

THE
MALABAR QUARTERLY REVIEW.

EDITED BY

K. N. SIVARAJAN, B. A.

VOL. IX.]

SEPTEMBER 1910,

[No. 3]

H. H. SIR RAMA VARMA, G. C. S. I., G. C. I. E.

BY MR. R. KULATHU AIYAR.

THE Silver Jubilee of the benign reign of His Highness the Maharajah of Travancore has been recently celebrated throughout the State with such spontaneous rejoicings, that I have considered it not inappropriate to utilize this occasion for presenting the readers of the *Malabar Quarterly Review* with a short sketch of the life of our illustrious ruler.

His Highness Sir Rama Varma, G. C. S. I., G. C. I. E., F. M. U., M. R. A. S., &c., &c., Maharaja of Travancore, was born on the 25th September 1857. His father was Raja Raja Varma Coil Tampuran, a very learned and cultured Nobleman and an eminent Sanskrit scholar. His mother Rani Lakshmi Bai also was a very talented and highly accomplished lady. Scarcely eleven days had passed after his birth when his mother Rani Lakshmi Bai, who was only 20 years old, died. This was a great loss to Travancore and the then Maharaja, Uttaram Tirunal, felt the loss very keenly. "It is impossible to describe" says Mr. Sankunni Menon, in his Travancore History, "the grief of the Maharaja and the rest of the Royal family on this sorrowful day." The baby Prince scarcely knew the deep shadow of sorrow that was cast on him. On the death of his mother the line of succession in the Royal family came to a close, and so two Princesses were

adopted from the Mavelikara house with the sanction of the British Government.

During childhood the Prince was taken great care of by his uncles who had more than ordinary interest in the young Prince. After the usual Vernacular studies, the Prince (with his elder brother Hastam Tirunal who died prematurely) was placed under the tuition of Mr. Annaji Row, B. A., and afterwards under Mr. Raghunatha Row, B. A. Mr. Ross, the then Principal of H. H. The Maharajah's College, Trivandrum, supervised the tuition.

In the Administration Report of 1045, M. E., Sir Madhava Row wrote:—"The studies of the young princes embraced during the year :

Reading.

History—Goldsmith's Rome, 130 pages (from the creation of the Decemviri to the establishment of the first Tirumvirate).

Geography—of Europe and Asia, 113 pages.

Arithmetic—Examples in Decimals, single and double rule of three and the rules for finding the Sq. Root.

Grammar—A portion of Sullivan's.

They read also several miscellaneous works calculated to instruct and amuse them; and to keep them informed on current topics, the illustrated *London News*, *The Madras Mail* and a couple of local Newspapers have been supplied. In the beginning of the current year Mr. Ross examined them by means of written papers in Arithmetic and History and *viva voce* in other subjects. The result was on the whole satisfactory. The elder prince has unhappily not enjoyed good health and under medical advice was obliged to suspend his studies for a time. In the study of Sanskrit both Princes appear to have progressed favourably. They now mix more than before in European Society and are thus brought under the influences calculated to expand their minds. Physical education has not been wholly neglected. The Princes ride and walk a good deal more than previously. Mr. R. Raghunatha Row, B. A., the English Tutor to the young Princes, is using his best endeavours in the important work confided to him. In general knowledge and in principles of conduct they manifest a marked improvement pregnant with gratifying promise for the future."

The tuition was continued till 1874. What with the able training he received, his natural intelligence and his assiduous application to his studies he grew a very learned man. He knows now all the important languages of India besides English. Mr. Ross gives some characteristics of the Prince as early as that time. "He was a man

of most equable temper. Nothing would ruffle his equanimity. In his manners always and to all, exceedingly courteous and above all conspicuously sympathetic." These were the chief points in his character which were early noticed in him by Mr. Ross.

Mr. Griffith, in his "India's Princes" speaks of our Prince's early studies and accomplishments in the following terms:—

"His Highness the present Maharaja was principally educated under a private Tutor (now holding the position of Dewan Peishcar—Deputy Dewan) assisted by the then Principal of the Maharaja's College. Under the zealous care of these gentlemen His Highness received a thorough training in all the ordinary branches of an English education. Provision was made at the same time for his acquiring a knowledge of Sanskrit which is considered an essential part of a Hindu liberal education. The Maharaja writes English with ease and with a very creditable knowledge of idioms. He has long shown a taste for Music including English instrumenal music and at times has the Brigade Band at one of his suburban residences to play European pieces to him. The band is entirely composed of Natives with the exception of the bandmaster, who is of European descent and whose family for three generations has held the appointment. His Highness, before he assumed the responsibilities of Government, used to be very fond of Lawn Tennis and was a fairly good player and even now enjoys a quiet game in the Courts of the British Resident or of the Officer Commanding the Brigade; he has also been known to find pleasure in being conducted by a European Lady-partner through the figures of the lancers or the Sir George de Coverly."

