INDIAN DUST

ROTHFELD

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BY

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(INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE)

Oxford:

ALDEN & CO. LTD., BOCARDO PRESS

LONDON:

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LTD.

1909

PR
6035
R77i

*** Some of these stories first appeared in *The Times of India*. The acknowledgments of the author are due to the proprietors and editor of that journal for their courtesy in permitting their republication in book form.

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INDIAN DUST

SONG OF THE MHOWRA TREE

SWEEP the ground beneath the tree,
Clear the grass !
Bring the twigs and light the fire,
Fire the grass !
For the flowers are thick and yellow,
And the heady juice is mellow,
And the summer's brought the mhowra,
Run, my lass !

Fruit and sweets for every boy,
Happy child,
Fat and naked in the shade,
Laughing child,
Filling baskets, gaily dancing,
They have sports the most entrancing,
Since the summer 's brought the mhowra,
Sweet and wild.

Indian Dust

For the women food and sauce,
Fill the pot!
It is good in every shape,
Cold and hot.
And the husbands sit contented
With a dish divinely scented,
When the summer 's brought the mhowra—
Such a lot.

Done with labour and with toil
In the field!
Hang the merchant and his book—
Blood congealed!
Here is money for the asking
To be got by merely basking
In the sun which gives the mhowra's
Golden yield.

Tree of drinking and of meat,
Blessed tree,
Peace and plenty to the Bhil
In thy lee!
At thy name all pulses tingle
In that land of hill and dingle,
Where the summer brings the mhowra,
Brave and free.

DE PROFUNDIS

DE PROFUNDIS

IN the long, low room the old man lay dying. He lay on the bed which for the seven last months had been his home, while his skin opened into sores and his bones had slowly softened and rotted. Now for five days he had been past speech and movement, and the watchers were waiting for his death. The glazing eyes were wide stretched, staring dully at the dead blank of whitewashed wall. Only the twitching fingers seemed still to feel for gold and count the worn rupees for which only beyond the memory of most men he had lived. For five long days incessantly, ever moving, ever twitching, the bloodless fingers had lived and sought their desire.

For during the last forty-seven years of his life Dwarkadas—now himself dying in the sixty-first year of his age—had lived only for the amassing of riches and the gathering of treasure. While still a young boy he had sat

behind his father in the small one-roomed booth on the unpaved village street and had added credits and debits and multiplied compound interest in the heavy ledgers and day books with their bindings of loose red leather. Every morning at eight, after the early bath and the obligatory prayers to the gods, he sate himself on the large cushion of stained scarlet rep which was at once his chair and desk, with the plain wooden box which held the change near his hand. Long after the villagers had gone to rest and the only sounds heard were the baying of the mangy village curs and the melancholy ululations of marauding jackal packs, the boy crouched by the feeble wick in a clay cruse of oil over the accounts which held his desires. For nearly fifty years this had been the manner of his life, and in their course he had won ever more and more wealth, so that now within twenty miles not a township, not a peasant but was in his debt and paid him grinding interest and grudging service.

Now he lay clothed in the last white cotton wraps of the dying. By his side crouched the two men, one of whom must be the heir to the savings of generations of usury. Nephew

and cousin, for five days they had thus crouched beside the bed, weary but watchful, waiting for the death which was so long in coming. Not for a moment did either dare to leave, for each feared the treachery of the other. So they sat without speech or sleep with the fire of hate in their eyes. Twice already had they lifted the old man from the bed to the floor, that the soul should depart in peace according to the law of the sacred books, and twice had a flicker of life returned to the staring eyes, and they had put him back on the bed.

Through the open door of the room could be seen the narrow verandah, and the hot glare of sunshine which threw in relief the sombre shadows of the dingy chamber, and made more shabby the bare walls where the whitewash hung in patches, and the ragged chintz-covered quilt through whose seams the stuffing of dirty cotton-wool had found its way in a dozen places.

On the verandah, crowded into the small patches of shade which lay black upon it against the intense light of the sun, sat half-a-dozen old crones in stained and weather-worn cotton mantles, waiting for the moment when they should raise the dirge and beat their dried breasts in lamentation. In the corner against

the wall lolled the Brahmin priest, his body bare to the waist, with the sacred thread hanging from the shoulders diagonally over the grizzled hair of his chest. The head—shaven save for the long lock of sleek black hair hanging from the crown—was bare, and the thighs were draped in the nice folds of a scarlet-hemmed cotton cloth. The heavy eyelids, half covering the long eyes, the thin graceful lips and delicate nostrils showed an intellectual pride and a sense of racial life which mocked the conventional cast of regret into which the calm features were composed. Beside him, in an attitude nicely compounded of deference to the priest, pride in his own position in the wealthy house, and sorrow for the passing of an environment, with nerveless gesture and weak, hanging under-lip, but with quick, cunning glance, sat Motiram, the money-lender's jackal and creature.

Inside the house, on the dirty quilt the old man's fingers still twitched, ever moving, in their bloodless arithmetic. And facing the house, in the sunlit village lake over which the windless, scorching air seemed to quiver with the intensity of heat, the buffaloes wallowed peacefully, only their nostrils and the base of

their horns above the surface, while a peasant woman, softly singing, filled her copper vessels with turbid water.

"He takes a long time a-dying," said one of the old women at last, with a fine sense of having found a conversational opening. "His heart must be sore for all the money he leaves."

"Aye," said another, "he was ever a hard man to move, but in his own way and at his own time. He will not yield to death either until he be ready. Yes, yes, a hard man—that was he always."

"And the money, think of the money," rejoined the first. "Millions and millions of silver rupees. Under the house and in the walls and in the garden, millions of clinking, chinking, silver coins. How can his spirit tear itself away from them? Millions of them, and he loved each one. Hundreds of thousands and tens of hundreds of thousands all round him, and over him, and under him, and he living only for them. Ah, death must be sore to him."

"Yes, a hard man, a hard man." The voice of the second old woman took up the refrain. "At his own time and in his own way would he act, and he minded others as little as if they

were flies. Never hurried, never slow, all came to him just when he wanted, and nothing could turn him from his course. Woe for any who sought to withstand him. For he went on, and those who withstood were discomfited. You remember the Inspector of Police, Motiram? He wished to get in his way when Dwarkadas forged the acceptance with which he dispossessed the Nawab of Islamabad of the lands which he and his forbears had held for four hundred years. They say the first Nawab came from Bokhara, and got a grant inscribed on brass from the Emperors of Delhi. Well, the Nawab lost his lands, and the Inspector—what of him? He died in jail, and his wife was a widow, and killed herself to avoid disgrace, and their boy died of hunger in the beggars' street in Bombay. It was a great warning for young policemen, he, he, he!"

The shrill chuckle of the crone ended in a choke, and the others laughed. Even the Brahmin priest smiled indulgently.

"Yes, a hard man and a hard master," said Motiram quietly, after a long pause as of reminiscence. "And who should know him better than I, who have served him for thirty years, through evil and good, through abuse and ill-

treatment. Thirty years have I served him and not one kind word, not one smile of affection, not one gleam of recognition have I had. Thirty years—yes, thirty years is a long time—a time long enough to change a man's mind and will. Man and boy have I served him, and all that time I have never seen him change and have never had a word of kindness from him. But I—O God! how I have changed in that time. How I have hated him—God in heaven, how I have loathed him! Time and time again I have vowed to slay him and then kill myself. But there was something in his steady, green eyes that I could not face, and which made me crouch to his heel like a whipped dog. And now he is dying, and I don't know what is to become of me. Thirty years is a long time and I have grown to need him and to build on him and cling to him. They say that love is a constant need of the beloved. I don't know, for I have never known love. I only know that I used to hate him, and without him I cannot now live. He was a hard man, a cruel man, and he crushed out most of the life from me many, many years ago. It must have taken time, and I cannot remember—if I ever knew—when he finally did it. It began when I first

came to him. But what in me is still alive lives only in and by him, and when he dies, O Narayan, what of me? The dried twig must drop with the trunk. The bubble must go with the stream."

The Brahmin nodded with an air of understanding.

"You say truly," he murmured. "Life and death are one, and vary only in degree. We can live only by living in others, and what lives in others is not our life. While we live we are already in great part dead, and after death we still partly live. Absorption—that is the great lesson of the universe—absorption of the self in the life of others, absorption of the not-self in the man himself. And therefore love is always death, and the lover dies to himself and lives in the object of love. And the end is always absorption and the nothingness of complete identity."

"Your wisdom is great," answered Motiram, "and you know the books of the gods. For me, I do not comprehend the causes of things, and the end of life is obscure. But this I know, that at first I hated and was revolted, and now I think I still hate but am not sure, while I do know that I cannot live if he be not there. Do

you know that when I first came to the shop of Dwarkadas I was young and handsome, with a smiling face and a happy nature, fond of friends and pleasure, glad to see my skin gleaming healthily in the sun, and to watch the supple muscles smoothly working in thigh or arm? Oh! I was young then, and asked only for pleasure and merriment. And now, look at me. Shrivelled and worn, my shoulders stooped, my thin calves bending weakly under the weight of the ageing body! And my emotions are dead and my passions gone, and my mind is active only for the work of Dwarkadas and the collecting of debts. Thirty years—that is what they have done for me. An old piece of rubbish—fit only to be a money-lender's process-server! Was that providence or justice or fate? Or was it just Dwarkadas alone with his infernal strength and his terrible will who made me what I am without any sin of mine or predestination? But I do not complain. I have found what I was fitted for, and this vileness was my function in life."

There was a pause. One of the old women moved. The old man's fingers could still be heard twitching on the quilt of the shabby bed. Motiram rose and walked softly into the room.

"There is no change," he said when he came out. "He still lies as he has done for five days, his eyes dully staring at the wall. Poor old man! He was a fine master after all."

"A long time dying, a long time dying," crowed the old woman who had first spoken. "He will win through this day yet. Millions of rupees which he does not want to leave."

They sat quiet for some time, and one of the women took a pinch of snuff.

"How did you first come to enter Dwarkadas's service, Motiram?" said the Brahmin, suddenly. "You were a boy then, I think you said."

"Yes, a boy of eighteen," answered Motiram. "I will tell you if you care to hear.

"My father was a small trader in the next village. He sold grain and chilies and salt and other small groceries. And he borrowed the capital for his shop and trade from Dwarkadas. He had paid most of it off when my sister, who had nearly reached puberty, had to be married, and he borrowed another twelve hundred rupees for her dowry, and the marriage expenses, from Dwarkadas. Next year he died, leaving my mother and myself to mourn him. I went on with the shop, and by honest trading managed

to make a fair profit the first year, enough to pay the interest on Dwarkadas's loan. So at the end of the year I went to him with the money. But Dwarkadas knew me to be intelligent, and he wanted the village business for himself. I suppose also he had gauged my character, its good points with its weaknesses. For now I see that I can never have had a strong will. At any rate, he would not take the interest alone, but insisted on the immediate return of the capital loan as well. I fell at his knees and sought his mercy. He looked as he always looked—unmoved, impassive, cold, all determination, no bowels. Then he promised me service as his agent on what seemed good pay. I gave way and agreed. Remember, I was only eighteen and a good boy. I had always been well liked, and had never had to fight. I suppose I was weak. At the end of a year my business was in Dwarkadas's hands, my pay had been met by debits for clothes and food and office fines, and my mother was serving in his house to keep ourselves from being turned off penniless, nay, worse than penniless, for the debtors' prison loomed in my sight. The history of the next three years is that of the gradual breaking of my spirit. The oilman's

bullock must be broken to the blinkers and the grinding-wheel. What with the goad and the strangling halter, with excess of toil and too little food, it is done. So was it with me. I laboured and was punished, strove and was rebuked, and over my head hung the fear of jail and pity for my mother. For Dwarkadas—whose death is now a grief unto my entrails—struck at me through my mother. Were I rebellious, she was punished. Did I revolt, she had to suffer. For three years I lived in hell, for my neck was not callous to the yoke. Then my mother died. At last I thought that I could face Dwarkadas without that most awful fear, fear for the mother that bore me. But it was not to be. Whether habit had had the better of me, or the death of my mother removed the last support to my weakness, whether I had become hopeless or was used to the task, I know not. I know only that I ceased to struggle. Never did I toil so hard as for the six months after her death. The vileness of my labours did not distress me, neither did I weary of the shame. I sought repose in my toil, and in the work of the day I found peace. I thought not, for that I was busy; neither did I feel, for that I was tired. And so I be-

came what I have since been, the beaten cur of Dwarkadas, the machine that did his behests, the slave of his cruelties and his meannesses."

Motiram paused and looked forth into the sunlight upon the village tank where the buffaloes lay deep in the water and the children had come forth to play. When he resumed, his body had lost its tension, and his voice was grey and dispassionate.

"Yes, for three years I suffered terribly, bitterly. When I entered the hut of a poor debtor and took from him his few pots and blankets, I could have wept for bitterness, and my soul cried out upon itself. I have torn the bed from under a woman in travail and left her to lie upon the ground. I have locked the door upon the orphan and turned him into the street. I have mocked a girl weeping at her father's death-bed and told her to find sustenance in her beauty. I have reaped the crops which the peasant had sown and told him to beg or steal. I could tell you of women dishonoured and men become vagabonds, of healthy peasants rotting in a city slum, of joy turned to lamentation and laughter become tears. But wherefore need I? You know it as well as I. Your revenue, O priest, as well as that of my master,

where does it come from? The incomes of your temple are swelled by the dancing girls who prostitute themselves within its walls. Your fields are rack-rented, and your cottages are nests of filth and cultures of disease. The rich merchant who leaves a bequest to your funds has earned his wealth in the betrayal of rivals, and the drowning of sailors on gaping hulks, and the robbery of the innocent and the trusting. The manufacturer who makes an endowment has attained riches from the ruin of many houses and the illness and starvation of his labourers. What of those who live without labour on inherited wealth? Is their money any more stainless, any less tainted? Ask of those who gathered it, coin by coin. Ever the answer is the same — sin and shame, suffering and horror. Aye, the respectable and the proud, they would pull a wry face if they could hear the real history of their wealth. But they suspect, and therefore will not hear. And they would take it all the same.

"This was the first bitter lesson of my noviciate. And, as things are thus, take it all in all, I say, give me the man who does the dirty work directly, without any humbug or lying to himself or others. Low as I am, I 'd rather have

the man who stood up to his work and faced it, dirt and all, than the coward who pretends to be horrified at the mischief he himself requires."

"Were you with Dwarkadas in the famine?" said one of the old women, stretching herself.

"Yes, that was one of the things I meant to mention," answered Motiram. "How I suffered and how I loathed my master in those days! But the years bring experience and knowledge; and now I dare not call him wrong, and I admire his will and determination. It was in 1886. The previous harvest had been good, so plentiful that prices had gone down and down, and the farmers could barely get enough for their crops to pay for their labour and their seed. For that is always the fate of the poor. When they have in plenty, they can get no price for their goods; and when they need, they buy dearly. I think it is a law of God. So Dwarkadas collected his debts and took grain, much grain for the money; and moreover, he bought and bought and always at the cheapest. And his granaries were filled even to overflowing. You see the brick barn over the yard. He built that in the spring of 1886. Then came the season of the rains. And the first two days after their breaking brought five inches of rain,

and all hoped for another good season. But afterwards came never a shower to refresh the parched and gasping earth. Day after day we watched the thin clouds with their fleeting ribbons of grey across the sky, but ever they flew to the horizon and never a drop fell. Day after day, till our eyes ached and our hearts were weary, but the earth remained dry and waste. So the season for the rains passed and the seedlings withered, and men sought succour of God. Only Dwarkadas sat in his shop and looked at his granaries and counted the bushels noted in his books, and thought of the profits to come. And the prices went up and up, till the corn which had found no purchasers six months before at fifty pounds the rupee, touched fourteen and thirteen and then twelve pounds the rupee. Yes, such days are hard for the poor.

"Well, Government did what they thought good and opened relief works. But the people were new to famine, and their hearts turned to water at the thought of the labour in the pits under that sun. Also they feared for the cattle which they would not leave. And those who were tillers shunned the disgrace of earth-work. And the engineers' clerks on the works would

not admit the starving without a bribe, and took toll of the wages of the destitute. We heard that the Collector Sahib, who knew the district, wished to order things otherwise, and that the Secretariat people in the hills thought they knew better. But who can say? Whatever was done was the will of Government. Perhaps it was also the will of God. At any rate, no one went to the works till he was thin and starving. And there were many who did not go then, but shut themselves into their houses and died like rats in a hole. Most of all did the women die thus. And then, finally, came the scourge of the goddess Durga Mata, the cholera. Those who were herded on the relief works died in their thousands, and those who remained in the villages died by scores. What between hunger and cholera, half of the people, I think, must have died. That was a dreadful year. Pray God we have never such another.

"Well, throughout all this Dwarkadas remained firm. Men prayed and implored and threatened. Women clung to his knees in supplication, or shrieked curses on his head. But he yielded never. Without the price, the full price, the market price, not a pound of grain would he sell. As for lending—not only did he

not lend, but he foreclosed his mortgages and gained much land. A weaker man might have given way, at least once and again. When the starving came to die upon his doorstep—and in the cholera time I have seen as many as three corpses there of a morning—when the villagers armed themselves and actually came to break open his doors and steal his money—another might have yielded to pity or to fear. I never saw his face move or his hand shake, for all that he lies so weak in there now. The law was the law, said my master ; and by the law his money and his grain were his own, to be parted with only for their full current value. And law is the wisdom of nations. But I found it hard to think so then, when I saw the people dying in pangs of hunger, all for want of the grain they had given *him* six months before. But, as he used to say, what was all his labour for, all the days of the year, save to make money by buying and selling? Why should he be baulked of the chance of a lifetime now? If it was right once, it was always right ; and pity was but the virtue of weakness.

" Yes, indeed, that was a terrible year, and even now I grow cold to think of its horrors. But what a man he was, my poor master. What

will, what courage, what steadfastness to principle ! "

Motiram sighed and turned his head anxiously to look within the room.

" He lives still ; he *will* not die," he said, with a note of defiant pride in his voice.

They sat on quietly on the verandah, shifting with the shade cast by the roof, as the sun declined towards the evening.

" Even you, Motiram, I think," said one of the old women suddenly, " do not know as much of the history of *his* wife," pointing with her thumb to the door, " as I did. Lord, Lord, what a pretty little girl I remember her when she first came here. She was little more than a child, and so dainty, with such pretty little ways. Merely to think of her is enough to make one feel young. Ah ! it's many a long year now since she first came. It wasn't long before she began to droop, however, poor little thing. One could hardly say Dwarkadas ill-treated her, I think. I don't suppose he beat her more than twice or thrice the whole time, and then it was coolly and quietly, as he always did everything, just by way of discipline. But the thing was, he never treated her well either. He had married chiefly to have children, partly

to have a cook. As he had to marry, he looked sharply to the dowry and made the best bargain he could. Oh, there was many a father who wanted his daughter to marry Dwarkadas, the rich banker. He could choose where he liked, and he took care that the one he chose brought a good dowry. I don't think he ever cared what she looked like, and as to character—why, he knew there was no one would stand up to him any way. He was too hard and strong. He thought he could mould any woman—aye, or any man—as he pleased. He never was one to care for women anyhow. His pleasure was in his accounts. All his strength and vigour, all the lust of life he spent on his ledgers and his books. He calculated wrong with her, all the same—he, he, he!—for all she was so small and pretty. Women don't mind ill-treatment much, I think. In my house I was beaten often, for my lord was hot of temper and very jealous. But I was young and pretty once—you wouldn't think so now, would you, when I am a widow and beat my breasts for hire at the buryings of others?—and my lord found pleasure in my beauty, and for once that he beat me he would kiss me a hundred times. Oh, the long spring nights

when the trees put out their shoots and the moon shines clear and soft! But never to be cared for, never to be caressed, that is more than woman can bear. When the bridal ceremony was over, and poor little Galalbai saw the man to whom she was linked by fate, she felt a shock, I know. Dwarkadas was still a young man in those days, but he was already old to look upon. He was never really young, I suppose. And he was cold and stern, and hardly troubled to look at his bride's face when she unveiled. However, she had pride to sustain her, and she was a good girl and believed what the Brahmins teach of duty to husbands and the ways of the Almighty. She tried to serve him faithfully and to respect and worship her lord."

"It is the will of God," said the Brahmin. "Our life is but a symbol. God to the man; her husband to the wife. Service and worship, and at the end—after many incarnations in progressive development—freedom in absorption. It is the law of the universe. Even the gods must serve and change on the road to perfection. What can we do—mere moments of universal life—but submit and suffer with hope?"

"Your words are the words of wisdom," answered the first speaker. "But I am only a woman and cannot understand. Hark! hear his fingers twitching on the quilt. Oh, the millions of silver rupees! He cannot bear to leave them.

