

INDIRA DEVI

A ROMANCE OF MODERN POLITICAL INDIA

By

A. SUBRAHMANYAM

Advocate

GANESH & CO., MADRAS

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PREFACE

THE object of this story is frankly political. Its author's endeavour has been, 'so far as relates to matters pictured therein, to uncover and truly present the average Indian mind, whose inscrutability is the subject of standing remark. Of the many literary shortcomings of this book, he hopes for that indulgent review which is usually accorded to work of new entrants to the craft.

Nellore }
7-8-30 }

THE AUTHOR

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CHAPTER I

MRS. PITT'S DECISION

READER, I am introducing you to happenings in the autumn of the year 1951.

The rains of a copious monsoon had just held off and nature revitalised was expressing herself in the growth of her infinite varieties and forms. The grass was carpeting the vast rolling spaces which just erstwhile had been looking sad, dry, and parched up, and the wealth of the wild, small Indian flowers that pattern it yellow, blue, red and white was springing up as a mosaic in a whole range of colour, such as can only be seen on an Indian meadow. The sinking weariness-unto-death feeling of the tropical summer was gone; all life had felt a new thrill, and the cool washed out atmosphere, hung over everywhere as an elixir from the gods.

It was not to be expected that the little township of N-L-E in a corner of the Southern Presidency of the Indian Continent should not have been affected with this new access of life, and the compound of Mrs. Pitt's bungalow in one of the newly formed suburbs of this little town was putting forth its colour of green, with the grass sprouting up

luxuriantly. Mrs. Pitt's cow "Sreekripa" which she had been bringing up with all the solicitude of a conviction religiously taken up since she came to live in this Hindu quarter, was, on the particular morning with which our story opens, peacefully browsing in the front of the yard, with her face and back somewhat generously daubed with saffron and red, the marks of her early morning worship. To Mrs. Pitt this cow was symbolic, symbolic of the good divine mother which fed its child Nature with the sustaining streams of life; and a tame Indian deer which to her mistress was a standing reminder of a notable incident out of the pages of the Ramayana, which book she loved and was holding open on her lap, took up another portion of the yard frisking and gambolling wildly into the air. Mrs. Pitt herself was sitting in the varandah, the broad octagonal form of which with its flight of long narrow steps and low parapet, was at once the feature and the comfort of the small bungalow to which it belonged. Between the fluted pillars with finely worked capitals that supported the roof, a fine, old brass chandelier hung from the ceiling; and at a little recess of the floor, Mrs. Pitt stationed herself amidst a suite of a few chairs and lounges on an Indian carpet, whereon was spread a splendid tiger skin with the deep black stripes yet fresh on a ground of shining yellow. But for these, the place was singularly bare of furniture. On the walls there were a few pictures, striking of which, were one of Christ, typifying meek

service of humanity, and another of Sree Krishna, the God of divine love. On Mrs. Pitt's table itself was a miniature of Mr. Pitt.

Mrs. Pitt had been widowed for some years. Her husband Mr. Pitt was a young civilian who came into the country in the early twenties and she came over with him at the critical age of twenty-one, when the impressions of a foreign land either direct one's life into a sympathetic flow, to mix fruitfully with the expansive life of its peoples and their environments, or stunt it into the limited self-centered existence as of the oyster, glued up in a case of egotistical hopes and fears, albeit as lustrous as may be the pearl itself inside. The Indian Civil Service of that day was indeed a *corps de elite* of young Britishers, honest and transparent, and well imbued with a sense of the duty of Government which they were called on to perform, but a little touch of the delusion of racial superiority which spoiled nearly all of them after a short sojourn among the placid, philosophical peoples of the country, coupled with an exaggerated notion of their individual relation to the work which their country of birth had been accomplishing, drew them generally into the mistake of imagining what they thought good for the people, should be accepted by them without demur, and of enforcing the same with impatient energy. The people at times resented, and resented with silent disdain; but they still submitted with a resignation which was felt for the

inevitable. The service however had a leaven, to which these spacious and freer times of which I am now speaking are due, which put itself into the task of understanding the real life of the people, and where the currents of their thoughts required "Government" to enable them to apprehend the higher conditions of existence—knowledge of which these young men acquired at the Universities—and which they came to impart. Mr. Pitt was one of this band. His ideal was the ideal of service; to throw light into the dark corners of the lives of his fellow men to whatever colour or creed they belonged, to lighten their labours of the world to the best of his might as man to man, and assist them by persuasion and gentle correction to more attractive visions of personal and communal life. When as a young man he went out into his first district there was famine wide-spread there, and he and his young wife rent their hearts with the sight of the spectacle of a thousand pairs of hungry eyes looking into them with the unuttered agony of a crushed up physical and moral being, they struggled to the best of their powers to administer to their afflicted human kin the most extensive beneficent solace they could. They brought them food, they brought them clothing; and more than both, comforted them to bear up their distress with cheerful fortitude. The young couple got on so well that wherever they went within the limits of Mr. Pitt's extensive administrative charge, the pure affections of the

people welcomed them as their nearest brother and sister, and dispensed to them a kindly hospitality, which did indeed good to their sincere natures to accept. Two children came to them in due course, a boy and a girl. The boy was sent to their English home for the customary education for English boys, but the parents retained their younger child, the girl, with them, to have her susceptibilities influenced by their own large-hearted work, and to enable her to unfold herself into a true queen of love when she entered in the process of time into her dominion of womanhood. With a life of peace and contentment in themselves flavoured with joys and anxieties of parenthood, the Pitts enjoyed and devoted themselves to a life of service to the multitudes of humble folks who toiled to provide them their pay, and to many of whom they saw earthly life was only resignation to a state of existence which was neither life nor death.

The inevitable furlough came, and the Pitts sailed home for a sojourn of some months. Mrs. Pitt stayed behind to spend sometime with her own relatives and to see more of her own son who was passing out of the school and was to enter the University. But the inexorable conditions of service brought away Mr. Pitt again to India and the charge of a district. He was called upon to wrestle with the raging plague there, and going amongst the stricken people much like a General trying to steady his scared hosts and stiffen their resistance, he

himself took the insidious infection, and one October evening, the seventh day of his attack he ravingly asked for his wife and children, and suddenly pulling himself up into consciousness, he sank into the hands of a trusty Brahmin clerk who was supporting his head, muttered he was happy to die along with so many of his people for whom he had toiled, and passed away in the midst of his weeping attendants. They carried him tenderly to his grave and buried him with all the marks of reverent affection. He was their hero, their big brother. They raised no stone nor tablet over his tomb to remember him to the people amidst whom he lived; but at even time every day, every householder of them as soon as the evening lamp is lit and placed in the front wall niche, raises his folded hands in a second of solemn prayer to the memory of Pitt "Dhora".

The sad news filtered to Mrs. Pitt in due course while at home, and she was faced with a situation which was no less oppressing than perplexing. The cares of family had suddenly swooped on her unsupported shoulders and not only the problem of her own life but the education and maintenance of her two nestlings oppressed her heart more than she could bear. Still there was no solution ready to hand. The boy had just passed into the University, where, according to the insensate standards of Western civilisation, which do not perceive that the best education of the people is an

asset to the body politic for which it will be well to spend its own money, learning is sold and bought at too dear a price, without even a touch of the ideal of the East where the man of learning is a soul in unhidden glow wherefrom he who cares can light his own intellectual lamp; and Mrs. Pitt had to find the money for the interminable bills on account of her Arthur or withdraw him from the portals of a passage whereout he could emerge into a decent worldly career in due course, as if, by the loss of his father, he had lost both his parents. Mrs. Pitt determined to do no such thing. She desired that though her Arthur had lost one of his parents, she should thereafter be both to him. Daisy Pitt, her darling daughter, was of the age when she was exchanging fancies with her play-fellows, and thought papa's purse was there, and there was not a wonder of her dreamland that she could not have. The greater sorrow, whose then? Of the child that asked, or the mother that could not give. No more for Daisy then, the happy joys of a well drawn out schooling. Her hopes for the usual course for girls in her station of life for the culture of the graces and accomplishments were no more, and the fond hope of her parents that they may at the proper hour place her hand into that of an eligible, young English gentleman's who would value his prize, were blasted. Mrs. Pitt was young, and her attractions were as fresh as at her first nuptial hour, and if she would only say "yes" as any

other might in her circumstances, she could command a second home and a fortune that could chase away all the apparitions of indigence and helplessness for herself and her children. But as I have been indicating Mrs. Pitt's nature was cast in a different mould. When love meets with love and two young hearts love with the fullness of love, where is the love that can remain for a third? And marriage! Is not marriage a marriage of souls, a process of refining, of fusion of temperaments, of mutual aspirations and fears, with the burning up of the dross of disagreements and incompatibilities in the crucible flame of love? Is it not a matter of two natures growing in to each other, soaking either with their essence so that the sap of a blended unity breaks forth into the multitudinous blossoms of the same hue on either bough? Though to Mrs. Pitt her husband was unseen, she felt his nature had been implanted into her, and that in everything she did she also acted him. She was the thinner bough on the broken stump from off which death had torn the larger one. In her thinking, she thought she was thinking as he would have thought and in her doing she felt she was doing as he would have done. There was only one life possible for her and that was to go along with the perpetual memory of the man who had left behind his life in her, a sort of continued state of marriage with the soul that had been drawn away into the Invisible. A second was impossible. She gathered her

belongings in her native place, paid a hurried visit to her son, and with her little Daisy, she turned her eyes once again towards the Western gate of India, and in due course arrived there and proceeded to the mofussil town I have already referred to, and settled down to a life of consecrated service to humanity.

She took up her house in the thick of the town where the bulk of the local community lived, and avoided the fashionable mistake of her European people who wherever they came to live, lived miles away in exclusiveness from their Indian fellows. She felt she could hardly be of use till she allowed those whom she had come to serve to know her, and she also knew them, and she began by assimilating her routine of life with that of the community amidst which she took up her residence. She visited her neighbours, and her neighbours visited her without restraint. Her housefront was washed and decorated every morning with the same criss-cross patterns in flour and powdered chalk as the houses of her Hindu neighbours. She rose with the dawn like the ladies of those households, cleaned the kitchen and the chamber of worship, put out the utensils in use for the maid to scrub and wash, and performed her ablutions. She then put on pure and undefiled clothes of silk, next spent sometime in worship, and afterwards supervised in the kitchen the preparation of her first meal for the day which she had converted into a purely vegetarian one in

conformity with the habits of the respected sections of her neighbours. For amongst Hindus, self-denial of every kind and freedom from grossness, attract respect in a way other virtues cannot. She spent much of her time in visiting the sick and helpless, and whoever of her acquaintance that wanted her assistance either by way of attendance by the sick-bed or help in money, could always rely on her response to the sincerest measure of her capacity. She nursed them, read to them and talked to them their own stories from their own puranas and entered into the spirit of their being. She was requited by the never ending solicitude of her richer and humbler sisters who had had the fortune of coming into contact with her, and their constant company; and she and they were never sure of repose till they had exchanged their thoughts when one of them was vexed with any of the eternal worries of domestic life. She settled down into an existence of happy quiescence, imbibing and cultivating the secret of the Hindu mind that life on earth is an awesome gift of a short sojourn for which an account might have to be given, and that it was good it be used well, and to one's self and to the rest of all living things.

So lived Mrs. Pitt at the time when occurred the events which form the subject of our story.

CHAPTER II

SOME NOTABLE NEIGHBOURS

THE morning in question Mrs. Pitt according to her habit, had finished the morning portion of her daily ritual and was seated in her easy chair in the front hall of her house. Her bare feet were according to her wont, resting on the tiger's skin before her chair, and the pages of her favourite book *The Ramayana* were open on the reading plank spread out on the arms of her seat. She was dressed in freshly washed silks, and had arranged the upper garment in somewhat close caplike fashion to give no mistake either from the European or Indian standpoint that she was in widow's weeds. To accentuate the impression, a long string of sacred beads was hanging from her neck. She was bending forward poring over the pages of the open book before her. It was part of her routine to read some portion of some one of the Hindu puranas as a matter of religious discipline immediately after her bath, when as ought to be expected, she would have an access of mental and physical exhilaration; a practice which she copied from some of her religiously inclined Hindu brethren with whom she moved with intimacy. She was getting along an

interesting passage, when the familiar hearty voice of her next-door neighbour Moropant Sadashiv broke upon her ear. She took away her eyes from her book and saw the burly-looking, yet kindly elderly gentleman coming forward with both his hands joined, and raised to his face, exclaiming "Namaskarams, Namaskarams to you, dear Sister Pitt".

She rose hurriedly from her seat, put aside her plank and book, gracefully advanced a step or two, returned the Pandit's salutation, and asked him to be seated.

"Any news from Arthur? When is he coming," he asked, squeezing himself into a chair nearest to him.

"No news yet, brother, the boy is disappointing me by every post. I am getting fidgety myself. Don't worry. If I do not hear from him by the next mail, I shall cable out to any of my relatives to send the boy packing here. Indeed, brother, the boy should have seen that he ought to have been in this country as quickly as possible to take over the care of the arrangements of his sister's wedding from his helpless mamma. But yes, it is always so with boys."

"Sister Pitt, how well you anticipate me. It is just like you. You have the real woman's touch. Your Gowri Sankar is to go out to his District, and that, very soon. May be the next month or the month after the next; cannot say whether it is to

Khulna, Ratnagiri, or Kangra or Tinnevely. Indeed, the Secretary to the Government was telling me that the orders of posting will be out next week. Very troubled times these, Sister. And I don't want the boy to go out without his wife. She will at least be a stand-by and his good cheer when he is at home."

"Have you been consulting the wise astrologers, for any possible 'Muhurtham' or auspicious day in the next few days," asked Mrs. Pitt.

"Oh," said the Pandit. "I have been doing nothing else, since I heard of my boy's possible posting. I have summoned Vaman Joshi, the renowned astrologer of Nagpur to come down at once. I expect him by this afternoon train. You know, Sister Pitt, it was he that predicted every step of my rise in the service. Let others say what they may. Whether Astrology is a science or an idle fraud, I have great faith in it. As a Hindu and a father, I will see that Gowri Sankar, whatever his own convictions be, shall have the benefit of all that has been ordained by tradition and common practice in these matters, and my own humble experience. Well Sister, a little conformity to these things hurts no body; if they have truth, we have protection."

"Do not laugh at me, brother, if I presume to talk to you like a Hindu and not as an English woman. The next month is Sravana, an auspicious month in the Hindu marriage calendar. Is not that

so? Possibly there may be some 'Muhurthams' that month, I expect," ventured Mrs. Pitt.

"True," replied the Pandit. "I have been consulting the Pandits this side, and they tell me that there are one or two really auspicious days for the marriage in Sravanam. But there is nothing like Vaman Joshi casting the young couple's horoscopes and fixing the hour. He would be here to-day as I told you, but meanwhile do please pick up the note you said you have of the hour and date of Daisy's birth. There is a great deal in that, I assure you, Sister."

They both rose from their seats, and talking to each other took to the back entrance of the house passing the kitchen door as the Pandit particularly wished to see how the giant jasmines were coming up in the hind garden. Miss Daisy who was in the kitchen sitting cutting up the vegetables for the breakfast, stood up when she saw her prospective father-in-law and gently receded to behind the kitchen door, as it was not courtesy due to him to stand face to face and talk to him. "Doing well, my child?" enquired the old Pandit of Daisy, to which she returned a half blushing and half distinct answer that she was, leaning out her head into the half open doorway. Mrs. Pitt and her visitor passed out into the garden and took leave of each other, the Pandit promising to return later in the day if his consulting astrologer, Vaman Joshi, duly arrived.

Rao Bahadur Moropant Sadashiv or "The Rao Bahadur" as he was more generally known in his locality, was a man of extraordinary force of character. He belonged to a Brahmin sect of the most orthodox type, and was at present the head of a large family of grown up sons and grandsons, nephews and nieces, brothers and sisters-in-law, all living together. He was a stalwart and well-built man, of striking and impressive cast of the face in which a pair of bright looking and commanding eyes were set. During his younger days, he also sported a fine pair of moustaches which, since his father's death, he had shaved and ceased to wear according to the conventions of his class, as it did not comport to keep them on, when he had to perform the various periodical religious ceremonies ordained for the benefit of his departed father's soul. His finely shaped mouth and thick set chin spread an air of determination to his countenance, which he embellished usually with an upright bar of sandal paste from between his eye brows, as an ardent devotee of the God Siva. His hair had become thin, and what few locks were on his head were inclined to be bushy, and brushed back, imparting to his massive face an expression of a somewhat leonine strength and courage. He carried an appropriately large heart in him, and the play of its kindness of feeling shone on his lips in a perpetual ripple of smiles. There was no mistake in the force of his speech, however. It was frank and straight, and it never

flinched to say the bitterest things when the occasion arose. He started life in the lower positions of Government service in the Department of Forests, and by dint of hard work, integrity and efficiency rose in time to the charge of a District. But it was said that his sense of self-respect marred his further promotion in service, by being distasteful to a pack of green eyed, supercilious, and unlettered Englishmen who happened to be his superiors in authority. He retired eventually on a decent pension and a chary Government satisfied its conscience by the bestowal of a Rao Bahadurship on him. He had the benefit of a public school education during the seventies and eighties of the last century, when learning was both understood and undertaken as a serious business, and before the inroads of soft headed zealots who think they can contrive to make even education easy. The Rao Bahadur therefore had a good grounding in Sanskrit, in the language wherein the precepts, practices and the culture of the race to which he belonged, which furnished the genius of his every day life, were enshrined, and of which, whereby, he could have a sympathetic understanding; and his equal mastery of English, an alien language which threw the doors open for the sampling of other stores of knowledge inscribed therein, gave him the benefit of an outlook on life from different points of view. He blended the result of both kinds of his studies into a happy mixture; and while he cherished and

refused to yield up his orthodoxy, which meant for him, a scheme for the discipline of high thinking and pure living according to his own people, he did not hesitate to adjust it for the reception of ideas wherever they came from, provided they were an improvement on the ideas of his traditional faith, for the interest of his self and larger humanity. The passion for real freedom that is the freedom of the soul to think, act and speak as it wished, blazed in him. It was to him a simple creature right, as much as the right to eat or to drink; and it was the privilege of no power to deny him that, provided in the exercise of it he did not trench on the same right of freedom in others. The cramping conventions of his class in the field of marriage for example did not meet with his sympathy; and he felt he could not understand the terrible amount of opposition even from unexpected quarters that was raised against the recent passage of a simple Civil Marriage Act through the Indian Houses of Legislature. He heartily praised that Act, and as if to prove how badly it was needed, he gave sanction to the proposed marriage of his son Gowri Sankar with Miss Daisy Pitt, as he thought that the young people's wishes were moving in that direction, since the Pitts came to live as his neighbours. His boy Gowri Sankar, he entered for the Indian Civil Service; and the young man was a dutiful and pleasant person. What better girl as wife for him than Daisy, the light of her mother's home, the bright

maiden with such uncommonly good looks, so graceful and modest, so gently unobtrusive and with a lively knowledge of the cares of home? Moreover Daisy was a frequent visitor to the ladies of his household and had endeared herself to one and all of them. She and her mother had been living practically in the spirit of his ancient faith and civilisation; and "why not I receive the child into the bosom of my family as a respected adoptee, the wife of my best boy?" the Pandit used to think in himself. He rallied sufficient courage to dare the criticisms if any of his relatives against the great innovation, and in due course communicated the idea to Mrs. Pitt. Mrs. Pitt needless to say felt surprised, but equally gratified at the prospect in life that so opened out for dear Daisy. In true Hindu fashion the parents hinted to their respective children the idea which, as it had been nearest to the hearts of the young people themselves, was of course promised consideration by them without being summarily rejected. The Pandit was thereafter very active in moving about discussing the detail of the arrangements with Mrs. Pitt as he was anxious to celebrate the wedding in all the amplitude of correct Hindu ceremonial and form. Arthur, Daisy's brother, had to give her away, and as he was at his military studies in England, steps had to be taken for providing him with the necessary convenience to permit him to visit this country to attend the marriage. It was about this that the

Pandit came to see Mrs. Pitt in the morning and what passed between them has already been told.

Late in the evening, two events of importance took place. The first was the receipt of a letter by Mrs. Pitt from her son by the post and for which she was looking forward for some days past. It ran as follows :

THE INDIAN CADETS CAMP,

4th June

“ MY DEAR MAMA,

“ I do not know for shame how to ask you to excuse me for the delay in replying to your last letter. The truth is, I am having very little time to see to anything. The people here are rather queer and are taking the last ounce out of our batch during this blessed training. Your news of Daisy's engagement and wedding is so interesting. I wanted to write to you at once. But as I have said time, more than anything else, is what I have not been able to command. How did it all happen? I never could dream that we would ally with a Brahmin family in marriage, but to be sure that is what you are assuring me. Naughty Daisy has not cared to write a line to me about this. Perhaps, she is blushing at the thoughts of her wedding. My chums here put me all sorts of questions about Daisy's marriage to an Indian; ask me if my would-be brother-in-law is anything like an African Zulu. Even at this time, knowledge

of India here is so poor. I tell them that a Brahmin is as mild and learned as a Rector of an English Parish, and that the average Indian has such a cultured outlook on life as any English philosopher. Some of them happen to have seen Sankar when he was out here for his out of India training last autumn, and when I tell them it is he that is to marry Daisy, their pity for her is only a little less. You say I must be present at the wedding, and tell me of all sorts of ceremonies I have to do, if at least to satisfy the feelings of our new Hindu relative. An English lad, to do ceremonies for his sister's wedding! I am bursting with laughter. The idea is so amusing. Think of my General granting me leave to go out of training to India, for a sister's wedding! I could not have made them see the whole affair as I do, but for the influence you set in motion. Otherwise, I would not have the ghost of a chance of being there at all now, wedding or no wedding. As it is, I am so glad I have got the leave and shall see you soon. I am come to town to purchase my passage and the next two or three days between Sandhurst and London, I hope to be on the boat Saturday next and be with you in due time. Meanwhile with kisses to you and love to Daisy.

I am,

Your own dear son,

ARTHUR."

The receipt of this letter dismissed the perplexities from Mrs. Pitt's mind which her conversation with the Rao Bahadur in the morning had created, and she was in the happy mood of being able to announce the dissolution of a great difficulty when he was to turn up in the course of the evening. She just had her cup of tea and moved out of the front gate; and looking down upon the road to be sure she saw the Pandit coming in company with another, keeping up an animated conversation all the while. She knew at once that the other would be no other than the Pandit's man of wisdom, Vaman Joshi, who should have arrived that afternoon. They presently came up and the three came into the hall and seated themselves. "Sister Pitt, this is my Pandit, Vaman Joshi of Nagpur. He arrived this afternoon," said Rao Bahadar Moropant.

"I see; so glad to see him," said Mrs. Pitt.

"That is alright. Have you picked up the particulars of the hour of Daisy's birth as I wanted you to? Joshi says he must return by the next train; says but for my pressing call he should not have been here at all," said Moropant.

"Very sorry, brother; you will excuse me. I wasn't able to attend to it. I shall do so now. After you left, Arthur's letter arrived by the post and . . ."

"Where is it? So Arthur's letter arrived. Does he say he is coming or not coming? Where is it, Sister?" queried Moropant in high excitement.

Mrs. Pitt took out the letter and reached it quietly to the Pandit. "This has occupied me, brother, since you left"; so she completed the answer. She left the Rao Bahadur engaged with Arthur's letter, and herself went inside to rummage her bundles of old papers for the precious note that he was requiring. After a good half hour's sweating over the business, she luckily discovered the piece of paper which she had stowed away years before, in utter ignorance of the importance it would attract to itself under these peculiar circumstances. Found however it was, and she brought it and handed it over with real relief to the Rao Bahadur and his companion. Vaman Joshi however deep his learning was, was not a worldly man; and he began with the inconvenient exchange of confidence with the bride's mother that an investigation into all these matters was not ordained by books of Hindu lore, when the girl to be wedded was a "Mlechcha," and that the Rao Bahadur was only pursuing a fad in summoning him, and troubling him to go into the whole subject as if it were the case of a pure Hindu couple. Seeing this dubious complimentation of the unsophisticated man of learning, and fearing that the strain into which he had unwound himself since the moment he had been told what he had been sent for, had not ceased, the Rao Bahadur took the situation in hand, and put an effective stopper upon the wise man's projected disquisition by firmly asking him to

get on with the business; upon which the Joshi meekly cast the horoscopes, made elaborate calculations about "accord and discord" of the life forces of the bride and bridegroom, and ultimately announced that the match was an excellent one and the wedded pair would have great prosperity, unalloyed happiness, and blessings of every kind. He proceeded to the fixing of a "Muhurtham" and selected one auspicious day in the month of Sravana that was in the August following. A beam of happiness passed over the Rao Bahadur's face when he heard the fixing of the event so soon after. Pandit Vaman Joshi drew up the "Patrika" in conventional form. Saffron and red were next called for and the corners of the "Patrika" were duly touched with them. Pandit Vaman Joshi then solemnly placed the paper before the Rao Bahadur and Mrs. Pitt. Then came the turn of doing customary courtesy to the man of learning on the finish of so auspicious a piece of labour, and Mrs. Pitt contributing the betel and nut and the Rao Bahadur a crisp hundred rupee note placed on it, the present was respectfully handed on a silver salver to Joshi who accepted it and the trio dispersed.

CHAPTER III

ARTHUR PITT ARRIVES

FOR a whole fortnight thereafter, there was a regular flow of visitors at Mrs. Pitt's place to offer felicitations to her and Miss Daisy on Miss Daisy's engagement. It was not to be expected that a social event of such first rate importance could not come to be known in the town at once; and the news of it affected the various persons it interested, from their own several points of view. To some extent, the extensive interest that came to be shown was due to the perpetual activity of the Rao Bahadur, who was simply bustling about the arrangements for the ceremony, in addition to trying the carrying capacity of the post with sheaves of invitation letters to one and all of his acquaintance in honour of an occasion of such unique importance. He forgot none of his past or present European friends to tell them what a bold step of social reform he was taking in receiving an English girl into the bosom of his orthodox Hindu family; and he surprised his Indian friends and relatives equally, with a challenge as to how they would adjust their

social relations with him thereafter. Already the Brahmins of his community were discussing the problem; and for a caste which had ever been so rigid about taking strangers into its fold, the only question turned out to be whether the Rao Bahadur's family with an English daughter-in-law could still be treated to be within the pale of social intercourse for them as formerly, or not. There were reports in the air of references to the "Mathadhipathi" or the religious head of their community, and getting a bull of excommunication against the Rao Bahadur. In the circle of his English and non-Hindu acquaintance the step was regarded as an experiment towards a unifying of the races in his country the result of which required to be watched. But to himself, the matter did not appear in either view. He had no quarrel with the anxiety of the rest of his Brahmin community to maintain its exclusiveness through birth, as it had reached its present state of spiritual and intellectual worth by steady evolution. But he valued individual freedom in the exercise of such a creature right as marriage too highly to sacrifice, in the interest of the exclusiveness of his community. He thought he had a duty to give all his support in such a case, irrespective of even the secondary considerations involved, such as the promotion of unification of races which was held in some quarters to be essential for the advancement of his country. The society to which he belonged might or might not favour a matrimonial

project that he cherished; it might keep up its social communion with him or not. If it did, well and good; otherwise, the Hindu society was capacious enough to assimilate new communities in any number that might come into being, through changing convictions and circumstances. It was in this view that he accepted the idea of a son taking a desirable English girl in marriage, and determined to give him all the support he could. He determined further that the celebration should be according to the strict Hindu ceremonial which he prized, as no one could interdict him from the faith of his conscience. He chose to put the new intellectual advance of his caste fellows to the test, and waited to see how they would behave to him in the coming functions.

Of the many who came to congratulate the Pitts from a pure personal point of view, on the tidings of the engagement, the first to arrive were Mrs. Chatfield and her daughter Miss Chatfield, the girl from Girton. The Chatfields had for some years been residents of the station, and on terms of friendship with the Pitt family, Mr. Chatfield the head of the house having for long been the Collector of the District. Mr. Chatfield was a survival from the old order of things. He was a member of the Old I. C. S. guard, which came into this country for governing the people, as the term went, before spacious times dawned on the country with what were known as Montford Reforms

a quarter of a century ago. To most of his then confreres, those reforms came as an insult, and many left the service and the country in a huff. But it was to the credit of Mr. Chatfield and a few more like him, that they stayed on adjusting their points of view to the new field of vision, giving of their best in the same old spirit of duty, and ultimately found that they were not the worse for having remained. The new order brought a new consciousness to the peoples with whom they had to deal, that it was the duty of the executive to go to the people to do what they bade it to do, instead of the people swarming up to it as to an august Pope, like a train of obsequious devotees to pray for benediction. Mr. Chatfield lived long enough in the country to let these scales drop off his eyes. He found that it was more superb, more human to move and live with masses of humanity, albeit they be no better than cattle, as members of the same order of creation with him, with whom he could exchange a thought, converse a word even on their own plane, than act and move as a cattle herd driving them as a herd of cattle, in the helpless solitariness of his own intellectual world. He had lived to see the self-same millions who in the days of his earlier service made a virtue of necessity, put a lid on their mouths, feigned silence when it was no good to be articulate, and took with unction what the powers that be gave of grace, now bustle about, order their own affairs with the same powers

of calculation of means to end as any other slice of humanity on God's earth, think and live in the exhilaration that comes of the knowledge of the absence of a repressing force, shaping for themselves a life rich and juicy as of the best in the world by reason of their hearts being in it! And his own position; it was so incomparably finer than before. He was the jaded pack ass of the burden of the administration as far as his District was concerned formerly, struggling under a perpetual load of reports about everybody's affairs; but now he was the Governor of his District, a sort of liaison officer between the District Body which raised and collected its own revenue, spent it as it liked within its own limits, according to the best considered notions of the wants of the various peoples inhabiting it, and the Central authority which appointed him, to take note of the possible effects of the District autonomy on the peace of the District. He was the chief executive officer of the new District Government. He collected its revenue and spent it according to the resolutions of the District Body; at the same time, he retained and remitted the central power's share of it with punctilious regularity. No more for him the trouble of ascertaining whether children learnt at School in English or in Vernacular or whether the vaccination of the rural folks was pushed on as well as it should be. The people of each district unit were left to themselves to hang or fall together according to

their own notions of what was good or bad for them; only they were not to make a nuisance of it to themselves or their neighbours and were to be prepared to pull in the team along with the rest when the needs of the country as a whole required it. Such was the position into which Mr. Chatfield had passed in the process of years. The people's quarrels did not touch him now, and so he stood to be held by none to blame. Everybody liked him, and he liked everybody. Age too had done its work in sobering the pride of race and mellowing of the judgment; and with the new found opportunities he sedulously cultivated of going among the people, he came to the conviction that the people of the part of the country into which he came to earn his bread were neither worse nor better in the most part of human nature than what he had known and seen of it in other climes and under other skies. Moreover he saw in the Indian temperament one great virtue at least. It possessed staidness, the mental ballast, not to allow itself to be made the sport of every picturesque idea that for the moment might excite its fancy. For instance in matters of matrimony, the good old sound idea that woman was the weaker vessel, and that the man who took her to wife was bound to cherish her, still clung fast to the Indian. At any rate, the wedded wife inspired herself with the trust she had a hold on her husband for life. If he be true, it was perpetual sunshine; if he be lukewarm, the

ladyship of a home was not a dignity in itself negligible; if he did not care for her, well, it was a tempering of the gold, a call for self-sacrifice which in itself was a solace. In his own old country the riot of thought without reference to practicability, under the conditions of a stern world, was whirling away people into paths of experimentation about everything, and alliances for fixed periods, under terms and conditions, were being tried there in the field of matrimony. The old gentleman therefore could not be said to have been wholly free from thoughts on this subject, when he asked his eldest girl Agnes Chatfield to steer her course towards India as soon as her studies in the conventional manner were over at Girton.

Mrs. Chatfield was not also averse to trying her daughter's matrimonial fortune in India, and she was a woman, though with the empty-headedness of assuming vanities of the familiar kind which were considered the mode for the European in India, who was not a bad sort, and looked equally well on either an Indian or an English lad for a prospective son-in-law. So it was as soon as Gowri Sankar's nomination to the Indian Civil Service was made, both Mr. and Mrs. Chatfield began to feel an interest in him, and when he was about to go to England for the finishing part of his training they very kindly obliged him with introductions to many of their friends there, and even wrote to their daughter Agnes to arrange to be coming to town now and

then to help him in settling down in that new place. Miss Chatfield was very kind to him that way, and she frequently managed to come away from her studies to town to look after her new charge. On Gowri Sankar's return to India Mr. Chatfield proposed him to the membership of his Club, and he and his wife gave him a standing invitation to visit them as much as he could. Gowri Sankar made use of this invitation for looking them up occasionally, but the arrival of Miss Agnes Chatfield inspired him to increase his visits; and by process of attraction, forsaking the older people, found himself more and more in her company alone. They met at the Club and at her house; they played and talked together and were much in each other's company. Miss Chatfield would talk to him of the fashions, the fancies of London, and the wonders of society they could only behold and admire from a distance, of Mayfair; the talk, the art, the pose, the gait, the dress and the adornment of the great ladies there; and how if she could have the opportunity, she longed to belong to that society; of the rambles they both had in town and country, the sights they saw, and the happy hours they had together; and of the thousand and one little delights they shared with each other, of the great city, when he was there under her care and particular guidance. She found a sentimental listener in him of all her rehearsals; and she would have been less than human if from his attitude she did not read a hope

that he might choose in due course to have all the more of it, and with her only, continuously, during all the years before them. It never crossed her mind that he might have a choice of life another way, wherein the excellences of fashion and thrills of society life which were the load stars of her existence might not touch him in the same spirit, however deliciously they might be for him as sensations of the moment; or that any other girl who could only provide him with a flat kind of existence would ever be able to secure him as her husband as against her. But the way of hope has not always been the same as that of its realisation. And he too. How secretive he was. It was the very evening previous, previous to the day when his marriage was being fixed and settled by his father and Daisy's mother, that he was talking to her in the Club in his usual strain; and he did not care to whisper a syllable of his coming happiness to her. Well, what was she to him; or he to her? He was only an Indian with whom for sometime she chose to mix her feelings. There were plenty of English lads, English gentlemen at that, any of whom would only be too glad to accept her at her face value, and press the best out of her splendid accomplishments, her superior taste and exquisite person, and glide with her through the vista of life in a transport of perfect joy. Even this groove of reflection did not appease her. It was cutting her to the quick that it was an English girl that the man for whom her

fancy was setting, secured for his wife, and that it was an English girl, though half corrupt to Indian ways that was able to steal a march over her without any obvious effort on her part. Had he but given her the chance, how well she would have taken him on hand and turned out of his unambitious and timid self, a real man soaked in the arts of life and riding on the crest of the wave of official success with her charm and brilliance. It was thus with the gall and wormwood of her thoughts so deeply stirred that she consented to drive over with her mother to see the Pitts that morning. She knew that the best way of forgetting was by way of resigning, and the best way of resigning, was by way of facing the situation. She imagined she would find Daisy and Gowri Sankar arm in arm tete-a-tete, absorbed in whispering to each other in some secluded part of the house, but she was amazed on arrival to see the younger and older Pitts occupying their accustomed places in the house, without a trace of Gowri Sankar anywhere in the house or the garden. Mrs. Pitt was as usual at that hour in her arm chair at the hall with an open book before her, and Daisy was before the kitchen door preparing the vegetables, and instructing the maid about the breakfast. There was nothing more than common about her dress or appearance in Daisy, except the blush on her face at the sight of friends that came to congratulate her, and as the Chatfields made their way into the hall,

Mrs. Chatfield sat down before Mrs. Pitt, while Agnes ran up to Daisy passing Mrs. Pitt with a "Good Morning" to her. Agnes bent over where Daisy was sitting and catching hold of her hand, pulled her up to stand and saying, "Oh, Daisy, let us go to the garden and talk and talk it out."

