

ART. X.—*Supplement to the Paper on Indian Theistic Reformers, published in the January Number of this Journal.*
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SINCE the publication of my paper on Indian Theistic Reformers in the January number of this Journal, I have received the following letter from Mr. Krishna Bihari Sen, brother of Mr. Keshab Chandar Sen :—

“BRAHMO MISSIONARY CONFERENCE,
22nd December, 1880.

“DEAR SIR,—In conformity with a resolution passed at the last meeting of the Missionary conference of the Brahma Somaj of India, held on Monday, the 20th instant, I beg to invite your attention to certain misstatements in your recent lecture on “Indian Theistic Reformers,” delivered before the Royal Asiatic Society in London, and to request you will be so good as to take an early opportunity of rectifying them, and placing the actual facts of the case before the English public.¹

“The Missionary Conference entirely repudiates the notion you seem to entertain that we members of the Brahma Somaj of India are a narrow clique of ‘Mr. Sen’s followers,’ who revere him ‘as more than human,’ and honour him ‘as an infallible Pope over his church.’

“It is true we have always given him high honor and reverence, for we verily look upon him as not only our Minister, but our best friend and guardian, and our truest benefactor. We regard him as an inspired apostle commissioned by God to lead us. But do we not look upon ourselves too as inspired and Heaven-appointed apostles, whose mission is to bear witness, each in his own humble way, unto the ‘New Dispensation’? However profound our

¹ I omit here, as out of place, a reference to a previous lecture of mine, delivered before a private audience, and never intended for publication, though an imperfect report appeared in a local newspaper, and found its way to India.

hearts' attachment and loyalty to our minister may be, as Theists we shrink back with a shudder from the idea of idolizing him as 'more than human.' The charge of Popery is altogether out of place in a church which accords the most unqualified liberty to every individual worker in God's vineyard, and whose affairs are managed by an elected Council subject to control at annual general meetings.

"The minister too, like every other officer elected by the community, holds his office by public suffrage. If he has continued for so long a period to occupy the position of our leader, it is owing solely to his superior merit and the vast moral influence of his personal character.

"You have been pleased to remark that even 'so late as January, 1879, he (Mr. Sen) declared that he once had a vision of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and St. Paul, who all favoured him with personal communications!' What the minister actually said on the occasion was, 'As I was walking along the path of my life I met three stately figures.' The very expression 'walking along the path of life' clearly shows the metaphorical character of the minister's statement. No stretch of argument would warrant a literal construction of the above passage. Vision in the superstitious sense of the term has no place in our Theology.

"The same may be said of the doctrine of personal communication with departed spirits. What the minister meant was simply a vivid and living spiritual realization with the eye of faith of the life and character of the three great prophets mentioned.

"The Cooch Behar marriage has been characterized in your lecture as 'another great scandal.' How the word 'scandal' can be made to apply to either of the two unfounded and fictitious charges of 'Popery' and 'vision' noticed above, defies our comprehension. Equally unreasonable is it to charge 'the great preacher against child-marriages' with the 'scandal' of having allowed his daughter to marry while she was 'not yet fourteen.' To dispel the delusion we have only to contradict your statement, or rather your assumption that 'the wedding actually took place on March 6, 1878.' The fact is, the wedding, in the European sense of the word, actually took place in the Brahma Mandir, on the 20th October, 1880, when the Mahārājah was eighteen and the Maharanee sixteen.

"The initial ceremony of 6th March was a mere *betrothal*, and the parties did not live together as man and wife till October last, more

than two years and seven months after they were betrothed. Surely the marriage of a girl who has entered upon her seventeenth year is not child-marriage.—I beg to remain, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

KRISHNA BIHARI SEN,
for Secretary, Brahma Missionary Conference."

I proceed to make a few comments on this letter. In the first place, the writers of it will be candid enough, I hope, to admit that they have made one great mistake. They have quoted from a newspaper report, which was necessarily imperfect and abbreviated, instead of waiting till the actual words of my lecture had been communicated to them. Now that they have the published lecture in their possession, they will find that much of their letter might have been left unwritten, or at least worded in a very different manner. For example, a reference to my actual words will show that they have no grounds for asserting that I entertain the notion that the members of the Brāhma Samāj of India are a "narrow clique of Mr. Sen's followers, who revere him as more than human, and honour him as an infallible Pope over his church."

