

HIS HIGHNESS MAHARAJA PRATAPSIH GAEKWAR.

There was great rejoicing when His Highness the <sup>new</sup> Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda was born on June 29th 1908, in the modest Motibag bungalow in the grounds of the Laxmi Vilas Palace.

The official records show that a salute of 21 guns was immediately fired from the State battery and a Gazette Extraordinary issued to announce the birth of a grandson, and ultimate successor, to Maharaja Sir Sayajirao. The latter who was then staying with His Excellency the Governor of Bombay in Poona, was overjoyed to know that the direct succession to the great Gaekwar heritage was assured, for he knew then that the health of the heir-apparent, the Yuvaraj Fatesinh ~~was not easily~~ <sup>ending</sup> ~~led~~ to a premature <sup>of</sup> a life of great promise.

Rejoicing and holidays were general and among the ceremonies, it is noted that sugar was distributed throughout the city from the backs of elephants. The British Resident of the day was a beneficiary in this respect, for the Prime Minister, Khan Bahadur Kersaspji Rustamji Ladachanji, accompanied by the Maharaja's brother, Shrimant Anand Rao, drove in full procession to the Residency to announce the birth of the little prince and to present the Resident with sugar.

Directly his official stay with the Governor of Bombay ended, Maharaja Sayajirao hastened back to his capital to see his grandson and a contemporary scribe, a palace official who was present at the time, records that "His Highness was all raptures" when he saw the baby. He ordered a special commemoration Durbar to be held in the palace, gave various entertainments and

lavishly distributed sweets to children and food and clothing to the poor.

In accordance with custom, the naming ceremony of the Rao royal grandson took place on the thirteenth day. His father wished the baby to be called Victor. The Maharaja agreed and chose the Sanskrit connotation "Pratap" which more nearly means "valour", adding to it suffix "sinh" meaning "lion", from his father's name. The present ruler of Baroda thus became Pratapsinh.

All too soon, the rejoicings gave place to deep sorrow. In his youth, the Yuvaraj Patesinh Rao had suffered from a nervous complaint but under expert medical treatment, this was thought to have disappeared for ever. Unhappily, only a few brief weeks after the birth of his son, this complaint reappeared with suddenness and defied the efforts for all the specialists. There came about that the little prince was never to know his father, whose life, with its promise of every happiness and success, was cut short at the early age of twenty-six.

The Yuvaradni Radhavatibai Sahab had never enjoyed robust health, and there is no doubt that this severe blow affected her delicate constitution. She devoted herself ~~unreservedly~~ to the baby and to his two elder sisters but as the years passed, it became evident that her life also was to be short. She was stricken by a mortal complaint from the sufferings of which death came as a welcome relief in 1919.

In his early boyhood, the Yuvaraj Pratapsinh Rao, was thus deprived of both parents. The late Maharaja Sahab had to replace them both and to shoulder all responsibility for his grandson's upbringing. This heavy responsibility he assumed with serious determination and his private letter and diaries disclose how much

loving care and thought he gave to the preparation of his eventual successor to a great heritage. This determination is the more to be commended in that the Maharaja himself suffered from <sup>poor</sup> different health in those vital years and had to tackle important problems which constantly disturbed such peace of mind as any ruler can hope to achieve.

Maharaja Gayaji Rao personally supervised every detail of the young prince's education and upbringing. It is quite clear from his letter that he had no intention of leaving anything to chance. Advice he would invite and consider carefully, but the decision and ultimate responsibility was to be his alone.

This meticulous care is understandable, for the Maharaja's own education, which ~~was~~ <sup>continued</sup> until after his adoption into the succession at the age of thirteen, was so concentrated that he missed not only most youthful pleasures but many of what he regarded as the essentials of a broad education. In addition, experience had proved that the purely Western education given to Indian Princes did not always prove satisfactory and might indeed have undesirable results in some respects.

~~The~~ The grandfather was resolved that what he considered to be mistakes in the education he had received should not be repeated in the case of his grandson. The first essential was that he should live as nearly a normal boy's life as his position permitted. Secondly, he must learn to live a disciplined life in wholesome surroundings. Thirdly, he must have a sound all-round education on a systematic basis but without cramming & the Western element must be balanced and incidental in the whole scheme. Fourthly, the prince must learn the virtue of hard work and the value of independent thinking.

It will be seen that the educational aim was very high, and deliberately so. The Maharaja wrote feelingly in 1923: "Times are changing and Princes cannot be allowed to lag behind their educated countrymen. I personally think the Princes ought to be better educated than ordinary men, if they are to hold their proper position."

The letters which His Highness wrote on this subject are full of interest and the records show that the Yuvaraj Pratapsinh Rao responded admirably to a careful plan of upbringing. Endowed by nature with a sturdy physique and excellent health, he also showed at an early age that he had an alert and receptive mind, and an independence of thought and judgment which augured well. All open air pursuits came readily to him and his studies were pursued with intelligence and application, but without bookishness. This response pleased His Highness who remarked that he had as little use for a flannelled fool as for a bookworm. Naturally, matters did not go smoothly all the time. Sometimes the tutors and guardians were at cross-purposes among themselves, or wrongly interpreted His Highness' wishes. Once or twice there were intrigues which His Highness would not tolerate for one moment, and he acted with promptitude and firmness. But on the whole the plan went steadily and successfully forward.

The prince's early education was supervised by carefully selected Indian and English tutors and he received it with boys of his age selected from the sons of gards and officers of the State. When the preparatory school stage was over, he was sent for a time to the Rajkumars' College at Rajkot, but His Highness soon came to a decision that it would be better for him to take his place as an ordinary school boy at the Baroda High School mixing with those whom he was destined to rule. But unlike the ordinary school boy, he had to work in his spare time with coaches in special subjects.

