuineness of the grievances and moved the motion of which he had given notice.

It was seconded and supported by Messrs A. L. de. Alwis and R. A. Bosanquet respectively. After the Colonial Secretary's speech against the motion was over, His Excellency the Governor addressed the House on the irregularity of the petitioners in addressing the petition. This expression of opinion on the part of His Excellency, after all that had been said by Ramanathan, roused him to bitter indignation. He felt that all the words he had spoken at length, all the arguments he had put forward, all the precedents he had cited had fallen on deaf ears. In a speech remarkable for trenchancy and force, he addressed the House:

"After the expression of opinion which has fallen from Your Excellency, I should, if my personal feelings are consulted, prefer to remain silent. But I cannot do so in the interests of the public. My position today is this. On taking my seat at this Board I find a bundle of privileges have been entrusted to my safe-keeping, and if I feel honestly and conscientiously that those privileges are in any way trespassed upon, it does not matter by whom, it becomes my duty, however painful it may be, that I should resist the attempt. My opinion may not be supported by the Official majority in the Council, but, all the same, my duty is to press it. Your Excellency has spoken of this Council as an 'outside body'."

H. E. The Governor:- No, I did not say this Council was an outside body.

Mr. Ramanathan:- I thought you spoke of it as an outside body. I understand, then, Your Excellency to say now that it is not an outside body?

H. E. The Governor:- Outside what?

Mr. Ramanathan:- Outside the Government?

H. E. The Governor:- It is outside the Executive Government.

Mr. Ramanathan :- I quite concede that proposition, Sir, but I say this Legislative Council is part and parcel of the Government of Ceylon. If you admit that we are not strangers, that we are not a body outside the Government of Ceylon, all the arguments I have heard today urged against the right of public servants to memorialize this Council must totter and fall to the ground. Treat us as part of the Government of Ceylon, as a body essential to the good administration of the the country, as men inspired by the same motives as yourselves, as single-minded men who have the good of the country at heart and who labour for the promotion of the general welfare. If you, Sir, realize this view, I feel confident that you will not quarrel with me or any other member for presenting a memorial of this kind to this Council.

H. E. The Governor :- I beg the honourable member's pardon. I am not blaming him. I said he was perfectly right. I regret myself that he should have done so, because on the part of the petitioners this was a grave breach of discipline. The honourable member is perfectly right. I say that clearly, but there are departmental reasons why public servants should not forward petitions to this Council.

Mr. Ramanathan (continuing) :- What I feel strongly about this is that a petition is presented to this Council, and the Government refuse to vouchsafe an answer or explanation. The Government, perhaps, think it is an indication of great strength, but my opinion is that it is an exhibition of weakness, because it fears legitimate criticism.

H. E. The Governor :- Do you press your motion ?

Mr. Ramanathan :- I do, but I think some other members wish to speak.

The Hon. Mr. J. Van Langenberg addressed the Council on the point of privilege and contended

that the intention of the petitioners being quite respectful, Mr. Ramanathan was within his right in presenting the memorial.

H. E. The Governor :- Do you press your motion ?

Mr. Ramanathan :- Yes, I do.

H. E. The Governor :- I am anxious that there shall be no opinion given on the claims of the memorialists. I am anxious that no such question shall be answered either in the negative or affirmative at the present time. I shall therefore, move the 'previous question'. The 'previous question' is that this question be now put.

Mr. Ramanathan :- Which question, Sir ?

H. E. The Governor : That this question, that is, your motion, be now put. The operation of that is that, if it is carried in the affirmative, then your question is put, and we divide on it. If the motion that this question be now put is decided in the negative, then the motion is not put at all.

Mr. Ramanathan :- I rise to a question of order, Sir. The rule that refers to a motion is this : "When a motion has been made and seconded and the debate closed, the question, thereupon, shall be put to the vote by the presiding member." It says 'shall be' put to the vote.

H. E. The Governor :- Have you a copy of the House of Commons rules ? I must confess, I do not find anything about the 'previous question' here

Mr. J. Van Langenberg :- I do not think there is any rule, Sir, about the 'previous question'.

After a pause the Hon. the Colonial Secretary moved the adjournment of the debate *sine die* and the motion was declared carried.

This was indeed a resounding triumph for the public servants, in days when they were gagged and held in dumb subjection. He obtained redress for their grievances. What is more, he established

for all time and in the face of strenuous, even adamantine opposition by Government, the right of public servants to memorialize the Legislative Council on matters appertaining to their service and seek redress for their grievances. He had ended for all time the traditional British practice of discriminating against the sons of the soil in making appointments to the higher rungs of the Public Service, redeemed them from the many disabilities and inequalities in which they had languished for long years and vindicated their dignity, self-respect and independence.

CHAPTER X

THE POST OFFICE SAVINGS BANKS

"It is the duty of the Government to help the working-classes, to wean them from improvidence, by holding out encouragements to save, by offering at their doors, so to speak, ready and attractive means of investing their small savings"

— *Ramanathan*

"The Government is not aware that it is their duty—a paramount duty it owes to the people of Ceylon—to do all in their power to help the non-intelligent masses to avoid improvident habits and to do what is right and useful in life."

— *Ramanathan*

OF Ramanathan's many memorable services to the people, the establishment of the Post Office Savings Banks was undoubtedly one. A man of great foresight and imagination, an exemplar of thrift and providence, he saw that such an institution as the Post Office Savings Bank would, as an inducement to thrift, be productive of great good to the land. Accordingly on 10th November, 1880, he moved in the Legislative Council "that it was desirable as a means of promoting national thrift to establish a Post Office Savings Bank with branches in the chief towns of Ceylon and that Government should take early steps for that purpose."

In a brilliant speech, he set forth his case. Ever the friend of the poor and the needy, he was mainly preoccupied with their welfare. He said, "My motion has in view the welfare of the working-classes. It is the duty of the Government to do all it can to improve their condition. Truly wretched is the family that is not able to make

both ends meet, but there are thousands of families whose earnings are in excess of their immediate wants, and it is the case of these families which the Government has to consider.

"What becomes of their small savings? I know of cases where thrifty men have entrusted these savings to a rich neighbour for safe custody, and the rich neighbour appropriated them to his own use. Others there are who attempt to lay out their money on loans and wreck their all in the end. A third class, afraid of the risks attendant on savings, pamper to their desires and necessarily live from hand to mouth. Others lock up their earnings in superfluous jewelry and thus miss the chance of making their money bear fruit by careful investment on profitable lands on interest. Others still — and these are by far the largest class — cannot help frequenting the tavern or the gambling house or indulging in needless litigation. Is it not the duty of the Government to help these classes of people, to wean them from improvidence by holding out encouragements to save, by offering at their very doors, so to speak, ready and attractive means of investing their small savings?

"The Ceylonese at present, I mean the masses, fall under the category of communities whom Sir William Harcourt described as fit for only a 'grandmotherly government'. It is usual to speak of Englishmen as independent, able to manage their own affairs, and self-relying. And yet what abundant precautions have been taken by English statesmen to encourage thrift among the English working-classes! They have their savings banks, penny banks acting as feeders to central banks, and Post Office banks. Not satisfied with these institutions, Dr. Fawcett has recently introduced a new system of savings. He was so struck with the wastage of pennies that he has empowered Post Office banks to receive from depositors a card-board of twelve penny postages in lieu of a shilling. The advantage

of this arrangement is obvious. Having once pasted a penny stamp on the card board, the workingman was less liable to fritter away the stamp than if he had the penny in his pocket. When he had collected twelve stamps in this manner, he handed the board to a Post Office and it was received as a deposit of one shilling. If such aids are necessary for the promotion of thrift among Englishmen, whose motto is 'Self-Help', what do not the Ceylonese require? To save them from improvidence, to enable them to put by something against an emergency or for the future, to help them to avoid debt, to be thrifty and grow to be independent is, I conceive, a pressing duty which the Government owes to the labouring classes. What we want is a ready and attractive method of inviting deposits. There should be no obstacles in the way of one who thinks of depositing. Post Office banks afford the necessary facilities. Each of the money order offices in our towns ought to be a Savings Bank also, admitting of sixpenny or shilling deposits. I do not think the Postmaster-General could experience any difficulty in working these banks. I have studied the rules under which these banks are worked in England and I find them to be thoroughly intelligible and easy to work. I sincerely hope that the Government will take this important matter into their consideration and initiate these banks at as early a date as possible."

He concluded: "I would be sorry to be put off with a distant promise, for I believe that such institutions tend directly to ameliorate the condition of the working-classes."

His Excellency the Governor appreciated the weight of his arguments and admitted that the Government was favourably disposed towards the establishment of the Post Office Savings Banks, but contended that there were certain practical hindrances in the way of their immediate institution. He also assured him that the Post Office Savings Banks would be established in the leading towns as soon

as those obstacles had been cleared.

Ramanathan waited for about a year and when he found that little or nothing had been done in that direction, he reintroduced the subject in October 1881. He was convinced that the matter he had taken in hand was one of supreme importance to individual and national well-being and felt that it was his duty, in spite of Governmental opposition, to resume the fight for its introduction. On 19th October, 1881, he moved for a return showing the number of deposits made during the preceding five years in the Kachcheri branches of the Ceylon Savings Bank and asked when the Government intended to give to the inhabitants of the principal towns of Ceylon the boon of Post Office Savings Banks.

"At the last session of this Council, nearly twelve months ago, I moved that it was desirable, as a means of promoting thrift amongst the Ceylonese, that Post Office Savings Banks be established in the leading towns of Ceylon, and that the Government do introduce these banks at as early a date as possible..... My motion, I said, had in view the welfare of the 'working-classes'. Since the introduction of the motion, I have been able to ascertain from the census returns of the Registrar-General what proportion of the population of Ceylon might be attracted by the advantage to be offered by the Post Office Savings Bank. The census returns show that the 'professional' class averages 1·2 per cent., the 'commercial' class, 5·3 per cent., the 'agricultural' class, 23·7 per cent., and the 'industrial' class, 2·8 per cent. of the entire population of Ceylon. The total of the working-classes may therefore be said to be a little over 30 per cent. of the Ceylonese. In other words, they number as many as 750,000 souls. Of this number, one tenth may be assumed to be naturally thrifty, which would leave 675,000 persons to be brought under the reforming influence of the Savings Bank. I should

say about 50 per cent. of this number sink their savings in gambling, drinking and litigation. Is it not the duty of the Government to do all in their power to see to the well-being of so large a number of the people of Ceylon?"

The Lieutenant Governor laid on the table the return moved for, but said that the Government was not prepared to establish Post Office Savings Banks then, because, while in an outstation Kachcheri, there was a responsible man to receive money and see that the money was deposited and that it went to the fountain-head, and while the money was paid there to one man, another checked it, and a third saw that it went straight to the Savings Bank, there was no one in the local Post Office to check the deposits made in the Post Office. He added that it was not fair to place a heavy financial liability on Postmasters, receiving, say, Rs. 20/- a month, and that unless the Government was able to have a proper organized check, it would not be possible to save the outstation Postmasters from temptation.

Ramanathan was pained to hear this from the Governor, and replied as follows: "Sir, I regret to hear the reply of the Hon. the Lieutenant Governor. The Government, I am assured, are perfectly sensible of the importance of promoting thrift and other social virtues in this Colony; and they have been told, in pointed terms, by my hon. friend on the right, the Sinhalese member (Mr. Albert de Alwis) that the institution of Post Office Savings Banks would have a direct bearing upon the suppression of crime. Government are aware of this and other things, but Government are not aware that it is their duty—a paramount duty they owe to the people of Ceylon—to do all in their power to help the non-intelligent masses to avoid improvident habits and to do what is right and useful in life.

"The Lieutenant Governor is content to remark that there are 2,896 depositors in outstations. He is

happy with such a state of things, but I am not; and I fully believe that this side of the House will never be happy with such a state of things. I went into facts and figures and pointed out that no less that 675,000 wage-earners are still unable to find facilities for the practice of thrift. The motto of Englishmen is said to be 'Self-Help' and it is also said that we natives are so unable to manage our own affairs that we require a grand-motherly government. While the Postmaster-General in England is devising means monthly and almost daily to wean the self-helping Englishmen from improvident ways, we, natives, under this grand-motherly government, are not to be helped at all. If men having greater powers of self-control than we have, require so many aids to thrift, why should not our countrymen be favoured with even a fraction of that aid?

"I have not asked for penny banks, or postal saving cards, but I only ask for Post Office Savings Banks in the leading towns of Ceylon. I do not want the Government to establish them in every petty village. The terms of my motion are very clear. I said I wanted those banks in the principal towns of Ceylon. I ask how many principal towns there are in Ceylon. Are not the Government prepared to give my countrymen the limited boon I have asked for? It is true that postholders in petty villages are poorly salaried, and I do not want small village postholders to be exposed to the temptation which the Lieutenant Governor has alluded to. But no harm surely could come, if post-holders in the principal towns were allowed for a while to be custodians of the monies deposited. They need not have the monies in their hands for a long time. They might render daily or weekly accounts, as suits the Postmaster-General. The Lieutenant Governor spoke of organized checks and said that unless a system of organized checks could be enforced upon these postholders, such an institution

as I advocate could not be established. He also stated that he did not know when this checking system could be introduced. In other words, he has said that for an institution which he himself admits, will have a good influence upon the people, my countrymen will have to wait till doomsday.

"Another reason put forward is that the investment of the monies deposited in the Savings Banks and now amounting to one million rupees odd have been lent out on mortgage of private property, and that by the introduction of the Post Office Savings Banks, all these monies would have to be re-invested on government security. My motion does not contemplate this change. I would leave the Ceylon Savings Bank intact. My object is to have Post Office Savings Banks working independently of the existing Ceylon Savings Bank.

"I understood the Hon. The Lieutenant Governor to say that the Kachcheri branches of the Savings Bank are doing good work. As I have already said, I cannot agree with that opinion. I believe there are about seventeen Kachcheries, whereas there are more than forty leading towns in Ceylon. It does not matter to me whether the system is worked in connection with the Kachcheri or with the Post-Office, but I only want that the present system should be extended to a much larger extent. If the Government would be prepared to add twenty-five or thirty towns more to the existing number, that would be some benefit to the Colony. As it is, I must repeat what I stated once before in Council, that the Government see their way somehow to spending large sums on undertakings which no one admits to be of general use to the Colony, but where the true interests of the Colony are at stake, the Government find difficulties and are thus gravely wanting in their duty to the people."

This is hard pounding and the case was unanswerable. No government which cared for reason or argument could ignore it. Ramanathan's motion

was accepted and implemented. The Post Office Savings Bank, which today is one of the most beneficent of national institutions and has its ramifications in the remotest corners of the country, became a *fait accompli*, as the result of his relentless and uncompromising struggle.

CHAPTER XI

CHARACTERISTICS

"Great souls who find me, have found the highest perfection."

— *Gita.*

"A man shows best where he outshines himself; to climb that height he'll spend in labour more than half his days."

— *Euripides.*

"It has not been my lot in any country to be associated with a gentleman of greater natural dignity, courtesy and charm of manner than Sir P. Ramanathan."

— *Prof. Marrs.*

"The Solicitor-General of Ceylon is one Ramanathan, a Tamil Hindu and a cultured man of great ability and influence. What struck me most was that he was altogether free from the social trammels which encumber us here."

— *Bal Gangadhar Tilak.*

Ramanathan takes his rightful place among the band of mortals who appear sporadically through the ages and after death achieve immortality. They are Supermen come into the world with a mandate, a divine purpose to fulfil. They are the salt of the earth, beacon lights to guide floundering humanity. But for them, the world would indeed be a poorer place for the habitation of mankind.

We are dazzled by the amazing versatility of his mind and interests. Statesman and man of action, sage and scholar, legislator and jurist, philosopher and man of religion, patriot and philanthropist, controversialist and orator, author

and administrator, educational reformer and benefactor, born leader and idol of the nation, he ran practically the whole gamut of life's possibilities. Such astounding versatility was the outcome of a compelling desire in him to explore and exploit life's fullest possibilities, to view life from every coign of vantage and serve mankind in its many and variegated realms. A great Governor, recalling the celebrated tribute of Dr. Johnson to his friend and compeer Oliver Goldsmith, once said of Ramanathan that he touched life at several points and what is remarkable, at every point at which he touched it, he touched it with distinction.

To begin with nature had endowed him prodigally with a vitality, that faculty of energy, endurance and elasticity that must be accounted prodigious. It was the proud boast of his friends and admirers that Ramanathan was engaged in vigorous and sustained activity for more than eighteen hours of the day. He was temperamentally incapable of idleness, and was physically and mentally the most active man alive. His rule in small things, as in great, was the homely proverb that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well. Whatever hand or mind or tongue found to do, he did with all his might. Carlyle defined genius as a transcendent capacity for taking pains and Mathew Arnold, as sheer dynamic energy. Ramanathan's genius was pre-eminently a combination of the twin faculties of energy and disciplined effort.

Comparatively early in life, conviction had come to him that the span of man's life is too brief and circumscribed for the fulfilment of life's purposes and that every moment of his waking life should be put to some intense and profitable labour. Under the guidance of his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, he had read and pondered upon Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* mastered and assimilated the *Thirukkural* and other ethical works of Tamil Literature which he had received, as part of his legacy, from his

grandfather Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar and had resolved to order his life in strict conformity with the great maxims of life and conduct enshrined in them. It was said that thenceforth not a minute of his time was ill-spent, not a word uttered that did not carry its weight of meaning and significance.

His bodily frame though not of the steely and heroic mould, never failed to answer his persistent and resolute calls. Whence, from what inexhaustible springs did this energy, which may aptly be described as demoniac, gush out in such wanton profusion? It should be accounted for, in part, by the outer circumstance of his stern and rigid vigilance against all forms of distraction or dissipation but in the main, by the inner fact of religion. Character, as has been said, is destiny and is the outcome of disciplined will, Ramanathan possessed in exceptional measure an uncommon force of will, which shielded him from the many and tumultuous passions and temptations which, in any age or clime, have never ceased to beset the path and encompass the ruin of many noble and aspiring natures. Addressing the Governor Sir Henry McCallum, he once said, "I cannot think with the freedom of the wild ass. My mind is so constituted that it labours hard to find for itself authority for its guidance. The mind of man is man himself. If he discards the law, if he does not endeavour to find out what principles ought to guide his mind, why then he becomes a creature of his own corporeal likes and dislikes. I systematically live down my likes and dislikes. I take care to inform myself what principles the law dictates to my mind, and I compel my mind to obey the law. Whatever the body's likes or dislikes may be, I subject my mind to the law. I say to my mind: 'You shall not break the law. You shall obey the law. You shall execute the law, and shall not act in any way but according to the behests of the law.' Thus have I lived for many years without succumbing to the freedom

of the wild ass."

Religion was the chief motive force of his life, the main-spring of his conduct and action. The man of religion works in a spirit of complete detachment, dedication and self-surrender, in conformity with the Vedic saying, "Whatever works thou doest, consecrate them to Brahma." He toils with a sense of mission and a conviction that he is doing God's own work, that he is after all a mere tool in God's hands for the fulfilment of His purposes in the world. This conviction, this complete freedom from personal and egotistical ends generates in him an energy that is unbounded and a wisdom that is unerring. His action thus gains an elevation, a sublimity, a perfection, a poise and serenity that no other power can possibly impart. It was precisely in this spirit that Ramanathan laboured through a whole lifetime. Hence his phenomenal energy and his equally phenomenal success. It would, nevertheless, be an error to suppose that his genius was merely an infinite capacity for taking pains. This would explain neither the gigantic amount of political, philosophical, religious, literary and legal output nor the terrific speed with which it was made. His was a capacious intellect capable of taking at a single sweep a wide range of diversified knowledge. His mental grasp and breadth, his capacity for seeing all aspects of a highly complicated question and so making unerringly the right choice between alternatives were immense.

We have it on the testimony of persons who actually lived with him and closely studied his ways that he worked incessantly both day and night. Sleep and idleness, he was wont to say, are the twin enemies of man. A great student of the *Upanishads*, he believed in and acted upon one of its maxims: "In the midst of action alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years." A friend of his who had occasion to call at his home one night at 2 a. m. found him immersed

in the study of some Sanskrit classic. He would pursue his work far into the night and whenever fatigue or exhaustion stole on him, he would recline in bed for a little while, after which he would resume his work, refreshed and revivified. It was upon the foundation of this incessant and vigorous activity allied to a prodigious and powerful intellect that he reared the stately edifice of his greatness in the many spheres of life in which he was called upon to play, in some a unique, and in others, a most distinguished role. He was not in the slightest degree influenced by the fatal fallacy so commonly held by lesser men that genius alone is at the root of all achievement. Whenever he found himself confronted with a knotty or intractable problem, he bowed all his energies to it until he found a solution. He focussed, dedicated and disciplined his whole life for the realization of what he conceived to be the supreme objectives of his life. Neither hunger nor fatigue nor sleep could deter him. This incessant and ardent activity was directed not to the domain of humdrum, prosaic business but rather to the high and rarefied realms of statecraft, speculative thought and philanthropic endeavour. He was among us the nearest approach to the *Gita* ideal of a Superman toiling in the service of humankind, with no eye to personal aggrandizement but rather in response to an insistent and implacable call within. He lived the full active life of man in the world with the inner life anchored in the Eternal Spirit.

The practice of working both day and night and at the top of his powers was evidently not a development of his later life but rather a habit he had formed in early youth. It had become so much a part of his nature that he was never at a loss, when the occasion demanded a sudden and exceptional effort. The story goes that in the days when Ramanathan was a young and blossoming lawyer in Colombo, a solicitor from the North

went up to him to have some complex legal document drawn by him. It was late at night. Ramanathan, having ascertained the necessary particulars, put his client to bed and proceeded to hammer out the document. In the early hours of the morning he waked the client up with the document drawn to perfection. Obviously he had toiled at it the whole night long, when average humanity slumbers in cosy beds.

Ramanathan inaugurated the day—though it is a misnomer to employ the term 'inaugurate' in reference to one who laboured day and night with but brief intervals of rest—with what he regarded as his most fundamental activity, religious meditation. Like the Hindu Rishis of old he would practise it for long hours behind closed doors. A disciple of his who, impelled by sheer intellectual curiosity, stole a glimpse of him through the keyhole of the sanctuary has left on record how profoundly impressive and awe-inspiring the spectacle was, the man seated cross-legged, with body erect and motionless and eyes apparently closed, oblivious of the world outside, the whole atmosphere charged with an intense and all-pervading calm and stillness, the individual soul holding secret and intimate communion with the Universal Soul. It was at such moments as these that he experienced his supremest bliss, as it was from that fountain-head that he drew his strength and inspiration. His next pre-occupation was the study of the Hindu Scriptures, the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*, the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*, the *Thiruvasagam* and a host of other works in which Hindu religion is so abundantly and reputedly rich. It was for him a labour of love, for herein lay his real heart. In this as in everything else that he did, far from being content with the light skirmishes or the superficial skimmings characteristic of the dilettante, he strove to attain the depth and mastery of the connoisseur. Thoroughness and precision

were his watch-words in every act of his life. This done, he would proceed to mundane studies, law, politics, economics, history, literature, philosophy—all these came within his giant grasp.

While engaged in secular studies it was customary with him to have ready to hand a secretary whose duty it was to take down everything that was note-worthy. It might not have been irksome for one of the calibre and stern will of Ramanathan to reconcile himself to a life of incessant toil at all hours of the day and night, but for a clerk drawn from the common run of men, the mere suggestion of commencing the day so early must have been repugnant. It was no sinecure to serve Ramanathan in any capacity. Unsparing of himself, he was equally unsparing of his subordinates. Himself a staunch believer in work both as man's highest expression of love and loyalty to his Maker and as the panacea for all human ills, he sought to instil in every one around him a love and enthusiasm for it. Where any question of dereliction of duty arose, he was stern and unshakably firm. To serve him even in the humblest capacity was a training of great worth and a guarantee of one's competence. He was never known to suffer fools or sluggards gladly, nor did he demand from them anything that he did not demand with even greater rigour from himself. The story goes that the clerk in question applied to the principal of a college for employment. When asked for his credentials, he replied that he had been in the employ of Ramanathan. The principal regretted his inability to offer him better employment and proceeded to inquire why he had thrown up an appointment under so great and so good a man. The applicant replied mournfully, "It is impossible to work with him, Sir. He is most exacting. He expects us to begin work at six in the morning. Though I have no other grievance but this, I find it impossible to put up with that life." This clerk found the

mere mechanical work of taking down the notes dictated to him so onerous and so unendurable. How much more so would the work of mastering the great classics of religion and metaphysics, of economics and sociology and the practical handling of the difficult problems of statecraft have been to Ramanathan! He was an idealist and expected as much of others as he gave himself, yet his idealism was firmly based on human nature and its capacities. He was never intolerant of weakness in those he employed, but taught them how to find strength in themselves. He made other men better and stronger not by setting before them an impossible goal, but by making them aware of what he himself had attained and habitually practised.

To those of his men in whose loyalty and devotion to duty he reposed trust, he was a singularly indulgent and generous master. Behind the steely exterior of a harsh and rigid discipline, there lay hid the tenderest of hearts. No man is a hero to his valets but the remarkable thing about Ramanathan was that he was more than a hero to his many valets. He was their beloved master and mentor of whose greatness and goodness they had such an overpowering sense, whom it was their special pride and privilege to serve with the intensest loyalty, affection and adoration. They were in ecstasies when mention of his name was made to them and rapturously acknowledged how much they owed him, how much they adored him while alive, and how dearly they cherished his memory, now that he was no more. It was said that few sought employment from him and went away disappointed, be he an accomplished scholar or a menial scavenger; all that was necessary was proof of his honesty and worth, and a place would be found somehow. One of his notable traits to which the men themselves have gleefully testified was that he never for a moment regarded them as his inferiors. No man believed more than he in the dignity of man and

the equality of all human beings. He served them the same fare that he served himself—a rare virtue among masters—instructed them in the principles of good living, befriended them, showed them a fulness of sympathy and understanding and extended to them every material and moral aid in their distress. He paid them handsomely and never accepted honorary service from any one, though many pressed it on him. Nay, he paid more than a fair salary to those whose family responsibilities, he felt, warranted such enhanced payment. To an American host who complained to him bitterly of the strain of having to manage his extensive estates, and expressed the desire to give them up, he said, "Think of the lives benefited by you on these properties. How many persons are made happy! You should take an interest in your workmen and their families, and try to improve them also."

The host replied, "Quite true; but unfortunately if one does that, they take advantage of one in ever so many ways."

Ramanathan rejoined, "Why consider that? Do not your own relations and friends, children and wife, take advantage of your kindness? Have you not observed that, if you yield to their desires, they love you, but when you advise them or do not indulge them, they complain of you and even abuse you? If others are presuming on your kindness, so much the worse for them spiritually. Whatever they do, you should do your duty lovingly and righteously. That is the only way of improving yourself; that is, growing in love and righteousness. Go straight on, advise them, point out to them their errors and how their spirit is being victimized by sensuousness or selfishness. Speak out, but see that you are in the right, and continue your thoughts and acts of loving-kindness to the end. Do not cease to love, or to promote the well-being of others."

The two letters that follow, to a member of his minor staff at his temple in Colombo, throw some

light on the cordiality and goodwill, that bound the master and the servant together.

Ramanathan College,
Chunnakam, 14-1-25.

My dear ....

I am glad that you have regained that measure of health necessary to enable you to go back to your country to recoup yourself completely. I appreciate fully your valuable services to the temple, and trust that you will soon return to Colombo fully restored in health and vigour.

I enclose a cheque for Rs. 100/- to defray the expenses of your journey home. You will receive full salary during your absence on leave for two months.

My best wishes and blessings.

Yours truly,
P. RAMANATHAN.

Colombo,
15th Dec., 1925.

My dear.....

Your letter tells me of your present afflictions. Your telegram informing me of your wife's illness reached me while I was in Jaffna. Be not perturbed; to view happiness and sorrow alike is in itself a "Sivapuja", an offering to the Almighty. I enclose herewith a cheque for Rs. 200/- as a free gift to you to meet your expenses.

May God bless you.

Yours truly,
P. RAMANATHAN.

His heart overflowed with love and compassion for all created things, bled at the sight of the poverty, misery and squalor that he saw around him. Man's inhumanity to man was, he felt, the cause of it all and made it the mission of his life to redeem man from his bondage to evil, from his subjection to social injustice and State oppression. A close study of his life and work shows us that the main thread that gives unity and strength to his whole career was his supreme concern for the

under-doggery of human society. Against a Government that sought to oppress the poor, he cried out in sheer agony and exasperation, "We who are feeding fat on our wealth, who roll along in motor cars and fine carriages, can have no conception of the grinding nature of the life which the people whom we have to deal with are labouring under." Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not live in an ivory-tower but mixed up with the common herd, studied at close range their trials and tribulations, and on every subject that concerned them, he could speak with the authority and conviction born of first-hand knowledge.

His capacity for acts of charity and philanthropy was unrivalled. He gave away freely and exultantly what the Gods bestowed on him. All his immense wealth, both what he inherited from his affluent ancestry and what he acquired by intense and assiduous toil and the exercise of the most rigid economy, was lavished on acts of charity and religion, with little regard for his own personal self or for the demands of his family. In the whole history of our race or country, it is hard to discover another who dedicated not merely himself but his own vast worldly estate to the service of his people and his religion. He is certainly our greatest exemplar of the Gandhian ideal of one's holding one's wealth not as owner but as trustee and using it for the service of one's fellowmen, taking for oneself nothing more than the bare necessaries of life. But in this exercise of charity and philanthropy, as in everything else, he was a most discerning judge; no worthy or salutary cause ever found him a reluctant or niggardly giver, as no bogus suppliant for his favour or munificence ever fared well with him. "No one ever successfully deceived him," was the proud boast of his friends and admirers. But his left hand knew not what the right hand gave away. No wonder, in one who was a life-long student and exponent of the Bible. It was revealed

only after his death even to Lady Ramanathan, from cheque books and other sources of evidence, the extent of his benefactions.

And hand in hand with this boundless generosity, there went a keen and resolute thrift. He was extraordinarily careful about little things. Even a scrap of paper, or a stray pin he would treasure. Waste of any kind, he abhorred. He would ruthlessly call himself, if responsibility was his, and his men, if theirs, to account for the last cent that had gone astray in a financial deal, big or small. To many it was a real intellectual puzzle that a man who flung his immense wealth by the lakh, nay, by the million, on charity and philanthropic activity with little thought of his own self, should be so over-scrupulous about trivial possessions. They little knew that, but for such careful husbandry, such close and vigilant handling of his resources, his lavish generosities and benefactions would have been impossible. If in any of his transactions, he was convinced that the other party had sustained a loss, he would gladly and gracefully make good the loss. In him one sees a rare combination of generosity, idealism and enthusiasm with an eminently practical and worldly sense of how to bring his ends to pass.

It is said that Ramanathan seldom or never reclined in a lounge or an easy-chair which he styled the 'lazy-chair'. The practice of lounging and reading, so common and so fashionable in his day as in ours, was altogether foreign to his active and energetic temperament. He was of opinion that one could hardly do any honest or effective work while in that lazy posture. Even in advanced age, when his body was shaken by infirmity and the blazing heat of a tropical sun compelled a siesta, this indomitable man was wont to engage himself in drawing and painting to ward off sleep. It is surprising that amidst his many and arduous labours, he yet found time to attend to every minute detail

of business and deal with it with the thoroughness and precision so eminently characteristic of him. His life is proof of the maxim that it is generally the man with little or nothing to do that makes bitter complaints against the lack of time. He replied to his correspondents punctually, readily gave advice to all who sought it—and there were multitudes of them—participated in public functions, big or small, designed to promote national interests, read voraciously, wrote incessantly, spoke perpetually to every kind of audience with the same irresistible effect, played host to his numerous friends, and attended promptly to all the needs of his dear children and his wife. It would be difficult to find one in the whole history of our Island who did so much within the span of a single lifetime or whose achievements were so various and so splendid.

Nature had endowed him with a mind at once subtle, deep, penetrating, vigorous and alert. It was as a sharp-edged sword, ever in readiness for prompt and effective action. At a glance, he could sense situations and at a moment's notice, he could rally all his faculties to his aid. In his long and versatile career, one cannot discover a single instance when his powers failed him or his adversaries caught him napping. It was often a marvel how brilliantly and masterfully he could meet unexpected situations, whether in a court of law or in the legislature or on the public platform. It would be truer to say that he was at his very best or that he rose to supreme heights only when an unforeseen danger or an unexpected challenge confronted him. And with all his intellectual subtlety and depth, his mental agility and resilience, there ran also an undercurrent of simplicity which may well be called childlike. He believed in the value of parliamentary institutions and government by the elite of the nation; he believed in the brotherhood of man and the unity of peoples and nations, in the sanctity of law and the primacy of moral and spiritual

values with a faith which was singularly literal; his views on religion were conventional and uncritical. He had little sense of humour and his attitude to life strikes one as that of an ingenuous child. If ever there was any egoism, it was childlike and simple-minded.

His was a seeking and questing mind which was untiring in its pursuit. His was an insatiable thirst to know the why and the wherefore of things and to base his beliefs and convictions on authentic and well-founded knowledge. No one at all acquainted with his speeches and writings can fail to remember his excessive, his extraordinary love of detail, his lively taste for facts, simply as facts. He had a great aversion from stuffing the blanks in his convictions with provisional thinking. It was the same in politics or literature or religion. He discussed readily only those aspects of which he felt he had a thorough knowledge and understanding. He would subject every intelligent and well-informed person to ruthless questioning in a supreme endeavour to discover the hidden meanings of things outside his ken and would not rest content until he had got to the heart of the matter and dispelled all his doubts. That eminent Orientalist and savant Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, in his reminiscences, recounts his experience of meeting Ramanathan at Chidhambaram temple in South India, of how by persistent and tireless cross-questioning, he sought to know from the high-priest and other dignitaries of the temple the deeper meaning and the inner religious significance of the various rituals and ceremonies he saw performed there; and from the architects and sculptors, the underlying meaning and purpose of the many exquisite *motifs* in the massive Hindu architecture and sculpture that he saw around him, of how he would not let them go until he had cleared all his doubts and known the precise truth. He also tells us of how Ramanathan, finding a priest incapable

of giving a satisfactory answer, told him to his face that an ill-informed and ill-equipped priest such as he should have no place at the temple. Swaminatha Iyer goes on to relate how he was amazed at the profundity and range of his Tamil and Sanskrit learning and the immaculate Tamil he spoke, untainted with the smallest admixture of foreign words or accents, how much he admired his superbly handsome, princely and undaunted bearing, the fulness and splendour of conversation which bespoke of a mind soaked in high culture, and the ringing and masterful tones of his speech as of a man accustomed to authority.

Not second to physical and intellectual vigour was his capacity for concentration. Concentration was the master-secret of his phenomenal success. Steady practice of instant, fixed and effectual attention was instinctive and natural to him. This power of concentration was strengthened and fortified by his lifelong practice of religious meditation. It is said that in the study and mastery of a given subject, however complex and recondite, he would immerse himself for days and weeks without experiencing the least sign of tedium or exhaustion. Even the pangs of hunger would not deter him from his work. Nor did he fly at a piece of work, deal with it, then let it fall from his grasp. It became a part of him. In the evenings, when after a day of weary toil, most men indulge themselves in idle sports and amusements, this indomitable man would be seen in his library absorbed in the study and contemplation of some great classic. When thus engaged, he would not brook interruption or disturbance of any kind. It is said that a rash and hasty youth once rushed into his study without any show of courtesy or prior intimation. Ramanathan peremptorily ordered him out and on second thoughts asked him to remain seated outside until he sent for him. Some time later, having gone through the work in hand, he

sent for the youth, motioned him to a seat and addressed him some words of gentle remonstrance: "When you wish to meet a person, big or small," he said, "you should ascertain in advance whether he is free, whether he could give you a patient hearing. You may not know in what weighty matters he may be engaged. It is always good to let him know that you have come to meet him and wait until you are called." True to his religious instincts, he was a passionate lover of silence and solitude and abhorred noise in any form. To any visitor to his home, the dominant note of the atmosphere there was an intense and all-pervading calm and stillness. Never did he talk except to some purpose and whenever he did, it was in the softest tones possible. Any display of boisterous good humour or light-hearted mirth, so common and so fashionable in high society, was utterly foreign to his temperament. He never indulged in them, because he had an instinctive aversion to frivolity or merry-making in any form nor could he find the time for them. His abhorrence of noise was so intense and so widely-known that it is said that persons who went to see him whether at his home or in his office took particular care that even their shoes did not creak. His high seriousness in all the concerns of life gave him an influence which he unmistakably wielded over his contemporaries.

Thoroughness and precision characterised all that he did. Perfection was his lodestar in every act of his life. He was a master of detail and never presumed to speak or write on any subject unless he had beforehand explored every available source of information and mastered every detail. This was evident from the very early years of his professional and public life. To any one who reads his early speeches in Council, the quality that compels notice is his thoroughness of treatment, his complete mastery of the hundred and one details that bear upon the subject. The speeches were

not the tentative efforts of the novice playing on the surface of his subject, but rather the finished product of the master whose clear and profound grasp of it enabled him to deal with it with ease, confidence and exactitude. Even as a youth, when called upon to play a part in piloting the ship of State, he realized the weighty responsibility of his position and spared no pains to play his part worthily and well. To hear him speak on any subject, was to acquaint oneself with the diverse facets and details of it. It was an education; no relevant point or detail was omitted. The facts were marshalled logically and forcefully so as to carry conviction to the most sceptical listener. He was wont to reinforce his arguments with pronouncements on the subject by competent authorities, by men who had lived and served the Island many generations ago, with parallels from other lands and even drew strength from classical writers. His reluctance, in private as well as public, to discuss what was not clear to him, to deal with anything on which he had not made up his mind nor arrived at certain clear-cut conclusions was the manifestation of a fundamental characteristic—a perfect integrity of mind. The foundation on which he built up his character and his greatness was the hard adamant stone of intellectual integrity. More than any other public man of his time, he lived and moved in the clearest atmosphere of truth. Artifice or affectation were entirely alien to his character as excess or exaggeration.

In the use of language he was most fastidious. Even in the handling of his day-to-day correspondence, he spared no pains to attain verbal finish, lucidity and precision. Diction should match the thought. In his endeavour to secure these effects, he would furbish and refurbish it tirelessly until his ideal of perfection was attained.

Ramanathan's transcendent capacity for work, his passionate devotion to the cause of his people

would not have carried him far as a leader of men without the sovereign quality of courage which was perhaps his master-trait. It is impossible to discover in all his long and illustrious career one single occasion when it failed him or through lack of it, he faltered or swerved one jot or tittle from what he conceived to be his path of duty. In assessing this supreme quality of his, one should not overlook the times in which he lived and laboured. Political freedom and its concomitant, freedom of speech and action, which today is the prerogative of every man and woman, was then virtually unknown. The Unofficial Members of the legislature were only a creation of the Governor who frowned on any attempt at free and unfettered criticism of governmental action from them. Moreover, they were often outvoted by the Official majority. An Unofficial Member who displayed undue independence often forfeited gubernatorial patronage and goodwill and in so doing, courted political exile. The speeches of Ramanathan give ample evidence of his splendid courage, his complete fearlessness which made him, not indeed indifferent to public opinon but wholly indifferent to anything mean or base. Once sure of his ground and of his duty, no risk of misunderstanding or of personal injury would restrain him, no clamour make him draw back. His pride was as noble as his courage, and no man of greater courage ever lived. This gallant, simple-minded, courteous gentleman could be very formidable in the face of wrong. He was no respector of persons, he once said of himself in Council. "Injustice from whatever source it might spring," he added, "calls forth my fiercest condemnation." Reason, Justice, Truth, Fair-play and Kindly-dealing were his ruling passions, and whenever they were in peril, there was no sacrifice, however great, that he would not make, no adversary, however formidable, that he would not encounter, to vindicate them. It was mainly due to the labours of this man, his uncle

Sir Muthucoomaraswamy and his brothers Coomaraswamy and Arunachalam that frank and fearless criticism of government was recognized as the necessary condition of good government; as, in his words, "the salt of good administration." Courage, like genius, does run in families.

On one occasion, when tempers had risen high in Council, when the Officials had closed their ranks against him, and turned a deaf ear to his impassioned plea for reason, justice and fair-play, in despair he cried out, "How much more pleasant it would be to me, Sir, to bask in the sunshine of Your Excellency's smiles, how much nicer to be courted by Officials, as a man who says pleasant things to their ears? What do I gain by this opposition, by choosing to express an independent opinion very unpalatable to Government? Do they treat me with respect for doing what I believe to be my duty? Do they treat me with even courtesy? No, no. They even challenge my motives. It does not matter to me, Sir. I do not want the favours of the Government. It is enough that I am able to say to myself, 'I have done what I feel to be right.' That will be my comfort." Religion was the main-spring of his superhuman courage and his supreme unconcern for worldly ends. His faith in God made him indomitable. "Craven fear," he said, "should not permeate the hearts of men who have been put into responsible positions and on whom people rely for safety." He viewed praise and blame alike, neither beaming at praise nor frowning at abuse. He looked within and never without for approval. No external circumstance ever had the power to disturb the equanimity of his soul. Whatever the world might think or speak of him, it was the Great Taskmaster to whom he looked up for his acquittal. "From my younger days," he said, "I have never been influenced by abuse or praise. They both seemed to fall flat on me. I feel pity for the man who abuses me."

Had he not learned from the *Gita*, "He who finds his happiness within, his joy within and likewise his light only within, that yogin becomes divine and attains to the beatitude of God." and from the *Thirukkural*, "As the earth bears up the men who delve into her breast, To bear with scornful men, of virtues is the best."?

Dr. Isaac Thambyah says, "Very early in his public career, Ramanathan had begun to pay the penalty of his position. The debt is undischarged to this day. His doings attracted attention and he was assailed. *The Ceylon Observer* was ever at him. There was no love lost between the two and they have lent their names to a leading case on the law of libel in Ceylon.

"To some *Observer* onslaughts on him in 1886, the following was his reply, characteristic of the mild Hindu: 'Your Chairman has referred to the misrepresentation by certain men, of my doings. He, of course, meant the *Observer*. All-Ceylon knows, I have been systematically maligned by that print in the performance of my public duties. I take this opportunity to expose this calumny on me. It proclaimed repeatedly during the last two months that I opposed the extension of the railway to Haputale owing to a personal animosity which I entertained towards His Excellency the Governor. The public were assured in explicit terms that I had quarrelled with Sir Arthur Gordon. I know you will be glad to hear from me a denial of that statement. My relations with that Governor have never been in the least embittered or interrupted. We have occasionally differed in opinion and have at times expressed ourselves warmly; but it is only a vain and malignant mind that would construe a difference of opinion into a personal affront. His Excellency knows as well as I do that our relations continue to be as cordial as they ever were. Even during the time the *Observer* was disseminating the slander, I was honoured by

His Excellency with most kindly letters. I know enough of the career of public men here and in England to feel assured that, if I persist in the path of duty, even the barking of the *Observer* will cease. What matters it whether such a paper abuses or praises? Does not our Tamil poet say, 'Lives there a man who bites the dog that bit him?'

"But gentlemen, I accept with a humble spirit your words of praise and these artistic emblems of your approbation. Excellence of work ought to be the day and night dream of men, not for the material rewards it may bring, but because the world is a training-ground or gymnasium for the healthy development of our faculties; and every endeavour should be made to emanicipate ourselves from ignorance, especially from two of its deadly forms, passion and prejudice, so as to reach morally and intellectually the highest point which our environment will permit us to obtain. Such, I take it, is the true meaning of success in life.'

"The true meaning of this rejoinder suggests the philosophic indifference which, in a form highly developed even to the stage of self-denial, he has shown in troublous after-times. In recent years, for instance, so many things have been said against him so openly that the iron must surely have entered his soul, but his lips have not moved in rebuke, nor his tongue to utter terrible things. Ramanathan is, indeed, a remarkable man."

In 1912, when Sir Henry McCallum retired from the Governership of the Island, the officials of Government together with the leaders of the people were making elaborate arrangements to accord him a grand farewell, and to present an address signed by the Official and the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council, expressing their approval and appreciation of the policy pursued and the services rendered by him. Ramanathan was not in favour of the proposed farewell or the presentation of an address, inasmuch as Governor McCallum had failed

in his duty by the people by reason of his lack of sympathy and concern for them. He promptly communicated his views to the Hon. Alexander Fairlie, the Secretary of the Farewell Committee, in a lengthy State Telegram which he despatched from Jaffna giving fifteen reasons against any kind of approval of His Excellency's administration. When the telegram was handed in at the Post Office for despatch, the Post Master betrayed some reluctance to accept it, much less as a State Telegram. But wiser counsels prevailed and the telegram was accepted and despatched as such. It was flashed in the daily press the following day and created a tremendous sensation. Here follows the text of the telegram:

"The Hon. Fairlie, M. L. C., Colombo.

Your telegram, I cannot conscientiously approve of an address to Governor McCallum. He has been found:

Firstly: To be repeatedly wanting in sympathy with the people and to have made no serious effort to study their real needs and wishes.

Secondly: To have insulted laymen and priests alike at public meetings.

Thirdly: to have defied public opinion.

Fourthly: to have been rash in the treatment of important public questions before they were ripe for settlement.

Fifthly: to have withheld from the Unofficial Members of the Council even the little information he had in his hands, though he had been told that they could not do their duty in Council without further information.

Sixthly: to have made a tool of the Legislative Council to gain the sanction of the Secretary of State for extravagant purposes.

Seventhly: to have misled the Secretary of State for the Colonies on such vital questions as the Reform of the Legislative Council, the introduction of the Excise system and the strenuous taxation of the citizens of Colombo

in regard to the second and third series of the drainage works.

Eighthly: to have rushed through the Legislative Council, matters of such moment to the public in such a way as seriously to dispirit the public mind and diminish public interest in the first four years of his administration.

Ninthly: to have not called the Legislative Council even after it was reformed, to consider financial, legislative and administrative questions frequently and as leisurely as in previous administrations.

Tenthly: to have shown himself manifestly partial to the unconstitutional and high-handed proceedings of the late Colonial Secretary, when officiating in Council.

Eleventhly: to have reduced the Legislative Council to the lowest level of usefulness by his gingerly and belated methods of laying the business of the country before it, and by wrong and impulsive rulings from the Chair, calculated to intimidate Members and to destroy their independence of speech and action.

Twelfthly: to have embarked upon unnecessary schemes of public works, which not only involved the Colony in a large public debt, but also limited the opportunity of his successors to carry out useful works.

Thirteenthly: to have unfairly treated able and upright Ceylonese in the different Government Departments, when their claims to promotion entered into competition with their European brothers.

Fourteenthly: to have recruited foreign officers, denying to worthy Ceylonese high offices they had a just expectation of filling; and

Fifteenthly: to have given to the Heads of Departments a wider latitude of action than that given by previous Governors as to the treatment of their subordinates and such members of the public as have to deal with them, much to the detriment of sound administration."

His capacity for righteous indignation was great and, when stirred, was most stubborn, pugnacious and indomitable. But he never allowed it to overpower him. His imperturbability and self-control were proverbial. The most malicious or disconcerting criticism or even the most violent abuse never ruffled his temper, nor drove him to passionate outbursts. Immunity from the contagion of excitement or intemperate fury was one of his distinctive and admirable traits. 'He kept his head packed in ice,' was the proud comment of one of his contemporaries. Did he not once say, "I have never been defeated by ridicule or sarcasm."? When he rose to reply he was exquisitely calm and self-possessed and his tone was measured and even gentle. But his soft and silvery tones were merely a camouflage for his crushing retorts and brilliant invectives. It was when wantonly assailed that he displayed to the best advantage his remarkable powers as debator and his marvellous skill in turning the tables on his assailants. It is at such moments as these that you behold the tiger whom you have provoked most flippantly and improvidently, the supreme master who has with exquisite ease and agility rallied every faculty to his aid, subdued every disconcerting impulse, and fortified his position by stern adherence to lofty principles and purposes. The cumulative effect of it all on his adversary was devastating. It was this side of his character that provoked a contemporary into remarking, "Ramanthan is a saint, but merely scratch the saint, and you will uncover a savage." But the tendency common in high places to nurse grievances or be vindictive was never his. Once scores were settled, the matter ended there and then. No man had a tenderer heart than he. Not everyone was so charitable. His capacity for forgiveness was unbounded. All that was necessary was admission of guilt and a penitent heart, and wrongs darker than death would be forgiven and forgotten. Nor was there

ever a taint of malice or rancour or ill-will in his generous, warm-hearted and intensely lovable nature. His heart was too noble and too divinely-inspired to harbour anything base or ignoble. He maintained the friendliest relations even with those whose views differed fundamentally from his.

In one of the Council debates, the Governor Lord Gordon attempted to fling a cheap jibe at him. In the course of his speech, His Excellency said, "I must say that there is, sometimes, in my opinion, in my Hon. friend's manner of posing in this Council something slightly, although in his own mind he may not intend it, of the posture of being the representative of the whole Unofficial community." Ramanathan protested most vehemently against this imputation. But His Excellency continued, "I appeal to the Unofficial Members of this Council whether that is so or not. We all know that he is not the general representative of the whole community. But nevertheless, I say that impression is sometimes conveyed. And not in this assembly alone. I have had letters from friends in England, who know nothing about Ceylon, except the fact that I am Governor of it, when he appeared there in that superb turban and resplendent decoration, which say that he was the representative and delegate of all the people in the Island. I find that mentioned. Therefore, however, unintentionally, I think my honourable friend's manner occasionally conveys that impression. Now, we all know, my honourable friend represents only the Tamil community, and we don't admit he has any right to represent any other section, and indeed I am quite aware that he has no desire himself to pose as an idol receiving the adoration of thousands of poor Sinhalese and Tamils, as their friend and saviour from a corrupt and despotic government."

Ramanathan was in no way perturbed by this piece of gratuitous sneer. When his turn to reply

came, with characteristic calm and self-possession but with trenchant and irresistible logic, he exposed the hollowness of His Excellency's arguments and forced him to beat an ignominious retreat.

He said, "As regards my posing before the world at large as the representative of all Ceylon, this is the first time that such an imputation has been cast upon me. I feel this imputation very much, because its object is to ridicule me, and of all weapons available to an opponent, the weapon of ridicule is the most difficult to parry. Your Excellency in attacking me from that chair in this way places me in a really painful position. When I went to London, the Secretary of State and all other officials, and those mercantile friends who were working with me on the deputation to the Secretary of State, knew that I was the representative of the Tamil interests only, but unfortunately there is a good deal of ignorance in London as to the people who live in Ceylon. Sir William Gregory in my presence introduced Mr. Dornhorst, a Burgher gentleman, to some friends in London as a Sinhalese gentleman from Colombo. I was very much astonished. On asking of him an explanation, I was told that Englishmen not familiar with Ceylon knew that only the Sinhalese people live there. In most circles in England, I found that men who went from Ceylon were spoken of as Sinhalese. In this state of ignorance, Your Excellency's friends who must be very ignorant people, wrote to you that I was a Sinhalese gentleman. But is that my fault? Your Excellency might have spared me the trouble of this explanation. I pose before the world as Sinhalese! What do I gain by it? I suppose it does not matter to an Englishman whether he is taken for a Scotsman or a Fijian. But it does matter to me. I have no desire to change my nationality; I pride myself on being Tamil. I hope a Sinhalese gentleman will always pride himself upon being Sinhalese, and an Englishman on being English. I feel much pained that so much publicity should have been given to a statement which is utterly unfounded in fact, and which ought not to have been made from that chair.

H. E. The Governor: But I say you do not understand me. It is not that the people in England supposed that you were a Sinhalese, but that you were the representative delegate of all the people in Ceylon, not the Sinhalese people only.

Mr. Ramanathan: But how am I responsible for their ignorance? I have seen it stated elsewhere .....

H. E. The Governor: Not that you personally were a Sinhalese, but that the people in England thought you were the representative delegate of all the Sinhalese.

Mr. Ramanathan: The opinions of ignorant Englishmen to be published at this Council Board!

But these were passing clouds. High-powered organisms, when in action, frequently emit a spark, but the mutual love and esteem that bound the aristocratic Englishman and the ebullient and irrepressible Tamil youth together continued undiminished or unabated.

Whenever unjust, even malicious criticism was levelled at him, he bowed down his head in perfect stillness and with his eyes closed as in yogic repose and drank in every word that was uttered, without betraying the least sign of impatience or irritation. The words of the Hon. W. W. Woods, Colonial Treasurer, are revealing: "And I very well remember, I think it was my very first meeting, when one of my colleagues—wild horses would not drag from me any indication of his identity—gave me a little good advice. He said to me among other things, 'Now, whatever you do, be careful about getting into an argument with *Ram*.'

"I am afraid, Sir, behind, the venerable Knight's back, we do often use that unceremonious but

affectionate abbreviation of his honoured name, and he will perhaps pardon me for repeating it on this occasion. Well, my adviser went on, 'Be very careful about that; what is more, be particularly careful, if he seems to be asleep, because it is hundred to one he is taking in everything you say and when you least expect it, will get up and tear you to pieces. Well, Sir, I took up that advice to heart and I feel it was very good advice, because I have found a lot of entertainment from observing the results to other people which followed from not taking that advice."

Despair or pessimism was wholly foreign to his buoyant and sanguine temperament. He never despaired of himself or of his country. For, whatever man may in his littleness say or do, the ways of God will ultimately prevail. Though he never expected a millennium, he had taken a hopeful view of human nature and the prospects of human civilization and believed in the value of wisely-directed effort on the part of statesmen and leaders bent on making the world better than they found it.

Nothing is rarer in our public men than a genuine devotion to all branches of the public service, but Ramanathan kept an eye on everything and would not countenance the smallest negligence or dereliction of duty on the part of public servants whose duty, he felt, was to serve the people and promote public good by every means in their power. On questions of duty and responsibility, he was stern and unshakably firm. Himself the finest exemplar of the punctilious, incorruptible and indefatigable public servant, he expected every other member of the public service to rise up to his high and often impossible standards. Whenever he travelled by train, it was his practice to observe closely how the public were treated by Railway Officials, what measure of comfort they were given, and whether the trains kept to the scheduled time. If the

Railway Officials failed in any of these particulars, he would not hesitate to remonstrate against it. They, therefore, took particular pains to see that they gave the travelling public no cause for complaint.

Ramanathan once happened to travel by train from Chunnakam to Colombo on the eve of the Kataragama Festival. The platform at the Jaffna Station was overflowing with pilgrims as a hopelessly congested train steamed in. It was a veritable stampede, the pilgrims struggling desperately to board the train. Ramanathan peeped out of his reserved compartment and the spectacle thus afforded was irresistible. He immediately alighted from the train, and was seated on the platform. He then summoned the Station Master and said, "Have you done your duty by these passengers? Unless you provide them convenient accommodation, I will not travel by it." The Station Master stood helpless. Ramanathan continued, "You had no right to sell them tickets, if you could not provide them convenient and safe travel." The Station Master ventured the reply, "I didn't know there would be such a dearth of accommodation. When the train arrived here, it was already too full." "Well you knew it's the Kataragama Festival season and you ought to have taken early measures to ensure increased accommodation," protested Ramanathan. "Your sale of a ticket meant that you, on behalf of the Government of Ceylon, have entered into a contract with the passenger to provide him convenient travel to his destination. Now do it. It is no good saying, 'What am I to do?'" The Station Master and the Guard ran up and down the platform not knowing what to do. The Station Master blamed the Guard for not bringing additional coaches, and the Guard in turn blamed the Station Master for not giving the authorities earlier notice, knowing it was festival time. An hour had passed and Ramanathan sat there like a monument. Meanwhile, the Station Master had rung up the Station Master at Kankesanthurai

for additional coaches. They were brought and all the passengers were comfortably accommodated. Ramanathan then turned to the Station Master and said, "Thank you, Mr. Station Master, for the service you have done to these pilgrims. They are longing to get to Kataragama as early as possible. Now they, poor souls, will bless you. Where there is a will, there is a way also. Should there be any query regarding the two hours' delay, please refer the General Manager to me. I take upon myself the responsibility. You need not worry about it." So saying, Ramanathan boarded the train and the train steamed out. Such was his conception of public duty, such his devotion to the people's welfare.

Ramanathan was an orator *par excellence*. From the first, he realized the inestimable worth of the power of speech to an aspirant to public and political fame, and strove hard from early youth to train and develop that faculty. It is said that he put himself to immense pains to learn correct articulation, pronunciation and posture and practised oratory before a mirror. The story goes that in one of his visits to Europe, he received a course of instruction in elocution in an institution reputed for it. He paid particular attention to gesture, action and all the multitudinous details of the orator's art. This laborious discipline in the theory and practice of public-speaking would not alone have sufficed to make him an orator of the first rank, had not Nature dowered him liberally in that province. He was tall and handsome, his personality charming and magnetic and his features mobile and expressive. A friend of his described him as the handsomest man he ever knew, as perfect of form and feature as ever Ravi Varma painted, with a high intellectual face, with eyes bright and lustrous and the whole body suffused with a golden hue. He dressed himself well; his long coat, his neatly-fashioned turban and the resplendent

shawl sat gracefully on him. His voice was singulary rich and capable of delicate and fine modulations. His tone was silvery and extremely delightful to the ear. His bearing was easy, erect, dignified and alert. To these extraordinary gifts of a striking and impressive presence were added the remarkable gifts of ready speech and ready repartee. Thus Nature had done much for him and he refined and perfected these gifts with interminable pains.

His extraordinary faculty of speech was not an empty art. It was no claptrap eloquence. Whenever he spoke, he spoke from deep and passionate conviction. An indomitable passion for the service of his country and the cause of Reason, Truth, Justice and Liberty, a passion wholly devoid of any taint of self-interest, coursed through every vein, shook every fibre of his being. His thoughts and words welled up from the deep recesses of his mind and heart and it was this more than any other that gave his speeches not only their amazing force and vivacity but also their enduring quality. He never prostituted this uncomman gift of speech in the service of unworthy or ignoble causes. It was this brilliant power of speech harnessed to the service of a sovereign purpose and reinforced by a singular fulness of sagacity and learning that earned for him the tribute of Lord Rosebury that he was 'the most accomplished speaker of the Empire.' His name will ever be remembered in our chronicles as our greatest master of eloquence. Myron H. Philips described him as: "A perfect master of the English Language, which he speaks without a foreign accent and an astonishingly winning and graceful speaker."

His eloquence was indubitably the finest ever heard in our legislature. There was in it a richness, a copiousness, a masculinity and splendour rare in the annals of parliamentary oratory. It was the spontaneous out-pouring of a mind schooled for long years in religious and philosophic thought, soaked

in the humanities, saturated with the subtleties of economics and statescraft. He relied not on heroics or pathetics, or on verbal flourishes to secure effect but rather on the strength and solidity of his arguments, on the intrinsic merits of his ease to carry conviction to his listeners. His views were as sound as his advocacy of them was firm and impassioned. His language was simple, direct and unvarnished but hand in hand with these there went a gravity and dignity, a force and vitality, a humanity and elevation that florid eloquence can hardly encompass. The secret of the extraordinary success of his oratory lay in his passionate sincerity, his purity of motive, his strength of conviction and a consistent appeal to moral principles. Wit and humour, the commonest resource of a parliamentarian, he had none. His case he rendered irresistible and unanswerable by a long array of arguments he flung at his hearers and by his nobility and elevation of purpose. He carried conviction by the very zest of his delivery, by the impression he conveyed of being passionately interested himself. Though born to rank and affluence and brought up in early life in an exclusive and sheltered society, he never lived in an ivory tower but had his feet planted firmly on the ground. He possessed practical, firsthand experience of every stratum of human society and could draw freely on that experience to illuminate his contentions. No other Ceylonese orator, not even his illustrious uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, had an equal power of firing an educated audience with an intense and burning enthusiasm or of animating and inspiring his people.

No other orator could associate transient questions with eternal truths or condense his arguments with such admirable force and clarity. Many of his political speeches combined much of the value of religious and philosophical dissertations. One hardly knows of any other from whose speeches the student of politics can derive so many maxims of political

action or philosophical wisdom. Few political speeches were so heavily weighted with philosophic and religious thought as were his. This tendency to lapse so easily into the realms of the spirit, so clear and so manifest in his early political career, became so pronounced and so irrepressible with the advance of years. Taking his stately flight from the earth below, he would by slow degrees soar into the rarefied regions above, leaving his earthly colleagues bewildered and exasperated below. Some thought him politician turned philosopher, whereas in truth, he was philosopher turned politician.

There were in his speeches a harmony, an effortless ease, a spontaneous flow of words, a spaciousness and moral exhilaration seldom found in parliamentary annals. His invectives were powerful and even withering. There was no conscious affectation in his nature. He said simple things in a simple way but few speakers of our age or country have equalled him in originality, in fire and in persuasive force. Much of the influence of his speaking was due to moral causes. There was a transparent sincerity and rectitude of purpose, a manifest disinterestedness, a fervid enthusiasm of patriotism in his character which added greatly to the effect of eloquence and gave him an ascendancy that was exercised by few of his contemporaries. From the beginning of his career, his eloquence became the great vivifying force on the Unofficial side and every question received a new impulse from his advocacy. The nation acclaimed it, while the governing hierarchy from Britain listened with profound respect and admiration.

Many think of Ramanathan as only a great politician or at best a great statesman, who dominated the political stage for over half a century. Few think of him as a great scholar and prolific writer, the foremost of his time ; and fewer ever suspected the versatility, range and depth of his intellectual attainments. All learning came within his giant

sweep, if only they served to elevate the soul, ennoble the morals and fortify the intellect. He was a student all through his life. *The Ceylon Independent* described him as, "admittedly, one of the most intellectual and cultured Ceylonese of all times." *The Daily Republican* of New York referred to him thus, "With a knowledge little short of encyclopaedic, a command of the English language at once the admiration and the despair of all who hear it, and a strong sense of humour withal, Mr. Ramanathan at the same time possesses vast stores of spiritual knowledge, of which the average Occidental is as ignorant as a babe." He had a passion for culture, an insatiable thirst to explore the realms of human thought and wisdom of all ages and of all climes. Even as an undergraduate at Presidency College, Madras, he refused to be tied down to his text-books, but read avidly what he liked. This passion originated from no love of material gain or worldly success but from the pressing need of the inner soul. One of his dearest possessions, if not the dearest, was his well-stocked library at *Sukhastan*. Dr. (then Mr.) C. W. W. Kannangara, referring to Ramanathan's library said, "There is one thing he possessed that he valued greatly. He loved his books. He laboured and worked in his library. He could spot any book there. It was a model of neatness and order, and there he spent a good deal of his time for his people, at work in his library." In his time it was, and perhaps is today, the finest private library in Ceylon. There was hardly any masterpiece in the domain of human thought and learning that was wanting in it. It embraced all the great literatures of the world, notably classical. He drank deep and freely of the inexhaustible springs of Greek and Sanskrit philosophy and drew immense solace and sustenance from it. He was full of the wisdom of the ancients and would read and re-read the immortals in preference to the latest books. Few even of his friends suspected

the prodigious range of his attainments. It was no vulgar avidity for information or pride of versatility that impelled him to delve deep into these perennial fountains of religious and philosophic thought, of economic and political speculation but rather an intense and compelling desire for the betterment of his soul and the service of man. One had merely to catch a glimpse of the man in his advanced old age seated in his library in the late hours of the night, rapt in the study of some great classic and lost to all sense of what was passing around him, to realize how much he adored learning and what a great scholar the nation lost when death overtook him. The acquisition of the library was the result of rare industry and rarer learning and he treasured it with the solicitude and devotion of a born scholar. His books were not merely handsome and well-bound but rare and precious. He was a systematic collector of valuable books and there was nothing in his library that was not of the first-rate. There was in him a conscious pride of possession and the love and awe with which he handled and fondled every volume showed that he felt himself the ephemeral custodian of a perennial treasure. Admission to his library was restricted to persons of indubitable culture and learning. Sir Hugh Clifford, a great and cultured Englishman, a prolific author besides, who was one of Ceylon's greatest Colonial Secretaries, and who later became the Governor of the Island, used to speak of Ramanathan's library with rapturous admiration. Whenever the relationship between these two political gladiators became strained, as they often did, in the Council Chamber, it was in the spacious library at *Sukhastan* that they met to soothe their frayed nerves and compose their differences. Sir Hugh Clifford, in a public speech, once referred to the "pleasantest hours I used to spend in the library of my good friend Sir Ponnambalam." It was to this library that Ramanathan retired after the heat and dust

of many a political combat, there to heal the wounds and to becalm his weary spirits in the reposeful quiet of silent communion with the master-spirits of all ages and of all climes. It was to him a perfect haven of rest, a hospital, a healing-place of the soul.

Though Ramanathan was in the limelight during the whole of a long life and was associated with every important political and social event in Ceylon for more than half-a-century, he was pre-eminently a recluse at heart. It was in moments of solitude, of indrawn stillness that he experienced his supreme-most bliss. Religion was to him the very breath of his being, the pivot on which his whole life revolved. Religion, it was said, was his life and his life was religion. Sprung as he was from the loins of forbears whose dominant passion was religion and nurtured in early life in an environment predominantly religious, no wonder, religion occupied the foremost place in his affections. Every argument on whatever theme and with whatever person was clenched invariably with an invocation to God. Every achievement, however stupendous the effort it entailed on him, was ascribed to the hand of an All-Merciful, All-Powerful Being. Every venture was sure of fulfilment, for there is God in Heaven and all is well with the world. "Parameshwaran will do everything," was his oft-repeated *Mantram.* His faith that Parameshwaran was always with him, bestowing on him strength and succour, guiding him to the realization of all his objectives was firm and unwavering. On one occasion, when he was taken in procession to the venue of a meeting amidst great pomp and splendour, with all the paraphernalia of a triumphal march, amidst cries of *Aro Hara,* he told those around him, "All that you see and hear are not for me; they are for Parameshwaran, the offerings of a simple and unsophisticated people." If these words do mean anything, they mean that his life was a dedication,

a consecration to the service of that great God, whose humble and lowly servant he sincerely believed he was. He never arrogated to himslef any honours or the credit for any action but accepted them meekly in the name of the Almighty. Absolute, unquestioning surrender to Providence and submission to His Will was instinctive with him. The perfection of both his inner self and the outer was the end that he strove through life to attain. And purity, he knew, is the means to its attainment. His one prayer to the Almighty, therefore, the prayer that was ever on his lips, the prayer that he made the motto of Parameshwara College was, "Grant me, O Lord! that threefold purity, purity of the body, purity of the mind and purity of my inward soul."

He had mastered the hymns of the Saivaite Saints and knew a good many of them by heart. He translated several volumes of these hymns into superb English prose for the benefit of his English readers and sang them before Western audiences. In moments of weariness or solitude or on lonesome walks, he would chant these hymns like one inspired, with an intensity of emotion and with tears streaming down his cheeks and would bring to bear upon the singing a singularly rich and mellifluous voice which he had cultivated from early life with assiduous toil and which compelled the admiration of those who heard it. He would sing them in crowded halls or in temple-corridors at the head of a choir. At such moments, one would behold the man completely transformed, every nerve and fibre of his being vibrating with divine ecstasy and love. "He sang indefatigably and sang always to God," said one of his contemporaries.

He would then proceed to expound them to the audience and the exposition of a single hymn would occupy hours. His luminous soul would throw a flood of light on them and elucidate great spiritual and philosophical truths hidden from the many.

He was pre-eminently a great *Bhakthan*, one of the greatest that ever lived He exemplified in himself all the highest virtues which Dr. Radhakrishnan postulates, are the hall-marks of a true *Bhakthan*. The learned Doctor says, "*Bhakthi* leads to *Jnana* or wisdom. When devotion glows, the Lord dwelling in the soul imparts to the devotee by his grace the light of wisdom. The devotee feels united intimately with the Supreme who is experienced as the being in whom all antitheses vanish. He sees God in himself and himself in God. For the devotee, the higher freedom is in surrender to God. Participation in God's work for the world is the duty of all devotees. When the devotee truly surrenders himself to the Divine, God becomes the ruling passion of his mind, and whatever the devotee does, he does for the glory of God. *Bhakthi* is an utter self-giving to the Transcendent. It is its own reward; such a devotee has in him the content of the highest knowledge as well as the energy of the perfect man." Navalar was the retired sage. Ramanathan was the Gita ideal of a sage in action, a true *Karma Yogin*. His inner soul yearned for solitude, for the peace and serenity of a secluded life, but his love for the people and his passionate concern for their well-being drove him into society. He could not comprehend the empty frivolities and fopperies of society. The glitter of rank and station and the glamour of worldly eminence had little lure for him. Though he accepted them as but the mundane rewards of service to humanity, he did not look or long for them. Service as an offering to the Almighty, service strenuous, self-sacrificing dedicated, absolute, was his ideal — an ideal which he had partly inherited from his noble ancestry and partly imbibed from the *Gita* of which he was a life-long student and exponent. If ever he looked for rewards, he looked for them from within and never from without, looked for the

approbation of his conscience rather than the acclamation of man. He had boundless trust in the guiding hand of Providence and this accounted for his singular courage, his equanimity, detachment, poise, serenity and selfless endeavour.

Religion was the chief motive force of his mind, the fundamental fact of his history. Political life was but one facet of his religious life. Politics was with him the noblest of man's careers; it was not a struggle for power or for wealth but a persistent and continuous effort to enable the submerged millions of his countrymen to attain the good life, to raise the quality of human beings, to train them for freedom and fellowship, for spiritual depth and social harmony. A politician who works for these ends cannot help being religious. It was this sense of the fundamentally spiritual nature of his work that gave depth and elevation to a career which would otherwise have become prosaic; no one who heard him could fail to see how his mind was possessed with the greatness of human affairs, with the moral and spiritual aspects of political, economic and social endeavour; above all, with the final supremacy of the soul over matter or circumstance. It was religion that prompted his literary life, that led him to pen certain volumes which have not been superseded. It was the religious motive that impelled and guided him in his conception of social duty. As age advanced, he became so much absorbed in religion and the pursuit of philosophy that nothing could disturb the equanimity of his soul. Mysticism found a settled home in him. Beneath all the agitated surface of a life of tumult and turmoil, there flowed a deep current of faith—passionate, sincere and single-minded—in God and obedience and resignation to His will, which gave him in the face of a thousand rebuffs complete mastery of all the resources of his head and heart. To certain teachers of Parameshwara College who refused to attend the morning Prayer Assembly, he addressed

a solemn but indignant warning, "Gentlemen, you know not what you do. By your denial of Parameshwaran, you are knocking at the gates of perdition." Though essentially a statesman, philosopher and man of religion, able to sustain argument on a high plane and follow the subtleties of thought in all their windings, he was also a practical man of affairs Though he lived and moved and had his being among the highest in the land, he never lost the common touch, but mixed with the common herd and knew their joys and sorrows. He had a canny sense of what was possible and achievable. It is not to be guilty of an over-statement to say that there was hardly any institution of any abiding national value, any piece of beneficent legislation, or any transformation of any importance in national life during the half-century preceding his death that did not owe its existence to him or at any rate bear unmistakably the stamp of his personality and influence.

Many whose knowledge of him was only cursory or superficial thought that there was a taint of vanity and egotism in his character. Nothing would be farther from the truth, for, these qualities are incompatible with religion and Ramanathan was nothing if not a man of religion. At his Golden Jubilee Celebration, when the greatest and the best in the land vied with one another in paying him homage and the most glittering tributes ever paid by man to man on the dazzling achievements of half-a-century dedicated to the shaping of his country's institutions, with uneasiness writ large upon a troubled countenance, he exclaimed, "I do not understand what all this fuss is about. I have been given certain talents; I have used them; that is all." He did not mention the fact that he had himself by assiduous toil and fixity of purpose multiplied these talents many times over.

Once, when a Hindu *Sannyasin* asked him, pointing to his stately mansion, its spacious lawns,

its rich tapestries and its sumptuous belongings, "Whose are these, Ramanathan?" Promptly came the reply, "Parameshwaran's". On one occasion, in the Legislative Council, Ramanathan made a serious indictment of Sir William Manning's administration as being unconstitutional and prejudicial to the national interest. The Governor in exasperation ordered the speaker in peremptory tones to sit down. Ramanathan bowed gracefully and sat down saying, "I stoop to conquer." In the evening, Sir William invited Ramanathan to tea in the Council Chamber to which the latter responded. Tea over, Ramanathan returned home, and dictated to his Private Secretary a memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, wherein he moved for Sir William's recall on the plea that the Government of the Colony by Sir William was a violation of the constitution.

The following morning, the Memorial was delivered at Queen's House to be forwarded to Whitehall. At 10, the same morning Ramanathan received a telephone call from the Governor politely seeking to know whether he (Ramanathan) could possibly call at Queen's House and offering to send him his car. Ramanathan accepted the invitation but declined the offer of the Governor's car and chose to go in his own instead. At the meeting, the Governor, among other things, expressed a wish that Ramanathan withdrew the Memorial in return for an apology he would offer him. Ramanathan agreed to withdraw the Memorial but added, "The apology is due not to me but to the Council, for it is more the Council's honour that Your Excellency outraged than mine. I am merely a *poochchi* (insect). Tomorrow I might vanish from the visible scene and be forgotten, but the integrity, the independence and the honour of the House must remain inviolate." That same evening, when the Council met, Sir William addressed an elaborate apology to the House and in particular to his good friend Ramanathan.

When on occasions Ramanathan travelled from Colombo to Chunnakam by train and a car was not readily available to take him home, he would be seen going in an open bullock-cart much to the, amazement and delight of the bystanders.

At a reception accorded to him, the sponsors chose to refer to him as "Master". Blazing with indignation, he vehemently repudiated that appellation, repeating the words, "Me, Master! No better than a mean crust of earth!" and protested, "There is but one Master and no second, and that is the Lord and Master of all Creation." His advice to Indian students in America, who met him during his American lecture tour was, "Let India know of the feeling of liberty, equality and fraternity which prevails here. I have met in America the most distinguished men, and I have found them the humblest of the humble. You may see a gentleman sitting by the side of a labourer in a railway car; there will be no disgust on the face of the gentleman nor uneasiness on the face of the labourer, who, feeling his political equality with the gentleman, strives to be gentle, and clean and neat in dress. Let our people know of the respect and friendliness with which Americans treat you here....."

To prefer a charge of vanity or pride or egotism against one who regarded himself as nothing more than a humble and lowly instrument in the hands of Providence, who disclaimed every title to ownership of his worldly estate and was content to hold it as but a dutiful tenant-at-will of the Almighty, who deemed himself no better than a fleeting phantom, a *poochchi*, who reckoned humility a cardinal virtue to be instilled in youth is an utterly false reading of the man, a travesty of the truth. To the humble and courteous, he was the soul of humility and courtesy, but pride or arrogance or egotism, from whatever source they sprang, never encountered a more deadly or a more resolute foe or

suffered a more indignant and ignominious repulse.