They then went out into the garden, Agnes jostling Daisy along with her. "Come, come, Daisy 'bai'. You are a 'bayee' or 'mayee' now. What a happy girl," said Agnes in a slight tone of scorn which a gush of emotion had provoked.

Daisy was not slow to feel the prick; and though the point at which Agnes aimed her taunt was not one which she looked upon as to make her otherwise than happy, the undertone of the undeserved and implied despisal was one she felt called upon tartly to note. "So Agnes dear you were to have been Chatfield 'mayee' even before I dreamt I would wed an Indian husband. You were going thick with Gowri, I used to hear."

"You are naughty, naughty, Daisy," said Agnes as she coloured deeply. "Not a word of it. Who had ever said I was selling myself to an unromantic Indian, be he an I.C.S. I have no taste for a ogreish father-in-law either, Daisy."

"We have been such good friends; I fear I spoiled your happiness when I was marrying Gowri," continued Daisy.

It was a trying situation for poor Agnes. She had herself assumed an air of unconcern about Gowri

Sankar though the manner in which he had so callously disposed of himself to Daisy Pitt was biting at her heart. She could not conceal her bitterness even for Daisy at the first sight of her, and she had only to thank herself for the handle she gave to the enemy of her happiness to turn the retort neatly on her, denying her even the satisfaction of a caustic outburst. But clever as she was, she realised her position and steadying herself broke out "Oh, Daisy, don't bother; it is true I and Gowri were such good friends and saw so much of each other in London. We shall be good friends all of us as heretofore, you, and God willing; Daisy, 'Mayee' or 'Miss' it is so happy to feel you have your own man. My heartfelt felicitations to you and Gowri Sankar"; and with an access of indubitable affection she grasped Daisy to her side and kissed her fervidly on both her cheeks. Then they fell to talking about the wedding day, the preparations that were going on apace, the presents that Daisy was to receive from her new relatives a la mode Hindu, her coming introduction into a Hindu household of parents, brothers and sisters-in-law and of the thousand and one interminable plans of conduct and behaviour for the happiness of herself, her husband, and her husband's family which was so magnanimous to accept her; in a way which only young people, and on the threshold of setting up house, can talk.

They had drifted apart unconsciously to different parts of the garden during their conversation, each

of them pausing here to scent a rose, and there, to admire the giant jasmines that were overloading the bushes. Daisy had just passed into the greenery which was the loving care of herself and her mother, when the patter of hurrying feet from the house and a sudden stop, roused her to look through the side of trailing creepers of the greenhouse, and she caught sight of Indira Devi standing in front of the house steps, with her hands behind her back looking all over for a glimpse of her in the garden. Her movement evidently caught Indira's ear, and she came up crying out in a loud tone of banter which was her privilege towards her new sister-in-law, "Love-languishing already. Arbors and greenhouses -romantic; quite".

"No, no, Indira, you never tire of teasing me; what is it you are holding back in your hands? Cannot expect me to have much of romance, marrying your unromantic brother. Ask Agnes over there to say if I am not right," replied Daisy.

Miss Agnes had just then been sticking a sprig of full blown jasmine into her hair at another point of the garden, when having been drawn into the conversation, she came up and joined them. "Say Agnes, if we have been romancing here? Indira thinks she has such a poetic brother for me to be romancing about; this dear minx," said Daisy.

Miss Chatfield felt difficult to understand this allusion to romance; whether it was conceived to be a dig into her, for her observations about Gowri

Sankar earlier in the morning or as a mere asseveration of what she was in fact doing, by a plain spoken and not over brilliant girl like Daisy. "For shame, my pretty lady, what is there for you to feel so proud of your brother and talk of romance about him? Too much afraid to show himself with Daisy, I suppose. What a lover! And so near of the wedding. For shame, how he neglects her when at all hours he should have been by her side," finished off Agnes, as if to reinforce Daisy's answer. But Indira was not in brilliance to be out done. "He is doing something better now, than to be talking and walking with Daisy. Here, see what a present he has sent," she said; and she opened out her hand and showed the jewel case she had all along been holding in her hands to the astonished friends.

"Lovely. What a necklace. When did he get it down? Say Indira, who is the jeweller? I shall ask pappa to get me one like this. Lovely; how lucky, Daisy. It must be worth a lot," exclaimed Agnes as they saw the splendid necklace of diamonds of the finest water in the case, as it was opened. "I have brought it to try on Daisy's neck. They sent me down to do it. We are coming to confirm the marriage contract this afternoon here; and we shall load Daisy with presents and fineries," said Indira. Then they stripped Daisy's neck and put the jewel round and agreed that it suited her to admiration. Daisy looked exquisite with her new

necklace, and there was a flush of colour to her face as if she was conscious of this embellishment of her splendid beauty. "‘Bapu,’ says if the diamonds do not go well with the whiteness of Daisy’s neck, no matter. She shall have another ruby one besides," added Indira.

It was a scene of silent feeling. Daisy Pitt felt overpowered with all the solid kindness that was being shown to her by her fiance and the members of his family. She was an orphan girl brought over by her mother into a new country, and brought up by her under conditions not usual to persons of her race; and her marriage too, was planned so peculiarly out of keeping with the usual conventions of the society into which she was born. She was fully conscious of the gravity of the step she was asked by her mother to take. She had known the family into which she was going, for long, and did not expect ought but respect and happiness; but still the circumstances were so complex. These acts of lavished kindness to her ever since the understanding about her marriage was come to, came to her as assurances every time that her rightful position was there, and to dispel any shades of doubt that might have possessed her. The gift of this splendid necklace, had it been from a fiance whom she had won according to the conventions of her native community, would have either been the subject of a stipulation on her part, or otherwise, treated as an act of inestimable condescension on the part of her lover.

But here the manner of the making of this gift was such as to leave behind no feeling of obligation in her by accepting it, and she was treated more as a child to whom it pleased her father-in-law to give. And he talked of giving her more and more. Surely this substantial expression of heartfelt affection through the impulse of it, was tolerable even without the honeyed tales of uxorious courtship, which if laid bare might after all reveal the ugly core of pure "business" on both sides. In Agnes Chatfield, the thoughts provoked were of a different complexion altogether. She had seen the diamond necklace, and heard of the coming of a ruby one. What luck for such a dull girl! It was true, she said, she would ask papa for one for herself. But for all that, for a Civilian who had been living on his pay, this was perhaps too much to give for one only of his children. She could not excuse herself for having missed the prize. It was with such sentiments working unseen of one another in the innermost recesses of their minds, that the three made a movement towards returning into the house. They found Mrs. Pitt and Mrs. Chatfield still chatting, and on a motion that it was time to get home, the older ladies rose to their feet to take leave of each other. Indira announced to Mrs. Pitt that the ladies of her household were coming there that afternoon for the "Nischithartham" or the confirmation of the marriage contract ceremony, and both she and Mrs. Pitt invited the Chatfields to come back

and grace the occasion, to which they heartily consented.

They took leave of one another and had hardly reached the outer gate in a group,—the Pitts accompanying the Chatfields to see them off there—when they were stopped by a carriage turning into the gate, with a young man within followed by a cart laden up to the roof with portmanteaus, boxes, sporting accessories, and a profusion of travelling requisites. It did not require much imagination on the part of Mrs. Pitt to realise that it was her son Arthur that after all was coming home. He alighted from the carriage with an active step as soon as he saw his mother and sister, bowed to the other ladies, and stood at ease on the fringe of the group, a tall well-made bright looking young man, full six feet and a half in his boots and with a fully developed military bearing. His introduction to the company was soon over and the Chatfields were settling down in their carriage to move away. Indira who was to walk up home and who had the privilege of previous acquaintance with Arthur, in taking leave said, "Good-bye, Captain Arthur" to him. "Not Captain yet. I shall be one by the time I come to claim your hand, Indira," replied Arthur. The sound of this passing answer floated on to Agnes Chatfield's ear as their carriage moved away.

It was a brilliant reception that took place later in the afternoon in Mr. "Cadet" Arthur Pitt's house. He took over—or his mother made over to

him—the arrangements of Daisy's wedding as soon as he installed himself as the head of his house, and he at once fell into the spirit of the whole affair both for the novelty and the responsibilities of the thing. Before the appointed hour, Mrs. Pitt indent-ed upon the good services of some of her intimate Hindu matron friends to help her with the advice necessary for her to put the function through, and they did her the kindness of attending in force to act Mrs. Pitt's side in the coming celebration. Miss Daisy was set on a specially prepared seat, and after "Arathi" or the auspicious benediction was anointed in oil and given a perfumed bath. Her feet were touched with saffron, and the mark of vermilion was neatly hinted on her face between the eye-brows. Arthur had come equipped with the bridal "Saries" he was to present her with, and she was dressed gracefully in one, with the border of lace drawn over daintily to veil the rear half of her head. Her tender children of the garden, the jasmines, provided flower enough, for blossoms to bedeck her hair and for the garlands round her neck to give her the solemnity of bridal appearance. At the appointed hour preceded by music and attended with the paraphernalia of trays of powdered saffron and vermilion or "Kunkhum," of betel leaf and nut, carried by gaily dressed servants, the ladies and gentlemen of Rao Bahadur Sadashiv Moropant's household, with their invited friends and neighbours trooped into Mrs. Pitt's house, bringing with them

the rich presents of cloth and ornaments for the intended bride, in full view of the public who had gathered on either side of the road to see the procession pass. In Mrs. Pitt's house the carpets had been spread, and two elderly matrons on Mrs. Pitt's side received the ladies and seated them, whereas Arthur Pitt received and accommodated the gentlemen. Of the invitees on the Pitt's side who attended, were Mrs. and Miss Chatfield and Miss Zelica Begum, the daughter of a Mahomedan grandee who was Mrs. Pitt's neighbour. Daisy was in due course brought into the centre of the group and worthily accommodated. Then when all had been seated, Pandit Sadashiv Moropant moving into a conspicuous position in the hall, placed a whole set of costly ornaments including the diamond necklace of the morning, in a large golden tray, and quite a dozen saris of various attractive hues and patterns in silk and lace before the wondering assembly. The hearty old gentleman announced somewhat too lustily for the occasion that he would make more presents of gold and cloth at the wedding to the child of his adoption, his daughter-in-law, as if to dispel any doubts in the minds of the Pitts, of his possible parsimoniousness on that score. The presents were duly appraised and admired by most in the assembly, and Miss Chatfield so far forgot the "ogreish" look of the Pandit, as to go up to him and put him questions about the diamond necklace and to pronounce that

it was lovely and superb. On behalf of the Rao Bahadur the priest in attendance called on Arthur to signify his determination to give his sister Daisy in holy wedlock to Pandit Gowri Sankar, the eldest son of Pandit Moropant Sadashiv, and proclaimed that the ornaments and dresses before the assembly were to be gifts to Miss Daisy Pitt in that event. Arthur was too amused at his part in the proceedings to respond articulately, but his consent was taken as granted and a contract of marriage between Daisy Pitt and Gowri Sankar Pandit was duly confirmed in the presence of the gathering, to be solemnised in sacramental form in the hour and on the date already fixed in the "Patrika" for the purpose. Then the presents were duly delivered to Daisy and "Arathy" was given to her. Athar and "Pan" were distributed and the party broke up with a lively foretaste of the actual wedding celebrations to commence in the following week.

CHAPTER IV

DAISY'S WEDDING

THE preparations for his son's wedding had during whole weeks previous, occupied the mind of the Rao Bahadur so much that with the whole-hearted response to the immense number of invitations he had given, the morning of the wedding day broke upon a scene of uncommon animation and splendour. The guests were rapidly filling up the immense pavilion that had been raised for the celebrations, and every minute, carriages of all kinds were setting them down at its every gate. Inside it, its floor was one expanse of carpet. It was in all colours; green and blue, woven into the pretty and delightfully artistic devices that had secured renown for the carpet weavers of Cashmere and Ellore from the very ancient times. The guests as they were received and came in, set themselves down on it wherever it pleased them, and in due course ranged themselves into little conversational groups, briskly talking away in all topics that interested them, helping themselves occasionally to the contents of huge silver trays placed in their midst, heaped up with spiced and perfumed "Pan" and "Supari".

Needless to say all of them were in "Dhoti," and the loose upper shawls with which they covered themselves were of costly fabrics, some trimmed in gold, some wholly in lace work, and all in all shades and sorts of colour that struck the fancies of the wearers, the religious character, and the splendour of the occasion. Not the least remarkable feature of the scene was the prettily placed, neat little dot of black or red, low between the eye-brows, on the faces of the lady guests, who cherished them not only as points of a well finished toilette but also as mark of their auspicious state of maiden or married blessedness. In contrast to this, were the broad three bands in ash and the circular wafers in sandal on the faces of the gentlemen. The ladies occupied by themselves one part of the pavilion, away from the quarter which the gentlemen had taken possession of. There they too sat on the floor. Dressed in the best contents of their ward-robcs, costly saris of silk and lace, and of lace and gold, with broad or narrow borders of gold and silver thread, and bodices of materials and in colours, to match, with a display of artistic and resplendent jewellery on their uncovered wrists and ankles, and necks and ears, the ladies' part of the pavilion was a gallery of exquisite faces in a variety of form and expression, talking and smiling happily through a riot and confusion of colour. In the centre of the pavilion a small dais had been raised whereon the bride and the bridegroom and the priest and the

others taking part in the ceremonial were to sit. There were low seats of wooden plank arranged for all of them there. In front of the seats of the bridal pair were placed various sets of dishes and vessels which contained articles of divine worship. There was proper place provided for the site of the sacrificial fire, which was to witness the bride and the bridegroom joining in holy wedlock. On the posts that supported the dais at the four corners were hung big pictures of the Deity adorned with garlands of flowers. The ceiling was all lined in cloth of snowy white, and this was picked off all over in squares, with hanging bunting of red, trimmed with tassels of yellow; and from between the squares were hung huge chandeliers with tinted domes of glass in which little lights twinkled.

But overhead the dais the lighting was of a different kind. Everything within that precinct was sacred and nothing but home made things could be used. The candles that burnt in the other lights of the pavilion were of tallow and therefore could not be touched, and the glass of the domes was not the product of the country. So a million little lamps were lit and they glowed from a million little wicks of twisted cotton from on the edges of burnished brass oil containers dropped by supporting chains from the ceiling overhead. Outside, the huge pavilion was draped and clothed over its tall supporting posts to a restful scheme of colour, and the festoons of evergreens and verdant creepers

that were clustered on them, increased the effect of the tall plantain columns with their heads of long foliage and bunches lashed vertically to them. More than everything, the throngs that gathered were its principal decoration, and in and out of the huge pavilion and its enclosure, people, invited and uninvited, crowded to witness the marriage—the Rao Bahadur and Arthur Pitt with a host of deputies for their respective sides going here, there and everywhere, doing the honours of the hosts among the gathering.

Overnight there had been mighty preparations at Pandit Moropant's house for the progress in procession of the bridegroom to the bride's house. Earlier in the evening a large company, grandly attired assembled at the invitation of the Pandit in the front court of his stately residence amidst the blaze of illuminations and a wonderland of decorations. The majestic dwelling of the bridegroom was picked out in outline by rows of tiny lamps alternating with lines of evergreen leaves strung together along the cornices of the building and from capital to capital of the imposingly shaped pillars of the deep verandas of the house. The heavily carved central doorway of the house in a colour of varnished brown, shimmered in relief against the blaze of light that beat on the polished white of the walls and the columns of the outer veranda. The musical bands in attendance struck up fine airs and began to play lively music, and the

space in the veranda was quickly filled up with huge salvers containing presents to the bride, of garments and dresses, flowers, perfumes, fruits and sweets, sacred saffron and red; and by trains of gaily attired and groomed men and maid-servants who were to carry them. In a short while, the bridegroom crossed the threshold and appeared in the centre of the passage supported by a strong party of his women relatives behind him, ready to move up in procession. There he stood glittering in his bridal dress, a flowing robe of silk inter-woven with tissues of gold and silver up to his ankles, with customary Indian shoes, and a big turban on his head shining in relief against the brown outline of the doorway and the faces of those that were pressing through it behind him. Costly necklaces of gold, set with precious stones were hung round his neck; and there was a bright coloured sash on his robe drawn lightly round the waist; and his broad forehead, with his distinctive caste mark between the long, thick, black eyebrows over a pair of fine, big, soft eyes, high nose, and the well-shaped features of the face, attracted a dignified and beaming expression of the countenance, which was enhanced by the beauty and brilliance of the diamond ear-rings which he wore on the lobes of the ears. Presently two little maids handed flowers and a garland, which he put over his neck, and two matrons moved up before him with a tray of coloured water and waved it gently without spilling the

contents in a vertical ring-like motion, to ward him from the evil eye through the forthcoming celebrations. The bridegroom dropped a piece of gold during the performance into the tray, as a present to the ladies that held it, and they appropriated it and threw out the water. Now there was a general movement towards forming up the procession outside the gate of the house, and as soon as the bridegroom settled himself in the saddle over his finely caparisoned grey horse as the central figure of the procession, the rest fell into a line and began the march. At the head, the musicians of the band made a brave display with their variegated uniforms and pipes of silver and gold, and behind them the male portion of the company ranged itself. Behind the bridegroom, the ladies marched, and the retinue of servants carrying the trays containing the presents, brought up the rear. On the flanks, the light and torch bearers marshalled themselves, while the men in charge of the fireworks to be displayed along the road moved backwards and forwards along the sides, lighting displays at frequent intervals. Some of the helpers with baskets of 'Pan and Supari' slung on their left forearms and others with flowers and perfumes in their hands went on distributing betel and nut not only in the procession itself but also to passers-by to whom the honours were thought to be due. Thus, bands playing, lights shining, and fire works blazing, the procession slowly accomplished its journey to the bride's house at

a late hour, where duly received by the bride's people, broke up in due course, and the guests retired for the night.

Before the day broke, every one was up and there was a stir of general excitement. Lots had to be done before the bridal pair could be prepared to take their seats on the marriage dais at the appointed hour, and the needed arrangements were gone about, with feverish celerity. The bride and the bridegroom had to be given their auspicious baths and dressed and adorned for the public ceremony. The bridegroom had also to go through an elaborate ritual for the renunciation of his state of studentship or 'Brahmacharya,' and preparation for the assumption of the stage of house-holder or 'Grahastha'. And all this was done in good time as keeping to the appointed moment for the time of tying the holy knots was the matter of prime importance. The scene in the pavilion that morning, a little while before the 'Muhurtham,' has already been described. The 'Muhurtham' time was rapidly approaching, when there was a sudden hush of silence in the large assembly and all eyes centred upon the youthful bridal pair who were led up stately to their appointed places on the raised centre of the pavilion. Both were dressed in cloths coloured in saffron, as this is an essential incident indicative of auspiciousness in all Hindu ceremonials. Miss Daisy looked charming like a framed picture. Her fair person was draped in her yellow saree, part of

which descended in ample folds from her waist to her heels, just revealing the bright circlets of gold in chainlet workmanship of exquisite skill with tassels of beads, round her ankles; while the loose remaining length of the same garment was dexterously thrown over her left shoulder with the richly worked broad hem just falling over the slope to hang loosely over the back, with an effective display of a broad shining border of lace and gold over a full jacket highly collared and buttoned at the front. Upon the collar, she wore a necklace of sparkling gems, with a pendant dropping just over the pit of the throat; and over her jacket and on the right front of her person, costly necklaces and jewellery were half exposed to view. She wore little glittering diamond nose-screws on either side of her well-cut nose, and her pretty face with (inevitable for the occasion) a broad round dot of red, low in the centre, her big lustrous eyes, shone with a frequent play of nervous look. Her hair fresh from the bath, and without the aid of artificial dressings forbidden when sitting for a sacred ceremony, was parted in the middle and brushed down on either side in zones of wavy black, and drawn and gathered in a loose knot behind into which a few blossoms of white jasmines and lilies were stuck. And there she stood, a tall, slender and fair maiden, well-poised and daintily attired, with a head of glorious hair and a face spread over with an expression of happy nervousness;

her heart swelling with the fullness of the solemnity of the new state of life into which she was passing, by grasping the hand of the youthful person by her side as her lover, companion, guide and master in holy wedlock. Young Gowri Sankar, though older in years, did not also fail to betray a slight nervousness born of the occasion. He was also dressed in a 'Dhoti' coloured in saffron and he covered the upper part of his body loosely with a richly embroidered shawl of the same colour. He wore a simple garland of white flowers round his neck; and the diamond earrings streaming rays of colours on his cheeks and a ring of red and blue stones on his right little finger, were the only ornaments on his person. He stood close—not too close—but close enough by the side of his future wife to make her feel that from that moment the shadow of his protection was over her, and the soft melting looks which he threw at her from a countenance betokening a reserve of strength of character, showed that he was taking her life into his bosom. The bridal pair then offered, standing with folding hands, the customary salutation to the assembly and sat down on their low seats of plank intended for them. Then the signal passed for the commencement of the ceremonies from the priests who were seated in front of the bridal couple, and the musical bands, gave the start to the proceedings with performing in perfect style a few snatches of divine music. The

priests then took up the cue with a loud chant of Vedic hymns which acquired further impressiveness from their very austere religious appearance. They were Brahmanas, men of God, whose only avocation in life was learning and whose only delight was to make it available for all those that desired it; and with the tri-fold horizontal bands of sacred ash on their wide foreheads, heavy garlands of 'Rudrakshas' or sacred beads, hanging on their breasts from their necks, their 'Dhoties' arranged in regulation folds before and behind, and upper cloths similarly in folds wound tightly over the "Dhoti" round their waists and bundles of blades of sacred grass and twigs for use at the ceremony, grasped in their hands, and above all with the illumination of culture in their countenance and dignity of demeanour, they indeed appeared revered. Erect in their places and facing the assembly right and left, they poured forth invocations of all the deities to bless the purpose before them, in a full throated delivery with systematised modulations of tone that passed through the silence and filled the pavilion from end to end. This done, they resumed their seats; and lit the sacrificial fire in front of the wedding couple. To the regular accompaniment of the appropriate hymns sung by the priests, the bride and the bridegroom made offerings of ghee and rice in the spirit of the ancient Vedic religion to the great deities, through their general carrier, the God of Fire, for blessings and prosperity and guidance in

the proper performance of the prescribed conduct both in respect of themselves and of the rest of the community of which they were units in the new state of householdership they were about to assume. Some more sundry ceremonial followed and the core of the wedding ceremony was touched. The priests again rose in their places and published to the assembly in the language and form prescribed, that the bride and the bridegroom of their respective ancestries were to be allied in holy matrimony at the moment fixed, and inviting any challenge or objection to the intended alliance on the score of any overlooked prohibitions of relationship or otherwise according to the Sastras. It was not to be expected that according to Hindu practices any surprise on this score would meet the assembly as all such points would have been carefully gone into a long time before ever any match is conclusively settled. No objection forthcoming, the summons went forth for the person who was to give away the bride, and Arthur dressed for the nonce as the bluest blooded Hindu stepped in with alacrity and sat beside his sister. Then followed the most impressive part. A basket filled to the brim with corn was placed and Arthur was asked to seat himself on the top of the corn. He was asked to take his sister close to him and pass his right arm round her as his father's proxy. Arthur with his right arm round his sister took a few betels and nuts and a cocoanut in his hands and Gowri Sankar moved up

in front of him; and with an oblation of water poured into Gowri Sankar's joined palms, Arthur placed the betels and nuts in his hands as a mark that he honored him and with the simple present of a cocoanut, he made over the person and the career of his sister to be nourished, cherished and respected by him. The bands burst out at this juncture with a fanfare of music, and it was indeed a relief to the assembly from the tenseness of that spectacle. Gowri Sankar having now accepted the bride, they were seated again in their former places and after some more proceedings that followed, they were asked to sit opposite to each other with the sacrificial fire between. The priests then pronounced their responses which the bride and the bridegroom recited in unison as far as they concerned each of them in the presence of the eternal fire, vowing fidelity, affection and reverential co-operation with each other. The yoke of new responsibilities the bride came under, was duly symbolised, and Gowri Sankar rising and bending over her tied the 'Thali' or the sacred string round her neck in token that he had taken her to wife. Next they rose together and hand in hand paced seven steps together, symbolising that they had started stepping their common life together with the sacred fire to bear witness; and Pandit Gowri Sankar and Daisy Pitt became man and wife to the remainder of their natural lives. The solemn ceremony was over. Thereafter it was an

outburst of rejoicings and congratulations on the consummation of the happy event, for the remainder of the sitting. Presents of valuable cloths, gold, jewels and money were brought to the wedded couple by friends, well-wishers and others who interested themselves in their prosperity and were first handed up to the officiating priests. They received them, blessed them and passed them on to the young couple with the felicitations of the donors. The presents did not partake of the nature of the various odds and ends required for the setting up of a new home as the young couple had already a home of the family to which they belonged. Matrons came and blessed the bridal pair, and with honouring the guests with distribution of perfumes, and 'Pan Supari' the ritual of the marriage ceremony was over.

CHAPTER V

THE FATEFUL BANQUET

INDIRA DEVI was sitting in the front parlour of her father's mansion to receive the lady guests for the night's banquet. She was looking a picture come out of its frame, in a Benares Sari virtually a mass of gold, and a repletion of adornment full unto satiety even for a young maiden of her years floating in the sunshine of her parent's affections. The rings on her fingers shone brilliantly, and the diamond bangles and the jewels on her wrists flashed with every movement of her hands. Her neck was a blaze of light with line on line of necklaces and drops of gold and gems, and the broader surface of the rich diamond 'Kammals' in her ears was breaking up the light anon into beams of the prismatic colours. There was a smile on her lips, half playful, half shy, from the bubbling vivacity of her natural temperament freezing under the nervousness born of the novelty of her situation as a little hostess; yet still the looks from under her broad eye-lids with long lashes were gleaming out of her dark eyes the delicious mischief that had made her so inevitable an associate to the large

number of her school mates, and a fascinating friend of those older than herself who had the privilege of being known to her. Her hair descended in curls somewhat low on her forehead, and the grey moonlight complexion of her face was relieved by the customary dot of bright, black between the eye brows, a little over where the ridge of her high and regular nose took off. There she sat looking like a little queen before a table weighed down with a mound of flowers, nosegays, and garlands, heaps of betel and nut, rows of rose water sprinklers and Attar-holders, and the other accessories requisite for a polite reception, in the middle of her gorgeously furnished hall over which a soft mellow light was dripping as from a flood, ready to hold her Court as the company arrived.

"Sitting dressed up for your wedding" chaffed Agnes Chatfield who was the first to arrive, as she rushed rustling in her yellow spangled blue Benares Sari and white jacket to where Indira was sitting. Agnes had not dressed herself in this Indian costume any time before; but she wanted now to please her fancy and designed it to blend with the dress effects of the Indian company which she was joining that night. "Not yet, please," tinkled Indira in a tone of imprecation to the sally of her friend. "O yes—I forget—; Arthur is not Captain yet," spouted Agnes, with the readiness of a jet of water from a released fountain. There was the echo of Arthur's answer on the day of his return home, to Indira's

accosting him as Captain Arthur when they all met him at the gate, still ringing in her ears in a subdued fullness of passion "I shall be one before I come to claim your hand". There had been a strong dash of discontent in her feelings since then, and she wondered in herself so very often what was there in this strange country that an English girl with an education finished in England, like herself, and made proficient in all the accomplishments of modish society, should have failed so far to strike the heart of a possible English or Indian mate for herself; and this provoked her to the higher effort of cleverness in her second sally as above at the expense of the younger girl. But she was soon to be punished. Indira was young but had a mind equally alert. "Say Agnes, you are tacking on lovers to every one of us as you choose; but how long are you going to be over, catching your own young fellow, my great lady," rolled out Indira's retort in a tone of studied slowness, her eyes beaming with a spirit of delicious mischief. This was a dart through Agnes' heart; and Indira plainly saw how cruelly she had hit Agnes as her face gradually fell and was gathering gloom. But she retrieved the situation easily in a trice. "Here, Agnes; Arthur Pitt is coming. How much he might like you in your Indian dress. No, come by my side. I will start him on the run to make out who you are. See, look at Kamaluddin the languishing young Nabob, with Zelica hanging on amorously by his side; mind

you, this is a wedding feast and more weddings must be planned for us that we have more feasts. You shall present me your lover to night before we part," she said and beckoned Agnes to a seat next to herself but slightly screened by the shadow of the high chair in which she was sitting.

By now, Arthur Pitt had gracefully stalked the length of the reception hall between the gentlemen's part of it where he entered and the place where Indira had set herself. Zelica Begum and her cousin Nabob Kamaluddin Quraishi from the neighbouring Mahomedan magnate's mansion, Indira's close friends, also arrived at the same time, and Zelica still not having got over her feeling of timorousness after her emancipation from the 'burka,' wished to go to the ladies' quarter; and so Arthur, Kamaluddin and Zelica made a beeline towards Indira conversing together, and presented themselves before her. Zelica and Nabob Kamaluddin were shown their seats where they settled down, but Arthur stood where he arrived and made a deep bow to Indira. His tall and poised figure dressed in a suit of light brown and fine black shoes, his favourite rose-bud in the low-cut lapel of his coat, a thick hand-stick hanging by the broad curve of its head on his left fore-arm, and over all with his well-brushed hair and quiet dignity of countenance, he stood an expression of real masculine form and grace before her. "I salute your majesty,

the Queen of Flowers," he said, making a deep courtesy suiting the action to his words.

"What temerity, what slight, ever heard of a subject presenting himself to his queen without his wife. Lese Majeste—Lese Majeste."

"I beg gracious pardon. My queen is too hard on me. I am too good a subject to own allegiance to any other but my queen."

"None of your double meaning conceits, Hush—Hush. We counsel you to take a wife—and what is life without a wife—nay, command you to find your partner even before we rise. We are holding a wedding court, and shall very much rejoice to hear of as many weddings in prospect as you may be willing or know to tell us about. Pray, be seated meanwhile," said Indira.

Zelica was obviously getting perturbed. A trouble of her own had fastened itself on her heart. Kama-luddin Quraishi was the son of her father's brother, and according to the laws of the Islamic religion, was the most proper person for her to marry. They had grown together in the same home and in the bosom of the same family, and led a life in common of absolute mutual dependence in which their individual feelings and expectations were inextricably and completely intertwined. To have thought of their separation in life, was in terms to think of the dismemberment of both. They had wealth; they had position; much, too much wealth for the lavish living of uncurbed caprice of two young lovers

to leave an impression upon, and a position second to none in their part of the country. For, Nabob Zahiruddin Qurashi, the head of the family and Zelica's father, bore with him the line of descent from an up-country chieftain who was compensated with a respectable pension for the resumption of a large landed estate after the Mutiny, and he amply made even, this misfortune of his ancestor by the amassing of huge profits in colossal business transactions with the Government during the Great War. Kamaluddin was to Zelica, first her older play-mate during the years of tender childhood; next, after she came to withdraw herself more and more into the seclusion behind the 'pardah,' and he trotted out as a school boy enlarging his acquaintance with the delights of children's land, he became her taster and patron who furnished her liberally with all the good things he himself stuffed his pockets with or tasted; and as they grew into adolescence, and the subject of their necessary union as husband and wife was constantly talked of in their presence as is habitual in oriental families, her mind got filled with thoughts of him, the only young man she knew, and she began to lean on him as the protector and comforter of her life. It was thus, through his persuasion and at his bidding, that she recently threw off the 'burka,' a wild and extraordinary step on the part of a high class Mahomedan girl, quietly like an obeying child, and entered on an school course at the local public

school; and the propriety or impropriety of so bold a step had not even for a moment engaged her thoughts for the reason that her simple mind accepted for her the role of being a passive subject to the desires and injunctions of her intended husband. Her own father had too much lived in the past to endorse the social innovations of his nephew, but he lived enough in the present to make a note of the movement of the times, and not to deny to the young people the choice of ways which they thought was good for them. After she began to attend school, she came to know Indira more, and develop a sisterly intimacy with her. As for Kamaluddin, as was the practice in the last generation with young men in easy circumstances, more particularly with Mahomedan young men, who disliked the milling at an Indian College and the irrational rigor of the examinations of an Indian University, he went to England, passed through the course at the Inns of Court and became a Barrister-at-Law. Whether his stay in England increased his stores of learning or not, it imbued him with a knowledge of her people and their general conditions of life at first hand, and this provoked him to turn his nose against the general superiority of air which they assume when residing in this country of ancient peoples. The piercing scent of its own democratic conceptions turned his head giddy and he turned home with an implacable feeling that a stranger was in his

household determined to make himself comfortable without much thought for his convenience, and with insufferable airs; and a mist of imagination rose before his mind when he contemplated the matter, about the ways and means in which he and his countrymen could secure a favourable place for themselves under the sun in their own country. He revolved ideas of self-government and nationalism in his mind; and nationalism was the lever with which he hoped to raise the structure of self-government. And, nationalism was not a thing so easy of creation amongst his own apathetic peoples! So he had latterly been somewhat keen on avoiding the entanglements of ordinary worldly cares, and dedicating himself solely for the work which was appealing to his sense of duty. He had spoken in this strain once or twice to his destined bride, and this had so filled her with alarm, that the solitary prop, leaning on which she grew, was falling away, and a dismay about her whole future, as if she was standing on the brink of an ocean. It was some such volume of feeling that surged up in the mind of poor Zelica at the tearing talk of weddings and betrothals, and her simple over-worked soul could not contain the wretchedness which through the possibility of Kamaluddin dropping her, had overtaken her. "Indira, Indira," she burst out regardless of the playing at Court which was in progress, "O Indira, how quick I should have reported to you of my own wedding.

But Kamaluddin is disagreeable; he says he wants to be a fakeer. "O dear Indira, what may I do". This was a note of tragedy from real life which required a treatment, that in the same breath, should comfort the dear friend from whom it came, and fit in as well, with the enacting of the little drama into which it was so unexpectedly introduced. There was a pause in the flow of Indira's wits, but only for a moment. She turned her eyes full on Kamaluddin's face first; and next looking at Zelica addressed her and said, in the tone of dignity fitting the royal part she was acting, "Fair subject, be it so. What may fakeers come into a Royal Court for but for a present. I present thee fair lady to him; and you" turning to Kamaluddin "we command you shall not refuse this gift from your Queen of flowers". There was hilarity once again in the little company, and the joy spread on their faces for relief from a really awkward passage; and poor Zelica felt really soothed and re-assured after this.

The force of the queenly behest was still hanging over Arthur's head; and he was expanding with the spirit of the proceedings. There was only the other girl in the shadow of the throne, and he had to make overtures to her and woo her. It was all Agnes could do to keep her lips tight pressing down the bubbling of her natural vivacity, so as not to discover herself too soon; and for the same reason she could not venture to leave the kindly

protection of the shadow of Indira's chair lest her face clearly show itself. Arthur gallantly paced up to her and fell down on his knees in the conventional attitude of adoration. He rummaged his whole stock of complimentary phraseology and language of love, and literally rained endearing phrases and epithets of melting language upon the pretty figure before him; but for all that, there was no response from her, not so much as even a parting of the lips in an attempt to answer, and in effect she sat still like a painted picture before him. He thought he had not met this Indian looking girl before; and though joking a little even with a mere acquaintance was privileged on an occasion like this, he could not with propriety approach her beyond a particular limit of distance to discover for himself the truth of all this mummery.