In 1873 was celebrated his threading ceremony. In 1875 his constant companion and play-mate—his dear brother Hastam Tirunal—died. This was a severe blow to him.

In his 23rd year he fell in love with the daughter of one of the late Maharajas, a typical Malabar Lady bestowed with all desirable qualities. She was a very remarkable lady fit in every way to be the companion of so noble a prince. The marriage came off soon and was celebrated with great oriental pomp and splendour. The young couple led a very happy life and soon they were blessed with a son. In the midst of all these joyous events grim sorrow crept in slowly. The hand that snatched away his dear mother and elder brother took off his affectionate wife also. He was plunged in deepest sorrow and distress. Before him lay the motherless child. The loving hand of a tender mother was not there to nurse it. The sight recalled his own

position some twenty-three years back.

In 1882 he made a tour in Southern India visiting Bangalore, Madras, Calicut, Cochin and other places.

On the 4th August 1885, the Maharaja Visakham Tirunal having breathed his last, Sir Rama Varma, Moolam Tirunal, the hero of our sketch, ascended the throne on the 19th August. He was then only 28 years of age. The coronation ceremony was performed with much splendour and *eclat*. On that auspicious occasion His Highness addressed the assembly in the following words:—

“ I little expected that at the early age of 28 I would be called upon to undertake the grave responsibilities of a Ruler. And coming as I do after an illustrious line of ancestors—not the least eminent and wise of whom have been my two lamented uncles His Highness the late Maharaja and his immediate predecessor—I feel all the more my own unworthiness to fill a position to which they have done so much honor. But while thus filled with a sense of my own incapacity, I must confess to a feeling of thankfulness that I see not a little in the circumstances in which I am placed to encourage and cheer me. This ancient kingdom under the fostering care of my predecessors has entered on a career of material prosperity never before known, the finances are in a flourishing condition and the foundations of future prosperity have been laid broad and deep. I have therefore only to work on the lines chalked out for me; and in endeavouring to do this it is no small consolation to me that I shall have the cordial aid and counsel of the British Representative at my Court and the support and protection of the Paramount Power to whose fortunes those of my House are fortunately indissolubly linked; and from whom in the long course of our happy connection we have never experienced anything but uniform kindness and friendship, and to whom we have always owed and will continue to owe unswerving loyalty and above all I am full of faith and hope and devoutly pray that the Author of all good who in His infinite and inscrutable wisdom has seen fit to end short a most useful and valuable life in the midst of a bright and successful career, may “ what in me is dark, illumine, what is low, raise and support,” guide me in the straight path of my duty, give me the will and power to follow in the footsteps of him whose premature loss we all deplore, and enable me to the best of the light vouchsafed to me to strive to promote the well-being and happiness of the nearly 2½ millions of peaceful and industrious subjects so unexpectedly committed to my care.”

On that same day a Royal warrant was issued by His Highness remitting old arrears of assessment to the extent of Rupees three lacs and a half and an annual grant of Rs. 1500 was sanctioned for the repair and construction of wells in places where they were most needed. As usual just after the Coronation there was the grand Royal procession in the State Palanquin, attended by all the officers of the State, the Nayar Brigade Sepoys with Band and all other ceremonial paraphernalia, and by thousands of people who had assembled to witness the glorious sight of their newly adorned monarch. Now full 25 years have passed since that memorable event—the Coronation. During this memorable period many and multifarious have been the reforms that have been introduced. When His Highness ascended the throne Mr. Rama Iyengar was the Dewan and he carried on the work of Survey and Settlement very vigorously. Rama Iyengar was a British Officer of great administrative abilities. He was succeeded by Mr. T. Rama Row who carried on his administration from 1887—1892. During his time the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty the late Queen-Empress of India was celebrated. His Highness subscribed Rs. 10,000 to the Imperial Institute in London, and Rs. 2,000 to the Technical Institute in Madras started to commemorate this event. In commemoration of this event in Travancore itself the Victoria Jubilee Town Hall was built at Trivandrum.

