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POPULAR TALES

OF

BENGAL.

BY

KASINDRANATH BANERJI.

Calcutta :

1905.

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To

THE HON'BLE

Sir Andrew Henderson Leith Fraser,

K. C. S. I.,

Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,

IN COMMEMORATION OF HIS HONOUR'S FIRST VISIT,

ON THE 30th. JANUARY 1905,

TO BASIRHAT,

—The Author's Birth-place—

IN THE DISTRICT OF THE 24-PARGANAHS,

BENGAL,

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS

(By Permission)

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PREFACE.

In writing these humorous tales, it has been my aim to combine amusement with information. With this object in view I have described, at some length, Indian ways and manners—particularly those that are prevalent in Bengal—whenever I have had an opportunity of doing so. I do not presume to lay any claim to originality, since the subject-matter of some of these tales is, probably, known to the majority of the people of Bengal ; but the garb in which I have ventured to put them forward before the public, though made of coarse texture, may appear new to my readers.

I have followed the example of the late Reverend Lal Behari Day—author of the *Folk-tales of Bengal*—and this little volume may be considered as a sort of sequel to that well-known book. But while that learned author, in writing his *Folk-tales*, selected only the extravagant ones—stories full of supernatural machinery—those contained in this book do not exceed the due bounds of probability ; or, in other words, the incidents related in these tales may happen in the ordinary course

of life, the only exception being the story of *Nimai the Singer*. The detailed description of certain Indian ways and manners may appear tedious to my Bengali readers, who are quite familiar with them ; but to European readers, who are curious about oriental ways, they may prove interesting. How far I have succeeded in my attempt, it is for the reader to decide.

My hearty thanks are due to those dear friends who have taken a lively interest in my work and encouraged me in publishing it. I am greatly indebted to Mr. W. P. S. Milsted, Principal of the Armenian College, to Mr. J. W. Chippendale, late Professor in the La Martiniere College, and to Mr. P. Mittra, Barrister-at-law, for their kindness in going through the manuscript and making certain valuable suggestions.

BASIRHAT :

District 24-Parganahs.

K. BANERJI.

BENGAL.

September, 1905.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
I. KING HABACHANDRA AND HIS PRIME MINISTER GABACHANDRA	1
II. THE THREE DANCERS	18
III. THE BARBER-BRAHMAN	32
IV. DON'T TRY TO PLEASE EVERYBODY	50
V. THE LUCKY ADVENTURER	57
VI. THE WITTY APPRENTICE	78
VII. THE SHREWD SON-IN-LAW	92
VIII. THE WORTHY NEPHEW	101
IX. MADARCHAND THE CRACKED QUACK	123
X. NIMAI THE SINGER	141
XI. BOKARAM'S MARRIAGE	165
XII. THE KING'S COUSIN	181
XIII. THE MAHAMMEDAN WEAVER	187
XIV. SERVICE SECURES SUMPTUOUS SUBSISTENCE.	205

POPULAR TALES OF BENGAL.

I.

KING HABACHANDRA AND HIS PRIME MINISTER GABACHANDRA.

IN days of yore, there reigned a mighty monarch whose name was Habachandra, who had a Prime Minister called Gabachandra. The name Habachandra literally means 'the moon among fools,' or a first-rate fool; and Gabachandra literally signifies the same thing. These two appellations were very deservedly applied to the King and his Prime Minister, as Habachandra was indeed a shallow-brained simpleton, and Gabachandra an addle-headed *ass*! The proverb, "like master like man," was fully illustrated in the union of these two worthies. Whenever the King

asked the Prime Minister for his advice in any difficult question, Gabachandra always gave it in such a stupid manner that no one, having a spark of common sense, could act upon it, except his royal master Habachandra.

This half-witted King often committed such egregious acts of folly, counselled by his muddle-headed minister, that he was always the laughing-stock of all persons in the country. The vagaries of the monarch and his minister, indeed, knew no bounds ; and they often inflicted such wrongs on the heads of their innocent subjects that it would make one's blood boil to record them. There was no justice at all to be got in King Habachandra's court. The proverb, "one doth the blame, another bears the shame," was amply demonstrated here. It was generally the case in the court of Habachandra that the guilty often escaped while the innocent suffered. In King Habachandra's capital there was no distinction between right and wrong, between good and evil. Almost all things were sold there indiscriminately for one and the same price.

One day it happened that a very reverend recluse, attended by one of his disciples, came to visit the capital of this King. He was a man of somewhat slender make, while his follower was rather inclined to plumpness. The recluse was very much pleased with the prosperous appearance of the city, and he intended to rest there for some time. Having selected a shady spot under a big Banyan-tree, in accordance with the

invariable custom of religious mendicants in India, the *Sannyási** desired his disciple to buy from the Bázár a *pice-worth* of *misri*, or sugarcandy, and a *pice-worth* of *muri*, or parched rice : the former was intended for the recluse, the latter for the disciple.

The *Sishya*,† on receiving the commands of his *Gurudeb*,‡ forthwith went to the Bázár and came back, after a little while, to his preceptor with a quantity of sugarcandy only. At this the recluse asked his disciple why he had not brought the parched rice he had been commanded to buy. The disciple thereupon joyously replied :—“ O *Gurudeb* ! This is a very strange city ! Almost all things are sold here for the same price : a *pice* would purchase as large a quantity of *misri* as that of *muri* !! This being the case, I have bought a *pice-worth* of *misri* for your reverence, and also a *pice-worth* of the same for my humble self, instead of the nasty *muri* which is always apt to make one ill. Oh ! I wish I could live here to the end of my days to enjoy all the good things of this blessed place !”

On hearing this, the wise recluse looked aghast and said :—“ My son, let us leave this strange land at once. No sensible man can safely remain in a place where *muri* and *misri* are sold for the same price. You know the great difference which exists between these two things in other districts. *Misri* is a highly delicious

* Recluse. † Disciple. ‡ Spiritual Guide.

and expensive article of food, whereas *muri* is insipid and cheap. It is clear, therefore, that there cannot be any justice in a country where this distinction is not observed. There is a very wise saying which enjoins on all prudent persons to depart from a place where sandal-wood and common fuel, camphor and cotton-wool, the cuckoo and the crow, the elephant and the ass, gold and glass, *muri* and *misri*, are held in equal esteem. I therefore bid you quit this place *at once* that your life may not be endangered by tarrying here."

The deluded disciple declined to go, being well pleased with the apparent prosperity of the capital of King Habachandra. As he was rather fond of good cheer, he could not forego the unusual temptation of getting so many delicious and high-priced articles of food almost for nothing. He determined to pass the remainder of his days in that strange and unique city, which seemed a perfect paradise to him, so that he might fill his capacious stomach with the choicest delicacies that were there to be had for merely a nominal price. Again and again the far-seeing *Sannyasi* pressed his purblind pupil to quit the city and to follow him, but in vain. The *Sishya* would much rather desert his respected *Gurudev*; but to depart from that city of ideal happiness—a land literally flowing with milk and honey—was to him an impossibility. The recluse was very much disgusted at this disobedience of his disciple, and he left the place leaving the self-willed

Sishya to his fate. But being a kind man, he advised his faithless follower, before leaving, to remember him, should he be in trouble.

Some time after this, it so happened that a burglar, while in the act of breaking open a house by effecting a *sindh*, or breach, in the mud-wall of a room, was crushed to death by the fallen fragments of the wall he had bored.

It will not be out of place here to describe the manner in which burglaries are generally committed in Bengal. The burglar uses a small sharp-edged iron instrument, called the *Sindh-kati*, for the purpose of making a small hole in the wall of a house through which to effect an entrance. The opening is just large enough to admit a man, who, however, would have to squeeze himself through, crawling on all fours. The burglar does not enter through this breach all at once for fear of being caught and severely beaten by the wakeful householders. By way of feeler, he, first of all, introduces through this opening a small well-blackened earthen cooking-pot, or *hāndi*, resembling a man's head, at the end of a long stick. If the inmates of the room are awake and on the alert, they would naturally, being in the dark, take the blackened earthen pot for the head of a burglar and would smash it with a *lātti*, or stout club. The wily thief would thus find out if the people in the room are awake, and would by this means escape the chance of getting his head smashed, and

he would instantly take to his heels to avoid being seized. If the *hândi* escapes smashing, the burglar thereby concludes that the inmates of the room are all fast asleep, and he then introduces his legs through the opening, to make assurance doubly sure. If his lower extremities are not caught hold of, neither broken nor cut, the cautious burglar gradually proceeds to insert his head into the *sindh*, and thus gains admittance into the room, while his accomplices remain outside to keep watch. A door is opened with great caution, and the unwelcome nocturnal visitors of the house carry off everything portable on which they can lay their hands. It is generally believed that the burglars anoint their eyes with an oily preparation which enables them, like cats, to see in the dark. They also use, so says Rumour, a certain charm called the *Nidili** by virtue of which the inmates of the room entered into by the burglars, are charmed into a sound sleep. But, whether any charm is used or not, it is a curious fact that the occupants of a room broken into by burglars, are generally found to have been fast asleep on the night of the burglary. And now to resume the thread of our narrative.

When the police of King Habachandra's capital found in the morning the dead body of the unfortunate burglar with the well-known *sindh-kat* in his hand,

*A soporific spell.

lying under the *debris* of the mud-wall, it told its own tale. The accident was at once reported to the King who thereupon ordered the immediate arrest of the innocent householder. Accordingly, the owner of the house was duly brought before His Majesty who sat upon a high throne of burnished gold, with his worthy Prime Minister by his side on a seat of polished silver lower than that of his royal master. King Habachandra, on seeing the prisoner, demanded of him, in a very grave tone, why he had built a house-wall so unsafe, that it had given way and killed an honest burglar engaged in his lawful vocation of boring his way into the room for the purpose of committing a little harmless theft. The astounded householder very humbly answered:—“*Dharmdūtār!** I am not to blame for this sad accident. The fault does not lie with *me*, but with the work-man who built the wall for me. I paid him for his labour, and I did not desire him to make the wall unsafe for burglars.”

Upon this the wise King Habachandra exclaimed:—“Oh! I see. You ought not to be punished for the unfortunate death of the poor burglar; you may depart in safety. But you must point out the guilty builder to the *Kotowal*.† The householder hastily left the court of King Habachandra thanking his stars for having so easily escaped the justice of this Indian Daniel! A few

* Incarnation of Justice. † Prefect of Police.

minutes after, the unhappy builder, who had built the mud-wall in question, was brought in. His Majesty very angrily asked him why he should not be held responsible for the death of the burglar who had perished solely through his fault, inasmuch as the wall built by him had given way and had crushed the unfortunate burglar while engaged in his lawful occupation of boring through it.

The work-man trembled in fear and replied :—“ May it please your Majesty. The fault is not mine. I merely laid the clods of earth one upon the other in building the wall, and I tried my best to make it as solid and as firm as I could. But the labourer who tempered the clay did not do his work properly ; the clods remained porous, and so they did not firmly stick together and form a solid mass.” The King thereupon exclaimed :—“ Oh ! I understand it now. You should not suffer for the fault of another ; so you may depart, after pointing out the guilty labourer to the police.” The builder respectfully bowed and left the Presence. The *Kotowal*, after a short time, brought in the labourer to the *Durbâr*, or court, of the sapient monarch. King Habachandra, in a rage, asked the labourer why he should not be punished for the death of the burglar who had perished through his negligence in not properly tempering the clay with which the mud-wall had been built.

The poor labourer was lost in wonder at this accusation ; but he very humbly replied :—“ My most gracious

Sovereign, I did not at all neglect my duty. I laboured hard to temper the clay properly; but the *kalsis** in which I fetched water for the purpose of tempering the hard earth, had not been well baked by the potter and some portion of the liquid leaked out in transit. The potter who supplied the *kalsis* is the man to blame and not I." On this the King exclaimed :—" Oh yes ! I now perceive how the matter stands. You are not the guilty person, so I will let you off. But you must show this potter to the *Kotowal* who shall bring him at once before me." The labourer made his humble obeisance at the feet of the mighty monarch, and forthwith followed the Chief of police to point out the hapless potter.

A little while after, the *Kotowal* brought the poor potter into the King's presence. The King, in great wrath, asked him why he should not suffer capital punishment for the death of the burglar who had perished solely through *his* fault. The poor potter shook from head to foot in fear. He was at a loss to make out why the death of a burglar should be laid to his charge. He therefore humbly replied :—" Sire, Your Majesty is the incarnation of justice. Your Majesty's judgment is always unerring. I therefore must suffer the extreme punishment ordered by Your Majesty. But may I be permitted to inquire how I have merited

* Earthen jars.

this punishment for the death of a burglar?" King Habachandra replied :—" Oh knave of a potter ! Know you not that the *kalsis* manufactured by you were not well baked, and so the water leaked out of them, so much so, that the labourer could not properly moisten the hard earth in tempering the clay for the mud-wall of a house. A poor burglar, in attempting to bore a hole through it, was crushed to death under the *debris* of the treacherous wall. Had you baked the *kalsis* well, this mishap would not have happened at all." " My most magnanimous Sovereign," rejoined the potter, " if such is the case, then be pleased not to lay the death of the burglar at the door of your humble servant who always carries on his craft as honestly as is possible. The fault, my most gracious Leige, lies with a certain dealer who sold me the fuel with which my earthen pots were baked. Had that man supplied me with a better quality of fuel, my *kalsis* would have been properly baked, and the unfortunate occurrence would never have happened."

The King, on hearing the specious plea of the potter ordered the immediate arrest of the guilty man who had sold bad fuel to the manufacturer of earthenware. The potter was allowed to go his way unharmed ; but His Majesty commanded him to point out to the police that roguish seller of fuel, owing to whose knavery the poor burglar had so sadly succumbed under the fallen wall.

It was not long before the wretched fuel-seller—the source of all the mischief—was dragged before the King, who, boiling with rage, demanded of the man why he should not be at once put to death to atone for the unfortunate end of the innocent burglar. The poor fuel-seller became quite thunderstruck, as he knew not how he deserved to die for the death of a burglar; he, therefore, very submissively requested to be enlightened on the point. King Habachandra, thereupon, thundered forth:—“Wretch! know you not that *you* are the root of all this evil? You supplied the potter with bad fuel, in consequence of which his *kalsis* were not well baked and they leaked very much; for this reason, the clay with which the mud-wall of a house had been built could not be properly tempered; and the poor burglar—a subject of mine—in making a *sindh* in the wall, met with a woful end owing to your wicked fraud; you therefore must suffer the consequences.”

The miserable fuel-seller trembled like a plantain leaf in a breeze, and uttered some excuses in his defence, to which His Majesty turned a deaf ear. It was the King's firm conviction that the burglar had perished *solely* through the roguery of this rascally fuel-seller! King Habachandra, therefore, said with impressive solemnity:—“Wretched man! had you supplied the potter with a better quality of fuel, the life of the poor burglar would not have been so sadly sacrificed. I won't listen.

to your lame excuses. Justice must be meted out impartially. I therefore sentence you to suffer death by impalement this very day.—*Jallhad*,* take the prisoner away and do your duty promptly.”

The poor fellow was forthwith removed from the King's presence and conducted to the *Dakshin-mashan*.

This was in ancient times a place for public execution, usually located at the southern extremity of a city. The south side of a city is preferred as a place of execution because the *Hindoos* believe that the abode of *Yama*, the great Destroyer, is situated in the south. A barbarous contrivance was generally used by the ancient kings of India in executing criminals. A long iron rod, sharp-pointed on the top, called the *Súl*, was fixed upright in the earth. The sharp end pointed towards the sky, a few feet above the ground. The doomed man was made to sit astride on the point of the *Súl*, and the weight of his body slowly transfixed him lengthwise on the sharp iron lance, the point of which ultimately came out of the victim's head. This inhuman mode of execution caused excruciating agony to the victim who died by inches, and it also struck terror into the hearts of the spectators. The dead body was allowed to remain and rot on the dreadful *Súl*.

Such being the mode of inflicting capital punishment on criminals in those days, the poor fuel-seller,

* Public executioner.

sentenced to be executed by the royal command of King Habachandra, in order to expiate the death of the burglar, was dragged to the *Dakshin-mashana*, or the place of execution, and was duly placed upon the point of the iron *Sú*. Now, the half-famished seller of fuel was very thin, and his body was as light as a feather, so that the point of the *Sú* failed to pierce through him, to the great amusement of all the spectators assembled there to witness the sorrowful scene.

When the grim officers of Death, engaged in the execution of the innocent fuel-seller, saw their victim sitting lightly on the point of the life-killing *Sú*, without suffering any serious injury, they became astonished and ashamed. The *Jallhád* jumped from the block, amidst the jeers of the assembled multitude, and quickly ran to report the matter to His Majesty. King Habachandra was in a mighty fix at this untoward circumstance, and knew not what to do. He was, consequently, obliged to seek counsel of his all-wise Prime Minister, Gabachandra. That worthy *Brihaspati** also felt some difficulty in quickly arriving at a solution of this vexatious problem. At last, however, the Prime Minister hit upon an expedient and thus addressed his royal master :—“ *Maháráj*, † it is a very simple matter indeed. Justice must not be deprived of its dues. If that rascally light-bodied fuel-seller will not die on the point

* The counsellor of the gods. † Great king.

of the *Súl*, let a heavy fat fellow be put upon it in his stead." The King was highly delighted at this very easy solution of a puzzling problem! He thanked his wise minister for his rare intelligence! Habachandra then ordered the executioner to find out a corpulent man, and to put him upon the point of the *Súl*, in place of the thin miserable fuel-seller whose obstinate determination to live was most strange! The *Jallhád* hurried away to carry out the King's command, and he was not long in securing a fat victim for the *Súl*.

The disobedient disciple of the recluse, whom he had deserted, had tarried in the peerless city of King Habachandra, to enjoy all the good things so easily obtainable there. He had been at the outset somewhat inclined to plumpness, and had become stouter by feeding on rich food to his heart's content. As he chanced to pass by the place of execution, his bulky body soon attracted the notice of the executioners who at once pounced upon him as a fit victim for the iron *Súl*! The poor thin fuel-seller was instantly taken down and allowed to depart in peace. Preparations were then set in progress for placing upon the *Súl* the portly person of the unhappy disciple, to his great dismay.

The news of the strange substitution of a fat man for a thin one, spread rapidly throughout the length and breadth of the land; and everybody wondered at the vagaries of the King and his Prime Minister. The doomed disciple was forcibly dragged nearer the dread-

ful instrument. He now found, when too late, that he had acted very foolishly in staying in a place where sugar-candy and parched-rice were sold for the same price. He began to curse his fatal folly, and bitterly remembered his *Gurudeb's* injunction not to remain for a single moment in that country.

It so chanced that the reverend recluse—the religious preceptor of the doomed man—was at that very time coming to that strange city to see how it had fared with his disobedient disciple. On reaching the capital of King Habachandra, the kind-hearted recluse was greatly distressed to hear of the fatal predicament into which his faithless follower had fallen, and he forthwith went to his rescue. The executioners were just then engaged in lifting their bulky victim to the *Súl*, when the recluse came running up and cried out:—“Hold! hold! my sons. Let go that sinful slave of society, who deserves not death on the point of this sacred *Súl*. I'll allow no one, except my humble self, to die on this wonderful instrument.” So saying the saintly *Sannyasi* held fast to the iron rod, to the astonishment of all. Vexed at this conduct of one whom they could in no way insult or disobey, for fear of incurring a deadly curse, the executioners again ran back to their royal master and reported the strange circumstance to him.

King Habachandra hastened at once to the place of execution, and his pet Prime Minister, Gabachandra,

followed him. The King then very reverentially requested the recluse to explain the reason of his volunteering to die for another—a thing which to him seemed so very strange. The *Sannyási* solemnly said :—“Sire, may the Almighty Father *Bhagabán** pour His choicest blessings on thy head and preserve thee from vice and misery! Now let me die on the point of this sacred *Sú*l which at once transports the man, who is fortunate enough to die on it, to the seventh heaven, however sinful he may be. This iron *Sú*l was forged at a very auspicious moment, called the *Máhen*dra-*kshana*, and in consequence thereof it has been impregnated with the extraordinary virtue of transporting its victim to the highest heaven. Knowing this fact from my long meditation on the Supreme Being, through a certain process called the *Yoga*, I have hastened hither to avail myself of this rare opportunity. I, therefore, earnestly pray that Your Majesty will be gracious enough to grant me this boon.”

At this point, Gabachandra, the pet Prime Minister of the King, put in :—“My most indulgent master, be pleased to confer on your old servant a favour which he humbly seeks at Your Majesty’s hands. Permit your poor Prime Minister to pass on to the highest heaven on the point of this sacred *Sú*l. I have served Your Majesty faithfully all my life and have grown gray in

*God.

your service. I now, therefore, beg to be rewarded with *this* boon."

King Habachandra, hearing the prayer of the Prime Minister, reflected for a while and then said :—"No, my worthy Minister, I cannot accede to your prayer. The temptation of so easy a translation to the *seventh heaven* is too great to resist. I am, therefore, resolved to place myself upon the point of this sacred *Sil*, and to go at once to the highest heaven to enjoy ethereal bliss." So saying, the addle-headed over-credulous King, Habachandra, caused himself to be placed upon the sharp point of the heaven-transporting *Sil*, and went directly to that place whence no traveller ever returns! The recluse then left the capital of King Habachandra with his disciple who now understood full well the justice of his *Gurudev's* observation that it is dangerous to stay in a place where *muri* and *misri* are sold for the same price.



II.

THE THREE DANCERS.



IN a certain town there lived a Bráhmán who had a small property. He passed his days in great ease as he was not of an ambitious turn of mind. The income derived from his estate sufficed to meet all his necessities. The Bráhmán had a devoted wife, but no children. Having no ties of affection to enchain them to a domestic life, the Bráhmán one day proposed to his wife that they should set out on a pilgrimage to all the sacred places and shrines in *Bhúrathabarsha*, or India. The Bráhmán's wife, overjoyed at her husband's holy resolution, expressed her satisfaction and approved of the proposal. Arrangements were accordingly made for the journey. All the dues were collected from those who owed them money, and they sold their property to advantage, as there was no knowing whether they would return from their travels or not. They then took leave of their friends and relatives, who all wished them a prosperous journey.

Before setting out, however, the Bráhmaṇ counted over the money collected by him. He found that he had a surplus of seven thousand *rupees* in hand, after keeping apart a good sum to meet the travelling expenses. He now began to think what he should do with this large amount, because it would be very imprudent to take with him all that he was worth, lest he might be robbed on the way. After laying their heads together for some time, the Bráhmaṇ and his wife came to the conclusion that the surplus of *rupees* seven thousand must be deposited with one of their trustworthy neighbours. In that town there lived a rich banker who was renowned for virtue and probity. To this person the Bráhmaṇ applied, and requested him to take charge of his money during his absence. The banker at first shrugged his shoulders, bit the tip of his tongue by way of refusal, and said that he could not receive in trust a Bráhmaṇ's money which was considered very sacred by him.

The banker was a *Baishya*, which caste occupies the third place in the caste system in India. As the Bráhmaṇ belonged to the highest caste, the good banker expressed his fears that should his business fail by some unlucky chance and the Bráhmaṇ's money be lost, he knew not what would become of him. His very salvation would be endangered, and he would thereby have to go certainly to the hell, called *Rouraba*, with his ancestors up to the fourteenth degree, to reside

there for ever. So keen was his notion of the sacredness of a Bráhmán's money !

After many yeas and nays, however, the banker's scruples yielded to the importunities of the Bráhmán, and he consented to be the trustee of that sacred money. The Bráhmán forthwith placed the amount, all in gold *mohars*, in the hands of the banker, who put the money in a strong iron-chest, after marking the bag with the name of the owner, and, by way of witness, with that of *Dharma*, or the god of Justice. The good Bráhmán could not make up his mind to ask for a receipt in the face of this display of moral rectitude on the part of the banker ; and he, therefore, went away without one. Pleased at his success with the upright banker, the Bráhmán returned home, informed his wife of everything that had happened there, and extolled in high terms the banker's moral principles and his sense of the sacredness of a Bráhmán's money.

They then set out on their pilgrimage and visited all the sacred places and shrines in India. As there was no Railway communication in those days in India, it took the travellers more than a year to complete their pilgrimage. At length they returned home to the great joy of their friends and relatives, who all thought that the Bráhmán and the Bráhmani* must have perished in some distant *Tirtha*, or sacred place, either from

*A Bráhmán's wife.

some disease or by the violent hands of *Dácdits*, or robbers. Great rejoicings were made in the families of the Bráhmañ's acquaintances. He and his wife, for some time, feasted every day in the houses of their friends on different dainties especially prepared for the occasion.

At length, however, the feasting being over, the Bráhmañ found leisure to attend to his household affairs. His first care was to get back the money he had deposited with the pious banker. He, accordingly, went to the house of that person, who, seeing that the Bráhmañ was now more holy after returning from the pilgrimage, stood up at once. The banker then cordially welcomed him, bowed to him by prostrating himself, took some particles of dust from his feet, touched them with his head, and put the sacred dust very reverentially on his tongue, according to the usual custom in vogue in India amongst the lower classes. After thus receiving the Bráhmañ, the banker gave him a high stool, spread over with a carpet, to sit upon, and very glibly entered into conversation with him on different topics. He then very politely requested the Bráhmañ to narrate to him fully how he had fared in his recent pilgrimage, what objects of interest he had seen at the different *Tirthas*, which he had only heard of, but had not seen—he being a poor sinner. The Bráhmañ satisfied the curiosity of the inquisitive banker by relating to him, in detail, the accounts of his

travels ; on which the pious banker thanked him and said that he had been purged of his sins to a considerable extent, through listening to the narration of the sacred shrines from the lips of the holy Bráhmaṇ.

Things went well thus far. The Bráhmaṇ at last wanted back the money he had deposited with the banker. On hearing of this demand, the pious banker looked aghast, as if he had fallen from the clouds ! He asked the Bráhmaṇ what he meant by demanding so large a sum with the keeping of which he had not been trusted at all. He then said :—“ How is it, O avaricious Bráhmaṇ ! that you make a demand on me for seven thousand *rupees*, when you know very well that you have not left even seven *cowries** with me ? ”

On this the good Bráhmaṇ was taken quite aback. He, at first, could scarcely believe his ears. He thought that the banker was merely joking with him, and so he said :—“ Good sir, your piety and integrity are too well known to me to make me believe what you say but assuredly do not mean. You are the last man in the world to help yourself to the money of a Bráhmaṇ whom you adore as a god. As you are a jewel of your caste and profession, I know my money is quite safe with you. But if you are short of money at present, I shall call on you another day and await your convenience.” To this the banker replied :—“ What say you, foolish,

* Small shells used as money.

Bráhmañ? My coffers are as full as ever. But why should I pay you when I owe you nothing?" The Bráhmañ now saw plainly through the real character of that sanctimonious banker. He now became convinced that he was the greatest scoundrel on the face of the earth, and repented of his folly in not having taken a receipt from the banker at the time of depositing the money. But his self-reproach could now avail him nothing.

The Bráhmañ, exceedingly sad and depressed at thus being treated by the treacherous banker, returned home weeping all the while for his heavy loss. He told his wife everything connected with the banker. She was astounded. She mourned the loss much more heavily, and struck her brow with both her hands in utter despair. That day and night passed away in sorrowing and lamenting. On the morrow, the Bráhmañi requested her husband to go again to the banker for the money, and she exhorted him not to cease dunning the banker, till, in disgust, he would be compelled to pay off the money. The good woman even instructed him to try his best to soften the heart of the unkind banker with his weeping and crying. The Bráhmañ again went to the deceitful banker, who, on seeing him, very angrily said :—"Oh senseless Bráhmañ! again have you come hither to bother me with your fraudulent demand for seven thousand *rupees*? Begone! I warn you not to darken my doors again."

The poor Bráhmán very entreatingly, and with tears in his eyes, replied :—“ My good sir, have pity on a poor Bráhmán. We have nothing to live upon but that money with you. If you refuse payment, we shall certainly have to starve.” Saying this the Bráhmán wept a flood of tears. But his sorrowful look and the profuse shedding of tears produced no effect whatever on the adamant heart of the money-loving banker. He still relented not; on the contrary he tauntingly said :—“ Have you lost your senses, wicked Bráhmán? How dare you accuse *me*, an honest and rich banker, of an act which I am quite incapable of doing? Had you really deposited any money with me, I would have, at this very moment, returned the same to you with the interest thereon.” The distracted Bráhmán again supplicated the heartless banker in very moving terms, to which he, however, turned a deaf ear. The hard-hearted wretch then relented so far as to offer the Bráhmán a *half-rupee* piece by way of charity, and said :—“ Oh poor Bráhmán! if you have nothing to live upon as you say, take this *adhuli** which I give you, as a good neighbour, taking into consideration your destitute condition caused by your recent extravagant pilgrimage.”

Indignant at the conduct of the banker, the Bráhmán flung away the piece of silver offered him by the heartless rascal, and returned home sorrowing all the

* A half-rupee piece of silver.

way. His good wife again comforted him with the hope that the banker might one day relent and pay back the money, and she advised him to go every day to the house and make daily demands for the money, although he might be repelled on every occasion. The Bráhmán followed the advice of his wife, and, from day to day, he went to the house of the banker and returned as unsuccessful as before.

It so happened that as the Bráhmán was returning to his house—crying and lamenting loudly as was his custom—he had to pass the house of a kind-hearted lady who had watched him, day by day, as he passed on his sorrowful journey. With a view to ascertain the cause of the Bráhmán's grief, which, she thought, must be very great, she desired one of her maid-servants to stop the sorrowing Bráhmán and to bring him to her at once. Accordingly, the maid-servant went out into the street, accosted him, and acquainted him with the wishes of her mistress. Seeing no harm in complying with the request of a kind-hearted lady, who was the wife of a very rich and renowned merchant of the town, the Bráhmán followed the maid-servant. He was at once ushered into the lady's presence, and was well received. The good woman then, in a very kind tone, inquired of the Bráhmán the cause of the great grief which made him cry whilst he went along the public streets.

The Bráhmán, with torrents of tears, told his tale to the good lady. The merchant's wife became greatly

moved at this, and thus addressed the Bráhmaṇ :—
 “Father, what you say is really very strange! To cheat a holy Bráhmaṇ of his sacred money, is so great a sin that it can never be pardoned by God. That the honey-lipped banker is a great rogue, has all along been suspected by my good husband, the merchant, who is now absent from home.” The Bráhmaṇ, now finding a kind sympathiser in the good lady before him, became somewhat consoled and said :—“Oh mother! that knavish banker, with the cloak of piety he puts on, easily deceives the world with his assumed sanctity. But though he may escape detection in this world, he will surely be made to pay for his perfidy in the next by that All-seeing Power, God.”

The kind-hearted lady then soothed the Bráhmaṇ with many sweet words, and said that she would try her best to help him towards the recovery of his money; on which the Bráhmaṇ blessed her from the bottom of his heart. She then requested him to go again on the morrow to the banker's house, whither she would also go at the same time, and to ask for the money in her presence, but he was not to recognise her there. The Bráhmaṇ gave his word and returned home. He informed his wife of his meeting with the kind-hearted lady. The Bráhmaṇi expressed her joy and said, that, most probably, through the intercession of that benign lady, their lost treasure would be restored to them. Leaving the Bráhmaṇ and the Bráhmaṇi in the arms

of alternate hope and despair, let us now return to the abode of that benevolent lady, the rich merchant's wife.