"Well, he met her always with indifference. He never thought to ask how she felt or what she did. To him she was only a means the more towards the purpose of life—to make his house the more comfortable so that he could the more easily busy himself in his office with the amassing of silver. He never gave her clothes or jewellery or pleasing little things. Nothing, nothing he gave her. Giving was not his way. He only took. She had no money allowed her, and for every farthing she needed she had to go to him, to be met with a frigid look and a cold argument on the need of the spending. It was a sorry life for a young girl—a child, she was little more. Well, she was young and very sweet, and there were several of the young men of the village who coveted her beauty. It happened in the end, as she was coming through the wood at the south of the village one summer noon. Who can say what really took place—whether he used

force or she consented? I don't think she can have minded much. The young, straight body and the look of longing and the sweet scent of health and strength in the curly hair and on the glistening muscles! No, I don't think that she minded much. She returned to her house, a faithless wife. And she was little more than a child. I don't know how Dwarkadas found out, but find out he did in the end. He did not beat her then. I don't think he was very angry even. He did not care for himself. If he was angry, it was for his name and on account of the unborn child. But he covered her with contempt, and his contempt made her despise herself the more as his wife. Oh, how he despised the yielding to passion, the temptation of sense! He knew only steadfast pursuit of purpose. He told her he could have pardoned her if she had done it to gain money.

"I think the birth of the child was the end for Galalbai. You remember Dwarkadas's son, Motiram, don't you? A horrid, misshapen, deformed boy, ugly and diseased. That was Galalbai's baby. When she saw what she had given birth to she lost heart and hope. She nursed the child as long as she was needed,

nursed him with terror and shuddering, as a painful duty. Then one day, when the child was weaned, she threw herself into the well and died. They say she feared another pregnancy then.

"It was the first and last time Dwarkadas was defeated. And that was by a woman. It made him furious, for then only did he doubt his power. He, he! I can see him now as he then was, trying to hide his anger and to persuade himself that his will had not for once been thwarted. Look at him now. You'd never think he had ever been the man he was."

"A bad defeat, a terrible defeat," said Motiram. "For the son could not live, mass of disease and deformity that he was. And Dwarkadas dies without a child to light the funeral pyre and speed his soul with the necessary prayers. And those two in there will fight and fight, and spend his substance, that for which he lived and laboured, in the law courts, in suits and pleas, in plaints and in charges. It was a sore thought to my poor old master. The name to go, and the business to be blasted, and the goodly silver to be spent on lawyers and pleaders. To labour and strive, to will the end and reach it, and know that it will all

be useless, all futile. What is will, what strength, what steadfastness? We are but playthings after all."

A sound made them all start to their feet and run into the room. The fingers had almost ceased to twitch, and the heirs were lifting the body of Dwarkadas for the third time to the floor.

"He has won through the day, and the sun is on the horizon," said the old woman, pointing to the door.

The nephew and the cousin stood facing each other across the corpse with hate gleaming in their eyes.

The buffaloes came slowly from the tank, shaking themselves and plunging as they came. The laughter of the village children playing round the tank was borne gently to the room on the evening breeze. Only Motiram leant against the lintel of the door, his head upon his arm, and wept.

THE CRIME OF NARSINGJI

THE CRIME OF NARSINGJI

"I DO hereby charge you, Narsingji Jevansingji, as follows :—That you, on or about the 15th of March at the railway station of Partabgadh, first, did strike with your sword Khanderao Sakaram with intent to kill him and did thereby cause his death ; second, did strike with your sword Lakshmiram Dhuleram with intent to kill him and did thereby cause his death ; third, did strike with your sword Ranchod Umed with intent to kill him and did thereby cause his death ; fourth, did strike with your sword Bai Galal with intent to kill her and did thereby cause her death ; fifth, did strike with your sword Bai Motibai with intent to kill her and did thereby cause her death ; and that you are therefore guilty of offences of murder under S. 302 of the Indian Penal Code, cognizable by the Court of the Political Agent ; and I therefore direct that you be tried for the said offences by the Court of the Political Agent."

The words rang drowsily through the hot tent. The sun hung straight above the world in the burning sky, and the very birds were asleep. Two blue-coated and blue-turbaned policemen leaned upon their sniders, and between them stood Narsingji Jevansingji, prisoner and Rajput, accused of murder. On neck and ears and ankle was the gleam of gold, and the jauntily twisted turban of yellow silk cocked gallantly over the left ear. The carefully-curled beard curved from the parting on the chin round the small ears. For Narsingji was a Rajput of the blood, a "son of the kingdom," the descendant of princes.

The prisoner moved uneasily, looked at his seated judge, was silent for a moment, and then burst into the story of his crime.

"Am I guilty, Sahib? I must be, for you tell me I am. Yet I had no intention of killing. Am I not a Rajput, born of the sun? Why should I stain my sword with the blood of women? My father slew the proud Mussulman troopers with steel. Should the blade be dirtied with murder? If you will listen, Sahib, I shall tell you the truth. Why should I speak a lie? I am guilty in your English law, and you will hang me by the neck. Your honour is

master. Who shall tell lies in the presence of the master?

"Yet you must know, O Sahib, I, Narsingji, son of Jevansingji, am a Rajput, and of noble house. The Rajah himself is no better, for it is but his destiny that he sits upon the lion-throne. But we are of one blood, he and I. So it was that I lived in his house. I, Narsingji, son of Jevansingji, lived as one of his officers, one of his cadets who shared in his bread and his drink. Since I was a child of twelve have I lived in his house, and been faithful to his salt. Much time has passed since then. But we are of one blood, he and I, O Sahib.

"Well, Sahib, the Rajah had a necklace of emeralds which he wished to have reset in Bombay. So the Rajah sent for me, Narsingji, son of Jevansingji, of the royal blood, to the ante-room on the upper storey, which looks over the river which flows from the hills in the pools among the rocks, and upon the temple of Mahadev where we sacrifice the buffaloes. The Rajah sent for me, and he put the necklace into my hands, the necklace of emeralds, and he ordered me to take it to Bombay and give it into the hands of Shivlal, goldsmith, in the Mar-

wari Bazar. And I laughed, for the task was light, and I had in me desire of seeing Bombay and the dancing girls of the Girgaum Road. Then a household page came to me out of the inner part of the house, and he handed me silks for matching in the Bhendi Bazar. And I took the silks, for it was an order of the Lady, the Rani of my Rajah.

" Next morning I rose early, and I rolled up the necklace of emeralds and the silks and my own clothes in my carpet, and I rode forth to the station. And at the station all smiled upon me and wished me well, for all knew me, Narsingji, of the Rajah's household. And all through the day I travelled, in the fire-carriage which the Sahibs have brought into the land. And the seats were hard, and the flies buzzed in the carriage and the dust flew thick and the sun beat hotter and hotter. Many lay down and slept, for the noontide is hot and sleep is good. But I slept not ; for, look you, I was alone amongst strangers, and with me were the silks and emeralds. And I have been ever faithful to my salt. So the day passed, O Sahib.

" It was night when the train reached Partabgadh, where it is established for us to change

into another train which runs from the North to Bombay. The mail, they said, would arrive in the early morning, before the crowing of the cocks. I was hungry, see you, for I had not broken fast all the long day. So I took my carpet to the end of the platform and sat upon the pebbles and ate bread of wheat-flour and picklings of green-stuffs, which they had given me from my house. For such is our custom upon journeyings. And when I had eaten, I filled my brass cup with water and drank. Evil is the water of Partabgadh. Assuredly he who drinks of it is defiled. Then—why should I tell a lie?—I undid the twist of my turban, and opened the little silver box that nestles therein, and cut off for myself the evening opium dose. Ours is the rich black juice of the Malva poppy, sweet, the giver of strength. Of such did I taste as is ever my custom, neither more nor less. Perhaps—who knows?—it may have been a little more, for I was tired and the day had been long. Then, being at ease, I leant back upon my bundle and looked up to the skies of the night. Stately and fair hung the splendour of the moon, white as of living silver, and the dark green of the shadows stood forth upon the earth, mystic and wonderful.

Beautiful shone the moon amongst the sparkling stars, like the face of the loved one by twilight, when she waits decked in her sixteen jewels and the curtains are brilliant with gems. I looked; and the wing-feathers of slumber brushed upon my eyelids. For I was at peace and had been tired.

"Then a fear took me by the heart for that I was in a strange place, and with me the silks and the trinkets. Say they not, 'In a strange place all men are thy enemies'? Verily such was my fate at Partabgadh. So, rousing myself, I lifted my carpet and went to the passage where they take the tickets, beside the office of the Master. And there stood a policeman, he whose name you have written first, O Sahib. One of the low-born was he, a rude Mahratta from the plundering Deccan, one of these petty lordlings whom ye have put to be a burden upon us, even unto our Rajput lands, ye rulers from the West. Seeing him, in spite of his surly brow and his dark skin, dark as a base-born robber's should be, I went to him and said, 'Brother'—a curse on my tongue that it ever called such as he 'Brother'—'I am tired and I have with me a bundle. Watch you it while I sleep, and it will be a kindness.' He

scowled—the low-born—and said, 'Who are you that I should be your servant? Call me "Sahib," brother-in-law.' I was angry, see you, but thinking that the emeralds were of my Rajah and that I must keep them safe, bethinking me also that I was in a strange land and he the Government, I humbled myself and entreated of him, even of a Mahratta. Then said he, 'What things of value have you, man from the hills, that you are afraid? Give me twenty rupees and I will watch them. Else shall I surely charge you with a theft.'

"Then I was more angry, for I was no thief, I, Narsingji, son of Jevansingji. But even in my wrath I kept hand on the rein of forbearance and said, 'Know thou, son of all the world, that I am a Rajput of a prince's household and no thief. Twenty rupees I cannot give thee, for so much have I not. But I will give you two rupees to let me sleep here and to look upon my bundle and see that it is safe.' Then he laughed aloud—a curse upon his master!—and his dark skin grew yet darker. He mocked me, taunting, and said, 'Sleep here thou shalt not, but under guard.,' And then he miscalled my wife and my mother, and my heart grew even fuller. So, speaking ill of my

honour, he came to lay hand on my bundle, saying he would see what it held and take his twenty rupees without gift. Then, in my anger, I told him that to put finger on the property of my king was as death. But he laughed and called me baseborn.

" There was blood in my eyes and the station was deep coloured with the red of blood, blood of the slaying of men. The dress of the man had turned crimson, and the smell of blood took me sharp and bitter in the nostrils. The breath of the Mother, the Mother of Death, lay upon me. In my arms lay my sword and the hilt fitted itself with a caress to the palm of my right hand. I drew it out with a scream and the edge already seemed red ere the killing. He cried and turned to flee, but the sword was already leaping in my hand, and it caught him on the skull with the crash of steel on the victim. I laughed, but I knew not why. I shouted, and knew not wherefore. But all around was the red of battle, and the smell of slaughter. ' Jai Kali ! ' the drumming was in my ear ! I turned round to see some form of man come and again bend to go. And he too was garbed in red ; and he fell also. So I ran forth upon the platform, shouting and slashing.

This alone I know and no more. Only I felt the blade whistle and heard the crash of blow upon flesh, and I longed to kill and kill. And so—so I dropped and was bound, and they told me I had slain five. It may be so, and I know I have killed, though I know not how many. Therefore give the order to hang, for such is your law. There shall be weeping in my house.

"But it is my prayer, O Sahib, that first you give an order to send the emeralds to Shivlal, goldsmith, of the Marwari Bazar. For never have I or my house, my lord, been faithless to our trust."

A BHIL IDYLL

A BHIL IDYLL

THE manner in which Motio Bhil came under the observation of the civilised world was this :

Jennings, the District Superintendent of Police, was camping at the outskirts of the jungles which cling thick upon the frontiers of the British province and the territories of the Rajput Chiefs. For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the administration of an Indian district it may be explained that it is the District Superintendent of Police who is responsible to the Head of the District for the proper order and discipline of the constabulary force, for the apprehension of offenders, the suppression of dacoits, and the general security of "Pax Britannica" from the efforts of reactionary malefactors. Hence it is one of his duties to inspect the little white-washed police outposts where four constables and a non-commissioned officer exist, year in and year out, on the luxurious wage of a nominal eight or ten rupees per month. There

they yawn, quarrel, drink, gamble, and keep their fowls and goats, and are supposed to prevent crime and arrest offenders within some five-and-twenty villages scattered over hill and over dale in an area of more than ninety square miles. When it is further remembered that the five men may belong to as many castes, that they are accompanied by their wives and families, that at least half are of communities amongst whom the privacy of their women-folk is a point of honour, while the accommodation for each family is a cubicle barely large enough for one man, and bathing and cooking have to be done in the open, it begins to be possible to understand some of the difficulties in the way of an energetic Superintendent. So the District Superintendent visits the outposts, in the intervals of rushing off to look at the scenes of three-day-old offences, and usually manages, if he is wise, to inspect an outpost in the Bhil country during the shooting season. For the policeman, who reads men as well as rules, is aware that he comes to more knowledge of the Bhil villager and of his men's relations to the people in their charge in a couple of days' shooting in the jungle than in a whole month passed at an office table.

A Bhil Idyll

Jennings had spent the greater part of a morning in following a little herd of the beautiful ravine deer, one buck and three does, through the teak woods, where the foot slips on jagged lumps of quartz and the broad, rasping leaves, lying dry upon the ground, crackle sharply at every careless step. He could see them now at the end of a long glade, daintily strolling on, the buck every now and then nibbling in his pride at the thicker, greener grass beside the thorny stems of the jujube shrub, the does glancing about and leaping to and fro in alarm. Of a sudden, as he looked, the strolling buck jumped high in the air, ran forward a dozen paces, and then collapsed inert, dead, an arrow through his heart.

Too astonished even to find words as yet for his annoyance, Jennings stood up. And he saw a young, dark figure, naked but for the strip of cloth between his thighs, and the dirty cotton rag twisted round his knotted locks, erect and wiry and strong, arise from behind a thicket, forty paces from where the deer had been standing, and run quickly and noiselessly, his bow and arrows in his hand, to the dead buck.

Jennings called out angrily and the man

stopped. As he saw the strange clothes and the white face he paused, uncertain whether to stand or flee. At last, his mind made up, he raised his eyes shyly, ready to run in a second if there were danger, his bow taut and an arrow at the string, his toes nervously clutching at the grass and digging in the earth.

In answer to Jennings's angry questions, the Bhil first saluted, his open palm held to the brow and then extended ; then drew himself up proudly and answered :

"Had I known, O Sahib, that you were following this deer, I should not have killed him. There are many more deer in the forest for me. I did not know. So I shot, for I wanted food, and it is my jungle. Also it gives me pleasure to see my arrow pierce the brown skin of the gazelle."

"Where do you come from?" said Jennings, astonished at his boldness of speech and his fearless manner.

The Bhil waved his hand widely to the horizon on the north.

"This is my country," he said. "We live here in the forests, wherever we find water and game."

"Are you a subject of a Native State, or

do you belong to a Government village?" again asked Jennings.

"We have no master," answered the Bhil. "We live where we list, and the Rajah's servants never dare come near us. The last who came, ten years ago, was driven mad by howls from the shadow of every tree and bush, night after night, as he tried to sleep and forget his fear of the jungle spirits. They shot him at last, and sent his head flying over the wall into the Rajah's palace on a moonlight night. Only when the Rajah dies and the new one is to be crowned, they send for the oldest of our tribe to mark him on the brow with his blood. For without that mark he cannot claim the lordship of the land."

Now Jennings was, like most policemen, keen on making as many useful recruits to his force as he could. Also he happened to be a man who was interested in native customs, especially in the manners of the jungle-folk, amongst whom he lived and whom he cared for, as one cares for those who have grown up under his watch and ward. So he ended by inducing the Bhil, Motio, to come into his camp with the buck, and see for the first time what is an English Sahib's fashion of life. And Motio

stayed for two days, looked at everything, walked gravely into the tent and fingered pictures and furniture, and made himself happy and comfortable at the camp-fire with the police escort which accompanied its Superintendent.

On the second day, as the camp was to move on to another village, Jennings had Motio called into his tent.

"I am leaving here to-night," said Jennings, as the young Bhil came gravely in and at once squatted quietly on the floor.

"So I have heard," answered Motio, "and I am sorry, for you have treated me well, and you have a lucky face."

"Well," said Jennings, "what I wanted to ask you is this: Would you like to come with me and join the police, and leave your jungle life?"

After a pause Motio answered, and his answer was to the effect that he would join the police if he might remain as an orderly in Jennings's camp, be allowed to resign if he found the longing for the jungle too much for him, and not have too much drill and belt-polishing.

Jennings consented, and thus Motio was enrolled in the Police Force of the District.

"And now," said Motio, as he left the tent, "I shall teach those lazy sweepers of yours what shikar is, and we kill many panthers when the grass is short."

* * * *

For two months Motio worked hard, learned drill, looked out for game for Jennings to shoot, and grew to understand the ways of Sahibs and the duties of the armed police. Then one evening he stood before his master in front of the desk, and saluted stiffly in the new English manner of which he was so proud.

"What do you want now?" said Jennings. "I have no time to go out shooting to-morrow, if that 's it."

"I need a month's leave of absence," said Motio.

Jennings laughed. "You can't have leave yet, you know. Why, you 've only been here two months. What do you want it for?"

"I have to go again into the jungles," said Motio. "There is no other reason."

After some more talk, Jennings, tired after a busy office day, ended by growing angry.

"You can't have it, that 's all," he cried. "Now you can go."

And Motio saluted and went.

After dinner Jennings was half sorry he had not given Motio his leave.

"I wonder what the fellow wanted it for," he thought. "Some devilry, I expect. Well, I suppose I had better have him in again to-morrow morning and let him have it if he wants. I suppose he needs gradual breaking in, and he is too good to lose."

But next morning there was no Motio to summon. As Jennings got out of bed, he stumbled over a neat bundle of a rifle, a bayonet, and a policeman's new uniform, tidily laid on the floor of the tent. Motio had taken his leave. Jennings cursed and made every-one uncomfortable for a couple of hours, but no trace of Motio could be found. No one knew where he had gone, and his footsteps could not be tracked on the hill-side. Only it was obvious that he must have walked into the tent in the dead of night to give back to the sirkar what he had received.

* * * *

A month passed and nothing was heard of Motio. Jennings thought of him sometimes with regret, for he had liked the boy and he missed him when he went out shooting. But he had practically given up all hope of ever

seeing him again, and supposed he had gone off in a huff to his native wilds. Only, twice a dead hare and once a buck was found in Jennings's sleeping-tent in the morning, and no one knew whence they had come. The butler suggested spirits, and Jennings wondered whether Motio could be anywhere near.

On the day that brought a month to its end since Motio had quietly disappeared into the night, Jennings, after finishing his office work, with its monotonous routine of punishments and diaries and accounts, had gone out for a solitary stroll in the exquisite but all too short Indian twilight, over the hill, covered with teak and acacia, beside which his tents were pitched. After seeing the red ball of the sun drop below the dim purple of the horizon, while the thin, grey haze twisted slowly along the dells and over tarn and pond, he turned to go back to his camp. As he turned, he found a quaint little group standing before him. In front was Motio, nearly naked as when first he had met him, his long, black locks twisted in a knot on his head, holding in his hand his long bamboo bow and half-a-dozen reed arrows. Behind him was a couple of great white-bodied Kankreji bullocks, with enormous dewlaps and fat

humps. And behind them again stood shyly, her gown half-drawn over her face, a young Bhil girl, with fringe carefully plastered on her brow, and beauty-spot tattooed below her lip, her legs from ankle to knee covered with heavy circlets of brass, her thighs half bare, her neck and bosom hung with layer after layer of crimson and indigo glass beads, draped in the heavy folds of a long blue cotton gown.

As Jennings stared, "I am here to report for duty," said Motio.

"You young rascal," said Jennings, half angry, half amused. "Where have you sprung from? Who tells you I shall take you back again? And what is all this you have brought with you?"

"This is my house," answered Motio. "Come forward, little torment"—this to his wife—"you need not hide your face before the Sahib. He is your father and your mother. And there are my cattle," he continued. "And now I want you to give me some land, so that I can build a house with wood from the Government forests, and live like a cultivator, and grow fat, like those sweepers, who do not know a panther's trail from a hyena's." And Motio laughed.

So in the end Motio came into camp with his wife and his cattle, and put on his uniform again, and bullied the village watchmen. And this was the story of his adventures as Jennings learned it.

After two months in service, Motio's heart, as is the case with all Bhils, became heavy for lack of a wife, and he felt that life was as nothing without a sturdy goodwife to cook his food for him and laugh with him at nights over the camp-fire. For the Bhil servant, unlike the Hindu of the plains, takes his wife with him when his master tours in tents through the districts. And Motio's heart beat the faster, because at the second last camp he had twice seen on the hill-side Rupli, the unmarried daughter of the village headman. There was a saucy twinkle in her eye when they first met, as she held her dainty nose in the air and walked with graceful, swinging stride past the staring youth. But he kept his eyes on her as she went, and saw her look back over her shoulder when she had gone some twenty yards further on. What she thought there is no saying, but her eyes fell and a little frown puckered her brow as she pulled the cloth over her face and went hurriedly on. The next time they met, the corners of her mouth

turned up in a smile, and a sweet little dimple appeared on her chin. But she made a remark, apparently to the world at large, about the wickedness of youths who have nothing better to do than to sit where girls pass. And she met his chaff with quick reply till she had disappeared over the brow of the hill.

