

LIFE AND TIMES
OF
Sir Hormusjee C. Dinshaw,
KT., O.B.E., M.V.O.

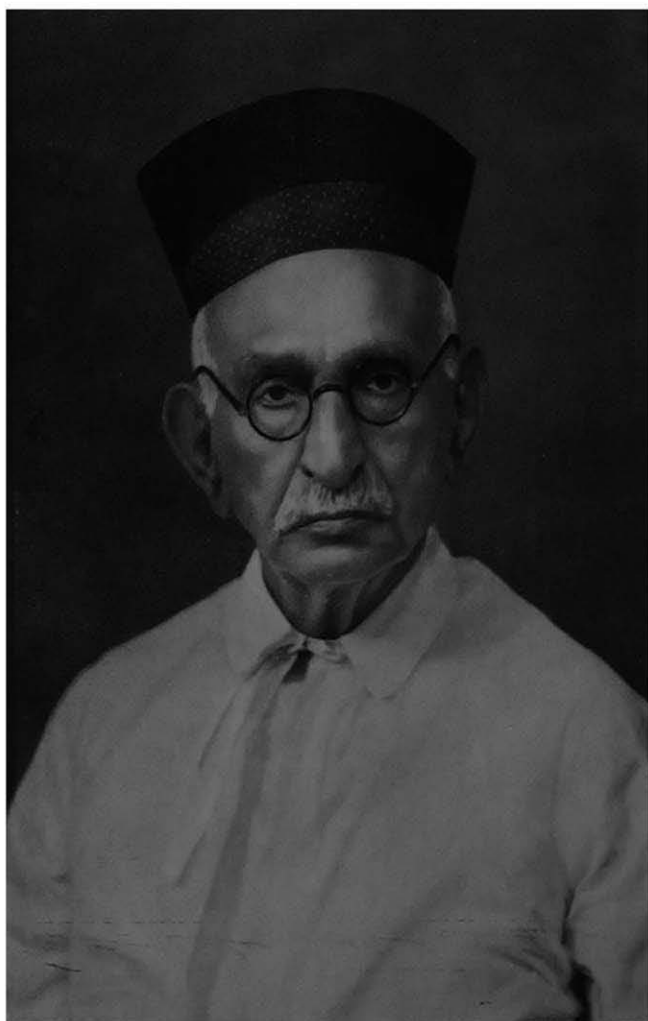
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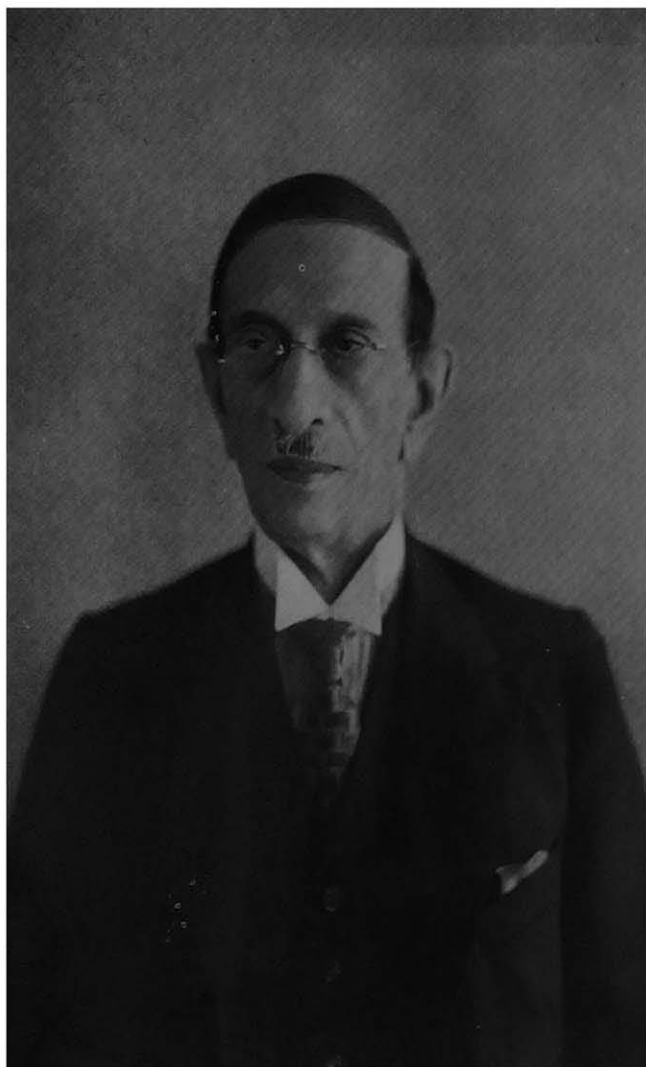
BY
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Dr. Sir Chimanlal H. Setalvad, K.C.I.E., LL.D.

