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STORIES OF BENGALEE LIFE

MIRIAM S. KNIGHT
AND
PRABHAT KUMAR MUKERJI

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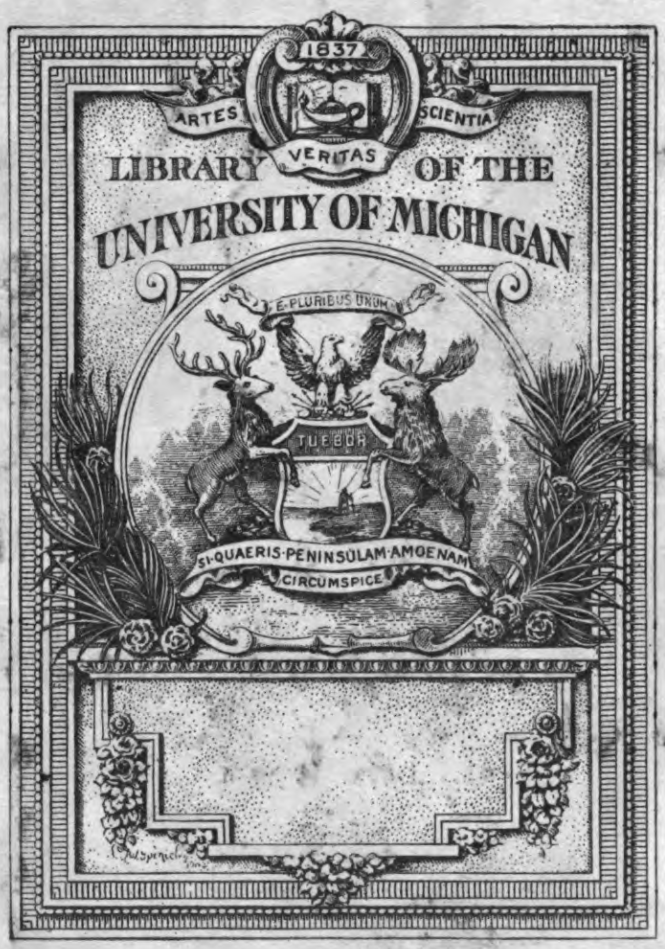

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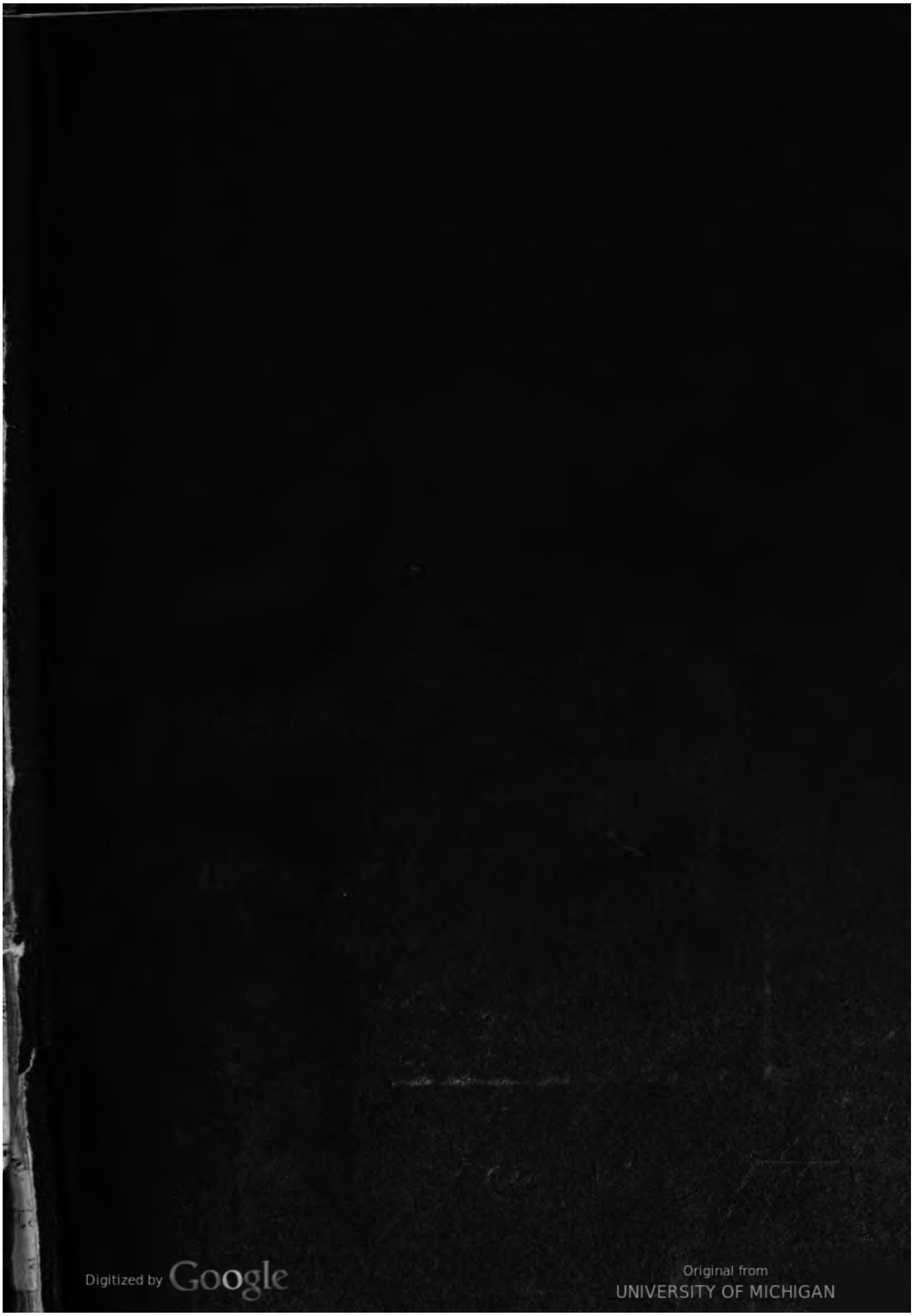
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Translated from the Bengali

OF

PRABHAT KUMAR MUKERJI

BY

MIRIAM S. KNIGHT

AND

THE AUTHOR

CALCUTTA

CHUCKERVERTTY, CHATTERJI & CO.,

15, COLLEGE SQUARE.

1912

Price { Paper, Rs. 1/8.
Cloth, „ 2.

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AT THE **India Press,**
24, Middle Road, Entally, Calcutta.

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FOREWORD

THE STORIES presented in this volume have been selected from the "*Naba-Katha*," the "*Sorashi*" and the "*Deshi-o-Bilati*" by MR. PRABHAT KUMAR MUKERJI, one of the best writers of short stories in the Bengali language.

The first four stories were translated by the author himself and the remaining six by MRS. M. S. KNIGHT, the well-known translator of some of BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE'S Bengali novels.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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THE WILES OF A PLEADER

CHAPTER I

SUBODH Chandra Haldar had been practising as a pleader for four years now, but still he did not seem to be getting on well. At the time he took his degree in law, all his friends were unanimous in their opinion that he was a clever man and would rise in his profession quickly. But alas, they have proved false prophets. Yet, it cannot be said that this failure was due to his lack of learning or his want of tact. A graduate of the University—the different letters of the alphabet at the tail of his name bore testimony to his academical knowledge. Then, he was tactful beyond his years. Soon after he obtained his degree, he decided to go and start practice at the district bar of Dinajshahi. He had heard that there was plenty of legal work to be had there, and also that the

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local bar was not a strong one in point of ability. Before leaving Calcutta, he went to pay his respects to a vakil living at Bhowanipur, who had known Subodh for a number of years and was kind to him. Subodh carried a small canvas bag with him and after exchanging the usual salutations, he said to the vakil—

"Will you do me a favour, Sir?"

"What is it?"

"I have got some little presents for you here in this bag. Will you be good enough to accept them?"

This excited the old gentleman's curiosity not a little. "What is it, Subodh?" he enquired.—"What have you brought for me?"

Subodh opened the bag and drew out of it a new *chapkan* of shining black alpacca and a brand new *shamla*. Placing the articles before the vakil, he said—"Do me the favour to accept these as presents."

The gentleman was rather taken aback at this unexpected proposal and said—"Well, but what is the meaning of it?"

Subodh replied smiling—"My motives are not at all disinterested. I shall expect something in return from you also."

"Pray speak out. I don't understand you, Subodh. What can I do for you?"

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Subodh said—"Kindly take these and let me have in return your old *chapkan* and *shamla*, if you don't mind."

The veteran pleader began to see light. He burst out laughing and said—"Bravo Subodh, a fine idea this, to be sure."

"Thanks very much"—said Subodh.—"You see, the position is this. I am going to try my luck in a town where I am a perfect stranger. That alone is damaging enough. Added to this, if the clients were to see me clad in a new *chapkan* and *shamla* they would at once discover that I am only a raw recruit. Who do you think would come near me then?"

The vakil was much amused and said—"Quite right, Subodh, you are perfectly right. Let me assure you that you would rise in your profession—and that, quickly. We want such acute men at the bar—we really do."

Subodh returned home in high spirits with an old *chapkan* and *shamla* in his bag. With a view to further conceal his youthfulness, he next went to a *Kaviraj* and bought a phial of medicated oil for applying to his forelocks and turning the hair grey. But in a moment of weakness he confided the secret to his wife. The next day he heard that the cat had knocked the bottle down from the table where it stood and all the contents were spilt on the floor.

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But alas, how hard the times have become! A man such as this had been attending the Bar Library of Dinajshahi for four long years and still the clients were keeping their distance.

Subodh's house stood in a much frequented street of the town. It was a small two-storied building with a little compound in front and a gate just bordering the street. The rent of the house has remained unpaid for three or four months. The *modi* has run up a bill close on a hundred rupees. The *Marwari* who supplied him with clothes has stopped any further credit. The landlord, the *modi*, the *Marwari* have begun to grow rather impertinent to Subodh of late. Although Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) has withheld her favours from Subodh all these years, the goddess of children has been very good to him. He has had two daughters and a son born to him at Dinajshahi. He has also secured the friendship of a brother pleader, Jagat Prasanna Babu. Jagat's father was a local pleader before him and some of the old clients have not deserted the son.

CHAPTER II

It was a winter morning. Sitting in his office room, Subodh Babu was drinking a cup of tea, sweetened with *goor*, as sugar was rather expen-

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sive. Thanks to *Swadeshi*, he need not feel ashamed at it now. Lately he has frequently been heard saying to his friends with evident pride—"Don't you trust the shopkeepers, gentlemen. What they sell as country sugar is really imported from Java. Many people think that yellow sugar is always country produce and it is only the crystal white variety that comes from foreign lands. But that is a great mistake. Thousands of tons of yellow sugar are imported every year from Java and elsewhere. I would prefer *goor* any day gentlemen, to be absolutely on the safe side."

Finishing his tea, Subodh shouted for the house-maid to take the cup and saucer away but nobody came. He then carried the cup to the inner apartments himself and there his wife told him that a little while ago the house-maid had raised a storm for the arrears of her wages, and had finally left, threatening a law-suit.

Poor Subodh heaved a deep sigh and preparing a *chelum* of tobacco, came back to his office. When at College, he never smoked a *hooka*, because it was not the fashion to do so. When he joined the bar he found that all the senior pleaders indulged in tobacco and in certain "other things" also. It was only the junior bar who neither smoked nor drank. So Subodh lost no time in providing himself with a *hooka*. A *seer* of tobacco of the eight-anna quality

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lasted him a fortnight. He made enquiries about the "other things" but discovered that a decent bottle could not be had for less than three rupees. So he stopped at tobacco. When at the end of the year he found that briefs were just as rare as at the beginning, although he had been faithfully smoking *hooka* all the time, he thought of giving it up out of sheer desperation. He did not smoke for a day or two and then found that he had caught a Tartar. However anxious he might be to give up his *hooka*, the *hooka* would not give him up. So he took to it again but this time it was only with the four-annas a *seer* quality of tobacco.

The clock struck ten. It being a Sunday, there was no bother about going to Court. Subodh smoked on and gradually fell into a brown study. The little patrimony that he had brought with him was gone long ago. Then he began to sell his wife's jewellery—one article at a time—but that stock was fast coming to an end also. How much longer could he go on in this way? What would become of him afterwards? Latterly he had been diligently studying the "Wanted" columns of different newspapers and had sent off shoals of applications, but so far without success. Expenses were increasing every day but the income was next to nothing. He made a little money now and then by executing commissions but that was not enough. Subodh

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Babu went on worrying himself in this manner, taking an occasional pull at his *hooka*. The hawkers of *mohonbhog*, the *gowalas* selling *ghee*, were passing along the street at intervals, plaintively shouting for customers. Sitting in his lonely office room, poor Subodh finished a whole *chelum* of tobacco of the four-annas a *seer* quality.

Some one's footsteps became audible in the compound outside. Subodh started up, muttering to himslf—"Who is that? A client, perhaps?" He had an old battered brief relating to a case long ago decided, which he used to keep handy for show. He quickly snatched it up from the side table and in a moment became deeply immersed in its dirty pages.

The footsteps climbed up the verandah and the next moment Jagat Prasanna Babu made this appearance with a newspaper in his hand. Subodh pushed thc old brief aside and hailed his friend with delight, saying—"Glad to see you, old chap. It is an unexpected pleasure, so early in the day."

"Oh, I was so tired sitting all by myself."—Jagat responded—"So I thought I would just look in and have a chat."

"I am glad. I also was longing for company. What's the paper—today's *Bengalee*? Let me have a look."

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Subodh Babu took the paper and opened the page where the situations vacant advertisements usually appeared. Jagat interrupted him saying—"Have you heard the news? Mr. Fuller is arriving here at 7 A.M., the day after to-morrow."

Subodh said—"Is he? I wish His Honour joy. He does't intend calling on me, does he?"

"Suppose he does. You would be at home to him, wouldn't you?"

"No Jagat"—went on Subodh in his bantering way—"That won't suit me at all. Mine is a *Swadeshi* household and besides, my servant has just run away. How am I to entertain His Honour?"

Jagat said, in the same spirit—"Do you know Subodh, it may be to your advantage to entertain him. Poor man, wherever he goes, nobody gives him a welcome. No Municipality has so far voted him an address. In many towns, the District Boards in their meetings have proposed addresses of welcome but have been outvoted by the non-official members."

Subodh, by way of joke, said—"If you think that my reward may take the shape of a comfortable berth under the Government, I am willing to present Mr. Fuller with an address of welcome myself."

"Haven't you heard that a pleader in East Bengal composed some verses in praise of Mr.

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Fuller and he has since been appointed a Government Pleader?"

This was a critical point in Subodh's life. What he had said in joke, he began to consider in an earnest manner. After thinking for a few moments he said—"You are right. A Government Pleadership would be the salvation of me, Jagat. But how am I to proceed in this matter?"

Jagat Babu took it merely as a joke and said—"Can you compose a poem in English?"

"No, I haven't rhymed two words together in my life."

"Try. Compose a poem and get it printed in gold. Distribute it to all and sundry, including the officials, the day Mr. Fuller arrives—and forward a copy to His Honour also. The Government Pleader of Faridsing, as Chairman of the Municipality there, did not care to present an address of welcome to Mr. Fuller. I hear that there is trouble over the matter and I shouldn't be at all surprised if you stepped into his shoes in the near future."

Subodh sat silently, engaged in deep meditation.

Jagat Babu in his waggish style went on—"Take your pen and a sheet of paper. I will help you. I used to write verses at one time. How should we begin? 'Hail Fuller—Lord of East Bengal'—what next? How should we rhyme it?"

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Subodh sat silently thinking as before. Jagat went on—"Let's rather have 'Hail Bamfylde Fuller—Lord of half Bengal'—it sounds majestic. What would the next line be? We can rhyme 'Bengal' with 'all,' 'call,' 'fall,'—there are plenty more. Yes, yes, let's have

Hail Bamfylde Fuller—Lord of half Bengal,
How glad are Dinajshahi people all
To—to—

How should it run? Won't you make a single suggestion? What, I compose the whole of the poem and you become the Government Pleader? Very comfortable for you!"

Subodh broke silence, saying—"No Jagat, don't go on in that way. I am thinking of something serious."

"I have got it"—Jagat continued—"yes.—

To welcome thee to their most ancient town—
The worthy representative of the Crown.

No. I think 'glorious' would be a better word than 'worthy'. Just listen to the whole of it—and take it down—

Hail Bamfylde Fuller—Lord of half Bengal,
How glad are Dinajshahi people all
To welcome thee to their most ancient town —
The glorious representative of the Crown.

Take it down Subodh, quick. Such a jewel of a poem should not be lost to the world and posterity."

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Subodh said—"Look here Jagat, can you lend me fifty rupees?"

Jagat, feigning annoyance, said—"I say, Subodh, this is very aggravating. Just fancy your introducing such a prosaic subject in the midst of such an ideal occupation. Go to—I won't help you to write the poem."

No smiles played on the lips of Subodh. His eyebrows were puckered. He said—"No Jagat, it is no longer a joke with me. Lend me fifty rupees, like a good chap. I have an idea."

"Really? What may it be?"

"It is an excellent opportunity and I thank you for suggesting the idea to me, though you did not mean it seriously. I want to bamboozle the Government and get something decent out of it. I am determined to try."

Jagat was not prepared for this. "What do you mean to do?"—he asked.

"I will accord a welcome to Mr. Fuller."

"What nonsense! Who are you, pray? Not a *Rajah*, not a *Zemindar*, not even a *Rai Bahadur*. Do you think that you would have an opportunity? Do you expect the Collector to ask you to be present on the railway platform when His Honour arrives? You surely don't imagine that you are going to be invited to the *durbar* or get a card for private interview?"

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"It doesn't matter, Jagat. I am going to do something which will certainly have the effect of bringing me to the prominent notice of Mr. Fuller. That will go a long way towards the attainment of my desire."

Jagat Babu looked very grave. After a moment's reflection he said—"Don't be a lunatic. The whole country has determined not a welcome him; will you alone do it? Like a traitor to your country, will you act against the wishes of our political leaders, from motives of self-interest?"

Subodh replied—"Jagat, you are talking like a school-boy. Here I am, rotting away for four years at Dinajshahi, selling my wife's jewels to buy my bread; have the 'political leaders' ever enquired of me, whether there was anything in my house for to-morrow's dinner? Do you know, I cannot afford to buy a sufficient supply of milk for my little ones—only the youngest born has a *seer* of milk every day and my wife feeds the others with a kind of porridge made of boiled *sooji* mixed with sugar. No house-maid stays long, for they are never paid their wages regularly. My wife's hands are getting tough and bony by doing constant house-work. If I get an opportunity of doing something for myself, why shouldn't I? If I can obtain a Government Pleadership by humouring this new Assam Government a little, where is

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the harm? One gets tired of going about in torn clothes and tattered shoes and being insulted at every turn of the road by one's creditors."

Jagat Babu maintained silence for a little while. Then he said—"What do you intend doing?"

"I will decorate my house nicely."

"Will that serve your purpose?"

"Oh no,—that's only a prelude—only the sowing of the seed. After that, things will take shape themselves. Affairs will take such a turn that I am bound to attract Mr. Fuller's favourable notice;—and my desire will be accomplished."

"Are you sure of the final result? You might reap nothing but thorns of abuse and calumny you know."

"I am quite sure. But I will require your good offices."

"What should I do?"

"That I will tell you from time to time as the affair developes. Just at present you need only go about vilifying me to people as a traitor to my country."

Jagat said smiling—"Oh yes, I can do that easy enough."

"But you must be very careful, my boy. Don't let anybody suspect that there is this understanding between you and myself."

"I shall take care."

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"That's good. But I want the money to-day."

"All right. I will send it through my clerk as soon as I get home."—Jagat rose to go.

Subodh walked to the gate with him. Before leaving, Jagat said—"Conspiracy is intoxicating. Not a bad game, this. I feel as though I am getting drunk with it. But I am not sanguine of your plan succeeding at all, Subodh, I tell you."

Subodh said with mock reverence—"God grant that the new Assam Government continue in its present mood a little while longer,—and I *will* succeed."

Shaking hands, the friends parted.

CHAPTER III

It is Monday. To-morrow the Lieutenant-Governor is due to arrive ; but yet, the people of the town are not making the slightest preparation to welcome the distinguished visitor. The sorrow and the insult resulting from the Partition of Bengal are rankling in the bosoms of all. The members of the Municipal Board, by an overwhelming majority, have outvoted the proposal to present His Honour with an address of welcome. The District Board have refused to pass a similar resolution though proposed from the chair by the Collector himself. The big landholders of the district who always took

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a prominent part in all public affairs have suddenly taken ill and gone away to different places for a change of air. A Mahomedan Deputy Magistrate and his co-religionist the Special Sub-Registrar of the town have, after much effort, started a brand new association called the *Anjumania Islamia*, consisting of about twenty members all told, and this Association have got up an address. Unfortunately no non-official member knew enough English to read out the address at the *Durbar*. The good Nawab of Dacca, being apprised of this difficulty by a telegram, has forthwith sent one of his English-knowing relations to Dinajshahi to assist them in their pleasant function.

On Monday morning the people of the town beheld a curious spectacle. About ten or twelve men were busily engaged in decorating the outside of Subodh Babu's house. Quantities of *jhow* and *deodar* leaves were seen heaped on his verandah. A few freshly cut banana trees were also visible. Speedily an arch constructed of split bamboos rose over his gateway. In half an hour the arch was covered over with the beautiful foliage of the *deodar*. On either side of the gate a banana tree was implanted. At the foot of each tree stood a new *ghurra* full of water, freshly painted over in yellow. Wreathes of marigold encircled each window facing the street. The outside wall was

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decorated all over with circular patches composed of *jhow* leaves, with a bunch of bright flowers of different colours fixed at the centre. To keep the flowers and the foliage fresh, one man was solely employed to bathe them with sprays of water at frequent intervals.

This kept Subodh Babu engaged till one o'clock. He then quickly finished his breakfast, wrote out a petition to the District Superintendent of Police, and ran to the poiice office. The petition contained a prayer for permission to display some fire-works at his own compound on the next day, in honour of the Lieutenant-Governor's visit to the town. Needless to say that the petition was granted as soon as it was put up before the D. S. P.

Returning home, Subodh again busied himself in looking after the decorations. He took a long piece of wooden plank and pasted it over with white paper. Then with a pair of scissors, he cut out of a sheet of scarlet paper certain letters of the alphabet intended to form a sentence welcoming Mr. Fuller to Dinajshahi. He was carefully fixing these letters on the white board when some young men and boys of the National School paid him a visit. The foremost of them saluted him politely and said—"What is all this, Sir?"

Subodh feigning a baby-like simplicity replied—"The Lieutenant-Governor is coming

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to-morrow, you see. I am therefore decorating my house as a sign of welcome to him."

"But, Sir, nobody else is doing it. Why should you?"

"Why? What's the harm?"

"Every one is in mourning because of the Partition of Bengal. This is not an occasion for festivity."

"Everybody is in mourning, did you say? But why? I find everybody just as jolly as ever."

"Do you then think, Sir, that the Partition of Bengal is a matter for rejoicing?"

Subodh was flabbergasted at this remark. Only the other day, at a public meeting to protest against the Partition,—he had harangued the audience in language such as this:—"My brother Bengalees,—till we have avenged this Partition,—this cutting in twain the beloved body of our Mother Bengal with a cruel sword as it were, let us not indulge in any kind of luxury or festivity, &c., &c."

Subodh kept a stolid silence. The boys tried to persuade him to desist and allow them to strip off the decorations. At last he found his voice to say—"It would be foolish to do that after spending so much money over it."

The boys said—"Kindly tell us what you have spent and we will make good the amount to you.

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All the students are willing to subscribe out of their tiffin-money at school."

Subodh felt a sudden pang shoot through his bosom. But he was not the man to desist from his purpose for merely sentimental reasons. In a voice of pretended annoyance he said—" Leave me alone. You boys have begun to poke your noses into everybody's affairs. Go home and mind your studies."

The boys left with a sigh of disappointment. It suddenly struck Subodh Babu that they were just as likely as not to come at night and tear up the decorations. They were up to any kind of mischief. So he put on his *cutcherry* dress and went to see the Police Superintendent. Arriving at his bungalow he was told that the Superintendent had gone to see the Collector. Subodh Babu, therefore, went to the Collector's *kothi* and sent in his card to the D. S. P.

He was sent for immediately. He found the Superintendent and the Collector sitting together. Subodh *salaamed* them both and stood, waiting their pleasure.

" What can I do for you, Babu ? "—said the D. S. P.

" Sir, I have decorated my house in honour of the Lieutenant Governor's arrival tomorrow. I

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have reason to apprehend that school-boys would come at night and tear up the decorations."

"Are you the gentleman who applied to-day for permission to display fire-works?"

"Yes, Sir."

The D. S. P. turned to the Collector and said—"It was about this gentleman that I was speaking."

The Collector looked at Subodh with a benignant smile, saying—"Are you a pleader?"

"Yes, Sir."

"That's good. I am glad to see you are so loyal. Would you like to attend His Honour's *durbar* tomorrow?"

"Yes, Sir—that would be a great privilege."

"All right. I will give you an invitation card. Your name, please?"

Subodh gave his name. The Collector took a blank card, filled it in himself and gave it to Subodh. The Police Superintendent said—"Never mind, Babu. Your decorations shall be safe. I will order four constables to mount guard in front of your house to-night."

Subodh saluted both the officers in a very deferential manner and took his departure.

The Lieutenant Governor arrived the next day at the appointed hour. Subodh Babu took his stand near his gate, in full dress, *shamla* and

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all. The phæton conveying the distinguished visitor drew near. The Commissioner of the Division and the Collector were also in the same carriage. As the equipage approached the gate, Subodh bent himself nearly double and *salaamed* His Honour. Mr. Fuller with a smiling face returned the salute. For a moment he cast his glance at the flags and festoons and the plank surmounting the archway over the gate, bearing the inscription—

LONG LIVE FULLER.

WELCOME TO DINAJSHAHI.

A faint smile played on His Honour's lips. The next moment the phæton was out of sight.

The *durbar* was to be held at ten o'clock. A big pandal had been set up on the *maidan*. After nine, Subodh hired a hackney carriage and drove to the place. He dismissed the *gharry* on arriving there, intending to walk back.

The *durbar* was very thinly attended. There were only two or three members of the *zemindar* class. All the gazetted officers of the Government —Deputy Magistrates, Munsiffs, had mustered in full force. Other servants of the Government,— ministerial officers and *amlas* were also in evidence. These latter had been especially ordered to be there so that the place might not look too

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empty. But this had been a sore trial to the *amlas*. They were poorly paid and managed to make both ends meet somehow. They possessed only one suit of *cutcherry* dress each,—hardly fit to be seen at a *durbar* in. Some of them had to borrow the suit they were wearing now. Those who had no such opportunity, have appeared in their everyday *cutcherry* costume—much the worse for constant wear. They could not help it, poor fellows. They ran the risk of losing their berths if they did not come. Besides Government servants, non-official gentlemen, either Hindus or Mohamedans, were very few in number. There were about fifteen Mohamedans present, representing the Anjumania Islamia.

In due time, His Honour entered the pandal. He looked venerable in his grey hairs. His face was lit up with a genial smile. All present stood up. The Collector then called upon the Anjumania Islamia to read their address of welcome. This done, the document was enclosed in a silver casket and presented to His Honour. The Mohamedans had printed Mr. Fuller's name as *Sir* Bamfylde Fuller, thus happily anticipating the honour conferred on him by Government some months later. Mr. Fuller stood up and delivered a speech in English and then another in Hindustani. Then came the ceremony of introductions.

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The Collector presented to His Honour one by one all the important personages there. Subodh deliberately pushed his way through the crowd and mustered courage to take his stand quite close to the Collector. The latter smiled at Subodh indulgently and presented him. Mr. Fuller shook hands with him cordially and said—

"Are you the gentleman who saluted me on my way from the railway station this morning?"

"Yes, Your Honour."

"Your house was beautifully decorated. I admire your taste. Are you a pleader?"

"Yes, Your Honour."

"The pleaders are generally very disloyal. I am highly annoyed with them. You, I find, have refused to dance to the piping of Surendra Nath Banerjee."

"I don't forget my duty, Your Honour, at the instance of other men."

"Very good. Come this afternoon to the Circuit House for private interview."—and Subodh was dismissed. Other people were introduced.

By and by the *durbar* broke up. Subodh was leaving when the Collector came up to him hurriedly and handing him a blank card for private interview said—"You are a lucky man. His Honor has especially asked for you. Come in time."

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Subodh thanked the Collector profusely and left.

On his way home his thoughts were—"What is all this? The most unexpected things are happening. Only the day before yesterday Jagat said in a sarcastic manner 'You surely don't imagine that you are going to be invited to the *durbar* or get a card for private interview?' Yet, all this have come to pass. Will the Government Pleadership then slip through my hands? Are the days of tribulation over at last? Is my lucky star beginning to rise?"

Subodh slowly wended his way to his home. When he had arrived at a short distance from it, he stopped and viewed the decorations. He felt very flattered that the Lieutenant-Governor himself had admired his taste. He looked on for a few moments with a gaze of rapture. He was about to proceed again when a very disagreeable thing happened.

The house near which he had taken his stand belonged to another pleader. Some mischievous urchins of the house who were on the roof, emptied a pail of water thickened with mud and cow-dung, directly over his head. Subodh cast his horrified looks above. Somebody shouted in derision—"Long live Subodh Babu. Welcome to Pandemonium."

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The dirty water, thoroughly besmearing his *shamla*, descended to his *chapkan* in several currents. Then soaking the *chapkan* through and through, it flowed down his trousers and found entrance into his shoes. In this condition, Subodh Babu hurried home as fast as his legs could carry him.

CHAPTER IV

His only decent *cutcherry* dress spoilt, Subodh did not know how to attend the private interview.

Bath and breakfast over, he called on a friend who was a Deputy Magistrate, told him every thing and asked for the loan of a suit.

The Deputy said—"Certainly Subodh Babu, I will lend you a suit with great pleasure. But what puzzles me is this. You gentlemen who belong to an independent profession, why should you lend yourself to all this tomfoolery? We are servants of the Government and have no choice but to submit. But you—why go out of your way to decorate your house, attend the *durbar*, go to the private interview and all that?"

Subodh Babu felt discomfited. He found his voice to say—"His Honour himself has asked me to the private interview. Would it be proper for me not to attend?"

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The Deputy Magistrate suddenly recollected that he had acted very unwisely in saying all this to Subodh Babu. What if his friend should go to the Collector and report the conversation? He would get into trouble with the authorities for such disloyal sentiments. Consequently he hastened to reply—"Oh yes, certainly—you must go. As His Honour has condescended to ask you personally, you ought to go by all means. Excuse me a moment, I will get you the suit."

The private interview was over. The display of fire-works in the evening was also accomplished. At nine o'clock, Subodh covering his face up carefully with a shawl, called on Jagat Babu.

Jagat welcomed him saying—"Bravo Subodh, Bravo! Things are turning out exactly as you said. Did you speak to the L. G. about a Government pleadership?"

"Oh no, that would have spoilt everything. He would at once have suspected that my loyalty was merely make-believe. Every thing in good time, my boy."

"What is your next step then?"

"Have you got telegram forms?"

"Yes."

"Let me have some, please."

Jagat Babu did as he was requested.

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Subodh explained saying—"We ought to send a report to the *Bengalee*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Bande Mataram*."

" What about ? "

" All about myself, of course."

" That has been done. The *Bengalee* correspondent Sukumar Babu has mentioned you in his report of the *durbar*. He has added also that you were the only member of the bar to attend."

"But has he mentioned the cow-dung and water incident ? "

" I don't think he has."

" That's the most important thing. Look at this, I have drafted a telegram giving the full details. I don't think Sukumar has reviled me enough in his telegram. That is of prime importance. The cow-dung incident and the welcome to Pandemonium is highly dramatic and would tickle people's imagination immensely. These ought to be especially mentioned."