As soon as the Bráhmaṇ had left her mansion, the good lady wrote a letter to the banker. She requested him to keep in trust her rubies, diamonds, and other precious stones, to the aggregate value of seven *lákhs** of *rupees*, during her absence from home as she intended to leave on the following day to go abroad in search of her husband, the merchant, who had been absent from home for a long time. She also added that she knew of no other man who could be trusted with valuables of so great a price than the banker himself; she, therefore, entreated him in very earnest terms to accede to her wishes.

On receiving this letter the covetous banker became exceedingly glad, and he chuckled at the idea of gaining so much wealth in a single day, through the lady's confidence in him. He then very politely replied to her letter in the affirmative, and expressed his readiness to place himself at her service, whenever it suited her convenience. That day the banker passed in anxious expectation of the lady's riches. Throughout the night he could not get even a wink of sleep, though he courted it several times. His greed for gold was so great that his very soul seemed to be centred on that

* A *lakh* = 100,000.

one point. He opened the shutters of the windows of his bed-room frequently during the night, to see if the eastern horizon was streaked with the red rays of the rising sun; and he cursed the darkness of the night which appeared to him interminable.

At length the much-wished-for morning arrived to the great joy of that votary of Mammon. The banker got up betimes and went into his sitting-room which served as his office, and impatiently waited there for the rich lady with her wealth. Half an hour afterwards, the merchant's wife made her appearance, in a carriage, attended by the maid-servant who had brought the letter to the banker on the previous day. The usual ceremony of greeting being over, the lady produced two fanciful ivory boxes of inlaid work before the banker, unlocked them with two small silver keys, opened their lids, and exposed to the view of the amazed banker the contents of the caskets, all shining and brilliant.

For some time, the overjoyed rascal feasted his eyes on the beauty and splendour of those jewels valued at seven *lakhs* of *rupees*, which were so soon to come into his possession for good. He was almost beside himself with joy, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he was able to maintain his outward composure in the presence of the merchant's wife. But while his eyes were still gloatingly riveted on the contents of the caskets, the unwelcome Bráhman

looked in as arranged, and, as usual, requested him to return the money he had lodged with the banker.

This time the banker did not, however, choose to treat the Bráhmán in the same way as he had done on the previous occasions. He thought within himself:—“If I now ignore the Bráhmán’s deposit, it may excite the confiding lady’s suspicion, and she may then change her mind. It is not, therefore, advisable to lose the chance of pocketing 700,000 *rupees* for the sake of a paltry 7000.” Thus reasoning inwardly, the banker at once opened his iron-safe, produced the bag of money marked with the Bráhmán’s name, and placed it in his hands. He even went so far as to force on the Bráhmán a thousand *rupees* more, by way of interest which had accrued on the capital while it remained in his hands.

This unexpected success with the deceitful banker gladdened the heart of the Bráhmán beyond measure. He now wept for joy and began to dance merrily with the bag of money upon his shoulders. At this moment, a maid-servant came running from the lady’s mansion and thus addressed her, panting all the while,—“My lady! my lady! come back at once to the mansion; my master, the merchant, has just now returned home from his tour.” Hearing this, the good lady appeared to be transported with joy and said:—“Has my husband come home?—Oh! what happy news this is for me!” The maid-servant replied:—“Yes, my lady. The gods have at last been propitious, and your husband,

my master, has come back safe and sound, and laden with immense riches." Upon this, the lady observed :—
 "Then I need not give this good banker the trouble of keeping all these things in his custody." So saying, she abruptly closed the caskets and handed them over to her maid-servants to be carried home in the carriage.

The overjoyed lady then began to dance along with the Bráhmaṇ. The astounded banker's eyes were now opened, and he saw through the trick which had been played upon him. But, strange to say, he also joined them in their dance with a good grace. Thus the three persons—the Bráhmaṇ, the lady and the banker—continued to dance together, to the surprise of the amused bystanders who were attracted to the scene by the unusual sight.

When an inquisitive spectator said :—"Oh Bráhmaṇ! wherefore do you dance?" The Bráhmaṇ answered :—"Oh sir! because I have this day recovered my money." The same person also remarked :—"Oh good lady! wherefore do you dance?" The lady answered :—"Oh sir! because my husband has come back this day." He then inquired :—"Oh banker! and wherefore do you dance?" The banker answered :—"Oh sir! it is because I have been taught a good lesson this day!"

After this, the delighted Bráhmaṇ blessed the clever lady for her kind assistance, and went home with his recovered treasure. The good lady also returned to her

mansion beaming with joy at having done a good deed that morning.

It is needless to say that the story of the merchant's return, as reported by the maid-servant, was not a fact at all. The discomfited banker bore this lesson in his heart to the end of his life.



III.

THE BARBER—BRAHMAN.



ONCE upon a time there lived a learned old Bráhmaṇ who was a priest. He subsisted on the perquisites of his parish and on voluntary gifts made by the well-to-do persons of the neighbouring villages. This priest had to perform all the religious rites amongst his parishioners. He had to celebrate marriage ceremonies, the investiture of Bráhmaṇ's sons with the holy thread, the putting of *bhat*, or boiled rice, into a child's mouth for the first time, called the *Annaprāshana*, and the *Srāddha* ceremony, or the funeral obsequies, of deceased persons. The offering up of *Pujā** to the several gods and goddesses, on the appointed days of the year, was also his duty.

This learned Bráhmaṇ had a young servant who was a barber by caste, but not by profession. He had lived in the Bráhmaṇ's family for more than sixteen

* *Worship.*

years. His father and mother, who lived in the same village, died when he was only a boy of six. As he had no near relatives or kind friends to take care of him, the orphan boy came one day to the priest's house to beg for alms. The kind-hearted Bráhmán, affected at the sight of the barber-boy, took compassion on him and offered him the shelter of his house. It is needless to say that the charge of maintenance of the friendless boy was undertaken by the old priest. Thus the poor orphan, having obtained a footing in the household of the kind Bráhmán, grew up to be a fine young man under the fostering care of the priest and his wife.

This barber-boy was endowed by nature with talents. His memory was so sharp that he learnt by heart almost all the Bráhmánical tenets and doctrines, merely through listening to the learned priest while he recited the religious formulas in the course of his own vocation. As he had received a good education under the tuition of his patron, the priest, he made rapid progress in his attainment of theological learning. In short, this talented barber-youth made himself well acquainted with all the duties of a Bráhmán, with ardent assiduity.

Now, the aforesaid knowledge made the barber-youth discontented with his own humble rank in society. He, therefore, determined to better his position at all costs. With all his intimate knowledge of the Bráhmánical lore, why should he not, he argued, be a Bráhmán himself? His ambitious nature had made him so con-

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ceited that he already considered himself as good as a Bráhmaṇ. The only thing wanting to elevate him to the rank and honour of a Bráhmaṇ, he fancied, was that symbol of Bráhmaṇical distinction, called *Paiták*, or holy thread.

Bráhmaṇs invariably wear this *Paiták*, in skeins, upon the left shoulder hanging slantwise round the chest, and, generally, reaching down to the upper part of the right thigh as far as the root of the thumb of the right hand, when extended, can reach. The barber-youth earnestly longed for this sign of pre-eminence, which alone barred him from becoming a Bráhmaṇ. But the difficulty arose as to the manner in which the requisite ceremony could be gone through without the aid of his patron, the priest. For some time he could not make up his mind to tell the Bráhmaṇ of his desire. It is not lawful in the eye of the religious codes of the Hindoos to make anyone a Bráhmaṇ, however deserving he may be. No one who is not born a Bráhmaṇ is entitled to that privilege. Our barber-youth, therefore, found it the hardest thing in the world to get himself invested with the holy thread which he so much longed for. He brooded over the matter day and night, till at last he mustered up sufficient courage and addressed the venerable priest in the following terms:—"Father, I have a boon to ask of your reverence. I hope your holiness will be pleased to grant it to *one* whom you consider as a son."

To this the priest replied :—"My son, open your mind to me. I shall be glad to grant you anything that lies in my power." The barber-servant then said :—"Oh Sir! it is a very simple matter indeed. All that I beg of your reverence is to make me a Bráhmaṇ. Through your favour I am well acquainted with the duties of a Bráhmaṇ, and I can recite, word for word, all the religious formulas. The ceremony of investing me with the holy thread will raise my mean self, your humble servant, to the position of a Bráhmaṇ, to which I am entitled by my knowledge, though not by birth."

At this unreasonable request of his protégé, the good priest laughed outright and said :—"Foolish youth! I am astonished at your effrontery. Dare you become a Bráhmaṇ? Know you not what your origin is? Can the son of a base barber be raised to the rank of a Bráhmaṇ? Don't aspire to what you cannot be. It is quite impossible for you. Pshaw! a dwarf wishes to reach the moon with his pygmy hands! The thought is simply ridiculous. Banish that foolish idea from your mind and be a reasonable man. Rest contented with the position in which the Creator has placed you." Thus rebuked by his benefactor, the young man felt mortified, but he again and again requested the priest, very earnestly, to help him in this matter. At length the old priest got very angry and cried out :—"Shame! shame! Vile son of a barber! no longer dost thou deserve the favour which I have hitherto bestowed

upon thee. Take thyself off and leave my house at once. I'll not look on thy impudent face any more."

The disheartened youth left the house of his patron, but did not abandon his original intention. He wandered about for some time in the hope of attaining his object, but in vain. He then betook himself to Benaras, the great seat of Bráhmānical learning; but, to his misfortune, no priest acceded to his prayer. They all laughed at him, taking him for a maniac. So strong, however, was his desire to secure the holy thread, which, he thought, would make him a Bráhman, that at length he determined to do away with the necessary ceremony. He, therefore, purchased from the Bázár some skeins of fine machine-made thread for this purpose. Taking three folds of the thread of the required length, he tied the knots without the requisite ceremony of repeating certain *mantras*, or formulas, over them. This thread could not be called *holy* at all, as it was purchased from the Bázár.

The sacred thread, *Paiták*, which is worn by a Bráhman, is spun exclusively by Bráhman women, generally by the widows. For this purpose a very fine spindle, called the *Táko*, having a tiny earthen ball attached to its lower end, is used, which is twirled with the thumb and the fore-finger of the right hand on the shell of a snail mounted with hard clay. The very fine threads, thus obtained from the spindle, are made up

into nine folds and well twisted together. These *Paitás*, or holy threads, are not sold in the Bázár, but they are to be had of the Bráhmán women who spin them.

Thus, taking five or six knots of the machine-made thread, our worthy barber-youth wore them in place of the holy thread, just like a good and genuine Bráhmán, and moreover considered himself as such. He then left for his native country, though not for his native village. Lest he should be recognised as the late barber-servant of the priest, he did not venture to approach the vicinity of those villages where he had been known in his former days. He betook himself to a remote part of the country and mixed in the society of Bráhmáns only. No one ever suspected him to be a low-caste man, thanks to his fine exterior and graceful demeanour! He easily managed to pass for a truly religious Bráhmán, and was entertained by several good Bráhmáns in their own houses without the least suspicion. They even took their meals with him under the same roof—a privilege which the Bráhmáns would never grant to any one who is not of their own sect. Elated with his success, the barber-youth, or rather now the barber-Bráhmán, roamed about from place to place, in high feather. Wherever he went, he received the homage due to a Bráhmán from the people of the lower classes, and he was even respected by the Bráhmáns themselves on account of his Bráhmanical learning.

Some time after, it so happened that the Barber-

Bráhmaṇ, in the course of his wanderings, came, one evening, to a village far away from his former home. He had to put up at that place for the night, as he could not continue his journey in the dark. There being no *sárais*, or inns, in the villages of Bengal, travellers are often obliged to ask for shelter of the generous villagers who never shut the door against strangers. Indeed, the *Sástras* or the religious codes of the Hindoos, strictly enjoin upon every householder to be hospitable to strangers who may come to his house for shelter or board. It is a great sin to refuse hospitality to a guest, however unseasonable the hour of his arrival may be, and however straitened may be the circumstances of the host. Even the poorest peasants gladly receive guests at their wretched hovels and entertain them to the best of their means. They will themselves rather go without food than keep their guests fasting. This prevalent love for hospitality among the people at large, supplies the want of inns in the villages of Bengal. But now to take up the thread of our tale.

The Barber-Bráhmaṇ, on reaching the village at nightfall, became anxious to secure lodgings for the night. As he was now playing the part of a Bráhmaṇ, his first care was to find out a Bráhmaṇ's dwelling, where he expected to be entertained cordially. After some inquiries, he came to the house of the only Bráhmaṇ living in that village. He had some difficulty

in reaching the Bráhmán's abode which was situated in a lonely spot, remote from the habitations of other villagers who were, for the most part, lower class people. The pretender presented himself as a guest at the house of this village Bráhmán. He was well received by the unsuspecting host who entertained him sumptuously and lodged him comfortably. The young man was well pleased with the hearty reception he had met with in the Bráhmán's house, and passed the night in delightful dreams.

The next morning when he was about to depart, his host, the only Bráhmán of that village, would not let him go without having his dinner at the hour of noon. The sham Bráhmán was consequently obliged to stay there at the request of his exceedingly hospitable host. In the course of conversation the pretender gave out that he was a *Kulin** or *one* descended from a high and distinguished family. He also did not forget to throw out the hint that he was still a bachelor, and that many a Bráhmán, in different villages, had offered the hand of his daughter to him in marriage.

* Originally, the possessors of *nine* special qualifications, viz., good conduct, modesty, knowledge, celebrity, pilgrimage to the holy places, firm faith in religion, performance of matrimonial alliances with highly respectable families, religious austerity, and liberality, were made *Kulins* by King Ballal Sen of Bengal. But the title has become hereditary, and the descendants of those *specialy qualified* persons now also enjoy the same honour, though they may not possess the said *nine* qualifications.

Now, it so happened that this village Bráhmaṇ had an unmarried grown-up daughter; and he was, for some time, on the look-out for an eligible bridegroom, but in vain. The anxiety of the Bráhmaṇ to marry his daughter to a *Kulin* was so great that he resolved to secure such a one at any cost; but, unfortunately, his endeavours hitherto had not been crowned with success. As he now fancied that he found in our barber-youth a true model of a *Kulin* Bráhmaṇ, being quite taken in by his false family history, the credulous Bráhmaṇ became exceedingly glad. He inwardly thanked his stars for this piece of good fortune which had brought that young *Kulin* Bráhmaṇ to his house. Indeed, he looked upon this favourable event as a god-send. Accordingly, when the guest had liberally been fed, and had taken his mid-day rest, the Bráhmaṇ broke the ice and very artfully proposed the marriage of his daughter, with his learned guest. He stated that, as he had no other children excepting his handsome daughter, whom he loved dearly, his whole property would, necessarily, devolve upon her after his death. He also declared that his future son-in-law should supply the place of a son, and live with him as a member of the family, to enjoy his riches which were not inconsiderable.

The impostor was overjoyed at this proposal of the Bráhmaṇ, and consented to take his host's daughter to wife; but, for the sake of keeping up appearances, he

at first raised some objections like a true *Kulin* Bráhmaṇ. His feigned scruples, however, soon yielded to the entreaties of the good Bráhmaṇ, and to the magnificent prospects held out to him. The question of the marriage gifts was then amicably settled, and the bridegroom and the bride's father were in high spirits in consequence of this unexpected good luck on both sides. The Bráhmaṇ, not choosing to let the grass grow under his feet, fixed the next day as an auspicious one for the wedding of his daughter. Preparations were then made for the happy occasion, and on the night of the day following, the celebration of the marriage ceremony took place in private. As there was no priest near at hand, the Bráhmaṇ himself had to officiate at the wedding and to do all that was needful. He gave away his daughter, in the usual way, to the young *Kulin* bridegroom with a happy heart. There being neither any bridal party, as there were no other Bráhmaṇs in that village, nor any friends of the bridegroom present there, the usual custom of entertaining them on the night of the marriage festival, had not to be attended to at all.

Thus the nuptial knot was indissolubly tied for ever, to the great joy of the Bráhmaṇ of the village, and that of the happy bridegroom on whom *Prajápati*, the god of marriage, had now so graciously smiled! The worthy son-in-law, as stipulated before, remained at his father-in-law's house in great ease and comfort. He was very

much liked by the parents of his newly married wife who also, as in duty bound, loved him dearly. The Bráhmán, being well off in worldly things, ministered to the wishes of his favourite *Kulin* son-in-law with a good grace. The young man's slightest wants were anticipated by the ever-obliging father-in-law, who tried his best to please his superb son-in-law by all means possible. In this wise the Barber-Bráhmán passed his days, for some time, quite comfortably. He always thanked his own ingenuity in giving himself out as a *Kulin* Bráhmán, which had not only enabled him to move in the highest circles of good Bráhmáns, but had also secured for him a beautiful Bráhmán girl as his wife, and the prospective good income of his father-in-law's estate into the bargain.

The fortunate son-in-law was happy in every respect; he had nothing to complain of at his father-in-law's house. But, one thing disturbed the quietude of his mind: he was ill at ease for fear of detection. He always dreaded, that, should by any unlucky chance his real origin become known, then his Bráhmán father-in-law, whose caste and honour he had intentionally violated, would at once come down upon him with his dire vengeance, and he would certainly be done for. He now perceived, to his great dismay, that his present position was very insecure, and that at any moment the gentlest breath of adverse fortune might scatter to the winds his grand structure, which, after all, had been

built on a quicksand! As a guilty mind is always suspicious, the pseudo-Bráhmañ even started at the sound of his own voice. He always, to avoid the least suspicion, did his best to pass for a right honest Bráhmañ in every way. He devoted himself to prayers and *Pujás* like a strict devotee. Even as a counterfeit coin has more marks than a genuine one, so he recited the names of the Hindoo deities almost incessantly. To give himself the airs of true *Kulin* Bráhmañs of bygone times, who, he had heard, used, as a matter of course, to ill-treat their wives, our cowardly hero now determined to tread in their steps, and forthwith set about it. In every word and deed, he began to slight the innocent girl whom he had married, and to pick quarrels with her.

The overbearing conduct of the husband cut the poor wife to the quick. She was at a loss to make out the real cause of his tyrannical treatment. The afflicted girl tried, heart and soul, to please her ill-tempered husband, but in vain. The more she endeavoured to become conciliatory, the more he began to show his temper. The poor girl, like a good wife, suffered patiently all the cruelties of her husband. This untoward circumstance caused great grief to the bride's father, and more especially to the doting mother.

Things went on in this way for some time, when, at length, an incident occurred which saved the suffering wife from the maltreatment of her cruel *Kulin*.

husband. One day, it came to pass that at noon, a venerable and learned Bráhmañ presented himself as a guest at the house of that village Bráhmañ where the barber-youth had been basking in the sunshine of good fortune. Now, this stranger Bráhmañ declined to partake of the meal prepared in the family kitchen. This is generally the case with many good Bráhmañs who do not eat anything cooked by the hands of any person who is not near of kin to them. In accordance with this Bráhmañical custom, the venerable guest preferred to cook his own food. And when he had finished his meal, the good dame of the house came up to him and entreatingly asked him if he could prepare an *amulet* for her daughter, or teach her some charm, which would have the effect of making her son-in-law treat her daughter a little more kindly.

While the mistress of the house was relating to her guest the circumstances under which her daughter had been married, the worthy son-in-law peeped in from the outer gate and slunk away in haste. The old Bráhmañ's eyes, however, had caught a glimpse of the face of the young man, whom he at once recognised as the barber-youth. The mother-in-law, at that time, told the learned Bráhmañ that the face which had just then been seen was her *Kulin* son-in-law's. Understanding how matters stood, the old Bráhmañ told the good dame that he would teach her daughter a certain charm which would effectually render her fiery son-in-law as quiet as a lamb.

Now, this venerable Bráhmañ was no less a person than the selfsame priest in whose house the adventurous barber-youth had so long lived. He, therefore, easily improvised a charm to quell the fury of the so-called *Kulin* husband of his hostess' daughter. He desired the anxious mother to call her daughter to him to receive her lesson in the wonderful charm. The aggrieved girl came up to the venerable priest, who, with due formality, taught her the following spell:—

'Tis manners betray the birth of a man ;
 Lo ! a jackdaw plays the part of a swan !!
 The priest forbids you to make any fuss ;
 Pray, do remember, yours is *thus and thus*.

He then instructed the girl to move quickly her right hand on the palm of her left, to imitate the stopping of a razor, while she repeated the last words of the charm—'*thus and thus*.' "Now, my daughter," said the learned priest to the bashful girl, "you have nothing to do but to recite thrice the *mantrae* which I have just now taught you, looking your ill-tempered husband full in the face. But don't forget, at the same time, to make the gesture of the hands I have shown you just now, while you repeat the words '*thus and thus*.' This formula will prove, my child, so effective that you will be quite struck with its efficacy." The priest then went away, after receiving

*A charm.

innumerable thanks from the mother and the daughter, who of course did not at all understand the hidden import of the husband-taming charm !

When the priest had gone away, the worthy son-in-law, with some degree of uncertainty in his mind, came in. He feared that the old priest might have given out everything to his relations. But when he saw that nothing was in the wind in that quarter, his mind was set at ease. He now again waxed angry with his innocent wife, and, in great fury, began to revile her in no measured terms. The poor girl, thereupon, resolved to test the efficacy of the newly-learnt charm, then and there. She earnestly repeated thrice, looking her husband full in the face, the *mantra* taught her by the old priest :—

'Tis manners betray the birth of a man ;
Lo ! a jackdaw plays the part of a swan !!
The priest forbids you to make any fuss ;
Pray, do remember, yours is *thus and thus*.

And when she repeated the words '*thus and thus*,' she suited the action to the word, as directed by the learned priest. The covert meaning of the spell, and the significance of the gesture of the girl's hands indicating the stropping of a razor, all struck home, and our Barber-Brahman got frightened. He fancied that he had been exposed by the old priest, his former master whom he had seen, a few minutes before, as a guest in the house. As this thought crossed his mind, the pretender became terrified and resolved to show a clean

pair of heels at once. In a trice, he entered his room, took up his bundle of clothes, and decamped in a great hurry.

The watchful mother-in-law observed this hasty flight and became uneasy. Just in the nick of time, the master of the house came in and was apprised by his wife of the sudden departure of their son-in-law without any apparent cause. On inquiry, he came to know that his daughter had simply recited a certain charm, taught her by their venerable guest, for the purpose of pacifying her husband, and that nothing else had happened which warranted the sudden departure of the son-in-law from the house. The Bráhma then insisted on hearing the wording of the spell from his daughter, who, with some demur, told her father everything, word for word. The intelligent Bráhma understood all, and he forthwith hastened to bring back his runaway son-in-law.

After a little while, he succeeded in overtaking the truant who declined to come back with him on the ground that his wife had flung in his teeth an insult, which he could not at all put up with. The condescending father-in-law then said to the fugitive son-in-law, with a bright smile,—“My son, you need not be frightened away from our house. My daughter has merely let you know, under cover of her spell, that yours is *‘thus and thus’*,” and he made the gesture of the hands spoken of before. “But my dear boy,” said the courteous father-in-law, “rest assured that you have nothing

to fear on that score. While yours is 'thus and thus,' know you that ours is *Tini-ki-ti-tak!*—*Tini-ki-ti-tak!* and he suited the action to the word by clapping his hands upon both his thighs in imitation of playing on a small drum called *dhole*.

Now, these *dholes* are much in use in Bengal amongst the lowest class of Hindoos, such as *Moochis* and other *pariahs*. The sum and substance of this mysterious allusion was this: the village Bráhmañ, in his youthful folly, had fallen in love with the good-looking daughter of a *Moochi*, and they had been living together as man and wife for a long time. The Bráhmañ had lost his caste by this indiscretion and had been excommunicated.

The daughter was the natural child of the Bráhmañ and the *Moochini* woman, the profession of whose caste people was to beat the drums called *dholes*, which, when struck upon by the hands, sounded to the tune of *Tini-ki-ti-tak!*—*Tini-ki-ti-tak!*

Thus the facetious father-in-law gave his surprised son-in-law to understand, in a funny manner, that he had, after all, married the daughter of the lowest *pariah* woman, and that by this the barber-youth had lost his own caste as well. Finding how matters stood, the son-in-law, covered with deep shame, now returned home with his father-in-law. He was much mortified at the disgrace into which he had so unwittingly fallen. He ever after cursed his ill luck which had plunged him into this abyss of

dishonour and degradation, while he was soaring high up on the wings of his long-cherished ambition! But it was the decree of fate, and he had to submit to it resignedly. He, therefore, continued to live in his father-in-law's house as before. He had now no more occasion to persecute his poor wife for the purpose of showing off his assumed *Kulinism*, or high and distinguished birth. As there was now no help for what had happened, he was obliged to put the best face upon the matter; and he henceforth lived happily with his wife.



IV.

DON'T TRY TO PLEASE EVERYBODY.

IN a certain village there lived a great fool. On one occasion he had to go to a distant town on some important errand. Before he set out on his journey his mother gave him a *siki*, or a *quarter-rupee* bit, to buy and eat *kichoo-michoo* on his way thither.

At noon the fool arrived at a Bázár and began to inquire of the shopkeepers whether they had *kichoo-michoo* to sell. He visited every shop, every stall, and every nook and corner of the Bázár to buy *kichoo-michoo*, but in vain. The honest dealers gave the inquirer to understand that *kichoo-michoo* meant *something* indefinite, and that he must mention the particular kind of thing he wanted to buy. It was the fool's firm conviction that the *kichoo-michoo*, mentioned by his mother, must be a good kind of food not known to those petty dealers of the Bázár. He therefore would not listen to reason, and so he went on inquiring for his ideal food.

As he was going round the market-place, for the *third* time, in search of *kichoo-michoo*, he was stopped by a fraudulent fruit-seller. This man, finding the fellow to be a great fool, resolved to cheat him of his money. He gave the fool a large slice of *kichoo-michoo* for his silver *siki*, and told him to eat the thing *raw* when away from the Bázár.

The silly man left the market-place and pursued his journey with the slice of *kichoo-michoo* in his hand. When he felt hungry, he ate it up and drank water from a road-side tank. A few minutes after, the poor fellow began to feel an acrid sensation in his mouth which tingled painfully. A flow of saliva ran down his chin, as if he had been treated with mercury.

Now, the fact was that the fraudulent fruit-seller had given the fool a raw slice of an esculent root called *oal*, which, when cooked, is sometimes served up at table in Bengal. But if it is eaten *raw*, the acrid property of *oal* causes inflammation of the mouth and consequent salivation.

As the fool was going along the road, the flow of saliva came out of his mouth in torrents, and the silly sufferer endeavoured to check the flow as best as he could. But, notwithstanding his utmost exertions, he slavered profusely. The foolish fellow thought that the fluid, which cost him a quarter of a *rupee*, should not

* *Amorphophallus campanulatus*,

dribble away from his mouth! So he began to restrain the flow and at the same time repeatedly say :—"A costly thing should not be allowed to fall!"—"A costly thing should not be allowed to fall!" It so chanced that a fowler was at that time laying traps for the purpose of catching wild birds, and the words of the slaving simpleton reached his ears. The fowler fancied that the fellow was wishing him bad luck, and that the man was praying for the safety of the feathered race, as he evidently meant that birds should not fall into the snares. Enraged at this, the fowler forthwith came up to the fool, gave him a good slap on the check, and told the silly fellow not to say so any more. On this the fool, to please the fowler, asked him what he should say. The fowler advised him to say :—"Let all be entrapped."

The fool changed his former saying for the new one, and, as he went on, began to repeat :—"Let all be entrapped!"—"Let all be entrapped!" It so happened that a gang of robbers was going along the road with some booty. They fancied that the man was wishing them evil. They, therefore, beat him and told him not to say so any more. The fool, to please the robbers, asked them what he should then say. The robbers advised him to say :—"Go and bring more."

The fool jogged on, uttering loudly :—"Go and bring more!"—"Go and bring more!" When he had gone a little way off, he saw a funeral party pass along

the road. A certain family had consisted of seven brothers, and one of them had died. Some of the surviving brothers, who were among the mourners, heard the exclamations of the fool, and they fancied that the malevolent man was wishing them a speedy death. They, therefore, soundly boxed his ears, and enjoined him not to say so. The foolish man, to please the offended brothers, asked them what he should say instead. In reply, he was told to say :— "Let this scene be seen no more".

The fool went on exclaiming :— "Let this scene be seen no more!"—"Let this scene be seen no more!" But as luck would have it, a marriage procession was passing down that road. The exclamations of the fool reached the ears of the persons forming the nuptial party. Some of them, who were bachelors, came down upon the unfortunate fool in great anger, and gave him some good blows; they thought that the man was wishing them an unmarried life. The fool, with a view to please the incensed bachelors, asked them what he should then say. The bachelors instructed him to say —"Let this scene be in every house."

Accordingly, the fool went on saying :—"Let this scene be in every house!"—"Let this scene be in every house!" A few minutes after, our hero came to a place where a house was burning, and a number of people were trying to quench the fury of the flames. The exclamations of the fool were heard by them, and they got angry. They thought that the wicked man was wishing

them evil, by praying that this scene of fire should take place in every house. Consequently, some rude people rushed at him, and showers of blows came thick upon the ill-starred idiot. The fool, to appease his enraged assailants, asked them what he should say instead. They told him to say :—"Let the fire go out at once."

Agreeable to this instruction, the fool wended his way exclaiming :—"Let the fire go out at once!"—"Let the fire go out at once!" He had gone about a mile when a traveller, who was cooking his food under a tree, and who had found it the hardest thing in the world to make a fire in the open air, heard the exclamations of the fool. The traveller turned black with rage, came upon the fool, and soundly flogged the unfortunate fellow with a piece of fuel-wood. The poor idiot, thus beaten, asked the traveller what he should then say to please him. The traveller told him to say :—"Cook and eat."

The fool went onwards, repeatedly exclaiming :—"Cook and eat!"—"Cook and eat!" It so chanced that some Bráhmans were disposing of the carcass of a cow that had belonged to them. The exclamations of the fool reached their ears, and they became exceedingly angry at this. As *Hindoos* do not touch beef on any account whatever, the Bráhmans thought that the unholy man was wickedly telling them to cook and eat the flesh of the dead cow, and they, therefore, beat the fool for his unhallowed exclamations. The poor fellow then, to please the Bráhmans, asked them what

he should say. They told him to say:—"Throw it away."

According to this instruction our hero went on exclaiming:—"Throw it away!"—"Throw it away!" As he neared a town in the after-noon, his outcry was heard by a rich-man's liveried servant who was carrying in his arms his master's little child. The exclamations of the fool grated on the ears of the faithful servant, who fancied that the fellow was advising him to throw away the little child he was carrying—the only hope of his very kind master. Upon this, the servant grew angry and gave the fool a few hard kicks. Being thus treated, the foolish fellow, to please the offended servant, asked him what he should then say. The servant told him to say:—"Hug it to the heart" and he caressed the babe fondly.