FOREWORD

BY

DR. SIR CHIMANLAL H. SETALVAD,

K.C.I.E., LL.D.

I have much pleasure in writing this Foreword to the life of Sir Hormusjee Cowasjee Dinshaw, an excellent volume so ably written by Mr. A. N. Joshi, B.A., LL.B., an Advocate of the Bombay High Court.

Sir Hormusjee, who is a well-known figure in his community, is the head of the Adenwalla family which has for some generations made a great name as merchants and financiers at Aden and Bombay. The history of their rise from poverty to affluence makes very instructive reading. The kindness and courtesy of the Adenwallas are proverbial and Indians travelling between India and Europe can never forget the great hospitality that has always been extended to them by Sir Hormusjee and his family whenever they pass through Aden.

Sir Hormusjee is a very unassuming, kind and liberal gentleman and he has always extended his

helping hand to all objects of public usefulness. His silent charity to people of his own community as well as of other communities is well-known in Bombay. For his philanthropy and other acts of public utility he has made himself very popular not only in Aden and Bombay but in other parts of the Presidency as well. A detailed biography therefore of such a personality will be welcomed by the public.

CHIMANLAL H. SETALVAD

BOMBAY, *10th June*, 1939.



Mr. J. R. B. Jeejeebhoy, J. P .
The Author of the 'Introduction'

INTRODUCTION

BY

MR. J. R. B. JEEJEEBHOY

Those miserable sons of distressed humanity, steeped in the mire of dejection and despair, from whom fortune has turned away her smiling face and hope and desire have long ceased to cheer their onward path, and whose fancy invariably plays the self-tormentor, may read with pleasure and advantage the edifying life story of the Adenwalla family, a biography which will teach them how industry, enterprise and patience will defy the frowns of fortune and lead a penniless but an adventurous and pushing man of dauntless courage on to the paths of prosperity and elevate him to an honourable position in life. It is written by Mr. Ambelal Naranjee Joshi, an Advocate of the Bombay High Court, a Hindu whose knowledge of the ancient history of the Parsees, strange to say, might well put to the flush many a scholar belonging to the Parsee community.

Mr. Joshi is a student of Parsee theology, Parsee culture and Parsee history and has quenched his thirst for knowledge from the fountain of old Zoroastrian literature. He reads, he digests and he thinks and his admiration for this community reaches a high level of appreciative acknowledg-

ment. He is a lawyer by profession but has turned his back upon the allurements and temptations of a rising pile which an exclusive and devoted practice of this high calling offers to its votary, and has spared time and energy for literature and philosophy as a relaxation from the fatigues of his legal duties.

Born at Palsana, a village in the vicinity of Udwada, the chief religious centre of the Parsees, educated in a Parsee institution, brought up under the fostering care of a Parsee headmaster, a great disciplinarian who held to him the torch of knowledge and enlightenment, in fact reared in a purely Parsee atmosphere, Ambelal Joshi, except for his religious persuasions, is in all respects a Parsee amongst Parsees. He once confessed to me candidly that he owed his present position entirely to their enlightened, progressive and cultured influence. He has, therefore, a warm corner in him for the followers of Zoroaster and experiences all that romantic flutter of the heart when he reads of Parsee exploits and Parsee achievements. Such is his love and admiration for the ancient people of Iran, the descendants of Jamshed and Noshirwan.

