

## CHAPTER II.

### CHILDHOOD AND EARLY INSTRUCTION.

It was noon when Isvar Chandra took his birth. His father, Thakurdas, was not at home, at that time. He had gone to the neighbouring *Hat* (market) of Kumarganja, which was nearly a mile off from his village. On his way back from the market, he met his father Ramjay, who told him that a bull-calf was born that day in their house. By this he alluded to his newly born grandchild by way of joke, but in this jest he darkly hinted at the future character of Vidyasagar. What he really meant by this joke, was that the child would be as stubborn as a bull-calf; and, most probably, he foresaw this from the marks on the child's fore-head and the lines on the palm of his hand. Besides, the science of astrology showed that the child was born at the moment when the moon was



connected with the *bull* [11](one of the signs of the zodiac). Those, who are born at such a time, must be stubborn and strong-minded like a bull. The *Sastras* say:—

সন্মার্গবৃত্তোহতিতরাং  
সত্যপ্রতিজ্ঞোহতিবিশালকীর্তিঃ।  
প্রসন্নগাত্রোহতিবিশালনেত্রো বৃষে স্থিতে রাত্রিপতৌ  
প্রসূতঃ॥

— ভোজ।

"One, born at a time when the master of the night (*i. e.* the moon) is at the *bull*, must be righteous, ever-pleased, complaisant, true to his word, far-famed, large-eyed, strong-bodied, and of amiable appearance."

Stubbornness was one of the principal features of Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar's character, and it was conspicuously visible in most of his acts. Stubbornness generates fixedness of purpose. It was for this reason that Stephen Gerard employed under him men of stubborn character. Isvar Chandra had a great fixedness of purpose. Whatever he handled, whether good or bad, he never left undone or half-done.



Thakurdas could not grasp the real purport of his father's jest. He understood the simple meaning that a bull-calf was actually born in their house, as at that time one of their cows was pregnant and her delivery was expected every moment. Both father and son soon returned home. Thakurdas went into the cowshed, and found that the cow was not yet delivered. Thakurdas's father then took him to the nursery, and showed him the child, saying, at the same time, that this was the bull-calf he referred to, and then explained its real meaning.

Sambhu Chandra Vidyaratna, one of the younger brothers of Isvar Chandra, says in his life of Vidyasagar:—

"Our grandfather, Ramjay Bandyopadhyay, who had then returned from his pilgrimage, wrote with lac-dye a few words in the lower part of the newly-born child's tongue, before the severance of its umbilical cord, and then told his wife, Durga Devi, that as an effect of this writing the child would be incapacitated for a little while from sucking the breast of its mother. He also said that the infant's delicate tongue,



being handled by his hard, rough hand, the child would stammer for a time; but that, being born at a most auspicious moment, the child would in future become a great man, and that his fame would spread far and wide." All this, Sambhu Chandra says, he heard from his father and from his paternal and maternal grandmothers. But Vidyasagar himself has made no mention of this in his auto-biography.

Shortly after Isvar Chandra's birth, Kenaram Acharyya, a great astrologer of the time, prepared his horoscope, and he was greatly surprised at the indications. He foresaw that the future of Vidyasagar was very auspicious, and that he would become a great man. That the Hindu astrology is no myth, but a well-founded science, is clearly proved from Vidyasagar's horoscope. All its predictions were fulfilled to the letter. As the subject is very abstruse and incomprehensible without a careful study of the science, we forbear entering into a discussion of Isvar Chandra's horoscope.

As we have said before, Isvar Chandra was born at a propitious moment, and this was verified by the surrounding circumstances. Slowly, but



surely, his father's troubles lessened. He began to have a larger income, and soon there was a sudden change, on all sides, for the better. There was a general talk in the neighbourhood that a most fortunate child was born to Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay. Hence Isvar Chandra was a great favourite with the neighbours. The grandfather, Ramjay Tarkasiddhanta, gave the child the name, Isvar (which means *Lord*).

The village Birsingha was not in a very flourishing state at that time. It had no English-teaching school. There was only a vernacular *pathasala* (primary school) for giving little boys an elementary education in reading and writing the Bengali language. After a few year's training in this school, the sons of comparatively well-to-do Brahmans were sent to *tols* (seats of Sanskrit education), where they had to study hard for several years, and then undergo a set of examinations held by the professor himself. After the final examination, the professor gave the pupils each a degree or title, and then dismissed them, who, in their turn, then opened *Tols* and set themselves up as independent professors of Sanskrit.



Isvar Chandra was now five years old, and it was time, according to the Hindu Sastras, that he should begin to read and write. At this time, there was a primary *pathsala* in Birsingha under the teachership of Sanatan Sarkar. School-masters of this class were generally rigorous and fond of using their rods freely. They were strict followers of the ancient proverb,—'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' Sanatan Sarkar, the village school-master of Birsingha, used to beat mercilessly the tender-aged boys under his care, and he was an object of terror to them. Isvar Chandra's father, Thakurdas, disapproved of this harsh dealing, and he heartily disliked Sanatan. He was, therefore, in great anxiety with respect to his little boy's education, and began to look out for a more humane teacher, who would use his rod less freely, and in whose hands he could safely place his little son.