In the year 1062 M. E. the Elaya Raja of Cochin, and the next year Lord Connemara, the then Governor of Madras, visited Travancore. In honor of latter's visit a market called 'The Connemara Market' was opened in the Capital city. The same year the Maharaja went to Bombay and paid a visit to Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and also to Lord and Lady Reay.

A Legislative Council was formed in 1888 with eight members, five official and three non-official, and with the Dewan as the President. The first meeting of the Council was held in September, 1888. The same year was started a Female Normal School in Trivandrum.

On the 4th December 1888, His Highness was given the title of "Knight Grand Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India."

In 1889 His Royal Highness Prince Albert Victor of Wales paid a visit to Travancore. This was the first occasion that a prince of the Royal Family of England visited Travancore and grand preparations were accordingly made to give His Royal Highness a fitting reception. His Highness the Maharajah received His Royal Highness at Courtallam

and His Royal Highness left Travancore highly pleased with the hospitality extended to him.

In 1890 His Highness went on a pilgrimage to Benares and also visited Calcutta and other important towns in Upper India. In April 1892 His Highness performed the *Tulapurusha-danam* ceremony—a ceremony performed by weighing the body of the king against an equal weight in gold and distributing the gold among the Brahmins. The required quantity of gold was coined in different sizes and weights. On the appointed day His Highness went to the temple of Sree Padmanabha and after certain religious ceremonies he was weighed against gold in the presence of several learned Brahmins and the coins were distributed among them all.

In January 1894 was performed the *Padma-garbham* ceremony. *Padma-garbham* or “Hiranya-garbham (in Sanskrit, Hiranya = gold, and Garbham = belly or inside, and so Hiranya-garbham means Golden womb) is a costly ceremony like Tulapurusha-danam, but performed by only the greatest of Emperors at their coronation. A vessel in the shape of a lotus flower, ten feet high and eight feet in circumference, is made of pure gold with a cover in the form of a crown somewhat in the shape of a prize cup and this is half-filled with *Pancha-gavyam*, water mixed with ghee, milk and other substances. The Brahmins chant their devotional prayers and hymns over the vessel according to the Canon of the Vedas. The king after performing his devotions approaches the place where the vessel is kept, accompanied by all the high-priests, Brahmins of note and learning in Malabar, Tinnevely, Madura, Canara &c., and gets into the golden vessel by means of a beautifully-lined ladder made for the purpose. When His Highness enters it, the cover is put on and he dips himself into the holy water five times while all the assembled priests and Brahmins continue praying and chanting Vedic hymns. This ceremony lasts about ten minutes after which the king comes out of the vessel by the same ladder and after going through certain other ceremonies prostrates himself before the image of Sree Padmanabhaswami, when the High Priest who is the chief celebrant of the ceremony and who acts the part of a Bishop takes the crown and placing it on the king's head pronounces the title ‘Kulasekhara Perumal.’ The place then resounds with Vedic hymns from the learned Brahmins.”

In 1897 was celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen and the Public Library and the Victoria Orphanage were started as memorials.

Mr. Shungarasoobier who succeeded Mr Rama Row in 1892 introduced many reforms in the state. The chief of them were the reorganisation of the Educational Department with three Range Inspectors and one Educational Secretary; the establishment of an English Normal School and a Reformatory School; the raising of the Girls High School to a 2nd grade College; the opening of an Agricultural Demonstration Farm; and the organisation of Town Improvement Committees throughout the state. The Kothayar Project, which is a blessing to the ryot population of Nanchinad, was also begun. A Women and Children's hospital was established. State Life Insurance was introduced and all the Government Servants were forced to insure their lives. Mr. Shungarasoobier's administration was a successful one and to him is due the great credit of having given a strong impetus to the cause of female education.

Mr. Krishnaswami Row took up the reins of the Government in 1898.

In January 1899 under the Command of Her Majesty the Queen-Empress the Royal Salute was increased by 2 guns. In a public Durbar held in that connection His Highness spoke as follows:—

“I regard this rare distinction not only as a token of Her Majesty's special favour but also as a proof of the interest which Her Majesty and Her representatives take in the well-being of this ancient state whose proud privilege it has always been to enjoy the friendship and protection of the British Government. While I sincerely rejoice at this the latest of the many marks of Her Majesty's goodwill to me and my House I recognise in it my obligation to merit by further endeavours to promote the happiness and prosperity of my people the continuance of the same confidence and regard.

“I cannot adequately express my sense of the warm interest so kindly taken by Lord Elgin in obtaining for me this coveted honor and I request you to be kind enough to convey to His Lordship my most grateful acknowledgments with the assurance of my firm and loyal attachment to the Throne and Person of Her Gracious Majesty.”