He is attracted towards them not because he is enamoured of their romantic past but because he adores their religion, so practical and pure, because he is an admirer of their cleanliness, in dress and in heart, because of their liberal views, in politics and philanthropy, because of their social and affable

manners and lastly because of their universal adaptability, the strangeness vanishing before their accommodating temperament. Mr. Joshi has on his hands the compilation of a book on Zoroaster and Firdausi, he has great respect and reverence for the Parsees' past, for their just and valiant Emperors, for their historical dynasties and for the great epic the Shah Nameh, one of the sublimest products of human genius.

In short Mr. Joshi is a lawyer, a historian, a writer of historical short stories, an essayist, a dramatist, a critical student of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well as of English literature and comparative politics, is versed in international and constitutional laws and is a critic and authority on the Indian theatre. He is also a great connoisseur of art, music and painting. Moreover, he is an eloquent speaker in Gujarati and English and claims some of the enlightened and influential Parsees amongst his best personal friends. He is a delightful conversationalist and being a versatile man conversation with him is indeed an intellectual entertainment. He had made an excursion or two into political literature but now lives in the comparatively calmer atmosphere of law and classics.

Such are in short the credentials of the learned author of this volume, a promising young man, sincere, sound and ultra modern in his out-look on life, a man who has displayed his ability as a scholar and biographer and has placed before us a work

which traces as it were, the making of an oak tree from a tiny acorn, and is replete with interesting episodes of a highly educative value.

Coming now to the life-sketch of Cowasjee Dinshaw, the founder of the family, it is, as mentioned above, both instructive and enlightening. To be born of very humble parents devoid of the means to feed or educate their children, to begin life as a compositor on a paltry salary of three Rupees per month in a printing-press and then after undergoing a salutary training in the school of adversity, to leave one's native shores for fresh fields and pastures new, to amass a decent fortune by dint of labour and rectitude and to utilise that fortune for the amelioration of one's fellow-men by the establishment of institutions of public utility, and in spite of affluence and power to live a simple and blameless life,—these are achievements which do not fall to the lot of an ordinary individual. It is the result of the cultivation of the highest and noblest qualities in human nature, it is the result of toil and patience, the result of putting to practical use the inherent spirit, adventurous and enterprising, of the Parsees, who had in the good old times the gift of discerning with the keen glance of genius what their contemporaries with all their experiences and resources were unable to perceive.

The goddess of Fortune favoured Cowasjee from the beginning of his career and she received him with open arms on the shores of Aden. When

he landed there the port was barren and desolate. There were no modern roads, no gas, no electricity, the last two conveniences had not yet come in vogue in those days, no fine buildings which it possesses to-day, no floating docks, in fact, it was devoid of all modern comforts devised by the inventive genius of man. Cowasjee indeed proved himself to be the maker of modern Aden. To compare great things with small, what Washington was to America, what William Tell was to Switzerland, what Ito was to Japan, Cowasjee was to the city of Aden. He did all he could to improve the amenities of the place, imported from Europe at great cost machinery for the manufacture of ice, potable water and salt, encouraged the spread of education and in a few years' time built up there a large trade, his sphere of business activities extending not only over Aden but over distant lands such as Zanzibar, Hodeidah, Djibouti, Mombassa and the Somali coast. To crown all these, he cultivated philanthropy as an inseparable accompaniment and founded religious institutions, dispensaries, libraries and proved himself a veritable patron to the poor and the needy.

If, as mentioned by a great author, man's happiness is measured in proportion to his virtues and his riches in proportion to his liberalities, Cowasjee was indeed a very happy and an affluent individual. As the volume of his trading operations increased he imported to the shores of Arabia more and more hands, especially Parsees, to look after his expanding business and thus he took delight in affording

service to hundreds of Parsee youths with whose co-operation was transformed this arid waste of Arabia into one of the most important ports of the British Empire. His industry, foresight and generous nature made him one of the outstanding personalities of his time. Many public men have achieved greater honours whilst others far less worthy have been acclaimed as public benefactors. But their reputation does not generally survive their demise. Long after they have been forgotten will Cowasjee's fame live on in many a broad-minded act of benevolence, in many a kindly and generous deed. The sun of his life set in a blaze of glory in the beginning of this century and when death claimed him as its own he had reached that elevated position occupied by those regarding whom all speak with expressions of respect and gratitude for deeds of benevolence done in this world. He rose from the lowest rung of the ladder by sheer ability, industry, enterprise, probity and initiative, attained a high reputation for himself and his family by acquiring a large fortune and by the beneficent use he made of it. Such an individual is an ornament to his community, an acquisition to his country, an example to his fellowmen and indeed deserves to be called one of the noblest works of God.