His choice fell on a Kulin Brahman, by name Kalikanta Chattopadhyay, who had formerly been a native of Birsingha, but had subsequently removed to his father-in-law's at Garuti, a small village close to Bhadresvar in



the district of Hugli. This Kalikanta had many wives in different places, as was the custom with the *Kulin* Brahmans of those days. Thakurdas sent for him at his father-in-law's, and on his arrival, set up another *pathsala* at Birsingha with Kalikanta as its teacher. Kalikanta, unlike his fellow-brother Sanatan, was a man of amiable disposition and considerable humanity. His treatment of his pupils was mild, decent and genial. He very seldom gave them corporal punishment. He tried, by gentle and soothing words, to rectify their mistakes, and to impart to them educational and moral lesson. He secured the warmest love and esteem of his pupils, and sincere friendship and patronage of their guardians. Such was the village school-master, who was introduced into Birsingha, and into the hands of this worthy teacher was Isvar Chandra placed by his father, at the early age of five years.

The boy, Isvar Chandra, had uncommon parts, which began to develop early in this elementary school. He finished the course of study taught in this kind of school in three year's time, and at this early age of eight, he wrote a



very good hand. Good handwriting had a very high place at that time, and was taken to be the best recommendation, a bride could have. The teacher, Kalikanta, was greatly surprised at the degree of intelligence and memory displayed by young Isvar Chandra, and he was often heard to say that this boy would become a great man in his after-life.

After he had been one year with Kalikanta, Isvar Chandra was seriously ill with Enlargement Spleen and Dysentery. He had, therefore, to be removed to the house of his maternal uncle at village *Patul*, for treatment. His younger brother, Dinabandhu, accompanied him. Here he was placed under the treatment of Ram Lochan *Kaviraj*, a native physician of Kothra, which is a village close to Khanakul Krishnanagar in the Hugli district. Under the treatment of this able physician, he was soon cured perfectly. When he regained strength enough to be able to undertake a journey, he came to his native village, Birsingha, and he was again placed under the tuition of the worthy teacher, Kalikanta, who loved his young pupil, Isvar Chandra, exceedingly. In the even-



ing, after he had dismissed his school, Kalikanta used daily to give him separate lessons in native Arithmetic, Mensuration, and other subjects, which formed the curriculum of study in elementary vernacular schools of those days, and then, when the lessons were over, he used to carry the boy to his home. For this reason Isvar Chandra adored him ever after.

In his early years, Isvar Chandra was very naughty, and many stories are told of his childish waywardness and mischievous freaks. Surely enough, most boys are naughty and mischievous in their early years, but their naughtiness is never called to mind, nor does it ever appear in the pages of immortal history. But one feels a sort of curiosity to hear, with thrilling pleasure, the tales of mischievous freaks of those who, in after years, led a glorious life, and left a good name. Chaitanya, otherwise known as Gauranga, the great Hindu reformer of *Vaishnaism*, while a young boy, used to steal and eat up fruit and other articles of divine worship offered by his compatriot Brahmans. Shakspeare, in his early days, associated himself with some other wicked boys, and stole



deer. The famous poet Wordsworth, in his boyhood, exceedingly tortured his mother. It is said that, one day, young Wordsworth, on looking at an old picture hanging from the walls, suddenly caught hold of his elder brother's arms, and requested him to lash the picture. His elder brother declining to comply with his inhuman request, he himself took up a whip, and with it lashed the picture several times. The reverend Doctor Peli was very naughty in his early years. He was a terror to his neighbours, who could not rest peacefully at night, for his depredations. Robert (afterwards *Lord*) Clive, the founder of the British empire in India, while only a little boy, used to ascend on the steeple of a very high church, and sit there composedly. Instances of such childish naughtiness on the part of men, who in after-life attained superiority and greatness, tend in a great measure to excite curious pleasurable feelings. The early part of the lives of many of these great men is conspicuously marked by freaks of childish naughtiness.

During his latter days, on one occasion, a gentleman paid Vidyasagar a friendly visit, ac-



accompanied with his young boy. Vidyasagar remarked that the boy would become a great man, at which the visitor smiled, saying that the boy was very naughty. Vidyasagar retorted as follows:—'Never mind, my friend, I too was very naughty in early days. I used to steal fruits from the orchards of my neighbours, and defile with soil other people's clothes left to dry in the sun. I was an object of terror to my neighbours.'

Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar was often heard to frankly admit his childish naughtiness. One Mathur Mandal was his near neighbour. Almost every day, on his way to or from school, he eased himself in front of Mathur Mandal's outer gates. Mathur's mother and wife removed the soil with their own hands. Mathur's wife, now and then lost her temper, and wanted to punish the culprit, but her mother-in-law prevented her, saying that she had heard from the boy's grand-father that he would become a great man. Whenever he passed by a rice or other corn field, of which there are plenty in Bengal, he used to tear away the ears of the newly-ripe corn and trample them under foot,



or scatter them to the winds, thus causing a great mischief to his neighbours. Now and then he chewed and devoured a few of the unhusked grains. On one of these occasions, the awn of a barley stuck into his throat, and he was in danger of his life. His grandmother drew it out with great dexterity, and thus saved the boy from imminent death. This wicked boy, in after-life, became a most inoffensive, humble, peaceful, pious man. In fact, such was the case with many men, who though very naughty in their early years, turned afterwards to be good and great men.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ADVENT TO CALCUTTA.

One day, after Isvar Chandra had finished his preliminary education in the primary school of his native village, his teacher, Kalikanta, came to his father, Thakurdas, and said:—"This boy is very intelligent. He has finished his curriculum here. You should now take him to Cal-