The fool, following the instruction of the man in livery, repeatedly exclaimed:—"Hug it to the heart!" "Hug it to the heart!" A little while after, he came up to a *mulláh*, or a *Mohammedán* priest, who was going along that road. A filthy pig stood in the middle of the narrow path, and it would not move away from the place. The *mulláh* could not pass by the abomination of his race, as pigs are looked upon by *Mohammedáns* as *háram*, or the most profane thing. The *mulláh* was therefore driving the pig out of his way by pelting it with brickbats. When the *Moslem* priest heard the exclamations of the idiot, he thought that the man was telling him to hug the

unhallowed hog to his heart. In disgust the *mulláh* muttered *toobbá! toobbá!*^{*}, turned round upon the impertinent fellow, and discharged volleys of abuse on the poor fool. Being thus ill-treated at every turn, the foolish man asked the *mulláh*, with a view to propitiate him, what he should say instead. The *Moslem* priest heard all from the man and concluded that the fellow was a first-rate fool. He, therefore, said to the man :—"Don't say anything."

The fool trudged on along the road exclaiming oftentimes :—"Don't say anything!"—"Don't say anything!" He had hardly covered half a mile, when some police constables, who were beating a thief to make him confess his crime, heard the exclamations of the fool. They got angry and at once arrested the man, taking him for an accomplice of the thief. He was soon brought before a magistrate, who, hearing everything from the accused, forthwith discharged him. The good magistrate instructed the fool not to open his mouth till he had reached his destination. He also said to him :—"Don't try to please everybody, which is quite impossible." And this time our foolish hero, obeying the orders of the magistrate, kept his lips *hermetically sealed*, so to speak, lest he should again come to grief. He reached the end of his journey without any further adventures.

*The Mohámmedán way of expressing vexation. It literally means to turn away from sin and return to God.

V.

THE LUCKY ADVENTURER.

THERE was once a young man who lived by his wits. One day as he was knocking about in the precincts of a small town in expectation of some adventure, he was met by an old Bráhmaṇ returning home from a grand feast. The old Bráhmaṇ was carrying on his shoulders two large *handis*, or earthen vessels. The *handis* were heavy, and the old man, whose strength was not equal to the task of carrying them, was groaning under the burden. He was, therefore, on the lookout for some person who would carry the *handis* for love or for money ; and finding the young man sauntering at his leisure, the Bráhmaṇ hailed him at the top of his feeble voice. The youth came up and bowed at the old man's feet. This way of showing respect to a Bráhmaṇ, or one of the priestly caste, by persons of the lower castes, is a universal custom in Bengal.

The old Bráhmaṇ, after bestowing his benediction

on the head of the stranger, asked him who and what he was. The young man answered that his name was Rámdhan and that he was a barber by caste. The old man thereupon said :—"My good man, will you carry these two *hándis* to yonder village where I live? You see, I am too old to carry these heavy *hándis* on my shoulders so far, so I desire you to do me this little service, and the gods will bless you for your doing this act of kindness to an old Bráhman." The youth readily consented to carry the *hándis* which were covered with *sarás*, or earthen lids, and asked the old man what they contained. The Bráhman said that the contents of one of the vessels were a number of ova of snakes and that the other *hándi* contained a quantity of serpent poison, and that the lids of the *hándis* containing those dangerous things must not be removed on any account whatever. The young man took the vessels upon his shoulders and followed the Bráhman at a respectful distance.

They had not gone far, when Rámdhan, the carrier of the *hándis*, thought it very strange that a holy Bráhman, who was not a snake-charmer, should take the trouble to carry the ova and poison of snakes in such large vessels. He doubted the veracity of the old man, and wanted to have a look into the *hándis* he was carrying, as he knew for certain that that at least would not do him any harm. Being thus resolved to satisfy his curiosity, the cunning youth purposely lagged behind,

cautiously removed the lids from the *hándis*, and looked into them. To his surprise, Rámdhan found that one vessel contained a large number of those white, round, small balls of sweets called *shandesh*, instead of the ova of snakes ; and that the other vessel contained a good quantity of thick-boiled milk called *kshir*, in place of the poison. Pleased with this discovery, Rámdhan forthwith helped himself to that delicious article of food called *shandesh*, and, on his way to the village, ate them up, one by one. When the *hándi* became empty, the cunning carrier, dashing it on the ground, cried out —“ Ho ! Thákoor !* Look here ! The ova in this *hándi* have all suddenly become fully hatched, and the young snakes have just made their way into the holes of this field.”

On this, the old Bráhman came down upon the wicked youth and beat him with his light slippers for his roguery. Being thus treated, Rámdhan made a great show of weeping. He blubbered and said :—“ O ! you have insulted me by beating me with slippers ; you have dishonoured me. I'll put an end to my miserable existence by swallowing the life-killing poison of this *hándi* here.” So saying Rámdhan dipped his hand into the *kshir*, or thick-boiled milk, and quickly ate it up. Seeing this, the poor old Bráhman was quite astounded. He cursed the fellow for his wickedness, and slowly

* A Brahman by way of reverence ; but literally it means a god.

went away a sadder and a wiser man. The Bráhmañ had been to a dinner party in a neighbouring town and was returning home when this incident occurred.

It is a general custom in Bengal to present a Bráhmañ guest with sweetmeats, and some money too, called the *Dakshiná*, when the dinner is over. Indeed, this gift of money-presents is invariably made to Bráhmañ guests; without it the feeding falls short of the full amount of spiritual effect. According to this custom, the Bráhmañ had brought away from the feast the *háñdis* of sweetmeats, which he was carrying on his shoulders when he saw Rámghan. He did not think it advisable to tell the carrier what the vessels really contained, for fear of his eating the contents, because barbers, as a class, are notorious for their cunning and greediness. But the precaution taken by the Bráhmañ proved of no avail, as we have seen, against the wily barber.

At nightfall the young adventurer went to a hamlet that was hard by. He made straight for a lonely cottage to ask for shelter. On his arrival he found the door closed, and two inmates of the cottage, who were of the peasant class, were talking to each other rather loudly. They were husband and wife, and the poor pair were conversing together on their domestic affairs without fear of anybody listening. The youth stopped and listened attentively to the following interesting conversation that was going on within. The wife said :—

"My dear! Can you not give me a milch cow, so that I may earn something for the support of the family by selling milk and *ghee*?"

Husband.—"My more than life! The idea is an excellent one. But where am I to get the money from to purchase a cow?"

Wife.—"I have five *rupees* buried under the floor near the hearth, which I am willing to lay out for the purpose."

Husband.—"I have myself also got as much money concealed in a pot on the top of the wall, at the north-east gable. With this joint stock, which amounts to ten *rupees*, a milch cow may be had, though not a good one."

Wife.—"You had better buy a cow to-morrow morning without fail, as I am impatient to have one."

Husband.—"Yes, my dearest wife. I'll do it to-morrow. But let us now go to bed, as I feel very sleepy and require rest after the hard toil of the day."

Having overheard this conversation, Rámdhan retraced his steps and went to another cottager with whom he easily obtained a night's lodging. On the morrow the peasant before alluded to was ploughing his field a little way off in front of his cottage. The young scamp came up to the ploughman and asked him if he could give him some water to drink. The

* Clarified butter.

kind cultivator expressed his sorrow for not having any water at hand at that time, but he pointed out his cottage to the thirsty youth and requested him to go there, where his good wife would give him some cool water to slake his thirst with. The youth remarked :—
 “My good friend, I don’t think your wife will lend her ears to the request of a stanger, so it is useless for me to apply to her; let me go elsewhere.” Piqued at this the peasant said :—“What do you say? A Hindoo woman will withhold water from a thirsty man, stranger though he be! If such should be the case, you had better call out to me, and I will make her smart for it.”

Without any further words the adventurer went direct to the cottage of the ploughman, and thus addressed the woman who was at work near the door :—
 —“My good woman, your husband has just now bought of me a fine milch cow for ten *rupees*, and he has sent me to you to receive payment for the same.” The mistress of the cottage was exceedingly glad at this news, but she did not straightway make the payment to one who was quite a stranger to her. She simply said :—“Wait for a little while, please. Let my husband return home, and he will himself pay you the amount. Indeed, I do not know where the money has been kept by him.” The wily adventurer replied :—“You need not distrust me, my good woman. Your husband has sent you word, through me, that a sum of five

rupees, which lies buried under the floor near the hearth, and a further sum of five *rupees*, which lies in a pot on the top of the wall near the north-east gable, are to be paid to me."

This detailed description of the places of concealment of the money, known to none but the husband and the wife, at once dissipated all doubt from the mind of the wary woman. But she, with the characteristic shrewdness of her sex, still hesitated in making over the money to the stranger in the absence of any witness. Seeing this delay, which is always dangerous, the artful adventurer said:—"Oh! I have told your husband that you will not trust me. But I can't wait any longer, so let me inform him of your hesitation." He then called out to the husband in the field:—"You see, my good friend, as I told you, your wife refuses to give me what I want." As the husbandman was within hail, he heard this and angrily bawled out:—"Give it to him, you stupid good-for-nothing woman! Why have you detained him so long?" Hearing this command of her husband, the good woman entered the cottage, and, after a little while, came back with the money. She then counted the ten *rupees* on the palm of the young rascal who instantly beat a hasty retreat.

A few minutes after, the peasant returned home quite knocked up with his hard toil at the plough. His anxious wife met him at the outer gate of the yard and eagerly asked him where the newly purchased cow

was; of what colour she was; how much milk she yielded; whether the animal was good-tempered or vicious; whether she was fat or lean; whether her young one was a cow-calf or a bull-calf; and many other such questions relating to the cow for which she had paid ten *rupees* to the stranger. These queries, however, fell flat on the tired ploughman who at once angrily growled forth:—"Come, Come, you vile wretch! These jokes of yours are quite out of season, as I am awfully fatigued and hungry. Let me take my meal and rest first, and then I shall set out to buy a milch cow for you." The astounded wife hurriedly said:—"What do you say, my dearest? You have already bought a fine cow for ten *rupees*, and I have paid the man for it at your bidding." The incensed husband cried out:—"Hold your tongue, woman! keep your jokes for another time; and now give me a plateful of *Pāntā* to satisfy the hunger gnawing within me."

The startled woman struck her forehead with both her palms, and exclaimed:—"Ah me! we are undone! The rogue has cheated us of our money. What shall I do now?" She then turned to her husband and said:—"But why did you bid me give the money to the man when he appealed to you?" But a hungry man is an angry man. The peasant, therefore, cried

*Boiled rice steeped in water overnight, generally eaten by the peasant class in Bengal, for breakfast.

out :—" I did not bid you give any money to the man, but I merely told you to give him some water which he had wanted from me.—Foolish woman! Instead of water you have given him the money!" Saying this, the enraged husband beat his innocent wife with the *pānchani*, or cattle-goad.

Smarting under the blows the poor woman ran after Rāmdhan, crying out :—" My money! My money! O! give me back my money." The villain looked back, and when he saw the duped woman running after him at a distance, he simply quickened his pace. When he had gone a long way off, the deceived woman still following him, he fell in with two persons who belonged to the police force of a neighbouring town. The youth accosted these men and asked them if they would purchase a fine woman belonging to him, of whom he was quite tired. The two policemen answering in the affirmative, the young man pointed out to them the woman that was following him, and demanded a sum of two hundred *rupees* for her. He also requested them to be quick in striking the bargain on the ground that if the woman overtook him, it would be very difficult for him to part from her as she was so fond of him. After some haggling about the price, they offered him one hundred *rupees*, and the bargain was at once concluded. The adventurer secured the money about his person and went off at a rapid pace.

When the two policemen met the woman and

heard everything from her concerning the wicked fraud, they became ashamed of their error. With a view to recover their money from the man and to punish him for his roguery, they pursued him in hot haste, raising a *hue and cry* as they went. The good woman, desisting from the useless pursuit, returned home sorrowfully. Seeing how matters stood, Rámdhan ran in the direction of the town which was hard by. Near the gate he saw a washer-man engaged in bleaching the clothes of the prince who reigned in that town. The adventurer accosted the washer-man and said :—“ My friend, don't you see two policemen coming this way towards you?” The washer-man started and looked in the direction pointed out. He descried two policemen really running towards him. Struck with terror at the sight, he asked the stranger if he knew the reason why the police officers were coming down upon him. The astute youth replied :—“ Know you not, my good man, that you have torn and spoiled some of the best clothes of the prince, which were given to you for bleaching? The policemen are coming hither to arrest you under orders from the prince, who will immediately put you into prison for the offence of damaging the clothes of His Highness.” On this the poor washer-man said :—“ Brother, what shall I do now to avert the wrath of His Highness? Can you not advise me in this dilemma?” The artful adventurer answered :—“ My friend, you had better flee at once leaving all

these things here. If you carry these clothes with you, it will surely lead to your arrest. As the police guards are gaining ground every minute, you ought not to tarry here for a single instant."

The deceived washer-man took to his heels in haste, and the young rogue instantly turned this opportunity to account. He at once took the place of the fuller whom he had contrived to scare away. Tying a piece of cloth round his head in the shape of a turban, as washer-men generally do when at work, he caught hold of another piece of cloth and began to beat it on a thick board, called the *pátá*, with his back towards the road. Diligent in his work, the sham washer-man thrashed the cloth on the *pátá* to make it clean, and, *ish! ish! ish!* went his breath at every stroke. The youth was thus toiling hard, when the two cheated policemen came up to him.

Taking Rámghan for a *bond fide* washer-man, the police officers asked him in a breath if he had seen a certain young man pass along that way. The false fuller feebly answered:—"Yes." He then, without stopping from his labour, indicated with his left hand the direction the real washer-man had taken. At this the two policemen pushed forward exclaiming:—"We will ferret out that cheating rascal, and will recover our money from him; so let us run fast." The adventurer laughed in his sleeve at this resolution of the policemen. As soon as they were out of sight, he selected the best suit of clothes belonging to the prince, and,

packing it up in a small bundle, decamped in haste.

By night he was a long way off, and beyond the reach of all pursuit. He took refuge in a roadside temple where the stone-idol of the goddess *Kali* stood upon a marble pedestal. For safety's sake the young man hid himself behind the life sized image of the goddess. At dead of night a gang of *daccits*, or robbers, came into the temple to pray to the goddess to bless their marauding expedition.

This custom of first propitiating the Goddess *Kali* was very prevalent in Bengal among *daccits* in ancient times. They even used to offer to the Goddess human victims on such occasions for the purpose of propitiating her. According to the legends of the Hindoos, this grim Goddess of war and bloodshed has four hands. The two left hands carry a sword and a severed human head, each, the head being held by a tuft of hair; while with the two right hands she offers the wished-for boon and protection to her votaries.

Now, the robbers assembled inside the temple, which was pitch-dark. The Captain of the gang then prayed fervently to the Goddess that their expedition might prove prosperous. From his place of concealment behind the idol the avaricious adventurer overheard the prayer, and he at once determined to seize this favourable opportunity and turn it to his own advantage. In a deep sonorous voice, as if it proceeded from the mouth of the idol, the audacious adventurer

roared out :—“ My sons, I am propitiated by your prayers. This night you shall get good booty. But I enjoin on you to leave a moiety of the spoil in this very temple for my *Pijah*. If you fail in this, you *shall* rue your disobedience.”

All the *dacchits* became thunderstruck at this oracle proceeding from the idol. Their hair stood on end, and a cold shudder crept through their frames. The Captain of the robbers, however, soon recovered his self-possession and had the courage to address the Goddess in the following terms :—“ Mother *Kali* ! I, as spokesman on behalf of my brave band, do promise to fulfil Thy command to the very letter.” So saying they left the temple.

True to their promise the *dacchits*, on their return, left one half of the plunder in the temple for the religious service of the Goddess, which was of course appropriated by the avaricious adventurer. The next morning, he issued forth from the temple laden with the riches left by the robbers. The booty consisted of jewelry, costly clothes and cash, and hence the adventurer had no difficulty in carrying them with him. At noon he felt hungry, and came to a Bázár where he saw a shop full of sweetmeats arrayed in a tempting show. His mouth watered at the sight of the delicious eatables, and he at once made for the sweetmeat-stall. To his great joy, he found that the confectioner was absent and that a little boy, about five years old, was watching over

the articles. On inquiry he came to know that the little fellow was a son of the confectioner who was at that time eating his meal inside the shop. Glad at this information, the unscrupulous adventurer forthwith began to eat of the sweetmeats without paying for them; upon which the little guardian of the shop grew alarmed and asked the man who he was. The cunning caitiff carelessly answered that his name was Fly, that he was well known to the confectioner, and that he every day ate the sweetmeats in like manner. The little boy was, however, not satisfied with this answer of the adventurer. He therefore called out:—"Papa, Fly is eating our sweetmeats." The unsuspecting father laughed and said.—"Never mind the fly, my child; you must guard the sweetmeats against the crow." The little boy remained silent, and the adventurer, having eaten his fill, went on his way. When the confectioner came out, he was much astonished to find the great havoc made upon his comfits by a single fly!

The rogue proceeded on his journey towards a great city that was a long way off. When he had cleared a couple of miles, he found a horseman fast asleep under a shady tree; his fine steed was standing quietly by, tied to a roadside hedge. Quick as thought, the adventurer mounted the horse, which stood ready-saddled, and galloped away with the speed of an arrow. The clattering of the horse's hoofs soon awakened the sound sleeper who started to his feet and found his horse gone! The

young man, in the mean time, rode at a rapid rate. At midnight he reached the city where he took up his quarters in a secluded part.

The next morning, our hero set out in search of adventures. As he was walking through the streets of the city he saw a grand procession moving from the king's palace towards a river that flowed hard by. Elbowing his way through the press of men he got into the midst of the procession. There he found some persons who were carrying a dead body in state. Upon a *charpoy*, or cot, made of silver and having a rich gold-fringed awning over it, lay the lifeless body of the king of that great city. The corpse was covered over with a valuable Cashmere shawl, and decorated with garlands of flowers. The silver cot, which served the purpose of a bier, was being borne by eight robust men. These persons and the mourners in general were uttering, ever and anon, loud cries of "*Hari-Hari-bole!*" "*Hari-Hari-bole!*" These cries, which signify the name of the Supreme God *Hari*, are invariably uttered by the carriers of the corpses of *Hindoos* in Bengal, the mourners as well joining in the chorus. The adventurer also learnt, from the conversation of the crowd, that the old king had been a widower, that he had died intestate without any issue, and that there was, till then, no known claimant to the throne. These circumstances at once led the ambitious adventurer to make up his mind : he determined to try his fortune in that quarter. He, there-

fore, hastened back to his lodgings to make preparations for the grand scheme.

Attiring himself in the rich royal robe, which he had previously purloined from the fuller whom he had contrived to scare away, the bold adventurer got upon the back of his stolen steed, carrying his valuable belongings with him in a bundle. He rode gallantly towards the river-side, where, he knew, the dead body of the king would be cremated. On his way thither he was favoured by fortune in the furtherance of his design. In a road-side cottage a good-looking elderly woman was working at a small oil-machine called *Ghāni-gātch*. The adventurer at once hit upon her as the fit person to help him in his great enterprise. Alighting from the horse at the door of the cottage, he entered within and held a conversation with the good-natured oil-woman. He succeeded soon in lulling her into the belief that he was a prince and the only son of the deceased king by his second wife, that he had all along lived with his mother in a small town remote from that city, and that he had just then come there on receipt of the tidings of the king's illness. He then requested her earnestly to help him in his attempts to assert his right, by personating his absent mother. This strange request was supported by a present of valuable gold-ornaments and costly clothes, which the robbers had left in the temple of the Goddess *Kālī*.

After some hesitation, the good oil-woman was at

last prevailed upon by the artful adventurer to comply with his wishes, thanks to his winning manners and to his smooth speeches, not to say anything of the brilliancy of the jewellery he had presented to her. A palanquin, with eight bearers, was soon procured for her conveyance. She wore a fine gold-embroidered silken *sári* * made in Benares, the gift of the wily adventurer. She then decorated herself with costly jewels given to her by the sham prince, and got into the palanquin which was instantly borne off by four stout bearers. Being a lonely widow and mistress of herself, the credulous oil-woman had not to consult anyone in the matter of going out with a stranger. The young adventurer, riding his mettled horse, trotted on before her; the palanquin followed behind; and the four relieving bearers brought up the rear.

In this manner, the small party of the audacious adventurer advanced at a rapid rate in the direction of the river, and reached there just at the right time. The corpse of the king had been laid upon a large pile of precious sandal-wood, and the priests were about to set fire to the pyre. Just at this point, the sham prince rode up to the cremating party and cried out:—"Hold! hold! gentlemen. Let *me* perform the last rites due to my deceased father, the king." Everyone was greatly astonished at this. The pretender promptly got down

* A piece of cloth, generally five yards long, worn by women of Bengal.

from his horse and approached the pyre. He then made a great show of weeping and forced out a torrent of tears over the dead body of the old king, his supposed father. The pseudo-mother of the young prince also came out of the palanquin, closely veiled, and admirably acted her part. She blubbered piteously, violently struck her brow and breast with both hands, dishevelled her hair, and rolled on the ground, in mourning for the death of her royal husband, in conformity with the instructions previously given her by the artful adventurer.

When an explanation was demanded, the young prince stated that he was the son of the deceased king who had married his mother in private ; that they lived in a small town far away from that city, in obedience to the wishes of his lamented father, for certain family reasons ; and that on receiving the tidings of the king's illness he and his mother had hastened thither to nurse him. The bereaved prince also added, with deep sighs, that they had come too late, as on their way to the palace they had heard of the king's death ; and that his inconsolable widowed mother had come to the place of cremation for the purpose of becoming a *sati*, or to be voluntarily burnt alive with the dead body of her husband. All these plausible assertions of the young adventurer were readily believed in by the people present at the place. Such a spell had been thrown over their mind by the specious statement of the young man, that they all took him for a real

prince. They even became glad that the son and heir of the deceased monarch had at last been found, and that the throne would pass on to the rightful heir instead of to some distant relation. The faintest shadow of a doubt in the mind of the most sceptical individual vanished in consideration of the fact of the supposed widow offering to die on the burning pyre with the remains of the king. Thus the lucky adventurer succeeded easily in passing himself off on the world as the son and heir of the defunct monarch.

Preparations were then made by the orders of the young prince for the *sahamarana* of the faithful wife of the deceased king, the virtuous mother of the prince. *Sahamarana* literally means 'dying together,' or the voluntary death of a widowed wife with the dead body of her husband, on a burning pyre. This practice of *sahamarana*, or becoming *sati*, was, in ancient times, very prevalent among the *Hindoos*; but it has now been put a stop to by the benign British Government.

According to the instruction of the prince, one hundred *dháks*, or large drums, and an equal number of *dholes*, or small drums, were soon procured. Jars of *ghee*, or clarified butter, were poured on the pile to make the wood readily combustible. The adventurer then requested the oil-woman in private, now acting the part of widowed queen, to come near the pyre to which fire had already been set, and to offer herself to become a *sati* in the eyes of the world. He swore most solemnly,

and by the names of all the *Hindoo* deities, that the *sahamarana* would be a mock one only, that she should certainly be dragged away by him when she would feign to plunge headlong into the devouring flames, and that he would give the people to understand that he could not live without his dearest mother. The simple-hearted woman, who had now gone too far to recede, was made to walk round the pile seven times. The drummers now began to beat on their instruments with enthusiasm ; and the air was rent with the deafening din of that horrible discord of two hundred drums striking up at one and the same time. At the bidding of the pretended prince, the place of cremation was soon cleared of the curious crowd collected there to witness the sacred scene ; only the priests were allowed to remain near the pyre.

When the requisite rites had been gone through, the *sati* stopped in front of the blazing fire. But her heart misgave her, and she hesitated in acting the last scene of the fearful farce. Seeing this, the wily adventurer encouraged her with many reassuring words, and told her she had nothing to fear, as she should certainly be dragged back by him when she would make a show of jumping into the fire. Thus reassured, the poor credulous woman made a feint of falling headlong on the burning pyre. But, as she took the plunge, the heartless rascal, instead of holding her back according to his solemn promises, gave the unfortunate woman a violent

push which at once carried her into the midst of the all-devouring flames, in order that she might not live to tell tales. The poor woman screamed and struggled to get out of the fire, but the adamant heart of that young villain was not in the least affected. The rogue, on the contrary, went so far as to press her hard down on the pyre with a piece of bamboo that was lying near at hand, exclaiming often :—" Courage, mother, courage !" The agonised woman shrieked forth :—" O ! I am an oil—man's widow ! The adventurer's statement is a falsehood."

When the priests, who stood a few yards off, heard that the *sati* was uttering something which they could not distinctly understand, they asked the young prince what she was saying. The artful adventurer readily answered :—" Mother is saying :—" O ! how I hate my widowhood !" Everyone now admired the calm courage and the exemplary devotion of the *sati* who was, however, soon burnt to ashes with the remains of the king. The procession then re-formed and went back to the palace where the lucky adventurer remained in mourning for a month. This prescribed period of mourning passed away, and the *Sraddha* ceremony of the king was celebrated with befitting magnificence by the young prince. When all was over, the Lucky Adventurer ascended the throne on an auspicious day, with great pomp. Thus, by a continuous run of good luck and an incredible amount of cunning, the low-born barber became a king in a very short time.

VI.

THE WITTY APPRENTICE.

THERE was once a poor man whose only means of living was his pen. He was by caste a Káyastha, or socially a grade lower than the Bráhmaṇ, and he was a writer by profession. This man maintained his wife and half a dozen little children, with great difficulty. Off and on he got some job in the way of his profession ; and it was with the strictest economy that he managed somehow to make both ends meet. One day he fell ill suddenly, which confined him to his bed for a long time. He, however, recovered slowly from his protracted illness, but became greatly involved in debt. When he regained his strength, the poor man moved heaven and earth to get some work, but without success. Fortune now frowned on him ; wherever he went to seek for assistance, he met with nothing but disappointment.

At length he was so hard pressed for money, that he resolved to leave his home in search of employment

elsewhere. As his clothes were not in the least decent, the poor scrivener had to borrow of his kind neighbours a suit of clothes and a pair of shoes to give himself a somewhat respectable appearance, without which it was not safe to present himself as a respectable person to anybody who might be disposed to take him on.

Eking out a few *rupees* by the sale of certain old furniture, he purchased therewith a quantity of rice and other necessaries for the support of his family during his absence. As he hoped that the provisions would hold out for some months, he made preparations for his journey with a somewhat light heart. Before setting out, however, he strictly observed certain rites calculated to ensure success, according to the universal belief of the rigid *Hindoos*. He smelt at a *billahpatra*,* applied a small quantity of *dadhi*, or sour curds, on the middle of his forehead with the tip of his ring-finger; tied a small quantity of *shiddhi* † in a corner of his *urdni*, or thin sheet; looked at a *purna-kumbha*, or a pitcher full of water to the brim with a mango-twigg upon it; cast his eyes on a small fish that was playfully swimming in the water kept there in an earthen vessel; and repeated thrice *Durgá! Durgá! Durgá!* or the name of that goddess who delivers *Hindoos* from distress. The poor man then slowly walked away from his house which was so dear to him, and

* Leaf of *Crataeva marmelos*.

† *Cannabis Sativa*.

left behind the still dearer inmates of it ; and "at each remove he dragged a lengthening chain."

For some time the unfortunate scribe wandered about from place to place, applying to several persons for employment ; but to his misfortune no one took compassion on him. He applied to a rich merchant who was the senior partner of a very flourishing firm ; there were several hands working in that office, and at that time there was no vacancy to be filled up. Next he called on a respectable trader, who very candidly confessed his inability to help him, as his business had recently suffered some unexpected loss which had told heavily on his resources. Then he paid his respects to a lawyer, who was very sorry that he could not do anything for the poor writer as his clients had lately fallen off considerably, and that in consequence he was under the painful necessity of reducing the number of clerks already in his employ. The disappointed man lastly betook himself to a prosperous-looking village, and there he observed a magnificent mansion smiling with the manifest marks of the blessings of *Lakshmi*, the goddess of prosperity. Upon inquiry, he came to know that the beautiful building belonged to the *Zamindar*, or laird, of the village ; and he intended to try his fortune there.

Accordingly, without further ado, the service-seeking scrivener presented himself at the great gate where the pompously-dressed porter prevented the poor man from

entering. His hungry-looking appearance and his travel-soiled apparel, stood in the way of his obtaining an easy entrance into that palatial pile. The gate-keeper, greatly offended at the sorry sight of the poor scrivener, would not let him in, and, to show his indifference, he began to sing the fag-end of a popular song in *Hindi*, his mother-tongue, he being a man from the north-western part of India, without caring to notice the forlorn condition of the fatigued visitor. Had the latter come in a carriage, the case would have certainly been otherwise. However, as the pinches of penury are very smarting, the poor applicant again and again requested the rude, robust, red-turbaned *Darwán* for permission to pass in, but that great man of the gate grew angry and heartlessly hurled some abusive language at him. Pocketing the insult as best as he could, the persevering pen-man proffered to the porter a piece of small silver coin called *siki*, or a *quarter rupee* bit. This pacifying policy produced the desired effect; it poured oil on troubled waters. The gruff guardian of the gate grinned graciously, when the shining silver *siki* slipped suddenly into his hand. So electric was the action of the *silver-piece*, that the hard features of the door-keeper instantly relaxed, his insolence gave way, and he became at once changed into as smiling and obliging a man as any that ever breathed on the face of the earth.

Now that the palms of the porter had been oiled, the great gate forthwith flew open on its huge hinges,

with a creaking noise, to admit the applicant. Having thus insured an ingress into the premises, the poor penman now sought to solicit the favour of the lord of the mansion. But how could he do that without the aid of the *ámlas*, or officials, working under that princely personage? Great folks are not easily accessible to a man in the position of our poor petitioner. He, therefore, at first applied to an old *Barkandás*, or peon, who, upon receipt of a few *pice*, took him to the *Jamóddár*, or head of the peons. The *Jamóddár* was a kind-hearted man, and he did not demand any money for his service, but he pleasantly received the present of an old umbrella from the applicant; and, in return, he brought the needy man before the *Násir*, or the chief of the executive staff. This functionary finding a fine stick worthy of his acceptance, which was presented to him by the man, was pleased to lead him to the presence of the *Dewánji*, or Head-officer, of the *Zamindár's* household. The *Dewánji*—a fat, full-faced, short-statured, sinister-looking, shrewd man of the world—being informed of the errand on which the poor man had come, at first rudely refused to comply with his request. But he afterwards kindly consented to introduce the candidate into the presence of his master, on condition that he should get a fourth part of the poor petitioner's pay, month by month, when he should be employed in the *Zamindár's* service.

