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BUNKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE.

Translated from Bengali

BY

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE name of Bunkim Chandra Chatterjee as a Bengali novelist has been sufficiently familiarised to the literary public by translations of some of his best novels by Mrs. Knight and Mr. H. A. D. Phillips. The extent of his fame even in Europe can be well imagined from the fact that one of his novels has been translated in German. He is unquestionably the best Bengali novelist that Bengal has yet produced.

Bunkim is pre-eminently the best product of English education in India, and no one occupies a higher position in the literary world of India to-day than he. Whatever might have been the greatness and glory of India in remote antiquity, Bunkim found it a different India altogether. The divine Sanscrit which had once been the living and fertilising influence was no longer living but dead. The mother dead, her children led a forlorn and moribund existence. The vernaculars of India which have their origin in Sanscrit were no longer the vehicles of noble and exalted thoughts, but a poor, weak, worthless clothing for crude and work-a-day ideas. The advent of the English flooded the land with Western thoughts and ideas. They came as manna to famished India and as nectar

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to her parched lips. A galvanic current ran through the length and breadth of the country; India shook off her torpor and like the fabled phœnix rose as it were from her ashes. The glow of health had long forsaken her cheeks, the pallor of death had overspread her countenance, and she had been gasping for breath. Now the colour came back to her cheeks, she heaved with life and vigour in a renewed adolescence and she brought forth her noble sons. And Bunkim was one of the noblest of them. Such were the environments in which Bunkim was ushered into existence.

Born in 1838, Bunkim soon found his way into an English School. From School to College was an easy slide. He graduated at the Hughli College, passed his law at the Presidency College at Calcutta, and was one of the first graduates of the Calcutta University. He was made a Deputy Magistrate, he obtained the title of Roy Bahadur and the distinction of the Order of a Companion of the Indian Empire was conferred on him.

By the time Bunkim finished his College career English education had done its work, and Bunkim throbbed and palpitated with an intellectual ferment. The Occident had projected on the Orient and the new thoughts and ideas surged up for a vent. Bunkim began to write novels and conduct a periodical entitled "The Bangadarshan." The magic charm of his pen soon resuscitated the Bengali language and imparted a unique life and vigour to it. Was

ever genius baffled by poverty of the language? Bunkim created a new language for him and began to bring forth his immortal creations. During the latter days of his life he devoted himself to religion and religious literature, the inevitable denouement of an oriental's life-story. He wrote the life of Krishna, the Hindu incarnation of the Deity, and also other religious books. His task done in this vale of tears the spirit of Bunkim winged its flight for its eternal home, and India was less by one of her noblest sons in May 1894. But the East had blended with the West and lo and behold! Bunkim standing forth against the intellectual horizon of India, a towering figure shedding its enlivening beams on the literature of Bengal for a grateful posterity to draw its life, inspiration and hope.

Chandrashekhar was first published in successive issues of his periodical "The Bangadarshan," mentioned above. The main historical incidents have been taken from a book in Persian entitled Seir Mutaqherin. Little need be said about Bunkim's style. It is gorgeous, rich, and vigorous. His powers of description remain yet unsurpassed by any Bengali author, and as regards the delineation of character the book will speak for itself. It will be an act of supererogation on my part to speak further on the merits of the book, as the reader will be able to judge for himself.

The work of translation is always difficult. The difficulty in the present instance is all the

more enhanced for want of affinity between English and Bengali, and also on account of a complete divergence between Eastern and Western modes of thought and expression. But in spite of these difficulties, I have tried my best to make the translation as literal as possible, at the same time never allowed elegance and idiom to be sacrificed by following the text too closely. Certain expressions, if translated literally, would convey no idea to a foreigner. In those places I have given the English expressions and phrases which are used to express sentiments similar to those intended to be conveyed in Bengali; I have also tried where it is possible to maintain certain peculiarities of expression, a literal rendering of which conveys both the sense as well as an idea of the peculiar expression to the English reader. I have given the allusions where they are necessary, and have also given explanatory foot-notes to bring out the point of certain expressions and to make the peculiar manners and customs of the Bengalis intelligible to a foreigner. In spite of my best efforts, I do not think I have been able to make the translation as I should have liked to have done, and I have no doubt that there are many defects in it. But I have this satisfaction in my mind that I have not done the work hurriedly or perfunctorily and I have done my best. As regards the book itself I need say only one thing more, and that is, that it is regarded as one of the best of Bunkim's novels, if not the very best.