It is a common practice with the general public, especially in India and more especially amongst the Parsees, to expect upon the death of an outstanding personality great things of his successor and if he fall, by even a small measure, below the level of his

illustrious predecessor he is marked out as a man of no consequence. The young hopeful has thus to enter into the arena of public life with this inevitable handicap.

With Hormusjee, the eldest son of Cowasjee, however, things were quite different. He proved himself to be, to use a hackneyed phrase, a chip of the old block, a revised edition of his father, an abridgment of all that was good and noble in him. All those qualities that go to the making of a Parsee Sethia, a class that has now died out, are inherent in him.

Here we might pause for a while and investigate as to what qualifications are necessary for the constitution of a Sethia. The answer probably is—ancestry, middle age, dress, manners, courteousness, communal service, philanthropy, piety, popularity and last but not least, an orthodox temperament. If you come across a venerable looking Parsee gentleman of good family in snow-white *dagli* with always a turban on his head, rather advanced in years, with whiskers or moustaches or both on, having the politeness of a nobleman, civil in manners, conservative in views, liberal with his moneys, and if that gentleman frequently attends religious places of worship on festive occasions, takes an active and keen interest in communal affairs, and has made himself universally respected by the masses and enjoys their confidence, that unique personality can with full justification come within the category

of a Sethia. Let local Diogeneses go about with their lanterns in their hands and they will discover only one individual to-day in possession of all these qualities and characteristics and that individual is without doubt the subject of this sketch, the last of the Parsee Sethias. As said above, the class has now vanished and as the surviving remnant of an interesting oligarchy, Sir Hormusjee's personality is made all the more notable and conspicuous and his biography absorbing and instructive.

Born in the year of the Indian Mutiny, young Hormusjee acquired the rudiments of the Gujarati language in a school in the Fort of Bombay. Thereafter he joined the Elphinstone and the Fort High Schools and passed his matriculation while yet in his teens. He was then sent to King's College, London, to give a finishing touch to his education, and that done, he acquired practical commercial knowledge in a firm in the English metropolis. His educational activities were then transferred from the banks of the Thames to those of the Seine and he entered as an apprentice in a firm in the capital of the French Empire. It was here that Hormusjee acquired knowledge of the French language which even to-day he speaks with comparative fluency.

In 1879 he returned to Aden after a couple of years' stay in Europe and joined his father's firm. He thus embarked in the voyage of life when he was only a score and two years of age and had resolved from the beginning of his career to ad-

vance more by the manipulations of the oar than by the motion of the wind. For a long period, year in and year out, he was chained down to his desk in his father's office and was instrumental in raising his firm to the high water-mark of mercantile enterprise. He was the pioneer in establishing a commercial link between Bombay and the African ports and was the first to introduce Indian merchandise in those distant regions. He is even to-day the senior partner of Messrs. Cowasjee Dinshaw & Bros., a firm well known as naval and mill agents and shipowners having their branches in almost all important towns of the world.

After the death of his father Cowasjee in 1900 fresh duties devolved upon Hormusjee as his eldest son and successor and which provided him with a wider field of useful activity. He is a typical product of the old school. From the very inception of his public career he extended his hand of succour to all around and made every man without distinction a denizen of his bosom. Never has he allowed his ears to be assailed with the lamentations of the suppliant without relieving them of their distress. Suffering humanity has ever melted his tender heart and it is always his aim to give the mendicant a human existence. His name is always in the forefront in all lists of public benefactions and it is gratifying to read that he has been spending about half a lac per year for the last several years for the alleviation of the sick and the indigent. As a friend of the masses his name will always be remembered

by the Aden and the Bombay public and will be transmitted to posterity as that of a philanthropic and kind-hearted gentleman.