Jagat Babu copied out the draft telegram and sent it off immediately. Subodh then bade him good night.

The next morning as Subodh just came out and sat in his office, two Sub-Inspectors of Police came and saluted him. One said—" Is it true, Sir, that when you were returning from the *durbar* yesterday, somebody emptied a pail of cow-dung

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and water over your head from the roof of the house opposite ?"

"Yes, it was so."

"This has reached the ears of the *Sahibs*. Should you like to prosecute this case, the Superintendent of Police has ordered us to render you every possible assistance. We will find out for you who the culprits are and who can depose as witnesses. Unfortunately this is not a case cognisable by the police. Had it been so, we would have arrested yesterday all the inmates of the house, young and old, and clapped them into *hazat*. You ought to file a petition of complaint this very day."

Subodh replied—"But I haven't seen any one. Against whom should I complain ?"

"We will immediately get you the names of all the young boys in that house. Their father, the pleader, must have abetted the offence. You mention them all as accused persons. Leave it to us to procure evidence against each and all of them. We will get the case proved to the very hilt."

Subodh remained in thoughtful silence for a little while. At last he said—"Give my *salaams* to the Police Sahib, *Darogaji*, and tell him that I very much appreciate his kindness. But as I have seen none and shall be able to identify none, it is absolutely no use lodging a complaint."

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The *Darogas* left, very much disappointed.

Subodh Babu then began to pull at his *hooka* vigorously and thought—"Poor boys!—They have done me a very good turn indeed. By this time the news is all over Calcutta with the morning papers, I believe. This will go a long way towards the fulfilment of my desire."

Subodh was right. Within three days the whole country rang with the news. The vernacular papers, copying the item from their English contemporaries (without acknowledgment) wrote long leading articles in terms not exactly complimentary to Subodh Babu. Some editors wrote—"Such traitors to the country should forthwith be placed outside the pale of society." One facetious writer published a poem entitled—"The purification of Subodh Babu." In it he said that cow-dung and water was a highly purifying agent of sin. The contamination resulting to Subodh Babu from shaking hands with Mr. Fuller at the *durbar*, has been washed clean with cow-dung and water. Prominent mention of Subodh Babu was made in the columns of the *Englishman* and other Anglo-Indian dailies also. These papers wrote—"There is no doubt that at the present moment there are thousands of educated natives in the New Province who are truly loyal to the British Government; but they dare not give ex-

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pression to their real sentiments for fear of being molested by the *budmashes*." They praised Subodh Babu's courage of conviction. On the other hand things were pretty hot for poor Subodh at Dinajshahi. The pleaders in the Bar Library hourly passed the most offensive remarks in his hearing. During his absence one member enquired of Jagat Babu—" I say, what is your friend's motive in behaving like this? Does he want to become a Deputy Magistrate, or a Police Inspector, or what? "

Jagat Babu replied with evident annoyance—" Don't ask me, for I am as much puzzled as you are."

" But he is such a friend of yours ;—you ought to know."

" Friend indeed ! I refuse to recognise a man of such a disgraceful character as friend."

" Have you had no talk with him? What ever is the matter with him? Has he gone mad? "

" I have not been on speaking terms with him since that day "—replied Jagat, with much dignity.

CHAPTER V

A week after the departure of the Lieutenant Governor, came the wedding day of a daughter of Kishori Mohan Babu, a leading member of the local bar. This gentleman was advanced in years and of a very kindly disposition. When every-

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body was denouncing poor Subodh in terms of unmitigated abuse, Kishori Babu was the only man who occasionally used to take up Subodh's part. He said one day—"Subodh was quite wrong in doing what he has done. There is no doubt of that. But we must also consider that he is very young and thoughtless. Oh no, you fellows mustn't go on persecuting the poor man like that. The amount of vilification that he has had in the newspapers is quite enough to drive one mad. That ought to be considered quite a sufficient punishment for him. Never mention it again."—Acting against the advice of some brother pleaders, Kishori Babu has invited Subodh also to partake of the marriage feast at his house.

It was evening. Subodh Babu sat in his office room, enjoying his *hooka*. Jagat well wrapped up in a shawl to conceal his identity, walked in.

Subodh gave him a hearty welcome. "Well, Jagat," he said—"it is so seldom that one sees you now-a-days."

"Yes, I daren't come openly to you. Everybody knows that I have cut you dead. But what about the real affair? Do you see any signs of success? I hope that abuse and denunciation are not going to be the only reward for your trouble."

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"Oh no! Everything in due time. We must hold our souls in patience till the psychological moment should arrive."

"I saw in the papers to-day that the Government Pleader of Faridsing has been compelled to send in his resignation. Why not fire off an application?"

"Oh dear no! Not a Government Pleadership. The bar would be too hot for me anywhere after all that has happened."

"What do you desire then?"

"I would much rather become a Deputy Magistrate. It carries a handsome salary—a settled income, and besides, the position is considered to be a high one too."

"The starting salary of a Deputy Magistrate is only two hundred rupees. Why not apply for a Deputy Superintendentship of Police? You get two hundred and fifty to start with."

Subodh replied with vehemence—"What, become a policeman and turn a real traitor to the country? These days, during which I have only posed as a traitor, have been too much for me I tell you. By becoming a Deputy Superintendent of Police my duty in this province will frequently be to go and hurl regulation *lathies* at the heads of poor urchins who have shouted *Bande Mataram*, to hunt down boys who in their youthful zeal have

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thrown away half a *seer* of Liverpool salt. No, thank you, not the Police Service for me. I would much rather go on starving at the bar."

"To become a Deputy Magistrate, you must send in your application. The Government will not come begging at your door, will they?"

"Of course I will apply—but things are not ripe enough yet. Something more requires to be done."

"What else?"

"I will tell you. You must get me boycotted. That's the thing. Boycott me all of you and then my claims with the Assam Government will be *pucca*."

"*I* can boycott you to-morrow—but will that do? How can I persuade others to do it?"

"Kishori Babu has asked me to his daughter's wedding."

"Will you go?"

"Certainly."

"Some people at first raised a difficulty about asking you, but Kishori Babu, like the good soul he is, stood by you and they relented."

"That's unfortunate. You can do one thing. Just as we all sit down to dinner, you kick up a row and refuse to eat with me."

"But what about the others?"

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"My dear fellow, you don't know human nature. You will find at least a dozen men there who would follow suit immediately. Then I will come away and send off long telegrams to the newspapers." Jagat hesitated a good deal. He said—"It would be a difficult manœuvre;—I shouldn't like to try it."

"But you must. It is all-important. The Government cannot fail to recognise my claim once I have been boycotted."

Jagat at last agreed to it after much coaxing and persuasion. He drank a cup of tea with Subodh and then left.

The next day, Jagat did as was arranged upon. About forty men sat down to dinner in a big hall and before the basket loaded with *pooris* made its appearance, Jagat jumped to his feet and said—"Gentlemen, you will excuse me. I am unable to dine in this company. Over there I see a man who by his conduct has forfeited his claim to be considered a member of our caste. I refuse to eat with Babu Subodh Chandra Haldar —a traitor to the country's best interests."

Several other young men also stood up and declared that they were exactly of the same opinion and would rather go away hungry than eat with Subodh Babu.

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A great hubbub followed. Many persons were seen getting ready to depart. At this juncture Subodh stood up and said—"Gentlemen, pray be seated. It is not proper that so many of you should go away because of one man. I would much rather go away myself, gentlemen, and leave you to enjoy yourselves."—Having delivered this speech, Subodh shot out of the room.

Poor Kishori Babu was greatly distressed at this unexpected calamity. He ran after Subodh, caught hold of him near the gate of his house, and besought him to remain and have his dinner in a separate room, all by himself.

Subodh set himself free from the poor old man's grasp with a violent jerk, saying—"No, thank you, Sir. I did not come here to be insulted like this. It is too much—really too much."

Coming home, he drafted a long telegram giving a full description of the incidents of the evening with embellishments calculated to greatly heighten the effect, and despatched copies of it to different Calcutta dailies regardless of cost. He of course took care not to put his own name down as the sender of these telegrams. Once again the newspaperdom of Calcutta, both Indian and Anglo-Indian, was on fire. Some Indian newspapers wrote—"The noble example set by Dinajshahi in thus boycotting a traitor to the country should

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be followed everywhere." The Anglo-Indian papers greatly sympathised with Subodh and wanted to know why the Government could not protect its loyal subjects from outrage at the hands of seditionists.

* * * * * *

A week elapsed. Subodh sent in his application to Shillong praying to be provided with a Deputy Collectorship. He mentioned that he had been boycotted not only in social matters but professionally also and had thus been deprived of the means of his livelihood.

A fortnight passed—no news from Shillong. Subodh began to get a little nervous about it. The Government, he thought, was not to be hoodwinked,—no Deputy Collectorship for him—and his chances at the bar gone for ever too.

Sunday came round. Subodh finished his cup of tea sweetened with *goor* and abandoned himself to his *hooka* and vain regrets. He was thinking of the worldly wisdom contained in the fable of the dog and the shadow, when suddenly Jagat made his appearance with a smile on his lips and a newspaper in his hand. Subodh was astonished to see him throw prudence to the winds and come in this open manner.

"Hallo, Jagat,—is that the *Bengalee*?"

"No, it is the *Englishman*."

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"Anything fresh?"

"Yes,—something very fresh indeed."

"What's it?"

"Guess."

"I give it up. Come, let me see what it is."

Jagat showed him a paragraph which ran as follows:—"We understand on good authority that Babu Subodh Chandra Haldar, B.L., has been appointed by the E. B. and Assam Government to the post of an eighth grade Deputy Collector. This gentleman was a pleader of considerable eminence at Dinajshahi, at any rate till the recent visi of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the province to that town, when Babu Subodh was rash enough to decorate his house as a mark of rejoicing and pay his loyal homage to His Honour at the *durbar*. The story of the persecution suffered by this brave and loyal Bengalee at the hands of his fellow-townsmen is well known to our readers. We thoroughly approve of the appointment."

Subodh read the paragraph twice over and then said with a sigh—"It is too good to be true. There is nothing in the Gazette yet."

"Never mind the Gazette"—Jagat said in a tone of assurance.—"A paragraph in the *Englishman* is just as good as an announcement in the official gazette. You ought to know that, Subodh."

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Jagat was right. The very next issue of the E. B. and Assam Gazette contained the announcement.

Subodh is now a Deputy Magistrate at Dacca. He no longer drinks his tea sweetened with *goor*. Pure *Swadeshi* crystal sugar manufactured at Cossipur now serves the purpose. He has taken to eight-annas a *seer* tobacco again.

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HIS RELEASE

I

BABU Nagendra Nath was on a visit to his father-in-law in Calcutta during the Christmas holidays. He was a Deputy Magistrate in Eastern Bengal and Assam, recently transferred to the *sudder* station of Faridsing district. When leaving his last station he left his wife and children with his father-in-law, and has now availed himself of the holidays to fetch them to Faridsing.

Calcutta, during the present Christmas, was full of bustle and enthusiasm. The Indian National Congress was to hold its sittings shortly. The Industrial Exhibition had already opened.

Nagendra Babu's father-in-law, a retired Subordinate Judge, lived at Bhowanipur. He had three sons;—the eldest was a *vakil* of the High Court; the second, an assistant in a Government office; the youngest did not do anything in particular,—he was frequently seen delivering speeches at public meetings.

Nagendra Babu was twenty-seven and has been a Deputy Magistrate for five years. His

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University career was a brilliant one, he having topped the list of successful M.A.'s of his year.

It was the day before the opening of the Congress. The Deputy, after a comfortable morning tea, was sitting in the inner apartments, chatting with his brothers- and his sisters-in-law.

Girindra Nath, his brother-in-law, enquired—"Is there any unrest at Faridsing now?"

"No,—I haven't seen any."

Little Indumati, his sister-in-law, asked—"How is *Swadeshi* getting on there?"

"Fairly well,—though it is nothing like what I used to read in the papers before going there."

Satyendra, his brother-in-law, observed—"That's only natural. The enthusiasm of early days never lasts. What we saw here in Calcutta at the beginning—"

Nagendra Babu interrupted him, saying,—"Faridsing is much ahead of your Calcutta in that respect. You dare not buy a piece of Manchester *dhoti* there openly. You find the school-boys patrolling the streets with *lathies* on their shoulders."

"Are they the National School boys?"—enquired the brother-in-law who was the public speaker.

"Yes, most of them. There are boys from other schools also."

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"Don't the teachers try to stop it?"

"Oh, they have given it up."

"And the Police?"

"The boys care precious little for the Police. In my rambles through the *bazars*, I have often heard them saying to the Police—'Look here Mr. Constable, I am picketting'—and the Constable grins."

This caused a burst of laughter. Satyendra Nath said—"Do you intend, Nagendra Babu, to send your little boy to the National School when you arrive there?"

"Heavens!—That would be as much as my job was worth"—said Nagendra Babu with a smile.

"But supposing you didn't risk your job,—would you do it?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Then why continue in such a service?"—chimed in Girindra Nath.

"One must live."

"You have completed your terms of legal study. Why not pass the examination and start practice as a *vakil* at the High Court?"

"Oh dear! Do you think I am fit to pass examinations at my age?"

Indumati, pouting her little lips, said—"You are not willing to give up serving the *Feringhees*—

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that's the real reason. Let us know please, are you in favour of *Swadeshi* or against it?"

"In favour, without question. Yesterday I brought from the *bazar* about fifty rupees worth of *Swadeshi* clothes to take to Faridsing,—you saw them."

"Aren't *Swadeshi* clothes available there?"

"Yes they are,—but the prices are rather high."

Satyendra, smiling sarcastically, said—"Don't you understand, Indu, he daren't patronise *Swadeshi* there lest the *Sahibs* should come to know of it."

Nagendra Babu said—"Well, well,—admitting that was the reason,—is there any harm in doing a virtuous act in secret?"

"There isn't. But take care, Nagendra Babu, that you don't *sin* openly to please your masters."

At this moment a chorus of voices was heard singing outside the house. Somebody said—"There's the Society of Mother-worshippers, come to collect donations for the Congress." They all came out of the house and saw about fifty young men and boys, with yellow *puggries* round their heads, singing a patriotic song to the accompaniment of *mridang* and *kartal*, calling upon the devoted to pay according to the means of each one for the worship of the Motherland. Some of them carried flags inscribed with "*Bande Mataram*" and one

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had a big *thali* in his hand containing the money already collected.

When the song was over, each one of the household placed something on the *thali*, silver coins of different value. Nagendra Babu gave them a ten-rupee note.

A young man of the party immediately approched him and said—"Your name, Sir, if you please."

"What does it matter?"—said Nagendra Babu.

"Our rule is to take down the names of those contributing more than five rupees."

"You may write—'A Friend'."

Satyendra said—"Write down—'A Deputy'—this gentleman is a Deputy Magistrate in Eastern Bengal and Assam where buying *Swadeshi* cloth is a felony and singing *Bande Mataram*, high treason."

Girindra interfered, saying—"No, no—don't mention the Deputy Magistrate.—'A friend' will do."

The young men made the note as desired and departed, resuming their song.

II

It was dusk. Some school-boys were walking about the streets in the bazar at Faridsing. They

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noticed a person dressed like a *Khansama* coming out of a shop with a tin of biscuits in his hand.

The boys at once approached the person and said—" Hallo *Khansamaji*, let's see what sort of biscuits you have bought."

The man stopped and handed over the tin to the boys. They inspected it and said—" Oh fie, this is English manufacture."

" Yes *Babuji*, English articles are good, aren't they ? "—said the *Khansama*, somewhat surprised.

One of the boys put in—" Are you a Hindoo or a Mahomedan ?"

" A Mahomedan, Sir."

" Food of English manufacture is *haram*, don't you know that ? "

" *Toba*, *toba*, don't say that *Babuji*."

" How much did they charge you ? "

" A rupee and a half."

" What, a rupee and a half ! You may have a tin of a better quality country-made biscuits for one rupee only—fresh from the machines."

The man was a *Khansama* in the employ of a European tea-planter putting up at the *Dak Bungalow*. He thought to himself—" Well, my *Sahib* has given me a rupee and a half for a tin of biscuits. If I can get him a better quality for a rupee only, I make a profit of eight annas and he eats nicer biscuits ; so, where is the harm ? "

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—Aloud he said to the boys—" Are you sure, gentlemen ? "

The boys felt encouraged and said—" Yes, *Khansamaji*, we are perfectly sure. Come with us and see the *deshi* tin for yourself. In the meanwhile let us all go and return this tin to the shopkeeper."

Four or five of the boys took the *Khansama* to the shopkeeper who had sold the tin and requested him to take it back and return the money. The latter obdurately refused to do so, saying—" Heaps of English articles are rotting in my shop on account of this wretched *Swadeshi*. If I have sold a tin, I am not going to take it back again."

The boys left the shop disappointed. They all held a short conference together and decided to buy the *Khansama* a tin of *deshi* biscuits out of their own money. They proposed to him that they should keep the English tin themselves and give him a *deshi* tin in exchange. The *Khansama* consenting, the boys took him to the *Swadeshi* stores, and bought him a *deshi* tin on credit.

The look of the tin apparently satisfied the *Khansama*. He said—" I think this will do, *Babuji*. But it is only one rupee. What about my balance of eight annas ?"

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The boys said to the *Swadeshi* shopkeeper —"Kindly let us have eight annas in cash. We will repay you this amount together with the price of the tin to-morrow."

The *Khansama*, pocketing his eight annas, looked at the tin again and said—"Are you quite sure, *Babuji*, that these biscuits would be just as good as English?"

"Better, a great deal better—we can assure you. Never buy English biscuits in future. They are *haram*."

"*Toba toba*" ejaculated the *Khansama* and proceeded towards the *Dak Bungalow*.

The boys came out of the shop and opening the tin, scattered its contents on the street. They then began to dance on the biscuits, singing in unison the opening bars of a popular song which exhorted people to kick all foreign commerce out of the country. They punctuated their song with frequent shouts of *Bande Mataram*. One of them kicked the empty tin out of shape and flung it into the gutter by the roadside.

The *Khansama* witnessed the whole performance from a little distance. Having newly come from Assam, he was at a loss to understand what it all meant. Seeing another pass, he asked —"Have the Babus turned mad or what?"

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"Since the *Bande Mataram* began, the boys don't allow anybody to buy *bilati* things."

"What do they say? *Bundook marum.*?"

"No, no—*Bande Mataram.*"

"What's that?"

"Some new kind of abuse they have invented, I think. The boys shout it out whenever they see Europeans now-a-days."

III

Having made a profit of eight annas clean, the *Khansama* returned to the *Dak Bungalow* in high glee. He found his master walking about the verandah in an impatient manner.

Seeing the *Khansama*, the *Sahib* enquired of him in an angry voice the cause of his delay and took the tin from his hand. As soon as he saw the words "Hindu Biscuits" inscribed on the tin, he lost all control over himself and hurled it with a tremendous force at the head of his servant. The poor man was standing at the edge of the verandah and the impact sent him down to the ground below where a quantity of rubbish was lying scattered. The corner of the tin cut open the skin of his forehead and he bled profusely.

The *Sahib*, taking no notice of the man's condition, roared out—"You damned son of a pig—why did you bring these *deshi* biscuits?"

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The *Khansama* managed to crawl up to the verandah again, and stood before his master, trembling with fear. With folded hands he said —"*Huzoor*,—I did buy *bilati* biscuits at first —but—"

"You did,—did you? What happened to them?"

"But *Huzoor*—The school-boys—" The *Khansama* thought he had much better bid good bye to his eight annas and confess that the boys had misled him into the belief that *deshi* biscuits were superior in quality and cheaper at the same time, so he bought them. He would however never do so again, &c., &c. But his master, burning with anger, interrupted him, saying—"What, the school-boys? *Bande Mataram*? They snatched your tin away—did they?"

The *Khansama* quickly changed his mind, thinking that this was by far the best way out of the difficulty. So he replied, bowing low,—"Yes, *Huzoor*—they snatched my *bilati* tin away."

"Why did you let them?"

"What could I do, *Khodawund*? I was alone and they were twenty or twenty-five against me."

The *Sahib* thought that things had happened exactly as he had been reading of late in the newspapers.

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"You damned coward—why did you not call the Police ?"

"I did, *Gharibparwar*—I shouted myself hoarse for the constables, but nobody turned up. The boys broke open the tin and scattering the biscuits on the street, began to dance on them, yelling *Bundook Maro* or some such thing. The *Huzoor's* tea was getting cold and as I had a rupee of my own in my pocket, I bought a *deshi* tin. The *bilati* tins could not be had for less than a rupee and a half, *Dharamawatar*."

The *Sahib* was convinced. "All right, I am going to see the District Magistrate at once about it. I will get these rascally boys clapped into jail"—he said, and taking his hat, marched off towards the Station Club.

The Magistrate, the Judge, the Police Superintendent and some other European officers were at the club. Some *Mem-Sahibs* were also present. The Judge and the Magistrate with their coats off and their shirt-sleeves tucked up, were playing a game of billiards. The Joint Magistrate, the Police Sahib and their respective wives, were playing bridge. The Civil Surgeon, with his pipe in his mouth, was turning over the leaves of the *Illustrated London News*. The gentlemen were drinking whisky-pegs and the ladies were sipping vermouth.

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The tea-planter, arriving at the gate, sent in his card to the District Magistrate, and immediately was asked to walk in. He entered, hat in hand, murmuring that he was very sorry to intrude, and then related the whole of the affair as he had heard from his servant.

The Magistrate's face became livid with rage. Addressing the Superintendent of Police, he said —"I say, this is serious. This must be seen to at once."

The Police *Sahib* jumped to his feet, saying —"Yes, I will myself go and see to it." Making over his cards to the Civil Surgeon, he left the club with the tea-planter. On the way he ordered his *Chuprassi* to summon the *Kotwali Daroga* to the *Dak Bungalow*, at once.

Arriving at the *Dak Bungalow*, the tea-planter said—"While we wait for your *Daroga*, may I offer you a peg?"

"Thanks, I don't mind"—said the D. S. P.

The bottle, glasses and soda-water appeared on the table. Havanna cigars were produced also.

"'Tis really very good of you to take so mueh trouble"—said the tea-planter.

The D. S. P. remarked—"This *Bande Mataram* nuisance is getting intolerable day by day. The scoundrels of the National School must have done it."

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The gentlemen then discussed over their glasses the state of unrest in the country, the impertinence of the present day Bengalis, the remissness of the Government in not adopting sterner measures and the criminal folly of the "White Babus" in Parliament in encouraging native lawlessness by their foolish questions.

In the meanwhile, Kasimulla Khan, the *Daroga*, arrived and saluting the D. S. P., stood attention.

"*Daroga*, do you know that there has been a disturbance in the *bazar* to-day?"

"Yes, *Huzoor*, I have just heard of it."

"What action have you taken?"

"I have deputed a Head Constable to find out the complainant, Sir."

"The complainant is here. Take down his *jtala* and draw up a First Information Report at once."

"Yes, *Huzoor*,"—and the *Daroga* took the *Khansama* out into the verandah, and getting hold of a lamp, sat down to draw up the First Information. The *Khansama* gave the *Daroga* the same story as he had done to his master. In the midst of it the *Daroga* enquired—"Did they assault you and were you wounded?"

"Yes, they assaulted me rather severely and these are the wounds I received,—see *Darogaji*"

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—whined the *Khansama* and pointed out to him the wound on his forehead he had received at the hand of his master, as well as several bruises he had sustained by falling on the rubbish heap.

All this was in the hearing of the tea-planter, but he did not feel that there was any necessity of correcting his servant. He merely murmured to himself—"What liars these damned natives are!"

The First Information drawn up, the D. S. P. said to his *Daroga*—"You must arrest the culprits this very evening. Don't let them out on bail during the night." He then bade good night to the tea-planter and left.

The *Daroga* then approached the tea-planter and said with much deference,

"Will the *Huzoor* be pleased to give the *Khansama* leave of absence for a little while to come with me and identify the accused?"

"All right, you may go *Khansama*. Show the culprits to the *Daroga*."

The *Khansama*, with great hesitancy, said —"They were a large number of boys, *Huzoor*, and it was getting dark. I doubt if I could identify them."

"*Soor* "—thundred his master—"If you can't identify the accused, I will dismiss you instantly."

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"*Jo Hukum, Huzoor*"—murmured the poor man and walked off with the *Daroga.*

This excellent Police Officer, without making the slightest attempt at any kind of enquiry, betook himself to the Boarding House attached to the National School. None of the resident teachers were present then. Many of the students were also out. In the central room, four or five boys, sitting on grass mats, were preparing their lessons by the light of open earthen lamps. The *Khansama* pointed to three of the boys as having been in the row, and the *Daroga* forthwith arrested them.

Needless to say that these boys knew nothing of the affair. Greatly astonished, they exclaimed —"Why are you arresting us, *Daroga Sahib?* What have we done?"

"You shall know it in Court, young men"—was the *Daroga's* laconic reply. He gave these boys in custody of three constables and sent them to the *thana.*

The *Daroga* next took the *Khansama* to the Government Hospital and got his wounds examined by the resident surgeon and an injury report duly made out. This done, he wanted the *Khansama* to accompany him to the *thana.*

"But I have been late already and must go back to my master. What should I do at the *thana*?"

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"Identify the accused."

"Haven't I done so already?"

"Yes, yes—but you must make yourself thoroughly acquainted with their faces to-night. To-morrow some Deputy Magistrate will come and mix up the three accused with half a dozen other boys of the same age—and you will be required to pick them out.* If you fail, bang goes your case."

"But the *Sahib* may be annoyed if I stay away long."

"Go and ask him for leave for a couple of hours."

The *Khansama* did as he was directed, explaining everything. His master gave him the leave, saying to himself—"How dishonest these d——d native Police are!"

The *Daroga* then got hold of certain other "witnesses"—shopkeepers and others from the *bazar* and brought them to the *thana*. For fear of the Police they agreed to depose to the very little they had seen and a good deal they had *not* seen. The whole of the evening was spent in giving these "witnesses" a thorough drill as to their statements in Court, and also in preparing them for to-morrow's "honest identification."

* This procedure is known as "honest identification" in Police parlance.—Translator.

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IV

The case was duly sent up and the District Magistrate made it over to Babu Nagendra Nath for trial.

It was evening. The Deputy Babu came home from the *cutcherry* and finishing his tea, was sitting on a verandah of the inner apartments, leisurely pulling at his *hooka*.

His wife, Charusila, a young lady of twenty summers, came and sat by him. Observing that her husband was rather taciturn that evening, she enquired—"You look sad. Is there anything wrong? Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing in particular."

But the lady was not satisfied with this reply. She began pressing him to tell her what was passing in his mind.

At last the Deputy Babu said—"You have heard of the students' case, haven't you? There are so many other Deputy Magistrates; it is very annoying that the case should have been made over to me for trial."

"You will try it? I am so glad. I was rather anxious on that score."

"Why anxious?"

"I apprehended that the case might be made over to somebody who would unjustly send the

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boys to jail, in order to please the *Sahibs*. A great weight is now removed from my mind."

The Deputy smiled inwardly at his wife's ingenuous confidence in his own judicial independence. He observed languidly—"Yes, but supposing the case is proved, I should not acquit the boys unjustly. Should I?"

"Oh, certainly not"—was Charusila's firm reply.—"I wouldn't have you do so even if they were my own children. But, from what I have heard, I am persuaded that they are quite innocent."

"Where have you heard it?"

"The other day when I was at the Munsiff Babu's house on the occasion of the *Bowbhat* ceremony of his daughter-in-law, many ladies there said that the boys had not as a matter of fact snatched away the tin of biscuits from the *Khansama;* that they had taken it from him with his free consent after having given him the full value of it, neither had they assaulted the man. Besides, the three boys who have actually been sent up were neither there nor were they in any way connected with the affair."

The Deputy Babu heaved a sigh and said—"Yes,—but the question is whether they would be able to prove it."

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"Oh yes—there will be plenty of evidence to prove it. There are many who have seen the whole affair."

"I hope they will be able to prove it"—said the Deputy Babu with another sigh.

Charusila thought for a few moments and then added—"But supposing they fail to prove it and their guilt is established. You should consider their youth and award a sentence of fine. You ought not to send the poor urchins to jail—as has been done in similar cases elsewhere."

Charusila, for some time, employed her gentle arts to cheer up her husband, but the Deputy Babu remained as sad and thoughtful as before. A little while after, a letter was brought in to him. He tore it open and found that it was from the District Magistrate, inviting him to a call at eight o'clock the next morning.

At the appointed hour Nagendra Babu arrived at the Magistrate's *kothi* and sent his card in. Outside in the verandah, seated on a bench, were a dozen visitors who were patiently waiting for an interview. A minute later, the Magistrate's *Chuprassi* came and showed him into the office room. "The *Sahib* is at *Chota Hazri*, Sir, and will be here directly"—said the *Chuprassi*, bowing low.

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A few minutes passed and then the Magistrate entered. He shook hands with Nagendra Babu, and asking him to be seated, enquired—"How is everything in town now?"

"It is in its normal condition, Sir."

"Any excitement among the *Swadeshi-wallas*?"

"None that I know of."

Lighting a cigarette, the Magistrate observed —"This *Swadeshi* is a damned rot.—What do you think of it, Nagendra Babu?"

"Sir—"

"Mind you, the real *Swadeshi*—an honest endeavour to help and improve the industries of the country—is a very good thing—and it has the hearty support of us all. But this *hulla*—this burning of Manchester cloth—what is all this?"

"That's wicked, Sir"—replied Nagendra Babu in a tone almost apologetic.

A short silence followed. The Magistrate then broke it, saying—"By the way—that biscuit case is in your file—isn't it?"

"Yes, Sir, it is."

"Oh the impudence of these boys! They almost fractured the poor *Kansama's* skull. They scattered the biscuits on the road and danced on them like so many devils. If these young scoundrels are not taught a good lesson now,—they

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would turn thieves and *dacoits* when they grow up. Their punishment ought to be exemplary."

Nagendra Babu sat silent, fixing his gaze on the carpet underneath.

Another brief silence followed. The *Sahib* then said—"How do you like Faridsing, Nagendra Babu? I find everything so dear here."

Immensely relieved at the change of topic, Nagendra Babu replied—"Yes, Sir, it is so. Milk sells at four annas a *seer* here."

"When I was a Joint at Bhagalpur"—the Magistrate continued—"I used to buy six large fowls for a rupee. Here I can hardly obtain more than three for that amount. There, the *Baburchi*, the *Khitmadgar* could be had for ten or twelve rupees. Here I have to pay twenty."

"Yes, Sir,—servants also are very dear here. We who are poorly paid, find it very difficult to make both ends meet."

"What grade are you in now, Nagendra Babu?"

"Two hundred and fifty, Sir."

"For how long?"

"Three years."

"What?"—exclaimed the Magistrate—"Three —years!—Shame! 'Tis a downright shame. I will have a look at your Service Book and write to the

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Commissioner recommending your promotion to the three-hundred grade as soon as I can."

"Thank you very much, Sir,—it would be so kind of you."

After a few minutes' more conversation, the Magistrate *Sahib* stood up and stretching his hand towards his visitor, said—"Well Nagendra Babu, I won't detain you longer. Good morning."

"Good morning, Sir"—bowed Nagendra Babu, and was about to depart.

"I say"—said the Magistrate—"If you hear anything special about this *Swadeshi* business in town, come and tell me at once. This *Swadeshi* must be stamped out at any cost."

Greatly pleased at the prospect of promotion, Nagendra Babu responded with apparent enthusiasm—"Yes, Sir. You can reckon upon my doing my duty towards the Government."

Coming out into the verandah, Nagendra Babu cast a proud glance on the expectant *salaam*-givers, still sitting patiently on the bench, and got into his carriage.