The story is told that Ramanathan was once travelling with his wife and daughter from India. In the train from Talai-Mannar, there was travelling with him in the same carriage a European passenger, an Indian Civil Servant named Burns. When the train steamed in at the Maradana Station, Ramanathan alighted from the train. As he did so, his umbrella which he was carrying with him, brushed Burn's foot accidentally. Always the soul of courtesy, Ramanathan turned to the European and apologized to him. The European, paying no heed to the apology, turned round and insulted him, using an exclamation which one would not expect from a gentleman. Ramanathan called upon him to withdraw the expression and apologize. This he refused to do. Ramanathan at once called the Station Superintendent and asked him to take charge of the European. The Superintendent advised Mr. Burns to express regret and be done with it. He also told him that if he refused, the consequences might not be very pleasant. "What is the consequence?" inquired the European. The Station Superintendent told him that he would have to give him in charge to the police. A constable was brought and the European was asked to give his name. He was asked what 'R' stood for. He replied that they could take it as "Robert Burns of Scotland". Still he refused to apologize or to give his name and address. A European Sergeant appeared on the scene. He took Burns aside and explained to him the gravity of the situation. Burns then met Ramanathan at his bungalow, withdrew the words and apologized to him. Ramanathan accepted the apology and added, "I hope you will not use such expressions again towards my countrymen."

Freedom from anxiety or worry was one of Ramanathan's outstanding characteristics. "No man," he would say, "is indispensable. The world

will go on without us." How could he worry, he who believed in a divine ordering of the universe and the helplessness of man in the grip of inexorable destiny? Careful and anxious thought and reckoning would precede every action, but no regrets or repentance, if ever it miscarried or failed. "They are acts of God and none could have anticipated them. Let us forget them and pass on to other things," he would say.

Ramanathan always enjoyed the loving friendship and esteem of the greatest not merely in his own but in many lands outside. His reputation as a philosopher, statesman, scholar and man of religion had travelled far and wide. His works on religion and philosophy were widely read and admired by many in various lands. More than all these, nature had endowed him with a warm heart and an affectionate disposition, a mind completely free from malice or ill-will and rejoicing in the good of all creation. *Sukhastan* was eagerly sought after by statesmen, scholars, patriots, leaders of the people and by many who longed for spiritual insight and illumination. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the formidable Indian patriot and leader, spent his days at *Sukhastan* when he visited Ceylon in 1900. During a prolonged stay, he held long discourses with his host on many abstruse and recondite problems of religion, philosophy and statecraft and was particularly impressed by his deep insight into the realms of the Spirit, by the range and versatility of his erudition, and above all, his complete freedom from the trammels of Western civilization. Tilak on his return to India, paid a glittering tribute to his host in the Indian press. Myron H. Philips, an eminent jurist of New York, spent some years with Ramanathan in an endeavour to study Eastern philosophy and religions. His admiration for his *Guru* was unbounded and in his numerous speeches and writings, it was in terms of the highest eulogy and veneration that he referred to him.

It was Myron Philips who first introduced Ramanathan to the people of America, and was in some measure responsible for the invitation that was later extended to him to undertake a lecture tour of that great and far-away land. This is what he said of him: "It is on his learning and spiritual insight that Mr. Ramanathan's chief claim to distinction rests. His repute as a spiritual teacher is very high; in this respect he is esteemed to be one of the greatest men in all India. Those who knew him well, indeed refer to him as one of those sages who have endowed India with the profound, mysterious majesty of spiritual wisdom, as in short a '*Brahmajnani*' or knower of God, a term descriptive of the highest spiritual development to which man can attain."

Col. H. S. Olcot, the great American Theosophist and benefactor of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions, was among his dearest friends. He made Ramanathan his loyal and trusted lieutenant in his labours for the educational and social uplift of the Buddists of Ceylon. As a token of his love and admiration for the Oriental, he gave him one of his treasured possessions, a leaf from the original manuscript of Sir Edwin Arnold's '*Light of Asia*', which he had received from the great author himself. Several Maharajas of the Native States of India, and their Dewans made *Sukhastan* their home during their visits to the Island. Sir K. Sheshadri Aiyer, K. C. S. I., then Dewan of Mysore and the Maker of Modern Mysore, spent one month with Ramanathan. It was an edifying and illuminating experience to the Dewan to listen to his host expatiate on questions both eternal and ephemeral.

Sudhansu Bose, the great Bengali writer, felt so far drawn to him by what he had heard of him that he came down to Colombo and spent many years with him in an endeavour to gain self-improvement. This is what he has said of him: "I had heard and read so much of the Hon'ble

(afterwards Sir) Ponnambalam Ramanathan, when I was doing literary work in Calcutta, that I felt greatly drawn to him for the sake of self-improvement. He was pleased to appoint me one of his Secretaries. His library contained a vast array of books relating to every field of knowledge. Among them were many cases of books on Ceylon and the Legislative Council Debates. His speeches were most interesting. For my own benefit, I studied them and their structure in respect to the matter set forth, the words used for that purpose, and the arguments urged. They appeared to be models of lucid statement, worthy of presentation to students preparing for political life in Ceylon and India."

Gladstone, the celebrated Victorian Premier, was among his closest friends. The veteran statesman had an affectionate regard for the young Oriental. Once when, in the course of his famous Midlothian Campaign, the indomitable champion of Irish Home Rule, in the plenitude of his power and pre-eminence, addressed a distinguished gathering, he accommodated Ramanathan, than a comparative youth, on the platform in company with some of the most illustrious sons of Britain. It was customary with Ramanathan, during his visits to England, to call on the Grand Old Man of England at his home at Hawarden and to learn from him the maxims of public and political morality. Among his friends he counted many other distinguished English statesmen and men of letters to whom his own intrinsic talents and the fact of his being the nephew of their esteemed friend Sir Muthucoomaraswamy gave him ready access. Mr. K. P. S. Menon M. A. (Oxon) I. C. S. who was then Agent of the Government of India and later, one of India's foremost diplomatists, aptly said, "Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan was a national figure with an international reputation. His charm of manner, his graceful speech, his natural

dignity, his lofty character, his deep sincerity, his independence of mind and his wide scholarship exercised an irresistible fascination on all who came in contact with him, and drew them to him. It was these qualities that won him the hearts of the people, and his colleagues in Council. His memory is not the monopoly of any particular community or any particular race. His was the kind of greatness which knew no bounds, racial or geographical. We know the other type of politician only too well, the kind of politician 'who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is heard no more'. We, perhaps, can call him the circumscribed politician, circumscribed by his community, by his constituency, by his creed.

"I had the privilege of meeting him but once. It is good enough in a case like this, for his was the kind of personality which, once seen, is never forgotten. Some one said of Dr. Johnson that if you only saw him taking shelter from rain under a tree, you would immediately come to the conclusion that you are in the presence of a great man. This statement is equally applicable to Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. Not that I saw him in the undignified act of taking shelter from a storm; he did not believe in taking shelter from storms, legal, political or martial storms. I saw him in the Legislative Council on a far more memorable occasion, when he delivered his speech on the Donoughmore Reforms; it was more than a speech, it was a philippic against the Reforms."

His Excellency, Sir Herbert Stanley said: "I can well remember, not quite two years ago, when I first landed in this country and made my bow to the Legislative Council, I was welcomed by our guest of the evening in a very charming speech; and, as I sat and listened to him, there came to my mind, the line which I may recall of Homer, in which he said of Nester, 'And from his tongue there flowed speech sweeter than honey.' I do

not imply for one moment that there is any resemblance between his turban and a beehive. We know that there is not a single bee in that bonnet, but the bee that distils the honey of which we partake with so much pleasure and which, occasionally I believe, leaves a little sting behind; and I have heard it said that those who sat and listened to him have occasionally felt a gentle prick, before he got to the end of his speech. However that may be, we all know that if there was a sting, it was a kindly sting and left no wound behind, which did not heal very quickly, and even those who came under his displeasure never lost their respect or affection for him."

Thrift, the vigilant husbanding of his material resources, was, as has been said, one of his outstanding virtues. He who would blaze with indignation at the least indication of improvidence or extravagance in the handling of national finances was just as wise and watchful in managing his own. He abhorred waste of any kind. Every item of personal and domestic expenditure was subjected to the closest and the most ruthless scrutiny. He treasured sedulously through life the parting advice and injunction of his devout father on the occasion of the two sons' leaving to India for higher education: "Sons, whatever you do, maintain a careful record of your expenses. Review these records in your calmer and leisured moments. Expenses which at one moment seemed to you unavoidable will, on second thoughts, appear to you superfluous and avoidable." He lived up to that advice and direction and attributed his freedom from want to the timely advice tendered by his dear and dutiful parent. His allowances to his sons at Royal and then at Cambridge never exceeded their bare necessities. "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves," was his oft-quoted saying. It was this frugality, this rigid and ruthless economy that enabled him to carry

through his manifold acts of charity and philanthropy. Parsimonious though he was in personal and private expenditure, he was lavish in his benefactions to his people. He was quite content to live to the end of his days at *Sukhastan*, an ancient and ancestral building which formed part of his inheritance, though he could well afford to build a more stately and luxurious mansion. His house in Jaffna within the premises of Ramanathan College was small and modest in the extreme. It was because he believed in the Biblical maxim that no man can serve two masters. He who aspired to serve man and God must first deny himself. In the custodianship of trust funds and public monies, he was scrupulously careful and resolutely economical in their disposal. Public money, he would say, is Parameshwaran's (God's) money. The story goes that his brother Arunachalam had borrowed from him a few thousand pounds out of temple funds on a promissory note. At the time the note was to expire, Arunachalam was away in England. Ramanathan saw no choice but to wire to the brother demanding payment and the brother had to wire back home to arrange immediate payment.

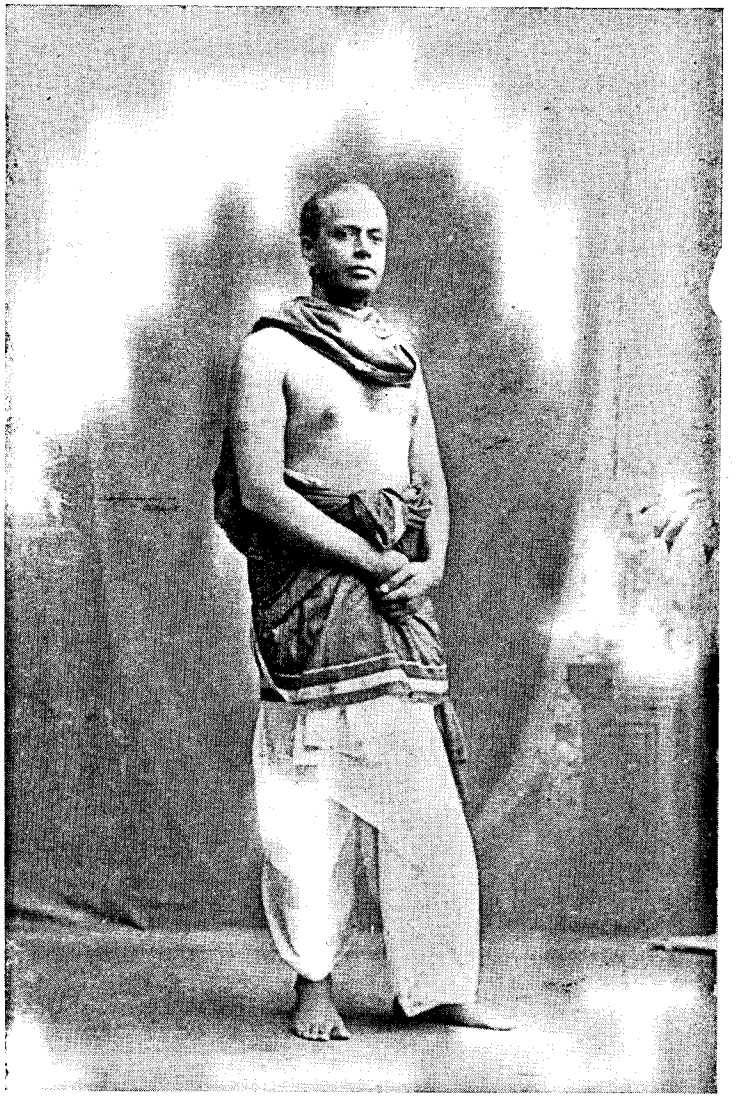
In his early youth, he tamely submitted to Western influences, was given to sumptuous eating and drinking and knew the taste of good whisky. An English earl who travelled widely and enjoyed the hospitality of many Eastern peoples has left on record that the best whisky he drank and the best tennis-court he played in was at *Sukhastan*. Ramanathan, moreover, prided himself on the most gorgeous Western attire and sported the Elwood hat. But this pattern of life was not long to endure. With his passage to manhood and the advent of his Master (religious teacher), the tenor of his life was completely changed.

In his eating and drinking, he became extremely abstemious as is customary with a Hindu *Bhakthan* (devotee). Never again was he a slave to the

palate and dreaded gluttony more than a monster. Henceforth through life, he practised vegetarianism religiously. His food was of the plainest and simplest. A little fruit, vegetables and some milk was all that he ate and drank, eschewed all stimulants and shunned the tobacco. Although he lived all his life in Colombo and on terms of the closest intimacy with the highest in the land, hedged in on every side by lavish eating and drinking, by luxurious and ostentatious living, he never succumbed to their lure but lived a simple, sober and austere life.

The Very Rev. Father M. J. LeGog said of Ramanathan, "Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan used to condense all his theories into a simple maxim, 'Plain living and high thinking'. I was once a witness to Sir Ramanathan's plain way of living. In the Refreshment Car from Talai-Mannar to Colombo he sat at table one evening and took for the whole of his dinner a simple glass of milk. When the hostels for the future University were being planned, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan insisted on the students' cubicles being of the simplest type, in order to inculcate in the future generations of educated Ceylonese the ways of plain living. Luxury and extravagance had no place in his life. He had a mind which was serene and an even temperament which breathed sweetness into its manner."

But in the construction his twin educational institutions in the North and his temple in Colombo and in endowing them liberally, he taxed his material resources to the limits of endurance. An idealist all his life, he aimed at strength, solidity, magnificence and finish in all he did. It is said that in the building of the temple in Colombo, he rejected every pillar wrought in massive granite and at enormous expense, if in the smallest degree, it fell short of his ideal of perfection. There was hardly any charitable institution in the Island that did



RAMANATHAN IN HOMELY ATTIRE

not receive liberal aid from him. But in his allowances to his children and other members of his family, he saw to it that they received nothing more than what was absolutely necessary. In his later years, he continued to use his rickety old car, which became an object of public ridicule, when lesser men were seen reeling about in luxury limousines. He who seeks to serve God and man, must first deny himself. It was in his perfect love of God and man that Ramanathan found the freedom of his self. It was his freedom of self that gave him freedom of action. It was this freedom of action, this detached, disinterested pursuit of what he deemed the good of man that gave his work a richness and fulness and splendour seldom achieved by other men.

Though in the early days of Colonial rule, Western attire and Western mode of living were the passport to high society and official advancement and our youth went crazy with it, he took to wearing the traditional long coat and turban of the Indian aristocracy and followed strictly the mode of life characteristic of his people. It was an act of exceptional moral courage to have taken this bold departure from the current fashion of the time. But Ramanathan was nothing if not his own master, ever resolute to act according to his own inner lights and never follow the beaten track; nothing if not a hard-grained, hard-boiled nationalist proud of his race and ancient heritage, always determined to defend them against all foreign inroads.

To many it must have seemed inexplicable that a man with all the accomplishments that Western education and culture could give, living on terms of the closest intimacy with the choicest spirits of his time and occupying in national life a position seldom attained by any other should have been so conservative in taste and manners as to cling tenaciously to the customs, habits and

modes of life of his forbears. A nationalist by instinct and conviction and a conservative by tradition, he saw no reason why he should surrender the charm and grace of his national attire to the mere frivolous fashion and the doubtful decencies of an alien garb. He had often to encounter a great deal of prejudice and unfriendly criticism at the hands of many Europeans and Europeanized Ceylonese, who in their ignorance believed that the retention of national customs and manners indicated a want of refinement. But some of the most cultured and thoughtful Englishmen appreciated and encouraged him in his ways.

Ramanathan once referred to how Sir Arthur Gordon (Lord Stanmore) the Governor expressed delight on seeing him in his turban. "My original head-dress was the turban. When I joined the Bar, I found that all my brethren went about bare-headed. Out of respect for them, I thought I should also take off my head-dress. But what happened? When later on I was called to a seat in the Legislative Council, I found that I had made a great mistake doffing the turban, for, there I met a Governor who promoted every thing national among us. The Governor was Sir Arthur Gordon, now Lord Stanmore. One day, I attended the grand opening ceremony of the Legislative Council with my national turban on. After the meeting was over, Governor Gordon called me aside and said, 'Mr. Ramanathan, why have you given up your beautiful turban? Wear it always.' That was the wish of the first gentleman of the country, the highest representative of Law and Order. I was bound to respect it, and from that day I have worn the turban."

His sensitiveness and moral independence were extraordinary. He never asked for fairer treatment for himself nor complained when it was denied, although it was notorious that at every turn of his great career as a servant of the State, his claims to high office, overwhelming though they

were, were wantonly flouted by a Government which was both hostile and inordinately jealous of his high talents and attainments. Nor did he seek favours for his children. Log-rolling, wire-pulling and other multitudinous arts which are the common resource of the crafty politician or the astute man of the world, seeking to further his ambitions or the fortunes of his family, were utterly unknown to him. His golden rule in life, the one he consistently and assiduously followed through life, was to do all the best he could in whatever situation Fortune placed him, without fear or favour and without regard for results. It was in the possession of this virtue of detachment from self, in his freedom from selfish ambition that lay the source of his authority and influence.

One piece of advice he gave his nephew, the late Sir Mahadeva, when he was elected to the legislature, was that he should not under any circumstance solicit favours of any kind from anyone, particularly those in authority. He was of the opinion that a people's representative who lends himself to such practices, forfeits his independence and cannot therefore do his duty by the people without fear or favour. He never claimed infallibility for himself, the customary infirmity of otherwise great and noble natures. No man was quicker or readier to own his own errors of judgement and to ask forgiveness.

Dr. Isaac Thambyah sums up the characteristics of the man in a few pregnant sentences. He says, "Unruffled calm, undaunted quiet, perennial brass — this is not an unjust estimate in summary of what many-sided Mr. Ramanathan has shown himself to be in recent years through good report and ill. These characteristics are quite in keeping with his sustained exclusiveness. The people's man of 1886, the fiery Councillor of 1889, he came eating and drinking, a friend of publicans and sinners; but the author of the 'Mystery of God-

liness' and the expounder of religions cut himself off from the company of men to mount the plane of quieter activities. Following his career closely from 1873 it is easy to say, with almost chronological accuracy, when the old Ramanathan gave place to the new. His putting on of the new man may be said to have taken place not very long before 1895. He came ununderstandable, his friends no longer walked with him and he deliberately mystified his ways even to the extent of being seriously misunderstood. A passage in his first book makes no secret of his belief in the consistency of his holding a high office in the Colony's chief department of crime and at the same time being, as he claims to be, a *Guru*, a *sannyasin*, a master unto many. The stately Oriental figure of the Solicitor-General, the meditative air of the man of many thoughts, thoughts thorny or sweet, thoughts that give peace or eat into the soul, the silver voice of the great master of speech – these are surely not without their attractions. But the attempt to know more of the man behind these masks of *Maya*, as he himself would say, though from various points of view, the attempt may lead to various conclusions, cannot be absolutely void of interest."

CHAPTER XII

THE ROAD ORDINANCE— THE REGISTRATION OF TITLES TO LAND

> "If the lower classes of the inhabitants of Ceylon lack anything, it is character. It is the duty of the Government to do everything in its power to elevate the character of the people. .....
>
> .....No one who has the interest of Ceylon at heart, much less, no one whose special duty is to ascertain the existence and nature of public evils and to do their best to remedy them, could be without observing the changes which are at present passing over the social morality of the Ceylonese.....
>
> — *Ramanathan*

THE Road Ordinance No. 10 of 1861 caused immense hardship and suffering to the people. The Ordinance required every male adult to offer free of all payment six days' compulsory labour on roads or pay commutation in cash. Very often the labourer was called upon to work in places fifteen or twenty miles away from his home and pay for his subsistence during this period of compulsory labour As he could not return home the same day after work, his family was denied his help or protection, and he, his subsistence.

Those who accepted commutation but could not find the wherewithal to pay were sentenced to hard labour and imprisoned for varying periods. Several thousands including "mere boys and even children who had not lost their first teeth" found themselves huddled up in prisons along with criminals, for non-payment of the commutation money. The hardships and misery they endured behind prison bars were appalling and their self-respect was undermined by their being saddled with criminals.

No man was more wide awake to the horror and despair of the poor and the oppressed or racked his brains more to discover a remedy than Ramanathan. His supreme concern through life was for the under-dog and under-doggery was rife in his time. On 13th October, 1880, Ramanathan moved in Council for a Commission of Inquiry into the different phases of the question which required to be investigated and made the following speech; "Since resolving upon the introduction of the subject of the Road Ordinance into Council, I have learnt some facts which make me believe that much pressure is not necessary on my part to induce the Government to grant a Commission of Inquiry."

He continued, "I do not complain of the road-tax itself, but I think that the machinery for the enforcement of labour and of the payment of the commutation money needs revision. The whole Ordinance is directed to the fulfilment of these two objects. As regards the collection of labour, clause 52 of the Ordinance No. 10 of 1861 prescribes the time and place of attendance to perform the labour. It is very hard for a villager to have to leave his family and travel fifteen miles to do the work prescribed by the District Road Committee. The villager cannot return home on the same day from so great a distance. As he has to work for six consecutive days on the task, his family will have to be without his help or protection for all this period. It is practically his banishment from his family for six days."

He pointed out that that hardship could be mitigated to a certain extent if clause 57 of the Road Ordinance were acted upon. That clause empowered the District Road Committee to pay the labourer on application subsistence money for twelve days and take work out of him for twelve, instead of six, days. He said he had reason to believe that that clause was a dead letter and that in fact

District Road Committees avoided entering into an obligation of that sort. He contended that a Commission, if granted, would be able to inquire into and report on these matters.

He proceeded, "Then, as regards the collection of the commutation money, payment of it is compulsory, under clause 61, in the month of April of every year. The time for collection ought to fall, not when people are engaged in cultivation, but when they have reaped their harvest.

"Another matter which demands the attention of the Council is the unrestrained power of commutation given to the labourer by Clause 60. This power injures the labourer and injures the District Road Committee. It injures the labourer in this way. If he, the labourer, is a man of means, the commutation money will be paid when due, but if he is poor and cannot pay, as is very naturally the case, he will come under the rigorous procedure prescribed for the recovery of the debt, and at length find himself in jail, condemned as a criminal to work with real criminals. Thus the poor labourer, too idle or proud to work of his own will on the roads, because he hopes to scrape up the wherewithal to pay, is sent to jail, under sentence of hard labour, punished, so to speak, for entertaining a vain hope. His punishment does not help a bit the District Road Committee. District Road Committees are bound under the Ordinance to make out a list of those who have commuted to pay, and have to pay to Government for the maintenance of the principal roads some two-thirds of the money which they expect to collect by way of commutation. The Government is paid this money, but the District Road Committees never recoup themselves in full. They cannot do it, as I have already pointed out. They lose the labour of the labourers sent to jail, and in addition have to pay the Government the defined quota for the principal roads.

"I will now refer to the evils of the summary process of recovery under Clause 64. As soon as those who have commuted to pay become defaulters, the Chairman of the District Road Committee transmits an Order in the following terms to the Magistrate of the District in which the defaulters are:

'It is ordered that the persons whose names and residences are under-mentioned do forthwith pay into the Police Court of..... the respective sums opposite to their names, being double the amount of the commutation due from them for the year.'

"The police Magistrate on receiving this order issues a warrant of distress. If sufficient distress cannot be had, as is very often the case, the defaulter is sentenced to hard labour and imprisoned for varying periods proportionately with the sums due. The committals in 1878 were 2,566; in 1876, 2,863; in 1873, 3,251; and in 1878 no less than 8,131. These wholesale committals sometimes overstock the prisons. Mr. Elliott, the Inspector-General of Prisons, refers to this in his report, dated 15th July, 1877. Speaking of the Road Ordinance defaulters in the Jaffna prisons, he says:

'The lock-up return discloses that all sorts of buildings scattered about the Fort, were utilized to supply sleeping room, such as the carpenter's shop, guard-room, old house on battery, lunatic cells, maingate, and even the verandah of Queen's House..... Not one of these buildings I need hardly state, has been approved of by the medical authorities or by any predecessor or myself as affording proper accommodation for any class of prisoners.'

"Mr. Elliott also refers to irregularities which 'are sure to creep in' in such wholesale committals. He speaks of mere boys and even children who have not lost their first teeth, being committed as defaulters, though the Ordinance expressly exempts persons under 18 and above 55.

"I have already commented on the injustice of treating civil debtors as criminals, but what is the effect of this treatment of civil debtors on the morale of the country? If the lower classes of the inhabitants of Ceylon lack anything, it is character. It is the duty of the Government to do everything in its power to elevate the character of the people. To remove a horror of imprisonment, to treat civil debtors as criminals, is not the way to teach people to despise crime.

"Moreover, may I ask what the cost of maintaining in prison these road defaulters is to Government? What is the object of imprisoning them? Is it to punish the offenders? If so, does such punishment further the object which the Ordinance has in view, namely, to supply the District Road Committee with the necessary funds? Some of Mr. Templer's observations, as Chairman of the Puttalam District Road Committee, are very useful. Hon. members will find them on page 95 of the Administration Reports for 1878.

"I have now stated my views in support of my motion. None of these views were put forward in connection with Mr. Alwis' motion. Mr. Alwis' reason for revision does not weigh much with me, for there is nothing in the Ordinance to prevent a greater apportionment of the road-tax fund to minor roads than, as at present, to principal roads. The Commission, I now move for, is to enquire into the present working of the Ordinance No. 10 of 1861, in conjunction with the Ordinances 6 of 1855 and 5 of 1866 so as to report (1) upon the best method of collecting labour, and (2) upon the restrained power of commutation and the best method of recovering the commutation money."

The motion was seconded by Mr. J. P. Obeysekera, the Sinhalese Member. Ramanathan had pin-pointed the evils inherent in the Road Ordinance, turned the searchlight on the social misery, suffering and degradation it inflicted on the poor and the

inarticulate and impressed on a callous and unthinking Government the extreme urgency for the appointment of a Commission to study the question in all its bearings and devise remedies for the evils complained of. The Government had no choice but to accept his motion in view of the arguments he put forward and appoint a Commission, of which he was made a member.

On the findings of the Commission, Ramanathan brought to bear a wealth of detail which he had garnered from a close and assiduous study of the subject and succeeded in devising many ingenious measures of improvement whereby the evils complained of in the working of the Ordinance were removed, as shown by the returns published in later years. The Road Ordinance ceased to be a nightmare to the rustic poor.

REGISTRATION OF TITLES TO LAND

To prevent needless litigation, the Government of 1863 passed an Ordinance for the registration of title deeds, but it remained a dead letter for fourteen years, and another Ordinance was introduced in 1877 to amplify and amend the earlier procedure. Unfortunately, this too was not put into operation though five years had gone by. No man knew more than Ramanathan that uncertainty of titles to land is a fruitful source of litigation or that litigation is among the greatest evils that could afflict human society.

On 30th November, 1881, Ramanathan asked what measures the Government had taken, and if they had not, why they had not taken, to bring into operation, in certain parts of the Island at least, the Ordinance No. 5 of 1877 relating to the Registration of Titles to Land.

He said, "No one who has the interest of Ceylon at heart, much less no one whose special duty is to ascertain the existence and nature of public evils and to do their best to remedy

them, could be without observing the changes which are at present passing over the social morality of the Ceylonese. When one phase of this large question I was led to consider viz: the growing tastes of the people for gambling and drinking, their scandalous abuse of the authority of the Police Courts and Courts of Justices of the Peace, and the various incentives they have to litigation in general, I felt the solution of that problem, a fragment though it be of a larger question, was quite worthy of the attempt of any public man in Ceylon. One of the main causes of litigation, often paving the way for gambling and drinking, is undoubtedly the difficulties connected with the possession of landed property. The land cases which arise in our courts are (1) cases in which one's title to it is disputed, (2) cases in which one's boundary lines are questioned, (3) cases in which some interest, such as planter's share, lease, servitude and the like, is claimed, and (4) cases in which a partition of lands held by co-heirs is prayed for. By far the largest proportion of these cases are cases in which titles and boundary lines are contested. I do not wish to detain the Council with an examination of the causes which have led to these disputes, but I may mention they are mainly due to the constant subdivision of property, whether by will or operation of law, among the descendants of the original owners, and also to the ignorance, neglect or slovenliness of the notaries who fail to give definite boundaries to the lands mentioned in the deeds executed before them.

"When issues arise in courts as to title and boundaries, they depend, of course, on oral testimony or documentary evidence. Oral testimony, I need not say, opens the way to much fraud and perjury, while documentary evidence is often liable to perversion, for deeds affecting one land are made to do duty for another land of the

same name in the same village. In 1880, there were for adjudication in the District Courts of the Island 5,364 cases, and in the various Courts of Requests 30,882, making a total of 36,246, which gives about 100 cases a day. How many of these are land cases? The Secretary of the District Court of Colombo tells me that, of the institutions in the Colombo District Court, 50 per cent. may be put down as land cases. The District of Colombo takes, I believe, the foremost rank in the Island for commercial transactions. If then, in this district, the proportion of land cases to other cases be about 50 to 100, the proportion in other districts must be vastly in favour of land cases. If the Government could only make titles certain and boundary lines clear, about 50 per cent. of the litigation of the counrty in our civil courts would go down.

"How is this to be done? The first thing to secure is a map of the country on a scientific basis. Hon. members who, like myself, are not conversant with the details of surveying, may be interested to hear what Mr. Markham says in a statement he laid before Parliament, exhibiting the moral and material progress of India during the year 1872—1873. I shall read only so much of it as will throw light on the question in hand." He now proceeded to quote Mr. Markham at length and then the Hon. Mr. Cayley who contended that in the absence of cadastral survey, it was questionable whether the registration of lands had not done more harm than good.

He suggested the institution of a trigonometrical survey to be followed by a cadastral survey showing the exact boundaries of villages, gardens and fields and their respective areas. If these surveys could be made and titles and boundaries inquired into and registered, he said, Ceylon would have reason to congratulate herself. He fulminated against the Government for its brazen failure to implement

the Ordinance, though five years had passed since its passing, cited numerous authorities from many lands in support of his case and added, "The Ordinance No. 5 of 1877 was passed in 1877; five years have passed since then. What has the Government done? Why have they not brought the Ordinance into force, an Ordinance of such vast importance to the community at large? Has a cadastral survey been made? If made, in part at least, why have the Government not introduced the Ordinance in the district so surveyed? I see no difficulty in the working of the Ordinance. Everybody's interests are protected by it. Wherein lies the difficulty? The country will owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, if you begin at once to enforce the Ordinance, which has for its object the abolition of the curse of the country, viz. litigation."

The Governor explained the difficulties in the path of the implementation of the Ordinance, as was customary with him to dwell overmuch on difficulties and put off the Unofficials by promising to look into the matter. But Ramanathan was not to be silenced by vague promises. He knew that litigation was a canker which was eating into the vitals of Ceylon society and that the Government should spare no pains to remove every inducement to litigation.

He said, "I cannot say I am quite satisfied with the answer given by the Hon. the Lieutenant-Governor. I believe and not only I, but other persons more competent than myself believe that the Government have exaggerated the difficulties connected with the working of the Ordinance No. 5 of 1877. If District Judges in Matara and Kalutara are competent to deal with partition and other land cases, involving claims to 1/164th share, or even shares more infinitesimally divided, I ask why should not the present Registrar-General, who enjoys quite a reputation for legal ability, be allowed to

enter upon inquiries of this kind? You will thus perceive, Sir, that the first argument of the Hon. the Lieutenant-Governor must be abandoned. The other argument he has urged is this, that an inquiry by the Registrar-General cannot go on *pari passu* with the enquiries of the Grain Tax Commissioners. I can only say that the department of the Registrar-General is quite separate and stands on a distinct ground from the department of the Grain Tax Commissioners, being presided over by different Officers. Why then cannot these inquiries go on separately? I fail to see the difficulty, but I feel certain that, if the Government exerts itself and grapples with the fancied difficulty, it would be doing its duty to the public at large."

The Hon. the Lietutenant-Governor then spoke of the most cherished prejudices of the Sinhalese, and added that these prejudices should not be interfered with too hastily. Ramanathan said, "The original Ordinance as to registration of titles and deeds was passed in 1863 and this is now 1881. Is it to be supposed that a lapse of eighteen years has not been sufficient to familiarize the Sinhalese with the wisdom or necessity of that Ordinance? But, if they had forgotten either, was not the Ordinance of 1877 a clear reminder? How then can it be now said that it is still too hasty to interfere with the prejudices of the Sinhalese? When will it be not too hasty to interfere with their prejudices? When will the proper time come for enforcing the Ordinance? The fact is, Sir, if there is a will, there is a way. For my part, I think there is sufficient ability amongst the Executive to deal with this matter successfully, if they wished to, but they do not want to, because it involves exertion.

"The result is we are put off with the answer that the Government would make inquiries. They are free to make inquiries when they like. It matters not to me. In 1863 the Ordinance was

passed, and amended in 1877, but they have not yet been enforced. The Council of those days have, it would appear, been making fools of themselves, by enacting an Ordinance which it was impossible to bring into operation. The action of the present Government is thus a queer comment on the practical genius of Sir Wm. Gregory and the eminent ability of the Hon. Mr. Cayley."

Baffled in his object this Session, Mr. Ramanathan moved again on the 11th of October, 1882, that it was not desirable to delay any longer the enforcement of the Ordinance 5 of 1877. This motion was agreed to by the Government. But in the attainment of his objective, he was confronted with another difficulty, when on the 22nd of November, the Government Agent of the Central Province objected vehemently to the insertion in the Supply Bill for 1883, of a vote of Rs. 5000 for the survey of private lands, as being inconsistent with the retrenchment of expenditure that had been ordered by the Legislative Council in consequence of the agricultural and commercial depression that began in 1879. Nevertheless all the members, including the Governor, supported the vote for the survey. It was a signal victory for Ramanthan, gained against very heavy odds. One fruitful source of litigation viz. disputes over land boundaries was thus removed.

CHAPTER XIII

RAMANATHAN AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

> "There is a great deal too much of hypocrisy in Jaffna in the matter of religion owing to the fact that the love of the Missionaries for proselytes is as boundless as the love of the Jaffnese to obtain some knowledge of English at any cost."
>
> — *Ramanathan*

MUCH was said and written about Ramanathan's relations with the Christian missionaries in Jaffna. Many Christians believed that he was hostile to them and that his words and actions were designed to undermine the good work of the missionaries. Such a view was utterly false and uncharitable, for in very truth Ramanathan had a genuine admiration for the noble and disinterested work done by them for the uplift of the people of Jaffna and proclaimed from many platforms his own indebtedness to missionary teachers. He himself made contributions, material and moral, to the success of Christian missionary schools and helped them ungrudgingly. Whenever Government grants for these schools came up for consideration before the legislature, he supported them wholeheartedly. When once, a proposal for the grant of Rs. 50,000 to Jaffna College was taken up, Rev. Bicknell approached Ramanathan with the request that he should support it. Ramanathan said, "I will put both my hands up, so long as it is a vote for education, without regard to what denominational institution the vote is for." And he did support it.

Rev. Bicknell was an enthusiastic admirer of Ramanathan. In one of his speeches, he said,

"The services of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan possessed two eminent characteristics. In the first place he seems to have been the spokesman for the people of Ceylon. I think he, more than any other man, has been able during a quarter of a century at least to give expression to the purposes, ideas and sentiments of this country. That was the greatest service. At the Jubilee Dinner, Sir Ponnambalam said that he was but a humble instrument of a Divine providence. I believe Sir Ponnambalam has also been a humble instrument in the hands of the people. The second characteristic is that Sir Ponnambalam has helped to bridge the chasm that exists between the different communities in the Island."

The two letters, one addressed by Dr. Thos. B. Scott, then Secretary of the American Ceylon Mission, to Ramanathan and the latter's reply to it, serve to throw some light on Ramanathan's attitude to Christian Missions.

Manipay,
March 22nd, 1910.

Hon. P. Ramanathan Esqr.,
Jaffna.

Dear Sir,

We, of the American Mission, have looked with interest on the project to establish a Boarding School for Hindu Girls in Jaffna. We have seen you choose a location very close to our Mission Boarding school. We have recognised that all true aims to educate the women of the land must surely do good to the community. We have raised no voice, so far as my knowledge goes, that has been inimical to your proposal.

We have recently seen one commonly accredited as your agent spending considerable time in addresses in the villages ostensibly for the object of rousing a popular desire for the education of girls so that your new school should receive pupils. We would have no words to say against it, if it did not involve a definite attempt to break up the existing schools. I had the opinion that such was not your wish or intention. I am still of the opinion

that effort that is being made to raise up Hindu schools by breaking up existing schools has not your approbation.

As the same time it is true that such agitation is at present going on and I venture to write this letter to you at the urgent request of teachers whose schools are suffering from the measures taken by those who openly claim to represent you and your wishes.

That such is not your intention I hope you will take opportunity to prove. There is ample opportunity for your new Boarding School to call for children for the higher grade of work from the existing schools. Only a very small percentage of those attending schools in the villages come to the existing Mission Boarding Schools. We would not offer objection to your asking children to join your new school, if the parents prefer, but we think the cause of education of girls is not wisely advanced by trying to break up what little work for them is already established.

I respectfully request that you will not permit such methods to be employed in your name without raising some public protest.

I remain,

Yours respectfully.

THOS. B. SCOTT.

April 9th, 1910.

Rev. T. B. Scott,
Manipay.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of the 22nd ultimo, addressed to Colombo was forwarded with my other letters to Kodaikanal at a time when I had left for Colombo. I returned here after a fortnight's absence and this is why your letter has remained unanswered till now.

When I was appealed to for help for the higher education of the Saiva Girls of Jaffna, I chose an allotment of land of about 25 acres near Kopay. After I had purchased it, many of the leading men of Jaffna thought that another site would be more suitable to the girls. Deferring to their opinion, I asked them to choose another land of at least 15 acres and they chose the only available land they knew of after twelve months of inquiry, and this is the land I have bought in

Inuvil. I am quite satisfied that its choice was not prompted by a spirit of opposition to your boarding school at Uduvil, but was unavoidable.

I would further explain that I impressed upon all my friends in Jaffna that, as only girls of 10 years and more could be usefully admitted as boarders, it was absolutely necessary to strengthen all existing schools and establish new ones as feeder schools for the boarding College; that I would contribute the funds necessary for this purpose, if they would organise themselves into different local Committees to visit, examine and report upon such feeder schools and that nothing was farther from my intention than to cause any heartburn among the Christian teachers in Jaffna, for whom I have always had great respect. You yourself are aware that for the building of your Manipay school, I subscribed a hundred rupees. My efforts to draw the Hindus and Christians together as brothers worshipping the same God, though by different methods, are well known from my addresses and published books, and you may rest assured that I shall do nothing to injure the wishes or aims of those who would worship God through Christian methods, for it is foolish to try to monopolize God, or to fancy that he who is in the heart of every man is attainable by the path of only one religion or master.

As regards the addresses given in Jaffna by Mr. Myron Phelps of New York, I did not hear any of them, but I have read one of them, printed *in extenso* in the *Hindu Organ.* I saw nothing in it to justify your supposition that he was striving to 'break up' your Mission Schools. I know him very well. He has a sincere regard for Missionaries from Western lands, and heartily appreciates the good work done by them for the children of their own fold in India and Ceylon. He would be the last man to do anything that would 'break up' the Mission Schools. He is strongly convinced that Christian Missionaries should do all they can to teach Christian doctrine to Christian children. But he is equally certain that it would be dangerous to the spiritual welfare of Hindu children to go into Christian schools for even secular education, because the daily practices and openly-expressed opinions of Christian teachers and Christian students would undermine all respect for their own ancestral

faith, and leave them in the end godless and utterly ruined in spirit, if there be no genuine conversion to Christianity. Can the soundness of this view be disputed? Faithful Christians will surely not allow their children to daily attend Hindu or Mohammedan Schools which inculcate the tenets of those religions. The danger to the development of spirituality under such adverse circumstances is so well appreciated among Christians that Christians of one denomination will not send their children to schools of another denomination. If the Roman Catholics insisted on the teaching of their children in their own schools, would that be said to be "breaking up" the Protestant schools? And if by reason of such insistence, the Protestant schools suffer depletion by the withdrawal of the Roman Catholic children, would it be considered right for the Protestant teachers to regard the event as a grievance against the Catholics? Calmer and fuller reflection on the part of those teachers who have urged you to write to me will, I think, lead them to accept the present disinclination of Saiva children to attend Christian schools not only as quite natural, but also as quite right from their point of view.

Wrong thought is the parent of grief and alarm. Now that I have stated the right lines of thought by which the present juncture of circumstances should be judged, may I hope that your teachers will accept with resignation, and even cheerfulness, the growing feeling on the part of Saiva parents in Jaffna that it would be better for their little ones to learn under the auspices of their own teachers.

With kind regards,
Yours very truly,
P. RAMANATHAN.

Ramanathan always urged Hindus not to view with hostility or disfavour the good work done by the Missionaries but to "join hands with them for the glorification of the one and the same God who is to be found within the pure souls of all human beings".

What he resisted implacably was the spirit of intolerance practised by Christian Missionaries, their

disdain of other religions and their overweening assumption that Christianity was, of all religions, the truest and best and that other religions should yield place to it. He who was a lifelong student of all religions, who believed in the unity of religion, who believed that all religions are at heart one and lead to one and the same God worshipped by all races of mankind, with whom, moreover, individual freedom was the first article of political and spiritual faith, the freedom to order one's life according to one's own lights and the traditions of one's forbears was profoundly distressed at this unholy attitude of the missionaries. In this he was a relentless and resourceful continuator of the policy set by Arumukha Navalar, the "Champion Hindu Reformer" as he called him. When the work of preselytization had assumed alarming proportions and when the Hindus grew apprehensive of the future of their religion and the religious beliefs and convictions of their children who had proceeded to missionary institutions for their education, they addressed a memorial to the legislature and requested Ramanathan to present it.

Ramanathan speaking on the memorial said: "I rise, Sir, to call the attention of this Council to the memorial I had the honour to present a fortnight ago from certain Hindu inhabitants of the Jaffna Peninsula, complaining of religious intolerance on the part of certain Christian missionary managers of grant-in-aid schools.

"The specific nature of the grievances complained of appears in the memorial itself, and that is that children who are obliged to go to these missionary schools are forced by the missionaries, under pain of fines and expulsion, to read the Bible whether they liked it or not, which in my estimation is an excellent book, and to rub off those sectarian marks of devotion to religion, which Hindus are enjoined by their ancient spiritual teachers to put on their forehead. It is needless now to go into

the reasons of these practices. They are matters of faith, about the validity of which this Council will not enquire or judge.

"I desire to approach the subject of the complaints made in the memorial with a due sense of the great work done by the missionaries in the field of general education. I am not at all antagonistic to their labours amongst us. I have always endeavoured to be tolerant in the widest sense of the word in matters of religious faith and religious enthusiasm. My opinions are well-known to all communities, and Christian missionaries have always courted my help in the solution of educational questions. In the year 1880 their leaders came to me in a body and asked me to represent their grievances to this Council, and I gladly did my best for them. I have no fear of being misunderstood. Your Excellency's words, that it is your intention to maintain perfect neutrality between the different creeds in Ceylon, have been recently quoted with approval by His Lordship the Bishop of Colombo.

"I beg in the first place to call your attention to the fact that there are no government schools, either English or Anglo-Vernacular, in the Northern Province of Ceylon, and that English education is imparted almost exclusively by the different Christian missionary bodies who have located themselves there. It appears that religious intolerance on the part of some of the managers has varied with varying times and circumstances, and that it has been steadily growing ever since the champion reformer of Hindus in the Northern Province died in 1879.

H. E. the Governor: Who did you say?

Mr. Ramanathan: The Hindu reformer named Arumukha Navalar. Hindu boys who, for want of their own English schools, resort to the missionary schools, have learnt to make mental reservations and are getting skilled in the art of dodging. The

holy ashes put on at home during worship are carefully rubbed off as they approach the Christian schools and they affect the methods of Christian boys while at school. I know of many cases in which even baptized boys and teachers, when they ceased to be connected with such schools, appear in their true colours, with broad stripes of consecrated ashes and rosaries, to the great merriment of the people and the deep chagrin of the missionaries. There is a great deal too much of hypocrisy in Jaffna in the matter of religion owing to the fact that the love of the missionaries for proselytes is as boundless as the love of the Jaffnese to obtain some knowledge of English at any cost. I cannot help thinking that the policy pursued by some of the Christian managers of grant-in-aid schools is a ruinous mistake."

He reinforced his case by quoting from the Report of Mr. Bruce, the late Director of Education and proceeded to press for a Conscience Clause in the code of Education. He said, "The intolerance of the Church of England missionaries and of the American missionaries in the Northern Province appears to be amply borne out by the observation which Mr. Bruce, the late Director of Public Instruction, has made in his report. Mr. Bruce said: 'The grant-in-aid expenditure is now almost exclusively incurred on account of schools under Christian Church or missionary societies. In the Roman Catholic schools there is a very strict Conscience Clause, but the managers of other societies, to whom I have written on the subject, have declined to pledge themselves that no scholar shall receive religious instruction contrary to the wishes of his parents.'

"Will, then, the Government, in view of these established facts, which cannot be denied, stand aloof and see unmoved the youth of Jaffna demoralized by the hypocritical feeling engendered and maintained by the circumstances of the case and

by its inability to withstand the powerful influence which the missionary has as an educational medium, or is it not the duty of the Government to intervene and put a stop to this evil? It was only last year that, in Christian England itself, the Archbishop of Canterbury insisted upon a Conscience Clause in the English Code of Education.

"There is, Sir, another view of the question which I should like to present to you, and that is this. Some years ago, the Church of England here was disendowed for the reason that the taxes which were gathered from non-Christians ought not to go towards the maintenance of the Anglican Church. The argument applies with increased force to education, and I submit that it is not right that these grants, which are paid out of the taxes gathered from non-Christians, should go in aid of the religious instruction insisted upon by the missionaries. I submit, that it is incumbent on the Government to afford relief to these memorialists, and I wait with anxiety to know what measures of relief the Government is going to give them. If there is no Conscience Clause in the grant-in-aid code, I think the sooner a clause of that kind is introduced, the better it will be for religious freedom in Ceylon.

"If the Government are unwilling to have a Conscience Clause, though I cannot conceive for what reason they should be unwilling, they should at all events give the inhabitants of the Northern Province the same advantages which are given to the inhabitants of other provinces. In the Western Province there are 26 English and Anglo-Vernacular Government schools; in the Central Province there are 11; in the Southern Province 10; but there are no such schools in the Northern Province. I feel, Sir, that I have only to state my case to enlist the sympathy of Honourable Members around this table, and I will not dwell any longer upon the subject."

The Lieutenant Governor, Sir John Douglas, replied that the memorial, complaining of the acts of

intolerance, was referred to the Director of Public Instruction for report, but that, as the report furnished by him did not give all the information that was required, the subject was referred for inquiry to the Government Agent of the Northern Province, that his report had not been received as yet, and the Government were pressing for speedy information. Moreover, Ramanathan was given the assurance that everything possible would be done to end the evil.

Not content with the negative role of arresting this tide of proselytization, he chose to play a positive and more constructive role, that of building or causing to be built throughout the country a net-work of schools and colleges with a predominantly nationalist background, where the nation's children could pursue their studies without detriment to their religious beliefs or their cultural traditions. He toured the country in days when the means of travel were few and far between, exhorting Hindus and Buddhists to wake up to a realization of the dangers inherent in the unimpeded march of missionary activity, to an appreciation of their ancient heritage of language and religion, their culture and tradition and to establish their own schools and colleges for the education of their children. He made lavish contributions of money too to ensure the success of this enterprise.

It was in the wake of his propagandist activity that there sprang into existence in various parts of the country, a chain of schools and colleges of which Jaffna Hindu College in the North and Ananda College in the South were the pioneers. It was in pursuit of this ideal that he founded at a later date the Hindu Board of Education which became a tremendous force in the educational uplift of the Hindus and spread its ramifications throughout the Island.

Not the least of his services to his people was his lifelong preoccupation with all things dis-

tinctively national and his impressing on both the people and the rulers the paramount duty and responsibility of conserving and strengthening them for the benefit of posterity.

To say that he was averse or hostile to any religion other than his own is to do his memory the gravest injury. What he condemned and combated strenuously was that spirit of intolerance, that active prejudice against members of other faiths, that frantic pursuit of converts which, alas, soiled and continue to soil the image of, otherwise, great religions, which made religion a divisive and disruptive factor rather than, what it should be, a unifying and harmonizing force in society.

His love and respect for all religions never wavered nor waned. Like the great Navalar who gave his Christian brethren a classic Tamil version of the Bible, he gave them his illuminating Commentaries on the Christian Gospels, which the Western world acclaimed as original and far-reaching expositions of the Christian Scriptures.

He once said: "It seems to me that some persons were doing their best to create an impression among many Christian brethren that I am intolerant of Christianity. This is pure falsehood. From early life I have been taught to respect the different religions of the world as different paths to one and the same God of all nations, and during my public career, I have always endeavoured to respect the religious convictions of every sect and even to work for the common good of all religions. I have served Christian Missionaries of all denominations while in Council. I have contributed to the building of Christian schools and churches. My Commentaries on St. Mathew and St. John were highly appreciated by men of high culture on both sides of the Atlantic."

CHAPTER XIV

THE REGISTRATION OF MOHAMMEDAN MARRIAGES

"I cannot understand why so great a change should be imposed on the Mohammedans, while their brethren, the Hindu Tamils, are allowed greater freedom."

— *Ramanathan*

ON the day of the opening of the Session of 1885 — 1886, the Hon. Mr. Samuel Grenier, the Acting Attorney-General, moved the first reading of the Bill entitled, "An Ordinance to Amend Code of Mohammedan Laws, and to provide for the Registration of Mohammedan Marriages contracted in the Colony". The Mohammedans protested vigorously against the Bill, for they were of opinion that it affected vitally their religion. A memorial embodying their protest was submitted to the Council and Ramanathan, their representative in Council, was urged to oppose the measure.

Ramanathan studied the question from different angles and made a masterly, authoritative and closely-reasoned protest against the Bill. At the outset of his speech, he condemned the framers of the Bill for referring to "an important section of our community who have been known for more than three hundred years to the European residents of the Island as the Moors of Ceylon" by various and conflicting names. He said, "It is amusing to find them referred to in the Bill in one place as 'Moors', in another place as 'Mohammadans', in a third place as 'Moors or Mohammadans', as if those responsible for the Bill could not identify the people for whom we are legis-

lating. Such a confusion of ideas, which is likely to add to the judicial work of interpretation in our Courts, may be all well in the year of grace 1806 — not that such confusion occurs in the code of 1806 — but in the latter end of the nineteenth century, it is not very creditable."

He proceeded to add that several deputations had met him in an endeavour to make him conversant with their opinions but deplored the absence of unanimity among them. Their opinions were as different as they were conflicting. He had therefore made a careful study of the question from different points of view and submitted to the Honourable Members the results of his independent study and examination. "I believe an imperfect recognition of the exact wants of the Mohammedan community has led to this Bill being characterized as 'needless and impracticable' by some of the memorialists who have petitioned this Council. It is universally admitted that the evidence of the marriage and the marriage settlement which is usually found recorded in the *Kadutham* should be placed on a more satisfactory basis, but it is denied that compulsory registration in the manner provided by the Bill is the true remedy. It is asserted that the Mohammedan community never asked for such a drastic remedy, and I am afraid that the history of this question justifies that assertion."

He traced the whole history of the Mohammedan laws of marriage and divorce from 1806, quoted *in extenso* the pronouncements of competent authorities like Mr. Gillman, Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, Sir Richard Morgan and Abdul Rahuman and proceeded, "The leading principle of the Bill, as my Honourable and learned friend has said, is in clause 20, which enacts that no marriage contracted hereafter by Mohammedans shall be valid unless registered in the manner and form provided for them. My Honourable friend says that this clause does not alter the Mohammedan law, but only provides that the best and most authentic evidence of marriage shall be registration. I must differ with him. That clause goes much further than that. It alters the substantive law of Mohammedan marriage. It enacts that the fact of registration shall be the most essential, and indeed the only efficient ceremony in the Mohammedan marriage. Whatever other ceremonies may take place, if this one ceremony of registration does not take place, the marriage is not a valid marriage. I have been expressly warned by my Mohammedan friends that, according to the Mohammedan laws, marriage consists of a proposal on the part of the bridegroom, an acceptance on the part of the bride, in the presence of witnesses and a payment or stipulation for payment of *Mohr* or dower by the bridegroom to the bride. These are the three requirements of the Mohammedan law to constitute a valid marriage. The *Kadutham* or written agreement and the *thali* are only social customs. The proposal, the acceptance, and the agreement to pay *Mohr* are effected by spoken words in the presence of witnesses. The intervention of a priest or a written document is not essential. That is the law of the Prophet. The magic of the marriage ceremony lies in those spoken words. Hereafter, those spoken words shall have no power or efficacy by themselves. The only thing that shall make marriage is registration. All the requirements of the Koran may have been duly observed, the law of the Prophet may have been fulfilled to the letter, but, if registration is not made, the marriage will not be a valid marriage. If that is not an alteration of the Mohammedan law, I do not know what else is.

"I cannot understand why so great a change should be imposed on the Mohammedans, while their brethren, the Hindu Tamils, are allowed greater freedom. With them, as indeed with the Maritime Buddhists, registration is the best proof of marriage,

but not the only mode of proving it. There are several cases decided by the Supreme Court to the effect that registration is not necessary to make a marriage valid. In the last case between Hindu Tamils, which came up for argument in appeal two months ago before the Collective Court, and in which my Honourable and learned friend the Attorney-General and I appeared on opposite sides, it was held that an intention to marry, followed by cohabitation as man and wife, was sufficient to constitute a valid marriage."

He cited the experience of compulsory registration amongst the Kandyans which, he said, should prove a warning to them. As a remedy for the oft-disputed cases of paternity which flooded our Courts in the Central Provinces, the Ordinance No. 3 of 1870 enacted that no marriage amongst the Kandyans should be valid unless registered. But as the Kandyans could not easily adapt themselves to the new conditions, they did not profit by them. On the contrary, they were grievously injured by the new Ordinance, for much of their progeny created since 1870 remained bastardized to that day. He submitted that the Mohammedans who were more zealous of their religion and therefore, far less likely to attach importance to the legal idea of registration, would not fare any better than the Kandyans.

He proceeded, "On whose authority the Bill now before us has made registration compulsory, I do no know, but I will ask the Government to consider whether it may not be desirable to educate the Mohammedans gradually up to the point of registration by enforcing this Ordinance at first within limited spheres. Let us see how it will work amongst the most advanced sections of the community. Let us proclaim the Ordinance in, say, Colombo, Galle and Kalutara. We have been memorialized chiefly by the inhabitants of these three places. Even amongst them there are

very grave differences of opinion, but I cannot bring myself to think that the 25,000 Mohammedans in Colombo, even if they were unanimous, and a few more in Galle and Kalutara, can possibly represent the wishes and wants of the 150,000 Mohammedans who are to be found in other parts of the Island. They are more ignorant of European modes of thought and more prejudiced, and my Honourable and learned friend himself confesses that in many parts of the Island the Mohammedans go without priests. Fancy then their condition! Is it right that their progeny should be exposed to the danger of being bastardized?" He concluded, "I am strongly in favour of a scheme for registering the *Koduthams* only, and not interfering with the Mohammedans in any other way. The dangers of compulsory registration of marriage appear to me to be very great. Clause 20 in the Bill is fearfully incisive, making, as it does, the test of a Mohammedan marriage depend on the fact of registration. The consequence would be much the same as those which have arisen under the Kandyan Marriage Ordinance. Such are my views, Sir, and I leave Honourable Members to deal with them as they like. There are many other points upon which I would have dwelt but my Honourable friend has made several concessions; I shall therefore not detain the Council any longer, but shall reserve for the Sub-Committee my remarks upon the details of the Bill."

The Bill was referred to a sub-committee and many modifications were adopted, but the Government would not agree to making the registration of marriage voluntary. When the Ordinance was passed, the leading Mohammedans of Colombo including the Turkish Consul, desired him to interview the Secretary of State for the Colonies during his proposed visit to England and to press for the rejection of the Ordinance. Accordingly, he met the Secretary of State and prevailed on him

to disallow the Ordinance.

Ramanathan's efforts were crowned with success. The Ordinance was not accepted but was returned to Ceylon for amendment. The Ordinance, when amended, made the Registration of Mohammedan marriages not as the only evidence of marriage, as contended by the Government, but as the best evidence of marriage.

This was indeed a signal service to the Mohammedans, in that it maintained the validity of their religion as against the Law, in matters pertaining to matrimony.

CHAPTER XV

RAMANATHAN AND THE BUDDHIST TEMPORALITIES

"The Buddhists, as a national sect, owe Mr. Ramanathan a deep debt of gratitude. His interest in the question of the Wesak Holiday and the Buddhist Temporalities Bill, his encouraging words to the Buddhist students of the Pali College and Theosophical Society, and a host of other services to Buddhism, have endeared him immensely to the Buddhists of Ceylon."

—*Sarasavi Sandaresa of May* 28, 1889.

"The Buddhist clergy are really objects of worship, and must therefore, theoretically, be purity itself. The action of the British Government has reduced a large proportion of them to a state of impurity."

—*Ramanathan*

IN 1888, Ramanathan rendered Buddhism in Ceylon a signal service for which he earned the loving gratitude and esteem of Buddhists throughout the country. A nationalist to the core, a statesman of liberal sympathies and catholic outlook and in the words of the Honourable Mr. C. Vanderwall, "a proud example of cultured independence", he toiled all his life for the preservation of national institutions from the ravages of alien influences and in doing so, displayed a firmness of purpose, an intrepid courage and an utter selflessness rare in the annals of leadership

Since the advent of foreign rule, the religion of the Buddha forfeited the privileged position it enjoyed under Sinhalese Kings. Though Buddhism was the religion of the majority of the nation, the Wesak Day was not a national holiday, while

Christianity and all Christian institutions found favour with the rulers. Ramanathan would not acquiesce in such brazen and high-handed disregard of national religions and institutions. He was largely responsible for setting on foot an agitation which made the Wesak Day a public holiday and a day of national rejoicing. He supported the Buddhist claim in such vigorous and impassioned language and with a wealth of reason and argument that all opposition, Official and Unofficial, was silenced. The Weask Day thus gained Official recognition and has since been a public holiday.

Another question which vitally concerned the future of Buddhism in Ceylon and in which Ramanathan played the foremost role was the management of the Buddhist Temporalities. It was notorious that under foreign rule, owing to governmental prejudice and indifference, the extensive properties and revenues of Buddhist institutions were scandalously mismanaged, misappropriated and misused. These pious endowments had long since ceased to serve the great purpose for which they had been intended, and these institutions had fast degenerated into homes of immorality and vice.

Sir Arthur Gordon, a sagacious and liberal-minded ruler, realizing under pressure from among the leaders the unhappy trend of things inside the Buddhist fold, sanctioned a scheme for the better management of the Temporalities and caused a bill to be introduced into the legislature in November, 1888. The Attorney-General Sir Samuel Grenier moved its second reading on the 28th of the month and Ramanathan seconded the motion in one of his brilliant and illuminating speeches. It was a speech remarkable for length and erudition, for the intensity of passion and the force of conviction they breathe. He opened it with the words, "I have much pleasure in seconding my Honourable friend the Attorney-General's motion. The measure before the Council is of paramount

importance, as it affects very seriously more than half the population of Ceylon. I, therefore, offer no apology for addressing the Council at some length on the *raison d'etre* and scope of this Bill, so that Buddhists and Non-Buddhists alike may see for themselves that by this Bill Your Excellency is trying to remedy the evils which certain of your predecessors and Secretaries of State had unwittingly caused by their fancied zeal for Christianity.

"The Bill before us seeks to do no more than bare justice to the Buddhists. In order to arrive at a correct opinion on this most difficult question, it is necessary to realize, to some extent at least, the condition of the priesthood and the temple endowments under the native Kings of Ceylon, and see how they were circumstanced after the country passed into the hands of the British. Unless the Bill now before us is studied in reference to these points, I believe very little justice will be done to it, and the question will degenerate into a wrangle as to the limits of the connection of Government with religious systems. If, however, the true bearings of the question are seen, it will appear, not as a question of competing claims of Christianity and Buddhism, but as a question of remedying a great social evil which is daily gnawing into the vitals of the Sinhalese." Unearthing an amazing wealth of relevant historical and administrative detail, he showed in juxtaposition the place of Buddhism under Sinhalese and Tamil Kings and its place under the British and protested indignantly against the neglect of the religion of the people by the rulers and against the weakening of its authority by the restless and demoralizing influences of European civilization. He cited profusely from the writings of reputed European scholars and historians to illustrate the pristine purity and sanctity of the Buddhist clergy and the exalted position they enjoyed under their own kings. He

said, "It is unnecessary here to dwell on the condition of the Buddhist clergy and endowments earlier than the eighteenth century, when the kingdom passed into the hands of the Tamils. It is enough to know that the Tamil kings, from Kirthi Sri (1717) downwards, fostered in all possible ways the spread of Buddhism, maintained inviolate the endowments made by the Sinhalese kings, and themselves bestowed large gifts on the church.

"The object of the endowments was: (1) to maintain the priests and the *dagobas, viharas,* and *pansalas* (2) to teach *bana*; and (3) to generally educate the people at the *pansala* schools.

"Everything in those times was opposed to corruption and peculation on the part of the monks. The absolute rule of the kings, whose displeasure was very often death to offenders, and the active power of chiefs, no less than the authority of the religion itself, which was in no way weakened, as in modern times, by the distracting and restless influences of European civilization, served as sufficient checks on the Buddhist clergy against misappropriation of temple revenues, or the practice of immorality. These were not the besetting sins of the abbots and monks. We have the evidence of the historians — Percival, Cordiner and Davy — in confirmation of this fact."

He quoted Davy as writing in 1821: "The rank of a priest next to that of Boodhoo, is considered the most exalted..... Their character in general is moral and inoffensive. The liberty they have of laying aside their yellow robes and of quitting the priesthood at pleasure has, no doubt, an excellent effect and must tend greatly to exclude licentiousness and stop corruption, which (witness the old Christian monasteries) are too apt to spring up and grow to a monstrous height when no natural vent can be given to the violence of passion. Like the monks of Europe in the dark ages, they are the principal proprietors of the

learning and literature of the country..... As moral teachers they appear in their best light; in this character I am not aware of any objection to them."

The Rev. Mr. Cordiner, who as a manager of the public schools of the Island between 1800 and 1805, had great opportunities of collecting reliable information, said: "All the wants of the Buddhist priests are supplied by the people, and the most beautiful females in the country attend them in their houses without wages. So great is the sanctity of their character that a virgin who has served in their abodes is considered by the young men as an enviable wife."

He then proceeded to quote Percival who, writing in 1803, after much personal experience of the Island, said: "The priests of Buddoo are in Ceylon accounted superior to all others. They are called Tirinanxes..... In such high veneration are the Tirinanxes held that their persons are accounted sacred..... The body of Tirinanxes are elected by the king from amongst the nobles, and they are consequently men possessed of power and influence, even independent of their sacred character. The honours and respect with which they are everywhere attended show the strong hold which they have on the minds of the people. All ranks bow down before them." He concluded the first part of his speech with: "It is thus clear that, upon the English assuming the administration of the country between 1796 and 1815, the morality and honour of the Buddhist clergy were all that was desirable." He then proceeded to "depict the circumstances under which this simplicity and purity of character, this satisfactory condition of things, altered since the advent of the British Government." He quoted historical and administrative evidence to prove that this altered condition of the clergy was the result of the irresponsibility and ignorance, the supineness and prejudice of British rule.

He said, "By the Convention of 1815, the religion of Buddha was declared inviolable, and its rites, ministers, and places of worship were to be maintained and protected, and the Government took upon themselves the prerogative exercised by the Kandyan kings of appointing incumbents and lay officers to the temples, and of keeping charge of the tooth-relic. By the Proclamation of 21st November, 1818, section 21, the Government in pursuance of the spirit of the Convention, exempted all lands which were then the property of temples from all taxation whatever, and by the Proclamation of 18th September, 1819, all temple lands were ordered to be registered. Mr. Colebrooke, in his report upon Ceylon dated 1831, speaks of 'much inconvenience' having arisen from the interference of the Government in the religious affairs of the country, and says: 'The interposition of its authority to enforce an observance of the rites of Buddhism is at variance with those principles of religious freedom which is a paramount duty to uphold. Nor can it justly afford to the Buddhist faith a greater degree of support than it extends to Christianity and to other systems of religion including the Hindu and Mahomedan.' In 1831, too, the Government set aside the old Kandyan Register and commenced in its place the Register known as Mr. Turnour's Register, but it was found difficult to continue the work of registration, owing to disputes regarding boundaries between Revenue Officers and the Temple Officers. At that time, therefore, and for many years till 1840, what troubled the Government was the growing inconvenience of its interference with the Buddhist religion, and the practical difficulties connected with the registration of temple lands. These subjects constituted what I may call the Buddhist Question of 1820 to 1840.

"In 1849, the year in which the Diocesan Committee for the propagation of the Gospel was

established, Governor Mackenzie, with more Christian zeal than statesmanship, refused to sign warrants appointing incumbents and lay officers to temples. From this refusal dates the second phase of the Buddhist Question—the Question of 1840 to 1853. He did not continue subsequently in his objection to signing these acts of appointment, because he saw that rights of property, to which Her Majesty's subjects in Ceylon were entitled, would be thrown into confusion by persisting in such refusal. Sir Colin Campbell, who succeeded him in 1841, found it impracticable to withhold his signature to these acts of appointment, but he entered into a lengthy correspondence with the Secretary of State on the subject; and at last Mr. Wodehouse prepared a Bill, which passed through the Legislative Council as Ordinance No. 2 of 1846, providing a machinery for the appointment or removal of incumbents, the registration of temple lands and services due thereof and the commutation of such services. It also provided against the alienation of temple lands. Lord Grey, in his despatch dated 13th April, 1847, did not see his way to sanctioning that part of the Ordinance which vested in the Committee all those rights, powers and privileges which the Government were said to have undertaken by the Convention of 1815, in regard to the appointment or removal of incumbents and to the exercising of the internal discipline of the ministers of the Buddhist religion. He contended that the Convention of 1815 meant nothing more than that the Buddhists were free to celebrate their religious rites and to hold all the places devoted to their worship without molestation from the British Government or from any one else, and that the Ordinance went much further and sought to enforce by law the more easy and convenient celebration of the Buddhist rites and ceremonies. For this reason he disallowed the Ordinance, and added: 'With a slight change of the machinery, the enactment

which I have enumerated might very properly be brought together as constituting one complete and distinct enactment.' Lord Torrington, who had succeeded Sir Colin Campbell, and to whom this despatch was addressed, felt very sorely upon the question as it then stood. The question is well summarized in the eighth paragraph of his despatch dated 10th May, 1849 (to be found among Parliamentary Papers laid before the Committee of Ceylon). 'For a long time,' says Lord Torrington, 'various petitions have been presented to me from priests in some of the temples, complaining that they were utterly unable to obtain their dues, or indeed, any of their rights to property; that they were suffering great distress and hardship; that their property was being ruined and their temples going to decay, simply from the absence of any power to control or command their people or receive their presents. Your Lordship is fully aware that in taking over the Kandyan country, they agreed by treaty to fulfil all the duties devolving on the king of Kandy, and one of these duties was the appointing by warrants the priests of the different temples. There is no other legal way of appointment and none of the Courts of Law recognize any such unless the priest who institutes the case shows or proves his claims by putting in this warrant. As priests have died, others have been selected by their brethren to succeed, but in no way can they claim their dues; the people know it, and are cunning enough, in addition to their fondness for litigation, to refuse to perform their duties unless compelled by Courts of Law.' Lord Torrington speaks of this as the *Buddhist Question* of his day, and he proposed to settle it not by enacting an Ordinance, but by resuming the practice of issuing acts of appointment to incumbents. Lord Grey replied that, pending a substitution of some new system of nomination, the Ceylon Government might continue to grant acts of appointment.

"Owing to the agitation of the Christian missionaries in Ceylon about this time, the Secretary of State, Sir John Parkington, by his despatch of 4th December, 1852, requested the Ceylon Government to relinquish its right to appoint the Buddhist incumbents, and under instructions contained in that despatch, the Government formed a Committee of Chiefs, consisting of nine *Ratemahatmayas* and four *Basnayaka Nilames*, who were to elect their own president, the *Dewa Nilame*, and generally to supervise the management of the Buddhist temporalities. The question of connection between the State and Buddhism, raised in 1846, was thus settled in 1853.

"The question of claims to exemption from taxation of temple lands was dealt with by Governor Ward, by Ordinance No. 10 of 1856. The other important question of registration of services due to *Viharas* and *Dewalas* was settled by Sir Hercules Robinson, by Ordinance No. 4 of 1870. It was in the year 1870 that the third and the present phase of the question—the Question of Misappropriation by Incumbents—was first brought to the notice of the Government. The Service Tenures' Commissioner for 1870 reported as follows: 'There is one question connected with the *Vihare* and *Dewale* estates which must before long force itself on the consideration of the Government. There is no means of ensuring the due application of rents from these estates to their legitimate purposes. The labour which should be employed on the repair of ecclesiastical buildings, is frequently taken for the erection of private buildings of the priests and lay incumbents, and the dues are often not accounted for. The complaints of misappropriation of temple property are frequent. Even the land is sometimes sold to ignorant purchasers, and when the services are commuted, this misappropriation, if not checked, will increase to the serious demoralization of the priests and *Basnaykas*. If the revenues are not

devoted to their original purpose, they should be employed on education, or otherwise for the benefit of the people, and not be appropriated to the personal use of Buddhist priests and *Basnaykas*.' Then the Commissioner for 1871 said in his report : 'It is necessary to again call attention to this question, as the evil is daily growing greater, and with its growth demoralizing the people and diminishing the value of public lands set apart for ecclesiastical purposes.' I need not say that since 1870 the demoralization of the monks and the people has been growing."

He continued, "I think, Sir, I may now justly claim to have established these facts: that the monks under native kings were generally as pure as any order of priesthood in the world; that they attended to their duties to the best of their power; and that the temporalities were managed fairly and honestly in terms of the endowment. Furthermore, I have established that this satisfactory condition of things continued more or less up to the close of Governor Mackenzie's administration, to wit 1841: that when he refused to discharge his duty of granting acts of appointment to incumbents, the relations between incumbents and their tenants were seriously dislocated, and the rights of property enjoyed by the trustees of temple lands were largely withheld from them, in violation of the Convention of 1815; and that the question which Lord Torrington pressed for settlement on the Secretary of State was, not the dishonesty of the monks but the dishonesty of the tenants. After allowing vast numbers of tenants and their friends and relations to welter in this species of dishonesty for several years between 1840 and 1852, the Government proposed to settle the difficulties it had created by handing the supervision and control of the temporalities to a Committee of Chiefs. Was that really a settlement of the question? By no means, because the personal influence of the chiefs had begun long since to be on the wane. However influential they might have been under the kings, even under the British rule for many years after 1815, the imposition of a new revenue and judicial system on the country has been silently but most effectually, undermining their personal authority over the people. The suppression of the *rajakariya* in 1832 was in itself a great curtailment of their powers, as also the proclamation of the Government a few years later that it would no longer interest itself in matters relating to the national religion. As the Government had been interfering with the religion and its priesthood only through the Chiefs, the withdrawal of the Government from such interference was practically a severance of connection between the Chiefs, as such, and the monks. Thenceforth the incumbents and the temple tenants saw that the Chiefs had no more right, power or excuse to interfere with them than ordinary laymen. I may add that, about the year 1850, the silent working of the revenue and judicial systems during the preceding thirty years had absorbed the last vestiges of their personal influence. What that influence was, even as late as 1840, might be inferred from a little quotation that I shall make from the evidence of Sir Emerson Tennent, given before the Parliamentary Committee in 1850. 'A very short time before I left the Island,' he said, 'a Roman Catholic missionary mentioned to me a remarkable illustration of the connection between Buddhism and the Chiefs of the country. He had every reason to be satisfied with his success in a certain district which he named, which was a populous valley containing some villages. Almost universally the inhabitants of those villages had avowed to him their belief of Christianity and their readiness to profess it, but, when they were urged to do so, they entreated the missionary to address himself to the Chief, and they stated that, if he

would give his permission, they would be prepared instantly, their whole families and their whole population, to profess the Christian religion. The Chiefs were averse to it, and they have remained Buddhists to the present day.' The power of the Chiefs being thus shattered what good was there in appointing a committee of Chiefs, without a proper constitution being devised by law for the effective working of the temporalities? The monks therefore, soon found themselves adrift, just as the tenants of the *Vihares* had gone adrift already. So there arose dishonesty on the part of the monks, in addition to the prevalent dishonesty on the part of the tenants."

He vehemently repudiated the suggestion made by Christians that the defective morality of the Buddhist clergy originated from the inherent defects of Buddhism as a religion. He said, "Unthinking Christians have said that it is the fault of the Buddhist religion which makes its votaries so peccant, but such an inference reveals a complete ignorance of the deplorable condition of Christian priests in Europe even so late as the latter end of the last century. By a parity of reasoning, Christianity must stand condemned, because it failed to keep its ministers in the path of duty. The fact is that the mass of mankind are very liable to temptation and to be led astray unless administrative and legal checks are imposed upon them." He arraigned the Government of Ceylon for removing these checks and restraints so absolutely necessary to keep errant and sinful man under control and by so doing, making itself the author of the many abuses which had crept into the Buddhist fold and concluded his argument by saying, "They (the Buddhist clergy) are really objects of worship, and must therefore, theoretically, be purity itself. The action of the British Government has reduced a large proportion of them to a state of impurity."

He then submitted, "The question for the Council now is, whether or not it is the duty of the Government to remedy or stem the current of this wholesale demoralization. I have no hesitation in saying that the increase of crime and litigation in the country is due as much to this demoralization as to any other cause. Are the Government, or are they not, bound to try to put an end to this state of things? In the presence of this grievous condition of things, it is only deeply ignorant or prejudiced people who will persist in stirring up the *odium theologieum*. It is not a question of Christianity losing ground or Buddhism gaining an advantage, but how a great social evil is to be remedied, how the fraudulent conversion by trustees is to be stopped. Rival religionists as such cannot do justice to this question. The Government, who now acknowledge that they occupy neutral ground and are responsible for the present state of things, are alone competent to deal with it. As the frauds that are being perpetrated cannot be reached by the existing law, and as such offences are the outcome of a want of organization, the only remedy consistent with justice to all parties is, first, to give the Buddhists a good working constitution, and then to punish such men as those who offend against its rules."