On the 31st August 1900 His Highness adopted from the Mavelikara family two Princesses Setu Lakshmi Bai and Setu Parvati Bai.

In November Lord Curzon the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India with Lady Curzon paid a visit to Travancure. His Excellency in his Banquet-speech referred to His Highness in terms of praise as follows:—

“I know His Highness by repute as a kindly and sympathetic

and diligent ruler whose merits have been tested and for whom the affection of his people had been continuously enhanced by fifteen years of prosperous administration. I know him to combine the most conservative instincts with the most enlightened views. Has not the Government of India itself signified in the most conspicuous manner its recognition of his statesmanship and his services by the addition of his salute to which His Highness just now alluded.....I must be allowed to congratulate him upon the steps that have recently been taken by renewed adoption for the perpetuation of the ruling line. In due time I trust that the expectations which have been aroused by this interesting event may meet with fulfilment and that there may never be wanting in the Travancore state a succession of princes royally born, well-nurtured and qualified by instinct and training to carry on its ancient and honorable traditions.....In one respect His Highness enjoys a position of peculiar responsibility; for he is the ruler of a community that is stamped by wide racial differences and represents a curious motley of religions. In such a case a prince can have no higher ambition than to show consideration to the low and equity and tolerance to all. In the History of States no rulers are more esteemed by posterity than those who have risen superior to the trammels of bigotry or exclusiveness and have dealt equal mercy and equal justice to all classes, including the humblest of their people. In this category of princes His Highness who has given so many proofs of liberality of sentiment may attain a conspicuous place and may leave a name that will long be cherished by later generations."

In January 1903 His Highness attended the Delhi Durbar and on that auspicious occasion His Highness was created a "Knight Grand Commander of the most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire."

In January 1904 His Highness the Raja of Cochin with some of the young princes, the Dewan and other officers visited Trivandrum. Grand preparations were made in connection with His Highness's visit and the Raja returned much pleased with the reception. The next year the Maharaja returned the visit to His Highness the Raja of Cochin who entertained him with munificent hospitality.

In 1904 Mr. V. P. Madhava Row was made Dewan. The most important thing connected with his administration was the inauguration of the "Sreemoolam Popular Assembly." This assembly wherein the accredited representatives of the people are allowed to express their views to Government on various administrative problems and on their own wants is a great boon to the Travancoreans. As years

roll on it is bound to bring untold blessings, rights, and privileges to the people. Mr. V. P. Madhava Row resigned his post here, since he was called upon by the Mysore Government to take up the Prime-ministership of that State. He was succeeded by Mr. S. Gopalacharya, B. A., B. L., who was recalled by the British Government after one year. Now Travancore has as its head of administration Dewan Bahadur P. Rajagopalacharya, C. I. E., from whom the people of Travancore expect many beneficent reforms.

The wisdom with which such able and intelligent Dewans have been selected reflects no little credit upon His Highness. "His Highness' rule has been marked by wise guidance, sound judgment and great solicitude for the public good."

"His Highness," to quote Mr. Nagam Aiyar, "is a humane and well-informed ruler, most intelligent and practical, most punctual in all his engagements, calm, business-like, even-tempered, patient, forgiving and above all genuinely solicitous of the welfare of his people. He is besides a most industrious worker and possesses a rare mastery over details of administration which often puzzle his ablest and most experienced officials. These estimable qualities of His Highness are known far and wide. He is perhaps too modest for these times and is content especially in an age of fuss and bluster and advertisement all round—to allow his talents to lie hid under a bushel relying on the silent reward which good works may bring in due time and leaving out of account altogether the fact that men and measures are generally judged ill in a hot scramble for bubble-reputation which has in a manner to be induced before being obtained."

About His Highness' dress, appearance, and habits, Sir J. D. Rees, M. P., writes "His Highness is somewhat below the middle height and rather slightly made with handsome regular features. He dresses plainly wearing no jewels or ornaments except a little *aigrette* which is always worn by the head of his house. He knows several Indian Languages other than his own vernacular Malayalam. His manner is singularly suave, simple and courteous. He possesses an equable temperament and those if any who have seen him lose his temper have never related the experience. In his habits he is regular and methodical. He eats moderately, never touches animal food and scrupulously abstains from alcoholic drinks.....He is fond of European society, is a member of the local European Club and is believed to admire the character of the ruling race. His Highness has a most retentive memory and most industrious habits."