Nature has engraved politeness and courtesy with so sharp a chisel in every lineament of Hormusjee's countenance that they mark him out as one of the most amiable gentlemen in the society in which he moves. He is a *persona grata* with the classes as well as with the masses. Men flushed with riches or those posted to high eminence will find their level under his roof with the meanest individuals his hospitality reaching them alike with the same warmth and fervour. Stranger and friend alike are welcomed there with affability and ease in the mild and gentle manners for which the owner of the mansion is so well distinguished. In his domestic circle the same virtues combine to exemplify in him the kind husband, loving father and a most affectionate grand-father.

We have mentioned above that one of the attributes distinguishing a Parsee Sethia is his stolid conservatism and we find that that characteristic has taken a strong hold of Sir Hormusjee who was very recently described as "a pillar of orthodoxy". To all intents and purposes he seems to worship it with idolatrous devotion. It might be mentioned here for the benefit of non-Parsee readers that the community has been divided to-day into two distinct schools, the reformers, who favour drastic changes both in religious and social customs pre-

vailing amongst them from times immemorial, and the anti-reformers or the orthodox who are wedded vehemently to the old order of things. The reformers' contention is as follows: "That we are an advancing community always in the vanguard of progress and that we should not grovel under the weight of antediluvian practices and usages borrowed perhaps centuries ago from the Hindus and now quite unsuited to modern ideas and requirements; that it would be a Herculean task to roll back the tide of liberalism and progress which has set in with such an irresistible rush in all parts of the world; that evolution is rampant everywhere, even the dry bones of hamlets and villages have been vivified and the whole world is astir with the pulsation of a new born instinct and that under the circumstances it is impossible at such a time to repress the impetuosity of an expanding world; that age is a stern monster whose mandates we all have to follow, otherwise we would be nowhere in the race of life and that that community which understands the irrepressible spirit of the age and adapts its institutions accordingly beats in the struggle its fellow community which cherishes with strange fatality stolid orthodoxy and rejects the suggestions of modern needs."

The anti-reformers, on the other hand, contend that any precipitate or inconsiderate action before the creation of a healthy opinion amongst the masses is more often than not apt to sow the seeds of dissension rather than accelerate progress; that in

their march towards the new order of things they might perhaps lose their individuality as members of the Parsee community whose very existence might be jeopardised; that the introduction of entirely new reforms without the old strength and backing, as advocated by the opposite side, will defeat their own end, endanger communal peace, concord and amity and divide the Parsees unnecessarily into factions and parties hardly conducive to its advancement and internal harmony.

Under these circumstances when partisan spirit runs so high, all eyes are turned towards the elders like Sir Hormusjee who command the respect and confidence of the people, and who could only explore the avenues of peace and unity banishing all factions and differences in the community, avoid a rupture and guide the combatants on to the paths of social and material welfare.

In all reforms and innovations, if at all introduced, one important factor to be remembered is that Parsee spirit should never be lost sight of but that it should be given modern expression acceptable to all shades of opinion. So long as the members of this microscopic community are true to themselves, true to their religious instincts and institutions, true to their ancient reputation and keep on marching abreast of the times, the forces of progress will set no limit to communal regeneration and the Parsees will continue to maintain their reputation as one of the most advanced communities of the East.

We have seen above that Sir Hormusjee is fond of living a simple life and belongs to that class who indulge in plain living and high thinking. He rises early and goes to bed before ten o'clock in the evening. He drinks moderately and was fond of physical exercises in his days he having been an athlete and a hill climber. He is punctual, methodical and avoids all excesses. He is a well-read man, has read Shakespeare, Scott, Victor Hugo, never reads "novels of horrors" and can talk tolerably well in French. He began to learn Persian when he had passed his three score years but could not master the language to his entire satisfaction. He has visited almost all parts of the world except Australia. He is a great admirer of British character and thinks "that an Englishman is all right so long as he is satisfied with what God meant him to be but gets into trouble when he tries to be something else." An Englishman, he says, is made for the times of crisis and emergency, serious in times of difficulty and in normal times free and easy. His admiration for Mahatma Gandhi is none the less praiseworthy and he hails him as the awakener of Indian nationhood, self-honour and self-respect.