I cannot conclude this Preface without acknowledging the very material help which my friend, Mr. P. Mitter, Barrister-at-law, has rendered to me by his many valuable suggestions for which I remain ever grateful.

DEBENDRA CH. MULLICK.

69, Serpentine Lane,
CALCUTTA,
The 28th July, 1905.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY AND THE GIRL.

SEATED in a mango-grove on the bank of the Bhagirathi, a boy was listening to the twilight murmur of the waters. At his feet a little girl, stretched on a bed of springing turf, was silently looking at his face. She looked and looked and looked : she looked at the sky, the river, and the trees, and again looked at his face. The boy's name was Protap, that of the girl was Shaibalini. Shaibalini was then a child of seven or eight, while Protap was just stepping into youth.

Overhead the *Papia*[1] flitted away flooding the skies with the modulations of its music Shaibalini in an imitative melody made the mango-grove on the bank tremulous with vibration. The murmur of the Ganges mingled with the mimic song.

The girl with her small hands strung a garland of wild flowers, delicate as the hands which culled them, and hung it round the neck of the boy. Anon she took it off and twisted it round her *chignon ;* the next moment she put it off, only to place it round his neck again. It could not be settled who should wear the garland, and so finding a fat sleek cow grazing hard by, Shaibalini wound the contested garland round its horns,

[1] The Indian sparrow-hawk, a song-bird, with a shrill, crescendo note.

and thus the point was decided. Quarrels like this were not of rare occurrence with them; there being times when the boy would fetch the young brood from the nest of birds, and pluck ripe mellow mangoes in the season and give them to Shaibalini in exchange for the garland.

In the soft sky of the gloaming when the stars were up, they would start counting. Who has seen them first? Which of them first came in view? How many do you see? Are they four? I see five. There is one, there is another, another, another, and another. It is a fib. Shaibalini could not see more than three.

Now let us count the boats. Tell me how many boats are passing? Are they sixteen? Come, a wager! it is eighteen. Shaibalini did not know to count; her first counting gave the number at nine, but the next raised it to twenty-one. Then they gave up the counting, and both fixed their gaze intently on one single boat. Who was in the boat—whither was it going—whence had it come?—were questions which puzzled their speculative powers. Look how the gold is flashing in the splashes of the oar.

CHAPTER II.

WHO COULD SINK AND WHO COULD NOT.

THUS affection came into being. Call it love or not, just as you fancy. A lover of sixteen, a sweetheart of eight; but in any case no one knows to love like children.

I believe there is a curse on the love of childhood. How few of those whom you have loved in childhood you come across in youth, how few of them live so long, and how few remain worthy of your love! In old

age, the memory only of the love of childhood is left; the rest all vanish, but how sweet is that memory!

Every boy must have been impressed some time or other with the face of some girl as particularly sweet—there is some transcendent charm in her eyes. How often did he pause in his play and look up at her face, how frequently did he stand *perdu* in her path to have a peep at her. Then that sweet face, that frank gaze—all, all have been swept away in the onrush of time, no one knows whither. We search the whole world to find it again—only the memory of it is left. There is a curse on the love of childhood.

Shaibalini was under the impression that she would be married to Protap. Protap knew it was not to be so. She was the daughter of an agnate; the relationship was distant, but yet an agnate. This was the first error in Shaibalini's reckoning.

Then Shaibalini was the daughter of poor parents. She had no relation alive excepting her mother. They had nothing to call their own save a hut and Shaibalini's wealth of beauty. Protap also was poor.

Shaibalini grew apace. Her beauty went on completing itself like the horned moon, but there was no marriage. There was expense in the matter, and who was to bear it? Who would care to search out that hoard of beauty in that wilderness and welcome it as an invaluable treasure?

Shaibalini increased in understanding. She knew that she had no other happiness in this world except in Protap, and she also knew that she had no chance of getting Protap in this life.

They took counsel of each other, they deliberated for days in private, and no one knew. When they had made up their minds, both went for a bath to the

Ganges. Several people were swimming there. "Shaibalini, come let us swim," proposed Protap. Both began to swim, both were expert in the natatory art, no other children in the village could swim like them. It was the rainy season, the water of the Ganges ran up to the brim—it glided along, swimming, dancing and racing. They clove the waters, churned and scattered them, and swam along. Their handsome youthful figures shone in the foaming eddies like twin gems set in a silver orb.

When the bathing-folk in the ghât saw them swim off to a considerable distance, they called them back, but they paid no heed—they went on. Again the bathers called them back, rated them, abused them, but neither of the two would listen—they went on. When they had gone a long way, Protap said, "Shaibalini, now is the time for our tying the nuptial knot."