After overcoming all these difficulties, the man at

last succeeded in securing an interview with the lord of the mansion. The *Zamindár*—a burly, big-bellied, bushy-mustachioed *Babu*, born with a silver spoon in his mouth—sat upon a high cushion placed on the floor of the *Boitakkhāna*, or saloon. His back was supported on a big pillow called a *tákiá*, and he wore a pair of gold-framed spectacles on his nose. A highly furnished huge *hookah*, called the *álbolah*, made of pure silver and inlaid with precious stones of different colours, stood gracefully in front. The beautifully embroidered silken tube of the ornamented *álbolah*, measuring some ten or twelve feet in length, lay before that august personage, in convolutions, like a coiled snake. Ever and anon, he was giving a hard pull at the mouth-piece of the tube, and emitting from his mouth clouds of smoke which rose to the ceiling in graceful curls. The sweet-scented tobacco-smoke was pervading the whole saloon with an elysian fragrance.

My lord, the *Zamindár*, was surrounded by a set of sycophants whose sole anxiety was to please his lordship with their vile flattery. It was their delectable duty to nod assent to everything which that great man might be pleased to say. These despicable toadies tried their best to outvie one another in the art of *toshámód*, or fawning. They would even put to shame the courtiers of King Canute by their absurd adulations. Were his lordship to observe that the surface of the water of a certain tank was high at one part and low

at another, these lying lick-spittles would at once cry out:—"Yes, your lordship; we all do see it plainly." These pitiful pick-thanks were, as usual, paying their court to the great man, with a view to get into the favour of that fountain-head of all good in the village. A number of tenants were also present there, standing at a respectful distance. They had come to their "*Má-báp*,"* or paramount lord, on diverse business: some were praying for remission of rents, some for grants of new leases, some for mutation of names in the rent-rolls. A few unfortunate *ryots* stood aside, with the palms of both hands joined together and holding in them worn-out *chudders* † suspended from their necks, by way of humiliation. They remained in anxious expectation of hearing the *Hoozur's* heavy voice pronounce their fate which was trembling in the balance. His lordship was the civil and criminal judge of his tenants, and his decision had the greatest weight with them. Indeed, the *Zamindárs* of Bengal do exercise great power over their submissive tenants, and they generally administer justice with equity and address, although they are often apt to carry things with a high hand in matters in which their own interests are concerned.

Such was the state of things in the *Darbár* of the mighty *Zamindár*, when the service-seeking poor man

* Literally, mother and father.

† Thin sheets.

was ushered into his lordship's presence. The applicant approached him with due deference and presented his petition praying for a permanent post in the clerical department. The *Peshkár* whose duty it was to put up all papers before his master, took up the petition and demanded the usual *Nazar*, or present due to the *Zamindár*.

This custom of taking *Nasars* from all persons coming to ask for some favour is very prevalent among the *Zamindárs* of Bengal. Every tenant is also bound to give some money as a *Nasar* to his landlord whenever he is pleased to pay his visit to a village belonging to him, which generally happens only once a year. This *Nasar* is not considered as a part-payment of rent, but as a present given in honour of the *Zamindár's* visit. Again, whenever anyone has occasion to pay his respects to the landlord, he is required to observe this monetary formality at first. But this is, however, not the case with those persons who frequently dance attendance on the *Zamindár* to gain his good graces.

In accordance with this established rule, the faithful *Peshkár* pressed the poor petitioner for the payment of the *Zamindár's Nazar*, without which he declined to put up the petition before his lordship. Upon this the applicant had the audacity to address that august nobleman, almost with tears in his eyes,—“My lord,” he said, “I am a poor petitioner; I have ventured to approach your lordship without the customary *Nasar*,

as I have got nothing to present your lordship with. Be pleased, therefore, to break the rule for once, and be kind to a poor man. I have come from a great distance, and I have not the honour of being your lordship's tenant."

The *Zamindár*, on hearing this, began to scrutinise the man from head to foot, with a piercing glance through his glasses, as if to stare him out of countenance. But as the petitioner stood this test without flinching, his lordship became convinced of the applicant's veracity, and kindly exempted him from the payment of the customary *Nazar*. He then ordered the *Peshkár* to read out the petition; which being done, and the hand-writing of the applicant being approved, the great man was pleased to say that he could not for the present bestow any salaried post on him, but that he might, if he liked, remain as an *Umedwár*, or candidate-apprentice, in the *seristah*, or office. He also told the petitioner that the tenure of his apprenticeship would not be a very long one, and that he should get free quarters and board from the *sarkár* which meant his illustrious self. Having no hope of obtaining a better berth elsewhere and being quite tired of trying his fortune far and wide, the poor man accepted the offer made by his lordship, and remained there as an *Umedwár*, or candidate-apprentice.

The new apprentice devoted himself to his duties and discharged them to the entire satisfaction of his

superiors. He worked hard in expectation of soon receiving a remuneration which would at least go to keep his family at home. Thus the *Umedwár* continued to diligently drive his pen in the *Zamindár's* office for some months, without obtaining anything in return for his services. But he thanked his stars that he had not to starve for want of money, as he got his daily meals from the kitchen of the *Zamindár*. A year passed, and the thought of his absent family suffering from extreme poverty often urged the poor man to appeal to the generosity of the great *Zamindár*, his patron ; but, that imperious individual asked the impatient apprentice to wait for a little time longer. The ill-starred scrivener scratched his head in vexation, and left the presence of his lordship.

Some months more rolled on, and all the articles of the apprentice's apparel became the worse for wear. He could not, with decency, put them on ; but he had no money to buy new clothes with, and so he was obliged to cover his body with torn old rags. Several times the poor man requested his lordship to allow him even a pittance for the purpose of purchasing the necessary articles of clothing. On every occasion the *Zamindár*, with many sweet words, soothed the solicitous scribe and told him to wait patiently ; and said that though patience was bitter, its fruit was sweet. This assurance of his lordship did not satisfy the poor man ; he was in urgent need of money, and fair words butter no parsnips.

But he was obliged to abide by his patron's pleasure, having no other alternative to fall back upon.

At length his garments grew so very worn and thread-bare, that they became quite unfit for further use. The unfortunate *Umedwár* had to patch up several rents in his remaining raiment, and thus he managed somehow to pass a few months more, in anxious expectation of obtaining a salaried post. It was hope only which supported him through this time of trial, and he continued in his apprenticeship in spite of all the privations detailed above. By this time his wardrobe had been reduced to a single *dhooti*, or cloth to wear round the waist. He was, consequently, obliged to put on, after his daily wash, a piece of rag which served the purposes of a towel. The wet cloth was dried in the sun, being stretched out on a grass-plot in front of the gate, after which it was worn again by the poor man. He used to do so, day after day, to his great disgust and inconvenience. His lordship had often seen him in such a wretched plight, but he shut his eyes to this sad sight with shameful indifference.

One day, it so turned out, that our apparel-less apprentice was drying his wet cloth in the sun, in front of the great gate, wearing a miserable rag round his waist, as he had been wont to do after his daily bath. The *Darwán*, or gate-keeper, felt very hungry. As it was past mid-day, the porter thought it was time for him to go and have his mid-day meal, and he began to abuse

his absent comrade for not coming to relieve him of his watch. He called to his companion to come quickly, but that man was at that time quietly discussing a large pile of *Chápáties*, or unleavened hand-made bread baked over a fire; so he angrily bawled out:—"Raho! raho!" or wait, wait.

Unable to struggle any longer with the torments of hunger, the porter resolved to leave his post at the gate and to go at once to have his meal. But how could he do so without flying in the face of his master's strict orders not to leave the gate unguarded on any account? This unfortunate circumstance puzzled the porter for some moments, and he was in a mighty fix to find out any person who would guard the gate during his temporary absence. Suddenly a happy idea crossed his mind; the poor apprentice had been standing before the gate in the act of drying his wet cloth in the sun, and our *Darwán's* eyes fell on him as the very person who would be willing to oblige him by taking his place for half an hour or so. Accordingly, he desired the apprentice to keep an eye on the gate that no one might enter the premises while he remained away. The ever-obliging *Umedwár* consented to this, as he was unwilling to incur the displeasure of anybody in the *Zamindár's* household, and the *Darwán*, thereupon, left the gate in charge of the ragged apprentice.

A few minutes passed, and no one came to the gate

which had been standing open to admit the apprentice, now doing the duty of *Darwán*. But all on a sudden an insane old man, who was stark naked, came to the gate and slipped in. The unfortunate *Umedwár* was at the time too much absorbed in his own sad reflections to see the madman, and so the latter entered the inner part of the premises without let or hindrance. The *Zamindár*, as he was coming out, met the madman in a state of perfect nudity and was horror-stricken. He, however, hastily drove away the naked lunatic, and in a great fury, proceeded to the gate to vent his anger on the head of the neglectful gate-keeper. The porter had, by that time, returned to his duty, and he stood up at once on seeing his master. The *Zamindár*, in an angry tone, asked the *Darwán* why he had allowed the madman to enter the mansion, and why he should not be at once dismissed for this gross neglect of his duty. The poor porter thereupon replied :—
“*Dharmavátr!* be pleased to pardon your humble servant. I went away, a few minutes ago, to eat my mid-day meal, leaving the gate in charge of the *Umedwár* who was drying his cloth in the sun there, and I knew nothing of this unfortunate occurrence.” Hearing this his lordship called the apprentice to him, and, in a towering passion, demanded to know whether the *Darwán's* statement was true. The apparel-less apprentice very humbly answered :—“ Yes, my lord, what the porter says is quite true.”

Zamindár.—"Did you not then see that a naked lunatic entered the mansion through the gate you were guarding?—Where were your eyes at the time?"

Apprentice.—"Yes, my lord; my eyes were fixed at the gate; and I really saw a naked man enter the mansion."

Zamindár.—"Why did you not then prevent the passage of the madman into the house?"

Apprentice.—"Because, my lord, I did not think the man to be mad at all."

Zamindár.—"What did you then take him for?"

Apprentice.—"Your lordship be pleased to pardon a sad mistake on the part of your humble servant. I took that naked man for some senior apprentice serving here, without any remuneration, from the time of your lordship's illustrious father. Serving as an unpaid apprentice under your lordship I have come to this wretched rag, and so it was natural for me to conclude that a man serving here *gratis* for a still longer period than myself, must needs go without even a rag round his waist."

This humorous reply of the witty apprentice did not, however, fall flat on the ear of the *Zamindár*. He was rather pleased with the wit and address of the man, and became ashamed of his own ungenerous conduct towards him. As his lordship was at bottom a kind-hearted man, he, from that very day, allowed the Witty Apprentice a liberal pay which enabled him to live comfortably with his family ever after.

VII.

THE SHREWD SON-IN-LAW.

IN a certain village there lived a young man who always had his wits about him. Whenever he got into an awkward scrape, his ever-prompt presence of mind came to his aid, and he managed to get out of it in triumph. In all witty discussions he always carried the day. He had married into a family living a long way off; and his visits to the house of his wife's father were, consequently, few and far between. On a certain day, this witty young man had to go to his father-in-law's house on the occasion of the *Shashti-bátá*—a ceremony among the *Hindoos* of Bengal—which is observed with great *eclat* by all classes of people: the high and the low, the rich and the poor.

On the sixth day of the new moon in the sunny month of *Jaishtha* (May-June), the *Shashti-bátá* festival is celebrated annually for the entertainment of sons-

in-law, especially the newly married ones. The reception which a son-in-law meets with at his father-in-law's house on this happy occasion is quite charming! Suffice it to say that young sons-in-law look forward eagerly to this happy day when they are to be entertained, to their heart's content, by the parents of their partners in life. Clothed in their best holiday clothes the happy sons-in-law repair to the abodes of their fathers-in-law, where they are cordially welcomed by the friends and relatives of their wives.

In the ceremony of the *Shashti-bátá*, the mother-in-law plays an important part. The son-in-law sits on a piece of carpet called *ásana*, or on a low wooden seat called *pinri*, facing towards the north or the east. The modest mother-in-law comes before the bashful son-in-law with a *bátá*, or dish, made of brass, bell-metal, or silver, according to her worldly circumstances. This *bátá* contains six fruits of different sorts, and a piece of *dhuti* and *urani*: the former is worn round the waist, and the latter is to cover the upper part of the body. The *bátá*, or dish, she places in the hands of the son-in-law, wishing him long life and prosperity. The son-in-law, on receiving the *dish*, pays some money as a present and bows his head at the feet of the much-respected mother-in-law. This ceremony being over, the son-in-law is feasted on several dainties especially prepared for him to celebrate the happy occasion.

In accordance with this custom which is still preva-

lent in Bengal, the witty son-in-law one day set out for the house of his father-in-law on the occasion of the *Shashti-bátá*. As his means did not allow him to take a carriage or a palanquin—a horse being out of the question, as it is very seldom used by the people of Bengal—he was obliged to travel on foot. Unfortunately, the young man was at that time afflicted with a defect in his vision which medical men call Hemeralopia, or night-blindness. He must, therefore, reach the house of his father-in-law before nightfall, otherwise he would be put to serious inconvenience. On, on, he hastened; fear of losing his way in the dark, owing to his defective sight, lent wings to his feet. But the night-blind son-in-law, notwithstanding his utmost endeavours to reach the end of his journey before the approach of night, found himself at dusk about a mile off from the village in which his father-in-law lived. He, therefore, made for the house of his wife's father by a short cut, crossing the fields as the crow flies. While he was thus running through the open fields he fell in with a cow that belonged to his father-in-law. He at once recognised the animal, and a happy thought flashed instantly through his fertile brain: he resolved to make use of the cow as a guide!

As night was fast approaching, the young man caught hold of the tail of the cow in a firm grip and twisted it hard. The beast, being thus treated, ran fast homeward dragging the nightblind son-in-law in her

wake. It being peculiar to the bovine race to run faster and faster when their tails are twisted, the unhappy young man was dragged by his dumb guide over a track full of unpleasant obstacles. At last he found himself within the cowshed in the compound of his father-in-law's house, where the animal had dragged him direct. Thus tiding over the first difficulty, the shrewd son-in-law began to cast about in his mind for some means to get admittance into the house without allowing anyone to know of his infirmity. To conceal his night-blindness, and to be conducted into the house by his wife's relatives, he muttered rather loudly :—"O ! I wish I had not come to the house of these impious people who treat the sacred cow with such indifference ! Let me see the animal safe in this shed, and then I must leave this place at once never to come back again to this accursed abode."

It so chanced that the brothers-in-law of the night-blind youth were at that very time passing by the cowshed, and they overheard these loud remarks. A light was quickly brought from the house, and, to their astonishment, they found their brother-in-law within the shed standing near the cow. They then asked their relative why he was lingering there instead of coming direct to the house. On this the shrewd youth exclaimed:—"Can a *born Hindoo* accept the hospitality of people who treat their cows with such shameful indifference ? Were it not for my timely interference, this good cow here—

the incarnation of the goddess *Bhagabati**—would certainly have been eaten up by a hungry wolf which had attacked her. You, my brothers, should have looked after the animal with more care." The good brothers became really ashamed and horrified at this story. They thanked their sister's husband for the great service he had rendered.

It would not be out of place here to mention that the bovine race is looked upon by *Hindoos* as the most sacred of animals, and that it is a great sin to kill a cow or a bull even by accident. Should an animal of this species, while in the possession of a *Hindoo* householder, happen to die from causes other than natural, the unfortunate householder has to undergo a severe penance and pay a large sum of money to the *Bráhmans* in expiation of the deadly sin which has accrued to him through such death. The ceremony of expiation is called the *Práyaschitta*.

Such being the case, the brothers considered themselves very fortunate that they had been saved from such an awful sin through the instrumentality of their dear relative—the husband of their sister. They then requested the youth to come into the house with them, but the latter declined on the ground that they were all great sinners, as they had disgracefully neglected the sacred cow. The good brothers apologised, but this did not satisfy the rigid respecter of the bovine race.

* The Goddess of spiritual prosperity.

At last they caught hold of him and conducted him to the house by using a little friendly force.

Our hero sat sullenly on a *pinri*, and remained silent and grave to conceal his infirmity. When urged by his sisters-in-law to take some refreshments served in a dish placed before him, he sat still and silent to avoid the necessity of groping for the plate. His sisters-in-law cracked several jokes at his expense, but even at this he did not open his lips. At last the eldest of his wife's sisters came forward, and, as a practical joke, pulled both his ears—a very common form of joking followed by sisters-in-law in Bengal towards their sisters' husbands—and she began to put the sweetmeats into his mouth. He readily ate them with a relish. This difficulty being thus got over, there still lay before him the greater one—the eating of the night meal with the male members of the family. When supper was announced the night-blind son-in-law again declined to eat, for, in order to get his meal, he would have to go to the family kitchen according to the general custom of the *Hindoos*. And how could he go there without the assistance of his relatives? So he said :—“Oh no ! I won't take *Bhat* * in the house of people who do not take proper care of the sacred cow and allow her to be devoured by wolves and tigers.”

Finding their brother-in-law very unwilling to eat in their house, the good brothers again came to his help

* Boiled rice.

and forcibly led him to a seat in the *verandah* of the kitchen. As he still did not touch the food placed before him, for fear of putting his hand on the wrong place, one of the brothers made him take his meal by forcibly placing his hand on the plate. The nightblind youth then began to eat with some degree of inconvenience, but his awkwardness in despatching the contents of the plate and the cups was ascribed to his reluctance in eating the boiled rice in the house of the sinful neglecters of the sacred cow. He thus managed somehow to do full justice to his repast when an unfortunate accident occurred which went very near to betray his defective vision.

In a large cup there was the head of a big *Rohita** fish with some soup, which the young man had not yet touched. A cat, tempted by the sight of the head of the *Rohita* fish, was prowling about and purring. The fish-loving animal was watching for an opportunity to carry off the dainty contained in the cup. The cat sidled up stealthily to it, seized the delicacy and ran away in great haste to enjoy it at her leisure. The nightblind son-in-law of course could not see what had happened, but his brothers-in-law did, and they all laughed loudly at the expense of the poor fellow. Having thus come to know how matters stood, our undaunted hero said that he did not at all like a fish's head, and that he had therefore allowed it to be carried

* *Cyprinus denticulatus*.

off by the cat. But, though he said so to put a good face upon the matter, he became inwardly very angry and resolved to wreak his vengeance upon the wicked cat, should she venture again to come near him with a like purpose. He, therefore, remained on the alert, and was all ears to catch the slightest noise indicating the feline freebooter's approach.

The affectionate mother-in-law of the nightblind youth saw from the cook-room this act of spoliation by the cat and became very sorry. Anxious to make good the loss sustained by her darling son-in-law, she came out with the head of another fish, kept in reserve. She gently approached her son-in-law and slipped the fish's head on the plate from which he was eating, without touching it, as it is the universal custom with the higher class *Hindoos* not to touch the plate or the person while one eats his meal.

But as soon as the heavy head of the fish fell plump on the plate, the watchful son-in-law, true to his determination of punishing the cat, gave a good slap on the hand of the mother-in-law under the impression that she was the cat which had come again on a plundering errand! At this the offended brothers-in-law reproached him for his rude and improper behaviour; on which the ever-ready son-in-law simply said that it served her right, inasmuch as she had violated the rules of etiquette which prohibited mothers-in-law from waiting on sons-in-law at mealtime. He also

artfully added that this custom was strictly observed in his native village, though it might not be the case there.

This explanation, which was a happy fabrication on the part of the shrewd son-in-law, satisfied the brothers-in-law and the matter ended there. The nightblind youth washed his mouth and hands as he could not continue to eat any more after having touched his mother-in-law. But instead of going to the bedroom prepared for him, he sat on, where he had eaten, in sullen silence, as he could not move without the help of another.

When requested by his relatives to go to bed he said very sadly :—"Oh ! don't say so ; I won't have a wink of sleep to-night. As I have committed an awful sin by striking my mother-in-law, though on sudden provocation at her unbecoming behaviour, I'll pass the night here in deep penitence." The good brothers again came to his rescue, consoled him for what at least was a very venial offence, and, using a little friendly violence, caught hold of him by the arms and led him into the bed chamber. Hitherto the shrewd son-in-law had successfully managed to get over the difficulties that had beset him, and now, to his great relief, he at once went to bed.

Early next morning he left the house of his relatives. He never again visited his father-in-law's house as long as his night-blindness lasted.

VIII.

THE WORTHY NEPHEW.

THERE was once a young boy called Hari who lived with his mother. Hari's father had died when he was in the cradle. Hari was a very bad boy ; all day long he would play with other village lads who were equally idle. He did no work to earn his bread, so he was often scolded by his mother. But he did not pay any heed to this and went on recklessly in his wayward course. His mother became anxious about him and tried her best to bring him round from the paths of vice, but without success. She one day thus spoke to Hari :—" My son, you are not a little boy now, but a grown-up lad, and it is high time for you to try and earn something for our existence. Pray, leave off your idle and vicious habits and be a good boy. As you have learnt no useful work, I fear, you will not be able to maintain yourself and your mother." On this the lad replied :—" Mother, am I not a chip of the old

block? My father, I am told, lived by his wits, and I shall go the way of my worthy sire. You shall shortly see whether or not I can earn enough for ourselves. This day I'll set out and try my hand at roguery."

Hari had an old scraggy nag left him by his father. On the afternoon of that day he got upon the *tat* * and bade adieu to his home. The knowing animal would not leave the stable, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the beast was made to stir out of its shed, thanks to the whip of Hari! The nag jogged on with its light burden, and, at the close of the day, the youthful rider reached the outskirts of a village where he intended to pass the night.

' As Hari was passing by the side of a jungle all on a sudden there rushed at him four stout men with large *latties*, or clubs, in their hands. Seeing this danger the intrepid boy repeatedly whipped the poor animal to make it run faster. The jade showed no signs of improving its pace, but on the contrary, came suddenly to a standstill and began to kick at the air with its hind legs. The marauders, coming up to the rider, raised their *latties* to hit him on the head. Hari was all but gone, when he fortunately recognised the voice of the robbers as they uttered a certain hideous outcry preparatory to dealing the fatal blow. The boy now grew bolder, laughed outright and cried out:—"What

* An Anglo-Indian term applied to a degenerated country-born horse.

ho ! my uncles ! will you murder and rob your own dear nephew Hari ?” Recognising in the rider their near and dear relative, the robbers instantly drew back in shame and confusion. They then begged the nephew to forgive and forget the ugly incident, and welcomed him home.

Arriving at the house of his uncles, who were his mother’s brothers, Hari was well received by his aunts. They all felt glad to see their nephew in the house after so long a time. The brothers were four in number and they lived together. The nephew was desired by his uncles and aunts to take some refreshment after his long journey, but he said to them :—“ My dear uncles and aunts, let me first see to my precious pony and then I shall mind my own comforts.” He then went himself to lodge and feed the nag, and, after a few minutes, returned to the room where his relatives were waiting for him. The greater part of the night passed away in the enjoyment of good cheer, and then the family rose to retire. The nephew was shown into a nice room where he slept soundly for the remaining portion of the night.

The eldest of Hari’s uncles was an early riser. He got up betimes and saw that the door of his nephew’s room was standing ajar. He thought that Hari had gone away earlier without taking leave. To ascertain the fact, however, the uncle went into the shed wherein Hari’s pony had been stabled for the night. He expect-

ed to find the pony also gone, but, to his great astonishment, the uncle found the nephew busily engaged in grooming the pony and, at the same time, carrying on a conversation with the animal! Led by curiosity the amazed uncle remained still and heard the following discourse :—

“ Well, my old friend,” Hari said, “ you are to carry me on your back to a distant part of the country. Are you strong enough to undertake this long journey ?” To this the beast distinctly replied :—“ My young master, I am always at your service. Though I am old, I can still carry you to the end of the Earth, if you wish it.” The boy said :—“ Yes, my good friend, I know you are ever ready to serve me, but I do not wish to jade you by over-riding. If you are not well refreshed, I may wait here for a few hours more and give you rest.” The pony rejoined :—“ Thank you, my good master, for your kind consideration, but you need not tarry here for my sake. My strength is quite equal to the task of carrying you over any distance you like.”

The amazed uncle of Hari could no longer restrain himself, but at once thus broke in, patting the boy on the back :—“ Well, my dear nephew, I see your pony can speak like man, which is indeed very wonderful. I have overheard the conversation that has just now taken place between you and your supernaturally gifted animal.” Hari looked back and exclaimed :—“ Ah ! you have caught us, uncle, in an unguarded moment. I

thought no one was near to overhear us at such a time and place. We were therefore talking freely, forgetting the wise saying that "walls have ears." But the die has been cast, and there is no help for it now. However, I hope, my dear uncle, that the secret is safe with you. As you are a very discreet man, no evil will come out of your knowledge of this strange fact. I am in constant fear of being robbed of my wonderful pony, and on this account I always maintain the strictest secrecy over the matter. I, therefore, implore you, uncle, not to breathe a single word to anybody about what you have just now heard and seen."

The eldest of Hari's uncles could not, however, keep the secret from his brothers whom he loved dearly. So he called to them, and, on their arrival at the spot, acquainted them with everything notwithstanding the nephew's repeated winks to signify he was not to do so. Hari left off grooming and came out of the stable, followed by his uncles. The four brothers then requested their relative to show again the strange phenomenon of the pony's speaking like man. The boy at first flatly denied the fact, upon which the uncles assured the nephew that no harm would befall him by their knowing the secret. After some persuasion, however, Hari consented to show the strange phenomenon to his uncles, and thus addressed them:—"My dear uncles, if you are so very eager to witness the wonderful power of my precious pony, you may ask him any question you

like." One of the brothers then said:— "Well, pony, can you really speak like man?" The old nag remained silent. On this the boy said:—"The pony will not speak without the permission of his master." He then thus addressed the animal:—"Well, my old friend, you may satisfy the curiosity of my uncles. They are very discreet persons, and I do not apprehend anything wrong from their knowing your secret."

Thus permitted the pony from inside the stable spoke as follows:—"My young master, you know that I do not like to talk much. But as I owe to your good uncles a deep gratitude for the night's lodging and feeding, I am ready to answer any question they may be pleased to ask me." Upon this the astonished brothers looked at one another in wonder. At first they could not believe their ears and thought they were in a dream. To test the matter further, the second brother then said:—"Strange pony! how have you acquired such a wonderful power? Are you a *man* transformed into a pony by some enchanter or enchantress?" To this the nag replied:—"No, sir; I am not a man, but only a poor pony. The power of speaking which I possess is the gift of a certain Himálayán sage whose pet I once was. Now, sir, don't ask me any more questions, as I am not inclined to talk much."

The nephew and the uncles returned to the sitting-room talking all the while on the wonderful power of the pony. The brothers then requested Hari to give

them an explanation. The boy said:—"You know, dear uncles, that my deceased father travelled abroad far and wide. Well, on one of these occasions he penetrated into the Himálayán jungles, where, fortunately, he fell in with a very learned sage. My father stayed there for some time with the good sage, who, being well pleased with his devotion, bestowed on him a few wonderful things; and this precious pony is one of them. Now uncles, you know all. Pray, don't utter a word about this strange fact, lest I may be robbed of my pet animal by some powerful men, and especially by the *Zamindár* of our village."

Hari's uncles, on hearing this story about the old nag whose extraordinary power they had already witnessed, naturally coveted it. They held a hasty consultation and came to the conclusion that the wonderful pony must be bought from their nephew. Accordingly, they made proposals to their young relative for the sale of the pony. Hari at first shrugged his shoulders and rejected the offer. But he was so hard pressed by his uncles that he at last was obliged to yield to their repeated requests. After some haggling, a sum of one thousand *rupees* was settled as a fair price for the wonderful animal. The nephew accepted the offer and parted with the pony, after instructing his uncles to take particular care of the old nag.

On the same day Hari returned home and made over the money to his mother who was quite astonished

to see such a large sum brought home by her idle son. She therefore asked the boy to tell her how he had come by that money. Hari, with smiles upon his lips, said :—
“Just see mother, whether I am capable of earning money or not. You always took me for an idle and worthless fellow, but you have now got the proof of my wonderful abilities. Did my father earn so much money in all his born days?” The good woman replied :—“My son, I am sure you must have stolen the money from somebody.” “O no! I am not a thief, mother,” retorted the boy in seeming indignation. He then added :—“You will be quite astonished to hear that I have sold off our old nag for a sum of one thousand *rupees*.” Hari’s mother became *greatly* astonished at this information. She, therefore, hastily remarked :—“But what fool on earth has bought from you the worthless animal at such an enormous price?” Hari answered :—“Dear mother, it was no other persons than *your* foolish brothers who have bought the old nag!”

This information startled Hari’s mother. She asked her son to explain how he had managed to palm off the worthless animal upon his uncles. Hari smiled and said :—“It was indeed a very simple matter, mother. At night I stopped at the house of my uncles and was well entertained by them, though they had, by mistake, almost *finished* me with their *latties* at our first meeting near the jungles. In the course of conversation with my uncles I found them to be avaricious and credulous.

Well, mother, I thought I should try to get some money from my dear relatives who had, you know, amassed wealth by robbery. With this object in view, I got up early, went direct into the stable and made the old nag converse with me. My uncles soon came there and nibbled at the bait. They offered me one thousand *rupees* for the sale of the talking pony ; I accepted the sum, and the bargain was at once concluded."

Upon this Hari's mother asked :—" But how could you make the pony speak like man ?" Hari answered :—" It was a piece of a very fine trickery on my part, mother. I am by nature gifted with the power of uttering sounds in such a manner that the voice appears to come not from *me*, but from some distant place and object. By practice I have much improved this power, and now I am master of this art. You now understand, mother, that it was a very simple matter for me to make the pony speak and answer the questions of my uncles." Hearing this explanation Hari's mother exclaimed :—" What a young rogue you are ! To cheat your own uncles of their money is certainly very bad of you. But how will you manage to save yourself from their resentment when they see through your nasty trick ?" "That depends on chance, mother," replied the boy with indifference.

Gentle reader, start not. The art of ventriloquism is not an unknown thing in India ; from time immemorial this secret art has been practised by a certain class of

men who pretend to drive away evil spirits from haunted houses and possessed persons. Many famous exorcists of our day are nothing more than so many successful ventriloquists. They generally show their skill in such a manner that ignorant people are quite taken in by this deception. By the aid of this secret art the exorcists make the supposed evil spirits speak out from dark corners, from ceilings of rooms, from tops of tall trees, &c., to the great astonishment of the audience. And now to resume the thread of our tale.

After the departure of the worthy nephew, the uncles of Hari talked together the whole day solely on the supposed virtue of the nag. They had purchased the pony for the purpose of selling it to advantage to the king of the country. They hoped the king would surely take a fancy to the wonderful animal and offer them an enormous price. Led by this happy idea the brothers took particular care of the nag and resolved to set out on the morrow to the king's palace for the purpose. At night they asked the pony whether he would eat pulse or gram. The pony gave no answer even at the repeated requests of his new masters. The duped brothers thought the good animal had very sorely taken to heart the separation from his old master, and hoped that it would be all right with him by the next morning.

At day-break the brothers again tried to induce the pony to speak to them, but, to their great vexation, the animal remained silent. They then cajoled him with

many endearing words, but with the same sad result. When this failed, the brothers grew angry and threatened the obstinate beast with a severe beating. This failing as well, they actually lashed the poor old pony to death in order to make him speak like man! The brothers now became convinced of the roguery of their nephew and vowed vengeance on the head of Hari. With stout clubs in their hands the enraged uncles forthwith hastened to chastise the knavish nephew, and to recover the money from him.