V

The case was taken up on the appointed day. On the day following the arrest of these boys, some pleaders of the local bar stood sureties for them and got them released on bail. The same

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gentlemen, at a sacrifice of their valuable time and money, were looking after the case and defending the boys in court.

The *Khansama* stuck to his former statement. In cross-examination the defence pleader asked him whether it was not a fact that his master the *Sahib* had caused the injury on his forehead by throwing the biscuit-tin at him. The *Khansama* stoutly denied it, persisting in his statement that the injury was caused by the boys who had slapped and cuffed him on the forehead.

The tea-planter, following in the wake of the "d——d natives," emphatically denied having hurled the tin at his servant's head.

Some *bazar* people spoke to the breaking of the biscuit box in the street and the boys' dancing on the scattered contents of it, but could not identify the accused as having been in the assembly. The Police put in the broken tin rescued from the gutter and an envelope containing dust mixed with powdered biscuits, as "Exhibits" in the case.

The merchant identified the boys and swore that they were among those who came into his shop with the *Khansama* and insisted on the English tin being taken back and the money refunded. A little while after they had left, he heard many voices shouting *Bande Mataram* from near

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the *Swadeshi* shop. In cross-examination he was asked whether or not school-boys for some time past had been picketing in front of his shop and thereby caused him much loss and annoyance. The man admitted the picketing and the consequent loss but denied that it had caused him the slightest annoyance.

The Assistant Surgeon deposed that the injury on the forehead was an incised wound, probably caused by some sharp and hard substance. In cross-examination by the defence he said that it could not have been caused by slaps and fisticuffs.

The case was then adjourned for defence evidence. On the appointed day the man who kept the *Swadeshi* Stores came and swore to everything that had actually happened. He also said that none of the boys in the dock were among those who came to his shop to buy the *deshi* tin.

A doctor in private practice said that he was passing along the street when he found some boys talking to the *Khansama*. He also swore to the fact that the latter had given up the tin to the boys quite voluntarily and expressed his willingness to take a tin of *deshi* biscuits in exchange. He also saw the *Khansama* accompanying the the boys to the *Swadeshi* Stores. In cross-examination by the Police he admitted that he

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himself was a staunch *Swadeshi* and held shares worth two hundred rupees in the *Swadeshi* Stores in question.

The *Khansama* of the *Dak Bungalow* was next examined. He deposed that the tea-planter had thrown a biscuit-tin at the head of his servant who fell down on a heap of rubbish and sustained injuries. He was positive that when the servant returned from the *bazar* he had no injuries on his person at all. In cross-examination he admitted that the pleader Babus were his occasional customers, ordering roast fowl and cutlets to be cooked, and that the servants of these Babus came to fetch the things away after nightfall. That was a source of some profit to him.

The case then closed and the arguments were heard. It was ordered that the judgment would be delivered that day week.

In the meantime the Deputy Babu was seen paying two or three calls to the District Magistrate at his *kothi*. People began to whisper to each other that these visits presaged evil.

On the day the judgment was due, Nagendra Babu's *ejlash* room was crowded to suffocation. A large number of school boys had attended. There were others also, eager to know the result.

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Nagendra Babu delivered the judgment. The accused were all found guilty and sentenced to undergo three months' rigorous imprisonment and to pay a fine of fifty rupees each.

As soon as this was known, the boys gave three shouts of *Bande Mataram*, just to cheer up the accused. With great difficulty the Police stopped the outburst and cleared the room.

Babu Kalikant, the leading pleader for the defence, asked for the judgment and read it through. The Deputy Magistrate wrote that no doubt there were many discrepancies in the prosecution evidence but they were only "minor discrepancies." If anything, they served to show that the prosecution witnesses were not tutored. It was true that some witnesses said that the unlawful assembly consisted of fifteen or twenty boys while others gave the number as fifty or sixty. None of these witnesses actually counted the number of boys there, so it was quite natural that they should differ in their estimates. The complainant swore that the accused had caused the injury on his forehead by slaps and fisticuffs while the medical evidence was that it could not have been caused in that manner. The learned pleader for the defence laid great stress on this point and invited the Court to hold that the case was a got-up one. But to the Deputy

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Magistrate's mind, the complainant during the occurrence must have been so confounded and panic-struck that it was impossible for him to remember precisely by what means the boys caused him the injury in question. As regards the defence witnesses the Deputy was of opinion that they all belonged to the so-called *Swadeshi* party and so they must be telling untruths to save the boys. The defence pleader argued that the *Dak Bungalow Khansama* was an independent witness and should be believed. But it appeared to the Deputy Magistrate that that individual was constantly patronised by the pleaders (who were all *Swadeshites*) and so it was not likely that he would incur the displeasure of his every-day customers by speaking the truth to support the case of a chance visitor like the tea-planter *Sahib*.

The pleaders immediately applied for and obtained a certified copy of the judgment. They then approached the Sessions Judge for filing an appeal and prayed for bail.

Hundreds of school-boys were waiting outside the Judge's Court. As soon as they heard that bail was granted, they began shouting *Bande Mataram* vociferously. They got hold of an empty *gharry* and put the three accused inside it. They then unharnessed the horses and began dragging the *gharry* themselves. Forming themselves into a

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procession they paraded through all the important streets of the town, singing a popular song glorifying martyrs.

VI

That evening Nagendra Babu returned home, not quite himself. He felt as though he had committed some heinous crime. His eyes were downcast and lustreless and his face was pale.

His wife sat at a corner of the verandah, sullen and sad. Nagendra Babu approached her, but she would not even look at him. He understood what it was due to.

Nagendra Babu put off his *cutcherry* costume and after a little while came again to his wife. Charusila sat in the same position as before, almost in tears.

"Why are you so sad, Charu?"—whispered Nagendra Babu tenderly.

Charusila neither spoke nor looked at her husband. He said again—"Tell me, Charu, what it is."

"I have a pain in my head"—muttered Charusila.

"Pain in the head? I am so sorry. When did it begin? Come, let me tie up your head with a handkerchief soaked in Eau-de-Cologne,—it would give you instant relief."

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"No, thanks"—Charusila replied—"it would be of no use."

The Deputy Babu left her for the present.

The house-maid brought him his tea and refreshments. Ordinarily Charusila herself used to wait on her husband at this time, but to-day she appeared not. Nagendra Babu tried to eat of the dishes set before him—but found it difficult to swallow anything. He felt as though the cavity of his breast was loaded with stones. He then sought consolation in his *hooka*. He kept on smoking for a good long while. When he could bear it no longer—he got up and approached his wife again. Finding her seated at the same place and in the same condition, he gently touched her arm and said—"Come, come,—don't sulk like that, dear. I had such good news to tell you to-day—I thought it would please you so."

Charusila slowly raised her head and said in a low voice—"What is it?"

"The District Magistrate has written to the Commissioner to-day recommending my promotion to the grade of three hundred."

Charu lowered her head again and this time her tears flowed freely—tears of burning shame at the thought that that was the price for which her husband had sold himself.

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Trying to raise his wife from her seat, Nagendra Babu said—"Oh Charu! Don't be so unreasonable, dear. What is there to cry about?"

Charusila gently pushed her husband away, saying—"Don't, please, speak to me to-day. Keep away from me, just for this day—I implore you." So saying she got up and walked away to her bedroom.

Nagendra Babu came out of the house and sat in the front verandah. The servant prepared his *chelum*. He once more abandoned himself to its ever consoling fumes. He smoked two or three *chelums* in succession during which the summer twilight deepened into the gloom of night. He gave himself up to bitter self-reproach as he smoked. He thought what he was when, fresh from College, he first sat on the *ejlash* as a Deputy Magistrate—and, what he has become since. To-day Charusila begged him not to speak to her, to stay away from her. No doubt she considered him fallen—contaminated,—was she wrong? Has he not, wearing the sacred robe of Justice to-day, dragged her to the mire instead of upholding and cherishing her? And, this was not the first time that he had done so. What made him stoop so low?—Was it not filthy lucre? The result of long years of culture and discipline—his sense of duty, piety, moral rectitude—why had he scattered these

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to the winds?—Merely for a handful of silver;—merely from the belief that the handful of silver would be imperilled if he displeased the power that be. Time was when half-educated Deputy Magistrates used to accept bribes from those litigating in their Courts.—They were not very much to blame, poor devils, for they knew no better. But Nagendra Babu, one of the most brilliant products of the University—has he not swerved from the strict path of justice, allured by an increment of fifty rupees a month to his salary? Was this not accepting bribe in a sense? What had he to plead in extenuation of his transgression?—Nothing, nothing whatever.

Such were the thoughts in which Nagendra Babu indulged. When he could bear them no longer, he decided to go out for a stroll. Taking his *chudder* and his stick, he left the house and walked about only such streets as were dark and unfrequented. He dreaded a chance meeting with any of his acquaintances.

He retired to rest at the usual hour, but had little or no sleep. The next day was a holiday—so he decided to go out on tour in the *mofussil*. The servants were busy making preparations for the journey. Nagendra Babu sat in his bedroom, with a book in his hand though scarcely reading it, when Charusila entered.

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She looked at her husband's face—pale and haggard—and at once divined his mental condition. In a moment, her heart became overwhelmed with loving sympathy for her husband in his mental agony. She approached him, and said in a tone sweetly sad—"When do you return?"

"To-morrow morning, I think"—said Nagendra Babu, without looking at his wife.

"You won't be away longer, would you?"

"Suppose I did,—*you* wouldn't be sorry."

This drew tears from Charusila's eyes. She hid her face in her husband's breast and sobbed.

"What's this?—Oh Charu!—don't go on like that, dear,"—said Nagendra Babu, lovingly raising up his wife's face with both hands.

But her sobs did not abate. At last Nagendra Babu said—"I cannot bear your grief any longer. Do tell me what you want me to do—what would please you—and it shall be done."

Charusila looked at her husband with an earnest gaze for a few moments. Then she slowly said—"Will you fulfil my wishes?"

"Tell me what they are."

"I wish you would retire from service—a service which compels you to sacrifice your conscience for its sake. I do not want your three hundred rupees a month. I do not want all the gold and silver—the comforts and the luxuries—

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which you provide me with. I would much rather you became a school-master on fifty rupees a month. We could manage the household even on that allowance—and be happy."

The Deputy Babu remained a few moments in silent thought. Then he spoke—"Yes, dear,—you are right. I will do as you wish."

The *gharry* was ready outside. There were not many minutes to be lost if Nagendra Babu meant to catch the train. He said again, re-assuring her—"Yes, I will send in my resignation. I don't want you to be unhappy, my beloved one"—and kissed her good bye.

VII

The next morning, before Nagendra Babu returned home, the *chuprassi* brought in the *dak*. Charusila saw that besides a few letters, there was an unusually large number of newspapers. She opened one packet and found that it was the Bengali daily called "*Sandhya*." In it was an article headed—"Vagaries of a *Ghotiram** at

* When a disparaging and contemptuous reference to a Deputy Magistrate is intended, he is spoken of as a Ghotiram. This term was coined by the late Babu Dina Bandhu Mitra, the greatest Bengalee dramatist of modern times, and has been in general acceptance in that sense ever since.—*Translator.*

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Faridsing." The "*Sandhya*," with the characteristic vulgarity of style all its own, had commented on the students' case and heaped abuses on Nagendra Babu. The article was heavily marked all round with a red pencil. Charusila had not the patience to read the whole of it—it was so very offensive. She then tore open another packet and found that it was the same issue of the "*Sandhya*," with the article marked in blue pencil. She then examined the different packets and saw they were all copies of the same number, seventeen altogether, kindly posted by seventeen different strangers from Calcutta, for Nagendra Babu's benefit. Charusila collected all the copies together, took them to the kitchen and threw them into the fire-place, lest they should meet her husband's eyes.

Nagendra Babu returned home about ten o'clock and finishing his bath and breakfast quickly, drove off to Court.

Charusila, finding her little boy still loitering about the house, enquired of him why he hadn't gone to school. The poor boy replied—"Mother, —I have already been insulted by other schoolboys in the streets. I don't wish to take the risk of being insulted further."

Charusila understood. "Very well," she said —"don't go to school to-day. I want you to accompany me to a certain place."

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At noon, Charusila sent for a *gharry*, and accompanied by her child, drove to the house of Babu Kali Kant, the pleader.

Entering the *zenana* she found assembled there several other ladies, wives of pleaders residing in the neighbourhood. Some of these ladies were playing cards—and some were watching. They looked at Charusila but uttered not a word of welcome. Kalikant Babu's wife welcomed her, but not so warmly as she had done on previous occasions.

Charusila began talking of ordinary matters in which the hostess only joined. The other ladies kept a studied silence. At last she mentioned the students' case herself.

One of the visiting ladies remarked—"It has been a very sad affair.—We did not expect it."

Kalikant Babu's wife added—"My husband was telling me that very likely the conviction would be set aside on appeal."

Another lady observed—"Unless of course the *Sahibs* refuse to do justice because it is a *Swadeshi* case."

"What's the date fixed for the hearing of the appeal, please?"—asked Charusila.

"I am not certain—but it will be heard shortly"—replied Kali Kant Babu's wife.

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"The boys ought to have an able Counsel down from Calcutta"—put in Charusila.

Kali Kant Babu's wife mused a little and then said—"Yes, but that means a lot of money, you know. I don't think the boys can afford it. Our husbands will do it for them as well as they can."

Charusila, with her bead bent low, said—"I am willing to pay for a Counsel."

This proposal came as a surprise to those present. One of the ladies said—"You? Why should you?"

Charusila continued—"You and your husbands are doing so much for the poor boys at the sacrifice of time and money. Am I not entitled to lend them a helping hand also? Here, I have brought with me a pair of golden bracelets. Over a thousand rupees would be realised by selling them. Let that amount be spent in engaging the services of some eminent Counsel. Oh, don't refuse my offer—for Heaven's sake, let me do something for my peace of mind."—The ladies noticed that Charusila's eyes were sparkling with tears as she finished.

Kali Kant Babu's wife took the bracelets, saying—"Very well, when my husband comes home from the Court, I will tell him."

This incident thawed the other ladies immediately. They began talking to Charusila in a

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kindly manner and vied with each other in making up for their past rudeness.

VIII

The students' appeal has been decided. A famous barrister of the Calcutta bar had appeared for them, but it was all in vain. The Sessions Judge rejected the appeal. The boys have gone to jail again. Arrangements are being made to move the High Court in Revision.

The news that Nagendra Babu's wife helped the boys by selling her jewellery is all over the town. It has reached the ears of the District Magistrate himself. Since then that officer has been treating Nagendra Babu rather harshly. One day he had to go to the *khas camera* of the Magistrate to explain some papers. He was not invited to a seat on the occasion as in days past. He had to explain the papers standing, like an ordinary clerk. Another day, in the presence of his subordinate staff, the Magistrate reprimanded Nagendra Babu severely in connection with one of the cases tried by him but set aside on appeal by the Judge.

Owing to such behaviour of the District Magistrate, and also to please his wife, Nagendra Babu has decided to retire from service, pass his Law Examination and start practice in the High

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Court. The husband and the wife talk over this project every day. It has been settled that Nagendra Babu would send in his resignation in a month's time.

A day or two after the Judge had passed orders in the students' case, Nagendra Babu was asked by the Magistrate to see him at his *kothi* on a certain morning. Formerly, he used to pay ceremonial visits to the Magistrate now and then, of his own accord; but for some weeks past he has deliberately been keeping himself away.

On the appointed morning, Nagendra Babu robed himself and drove to the Magistrate's *kothi*. The bearer took his card in. There was a wooden bench placed in the verandah outside the office room. The custom with the Magistrate was that when gazetted officers or big *zemindars* came to visit him, they were shown into the office room to await his arrival. Men of a lesser position were asked to sit on the bench till each should be called for by the Magistrate in his turn according to the time of his arrival. Contrary to custom, the bearer came out to-day and asked Nagendra Babu to sit on the bench. About half-a-dozen men of the smaller fry were seated there. Nagendra Babu keenly felt the insult offered to him and instead of sitting on the bench, began to walk about in the verandah to pass the waiting time.

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A little while later, the bearer rushed out of the room where the Magistrate was having his *chota hazri* and addressing the Deputy said—"The *Sahib* is annoyed at the noise made with your boots, Sir. Kindly sit on the bench."

At this second insult, Nagendra Babu's blood boiled—but he restrained himself. He went and seated himself on the bench. The smaller fry squeezed themselves together to leave a respectable space between themselves and the Deputy Magistrate.

A little later the *Sahib* finished his *chota hazri* and entered the office room. The first man he sent for—was not Nagendra Babu. One by one the smaller fry were ushered into the august presence of the Lord of the District and dismissed after a few minutes' conversation. Several men came subsequent to Nagendra Babu's arrival. Gradually, they too began to be sent for. Nagendra Babu had no doubt that the Magistrate's intention was to disgrace him publicly. During the interval of waiting his feelings may be better imagined than described. He was perspiring all over and his handkerchief became quite useless after a time. Sitting on the bench there, he resolved to send in his resignation—not after one month—but that very day.

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At last, Nagendra Babu was the sole occupant of the bench. The last visitor departed, and he was sent for. Nagendra Babu reeled into the Magistrate's presence, like one drunk.

"Good morning, Sir."—said he as he entered.

The Magistrate, keeping his seat, said—"Good morning, Babu."

Babu !—On former occasions, the Magistrate used to rise, offer his hand, and say—"Good morning, *Nagendra* Babu." He knew very well that Bengalee gentlemen of position took offence at being addressed as "Babu" without their names being prefixed to it.*

Nagendra Babu, however, did not mind it,—as he had already deci ded upon the course he was to pursue.

Pressing his cigar between his teeth the Magistrate asked—"What news about *Swadeshi* in the town ?"

* Before the advent of the English, the word "Babu" standing alone was a term of great respect. But Englishmen by their contemptuous use of it, have rendered it obnoxious to the community. A Bengalee would not resent being addressed as "Babu" by his own countrymen ; but would take offence if a European were to address him so. If the name is prefixed to the "Babu," it is all right. The matter is purely sentimental though difficult to support by logic. It is very much like the gentlemen of Scotland claiming to be called Scotsmen and taking offence at their being called Scotchmen.—*Translator.*

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"Good,"—replied Nagendra Babu.

"I am glad to hear it. It is the effect of the drastic measures taken in the biscuits case."

"I am afraid"—said Nagendra Babu—"you misunderstand me, Sir. I said 'good' from the point of view of the people,—not of the Government. Since my decision in the biscuits case the people of the town have become stauncher adherents of *Swadeshi* than before."

The Magistrate exclaimed in astonishment—"Then why do you say it is good? Are you a *Swadeshi* too?"

"Since the *Swadeshi* movement was started, Sir, not a single pice worth of any foreign article has entered my house"—came Nagendra Babu's proud reply.

The Magistrate's face became crimson. He knew perfectly well that many Bengalees who were in Government service, cherished their *Swadeshi* principles privately—but so far nobody had ever dared parade it before the *Sahibs* their masters. He also felt that Nagendra Babu was paying him back for the insult that had been meted out to him this morning. But the proud *Sahib* was not a man to betray his feelings. He feigned amusement and said with a smile—"Yes, I have heard that Bengalee ladies are keener about *Swadeshi* than the men-folk even." After a pause, his

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feeling of annoyance over-powering him, the Magistrate broke out—"By the way—I have heard that your wife contributed a thousand rupees towards the costs of the students' appeal by selling her jewellery. Is it a fact?"

"Yes, Sir, it is so. Besides, my wife has promised to pay the costs of the High Court motion also"—said Nagendra Babu in the most unconcerned manner.

Now, this was too much for the Magistrate. He flared up again and said in a choking voice—'But is this not defying the Government?"

"I don't know, Sir.—The High Court has been established by the Government also, and I thought that the Government was as anxious to do justice between itself and the people—as the people themselves."

"May be."—said the Magistrate—"But your wife had no business to interfere. It may not be defying the Government, but it is defying the Executive."

"Thank God, Sir, my wife is not in executive service."

Besides anger, the feeling of astonishment also was overwhelming the mind of the Magistrate *Sahib*. He had been in the Bengal Civil Service for so many years but such undaunted spirit in a Bengalee was quite a new thing to him. Yes,

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Nagendra Babu was deliberately paying him back in his own coin—that the Magistrate fully realised. But wait—the *Sahib* had in his hand such a magic wand as would bring Nagendra Babu to his knees at the very first touch of it. He mused for a few moments and then said calmly—

"Let that pass. The reason why I sent for you this morning is this. Of late, you have been very negligent of your duties. Unless you become more careful, I will have to withdraw my recommendation to the Commissioner for your promotion to the higher grade. I may even be obliged to reduce you to a lower grade."

Having delivered this oration, the Magistrate triumphantly scrutinised Nagendra Babu's face for signs of the inevitable result. He was convinced that Nagendra Babu would collapse immediately and be eager to obtain his pardon with becoming humility.

But the 'inevitable' did not happen. A smile of contempt slowly lit up Nagendra Babu's face. "You may do as you please, Sir,"—he said—"because it won't affect me."

"What do you mean?"—exclaimed the Magistrate at this wholly unexpected reply.

"I have decided to send in my resignation, Sir, and my application will reach you in your office to-day. Would you be so good as to

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arrange that I may not be detained beyond the usual period of a month's notice?"

The Sahib's face fell. What! The Bengalee —the Bengalee, with whom Government service was the be-all and end-all of existence—coolly flinging away the high position of a Deputy Magistrate!—Well, the Sahib was not prepared for this. Surely, the times were strange.

Nagendra Babu looked at his watch and standing up, said—"I mustn't detain you longer, Sir. Good morning."

Absent-mindedly, the Magistrate stood up and giving Nagendra Babu his hand, said—"Good morning."

A month passed. To-day, Nagendra Babu sat on the *ejlash* for the last time. At close of day a large gathering of students was noticed outside his Court. Many of them carried flags inscribed with "*Bande Mataram.*" An open victoria, minus horses, was kept ready underneath a banian tree.

As soon as Nagendra Babu came out of the Court, the boys garlanded him. They begged him to get into the victoria and expressed their desire to drag the carriage themselves through the main streets of the town. Nagendra Babu thanked the boys for their good-will but firmly declined to be made the subject of a demonstration. The boys

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brought the carriage from underneath the tree and implored him to grant their prayer.

At this moment, two peasants were passing by, one belonging to the town and the other just arrived from a distant village.

The village-peasant enquired of his urban companion—"I say—what is all this? Is the Babu with a garland round his neck, going to be married?"

"I think, not,"—replied the town peasant in his superior wisdom.—"The Babu, I presume, has just been released from jail. They garland Babus who come out of jail now-a-days and make a great fuss of them."

The boys were still pleading with Nagendra Babu to get into the victoria, but he begged to be excused. He returned home walking as he did every day. After a break of two months, to-day the reconciliation between the husband and the wife was complete.

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SWIFT RETRIBUTION

I

IT was evening. Sitting inside the Telegraph Office at Sirajpur Railway Station, Dr. Hara Govind Chatterjee, addressing the young operator, said—"You needn't feel anxious. Send somebody with me and I will give him a powder and a mixture for your little boy, to be taken once in two hours. It is nothing serious."

"Thanks very much indeed,"—replied the telegraph-operator.—"Your assurance is a great relief to me, Sir. That's our only child you know, and my wife is greatly distressed over it. We really have passed some very anxious hours." Saying this, the telegraphist offered to pay the Doctor a couple of rupees, being the latter's usual fee for a visit and eight annas as his *gharry* hire.

The Doctor looked up smiling and said—"What's that? Oh no, no,—never mind, never mind. Keep your money, please."

"Thank you for your kindness, Sir, all the same. —But—but—it would be extremely unfair to you if I did not pay for your trouble,"—the young man pleaded.

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"Unfair to me? Why should it? Just wait,—let me cure your boy completely—and then you may treat me to a dinner on the full-moon day following and I promise to come. There is great merit in feasting a Brahmin on a full-moon day—there is, indeed,"—and the good Doctor burst into a genial laughter. It was a rule with him never to accept fees from poor people.

As soon as the laugh subsided, a cheer of "*Bande Mataram*" was heard on the platform outside, joined in by numerous voices. The Doctor looking surprised, said—"What is that?"

"There was a *Swadeshi* preacher come from Calcutta,"—explained the telegraphist—"and I think, people have come to see him off."

Both walked out into the platform. The preacher was no other than the well-known editor of the *Bir Bharata* (Heroic India) newspaper,—Srijut Benoy Krishna Sen.

Though a Government servant, the Doctor Babu, in common with other Indian servants of the Government, was a true *Swadeshi* at heart. It was whispered that under cover of night, he frequently visited the *Swadeshi* shops of the town and brought home loads of forbidden, that is to say, country-made goods. He could not resist the temptation of going and speaking to Benoy Babu.

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After a few minutes' conversation, however, the train steamed into the Station.

The *Swadeshi* preacher, accompanied by Pleaders, *Mukhtears*, students and others who had come to see him off, hurried towards the train. He held a second class return ticket. Just as he opened the door of a compartment, a European passenger who was inside, shouted out—"Oh you,—this is not for *kala admis*."

"You don't suppose my rupees were black too, do you? I also happen to hold a second class ticket,"—retorted the *Swadeshi* preacher and stepped inside.

Now this was too much for the *Badshah-ka-dost*.* He got up in a fury and gave a violent push to the disloyalty incarnate—clad in a *dhoti, kurta* and silk *chudder*. Although Benoy Babu was the worthy editor of the "Heroic India," he was not much of an athlete. His health and his strength he had sacrificed at the shrine of the Calcutta University and had received a few pieces of paper by way of blessing. He had obtained, besides, a pair of

* The allusion here is to the military officer who wantonly assaulted a respectable Punjabi Pleader on the Kalka-Simla road some years back and at the same time boasted that he was *Badshah-ka-dost* (a friend of the Emperor himself).—God save the Emperor from such friends.—*Translator*.

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gold-rimmed spectacles elsewhere, for which he had to pay extra. He fell flat on the platform and his glasses went to pieces.

The next moment, a tremendous shout of *Bande Mataram* rose from the assembly who had come to see Benoy Babu off. Two or three of them unceremoniously dragged the European out into the platform and began to belabour him mercilessly. Hearing the uproar the Eurasian guard was approaching there to see what the matter was. As soon as the real state of affairs became apparent to him, he ran breathlessly back to his brake-van and waved the green light as signal for the engine-driver to start.

The bystanders, with great difficulty, extricated the poor European from the uncomfortable situation he was in. By this time the Doctor Babu too arrived there. Seeing the *Sahib's* condition—he was bleeding profusely—he offered to take him to the Government Hospital and bandage his wounds. The *Sahib* readily consented.

In the meanwhile Benoy Babu had got up and quietly seated himself in an Intermediate class compartment. The next day he arrived at Calcutta without further adventure and published a furious article in his paper about the insolence of Europeans in this country.

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II

Babu Hara Govind was in charge of the Government Hospital of the town. He had grown old and commanded a large practice. There were two M. B's, and half-a-dozen L. M. S.'s in the town—but still Hara Govind Babu was in great request. No one else inspired so much confidence in the minds of the public as did Hara Govind Babu. He was so much sought after that he had scarcely time enough to have his meals in peace.

Babu Hara Govind had two sons—the elder, Ajay Chandra was studying for his B. A. degree at the Ripon College in Calcutta; the younger, Sushil attended the Zilla School of the town. Ajay was now at home during his summer holidays. He had recently been married and his wife was here also.

Babu Hara Govind returned home from the Hospital after ten o'clock that night.

"How is the *Sahib*, father?"—said Ajay Chandra as soon as his father arrived.

"Much better now. He was rather seriously hurt on the head—but he will be all right I hope. He has been handled very roughly, poor fellow."

"Served him right, father,—don't you think so? Just because he has a white complexion, he

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thinks he is the Viceroy himself. I am *not* sorry for him."

The Doctor Babu mused for a while. Then he said—"No doubt the *Sahib* acted wrongly. But five men attacking one man—was it a fair fight? I am ashamed at the conduct of my countrymen."

"I do not think,"—rejoined Ajay—"there ever can be a fair fight between an Englishman and an Indian."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because everything is unfair right through. Should there be a criminal case in connection with this matter for instance, would justice be done to such as are hauled up as accused?"

The Doctor smiled.

"I don't think much of your logic, Ajay."—he said.—"Because somebody else does what is wrong, is that any reason why I should act similarly?"

Ajay did not know how to meet this. After a little while he said—"What seems to me, father, is, that in such matters, number ought not to be the criterion for judging whether the fight has been fair or otherwise. A Bengalee is nothing but an individual in such cases. An Englishman on the other hand, is an individual, a member of the ruling race—and not infrequently, one vested

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with some amount of authority. So it follows that it would take three Bengalees to match an Englishman—or perhaps more than three."

"Do you know Ajay,"—said the Doctor, a little piqued—"that you insult your own nation by advancing this argument? An Englishman, like a Bengalee, is nothing but an individual. May be he is a member of the ruling race—may be he is the District Magistrate himself—but do you think that these considerations would lend additional strength to his muscles?"

"Not to his muscles certainly,—father; but wouldn't it help to strengthen his mind?"

The Doctor Babu felt the force of this argument. Aloud, he said,—"To a certain extent, no doubt, you are right, Ajay. But I can never bring myself to believe that one Bengalee wouldn't be a match for another man, to whatever nationality he may belong. In such cases, wouldn't there be strong influences acting on the mind of a Bengalee also? When one of us stands up determined to save his self-respect from being sullied, to protest against oppression and tyranny, to protect his mother, his sister from insult offered by any one—I am sure these considerations would lend additional strength to his honest arms."

About this time the house servant made his appearance and announced that supper was

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ready. Father and son walked into the inner apartments.

III

The next morning there was a great sensation in the official circles, owing to this European assault case. The District Magistrate's temper was on fire. He issued strict orders on the Police to complete the investigation and send up the accused persons for trial within three days. The town Sub-Inspector Badan Chandra Ghose, took up the investigation. Foregoing food and sleep he rummaged the town all day long in search of evidence. He arrested a few junior pleaders and *mukhtears*, and also some students noted for their robust constitution.

The investigation made a rapid progress during the first day. The next morning at six o'clock, Doctor Hara Govind was sitting in the front verandah of his house, enjoying his early morning *hooka*, when the Sub-Inspector, dressed in his *dhoti* and *chudder* made his appearance. He had a silver mounted Malacca cane in his hand which he was swinging to and fro sportively. His face was beaming with a self-complacent smile.

The Doctor Babu welcomed his visitor and begged him to be seated.

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After a few commonplace observations the *Daroga* said—"It has become difficult for me to keep my job, Doctor Babu."

"How so?" queried the Doctor, somewhat surprised.

"That *Sahib*-assault case of day before yesterday will bring me to grief I fear,"—responded the Sub-Inspector in a plaintive tone.

The Doctor with a smile faintly sarcastic, remarked—"But you have arrested a good many of the culprits, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have,"—replied the *Daroga*—"but I have failed to collect much evidence, so far."

"If there isn't any satisfactory evidence, what led you to arrest them?"—and the Doctor again indulged in a smile full of meaning.

"Oh, I have arrested the right persons, sure enough. Those fellows are great ruffians. Many a time have I seen the Magistrate-*Sahib* driving along and these lads, coming from the opposite direction, let the Magistrate-*Sahib* pass by without even *salaaming* him."

"Is it on that ground that you have arrested them?"

"Oh no, no,—not at all,"—replied the *Daroga* with vehemence.—"There is no doubt that they assaulted the Englishman. I have got witnesses too —but not what the Courts call credible witnesses."

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" If the witnesses are not credible, surely you ought not to keep these men in *hajat*,"—observed the Doctor Babu.

The Sub-Inspector said with a shudder—" If I let them off,—I shouldn't remain in my post long, Doctor Babu. There is only one day intervening. The trial begins the day after to-morrow. That's what I have come to you for."

" To me?"—queried the Doctor, somewhat surprised.—" To me?—But how can I help you?"

" You can Doctor Babu,—of course you can," —grinned the *Daroga* and continued in a tone extremely polite and solicitous—" I hear that you were present there,—so I have come to beg you to give evidence in this case."