What I said was, that charges of this kind had been brought against Mr. Sen, and this the printed documents in my possession abundantly prove. But, say the writers of the letter, such a charge can only be true in so far as "we regard him as an inspired apostle commissioned by God to lead us." This seems rather a naïve way of refuting the charge, especially as they subsequently admit that their own apostleship is only "to bear witness to the New Dispensation." But the spontaneous confessions made by Mr. Sen's own friends in the editorial articles of the *Indian Mirror* seem to have furnished Mr. Sen's opponents with fair reasons for bringing against him the charge of which the writers of the letter complain. Take, for instance, the following:—

"The minister is a part, a great part, a central part of the dispensation. It is he who has given the life and tone to the entire movement, and as he is completely identified with it, his

preachings and precepts we accept as the embodiment of the dispensation itself. Thus, then, we cannot do away with this man, who is the leader, the mouth-piece, the heaven-appointed missionary of what we call the Brahmo Somāj. The *Indian Mirror* accepts in its entirety the plan and programme of his life—the plan and programme that is to give India her life and salvation.”—*Indian Mirror*, Nov. 16, 1879.

Again, we find that Paṇḍit Bijoy Kṛishṇa Gosvami, the oldest of Mr. Sen's missionaries, and the only one who seceded on account of the Kuch Behār marriage, stated in a letter to the Dacca vernacular paper that one evening Mr. Sen addressed a number of missionaries, of whom the Paṇḍit was one, saying to them: “What am I? You should have a clear and definite notion about that. Souls are of three orders,—the liberated, the seeking, and the bound. The liberated souls are the eternal companions of the Lord, they are now and then sent down by God. Such were Christ, Chaitanya, and others. I regard myself as that Christ and Chaitanya; for that soul am I. These liberated souls have also circles of companions, as John, Peter, etc., of Christ, and Adwaita, Nityananda, Haridas, and others of Chaitanya.”—(*Brahmo Public Opinion* of May 22, 1879). I am aware that this statement rests entirely on the authority of Paṇḍit B. K. Gosvami, and that some of the opposite party declared that his memory was at fault as to the exact words employed; but it furnishes a conclusive indication of the opinion that prevailed everywhere as to Mr. Sen's own idea of his own character.

So recently as Saturday, January 22, of the present year, Mr. Sen spoke for nearly two hours on the “New Dispensation.” The *Statesman* of Monday, January 24, says in its leading article: “Certainly no one who has heard him on former occasions will say that his genius ever showed more strength and brightness than now.” It then describes the lecture from recollection, and although admitting that Keshab Chandar Sen laboured to sink his own individuality, it continues as follows:—

“To many, no doubt, the pretensions of the ‘New Dispensation’ will seem astounding and extravagant; to some they may seem impious, if not absurd. Keshab Chander Sen boldly announces that this New Dispensation is the rising of a new sun in the East, destined to dispel the darkness of ages. It is comparable with the Jewish and Christian revelations; it is, indeed, the necessary sequel and completion of these; not greater, but yet an onward step, a broader development in the spiritual growth and education of mankind. If he does not equal himself with Moses, Christ, or even Paul, whose feet he is ready to clasp and kiss, he claims them as his spiritual progenitors, and regards his church as the perfect outcome of theirs by a necessary process of evolution. Moses necessitated Christ; Christ necessitated Paul; and Paul necessitated Keshab Chander Sen.”

I am quite ready to accept the explanation that when Keshab Chandar Sen declared he had had visions of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and St. Paul, he was only speaking figuratively, but whether the public in general will agree that all the strange things asserted in the *Mirror* as revealed during the “Pilgrimages of Saints” can be made to bear a metaphorical interpretation is doubtful.

As to the question whether Mr. Sen has been justly accused of exercising despotic authority over his followers, it is at least clear from the speeches made at the foundation of the Sādhārāṇa Brāhma Samāj in May, 1878, that a strong feeling existed among the protesting members of the Samāj that all attempts at organizing a constitution during the previous six or seven years had been rendered nugatory by the action of a particular party (see Miss Collet’s Year Book for 1878, pp. 64–70). Moreover, the official correspondence which preceded the actual schism shows that no constitutional institutions answering to the description given by the writers of the present letter then existed.