Meanwhile, the continuous titter of the laughter of his friends was growing on his nerves. He began seriously to doubt whether after all the figure to which he had been paying such assiduous court all the time was a living beauty or only an exquisite statue dressed up so bewitchingly for playing a huge practical joke on him. He could not stand the situation any longer, and taking his courage into both his hands and in a voice betokening exasperation, he addressed himself to her and said, "Speak, lady, and answer: otherwise, I take your silence as consent and shall bear you away out of this hall as my bride lawfully won." Agnes

understood the dead earnestness of the man, and realising the desperateness of the situation, thought it was unsafe to keep silent any longer, lest he carry her away in his arms, and cause a big diversion to the whole of the assembling company; and promptly opening her lips said in a tone of low whisper, "Do not be so rash as that now."

The voice and the language revealed the identity of the person who had so long taken the rise out of him, and I will not undertake to tell you, indulgent reader, whether at the close, Arthur did not feel that Agnes Chatfield was not ravishingly delicious in her Indian attire or that there might be some meaning in the emphasis she laid on the "now" in her answer. Enough to say the little company had added merriment through all this banter and joking; and as the female guests began to arrive in more numbers, Arthur Pitt and Nabob Kamaluddin moved out of the party, agreeably to the conventions of Hindu gatherings, to join the gentlemen at the other end of the hall.

Here it was that more serious thoughts were convulsing the minds of the assembled guests and those assembling fast. It was not merely the high status of the host nor the likely splendour of the reception of such a warm-hearted gentleman as Rao Bahadur Moropant that was responsible for the cheerful response on the part of such a crowd of guests. There was added zest from the uniqueness of the event, and every one speculated on the

manifold side issues that were likely to come into being on the occasion of this general dinner. In India, the most laborious part of the programme of a wedding ceremony, is the interminable dinners; the parties feasting themselves, feasting the rich, feasting the high and feasting the low and the poor, on so many occasions, and on scales corresponding with the opulence of the families brought into alliance. The poor of the town had been fed sumptuously many times during the celebrations; and a gift of food being the most satisfying, at the same time the least costly, the fed depart fully gratified, constantly thinking of the kindness of their patron, and the volume of simultaneous good wishes of such a host is believed to bring blessings to the provider of the feasts. The respectable section of the community had to be invited to partake in his own rejoicings, and a gentleman like the Pandit who did not know how to stint or conceive of things on a meagre scale, issued his respectful invitations for the evening's dinner, literally broadcast. His friends among the Hindus of all castes and shades of religion, and from among the Mahomadans, and the Christians, all very agreeably accepted the invitation; and ordinarily, according to the established custom of the country there would have been no difficulty in arranging for their service, by providing separate accommodation for them in groups, according to their castes, and without wounding the susceptibilities of any one by obliging him to sit and eat

in sight of another who had not the privilege to look on. Individuals till now had broken, or had not scrupulously maintained, the observance of communal prohibitions about interdining, only on the sly, or with a publicity which their respective communities had declined to notice as instances too casual and solitary to affect their established usages; but it was a case of representative and large sections on the present occasion, and every one of them was curious as to what attitude the rest of them were going to adopt. The titter of the conversation at every table round which the guests disposed themselves centred round this topic, and notes were being passionately exchanged as to how one or other had to behave himself when the matter came to a push. The talk spread from table to table, and the conversation became general, when one elderly Mudaliar guest, scrupulously orthodox, with a garland of the sacred Thulasi beads round his neck and a 'Namam' mark flaming across his forehead—a toilet which he underwent on returning home and casting off his office dress which had been polluted by the touch or proximity of all and sundry while he was in the office—said "Surely, you do not expect me to sit along and eat with a Naidu whose mother or grand-mother was for aught I know a public woman" in reply to an enquirer from the other end of the hall.

"Would you object to being placed next a Brahmana," an estimable low caste Hindu Christian

convert chimed from somewhere in the middle of the room taking up the thread.

"A Brahmin is not the same thing as a pariah," answered the Mudaliar retortingly.

"May be or may not be; that is not the point. Would the Brahmin like being placed next to you," persisted the questioner.

"No reason why he should not. See, how religious I am. The secrets of religion are not solely for his keeping. I live the life ordained for a Hindu as he does. I dress, I eat as he does. I am as strict a vegetarian as he is. I probe into the mysteries of religion as deeply as he does. I am as good as he in every way. Why should he not like? Except it be for his arrogance or pride of birth. Well, for birth," protested the Mudaliar.

"Why would not the selfsame arguments affect the comparison between you and the pariah, may I know?" asked another gentleman of the company.

"I agree with our Mudaliar friend," quietly remarked a Brahmana who was intently following the course of the conversation; "but the fault of his argument is that he is not willing to grant to the Brahmana the same freedom of thought that he himself assumes. If our friend thinks he is the Brahmana's equal, there is no reason why the Brahmana should not think he is not. The truth is that we are constantly beating up a lot of froth in this controversy." "If it is a point of self-respect," continued the Brahmana, "it is a point of

self-respect all round. Every one of us is at liberty to think we are better than any other, but none of us has a right to quarrel if others do not accept us at our own estimate."

"Well said," echoed the Christian who had set the ball rolling with his poser to the Mudaliar gentleman. "It is only wise that persons whose sentiments are likely to come into conflict thus shall avoid fields of common activity where they are likely to arise."

"Indeed!" This ejaculation of a withering sneer somewhat in stentorian tone was hurled by one of a party of young gentlemen who had monopolised a small table in another corner of the room, where they were discoursing on the essential necessity of inter-dining and inter-marrying among the peoples of India for the formation of the Indian Nation, and assessing the importance of the mixed marriage under the auspices of which they had met for a general dinner. They kept an ear open with contemptuous attention to what the "ancient blocks" were talking, somewhat away from them, but when the last of their observations promised to settle their conversation with a conclusion nugatory of their own convictions, they thought the propagation of such mischief had to be countered, and interposed in the emphatic manner described above. "It is due to attitude like this that slavery is writ large across our faces. It will be to this that it will never be wiped out. If each man withdraws into

himself and avoids the rest for the one thousand and one considerations that crop up eternally on account of our differences of religion, caste, diet, etc., how on earth are we to combine for common purposes and effectuate them? This is why we should be in a perpetual fever to betake to inter-dining and inter-marriage in our peoples, to enable us to uproot our little differences, to live a common life, or to at least muster a common voice to demand that our political pupilage shall cease. Do you realise, Sirs, that our inner consciousness that we are not free shrivels up the sprouting bud of the idea of an expanded existence for us," thumped down the youthful interposer.

"We all know, Sir, too what is good for our country; and we have lived longer than you," came the answer in a chorus from the group to whom the earlier conversation was confined, and who took the last speaker's observations as a reflection on them collectively. "You speak evidently in the manner of the old maxim 'we think our fathers fools' but remember also your wiser sons may call you so. Every one has thought and been thinking about for generations about these two quack remedies of intermarriage and inter-dining as a panacea for everything in our unfortunate country; but those who suggest them do not seem to realise the difficulties of applying them to our conditions. We Hindus are a spiritually-minded race. That is our objective in this life; or the objective of

every Hindu individual is his own psychic evolution or the evolution of his own individual soul to achieve ultimate emancipation. The endeavour towards this end is more or less of the 'every man unto himself' kind, and is incapable of union or jointness in effort. Each man submits himself to a method of disciplining himself, which may be unsuitable to his fellow, and it is legitimate for him to form his own notion of the stage of evolution at which he feels he has arrived. So he shuns men and things which he believes will detract from the level he has attained. Abnormal cases apart, he can fairly presume that men of his own caste are persons who have started with the same amount of evolution 'fund' as it were which every one of them can enrich or deplete for himself according to his inclination" asserted our Mudaliar friend leading the conversation for his group. "Have you heard, Sir," he continued, "ever, I mean, of the science called Eugenics of which the West is making so much and which bases its teaching of race regeneration on the principle of well assortment of natures in marriage. This promiscuous jumbling up which you dignify with the name of inter-marriage, sir, is as our peoples are at present circumstanced conducive neither to the advancement of the individual nor of the community. Politics is a by-concern to the Hindu, and inter-dining or intermarriage as political expedients will never catch."

"O yes, O yes; it is always these same arguments. They are so generously trotted out whenever the only two practicable expedients for the construction of our nation are mentioned. None is so blind who will not see. You do not even take the trouble to consider how these things have worked in other countries and in similar circumstances. Yes, the only way to silence the objecting Hindū is through the means of the legislature. He does not know to resist a law and will reconcile himself to any repugnance provided it comes to him in the shape of a law. We shall compel him yet to do many things to which of his free will he will offer eternal opposition," crowed the young desperadoes.

The conversation did not show signs of flagging but on the other hand grew warmer. Starting out of a simple matter of seats at dinner, it enlarged itself into a discussion of the social jealousies between the higher and lower castes, and gradually tailed off into a political controversy which promised to grow very bitter. These tendencies were put a stop to by the timely appearance of the host, the Rao Bahadur, who sweating under the cares of the appropriate arrangements for the dinner for his guests, came up to them, swung his arms high over his head, and exclaiming "Namaskarams" with joined hands requested one and all of them to make a move into the dinner hall.

It was a time of untiring effort on the part of the Rao Bahadur and his house-hold to get up the

dinner service during that evening when the guests were assembling in the drawing room of his mansion. In accordance with the custom of the country, the culinary arrangements were left in the hands of the Brahmins, of whose hands most castes of the country do not object to receive cooked food, and as the host was himself a Brahmin and the cooks Brahmins too, it need not be said that the dinner was purely and wholly vegetarian. But what a wealth of dishes and courses had been prepared! Sweets, cakes, puddings into which maunds of sugar, ghee, almonds, cashew and currants, "chara" nuts and pistachios, cocoanut and candy had been worked, and spiced with nutmeg, cardamum, fragrant saffron and rose-water; sweet halvas, prepared rices, pulihoras and pongals, poisams, sambars and rasams, vegetable slices fried in ghee; vegetables cut and cooked with pulses in a hash; popdums, pickles and vadiams of numberless variety, chatnies and salads in lemon or tamarind and salt, hot and sharp, seasoned with mustard, fried pulse, and assafoetida, milks and curds, vadais simple and vadais stewed in curds, pagodas and sevs, and preparations in numberless variety, out of Bengal gram and flour into which ginger, coriander and condiments and other seasoning were mixed mellowing the taste of salt and chilly and fried in ghee; and a multitude of side dishes and entrees which the art of a Brahmin chef alone can perfect. A small army of cooks had been at preparing and perfecting the various good

things since the morning, and the good Rao Bahadur and the ladies of the house-hold were constantly in and out the kitchen rushing supplies and superintending without even time to breathe. For, did he not mention that the meal was to be at 8 p.m. sharp?; and at 8 p.m. sharp it had to be as a protest and good example against the laxity that had crept into the management of this essential social institution among the Hindu community. From the evening hour, a number of anterooms had been cleaned, watered and lighted. Low seats of plank in lines, each with a broad plate of plantain leaf spread in front, and a silver lota placed at the side were ranged on the floor alongside the walls in every room, leaving spacious courts between, wherein the waiters could move freely, and high lamp-stands of chased and burnished brass, with lights burning, could be placed as ornaments in the centre. Waiters and attendants in the glow of a series of purificatory baths, and in clothes washed and dried secure from even a breath of defilement, were placed in position in every one of them with huge trays piled over with the creations of the kitchen, to serve and wait on the guests accommodated therein. Caldrons of warm water were placed here and there at points of convenience in the long corridor, with servants in attendance; and vessel-fuls were handed up to the guests to wash their hands and feet as they came in, with clean linen to wipe.

In the spacious drawing room which the Rao Bahadur had designed to be the pride of his mansion, tapestries of jessmine and rose were hung on the walls. The piles of costly carpet in it on which the foot sank as on growing grass were brushed and re-spread on the floor. A few sofas and occasional chairs were set up here and there for the comfort of those whose transformed habits would not let them seat like the others on the floor. At appointed places and within easy access of the guests in all parts of the room, fine marble top tables were placed whereon big silver bowls of perfumed sandal, rose-water sprinklers made of gold, attar boxes, silver baskets of flowers and big silver trays heaped with prepared nut and tender pan for the guests to chew, were placed. Here, there and all over, perfumed sticks stuck in bunches in boughs of dwarf trees wrought in silver and placed on pretty marble cosies were burning out smoke of exquisite scent pervading the whole room, and not the least the hundred and one wants of the Veena musicians engaged to provide the evening's entertainment and who are apt to be squeamish on these occasions were attended to. With the exacting appeals of other innumerable and miscellaneous matters incidental to a large reception, it was no wonder that Mrs. Sadasiv and the Rao Bahadur, the hostess and the host, breathed a sigh of relief when, by the appointed hour, they felt they could announce dinner to the assembled guests.

When the Rao Bahadur was inviting the guests to their dinner seats, as has already been narrated, the embers of the controversy that his appearance had only stilled, sparkled out again at the table where the young nationalists were, and it could be seen that they were at perfecting some plan. What it was will presently appear.

The guests rose in response to the summons of the host and dressing themselves for the meal, filed along the corridor, where they were politely shown into the rooms reserved for them according to their castes and religions. Every one went into his appropriate place with a good cheer and with a regard to the fine feelings of his host who had not spared himself to give them his heartiest reception. Not even the Mudaliar nor his opponents in the controversy showed inclination to trespass into reservations of the other castes; and in a short time, every guest was in his appointed place. But those who did not care for the observance of these traditional scruples were a body by themselves and they all chose to sit at one table in a separate room; and in this body, were some of the occupants of the small table round which the ideas of nationalism and the welding of the nation were, as we have already seen, raging hot.

The service of the food and drinks was set into motion with great alacrity, and the guests in all parts of the great house fell to discussing the dishes and partaking of them with great gusto.

adding the pleasures of conversation to those of the palate. The meal was fairly half over everywhere, when suddenly the noise of a commotion and a high-pitched quarrel somewhere about the vicinity of the kitchen spread all over the place. Every one stopped eating and strained his ears to make out what it was all about, when the noises came nearer into the corridor, and some of the nationalist guests burst into the various rooms with the service trays in their hands trying to take a hand in the service and distribution of the food, closely followed by the regular cooks and waiters who were scuffling to pull off the trays and prevent their intrusion. The meaning of the whole thing dawned on the minds of the guests who were yet before their leaves and when they saw it was Nawab Kamaluddin, a pariah christian and a squad of low-caste persons who rushed in to serve the food, they left their leaves and rose with a swish and broke out into the corridor. The scene that followed was one of indescribable confusion. Dishes and trays pulled and being re-pulled from one another's hands; enraged guests, cooks and servants in a white heat of passion and the intruders mixed up in fighting knots here and there; the noise of falling trays and utensils from the hands of the fighters, the food, the eatables and the dainties scattered in heaps all over; the leavings of unfinished meals and provisions served in plenty on the leaf plates in every room, the guests pellmell, some trying to make

their exit without any ceremony out of every available outlet, some passing and re-passing to gaze with astonishment upon this scene of disorder, some more, gathering in companies here and there discussing the disgraceful though well-intentioned impudence of the ardent young men who knocked out the happiness of a generous host by creating a scene of humiliation and chaos in his own house, and the possible developments in respect of the community at large. An atmosphere of sadness enveloped what was a little while ago a scene of brightness, pleasure and bubbling of high spirit. There was none but did think in the terms of the severest condemnation of the conspirators who smashed up the happiness of a fine evening.

The Rao Bahadur and his lady were simply beside themselves with grief as they looked on the occurrence, Thy tried to restore order as best as they could as soon as the trouble started; but as the situation developed much beyond their power they gave it up and let things take their own course. They had both been looking upon this coming occasion with pride, and desired and designed to give the grandest reception to their vast circle of friends and acquaintance. They had been working at the arrangements for days previously, and when they completed the last bit in the evening and saw the large gathering crowding into their gorgeous reception hall with their only and favourite daughter Indira Devi doing the honours of the

reception, their hearts swelled with joy and they thought that the consummation of their social pride was come. They could hardly think that an hour hence it would be their lot to face the humiliation of their invited guests departing from their house only half fed, themselves too much pained to talk the matter over with any, through no fault of theirs but through the acts of a few who broke their hospitality. They could do nothing but to drink the gall to its bitterest dregs and let matters alone. The aftermath was soon over. The gathering cleared and the Rao Bahadur and his lady retired, leaving the servants to clear up the premises and wind up the function.

Of those of the family who looked upon the scene of devastation, Indira Devi was the most silent and intent spectator. The scene touched her as it could have touched none other. Her head swam with reflections and ideas which decided her whole future. What they were we shall know in the sequel.

CHAPTER VI

ARTHUR'S DEPARTURE

ARTHUR could not meet Indira that evening after the banquet, to take her leave to go, as he saw her deep in grief and not in a mood to be talked to; nor was he himself inclined to meet her under the circumstances. The pathos of a brilliant undertaking wrecked, stirred him deeply; and his own feelings were also too strong for words. He felt however it was incumbent he should take leave of his hosts, but both the host and the hostess were not to be seen. He thought he could make up for it by seeing their daughter and telling her he was going. But he found Indira was so wholly absorbed in herself that he thought he could make no impression. So he made up his mind to leave without doing the courtesy of seeing any one then and departed thinking of making amends at the earliest opportunity.

So it was, he turned his footsteps towards the house of his sister and Indira early one morning 3 or 4 days later. He could not find time to go earlier as he had to leave town during the interval

to transact some official business in connection with his approaching departure to England, and his pre-occupations to ready himself for his journey left him little time or thought for anything else. Now that they were over, and he had timed to start the next afternoon, he thought of paying his visit to Moropant's family, and accordingly arrived at their place.

He found the Rao Bahadur and Mrs. Moropant in their usual places in their anteroom in their house, the Rao Bahadur just come in after his morning ablutions and worship, and his lady giving attention to some item of domestic management. She too as was required of a Hindu matron of her age had already performed her bath and worshipped the sacred "Tholasi" in the back-yard and by the time the Rao Bahadur had finished the pooja of the family God, joined him in prayers, accepted the 'Theertham' or consecrated water given to her by her husband, sipped it, and followed him into the room. As Arthur made his appearance, the old gentleman moved up quickly to him and grasped him by the hand, wishing him a lusty 'good-morning'. "Hallo, Arthur, how do you do?; have not seen you since that evening," said he. Attracted by the sound, the lady looked up, and seeing Arthur, also signalled to him her welcome. Arthur was such a gentleman of good feelings and fine sense of consideration for others, that his heart sank within him to hear of the Rao Bahadur's reference to that

unfortunate evening, and his not having been seen by him since then. He knew it was only a casual observation of the elderly gentleman who was simplicity itself, but it reminded him of his own delinquencies to his new relative, and so fine a gentleman at that. The sadness had not yet worn away from their looks, and Arthur felt the enormity of having delayed his condolences to the couple on what had been come to be regarded by them as a sorrow of no mean magnitude. Arthur with these inconvenient reflections, could only stutter out his salutation to them in reply. "Too busy, uncle; I am going away to-morrow, you know; had to run up to Army Headquarters to draw my allowances and see to one or two things before I left. Could not pick up courage to meet you after the terrible experience that night, uncle. My aunt and you have, I trust, got over the unpleasant memory," said Arthur. "Well, hem, no matter. I am philosophical always, you know; I take things as they come. As for myself, I did it all with the best of kind feelings for my friends and acquaintances, and for myself for the sheer joy of doing a pleasant thing. You see the result was not in my hands; the fates wanted it otherwise. But why did the fools spoil my own happiness and that of the rest under my own roof, I wonder," said the Rao Bahadur. Arthur turned his eyes towards Mrs. Moropant's face to read her thoughts. He saw her lips quiver, but she regained her self-possession in

a moment ; and with the expression in her face of a vexation suffered, she slowly strung out her remarks in this wise. "We are already having persecution at the hands of our enemies, Arthur, for bringing Daisy into our family ; but to have it at the hands of friends as well ! They would say I broke tradition, and that punishment is following. I feel I cannot survive the disgrace." "There is not the wonder, uncle Panditji," replied Arthur. "The wonder is how you allowed them to behave thus. Had it been that I could have had my way, I should have beaten the whole lot of them into a jelly. The confounded rascals had no business to bring their quarrels into another's house and starve out a whole crowd. Do not be terrified, good aunt, that Daisy's incoming is unpropitious" somewhat nettled by the strain of melancholy in which that lady made a suggestive reference to his own poor sister.

"Breaking a tradition" "unpropitious" what a curious idea, thought Arthur. "Every present good tradition must have had a beginning in the breaking of an old one ; and new ones can have their beginnings only by breaking with present ones," said he to himself, and revolved this mentality of Mrs. Pandit in his mind as if he had a personal interest in it. He brought the conversation to a finish as best as he could under those depressing circumstances, and taking leave of them sought out his sister, to see how she had been getting on, and whether the new idea that had got hold

of her mother-in-law had made any difference in the treatment she had all along been getting at her hands. He was glad to find her in her wonted humour and in the zenith of happiness that befitted a new bride who possessed the esteem, and had gained the affections of her doting new relatives and her loving husband. After all, he thought, the good old lady was a magnanimous creature; her fears or doubts she kept to herself and would not impart them through any means to the object of them, and land a nightmare on the blissful existence of his beloved sister. What mattered it for him what she thought for the rest?

There was only one other person of that household whom he cared to tell he was going. Ever since this alliance, he had occasion to be thrown into company with Indira much and they had become fast friends. On her part, the tall, well-bred appearance of the English lad and the honest big eyes in his handsome face made an impression, which was in no way belied by the robust and straightforward behaviour he exhibited in matters that came under her notice. But to him, the sweet girl of seventeen, draped in the artistic costumes of classic India, with a sparkling vivacity, so unlike the usual dignified demureness of her Indian sisters, and still more unlike the frivolous ebullition of sheer animal spirits so characteristic of the European girls he had seen, and above all with the intense strength of a thoughtful mind, had

ceased to be a vision, and on the other hand, had left an enduring imprint on the substance of his mind. The thoughts of her were a constant and pleasant obtrusion into his whole sphere of thinking, in whichever manner he occupied it. It was no wonder that his eyes were sensitive to her presence and it was thus, that when he looked out for her, his eyes fell on the elegant and graceful form in blue sari and white and gold bodice with a border of lace, standing like a framed picture against the back-ground of the garden near a bush of jasmines in bloom, at the other end of the garden walk. She had just risen, and gone straight into the garden where after cleaning her teeth and washing her face, she went directly to her favourite patch to pick the giant jasmines which had fully opened in the morning. Her tresses disturbed out of their evening's toilet were being blown about by the light, cool morning breeze and she was frequently smoothing them down with her fingers ; and she was passing swiftly from bush to bush gathering the flowers into a tray of wicker in her hand scenting some on the stems, and occasionally sticking a blossom in her hair, and every now and then turning her beautiful golden face from away the breeze to prevent the locks being blown into her eyes. He was thinking or rather tried to think if it would be correct for him to go and meet Indira, when she was in a state of more or less dishabille, and in an occupation in which she might not like her privacy

to be disturbed ; but for once his feet he found were fleetier than his thoughts, and he was nearly half-way towards her before he could order his premises for a judgment. Having proceeded so far, he thought there was no good in considering the matter further, and the brake of indecision having been removed from his power of motion, he was by Indira's side in the winking of an eye. She was surprised for the moment, and at once instinctively adjusted her dress and toilet as best as she could to seem presentable to her visitor. With mutual greetings, the first feeling of awkwardness was got over on the part of both.

"I am come to tell you, Miss Indira, I am going," said Arthur.

"Where to," asked Indira.

"To England, of course ; I have a few more cursed months of training to do for winning my commission, and I am leaving for Bombay this afternoon for going to do it. It is all right when once you are there ; but it is so heavy to leave after the fine days I have had at home and with friends like you. How much I wish I could stay and spend evening after evening with you as we did on the evening when you were queen of flowers," said Arthur with a sigh.

"I hardly knew it was so interesting to you ; but we have no reason to cherish similar memories of the same," said Indira opening out her broad eyes full on Arthur's face with a look of intense dejection.

Arthur realised that he touched the wrong chord, even though he had wanted to pay and meant a delicate and sincere personal compliment to her. "Forgive me, O forgive me, Indira Devi," he burst out in an access of passion, "my blood boils to think of the disgraceful scene which those misguided asses enacted that night. Will you please sit down, Miss Indira; you look ill; forgive me, please forgive me, for I have made you miserable by alluding to it so thoughtlessly." He led her to a recess of the garden where there were a couple of stone benches placed opposite to each other, and they sat down one on each facing each other. "Indira Devi," he continued, "I cannot for the life of me understand why that confounded lot blighted the happiness of every one of us in that fashion. Are they gentlemen? Could they not think they were under some other's roof, and that it was due to him that none of them should mar the gaiety of the function that he had so generously arranged for them all. The excited beasts. Fellows who lack so much discernment and self-restraint, prate so glibly of nationalism and the manner of achieving it. Patriots it seems; I would have knocked their heads against each other, only I was ashamed of contributing my own share to the disturbance."

"It has so upset us all," remarked Indira laconically.

"I see it, I am so sorry. Any way I could hardly imagine that all of you would have taken it so

much to heart. I am just coming from your mother. The good lady seems to read it as a gloomy foreboding," said Arthur.

"It is so, Mr. Pitt," said Indira. "You see the view we take of these functions. They are in the first place regarded as an offering to the deity as a grateful acknowledgment of blessings conferred; and this form is given as most likely to please Him as it gives the greatest amount of satisfaction to a large number of His creatures. It is only secondarily that we estimate them as a process of give and take of good fellowship between persons, who have all to tread the way of this mortal life for short or long. "Between us," she continued, "my mother was so unwilling at first about accepting Daisy as bride to my brother; she is so afraid of making a breach with tradition, and she is fond of saying that such a lapse will bring on ill-luck. It was my good father and I that eventually were able to make her consent to the match."

"And you, Miss Indira. It is so interesting to me. Do tell me how it all happened," exclaimed Arthur growing enthusiastic.

"Listen," remonstrated Indira mildly. "I was telling you that. It is a political alliance, if you will; and not until we put it to my mother thus and that it was in the interests of our country, did she yield. My father is never tired of telling us that he does not remember the political conditions of this country having been so turbid at any time

before. You know the bluff old gentleman, and he feels it quite to the point of shedding tears at times. He is old enough to remember things as they were or had heard they were before the Britisher consolidated his Government of this country, and he speaks out his grateful heart so often that his lot was cast in times when he could reap in peace what he had sown on the land and had no need to start at every morsel to see if he has to gather his little ones in his arms and flee as a fugitive without finishing his meal. Still why alone on the face of this earth in this unfortunate land, its peoples will not know to settle down and live orderly without a whipping master, he constantly torments his poor soul with the question. Why do they remember only to differ and hate? Why does the Moslem cut the throat of the Hindu in the name of God and religion? And why does one Hindu glory to disagree with another in the name of every trifle from the cut of the hair to the pattern of the dress, and Hindus and Mussalmans both, go scalp-hunting of others who have the misfortune to be born of another hue. Yea, and not content with these outward differences their innate thoughts have been stirred to the very depths to a malignant passion of man against man for being rich or poor, literate or illiterate, efficient or inefficient. So he cogitates. There is nothing in the shape of a remedy for this bitter state of things that is brought to his notice and he does not heed; he is like the desperate sick

man who is only too avid to swallow a medicine, be it quack or scientific. Inter-racial marriages, inter-castal dinners, a common religion, a common script; and everything else under the Moon and the Sun which some day dreamer dreams and propounds; "I shall not be found wanting to make my own contribution of effort for the country's good," he always says; and when the question of my brother's marriage came up, I suggested he should get the bride out of our caste. "So then; it shall be none else than Sister Pitt's daughter," he exclaimed. "Daisy is a real Daisy: such a sweet girl, so Hinduised herself and her mother and we shall have her. So it was Mr. Pitt," said Indira.

"Let me give you my grateful thanks on behalf of Daisy; but will you let me ask you for myself and Daisy whether you too are of the same way of thinking with your mother on the breach of tradition," put forth Arthur in diffidence.

"Do not embarrass yourself, Mr. Pitt," she continued. "It were impossible you should have asked me the question. Had we any such conviction, my father and we would not have thought of this marriage. Life would be so dull if ever we could not break away from tradition. Forgive my mother. She is an old ideaed dear, and as a dutiful wife, has adopted her husband's view in the place of her own. Because the function did not succeed, she apprehends whether the Deity was displeased.

Even for this all He wrought our fates and if it was in the page of our Book of Fate that ill-luck should come this wise, it is folly to grieve as we cannot help. Let this pass. But I am ill at ease, so ill at ease, Arthur, since that incident. It has set me fiercely thinking."

"What about," enquired Arthur archly. "Yes, it set me too fiercely thinking that night why I should not knock down every one of them who were making pandemonium in the house of a helpless host," he added in a tone of suppressed passion.

"Not that way," rejoined Indira with animation, "No, no, I am not surprised that is the Englishman's way of thinking. Now understand, please. You have known Kamaluddin. If he were not a gentleman, you would not have kept his company. The fellow was so abashed and has since fled this country for shame. Almost all the rest of them were of the same class. Now what makes me think is, why did all this young men, gentlemen all, so far forget themselves to behave so riotously in a respected friend's house and for ever tar themselves with ignominy for causing him irretrievable mental pain by breaking up a splendid social function. This is how it strikes me. I think unless they were consumed with a idea which they would have noted was not inconsistent with their gentlemanliness, and the necessity of a mode of action which must have seemed to them imperative they would not have acted so. They judged wrong and they found

that in the event to their cost. They are fools who expect to root up prejudices of centuries with the frenzy of a time. Grant it all why were they seized with the idea? It seems to me to be this. They think that the peoples of this country deserve to live as they hope and feel, without fear of the ogre of foreign dictation perpetually dominating their minds. They try to consolidate the peoples of this country by forcibly obliterating time-honoured notions. They have stultified themselves; for that is the wrong way. But why this consolidation with such stupendous endeavour, is this a menace to the Britisher, you may ask. I answer till they consolidate themselves, the Britisher will not take off his yoke; that is how they think. Is not the ruling element, the number of Britishers set to rule, so small, a mere drop in the ocean, so to say, that this mass of humanity in this country can breathe freely and aspire to any life it desires, you may question. I shall answer that. I know it from the case of my own father. You know what a valued officer of the State he was. They advanced him in service, they honoured him; but still in the level of his service, the Englishman was not a comrade to him. He was uppish—the English co-official was—and he never failed to remind my father that he was a limb of the ruling body. This ruling element is doubtless a drop in the ocean; no, a drop on the ocean; but such a drop of viscid oil that spreads like a film all over the

surface and through which life underneath cannot properly breathe. Forgive me, Mr. Pitt, I am rattling away." "See," she said, pointing to the towering big, broad banyan tree a little beyond the hedge of the garden where they were, and the variegated menagerie under it of a few village cattle from the neighbouring common, one or two stray donkeys, some goats and a herd of swine feeding on the red ripe berries that had dropped thick under from it, "how those dumb animals do not think of their differences but crowd under and quietly feed on the gifts of that great tree, without molesting each other or trying to butt each other out. I would not do those poor creatures the injustice of attributing the thought and say that any of them was thinking to whom it was the tree under whose shade all of them were gathered belong. It cannot be that the peoples of India are essentially more selfish in their constitution than those beasts can be. Is not India big enough, broad enough for every one of them to consent to take his little place under its shade without the effrontery of asking why the rest are there and without the help of another to keep the ring for them all? Is there nothing in India, this land of the Rishis, for them to live for? This is what I ask, think and ponder over, Arthur."

Her face was suffused with a glow of intellectual excitement after this effort. Arthur was plainly perplexed. He feared to think familiarly of her

now even in the secrecy of his own mind, and a curious feeling of helplessness crept over him in her presence. He had hardly dreamt that this slim pretty young girl of unusual vivacity who was still pursuing her studies at College was so weighted with a strain of serious thought, and gifted with an imagination and insight which might well have been the envy of older and more experienced persons than herself. He did not endeavour to reply but rising to his feet, he simply remarked, "Indira Devi or India Devi as I shall have your name now, you are to me like the crown of that banyan tree to the goat which is lying under it so impulsively chewing its cud. I am going. Perhaps by the time I come back you shall have been married and settled." There was a sigh in his voice and he turned his face aside as he felt he would break down to look her in the face.

"Cannot be so sure of that," said Indira quietly.

CHAPTER VII

A FAREWELL VISIT FROM THE CHATFIELDS

IT was a different Arthur that reached home late that morning from the one that had set out with the buoyancy of anticipatory happiness a few hours before. His visible excuse for that visit was to tell the Moropants he was going away. But it was in reality to have a farewell look at Indira with whom he was insensibly falling in love. As a young man preparing to launch out on a career offering good worldly chances in life, he had never wanted girl friends during his stay in England, or India, either, whose company he could call upon for the enjoyment of the lighter pleasures of life, or from whom he could not have picked out a wife; but his knowledge of such companionship had created a reservation in his heart against accepting the same, with its note of strident assertion of equality and easy familiarity that characterised it, for the display of the emotions of his deeper life. Those experiences invariably had left him cold after a temporary exhilaration. His mind instinctively turned aside from the idea of a wife creeping into his life, as it were with the oppressiveness of a partner who had

pooled assets with him, and possessing him with the notion that there was a constant claim to withdraw her share whenever she felt that things did not go well. On the other hand it interested him to dwell in the secret recesses of his mind upon the idea of a companion in life who strong with understanding and appealingly silent, would be like a magnet to him perpetually scintillating suggestions that his happiness was to live for her, and stimulating him to take her up in the overwhelming vortex of his love. A vague and disconcerting feeling was growing in him that that image of his was coalescing with Indira, and of course in the view of the recent domestic happening, he thought he foresaw no difficulty on any other score, of inviting her to be his wife. She was yet of that agreeable tenderness in years when she would not disdain guidance from one older, or be inclined to be wilful or self-assertive, and this was not a small factor of her attraction to him. It was under these circumstances that as I have already said, he was insensibly falling in love with her, and when he met her in this frame of mind in the morning, it came as a sudden shock to see that slender young girl reveal herself to him as set on a plane of thought coloured with ardent emotion about her country and its people, in which the speck of his own personal life could have little or no place. Bitterest of all was the circumstance that on her side she was "fancy free," "uninclined to thoughts of love," which made it difficult for him

to cultivate in her an impressionability, wherewith he could make that little speck of his own life expand and envelop her whole region of thought and being. She came no nearer in addressing him than in the distant style of "Mr. Pitt" except when she so far recollected on rare occasions that he was a relative through her sister-in-law, and used to some familiarity with her on account of which she could address him as Arthur. Arthur was thus in a frenzy of disappointment when he took leave of her in that wise and gained the gateway of his house again in due course.

It was in no way pouring oil on troubled waters, when at the entrance to his quarters he espied the familiar carriage of the Chatfields waiting on the drive within his mother's compound. He knew the Chatfields had come, but what troubled him more acutely was the certainty that Miss Agnes Chatfield would be one of his visitors. He had told them he was going, and the good old soul, the Mrs. Chatfield, was no doubt come to bid him bon voyage and perhaps entrust him with messages of kind enquiries for her numerous relatives to be delivered to them, on his arrival in England. But the same could not be said to have been wholly the purpose of Agnes. She had become a good friend, and he was aware she was developing an attachment for him as well. She was of sufficient age to be knowing, and was playing her cards well for the prize. Since that drama in Indira's presence on the evening of the fateful

banquet, when Arthur gave himself away in high access of spirits in voluptuous admiration of her beauty, she had imagined she had fixed him. And now that within a few hours of his approaching journey he found time and inclination to go to look up Indira, and not her, and she was herself in his house to see, what scene there might be when they met, he could not trust himself to imagine. He hated the whole thing and cursed all these complications that were in a way of his own making.