" I was present there at the Station no-doubt, but not on the platform where all this happened. I came on the scene when the assult had been over. The assailants had dispersed before that. So how can I say who assaulted the *Sahib*?"

The Sub-Inspector looked as though he was very much vexed with himself. " Is that so? I have made a mess of it then. I wish I had known —I really do,"—he said.

" What's the matter, *Daroga* Babu?"

The *Daroga* shook his head slowly, pursed up his lips and looked at the ceiling. Then, in a

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regretful voice, he murmured—" I am so sorry. I have created trouble for you—but how could I know ? "

" What have you done ? "—asked the Doctor Babu rather anxiously.

Slowly, the *Daroga* proceeded to explain—" You see, it was in this way. Yesterday afternoon the District Magistrate was at the Club and he sent for me. I went and stood there, *salaaming* him. ' Well, *Daroga*'—he said—' have you collected good and strong evidence in the European assault case ?'—' Yes *Huzoor* ',—I replied—' There are a constable and two *chowkidars* who saw the whole occurrence and can identify all the accused.' The Magistrate seemed to be very angry at this. ' Nonsense '—he exclaimed—' a constable and two *chowkidars* ? Couldn't you find out any credible witnesses ?' The bloodshot eyes of the Magistrate *Sahib* threw me into such a state of confusion that I did not know what I was saying. ' Yes, *Dharamawatar*,'—I faltered out—' there is the Government Doctor, Hara Govind Babu who also was present there and recognised all the accused persons.' ' All right '—said the Magistrate *Sahib*, —and walked off to the tennis court."

The Doctor felt very much annoyed. " You ought not to have said this to the Magistrate without ascertaining if it was a fact,"—he said.

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"But how am I to blame, Sir? You were present there, you brought the gentleman to the Hospital, how should I know that you did not witness the occurrence?"

"Well—all that you can do now is to go back to the Magistrate and tell him the real facts."

"Oh no Doctor Babu, how can that be?"—the *Daroga* burst out. "What? Blow hot and cold in the same breath? I am not the man to say one thing to-day and the opposite thing to-morrow. I am a man of my word—and I stick to my word through thick and thin,—come what may."

The Doctor smiled. He then said—"I will go and tell the Magistrate *Sahib* myself."

The *Daroga* held up his hand in solemn warning. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Doctor Babu." Then after a little pause, he said—"Do you know what the consequence will be?"

"What?"

"It is an official secret and perhaps I am betraying the Government in disclosing it to you. But I am your friend and I shall do it. Listen,"—and the *Daroga* said in slow and solemn words—"You are already in the bad books of the the Government, because it is known to the *Sahibs* that you have abandoned Manchester cloth in favour of country-made *dhotis* and are no longer eating

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Liverpool salt. If you go now and tell the Magistrate *Sahib* that you did not see the assault on the European gentleman, he would naturally think that you are unwilling to depose as a witness because it is a *Swadeshi* case."

"Is it disloyalty to wear Bombay-made *dhotis* and eat country salt then?"—the Doctor flared up.—"Besides, what has *Swadeshi* to do with this assault, pray?"

The *Daroga* replied with great composure —"Don't excite yourself, Doctor Babu. Don't you see how times are? Granted, it is not disloyalty to eat country salt and wear Bombay cloth. Granted, this assault has nothing whatever to do with the *Swadeshi* movement. But *they* think it so. You cannot alter that fact. What's the use of beating your head against the wall?"

This had the desired effect on the poor Doctor. "Yes, I suppose you are right. But the question is how am I to get out of it?"—has said.

Very much pleased at the prospect of bringing his host down from the high horse he was riding, the *Daroga* said—"You must make the best of the situation, Sir. Just half an hour in the witness box wouldn't harm you much. Shall we walk to the *thana* now? You will see the accused there confined in the *hajat*. You ought to have a good

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look at them now, so that there may be no mistake when identifying them in Court. I will also read out to you the case-dairy from which you will know what the other witnesses are going to say before the Magistrate. Nothing like being thoroughly prepared beforehand."

There was an immediate explosion. Hara Govind Babu stood up, trembling with indignation. Shaking his fist at the Sub-Inspector he said—"What? You dare propose that to me? You think I am the man to give false evidence, do you? Get out at once.—Anybody there?—Kick this wretch of a *Daroga* out of the house."

Babu Badan Chandra rose. Adjusting his *chudder* round his neck, he said—"Take care, Sir. You will have to smart for this."

Hara Govind Babu shouted out—"You can do your worst. Go and tell your father* the Magistrate *Sahib*—I don't care."

IV

The *Daroga* Babu, mad with rage, returned to the *thana* as quickly as he could. Addressing his Head Constable, Hafez Ali, he said—"*Jemadar Sahib*, do you know the names of the Doctor's two sons?"

* This is a common form of abuse in India.

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"The Doctor's sons? Which Doctor?"

"Hara Govind,"—replied the *Daroga* impatiently.—"Hara Govind, who else?—The man who eats the salt of the Government and is faithless to it."

"I am afraid I don't know their names,"—the Head Constable ventured to reply.

"Will you get me their names quickly?"

"Yes, I will. What's the matter with them?"

"Oh, don't stand there bandying words with me. Go."

The Head Constable disappeared. The *Daroga* then paced the verandah of the *thana* like a tiger in fury and began to murmur.—

"What!—He dares insult the *Daroga* himself? Get his servant to kick me out of the house? What does Hara Govind fancy himself to be, I wonder! I will get both his sons arrested before they are an hour older—yes, I will. But that won't satisfy me at all. I will crush the Doctor under my heels—see if I don't. I will get up a case against him—a very serious criminal charge—take my word for it. What shall it be? Yes—he receives stolen property. Thieves come to his house at night and dispose of their booty to him at half price and quarter price. I will search his house and discover heaps of stolen property. *I* know how it is done—nothing easier. But—but—would the Deputy Magistrate believe

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it when trying him? Wouldn't he? To Deputy Magistrates, the words of a *Daroga* are as the Holy Gospel. Acquit the Doctor—would he? I would like to see him doing that. I would go to my Superintendent and get him to send a long report to the Government about the conduct of the Deputy Magistrate—and what would happen when the next Gazette is published?—Why, the Deputy's promotion would be stopped for two years—of course. That's why the Deputy *Sahibs* are so afraid of the *Darogas* now a days—that's the secret of it. But should the Judge set aside the conviction on appeal? Should he, for instance, say —'Here is a Doctor earning so many hundred rupees a month—is it likely that a man of his position and education would receive stolen property?' What then? Yes, the Judge might do that. They are dangerous men—these Judges. Pity they are not under the thumb of the Executive. Let me rather do another thing. The other day I sent some injured persons to him for examination in connection with a rioting case. He certified the injuries as being of the nature of simple hurt. I will get hold of one of those persons and make him lodge a complaint to the effect that his injuries were really severe, coming under the definition of grievous hurt, but the Doctor Babu took a bribe of three hundred rupees from the accused persons and

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reported the injuries as simple. That would seem plausible enough, and I should like to see how the Doctor gets out of *that*. Wouldn't the fellow lodge the complaint if I wanted him to? Would he dare disobey me? Does he not know that I can start a bad livelihood case against him and send him up under section 110 any day I choose?"

At this moment the Head Constable returned and gave the names as being Ajay Chandra and Sushil Chandra.

The Sub-Inspector immediately sat down to write a confidential report to the District Magistrate, praying for a search warrant. The following is a faithful translation of his Bengali report—

Hail Cherisher of the Poor!

During my investigation in the European Assault Case, as directed by the *Huzoor*, I have found that two other boys took part in the outrage. They are Ajay Chandra and Sushil Chandra—both sons of the Assistant Surgeon Hara Govind Chatterjee. Ajay, it seems, is a very turbulent young man, studying at Babu Surendranath Banerjea's College in Calcutta. It appears that it was at the instigation of Ajay Chandra that the other accused persons fell upon the European and began to beat him. I am taking steps to arrest both the brothers forthwith under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

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2. By diligent enquiry I have also found that this Ajay had also taken part in the recent Beadon Square riots at Calcutta. He has started a *Samity* here to teach youngmen the use of the *lathi* and this nefarious society is supported by monthly subscriptions given by many gentlemen of the town. The other boy Sushil Chandra, though very young yet, has started a "Children's Stone Throwing *Samity*," the object of the members being to throw stones at European ladies and gentlemen whenever they get a chance of doing so.

3. Having made a confidential enquiry I have come to know that the bloodstained *lathi* actually used in assaulting the *Sahib* is concealed in the Doctor's house. The subscription list of the *Lathi*-play *Samity* is also there—and an examination of its pages may give me additional clues in detecting more culprits. I therefore pray that Your Honour may be pleased to grant me a search warrant under Section 96, Criminal Procedure Code, to search the house of the said Doctor Hara Govind Chatterjee.

4. I also desire to bring to Your Worship's notice that Dr. Hara Govind is a staunch supporter of *Swadeshi*. Only country-made sugar and salt are used in his household. He has purchased shares worth five hundred rupees in the Indian Cotton Mill in the *benami* of his wife. Both his

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sons being accused in this case, I apprehend that he would not depose truly if examined as a prosecution witness. I have therefore removed his name from the list of witnesses. I have also heard that the Doctor is going about telling people that he does not care a rap for any Judge or Magistrate.

Your most obedient servant,
BADAN CHANDRA GHOSE,
S. I.

In the meanwhile the two ill-fated boys were brought to the *thana* under arrest. A little while after, some pleaders came to have them released on bail, offering to stand sureties themselves. "The *Sahib's hukum* is against it"—was the *Daroga's* laconic reply.

V

The District Magistrate signed a search warrant as soon as he received the *Daroga's* report. His *Chuprassi* came to the *thana* and delivered it to the Sub-Inspector. At that time the *Daroga* was engaged in striking a bargain with a man accused of cattle-lifting. The accused, with folded hands, was saying to the *Daroga*—"Here I have got a hundred rupees, your Lordship, to collect which I had to sell off my ploughs and bullocks. Be pleased to accept this amount and let me off."

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The *Daroga* was replying that not a *cowri* less than two hundred rupees would he accept, and if that sum was not forthcoming within the day, he would send him up to take his trial the next day. But the opportune arrival of the search warrant so pleased the Sub-Inspector that he immediately relinquished his just claims, accepted the hundred rupees, and submitted a final report in the following words :—

"On enquiry I find that the accused is innocent of the charge. The complainant's cow ran away from its pen and trespassing into the cow-shed of the accused, began unlawfully to eat the fodder which was stored there. The accused therefore tied the cow up by way of punishing it. Mistake of facts."

Having thus dismissed the cattle-lifter, *Daroga* Badan Babu read the search warrant through very carefully. He then hurriedly put on his uniform, and getting together a force of ten or twelve constables, marched heroically to the Doctor's house.

Arriving there, he called two of the Doctor's neighbours to witness the search, as required by law. Standing at the front door, he began to shout vociferously, demanding admission.

Babu Hara Govind came out, looking very much surprised. The *Daroga* showed him the

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search warrant and requested that the ladies of the house might retire and shut themselves in the kitchen till the search was over.

The *Daroga* then entered the house and began his operations. He told the constables to take all the boxes and trunks from the different rooms and heap them up in the court-yard. This done, he unlocked such boxes the keys of which were forthcoming. The rest were forced open. He caused the contents of all the boxes to be thrown down in a heap and began his search by kicking them about. *Shawls*, *alwans*, *saris* from the looms of Dacca and Santipur, coats, shirts, chemises, blouses, handkerchiefs, socks flew about in every direction. From the box belonging to the Doctor Babu's daughter-in law came out a bundle of love-letters from her young husband. The *Daroga* grabbed the bundle saying—"Evidence of sedition and conspiracy—to be sure." He stowed it away very carefully in the inside pocket of his coat. From Ajay Chandra's box came out a copy of *Ananda Math*.* The *Daroga* yelled with delight and pounced upon it. When the contents of the boxes had been ransacked the *Daroga* visited each room in succession and broke open almirahs, drawers,—in fact everything he could lay his hands on. The

*A patriotic novel by the late Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the most eminent Bengalee writer of modern times.

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Doctor's book containing copies of prescriptions, two or three files of old letters, the household account book, a framed portrait of Babu Surendra Nath Banerjea, monthly magazine containing portraits of Bepin Pal, Aurobindo Ghose, Tilak, Lajpat Rai, &c., were all seized with avidity. Opening the almirah containing medicines, he examined every phial minutely to see if anything of an explosive nature could be discovered. There was a bottle enclosed in a wire-netting, displaying a label well known to the *Daroga* by its appearance—for he could not read English. He took it out, held it against the light and addressing the two search witnesses, said—"Hello,—I didn't know the Doctor went in for such things. I thought he was a d—d teetotaler." The *Daroga* looked at the bottle very affectionately—and turning to the others said—"Have a drop gentlemen?"

"No, thanks, we don't drink,"—replied one of them.

"Nothing like an ounce of brandy, taken neat, when you are tired,"—and the *Daroga* suited his action to his words.

But it tasted so peculiar that the *Daroga* felt some misgivings as to the nature of the liquid. Handing over the bottle to the search witnesses, he requested them to see what it was. They read the

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lable and declared it was excellent cognac, the produce of France.

The *Daroga* then found his way to the Doctor's bed room. "Rip open the pillows and the mattresses,"—he said to his constables.—"On many occasions have I discovered incriminating things concealed inside them."

The constables carried the bedding to the court yard, ripped everything open and shook down the cotton wool. Nothing incriminating came out, however. The winds sportively carried away a great portion of the cotton wool and showered it down on tops of trees and heads of wayfarers in the neighbouring streets.

So the search came to an end. Badan Babu then began to draw up a list of the articles seized. Suddenly he recollected that no *lathis* had so far been found.

"Look every where, constables,"—he said—"if you can discover any *lathis*."

Shew Ratan, the up-country servant of the house, was the happy possessor of a heavy bamboo stick brought from his native village in the Mozafferpur District. The constables soon got hold of it. The *Daroga* examined it minutely to see if there was anything which could pass muster for an old blood-stain. But there was no such mark. The *lathi* nevertheless was entered in the

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search list with the remark—"One heavy bamboo club, stained with blood." Strange to say, when this *lathi* was produced in Court the next day but one, it *did* show unmistakable stains of blood. The *Daroga* then got the witnesses to sign the search list. Giving the Doctor Babu an ironical salute, executed in the military style, he triumphantly marched back to the *thana.*

All this time, poor Babu Hara Govind was quietly sitting in a chair, placed just outside the kitchen door. The ladies were inside—so he did not stir from there for one single moment, lest the ruffians should offer any insult to them.

When the *Daroga* cleared out, Hara Govind Babu left his post and came outside. The search witnesses were still loitering there. "You have seen everything, gentlemen,"—he said.

"Yes, we have,"—said one of them.

"I am going to see the District Magistrate. Would you mind coming with me to his *bungalow* for a few minutes?"

"What for?"—said one.

"I want to go and state the whole affair to him. I want to see whether he takes any steps to mete out justice to me."

The two men stood silent for a little while. The Doctor, growing impatient, said—"What do you say, gentlemen? Would you come with me?"

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One of them replied—" I think you had much better go and speak to the Magistrate yourself, Sir. It is a very delicate matter—and I hardly think—the presence of a third party—"

The other man was more outspoken. He interrupted his companion, saying—" I hate diddle-daddle. I tell you plainly, Sir, your going to the Magistrate would be perfectly useless. Besides,—we won't speak against the Police—we can't. We are poor men and contrive to maintain our family somehow. After having seen, Sir, how you—a Government servant and a man of wealth and position—have fared at the hands of the Police, it would be insane for us to court their displeasure. To you, they haven't done anything worse than searching your house. Us, they would handcuff and drag along the public streets, poking at our ribs with their batons all the way."

Hara Govind Babu looked at them for a minute in silent contempt. Then he said—" Just as you please, gentlemen."

" Good afternoon, Sir,"—and the two men departed.

The Doctor then dressed and walked to the Magistrate's *bungalow*. The *Sahib* was then in his tennis suit with a racket in his hand and was preparing to bike to his Club.

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"Good afternoon, Sir'—saluted Hara Govind Babu and stood before the Lord of the District.

"Good afternoon. What's it, Doctor?"

"I am here to seek justice at your hands, Sir. The *Kotwali* Sub-Inspector, on pretence of searching my house this afternoon,—"

The District Magistrate interrupted him, saying—"Haven't two of your sons been arrested to-day in connection with the European Assault Case?"

"Yes, Sir, they have. But it is out of sheer malice that the *Daroga* has done so. Only this morning—"

The *Sahib* became crimson with anger. "How dare you!"—he shouted—"how dare you come and try to bias me, knowing that I try your sons' case the day after to-morrow?" The *Sahib* then jumped into the saddle of his bicycle and the next moment he disappeared.

Babu Hara Govind heaved a deep sigh and with languid steps, walked back to his house.

VI

It was dusk. The Doctor was sitting inside his house, surrounded by his wife and daughters. The false accusation against his sons, the disgrace and the insult he had suffered, had cast a gloom over the household.

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The hours wore on. No arrangements were being made to cook the evening meal. Nobody had any appetite. The Doctor himself was suffering from a head-ache. He was lying down on a sofa. His daughter was applying eau-de-cologne and water to the handkerchief with which his head was bandaged. His daughter-in-law was fanning him.

Somebody was heard shouting outside, "Doctor Babu—Doctor Babu—"

The servant Shew Ratan went out to see who it was. He returned and said—"There is somebody who wants you to go and see a patient, Sir."

"Tell him I am unwell this evening. He should fetch some other doctor,"—said Babu Hara Govind.

"Yes, Sir,"—and the servant went out.

Half-an-hour passed. Again there was a shout—"Doctor Babu—Doctor Babu."

Shew Ratan went out again. Coming back, he said—"The same man has returned, Sir. He says he wouldn't leave this time without seeing you."

"All right. Show him in,"—said the Doctor with some annoyance.

The ladies retired. The man entered, bowing ceremoniously.

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"We are in great distress, Sir. It is a bad case,"—the man said.

"Who is ill?"

The man stood speechless, fixing his gaze on the floor.

"Who is ill? What's the trouble?"—The Doctor repeated.

"I hardly know what to say, Sir."

The Doctor was not a little astonished at this mysterious reply. "Who are you, please?"—he said.

"I am the writer-constable at the *thana*. My name is Hara Dhan Sircar. The *Daroga* is very ill. He is extremely sorry and repentant for all that has happened to-day. Is he past forgiveness?"

"What is he suffering from?"—enquired Babu Hara Govind.

"He has a great pain in his chest and the head. Do come, Sir, and forget the past."

"There are other doctors besides me in this town. Go to one of them."

The writer-constable then drew out of his pocket a hundred rupees in silver and currency notes. Placing the amount near the Doctor Babu's feet, he said—"Have mercy, Sir."

The sight of the money highly offended the Doctor. "Have you come to tempt me with money?"—he said angrily.—"Do you suppose

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that everybody is as money-grabbing as the Police? I wouldn't come for a *lakh* of rupees even. Take yourself off, Sir, at once."

The writer-constable then gathered up the money and departed.

The clock struck nine. The Doctor's wife said to her husband—"Will you drink a little milk? Shall I boil some for you?"

"Yes, thanks,—if you don't mind,"—said the Doctor.

The lady went into the kitchen and lighted a fire. When the milk had nearly boiled, the rumbling of a carriage was heard stopping at the back door. The next moment a young lady, accompanied by her maid, entered.

"Who are you, madam?"—asked the Doctor's wife.

"She is *Daroga* Badan Babu's wife, madam"—replied the maid-servant.

"I am the person you are looking for,"—the Doctor's wife said. The young lady came inside the kitchen and stooping down, caught hold of the feet of her hostess.

The Doctor's wife was greatly embarassed. "What is all this?"—she demanded in an astonished voice.

"Madam, my husband is dying."

"Is he so very ill, then?"

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"Yes, madam. Your husband says, why don't we send for some other doctor. But madam, no other doctor would do him any good because they would not be able to diagnose the case properly. My husband drank something here which caused this illness."

"Drank something here?"—exclaimed the Doctor's wife.—"He didn't drink anything."

"Yes, he did,"—said the young lady. "Would you kindly take me to your husband so that I may tell him everything? I wouldn't hesitate to speak to him at this crisis, though I am a stranger."

The lady of the house took her visitor to the Doctor.

"Have mercy on my husband, Sir. Save his life,"—said the young lady entreatingly.

The Doctor's wife then explained everything.

"Drank something here!"—said the Doctor with surprise. "What did he drink?"

"He was telling me that when searching your dispensing room, Sir, he found a bottle labelled brandy—and he drank some of its contents, thinking it was brandy. But now he fears that it wasn't brandy at all."

"A bottle labelled brandy?—Wait a minute"—and the Doctor disappeared. He went into his dispensing room and examined the bottle.

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Returning to the room he exclaimed—"Good God! He has poisoned himself, madam."

Tears began to flow down the cheeks of the disconsolate woman.

"Have you come in a *gharry*, madam?"

"Yes, Sir, I have."

"Then I am going to the *thana* in your *gharry*. You please wait here till I send it back to you."—Saying so, the Doctor hurriedly got together some surgical appliances and a chest of medicines, and was ready to depart.

"Do you think, Sir, that my husband will be saved?"—asked the young lady in a voice choked with sobs.

"It all depends on Providence, madam"—and the Doctor shot out of the room.

He spent the night at the *thana*, attending on his patient. The *Daroga* was saved.

In due time the European Assault Case was decided. The two sons of the Doctor were acquitted, as no witnesses could identify them. The others got six months hard labour each.

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THE LADY FROM BENARES

I

BABU Girindra Nath, the Head Goods Clerk of Dinapur Railway Station, lived in a small thatched cottage away in the *bazaar*. After entering upon service he led rather a wild bachelor life for about ten years. But now he was quite another man, having recently taken unto him a wife.

Mrs. Girindra was not quite a child as Hindoo brides generally are—he saw to that. Her name was Maloti. Her complexion was rather dark,—but there was a tenderness about her that made her sweet though she could lay no claims to beauty. Young as she was, she had to keep house for her husband. She had no mother-in-law, no sister-in-law to look after her, poor child! When her husband was away at work, she had no one in the house to talk to, no one except Bhojooa's mother who spoke no Bengalee. This person was there in the capacity of a domestic servant. She had to be paid a rupee extra per month because it was stipulated that she should stay in the house all day long—looking after her young mistress.

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It was a winter afternoon—past three o'clock. The sun had declined towards the western horizon. Maloti, coming out of her bedroom, stood in the verandah. Bhojooa's mother, according to her custom, was lying down in a corner wrapped up in blankets and snoring away. Maloti felt a little amused as she saw her in this condition. "The amount of sleep she can get through"—muttered Maloti to herself—"is really wonderful."

At this moment a hoarse voice was heard shouting outside—"Babu!—*Eji* Babu!"

Maloti ran towards the door and peeping through a chink, saw that it was a station porter loaded with baggage. An elderly Bengalee lady with widow's weeds on, stood by his side.

Maloti ran back to the verandah and called out the name of Bhojooah's mother, trying to wake her up. She did it several times, all to no purpose. Then at last she began to shake her violently crying—"*A gay Bhojooah kay mayee*!" At last the woman did awake, went to the door shivering and let the lady in.

A second later, the stranger stood in the verandah, calmly looking at Maloti. The girl thought she must be a relation of her husband's—but then no one was expected. She remained in a

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state of perplexity and could not decide whether to *pronam** her or not.

"Is this Girindra Babu's house?"—the new-comer said.

"Yes"—replied Maloti.

"Are you his wife?"

By a shake of her head Maloti indicated that it was so. Then she mustered courage to speak—"Where are you coming from, madam?"

"I am coming from Benares"—the widow sweetly replied. "I was going down home but unfortunately, while in the train, lost my ticket. They stopped me here because I must buy another. They told me that the next train was not due till midnight. Being alone in a strange place, I thought I had much better find out some Bengalee family and beg them to let me pass the time in their house. Would you mind?"

"Oh, not at all.—You are welcome, madam. Pray be seated."

At Maloti's bidding, the servant spread a *durry* in the verandah for them to sit on.

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* *Pronaming* is the Hindoo way of doing reverence on special occasions to one's elderly relations or to friends who belong to a higher caste. It is done by kneeling down in front of the revered and touching the ground with the forehead.

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"Here *Dai*, run to the *bazaar* and buy some refreshments for this lady"—said Maloti, handing a rupee to the maid.

"Oh, don't trouble, thanks"—said the Benares lady. "I have got some fruits here in my bundle. I wouldn't however mind a plate of rice as I took the train early in the morning."

"Oh, certainly. How stupid of me not to have thought that. *Dai*, light up the kitchen fire, quick."

The *Dai* returned the rupee to her mistress and went about her work. The two ladies sat on the *durry*, talking.

"What is your name, dear?"

"Maloti."

"Where is your parental home?"

"Uttarparah."

"Are both your parents alive?"

Maloti, in a tone of embarrassment, replied —"My father died soon after I was born. My mother also died when I was quite a young thing"—saying which Maloti got up to see how the *Dai* was getting on with the fire. She scolded her for her awkwardness and began to do it herself.

A little while later, Maloti was cooking for her guest and the latter was sitting by her side, talking.

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"How long have you been married?"—asked the lady from Benares.

"In the month of Bysakh."

"Only that! How long have you been here?"

"About two months, I think."

"When does your husband leave for office?"

Maloti blushed at the mention of her husband. "At nine o'clock in the morning"—she replied, her eyes directed towards the floor.

"And when does he come home?"

"At six,—sometimes as late as seven o'clock."

II

Girindra Nath returned home no sooner the lamps were lighted. Maloti after giving him the accustomed welcome, said—"So early to-day?"

Girindra smiled and stroking his wife on the chin playfully, said—"I thought you were feeling lonely and so I made haste."

With beaming eyes Maloti said—"But I am not alone to-day. Guess who has come."

Girindra looked surprised. "Who is it?"—he enquired.

"A Bengalee lady—a widow. She was going home from Benares by the afternoon passenger. But as she had lost her ticket, they stopped her here."

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"A Bengalee lady from Benares? Was she alone? How old is she?"

"She was alone. She may be forty or fifty."

Girindra smiled as he heard his wife's conjecture. "You won't find out the difference between forty and fifty till you are forty yourself"—he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Sixteen thinks forty and fifty to be very much the same. But forty refuses to class itself with fifty"—saying which he pinched the cheek of her who was sixteen.

But the playfulness of his attitude did not last long. "I say, there are so many Bengalee families about here, why should she have made us her special choice?"—said he.

"Do you object?"—said Maloti, rather taken aback at the remark.

"I certainly do. Is she good-looking?"

Maloti frowned. "What does that matter?"—she asked, shooting an angry glance at her husband.

"It matters a good deal, indeed. An unprotected female, from Benares too, of all places in the world. I am only thinking what *sort* of a widow she is."

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Maloti understood her husband's meaning.*

"Oh, no,"—she said with conviction—"she is not what you suspect. She is perfectly respectable."

"As if *you* knew"—remarked Girindra sarcastically. "When is she leaving, pray?"

"I didn't ask her."

"The next train leaves at midnight."

"How can she go alone in the night?"

Girindra stood up saying—"Never mind that. I will see her to the station myself. The sooner we get rid of her the better"—and he walked out of the room.

Maloti sat there, looking dejected. Girindra returned a little later and seeing his wife in this condition, said—"What is the matter with you now?"

"It is so awkward for me. She hasn't said anything about leaving to-night. I can't turn her out, can I?"

"Don't you fret about that. If you can't, I will."

---

* When a Bengalee woman has the misfortune to make a *faux pas*, her people, in order to avoid scandal, often remove her from the family dwelling house and provide her with a house elsewhere, Benares being selected in most cases. It not infrequently happens that after some time these unfortunate women are left to shift for themselves.

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Having said this, he walked to a cup-board and took out a bottle encased in a wire netting. He poured out some of its coloured contents in a tumbler and drank it off. During the next quarter of an hour he repeated this process two or three times.

Wonderful were the effects of the coloured liquid! His vexation departed mail speed. He became very lively and began talking to his wife in an exceedingly amiable manner.

In the meantime, the lady from Benares came and stood outside the room. Girindra Nath suddenly went out and *pronamed* her reverently, saying—"It was so good of you to have come, madam."

The lady spoke not. Girindra then stood up and said in his suavest manner—

"May I ask, where you live?"

"I am living at Benares now."

"Where were you going to?"

"I was going down home,—but unfortunately I lost my ticket—"

Girindra interrupted her by saying—

"Yes, yes, I have heard all that. Pray make yourself quite at home, madam. You could proceed by the same train tomorrow afternoon."

"It is very kind of you, my son. But is'nt there a train leaving at midnight?"

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"Of course there is—but you don't want to kill yourself by going out in the raw cold night, do you? If you did—we simply wouldn't let you" —and he burst into a melodious laughter.

Girindra Nath wrapped himself up in a warm *shawl* and helping himself to a *pan*, went out to visit friends.

It was late when he came back. Everybody else had gone to bed—only Maloti was sitting up. As soon as she opened the door for her husband, he kissed her on both cheeks. His breath was smelling of liquor—but Maloti had got accustomed to it.

"So late!"—exclaimed the wife.

"There is good news."

"What's it?"

"I have been transferred to Tari Ghat."

"Any increase in pay?"

Girindra Nath mentioned the amount. It was a very good lift. Maloti's face flushed with joy.

They now reached the bed-room. Girindra said that they would have to leave for the new station in three or four days time.

The next morning, before leaving for office, he noticed the lady from Benares. Aside he said to his wife—"Didn't the woman go last night?"

"Goodness!—Didn't you yourself tell her to stop till to-day? She was only too anxious to leave."

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"Did I?"—said Girindra, much vexed. "Anyhow, I will send a porter to fetch her before the afternoon train. See that she leaves—and you had better be careful about the plates."

Maloti said nothing—she only looked at her husband reproachfully with her large, sad eyes.

After breakfast, Maloti and the Benares lady sat in the courtyard, enjoying the warmth of the sun. They talked a great deal. Never since Maloti left Bengal, had she a chance of enjoying a conversation such as this with a lady friend. She had grown quite tired of talking Hindustani to Bhojooa's mother.

It was two o'clock now. The porter from the station was expected every minute. The Benares lady packed up her things and made ready to go. "I have been with you"—she said—"only one day—and yet I feel it hard to part."

Maloti also entertained a similar feeling. She had obtained the companionship of a lady friend in her solitude and it was very soothing to her.

It was half-past two. The porter could not be long in coming now. Maloti said to her friend—"Suppose you did not go to-day but stayed on a few days more. Couldn't you do that? I feel so lonely at times, all by myself. Sometimes I feel like crying."

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"Yes, I could stay over easily—but wouldn't it annoy your husband?"

"Oh, nonsense,"—said Maloti, although she knew that the apprehension was only too well founded. "Well, I will risk it"—said she to herself.—"It surely cannot be very wrong to have this lady with us for a few days longer. Here I am, going through the household drudgery day after day all alone,—couldn't I allow myself a little relaxation by way of having a friend to talk to?—I certainly could—and I will." Then she began to rehearse in her mind as to what she would say to her husband in the evening when he should express his displeasure. She would give it pretty hot to him,—indeed she would.

It struck three, but the porter never turned up. The train came and went, they could hear the distant rumbling. Oh, it was such a relief! Maloti began to chatter away in the most lively strain.

Towards evening, Maloti was sending her maid to the *bazaar* to buy refreshments for her husband. The Benares lady said—"Why do you use these *bazaar* things? If I were you, I would prepare them at home myself."

"Who is going to take all that trouble"—laughed Maloti.

"It is no trouble at all. Let me show you today how to do it."

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III

Girindra Nath was unusually late coming home that evening. When he saw the Benares lady, he exclaimed—"It was so stupid of me! I forgot all about sending a porter to fetch you, madam. Since you have given us the pleasure of your company for two days, extend it another day. I haven't got to go to office to-morrow and I shall see you off myself."