Sir Hormusji once held and still holds many positions of responsibility at Aden and in Bombay and his character, private and moral, served to adorn the high offices he was called upon to fill. For all his multifarious services he was awarded more titles than one and was hailed as a Parsee "of spotless life and of great sincerity."

We have in this short Introduction tried to lay before the reader a bird's eye view of the careers of Cowasjee Dinshaw and his son Hormusjee the amplification of which will be found in this excellent volume, so beautifully printed and well got up and which should be read by every Parsee proud of his race and religion. The lives of both father and son are exemplary. While that of the former is a fine example of the triumph of mind over matter, the victory of industry and patience over the contending forces of poverty and pessimism, the latter's proves to the present generation that true regard for one's fellowmen, philanthropy, urbanity of manners and above all, virtue and piety, bring in their turn the love, respect and confidence of the people, which is the highest reward, the crowning glory for a man in the eventide of his life. Sir Hormusjee is a Parsee to the back-bone and as a true and faithful disciple of Zoroaster he has never faltered in his adherence to his noble religion which teaches him to lead a life of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

J. R. B. JEEJEEBHOY

BOMBAY, *8th June*, 1939.



Mr. Ambalal N. Joshi, Advocate,
the author of Sir Hormusjee's biography in Gujarati and English.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE Parsees of India have produced many illustrious personages of rare merits and outstanding abilities. These eminent men have by their golden deeds, humanitarian activities and cosmopolitan charities given additional lustre to the modern Parsees who are in duty bound to act upto the ancient ideals by holding fast to the glorious heritage of their far-famed ancestors. They have also played a very important part in India's all-comprehensive reconstruction and regeneration.

It is a rare quality among the Parsees to adjust and adapt themselves according to times and circumstances. They are noted for their adaptability, loyalty, devotion to duty and generosity. They are equally conspicuous for their religious tolerance and tender qualities of head and heart. Owing to these peculiar rare characteristics, they have become pioneers in many spheres having taken the initiative and lead in many an adventure among the teeming millions of India.

In this well-known, highly honoured and respected community with a benevolence of world-wide fame Sir Hormusjee C. Dinshaw has now become a household word. By his patriotism, national, religious and communal pride, philanthropy, steady and well-balanced views and also by his other

innumerable distinctive ameabilities: he has become the most esteemed *Akabar* of the Parsee Community. In fine, Sir Hormusjee is a class by himself, docile, cool, contented, sober, and lastly a patriarchal patrician with an individuality all his own.

Sir Hormusjee's optimism is almost contagious. All those individuals who have come in close touch with him have been impressed and inspired by his saintliness, simplicity, sincerity and versatility. Plain living and high thinking is his motto. He is good humoured, mild tempered, yet dignified and contented. He has the least ego or conceit in him and hence he seems to have not a single enemy in his life. His family always bows to his judgment, well knowing that he is ready to grant any reasonable request. He is an omnivorous reader and possesses an excellent memory. A fascinating conversationalist and an admirer of English and French languages, Sir Hormusjee is a man of great achievement, far-seeing and circumspect. In short, he is at once a businessman, a patriot, a thinker, a philanthropist, and a leader of the Parsee community, whose service to India is as great as his love for her is profound.

Though Sir Hormusjee has been brought up under the combined influences of oriental and occidental cultures and civilisations, yet he has managed singularly to debar from his daily walks of life all those undesirable elements to be found in both of them and has adopted and assimilated only those

rare qualities and precious elements in them which have proved to be safely acceptable.

Even at present in his 83rd year, by his robust optimism, pleasing temperament, contentment and regular and orderly mode of living as well as by his passing a life of spotless morality, religious attachment and implicit faith in the Benign Creator, he is leading a healthy, vigorous and carefree life. In short, this Grand Old Man of the Parsee Community has the humanity of a humanitarian, gentlemanliness of a gentleman, saintliness of a saint, self-sacrificing philanthropy of an ideal Zoroastrian with compassion, piety, humility and respect ever seeking redemption and relief of suffering humanity.