His studies at the Baroda High School were interrupted by a stay of about eighteen months in England, when as the present Maharaja himself says, he derived great benefit from following the normal curriculum at a well-known preparatory school in Eastbourne.

When the prince had successfully matriculated, he completed his purely academic education with one year in the Baroda College and the other at the Deccan College, Poona, in preference to a similar period at Rugby for which he was originally entered. Finally, to round off his education (and this did not happen until 1931 when he had secured a good grounding in the state administration), his grandfather sent him on the old-fashioned "Grand Tour" of Europe and for a good holiday in England. It is worthy of note that never during this time was it permitted for the prince's mind to become obsessed with the thought of the power and responsibility that must eventually pass to him. Also, he was never allowed more money or more servants than a normal boy of aristocratic standing. He had to learn to do things for himself and in fact undertook one long foreign tour without either a valet or attendant, packing his own things and making his own travel arrangements.

College-days over, there arose the problem whether he should proceed to Oxford or Cambridge, like his father and uncles, or to an Indian University, or whether the State Administration itself did not provide a better training ground. His Highness pondered long over this and eventually decided that the State Administration offered advantages which could not be secured elsewhere. His letters show that the Maharaja decided this on the merits but influenced also by the feeling that he was growing old and that his heir and successor should gradually relieve him of some of the burdens of an unusually long reign.

This decision taken, where should the Yuvaraj, now of age, start his studies? This time His Highness did not hesitate for long. The start must be made at the foot of the ladder and in the Revenue department which, in a predominantly agricultural State like Baroda, is the backbone of the administration and provides close contact with people in every walk of life. As experience grew the Yuvaraj filled appointments of increasing importance. He was advised and guided by capable administrators like Sir V.T. Krishnana Chari, J.K. K. Shivraj Singh, Mr. R.S. Nars Patil, Mr. Justice Patkar, the late Rao Bahadur Kamal Dasai and others, but made his own decisions and accepted full responsibility for them. And throughout he received special coaching in the sciences which were essential for administration and rulership.

This training occupied eleven years but at an earlier stage, the Yuvaraj Sahib was already pulling his full weight in the administration. For the last seven years he worked as Karna Sachiv, an ministerial post which carries with it both membership of the Executive Council and the onerous responsibility of putting its decisions into effect. Thus he was enabled to acquire an intimate knowledge of the manner in which other state departments functioned. Also he was called upon to play a part in public life, to deputise for his grandfather at important functions and to make speeches which demand thoughtful preparation.

Not the least valuable of his varied experiences were the many occasions when he was required to work as Secretary to his grandfather, for he was able to acquire an insight into practical rulership and knowledge of the wide field of international affairs in which his grandfather played a leading part. It was in this capacity that the Yuvaraj attended such historic events as the

Round table Conference, the Imperial Conference and the Coronation. Though he has not been able to travel as extensively as he could have wished, the Yuvaraj has sought opportunities to visit all parts of India, while on his last foreign tour, he travelled extensively in Europe and then returned by way of the United States, Japan, China and Malaya.

Such is the outline of the training of the man, who at the age of thirty-one has been called upon to shoulder those responsibilities which his illustrious grandfather bore so ably for sixty-three years. The old Maharaja was wont to emphasise that in every activity in life, the foundations are everything. And it was solace to him always in his closing years to realise that in the case of his successor the foundations of a happy and successful life had been well and truly laid.

It is due to this foresight and care that the new Maharaja Sahib's life and character are so well-balanced. His family life, for example, is very happy. Ten years ago he married Shrimant Shantadevi Raje of the well-known Ghorpade family of Kolhapur. This union has been blessed with four daughters and two sons, of whom the eldest Fatmahsinh Raje, now becomes the Yuvaraj. Her Highness is very well educated and those privileged to meet her bear witness to her charming personality.

His Highness Maharaja Pratapsinh Raje, despite his growing responsibilities in office in recent years has always insisted upon a proportion of relaxation and exercise. Since his early days, he has been a devotee of personal physical fitness, and even if work and training must be placed first, there always had to be proper exercise, though perhaps limited by duty to an early

morning gallop or badminton by artificial light. All pastimes come easily to him but there are few relaxations he prefers to shooting and roughing it in outlying forest areas.

He is a fine horseman and a keen polo player and at at once one time he gave promise of emulating his ~~600~~ father's prowess at cricket, but while he remains a strong supporter of the game, he longer takes it seriously as a performer. Tennis instead has become His Highness' chief means of vigorous daily exercise and by dint of constant practice and skilled coaching, he has achieved a place among the leading doubles players in India. Indeed, had ~~it~~ not been for the death of his grandfather the Maharaja would have had the honour of leading India's Davis Cup team in its overseas ventures year.

In build the new Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda is sturdy and strong, shrewd, observant and self-reliant, he dislikes sycophancy and bald-truths. The whole truth and all the facts, put frankly and clearly, will have his sympathy and attention. He has a natural dignity and unassuming manner, knows his own mind and makes it up, but listens carefully to the views of ~~each~~ others. And once duties can be put aside, he is a most cheerful companion with a merry laugh.

One sees in His Highness Maharaja Pratapsinh Rao many of the admirable qualities which made his grandfather such a remarkable man, and in early manhood, it is possible to discern every promise that his stewardship, taken at a time of unusual difficulties, will be similarly distinguished by devotion and high achievement. Well endowed by nature, sympathetically educated and conscientiously trained, there could be no better successor than the new Maharaja Gaekwar to the illustrious predecessor to whom he owes so much and in whose footsteps he is determined to tread. ....