He entered the hall where his mother and Mrs. Chatfield were quietly conversing; and apart from them, on a seat in the corner was Agnes with the green eye of jealousy, already struck up in the pose of the slighted lover. "Good-morning to you, Mr. Pitt; did not think you would have been going out so early," saluted Agnes.

"Good morning, Miss Chatfield; yes, what of that," said Arthur.

"Nothing, please, I beg a thousand pardons. Need not have been so rude to a friend. I only wanted to say that I expected to see you at home when we came," said Agnes.

The fact he was rude to a strange lady, albeit a friend of some acquaintance, abashed him. He sought to make up for it by being extra deferential.

"I am sorry, Miss Agnes, I was not at home when you came. Very sorry I kept you waiting, but then may I say you did not let me know of your coming," pointed out Arthur in excuse.

"Ah, how stupid; it was my fault. I thought you yourself would be looking up to tell a poor friend you were going away," said Agnes with a sigh.

Just the situation he had pictured to himself as he was coming in, had arisen; and he could not think what to say to get even with her. Agnes Chatfield was, after all, not a person for whom he wholly had not cared.

"I do not know why I had not done so, Agnes; I was wrong. I should have come to see your dear parents as a matter of mere duty, and you, to say farewell, for the sake of old times and for what all you have been to me in England at the least," said Arthur with a touch of remorse. "I had wanted to see those Moropants as I had not seen them since we were all there that night, and have just been to pay them a call. That was all, dear lady."

She was steadily taking in the position, and perceived that her victim was coming under, and she resolved to make use of the advantage to pin him down once and for all effectually, the more so that her affections for him were real and sincere. It were well if she could work it up to make him commit himself, and she would have firmly secured the prize.

"No, no, no explanations please, new times, new friends," protested Agnes with a break in her voice. "What right have I to expect a young gentleman like you to order his engagements for my

convenience. For the sake of old times. Indeed. And 'my dear lady' too. I wish you said that no more, Mr. Pitt. I am extremely grateful to you for having said that this once at least; do reserve it for Indira Devi hereafter."

She drew herself nearer to him imperceptibly and sinking slightly on her side, looked up full into his face, with the tears falling in beads from the corners of her eyes.

Arthur bent his face forward and held her up in his arms. His lips were almost on her cheeks.

It was a moment of acute tenseness for both.

Somewhere, struggling against the load of her sentiment was a thought in the soul of that distressed and expectant girl, that he might bring his lips nearer, and press them with a kiss on her cheek and tell her "No, my dear, it will be always you, my dearest dear," and set the seal of the acme of her happiness.

He brought his lips close to her ear, in an attitude to tell her something. He spoke to her in a whisper, in a tone of desperation.

"Do not be silly, please, Miss Agnes Chatfield," was all that he spoke.

* * * *

The time for his departure was coming fast and Arthur had to ready himself for the journey. He joined his mother and Mrs. Chatfield, and Mrs. Chatfield was good enough to tell him that he ought to be taking good care of himself and gave all that

kind of advice which a motherly woman might be expected to give a young man going out to sojourn in a distant land. She brought with her a portfolio of letters to numerous relatives and friends in the old country to whom he had to deliver them, and he put his best face on the matter, and accepted the mission. He was perturbed by the events of the morning, and had not a clear head to apply to the hundred and one odd demands of a long journey. It was this thing or the other that was forgotten; that or this stowed away in the wrong place; and he spent sometime emptying packed trunks and re-packing emptied ones to put their contents in due order. The Chatfields had left while he was so engaged, and in a short while he had taken his breakfast, and his things were already in his carriage, and he was on his way to the Railway Station. He took leave of his mother at the gate, and asked the coachman to drive him to the station past Daisy's house, that he might take leave of her.

He stopped at the house of the Moropants and saw Daisy and Indira together. He took hurried leave of Daisy, and nodded farewell to Indira. He was to have gone straight to the Station from them; but he felt a sudden prompting which he was unable to resist. He turned his carriage towards the Chatfield Bungalow. He entered the house and saw Mrs. Chatfield busy in the hall. He approached her and shook hands with her, and asked for Agnes. He found her sad and wretched beyond words,

fumbling to do something, in her room in another part of the house. "Do not worry; I am come to tell you, Agnes dear, I was going."

He did not pause to see the brightening gleam through the cloud on her face and had left by the time she could collect herself to speak.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ASCETIC'S ARRIVAL

SOME few days after the events that were related in the last chapter occurred, mingled in the swarms of the population that daily floated in and out of the city of N.L.R., there entered through its gates one morning, a person of no mean appearance, clad in the saffron robes of a Sadhu. He was young, handsome in features, with a tall and well-proportioned physique, and his broad brow bore the characteristic halo of a strong intellect and culture. There was fire in his eye, and his massive and well-cut jaw with prominent chin bespoke of his character for virile determination. He wore neither beard nor moustache, and his head was equally clean-shaven after the manner of a Hindu Sanyasi. The three parallel bands of sacred ash, drawn horizontally across his forehead from side to side, could have been said to have clearly proclaimed that the creed to which he was devoted, was Hindu, but for his dubious ornamentation of garlands of stone and coloured beads which usually were of the apparel of a Mahomadan Fakir. The long robe with low-cut

collar flowed down to his bare ankles, and the ample sleeves of the same garment covered a pair of well-knit brawny arms just showing a string of "Rudrakshas" wound round the wrists. He held the capacious shell bowl of his order under his left arm, and in his right hand was the drinking vessel of gourd. He wore neither shoes nor sandals, and his quick long paces betrayed a frame of mind, at once intensely energetic, and extremely in a hurry about something. He spoke Hindustani, but at times he showed a preference to speaking in English which he did in high and faultless style.

His pace automatically slowed down as he neared the approaches of the big bazaar which he had to traverse. The sun had already risen high over the eastern horizon, and it was getting fairly clear to him that he should get in his supplies for the morning's breakfast on his way through it to the Musafarkhana. So he took out his bowl and tossed it back over his shoulder, keeping it in position with the slender iron chain which was attached to it; and that was all he did to find his provisions. He asked no body; he spoke to none. He merely moved along at a slower rate on the line of his route, threading his way between the crowds that jostled one another in the Indian bazaar in the busy hours of the morning. But his very appearance among them was enough to clear a passage for him, the passers on his sides instinctively falling back and pausing momentarily to offer salutations, each

according to the manner of his sect and persuasion. A continuous cry of "Ram Ram," "Salam Alaikum," "Namaskaram, Maharaj" was carried forward in his wake as he passed, and it was not an empty reverencing at that, that pleased the crowds, for every now and then, some one of them would step up behind the traveller and drop a pice or two or a handful of vegetables into the open bowl. He moved on in this wise for sometime, and apparently from what he might have thought of the chink of the coin as it fell into the bowl that he had enough for his day's expense, he brought his bowl back sharply over the shoulder and clutched it in its old position under the arm, and went and stopped in front of a grocer's shop. He thrust forward the bowl with the money in it, and motioned with his eyes to the tradesman to take the cash and asked for "atta" or flour. The flour was soon measured out, and put as a parcel into the bowl, and the tradesman between virtue and business helped himself to so much only of the cash as was a fair price for the article he supplied leaving some more pice still in the bowl. He rose up to his full height after the bargain, and fell prostrate on the Sadhu's feet, obviously intending that though the inexorable claims of business prevented him from making a present to the Sadhu of the flour he supplied, still his soul was not behind others in offering obeisance where it was due. It was a rule of the Sadhu's order that he should not touch cash nor

possess more of it than what he wanted for the day, and so the Sadhu thus furnished with some provisions in his bowl, and the few more he wanted exchanged for the remainder of his money on his way, moved towards the Musaferkhana which was at the extreme end of the town, and near the European Quarter and very little frequented by travellers, and installed himself there.

The news that a strange mystic had arrived in the town spread like wildfire, and it was not long before queues of the curious young and old, and of persons of both sexes of religiosity and penchant for diving into the mysteries of the Life beyond and the eternal, began to take up positions before him. He had not been a long time over his ablutions and the preparation of his simple fare of roasted vegetables and cake of flour and salt which he baked over the glowing cinders from the bundle of sticks he purchased on his way to the rest-house, and had scarcely eaten his meal and stretched his tired limbs on one of the broad slabs of the flooring, than his uninvited enquirers began to press themselves on his attention. He signalled to them to sit down. "What do you want, sisters and brethren, of this humble servant of the Lord," he said to them. "Will it not please you to let him go undisturbed," he plaintively asked.

"No, no, Bawa," cried a chorus of voices. "It is our good fortune, that you should have been pleased to pass through this town. We count on this day

as a sacred day for us. It does not often fall to us to worship the Wise. We wait for moments like these to be imparted the secrets of life. Pray, give us a discourse; condescend to deliver us a message."

He rose and sat up, cross-legged in the customary posture of a Sadhu, closed his eyes for a moment, and opened them again with a gleam as if he had drawn his inward fire into them. He did not speak at once. He kept silent as if he was deliberating for a while, and when he spoke, he shook down his words, forcefully, and slowly, one after another. "I have no message, but the one that Mother India has handed down to her children from the immemorial past. The Great Lord Parameswara is only One. Live into the idea. See, I bear the symbols of the Mahomadan Fakir, his stone beads, and the grey ash of the Hindu ascetic. To me both are the same. Fools quarrel about religion. India's ideal of life is service. We are all children of the same mother, Mother India. Serve one another: and live, live for her glory in all Eternity."

As he spoke, the words fell upon his audience which was well attuned to take that kind of teaching. They felt lifted into the sublime and that satisfied them. The Sadhu closed his eyes again, as if to intimate to his hearers that he had abstracted into himself and they would be no further noticed, and resumed his prostrate position on his bed of stone. The crowd gradually thinned away,

and only one or two, more ardent than the rest struck on in the hope of giving personal service to the ascetic when he woke.

Even for more than the mysteries he may reveal, a Sadhu's company is cherished for the elevating influence of his proximity. First, he is one who had the strength of mind in choosing to join the order, to give up self and the pleasures of self; secondly, he is one who has dedicated himself to the services of his fellows. His business is the perpetual contemplation of God, and pondering over the mysteries of human life; and in India, where the life here is rated at its proper worth as a mere passage through the world with the acquisition just enough of its wealth to support it, the craving for even a possibility of a side peep into the life hereafter, enslaves even more than average minds to those that may be supposed to be able to impart the knowledge. It may not always please that greater soul to take the ardent aspirant into confidence at once; hence, the waiting on him, the reverential service to him, and the constant attendance to ensure that when the mood and the opportunity arrive, they may not be missed.

In virtue of the service for which he has ordained himself, it is the duty of all Hindu householders to look after a Sadhu, whenever he is in their midst. It is the pious duty of every one of them to board and lodge him as long as it pleases him to stay—which by the way is ordinarily limited

in practice to a day—invite appropriate company, and generally to create conditions under which he may tend to be expansive and discourse to his host and fellow-guests on the abstrusest problems of theology and religion.

The news of the arrival of the Sadhu got well abroad into the town within a day or two of his arrival, seasoned with items of his great knowledge of the supernatural, his suspicious mysticism, his thrilling feats of occultism, and such like capabilities, which the populace generally imagines to exist in the objects of its adoration; and to the creation of which idea, the personal magnetism, and alert mentality of the Sadhu had, without doubt, considerably contributed. It behoved then for the respectable house-holders of the small township to invite him as a guest by turns. So, Rao Bahadur Moropant, as one of the most prominent Hindu inhabitants decided to give the Sadhu the first invitation.

He thought deeply about the change in the status of the orthodoxy of his family wrought by the great innovation he had brought about by the grafting of a girl of English parentage into his house-hold by marriage. He was not sure if the Sadhu would accept his invitation under the circumstances; but as a devout house-holder albeit with advanced notions of what is just and fitting with the times, whose duty it was to practise the "Dharma" enjoined by the Hindu Shastras, he

thought it was clear he ought to offer the invitation, whether it would be accepted or not. Out therefore he sallied one afternoon, after a hurried consultation with his lady, who for her share put vigour into the idea; for though she would not say so to her worthy husband, she had a notion that the advent of such a religious personage as the Sadhu would sanctify her house, and incidentally charm away the evil influence of the break in tradition she had allowed by marrying an English girl to her son, the fear of which was still lurking in her mind.

Soon he reached the Musafarkhana, the Sadhu's quarters. The Sadhu was in the state of meditation, and the usual assembly of adorers and sight-seers who had been in constant waiting upon the great personage was seated thick here and there and all about in the space around him. There was a quiet recognition for him, as soon as he arrived, and leaving off his shoes at a distance, he also gained a place in front of the Sadhu through the deference of those who were already there and kindly made room for him. Then he looked this way and that; and to the salutations by way of a gracious smile or a courteous bow he was met with from all corners of the gathering, he gave respectful acknowledgments, and settling down, engaged himself in occasional talk with his neighbours in a suppressed undertone till the Sadhu woke up from his reverie.

The Sadhu's eyes fell upon the impressive stranger before him, and instantly some one who had established some familiarity with him during the few days he had been in the town mentioned to him that it was Rao Bahadur Moropant Viswanath, the leading Hindu citizen of the place. On that, the Rao Bahadur stood up and fell flat in prostration at the feet of the Sadhu, in the customary style of obeisance to personages of his order.

"Namaskar, Maharaj, Namaskar," cried the Rao Bahadur, rising up, joining his hands together.

"Jai, Srimantki Jai" returned the Sadhu and motioned him with his hands to be seated.

Reciprocation of civilities over, the Rao Bahadur in an access of extra deferentiality and in bated breath, ventured the observation of polite formality. "I trust, Sadhu, you are comfortable. We do not know much how to receive great souls like you here, but we do not lack the wish to treat you with devotion. Please forgive shortcomings, and they must be innumerable."

"What comforts do I want," remarked the ascetic drily. "I do not think of them; they are the abjuration of my order; my thoughts are deep drawn on elsewhere. Quiet and repose are what I want, but you see," said he with a bitter smile without choosing to finish his sentence.

"Ah, it is the same we too want, holy father. We come to you for getting the secret," spoke a voice from the assembly naively. "It is our

privilege to offer our services to holy men and like the 'moon-birds' wait to devour the rays that sparkle from their refulgent souls."

"Bava Maharaj, I have come to make a prayer," observed the Bao Bahadur. "It is that your holy 'Atma' will be pleased to accept the hospitality of my family to-morrow. I have made the necessary arrangements in the hope of your acceptance. It will be only a small party to dine, and I shall see the 'Atidhi Pooja' or the guest worship over as early as possible. Pray, what be thy answer," obsequiously asked the Pandit.

"Your house is the house of Parameswara as much as this Musafarkhana; the Lord's house, wherever it be, is where this humble soul seeks to dwell in bliss. No prayer, Sriman, I will do as God bid," said the Sadhu.

But the Panditji had forgotten the skeleton in his cup-board. The idea had all along been uppermost in his mind, but at the nick of time he lost memory of it. What would the Sadhu say now? The Sadhu had so readily granted his request, and if he now mentioned the fact, it would be that he might be taken to have had wilfully concealed it to get the Sadhu's consent and he might decline to come. Whatever the impression he would create it was due to the holy man that he should tell him the fact, and get his decision with the full knowledge of the circumstances. "My most humble thanks, my grateful thanks to your holiness, Bava Maharaj.

You have conferred a boon on this humble creature and his house. I shall in duty be bound for the boon accorded. Sadhuji, I have but one thing more to mention," said the Pandit fumbling for the courage to come out with the disclosure.

But the Sadhu forestalled him with an almost uncanny prescience of what he desired to mention to him.

"It is the matter of your English daughter-in-law, is it not? Yes. We transcend the conventions of caste and race, when we enter the 'Ashramam'. 'Sarvam Mayam Jagat.' From our plane, it is the same soul in every body and your English daughter-in-law is as welcome to offer me the traditional civilities to the guest as any other orthodox born member of your family. And what a great idea was that of yours, 'Srimant,'" said the Sadhu. "Skins do not colour souls."

"Just so, Bava, my holy father. It is the same, the very same," cried the Rao Bahadur in intense admiration, not knowing what was the more surprising—the unexpectedly easy matter-of-course acquiescence in the conditions of his invitation, or the marvellous exhibition of thought reading as an instance of the occult powers with which the Bava was being credited. Any way, the object of his visit was attained and he imagined in himself the intense pleasure, which his good lady would feel more than himself, when he was going to tell her that the holy man was going to be their guest the

following day. A fountain of ideas gushed out in himself. He thought he could put his doubts in the sphere of Hindu social re-construction, compulsory nationalisation and of other kindred matters which were convulsing the mind of the country, and about which his own views were strong, before a man whose opinions were entitled to respect according to tradition, and learn what he had to say. Moreover, he expected those that were questioning his actions, and undermining his influence, some of them at least would not fail to lay hold of the opportunity by being present at the reception as guests and raising a whole discussion before him. He thought all this was for the good, and retraced his footsteps home with more than his usual alacrity of step and height of good spirits, completely filled with the thought of the coming event, and the surpassing arrangements that had to be made for making it a grand success.

CHAPTER IX

THE "YATHI" POOJA OR THE ANCHORITE'S WORSHIP

MRS. SADASHIV MOROPANT, to refer to her by the description more familiar to my readers as the Rao Bahadur's wife, had been standing at the threshold of the main doorway of her mansion for sometime. Her husband had left the house many hours before on the simple mission of inviting a strange Sanyasi for a meal, and as there could be nothing as far as one could ordinarily see in this to occupy him the best part of a day, her mind unconsciously came to exercise itself with doubts and misgivings about happenings at the place whither he had gone. So it was that she moved to the doorway, in time with the thoughts that possessed her; and the little family group of herself, Indira with her eyes glued to the sewing upon which her fingers were still plying, a little away, Daisy with the cowries snatched into her hand from off the "snake and ladder" board on which she was having a game with her mother-in-law, and the little tot of "Visvesh" the three-year-old son of the lusty Rao Bahadur tugging at

the hem of his mother's sari with his left hand, while vigorously sucking the thumb of his right, was keeping a look out for the appearance of the house-holder whose arrival they awaited.

It was not anxiously long however before the tenseness of the wait was relieved by the sudden bolting of little "Visvesh" into the road, who by the time the eyes of the ladies fell on him, had already stopped his "daddy" on the road, made him surrender his walking stick and shoes, and was proudly dragging himself home in these two new articles of dress, with the old gentleman holding him to keep him steady. The little fellow kept up continuously, a shrill cry at the top of his voice, "Ma, ma, I am bringing babu home."

"Hush, hush, you little mite; whatever is the meaning of your tumbling out into the street like that? See them, horses and carts, bulls and bandies. You may fall under them. I will tell 'bhais' teacher to come round to you with his cane if you do it another time."

"You won't be there to see me do it another time," replied the little imp gaily; "Bhais teacher will not cane me; he will only kiss me." "Bus, bus" (enough) said the pleased mother drawing the child into the ample folds of her sari, and stroking his tiny head, "speak, Panditji, what had been keeping you so long; we were wondering what could be happening with the Sadhu."

"Drawing too long at his hubble-bubble pipe, father?" said Indira.

"No, no; that is not the way to speak of holy people, child. Sadhus and Sanyasis are selfless people and we should reverence them. It is a pity that many of them are not over the self-indulgence of a heavy smoke; they say that it excites them to religious thought; but Indira, dear, you will find this Sadhu above that too."

"Is he coming then? Really to-morrow? Engaged him, true: have you?" rang out all the ladies in an enthusiastic chorus. "How did you ask him, told him about Daisy, any trouble?" enquired his anxious wife.

They moved talking thus into the hall, where the Rao Bahadur was allowed to settle down into his usual chair, while the ladies took their accustomed places about him. "No trouble at all with him, missies; he is a real great man," said he, trying to recite his experiences of the afternoon and imparting the information for which they had been so anxiously seeking. "He was asleep when I went there, my dears; and our people there who were about him had forgotten to be rude to me for my trespasses as they have had been for some time now towards me. They introduced me to him with something of their former regard for me; and we got on talking about this thing and that and I told him, I wanted him to be our guest to-morrow, to which he promptly

consented." There was a look of mild wonder over the faces of those about me. "Then I thought and recollected that I had made the most stupendous mistake. 'How,' I thought in myself, 'could I have forgotten to tell him just the very thing, the most important thing I should have told him and how to do it then?' He paused. 'However—I took my courage into both my hands,' and said, 'holy father, I have made a serious mistake: I forgot to tell you I have an English daughter-in-law. You have been pleased to consent to be my guest'."

"How did he take it," put in Daisy by way of a mildly interested query. She was beginning to see that however much she was assimilated by the family into which she arrived, she was always getting into the way of its former usual social relations with others of the same community.

"He took it with boundless zest, my child: he complimented me so enthusiastically," answered the old Rao Bahadur chasing away the shade from off the radiance of the pearl of his daughter-in-law. "He spoke to me about you even before I mentioned you to him; he should have had heard of your wedding with gratification to have noted and remembered it so well," continued the happy father-in-law.

Daisy bent her head beaming with pleasure. It did her heart good to know the re-affirmation of continued affection towards her.

"That is all well," chimed Indira taking her eyes off the knitting she had in hand, for the first time during the conversation. "Who are to be our guests?" "Whom do you propose to invite?" she asked.

"We shall consider it now; what do you say, dear," said the Rao Bahadur turning to his wife.

"None of your big fashionable dinners please," said she somewhat remonstratingly.

"That is not it, mother," wedged in Indira. "What I have in my head is that we must make this the occasion to invite such of our good friends here who are continuously saying small things about father for the innovation he made. It will stop their tongues wagging to hear what the Swami says about this and other kindred matters. They cannot take 'Thirtham' or holy water from the Swami's hands in our house and continue to affect to treat us out-castes. We must issue a general invitation to one and all of our community, as is usual in these cases, and watch the result. It will be interesting."

"Your deeds on your heads. Between you and your father, it is all I can do, an old fashioned, quiet loving woman to keep my spirits in balance. Hush, child," said Mrs. Moropant turning to the little fellow who was still swinging round and round her, holding firmly to the folds of her sari. "Keep quiet, will you? You will have no cakes to-morrow. Come, dears," she said, the spirit of the housewife rising in her. "Enough now of this ado. I shall

consented." There was a look of mild wonder over the faces of those about me. "Then I thought and recollected that I had made the most stupendous mistake. 'How,' I thought in myself, 'could I have forgotten to tell him just the very thing, the most important thing I should have told him and how to do it then?' He paused. 'However—I took my courage into both my hands,' and said, 'holy father, I have made a serious mistake: I forgot to tell you I have an English daughter-in-law. You have been pleased to consent to be my guest'."

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"We shall consider it now; what do you say, dear," said the Rao Bahadur turning to his wife.

"None of your big fashionable dinners please," said she somewhat remonstratingly.

"That is not it, mother," wedged in Indira. "What I have in my head is that we must make this the occasion to invite such of our good friends here who are continuously saying small things about father for the innovation he made. It will stop their tongues wagging to hear what the Swami says about this and other kindred matters. They cannot take 'Thirtham' or holy water from the Swami's hands in our house and continue to affect to treat us out-castes. We must issue a general invitation to one and all of our community, as is usual in these cases, and watch the result. It will be interesting."

"Your deeds on your heads. Between you and your father, it is all I can do, an old fashioned, quiet loving woman to keep my spirits in balance. Hush, child," said Mrs. Moropant turning to the little fellow who was still swinging round and round her, holding firmly to the folds of her sari. "Keep quiet, will you? You will have no cakes to-morrow. Come, dears," she said, the spirit of the housewife rising in her. "Enough now of this ado. I shall

go and look about the things in the kitchen and the Pooja house. You see to the invitations please; there is no time to lose . . . ”

With this admonition Mrs. Moropant turned her feet briskly into the inner apartments of the house, little Visvesh treading on her heels happy beyond expression about the prospect of his coming cakes, but all the same anxiously questioning his worried mother with a needless curiosity as to who was coming and what was to happen in their house on the morrow. As for the worthy Rao Bahadur and Indira, they sat on sometime making out a list of the invitees, with Daisy helping with suggestions now and then; and the Rao Bahadur bustled again out of the house to give his invitations to such of the select guests to whom the courtesy of personal invitation was due from him for the next day's reception and Pooja at his place. Indira for her part could not forget her two good friends, Miss Chatfield and Zelica Begum, for such an interesting event and wrote pressing them to come.

The family was up betimes the following morning, and there was no end to the scrubbing and washing of the floors and the tidying up of the house against such an important event, according to routine. The servants were emptying pails of water all over and sweeping out, and the ladies of the house were decorating the washed floors with designs and pretty patterns in white and colour after them. The house cleaned, everyone had an anointing and the sacred

bath, and the costly images of the family worship were reverently brought out, cleaned and bathed and put back in their places. The banquet was preparing in the kitchen under the careful eye of Mrs. Moropant and the Rao Bahadur himself took an extra sitting of 'Japam' or incantations and worship; and the family Purohit or the minister had also finished communicating the general invitation of the Rao Bahadur to every one of the Brahmin community in the place and returned. The guest of honour only had to come; and everything was ready to give him a hearty and respectful greeting.

His bowl over his shoulder the Swami set out towards the expected time to the Rao Bahadur's house. He was unnoticed till he passed down a part of the road, but it was not long before he was recognised and one on another, a following collected and marched behind him. Arriving at the Rao Bahadur's house he stopped short at the gate, announced himself singing out at the top of his voice the formula in the Sanskrit language to intimate the arrival of a Sanyasi at a house-holder's place.

You should have seen the Rao Bahadur at the moment. He had finished his morning ablutions and stepped out of the Pooja room, in the make up of a characteristically graceful Brahmin person. There was a broad daub of the paste of fragrant sandal across his roomy forehead, spread out more

like an inverted comet, with the head resting between the eyebrows and the streaks of the tail vanishing away under the thin line of scattered locks surmounting on the top. What few locks of hair that still survived on the ample surface of his head were brushed back, and the shaggy thick eyebrows shading his striking pair of eyes now half shut in the attitude of prayer, and the moustaches like two new clipped tea bushes resting precariously on the slope of his upper lip gave unique impressiveness to the broad cast of his countenance. A costly silk Benares taffeta draped his lower limbs and an equally elegant and costly, but smaller upper cloth was wound over it round his loins in token of his extreme respect towards the expected visitor: and he gave no other covering to his athletic chest than that of his folded muscular arms in the same spirit of devotion. The excitement of the event coupled with the waiting from the morning had been gradually growing on him; and when the cry of the Sadhu fell on his ears as he was standing with his respected wife—herself in the subdued finery of religious attire—only a sober yellow silk sari with the loose end thrown over the left shoulder, setting off the bright red of her bodice; her long hair still slightly wet from her sanctifying bath, twisted loosely in a knot at the ends with a blossom and a sprig of the sacred basil stuck into it; the bright dot of vermilion shining between the eyebrows a little low on her golden-coloured face; with a silver

tray with fruit and flower—presents and marks of respect for the prospective guest, held lightly under her left arm and kept in place slightly pressed against the side with a bangled wrist and shapely hand; and with no other thoughts uppermost but the one like of the true Hindu wife, of assisting her husband in his devotional rites and doing with him jointly the civilities of the house as was her right—he felt as if shook by a sudden gust from out of his reverie, and in an instant was rolling his limbs in prostration at his feet, working off his access of religiosity. His graceful help mate touched his feet and presented him the offerings of flower and fruit; and this greeting over, the whole company moved into the house, chanting hymns, the worthy host leading.

The Swami was duly installed and the large mixed gathering that assembled in response to the Rao Bahadur's invitation—and in part without it also—settled down in the big reception hall of the house. The Rao Bahadur next washed the feet of the holy guest, his wife pouring down the water, and both husband and wife sprinkled a few drops of it over their heads. A present of coin was then placed on the washed feet and this was duly touched and returned by the Swami. The Swami then in his turn uttered prayers and conducted the worship of the family Gods and time came for the distribution of the sacred Tulasi with which the worship was performed, and holy water, to the assembled persons.

Beautiful Indira was there; and her own friends, Zelica, her next-door neighbour, and Agnes Chatfield, both of whom she had asked to come. There was another of her neighbours whom she hoped to see in the assemblage: but he was not there. It came to her lips to question her father if their invitation had been sent to his family, but an instinctive shyness suppressed it. This person was Srimanth Bala Sundara Ganesh Shastri, the brilliant and youthful scion of the opulent Hindu family in the country and son of Vedamoorthy Nataraja Somayajigal, the richest and most revered Brahmin Vaidik Pandit, who had lived in the opposite row of their street in the most undefiled orthodoxy for upwards of 50 years. Of more of this young gentleman by and by.

The family minister in attendance who had to undertake the work of distribution of the holy water and the 'Prasadam'—in this case not more substantial for the present than the sacred 'Tulasi' with which the deity was worshipped—no sooner readied himself by tying his loose upper shawl tightly round his waist, and taking the water bowl, and the plate of 'Tulasi' in his hands, than nearly a dozen of the members of the gathering in the hall rose up here and there to their feet simultaneously and addressed the Swami. "Holy father, before you sanction the distribution of the 'Thirtham' and 'Prasadam,' we of the tradition of orthodoxy desire to put you a question or two. We shall have whole-heartedly to

resign ourselves to the sacrilege of refusing your Holiness' gifts if we have no answers otherwise," they all said.

"I am a deputy of 'Sishtachara Sampanna,' 'Veda Prachara,' 'Vedamoorthi Nataraja Somayajigal,' the renowned Vaideek of this town. I have been commissioned to enquire of you, your Reverence, how you practising the Hindu dharma of 'Smrities' and having embraced the status of Sanyasi and annexed the unchallengeable privilege of an adoring reception at the hands of every house-holder, could accept, nay, approve of the enormous transgression of the commandment of the 'Smrities' that has been perpetrated in this house. Is there precedent or support in the sacred books for the Brahmin mlecha alliance which your worthy host has flaunted in the face of the pure Brahmin community of this place, nay, in the face of the whole of the Hindu population here, who are not ashamed to own, or affirm their loyalty and belief in, the ways and sayings of their forefathers? We all regard our aged Rao Bahadur; but say, how you wish us to take the departure of acquiescing in his departure, and blight our hopes of salvation? Say, Holy Personage, how you set your seal of approval, and offering your gifts at this seat make of us heretics and out-castes?" spoke the foremost, but with the becoming regard due to the sacred man according to the Dharma which he felt was none the less obligatory on him.

“So for this, are our interdictions and the bans, on the inroads on our religious practices. If we tolerate one, we must tolerate another; and if we tolerate one other and another, how long does the distinctiveness of our social organisation last? We cannot hinder the paths of our religious evolution by permitting the overthrow of our social scheme from which they proceed,” spoke a second with great denunciation; and the rest of the protestants joined the chorus of objection.

So the rumblings of orthodoxy released themselves and for a pretty long while questions from every standpoint were in full blast and observations and cross-observations from all corners of the hall, about the preference of nationalisation at the expense of religion, the wisdom of innovations like the one under consideration even as a correct means for the end desired; and so on, were let flying in the air.

“Thank you, my brethren,” said the Sadhu at last breaking silence, addressing his questioners. “I have listened to all your estimable doubts and difficulties but pray what manner of resolution of them could it be to you, who still are tied to the demands of your social world, by one who has gone out of it? If it please you to have my views nevertheless, forbear with me, my good friends, and I will tell you what I feel. Now first to me who have become a Sanyasi, caste is non-existent, and I find in all men of whatever caste or colour,

a part of my own self: and I can therefore know no difference about myself in me and them. From this view, there is no 'mlecha' or true 'Hindu' and the Rao Bahadur has done no wrong nor offended the spirit of your sacred books. He has realised that breadth of feeling as a householder, to realise which men become Sanyasis. If it is meet for one who is approvedly on a higher plane to forget these distinctions, what reason then that it cannot be the same for one who is on a lower? Now for the second; find you, friends, that the secret spark of the Hindu Religion is freedom of action, liberty in the individual to act as he pleases. Man must endeavour, work for and attain salvation. It is but fair he should be allowed to tread the way which attracts him. Why should society war on his choice? What right has it to fetter him in a matter so purely his own personal concern? Now for the third. What after all is the prejudice he works to the community in a case like that? If he elects to follow a particular course, they have the same liberty of action to break away from him if they please. The Hindu fold is so comprehensive, so kindly elastic to gather up into itself every new community of ideas and of new persuasions, and allow it a life of its own, unconnected, unattached to the rest, provided only it confesses to the principles of its faith. And of faith? and if one believes in a faith you cannot compel him to disbelieve

in it? Therefore friends, if a man says 'I am a Hindu, I believe in the Hindu religion,' no one on earth can tell him he is not a Hindu, because his ways are not your ways. You may not associate with him: but still the Hindu world will expand enough to find room for him and fellows of his ways of thinking to form a community by themselves and lead their lives according to their own notions of what is helpful or hindering in their own paths of spiritual travel. Now what has our worthy host done? HE has chosen and done what he has thought best for himself and his children; and he is sure to bear his own burden, and not ask any one of us to give him a helping hand. Let us not strew thorns in his path. Let us not deny him the simple privilege of the exercise of his mere creature rights. Let him drink or eat or sleep or marry as seems best for him without trenching upon our modes of thought, and sentiments, our likes or dislikes, of course. There is no call on any one of us, brethren, to be the keeper of his neighbour's salvation. Let us not presume therefore that we must be the self-constituted protectors of the safety of the souls of our fellows: on the other hand, we shall serve, serve one another within the limits of our aptitudes in the spirit of our religion, to soften the asperities of life for others, and find for ourselves the labour through which to secure our own ultimate dissolution in the Godhead." And he added after a pause

"Now whoever spoke of nationalisation? Of nationalisation as the sole means of the achievement of political independence? Political dependence—imposition of aliens' will—shroud of despair over our own higher inspirations! Political freedom I grant is the key to the freedom of the spirit. Feel as a nation: there is momentum in it to become, of a solid compact body, fired with the unanimity of an ideal, unanimity of action, to rush a career of ambition, which a mere collection of individuals can never possess; and it may not come even to us if we were all of the same tribe the same tradition, and the same religion. But let us not lose our souls were we to gain even worlds that wise. Let us not be a Nation by a compelled intrafusion of blood or food, on an assumption of dubious universal equality. Now mark me; those who would be patriots. It is not necessary to be of one religion or of one community or of one equality to unite to feel as a nation, if as a Nation you do want to feel. There is a simpler and larger watchword, to which every one of you may acknowledge allegiance, and that is 'Ccountry'. Go engrave it on your banners and hoist the standards. You shall march onwards as a Nation; for you who inhabit India is the Indian Nation. To you is the right to make the most of the country in which you live, and, none others however mightier they be, have justice to lay their hands on you. God's earth! my brethren, which, do not forget, and the

most powerful anywhere on its face, may but come and go”.

He was heard in solemn silence, and as soon as he finished his animated observations, there was a general sign of movement in the gathering. Such of those who raised the note of dissent to accepting his blessing and “prasadam” had obviously quickly made up their minds that it was no breach of orthodoxy to accept gifts at the Swami’s hands, whatever mental reservation they made about the case of the Rao Bahadur himself. At any rate they did not fail to revert to a view that there may possibly be something in the nature of reason, in the stand that their respected fellow citizen and member of their community had taken up. The family minister whose activities had a short while ago been suddenly suspended, took up again the plates of ‘Prasadam’ and ‘Thirtham’ and made the distribution duly. After which the Swami rose to his feet which action evoked the same response on the part of the gathering. He thanked them for having honoured him and their host, for having attended despite their objections of conscience and listened to his remarks with whole-hearted tolerance; and the Rao Bahadur on his part followed suit in offering his own thanksgivings. He begged the party to stay on for breakfast and, as is usual in such circumstances, some excused themselves, and the rest stayed on. Needless to say that

the virtues of Mrs. Moropant, Rao Bahadur, as a hostess which had so often stood the test, were also fully in evidence on this occasion as well, and every one who sat to their leaves had a warm reception and sumptuous meal. Good Indira gracefully flitted between the rows of guests enquiring after their wants and looking to their being supplied. The Swami pronounced the finishing graces and the benediction on the host and the hostess, and after 'pan' and 'supari' and 'flowers' and 'sandal,' the guests dispersed.