We shall next see how His Highness spends his time every day. His Highness gets up early at four or half past four. After his morning ablutions he dresses himself and remains ready in the audience Hall by 5 o'clock to receive his visitors. This would keep him till 6-30' or so, and then at about seven o'clock he goes to the Palace Tank for his bath. Every alternate day he bathes with oil, and once a fortnight he gets himself shaved. After the bath he recites his prayers and goes to the Devarapura (the place of worship in the Palace) for worship, and gives off a lot of Danams (gifts) to the Brahmins. This would occupy him till 8-30', at which time he goes to Sree Padmanabhaswami Temple for worship. When he goes to the temple he puts on his head a green cap on which are engraved the feet of Sree Padmanabha symbolising the great devotion of the sovereign to the holy feet. After worship he returns to the palace at about 9 A. M., when he takes his breakfast. This is his first meal. The food is served in gold and silver plates and bowls all arranged in a large plantain leaf called *Ateekalum*. When he takes his meal the palace musicians sing songs in the adjoining room. After his breakfast he goes through his private letters that are received by Anchal* and Post. At 10 A. M., he begins his office work. The Sarvadhikariakar comes in at 10 o'clock and makes his report, which lasts till 11-30'. From 11-30' to 1 P. M., His Highness goes through all the official papers that are submitted to him for orders and passes orders with his own hand. Between 1 and 1-45' P. M., he takes some rest and a little before 2 P. M., he takes his coffee. Precisely at 2 o'clock he is ready in the Drawing Room to receive his officers. The Dewan visits him on Mondays and Fridays and the other Heads of Departments on other appointed days. He then reads his Papers and Magazines, both English and Indian, and often marks out and sends to his Dewan observations regarding State affairs. At 4 P. M., he goes on a short drive to a Bungalow near the Museum but sometimes to the beach and returns at half past five. As soon as he returns he bathes and performs his *Sandhyavandan* and other prayers. He takes his supper at 7 P. M., walks to and fro in his Drawing Room for about half an hour, and then reads newspapers and books till 9 P. M. Precisely at 9, he goes to bed.

About His Highness's loyalty to the British Crown Sir. J. D. Rees M. P., says "The Maharajah, it need hardly be said, is supremely

* The Postal Service of the Travancore State is known as the Anchal Department.—Ed. M. Q. R.

loyal to the throne and to the British Government. Since he cannot himself visit England he rejoiced the more that he was able to entertain in his State the late Duke of Clarence, by whose early death he was sincerely touched. Towards the King he entertains that feeling of personal loyalty and affection with which the late Queen happily inspired the Indian Princes."

His Highness takes very great interest in Female Education. About this Sir J. D. Rees wrote: "The Maharaja also takes deep interest in Female Education, the proportion of girls under instruction in the State being larger than anywhere else in British India. This is partly due to the independent position occupied by women on the Malabar Coast, where they are able to choose their own husbands and even to change them for good and sufficient reasons. There are at Trivandrum a Vernacular High School, two English High Schools and a College for Women. In the Vernacular School pretty girls, clothed in white robes and wearing natural flowers in their hair, may be seen like so many dusky Hypatias demonstrating for the benefit of their pupils on the blackboard."

His Highness is a very able administrator. About his knowledge of all the details of administration Sir Arthur Lawley said in his Banquet speech in January 1907: "...I can assure you that it is a great privilege to me to see something of His Highness' work which he is carrying on here with such ability and such sagacity; while he plays with accurate propriety the part of a strictly constitutional ruler, I know that he has a complete and intimate knowledge of all the details of administration. Holding as he does a reverence for the traditions and the history of his country, at the same time he has shown himself ready to profit by Western ideas so far as they are compatible with the instincts and sentiments of his people. For instance, in the reorganisation of the Excise, in Settlement, in matters especially of Education, in matters of the advancement of Medical science and the placing of medical skill within the reach of his people his work is that of an enlightened and sympathetic ruler."

The Royal Motto of Travancore is "Charity Our Household Divinity," and a very noble motto it is. That Travancore is an asylum to people from the poverty-stricken areas of British India needs no special mention here. The predecessors of our present Maharaja have always been treading on the path of charity and righteousness and have done their best to promote the material condition of the state. Under our present ruler the state has in a conspicuous manner advanced in every direction. May God bless His Highness with long life to hold his beneficent and progressive sway over the 'Land of Charity' is the fervent prayer which constantly rises from the heart of every one of His Highness's loyal and devoted subjects in Travancore.

R. KULATHU AIYAR.