So on the night when Motio ran away, he went back to the village of Rupli's father. For two days he lay on the hill-side above her homestead, where in the day he could see Rupli working with the women in the yard beside the cows and buffaloes. And he thought how dainty she was and how strong. And at night he would play on a rude reed-pipe and wish for a homestead of his own, and dream of basket-work bins full of beads of old-gold coloured maize, and the girl singing as she sat beside the threshold. On the third day she came up the hill with her basket to gather the fallen flowers of the mhowra trees. Perhaps she had heard the piping, and guessed who was waiting there.

Then, "What are you doing here?" said Rupli.

And "Looking for you," answered Motio.

After that they saw each other every day for a week in the warm forenoon or just before

sunset, and Motio would gather humble little blue flowers for her from the crevices of the rocks, and bolder blossoms of yellow which grow on the thorn-bushes. Then he wanted her to marry him, and Rupli was not loath. But although amongst the Bhils a father will seldom meddle with the courtships of his daughter, yet before he allows the marriage he must be paid some eighty rupees in cash. And money was precisely what Motio had not got. So he sought to win her over to run off with him into the forests. And Rupli at first said "No," and told him to work and come back for her after a year. At last on the tenth day when they met in the twilight, Motio grew bolder and took her in his arms and caressed her, so that she stayed with him until all had grown dark, and it was too late to think of going home. And so she remained with him, and Motio had won his wife.

For another ten days they lived thus in the jungle, moving on by day from place to place, the ground their bed and their canopy the stars. In the daytime Motio would shoot with his arrows a wild peacock, a hare, or a couple of ring-doves, and Rupli would cull berries from the trees, or pull the succulent herbs and wild

roots which grew in the forests. And gradually they worked towards the hills beneath which lay the Superintendent's camp.

Then one day Motio asked, "Do you think you could stay here for three days by yourself? If you will be brave and not fear the spirits that lurk in the branching roots of the banyan-trees —sure they would never hurt one like you!—I go to fetch cattle for our field. For the Sahib shall give us a field."

Then Motio went over the border, for he would not lift his hand in his master's district, to a rich village in the State of an Allied Chief, where grain-eating Hindu cultivators lived in stuffy brick houses side by side. In the noon Motio went down the streets and looked at everything, and sat at the money-lender's shop. And he learned that the crustiest and most miserly of the farmers was one Shankarbhai, who only the week before had had a Bhil sent to jail on a false charge. And when the village cattle came back in the evening, Motio looked on Shankarbhai's two Kankreji bullocks, each worth full ninety rupees, and found them good.

So at eleven that night Motio, his arrows ready in his hand, opened the latch of the byre.

Two hours later he was driving the startled, unwieldy bullocks through the forest towards the glade where Rupli waited.

"They will never be able to track me," he reasoned, "so no harm is done. And besides, they are not our people, those who live on the other side of the border, and Shankar has wronged a Bhil before now."

But all the same he did not think it necessary to let Jennings know how he came by the bullocks.

"And now," added Motio, "you know the custom of our people. After an elopement, a friend must first go to the father and bring him to consent. And the bridegroom must either pay in money that which shall be agreed, or must do service for seven years in the father's house for the bride. Now I serve the Sirkar. Therefore, O Sahib, call you the headman and get him to accept one of the bullocks as the gift for my wife, and I shall serve the Sirkar for those seven years."

And this is the story of Motio's wooing and wedding.

A BHIL DANCE

A BHIL DANCE

UPON the slopes which roll from the British Province of Gujarat towards Central India and Rajputana is spread a demarcation of lands —known by the name of Rampur—which includes a lake, fields of Indian corn, crags and hills, and the beginnings of a forest. Village there is none. Over all these lands in a space of three-and-a-quarter square miles there stand only seventeen houses, separated one from the other by some three or four hundred yards. Each is the homestead of a Bhil farmer, built of wood logs, in two or three cases covered by rough tiles, the rest thatched with the coarse grass of the neighbouring jungle. Facing the main house is the open byre in which are bound the bullocks, cows, and milch buffaloes which are the wealth of their owner. One or two smaller huts nestle by the side of the main house, which differs from them only in size, the dwellings of a married relation or a depen-

dent. Round the little batch of log huts is a wattle fence, not unlike a larger sheep-hurdle, with a gate of withies lying half open on its side. Not unbeautiful is the homestead, with the pumpkin creepers clinging over thatch and over fence, their golden fruit gleaming upon the brown, like a memory of orchards. And round the fence is a little garden, spiky with the tall shoots of the castor plant, and smiling with broad tobacco leaves.

To-night there is feasting in Rampur. For the season has been good, and the maize-heads are heaped high in the homesteads, and the sprites and goblins of the rocks and trees have been kind ; and now is the evening of the wedding of the son of old Vaghji Patel, the headman of the Bhil hamlet. And old Vaghji, with his white locks and his many cattle, has sent forth to call whomsoever it please to Rampur for eating and drinking and dancing.

So, ever since the first dusk of the night has crept out of the teak forests on the hill, the villagers have been coming from near and far to the taller clump of mhowra trees beside the shore of the little lake, where two huge heaps of wood have been piled for bonfires.

As they chat in the twilight, the picture is

not without its charm. Since the beginning of history, the low hills which spur into the rich plains of Gujarat, and the plateau and downs of Mewar and Malwa have been the camping-ground for a race of wiry hillmen, the aboriginal Bhils. The earliest poems of the Sanskrit nations are full of struggles with the jungle chiefs, and of legends of magic-working savage queens, and of hospitable huts in the forest, where the wanderer was fed by buxom Bhil women. Again long and bitter were the conflicts between the fierce Bhils and the Rajput leaders of the White Hun hordes, the "Sons of the Kingdom," fiery from Scythia. Century in and century out, the struggle went on till the Rajput monarch, offspring of Sun or Moon or Fire, as his bards sing him, established over the hillmen a precarious sovereignty. But still are the forests to the Bhil. Still when he takes his seat upon the lion throne, a Bhil marks the monarch's brow with his blood, to show that the right to rule comes from the forest with its gallant little hillmen. But as they sit beneath the mhowra trees, little the villagers heed of Rajput princes and of former warrings. Almost all are dark-brown men, small in stature, but robust and muscular. Broad chests, wiry thighs

and calves, mark them for the untiring trackers that they are, following day after day the wounded panther as he moves with his gliding run from lair to lair in the crags. Their women, deep-breasted, broad, their large thighs showing bare, look fit to be the mothers of sound children, healthy and strong. And pleasant and comely enough they appear with their flat, good-natured faces, and their plump limbs, their features coarse perhaps but sonsy. Low on their brows, their hair lies in a pleated fringe, with the straggling tresses fastened by a bell-shaped silver brooch. Layer and layer of glass beads, dark blue and crimson, lie heavy over neck and breast. A coarse cloak of navy blue, draped from the head over the body, is tucked up with the petticoat into the waist-band, leaving the thighs half bare. As they move there is a tinkling and clashing from the heavy bands of brass which circle the leg from knee to instep. The dress of the men-folk is simpler. The long hair, caught into a top-knot, is fastened by a comb, and circled with a twisted piece of white cotton cloth. A twisted string around the waist supports a similar piece of cheap cloth. And now, when the evening air is fresh, another square piece of dirty cotton

cloth is thrown over the shoulders. But beside every man lies the bamboo bow with a dozen or so of reed arrows. For the Bhil is even now a fighter, and still more a hunter and killer of game. So they sit with many a ringing laugh, for the Bhil is always fond of his joke and sees ever laughter in the merry life of the jungle.

But the darkness is now heavy upon hill and field, and the time has drawn near for the dance. In rows round the field some five hundred men, women and children are already sitting, waiting and wondering, in pleasurable excitement. Some have brought small wooden drums to be beaten with bent sticks, and a large kettle-drum has been dragged into the midst of the crowd. Seated apart from the others, one little cluster of men and women has brought clarionets and fifes, dirty, fantastically garbed in rags, half naked. These are the Thoris, a tribe of wild gipsy tinkers, workers in wood, and beautiful singers.

The headmen of the nearest three villages have undertaken the slaying, skinning and cooking of a goat and the boiling of a huge quantity of rice, the gifts of old Vaghji Patel. They are busy now, cutting the meat into small slices and throwing it into the cauldron with

clarified butter and salt and pepper, there to simmer gently as the boys eagerly take turn and turn about to stir it with a large wooden stick. In another pot the rice bubbles and boils. On all sides, men and women rush off to strip the "kankra" bushes of their leaves, which they deftly bend into plates and cups. But old Vaghji himself squats proudly under the biggest tree in charge of two great earthenware pots full of country liquor.

And now the hour has come, and a torch is held to the two bonfires, the loftier of which the Bhils have taken to calling "uncle," while the smaller is "the old wife." As the flames spring high and lick the tops of the teakwood logs, a mighty shout goes up from five hundred lungs, and all the drums are set a-beating. Here and there a boy runs rapidly round the bonfire three times, throwing into it grain, for an offering to Kalka Mata. Dully red is the clothing of the night, and the tops of trees are made visible from afar.

Shout! Yet again shout! Into the midst the drummers gather together and beat the skins in wild harmony. Round them and round the blazing bonfires the men begin to circle, slowly first, slowly, a turn to the right, a turn to the

left, then on again slowly, the light sticks in their hands, tapping each other softly, listlessly. Then faster the rhythm of the dance begins to tingle, and the light to shine in the eye. Some one shrills out that cry which is to the Bhil what the Highlander's whoop is, a battle-cry and an encouragement to the dance, the lips quickly trilling, the yell quavering from the compressed throat. Faster and faster they go round and round, ever in a circle round the blaze. The dust rolls up in clouds of beautiful, changing curves, and hangs like a fiery cloak over the jerking, dusky bodies, dancing demoniac in the light of flames. Faster beat the drums, faster beats stick upon stick. Three steps forward, then a turn, each stick smiting first in front and then behind, then again three steps forward. Round and round the women too are dancing, and their shrill voices have begun a song. The men hear and follow the song. In weird antiphony, line after line rises high from the dancing women, to be echoed in the deeper voices of the men.

"Men of the helmet, may your helmet glitter!
Men of the helmet, may your helmet glitter!
Rajahs and Rajahs, a-tremble must shudder,
Rajahs and Rajahs, a-tremble must shudder.
Men of the helmet, may your helmet glitter!

You have counted our women upon the relief camp.
You have fattened our children upon the relief camp.
You have counted our husbands upon the relief camp.
You have given them cattle upon the relief camp.
Men of the helmet, may your helmet glitter!
Men of the helmet, may your power linger!"

As the night grows older, the fun becomes ever lustier and louder. With each successive round of the drink the shouting is more vigorous, the dancing more furious. A circle of men has joined hands, and on each one's shoulders stands a woman, their hands also clasped, all revolving to the tune of the village song. "The red horse is asking for gram, the red horse has broken his tether." Jest and gibe are bandied freely between the lads and lasses, and now and again a loving look or touch is rewarded with a ringing box on the ears. Not a few of the men, as the drink becomes heavy, have fallen to sleep in the grass under the mhowra trees. But the singing and the dancing go on ever louder, ever merrier, long after old Vaghji Patel has gone off to sleep, while the night passes the early hours. Only as the air freshens to the morning do the villagers think of home. Some of the roysterers are still in the field, asleep or chatting, as the trees become grey in the first shimmer of the coming dawn.

A RAJPUT LADY

A RAJPUT LADY

WE had had a more than usually interesting dinner—six of us—that evening in the little station. It was one of those evenings in the later rains, when the sun goes down surrounded by trailing clouds of glory, and even the outlines of the Indian hills in the middle distance seem softened and poetized by the damp and heavy air. Their blue heights and the dark green fronds of the tropical trees shade off into dim greys and purples against the pale yellow and palest rose of the mists that hang over the blue enamel vault of the sky, all scintillating with little diamond points which once were stars. Heavy and warm is the sultry air, and full it would seem of every kind and description of insect life.

The melancholy cicadas shrill their myriad plaints, and lizards cling to the wall near the lamp to shoot their sudden tongues upon their clustering victims. Lazily wave the punkahs

overhead, while noiseless servants bring and remove the dishes.

Our host was Captain Carruthers, C.I.E., Political Resident of the third grade. Still a young man, he owed his selection for special appointment and his rapid promotion to the fortunate and rare coincidence of serving under a Viceroy who had devoted a genius destined for the supreme control of an Empire and a mind unhampered by formulæ to the subordinate administration of England's greatest dependency. With such a master, his peculiar talents, his facile trick of the native languages, his thorough acquaintance with the thoughts and habits of the Indian peoples, his unconventional disregard for bureaucratic forms, and his determination to adapt his methods to the conditions of a foreign land, had marked him out for a distinguished and brilliant career. The one danger in front of him was the proximate departure of the one great Governor-General, whose personality had for five years inspired with new life every branch of administration. For there were many who saw in Captain Carruthers but a dangerous innovator, nay, a revolutionary, who viewed with suspicion an interest in and knowledge of the people

which they stigmatized as opposed to every tradition of the service, and who expressed with bated breath their sincere hopes that the support given to views like his might not ultimately prove disastrous to the highest interests of British rule.

With such a host, with his eclectic sympathies and his tendency to Epicureanism, a good dinner well served was a certainty. The cook was the best that Goa could produce—Goa, that quaint old colony of the glorious days of Portugal, which nowadays would appear to have for purpose only the preserving of a race of dusky chefs. The rooms were rich with Oriental tapestries, and silks from Bokhara with dainty white stitches upon dark blue and mauve foundations vied with the heavy gorgeousness of gold brocades from little workshops hidden under the ancient walls of Ahmedabad. Miniature portraits of bygone Grand Moghuls, laboriously painted on ivory by the handicraftsmen of moribund Delhi, hung side by side with pictures unearthed in the forlorn treasuries of the decayed city of Bijapur. Elaborate sandal-wood carvings from the Canarese coast, with distorted deities upon monstrous bulls and elephants, jostled the simpler *chenar*

designs of Kashmir. Silver from the desert-circled cities of Cutch, brass from the Peshwa's capital at Poona, curious maces and halberds from Bikanir and Jaipur, Arab shields and daggers found in Hyderabad or the palaces of Surat, lay upon tables or hung upon the curtained walls. There was not an ornament but had some history, some quality to impress the fancy or please the eye.

Of the other guests four were officials of the usual sun-dried weary-eyed type. There was Hitchcock the policeman, thin, wiry, his hair grizzled at the temples, rather silent, but apt to burst forth at odd intervals when his temper was roused. Budgen the engineer, middle-aged, rather gross, given to talking loudly and using abstract words without any very precise meaning, represented all that was conventional, and clung bitterly to a middle-class respectability against whose foundations thirty years of Indian service had drifted in vain. McInnes the doctor, with an accent which still smacked of the mists of the moors, sceptical, rather eccentric, sad with longing for a wife and children whom he saw once in three years, and weary of the incessant struggle with the niggardliness of a neglected department on one

hand and popular ignorance and timidity on the other, completed the quartette with myself, of whom it is unnecessary to say more than that I was Carruthers' Assistant, very young, very enthusiastic, and very superior.

The last guest was—given the surroundings—the most interesting phenomenon in the station. He was a witty Frenchman, a traveller thrown by the winds of fortune upon the sands of India. By what odd chances he had found himself in our little spot on the map and at Carruthers' table would make another and a queerer story. It might be studied with advantage by the student of social philosophy and the comedy of life ; for it was an example, singularly striking, of the deflection by an almost unfelt force of circumstances, so trifling as to be passed over without remark by the unobservant, yet important to the sociologist, of the course of character and the ordinary action of human will. But, as the personages involved are still alive, and in at least two instances hold positions in which they command the respect of a world that does not know the facts connected with this incident, the story must, at least for the present, remain veiled.

After dinner, we had sat in long cane chairs

placed on a camp carpet in front of the verandah. Over the coffee and cigars the talk had as usual got upon the subject of women and of marriage, and the place of women in society in particular.

McInnes contributed a few observations from the scientific and biological point of view. "Differentiation of physical organism must imply difference of function in social relations also," was perhaps the weightiest of his remarks.

"All said and done, men and women are both led by the same passions," is the only remark I remember to have heard from Hitchcock. Budgen's share in the conversation was mainly confined to a growling crescendo of interjections in which "the noble influence of a pure woman," "the hand that rocks the cradle," "refining power," "must be preserved from all coarseness," "little self-control," and "a liberal education," are those I can chiefly recall from a wealth of similar gems of common-sense.

But, all through, it was our French guest who shone, who excelled in wit and brilliance on this topic. For half-an-hour he had tossed the ball of conversation up and down on the

breeze of fancy, iridescent under the brilliance of his fantasy, scintillating in the gleam of epigram and antithesis. "Le mouvement feministe" it was that became the chief target of his sarcasms, and that independence which the woman of the West is so illogically clamorous towards—independence from her proper functions, he declared. Perhaps in all this he was not free from a touch of personal bitterness, as will be seen if his story can ever be told.

All this time Budgen was visibly growing more and more uneasy.

"Hang it all, my dear chap," he has often said to me since ;—Budgen is one of those men who always call you "my dear chap" ;—"Hang it all, I am proud to say I know nothing and want to know nothing of all this abominable modern fashionable cynicism. Stuff and nonsense, my dear chap, sheer rot and wickedness. I simply couldn't stick the looseness and frivolity of that wretched foreigner. Hang it all, every word I ventured to put in, that fellow at once began twisting it inside out. He wants to find out the idea hidden away beneath words, he says. The idea! Why, it 's—it 's positively immoral, my dear chap. I thank God that the words I learnt in the

nursery from my father and my mother are still good enough for me. As if every one didn't know what right and wrong mean! All humbug, I tell you, all humbug."

Finally an aphorism from the Frenchman, rather too much perhaps for all of us, that there are only two professions for a woman—being married and—not being married—raised old Budgen's indignation to the boiling pitch. Rising up and thumping on the table so that all must hear him, he exclaimed :—

"Monsieur, do you indeed realize for a moment to what your vile theories would reduce woman, the inspiration of our life and the companion of our sorrows? Why, you would bring her down to the wretched level of the oppressed and timid females of this country. And all this time, thank goodness, we of the Anglo-Saxon race are slowly and laboriously trying to elevate them by Zenana missions and primary education."

There was a minute's constrained silence, for we all felt that the discussion had taken an unpleasant turn.

Then Carruthers' soft voice broke in.

"*A propos* of the women of India," he said, "I can tell you a true history from my own

experience. Mind you, I express no views and I have no theories. I am either too old or not old enough to wish to reform the world. I don't profess to do more than observe facts. But I think I know something of Indian life, and the Indian woman is not always an oppressed and suffering slave. Would you care to hear the story?"

We all knew that any of Carruthers' experiences would be interesting, and there was a general chorus of assent. After we had provided ourselves with smokes and drinks Carruthers began. And this is the story he told us that evening on the drive in front of the verandah.

* * * *

"Soon after I had entered the Political Service I found myself on the 3rd of May, 1897, more than fifty miles from a railway station in the wild country of forest and dingle which forms the little State of Patipur on the confines of Gujarat and the Central Indian plateau.

"There is a rocky gorge in the cliff-bound hills through which round an abrupt curve tumble and seethe the waters of a highland stream. In the season of the rains the roar of the freshet as it leaps around the corner of

the crags can be heard far into the woods, and even in the hazy height of summer a pellucid rivulet cascades in the lightest spray from rock to rock or slowly shimmers through sleepy pools. Long after the fiery sun of the weary months has turned all the surface of the land to a yellowish, reddish dust, the marge of this gorge is still green with a living herb. In the clefts of the rocks clings damp, cool moss, and a cluster of ferns raises its dainty fronds. The long, clean green of the exotic leaves of the plantains lends a suggestion of tales, long ago read, of tropical vegetation and of dark mysteries lurking in visionary savannahs. Where the stream becomes still after turning the shoulder of the hill, lies a small stretch of flat meadow set with a clump of magnificent mango-trees, in the midst a little shrine, faced by a couched bull of sculptured marble, for the phallic worship of the God of all the World. Here encamps the wandering Vanjara, carrying grain and butter and sometimes opium from the North on his train of pack-oxen. Tinkers from Marwar, stalwart men with curling beards and strips of red cloth round their locks, here unyoke their great, square wains covered with quaint wood-carving. The Charan drover

brings his cattle here to rest as he marches from market to market along this ancient trade route between Malwa and no less fertile Gujarat. And here too at times the eye is dazzled by cloths of gold and the waving of pennons, and the air is loud with the tinkle of sword in sheath and the neighing of prancing stallions, when the sumptuous royal tents are pitched for the visit of a neighbouring chief or of a high official.

" There with the usual accompaniment of red-coated messengers and galloping lancers I had pitched my tents, with the British flag floating over the encampment, for my usual official visit to the State.