As soon as Hari descried that his uncles were coming down upon him, he hid himself. The brothers arrived at the house and saw their sister sitting on the floor of the *verandah* at her *charká*, or spinning wheel. They then rudely asked her where Hari was, on which she answered that she did not know. The old woman inquired of her brothers why they had come in such an angry mood. Upon this, the youngest brother, who was a hot-tempered young man, said in great anger :— “Oh! you pretend to know nothing about the roguery of your son, vile woman!” With these words he gave his sister a good blow upon the head with the club he had in his hand. The poor woman instantly dropped down dead even without a groan, as if she had been struck by a thunderbolt. Seeing this mishap, the other brothers rushed to her aid; but it was too late. On minutely examining the condition of their sister, the brothers came to know for certain that she was not

stunned but killed outright. This sad discovery terrified them, robbers and murderers though they were. They then held a hasty consultation as to what should be done to escape punishment at the hands of justice. It was decided that their nephew must be propitiated, and the matter completely hushed up. As no one had witnessed the act of murder, the brothers hoped to amicably settle the matter with their nephew, and to attribute the sudden death of their sister to natural causes. With this resolve they began to search for their nephew, after covering up the dead body with a cloth, according to the universal *Hindoo* custom. One of the brothers sat by the murdered woman, touching her with his hand to prevent the entrance of evil spirits into the body!

The uncles of Hari were not long in the search. They soon found out their nephew and told him everything. They then came back to the house where the dead body lay. The boy was quite shocked at the sight of death, and remained silent for some time, overwhelmed with grief. The uncles consoled him and begged his pardon for the sad accident. They also volunteered to pardon him, in their turn, for his vile cheating, and related to him the sad fate of the poor pony. To this Hari replied :—"O uncles! You have killed the wonderful animal through your extreme impatience. If you only allowed the gifted pony some time to recover from the deep sorrow caused by the

unexpected separation from his old master, he would have certainly spoken to you as before. As for your killing my mother, how can I proceed against *you* who are my dear mother's brothers?" This assurance of the nephew cheered the hearts of the uncles who all thanked and blessed him for his forbearance. They then desired their nephew to make arrangements for the cremation of the dead body and expressed their readiness to help him in the matter. Hari said:—"Not so fast, my dear uncles! you had better bathe in the tank, take some refreshments, and then we shall see what's to be done with my murdered mother."

All the uncles went to bathe leaving Hari in charge of the dead body. On their return, they partook of some food found ready in the house. They then asked the nephew whether the body of the lost one was ready to be removed to the place of cremation. Hari smiled and said:—"Oh uncles! I am not going to burn the body of my dear mother until I have tried the virtue of a certain magic-wand that I possess. This wand is also a gift of the Himálayán Sage; it is endowed with the wonderful virtue of restoring life to a person who has been killed. My father had not the opportunity to test this property of the magic-wand, and it has since been lying in our strong chest." At this the uncles were astonished, and the eldest of them said:—"Is it true that you possess such a wonderful wand, my dear nephew?" "I do believe so, dear uncle," answered

the boy. The uncles, thereupon, requested him to produce the magic-wand and to test its vaunted virtue on their murdered sister.

Hari desired one of his uncles to open a strong chest for him, as he could not himself do it after having touched the dead body, which had rendered him ceremonially unclean. The magic-wand was then taken out of the chest and made over to Hari. The boy held the wand in his right hand and passed it seven times over the body, from the head down to the feet, and then pulled up the dear one by the hands. No sooner was this done than the murdered mother of Hari opened her eyes and sat up perfectly restored to life. O wonder of wonders! What a miracle was performed by the magic-wand of the Himálayán Sage! The amazed uncles could scarcely believe their eyes. They fancied that they were in a delightful dream. But when their resuscitated sister addressed and reproached them for their rashness, they believed that it was indeed a reality. The ashamed brothers apologised to their sister and begged her pardon, which was, however, readily granted.

Now, the uncles of Hari, seeing this wonderful virtue of the magic-wand, became very eager to possess it for their own behoof, as they were highway-men and therefore liable to lose life in some unfortunate affray. The brothers, being in affluent circumstances, offered to buy the wonderful wand for a sum of two thousand

rupees. Hari at first expressed his unwillingness, but he was subsequently obliged to accept the offer. One of the brothers hastened home and fetched the money, which was at once given to Hari.

The delighted brothers came back to their village and passed a greater part of the night in consulting together as to how they could best utilize the wonderful virtue of the magic-wand. After much discussion, the third brother made a happy suggestion and said :—" I say, brothers, it would be better for us if we could kill our wives before leaving home and restore life to them on our return. This measure, if adopted, would serve a double purpose: first, it would be a very economical way of housekeeping, inasmuch as we should not have to bear the feeding charges of our wives during our absence; secondly, our ever-quarrelling consorts would not be able to make our home a scene of constant discord and brawling while we remain away from it. I, therefore, make this proposal, my good brothers, for your careful consideration." The other brothers accepted the proposal with acclamation. It was settled that from the next day they would put into practice this economical way of housekeeping! Accordingly, on the following morning, when the brothers left home, they killed their wives and kept the dead bodies locked up in their respective rooms.

Returning at night, the brothers opened the doors of the rooms wherein the dead women lay. First of

all, they wanted to re-animate the wife of the eldest brother, and for this purpose they all repaired to her room. One of them held the magic-wand in his hand and passed it *seven* times over the dead body. But alas! no sign of life returned. The horrorstricken brothers then repeated the process *fourteen* times, nay, even *twenty-one* times, but to no purpose. The life-restoring virtue of the magic-wand was also tried successively on the other dear ones, but with the same sad result. The afflicted brothers now repented of their folly in implicitly believing in the pretended virtue of Hari's magic-wand. They could not, however, for their lives account for the wonderful phenomenon shown to them by their nephew in restoring life to his murdered mother with the self-same magic-wand. The bereaved brothers passed the night in sorrowing and in disposing of the dead bodies. They now came to understand fully that they had been cheated by their knavish nephew, and so they swore violently to wreak a deadly vengeance on the head of that young rascal.

Some explanation is here necessary as to why the magic-wand, which had restored life to Hari's mother, now failed in resuscitating Hari's aunts. The fact was that the woman killed by the youngest brother, was *not* Hari's mother, but his aunt. Hari's mother had a twin sister who was so much like herself that it was very difficult to say for certain which of them was Hari's mother and which his aunt. This woman was

also a widow and lived in a distant village. She had come to Hari's house on the previous night on a visit to her twin sister. At the time when Hari's uncles came to chastise him, it was the poor aunt who had been sitting in the *verandah* while Hari's mother was away from home. The enraged brothers knew not that their other sister had come to the house, and they took her for Hari's mother. When the uncles had gone to bathe in the tank the worthy nephew removed the dead body of his mother's twin sister and substituted his *real* mother, who had by that time come back home, for his murdered aunt. And this explains the miracle of the resuscitation of Hari's mother.

Early next morning the maddened uncles of Hari hastened to the house of their nephew to punish him for his base cheating which had cost them so dearly. The boy was just leaving the house when the brothers suddenly pounced upon him, and, in the twinkling of an eye, put him into a large sack which they had brought with them for the purpose. They securely tied up the mouth of the sack, and the strongest of them took it upon his head. They then went away from the place to throw their rogue of a nephew into the sea which was close by their own home.

Reaching the sea-side the revengeful uncles of Hari carried the load to a high bank. Two of the brothers took the heavy sack by the ends, swung it to and fro for a few seconds, and then let go their hold with

a sudden jerk. Away went the sack in the air, splash it fell on the waters of the sea, and, down, down, it sank into the bottom of the deep!

Thus wreaking their deadly vengeance on the miscreant, the uncles of Hari returned home after being fully satisfied that their wily nephew lived no more. They talked over the matter till the after-noon, and they fancied that the last screams of their drowning relative were still ringing in their ears! They now felt very sorry for their rash behaviour in drowning their only nephew and heir, as they had no children of their own; and the brothers now wished that they had not committed the crime. The remorseful uncles of Hari were in this wise repenting of their misdeed, when lo! there suddenly turned up before their eyes the very person for whose death they were sorrowing! The astonished uncles saw their nephew, all wet and dripping, pass by the house in a sneaking manner. They thought that the boy bore a charmed life, and that, therefore, he had been able to come out of the water, safe and sound. They then stopped the nephew, begged his pardon, and asked him to explain the matter.

Hari at first tried to evade the questionings of his uncles, but being hard pressed by them he thus addressed his relatives:—"Oh uncles! if you had but thrown me further off, you would have thereby favoured your nephew *greatly*. I am, however, very thankful to you for the good ducking you were pleased to give me."

This strange speech of the nephew at once roused the curiosity of the uncles to the highest pitch, and they requested him to go on with the explanation. "Well, uncles," said Hari with a smile, "as soon as I reached the bottom of the sea I was set free by a sea-nymph who took compassion on me. I then found, to my great astonishment, that I had fallen on a bed of precious pearls! I looked around and also saw a bed of brilliant gems lying ahead of me. But, as I could not go there on account of a watery barrier, I only feasted my eyes on the splendour of those matchless jewels. When I came out of the sea I carried a quantity of pearls tied in a corner of my cloth. I now, therefore, earnestly request you, uncles, that, should you in future be inclined to drown me in the sea, you would be pleased to take the trouble of flinging me a little way further off, so that I might descend on the bed of those priceless jewels." Hari then opened the bundle and showed to his uncles the quantity of pearls he had carried away from the bottom of the sea.

This convincing proof of the truth of Hari's statement at once excited the avarice of the credulous brothers. They resolved to fetch for themselves as large a quantity of gems from the bottom of the deep as they would be able to carry with them. The covetous uncles, therefore, requested the nephew to point out to them the particular part of the sea in which the bed of gems lay. Hari consenting to this, the

brothers betook themselves to the sea-side. The nephew now advised his uncles to procure a boat and four large sacks. When this was done, they all got into the boat—the four uncles and the nephew. They then plied the oars and rowed the boat to an offing indicated by the boy. The nephew now addressed the uncles thus:—“This is the very spot, uncles, where lies the layer of those brilliant gems. Now, take the sacks with you and dive into the sea until you descend on the bed of jewels lying very deep underneath.” The uncles said that they were not good divers and that they were sure to come up soon if they attempted to reach the bottom. Upon this, the nephew advised the uncles to put themselves into the sacks and to undertake an easy journey through the water to the bed of gems!

This good suggestion at once removed the difficulty, but there now arose a dispute as to which of the brothers should go first, each of them volunteering to take the lead. At this point the nephew interfered and said:—“Well, uncles, it would be better if you *all* could go to the bed of gems at one and the same time, while I remain here in charge of this boat. In that case, should the nymph, who mounts guard at the place, be found inclined to oppose you, then you might be in a position to overcome her by your united strength.” This good advice at once settled the question. The four brothers, acting up to the instructions given them by their nephew, got themselves inside the sacks, the

mouths of which were then securely tied up with strong strings. When this was done, Hari hurriedly rolled away the heavy sacks off the boat, one by one. At each plunge into the sea the nephew wished his uncles a pleasant trip to the bed of gems!

Thus consigning the uncles to a watery grave the worthy nephew returned home in triumph. His anxious mother asked him how he had managed to escape the wrath of his uncles, on which the boy said:—
“ Well, mother, your brothers put me into a sack and carried it away to throw me into the sea. You know, dear mother, this was not at all a comfortable conveyance for me, and I must have perished, had not the sack, fortunately, several rents in it, and especially a large one just about my nose. Three of my uncles had gone to the sea-side while the fourth lagged behind with his heavy burden. On the way, the uncle, who was carrying me on his head, put the sack down and went to a neighbouring hut for the purpose of smoking. I then struggled hard to get out of the sack, but I could not succeed. At this moment a cowboy came up and opened the mouth of the sack out of curiosity. Thus liberated I popped out with smiles upon my lips. The cowboy asked me whither I was going in such a close conveyance. I told him that I was going to marry a beautiful girl in a neighbouring village and that I preferred the sack to a palanquin, as I wanted to go there *very* privately for certain family reasons. Finding the cowboy to be a great fool, I asked him whether he

would like to marry the beautiful girl in my stead. The foolish fellow grinned with joy, and I made him enter the sack, with instruction to keep perfectly quiet until he was taken out by the girl's father! In this way, mother, I managed to give my revengeful uncles the slip, and went to the neighbouring town and purchased a quantity of false pearls."

Hari then related to his mother all that had taken place between himself and his uncles. The old woman was greatly shocked at the rascality of her son and she exclaimed :—"What a young rogue you are!" The boy laughed and said :—"Well, mother, you now see whether I am capable of earning my bread or not. As my uncles have perished without any issue, their whole property devolves on *me* who am their legal heir."



IX.

MADARCHAND THE CRACKED QUACK.

IN days gone by there lived a great *Kavirāja*, or physician. His reputation as a successful medical man spread far and wide, and secured him numerous patients from all parts of the country. He had in his house several pupils who had flocked thither to study medicine under the tuition of this learned and skilful follower of Dhanwantari, the Hindoo Æsculapius. All of these pupils received instruction *gratis*, not to speak of free quarters and board, which, as a matter of right, they always got from the Professor. This custom still prevails in Bengal and shows the generosity of heart of the *Kavirājas*.

One day a silly young man, whose name was *Mádarchánd*, came to this learned physician to be enrolled as a pupil. The good Doctor found the new-comer utterly devoid of common sense, and wanting in

that necessary qualification which is required for mastering that most abstruse science which deals with life and death. Mádarchánd was informed of this unpleasant fact, and advised to follow some other profession which would suit him better. But the obstinate fellow would not listen to reason, and so he importuned the kind-hearted *Kabirája* to take compassion on him. Being unable to get rid of the applicant, the Professor was obliged to enrol him simply for the purpose of humouring the fool. Mádarchánd, exceedingly glad at his success with the good physician, lived with him to learn medicine. Needless it is to say that he did not make any progress towards the accomplishment of his object; but, notwithstanding this fact, the silly man still hoped to become a great physician in a short time and to be soon on the high road to fortune.

One day an incident of great moment occurred to Mádarchánd, which made that foolish fellow believe that he would become a *Rájáh*, sooner or later. A house-lizard happened to drop on the top of his head from the ceiling of a room, and it squeaked thrice *tik ! tik ! tik !* Now, with *Hindoos* the fall of the house-lizard predicts good or evil according to the parts of the body on which the prescient animal happens to drop. So much importance is attached to the accidental fall of the house-lizard that in their daily almanac there is a nice dissertation on this subject. This curious divination by animals, like *Myomancy* (divination by mice),

Ornithomancy (divination by birds), and Ophiomancy (divination by fish) of the superstitious ancients, is still extant in Bengal and is implicitly believed in by the ignorant people. If the house-lizard falls on the right side of the body, it is an evil omen; it forebodes loss of friends or fortune. If the animal drops on the left side of the body, it foretells gain. If it fortunately falls on the breast, head, back, or throat, it predicts acquisition of a kingdom. If the lizard falls on the arms, legs, or over the heart, it announces great happiness.

In accordance with this theory our foolish friend Mádarchánd firmly believed in his eventually becoming a king; and he always bowed reverentially to the Bráhmans, earnestly soliciting their benediction for the fulfilment of the house-lizard's prophecy! All the other medical students always enjoyed themselves at Mádarchánd's expense, and they often fooled him to the top of his bent by calling him "*Rájáh Mádarchánd!*" The poor simpleton was greatly flattered by this regal appellation and exulted in the idea of soon becoming the observed of all observers.

A year or two passed away in this manner, and the happy fool lived merrily in the abode of the *Kabirája*, but his progress in the science of Medicine was *nil*. Now Mádarchánd thought that it was high time for him to learn Therapeutics clinically. For this purpose he one day accompanied his Professor, the *Kabirája*, to

the house of a certain patient who had been laid up with fever. The physician felt the pulse of the sick man, and ascertained the extent of the fever very correctly without the aid of a clinical thermometer—an article which is never used by the native physicians of Bengal. The *Kabirāja*, who was a very considerate man and well-experienced in practice, carefully studied all the objective and subjective symptoms of the patient, and recited a few *slokas*, or formulas, in *Sanskrit* verse pertinent to the case before him. He then prescribed certain pills to be taken with honey and the juice of the *Safálicá** leaves, well mixed together in a small stone mortar. Having done this, the *Kabirāja* desired his patient not to eat anything on that day, and he left him after receiving his fee.

Next day the sick man was again visited by the physician followed by his foolish pupil *Mádarchánd*. The *Kabirāja* felt the pulse of the patient for a few minutes with great attention, and then gravely asked him if he had eaten anything on the previous day. The invalid answered in the negative; but the learned Doctor smiled and said:—"My good man, why do you deny that you ate yesterday some grains of pomegranate? It is not good to suppress facts from physicians. However, it will do you no harm; so go on taking these pills as before." With these words the physician left his patient.

* *Nyctanthes Arbori tristis*.

Poor *Mádarchánd* was lost in wonder at this. He was at a loss to understand how the *Kabirája* could know for certain, by feeling the pulse, that some grains of pomegranate had been eaten by the patient. He attributed this feat to some supernatural power on the part of the *Kabirája*, and he earnestly wished to get at the secret somehow or other. He therefore requested his Professor to impart to him the occult knowledge by virtue of which he could so dexterously divine what the patient had eaten on the previous day. The kind-hearted *Kabirája* laughed outright, but the inquisitive student still insisted on knowing the secret from him. The physician, vexed with the incessant importunities of his pupil, told him at last that it was a very simple matter indeed, inasmuch as he had seen, while feeling the pulse of the sick man, one half-eaten pomegranate lying under the bedstead of the invalid. "My good friend," said the kind *Kabirája*, "this guess-work sometimes stands us, physicians, in good stead. In our practice we should be minute observers, and no facts, however trifling in themselves, should be neglected. And this is the secret you are so eager to know."

Mádarchánd now fancied that he had got the key to the mystery of successfully treating cases of diseases, and he therefore determined to set up at once as an independent medical practitioner. He took leave of his Professor and went home joyfully. The next day he set out in quest of sick persons, giving himself out as a

duly qualified physician. He was not long, however, in securing a patient for himself: a country gentleman who was ill, being taken in by his false pretensions, called in our *soi-disant* *Kabirāja* Mádárchánd. The new practitioner presented himself at the bed-side of the patient and sat gravely for some time to observe the symptoms of the disease. He then felt the pulse with ludicrous attention, gave him a few pills which he had purloined from the dispensary of the *Kabirāja*, and strictly enjoined him not to eat anything that day. He next left his patient after receiving a nominal fee, to his great delight.

Next morning Mádárchánd went again to the abode of his patient and sat by him as before. He then, while feeling the pulse, began to cast his eyes furtively under the bedstead of the sick man to see what the latter had eaten on the previous day. Finding an old shoe, half bitten off by a dog, lying under the bedstead, the fool at once put into requisition the wonderful guess-treatment to show off his extraordinary skill and knowledge. With this object in view, Mádárchánd asked the patient whether he had eaten anything or not. The sick gentleman answered that he had tasted nothing in the shape of food. On this the silly quack simpered and said:—“My good sir, why do you so shamefully deny the fact of your having eaten a good half portion of an old shoe overnight? You cannot conceal anything from me, you see! It is as clear as

noon-day ; your pulse betrays you, sir." Incensed at this foolish remark of the cracked quack, the invalid ordered his attendants to drive him out pulling by the ear. Being thus ignobly expelled from the house of his patient, Mádarchánd returned slowly to the abode of his Professor to perfect his knowledge.

A few months passed away. The physician was one day sent for by the king of the country. This time Mádarchánd also accompanied him to receive practical training. The king desired the doctor to treat an elephant of his, suddenly suffering from a large swelling about the throat. The intelligent physician carefully felt the tumour, heard in detail all the particulars from the *máhooth*, or keeper of the animal, correctly diagnosed the case, and caused two large bricks to be brought there. He then placed one of the bricks underneath the swelling, and with the other gave a good thump on it. The tumour disappeared instantly to the astonishment of all, and the doctor returned home amply rewarded for his successful treatment. Mádarchánd was again lost in wonder at the skill of his Professor, and became eager to possess the secret of this successful treatment. He therefore requested his teacher to explain to him the method of the new treatment which he had followed in the case of the king's elephant. The good physician smiled and said :—"It is again guess-work which has helped me in this matter. In hearing the history of the case, I came to know that

the elephant had that day passed through a field of water-melon. From this I concluded that the animal must have taken a water-melon too large to be swallowed entire, and that in attempting to do so the melon had stuck in his throat. I, therefore, crushed the fruit with a stroke of the brick, and that immediately relieved the beast." Mádarchánd thought that by this time his education had been perfected, and he, therefore, resolved to try his hand again at independent practice.

With this intent the fool left the house of the *Kabirája* and roamed about in search of patients, proclaiming himself a *specialist* in diseases of the throat! Ere long he was called in for the treatment of a child suffering from an enlargement of the thyroid gland, a disease commonly known by the name of *goitre*, which looked as large as an apple. The cracked quack quickly felt the tumour, smiled in a silly manner, and assured the anxious father of the little sufferer that he would make the swelling disappear in no time. He then asked for two large bricks, which were, however, brought to him by the astonished friends of the patient. Preparations for crushing the tumour were soon made by the dexterous doctor! But just as he was about to give a good thump of the brick on the enlarged gland, his uplifted right hand was quickly arrested by the watchful father who happened to be near. Were it not for this timely interference, the poor child must have been killed outright; but, as it was, the little patient had a hair-breadth

escape. When the enraged friends of the suffering child asked the silly quack to explain his conduct, Mádarchánd gravely said that he was going to *crush* the water-melon that had stuck in the child's throat! He also added that this sort of treatment was called the *guess-treatment*, not known to many physicians of the day. Convinced of the great silliness of the crack-brained quack, his patient's friends gave him a good thrashing and drove him away. Disappointed in his second attempt, the dull-headed doctor dolefully dragged himself to the house of his patron, the *Kabirája*, and stayed there to improve his knowledge.

A few months passed away without any incident of note. At length, one day, the *Kabirája* was called in to treat a patient whose case was very serious. This time our Mádarchánd also accompanied him. The physician found the patient in a state of collapse, shook his head gloomily, and gave out an unfavourable prognosis of the case. However, at the repeated requests of the patient's friends, he administered a few black globules to the dying man, and, at the same time, remarked that *that* was the only medicine for *hopeless cases*. Now, this boasted medicine of the *Kabirája* was really a strong stimulant, and it soon acted beneficially on the sinking patient. Under its restorative influence the man began to rally quickly, and he was dragged away, so to speak, from Death's door.

When Mádarchánd saw the efficacy of the medicine

he requested the physician to tell him if it would act similarly in every kind of malady. The good *Kabirāja* said that the medicine could not be administered in all sorts of diseases, but that it would certainly be helpful in *hopeless cases*. This discovery made Mádarchánd think that he should again launch out as a medical practitioner for the *third* time. He, therefore, purloined a good quantity of the medicine, and in an auspicious moment he bade good-bye to the abode of the *Kabirāja*. This time he went to a distant part of the country and established himself in the suburbs of a great city. But as no one trusted a new physician, Mádarchánd had to wait patiently in expectation of getting some *hopeless cases* sooner or later. A short time after, the New Doctor, as Mádarchánd was generally called by the poor peasants of the village, fortunately performed certain wonders in medical science, which established his reputation as a very successful physician, and paved the way for his future fortune.

One day, it so happened that a poor peasant was passing by the place where Mádarchánd lived. The man looked very sad and melancholy, and our patient-seeking practitioner at once pounced upon the peasant and asked what was the matter with him. The poor man said that a cow belonging to him had been lost for the last three days, which caused him much grief, and that he was wandering hopelessly in search of the missing animal. On this the New Doctor said :—“ My

good man, if your case is really a *hopeless* one, I can give you a medicine which will certainly help you in this matter. You will be quite struck with its charming efficacy." "Can a missing cow be found through the agency of your drug?" asked the astonished man. "Certainly it can be," the New Doctor answered with great confidence. "If you but swallow a few globules of my medicine for *hopeless cases*, you are sure to recover your missing cow during the course of this very day." Believing in the pretensions of the quack the simple agriculturist agreed to take the much vaunted remedy of the New Doctor. Upon this Mádarchánd made over some pellets of the medicine to the credulous cultivator who at once swallowed them with water and returned home, promising to reward the quack with some quantity of paddy if the lost cow be found.

A little while after, the medicine began to operate on the cow-seeking patient of the New Doctor. Though the strong stimulant medicine of the *Kabirája* had saved a dying man, as we have seen, on a previous occasion, it made the peasant, who had taken it in health, very ill. The signs of approaching collapse were visible on him, and, under the toxic influence of the drug, the poor fellow was about to die. The man, however, made a rapid recovery from the effects of the snake-venom which was the chief ingredient of the medicine, as it was introduced into the system through the ordinary channel, and not by direct inoculation,

and therefore the symptoms developed were mild and evanescent. But, though the cracked quack's mode of treatment was violent, its result was excellent! For, as chance would have it, the missing cow of the peasant returned home on the night of that momentous day, to the great delight of the poor man. This accidental return of the cultivator's cow was attributed to the wonderful efficacy of the New Doctor's medicine for *hopeless cases*! The news of this extraordinary event spread far and wide among the simple-hearted peasants of the adjacent villages, and it increased the reputation of the quack.

After a short while an event of greater moment took place in the neighbouring city, which went to lay the foundation of Mádárchánd's future fortune. It so happened that the king of the country, who lived in that city, had two wives—the *Suo Ráni* and the *Duo Ráni*. Polygamy being very common in India, especially in ancient times, the king, as a matter of course, had a couple of queens. Now, the words *Suo Ráni* signify the Favourite Queen, and the expression *Duo Ráni* means the Neglected Queen. It is needless to say that the *Suo Ráni* was the apple of the king's eye, whilst the *Duo Ráni* lived in disgrace. The king was not allowed by the Favourite Queen even to see the neglected one, so great was the influence of the *Suo* over her henpecked husband!

The *Duo Ráni* was one day addressed by a favourite

maid-servant of hers, who happened to be a resident of that identical village where the cracked quack Mádarchánd so successfully practised medicine! "My most beloved Lady," said the officious maid, "will your Majesty deign to hear what this humble slave has got to say?" The *Duo Ráni* gave her permission to speak out, and the favourite maid continued:—"My most gracious Lady, your Majesty's misfortune always hangs like a mill-stone round my neck, and the thought of your Majesty's welfare is ever-present in my mind. I, therefore, take the liberty of advising your Majesty in this matter, and humbly beg to recommend a particular course to your Majesty's notice. A new *Kabirája* has of late come to our village. He prescribed a wonderful medicine by virtue of which, the other day, a poor peasant found his missing cow when there was not the *least* hope of recovering the animal. I, therefore, earnestly beseech your Majesty to take the medicine of the New Doctor; and I can say with the greatest assurance that your Majesty will certainly be restored to the favour of His Majesty the king, in the course of the very day of your taking the medicine."

The *abigail* then described in eloquent terms the extraordinary power of the New Doctor. The *Duo Ráni*, woman as she was, did not neglect to act up to the well-meant advice of her maid. The latter, therefore, hurried forthwith to fetch from that famous physician the wonderful medicine so much talked of amongst

the simple folks of the villages in the vicinity of the city. The cracked quack, on hearing the whole history, concluded that the case was certainly a *hopeless* one, and gave the maid some globules of the medicine, after stipulating for a large sum in case of success. The woman returned to her mistress and made over the medicine to her, which was instantly swallowed by the *Duo Ráni*. The globules acted in a short time, and the Neglected Queen became so bad with them that her attendants grew apprehensive for her life, and thought it proper to report the matter to the king. His Majesty, hearing of the serious illness of the *Duo Ráni*, hesitated for a while for fear of the severe curtain-lectures of the *Suo Ráni* who was a terrible termagant. However, being a man full of the milk of human kindness, he could not refrain from doing the sacred duty of a husband towards an afflicted wife who then lay at Death's door.

The king repaired to the suite of apartments occupied by the *Duo Ráni* and found her bed-ridden. She could not raise herself to receive her royal husband; the hand of Death was evidently upon her. She, however, very faintly muttered some thanks to His Majesty for his kind condescension to her at her last moments. The king was greatly moved by the touching words of the *Duo Ráni* and the sad sight which he saw before him. He passed the night in her chamber, comforting and nursing her all the while. The Neglected Queen,

however, did not die ; but she soon recovered from the toxic effects of the *Kabirāja's* medicine.

From that time, the king came every day to inquire after the health of the *Duo*, notwithstanding the *Suo's* strongest protestations against it. The *Duo Ráni*, who was young and beautiful, regained by degrees her health and beauty, and the king became quite struck with her blooming charms and her winning manners. Thenceforward the once disregarded *Duo* occupied the first place in the affections of the king, while the former favourite was neglected. Through the efficacy of Mádarchánd's medicine for *hopeless cases* a very extraordinary thing had happened : the *Duo* took the place of the *Suo*, and the *Suo* became the *Duo* ! The successful quack was amply rewarded by the then *Suo Ráni* for his performing this miracle in Medical Science ! Our lucky friend Mádarchánd left the village for good and came to the city where he lived like a lordling.

A few months were over when a neighbouring king came to invade the city where Mádarchánd was so pleasantly passing his days. The mighty army of the invading king halted for the night on the other side of a river that flowed hard by, just opposite to the barracks in which the City Guards resided. The river not being fordable, the enemy had to put up tents for shelter during the night, intending to cross the stream on the morrow. The king, as he was not at all prepared for this sudden invasion, was greatly dismayed.

There were only a small number of soldiers in the barracks, and it would have been an act of sheer madness to go and encounter the mighty army of the invader with such a handful of men. He was therefore on the point of treating with the enemy for terms.

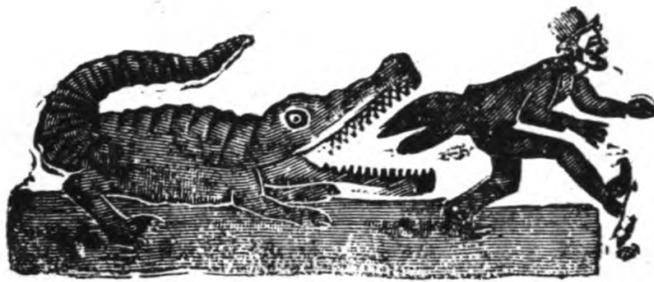
In the night the Favourite Queen perceived the pensive look of the king and became greatly perturbed in mind. Learning the cause of his anxiety, the new *Suo Ráni* earnestly requested her royal consort to consult a certain eminent physician called Mádárchánd the New Doctor. The king asked her, with a sickly smile, what a medical man could do in the matter of war, the question of fighting being beyond the province of Medicine. The *Suo Ráni* looked grave and said:—“My Lord, you know nothing about the power of this wonderful man. To tell the truth, it is only through the agency of his medicine for *hopeless cases* that your royal self has been restored to me. I, therefore, earnestly pray that this New Doctor be called in and consulted at once.” She then extolled the foolish quack to the skies as the most extraordinary man on the face of the earth! Being at last prevailed upon by the solicitations of the Favourite Queen, the king sent for Mádárchánd who came to the palace with due dignity. On hearing what the matter was, the New Doctor dexterously diagnosed the case to be a *hopeless* one, and solemnly said that the capital of the king could be saved if His Majesty’s soldiers were ordered to take, on

that very night, his medicine for *hopeless cases*! As a drowning man catches at a straw, the king gave orders for drugging the troops.