In vehement and impassioned language, he pooh-poohed the fear expressed by Christian missionaries that such governmental control of Buddhist temporalities would have the effect of augmenting the prestige of Buddhism in Ceylon. He asked indignantly, "Can it be said, that because District Courts have to supervise the accounts of Buddhist administrators, the prestige of Buddhism is being increased? No principle in the methods of British administration is clearer or better known than that the Judges are independent of the Executive Government, and that the law knows no distinction of colour, creed, or race. What justice, nay, common

sense, is there in the argument that, by the accounts of temple trustees being audited by Courts of Law, a new bond of connection between Government and Buddhism is being forged, or that Buddhism is being encouraged? I can understand the argument that, by such auditing, not the Government but Courts of Law have been connected with Buddhism, but unfortunately, in the same sense, the Courts of Law have been connected with murder, adultery, theft, and alas, every species of evil on earth! That argument therefore proves too much. It involves the dilemma that British Courts of Law should be abolished, or that it is perfectly justifiable that they should audit these accounts."

He then proceeded to cite the example of India where, despite the presence of two million Christians, the Government of India had established control over Hindu temporalities. He asked, "But what means this intolerance, this diseased sensitiveness in Ceylon, when in India, where there are two million Christians, several Bishops and a proportionately large number of official and unofficial Chaplains, the Government of India have gone to greater lengths in regard to Hindu temples, than my Honourable and learned friend the Attorney-General has chosen to go in Ceylon? From a careful study of the question, I am perfectly convinced that he has taken great pains to conciliate the wishes of the Christian missionaries. In the Bill before us, my Honourable and learned friend empowers the Headmen of each sub-district to call meetings for the election of Committee members. The Indian Act (XX of 1863) actually enables the Local Government to appoint the Committee members themselves in the first instance and to notify such appointments in the official Gazette. In case a vacancy arises in their midst the Committee members have to fill it up as they like. Should such vacancy remain unfilled, the Indian Court has the power to appoint its own nominee to it.

The Chief Court has also the power to call for the accounts of the trustees, and may in certain cases appoint managers to perform all the duties, and exercise all the powers usually exercised by a trustee or manager. If my Honourable and learned friend had only introduced similar clauses in Ceylon, I suppose the missionaries here would have stoned him to death.

"I have now all but done, Sir. I do not commit myself to the details of the Bill, which I shall deal with in Sub-Committee. I desire only to say, that, if the scheme proposed can be made to work, this Bill must be considered as one of the greatest achievements of your administration—as great as the relief you afforded to the country at large by guaranteeing the discredited notes of the Oriental Banking Corporation and greater than the setting apart of a portion of the grain-tax for a systematic irrigation policy: a greater achievement, I say, because the Bill aims not only at reforming a social abuse affecting nearly two million people, but also at spreading elementary education throughout the length and breadth of Ceylon. It is an important contribution towards self-government, on lines more enlarged than any we have had hitherto, be it District Road Committees, Local Boards, or Municipalities, nay, more still! It will lay aside that lurking suspicion in the minds of the natives, that the British Government acquires and rules over countries only for its own end, or for the benefit of the English settlers, without reference to their own needs and inner convictions. This Bill is a standing refutation of that idea, and will have the effect of evoking the utmost loyalty in the minds of all natives, for the simple reason that it does them justice at last, and is the outcome of the purest disinterestedness."

The speech was unanswerable, overwhelming. Ramanathan had not minced words He had stated

the plain, unvarnished truth without fear or favour and in so doing had trodden heavily on the corns of Officials and even of some of the Unofficials who had embraced the religion of the rulers. Many smarted under it but that was a matter of no moment for an intrepid votary of Truth, Reason Justice and Fairplay.

The opposition, though vehement, was stumped and the Buddhist cause triumphed. The Bill was referred to a Sub-Committee on which Ramanathan was appointed to serve. On the findings of the Sub-Committee, he brought to bear the results of his long and sustained study of this great national problem. The Bill was finally passed in March, 1889.

It was largely owing to Ramanathan's labours that Buddhism as a religion, rose high in the esteem of British administration, that it entered upon a new lease of vigorous and beneficent life, when it had almost been smothered under the weight of foreign missionary activity aided and abetted by an alien raj, that Buddhist institutions received governmental recognition and their properties and revenues were defended against malversation and fraud.

This gallant and chivalrous fight of his for the preservation of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions and their restoration to their pristine glory and pre-eminence earned for him the loving gratitude and adoration of many generations of Buddhists and friends of Buddhism throughout the land.

Colonel H. S. Olcott sent him the following congratulatory message:

61, Maliban Street,
Pettah,
7th Feb., 1889.

Dear Mr. Ramanathan,

In redemption of my promise, I send you a sheet of the original Ms. of Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia". It was given me by him personally

in London in July, 1884. I need scarcely tell you that this is a literary treasure that one day must have a great value apart from its historic interest, and in giving it to you, I feel that you have richly earned it by your chivalrous help in the Legislative Council to the Buddhist community of Ceylon. If good wishes coming from a thankful heart have any dynamic value, then shall mine follow you to the end of your public career.

Faithfully yours,
H. S. OLCOTT

CHAPTER XVI

RAMANATHAN'S WORK FOR THE LEGAL PROFESSION

"Our duty is to provide the Island with men properly qualified to practise the profession of Law—men who would adorn and not disgrace it."

— Ramanathan

"He found the law-students an amorphous, incoherent body. He helped to make them a coherent, well-disciplined mass."

—E. W. Jayawardene, K. C.

IN 1889, Ramanathan addressed himself to the task of redressing the grievances of law-students and remedying the shortcomings of the legal profession. His and his alone is the singular distinction of being primarily responsible for the establishment of the Law College at a time when no other British Colony could boast of one. Always a man of vision and foresight and dedicated to the shaping of our national institutions, he saw that "the more carefuly and the more earnestly students are educated for the legal profession, the better would the interests of suitors and the cause of justice be served" and that lawyers so educated and trained would be an inestimable boon to the nation. In his day, students-at-law were subject to grave handicaps and hardships owing to the absence of an organized institution which could dispense sound legal knowledge to all who sought it. Anyone who chose to enter the legal profession was required to undergo a three-year-period of apprenticeship under a practising lawyer and pass a qualifying examination. The Supreme Court provided that "a

candidate was eligible to appear for the examination, if only he produced from his master a certificate that, during the whole of the three years covered by the articles of apprenticeship, he was actually employed as clerk in the proper business of Proctor or Advocate, and was during the whole of such period instructed in the knowledge and practice of the law by such master." In the large majority of cases it happened that the masters issued the certificates without imparting to their students the requisite instruction and training. Inevitably large numbers of the students failed at the examinations and dissatisfaction and discontent were rife among them.

Ramanathan, who was always wide awake to the needs and wants of the people, set about the task of discovering a remedy. A full-fledged institution of legal instruction, working full-time with a staff of specialist lecturers would alone, he knew, prove a permanent and effectual remedy. He also knew that the emergence of such an institution would be to his own disadvantage, inasmuch as he was one of a few lawyers who were eagerly sought after and whose services were handsomely paid for by legal apprentices. But one does not discover a single instance in his long and illustrious career in which he permitted personal interest to outweigh public good.

He drafted a comprehensive scheme for the admission, education and examination of students-at-law and intended to embody it in an Ordinance; but the Attorney-General, the Hon. Mr. S. Grenier, who introduced in Council during the session 1887—1888 an Ordinance to consolidate and amend the laws relating to Courts and their powers and jurisdictions, desired to adopt Ramanathan's scheme of legal education and make it part of his own Ordinance relating to Courts of Justice. The Council resolved the annexation. After the Bill had been read a second time, the Council resolved itself

into a Committee on 13th February, 1889 to consider the report of the Sub-Committee. Ramanathan speaking on the Bill said *inter alia:* "I think, Sir, it will be conceded that the more carefully and the more earnestly students are educated for the legal profession, the better would the interest of suitors be served, and that, as a strict examination necessarily leads to the selection of the fewest and fittest, their chances of success in the profession would be proportionately higher. Now, under the Rules of 1841, which we are repealing, the duty of instructing students in the knowledge and practice of the law was left to private Advocates and Proctors in their own chambers and the Supreme Court provided that the candidate should be eligible to stand the examination only in case he produced from his master a certificate that, during the whole of the three years covered by the articles of apprenticeship, he was actually employed as clerk in the proper business of proctor, and had been, during the whole of such period, instructed in the knowledge and practice of the law by such master. If the trust reposed by the Supreme Court upon the master and student were faithfully carried out, the master would have insisted upon his student attending his chambers at least two or three times every week, prescribed for him a regular course of law studies, examined him from time to time, made him do the work of a clerk, copying and often framing the different forms and precedents necessary for the due prosecution of a case in Court, and asked his attendance in Court occasionally, so as to learn how a case is conducted in Court. There are no doubt some lawyers, at the present day, who keep their students to their work more or less in this way, but, alas, they are too few, and the consequence is that, notwithstanding the production of the certificate in all its strictness, the general run of students had been found to

be remarkably ignorant of law and even of plain English. Matters became so scandalous that the Council of Legal Education ruled that they would not examine students who have been plucked twice, unless they satisfactorily showed why they failed to prepare their subjects in a competent manner. The Council also ruled that 'competent knowledge' of the subjects of the examinations should mean the earning of 66 percent of the maximum marks. It was pointed out to me by law students that both these rules worked very harshly on them, so much so, that only an extremely limited number of students were able to obtain passes. The students felt that these rules had the effect practically of barring most of them from entering the legal profession. They also complained that, at the close of their three years of study, they were submitted to a preliminary examination on general subjects,— subjects relating to general knowledge, — which reduced still further their chances of passing as Proctors ; and they contended that the proper time for a preliminary examination was before they were admitted to read law, and not three years after they had been admitted as students-at-law. They further complained that nobody appeared to take an interest in their welfare, but were allowed to drift and ultimately to fall victims to circumstances.

"From my own knowledge of local affairs and conditions, I had perceived long ago that the entire scheme of their studies required urgently to be re-organized, and the rules relating to their admission and examination, made not only definite and equitable, but also more suited to the wants of the country, so that candidates might know beforehand for certain what was expected of them and be freed from arbitrary treatment on the part of the examiners or even of the Council of Legal Education, against which the students were very bitter. It appeared to me that it was high time

that law students should be dealt with much in the same manner as our medical students are. I carefully worked out a new scheme, framed the necessary rules and submitted them to the Committee appointed to report on the Civil Procedure Code, and upon their approval, the rules were submitted to the Judges of the Supreme Court who had no objection to offer. It is these rules that honourable members are now called upon to pass."

Part of his scheme consisted of rules for the admission of students to read law, which made admission dependent on the candidates' passing a preliminary examination in subjects of general knowledge, if he had not already passed certain University examinations. Upon being admitted, he was required to pay certain fees to the Council of Legal Education in order to enable it to make provision for law lectures and to meet the other expenses of the College. Before the establishment of the Law College, these fees formed part of the income of the Advocates and Proctors who took in apprentices for payment. He said: "I may say that in diverting these fees to the Council of Legal Education, I personally lose a fairly large income every year, and so do my Honourable and learned friends, the Attorney-General and the Sinhalese member. But we don't complain of this loss, nor have I heard of any complaints on the part of other Advocates or Proctors. We believe that the interests of the public ought to override the interests of small minorities. When the students are admitted to read law, they are all required to be in Colombo during the period of the delivery of the law lectures. Residence in Colombo will enable students not only to become familiar with the manner in which cases are heard and disposed of in the District Court of Colombo and the Appellate Court, but also to study the ways and principles of the leading lawyers of the metropolitan bar. Under

the existing system, a student in the remote provinces, having no better example before him than his own master, is apt to copy his virtues as well as vices, and so transmit the latter from one generation of lawyers to another, much to the detriment of the country. This will not be possible hereafter. The lecturers will keep the students to their work and examine them from time to time during the first eighteen months of their study, and when they have satisfied themselves that they are fit to stand a public examination, they will certify to that effect, whereupon such students will be admitted to what is called the intermediate examination. If they pass it, they will have to read and be lectured for 18 months more and pass the final examination. After that, the successful students are required to go under a practising lawyer and learn for six months that part of his work which is usually done in chambers. At the end of that period they are admitted as Proctors. The whole course occupies three and a half years, and no parent need hereafter entertain fears of his son being not cared for or wasting his time or opportunities."

In his scheme he urged certain important changes in the subjects of instruction to suit modern requirements. In short, he formulated a scheme comprehensive and calculated to remove every legitimate grievance of the students. He said in the course of his speech: "I have thus done my best to smooth down the difficulties which at present beset a law student's career. They were complaining of the 66 per cent. rule, of the two-failures rule of the preliminary examination on general knowledge coming at the end of the three years, of uncertain action on the part of the examiners and the Council of Legal Education, and of an utter want of interest in their affairs and destinies. I have endeavoured to help them upon all those points." He concluded his speech

thus: "Our duty is to provide the Island with men properly qualified to practise the profession as Proctor or Advocate — men who would adorn and not disgrace it. That principle — the good of the public and of the profession—is the standpoint of view of the new rules."

His case was unanswerable. The scheme was accepted and implemented. Before long, the Law College became a reality. But for his initiative and enterprise, Ceylon would not have had a Law College for many years. It was a tremendous boon to students-at-law who had hitherto to linger in the corridors and vestibules of their masters' offices and wait patiently at their convenience, be cursorily and spasmodically instructed and suffer the agony and humiliation of repeated failures, for he gave them a "status, a name and a legal habitation." It was also a real service to the country in general, for he ensured a regular supply of men systematically taught and trained by expert teachers to assist in the administration of justice. *The Ceylon Daily News,* in one of its tributes to Ramanathan's memory said, "When an apprentice under Sir Richard Morgan, he had realized that one of the greatest handicaps young men in the country had to contend with was the want of a proper system of legal education. Early in his career as a Member of the Legislative Council, he began a movement for the inauguration of a system of legal education. His efforts were crowned with success when the Council of Legal Education and the Law College were established." The age of the law-student looking up to his master and placing himself at his mercy for what little instruction he could get from him, was now past. He could now settle down to his studies in an institution set up and supported by the State and be instructed by learned teachers at regular hours.

His labours on behalf of the law-students did

not cease with the founding of the Law College. All through life, he showed a genuine and fatherly interest in their well-being. He drew up their syllabus of studies, guided them through their difficulties and was their acknowledged champion and benefactor in the Council of Legal Education. He was commonly and variously called the "Father of the Law Students", the "Father of Legal Education" etc. He was President of the Law-Students' Union for eleven years and strove hard to the end of life to render the system of legal education a source of pride and strength to the country.

On 24th February, 1884 the Chief Justice Sir Bruce Burnside addressed a Memorandum to two other judges of the Supreme Court in which he pointed out that the requirements of Ordinance No. 19 of 1873, that persons admitted to the profession as Advocates should have attended a course of lectures provided by the Council in Jurisprudence and Roman Law, seemed to be entirely disregarded and said that it was questionable whether persons admitted to the profession without satisfying that requirement had been properly admitted, He, therefore, suggested that one of the vacancies in the Council be filled by the appointment of the Honourable Mr. P. Ramanathan and that he be requested to deliver a course of lectures on "Roman Law and Jurisprudence etc." The other two judges "cordially agreed" to that suggestion. Ramanathan was accordingly written to and by his letter of 24th March, 1884, he promised "gladly to enter upon the responsibilities of the appointment with as little delay as possible." The Council minutes which records the above facts contains also a statement that the lectures were subsequently delivered. The lectures are now extant in print. They are a masterly and authoritative exposition of their subjects and embody a wealth of scholarship and research into the working of legal institutions in ancient Rome, in ancient and

modern societies.

When Ramanathan resigned the Presidency on the eve of his departure to America, the law students assembled to bid him farewell. Mr. Hector A. Jayawardene, a leading advocate and Vice-President of the Union at the time said, "This day is the darkest in the history of the Union—darkened by the sadness of bidding farewell to the President, who has rendered unparalleled service to the law-students and who has won unique distinction in the Empire. Every law-student found in him a true and devoted friend. Not only is he deeply interested in politics but most painstaking in instructing the youth of the country." No man enjoyed in such full measure, the love, esteem and reverence of the members of the legal profession in Ceylon as did Ramanathan. The law-students in gratitude made him their patron for life. His labours on their behalf were productive of immense good both to the profession and the nation and will ever remain an enduring monument to his memory.

Sir P. C. Layard, the Chief Justice, between whom and Ramanathan, no love was ever lost, had once to admit, "The Law students should remember what their President (Mr. Ramanathan) has done for the law-students of Ceylon. He has placed both branches of the profession under a deep debt of gratitude ..... I am very proud that I have been permitted to express on behalf of them all, their thanks to Mr. Ramanathan for the manner in which he has, as their President, and as the originator of the present system of legal education, improved the position of the law-students of the Colony." Sir Samuel Grenier, the Attorney-General said that "these rules framed by Ramanathan constituted a complete scheme for the admission, education and examination of our students-at-law, which had for its object the raising of the standard of the profession. These rules

have been said to have inaugurated what one may call the modern period in the History of Legal Education in Ceylon."

No account of Ramanathan's work for the legal profession can lay claim to completeness without reference, however casual, to his Law Reports. It was he who first conceived the idea of law-reporting in systematic form. Lynx-eyed, he saw the great disabilities under which the profession suffered for want of law reports. The Supreme Court gave contradictory decisions and spent much time and labour over cases, the principles of which had already been decided by previous judges. The Bar did not know where to find precedents. This was a great handicap to both the Bench and the Bar. But all the time, the past judgments of the Supreme Court lay hid in their dusty and musty shelves of the Supreme Court Registry. Ramanathan never beheld a difficulty which he did not strive to surmount or a want which he did not strive to fulfil. The judgments of the Supreme Court, he knew, if rescued from the obscurity of these shelves, edited and embodied in handy volumes, would be a real boon to both lawyers and judges and go far towards remedying the anomalies and discrepancies then so rife in the administration of justice. There was none who would undertake such a voluminous and wearisome work. But the work had to be done somehow. He therefore girded himself to the task and set about it in 1874. He read through the records carefully, marked out all the important judgments, set his clerk to copy them out and indexed them for his own private use. One day, when associated with the late Sir Richard Cayley in the conduct of a case in appeal, which involved many points of law supposed to be undecided, Ramanathan produced his galaxy of decided cases to the extreme amazement of his senior, who was then Queen's Advocate of Ceylon. Sir Richard Cayley was so

overjoyed that he brought the volumes in manuscript to the notice of the Government of Ceylon with the request that it should offer the author substantial aid, if he would carry them through the press.

The Government readily assented and extended to him all possible aid. The result was the birth of seven volumes of reports covering the periods 1820 — 1855, 1860 — 1868 and 1874 — 1876 after twelve years of laborious toil. The bridging of these gulfs, the intervening years, was necessary for a digest of the Judiciary Law.

No efforts, however, were made by others to continue the good work he had so ably inaugurated. Many years later the Government solicited him to resume his work of reporting the Supreme Court decisions. The result was the publication of the New Law Reports in eight volumes. He thus placed the Bench and the Bar under a deep debt of gratitude for no less than fifteen volumes of Law Reports.

Referring to his Law Reports, Sir Dornhorst observed, "He has also been of great assistance to us by the attention and assiduity he has paid to Law-Reporting. I am sure the Bar will always be grateful to him for his numerous volumes of Case Law. It pays its daily tribute to him for his reports which in themselves will perpetuate his memory."

In 1877 Sir John Phear arrived in Ceylon to assume the office of Chief Justice, from the High Court of Calcutta, and found Ramanathan editing the current Law Reports for that year. He urged the energetic young lawyer to lend himself to the additional task of editing the new reports called *The Supreme Court Circular*, a Journal which the Chief Justice initiated for the benefit of the Judges of the Lower Courts. Ramanathan, always a glutton for work, who never flinched from labours, however strenuous or exacting, cheerfully undertook the

responsibility and carried on the work until 1879, when he was elevated to the Tamil Seat in the legislature.

Sir John Phear was so profoundly impressed with the thoroughness and precision with which Ramanathan performed it that, on the eve of his departure to England, he paid a glittering tribute to the latter in a letter addressed to His Excellency the Governor. The letter runs thus: "I cannot close this letter without stating to Your Excellency that I desire to acknowledge my high appreciation of the readiness with which Mr. Ramanathan yielded his own private enterprise, in favour of *The Supreme Court Circular*, when the latter was proposed by me, and also the loyalty and thoroughness with which he has ever since supported the new publication, gratuitously giving his own personal services towards maintaining it. In his present position, he does not, I believe, consider that he could undertake the conduct of these reports for pay from Government. He has thus unquestionably suffered considerable pecuniary loss by sacrificing his personal interest out of a liberal-minded consideration for the general advantage of the public and the profession. And although he does not himself ask for compensation, still I venture to think that his public spirit, at least, deserves some fuller recognition, if it could be extended to him, than the mere thanks of the judges, however cordially accorded." Dr. Isaac Thambyah too joins in the tribute: "Ramanathan was the first sole editor of Law-Reports in Ceylon on a large scale. For three full years after his being enrolled, he applied himself to wade through over fifty volumes of decisions and unaided, to select and copy out important judgments. Being once engaged in a case with the Queen's Advocate Sir Richard Cayley, Ramanathan was able to give him a valuable reference. Cayley, looking over the manuscripts recommended them to Govern-

ment. The result was the publication in 1877 under Government patronage, of the first volumes of the unbroken series of Ramanathan's Reports of cases decided from 1820 to 1877. They were brought out in twelve years in six thick volumes. Sir John Budd Phear made Ramanathan editor of *The Supreme Court Circular*. The new Law-Reports, subsidized by Government, was edited by him. The first volume was concluded in 1896 and the sixth volume is now current."

The story of how it came about that he was called upon to edit *The Supreme Court Circular* was recounted in later years by Ramanathan himself: "After serving in Calcutta for several years and winning the affections of the pepople, Sir John Phear came to Ceylon. At that time I was a member of the Bar and used to delight in reporting cases decided by the Supreme Court. I also practised before Sir John Budd Phear, and he mentioned to me one day that he would like to have my services more intimately than as an ordinary reporter, by helping him in bringing useful judgments in the Supreme Court every week before the Judiciary of the Island. He called these reports *The Supreme Court Circular* and he was anxious that the Police Magistrates, the Commissioners of Requests and the District Judges should be made acquainted as early as possible with the latest decisions of the Supreme Court. He found, as he had repeatedly mentioned in his judgments, that the work of the minor Judiciary, including District Judges, was of a very inferior kind. They did not know how to record evidence in a consecutive fashion and in as full a manner as possible. So that when the case came before the Supreme Court for consideration and discussion, there was wanting a great deal of completeness in the history of a case. It was found that the evidence was recorded in a most scrappy and jerky fashion with little or no consecutiveness in it.

"The Judges of the Supreme Court frequently complained of the want of training of the minor Judiciary in regard to the recording of facts of cases. As regards the law, it was even worse. Therefore, the Supreme Court, after frequently bringing these deficiencies to the notice of the officers concerned and also of the public, thought it high time that they should be trained by means of *The Supreme Court Circular* issued by the Judges of the Supreme Court themselves. They wanted me to be the editor of *The Supreme Court Circular* and I readily consented. I believe the first volume was brought out in 1878. I was in constant consultation with Sir John Budd Phear and other Judges and Sir John himself took much interest in the publication of these cases. The result was that both the Bar and the Judiciary learnt many an important lesson which they should have learned much earlier in the profession."

Great as these services were, greater far and of more lasting import was the example he set for posterity to follow, of the perfect pattern of a lawyer who, with a superb mastery of law, combined an integrity and purity of character, a firmness and fearlessness of advocacy rare in the annals of legal history.

CHAPTER XVII

TOUR TO EUROPE

"One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey."

— *Hazlitt*

IN 1886, Ramanathan left the Island on an extensive tour of Europe, accompanied by his wife and their eldest daughter. Just thirtyfive, the unchallenged leader of the Unofficials in the Legislature, a lawyer with an established reputation, a happy husband, a happy father, Ramanathan occupied an enviable position at this period of his life. He seemed to be in line for even greater eminence.

Europe was then at the height of her power and pre-eminence. She had established her dominion over nature and man. She led the world in scientific and humane learning, in political and social endeavour, in trade, industry and commerce, in every art of human life. She held vast continents in her imperial sway. A European tour was then deemed an indispensable epuipment for a gentleman of culture and ambition and Ramanathan undertook it not in a spirit of idle curiosity but rather in the spirit of a pilgrim seeking to know all that was best and noblest in the culture and civilization of the West. His uncle and beloved mentor Sir Muthucoomaraswamy was to him a shining example of what the West could do to mould a gentleman, scholar and statesman. He had heard from him ecstatic praises of Victorian statesmen and read avidly from books and periodicals of their brilliant powers and dazzling achievements, of the towering personalities of Gladstone and Disraeli and longed to learn from them the secret of political action and parliamentary oratory.

A more impressive Ceylonese rarely left our shores. Handsome beyond praise, and sufficiently conscious of it to be careful never to appear at a disadvantage, dignified in manners, versed in many languages, full of the ancient learning, a gentleman, a scholar, a patriot and the acknowledged leader of his people, Ramanathan moved about in a leisurely manner from city to city, meeting and seeing and learning many things and creating, one cannot doubt, an all-too-flattering impression of an accomplished and cultured Ceylonese.

On the eve of his departure, the various communities vied with one another in proclaiming their great appreciation of his signal services to them in and out of the legislature between 1879–1886. Voicing the sentiments of the Sinhalese, the Venerable Hikkaduwe Sumangala Nayaka Unanse (Principal of the Pali Vidyodaya College and High Priest of Sri Pada, Ratnapura) A. P. Dharme Gunewardene (President of the Ceylon Branch of the Theosophical Society) and many other leading Buddhists presented him on 8th February, 1886 an address reputedly drawn by Colonel H. S. Olcott, the founder and President of the Theosophical Society, whose confidence in Ramanathan's integrity and devotion to the cause of Buddhist education was so unbounded that he made him joint trustee with himself of certain funds which he had collected for educational work among the Buddhists. The following is the text of the address:

Respected Sir,

We cannot allow you to leave the Island upon your projected tour to Europe without expressing our sense of gratitude and obligation for the services conferred by you upon

the Sinhalese Community at large. We have watched your public career during the last seven years, ever since, by the lamented death of your kinsman Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, you were called upon to discharge the functions of an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council. Your unremitting devotion to the cause of the general welfare, we are proud to own, has given universal satisfaction. Among other services rendered by you, we would specially name the reforms which have been effected throughout the Island, at your instance, in the matter of the system of compulsory labour exacted from every male adult inhabitant under the Thoroughfares Ordinance of 1861. The wholesale demoralization of the country, consequent upon the thousands of our fellow citizens finding themselves annually incarcerated in the gaols of the Island, for reasons other than vice or criminal intent, has been happily stemmed by your efforts. You moved for a Commission of Enquiry on this subject in 1881 and the report which you and the other Commissioners framed led to the passing of the Ordinance No. 31 of 1884, reorganizing our laws on the subject and affording relief to the masses of our people.

We would also mention that it was through your persistent advocacy that the Ceylonese now enjoy the boon of Post Office Savings Banks, so useful in promoting habits of thrift and other domestic virtues. It was also through you that Government have recently sanctioned the establishment of Reformatories and Industrial Schools for Juvenile Offenders, so that it is no longer necessary to brand for life with ignominy what after all may be but youthful ignorance and indiscretion.

We take this opportunity to offer you our best thanks for supporting in Council the measure granting the Buddhists of Ceylon, in whom we are so deeply interested, the Birthday of our Lord Buddha as a public holiday. This Sir, is a boon that we cannot too highly prize, as it makes it possible for the entire body of Buddhists to unite in paying a national tribute to the memory of the Founder of our Faith, without interfering with their secular duties. Your generous catholicity in this instance conspicuously illustrates the tolerant and benign spirit taught in your own Shastras and incites to reciprocal acts of goodwill."

On 26 March, 1886 a representative gathering of Tamils, Muslims and Malays met at the Town Hall with Mr. Haniffa, M. M. C. as Chairman and presented Ramanathan with an illuminated address, together with a gold medal, and a gold watch and chain, as an expression of their admiration of the independence, ability and high sense of duty which marked his public career.

Here follows the text of their address:

Honoured Sir,

In pursuance of the resolution passed at a public meeting of the Tamil-speaking Community held in the Town Hall of Colombo, on the 26th day of February, 1886, we desire on the eve of your departure for Europe, to express to you our warm appreciation of the great public services which you have rendered to Ceylon. You have amply justified your selection as the Tamil Representative in the Legislative Council and have proved a worthy successor to your distinguished uncle, the late Sir Muthucoomaraswamy. The whole Island has watched with admiration the independence, high sense of duty and devotion to public interests, which

have marked your career. It is most gratifying to us that our fellow countrymen, the Sinhalese have already expressed to you their assurances of esteem and acknowledgement of the benefits they have received at your hands. In a Crown Colony like Ceylon, it is a priceless advantage to the public and the Government to have in the Legislative Council an Unofficial Member of your standing, who combines ability and experience with integrity and fearless independence.

We wish you a safe and pleasant voyage. We pray God that He will bring you back to us in renewed health and vigour and grant us a continuance of your valuable services. We beg you to accept this medal, watch and chain and to wear them in remembrance of this public meeting."

The medal, watch and chain were exquisitely designed and superbly wrought in heavy gold. They embellished a personality already charming and he wore them with legitimate pride to the end of life. The inscription on the medal was a ringing testimony to the love and adoration of his pepole. It said, "This medal and chain together with an address and a gold watch and chain, were presented at a Public Meeting of Tamils (Hindus and Christians) and Mohammedans held at the Town Hall, Colombo on the 26th day of March, 1886 to their representative in the Lesgislative Council of Ceylon, the Hon. Ponnambalam Ramanathan in recognition of his public services and of the independence, ability and high sense of duty which have always marked his career."

Ramanathan spent five months touring the leading towns and cities of Europe and established enduring contacts wherever he went. His intrinsic talents, the lustre of his family name and above all, the tradition of friendship with the elite of

English and French society set up by his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, opened for him the homes of the nobility and gentry in these lands. He visited the Public Schools and the Universities of England and the Continent and studied at close range their working, for education was a lifelong passion of his. The universities of Sorbonne in France and Hiedelberg in Germany particularly impressed him. He who had set his heart on the regeneration of his country's youth through a sound and well-planned system of education had first to study the systems of education obtaining in the more progressive countries of the West.

It was a period of hectic political activity for Britain, both domestic and foreign. At home, the agitation for parliamentary reform and the extension of the franchise was vigorous and unrelenting. Working-class unrest was endemic. In the Empire, Ireland was seething with discontent and was fast tending towards anarchy, while British statesmen were sharply divided among themselves on the question of discovering a remedy. Trouble was brewing in South Africa and Egypt. There was, moreover, a hardening of the international tone. Paradoxically, this was also a period of unprecedented prosperity for Britain. The bettering of conditions of life for the majority of the people by the application of science and technology was the material achievement of the Victorian age. Parliament was now a hive of ceaseless and impassioned activity, an arena of clashing armour for the gallants of the age, that brilliant galaxy of Victorian statesmen.

It was, doubtless, an edifying and ennobling experience for a statesman of the Empire, dedicated to the cause of his country's freedom and the regeneration of his people to have watched this scene of intense parliamentary activity wherein issues of great national and international import

were debated with uncommon fire and eloquence.

Ramanathan was received by members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers with more than ordinary warmth and cordiality, for his reputation had already travelled before him. He visited the great Liberal statesman Gladstone at his home at Hawarden and discussed with him a wide variety of subjects pertaining to the government of his country. He had also the privilege of accompanying him in the course of his memorable Midlothian campaign wherein he heard the veteran parliamentarian voice sentiments which went deep into his heart and which he often recalled in later life with great approbation. He once said, "I heard the great Gladstone in Edinburgh during his Midlothian Campaign. I was on the same platform with him and he told us, 'I expect every Englishman, to be an Englishman, every Scotchman, to be a Scotchman, every Welshman, to be a Welshman, and every Irishman, to be an Irishman." He pressed on the Secretary of State for the Colonies the urgency of the need for the reform of the Constitution, brought home to him the evils and excesses of bureaucratic tyranny, and moved for the curtailment of the powers of the Governor and the extension of the powers of the people's representatives.

He, Mrs. Ramanathan and their daughter were presented by H. R. H. the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII) to Her Majesty Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. They had also the signal honour of being invited by the Prince to meet the Queen at a Garden Party at Marlborough House, his residence in London. The aged Queen was more than ordinarily delighted to see the distinguished Oriental hailing from a corner of her Empire, his charming wife and daughter, all in their radiant and distinctive national attire. It is noteworthy here that, except during a brief period of exuberant early youth, Ramanathan never

appeared in public or private, at home or abroad, before the highest or the lowest, in any other garb than his own national attire—the long coat, the resplendent shawl, and the magnificent turban of the Tamil aristocracy. This caused no small vexation or amusement to the Colonial Englishman. Once, Sir Arthur Gordon, the Governor, attempted to poke fun at him and suffered the severest rebuke. Unlike the leaders of his or our time, Ramanathan never lost his roots. That pride of race and religion, culture and tradition ever glowed in him and he defended them against all assailants with leonine ferocity.

The Queen was, moreover, gratified to learn that the impressive visitor was no other than a scion of the family of Sir Muthucoomaraswamy who had, in years gone by, charmed her Court by his lively presentation of the classical play *Harichandra* and for whom she continued to cherish feelings of great warmth and admiration.

A still greater honour awaited him there. The brilliance of his reputation as a lawyer and legislator had preceded him to Europe. The Inner Temple, in an endeavour to do him honour, called him to the English Bar, *honoris causa*. That he should have been honoured by an institution which was reputedly frugal of its honours makes the honour all the more remarkable. He was the only Asiatic to enjoy this proud distinction, and there were only two others in other lands who shared this distinction with him at that time, and they were Alexander Benjamin, an eminent American lawyer and His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, future King Edward VII. In this connection, it is well to remember that it was his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy who first opened the Inns of Court to all those who were neither Christians nor Jews, when they were closed against them by formidable barriers of race and religion.

The impression Ramanathan made on the West,

particularly on British political circles, was profound. Next to his uncle, he raised the prestige of his country in the eyes of the Western world. This circumstance had beneficent and far-reaching influence on the attitude of British statesmen towards the government of this country. J. R. Weinman says, "Ramanathan was received in London as the greatest Unofficial of Ceylon."

After five months of strenuous and eager travel in which he not only acquainted himself with the outward aspect of the leading towns and cities of Europe but consorted with many distinguished Europeans of that day, Ramanathan returned home with a wealth of experience which served him well in his subsequent career as statesman and leader of the nation.

CHAPTER XVIII

RAMANATHAN AND THE JAFFNA RAILWAY

> "I now most earnestly believe in the paying capacities of the Jaffna Railway, and my advice to the people of the North is that they ought not to abandon the position first assumed by them, that it is the duty of the Government to construct this line, just as they had taken upon themselves the construction of the other lines in other parts of the country... It is not a wild scheme; it is a very practicable scheme. It is a scheme that will do the greatest good to Ceylon ..... I shall never cease to agitate until the railway to Jaffna is an accomplished fact."
>
> — *Ramanathan*

FEW of us who enjoy the facilities provided by the Jaffna Railway realize for a moment that we owe its early existence to the courage and vision, the dogged tenacity and firmness of purpose of a man who through a long and arduous life was in the forefront of every struggle that aimed at promoting his country's happiness and well-being. The pages of the Hansard and the contemporary press provide striking testimony to the assiduous and untiring effort he made in collecting and sifting a vast array of relevant material, in mastering the multitudinous details of an eminently complex and controversial question, to the valiant, vigorous and sustained struggle he waged in and out of the legislature to convince a very sceptical and self-opinionated body of Officials in the legislature of the paying capacity of the Northern Railway. The inordinate length of the line, "the wilderness of the Northern and North-Central Provinces" through which the line would

pass, the hardened opposition of the Government Agent for the Northern Province, the financial embarrassments of the country resulting from the Haputale Railway extension, were some of the principal causes which helped to create this incubus of prejudice against the project. Contemporary opinion branded it as "the Line to the Moon." But Ramanathan was not the man to be overawed by any obstacle, however formidable. He was passionately convinced that a railway to Jaffna was a stern and inescapable necessity and that in the long run its return to the nation in material and moral well-being would be immeasurable. A cold, calculating and hard-headed Colonial administration which viewed questions of great national import from the narrow and circumscribed angle of economics rather than the broad standpoint of national utility and well-being and would not venture on anything, however imperative and salutary, unless it warranted immediate pecuniary returns, viewed with smug complacency and unconcern an integral section of the country's population languish in isolation, vast resources of productive land waste away in barren infertility for want of the means of communication and transport. The most outstanding trait in Ramanathan's character was never to rest content until what he conceived to be a national want was satisfied. It was a single-handed and apparently futile struggle that he chose to wage. British officialdom in its entirety was consistent and resolute in its hostility to the project. The Unofficials were no less so. Even the Jaffna Railway Committee which had been set up at Ramanathan's instance and was agitating for the railway, recoiled from the conflict in the face of adamantine Official opposition; but Ramanathan worked with grim tenacity for what ultimately proved to be one of his stupendous triumphs.

In 1837 Ramanathan moved in the Legislative Council the appointment of a Select Committee to

investigate the possibilities of a railway to Jaffna. Accordingly a Select Committee was appointed consisting of two Officials, the Treasurer (Mr. G. T. M. O'Brien) and the Surveyor-General (Colonel T. Clarke) and two Unofficials, Messrs. Ramanathan and Bosanquet "to take evidence as to the goods and passenger traffic which a line of railway running either from Matale to Jaffna or from Polgahawela to Jaffna might command and to report their views thereon."

The Select Committee set about its work in a perfunctory and half-hearted manner, in a spirit of utter diffidence and scepticism, inasmuch as it was filled with grave doubts and misgivings about the practicality and paying capacity of the proposed railway. It confined itself to addressing an elaborate questionaire on the subject to the Government Agents, heads of departments and others who, they believed, could furnish the necessary information. It then forwarded the replies to the General Manager of Railways to draw up an estimate of the income obtainable and the expenditure involved. The Select Committee did not even trouble itself to analyse the statistics submitted to it, nor express any opinion on them.

The General Manager accordingly drew up an estimate of income and expenditure as best he could, though the evidence supplied to him were, in many ways, meagre and conflicting, and concluded that the proposed railway, if undertaken, would entail a heavy loss and prove a great liability. The Select Committee reported to the Council accordingly, in the belief that the General Manager was right in his conclusions.

Everyone of the Officials of Government shared the prevailing view, genuine and widespread, that the proposed line would be a tragic failure and an insupportable burden on the Government, but felt that he was doing a formal duty in sanctioning the appointment of a Select Committee. The

undercurrent of feeling was that they were all wasting valuable time. They could not shake off the prejudice that the line would not pay. When the Governor Sir Arthur Gordon visited Jaffna in July 1887, he candidly told the deputation of the Jaffna Railway Committee which waited on him: "I think I should not be dealing fairly with you, if I did not at once avow that, whatever may be the case at some future period, there is no present probability that the work you desire will, for many years to come, be undertaken by the local Government." The Government Agent of the Northern Province was equally sceptical. The Select Committee had reported and Ramanathan was a signatory to the report that the total receipts of the Railway would amount to Rs. 981,330/- and the working expenses, to Rs. 1,052,88/-, involving a loss of Rs. 70,758/-

Both the Official and the Unofficial Members of the legislature and even many representatives of public opinion were rooted in the belief that the line would be an unqualified failure. But Ramanathan, with his sanguine temperament and his lifelong refusal to take anything on authority but always to subject it to the closest and most painstaking scrutiny, was not to be led away by the conclusions of the General Manager. A close and conscientious study of the question made subsequently convinced him that the line would not merely pay but pay handsomely. It now dawned upon him that the Select Committee had blundered gravely in accepting hastily and without due forethought or scrutiny the conclusions of the General Manager and he rued the day he signed the Report.

But to convince a body of Officials and Unofficials hardened in their scepticism and opposition was no easy task. On 20th March, 1889, he moved that a professional survey of the proposed alternative lines of railway be made. With the

courage and pertinacity born of deep conviction, and indignant at the apathy and indifference of the White bureaucracy, he delivered a series of impassioned addresses in Council stating in clear and unanswerable language his reasons for his conviction that the line would pay. For wealth of statistical detail, for lucidity of exposition and for the intense patriotic passion they breathe, the speeches are a marvel of parliamentary eloquence. He was not playing on the surface of the question but delving deep into it armed with every fact and figure that he had accumulated and sifted with intense and assiduous pains. "The reason," he said, "put forward by the Jaffna Committee for asking for a survey was their desire to negotiate with regard to some definite line before a private contractor so as to enter into an agreement with him. But for my part I ask for the survey on a much higher ground which I hope to establish today, that the Jaffna Railway will pay."

He proceeded to state his reasons for his change of conviction after signing the report of the Select Committee and for his belief in the paying capacity of the proposed railway. With customary courage, he frankly confessed in Council that he had blundered gravely in accepting too readily and without careful scrutiny the data laid before him, begged for pardon and a reconsideration of the whole question in the light of fresh and authentic material he had garnered and expressed his firm and unshakable faith in the capacity of the Jaffna Railway to pay. He said, "Since signing the report of the Select Committee, I have been able to take a different and new view of the question. I have already shaken myself off from the delusion which had taken possession of us all that the line would not pay, and I have carefully re-considered the question, much more carefully than when I had been sitting in the Committee with the incubus of prejudice and

scepticism which obscured our judgment. I shall never cease to regret the part I played in presenting to Council the Report which I am criticizing. I blame myself intensely, and have taken the earliest opportunity to rectify the mistake. I do not blame my colleagues who acted with me in committee. But I condemn myself over and over again for allowing myself to be spellbound and to drift hopelessly to a foregone conclusion. I am now anxious to undo the mischief. Who, in this world has been free from mistakes? Do not the best judges at times recall their solemn judgments? I recall my judgment, not upon the point that the best route to Jaffna would be the route from Polgahawela, via Kurunegala and Dambulla, but upon the point of income and expenditure."

He flung on the floor of the Council Chamber a surprising wealth of elabroate statistical detail to establish his contention that the Jaffna Railway would not merely pay but pay handsomely, and concluded, "Sir like all my honourable friends, I was very sceptical of the paying capacities of this Railway. I was no advocate of it, my desire being to inquire and arrive at a just opinion. Till I had signed the report I did not realize the truth that I had been led away more by authority than by argument. Several reasons, as I have explained, conspired to lead us into this sceptical frame of mind. When, therefore, the General Manager reported adversely on the statistics laid before him, it effectually paralysed me, as indeed, I believe, my honourable colleagues. In this condition, without allowing ourselves time to regain our independence of judgment, we agreed to the report, slavishly endorsing the Railway Manager's opinion.

"Since that fatal day, I have been questioning myself, 'Did you use your own critical judgment, or did you slavishly adopt the judgments

of others?' And as often have I confessed, 'I have erred,' and recall my judgments as many a judge is obliged to recall his solemn judgment, on the ground that it emanated *improvide* or *per incuriam.*

"I know not for certain whether you are going to refuse my motion. If you do, my motion has enabled me to raise a discussion on the subject, to recall my opinion, and to state to the public the true position of the Jaffna Railway question. We ought not to be guided by this report of the Select Committee for a minute. We ought not to fall into the same mental delusion, which the length of the line and the 'wilderness of the North-Central and Northern Provinces' have caused in the minds of all Officials, from the Governor downwards. I now most earnestly believe in the paying capacities of the Jaffna Railway, and my advice to the people of the North is that they ought not to abandon the position first assumed by them, that it is the duty of the Government to construct this line, just as they had taken upon themselves the construction of the other lines in other parts of the country; that they ought not to waste their time and energies in treating with a private contractor, because there are serious administrative difficulties in the way of a private contractor working the line; and that they ought to press on the attention of the Government, again and again, this subject until they are forced to enter upon the work of construction.

"If you, Sir, have followed me in my address, I think I may justly claim that I have succeeded in dispelling the delusion once for all that the Jaffna Railway question is not one within the domain of practical politics. I trust that honourable members would from today think of the proposal as quite feasible, and that, whether your Excellency will grant the memorialists their prayer for a survey or not, you will at least from today

consider the project as one deserving of the serious attention of the Government."

But the Officials were not to be converted and the Colonial Secretary, Sir Edward Noel Walker said that the Government declined to accept Ramanathan's motion for a survey of the line to Jaffna, because "in the face of the Select Committee's report, to spend public money on such a survey would be simply throwing it away."

This statement of the Colonial Secretary, after he had listened to the long, elaborate and factual exposition of the case, was arbitrary and exasperating. He had not controverted any of the statistical details which Ramanathan had poured across the floor of the House but blindly took his stand on the report of the Select Committee, which Ramanathan had exposed so relentlessly. Ramanathan said, "It is rather disappointing, after all I have been able to say, that my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary should take his stand upon the very report which I have exposed" and explained why the Government should not take their stand on the report of the Select Committee. He asked, "Was there any examination and sifting of the details? Was there any proper criticism of the figures? Sir, there was a sort of despair hanging over us from the beginning of the question and the conclusion of the General Manager paralysed me, and, I am afraid, my honourable colleagues also. Alas! we too hastily agreed to report in terms of the General Manager's verdict. If the report had not been agreed to and presented at the time it was presented to the Council, it would never have been presented at all.

"Under those circumstances, I am very sorry that my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary should take his stand upon that report. I condemn the report and I condemn myself. I shall never cease to regret it. I am open to be abused by all the people of Jaffna, by all Ceylon. I feel

that on this question I have not fulfilled the trust reposed in me." His Excellency interposed, "Oh no! no!" Ramanathan continued, "That is my feeling, Sir. So I take the earliest opportunity to come before the Council and candidly state what the circumstances are under which the report was presented, and how differently the subject has manifested itself to me ever since I gave my independent judgment to it. And yet my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary takes his stand upon that very report, and says, 'Owing to that report we cannot give you a survey.' That is very hard, Sir. My position is unbearable.

"It is the duty of the Government to sympathize with me in the circumstances which I have truly described, and to do something to alleviate my sorrow. I feel very strongly now on the practicality and paying capacity of this line. It was only after I had signed the report that I began to shake off the incubus of prejudice, and tackle the subject with a free and critical judgment. It then presented itself to me in quite another light. It dawned on me that this was profitable undertaking, and I am now firmly convinced of it. This conviction ought to have come to me much earlier but, Sir, if in a subject so special, I do not receive that active assistance from men who are expected to know more than I do, what am I to do? Still I do not blame my honourable colleagues. I blame myself. I wish to say that I am the principal offender. Which man is free from mistakes? Under these circumstances I cannot rest satisfied with the answer which my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary has given."

But all his efforts were of no avail. The Government laboured under the settled prejudice that the proposed line would be a total and unqualified failure and refused to listen to any arguments to the contrary. Undeterred by the over-

whelming strength of the tide that was running against him, with the pertinacity and grim resolve of a born controversalist and man of action, he pursued the matter. After the refusal of the Government to sanction a survey of the proposed railway line, he prevailed on the general public to take up the question and at a public meeting held in Colombo on 5th August, 1889, it expressed its emphatic opinion that the conclusions arrived at by the Select Committee were fundamentally unsound as based on premises utterly inadequate and inaccurate. Through a memorial dated 25th September, 1889, it pleaded for an immediate survey of the proposed line but the Government gave no heed to it.

On 11th December, Ramanathan moved the Legislative Council for the appointment of a fresh Select Committee to inquire into and report on the statements contained in the public memorial with regard to the paying capacities of the Railway to Jaffna and for an immediate survey of the route from Polgahawela to Jaffna.

In the course of a long and impassioned address, he traced the history of the agitation for the Railway to Jaffna, from its inception, exposed energetically the report of the Select Committee, their flagrant disregard of the responsibilities laid on them, their failure to collect and sift evidence and their blind and uncritical acceptance of the General Manager's verdict as final. He dwelt at length on the errors and omissions of the Government Agent with regard to the local traffic in the different sections and the through traffic and the working expenses. He said: "Now, Your Excellency and my honourable friends ought to know how it was that this Select Committee came to make such egregious blunders. Mr. Allanson Bailey was its first Chairman. I remember that he, the Surveyor-General, and myself met once only to consider and arrange the preliminaries. We thought certain questions

should be drafted and forwarded to the Government Agent, Assistant Agents and the Director of Public Works. The questions were framed and forwarded, but Mr. Allanson Bailey had to retire from the chair; then my honourable friend who is at present the Government Agent of the Central Province became the Chairman, but he too had little to do with the question. In his letter to me, dated August 12th, he said: 'The reports of the Government Agents and of the Director of Public Works would have to be fully considered by all the members of the Select Committee before we could agree to the Report.' But before we came to consider the reports, my honourable friend retired from the chair, and we found some difficulty in persuading my honourable friend the present Treasurer (Mr. G. T. M. O'Brien) to assume the chairmanship. He was ill, and I fancy he had other reasons for saying that he did not care to be the chairman; but however, we overcame his scruples, and he took the chair. Under his presidency, Sir, there was not one meeting of the three surviving members; Mr. Bosanquet had gone to England. I used to run about with a bundle of papers, and wait upon my honourable friend the Treasurer as to what his convenience might be: then, having got his views, I would go to my honourable friend the Surveyor-General's office and ask him, and he would say, 'I am going out, that day will not suit me, and I do not know when I shall return. I shall write to the Treasurer. Let the matter slide for a few days' and so on. I tried my best to bring my honourable friends the Treasurer and the Surveyor-General, together upon this question: but I never once succeeded. I don't blame them a bit. Well, Sir, at least the Treasurer and I agreed to accept the 'results' prepared by the General Manager. In fairness to my honourable friend the Surveyor-General, I must say that he did not see our report. I think he

did not even put his signature to the paper, but all the same his name appeared in print as a member who had assented to the report. I have candidly told your Excellency my reasons for recalling my judgment upon the matter. Many were the errors and omissions of the Government Agents as to the local traffic in the different sections of the proposed railway and as to the through traffic, and the expenses of the line were also erroneous. Now it must be clear to you that, as between the public and the Council, the opinion of my honourable friend the Treasurer is the only opinion which adheres to the report, and he alone now stands saying that Jaffna Railway would not pay.

"I ask, Sir, if you, as the Governor of this Island, would tolerate for a minute a situation of this kind. I have, Sir, the highest respect for my honourable friend's ability. I believe he is an ornament to the Civil Service. I believe him to be one of the most clear-headed officials of the Government, but, Sir, I should not like to be in his position now. He is undertaking too great a responsibility by obstructing a fair and full inquiry. The appointment of a new Committee comes handicapped in this way. The blunders we have committed are so patent that it is not right to leave a question of such magnitude to be suspended in mid-air. It is therefore that in obedience to the wishes of the general public, I have thought it my duty to try and persuade Your Excellency to order a re-investigation of the question. I may say that every Unofficial member on this side of the House goes with me and if their representations and the representations of the public have any dynamic value whatever, they ought to have the effect of compelling you to yield to our demand. I believe in the efficacy of united representation. I hope, Sir, you will assent to my motion."

The motion, having been seconded and supported by the other Unofficial Members, the Honourable the Treasurer (Mr. G. T. M. O'Brien) attempted in general terms to justify the estimates of income and expenditure calculated by the General Manager and stated that "the appointment of a second Select Committee would only raise false hopes which had no chance of ever being realized and would unnecessarily waste the time of the public officers that might be selected to sit on the Committee."

Such a reply from the Treasurer after all that had been said to the contrary, roused Ramanathan to passionate indignation. In a speech remarkable for persuasive force and trenchancy of argument and diction, he exposed the hollowness of the Treasurer's position. He said, "Sir, all along I felt that the advice which my honourable friend the Treasurer might give to Your Excellency would carry great weight with you, and therefore, I went out of my way to request him to study the figures and facts in conjunction with me, so that he might arrive at a correct decision. He did not choose to avail himself of that offer, and today this principal adviser of your Government has made the humble confession that he has not been able to find time to study the Memorial which was presented to Your Excellency. I believe the Government looks upon my honourable friend as a species of *Woolwich Infant*. Well, all I can say is that the big gun has burst today. His past reputation made me expect at least a specious reply to the arguments we urged from this end of the table. But what has he said to the Council? When he opened his mouth and began to speak, he, in homely English, 'put his foot into it'. For, he wanted the Government and the honourable members to believe that the Memorialists had actually included in their estimates not only 26,000 tons of traffic from Jaffna to Colombo but also 26,000 tons from Colombo to Jaffna. That was his first egregious blunder, affording proof

positive that he had not studied the subject. The Memorialists have placed before Your Excellency two balance sheets—one balance sheet as propounded by the Select Committee, and the other balance sheet, head for head, as proposed by the Public Committee. It was open to him to study the details of these two balance sheets and act up to the responsibility of advising the Government. Had he devoted some part of what he believed to be his valuable time for the consideration of the question, which the public have set their heart upon, he could have easily grasped the fact set forth in the Memorial that the through traffic was only 13,000 tons either way. Sir, I cannot contain myself when I find that a public servant of his standing should pretend to advise the Government without carefully considering the plain facts of our case. A few minutes ago I conceded that he was one of our ablest civilians. All the greater shame to him that he has neglected to study this important question. The Government and the public who pay him expected that he would give his mind to the subject in all its bearings. But he has not done so. Necessarily, he has made this egregious blunder." His indignation hardly quenched, he proceeded to pour the vials of his wrath on the Treasurer whose one and invariable note in the whole gamut of the discussion was that the honourable members were wasting valuable time. He asked, "Why should he tell us over and over again that his time is very valuable and that the time of the public officers should not be wasted? Is it because he has such an over-weening confidence in his own powers that he tramples under his foot the opinions of some of the most able and honest Unofficials of the Colony?"

H. E. the Governor "Order, order."

Ramanathan: "Sir, I feel it very much. This is not a personal question with me and if I give utterance to my feelings, I cannot help it.

"Then, Sir, he tells us in a patronizing way, 'We don't want to raise false hopes amongst these foolish Memorialists, who have been studying the question in a way which clearly shows that they do not understand it, and therefore, the Government should put a stopper on the enthusiasm of these little children.' Is this the spirit in which public and independent men who have devoted their time and energies to this question are to be treated? We are little children forsooth, dabbling in politics! Why, Sir, the disclosure made today is that my honourable friend is a neophyte in the art of government. He said that the Memorialists had gone too far afield from the argument. Let me cast back that reflection upon himself. He has gone too far afield from our argument. He has not faced any one of the objections that I raised; I pointed out categorically so many omissions on the part of the Select Committee. Did my honourable friend meet any one of these objections? Where he met one, he had the honesty to say *peccavi*. Sir, my objections remain unanswered. What has he said as regards the point that only one-third of the 26,000 tons of the traffic from Jaffna to Colombo had been credited to the Railway? He wasted the time of the Council by reading long extracts, and when I asked him pointedly what was his reason for stating that more than one-third of the traffic could not be assigned, he said 'Jaffna has nine ports.' What have the nine ports of Jaffna to do with the traffic that could come down from Jaffna to Colombo in a single day, by the Central Road? That is precisely what the public cannot understand. I contend, Sir, that part of the Memorialist's case remains unanswered. Then I pointed out that the through passengers from Matale to Jaffna had not been taken into account. Has my honourable friend met that? He has not, and I have a right to ask for Your Excellency's sympathy

on this point. Then I asked: 'Why has not even one passenger been allowed for the section between Anuradhapura and Jaffna?' My honourable friend read a long paragraph about a country denuded by famine and disease. Is that an answer? Is there no population in the country between Jaffna and Anuradhapura? What explanation has the Chairman of the Committee given us as to why not one passenger has been brought to the credit of this section of the railway? He has given us no explanation. I contend that the Memorialists are right, and that my honourable friend is mistaken. Then I made a point of the 4,000 tons carried over the Padeniya-Balala road and he has admitted the point. Next I spoke about savings from the immigration charges. Has he dealt with that? He has not. Then I spoke of the reduction of expenditure as regards the maintenance and working expenses of the railway. In reply he repeats to the Council what was already before us, viz. the opinion of the Railway Manager. The Railway Manager has in our judgment erred, and have I not told you that we have the figures of our expert, who would be able to maintain his own against the estimate of the Traffic Manager?

"These and other facts my honourable friend has not met, but he has set up and stalked his own phantoms and demolished them to his satisfaction. And then he says, 'Oh we don't want a Railway to Jaffna: what we want is that the people should be fed, and that they should be removed to better places.' Well, Sir, in case of dire distress, Government would create relief works and give the people wages, where wages cannot be earned elsewhere. In extreme distress there would be food actually supplied, but under ordinary circumstances, does my honourable friend really mean that a part of the revenue should be set apart for the feeding of the poor people there? What is the other suggestion that he makes? It is that the

people should be removed from the woods of Anuradhapura to healthier localities. Accepting for the moment the wisdom of his proposal, how are these walking skeletons to be moved on? Are they to be goaded on southwards and forced to walk perhaps fifty or a hundred miles, or is it better policy that they should be provided with railway and be carried in comfort from those wild regions to more favoured spots?

"My honourable friend's ideas may appear to him to be sound, but they cannot be accepted by the Memorialists, who have taken much time and much trouble to think out this question. The more I see of the ways of my honourable friend, the more and more is my heart stricken with sorrow. I can only say that the best men of this country emphatically repudiate his opinion that the Jaffna railway will not pay, and assert that it ought to be made." Ramanathan's reply was pungent, overpowering, even devastating. He had rebutted all the arguments of the Treasurer but nevertheless, the Officials were adamant in their opposition, and these were days in which the Official majority ruled the roost.

The motion, on being put to the vote, was lost, the Official majority of one voting against it. But Ramanathan had made out an unanswerable case for the Jaffna Railway. The Unofficial Members handed in a protest against the division. The Government felt its prestige broken by Ramanathan's philippics. His sanguine and unshaken faith in the capacity of the Jaffna Railway to pay coupled with the antipathy and the unfeeling opposition of the Government to it created a nation-wide upheaval. It became the burning topic of the day and engaged the attention of the leading spirits of the time whose work, in the words of the Honourable Sir J. J. Grinlinton, "had been for a considerable time to examine into the subject of railway extension to the North almost daily."

The Government felt it could not any longer save its face and appointed a Commission consisting of the Honourables Sir F. R. Saunders, Sir J. J. Grinlinton, MacBride, P. Ramanathan, T. N. Christie, F. J. Warning and Bowden Smith to "inquire into and report on the question." The Commission unlike its predecessor, the Select Committee, set about the business with an open mind and a desire to do justice. It made a close and comprehensive study of every phase of the question. Moreover, Ramanathan brought to bear on its findings the immense wealth of authentic material that he had accumulated over the years with patient and laborious industry in a supreme bid to study the question in all its aspects and made converts of the Commissioners who readily recommended the construction of the line on no other ground than that it would pay.

Ramanathan had now won his case. It was accepted on all hands that the Jaffna Railway would pay. His Excellency the Governor Sir West Ridgeway followed it up by conveying in his despatch of 6th May, 1897 to the Secretary of State for the Colonies the recommendations of the Commission and his own belief "in the economic self-sufficiency of the proposed railway." *Inter alia,* His Excellency said, "Your decision on both these proposals will be anxiously awaited not only by the Government and the Legislature, but by all classes of the Community. I have referred to the consensus of opinion on the subject, and indeed, I do not believe that any former proposal for railway extension in this Colony has been so widely and cordially supported. A Commission, exceptionally capable and representative of all classes, has after the most careful deliberation pronounced unanimously in favour of railway extension to the North. Its views were cordially though informally endorsed by the Legislature when the report was presented. The native population, whose sentiments are admirably expressed by Ramanathan in the extract attached to this despatch, enthusiastically advocates the scheme, and the planters, through their representative on the Commission, also approve—no doubt they begin to appreciate the advantage which they will derive from the railway communication with the North in overcoming the labour difficulty."

The Secretary of State, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, promptly sanctioned the line and no news was ever received with greater or more uproarious joy and acclamation than this. A large and distinguished gathering representative of all races, Europeans, Burghers, Singhalese, Muslims and Tamils met at the Great Hall of St. Joseph's College, Colombo on 15th January, 1898, to celebrate the event and convey to the Secretary of State their appreciation and gratitude for what they regarded as a tremendous boon to the nation.

Ramanathan thus achieved what he had long striven to achieve. Insurmountable were the obstacles he had to contend against but undaunted and almost single-handed, he persevered in the struggle until victory came within his grasp. It was a triumph of tenacity and indomitable will, of courage and an intense and passionate devotion to the happiness and well-being of the nation. Not merely the rulers but the people too had believed in their heart of hearts that a railway to the North was not a practicable proposition in view of its inordinate length and the wilderness through which it was to pass, that it would mean a crippling burden and a perennial drain on the national exchequer. Ramanathan alone was firm in his conviction that the proposed railway, far from being a national liability, would be a tremendous national asset, that it would pay handsome dividends. Time has proved that in this unseemly conflict and controversy, Ramanathan alone was right, while all the others were wrong, in that, of

the many lines operated by the C. G. R. the Northern Line has through the decades of its existence brought in the biggest revenue.

CHAPTER XIX

RELIGIOUS GROWTH

"Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the Truth will instruct thee in knowledge."

— *Gita*

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and every thing will be added unto you."

— *The Bible*

WHEN Ramanathan was leading the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council and was a power in the land, the demands of the soul made themselves felt. A passion for religion, for the realization of the Supreme *Atman* within him, a passion more inherited than imbibed, swayed him. In an endeavour to allay this passion, to appease this spiritual hunger, he learned with avidity the sacred books of the East and the West and spent long hours in the contemplation of the sacred and eternal truths enshrined in them. He delved deep into the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*, the *Bible* and the *Koran*, in short, into all the spiritual legacy of mankind. Sanskrit Literature proved an inexhaustible reservoir of invaluable spiritual knowledge. He explored the whole region of Hindu philosophy.

At this stage, there came into his life one whose influence in moulding his spiritual destiny can hardly be over-rated. In the last decade of the last century, there came to Colombo to the home of Ramanathan, a certain gentleman of culture and breeding, a religious teacher of true spiritual wisdom and discernment, just the type of *Guru*

whom Ramanathan in the pangs of early spiritual travail sorely needed.

The strange visitor was no other than Arulparanandha Swamigal of Tanjore, the saintly grandfather of S. Natesan, Ramanathan's future son-in-law. The Swamigal had, as has already been noted, visited the Island on an earlier occasion with a mission to Sir Muthucoomaraswamy from the deposed Maharani of Tanjore. Muthucoomaraswamy's intercession with the Imperial Government on behalf of the Maharani could not bear full fruit owing to differences in the royal household. Now that the differences had been composed, and the royal family had agreed upon the question of succession to the vacant throne, Arulparanandha Swamigal was commissioned by the Maharani to meet Ramanathan and prevail on him to exercise his good offices in securing the throne for the grandson of the late Maharajah.

True to the doctrine, "Seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened; ask and it shall be given," Ramanathan found in this weird visitor the Master for whom his spirit yearned. He remembered what his saintly father had told him in early boyhood, when he took him on pilgrimage to the Hindu Shrines of India that temple worship is but one of many paths to spiritual enlightenment and that final illumination and liberation can come only through a *Guru* acting as intermediary. The story goes that, when Ramanathan was living in stately splendour, amid all the luxury and ostentation that generally accompany rank and affluence, and steeped in the traditions of Western materialism, the saint, wearing the distinctive garb of his race, trod barefoot the richly carpeted floor of *Sukhastan* with presumptuous daring and appeared before the lord of the mansion. This was a bitter pill for the latter to swallow. In peremptory tones he demanded to know who he was and how dare he tread

ARULPARANANDHA SWAMIGAL

his apartments. But the saint in imperious and authoritative accents commanded him to hold his tongue, and added, "I have come to reform you." Ramanathan looked askance and saw in his mien and manner a something that compelled awe and reverence. Overpowered by a sense of guilt, he tearfully craved pardon for his insolence.

The advent of the *Swami* opened a new vista in the life of Ramanathan. It seemed as if the gods had of set purpose sent the *Swami* to wean him from the sensuous materialism into which he was fast sinking and set him firmly on the path of piety and spiritual endeavour. Henceforth, he became the *Swami's* ardent disciple and, what is more, summoned his brother Arunachalam and made him do likewise. The two brothers betook themselves to an impassioned study of religion and philosophy and the practice of yogic meditation under the enlightened direction of their teacher. It was he who planted deep in their minds the fundamental truths of religion and quickened in them their spiritual pulse. All the immense wealth of Hindu religious and philosophic thought, the whole panorama of *Vedic* and *Agamic* literature were unfolded to their eager gaze by the magic touch of their Master. It was a turning-point in the lives of the two brothers. It is said that during these years Ramanathan pursued the study and practice of religion to the exclusion of every other interest and to the detriment of a very lucrative practice at the Bar.

The effect of all this on the man was prodigious. A new world opened before him; a new light dawned on his horizon, and a new transformation came upon him. He became alive to a new joy and serenity, a consciousness of inward strength and liberation, a courage and energy of purpose and a constant life in God. A mistrust of the reality of material phenomena, and a living faith in spiritual values, a gradual isolation from

the objects of sense and an increasing absorption in the life of the spirit characterized this period of his life. Arunachalam, writing to Edward Carpenter, says, "You met my brother (Ramanathan) some years ago in England, and if you saw him now, you would be able to judge the change. What a high spiritual and intellectual level he has reached. So calm and happy and wise, of a truthfulness and courage that nothing can shake, fearing nothing, desiring nothing, so sympathetic and loving — and with such a charm of manner and face, the reflection of the calm and peace within."

Ramanathan's exposition and interpretation of the *Saiva Sidhdhanta* Philosophy to learned audiences in India and the West were acclaimed very original and far-reaching contributions to Hindu philosophic thought. He gratefully acknowledged having learned them all at the feet of his beloved Master. The two brothers were never weary of proclaiming to the world their enormous indebtedness to him. Arunachalam's letters to Edward Carpenter abound in ecstatic and laudatory references to this religious teacher. The great Englishman became so far enamoured of him from all that he had heard of him that he journeyed to Ceylon to see him in person and partake of his spiritual repast.

In one of his letters, Arunachalam makes the following reference to the *Guru:* "He is far the most cultured man I know. A vigorous, practical intellect which finds no subject too great or too small, which handles thoroughly and masters everything it takes up — whether an abstruse problem of philosophy, an intricate lawsuit, or the cooking of some appetizing dish — devoting individual attention to the subject in hand until it is disposed of; and a purity and loftiness of character which nothing can shake. What else can a man be who has attained his spiritual height! The freaks of passion which cloud the intellect of the so-called

men of genius do not trouble him. There is no self ever bobbing up like a Jack-in-the-Box. The divine light within shines forth pure and serene."

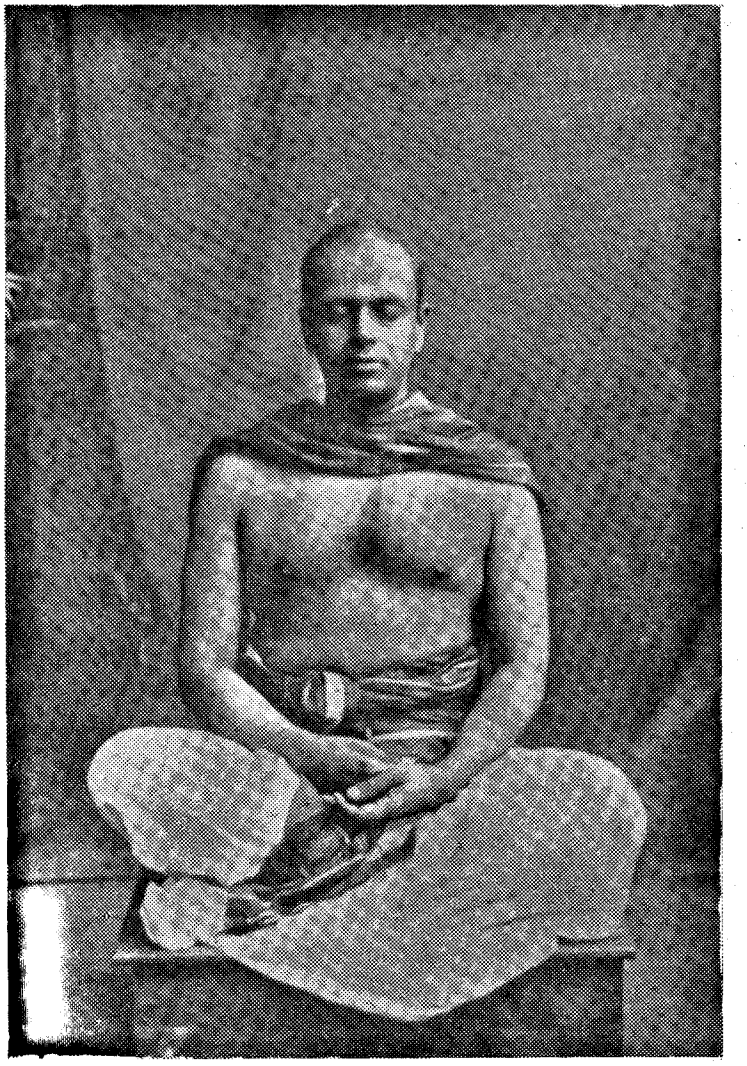
In another place, he says, "I have come here to be alone with the Master who first raised for me a corner of the veil that hides the mysteries of the universe. I hope to return to Tanjore sometime next year and live near the Master for about a year."

After a sojourn which lasted some years, the *Swami* returned to India. His mission was complete. It was customary with the brothers to visit him at his home at Tanjore as often as the press of official duty permitted and draw what spiritual nutriment they could from their daily converse and association with him. When he attained *Samadhi* they built and dedicated a shrine to his worship and made abundant endowments to ensure its continued maintenance and the performance of regular services.

The passing away of the Master was a shocking calamity to the brothers, and created a void that could hardly be filled. In another letter to Edward Carpenter, Arunachalam says, "I have for some time past been most anxious to write and tell you of the great calamity that has overtaken me in the loss of our dear Master. He is of course not really lost to us but is present and ready to help as ever. But I cannot yet realize this. The long association in my mind of him with the body in which he appeared to us, has left a void not to be filled and I keep thinking when again I shall see that gracious face and hear those gracious words, so full of comfort and help and strength. How merciful God has been to me to bring me under the Master's influence! Alas! how unworthy I have been of him and how far from the goal he ever kept before me and by his presence, encouragement and advice tried to make me reach."

Henceforth religion became the chief preoccupation of Ramanathan's life. Long hours spent in meditation (*Yoga*) and in the assiduous study of the Scriptures made Ramanathan a true saint at heart, though to all appearances, he was a man of the world. It is one of the chief glories of his life that he combined strenuous worldly life with true spiritual detachment, exemplifying in himself the *beau ideal* of the *Karma Yogin*. He did not run away from the world into mountain caves or forest retreats, as many Hindu saints and sages have done to escape the foul contagion of a material and sensual world, nor did he cast away the trammels and trappings of office and don the orange garb of a *sanyasin*. He lived in the world amidst its pleasures and frivolities, its follies and futilities but did not succumb to them. Thus early in life, a sudden transformation came upon him; his life gained a new light and a new radiance, the vanity and emptiness of glamorous material existence dawned on him. He carried religion and philosophy into the realm of politics. While addressing the legislature on high subjects of State, he would unconsciously and freely lapse into the rarefied region of philosophic and religious speculation and discourse at some length to a distracted and unheeding generation on the eternal principles that should govern the conduct of public and political life. His colleagues were inclined to be a little cynical and flippant about this, but they little knew that politics unless founded upon sound principles of religion and morality degenerates into a farce and a mockery.

Ramanathan is undoubtedly the first and presumably, the last among our great leaders to have spiritualized our politics, to have placed religion and morality in the forefront of good government. It was this great spiritual quality and its chief offspring, a high moral sense that



RAMANATHAN IN YOGIC MEDITATION

gave his leadership a purity and strength, a nobility and elevation seldom or never seen in the annals of our political history. It was this that gave our politics of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth its peculiar and distinctive character, a spaciousness and splendour, an impassioned energy and moral exhilaration, a selfless patriotism and a largeness of view hard to find in our subsequent history. It was his example and precept that reared a band of leaders who placed their country before self, who toiled in a spirit of dedication for the good of their motherland and in doing so, displayed a firmness and fearlessness that staggered the foreign imperialist. It was these that enabled an enslaved people to march from strength to strength and emerge towards the close of his long and illustrious leadership into the haven of national freedom and popular sovereignty.

CHAPTER XX

THE REPEAL OF THE GRAIN TAX ORDINANCE

"What fearful misery! The mode of assessment adopted by the Commissioners in districts where complaints are rife should engage the attention of the Select Committee with a view to enabling the Council to offer such relief to the unfortunate tax-payers as their case demands."

— *Ramanathan*

THE Repeal of the Grain Tax in 1889 ranks among the foremost achievements of Ramanathan's prolific career. The Grain Tax was a veritable nightmare to the Ceylon farmer whom the Government subjected to a levy of ten percent. of the average annual yield. The farmer was obliged to pay the levy even when the crops failed for reasons outside human control. Several thousands of peasant farmers whose sole means of livelihood was their small holdings, were deprived of their holdings either by forfeiture or sale of lands for non-payment of the tax. The social misery, suffering and degradation thus engendered was appalling in its magnitude. A sensitive and compassionate nature such as Ramanathan's could not view with equanimity and unconcern a situation so touching and so poignant in its intensity. Though born of a long line of aristocrats, Ramanathan was far from aristocratic in his sympathies. He was through life a redoubtable champion of the under-dog and his life was dedicated to fighting the battles of the oppressed and downtrodden and the alleviation of human misery and suffering.

The merest suggestion of the repeal of this cruel and oppressive tax was repugnant to Official opinion. It contended that the tax was not a British invention but an impost which dated back to distant antiquity, that under native kings, it was far heavier and more extortionate, but that the British had from time to time mitigated its severity, that, as last settled by Ordinance No. 11 of 1878, it was lighter than at any previous time. It further argued that it was in the nature of things, a rent on land and not a tax, that any remission or curtailment of it would inevitably lead to a serious curtailment of expenditure on public works, that the farmer thus relieved of the levy, would be prone to neglect cultivation and that such neglect would have very adverse repercussions on national economy and the production of food, and that the substitution of a general tax for the grain tax and the import duty on grain was impracticable.

Undeterred by any of these considerations, and painfully conscious of the immense hardships the people suffered, Ramanathan moved on 20th March, 1889 for the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the working of the Paddy Grain Tax Ordinance with the ultimate object of either securing its complete abolition or at least reducing its severity. The Cobden Club in England elected him an Honorary Member. The influence of that indomitable reformer and political philosopher who gave his name to the club and of his devoted band of economists was strong in him. He saw no reason why the benefits of a policy — the repeal of all food taxes — which had received such enthusiastic and widespread acceptance in the land of the rulers should not be extended to the Colonies.

In moving the resolution, he said, "I think, Sir, the time has arrived for the Council to examine the working of the Ordinance from a

financial and administrative point of view, so as to find out how the requirements of the revenue and of the people have been answered by it."