" Facing my camp on a steep and rocky peak stood the castellated mansion of the Rajput chief of the land. Tier upon tier rose the white walls, crowned by three nearly spherical cupolas, each with a marble spike pointing upward to the sky, the windows supported by the frail pillars of Oriental architecture and arched in the manner of the Saracens. The tall, quivering head of a palm tree rose from the inner courtyard over the walls, planted no doubt many decades ago by some idle princess reclining on cushions of Persian cloth under the waving

fans of handmaidens and young boys beside the cool fountain with its paving of mosaic.

" On the second morning of my arrival I rode in the grey moments of the Indian dawn, when through the pure air the landscape is touched by the first tints of the day to a delicate dream of some dim fairyland, up the steep approach to the guarded gate in the wall, where the Arab watchmen keep the entrance for their chief. At the gate I got off and left my horse with the guard. I myself went in to the first court-yard and there waited.

" I had hardly stood there five minutes when the inner gate opened, and amid shouts of ' Glory, great King ! ' from the bowing servitors, there came forth, robed in white linen, bearded, with full flashing eyes, Partabsingji, the Chief. But my glance did not linger on his manly figure, for behind came a slender, graceful form, such as I had not yet seen in my life. The dress was that of a young Rajput, white jean trousers tight to the knee, crinkled in many folds over the gold-circled ankles and fuller on the thighs, a rather long jacket of black velvet with silver buttons and braid, the sleeves slit to show the fine ruffles of a lace shirt, round the neck a gold chain set with

pearls. But, framed in the voluminous turban of thin, rose-coloured silk was a beautiful olive-tinted face, the red lips half parted to a smile through which shone a row of dainty teeth like the seeds in a ripe pomegranate, the eyes profound like a dark mountain pool half-shaded from the sun, large and imperial. In the man's dress, the face was yet unmistakably a woman's, and a happy woman's. The light of free intelligence shot from under the long eyelashes, and the brave brow spoke of a habit to command. The full round curves of the cheek and the up-turning corners of the lip one divined to be still tired from the kisses of love ; and the kindly glance and soft smile showed a life well filled and happy in rich affections. I saw the face but for a moment, yet the memory lingers in my life, as of some sweet and rare picture seen dimly in childhood in the oaken hall of some old Tudor manor. She mounted her pawing Arab, and rode off slowly side by side with the chief, a very flower of Rajput chivalry.

" Struck as I was by her loveliness—a loveliness enhanced by the marked distinction of high birth and the glow of happy fulfilment of life,—I set to work to find out her history,

What I heard from the chief himself and what I succeeded in discovering from others of the princess's life, learnt piece by piece and disconnectedly, I shall tell you as well as I can in the sequence of events.

"The lady Sundriba was the daughter of a petty chief of Mewar of high descent but narrow acres. There, as the daughter of a small chief, she had spent her childhood largely out of doors, had learned to ride and use a bow, to know the woods and fields, and to be friendly with her father's people. Even as a child she had shown the promise of great beauty, and, running about as she did, her face had the flush of health, and her fine limbs grew straight and full and strong. When she was twelve years of age, it was time to retire to the seclusion of the women's apartments. But the State was small and out of the way, and the seclusion was not of the strictest. Still she would drive out, and once in the fields, would mount a horse and gallop off beside her father. And in the women's apartments she learnt much, to know the world, and the duties of a good and faithful wife, how to please a husband's affections, and the gentle arts of sewing and playing the guitar, and to sing the old songs of the heroes. Her

happiest hours were when she lay beside her mother in the twilight and caught glimpses of that wider life as wife and mother which was beginning to open its rich promise in the seclusion of ripe womanhood.

"One day, just after she was fourteen, her father's little mansion was all astir with excitement and preparation. For the Rajah Partabsingji, lord of a much wealthier and mightier State, was passing through her father's territories on his way to another Rajah, and was to spend the night at her father's house. All day she had helped her mother to supervise the servants and see that the cooking was properly done. At last at dusk she was free to lie with her mother on the balcony seat behind the trellis screen which looked into the courtyard.

"'I wonder what he will be like, dearest mother,' said the young girl. 'Old and fat, I suppose, with a paunch like Ganpati, or like the funny little *bania* who keeps the grain shop at the corner. Or perhaps he will be supercilious, stroking his moustache the whole time, and thinking himself a second Arjun.'

"As she spoke was heard the first distant melancholy drumming of the kettle-drums which headed the welcoming procession. Slowly,

slowly, they came nearer, till at last amidst the glare and smoke of torches the cavalcade entered the courtyard. And there finally, beside her father, rode in the Rajah Partabsingji. She looked and saw the young man, then twenty-five years of age, strong, manly, spirited; and the shiver which ran down her spine and through her limbs told her that here was her appointed destiny.

"'No man,' she whispered, 'but the god Rama himself. O God! to be his Sita.'

"The mother pressed her to her breast.

"'Hush, little Sundriba,' she said. 'Put away all such thoughts. Remember, you should not even have seen his face. You are a Rajput lady, and for us honour must always conquer love. Above all, let not your father dream that you have remarked the Rajah. He might kill us both.'

"That night the little lady lay uneasily upon her bed, thinking ever of the noble face and the handsome form of him whom in her thoughts she already styled lord. At last she called the little confidential slave who slept near her on the ground, and made her creep into bed beside her, and there, her arms around her neck, cheek upon cheek, she whispered her secret.

"'He is my king,' she said, 'and I must serve him. Surely God has appointed me to be his slave. I will hang flowers on the image of Krishna, that his golden pipe may bring us together.'

"'And let me also try to help, little mistress,' said the servant girl. 'I shall enlist Ratnasing, the State minstrel, on our side, and we shall see what he can do.'

"And so finally the two girls talked themselves to sleep, mistress and maid still locked in each other's arms.

"What the maid had promised she fulfilled. There were hurried whispers in dark corridors, and smiles to Ratnasing, and conversation from behind the curtain with Bhulakidas, the Brahmin priest.

"Perhaps the mother was not quite blind to her daughter's scheme. For one evening as they sat hand in hand, while the maids packed and folded, after their weekly brushing and cleaning, the rich accordion-pleated skirts of flowered silk and gold brocade and stiffly woven *mashru*, and the gala mantles of rainbow hue, some thin and light as air from the looms of Lucknow, others of softest shades of pink and azure, such as the Parsi ladies love, others shot

with varying greens and scarlets in the fashion of Kathiawad, the mother pressed her yielding fingers, and said :—

" ' Remember, my Sundriba, that power and wealth do not always bring happiness. Is it not a Rajput proverb that the wife of the poor nobleman is a queen, for she rules her husband, but the spouse of the rich prince is his meanest slave? Think well before you set your hopes too high.'

" But the girl still cherished her desire and fostered her love in her breast. And so finally the State minstrel was called and received his instructions, and went to the Court of Partabsingji, and sang the praises of his master's fair daughter. And means were found to put into the Rajah's hand a miniature of the girl, and he found her beautiful. What need to recount all the tardy negotiations of a Rajput marriage—the bribes to the privileged slaves, and the winning over of ministers? At last the gold-covered cocoa-nuts were given and accepted, and the day for the wedding settled. But since Sundriba's father was but a small chief and Partabsingji was the lord of important territories, it would not have been right for him himself to go to her house to be mar-

ried. So he sent, as the Rajput custom is, his sword—for surely the best part of a man is his sword—and Sundriba was married to the steel, the end of her dress knotted to the jewelled hilt.

"That night in the first fond kiss of love Sundriba gained an ascendancy over the chief which she never lost in his life. Some thought of godhead and of fate there was perhaps in both, as Partabsingji, coming in to partake of that first common meal which is the holy symbol of matrimony, lifted the veil gently from the head bowed in submission over the crossed hands. What words can tell the rapture when he raised the modest face and saw how fair was his wife. While she still stood to serve him with his meal, as is the first duty of the newly-wedded wife, he caught her skirt and gently pulled her to his knee and pressed her blushing face and perfumed hair to his bosom. Reverently, but yet how ardently, he slipped his hand to her back and undid the fastenings of her shimmering bodice and bared her virgin breasts.

"'Thou lovest me too, mother of my sons to be?' he whispered.

"The girl slipped from his arms and, pressing her lips in wild kisses on his feet, while

the long tresses of her hair curled like black cobras on the ground, with sobs of convulsive happiness, she cried :—

" ' My king, my more than God ! love is too feeble a word for what I feel. I live only in you and as part of you. Think not you also that, from generation to generation and from age to age, in every incarnation of our souls and in every resurrection of our lives, I am appointed to worship and adore you, to serve you and to make soft and sweet your life, so that your soul may the quicker come to its liberation and with it drag perchance your handmaiden also to the light. So, age to age, and generation to generation, shall I serve you till the day come when we be both absorbed into the absolute unity of final freedom. In the meantime we are both of the race of kings, and I swear to keep in all things pure and undefiled the Rajput honour. All I ask is but to bear your seed to fruit.'

* * * *

" Thus began and thus passed the life of a Rajput lady—not unbeautifully and not without its excellence. Sweet and good-natured, kind to all, to her lord always respectful, always tender, seeking her perfection—the fulfilment

of her function—only in his happiness, she was herself happy and ruled him completely though unconsciously. There was another wife, a shyer, less distinctive girl, who was at first inclined to receive Sundriba with suspicion ; but even she was soon won by the sweetness of the lady's nature, and the girls became fast friends. Sundriba, although Partabsingji wished to be only her lover, insisted that he should treat both equally and show no partiality. Daily her influence grew, and Partabsingji consulted her even in all matters of administration. How many an official letter was sent, which was inspired in reality by the lady behind the curtain. Then as Partabsingji found that his wife could ride and shoot, he grew gradually into the habit of taking her with him in the dress of a youth to the chase and the sports of the field. In pleasures and in business they became real companions, sharers of good and ill, and daily their love grew stronger and stronger.

* * * *

" This was the story I then learnt," continued Carruthers. " Very soon after, I left the neighbourhood of the State and was sent wandering from district to district for several years. And I heard no more of Sundriba and of Partab-

singji. But the face of the lady I remembered well, and I always hoped to hear more of her life. But it was only last year, when I was on leave, and then in London, that I heard the sad end of the idyll. I was sitting in the club in St. James's Square, when in walked Smithson of the Political, who had taken over from me when I left Patitpur. I heard the end from him.

"Poor old Partabsingji, it seems, killed himself one day while galloping after a pig. The horse fell, and Partabsingji struck his head on a stone. They picked him up unconscious, and he died immediately after. So he died a good sportsman as he had lived.

"As for his wife, they say that she was sitting at the window which looks over the gorge waiting for his return, as she always did, when she saw them carrying him slowly along on a bier of branches. She did not weep or scream, but sat there motionless, watching, watching, till they brought him into her room. Then she got up, her face set and still, and her eyes dazed, and sat down on the ground beside the couch where they had laid him, and began to shampoo his limbs as if he were tired from riding—you know the Indian way. For a couple of minutes she pressed the cold legs, and then

suddenly, without a cry, she fell fainting upon him, her head upon his chest. Well, they revived her, of course, but she never again took any interest in life. She cried out only once, as the body left the palace for the pyre, but she used to spend the whole day at the window from which she had seen them bringing in his corpse. I think there can be no doubt that, had it been possible, she would have burnt herself on her husband's funeral pyre in the old Rajput fashion. She interested herself in affairs only once, when she was asked to adopt a son to her husband, for they had been childless. Then she made, I think, a remarkably good choice. Six months after the day they had brought back her husband, they found her one evening of the rains lying dead upon the window-ledge where she always used to sit. She must have passed away peaceably as she watched."

THE LOOTING OF HIRACHAND

THE LOOTING OF HIRACHAND

"How much is old Hirachand asking for millet to-day?"

"He wanted three annas. And I said the grain was the same as he had had all the year, and he had been taking two-and-a-half annas, and that was a quarter more than it was worth. But he would take nothing less than three annas, the cursed usurer."

"Thus it is. The usurer comes to our land and fattens on us in the good years, and now that the year is bad, he lets us starve and fills his stomach with the profit on our own grain."

The speakers were seated beside a little hut on the outskirts of the village of Partapghad, while the evening grey stole over the summer sky, and the thin smoke floated lazily round the cottages. The one who had last spoken, and who was now angrily sucking the smoke from a dirty clay pipe-bowl, was Koia of the Withered Arm, a stunted being with one eye a-squint and an arm which the travails of birth

had twisted and deformed to an uncouth stump. Both were of that forest tribe of Naikdas, which successive Administration Reports have called the wildest race in Western India. How and whence this survival of an earlier age has come, how it has existed alone, unknown, forgotten, in the teak jungle and the marsh, companioned only by beasts of prey, is a question which none has been able to attempt to answer. Stunted, squat, living in grass huts, there where the sprites of fever lurk, uncouth, shy, yet with the cunning of the panther in the woods, they still survive, their food the fruits of creepers and of trees and such beasts as they can kill, even to the lizard and the monkey. As a rule they are easily moved to laughter, friendly with those they know, grateful for a kind word, loyal to their own leaders, and affectionate to their wives and children. They are fond of their forest trees and flowers, and, almost alone of the natives of India, a Naikda boy will now and then be seen to climb a rock or a tree to gather a bud for his sweetheart's pleasure. But, rouse them by intrusion on their immemorial forest rights, or let them once be pinched by the thin finger of famine, and the savage is up in all his cruelty and his wantonness. Even in the

history of a British province more than one revolt has shown how readily the childish smile turns to childish madness.

For more years than can be known the Naikda has lived and died in the pathless forests of teakwood which now are dense where the minarets and domes of the Moslem capital of Champaner once proudly rose. Alone and unmolested he has skulked where a pillar rising from the mud of a dank morass, or a stone, ruined and creeper-hung, in the midst of tall, rank grasses, marks the site of an ancient edifice. The hyena and the jackal have their den where kings once lived in marble idleness; and the panther hunts the gazelle or the spotted deer in the half-light of the woods where, horsed upon priceless chargers, the proud nobles of the faith have caracolled in luxurious procession. Above his head springs sudden the rocky mass of Pavagadh, stern and proud.

As the two Naikdas sat and grumbled, there rode towards them a young man on a country-bred pony, its saddle of quilted cloth, the martingale of tarnished gold lace. On his head a coloured cloth was twisted jauntily, with a cock over the left ear. A silver circlet dangled over the left ankle.

"How goes it with you?" said the young man, reining up. "No work and much food is the order of these famine days, isn't it?" he added, with a bitter smile.

The two Naikdas grinned doubtfully, but gave a respectful salute. For the rider was Ratansingji, the son of the headman of Partapghad, one of those Bharia Kolis who for two or three hundred years have penetrated into the thicknesses of the forest and established for themselves estate and authority over the forest peoples. Originally of Rajput descent, they married with the women of their Koli soldiery, and rank now between the Koli and the Rajput. Ratansing, a handsome young man with liquid eyes and curling moustache, had not a few of the tastes of his Rajput ancestry. Dissipated, luxurious, fond of bright colours, of horses and shooting, he took the world for the stage of his magnificent enjoyment. To supply his pleasure he had freely borrowed without care or heed, and the largest of his creditors was the village usurer, Hirachand.

For a few moments Ratansing, his hand dropped upon the withers of his horse, looked upon the malevolent countenance of Koia of the Withered Arm. Then he dismounted, and as

one who had resolved, sat down deliberately beside the two Naikdas.

"And what of our usurer Hirachand?" he said. "How long is the Hindu trader to lord it in our jungles? Once I thought this to be our village, and I fancied that you too had some claim upon this land."

The two Naikdas moved uneasily, and the face of Koia grew more bitter.

Then Koia spoke: "The land is ours, and we want no Brahmin or Bania here. Would that we had his grain. May the tiger strike him dead!"

"The grain is here to our hand," said Ratansing, in strident tone. "The grain is here. But where are the men to take it? The jungle breed was once of men. But now it spawns serfs and cowards."

Thus they talked—the Koli youth and the jungle men—for more than half-an-hour, —eagerly, bitterly. At last they grew more quiet, and a satisfied smile curved the lips of the young gallant.

"Don't forget the account books with the record of my debts," he said, as he rose to go. "Let me see them first, and then into the fire with them!"

Koia smiled. "It will teach him to stay in the city and to leave us to our woods."

It was five years since Hirachand and his two sons had settled in Partapghad. One of a most enterprising caste of traders, the Lohanas, he had dared the unknown terrors of the forest land at the temptation of enormous profit in this unexploited soil. And beyond expectation he had succeeded. The few Bharia Koli houses had purchased largely of his silks and gold brocades, and had accumulated debt upon debt for no reason at all except the temptation of finding for the first time in their lives unlimited credit. Remembering only the days when the sovran power was also judge, and, as judge, dealt equity to its subjects, they recked nothing when they found that the Bania had had mortgage-deeds of their lands written by a cheap solicitor in the market town twenty miles off. They themselves had refused to sign, but they had not yet learnt that the solicitor's practice depended on his ability to forge signatures upon deeds and to produce eye-witnesses therewith to swear they were present when the debtors signed the deeds. Knowing nothing of the new laws, it had barely entered their minds that the Head of the District was no longer judge between

his people, and that they would be ruined upon the evidence of false bonds by judges, the caste-fellows of the usurer and the trader. The Naikdas had found not credit but tempting toys and trinkets for barter, glass beads from Birmingham, and light-coloured cloths and brass and pewter gewgaws. So every year their scanty grain and the gum and honey which they collected in the woods found its way to the shop of Hirachand. And Hirachand grew fat and ate more clarified butter with his lentils and bread. Once he had even bought his wife a new gown.

And now for five months there had been scarcity in the land, and Hirachand rubbed his stomach, and when no one was looking unbent to smile. For to him at least had come a season of exceeding profit. All the grain for which he had bartered worthless trinkets in past years now found a ready market at a price which would bring at least six hundred per cent., and, as he was the only trader in the jungle country, his rate was always four points higher than that of the market town. Only one trouble he had, and that was with the Bharia Kolis. Ratansing had come to borrow more,

and had even threatened the usurer when he refused to lend. But Hirachand, who hated the young man for his looks and gallantry, and loathed him with the zeal of the religious bigot because the Koli shot the deer and the antelope, had told him that his land was now in the trader's hands, and that he could demonstrate this to any Court by the certain evidence of his books. Ratansing had carried it off for the moment bravely, and had waited for the usurer's wife at the well, but the sting was still in his heart, and he feared, for he had learned something of the new English laws, for the land of his ancestors.

On the second night after Ratansingji had sat beside the Naikda huts, the crescent moon showed twelve men, naked except for the strip of cloth between the loins, standing under the mhowra trees beside the house and shop of Hirachand. A low whistle roused the Naikda watchman who lay in front beside a small wood fire, swathed in a cotton cloth. He sat up, looked round, and went slowly to the mhowra trees. Koia of the Withered Arm came forward and met him.

"Brother," he said, "we have come for the

trader's grain. Go in peace, but cry out first, so that you can swear to the Government that you were beaten and fled."

"But," said the man, "he pays me to watch his house."

"He pays," sneered Koia, "but how much? Barely enough to fill your stomach, and he makes your wife and children work like slaves. He pays, but he pays you with your own grain. Say no more. The grain is to be ours and we are your own folk. Would you be for the usurer, the thief of our goods, the miser, the tyrant? Or are you for your own blood of the jungle folk?"

The man looked round and saw those other figures in the shadows of the trees, all his own people, the folk of his own village, of his own kith and kin, all determined to rob the master whom he himself hated, whom he served only for a pittance, bearing kicks and curses. No longer he hesitated.

For a few moments longer the man talked with the Naikdas. Then he returned to his place and fired a couple of arrows into the air. Then he let go a terrific yell.

"*Shet, Shet,*" he bawled, "thieves, thieves! Get up, quick. Oh, my father, spare me. Don't

kill me." Some one moved in the house. The Naikda smiled and ran off, still howling, till his voice grew faint in the distance.

From the shade of the trees the dim figures moved forward towards the gate of the shop. In each one's hand were the bamboo bow and the painted arrows of reed. Koia kicked the watchman's fire till the red flames blazed and the contours of house and trees grew ruddy against the darkness.

"Who is there?" cried an old man's voice from the house.

"It is we," cried Koia, with cruel laugh. "We, your clients. Give us grain, for we want to eat. Give quickly, or we set fire to your thatch."

After some whispering the door-chain clanked, and the old man walked forth with his two sons. A woman's face peered anxiously round the door.

"What do you want at this time of night, brothers-in-law?" said Hirachand. "You get no grain here. Off to your dens, you dogs of Naikdas."

For some minutes they continued disputing, the Naikdas edging nearer to the door. At last the old man lost his temper and struck a

Naikda with his stick. In another moment all was over.

"Strike, strike!" cried some one. A Naikda rushed into the shop, another, then another, pushing aside the screaming woman, and dragged out two sacks of grain. The old man saw his precious hoard touched. He sobbed, he threw down his turban, beat his hair. At last in a very frenzy he struck again. His sons had already turned to flee. Four Naikdas were carrying off the sacks of grain.