"What is the use of going any further? Let it be even here," answered Shaibalini.

Protap sank.

Shaibalini could not; she was afraid. "Why should I die?" thought she. "Who is Protap to me? I feel afraid, I cannot die." Shaibalini could not sink; she turned and swam back to the shore.

CHAPTER III.

THE BRIDEGROOM FOUND.

NOT very far from where Protap sank, a skiff was rowing along. One of the passengers saw Protap sink and leapt into the water. The passenger was Chandrashekhar Sharma.[1]

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[1] Sharma is the generic title of a Brahmin.

Chandrashekhar swam up and lifted Protap into the boat. He drove the boat ashore, and accompanied Protap to his home.

Protap's mother would not let him depart. She fell at his feet and prevailed upon him to partake of her hospitality for the day. Chandrashekhar remained in the dark as to the real object of Protap's drowning.

Shaibalini did not show her face to Protap again. But Chandrashekhar saw her—saw her, and was charmed.

Just then Chandrashekhar was in the midst of a great perplexity. He had barely stepped over his thirty-second year. He was a householder, yet not worldly-minded. Up to this, he had not married. Marriage generally stands in the way of acquiring knowledge, hence he was very much averse to it. But lately he had lost his mother, a little over a year. Under the new conditions, celibacy obstructed the acquisition of knowledge. In the first place, he had to cook with his own hands; that cost him no little time, and it was a drawback to acquiring and imparting knowledge. In the next place, there was the worship of the family idol—the Salagram in his house. He had to do every thing with his own hands in connection with its worship, and that cost him time again. The worship was not properly done, the household was upset, so much so, that he could not get up his meals every day. Books were mislaid and could not be found. He often forgot where he kept the moneys he received and the persons he paid. There was not much expense, yet his income proved inadequate. Chandrashekhar thought that by marrying, matters might be bettered somehow.

But in the event of marriage, he had made up his mind not to marry a beautiful girl, for such a girl might

enthral his mind; he did not care to be fettered by domestic ties.

While in such a frame of mind, Chandrashekhar came across Shaibalini. The sight of her broke the ascetic's vow. He deliberated, he hesitated, and, at last becoming his own match-maker, he married Shaibalini. Who is proof against the charms of beauty!

The story opens eight years after this marriage.

CHANDRASHEKHAR.

PART I.

THE WOMAN-SINNER.

CHAPTER I.

DALANI BEGUM.

THE ruler of the provinces of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa, Nawab Aliza Mir Kasim Khan, lived in the Fort of Monghyr. Inside the fort and within the harem, a particular spot was looking exceedingly charming. The first watch of the night had not yet been over. A soft thick carpet covered the variegated pavement of an apartment. Lights were burning from silver lamps fed with scented oil. The room was redolent of the perfume of sweet-smelling flowers. With her small head propped up against a king-cob pillow, a slight, girlish figure was reclining and composing herself to read the Gulistha. She was seventeen, but short and delicate as a child. While reading the Gulistha she occasionally sat up and looked round and talked to herself. Now she muttered, "What keeps him away so long, I wonder?" Then the next moment, "Why should he come? I am only one among a thousand slaves, why should he take the trouble of coming so far for me?" Presently she resumed her Gulistha. After reading a little again she cried, "Augh! I do not like

it," and laid down the book. "If he will not come," she went on, "I can go to him if he only wishes it. But then why should he remember me! I am no better than one among a thousand slaves." Again she returned to her book and again she threw it down in disgust and said, "Well, why should God dispose of things in such a way! Why should one be made to pine away for another! If that is His will, then why should not one desire for the person who is within one's reach! Why this desire, to have one who cannot be had! Why should I, a mere creeper, aspire to climb up a *sal* tree!" The girl then put her book away and stood up. The weight of her thick curly tresses falling from the small faultless head like a cluster of serpents began to tremble, the dazzling scarf embroidered with gold and scattering sweet perfumes began to flutter, and the slightest motion of her limbs rolled waves of beauty along the room—waves such as are born of the slightest stir in fathomless waters.

The girl then took up a lute and began to tune it, and slowly and softly crooned a song, as if she was afraid of an audience. Just at this moment, the salute of the near sentinel and the footfall of palanquin-bearers met her ears. She started up and hastening to the door found it was the Nawab's *tonjon*. Nawab Mir Kasim Ali Khan got out of the *tonjon* and entered the apartment.