The New Doctor betook himself to the barracks with a large supply of the medicine. He showed a royal writ to the Captain of the Guards, and the sons of Mars, one and all, were drugged with the medicine for *hopeless cases* for the patriotic purpose of saving the city from the invasion of the enemy! The medicine began to take effect after a little while, and, with the early dawn of day, the soldiers became very ill. From morning to noon they were removed, in litters, to the Hospital which stood by the side of the river. Now, the invaders, who were stationed on the other side of the stream, marked this. They fancied that a dreadful plague was raging in the city, and that they were sure to catch the contagion, were they to set foot in that doomed place. A panic broke out amongst the deluded invaders, and they thought it prudent to break up the encampment and beat a hasty retreat.

And thus the king's capital was saved by the medicine of the New Doctor! The suffering soldiers soon recovered, and the grateful king, in return for the invaluable services rendered by Mádarchánd, gave him in marriage his only daughter, by his first wife, at the recommendation of the new *Suo Ráni*. A few years later the king died without any male issue, and our fortunate friend, Mádarchánd the Cracked Quack, became

king to his extreme delight. The auspicious fall of the house-lizard on the crown of his head bore good fruit at last. When fortune favours, a molehill is turned into a mountain !



X.

NIMAI THE SINGER.

ONCE upon a time there lived in a village in rural Bengal two brothers. The elder was called Naba and the younger delighted in the euphonious name of Nimai Náeke. These brothers enjoyed a comfortable competence left them by their father who had been a well-to-do farmer. Naba, the elder, attended to all the household affairs of the family, while Nimai gave himself up to all sorts of sport and pleasure. Rising very late in the morning, for he was of a sluggish disposition, (and it may be averred, without fear of contradiction, that he had never seen the sun rise in all his life), Nimai indulged himself in smoking tobacco with other idlers of the village. It was also a notorious fact that he was addicted to smoking *gánjá**; and Rumour was so unkind

* Cannabis Indica or Indian hemp. It is an intoxicating exhilarant. Under its influence all sensations and emotions, all perceptions and conceptions, are exaggerated to the utmost degree. It increases both motor and intellectual activity. Though the pleasure caused by it is paradise itself, any painful thought or feeling plunges at once into the depths of misery. Its excessive use may end in insanity.

as to assert that he even had a very close acquaintance with some other excisable articles. Thus he passed his mornings in smoking and chatting, but it must be said to his credit that he never tainted his tongue with scandalous gossip to which the narrow-minded village people are generally prone.

At noon, Nimai used to bathe in a large tank, called the *Dighi*, situated on the outskirts of the village. After indifferently anointing his whole body with mustard-oil, splash he went into the dark waters of the *Dighi* with a plunge to which an impetus had been given by a short run, to the great terror of the ducks and other aquatic fowl that had been gracefully skimming the surface of the water. These terrified species of the feathered-race, molested by Nimai Náeke's violent mode of bathing, instantly set up a loud, sharp, quacking noise, and fled to some distant part of the *Dighi* to hide themselves in the recesses formed by overhanging creepers and certain water-weed. But to their great relief, our hero did not remain long in the water, as cold would certainly spoil the effects of the *ganjá* fumes he had inhaled. He merely dived three times in quick succession, blocking up, with the forefingers of both hands, the openings of his ears. He then quickly came out of the water, stood on the *ghát*, or flight of steps leading into the water, thoroughly wrung his *gámchhá*, or bathing towel, dyed with *alámáti** and with it

* A kind of light-yellow earth.

quickly rubbed himself dry.

The bathing being thus over, Nimai wended his way homewards at a rapid pace, his dripping *dhuti*, or wearing cloth, leaving a wet track behind him. When he reached home, the wet cloth was changed for a dry one, although it had not the slightest pretension to cleanliness. It was always the lot of his poor old mother to wash the cast off cloth and to dry it in the sun. He then went straight into the kitchen, squatted upon a *pinri*, or low wooden seat, and at once fell to his meal of boiled rice, pulse, and curries of different sorts and flavours, which the anxious care of the old mother had provided for his repast. After doing full justice to the viands set before him in plates and cups made of bell-metal, Nimai Náeke drank off a large cupful of boiled milk, the produce of the household dairy. This delicacy he could not dispense with, as it was considered highly conducive to his somewhat shattered health undermined by the deleterious effects of *gánjá* and other intoxicants.

Having finished his meal, Nimai washed his hands and mouth, and the services of the indispensable *gamchhá* were again called into requisition. He then chewed a *pán*, or betel-leaf, seasoned with lime, catechu, and pieces of betel-nut. Next he gave a good many hard pulls at his *hooká*, or hubble-bubble, puffed out a volume of smoke through his mouth and nostrils, and then quietly went to take his mid-day nap on a mat

spread out on the floor of the *Chandimandap*.* Awaking in the afternoon he again smoked for some time, washed his face and eyes, ate a quantity of *muri*, or parched rice, with *goor*, or molasses, and then went to play at cards with his friends, which occupation lasted till evening. Though he was not a master-hand in the game, he was so very fond of it that he indulged himself every day in this innocent pleasure to his heart's content, not forgetting, time and again, to take a pull at the friendly *hooká* which was such a great favourite with him. He very often lost the game, but he did not lose any money as it is not the general custom in rural Bengal to play cards for stakes. Notwithstanding his repeated ill luck at play, his zeal abated not. The more he lost, the more he warmed up to it. But whenever the tables turned and he happened to win, his joy knew no bounds. He jumped, he danced, he made various odd and comic gestures at his antagonists, and the room rang with the peals of his loud laughter.

At the approach of night, Nimai bestowed his attention on other diversion than cards. He was rather fond of music, and he devoted the best part of his nights to the cultivation of this science—not vocal, but instrumental. He was the happy owner of a very old *behálá*, or violin, a sort of heirloom in his family, which

* Literally *Chandi's* house where the periodical worship of goddess *Chandi*, or Durgá, is performed, but which usually serves the purpose of a drawingroom.

had come down to him probably from his great-grandfather. This instrument managed somehow to keep its several disjointed limbs together solely through Nimai's officious interference. His hands were always ready to help his superannuated friend, the fiddle, with glue, putty and ligatures. These restoratives were applied by Nimai to his wooden patient as skilfully as an experienced surgeon would treat his patient of flesh and blood. Thus, the timeworn, tuneless, faded instrument was fortunate enough to keep its parts from falling to pieces through the care of Nimai Náeke. One Haridás Bairági of the village, an old associate of Nimai and a *gánjá-smoker* too, was his music-master and visited him nightly to give him lessons.

When the music-master had seated himself on the mat, Nimai first prepared a small quantity of *gánjá*, mixing it thoroughly with some pieces of dry tobacco-leaves and a few drops of water. He then took the mixture in the hollow of the palm of his left hand, rubbed it hard with the right thumb for some time, then cut it into pieces with a knife on a small block of wood, again put the minced mixture in the hollow of the left hand, and kneaded it well as before. The *gánjá* underwent this process of sublime preparation twice or thrice and then it was declared ready for use. Nimai now put this mass into a small narrow earthen bowl called *koliká*, lighted it with some pieces of burning cinder, and set the *koliká* on the top of a carved slender wooden tube

called *Nalichá*, measuring a few inches in length and attached to a small cocoanut-shell *hooká*. He then joyfully ejaculated, '*Bom Mohadev** !' as an invocation to the god of intoxication, and offered it devoutly as an oblation to that Deity with halfclosed eyes. Afterwards he applied his lips to the opening of the *hooká*, and gave such a number of hard pulls at it that the mixture instantly blazed up with a flash. The *hooká* was then passed round to his *Ostádjí*, or tutor, who took the clay bowl, *koliká*, off the top of the *nalichá*, grasped it firmly with both his hands, applied his lips to the pipe-like aperture thus formed and smoked away the whole thing in a quick succession of puffs. This contrivance was devised by Haridás Bairági, the music-master, to supply the place of a *hooká*, as he would not apply his mouth to the one used by his pupil, the Bairági being of a different caste from that of Nimai Náeke.

This indispensable preliminary having been religiously attended to, Nimai produced his favourite fiddle from its worn case of patched coarse cloth, felt the strings with the fingers of his right hand to see if they were in tune, gave a few twists with the left hand to

* *Bom* means the same as *Om*, which contains the mystic names of the Hindu *Triad*—*Visnú*, *Siva* and *Brahmá*—and it generally prefaces the names of the gods, all the prayers and sacred writings. It is said that the diety *Siva*, or *Mahádeva*, the Great Teacher of the *Yogis*, or ascetics, usually utters *Bom ! Bom !* by way of inculcating the doctrine of the Hindu Trinity.

the wooden pegs to which the strings were fastened, and proceeded to tune the instrument; but it did not respond to his satisfaction. He, however, grasped the fiddle by its long narrow neck in his left hand, placed the butt-end of it upon his arm, took the bow, which had already been carefully resined, in his right hand and diligently plied it over the strings, and at the same time touched or compressed them near the pegs with the fingers of the left hand, and thus essayed to bring forth from them the so-called modulations in music.

The bow ran briskly over the strings, and the reluctant instrument squeaked and emitted the sound of *káng-kor-kong! káng-kor-kong! kong! kong!* Nimai all the while marked the time by shaking his head to and fro and by stamping on the ground with his feet. But the bungling fingers of the plucky player, unfortunately, brought forth the most disagreeable strains, in comparison with which the croaking of toads and frogs might be considered melodious and musical! His music-master, Haridás Bairági, often corrected him with a nudge of his elbow and showed him how to play a particular strain. He then felt abashed; but whenever his tutor happened to call out *sábash! sábash!* or *bravo! bravo!* by way of encouragement, his heart leapt with joy, and he was almost beside himself for pleasure.

Long past midnight Nimai waged war with the strings of the fiddle, and then a truce was made between him and the rebellious chords! Putting the

behála into its cloth-case and carefully hanging it upon a peg in the corner of the house, Nimai broke up the music-party (if two could be said to make up a party) for the night. Haridás, the tutor, then bade goodnight to his pupil, and went away to his home ; but before he did so, he did not forget to give a few final whiffs to the *koliká* containing the *gánjá* which Nimai had quickly prepared as a parting honour paid to his *Ostádjí*. Our hero then repaired to the kitchen to despatch a cold supper which the old lady, his mother, had kept ready for him by covering it with a basket. He swallowed the contents of the plate and the cups ; and then finishing the process of washing the mouth and hands as before, he chewed the *pán* and smoked tobacco. After this he went to his mat-bed to snore away the remaining portion of the night, and slept on till late in the morning.

In this wise Nimai merrily passed his days without any care, while his elder brother Naba did everything that was required for the comfort and maintenance of the family. As he was an indulgent brother, he suffered his younger brother's idleness to continue and made good the loss by his own redoubled industry. By dint of constant application to the business of their farm, Naba not only supported the family in comfort, but also succeeded in laying by something against the future.

I now must apologize to my readers for not telling

them at the outset that Nimai Náeke had hitherto been leading an unmarried life, though his elder brother, Naba, was a married man and the father of many children. Nimai, unfortunately, carried no very good recommendations about him, either in his personal appearance which was not in the least prepossessing, or in his manners which were not in the least agreeable. In person, he was short of stature, thin and attenuated, with rickety bones and disproportionate limbs. He had small gray eyes, a large head, and two rows of dirty uneven teeth—the upper canines and incisors of which bulged out considerably from the lip. He had also many other minor deformities which made him look a monster of ugliness. Indeed, he was an object of terror to all the little boys and girls of the village. The very sight of him made them take to their heels as fast as they could, screaming all the while. In disposition, he was peevish, conceited, quarrelsome and irascible. All these circumstances unmercifully conspired against him and worked inevitably to break off any match which the *ghattacks*, or match-makers, might have otherwise happily concluded for him. Indeed, the rumour of his personal disqualifications, coupled with the fact of his habit of *gánjá* smoking, stood between him and the altar of Prajápati, the god of marriage; and hence it was that no father had been found willing to take such a rare phenomenon of human ugliness for his son-in-law, either for love or for money.

And this was the reason why poor Nimai Náeke had to remain single so long.

The evident anxiety of Nimai's mother to get him married had hitherto kept up his drooping spirits. She had sent several match-makers to different parts of the country in search of a suitable bride for Nimai ; but all of them had returned unsuccessful, to the great grief of the mother and the extreme disappointment of the son. At length our hero very philosophically made up his mind to live a single life. But he determined to turn over a new leaf, and as a good set-off against his compulsory celibacy, he happily resolved to be wedded to his lady-love, Music. As he considered himself an expert in the art of fiddling, he now conceived the idea of cultivating vocal music as well. When once this idea got into his head, it took firm root there. He began to cast about for some means to secure a master who would teach him vocal music, as Haridás Bairági, his violin-teacher, did not profess to be a vocalist at all. But unfortunately, the neighbouring villages, for some miles round, could not produce a man who had any pretension to a knowledge of vocal music. So Nimai thought of bidding adieu to his happy home in quest of a new music-master who would be able to teach him to use his voice to advantage. He informed his mother of his intention, and she earnestly desired him not to go. He told his elder brother about it, and his brother set his face against it altogether. He then

consulted some of his so-called friends, who one and all declared that it was a capital idea on his part, and that he was sure to become, in time, a celebrity!

Nimai, therefore, secretly made preparations for his departure from home. Very early one morning he slunk out of his bed-room without the knowledge of any of the inmates of the house, looked cautiously around him for a few seconds to see that the coast was clear, and then hastily made off towards the highway. Quick were the steps that led him along the rough rugged road, and on he went without stopping for a moment, till his native village was left far behind. The sun rose in the East in all its crimson glory, to the extreme surprise of Nimai who had never before been a witness to so glorious a spectacle, for he had never before seen a sunrise in all his life. Our hero, however, was soon miles and miles away from his home, thanks to his two tiny legs that served him manfully in this extraordinary expedition.

Leaving the self-exiled Nimai Náeke to pursue his journey, let us now return to the home made desolate by his hasty flight. His mother was the first to notice that the door of her son's room was ajar so early, contrary to all the rules which had hitherto governed Nimai's life. At first she supposed that he had got up so early to do some important errand and that he would come back soon to enjoy the luxury of a morning sleep, according to his daily habit. But when the sun rose

high and Nimai returned not, his mother's heart became filled with alarm. All the members of the family were duly informed of Nimai's strange absence from home, and a search was made in the village, but in vain.

Different conjectures were put forth by different persons to account for Nimai's sudden disappearance. His old mother thought that her son had been carried off by a *pari*, or female fairy, named *Nisi*, who, according to the general belief of the ignorant people of Bengal, takes away to her abode, through space, any unmarried person of the male sex who might attract her notice by his genteel and graceful appearance. It is supposed that the *pari*, when she falls in love with a mortal and intends to carry him off, comes to the house of her beloved one at dead of night and calls him by name only *once* or *twice*. At the enchanting call of this *Nisi pari*, the unfortunate man instantly walks in his sleep out of his bedroom and unconsciously goes to her to be carried off for good. Hence it has become a general custom among the superstitious folk in Bengal never to respond to only *one* call by name at night, even though they should recognize the voice of the caller. As a sure safe-guard against being allured away by the *pari*, the calls must be repeated *thrice* before a response is given.

Nimai's elder brother, Naba, did not put any faith in the abduction of his younger brother by *pari*, as believed in by his old mother and many other old ladies of

the neighbourhood. He was of the opinion that that incarnation of idleness had left home on some fool's errand. Nimai's sister-in-law, Naba's wife, jocosely declared that her brother-in-law had gone away to select and bring home a bride for himself. Some old people fancied that he had drowned himself in the waters of the deep *Dighi* out of sheer despondency arising from the want of a partner in life. A few young fellows facetiously gave out that Nimai had repaired to the abode of *Mahádeba*, the god of intoxication, to borrow a superior quality of *gánjá* smoked by that Deity! All the little children danced with joy as they thought that the object of their terror had gone to the palace of *Yama*, the Ruler of the departed, to play on his *behálá* there on the occasion of the marriage-festival of that dismal Deity's daughter! And they sincerely wished that he might not return to frighten them by his unsightly appearance.

It was only Haridás Bairági, Nimai's violin-teacher, who divined the real cause of his pupil's disappearance, and pointed out the important fact that he had taken away with him his favourite fiddle and that he had gone abroad to qualify himself as a master-singer. This thought, to be sure, afforded some consolation to the sorrowing mother, and she anxiously awaited the return of her darling son, the bright light of her house, her "Treasure of Seven Kings," as she often said with floods of tears.

In this manner time flew on its rapid wings, and minutes grew into hours, hours into days, days into months, and months into years; and thus three years rolled on without any tidings of Nimai. The poor old mother's heart yearned for her missing son, and she made several vows to offer many goats, rams, and even a couple of young buffaloes, to the goddess *Kālī*, should she be kind and propitious enough to restore to her arms her long-lost jewel of a son. A few months more passed away without bringing any tidings of Nimai, and the hope which had hitherto sustained the health of the bereaved mother began now to fail, when, lo and behold! one evening, Nimai suddenly turned up in the village like an apparition from the other world. The news of his return spread like wild-fire all over the place, and the house of the sorrowing mother became a scene of joy. She religiously fulfilled her vows to the goddess *Kālī*, for the happy restoration of her son; and all the village people were glad to see their old friend back in his home after so long an absence, excepting the little boys and girls who, one and all, cursed the return of *the village bugbear*. When asked by his friends and relatives where he had been and what he had been doing during his long absence from home, Nimai gravely said that he had passed his time very profitably inasmuch as he had qualified himself, under the training of several renowned vocalists of the day, as a master-singer. He also told them, with a certain degree of

pride, that very shortly they would have a proof of his vocal skill.

Accordingly, on the second day of his return, Nimai made arrangements for entertaining the people of the village with his performance of vocal music. A large canopy was placed over bamboo frames, in the yard in front of the *Chandimandapa*, and underneath several mats were spread for the guests. He invited all the villagers to his performance, as he would that day make his *debut* in the capacity of a public singer. When the audience had taken their seats in the expectation of hearing his songs, Nimai appeared before the amused assembly, in a droll dress, with the favourite fiddle in his hand, and the expectant spectators could not refrain from laughing outright. But when he opened his mouth and began to sing to the accompaniment of his tuneless *behála*, the audience could bear it no longer and left the place in disgust, shouting and hooting as they went. But Nimai, be it said to his credit, took no notice of this.

Notwithstanding his utter failure on the day of his *debut*, he continued, invariably every evening, to waste the sweetness of his voice on a dreadfully apathetic audience, solely composed of the members of his own family, who had no other alternative but to submit resignedly to this infliction of Nimai's voice. Even these 'solitary few' could not put up with his horrid performance any longer, and they requested him to desist from

displaying his vocal powers within their hearing. But our hero would not listen to them and continued the infliction as before. At last an agreement was entered into between Nimai and his friends that he would repair to a lonely spot on the outskirts of the village, where he might exercise his vocal powers to his heart's content. Nimai agreed to this proposal on condition that he should have at least *one* person there to supply the place of an audience.

Then came the difficulty of finding a man who would consent to endure the infliction; for, no body that was not deaf would willingly agree to such martyrdom. To mend matters, however, Nimai's mother, who doted on her darling son, proposed to hire a man to listen to her son's vocal performances; and Naba, the elder brother of our vocalist, rather to please the old mother than to humour his younger brother, agreed to give half a *maund** of paddy, the produce of their fields, to anyone who would consent to be Nimai's listener for a day. But even this tempting promise could not induce many people to become Nimai's audience. So it happened that if any unfortunate individual, pinched by dire necessity, came one evening to be Nimai's paid listener, he was sure not to return the next day. Some other poor fellow would, perhaps, take his place, but with the same inevitable result. Sometimes, therefore,

*One *maund* is equal to $82\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. Avoir.

Nimai would fain content himself with having only the large *tokul** tree, under which he exercised his inimitable vocal powers, for his passive listener.

In this wise Nimai went on when an incident of some moment occurred. There was in that village a very poor Bráhmaṇ who, with great difficulty, managed to keep body and soul together. The main source of his income was derived from the spindle of his good wife who laboured very hard to get bread for her husband and herself. But as fate would have it, the Bráhmaṇ's wife became suddenly ill and her strength gave way. She could not now toil as before, and extreme poverty stared them in the face. The good woman suggested that her husband should go every evening, at least till her strength returned, to be a hearer of Nimai's vocal performances, and by that means to get sufficient paddy to preserve them from actual starvation.

The poor Bráhmaṇ could not, however, be prevailed upon by his wife to acquiesce in a proposal that involved his making a martyr of himself to Nimai's vocal skill. He would rather starve than listen to Nimai's disagreeable voice of which he had a very vivid recollection. He therefore could not bring himself to accept his wife's proposal, and so they actually starved for two days. On the third day he was so hard pressed

* *Mimusops Elengi*.

by the good woman, his wife, that he thought it expedient to bid farewell to his home, and so he went away without saying anything to his ailing wife.

He wandered about all day long in expectation of getting some relief, but in vain. Towards evening he left the village and went to another place, a long distance from his home. Here also he was unsuccessful in his attempts, and in sheer desperation, he made up his mind to commit suicide. To perpetrate this awful crime, the wretched man got upon a large *Bata* † tree that stood on the border of that village, and made preparations for strangling himself with the twisted *uráni*, or thin sheet, which he had about him. But as he was just putting the improvised halter round his neck, he was thus accosted by a kind *Brahmadaitya*, or the ghost of a *Bráhma*n, that haunted the *Bata* tree.

Brahmadaitya.—"Oh unhappy man! wherefore do you thus attempt to make away with that life which everybody so dearly clings to?"

*Poor Bráhma*n.—"Sir Unknown! I am going to put an end to my miserable existence because I cannot support myself and my wife."

Brahmadaitya.—"But who are you? Please tell me your story briefly."

*Poor Bráhma*n.—"I am a poor *Bráhma*n, and I live in the village over there. For three days I have tasted

† *Ficus Indica*.

nothing in the shape of food, and my wife also is starving at home."

Brahmadaitya.—"Is your condition so very desperate that you meditate committing suicide?—But have you tried all means available?"

Poor Bráhmañ.—"Yes sir! I have left no stone unturned excepting *one*."

Brahmadaitya.—"And what is that *one*?"

Poor Bráhmañ.—"I could have got a quantity of paddy every day by listening to the songs of one Nimai Náeke of our village. But I would rather die a thousand deaths than undergo the infliction of his harsh braying which *he* calls singing!"

Brahmadaitya.—"Yes! yes! you are quite right, my friend. I am a Brahmadaitya and I used to inhabit, from a very long time, that identical *bokul* tree under which Nimai now sings. But I was compelled to say good-bye to that favourite haunt of mine on the first day that he sang under its shade, and I have chosen this *Bata* tree for my new abode, because here at least my ears are safe from Nimai's horrible voice. Now, I look upon you as my younger brother, since we both had to leave our homes for one and the same reason. I take pity on your destitute condition, and I'll do something for you. You need not destroy yourself, but hear what I say to you. At this very moment I'll go to Kánchannagara, and there I'll put the young and beautiful queen of the old king under my ghostly

influence. I'll make it a point that no one but yourself shall be able to deliver that royal lady from my control. I bid you go there to-morrow and strike a good bargain with the old king for the recovery of his favourite consort. At your approach I'll leave her, I promise you. But there is one condition which you must abide by at the risk of your life. And it is this: you shall never again venture to come near me for the purpose of delivering any other person whom I may be pleased to possess at any other time. Now, you have heard all; go you to Kánchannagara and make your fortune."

Overjoyed at the promise of that benign Brahma-daitya, the poor Bráhmañan thanked him and got down from the tree, and at once made for Kánchannagara with a light heart.

True to his word, the Brahmadaitya possessed the beautiful queen that very night, and the king's palace instantly became a scene of sorrow and confusion. The royal lady began to scream furiously, foamed at the mouth, threw her arms and legs convulsively about, contorted her face, rolled her eyes, tossed her head, tore her hair, now wept, now remained moody, and then laughed aloud. The king became mightily alarmed on account of these sudden manifestations of ghostly influence on the part of his queen, and tried every means to reclaim her from the grasp of the evil spirit, but the attempts of all the famous exorcisers of proved futile. All their *mantras*, or charms,

were lost upon the Brahmadaitya, and the king began to despair. At length our poor Bráhmán presented himself at the king's palace and offered his services as an *ojhá*, or exorcist. He demanded a *lák* of *rupees* as his reward in case of success, to which the king agreed and the Bráhmán undertook the task of exorcising the spirit that tormented the queen. He went alone into the room where the lady lay under the influence of the Brahmadaitya, and simply said :—"Oh my good brother ! I am come."

On hearing the words of the poor Bráhmán, the Brahmadaitya, as arranged before, left the person of the queen and went back to his new haunt, the *Bata* tree, after having warned the Bráhmán not to venture near him again on a similar errand. The royal lady immediately recovered, to the infinite joy of her husband. The king did not withdraw from his promise ; he gave the poor Bráhmán a *lák* of *rupees* for his success in exorcising the evil spirit, and he also presented him with a very fine house to live in. The poor Bráhmán had now become rich far beyond his expectation, and he resided there very happily with his wife whom he had brought thither from his native village.

Some time after, another event occurred which required the services of our now wealthy Bráhmán. The youthful daughter of a neighbouring Rájáh had been suffering from the influence of an evil spirit by which she had been possessed. Many famous exorcists

of the day had exerted their utmost to cast out the spirit, but to no purpose. The royal father of the young princess became very anxious about her and tried all means which wealth and power could procure. At length the fame of our Bráhmaṇ, as a successful exorcist, reached the ears of this Rájáh who was on very friendly terms with the old king in whose capital, and under whose patronage, the Bráhmaṇ was then living. The Rájáh forthwith sent a messenger to the old king requesting him to send the Bráhmaṇ *ojhá* to his palace for the purpose of delivering his daughter from the influence of the evil spirit. Thereupon the old king desired the Bráhmaṇ to go at once to the palace of the said Rájáh and cure the girl. The Bráhmaṇ very submissively declined the honour, since he was in reality not an exorcist at all, and put forward several pleas by way of evasion. But his patron, the old king, would not listen to them, and strongly insisted on the Bráhmaṇ's going to the Rájáh's, under pain of confiscation of his whole property. As the Bráhmaṇ still hesitated, the king thought it expedient to send him under an escort to his friend, the Rájáh, who had besought his help. The Bráhmaṇ was now obliged to go there ; but most reluctantly he did so, fearing all the while that the evil spirit might be no other than his former kind friend, the Brahmadaitya, who had repeatedly warned him not to approach him again. As this thought passed through his mind, the Bráhmaṇ shudder-

ed inwardly ; but there was no help for it.

In due time, however, the Bráhmaṇ came, or rather was led by his escort, to the palace of the Rájáh. He was at once shown into the apartment of the princess. But he had no sooner set foot on the threshold of the room than the spirit very angrily bawled out :—"Wretch ! know you not that I am the same Brahmadaitya who once befriended you in your extreme distress ? And how is it that you have so soon forgotten my strict injunction not to venture near me again ? How dare you come here to drive me away from the person of this beautiful princess whom it is my pleasure at present to possess ? As you have broken the compact, I'll break your neck for you ; you shall feel the consequences instantly." At this sudden outburst of rage on the part of the Brahmadaitya, our Bráhmaṇ trembled from head to foot, his hair stood on end, and he seemed more dead than alive. But at this critical moment his presence of mind came to his aid, and he very timidly replied :—"Oh my good brother ! I have come here not to drive you away, but to inform you of a very important fact. Nimai Náeke, my former co-villager, is coming here to-day to sing at this Rájáh's palace, and I therefore thought it my bounden duty to warn my benefactor of the impending danger, and it is solely on this account that I have taken the trouble of travelling so great a distance leaving my happy home behind."

This artful answer of the ready-witted Bráhmaṇ

instantly had the desired effect. The Brahmadaitya became greatly agitated and said :—“Is it so, my brother? I am very thankful to you for your timely information. I must leave this place at once, so that I may escape hearing once more the horrible voice of Nimai. Now, my brother, take as much money from the Rájáh as you can and be richer. I'll immediately depart.” So saying the Brahmadaitya beat a hasty retreat, and the Rájáh's daughter lay recovered. Fortune had again smiled on the Bráhman, and he received a *lakh* of *rupees* from the delighted Rájáh, by way of reward, for his success in expelling the evil spirit by his wonderful charms. Thus the once poor Bráhman now became a very rich man ; first, through the favour of the benign Brahmadaitya, and secondly, by his own presence of mind which had suggested to him the artful answer he had given to the Brahmadaitya.

The Bráhman lived in prosperity to the end of his life, and was blessed with children and grand-children, who all enjoyed the fruits of his good fortune. Our old friend, Nimai the Singer, continued to regale himself with the sweetness of his own music, both vocal and instrumental, as long as he lived.

XI.

BOKARAM'S MARRIAGE.

IN a certain village there lived a young man whose intellect was not very clear. His real name was Padmalochana, or the *lotus-eyed*; but he was generally known in the village by the *sobriquet* of Bokárám, or the Peerless Fool. He lived with his widowed mother who enjoyed a small competence. The old lady was very obliging and good-natured, and for this reason, she and her foolish son were greatly liked by their neighbours.

When Bokárám arrived at the age of twenty-two, his doting mother wanted to see him married before she died. Bokárám's mother pondered on this subject day and night. But how could she get her darling son married, as he was a notorious fool? This thought troubled her much. At length she opened her mind to some of her neighbours, with moist eyes, and besought their assistance. The good neighbours, moved by the tears of the old widow, promised to help her in the fur-

therance of her wishes. They therefore set to work at once by sending for a famous *Ghataka*, or match-maker, who lived in a neighbouring village.

In Bengal the match-makers carry on the very pleasant profession of arranging weddings of people. A Bengal match-maker's stock in trade consists of nothing but the artful use of a smooth tongue. These crafty makers of matches, when well paid, can join together in holy wedlock even the two opposite poles of the Earth! The match-makers enjoy the confidence of the public at large so much, that they are looked upon as indispensable helps to matrimonial alliances. It is indeed the hardest thing in the world to get one's sons and daughters married in Bengal without the aid of the professional makers of matches. These useful functionaries have a record, ready at their fingers' ends, of all the marriageable girls and young men living within a circuit of some miles. They are also acquainted with the pedigrees of the higher class *Hindoos*, and it is on this account that their services are so much in request. Marriage, in India, means merely a matter of choice on the part of the parents or guardians of the brides and bridegrooms. As the practice of courtship, and the exercise of free choice by the parties concerned are not allowed in India, matches are generally brought about by these *Ghatakas*. They receive fees from both sides; especially are they well paid by those who have undesirable parties to marry.