Who let fly that arrow cannot be known. There had been no thought to kill, so much is certain. But hardly had the old man raised his stick a second time, even as the marauders were already turned to flee, when he fell, an arrow through his heart. The Naikdas did not pause to look again, but made off after those who were carrying the precious sacks of grain.

But, even as they went, there burst across the field into the house, tall, jubilant, with chin and mouth covered in a fold of his turban, the son of the headman, the gallant of the village, Ratansing. Quickly he came out again with the usurer's account-books.

Laughing, seeming in the dancing light of the fire even taller than he was, he tore the

books to shreds and tossed them into the fire. Kicking the carcase which lay before him, loathsome even in death, he cried :—

"The forest to our people, and the trader to the city. Those to whom the sovran gives no justice, seek justice by their own hand."

* * * *

Such a crime could not, of course, be disguised. Several of the dacoits were arrested and committed, but what evidence could there be? They were discharged. Against Ratansing there was not enough even to justify his arrest. So Ratansing laughs and rides and shoots and drinks and jests with the maidens at the well. For now he knows that the land will be his, as it has been his forbears'. And there come no more traders to Partapghad.

ON THY HEAD

ON THY HEAD

A LEGEND

I HAD been shooting in the State of one of those Rajput chiefs whose territories form the fringes of the Province of Gujarat. In the evening I was visited in my tents by two Bharots, State poets and hereditary bards or minstrels, whose seat was in the capital of the Chief. We fell to talking of the former history of their caste—once a powerful class, to whom the English power largely owed the submission of Kathiawad, a race of genealogists and bardic singers, come originally, it would seem, with their chiefs in the Scythian invasion thirteen centuries ago, for ages powerful and feared, but now with so many others decaying and contemned in that general downfall of ideals which the forces of the West have wrought. And we spoke of that curious custom which is known as "traga"—the tradition of which is the proudest heritage of the minstrel caste. It is that custom by

which the minstrel will kill himself in protest against tyranny or breaking of word by the chief, and by his death devote to eternal perdition the forswearer and the despot. To the Rajput Chief it is the point of honour—honour at once and superstition—never to traverse that promise which the minstrel has once taken on his head. It is on this account that even now, when a chief is to bind himself by deed, it is the Bharot that stands surety. In a land where ridicule is unknown, the custom of "traga" alone remains to temper despotism. Then the older of the two Bharots told me this story, which I set down as he told.

* * * *

One hundred and fifty years ago, in that region of Kathiawad where the salt of the sea bites white through the soil, and the hot, treeless plain stretches flat under the vertical sun till it loses itself in the haze of many mirages, ruled the Jhala Chief Ramsingji. Cruel he was and mean, driving forth the beggar with bitter words, hating the priest and the singer, savage and grasping in the winter season when the grain of the fields was brought by the tenants to be weighed and divided in equal shares on the great threshing-floor. In the

house he had two wives, but of the two marriages had been born but one son, Ranjitsingji, a stripling of eighteen years.

One morning when the chief had ridden forth to note how the crops came up and count how much could be squeezed from the cultivators, there came timidly on his little pony into the courtyard of the palace the "purohit," or family priest. The last time he had come to the house the chief had cast him forth with contumely, and forbidden him ever again to come crying for alms to his doors. But to the Brahmin the hope of gain came very near, and, in the absence of the chief, he counted on the religious feeling of the two princesses. So he came and was admitted, even into the presence of the ladies. But it happened that on that day Ramsingji turned his horse's head homewards early; for the dust had been blowing hot in his face on the desert wind. And the first thing he saw when he entered his courtyard was the little pony. So he asked who had come. And one answered of the door-keepers, "Lord, it is the priest."

Then Ramsingji grew very wrath and alighted, and strode quickly up the steps and into the inner apartments. His sword was

clutched in his hand, and on his brow was knotted the frown of his anger. The women heard his step and grew afraid, and the priest clambered out through a narrow window.

The chief struck open the door and entered the women's room, where only the elder wife, the mother of Ranjitsingji, the more beloved, remained to meet his anger.

"What is this?" cried the chief, and his voice was hoarse. "Whom hast thou had here, misbegotten?"

The princess stood and bowed before her lord, and raised her clasped hands to her forehead.

"I ask forgiveness," she said, "O master of mine. It was long since I had consulted the priest, and I had need to ask him on behalf of our son. It was the family priest, O master and lord."

Then Ramsingji spoke never a word, but twice he smote her with the flat blade of the sword, and once he dashed the hilt upon her mouth. And then he turned from the room and stalked into the reception room to drink opium with his retainers.

But Ranjitsingji, the son, had heard the coming of the chief and the noise of the doors

and the women running. Therefore he went to his mother's room, lest aught should have befallen. There he found his mother lying on the floor, with her garment loose, sobbing, and the blood was trickling from her mouth. Then Ranjitsingji too grew angry, and he caught his sword in his hand and swore an oath to abandon the land.

"What was this," he cried, "wherefore my father should strike you? Cruel I knew him and mean I knew him, but I kept silence. He had forgotten the honour of the Rajput, and yet I remained silent. But now that he has struck you, my mother, and for no fault of yours, but for the fault of his own meanness, from henceforward I count him no father of mine. Let him rule here, but I leave him, I leave my house and my home, my land and my gods. I go to seek new kingdoms with my sword."

So saying, he kissed his mother and ran out and ordered his horse to be saddled.

As he passed the door of the Durbar he heard laughter, and his father beckoned to him to enter. But he stood at the door and said :

"You have counted the money like a trader ; you have closed your hand to singer and priest ; so that I hold you no longer a Rajput ; and

now you have beaten my mother. So I go forth and leave you and your land."

And Ramsingji, the chief, was angry, and said, " Go then, for thou art no son of mine."

And it was in this wise that Ranjitsingji mounted his horse and rode off from his home.

As the hours passed the old man became ever more uneasy. His minister had said, and the words had sunk deep in his heart, that Ranjitsingji was his only son, the hope of his race, the only one left to set alight his funeral pyre. And the retainers looked sad or murmured. Affliction pressed hard upon the house. At last towards sundown the chief yielded up his pride and asked his minister for counsel how to win back the boy, his only son. Then spoke the wise Brahmin minister :

" Ranjitsingji, the royal youth, has gone forth in anger and has taken an oath. The Rajput blood and the Rajput pride beat hot in his pulses. Advice he will not heed nor the words of your servants. There is one man and one man alone who may bring him back, and that is Karsanbhai, the bard of your house."

Now there was hot blood between the chief and Karsanbhai, the hereditary minstrel. For the chief had withdrawn from the bard the land

which his ancestors had in gift for their singing from the forbears of the chief. Yet, since Ranjitsingji was his only son, the chief even made shift to forget the words that had passed and called Karsanbhai to the Durbar. But Karsanbhai would agree to go to recall the youth only when the chief had solemnly sworn by the cow to restore the lands he had forfeited. Then at last Karsanbhai said, "I go ; and, on the second day I bring back Ranjitsingji."

On the bank of a river, amidst rich parkland studded with trees, where large herds of antelope fearlessly graze and the florican dance in the rainy season, rise the towers of the Mahadev temple of Bhimnath. Hither of old the chiefs used to come to worship, to make alliances, and to settle their disputes. Hither had come Ranjitsingji to say farewell to the golden lands of Kathiawad ; and hither after him came the minstrel Karsanbhai. Into the palace whose many storeys rise proudly over the river, to the left of the underground shrine, went the Bharot. In the large room he found his prince Ranjitsingji seated with three other chiefs. Thrice the Bharot lifted his hand from the ground to his brow in salutation. And Ranjitsingji smiled, for he had a kindly heart, and

bade the Bharot sit on the ground before him, and caught his hand to pour into it from the silver pot the customary draught of opium. But Karsanbhai shook his head.

"I drink the opium," he said, "only if you will first hear the story which I have composed."

The young chief hesitated, but said, "It would be a breach of politeness not to hear. But let it be short, for I go to-night, and I have yet to sanctify my sword beside the sacred tree of Arjun and to worship the great God."

Then Karsanbhai, still holding in his hand the hand of his chief's son, told this story.

"Once of old at Delhi the Moghul Emperor sat in Durbar in the marble agate-inlaid hall, surrounded by his courtiers and his nobles. And the talk had turned to the doings of the Rajputs and their bravery in battle.

"Then the Emperor said, 'I have heard, but I hold it not for truth, that it has happened that some Rajputs by the gift of God and their own prowess have been able, even after they themselves are slain, yet with their dead body to use their sword upon their enemies. Does any of you hold this for true? And if it be, is there

amongst you any Rajput who will venture his life to prove the power of his race?'

"At the Emperor's words all the Hindu nobles looked upon one another, but they saw in their eyes that one and all were afraid. Twice the mace-bearer passed slowly round the hall, in his hand the betel-leaf, to accept which meant the acceptance of the gage. A third and last time he proceeded round the assembly, and at last one of the chiefs of Marwar reached out his hand in the silence and accepted the leaf.

"The Emperor smiled and said, 'So be it. We meet again after a month, and then, brave chief, we shall see thy prowess.'

"So a month passed, and again the Emperor met his nobles in Durbar. Amongst them sat the chief from Marwar who had accepted the challenge, and beside him sat his son, a boy of fourteen years, a handsome boy. He had, when he heard of the challenge, pleaded hard to be allowed to come, and his father had at last yielded.

"Then the Emperor called, 'Who is it who has taken the challenge and will show his prowess after death?'

Then before the chief could answer, a silvery

voice rang through the hall, and there stood his son, crying, 'Monarch, it is I.'

"Then the boy walked quickly, amidst the murmur of wonder, to the centre of the hall and sat down on the floor, his small sword on his dress, facing the throne.

"Then the Emperor laughed the more, and said, 'Is it your wish that I should try the courage of this child?'

"And the chief answered, 'Sultan, what shall I say? Since he has taken the task on his own head, to refuse would be to doubt his Rajput courage and my own honour.'

"Then the Emperor called upon Dilawar-khan, the tallest of his Pathan swordsmen, to cut off the head of the boy. Exclaiming that it was a stain upon himself to slay a child, the Pathan was forced at last to undertake the deed. Slowly he marched down the hall to the place where the boy still sat. He bared his scimitar, raised it above his head; a flash, and the head rolled severed upon the ground.

"And then in the sight of all was seen a wonder. The headless corpse rose to its feet, and drew its sword, and smote Dilawarkhan, the bravest of the swordsmen. Then the body

turned to the side of the hall to the lines where sat the Mahomedan nobles, and made its way amongst them in their panic, slaying as it went. Still waved the sword and still it slew, till at last the body reached the throne on which sat the Moghul Emperor, cold, staring, and aghast. Beside the throne stood the headless corpse and waved its bloody sword. Before it, there in its power, sat the oppressor, the outcast, the Emperor. Surely death seemed very nigh. But now from the corner, where sat the Hindu nobles, sprang a Bharot. Forward he ran to the corpse and caught its clammy hand.

"Then," said Karsanbhai, continuing the story, "then the Bharot drew his dagger—as I draw mine—and placed it with the point at his own throat—as the point of my dagger is at my throat—and then, still holding the hand of the corpse—as I clasp yours—he cried to the soul of the boy.

"'Chief,' he cried, 'spare the king, Mussulman though he be, spare the king, the ruler of Hindustan. Spare the Emperor, or I kill myself. And on thy head be it.'

"Then the corpse heard and feared the curse of the Bharot. The sword dropped from its nerveless fingers, and the pale trunk fell upon

the ground before the throne. For one is the honour of Bharot and Rajput.

"And now," said Karsanbhai, and his hand was still upon the chief's and his dagger still at his throat, "now hear thou also, son of thy father. For I swear that so also do I devote my life, if thou return not to thy realm. On thy head be it if I die."

* * * *

In this wise did the young prince return to his father, and so the Bharot Karsanbhai won back the lands of his forbears. Those were good days.

BEHIND THE PARDAH

"YES, I despise you. Think you that I married you by choice, and that I wanted a husband without ambition? No, no! The stories of the gods are old stories. I was married to you because my parents wanted it, and you were ready to accept a small dowry. At first I pretended love. But after a year I saw you truly for what you were—weak, what the world calls good-natured, always fiddling away with old books and pictures and music—nice pleasures for a prince. And so I despised you—husband mine!"

The young man, who was stalking angrily from one end of the room to the other, stepped forward quickly and caught her wrist and dragged her to the floor.

"I too, I loathe you. I cannot say how I loathe you, vile woman, faithless wife. You are all evil, and you know not even good. And now I, a Rajput, to whom honour unblemished

should be the torch of life, I do not even know whether our son is mine. I cannot think why I do not slay you."

With a jerk that threw her to the ground, he released her arm and rushed furiously to the door.

But, as he reached it, the woman, quickly jumping to her feet, erect in all her pride and disdain, cried :—

"Never shall you know the secret either. Let that be the punishment of your weakness, ever to doubt our child's paternity—but to know, never!"

The speakers were the Rajah Ramsingji, Chief of the Mewar State of Hathiwada, and his wife the Princess Ruplibai. Distorted as his face was by passion, Ramsingji was still a handsome young man, with large, voluptuous eyes, and soft, curling hair, the lips somewhat full and sensuous, the chin round and delicate. Twenty-four years of age, he had assumed the reins of sovranty three years before, after a minority of five years during which the State had been administered on his behalf by the British Government. Over his father's end there hung the dark cloud of suspected poisoning which so often looms heavy and threatening

on the horizon of native rulers. To the young prince the suspicion was all but certainty ; and often, in the gloomy watches of the night, he had seemed to grope and grapple with the spirit of the dead for vindication and for vengeance. For the rest, his youth had been spent as is that of most young chiefs. In the Princes' College he had been taught football and polo, had studied a little, had been initiated in photography, and had learnt to mix like a man and a gentleman with his equals and with strangers. He had suffered the usual trials and contended with the usual temptations, and his character had slowly, in pleasure and in pain, in rivalry and in solitude, learnt the last and greatest lesson, to know itself.

A stranger seeing the Princess Ruplibai would have been struck first by the richness of the apparel of a royal lady. From her head, draped in full flowing folds over shoulder and breast to her feet, hung a mantle of silk, shot with changing hues of rose-pink, green, and palest yellow, the hem of woven gold. A bodice of richly flowered brocade and a short pleated skirt of a stiff fabric of interwoven silk and cotton peered and glimmered underneath the mantle. The dainty ankles were

circled with chains of silver, and the deft toes were covered with rings and bells. A necklace of leaf upon leaf of gold with a jewelled pendant (such as are found in stifling death-chambers under Egyptian pyramids or in the volcanic ashes of Pompeii) circled the full round neck. The ears were pierced by rings of gold, on which trembled and quivered little clusters of pearls and emeralds ; and the high forehead, of the colour of ripe wheat, was framed with a chain of pearls and rubies against the carefully drawn black hair. But the face had an interest more subtle and more enduring than the sensuous appeal of rich raiment. For it was stamped with an intellectual energy and a pride of will-power rarely to be found in the soft and affectionate women of the East. A lofty brow, a long fine nose with clearly chiselled mobile nostrils, and thin, tight lips made a countenance which seemed destined to will and to command action.

Her marriage with the chief of Hathiwada had taken place seven years ago, when he was seventeen and she just fifteen, but, except for the first formal meeting, they had not lived together as husband and wife till he came of age and began to rule. The marriage had

been made, as is the custom, without any prior knowledge of each other, in accordance with the wish of Ramsingji's dead father and of Ruplibai's parents. In addition, Ramsingji had married, on coming of age, another princess, a timid, plain, and uninteresting girl, who had tranquilly accepted a second place, and was content to await with resignation either neglect or affection. This second marriage had been prompted entirely by financial expectations, with a view to replenishing the treasury of the State with a large dower.

At first the Chief's marriage with Ruplibai had appeared to him destined for happiness. Charmed to find her clever and intellectual, he recognised in her with admiration and self-congratulation a decision and a power of will in which he knew himself to be lacking. That qualities, in themselves so excellent, and which in a Chief might have been desirable, could be perilous in a wife and destructive to happiness, was a reflection beyond his experience of life. And doubtless in the beginning the girl, joying in the novelty of love and caresses, for a moment indulgent of the happy carelessness of her years, had overlooked in the *man* who held out the cup of pleasure a temperament

ultimately alien and discordant. For even from the first the difference of character, always latent, occasionally became overt. A disposition which conceived the end of life to consist in honours and wealth, and which determined all action to those ends, could have no patience with a nature which knew happiness only in the careless varying enjoyment of art and literature, and sought for nothing save freedom from trammelling intention and narrowing effort. This essential discordance had early brought a tone of bitterness into their discussions ; and it required but the waning of the novel enjoyments of love for the discussions to become quarrels and the quarrels to end in hate. The birth of a child had, as often happens in actual life, served only to embitter their feelings by questions of education and of future action. And finally, the frequency of a Brahmin priest's visits to the zenana quarters had sown the last, worst doubts in the Chief's mind, and he sought in each gesture and glance of his heir for a certainty which he feared might be worse than doubt.

A week after this last quarrel, on the night of the *amas*, when the crescent moon veils herself to mourn the waning of her predecessor, at

the hour when the first cool breezes of the passing night temper the heat which rises with the dusk from the parched earth after an Indian summer day, the Brahmin priest Mahipatram stood within the walled courtyard of the palace. As he quietly walked to the postern-gate of the forbidden quarters of the lady Ruplibai, he could see by the red sparks of the log fire at the further end two sleeping watchmen lying huddled on the ground under rough cotton cloths. The third, who, knowing the Court priest for a person of privilege as well as of sanctity, had allowed him to pass on his assurance of an urgent message from the Chief, still sat on his haunches before the fire, pulling through his hands the fumes of the rough tobacco remaining in a clay pipe-bowl.

Hardly had the priest tapped at the door, when the bolt was drawn and a hand caught his wrist and drew him into the dark passage.

"Walk very quietly for fear of waking the maids," said the voice of the lady Ruplibai, for it was she herself who had waited at the door.

Her hand still on his wrist, she led him silently along the passage as it bent and curved round the angles of the thick walls. Very

silently she led him past the open ante-room where three maids slept by the feeble light of a wick floating in a clay saucer of oil. At last, with a glance round, she opened the door of her own bedroom and shut it quickly behind them. There she let him go, and, as she chained the door, burst into a long soft laugh. Then, throwing her arm on the priest's neck, she led him to a couch and nestled down beside him.

"At last, at last," she said, as he pressed her scented head to his breast. "How long it is since we last sat together like this! But no," she added, as he sought to draw her closer on his knee, "not yet, my priest. I have asked you to come to-night as I have serious things to talk over. First let us settle them, afterwards—if you are not tired, my life—afterwards we shall see."

"I know nothing so serious as love," said the priest, smiling.

"Oh, yes! Indeed there are other things, too," answered the lady, quietly. "And we must think them over first."

Then lucidly, with a quiet bitterness in every tone and choice of phrase, Ruplibai told her lover the history of her quarrel with her hus-

band, of his suspicions and of her open defiance. The Brahmin's face, as he listened, showed signs of disturbance and depression.

"It was imprudent of you," he said, when she had done, "to have so openly opposed him and to have so far uncovered your mind. A little dissimulation would have been more expedient. It——"

"True, true," she interrupted. "I know all that. I grant all that. But *you* have not to live day by day with a man you despise, to bear caresses from one you detest, to be tied to one whose every word irritates. It is easy for you to be wise. But I am a woman, and there are moments when I *must* speak. But the point *now* is this. For the last week, the Chief has eaten and slept always with my co-wife. I know she is unattractive and stupid, but he must have some one, I suppose, and there is no other. Now my pride cannot bear her in my place, and her ascendancy would prove the ruin of all our plans—your influence, my schemes of aggrandisement, perhaps even of the succession of our boy. Therefore, bethink you how to combat his growing fondness for the Thakrani."

After some discussion of the conditions of

the problem, the Brahmin summed up the position.

"It is obviously essential," he said, "that you and not the other princess should sway the Chief. It is unfortunately now impossible for you to recover your influence directly and by your own beauty and charm. Yet he can be diverted from the other princess only by love for some other woman. Therefore——"

"Therefore," she cried, interrupting, clapping her hands with joy, "therefore, my dear little pet of a priest, I know the very thing —a girl who will make him love her and yet will be entirely devoted to me—a girl who will influence him, yet only for my sake—a pearl, a jewel, my handmaiden Motiba."

* * * *

The girl Motiba was indeed well cast for the part which her mistress had assigned. Belonging to that family of hereditary domestic slaves who people the palaces of Rajput chiefs, who live and marry and love at their master's commands, and are sent with brides as a portion of their dower, she had come with the princess Ruplibai from her father's home when she arrived at Hathiwada as the bride of the Rajah Ramsingji. Her ancestry was preserved in no

versified genealogy, such as the family minstrels sing of the chiefs ; but in the course of ages spent in zenanas with the condescending loves and passions of young chiefs and of education at the side of princesses, her race was, in fact, though not in name, barely to be distinguished from the proudest Chohan or the noblest of Rathors. Since first the hordes of the White Huns and the Yavas and the Ionians had migrated to India and founded empires on the ruins of old Aryan dynasties, the maidens of the lower soldiery had mingled with the kingly blood to produce this race of family servants.