"Dalani Bibi,[1] what song were you singing?" asked the Nawab after taking his seat. Perhaps, the real name of the young lady was Dowlatunnissa. The Nawab used to call her "Dalani" for the sake of brevity. For this reason all the household used to call her Dalani Begum, or Dalani Bibi.

[1] Bibi is an honorific for Mahomedan ladies of rank.

Dalani bashfully held down her head. To her misfortune the Nawab continued, "Go on with your song, why do you stop ? I want to listen."

This set up a great commotion. The strings of the lute became refractory—they would never be set in order. She threw it down in despair and took up the violin. The violin also seemed to disclose a false ring. "That will do," said the Nawab to relieve her embarrassment, "you had better sing in accompaniment." At this, Dalani thought that the Nawab had concluded that she had no knowledge of music. At that, and after that, Dalani could not open her lips. She tried hard, but her lips would not obey—no, not for worlds. They were about to open, they nearly opened, but at last did not open. Like the *hibiscus* in a cloudy day, the lips were about to open, but opened not; like the rhymes of a timorous poet, they were about to speak, but spoke not; like the endearing address swelling in the throat of a love-lorn lady in a miff at the approach of her truant love, her lips were about to speak, but spoke not. Then suddenly putting down the lute she jerked out, "I won't sing."

"Why," asked the Nawab in surprise, "are you angry ?"

"First get me the musical instrument which Englishmen at Calcutta play in accompaniment with their song, then I will sing to you again, otherwise not."

"If there be no thorn in the way," said Mir Kasim smiling, "surely I will get you one."

"Why should there be any thorn ?"

"I am afraid I may have to quarrel with the English," said the Nawab sadly. "Why, have you not heard anything about it ?"

"Yes, I have," answered Dalani, and remained silent.

"Dalani Bibi, what are you thinking about in that abstracted way?" asked Mir Kasim.

"One day you told me," replied Dalani, "that whoever would fight the English was sure to be defeated, then why do you propose to break out with them? I am a girl, your humble servant; I know it is extremely improper on my part to talk of these things, but I have a right to speak, and that is because you are graciously pleased to love me."

"That is true, Dalani," said the Nawab, "I do love you. I have never loved woman as I love you, nor do I think I ever shall."

A thrill of pleasure passed through Dalani's frame. She remained speechless for sometime; tears started into her eyes, and brushing them away, she said, "If you know that whoever would fight the English was sure to be defeated, then why have you made up your mind to fall out with them?"

"I," said Mir Kasim a little softly, "have no other alternative. I look upon you as my own, therefore I tell you these things. I know it for certain that this quarrel will cost me my throne, perhaps I shall lose my life. Then why do I want to fight?—you might ask. From the way in which the English are behaving, one would imagine as if they were the rulers and not I. What is the good of a kingdom of which I am not the king? Not only that; they say, 'we are the rulers, but the grinding of the people is left to you, you shall do that for us.' Why should I do it? If I cannot reign for the good of my people I will rather abdicate my throne. Why should I be a participator in their sin and infamy for nothing? I am not Sirajuddaula or Mir Jafar."

Dalani mentally applauded the Lord of Bengal a hundred times, and aloud she said, "Lord of my life! what should I say in reply? But I have got one request to make—don't go to the war yourself."

"In a matter like this, is it right for the Nawab of Bengal to listen to the advice of a woman, or is it proper for her to offer any such advice?"

Dalani felt abashed and sorry, and said, "I crave your pardon, I have spoken thoughtlessly. A woman's mind is not easily allayed, therefore I have said these things. But I have got another request."

"What is it?"

"Will you take me to the war with you?"

"Why, are you going to fight? Tell me I will dismiss Gurgan Khan and appoint you instead."

Dalani was again covered with shame and remained tongue-tied. "Why do you wish to go?" asked Mir Kasim affectionately.

"Because I want to keep with you."

Mir Kasim did not consent; he would never consent to it.

"My liege!" said Dalani with a soft smile, "you can predict the future. Tell me where I shall be during the war."

"In that case let me have the standish," said Mir Kasim smiling.

A serving-maid brought a golden standish at Dalani's bidding.

Mir Kasim had learnt astrology from the Hindus. Following his teachings he cast figures and began to calculate. After a while he flung the paper at a distance, and sat morose. "What do you find?" asked Dalani.

"What I find," answered Mir Kasim, "is very strange. You had better not hear it."