Of all those that looked on the proceedings of the morning, no one was a more interested spectator than pretty and thoughtful Indira. The discussion of the various troubles of her father for which she had been looking forward for an authority to settlement, and the basis on which he placed his answers profoundly impressed her and his exhortation towards the last to every Indian to strive for political independence had fallen in so completely with her own agitation that she felt that she was standing at the threshold of a new life. She felt she must do something, however intangible it might be to win and recover the Government of her country into the hands of the people who lived and had their being there. During all the time there was a continual bubbling of ideas on her head, and she thought she would wait till the great spiritual man was unengaged, say after his meal, to approach him and seek his advice on the thoughts

that filled her. Moreover, she had not introduced her special guests, Zelica and Agnes, to the wise man and let them have an opportunity of a talk with him. With these and similar thoughts, she made herself the centre of the pretty trio of herself and her two young friends and slyly moved up to where the Swami was resting, to embarrass him with their innocent graces, and bombard him with trying questions.

He jerked himself into a sitting posture, immediately as the arrival of the three young damsels met his gaze, and stretching out his arms, and gently touching their bowed heads with both his hands, the Swami pronounced a solemn benediction and bade them be seated. The invitation was superfluous, and the bevy of pretty and half inquisitive girls duly installed themselves on the broad lower step of the wooden platform on which the Swami was resting, as if they were in the order of his devout discipleship. Once in the presence, their instinctive diffidence overcame them, and for some minutes, they sat looking at each other, failing to draw up the courage to speak. Contrary to his first imaginings, the Swami found it was his young visitors that were feeling embarrassed, and he accordingly resolved to break the ice. "What has brought you all here, respected young ladies?" he gently asked opening the conversation.

"It is for you to know and not for us to tell, holy father," rang the silvery voices of the pretty

maidens together like a peal of wedding bells. The speech of the holy man had the desired effect and the girls recovered their playful vivacity. Once again he saw their first score was against him; and not to be outdone, with a merry twinkle in his eye he gravely announced, "Little ladies, I am no doubt a seer: I see you have come to ask me who your respective husbands would be," which answer brought blushes instantaneously to their youthful cheeks. "Show me your hands, let me read them," he continued in kindly humour.

To which all three girls put out their hands simultaneously with delightful alacrity. He scanned the lines on their hands in order; and to each one in turn delivered himself of his prophecy. "You will woo and win; you will be wooed and lost; you are won and will not be wooed," he said to Agnes, Indira and Zelica respectively. The prophecy though cryptic, nevertheless brought some comfort to the somewhat agitated soul of Agnes, in that it gave promise of an ultimate settlement in matrimony, whether she wooed or was wooed; and to poor Zelica, it was a veritable message of resurrection. She raised her eyes and looked into the prophet's face, and from something in it that struck her, came near to thinking that he might be her own Nawab Kamaluddin telling her that he would come to take her in the guise of that prophecy. But it was on Indira that the words of the seer appeared to make no impression.

"I do not want your tales of wooings and winnings, Swamiji, for if women want they will have husbands enough. Do tell me, Sir, if I have the destiny to do service, and to the country, in the manner you were speaking in the morning," enquired Indira with resolution.

"I spoke of service when I spoke of husbands, Madam," replied the Swami with much earnestness. "When women learn to serve their husbands, they learn to serve their children; when they learn to serve their children, they learn to serve their country. Remember, young ladies," he continued, "service is the ideal of life. Through service is the realisation of human affection. In service is the revelation of human brotherhood; better say 'I serve' than 'I be served'."

He related that he belonged to an organisation called the 'Servants of the country' which had been formed with the object of creating an enthusiasm in every son and daughter of India for the glorification of the Motherland and her re-establishment on her ancient pedestal, and if even ever so many came, still there would be room for more to enlist themselves of his order at the "Deshashram" on the banks of the Nerbudda. He reminded himself that it was time to go, and with one bow of the head in general salutation to one and all, he was gone as suddenly as he had come.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT DEBATE

THE rumblings that were heard at the company's discussions on that night of the fateful banquet at the Rao Bahadur's house and the incidents which then occurred, gathered strength of sound during the succeeding months that intervened before the next general election, when it burst forth into a convulsion of furious proportions. The young bloods who had presumed that the shaping of the fate of the country for the future had descended particularly on them, had during these months carried on a violent and widespread campaign to force the issue. They filled the air with the loud battle cries of Social Democracy and Nationalisation; they flooded the country with perfervid oratory; and they paved the soil with leaflets, hand-bills and manifestoes. But by an irony of fate, the single reverberation of this fierce effort that came back from all the corners of the land was the sound and fury of a detestable and demoralising agitation to decimate the world-old intellectual Brahmin minority. "Down with the Brahmin," "The Brahmin must go," "He

must merge or die," was the sound that rose like a column over and above the din of this election-battle everywhere. The Brahmin was yet the stronghold of the Hindu religion; but, worse, it was he who mostly ministered it to the rest of the community. He was abstemious, and his vows were of poverty and spirituality; and his ideal of life was plain living and high thinking. He lived up to his ideal of life to the best of his ability, with admirable tenacity; and the average non-brahmin Hindu to whom religion was the breath of his nostrils and the language of his mind, sought to follow his precept and example and tried to model his life on him accordingly. The doctrine of Social Democracy had a particularly alluring look; and it had besides the enhanced importance as a factor of prime necessity in their sacred scheme of nationalisation. But the Brahmin though in his numbers was negligible, was the insidious force in the non-brahmin mind of the type of the Mudaliar gentleman at the Rao Bahadur's banquet, which prevented their vital doctrine from making headway with it. Such non-brahmin Hindus opposed because, they thought, it was not consistent with the idea of the evolution of the individual soul and the degrees thereof; and differences had to be maintained. So, argued the young enthusiasts, the Brahmin must be taken out of the way, must be pinched out. They had another reason; it was pleasant to have power. With the scheme of Hindu polity, the Brahmin was told off

to cultivate his intellect for the benefit of himself and the community as a whole, and his maintenance was made a charge thereon, and he was freed from the production of material wealth for his own support. He was early therefore consultant and intellectual adviser of ancient kings, and the influence that he so attained was carried through for him even during the succeeding periods of foreign rule when he was selected for and appointed to posts in the civil administration. The situation was the same even after the British obtained mastery of the country and it was the Brahmin caste more than relatively to its strength of numbers that made the largest contribution to the official phalanx. To push them out from the position in which they were placed by the sheer logic of events was another concern which was nearest to their hearts.

The Mahomadens whose religion was like the poles apart from that of the young Hindus, posed to join hands with them in their overwhelming endeavour, and played for great stakes in doing so. For all else outside their fold, they had no recognition; such, to them were an irrelevancy in the field of existence, which they had to either absorb or remove as a matter of pious duty. Within their community itself, they are said to observe very pretty ideas of personal equality and affecting mutual brotherhood, but all others outside it have only felt the militancy of their religion in the name

of which its adherents gave others no quarter, and whose jagged hardness of intolerance, even the wheel of Time has not been able to grind down. In the situation therefore, they found possibilities of a new field for the attainment of the holy aspiration which is said to eternally reside in them, of making India a Mahomaden Empire, and leading an Indian Nation into the open embraces of the great Allah and Mahomed his prophet. What more easy than that? If the elements of the Hindu community made up their minds to commingle with them for the purposes of temporal power, it would be but the next step to coax them to allow the cement of their religion to set, in the double stream of blood that has been started to flow into each other in the name of Nationalisation. And Power! it was equally acceptable for them to strive for. The Brahmin as the bulwark of the Hindu religion and the last line of its defence and the present hand of power, was a two-fold obstacle which it would serve the Mahomaden equally well to see out of the way. He therefore became a factor of the non-brahmin confederacy, which was devised to take up everything in existence which was not the Brahmin.

Thus the nationalists and social democrats, long months previous to a riotous general election, pronounced the doom of the little Brahmin. What was required was a thumping majority of theirs in the new council to vote down the puny voice of any possible opposition that might be raised by

soft-headed people who could not swallow their consciences in the glorious matter of crushing a helpless minority out of existence. To this end they put in motion their mammoth organisation of both men and treasure to hook up the votes of an unlettered and cheap proletariat which had come to bless the British Circar for having placed in its hands a decade ago, in the shape of the vote, an asset with which to meet its liability for Government revenue at least half way in the election year. So men and money moved throughout the length and breadth of the Presidency to the cry "The Brahmin must go". The plan was to introduce and pass through, at the very first sitting of the council, a compulsory marriage bill whereby it would be incumbent upon Brahmins of the realm to give their daughters in marriage only to non-brahmin sons, and to receive only non-brahmin daughters for their sons under pain of high penalties and punishments. The punishment was to be nothing less than for treason, *i.e.*, transportation for life; and the state was to have the right to put the marriage through the court, in place of the accused. It was the surest and nearest way, they argued, of exterminating the community; it would give them the added pleasure of giving it mortal humiliation in the process. As it was bound to be, the result of the election went overwhelmingly in their favour; a mere trifle in numerical strength, the condemned community had not the ghost of a chance against

its gigantic enemies. So the preliminaries had been satisfactorily arranged. The session of the council had been summoned and the date of its first meeting fixed; and the measure was also included in the Governor's speech by the ministry. All eyes were turned upon the coming debate, the like of which had never before risen in this ancient land.

Indira, high-souled Indira had somehow become singularly susceptible to the meaning of all these portents since the beginning of the movement sketched above, and gradually a cloud of melancholy was settling on her. The question of her own disposal eventually, the disposal of the vista of her life of high-minded resolve and occupation, fastened on to fancies in persons and things that she had already formed, had become intimate with her, and she had the vision to perceive that it was coming to be inevitably prejudiced. She felt she stood on the threshold of her sweet young life like a condemned criminal on whose neck the axe was to descend on the morrow, but with this difference that, in her case, it was sure the change of existence would be throwing her only into a gloom wherein her flesh and spirit would be the sport of the rule of a tyrant majority, whereas in his case it might well be a possibility he was being rushed into a brightness he had not hitherto known. She was the apple of her father's eye, and in the warmth of the bosom of her family she was unfolding herself, a sight of pleasure to her own near and dear and to others who took

an interest in her, and with her own consciousness of the same. Love of course had not certainly begun to distress her, but still it could not be said that she had not begun to know it, and to those who could have observed her, it would have been apparent that the thoughts about a particular young man were taking more and more room in her feelings from day to day. It was the prospect of such a life, a life of bright and enduring sunshine, without the blot of a shadow that she was counting upon; and the anguish that whatever else it was to be it would not be this, had entered into her soul. Her parents themselves were not insensible to the developing situation, but what was gained by distressing them the more by her discussing the matter with them, she did not see; perhaps it might only result in all the three of them resolving not to fight against fate, but bow to the inevitable. She felt she was not strong to take counsel with her own self either. But still the thought of silent resignation to fate under the circumstances was one that scorched her. Was she the bairn of a blue-blooded Brahmin family, the product of a physical and spiritual evolution of ages that had co-ordinated the conflicting forces of the flesh and the soul into a scheme of life wherein the visible body was regarded as the mere instrument of the invisible soul, provided for it for the practice of its karma or good deeds by which alone it had to carry itself through the evolution which ought to culminate in

its final absorption into the godhead; and wherein its own incitations for self-indulgence have no place, lest they corrupt the springs of the soul's action against the eternal laws of God which is "Serve yourself through serving your fellows of the same creation"—was she to mate by the compelling force of a wicked law of the land with one out of her caste, feeding grossly, thinking corruptly and in whose degree of spiritual evolution the difference between her and him was like between Diogenes and the pig, or with a Mahomaden to whom the killing of a cow was sacred, and slaying a non-Mahomaden at times was religion? She would not submit to such a fate, if she could. It would be pollution of body and more of mind, and she would not be the mother of offspring to whom, according to her lights, instead of giving a stride forward at the start of their earthly careers, as would please her maternal instincts to do, she would only give a start with the handicap of a mixed up mentality which they would take a cycle of generations to resettle and clarify. Still she had time to ponder the matter over, as the debate was to take place the next evening: and she determined to watch the course of proceedings before deciding on the line of action she had to adopt.

There was no comfort for her from friends. Of them she had not many either. Zelica who was one of her intimates and who, by reason of living near, came to see her often, was no doubt much saddened by the dejection of her friend, but she

neither knew what troubled her nor how to elevate her spirits even if she did. The utmost and her most heartfelt comfort she could offer Indira was to tell, "Oh, my dear Indira, why are you so sad? Oh, what can I do for you? Oh, where is Kamaluddin? How happy we would both of us be, if like sisters we married him together." She knew however that she would have the desired guidance at the critical point of time and that source would not disappoint her.

It was in the gorgeous hall, the House of the Provincial Parliament, that the momentous debate eventually came off the next evening. From an early hour animated queues of privileged visitors besieged the building and, when the doors were thrown open at the appointed hour, there was such an inrush which its old walls had not known within the twenty-five years of its existence. The visitors' gallery quickly filled up, and rows on rows of partisan publicists and interested spectators in dead earnest about the coming proceedings, either screwed themselves down into the seats at once or sat turning from side to side impatiently from time to time resting their chins in both their hands against the gallery rail, the line of their faces against its top looking for all that like a frieze of the expressions of human emotion in an exhibition of psychological art. There was Nawab Kamaluddin, for instance, who had suddenly turned up in the gallery for the first time after his suspicious

flight from the place after the fateful banquet in the Rao Bahadur's house; his eyelids in paint of black along the line of his eye lashes; his lips in deep red, the colour of the heavy lump of chew of betel and of areca in his mouth; the short tapering black beard and the fine moustaches well-oiled and combed; the turban richly worked in silver and gold thread high over the clean shaven head, and the long silk toga flowing down to his heels; and he, the young Nawab beaming with a feeling of happiness with himself as with the rest of the world, sat rolling his chew, turning this side and that, and stroking his beard like a typical Mahomaden bride-groom, come there, to receive his warrant of demand under the prospective statute of the evening, for the hand of the comeliest Brahmin maiden of his acquaintance over and above his own Zelica's. This was the moment of of his party's triumph, and he could not deny himself the pleasure of being present in the House at the time, and so dropped into it suddenly as if from nowhere. As if in some contrast to his, the countenance of his neighbour by about three places, Mr. Samiroya Mudaliar, the great orator of his party and the mightiest exponent of its policy in the last House, but now without a place there after the new election, was a study in the region of conscientious doubt; and the strain of thought that was stirring his political wisdom to its deepest foundation at the precise moment was, though his

attack on the proud Brahmin, was thoroughly justified and the measure that was about to be placed on the statue book in the course of that sitting, and due to a great part to his own exertions in the past, was undoubtedly necessary to break the neck of that odious creature in the Indian caste creation, still if it came to be that the democrat still further up his own row, the chuckler Adimandhra Mr. Poliah with whose community, he was still in active social relation, turned up at his door with the writ for the hand of his daughter Miss Jivamritham, B.A., and claimed to take her to his own hearth where she had to dress and cook carrion, or be it better, slaughtered beef itself, and serve it to her husband and her husband's people, what then? Surely he was wrong in having allowed the measure to be shaped so comprehensively. He should have seen to have restricted it to the Brahmin alone. But if its scope has been as narrow, would the communities and castes lower to his have joined forces with him for such a partial measure without any chances of their social elevation, or rather affirmation of social equality, or social democracy, and where would have been his glorious party? That was the difficulty. Well—He was a great power in his party—Was he not? And with his party influence, he could avoid such a disaster, if it could ever come to his own doors. Politics is a game where every one plays for his own opportunity, aboveboard or belowboard; "right

or principle—fiddle-sticks!" So mused Mr. Samiroya Mudaliar.

Poliah or Cheppula Poliah or footwear Poliah as his full name is, referred to above, was one of the shining lights of the depressed class movement. He was the pillar of fire that the depressed classes followed in their onward or "upward" march towards social elevation, and he was thus in no way an enemy of the proposed legislation the progress of which he had come there that evening to watch. He had no doubt, as his fathers had before him, cobbled and mended others' shoes as a family trade; and though now as a result of the forces he had assumed the privilege of manipulating, he could contemplate with secret satisfaction his being able to tap some of his superior castemen hereafter on their shoulders and ask them to make a pair of shoes for him and bring it to him, still he too had his own doubts about the coming statute. It was very agreeable to him, the prospect of Brahmin or other high caste daughters and sons-in-law coming into his family by virtue of the new law; but it was the Mahomaden's claim thereunder that rose into his throat and which he looked unable to swallow. The Mahomaden community, at any rate the large lower section of it in this country moved on terms of easy familiarity with his own; and if this social intercourse was strengthened by a right of marriage into it as well, he thought he saw generations of hybrid Mahomadens rising to disturb

the peace of its households and gradually winning it to Islam from the Hindu faith. For whatever else may be said of him he was a Hindu, and a staunch Hindu to the core, and he felt his religion was thus in danger. He saw the country overrun in a few generations with legions of hybrid Mahomadens more bigoted than their fathers, claiming marriage into the Hindu community, to gather more and more of it by giant strides into the Moslem fold by the device of marrying many wives at one time; and divorcing old and marrying new wives in quick succession, in the name of religious law, to increase the Mahomaden population so that India may be converted into a huge Mahomaden Empire.

Alone by himself, and without thoughts as to the broader bearing of the coming law but wholly immersed in the contemplation of its effect on himself, sat, Vedamurthi Nataraja Sastrigal in another corner of the gallery, an image of dejection. His traditional position of importance in this world was not only being taken away by the movement for the overthrow of the Brahmin, but even his happiness in the next was being prejudiced, by a forced breach from the practice of orthodoxy according to the letter of the Shastras. He was there to watch the effect the speech his brilliant son, Balasundara Ganesh Sastri, an established power in the House on the opposition side, was to make, as a forlorn hope.

Varying between such trains of representative thought were the visitors who packed the gallery, but their excitement was nowhere to what filled the Chamber which they overlooked. Every one of the features of its inside arrangements was untouched and undisturbed in its old place. The President's chair with its long back of ebony and gold shining against the red of the mattress of the seat, and set well under its canopy with the fringe of flowing purple silken tassels on its high pedestal descending to the floor of white marble in row of row of steps in polished Mysore porphyry, looked with its usual dignity on the rest of the furnishings of the hall. Opposite, the huge oblong clock which had just seen the silver jubilee of its installation in its present place under the visitors' gallery pass, was recording history as it had had, with severe rectitude in the same place; and the members' benches in green leather and polished teak spread out like a fan, rose tier on tier in the well between. The elegant frescoes on the walls were unaltered in the delicate shades of their original colours; and the surface of the ceiling dug out in a scheme of symmetrical figures, and walled away from one another by short ridges of carved teak and rose wood, portraying in painting court scenes and council audiences from the great Hindu epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, looked down with its wonted benevolence on the scene below. Everything in the

inanimate setting of the chamber was, as it used to be.

But the atmosphere was electric. It was charged with passion, and the tremors of agitation and excitement visibly flowed up to every nook and corner of the great hall. One by one the members slowly paced in through the doorways on either side of the President's dais and moved up into their accustomed places, and there drew themselves into animated groups, exchanging noisy and quick conversation among themselves, over the tops of their benches. As more time elapsed, the hum of conversation set vibrant and intensified, and deepened into a din in due course. A half dozen persons started up in sheer excitement in one place and commenced to hurl a string of Sanskrit texts, over no one in particular, as if to say in them was the fullest authority for the principle of the bill they were about to pass. An instantaneous rejoinder was throated out from another part of the arena by a whole choir in equally clear Sanskrit that it had been said ages ago that there would be Varna Sankaram or mixing up of castes in the Kaliyuga. Some more too excited even to keep seated, tried to cool themselves by pacing up and down the floor in the passage between the galleries, muttering or crying that the day of iniquity was to close, and the kingdom of fools, sought to be supported always on this text or that text of the so-called ancient Scriptures, would be broken up beyond resurrection.

Interjections and ejaculations, insults and intimidations, from one to one, and many to many, rose out of the cross talks and discussions from all quarters of the hall; and the note of fury and hate sailed like a cloud over the confusion that prevailed.

Presently there was a hush; it was the Hon'ble Minister-in-charge of the bill arriving into the House. The Hon'ble Mr. Setuswami Reddy was a person who had earned distinctions in American Universities in his studies of Sociology and Politics in his early days, and was reputed to have kept himself so abreast of developments of ideas in those subjects that, with regard to the former, he was supposed to cultivate views about marriage, and relations with the other sex, which had the flavour of easy touch and go, and so radically different from the notions cherished in this ancient country. His wide studies and deep scholarship were all known to all; his readiness of speech and graces of manner were generally recognised; but his culture only, people doubted, as they could not understand how any one could be said to possess it, who accepted no self-restraint in such a fundamental matter as the inter-relation of the sexes in society. He scoffed at their old world impertinences; he pitied their neglect of opportunities for the widening of their outlook in a thoroughly rational manner. After all loves and romances, sentiments and passions were all exaltations to support the operation of the physical law of sex, and what then if it was this man and

not that, for this woman or the other? So he held. That was the essence of social democracy in practice: a feeling of universal equality, of mutual trust, of the absence of that haunting doubt, that one does not think himself to be as good as his neighbour, that can weld and move a human mass into action. This was the frame of mind that Mr. Setuswami Reddy thought his country wanted in its political juncture. He would educate the people into that idea even against their will. He could dope the uneducated mass, chiefly the men of his caste, into accepting it; and the discerning intellectuals he could rush, with that solid strength behind him. So he was thought he could be put in charge of the bill, and he undertook to pilot it.

I will linger no further on the procession of personages that duly stepped in consequence and state into the House after the Hon'ble Minister-in-charge, or the order in which they arrived. One after another the Ministers filed into their places in the front Government Bench, bowing high and low, and with other apposite gestures, to those who greeted them as they came in. The Hon'ble Mr. Mudaliar, the Minister for Law, dressed in the correctest European style of clothing, walked in with a smile on his lips for everybody, nervously fingering the knot of his neck-tie into which he had stuck a diamond star, as if he was in perpetual fear that that article of dress

might be found deflected out of its correct place even by accident, by the movement of his own limbs falling out of line with the measured gait in which he used to carry himself along. Mr. Ali Khan Aliverdi, the Mahomaden representative in the ministry, arrived in no less trim, but he wore an expression that, as one who had known no scruple or honour in the manipulation of forces to keep himself at the head of the provincial municipal administration of which he was chairman, he knew why he joined the ministry, and how much he should be able to get out of it for himself. He was appropriately in charge of the Local Self-Government Ministry. With their other colleagues the Hon'ble the Rajah and the Hon'ble Venugopal, pompous but non-entities in their offices, the Government front bench was a packed place, with a line of despatch boxes in front, and a neat row of occupants behind, when the shout "Silence" was heard, and a dressy chobdar with the silver rod ushered the Hon'ble President into the Assembly.

All rose to their feet, and with a deep bow to the Assembly and a bow in answer from it, the President took his seat, and the others resumed theirs. The routine business of the evening no sooner had been got through, than the motion standing in the name of the Hon'ble Mr. Setuswami Reddy was called by the Clerk of the House.

"Sir," said the Hon'ble Mr. Reddy rising to his feet and raising his voice with the confidence which

the complacency of an assembly to a legislation of which he is sponsor begets in a minister, "This occasion is unique in the history of India. There has never been an occasion like this before in the four thousand years of its past history. The party, Sir, of which I have the honour to be one of the leaders, is itself an event; its birth, as the world is aware, is itself an epoch. To-night it is going to make history. From the beginning of the age of which we have glimmerings in this ancient country when the time-honoured dotard, my people call him, I am ashamed to say, a sage—Manu slashed, with the words of his code, the population of this country this way and that into so many pieces or fragments of society, this unfortunate land of mine has never known what the least of the other countries of the world does not fail to remember to-day, namely, to realise what is to be a Nation. I say this, Sir, in tears of bitter humiliation; but I have this comfort, Sir, nevertheless that by the end of this sitting to-night, we shall have known that humiliation no more. (Cheers.) The Indian nation shall be born to-night. (Renewed cheers.) Sir, it is the misfortune of this country that in the twentieth century and in this year of grace, we must be found hard at work demonstrating elementary principles of sociological knowledge and hammering them into the heads of the mass of our population, steeped in the ignorance of ages, and wilfully, treacherously kept in that condition—I assert deliberately—by the

machinations, of a vigorously intellectual community, only a handful in numbers (a voice—"the Brahmins", we will wipe them out"). Order, Order—who in the name of God and religion, have perverted its power of apprehension, distorted its point of view, and filled its head with a farrago of sanctimonious nonsense which has made it incurably irresponsive to the power of reason: and whose guile, thank God, we have been able to discover today, and whose power of evil we shall shut down tonight, if need be, by crushing that community out of existence. (Hear, hear.) Sir, the doctrine of equality of man which is the foundation of the principle of social democracy, which is the creed of my honored party, is accepted as an axiom everywhere else on the face of the civilised globe but is a theme for demonstration in this wonderful land; and where else, Sir, can you find the self-sufficiency, self-esteem and the mental isolation on the part of almost every individual in a community who thinks he is polluted by the touch of another; whose personal sanctity is greater than his neighbour's, and all agreeing to support the tier on tier of the great social hierarchy of caste. Sir, I am almost ashamed to refer to it; but I will put it to every one member of this council who must either have taken part or heard of it, could such a thing as the notorious rumpus at the banquet in one of our esteemed citizens' houses as that one that happened in the Rao Bahadur's house, could it be possible that such

a thing have happened in any other country? You cannot sit or speak or dine or marry without restrictions in this country of ours; and these restrictions and restraints are so many wedges that are cleaving and disintegrating the possibility of creating ourselves into a nation. These restrictions shall hereafter be impossible. Where other peoples are advancing in the light of reason and logic, we are smothering that light with the darkness of custom, and precedents out of books and texts of a pre-historic age. These shall hold place no longer. We shall think for our people; if they do not willingly hear, we will compel them to do so. We shall lay the foundations of an industrial and political greatness of a homogeneous community by laying down and asserting the doctrine of the equality of man and obliterating differences which offend against the doctrine. Who will say that a compulsory Inter-marriage Act is not the surest means of the social levelling that we contemplate, and I ask the House to support my bill and pass it into law, even though its first results may be the disappearance of the Brahmin community, which we are resolved and agreed to overthrow. (Applause.)

It was not necessary that this sententious and determined pronouncement of the Hon'ble Mr. Setu-swami should be supported by another speech from the Government side; such was the temper of the House; but the existence of Mr. Ali Khan Aliverdi in the ministry as a representative of the Mahomaden

non-brahmins, was thought such an opportunity as should not be missed for the delivery of a message of reassurance from the Mahomaden non-brahmin to the Hindu non-brahmins as to the complete identification of their mutual ideals for the overthrow of the brahmin and the measures for the mixing up of a Nation. So the Hon'ble Mr. Ali Khan followed the mover of the bill.

"Sir," said Mr. Khan Aliverdi, "It would hardly fall to a Government member to follow the Hon'ble mover of the bill to speak in support of the measure ordinarily. But I rise now to speak out my feelings as a representative of the Mahomaden community about the great measure to which we are going to commit ourselves. I feel so peculiar that I should rise to re-establish as it were with arguments as a statute, what is taken to be a mere matter of course in the great democratic community to which I belong. (Applause.) The Mahomaden fold is the greatest social democracy the world has known. (Applause.) It knows no caste; it knows no sect. Its members know no hindrance for marriage; a 'mali' may aspire for the hand of the daughter of an Emperor. It is therefore a gratification for the high community to which I belong that it should be able to support the extension of a principle which it knows, into the Hindu community, and to share in its practice for the achievement of national solidarity, the goal on which we have all set our hearts. (Applause.) But I am bound to utter this

warning. By the laws of our Prophet, Allah bless his name—which no earthly power can transcend, it is ordained that no Mussalman can marry an infidel. When I say that the Mahomaden community is gratified to join hands with the Hindus in the practical working of this new measure, in other words to ally itself with the Hindu community by bonds of marriage, it will be only on this condition that he or she of that community will embrace Islam. In this I am sure I am not asking for much from my Hindu countrymen for the sake of a great cause. (Cries of No No.), I am glad to hear these interjections of approval, Sir, may I hope that in the due course of events, with the beginnings to be made under the ægis of this Statute, that my Hindu countrymen in whose philosophy all religions are the same, see the better side of Reason, ally to the affinities of marriage the tie of common religion, and build with the cement of blood and Religion, a great Indian—Mahomaden Nation!

There was not so much of applause to greet this last hope of the Mahomaden member of the non-brahmin confederacy, but it was evident that it was fairly realised that the Mahomaden community had thrust its hand through the screen as to its conditions and aspirations in joining its forces with the other non-brahmins. But the tone of the debate had made the ministerialists quite heady, so that there was no pause on the last part of the their Mahomaden confrere's speech, for them to

throw down the challenge that might have been otherwise its portion. The hush of the silence that followed was oppressive, and only such as is in the expectancy of a great announcement. No one else cared to speak; it looked as if no one else would.

Such soft looks as stole from under the silken lashes of a pair of eyelids, drooping with despondency, looking out from a seat in the visitors' gallery, flashing across to where he was from time to time, sparkled into flame the anguish that writhed the frame of the young and brilliant Leader of the Opposition Srimanth Balasundara Ganēsa Sastrigal.

"I shall fight this fight, if fight, I must, till I die, and this wild democracy is shamed before all the nations of the earth," he exclaimed as he shot up arrowlike from out of his place, his face spread over with a rigid calm, the incrustation of his boiling rage, his fine big eyes steely grey, teeth set, and every muscle of his erect frame tense with excitement. "I shall not let this mongrel mass of malefactors destroy a world old race of intellectual innocents as long as one ounce of breath is left in me," he said, as he swept the air with his right forefinger outstretched in scorn at the line of the ministerialist benches before him. "You cheated him, the Brahmin, at first of his right to his share of the world's wealth by telling him the sordid goods of the earth were not for him. You dedicated him

to prayer and penury, to high thinking and plain living; to serve you with speculations about the Beyond and promised to protect and maintain him. He took up the work for its glory and drew a trail of light in his path for you motley mannikins to mark and follow. Turncoats, to-day you have your hands on his throat and cry "You have steeped us in ignorance; you stifled us in power, you shall now die like a dog." Do you believe the charge to be just, to be true? Go from end to end of this land, and feel the charm that resides in every breast, which softens the sway of passions and quells its revolt against its fellowmen, for the inequalities, the acerbities of this earthly life; unfold whereof comes to them, this understanding, that in this little span of here to-day and gone to-morrow, these are not worth all the mutual warring and tearing in which other peoples in other places perpetually envelop themselves, to wrest worldly wealth from one another's hands, as if they were to endure in its enjoyment to the end of time; and that after all, this life to each man is unto him only that much His Maker grants unto him in the degree of his good fellowship with the rest of his creatures. Deny this is wisdom? call it ignorance? Deny it if you may; but the nations of the earth are already looking to you to impart to them the secret. Whose gift is this? say who taught your peoples this art of life, by precept and practice, over the breadth and length of this land, this composure to live like

angels, and die like humans? "Stifled you in power?" Kings and warriors, merchants and magnates—all were you. Was the brahmin any? When and what power had he? He came into your counsels when you called and you took his advice or not as it suited you. You are as you made yourselves, as your own kings had made you. To-day you plot in chambers of iniquity, and by shameless inversion of logic, roar and growl upon him as if he were your oppressor. Talk like injured people? Of the righting your world-old wrongs? Is it justice that you are doing to the brahmin? To him, this the equity, the discharge of the moral duty of protection you owe and have vouchsafed to him? By the holy Gods, the great gods of Bharatavarsha, you are an unholy combine. Yours is the greed and fury of the pack. You gibe at justice when you speak in its name. You are jealous of the hold the brahmin has on the spiritual life of your people. You are even envious of his living on service, the last resort of the literary man, and have made a dead set to pull him out of it by calling it power. You have caught him at a disadvantage. He cannot go to the soil, for you have grabbed up all the land. He cannot go into the trade for you have centered all temporal wealth in your hands. You have ceased to support him by calling him your oppressor. You deny him the chance to live by service, for you are jealous of his power. By trampling down on every law of honour you hack at

the sacredness of your word and understanding with him, to support him for all time; and with every artifice of perfidy you are now trying to squeeze him out of his place on this ancient earth and polity by blackening him with sins, yours, and not his. "Be that so; but mark me," he said, raising his voice to a rich but subdued tremor and stately rolling out his words "this victory may be yours; the path of righteousness is not the strength of multitudes. You may kill the brahmin, and he will pass away with a smile on his face and without a tear in his eye, for it is in the essence of his training that the spoliation of his things of this world has no terrors for him. But weigh this; the curse of his blood will be upon you. You will fatten on the sin with which you have put a small community out of the way at first; and time and again with this same strength of a fortuitous combine for the moment, you will draw the doom of this group or that, of the manifold communities of your confederacy, which for the time incurs your displeasure; and your passion for the taste of the fruit of a solidarised nation would be like the Dead Sea fruit breaking away on your lips".

He cast up his eyes to have a look round upon the throng of spectators in the galleries above, to glean from their looks if they at least had that sympathy which the assembly below had lacked. But his eyes caught the retreating form of an exquisite grace and youth that appeared to be very much in a hurry to

get out and depart. He was glad she was gone, but the fixed gaze of Nawab Kamaluddin on that figure till she was out of view, that spoke of ardent intentions about her, struck him like a dagger through his heart. He sank into his seat, tired and exhausted with the effort of his declamation, and with a wild despair in his eye, as if his life and aspirations were engulfed for ever.

CHAPTER XI

THE RENUNCIATION

THE rest of the business of the Council's sitting was over within the next few minutes. There were no more speeches made, nor speakers anxious to rise, and the motion was made that the question be now put. The formula was repeated; and amidst a scene of the wildest excitement that reverberated through the walls of the old council hall as never before, the President announced that the motion was carried. Roars of applause greeted the Ministers and members leapt to their feet; and Ministers and supporters converged into a melee of vigorous handshakes and pathetic mutual embraces in the vestibule, where after a hearty indulgence for sometime, they emptied out from the scenes of their greatest political triumph in due course. There was nothing more to be done but the grant of the assent of the Governor for the Intermarriage bill becoming law.

The few days which thus would elapse was the only respite which Indira possessed and she determined to make the best use of it for exploring the ways and means of escape from the detestable

fate that was overhanging her, and lay her plans accordingly.

Alas for human helplessness! The tortures of our secret emotions are our own: our pains and miseries, not even those of our flesh or bone of our bone can lend a helping hand to relieve us from. We must bear our own cross. Our emotions burning, our scorched thoughts may race like galloping wild horses across the prairie for a means of escape; but turn whichever way they may, they knock up against the blind barrier of the limitations of our existence. We are victimized by the consciousness of our suffering; but the irradiation which can give us the rescue is withheld from us by a cruel hand. What then are we humans more than the toys that we ourselves create, which spin and run with the force of the mechanism we put in till it is spent, but the sport of a higher Hand who inspires us with the forces that convulse us for a time, till we stop in Death. We at least are merciful to our own creatures; we do not endow them with the self-sentience to torment themselves with the pleasures or pains of their agitation. But we! We rage and burn to no end with the feelings of our motion, till our thoughts all consumed, fall down in a heap of ashes, with no power to order ourselves to our emancipation, but only following the lead of our fate that was born with our births, not knowing why we came here or where we go.