The only other point is the Kuch Behār marriage. Had the writers of the letter signed by Mr. K. B. Sen waited to ascertain my actual words, they might have avoided attributing expressions to me which I never used. I certainly stated that the marriage took place on March 6, 1878, but I

added that "after the wedding, and *before living with his child-wife*, the young Mahārāja set out for England." It is astonishing that the members of the Brāhma Missionary Conference should venture to deny the fact that the ceremony of March 6, 1878, was the legal marriage. What did the "official paper," published in the *Indian Mirror* of December 29, 1878, notify to the public?—

"The principal event of the year was the Rājah's marriage, which was celebrated on the 6th March at the Raj Bari in Kuch Behār, in the presence of a large assemblage of spectators, both Native and European. The difficulty of reconciling the Hindū and Brahmo ceremonial forms was, as may be imagined, an arduous one. It was necessary to the legality of the marriage that the rites should be Hindū in all essential features. After much deliberation and argument Babu Keshab Chander Sen was brought to see that the Rājah not being a Brahmo, and the Brahmo Marriage Act not being in force in Kuch Behār, it was absolutely essential that the marriage, if it took place at all, should be a Hindū marriage."

And again :—

"The marriage has since been formally declared legal by the Commissioner, acting under Government as the law-giving power, and his declaration to that effect has been filed among the permanent records in the archives of Kuch Behār."

There cannot be the least doubt that the ceremony of March 6, 1878, was the true legal marriage by which Mr. Sen's daughter was made Mahārāṇī of Kuch Behār, and by which title she would have been ever afterwards known, even had she never lived with her husband. Every will-wisher of the Samāj will be glad to hear that a private religious ceremony in strict accordance with theistic doctrine was performed on October 20, 1880, but this does not justify the members of the Missionary Conference in calling "the nuptial ceremony" of March, 6, 1878, a mere betrothal. They must know very well that had the young Mahārāja died before October 20, 1880, Mr. Sen's daughter would have been treated as his widow.

Surely it would be better to admit at once that the acquiescence of Mr. Sen in the performance of the marriage ceremony at so early an age, before his daughter was fourteen, was an error of judgment.

Nor can Mr. Sen's admirers shut their eyes to the unwisdom of some of the sensational novelties recently introduced into the forms of worship of his own Samāj. Witness the following notice in the *Sunday Mirror* of January 23, 1881: "The Flag of the New Dispensation will be unfurled in the Brahma Mandir this evening after Kirtan, when the Arati will be chanted."

What this Arati means is not quite clear. In its ordinary acceptation, the word denotes the act of waving lights before an idol or object of worship. If homage of any kind is directed towards the flag (which *Brahmo Public Opinion* of January 27 declares to be the case), it cannot but be matter of regret that such a proceeding should be countenanced by the leaders of the Brāhma Samāj of India.

Yet, in spite of the mistakes which Mr. Keshab Chandar Sen has committed, every friend of India will admit that he has laid his country under incalculable obligations. Perhaps the exact value of the debt she owes him can scarcely be estimated aright till his career is completed. But one thing is certain, that whatever differences of opinion may arise in regard to his merits as a Reformer, even his bitterest opponents must agree that India has never produced a man of more commanding ability and conspicuous talents as an orator, or of more earnestness of character and self-sacrificing devotion as a religious leader.

His latest annual address, before referred to, attracted an immense concourse of hearers, among whom was the Reverend E. H. Bickersteth, of Christ Church, Hampstead, the author of "Yesterday, To-day, and For Ever." Mr. Bickersteth gives his impression of the address in a recent letter written from Bishop's Palace, Calcutta:—

"This afternoon (Jan. 22) Keshab Chander Sen gave his annual address to the Brahma Samāj in the Town Hall. The huge hall

was crammed, I should say 3,500 men and some six ladies; almost all were Hindūs, thoughtful, earnest-looking men. He spoke for one hour and forty minutes—a torrent of eloquence. He denies the Godhead of Christ, though, with this grave and grievous lack, nothing in parts could be more impassioned than his language of devotion to Christ. He thinks himself the prophet of a 'New Dispensation,' as he calls it, which is to affirm the Unity of the Godhead, and the unity of all earnest creeds—Hindū, Moslem, and Christian—who worship God. Of course it is a great advance upon the multiform idolatry of this land; and again and again I said to myself 'Quoniam talis es, utinam noster esses.'"