When the match-maker came, at the call of the kind neighbours of Bokárám, he was requested to lend his services in forming a suitable match for the fool. Bokárám's mother, with tearful eyes, said to the match-maker :—"O *Ghataka Mahásaya* ! I have no one in this wide world, whom I may call my own, except my darling boy. You see, I am an old woman, there is no knowing when I shall be carried off by the messengers of *Yama*.† But before I die, I long to see the moon-face of *Boumá*.(1) You see, sir, my son is as handsome as *Kártika*(2) He is very gentle and mild in temper. He is so very good-natured that he would not even utter a single word if you hit him seven slaps on the cheek. As regards his education, what shall I say to you? He attended the village *Pátsála*(3) for over three years; and the *Guru Mahásaya*(4) said that he had finished writing on palmyra-leaves, and then on plantain-leaves; and as he was about to begin writing on paper, he fell ill and left *pátsála* for good. But you know, sir, he is my only son; whatever I possess is all *his*; and, I can assure you, he has no need to be anxious for food or dress."

*Mr. Ghataka.

†The Indian Pluto.

1. A daughter-in-law.
2. A god famous as the type of manly beauty.
3. A village school where elementary education is imparted.
4. A village pedagogue.

The match-maker gave the good lady his word to get her son soon married to a beautiful girl, and he forthwith proceeded on this errand, as he hoped to be amply rewarded by the doting mother. He, certainly, knew everything about Bokárám and his lack of qualifications ; but that mattered very little to him as it was his profession to make up matches of all sorts, both equal and unequal—good, bad or indifferent.

After a few days, the match-maker returned with good news : he had succeeded in securing a pretty girl in a distant village. The father of the girl had been found very anxious about getting his daughter married *at once*, as she was about to pass her eighth year, or the *gouri-kál*—a time most suitable for giving away one's daughter in marriage!

In Bengal where early marriage is extant, girls are generally married between the ages of eight and eleven. But the father of the girl is supposed to lay up a store of good deeds, to serve him in the life to come, if he can marry his daughter in her *eighth* year, for, a virgin of eight is, according to the prevailing notion, supposed to be the goddess *Párvati*, or *Gouri* herself.

Now, the match-maker told Bokárám's mother and her neighbours to be ready for *showing* the *pátra*, or the would-be bridegroom, to the would-be bride's people on the following day. He told them besides, in confidence of course, that he had assured the father of the girl that the *pátra* was eligible in *all* respects. He therefore re-

requested the assistance of Bokárám's neighbours to so arrange things that his reputation as an honest and trustworthy maker of matches might not suffer in the least. Bokárám lived in a thatched mud-house, but it must be shown to the girl's father that the *pátra* was the possessor of a fine brick-built house, in order to bear out the match-maker's description of Bokárám's circumstances in life given to the father of the girl. Bokárám was an idle, idiotic, and ignorant youth, but he must appear to be a busy, intelligent, and well-educated young man in the eyes of the would-be bride's friends. If these things could be managed satisfactorily, then *Prajápati*, the god of marriage, would certainly bless Bokárám with the hand of the beautiful girl. Bokárám's delighted mother said to the match-maker :—
 " Oh *Ghataka Mahásaya* ! may flowers and sandal-wood paste fall on your face*!"

Arrangements were then made by the assisting neighbours for passing off the fool on the girl's father as a very eligible young man. Next morning Bokárám and his mother were lodged in a large brick-built house which belonged to a rich neighbour of theirs. The *Baitakkhána*, or sitting-room, was well fitted up for the reception of the girl's father and his friends. Delicious articles of food were kept ready against their coming. Some of the respectable neighbours also waited there to receive the welcome visitors.

* This means the same as *amen*.

At about noon, the expected party, consisting of the girl's father and his four friends, arrived at the village. They were shown direct into the fine brick-built house where Bokárám and his mother were staying for the occasion. The guests were cordially welcomed by the neighbours present. The new-comers were highly pleased with the appearance of their surroundings, and, even before they saw the *pátra*, they had almost made up their mind to bestow the hand of the girl on him whom they supposed to be so well-to-do.

After the guests had been sumptuously entertained, they all again assembled in the sitting-room. The crafty match-maker was the first to introduce the subject; he thus addressed the father of the girl:—"You see, sir, with your own eyes, what a nice building this is! It appears to be smiling with the blessings of mother *Lakshmi**! You will be quite charmed with the personal beauty of the *pátra* when you see him. The match I have fixed on for your lovely daughter is an excellent one in all respects. It would certainly be a very fortunate thing if this desirable union could be effected." The gentleman, thus addressed, smiled and said:—"Everything depends on the *will* of *Prajápati*!—But where is the *pátra*? It's growing late; and we must be off before nightfall."

The match-maker then requested the assisting neighbours to introduce the *pátra* to the visitors and to make

* The goddess of prosperity.

the *páká*,* or final, settlement of the marriage. Thereupon the assisting neighbours informed them that the would-be bridegroom would soon make his appearance there on his return from the law-court in a neighbouring town whither he had gone to conduct a very important case of his own. They also added that, as his lawyers could not do anything without his valuable instructions, he was obliged to attend court even on such an important day as *that*. The neighbours and the match-maker then made much of the *pátra* and dwelt at great length on his wealth, intelligence, and good-nature, to the great joy of the visitors.

The guests had to wait for the return of the *pátra* from the *Káchhari*, or law-court. In the mean time, several persons dropped in and inquired if *Bara-Bábu* † (meaning thereby our friend Bokárám) had returned home. Some of them said that they wanted to consult *Bara-Bábu* about certain intricate questions of law; some said that they asked for *Bara-Bábu*, as they had with them some drafts of certain important documents to get them corrected by him; others said that they required *Bara-Bábu's* assistance in obtaining employment under some great men with whom he was on friendly terms; a few poor people said they wanted to see *Bara-Bábu* to borrow money from him. All these of course went to

* Literally, ripe.

† The great Bábu.

raise Bokárám *very high* in the estimation of the guests!

At length, Bokárám, very finely dressed, was made to issue from the house through a back-door and to re-enter it by the front gate with a bundle of papers in his hand. As he was crossing the courtyard, all the persons in the sitting-room had a full view of him. The crafty match-maker, pointing out Bokárám to the guests, cried out:—"There! there goes the *pátra*! Oh! what a fine young man he is! I told you before, sirs, that he might be likened to *Kártikeya* * in beauty, didn't I?" Bokárám was indeed of comely appearance, but his fine exterior only served to hide his vacant interior.

The match-maker then requested *Bara-Bábu* to come once into the sitting-room and see the gentlemen who were waiting for him. But Bokárám, as instructed before, merely gave a grunt in reply and went direct into the inner apartments of the house. His uncivil behaviour was readily ascribed by the wily match-maker to the vexation arising out of sheer fatigue, after the arduous work he had had to do in the law-court from which he had just then returned. But, as formality required the presence of the *pátra* before the visitors for the purpose of receiving the *ásirbád*, or benediction, he was sent for again after half an hour.

The messenger returned with the news that *Bara-Bábu* could not come out that day, as he felt very much

*The same as *Kártiás* : a god celebrated for his manly beauty.

knocked up in consequence of his hard labour in the *Káchhári*, and especially, as he had a very bad headache at the same time. At this, the girl's father and his companions held a consultation as to what they should do. As everything seemed satisfactory, they came to the conclusion that the final settlement of the marriage must be made then and there.

Accordingly, the *páká* arrangements were made with the neighbours of the *pátra*, one of whom was related as uncle to the young man. The *ásirbád* which means, in the language of matrimony, the present of money given to an affianced couple at the time of final settlement, was made by proxy through the hand of the friendly match-maker. The guests then went away after settling everything to their satisfaction.

A few days after, the match-maker and some of the neighbours of Bokarám betook themselves to the abode of the girl's father, in their turn, to make the customary *ásirbád* to the *pátri*, or the would-be bride. An auspicious day was then fixed for the celebration of the marriage and the *pátra's* party returned home.

In due course, the ceremony of the *gátra-haridrú*, which means the besmearing of the bodies of the would-be bride and bridegroom with ground turmeric and mustard-oil, was performed in the houses of the *pátra* and *pátri*, respectively. On that very day, the affianced youth and the little girl ate the *áibara-bhát*, or the bachelor's and spinster's feast, in their respective homes.

And many such feasts, accompanied with presents of new clothes, were also given to both the parties by their friends, relatives, and neighbours, during the intervening time between the day of the *gôtra-haridrâ* and that of the marriage ceremony.

On the night of the day appointed, Bokâram, gaudily dressed in red silks, arrived in a beautiful *palanquin* at the house of the bride's father. His friends, relatives, and neighbours formed the *Bara-jâtra*, or bridegroom's party; musicians and torch-bearers were also in the procession. In the middle of a large room the *Bara*, or the bridegroom, was made to sit on a beautiful carpet, with fine pillows on three sides. Upon his head was a light cone-shaped crown called the *topar*, made of *solâ*,* or the Indian cork-plant, and beautifully adorned with paintings and fine work of talc. In his right hand the *Bara* held a *jânti*, or betel-nut-cracker; and round the wrist of the same hand were tied with red thread a few blades of *dûrbâ* †, or bent grass. The red silken dress, the conical crown of *solâ*, the betel-nut-cracker, and the tuft of *dûrbâ* grass, are the indispensable decorations of a bridegroom on the wedding night; though other embellishments, such as gold chains and rings, are often seen on the person of a rich bridegroom.

Surrounding the *Bara*, the bridegroom's party and the bride's party sat together in fine dresses. Gay

* *Æschynomene paludosa*.

† *Cynodon dactylon*.

conversation and jokes went round among the assembled men, though the bridegroom himself remained silent with downcast eyes. The school boys of the bridal party began to sound the knowledge of those of the bridegroom's party, and *vice versa*, by asking one another questions on different subjects, especially mental arithmetic and puzzles. But no one put any question to the bridegroom, as he was not expected to answer any. It is a general custom in Bengal that, on the wedding night, the bridegroom does not talk much, for it is supposed that much talking would be inconsistent with good breeding on such a solemn occasion. There is even a proverb which places a bridegroom and a thief on the same footing! It says :—

A bridegroom on the wedding night,
A thief is he in every light!

This custom, however, saved our friend Bokárám from answering any questions he might have been asked, which was, indeed, a fortunate thing for him. A little while after, when the *lagna*, or the moment of conjunction of auspicious planets, had arrived, the family barber came in and conducted the bridegroom to the place assigned for the *sampradána*, or giving away of the bride. The little girl, clothed in a red silk *sári*,* was brought there seated on a flat piece of wood,

* A piece of cloth with broad borders, worn by women.

called *pinri*, on which had been painted various patterns in beautiful colours mixed with ground rice made into a paste, bearing testimony to the skill in *alipānā** of the ladies of the family. The bride was completely veiled with the loose end of her *sāri* and decorated with ornaments of gold and silver. She was carried upon the *pinri* by two men, and was placed on the left side of the bridegroom, after being turned seven times round him amid the sonorous acclamations of joy to the tune of *ulu ! ulu ! ulu !* uttered in a chorus by the ladies present at the wedding, with the accompaniment of the high-sounding *sankha*, or conch-shell.

The priests of the bride and the bridegroom solemnly recited certain *mantras*, or formulas, which were repeated by the bridegroom and the bride's father. Then the most interesting part of the ceremony, called the *Subhadristi*, was duly performed. This means the first and the most auspicious interview of the bride and the bridegroom at the time of marriage. But it must not be supposed that it happens in the usual way, and that the married couple are allowed the opportunity of speaking to each other.

The *Subhadristi* takes place in the following manner. The bride and the bridegroom are made to sit *vis à vis*, and a piece of cloth is put over their heads to form a complete covering. They are then

* Painting.

enjoined by the attending priests to look into each other's face, and their eyes meet only for a few seconds ! At this important moment the family barber cries out, in a sonorous tone, certain burning imprecations on the heads of the supposed evil-doers and evil-thinkers that may have been present there to maliciously mar, by their infernal incantations, the future felicity of the happy pair's married life.

The nuptial knot was thus tied for ever. The usual feast was given to the bride's and the bridegroom's parties, and, after eating their fill, they dispersed to their respective homes, pleased with the hospitality of the bride's father. The bride and the bridegroom were then conducted into a nicely fitted-up room in the *Zanánd*, called the *Básara-ghara*.

A dumb man has no enemy, says the proverb ; and it was true in the case of Bokáram. Hitherto none of the bride's party had suspected anything wrong about him, and the secret of his natural stupidity had been well kept. But as he passed from the province of *men* into the domain of *women*, that is, when he set foot in the *Básara-ghara*, his hour of trial came. It is said that, in the *Básara-ghara*, even a wooden doll must speak out ! If a bridegroom remains silent in the *Básara-ghara*, the attendant ladies would even pinch him to make him find his tongue. Whether he likes it or not, speak he must to the ladies in the *Básara-ghara*.

On a wedding night the ladies are allowed to take

many liberties in the *Básara-ghara*, and they utilize this opportunity by singing, dancing, and cracking jokes at the expense of the poor bridegroom, in all of which he is compelled to join. But it must be said in justice to the fair sex, that, though they pass the night in the *Básara-ghara* in making themselves merry with the bridegroom, most of them would not come near him on the morrow, and would never again speak to him in all their life-time.

Our foolish friend Bokárám was, however, not destined to enjoy all the sweets of the *Básara-ghara*! It was, indeed, a very unfortunate thing for him! But he could not any longer maintain his silence, and he was not to blame for that. A naughty girl twisted his ears; another pinched him; while a third pulled him by the nose! These practical jokes annoyed Bokárám considerably, so much so that it was with the greatest difficulty that he was able to curb his temper. But when a bonny cousin of the bride playfully put her hand on the gold chain he had round his neck, Bokárám could restrain himself no longer; and he at once cried out gruffly:—"Touch this chain at your peril, you young hussy! You know not to whom it belongs. You think it is *mine*, but you are mistaken. This gold chain belongs to the *Zamindár* of our village, and my mother has borrowed it for me. And I can take my oath on it that it will not be good for you, if the *Zamindár* comes to know that you have been handling his chain. I warn

you all. You may do whatever you like with my ears, with my nose, with my limbs, as they are all *mine*, but don't meddle with this chain which is *not* mine."

All the ladies roared with laughter at this foolish remark of the bridegroom, and they left the *Básara-ghara* crying shame on the unfortunate bride's father. Some elderly ladies sadly observed that this unequal union was a bitter irony of fate!

Needless it is to say that the crafty match-maker was amply rewarded by both the parties on the very night of the celebration of the marriage, and that he slunk away just after the ceremony was over. When the parents of the little bride came to know that their son-in-law was after all a great fool, they were astonished and cursed the crafty match-maker for his vile deception. But wedlock is padlock; with *Hindoos* it must remain binding for ever. The practice of *free choice* not being in vogue among them, a good many poor wives have to suffer silently the wrongs inflicted on them by their parents or guardians, however unintentional that might be. But it must be said to the credit of these poor afflicted creatures that they do generally sacrifice all their happiness at the altar of devotion to their husbands. In the eyes of a good *Hindoo* wife her husband is a god in human shape; and as such she always worships him, overlooking the defects, mental, moral, or physical, that may exist in him. Such being the case in India, Bokárám had no fear of being spurn

ed by his wife after his marriage as she grew older. So Bokárám returned home with his pretty little bride to the great joy of his old mother.



XII.

THE KING'S COUSIN.

ONCE upon a time there reigned a great king who was renowned for justice and intelligence. He was master of boundless wealth which he always bestowed on the poor with a liberal hand. The fame of this monarch's liberality spread abroad far and wide ; and every day his court was crowded with numerous needy persons who all received assistance from this kind-hearted monarch. His munificence was so great that it was generally compared to the vastness of the ocean. No one ever returned disappointed from his palace ; everybody received donation from the King far beyond his expectation.

One day, while the King was holding a *darbar*, or court, a poor old man in rags presented himself at the palace-gate and prayed for admittance. The porter asked him who he was and what he wanted. The applicant answered that he was a cousin of the King and that he wanted to see his Majesty on some im-

portant errand. The porter, thereupon, announced to the King that a cousin of his Majesty was waiting at the gate. The King became astonished at this announcement, as he could not, to the best of his recollection, remember that he had any cousin at all. He was, however, pleased to grant access to the visitor, and the porter retired to carry out the orders of his Majesty. All the persons present in the King's court remained on tiptoe to see what the King's cousin was like.

A few minutes after, the old man came in leaning on a strong staff. He slowly approached his Majesty and sat before him with due deference. The King asked him who he was. The old man said :—" May it please your Majesty, I am a son of your Majesty's mother's sister, and so I am cousin to your Majesty." The King smiled and said :—" How does it fare with you now, cousin ?" The old man replied :—" Not all right, your Majesty ; great changes have taken place. The grand house I live in has become old and is tottering. The *thirty-two* servants, who had so long served me faithfully, quitted my service, one by one, to my great inconvenience. For out-door work I have now to depend upon *three* against *two* in my former days. The *two* friends that were near have gone to some distance ; and *two* others that were distant have come nearer." The King then asked him what he came there for. The old man said he implored his Majesty's assistance that he might pass his days remaining, in peace.

After some deliberation the King gave him a *rupee*. Thereupon the dissatisfied old man said :—"How is it that your Majesty has been pleased to bestow on me a single *rupee*, whereas I expected to get *at least* a thousand? They say your Majesty is as bountiful as *Karna*; but in your cousin's case it has proved otherwise!" The King said that he could not give him more as his royal treasury was at the lowest ebb at that time, but that he would consider the visitor's case later.

On this the old man replied :—"If your Majesty's treasury be indeed empty, I would then advise your Majesty to go to Lanká†, and to bring some thousand *maunds*‡ of gold from that island where it is as plentiful as sand on the sea-beach." "But how am I to cross the ocean in order to reach that Island of Gold?" asked the King with a smile. He then added :—"You know, cousin, that I cannot go to Lanká on board a ship, as it is strictly prohibited by the *Hindoo sástras* to make a voyage in a ship." "In that case, your Majesty has only to take the trouble of walking into that Island of Gold," replied the old man coolly. The King laughed and said : "But how is it possible for a man to cross the ocean on foot?" The old man rejoined :—" 'Tis

* A prince of the Pauranic Age, famous for his extreme liberality,

† The modern island of Ceylon described in the great Epic Poem *Rámáyana*, as 'the City of Gold.'

‡ 1 *maund* = 100 lbs. Troy.

not at all impossible, your Majesty. I'll help your Majesty in this matter." "How so?" inquired the King. The old man said :—"I would myself, for your Majesty's sake, walk into Lankā through the bed of the ocean, and your Majesty might then follow me on foot!" The King laughed heartily at this strange remark of his cousin, and gave him a *lakh* of *rupees*.

After the departure of the King's Cousin, all the courtiers present began to whisper to one another. They could not understand who the old man was, what he had said, and why the King had been finally so pleased with the absurd observation made by the man. The courtiers did not dare ask his majesty for an explanation; but, fortunately, the King himself volunteered them one.

His Majesty thus addressed his courtiers :—"I am sure you are all dying with curiosity to know some particulars about that mysterious old man. Well, that old man introduced himself as my cousin, and cousin he *is* in one sense. Prosperity and Adversity are two sisters. I am a son of Prosperity, whilst the indigent old man is a son of Adversity; and you know very well that a son of one's mother's sister is a cousin. The intelligent man has given out that the house he lives in has become old and is tottering; by this he meant his body—the abode of the soul. The *thirty-two* servants that had one by one, quitted his service, were the complete set of his teeth. For out-door work the old man now

depends on *shree*; by this he means his two legs and his *staff*. His two friends that were near, but have now gone to some distance, are his two ears. By this he informed me that he had become hard of hearing. His two other friends that were at a distance, but have now come nearer, are his two eyes. By this he has given me to understand that his dim eyes cannot now see objects at a distance."

The courtiers praised the sharp intelligence of the King for his readily understanding the out-of-the-way manner of the old man's representing facts. They then requested the King to explain to them the reason of his bestowing on the old man the large sum of one *lakh* of *rupees*, on his making a very absurd observation of walking into the Island of Lanká. The King smiled and said :—"The last remark of the old man, which you all think to be very foolish and absurd, was the most witty one." "How so, your Majesty?" asked the astonished courtiers in a breath. The King thereupon went on :—"Well, the old man said that he would himself walk into the Island of Lanká, and he advised me to follow him thither dryshod! This bantering remark of the man was a hard hit. The covert meaning of this piece of railery was, that he considered himself so unfortunate that the ocean-like vastness of my wealth instantly dried up at his arrival; so it was certain, he said, that the ocean itself must dry up at once at his approach! For this satirical but witty

remark of the poor old man, I have given him a *lâke* of *rupees* as a reward."

The courtiers and all other people present in the royal court highly praised the ready wit of the King's Cousin.



XIII.

THE MAHAMMEDAN WEAVER.

A FAMOUS fortune-teller once arrived at a village inhabited by persons of different castes and creeds. It is not an unusual sight, in a village of Bengal, to see men and women flock to soothsayers for the purpose of consulting them. The arrival of these *all-knowing* men at a village, is looked upon by the simple villagers as an important event. The usually dull village at once assumes an aspect of animation on these extraordinary occasions. People hasten to these *readers-of-the-destinies-of-man*, who pretend to predict the events of human life, by observing the lines on the palms of the hands, by the wrinkles on the forehead, by the positions of the planets, by the cawing of crows, from the naming of certain fruits and flowers, by arithmetical numbers, and by a thousand and one such other means which these pretenders generally make use of to foretell the fate of man.

Futurity, which is still a sealed book to all human knowledge, is enveloped in utter darkness, and it is not given to us to pry into it. But the morbid curiosity of man, to know his future fate, is so great that he always seeks to uplift the veil from the face of the future, forgetting the wise maxim—"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

Now, a crowd soon collected around that important individual whose presence in the village was taken advantage of by the simple folks. The shrewd seer, seeing such an assemblage about him, was glad at the prospect of extensive gain. He gravely gave out his predictions which were implicitly believed in by those credulous country people. Among the numerous dupes of the fortunate fortune-teller, there was a certain silly weaver who was, by religion, a *Mahammedán*. This man came up to the soothsayer, presented him a *rupee*, and wanted to know the *date* of his death. The crafty diviner drew the right hand of the inquirer close to his eyes, and attentively observed the lines and other marks on the palm. He then recited certain formulas from Chiromancy, or Palmistry, and gave the weaver to understand that he would enjoy a long life and prosperity. Not satisfied with this vague prediction of the seer, the half-witted weaver withdrew his hand, and asked the pretender to predict point-blank the exact date and the circumstance of his death.

The soothsayer candidly confessed that he could not

predict the precise date and circumstance of one's death. On this the silly weaver said :—" Oh ! - If you cannot tell me what I want to know, then return the money I presented to you." Thereupon the Palmister grew greatly perplexed. He did not like that the money which had already come into his pocket should find its way out of it. Perceiving that his querist was a great fool, he asked him who he was. The half-witted man answered that he was a *Jolá*, or *Mahammedan* weaver. On this the astute astrologer asked him to name a flower. The *Jolá* said :—" Jessamine." The fortune-teller forthwith began to jabber some jargon. He then gravely uttered his prediction : the weaver should surely shuffle off the mortal coil on the *day* that a *red thread* should pass out of his body !

Satisfied with this prediction, the foolish weaver returned home with the knowledge of his ultimate end ! The *Jolá* informed his wife of the circumstance which would surely attend his death, at which she laughed outright. But the witless weaver was firm in his conviction ; and he therefore waxed angry with his more sensible wife for her incredulity. The good woman, however, to avoid an unpleasant scene, humoured her foolish husband and said that she would watch over him for the purpose of detecting the coming out of the death-producing *red thread* !

A few months rolled on without any incident of note. The weaver was one day working at his loom,

and he was just going to insert a small reel of red thread into the shuttle, when his wife desired him to fetch at once some fuel for cooking purposes. The matter being very urgent, the weaver stood up instantly with the small reel of red thread in his hand, and, in a hurry, went out to get the wood. In sheer absence of mind he stuck the *reel* in the folds of the waist-band of his *dhuti*, or wearing cloth, when he left the house. A little way off from his home, he found some dead branches on a tall mango-tree that stood on the road-side. The weaver climbed up the tree and began to break off the dead boughs one by one.

While he was thus engaged, the *reel*, by chance, dropped on the ground; the loose end of the thread, however, remained stuck in the folds of his waist-band. The weaver was unaware of this fact, and he went on with his work. Some travellers were passing along that road, and they saw the red thread floating in the air. They looked up and found a man upon the top of the tree, from the folds of whose waistband the red thread was hanging. The wayfarers, led by curiosity, asked the man who he was. In reply the weaver told them that he was a *Jolá*. At this, the travellers remarked:—
“O! that is why *that* red thread is dangling from your waist!”

As soon as this joke of the travellers reached the ears of the witless weaver, he looked round and saw that a piece of red thread was indeed hanging from his

waist. All on a sudden the prediction of the fortune-teller—that he should die on the day that a red thread would come out of his body—flashed across his mind. The fact of his himself sticking the small reel of red thread in the folds of his waistband, quite escaped his muddled memory. The foolish man thought that the soothsayer could not have erred; and that, therefore, he must be indeed dead! How could he believe otherwise in the face of such strong ocular evidence as the coming out of the *red thread* which was still floating in the air? He took himself for a *dead* man! It was fortunate for him that he did not drop from the tree *dead* through the strain of his morbid mind.

More dead than alive the foolish weaver forthwith got down from the tree, and returned home in a melancholy mood. When asked by his wife what the matter was, he answered that it was a *very* serious one. He then reminded her of the prediction about the circumstance which should attend his death, that had been foretold a few months ago by the unerring soothsayer; and he went on to tell her in a lugubrious tone:—"O *Jolani**! I am a *dead* man. You well remember the prophecy of the good *Ganaka*† for which I paid him a *rupee*. A few minutes past, when I was breaking off the dead branches on the top of a tree, a reel of red thread

* Wife of a *Jold*.

† Fortune-teller.

came out of my waist. Some people who passed by that tree saw *this* and informed me of the fatal fact. I therefore no longer belong to this world, but I am already a denizen of the *world of the departed*. My good wife, you have become a widow, and henceforth you have to live single without your poor mate! Now, wife, make haste with the preparations for my funeral, and put me into a grave as soon as possible."

The good woman laughed heartily at this absurd request of her silly husband. How could she bury a living man? She was sane enough to see the foolishness of her husband in believing in the funny prediction of the fortune-teller. She, therefore, tried her best to convince him of his folly, but in vain. The weaver would not listen to reason; he was firm in his blind belief. The coming out of the *red thread* could not err! He considered himself a dead man, and the grave his proper abode. He then earnestly implored his wife to recognise the propriety of burying him at once. He even went so far as to threaten her with a severe beating for her non-compliance. The good woman still remonstrating with the witless husband, he waxed awfully angry. He gave her a few blows for her disobedience, and insisted on his immediate interment. The *Jolani*, thinking that her husband had gone mad, summoned several of the neighbours and asked their advice. They also tried their best to bring him to his senses, but their attempts proved futile. The

more they endeavoured to convince him of his silliness, the more obstinate he became.

Seeing it hopeless to reason with such a peerless fool, the good neighbours, with a view to teach him a lesson, at last consented to humour him. They carried him to the same spot where the *red thread* had first appeared in view, and under the same tree on which the weaver had been when he first saw it, a large hole was dug to receive the body of the *Jolá* in the full vigour of life and health! The neighbours made the foolish fellow sit on his haunches inside the mock-grave, and covered him up with earth up to the armpits. That the exposed parts of his body might not be injured by dogs and jackals, which would have been the case if he had remained in an absolutely helpless state, his two arms were left free. They then placed a quantity of dry leaves and creepers upon his head and arms to hide them from the public view. In this manner the burial of the *living* weaver having been accomplished, the neighbours returned to their respective homes, with the intention of setting him free next morning. The foolish weaver closed his eyes and remained in his mock-grave in a death-like silence!

Throughout that livelong day, he continued in that unpleasant position without showing any signs of life. He suffered greatly, but he thought that all dead people suffered in like manner, that his sufferings were only the necessary adjuncts of death, which, in fact, distin-

guished death from life. With the approach of night hunger began to trouble him sorely. The silly man wondered why he was not supplied, after death, with dainty dishes of diverse articles of food by the *all-yielding-tree* which grows in the *Mahámmedán* Paradise. He also wondered why he was not attended by the *seventy* black-eyed *houris*, or nymphs, who attend in Paradise on all true Believers, according to the promises of their great Prophet, Mahámmed, of whose religion he was a faithful follower. As a true Believer the poor fellow expected to enjoy all the luxuries of the *Mahámmedán* Paradise. It was because of this that he had so longed for death—which was the portal through which the soul must pass in order to get to Paradise. But being sadly disappointed in his expectations, and being tormented by the severe pangs of hunger, the poor weaver earnestly wished that he had not died; for, death meant absolute starvation—a condition for which he had not bargained! However, as there was no help then, he remained in silence suffering like a martyr.

At midnight, it came to pass that two thieves were going by the place where the weaver lay half-buried. One of them trod in some soft mud. He therefore, in disgust, informed his comrade of this unpleasant fact. The second thief advised the first thief to wipe his foot on a low bush that lay hard by. The first thief did as he was advised. But the bush, on which he set his foot

for the purpose of cleansing it, contained the hidden head of the weaver. As the hands of the man were free, he instantly caught hold of the thief's intruding foot in a firm grip. The thief got frightened, and told his companion that his foot had been seized by *something* under the bush. The second thief said to the first thief:—"Fool that you are! 'Tis nothing; shake it off and come sharp." The first thief tried to get rid of the weaver's hold by jerking his leg. But his foot was held in a vice-like grasp; the more he tugged to get free, the firmer became the hold. The half-buried weaver then feebly muttered between his teeth:—"Brute! dare you tread on my head?"

As the weakness consequent on long fasting had rendered his tone nasal, and as ghosts have invariably a nasal voice, according to the popular belief in Bengal, the thief was frightened out of his wits. He shook from head to foot, and called upon his companion to extricate him from the grasp of the ghost!

The second thief, who was more courageous than the first, came up to him and removed the bushy covering from the head of the weaver. He had also the boldness to ask the supposed ghost who he was and wherefore he lay in such a peculiar plight. In reply the weaver said that he was a *Jolá*, that he had died that day, and that he had been buried in that manner by his neighbours.

On this the first thief thought that he had fallen

into the hands of a *Mámdo*, or the ghost of a *Mahim-medán*, and therefore more dangerous to a *Hindoo* than a spirit of his own religion. But the intrepid second thief asked the ghost again how he had met with his death. The weaver related in detail the peculiar circumstance of his death, and the thieves became convinced that the supposed *Mámdo* was, after all, a *Jolá* in flesh and blood. They then requested him to let go his hold, but the weaver would not do so unless he was taken out of the grave. The thieves, thereupon, exhumed him with their *sindh-káti*, or the boring instrument. The poor weaver came out of the mock-grave and relieved himself by stretching his limbs.

After his resurrection the hungry weaver asked the thieves for something to eat. The burglars said, they had nothing about them in the shape of food, but that if he liked to accompany them on their thieving expedition, he might get something to eat. The weaver consented and followed the house-breakers.