It was therefore not the easy thing, despite her determination, that Indira thought the laying out of her future plans would be, but as she thought and thought during her journey home from the council Hall, her confusion became worse, indecision greater. The legion of thoughts that rushed into her brain did not leave her wise, nor make her happy. She thought of going to her brother who was in charge of a district now, but the law here was the law there, and there was no hope he could shield her. Her parents would be no good either, for however deep their own grief, perhaps deeper than her own, she was certain they would counsel her to succumb to the inevitable.

There was only one other to whom she would willingly have gone, to whom she would have entrusted her protection, to whom she would have given herself wholly up. But alas; it was because of his having been filched away from her by the hand of this cruel law, the thoughts of her protection and her protectors engaged and agitated her mind, and she turned away her thoughts from and about him, through agony, as from the corpse of a murdered lover. The wide, wide world had shrunk in its orbit to the little spot where she stood thinking, and she could not see where to go or what to do.

She stood dazed in this lulled state of mind for a space when suddenly she saw the veil rise from before her eyes, and the idea of the holy man who

had been in the town for some days together now, suddenly dawned on her, and she thought she could do nothing better than consult him. He was sure to tell her how she stood in the prospects of a worldly happiness, with a husband and a family, and those goodly pleasures which count for something in this life after her heart, and if in his distant vision, he could not promise her those things, why, it was open for her to renounce all at once, and immediately consecrate herself for that life of service and self denial which were sure to bring her the blessings of the next, and join the band at the "Deshasram" of which he was the head and for which she has had his standing invitation.

Her mental oscillation ceased at once, and she turned on her heels and headed straight, while half on her way home, back, towards the lodgings of the Swami. It was long past the hour for a young lady of her position and age to be seen going alone to strange quarters, but she quieted herself with the assurance that after all she was going to pay a visit to the holy father and even if she were seen, nobody would think of talking about it. She was thus walking along with her fevered thoughts for her company, when from behind, the pat, pat, of a pedestrian's footsteps coming alone in her own direction, struck on her ears.

She had hardly time to turn round and see, when the accents of a familiar voice rang out "Indira

Devi, my own Indira, where are you going now". It was an impassioned enquiry.

How she could have wished that that voice and that situation were that of her own Nilakant or that some benign soul had descended from the air and borne her away in his arms!

But it was Nawab Kamaluddin that spoke to her. Her heart leapt into her throat and she could scarcely answer. God of Gods! was it after all for this that she turned round to walk this way, to walk straight into the jaws of the tiger, the blood thirsty brute, the demon that planned to suck up her life—from whom to escape, she was running that way to procure a plan. She became worse than the frightened hare set upon by the hounds. She became stock still and glued to the spot whereon she stood. She did not know if she would not be carried away at once by the Nawab, without even the respite she hoped she should have before the promulgation of the new law and the issue of his marriage warrant.

"Do not be alarmed, my love; for the sake of old times and long friendship; where alone in this dark hour do you go Indira, my beloved," asked the Nawab with a gush of feeling as for a prospective bride.

There was a glint in his eye which spoke of a fullness of emotion which he could hardly suppress and equally dared not express. His right arm involuntarily flew out to reach the waist of radiant

Indira; but he stopped short and drew it back again to his side by the sheer force of his will. He saw Indira quivering violently. "Please do not touch me," she lisped. He heard her.

It spurred him into a temporary madness. He thought he would kidnap her. It was exasperating that this slip of a girl who in the next few days willy or nilly, was to become his wife, should now balk him of the pleasure of an heart to heart embrace under these romantic circumstances. But the discipline of his mind came to his rescue. He saw that for that very reason of her going to be his wife, he should not molest her.

"Queen of my night," he burst out with an upheaval of passion; but it was for a moment. He turned upon himself with impatient bitterness. "Ha! what insanity, what unreasoning impatience, that I should flutter for the full moon to ride over the vault of my mind and gather into its own radiance the deep of my thoughts, while but her crescent beams had just erstwhile pierced the gloom that had spread over them." He broke off again. There was a brief pause. He turned round and stood opposite to her in an attitude of supplication.

"I will not touch you my life, my love. My hand shall not be upon you as you wish, at this moment, but it shall be upon anyone who dares to molest you now or hereafter. Where do you go? May I not come with you, and to protect you on the way in this dark hour of the night," Kamaluddin asked.

His promise not to touch her gave her the requisite amount of recovery, and she was able once again to summon for herself the self-control to answer him. He himself gave her the protection against himself which she desperately needed at the moment, and there was nothing more that she wanted either from him or from anybody then. "Thank you," she said. "I do want to be alone. Pray leave me alone; I am going to the holy man yonder; and that is not a long way," she added.

There was obviously something that satisfied him in her answer and without more of ado or unrequited tenderness towards the prize of his life, he left her presence and with a brisk step passed out of her view.

* * * *

The holy man's dwelling was not a long way off, but Indira Devi was however a long time in coming. She reached the steps with a faltering pace, but the sight of another unusual and unexpected happening woke her up from her abstraction to the perception of living realities. A European girl, Agnes, the child of the biggest officer in the district, and herself the product of an English University, was the last person Indira could have expected to have had any point of sympathy or common interest with a clean shaven bazaar mystic of the orange robe of the East, but there was no doubt she saw she was there discussing something with the holy man.

Indira did not need to look a second time at the white figure that was sitting opposite to the holy man to make out that it was her own friend Agnes Chatfield. But what could Agnes be talking about to the ascetic at this hour? She no doubt lived opposite to his lodgings and might have been his acquaintance by sight; and the introduction she gave her at the holy man's worship in her own house, might have given her some familiarity as well. But all this, seemed to her mind, could not have been the occasion of a casual visit to the young monk during unconventional hours; and that she should have been found closeted with him alone in the depth of the night, by the light of a tiny oil fed lamp, exchanging confidences animatedly, bespoke to her mind that the object of her friend's visit must have been something of intimate mystery to her. She paused instinctively and stopped short. She almost thought she would retrace her steps and return home.

But it was a tell-tale shadow, the shadow of her own slight and lengthened form in the narrow beam of the flickering lamp that roused the pair's attention to her presence.

"By the good God! My beloved Indira, What you! eh! come in my dear," exclaimed Agnes.

But it was a strange meeting, that surprised every one of the trio; and not the least perturbed was the young monk himself. "I will turn back and go; I have no mind to intrude," answered

Indira in an undertone. But they would not let her go. Indira still stood on the outside steps hesitant.

Agnes flew to her feet and quickly gained Indira where she stood. She threw her arm tightly round her waist and with tender force walked her inside into the presence of the seer. Once inside, the restraint softened, and the three sat down to a bright talk as in a meeting at Indira's own house on a former day.

"Indira Moyee, pray what has brought you here at this hour? 'Anxiety' 'Devotion'? How do you do? Are mother and father well? the little 'baccha' my young bhayi, your little brother too. My blessings on him. Pray be seated, Moyee." "Ah Lady Agnes, what fine lady! so curious, so exacting, Indira Moyee. She has been ferreting out the inmost recesses of my prognostication for the past one hour with her most engaging question shall I say it. Lady Agnes—who, where, her prospective husband is?" added the soothsayer jocularly, and with a dignified smile.

"Lucky girl," sobbed Indira. Agnes hung her head with a blush, and with the proper amount of shyness turned upon the reverend man. "Really, really, holy father, what wantonness! what betrayal of secret confidence," she pouted.

"You must not say like that, my lady; our own Indira Moyee is the beloved of our hearts. There be no secrets between us. My Devi, me-thinks

recollects what I have told you all already about you. You will woo and win."

"The same old old prophecy; and as uninforming as ever. There is no freshness about it," piped Agnes looking at the company from through the corner of her eye, her head still bent.

"Who and where, that is the point Agnes wants so much to know," stressed Indira. "Your prophecies are otherwise so cruel, seer," she added.

"Yes, yes," chimed Agnes in agreement. "Indira says the same in good memory of what you told her about herself, swamiji. You will be wooed, but not won. Is it not dear?"

A wave of emotion overwhelmed Indira, and she began to sob hysterically. "Oh me! Why me!" sobbed Indira aloud; she broke down utterly and soon fell into a swoon.

By the time Indira arrived at the holy man's place, Agnes had been engaged in the extremely interesting occupation of casting about the ways and means of putting out her only possible rival in love out of the way. It was known that she had set her own heart along with those of her parents on hooking up young Arthur Pitt to lead her to the altar; but added to this preference of hers, she had also secretly vowed in herself to dare or die in the attempt of getting him, as the punishment to the slight he had poured into her ear under his own roof, when in a mood of false confidence she laid bare her love to him in his own arms, on the day

when she along with her mother went to the Pitts to congratulate them on Daisy's betrothal. She had known of Arthur's infatuation for Indira; and it was heavy odds against her that only if Indira should say the word, her own pretty bird would have flown away from her reach. To fix up Indira therefore irretrievably elsewhere, to smother Arthur's thoughts for her for all time, was the only key to her success: and that was the plan of the campaign she was laying with the man of wisdom opposite at that hour of night. There was a shade of Nawab Kamaluddin outspread, over her midnight lucubration with the swami; and she was urging that the deliverance that had come to her through Kamaluddin's claim to Indira's hand under the new statute should not be lost under any circumstances. There were the strength of love and the strength of lust; and between the two, she expected her little scheme to come to fruition.

But it was a different Agnes now. She forgot all that in the presence of human misery, and the plight of Indira roused her feelings of friendship, and that strain of human sympathy which in the face of adversity, makes the whole world kin. She herself was overcome with grief and she drew Indira on into her lap, and rested her head tenderly on her thigh. The monk was not behind hand in his ministrations either, and the two poured on her their good offices of appeasement which soon restored her to her senses. "Ah me! Why me! my

death-warrant has been signed!" she woke up with the wail on her lips.

"Peace, peace! child, do not sob like that, my Indira, my heart, what has happened to you," protested Agnes, bending over to calm her with a kiss. A stream of hot tears flowed over from Agnes' eyes on Indira's cheeks: and Indira raised her falling eyes and met Agnes' glance. In that one second passed through those two young girlish souls a flood of the divine affection which all the hate and dislike of the many previous hours could not touch. It was only the soul of the man who was sitting looking on, that did not relent.

"My own, my own life is done, is finished, Swamiji," cried Indira, "there is nothing for me to live for on this earth." "Agnes, my life has become the Dead Sea fruit that has turned into ashes on my lips," she drawled out turning to her friend with a faintness that even her fervor could not inspirit. "My death warrant has been signed," she moaned lowly.

"Whatever could have happened to you? I beseech you! Indi, my beloved! You make me weep for your distress. What is the death? what has blasted the sweetness of your life? What has drowned your bliss? Speak my heart," stuttered Agnes with a gush of emotion excited by the presence of her companion's misery, than by a spirit of enquiry. For the time her knowledge of the facts of the case

was obliterated by the sight of Indira's abysmal wretchedness.

"They have me these cannibals, who would have my flesh and my person: these social democrats, these Nation builders, in the name of the new marriage law? They would crush me, the fairest flower of a brahmin nursery, to feed the lust of a Mahomedan despoiler to make my country great! No, I cannot stand this," Indira moaned.

There was a glare in the eyes of HE of the orange robe; but it was for a moment, and passed away like a flash.

"No," she continued, "I will not surrender my birth-right to live up to the ideals of a civilisation into which I am in the grace of God born; come what may. Strike me down, let them; yield I will never." The voice grew tremulous; and rose step on step with a tremor, and then she exclaimed, "white as a lily, stately like the poppy, fragrant like the jasmine, and dainty as a rose; that is the ideal of life to which my brahmin priesthood has bred me up; will I suffer being defiled for the few years of fleeting time on this despicable earth, by this sensual horde who will not live but by taking life; the vandals who will scoff at heights they cannot reach, but will still pull them down to their vicious flatness, to have the peurile pleasure of thinking that they have all grown up to their level; no, Agnes see I will baulk them in their own game." "Ah, my governors," she cried out in a fierce

apostrophe, "you have no vision; you are stirring up the fabric of this ancient land with the Devil's long spoon to its very depths, and mind ye, He will set the fare before you which you shall have to eat to the full in the end."

Agnes found it would be too much even for her to act as if she sympathised with her friend in a situation so much to her liking and in which she had so serious an interest; she contented herself therefore by simply administering some soothing advice. "Look here," she said, "it is no good trying to fight the inevitable; we may only bow to it my dear; reconciliation is after all the spring of all human happiness. Look at the matter in that light; do not dare, do not be rash."

"I am determined but I will not be rash," answered Indira. "These fools! they have thought they have trapped me. I shall not take away my life as you fear, my dear Agnes, as perhaps you think I may, when I say I shall baulk them in their game. No. I want to live to teach them better. I have Agnes, brains Agnes, to foil them. Look," she said, "raising the veil over her hair and snipping off a few locks passionately" this circular spot on the crown of my head is the mark of my future state. I have cut off the hair there to dedicate myself. I have renounced the world: "I am an anchorite, a nun hereafter. I am marriageable no longer. Where be my legislators now who seek to dethrone me from my Brahminhood, and cast me to a mlecha

Mahomaden suitor?" Indira asked. Agnes was gratified beyond measure, at this bold triumph of her friend. She had two good reasons for the same. Her prayers were heard; and it was reserved for her to have the supreme pleasure of learning that Indira's rivalry in her love was at an end, and that, with the added refinement of hearing it from Indira's own lips; and the second was her instinctive dislike as an English woman to the deprivation of individual and personal freedom which the new law meant, and to the measures of compulsion and force, which under the name of law, the latest recruits to the profession of government were putting through in the land, by the aid of the strength of unreasoning numbers. "The fools," she echoed in her mind the words of her friend; "they thought they knew all about making laws, and here it is, a slip of a girl is able to throw them all back into their faces." "Oh joy," she burst out, "happy Indira. The fool I was. Why did I think you would do something rash! I should have had the wit to imagine you would do some such thing like this superbly to defend yourself." She could not contain herself and threw her remarkable friend on herself in the happiness of a tight embrace.

But it was apparent that feelings of a different kind were rampant in the mind of the Swamiji, from the scowl and agitation that were passing over his countenance. It was visible that he was thinking that Indira had made a daring score; but with all

the inward struggle he seemed to be passing through, he could not conceal an expression somewhat in the nature of severe personal disappointment at the turn events had taken.

"I have come to ask you, Swamiji, for your blessings in my enterprise," proceeded Indira having recovered by now her natural overpowering sweetness of tone. "I am the latest recruit for—at your Deshasram, at Nasik. I have come to ask you to enrol me as such. Through the bitterness of my own individual life have I emerged into the larger life for the country and to-day have I ordained myself for the country's service. I shall teach them," she added radiantly, "the gospel of good government that alone can endure, the one for all and the all for the one," against the creed of spite and suppression with which the non-brahmin Social democrats are stifling the country.

"You shall have all the protection I can give or can ever give, Indira Devi," spoke the Swami, with the brilliance returning to his eyes. Indira being now secured in his protection, he felt relieved as if he had found something he had lost.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEPARTURE

WITHIN a very little time after this, Indira found herself under the parental roof again, but she entered the old house feeling like a stranger in her heart. Our ideas are our masters after all ; they govern us and compel our obedience, as no other power on earth can, and how quick they can place and displace us in our relations with our cherished environments is the greatest marvel of all. The idea of her renunciation destroyed the intimacy of her relationship with everything that she had called her own. Her room was no longer her room ; and her parents stood there as her parents no longer ; and those possessions big or small in the house to which she had an attachment as dear as to her own life, dropped off their hold on her mind in that single moment. Indeed the idea became the juice as it were which embittered the taste of her contemplation of these things, and drove her away thereafter as it were in repulsion from them.

The hall clock had struck the hour of eleven at night, when Mrs. Moropant Sadasiv, flitted with an anxious face into her husband's room where the

Rao Bahadur was sitting before his reading table, resolving his sorrows in the philosophy of the pages of the Bhagavad-Gita. The old but animated gentleman was so much in communion with the spirit of what he was studying, that he was disturbed by the arrival of his respected and respectful wife, and he did not take off his eye from the pages of his book, mindless of her presence. The good lady on her part was reluctant to commit herself to the gross incivility of disturbing the gentleman whom she revered both as an elder and her husband, and stood on, but her maternal anxiety overcame her, and depending on the familiarity of a wifehood of more than thirty years, advanced opposite to him, and said, "Panditji, Indira is not come home yet."

The Rao Bahadur waked up from his reverie abstractedly, looked at his wife and asked her what she was saying.

"What is it," "What is it you say," my housewife, dear, he asked. "I only say, Sir, Indira is not come home yet; it is gone 11 o'clock of the night already and she is not come back."

"Ah! grunted the old gentleman, collecting his thoughts into the living present 'Indira is not come back' is it? Yes, this is the way of these modern little ladies. Where could she have gone, the little minx. Ah! yes, I now think. Is this not the night of the marriage bill debate, my mistress," he asked of his wife.

"Bills or debates, Panditji what do I know or care to know for. I do not know; as if I can better the world by leaving the work that I know best, and busyboding about things that others know better to do. If I can keep the house shipshape and look after you and the children well, and see that there is no sliding in the traditional civilities and charities of this ancient house lest the whole world may say 'This daughter-in-law has come into power; ha—she has brought the name and fame of the old Moropant family into the dust,' that is more than I want, and the sprig of the sacred basil and spoonful of sacred water at the feet of my Shri Vittoba will look after me. I want no bills or debates; whatever the gods have written across my face I will endure," replied Mrs. Moropant. "By the way," began the Rao Bahadur, as if in a strain to enlarge on the lack of his wife's political predilections; but the lady stopped him short. "The child is not come home; and it is getting late, and whatever it is you said, Panditji, to-night may be disturbed. Whatever may happen to her, the silly girl, she may come home or be carried away," Mrs. Moropant said with a quiver in her voice.

"Do not be silly my angel," growled the Rao Bahadur as if to wear down the rise of needless anguish on his worthy wife's part. "Whatever is going to happen to Indira? she is gone to witness the debate in the House, and she must be coming back unless Nilakant has waylaid her and is talking

innocent nonsense. If you fear so much, ask one of the servants to go with a lantern along the road to meet her and bring her home." "This will do," he added.

There was nothing more to be done; she could remonstrate no more, and the master of the house had dismissed her commanding what had to be done. She went in and instructed a servant to go with a light along the road and she herself made "pradakshina" to the deity in the domestic shrine, that nothing ill may come to her beloved child, and came out and sat on the dais in the front verandah of the house, with the little son in her lap, eagerly listening to any sound of Indira's returning footsteps.

It was at this juncture that Indira neared the house steps, and Mrs. Moropant's maternal ear at once detected her coming, and she hurried out to the outer gate to meet with anxiety and admonition her truant child. "Whatever could this mean, Indira, Fine, very fine, indeed, kicking out your heels till 11 o'clock of the night. And you a girl to marry. Thank you missie, you have given me and your papa the fright of our lives. Well done; please go in and bring your papa in for supper. We have been waiting for you," said Mrs. Moropant.

"Nothing terrible has happened, mother, to upset you so much," rejoined Indira, dragging her somewhat limp self into the house.

"Yes madam, nothing terrible may not have happened. You are grand ladies; cannot afford to

be civil to your own mothers," remarked Mrs. Moropant with vexation.

"I want no more to be rude to you, mother, than to our goddess Shri Tripurasundari. I am ill mother, that is all. Forgive me mother," said Indira, and she turned sharply round to fall on her mother's feet as both mother and daughter were going in the passage.

Mrs. Moropant had hardly expected that her dearest and delicate daughter, the apple of her eye so to speak whose non-return home early she was fretting so much about, would be ill; and that she should have made her worse with her scolding, became too much for her to bear; and the huff she was in instantaneously dissolved into an outburst of emotion about her health which made her exceedingly fidgety. She could not think of doing anything, not even of putting Indira to bed to soothe her, and she called out to her husband.

The separation from his sacred studies was an annoyance to the old gentleman even when it was at the call of supper, at which as at every other family meal he had to preside, and as his housewife's voice was heard, he took it it was for the night meal he was being invited, and that it meant Indira had returned, and she, with other members of the family were already in their places. But even his good humoured sarcasam with which he looked at the bustle in the life of his family received a scare, when he found on his way to the dining

hall that the family was grouped round Indira in her room. Father, mother and children, and servants who had gathered as soon as word was heard that Indira Devi was taken ill, all talked with one another, at the same time ; and notes and suggestions from every one as to this or that to be done were thrust forward and discussed simultaneously, before the Rao Bahadur cleared his way and sat near Indira on her bed.

He stroked her with subdued sadness and tried to get her to speak. "Moyee Indira what ails you my child," he asked with a lump in his throat. If the fear of death is as is said, but the fear of an enforced severance from our environments in this world into which we have driven our roots, then poor Indira was undergoing something of that state when all this parental and friendly concern was being lavished on her. When she was away from them and in surroundings and circumstances which evoked resolution on her part, she readily took it in an access of spiritedness, with perhaps but an incomplete visualisation of the magnitude of the choice she was making ; but when she came back into the old home and in sight of her parents, and a choking atmosphere of affection overwhelmed her even at the supposition of an illness that really was not there, she became unnerved and an intellectual miasma spread over her. She hardly knew how to give her father an assuring answer. Mothers are mothers indeed and their affections are like the

light open showers that rain and refresh for a while and blow away, but a father's affection is a secret spout concealed deep down under the surface, which when released shoots up in a overwhelming flood and sweeps one off his feet.

"Speak Indira, speak my child; it is your old father that asks you. What ails you my daughter," repeated the old gentleman in a pathetic wail. Indira felt much too moved by her father's appeal to remain silent. "There is nothing the matter with my body father; but I am oppressed in mind, I feel churned up," she answered.

"There shall be nothing for you, to feel oppressed about, as long as you are in your father's house, my lass," said the father, his robustness of spirit reasserting itself. "What agitates you my child," he asked again. "I can no more say than I can know myself father; but I feel upset, convulsed. that is all," said Indira.

"Then that is nothing; do not mind it. The whole household is gathered about you, dear; your brothers and mother. Ah! see how the old lady is hanging on what you say—quiet yourself; have your meal and it will pass away. Rise we shall go for our supper, for which we have been waiting for you." He tried to raise her and walk her into the dining room reassuring her so. But she declined to follow.

"I want no food, no clothes, father; I am all now past those wants. I do not want to be here any

more. Everything hereabout is beginning to jar on my nerves," cried Indira.

"No Moyee, do not be silly. You have no more reason to be tired of your father's home than the Queen of England of her throne. It will be time enough for you to think of leaving us, and when the day comes, you shall leave us with our blessings to another home. Meanwhile do not break your parents' hearts by saying you will go away from here. May be you have gone to hear the debate, and all the raucous nonsense that may have been roared, has upset you. Is it my child?" persisted the anguished father.

Indira heaved a sigh; and lapsed into silence for a time. Then she broke out in a frenzy. "It is all over; it is all over; this is no more home for me; this or another. It is all idle speech, this or another home for me here. The begging bowl is my nurse; the saffron robe, the saffron robe of nuptials; and the great vault of Heaven the vault of my other house to be. Send me there into that my other home with your blessings father, father, as you promise. I do not want to be here any more, here any more; and I must be going. Let me alone, do let me alone," exclaimed Indira, hysterically and lapsed into a slumber of exhaustion.

The party inside quickly withdrew, as of all the remedial measures that suggested themselves, that which Indira herself desired of being let alone struck as the very best that could be thought

of at that hour under those circumstances ; but when once outside there was an animated parley, between the gentleman and the lady of the house, reinforced by the views of some of the elderly dependants and servants. "I have no doubt she is possessed," one said ; "otherwise think this meek child who knew nothing else but to read and laugh all her time, talk in this manner," said another by way of an affirmation of the hypothesis. "Baba, did not one of your ancestors die a sanyasin, see she speaks like a sanyasi ; the old crony perhaps has descended upon the poor child and is worrying her," asked a third. "Why do you talk scurrilously of a deceased ancestor ; can you not see she is just at the crisis of the age for marriage, and sure she must have been seized by a loving nymph who must have jumped on her as she came along now alone, under the trees at this midnight hour," corrected a fourth sapiently.

With this wealth of suggestions and conjectures the poor old Rao Bahadur was fairly non-plussed, but the substance of the last suggestion came very near to his diagnosis of the case. It was bound to be, he thought, that an young, adolescent and high spirited girl like Indira, none very robust physically, should have been over excited by the hearing of all that was said in that iniquitous debate on the Intermarriage bill during the evening, and that the reaction on her own thoughts should have worked on her nerves to bring about a fit of hysteria ; and

this he thought did not require much medicining at that hour, and if she were left with some good rest the fit would wear away and things could be seen to satisfactorily in the morning. So he posted a servant at the threshold of Indira's room to be in attendance, and he and his wife with the rest of the family went in to look after the unfinished work of the night.

"It is no good your telling me, your persuading me that there is nothing. I knew it; I know it now," went on Mrs. Moropant murmuring along with her husband into the inner apartments. "It is not for nothing that elders say that if holy family usages are broken, misfortunes are sure to follow. I sought as best as I could, Panditji, to wean you from the innovation in Gouri's marriage and you would not listen. They all forebode evil out of it; and we had the first fruit of it in the break up of the wedding dinner itself. How inauspicious! my pride as the hostess of the house, the house wife who has come into the keeping of the honor of the noble traditions of this ancient family and the glory of its domestic life and worship, was humbled into the dust then; and now my dearest and sweetest child is in bed with a fateful illness. You and this little girl held me down then as if you were winning the seven worlds for us, called it reform for the country, cried me down as superstition and all the rest of it—My luck, my good husband! Ha."

"I do not want you to revert over and over again to that same stale superstition of yours. Bai," rejoined the Pandit, with emphasis, forgetting for once the civility due to the wife he had always held in esteem. He had always thought that her coming into his family was a condescension for which he was grateful. She was the much esteemed daughter of a Deshmukh of high estate and at the time of his marriage though his own family was nearly the same status, it was down somewhat in worldly fortune. In due course he discovered the ideal of a wife in her and he secretly cherished her as the staff of his happiness in life.

"Forgive me my lord, this impertinence," prayed the Hindu wife. "Ah how blind my motherly anguish makes me to the plainest things. Is not my daughter yours? and what can I hope to do more than you yourself can do for her. Ah! how senseless I should have offended you."

"Speak no more about it, my wifey dear; it was the frequent rubbing on an old sore that gave me the sudden annoyance, dear. Do not worry. I should have known better than upset you now with a sharp temper. Excuse me. I am as much anxious about these happenings as you are, dear; only I cannot get you think about it in my manner and without superstition. Perhaps you see better and are right. Of all the superstitions of mankind I know, the worst is that of the wise who think they

can regenerate a world which will not be persuaded"; so spoke the Rao Bahadur.

Silence was having its spell over the house and the household, when at four o'clock in the morning Indira woke up from her sleep. Even the attendant at her door was snoring, evidently making up by quality for quantity the sleep which he had lost during the early hours of the night. The lamp in her room was burning with a subdued glow.

She found herself much refreshed and fit to meditate upon her plans and take up the thread of her thoughts at the point where the events of the overnight had puzzled it. Her mental weakness which she felt on sight of her house and parents and which threatened to subdue her previous resolves wore away, and there was no more wavering in her. She felt more than ever strengthened in her determination to leave home and consecrate herself for the service of the country; to enable her to labour her little mite for the confusion of its enemies and the establishment of institutions under which it would no longer be possible for selfish political hordes to have every thing their own way, but would secure to the merest of the inhabitants of her country the freedom and latitude to live up to his deserts.

So she sat up in bed and began to prepare herself for the moment of her self immolation. She stripped herself of her jewels one by one and took a fond parting look at them and tied them all up in a

bundle and thrust it under the pillow. She opened her wardrobes next and tenderly took out every one of the valuable dresses and saris with which through youthful fancy and caprice she got herself provided by her fond parents; and after lingering over for a few seconds restored them to their places and said a silent farewell to them all. She hastily picked up a saffron colored sari and wound herself in it and stood before the looking glass. She could hardly detect herself in this new appearance; and she was satisfied that her self extinction in her prior state of a person to follow earthly joys and cares was complete. In her new dress she looked like a daughter of the woods into which she was going at the "Deshasram". She cast a last glance at her former boudoir and all her gorgeous belongings therein and slipped out, without rousing the attendant who was still sleeping with his head on the door frame,—for ever.

She walked quickly into the backyard, and by way of it into her pretty flower garden of which she was so fond, and to which she desired to say a last farewell. The morning moon was just throwing a fog of light over a bank of clouds, and the giant jasmynes, Indira's dearest flowers, were opening their petals in bunches and looked from across the sward like a scattered constellation of stars.

She paused, and just for a moment, and stepped briskly into amidst the flower beds.

And what a revival of memories! Her head she felt was like a volcano in eruption. Her thoughts, her daily communion there with her flower friends; her jokes, her sprightly buoyancy of life; her thoughts of marriage and anticipations of pleasure and the thousand and one other things that thrilled her life through innocent hours of amusement, flowed down like a stream of lava and scorched her. It was also here, that Arthur for whom it could not be said she did not care, made his foiled proposal of marriage to her.

She was moving jauntily between the bushes, admiring, smelling and feeling the opening flowers, when her eye caught sight of a standing figure almost about the place where Arthur and she had their last meeting. An idea rushed into her head momentarily if it might be the shape of good Arthur, who by a kind of telepathy come to know of her misfortunes, had suddenly appeared on the scene to rescue her. But there was hardly any time for the enlargement of these speculations before the figure advanced towards her with a confident familiarity, and stood revealed before her as Neelakanta Ganesh.

"Soft, soft," he whispered, as she was about to cry out in trepidation. "I have come to carry you away. There is not time to lose. We shall flee the country and go into another land where these 'pisachas' will have no hold on us. Do not doubt or fear. 'Where dunces damn and deign to rule,

brains but become the badge of the fool,' has befallen to this great country in this cycle. There are lands over the wide wide world, where we can go, and with my brains I shall support you like a queen." He rushed forward to put his arm round her waist to lift her way.

Indira had neither time to lose nor to think. She expected to take the first train going up country even before it was broad morning. She hardly expected Neelakant at this hour or here with a proposal like this.

There had indeed been a growing feeling between the two families that Neelakant should be married to Indira, but as happens in high class Indian families, the matter had not been fully negotiated and resulted yet in their betrothal. Neelakant had been ardently hoping to annex this fair flower of the Rao Bahadur's family and enthrone her in his heart, but as far as Indira was concerned, except that she felt her heart also was being drawn to Neelakant, owing to his handsomeness of appearance, brilliance of intellect, and great prospects as a political leader, she had not yet conceived a consuming love for him which she would, only for her husband if he or another became such, when her parents married her away. No obstacle rose against the assertion of her power of grim determination and the memory of her resolution to serve for the betterment of the country; and her mind was suffused with this, when she decided on her answer.

"Too late," she said.

"My darling, no," remonstrated Neelakant with deep emotion. "One quarter of an hour yet for the next outgoing train." I shall put myself and you in it if only you will say "Yes," replied Neelakant importunately.

"Too late, too late," she continued repeating with deep feeling. "Six hours earlier I do not know what I should have said." Quietly gazing down fixedly on the big jasmine flower which she held in her fingers she uttered this reply.

"Great god? I cannot suffer this any more or longer, this agony of my life," Neelakant burst out. "Am I to sink into cold earth even without my love requited. Indira Devi, Queen of my thoughts, with whom I thought I could travel to the ends of the earth; you too! will you too strike me down with your cruel word? No, No, I will not heed that all, not even your hesitancy. Come what may, I shall bear you away in my arms and no one shall deprive me of my prize till I am vanquished and felled down."

"I am no more your prize, than you could be mine, beloved," she moaned with heart-rending sadness. "Life is made up of supreme moments, dear; once gone, they are never retrieved. Six hours before, I could have been yours; I am another's now."

"Whose," he screamed wildly as if thrust back with a dagger. "I will not hear," he said. "Let

him whose you have become, come and wrest you away. You are mine now; I will not yield my prize," he added with desperation; "not so long as this right arm can defend."

"It is all no use, no use, alas!" she said shaking her head with detested determination. "My word has been said, and I cannot take it back. If I would be anybody, it would be yours. But look," she said stretching her dainty fingers on the crown of her hair, "here is my vow, my vow of service for the country. I have given myself up for the country and I can give myself up to no other."

He found no words to say to oppose.

"There is no more life for me. My soul has merged in yours; and if you leave and we part I am to wither and die. Take pity on me and let me keep to you. Make me your chela. You shall be the substance, and I like your shadow shall be of you, but apart, following you inseparably, and fulfil my heart's desire by keeping your company," he implored. He did not wait for an answer but pushed his right arm round Indira's waist and pressed her to his side despite her somewhat pliant opposition; and he bore her away to the railway station in quick time to catch the next train, to start their wanderings in the world together.

Amid the din and confusion of the departure of an Indian railway train, Neelakant hustled Indira into the nearest compartment and he ran up to the station office to buy the tickets for himself and her.

The railway staff none too accommodating to passengers at all times, was not over helpful to poor Neelakant in a hurry. He was trying his best to get the booking clerk to issue his tickets, but between the leisurely calculations of the price by the clerk and the mental confusion of Neelakant, the train sounded its whistle and sped on its way.

Neelakant lost his thoughts and looked on dazed at the departing train. One or two kindly acquaintances on the platform consoled him by saying that he could catch the next train. He began to think so too. But alas—the tragedy of it! He had forgotten to ask Indira what her destination might be.

CHAPTER XIII

MISGIVINGS

LATE in the morning news spread in the city Indira Devi was not to be found, and caught wild fire.

It was not ordinarily such as would have been of more than special interest to the family of the young maiden or to some of its relations, but the state of effervescence into which the township had been thrown by the passing of the Intermarriage Act the previous evening had invested the incident with more than its proper share of consequence. Warrant booths for the issue of the authorisations necessary were commenced to be set up in various quarters of the town, to be put into commission as soon as the legal formalities to make the measure an operative statute were gone through; and people of both forms of opinion, those that wished to take benefit out of the measure and those that wanted to prevent its working, were both active, trying to take time by the forelock.

As far as the interests of our story are concerned, if it has not already been obvious to my readers, it is sufficient to say that Nawab Kamaluddin was the only person who was burning with the cupidity

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to make Indira his wife through the powers under the statute, and being prominently associated with the fortunes of the Non-brahmin party, was securing moves and manœuvres to take delivery of his prize.

Late in the forenoon it was as if a whirlwind was sweeping through the city. The whole of the population turned out into the street to talk, to discuss and decide about the impending events; and everywhere on the top of it, was the relation of the news about Indira's disappearance. At street corners, in street centres, up the roads and down them, and on pials and fronts of the houses, animated groups of men and women were discussing the possibilities of the new law and the fate of this family or that which had a son or daughter.

"Have you heard," said Manikya Bai, the wife of Pandit Murlidhar, a Vydik brahmin of the place, standing on the edge of the sheltered dais in the front of her house, and supporting herself leaning with her outstretched hands on the inside of the eaves-board of the sloping roof of the verandah, to Savitri, a neighbour who came tripping up the street with a child on her hip itching to have a chat with anybody she could come across, and stepped on to her front housesteps, "The Rao Bahadur's daughter has disappeared, they say. Is it true. Do you know."

"Ha! Ha! How can I know more than you. It is your husband that goes to their house so much; you ought to know better. Where is he? I sidled

up seeing you, thinking you might tell me something," Savitri said.