It was an unanswerable speech. For complete mastery of the subject and for wealth of detail, for patriotic passion and strength of conviction, for firm and fearless advocacy of the cause of the impoverished peasantry, it has few parallels in parliamentary eloquence. The speech is therefore quoted *in extenso*. He continued: "The Council has heard of complaints against the working of the Ordinance ever since 1881, from which time, yearly, clearer views have been formed as regards the benefits and the evils of the Ordinance. My friend, the late Mr. Alwis, addressed the Council no less than five times, and as often was he unsuccessful in inducing the Government to admit that the Ordinance, or the working of it, required to be improved.

"As is well-known, the object of the Ordinance was to make the tax leviable on the produce of the land. There are several clauses which show that it is the produce of the land which is liable to the tax. Confining my attention to paddy lands, I would observe that the grain tax due in respect of the produce of each field was permitted by this Ordinance to be commuted either for a fixed sum payable annually or for a fixed sum payable in those years only in which the field or parcel of land produced that crop. The first system of payment was called the Annual Commutation and the second system was called Crop Commutation. The method of payment was left in the hands of the tax-payers, and if they did not choose either Annual Commutation or Crop Commutation, the Commission appointed under the Ordinance was enjoined to make the choice for the tax-payer and whether the choice was made by the tax-payer or by the Commissioner, it was made by this Ordinance to be quite final.

Then, as regards the assessment of the money value of the produce, the Commissioner was empowered by the Ordinance to make it in a particular way and the right of appeal was given to the tax-payer and the decision of the Governor in Executive Council was also made final. On failure to pay the tax, it was provided by the 18th clause that either the land or the produce grown on land, or any movable property found on the land might be sold. Such is the scheme, Sir, provided by the Ordinance.

"One of the subjects which ought to be considered by the Select Committee is the choice given by this Ordinance to the tax-payers between the Annual and the Crop Commutations. The 8th clause of the Ordinance, Sir, has had the effect of serving as a sort of bait to the tax-payer to induce him to prefer the Annual Commutation. The average annual yield is taken, and supposing it to be 1,000 bushels, and supposing the customary proportion due as tax to be one-tenth, the tax leviable on the land would amount to 100 bushels. The Ordinance directs that 10% of this be deducted, and the value of the Annual Commutation fixed at 90 bushels, so that instead of the tax-payer paying 100 bushels to the Government, this Ordinance professes to give him the advantage of paying 90 bushels only, if he makes his choice in favour of the Annual Commutation. By this clause it is thought a great many tax-payers in the country have been victimized, and in illustration of that, Sir, I would quote the observations which Mr. Fraser, the Government Agent of the Eastern Province, has made in regard to the working of this Ordinance in that Province — the Trincomalee district and the Batticaloa district. In the former, the people were prudent enough to choose the Crop Commutation, but in the latter, they did not make any choice whatever, and therefore the Commissioner appointed for that

district pronounced in favour of Annual Commutation. The consequences of this choice have been most serious to the people of the District. Mr. Fraser says: 'The land-owners have, however, themselves, in a great measure, to blame for the positions in which they stand. Averse from entering into any contract which bound them to pay a fixed tithe, they held aloof, and imagined that by doing so, their lands would be excluded from the assessment. They took no steps to choose the form of Commutation best adapted to their circumstances, and, as a rule, left the election to the Grain Commissioner. The decisions of the Grain Commissioner were scarcely even appealed against, and the method of assessment adopted, if not acquiesced in, was never seriously questioned. The result is that we find a condition of things very much the reverse of what is reported from the Trincomalee district and the rate and method of assessment adopted formed a general subject of complaint.'

"This is one of the points which should be considered by the Select Committee in case Your Excellency agreed to appoint one.

"Then, Sir, with regard to the assessment of the Commutation. This is provided by the 8th and 9th clauses of the Ordinance, and, any appeal against the decision of the Commissioner goes to the Governor in Executive Council. But considering the habits and ways of the paddy-field-owning class, it is a question to be seriously considered whether the Commissioners, who have been appointed to make this assessment, have been carrying out the true spirit of the Ordinance, or acting up to the recommendations of the Grain Tax Commissioners appointed by Sir William Gregory. Those Commissioners said:

'Commutation should be made on a careful field-to-field assessment and should be based on the average annual crop which the land is capable

of yielding, regard being had to its soil, water-supply, facilities for obtaining manure, its liability to any special damage, and all circumstances which affect its cultivation beneficially or otherwise. We recommend that the Commutation should in the first instance be made at the most liberal rate compatible with the maintenance of the revenue.'

"Now, instead of exercising the utmost liberality in making this assessment, it is undoubtedly true that, in some districts at least, the Commissioners have made a grinding assessment. I would refer to the diary of Mr. Fisher in the Administration Report of 1886. He says:

> '*November 12th:* Drove out in the morning to Pattirippu, eighteen miles, to commence the sale of lands seized for the non-payment of Commutation in the Eruvil and Poraitivu divisions. The people were very lucid in their complaints of the present high rate of assessment, but I persuaded most of the landowners to pay the amount due, and gave the defaulters time to the 27th to pay at the Kachcheri. The Vanniya Headman informed me that most of the crop commutation lands were lying waste, the owners intending to escape the payment of tax by not cultivating.
>
> '*November 13th*: To Kalmunai, six miles. Examined list of lands seized in Karaivaku, north and south, and persuaded most of the landowners to pay the assessment. Some cases were brought to my notice where lands had been seized at Rs. 3 an acre. I explained that I was unable to interfere, as the time for appeal had elapsed, and that the assessment must be paid. Some cases of great hardship I reserved for consideration, pending the instruction of Government. These were instances in which several divided shares had been assessed as one parcel, and, because one shareholder had paid the tax on the uncultivated allotments, I did not sell a single land, the people seeming disposed to take advice and to pay the amounts due.
>
> '*November 15th*: Examined the list of lands seized in the Sammanturai and Nadukadu divisions, and inquired into petitions connected with the seizure. The whole of the Nadukadu lands had been seized, and the owners represented that their

tax had been doubled by the Grain Commissioner, and they had been ordered to pay annual commutation, while cultivation was attended with the greatest uncertainty, and they could never depend upon cultivation in two consecutive years.

'I explained to the landowners that I was unable to grant them any relief, and that they had better petition the Governor, supporting their statements by statistics. The lands in Nadukadu are undoubtedly rich but they suffer from floods and from the inroads of wild beasts and the difficulties connected with the removal and transport of produce is also very great. The majority of the landowners in Sammanturai agreed to pay up and I have directed the defaulters to appear at the Kachcheri on the 29th.

'The Karaivaku Vanniya sends me a list of the lands seized and advertised for sale in the Eruvil, Poraitivu, and Karaivaku pattus:-

Eruvil, 62 lands	acres	...	245
Poraitivu, 94 lands	,,	...	1,523
Karaivaku, 527 lands	,,	...	3,261

'*November 16th*: To Arasadi, six miles. I examined the list of lands seized in the Nintavur division, seventy-four lands, 801 acres in extent, had been seized. I explained the provisions of the Ordinance to the people, and advised them to pay the amounts due, which they consented to do.

'*November 17th:* To Akkaraipattu, and back to Arasadi, twenty miles. The number of lands seized in the Akkaraipattu division is very large, and the people showed great dissatisfaction, and complained bitterly of the manner in which their land-tax had been raised. They say they plunged headlong into debt in the famine period (1878), and that they have not yet been able to clear themselves, and that they are quite unable to meet their liabilities without further involving themselves. I explained the provisions of the Ordinance to them, and told them that they must pay the tax due, or run the risk of losing their lands. I gave them time till December 1st to pay and refrained from selling any of the lands advertised. The Vanniya gave me this statement of lands seized in his division:- Nintavur 74 lands 801 acres; Akkaraipattu 4,123 acres. Total 4,924 acres.'

"Let these extracts speak for themselves. What fearful misery! The mode of assessment

adopted by the Commissioners in districts where complaints are rife should engage the attention of the Select Committee with a view to enabling the Council to offer such relief to the unfortunate tax-payers as their case demands.

"Then, Sir, let me refer to the sale of lands for arrears of taxation. It is not merely in the Eastern Province that complaints have been made upon this point. Such complaints are almost universal. To begin with the Western Province, the Government Agent admits that there is hardship in the imposition of this tax on half-duty fields and *tallumaru* fields, and he reports that since the Ordinance came into operation in his Province, 4,000 acres of paddy land had been seized and sold for Rs. 12,000: that is to say, an acre of paddy land selling at the rate of Rs. 3.

"The Assistant Agent at Ratnapura has also very serious objections to the working of this Ordinance. He says:

'I still adhere to my opinion that Sabaragamuwa is not a district in which the system of compulsory commutation should have been introduced ..... Introduced as it was exactly at the time when coffee failed and all the native gardens ceased to yield, the effect on the district has been most disastrous.'

"The Committee might report whether it is right in all districts that compulsory commutation should be introduced, or whether in certain districts the requirement of the population should be taken into consideration, and a Crop Commutation only enforced. Of course, the Commissioners are vested with the power to introduce either the one or the other, but most generally it has been found that they have gone in for Annual Commutation. Then, Sir, the Government Agent for the Southern Province is equally clear as to the lands seized and sold under this Ordinance. He says that in four years, 2,300 acres have been sold.

In the Central Province the Assistant Agent at Nuwara Eliya is very strongly opposed to the policy of selling lands for arrears of commutation. I do not think the Ordinance itself has been introduced in Nuwara Eliya, but Mr. LeMesurier speaks against the policy. I am just reminded by my honourable friend, the Sinhalese member, that the Ordinance was introduced into Nuwara Eliya last year. I should like, Sir, to quote Mr. LeMesurier's observation. He says:

'I find that out of a total of 18,848 fields in the district, 2,889 have been sold for default, that is to say, over 18 percent. of the fields have forcibly changed hands in four years ..... In 1881 the population of the villages, in which sales have been held was 34,216: it is now as near as can be ascertained, 30,693—a decrease of ten percent.'

"I submit, Sir, that if there is to be so much depletion in population owing to the working of this Ordinance, it is high time for this Council to inquire into the subject. In the North-Western Province, Mr. Templer reports that 'the Grain Tax Ordinance is happily not in force.' It thus becomes our duty, to examine into the question whether lands ought to be sold in the way they have been for arrears of taxation, or whether it would not be more desirable to levy upon the produce only, or some other kind of property.

"There are many other points which I should like to press upon the Council, for instance, the rate or value per bushel of paddy. Under the Ordinance, it is provided 'that the average price of paddy per bushel prevailing in the district in which the land is situated during the 14 years preceding the inquiry shall, as far as the same is ascertainable, be deemed to be the value of paddy per bushel.' I am inclined on the contrary to agree with the Assistant Agent of Nuwara Eliya that the rate per bushel ought to be the price prevailing at the threshing floor of the paddyfield itself.

"There is also another suggestion, which I think is very good, viz. that in case of real property it would be desirable not to collect the tax in money, but as of old in kind. I might also remark Sir, that it would be for the Committee to consider whether the responsibility of paying the tax should be cast altogether upon the landlords who do not live on the land, but rather upon the cultivator who has leased the land from the landlord. Now, whatever may be the case, Sir, in other Provinces, it is, I think, undoubted that in the Southern Province at least the whole expanse of the country is more or less in the hands of cultivators and not landlords who are absentees. The consequence is that the payment of this tax being insisted upon from the landlords, it has often happened that the cultivator has allowed the land to be seized and sold, though able to pay the arrears of taxation.

"Then I would suggest the consideration of another point, and that is that, when there are several shareholders of a piece of land, if one of the shareholders pay the tax, there is no provision in the Ordinance enabling the paying shareholder to recover from the defaulting shareholders the shares of the taxes due by them.

"It is needless to detain the Council any longer. I think the points I have put forward are sufficient to engage the attention of a Select Committee. A *prima facie* case has been made out by the tax payers of the country against the Ordinance as it is found to work at present. I do not condemn the Ordinance in toto. On the contrary, I think various benefits have been realized by the Ordinance. I am only directing the attention of the Council to the fact that there are some evils of great magnitude which require amendment, and if your Excellency will grant us the Committee, I have no doubt that they will be able to report upon the matter in a satisfactory

manner, and afford an opportunity to the Council to give the necessary relief to these unfortunate men."

The motion was seconded by the honourable A. de A. Seneviratne and the Governor agreed to sanction the appointment of a Select Committee. Thereupon, Ramanathan moved that the Committee consist of the Honourable the Treasurer, the Government Agent, W. P., the Government Agent, C. P., Mr. Seneviratne and himself. This was agreed to.

Ramanathan brought to bear on the findings of the Select Committee the vast resources of statistical detail he had garnered with untiring energy and zeal and demonstrated to its Members beyond all doubts that the tax was iniquitous and oppressive. An exhaustive report on the subject dated 31st March, 1890 was laid on the table of the Legislative Council by order of Governor Havelock. To prove to the Government that the revenue that accrued from the tax was not commensurate with the volume of misery and hardship it inflicted, Ramanathan moved for a return of the annual average revenue derived from this source in the Northern Province and the Colonial Secretary replied it was 94,913 bushels which at Rs. 1.35 per bushel represented Rs. 128,132.

Ramanathan had now made out an unanswerable case for the repeal of the tax. The strength and vigour of his arguments were overwhelming and the Governor who, from the outset, was so firm and unrelenting, so far succumbed to them that he said in a despatch to the Secretary of State for Colonies, "I have come to the conclusion that the Paddy Tax is an obnoxious tax and that it should be abrogated." The Secretary of State directed the Ceylon Government to take measures to abolish the tax.

Accordingly, by order of His Excellency, the Auditor-General introduced an Ordinance for the

repeal of the grain taxes. The Ordinance No. 4 of 1892 abolishing the tax was passed on 1st June, 1892 and came into operation on 11th December, of the same year.

This was a tremendous relief to the agricultural population. It was as if a deadweight had been lifted from off their backs. They could now enjoy to the full the fruits of their labour and were moreover freed from the burden of having to pay the tax even when the crops failed for reasons outside their control. Agriculture received a fresh impetus and became more remunerative, when relieved of the incubus of a dreadful governmental levy. By this act of his life, Ramanathan earned the undying gratitude and adoration of succeeding generations of his people whose mainstay was agriculture.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAKING OF A BUDGET

> Nations seldom realize till too late how prominent a place a sound system of finance holds among the vital elements of national stability and well-being; how few political changes are worth purchasing by its sacrifice; how widely and seriously human happiness is affected by the downfall or the perturbation of national credit, or by excessive, injudicious and unjust taxation.
>
> — *Lecky*

IT is little known that Ramanathan was, among other things, a great political economist and financier. The part he played in restoring national credit after its breakdown through injudicious and extravagant spending and in maintaining the financial stability and economic well-being of the country by a long course of retrenchment in every thing except productive expenditure constitutes one of the glorious chapters in the story of his long and illustrious leadership. In his anxious dissection and microscopic scrutiny of every item of national expenditure, in his invincible aversion to waste or profusion, in his realistic and down-to-earth assessment of national income, he was acknowledged to be unequalled. It was during budget debates that his genius for handling national finance, his complete mastery of the multitudinous details of national income and expenditure, his exceptional powers of eloquence and resourcefulness of argument were seen at their best. In days when the budget evoked little interest or enthusiasm either among our legislators or the generality of the nation, and was passed with little ado, he raised finance to

the high place it should occupy in any sound, well-governing community and made the budget a grand occasion. This devotion to national finance originated not merely from his inborn love of thrift and habits of business, but more from a sincere and passionate desire to mitigate the hard lot of the toiling masses, from an ardent concern in improving human well-being and raising the moral ideals of his people. It was the intensity and depth of his social passion that impelled him to master the complexities and intricacies of national finance. His ideal was the emancipation of society from the fiscal burdens that held them in subjection and to open the path to a fuller life and greater social felicity, to enlarge the facilities of life and diffuse them over a wider area. A sort of religious quality permeated and informed his handling of national finance.

The white bureaucracy in the nineteenth century believed and acted upon the belief that colonial finance was the Englishman's preserve. Budgets were prepared by them to suit Imperial ends and serve European interests, and were passed by them with the aid of the Official majority. Any attempt on the part of the people's representatives to criticize the budget unduly or to point out its blemishes or shortcomings was construed as unwarranted intrusion. It was often customary with the Unofficials to take the budget on trust and make little ado about it.

But it was never Ramanathan's way to take anything on trust or authority but to subject everything to a ruthless and searching scrutiny himself. Nor was he the man to be overawed or subdued by Official frowns. He would stand his ground against the most formidable adversary and fight every issue to the last man and the last ditch. Times without number, he was at loggerheads with the White bureaucracy and waged bitter conflict over questions of national finance.

On 8th December, 1887, in the supply Bill, the Government proposed a vote of Rs. 300,000 which was the interest and sinking fund to be paid to the Crown Agents on a loan of Rs. 6,000,000 which they proposed to raise for the Railway extension to Haputale. Ramanathan opposed the vote on the ground that the financial condition of the Island was too depressed and the needs of the Colony is other directions too urgent to admit of the expenditure of vast sums of borrowed money on a project which showed little promise of being self-supporting or whose utility to the nation was not quite commensurate with the vast sums of money expended, or which could be taken in hand more conveniently when better times set in. But the Government was obdurate. Ramanathan's stalwart marshalling of facts and figures with which he overwhelmed the Colonial Secretary and smashed his airy castles created at that time and will continue to create in the minds of every reader of his speeches the greatest admiration for his complete mastery of detail, his soundness of reason and argument, lucidity of statement, for sustained fire and persuasive force, for fearless independence, and unrivalled powers of debate. "The flashes of oratory," said an eye-witness, "which sparkled throughout his address were worthy of a Pitt or a Gladstone." I have quoted only the concluding part of the speech, but it gives us an idea of what his early budget speeches were like.

In the course of his speech, Ramanathan said, "The question raised by the Secretary of State is: 'Can the general revenue of the Island bear these charges?' Your Excellency says: 'Yes, the revenue is in a flourishing state, it can meet these charges.' This issue happily throws out of consideration the vexed questions of, 'Will the line to Haputale pay?' 'Ought the line to be to Haputale or Badulla?' 'Is it to be on the broad gauge or the narrow gauge system?' and so on.

My remarks today will be confined to the one issue raised by the Supply Bill for 1888, namely, 'Will the revenue for 1888 bear, in addition to its other burdens, this burden of Rs. 300,000?' This is altogether a revenue question which is quite germane to the Supply Bill. I shall not waste the time of the Council on any other question." He examined minutely the estimates of revenue for 1888, item by item, showed clearly how the Colonial Secretary had over-drawn them and proceeded. "I do not think I ought to trouble the Council with criticisms on other heads of revenue. I shall, to save time, admit these estimates. But I think I have shown that in the Customs, there is an over-estimate of Rs. 140,000, in pearl fishery, an over-estimate of Rs. 250,000; and in licences, an over-estimate of Rs. 120,000, all aggregating to Rs. 510,000. The total estimate of revenue for 1888 would thus be reduced from Rs. 13,764,000 to Rs. 13,254,000. Passing now to the expenditure side, we see it set down in the Supply Bill, as revised by the Committee, at Rs. 13,637,000, which would be an excess of expenditure over revenue of Rs. 393,000. Even if the Government hauled in all the money they expect from the pearl fishery, there would be a large deficit. In this state of things, are we justified in charging the revenue with the interest required for the railway loan? In my humble opinion, we cannot afford to do so, and the question raised by the Secretary of State must be answered decidedly in the negative. Sir, we want every cent of the revenue of next year. I shall say the same thing of 1889. I do not want to look further ahead. What is the condition of our roads? Take the road leading from the Uva Province into the Eastern Province. It is admitted by the Government that it is in a most deplorable condition. Take the road from Balangoda to Ratnapura, that is, too, in a disgraceful state.

H. E. The Governor: "No!"

Mr. Ramanathan: "Well, I have good authority for saying so.

"Take the old Colombo — Kandy road, which everyone of my friends who have to travel on it, says is in a very bad state. Rumour has it that high officials have also reported to the Government on the condition of this road. I should very much like to see the reports, if any, on the subject. Then, there is the Colombo—Bope road. It was a sight worth seeing, to see the Director of Public Works attempting to jog along the road in a hackery. I believe two or three miles of it jolted him about so much that he returned home, sick and aching all over. (*Laughter*) I wonder what would have happened to him had he tried a few more miles of that road. He would perhaps not have returned to tell his own tale. (*Laughter*) Why are these roads left in this state? Is it not for want of revenue? I do not expect the Government to give us new roads, but I do expect them to husband the revenue in such a way as to keep in efficient repair the roads which more prosperous days have given us. And I say that our roads generally are not kept in the state of order which the needs of traffic and communication demand. But this is not all. Our broken bridges claim our immediate attention. Take the Ponnalai Causeway in the Jaffna Peninsula. It was broken in several places by the cyclone which passed over that part of the Island in 1884, I believe. We were able to do nothing for it in 1885, or 1886 or 1887. And nothing would have been done, I think, even this year but for me."

H. E. The Governor: "Oh! Oh!"

Mr. Ramanathan: "I do not understand these protestations. Your Excellency, in your message, gave the preference, as between Toppu bridge and the Ponnalai causeway, to the former, and it was on my interference that the sub-committee agreed to recommend the repair of the Ponnalai Causeway.

"Your Excellency will, therefore, see what I meant by saying that but for me, perhaps, the causeway would have been forgotten and preference given to Toppu Bridge. If you have anything to say to the contrary, I shall stand corrected. To continue, when was the Toppu Bridge broken? Nearly two years ago. It is on the highway from Negombo to Chilaw, and had you the revenue, would you have failed to repair it so long? The most necessary of public works have thus been neglected and allowed to continue in ruins for want of revenue.

"But there is something even more important than the means of communication and carriage of traffic. I mean security of life and property in towns. Everyone knows how rampant crime has been during the last few years, and it is notorious that the police is far too under-manned. I believe the Inspector-General of Police has repeatedly complained that the constables are utterly unable to do sixteen or eighteen hours of watching every day, and that for want of an increase of constables he has found himself helpless in the prevention and detection of crime. Fancy a straggling town like Colombo with 120,000 inhabitants attempted to be secured against thieves and other malefactors by the few constables now told off to duty! This is an acknowledged want of great importance. Security of property in towns cannot any longer be postponed. It ought to have been attended to many years ago, but our revenue did not permit it. This is a fact beyond dispute. Can we postpone the augmentation of the Police any longer? No, not at all.

"Then consider our prison establishments. Are our malefactors deterred from crime by the discipline or internal arrangements in the prisons? Prisons can never be effective for the end they exist unless

the prisoners are withdrawn from outdoor work and put on indoor work. The prisoners, besides being well-fed, find it a jolly thing to be led in batches all about the town, and to have opportunities of exchanging glances, if not words, with their friends and relations, aye, of being provided, unknown to guards, with luxuries in the shape of tobacco, betel etc. If our revenue permitted it, would the Government employ prisoners on public works outside the jails?

"I need not refer to other cases of the essentials of good government being neglected or postponed for want of revenue. And yet what are we going to do today? With a deficit staring us in the face, we want the Secretary of State to believe that we may easily spare Rs. 90,000 for railway interest. I cannot be a party to this way of thinking. If there are such difficulties in the way of our voting Rs. 90,000 for 1887, I do not know how we shall be able to vote Rs. 280,000 for 1889. Does my honourable friend expect a pearl fishery in 1889 and in 1890 also! But I ought not to detain the Council longer. Such are some of the reasons for refusing to go with the Government on this question. I say that the circumstances of the Colony do not admit of this vote for 1888. I also say that it is not proper to vote any moneys towards a measure the Secretary of State declines to sanction. I sincerely hope the Government would see its way not to force this vote through the Council."

The Honourable the Acting Colonial Secretary (Mr. O'Brien) replied that it would be very difficult for him (Ramanathan) to make a speech better calculated to prejudice the credit of the Colony, and to injure that section of the community whose interests he may be supposed to have more particularly at heart. His motive was not far to seek. His mental vision was obscured by some preconceived idea. He opposed the extension to

Haputale. It was an object of paramount importance with him to delay, if not to prevent this extension.

Obviously, the Colonial Secretary was not playing the game nor had he met any of the points raised by Ramanathan. He was attributing motives and side-tracking the issue, where he should have countered his assailant's arguments with arguments. Ramanathan was stung by this unseemly imputation on the part of the Colonial Secretary. He said, "I call my honourable friend to order, Sir. He has no right in this Council to impute improper motives to honourable members. He knows there is a rule to that effect; Rule 33 provides 'all imputations of improper motives shall be considered as being highly disorderly, and such conduct shall be minuted in the journals, if it shall appear to a majority of the Council to be necessary.'"

H. E. the Governor intervened, "I am not aware that the Honourable the Colonial Secretary has attributed any improper motives to my honourable friend, and I shall extend to him the same latitude that I extended to my honourable friend, when at a recent meeting he imputed improper motives to the merchants of Colombo."

Ramanathan protested, "Merchants of Colombo are not members of Council! He charges me with improper motives."

H. E. the Governor added, "I cannot suppose my honourable friend the Colonial Secretary will make any other than a perfectly proper and legitimate speech, or impute to the honourable member any but proper motives."

The Acting Colonial Secretary explained that he did not charge the honourable member with any improper motive or with any motive other than wishing to oppose this vote, and continued his speech on the merits of the question. When

he had finished his speech, Ramanathan rose to reply. It was more than a reply; it was a diatribe. He said, "The Colonial Secretary spoke of my mental vision being obscured. I leave the public to decide between him and me as to whose vision is obscured. What shall I say of the obscurity of his mental vision when he confounded the only issue which I raised with other issues which I did not raise, and which had no bearing whatever upon the point before the Council? I spoke of the condition of the revenue for the year 1888, and of its inability to bear the charge of Rs. 90,000 proposed to be voted on account of interest for the Haputale Railway Extension. But nineteen-twentieths of the speech he delivered referred to the policy of progress, to the success of the planting enterprise, and other irrelevant matters. Under these circumstances am I not justified in asking whether it was his vision or mine that was obscured? His conduct today, Sir, reminds me of a trick common among pettifogging lawyers. Seeing that the position I had taken up was impregnable, he had resorted to abuse. He has also made monstrous charges against me, such as that I accused the Government of systematically neglecting native interests, and that our railway policy has been a complete failure, charges which were never before brought against me. With the accession of my honourable friend to this Board, the tone of our debates has changed, but I hope that no other member will copy him in this respect, and pursue his policy of abusing and misrepresenting one's opponents. In this obscurity of his vision, he has wandered off and taken the trouble to disprove a fancied connection between arrack rents and stamp duties, and to show that, notwithstanding the stamp duties, the arrack rents have gone higher and higher up.

"In his confusion, too, he spoke of 15,000 acres of land having been opened in the Puttalam

District as a sure indication of prosperity at the present day. Does my honourable friend mean to say that the money with which those 15,000 acres was bought represents profits made this year or last year or the year before last? The truth is all the other way. It was money which had been made long ago, I think. After the failure of the Oriental Bank and the fall in the value of house property, moneys were withdrawn from Banks and from investments on mortgage of household property, and capitalists were obliged to lay out the moneys so withdrawn on the purchase of lands for the purpose of cultivation. In other words, the price of the 15,000 acres was transferred from one investment to another—in short, from one pocket to another pocket. This simple transfer of money from one pocket to another is spoken of by my honourable friend as a sure indication of returning prosperity.

"As regards his irrelevant platitudes relating to the policy of progress, it would, I think, comfort him to hear that I fully believe in the benefits of railway extension. Does he take us for babies that he should prove to us its benefits? For the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon to give the Legislative Council a dissertation upon the benefits of railway extension is really too amusing. It would also comfort him, I think, to hear that I quite agree with him as regards the good which the planters have done to the Island. The honourable member on my left (the Hon'ble R. B. Downall) will bear witness to the numerous times I have helped in the measures which he brought before Council, and how often, how gratefully, and how feelingly I have acknowledged the benefits which the planters have conferred upon Ceylon.

"My honourable friend the Colonial Secretary might have given some credit to the merchants who, in my opinion, have done so much, at least, for the Island, but in his desire to curry favour with the

planters, he has left the merchants altogether in the cold.....

"Does my honourable friend suppose that I expect the Government to take one view in respect to the Jaffna line, and another view in respect to the Haputale railway? I would not care a brass button for the Jaffna railway, if the Colony were not able to pay out of its general revenue the interest on the loan that we might raise for it. Could I come to the Government and say, 'As a matter of favour to us, Tamils, contribute to the Jaffna railway interest something out of the general revenue'? My honourable friend thought he could crush me with that argument. No, I am not so enamoured of the Jaffna railway as to have it made at the cost of the Island's ruin. It is true I represent the Tamils here, but it cannot be said that during any part of my legislative career I have looked to the Tamil interest only, to the detriment of other interests.....

"How much more pleasant it would be to me, Sir, to bask in the sunshine of Your Excellency's smiles, how much nicer to be courted by Officials, as a man who says pleasant things to their ears? What do I gain for myself by this opposition, by choosing to express an independent opinion, very unpalatable to Government? Do they treat me with respect for doing what I believe to be my duty? Do they treat me with even courtesy? No, no. They even challenge my motives. It does not matter to me, Sir. I do not want the favours of the Government. It is enough that I am able to say to myself, 'I have done what I feel to be right.' That will be my comfort.

"I tried to prove that in respect of the customs, pearl fishery and licences, his estimate was overdrawn by about Rs. 520,000. Then I asked if the revenue is to come down to Rs. 13,254,000 and the expenditure to amount to Rs. 13,637,000, would not there be a deficit? How are we going to

make both ends meet? While there was a deficit glaring you in the face, would you, I said, commit the country to a charge of Rs. 90,000? Has my honourable friend answered that question? Instead of answering it, he has like a whipped child (*laughter*) been running all over the place, and then at last turned round and abused me! (*laughter*). I say, Sir, he has not met my argument upon the only issue I raised, i. e. upon the state of our revenue for the year 1888. Sir, supposing I allow this vote to pass today, and supposing as I fully believe, that the revenue is really unable to meet this charge, what will happen? My honourable friend there (the Colonial Secretary) would say: 'Tax, tax the people.' Since Your Excellency's arrival, how much taxation has been put upon our shoulders? I make out that a sum of Rs. 600,000 has been levied by taxation. There can be no question about it, for in Your Excellency's message of 1884, it was said: 'His Excellency anticipates from the changes contemplated in the Customs duties, an increase of about Rs. 200,000 on the Customs duties over that of the present year.'

"On stamps an increase of about Rs. 150,000 is expected if the new scale of duties is adopted. ..... An increase of the postal rates will, it is anticipated, yield another Rs. 60,000, making in 1884 alone a total of Rs. 400,000. I need not touch upon other heads. Well, Sir, if next year's revenue falls short of my honourable friend's expectations, he would be forced to say to you, Sir, 'Tax, tax again,' though since 1884, we have been already taxed to the extent of Rs. 600,000. I feel that there is a great likelihood of fresh taxation being imposed on us, if in the present state of our revenue, the charge of Rs. 90,000 were made for 1888, and Rs. 280,000 for each of the two or three following years. This is the reason for my attitude today, and this is the motive for my opposition, not those discreditable, ugly motives

(laughter) which my honourable friend insinuated. I like to fight a battle openly and honourably, not in the nasty, sloping way he would have me fight it."

At the conclusion of Ramanathan's reply, the Governor went up to the rescue of the Colonial Secretary and addressed the Council at some length. Without meeting any of the points raised but side-tracking the whole issue, he even descended to personal ridicule, charging Ramanathan with posing before the world as the representative of the whole Unofficial community. Ramnathan replied with deadly effect. His Excellency's attack and Ramanathan's reply are given in the Chapter entitled '*Characteristics.*'

J. R. Weinman referring to this and many other exchanges between the Colonial Secretary and Ramanathan, says in his *Memoirs*, "G. T. M. O'Brien, the greatest Colonial Secretary we had, tried to squash him (Ramanathan), but in vain." In this connection it is well to remember that it was from this self-same Colonial Secretary that Ramanathan earned the title of "Rupert of Debate."

CHAPTER XXII

DEVELOPMENT OF IRRIGATION IN CEYLON

Ye shall eat of the fat of the land.

— The Old Testament

Every rood of ground maintained its man.

— Oliver Goldsmith

THE achievement of self-sufficiency in food, the expansion of agriculture by harnessing all the physical and material resources ready to hand, the settling of the landless on the land, and the saving of the landed interest which under foreign rule suffered undue neglect and groaned under heavy fiscal burdens were some of the questions with which from his early legislative career Ramanathan was intensely and ceaselesely occupied. To achieve these ends, he sought to liberate the farmer from the many shackles that held him in subjection, viz. the Grain Tax, a veritable nightmare, unrestrained competition from cheap imported food, the vagaries of the seasons and above all, the apathy and indifference of an alien bureaucracy to the hapless plight of the indigenous agriculturist and to offer him all the aids and incentives necessary to render farming productive and remunerative.

His was the gospel of "Back to the Land." No man knew more than he the untold possibilities latent in our soil or looked up more to the land to redeem us from the many economic and social ills which afflicted us. Amidst the many and diversified interests of a very versatile career, he yet found time for the pursuit of agriculture on

the grand scale. Even as a youth in his early thirties, he took to coconut-planting and brought vast acres under coconut. As a contemporary remarked jestingly, he "combined the culture of the soul with the culture of coconut." In decrepit old age, he embarked upon an ambitious programme of paddy-cultivation and built up a model-farm of a thousand acres at Kilinochchi. In doing this, he was impelled not by any inordinate love of wealth—he never succumbed to the lure of wealth —or pride of possession but by a supreme endeavour to open the eyes of a benighted, indolent and unheeding generation to the immense possibilities hidden in our soil. He knew that the cure for our poverty, unemployment and consequent social degradation is to be sought not in the hectic pursuit of the white-collar job which he knew was fast gripping the nation's youth, nor in industry nor in trade or commerce but in the land which from time immemorial had been our main prop and stay, but which through centuries of neglect lay embedded in the jungle. It was in the wake of his pioneering energy and example and the sustained pressure he exerted on them that both the Government and the people woke up from their age-old lethargy and stupor to a realization of their great heritage of wealth hidden in their soil, that the cultivation of food-crops received a new impetus and a new dignity and was freed from fiscal burdens which continued to oppress it, that vast and extensive tracts of jungle-land were cleared and transformed into rich and smiling plains, that state-sponsored agricultural colonies sprang into existence in various parts of the country, that the Government reoriented its agricultural policy and launched upon a programme of agricultural expansion and that a host of new towns and cities grew up in places which had for centuries been the homes of predatory beasts. Kilinochchi and Paranthan in the North, like many other towns in other parts of the

country, owe their rise to wealth and pre-eminence to his priceless and inspiring example.

An alien *raj* which was averse to investing money on long-term projects and looked for immediate economic returns, which believed in importing cheap food from foreign lands, oblivious of its adverse effects on the home-producer, and was focusing its energies and resources on the expansion of export crops and seeking to pamper the foreign investor was prone to ignore the claim of the indigenous agriculturist.

Ramanathan was in a very real sense the pioneer in the revival and rehabilitation of our agriculture. He taught us that our future lies in the land which is our most precious heritage, that human freedom and civilization and all human values have their roots in the soil, that a people who shun the soil and cling to the phantom of the white-collar job will before long be uprooted and enslaved.

He knew the prime need of the agriculturist, the producer of foodcrops, is water and addressed himself to the problem of conserving the Island's immense resources of water which had hitherto found its way to the sea and making it available to him in abundant supply at all seasons of the year. Under native kings the many thousands of tanks and channels scattered all over the country were a great national asset and were kept in good repair. The farmer could draw freely on their supplies when the occasion demanded. But with the advent of foreign rule, these tanks fell into disuse and disrepair and all the surrounding lands which in earlier times were fed by these tanks and channels were gradually submerged in jungle. While agriculture flourished, there was peace and plenty in the land but now the agriculturist was reduced to penury and destitution. His plight was hard to contemplate. With vision and foresight, Ramanathan discerned the causes of the progressive

decline of agriculture, the impoverishment and degradation of the agriculturist and peasant-farmer and saw the remedy in the repeal of the Corn Laws and the abolition of all taxes on home-grown food-crops, in the renovation and modernization of our irrigation system, and the rehabilitation of the farming interest.

Having diagnosed the disease, he would not rest content until he had discovered the cure. He now impressed upon the Governor, Lord Gorden, a generous and high-minded ruler, the extreme necessity of having to tackle this paramount national problem with the least possible delay. In consequence, a Bill entitled "An Ordinance relating to Irrigation Works" embodying the proposals sanctioned by His Excellency was presented in the legislature by the honourable Mr. Samuel Grenier (Attorney-General). The main features of the Bill were that it provided for a special irrigation fund by means of an annual appropriation of a part of the grain taxes levied in Ceylon towards the cost of the irrigation works and created Central and Provincial Irrigation Boards with the object of securing a more judicious and equitable distribution of available funds than was possible under existing arrangements.

Ramanathan seconded the Bill in one of his brilliant and authoritative speeches. It is too long to bear reproduction here and the reader is referred to the Hansards for 1886 and 1888. Suffice it to say that it is one of the most masterly, most learned and authoritative speeches ever heard in our legislature. A panoramic view of the history of irrigation from the times of Sinhalese and Tamil Kings down to his own day is unfolded to our gaze. He proceeds to expatiate at some length and with a wealth of quotations from varied sources on the tremendous benefits that would accrue to the nation from a restoration and modernization of the many thousands of these ancient tanks and

water-works. He dwells at length on the enormous importance attached to irrigation by ancient kings, its neglect under foreign rule, the policy pursued by successive British Governors and Secretaries of State and concludes:

"It has fallen to you, Sir, to crown the work of your great predecessors Sir Henry Ward, Sir Hercules Robinson, and Sir William Gregory, with a measure which has in view the steady maintenance and restoration of tanks and *elas*. You have in this Bill given effect to the policy chalked out by the committee of high officials in England in 1841, to the policy emphasized by Lord Grey in 1849 and accepted by Sir Henry Ward in 1855, to the policy prayed for by the petitioners whose case was represented in Council by the late Sir Coomara Swamy in 1866. No longer shall the fertility of rice fields in the tank districts diminish. No longer shall the complaint of the historian of the *Rajavali* apply to the British Govermment. You, Sir, have earned the gratitude of Thamils and Sinhalese alike.

"That was a great triumph of yours when you procured the reduction of the military contribution. Great also was your act when you averted a general calamity by guaranteeing the notes of the Oriental Bank. To-day you have achieved a third triumph. It is open to you, Sir, to earn another great triumph by carrying the railway to the North, right through the irrigation districts and making them a complete financial success. You have heard the opinion of my honourable friend, the European Planting member, as regards the comparative merits of the railway northwards and southwards. He has expressed his preference, on grounds of remunerative character, in favour of the northern extension. As a gentleman who has long resided in the country, who has critically studied its wants and who has a large experience of railways and railway extensions, his opinion is

entitled to the highest weight; and it remains for you to act up to that opinion and the opinions of the leading men whose case I pressed in Council the other day, and to sanction the railway to the North.

"I would now beg to refer to some matters of detail in the Bill before us. It provides that the cost of the construction, repair and improvement of the irrigation works when undertaken under sections 9, 10 or 14, the lands benefited by such works and the proprietors whereof shall become and be severally bound to repay the cost of such work. This would include a class of irrigation works, the cost of which it has never yet been our policy to recoup. Sir William Gregory in his last address to the Council in 1877 said:

'We have now three systems at work in respect to irrigation in Ceylon; (1) where construction is executed by Government and the cost repaid by ten instalments, it being intended by the Government in 1867 to assess the land-owners for maintenance and repair at the end of ten years, though such intention is not embodied in the Ordinance; (2) where construction is executed by the Government and the cost of such construction and of maintenance and repairs is defrayed by a water-rate of one rupee per acre in perpetuity; (3) where the villages do all the work of repairing and maintaining their bunds, the Government supervising the work and gratuitously supplying the masonry and iron sluice-gates.' Honourable members will now see that the expenses incurred by the Government in the last class of irrigation works were never intended to be repaid by the land-owners. When I called the attention of my honourable and learned friend the Attorney-General to this fact, he admitted the necessity of amending the Bill and has to-day got the leave of the Council to make the necessary amendments, but I doubt whether the general words he has employed

are clear enough to indicate the exemption I claim, and which was conceded by the 39th resolution of the Irrigation Committee of 1867. When the Bill is referred to a sub-committee, I have no doubt we shall be able to come to an agreement on the subject. It is also necessary to keep in view in the Bill the principle that the upkeep and repairs of works for which a water-rate is levied should be at the expense of the Government.

"There is one other matter, Sir, I would refer to, and that is the Ordinance No. 42 of 1884, which provides that, when any irrigation work has been constructed under the Ordinance No. 21 of 1867 or Ordinance No. 2 of 1873, and the cost thereof has been repaid by ten annual instalments, the lands benefited by such works shall, upon the expiration of such period of ten years, become severally liable to an annual charge or rate not exceeding 75 cents per acre for the annual upkeep and maintenance of such works. I do not know why the works constructed under the Ordinance No. 2 of 1873, are sought to be affected by the Ordinance No. 42 of 1884, seeing that the water-rate of one rupee per acre levied under the Ordinance No. 2 of 1873, as explained by Sir William, is intended to be a perpetual charge and cover not only the cost of construction, but also of maintenance and repairs. I would have called the attention of the Council to this, had I been able to be present in Council on the 19th December, 1884, when the second reading took place. I see I was not even on the sub-committee. Under any circumstance, now that we have a Bill by which a portion of the general revenue is to be set apart for the maintenance and repair of irrigation works, it is only right that the Ordinance No. 42 of 1884 should be repealed. Your Excellency has admitted that our revenue from grain tax cannot be justified unless it is devoted to the purposes for which it was originally imposed. If then a

third of this source of revenue is set apart, as it will hereafter be, for the construction, repair and maintenance of irrigation works, what necessity is there for the Ordinance No. 42 of 1884? My honourable and learned friend, the Attorney-General promised to me to-day that he would bring in at the next session an Ordinance to consolidate all the existing Irrigation Ordinances. I sincerely trust the Government will then agree to the repeal of the Ordinance of 1884, and when that is done, Sir, our irrigation policy will be complete, and all my countrymen will for ever be grateful to Your Excellency."

What exhortation! What pathetic and passionate plea! What lavish and selfless expenditure of one's precious time and energy! All this to open the eyes of and shake out of its smug complacency, a benighted and obscurantist administration, in a desperate bid to promote the nation's welfare. The Bill was passed. It proved a tremendous boon to the agriculturist who had hitherto been dependent on the vagaries of the seasons, and gave a real fillip to an occupation which from time immemorial had been the mainstay of the nation. It was borne in on the Government, owing largely to Ramanathan's efforts that the development of irrigation and the rehabilitation of the farming population were both a national priority and that no nation could neglect it except at its own peril. Henceforth, the Government regarded irrigation as a major national responsibility and expended large sums of money on it.

But the European planters who feared that big-scale expenditure on irrigation and the abolition of the Grain-Tax would inevitably lead to a curtail ment of the vote for the provision of facilities for them, were from the outset very hostile to it. They argued that paddy much cheaper than home-grown paddy could be imported and delivered at the door of the peasant and all governmental

expenditure on irrigation and agriculture was uneconomical and unremunerative.

When on 20th December, 1888, the Government set apart a sum of Rs. 41,700 in the Supply Bill for 1889 for the construction of Kitulbokka Anicut and Channel, the Honourable T. N. Christie, the Planting Representative opposed the provision and waxed eloquent on what he called the unsoundness of the Government's irrigation policy. Ramanathan was not to be bamboozled but replied in a speech too long to have even extracts reproduced here, a speech which was deadly in its effect and which pulverized the arguments of his adversary. He said in effect that it did not matter to Englishmen many of whom did not have an inch of land to call their own, who congregated in large numbers in towns and cities in search of remunerative employment and were even prepared to emigrate to distant Australia but it mattered to the Ceylonese who were true sons of their soil, to which they were bound and from which they had from remote antiquity derived their sustenance. He then proceeded to enumerate the many aids and amenities the Government had provided for the planters at the expense of the people and discoursed at length on the importance attached to irrigation and agriculture in other lands and condemned the niggardly attitude of the Government of Ceylon. The provision was passed. Thanks to his persistent efforts, the development of irrigation became one of the major concerns of the Government, and a tremendous boon to the nation.

CHAPTER XXIII

REDUCTION OF MILITARY EXPENDITURE — FREEDOM OF SPEECH FOR OFFICIAL MEMBERS

The Cause of Freedom is the cause of God.

— Edmund Burke

A loftier race
Than e'er the world hath known shall rise
With flame of freedom in their souls
And light of knowledge in their eyes.

— J. A. Symonds

CEYLON'S annual contribution to the Imperial Exchequer for the maintenance of an Imperial army in the country was proving a very considerable drain on her meagre revenues. Money which could be utilized for the development of the Island's material and economic resources and the promotion of the people's prosperity and well-being was paid into the Imperial coffers for Imperial defence on the orders of the Imperial Government. It was this question that precipitated an unprecedented but abortive political crisis in 1864 when the Unofficials led by that intrepid Englishman, George Wall, walked out of the legislature in a body, boycotted its sittings, founded the Ceylon League, comprising the ablest and most formidable leaders of the day and carried on a vigorous agitation for the abolition or reduction of this unjust and arbitrary levy and the extension of the powers of the Unofficials. Their main causes of complaint were "the whole cost of the military establishment, even that portion of it which served only Imperial interests, were borne by the Colony, on the man-

date of the Home Government and that the right of the Council to vote supplies was denied it." But the Home Government, acting on the advice of the Governor Sir Hercules Robinson, stood firm. The Secretary of State, Edward Cardwell, replied in language far from compromising or conciliatory. When the Unofficials tendered their resignations to the Queen, he said, "Her Majesty was advised to accede to their request to leave the Council." In reply to the demand for the extension of the rights of Unofficials, the Governor was equally forthright and categorical. His Excellency said, "I venture to record my conviction, the result of anxious study and observation, that the present form of government is one quite suited to your wants and that it would be unwise to introduce any innovation or to attempt any experiments, however plausible in theory or specious in appearance." No wonder that in the face of this double repulse — on both the local and Imperial fronts — the agitation for reform of the legislature petered out, the League melted away soon after, the Unofficials had to eat humble pie and resume their seats in the legislature, the Government was content to carry on as usual and all questions continued to be decided by the counting of noses.

Feeling strongly on the subject, Ramanathan moved in Council on 20th November, 1889 that a humble address be presented to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria praying for a reduction of the Island's contribution to a sum not exceeding what would be sufficient for a force necessary to maintain the internal peace of the Island.

H. E. the Governor replied that instead of an address to the Queen, it would be advisable for him to write a Despatch to the Secretary of State on the subject. Accordingly Ramanathan withdrew his motion and wrote to the Secretary of State. On being informed by the Governor in due course that the authorities of the War Office

and the Treasury did not accept the recommendations of the Secretary of State, but on the other hand, proposed to exact a larger contribution than hitherto, Ramanathan would not accept the ruling of the War Office but renewed his motion for the appointment of a Select Committee to prepare an Address to the Queen.

In moving the motion, Ramanathan said, "The subject of my motion, Sir, has always been of painful interest to this Council and to the public at large. It may be remembered that, soon after the question was raised at the Colonial Office during the time of Mr. Secretary Cardwell, all the Unofficial Members of Council resigned their seats in a body in November, 1864, rather than sanction a vote which they characterized as unjust and most inexpedient, but which, nevertheless, the Government were ordered to carry through the Legislative Council.

"This military contribution then stood, I believe, at £ 126,000. It rose, sometime afterwards, to Rs. 1,600,000; and after the disbandment of the Native Infantry it fell to 1,240,000 rupees. At the time the Retrenchment Committee was appointed — that was in 1882 — Rs. 1,240,000 was the amount paid by the Colony to the Imperial Exchequer. The time had then come for raising anew the cry for justice. We were in distressed circumstances, and we asked for a reduction of the military contribution on the score of both justice and poverty. After proving that the financial condition of the Island was in a very bad way indeed, the Retrenchment Committee contended that it was unjust and unfair that this Colony should be called upon to pay for a British soldier at the rate of £ 100 per man per year, while the other Colonies of Her Majesty were required to pay from £ 50 downwards per head. The reduction which the Retrenchment Committee aimed at was about Rs. 600,000. In view of Sir James

Longden's opinion that the force could not be safely reduced, the Retrenchment Committee contented themselves with the argument that the claim appeared to them to be an inconsistent and unequitable rate of maintenance. Subsequent events, Sir, have proved that, if we had rested our case on this argument only, we should certainly not have succeeded as we latterly did, because the War Committee appointed by the Treasury have proved, at least to the satisfaction of the Lords of the Treasury, that the 1,200 British soldiers and officers stationed in the Island cost actually no less a sum than £ 129,000. This is at the rate of £ 107 per head."

He now proceeded to quote profusely from numerous despatches on the subject to and from the Home Government and from the pronouncements of liberal British statesmen and maintained his position that no more than 400 men were required for the service of the Colony for the purpose of internal defence and that their cost would be about Rs. 516,000 and that was all that the country could afford.

He then dwelt at some length on the manifold needs of the country that demanded the expenditure of every cent of the revenue. He said, "When the justice of our case is so complete, I don't think it is necessary on my part to make good the contention that all the resources of Ceylon are necessary for purely local purposes in order that we may not stand still, but rather move onwards, although it be but slowly. But in view of some remarks I have seen made in some of these despatches, I think the military authorities in England would be inclined to give way to our representation, not so much on the ground of justice and fairness, but rather on the score of want of means. I am in a position to state that we cannot spare more than the Rs. 516,000 we have promised to pay.

"Our requirements are manifold. We have, Sir, to find improved means of communication, and save the masses from the effects of drought and disease, and supply them with wholesome food and water; we have to provide them with better protection in regard to their persons and property. Under the first head, I would name the necessity of making new roads in diverse parts of the country. We want main roads as much as roads from villages to the main roads. The Administration Reports of the several heads of departments are full, Sir, of our wants, and anybody who has given his attention to these Administration Reports will see perfectly well that the plea we are putting forward of our inability to pay more than the 515,000 rupees is really an honest and *bona fide* plea. This is what the Director of Public Works says: 'I believe roads confer more good on the people than anything else and that there is no greater boon to a country. And I think that the improvement and bridging of the main coast road in the Maritime Provinces of the Island, where no improvement has yet been done, deserve the favourable consideration of Government. Wherever this road has been converted from heavy sand into a well-formed gravelled roadway, even though the main rivers are still unbridged, cultivation of native products has extended, and the population has spread itself along the coast line. This is specially noticeable in the Eastern Province, both north and south of Puliyantivu.'

"Now, Sir, that is the opinion of the Director of Public works. Now, let me trouble the Council for one minute as to the inland roads. Mr. Wace writes from Sabaragamuwa: 'As regards improvement of the means of communication, there is truly an enormous amount of work to be done in Sabaragamuwa.'

"Then comes the cry from the Northern Province. The district is starved and shackled for

want of good cart roads to Vavuniya—Vilankulam and Mankulam. Mr. Twynam gives a series of roads, Sir, the improvement of which the Government ought to take up without delay. For the improvement of the Central road from Anuradhapura northwards, as much as Rs. 80,000 is required, and so on, a series of roads. I am not going to take honourable Members through the whole list, and I don't want to prove more than I have done that Ceylon is actually suffering from a want of good roads.

"I shall pass on, Sir, to another necessity that seems to be admitted very generally, and that is, that we should make navigable some of our rivers—the Kelani ganga, the Kalu ganga, the Kuda ganga, and everybody who has travelled along the canals from Calpentyn to Negombo will see that it requires a great deal of repairs to be done. In fact transport of produce is now an exceedingly difficult thing, and I don't think the resources of the Government Agents of the Western Province and North-Western Province are equal to undertaking these repairs without much aid being given them from general revenue.

"Then, Sir, I would mention, under the same head of means of communication, that we want Railway Extension. I don't speak of large railway extensions like the railway to Jaffna, but I speak of smaller works such as a railway to Galle, Matara and Hambantota, a light railway to Negombo, and a light railway from Veyangoda to Ratnapura *via* Ruanwella; and then we want telegraphic extension to Kegalla, to Hambantota, and from Ratnapura *via* Rakwana to Galle. Then I may also mention the absolute necessity for a new Post Office and a Central Railway Station at Colombo.

"But, Sir, let me pass on to the next head, that is to say, that we ought to give the masses better supplies of food and look after them more

directly than we now do in regard to sanitation etc. Of course, Sir, I put first and foremost irrigation works and then hospitals and dispensaries, and water supplies for the towns of Negombo, Hambantota, Mannar and Tangalla.

"Then, Sir, with regard to the protection of persons and property, I would refer to the increase of the Police force, and the payment of our native headmen. There are also other administrative measures requiring money. That is to say, with regard to the Registration of Titles with which we are going on in a wonderfully slow way, appointing only one Commissioner to do the work, which will probably at this rate take a hundred years. At the same time it is admitted that no better work can be undertaken by Government for the suppression of litigation than that of making titles more certain and good. It is for want of money we are unable to pay three or four Registrars and set them on this work. Then, Sir, with reference to the safety of deeds and other documents, Your Excellency knows perfectly well that the Registrar-General has complained to you on the subject, and Your Excellency has admitted the necessity of a new office for the Registrar-General. We are unable to undertake it because we have no money. I would also speak, Sir, in this connection about the state of our Royal College. That requires building anew from top to bottom. Then, Sir, we want a cadastral survey, and we want a geological survey and we want to give relief to our grain-tax payers.

"But, really, I need not multiply instances, for a man who has kept his eyes and ears open would be exceedingly sorry, if the War Office should insist upon wringing from us more than we can pay. I fully expected, Sir, to see the War Office authorities actuated by justice and generosity, but in this case, Sir, it grieves me to think that they have forgotten their traditional instincts.

We, of course, can only appeal for justice to the British Government, and I must say that, if the War Office insists on forcing this money from us, it will be undoing to a vast extent the benefits which the Government has conferred only recently in enlarging the constitution of this Council. What is the good of enlarging the constitution of this Council, while with the other hand, they exert their giant force upon us and make us do what we complain of as being a most unjust and inexpedient thing? We are not trying to avoid our just obligations. The Council will, no doubt, give its assurance that in time of war or in the event of threatened invasion, it will loyally and freely contribute towards the defence of the Colony and the maintenance of the integrity of the Empire."

He concluded, "I have therefore much pleasure in pressing upon honourable members the following motion: that the Council do present to Her Majesty the Queen a humble address praying that the annual contribution to the Imperial Exchequer for military purposes be reduced to an amount not exceeding what would be sufficient for a force necessary to maintain the internal peace of the Island."

Ramanathan's case was unanswerable. Who could resist its logic? The Governor and his Council nodded assent. A Select Committee was unanimously appointed. It drafted a memorial which was adopted by the Council at its subsequent sitting and forwarded to the Queen. It was an eloquent and moving appeal reputedly drawn by Ramanathan himself, for the removal or the reduction of this deadweight on the Island's scanty resources and the gracious Queen gave her assent. The contribution to the Imperial Exchequer was substantially reduced. It was undoubtedly a great triumph of tenacity and fearless independence and a stubborn refusal to accept defeat even from so lofty citadels as the Imperial Government and the War Office and a firm determination to carry matters

for the adjudication of the fountain-head of all authority, the Queen herself. It was a victory for the nation in that its views on the Government of the country ultimately prevailed.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

The Official Members of the Legislative Council were not granted the freedom of speech and vote. They had willy-nilly to toe the Government line. The Governor would indicate their line of action and like blind cattle, they had to follow. It was the Governor's Government. There did not exist even the vestige of freedom for anybody. The Governor was armed with absolute powers and often played the part of a tyrant riding roughshod over the views and wishes of both Officials and Unofficials alike. Weinman says, "The Governor is the Government. He is all-powerful. He wields more power than the King, more power within his small domain — it is not so small after all — than the Kaiser or the President of the United States. He not only reigns but rules. He is surrounded by all the trappings of Royalty.....He is the single and supreme authority, responsible to and representative of his Majesty."

Of the humiliation to which the Official Members of the legislature were subjected and the impotence to which they were reduced, Weinman continues, "The Ceylon Government is still carried on as before, and all questions are decided by the counting of noses. An Official may, however, vote against a Government measure, but only at the cost of the post he occupies, his pension and a possible C. M. G. ship or something better or worse. In a contest between conscience and pension, the latter has so far always come out victorious, and it is not likely that the record will be broken." To many of them who were men of character, intelligence and independence, it was a bitter and humiliating subjection. Often they had

to act against the dictates of their conscience, their reason and good sense. Motions initiated by Unofficial members, however beneficent and salutary, were often ship-wrecked, if they did not receive the Governor's blessings, on the rocks of the Official 'brutal' majority, as it was often styled. Both the Officials and the Unofficials writhed under this unhappy dispensation.

On 19th December, 1889, the Honourable T. N. Christie, the Planting Representative moved and Ramanathan seconded the following motion:

That this council do humbly petition Her Majesty the Queen:

(1) to consider the desirability of allowing freedom of speech and vote to the Official Members of the Legislative Council except when Her Majesty's Secretary of State intimates to the Council the orders of the Imperial Government and

(2) to cause a despatch clearly defining the position of the Official Members to be laid before the Council.

Ramanthan's speech on this occasion is quoted at considerable length inasmuch as it unearths a good deal of historical detail, which otherwise would be lost to posterity. He said, "The question my honourable friend, the Planting Representative has raised is a very important one, one in which all Ceylon, I may say, both European and Ceylonese, is vastly interested. At the same time it is a very difficult question, and one that cannot be satisfactorily disposed of without reference to the aims and objects which those who founded the Legislative Council had in view.

"During the administration of Sir Edward Barnes, there was a constant deficit of revenue, and two commissions of enquiry were appointed by the Secretary of State to inquire into the financial and judicial systems in vogue in the Island. Lieut.-Colonel Colebrooke was the Commissioner of

Inquiry with regard to the administrative system. He came here, made inquiries from different classes of people, and at last reported to Viscount Goderich, in 1831 I believe, his views about giving the Colony a good workable Council. He proposed that the Governor should not be the President of the Council, but some other officers—I think it was the Chief Justice and he recommended as follows:

'To secure as great a degree of efficiency as may be attainable, this body should be composed of a larger number of the principal officers of Government, civil and military, than have hitherto been appointed to the Council. The heads of general departments at the seat of Government, the Attorney-General, and the Government Agent of the Colombo district, would properly be appointed to it, provision being at once made for the admission of any respectable inhabitants, European or native, whom His Majesty may hereafter be pleased to appoint.'

"And further down, he says:

'Without involving the Governor in the discussions of the Council, or exposing its members to any influence unfavourable to the independent discharge of their legislative functions, provision may be made by these arrangements for the gradual amelioration of the Colonial institutions for that publicity in regard to the affairs of the Island which will conciliate public confidence, and for such deliberation in regulating them as will protect the people from precipitate changes of the laws affecting their rights and interests.'

"To anybody who reads Colonel Colebrooke's report, it will be apparent that he, at all events, had in view the principle that the utmost latitude of discussion should be given to every one of the members who would form the proposed board. When the report was received by the Secretary of State, it was thought that the presence of the

Governor in Council would enable him to become familiar with the thoughts and feelings of those representative men who might be called upon to take seats at the proposed board, and therefore it was resolved that no other person but the Governor should be the president of the board. At the same time, the Secretary of State thought that no Governor who cared for the good Government of the Island would impose even the slightest check upon this freedom of speech, and I may say that Earl Grey, in stating his views in 1848, practically gives utterance to the views which no doubt one of his earlier brethren in office entertained on that question. He said:

'I am convinced that the circumstance of having taken an active part in the preparation of such measures will never induce the Governor to entertain the slightest wish to check the remarks of those who may honestly object to any of his proposals. On the contrary, it will be naturally his desire, while there is still an opportunity of amending and reconsidering the measures brought forward, to hear the criticisms of the members of the Legislative Council, whose object, it is to be presumed, will be the same as his own, namely, that of rendering the laws which are enacted as well adapted as possible to the wants of the community. Considering how deeply the reputation of the Governor is concerned in the prosperity of the Colony entrusted to his charge, he cannot but be anxious for the best assistance which he may be able to procure towards rendering his measures as effective as possible.'

"Well, Sir, the Council was at length established by Commission granted under the hand of William IV., on the 19th March, 1833, and the reason why four Officials, independent of the Executive Council, were asked to take their seats in the Legislative Council appears to me to be this: There were the Governor and five Official mem-

bers who represented the Executive Government of the country making in all six Official members. On the other hand, there were six Unofficial members appointed to represent the different interests in Ceylon. Now, the four non-executive Official members were put on the board evidently to operate as a sort of check on the Official members as well as a check on the Unofficial members. The Government Agent of the Western Province, the Government Agent of the Central Province, the Collector of Customs, and the Surveyor-General, were men of highest standing in the Civil Service, daily coming in contact with natives and Europeans of all classes, and therefore it was of importance that experience gained under such favourable circumstances should not be lost to the Council. It was, therefore, I believe, that these four gentlemen were made members of the Legislative Council. It appears clear to me that it was never intended to restrict freedom of speech and vote, so far as these four were concerned, in the same manner as in the case of the six members of the Executive Council.

"Now I would refer Your Excellency to an address given by Sir Robert Horton to the Council on the 14th September, 1835. He said:

'The initiation and introduction of laws belong to the Executive Government, under His Majesty's Instructions. When these laws are introduced into the Legislative Council, it is open to any member to vote against the first reading of an Ordinance, the subject-matter of which does not, in his opinion, require to be dealt with at all in the way of new legislation. If a majority voted against the first reading, which involves the principle of the Ordinance, of course there would be an end of the particular measure of legislation proposed. If, however, the majority adopted the principle of the Ordinance by voting for the first reading, it is then read a second time and each clause separately

considered. There is a third stage, when it is proposed that the Ordinance do pass into law.'

"It is, therefore, obvious that the first Governor, who had to deal with the Legislative Council, thought that all the members who took part in the deliberations were perfectly free to express their opinions as they liked. The next Governor, Sir, was the Rt. Hon. Mr. Mackenzie, and you will find in his address much the same opinion. He said:

'As the first representative of our present Most Gracious Sovereign in Ceylon, on this first occasion of meeting its Legislative Council, it would be worse than presumption in me to say that I do not feel the grave responsibility of the duties that devolve upon me as your president. I know well that I am entitled to look to you, gentlemen, for aid in framing wise and just laws, suited to the circumstances of this Colony. Without that aid in the performance of my duties which I acknowledge the importance of, my anxiety and care for the conduct of the affairs of this Colony with punctuality and energy would be fearfully increased, but aided by you cordially in maturing such acts of legislation as may be from time to time required, I shall not shrink from the task which my situation imposes upon me.'

"I may say that, considering that the Chief Justice was a member of the Legislative Council at the time of the Presidency of Mr. Mackenzie, it would be absurd to suppose that an Official of that high standing could be called upon either to hold his tongue or not to vote as he liked. Indeed, Sir, in 1848 it was distinctly proved in the House of Commons by the witnesses summoned before it that it was the invariable rule for Official Members to be allowed freedom of speech. Mr. Ackland proved it, and the father of my honourable friend, who is at present the Government Agent, also proved it; and in fact the Secretary of State

himself admitted that no proof was necessary on that point. It also transpired before the Parliamentary Committee that the very first occasion in which this rule was infringed was in 1847, when the Ordinance No. 10 of 1847 was attempted to be forced through the Council. Lord Torrington then asked the Official Members of the Council to vote in support of that measure. This order, Sir, gave grave dissatisfaction and, after reference had been made to the Secretary of States, who was then Earl Grey, the despatch which my honourable friend has already read to the Council was written. On this point I beg to quote a part of a paragraph from Lord Grey's despatch:

'With regard to the amount of freedom in their conduct, as Legislators, to be allowed to the Official Members of the Legislative Council, which is the subject of the next part of Mr. Ackland's letter to myself, as well of his former letter to the Legislative Council to which he refers, it appears to me that the best rule which can be laid down under the circumstances of Ceylon is, that the Official Members of the Council are entitled as well as the Unofficial, to express their opinion upon all subjects with the utmost freedom, but that, after they have done so, it would be improper and inconsistent with their official character, to defeat, by their votes, measures which the Governor, having fully considered their observations, might continue to think it necessary to press forward.'

"I may say, Sir, that this document — Earl Grey's despatch,—is, so to speak, our Charter relating to freedom of speech in Council. Now this much is clear from this despatch, that not merely were four non-Executive Officials entitled to have their own say upon all questions, but even the Executive Members of the Council. This freedom of speech, so far as I have been able to judge, was allowed to all members certainly up to 1868.

General Hodgson, who was the Governor in 1869, addressing the Legislative Council said: 'The Council will do me the justice to admit that, during my administration and my presidency over this assembly, there has been the entire freedom of discussion which is necessary for the proper consideration and ventilation of any public question, and that every member, whether official or non-official, an adherent of Government or an opponent of Government, has been freely encouraged to enunciate his opinions, and has been responded to in a fair and generous spirit.'

"I see Sir, that this speech was delivered to the Council on the 19th January, 1869. After Sir Hercules Robinson assumed the administration of the Government, there was a serious difference of opinion between him and the Council, as regards the right of that Council to deal with its revenues without dictation on the part of the Secretary of State. I need not go into that part of the question, because the principle then contended for is now pressing upon the attention of the Council. Turning, Sir, to the division lists of the Council, I find there are many divisions in which Official Members during the time of Sir Hercules Robinson have been voting with the Unofficials sometimes, and sometimes with the Governor. In fact, I have seen one or two divisions when the Colonial Secretary and the Treasurer, though members of the Executive Council, have been voting against the Governor. During Governor Longden's time there appears to have been some amount of freedom, judging, I say again, from the division lists of the Council.

"It is said, Sir, that it is only after the arrival of Your Excellency in Ceylon that some pressure has been put upon Official Members as regards their freedom of speech and vote. I am not at all certain of that, Sir, because I believe there is a despatch written by the Duke of Buck-

ingham in 1869. I knew that I had a copy of the despatch — or a portion at all events of that despatch — and I did my best this morning, Sir, to find it out, but I failed. That despatch is a stumbling block in the way of my honourable friend. Then again we have also heard of the existence of another despatch more recently sent out to the Island — I believe in 1888—in reference to some objections taken by a distinguished officer of the Civil Service, and I believe that, too, sanctions in a way the restriction of freedom of speech and vote. The despatch of the Duke of Buckingham written in 1868 seems to be contradicted by the declaration of Governor Hodgson in 1869 that the greatest latitude of discussion was allowed by him to the Official Members of the Legislative Council. Your Excellency may be able to throw some light upon this part of the question. It certainly requires elucidation.

"Apart from these two despatches, I must say that all the argument is upon our side, and barring these despatches, I would show upon general grounds the expediency of giving to Official Members, at all events to the four Official Members I have named as holding the balance of power, perfect freedom of speech. My honourable friend's motion distinctly asks that any despatch clearly defining the position of the Official Members be laid before the Council, and I am sure the public will be very glad, Sir, to read the contents of the despatch. At the same time, this much is certain, that a privilege which was granted to the public in 1833, and preserved to them with one little interruption up to 1868, ought not to be withdrawn from them without substantial reasons. I do not know under what circumstances the despatch of the Duke of Buckingham was written. If Your Excellency is desirous of enforcing the terms of that despatch, the Unofficial Members would be placed in an awkward position. Up to 1868 they

looked upon these four non-executive Officials, as keeping a neutral position in regard to measures that may be brought by the Government or by the Unofficials, and dealing with them impartially. Hereafter they would be prevented from expressing their opinions as freely as they would otherwise do. The strength of the Unofficials is, therefore, very greatly reduced; and the strength of the Government has been as greatly increased.

"If Your Excellency could see your way to restoring to the four non-executive officials the freedom of vote and speech which they once undoubtedly possessed, I feel perfectly certain that the country would be very grateful to you.

"The remarks that I have made, Sir, will now enable members to see how I stand personally in regard to the motion before the Council. The motion suggests the desirability of allowing freedom of speech and vote to the Official members of the Legislative Council. The Official members consist of the Governor and the members of the Executive Council and the four non-executive members. I do not think the history of the question permits me to say that the Executive Council Members had ever the right to vote in the Legislative Council as they liked; but the papers before us show that they had a right to speak. But as regards the non-executive officials, I take it they were allowed both to speak and vote as they liked, at least up to 1868."

All his arguments, all his spirited plea for freedom of speech and vote for the Official members of the legislature, at least the four non-executive officials, were of little avail. The Governor was obdurate. The Bill was defeated by the use of the self-same gagged and shackled Official element which he had striven so hard and so strenuously to save. But he had made out an unanswerable case and in doing so, had dug deep into the records of our past constitutional history. He

had impressed upon the Governor and the Imperial Government that such arbitrary suppression of freedom in the Councils of State, far from being the intention of the original framers of the constitution, was a later imposition by Governors overzealous of their authority, that it was contrary to all the principles of good government and a negation of rudimentary human rights.

Though defeated, he would not rest content but pursued the matter with greater energy and resolution in his subsequent historic Memorandum to the Queen, on the Reform of the Constitution.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CEYLON NATIONAL ASSOCIATION — THE MEMORANDUM ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

"During the long and active period of over fifty years, there was no occasion on which he did not assist his people in their long struggle towards self-government, at every stage of which he fought in the van."

— Governor Sir Graeme Thomson

"I would have you fix your eyes upon Athens day by day, contemplate her potentialities; not merely what she is but what she has the power to be, until you become her lovers. Reflect that her greatness had been built up by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it. Make them your example and learn from them that the secret of happiness is Freedom and the secret of Freedom, Courage."

— Pericles

"Unless we have true faith in freedom, knowing it to be creative, manfully taking all risks, not only do we lose the right to claim freedom in politics, but we also lack the power to maintain it with all our strength."

— Rabindranath Tagore

"The clamour for the very institutions of the United Kingdom ought to be a clamour that should find sympathy in the heart of every enlightened man, including the men who come here from England to govern the people. They should not condemn the clamour, supported as it is by many a high official in England and in India, and by many a Member of Parliament, who have cried shame upon the delay and upon the limited nature of the reforms that have been given to such a great people whose history ex-

tends for thousands of years and who from the very first, have been considered to be among the most civilised nations of the world. The reforms have been given by little doles with a gingerly spirit, for no reason that we know of. Their hearts burn and they say to themselves, 'It is better to die than to go on in the way we have been going on for so many years past.'"

— *Ramanathan*

"I declare that it has not been sufficiently realised in Ceylon that the experiment of entrusting officers coming from abroad with the work of making laws in regard to so complicated a question as reform is attended with grave peril."

— *Ramanathan*

"Liberty is not a means to a higher political end. It is itself the highest political end."

— *Lord Acton*

"The first of earthly blessings, independence."

— *Edward Gibbon*

DURING the half century and more during which he dominated the political scene of his country, Ramanathan gave an unprecedented impulse to the great cause of constitutional reform and the achievement of national freedom and popular sovereignty. If there was one man among Lanka's sons whose contribution to the cause of national liberation during the dark days of early British imperialism far outweighed that of any other, whose life was one long and persistent struggle against the trammels of foreign rule, one to whose indefatigable energy and passionate faith in the potency of self-rule we owe largely the freedom that we belaud today, it was Ramanathan. This passion for national freedom, this intense longing to enable the many millions of his countrymen who had for centuries lain prostrate under the heels of imperial masters, to live a free, full and unfettered life, is the one thread that runs through his whole

public and political life and gives it its unity and strength. In fact, it has been said that the story of his life and work during the half century preceding the Donoughmore Reforms is also the history of the country's progressive transformation from a state of abject subjection and servitude to an alien White bureaucracy into one in which the people were the virtual arbiters of their national destinies.

It may be said with equal truth that if there was one family that worked resolutely and single-mindedly for the expulsion of the foreigner in the hey-day of his imperial sway, that challenged the imperialist at every turn and in every measure prejudicial to the people's interest, whose influence advanced immeasurably the cause of national freedom and sovereignty, it was Ramanathan's. Strange as it may seem, a genius for freedom, a passion for self-determination, a passion more inherited than imbibed, coursed through every nerve and fibre of its being. It was the dazzling greatness and brilliance of this family that raised the prestige of this little island high in the estimation of British statesmen and accelerated the pace of constitutional reform and the ultimate achievement of Home-Rule.

Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy, Ramanathan's grandfather on the mother's side, laid down a high and lucrative office under the Government in 1834 to espouse the cause of his people in the country's newly-constituted legislature. Mudaliyar Ponnambalam, the father, valued worldly wealth and eminence at nought, and in the pursuit of spiritual freedom and philanthropic endeavour made an exultant sacrifice of all his immense worldly estate. It was the peculiar glory of Ramanathan's uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy, the first non-Christian Barrister and scholar of the highest renown whom Ferguson, the celebrated editor of *the Observer* described as "the foremost man of the twenty

million or more of the Dravidian race" to have pulled down the hoary barriers of racial and religious exclusiveness that shut the Inns of Court against non-Christians, and enabled Eastern peoples to be called to the English Bar. He it was who, in his prime, threw overboard a brilliant career both in the Civil Service and at the Bar wherein he could have achieved the greatest possible distinction and inaugurated the tradition of a gentleman of high culture and affluent means dedicating his life whole and entire to the service of his country and the cause of national freedom. He did this purely for the love of his country in days when politics carried with it no emoluments of any kind. He waged a valiant and unceasing conflict with British imperialism and did more than any other man of his time to advance the cause that was dearest to his heart — the liberation of the people from the thraldom of foreign rule and the promotion of national happiness and well-being. He fought long and resolutely for the Disestablishment of the Christian Church which the Imperialists had enthroned as the Established Church of Ceylon and to which they gave State patronage, while ignoring the religion of the people. His speech on this occasion produced such a devastating effect on Sir Grant Duff, then Secretary of State for the Colonies who read the speech, that he was driven to declare that if Ceylonese politicians could rise to such heights of political wisdom and eloquence, they might as well be permitted to manage their own affairs.

Ramanathan's elder brother Mudaliyar Coomaraswamy, a fiery and indomitable patriot and parliamentarian of the highest calibre displayed such impetuous and amazing freedom in his denunciation of British rule and on one memorable occasion, likened the British Government of Ceylon to a high-way robber instead of being a beneficent ruler, that the enraged Governor would have none

of him at the next Council, despite Coomaraswamy's overwhelming merits and the universal clamour of his people. Ramanathan's younger brother Arunachalam's retirement from the Public Service in 1913 opened a new era in the history of Ceylon's freedom-struggle. Acknowledged to be the finest flower of Cambridge University culture, the brightest ornament of the Civil Service, a scholar of immense and varied erudition, a philosopher and man of religion and moreover, a gentleman of exceptional charm and goodness of heart, a man remarkable, in the words of Edward Carpenter, for his sturdy independence, Arunachalam threw himself headlong into the freedom struggle. Inestimable, incomparable were the services rendered by this man among men to the cause of political freedom, social reform and the amelioration of the lot of the working-classes. The story of his heroic struggle for national freedom is told in another chapter.