Maloti smelt of wine directly she came to her husband. "Things are looking bad"—she crossly said. "You will get worse and worse at Tari Ghat when you earn more money."

Girindra in caressing tones, said—

"Dear, oh dear!—Do you imagine there is Kellner there? Oh, no—it is a very small station — quite out of the way. Once there, I will purify myself by a dip in the Ganges and give up these sorts of things *ek dum*."

"Aren't you going to office to-morrow?"

"No, I have finished my work here and made over charge. The day after to-morrow I will give a dinner to my friends to celebrate my lift and all arrangements for it must be made to-morrow."

Girindra Nath then sat down to his supper. It was such an improvement over his ordinary evening fare that he enquired of his wife how it

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was so. When told that it was the work of the Benares lady, he said—"A thought strikes me. Do you think, if we asked her, she would stay over till the day after to-morrow and help you to cook the dinner?"

"You had better ask her yourself"—said Maloti, greatly pleased.

"But I shouldn't go and speak to her in this condition—should I?"

"You silly!"—said Maloti in a tone of soft rebuke. "Didn't you speak to her as you came in just now."

"Did I?"—gasped Girindra. Then in a moment his recollection seemed to revive—and he kept on saying—"Yes I did—of course I did."

Maloti communicated her husband's request to the Benares lady, who cheerfully assented.

IV

It was Sunday—the day fixed for Girindra Nath to leave for Tari Ghat. The Benares lady said—"I have changed my mind and do not want to go down to Bengal now. I will go back to Benares."

Maloti proposed to her that she might go over with them to Tari Ghat and spend a few days there and then go on to Benares, which was only three or four stations off.

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In the meantime Girindra came and asked his wife for thirty rupees in order to pay off his *bazaar* accounts.

"Thirty rupees! But I haven't got it"—Maloti exclaimed.

"Didn't I bring you eighty rupees the other day?—Surely we couldn't have spent all that."

"Well—let me see how much is left. You had fifty rupees to buy things for the dinner and last evening when your guests arrived you took away the remainder on two or three different occasions for fresh bottles to entertain your company." Having said this, Maloti opened her box and found that it contained two rupees and fourteen annas in all.

"Bless me—what am I to do now?"—ejaculated Girindra.

"You have yourself to thank for it"—said Maloti after a short silence. "Your drink will be the ruin of you some day. You never stop to think *then*—you simply clamour for money."

Girindra did not pay much heed to his wife's well-intentioned sermon. Preparing to go out he said—"I must get somebody to lend me the amount."

The Benares lady, who was standing outside and could hear everything that was passing, now called Maloti to her and said—"Would your

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husband mind accepting the amount as a loan from me? I am not going home now, so I could easily spare it."

Maloti communicated the message to her husband, but he would not hear of it. "Oh, no,"—he said—"we hardly know her at all. How could we accept a loan from her?"

The lady then walked in herself. Speaking to Girindra for the first time face to face, she said —"What harm is there if you did, my son? After some little time, when you have settled down at Tari Ghat, I will come again to visit you. You can return me the money then."

Girindra pondered for a few seconds and then replied—"It is really very good of you, madam. Would you mind coming to Tari Ghat along with us now? I could then repay the amount to you there in five or six days."

"Well—well—there is no hurry about it. We can settle that by and by. How much do you require now? Only thirty rupees? I could spare you a little more, my son. You mustn't feel the least delicacy about it."

"Thirty is all that I require, madam; thank you very much"—said Girindra.

The Benares lady then opened her box and taking three currency notes out of it, handed them to Girindra.

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That evening, close upon midnight, Girindra left Dinapur accompanied by his wife and the Benares lady. Bhojooa's mother set up a loud lamentation at the parting though she persistently refused Girindra's offer to take her with them to Tari Ghat.

On their way to the railway station, Maloti again tried to persuade the Benares lady to come with them to Tari Ghat but it was of no avail. At Dildarnagar junction early the next morning, Girindra changed their train for another, bidding good bye to their matronly friend.

V

Not long after sunrise, the young couple reached Tari Ghat and put up in the quarters provided by the Railway. After putting things in order a little, Girindra went to the station to make the acquaintance to his fellow-workers.

Maloti, intending to have her bath, opened a trunk to take out a *saree*. It was this trunk which ordinarily contained her jewel case. What was her amazement to find that the jewel-case was not there!

"It must be in some other box" she murmured to herself. Then she opened all her boxes, one after another, but the jewel case could not be found.

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"But this is absurd! It *must* be somewhere" exclaimed Maloti in trembling voice and ransacked every box over and over again—examining every fold of the clothes even—but with no better result.

Then at last she sat on the floor—broken down—to give vent to her feelings. She wept like a child and tears flowed down her cheeks unceasingly.

It was some time before her husband came home. Seeing Maloti in this predicament he whispered—"What is this?"

She then related the disaster to him in words constantly broken with sobs.

Girindra sank into a chair. "Have you searched well?"—said he.

"I have."

"When did you see it last?"

"I remember having putting the jewel case inside the black trunk at Dinapur yesterday."

"Did you open the trunk while in the train—just to take out something or other you know?"

"Yes, I did once. I was feeling chilly and opened it to take out a *shawl*."

"You must have taken out the jewel case also and forgotten to put it back again."

"Oh, no"—said Maloti confidently. "The *shawl* was lying just at the top of everything else

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and I had no occasion to disturb the rest of the contents."

"After that where did you put the key?"

"It was fastened to my belt."

"And you went to sleep after that?"

"I did"—said Maloti, looking blankly at her husband's face.

"It is quite clear to me now"—said Girindra after a moment's pause. "The Benares woman must have stolen it."

Maloti did not protest.

"When you were fast asleep"—Girindra continued—"she must have softly loosened the key from your belt, opened the box and extracted the jewel-case. Do you know her name?"

"No, I don't. How could I with propriety enquire the name of a lady old enough to be my mother?"

"Where does she live at Benares?"

"In some *muth** or other."

"*Some muth* or other! Well, there are about a couple of hundred there. Have you any idea as to its locality?"

"No, I haven't."

"Didn't I warn you"—said Girindra somewhat hotly—"Didn't I warn you at the very outset, not to trust these people? They are a

* *Muth* is a monastery or a nunnery as the case may be.

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dangerous lot—these strumpets of Benares. She has made a big haul with her thirty-rupee bait."

At last Maloti lifted her eyes and protested—

"I can't believe she has done it. I shouldn't be surprised if I left it behind at the Dinapur house myself"—said she with firmness.

But Girindra would not listen to it. "You little know the ways of the world, my dear"—said Girindra loftily and then walked off to send a telegram to the Police.

VI

A fortnight passed. During this interval the young couple have very nearly got over their grief for having lost the jewels. They laughed and joked and enjoyed themselves just as they had done in days gone by. Girindra Nath's new appointment proved to be a very lucrative one and that no doubt helped to console them not a little.

On receipt of the telegram, the Head Constable of Dildarnagar came that very day and recorded Girindra's statement together with a descriptive list of the missing jewels. Nothing has been heard from the Police since.

It was half past eleven. Girindra Nath was away in his office. Maloti was sitting over her midday meal when the train from Dildarnagar arrived. Each time the train came in, Maloti

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would rush to the front door and through a chink in it, watch with childish delight the flow of life on the platform. On this occasion she left her meal unfinished and hastened to the door. Quite an unexpected sight met her gaze. The Benares lady came out of the train and stood on the platform. A porter was taking her things out. She seemingly made some enquiry of the porter and the latter pointed with his finger towards Girindra's house.

Maloti rushed back, put away the remnants of her meal and made herself tidy. With a trembling heart she awaited the arrival of the lady. Such a train of thoughts passed through her mind within that short interval! Her little heart throbbed with delight and she prayed inwardly that her visitor might remain ignorant of her husband's suspicions towards her. All along Maloti believed her to be innocent,—now she became certain of it; were it otherwise, would she have come again of her own accord?

A minute or two later, the lady stood before Maloti. "I am so glad you have come"—she said, as she offered her *pronam*. The lady placed her hand affectionately on Maloti's head and blessed her silently.

Maloti then wanted to light up a fire to cook a meal for her visitor, but the latter interrupted her

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saying—"You need not trouble about it, dear, for it is the fast of *ekadasi*."*

The two sat down, engaged in conversation. Maloti could not fail to notice that her visitor's countenance betrayed a sadness and that there was something weighing heavily on her mind. She made bold to ask her the reason for it.

"You ought to know"—the Benares lady sighed.

"What is it"—faltered out Maloti, afraid of the reply she might receive.

"You suspect that I took away your jewel case. You have sent the Police after me—and still you ask why I am looking sad?"

Maloti was silent for some moments, overcome with a feeling of shame. Then she looked up and said—"Would you believe me if I told you that I did not, for one single moment, harbour any such suspicion in my mind?"

"But your husband did"—said the Benares lady ruefully.

"He never thought"—said Maloti in an apologetic tone—"that the Police would ever find you out. Why, only this morning he was saying to me that Benares contained no end of nunneries

* *Ekadasi*—the eleventh day of the moon, is observed by all Hindu widows as a day of fast.

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and to discover a nameless person from amongst their midst was entirely hopeless."

"They did find me out, however, and gave me so much trouble that I had to pay down two hundred rupees to free myself from their clutches."

"So, this has been your reward for making friends with us! I am so sorry."

A silence followed. The lady then asked—

"When does your husband come home?"

"At nightfall."

Clouds began to gather in the sky. The sunlight faded away. Looking outside, the Benares lady softly said—"I hope it is not going to rain."

"What does it matter?"—said Maloti.

"I must be off to-day."

"What! To-day?"

The lips of the lady betrayed a momentary smile. "You silly girl,"—she said—"your husband suspects me to be a robber and you desire that I should be your guest? I must return by the two-thirty train to-day. Many belonging to our nunnery are going on a pilgrimage to Puri. We all start to-morrow."

"Would you be away long?"

"Why do you ask? Would we meet again when I return?"—said the lady, her eyes dimmed with tears.

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After a short pause she said—"Maloti, my child, would you like to please me?"

"Yes, if I could"—replied Maloti eagerly.

"I have got a few articles of jewellery here. Wear them for my sake"—she said, as she unlocked her box and pulled out a jewel-case of exquisite workmanship. See then pressed a spring and the lid flew open.

Maloti was amazed to see its contents. Gold and silver, set with rubies, diamonds and other precious stones almost blinded her vision with their dazzle.

"I present these to you"—said the Benares lady affectionately.

Maloti was tongue-tied for a few seconds. Then she found words to say—"You will excuse me, I can't accept these."

"Why not?"—said her friend complainingly.

"Why should I take these from you?—They are worth a small fortune."

"Well—they are my gift to you."

"May be—but what right have I to take them? I mustn't indeed."

Clouds deepened in the sky. There were signs of a coming storm. Daylight was all but gone.

In slow, deliberate accents, the Benares lady said—"Suppose you have such a right."

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"I have such a right? What do you mean?" —said Maloti, in utter astonishment.

Looking on the floor with tearful eyes, the Benares lady said—almost in whispers—

"I will tell you. That is why I have come to-day."

Maloti's bosom throbbed with an uncertain terror. She glanced at the lady in breathless silence.

"Is your mother really dead?"

"That's what people say"—said Maloti, her tones clearly betraying her painful diffidence.

"Then you know. I am your wretched mother."—Tears freely flowed down the lady's cheeks as she uttered these words.

A thrill of horror passed through Maloti's frame. Involuntarily she moved away a little from her mother.

An incident that had occurred a few months ago, came back to Maloti's mind. She was at her paternal home then, before her husband took her to Dinapur. Mokshada, whom she called her grandmother, had just returned after a long pilgrimage. She was sharing a bed with an aunt of hers and this old lady. Thinking that Maloti was fast asleep, the two elderly ladies began a secret conversation. But Maloti was really awake and could catch every syllable that passed

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between them. What she heard gave her a cruel shock of surprise. She then learnt for the first time that her mother whom she believed to be in heaven, was really alive and that the grandmother had accidentally come across her in some place of pilgrimage. She learnt that her mother, whose memory she had been cherishing all her life as a most sacred treasure, was, in the eyes of the world a fallen woman. The agony of mind that Maloti bore in silence that night was indescribable—and this was that mother! The pain and the humiliation of that night now returned to her with redoubled intensity.

The mother was weeping still. After regaining her self-possession to some extent, she said—"Does my son-in-law know?"

"No, he doesn't."

"When did you hear?"

"After marriage."

"Was it from aunt Mokshada?

"Yes."

"It was from her that I heard of your marriage and that your husband was the Goods Clerk at Dinapur. She also told me that you were to come to Dinapur in the month of *Aswin*."

Maloti wiped away her tears with a corner of her *saree*, looked her mother full in the face and said—"Then it was not by chance that you

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came to Dinapore! Why did you?" Her tone, alas, was stern and unforgiving.

The poor mother relapsed into another fit of sobs. "Can one forget one's own child?"—she managed to say.

Maloti felt like crying too. It seemed strange to her that she should have become so tenderly attached to this lady, quite unaware of the relationship between them.

"Why did you reveal yourself?"—said Maloti in a tremulous voice.

"I hardly know. I could not restrain myself."

Maloti was about to say—"I am glad you did or else I should never have known what it was to look upon one's mother." But she checked herself immediately. An inner voice seemed to whisper to her—"Such a mother! Better not have seen her at all."—So she sat there, sternly silent.

The departure of the train drew near. The Station porter, as arranged, came to fetch away the things.

"Please take away these jewels—I won't wear them"—said Maloti.

The lady looked at her daughter's face and understood what was passing in her mind. She said —"It is not as you suppose. You may wear them without the slightest compunction. Had it been otherwise, I would much rather have thrown them

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in the river than given them to *you*. For fourteen years I have done penance for the one single folly of my life. These articles of jewellery are not the wages of my sin. My father was a very rich man, and he gave me these when I was married."

"But still I feel I cannot use them, without consulting my husband first."

"Yes, ask him. Should he however disapprove, you may sell them and make over the proceeds to some Hindoo temple."

She rose to go.

Maloti, in spite of her resolution to the contrary, now fully surrendered herself to the claims of nature. Clasping the feet of the lady with both her arms, she made her obeisance and in a voice choked with tears, said—"Mamma, come again."

"May you be a *Savitri*, may fortune and happiness ever attend your path"—the mother sobbed out and the next moment she was gone.

———

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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

CHAPTER I

An April day was nearing its close. Bijai Mitra sat card-playing in Gopal Sarkar's reception room. Suddenly his youngest son, darting into the room, said breathlessly, "Father! come home quickly; there is a telegram." At the word "telegram" the occupants of the reception room were alarmed. The arrival of a telegram is not a daily event in villages, and as a rule telegrams bring ill news—news of misfortune.

Bijai Mitra, throwing down his cards, thrust his feet into his canvas slippers and went home at a quick pace. The Telegraph *Chuprassi*, heated by his walk from the distant station, sat looking very important in the verandah at the entrance, with his great staff beside him. He was surrounded by a host of curious boys and girls. Having signed the receipt, Bijai Mitra opened the telegram with trembling hands. Instantly his face became suffused with the light of joy. Entering the inner room, he found his wife anxiously awaiting his coming. "The news is good"—he said.

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"What is it?"

"Binod is coming home."

"Binod! Where from? When will he be here?"

"That he does not say. He telegraphs from Mokameh, and will arrive to-morrow, I should think."

Bijai Hari and Binod Bihari were brothers. They lost their parents when Binod was small. Bijai Hari's wife had reared the boy to manhood. As Binod grew he became unruly and perverse, wrangling perpetually with his brother. Once, blinded by anger, Bijai Hari struck his brother with a shoe.* On that day Binod fled from home. One day, two days, a whole week passed, but Binod did not return. Then Bijai Hari began to advertise in the newspapers. He offered a reward of ten rupees, but in vain; he obtained no news of Binod. Months became years, until now three years had gone by. Having no trace of Binod, Bijai Hari was ashamed to meet his friends. And now news had come that this lost brother was coming home. In the joy of their hearts at this news, sweetmeats in abundance were offered by the family that evening on the *Tulsi* shrine in the courtyard, by which the village

* Striking with a shoe is considered as a very grave insult in India.

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lads were not slow to profit. The good news spread through the village, and the friends awaited joyously the return of Binod.

The next afternoon Binod's carriage entered the village, and he stepped out from it, cash-box in hand. The coachman and the house servant together took down the luggage. Entering the house, Binod saluted with deference his brother and his sister-in-law, took the children on his lap, petting them with awkward caresses. Then calling to his sister-in-law, he placed his cash-box in her hands, saying—"Kindly keep this most carefully in your iron chest, sister-in-law."

The sister-in-law noticed that the box was very heavy. Much pleased, she said, as she put it away—"Where have you been so long, brother-in-law?"

"I was at Motihari."

"And you have remembered us at last?"

"How could I leave my work to come, sister?"

"What pay are you getting?"

"120 rupees a month."

"Are you married?"

"Married? Why should I marry?"

The sister-in-law began some jesting remark, when Bijai Babu, coming in, reminded his wife that the traveller must be hungry, and begged her

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to hasten the preparation of food and leave explanations until after the meal.

By the time that the meal was concluded it had become evening, and friends filled the reception room. The two brothers sat down in their midst. Binod's shoulders quite ached from his prostrations before preceptors and relatives. Some said—"Not hearing anything for so long we thought, where can the boy be gone? He has become a great man indeed! A salary of Rs. 120 is not easily secured now-a-days."

Other youths of the village who, having passed the B.A., were hoping for a clerkship in the Comptroller General's office in Calcutta on Rs. 30 a month; and those who, having attained the M. A., were unable to obtain a mastership on Rs. 50, were much discussed. Old Chakravarti Mahashoi said—"It is all a matter of destiny, brother; and this one has not even passed the B.A., the grand B.A. degree." Many chimed in, "That is true, indeed."—"You are quite right in saying that." A man of the new school said, "It is destiny, certainly; but with that intelligence is required." To which another added—"We always knew that Binod was intelligent." Sarkar Mahashoi, amid similar flattering remarks, struck in—"In childhood he was very perverse; but many are so at that period of life, but change as

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they get older. And now may he prosper in this excellent post! May his pay increase and his position improve. This is our blessing upon him!"

Bijai, looking affectionately upon his brother, replied—"Your blessings go with him, Mahashoi!"

CHAPTER II

The next morning Binod, sitting with his brother's children in the verandah, said to them—"You have not yet seen what I have brought for you!"

"What, Uncle? What have you brought for us?"—clamoured the children.

Binod, opening a trunk, gave to one a gutta percha monkey, to another a red ball, to a third a lady doll. The children began to jump with joy. Looking into the amiable countenance of his sister-in-law, Binod said—"Do you not ask what I have brought for you, *Bou Didi*?"

"What have you brought, brother?"

"Guess."

"How can I?"

"What would you like it to be?"

"What would I like to get? Let me think a little. Not a monkey; there is one in the house already."

Binod, affecting anger, exclaimed—"Sister-in-law! Do you call my elder brother a monkey?"

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"Now see! Did I name anyone? If you yourselves fit on the cap, how can I help it?"

"I don't think you want a lady doll; we have that in the house also."*

"No; I don't want a wax doll. If you would marry a real live doll and bring her home, I should be delighted, brother."

"When you see what I have brought, you will be even more delighted. It is on this account I have delayed so long in coming home. I was accumulating the money. Let us have out my cash-box, sister-in-law."

The sister-in-law, opening the chest, took out the green cloth-covered box. Binod began to search for the key in all his pockets and in each of his coats, but found it not. Then he opened the two trunks, turned their contents upside down—still no key. With a dejected look he said—"I must have left it in the carriage" and, holding his head with his hand, he fell into a seat.

To comfort him his sister-in-law said—"Never mind if the key is lost; the property is all safe. We have the box here, and will soon find the key. At worst we can only break open the box."

* Meaning his sister-in-law. This is meant as a compliment. "Beautiful as a lady doll" is a current Bengali expression.

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Smiling sadly, Binod said—"But the money I brought for daily expenses is there also, *Didi*; I have nothing in hand."

"Well, you must take from us what you need for the present."

"This box can only be opened in Calcutta. I worked so hard to get these ornaments made for you, and now I cannot even show them to you. That is what vexes me."

"Don't worry yourself about it. I shall see them in a couple of days. What have you brought? Tell me."

"I had a pair of gold bracelets made for you."

Bou Didi was delighted. Binod, gradually recovering himself, said—"Can you make tea, sister? It is quite the thing now to drink tea in the early morning."

Bou Didi's mind was filled with surprise. The younger brother had so quickly recovered from his vexation! But thinking no more of it, she said—"We have none of that leaf, brother."

"Oh, I have some with me. We only want boiling water, sugar and milk."

The children began to dance, crying—"Oh, Uncle! We will drink tea; give us some tea."

For want of a proper teapot, they brought hot water in a jug. A handful of tea was thrown into it and the mouth closed with a stone cup.

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The children brought one a cup, another a glass, the third an open water vessel, and seated themselves. When the tea was brewed, sugar and milk were mixed with it in the jug. Then, placing a strainer over the mouth of the jug, *Bou Didi* poured out the tea. Whether the tea reached the children's inside or no, great waves of it played over the floor.

CHAPTER III

Atul Ghosh, *Zemindar* of the neighbouring village, had a daugher fourteen years old, still unmarried. Binod Bihari, a young man of their of their own caste and of good family, accomplished and unmarried, had just arrived. What might not eventually result from these facts?

On the afternoon of that day, Ghosh Mahashoi sent a messenger to Bijai Mitra with a proposal. Bijai returned for answer that if such a thing should come about, it would give him pleasure: that he would inquire what his family and Binod thought of the proposal. The family said—"We have seen the maiden; there is nothing objectionable about her. If they are not too stingy with the dowry there will be no opposition, and the marriage might take place this April."

Even if a maiden has been seen a thousand times, yet, if a proposal of marriage be made for

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her, a state visit of inspection becomes necessary. So in an hour indicated as auspicious, Bijai Mitra went with a number of his friends to visit the maiden. Ghosh Mahashoi welcomed them very graciously; but when the matter of dowry came to be discussed, he was unwilling to go beyond a thousand rupees. The friends of the young man could not restrain a smile at the absurdity of the proposal. They said—"Why, the father of a lad who had just passed the Entrance and was reading for the F.A. would demand as much as a thousand rupees, and what would he be worth? He would be lucky if he obtained a post at Rs. 15 a month."

The girl's friends replied—"Ah! that is quite a separate matter. He is being educated. He is a fish of the sea, to what size he would grow we do not know yet. Perhaps he may one day be a judge of the High Court. But for one who has already entered service, the prospects have become limited to a certain extent, you admit that, don't you?"

In this sort of discussion Ghosh Mahashoi rose gradually to two thousand rupees. The others said—"A thousand in ornaments. and gifts to the value of another thousand; else we cannot entertain the proposal." To which Ghosh Mahashoi replied that he would consider the matter and

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send them word. Approving of this decision, the young man's friends enjoyed a final smoke and went their way home.

The next day news came that Ghosh Mahashoi had with much difficulty raised his offer to two thousand five hundred rupees. If they were content with that, well; otherwise negotiations must cease. Bijai Mitra sent an answer saying that money was a matter of small value; a good connexion much more to be desired. And his desire for connexion with Ghosh Mahashoi was such that he agreed to let the dowry stand at two thousand and five hundred rupees. And now the day might be fixed upon.

There was no difficulty in satisfying Binod; but when he heard of the thousand rupees' worth of ornaments he began to grumble—"What sort of ornaments can one obtain for a thousand rupees, *Bou Didi*? The bracelets I had made for you cost over two hundred and fifty rupees. You can't get a decent set of ornaments for a thousand rupees."

"Of course you can't. They will serve the present purpose and you can change them afterwards when you have saved the money."

Binod meditated for a while, then said—"See, sister-in-law, let us manage this way. Tell those people not to have the ornaments made, but to

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give us cash the thousand rupees they are to cost; then, with thousand rupees of ours joined to it, I can have ornaments made to my taste in Calcutta. I shall have to go there to get this box opened."

Bou Didi, with her hand pressed to her brow, thought over the suggestion, then said—"It is not a bad idea. They shall be told to do that. And when we send the bride back to her parents we can array her in the ornaments."

"Say, sister-in-law, how many days will it take to go to Calcutta, get the ornaments made, and bring them here?"

"How many days? If you go to sister Abala's house in Nebutolah, call in the jeweller, and cause him to sit there and make the ornaments, they will be ready in seven days. That is how she has her own ornaments made."

"Will the Ghoshes agree?"

"Why should they not?"—replied the sister-in-law, who then went to consult her husband. Bijai Mitra said—"I see no reason why they should not agree." But, turning things over in his mind as he smoked, he thought within himself—"Whether my brother has secured a good post or not, his character has much deteriorated."

Atul Ghosh agreed. He could not let his daughter appear on the marriage seat quite

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devoid of ornaments, so he was obliged to supply some. Then he had to give the cash also. In the end the cost amounted to three thousand rupees. The marriage was carried out with great pomp. The bride's name was Sarat Kumari.

CHAPTER IV.

Binod's sister-in-law said to the mother of the newly-made bride—"It will take time to make the ornaments, so we cannot send the bride home to you in less than a fortnight."*

The mother answered—"That will be all right. You are quite near, and I will send a palanquin now and then to bring her over for a few hours; this will suffice for the time." A young lady who was standing by remarked—"Nowadays, brides don't weep as they did formerly when going to the mother-in-law's house. In a couple of days they become chums with their husbands."

A week passed after the wedding, yet Binod said no word of going to Calcutta. Jesting relatives began to wink, and say—"One bunch before

* After a short visit to her mother-in-law, it is usual for a bride to return to her parents for a time before settling down in her husband's home.—TRANSLATOR

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reaching the top of the tree." * The sister-in-law approaching Binod, said to him—"Brother, further delay in getting the ornaments made will not look well. I met the bride's aunt yesterday, and she enquired if the ornaments had come yet."

Binod said—"Do you wish to drive me away, sister-in-law? You are a friend indeed!"

"I quite understand, brother; but you must do something to satisfy the family. Go early in the morning to Calcutta, spend the day there; buy the gold, call in the goldsmith, give the measures, and charge Abala Didi to see them done, and then return by the evening train, which gets in here about midnight. I will leave food for you in your bedroom."

"How wise you are, sister-in-law!"

It was arranged that early the next morning Binod should go to Calcutta. Evening fell;

* On a dark night a thief went out to steal dates from a neighbour's tree. Another thief was there before him, who, having plucked a bunch, let it down with a string to avoid noise. The second thief, when half-way up, caught the bunch (not perceiving the first thief) and exclaimed: "Hullo, what luck! a bunch before reaching the top." This proverb is used when something happens before its time. Binod was just married, and his devotion to his wife was quite premature. In such marriages men do not fall in love with their wives until one or two years have passed.

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supper over, bedtime came. Placing their bed before the open venetians Binod and Sarat Kumari lay down. The garden lay bathed in moonlight; a pleasant air was blowing.

Binod was more silent than usual. Sarat Kumari said—"Of what are you thinking?"

"Of much trouble."

"What trouble,"—the girl asked, anxiously.

Binod answered—"If I tell you, you won't trust me any longer."

Sarat said—"Can a wife distrust her husband?"

Binod kept his eyes on his wife's face. Her hair lay in loose curls upon her temples. Sincerity beamed from her eyes.

Binod said—"I am an evil man. I have deceived you all."

The girl looked at her husband in silence. Binod continued—"I have no employment in Motihari, neither have I 120 rupees a month."

In great astonishment Sarat said—"Where, then, do you work?"

"I have no employment. I was in the railway office at Allahabad, but I lost that post. Seeing no other resource, I thought I would get some money by marrying, and so used this stratagem. I knew that if I succeeded in effecting a marriage by means of the pretended excellent post, discovery

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must immediately follow; so I meant to fly at once with the money."

A little earlier, in deep sincerity and boundless faith, the girl had said—"Can a wife ever distrust her husband?" But as at the touch of dawn the darkness of night quickly vanishes, so at this revelation of her husband's true character her faith in him rapidly melted away. She remained voiceless, as though under the weight of a heavy blow.

Placing a hand on his wife's shoulder, Binod went on—"When, before the marriage, I said I would have the ornaments made in Calcutta, it was with this design. Under the pretext of getting them made, I meant at some time to go off with the money. You have brought these schemes to the ground."

Sarat, with a shiver, removed her shoulder from beneath her husband's hand, and sat up in the bed, saying—"What have I done?"

"You have bound me in golden fetters. I cannot leave you. Nevertheless, I cannot stay. If I do, the thing will come out—to-day or to-morrow. I could not show my face for shame."

The girl's heart was bursting with anger, contempt and shame. Then she asked—"Where did you mean to go?"

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"I meant going to the coal mines; and it is there I will go and take a contract. The work is hard, but profitable."

Suddenly Sarat said—"I will go with you."

Binod sprang up in the bed. "You will go, Sarat?"—he said, joyfully. "Can you go?"

"I can. Have you thought for a moment what I shall have to endure from people's tongues if you go and I stay? The whole country will jeer at us; people will say whatever comes into their minds, and I shall have to sit and listen to them."

Binod's joy was overcast. Sarat's flight meant not self-devotion only, but self-protection. After a while he said—"Then we will go together."

"When?"

"It is arranged that I shall go to Calcutta early on the day after to-morrow. So before we sleep I will put the money in the hand bag and place it in this room, At about two o'clock in the morning we will go. We will take a small cottage near the mines. The place is quite unknown. There we will begin a new life."

What was it that arose in the girl bride's mind amid anger and sorrow? One phrase kept thrusting itself upon her—"You have brought my schemes to the ground." The thought was a sweet one. Her husband had been unable to fly, leaving her behind. It was like one sweet

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fruit in a forest of thorns. She fell asleep with this atom of joy ever rising amid the confusion of her thoughts.

When, on the day but one after, *Bou Didi* came to arouse Binod as agreed upon, there was no one to be found. On the bed there lay a letter addressed to her husband :—

" Honoured Brother,—I have gone West with my wife. I have imposed upon you all. I am not employed at Motihari. I had a small post in the railway office at Allahabad, but that I lost through drinking. Then being destitute, I resolved upon helping myself by marriage. Lest I should be found out, I searched the Directory to see whether anyone of my name held a good post anywhere. I found that in Motihari a certain Binod Bihari Mitra had a good berth. Fixing his salary in my mind, I came home and got married.

" I have not a single copper. My cash box is filled with broken glass. My sister-in-law's bracelets are not yet made. Please have them made with the thousand rupees I obtained in the marriage. I have resolved to use the jewel money in business. If some day I am able to retrieve my character and condition, you will see me again ; for the present I bid you a respectful farewell.

Your unworthy servant,

SRI BINOD BIHARI MITRA."

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On reading the letter, *Bou Didi* was astounded; but since he had gone confessing the truth, she was not so very angry with her young brother-in-law. But the fact that the girl yet so young had accompanied her husband struck the sister-in-law as being very extraordinary, and in her mind she began to ponder—"What are the times coming to?"

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THE FOREST CHILD

CHAPTER I

WELL-EQUIPPED with warm clothing, Kumud Nath, his wife and two-year-old boy, *Khoka*, set out for Simla on the 1st of December. The day for the journey had been fixed by the most exact astrological reckoning. And when fortune proved adverse, no one could say at what point the calculations went wrong. To this husband and wife the journey proved to be the heaviest misfortune that had ever befallen them.

Having been for some years subject to malarial fever, Kumud Nath had become reduced to skin and bone. The doctor advised him to spend some months in a cold climate. The name of Kumud Babu's wife was Giribala. She was born in the Simla hills, and had lived there some years, as her father, the late Kali Kanta Mitra, had worked there. She now urged her husband to go to Simla.

Kumud Nath exclaimed—"Ruination! Go to Simla in the cold?"

