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SIR P. C. RAY

IN order to commemorate the eightieth birthday of Sir P. C. Ray an appeal has been issued by eminent Indians belonging to all walks of life for a fund, which would be associated with his name and utilised for the promotion of scientific and industrial research. The appeal, which we are publishing elsewhere, recalls what the Indian nation owes to Sir P. C. Ray and we would on this happy occasion like to dwell briefly on his truly eventful life.

Born on August 2, 1861, in a village called Raruli in Bengal, Prafulla Chandra was nurtured in a cultured family and brought up for a few years on the country estate of his father, Haris Chandra Ray. In 1870, the family moved to Calcutta, and Prafulla Chandra received his early education at the well-known Hare School, and later at the Metropolitan College founded by the illustrious Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

A Gilchrist Scholarship, which he won in a competitive examination, enabled him to proceed abroad in 1882 and work for his B.Sc. and D.Sc. degrees of Edinburgh University under Prof. Crum Brown. He secured the Hope Prize Scholarship, acted as a member of the staff and was also elected Vice-President of the University Chemical Society, of which Crum Brown was the President. Prominent among his fellow-students was James Walker, who later distinguished himself as a physical chemist. One striking event which throws considerable light on the burning patriotism and on the versatile talents of Prafulla Chandra was when he wrote his famous essay on India while still a student at Edinburgh. This, as is well known, brought the young Indian student a highly appreciative letter from John Bright, part of which was as follows: "There is an ignorance on

the part of the public in this country and great selfishness here and in India as to our true interests in India. The departures from morality and true statesmanship will bring about calamity and perhaps ruin, which our children may witness and deplore." It looks as if this might have been written yesterday!

Returning to India, Prafulla Chandra Ray joined Presidency College as an assistant professor in 1889 and found that Imperial Services were not meant for Indians, however talented they might be. His enthusiasm for research was, however, unbounded and it was at Presidency College that he began to infect his students with his enthusiasm for chemistry. He has been directly and indirectly the creator of that flourishing school of chemistry that we see in India to-day. Most of his later work was carried out at the University College of Science and Technology, which owes its origin to the genius of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and the munificence of Sir Taraknath Palit and Sir Rashbehary Ghose. At the invitation of Sir Asutosh, Sir P. C. Ray joined the Palit Chair of Chemistry in 1916, which he held till a few years back. His scientific work has embraced varied fields in inorganic and organic chemistry and his monumental work on the "History of Hindu Chemistry" brought him a great tribute from that world-renowned savant Berthelot. The founding of the Indian Chemical Society was one of the products of his life-long scientific labour.

What is, however, noticeable in the career of Prafulla Chandra is a passionate love for India and his anxiety to make India modern, scientifically minded and industrialised. It

is this urge that led him to his pioneering effort in founding the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works, Ltd. Although Sir P. C. Ray has not only founded this firm but has helped its progress in every conceivable way, it is common knowledge that he himself refused to derive any financial benefit from it. It is up to this firm now to redeem its debt by contributing liberally to the fund for which the appeal has been issued.

As a philanthropist and a man whose heart goes out to his fellow-countrymen in every distress, Sir P. C. Ray needs no praise. His colossal efforts during the North Bengal Flood, his literally spending himself in order to help poor students and in order to support various organisations for social uplift are well known. In fact, when one reflects on the life of Sir P. C. Ray, one would find it difficult to find a parallel embodying in one personality his utter selflessness bordering on asceticism, his passionate devotion to science and learning in varied branches, his consuming love for his country and for the lowly and the poor, and his almost evangelical efforts to get this country out of the rut of obscurantism and superstition and put it on the road of science and industry. There is indeed hardly any aspect of India's national renaissance that does not bear the indelible impress of Sir P. C. Ray's leadership and untiring work. It is a matter of pride for any nation to be able to honour such a man and we would heartily endorse the appeal which seeks to perpetuate his eightieth birthday by raising funds for the promotion of scientific and industrial research, which has been the central love of his life.