Great as were the achievements of Arunachalam in the field of political and social leadership, they were a pale shadow beside those of his brother Ramanathan. It should, however, be added in fairness to the former that the niggardly Fates vouchsafed to him just ten years of retired life within which to labour for the political, social and economic emancipation of his country, while they granted the latter a full half century and more. From the very commencement of his political career in 1879 until 1930 when death claimed him, Ramanathan's life was one long and relentless struggle against bondage to alien domination The ruling passion of his life was a love of liberty; it was this which made him take a vigorous and occasionally an intemperate part against every man or measure in which he could detect a taint or tendency to oppression; it was this which impelled him to speak or write with uncommon bitterness and vehemence; but it was this which gave

him moral power, which won for him the fear and esteem of the ruling power and a niche in the affections of his people. Living as he did in an age in which European nations exercised unquestioned sway over many lands and many peoples, an age in which subject peoples had with the passage of centuries become inured to such servitude and accepted it meekly as their destined lot, in which servile submission to the foreign master and tame acquiescence in his dictates and policies had come to be recognized as the hall-mark of good breeding, and the surest road to self-advancement, here was a man who resolutely, heroically and selflessly challenged the foreigner at every turn, questioned the validity of his claims to impose his rule on other peoples and told him firmly and fearlessly that it is the sovereign and inalienable prerogative of any people to rule themselves. The *Hansards* and other records of the fifty years during which he served his people both in and out of the country's legislature bear ample evidence of how valiantly and pertinaciously he crossed swords with an alien and arbitrary bureaucracy in a supreme bid to vindicate the rights and liberties of his people against its presumptuous inroads and of how in the end he emerged with victory in his hands. It is not to be guilty of an overstatement to say that Ramanathan's parliamentary career of fifty years is coincident with Ceylon's progressive advance towards freedom and its ultimate attainment. It is no small part of his greatness that in 1879 when he first entered public life, he found his people a subject race bound hand and foot to an alien imperialist and that in 1930 when at his death he relinguished it, he left them a virtually free and self-governing community. From the very outset of his parliamentary life, he made the foreigner feel that he (the foreigner) was an anachronism, a superfluity, a gratuitous imposition in a land that could produce men conspicuous for political sagacity and administrative acumen, men who could, if given the opportunity, beat him at his own game.

Early in his political career, despite the handicaps of age — he was then just thirtyfive — by virtue of his brilliant and varied talents, his burning patriotism and his extrordinary flair for political action, he was made the Senior Unofficial Member, the highest office one outside the Government could hold. He startled his colleagues, both Official and Unofficial, by his superb powers of oratory, his easy self-command, by the lightning rapidity of his mind and the amazing skill and adroitness with which he turned the tables on his opponents, by sheer intrepidity of spirit and disregard of personal consequence and by his passionate and lifelong devotion to the cause of Truth, Reason, Justice and Fair-play in all things big and small.

Under his leadership the Unofficial element became a dynamic and elemental force in the government of the country, with which the Officials always found it necessary to come to terms. Governor Sir Arthur Gordon was once constrained to remark ruefully that "the influence of the opinions of the six Unofficial Members was out of all proportion to their numerical strength." In 1910, Lord Crewe declared, "Notwithstanding the majority of Officials in the Council, it is not intended to carry through Council a policy which is unanimously opposed by the ten Unofficial Members, unless the question is one affecting Imperial policy." His fiery and indomitable spirit, smarting under the shackles of alien rule, swore vengeance on all forms of despotism. None had studied and pondered on the subject of Constitutional Reform more than he. None understood more than he the grim truth that no greater calamity can ever befall a people than subjection to alien rule and none, more resolved to end it. But his profoundly religious and philosophic nature recoiled from the methods

of violence or coercion so common and so fashionable among subject peoples in his day. He believed in the power of reason and argument, in the methods of peaceful persuasion and a friendly appeal to man's moral sense. He had abundant faith in the Englishman's inherent and innate good sense, his humanity and moral elevation, and his traditional love of justice, fair-play and kindly-dealing.

As a first step towards the achievement of his objective, he founded the Ceylon National Association, and became its President. Under his inspiring, enlightened and vigorous leadership, the association became a hive of beneficent and ceaseless activity, and remained the most potent political force in the country until its supersession in 1919 by the Ceylon National Congress founded by his brother Arunachalam. He roped in the best talents in the country, formulated a programme of action and made the reform of the constitution the burning topic of the hour. The main aim of the Association was "to help in the formation of a healthy public opinion on all questions of public importance and to promote by every legitimate means the political, intellectual and material advancement of the people." The Reform of the Constitution was made the subject of frequent and anxious deliberation. He was wroth at the idea of foreigners, adjudicating upon the form and character of the government a people should have and declared with all the emphasis at his command that it is the sovereign and indefeasible right of any people big or small, to determine their political destinies. He once said in the legislature, "I declare that it has not been sufficiently realized in Ceylon that the experiment of entrusting officers coming from abroad with the work of making laws in regard to so complicated a question as reform is attended with grave peril..... Now the conviction of the most thoughtful men in this country is that it is no longer right to let things drift. In the advanced

state of education and enterprise which Ceylon has reached, it is felt that a serious attempt should be made to enlighten those British officers who are sympathetically disposed towards freedom and make them see that reform according to their own conception of things will not be acceptable to the people."

In 1890, he drew up and presented to the Imperial Parliament a Memorial wherein he embodied some specific and far-reaching proposals, which touched the very roots of national freedom. It was a courageous and impassioned plea for a drastic reform of the legislature and a severe curtailment of the powers and prerogatives of the Governor in days when the Governor was an autocrat and, with the aid of a dumb, docile Official majority in the Legislature, he rode rough-shod over the rights and liberties of the people. For those were days when the Governor was a petty tyrant, a pocket-dictator and the government was the Governor's Government. All the members of the legislature, including Ramanathan himself, were his nominees and held their seats at his pleasure. The Official Members were merely his mouthpieces, the pliant and servile instruments of his over-riding will and command. His frown meant for them political exile and extinction. It was against this potentate that Ramanathan in his early political career launched a frontal attack, came into head-on conflict. And the Governor was, at the time, no less a person than that born aristocrat Sir Arthur Gordon (later Lord Stanmore) whom a contemporary described as "the most autocratic and masterful Governor who was not above a few petty spites and did not hesitate to use his giant's strength as a giant."

The Memorandum is a classic on the subject and can at almost a century's remove be read with great profit by students of our Constitutional History. It is a most courageous, vigorous and

closely-argued plea for reform. For complete mastery and masculine grasp of subject, for wealth of material drawn from diverse authoritative sources, for depth of thought and force of conviction, for fearlessness and fiery independence and straightforward diction, it has reason to rank among the greatest of its kind. It is too long to bear reproduction here and is given in the Appendix.

In the opening paragraph of the Memorandum, without preamble he comes to grips with the problem of reform and condemns in frank, fearless and forthright terms "the invasion of the rights of Your Majesty's Legislative Council of the Island on the part of some Governors for some years past." His indignation bursts forth in language far from conciliatory, his attitude is openly defiant. He uses no milder term than "invasion" and stresses the need to curb the invader and uphold the rights of the people, as expressed by their representatives in the legislature.

He proceeds to denounce as arbitrary, high-handed and obscurantist the action of Governor Sir Arthur Gordon in intimating to "the Unofficial Members of the legislature that they will henceforth hold their seats for a term of only three years", while the normal term of the Council was five years and an Unofficial who proved himself a worthy representative of the people, held his membership for life. This was, obviously, an unholy attempt on the part of the Governor to gag the Unofficials or shut them out of the legislature if they proved recalcitrant and critical of his authority.

If the Governor's will prevailed in the matter, the Unofficial members of the legislature would cease to be representatives of the people and become mere vassals or bondmen of the Governor, become mere stooges in his hands.

It is noteworthy that this novel move on the part of the Governor Lord Gordon to limit the term of the Unofficials was a dart pointed directly

and specifically at Ramanathan himself who was a firm, fearless and uncompromising critic of governmental excesses and before whose withering onslaughts the prestige and pretensions of the White bureaucracy shook to their foundations. Ramanathan contends that the Governor, by so doing, has arrogated to himself powers which lay completely outside the pale of his authority.

He then moves for the repeal of Clause 18 of "Your Majesty's instructions to the Governor whereby members of the Legislative Council are debarred from proposing any ordinance, vote, resolution or question which creates a charge upon the revenue without express leave from the Governor." "This clause," Ramanathan contends, "reduces the position of the members of the legislature to sheer vassalage and serfdom" and should find no place in the legislature of any civilized State. The members of the legislature, he contends, are the spokesmen of the nation and if the government exists for the people, the people's representatives should have the freedom to propose any piece of legislation calculated to advance the common good.

It was a bold and far-reaching proposal which, if accepted by the Imperial Parliament, would transform radically the whole legislative structure. It would strike at the roots of gubernatorial despotism, strengthen the position of the people's representatives and set the nation safely on the road to self-rule.

He now waxes eloquent on the subject of freedom of speech and vote for the Official Members of the legislature, who, it should here be remembered, occupied at this time the unenviable and even ignominious position of being mere puppets and play-things of the Governor, mere voting machines of the Government. Whatever their personal views and sentiments on subjects that came up for debate and discussion before the Council board, they had to suppress them in abject submission

to the Governor who posed as an autocrat and compelled obedience to his will and required them "under penalty of loss of office to remain silent and to vote with the Governor in support of a measure or policy inaugurated by him even if their views were opposed to his."

Ramanathan pleads that "the Governor has no such power under our Constitution" and adds, "Your Majesty should confirm it to your subjects in the Island the safeguards conceded to them by the Letters Patent and Royal Instructions issued in 1833."

This attitude of the Governor was arbitrary and outrageous in the extreme. Ramanathan who valued his own independence more than anything else and spoke out his mind freely and fearlessly on every subject that came before the Council board, saw no reason why the Officials who were very worthy and honourable men occupying the highest offices in the State, should be gagged in this degrading manner, robbed of their manliness and independence and made servile stooges of the Governor. He made a vehement plea for the immediate removal of this disability and the extension to all Officials the right of free speech and free vote. Such an act, he pleaded, would enhance the strength and prestige of the legislature and make it a parliament of free men rather than a survival of feudal despotism.

Ramanathan's shafts were directed mainly against the Governor who posed as a despot, whose pretensions he was out to prick through, and whose wings he sought to clip at every conceivable opportunity and by every conceivable means. No wonder, Governors dreaded him and spared no pains to shut him out of the legislature and out of positions of responsibility and authority in the public service which his transcendent abilities warranted.

Ramanathan now proceeds to ask the Imperial Parliament to define the precise position of the

Governor who claimed to be her Majesty the Queen's representative in the country and arrogated to himself powers and prerogatives which that exalted position implied. Ramanathan refuted that claim of the Governor vehemently and pointed out in the Memorandum that the Governor of a Colony, far from being the representative of the royalty, was only a paid servant of the Colonial Office and could not with any show of reason claim the powers and privileges of a royal representative. In saying so, he took his stand on a memorable judgement of the Privy Council which said, "If it be argued that the Governor of a Colony is quasi-sovereign, the answer is that he does not represent him generally, having only the functions delegated to him by the terms of his commission, and being only the officer to execute the specific powers with which that commission clothes him."

Ramanathan goes further to say that the true representative of the Sovereign is not the Governor but rather the Legislative Council "more fully and truly the agent or representative of the Sovereign than the Governor himself, because (1) the peculiarly sovereign powers of taxation, expenditure and legislation are vested in it and not in the Governor (2) he has to render to the Council every year what Sir Henry Ward described as 'an account of his stewardship' (3) his executive acts are liable to be inquired into and censured, if necessary, by the Council and (4) it could stop his pay, by means of an Ordinance relating to the fixed charges of the Island; or refuse to vote the contingent charges allowed him annually under the Supply Bill."

Ramanathan thus established the supremacy of the legislature over the Governor. It was a knock-out blow to the latter's pretended but widely acknowledged, position.

Ramanathan further submits that "the Legislative and Executive Councils, were set up to

advise the Governor in the administration of the Colony. The Governor should, therefore, welcome the advice thus tendered by the two Councils with good grace instead of trying to over-awe them or silence them, as was customary with Governors of those times.

He now proceeds to press on the Imperial Parliament the extreme urgency of the need to do away with the retrograde and outmoded system of Governors' nominating members to the legislature and makes a vehement plea for the introduction of the system of electing members, so much in vogue in all civilized and progressive countries.

This was another bold and far-reaching proposal, which, if accepted would transform radically the whole legislative structure, end for all time what, in his time, was called the "Governor's Government" and set in motion the machinery of popular self-rule.

In another paragraph, he condemns in downright terms the action of the Governor in appointing a member of the Public Service to represent an important section of the people in the Legislative Council as an Unofficial member. He points out the anomaly and paradox of the Member's position, inasmuch as the Member was at once an Official in the pay of the Governor and therefore bound in loyalty and obeisance to do his will, and an Unofficial in the service of the people. Such a member would merely be the Governor's tool, a mere bondman of his and not a free and independent representative of the people. He could not reasonably be expected to speak out his mind when the actions of the Governor ran counter to national interests.

Many more were the issues he raised in his Memorandum but which it would be impossible to discuss here within our narrow limits. Suffice it to say that it is a most learned, most radical, comprehensive, courageous, closely-argued, deeply and subtly thought-out exposition of the case for

constitutional reform and the advance of the people's rights in an age in which the Governor played the role of an autocrat and reduced the legislature to a mouthpiece of his and an instrument to register his will. These demands, if granted, would give the legislature an immense accession of strength and vitality and make it a forum of free, unfettered public discussion and disposal of national problems rather than what it then was, a feudal assembly.

It was his persistent and passionate cry for constitutional reform and the extension of the people's rights coupled with his fourteen years of service in the legislature during which he crossed swords with every Governor and everyone of his lieutenants that led to his removal from the legislature. The Governor who felt his prestige broken by Ramanathan's philippics against his autocracy and misrule was of the opinion—and the Secretary of State for the Colonies concurred—that it would be impossible for him to carry on the government in accordance with his own will, so long as Ramanathan continued to be a member of the legislature and questioned his actions at every turn.

So a way had to be found to rid the legislature of such a rebellious and recalcitrant fire-eater who, besides, founded political associations, carried on a nation-wide crusade for national freedom and made an unanswerable case for the extension of the people's rights and the limitation of the powers of the Governor and his Official coterie. A way out of this impasse was found in the three-year rule—later extended to five years—whereby no Unofficial Member could hold office for more than three years. It was, as has been said, a dart pointed specifically at Ramanathan himself, who had already held the membership for eleven years. To save his face and soothe public passions, the Governor sought and obtained the consent of the Secretary of State, to appoint Ramanathan Solicitor-

General. Ramanathan accepted the office, for he knew he would no longer be able to continue in the legislature if the five-year rule were implemented. But he had sown the seeds of freedom safely and securely. broadcast the principles of national self-rule, which in the ensuing decades, germinated and fructified in the rapid march of constitutional reform, when once again, at the cessation of his office of Solicitor-General, he entered the arena of political life and picked up the threads where he had left them some fifteen years ago.

CHAPTER XXV

THE JAFFNA MARKETS ORDINANCE

"What are we coming to? Is the Government Agent of the Northern Province so potent in this country that he should be allowed to have his own way and to be treated exceptionally? I have heard of officials becoming powerful, but this official has become too powerful."

— *Ramanathan*

"Living as we do in comfort and plenty, we cannot conceive the dire distress which these people undergo in the Northern Province. They occupy a world about which we know nothing. It is all very well for us to profess to speak of their wants, but their real wants and wishes can never be understood, unless we go amongst them, speak their language, and get from their lips a description of their true condition."

— *Ramanathan*

IN the late decades of the last century, the Government Agents of the Northern Province, with the connivance of native Headmen exercised autocratic and oppressive sway over the people of the Province. Taking advantage of its remoteness from the seat of central administration and the consequent laxity of control over its affairs in days when the means of communication were slow and scanty, these administering angels posed as the 'Rajahs of the North' and were fast becoming a law unto themselves. The Governors who alone could control them, were guided for the most part by their reports. No wonder, some unsympathetic and power-intoxicated Agents abused their power and often indulged in administrative excesses. Reports of such excesses seldom escaped Ramanathan's notice, inasmuch as he always kept

his eyes and ears open to the conduct of public officials and spared no pains to bring offenders to book.

Such excesses, such want of sympathy for the people conflicted bitterly with Ramanathan's concept of a public servant as a beneficent and loving agent of the State whose supreme objective should be the promotion of the people's happiness and well-being. Himself the finest exemplar of an indefatigable and incorruptible servant of the State who placed his country before self, he would not countenance the smallest lapse on the part of public officials but would fall foul of them if ever they erred.

On 19th March 1890, the Honourable the Attorney-General moved the second reading of "An Ordinance relating to Markets in the Northern Province." The Auditor-General seconded it. This Ordinance proposed that the power of making bye-laws for these markets should be withdrawn from the Local Board of Health created by the Ordinance No. 7 of 1876 and should be entrusted to the smaller Board of Health created by the Ordinance No. 8 of 1866, which provided that it might consist of two or more persons for the purpose of guarding against the spread of disease in the Island. In the case of the Northern Province, there would be, in the event of the Ordinance being passed, a Board of Health consisting of two or more persons, one of whom would be the Government Agent of the Northern Province.

Ramanathan had known and heard far too much of the Government Agent to feel happy about the proposed dispensation. In a speech charged with trenchant fire and scorching indignation, he opposed the Bill and arraigned the Government Agent as one who by nature and temperament was utterly unfit to be the principal provincial executive of the Crown.

He said: "Now, Sir, it is a matter of notoriety that the present Government Agent for the

Northern Province has an unfortunate tendency of not seeing eye to eye with, or working in harmony with, other persons appointed to co-operate with him on such Boards. I do not make this statement by way of accusation against him. I mention this feature of his mind as an existing fact. Various gentlemen moving in different circles have reported to me that, whether it be the Police Magistrate, or the District Judge, or the Medical Officer in the Province, or the Engineer or any other person, the present Government Agent does not pull well together with such persons appointed as his colleagues. This is a remarkable fact which we have to bear in mind in connection with the proposed piece of legislation. Your Excellency may nominate two or more persons to that Board, but all the same, the Board will soon mean the present Government Agent and him only. The other members appointed to the Board would gradually become dummies or fall off, so that, though this Bill professes to give the power of making bye-laws to the Board of Health, the bye-laws will be really and truly the bye-laws of the present Government Agent of the Northern Province so long as he is there. It is possible that other men appointed as Government Agents to that Province might develop the same frame of mind, desiring to be the 'Rajah of the North' and therefore it is that I am unable to see the expediency of clauses 2 and 3 of the Bill."

He now proceeded to defend the existing Local Boards of Health and Improvement as being more democratic and more broad-based and therefore less prone to oppression. He upheld the principle that it was the sovereign prerogative of the Legislative Council to legislate for the people and condemned the folly and futility of delegating these powers to another body smaller in composition and less representative.

"I may say that our present Boards of Health

and Improvement are, every one of them creations under the Ordinance No. 7 of 1876.

Honourable The Attorney-General: 1886.

Mr. Ramanathan: No. I say 1876, by virtue of which the elective principle was introduced. I say the Local Boards of Health were created by the Ord. No. 7 of 1876, which introduced the elective principle. It is the people who elect the Unofficial Members of the Board, and the Governor nominates the Official Members. The two classes of members who are generally over the number of five work together in harmony to the best of their power, and under such circumstances I would say that the power of making bye-laws may be safely entrusted to them. Laws affecting the general public can only be made by the Legislative Council and, in delegating these superior powers to another body, we ought to take care that the new body is safeguarded from temptations and abuses. I looked with concern upon such powers drifting into the hands of one man.

"Now, consider the laws, which the Government Agent might make in reference to Market Lands. Your Excellency has special advisers to explain to you all about the nature of Crown lands and markets; but you have confessed to-day, and the Members of the Executive Council have also inferentially admitted to-day, that in local matters you are generally content to accept the opinions and advice of the Government Agent himself. He is your principal adviser, so that the necessary check which you might bring to bear upon the Government Agent under ordinary circumstances is no longer within your power. In these circumstances, Your Excellency and the Members of the Executive Council will not be able to say whether the bye-laws proposed by the Government Agent are just or not."

He proceeded to examine the dangers inherent in the Ordinance which gave the proposed Board

the power to interfere in business activity carried on in private lands. This power might be abused, the sanctity of private right, violated and the life of people engaged in such activity, rendered intolerable.

"Putting aside the Crown lands, we come to private lands, and the bye-laws may refer to the imposition and recovery of fees for licenses to open and hold markets on such lands; they may refer to the regulation of the sale of meat, fish, vegetables and other articles exposed on such lands; they may refer to the prohibition of the sale of such articles on such lands, and to the temporary or permanent closing of any market held on such lands; and they can go further, for one clause says that the Board of Health may even turn out a person from his own land under certain circumstances. His own land! He may be living on that land, and he may have no other means of livelihood; and therefore, he may be compelled to have a little boutique along the roadside or any other place, and yet the Government Agent and his associates, if he chooses to work with them, may order him to close that boutique, and if he does not, the Government Agent may enter it and turn him out neck and crop. I ask if, in a remote province like the Northern Province, it is safe to give such powers to the Government Agent. I submit that the more distant a province is, the more chary the Government should be in conferring powers so extensive upon such officials. There are many other clauses, Sir, which I should like to dwell upon, but time is going apace, and therefore, I will not trouble the Council much longer."

He now proceeded to consider the charges for licences to run boutiques. It was there that his indignation burst into a flame. "But see what is the charge for licenses to hold a boutique on a man's own land. The schedule says: 'Licences to

open or hold a market on land not the property of the Crown, should carry a fee for the first twelve months of Rs. 200, and for every subsequent twelve months Rs. 50.' The traders of Jaffna, especially that class of the population who hold boutiques, is supposed to be possessed of Rs. 200 by the first of January in the first year, and ever after, of Rs. 50, in order that they may pay these sums to the Government for a licence for the purpose of earning a livelihood in their own houses. What are we coming to, Sir? What are we coming to? Is the Government Agent of the Northern Province so potent in this country that he should be allowed to have his own way and to be treated exceptionally? I have heard of officials becoming powerful, but this official has become too powerful. I cannot assent to this extraordinary legislation for the Northern Province. So long as I have a voice, I shall protest against such dangerous legislation."

The Government with the aid of the Official majority carried the second reading of the Bill but promised that in Committee it would define the term "Market" so as to safeguard all private rights.

Once again he returned to the fray when he learned that a tax-gatherer had been charged at the Magistrate's Court, Mallakam for extortion and theft at the Chunnakam Market and convicted. He moved for all papers relating to the case and in doing so related at some length his own experience of the harrowing poverty and misery of those who did business at the Chunnakam Market, and on whom the Governmet Agent practised his cruelty and oppression. The speech deserves to be quoted at length.

"It is not generally known in this part of the country, that the people who take their goods for sale at the Chunnakam market are drawn from the poor population of the Peninsula. They are

all Tamils, and their status may be compared to the Sinhalese basket-women who are frequently seen walking in the streets of Colombo and sitting under the shade of trees selling things to the passers-by. The hardships of the people who frequent the market in Chunnakam deserve the attentive consideration of the Council, not merely for their own sakes, but also as involving the larger question of the impolicy of levying a tax on the minor industries of the island.

"The case also, Sir, illustrates what serious misconceptions have been entertained by the Government Agent of the Northern Province as regards the nature of these immemorial markets, and as regards his own rights and duties as an officer of the Government.

"There are many immemorial markets in the Northern Province, and this one in Chunnakam is among the largest, being about seven miles distant from the town of Jaffna, and the fairs held in the place are held every other day in the week, from morning to evening. I visited one of them in September last about one o' clock in the afternoon, and I found there were about 500 vendors mostly women, some occupying miserable sheds, and others selling under the shade of trees. The whole market covered an area of about two acres, and the articles sold consisted of the barest necessities of life, such as rice, paddy, brinjals, plantains, coconuts, arecanuts, betel and curry stuffs, herbs of different kinds, chillies, onions, poonac, and so on. Upon inquiry I found that the little huts constructed on the spot cost not more than 37 cts. each. Each of them was occupied by about eight women, and they paid at the rate of about 25 cts. per month yielding in all an income of Rs. 2 for the hut, which is a very handsome return per month for the 37 cts. spent on them. I went round the whole of the place and the complaint was most universal, not merely as regards the levy

of an additional one cent demanded from these miserable women, but also as regards the methods adopted for the recovery of this one cent per day. Whether owners had one rupee worth of goods or less, the tax was invariably collected from them at the rate of one cent, or sometimes at the rate of half a cent; and then it was mentioned to me, and I have no reason for disbelieving my information, that, if one of these women did not pay this one cent regularly, the tax collectors would help themselves to her brinjals or coconuts or arecanuts as they like. At the end of the day, before the fair was over, these publicans would hold a public auction of the articles distrained in this fashion, and then pay themselves in that way. It was mentioned to me also that the Government Agent had authorized these publicans, one or two of whom were Headmen, to recover as much as Rs. 50 a month by the levying of these taxes, and he insisted that the sum should be paid into the Kachcheri. I was not able to ascertain what this imposition was for. Everybody in the Island, especially every public officer, except perhaps Mr. Twynam, would admit that the method adopted for the recovery of the imposition is illegal and oppressive, and in any civilized part of the world under the administration of the British Government, the system of distress that has been carried on for the last four years in the Peninsula of Jaffna would be condemned, I mean the mode of distraining goods for non-payment of a fancied tax or rent.

"But, Sir, being on the spot, I was anxious to find out whether these vendors had any real difficulty in paying the one cent that was claimed of them; whether, quite apart from legal and constitutional questions, these women were able or not to give one cent a day, I took notes carefully on that day, and the answer returned to me was, 'How am I to pay one cent for selling

such articles as these?' I wanted to know what they meant. 'Listen to me, Sir,' they said, 'we bring into the market no more than 80 or 90 cents worth of articles The profit on the retail sale of these articles is about six cents, often a loss. We leave our homes all for these six cents or three cents.' I asked them why they left their homes for six or three cents and travelled three or four miles to make those few cents a day, and the pathetic answer was, 'What else are we to do?'

"I went to another part of the market and put the same question, and I have got in my notes that a rice vendor bought ten measures of paddy at 7½ cents a measure, equal to *82* cents. The profit on the sale of the ten measures converted into rice was nine cents."

In language seething with indignation and contempt, he arraigned the rich who, living as they did in cosy comfort, in the lap of luxury and ostentation, could hardly conceive of the unspeakable misery and hardship endured by those folks who in their desperate efforts to eke out a precarious existence resorted to those markets at great strain and suffering to themselves.

"Living as we do in comfort and plenty, we cannot conceive the dire distress which these people undergo in the Northern Province. They occupy a world about which we know nothing. It is all very well for us, to profess to speak of their wants, but their real wants and wishes can never be understood unless we go amongst them, speak their language, and get from their lips a description of their true condition. It, therefore, appeared quite conclusive to me that none but the best of the vendors in the market could pay one cent a day in addition to the rent for the stalls. The Government Agent who has lived in that land for very many years ought to have known the condition of the people.

"He also failed to realize, Sir, what an im-

memorial market is, as held in the Northern Province. It does not mean buildings made of mortar or cadjan sheds, but it is the liberty or franchise enjoyed by a number of villagers in the way of exposing for sale, at a certain spot, goods suitable for consumption in the country. Considering the history of markets, it cannot be doubted that they are very different from the markets held in towns. In fact, Sir Summer Maine, writing in his charming book on Village Communities, has very clearly pointed out the true nature of a market. He says 'that a market is the neutral ground between a certain number of villages set apart for the purpose of holding sales of different kinds of wares in which, under the ancient constitution of society, the members of the different autonomous proprietory groups met in safety and bought and sold unshackled by customary rule.' It is admitted by the Government Agent himself that Chunnakam and certain other markets are immemorial markets. I say that, if the Government Agent had recognized their true nature, he would not have attempted to levy an imposition on the people. He did not understand their nature and failed to appreciate the poverty-stricken condition of the people." He now proceeds to state the facts of the case.

"My motion, Sir, refers to a particular case decided by the Police Court of Mallakam. It came up in appeal and was affirmed. One of the accused in that case said: 'I was authorised both by the Maniyakar and the Government Agent to recover the money.' He called the Police Vidane of Chunnakam who stated: 'When complainant refused to pay, the first accused told him that if he would not pay, he must leave that place and go, and sell elsewhere. Some sellers of vegetables paid rent. It is collected now from those who occupy the stalls, as well as from the people who sell in the open air. We need to recover rent only from stall-holders

till about three or four months ago.'

"The people, Sir naturally resisted the levy of the new imposition. It was proved that in 1886 the people, owing to these oppressive impositions, determined to hold the market at an adjoining place. The Government Agent then asked the Headmen to prevent any such thing being done, and, upon their being unable to prevent the removal of the market, he is said to have dismissed eleven Headmen. This was publicly stated in the '*Hindu Organ*', and it has not been denied up to this day. The Government Agent still persists in having his own way. There have been, I am told, twenty cases instituted. The last one was decided on the 4th of December, and the Magistrate found that the accused had attempted assault and extortion on the complainant, and theft in helping himself to the goods exposed for sale there, without the authority of the owner.

"It should be added that the publicans have sometimes levied upon one and the same produce sold twice over. A man, for instance brings 20 coconuts for sale in the market, and a poor woman buys from him two nuts and breaks them and sells pieces of the kernel for a cent or so, and the tax or imposition is levied not only on the man who brought the 20 coconuts to the market, but also on the unfortunate woman who bought two nuts for the purpose of selling the kernel in broken pieces. The same thing has happened in the case of salt—both persons were taxed."

In conclusion, he sought to know if the Government had taken any action to call to book those oppressors of the poor and caution them against the repetition of such excesses in the future.

"I fully recognize that the Government Agent for the Northern Province is a good and able man, but his goodness and ability in point of administration cannot shelter him from such faults as these. I wish to know, Sir, whether Government

have received any explanation from him as to the way in which he has administered this market before and after the decision of this case. I move, Sir, for papers and hope that Government will issue immediate orders to the Government Agent not to persist in the recovery of these impositions, which are as illegal as they are oppressive.

The Hon. Mr. A. de A. Seneviratne seconded.

The Colonial Secretary tried to prevaricate saying that the Government had not heard of those cases, that considering the sympathetic nature of the Government Agent, he could not believe the statements made against him ; that the money which was said to have been levied, was not a tax but appeared to him to be in the nature of rates, that they were necessary to meet the cost of keeping clean the market; and that he would lay before the Council the record of the Police Court case in due time.

Ramanathan was not to rest content with such evasion. He expressed amazement at the arguments of the Colonial Secretary and asked how he could refuse to accept the first-hand evidence taken on the spot by himself and by the Police Magistrate who heard the case and condemned the accused for extortion and theft. He insisted on the Government's instructing the Government Agent to cease to oppress the poor vendors in the public market. Necessary action was taken and the proverbial autocracy and oppression of Government Agents became things of the past.

CHAPTER XXVI

IMPERIAL HONOURS — THE GRANT OF THE DIGNITY OF C. M. G.

"It is not so much that Ramanathan is honoured as the Order itself."

— *Catholic Guardian*

IN 1889 Ramanathan was invested with the insignia of C. M. G. by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, "for distinguished public services", as Who's Who put it. He had already served his country in its supreme legislature for more than ten years with uncommon distinction and since 1886 had been the Senior Unofficial Member of the Council. His reputation as the nation's foremost leader and spokesman of shattering force had travelled far and wide. It was in the fitness of things that he should receive recognition at the hands of the Queen. Few men had earned their honours with more heroic effort than he.

His Excellency the Governor the Honourable Sir Arthur Gordon, writing to him from Kandy, on May 25, 1889, said :

My Dear Ramanathan,

I received this morning a telegram from the Secretary of State announcing that you and Mr. O'Brien had been made C. M. G's. I had asked for the higher rank for you, and although the Secretary of State thinks that he must adhere to the rule that, in all but the most exceptional cases, a beginning must be made at the beginning, I have reason to believe that if the recommendation is repeated by me next year, it will be attended to.

Meanwhile, it is always something to possess the highest initial distinction Colonists ever reached.

Yours ever truly,

A. GORDON.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Knutsford wrote to him the following letter:

Colonial Office,
May 10, 1889.

My dear Sir,

I trust that it will be gratifying to you to know that the Queen has been pleased to confer on you the honour of C. M. G. It has given me great pleasure to submit your name for this honour, which you have so well and fairly won by your loyal and excellent services in Ceylon.

I remain,
KNUTSFORD.

His Excellency Sir E. Noel Walker, K. C. M. G. Lieutenant-Governor wrote:

Kandy,
May 27th, 1889.

Dear Mr. Ramanathan,

I see by the newspapers that the Queen has been pleased to appoint you to be a Companion of St. Michael and St. George. Allow me to offer you my congratulations on this distinction, which has been certainly well-earned by your loyal and gratuitous services to the Colony, as a member of the Legislative Council for ten years, and by your earnest and faithful representation of a most faithful and industrious and important section of the Community.

Our personal intercourses have, in my short service in Ceylon, been to me of the most agreeable and considerate character and I trust that our relations as Companions of the same Order and in the same public work, may long so continue.

Yours Sincerely,
E. NOEL WALKER.

Ramanathan's honour was acclaimed with joyous enthusiasm by the entirety of the nation. *'The Times of Ceylon'* made this comment:

"Mr. Ramanathan has well earned the distinction. He has devoted himself to public duties as few, if any others, of his countrymen in Ceylon could do and whatever opinion we may hold as to his views on public questions, there is no denying his integrity and the fearlessness and independence he has shown on many trying occasions.

"We congratulate the gentleman on the honour he has received."

The Chief Justice of Ceylon, Sir Bruce Burnside wrote:

Dear Mr. Ramanathan,

I have just heard that Her Majesty has been pleased to give you the Order of C. M. G. I wish to congratulate you on the distinction which you have well deserved in the fearless advocacy of the interests of your countrymen. I trust the same career may bring you further distinction.

It would be a good thing for Ceylon, if there were more of her sons who would speak their minds and let themselves be heard on public matters.

Believe me,
Yours very truly,
BRUCE BURNSIDE.

'The Ceylon Patriot' said:

"We congratulate Mr. Ramanathan on the honour which Her Gracious Majesty has been pleased to confer on him; yet we regret that the honour is in no way proportionate to the meritorious services rendered by the Honourable Member. But these are days when 'talent stinks and merit weeps unknown' and we must be content with small mercies. We can safely say without fear of contradiction that of all those whose singular fortune it has been to receive this title, no one so richly deserved it as the Honourable Member, and it is not too much to expect that he will soon go up the next rung of the ladder as a Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George. *Vive P. Ramanathan.*"

The Sinhalese paper *'Sarasavi Sandresa'* wrote:

"The Buddhists as a national sect, owe Mr. Ramanathan a deep debt of gratitude. His interest in the question of the Wesak Holiday and the Buddhist Temporalities Bill, his encouraging words to the Buddhists students of the Pali College and

Theosophical Society, and a host of other services towards Buddhism, have endeared him immensely to the Buddhists of Ceylon.

"We now, therefore, take the opportunity of congratulating Mr. Ramanathan on the distinction conferred on him by her Majesty the Queen in creating him a C. M. G."

'The Catholic Guardian' wrote:

"Many men have received honours, but no one has earned his honour more worthily than Ramanathan. Indeed, as he is entitled to higher dignity than the one conferred upon him, it is not so much that he is honoured as the Order itself. If, as we have often written, only distinguished public service should be recognized by the Sovereign, there is no doubt that Ramanathan alone deserves to be decorated, seeing that he has devoted himself to such work of his own accord and for no pay.

"Moreover, it should be remembered that, as Ramanathan is the representative of all the Tamils of the Island and a renowned chief, the honour conferred upon him is an honour to us all. Thereupon do we congratulate him with infinite pleasure."

Seldom was such high honour conferred on one so early in one's career; never was the announcement received with such universal acclaim. The reason is not far to seek. Ramanathan, though nominally representing the Tamil interest in the legislature, had by rapid strides, risen to national stature. Every issue, so long as it appertained to the national interest and was founded on the principles of Truth, Justice and Humanity, found in him a stalwart ally and indomitable champion.

The Investiture Ceremony was performed at Queen's House on 15th October, 1889 in the presence of all the Companions of the Order, and other distinguished citizens of the the Island. The occasion was one of great national rejoicing, inasmuch as the Government had done signal honour to a national hero.

In this connection, it is worthy of note that it was with Governor Gordon that Ramanathan often and relentlessly crossed swords in the Council Chamber. The Hansards and the press of these years are richly starred with numerous passages-at-arms wherein the great English aristocrat and masterful ruler and the dauntless and irrepressible youth were engaged in what then appeared to be mortal combats and which provided no small entertainment and edification to his colleagues in the legislature and then, to the reading public. All this, far from lowering Ramanathan in the esteem of the Englishman, raised him high in his admiration. Ramanathan's transparent sincerity and flaming patriotism, his uncommon powers of intellect and speech harnessed to the service of Truth, Justice and Freedom, his fearlessness and sturdy independence these and many others exercised a peculiar fascination on Lord Gordon. Gordon recommended a Knighthood, but the Secretary of State thought the usual order should be adhered to.

It is noteworthy that in the case of no other recipient did an honour, Imperial or local, evoke such enthusiastic and widespread acclaim. All classes and creeds, all racial and communal groups joined in felicitating him. The secret of it all was that Ramanathan had a universal mind. In all his long and illustrious career of half-a-century and more, he never identified himself with any one section of the people but fought the cause of every community. He was *par excellence* the member for the Man in the Pub and for the Family by the Hearth, and gave himself ungrudgingly to every generous cause. No community deprived of justice was without a champion in the Legislature so long as Ramanathan was member of it. No wonder, then, that the *Catholic Guardian*, a conservative organ, exultingly declared, "It is not so much that Ramanathan is honoured as the Order itself."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PROBLEM OF INDIAN LABOUR

"The coolies represent labour and the planters, capital, and the joint result of these two elements contribute greatly to the prosperity of Ceylon. By the labour of the coolies, the planters are as much benefited as the Colony itself. Why should the planters bear all the expenses themselves? The Government ought to share the cost of the scheme (provision of medical facilities) with the planters. That is nothing but fair."

— Ramanathan

"It is the duty of the Government to take under their protection the cooly, and to afford him all the help he needs during illness. The prosperity of Ceylon is bound up no less with the stability of the labour-supply than with the influence of European capital."

— Ramanathan

DURING his long and illustrious leadership, Ramanathan was a friend of the Indian immigrant labourer, partly for this reason that his heart instinctively went out in love and compassion for the poor, the inarticulate and the oppressed and partly for another reason, that the Island's prosperity and well-being was closely bound up with the happiness and well-being of the Indian labourer. He knew that European capital allied to Indian immigrant labour provided the basis on which the Island's economy was founded, and that anything that tended to impair their efficiency and well-being would jeopardize the economic future of the country. It was, therefore, not surprising that he showed special concern for the health and happiness of Indian immigrant labour.

It was notorious that the Indian immigrant labourer was, in the high-tide of European hegemony and before the advent of labour combinations, a victim of gross maltreatment and exploitation. He was for the most part ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-provided with medical or sanitary services. Consequently, mortality rate was appallingly high. It was both a human and an economic problem.

The Government, oblivious of the manifold benefits that accrued from the planting enterprise sought to palm on the Planters the sole responsibility of providing medical relief for plantation labour. Ramanathan opposed this attitude of the Government and asked indignantly, "Why should the Planters bear all the expense themselves?" and pressed his view that "the Government ought to share the cost of the scheme with the Planters. That is nothing but fair."

But the Government continued to be obdurate and the Honourable Member representing the European Planters suggested the imposition of a small duty on coffee, tea, cinchona etc. Ramanathan opposed it, for he knew that native planting enterprise too would be hit by such an export duty and persisted in his view that it was the conjoint responsibility of the European Planter and the Government to find the wherewithal of providing satisfactory medical relief to Indian labour. He said, "I have nothing to say against the suggestion, provided plantation coffee, and not native coffee, is taxed in that manner. I am assured that native coffee growers do not employ Tamil labourers, but work themselves on their own lands, and therefore, I do not think that a general export duty may fairly be demanded of all classes of planters. This question is a difficult one and requires careful study. But whatever the mode of assessment, it is very plain that Government ought to take the scheme entirely into their own hands, for that is the only manner in which the interest of

the cooly can be effectually looked after." In view of his opposition, and that of the Secretary of State, the proposal for the imposition of an export duty was abandoned, and in lieu of it, a new tax was proposed viz. a Capitation Tax on Indian labour.

Ramanathan protested vigorously against this proposal too for two reasons: one was that to single out Indian labour for such a tax, while exempting native labour would be but to practise an unhealthy and invidious discrimination against a community which was the main prop and stay of the Island's economy. He asked, "If coffee, cocoa, cinchona and tea planters are to pay a tax, why should not planters engaged in other enterprises also pay a similar tax? I have already shown that there are about 300,000 acres of coffee. It would appear that the area covered by coconut plantations is as great, viz., 300,000 acres. It is also estimated that arecanut, palmyra and kitul palm plantations cover about 120,000 acres, and cinnamon plantations about 30,000 acres. Why are not the owners of all these plantations to be taxed equally with the owners of coffee, cocoa, tea and cinchona planters? Is it simply because the owners of coconut, palmyra, arecanut, kitul and cinnamon plantations are not supposed to employ immigrant labour? Granting that they employ for the most part resident labour, do or do not the Government freely provide for the medical wants of the resident labourers? I might be told that clause 27 of the Labour Ordinance imposes upon all masters alike the obligation of attending to the medical wants of their servants. I can only say that that clause is more honoured in the breach than in the observance. My own personal experience has been so. Whenever my servants fell ill and my doctor was not at hand, I have asked them to go to the hospital. They were treated and no questions were asked. The same may be said of resident labourers employed under coconut, cinnamon, palmyra and arecanut planters. But whether or not the hospitals dispense relief to them free of cost, why don't the Government force upon coconut, cinnamon, palmyra and arecanut planters a medical scheme and a tax in aid of it? Is it because they employ Sinhalese or other resident labour? Is then the employment of immigrant or other Tamil labour so heinous an offence or so prejudicial to the country as to merit the burden of taxation?"

Ramanathan's next reason was that Indian labour contributed directly to the revenue a very large sum of money from year to year. He placed before the Council an elaborate wealth of statistical detail which he had accumulated with strenuous pains and proved incontestably that Indian immigrant labour alone was solely responsible for an increase of not less than Rs. 1,200,000 to the national revenue, taking into reckoning only some major items of imports and exports.

He continued, "The figures then stand as follows: the Tamil labourers in the Central Province increase the nett income of the Customs by Rs. 331,300, and the nett income of the railway by Rs. 395,000 by their consumption of rice, making a total of Rs. 826,300. And the Planters, by paying Rs. 328,450 for transport of coffee and Rs. 45,500 for transport of manure, increase the nett income of the railway by Rs. 373,950. The total of the contribution of the Planters and the Tamil labourers together to the revenue of Ceylon thus aggregate to a little more than Rs. 1,200,000. Your Excellency will perceive that I have not taken into account the import duty or the railway freight realized for the cotton goods and curry-stuffs used by the Tamil labourers, nor have I considered the revenue derived from them as stamp duty, nor the many indirect ways in which their capital circulating in different directions, must of necessity contribute to the revenue."

He proceeded to ask, "Under all these circumstances, will it be difficult to decide the question whether the Capitation Tax now proposed is fair or not? Is it just that they who contribute to the revenue of Ceylon so large a sum as Rs. 1,200,000 should be asked to pay a tax which they complain will fall heavily on them? Why should not the Government pay out of the general revenue Rs. 150,000 or less for the benefit of the community which enriches the Colony directly by Rs. 1,200,000? Sir, these are my opinions on the principle of the bill. They are not new, nor have I trimmed them to catch popular applause. In the very year that I took my seat in Council, I put forward these views, when the Honourable the Colonial Secretary moved in 1879 the bill proposing an assessment tax. This is what I said:

'The coolies represent labour and the Planters capital, and the joint result of these two elements contribute greatly to the prosperity of Ceylon. By the labour of the coolies, the Planters are as much benefited as the Colony itself. Why should the Planters bear all the expense themselves? The Government ought to share the cost of the scheme with the Planters. That is nothing but fair.'"

It was then proposed to impose an import duty on rice, which too Ramanathan opposed, for he knew it would fall heavily on the poor. He clung tenaciously to the view that the Government and the European Planters should share between themselves the cost of providing medical relief to Indian immigrant labour; and his view was finally upheld.

The Labour Ordinance of 1884 was framed with a view to affording protection for the Indian labourer and enabling him to recover his wages which, owing to a financial depression, was falling into arrears. But it was rendered practically inoperative by certain judgements of the Supreme Court affecting the construction and meaning of

certain clauses; by such judgements, the monthly-paid labourers were converted into day labourers and the checks imposed by the Ordinance against undue delay in the payment of the labourer's wages were rendered void, as also the facilities enacted for the easy recovery of their wages.

When this Ordinance of 1884 was taken in Committee, Ramanathan who was one of its members pleaded vehemently for the inclusion in it of a self-acting clause, whereby a labourer whose wages had not been paid, could neglect their duty, or refuse to work or quit service without leave, if at the time of the alleged offence, any monthly wages payable to them had not been paid in full. But owing to the stubborn resistance of the Officials, the clause was not included. Had such a clause been included, the purpose of the Ordinance of 1884 would not have been defeated.

When the Governor Sir Arthur Gordon, in his despatch to the Secretary of State, communicated to him the judgements of the Supreme Court, whereby the Ordinance of 1884 was nullified, the latter directed the Governor to amend the Ordinance to include the self-acting clause. The Planters were up in arms against this directive of the Secretary of State and characterized this action of his as "arbitrary, unwise and an affront to the Unofficial Members." They opposed the proposed amendments tooth and nail, but Ramanathan gave them his warm support, for they were a vindication of his original stand in favour of the self-acting clauses.

He said, "My honourable friends who represent the European Planting and Mercantile communities have spoken about the affront thrown upon the Legislative Council by the Secretary of State in requiring Your Excellency to carry this bill through by means of the Official vote. So far as I am concerned, my honourable friends who sat with me on the Committee of the previous bill know perfectly well how assiduously I fought for

the maintenance of what is called the self-acting principle, and I then expressed in Committee my surprise that Official after Official abandoned it. Seeing this state of things, I was obliged to accept the resolution of the majority, and the terms in which the Ordinance stands now. Therefore, my opinion in regard to the conduct of the Secretary of State is really this, that in the public interest, he has done nothing but what is right and proper.

"Passing from the action of the Secretary of State to the merits of the labour question, I have sadly observed that the opposition raised on behalf of the Planters, and in fact by the Planters themselves, has been as illogical as it has been prejudiced. I am not going to rip up the question from the beginning and point out in what respect they have been illogical and bitterly biased, but we have two instances of it to-day. One is the remark of my honourable friend who represents the European Mercantile Community, that Your Excellency's despatch brought about the refusal of the sanction on the part of the Secretary of State."

The Honourable W. W. Mitchell (interposing): "I said it was enough to do so."

Mr. Ramanathan (continuing): "That will quite answer my purpose, and I beg his pardon for not remembering his *ipsissima verba*. But my honourable friend does not appear to have considered whether the effect of that despatch had done good to the Planters or put them in a worse position, and should we not rise above our own horizon, and see whether the interests of the Planters and the coolies have been or have not been really improved by the measure which he has asked Your Excellency to present to this Council? My honourable friend who represents the General European Planting interests has spoken of the danger of experimenting upon the labour laws at this crisis, apparently suggesting that the Government of Ceylon has, of its own free choice, forced upon

the Council and the planting community a meddlesome policy. Now, that shows a total inappreciation of the actual facts of the case. I am prepared to show that the Government have not unduly interfered with any one's rights or liberties. They have simply done their duty.

"The labour law which is before us to-day is the result of the development of certain causes for which the Government is not responsible. Nor have they been experimenting. It was their duty to have taken notice of the situation that had arisen. Consider, Sir, for a moment how the Ordinance No. II of 1865 was passed through the Legislative Council. By it a man who was really and truly a day labourer, paid according to the number of days he worked, was converted into a monthly labourer, with the consequence that for refusal to work, or for desertion of duty, he was made punishable as a common criminal. That was done primarily, as I understand it, in the interests of one section of the community, and that was the Planters. The Government having wrought this change in the condition of the labourer in order to benefit the Planter, the law as it then stood worked smoothly for a number of years, till Government's interference became necessary again, but this time it was in the interests of the coolies. The Planters were, no doubt humane, mindful of their own interests as much as the interests of the cooly, but owing to the pressure of work and other circumstances, when the coolies fell ill they neglected them. It became necessary for the Government to introduce an Ordinance regulating the medical wants of the planting districts. Some time afterwards when the collapse of the coffee enterprise came, it was found, by the reports furnished by these medical officers, that the condition of the coolies was in a very deplorable state. It was found that they were in a half-starved condition on many estates, owing to their wages not being

paid; and when the matter was reported in this official manner, it became the duty of Government to enquire into the matter. It was then found that the representations made by their medical officers were true. In fact the Planter's Association admitted, and my honourable friends also admitted, this unfortunate state of things. But they said it was the result of misfortune, and there was no intention to be wilfully negligent or dishonest. Thereupon, Sir John Douglas, who was then administering the Government, wrote a despatch to the Secretary of State, which was, as honourable members will remember, tabled on the 21st December, 1883. The despatch is dated the 12th October, 1883. He set forth the circumstances under which Government interference became necessary, and wound up his despatch as follows:

'The special points upon which the existing law appears to me to be most in need of amendment are these: (1) A labourer paid by the day's work should incur the liabilities of a daily labourer only. Monthly labourers should be given a monthly wage It would follow that no penalty for desertion would lie against labour paid by the day's work. (2) Arrears of wages should be a first charge upon the estate for twelve months, instead of three, as at present. (3) The Government Agent of the Province, or any person authorized by him in writing, should have power at any time to inspect the coolies on any estate, and ascertain whether their wages have been paid. If it be found that the wages are more than three months in arrears, the Agent or his officer should have swift and summary powers for recovering their wages. The procedure laid in clause 23 of Ordinance 17 of 1880, would probably be found well suited for this purpose. (4) It may perhaps, be desirable to preserve *in terrorem* the penalties of fine and imprisonment against the employer for breach of contract with his labourers. See Section 14 of Ordinance II of

1865, but it should be remembered that the employer is the Superintendent of the estate who, in the majority of cases in Ceylon, is not the proprietor, nor has he anything to do with providing funds for working the estate. The Superintendent has indeed of late been often in a worse plight than the cooly. The latter has been supplied at any rate with rice, the former may have received nothing whatever. The real remedy, therefore is against the pocket of the proprietor (frequently an absentee), and of the agents responsible for working the estate. The procedure above referred to under clause 23 of Ordinance 17 of 1868 would appear to afford such a remedy. (5) When the labourer is provided with rice by his employer, as he must of necessity be in the vast majority of cases, it should be obligatory to supply the rice at cost price. This is not the universal practice at present. Provisions such as the above would, in my opinion, afford that security for wages which is indispensable as well for the protection of the cooly as in the best interests of agricultural enterprise in Ceylon.'

"Thereupon Lord Derby wrote to Your Excellency, upon your assumption of office as Governor of this Island, that you should at once frame laws upon the lines stated by Sir John Douglas. How could Your Excellency be without taking notice of these instructions? Admittedly the coolies' wages were not paid; admittedly the coolies found it exceedingly difficult to recover their wages by means of the Law Courts. It thus became your paramount duty to directly interfere and settle this unfortunate state of things by enacting the Ordinance of 1884. Now, have I not shown conclusively that it was not Your Excellency's Government who tried experiments with the Labour Laws of the Land?

"The Ordinance that was passed was good enough and things would have gone on satisfac-

torily, had not the Supreme Court of this island construed the Ordinance in such a way as to at once throw the whole machinery out of joint. Was it right on the part of the Government to stand by and see the whole scheme devised after so much trouble, collapse without a remedy? The inhabitants of the Island expected Your Excellency to rise to the occasion, and you have introduced another Ordinance to regulate the relations between the Planters and their labourers. It was necessary to conserve labourers' wages and to enable them to recover their wages without trouble. The Planters complained that the interference caused by the furnishing of returns, the Attorney-General's inspection and supervision, and so on, were very vexatious. Your Excellency gave up those inquisitorial clauses and substituted what has been called the self-acting check. Supposing you had not introduced the self-acting check, would the Planters have accepted the inquisitorial clauses?"

Mr. T. N. Christie: "Yes, certainly."

Mr. P. Ramanathan (continuing)—"about which you Planters have complained so long and so loud? It was only when my honourable friend found that the self-acting check would not do, so far as the payment of the coolies was concerned, that he harked back and said 'We would rather let the whole thing go on as of old.' I do not think this is fair. The truth must be spoken, and I am sure that an unprejudiced person would at once admit, what the planters and merchants are not able to see that the Government has done nothing but what is proper and fair in the interests of the cooly, the planter, and the country at large. I, therefore, say again that there is nothing experimental in this legislation. I think it is most humane legislation. Now that the Secretary of State has sent back this Bill, and Your Excellency has given further latitude to the Planters even upon lines which you did not contemplate at first, I think Planters ought to be thankful instead of being cantankerous."

It will thus be seen that throughout his long career, Ramanathan was engaged in a persistent and heroic struggle on behalf of the Indian immigrant labourer against the apathy, the self-interest and even heartless cruelty of both the Planters and the Government. It was his valiant and vigorous championship that rendered the lot of the immigrant labourer more endurable than what it was in earlier days.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LEGAL REFORM

"It is only when the people of the country have reasons for absolute confidence in the decisions of the Police Magistrates that the Legislature ought to deny the right of appeal."

— *Ramanathan*

"In my opinion, it would be impolitic, in the circumstances of this Colony, to entrust officers engaged in purely administrative work with judicial offices."

— *Ramanathan*

ONE of the greatest and most enduring of Ramanathan's Services to his country was legal reform. A keen and astute lawyer with a profound mastery of the law of his land and its administration, who had withal made a comparative study of the legal systems obtaining in many lands outside could not help being alive to the deficiencies and shortcomings in the legal system of his own country. He knew that a well-conceived body of laws ably administered by a competent and independent judiciary constitutes the root and basis of all progressive society. A passionate lover of freedom, he knew that law is the surest safeguard of individual liberty against arbitrary rule. The legal system imposed upon the country by an alien Colonial power was fast becoming outmoded and out of tune with the moving trends of the times. He therefore, brought home to the Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon the urgency of the need to revise the body of laws and to render its administration more efficient.

Accordingly, an Extraordinary Session of the

Legislative Council was opened on 18th July, 1883 for the purpose of considering the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. The records of the Council Proceedings in Committee held during the four months ending October 1883 contain some of the finest specimens of Ramanathan's great legal acumen, his profound mastery of his subject, his readiness in debate and above all, his earnest endeavour to safeguard the interests of the people displayed in the course of the long debates that took place upon the various clauses of those bills.

Clause 406 of the Criminal Procedure Code proposed to do away with the right of appeal in all cases where the punishment inflicted was imprisonment of a month or less. Ramanathan stoutly upheld the principle that every accused person should have the right of appeal in all cases, big and small, that "it is better that the administration of justice should be believed to be pure than that it should be actually so," and that every judgement should, if the accused so desired, be re-examined and revised by a higher tribunal.

Accordingly on 8th September 1883, he moved for the deletion of the offending clause (406) and said, among other things: "The people of Ceylon have not always felt confidence in the soundness of the judgements pronounced by Police Magistrates." He added that "it is only when the people of this country have reasons for absolute confidence in the decisions of the Police Magistrates that the Legislature ought to deny the right of appeal."

He condemned the manner in which a Police Magistrate was drawn into the Public Service. He said: "Let us look into the way in which a Magistrate is drafted into the Service. He is quite new to the country and the habits of the people of Ceylon. On assuming duty, he hears evidence and records his judgement upon the evidence adduced. He attributes this motive to one witness and that to another, which may not be the true motives.

He interprets the statements of the witnesses by his own ideas of things. He then passes his judgement upon this incorrect assignment of motives, and incorrect interpretation of evidence, a judgement which, in the opinion of another person of greater experience, would be incorrect. In such a case, I ask, would this Council conscientiously take upon itself the responsibility of depriving the people of the country of the right of appeal which they now possess? I think, in this discussion, proper weight has not been given to the opinion of Mr. Ferdinands upon one point. He points out the incongruity of appeals being granted in the case of a person who comes before the Court complaining he has been deprived of a six-penny piece or of some small debt which has not been paid. In that case, he has a right of appeal; but in the other more important case, he has no right of appeal. Nor has sufficient weight been given to the argument brought forward by my hon'ble and learned friend opposite (the Hon'ble J. Van Langenberg) as regards the incongruity of allowing appeals in cases which involve a punishment of three months and not allowing appeals in cases of punishment of one month's imprisonment only. We should not be inconsistent. To one man a thousand pounds may not be much, but to another ten pounds may be a fortune. To one man a day's imprisonment would be ruinous, but to another man three month's imprisonment may ward off starvation at his house and so be agreeable to him. I am the last person to advocate changes simply for the purpose of realizing ideal reforms. But here we have substantial incongruities in allowing appeals in cases of one month's imprisonment. Surely, some explanation is due to those who ask for the reason of all this."

In conclusion, he made a moving appeal to His Excellency the Governor not to pin too much faith on the judgements of Police Magistrates but

to extend to the people of Ceylon their legitimate right of appeal. He said, "I appeal to Your Excellency to view the circumstances in which Ceylon is situated and the means by which the machinery of justice is administered, and I feel it my duty to beg Your Excellency not to take away from the inhabitants of Ceylon the right which they have possessed for so many years and which they keenly appreciate. Sir, I move that this clause be deleted, and ask Hon'ble members to do the people of this country justice by voting with me."

On 29th October, 1884, Ramanathan protested vigorously against the Government's decision to entrust Executive Officers with purely judicial functions. He contended that the vesting of both administrative and judicial functions in one and the same person is contrary to all the canons of British justice. He said: "A very large question is opened up today on the face of this Bill and I appeal to my honourable friends on this side of the House to have their say on this subject. For my part, I would respectfully state to Your Excellency that in my opinion it would be impolitic, in the circumstances of this Colony, to entrust officers engaged in purely administrative work with judicial offices."

He waxed eloquent on the impropriety and anomaly of the same person being both prosecutor and judge, as was proposed by the Thoroughfares Ordinance whereby the Chairman of a Road Committee was both prosecutor and judge in cases where offenders against the Ordinance were involved. He said: "Because it is an established rule in the British system of Government to separate and keep distinct the duties of administration and judicial functions, and because it is improper that the Chairmen of Road Committees should be both prosecutor and judge. There are heaps of cases in English Law where the slightest personal interest

in a case disqualifies a man from being judge in it. I remember a case, and that is one of our leading cases, where the Lord Chancellor of England, having a few shares in a public company, sat in judgement over a case brought by one Dimes against that company. His judgement was set aside by the House of Lords on the ground of interest. I desire to call this Council's attention to it, because I believe that we are forgetting some salient principles of administration. The case in question is reported in the third volume of the House of Lords Reports. Lord Campbell said: 'No one can suppose that Lord Cottenham could be in the remotest degree influenced by the interest that he had in this concern; but, my Lords, it is of the last importance that the maxim that no man is to be judge in his own cause should be held sacred. And that is not to be confined to a cause in which he is a party, but applies to a cause in which he has an interest. Since I have had the honour to be Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench, we have again and again set aside proceedings in inferior tribunals, because an individual who had an interest in a cause took a part in the decision. And it will have a most salutary influence on these tribunals, when it is known that this high court of last resort, in a case in which the Lord Chancellor of England had an interest, considered that his decree was on that account a decree not according to law, and was set aside. This will be a lesson to all inferior tribunals to take care not only that in their decrees they are not influenced by their personal interest, but to avoid the appearance of labouring under such an influence.' That is the lofty standard which justice demands of those who are entrusted with judicial, legislative and executive work. I hope that principle will never be forgotten in Ceylon.

"The Chairman of the District or Provincial Road Committee, who is deeply interested in the collection of taxes and the proper maintenance of roads, is by this Bill made at the same time prosecutor and judge. I submit that these two clauses 15 and 18 are a direct infringement of a very valuable principle which actuates the English system of government. It passes my comprehension to know who is responsible for the violation of this time-honoured policy. I do not know of any precedent in our laws for entrusting an administrative officer with judicial work. Neither do I see any necessity for it. Perhaps the Government desired to simplify procedure, but there may be too much simplification."

On 19th November, 1884, Ramanathan questioned the legality of empowering the Governor in Executive Council to validate rules framed by Village Committees and upheld the principle that the Legislative Council alone had the sovereign powers of legislation.

He asked the Governor "whether it was constitutional for this Council to delegate its functions in so sweeping a manner to other bodies" and concluded, "I strongly deprecate the passing of this Bill. The essence of my opposition is to its second clause."

The Bill was referred to a Sub-Committee and when its report was presented to the Council, Ramanathan pointed out the inefficacy of the recommendation of the Sub-Committee as to Clause 2. (It should in parenthesis he said that it was this clause that empowered the Governor in Executive Council to validate rules framed by Village Committees, thus robbing the Legislative Council of its sovereign powers of legislation.)

The Governor saw reason in Ramanathan's contention and withdrew Clause 2 altogether, thus upholding the supremacy of the legislature over all other institutions.

The Government, with the three-fold object of increasing the revenue, checking litigation, and

restricting appeals, proposed to impose prohibitive stamp duties on all forms of legal proceedings.

On 26th November, 1884 the Honourable the Acting Colonial Secretary (Mr. J. F. Dickson) moved the second reading of the Bill designed to give effect to the proposal.

Ramanathan opposed the Bill in one of his long and eloquent speeches. Though he was in active sympathy with the Government in its efforts to augment the national revenue, he was out of sympathy with the means adopted to achieve this end. He maintained that the right of access to a court of law for redress of wrongs that cannot otherwise be redressed, for justice that is otherwise unobtainable, is the prerogative of every individual and no government has reason to deny access to it or beset its path with superfluous impediments. On the contrary, he maintained, it is the duty and responsibility of the Government to facilitate access to courts of law for the pacific settlement of private disputes.

He combated indignantly the allegation made by the Government that the Ceylonese were far too litigious. That he felt was a gratuitous slur on the people. He went furthur to say that in a world bristling with violence, in a world which readily lends itself to violence for the settlement of its disputes, it was a virtue with the Ceylonese that they should eschew violence and look up to their public tribunals for adjudication.

Inter alia, he said: "I sympathize with the Government in their endeavour to resuscitate a falling revenue, but I cannot go with the Government in their contention that the people of this country are far too litigious or prefer appeals more unjustifiably than people in other countries do. It is only those who view the surface of things that condemn our people for litigiousness, by professing to compare the statistics which are usually published in England or India. We know for certain

how many cases are instituted in the Gangsabawas, Police Courts, Courts of Requests and District Courts and also in the Supreme Court of the Island; but most of us do not know how many cases are instituted in India or England in courts corresponding to our Gangsabawas and Courts of Requests ..... It is certain that the basis of comparison which is sought to be instituted between litigants in Ceylon and litigants in India and England is radically wrong. I think that those who are raising the cry that our people are too fond of litigation are giving utterance to a statement not warranted by facts.

"But supposing that the people of this country are fond of litigation, it yet remains to be shown that, by increasing the stamp duties, the people of this country would refrain from going to courts. If they go to our Courts, it is because they do not want to take the law into their own hands. They are not given to bullying or roughly treating others. As they find that the British Government have furnished them with Courts of Justice to have their wrongs redressed, they avail themselves of the privilege given them."

He now proceeds to probe the causes that encouraged this increased propensity to litigation and submitted that the British Government of Ceylon, by its destruction of the traditional authority of the Headmen, by its utter neglect of education and its failure to provide opportunities of employment for the people was mainly responsible for this unhappy state of things.

He said, "In former times, under the native rulers, Courts of Justice were not many nor accessible; nor were trade operations so multifarious as now. Disputes in those days were comparatively few, and, when they arose, they were mostly settled by village headmen and relations. But now, things are different. The authority of Headmen has been destroyed, and the transactions of life have in-

creased enormously. It is, therefore, not right to say that, by the people resorting to our modern Courts of Justice, they are guilty of being too fond of litigation. As well might it be said that, by the British Government giving hospitals to the people and the people flocking to hospitals, they are to be blamed as too fond of falling sick. The secret of litigation, Sir, is in my opinion the importance which one attaches to rights denied or wrongs perpetrated, and to the loose manner in which business is conducted among our people. Until the people are better educated, are less petty-minded, and are able to find active occupations in a busy industrial life which will keep them engaged from one end of the day to the other so as to divert their thoughts from grievances of fancied magnitude, they will resort to Courts as frequently as they do now. I cannot admit that they are more litigious than the people of India or Europe. Putting high duties, therefore, on legal proceedings is not in my opinion a proper mode of checking peaceful litigation."

On the question of appeals, he contended that, until the lower courts were manned by qualified and competent judges experienced in the administration of justice, the Government had no reason for restricting appeals.

He said, "We were told in sub-committee that appeals should be restricted, and it was stated — on whose authority I know not — that appeals are needlessly preferred. I have studied the statistics of the Appellate Court, and I admit that there is a large number of affirmations of the Courts below, but there is also an appreciable number of modifications and reversals; and if anybody takes upon himself to bring a sweeping charge against the people of Ceylon that they prefer appeals illegitimately, it is only just that he should prove it. A bare statement like that cannot become true because it has been made. We shall not

accept it. If the Government had proved by statistics that the Appellate Courts in England do not affirm as often as our Appellate Court does, we would gladly own the impeachment. But nothing of the kind has been done. Those who have any practice in our Appellate Court would tell you that their opinion is just the reverse, and that the people of this country are in as normal a condition in regard to litigation in appeal as people in other countries."

He protested vigorously against the allegation made in certain quarters that appeals in Ceylon were a luxury and should therefore be paid for heavily. He said: "We have also been assured that appeals in Ceylon are a luxury and as such, they should be highly paid for. That is a point on which I and my honourable friend on the right (Mr. A. L. de Alwis) feel strongly. It is not a luxury in the circumstances of the Colony, but is an absolute necessity. Our Judiciary, with a few notable exceptions, have no special training in the law, nor have they much experience of our hearths and homes. Necessarily, therefore, their findings on facts do not command the respect they otherwise might, nor are their decisions on law satisfactory. I have heard many a civilian say that they did not qualify themselves in law, because they left to the Appellate Court the correction of their errors in law. I, therefore, am quite certain that appeals are not a luxury in Ceylon."

It was a very long, learned, factual, well-argued and eloquent vindication of the right of people of all classes and conditions to have easy access to courts of law to have their wrongs righted, their grievances redressed. In his endeavour to make the framers of the Bill see the light of reason and justice, he had perforce to fall foul of the Acting Colonial Secretary and the Law Officers of the Crown.

It is impossible, within the compass of a few

pages, to do even bare justice to the magnitude of his labours in the field of legal reform, even before he became one of the principal law-officers of the Crown. Suffice it to say that he spotlighted the numerous blemishes and shortcomings in our legal system and gave an impulse to legal reform never attempted before or after. A firm believer in the sanctity of law and the paramountcy of its reign in national life, he strove hard all his life to modernize and strengthen our legal system and render it a source of real pride to the country.

CHAPTER XXIX

RETIREMENT FROM COUNCIL IN 1892

"In my opinion, no man has risen to the ideal of what a representative of the people should be as Mr. Ramanathan has done."

—*Sir Frederick Dornhorst*

"High posts in the Government Service did not go a-begging in those days."

—*The Ceylon Observer*

IN 1892, Ramanathan received the following letter from His Excellency Sir Arthur Havelock:

Galle,
30th September, 1892.

Dear Mr. Ramanathan,

The Secretary of State, Lord Ripon, has arrangements in contemplation which will probably cause a vacancy in the office of Solicitor-General. I shall be at Galle until Monday next. Your reply should be addressed to that place.

Yours Sincerely,
A. E. HAVELOCK.

On Ramanathan's replying that he would be willing to accept the post offered, the Governor thanked him and expressed the hope that he would continue to occupy the Tamil Seat in Council till the close of the session in December, 1892. He agreed to do so, and sat in Council till 14th December.

The news of Ramanathan's quitting the arena of politics, where he had for fourteen years been a prize-fighter, where, from the moment of his entry, he had become the observed of all observers, gave a rude shock to the nation which had followed

his political life with uncommon pride and admiration. There had been no question of any national importance in which he had not played during all these fourteen years a conspicuous and dazzling role. There had been hardly any evil social, political or economic that he did not seek to combat with suitable legislation. He had levelled the most courageous blows at the injustices and anomalies inherent in British administration of the country. Though an aristocrat born of a long line of aristocrats, he was ever and anon the intrepid and irrepressible champion of the under-dog; and underdoggery was rife in his time. The part he played in the foundation of that most beneficent institution, the Post Office Savings Bank, his untiring labours in the cause of legal education and the modernizing and strengthening of our legal system, his gallant fight on behalf of the Indian indentured labourer, his vigorous and undaunted championship of all ranks of Public Servants, particularly the humbler ones of the Junior Clerical Service, his unparallelled contributions to educational reform, his heroic defence of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions and above all, his impassioned plea for constitutional reform and the extension of the people's rights were all fresh in the minds of all men. The removal of so stalwart a champion and benefactor from the nation's supreme legislature was unbearable in the extreme.

Commenting on Ramanathan's retirement from Council, a leading newspaper which did not believe in sowing compliments broadcast, remarked: "His experience in the Council and his thorough knowledge of the country will be lost to the Government as well as to the public in the discussions of certain measures which are likely to engage the attention of the Council soon. We hope that Mr. Ramanathan will retain his seat at least until those measures are passed into law. The prospects of the great Northern Railway which

are just now within reasonable hopes of realization will suffer very much if Mr. Ramanathan should by virtue of his office as Solicitor-General lose his place in the Railway Commission. We shall not go over the ground again, but we think it will not be doubted for a moment that the great Northern Railway question has been brought to the present stage by the cordial and warm support Mr. Ramanathan gave to it in and out of the Council. We hope, therefore, that the Government would allow him to remain a Member of the Railway Commission until a final and definite Report is submitted by that body. It is for these reasons we regret that Mr. Ramanathan should resign his seat in the Council by accepting office under Government."

An Englishman, who had seen and heard Ramanathan in the Ceylon legislature in 1889 and then met him forty years later in England, when the latter visited that land to protest against the Donoughmore Constitution, has left the following record of him: "When I visited Ceylon in 1889, Mr. Ramanathan had been a member of Council for most of a decade and was in the plenitude of the powers of early manhood. Mr. Thomas North Christie had just succeeded, as Planting Member, Mr. Downall who had died in harness and he and the Tamil Member were the leading orators. Each had a fine presence and thrust and blow were exchanged with marked ability. Irrigation policy and other matters were the subjects of terrific debates, with Sir Arthur Gordon presiding. Forty years later, the veteran Ceylonese appeared in London under the guise of a flowing white beard; but his eyes still sparkled, although his grip on life was already relaxing that his spirit might the easier take flight. Sir Ponnambalam should be held in perpetual memory as exemplifying that rectitude and honesty of purpose that gives real power to both the spoken and the written word."

But Ramanathan was of all persons the last to desert the cause of his people, however high the sacrifice, and take up an office under Government, however high and remunerative. In those days, unlike now, membership of the legislature was dependent not on popular support but on the favour and good-will of the Government. It was not popular election but nomination by the Governor that placed one in Council.

Ramanathan, though he had the fierce support of the nation, was, nevertheless, swayed by the fear that the Government in whose side he had frequently been a thorn, against which he had often fulminated with the fire and eloquence of a born debator and controversialist whenever its actions ran counter to national interests would seize upon some pretext, however flimsy or trivial, to shut him out of the legislature. Moreover, the Government had of late years limited a member's term of office to five years. When that rule was enforced, Ramanathan would be the first to go, inasmuch as he had been in the legislature for an uninterrupted period of fourteen years and if there was one person whom the governing hierarchy would love to be rid of, it was he and no other.

Let us hear what he had to say on the subject: "When I was leading the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council in 1892, the Marquis of Ripon, without consulting the local Government, requested Governor Havelock to offer me the post of Solicitor-General of the Island, and I took it, because the five year rule was being enforced, and I, a thorn in the side of the Government, was not sure of a reappointment, and I hoped to come back to the Legislative Council as Attorney-General, which, indeed, I did in 1904, 1905 and 1906. During the years in which I was obliged to keep myself aloof from Unofficial circles, I found a great change had come over the minds of the people. They had lost all interest in public affairs

owing to a variety of causes, the chief of which was the impatience of the Government at the criticism of those outside the Government circles."

Ramanathan's absence from the Council Chamber was undoubtedly a severe set-back to the cause of the people, inasmuch as he had been the life and soul of the Legislature and no better custodian of their political fortunes could be found. But he preferred to serve them in some surer capacity rather than depend on the quicksands of gubernatorial goodwill or the dubious hazards of nomination. His fourteen years of life in the Legislative Council had been a period of strenuous endeavour and prolific achievement.

Glittering tributes were paid to him in the Council Chamber by his colleagues, both Official and Unofficial. Portions of their speeches are quoted here verbatim, as they serve to throw light on his work there. The Hon. Lieut. Governor (Sir Noel Walker) said, "Though not the eldest in service, the Honourable Member has sat at this Council table since the middle of 1879, and for six years, since 1886, he has been the Senior Unofficial Member. During these fourteen years, which in the history of the Colony is certainly a long period, the Hon. Member has taken a prominent and important part in the discussions and resolutions of Council, and has, I may say, carefully and fully watched over the interests of that portion of the community which he specially represents, and which constitutes one-fourth of our number of population. Nor have his useful services been restricted to that community. In matters affecting the profession to which he belongs, as well as in questions involving a knowledge of the history of the Council, his assistance has been most valuable.

"In the Committee work, which, perhaps does not receive so much public notice and is not so much a matter of public cognizance, but where

the substantial work of the Legislature is really done, the honourable member has always been most helpful and most forbearing in the consideration of the views of members which might have been opposed to his own.

"In the personal and informal communications which I have been permitted to have with the honourable member and other members of this Council, I have received from him in a marked degree, as from no other members of this Council, a uniform courtesy and consideration which outweighed and extinguished any petty difference inevitable to a deliberative assembly; and I am sure I only express the feeling of this Council, when I say that we see the severance of the honourable member's connection with this Council with regret.

"It is not a matter of surprise, Sir, that the honourable member should seek to relinquish his position at this Council and to pursue his career in the higher walks of the attractive profession to which he belongs. It is precisely the course which another honourable member of this Council followed some sixteen years ago. For myself I trust that the help and co-operation I have received from the honourable member as his colleague in this Legislative Council will be extended to me as a brother officer."

The Honourable Mr. W. W. Mitchell (European Mercantile Representative) said, "The powers of Unofficial Members, it is well known, are but limited, and the position of the leader of the Unofficials is frequently one of some difficulty. He has indeed to occupy somewhat the position of the leader of a forlorn hope. Not that the function of the Unofficials is to attack the Government. Far from it, but I conceive the functions are to criticize and advise, and if need be, to offer resistance where measures are brought forward which appear to be likely to work in a manner which would be contrary to their desires.