The colour of the girl was the ripe gold of the wheat, when the harvester whets his sickle for the gleaning and the rich Bhal, like a yellow ocean, mile upon mile waves and ripples as the winds breathe on the ripened corn. Her eyes were like gleaming sapphires veiled under the languid lids of a lotus flower, and her mouth was as a bursting pomegranate. The smile, which broke upon the tender oval of her face, was like a beam of sunshine in a mountain tarn ; and the dimple at her chin like the petal of a woodland flower. Girlhood in her was just ripening to the woman, and the curves of her lithe figure, as they swelled to maturity, at once

spoke her purity and whispered a summons for love.

This was the girl whom now the Chief found ever on his passage as he stalked gloomily and wearily through the vast loveless halls of his mansion. Barely had he noticed her before, for at first she had been but little more than a child, and then, as she grew beautiful, his wife had kept her out of the way when she expected her husband's visits. And now all at once she was lovely, and he stared amazed at her beauty. So, meeting her often in the passages in the house, he would stop and speak and ask how she did and whither she went. And he saw how modestly the girl bore herself, and how her voice grew tremulous with passion as she answered, and twice or thrice he thought to read a message of tenderness in her eyes.

And one evening came the inevitable end. It was one of those languid evenings of the later rains when the heart, in sympathy with nature, yearns for cherishing and softness. The chief reclined idly on a heap of cushions after his solitary feast, a manuscript of the Sanskrit Upanishads drooping from his listless fingers. Bored with the placid amiability of one princess, and still wroth at the evil of the other, he had

sought distraction in his books ; but the thrill of nature in that wonderful season was upon him, and he could not read. And he raised his eyes and saw Motiba before him leaning against a pillar in the shadows of the hall. And he called her, and she sat on the floor before him. And the scent of the tuberoses at her ears and the jasmine in her hair caught him by the nostrils and intoxicated him ; and the smile on her lips danced to his eyes and dazzled him. So he drew her to the cushions and made her sit beside him, and he bent over her and he kissed her lips. And he felt her tremble against him, and lost himself in the sensation.

" May I love you, best beloved? " whispered the Chief.

And softly the girl murmured, " I am your handmaiden, and love is your right. I could never say you nay. But, lord and king, know that I have worshipped you since first I saw you, and that for one moment of your careless love I would gladly give life and soul."

* * * *

There opened now for the young Chief a period of happiness such as he had dreamt of only in his imaginative hours, but had never hoped to realize.

Motiba he found clever and docile, anxious to learn and study so as to understand and sympathize with her lover's moods. It was not long before she told him of Ruplibai's plot, and of her intention to bring the Chief under her sway by means of her servant.

"But," added Motiba, "I consented only because I had always worshipped you and wanted your love; and it was only by pretending to submit to her wishes and to act in her interests that I could hope to meet you. Now I have succeeded, and my King has honoured me—if only for a brief day—with his love. And I belong to him and know none other. I am his creature, and live only for his service."

Then was the Chief wroth. So he broke the rules of custom and took Motiba from the service of Ruplibai; and he gave her a suite of apartments to herself, and bade all speak of her as "lady" and give her honour. And every evening he went to her rooms and ate with her and loved.

Thus for a year the Rajah Ramsingji found happiness; and finding it himself, gave of it in fullest measure to his well-beloved, the former slave-girl. Pillowing his head on her lap, his eyes turned back upon her smiling face, he

would compose verses, which still remain, in his native Hindi ; and the lines were hot with passion and soft with the sweet guardianship of true love. Or he would stroke the strings of the *vina* or rebeck and seek long-lost melodies of love, or in more martial strain pinch the wires of the great *taus* which looks like a peacock's tail, and sing legends of old wars and Rajput chivalry. And at last he found in love sympathy and encouragement to the arts which were dearest to him.

One evening the Brahmin Mahipatram was again in the Lady Ruplibai's chambers. The faces of both were stamped with the strain of serious thought ; and their speech was overcast with gloomy decision.

" Who would have thought that the girl would prove faithless to my trust ? " said Ruplibai. " A mere slave, with generation after generation of servitude to my race in her blood, to betray my interests to a stranger chief ! Was love for *her* ? and can a mere emotion outweigh duty to race and name ? "

" Love is a dangerous toy to play with," said the priest. " What woman can hold her hand from its rosy bloom ? But now that it is plain she is blind to your purpose, and seeks only

to be one with her lover in every hope and fear, we dare not wait or imperil our fortune longer."

"You are right," cried Ruplibai, in sharp, swift tones. "There is but one way, and we must be comrades on that path. This is the cholera month, and the Chief—must—die."

"You have said it, not I," murmured the priest. "I take no life—my gods forbid it. Yet I may perchance obtain a philtre for your hand, which—if you give it to the Chief—well, why should not I too be happy, knowing no sin myself?"

* * * *

Four days later a maid from the zenana of Ruplibai stood before the Chief and salaamed. In answer to his gesture she gave this message:

"The Lady bids me remind you, Sire, that to-night is the anniversary of your wedding. She craves forgiveness for any fault, and humbly begs that at least this evening you will honour her with your presence at dinner, and show the Court that, if she be out of favour, yet she is your lawful wife. So says the Lady."

The Rajah frowned. Then after a minute's thought:

"Tell her I come," he said.

Motiba would have protested, but the Chief checked her.

"I must go," he said. "We both know that it is no pleasure. But men are the bondsmen of habit and serfs to custom. In the eye of custom I have already sufficiently wronged my wife—my noble wife "—he added, bitterly—" by breaking etiquette and taking you from her service at our pleasure. I cannot again withstand custom. Probably she will only weep or storm, and I must endure her temper for an hour or two. And say there be more—well, what is the life of man but a ripple on the surface of ocean or a gossamer floating against the sky? We come and go on the blasts of fate, and our actions are but movements of the winds of compulsion. Farewell, my Motiba. I go."

Ruplibai received the Chief without recrimination, even with prostration. She carefully avoided all subject for dispute and waited on him dutifully and with reverence. Dinner was eaten, and while his wife finished hers, the Chief drew solace from the long tubes of the scented hookah.

Of a sudden the gripe of pain was upon him and he wrestled with the terror of poison. The

amber holder dropped from his writhing hand and splintered on the floor. And the woman stood before the twisting body, hate leaping from her eyes like a tongue of fire from the embers. The curse was cold on his palate, and the chilled lips were dry and parched.

"Thou wouldst set free the maid from the mistress," she slowly said, and venom seemed to be stilling from her lips. "Thou wouldst tear honour from thy diadem and cast it into the purling stream of love. Thy fingers were nerveless for the sceptre's grasp and sought the neck of the lute. And now thou diest. Thou diest, and on thy throne shall sit his mother's son—not thine. Thou diest and I rule."

The Chief sought to call a physician, but the doors were guarded by the attendants of the princess, and not one there was who would hear his word. Slowly the cold of his limbs increased, and the pangs at last grew fainter in the weakness of coming death.

Then of a sudden the dying man sat straight in a last effort of will. He bent his brow on the Arab who guarded the nearest door, and in a tone in which spoke a line of royal ancestors, "Call the Lady Motiba," he cried, "and bring

with you also a Brahmin, any Brahmin save only Mahipatram."

The man was minded to refuse, but before the glance in his master's eye he quailed, and lifted his hand to his head in obedience and went.

And the Chief lay back with a sigh.

When they came—Motiba in tears, the Brahmin horrified and afraid—the Chief spoke again.

"I have no time to lose ; for I die and this woman has slain me. I can prove nothing, and no stain of doubt must rest on our line. So let it pass, and say only that I died of cholera, and let her child reign in my stead. But one thing I can still do. Go, priest, join the hem of Motiba's garment to my mantle, recite the sacred Sanskrit *shlokas*, and let us be joined in matrimony ; that so shall the future of Motiba be assured as my wife."

Thus was Motiba married to a dying man, and the last music in the ears of Ramsingji, Rajah of Hathiwada, was the dull chanting of the marriage *shlokas* of the Sanskrit service.

FROM SUDDEN DEATH

FROM SUDDEN DEATH

THE gnarled babul tree in the gully was a well-known landmark in the village of Khandgam and the neighbouring countryside. Year in, year out, the yellow blossoms and the twisted branches with their long, sharp thorns cast their blighting shadow on Bapurao's millet crop. The tree seemed to frown and sneer as the first green shoots of corn sprouted forth from the dark, friable soil, and grew into broad, green leaves, and turned again to yellow, while five feet high the heavy heads of millet bent and beckoned in each breath of wind over the dancing waves of gold. But when the grain failed and the ground was parched and great rents yawned in the browning field, when every day light clouds crept over the brazen face of the sky, and never a cloud halted to bring the promise of showers, then would the branches of the old babul bourgeon into green buds, as though the malicious sprites that dwelt in the

deep roots of the tree found joy in the woes of men.

To-day the millet was trampled under foot, and the tree cast its shadows on a cluster of whispering, excited villagers. And in the midst of them, his face twisted round and downwards, stiff stretched fingers clutching at the scanty tufts of grass between the roots, lay the body of Bapurao, the young owner of the field. Dead, dead as any carcase at the skinner's! The skull was smashed and shattered, and his coarse linen tunic and the ground between his outstretched arms were crimson with blood. Great gouts of gore were sticky upon his face. The burst eyeball and the broken bridge of his nose accused yet another terrible blow of enmity. But the body lay stiff and rigid, caring nought.

A young man, sturdy, lithe! A man to be the stay and hope of a family, to till and labour at the soil, to speak weightily in village councils, and finally to be borne to that last pyre, which all must some day go to meet, amidst respect and remembrance. Dead, and the murderer at large! Dead, and another family to be rent and scattered to the winds of destiny!

The sun, slowly turning to ochre, was still

two feet above the horizon, when the body had been found. Gulnak, the Mahar, outcast and menial servant of the village, had all but stumbled upon it as he returned, chorusing a village song, from the delivery of letters for the accountant, who, in those outlying villages represents fate, law, Brahmin supremacy, and His Majesty the King-Emperor. A gasp of horror, a call upon the great God of the outcasts—the all-powerful God of the aboriginal races—and off rushed Gulnak over gully and through millet, across brake and rock and bush, straight to the little hall where the village elders meet. Quickly he panted forth the news to the headman, and ran to tell the bereft mother.

Now the mother sat upon the ground at her Bapurao's feet, rocking herself to and fro in her grief, crooning out words of revenge and of lamentation. A little sobbing naked child clung tightly to her mantle, Bapurao's young brother, and sought to read the secret in her face. A few feet off, her face hidden under the folds of her mantle, crouched a girl of some twelve years, Bapurao's child wife, too soon a widow.

The village elders stood by whispering, already suspecting, yet afraid to voice their sus-

picions. And, at a slight distance to show their respect, stood or squatted the curious and the horrified, finding doubtless a pang not unlike pleasure in this excitement and this fierce emotion.

"The Head Constable, he should be coming," muttered the headman. "He has only four miles to come, and I sent the messenger off nearly two hours ago."

"He will come, brother, fear it not," gloomily said another. "When the buffalo is slain, shall not the jackal come? When was the vulture wont to neglect the carcase?"

"Aye, brother," chimed in another. "First the Head Constable with his orderlies, and then the Chief Constable with *his* orderlies, and then the Inspector, and then the white Police Sahib and all of them with *their* orderlies. And all of them crying for flour and wood, and we to rush to their bidding and to bear their keep, and bow to their abuse and their blows. For even such is the law of murder. Well I remember when I was a boy and the misbegotten barber cut his wife's throat. Hurrying and worry for many days, and ever, at the end of all, money to be given and spent and labour to be wasted."

"Nay, not even is that the worst," returned the headman. "Also there come journeyings to the Courts. First to the Assistant Sahib's tents, two days belike to go, and two days to remain, or even three or four, and two days to return. And if he be one of the black Sahibs and not the white Assistant, then will there be ever adjournments and more journeyings to and fro. And who is to keep our wives and do our labour for those days?"

"Yea, brother," said the other. "And if the Assistant Sahib be luckily one of those that know our tongue and is near to our customs, and has eaten and slept with our people, then indeed may it yet be well, and the evidence be quickly taken and our story heard, and the worst is but a curse or two from our own Sahib if we tell a lie. And what of that? But if he be of the new breed, that talks so that we know not our own tongue, who neither rides nor shoots nor lives as the old Sahibs did, but looks like a clerk and studies books of law instead of men—may my lord perish! For then are days to be wasted and words to be translated to his tongue, and every rascally attorney—son of the village usurer—to talk big to us and insult us with 'thee' and 'thou'—a curse upon their

breed ! Much money have they taken from us and paid us in insults."

"Aye, indeed," said the headman. "And then the Judge's Court and the jostling of policemen and ushers and the translations into the language of the Sahibs. Well, ten thousand curses upon the adulterous bastard who slew Bapurao and brought this trouble upon us."

"See, see, master uncle," here interrupted one of the little group of outcasts apart from the others, "see, here comes the Head Constable on his horse."

The villagers all rose respectfully, and the headman and the elders went forward bowing to meet the present master of their destinies.

This Head Constable, Imamkhan, was a young Mussulman of good family, who, in the spirit of the new time, had taken the trouble not merely to educate himself—many of the older generation had done this—but also to acquire the particular knowledge required by a somewhat arbitrary educational department for employment under Government. Smart, active, energetic, with a good moral character, he seemed destined for early promotion to the higher grades, and he fully intended to let no

opportunity slip. He looked a fine figure of a man, five foot ten at least, his beard carefully parted in the middle, a purple turban with loose ends smartly tied upon his head, with his neat blue serge patrol jacket, his corduroy breeches, and his dark blue putties. Dismounting, he came with firm, energetic step towards the headman. His two orderlies stood smartly to attention.

"Well, what 's this?" he said, as he acknowledged the villagers' salams. "A murder? A bad business this for all of you, if the murderer is not found quickly. Aye, and safely, too. No more rest for the village, while I am in the district, if he isn't. Is that understood? Well, have you held the inquest yet?"

Then as he saw them glance at each other and the headman came forward,—

"All right, I see you haven't. Well, that 's the first thing. Get paper and pen."

The next hour was spent in the inquest, and the signing of the formal description of the corpse and the papers required by law. By the time it was completed, the sudden Indian twilight was already over, and torches of tarred rags had been lit by the village menials. The Head Constable gave the necessary orders for

the transport under escort of the body to the nearest hospital for a post-mortem examination.

This duty done, Imamkhan turned to go towards the village, accompanied by the elders and spectators. The mother of the murdered youth rose fiercely with wild sobs. The Head Constable let her sob for a few minutes, and then turning suddenly in the darkness where the red lights of the torches fell on the woman's haggard eyes and tear-stained face :

" Come now," he said, " who did it? Tell me here at once, while still your son's murdered body lies beneath the care of his own babul tree."

Half blinded by the light, her hands stretched forth, her fingers moving as if she sought to grasp something which evaded them,—

" Pandurang," she cried, " Pandurang, my nephew, my husband's brother's son. I saw it not, perhaps I know it not. Yet I know it, I swear it. It was he."

" Hush thee, woman," said the headman, bitterly. " What dost thou know? "

But drowning his voice, without moving or turning his fixed gaze from the woman's eyes,

" Why sayest thou so? " cried Imamkhan.

"The motive? and thy reason? Tell me this?"

And again as if fascinated, her body still in the forward poise,—

"He wanted the land," she said in monotonous voice. "He sued me for its possession, for the ownership is with me. And when he lost, he appealed, and he lost again and appealed again. And ever he hated me. But he pretended alway in his false heart to love my boy, and what could an old woman's warnings do?"

Again the headman sought to interrupt, and said something of there being no proof, and of disgrace to the village.

But this time Imamkhan had turned sharply and his eye caught his orderlies.

"Go," he said in firm, imperious tones to the one. "Go, Rehmatmian, straight to the house of Pandurang. If he be there, arrest him not, but let him not so much as stir a finger without my leave nor speak to any one, nor let any of his house go forth. And ye, ye others," turning again to the villagers, "hark ye, if there be question in the Courts of this, remember well that no arrest was made to-night, nor was Pandurang under surveillance. For, since the wisdom of the Sahibs," he added, with a silky

smile, "has decreed that no suspect is to be in anything hampered, I do no more than watch him from a distance. But you, Rehmatmian," he said, and again his voice rang strident and imperious, "remember you also that if he leave his abode or have speech of any one, I shall find cause for your dismissal. If he is not at home, search for him and let me instantly know."

And so the little procession came to the village. Up the narrow irregular street with its rough stones and cobbles protruding to trip the unwary foot, past the strong houses of unhewn stone, windowless to the street, odorous with all the immemorial filth of a Mahratti hamlet, they went where stood the temple of the monkey-god Maruti, which was also the village meeting-hall. The village was like any one of five hundred more, which, dirty, malodorous, but strong and rude, are scattered on the Deccan plateau eastwards from the verdure-covered crags of the Ghauts, homes of that sturdy black robber race which nibbled morsels from the decaying monarchy of Delhi, and rolled wave-like to the walls of Calcutta.

At the temple Imamkhan sat down and began his investigation. Except for an hour's rest, he toiled on through the whole night, asking,

listening, constantly recurring to and repeating his questions, till, piece by piece, and phrase by phrase, he had extracted from the reluctant villagers all that was to be known of the crime. And to the eyes not only of Imamkhan but even to the sullen and unwilling audience, it seemed clear that Bapurao's murderer was his uncle's son.

In the morning, after the hour of ablution and prayer, the headman and three of the elders came to the Head Constable as he prepared to break his fast.

After salutation, they sat down on their heels and began discoursing at large in the aimless manner affected by the Indian when he is feeling his way for a personal request. At last, after much desultory talk, they came to the point.

"Master," said the headman, "upon our minds is this. Your Honour knows that Pandurang is of good family, one whose ancestors have since the founding of the village tilled their own land and yoked their own ploughs. Now it is not seemly that such as he be hanged or exiled over the black water. And there is the disgrace to the village, and there is not one of us but is kin to Bapurao and sib to Pandurang. Therefore suspect not Pandurang.

Surely it is not impossible that Bapurao was killed by a falling branch of the devil's tree. And if such be the inquest, here are a hundred rupees for your Honour and another two hundred when the inquest is countersigned by the Sahib. And so shall we be free of the trouble and the disgrace. We are poor people, or we should have placed more at your feet."

"I remember when I was a boy," said another elder, "a misbegotten barber——"

But Imamkhan simply smiled and shook his head.

"Fools, fools!" he said. "What are your three hundred rupees, nay, three thousand and thrice three thousand rupees to me? To me that shall be Inspector and the Sahib's Deputy, or, who knows? perhaps some day shall be Superintendent of all the Police under the Head of the District. Think you, idiots, that I shall risk my career and the fruit of my studies for your paltry bribes? In other days there were other ways. But I am a hunter of men, and I stoop to no offal of dogs. I am a Mussulman and I eat not with the Mahratta. What I see I say, and if there be trouble to you, make your complaint to the King that makes laws and not to me that am his servant. Go, go quickly,

lest a worse befall. Go, you have my leave to go."

* * * *

All that day again the Head Constable was busy with the witnesses, repeating their answers, seeking to shake them at every point, looking for circumstantial corroboration of every statement, till at last he felt that he had his case impregnably established. And all the day sat Pandurang at the door of his house, with the orderly ever standing at guard over him, without food and without speech, and he watched each witness as he went to or from the enquiry. And as he sat and was allowed to see but could neither hear nor speak, as he grew fainter from sleeplessness and hunger, and his nerves became more and more excited under the strain of enforced mental and bodily inaction, nearer and nearer he saw the gallows looming and greater and greater he imaged the case against him.

At last at the hour of dusk, when the village outcasts go from house to house to beg their day's dole of bread, and the weary ploughmen turn to their homes, the orderly tapped him on the shoulder.

"Arise, Pandurang," he said, "arise and

follow me to the master. And see thou makest no hesitation in thy answers, for he is a Mussulman and an ill man to cross. And he has the sight by which he can read the lie on thy brow ere yet it be uttered."

On the lower step of the temple, his hands crossed upon his chest, his head bent slightly forward in respect, stood Pandurang. Under the dark shadows of the unhewn beams he saw of the Head Constable only the vague outlines of the fiercely curling beard and the white eyeballs and the flashing pupils. A young man was Pandurang also, with projecting underjaw and loose twitching mouth. Above his eyebrows the bones stood out like ill-shapen knobs.

For two minutes the men measured eyes.

Then, "Where were you yesterday?" began the soft tones of the Head Constable.

And, "In my rice-field," answered Pandurang.

"A lie!" rejoined the Head Constable. "Stand forth, Saltan, and tell where thou didst meet him. Near the well, was it not?"

But Pandurang broke in again.

"The well! That was in the morning. It was at the time that Bapurao was killed that I was in my rice-field."

