

A Calcutta Diary**A Hundred Years Ago and Today**

MONDAY's morning papers this is pure affectation, for Calcutta has no evening papers worth talking about—carried photographs of a statue of perhaps the greatest Bengali born, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. The brief report underneath said what was obvious enough, that birds' droppings had thickly settled on the head. There is an element of honesty in this neglect of the statue. After all, the present generation of Bengalis has no time at all for the values sought to be created by Vidyasagar, it would have been hypocritical to disown the man and cleanse the statue. Unreadably sloppy biographies of Ramakrishna and insufferably sentimental movies on Mahaprabhu Chaitanya are what the Bengali likes today. He has no right, to take Vidyasagar's name once a year. The West Bengal Pradesh Congress is well advised to celebrate Dr Roy's birthday rather than Vidyasagar's.

The difference is brought into sharper relief by the Pradesh Congress' decision to celebrate the centenary of the Sepoy Mutiny. The celebrations will go on from August 3 to August 26 and include, in passing, the celebration of the tenth anniversary of Independence. There will be processions with torches led by a Minister and there will be mass meetings addressed by leaders from the Centre and some States. Much money will be spent, and a good time will doubtless be had by many. The venue will be the Eden Gardens. A sort of fall Adam had not had.

Now a great deal about what happened in 1857 is obscure. Historians have still to make up their minds whether it was only a feudal revolt against the British or a national movement for freedom. Where there is no difference of opinion at all is that the Bengalis played a very insignificant part in the whole affair, although the first incident may well have taken place at Barrackpore. When the Bengali attitude was not indifferent to the mutiny, it was almost always hostile. Raj Narain Bose is on record on one point. He used to go to school with a dhoti underneath his trousers—just in case the muti-

neers came. The intellectual leaders of Bengal were all agreed that a reversal of history, which is all the success of the mutiny would have meant, would be a retrograde thing. Rightly or wrongly, they thought that the end of British rule in 1857 would be a step backward for India. Their confidence in the British was upheld, and the mutiny ended with the further consolidation of British rule. They immediately proceeded to see how best to take advantage of the coming of the British. Came the University, came schools for girls, came what we call the Bengali renaissance.

The correctness or otherwise of this attitude is not under discussion now. What is intended is only the reassertion of two facts: one, Bengal ignored or disliked the Sepoy Mutiny; and two, the Bengalis collaborated with the British and experienced the most creative phase of their national existence in recent history. The impact of Western culture had just begun to intoxicate the Bengali, and he was not going to change it for, let us say it, another spell of decaying Islamic culture. The leaders of the renaissance being mostly Hindus, they could scarcely be expected to forget that they were very often in a position of inferiority vis-a-vis the Moslem. It was, I grant you unpatriotic of the Bengalis to decide that they would rather be inferior to some foreigners than to their own country men, but the fact remains that that is how they decided. Even as the present-day Hindus will do well to ask themselves why so many Moslems wanted a State of their own ninety years later, the Moslems in India today might ask themselves why, a hundred years ago, the Hindus preferred British rule to Mughal rule.

Whence, then, the Bengali's present enthusiasm for the Sepoy Mutiny? A very facile answer would be that the Bengalis now consider themselves a part of the Indian nation and, therefore, participate in the celebration of what the rest of the country considers a national movement to liberate the whole country. A less charitable but not necessarily less correct view would

be that the Bengali has now lost all consciousness of his former—and it is former intellectual superiority, and is only too glad to swim with the current of what passes for national sentiment. Shedding his dreadful sense of separateness can do the Bengali nothing but good, but only if certain other differences are recognised. One is that the dissociation of a hundred years ago was an intellectual and deliberate decision, and that the decision today may be one of opportunism, of expediency.

There are obvious objections to this. The distortion of history may be regarded a minor offence, although here again the Bengali should remember that the two Bengali historians commissioned to write the history of the Sepoy Mutiny as Maulana Azad would like it written declined to oblige Authority. Both retained their integrity, and one went to the extent of repudiating the official view in unequivocal terms. It is a long time, however, since Bengali intellectualism had anything to do with Congress politics in the State; and herein can be seen one of the basic weaknesses of Bengal politics. What the Pradesh Congress has done is only to extend official recognition to the fact of Bengali insignificance in Indian politics.