Keeping this viewpoint before me I have attempted in the following pages a biographical sketch of Sir Hormusjee's life. Sir Hormusjee, the great patron of art and letters is not only my guide, philosopher and friend but has a personal and parental interest in my literary and legal activities. My admiration for him is not blind but his achievements demand that admiration and appreciation. I have the rare privilege of knowing Sir Hormusjee at close quarters during the last ten years and I can recall with pride some of the happiest and thrilling moments of my life. Sir Hormusjee is a man of very few words, he is unassuming, shy and reserved. Besides, he writes few letters and keeps no diary. He does not even remember accu-

rately the individuals, institutions or associations he has patronised with his purse during his life-time. He is now too old to be disturbed and has not the same enthusiasm, the same activity, and the same freshness which he had when I first met him. Sir Hormusjee now feels the pangs of old age in as much as he gets easily tired and requires complete mental and physical rest. Only those in his close confidence can thus throw a flood of light on his multifarious and multitudinous activities, his ideals and his views on the various burning problems of the day, and I can say with pride that it is my profound pleasure and proud privilege of being in Sir Hormusjee's close confidence and I have tried my best to interpret and appreciate him to the best of my abilities. I hope and trust, therefore, that this inspiring, instructive and illuminating biographical sketch of Sir Hormusjee will be a source of great inspiration to the rising generations of the Parsee Community.

Biographies of businessmen are few in number; for the life of a businessman, whose daily routine revolves between home and office, is a subject which rarely stimulates the pen and the general public has not so much interest in the life of a businessman as in that of a literateur, a man of action or a nation builder. Yet there may be consciously or unconsciously a latent message for others in the lives of businessmen and philanthropists like Sir Hormusjee, Lord Nuffield and Mr. Henry Ford in as much as that they not only know how to amass

wealth but equally know at the same time the utility of wealth and the manifold advantages accruing therefrom. By means of wealth they have succeeded in mitigating the misfortunes and calamities of suffering humanity, and have shown to the world the ideal of cosmopolitan charity, and the ideal of equitable distribution of riches. Sir Hormusjee is one who knows how to acquire wealth and how to dispose of a fortune. He has all the qualities which make a successful man of business and he can bring courage and imagination to bear upon all his undertakings. He is not in the least indifferent to money, nor to things which wealth can provide. Every commercial enterprise to which he sets his hand is meant to pay. But wealth, to Sir Hormusjee is never an end in itself, it is the means to an end—the greater prosperity of India and the amelioration of his co-religionists. He has a ready sympathy for honest politicians, ideal social reformers, selfless social workers, creative artists and humanitarians. Sir Hormusjee is a businessman no doubt but he is a business patriot in the full sense of the term.

Before I conclude, I must thank Dr. Sir Chimanlal H. Setalvad, K.C.I.E., LL.D., the Liberal leader for kindly condescending to write an appreciative 'Foreword' and Mr. J. R. B. Jeejeebhoy, J.P. to write an illumined 'Introduction' to this biography. Last but not the least, I cannot forget Mr. Minocher R. Bhowndree, the intelligent, enthusiastic and obliging personal secretary of Sir Hormusjee,

whose spontaneous co-operation and assistance throughout the preparation of this biography have been simply praiseworthy and of inestimable value to me.

I am quite optimistic that the hero-worshipping community of the Parsees—who look upon Sir Hormusjee C. Dinshaw, Kt., as the Nestor and Tribune of the Parsee Community, the Hatem-e-Tai of Parsee charity, the Doyen of Parsee orthodoxy, the bulwark of Mazdaysni religion and rituals, the unflinching opponent of pernicious religious and social reforms, the philanthropist without a peer and the glory and pride of the Parsee Community—might do full justice to immortalise his name even during his life-time and might imbibe the various sovereign virtues and sterling qualities which are deeply impregnated in his heart.

High Court, Bombay,
Monday, 10th July, 1939

AMBELAL N. JOSHI

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