They both espied Ahalya coming along with quick paces from the opposite side of the road with a big brass waterpot under her arm shining from mere cleanliness like burnished gold, dressed in a sari of pure silk, her long tresses hanging loose wet with purificatory bath preparatory to entering on the duties of the kitchen, obviously, to the street water-fountain post opposite to where they were standing to get her morning supply of water. They thought they could refer to her as she was a great gossip of their street and were about to beckon to her; but she needed no invitation.

"It is all too true," she said, "but I am in hurry to get back home this morning. My husband wants his breakfast early this morning of all days, and I must make it ready for him" finding a just little respite to stop in front of them and deliver herself of the day's news. "It is too true that Indira has not been seen since the early hours of the morning. The maid servant in my opposite house has a grand mother who is related to somebody in the Rao Bahadur's house; and I heard her relating the news to a little crowd this morning. There can be no more doubt," but she tailed off her story in a whisper, drawing up a little closer to her auditors and curling her forefinger on her nearly closed lips, "she has run away with a Mahomedan. Such is the story".

Their curiosity was provoked, they begged her to repeat all the particularities of the story as she had heard. The more they importuned, Ahalya thought the more she had to hurry away, and she left them high and dry upon the shores of speculation without staying a second more to assist them in the understanding of the event.

There was an inrush into the house, of the party in the street, ladies and gentleman, who were on the trail of Pandit Murlidhar as the said gentleman walked with quick paces into his house. The assumption was, he would have been to the Rao Bahadur's house either on the invitation of the said gentleman for some consultation about the auspicious and the inauspicious, and on matters pertaining to his vocation of priesthood, or on a visit of a condolence as soon as he had news of so overwhelming an event in his patron's house. Pandit Murlidhar had no doubt been to the Rao Bahadur's house, but as it always happens, when actually in the house, he shrank behind this corner and that as a poor Vydik and could not summon the courage to face the Rao Bahadur, to offer even a dumb condolence with at least a dejected look. No doubt, he gleaned bits of information from the talk of the visitors going in and out, but he was not sure about the correctness of the story he pieced for himself out of all that. He satisfied himself that Indira was not in the house and that the family was in an agitation about her departure. This he guessed

could not have been all right. He presented himself before the Rao Bahadur's wife, who virtually was his patron, saluted her and took her leave promising to come up later in reply to her invitation to do so.

"By my faith," said he, after reaching the courtyard of his house, looking at his wife who was questioning him with her looks "our Panditji Maharaj and his wife are swimming in the ocean of grief" trying to give a flourish of style to his story. "The Maharaj would not even speak to me for grief. Mayee wants us to be there a little later; you may have some presents for the propitiatory ceremonies I intend to prescribe."

Manikya Bai had been so overcome with the atmosphere of compassion for the aged Rao Bahadur and his good lady, which her talk since the morning with her associates about the disappearance of Indira had created, that her husband's observation about the prospect of her costly presents in connection with her patrons' misfortune passed her unnoticed.

"Who is the Mussalman with whom Indira ran away, Panditji? What a shame, for the family. Such a nice girl was, I thought Indira. No, No, these modern girls! there is no knowing about them. Was her man handsome?" Manikya Bai plied her husband with questions.

Pandit Murlidhar now found himself the centre of the large company which had followed him into

his house eagerly expecting to hear his news. The questionnaire put to him by his wife with the privilege of familiarity had the assent of them all, but Savitri with that true love of romance so characteristic of the feminine, stretched out Manikya Bai's observation to say, that the elopement having happened, it was at least to be hoped that Indira would find happiness in a lover who was at least handsome. There was a general sense of disapproval from the rest of the party at this somewhat levitous treatment of a serious matter. "What would the great Rao Bahadur and his lady say if they come to hear," growled some of them.

"Hush, hush, you womenfolk, hold your tongues; what indeed would those great people say if it was taken to their ears that we were all talking lightly of their serious misfortune thus," snubbed the purohit as an essential preliminary to his undertaking of setting their news right on so important an event. "I am just returning from Rao Bahadur's house; and you must know my information is absolutely correct. There was no doubt a Mussalman in the case, but" he added with a twitch of his eyebrow to relieve the effect of his statement on the company, "only a spirit. It appears poor Indira was returning home last night from some place when a Mussalman spirit caught hold of her. When she came home she went mad; the whole of the night there was a watch kept over her, and in the morning they discovered she was gone."

"Whoever said it was a spirit and not a Mussalman," retorted Savitri, in the form of an anxious enquiry; "and whoever said she went alone," she added.

"They say we have now a law by which we shall have strange sons-in-law, Mahomedan, pariah, or sudra, whether we want or not. The whole of our town is simmering with the news. I do not know if, by the time I get home some villain of a chuckler is waiting at my door to lead away my poor Sumitri, or has already bolted away with her. My poor Sumitri, Sumitri," said Amba Bai, and burst out into sobs.

At this Lakshmi instinctively got hold of her little three-year old baby and settled her secure on her hip, as if she was in fear of her being kidnapped. "Say Savitri, what is all this? Is what Amba says true? I thought the Sirkar punished these things," she asked.

"Tush, you helot of a woman; who is the Sirkar? it is our own government; this is the way to freedom, to freedom; national freedom. What matters it? for you or for your daughter? Cannot a Mussalman or a pariah beget children on your daughter or you, as for that matter, as a brahmin; for they say there is to be a law whereby though you are married to one, you must be the wife of every man in the community who wants you. Agreeable business," shrieked Savitri.

The whole of the company including poor Pandit Murlidhar, lengthened their faces, opened their eyes

wide, and seemed to look blank at Savitri's astounding political information.

"There was no doubt the case of Draupadi who was said to have had five husbands, but that was long long ago," said Pandit Murlidhar, trying to understand the course of legislation stated by Savitri with reference to ancient precedents. He was by profession, poor man, not of a mentality ever to differ from the government of the day, and it dawned on him to explain the situation to himself in some such way. "If Draupadi could have five husbands ages, ages ago, by a simple rule of three, the modern woman must have a countless number of husbands judging by the number of years passed since her day; nobody can say Draupadi was wrong," observed the Pandit sagely.

"Splendid," shouted the irrepressible Savitri, "your logic Panditji is splendid. Why do you not stick to your pice and 'darbha'. It is in the name of people like you, our own government, government by majority, has come to pass, and we are all having the benefit of the great boon, which in the name of men like you, impudent busy bodies wrested from cowardly Britishers and which is giving you the stick."

"I do not know what all this means Savitri," cried Amba, "but I know one thing only; it is this. There may be promiscuity or confusion of castes in the Kali yuga as some of our sacred books may have said; I would rather throw my child first and

I drown myself next in my houseyard well, before I yield myself or my daughter to any, except to one of my choice according to the rules and customs of my family and caste, law or no law."

"I see, I see, now I see," drawled out with deliberate tediousness Manikya Bai, as if she had been inspired with the key to the riddle in the Rao Bahadur's house. "Now I see," she repeated, as if every moment as it passed, confirmed her in her real understanding of the event. "Do you think, Indira is gone anywhere. No, no. It is this law that must have scared the great folk and they must be hiding away Indira. Poor Indira, how long can she be kept secreted like this. What Pandit, do you not think the police or others will get into the house, put our Rao Bahadur into disgrace. Do you think the great people can succeed if all what Savitri says is true," remarked Manikya Bai.

"Hold your tongue my good housewife; it seems it will not do for you that we should get on quiet but you must embroil me with the police; and may be or may not be, our patrons have trouble with the police; they are big people and have influence to straighten matters out. But you and me, if they only hear we talk thus, sure they will begin with us and put the iron bangles on our hands and march us to the station saying that we know about Indira's departure. By our Gods."

There was an inrush of two strangers from the street into the house which paralysed further speech

on Pandit Murlidhar's part. He thought what he was anticipating had become a reality to his bewildered eyes, but the forms of the two arrivals resolved themselves into familiar messengers from the Rao Bahadur's household.

Manikya Bai took up the speaking, both as the Pandit had not recovered from his confusion, and she did not want to be forestalled in the importance of making first enquiries in an agitating matter of this kind. "Is Indira found?" she yelled.

"We have come to take away your husband; he is wanted. Panditji quick," cried the messengers to the Pandit. The Pandit's confusion worsened; he could hardly rally the courage to ask in return who wanted and why he was wanted. He began to sink under suspicions. His better half came unconsciously to his rescue.

"Who wants the Pandit," she asked, "who are all there? and what are they talking about." She motioned to them to come near and asked if there were the police, in a whisper.

The mention of the police to the messengers created in them suspicions where they were not before, and the confusion became worse confounded as the worthy Pandit and his wife on the one hand and the messengers on the other conversed with an undercurrent of mutual reserve. Without more ado, the Pandit and his wife thought they had but to go as their patrons sent them a call, and they both slowly wended their way to the Rao Bahadur's house

in the company of the men, and the little meeting at Murlidhar's house slowly melted away.

Not long afterwards, could be seen a small procession, the central figure of which was a Hindu matron of middle age dressed conventionally for an austere religious visit. Her long dark tresses were gathered behind her head, and the ends tied into a loose knot far low down to allow them to dry up after a full bath, and her saffron robe draped her well knit figure in ample folds, while the broad band of silver tissue along the border of the garment ascended in a graceful curve with the loose end of it thrown over her shoulder, like a patch of moon shine over the edge of a well chiselled statue of marble. There was a sprig of half opened jasmine tucked carelessly in the end knot of her hair; and parted in the middle, her raven black tresses wavily outlined her forehead of golden yellow, in the centre of which shone the dot of vermilion, the pride, and at once the fate of the Hindu woman. A pair of plaited simple silver anklets adorned her ankles and the inevitable rings in sets of two on the second toe of her either foot proclaimed her wedded state, the root foundation of her mental peace, against which the rest of God's dispensations happy or otherwise, weighed as nothing. The stream of color that flowed from the pretty jewelled discs of gems and gold in her ears—called "kammals" in the language of the country,—in the morning sun, flashed on her

face, as she turned her head this side or that; but this morning the high tones of their brilliance seemed strangely out of accord with the prevailing sadness of her countenance. She carried a silver tray of fruit and flowers and betel and nuts under her left arm, the presents she had to make when she visited the Deity, or the holy, His representatives on earth.

Pandit Murlidhar and his consort, Manikya Bai were of course of the party. They were "Vydikies" or priests, whose presence was indispensable to direct the ceremonial at the meeting.

Mrs. Moropant, it was, was the matron referred to. As soon as the first hubbub in the house subsided, she thought of making vows and seeking counsel from her family gods, but later conceived another idea for seeking more articulate advice, that she would consult a holy man or a seer. She turned over in her mind as to the person to whom she would go, and she thought Pandit Murlidhar would be in a position to help her with suggestions. On the spur of the moment, she sent the message to him to come up, which caused the little perturbation to the Pandit and his devoted wife. When they came, she was ready with her question to him, which unfortunately was a poser to him.

"Say Sastri, who do you think is best to consult for a prognostication," asked the devout and believing lady.

Poor Murlidhar was not much of an expert in the science of answering questions by mystic calculation,

but he made up for want of learning by harmless dissimulation for the protection of his patronage. So he closed his eyes as if for deep inspiration, muttered one or two mantrams, ran his thumb rapidly on the face of his other fingers in cabalistic counting, and announced that it pointed to a profitable consultation with a person living in the south—south-west direction to them; and it was no other than the holy man who had come into the town and who already had been once the honoured guest of the Moropant family. He knew his lady patron had trust in the seer; even if the seer were wrong, he would be safe.

So it came about that the procession was formed; and they moved along the road to the dwelling of the holy man in quiet dignity. They arrived at the gate and knocked at the door. The call was not heard and there was no answer. The house was empty.

Just raised over the top of the parapet wall on the opposite side of the road, was the face of Agnes Chatfield, peering across to have a view of this pathetic party from the Rao Bahadur's house. She, poor soul, was beside herself when she saw the sad spectacle, and it went to her heart to see Mrs. Moropant, her friends' mother, whom she almost treated as her own, to come out on this sad business, so long away from her house,—one who had never or rarely crossed her own threshold.

She took it in at a look, the errand on which the other came, and the dignity with which she accepted the disappointment made her seem more than beautiful to her eyes. She would have run across and kissed her face with tears for very grief, but she felt that without anything of her own making she had become the repository of the very vital secrets she had come to seek, the consciousness of which, put a brake on her impulses. She knew where her child had gone; she knew where the seer had gone; she could tell her about both. She judged it was inexpedient to impart the information. She would on the other hand go to and bring Indira and restore her to her mother in fact. That she determined to do.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DARK HOUR

KUNDAN LAL MEHR CHAND, RAO SAHIB, was in charge of the Cusbah Police Station, N.L.R. He was pretty early that morning at his post, and having come there, he pulled off his puggree, threw it with a graceful negligé on his desk, sat balancing himself on one arm of his chair sticking a 'beedi' between his lips, and was whiffing away in a tremendous buoyancy of spirits. Nor was there no excuse for this. Kundan Lal was one of those gifted human beings who knew the art or artifice of serving himself while he showed all the time he was serving others, and prospered exceedingly. As a policeman he found great scope for the exercise of his natural instinct, and fortune favouring him with a place in the Cusbah police station, where there was always plenty of crime reported, he found in every case reported a potential golden egg which would hatch in his pocket. Nevertheless as you will perceive, he was well thought of by his superiors, and the handle to his name 'Rao Sahib' was one that was conferred on him for work which extorted the admiration of his departmental chiefs. His method

was so simple that few people could think it could be a fact, and he stuck to it with astonishing freedom from detection. He never spared himself, for as can be seen, few people, who are after making money ill or well, try to spare themselves. To the Superintendent of Police under whose very eye, so to speak, he worked at the headquarter station, his being there, here and everywhere, struck as part of his professional zeal and untiring disinterestedness; and he was safe therefore from his displeasure which might be the beginning of the close of his career. He had the aid of a convenient standard for a policeman's work, namely that he was not responsible for detection of crime, but was only to attend to its prevention. Of course, still crime was committed, but that was taken to be happening in spite of prevention by the policeman. Detection! Why, it was thought it should be left to take its own chances, as an officer in charge of a station received so many reports of crime and had himself to write so many reports a day in addition to other administrative work, that of course, one had to look askance necessarily, if in as many cases he liked his detection stopped with the beginning of the investigation. Here therefore was the vista of the policeman's paradise! He could wear a broad smile for the unfortunate who could deliver special messages into his ear for prosecuting a detection or recovering property lost, as he could turn down with a frown and plausible excuse, the importunity

of another with empty hands, that his case was only one of so many and must take its luck with the rest, which virtually meant no luck at all. Or he could make some more cases the field of pleasant manoeuvre by making both parties pay him for the privilege of scrapping them as "being of a civil nature, and reported through mistake of fact." He did it all with impunity, was believed by his superiors as impeccable, and prospered with other's rupees freely finding their way into his capacious treasury.

He had piloted one or two negotiations in the cases reported to him during the previous day, and was sending out his men to obtain performance of the secret promises that had been made; and this accounted for the height of spirits in which he was with the anticipation of pleasure with respect to what similar luck the day would bring, when a messenger with a broad belt across his shoulder, indicative of his service in high quarters came up and handed to him a note in a big and sealed envelope.

"Salamat Sircar," he said, "Nawab Kamaluddin Sahib sends his salaams."

He hastily tore up the cover and read the note. It simply asked him to come up for a short consultation. There was a fall in the pleasant eagerness with which he received and read it. After all Nawab Kamaluddin had written to ask him to see him for Police bundobust during his coming marriage celebrations, perhaps. A dry matter

though ! but still the Nawab was too big a person to be disobliged. So he put on his turban and quietly followed the messenger.

It was a few minutes walk from the station house to the Nawab's mansion, and soon he found himself in the presence of the big man. "Salaam Aleikum, Tashraf, Raho," greeted the Nawab and invited him to take his seat.

Mehr Chandji lost no time in taking the measure of his host or the circumstances in which he appeared to be, to judge by the manner of his deportment and the unusual obsequiousness of his greeting. He knew that something was up, and not the mere matter of arranging for a few constables to keep order at the time of Nawab's marriage as he had imagined.

"Aleikum Sirkar," cried Mehr Chand in return, dropping into a chair opposite to the Nawab ; and stooping his head, engaged himself in looking down on his puttied shins from the top of his knees to the toes of his boots. He began to rub them down lazily with both his hands in an attitude of affected ennui. "Whatever can have been the matter ; your summons so early, Huzur." Mehr Chand sent up a query from a side of his still stooping head, as reluctant as a wisp of smoke which will not go up a chimney on a rainy day.

Nawab Kamaluddin for all his Nawabship was as funky before the policeman as anyone of smaller station. He speedily cast about his mind for the

secret approach to this suspicious policeman. He affected to look about the room to see if no one else was present and then quickly drew his chair close, almost into Mehr Chand's own to enable him to be quite confidential and talk to him into his ear.

"Nothing very much, Inspector Saheb. Just a little business. You are my own bhai, brother—ha—ha—take this cigarette; Egyptian hai, bahuth acha" chuckled the nobleman. He smiled and paused awhile. Then he pouted his lips and put them into his ear and spoke as if he pumped into it.

"Just a little business—bhai, that Kaffir, Ah—He has sent—he has sent—her," wringing and rolling his hands one over the other, the corners of his mouth quivering, and slight lachrymosity spreading over his eyes; his face in utter wretchedness—"away away: the Kaffir. What to do."

"What to do"—hurled back the policeman on his distressed companion, in the coldest and most distant manner imaginable. He shut his eyes in addition to his previous pose, and began to shake his head from side to side like a disturbed elephant.

"To speak thus—no—not—to speak thus—Mehr Chand Bhai—'I did not send for you to speak thus'—here the Nawab scraped off a drop of tear with the nail of his thumb—"the Kaffir has sent her away—her—mine under the law, Bhai—what to do—Inspector Saheb"—Kamaluddin went on whining.

"I know no more what to do, than yourself, Nawab Saheb, Eh fazr bahut kama hai. I am very busy

this morning. Bahut Salaam. Mi jayenga," said Mehr Chand as he rose very stiffly, salaamed the Nawab and was departing. The thought of Kamaluddin's coming marriage crossed his mind, and of the odd services he might be called upon to do, when that big function would be on local society; and even if that extra for which he came to fish this morning proved, blank, it occurred to him, it was not wise to make himself disagreeable now, if he was to be remembered at the time of the making of the customary presents at the Nawab's palace on the occasion of his wedding. So he decided to be genial and stopped abruptly and asked.

"Ap Ka Shadi Nai Chalayunga Kya. Huzore? Is not your wedding taking place. Who? whom? who sent away the bride? where." "Eh aisa sarka nahin. Ape bahaito," Kamaluddin caught the cogitating policeman by the hand and seated him down again. "Tyro bai. Mera shadi ki waste ape jara kushi karna. (You must make merry on account of my wedding.)" With a telling light in his eye, Kamaluddin pushed his hand deep into his trouser pocket and pulled out a five hundred rupee note, placed it into the policeman's palm and doubled his fingers tight over it.

The light came into Mehr Chand's mind and he began to see more things than formerly. His wits suddenly brightened and he became particularly inquisitive. Of course he knew the meaning of the

gift and he understood Kamaluddin at once. "You are very clever Sirkar," he observed.

"It is this way, Mehr Chand's Bai." My wedding is coming off next week and with my poor Zelika, "such". "Truth" next week, Mehr Chand Bai, my uncle the old Nawab is in a fidget; he wants the marriage to come off at once, at once, Bahi Mehr Chand Bhai. You know the law. Ha, ha, the old Nawab is afraid some kaffir may take out a warrant for the hand of my poor Zelika—(here Kamaluddin made a gesture as if Zelika's hand was in his, and he squeezed it most lovingly). If her wedding is delayed and Zelika—poor dear—she is melting away in anguish lest somebody other than your friend here, her betrothed, may—Allah re—snatch her away as his bride. What funny laws! these government wallahs! Tush . . . Not this Mehr Chand Bai. My marriage with Zelika is allright. It will come off next week. You must also attend it . . . not it . . . but the kaffir . . . he has sent her away, bhai, his daughter Indira Devi, last night, last night, to prevent my marrying her under the new law." He rolled his eyes in silent rhapsody and drooped his eyelids.

"The funny law you referred to" broke in Mehr Chand.

"Ho ho Inspectorji. Indira was to have been mine own. The old kaffir . . . wun ka nam kya . . . what is his name . . . Rao Bahadur . . . wuhne . . . he—what does it matter for him if I am his

son-in-law or some bhikari bomman ki behta . . . beggar brahmin's son . . . he sent her away somewhere, Mehr Chand Bai, last night, Inspector sahib. This kind of flouting the law! it must not be allowed. You must put your foot down and teach everyone a lesson through the old fellow. What do you say to arrest him now and put him in the lock up," whispered Kamaluddin agitatedly into Mehr Chand's ear.

Mehr Chand rubbed his palms on his knees: and with the warmth rubbed both his eyes. He saw things clearer than ever. It was after all to get the old Rao Bahadur put in the lock up for spite that the scheming young Mahomedan had sent for him! But what of it—it was all to the good. He had a tip of five hundred rupees for the job to begin the day with and there was the chance open for another five hundred or more with the Rao Bahadur. The Nawab was very good brother indeed. No brother would have presented him with a snug thousand rupees or so on a fine day like that.

He warmed to business. "Now Nawab Sahib. We shall think of it. You are very kind, very kind to present to me with five hundred rupees for your marriage. Bahut salam. But now the Rao Bahadur is a very big man?" said Mehr Chand. "Am I not a big man? why do you fear? is not the government on our side. Do not fear. Smash the old fellow. The old kaffir; see what advancement for you. My word—put the old man in the lock up." jerked the Nawab.

"Very good," proceeded the policeman, with much deliberate caution. "Have you sent in the F. I. R.?"

"Are toba toba. What is F. I. R. These laws all are for the brahmins. Who knows these things? If one mistake the whole thing goes. I know—what to do now."

"Now or never; you speak right. If there is one error of procedure or law, the judge will upset all we do. If there is no F. I. R. what can a policeman do. It is the policeman's charter. Let us see what we can do. Can you get one written and sent up to the police station before I go back? In another quarter of an hour I just go to the Rao Bahadur's house to have a scent of things, there," said Mehr Chand.

"Bai, why do not you write up the F. I. R. yourself? You know what you want and if I write or get written we may make mistakes. You can do it best," urged Kamaluddin.

"But no one can do a thing as well as he who wants."

With more entreaty and persuasion Kamaluddin coaxed Mehr Chand into dictating the F. I. R. He gave the oral draft in the best police style which Kamaluddin took down. No time was lost in getting it done fair, and the first information report which is sworn upon by every judge in the land as the most basic record in every criminal case, was soon on the record after the complainant in the case had taken counsel of the investigating policeman.

Mehr Chand started upon his work at the other end. He planned his visit as ostensibly of condolence to the aged Rao Bahadur, and while with him to shape his action according to the contingencies of the moment. It would be all as how the old gentleman would have it. Kamaluddin's mortgage over him in any case he could not ignore.

A short walk brought him to the house of the Rao Bahadur and his presence. He found him much cast down, but serene.

"Namskaram Babooji," saluted Mehr Chand, affecting the regard of a son to a father by the form of the convention of his address. Moropant acknowledged the salutation with his looks. He motioned to his visitor to be seated, which Mehr Chand did.

"Ha, ha, what a calamity, babooji at this age for a great soul," he said.

"Ha, calamities do not take reckon of age or time. They come as they want to," muttered the Rao Bahadur.

"True, the suffering them; that is the human part," observed Mehr Chand explanatorily. "Yes what cannot be helped must be suffered, but the depression, the sadness and the humiliation of all," responded the old gentleman with more than usual feeling. "Ha! who would have thought my dear child—" His words were smothered by overwhelming emotion.

At the word "humiliation" Mehr Chand's inward thoughts jumped up as a cat which had been waiting

for the chance to jump at a mouse. "Rao Bahadurji, these intermarriages, I suspect are sinisterly busy getting up this or that some trouble to you over this matter. That was the latest that came to my ears this morning," he drawled out in an indefinite murmur. He waited for what encouragement that bluff old man's answer would give.

He was stoic, was old Moropant. "Troubles," he sneered, "They are free to shake them over me in a whirlwind. They can do no more than what they have already done."

The wily policeman's first train did not take fire. He was not however without resource. He had counted upon his intended victim's agitated thoughts to throw him into his arms by the talking to him of his fears; he now thought, if he could not get control of him this wise to achieve his end, he would try by proffering helpful suggestions which might spare him the impending catastrophe.

"Why should they say you sent Indira away. Can it not be that poor Indira was kidnapped," Mehr Chand hinted slyly.

There was not the expected response for this either; the old Rao Bahadur did not care to embrace even this hint. If he would, Kamaluddin's mortgage over him notwithstanding, Mehr Chand would have sold himself easily, for some good consideration to the old and respected Hindu householder, and balked Kamaluddin and his intermarriage associates in their game by a counter case.

Moropant could not or would not see his objective : there was nothing more for him to do. He ought to be honorable in at least paying off his pledge to Kamaluddin. So he left, and within an half an hour he came back with the charge in his hand, aided and assisted by Kamaluddin and his friends of the non-brahmin party to heap shame and disgrace on the old brahmin, and trample the magnificence and the age old reputation of the Moropants into the dust.

It was at this nick of time that Mrs. Moropant reached home after her ineffectual visit to the seer's quarter in the morning. Her house he found was surrounded by the police. There were some notable bigwigs coming out and going into her house, and there was an atmosphere of activity and proceedings in and about her house, which she had never known. The crowd was an impenetrable outside and there was a dull haze of sound overhanging it in which every sort of expression and language, descriptive of the variety of emotions in the multitude, was mingled.

Poor Mrs. Moropant could hardly gain access into the house without much difficulty. She found the scene inside no better than that outside ; her dear husband was in his chair in the old place with all the husehold servants gathered here and there in odd corners of the vast hall, looking on the tragic proceedings in silent dismay and misery. There were Nawab Kamaluddin and Mehr Chand with his

warrant of arrest: and Kamaluddin was urging the inspector to make no more delay in taking away her husband to the police station.

Her body was in a flame of anger when she beheld Kamaluddin, the cause of all the tragedy in her house since the day of the fateful banquet, come back and standing in the same place in the inside of her home wherefrom he raised the storm on that fateful night; now crowing to lead away the respected master of the house to the police station under arrest. But she was a woman; a disciplined Hindu housewife who ruled her emotions with reason. Another might have ripped him into tatters like a giantess possessed. More, a vile, scornful smile spread over his face, as if he had been in the secret know of the result of her pilgrimage to the vanished seer of the town. Her blood danced in her veins to see him.

"I have been waiting for you my old woman to tell you I was going." said the old Rao Bahadur to his wife as he saw her. "The honour of the family is come into the dust."

The exclamation roused the subdued grief on the part of the squeezing and the half suffocating crowd that minutely gathered volume in the centre of the old hall of the Moropants since the beginning of the morning's proceedings, and which had only wanted the sign of the first break of the tenseness to rush out into a deluge of wail and lament. All eyes looked at Mrs. Moropant to see her giving

way. No. She stood brave. She resigned herself to the tragedy.

"Go, my old gentleman, husband dear. His will be done; an ignorant wife's misgivings might have been heeded," was all she said.

Rao Bahadur Moropant bent his head. He put away his turban and shoes, and carelessly wrapped a shawl over his shoulders. He took his place between Mehr Chand and Kamaluddin and walked away unfalteringly to the police station with the crowd following behind.

* * *

"Now Zelica this is our nuptial hour and you are now mine, as assuredly as when we were betrothed: now no more fear of a kaffir, dear, thrusting away poor Kamal from your side. You are mine, assuredly mine. Now come, lay your little hand in my lap. Oh these horrid jewels, these diamond forehead trappings, these jangling ear drops, of rubies and emeralds and tassels of pearls! why have these old cronies of the harem bedecked you with these to hide your little golden face? Tush, here you go, you impudent silken veil with all your flowers and brocades, an insult to the pretty blooming flower that you screen. Come Zelica, lay your little head in my lap and look into my eyes so close that I can think of nothing else but looking into yours always! Oh Zelica, this necklace, this proud necklace of brilliants your poor father yearned to give you and you were proud to wear on your wedding day! This

is no match for this streak of perfume I shall daub on your throat. Zelica, Zelica my beloved I shall tuck jasmynes into your tresses and tickle your sides and give me, my heart, that entrancing smile, my love, that shall spread over your face, the reflection of my own expanding happiness, the ecstasy of this moment."

The long expected marriage of Kamaluddin with Zelica, his own uncle's daughter, came to pass in the next few days and the celebration was a social event of great importance, as Kamaluddin's uncle was a Mussalman notable of the locality. It was celebrated for a number of days with great pomp and magnificence, and the various functions were attended with the customary splendour. Poor Zelica found her own happiness at last; the simple girl that wanted no more than the happiness of being joined to a husband she had been betrothed to. As for Kamaluddin it was a different story. He loved Zelica indeed, enough that his sentiments of the nuptial hour were sincere and genuine: but he thought that Indira was his prize and he had a secret gnawing that he was unable to have her at his side at the moment of the exhilaration of the passion of his love. It would not have spoiled Zelica's happiness, for she herself had counselled Indira not to worry about Kamaluddin's suit as that would give them the occasion to go through life as loving sisters. But this was not to be. Kamaluddin would not rest till he was on the trail of eluding Indira.

CHAPTER XV

AGNES' SEARCHINGS

THE arrest and disgrace of the Rao Bahadur was the touch wood with which popular resentment lighted up into the conflagration that began to sweep like a wild fire from end to end across the land. The revolt had long been seen to be coming against the pranks and antics of the wild-headed gang who under the name "social democrats" had installed themselves as the pseudo-saviours of the country, but their expression of the popular mind was so utterly aloof from its true character, that their methods of government were so despondently out of tune with the real spirit of the peoples. Their inter-marriage Act was the fire brand they pushed, as it were, into the hayrick, and the commotion that followed was deeper and more terror-striking than what was in the days of the great mutiny. It was as if a great drive of hares or other wild game was afoot, and the people fled across and onward through the country for evading and eluding the process and pursuers of the law who were being hourly whirled against nearly the whole of the population in every

locality. Long lines of refugees from all quarters of the country, refugees from dishonour and disaster, arriving in cart loads and train loads, constantly passed and repassed one another, congesting the highways and byways, just pausing here and there for a bewailing of the common woe. But the treasures which the exiles were out to hide, their marriageable children, were not such as could possibly be concealed as other treasures might have been, in times of similar distress; and these long and unending marches possessed them with wild consternation and dismay. But the directors of this flight, the high ministers, sat like grim death, still increasing the asperity of their measures, to exploit to their best the possibilities of this convulsion for, throwing up by pressure, something in the nature of a merciless terrestrial compression, THE NEW INDIAN NATION. Needless to say this deep and violent stir at long last opened the eyes of the supreme authorities and they lost no time in planning and sanctioning the requisite steps for restoring order in the country, and allaying popular disquiet. A state of martial law was proclaimed over the head of the erring ministry and small detachments were asked to perambulate the country; and a declaration of the revision of the constitution was also made.

One point of personal interest to us is that Capt. Arthur Pitt was attached to this perambulating force.

Now to our story. The various strands of it will, I believe, have by this time made themselves obvious as to have gone into the firm grip of our young and masterful friend Miss Agnes Chatfield. She had whirled round and round with all the rapidity of revolution she could command, for the sheer joy of it, with the strings of this "kolattam dance" in hand, now and then looking up to see that they were correctly falling into their places and disengaging them when they had not; all to produce the final effect, a brilliantly twined up plait with the prettiest and most ordered up piece of work from step to step. Agnes was not the simply selfish, self indulgent butterfly filled with nothing else but the intoxication of the joy of her own living. What better she was, this sequel will show.

She had seen the Intermarriage Act operating; and as one with whom it had no concern, she had watched the iniquity, wretchedness of it all; and her fine English feeling of freedom was stirred to its very depth. But for her game, she had to dally with it, and impress it into her aid, for making herself the confidant of the vicious seer as on the night of Indira's visit as we have already seen. Indira was also her dearest friend, and she disliked being disloyal to her. Her father, the shaggy old lion had dared all the meanness of his own and his country's enemies, with the unfaltering steadiness and the composure of his own inward peace so characteristic of him always; but his poor wife, her

own friend Indira's mother, was so unhappy and miserable that she attracted all her commiseration. Poor Indira she must find, for her happiness, if she could. She resolved to strive her best to compromise her conflicting roles and bring peace and happiness to all in whom she was interested.

To this end she sought to discover the whereabouts of Indira and she resolved, cost what it might, to succeed in doing so. It was no good to set her sails to all the winds; so she saw to gathering what information she could procure, locally. But she received none.

She first went to the house of Indira's parents to see her mother; but she found the old lady sitting huddled up against a corner of the house, looking like a heap of the swept up remains of a resplendent China vase, dashed into bits—a picture of sad and broken up glory, still so fascinating in its minute and tragic humiliation. To her all was lost; her fair family name, the unrivalled respect of the husband she revered, and her darling, only, daughter—and the world was nothing more to her. Agnes saw that she was drawing a blank here, and tried to offer her some consolation instead. "Mother, I am going asearching for Indi, to fetch her back to you," she said. "Bless you Agnes" was all the answer she had.

She next revolved in her mind what she remembered of what she had heard at the time, that Neelakant was seen in the company of Indira last

when she departed from the railway station that ill-fated morning. He could be approached, she thought in herself, for some active sympathy in this undertaking, and she hastened to him at once. She found him depressed well enough, and not having had yet quite got over the effect of the stupidity of his forgetting to find out from Indira her destination when he put her aboard the train; and the love in him was roused when Agnes told him what she had come to him for, so much as to make him insist he would accompany her. Agnes was in no mind to accept this burden; and so counselled him to run down on another track.

There was only one other source left; that was the double charactered Kamaluddin, but her intimate. She used to have talks with him about the tangle of her own love and in its incidental little conspiracies, and it would not do to go on a such momentous errand without saying him goodbye. She found him interesting Zelica, and with a warm greeting from both, settled down before them for a bit of talk and leave taking.

Say Nawab where is the "Deshasram".

"What do you want to know anything about it; Madam, it is a kind of secret society which we would imperil to let a English lady know."

"Now Nawab I am serious," she protested, "I am going out to find Indira there."

"Oh what," he exclaimed. The uttering of Indira's name gave a catch in his heart though he

was deep in the pleasures of his recent wedding with Zelica, and he rose to his feet and came forward to hug Agnes to his bosom in gratitude for the very grateful information he heard from her. Agnes felt awkward for this demonstration in the presence of Zelica his wife, and resisted the embrace. "Say will you, where the Deshasram is or I go," she cried, petulantly.

"I am going there myself in the next few days and am sorry you want to be there earlier. I have heard it said that it is on the Narbudha; and that the nearest station is M. You alight at the station, and go by cart or foot a five days' journey thereto, through enrapturing forest and sylvan scenery, a gem of extravagant natural beauty set in the middle of Nature's original kingdom. You will not waste your journey thither, my lady; and if you catch the truant filly there, good fortune attend you and me." There was a quick exchange of glances, and Agnes was waving goodbye with her hand, and before Kamaluddin could add another word.

One hot morning in the parts of Central India where the heat is never kind, resolute Agnes Chatfield got herself lost in the crowd of the Indian country side. She cast aside her English dress, and clothed herself in the garb of an Indian religious sister, and with a small handbag to hold just the one or two necessaries which would have to be her only standby during the long journey she had projected. she sallied out trusting to her mother

wit and grit for the rest. She knew that unless she mixed with the crowd that wandered, she would not be able to gain news of the object of her search, and she undertook this hard and perilous journey for the pleasure of the undertaking.