"A united Unofficial phalanx has often produced, in my experience, results very beneficial indeed to the whole community in safeguarding the interests of the many, where they seemed to be somewhat at stake, and when any such action has been taken, my honourable and learned friend has invariably shown tact and good sense and independence. He has always had the courage of his convictions and has not hesitated to give expression to his feelings in matters brought before the Council. He has at all times exhibited a keen interest in the welfare of the people, and by his untiring energy and ability has, in many instances and on many occasions, rendered able assistance to the Government. This was recognized about three years ago when her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen conferred on him the Order of St. Michael and St. George.

"He has been now selected to fill the office of Solicitor-General in this Colony; and let us hope that his career will continue to be accompanied by the lustre which has spread over his past unofficial life. In the name of his Unofficial Colleagues, it is fitting I should on this occasion testify to our appreciation of his abilities and services whilst bidding him farewell."

The Honourable Mr. T. B. Panabokke (Kandyan Representative) said, "What a great tower of strength he was to me, as there were many things that were common between the community he represents and the community that I have the honour to represent. Thus in matters of religion, I think, our interests are united, and in most of the manners and customs there are many things in common between the Tamil and the Kandyan communities, and therefore whenever a question of this sort, which was interesting to the Kandyan Community was coming up, and I had an opportunity of discussing it, my honourable friend was a tower of strength to me, and to the enemy, I

should say, a battery constructed of adamant; and I, therefore, say it is a positive loss to me — even looking at it in a personal point of view — to lose his valuable services from this Council."

The honourable Mr. M. C. Abdul Rahiman (Muhammadan Representative) said, "Today the Council loses the services and advice of the Senior Unofficial Member, and the blow falls hardest on the Unofficial side of the House. Whatever steps Mr. Ramanathan had taken for the good of the country had met with success. It is an admitted fact that every statesman has enemies, but I am glad to say that in this instance, they are very few. He is a bright example for this countrymen to follow..... All the native communities are equally agreed in congratulating the honourable member. May he be blessed with long life and strength."

To these demonstrations of gratitude and admiration, Ramanathan replied, "I feel overwhelmed, and know not how to express my thanks for the very kind words which have fallen from the honourable speakers. Being too sensible of my own deficiencies, I cannot appropriate those remarks as my just deserts. I accept them only as indications of the generous spirit which pervades the hearts of my honourable friends, ever desirous of forgetting and forgiving the faults, and cherishing and proclaiming the virtues, of others. Their thoughtful magnanimity gives me the chance of taking formal leave of my colleagues, and it is only natural that on such occasions, I should cast back my looks for a moment upon the time when circumstances were driving me on to the platform of public service as a member of this grand, aye, august body, invested with the sovereign powers of legislation, taxation and administration.

"I confess my attention was first drawn to the greatness of such a position by the pomp and ceremony associated with the opening day of

the year's sessions. Returning from abroad some four and twenty years ago, my youthful imagination was fired by the more than usual splendour which Sir Hercules Robinson took delight in imparting to the proceedings of the day. I did not get near enough to hear the distinguished Governor clearly, but by gentle nudging I gradually came abreast of the first line of hearers who were standing, only to find that his address was drawing to a close and the time had arrived for the breaking up of the assembly. That was my first experience of the Legislative Council.

"Similar to that experience is today's experience, for, having attained to the first rank among my Unofficial Colleagues as their leader, — the foremost position which one outside the Government service can ever occupy, — I find myself ordered not to stay there but to move on to another scene of labour, even to the inner workshop of legislation and the confidential direction of those entrusted with the investigation and prosecution of crime. To me, this day, closing a great and eventful chapter in my life, is a day of judgment; and I am glad indeed — glad beyond measure – to have the assurance of my honourable colleagues, who have the best opportunities of judging, that I have done well. What more satisfactory reward can man expect from man? I only hope that at the end of the new career now opened to me, I shall be equally fortunate in obtaining the same verdict from those qualified to judge.

"I thank Your Excellency for sanctioning the proceedings of this day. I thank the Lieutenant Governor and my other honourable friends who have spoken, for the appreciative words which they have been pleased to say, on behalf of themselves and of the Official and Unofficial sides of this House; and I thank the other honourable members for listening with patience and kindly-feeling to the remarks which have been made on

this occasion. I thank them all as warmly as possible.

"His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has expressed a hope that I will, as Solicitor-General, give him all help and co-operation with as free a hand as, he says, I have done in Council. I beg to assure him of it. It will be my duty and privilege to do all in my power to serve the Government, and it cannot be justly said that the interests of the Government are not identical with those of the public. Both interests, when rightly considered, are one.

"I again repeat I have not words sufficiently expressive to convey to honourable members my sense of gratitude for their kindness and indulgence."

His Excellency the Governor, in putting the motion for adjournment, said, "I wish to express my high appreciation of the services of the honourable member who is about to leave us, and my regret at his approaching retirement from the place in this Council which he has so long, so ably, and so usefully filled."

It was undoubtedly a dark moment for the great statesman to bid adieu to the scene of his labours wherein for fourteen years he had played the foremost role and won the most astonishing triumphs over adversaries no whit his inferiors, the scene which had reverberated with the splendour of his eloquence and chuckled with ecstasy and delight at the spectacle of his numerous bouts of thrust and parry, at whose anvil the most salutary pieces of legislation were forged, wherein by his genius for political action and the ardour of his patriotism, he had defended the rights and liberties of his people against the inroads of a foreign imperial power. But the gods had decreed otherwise and he had to bow down.

CHAPTER XXX

MUDALIYAR PONNAMBALAM COOMARASWAMY

"Mudaliyar Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy was a tower of strength to his countrymen and the Tamils never had a more independent or abler representative in Council than him."

— *The Ceylon Observer*

LET us in passing, devote some pages to a brief sketch of the life and work of Mudaliyar Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy, the eldest of Mudaliyar Ponnambalam's three sons, and one who like his two illustrious brothers, played a distinguished role in the public and political life of the Island. This sketch is the more apposite for this reason that he it was who filled the Tamil Seat when it fell vacant on Ramanathan's appointment to the office of Solicitor-General. It was remarkable that the impetuous current of genius inherent in the family should have run through all the three sons of Mudaliyar Ponnambalam. Coomaraswamy was the last of the long line of Tamil leaders who from among its sons held the Tamil Seat in almost unbroken succession for well-nigh three quarters of a century until in 1897, despite the universal clamour of the nation, the Seat was wrested from its hands by the Imperialist who, enraged at the extraordinary independence and fierce denunciation of Governmental excesses indulged in by its scions, could trot out no other excuse but that it had over the years gained a monopoly of the Seat.

Coomaraswamy like his two brothers, was a man possessed of high intellectual powers, unim-

peachable integrity and independence of character and a passion for the service of his people. He was a politician who had in him the germs of a great statesman and would certainly have flowered into one had not the White Sahibs, smarting under the strokes of his fiery eloquence, deliberately shut him out of the legislature after only a single term of five years. He was a scholar steeped in Eastern classics and acknowledged to be the most fascinating talker of his time. As a Councillor, he was proud of his independence, a rare and intrepid quality in political life. He was so far enamoured of this virtue that he rarely lost any opportunity of exposing bureaucratic excesses. J. R. Weinman says, "Ramanathan's elder brother Coomaraswamy was a man of quite different mould. Intellectually he was Ramanathan's superior, but he had not his application. He knew the joy of living and warmed both his hands in the fire of life. Nobody accused him of pouring over blue-books after dinner. He was hot-headed, impetuous and warm-hearted, the creature of impulse, and men liked him all the better for his indiscretions blazing at times, but never offensive."

Born in Colombo on 7th December, 1849 Coomaraswamy received his early education at Queen's Academy, (now Royal College). In 1864, his father had him admitted to Presidency College, Madras along with his brother Ramanathan. On his return from Madras, he studied law and qualified as a proctor. His practice in Colombo was extensive and lucrative. His fundamental honesty, his sincerity and candour, his passion for justice, his firm and fearless espousal of popular causes, coupled with intellectual power of a high order marked him out as one destined for public life. He was a Member of the Colombo Municipal Council for a continuous period of twenty years and relinguished that office on grounds of illness only a few years before his death.

He succeeded his brother Ramanathan as Tamil Member in the Legislative Council in 1893, when the latter was appointed Solicitor-General. On the occasion of his candidature to the Tamil Seat, certain interested persons, who, besides, were influenced by motives of jealousy at the pre-eminence the family had won, raised a vigorous protest. Their sole contention was that the Tamil Seat, since the inception of the Council in 1835, had been the preserve of the family. The Government which had been ill-at-ease during his predecessor's tenure of the Seat by reason of Ramanathan's incapacity to mince words, was at first inclined to lend weight to the opposition. But the tide of public opinion in favour of Coomaraswamy was so strong and so overwhelming that the Government had perforce to give in.

While in Council, he proved himself to be a no mean representative of that illustrious line of public men who had adorned our public life for six decades. He was a powerful debator and a fearless critic of Government measures, as the Hansards of the time show. Among the many important measures that came up for discussion in the legislature during his tenure of the Seat were the Ordinance amending the Law relating to the Registration of Marriages and the Waste Lands Ordinance.

The late Mr. Lionel Lees was in charge of the Marriage Ordinance and there were several passages-at-arms between the distinguished Civilian and the then Tamil Member in the course of the debate on its second reading. The Bill sought to make registration of marriages compulsory for all classes of the population except the Mohammedans, while Coomaraswamy upheld the position that registration was but one among many evidences of marriage. He challenged the Government to show if registration of marriages was compulsory in any part of the British Isles and protested that what

was not good for the British Isles should not be deemed good for a Colony inhabited by diverse races having diverse customs, religious and social, which would interfere with the prompt registration of their marriages. "I have shown," he said, "there is no necessity for the Bill because (1) we have done very well without it hitherto and nobody has complained of it. (2) I have shown that the matter is repugnant to the feelings of the Hindus, and (3) what you now propose to enact is not the law of England, not the law of Scotland, not the law of Ireland and not the law of India. My Honourable friend the Treasurer seems to be well versed in English statutes; for everything I say, he says, is not in this Act or that. Let him show in any Act relating to England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales or India that registration is compulsory and that marriages are invalid without it. If he shows me that, I will withdraw that opposition. But he cannot. All that the laws of Great Britain and India state is that registration will be the best evidence of marriage. Place us poor dark people who are under a beneficent Government, place us under the same laws that are good for you."

The Bill, however, was passed with the aid of the Official majority. Coomaraswamy would not accept this ruling of the Governor's Government but took it up with the Secretary of State and would not rest content until the Bill was disallowed and the law, allowed to remain in its former shape, viz. that registration was only the best evidence of marriage. It was notorious that the Government took his strictures, particularly on the Waste Lands Ordinance, so much to heart that it obstinately refused to nominate him for a second term in the face of a unanimous cry for his reappointment. The remark that gave offence to Sir West Ridgeway was this: "Instead of being the protector of the people, the Government

MUDALIYAR COOMARASWAMY

assumes the role, if I may so call it, of the highway robber. Lands are possessed by us.....".

H. E. The Governor, in sheer exasperation cried out: "I did not follow the honourable member. Will he repeat those words?

Coomaraswamy proceeded to repeat, "I said.....".

H. E. the Governor: "Perhaps the honourable member had better not. The honourable member will proceed."

There were many other subjects that engrossed Coomaraswamy's attention in the legislature, particularly the development of irrigation, the expansion of agriculture and the passing of the Village Committees Ordinance. The glamour and prestige of the legislature was greatly heightened by his tenure of the Seat, though only for a brief period of five years. He proved himself a worthy upholder of the lofty traditions of public service set by his uncle Sir Muthucoomaraswamy and his brother Ramanathan. His impact on both the Official and the Unofficial Members was so telling and so profound that before long he was made the Senior Unofficial Member.

But Coomaraswamy was not to hold the Seat long, for those were days when membership of the Legislature was dependent not on popular support but on gubernatorial favour and patronage and Coomaraswamy's characteristics of freedom and fearless independence were least calculated to win that favour and patronage. Sir West Ridgeway who would never countenance independence among the members of the Legislative Council was glad to seize the first opportunity to get rid of him by appointing Dr. Rockwood as Tamil Member.

Ramanathan relates the story of how his brother Coomaraswamy was refused nomination for a second term of membership in the Legislative Council by Governor Sir West Ridgeway, in spite of overwhelming support from all the Tamil-speaking races of the Island. He says, "Another Governor contri-

buted greatly to the disgust of the people in 1892. There was a very strong Member of Council representing the Tamils. He condemned some of the administrative and legislative acts of the Government of Ceylon. On the expiry of the term of office of that Member of Council — he was my elder brother — the Tamil people held a mammoth meeting at the Town Hall of Colombo to consider who would be a competent successor to that Member Mr. Coomaraswamy who was too outspoken for the Government. The late Dr. Rockwood, a man in whom the whole of the European Community had great confidence, and who was himself a Tamil man, was the Chairman of the meeting and there was a unanimous resolution passed in which the Chairman himself joined, that they should again submit for nomination the name of Coomaraswamy who had acted so independently during his term of five years in the Legislative Council. Then Governor Ridgeway took this extraordinary step. He did not want Mr. Coomaraswamy back again in Council. So he wrote a private letter to Dr. Rockwood and asked him whether he would accept the Seat. And Dr. Rockwood, without communicating with Mr. Coomaraswamy or any other person who took part in the meeting, accepted the offer. It was thus realized that no reliance could be placed upon the Governor for doing the right thing at the proper time when the system of nomination prevailed."

J. R. Weinman makes an illuminating comment. He says, "At a public meeting to consider a proposed Ordinance doing away with appeals in certain criminal cases, Coomaraswamy objected to the proposed amendment on various grounds, one of which was that it was notorious that a certain Magistrate used to come to Court drunk. The Colonial Secretary wrote asking him for particulars and he wrote back that if a Commission was appointed, he was prepared to give evidence, and

the matter dropped. In Council, he once declared that Government in enacting the Waste Lands Ordinance was playing the part of a high-way robber, and Sir West Ridgeway called him to order.

"It need not be said that he was not reappointed after his five years' term of office had expired. His successor was a Government Pensioner, the most distinguised surgeon of the day, whose previous training naturally did not fit him for the office; but the Seat was taken out of the family, and there was an end of the local Cecils."

Sir West Ridgeway however wrote to Coomaraswamy a letter on his retirement fully appreciating his services as a Legislator and offering him a seat in the Central Irrigation Board. Coomaraswamy was more nationalist than his brothers Ramanathan or Arunachalam (though they were in themselves great nationalists) and his labours in the cause of Hindu revival when in the South Hinduism and the Hindu way of life were fast decaying under the impact of Western influences are comparable to those of Arumuga Navalar in the North. Coomaraswamy was an eminent Tamil scholar of his time and an acknowledged patron of Tamil learning. He was commonly known as *Maha Vidvan*. His passion for Tamil and Sanskrit Literature endured through life and impelled him to edit and publish a number of *Sangham* works, notably *Silapathikaram*, which had lain in obscurity for centuries. He was the first to determine the date of its authorship, which was accepted by the great scholars of India. He was a devout Hindu who lived up to the ideals of his faith. He was also a great student of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*. When his father died, the management of the Sivan Temple at Kochchikadai devolved on him. It is said that he carried out the duties enjoined on him by his father with regard to the management of the temple with meticulous attention to details.

He saw to it that the performance of ceremonies in the Temple conformed strictly to the rules laid down in the *Agamas*. He also established in the precincts of the temple an Agamic School for the training of Brahmin priests, and only those who underwent the training were admitted to the service of the Temple.

Coomaraswamy was for many years President of both the Jaffna and the Colombo Saiva Paripalana Sabais and gave vigorous lead to all movements which aimed at promoting Hindu religion and culture. The Tamils of Jaffna, especially the Hindus, owe him a deep debt of gratitude for his many services in their behalf. On the invitation of the Hindu community, he came to Jaffna in 1895 and performed the ceremonial opening of the Jaffna Hindu College. His presence on that occasion gave a great impetus to the cause of Hindu education in the North. He endowed the College with funds for two scholarships which still exist. Coomaraswamy was chiefly instrumental in making Jaffna Hindu College a grant-in-aid institution, in spite of strenuous opposition from Missionaries. Although he was no longer a Member of the Legislative Council he was again instrumental, through his friend the Honourable S. C. Obeyesekere in securing the incorporation of Hindu College by an Ordinance passed by the Ceylon Legislative Council. No three brothers ever rose to such eminent and commanding positions in public life as did the three sons of Mudaliyar Ponnambalam.

By his death on 7th June, 1906 Ceylon lost one of its most trusted and stalwart leaders and the Tamils a great friend and benefactor. *The Ceylon Observer* of that time in its obituary notice said, "Not for several years has the Tamil Community suffered such a heavy blow as that which has just befallen them in the death of Mudaliyar Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy. He was a tower of strength to his countrymen and the Tamils never

had a more independent or an abler representative in Council than the deceased gentleman."

The Ceylon Independent wrote of him thus: "As a public man he always stood out as one who did his duty fearlessly and well, whose uprightness and independence of spirit would not permit him to acquiesce silently in the perpetration of wrong and injustice and who strove in small things as in great to the best of his ability to promote the interests of his people and the land of his birth."

Thus passed away in the prime of manhood and mourned by a whole nation one of Lanka's illustrious sons, a fiery and indomitable patriot and hard-grained nationalist, a noble-hearted gentleman and above all, a scholar of uncommon erudition whom competent critics adjudged a greater intellectual than Ramanathan himself. Had the Fates ordained him longer life and the White bureaucracy, shown itself less arbitrary and more propitious, Coomaraswamy would have risen to statesmanship of the highest order and rendered his country greater and more abiding services than his brief tenure of office in the legislature would admit. Nevertheless, his memory will live enshrined in the hearts of his people and be a source of inspiration to generations unborn.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOLICITOR-GENERAL— ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"Mr. Ramanathan, in the Solicitor-General's chair, you are a race-horse yoked to a bullock-cart."

—Sir Henry Blake

"Within a very short time of his entry into the Council, he asserted his position as one of the ablest debators in the House. The Government was not slow to appreciate his merit and made him the offer of the post of Solicitor-General of the Island. He accepted that office and while serving in that capacity, he acted for the Attorney-General."

"In regard to the exercise of his duties as a public servant, he gained the approbation of the general public as well as the Crown, an achievement which I may describe as a very difficult one."

—Sir Stanley Obeyesekere

ON 15th December, 1892, Ramanathan entered the inner workshop of legislation, by accepting from the Secretary of State for the Colonies the post of Solicitor-General. He had served the country brilliantly in the Legislative Council for fourteen years as the representative of the Tamil-speaking population of Ceylon, had taken by far the foremost part in the deliberation and disposal of the great political issues of the day and had comparatively early in his career, been elevated to the high and responsible office of Senior Unofficial Member. As a lawyer, he was in the very forefront. For sound mastery of law, for extraordinary forensic skill and a lively sense of the rights and responsibilities of the profession, he

had few equals. It was in the very nature of things that a man so eminently qualified should be chosen to fill the high and responsible office of Solicitor-General.

For fourteen years he toiled at the office of Solicitor-General and rendered unparallelled service to the cause of justice and the raising of the intellectual and moral tone of our judiciary. One of his most distinctive traits, one which he brought to bear on every activity that he was called upon to perform was his almost superhuman capacity for work and his attention to minute detail. Every case he argued for the Crown, he prepared with the utmost care and thoroughness characteristic of him. Competent critics have placed him among the grandest prosecutors this country has known. It was a treat to hear Ramanathan argue important cases. Even the most eminent lawyers had their toughest moments at his hands. The late Mr. Justice Garvin, recalling some personal reminiscences of Ramanathan whom he had known from his boyhood days and with whom he had later the privilege of more intimate acquaintance as a lawyer, said of him, "It was a great satisfaction for the young lawyers of the time when Sir Ramanathan was Solicitor-General to watch him and Mr. Dornhorst, Ceylon's greatest advocate of living memory, in court, opposed to each other, and it was a great experience to them to watch the two intellectual giants in combat. Irrespective of the great talents they possessed, it was the unfailing courtesy towards an opponent which was manifested in Sir Ramanathan that drew our attention to him."

The power and range of his intellect were so great and his memory was so prodigious that it was said that he could master and hold in mind the mainfold aspects and details of a highly complicated case. His addresses to the jury, were finished examples of subtle argument and clear and convincing presentation of facts. Dr. Isaac Thambyah

says, "As Solicitor-General and being entrusted with important prosecutions, his legal trend is essentially constructive. He is a master-builder. From the Council Chamber, he had brought with him the marvellous capacity for marshalling facts. A man of great method, he is, like his brother Arunachalam, a first-rate statician. His special Crime Report, published in 1898, is confessedly a work of no small merit." Another great contemporary said of him, "Ramanathan was a fighter and his encounters with the great Frederick Dornhorst, the Unofficial Leader of the Bar cannot be forgotten. He was a terror as prosecutor in the Assize Court, and it was a treat to listen to him summing up a case to the jury. Dornhorst was powerful and eloquent. Ramanathan was very suave in his manner and polished in his diction. He was extremely calm and never got ruffled."

It added to the greatness of Ramanathan that as an officer of the Crown occupying one of its highest positions, he was singularly free from the vices so common in high places, namely an overweening sense of their importance, browbeating the public, indifference to duty, sloth and an almost callous disregard of the wants and needs of the public. He was courteous and considerate to one and all and placed the good of the public before every other consideration. As a public servant he had a lively sense of his duty and responsibility to the people whose servants he thought he merely was and strove to the best of his ability to do his utmost for them. Ramanathan may well be regarded as the paragon of public servant.

The one secret of his extraordinary success and ascendancy in whatever course of life he chose, lay in the fact that he was before everything else a philosopher and man of religion who carried that philosophic temper, that calm and repose of mind, that spirit of inquiry and detachment which

characterize the actions of his tribe. Of his chambers at the office of Solicitor-General, *The Times of Ceylon* in its issue of 30th September, 1904 says, "In all huge, wandering, dreary Hulftsdorp, there is no place which refreshes the eye and soothes the soul so much as the chambers of the Solicitor-General, Mr. P. Ramanathan, C. M. G., K. C. Elsewhere things massive, ponderous, dull, unpoetical, wearying and distressing; here delicate tints, harmonies of light and shade and colour, restful settees, gentle electric fans, lovely pictures and an atmosphere charged with a nameless charm of poetry offering a haven from the jar of law and prosaic bickerings at the bar. It is a transition from the 'damnable materialism'—which complains, accuses, sues, demands, appeals and argues in the courts, all in quest of rupees and cents—degrading self-interest and grovelling covetousness to the mystic spiritualism of the thinker, philosopher, reformer, the man who laments and deplores, soothes and elevates, guides and directs or at least endeavours to do so."

A stranger who had the privilege of visiting his chambers at Hulftsdorp has left on record: "Sir Ponnambalam's Chambers at the Courts gave one the impression of restfulness. To see him on business was a pleasure, especially if it had nothing to do with law. The atmosphere of the Law Courts was relieved by pleasant pictures on the walls and the general appearance of the room seemed to transport the caller from a vortex into a quiet room, say, in a seaside resort. An air of peacefulness pervaded the room and the occupant seemed the last person the visitor would associate with the turmoil and strife of courts of law. Such was Mr. Ramanathan. The writer, who was quite a stranger to him, once had this experience of a visit to his chambers on a busy day and the memory of it still survives a fragrant one. A kindly greeting, a few personal inquiries were a prelude to a plea-

sant quarter of an hour in which there seemed no hurry on the part of a busy Solicitor-General to close the visit. There was nothing of the official in his attitude in which the characteristics of a kindly gentleman predominated."

During his tenure of office as Solicitor-General, Ramanathan filled the high office of acting Attorney-General three times. To us today the appointment of a Ceylonese to this high office will excite little surprise, when the whole machinery of government is manned by the sons of the soil. But in the hey-day of Colonial rule, a Ceylonese holding an important administrative or judicial office was virtually unknown. Even merit of an extraordinary quality was ignored. The appointment of Ramanathan as Solicitor-General was a noteworthy event, inasmuch as it created a precedent which, once set, was followed in after years by our Colonial rulers in admitting Ceylonese to the higher ranks of the public service. Ramanathan performed the duties of the office with the greatest possible distinction and proved to a Government, which was rather sceptical, the capacity of his people for high office. He was in every way equipped for the post. His superb mastery of law, the thoroughness and precision of his scholarship, his wide and varied experience and above all, his concern for the reign of law and the enforcement of justice marked him out as one specially fitted for this high office.

As an Acting Attorney-General he was instrumental in formulating important legislative measures which are among the most beneficent in our Statute Book. Certain anomalies and shortcomings in the laws of *Thesavalamai* which led to grave abuses were remedied by him. He brought forward a motion for the suppression of touts and secured its passage through the Legislative Council. He had an Ordinance passed for dealing with habitual criminals more effectively than hitherto. He based the Ordinance on the plea that "the want of a systematic method of dealing with habitual criminals has been felt for many years past" and that "it has become necessary to organize stronger and more effective measures to protect the public and to restrain the evil propensities of such persons (habitual criminals)." He proposed various measures which were accepted.

The Village Communities Ordinance formulated and sponsored by him as Acting Attorney-General marked a great advance on the road to village self-rule and self-sufficiency. He was through life a firm believer in the efficacy of decentralized administration and in strengthening the hands of Local Government institutions. Villages, he contended, should be reorganized and reconstructed so as to render them more self-governing and more self-dependent than they had hitherto been. He was of the opinion that self-government should begin with the village and gradually permeate the whole country. He believed in the necessity for self-sacrifice and co-operative effort on the part of villagers to remedy their needs and wants and enrich village life without having to depend overfar on governmental action. He was in a real sense the forerunner of Mahatma Gandhi whose endeavours were mainly directed towards transforming Indian villages into self-supporting, self-dependent and self-governing units. He was also the precursor of the *Shramadana* movement which is so much in vogue today and has done so much for village reconstruction and rehabilitation.

In moving the second-reading of the "Village Communities Ordinance" on 7th November, 1894, he said, "I would ask Honourable members to remember that according to this Ordinance, the duty is cast upon Village Communities to perform many an act which would involve expenditure of both labour and money. Confining myself to subsections which are dealt with by the amending Ordinance before us today, I would point out that

the first sub-section refers to constructing and maintaining village roads, bridges and *ambalams*, wells, market-places, water-courses and so on. The second sub-section refers to the building and repairing of school-rooms; the 13th sub-section, to the building and repairing of Court-houses for the Village-Tribunals; the 16th sub-section, to village-roads; and the 17th sub-section to the repairing and maintaining of village schools."

Ramanathan moved that "all these operations are of vital importance to the concerns of the Village Communities" and that they should be performed under the direction of Village Communities. Village Communities should, he contended, be given the necessary powers "to make rules for regulating these affairs, for levying labour etc."

To some of his critics who opposed the Ordinance on the ground that he was asking for five days' work from each villager for the performance of the works he specified in the Ordinance, he said, "I submit with great confidence that those five days are nothing much for a villager to give in the course of a year, considering the important work he has to do in regard to the community of which he is a unit..... The objection would be a very good one if it could be shown that the villager is fully occupied throughout the day, or is as much occupied throughout the day as a man about town. We know, as a matter of fact, that he is very idle. The villager is very idle in his village for the most part of the day, and I do not see why, having so much time on his hands, he should not be called upon to give a small portion of his time for the benefit of his kith and kin in the village. We all prize public service. It is considered, both in England and in every civilized country, that public service is one of the most holy things for a man to be engaged upon. Why should not the villager be made to take his first step in the reign of public service and contribute

for the benefit of the community a few days' labour out of the abundance of idle time that hangs so heavily upon his hands? I submit, therefore, that both upon principle and authority, this enactment is sound."

It would be tedious to enumerate all that he did in the office of Acting Attorney-General with that thoroughness and efficiency which characterized both his public and private life. Even his bitterest enemies could not charge him with official delinquency or incapacity. In 1902 Ramanathan was to drain to the dregs the bitter cup of disappointment at the hands of British officialdom, for when Mr. Layard, the Attorney-General was made the Chief Justice of the Island, Ramanathan's claim to the office of Attorney-General, though overwhelming, were flagrantly overlooked. He was not even allowed on this occasion to act in that office. Mr. J. H. Templer, Senior Crown-Counsel, who was very much Ramanathan's junior, was appointed to act as Attorney-General, a most iniquitous act. A junior officer and a subordinate of Ramanathan became Ramanathan's superior. When this announcement was made from Queen's House, many people could not believe it.

One does not know why Governor Sir West Ridgeway acted in this manner. Sir West Ridgeway was a great Governor but he had certain very strong prejudices and nowhere were they so clearly pronounced as in his treatment of Ramanathan. It may be that Ramanathan's independence of mind, his frank and fearless criticisms of the Government, his singular merits, and above all, the old Colonial Englishman's jealousy and dislike of marked talent in coloured races were hardly calculated to advance his fortunes and created in the mind of the Governor an aversion to Ramanathan. A place on the Supreme Court Bench on which Ramanathan had long set his heart was also denied to him. Mr. Wendt, a comparatively

junior officer of the Crown, became a judge of the Supreme Court. Ceylonese opinion was, of course, violently outraged at this brutal treatment of Ramanathan. But the Government was determined to have its own way. One who, judged by any standard, would have been an ornament of the Supreme Court Bench was tied down to a comparatively minor office and made to languish in obscurity, while men markedly inferior to him in talent and attainment were elevated to the highest offices. No doubt the Governor was aided in his resolve by the British-owned Press which was vehement and malicious in its attacks on Ramanathan.

The Observer which under Mr. Ferguson had for long been an ardent admirer of Ramanathan and had held him up as a paragon of everything that was desirable in public and private life changed its attitude to one of the grossest detraction. The reason for this paper's intemperate malice and ill-will towards Ramanathan is to be sought in a libel case instituted by him against the paper a few years earlier for publishing some libellous statements against him. Since then *The Times* too was hostile to him.

If ever a man deserved a place on the Supreme Court Bench it was Ramanathan. He had sat on several Commissions and had acted three times as Attorney-General. For about a quarter of a century, he was responsible for the introduction of almost every important piece of legislation, first as Member of the Legislative Council and afterwards as a Law Officer of the Crown. He was the first Ceylonese to occupy a seat in the Executive Council of Ceylon, when as Acting-Attorney-General, he sat at its board for three terms. He was one of the Commissioners who framed the Civil Procedure Code and the Courts Ordinance.

The story is told of Nicholas Gould, an Advocate of the Colombo Bar and contemporary

of Ramanathan, who had won great notoriety by reason of his many misdeeds, that he smuggled into the press a very damaging and libellous criticism of himself written by himself but bearing the forged signature of Mr. Vancuylenberg, the Burgher representative in the Legislative Council and a gentleman of unblemished repute and influence at that time. When it was published, the ingenious Gould went to Court and filed a libel action against Mr. Vancuylenberg. Ramanathan, who was then the Solicitor-General, did not press the case for Mr. Gould, as he was convinced of the falsity of the case and of the great honour and integrity of the defendant. Mr. Gould was offended with Ramanathan on this account and, being of a vindictive turn of mind, waited for an opportunity to wreak vengeance. The opportunity came when Ramanathan's claims for a place on the Supreme Court Bench were being considered. Mr. Gould, with the support of the British-owned Press, published a letter wherein he embodied a number of base and ill-founded charges against Ramanathan's tenure of office as Solicitor-General. The Government, which was on the look-out for a pretext, saw in this a good one and denied Ramanathan an office to which his transcendent abilities and attainments entitled him.

Dr. Isaac Thambyah, commenting on this, said, "In 1901, when Chief Justice Bonsor left Ceylon, there was considerable public stir as to the probabilities of Ramanathan's being elevated to a seat on the Supreme Court Bench. Whatever motives there might have been for the marked opposition to his chances of elevation and whatever the reasons for his being left to remain so long as Solicitor-General, one thing is confessedly clear, that Ramanathan is a man of such grace of intellect and greatness of natural ability as fitly to adorn the Supreme Court Bench."

In 1903 Ramanathan was made a King's

Counsel by His Majesty King Edward VII on the recommendation of the Governor Sir West Ridgeway. This was Governor Ridgeway's sop to public opinion, which showed itself very violent and irreconciliable. His Excellency wrote to Ramanathan:

Queen's House,
Colombo.

Dear Mr. Ramanathan,

The King has heen pleased on my recommendation to appoint you one of His Majesty's Counsel for Ceylon.

Yours sincerely,
SIR WEST RIDGEWAY

This was then a very rare distinction conferred only on men of exceptional character and acknowledged eminence in the legal profession. It was a recognition of Ramanathan's brilliant career at the Bar, his services to the legal profession and to the Government as Solicitor-General of the Island from 1892. Although he had been passed over when the post of Attorney-General fell vacant and his claims overlooked for a place on the Supreme Court Bench, yet this honour was sufficient testimony to his worth. Though he was the first Tamil to be thus honoured, it was nevertheless belated as every other honour conferred on him.

In 1905, having toiled at the desk of the Solicitor-General and then, of the Acting Attorney-General, for fourteen years with every possible distinction but with no prospect of promotion, Ramanathan laid down his reins of office, though he could well have remained on in the service for some more years. The gods had marked him out for a higher sphere of usefulness. The American people whose hearts had been stirred to their depths by Ramanathan's profoundly illuminating Commentaries on the Christian Gospels and his writings on religion and philosophy entreated him to go to them and teach them the Truth which, they assured him, he had found. Ramanathan who

set little store by worldly advancement but viewed religion and spirituality and the service of man as the highest end of life, accepted the invitation and cast aside not merely his judicial office but his whole legal career.

It is noteworthy that the British ruler never spared Ramanathan. No wonder, for subject peoples have from the dawn of imperialism been the playthings of the rulers. Armed with the powers and prerogatives of a despot, flouting the strength and unanimity of public opinion, riding rough-shod over all the demands of justice, fair-play and humane-dealing, the Britisher consistently, systematically and of set purpose thwarted Ramanathan at every turn of his illustrious career. It was partly his jealousy over his exceptional talents and attainments, and partly, part of his considered policy, never to encourage subject peoples or elevate them to high office, however patent and overwhelming their merits be. The tragedy of subjection to an alien master! In 1892, by bringing in the five-year rule, he shut him out of the legislature where for thirteen years he outshone everyone of his colleagues both Official and Unofficial and showed an independence and intrepidity of spirit unparallelled in our political history. With perfect complacency and without the smallest twinge of conscience, he allowed him to languish in the obscurity of the office of Solicitor-General, throwing up many of his white-skinned juniors over him. It was of this man that Governor Sir Henry Blake was constrained to speak in language that deserve to ring through the ages: "Ramanathan, in the chair of the Solicitor-General, you are a race-horse yoked to a bullock-cart."

But all these reverses and set-backs, had they befallen a weak man, would have ended him. But Ramanathan was made of far sterner stuff. On the contrary, they strengthened and emboldened him. They also proved real blessings in disguise. In

his office of Solicitor-General and Acting Attorney-General, he had rendered a national service not merely in raising the standard of efficiency, purity and competence in the judiciary but in proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that the much-despised Ceylonese could beat the Britisher at his own game, in the handling of high judicial and administrative responsibilities. His premature retirement enabled him to respond to the call of the American people and win for himself international renown as a religious teacher and philosopher of rare spiritual insight and vision.

His return from America enabled him to embark upon an ambitious programme of higher education for girls. Then came his call to the legislature in 1911 where as Member representing the educated population of the Island, he entered upon the most prolific period of his enormous career. Had Ramanathan been confirmed in the office of Attorney-General or raised to the Supreme Court Bench, his services in more constructive and creative fields would have been lost to the nation.

CHAPTER XXXII

RAMANATHAN AND THE FOUNDATION OF CEYLONESE NATIONALISM

> "If Sinhalese lips will not speak the Sinhalese language, who else is there to speak it? ..... How is a nation to be lifted out of error, reformed and advanced into plains of higher knowledge except by its own language?"
>
> — *Ramanathan*

IN a very real sense, Ramanathan is the Father and the Apostle of modern Ceylonese nationalism. In an age in which the language and religion, the distinctive culture and tradition of the Ceylonese ran the risk of being completely engulfed by the flood-tides of the West, when the people themselves were engaged in a frantic pursuit of things Western and frowned on everything distinctively theirs, their language, their culture, their tradition and their ways of life, Ramanathan, more than any other man of his time, woke up to the dangers that lurked in the new trend, and lost no time in raising his trumpet voice of warning against the tendency of the times.

Ramanthan's speech at Ananda College on 3rd September, 1904 addressed to the Sinhalese people was acclaimed a landmark in the history of Ceylonese nationalism. It shocked the people into a realization of their folly and ignorance in discarding their roots and becoming oblivious of their great national heritage and tradition. He was among the early pioneers of Sinhala renaissance and contemporary opinion called him the Tamil who was foster-parent of Sinhala.

But his nationalism, unlike its current counter-

feit was healthy and wholesome, constructive and creative, the nationalism that proclaimed the sovereign principle of live and let live, not that perverted brand which seeks to exploit and subjugate weaker peoples, which over the years has shed much innocent blood, plunged peoples and nations into suicidal conflicts, transformed this earth, this realm of God into a cockpit of warring peoples, the nationalism which, though exposed, discredited and disowned by larger nations, smaller ones in their pettiness and ignorance yet cling to, unmindful of the doom that history has ordained for its votaries. His nationalism was of that lofty and sublime order taught by the sages and seers of all times, that upholds the indefeasible right of peoples, big or small, groups, racial or religious, to live a free, full life untrammelled by extraneous pressures or restraints, and in conformity with their racial, religious and cultural traditions and propounds the gospel that human society will never be reformed but on some law of love and understanding, that the ultimate cure for human ills is mutual goodwill and charity and that hatred and oppression are poisons without effect but to inflame and estrange.

When in 1880, Colonel Henry Olcott arrived in the Island, founded the Buddhist Theosophist Society and worked for the revival of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions and the propagation of Buddhist education, he found in Ramanathan a stalwart ally and lieutenant, who worked with him shoulder to shoulder to achieve their common objective. Olcott's faith in Ramanathan was so unbounded that he made him joint-treasurer with himself of the immense funds he raised for the furtherance of Buddhist education. They were both the geniuses behind the agitation for making the Wesak Day a public holiday, for safe-guarding the Buddhist temporalities against peculation and fraud and for the revival and rehabilitation of Buddhist institutions. Ramanathan it was who initiated a move for the establishment of a Buddhist—Hindu College in Colombo with the dual object of bringing the two peoples closer together and helping them conserve their great and ancient heritage.

In his "Old Diary Leaves" 4th series, 1887—92 Olcott had said, "The relations between the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus in Ceylon are so friendly that the Honourable P. Ramanathan, M. L. C., the accepted leader of the latter community, had several conferences with me about the feasibility of founding a Hindu—Buddhist College for the benefit of the two nationalities. We consulted our friends respectively and were inclined to think it might be done, but, after all, the project failed to gain the necessary support. Ramanathan and I were also of one mind about starting a crematorium, which would be a real blessing to the whole public and this is a thing for the future, when a less busy man than I, and a resident, can devote his time to the business. The Hindus of Ceylon follow the ancestral fashion of burning their dead, but the Sinhalese, save in the case of their bhikkus and the feudatory chiefs of Kandy, have forgotten that it was formerly considered a disgrace to bury the corpse of any but a very low caste person, and stick to burial for lack of somebody to arouse their attention to the immense advantages of cremation."

Ramanathan's speech at Ananda College opened the eyes of a people who had lost sight of their true destiny and were engaged in a hot pursuit of false ideals.

In introducing Ramanathan, Olcott said, "From the time that the Buddhists of Ceylon began to take into their own hands the education of their youths, we have had a staunch friend and co-operator in the person of my friend Mr. Ramanathan, the Solicitor-General of Ceylon. He is here now, and I call on him to be good enough to address

the assembly."

In a thought-provoking and soul-stirring speech on 'Denationalisation of the Singhalese', which is reproduced here at some length, Ramanathan said, "It has delighted me to be able to come here and to take some part in the day's celebrations on the invitation of my very good friend Mr. Jayatileke, the Principal of this College. I consider the carrying away of the Government University Scholarship of £200 a year, tenable for four years, by Mr. G. K. W. Perera, a happy fruition of the labours of those who have established and continued to maintain Ananda College. It was more than twenty years ago that Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky visited Colombo for the first time in the interests of the Buddhists of Ceylon. At that time very few of them appreciated the greatness of Buddhism. The Buddhists did not understand the spirit of their religion. It was owing to the expositions of Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky and their enthusiastic admiration of Buddhism that the Sinhalese began to take an active interest in the apprehension of their faith and the dissemination of its principles. (Applause) Most of you know how they went about the country preaching Buddhism, urging the people to establish schools for Buddhist boys and girls, conferred with learned monks in the country, formulated in intelligible Sinhalese and English the leading principles of Buddhism and scattered broadcast Buddhist Catechisms throughout the Island. (Applause) The development of the Buddhistic Faith in Ceylon and the rapid growth of schools for Buddhists since then have been marvellous.

"But you should not rest content with the work that has been already done. The light kindled by Col. Olcott and others burns with vigour indeed in our midst. Nevertheless, I see no signs of abatement in the spirit of denationalization that has taken possession of the country. (Applause)

First and foremost is the utter neglect of the use of the Sinhalese language amongst those who have learned to speak English. It has been my privilege for many years to be in constant touch with eminent Sinhalese gentlemen. They have all seen the spread of Buddhism and the consequent respect for Sinhalese institutions, but many of them have not thrown themselves heart-whole into the national movement begun and maintained by the worthy friends who are present here to-day and by those who, though not present in person, are yet with us in spirit. Those of the Sinhalese who profess the Christian religion, and who, being educated in English, have not kept in touch with Sinhalese literature, have failed to join hands with those Sinhalese leaders who take an active interest in Ananda College and the advancement of ancient national ideals and practices which were the glory of the Sinhalese in days of yore. I have asked these denationalized Sinhalese gentlemen, 'Will you tell me what constitutes a Sinhalese man?' Not knowing the answer, they have remained silent. I then asked them, 'Do you take delight in speaking the beautiful Sinhalese language at your homes, and among your friends whom you meet in railway carriages and other places, and on public platforms?' They feebly smiled. The other day, I was travelling in a railway carriage where I met four or five Sinhalese gentlemen of first rank, and the party included a Sinhalese lady. I found them all engaged in speaking the English language. Ah me! If Sinhalese lips will not speak the Sinhalese language, who else is there to speak it? (Applause).

"Fancy the English neglecting their own language and speaking French everywhere, or the French speaking German everywhere! Would that be considered natural or national? How is a nation to be lifted out of error, reformed and advanced into plains of higher knowledge except by its own language? Language is the vehicle of thought.

It is permissible to collect good thoughts from any nation, but if the nation to which you belong is to prosper by the thoughts you have culled, your communication of those thoughts to your nation must be in your own language. Then the language lives enriched and those who use that language are benefited by the thoughts introduced into it. If those of you who are considered leading men and women of the country do not cultivate your language and make it a vehicle in ordinary use for good thoughts, it will live in the lips of the illiterate only, with the result that it will become more and more neglected and corrupted, and at last die an unwept death. (Applause)

"The late Mr. Gladstone, addressing a mixed audience in one of his great political campaigns, said years ago that he expected every Englishman to be an Englishman, a Scotchman, a Scotchman, and an Irishman, an Irishman, for the simple reason that the improvement of a nation is effected most easily and maintained most enduringly by means of its own national forces. If the leaders of a people get denationalized, they are no longer forces for permanent good amongst that people. Therefore, for the sake of the nation, its leaders must be national. (Applause) Howsoever broad their views of life may be, yet for purposes of practical politics, nationality must be maintained. Otherwise, the work of uplifting the masses of the people becomes impossible. For the sake of the people, then, if not for your own sake, you must take delight in the Sinhalese language; you must not spurn it. I have been to many countries and know several races in the East and in the West. You know me well; when you have been wrong, I have told you that you were wrong; and when you were striving for what was right, I have worked with you. I am no flatterer; I tell you that, having gone to many a land, I have not come across a finer race to look at or a race

possessed of a more reasoned-out philosophy than the Sinhalese. (Applause). There are about 1,500 millions of human beings on the face of this earth but only one and three quarter million Sinhalese, and every day the undiscerning adoption of the fashionable vices of Western civilization is doing much harm to our country. It is tainting us with its materialistic spirit, which the enlightened men of the West themselves admit, is playing sad havoc in their countries.

"We are deeply religious; we live for another country, the country that is invisible. It is the country known in the Buddhist Pali language as *Amatapadam* or *Nirvana*. We are spiritual I say, and when I see this damnable materialism flowing into our households and corrupting the youth of our country, my heart aches, and I feel that every Sinhalese man, every Tamil man, who knows what he is about, should raise his voice and protest against the denationalization that is going on in this country. (Applause). Gentlemen, I do not speak against the Westerners. Their great men are really great. They are very good; they have taught us to be enterprising; they have taught us to love fair-play; they have taught us to do justice to the meanest; they have restored to us many a social virtue that we had lost by the maladministration of our own rulers. We are deeply thankful to them for all these blessings, but what I protest against is the inflow of that materialistic spirit which their own cultured men are protesting against. (Applause). We are spiritual, we long to know something of the Spirit, and that longing must be satisfied. If a Sinhalese man does not, by studying Pali and Sinhalese works, take the trouble to know something of the Spirit that is in him, something of the Spirit that is in each of us, something of the Boundless, the Infinite Spirit that is in the human body, he is not a Sinhalese man. A Sinhalese man must know

something of *Nirvana* and of the entity within man which is appointed to reach *Nirvana* by the path of Good Works (Applause).

"A Sinhalese man is not a tailor-made figure, who puts on a frock-coat, a broad collar, a top-hat and patent leather boots. He is not a person born only to spread out his shoulders thus dressed, carry an umbrella in a particular way, have a cigar in his mouth, and say "haw" every now and then (Laughter). That is not a Sinhalese man. That is something other than Sinhalese. The man who speaks Sinhalese like the two reverend monks whom we all have had the pleasure of hearing a few minutes ago without any admixture of foreign language, who can roll out sentence after sentence in pure Sinhalese, charged with sober sense, inspiring and grand to hear, is a Sinhalese man indeed. I say we have specimens of Sinhalese gentlemen on this platform. It is your duty to cultivate the study of the Sinhalese language to the best of your power, and to speak it, ignoring the English language on all occasions and at all places where English has no business. If you do so, then I say you will be doing your duty to your nation; your example will be productive of untold good in the field of nationalization. But if you do not do so and delight in donning the external and ephemeral phases of Western civilization and cannot or will not speak your native language on public platforms, in railway carriages and in drawing-rooms, and will not stand up for your national institutions, then I say none of you deserve to be called Sinhalese. The 1,800,000 Sinhalese will soon dwindle down to nothing. The nation will be ruined, and we must await with trembling knees the early destruction of the Sinhalese language. Have not the Anglo-Saxons passed away? Have not the Normans passed away? Has not many a great nation passed away? Where are the Phoenicians? Where are the Assyrians, the Grecians and

Romans? Where are they? All swept off the face of the earth because of denationalization, because they have been too ready to open their door to the inflow of foreign ideals and practices not in harmony with their civilization. I can speak for some time more, Ladies and Gentlemen, but others must speak as well, and therefore I beg to resume my seat."'

Congratulatory messages poured in from every quarter. *The Sandaresa*, commenting editorially, said, "Mr. Ramanathan's speech at Ananda College last Saturday, of which we give a translation elsewhere, deserves to be carefully pondered over by all who are interested in the preservation and welfare of the Sinhalese Community. There is not the least doubt that our people are being gradually denationalized. The process has been going on for the last four centuries but never was the pace quicker than at the present day. We are little by little losing all the traits that used to characterize us as a race, and the probabilities are that, unless the national spirit is revived and preserved, we shall soon become a class of non-descripts, contemptible in the eyes of the world.

"It is against this fate that is imminent that the Solicitor-General sounded his note of warning: and notwithstanding his critics in the English Press, he has done a service to the Sinhalese Community by crying halt to these and asking them to consider whither they are tending. The best traits and traditions of a race are inseparably bound up with its language. When a people so far forgets itself and its past history as to neglect and spurn the study and use of its own language, it may be safely predicted that that people will not for long preserve its identity. Mr. Ramanathan poured ridicule — and it was richly deserved — upon the so-called leaders of the Sinhalese who could not talk in their mother-tongue and who prided themselves upon their English 'Style'. Such

men we have undoubtedly amongst us, and their number, we regret to say, is increasing. Not seldom we come across men of position and influence standing up before an audience of their countrymen with a shameful confession of inability to talk in Sinhalese. Such degeneracy exists nowhere else in the world, except perhaps among the descendants of the Negro slaves in America. But in the case of the latter it was long separation from their home and the cruel tyranny of circumstance that drove them to the degraded position of a race without a language of its own.

"The Sinhalese people, however, have never laboured under such unhappy circumstances; but still influenced by the pernicious example set by men of position and influence, they have neglected their mother-tongue and discarded their customs and manners in servile imitation of the Europeans. This aping of the English brings us neither honour nor profit. The Sinhalese man who goes about travestying in his talk and dress the ways of the Westerner makes himself ridiculous and despicable in the eyes of the very Englishman whom he feebly attempts to imitate. The English are a patriotic people, who love their country and everything connected with it with an intense love. They cannot but look down with contempt upon a race which so readily gives up its national characteristics. And then how much it costs us, this aping of the Englishman! How unhappy have we become by abandoning our simple ways of living for the sake of European fashions! It will, of course, be said that it is too late in the day to attempt to stem the current. We do not think so. The result of our work during the past twenty years or so in the field of education and religion ought to encourage us to extend our efforts to the sphere of social reform. The Sinhalese Buddhists have rescued their Faith from the very jaws of extinction. They have at the same time successfully carried out a large scheme of education for the welfare of their children. Mr. Ramanathan in his speech at Ananda College, merely called upon them to turn their attention to the preservation of the national spirit and sentiments which are now threatened with extinction."

D. C. De Silva, Hony. Secretary

The Hony. Secretary of *Jnanaprabodha Samagama*, Slave Island, addressed the following letter to Ramanathan:

Dear Sir,

I am directed by the Slave Island Sinhalese Literary Association known as the "Jnanaprabodha Samagama" to send you a copy of the following resolution unanimously adopted at its meeting held on the 9th inst. under the presidentship of M. G. Mendis Gunasekera, Mudaliyar.

"The society with great pleasure records its hearty approval of the instructive and encouraging words spoken by Mr. P. Ramanathan, K. C., C. M. G., Solicitor-General of Ceylon, at the recent prize distribution of Ananda College, for the welfare of the Sinhalese Nation, especially for urging the young Sinhalese to learn, use and cultivate their mother-tongue, with a view to check the denationalization of their race.

"It is very gratifying to the Society, which was started five years ago to promote the intellectual and social welfare of the Sinhalese, to hear such salutary advice from a distinguished gentleman of position and learning.

"The Society remembers with gratitude the many favours conferred on the Sinhalese by Mr. P. Ramanathan, when he was a member of the Legislative Council.

"The Society, therefore, takes this opportunity to convey its hearty thanks for the valuable advice given at a time when it was most needed."

I am, Dear Sir,

Your obedient servant.
D. C. De. SILVA

Incomparable, inestimable were Ramanathan's services to the revival of our ancient Tamil culture and tradition and the resuscitation of Tamil

nationalism, when for centuries they lay battered and soulless under the onslaughts of foreign domination and oppression. In much the same manner as he expected a Sinhalese to be a good Sinhalese, a Muslim to be a good Muslim and a good Christian to be a good Christian, he expected every Tamil too to be a good Tamil in full possession of his linguistic, cultural and religious heritage. It was one of the first articles of his political creed that the loss of a people's roots — which alone give a people its durability and strength to withstand the impact of time and circumstance—is the greatest calamity that can befall it and the surest prelude to its annihilation and ultimate extinction.

He was the finest exemplar, the living embodiment of everything great and glorious in Tamil and Hindu culture and expected every Tamil to live up to it. What the great Navalar preached, he practised. He translated into practical realities the dreams of that great sage and saint. The spirit of the Tamil race lived in him and breathed through him. No man was more alive to the greatness and grandeur of Tamil Language and Literature and its magnificent culture. Few men excelled him in Tamil learning and scholarship or drank more deeply or more freely of its rich and fragrant streams, or strove more assiduously to maintain the Tamil Language in its pristine purity and strength. His handling of Tamil prose, whether in its written or spoken expression, was perfect. There was in it a subtle charm, an ineffable beauty and strength rare in the effusions of other men. It was this that captivated the heart of that eminent Tamil savant and scholar Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar and impelled him to pay a memorable tribute. On every available occasion, whether in written or spoken communication, he used the Tamil Language and that in an age which in its ignorance and folly regarded the use

of the national languages as something derogatory and beneath the notice of a gentleman and a man of education.

It was in a supreme bid to protect and promote Tamil Language and Literature and its great culture and give it the legitimate place it should occupy in national life that he founded and endowed his twin Colleges, the Ramanathan College and the Parameshwara College. It was in a similar bid to protect and promote Sinhalese Language and Literature and its great culture that he exhorted the Sinhalese to found and endow Ananda College and its affiliated institutions. He held the view that, just as it is the paramount duty and responsibility of the Tamils to safeguard Tamil culture and tradition, it is the inescapable duty of the Sinhalese to safeguard theirs. During his long and illustrious leadership, he spared no pains to inspire in them a pride in their national heritage and to imbue them with a passion for conserving it.

This indomitable statesman and virile thinker, this hard-grained nationalist and man of vision, in the evening of his life fondled the hope that Parameshwara College would before long blossom forth into a Tamil University, a cradle of Tamil and Hindu culture and dispense intellectual and spiritual nutriment to all those who would seek it for their sustenance. But he had reckoned without the host. Nevertheless, his and his alone is the peculiar distinction of having inspired in the people a genuine national awakening, a passion for all things national in an age which, dazzled by the glare of an exotic culture, had come to spurn theirs.

It was this passionate clinging to his roots, his pride in all things truly national and his energetic crusade against the erosive influence of an exclusive attachment to an alien culture that brought down upon him the animosity and even

active hostility of the British bureaucrats and the British-owned press and thwarted him at every stage of his public and political career. But with him no personal sacrifice was too great to deter him from what he conceived to be his path of duty by his people.

CHAPTER XXXIII

COMMENTARIES ON THE CHRISTIAN GOSPELS—DIAMOND JUBILEE OF QUEEN VICTORIA

"The reading of the Culture of the Soul among Western Nations and of the Commentaries of St. Mathew and St. John have quite changed the tenor of my life. It has given me a new rule of measurement by which I find myself accepting or rejecting all other ideas."

—*Dr. A. B. Eadie, of U. S. A.*

"Mr. Ramanathan impresses me as a very remarkable man. His interpretations are simply wonderful. The spirit of this man is Christly."

—*Rev. Walter A. A. Gardner, Rector, Church of the Holy Comforter, New York.*

IT has already been observed that ever since Ramanathan came under the influence of Arulparananda Swamigal and under his inspiring and enlightened guidance learned religion and philosophy, religion became the dominant passion of his life, the chief solace and the most fortifying element in a life so full of tumult and turmoil. Practically every hour of his waking life except what he spent on official business, was devoted to the practice of religion and to the mastery of every system of religious and philosophic thought. Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism—in short all the religions of the world came within the range of his study and contemplation. In 1898 and 1902 he gave to the world his two monumental volumes, the *Commentaries on St. Mathew and St. John.* They are exhaustive, authoritative

and illuminating interpretations of the Christian Gospels in the light of his *Gnana Yoga* and were edited by his devoted disciple R. L. Harrison, who later became Lady Ramanathan. They set forth in two large and closely-printed volumes a comprehensive and harmonious interpretation of the teachings of Jesus perfectly in accord with the doctrines of the Vedantic philosophy of India. They reveal most forcibly the depth and clearness of his insight into religion, and the wealth, the range and profundity of his scholarship.

They brought to light all the deeper meaning, all the realities that lie embedded in the Gospels and made them a living force and a source of light and inspiration to many who before could not penetrate their hidden meanings. It is impossible to convey in a brief sketch such as this any idea of the greatness of his Commentaries on the Gospels. The reader is referred to the books themselves. An example taken at random from his *Commentaries on St. John* is quoted below to show the range of his scholarship and the clearness of his spiritual vision. Commenting on the verse, 'That the works of God should be manifest in Him', he says, "The Greek words '*ïva pavepwOñ rá ëpya rov Oeov ëv avrw*' should be rendered (he was made blind) in order that the (fact of the) constant functioning of God (in every incident of life) may be revealed to him (lit, may appear in him).

"Taking these words together with what had gone before, we have Lord Jesus' answer in full as follows: 'The blindness of this man came upon him, not because he or his parents had sinned, but that he might have the opportunity of realising the all-important fact that the 'Lord Reigneth' (Ps. xciii. 1) in every incident of life.

"The perception of this great truth of the Lord's incessant Reign is the one consummation for which man was brought from the darkness

or sleep of ages to birth or light. It is the one Prayer that Jesus taught should be daily in the mind of every spiritual person: 'May Thy Kingdom come: Thine the Power, Thine the Glory for ever:' (Matt. vi. 10, 13) When the Kingdom has come—when one has awakened to the fact that God, and not man, 'works in all places of His domination' (Ps. ciii. 22) when one sees that what is called human endeavour is nothing more than the use of the Power of God lent for the attainment of certain objects, and that, whether one desired it or not, the Lord would of His own accord (because He is the omnipresent Ruler of the Universe) distribute pain and pleasure suitably to the needs of each soul—then indeed would thoughts of every description run down to a calm and leave the spirit within beautifully restful, yet keenly responsive to the inflow of God's energy for His own purposes. Then indeed would one recognize the full meaning of the words:

'Be still and know that I am the Lord' (Ps. xlvi 10).

"But how does this doctrine of the supremacy and ubiquity of God's Power, so necessary for the pacification or sanctification of the soul, fulfil (complete) the doctrine that God judges (rewards and punishes) according to the works of each man? It completes it by enlarging our meaning of the expression, 'works of man.'

"What are works? A man is said to be working, or at work, when he is energizing, putting forth what is within him, whether it be thought or speech or other act, and he is said to cease working or to be at rest when such thought, speech, or act is stilled. Thus, works are energies manifested. As thought, speech or other action is impossible on the part of the soul without the instruments through which those functions take place, and as such instruments were given by the Lord to the soul to suit the varying densities of

worldliness inherent in each soul, the expression, 'works of man', means in effect the soul's manifestations or worldliness through the thought-channels, word-channels, and other act-channels found for it by the Lord. Supposing these channels had not been organized for the soul, what would have become of it? It would have remained immersed in the corruption, called worldliness, so much so that it would not even know its stupefied condition. To dispel this woeful darkness, the Lord gave to the soul instruments of knowledge and action, wherewith to find occupation and light; and He Himself graciously remained in the soul and became its Guide on account of its helplessness. In this intimate relation of 'I in God and God in me' (John x 5; xiv. 11) rendered necessary by the soul having no power of its own (John v. 19; vi. 57), it is God who makes manifest (or brings to light) the worldliness of the Soul. Thus, the expression, 'works of man', involves a two-fold meaning: (1) The soul's manifestation of the worldliness; and (2) God's manifestation to the soul of its worldliness. In this manner does the expression, 'Works of man', come to mean also 'Works of God.'

"The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation" (Ps. cxviii. 14). To such Sanctified Souls there is no other power but God's, visible in the Universe. To those who incline now to God and now to the world, the Power of God appears to war with the power of the world. And to those who have no conception of God, all power seems to be of the world only, that is, of man and nature. Nevertheless, the truth remains that the, 'fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom' (Ps. cxi. 10), and that it is the Lord who 'works in all places of His dominion' (ib. ciii. 22) as 'Power belongeth unto the Lord' (Ps. lxii. 11).

"It is obviously not enough that the Lord should cause the soul only to see its worldliness,

because seeing, it has no power to efface it. Therefore, the Lord graciously cleanses the soul also: 'Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy Law, that Thou mayest give him Rest!' (Ps. xciv. 12, 13). This chastening or purification of the soul by means of affliction may be compared to the goldsmith's process of purging alloy from gold (Eccles. ii. 5). Skilled in the art of refining, he knows how often a given lump requires to be melted and beaten, before it could attain its purity. The gold, of course, is not conscious of the treatment it has received, but the soul knows, for the time being at least, the sorrows it has passed through. It may often fancy that it has suffered more than was needed, but the Lord is as wise as He is mighty, and a day comes when the soul appreciates 'how excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God' (ps. xxxvi 7), and how marvellous that 'by the sadness of countenance is the heart made better' (Eccles. vii. 3). The soul is made better and better till absolute purity or perfection is reached, when it sees God spiritually (Matt. v. 8) and enters into fellowship with Him.

"Such is the ultimate nature of works. By whatsoever name you call them—'the works of man', or 'the works of God'—the simple truth which you have to bear in mind is, that it is the Lord who drives you through storm and sunshine unto salvation. You may or may not see the reasons of your pains and pleasures, but He knows best what is good for you, and has given you career after career, according to your needs—not that you carved them out yourself—which will assuredly bring you in due time to the haven of Rest or Peace or Eternal Life.

"It was in view of the final truth that what appears to be the works of man are manifestations of God's power and mercy, that Jesus explained that the blindness of the beggar, who stood

before him, was a dispensation of the Lord, preparatory to giving him spiritual discernment. The sequel shows (in vers 30–38) that the blind beggar was really an enlightened person, who had not only a fair knowledge of sound doctrine, but also much devotion to the Lord, so that Jesus thought him worthy enough, after his excommunication by the Jews, to find him out and disclose to him the fact of his own Christhood."

The Commentaries made a profound impression all over the world, particularly in America and Europe. *The Metaphysical Magazine* in a review of them said, "For teachers and students in the metaphysical arena, we know of no more deserving and practical Commentaries on the Holy Scriptures". *The Theosophist* reviewing them says, "Those who seek to obtain additional light on the Christian Bible will find ample material for thought and reflection in these Commentaries. To all who bear in mind and accept the view of Dean Farrar as expressed in his recent work, *The Bible, Its Meaning and Interpretations*, that the Bible is a book of Eastern origin and can only be understood by applying Eastern methods, the study of Sri Parananda's (for that was the name under which he published them) Commentaries should prove very interesting and very profitable."

In Australia too they met with a very warm and widespread reception, and the *Australian Herald*, in a review of them, spoke of the "very valuable thoughts they contained." The volumes enjoyed an extensive sale in Christian countries, and nearly every good Christian owned and studied them with much profit and enthusiasm. In India the results were not far different. Orthodox pandits were for the first time in history impressed by the value of the Gospels as Spiritual Guides and actually undertook to translate them into Indian languages, that they may be carefully read and

studied by the people of India.

Through these Commentaries, the fame of Ramanathan as a great religious teacher became international. Many a Westerner, thirsting for religious knowledge or seeking enlightenment, was drawn to his home in Colombo and had the satisfaction of having his thirst allayed, his doubts and uncertainties dispelled. His visit to America on the invitation of two hundred ladies and gentlemen of high rank and eminence was the result of the strong impression made there by these Commentaries.

In 1904, Ramanathan undertook another work which has proved a great boon to the Tamils. We mean his translation of the *Bagavad Gita* from its Sanskrit original into Tamil. He who had all his life found in the *Gita* such an inexhaustible fountain of religious inspiration and enlightenment longed to extend to the Tamils of India and Ceylon the privilege of reading it in their own vernacular. It should be remembered that what he gave them was not merely a translation of the verses in the *Gita* into simple and lucid prose, but more, exhaustive and illuminating commentaries on them. The translation and the commentaries were applauded by eminent Tamil pundits and men of religion in India. We shall do his memory a great disservice if we conclude that in spending so much of his valuable time and energy on these publications, he was influenced even remotely by a desire for fame or material gain. They emanated from a sincere and noble desire to make this rich treasure trove of spirituality accessible to his people and to render religion a vitalizing force in the life of a generation which was being rapidly enslaved by materialism and worldliness.

In 1906, another work of his, *The Culture of the Soul among Western Nations* was published by Messrs Putnam and Sons, New York. In it Ramanathan discourses at some length on a wide

variety of problems relating to religion and metaphysics, on Faith or Love of God; Scripture and its Interpretation; the Traditional Oral Interpretation of the Scriptures, and the Disastrous consequences of its loss to Western Nations; the Key of Knowledge or the Fundamental Experiences of the Sanctified in Spirit; the Law and the Prophets of Ancient Judaea; the Teachings of the Psalmists, the Practical Nature of the Doctrine as regards the Conversion of Self-love into Perfect Love etc. Though these discourses deal with Christianity and the Christian Scriptures, he interposes freely the teachings of Indian saints to amplify and illuminate them. He speaks of the experiences of these saints, of their holding intimate communion with, and final absorption in, God. He says: "The Western Nations know only of Christ, but India knows of scores in each generation. God is known by the soul only when the mind runs down to a calm and lies quite still. God and soul, being purely spiritual, cannot be explained sufficiently by words. A worldly saying is best interpreted by a man of wordly experience; a spiritual saying is best interpreted by a man of spiritual experience. Experience is the touchstone of interpretation. God is to be seen where the world is not; that is to say, in the region of pure consciousness.

"The truth, as explained by *Gnanis* (knowers of God), is that consciousness is wholly distinct from the mind and the senses. Consciousness is the being which knows and must not be confounded with the states of sensibilities induced through the excitement of the senses and thoughts." Many agree that the book is a very valuable contribution to religious literature. It considers the question how far Western Nations have grasped the problem of life, namely, the discovery of the soul in themselves. It discusses the preliminaries and methods necessary for such a discovery and points out that Europe and America will be powerless to

probe the depths of the soul so long as they are steeped in materialism and speculative philosophy. One cannot resist the temptation to quote the opinions of some eminent Western critics. The Honourable Mr. Charles H. Aldrich, Ex-Solicitor-General of the United States of America said: '*The Culture of the Soul among Western Nations*' is the clearest guide to spiritual enlightenment, I have found. The author is unquestionably a man of great wisdom concerning the deeper problems of life and its ultimate purpose under God, and writes with a persuasiveness that shows the way to every soul, prepared through renunciation of the world, to peace and rest.

"He is a great teacher, one of those enlightened ones who see and feel God, one possessed with perfect love, the 'complete fellowship with God' of the apostle.

"His explanations of this condition of complete fellowship; of the place of Jesus as a teacher; of his Sonship and that of the enlightened ones of all time, including the present; of the sameness of the truth of all religions, have a clearness and sweetness that seem inspired.

"Whether this message of or through Mr. Ramanathan is seed that will bear fruit depends upon his readers. It will bear fruit bounteously in the hearts of those whose experience has prepared them to hear and understand.

"To all who are yearning for higher things, who seek spiritual insight, who realize the emptiness and vanity of worldly pursuits and pleasures, I commend this little book, full to overflowing with spiritual discernment. Such a person will not find it filled with new or startling theories. Rather, there will be found the truths the heart knows, stated with the clearness and wisdom of the master."

The Honourable S. S. Benjamin, Ex-Minister of the United States of America said: "I find

myself impressed with the catholicity of Mr. Ramanathan's thought and with the felicitous manner in which he harmonizes the essential principles of the religions and writings of the East and the West. It seems to me his mission to become a powerful factor in removing the antagonism so long assumed to divide the spiritual teachers of Europe and Asia. His scholarly presentation of the dignified truths of the seers of past ages cannot but be of distinct benefit to those who are groping for more light in this age."

'*The Glascow News*' had the following comment: "It is an admirably written and thoughtful book. It is a valuable contribution to theological literature."

'*The Hibbert Journal*' of the second quarter of 1909 contained a review of the work by Mr. W. T. Seiger in which the writer commended it in the most exalted language.

There is a host of other books of his on religion and philosophy which will be mentioned in their due place. Suffice it to say that he gave the world a body of writings which are a permanent legacy to religious and philosophical thought, which gave life and religion a new meaning and a new significance hitherto hidden from the many and left an indelible impression on the contemporary mind of Europe and America.

The secret of it all was that Ramanathan was above all things a philosopher and man of religion. Religion was, as has been said, the fundamental fact of his history, the fountain-head from which there welled out all the multitudinous streams of national activity, political and social, philanthropic and patriotic. But his preoccupation with politics over half a century and more, the pre-eminence he achieved in that important sphere of national life and the glamour and enthusiasm that normally accompanies it tended to outshadow and eclipse the real man, to conceal the true

philosopher and man of religion under a facade of worldliness, the man whose whole life was spent in the practice of religion and the pursuit of high philosophic thought.

The world he lived in was a world that held the East in bondage, a world dominated by Western ideals and material values, a world which had not yet waked up to a consciousness of the greatness and splendour of Eastern religions and cultures. Were he living today when the religions and philosophies, the cultures and traditions of the East have come into their own, have come to be recognized for what they really are, the highest expressions of man's genius, he would at a stride take his rightful place and rank among the greatest exponents of religion and philosophy.

He it was who, following the trail set by Swami Vivekananda, carried to the West the message of the East, impressed upon the Western mind which had long come to regard the East as the home of primeval barbarism and obscurantism, the seat of false gods and superstitious rituals, that the East had much to teach the West yet, that the Easterner had a deeper and truer sense of spiritual and cultural values than any the Western world could offer. His immense body of speeches and writings, commentaries and translations opened the eyes of the Western world to the vast treasures of spirituality and high philosophic thought that had hitherto remained a closed-book to it.

It was he, moreover, that awakened his people to a realization of the excellence and splendour of their own spiritual and cultural heritage at a time when they had, in their ignorance and sloth, permitted themselves to be swept off their feet by false notions of the greatness and superiority of all things Western. Posterity has reason to cherish his memory for this, if for no other, that he rescued his people from the deadly grip of

alien religions and cultures and taught them to take pride in their great and ancient heritage of religion and culture, taught them that no greater calamity can ever befall a people than to be detached from their spiritual and cultural foundations, to lose their historical roots and become exiles from their own past.

THE DIAMOND JUBILEE OF QUEEN VICTORIA

In 1897 the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign was celebrated with great pomp and pageantry throughout the British Empire. The event was unique in British History, for no other British Sovereign had sat on the throne for so great a length of years nor had the reign of any other been more glorious or more spectacular. The whole British nation joined in a spirit of jubilant enthusiasm to pay homage to a queen in whose spacious reign England achieved world supremacy.

Representatives from the remotest parts of a far-flung Empire and from every known corner of the wide world thronged the streets of London, deputed by grateful and admiring peoples to do honour to the great Queen. In Ceylon, the choice of a Tamil Representative naturally fell on Ramanathan. There was, however, another aspirant to this honour, Mr. E. S. W. Senathirajah, a leading Tamil Advocate of the Colombo Bar. The claims of this candidate, great as they were, were as nothing compared to those of the other. Ramanathan's luminous record of public and political work entitled him more than any other to this signal honour. The government naturally chose him to represent the Tamil Community of Ceylon at the great Queen's Diamond Jubilee. In disappointment Mr. Senathirajah went to London a his own expense.

Ramanathan was then in the prime of man hood with all his powers and faculties attuned well-nigh to perfection. His services to the nation

were unparalleled. His selection was, therefore, acclaimed by all the communities. They held meetings all over the country, read addresses, expressed their joy and satisfaction and wished him godspeed. He sailed to England accompanied by his wife and daughter and carrying with him the sincere good wishes of the nation.

He appeared before the Queen in his magnificent long-coat and his resplendent turban and shawl. There were assembled in the gilded hall the highest of every land, princes of royal blood, the elite of the nobility, the most renowned statesmen, scientists, poets and philosophers, all of international repute and from every corner of the known world, to felicitate the Queen on this extraordinary occasion. Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister opened the proceedings with a glittering tribute to the Queen. When he had concluded, the next person whom the noble Lord is reported to have invited to address the illustrious assembly was Ramanathan. In his introductory speech, he called him the most accomplished speaker in the Empire. Ramanathan spoke for about half an hour and the audience listened spellbound to the silvery tones of his thoughtful and inspiring eloquence. The impression he created was profound and Lord Salisbury, in his concluding remarks, complimented the speaker on his magnificent performance.

He said, he had the privilege of listening to many a celebrated speaker but to none who surpassed Ramanathan. The following day, the British press eulogized Ramanathan, saying that, as an orator, he was second only to Lord Rosebury. This was indeed a signal honour, of which all Ceylon was rightly proud. Some years later when Lord Morley, having listened to a speech of Surendra Nath Banerjea, the great Indian patriot and statesman, said that Surendra Nath Banerjea was second only to Lord Rosebury in the realm of oratory,

the British press protested strongly and said that Rosebury's second was Ramanathan of Ceylon and no other.

The Queen awarded Ramanathan a gold medal, an honour conferred only on men of rank and distinction to commemorate this happy and memorable event. Having raised both himself and his country in the esteem not merely of Britain but of the world, he returned home, to resume his labours at the Office of Solicitor-General.

CHAPTER XXXIV

LADY RAMANATHAN

"We shall be failing in our duty, if we do not pay our tribute to the noble lady who was Ramanathan's partner in his later life, who shared all his joys and sorrows. She was born in a country thousands of miles away; nevertheless, she has dedicated her life to the service of a society quite different from the one in the land of her birth."

—*C. Coomaraswamy*
High Commissioner for Ceylon in India

WHEN Ramanathan was Solicitor-General, there came into his life a woman of great culture and refinement, of singular charm of character and person, who was destined to be one of the most potent influences both upon his intellectual and spiritual development and upon his whole subsequent career. She was no other than Miss R. L. Harrison who later became Lady Ramanathan. Her father was an Englishman of high birth and considerable fortune from Bradford in Yorkshire who, impelled by the lure of gold and adventure, emigrated to Australia in the middle of the 19th century and opened up gold mines there.

The comparative study of religion and the search for spiritual truths was a passion of her early life. For a time she came under the spell of the Theosophical Movement in Australia but could find little in it to allay her spiritual thirst. She had heard of high-souled saints and master-spirits of religion living in India and Ceylon, who could lead her to a Knowledge of Reality and was determined to seek them out and learn at their feet.

The quest brought her to Ramanathan who, at this time, combined with his official duties a comparative study of religion and the pursuit of Truth. She knew she had found her *Guru*, her Master and would not depart from him until she had achieved her life's purpose. Ramanathan made her a disciple of his and expounded to her the mysteries of religion and guided her in the path of spiritual enlightenment. She renounced all ties of home and country and strove at his feet to solve the manifold questions of life and religion.

Ramanathan chose the Bible for his first text of religious exposition to her, as it was the one with which she was most familiar. His expositions of the Gospels were subsequently collected and edited by her in two substantial volumes under the title '*The Commentaries of St. Mathew and St. John*' and won international renown. Under his guidance, she took to an enthusiastic study of the Hindu classics and became in her own right an authority on Hindu religion and philosophy. She became enamoured of Tamil and Sanskrit learning and translated many classics into superb English prose for the benefit of Western readers. Amidst the multitudinous labours of a very crowded and tumultuous life, Ramanathan found in her a true friend, an intelligent companion, an able collaborator in his many-sided intellectual and spiritual activity and an unfailing source of inspiration and refreshment to him.

When he proceeded to America on his lecture tour, she accompanied him as his Private-Secretary and was in no small measure responsible for its spectacular success. The Book, '*Western Pictures for Eastern Students*', an elaborate account of his American lecture-tour, was mainly the fruit of her labours. In 1906 when Ramanathan visited England, on his return from America, he felt that the selfless and devoted labours of a woman who had stood by him through the many vicissi-

tudes of an arduous life should not go unrewarded. Being then a widower, he made her his second wife and registered their marriage there. It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of her contribution to his subsequent success and renown.