There is much to be said for the point of view that Bengal should fall in line with the rest of India, not only in lines of action but also in lines or thought. This country badly needs some emotional integration, and the Sepoy Mutiny could be used as an excellent unifier. There is historical evidence that in some places Hindus and Moslems fought together what was regarded as a common enemy, Except for an artificially respired phase or two Khilafat, for instance—the Congress nationalist movement has always been dogged by dissensions between Hindus and Moslems. To buttress the secular idea of 1957 it would indeed be wonderful to prove that in 1857 at least things were different. It may well be argued that what Plato called "a useful lie" would do us good.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

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would probably have looked at it differently. He was more Socratic than Platonic. He had the funny notion that truth was a better thing to stick to than expediency. It may yet be seen that the notion

isn't as funny as Atulya Ghosh, President of the Pradesh Comndttee, may think. It may yet be seen that the bluntly truthful Bengalis of a hundred years ago did rather better by Bengal than

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the "sharper" leaders of today. I said, "It may be," which carries with it the suggestion of the other possibility that it may not. Flibbertigibbet
July 29.

Book Review

Stockholders' Vade-Mecum

Investors' Encyclopaedia 1956-57. Kothari & Sons, Madras. Pages 2,329. Price Rs 20.

Investor's India Year Book 1957. Compiled by Place, Siddons and Gough. Orient Longmans, Calcutta. Pages 468. Price Rs 20.

THE twentieth edition of Kothari's Investors' Encyclopaedia has grown to 2,329 pages and maintains its tradition of comprehensiveness. 27 sections cover all Government and semi-Government loans, State enterprises and more than 1,500 companies in various industries. These are supplemented by sections dealing with company law, old and new, taxes, control of capital issues, procedure for the promotion of industries and the rules of the three leading stock exchanges in the country. Each industrial section, moreover, contains a brief review of the industry as a whole. The General Review at the beginning gives a compendious account of economic and financial developments of the year, together with the progress and targets of the two Five Year Plans, many of which are illustrated by graphs and charts. The annual production and employment statistics of 111 industries are presented for the seven years 1950 to 1956.

To bring out such a publication involves prodigious effort and one can speak only in superlatives of this bulky volume, even though the company information it gives generally comes up only to the end of 1955. The price remains unchanged at Rs 20 despite the larger bulk.

The Investor's India Year Book 1957 is a much older but substantially smaller publication the present volume is its 43rd edition and contains only 468 pages in all, covering less than 700 companies. It thus makes no claim to all-India coverage, except hi the matter of Government loans, other trustee securities, and perhaps railways. As with the last Year Book, it is difficult to perceive the principle on which companies have been selected. French Motor Co apparently makes the grade but Premier Automobiles fails to do so. Other notable omis-

sions, to quote only a few, are Tube Investments, Digvijay, I C I C I Walcharumagar, Atul and Calico. As compared with Kothari's 27 sections dealing with loans and companies. Place, Siddons and Gough are quite satisfied with 12. And probably to demonstrate their exclusive interest in Calcutta, the regulations of the Rom bay and Madras Stock Exchanges find no place in the Year Book.

What it lacks in coverage, the



"One has no protecting
power save prudence."

Juvenal.

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Year Book endeavours to make up in its 'critical' analysis, which is entitled 'Trials of Industrialisation', a bit of a climb down from last year's 'A Year of Socialism'. The change has resulted from the appraisal which concludes that official socialism is sobering down. The hard-headed practical men who wrote this survey place Ideology and common sense at conveniently opposite poles, and naturally proceed to expatiate on the virtues of the latter as against the vices of the former. After duly commenting upon the over-ambitiousness of the Second Plan, the Year Book states that "It is remarkable that when the goal for the rest of the economy is socialism, agriculture should be progressing along lines which are the exact opposite." One does not know what this means and whether, if this trend is really in existence, it meets with the approval of the compilers; there is no doubt, however, that the increased borrowing of the commercial banks from the Reserve Bank does not, for "such a development would put the country's private banking system firmly into the Government's hands. And from there it would probably be impossible to extricate it." Has the Bill Market Scheme succeeded so early in causing panic?

It is reassuring to investors to know all the same that the leading firm of brokers at Calcutta are no longer unduly scared of nationalisation and that they expect the future for the share market to be at least no worse than its past. Indeed they conclude that "so much water has been shaken out of the market in the past year that it would be surprising if the present level of prices did not disguise a number of first class bargains". From which may be drawn the inference that the private sector has not gone to the dogs in spite of Kaldor and T T K.