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Giribala answered,—"There is not so much to fear as you think. The cold at Simla is delightful. You have never seen a snowstorm; it is a wonderful thing."

Kumud Babu consulted the doctor. He said —"It won't hurt you, but the contrary. But you must be very careful of yourself."

The journey was made strictly according to the doctor's instructions. They spent three weeks in Simla in great enjoyment. Kumud Nath had an intimate friend in the Simla Collectorate Office, named Jadu Babu. He rented a handsome two-storied house. At first Kumud Nath could not walk very much. He would lie on a couch studying the Simla Guide Book, planning excursions, or sit at a window watching the string of loaded camels passing on the highway, or the different vehicles—the *ekka*, the *tonga*, or the *jhampan*. The novelty of it all amused him. The faces of the hill women pleased him beyond measure. Close at hand fields of grain cut like steps in the side of the precipice; the Lepcha huts, the Lepcha dress, their form and gait interested him beyond expression. Again, a fresh wonder. On the 20th of December there was a good fall of snow. Kumud Babu was as delighted with it as his litte boy. Giribala rejoiced in her husband's pleasure.

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To-day is the 25th—the Great Day! At eight in the morning, Jadu Babu, putting on his ulster and gaiters, took his tall snow staff and presented himself at Kumud Babu's house in Boileauganj. Kumud Babu had not entirely given up his bed.

The two friends sat drinking very hot tea. Jadu Babu asked Kumud if he took much walking exercise.

"Not so very much, but I do walk. Yesterday I went round Jakko."

"When you are stronger I will walk with you. You could not go my pace now, you would lose your breath."

Having finished his first cup of tea, Jadu Babu took a second. Up to this lamps had been burning in the room, but as it had now become light outside, the servant put them out. Jadu Babu finished his second cup, and then prepared to depart.

"Sit down, I beg; what is your hurry?"

"There is some business——"

"Some *Yoga* ceremonies?"

It was well known in Simla that Jadu Babu secretly practised the *Yoga* ceremonial. With a confused laugh, he replied—"Oh, that is all over."

"Then?"

"To-day I have other business. After the early meal I go to visit the Tara Devi. The ladies have been urging me to do so."

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"To go and see Tara Devi? Why did you not tell me? Ever since we came my wife has been anxious to go one day. How far is it?"

"Six or seven miles."

"Can one go in a rickshaw?"

"Yes; you can go to the foot of the hill. A rickshaw can't climb to the top, of course."

"When must one start to be able to return by evening?"

"If you start at noon it will do."

The whole thing was arranged. Jadu Babu said it would be better to start earlier—say eleven o'clock. Happily, the sky was clear. Five days had passed since the last fall of snow. It had now melted and dried up. The road would probably be clear also. Jadu Babu said that at eleven his own rickshaw and three others for Kumud's party, including one for the child's servant, would be waiting. Then, taking his snow staff, he went off smiling, his feet making a slushering sound in the slush. Kumud Babu thought —"He goes like a demon; how can one go like that?"

Presently Giribala came in. She showed no joy on hearing they were to visit Tara Devi. She said—"Why should we go in a crowd? You and I were going together; I shan't have a chance of talking to you."

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"It does not do to go about alone in a strange country. They know all about it, and can explain everything to us."

Giribala answered gently—"I know about everything in this place."

It was then nearly ten o'clock. They got through with the bathing and breakfast. They gave the boy his milk, touched up his eyelids with black, and dressed him.

At half-past eleven Jadu Babu and his people arrived at the gate. At the moment of starting Giribala's left eyelid did not quiver, there was no sign of coming misfortune to disturb her, nevertheless she remained depressed. Now, when this pilgrimage to Tara Devi recurs to her mind, her whole frame shudders.

When they reached the boundary of Simla, Kumud Babu alighted from his rickshaw and walked with Jadu Babu. This excited in the ladies a desire to walk. They too alighted and went some little way, then became fatigued and returned to their rickshaws. Upon which Jadu Babu reflected, laughingly—"Women have no strength; they like to pretend to do everything. Is it likely they can ascend hills?"

Giribala chatted joyously with her companions; there was no longer any sadness in her thoughts. At two o'clock the rickshaws had

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reached Tara Devi. It is a mountain peak about two hundred feet high from its base. Leaving the rickshaws, they ascended the peak.

Within the temple there was the stone image of Tara Devi painted in vermilion. It was a frightful sight to see. The ladies began their worship. The two gentlemen went about observing the natural beauties of the place: on one side a deep precipice, on the other lofty forests. A solitary place, dear to thoughtful minds. Not far off rose the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. After noon the atmosphere glittered with the intensity of the sun's rays. The Temple Priest began to chat with them. His home was in Hushiarpur. What sort of an income did he get? Not much of that. Hillmen scarcely paid any money; some brought wheat, some potatoes, some honey. Rich people—Chiefs, Rajas, Maharajas—when they came, bestowed lavishly. There was great difficulty about water. It had to be brought in *ghaillas* from the well below—when the spring therein was in flow.

At this moment the cry of a child was heard not far off from beneath a withered tree. A forest child had been lying sleeping in the sun, it now was sitting up crying. Glancing at the child, the priest said—"*Babuji*, two days ago I fell into great trouble about that child." The two

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friends went slowly towards the tree. The child had on a leather coat and a curious skin cap with the hair on; some bones strung together as a necklace were round his throat. He was about two years old. The priest said he had picked up the child two days before. Some hill woman had lost him, and had not yet come in search of him.

Kumud Nath said to Jadu Babu—"Come along, we will take him with us."

"Are you mad? What can you do with him?"

"Bring him up."

"And if his mother comes in search of him?"

"I will give my address to the priest. If the child's mother comes I will give him up to her."

With these words Kumud Nath called his wife aside. At first she did not consent to the proposal. Kumud Nath urged the helpless condition of the child. He said—"Among these uncivilised races they don't concern themselves about the loss of a child; if they did, the mother would have come in search of it. In a day or two the child, if he stays here, will die."

These words stirred the mother's heart in Giribala. She gave it some milk from that brought for her own boy. It was now time to return. It was near four o'clock, and at five the

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sun would set. *Khoka* took possession of his father's lap. The forest child was entrusted to the servant. By seven o'clock the party returned to Simla.

CHAPTER II

On the next day Giribala gave the forest child a warm bath, took off his necklace, wrapped him in flannel and touched his eyes with black. Kumud Nath said his name was to remain Buno (Forester). *Khoka* now began to regard him as a fellow-creature,—hitherto he had shrunk from him as from some wild animal.

In the evening Jadu Babu was to come to dinner. He soon gave proof that vain boasting was not a habit with him. After dinner he said—"One day you will have to pay for having adopted that child."

Kumud Nath replied, with a laugh—"My dear sir, he is not a tiger-cub that he should, when grown, be unable to forget the habits of his race, and eat one up."

Jadu Babu did not answer immediately, but after a time he said, with a loud laugh—"Quite true, quite true; we'll see you make a man of him—don't coddle him."

The forest child played heartily all day, but at dawn next day his body was very hot—he had

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fever. The whole day he lay senseless. In the evening Kumud Nath brought a doctor, who said the cold had affected his lungs. During two days the usual remedies were applied, but the child did not recover. He died in Giribala's lap at 2 a.m. on the 29th December.

Giribala wept long. She said—"Alas! Whose child is it? It would have been better if we had not brought it. What a mistake! Why have we been deluded thus? What can we say to the mother if she comes?"

Khoka became sad at the loss of his companion. Perpetually he asked—"Where is Buno gone?"

The whole day was spent in grieving by the husband and wife. About nine in the evening, when, after his meal, Kumud was preparing to go to rest, the voice of the postman was heard below. He gave the letters to the servant and departed; the sound of his steps became inaudible.

Kumud Nath each moment expected the servant to come upstairs, letters in hand. But he came not. Kumud Nath opened the shutters with intent to call out to him, when, along with a very cold wind, an indistinct sound as of a great scuffle reached his ear. To learn what was going on, Kumud Nath descended with a lantern. He found his servant, Bisua, holding a beautiful young

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hill woman, with both his arms round her waist. With much exertion of force, she was striving to free herself. At sight of Kumud Nath she produced a *kukri* knife from the corner of her garment. Kumud Nath stepped back; the servant also let go the woman, who fled swiftly through the open door.

Bisua, much excited, exclaimed—"A thief, master!"

Kumud Nath, thinking him stupid, said—"If you had held both her hands, she could not have got the knife out."

"She is very strong in body, Sir. Had I not caught her that way, I could not have held her."

Anyhow Kumud thought, since the thief had been prevented from robbing, it was well she should escape. If they had held her they would have had to give her up to the police, with all the bother of a prosecution. He went upstairs and laid himself down. Giribala, when she heard the facts, said—"She was no thief; she was your servant's mistress. In fear of being caught she used her wits."

"Then why the knife?"

"Do you not know? It is customary with these hill women. They always have a knife about them."

The next morning Kumud Babu questioned his servant, but he denied any knowledge of the woman.

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CHAPTER III

That day the sky was very clear. *Khoka*, being put in the perambulator, was taken out for an airing by the servant. It was now two, Giribala had repeatedly desired the servant to return not later than one o'clock. Three struck, and still no *Khoka*. At half-past three husband and wife were greatly alarmed. They were about to send a servant in search, when a letter came from the police office *Daroga* requesting Kumud Nath to attend at the police station on a special matter.

First the non-return of the child, and now this police summons, filled them with fear of misfortune. Kumud Babu went out at once. Giribala wandered restlessly about the house like a stricken deer. After a time she despatched Bisua to the police station, with orders if his master's return was not immediate, to come back and tell her what was going on.

When Kumud Babu reached the *thana* he found a great crowd there. In the verandah, *Khoka*, seated in the perambulator, was crying, a policeman standing on guard. His father took him in his arms and kissed him. *Khoka*, satisfied, became calm. The *Daroga*, with a *salaam*, said—"Babu, you have had one great trouble; now

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another has come about. A *Lepcha* woman tried to kill your child; your servant preventing her, she stabbed him with her knife."

"Where is my servant?"

"I've sent him to the Ripon Hospital."

"Will he live?"

"It is to be feared he will not. She would have killed the child also, but that Khoda Bux, the constable, caught her."

Kumud Babu was overwhelmed. He thought —"It must be the woman of last night." He asked—"Where is the prisoner?"

The *Daroga* took Kumud Babu to the cell. He saw that it was indeed she, the beautiful hill woman. Kumud Babu's thoughts were paralysed: he could not conceive why she should feel such enmity against him. He asked the *Daroga*— "Do you know why she tried to kill my child? Has she confessed anything?"

"She says she lost her child on Tara Devi hill, that you brought it away and killed it. So she has tried to get her revenge."

"I killed her child! I ——!"

"I have learned all from your servant's deposition. See, Babu, they are a terrible race; how can they understand that you out of goodness brought away the child to preserve its life? They think you brought it away to slaughter it, and that you did so."

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Kumud Nath before this had sent *Khoka* home with Bisua. Now, after giving his own deposition, he went home, sending the perambulator by a coolie.

Giribala, weeping, said—"To-day my child is born again. In what evil hour did I bring him from home? Let us go back there—not another hour will I stay here."

The next day was cloudy. After rain there was a snowfall. What delight for *Khoka*! He wanted to put his hand through the shutters and touch the snow. It became very dark. Before four o'clock lamps had to be lighted. Kumud Babu said—"Let us dine early this evening." After playing all day, *Khoka* had fallen asleep. At six, Kumud Babu sat down to eat. Giribala lit a fire and then sat down by her husband, chatting with him. When he had finished he went out on to the circular verandah. Like a flash of lighting he saw a woman darting forth in front of him. It was the same person, that destructive *Lepcha* woman. A moment or two earlier, she had slain the warder and escaped from the cell.

For a moment, under the stress of excitement, Kumud Nath pursued her. Going below he saw Bisua lying with his throat cut, the floor covered with blood. The sight staggered him. His

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understanding became obscured. He reeled like a drunken man up the stairs.

Entering the sleeping room he saw Giribala rolling on the ground in an agony of weeping. That ogress had slain their child.

Outside in the cold dark evening, snow fell unceasingly.

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THE FOUNDLING

I

IT was afternoon. The swollen Ganges of the month of *Sawan* was lapping the roots of the banian tree at the *ghat* of Motiganj. A decayed-looking boat was being moored there. Out of it stepped cautiously an aged lean-bodied Brahman. The boatman handed to him his bag, his umbrella and his stick. Taking them in one hand, with the other he extended a small silver coin, a quarter-rupee, as payment for the rowers. The boatman taking the coin, said—"Master, there are five of us, how will four annas suffice?"

"Do you mean to say that four annas is too little?"

"*Huzoor*, the whole will go in buying four seers of rice. Then there is the cooking pot, the wood and the salt to buy."

"There! take two more annas,"—and the Brahman, carefully and with many countings dealt eight pice into the boatman's hand. Even yet the boatman was not satisfied. He said—"Sir, five pice each after a hard day's labour is not enough. Make it the full eight annas."

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After some further haggling the old man threw down four more pice. Then looking carefully all round he said in a low voice to the boatman—"If any one asks you what has brought you here, say—'Our Thakur has come hither to arrange a wedding.'" Then the old man ascended slowly to the road and made his way at the same pace to his destination. People entering the village shops, stood for a moment gazing curiously at the unknown figure, and then went about their business.

The old man was named Sitanath Mukerji. He lived at Nobogram. Sitting down early in the morning to write, one knows not what Fate has in store. No one in Nobogram ever uttered the old man's name until after breaking his fast. His character for miserliness was widely known.*

At Motigunj lived the father-in-law of Sita-Nath's son. Five years earlier the daughter of Hrishikesh Banerji had been married to Sriman Annada Charan, the youngest son of Sitanath Mukerji. After a time the daughter-in-law having reason to expect an infant was taken to her father's house. She gave birth to a daughter and left this

* A superstition exists that if any one, before breaking his fast, should utter the name of a very miserly person, he may expect that Fate will deprive him of food for that day. So the author, writing of Sitanath before breakfast, says he knows not what is before him.—*Translator.*

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world. This was now five or six months ago. Five years before, in gala dress and accompanied by a troop of musicians, Sitanath had conveyed the young bridegroom in a palanquin along this road. These memories gave his countenance a slightly saddened look.

It did not take long to reach Banerji's house. The reception-room was opened and Sitanath took a seat there. The marks of *Basudhárá* made on the wall at the time of his son's wedding were visible. His son's father-in-law, Hrishi Kesh, had been at that period a very prosperous man. He had spent 3,000 Rupees on the marriage of his daughter. He was engaged in the grain exporting business. During the five years that had since elapsed, loss followed upon loss, until now he was not merely ruined but involved in debt. The marks on the wall of the reception-room, which had not once been white-washed since the wedding, though a common enough sight, indicated his embarrassed condition.

A servant lad mending the garden fence, cast sideway glances at Sitanath sitting in the reception-room. The latter ht sight of the caugboy and said—"Oh, you,—inform your master that Sitanath Mukerji of Nobogram has arrived."

The lad, not vouchsafing a word in reply to this injunction, looked silently at the new arrival.

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Gloomily he attached a piece of wood to the fence and made it firm with a piece of rope. Then with a sour face and sluggish steps he went to the inner apartments.

Without much delay, Hrishi Kesh, in coarse and not too fresh apparel came out to the visitor. Sitanath observed that his son's father-in-law was no longer the personable man of former days. His figure had deteriorated, his eyes were cavernous. The two men exchanged salutations and embraces and made the usual polite inquiries. The eyes of Hrishi Kesh were overflowing. Big drops fell upon his raiment. The servant, coming in, served tobacco. For a long time the two men smoked steadily on, speaking not a word.

At length Sitanath said—"Brother! what was to happen has happened and can never be recalled. Why indulge this vain grief? Let me see the little girl."

Hrishi Kesh arose and went indoors. Presently he returned followed by a nurse bearing in her arms an emaciated child in a chintz wrapper. It neither smiled nor wept, but kept its gaze fixed in one direction as though indifferent to everything.

The grandfather, in honour of its being his first sight of the child, produced a half rupee, but on second thoughts exchanged the smaller coin for a whole rupee. Never in his life had Mukerji

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Mahashoi been known to make an exchange in this direction, but now he had a particular reason for doing so. Offering the rupee he looked in his grand daughter's face. The nurse took the coin but as one dissatisfied, averted her face. The present of a rupee did not impress her favourably —she thought—"Mean creature!—A firstborn child and the mother dead too! Could he not have given gold!"

Gradually it became dark. Mukerji, washing his hands and feet, entered the house for the evening service. Scarcely had he seated himself on the prayer carpet when he heard the voice of his son's mother-in-law weeping and calling for her lost daughter. The bitter cry of the mother's heart seemed to make the twilight quiver. From the eyes of Hrishi Kesh also tears streamed abundantly. Sitanath remained cold and apathetic, saying only from time to time—"Ha! *Narayan*, what hast thou done?"

When the sobs of the mother ceased, Sitanath finished his devotions and then sat down to partake of a meal. But what was it that still troubled his inner thoughts? Of the purpose that had brought him such a distance by river he had not yet said a word. Since his arrival he had made many attempts to broach the subject but without success. At length he decided to let it rest for the night.

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"Let it be!"—he thought—"I shall speak of it to-morrow. I shall get through the night somehow."

After the meal a bed was prepared for him in the reception-room. Hrishi Kesh took leave for the night. The before mentioned serving lad slept at one side on a blanket.

A prey to evil thoughts, the Brahman could not sleep, but passed the night in harassing doubt as to whether the design that had brought him would or would not be accomplished. The serving lad's rest was interrupted by constant demands for the *hookah*.—When he was roused up for the fourth time to prepare it, he said—"There is no more tobacco left, Sir, it is all consumed." Seizing an opportunity when unobserved, he had thrust out the remnants of tobacco through the slits of the venetian shutters to escape further trouble.

II

With the morning Sitanath arose, calling on the goddess *Durga*. His son's father-in-law came to join him and as they sat together, smoking, Sitanath resolved to speak. By way of preface he began thus:—

"My dear Sir, there is no way of escape from destiny. Who can upset the decrees of fate? I have four more daughters-in-law; but among them all there is not one to compare with her who was

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the youngest. As was her beauty so also was her virtue. To her charm all, even the animals and the birds, were subject. We have a cow at home named Rangi, of such an evil disposition that no one can approach it. Even if you feed it, it thrusts at you with its horns: only to the little daughter-in-law was it gracious. The young wives quarrel amongst themselves, that happens in all families, but my other daughters-in-law always regarded the little one as their very own sister. When the sad news of her death came, my eldest daughter-in-law fell to the ground from the shock. For three days and nights she did not touch food. To this day she says—I should have felt less keenly the loss of my own child."

Hrishi Kesh wept profusely. In quivering tones he said—"No more, Sir, I beseech you. What can come of dwelling upon it? Speak of something else, I beg."

Sitanath was silent. He was floored by his own ill-judged beginning. He sat cursing his own stupidity. After a while, he began to talk of different matters and then furious with himself he made a fresh attempt. Rejecting all preface he spoke to the point. In the utterance it sounded so brutal that he was himself ashamed.

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It was simply a question of the daughter-in-law's wedding ornaments. The old man had come to claim them.

The demand made, Hrishi Kesh remained silent for a long time. When he had heard that his daughter's father-in-law was coming, he perfectly understood what was bringing him. And now the claim was made. He sometimes used to cherish the hope that he would keep the jewels, and would not give them up. If his grand child should live, the burthen of getting her married would fall upon him. He would keep the jewels and let them be her wedding ornaments. When he had spent 2,000 rupees in ornaments for his daughter's wedding, he had been fairly wealthy. Now all that was changed. The thought of how his family would be maintained in the case of his own death often gave him grave concern.

Yet amid all these thoughts, despair of being able to retain the jewels grew in his mind. At last he resolved in any case to try and put it off for the present. He said—"Mukerji Mahashoi, those things belong to you. Of what I once gave to your son I will not keep back a single pennyweight. But I must ask you to wait a little. I cannot give them to you now."

Mukerji Mahashoi's face became withered. His thought was—"This man has pledged the

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ornaments. If so, it is ruin." Aloud he said—"Why so? What prevents you from giving them now?"

Uttering a deep sigh Hrishi Kesh answered—"Our grief is not six months old. Give us time. Who is to take the ornaments out of the jewel case? I know not where to look for them; and my wife, since that dreadful night, does not set foot in the girl's chamber, and to touch anything that belonged to her, makes her weep distressingly. How then can I say to her—'Open your child's box and take out her jewels?'—We lost a little girl years ago at Triveni: that is past and gone—but this second loss—. Grant us time: we will give you the things after a while."

Fourteen years before, on the occasion of the great *Varuni* Festival, Hrishi Kesh with his family had gone to bathe in the Ganges at Triveni, and there lost a little girl about two years old. This is the fact to which he refers here. The reason given by Hrishi Kesh for his reluctance to part with the jewels was only too true, but then every one does not regard such a reason as sufficient. Sitanath did not. He said angrily—

"Brother, is not the grief mine also? But what can I do? Where there is a family there must also be sorrow. I have never seen any one yet, who could escape it, be it the King on his throne or the beggar by the way side. But a man

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of the world gets over it in a couple of months; eats, sleeps, laughs and goes about his daily business. If she is so overwhelmed, do you yourself take the key, open the case and bring out the jewels."

Hrishi Kesh went on smoking in gloomy silence. Sitanath began to press him—still the father-in-law could not abandon the hope of retaining the ornaments. He said, sadly—"Let us wait till the year is out, Mahashoi, then come and fetch them away. Nay, if you wish it, I will undertake to deliver the jewels at your own house."

Sitanath said harshly—"Man's life is like unto the water on a lotus leaf. To-day it is here, to-morrow it is gone. We cannot be sure of an hour. Suppose I do not live a year?"

Hrishi Kesh said to himself—"If you do not live, the value of the jewels will be spent on your *sradh*." Aloud he said—"In that case your jewels will remain in our care and will be used for your grand daughter's wedding."

Sitanath answered with a sneer—"Do you suppose my grand daughter will always remain with you? When she has grown a little, I shall take her away. My eldest daughter-in-law is crazy to see the child. Even when I was leaving home she said—'Father, shall I come with you and see the little

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one?' You talk of the child's marriage, but how do we know what is our destiny? Will this child live? From what I saw in her face just now, I did not think there was much hope of it."

Hrishi Kesh was a shrewd man of business. He caught up the other's words saying—"Very well, let the jewels remain and do you take them when you fetch the child."

At these words Sitanath became furious. "Ho, brother! Do you distrust me? Will it be for your good to vex a Brahman by making him return without the jewels?"

Hrishi Kesh had known the character of his daughter's father-in-law before now and recognised that he was not to be turned from his purpose. So feeling it useless to raise further difficulties he said—"Then take them."

Sitanath's face became joyous. He said—"After the midday meal I will go home. I am now going to bathe in the Ganges. Do you get the jewels ready for me by the time I come back."

His bath finished, Sitanath with great ostentation seated himself on the *ghat* to perform his devotions. To-day the gods had shown him great favour, so his devotions were zealous and prolonged. Returning to the house, he quickly finished his meal. He could not endure longer

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delay. He said to Hrishi Kesh—"Brother, bring the jewels now. By *Durga's* favour I will set out this afternoon."

Hrishi Kesh went to the inner rooms and stayed there a very long time. Sitanath thought—"Give them he will, but he is putting off the evil moment as long as he can." Being in a very cheerful mood he began to hum,

> "Reject, Oh mind, all earthly care,
> Seek *Krishna's* feet in constant prayer."

Then seeing Hrishi Kesh returning empty-handed his song came to an abrupt end. He said with surprise—"What has happened?"

"It cannot be."

"What does that mean?"

Hrishi Kesh explained—"Mukerji Mahashoi I was ready to give you the ornaments. When I first spoke to my wife, she wept bitterly, then she said—'There is no key. It was fastened to my daughter's waist and went with her to the funeral pyre."

Sitanath did not credit this story. He said angrily—"That won't do for me. If there is no key, break open the box. I will not leave without the jewels."

Hrishi Kesh said—"If you won't go, then you are welcome to stay. As there is no key, what can I do? Does it become you to compel me to

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outrage my wife's feelings by calling in a blacksmith and having the box broken open?"

Sitanath with distorted face, screamed out—"No, such a conduct does not become me. It becomes you to cheat a Brahman. Will you give them, or will you not, Sir? Speak plainly. If you will not give them, I will snap my sacred thread and depart, cursing you.* It shall be your ruin and that before the third night shall expire."

Hrishi Kesh, looking at the convulsed features of Sitanath, felt highly insulted. He went himself to call in a smith, took him to the upper story and had the box broken open. The mother seeing this cruel piece of work, rolled on the ground in an agony of grief.

The father-in-law having departed with the jewels, Hrishi Kesh also laid himself down upon his bed. On that day neither husband nor wife touched food again.

III

We are now at Nobogram, on the bank of the Bhagirathi, surrounded by trees. It is early dawn. The birds have not yet begun their morning song. Wearing a tattered quilt around his person and a turban round his head, Sitanath walked very

* A Brahman's curse, accompanied with the snapping of his holy thread, is believed to be particularly dangerous.

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slowly towards his home. The rain of the previous night, dripping from the boughs of the trees, soaked his clothing.

Gradually he reached the entrance gate. It was shut. On each side of it was a brick-built seat much broken from long neglect. On either side grew flowering shrubs now a mass of bloom.

Sitanath in a thin hoarse voice called out—"Nitai!" After the third call an answer was obtained from within—"Coming"—and Nitai rushing forward opened the gate. A glance at his master rendered him speechless with surprise. In one week's time Sitanath's appearance had become so greatly changed. No umbrella, no walking stick, no bag, and where had he got that tattered quilt from? Nitai could not make it out at all. He was of the weaver caste. A serving lad in his apprenticeship, he received no wages, only food and protection. Sitanath asked—"How are things going on, Nitai? Is the family well?"

"Quite well. But where is your stick, Sir, and your umbrella?"

The old man cast a piteous look upon Nitai, who said—"You have come back without them I think?"

Weeping, the aged man replied—"Yes, Nitai, they are gone."

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Nitai had long cast a covetous eye upon that bamboo walking stick. He had long designed carrying it off upon some convenient opportunity and hiding it in his home. So now he was a bit troubled about it. He was sure some servant fellow at Motiganj had taken it, but had he also taken the umbrella? It was such a ragged old thing that had Nitai's master offered it to him as a gift, it is doubtful if he would have taken it. If the fellow had taken it, it must have been with the idea of loosening the staff from its mounts and cutting it up into arrows, for as an umbrella it was of no service at all.

Sitanath went to his own room and sat down. Nitai lit a match, prepared the *hookah* and placed it in his master's hand. But Sitanath set it down on the tarnished brass stand. Never before had he shown such distaste for the tobacco plant. Casting down his eyes and shaking his head with a deep sigh, he said—"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ruin has come upon me." At this sight Nitai took himself out of the way. The eldest son's wife was at that moment scouring the verandah. To her Nitai described his master's condition. She said, "Rouse up the *Bara* Babu."

The eldest son's name was Srinibash. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes he went to Sitanath's room. At his father's appearance he exclaimed in

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astonishment—"What is this? Why are your looks so changed, Sir? Has some misfortune occurred?"

The old man, swaying his head up and down, said in piteous tones—"Ha, ha, ha, ha, destruction has come upon me."

"What has happened? Would they not give the jewels?"

"They gave them, they gave them, but I am ruined."

Srinibash looked eagerly at his father in the hope that he would say something more, but nothing came from the old man's lips, save the same indistinct mutterings.

At length Srinibash said—"Well, what happened? Are they lost?"

The old man answered as before. This time Srinibash, annoyed, said—"What has happened? Will you not speak plainly?"

"They are gone, I tell you. They are lost."

"But in what way? Were they stolen?"

"No."

"Taken by dacoits?"

"No."

"Then."

This time Sitanath got out with much difficulty the words—"Bhudhar Chatterji of Chandbari has taken them."

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The son said angrily—"Who is he? How can he have taken the jewel case? Did he seize upon it? Have you come quietly away without seeking the aid of the police?"

"Did I not go to the police? I went to the police, but the *Daroga* of that *thana* is the husband of Bhudhar Chatterji's sister."

"Let him be her husband or her father. If you made a charge, he must write it in his diary and have a search made."

"He enter it in his diary? On the contrary he threatened me with jail for making a false charge."

In the same mess-house with Srinibash, in his student days, there had been a pupil studying law. From his talk Srinibash had learned something of legal matters. For a shilling he had bought a copy of "Mukhtear's Guide," and whenever there was a law-suit in the village, Srinibash usually advised one party or the other. He now said gravely to his father—"Tell me plainly what happened from first to last; let me see if I cannot find some remedy."

Then the old man began his narrative. I give the essence of it omitting the sighs, the tears, the useless whinings with which he dragged the tale through an hour of time.

Before dusk he had set out on his return journey, the boat being towed from the shore.

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Suddenly the tow-rope breaking, the boat drifted rapidly away in the opposite direction. Coming forcibly in contact with an immense cargo boat at Chandbari *ghat*, the smaller boat was wrecked. The jewel box was fastencd to Sitanath's back with his upper-garment. Bhudhar Chatterji rescued the senseless old man from the water and had him carried to his house. He restored him to life by medical aid but did not return him the jewel box.

Knitting his brows Srinibash asked—"Did he himself confess to having the jewels?"

"Not at first. When I came to my senses I asked—where is the box that was fastened to my back? He answered—We have found no box. Then I screamed out—All my property is gone; you have killed a Brahman. And with that I swooned away again. When I revived, I saw that a doctor had come from somewhere. He said—Don't be anxious, your box is all right. He enquired all about me, felt my pulse, gave me medicine and went away saying—You have nothing to fear; in three days you will be able to get about."

Srinibash said eagerly—"Then I will summon the doctor as a witness to the court. I will get those jewels from Bhudhur Chatterji. I will haul him up by the ears."

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"That is hopeless—useless. Did I not go to the doctor? He said he knew nothing about any jewels. Only to pacify me he had said they were all right. What would you gain by summoning him? He would only say the same in court."

"Then how do you know Bhudhar Chatterji took them?"

"After that Bhudar Chatterji said so himself."

"Admitted having taken them, yet did not give them up! He is a funny fellow! What was his purpose in admitting it? It would have been more to his interest to deny it."

"There is a motive,—he has a motive. He said—Marry your youngest son with my daughter. If you do that, you will get all the jewels as dowry. I am poor and my daughter gets no husband. Your jewels will return to your house, and as a reward I shall be discharged of my obligation to get my daughter married."

To this Srinibash replied—"If that is the way of it, I see there will be difficulties." And he sat biting the ends of his moustach as he pondered.

Sitanath's youngest son was named *Sriman* Annada Charan. He was a youth who had failed to pass the F. A. Examination. He rather affected English customs. Morning and evening he took tea and biscuits. Among the young men of the

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village he was esteemed a learned man. His face was handsome and set off by fine hair. After the death of his wife he published a book of fragmentary poems entitled "Sorrowful Tears of a Broken Heart." Whenever the subject of marriage had been introduced, he had replied to it with great contempt. He was honoured amongst his friends as a faithful lover of his departed wife. There was no hope of its being possible to reconcile him to the proposed marriage. This is why Srinibash anticipated difficulties.

The old man replied—"Do all you can to persuade him into this marriage. Otherwise at my age I shall not be able to bear the loss of these jewels. I shall die of it. Tell him if he does not consent, he will be guilty of the sin of parricide."

Annada's four brothers seized hold of him and kept him in their midst. The whole day they plied him with persuasions, arguments, entreaty, anger, but nothing moved him. His relatives flattered his more intimate friends into using their influence in the same direction. The different arguments against a second marriage advanced by Annada, his friends discussed and demolished one by one as occasion served. And when, leaving aside the practical view of it, he referred to sentiment, they heaped up countless instances of desolate widowers contracting a second marriage.