In her Ramanathan found a lady of latent intellectual and spiritual power, endowed with a passion for selfless service and philosophic learning, just the sort of woman Ramanathan sorely needed, the sort of woman that fosters genius and fashions greatness, just the sort that one could take into active partnership in the multitudinous labours of a very versatile and dedicated life. To say that she, though heir to an alien culture and an alien upbringing, in every way exemplified the noblest traditions of Hindu womanhood by unquestioning obedience to her lord's will, by perfect trust in and passionate adoration of him, by cheerful and complete subordination of her personal comforts to his is not to be guilty of an overstatement. His happiness, his comfort, his peace of mind was her supreme concern. She fulfilled his wishes with scrupulous attention to detail both when he was alive and after he was dead, never pausing to consider whether the wish accorded with hers. "My Master willed it," she would say, "and therefore it must be done."

And the husband was far too exacting. This man whose chief cause of complaint against his first wife was that she was out of sympathy with him and could not rise to the level of his higher aspirations nor provide that intellectual and spiritual companionship which great minds generally long for in their women, was equally severe with the second. The truth of it was that Ramanathan, though alive to the subtle charm of a woman's personality, was never its victim. The invariable complaint of his first wife was that he never gave any of his time to her nor indulged her with any of those blandishments, that

good-natured and loving gaiety, that convivial converse so dear to the heart of every woman and makes her his captive. Absorbed in his work he would forget to tell her in advance what his movements would be, whither he intended to travel, but she could, as if by some intuitive impulse, divine them and make all preparations for them. Whenever he made a train journey, the noble lady would be the first to enter the train compartment, dust and clean his seat, personally provide for every detail of his comfort on the journey and, when the husband was comfortably seated and the train steamed out, return home content.

He would go on working at his desk far into the day and night completely oblivious of food and drink and would brook no interference. If she asked him for lunch or dinner, he would upbraid her for interrupting him. Knowing this side of his nature, she would gently steal into his presence, employ all the arts that only a woman knows of ingratiating herself with him, cautiously cajole him into conversation on the subject that preoccupied him and then let slip a mild suggestion that it would be wise to have a hurried meal and resume.

She played host to his numerous friends who came to him from far and near, supervised his large retinue of servants, managed his extensive estates and farms and did a host of other things in a supreme endeavour to free him from the many anxieties and worries which are generally the portion of men in high places. She was a vegetarian ever since she came under his influence and remained so to the end of life. In her last days, when in the grip of a dire illness that finally ended her, the doctors advised her to take liver extract, she stubbornly refused to do so. Ramanathan loved her dearly as became a good husband and held her in high esteem to the end of his days. Their only daughter Sivagamasundari

LADY RAMANATHAN

was married to S. Natesapillai, scholar, educationist, historian and politician.

How came it that Natesapillai became a member of the Ramanathan family. As has already been observed, he was the lineal descendant of Swami Arulparananda Dhesikar, Ramanathan's revered *Guru* and admittedly the most vitalizing and transforming influence on his whole life. Prompted by the tradition of enduring friendship, conscious of the love and veneration the children of Ponnambala Mudaliyar had for his saintly ancestor, the accomplished youth on the threshold of a bright career at the Indian Bar, met Ramanathan at his summer-residence at Kodai Kanal in S. India. The veteran statesman was apparently impressed by the youth's scholarship and charming presence. In the course of a prolonged conversation, Natesapillai told his interlocutor that he was a professional lawyer. Ramanathan said, "Law is meant to be studied but not practised. Why don't you do something nobler than that?" Strange commentary from the immortals of the trade! The masterful personality of the great statesman and jurist prevailed and the youth accepted an appointment to the staff of Parameshvara College. The new find, in addition to being a votary of the legal art, was also a scholar of great erudition, particularly in the realm of Oriental learning. Whenever Ramanathan addressed learned audiences in Tamil, it was his practice to have the scholarly youth at his side. He would quote profusely from the Tamil classics and, if on occasions his aged memory betrayed any gaps, he would call upon the youth to fill them up and it was unfailingly done. Natesapillai helped Ramanathan immensely in the many literary and philosophical works the latter accomplished in Tamil. As Principal of Parameshvara College for many years, he left the imprint of his personality on it.

Lady Ramanathan's wide scholarship and her untiring labours in the cause of women's education received recognition when the University of Ceylon conferred on her the Doctorate of Laws, *honoris causa*.

She died in 1953 full of years and honour, mourned by the people whom she loved so well, whom she served for half a century with surprising loyalty and devotion.

CHAPTER XXXV

LECTURE VISIT TO AMERICA

"Ramanathan is by far the most spiritually illuminating teacher I have ever known."

— Myron Phelps

"As long as Mr. Ramanathan will teach us, we are willing to sit and listen."

— An American Professor

His fame as a scholar and philosopher went far beyond the confines of this Island, and he was acclaimed both in India and in America. To the latter country he went on the invitation of a number of leading ladies and gentlemen in order to lecture on philosophy to many American universities and other seats of learning. These lectures are still remembered by many in America.

— Sir Graeme Thompson

MYRON H. Phelps, a great American, was also an eminent lawyer of New York, a scholar of immense and varied erudition and Director of Monsalvat School for the Comparative Study of Religion. He had devoted more than twenty-three years of a strenuous life to an enthusiastic study of Eastern religions and ethics and had from that study imbibed a genuine love for India and the Indian people. He was by conviction a Hindu Vedhantist and confirmed vegetarian and adopted the Indian dress and the Indian way of life. He was the host of Swami Vivekananda when that great Indian monk spent some years in America on his historic mission.

In 1901, Phelps called on Ramanathan at his home in Colombo and listened to his profoundly

illuminating discourses on religion and philosophy. He became so far enamoured of them that he felt convinced he had found the Master he had striven all his life to find and remained behind in Colombo for a whole year to learn more from him. He assured Ramanathan that there were hundreds of souls in America who, like him, were hungering for spiritual knowledge, that he (Ramanathan) possessed that knowledge in abundant measure and that the American people would accord him a royal welcome and be eternally grateful to him if he would visit that land and lecture to them on religion and philosophy.

At about this time, Ramanathan received an earnest and moving appeal signed by about two hundred American ladies and gentlemen beseeching him to go to them and teach them the Truth. He also received a cordial and pressing invitation from H. W. Percival, the President of the Theosophical Society of America on his own behalf and on behalf of the members of the Society.

Ramanathan's pre-eminence as a religious teacher and scholar had spread far beyond the confines of his country. His '*Commentaries on St. Mathew and St. John*' and above all, his speeches and writings on religion and philosophy had created a deep and lasting impression on the West. The people longed to see him and hear him expound the mysteries of life and religion. Religion had become the ruling element of his life and feeling within himself a call for higher work, he resolved to devote the rest of his life to it. He saw before him a great field for his endeavour and felt it was the bounden duty of those who had heard the Message and seen the Light to impart them to those who thirsted for them. He knew that of the many services that man can render unto man, service in the domain of religion and the diffusion of spiritual light is the greatest and the best. He had heard how fruitful and far-reaching

in its results was the work of Swami Vivekananda in the West and desired to follow it up himself. He felt he had a great mission to fulfil. He says, "I can say only now that I have found higher work than what is done at the Bar or in the Legislative Council. The moment that higher work became clear to me, I felt that my time was being wasted in the Law Courts and in the arena of politics. You, my friends, know I have had for some years little time for visiting even my best friends. I am at work throughout the day, and far into the night not upon official or professional work, but upon the higher work which I have felt myself urged to. So I have gone on for some years. One day, early this year, I called on his Excellency the Governor, Sir Henry Blake, on official business. On that day happened a turning-point in my life. I thought he knew nothing of me except as Solicitor-General, but he spoke to me as though he had known me all his life. I had heard he was earnest, sympathetic and cultured, but how he knew about my aims in life and the work I cherished at heart is a mystery. He told me that in the Solicitor-General's chair, I was like a race-horse in a cart. He told me that I was destined for higher work, and as invitations had come from America, he thought that I ought to accept them and satisfy those who thirsted for such knowledge as I could give. This was most encouraging. In the course of that conversation he said he would give me twelve months' leave, if I cared to honour those invitations. How singular that, when I was asking myself how I was to devote myself to the work I love best, the Governor of Ceylon should tell me that a great sphere of usefulness was opening before me, and should befriend me in that cause. I accepted his kind offer with many thanks, and I told him at the same time that, on the expiry of the year's leave, I would retire from Government

Service, in order that I might devote all my time with undivided attention to national work among my countrymen."

The words of a great contemporary are worth recalling: "By his monumental exposition of the Christian Scriptures and by his authoritative writings on the various systems of philosophy, Ramanathan had achieved international reputation as an exponent of religion and philosophy."

Ramanathan accepted the invitation and the American people were jubilant over it. Myron H. Phelps addressed his countrymen in the following terms: "Following the long procession of Indian Teachers who have sought our shores during the past score of years, one whose position, attainments and character are such as to cast a lustre on all who preceded him, is expected to visit us during the coming summer. It is to make this fact known to your readers, that those who wish may avail themselves of the opportunity of meeting him, and that a fitting tribute of respect and honour may be paid by us to a really great man, that I am preparing the present paper. The person to whom I refer is the Honourable P. Ramanathan, K. C., C. M. G., Solicitor-General of Ceylon.

"Mr. Ramanathan is a man thoroughly representative of the Indian nation, both in its external, material, and its inner, spiritual aspects, in a higher degree, perhaps, than any one who has hitherto visited America from that land. His family is one of the oldest of Southern India, and has long been the leading family among the Hindus in the Island of Ceylon.

"He has large wealth, has received a European as well as an Indian education, and is a man of sound knowledge and culture in the learning of both the East and the West.

"It is with reference to the spiritual aspects of life, however, that Mr. Ramanathan is preeminently representative of India. His repute as a

man of wisdom — of spiritual illumination — is very great among his countrymen. Those who know him well, indeed, regard him as one of those Sages who have endowed India with the mysterious majesty of Spiritual Wisdom — as, in short, a *Brahmajnani* or knower of God. For in India, there is commonly understood by Hindus — not by most Europeans — to be a science quite unknown, quite undreamt of by the 'progressive' West, namely, the science of *jnanam*, or Spiritual Wisdom; a science which has to do solely with spiritual things, which deals with the principles which underlie both the visible and the invisible worlds, which is based upon actual and immediate knowledge of God.

"The *Jnanis* stand for the highest and most sacred ideas of the Indian civilization — for all that is finest, noblest, and purest in it. They are the efflorescence of the life of the nation as a whole, not any sect, creed, or division of it. To them, all external religious forms are alike. The Brahmin, the Buddhist, the Christian, the Mohammedan, or the Agnostic are to them the same. Development of character and aptitude for receiving spiritual instruction are the only credentials which they regard. The most enlightened men of India have always gone and still go to the *Jnanis* when seeking spiritual light.

"It is such a man that Mr. Ramanathan is reputed to be among his countrymen, who know him well. He has made an extensive and critical study of the Christian Scriptures, and has written exhaustive commentaries on the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John, and a portion of the Psalms of David. These commentaries are in the highest degree sympathetic and reverent; and as the author has been from his youth imbued with the ideas of Indian civilization and is wholly loyal to them and to the Indian Scriptures, his interpretation of the Christian Scriptures is essentially a harmoni-

zation of the two religious systems. He finds in the teachings of the Old and the New Testaments the leading doctrines of the Sages of India, as laid down in the great *Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita,* and other sacred writings in Sanskrit and Tamil.

"It was through a friend who knew him, and his published Commentaries that, in the year 1901, I first learned of Mr. Ramanathan; and I made the journey to India chiefly for the purpose of meeting him. My acquaintance with him resulted in my studying with him the underlying principles of all religions for upwards of a year. I found him possessed of great powers of exposition and by far the most spiritually illuminating teacher I have ever known.

"A number of circumstances combine to warrant the expectation that considerable results may follow his visit to America. Mr. Ramanathan's perfect mastery of the English as well as his native language, and his extensive acquaintance with the science and literature of the West and of the East, fit him to be a more perfect interpreter of the one to the other than any one who has preceded him. Further, Mr. Ramanathan's distinguished position as the second Law Officer of the Crown, and as the recognized leader of the Tamil race in Ceylon, and his large wealth, are, in a measure, guarantees for the sincerity of his efforts. Moreover, he is a very winning and attractive speaker, and a man of great charm of manner and personal character. He is, therefore, I think, exceptionally qualified to secure the attention, respect, and affectionate regard of Americans."

Dr. Paul Carus, the learned Editor of the *Open Court* welcomed him in the following words: "We express our satisfaction at the prospect of Mr. Ramanathan's visit to this country. We have not yet been in direct communication with him, but are acquainted with his books on

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the Christian Scriptures and know of his prominent position in Ceylon. It is by no means impossible that we shall have to greet Mr. Ramanathan as the truest and best representative of the India of the future."

When it became known in Colombo that Ramanathan had decided to proceed on a lecture tour of America, people felt it was a signal honour done to their country and vied with one another in felicitating him. At one of these functions, Sir Frederick Dornhorst, K. C. said, "Gentlemen, I am forced by those present here to speak, against my own resolution not to speak, and against the express wishes of my good friend Mr. Ramanathan, but you all seem to have strongly developed in you the idea that there should be no public entertainment without a speech. I have known Mr. Ramanathan from childhood. We were children together, boys together, youths together, men together, and now we are old men together. In the early days of his vigorous manhood, he was a great believer in the virtues of Western civilization. He knew what a good dinner was, and no one appreciated his dinners more than I did. But I am sorry to say, as he ripened in years, he has taken to the vices of Eastern civilization. He abhors drink, never smokes, and even despises his terrestrial body, not to the extent of being regardless of the cut of his coat and trousers, for he is neat and tidy still..... He has been a unique personality amongst us. He stands among you and shows that it is possible to outlive criticism. This large and representative assembly is sufficient testimony to his worth as a public man. The one man in Ceylon who had come nearest to the ideal of what a representative should be is Mr. Ramanathan.

"At the Bar, he and I have been often pitted against each other. As he told the jury the other day, on the last occasion we appeared against

each other in the Supreme Court, 'We fight, we scratch each other's faces, and pull each other's hair, but we go out arm in arm.' That is a very good illustration of our life at the Bar.

"Now he is going away from us to America. Wherever he is, whether preaching what he believes to be the true end of man, whether acquiring new fame in a new land, wherever he is, let me assure him that his memory will be always with us. Let us drink to his health in a substance which he despises."

The Times of Ceylon in an appreciative account of Ramanathan said: "Mr. Ramanathan acted on three occasions as Attorney-General of the Island, and was decorated in 1889 for distinguished public services in Ceylon. Three years earlier, the Honourable Benchers of the Inner Temple conferred on him the honour — rare in the legal profession — of having him called, *honoris causa*, to the English Bar. Apart from his professional activities and his official duties, Mr. Ramanathan has found time for scientific research, and the publication of several treatises on philosophy, theology, ethnology, sociology and Oriental literature.

"Today he surrenders the official position he has occupied for thirteen years, to go on an extended tour through America, where he will communicate to many audiences the results of the thought and study of his leisure hours. On his return to Ceylon, he intends to dedicate the remaining years of his life to a sustaind attempt to realize what he believes are the ardent aspirations of the more thoughtful among his countrymen for a larger and truer national life."

On 5th July, 1905 Ramanathan embarked on one of the magnificent steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company and left the shores of Ceylon for America. He landed in London and boarded another steamer, the 'Campania' and sailed for New York. A certain gentleman

came up to him and asked him, "Sir what is your religion? We have heard that the people in India have no true religion. Is that so?"

Ramanathan answered, "My religion, that is, the religion in which I was born, is called by Westerners the Hindu Religion. We do not know it by that name. We call our religion the way to Siva, or *Saiva marga*. It is the worship of the one Lord of all nations, who is all Peace and all Power, for that is the meaning of *Si-va*."

Another gentleman asked, "Do your people believe in immersion?" Ramanathan said, "Yes, but not as Westerners believe in mere ritual. We believe in the human spirit being immersed in the grace of the Infinite Spirit, in the immersion of human love in godly love. We are not satisfied with immersing the body in water. Flesh profiteth nothing. It is the spirit that quickeneth. The Doctrine of Immersion relates to the spirit, not to the body."

Another asked, "Do your people have a fixed day for worship?

"Yes", said Mr. Ramanathan; "they worship every day. They begin the day with worship, and close it with worship everyday. Even our coachmen will not get on to their driving-box without worship in the act of mounting. It would be difficult to disestablish even a common labourer in our streets from his religion. He lives for worship. It is not so with Westerners."

"Sir", said another person, "what do you think of Western progress?"

Mr. Ramanathan said, "The minds of the Westerners are never at rest. They do not believe in rest. Rest, they fancy, is stagnation, and therefore they are always moving on to new things. They call this love of change 'Progress'. The ancient Greeks, who in the days of Pericles were politically and commercially at the height of prosperity, soon spun themselves out of existence by

running after new things out of mere love of change; and that is our danger, too, the consequence of copying Western nations, which we are fighting against. We want progress towards God—not progress towards the world. We want progress in the plane of spirituality, not in the plane of sensuousness. We prefer God to the world. Adorn worldly life with every comfort, convenience and luxury, but do not quench the spirit, said St. Paul."

Ramanathan landed in New York, and on the day he landed in America the *New York Evening Post* published a lengthy appreciation of him, of which the first two paragraphs were as follows: "Among the passengers on the steamship 'Campania', which reached her pier this morning, was the Honourable P. Ramanathan, the Solicitor-General of Ceylon, and a member of one of the most ancient Hindu families of Southern India. He is to remain in this country eight or ten months, the first of which he will spend at Greenacre, Maine, some three miles north-west of Portsmouth. His visit is an event of distinctly world-interest, his friends say, because of his eminence in his own country, his broad and sound culture in the science and literature of both the West and the East; and his pronounced views and luminous and persuasive speech as to the fundamental unity of all religions and the brotherhood of all mankind, make it quite certain that he will cause a definite and considerable contribution to a better understanding between the East and the West.

"The Hindu is a man of striking personal appearance. His dress is a compromise between the costume of the East and the West, made necessary, no doubt, by his official position as an officer of the British Government. It consists of the large white Tamil turban, which is its only distinctive Oriental feature, and a clerical-cut frock suit of grey cashmere,"

At the Greenacre University, Ramanathan spoke

on 'The Unity of Faith'. In introducing the speaker, Myron Phelps said: "My friends, today we are permitted to see our most cherished wish fulfilled, for we have in our midst one who can teach us how to attain Peace. You all know, how, about two years ago, I went to the East in search of Light. It was then my privilege to meet Mr. Ramanathan and to hear him teach, and I at once knew that I had come to the end of my search, that Mr. Ramanathan could give me what all others had failed to give. I remained with him in Ceylon one year, and then circumstances forced me to return to America. Before I left, I said to Mr. Ramanathan, 'Will you come to America and tell my countrymen some of the truths which you have taught me?' He answered, 'If your love and theirs is strong enough, it will draw me there.' Our love has been great, and since my return, you have all begged him very often to come. At last he has come, and I shall now let his sweet words speak for themselves."

Ramanathan could hardly find words to begin. He was much moved. He spoke slowly and gently, and in a few seconds he was himself. His words flowed freely on the subject chosen for the day, "Our God is a Consuming Fire." His address held the audience spellbound for an hour and a half. The impression made was profound. One and all acknowledged that they had never heard a sermon so real and so practical. For the first time in their lives they felt their spirits quickened. They crowded round him to express their gratitude to him, and Dr. Fillmore Moore took him away from their midst, saying it was quite time that their esteemed guest was permitted to take his dinner. So the gathering dispersed, and Mr. Ramanathan was escorted by the Doctor and a few others to his apartments.

While Ramanathan was at Greenacre, the Deacon of the Eliot Church, a gentleman of about seventy-

two years became enamoured of his teachings. As a token of his gratitude and appreciation, he brought the distinguished teacher, an abundant supply of milk, vegetables and fruits every day from his own farm. In the course of an interview, he told Ramanathan, "I knew of only one other who could move people as you did, and that was Mr. Henry Ward Beacher of Plymouth Church."

Ramanathan remained in Greenacre for five weeks, delivered more than fifty lectures teaching the people the true path of God. When the time came for his departure from Greenacre, the following resolution was passed expressing their sincere gratitude and admiration for his services to them: "We, the members of the Monsalvat School for the Comparative Study of Religion, desire to bear witness to our deep appreciation of the service rendered by the Honourable P. Ramanathan to the cause he has at heart equally with us.

"While bringing to us a deep faith in the Religion of the East and while in no wise renouncing his allegiance thereto, he has shown such insight into the spirit and genius of Christianity, that his interpretations have been as stimulating as they have been suggestive and illuminating.

"We therefore tender our sincerest gratitude to Mr. Ramanathan and his companions, and we wish them a hearty God-speed."

The resolution was immediately submitted to the consideration of the Monsalvat School, and it was unanimously resolved, all the members present standing and acclaiming their concurrence, that the said resolution be adopted.

The last evening of Mr. Ramanathan's stay at Greenacre was spent at the home of one of his most ardent disciples, who had so arranged that no others but the family and two very dear friends should be present to receive the last words of help from Mr. Ramanathan before he left Greenacre. They took him to a quiet room in a part of

the house reserved only for very special occasions, where they did not expect any interruption. Here they had not been seated long before a lady and gentleman were announced, and, thinking they were the friends who had been invited, the host asked them to come in. They proved to be entire strangers to everyone present. Not even the hostess knew them. No one had ever seen them at Greenacre before. With many apologies they gave their names as Dr. and Mrs. ..... of New York, and explained that, having heard that Mr. Ramanathan was at Greenacre, and that he was leaving the next morning, they had travelled all day to see him, feeling this to be their only chance of meeting him. Turning to Mr. Ramanathan they said: "We are very sorry to have disturbed every one here, but having heard of you at New York from numerous friends, we felt we must see you, Sir. We are, in fact, desperate. We have been urged to break through the rules of worldly life. Regard for manners has been waging war in our breasts with the deep-seated yearning to hear you. We quite see we have broken in upon a select gathering, but we shall wait outside, till all have heard you."

Mr. Ramanathan welcomed them, and said such perseverence as theirs in the cause of Truth would surely be rewarded. He was there for no other purpose than to help those who craved for help. The hostess looked quite concerned, as she had herself given them admittance, and the 'intruders' appeared to be earnest and thirsty souls. So those who had assembled by appointment preferred to go into an adjoining room till the worthy doctor and his wife from New York had been fed. This is a sample of the enthusiasm bred in the hearts of men and women by the discourses of Mr. Ramanathan.

Of Ramanathan's work at Greenacre, a disciple of his wrote to Lady Ramanathan the following

appreciation: "It cannot be denied that the days have been less joyous since you left. The feeling of loneliness was almost overwhelming for a time, and then came the realization of the blessings we received, and the spirit of thankfulness overshadowed the sorrow of parting: thankfulness that there are so many among those who day after day listened to the Master, whose lives are quite transformed by the line upon line and precept upon precept of his teaching. There are many witnesses to the truth of this. There are also true disciples whose lives from this time forth will be dedicated to that which is imperishable, and others in whom the spiritual discernment is quickened. The Rev. Mr. Brown (of Elliot Church) has become a great teacher himself, because of his faithful listening to the Master. I saw Miss Parmer accidentally, and we talked together for a while. She spoke of 'what the great teacher, for whom we have waited, had done for us, and of our duty to recall and treasure up his fervent unfoldment.' Numberless have been the testimonies of the abiding influence of the Master's words....."

Another lady testified with tears streaming down her face, "He has given us a Bible. I always go to church and read my Bible, but it never meant anything to me, though I wrestled with it and prayed over it. I could not understand it; but now all is so clear, and now my Bible has become an inexpressible help and inspiration and source of consolation."

From Greenacre, Ramanathan proceeded to Boston and New York and delivered several courses of lectures there. In Boston, the President and the members of the Zionist Association escorted him from the station to their Hall and begged him to say a few words at the meeting. As Ramanathan spoke, there was unbroken silence, but all eyes shone with earnestness and all faces beamed with the sense of just being awakened. As soon

as he ceased, the hall rang with enthusiastic applause, and the report of the proceedings in the Boston papers next day spoke of Ramanathan as "the Orator of the Evening." He had touched the hearts of the Jewish people and they set themselves the next day to the work of forming a society for the study of the methods necessary for their return to the Holy City of Jerusalem, along lines indicated by Ramanathan. He visited the great Conference of Unitarian Ministers in Atlantic City, and there was accorded a civic reception by the Mayor. In the course of a lengthy and profoundly luminous lecture on 'Peace' during which he held his audience spell-bound, he asked, "Does peace mean peace-making between two quarrelsome persons?" and proceeded to answer, "That also is a form of peace, and I may say an easy form of peace. But the peace of which the Great Master spoke was peace of a different kind.

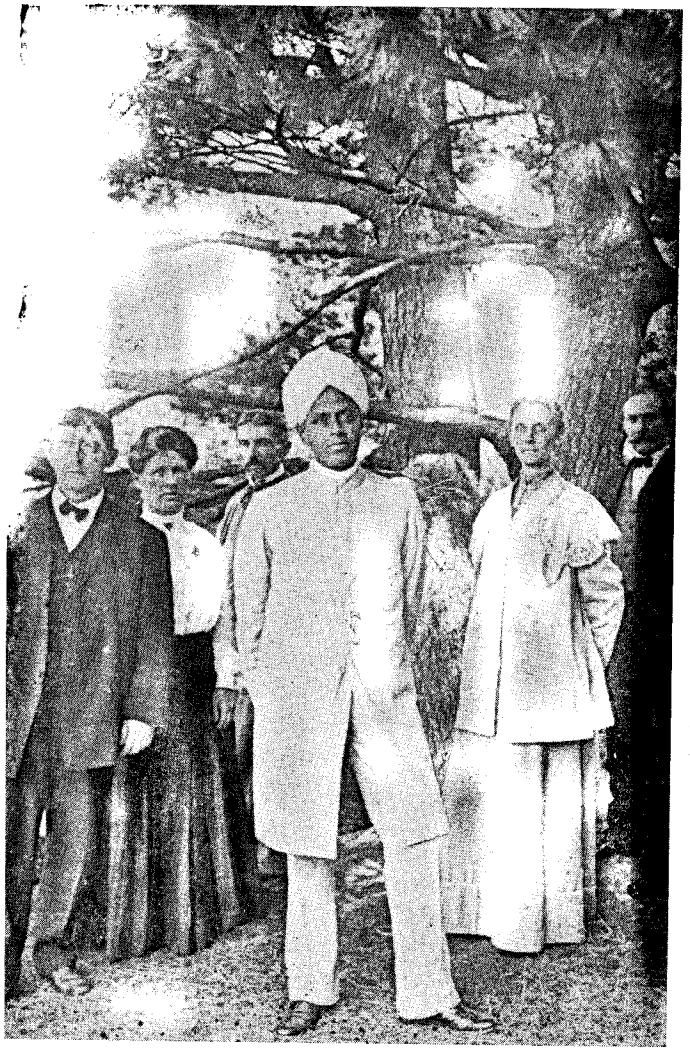
"It was individual peace in one's own heart. It is the peace which in its highest development is known as the peace that passeth all understanding. He said, 'Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.' That peace is the peace which cometh out of the practice of letting our thoughts run down to a sweet calm. We all know how much our hearts are afflicted by thoughts of all kinds, raging, conflicting thoughts, which rob us of what is called our peace of mind or restfulness of spirit. Jesus said, 'Ye that are heavily laden, come unto me and I will give you rest.' Laden with what? With afflicting thoughts. The Rest that he spoke of is the fruit of the doctrine he preached, namely, the doctrine of pacifying oneself and letting our burdensome thoughts melt and run down to a beautiful calm. He meant to say, as all great Sages say, that if one succeeds in the art of tranquillizing one's thoughts — in the art of peace-making — that spirit will be acknowledged by God as his son.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect', and St. Paul said that it is open to each one of us to attain the measure and stature of the fulness of Christ; that is, every man may by due culture become a Christ, a 'son of God', in the language of Jesus. This art of pacifying oneself leads one indeed to the Blessed State, namely, the state wherein is the knowledge of God, the unspeakable joy of knowing God and being in fellowship with him.

"Knowledge of God cannot be attained by man unless his thoughts are allowed to run down to a calm. In that pacific state, man attains the sonship of God, if able to be in communion with God. Ask yourselves for a moment, how you can pray to God, unless you pacify yourselves. You cannot put yourselves in communication with Him, be in fellowship with Him for a second, unless you close the portals of your senses and dismiss worldly thoughts. In that state of comparative peace, it is possible for man to be in touch with God.

He concluded a long and illuminating discourse with the words: "Brothers and Sisters, I am exceedingly glad that I have been given an opportunity to see your faces and to become more familiar with those of you who are occupied with this great art of finding God within yourselves. We need not go far to seek God.

"Lo, said Jesus, if any man say unto you that Christ is there or here, do not believe him, because Christ is within each of you; and our aim should be to find him in our hearts by the art of peace-making. Peace-making indeed — that art of allowing thoughts to run down to a sweet calm — is the chief method of all religions, and unless you learn it, you will not be able to make much progress individually, or in the work of helping others efficiently in the active duties of their lives."



RAMANATHAN AND HIS AMERICAN DISCIPLES

At the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York, one of the biggest of America's educational institutions and often called 'The People's University', Ramanathan was invited to deliver the Inaugural Lecture at its first meeting of the academic year of 1905-1906. An unprecedented gathering was assembled to hear him. Prof. Franklin W. Hooper, in introducing the speaker referred to the many valuable lessons the West were learning from the East and said, among other things, "To-night we have with us a distinguished representative of our Mother Country from India and Ceylon, a great Eastern scholar and statesman of the first rank, a devoutly religious man." Ramanathan delivered a very instructive and inspiring lecture entitled, "The Spirit of the East contrasted with the Spirit of the West." It was a very lengthy lecture, one treasured by all Americans. He emphasized the point that the civilization of the West was materialistic, was one of works, while that of the East was essentially spiritualistic. The lecture provides ample evidence of his deep insight into religion and his wide scholarship. It was published and read widely in America and in other lands.

Many were the lectures delivered by Ramanathan in New York. His host, fearing that he was being over-worked, carried him off one Saturday for a trip up the charming Hudson River, on the steam launch 'Albany'. Ramanathan entered into the delights of the river scenery with the same zest and enthusiasm which characterized all his doings.

The New York Times said of him among other things: "There is nothing of the foreigner, strange to say, in Ramanthan's use of English; just a shade of accent and a choice of phrase occasionally that recalls British usage in such matters. The low, melodious voice may be a racial peculiarity, though it fits the amiable tempera-

ment of the speaker admirably. A Hindu sage ordinarily may be an extremely formidable personage to meet. Ramanathan, however, has the gift of veiling whatever he has of mystic lore in so simple an exterior that one is led at first to regard him as being quite transparent, child-like, mentally. A little experience, however, reveals the 'artless art' of the Oriental, that is able to convey so much of the acerbities of criticism or the profundity of learning in a conversational manner that is outwardly charming in its apparent *naivete*. Shorn of this charm, divested of this gentleness, the sage, standing in the great modern hallway of the New York Bar Association, with its pillars and statues surrounding him, may be said to have really measured the proud America of to-day with the India of venerable philosophies and religions—and if the sentiment of scorn is possible to the mild *Jnani*, it was certainly there, though unexpressed, as a result of his comparisons. There was a touch of sadness in his voice and eye when he spoke of the spirit of the West....."

While in New York he visited the famous Columbia University and every educational institution of importance, for one of the objects of his American visit was to study at first-hand the systems and methods of education adopted in schools, colleges and universities there. Wherever he went, he addressed vast gatherings comprising the intellectual elite of American society. In one of the colleges, when Ramanathan had finished speaking, the Principal said to the students, "Now, if I should ask you the name of the gentleman who has just addressed you, could any of you tell me?" They were all very much amused, because none of them could pronounce the name. The Principal then gave it to them in syllables, and asked the Music-Master to beat time and lead the boys in singing the name according to their method. The students then sang their college song and finished

the verse with the words, "Ra-ma-na-than, Ra-ma-na-than, Ra-ma-na-than." Ramanathan was struck by the vast sums of money spent by Americans on education and the enormous facilities and amenities provided to students. In New York, he had the privilege of attending a political meeting and was greatly impressed by the spirit of enthusiasm and animation that prevailed, the absolute freedom of speech, the lavish expenditure of money and material, and the splendour that characterized it.

At Harvard University, Ramanathan was received by Prof. C. R. Lanman Ph. D., L. L. D. Prof. of Sanskrit. Ramanathan delivered a lecture on 'Progress'. He analysed the term 'Progress' in all its phases, industrial, scientific, and political and urged them to aim at progress in the direction of spirituality, which was the lesson which India had to teach the West. From Harvard, Ramanathan proceeded to Philadelphia and thence to John Hopkin's University at Baltimore. From Baltimore, he proceeded to Washington, the Federal Capital, the stateliness and magnificence of which impressed him immensely. He spent five weeks in Washington and every week he delivered not less than four lectures to distinguished audiences. All his spare moments were devoted to meeting large numbers of men and women who were troubled with religious doubts and longed to have them cleared. While in Washington, he was privileged to witness the grand ceremonial opening of Congress from a seat specially reserved for him. He was taken to every place of importance in the city. When he went round the beautiful Library of Congress, the Librarian brought up a pile of books for his inspection. On examining them, he found them to be his own series of Ceylon Law Reports in several volumes. The Librarian smiled and said, "We shall be glad to have copies of your other books also at your convenience." Mr.

Ramanathan promised to send them when he returned to Ceylon.

From Washington Ramanathan proceeded to Ithaca on the invitation of the President of Cornell University to give an address there on the 29th of the month. He spoke before a large and very appreciative audience on a subject which had proved quite attractive to American audiences, and which he presented each time in a novel form—the contrast between the ideals and civilizations of the East and those of the West.

When the lecture was over, there happened, a pleasing incident. A gentleman of over seventy years of age, who had sat in the front part of the house and evinced much interest, was introduced to Ramanathan as Mr. Corson, Professor of Literature in the University. Having exchanged greetings, the Professor said: "Have you seen those remarkable Commentaries on St. Matthew and St. John by Sri Parananda – the finest commentaries I have ever read?" They were Ramanathan's own books.

At Cornell University, Ramanathan gave the following advice to Indian youth who were reading at the University: "Let India know of the feeling of liberty, equality, and fraternity which prevails here. I have met in America the most distinguished men, and I have found them the humblest of the humble. You may see a gentleman sitting by the side of a labourer in a railway-car; there will be no disgust on the face of the gentleman, nor uneasiness in the face of the labourer, who, feeling his political equality with the gentleman, strives to be gentle and clean and neat in dress. Let our people know of the respect and friendliness with which Americans treat you here. It will make them more independent in the face of ill-treatment by foreigners. It is well also that the English should learn of the courtesy shown you by the Americans. The example of loving-

kindness will tend to improve their bearing towards our people.

"Tell our countrymen also of the greatness of America, in commerce, manufactures, agriculture, and wealth. It is well that they should know America's greatness; then they will be less liable to imposition from those who now presume upon their ignorance. Still more, if India knew of the skill and ingenuity which characterize American methods of manufacture, and the excellent quality and cheapness of some class of American goods, a great trade would reap many and important advantages."

Ramanathan visited every important town and city in America and was shown every place of interest there. He visited great universities and other seats of culture and learning, churches and other religious and philosophical institutions, and wherever he went he taught the people how to live the life righteous, the life holy and good. His discourses were for the most part on the Bible. He made it a living force to many and an inexhaustible treasure-house of inspiration and consolation. The impact of his teaching on his hearers was so profound and so telling that a lady who would have none of the Bible and had said, "I have given that up many years ago. I want something better than that," and who, moreover, would not enter a church and had not done so for forty years, testified, "He has given me a Bible. I read my Bible, but it never meant anything to me, though I wrestled with it and prayed over it. I could not understand it, but now all is clear and my Bible has become an inexpressible help and inspiration and source of consolation. In my blindness, how long have I denied myself this blessedness!"

Ramanathan was greatly impressed by America's stupendous material progress. He marvelled at the vast business and industrial organizations, and

above all, at the magnificent schools, colleges and universities on which the American people and their government expended colossal sums of money annually. However, he who had made it the central creed of his life that life, whether of the individual or the nation, defeats itself, becomes an empty, loud-sounding nothing, unless the spiritual keeps pace with the material, was distressed to find that in American life, the material was fast tending to outstrip the spiritual. This flight from spirituality, this idealization or idolization of material values to the detriment of the spiritual was one bleak spot he saw and deplored in American life.

He spent a year of a very crowded but very fruitful life with the American people. People sat at his feet and learned the message of Truth and Light which he had brought to them.

The American public offered him as a tribute to his services, a large sum of money to be devoted to educational work in Ceylon which Ramanathan had decided upon undertaking on his return from America. But he politely refused the offer, inasmuch as he felt that, if he accepted it, he would have to plan his educational projects on the lines they might prescribe or wish. It was never his intention to raise money in America. He went there only to satisfy the impulse he felt within him to do religious work, to carry spiritual culture to a land where, he was convinced, there was a genuine and intense thirst for it, and where rampant materialism threatened to eclipse all spiritual values. His mission was more than fulfilled, as we can judge from the numerous comments in the American press. Within the period of a single year, there was hardly any place of importance to which he was not invited and where he did not instruct the people in religion and the culture of the Spirit.

Prof. T. F. Crane L. L. D., Litt. D., Dean of the University Faculty, Cornell University, paid

the following tribute to Ramanathan's work: "Mr. Ramanathan created a very profound impression by his lectures here and by his most interesting personality. It is worth much to our students to realize how it is possible for a man to carry his religion into his every day life, or, in other words, to make his religion a part of himself."

The words of Myron H. Phelps may also be quoted here: "Mr. Ramanathan leaves many friends in America, many who had received from him a new light, a new hope and a new inspiration which they believe will over continue to illumine and cheer their pathway through life."

In April, 1906 Ramanathan left the shores of America carrying with him the gratitude and good wishes of a whole nation. There were many in America who for long years cherished the memory of his visit and found in his books and in his lectures much spiritual sustenance and comfort. He arrived in Ceylon on 3rd June, 1906.

Ramanathan has left us the following record of his American visit: "I received an invitation from about two hundred ladies and gentlemen in the West, to go over there and to lecture to them on the lines opened out in my publications on the subject of the Gospel of Jesus. In the course of a friendship formed with the cultured men and women in Western lands, I made a great discovery as to the real condition of their religious state. Those, who had arrived here from Western lands, left in the minds of the natives of India and Ceylon the impression that cultured Westerners were not only industrious and upright but religious and well-informed in matters relating to the Spirit. In fact, Western teachers of religion posed here as the sole possessors of the truth in regard to Spiritual Life and were many of them given to belittling and condemning the faith of our forefathers. My visit to the United States of America revealed to me the fact that neither the cultured

laymen nor the learned clergymen knew the truth about God, the Holy Spirit and Christ, or the relations which these three entities bore to each other and to man and the world without. The Presidents and Professors of Universities and the Principals and tutors of Theological Colleges confessed alike that they knew nothing about God, Soul or Matter, though they had read much and thought much on these subjects. They further confessed that they did not understand the sayings of Jesus and Paul as recorded in the Bible and desired to know whether I could give them a more satifactory exposition than they had already.

"I was very pleased to see their frankness and eager desire to know the Truth at any cost. Sir Henry Blake had told me that Americans were far more liberal-minded than the English and had strongly recommended me to go and meet the Americans and expound to them the Eastern methods of interpretation which he had read with pleasure and profit in my published works.

"I found the cultured Americans free beyond expectation in the quest of Truth. The English dominated by old traditions, had a fear of His Lordship the Bishop or the Duke. They feared to offend the aristocracy and continued to be subject to error which they sanctified under the name of Conservation. They loved to be conservative. They were afraid of free discussion in matters relating to the Spirit, and were ashamed to confess their ignorance on such points. The cultured American loved to acknowledge his error, to unlearn what had been wrongly taught and to receive light from whatever source it came. The Pastors of Churches, and learned Theologians, after hearing me said: "Pray give us more of this doctrine. This is what we have been in search of. For want of this doctrine our churches have become empty. We say to our congregation: 'Be good and seek God.' The more earnest among them tell us: 'I know

that I am going astray, I am not at all satisfied with myself, I am willing to be good, but, teach me how I may become good and how I am to seek and find God.' We are driven to a corner; we dare not say that we are unfit to teach, because if we own our ignorance of things spiritual, the few that are left in the Church will go away from it. We avoid the question by teaching them practical goodness, how to build churches, hospitals and schools; how to manage them; how to maintain soup-kitchens for the poor and the maimed; how to organize amusements for the children; how to send out Missionaries to the heathens in foreign lands."

"'Compare this humble confession of ignorance on the part of the learned divines, of wealthy men and women who send out Missionaries to teach the Gospel of Jesus to the so-called heathens of the East, with the arrogant assurance that they knew all about God and His Ways and that the Hindus, who have outlived every ancient nation of the world by their adherence to spirituality know nothing about the Soul and the way to worship God.'"

CHAPTER XXXVI

PONNAMBALAVANESHWARAR TEMPLE

"They neither build the Temples in their days,
Nor matter for succeeding founders raise."

— Cromwell

IN 1907, Ramanathan embarked on what may rightly be termed a stupendous venture, the rebuilding of Ponnambalavaneshwarar Temple, Colombo. An idealist who was also a man of action, he set out not to build a temple in the humdrum, prosaic sense of the word but to raise a monument to the glory of God and the service of man, one that would surpass every other in existence, in solidity and magnificence, in architectural beauty and structural excellence, in its power of spiritual appeal. In so doing, he aimed at transmitting to his people the true conception of a temple as the radiant centre of religion and art for mankind. It was one of his grandest achievements. It is no less the most exquisite piece of Hindu architecture in the country.

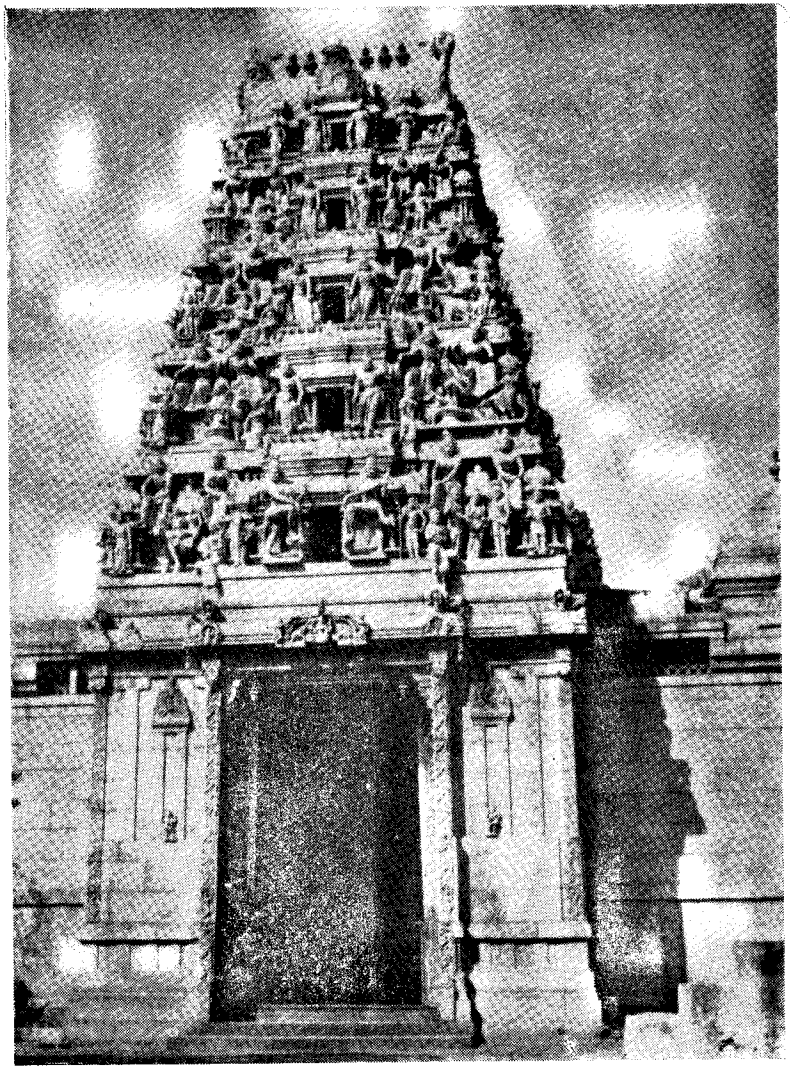
The temple was originally built and endowed by his father Ponnambala Mudaliyar in 1856 to supply a long-felt want, a place of worship for the Hindus of Colombo. Ponnambala Mudaliyar, as has already been observed, was before every thing else a holy and humble man at heart in whom the love of God and the passion for service overshadowed every other impulse. Profoundly distressed by the spectacle of large numbers of Hindus in the metropolis becoming oblivious of their ancestral faith for want of a common place of worship and straying into other folds, he made a firm and

pious resolve to discover a remedy as best he could. He acquired at Sea Street a plot of land, the property of one Captain John Foulstone. There single-handed he built a temple at an immense cost and endowed it with a thousand acres of highly productive coconut land and several buildings within the city. He also had a Trust Deed executed, vesting the management of the temple in the eldest surviving member of the family. Accordingly, on Ponnambalam's death in 1887, the management devolved on his eldest son Coomaraswamy. On Coomaraswamy's death in 1905, Ramanathan being the eldest surviving member, became manager. He was truly a chip of the old block, for, with him as with his devout father, religion was the chief motive force, the ruling passion of life. Moreover, his faith in the value and efficacy of temple-worship was unquestioning, for had he not learned from *Auvai*, the ancient Tamil poetess, of whose pithy and luminous maxims he was a lifelong student and commentator, that temple-worship confers immeasurable good on human-kind?

In the management of the temple and the custodianship of its resources he exercised the utmost vigilance and economy. As an impassioned student of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*, he saw to it that the temple ceremonies conformed strictly to the Agamic tradition and that every cent of the income that accrued from the temple properties was scrupulously accounted for. Rigid, even ruthlesss as was his economy in the use of his private means, it was even more so in his handling of public funds. Every one of Ponnambala Mudaliyar's sons was a model of what a custodian of public monies should be. The temple, which was originally built of brick and mortar, bore the scars of age. A renovation of the buildings was found to be imperative. Ramanathan, who never believed in half measures but aimed at perfection in everything that he did, resolved to demolish

the entire structure and rear in its place a new edifice of granite in the best traditions of Hindu architecture, one capable of withstanding the ravages of time, and serving as a lasting monument to the religion of his forbears. It was indubitably a prodigious task that he set out to perform unaided. Contemporary judges pronounced the project preposterous. Ramanathan's brother Arunachalam is reported to have told his (Ramanathan's) son Vamadeva "Your father is mad, stark mad. Who in his senses will set out to build single-handed a temple dedicated to Siva, and that on the lines of those magnificent temples in South India built by many generations of kings and potentates?" When the son communicated this to the father, the father told the son, "A great temple like the Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple was not built in one year or by one man. A great Pandyan King began it and subsequent Pandyans and Nayakas completed it. I begin it, my son, and it is for you and your progeny who come after me to complete it."

But the argument is fallacious. The Pandyan and Nayaka rulers had all the massed resources of a great Kingdom, immense reserves of men and material at their command, while he was after all a private individual with resources necessarily limited and having to pay for everything in cash. All he could count upon were the income derived from the rich endowments of a pious father and his own private savings accumulated over the years with rigid and self-denying economy but by no means commensurate with the magnitude of the task that lay before him. Undeterred by discouragements and even derision from every quarter, conscious only of the greatness and sanctity of the cause, with supreme faith in the guiding-hand of Providence, this indomitable man girded himself to the task. Herein lay his genius for action, in the calm serenity with which he thought things



PONNAMBALAVANESHWARAR TEMPLE
(Front view)

out for himself, formed his own judgments and laid his plans, in the undismayed firmness with which he adhered to them in the face of popular clamour or conflicting counsels, in the vigour and strength of will with which he executed them.

The decision taken, he went to South India himself, engaged the ablest masters of Dravidian architecture and sculpture and brought them to Colombo. He instructed them that the work they had taken in hand to accomplish was a sacred one and should be performed with skill, awe and reverence, for what they set out to build was nothing less than an abode for Lord Siva. Every minute detail of their craft, he impressed upon them, should receive the most scrupulous attention. In order to inspire the workmen in the performance of the sacred work, he would recite to them hymns from the Hindu Scriptures.

The work commenced in 1907. The original building was brought to the ground in its entirety, and a new plan for its rebuilding was drawn. The granite quarries of Veyangoda supplied the material. Several hundreds of expert craftsmen laboured for six years. Each pillar in the grand structure then cost him many thousands of rupees, but if he discovered the smallest blemish in any one of them, he promptly rejected it and had another made in its stead. He aimed at perfection and would not countenance even the least falling off from the mark. The major part of the work was completed in 1912, at a cost of two million rupees. Even to this day the work of building continues. The colossal structure stands there at Sea Street, Colombo, as an enduring monument to the memory of one with whom love of God and doing His will was the sole end and aim of man's existence, whose trust in His Mercy and Beneficence was so firm and so absolute.

The consecration ceremony was performed on 21st November, 1912. It is not to be guilty of an

overstatement to say that there does not exist in our Island a nobler piece of architecture and sculpture. Huge masses of rough granite transformed into the likeness of polished marble and life-like figures wrought with consummate artistic skill embellish the whole structure. Massive pillars of fine granite decked with exquisite sculptural engravings form many rows. Stones robbed of their weight by the cunning art of the chisel are suspended high as if by some supernatural agency. Images and other carvings on the walls and on the several domes worked in hard stone and with an outer coating of fine paint look like those made of the purest and softest wax. All these are a ringing tribute to the immense practical knowledge and the superb craftsmanship of the architects and builders who were specially commissioned for the work. Its strength and solidity, its beauty and grandeur, its majesty and massive magnificence have compelled and will continue to compel for ages to come the loving admiration of generations, for Ramanathan built not for an age but for all time. The edifice is an example of supreme art and is the result of "the practice of austerity, *tapasya*, which eschews all desire for name and fame but pours out the best in oneself with love and devotion." It is a living monument to the greatness of Hindu architecture and sculpture.

Further, Ramanathan provided the priests and the other employees of the temple with well-built quarters in the neighbourhood, paid them liberally and ensured the regular and systematic performance of six *poojas* daily. He saw to it that the temple rites and ceremonies accorded strictly and meticulously with the prescribed Agamic tradition. Such was his simple, childlike, unquestioning faith in God and the religion of his forbears.

Today, unhappily a materialistic and ungodly generation does not assess at its true worth the magnitude of his services to his God and his

religion. He gave the Hindus a place of worship indubitably the stateliest and the most magnificent of its kind in the country. Worshippers at the morning and evening *poojas* do not forgather in as large numbers as they used to in earlier days. But, whether they come or not, the usual *poojas* and ceremonies at the Ponnambalavaneshwarar Temple are performed and will continue to be performed for evermore with undiminished solemnity and splendour, for so had the saintly father and the no less saintly son ordained it.

CHAPTER XXXVII

RAMANATHAN COLLEGE

"A woman is the Centre of Life, the very Pivot of Existence. Life revolves round her. She is the Daughter, she is the Wife, she is the Mother. There is no Home and no Family without her."

— Kishori Gopal Krishnan

"Now that the difficulties in my path are cleared away, I said to myself that I would go to America and on my return, devote myself to national work amongst my countrymen and whatever resources are in my hands, I hope to devote to the service of my country. I am afraid that to my own generation, I cannot be of much use, but I certainly hope to be able to do some good at least to some of your children and children's children."

— Ramanathan

IN 1890, Ramanathan conceived the idea of founding a national Buddhist-Hindu College in Colombo, to serve as a model for other institutions, which it was part of his plan to establish in various parts of the country. Such an institution, apart from providing facilities for the higher education of Buddhist and Hindu Youth against a predominantly Buddhist and Hindu background, would, he believed, have the additional and all-important advantage of providing a common home for the spirit of Buddhist and Hindu culture and serving as a meeting-point for the two peoples. He sought to lay the foundations of a free and united Lanka in our schools and colleges in which the country's youth could, in their early formative period, grow up in the traditions of a common religious and cultural heritage, share the same

educational experience and by so doing, strengthen that unity of mind and outlook so vital to national solidarity and well-being. Accordingly he addressed the leaders of the two communities on the subject, formed a central committee and opened a fund with his initial contribution of Rs. 25,000. He had proceeded far in his plans when an unforeseen split occured between the Buddhists and the Hindus on the question of management. Moreover, the Buddhists desired to establish a separate institution for themselves and founded in consequence the present Ananda College. The Hindus had perforce to withdraw and Ramanathan transferred that sum of money to the Saiva Paripalana Sabai in Colombo. It was a bitter disappointment to him. Nevertheless, his concern for Buddhist education and the preservation of Buddhist culture and tradition never wavered, as is evident from a remark of Colonel Olcott, quoted in an earlier chapter.

In September, 1890 when he visited Jaffna as a Member of the Jaffna Railway Commission, he was accorded a public welcome at the Saiva School, the nucleus of the present Jaffna Hindu College. In a brilliant and inspiring address to a vast concourse of Hindus from all parts of the Peninsula, he exhorted them to conserve their rich and ancient national heritage by actively assisting the Jaffna Saiva Paripalana Sabai in organizing Hindu education in conformity with Hindu tradition and culture. He ended by saying that he would always esteem such assistance as his supreme reward for his service to his people. On another occasion he convened a meeting of the Hindus in Jaffna to consider ways and means of establishing a National College for the Hindus. He suggested the expansion and development of the Saiva School into a first-rate College and promised to do everything in his power for the realization of their objective. Moreover, he inaugurated a fund with an initial contribution of Rs. 2000/- and made an earnest

and moving appeal to all Hindus to espouse this great national enterprise. Jaffna Hindu College is the material realization of his early hopes and aspirations in the realm of Hindu education. Many a Hindu School in the Peninsula owes its existence today to his inspiration, munificence and guidance. He it was who first whipped up in his people a sense of national pride and a passion for conserving their rich cultural and religious heritage.

Ramanathan, it is well to remember, had strong and clear-cut views on education which, from time to time, he embodied in his speeches and writings and has left to us a rich legacy of literature on the subject. Few men had pondered more deeply on it or had arrived at conclusions which time has more than confirmed; fewer strove harder to translate them into practical realities. He knew that a sound, well-planned and well-organized system of education sponsored by the State and actively aided by private philanthropy and manned by a body of teachers dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of learning and the shaping of the nation's youth is the greatest boon that a people can confer on youth and the panacea for all social ills.

When his plans for founding in Colombo a great seat of learning for both Hindu and Buddhist youth proved abortive, he turned his attention to the founding of an institution for the higher education of Hindu girls in Jaffna. He was so far enamoured of female education that, even before he set about the task of building Ramanathan College, he used to offer material and moral aid to institutions that dispensed intellectual and moral training for girls. He clung passionately to the view that a woman of sound intellectual, moral and religious culture made a contribution of greater and more abiding worth to national regeneration than man, for none realized more than he, the truth of the saying that when you educate

a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a whole family.

The institution he envisaged was to be a shrine of Hindu culture. It was to recapture the true spirit of the ancient and traditional culture of the Hindus which he feared was fast disintegrating under the impact of Western influences. His faith in the superiority of that culture over every other was firm and unwavering and he was a lifelong votary and exponent of it. It was one of his supreme regrets that Hindu girls who were the proud heirs and inheritors of so great and glorious a culture and tradition should turn their backs on them and embrace an alien culture whose influence upon them was, he believed, extremely unwholesome, even positively pernicious. The passionate pursuit of an alien culture to the neglect of one's own had, in his view, the effect of making one a degenerate, denationalized, debased individual rather than a healthy, wholesome, full-fledged human being. In effect, he asked Hindu parents, "Why! oh why! should your children chase the will-o'-the-wisp of an alien and dubious culture and become strangers in their own land and among their own people, when they have at their own door a solid and tangible heritage in one of the greatest cultures known to human history? He wanted Hindu girls to grow up in a predominantly Hindu environment, breathe a Hindu atmosphere, imbibe Hindu ideals and exemplify in their day-to-day lives the ancient and traditional virtues that have for centuries untold been the proud hall-marks of Hindu womanhood. He was convinced that the position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level.

As a student of the *Vedas*, he knew the exalted position accorded to women and the dignified role they played in the social life of ancient India and was deeply distressed by their present neglect

and their degradation through the centuries. He was particularly distressed by the spectacle of their being sunk in illiteracy, superstition and ineptitude. An inexhaustible reservoir of talent, self-sacrifice, sweetness, compassion and all the civilizing influences which are more the possession and the pride of the woman than of the man is allowed to run dry by the apathy and inhumanity of man. Women are the true nation-builders, for their proper function is not merely to bring into the world a brood of children, but more, to impart to them in their early formative years the sort of training that befits them for leadership in later life. The woman is the true conservator, the guardian-angel of a nation's culture, the torch-bearers of a people's civilization. The intellectual moral and spiritual discipline she imparts to her children in their impressionable years is of more enduring value than all their subsequent training. National regeneration, Ramanathan maintained, can be achieved mainly through the agency of the mother. An illiterate, degraded and superstitious mother can hardly cultivate the graces of life, or have a true sense of what is becoming or rise to her heights of duty or responsibility.

At the time that we are speaking of, the higher education of girls was virtually a monopoly of a few Christian Schools, and was imparted in an atmosphere predominantly Christian. Hindu parents who realized the importance of higher education for their daughters fought shy of these schools for fear that their religious beliefs and convictions might be impaired. Hence Hindu girls were starved of the intellectual, moral and spiritual nutriment so indispensable to their growth and development. Ramanathan could not view with complacency or unconcern this unhappy state of things. He felt that an institution which would at once impart higher education for our girls and serve to recapture the spirit of our ancient traditional Hindu culture was an imperative necessity.

Explaining the reasons that impelled him to found Ramanathan College, he said: "The idea of founding a college for girls has been in my mind for about ten years. When my official career was drawing to a close, I thought that the time had come to me to enter upon purely educational work. Great as political work is, I am not satisfied with the results attained through labour on the platform. It is mostly of ephemeral value and does not deeply affect the real welfare of the people in their everyday life. I think purely educational work is far more important, because a teacher who understands human nature and its essential needs, can easily impress his hearers and readers with such principles as are conducive to the creation of goodness in the heart and practical ability in the head by writing books and delivering lectures. While I was in this frame of mind, I received an invitation from about two hundred ladies and gentlemen in the West to go over there and lecture to them on the lines opened out in my public lectures on the subject of the Gospel of Jesus. The idea of founding a college in which both temporal and spiritual knowledge could be given to Hindu children was alive in my mind. I had at one time thought of building a college in Colombo for the Tamil boys who were flocking there from different parts of Ceylon and of weaning them from their irreligious, sensuous and denationalized methods of life in which they were deeply entangled. But when I visited Jaffna three years ago, I found the condition of things there for girls even more appalling than the condition of things for boys in Colombo. The boys in Jaffna had many high schools conducted on Saiva principles; but the girls had either to seek admission to Christian schools or be at home entirely neglecting their studies. I found the parents wailing their lot and complaining bitterly of the poison in-

stilled into the minds of such of their boys and girls as had to go to Christian schools for their education. I resolved to end this unhappy state of things in Jaffna by building a college large enough for girls, little and grown-up, to study peacefully what was beneficial to their souls and profitable in worldly life."

The selection of a suitable site engaged his attention for a number of years. His plan was to choose a site that would serve all Jaffna. Moreover, a site removed from the din and dust, the tumult and uproar, characteristic of towns and cities, a site wherein the peace and solemnity, the beauty and freshness of natural scenery would conduce to the pursuit of high intellectual and spiritual culture. With this end in view, he convened a meeting of the leading citizens of Jaffna, explained to them in detail his plans about the Boarding School and requested them to use their local knowledge in the selection of a site most suited for the purpose.

The site first chosen was at Thirunelveli, but this was subsequently given up owing chiefly to the defective title of the land. Ramanathan did not want to venture upon a site whose title deeds might at a later period be contested. Secondly another site was chosen at Kopay and twenty-five acres of land was acquired for the purpose. This was also abandoned, when a better site of twenty-five acres of land was available at Chunnakam. It was from this Kopay land that Ramanathan donated to Government the five acres on which the Kopay Training School now stands. The remaining twenty acres forms part of the endowment of Ramanathan College.

The plan for the proposed Girls College was drawn by Mr. Kandaswamy of Matale, a great architect in his day, and the building was given on contract to Messrs Blythe and Co. of Slave Island. Mr. Blythe, an engineer and builder of

repute, was specially brought down from Colombo to supervise the work of construction.

On Friday the 3rd of June, 1910, at about 7-30 p. m. in the presence of a distinguished and appreciative gathering, the foundation stone for the Girls College was laid by Ramanathan. This event was acclaimed a landmark in the annals of Jaffna, as it marked the advent of the first institution for the higher education of Hindu girls.

In establishing the College, Ramanathan had to encounter considerable opposition from Christian Missionaries. They represented him as an enemy of the Christians and maintained that his college at Chunnakam, in close proximity to the Uduvil Girls College, was designed to imperil and oust the latter. They also gave currency to a false and malicious rumour that he had collected money in America for the purpose of founding the College. One cannot find a more conclusive refutation of the charge than that made by Myron. H. Phelps. He gave the lie direct when he said in a lecture at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya: "I want to refer to a statement to which a Missionary paper *The Jaffna Morning Star* has given currency. That sheet stated some weeks ago that Ramanathan had collected money in America for his school. That statement I know to be absolutely untrue. I was with Ramanathan substantially all the time he was in America. He did not ask or receive a cent for any purpose while he was there."

Referring to the Girl's College, Phelps said: "Now this public-spirited act of Ramanathan gives Jaffna a great opportunity. It ought to excite the generous emulation of all the citizens of Jaffna and if you all pull together, good results will be accomplished. There is a decided and growing interest and enthusiasm with regard to the subject among the masses of the people."

Hundreds of skilled workmen laboured continually for two and a half years and in 1913 the

work of building the college was completed at an immense cost to its founder. The whole building was constructed of steel and reinforced concrete so as to withstand the impact of time. It provided comfortable accommodation for five hundred day scholars and two hundred and fifty boarders. It had besides a lecture hall and a library. In structure, equipment and collegiate amenities, the College was not second to any in the country. It represented a great idea, nobly conceived and boldly accomplished.

It stands there together with its male counterpart, Parameshvara College, as an imperishable monument to the memory of a man who placed his people before self, who laboured all his life for the intellectual, moral and religious uplift of his people. As the unaided achievement of a single individual, they are certainly without a parallel in the Island. On Monday the 20th June, 1913, the College was formally opened. It was a day of rejoicing for all Jaffna. A large assemblage of Hindus and Christians gathered in the College Hall to celebrate this unique occasion. Addresses of thanks signed by the leaders of Jaffna were presented to the great benefactor. In his reply Ramanathan thanked them and exhorted them to feel proud of the institution and appealed to one and all to give it their support and patronage. He took this oportunity to implore the public-spirited and wealthy sons of Jaffna to encourage the movement for starting a daily newspaper to be called *The Ceylonese* by buying shares in the Company which would be formed for that purpose.

It was Ramanathan's ambition to harness a competent team to tutorial work. For no man knew better than he the truth that it is not tall and stately buildings nor external trappings and embellishments that make for educational success but rather the living touch of great and dedicated teachers. Mrs. Florence Farr Emery, a graduate of

the famous Cheltenham Ladies' College, and an English woman of singular culture and refinement, whose was a name to conjure with in the literary and philosophical world of her time, was appointed Principal. Nothing short of the lure of his great name could draw her to this distant land. Here follows an estimate of her by a great contemporary: "She is well acquainted with modern conditions of life in the West. She has studied and discussed social problems with many a leader of modern thought. She has written on the social position of women and is well known in London as an advanced thinker. She has taken a prominent part in the many attempts that have been made in England to convert the stage into a means of education for men and women. She has lectured on English Literature in the principal colleges of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and Canada. In January, 1911 she was specially engaged by the Classical Association to deliver a course of lectures on the Latin Poets at the General Meeting held that year at the Liverpool University.

"At the same time she is deeply imbued with a love for the wisdom contained in the great religions of the world. She entertains the highest regard for the Vedas and the Agamas of India, and has devoted much of her time and attention to the study of the works of the sages of India."

The staff was an admixture of all that was best in the East and the West. He aimed at a fusion of the two cultural streams. He had a fervent admiration for qualities distinctively Western, an exceptional capacity for work, vigour and promptitude in action, love of order, initiative and enterprise. The students of his school should imbibe these qualities, while preserving the traditional virtues of the East.

The College was a priceless boon to the Hindus of Jaffna. Though they formed the overwhelming

majority of the population, there did not exist a single institution for the higher education of Hindu girls. He supplied a great and long-felt want in a manner never before attempted, and by doing so, earned the undying gratitude of his people. It is not given to many, however wealthy or public-spirited, to accomplish so great and so noble a task at a cost which may well have crippled the resources of any man. It was the love and devotion that he bore for his people that impelled him to make such immense sacrifice.

Ramanathan defined the aims and objects of the College thus: "To give the girls seeking admission to the residential Hindu School, such a training as would make them not only thoroughly efficient at home and in society without being denationalized, but also devoted to God, loyal to the King and desirous of the welfare of the people; and to embody in practical form the ancient Indian system known as *Guru Kula Vasam*, wherein the privileges of residence and constant association with cultured teachers was deemed essential to the development of the moral, intellectual and spiritual qualities of the pupil.

"A similar system in the case of boys has been in vogue in the West for several centuries, but it was only about fifty years ago that it was extended for the benefit of girls with most satisfactory results in England and other Western countries. The time has come for giving our girls of the present day the advantages of the *Guru Kula Vasam* system so as to make them thoroughly efficient and useful both at home and in society.

"It is necessary that girls should begin to study at an early age the right views of life, and straight methods of action. In India we have a set of traditions which if studied properly will certainly conduce to the happiness of daily life and the proper solution of its problems. These principles are to be found in the *Jnana Sastras*, *Dharma Sastras, Puranas and Ithihasas*, which respectively are the precepts of true life; the precepts of right conduct; ancient legends of God's mercies and national stories of famous dynasties intended to illustrate sound principles of political and social life, written by some of the most renowned sages of India.

"The course of instruction in the College will aim at the natural development of the faculties and talents of the girls admitted therein. Our ancient system of education carefully provided against cramming and too much forcing of the mind and body, by combining knowledge with insight and organized amusement. In the case of little children the methods of study were similar to those adopted in Germany in recent times in the Kindergarten (child garden) system, which claims to develop children like flower plants in a garden. Italy has given us the Montessori system which is an advance on the Kindergarten system. It will be on a combination of the ancient Tamil system with the Kindergarten and the Montessori systems, that little children will be trained in mind and body. Children thus educated are sure to make rapid progress in their studies in the higher classes.

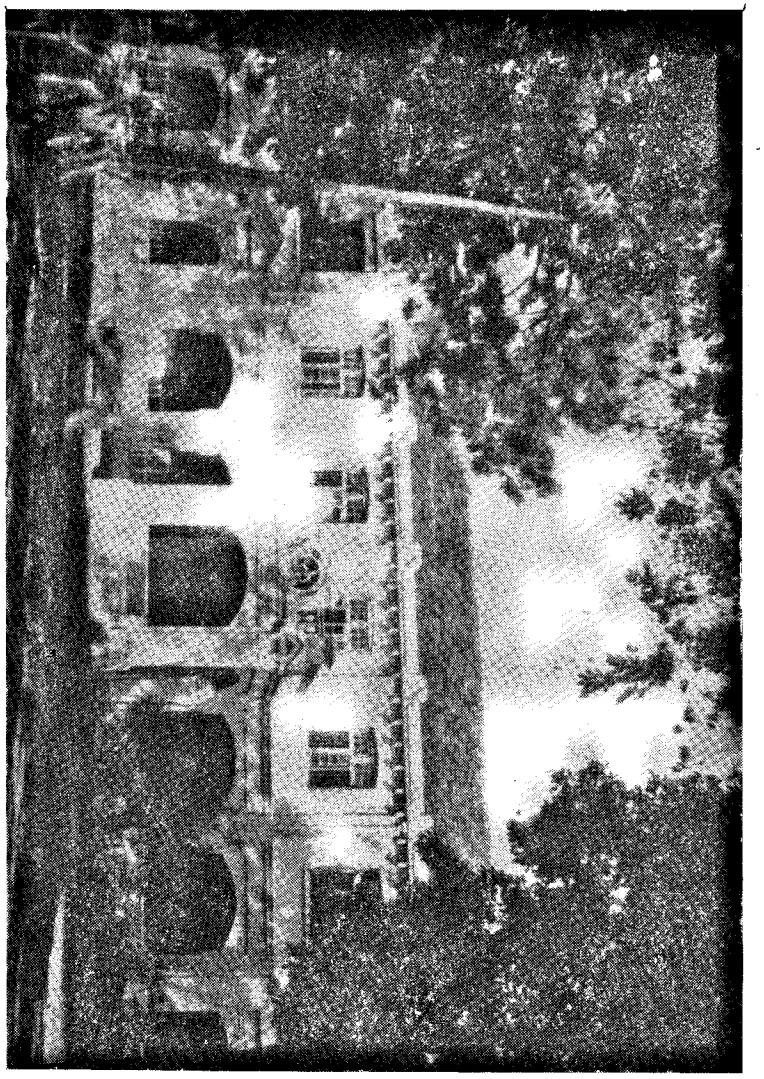
"The pupils admitted to the College will be instructed both in Tamil and in English. In English the standards prescribed by the Director of Public Instruction in the Code and by the Universities of Madras, Cambridge and London will be followed; and in Tamil, lessons will be given in Tamil Literature and Saiva religion. Every effort will be made to create in the pupils an intelligent devotion to God, loyalty to the King and public spirit, to foster national ideals, and to promote the harmonious development of mind and body. In these courses of instruction, particular attention will be paid to impart to the students, by a graduated series of lessons, the principles of the Saiva faith and all the ideals and practices

necessary for the maintenance of the national life of the Tamils. Every endeavour will be made to revive interest in Tamil literature, music and other fine arts."

He sought to revive the system of *Guru-Kula-Vasa* in vogue in ancient India, which had done much for the intellectual, moral and spiritual uplift of youth and which under the impact of Western influence was fast disappearing. Children grew up like tender plants under the direct inspiration and living example of dedicated teachers who were monuments of learning, spirituality and good living. They shared the day-to-day life of the teacher, served him meekly and performed the humblest tasks of daily life. Thus they cultivated humility, practical ability and love of service. On completing their period of training, they could enter the world with their powers and potentialities developed and face the problems of life with courage, skill and resource.

There was another great idealist and philosopher and contemporary of Ramanathan who bemoaned overfar the loss of India's ancient educational system and sought to recapture it in his World-University, the Visva Bharati at Shantiniketan. Rabindranath Tagore says: "In India we still cherish in our memory the tradition of the forest colonies of great teachers. These places were neither schools nor monasteries, in the modern sense of the word. They consisted of homes where with their families lived men whose object was to see the world in God and to realize their own life in Him. Though they lived outside society, yet they were to society what the sun is to the planets, the centre from which it received its life and light. And here boys grew up in an intimate vision of eternal life, before they were thought fit to enter the state of the house-holder.....

"This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took



RAMANATHAN COLLEGE
(Front view)

possession of my mind. Those who in other countries are favoured with unlimited expectations of worldly prospects can fix their purposes of education on these objects. But for us to maintain the self-respect which we owe to ourselves and to our Creator, we must make the purpose of our education nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and freedom of soul. It is pitiful to have to scramble for small pittances of fortune. Only let us have access to the life that goes beyond death and rises above all circumstances, let us find our God, let us live for that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love. Such emancipation of soul we have witnessed in our country among men devoid of book-learning and living in absolute poverty. In India, we have the inheritance of this treasure of spiritual wisdom. Let the object of our education be to open it out before us and to give us the power to make the true use of it in our life and offer it to the rest of the world, when the time comes, as our contribution to its eternal welfare."

Inside the premises of the College, Ramanathan established a Saiva Training School for girls who, after completing their collegiate career, chose to qualify themselves as teachers.

He endowed the college with a farm at Kilinochchi from which the college was to obtain the necessary supplies of rice, vegetables and milk for the boarding. His ambition was to make the college self-sufficient in the matter of food.

Few men realized the truth more than he that religion is the heart of education and worship, the centre of school life. The morning and the evening worship in the college temple was made an important and integral feature of student life. The college garden supplies a wide variety of flowers needed for the purpose. The

girls gather the flowers and weave garlands for the deity. They polish the vessels and light the lamps morning and evening and sing in sweet and melodious tunes the ancient Saivite hymns arranged for each day by the founder himself. It is an unforgettable and ennobling experience to find oneself within the precincts of the college at evening prayer-time and listen to the soft strains of music that fall from the lips of the college choir. Decades have glided by since the great founder passed out of the visible scene and strangers have come into the inheritance but the principles he formulated and the practices he instituted continue undiminished to this day.

In founding this institution, he aimed at not merely supplying a long and keenly-felt want, a school for the higher education of Hindu girls, but more, at building a home for the spirit of Hindu womanhood, torn and distracted as it was by the savage hand of time and the impact of alien influences. He sought to revive the traditions of Hindu womanhood as exemplified by Sita, Savithiri and Damayanthi. Moreover, he knew that the battle for national freedom should be won in our schools and colleges; that it is in them that the foundations of a truly happy and progressive national life are laid. Illiteracy among women was rampant. Education, where it existed, was soulless, denationalizing, machine-made, spurious, mere memorization in a foreign tongue. He provided that the language, the literature and the traditional culture of the child received particular emphasis. Religion was made the background of everything. He took special pains to create a religious atmosphere, in order that the child's religious convictions might be deepened and made a lasting and beneficent influence on its whole future life. He saw to it that the child's character and conduct, dress and deportment, nay every detail of its daily life conformed to the best patterns of Hindu womanhood. Himself a passionate lover of music and a firm believer in the value of music in education, he provided for efficient and systematic instruction in Carnatic music, vocal and instrumental, by experts recruited from abroad. Home Science figured high in the curriculum. It was his supreme objective to train and develop every faculty of the child and enable it to play its part in life worthily and well. There can be no better testimony to the success of Ramanathan's labours in this field than the fact that the alumni of Ramanathan College carry about them the distinctive and unmistakable stamp of Hindu and Tamil culture and that in any assemblage of women, one can effortlessly and infallibly pick them out.

C. K. Swaminathan, that veteran school master and one of Ramanathan's foremost lieutenants says, "Ramanathan's aim in founding Ramanathan College was to give Hindu girls sound education on Hindu lines and in a Hindu atmosphere under his personal supervision so that they might become inheritors of Hindu tradition and culture and be an ornament to Hindu homes. He wanted to arrest the unhealthy influence of Christian Mission Schools and the Western ways of life followed in those schools.