"And pray, how know you *that* time?" said the Head Constable; and Pandurang recognized that he had made his first mistake. In a storm of protestation he entangled himself worse and worse, and at last was left gasping with the consciousness that he had succeeded in showing a knowledge for whose acquisition he could not fairly account. And his dark skin grew more livid. Nervously he kept swallowing the Adam's apple in his throat, and his bare toes clutched at the ground.

For some twenty minutes more he was led time after time into admissions and confused when he sought to explain. And always he grew more livid and his fingers twitched more and more.

At last he threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and with a cry to the God Narayan he confessed his crime, and told the story which he afterwards re-told to Magistrate and to Sessions Judge.

* * * *

"My father was the elder brother of Bapurao's father. So the family property belonged to him, and he was the head of his family. But he died when I was a little child, and my mother followed him shortly. So I was

taken to my uncle's house and fed and clothed, and I played with Pandurang, and we were brother and brother. And my uncle, as was right, managed the family property till I should grow up and hold the headship of our house. But my uncle was a hard man, near and close with money. And of all that came in, he spent less than a moiety. And in the bad years he lent of what he had saved and he took it back from his debtors with increase of twenty and of thirty, yea, of forty and of fifty per cent. And ever he bought new lands of the richest in the village, and they were added to our patrimony. But, when as a boy I asked him for a penny from our money for sweets or beads, he cuffed my head or threw me on the ground, and said, 'Our money, indeed! It is my money, and you are only a beggar child whom I am keeping for charity.' And ever and anon he would scold me for waste and tell me I should die in want. And he would compel me to work always harder, while I saw that the riches of which I should be master ever augmented and would suffice for much good living. But our fields grew so that from two on the stony outskirts of the village, which my father left when he died, we owned seven, and five of them were

of the best in the place, rich fat black soil. And then my uncle died and my aunt succeeded to the management, for I was not yet of age. But Pandurang did all the work; and my aunt would not trust me to look after plough or drill, for she said I was a lazy good-for-nothing, and Pandurang was the child of her womb. So my heart grew bitter upon her and I hated her. And Pandurang, how I hated him too! With his smooth careless face and his light heart, his boisterous ways and silly smile, God, how I hated him! But I durst not show it, for he was stronger than I, like the coarse animal he was; but he was stupid and he could not read my secret. When we became older, and I saw the women smile upon him at the well, I was on fire within. Especially there was a young widow whom I too—but let her go! Then I came of age and I demanded my estates to manage. And my aunt smiled, and said she was glad to deliver it up, and she hoped I would now really work and be thrifty and sensible. Curse her! as if I wanted her advice. I wanted only the land, *my* land. And then she gave me the two fields, which her husband had had from my father, and said this was mine, and from the kindness of her heart she would give me also two bullocks for the plough and a

milch buffalo. But I, I demanded the whole land, seven fields in all, five of them excellent. Oh, the rich fat black soil! For was not I the head of the family? and was it not mine to possess it all and to give to them only what they required for sustenance? And when she said they belonged not to the family but were the private proceeds of her husband's thrift and management, what was that to me? His thrift too was for me, for I was by right the head of the family, and he got the wherewithal to make profit by his management of our land. It was true my father had not profited, but what of that? He had a generous nature like mine, and spent much on dancing girls. So when I saw she would not give me back my lands, I sued her in the Courts. But though my right was so plain, yet the Court took her side and denied me my claim to the land. So I appealed and I lost again; and I appealed again even to the great High Court in Bombay, and there I lost again. And the villagers all mocked me and, as usual, took the side of the stronger, and flattered the Courts and said I was a fool. And I was utterly foredone. But all this time I showed not my hate to Pandurang, and he thought that I acquiesced. The fool! And others are such fools that they called his simplicity generosity.

But I saw that there was no justice in the land. And I saw that I could show Government the wrong that their law had done me only if I killed Pandurang. So yesterday as he sat under the babul slinging stones idly at the starlings pecking at the millet ears, singing a song lightly like a fool—who knows? perhaps thinking of the widow—curse him—I crept up through the millet and before he heard me, I struck my axe into his skull. And so I vindicated my rights. And I hope the Government will thus learn what wrong they have done me, who should have had all, to store or to spend."

* * * *

This was the story Pandurang told, his eyes glaring sullenly from under the protruding eyebrows. This was the story he twice repeated in the Courts with no change and with no sense of wrong or of shame.

* * * *

The final scene took place one morning in the first grey of dawn in a little barred shed outside of the Central jail. Before the doctor and the magistrate, under the escort of two files, with twenty idle spectators craning forward to see, Bapurao stood, still unmoved, under the last beam, the rope upon his neck.

IN THE TWILIGHT

IN THE TWILIGHT

THE young man standing in the dusty road kicked a pebble away despitefully. Never, he thought, had the low booths, where the traders crouched amidst their gear, looked so squalid, or the brick hovels, where the stone kerns turning growled harsh harmony, seemed so dingy, so poor and so wretched. At the end of the long brown road a creaking cart, unchanged from the pattern of a thousand years, slowly turned the corner and jolted upon the rough-hewn kerb, while the driver bending twisted the bullocks' tails and in shrill rising cadence rained imprecations on their master. For the rest, all was stillness, immobility.

Yes, Abdul Karim—"the Servant of the Merciful," for that was his name—was weary and discontented. Above the poor shops and houses, overhanging lowly hut and dirty gutter, poised large domes and noble cupolas and minarets like the shafts of fantasy and hope.

For the town had been the capital of a line of sovereigns, profuse in adornment, indulgent to caprice, ambitious of pomp and of magnificence. In a galley, freighted only with swords and spears and with the weight of daring resolves, driven by the straining muscles of many slaves, the bastard son of a Sultan had fled from the luxury of Istamboul by the rocky islands of the Red Sea to the slow swell of the Indian Ocean and the palm-fringed beaches of the Canarese coast. With sword and spear, but still more with daring and with will, he had founded a kingdom and established a dynasty. Here he and his heirs had reigned and ruled for two hundred years. Here they had turned the heart of the idolaters to Islam, and had made known the word of the One God and the gospel of eternal bliss. At their behest palaces and mosques had raised their domes upon light arches, and splendid mausoleums still attested their power and their taste. Agate and porphyry, chalcedony and malachite had been brought from the metes of earth to embellish the pillars of their domiciles and the walls of their tepidaria. The polished marble had been fretted into curious shapes and the oyster-shell been ground by artificers for the stucco of their

edifices. Well did Abdul Karim remember the story of their lineage and the name of each famous gorgeous potentate. Tughleg Beg and Arslan Beg, Abdul Kadar and Humayun, he still had their portraits, each in the same conventional pose, kneeling as in full Durbar, the jewelled scimitar of state upon the lap, a rose held in the fingers of the raised right hand, portraits wrought after some Italian emancipate's teaching with the loving joy and detailed fidelity of a Giotto or a Mantegna. Great had the ancient city been and mighty its renown, lofty its pride and splendid its accomplishment. But the eye of the covetous had fallen upon it, and war upon war had rolled purple waves over its foundations. The glory was departed and the mighty had passed away.

The narrow booths on the fringes of the dusty road seemed more than ever squalid and dingy. With an impatient movement of his shoulders, Abdul Karim turned down a lane to the ruin of the former Presence Hall. As he went, an old beggarman, a Moslem mendicant, bearded, ragged, and dirty, with tinkling of bells and scraping of viol, sang for alms the praises of 'Ali, the leonine.

As he came forth from the lane to the broader

space beyond, crossed by a well-made rolled road, a motor-car of the latest type dashed past him, and an energetic European voice called out :

" Hallo ! Abdul Karim," it said. " How are you getting on? Come up and have a talk some evening. I should like to see you."

" Delighted," he answered, with a bow. And the Collector's car with throbs and puffs bounded on down the road.

" The Collector," thought Abdul Karim, his eye idly following the vanishing car. " The Head of the District ! Not that I have anything to say against him personally. He is pleasant enough, does his duty as he knows it, is kind and compassionate to the needy. Certainly I wish him no ill. But the shame of it ! An alien official where our own kings ruled ! A foreign law where monarchs pronounced the word of God ! Here devastation and the slumber of death. There an inexorable sweep of social thought and individual energy. And yet in what, save in industry and in technical skill, are they better than we, are they even as good? Oh God ! grant me the power to summon my people from their evil sleep, to exorcise the spell and to lead them unto light."

For a moment more he stood ; then impatiently he strode past the span of the mighty arch behind which ruins reared their desolate fragments, where once kings and courtiers had sat in all the gaiety of gems and velvets and gold brocades. Now all was silent and drear, save when for an hour before sunset the English officers and their wives played tennis and talked of servants and salary in its shadow. Hardly daring to look, he strode past the melancholy monument, past the remains of the old zenana, where Hindu clerks now entered accounts and copied correspondence the livelong day ; to the battered breaches of the city wall and the dry broken bed of the ancient moat. A hundred and fifty yards off on the sandy plain stood a whitewashed house of a better stamp. Through its open gate, where a recumbent servant in trousers that once were white, with a sheet thrown over his bare shoulders and chest, jumped to his feet and bowed, he entered the inner courtyard and, threading his way over the droppings of horse and camel, opened a door to the right.

An old man half-sat, half-lay on two cushions, propped against the wall, his fingers lazily holding the elastic coils of a water-pipe. The room

felt cool after the glare of the sun, and the air was sweet with the smell of tobacco perfumed with musk and the juice of sugar-cane. A green lizard panted upon the wall and a gold-edged scarf of lawn was flung carelessly over a peg.

"In the name of God," said Abdul Karim's father, for such the old man was, and waved his hand to another cushion near him.

Abdul Karim bowed, murmured an enquiry after his "auspicious health," and sank wearily down. How cool the room was and how peaceful! He closed his eyes in a delicious languor.

"Why strive? Why suffer? Why be unhappy?" something within him seemed to murmur. "Is not life allotted to each one by the will of God, the Omnipotent? The powerful He oppresses and He uplifts the lowly and the humble. Contentment of heart and love are the burnt-offerings in which He finds delight, and submission the attribute which He values. Is not everything here, father and mother, peace and sustenance? Oh! to be at rest, to acquiesce, to be content."

His father's voice roused him from his reverie.

"You are sad, my son," he said, and his

tone sounded even and restful. "You are sad, but you do not confide in me. You are restless and know not what to do. You are weary, yet you seek not repose. Why are you troubled with what concerns you not? Why do you fatigue your eyesight for a scrutiny of that which lies not in your decree?"

A sob caught at the son's throat as he answered.

"Sad! Yes, I am sad. The darwesh that lives under the cypresses beside the tombs of the dead, is he not sad? The nightingale in autumn at the withering of the rose, the lover in the rest-house at the veiling of the beloved, the singer in the tavern at the flight of the wine-bearer, shall they not be sad? Wherever I look, there is nothing, only ruin and death. No hopes, no desires, no eager pulsing of life, no national ideal, nay, not even a nation or a people. The peasant seeks his sustenance, the trader wealth, the Nawab and the Rajah the oblivion of sensual pleasure and the lusts of the flesh. Existence is limited to sensation and effort to disjunct acquisition. But for the real life of social growth, for the development of thought and of the national idea, there is no one to care or to strive."

"The land was uneasy and at strife," said the father, "and our governors have given us peace. There was confusion and disaster, and they have made it the dwelling of order. For poverty and fear and the rending of savage men and savage beasts, they have given justice and trust and security. Then wherefore should we not be content? Why should we forsake that which by the grace of God has been given, seeking after dreams and impossible fancies?"

The son broke in again, and his voice was strident and his gesture vehement.

"Because," he cried, "because their task is done. With peace and order, with justice and security they have given us the conditions of growth and development. I am not ungrateful, far from it. Whatever befall, to the enlightenment, the firm impartiality, and the assistance of our rulers, we owe a debt which can hardly be repaid. It is to them that we owe the conditions of real life and the stimulus of progress. But the debt cannot be repaid by mere acquiescence and a deathly passivity. They may themselves be blind to the writing of the moving finger of Time. But surely, sooner or later, they will know, and we at least must be now

convinced, that we can show our appreciation of their merits and our assimilation of their teaching, only by ourselves building on the foundations they have laid, by moulding ourselves to the ideals of a national unity and a real freedom. To our aspirations it is no answer that individual effort is untrammelled, and that the merchant is free to acquire and to hoard riches. Yet we who see the truth are so few and so weak. The old think only of the past and so are satisfied with the present. The pious are timid of the spread of free-thought and of speculation. The rich are, as ever, fearful of revolution and of personal loss. And the mass of the people, what care they?—they have their castes and their sects, their superstitions and their petty desires. They are content or are uneasy only when prices rise and wages fall, or when new laws and unheard-of complexities rob them of their customary observances or their traditional conditions. The land sleeps, and I would have an awakening. The people is in darkness, and I would lead it into light. Hence I am weary, father, and sad."

A sweet voice from an inner chamber called out that dinner was ready, and father and son rose, and, after washing their hands over a

silver ewer held by a servant, sat down at the table of the lady of the house.

A descendant of a noble, but an impoverished race, Abdul Karim had early shown the tokens of exceptional talents. From the village school, he had been sent to the great Mohammedan college of Aligarh, had taken a degree in an Indian University, and had finally become a student of Oxford. How well he remembered the incessant discussions, the doubts and anxieties, his mother's tears, his father's hesitancy and dubitation. Friends and relations had come to counsel and opposed or murmured a timid acquiescence. The Head of the District had been consulted ; and he remembered his father, in state dress, his sword at his side, taking him by the hand past the police guard and the rows of bowing messengers, to the office with the swinging punkahs, where the Collector sat amidst piles of reports and printed Resolutions. Under all the prescribed forms of Mussulman courtesy, the boy had shown a strong will and a resolute decision, and the Collector had used all his influence to persuade the father to yield to his son's desire. Finally the difficulties were dispelled and the decision taken. His father had gone with him to Bombay and

said good-bye to him for three years on the busy quay, where a tug lay to take passengers to the great mail-steamer. How lost he had felt, and yet what delight in the almost painful excitement. Could he ever forget that journey? The steamer, moving on without hurry or bustle, at the same even pace across the interminable expanse of ocean, purposeful of the future in the immediate nothingness, was it not the type of ordered and disciplined life? Was there not too a lesson in the undisturbed regularity of the passengers' lives, those quiet English men and women, who, day by day, on sea or on land, at home or in the distant tropics, rose at the same hour, ate and drank in the same way, changed at night to the same starched shirt, or the same low-cut frock? Disciplined effort, the economy of rigid habit, individual self-reliance, all were there.

To Abdul Karim, as to every right-minded undergraduate, Oxford had been the revelation of life. Symbols are always needed for the great truths of reason. It is only the understanding that can dispense with them. But they can be differently interpreted by different minds ; indeed, that is the truth and the value of symbols. To the young Mussulman, Oxford

stood for the fearless search for truth, for thought, free and unshackled, penetrating and analysing all conditions and all traditions, for the development of personality and the emancipation of the individual. Chiefly he was impressed by the effort at rational method and the solicitude for individual self-subsistence. Coming from a society which judged thought by its coherence with authority, and valued life for its consistence with custom and its abnegation, he was all but swept off his feet by the sudden wave of doubt and criticism. In three years his mind had to compass a change of aspect to which Europe had attained by the slow march of five centuries, and which even in Europe has still eluded the view of large numbers. It was only by careful and persistent effort that he could, without great peril, reach the stage of mental development which subjects all ideas, even the ideas of self, of reality, and of God, to the criticism of thought, which weighs concepts by their own consistency rather than by their deduction from authority, and which finds the true criterion of society in the emancipation of humanity. It mattered not in what school of philosophy he walked, sensationalism and nihilism, idealism and subjec-

tivity, Locke and Mill, Hume and Kant, Plato and Hegel, however they differed, they were at least all alike in this, that they sought for the tests of reality and the criteria of right and truth in the thought of humanity, not in the teachings of authority. In his studies of history, again, he learnt to see progress conditioned by ideas and freedom developing itself by the enlargement of mind from tradition. Self-reliance, self-realization, emancipation, it was for them that Oxford stood to the young Mohammedan.

Now for a year he had returned to the small country town that lurked under the ruins of former greatness. For a year he had grown ever more restless, more discontented. Career there was none open to him, or rather, none that was open attracted him. The acquisition of private property, all said and done, that was all that an alien Government had left its subjects. It was true that this acquisition was unimpeded, secured by law and impartial administration, even encouraged and rewarded. For those who had the merchant blood in their veins and who could find satisfaction in the mere accumulation of wealth, this was certainly admirable, and they were in consequence daily

more successful, more important. But the Government had forgotten that it is not every one who can regard external acquisition as a sufficient end in life or find satisfaction in servitude to external aims. There were some who must desire to guide opinion, to influence thought, to realize themselves in harmony with a growing, living society. For them, he thought bitterly, there was now no room in India. Slowly his discontent grew morbid. More and more he sought solitude, and less and less was he able to shake off the obsession. Even his body showed the strain, and his face grew pinched and worn and livid.

After dinner there had again been discussion, and Abdul Karim had found it more than ever difficult to control his temper and keep his speech and conduct normal.

"I was at the Kazi's house to-day," said his mother. "They asked a great deal after you, and were anxious to know how you were getting on."

"It was very kind," said Abdul Karim, absently.

"Is that all you have to say?" answered his mother. "Very kind, indeed! Don't you want to know who was there, and what more they

said? The boy might as well be of wood. What 's the good of telling him anything? "

" No, no ! go on, mother. I am really listening," he said.

" You don't look very like it. But never mind. I'll tell you. Well, there was the Kazi's wife and the married daughter, you know, the one whose husband is a Sub-Judge. She doesn't look very happy, poor child. They say they don't get on well. Why, I 'm sure I don't know, for she has a lovely, fat baby, a boy, such a picture.—Now, don't get so impatient. Of course it wasn't the baby I was going to tell you about. Well, the younger daughter was there too, such a pretty girl, only thirteen, such a nice smile and so obedient, they tell me—"

" Oh ! mother, please, not again," pleaded the young man. " I always know what you end in when you start speaking like that ; and you know I won't marry. At least not now."

" Not marry ! What nonsense ! " she replied. " Every man marries. What else should he do? And you 're getting very old now. Every one sneers at us and makes nasty remarks. I ought to have held a grandchild in my lap long ago. Well, well, I won't worry

you and make you impatient. But you must listen—" And so on it had gone, and his father had chimed in and said he must make up his mind to marry in the next two months, and that then he would stop being so restless and unhappy, and would settle down to a profession and a normal, contented existence.

"You wait till you have a pleasant wife and a couple of children," he had finally summed up, "you will have plenty to think about then, and will be glad to be at home and find everything contented and peaceful."

It was hopeless for him to try to explain his views to them. They could never understand. How could they? How different their lives really were from his! As he thought this and listened, a strong passion of self-pity surged over him, and, with tears in his eyes, he asked his father's permission to go forth.

"Marriage. Yes, that was the worst of it," he thought. "Marriage as a means of oblivion and brutish contentment. To marry so that I should forsake my ideals and cease to strive; that I should in comfort of body, in petty pleasures and petty cares find the anæsthetic for my troubled mind. Never, never! Not such is the marriage that will tempt me.

Could I hope to find in marriage a noble companionship that should inspire me to higher thought and fire me to lofty action, that should raise my spirits when I am depressed, revive me when I am faint, curb me when I am impulsive, inform my life with purity of purpose and singleness of heart, above all fill me with courage and self-reliance by *her* trust, then, then, indeed would I readily, gladly marry. But for me, where is such a companion to be had? A Kazi's daughter, a child, immature, uneducated, worse than uneducated in that her thoughts and her habits are trammelled and perverted by narrow superstitions and faulty upbringing, such is the wife whom I should get. A girl with no care beyond the servants, no idea beyond food and passion and children, no wish but for the comfort of a petted domestic animal. What would be my life with her? What, poor child, would her life be with me? No, never shall I consent so to ruin two lives. Education has put a barrier too high between me and the daughters of my people. I am not what I was born, but what I have been taught to be. I cannot now deny my faiths, my ideals. I am severed from my people and am no longer of them; but all the more it is my duty to

labour and to suffer for them and to raise them from the slough in which their feet at present stick."

The next two days passed heavily for Abdul Karim. Gloom, deeper than ever, settled upon him, and he found it hard to maintain the necessary calm and politeness, when his future was discussed by his parents. When he tried to study, his eyes would read line after line without his troubled consciousness grasping a word of their meaning. Chiefly he liked to rise early, as the first grey lights of the dawn trembled on the dark pall of night and routed the radiant stars. He would go forth noiselessly from the house and walk far in the brisk cool air of the morning across the plain to some ancient well where the blue-grey pigeons circled and flew, or to the cemeteries where reposed the departed of his race.