Her journeyings were indeed hard. She would start the day in the cool hours of the dawn and get on the road, and trudge a weary way the end of which she did not know, sometimes alone, more often, along with the stream of travellers, perpetually passing and repassing over an Indian highway before the sun rose high in the east. She would get into a wayside village or town, go about to solicit alms for the day, but inwardly also with the deeper purpose of searching for the lost wanderer, and hoping against hope that she might stumble upon her poor dear Indira somewhere, and at some time. She would retire to some Dharmasala or the hospitable pial of some respectful individual of the locality where after an abbreviated meal she would rest for a while, and with the declining sun join again the crowds on the road for the next halting station for the night. Her demure silence, the colour of her complexion, and her dignified features provoked no inquisitive or disrespectful enquiries, and her voluntary role of beggary whether successful or not everywhere, never at least encountered derision or disrespect, as at times happens even in this land of cherished alms giving. She boarded a train now and then with the savings of the charity

she had received, to discover on the platforms, in the waiting rooms, and the travelling railway community that eternally choked the carriages, a glimpse of her Indira, and she sped on thus, over long stretches of her intended journey. But the result continued to be discouragingly the same. At the Dharmasalas where a motley crowd of people of all grades of life gathered and dispersed by bullock carts and palankins, and on horseback or foot, to her insistent call of Indira, Indira, there was no answer; in the streets of the towns and the villages through which she pursued her quest, to her all-pervading cry of Indira Indira, the response was the same; and where at the police stations and at other posts of public investigation, she lifted her veil and revealed her true identity to enlist active sympathy, she fared no better. She became so full of the idea of her quest that her imagination became fevered; and she came to be looked upon in due course as a harmless maniac with the constant cry of "Indira" "Indira" on her lips.

So it was that Nemesis overtook poor Agnes. She had loathed Indira so, once, and wanted her out of the way; and now to her there was no one else in the world.

Challenged, distressed, but never discouraged, Agnes held on to her pursuit on many trails for some days, and after over a month of wandering threaded her way into the Deshasram of which Indira was speaking. She might, she thought

succeeded in finding her there; or at least Kama-luddin, as he had told her he would go, when she saw him before her journey. She found neither. But the vestiges of the place as the headquarter of a band of dreamy young people, intent upon shaking society to its foundations, to reconstruct on it the world of their dreams, were plentiful and apparent. They gave her conviction that Kama-luddin could be seen there some day soon, and she thought she would come there back again to see him even if she missed Indira.

For the nonce she was a derelict ship, tossed about only by movement, and without direction. She took to the road again. The call of the quest was irresistible.

Tramping and trudging, day in and day out, and by the same routine, morning before evening, and evening after morning, Agnes drew her weary limbs for some days, before she came to a region in which it looked she had left behind the scenes of turmoil and commotion through which for some months she had till now passed. The country through which she had travelled the long, long, months of unfulfilled hopes had for all that seemed to her like a huge tray in which human beings like so many peas were being shaken up; continuous agitation, movement and distress without rest, quiet or peace. Now she crossed a boundary where she seemed to perceive something of a settling down among the people.

She enquired. "Oh it is Capt. Arthur's faltun come here about and giving us confidence and quiet, Moyee. You should have seen us fleeing like wild hares before a forest fire a few days back," said a grisly bearded villager.

"But where then is the faltun now," asked Agnes further.

"May be east, west or north, cannot say. It was, and the good Sahib, someone one month back; he was with us talking to us straight and kind as one who was our relative and he told us not to be afraid of these new marriage laws, but go back to our lands and homes and never worry. So we have. We shall have the village piper busy the coming days, and our daughters, we will marry them according to our own castes and customs, Ha, and be happy. God bless Arthur Sahib."

"Where now is he," she pressed to know.

The old man merely shook his head like the men of his class and passed on. "Arthur, Arthur" the name, it became a superior distraction to her from the moment she heard it said. Her heart strings began to pull her towards the bearer of that charmed name, for her own sake; and the odds were that Indira also might be found with him. Just a chance. So she turned her footsteps to meeting him.

A few more days' rambling and wandering put her in touch with Arthur's camp. One evening she presented herself at dusk as a petitioner before him.

"A petitioner, Saheb," cried his orderly. "The Captain was sitting before his evening meal after the day's work was over thinking over his plans for the morning." "A petitioner, at this hour of the evening, orderly," repeated the Captain, "may be a fugitive; bring her over," he ordered. "A high lady from her looks, though not her dress," remarked the orderly as he passed out. Campaigning together had won for the old servant a tolerable familiarity with the master.

Agnes stepped into the presence and stood as if at attention.

Arthur could not believe his own eyes.

"Can it be you Agnes," he cried in bewilderment. His feet instinctively stood him up and he embraced her. Years of separation and the sudden appearance of a familiar friend, when in dire need of company, affected him to the quick.

"A fugitive, you too Agnes," he asked half in jest, but really more in earnest, after the strange scenes to which he had been a witness.

"No thanks, Arthur; thank God I am a child of a free Briton." "I thank the same Providence too, Agnes. Oh Agnes, you should have seen the humiliation, the distress, which these poor people have been undergoing. Thank God we are free born British Children."

"If not a fugitive, why has she come seeking me out," so thought Arthur. A cold feeling began creeping up to his heart. But the next moment, he

became absorbed in the distressing news she began to unfold. They sat face to face near each other, and Agnes found Arthur for the first time an eager listener to her.

She told him step by step of Indira's misery, and how she left home to avoid being caught up by the new law, of Kamaluddin's forced love, and the old Rao Bahadur's dishonour, and that eminently God's good woman, Mrs. Moropant, sinking into a state of a despairing lifelessness through all these trials. The color was rising to Arthur's face during the narration, and when Kamaluddin's part was being related, he automatically ground his teeth as if he were a wounded tiger crunching into meal, the bones of the human unfortunate who had shot him and whom he had caught; and when Mrs. Moropant's, whom he had revered as his own mother, name was mentioned, he was beside himself in a rage. A fearful glow which flared luridly in the light of the lamp suffused his usually composed and benign features. "Yes, these curses; they will be swept off this meek and suffering land," he remarked resolutely.

"But where is Indira now," he ventured to ask at the unfinished close of the story.

"I thought she would be safe with you; that is why I have come down here."

"To see how happy we were both of us together here," he dabbed. "No Captain," she remonstrated with spirit, "I do not mind about yours, Mr. Arthur,

and if Indira were here and happy, I should have been so extremely gratified. My pilgrimage would have ended. Indeed Mr. Arthur these wanderings have been severe self abnegation to me. I promised Indira's mother that I would find and bring her back to her; and as for her, fie upon the crimes and cruelties that have driven her from home! My heart was rent asunder, and I could find no peace till I found her, and consoled her with my company and suffered with her in the spirit of the friendship of our youth. I hoped she might have heard of your operating here and found her way into camp. That is why I am come here; and not as you speak Mr. Pitt."

This put Agnes in a new light to Arthur. "I warmly compliment you, Agnes, and in these days! You are a little heroine," he remarked touched, "you are nearer to me now through one who is so dear to us both. Did you think, say, if Indira would be herself if she came so easily seeking protection into my camp?" asked Arthur.

"No Arthur," she answered somewhat mollified. The springs of love when they exist, have the power to rise to soften the driest surface. Agnes shed her temper when Arthur spoke kindly, and chose to forget the insult of his imputation. "No Arthur you are right; Indira would not be beaten, and she is playing the game with her enemies. She says she is not marriageable and snaps her fingers at the law, and dares all the Kamaluddins and the social

democrats in the world. They cannot touch a hair of my head, she protests. But physical compulsion, duress, brute force—that is what makes me afraid about her, Arthur. She is a woman, a mere slip of a girl, so tender and weak.”

His chest heaved with the rush of righteous indignation as he heard. “Leave that to me Agnes. Let me hear or know; the wretch that will molest her beyond the letter of the law will know to account for it to my sword. Be gone as quick as you can Agnes. I shall beat up the country on my side. God's help be with you, little woman! There is no love half so sweet as the love of the selfless. Give me your hand and we shall pray.”

They retired in silence for the night. Agnes made herself ready for the road again in the morning, and Captain Arthur bade her a feeling farewell.

CHAPTER XVI

ARTHUR WEDS

AGNES' message and meeting created a deeper and personal objective to Captain Arthur's campaigning than hitherto. It was a sorry business, the whole of it, he was taking a part in to remedy, and it having come nearer home to him, struck him sorrier than ever. That the laws of any country should be so prostituted for however high a purpose, to steal from a person the respect of his fellows, the peace of his home, and just situation, was as despicable in his view as despicableness can be ; but that it should be accomplished with the complicity of a freedom loving nation like the British made him boil over. His work appealed to him in that it gave him the privilege of righting human wrong to what extent it was allowed to him ; and he swept the country with his column reassuring, recovering, and resettling the inhabitants in their accustomed grooves of freedom. He moved, with their goodwill behind and awaiting him in front, and there was nothing that he could not see, nor hear among them. Indira's plight took possession of all his active thoughts in

the present, and her discovery and recovery became the object of anxious action on his part. With his acquaintance of the country side, his enquiries for her spread far and wide, and he hoped momentarily that some one of his grateful people would bring news to him of this entrancing maiden, so elusive in flight as he had found her in her freedom.

He awaited news from Agnes. He even wrote to Daisy, and his brother-in-law who was now in charge of a neighbouring district, to telegraph to him the first thing if and when Indira reached them safe. But days rolled by and his waiting seemed to have no end; what might have become of her, through another's hand or her own, in these days of foul turmoil began to loom into his vision as a possibility which he dreaded to think of.

It was thus one evening in the twilight, tired of his usual labour of the day, he sat in his shirt sleeves in the front of his tent in his small chair, his left leg on the ground, and the right crossed over, his head and arms thrown back over the top of his chair, eyes closed, thinking dreamily of all things, but of nothing in particular. The feverishness of his hope to have tidings of Indira had worn itself through despondency into a flat dull ache below the level of his acute consciousness, and as with the other so many aches of baffled hope and thwarted happiness to which the human unfortunate is so liable, he had ceased to embitter himself with this

also. But as it so often happens in the way of this contrary and belatedly generous world, he had hardly the notion that at this time he was going to have the fulfilment of the hope that he had, for sometime now, resigned. As if bursting open through his closed eyes he saw the slim figure of Indira standing near him and touching his chair. She was looking just the same, so rapturously pretty as he found her amongst her flower shrubs when he last saw her; her resplendent sari of yellow silk and gold lace falling in full and ample folds to her heels from under the golden zone with which she had tightened it to her waist; a full length of it to the end with its border of broad lace thrown back loose on her satin bodice and over the left shoulder, her raven tresses combed back and gathered into a plaited coiffure and adorned with a string of the opening flowers of her favourite jasmine; the face as pretty, with the tiny dot of vermilion between the gently curving eyebrows; and the perpetually playful smile rippling over the semi-open bud of her little mouth throwing a soulful illumination on her countenance, along with the flash of the one or two customary diamond jewels she wore on her nose and ears. She stood as if out and disengaged from the background of some South Indian sculpture, a form so sharp and clear cut in features, and so well proportioned and poised as of those living goddesses which the Dravidian architects revelled in chiselling; and alas, as silent.

He twinged to his feet radiant with joy and reeling in happiness; and sprang forward with tense outstretched arms to smother her in his embrace. He came to his senses, for he found he was only crushing the thin air.

Even for all this it was not an empty vision. Just at this same hour and minute, Agnes, wonderful Agnes was inditing her magic message of rescue; "Discovered; in dire distress; follow messenger" and despatching it to Arthur.

Departing from Arthur's camp as we have seen, Agnes went about beating the country and also paid a visit to Gowri Shanker and his wife Daisy. Having found them in the same predicament as herself about Indira, in a mood of sinking enthusiasm which overcomes us all after a continuously failing struggle against odds, she bethought herself of her intended repetition of the visit to the Deshasram and of the pleasure of meeting Kamaluddin there. So she went back on the old trails in due course to the same place.

It was a new Deshasram that she found this time. She found it busy and very active and well populated. It wore a methodical look of business and movement, and its population were alert and alacritous and desperately busy about some work or other which every one of them had on hand. It looked to her to be the center and headquarter of an organisation which had abstracted itself into inaccessible country for steady and

secret work. She went in and enquired. She found Nawab Kamaluddin already arrived there and in residence; and wonder of wonders he was himself the false seer whom she knew at N-L-R as had been told was its head, and this the rendezvous and workshop of his virulent Social Democrats!

It was so nice she thought she was entering the place under such influential auspices, into a place she could call her own. She lost no time in sending news of her arrival to Kamaluddin and the next moment he was before her at the foot of the steps of his forest retreat; beaming with exultation and bathed in smiles, with loyal Zelica behind and not far away from him.

"Miss Agnes from whichever point of the world have you dropped in here now. So glad to see you here; so surprised. Could you have guessed you would see Zelica here," Kamaluddin asked in his most mellifluous tone.

Zelica herself was not less overjoyed. Agnes acknowledged the warmth of their reception and after some more mutual kind enquiries she retired with her hosts to settle down for a few days of care free comfort and rest.

Agnes and Zelica used to walk the grounds of the sylvan retreat together and go about the surrounding hills and dales enjoying the magnificent splendour of the woods and flowers. It was on such an occasion as first they had when they were out together that the happy memories of their friendship

with Indira in similar situations before love's jealousies left their little scars, came uppermost in Agnes' mind, and Agnes beside herself exclaimed, "Zelica, Zelica; how I wish Indira were here with us now. Such a trio were we. Alas, for her, where she is or what has become of her Heaven alone knows—the poor dear"; and Agnes put her face into her hands and sobbed.

"Why, why Agnes, I will show you Indira this minute. Indira is here now. Do not cry. The fool I was! How did I fail to tell you, till now, that," groaned simple Zelica, "Indira is here, Agnes; only the Nawab is in somewhat close watch over her."

Agnes gasped. Indira there, and she not having sensed her presence, ridiculous; insane. She grew wild with excitement and swept Zelica into the circle of her arm and drew her along to where Indira was under the Nawab's close watch. Indira to be sure was there, but the Nawab was holding her close prisoner!

Here at last was her discovery! After months of tiresome and torturous toil. Indira had come to Deshasram as she had said, and Kamaluddin too, as good as his word. But why! she could have waited all this time and spared herself all her adventure if it were but to witness this terrible tragedy.

Her anticipations of pleasure to recover and head off the truant child, to restore the light and cheer

to a darkened home against all odds, were now dead against the beginnings of the hard world old tragedy of a man compelling a woman to yield herself to him against her will. The situation demanded great coolness and adroitness, if the tragedy was to be averted, at least not precipitated, and she like all heroines as in the past determined to bring all her resourcefulness to the test.

There was one circumstance in this case which was of value to her and that was her somewhat intimate acquaintance with the human brute in question.

She made up her mind to make a diplomatic overture to the Nawab at the first opportunity. The same afternoon, while he and his Begum were sitting together she joined them after lunch.

"You are a happy man now, Kamaluddin, with Zelica by your side; and Zelica too must be happy; and yours has been a match since birth. Can you think how you both would feel now, Nawab, if Indira were with you both, as Begum No. 2, as you had once hoped to acquire her?" she asked.

"Why hope to? I have. You must ask Zelica for what she feels." "I neither think this nor that, Miss Agnes"; Zelica broke out; "Indira will not hear. Kamal is harsh with her and that I don't like. I tell her, Indira, do not be up against a man's will. Marry him as he asks, and we shall be sisters now as we have been friends, and be happy."

"What a complacent gem of a wife, Kamalji! Not ashamed to ask her to partner your love with another."

"As if you are not interested! Do not be an angel. If shame to me, some of it yours." He said this with a malicious twist of his accent.

Zelica came to her relief, though unconsciously.

"Do not call yourselves names, no account of me; I no more care Begum two, were Indira or any other. What is a husband's love when you have children! If he keeps yours, well and good; else the children take his place. A husband may forget his wife; but children, their mother never." This was her simple philosophy.

"Yes, I answer, Nawab, woman has been double tongued since the beginning of time. Has man never played double," observed Agnes naively. But the thrust went home.

"How well I remember those little talks," she continued, "you as the false seer of N. L. R. and I an anxious consultant of your preternatural wisdom. We durst not have planned in the exquisite manner it has come off now, of its own accord." "I am still on your side," she added with a meaning twinkle in her eye, but tell me, Nawab, how it has happened.

"Kismet. I am favoured of the men and of the gods, and I set my heart upon having such a fair maiden as Indira,—would either of them refuse? I thought she had slipped out of my hands, when we

heard that she was not to be seen at N. L. R. when the intermarriage warrants went out, and we curled up the poor old Rao Bahadur so for it; but believe me, I felt she looked too faithful a chela to be false to the word. She said you know, she would come here; and I knew I would have her here. I was eager to come here at once; and when I did the hunted hare had already walked into the kitchen."

"But what now the obstacle."

"The perky maiden will still have her way. She talks to me law, says I have no right to wed her; she is not marriageable. She is a religious sister and so on. And am I the man to be baffled and take these excuses?"

She wished to sound the nature of his future intentions.

"What law gives, you can take by force," she cut in drily.

"True, true, you speak well. The tenets of my religion too as I have been made to understand, justify the use of force in a case like this, for the faith. But Miss Agnes in this twentieth century of ours, we civilised people, must we, not really draw the line at the actual resort to physical violence? No fear, see I shall wear her down by mere process of time and bend her to my will. I have her safe and she cannot go out of my country."

Here in his reluctance to resort to physical force, was, she felt a margin of safety. Her brain began to grind like an engine.

"May I see her," she asked impetuously.

"See her. I wanted to beg you to see her. I cannot stand this trial and suspense too long. I am young and I fear to think what I may be goaded to do. See that haughty minx, tell her it is no good to kick against the traces which fates have fastened; counsel her to say 'yes'; else Nawab Kamaluddin will not be the man whom she could foil."

"Leave all that to me; will you. I shall make it right. Thank you Kamal for the confidence," she said.

She had perfected her schemes inwardly by this time, and had them cut and dry as in a time table. She scored her first victory off him in obtaining the general pass for visiting Indira and she lost no time in taking the next step. She passed the long hall and the corridors, and tracked the silent mews in the hind part of the Nawab's bungalow where the ladies of the Zenana are quartered. In a room for herself, though at some distance from the rest, Indira Devi, the charmed blossom of her parents' home, was withering away, falling off petal by petal in single confinement in a false sanctuary into which she had run in wild confidence. A daughter of the Maharattas, the days as they wore, dried up any flabbiness in her resolve and day after day she became more and more resolute and was looking the very image of unapproachable defiance when Agnes' eyes fell on her.

The two girls met and stood face to face in silent commiseration, choked with sticky grief. They had no words to say to each other at first, but after a time Agnes steadied herself to impart secretly her simple assurance to her to soften the agony. "Never fear Indira. I am here to rescue you. We were at first as if the two halves of one; when love's jealousies came, I conspired against you. When you ran away you left none for me to hate; and the hunger of companionship came over me again, I could not live without you; and with our dear mother sorrowing for you, and her home like a deserted temple, I have sworn to recover and restore you to her. I am conscience stricken. Do not lose cheer Indi. We shall make it even with this Mahomedan monster soon." She thought she had lingered long enough and closed her interview for that day once.

The Nawab was on tenter hooks to hear from this new accessory what push she had given to his suit. To his insistent enquiry, she said turning her broadest and richest smile on him you will hear soon. "Remember in your happiness is mine"; and thus lulled him into ceasing to ask more impatient questions for a time.

She interviewed Indira daily as it fitted with her scheme of things. She inspired Indira with her presence; she learnt from her by degrees the story of her exodus and her experiences in the land of her promise, and the Nawab could see her diligence in the prosecution of his suit.

Indira's was only a short story to relate. Left alone in the train without a ticket or a pass that fateful morning she was rudely handled out at the next stop where from, she picked up the onward part of the memorable journey. Tramping and trudging, foot-sore and weary of heart, she succeeded in avoiding the evils of the road and the law, and came over to the "Deshasram" after what seemed to be endless time, where she thought she had found her sanctuary of refuge. The prior was not there when she came, and she patiently waited against his expected arrival. The activities of the community that resided raised suspicions, but when the ardently looked for head of the place arrived, her heart sank within her and she felt she was falling into a heap when she found he was no other than Nawab Kamaluddin, and that it was he who masqueraded at N. L. R. for so long as the strange seer. There was nothing for her to do now. She had thrust her head into the tiger's jaws knowingly, and her appeal for the safety of her honour and life had told on him only as much as they usually can, on that blood-thirsty beast itself. Death was the only alternative; and she was awaiting for it. Now, for her part in the original game with the Nawab, Agnes considered whether she could bring him round with a pointed appeal to a sense of the unrighteousness of the deceit he had practised on Indira to entrap her.

So she made herself very nice to him one afternoon, and after reporting how extraordinary was the progress his suit was making, tackled him with a series of questions in her most flamboyant style.

"Now Nawab, to be doing justice to Indira, is it right you should have trapped her with such bare faced deceit."

"All is fair in love and war."

"Now next, is not a lover a gentleman and with a sense of chivalry to whom his lady love's entreaties should appeal."

"Love has no eyes ; Is not Cupid blind ?"

"My Nawab again ; does a gallant man coerce a woman who will not return his love ?"

"Have you heard of the course of fervid love ever running smooth ?"

"Only once again, friend, may strong man appropriate by force a weak unwilling woman." "Well, Oh! that is what is always being done," said the Nawab with blatant assurance.

She saw there was no good further in trying to secure the desired solution of the problem from a man of such pronounced mentality through mild ways and means ; she resolved to do the only thing she could do, that is communicate with Captain Arthur, before it was too late. So she indited the message which we already know and obtaining a secret messenger with a liberal present of wages urged him into Captain Arthur's camp, with the utmost speed possible.

It was after the inevitable delay of the messenger's journey that Agnes' appeal of urgent help found its way into Arthur's hands.

The remainder of the story is soon told. That twilight vision set Arthur's nerves on edge, and his whole physical and mental frame was in a state of convulsion not dissimilar to the hot weather convulsions of the Indian sky with lightning and thunder. Like the same monsoon rain that succeeds it, cools and subdues the atmosphere, the news in Agnes letter which Arthur received of a morning early, cooled and steadied him and soothed him. It made him fit and ready for action. The rest of it was the work of a trice.

Gathering his flying column together, he took the road at once. Urging the horse at top speed, he finished the first stage of his journey by about evening and before the first streaks of morning light appeared, had besieged the gates of "Deshasram," drawn a cordon of his men all round it, and in helmet, sword and uniform, and mounted on his high charger, was at the steps of Nawab Kamaluddin's mansion demanding his appearance.

The colony was astir and in boisterous confusion; and the inmates were moving to and fro, pellmell, unable to guess the why or whereof, of this sudden military investment. Nawab Kamaluddin rudely disturbed from his morning slumbers after a jovial night, lurched out to give a surly greeting to his

visitor; and rubbing his eyes well open, found himself confronting Captain Arthur Pitt.

There was no more ado. "I lay my hands on you Nawab Kamaluddin and arrest you in the name of the law," pronounced the Captain.

"Why," he growled.

"The military have short work with questions like why and wherefore; lead me to where you hold Indira Devi captive."

The light now began to penetrate Kamaluddin's befuddled mind, and the whole party surged into the presence of Indira.

"Indira Devi, you are no longer a prisoner. Please step out; my respectful condolences to you for all that you have suffered," Arthur said making a deep curtsy.

He turned round to have another look of bitter scorn at Kamaluddin. Kamaluddin winced under it; but presuming upon his previous acquaintance with the Captain, began to plead.

"I have no more kept her captive, than she chose herself to be, Captain Pitt. She came here of her own will and that I should have entertained her is my only wrong. There must be traitors in my camp to have borne all this tale against me."

Arthur now turned his eyes to Indira, and she also raised her eyes to look at him. The meeting was too moving for words and both took time to calm their welling emotions. Indira, beautiful as ever but with the cheer pressed out of her agonied

soul, the vivacity that used to lurk about the corners of her mouth gone, the features grown severer and cold through the tempering of her resolution from minute to minute, the bitterness of her soul gleaming through her wide open eyes, stiffened herself in upstanding majesty, and unfolded her tale. She spoke of the soul wearing anguish which entered her heart and drove her from home, how she gave her simple reverence to the strange seer at her place and in abundant confidence accepted the refuge he offered: how it was Kamaluddin that abused her innocent trust by playing the false seer, and entrapped her by daring deceit into the very den of danger from which she sought to escape; how in slight of all the laws of hospitality he pressed his advances in dangerous importunity when she fell into his power; how he rejected all her appeals to fairness, honour and chivalry; and how she had for months awaited in grim expectation the downward slide of the avalanche which was to despoil her of honour or life.

Kamaluddin's case was answered. "He would not listen to me," murmured Zelica; and Agnes paced up behind like a disinterested spectator.

Arthur cast a look at Kamaluddin of scorching scorn. "My men will seize you, pig. You are contemptible even for my touch," and he ordered his men accordingly.

A little more rounding of odds and ends had to be done. The suppression of the secret organisation

had to be carried out. He ordered the members to be collected and put them under marching orders ; and pulled the shutters down of a centre which, for sinister influence during its short-lived history, was the most violent of its generation.

LATER. With the feeling attentions of both of her friends, Arthur and Agnes, Indira was gradually getting over the sinking feeling of a bruised heart and battered emotions, and Arthur rejoicedly watched the bloom rise to her cheeks. Inwardly the embers of a suppressed flame commenced to smoulder again.

They were both out walking as usual in the young moonlit night before the hour of dinner among the garden paths of the huge grove in which Arthur had been pitching his camp. The henna and oranges that bordered the paths, were in full flower and the fragrance had filled the air. Indira was walking with her head bent as if engaged in toeing up the patches of shadows from the neighbouring giant mangoes on the dappled ground as a reflex of the tinge of sadness that had settled on her countenance.

Her pose was irresistible and he braved risking the question.

He looked up at the sky and a sheet of cloud was scattered, over which the young moon was racing.

"Look, look, Indira, how the young moon races at this hour of the night. An appointment to keep, perhaps." There was a faint smile on her lips.

"With a languishing lady-love," she supplemented jocosely.

"Love, lady-love, and languishing. Not every man's bliss, Ah."

She blushed. "But few who desire deserve. Knight-errants are so rare," she said.

"Not so rare, indeed, Indira," he turned to her reproachingly.

"No, Arthur, you are their rarest," she spoke, in feeling gratefulness; "and I wonder how many of the pretty maids whom you have saved and succoured could be so poor in spirit as not to have languished for you, because you had not carried them away as your prize, as you should have done."

They had reached a point in the walk where a spreading orange branch laden with blossom overhung the path. Arthur abruptly turned round and stood opposite to Indira barring her way.

"Speak the word, Indira, say you are mine. I do not care for pretty maidens languishing for me; but I have languished for you. I am come back as Captain Arthur now."

The incidents of their last meeting in a situation similar to this amidst the flowers of her own garden of her distant home, flashed past her mind in quick review and she distinctly remembered replying to him to the same question that he was not "Captain" Arthur yet. Arthur was not wholly wrong in having built a hope for her hand on what was half a promise on her part, but subsequent events had proved too

much for both of them. She looked away from him pensively and said nothing.

"Speak, Indira, speak," he implored growing more insistent. "Do not tell me the dreaded 'No,' for by all laws of the heart and of romance, you are my prize."

She could remain silent no longer. After a pause, she rallied the courage to give him the inevitable answer. "Arthur," she said, "I would be glad to be claimed by you, nay rejoice to be accepted as your prize. Is my love, my life, greater to me than the honour you have protected? I would gladly lay both at your feet." But she said raising her eyes and looking into his, "the tide of events since you left me last had been too much for me to turn; and I have taken steps that are now irrevocable. I can no longer be anybody's wife," she added with desperate courage, "and where I could have been your wife, Arthur, I shall be your sister, love you the same and more unselfishly all my life. Please accept this my offering." "But, are all laws of this world without exceptions?" he asked querulously.

"Not the laws of honour, Arthur. They at least must, in this world of temptation, be without exceptions. Look here," she asked pulling her hood lower down over her hair on the back of her head, "look at this little spot of coif in my crown: I have consecrated myself as a sister of service. I am now a nun and may no longer marry. If you would rob

me now of the honour you protected then, I shall yield."

Arthur saw the matter wholly in a new light.

Days passed and the time came when Agnes thought she had to go back home. She had achieved her purpose and succeeded eminently in her endeavour and the result was all the more gratifying for all the troubles she undertook. She had the best of Arthur's company and of Indira who had become dearer to her for all the wonderful part she bore in the matter of her rescue. Restoring Indira to her home was the only thing that remained to be done.

One morning when all three of them were seated together in the innocent pleasures of talk, Agnes said the time was come for her to take leave. Arthur began to think. He decided.

"Not so soon, Agnes; not before some more adventures together."

This was encouragement enough; and her heart began to thump against her side feverishly.

"What would Indira say?"

"You are dear to me and he is dear to me; is Arthur; and, through me, you will be dear to each other. Have a joint adventure again, the great adventure of life together." "This is what I say," said Indira.

"You speak to us still like the Queen of Flowers," purred both together.

"Thank you, Indira ; you have given me a wife," Arthur said.

This was all too swift for poor Agnes, and she could hardly trust her ears to hear Arthur aright. The poor thing was supremely happy that he called her his "wife," and she felt it was the crowning requital for the arduous search she had made for Indira. It was a contented and grateful Agnes that beheld Indira first and Arthur next, and burying her face in her hands in tearful happiness, protested, "No, Arthur, it is I who have found my husband."

APPENDIX

A SCHEME OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Extracted from Indira Devi's papers

1. *The Privy Council.*—The Privy Council to continue as at present, the Highest Tribunal of Appeal, but with jurisdiction so modified as to embrace hereafter only matters of high pecuniary or constitutional interest.

2. *The Supreme Council of India.*—President, The Viceroy, Vice-President: To be elected by the members of the Council. Members: (i) Deputies from the Governments of Protected States, (ii) Subject's representatives from the same, (iii) Elected representatives from Provincial Legislative Councils; Not more than 100 in number to be provided by the said bodies according to their relative strength and importance. Functions: To deal solely with matters of (a) Foreign Affairs, the Army and Defence, (b) Commerce, including Railways, Customs and Tariffs, (c) Post and Telegraphs, (d) Currency, Imperial Research Institutes and General Welfare; each department in charge of an Executive Councillor budgeting for and making a demand for

his needs. The Council as a whole is to discuss and pass the combined budget and issue the demand for money on the Provincial Councils and the Protected States in proportions to be settled.

The power of taxation and legislation of the Supreme Council is to be limited to matters connected with the Departments solely in its charge, supplemented by an emergency power to raise by general taxation the demand on the Provincial Councils if the said demand is dishonored. The Viceroy is to have the reserve power of certifying a demand except when it has been rejected in any division by $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total strength of the Council.

The present British Indian Army with other Defence arms and the Imperial Service troops of the Protected States are to be united and administered as a single Indian Army by the Commander-in-Chief, and thus provide for a larger interchange of Indian Officers among the Indian units, with scope for their better training and the development of esprit-de-corps. Sections stationed in the Protected States are to act as forces for the preservation of their internal peace in emergencies.

Provincial Councils.—Present territorial limits of Provinces to be kept intact for fostering local attachments and emulation, and left undisturbed except for dire necessity. These Councils are to be the key functioning bodies working on the basis of party programmes, initiating and passing legislation on all matters excepting those reserved for the

District Legislatures—and including civil and criminal law, both substantive and adjective, Revenue and taxation, Universities, Education secondary and professional, Law and Order, Public Health,—and settling the policy, efficiency and ways of good government and development in the life of the people. Members are to be about 200 and elected exclusively by the District Legislatures. The High Courts are to function with Judges to be appointed by the King as at present, but their number is to be considerably reduced with work correspondingly, by throwing much of it on the District Judiciaries to be performed by them in most types of cases with the assistance of assessors chosen from the Bar, for limiting appeals, and under the control of the District Legislature. The Provincial Councils are also to form and maintain the Provincial Services, primarily to provide in their various departments liaison officers between the Provincial and District Legislatures. The appointments to these services are to be made by the Governor; but appointments to the Civil and Criminal branches of both the Provincial and District Judiciary are to be made by the High Court. The Provincial Legislature is to be the revising body for all the legislation passed by the District Legislatures.

District Legislative Councils.—Every District is to have a legislative and administrative Council to be worked on the basis of party programmes, with a

strength of membership at the rate of one representative for 5,000 people, one-third of which elected by a general electorate of adult persons possessing the minimum literary qualification of a University entrance eligibility certificate, one-third elected by a general electorate with a fixed property qualification, and the remainder on a communal basis by every one of the communities as recognised by the Census living within the electoral area, and with representation proportionate to their respective sizes and without plural voting in any case. Subject to reserved exceptions, every branch of the District administration is to be under and carried on by the District Council, which is to have supplemental legislative authority in matters of Public Health, Sanitation, Primary Education, Communications, Banking, Industries, Co-operative Credit, Excise and similar scheduled matters pertaining to rural welfare. But the District Legislature is to have exclusive jurisdiction in matters relative to social and religious customs and usages—subject nevertheless to the proviso that no social legislation is to be considered unless introduced by a representative of the community to which it relates and no place of religious worship shall be erected within two furlongs of any public street or pathway. The present Municipalities and local bodies are to be abolished. The Provincial liaison officers detailed to each district are to watch and report progress in their respective departments under the District Legislature

to the Provincial Ministry. The District Legislature is to share with the Provincial Council a $\frac{2}{3}$ share of the revenue raised in it for the expenses of its own administration.

Notes.—In the scheme here presented, the District Council becomes the comprehensive unit of government in moderate compass and in intimate touch with the real currents of life among the people, and over whose operations the limited community under its care can exercise an effective control by means of an enlarged, real and direct representation, subject to its errors being corrected by a Provincial Council of a higher intellectual calibre. The Provincial Councils become the meeting places of men of distilled talent and authority from the districts by reason of the indirect representation proposed. Matters of common internal and external interest for all the inhabitants whether of British India or the Protected States are brought within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Council, so that when the Viceroy in due time steps aside, it may become the Dominion Parliament of the Princes and peoples of India.

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POTTER'S CLAY

BY

HILTON BROWN

Mr. Brown needs no introduction and his short stories in the various newspapers and periodicals are of such high standard that few have failed to feel the necessity of possessing his stories collected in a book form.

Mr. Brown has had intimate knowledge of Indian life, in all its mysterious intricacies, and his short stories thus range over a variety of subjects. The joys and sorrows, the fears and superstitions of the South Indian people have been portrayed by Mr. Brown with consummate skill in the one hundred and ninety pages of the book. His style has a racy directness which grips the reader's attention, while his delicious humour puts him in the best moods. We heartily commend this second KIPLING to the English reading public.

A novelist of good repute, Hilton Brown makes the reader feel that it is child's play for him to write short stories. Such of them as enter into this book curiously tangle into webs and then unwind themselves. Though a foreigner, his stories reveal a generous understanding of the baffling enigma of Indian life, though standing, as he feels he does, "but on the frontier of an enchanted country." Nevertheless Mr. Brown, who has nothing of the ordinary white man's burden about him, thinks that "East knows East best and a wise man does not try to teach it." In one story he unconsciously betrays the muck-raking personality of Miss Mayo in that diseased literary genius of "Cacoethes". "Within a month of Raymond's modest debut, Cotts found he had done the most dreadful things; he had raked up forgotten scandals which in point of fact he had not forgotten but had never heard of; he had published intimate papers within his personal knowledge which really weren't at all; he had defamed half the men in South India and insulted three quarters of their wives; he had abused hospitality he had divulged confidences—God only knows what he had not done."

Written with an incisive skill, the stories form a charming collection such as whet our desire to have more of them.
—*Servant of India*, Re. 1-8

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