"According to his plan, the College was to be mainly a residential institution on the lines of the *Guru-Kula-Vasa* of olden times. Ramanathan attended personally to all details connected with the organization of the College. He was in the temple with the girls to direct them in worship and to sing the hymns of the Saivite saints in the proper manner. He was in the dining hall to supervise the serving of meals. He was keen about their personal cleanliness and their dress and deportment. He wanted the girls to be brought up as Hindu girls in every respect, so that they might become good Hindu wives and mothers.

"The study of Tamil was always a special feature of Ramanathan College. As Tamil was not a subject for the Cambridge Local Examinations which were then in vogue, he organized classes for the advanced study of Tamil based on a syllabus prepared by the Madura Tamil Sangam, which undertook to conduct examinations here.

"Ramanathan was always a great believer in higher education for girls and expected the College to expand to University rank. He kept this idea always before him.

"Soon after the founding of the College, Ramanathan delivered a series of weekly lectures on religion in the College Hall for the spiritual upliftment of the Hindu public. His exposition of *Saiva Sidhdhantha* was profound and inspiring.

"He organized an association for Hindu ladies known as the *Saiva Mangayar Sabai* for the promotion of the welfare of Hindu women.

"He opened a Training College for women teachers, an urgent need which he supplied in order to give facilities for Hindu girls to be trained as teachers, who had otherwise to seek admission to Mission schools by becoming Christians. In short he left nothing undone for the uplift of Hindu womanhood."

He was out of sympathy with the modern concept of woman's place in society and clung tenaciously to the view that the legitimate sphere of a woman's activity is the home, not the tumultuous and competitive world for which, he believed, God designed man. In the home, the woman is the mistress and with every faculty trained and developed by a correct scheme of education, she exerts an influence for the good of the race, comparable to, and often in excess of what her male counterpart achieves outside.

The whole College compound is studded with umbrageous trees and lovely flowering plants. Nature is seen there at her loveliest. In these

sylvan retreats five miles away from the Northern capital, far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, the children work and play and prepare themselves for the life that awaits them, in an atmosphere saturated with all that is best in the ancient and glorious culture of the Hindus. Well and truly was it said of the College by Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, statesman and scholar, on the occasion of his Ramanathan Memorial lecture:

"The institution represents a great idea, worthy of Sir Ramanathan and I deem it a great pleasure to have even for a short time participated in its life."

Ramanathan built for himself a modest home and lived in Spartan simplicity within the precincts of the College, beside its tall and stately buildings. Whatever time he could spare from an arduous and crowded life, he bestowed on the school and, with the anxious solicitude of a parent, would watch the little children at their work, in their recreations, in their prayers and in every other act of their daily life. In moonlit nights, he would be seen hovering about the College garden like an ethereal spirit, amid the shady groves and flowering shrubs, and meditating on how best to achieve the political, economic and cultural emancipation of his people.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE EDUCATED CEYLONESE MEMBER

"If the country is really in peril, we should all vote for Ramanathan."

—Sir James Peiris

"On his return from America, the people have been eager and persistent in seeking his advice guidance and patronage in every public movement, proposing him to be the President of this Association and Patron of that Association, inviting him to preside at this and that public meeting and asking him to take part in this and that public movement."

—Hector Jayawardene

THE year 1910 is memorable in the life of Ramanathan, in that it marked his return to active political life, although he had decided to retire from it once and for all and devote the rest of his life to religious, literary and educational work. He had in pursuance of that decision undertaken an extensive lecture-tour of America and gone far towards building his school for the higher education of girls. At the age of sixty, he took up once again, with undiminished vigour and enthusiasm, the burden of his people and the years of his second entry into public life were among the most strenuous and eventful.

The year is no less memorable in the political history of Ceylon, in that it marked the introduction of the principle of popular election into Ceylon politics and the first step towards the attainment of responsible self-government.

It is worth recalling that Ramanathan, while yet an Unofficial Member of the legislature in the

eighties of last century founded the Ceylon National Association with the express purpose of curbing the excesses of British rule, and as its first president, roped in the best talents of the country, made it a dynamic political force and set on foot a vigorous and sustained agitation for the reform of the Constitution. It was then that he drew up and submitted to the Queen his classic Memorandum on Reform wherein, among other things, he made out an unanswerable case for the abolition of the outmoded system of Governors' nominating members to the legislature and the substitution of the system of popular election. But with his appointment as Solicitor-General and his removal from the political scene, the Association, for lack of the necessary driving-power, became a defunct body. People lost all interest in public life and matters were allowed to drift as ever before. On his retirement from the public service and his return from his lecture-tour to America, he resuscitated the Association, infused into it a new life and vigour and gave a real fillip to reform activity. It was in response to this activity that the Imperial Parliament, acting contrary to the advice of the local British sahibs, granted a substantial measure of reforms whereby for the first time in British rule, the principle of electing members to the legislature was accepted.

Referring to his work for the Reform of the Constitution, Ramanathan said: "It is a matter of record that as early as June 1907 about the time that the Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, landed in Ceylon, I, as President of the Ceylon National Association, had the pleasure of referring that subject to the consideration and report of the Committee of the Association and that after I retired from the Chair, I attended a meeting of the Association in which this subject was being considered, gave the benefit of my advice, and later on, when Mr. Arthur Alwis sent to me his draft of the Memorial

to the Secretary of State, I revised it carefully, substituted two or three new paragraphs and otherwise amended it, and it was this revised draft that was adopted by the Association and forwarded to the Secretary of State."

In another place Ramanathan made the following reference: "He (Sir Henry McCallum) objected *in toto* to the grant of the franchise to what he called the native communities, first, because a vote to the vast majority of them would be meaningless, and they would not use their privilege with judgement or intelligence — I quote his own words; secondly, because the candidates who would seek election would be drawn mostly from the body of natives who have received a European training and education and who — to quote again his own words— would be in no sense truly representative of the masses, whose ideals, aspirations and interests are all moulded on European models, and are no longer those of the majority of their countrymen; and thirdly, because — to quote his words again — the real representatives of the peasantry of Ceylon are the Government Agents of the Provinces and other Civil Servants, who having spent the best part of their lives in Ceylon, occupy the seats in the Legislative Council. Sir Henry McCallum was strongly of the opinion that appointments to seats in the Legislative Council should continue to be made by means of nominations and the only change he could recommend was a Nominated Member for the Educated Ceylonese and an additional Nominated Member for the Low-Country Sinhalese. Lord Crewe, to the eternal gratitude of the people of Ceylon, was the first among the Ministers of His Majesty to recognize that the time had come to grant the elective system in respect of the Legislative Council of Ceylon."

It speaks volumes for the good sense, statesmanship and vision of the Imperial Government, particularly of Lord Crewe, then Secretary of State

for the Colonies, in that it recognized the claims of the people and granted them a measure of responsible self-government, despite the vigorous and energetic opposition of the Governor Sir Henry McCallum, who contended that the people of Ceylon were not ripe for even a small measure of self-government and strongly advocated the retention of the system of nomination. In one of his public utterances, His Excellency frankly confessed: "The Elective Franchise should not have been given to the Ceylonese. I opposed the granting of this privilege to the best of my powers. But His Majesty's Government, setting aside my recommendations, which favoured the extension of the Nomination System, have created an Elective Seat for the Ceylonese and another for the Burghers; I am sure the Secretary of State for the Colonies has committed a blunder." The new constitution granted the Europeans the right of electing two members to the legislature; the Burghers, one; and the Educated Ceylonese, one.

But how came it that Ramanathan was the first Ceylonese to achieve an electoral success and become the first representative of the Educated Ceylonese population in the Reformed Legislative Council, when it was generally believed that he had finally said good-bye to politics. Let us listen to him: "On my return from America after a year's absence, I was not allowed by my countrymen to go in the line that I desired most. They insisted upon my returning to the political field. They said that the Ceylon National Association had died, that I should resuscitate it and keep it in vigorous state by being its President, and within a year of its resuscitation, I had the pleasure of seeing the Association take up the subject of the reform of the Legislative Council. That was in June 1907. The Jaffna Association wrote to us about the same time to advise them upon what lines the reform should be, and the

whole subject was referred for the consideration and report of a strong Committee. The next year I begged hard to be relieved of the onerous duty of President, and Mr. Arthur Alwis was appointed as such. I went away to a sanatorium in India and was passing my days quietly, busy with my books. I then received letter after letter pressing me to come forward as candidate for the Educated Ceylonese Seat. These things are not generally known and I would take the present opportunity to answer the challenge that has been made to me as to who my sponsors are.

"The first letter that came to me in India was dated 20th May, 1910; it was from Kegalle, and was signed by Mr. J. R. Molligodde, the Crown Proctor. He said:

> *My Dear Mr. Ramanathan,*
>
> We are all desirous of having you for the Educated Ceylonese Seat. A large number of the educated Ceylonese here are ready to support you. I hope you will have no objection to our putting forward your name. With kind regards,
>
> Yours Sincerely,
> J. R. MOLLIGODDE.

"A few days afterwards on the first of June, the President of the Jaffna Association and retired Principal of Kumbakonam College, South India, Mr. James Hensman, wrote to me as follows: 'At a full meeting of the Committee of the Jaffna Association held on the 30th ultimo, the question of nominating a candidate for the Educated Ceylonese Seat in Council was considered, and it was unanimously resolved to ask you to stand as a candidate. They are of opinion that your past eminent services to Ceylon, your knowledge and experience pre-eminently entitled you to be the representative of the Educated Ceylonese section of the population. We shall feel it an honour to have you as our representative. Will you do us that honour?

'The Committee are confident that without any special exertion on your part, you can command all or nearly all the Tamil votes in the Island, provided your willingness to stand is announced in sufficient time.'

"Then on the 5th June, I received the following letter signed by many influential gentlemen, all leaders of every community, resident in Colombo:

> '*Dear Sir,*
>
> As you are aware that the educated Ceylonese are to be represented in Council by an elected member, we, the undersigned, are anxious that you should be elected to represent them. We need hardly mention here anything more than that, as Unofficial Leader in the Legislative Council for many years, there is in you the experience which no other member or candidate for election could possess. As a fitting tribute to such experience, we request you to consent to your name being put forward for election for the above-mentioned Seat.
>
> We have every reason to believe that you will have the unanimous support of the electorate.
>
> Awaiting a favourable and early reply,
>
> We are,
> Dear Sir, Yours faithfully,
>
> (The letter was signed by Mr. Donald Obeyasekere, and a host of other leaders in Colombo, of the different communities of the Island.')

"In view of these and other representations, I resolved to go down to Colombo. The moment it was known that I had arrived, a number of gentlemen interviewed me, and the principal argument that weighed with me was this: 'You are in possession of certain talents and of unequalled experience of the country. You cannot hand them over to your children. The proper recipients of the gifts are the citizens of Ceylon. Will you give them to us or let them remain unused by anybody?' This was very high ground to take. Furthermore, during the fourteen years in which I was obliged to keep myself aloof from Un-

official circles, I found that a great change had come over the minds of the people. They had lost all interest in public affairs owing to a variety of causes, the chief of which was the impatience of the Government at the criticism of those outside the Government circle. But to enter the arena of politics would undoubtedly take away a large portion of my time from the work that I had chalked out for myself. This work would benefit a large number of the finer spirits of the world, but the political work which was pressed upon me would benefit another class of people. The question was whether, in view of the genuine and widespread desire of those who prized political work, I should divide my time between it and the other higher work. I determined to respond to their call, and to do whatever was possible to be done for the public welfare in the event of my being elected as a member of the Legislative Council."

Ramanathan, accordingly, bowed to the people's will, as was the way with him in his long and illustrious career. Mr. J. M. Hensman said: "Ramanathan, although he must have felt that he had already rendered his full measure of service to his country in public life, thought that it would be ungracious to go against what he believed to be the unanimous wish of the people. So he had to say, 'I consent'. He could not be Ramanathan if he said 'No'."

In accepting the invitation, Ramanathan could not have been influenced by considerations of fame and renown with posterity, for he could rest secure on the laurels of his past achievements. He had grown weary with thirty years of incessant and strenuous toil in the service of his country and his soul now yearned for peace and the repose of religious and philosophical study. But his country's call was so insistent and unrelenting that he could not bring himself to ignore it. On his return home after his extensive lecture tour

of America and Europe, he longed intensely to eschew the rough-and-tumble, the heat and dust of political combat and devote the rest of his life wholly to spiritual, educational and literary pursuits. He had, moreover, drawn up an elaborate programme of work for the educational and social uplift of his people and had even proceeded far in his plans to build a school for the higher education of girls in Jaffna. Yet his people clamoured for his services in the arena of politics. He knew that on the holder of this Seat, the first of its kind, would devolve a weighty responsibility and there was then hardly any other who possessed that wealth of learning and political experience necessary to fill the Seat with distinction and demonstrate to the sceptical foreigner the fitness of the people for self-rule. He felt that the knowledge he had gained at close range of legislative activity in America and Europe in his extensive travels equipped him for this office. These indeed were the reasons that impelled him to accede to the solicitations of the people.

But contrary to expectation, Ramanathan's path was not to be strewn with roses. It was beset with countless obstacles, some of them formidable and apparently insurmountable. First and foremost, the Governor Sir Henry McCallum came forward with his objections to Ramanathan's candidature. It was in keeping with the traditional policy of His Excellency's predecessors to shut Ramanathan out of the legislature on some pretext, however flimsy or tenuous, inasmuch as Ramanathan was ever a thorn in the flesh of the British rulers by reason of his firm and fearless espousal of popular causes and his bold and courageous criticism of the acts of the Government. The Governor adopted a ruse to thwart his election. His Excellency ordered that "Ramanathan's name be struck off his Private Entree List on the ground that Ramanathan, though residing in Colombo during

the three years 1908, 1909 and 1910 had never called at Queen's House during that period, nor paid his respects to His Excellency and that he had thereby committed a breach of good manners and was wanting in courtesy to the Governor." A person who had his name thus struck off, was disqualified for seeking election to the legislature. The attempt on the part of the Governor to bar the entrance into the Councils of State of one who was universally acclaimed the most consummate parliamentarian alive on a pretext so trivial and untenable, shocked not only Ramanathan but more, the people who put him forward, and evoked much public excitement and resentment. Ramanathan felt it was a flagrant and high-handed defiance of the people's wishes and was determined not to take things lying down but to see that the popular will prevailed. He protested vigorously. The correspondence that passed between the Governor and Ramanathan on this vexatious question provides very diverting and edifying reading.

LETTERS

Colombo,
21st June, 1911.

The Honorary Secretary,
of the General Committee of Electors
appointed to support the nomination of
Mr. Ramanathan to the Council Seat in
the Legislative Council, Colombo.

Dear Sir,

With reference to the omission of my name from the Private Entree List of His Excellency Sir Henry McCallum, and the earnest desire of the electors conveyed to me by the body of gentlemen who called on me at the end of last month, soon after my return to the Island, I beg to forward, for the information of the General Committee, a true copy of the correspondence between me and His Excellency's Aide-de-Camp on the subject.

Yours faithfully,
P. RAMANATHAN.

(True copy of the correspondence referred to)

Colombo,
3rd June, 1911.

Capt. P. G. Theobald,
A. D. C. to H. E. the Governor,
Colombo.

Dear Sir,

I returned to CeyIon this week and I take the earliest opportunity to invite the attention of His Excellency the Governor to the omission of my name from his Private Entree List. I find from the local newspapers an announcement made by you that, upon some one representing to the Governor that, though I was residing in Colombo for three years, namely 1908, 1909, 1910, I had never called at Queen's House during that period, nor paid my respects to him, you were directed to erase my name, on the ground that I had committed a breach of good manners and was wanting in courtesy to the Governor. I beg to state that the representation made of me to His Excellency is not correct. It is true, I have a town residence in Colombo but for about six months every year during the three years in question, I was not in the Island; and when I returned to it, I was constantly out of Colombo on urgent work in different parts of the country. Owing to unavoidable absence from Colombo, I have not been able to call at Queen's House as those who live in town throughout the year; but I have attended every Levee held by the Governor, and at least one of his "At Homes". It is not my nature to break good manners or practise discourtesy. My relations with past Governors were always of the most pleasant kind. Sir Arther Havelock, after seeing me work in the Executive Council as one of his colleagues, was pleased to say, in regard to the contentious office of Attorney-General which I had held, that the good services I had rendered had been 'all the more appreciated by me,' (Governor Havelock) 'by reason of the grace and courtesy with which you' (that is I) 'have known how to adorn it.'

"Sir Henry McCallum's insufficient acquaintance with me and with the exacting necessities of the strenuous life I am leading has made him accept too readily the report I refer to. The

injustice to me would not have occurred had I been given an opportunity for an explanation. I shall bear my trials with equanimity, and shall continue to wish His Excellency well in the arduous work entrusted to him by our Gracious Sovereign, of governing the people wisely and mercifully.

Yours faithfully,
P. RAMANATHAN

Queen's House,
Colombo, 6th June, 1911.

Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter of 3rd instant. I note with regret, that though it contains references to certain public services to the Crown in the past, it does not contain any apology for your lack of respect to His Majesty's representative in the present.

I also learn with unfeigned surprise that you consider the exercise of your privilege of the Private Entree to be the equivalent of a call on His Excellency the Governor. This is not so.

I wish, however, to inform you that in the event of my receiving a proper apology and after you have written your name in the Visitor's Book at Queen's House, I am instructed to restore your name to the Private Entree List.

Yours faithfully,
P. G THEOBALD, Capt. A. D. C.

To: P. RAMANATHAN, K. C., C. M. G.

Colombo,
7th June, 1911.

Capt. P. G. Theobald,
A. D. C. to His Ex. the Governor,
Colombo.

Sir,

Yours of the 6th instant to hand. I fail to see in it any indication that you submitted my letter to His Ex. the Governor, or that the contents of your letter have had his approval.

I did not seek your opinion on the points to which I invited His Excellency's attention, but as you have pressed them on me, it becomes my duty to say that you are in error in supposing that the Governor of Ceylon is the Representative of His Majesty the King, for it has been held by His Majesty's Judges in England that the Governor of a Crown Colony is not the representative of the Crown, but is only an officer invested with a limited authority.

You are equally in error in supposing that I thought that the exercise of my privilege of Private Entree was equivalent to a call on the Governor. I did not say so, nor thought so. Your surprise is due to your misconception. The wise and witty essay in Addison's Spectator on Levees other than the King's is well worthy of your study. It is there observed that the business of a Levee is to receive the acknowledgement of a multitude that a man is wise, bounteous, valiant and powerful. And in Ogilvie's Dictionary, it is said that the term Levee is applied in English to the public occasion on which the Sovereign receives visits from such of his subjects as are entitled by rank or fortune to the honour. The privilege of Private Entree simply denotes the special method in which the visitor's call is allowed to be made and must not be confounded with the visit or call itself.

I would now respectfully point out to His Excellency that my attendance at the Levees held by him must be accepted, according to usage and precedent in England, as calls or visits, and as acknowledgements on my part of the authority granted to him as Governor of the Island by our Gracious Sovereign, and they negative the contention that I was lacking in respect for the Governor. He has my additional explanation that my not having attended his "At Homes" and not writing my name in his Visitor's Book, as often as I wished, was due to my absence from the Island and (when I returned to it) to my being out of town on urgent work. As the Governor himself is frequently out of town and takes away with him the Visitor's Book to Nuwara-Eliya and Kandy, I have found it impossible to gratify his wishes more than I have done.

The Newspapers have borne testimony to the deep sensation caused throughout the Island by His Excellency's conduct towards me. To expect me to make a "proper" apology for an offence I never committed, or even intended, as a condition precedent to the restoration of my name to the

Private Entree List, is to require of me to sacrifice my sense of justice and my duty towards my countrymen for personal vainglory.

If His Excellency calmly considers the real facts of the case, dissociated from assumption, he may yet be able to see that he owes me not only reparation but also an apology.

Yours faithfully,
P. RAMANATHAN

Queen's House,
Colombo,
8th June, 1911.

Sir,

I am directed by his Excellency the Governor to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 7th instant and to say there is nothing to add to the letter which you have already received from me except to remark that, as you are aware, whether His Excellency is in residence in Colombo or not, a book is always kept in the hall at Queen's House in which callers write their names.

Yours faithfully,
P. G. THEOBALD, Capt., A. D. C.

P. RAMANATHAN, Esq., K. C., C. M. G.

Colombo,
20th June, 1911.

Capt. P. G. THEOBALD,
A. D. C. to His Excellency the Governor,
Colombo.

Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 8th instant, which I was unable to answer earlier owing to my absence from the Island, to which I returned only this morning, I regret that His Excellency the Governor is not disposed to acknowledge the facts of the case that has arisen, or to give weight to those lines of thought which I submitted to him in my previous letters as helpful to the right settlement of the dispute.

The Governor's complaint against me, as announced by you in the newspapers, was that I had never called at Queen's House during 1908, 1909, 1910 nor paid my respects to him, although I was residing in Colombo during that period.

I pointed out that none of these statements was consistent with fact, and that his conclusion, that I had committed a breach of good manners and was wanting in courtesy to him, could not be maintained because it did not rest in fact.

His Excellency does not challenge my statement or the validity of any of my reasons, but seems to justify his conclusion by the new ground that I did not put my name down on his Visitor's Book. If I have the opportunity of seeing the Visitor's Book of the Governor and of Lady McCallum, I may be able to show my name in it, for I have a distinct recollection that I did write my name in it, at least on one or two occasions. Even if I did not, if His Excellency would only remember that I was absent from the Island for several months of each of the years named, and that, when I returned to it, I had to attend to urgent work out of Colombo in different parts of the country, he would see that the new reason is equally untenable.

The Governor makes a point of his rule of keeping in the hall of Queen's House his Visitor's Book, whether he is in Colombo or not, and adds that I was aware of it, meaning thereby that, with this knowledge on my part, I ought to have put my name down in the Book, even though he was not in Colombo. I beg to say that it is pure assumption to say that I was aware of his rule. He should not assume that a thing known to himself must be known to others also, for as a matter of fact, I was not aware that, when His Excellency was in residence in Kandy or Nuwara-Eliya, he left his Visitor's Book in Colombo. In the case of a previous Governor, when I called at Queen's House to write my name in his Book, I was told it was taken away to Kandy.

I have now done my best to offer the fullest possible explanation to His Excellency in the hope that he would be only too glad to make reparation. But he has not done so. His attitude towards me has caused great irritation in the minds of the vast body of electors who have spontaneously nominated me to the Ceylonese Seat at the forthcoming election. From the day His Majesty the King was pleased to grant to the people of Ceylon the great privilege of having a share in the administration of the public affairs of the

Island, they have become possessed of a direct interest in the good government of the country. Some months ago, many of these electors complained bitterly to me that His Excellency's action in certain respects was calculated to interfere with the course of public opinion in regard to their nomination of me. I could not believe this and I defended him in a public speech, which I delivered on the 11th February last. Now they complain that my defence of him was vain, and that His Excellency has openly intruded into the political contest by slandering their chosen representative, and so violated the neutrality which it is his duty to maintain. I am not able to pacify them, and I leave it to His Excellency to consider whether it is wise to let the electors lay their grievances before His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, when it is possible for His Excellency to repair here the injury done to me and to their cause.

Yours faithfully,
P. RAMANATHAN.

Queen's House,
Colombo,
21st June, 1911.

Sir,

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 20th instant.

Yours faithfully,
P. G. THEOBALD, Capt.,
A. D. C.

An apology was asked for by the Governor and was firmly and pertinaciously refused by Ramanathan. His Excellency who was unable to counter the force and vigour of his adversary's arguments and the overwhelming tide of public opinion gave in. Ramanathan's name was nominated for election by His Excellency along with that of Dr. H. M. Fernando, much to the relief of Ramanathan's friends and supporters and the chagrin of Dr. Fernando.

It must in fairness be said of Dr. Fernando that he was one of the foremost intellectuals of

his time. He was an M. D., and a B. Sc. London. He had served the Government and his country on various Medical Commissions and had achieved amazing success in his field. He was family physician to His Excellency the Governor and to many other leading men in the Island. By his extraordinary powers of healing, he had won renown and influence all over the land. He shone bright in the favour and esteem of Government which made him a Justice of the Peace when his candidature was announced. But to politics he was a novice. Nevertheless, he flung himself into the fray with frantic energy and left no stone unturned to gain his end. The following letter from the hand of a great contemporary and appearing in a leading Colombo journal brings in relief the comparative merits of the two candidates:

"As there are two gentlemen of fame and renown, men of wisdom and knowledge, who proffer their services to represent in the Legislative Council the Educated Ceylonese, it is at present a question of importance, which of the two is preferable to the other. Both of them are erudite scholars in their own lines of business. Both of them have English qualifications; one being a healer of the body and the other, an interpreter and a mender of the law. One is an elderly gentleman of culture who ably filled a place in the Council, and the other no orator, but a mender of broken bones. Mr. Ramanathan is a man of vast experience in mental philosophy and politics, the other is a novice who has yet to gain experience in the art of oratory and politics. I ask you, Mr. Editor, 'Whom should men prefer out of these two for a seat in the Council as adviser and framer of laws — one who was tried and not found wanting or the other, a tyro, in politics?'"

Philip E. Morgappah laid down the essential qualifications in an aspirant to the Seat: "The elected member should be a great scholar, a clever

writer and a powerful orator; one who has the interests of his countrymen at heart, one who is wise to plan, bold to speak and courageous to act, and in whom the Sinhalese and the Tamils of all classes and creeds have their fullest confidence. The only person who possesses these qualifications in ample measure is Ponnambalam Ramanathan. His rarest talents for controversy, for extempore debate, his fearlessness and his devotion to duty eminently qualify him for the Seat."

The choicest spirits of the age from among the ranks of the Sinhalese, men like Messrs. H. A. Jayawardene, an eminent Advocate of the Colombo Bar, A. de Senevaratne, C. Batuwantuduwa, Francis de Soysa, De Alwis, Corea and a host of others vied with one another in their fervent and unrelenting support of Ramanathan. It would be tedious, even unedifying, to enter into the protracted platform and newspaper controversy that raged with a rancour and virulence almost unparalleled in our political history, between the supporters of Ramanathan on the one side and those of Dr. Fernando on the other, the heat and dust raised by that political combat.

The campaign commenced in the early part of 1910 and ended in January of the following year. Judging from the vast literature that poured through the press, this election occupied certainly the foremost place in the minds of all thoughtful men. Hardly a day passed without a bitter and even acrimonious controversy on the subject. *The Morning Leader*, a daily newspaper now defunct, then owned by a kinsman of Dr. Fernando, championed his cause. It did not shrink from using the language of vituperation and the methods of base and malicious detraction against Ramanathan. It questioned the sincerity of his motives, and even concocted false stories to blacken his fair name and reputation. From the very day that Ramanathan announced his candidature to the day

he was returned, it did not weary of carrying on a vigorous campaign of deliberate vilification and abuse.

It alleged that Ramanathan's tenure of office as Solicitor-General came to an ignominious and premature end in 1904, precipitated by his incapacity to work on friendly terms with the Government; that he had by his indiscreet and outspoken ways antagonized every section of the Government; that a person who did not shine in the favour and goodwill of the Government should not be deemed a fit person to represent the entire educated population in the country's supreme legislature; that Dr. Fernando, who abundantly enjoyed the patronage of the Government, would be able to deliver the goods, without fussy or flamboyant talking; that Ramanathan was always having an eye to a place on the Supreme Court Bench and that he undertook his trip to America mainly with a view to visiting England and influencing the Secretary of State for the Colonies in his favour; that he was physically unfit to withstand the immense strain that would befall the occupant of the Seat. It would be wearisome to reiterate all the baseless and outrageous charges levelled against Ramanathan by this paper. Its attitude provoked such bitter resentment in the public mind that many fair-minded persons were goaded into retaliating and there was brought into existence a controversy the like of which for malignity, rancour and vehemence has rarely been known in our electoral history.

A sinister rumour was spread abroad that Ramanathan had in the Baddebedde case displayed moral delinquency and that the Governor had in consequence omitted his name from the list of those he recommended to the Home Government for the grant of silk. To give the lie to it, Ramanathan said: "I was not a party to that case, nor was I summoned and examined as a

witness by either side, but Mr. Perera cross-examined certain witnesses of the plaintiff day after day in the District Court of Colombo and dragged my name into the case most unjustifiably and did all he could to blacken my character and reputation. The District Judge of Colombo, in his judgement delivered on 8th February, 1899, spoke as follows regarding the conduct of Mr. Perera and his colleague who were the counsels for the second defendant: 'Persistent efforts have been made to cloud the simple issues before the Court by those responsible for the defence of the second defendant, by trying to drag into the inquiry matters wholly irrelevant to it. A great deal of mud has been thrown at Mr. Ramanathan unfairly behind his back. The second defendant and his counsels have, however, grossly deceived the Court and acted like cowards by not daring to put forward an iota of evidence in support of the serious charges they made against him.'" To refute the second allegation, Ramanathan read out a letter from the Governor Sir West Ridgeway; "The King has been pleased on my recommendations to appoint you one of His Majesty's Counsels for Ceylon."

Many and preposterous were the charges preferred against Ramanathan by the Editor of *The Morning Leader* but they proved unavailing. It was the same editor who, in his character study of Ramanathan published in *The Morning Times* in 1907, said, "So sired and cradled in the traditions of such a house, Ramanathan would have been a violation of all the laws of heredity, had he failed to follow in the footsteps of his forbears. That he rivalled the greatness of his predecessors and surpassed every Ceylonese Official Representative in the Legislative Council was testified to a few months ago by Mr. Dornhorst who is no mean judge of public men and public achievements. The country's sorest need is now

just such men as Mr. Ramanathan has shown himself during the last thirty years."

Public opinion grew to a frenzy at the vile and wanton attacks of *The Morning Leader*. Public meetings were held in Colombo and in all provincial towns and vigorous protests were lodged against the monstrous and high-handed attitude of the paper. In one of these, Mr. Cox Sproule said at Kandy that the paper should rightly be called *The Morning Misleader*. Another great contemporary observed, "The Editor of *The Morning Leader* wasted gallons of ink, quires of paper in manufacturing scurrilous articles against him whom the country considers its hero. He intends to undervalue his brilliant splendour. Let him do all this, yet the fact remains as unimpeachable as ever that Mr. Ramanathan commands the same amount of love, confidence and admiration of his grateful countrymen. How heart-rending it is to ignore the claims of this great hero, who has shed a lustre on the name of the Ceylonese, this man whom any country will admire and cherish! Born in any other country possessing independent government, he would have been at the helm of its affairs. But born in Ceylon, he was not able to attain a greater position than he actually did. Who is the Ceylonese, nay the cultured being who after reading in the *Hansard*, what Ramanathan effected in the Council during his time, cannot but exclaim, 'Here is the man, take him for all in all. We shall not look upon his like again! Impudent it is to compare the claims of this great hero to those of any other in the Island. He was a tried campaigner. His fame is far and wide amongst the civilized nations of the West; he had held spell-bound many a learned assembly in America and earned the enviable name of an 'erudite Hindu'. He, in short, is a unique personality which a country rarely sees and therefore cherishes."

The attacks of *The Morning Leader*, far from weakening Ramanathan's hold upon the affections of his people, served to strengthen it. Ramanathan said: "The long-continued attacks of *The Morning Leader* on me have done much harm to that paper, because most of its readers consider them to be a tissue of misrepresentation and falsehood. The Editor himself has got tired of what he calls 'beastly politics'. Politics or the art of good government of the people is one of the noblest of human arts and an instrument of self-culture into the bargain. The misguided Editor made it beastly by distorting and perverting the truth and by habitually creating a scandal out of innocent and trifling incidents."

The Catholic Guardian and *The Morning Star* opposed his candidature on religious grounds. The attacks became so disgusting even to Christians that some of the leading Christians in Jaffna, Messrs. J. M. Hensman, T. Homer Vanniasingam, W. D. Niles, J. M. Thomas, G. C. Thambiah and V. Joseph wrote a letter to the press remonstrating vehemently against such attacks.

For well-nigh a year and a half, the supporters of Dr. Fernando had recourse to every resource in their power to discredit and disparage Ramanathan. But Ramanathan stood four square against all this calumny and vituperation. He never complained but bore them with the equanimity and unconcern characteristic of one who reposed his trust in God and who had the satisfaction that they were not grounded in truth. "I can bear many a deep thrust. My nature is such that even if I received a stab wound, I shall say to myself, 'Bear your Cross like a man.' I do not complain about my troubles even to my friends. I have learnt to suffer long and outlive corruption. During the past few months, our opponents were doing their best to force me to speak. Would I defend myself to men who were reeking with

corruption and hate? No! but by your love you have made me do what nothing else would have induced me to do. When I see in every town of Ceylon there are numbers of men standing up for me with the utmost confidence in me, demanding no explanation whatever from me as to the vile accusations brought against me but enthusiastically desiring me to go to the poll, promising to win the Seat for me, how could I be silent?

"I had long felt that I should let them know that I am not the bad man these shameful calumniators are trying to make me out to be. I never like to defend myself to the wrong man and the members of the Bar present here know that I have not asked them to hear my tale or to give me their sympathy. I feel that I should not carry stories of corruption to my friends, knowing that such stories have the effect of spoiling the minds of the hearers. But impartial judges have effaced the works of corrupt men. They might have remembered Gladstone's remark, 'Criticism never hurts any one. If false, it cannot hurt you, unless you are wanting in character. If true, it shows a man his weak points and forewarns him against failure and trouble.'"

Leading Sinhalese citizens were untiring in their efforts to win the Seat for Ramanathan. They vehemently protested against the scurrilous attacks of Dr. Fernando's party and organized distinguished public gatherings in many important towns where Ramanathan was made the principal speaker, and where he enunciated his policy and established his fitness for election. His speeches on these occasions, far from being the ephemeral effusions of contentious and combative men, are models of courtesy, sobriety and moderation, of good manners and restraint, emitting none of the heat and dust associated with modern electioneering. One looks in vain for a word of disparagement or detraction against the rival candi-

date nor any spirited wooing of the electorate. They embody the distilled wisdom of a life-time devoted to political and philosophic thought and enunciate the eternal, the unvarying principles that should underlie the government of human society and the duties of citizens. Prof. Suntharalingam has recorded his impressions of one of these meetings. "The meeting was advertised for 5 o'clock one evening. Before the appointed hour, the whole hall was packed; the side-verandhas were crowded out; on the vacant land and on the road outside, hundreds were standing. Everyone was anxiously waiting. There arose from the road, rounds of cheers and there appeared at the door the stately, 'turbanned', long-coated Ramanathan. The audience in the hall stood up to a man and cheered lustily. Slowly, gracefully, with hands clasped in *Namaskaram*, turning now to the right and now to the left, smiling, bowing and worshipping, a born leader of men, Ramanathan walked through the centre aisle in the hall. He was flanked on one side by the stodgy figure of Hector Jayawardene, an uncle of our J. R. Jayawardene, in West-End-Cut tweed suit. After Ramanathan and his leading supporters reached the platform amidst deafening applause, I saw Ramanathan, after further *Namaskarams* all round, beckoning to the members of the audience to sit down before he and the others took their seats on the platform; they were late-Victorian gentlemen.

"There was then a pin-drop silence. Those were the days when one did not have loud-speakers and people knew they could not whisper to each other lest they should miss a word that was uttered from the platform. The days of market-place hustings and of 'vulgar mobs' — to use Ramanathan's words — two decades later had still to dawn. In the thick of the electioneering, a strange incident took place. There was a party at Queen's House. The guests dispersed late at night. Early next morning, it was announced that Justice Wendt — Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court — who had been to the party had died before morn. It was whispered widely that Wendt had drunk a glass of fruit drink that was offered to Ramanathan. While Ramanathan had survived, Wendt had succumbed."

Dr. Fernando, in the last resort, published a Manifesto wherein he formulated his claims to the Seat, exhorting his countrymen to give him their unanimous support and condemning the policy of his antagonist. He concluded it with the telling words, "The eyes of the authorities both here and in England are upon you and if the Seat is not given to the proper person, the franchise will be withdrawn from you by Parliament."

Hector Jayawardene in one of his speeches made a comparative study of the claims of the two candidates. He said, "At this critical period of our political history, when we are making every effort to achieve our ambition of self-government under British rule, it is essential that we should have a man of ripe experience, of varied knowledge and of great debating powers to guide our political destinies. We do not want a mere political tyro. We do not want a child who is playing on the sea-shore of politics. We want a man who has had experience, who has devoted his life to this great work and I tell you, gentlemen, there is only one man in Ceylon of this stamp.

"Now gentlemen, what are the credentials of the two candidates? We have not yet developed any lines of policy, because this is the first time we are going to have an election, and this election must rest entirely upon the qualifications of the candidates. There is absolutely no comparison between the two candidates. Here is a pigmy trying to contest with a political giant. It is barefaced effrontery for any man in Ceylon to put himself forward against Ramanathan. We

find Ramanathan an advocate of our Courts who has had the rare and singular honour of having been made a Barrister *honoris causa*, that is without passing any examinations or keeping any terms; he was granted this honour which is still unprecedented in the Island. Then we find him in the Legislative Council in 1879 at the age of 28 years. He must have been a prodigy indeed to have represented not only the Tamils but the Mohammedans also in the Legislative Council, when he was only 28 years of age. Gentlemen, I need not tell you of his political triumphs. He has done everything that a member could have done in Council. He has done yeoman service in the past, and he has seen the passage of nearly every Bill which tended to the amelioration of the people of the country. And it is well known how he has made himself a useful member to the whole of Ceylon and not only to the communities he represented. Now take the case of the other candidate. I do not want to say and I am not going to say anything personal about Dr. Fernando. Ramanathan is a gentleman and his followers are gentlemen. When a man puts himself as a person worthy of public trust, we have a right to ask him for his credentials? What are Dr. Fernando's credentials? The only thing we could say of him is that he was in the Medical Department for a number of years. Has he ever been in a Legislative or Municipal body? Has he ever made a public speech? I know that he has read speeches but that is not making public speeches. I know, gentlemen, that when he makes a speech, it causes a stampede among the hearers. Now, gentlemen, the climax of absurdity is reached when with one voice the Manifesto declares that Dr. Fernando is the best and fittest person to represent the Educated Ceylonese. Gentlemen, to say so is to say what is palpably false. To say that is to proclaim the bankruptcy of the Educated Ceylonese in intellect

RAMANATHAN AS EDUCATED CEYLONESE MEMBER

and talents. To say a man who has never made a public speech, who never was inside a Legislative or Municipal body, is the best and fittest candidate for the Legislative Council is to insult us all. It is a matter for congratulation to Ramanathan's supporters to find that he has not been induced by these attacks to move one hair's breadth from the true line of honourable leadership. Both in the work of the Council Chamber and the public platform, Ramanathan wields a rapier always sharp, always bright and always unstained."

The nomination papers for the two candidates were duly submitted. Dr. Fernando's name was proposed by Mr. Thomas Edward de Sampayo and seconded by Mr. William Mather. Ramanathan tendered four nomination papers in his favour. The first paper had Messrs. A. de. A. Seneviratne and V. Casipillai as proposer and seconder respectively; the second, Messrs. Hector Alfred Jayawardene and Francis de Soysa; the third, Messrs. Charles Batuwantudawa and Edward Victor de Rosario; and the fourth, Messrs. Edward Gunaretne and Austin Fernando Gunaretna.

The 13th of December, 1911 will go down to history, for it was on that day that the Ceylonese went to the polls for the first time for the election of their representative to the supreme legislature. The entire Island was aglow with eagerness and enthusiasm. The educated electors from every nook and corner of the Island betook themselves enthusiastically and of their own free will to the various polling booths to exercise their newly-won and dearly-cherished political privilege of active participation in the good governance of the land through their elected representatives. In doing that, every elector felt that he was but discharging a civic duty for the good of his country. There was nothing of the scramble, the tumult and uproar characteristic of elections today.

Ramanathan swept the polls. He secured a majority of 664 votes over his rival candidate. This majority did not include the votes recorded in Trincomalee, Mannar and Mullaitivu which were not counted owing to certain irregularities in the procedure adopted by the presiding officers on the day of the election. These were places where Ramanathan counted upon almost unanimous support. Out of 440 votes recorded in Jaffna 410 were for Ramanathan. It was a landslide victory for him, a triumph of merit, for the electorate, unlike the teeming, swarming, vulgar, venal masses who sway elections today, comprised the fine flower of the country's population, patriots to the core, whose devotion to national ends overshadowed every ignoble impulse.

Thus the campaign which commenced in the early part of 1910 came to a close on 13th December, 1911. The electorate had demonstrated clearly and unmistakably that the Ceylonese could transcend racial or religious prejudices in matters affecting the national interest. The celebration of the victory was nation-wide. Indeed the receptions accorded to Ramanathan on this occasion were unrivalled in grandeur and magnificence.

In Colombo, the following address was presented to him, signed by the leaders of all communities.

The Honourable Ponnambalam Ramanathan,
Honourable Sir,

On behalf of your friends and well-wishers, we beg to offer you our warmest congratulations on your election as the First Ceylonese Member in the Reformed Legislative Council.

Your exceptional abilities, your high intellectual attainments and your unswerving and unselfish devotion to your country's cause left no doubt in the minds of the large and educated masses of the Ceylonese, that you were the fittest person to be elected to the Ceylonese Seat in the newly-constituted Legislative Council. The overwhelming majority by which you have been returned bears eloquent

— Courtesy : 'Times of Ceylon'

A Man of Many Parts

Cartoon appearing in the "Times of Ceylon" in 1910

testimony to their high appreciation of your extraordinary talents and sterling qualities.

We have every confidence that you will apply yourself as assiduously to the amelioration of the country as you have heretofore done and that your tenure of office will be signalised by the realisation of the hopes and aspirations of the different communities of the Island.

Trusting that you will be long spared in your career of usefulness to the public of Ceylon, and that all happiness and prosperity may ever attend on you,

We beg to remain, Sir,
(sgd.) by the leaders of all communities.

Colombo,
15th January, 1912.

Old, being now past sixty, but firm and dexterous both in mind and body, free as a bird, free from the trammels of official or professional life, secure against want, happy with his colossal reputation earned in many lands and among many peoples, with his terrific energy which grew with age, this indomitable patriot entered upon the most fruitful and beneficent period of his enormous career.

APPENDIX

Memorandum on the Reform of the Constitution, presented to Her Majesty Queen Victoria on 10th February, 1890 by the Honourable P. Ramanathan, C. M. G., M. L. C.

TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY

The Humble Memorial of
The Ceylon National Association.

Most Respectfully Sheweth:

1. That your petitioners beg leave to lay before Your Majesty their grievances and humble representations regarding:

(a) The invasion of the rights of Your Majesty's Legislative Council of the Island on the part of some Governors for many years past;

(b) The recent intimation by His Excellency Sir Arthur Gordon that the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council will hereafter hold their seats for a term of only three years;

(c) The 18th clause of Your Majesty's Instructions to the Governor, whereby members of the Legislative Council are prevented from proposing any ordinance, vote, resolution or question, which creates a charge upon the revenue, without express leave from the Governor;

(d) The recent appointment of a gentleman holding office under Government to an Unofficial Seat in Council, while continuing to hold such office.

2. The first of these subjects engaged the attention of the Legislative Council on the 19th of December last, upon a motion introduced by the Honourable Mr. Christie who represents the European Planters. The motion ran as follows: "That the Council do humbly petition Her Majesty the Queen to consider the desirability of allowing freedom of speech and vote to Official Members of the Legislative Council, except when Her Majesty's Secretary of State intimates to the Council the orders of the Imperial Government; and to cause a despatch clearly de-

fining the position of the Official Members to be laid before the Council."

3. The debate which took place in Council is of great value to the public from the disclosure which the Government have, for the first time in the annals of the Council, made of the materials on which they have been founding the contention that, though the Official Members have a legal right to speak and vote as they like, yet they are bound, under penalty of loss of office, to remain silent and to vote with the Governor in support of a measure or policy inaugurated by him, even if their views were opposed to his. It was not possible for the Unofficial Members of Council to have dealt with the question otherwise than they did, because there always hung a mystery over the facts and reasons relied upon by the local Government, and the information relating to the subject was so scattered and difficult of access that it was not possible to collect all the materials and bring them into a focus between the day on which the notice of motion was given and the day on which it was taken up for discussion. Your humble memorialists, belonging as they do to an association founded expressedly "to help in the formation of a healthy public opinion on all questions of public importance and to promote by every legitimate means the political, intellectual and material advancement of the people", have profited by the debate in Council and have had time to examine to the best of their power and opportunity the question whether the constitution given by Your Majesty's predecessors to the Island permits the Governor to assume to himself, without special direction on the part of Your Majesty, *the power to interfere with the freedom of speech and vote of the Official Members of Council.* Your Memorialists humbly think that the Governor has no such power under our constitution, and that the good government of the Island renders it imperative that Your Majesty should confirm it to your subjects in the Island the safe-guards conceded to them by the Letters Patent and Royal Instructions issued in 1833. The opinion is gaining ground that the time has come for a popular representation in Council by means of an electoral franchise. Your Memorialists respectfully urge that Your Majesty's subjects should be allowd at least to enjoy the privileges of the existing constitution according to the intention of its beneficent founders, without interference on the part of Governors who believe in the expediency of mild despotism.

4. As regards the constitution of the Government of Ceylon, that is, the nature of the rights and duties of

the Governor, the Executive Council and the Legislative Council, and the relation which these functionaries bear to each other, your memorialists humbly submit that it has been decided by Your Majesty's Privy Council that the Governor of a Colony is not quasi-sovereign, and that he is only an officer empowered to execute certain duties entrusted to him by the Commission appointing him, in the manner set forth in the "Instructions" accompanying that Commission. "If it be argued," said the Lords of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, "that the Governor of a Colony is quasi-sovereign, the answer is that he does not even represent him generally, having only the functions delegated to him by the terms of his commission, and being only the officer to execute the specific powers with which that commission clothes him." (3 Moore's P. C. 476).

5. As the Crown cannot carry on the government of the Island *in propria persona*, it had to appoint an executive officer called the Governor. Upon arriving in the Colony, he was not to act in despotic manner, but to seek the advice and co-operation of the two councils already established in the Island, and particularly referred to in the very Commission and instructions issued to him as "our councils", that is the councils of the Sovereign.

6. The functions of Government relate to finance, legislation, public works and general administration, including executive work. Much of the last is carried on by means of the several departments of state, under the immediate supervision of their respective heads, according to settled methods. Where, however, circumstances arise outside the routine, a reference becomes necessary to the Governor. So, in regard to general administration, he is naturally bound to keep a vigilant eye on all public servants, promoting and encouraging some, punishing, removing and dismissing others, and appointing others instead; securing efficiency with economy; devising measures conducive to the increase of the food supplies of the people, and the improvement of their health, morals and intellect. It would also be his duty to originate schemes for rendering inter-communication and transport cheap and easy, simplifying laws, reforming abuses and discharging the several duties cast upon him by the ordinances of the legislature. In all such matters, it would be highly injurious to the Colony to leave him without responsible advisers. The Sovereign, therefore, formed four of the most able and experienced of his civil servants, together with the military officer commanding the land forces, into a council for the express purpose of advising him in the

discharge of his executive or administrative functions. This council is hence called the Executive Council. The Governor is directed and required in all cases to consult with the Executive Council, excepting only when the matters to be decided are too unimportant to require their advice, or too urgent to admit of such advice being given. And the members of the Executive Council are required to meet in obedience to any summons which may be issued by the Governor, and to advise him upon all questions which may be proposed by him for their consideration. Minutes are to be kept of their deliberations and proceedings, and full and exact copies are to be transmitted to the Secretary of State periodically. But power was given to the Governor to act in his discretion in opposition to the advice of the Executive Council, provided that in any case he fully report to the Secretary of State by the first convenient opportunity every proceeding, with the grounds and reasons thereof.

7. The following four clauses in the Royal Instructions issued to Governor Horton in 1883, the year in which the Executive Council was established, shew the anxious care with which the Crown impressed on that Governor the dangers of acting in an arbitrary manner, and the extreme desirability of being guided by the advice of that Council. The Instructions issued to succeeding Governors have been substantially the same, with few verbal alterations.

"And we do further direct and appoint that, in execution of the powers and authorities committed to you by our said Commission, you do in all cases consult with our Executive Council, excepting only in cases which may be of such a nature that in your judgment our service would sustain material prejudice by consulting the said council thereon, or when the matters to be decided shall be too unimportant to require their advice, or too urgent to admit of their advice being given by the time within which it may be necessary for you to act in respect of any such matters: provided that in all such urgent cases you do subsequently, and at the earliest practicable period, communicate to our said Executive Council the measures you may have so adopted, with the reasons thereof.

"And we do further direct and appoint that no question shall be brought before our said Executive Council for their advice or decision excepting only such question as may be proposed by you for that purpose: provided, nevertheless, that if any member shall, by application in writing, request you so to propose any question, it shall be competent to any such member to record upon the said minutes such his written application, together with the answer which may be returned by you to the same."

"And we do authorise you in your discretion, and if it shall in any case appear right so to do, to act in the exercise of the power committed to you by our said commission in opposition to the advise which may in such case be given to you by the members of the said Executive Council; provided, nevertheless, that every such proceeding shall be fully reported to us by the first convenient opportunity, together with the grounds and reasons thereof; and we do further direct that in every case it shall be competent to any member of the said council to record at length on the said minutes the grounds of any advice or opinion he may give upon any question brought under the consideration of such council."

"And we do further direct and appoint that a full and exact journal or minute be kept of all the deliberations, acts, proceedings, votes and resolutions of our said Executive Council, and that at each meeting of the said council the minutes of the last preceding meeting shall be read over, and confirmed or amended, as the case may require, before proceeding to the despatch of any other business, and that twice in each year a full transcript of all the said minutes for the preceding half-year be transmitted to us through one of our Principal Secretaries of State."

8. In establishing his Executive Council in the Island, the Sovereign had in view the necessity not only of affording the Governor the means of consulting with responsible officers, but also of controlling him in case he rejected their advice. But such control cannot be exercised with becoming speed, because from the difficulties presented by distance, it is impossible for the Secretary of State to peruse the minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council and advise the Crown to approve or disapprove of the Governor's policy or measure, without seriously delaying the public business of the country. Nor can the control, even if readily exercisable, be satisfactory, because the Sovereign does not know the actual wants and wishes of the various sections of the people who inhabit the Island. He had, therefore, to institute in the Island itself a body without whose approval the Governor was not to proceed to action. Such a body is the Legislative Council, more fully and truly the agent or representative of the Sovereign than the Governor himself, because, (1) the peculiarly sovereign powers of taxation, expenditure and legislation are vested in it, and not in the Governor; (2) he has to render to the Council every year what Sir

Henry Ward described as "an account of his stewardship"; (3) his executive acts are liable to be inquired into and censured, if necessary, by the Council; and (4) it could stop his pay, by means of an Ordinance, amending the Ordinance relating to the fixed charges of the Island; or refuse to vote the contingent charges allowed him annually under the Supply Bill.

9. Such are the means taken by the Crown, as your memorialists understand the constitution, to guard the inhabitants of the Island against the dangers of personal government or autocratic rule on the part of the Governor. Passing from the general Constitution of our Government, your memorialists beg leave to refer to the right of the Governor to command the Official Members of the Legislative Council to support his own policy, if not by speech, at least by vote.

10. The five members of the Executive Council, together with the Governor are made part of the Legislative Council. Four other officials — the Government Agent for the Western Province, the Government Agent for the Central Province, the Surveyor-General, and the Principal Collector of Customs—have also been given seats on the Official side; and six members independent of office, selected by the Crown, represent in council the interests of the principal races inhabiting the Island. The Council was thus composed of sixteen members till last year, and it was provided that "all questions proposed for debate in the said council shall be decided by the majority of votes; it being our pleasure that you (the Governor), or the member presiding in your absence, shall have an original vote in common with the other members of the Council and also a casting vote, if upon any question the vote shall be equally divided."

11. Why were the four non-executive officials put into Legislative Council? It could not be to blindly support the Governor and give him the majority of votes, because, as against the six unofficial members, the votes of the five executive officials, together with his own original and casting votes, gave him the required majority. Nor can it be said that they are present in council only as figureheads, because they are all men of practical ability, integrity and experience. It is, therefore, certain that their selection to seats in the Sovereign's council was for the purpose of taking an active part in the deliberations of the council. From the majority of the votes of these three classes of members, safety in matters of taxation, expenditure, legislation and general administration was naturally expected. Herein lies the reason why the Crown enjoins

the Governor to take not only the advice of the Legislative Council, but its consent also, — why it does not empower him to act in opposition to the Legislative Council, but to submit to the votes of the major part of the Council.

12. The significance of the oath taken in those days by the members of the Legislative Council, should not be lost sight of. They were sworn to judge of all matters placed before them impartially. How could the Official Members perform this duty if they were called upon to express their judgment, verdict or vote at the Governor's dictation?

13. Nor ought the reason of the 18th clause of the Royal Instructions to be forgotten, by virtue of which no ordinance, vote, resolution or question, which creates a charge upon the revenue, could be proposed by a member of the Legislative Council, without express leave from the Governor. What necessity is there for this restriction, if the Governor can command the votes of the Official Members?

14. Between 1833 and 1840, no difficulty seems to have been experienced by Governors Horton and Mackenzie in the working of the Legislative Council. But upon Sir Colin Campbell assuming the administration of the Island, the question arose — whether the members of the Executive Council are bound to support in the Legislative Council a measure determined upon by the majority of the Executive Council. Lord John Russel, who was then Secretary of State for the Colonies, thought that upon all minor matters there was no objection to the members of the Executive Council expressing any difference of opinion as freely as they pleased in the Legislative Council, and that such freedom would give all the greater weight to their concurrence when acting together; but upon all matters of importance, he ruled that, if a member of the Executive Council dissented *from the Governor and from the majority*, he was at liberty to remain neutral, that is, not to vote at all in the Legislative Council.

15. This important despatch of Lord John Russel was not even once mentioned in the whole course of the recent debate in the Legislative Council. His ruling, your memorialists repeat, was entirely in favour of freedom of speech being exercised in the Legislative Council by members of the Executive Council. In other words, freedom of vote in the Legislative Council was permitted to the executive officials where the Governor attempted to force through the Legislative Council a measure which was all his own, or which was supported by only the minority of the Executive Council.

16. Your Memorialists have not seen the full text of this despatch but the substance of it, as quoted above, appears in the evidence given by Mr. Wodehouse (who had been Government Agent for the Western Province, and who afterwards became the Governor of Bombay) before the Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed in 1849 to report on the affairs of the Island. He stated that the despatch in question was never published in the Island. It is not surprising that Sir Colin Campbell and other Governors in favour of autocratic rule should have ignored its existence.

17. Lord Torrington was the first Governor who acted in direct violation of the principles of our constitution and of the spirit of Lord John Russell's despatch. That was in 1848. It was proved beyond doubt before the Select Committee of the House of Commons that up to that year the official members of the Legislative Council were at liberty to speak and vote as each liked, unless the question that was brought forward came recommended from the Home Government. The questions put by the Parliamentary Committee to Mr. Frederick Saunders, the Collector of Customs, and the answers given by him, are worth citing on the point:-

> Will you state in what position you have been, with regard to your voting? Have you considered yourself at liberty to give your independent voice, or have you been acting under any regulation or understanding in that respect? — I have always considered myself at liberty to give an independent vote, unless the question that was brought forward came recommended from the Home Government, and then I have always considered myself bound to vote with the government.
>
> Supposing the Governor of the Colony had proposed anything to the Legislative Council, with the advice of the Executive Council, how would you have acted? — On all the measures emanating from the local Government, I have considered myself at liberty to vote as I pleased and to exercise my own judgment.
>
> Has there been any difference under the two Governors (Sir Colin Campbell and Lord Torrington) under whom you have been, as regards the respective officers voting? — Yes. During the time that Lord Torrington has been there, he has in fact considered that we were bound by our situations to vote with the Government on all occasions; he has told us so.
>
> In what way have you been told that you were expected to vote with the Government? — Lord Torrington communicated to us privately that he expected that on all occasions we should vote with the Government.
>
> What was the practice under the Governor before? Was there any communication made to you, or order given? — No orders were given, but the subject had been, in Sir Colin Campbell's time, brought under the consideration of Her Majesty's Government.
>
> Can you state who brought the subject forward, or on what occasion it was brought forward? — I am not aware, but it was during the time that Lord John Russell was Colonial Secretary.
>
> Did you consider yourself, as a member of the Legislative Council, upon that representation being made to you, bound to obey it? — Yes. I did, more particularly as I was informed by a member of the Executive Council that the subject would be referred to her Majesty's Government.
>
> When you take your seat in the Council, do you take any oath? — Yes there is an oath administered.
>
> From the time of the despatch from Lord John Russell in reply to the reference made to him on the subject of voting in the Legislative Council, have the official members of the Legislative Council acted in conformity with the despatch of Lord John Russell? — That despatch was never made public.
>
> Then you only know that there was a reference made to the subject in the time of Sir Colin Campbell without knowing what the result was? — Just so.
>
> Have you never seen the reply of Lord John Russell? — No.
>
> Were its contents not communicated by Sir Colin Campbell to the members of the Legislative Council? — No; they may have been communicated to the Executive Council, but not to the Legislative Council.
>
> Have you the words of the oath that you take as a member of the Legislative Council? — No, I have not.
>
> You do not recollect them? — Not the precise words.
>
> Do you recollect the substance or the nature of the oath? — That you are to judge of all matters impartially which shall come before you.
>
> In Sir Colin Campbell's time and in Lord Torrington's time, was the same oath taken? — Yes.
>
> Are you aware whether the same practice existed in Sir Colin Campbell's time, or whether he had given the same advice to the official members of the Legislative Council as Lord Torrington gave? — No, there

was no such restraint placed upon us in the time of Sir Colin Campbell.

You said that in Sir Colin Campbell's time, you considered yourself perfectly free to act upon your own judgment in reference to measures brought before the Legislative Council? — Quite so.

Did you remonstrate or object to any instructions or orders being given respecting your voting? — I had an interview with Lord Torrington upon the subject; but, as I stated before, I understood from a member of the Executive Council that it would be referred to Her Majesty's Government; and I understand that the question has, since I left the Colony, been decided by Earl Grey.

Do you know whether the same advice or order was given to the other official members of the Legislative Council as was given to you? — I heard so.

18. Mr. George Ackland, an eminent merchant who had a seat in the Legislative Council, took a leading part in protesting against the power arrogated by Lord Torrington of commanding the silence and the votes of the official members of the Legislative Council. Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote as follows, in his despatch dated 19th May, 1848:-

> "It appears to me that the best rule which can be laid down under the circumstances of Ceylon is, that the official members of the Council are entitled, as well as the unofficial, to express their opinion upon all subjects with the utmost freedom, but that, after they have done so, it would be improper and inconsistent with their official character, to defeat, by their votes, measures which the Governor, having fully considered their observations, might continue to think it necessary to press forward. If they should altogether disapprove of them, it would in my opinion be their duty to enable him to pass them upon his own responsibility, recording by a minute, if they should deem it requisite, the objection which they might entertain. The adoption of a different rule would create the risk of a most inconvenient obstruction of the march of Government."

19. This despatch, your memorialists humbly submit, is open to many grave objections. It is not based upon a study of the authoritative instruments which define our constitution, but upon Lord Grey's ideas of expediency,— or as he puts it — of "the best rule which can be laid down under the circumstances of Ceylon." And when he speaks of the inconsistency of the official members defeating by their votes "measures which the Governor, having fully considered their observations, might continue to think it necessary to press forward," he plainly exhibits a complete want of appreciation of the nature of our constitution. In supporting Lord Torrington, Lord Grey not only deprived the public of one of the most important constitutional methods of defending themselves, through the Legislative Council, against the tyranny, folly or ignorance of an obstinate Governor, but also surrendered into his hands a valuable check which the Crown had upon him. If an official member of council is not to oppose by vote a measure introduced by a Governor, is not the Governor at liberty to report the measure as unopposed? And if so, is not the Secretary of State liable to be misled? The very weapon, therefore, with which Lord Grey armed the Governor against the public may be turned against the Secretary of State himself. The question of the extension of the railway to Haputale happily illustrates this truth. The Secretary of State was against the extension, being in entire harmony with the views expressed by the natives of the Island; but the Governor was able to declare that the majority of the Legislative Council had voted together for it, and was thus in a position to force his hands.

20. That Lord Grey's opinion was ill-considered will also appear from the remark he made that the dissenting officials might record by a minute the objections which they might entertain. It is impossible to act upon his suggestion, for the simple reason that the rules of the Legislative Council admit, and admitted in those days, of a dissent only in case the Council proceeded to a division, and the dissenting member was in the minority. Supposing, therefore, no division took place, the chance of recording a minute would be lost. Nor, if the officials voted together, would a member in the majority be able to dissent. Nor yet, if one of them was neutral, that is, did not vote, could he dissent. The fact appears to be that Lord Grey confounded the procedure of the Executive Council with that of the Legislative Council.

21. His opinion was not only ill-advised in these respects, but too vaguely expressed, at least in one important matter; his words do not indicate whether the officials, after expressing their opinions, are bound to vote with the Governor or whether they might in their discretion remain neutral. Mr. Wodehouse, who gave evidence before the parliamentary committee of 1849, stated that Lord Grey was not at all clear on this point, and that his opinion was not practically tested.

22. While Lord Grey's views on the subject of voting are plainly mistaken, his observations on the necessity of

giving freedom of speech to the official members deserve to be carefully remembered,—barring the grievous error he fell into of speaking of the Legislative Council as the *Governor's* Council. These are his words:

> "I am convinced that the circumstance of having taken an active part in the preparation of such measures will never induce the Governor to entertain the slightest wish to check the remarks of those who may honestly object to any of his proposals. On the contrary, it will naturally be his desire, while there is an opportunity of amending and reconsidering the measures brought forward, to hear the criticisms of the members of his (sic) Legislative Council, whose object, it is to be presumed, will be the same as his own: namely that of rendering the laws which are enacted as well adapted as possible to the wants of the community. Considering how deeply the reputation of the Governor is concerned in the prosperity of the Colony entrusted to his charge, he cannot but be anxious for the best assistance which he may be able to procure towards rendering his measures as effective as possible.

23. The commercial and political crisis through which the Island passed during this period, coupled with the do-nothing policy of Sir George Anderson who administered the government from 1850 to 1855, helped to draw off public attention from the serious invasion of the rights of the Legislative Council. The official members of the council could not be expected to remonstrate with the Secretary of State upon the curtailment of their privileges, which are of course the privileges of the public. The unofficials of the day could not consider the subject in council, because, even up to the time of Sir Henry Ward, the Royal Instructions were that no questions should be debated there, unless the same had been proposed by the Governor. Outside the council, there was no public body founded for the express purpose of advocating and defending measures of public interest. It thus came to pass that the disclosures made before the Parliamentary Committee left little or no impression on the public mind, more especially as the Imperial Government did not see fit to acquiesce in the recommendation of the Parliamentary Committee that a royal commission shouid be appointed to proceed to Ceylon to ascertain what measures were necessary for the better government of the colony. Everything, therefore, conspired to the silent growth of the power of the Governor at the expense of the power of the Legislative Council.

24. In 1868, the Duke of Buckingham addressed a despatch to all the Crown Colonies, referring to the official

and nominated members of the Legislative Council. Your memorialists do not know the circumstances which called for the despatch, but the following is all that is necessary to quote from it here:-

> "There are the members who hold their seats in virtue of offices held under the Crown . ..... and they may, if necessary, be required to support the Crown in the Legislature according to such directions as may be given to them by the Governor or Lieut. Governor as the representative of the Crown. But it is not considered expedient by Her Majesty's Government that, without necessity, the same implicit obedience should be exacted from officers of the Crown, in their Legislative capacity as would be due from them in the execution of their offices. Legislation includes within its range questions of religion and other questions of high moral import in respect of which officers of the Crown may happen to have conscientious scruples, and if after explaining their difficulties to the Governor, he should be unable to remove them, they may reasonably expect to be excused from taking part in measures to which they object on these grounds. At the same time, an officer whose seat in the legislature is by law inseparable from his office, could not be continued in the office and the seat, if his conscience should not permit him to give the Crown such a measure of support as may be necessary to enable the Governor to carry on the business of government in the legislature on the principles and according to the intention with which the legislature was constituted. It is very rarely, if at all, that such a case can be expected to arise."

25. This, your memorialists submit, is a well-considered and carefully worded document, of which Your Majesty's subjects in the Island have little to fear. It clearly states that the official members "may, if necessary, be required to support the *Crown* in the legislature," and that it is right that they should "give the *Crown* such a measure of support as may be necessary to enable the Governor to carry on the business of government *on the principles and according to the intention with which the legislature was constituted.*" To quote this despatch, as it was quoted in the recent debate in council, in favour of the pretended right of the Governor to have his own personal policy supported by the votes of the official members of the Legislative Council, is to beg the question, because it leaves undetermined the nature of the constitution of our government and the principles upon which such support

may be asked on behalf of the Crown. But it is clear, from the decision of the Lords of the Privy Council cited already, that the Governor is not the Crown, nor does he represent it even generally. On the contrary, if the Crown is to judge whether the Governor or the majority of the Legislative Council is right, it must be conceded, as a condition precedent, that there should be the utmost freedom in the expression of opinion and the giving of votes on the part of official members. And therefore the Governor, unless specially authorised thereto by the Crown, could not bid the official members vote in any particular direction.

26. A later despatch under the hand of Lord Knutsford, dated July 1888, was produced by the Governor, and the following words, pertinent to the subject, occur in it:-

> "It is a well understood rule that Official Members of Council are not to oppose either by speech or vote the settled policy of Government."

At first sight this despatch may appear to be in favour of the contention of the Governor, but it is not really so. For what is the meaning of the expression "settled policy of the government"? The term "government" here cannot mean the executive government, because in Ceylon the executive government means the Governor down to the humblest servant in the receipt of pay from the Legislative Council. The executive government is carried on by all these officials, under the command of the Governor communicated through the Colonial Secretary to the several heads of department. If the term "executive government" is not to signify the Governor, the Colonial Secretary and the departmental chiefs, it can signify the Governor only. This being so, he cannot order the official members of the Sovereign's councils to support his own individual policy, without the special authority of the Crown for, according to our constitution, as properly explained by Lord John Russell, (1) members who have been in the minority in the Executive Council would be quite within their right to speak in the Legislative Council against the Governor's policy, but not to vote against it; (2) if unsupported by the majority of the Executive Council, its members would be within their right not only to speak but also to vote against it in the Legislative Council; and (3) *a fortiori*, the other officials of the Legislative Council would be free to speak and vote against the Governor's policy, whether it is supported or not by the Executive Council. It is thus clear that when Lord Knutsford referred to the duty of the official members of the Legislative Council to abstain from opposing by speech or vote the settled policy of the government, he had in view only the policy settled in England by the Crown. Even in this case, it will be noted that his words—"not to oppose either by speech or vote,"—tacitly acknowledge their right to remain neutral, that is, not to vote at all.

27. But if it be argued that the circumstances which called for the despatch of Lord Knutsford indicate what the words themselves do not,—namely, that he meant to subordinate the speech and vote of the official members of Your Majesty's Legislative Council to the personal wishes of the Governor, your memorialists submit that the despatches of Secretaries of State cannot withdraw or limit the privileges graciously granted by the Crown to the official members, for the good of its subjects, by Letters Patent and Instructions issued under the royal signet and sign manual.

28. If the contention on behalf of the Governor be right that he may, without special instructions from the Secretary of State, command the official members of the Legislative Council to abstain from speaking and to vote in his support, your memorialists submit in all humility that it would be childish, and trifling with the unofficial members, who may be in disagreement with him to ask them "Will you divide the council?" It was pointed out as far back as 1848 in the House of Commons that the power arrogated by Lord Torrington had reduced the Council to a veritable sham. This is what Mr. Henry Layard stated in evidence before the Parliamentary Committee:-

> "The Legislative Council is really useless; in effect, it is worse than useless; for it produces the impression upon the public mind that the members are at liberty to vote as they please, when in fact their hands are more tied than ever, and acts go forward as if they have received the confirmation of all the members, when those acts are opposed to the opinions of individual members of the council."

29. Between 1848 and 1888, there have been Governors who have allowed our constitution to work according to the lines prescribed by its founders. Sir Henry Ward (1855—1860), for instance, in his last address to the Legislative Council, expressly admitted that progress was impossible for a colony like Ceylon, unless the Governor's views were in harmony with those of the two councils. His words are:

> "In the peculiar circumstances of Ceylon, with great capabilities still undeveloped, few questions of principle to settle, and a growing demand for material

improvements as the conditions of planting and mercantile success, it is upon the agreement between the Councils and the Governor for the time being that the progress of the colony depends."

Your memorialists would also refer to Major-General Hodgson, who administered the Government in 1868, during the absence on leave of Sir Hercules Robinson. The following observations of General Hodgson are apparently intended to mark his sense of the manner in which the official members of council had been ordered about, in the performance of their legislative duties, by the Governor for whom he was acting:

> "The council will do me the justice to admit during my administration and my presidency over this assembly, there has been the entire freedom of discussion which is necessary for the proper consideration and ventilation of any public question, and that every member, whether official or unofficial, an adherent or opponent of government, has been freeely encouraged to enunciate his opinions, and has been responded to in a fair and generous spirit."

30. It thus follows that it is against principle and authority to subordinate the Legislative Council to the wishes of the Governor. A careful study of our constitution will show that the responsibility of the Governor to the Crown commences principally when he chooses to disregard the unbiased advice of the Sovereign's Executive and Legislative Councils; that without the corrective influence of the two Councils, his responsibility to the Crown commences principally when he chooses to disregard the unbiased advice of the Sovereign's Executive and Legislative Councils; that without the corrective influence of the two Councils, his responsibility to the Crown would be a responsibility in name only; and that the subjects of Her Majesty have no means of resisting *effectively and in due season* the tyranny, folly or ignorance of an obstinate Governor, except through the co-operation of the experienced official members with their own unofficial representatives.

31. Your memorialists would add that the official members of the Legislative Councils established in India have perfect freedom of speech and vote, without being liable to forfeit office when regard for public weal prompts them to speak and to vote against measures introduced by the Governor.

32. Your Memorialists submit that the control of the Crown over the Governor cannot be effectively exercised, with due regard to the wants of Your Majesty's subjects in the Island, if the public have no opportunities of

knowing and quoting against the Governor, the opinions of your official councillors. If they are made to pose as supporters of his policy, how is the Secretary of State to judge between the public and the Governor, so as to be able to recommend the allowance or disallowance of a measure *pressed* through the council by the Governor? By a proceeding so unreal and misleading, the Governor may evade the double check imposed on him by the Crown—namely, the local check by means of the Legislative Council, and the check in England by means of the Secretary of State – and play the one off against the other, with disastrous results to the Island. To submit the official members of the Legislative Council to the dictation of the Governor would be not only to deprive the public of Ceylon of the most important of the constitutional methods of resisting the ill-considered schemes of the Governor, but also to render his responsibility to the Crown a responsibility in name only. Even if it could be more than nominal without the aid of the Legislative Council, it would be poor consolation to the public that the Governor, who has wasted the revenue of the Island and committed grievous blunders in administration has been held "responsible" long after the mischief was done.

33. As regards the tenure of seats in council by unofficial members for only three years, your memorialists are aware that this rule obtains in the case of the Legislative Councils of India. But these councils are very differently constituted from the Legislative Council of Ceylon. In India, the Legislative Councils are simply and purely law-making councils, without powers of taxation, expenditure and interpolation. Nor have members there the right to introduce motions of any kind for discussion, as in Ceylon. The consequence is, the rules of those councils are very simple, and studies of precedents, of numberless financial questions, and of histories of all kinds of public questions to be gathered from the various administration Reports, Sessional Papers, *Hansard* and other stores of literature, are not necessary to the same extent as in Ceylon. It is the common experience of our members of council, both official and unofficial, that even three or four years of practical experience of the working of our council does not give them a full insight into its procedure. How then could a gentleman, appointed for a period of three years, do justice to the complicated work he is called upon to perform? His work is therefore bound to be unsatisfactory for the first three years. Then again, it is a constant complaint in India that tenure of office for three years does not promote the independence of its members. A

Governor, who does not care to be opposed in his measures, could by means of this rule get rid of a troublesome member, as is often done in India.

34. Your memorialists therefore submit that, under the circumstances of Ceylon it would be more expedient to prolong the tenure to at least seven years. Holding office for such a period would enable the members to take an interest in their work, watch the development of useful public measures and actively push them forward to a successful end.

35. As regards clause 18 of the Royal Instructions to the Governor, whereby members are prevented from proposing an ordinance, vote, resolution or question, which creates a charge upon the revenue, without express leave from the Governor, — your memorialists submit that the loyalty and good sense which the members of the Legislative Council have hitherto uniformly shewn in the consideration of the several questions submitted to them, justify the abrogation of this clause, in which case the usefulness of the Council would be considerably increased.

36. Your memorialists beg to refer to the recent appointment of a government servant to an unofficial seat in Council, while continuing to hold such office. The gentleman selected by the Governor to occupy the seat, created on behalf of the Kandyan Sinhalese, is truly a representative man of integrity and ability. But your memorialists, while expressing their gratitude for the concession made in creating two additional unofficial seats, beg to submit that it is inexpedient that one who holds office under the executive government should at the same time be an unofficial member of council. The position of the present Kandyan member is anomalous in the highest degree. As a Ratemahatmaya, he is bound to obey the orders of the Government Agent, and indeed of his Office Assistant. He is also obliged in a manner to carry out the instructions of the Fiscal, the Police Magistrate and the Inspector-General of Police. But, as an unofficial member, he may oppose and even condemn them all. Is it possible to discharge two sets of duties so radically different and inconsistent with each other, with satisfaction either to the officials whom he serves, or the public whom also he is made to serve. "No man can serve two masters" is the common experience of humanity. However able and honest the present Kandyan member may be, he ought not to be called on to fill such an anomalous and difficult position. It has moreover the tendency of diminishing in the estimation of the public the prestige of the other unofficial members of council.

37. Wherefore your memorialists humbly feel that, instead of the privileges of the Legislative Council broadening down in the course of years from precedent to precedent, they have been gradually but almost imperceptibly narrowed, so that its usefulness and independence have become greatly curtailed. They pray:-

1. that the official members of the Legislative Council be given freedom of speech and vote in terms of the despatch of Lord Russel, without being made liable to the censure or other punitive treatment of the executive government;
2. that the unofficial members of the Legislative Council be hereafter appointed for a term of at least seven years;
3. that the 18th clause of Your Majesty's Instructions to the Governor whereby members of the Legislative Council are prevented from proposing any ordinance, vote, resolution or question, which creates a charge upon the revenue, without express leave from the Governor, be abrogated;
4. that no gentleman be appointed to an unofficial seat in the Legislative Council who holds office under the Government; and that, if the present member who has been selected to represent the interests of the Kandyan Sinhalese be unwilling to sever his connection with the Government, under such terms and conditions as Your Majesty may be pleased to provide, another gentleman, independent of office, be appointed to the said seat.

And your memorialists, as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

Colombo,
10th February, 1890. P. Ramanathan

President of the Ceylon National Association.

End of Volume I