A short while after, they reached a village and selected a mud-house to rob. When a *sindh*, or hole to effect a burglarious entrance, had been bored through the wall, and the usual precautionary measures had been adopted to ascertain whether the inmates of the house were asleep or not, the two wily thieves remained outside to keep watch while they made the foolish weaver enter the room to steal all things portable. The burglars desired the *Jolá* to bring to them *heavy things*,

meaning thereby boxes, trunks, &c. The foolish man brought out a heavy *sil*, or stone for grinding curry-powder! The thieves threw away the worthless *sil* in disgust, and told him to bring out *shining things*, by which they meant the brass and bell-metal utensils extensively used in *Hindoo* households.

The fool re-entered the room, and, a few minutes after, returned to his companions with a looking-glass! The burglars, in great vexation dashed the mirror on the ground, and asked him to bring away those things that *tinkle*, thereby meaning again the metal-utensils of the house.

The weaver again went into the room and came back to his accomplices with a large bell. And this time the *Jolá* joyfully jumped to the conclusion that he had at last found out the proper object! As a proof of his carrying out their instructions without any error, the weaver said, in an under tone, to the thieves:—
“My friends, this time *at least* there has been no mistake made by me. I have brought out for you the *right thing* after much search. Hear how it tinkles!”
Saying this, the fool rang the bell violently. The sleeping inmates of the house woke up at once at the *ding-dong* of the bell. The frightened burglars ran away at the top of their speed. The weaver, seeing a great stir in the house, had the presence of mind to slink away in haste.

The foolish man then betook himself to another

house in the same village, for the purpose of getting some food. He entered the compound and saw some seven or eight houses closely situated together. He gently pushed at the closed doors, one by one, and found them all fastened from within. Lastly, the door of a small room yielded to his touch. He pushed it open and entered. An earthen lamp was dimly burning there ; and by its flickering light he could see everything inside the room. There was no one there except an old woman lying fast asleep on a mat-bed. Hungry as a wolf, the weaver began to rummage the room in search of food, but, to his disappointment, he found nothing.

At last his eyes lighted upon a new *hândi*, or cooking-pot, which contained a quantity of *kshud* *. Overjoyed at this discovery, the hungry weaver took the vessel in his hand and poured some water on the *kshud* from a pitcher that lay in a corner. Fortunately for him, there were a small oven and a quantity of fuel in the room. He quickly lighted a fire in the oven with the flame of the lamp, and set the earthen pot upon it. The fire blazed forth brilliantly, and the contents of the vessel began to boil raising up large bubbles on the surface of the super-heated water, which emitted a *tog-bog* sound as they burst. The hungry weaver sat by the fire intently watching the process of boiling. But as luck would have it, the sleeping old woman, who had hither-

*Particles of rice.

to lain on her side, suddenly turned on her back and began to snore violently. As she had lost all her teeth, the breath came out through her half-open mouth with the mumbling sound of *khábbo ! khábbo ! khábbo !*

Now, *khába* means—I shall eat; and from the very close resemblance of *khábbo* to *khába*, the foolish weaver fancied that the old woman was also hungry and was expressing her desire to eat the boiling *kshud*. He therefore said:—"Wait a little, old lady; I shall give you a part of my food when it is properly boiled." But, regardless of the weaver's offer, the old woman continued to snore as before. Again the weaver requested the sleeping woman to remain silent till the boiling process was over, but she went on snoring *khábbo ! khábbo ! khábbo !* The hungry man at last got angry and said:—"Can't you wait for a few minutes, you hungry hag? Don't bother me any more with your *khábbo ! khábbo ! khábbo !* Let me finish my meal first, and then you shall get your share."

But the sleeping old woman grew more noisy in her snoring, and the starving weaver lost his temper altogether at the old woman's pertinacity. He got up in a towering passion, held the heated *hándi* with his hands, and poured the boiling contents of the vessel into the half-open mouth of the poor sleeper. He was so far carried away by his anger that he even pressed it hard on the face of the old woman, crying out:—"Eat as much as you like, you

voracious old beast !”

The family consisted of seven brothers who were living in comensality—a practice very common in India—and the old lady was their mother. At the cries of the weaver they all came out with lights and entered her room. To their great horror and astonishment, they found that a stranger was pressing a *handi* on the face of their old mother, and at the same time was uttering strange cries.

The brothers quickly separated the man from their mother who had, in the mean time, breathed her last from suffocation. They then asked him who he was, why he had come into that room, and wherefore he had committed such an atrocious act. In reply to these queries he related to them his whole story, and they were fully convinced that the man was the greatest fool on the face of the earth. The good brothers became greatly concerned at the sad end of their old mother. Her violent death at the hands of the *Jolá*, who was a *Mahammedán*, was considered very degrading to them—they being rigid *Hindoos*. That the mother of seven sons should die so sadly, that there should be nobody, whom she loved, near her in her last moments, and that she should meet a violent death at the hands of the foolish *Jolá*, cut them to the quick. They feared that their caste-people would shun them as disgraced men, should they come to know of the fact that their mother had met with her death without the religious ceremonies

usually performed for the dying, and especially at the bands of a *Mahammedán*.

The seven sons of the defunct old woman, after laying their heads together, came to the conclusion that the matter must be hushed up and that the foolish *Jolá* must be bribed to keep a still tongue over the matter. They, therefore, instead of handing the foolish murderer of their mother over to justice, thought it prudent to offer the man a sum of one hundred *rupees* as hush-money. The weaver gladly accepted the offer and returned home rich. The bereaved brothers gave out that their old mother had died a natural death. They performed the cremation of the dead body in strict accordance with the religious rites of the *Hindoos*.

Very early next morning, the *Jolá* reached his home and called to his wife to open the door for him. He then told her that even after his death he had earned a hundred *rupees* for her, and he gave the money to the good woman. After fully satisfying the cravings of hunger, he went out to see his neighbours who all laughed heartily at his resuscitation!

After some time, it entered into the head of the foolish weaver to learn the art of singing. With this intent he set out one morning taking a few *rupees* with him. Scarcely had he gone a hundred yards when he noticed that a rat was throwing up the loose earth from a hole it had been burrowing in a mound. The witless weaver learnt a song from the rat! He sang to him-

self :—" Bore and throw out the earth, you bore and throw out the earth !" He then threw a *rupee* towards the rat, by way of reward, and went onwards. When he had covered a distance of a score of yards more, he noticed a certain small creeping animal, having numerous feet, called *kenno*, or a kind of centipede, whose nature it is to curl up at the slightest touch. The *kenno*, coming in contact with his great-toe, wound itself up into a coil and lay still, according to its well-known peculiar nature. The foolish weaver learnt another song and cried out :—" Shrink and lie still, you shrink and lie still !" He paid down a *rupee* to the insect and went away. A little way off he saw a jackal. At his approach the animal fled in fear, but as it retreated it often looked behind to see if it were pursued. From this great master of singing the weaver learnt a fresh song! He sang again :—" Retreat and look behind, you retreat and look behind !" He flung a *rupee* to the jackal and advanced. After a little while he fell in with the *Mandal*, or head-man of the village. This accidental meeting with the head-man also supplied our hero with a theme for a new song. He cried out :—" Oh ! You are the *Mandal*, I see !" Saying this he paid the man a *rupee* and returned home.

Now, the head-man of the village, who had marked the fool's throwing away of the money, fancied that the *Jolá* must have got some hidden treasure. Though an honest man, the *Mandal* could not resist

the temptation of possessing a part of the weaver's wealth. He, therefore, determined to steal the fool's money on the night of that very day.

Accordingly, in the dead of the night, the *Mandal* came to the rear of the weaver's house and began to bore a hole through the mud-wall, with a *khontá*, or a blunt iron-blade fixed at the end of a long wooden handle. This was not the regular boring instrument used by a burglar, but an apology for it, he not being a professional thief. The *Mandal* thought that the inmates of the house were sleeping soundly, and he went on with his work of boring. But suddenly the wakeful weaver burst, by way of rehearsal, into his newly learnt vocal music, and sang aloud:—"Bore and throw out the earth, you bore and throw out the earth!" The *Mandal*, who was at that very time boring through the mud-wall and throwing out the loose earth from the hole he was making, heard this song. He grew alarmed, left off his work, and sat still in breathless silence. Again the weaver sang loudly:—"Shrink and lie still, you shrink and lie still!" The *Mandal* fancied that the weaver must have seen him by some secret means. Quick as thought he rose up and took to his heels. But as he was fleeing fast, he looked behind several times to see if he were pursued. Again the *Jolá* joyfully burst into his song:—"Retreat and look behind, you retreat and look behind!" The frightened *Mandal* thought that he was certainly watched by the

wakeful weaver, but that he was not recognised in the dark. But scarcely had he gone on a couple of yards when our vocalist vociferated:—"Oh! you are the *Mandal*, I see!"

This time the fugitive *Mandal* fancied that he had been recognised beyond all doubt, and that it was, therefore, useless to run away. Being the *head-man* of the village, he became anxious to preserve his reputation as an honest man. With this purpose he returned to the house of the weaver, called him out, candidly confessed all, and begged his pardon. The *Mandal*, who was well off in the world, also offered the weaver a sum of one hundred *rupees* to purchase his silence. The *Jolá*, who had indeed been ignorant of the real fact, joyfully accepted the offer and kept the secret. The *Mahámmédán Weaver* now became Fortune's favourite, and he lived long and happily with his wife and children.



XIV.

SERVICE SECURES SUMPTUOUS SUBSISTENCE.

IN a certain village there lived a sharp-witted young man whose name was Bholánáth Sarkár. He was by caste a *Kdyastha*. Bholánáth had had a good education in the village school. He also possessed a smattering of Persian—a language much valued during the Mahámmedán sovereignty in India. But with all his knowledge and intelligence, he could not earn enough to support his family. He was, therefore, passing his days in misery, when a friend of his advised him to try his fortune in the court of the king of the country. This kind friend also remarked that Bholánáth would certainly make his fortune, if his talents were properly directed: he would make either a very good officer or a notorious *badmash**.

*A rógue.

Bholánáth very rightly resolved to turn an honest penny, and so he set out for the King's Court. In due course he reached the royal city, and presented himself before his Majesty. The King's attention was soon attracted towards the young man by his fine face beaming with good grace and intelligence. His Majesty called the new-comer to him and asked him what he wanted.

Bholánáth approached the throne with due deference and made obeisance to the King. He then humbly said :—" May it please your Majesty, I am a poor man. I have come from a long way off and I beseech your Majesty to favour me with an employment under your Majesty." But the King replied :—" I am very sorry, my young man, that there is no vacancy to be filled up for the present ; so I see no way to help you now." The applicant appealed to the generosity of the King and humbly said :—" So please your Majesty graciously bestow on me a post, it matters little whether it brings with it any pay or not." " But what benefit will you derive from a post to which no salary is attached ?" asked the King in astonishment. Bholánáth replied :—" Your Majesty be pleased to know that *service secures sumptuous subsistence* for a man of intelligence. All that I require is to enter your Majesty's service, and I do not want any pay for the post."

The King held a consultation with his ministers as to what particular post the applicant should be appoint-

ed, so that he might not have the *least* chance of gaining anything therefrom. The ministers, after a deep deliberation, came to the conclusion that the young man should be made Superintendent of the *gharials* whose duty it was to strike the hours of day and night upon a large Chinese gong suspended in a lofty tower, called the *Ghari-kháná*, attached to a portion of the palace-gate. They then acquainted the King with their decision, and his Majesty was glad that a really lucreless post had been hit upon by the ministers. The King informed Bholánáth of his new appointment, to which he bowed assent and left the presence of his Majesty.

On the same day Bholánáth took charge of the *Ghari-kháná*, and the *gharials*, or the strikers of the gong, were placed under the orders of the new Superintendent. Throughout the day Bholánáth turned over in his mind how he could make some money out of his new appointment. The duty of the *gharials* consisted simply in striking the hours of day and night; and, in that monotonous work, they could, if they would, in no way appropriate to themselves any illicit gain arising from their avocation. The Superintendent, therefore, cudgelled his brains to devise means of collecting some money, but in vain. At last, however, hoping against hope, he ordered the *gharials* to strike twelve times on the gong when it was just the time for striking the hour of *nine* in the night.

The *gharials* protested against this order of their

Superintendent, but he insisted upon their obeying his orders, on pain of immediate dismissal. Finding the Superintendent very firm in his order, the submissive *gharials* obeyed him and struck the hour of twelve. By taking this sudden leap of three hours over the space of night-time, Bholánáth hoped that *something* might turn up in his favour. Ordering his subordinates to go on striking regularly the consecutive hours after twelve o'clock, according to the hour-glass of the *Ghari-khdná*, he then left the place.

The astonished *gharials* could not see any earthly reason of thus effecting a change in the time of the night by their new Superintendent, and they remained struck with wonder. But, though the *gharials* did not see any effect of this sudden change, it nevertheless produced a very important effect in a certain quarter of that great city.

The King had two queens who often quarrelled for the monopoly of the affection of their royal husband. The good King, thinking it very unjust to lean to any particular spouse, had equally divided his affection between his two queens. It had been arranged that he would remain with the elder queen from evening to mid-night, and with the younger queen from after mid-night to morning. The impartial King strictly followed this routine, and by this means he was able to enjoy peace in his unenviable life of bigamy. Now, the King was in the apartment of the elder queen, when, from the

Ghari-khónó, ding-dong! ding-dong! struck the hour of midnight while it was really nine o'clock. Scarcely had the heavy sounds of the gong completely died away when the King, true to his compact, rose in haste and left the apartment of the elder queen for that of the younger one.

The elder queen became very sad at this sudden departure of her royal husband. She wondered why on that particular night *time* flew on its most rapid wings! She remembered to have heard the Chinese gong proclaim the hour of eight, but she was not certain whether or not she had heard the striking of the consecutive hours after eight to midnight. So absorbed she had been, she thought, in paying her attentions to her lord of life! The elder queen, thus untimely deprived of the company of her royal husband, became ill at ease and passed the night in sad bewilderment. Her head did not press the pillow even for a single instant; her downy bed seemed to her as hard as rock and as prickly as thorns. She sat up the whole of the night without having a wink of sleep.

Several were the conjectures that rose rapidly in the mind of the disconsolate queen, relative to the cause of the unusual occurrence of that night. She at last came to the conclusion that the strikers of the gong must have been bribed by her rival, the younger queen. This conjecture grew gradually into a conviction, and it tormented her much. Oh, what would become of her if

this thing was to happen every night! It must be remedied at once, or she would be utterly lost. She, therefore, resolved to take prompt steps to prevent the recurrence of the evil as soon as the day dawned.

Early next morning, the elder queen sent her confidential maid to the *Ghari-kháná* to inquire into the matter. The *ghariáls* informed her that it was the new Superintendent Bholánáth Sarkár who had ordered them to strike the hour of twelve when it had been really the time for striking *nine*, and that they did not know anything about his motive for doing so. When the elder queen heard from the maid-servant that the new Superintendent of the *Ghari-kháná* had effected this sudden change in the time, by anticipating it by *three* hours, she sent for him in private. Bholánáth appeared before the senior queen who thus addressed him :—“ Well, my worthy Superintendent of the *Ghari-kháná*, what made you proclaim the hour of midnight when it was really nine o'clock? I see, you must have been bribed by that siren, the designing junior queen, to hasten the departure of his Majesty from my apartment. My good man, come over to my side and strike the hour of twelve just at three o'clock in the morning; and here is a sum of five thousand *rupees* for you.” Bholánáth smiled, bowed to the queen, accepted the offer, and gave her his assurance to carry out her wishes to the best of his power. The senior queen remained satisfied with this arrangement, and the new Superintendent of the

Gharikháná left her presence.

At nine o'clock in the night, Bholánáth ordered the *gharials* to postpone the striking of the consecutive hours regularly. At twelve, he ordered to strike *ten*, at two A. M., *eleven*; and at three A. M., the Chinese gong proclaimed the hour of *twelve*. Upon this the King rose heavily and betook himself to the apartment of his second wife who was impatiently waiting for him.

The junior queen, in the meantime, had been wondering why *time* on that particular night was passing at a snail's pace! She became restless, and opened the door of her room several times to have a look into the corridor to see whether the lord of her life was coming to her. The King had visited her last night much earlier, and how was it that he had not made his appearance up to that time? Three wax-candles had already been burnt, and yet no sign of the King's arrival was visible. Last night, scarcely the second candle had been lighted, his Majesty had favoured her with a visit. But that particular night seemed to her the dullest one in all her born days.

When the King at last came to her apartment, the junior queen asked him the reason of his unusual delay. His Majesty said that he could not come to her earlier than the appointed hour of twelve, that she must have heard the gong just then proclaim the hour of midnight, and that he was therefore not late even by a minute. However, the matter ended there, and the King slept in

the apartment of his junior consort. But the younger queen did not at all enjoy sleep on that night, as she was thinking in her mind how she could remedy the evil which had caused her so much trouble and anxiety. At length she rightly guessed that the men in charge of the Chinese gong must have been at the bottom of the mischief, and she determined to see to this on the morrow.

On inquiries made through her maid the junior queen came to know that it was the new Superintendent of the *Ghari-kháná* who had been the root of all the evil. She, therefore, called him in, and Bholánáth, in a few minutes, appeared before her. The offended queen demanded of him the reason of his acting thus overnight. Bholánáth Sarkár humbly replied :—"My most gracious Queen, I did not intend your Majesty any mischief. I merely corrected the time which was going wrong ; and I could not help it doing so, as it is my duty to proclaim the right time on the gong of the *Ghari-kháná*. If I have, however, been in any way the cause of your Majesty's annoyance in the faithful discharge of my duty, I humbly beg to be pardoned for that." The junior queen said :—"Well, my good Superintendent, I know it all : your palms have been sufficiently oiled by the elder queen for the purpose of tormenting me. But now espouse *my* cause, and henceforth strike the hour of midnight just at nine o'clock in the evening ; and here is a large sum of ten thousand *rupees* for you." Bholá-

náth bowed respectfully to the junior queen and said :—
“ My humble self shall always be at your Majesty’s
service.” So saying he went away with the money.

Now, the Superintendent of the *Ghari-kháná* did not appropriate all that money to himself, but on the same day he deposited the large amount of fifteen thousand *rupees* into the King’s treasury. When his Majesty heard of this deposit, he became quite astonished. He could not even conjecture how Bholánáth had collected such an enormous amount in a couple of days! Lost in amazement the King called that wonderful man to his presence, and asked him for an explanation. Bholánáth told his Majesty everything, who thereupon laughed heartily and said :—“ My good man, I see, you can make money out of *anything*! But you must not continue to hold your present post any longer, lest my domestic happiness be marred every night by your readiness to change sides in serving the rival queens. I shall soon, however, decide what I am to do with you.”

The King called upon his counsellors to try Bholánáth Sarkár in a different kind of work. The ministers advised the King to employ that resourceful man to take measurements of all the roads and streets in that city, as they thought he would not be able to make money out of that new occupation. Accordingly, the King ordered Bholánáth to survey the roads and streets and to submit to him their detailed measurements. Bholánáth bowed respectfully to the King and said :—“ Your

Majesty's command will be carried out to the best of my ability ; but I want a royal *parawoánda** to the effect that no one opposes me in the due discharge of my duty." The King granted him the document, and Bholánáth left the palace.

Next day the new Surveyor went out with some *coolies* to commence the work of survey. With a strong rope measuring eighty cubits in length, and having marks of divisions every four cubits apart, Bholánáth began the work of survey. In Bengal the measurement of land is usually made with a twisted rope, called *rashi*, which is 120 feet long and divided into twenty equal parts ; the whole length of the *rashi* is called a *bighá*, and each part a *kátá*. In ancient times tapes and chains were not used, and different standards of measurement were also in vogue: a *rashi* varied from 40 to 55 yards.

The Surveyor selected a thickly populated street, having beautiful buildings on both sides, and went on measuring it. He frequently took offsets of large and costly houses and noted them down in his field-book. In those days survey of roads and streets being an unusual thing, great was the curiosity of the people to know its real object. Some of them asked the Surveyor, but Bholánáth was not the man to be wormed out of it easily. He simply smiled and said that he knew how to keep a secret, and that he was doing so under orders

* A writ.

of the King. He showed them the writ bearing the sign manual of his Majesty, as was usually the case in ancient times, and went on with his work.

Now, some prudent citizens, whose houses stood on either side of the street, thought it proper to enquire a little more into the matter. They, therefore, earnestly requested the Surveyor to enlighten them on the point. Bholánáth said:—"You know, sirs, that it is forbidden to divulge an official secret ; but as you are very eager to know it, I'll satisfy your curiosity." He then added :—"Well, my good sirs, I have been entrusted by the King with the important work of improving the condition of this city by widening some of the narrow streets and making a few new roads. With this object I have been measuring the streets and taking the offsets of those houses that are very likely to be pulled down for the purpose."

On this specious information the credulous householders became greatly concerned. They held a consultation as to how to avert the impending danger to their costly buildings, and asked the Surveyor if he could help them in this matter. Bholánáth, with a view to raise the price of his supposed services in their favour, said that the thing was a very difficult one and that it could only be done to his own great detriment.

The upshot of this declaration was this: money poured into his pocket by way of compensating him for his personal damage for not faithfully carrying out the

command of the King. In this manner he was successful in earning money in almost all the streets he measured, and a sum of twenty thousand *rupees* flowed into his coffer. This amount he directly deposited into the treasury, and his Majesty was astonished to find that Bholánáth had collected such a large sum of money in that simple work.

The King then took counsel with his ministers who, after holding a deep consultation, advised his Majesty to appoint Bholánáth to a very curious post. With a view to get that intelligent man into trouble, the jealous ministers thought it expedient to employ Bholánáth Sarkár in counting the number of waves that ruffled the surface of a large river on the bank of which the city stood. The King thereupon thus addressed the man :—
“ Now, Bholánáth, I have at last selected a very good employment for you. You are to count, in the course of this day, the exact number of the waves that agitate the bosom of the river. If you fail in this, you will lose my favour and your services will be dispensed with.”
Bholánáth replied without any concern :—“ I bow down to the orders of your Majesty ; but how can your humble servant count the number of waves of the whole river which is a very large one? That I may be able to correctly count the number of the waves, a particular part of the river should be pointed out to me. Besides, a necessary establishment will be required to do the job properly. Your Majesty be, therefore, pleased

to grant me all that I want, and my task will surely be done to your Majesty's entire satisfaction." The King said :—"Your request is reasonable. You are permitted to take with you whatever establishment you require, and your jurisdiction extends over a mile of the river including the port." Bholánáth bowed and left the court.

Provided with a guard of one hundred men, Bholánáth stationed himself on the bank of the river, near the port. He at once set to work and began to count the waves that rose on the surface of the river, and noted down their number on sheets of paper! In a very short space of time the enthusiastic enumerator counted over some hundreds of thousands of waves that curled the waters of the river! But when with the tide numerous boats were coming into the port, the Enumerator of the waves ordered his men to stop their progress at once. On this the boatmen had to keep their boats away from the port to their great inconvenience. The *Máhájans*, or merchants, who were the owners of the boats and whose merchandise the vessels did carry, came in a body to the Enumerator and begged his permission to enter the port. Bholánáth very gravely gave them to understand that they might do so without breaking the waves. He also added that should any of their boats or oars happen to damage even a single wave, the exact number of which he was to report to the King, then all the boats with their

freight would at once be confiscated.

The merchants grew perplexed. They were at a loss to devise means of taking their boats into the port without causing any damage to the dancing waves. As they were likely to suffer considerable loss if their boats were not cleared during the course of that day, and as they could not do that without entering the port, the merchants were glad to offer the Enumerator a sum of twenty-five thousand *rupees* by way of indemnification for damages done to the waves. Bholánáth accepted the offer and permitted the boats to enter the port. At sun-set he returned to the King's palace with a large bundle of account papers upon the head of a stout *coolie*. The sum of twenty-five thousand *rupees* was, as usual, deposited into the treasury.

When the King came to know of this remittance his wonder knew no bounds. His Majesty summoned Bholánáth and enquired if he had counted the exact number of the waves. The Enumerator answered in the affirmative and placed the bundle of accounts before the throne. The King then asked him how he had collected the large sum of twenty-five thousand *rupees* remitted by him into the treasury. Bholánáth smiled and said :—" May it please your Majesty, the money was realized in indemnification for the damages done to the waves by the boats of the merchants." The King frowned and said :—"How comes it, my man, that you permitted the boats to enter the port and thereby break

the waves, the exact number of which you were entrusted to count? The accounts submitted by you are then *not* correct, I presume." Bholánáth bowed and replied :—"No, your Majesty, my accounts are quite correct. It is true that some of the waves were broken by the boats, but that did not stand in the way of my correctly counting them. I entered the broken parts into my accounts, just in the plan of counting bricks, by taking two *halves* or four *quarters* to make *one*. Your Majesty, therefore, need not doubt the accuracy of my accounts, which may, however, be tested by some other person, if your Majesty think it necessary."

This reply silenced the King. He could not reasonably find fault with the Enumerator of the waves. He therefore again sought the counsel of his wise ministers, and desired them to find out some other employment for Bholánáth in which he might not gain even a single *cowri* * and that the work should be of such a nature as would be very difficult for him to accomplish it. The ministers, after laying their heads together for some time, gave certain advice to the King, and his Majesty, accordingly, addressed Bholánáth thus :—"Now, my worthy man, a very important work is entrusted to you. You are to kill all the mice and rats that infest the houses of this city ; and for this purpose you are allowed only *three days* from to-morrow morning. But mind,

* A small shell used as money.

the work of extirpation of those noxious little animals should be so complete that not a single one of them might be seen in the whole city after the expiry of the time allowed. You shall do your duty with the greatest care; and, should anyone happen to complain of molestation by a mouse or a rat, that would surely go to prove your neglect of duty, and you shall be severely dealt with."

Our undaunted hero bowed to the King and wanted an establishment of five hundred *coolies* who should be placed *entirely* under his orders, to assist him in his arduous work. His Majesty granted him the establishment prayed for, and that man of plentiful pluck left the presence of the King, after assuring him that the work would be accomplished to the entire satisfaction of his Majesty.

Next morning our valiant Bholánáth marched at the head of five hundred robust men with spades, shovels and pickaxes, to carry out the command of the King. He selected large mansions and palatial buildings to begin operation on. With his formidable gang of *coolies* Bholánáth arrived at a magnificent mansion and showed the royal writ to the owner. He then ordered his men to dig open the floors of the rooms in quest of mice and rats that might be lurking there. The owner of the mansion, seeing that a great damage was about to be done to the stucco floors, became horrified and offered to purchase the forbearance of the redoubtable Rat-

killer at a very high price. Bholánáth accepted the offer on condition that the house-owner should grant him a certificate to the effect that all the mice and rats, infesting his mansion, had been killed, and that if at any time the master of the mansion should happen to complain of ravages by rats and mice, it would be considered *totally* false. In this manner the daughty destroyer of the murine race visited every house, and in every case the same satisfactory result attended him.

On the *second* day Bholánáth went to the house of the King's Prime Minister and ordered his men to commence operation. The Prime Minister, who was at that time at home, came out to see what the matter was. Seeing the rat-killers with their implements, he asked Bholánáth what he meant by coming to his house where no rat or mouse could possibly live, the floors of the rooms being all laid with marble. Bholánáth replied that he had seen a mouse steal into the grand-saloon, and that he must find out the noxious animal and kill it at once. He then gave orders to his *coolies* to dig open the costly marble-floor in quest of the little mouse. The Prime Minister objected strongly, but Bholánáth remained inexorable. As his threats and entreaties were all lost upon Bholánáth, the prudent Prime Minister thought it proper to purchase the Rat-killer's forbearance. He therefore offered Bholánáth a large sum, to save the costly marble-floor of his saloon. Bholánáth accepted the offer and went away in triumph with

his men, after securing the necessary certificate.

On the *third* day, Bholánáth entered the royal palace with his formidable band of rat-killers. The King was then taking his mid-day rest in a highly decorated saloon on the second floor, supported upon beautiful columns of ornamental work. Bholánáth selected this room and ordered his men to attack the pillars with the pickaxes. The sturdy strokes of the implements of the rough rat-killers soon made the pillars shake. The guards of the royal household strongly protested against it, but Bholánáth told them that he was doing so under the orders of his Majesty and that he would not, therefore, desist from his work. The columns shook under each stroke of the heavy implements ; and the King, suddenly disturbed from his mid-day nap, came down in great dismay apprehending that it was the effect of an earthquake !

When his Majesty saw Bholánáth and his band of rat-killers, he asked him, in an angry tone, why he was trying to pull down the beautiful pillars of the saloon. Bholánáth very humbly replied that he was simply doing his duty of destroying the mice and rats lurking within the holes of the royal premises. He also added that he had just then seen some mice climb up the columns of the saloon, and that he was therefore dismantling them with a view to ferret out those noxious little animals that must have taken refuge within some small apertures in the pillars.

The King, in great vexation, demanded to know how Bholánáth had ventured to come to his palace to kill rats and mice. "My most gracious Liege," replied Bholánáth with due deference, "your Majesty did not make any exception to the general orders. Your Majesty's palace stands within this city, and I should, therefore, kill all the rates and mice that infest the palace buildings. If I now leave the palace unsearched and should a mouse happen to pop out afterwards, that would certainly prove neglect of my duty, and I shall be severely punished." He then suddenly cried out :—
"There, there, goes a mouse! Quick, quick, with your work, my hardy fellows. My life depends on the destruction of the mischievous mouse that has taken refuge in this room."

The robust rat-killers promptly obeyed the order of their immediate superior, and *thump! thump! thump!* went their heavy implements to pull down the pillars of the saloon; and that beautiful building showed signs of collapsing soon.

The King, finding Bholánáth very resolute, conjured him to desist from the work for a short time and to listen to him. His Majesty could not, in justice, punish Bholánáth for his obstinacy, as his argument was a plausible one. The Rat-killer, however, granted a respite to the pillars and thus addressed the King :—"Sire, your Majesty's humble servant has succeeded in extirpating all the mice and rats that infested the houses in

this great city, as these certificates will prove, excepting those that are lurking in the palace of your Majesty; and now I must finish my work *to-day*, this being the last one of the *three* days allowed to me."

The King told Bholánáth that he was quite satisfied with his work, that Bholánáth was not required to destroy the rats and mice of the palace, and that he would take it for granted that they had *all* been killed by him. To this Bholánáth respectfully replied:—"In that case your Majesty is to grant me the requisite certificate and my reward for performing this feat within the time allowed." The good King gladly granted the certificate asked for, and also gave him a *lákh* of *rupees* as a reward for his rare intelligence and indomitable courage. Bholánáth bowed to the King and said:—"Did I not tell your Majesty that *service secures sumptuous subsistence* for a man of intelligence? And your Majesty has now seen the verification of my motto; but the matter must end here. I, however, beg your Majesty's pardon for the disturbance caused by my humble self."

The King became much pleased with Bholánáth Sarkár and that same day he was appointed Prime Minister. Needless to say he very worthily discharged the most responsible duties of his new office.

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