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Such a one became a *Sannyasi* for the death of his wife and leaving home wandered in the forests and jungles and on mountain heights with his blanket and *lota* on his shoulder, yet ere a year elapsed he returned home and married a second time. Another after losing his wife produced a volume of poetry which was highly eulogised by all the great men of his time from Bankim Babu downwards,—but he married not only once more but even a third time. In this battle Annada was at length obliged to own himself defeated—but he did not consent to marry.

Meanwhile the time was running close. Bhudhar Chatterji had granted ten days only. The 20th *Sawan* would be the last day. Three days were gone, only a week remained.

As the son still refused, the father announced that he would himself marry the girl. "I cannot give up Rs. 2,000 worth of jewels, whatever may befall me in consequence"—said he.

This news getting abroad in the village produced a burst of ridicule. People said that the loss of the jewels and the upsetting of the boat was all fiction, that the sight of a beautiful young girl had turned the old man's head and upset his reason. One said—"Who would have expected this from the old man! His looks are quite deceptive." Another suggested that a copy of Dinabandhu

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Mitra's play "An Old Man's Craze for Marriage" should be bought by subscription and presented to him. One with a turn for verse-making, urged by many, composed some amusing songs on the subject.

One or two of the graver folks came to Sitanath and addressed him, saying—"Mukerji Mahashoi, we hear you intend to marry, but what if they decline to give you the girl? You are somewhat advanced in years, you know, and it is just likely they may not consent."

Sitanath replied—"I knew beforehand that the wayward boy might refuse to marry. But they said if the son refuse, I shall have the ornaments by marrying her myself. The girl is much too grown already and because of their poverty does not get married. So lest they should lose caste, they will not stop to consider if the bridegroom be young or old."

Whatever amusement the village folk might derive from all this, the family on hearing this announcement felt as though a thunderbolt had fallen on their heads. The four sons and their four wives became distracted. Each and all assailed the old man in their various ways.

Sitanath said—"Observe! I have no desire to marry. Do you somehow contrive to bring round Annada and I will solemnise his marriage and bring home the golden bride."

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Annada, poor wretch, had enjoyed a little respite,—but after this the persecutions began afresh with twofold zeal. At length Annada, with face and eyes inflamed, said angrily—"If you all continue to plague me in this way, I will take myself off from home."

The eldest son's wife retorted—"I have seen much in the course of my life, brother-in-law, and if I live I shall see more. You are making a tremendous fuss now—but we shall see how it will end."

24th *Sawan.* There were but five days left to the wedding. Sitanath took money and went to Calcutta. He had said as he went that he would buy there the necessary things and proceed thence to the wedding.

When the old man was gone, a fresh commotion arose in the house. Small and great all turned sword in hand upon Annada. The mother had been dead about ten years. The sons, the daughters and the grand children made a large family. Sitanath did not marry again, nor had people advised that he should do so. So for these ten years the eldest son's wife had been mistress of the house—and now, suddenly, for a raw girl to be brought in to snatch the sceptre of government from her hand! The thought was torture. She came weeping to Annada and said—"Anu brother, there is still

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time—do you now marry this girl, else the golden family will be wrecked."

Suddenly Annada said—"See! *Bou Didi* I have thought of a plan. I hear those people are very poor and that is why the girl does not get married. Do you, amongst yourselves, collect a thousand rupees and let me have them. I will give them to Bhudhar Chatterji and say to him—'You are a Brahman with a daughter to marry. I have brought you a little assistance. Find a suitor to your mind and give him your daughter, and give me back my ornaments.' He may consent. He is not a bad man, his conduct shews that. He might easily have denied having the jewels, you see."

The proposal was discussed in family council. Every one said—"It is not a bad idea. It won't hurt to try it."

It gave them life. Collecting the silver in the house and borrowing a little, they made up the sum. The same evening Annada took boat for Chandbari.

IV

(A LETTER)

VILLAGE OF CHANDBARI,
27th Sawan.

This representation is laid, with many respectful salutations, at the sacred lotus feet of the Excellent and Worshipful Father.

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On the day following your departure for Calcutta, I arrived in the course of business at the village of Chandbari. I first paid my respects to your friend Babu Bhudharnath Chatterji. He is a very nice gentleman. He gave me the most cordial welcome, to the extent that I am staying as a guest in his house.

When my arrival was known, some gentlemen from the village came to see me, and one of them, an elderly person, took me aside and said, "Young gentleman, I hear that you are prepared to marry this Bhudhar Chatterji's daughter."

I replied politely that it was not I, but my honoured father who cherished that desire. At this the gentleman was taken aback. He evidently thought I was making fun of him. So I explained. Whereupon the gentleman said—"That would be ruin. You must not let your father do this. The caste of the girl is not known. She is a foundling. Thirteen or fourteen years ago when the great *Varuni* Festival was held at Triveni, there was an immense assemblage of people. Having gone there with his family to bathe in the Ganges, Chatterji picked up this little girl. She was then about two years old. Being himself childless, Chatterji brought up the girl as his daughter. Many times arrangements were made to marry her; but lest some good *Kulin* should incur loss

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of caste by taking her to wife, we have each time warned the party of the intending groom. I now warn you."

On hearing that the child had been picked up at the great *Varuni* Festival at Triveni, a suspicion arose in my mind and I resolved to see the girl. I said to Chatterji Mahashoi that as my father was about to marry his daughter, it was fit and proper that I should see her first. Chatterji had the girl suitably dressed and brought to me for my inspection. At first sight of her I was amazed to find that she was the exact image of my lost wife. I then said to Chatterji Mahashoi—"This girl is not your daughter. I know all about it." The truth of this Chatterji was constrained to admit. What I then wormed out of him through much cross questioning, confirmed my suspicions—the girl is my sister-in-law. Reckoning up the time, I found it is just thirteen years ago that my mother-in-law returned from Triveni having lost her child, then only two years old. During a whole week the parents vainly made searches for her in all directions. As the child was adorned with many golden ornaments, it was believed that she had been murdered by some one for the jewels. All this history is certainly known to you. To arrive at certainty in the matter, I telegraphed to my father-in-law. This morning he arrived here

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with my mother-in-law. When they examined the girl they found a birth-mark on the left upper arm which convinced the mother that the girl was her daughter.

For you to marry her, under these circumstances, would confuse relationship. On this account and also as I feel it my duty to save you from this alliance so embarrassing to yourself at your age, I finally consented to marry the girl myself. Therefore please to come quickly with all the needful things. I have sent written invitations to my brothers at home.

ANNADA CHARAN DEB SARMA.

P.S. If you have time before coming away, will you kindly go to Gurudas Chatterjee, book-seller, and bring away with you all unsold copies of my book "Sorrowful Tears of a Broken Heart"? I enclose a note addressed to the book-seller that he may know you have my warrant. Enquire of him please whether, if I write my autobiography, he is prepared to publish it at his own cost. This unwritten work is sure to be very humorous and entertaining.

ANNADA—

P.P.S. Bhudhar Chatterji now states that what he said to you about my first wife's ornaments was all false. When Chatterji Mahashoi found me

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willing to marry the girl for her own sake, he revealed the truth. I questioned him as to why he had deceived you in this way. He said—"When Mukerji Mahashoi became conscious and asked for his box, I was astonished and said truly that I had found no box. Then the doctor came and advised me not to say so as it might aggravate his illness. So I pretended that the box was safe and gave him a chance to recover. It then struck me that it would be a good stroke of business to make a further use of the pretence and getting the girl married. I would have revealed the truth to your father when the nuptial rites were over."—Chatterji Mahashoi though affable and hospitable seems to be a man of very loose moral principles. I congratulate myself that I have escaped becoming *his* son-in-law.

ANNADA.

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THE FULFILMENT OF A VOW

I

BHABATOSH was studying English at the College, it was true, but he did so much against his inclinatlon. He had no belief in English education. In his opinion the study of English had been the ruin of the country. The Hindu sentiment was gradually disappearing, evil habits increasing and there was no means of reviving the happy days of old. Such was the constant complaint of Bhabatosh. His people obliged him to study English, else he would have preferred to attend a Sanskrit School at Navadwip or elsewhere. Still, even if he must study English, none the less was he able to pursue his own ideas in thought and in practice.

Bhabatosh, living in a Calcutta hostel or "mess-house" was pursuing his studies, when suddenly he awoke to the fact that the *Durga Puja* holidays were at hand. So he bought new apparel for the home, packed his box and set out for his village, which was at no great distance from the city.

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The *Puja* was over, the day of full moon had come. At dawn the mother of Bhabatosh, a widow, went to bathe in the Ganges. The *ghat* lay a little distance from the village. A number of women from the adjoining villages thronged its steps that morning. The mother of Bhabatosh, as she came up from the stream, saw an old friend of her girlhood, the wife of Upendra Babu.

Greeting each other, the friends exchanged the usual enquiries, and then Upendra Babu's wife asked—"Is Bhabatosh at home?"

"He came, but his holiday is over and he will be returning to Calcutta."

Upendra Babu had a pretty little daughter, thirteen years old, named Pulina. She was unmarried.

Upendra Babu's wife said—"Sister, would it not be well if my Pulina and your Bhabatosh were to marry?"

The widow answered—"That has been my wish also this long time, sister;—but my son does not wish to marry. What can I do? How often have I tried to arrange a marriage for him and it has always fallen through."

"Well, try once more. Your son is grown, and if he marries you will have much happiness. Why won't he marry?"

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"I will see. If he agrees, the wedding can take place in February."

When the widow reached her home Bhabatosh was sitting in his room reading a newspaper. His mother said—"Come to the inner apartments, I want to speak to you."

Laying aside the paper Bhabatosh very slowly followed his mother. Taking him to her own room the mother said—"Son, I have arranged a marriage for you. You are my eldest son. I have long wished for a daughter-in-law. Fulfil my desire."

As I have intimated, Bhabatosh was extremely averse to marriage—not though for the reasons an Englishman would have had. Not because it was unsuitable to marry while still a student, or because his means were insufficient. His objection was of another kind and based upon the *shastras* too. He had heard (and even read in the newspapers) that the brides of the present generation no longer resemble the modest Hindu bride of former days, but are coquettes and fond of dress, that they do not worship their husbands as enjoined by the sacred writings, but are anxious to associate with them on terms of equality. Yet how could the unlucky man oppose his widowed mother's entreaties? He did not desire to incur the sin of neglecting his mother's repeated

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requests. So he had resolved that should she again urge the matter, he would consent, but he would be careful to select a bride according to his own ideal.

That Bhabatosh had independent ideas on this subject was well known to his comrades in the hostel. When the youths gathered nightly on the roof after their evening meal, this was a standing subject of discussion with them as they smoked their cigarettes of various sorts. How often had Bhabatosh said—"When I marry, if I do marry, I will take a dark ugly girl as my wife. The nice-looking girls are all full of vanity. They do not reverence their husband's parents, nor do they look up to the husband himself. Instead of being dutiful wives they are frivolous, besides that they are dressy and full of airs. Considering themselves 'beauties,' they think of nothing but how to set off their charms. They must have European soaps, scent, powder, Parsi *saris* and chemises, while the poor wretch of a husband must pay the bills. Then, I will not marry an educated girl. They only read novels (some even write them) and play cards, or spend the day writing love poems to their husbands. The house work is neglected, they have no time for their devotions, the children are left screaming on the floor, &c. &c." After listening to talk of this kind, some of the

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lads would say—"Very good Bhabatosh Babu! When the time comes we shall see how you act. Many talk in this way. There is a great difference between speech and action."

Inflamed by these doubts, Bhabatosh would reply—"Yes, you shall see gentlemen, you shall see. With me speech and action are one."

So when his mother repeated her urgings, Bhabatosh, consenting, said—"Very well, mother, I will marry, but I wish to choose my bride."

The mother was delighted. "You wish to see your bride before you take her? Very good. There is a charming, beautiful girl I know of, just thirteen."

Startled, Bhabatosh said—"Is she so beautiful?" "Very."—the mother said.—"Her face is like that of the goddess *Durga*, the same nose, the same eyes, the same fine brows, with a complexion like a rose."

Bhabatosh said slowly and gravely—"I will not marry such a girl as that, mother."

"Why not?"—exclaimed the mother in astonishment. "What is the matter?"

"I will not marry a beautiful girl."

"Then, what sort of girl will you marry?"

"I will marry a dark ugly girl." Bhabatosh was firm as rock.

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The mother was even more astonished. "Foolish boy! Every one desires a pretty wife; and one is not so easily to be had"—she observed.

"Let them then. I will make a different marriage." As he spoke his face became irradiated by self-glorification. Was he one of the crowd? Should he, like all the rest, marry only from desire?

Seeing his mother a litle dejected, Bhabatosh opened his mind to her. He showed how impossible it was for a beautiful girl to become a model Hindu wife. Finally he said his resolve was firm, unshakable—immovable.

His mother troubled him no more that day. The vacation ending, he returned to Calcutta.

II

A few days later the wife of Upendra Banerji came in a palanquin to visit the mother of Bhabatosh. After the first greetings the wife of Upendra Babu said—"Sister, was Bhabatosh agreeable?"

"He is ready to marry, but he has strange ideas in his head."

"What sort of ideas?"

"First, he said he must see the girl before consenting. I said that would be very good. I could procure his seeing a beautiful girl, in every vay suitable. Then he said he would not marry

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a beauty, but desired a dark ugly girl for a wife."

Upen Babu's wife was astonished. "I never heard of a fancy so unnatural"—she said. "Why does he show such a strange humour?"

The mother then gave to her friend the reasons Bhabatosh had explained to herself. After some reflection Upen Babu's wife said—"I will ask you to do one little thing, sister. Write to Bhabatosh to come this Saturday. Tell him you have found a girl that you think will suit and ask him to come and see her. When he is here, send him to our house on Sunday afternoon. I will arrange everything."

The mother consented, as she thought—"Upendra Babu's wife fancies that if Bhabatosh only sees Pulina, he will be unable to resist marrying her and that would be no marvel, for the girl is indeed lovely."

Bhabatosh came home on the Saturday. The next afternoon he set out in a bullock carriage, his hair in glorious disorder, (because the ancient Hindu sages did not dress their hair), for the village where the Banerjis lived.

On arrival he heard that Upen Babu was away on business. A young man received him courteously and took him to the reception room. This youth was a nephew of Upendra Babu. After

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a while a maid-servant informed them that they were to go to the inner apartments. The maid, looking at Bhabatosh, smiled mischievously.

The two young men went in, the visitor having the impression that all the servants were laughing secretly. Bhabatosh was taken to a room very well arranged. In the middle a seat had been placed before which stood silver trays containing sweetmeats and fruit. A little further off, another seat had been placed. Complying with the request of his young host, Bhabatosh sat down to partake of the refreshments. At this moment there was a sound of the jingling of anklets outside, and a maid entered, bringing in a girl who, taking the other seat, gazed around her with looks full of curiosity.

Bhabatosh eat of the fruit slowly, casting side glances at the girl. She wore a Bombay *sari* of a purple colour. Her head was uncovered, her hair dressed with a liberal supply of oil. The girl was blacker than ink, her small eyes sunk in their sockets glanced perpetually around, her forehead was high, the chin scarcely existed, her front teeth were much too prominent. Bhabatosh thought, this girl would make him a pattern wife. Clearing his throat and summoning up his courage he asked—"What is your name?"

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The girl looking suddenly at the speaker and showing the tip of her tongue, said—"What?"

"What is your name?"

"My name is Jagadamba" (a name as out of date as Griselda or Lavinia.)

Thereupon the young host and the maid-servant cast angry looks at the girl, who immediately added—"My name is Pulina" (a name as modern as the other was ancient.)

The youth said—"Formerly her name was Jagadamba, but now she is called Pulina."

Bhabatosh thought—"The change is not for the better. Pulina! Jagadamba sounds far better; it is a *Puranic* name used by the ancient priests. If I marry her, that name shall be re-instated." He then asked aloud—"Do you read?"

As before, the girl put out the tip of her tongue and said—"What?"

"Do you read?"

"I don't read at all. My brother—"

The maid-servant and the youth again shooting angry glances at her, the girl desisted. Bhabatosh was even more pleased. This was just the very thing. There was every chance of his making of her a real Hindu house-mistress. She was not

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much to look at; but then that exactly was his vow. When the wedding was arranged he would invite his mess-mates to witness it. Aloud he said —"Well, you can go now."

Again the girl said—"What?"—displaying the end of her tongue.

"You can go."

The maid-servant took her away. Bhabatosh had finished his lunch. At this moment a girl of thirteen brought spices in a silver dish. She was a lovely child. She wore a white country *sari* bordered black. She had four anklets on her feet. On her wrists she wore bracelets of gold. Putting down the spices she went away. As she went with averted looks she let a little smile escape her lips.

Bhabatosh thought to himself—"There is a beautiful girl. If I were to marry her, how should I be safe? My life-long ideals would sink to the bottom of the sea." His mind was quite up-lifted with self-glorification over the fulfilment of his vow.

The youth took Bhabatosh to the outer apartments. The maid-servant, laughing a little, said—"The ladies of the house are asking if you approve of the bride."

"I do"—replied Bhabatosh with much dignity.

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III

On his way back home Bhabatosh reviewed the events of the afternoon. His way led him through the village where numbers of girls were returning to their homes bearing pots filled with water. He considered their faces rather carefully as they passed. There were pretty ones among them and many plain faces, but not one of them was so ugly as Jagadamba.

The carriage approached the fields, and now his mind was filled with pride in his victory over himself. Yet he felt his chosen bride need not have been quite so ugly. But since his choice was made, what was the use of such reflections? At this point he reached home. His mother said—"Well, do you approve of the maiden?"

"Yes mother, I do."

"Then shall I settle the matter?"

"Please."

"Shall it be early in February?"

"It may as well,"—and Bhabatosh betook himself elsewhere. The mother observed that the youth's mind was somewhat heavy. She imagined that though pleased at his choice, he was rather ashamed to have made it after so many vows that he would not marry a beauty.

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Bhabatosh took no supper that night, declaring that he had no appetite.

The triumph in his mind over his self-conquest and the fulfilment of his vow began to abate. As often as Jagadamba's face arose before his mind, his heart grew cold within him. He began to think that ugly as she was, it would not have been so bad had she shown some signs of intellect.

On Monday early, Bhabatosh took train for Calcutta, his mother having remarked that there were only ten days to the wedding and that he must come home two days before the event.

At the mess-house his comrades observed that his countenance was clouded. He went to his own room and sat down. One after another came to him with greeting and the question—"What news have you for us?"—Before setting out for his home Bhabatosh had told them all what was afoot.

With an embarrassed laugh Bhabatosh answered—"The news is good." Then they questioned him as to the girl's appearance, her accomplishments, her age. Suddenly one of them said—"What is her name?" Bhabatosh gave it.

At the sound of it something of a smile appeared on every face. One only, losing control over himself, laughed out—"Ha! ha! ha! Jagadamba! he! he! he! A fine name that, isn't it?"

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Sarat Babu said—"Why do you laugh, Nripendra Babu?"

"I was not laughing, he! he! he! Why should I laugh? ha! ha!"

Rajani Babu said—"What is the matter with the name? It is a classical name. In the present day you all select fancy names from the stage plays, Sarasibala, Jyotirmayi, Tarulata, &c., &c."

Bhabatosh shook his head gravely at these words. His former enthusiasm on these points was now much lessened.

There were but nine days left to the wedding. He knows how they passed with him. His comrades also knew something of it. The more Bhabatosh thought of Jagadamba, the more his heart was oppressed. He attended College but took in nothing of the lectures. He had been distinguished in the mess-house for his appetite, but now half his meal was left upon his plate. He joined with none in merry converse; he was always absent-minded. The comrades began to chaff him, saying—"Bhabatosh Babu, you show every sign of having been smitten by the shaft of Cupid."

Lying on his couch at night, Bhabatosh could scarcely sleep,—he could only toss from side to side. When at length sleep came, it was filled with terrible dreams. In one dream he saw Jagadamba

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wearing the hideous face of the idol Kali. The little that he could see of her tongue now seemed to be fully protruding. It seemed as if she had grown an extra pair of arms. In one hand she held a blood-smeared sword, in the other a severed head, which seemed to be that of Bhabatosh himself. In another dream he seemed to have lost himself in a thorny jungle. As he was anxiously seeking a path out of it, a she-buffalo came up and tried to rush at him. The brute was wearing a Bombay *sari* of the people colour. Her face was that of Jagadamba, only that she had two horns.

When there were but three days to the wedding, Bhabatosh thought he would write to his mother and stop the marriage. That day he did not go to College. He sat alone all day in his room writing and tearing up letter after letter. What would his comrades say when they should hear the marriage was broken off? How would he be able to endure their jeers and their banter?

That night as he lay on his bed, he resolved that without a word to any one he would go off to the Western Provinces. He got up, lit his lamp, and turned over the leaves of the time table. But at dawn his mood again changed. What? Should he after making all this fuss incur the name of a coward? That should never be. He would fulfil his vow, whatever may his lot be afterwards.

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At the appointed time he went home and in due course entered the wedding booth. The assembly, the lights, the noise raised his spirits after the previous ten days. In the hour of battle, even the most timid soldier loses his fears.

The wedding began, but his heart was callous;—neither fear nor anxiety, hope nor despair possessed him.

Gradually the time came for uplifting of the bride's veil. To ensure good fortune, a cloth was thrown over the heads of groom and bride. On glancing at the bride's face, Bhabatosh was filled with astonishment. She was not the ogress of the last ten days. She was not the hideous Jagadamba of his dreams, but the lovely maiden who had served him with spices in a silver dish.

* * * * *

On the night of the "Flower Decoration" Bhabatosh strove to make his newly-wedded wife converse. For a little while he was without success. Then Bhabatosh had recourse to a stratagem. He thought, perhaps if she heard her own people found fault with, she might defend them. So he said—"Why did your mother play me this trick?"

"Had you not said that because I was good-looking, you would not marry me? It served you right."

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Hitherto Bhabatosh had been unable to solve this problem. He now said—"What girl was it that I saw?"

"She was the daughter of the village oilman. It served you right."

* * * * *

And there even came a day when, before the post was quite due, Bhabatosh would be standing in the street at the door of the "mess-house" to take his letters from the Postman.

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THE DANGER OF BEING WRONGLY TAUGHT

MY people were insisting upon my spending the Christmas vacation at Madhupur, where we possessed a small bungalow. So I put my things together, and went to Howrah Station to catch the three o'clock afternoon train.

What a crowd there was that day! But, fortunately, it was composed of the gentry only—for the most part young men in fair white raiment, pleasantly perfumed; their faces joyous, lit up with smiles. They looked as if they were young husbands going by this train to the houses of their fathers-in-law. Such an assemblage was not tiresome, but the contrary.

The train started. The young men filled the air of the compartment with loud laughter and the smoke of their cigarettes. The train continued to be thronged as far as Hooghly,—after that the crowd began to lessen. At Pundooah, a stout old man entered our carriage. On his head he wore a black woollen comforter twisted round like a turban, and on his nose a pair of silver-framed spectacles. A couple of old-fashioned shawls covered his person. He wore English shoes over

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warm socks. He seemed about fifty years of age. Quite a number of people had come with this gentleman and there was much luggage, which was now filling up the compartment. From below, somebody called out—"Have all the things have been put in? Count them over and see." At these words the Babu began to count the articles one by one in a loud voice, while at the same time the departure bell rang. After twice counting them over, he said—"Why, there are six only—weren't there seven?"—and the train began to move. The Babu suddenly thurst his head out of the window and called vociferously—"The *handi*! The *handi*!" A man was running with the train bearing the article to place it in his hand, but the Babu could not grasp it, and the earthenware fell to the ground. We heard the noise of the crash.

The gentleman—furiously angry—then sat down on the bench. Noting me as a senior amongst the young men present, he addressed me, saying—"Did you see, Sir? Did you see the whole business—he gave the *handi* and let it go?"

I felt amused at the man's appeal to me, and with difficulty repressing a smile, I asked—"What did the vessel contain?"

"Sir, there was food in it. A potful of food—two rupees worth of provisions fallen upon the platform and smeared with dust, and I have

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enjoyed none of it. As I came from home I said repeatedly, 'Mind the *handi*'—'Don't you forget *handi*.' And then they did forget it. A potful of food, Mahashoi, gone! I cannot eat *bazaar* food, it does not agree with me. Wherever I go I take my own supply with me. My father's sister was up at five this morning preparing these *loochees*. (Here the Babu began to count upon his fingers) There were *loochees*, *kachowris*, fried potatoes, fried *byguns*, *mohonbhog*, a pound of Mollnai balls—have you ever tasted Mollnai balls?"

From the beginning of this speech the young men had been pressing their faces to hide their smile, but at this question they burst out laughing. Preserving a becoming gravity, I answered—"I don't remember having tasted them."

"If that is so, be sure you have *not* tasted them: it is not a thing to be forgotten."

"Very probably."

"Have you never heard of Mollnai balls?"

"No."

"Where do you come form?"

"Calcutta."

"Where do you live?"

"At Calcutta."

"Oh! you are a downright Calcutian I see. Well I'll tell you a story about the Mollnai balls; but first, let me prepare some tobacco."

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And he addressed himself to the task. During the whole course of my travels, never had I met a man such as this. Pity, such a speaker has found no place in the arena of Bengal politics! It occurred to me that this was a fine chance for me. The train arrived at Madhupur at a very inconvenient hour, a time when one is apt to fall asleep; and if you do so you risk passing the station. By favour of this prince of talkers I might be able to keep awake. As he prepared the tobacco the old man said—"What is your name, Sir?"

"Mahananda Chatterji."

"My name is Sri Madan Gopal Dev Sarma Mukerji. I live at the village of Ilchoba, near Mollnai, in the Burdwan District. We are decendants of Jogeswar Pandit. Jogeswar Pandit had seven sons—Shankar Janoki Nath being one of them —We are the descendants of that Janoki Nath."

The speech was thus abbreviated, because Madan Gopal Babu had now begun to smoke. The expression of his face had been somewhat sad a little while ago, I fancy because of his loss—now a little pride beamed from it, probably at the memory of the renown of his ancestors. I studied his face with much curiosity.

Now the train stopped at Burdwan. My supply of cigars being exhausted, I alighted to

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purchase some more at the hotel, and to ease my limbs by walking about until the last bell should be struck. When the train started I perceived that all the passengers had left but our two selves. Madan Gopal Babu, glacing at me, said—"Well Sadananda Babu—"

I interrupted him—"My name is Mahananda."

"Yes, to be sure! Well, Mahananda Babu, how far do you travel?"

"To Madhupur."

"I go to *Kasi* (Benares). You will soon arrive at your destination—a few hours only. But I must keep on through the night and all to-morrow. What can I live on through all the time I ask you? I shall not reach Kasi till the evening. Is hot my mother staying there? She has lived there these three years. She has become old—past seventy—but she still rises early every morning to bathe in the Ganges at the *Ghat* of the Ten Horse Sacrifice, in winter, in summer, and in rain. Since last August she has been having slight attacks of fever. There is no cause for anxiety—still, hearing that she is ill, how can I stay at home? Our preceptor's second son is a professor at the Benares College, and dwells there with his family, so I have placed my mother in his care. He is a very worthy man. They say he has no equal in Kasi on questions of Logic. He

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is of my age—we played together. Even at that age the sharpness of his intellect displayed itself. It reminds me—"

To check the flow of his talk, I asked—"Do you smoke cigars, Sir?"

"Cigars? Sometimes, yes—sometimes I do. When I studied English in my youth at Calcutta, I smoked many a cigar. Your bird's-eye cigarettes were not then in existence. Are they good cigars?"

"They are not bad. Try one." And opening my cigar case I held it before him. He selected one. I also lit mine.

The train had now passed Raneegunge. On both sides were many coal mines. In places there were heaps of coal burning, giving a brilliant light. Near by coolies were sitting in temporary huts built of loose bricks. Others were cooking.

I felt hungry, and thought it would be a good time to eat. I had with me my tiffin basket stocked with provisions. With difficulty, I extracted it from amidst Madan Babu's luggage. Then I thought—Can I eat while my fellow traveller fasts? Yet even if I ask him, I do not know whether he will consent, because my provisions are not strictly orthodox.—At length I determined to ask him: if he consented, good; if not, what could I do? So placing the basket on the seat and raising the cover, I said—"Madan Babu,

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the food you brought is gone. I have some here and if you have no objection, we will share it."

Madan Babu, looking ardently at my basket, said—"What is there in that thing of yours?"

Not counting on my fingers, I replied—"Loaves, eggs, two or three kinds of meat, butter, and other things."

"Hindu meat? Not meat from the European hotel?"

"Hindu meat. Cooked by our Brahman cook. Only the loaves are from the European hotel; everything else is prepared according to Hindu custom."

Madan Babu said—"That will do, I don't mind hotel bread: I ate plenty of them when studying English in Calcutta. All sorts of things did I eat!* The students in those days were very disorderly"—and he began to laugh.

Without further words I took out the provisions and arranged them on plates; then I asked—"Do you use knife and fork?"

"No, brother, I can't be troubled with all that. I'll use fingers instead."

When we had finished the meat, I said to Madan Babu—"There is more bread, butter, jam and marmalade. What will you have?"

* To eat European bread was to infringe upon caste rules.

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"Marmalade! Marmalade! Give me a taste of that, I have never eaten it."

I gave him. When he had finished, he washed his mouth and fingers with a tumbler of water, leaning out through the window; then draping himself with the shawls he sat down, squatting on the bench. I was about to give him another cigar, but he said—"No, I will prepare my *hookah*. Nothing can compare with the *hookah*, brother!"

When he had filled the bowl, I said—"You did not tell me that story of the Mollnai balls."

"True, I was forgetting. This is not a story of our time, but of days gone by. The Maharaja of Burdwan had a great relish for Mollnai balls, so he gave an order that the best confectioner at Mollnai should be brought to Burdwan, and told to prepare the balls. A king's order cannot be disputed, so the chief confectioner arrived at Burdwan with his pots and pans. He prepared the balls, but they had not the same flavour. The Maharaja said—'Well, Confectioner, these are not like the others.' The confectioner, folding his hands together (here Madan Babu illustrates the action with his own hands) said, 'Shall I speak plainly, Maharaja—without fear?' The Raja answered—'Speak fearlessly.' The confectioner said—'Maharaja, you have had *me* brought here from Mollnai, but you have brought neither Mollnai

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soil nor Mollnai water."—And here Madan Babu was seized with a convulsion of laughter and coughing, and finally said—"Good! Wasn't it?"

When he had fully recovered, he said—"As you have not eaten Mollnai balls, you can't even imagine how good they are. Well, you wait until I return from Kasi. Can you not come there some Saturday or Sunday?"

"Easily."

"Very good, then come when I send you an invitation. I will send a bullock-carriage to the station to meet you. From Pundooah to Ilchoba is not far. I will give you Mollnai balls, and treat you to some country marmalade too."

Astonished, I exclaimed—"Country marmalade! What is that? I do not know it."

"Ah,"—said Madan Babu, laughing—"you are indeed a Calcutian, knowing of nothing beyond the Ditch. I fancy you have never seen the rice tree! It bears a red flower and the trunk of it is sawn into planks,"—and he fell into another fit of laughter and coughing. When better, he said—"Marmalade is only jam made from the *bael* fruit. You can obtain it in Calcutta also."

Taking a long pull at my cigar, I said—"Pardon me, but marmalade has nothing to do with the *bael* fruit."

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"What do you say?"

I repeated my assertion.

"How? What is the meaning of marmalade then? Is it not jam made from the *bael* fruit?"

"Of course, not."

"Do you expect me to believe that? In boyhood we learned that the meaning of marmalade was, as I say, jam made from the *bael* fruit."

"The master taught you wrong."

"But of what fruit is it the jam then if not of the *bael*?"

"If you call it jam, it is the jam of the orange."

At these words, Madan Babu was astounded. In accents of fear, he repeated—"Jam of the orange?"

"What is the meaning of this?"—I thought; aloud, I said—"To be sure, the jam of the orange."