It is to be hoped that much of the bitterness of feeling produced by the late schism has already passed away, and that the various Samājes of India may ere long forget their petty differences, and agree upon some course of combined and systematic action. Surely the little army of Reformers, however courageous, is not strong enough to bear weakening by internal divisions. A compact and serried front is urgently needed in the presence of malignant foes, who neglect no opportunity of marshalling their forces, and uniting in active co-operation for the destruction of the scattered ranks of their opponents. I hail as an augury of approaching peace and reconciliation among the divided theistic churches, the recent congratulatory letter addressed by the Prārthanā Samāj of Bombay to the Brāhma Samāj of India, in which the writers express themselves thus:—

"We trust that the devotions of the next week will be a prelude to a mutual reconciliation with all who agree with you and with us in thinking that union with reasonable differences is quite possible, if there is mutual confidence in one another and in the guidance of Providence."

In conclusion, I am happy to say that I have just received a letter from Mr. Keshab Chandar Sen, written in a spirit of Christian charity and humility well worthy of imitation. The letter closes with these words: "In future I beg you will do me the favour, whenever any controversy is raised, to

seek and publish the fullest information available regarding all parties implicated. Depend upon me I have not the least wish to influence your judgment, I only wish, as you certainly wish, that the whole truth should be given out. There can be no doubt that truth will triumph at last."

NOTE.—It is not worth while to do more than refer in a note to a certain critic of the *Ahitaishī* and *Chidrānveshī* type, who doing me the honour to notice my paper on "Indian Theistic Reformers" in the *Academy* of January 22, 1881, describes it as "a résumé of the information contained in Miss S. D. Collet's *Brahmo Year Book*, and Miss Carpenter's publications;" ignoring my own notification that the paper is "principally the result of my own researches in India." The reviewer has probably himself never been in India, and never personally associated with the Brāhmas, or he would be aware that they are better English scholars than they are Sanskrit. It was with the precise object of making this clear that in giving the English version of the creed of the Brāhmas in their own words, I occasionally inserted their own corresponding Sanskrit version. It might have been expected that the *Academy* reviewer would have had sufficient acuteness to perceive that the English version of the Sanskrit was not mine at all, and that I should have been no more justified in altering the words than he would be in altering the present English version of the Athanasian Creed. Moreover, I think the Brāhmas are right in *popularly* translating *nir-avayava* by "formless," rather than by "partless," and *mukti-kāraṇa* by "Giver of salvation," rather than by "Causer of emancipation." Nor can I agree with the reviewer in translating *Brahmīya-sabhā* by "Society of the Brāhmos or believers in Brahman," and *Tattva-bodhinī sabhā* by "Truth-teaching or Truth-rousing Society." Since he quotes Boehtlingk's Dictionary, he has only to refer to the same work to find that *bodhinī* is used for "knowing" quite as much as for "teaching," and most people, I think, will agree with me that *Tattva-bodhinī* when applied to a Society is best translated by "Truth-knowing," or "Truth-investigating." Is it to impress us with his knowledge of grammar that the reviewer informs us that Brāhma is from a base brahman? If I had been writing a scientific, instead of a popular article, I should have been careful to notify the same undoubted fact (compare my *Sanskrit Grammar*, published by the University of Oxford,

4th edition, p. 63), though I should have been sorry to have fallen into the error of stating that "there is no such word as brāhmā, except in composition," and that it does not therefore exist as a nominative or accusative case. What I asserted was that the word Brāhma is an adjective formed from the *name* Brāhmā. I asserted this with the simple object of guarding the general reader from confounding the name Brahmā with the name Brahmā, which he might have done had I merely given the grammatical derivation; and I maintain that I was right. The reviewer seems quite unconscious of his own inconsistency in first approving the popular character of my paper, and then expecting its popular character to be abandoned.