On the evening of the second day he remembered the Collector's invitation. He put on an *angarka* of black broad-cloth with gold tassels and a brocaded turban, and drove up the broad avenue shaded by the spreading branches of many banyan trees to that officer's bungalow. Him he found in his tennis flannels reclining on the verandah, in a long chair with wooden

footrests, a wiry fox-terrier and a Rampur greyhound at his feet. He was gladly made welcome, given cigars and cigarettes, and generally compelled to feel at home. The fox-terrier after some suspicious sniffing, wagged his tail and curled himself up comfortably between him and his master. The greyhound fixed her soft eyes on his face. They talked quietly and easily with something of real friendship and respect of the District and municipal affairs, and tennis and cricket, horses and polo. Gradually, by one of those turns which conversation in India always takes between men who are born in or know England, they found themselves speaking of the London theatres and Savoy suppers, and the noise and rush of Piccadilly. The very names and the sense of partnership in the great English city, seemed to flavour their conversation with a rich bouquet of intimacy, a fuller-bodied sympathy. In momentary silence their thoughts seemed to draw nearer to each other.

"It must be very difficult for you to know what to do here now, I fear," at last said the Collector. "Oxford and London, society and freedom, and then an Indian provincial town. What a contrast! Yes, it must be terrible. I

often wonder whether we are wise. English education must inevitably make the return so hard for the Indian student."

"It isn't easy," said Abdul Karim, in a tense voice. "You don't know what I have suffered. Only these last three days they have been worrying me all the time to get married. *You* know what that would mean for me. But all that isn't the worst of it. I think one could in time grow callous. It 's the thinness, the starkness of our life which is really terrible. No real interests, no live energies. Just custom, abnegation of all individuality, of all ambition and desire. That is the tragedy."

"Yes, I think I know what you mean," said the Collector. "It *is* deathly. But surely you can make some sort of intellectual life for yourself. You can study. And there is always a career for you at the Bar, or in municipal life or something of that kind."

"Ah, no one can quite understand except one of us," answered Abdul Karim. "I think you sympathize and understand better than most Englishmen, but even you don't really know what it means. How can you? Man is after all only alive as a member of a social whole. Even reading and study are fruitful and real only if

they are shaped by the time-spirit, only if the individual leaps from the spring-board of public thought and common interests. He must keep in touch with the living present, with national life, with the general ideals of which his effort is only a flower. Cut him off from the tree and his mental powers wither and die. Municipal work and all that sort of thing isn't real in India, you know that as well as I. There is no spirit behind it to animate it, no corporate life, no consciousness of the living society. You know what it all means. A little artificial vanity, the desire to please an official, to bulk a little larger in the public eye, the hope of a title or a decoration. For the soul it is starvation. And the Bar is not a career, in India at least. It 's just a method of making money. Perhaps you won't quite understand the difference, for, Sir, if you will pardon my saying so, that again is *your* national weakness. But it is not what I need."

"I know what you mean," again said the Collector. "A life without ideals is not the best sort of life, no doubt. But what else can I suggest? You see the few must pay for the peace and tranquillity of the many. After all, good government is not a small thing."

"No, no, I don't say that," cried Abdul Karim. "I am not ungrateful. But there is one thing better than contentment, and that is discontent. That is an English saying, after all. Don't you think, don't you know how terrible it is for us to see our country asleep in a sluggish lethargy? Material prosperity isn't everything; in a sense it isn't even anything. Is it not our duty, as Indians—for after all we *are* Indians, not Englishmen—to do all that we can to awaken it to national life and national thought, to discontent and effort and even pain? Without suffering there can be no happiness; without struggle is no achievement."

"Well, well, Abdul Karim," said the Collector, "we mustn't talk politics. Only remember you are not one nation, but many. Don't let English-learnt ideas carry you too far from the facts. And remember there is always good work to be done at every man's door. And now have another cigarette and a glass of lemonade."

A few minutes later Abdul Karim had said good-bye and was again sitting in his phaeton.

"Remember each man has the duties of his station to perform," the Collector called after

him. Abdul Karim only shook his head as he drove away.

The Collector sighed as he went to his bedroom and changed. A quarter of an hour later he had forgotten his fears for the boy, as he sat at his table and opened the pile of documents brought by the evening post.

The next morning Abdul Karim waked early, for it was the tenth day of the month of Zu'l-Hijjah, the Feast of Sacrifice, the great festival instituted by the Prophet at Medina as a day of atonement for the people. For the Prophet had recalled the intended slaying of Ishmael* by Abraham, and, as he slew his votive offering, he had cried, "O Lord! I sacrifice this for my whole people, all those who bear witness to Thy unity and my mission." Wherefore to this day this is the greatest of festivals for the Faithful. All the Mussulmans of the town met in the morning in a field some way from the city, where a turreted wall at the end of a large stone platform showed the direction of Mecca, the Holy City. Thither he had gone with his father in clean white raiment to pray with the people and listen to the preaching of

* In the Arabic version, Ishmael replaces Isaac.

the Imám, the leader of prayer. In ordered lines they had stood and knelt and prostrated themselves, following with a nice exactness the ritual and words of the leader of prayer. Twice was the prayer said, and all had hearkened to the homily of the preacher. In the end they repeated after the Imám the solemn words,

"Verily, my prayers, my sacrifice, my life, my death belong to God, the Lord of the worlds. I am of those that are resigned."

His father had brought a bull to the sacrifice, one-third of which even according to the law was given to friends, and one-third distributed to the poor and the needy, and one-third kept for a family feast. For that was the law of God.

Abdul Karim had watched and prayed, and, as he saw, the tears had risen to his eyes. As he hearkened to the noble cadences of the Arabic lines, he had shivered with the excess of excitement, and his throat had been parched and dry. The sword of the Faith seemed to glint before his eyes and the crash of spear upon shield and the rushing of horses to sound in his ear. Here he felt were his people, his life. Verily he was of the Faithful too. O God! let it be his to lead them to light, to vivify

their faith with the blood of thought and strife and desire, to make their religion a living creed of reason, not the dull iteration of formalism. Yet it should be a Mohammedan rationalism, a really national idea, a new, a higher ideal of social duty and of individual growth. The West had gone mad with individualism, had blasphemed the rights of the social whole, and was diseased with selfishness and unreality. This at any rate had Islám done, that it put the whole before the part, that it showed the single man his weakness, that it demanded always resignation, self-sacrifice, discipline. A new Islám, the old Islám rationalized and revived, that was the world's need, India's need.

With such thoughts flying through his head, Abdul Karim sat all day as though dazed in a corner of the courtyard, seeing, but hardly conscious of seeing, the throng of friends and servants, the eating and talking, the going and coming. One or two had come up to speak but he heeded them not. Seeing him pre-occupied, they had gone away and left him to his own thoughts, with the quiet courtesy of the East. It was the voice of the muezzin, with the old cry of "God is great. There is no god but God," that first brought him from his ecstasy.

Suddenly starting, he found himself alone ; and knew it to be the hour of the sunset prayer.

Going to the mosque, he had knelt at the very threshold, behind the last line of worshippers. A real peace swung him to rest as he repeated, almost unconsciously, the words he so well knew, the Takbir, the Durud, the Du'a. Still he knelt on in his place, as the others slowly filed out and the mosque was left to darkness and to him. The shadows crept from the marble pulpit and the arabesques of the West wall to the vast dome and the great central arch. All was silence, and only the distant howl of the jackals was borne on the air.

He repeated again to himself the words of the " Prayer which Opens," the prayer which is said for the sick and the dying.

" Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds, the compassionate, the merciful, King of the day of reckoning. Thee do we worship and to Thee do we cry for help. Guide Thou us on the right path, the path of those to whom thou art gracious, not of those with whom Thou art angered, nor of those who go astray."

And as he still knelt, he seemed to hear from on high a voice. And the voice was the voice of 'Ali, the Lion of God. And the voice

said :—" Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." And then the voice was silent.

And he stretched forth his hands and wept.

And, after he had wept, he cried out and said :—" Yea, verily, I am of those that are resigned. Let my blood be accepted for that of the people, that they become strong and hale. Let me die that they may live and be mighty. For by my life can I do nothing and without Thee there is no health. Grant them greatness and singleness of purpose and the life of the spirit, and accept Thou my sacrifice."

And when he had thus spoken he fell forward upon his face and he knew no more.

* * * *

They found him thus at the dawning. And as he had lain, so had the stone of the threshold pressed upon his neck. And the mark on his neck was like unto the mark of the knife at the sacrifice. And, seeing this, they wondered.

As they buried him, the mourners exclaimed, according to usage, " It is the will of God."

And his father replied :—" I am pleased with the will of God."

LAURENCE HOPE

LAURENCE HOPE

Of the many forces which the contact of India with the British Empire has brought to work, none is more fascinating to study and none is less investigated than the influence of the East on English thought and emotion. The æsthetic value of our Oriental dominions, and their meaning in and for art, forms a chapter of the history of thought of which the opening pages have barely been turned.

But India as a subject for art holds a position so singular that for its comprehension the thought has to travel to Syria or Judæa in the grasp of Rome. The Roman "merchant prince," with his "stake in the country" and his assured social position, his elaborate dinners and those traditional sports in which he forgot the financial origin of his fortunes, turned with superior scorn from the grotesque gods and the elemental passions of the Assyrian. For the fiery pride and furious fanaticism of the Jew,

his crude fears of Jehovah, his apathetic prostration before God, and his impotent revolts against man, he felt no less the contempt of the practical leader of men for dreams and vain futilities. And the contempt was certainly not less bitter, that the despised native of Judæa saw but a useful toy or the means of earthly success in all Rome's barbarous civilisation. Even then the East—Judæa or Assyria—had its call to the Western ear ; but the call was heard only by those poets who never left the pavements of Rome but for the country houses of its social leaders. And even to the poet what did it import? A mysterious epithet to adorn a line or some rich local image for the cadences of a couplet. But those who had known the East—the discourteous, narrow-minded Colonel who had muddled a regiment through its sands, the merchant who had sought in its mines and plantations his ostentatious wealth, the Civil Servant who had made a solitude, and in his annual report had called it peace—what thought had any of these except of the clubs and drawing-rooms of Rome, the civilization of those huge blocks of brick and mortar, and the comforts of their serious sports and daily paper? Those who had seen had no tongue to tell : and those

who might both have listened and sung, if they could have known, knew nothing save the name of some lost battle or the birthplace of a lady's perfumed charm.

India has had a fate not very different. "The glorious East" and "the mysterious Orient" have long become the commonplaces both of literature and journalism, both of that which is unreadable and of that which is never read. The poet finds melody in the music of an Indian name or seeks images from the storied vale and water-borne gardens of Kashmir. The journalist flies for three months from Bombay to Calcutta, and bespangles his vivid columns with local colour of "gaudy hues" and "silken curtains" and "opalescent skies" for the delight of his anæmic readers in the London suburbs—readers who seek in the silly anæsthesia of sentimental romance and tasteless epithet relief from the dreary round of servile work and trivial monotony. Dumb are those who have lived within her frontiers. The curse of officialism is on them, and their ears cannot hear nor their eyes see. Their tongues are dumb, for they cannot speak. They live, but they know not life. For since all art is essentially immoral, and in India at any rate

sympathy lies on the way that is called perilous, what can they know or say who are daily drilled for the conservation of a social fabric, pressed for the round of conformed respectability? There where the possession of ideas is more discountenanced than even the possession of manners, and few are allowed to have experience till they have lost the capacity for thought, the official spends his weary existence in instructing others and forgetting to learn himself.

And the people of the land themselves—how can they express the life of their own folk? The touch of Western education as interpreted by intellectual dulness has withered their life and robbed them of originality. In England the man who has taken a Third in Greats is often brilliant, and the man who has taken a First may sometimes be clever ; but he who has taken a Second is damned for life to intolerable mediocrity. He usually does something dreadful, and becomes a master at a private school or an archæologist or a County Councillor. In India it is the Seconds in life who count. They have set up a standard of school training and become instructors of youth. The results are not far to seek. In this generation the educated native reads all sorts of instructive

books and discusses Spencer. His absolute want of manners has become the subject of constant remark, and his elders deplore his lack of idealism. It is obvious that no efforts of art or desire to create beauty can be looked for in such as he. If he wrote anything, it would no doubt be a legal commentary or a constitutional treatise or something equally tiresome and informative. Fortunately for him, his wife and his mother are still untouched by the West of Clapham, so that instruction has not yet killed but only numbed the functions of his thought. Native journalism daily shows that he still has in remarkable degree, though he tries not to think so, the power of creating a wholly unreal world to agree with his prejudices and his motives.

For the first time the life of the East has in English literature obtained artistic expression in the poems of the lady who called herself Laurence Hope. And not a little significant is it of English life in the East that her work has found recognition not amongst her countrymen in India, but amongst those who under grey northern skies have the taste to understand and the desire to know passion and beauty in an Eastern garb. Direct and simple in her appeal,

natural and primitive in her matter, she would in any case find readers only in those whom high rank or real mental training has uplifted above the petty artificialities and conservative conventions of a middle class. How strongly, then, must her words speak to those who, knowing in life but matter for energy of function, are further jaded by the dull necessities of Society, by the unceasing repetition of social performance, and the cold wintry habits of their own environment.

Of all the qualities of her poems the most remarkable is their truth. And the truth is achieved because Laurence Hope knew—knew perhaps but dimly by some vague feminine instinct—that verity lies not in imitation but in creation. She felt—but we know not how or why she felt—that Art dies when it mirrors Nature, and that, as Aristotle has told us once for all, Nature can never be more than Art's poor material. To her the observation of alien emotions, unknown desires, has brought a thought so transformed that from her lips fall the fiery words, true because unreal, universal because not individual, in which she expresses a mood, a passion, or a temperament, not yet felt or known of any, yet motive in a whole

nation's varied life. For the living man or the living woman, compact of appetites, moulded of hereditary traits, confined by habits, respondent to all manner of stimulus, is surely only in partial sense alive ; sentient or percipient only by momentary effort, and then dimly, blindly. Not so, we may be sure, as in the poem, speaks the deserted princess, recumbent upon purple cushions at the barred, pillared balcony, while in the dark corners of the chamber prattle the idle slave-girls, their white teeth gleaming against the brown skin. Not so spoke, even in inner communion, the fierce Afridi with his black ringlets clustering round his ear, as he left his friend's betrayer and his mistress to the fatal mercies of her spouse. Not so indeed could they speak, for Art alone can express and inform that which in Nature is merely chaotic. And what a commentary on the figments of the Naturalistic school is it that with one beauteous line Laurence Hope attains more truth than all the wearisome *documents humains* and all the elaborate details of their meticulous copy-books. For it is not for Art to reproduce life's facts, but, by transforming them, to make of them vehicles of beauty and of awe.

So in Laurence Hope you shall never find an attempt at portraiture, or the reproduction of act or scene or the details of local colour, and the other facile aids to verisimilitude. Never when she mentions a name or a flower or any Indian thing, does one feel that here is a conscious effort for actuality. Always it comes merely for its melody or its consonance with the mood expressed. She produces an atmosphere. A background she never copies.

Like all true art-work, the poems of Laurence Hope are in the main subjective. She writes as she writes, even if it be of the moods and feelings of an alien folk, because she has absorbed their thought and being into her mind and she expresses it as she herself feels it, sympathizes in it in the old Greek sense, but restrained and selected for the forms imposed by her chosen art. "Zira in Captivity" is for her no mere Indian woman, actual, living, but rather the Zira whom she in her own mind has known, whom she has conceived as the Zira that all Indians, however unwittingly, feel and recognize. The hands which she sees beside the Shalimar have in this life never held baby to the breast or pulled the veil over

the pallid face. In the mind of the artist they came to being, and in the forms of her art they live. They are kin to us all because they knew no kin, and their sweetness is unending because it was never tasted of man. They bear no name, but, unknown, they beckon to us through the mist of dreams, called by a mood, creatures of all humanity's passions and its joys.

In all her poems the subjects are three—Youth and Beauty and Love. How far any or all the poems are really imitations of Eastern work it would be impertinent to enquire. But this at least may be said, that they have drawn their inspiration mainly from the world of Islam and the Persian poets. Hindu poetry, at least as we know it, has given but objective description and involved epic and wearisome didacticism. Gem-like and exquisite, almost the only exceptions are the lyrics of the sad Mewar queen, Mirabai. Oppressed by an artificial social system, lost in the dreams of a vast metaphysic, obsessed by false ideas of asceticism, Hindu thought has never since its Dark Ages regained the liberty which is a condition of lyrical expression. But the proud Mussulman, with his predestination to excuse sin, his fiery passions, and his domestic freedom, has

ever chanted gaily odes to his loves and lyrics of his moods.

Akin is the love of which Laurence Hope tells to the "absolute love" of the Khwaja's Divan. Groping only for that one whom it loves, it is lost to all thought of self and remembers its own being only to cry out for absorption in the beloved. The lover seeks no feeling, no wish, no thought save from the impulse of the beloved; his aim is the destruction of self-consciousness in union with the object of his desires. It is not the self-abasement of the lover which is met, however seldom, in the poetry of the West—a pose, one feels, or perhaps a mood in which the abasement is still conscious of its humility. Nor yet is it the sublime devotion of the Hindu lady, content for incarnation after incarnation to serve and serve without a reward, only to be lost finally in a quiescent Universal Spirit. Rather it is also selfish and also proud, for it has pride in being lost in the beloved's life, and it knows the ecstasy of delight in the abandonment of self. Very feminine is the mood, but also how Eastern the femininity! Certain it is that Laurence Hope could never have expressed so passionate a desire for unity with the "king," the "lord,"

had she not been a woman ; but it is safe to say also that she could never have sung it as she did, had her mind not been steeped in the lessons of the East.

" Talk not, my Lord, of unrequited love,
Since love requites itself most royally.
Do we not live but by the sun above,
And takes he any need of thee or me? "

Not less may the worship of Youth and its tremulous, slender beauties be found in the spirit of Iran and the odes which are sung beside the runnels and concrete foundations of the rose-gardens of Shiraz. Beauty is the gift of God, and youth is the season of beauty ; surely not otherwise did the Moslem poet think.

" I am not sure if I knew the truth
What his case or crime might be,
I only know that he pleaded Youth,
A beautiful, golden plea.
* * * *
Could he plead in a lovelier way?
His judges acquitted him."

Youth and Beauty and Love—the " slender ankle bruised among the clods," the scent from the young body in the midday sun, the strong shoulder gleaming white in the moonlight as it bends towards the shy bride—shy, yet how warmly eager!—it is of such things and of

the moods which come at their sight to the Eastern heart that Laurence Hope sings. And she sings in lines which are all a-pulse with passion and tremulous with desires, knowing no shame, brooking no remorse, ignorant of social right or wrong, wild for the lover's kiss and happy in his memory.

" Free to the eyes, that think no shame
That a girl should bloom like a forest flower,
Who hold that love is a sacred flame,—
Outward beauty a God-like dower."

Others have told of these, though few with the sincerity and the passion of Laurence Hope, and none in English literature through the same medium of Oriental temperament and image. But with it she has brought what is almost, if not quite, new to literature, the feminine outlook and the distinctive cry for maternity. It is curious to reflect that the lyrical writings of the world should so far have failed to give expression to that overpowering and biologically natural will for maternity which alone, one must suppose, can have made matrimony tolerable to any beautiful woman, which alone could make her submit to the stringent regulations of the oldest Guild of the world. And yet it is not unnatural, since men have been mainly

the poets of the world, and no man can know or more than dimly conjecture that wild craving. Here in Laurence Hope, in how many poems, it finds perfect expression, bold, unrestrained, ever active, even if tacit, in the most ecstatic enjoyment of present love. The whole nature of the woman seeks to be absorbed in the lover, seeks, one would think, its fullest gratification in his kiss ; yet all the time she seeks absorption only in order once again to create him ; she sees in him at once the end of her life and the means of fulfilling her proper functions.

" Thine is his valour, O Bride, and his beauty
Thine to possess and re-issue again ;
Such is thy tender and passionate duty,
Licit thy pleasure and honoured thy pain."

So sing the bridesmaids as they dance before the bride, and they tell but the old lesson of the Prayer Book, so often read, so little understood.

" This morn I watched a tremulous fading rose
Rise on the wind to court a butterfly.
' One speck of pollen ere my petals close ;
Bring me one touch of love before I die.' "

Truly, if Laurence Hope has done nothing else, she has at least done this, that she has

laid bare the longing of the woman for the man. It may well be that, reading, we may understand; and, understanding, we may better cherish the woman whose very kiss is a cry for travail and pain, and for whom the truest glory and joy of love is in the anguish and pangs of motherhood. In the melody of her lines is shaped the image of one, fair and straight, poised on a pinnacle, in the rays of the golden sun, her wheaten skin flushed with desire, modest but not afraid, smiling and yet earnest, as at a sacrament, with her arms indeed outstretched to man, but her eyes stedfastly ever agaze on that dazzling firmament where she alone reads the future strivings of her race—eternal symbol of woman at her highest — at once Wife and Mistress and Mother.

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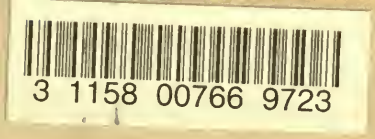
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