"If it were of the orange it would be entirely sweet. Why is there a bitter taste mixed with the sweet then?"

"It is not made from our ordinary oranges. There is an orange growing at Seville, in Spain, that looks like this, but has a bitter flavour. The marmalade is made from this kind."

The expression of fear in Madan Babu's face gave place to one of disgust. He said—"Are you certain of what you say?" His voice was a little hoarse.

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"I am quite certain."

Madan Babu, mocking me, said—"Quite certain!"

Greatly astonished, and also very angry, I said—"Mahashoi, grimacing is not regarded as an act worthy of a gentleman." I rested my back against the window shutter, put my feet up on the bench, and sat gazing at the roof lamp.

Madan Babu said—"I am much obliged to you for the information. Was there any enmity between us? For twenty years I have not eaten an orange. Why did you make me do so?"

"Why, an orange is not a poisonous thing."

"It may not be poisonous to *you*, it is poisonous to *me*. Why did you make me eat it?"

Disgusted, I said—"Had you told me beforehand that you did not eat oranges?"

Again distorting his face, Madan Babu said—"Had I told you that beforehand! Why did you not tell me at the time what was in the marmalade?"

Burning with anger at the man's behaviour, I said—"You are exceeding the bounds of good manners."

"Go, go! I have seen plenty of Calcutta Babus of your sort; 'exceeding the bounds of good manners,' indeed. *You* have come to teach me good manners! Knowing the use of a knife and

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fork does not constitute good manners. Fine manners, indeed, to force upon an unguarded man a sort of food he does not eat."

"You were starving. I gave you to eat of what I had, and this is my reward."

"I was starving, indeed! Did I come crying to you for food?"

"Oh, say what you like"—I cried angrily, and wrapping myself in my rug I lay down on the bench.

The Babu scolded on without interruption. Gradually, his voice softened. The memory of his earthen pot lost at Pundooah station returned to his mind, and he said—"If I had had that food with me, this misfortune would not have occurred," —and so forth. I thought to myself that the man was half mad. By continually talking he calmed himself; then I recognised by the sounds that he was preparing his *hookah*; then he smoked. I covered my face with my rug and tried to sleep, but sleep would not come. Madan Babu prolonged his smoke.

At length the train stopped at Asansole. Putting his head out of window, he called—"*Chuprassi*! O *Chuprassi*!"

A man approached and was asked—"Can you tell me the hour?"

"Half-past eleven, Sir"—the man answered.

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"When will the train reach Madhupur?"

"At twelve o'clock."

I reflected—"The man is so angry with me that until I leave the train—until he has got rid of the sinner—he cannot rest."

The train started. A little later I felt the touch of a hand on my rug. "Sadananda Babu—wake up!"

My name not being Sadananda, I took no notice.

"Brother! Sit up, they say we approach Madhupur. Get up! get up!"

I threw the rug from my face.

"Brother, are you angry?"

I sat up—and said, drily—"Have you a monopoly of anger?"

Gently patting me on my back, the old man said—"Do not be angry. I am an old man. If a couple of words are said, do we need quarrel further? I am a hot-tempered man, and I fancied the fault was all on your side. Forgive me."

It struck me that this was truly the man's nature. He had said—"I fancied the fault was all yours," and it was evident he still thought some of the blame was mine—if not all. But the old man's tones were so gentle and pitiful, that my former anger against him departed. I smiled in sign of reconciliation. Madan Babu said—"If I

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were to tell you fully why I do not eat oranges you would comprehend."

Madan Babu's eyes were clouded; after some coughing, he said—"Will you listen?" He spoke in a very low tone.

"Say on,"—I said.

He began—"It is now twenty years since I killed a man."

I shivered. "Killed a man?"

"Murdered! Certainly. That is called murder. Listen! In the December of a certain year I went to Calcutta to make purchases, with a view to giving my eldest daughter in marriage in January. I alighted at a boarding house used by college students. There was no vacancy in any room except in one occupied by a fever patient. His brother-in-law shared it with him. The sister's husband's name was Kedar, the brother-in-law was named Prabodh. Kedar was a man from East Bengal, of about twenty-two years. Prabodh was two or three years younger. Pradodh neglected attendance at college, and assiduously nursed his brother-in-law. Hour by hour he gave him his physic, took his temperature, pressed his head and limbs, and rose several times in the night to attend to him. For some days the patient was very restless, then there came a day of ease. The fever visibly decreased. I was to return home on the

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evening of that day. In the morning I had bought a hundred oranges in Madhab Babu's *bazaar*. I said to Prabodh—'As there is a sick man here, would it be prudent to store the oranges in this room?' Prabodh said—'Oh, it doesn't matter at all, just place them on one side.' I placed the oranges there and went again to the *bazaar*. Prabodh, seing his brother-in-law somewhat better, went to his class after many days of absence. Returning to the lodgings in the evening I saw that destruction had come upon us. Alone in the chamber and unable to resist the temptation, Kedar had eaten voraciously of the oranges, and was now in a raging fever. I put away the thought of returning home, and stayed to nurse the patient. With the money intended for my daughter's marriage expenses, I called in the most experienced physicians to be found in Calcutta. Fasting and sleepless I nursed him through three days and nights, but in vain, we could not save him."—And the old man fell silent.

I had sat like a statue listening to this mournful story. Without, great darkness reigned; the train sped fast. The light in the lamp above was dying, the wick was cumbered with soot. In the dead of night we two living beings sat in the compartment.

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Throwing off a deep sigh, I said—"How are you to blame for that? You didn't do it with intention; especially as the brother-in-law—when you asked him—"

"The brother-in-law was a boy. I was of the age of his father. If he made a mistake, had I the right to act upon it?"

"It was a very sorrowful matter"—I said—"but that you should blame yourself so severely is entirely wrong. A sin is measured not by its results, but by the intention of the doer."

Madan Babu said, in feeble tones—"I cannot console myself with that argument. I am responsible. If you had seen Prabodh's grief! He said they were five brothers and one sister. This one sister—so much beloved—of about 13 years, was the victim of this calamity. My own daughter was then thirteen. I went home and gave her in marriage, but I could not look her in the face. When I looked at her, the thought of the other maiden, whose happiness I had destroyed, clouded my mind."

The train slackened speed; we had arrived at Madhupur. What consolation could I offer to the old man? "Madan Gopal Babu"—I said—"it is in vain that you blame yourself. Life and death are in the hands of the Almighty, not in those of man. Do you not believe in our sacred writings?"

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Madan Gopal Babu replied not. His eyes were wet.

The train stopped. The sleep-laden *Khalassis* called out feebly—"Madhupur! Madhupur!"—I saluted Madan Gopal Babu and alighted.

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A PSEUDONYM

CHAPTER I

AFTER many struggles with the Press, I succeeded in getting out the holiday number of the *Light of Bengal* before the Durga Puja. I was giving instructions to the manager as to the despatch of the journal when Satish appeared in English costume, smoking a cigarette. He said, "Come to Darjeeling."

Satish was the friend of my boyhood. We studied in the same class, sat together, worked together. The Master used to call us Castor and Pollux.

Having matriculated, we came to the College at Calcutta; but from that time our lives began to diverge. Satish tried in every way to adopt the manners of Europeans; while I became devoted to my mother-tongue. Satish jeered at me for constantly reading and writing Bengali; while I lost no opportunity of having a fling at him for imitating Europeans. Later Satish went to England and returned a barrister, having completely adopted English ways.

We were no longer, as in boyhood, one soul and spirit. Satish had become changed. He no

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longer confided all his thoughts to me. Nevertheless we were excellent friends. He said—"Come to Darjeeling."

"When do you go?"—I asked.

"To-day."

"Goodness! Where is the time?"

Satish opened his watch, and holding his cigarette between his teeth, said—"It is only ten; the train goes at four. Six hours—360 minutes. Heaps and heaps of time."

"My good fellow"—I replied—"you have become a sahib. Can I, a black man, emulate your speedy way of doing things? By the time I have bathed and dined it will be twelve o'clock. Then some little rest—"

"Nonsense! I will not take your excuses."

"If you wanted to go to Darjeeling, why did you not tell me two days ago?"

"It was only this morning that I received the invitation from Dr. Sen."

"What!"—I exclaimed in astonishment—"Is Dr. Sen at Darjeeling with his family—and his daughter?"

"Certainly"—and he laughed a little.

That Dr. Sen's learned daughter Nirmala had captivated my friend was an open secret. I said—"How terrible! Must we wait till four o'clock? Is

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there no earlier train?" Satish, also sighing like an actor, said—"No." I sang—

"From her dear presence how can I stay,
Counting the moments and hours away?"

Although I have never been in love with a woman myself, I am pretty familiar with the affair. To have suggested even a day's delay to Satish would have been like trying to preach the tiger into vegetarianism; so I resolved to go. Hastly collecting my things we set out by the four o'clock train.

CHAPTER II

While the train slowed into Darjeeling Railway Station, I perceived Dr. Sen with his wife and daughter standing on the platform. At the sight of a Bengali maiden wearing shoes and stockings, and standing openly on a public platform, my gall rose. I have seen many *Brahmo* ladies in my time, and I even know one or two of them, so that these fashions are not altogether new to me. Nevertheless, to meet thus Satish's future wife and future mother-in-law was a fresh blow to me. I am much in favour of the education of women, but doing away with the zenana custom is a thing I cannot endure the thought of. I have just published an article in my paper on the subject, and was at that very moment framing in my brain

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fresh matter for future articles in a similar strain. Some very hard, sharp words were arranging themselves in my head, but in a short time they were all dispersed.

Alighting from the train, Satish presented me to his friends. Having never been introduced to ladies of that type, I knew not what was called for in the position, and, unable to say a word, I stood like a fool at the end of the platform near some shrubs.

Presently Nirmala approached me and said, with a smile—"Manmatha Babu, I read your paper regularly"—and seemed as if she would have said more, but did not. Nirmala's mother said—"When will the *Puja* number of *The Light of Bengal* appear, Manmatha Babu?"

"The *Puja* number is alreay, out"—I said.

Mrs. Sen looked at Nirmala, and asked—"Have you received it?"

"Not yet."

"Excuse me"—I said—"there has not been time for your copy to arrive yet. It was issued only yesterday, and we cannot despatch all the copies in one day.

Nirmala said—"Oh, my copy goes first to Dacca, and then is sent on here. Have you not a copy with you, Manmatha Babu?"

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My editor soul was delighted at Nirmala's interest in *The Light of Bengal*, and I answered quickly—"Oh yes, I have copies. I will send one to you to-morrow."

"Don't trouble about it, send it when quite convenient"—replied Nirmala.

Mrs. Sen said—"Manmatha Babu, we shall be glad to have you with us at tea to-morrow afternoon"—and with the usual polite farewells they departed.

I went towards the Sanatorium, thinking that such is the influence of education and habit that even a Bengali maiden can talk to a strange gentleman in a free and easy manner, without the least embarrassment. At night, resting my wearied body on my bed, I revolved many thoughts on social matters. What would be the ultimate result of these new manners and customs we were importing with education from Europe? But before my reflections travelled far I had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER III

As I drank my tea the next morning, I reviewed the events of the previous day. I could not regard this free mingling of the sexes except as a danger to social morality. So I resolved not to go to this tea. Why should I

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act against my own beliefs? I would send *The Light of Bengal* by a servant, or it might be Satish would be coming in, and I could send it by him. But Satish was such an ass that he did not come. I suppose he could not leave his Nirmala. I began to picture their courting in my mind, and felt highly entertained.

When I had finished lunch it struck me that it might be a breach of manners not to go to this tea. As I had accepted the invitation, I was bound to go. If it was opposed to my convictions, I ought to have declined at the time. I must go to-day, and be careful in the future not to accept any further invitations. So in the afternoon I prepared to go. I was rather careful about my toilet. I told myself that if it were a gathering of men only there would be no need of being particular, but in women's society a certain smartness was necessary.

I have often been at Darjeeling ; all its streets were well known to me. I arrived at the house just ten minutes before four o'clock. The hour fixed was four. I thought—" These people hold by English ways. If I go in before the time they would probably think me a barbarian." So I walked about a little, and sent in my card precisely at four.

I was warmly welcomed by all. Nirmala looked very beautiful today. When I had seen

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her at the station, wearing an English cape and shoes, I did not like her appearance. Now I saw her in red velvet shoes of Indian make, an orange-coloured *sari* draped in the new fashion, her plentiful hair gathered into a knot, and adorned with a hill rose of a yellow colour. Nirmala looked very handsome indeed.

At first I did not see Satish and resolved, when I met him alone, to let off a few jokes about the worshipful red feet of his divinity.* He soon after came in. When tea was over, and some time had been spent in conversation, we set out in company for a walk.

When I took my leave, Mrs. Sen said—"Manmatha Babu, if you will join us again at tea to-morrow, we can afterwards go out for a walk together."

It occurred to me that now was the time clearly to decline the invitation. Should I give the true reason for my objection thereto? Should I not take this opportunity to bring home to her the deep sociological truth underlying the idea? But again I thought—"What is it for an invitation? 'If you come.' Could that be called an invitation?"

Disturbed with this inward debate, I could not frame any answer, and on their part they were giving the farewell salute.

* All the Hindu goddesses have red feet.

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CHAPTER IV

At ten o'clock next morning Satish came in. When I asked how he could tear himself away from Nirmala, he said—"She is so taken up with that wretched paper of yours, *The Mirror of Bengal*—or *The Light of Bengal*, whatever you call it, you gave her, that I came away in a rage."

I was delighted. Was Nirmala's love for literature so great? I thought if Nirmala wrote herself, I would not mind printing the article in *The Light of Bengal*, after necessary corrections.

Satish had much to relate about her. The happiness of these two young lovers renewed the youth in my mind also. Satish said—"Now I am going. I just looked in to see if the rooms suited you. We shall meet at tea time. You are coming, I hope?"

"At tea time? No; not to-day. Mrs. Sen did not invite me."

"Of course she did; I heard her."

"In what way? She only said, 'If you come."

"Exactly; that was an invitation. Must one present oneself at your door with the garment round one's neck, as invitations are prescribed in the *Shastras*? What an old fogey you are."

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"You don't say so! But I am hardly at liberty to come to-day. Would it be thought dreadfully impolite if I did not come? I am not very well acquainted with your English etiquette and that sort of rubbish."

Satish said, gravely—"It would be extremely impolite."

At this I felt very angry with myself. I ought to have said to Mrs. Sen—"I shall not be able to come to-morrow, as I shall be busy." Instead of that I had debated whether this invitation were or were not in proper form, hence this predicament.

Satish said, laughingly—"Oh, it is not so terribly impolite as all that; you need not be so troubled. If you apologise next time you meet, it will pass. But why should you not come? Do, there's a good fellow."

I was not anxious to give the true reason to Satish at that moment. "There is some important work"—I said.

"Important work can be done to-morrow. To-day you must come. At least, try to come." And he disappeared.

I said to myself—"You may say what you like; I won't go any more."

But as time went on I began to feel very lonely. Also, I was eager to discover what Nirmala

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thought of that number of *The Light of Bengal*, especially of that article of mine, "The Ideal Woman's Life." Had I not written it for the benefit of the new women of the class of Nirmala? I must know how that article had affected her views, so I decided to go.

When I arrived, there was no one in the drawing-room. But presently Nirmala came, and, saluting me with a smile, said—"I am so glad to see you. We had given up all hope of your coming. Father, mother, and Satish Babu are all gone to see the garden. Satish Babu said you would not come to-day; you were too busy. Some new writing, I expect?"

"Yes—no, I had work that I thought"—

"I understand. May I ask, Manmatha Babu, how many hours a day you give to *The Light of Bengal*?"

"Nearly all my time. I exist for its sake."

"That must be delicious. I wish I could devote myself to literature, day and night, in that way. But is it not very rash to confess that to you?"

"Why so?"

"From what you say in that article of yours, 'The Ideal woman's Life,' it seems that you think that home is the woman's proper sphere; that, to forget herself entirely in the service of others in the domestic circle, is woman's true existence."

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"You must, then, have read the article?"

"Read it! Certainly. I have finished the whole of the magazine. Last night I fell asleep reading it in bed. I awoke to see the candle burnt quite down, and flickering with so great a flare that at first I was much alarmed."

"Ah! it is fortunate nothing caught fire."

"If through my reading that journal my curtains had caught fire and I had been burnt to death—the announcement of the event in the different newspapers would have been a fine advertisement for your *Light of Bengal*."

At first I could think of no suitable reply to this speech; a sort of metaphor was buzzing in my brain, that, like the wax of the candle of which she spoke, this educated maiden was tender and delicate, and bright like its flame. I gave a meaningless laugh, and at length said—"Since you are so fond of Bengali literature, why do you not write yourself?"

"If I wrote, who would read? In the first place, who would print it?"

I had a suspicion that Nirmala did write in secret, but I had not the courage to ask. The discussion turned upon the short story. I said that the present custom of giving a short story each month was a cause of great embarrassment to

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an editor at times owing to the dearth of good tales of this kind.

Nirmala said—"I have a friend who writes short stories. I have one by me now; will you look at it?"

Had I anticipated this disaster, I would not have introduced the topic of the short story at all. In the drudgery of editorial duties it fell to my lot to read many stories by novices. But I had come now to the hills for a month's holiday. However, there was no escape, so I said—"I will look at whatever you give me."

"You must give me your real opinion of it."

"I will do so."

"You must not keep anything back, because the writer is my friend."

"If you are really anxious to hear it, I will give you my genuine opinion."

Nirmala immediately went to fetch the story. A few minutes later she placed in my hands a bundle of beautifully executed manuscript on ruled foolscap, with half margins, fastened at the corner with crimson silk. At first sight I exclaimed—"A new writer?"

"Yes; but how do you know?"

"New writers nearly always take great pains in preparing their manuscript. The handwriting of authors of established reputation is usually illegible."

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As I said this, I turned to the last page in search of the name as is usual with editors. There was none. I glanced through the page to see if the lovers ended their lives by poison. New authors seldom permit their heroes or heroines to survive. But I saw that these here were allowed to live, so I became rather hopeful. A doubt arose whether Nirmala herself might not be the writer. Many shy writers present their first efforts as written by a friend. I said—"I will take this home to-day, and let you know to-morrow what I think of it."

That it was written by Nirmala was extremely probable. The words in which I should express my opinion were already cut and dried. I had to do this sort of work, giving an opinion on a friends literary efforts—most days of my life.

The phrases were there; you had but to distribute them: "Very readable in certain parts" "with practice he may become an excellent writer," &c., &c.

One after another, all the members of the family came in. When tea was over, we sat about chatting. There was no further talk af a walk.

CHAPTER VI

On reaching home I read the story. I saw I had made a great mistake. It was no maiden

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effort, the composition was that of a practised writer. The diction was vigorous, but restrained. Again, it was not written by Nirmala. One has not been an editor so long for nothing. I was not even at a loss to name the writer. It was by Gouri Kanta Ray. I had never met him, but had heard that he lived out towards Dacca. I had read many of his writings. He was one of the best writers of the younger generation, yet there were many defects in his writing. These were due to his youth, and would be rectified by time.

The next day I gave a good report of it to Nirmala. In one or two places I pointed out faults, but accorded much praise. "Is the writer very young ?"—I asked.

"Yes ; a little older than I am."

"He is a great friend of yours, I think ?"

"It is so."

I did not like this. Why should a "great friendship" exist between a young woman and a young man ?

I asked—"Can we have one or two of his writings ?"

"Why ? Do you find them very tempting ?"

"I confess I do."

"Well, I will look out one or two. But not this one."

"Have you many of his writings by you ?"

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"Yes, I have many. Whenever he finishes a new one he sends it to me to read."

I thought—"This is not at all right. So great an intimacy!" Aloud I said—"You are, then, his principal reader?"

"At least, I am his first reader. I fancy no one admires his writings more than I do."

"May I not hear his name?"

Nirmala reflected a little, and then said—"Gouri Kanta Ray"—and as she spoke, her cheeks became crimson.

I felt sorry for Satish.

Then we began to discuss Gouri Kanta's published writings, and I said that we had received his newly-published novel "Nandarani" for review.

During several days after this I discussed Gouri Kanta's writings very freely with Nirmala. She simply worshipped him. An inexplicable feeling of hostility arose in my mind against this man.

CHAPTER VII

Satish had not yet asked for the hand of Nirmala from her parents. When he should do so, it was pretty certain he would be accepted as a husband for her. It was my firm belief that Dr. Sen was as anxious to become his father-in-law as Satish was to become Dr. Sen's son-in-law.

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This had become clear to me during these few days. But this affair of Gouri Kanta caused me much uneasiness. I could not understand this close friendship. The affair showed itself thus to me: Satish and Nirmala married. Nirmala strongly devoted to Bengali literature; Satish furious at its very name. Meanwhile, Gouri Kanta Ray, a brilliant writer, had chosen Nirmala of all the women in the world, to be his literary confidante. And Nirmala was strongly attracted by him. This was like an unknown seed—Who could tell what kind of tree might not grow out of it?

I would not suffer this to come about. I would clear my friend's married life from thorns. The temple for the worship of Gouri Kanta that Nirmala had consecreted in her mind, I would reduce to ashes by thunderbolts of criticism. I would show that there were writers among the new men even more brilliant than Gouri Kanta. I would expose Gouri Kanta's errors in language and in grammar. Going through ancient and modern Western literature, I would show the same ideas as those expressed by Gouri Kanta. Side by side I would print extracts proclaiming him a thief in the face of the world, and thus by constant reiteration, I would give birth to the conviction in Nirmala's mind that her god was nothing better than a clay idol stuffed with straw.

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I had sacrificed everything for *The Light of Bengal.* My Critical Mace was the dread of every writer, great and small. Now, by the aid of this mace I would accomplish an act of friendship. Once a doubt arose whether this would not be a breach of my editorial duties, but aided by my inclination, I easily succeeded in putting my conscience to sleep.

Thus resolving, I wrote a terribly sharp review of "Nandarani," pulling it to pieces, and sent it to Calcutta to appear in the October number of my journal.

In due time the order proofs arrived. Upon them, in various places, I sharpened the sting of criticism. On that afternoon Satish came in. Seeing "Nandarani" on my table, he took it up. I said hastily—don't touch it, it is only a Bengali book."

"You have been so occupied with this wretched book lately that you have not been to see us for a week. Whenever I come here I find you at work on this book; so I have come to carry it off."

"I have been reviewing the work. You can take it away now, as I have finished."

"The review is finished?"

"Yes; I despatched the order proofs by post some miuutes ago." Seeing Satish concerning

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himself with Bengali literature, I asked myself, "What can have happened?"

Satish, looking at me, began to smile.

"What is it?"—I asked.

"I am going to tell you a secret about myself. I have only been waiting to do so until that review should appear in your paper."

Supremely astonished, I said—"A review of Nandarani! What connexion is there between that and any secret about yourself?"

"A very close connexion. I am Gouri Kanta Ray."

It was as if I had fallen from the skies.

"You!!!"

"Yes—I—don't you see? *Sati* means Gouri, and *ish* means Kanta."

I repeated "*You!*" and while speaking I rang the bell to call a servant. When he came, I bade him bring a telegraph form. Satish told me that when he was in England he used to sit in the British Museum reading all the good Bengali works with great attention. Then he studied and practised original composition. He was waiting to tell me this until a review of his first long novel should appear in *The Light of Bengal*, lest, knowing it beforehand, I should be biassed by friendship in reviewing the work.

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The servant brought the telegraph form. I telegraphed to the manager that I had dispatched the order proof by post, but that it was not to be printed. In place of it I told him to put in another article.

THE END

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GLOSSARY

Alwan, a woollen sheet used as a wrapper.

Amla, a ministerial officer.

Aswin, the sixth Hindu month, September-October.

Baburchi, a Mahomedan cook.

Bael, the wood-apple.

Bande Mataram, the opening words of a patriotic song, meaning—I offer my obeisance to the Motherland.

Bara Babu, the eldest son ; used in connection with a firm or an office, the head ministerial officer.

Benami, assumed name.

Bilati, foreign or English.

Brahmo, a religious sect of advanced ideas who worship one God and do not shut up their women.

Bou Didi, the wife of an elder brother or cousin.

Budmash, a rogue, rascal.

Bundook, a gun.

Bygun, the fruit of the egg plant ; the brinjal.

Chapkan, a long flowing coat.

Chelum, a small earthen bowl which is filled with tobacco and lighted with charcoal cakes.

Chota Hazri, the morning tea and toast.

Chowkidar, a police watchman.

Chudder, a sheet for draping the upper portion of the body.

Chuprassi, a peon or orderly.

Cowri, a shell representing the smallest money value.

Cutcherry, a court house or office.

Dai, a maid servant.

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Dak, post.
Dak Bungalow, a rest house for travellers.
Daroga, a Sub-Inspector of Police.
Deodar, a cedar tree.
Deshi, country made.
Dharmawatar, Incarnation of Justice.
Dhoti, a cloth for draping the lower part of the body.
Durbar, a levee held by a high official.
Durga, a Hindu goddess.
Durry, a cotton carpet.
Ejlash, a raised platform where a judicial officer sits.
Ek dum, all at once.
Ekka, a two wheeled bamboo cart, drawn by a pony.
Feringhi, a European.
Ghailla, a pitcher.
Gharibparwar, Supporter of the poor.
Ghat, a bathing or landing place on the bank of a river.
Ghee, clarified butter.
Ghurra, same as *ghailla*.
Goor, treacle.
Gowala, a dairyman.
Hajat, a lock up for undertrial prisoners.
Handi, an earthen pot used for cooking or as a receptacle of food.
Haram, forbidden, unclean.
Hookah, the pipe etc., in which tobacco is smoked.
Hukum, order.
Hulla, tumult.
Huzoor, Your Honor.
Jemadar, Head constable.

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Jhow, the tamarisk tree.

Kachowri, a kind of pastry filled with bruised pulse.

Kala admi, black man.

Kartal, small cymbals made of brass.

Kaviraj, a Bengalee physician, practising the Hindu system of medicine.

Khalassi, a station porter.

Khansama, a house steward.

Khas camera, private chamber.

Khitmadgar, a table servant.

Khodawand, master, lord.

Khoka, baby.

Kothi, house.

Kotwali, the chief police station in a town.

Krishna, a Hindu God, the tenth incarnation of Vishnu.

Kulin, in Bengal, a class of Brahmans who take precedence of all other Brahmans.

Kurta, a kind of tunic.

Lakh, a hundred thousands.

Lathi, a bambooo club.

Loochi, a soft thin flour cake fried in *Ghee*.

Lota, a small water pot made of brass or bell-metal.

Maidan, a plain.

Maro, shoot.

Mem Saheb, a European lady.

Modi, a grocer.

Mofussil, the country as distinguished from the town.

Mohonbhog, a sweet meat made of semolina, *Ghee* and sugar.

Mridang, a small drum.

Muktear, an attorney.

Narayan, an epithet of Vishnu.

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Pan, a betel leaf.
Poori, same as *loochee*.
Pucca, sure, settled, literally ripe.
Puggri, a turban.
Puja, worship.
Puranic, from the *Purans* or sacred poems of Hindu mythology.
Rai Bahadur, a tittle bestowed by Government as a reward for public service.
Rajah, a tittle bestowed by Government to big Zemindars.
Sahib, a European.
Salaam, the Indian mode of salutation.
Samity, associatlon.
Sannyasi, a mendicant.
Sari, a long piece of cloth worn by Hindu women.
Savitri, a mythologieal character typifying wifely devotion and fidelity.
Sawan, the fourth Hindu month, July-August.
Seer, a weight of one killogramme, just over 2lbs.
Shamla, a shawl-turban.
Shastra, the Hindu scriptures.
Sooji, semolina.
Soor, a hog.
Sradh. the funeral rites of Hindus.
Sudder, the district head quarters.
Swadeshi, literally "own country" a movement for the encouragement of indigenous industries.
Thali, a flat plate of brass or bell metal.
Thana, a public station.
Toba, the Mussulman cry of abjuration.
Tonga, a light two wheeled cart to seat four.
Tulsi, sweet basil, the sacred plant of the Hindus.
Zemindar, a landed proprietor.

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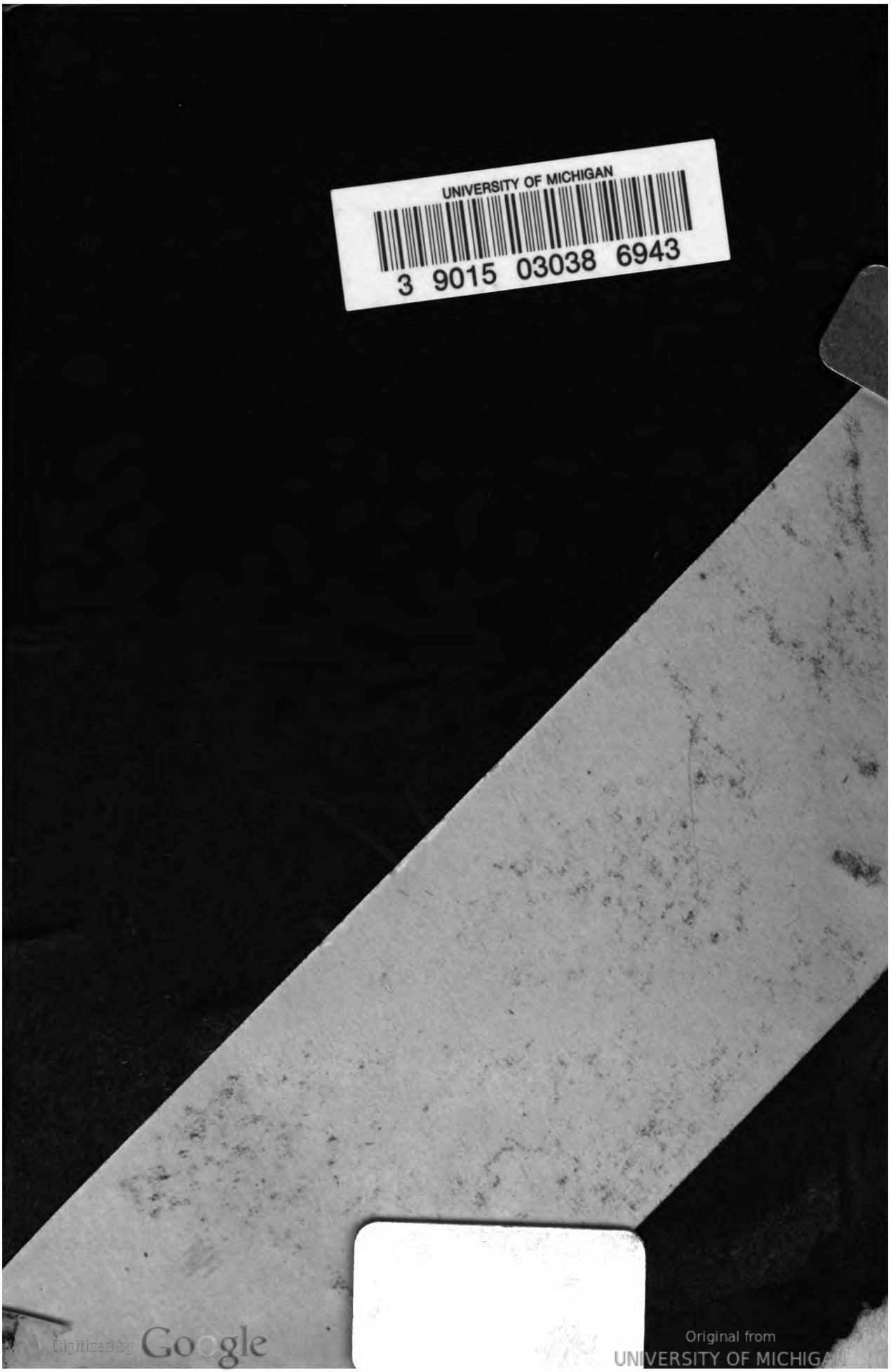
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