The next instant, the Nawab went out and sent for the Chief Secretary. He directed him to issue a mandate on a Hindu officer at Murshidabad to the following effect :—Not very far from Murshidabad, there is a place called Vedagram. A learned Brahmin by name Chandrashekhar Sharma lives there. He taught me astrology. He should be brought up and made to calculate as to where Dalani Begum would be both during and after the war, in case war should shortly break out with the English.

The Chief Secretary carried out the instructions of the Nawab. He sent a man to Murshidabad to fetch Chandrashekhar.

CHAPTER II.

THE "BHEEMA."

THICK rows of palms skirted the banks of a big tank called "the Bheema." The golden rays of the declining sun had fallen on its dark waters; the dark shadows of the palms along with the sunbeams had been imprinted on their surface; by the side of a ghât or water-stair-way, a few small trees mantled with creepers and linked together by them, with the branches spreading out up to the water-surface, sheltered from view the water-frolicking ladies. In that dim seclusion Shaibalini and Sundari with metallic pitchers in their hands were sporting with the water.

What is meant by water sporting with a girl? We do not know that, we are not water. He only can tell us who has been melted into water at the sight of beauty. He alone can tell us how the water, tossing up ripples urged by the onset of the pitcher and marking

time with the jingle of the ornaments on the arms, dances in unison; how dangling the garland of water-flowers pressing against the heart and swaying the little bird eager in swimming; how circling round and round the girl, peeping at her arms, throat, shoulders, and bosom, and pitching up waves, it dances in unison. He alone can tell us how the girl, letting the pitcher drift at the mercy of the gentle breeze, and sunk in water up to the chin, touches the water with her lips, crimson as the fruit of the balsam-apple, and sends it into her mouth and back again towards the sun, and how in that process the water makes a present of a hundred suns reflected in the falling spray. In the movement of the girl's limbs the water dances up in jets and her heart also dances with the dancing of the ripple. Both are equal—the water is volatile, and the heart of world-upsetting womanhood is volatile likewise. No impression is left on the water—is a young lady's heart anyway different?

The golden sunbeams dissolved in the dark waters of the tank and in a moment every thing was dark, only the palm-tops glistened like golden pennons.

"Sister," said Sundari, "it is getting on to night; we should not tarry here any longer, come, let us go home."

"No one is here," said Shaibalini, "do sing a song dear, softly?"

"Go to, you sinner, come home."

Shaibalini began to hum the scrap of a song:—

"Home, friend, again I shall not go.
My Cupid lo! is coming there.
Go home again I shall not, oh!"

"Perdition take you! your Cupid is waiting at home—why don't you go there?"

"Go and tell him that his Psyche finding the water of the Bheema cool, has drowned herself."

"Now keep your fooling aside. It is already dark, I cannot wait any longer. And then again, Khemi's mother has declared that a white man has appeared in the neighbourhood to-day."

"What is there in that for you or me to be afraid of?"

"Eh! is that it? Come out of the water, or else I go."

"I am not going to get out—you can go."

Sundari got very much annoyed, filled her pitcher and got upon the bank.

"La!" cried Sundari turning round, "Do you seriously mean to stay alone in the ghât at this time of dusk?"

Shaibalini did not make any reply, and pointed her finger in a particular direction. Following the direction of the finger, Sundari looked and saw on the other side of the tank under a palm-tree—oh, ruination! Without uttering another word she flung the pitcher on the ground from her hip and ran away with breathless speed. The brass pitcher rolled down emitting its watery contents with a gurgling sound and again disappeared in the water.

Sundari had seen an Englishman under the palm-trees.

The sight of the Englishman did not shake Shaibalini out of her place, nor did she get out of the water. She only dipped herself up to the breast and covering just half of her head, including the *chignon*, with her wet cloth, remained like a blooming water-lily. In the cloud of waters the fixed lightning smiled; in the dark waves of the Bheema the golden lotus opened in bloom.

When he found that Sundari had run away and the coast was clear, the Englishman under cover of the palm-rows slowly crept up to the ghât.

Of a surety he looked young. He had neither moustache nor beard. His hair was dark for an Englishman, and so were his eyes. He was smartly dressed, and the watch, chain, ring and other jewellery about his person were nice and decent.

He slowly came up to the ghât and going near the edge of the water said, "I come again fair lady."

"I do not understand that rubbish," said Shaibalini in Bengali.

"Oh—ay—that nasty gibberish! I must speak it, I suppose. (*Hum*) I, again (*aya hai*) have come."

Shaibalini: (In Bengali), "Why, is this the way to Pluto's abode?"

The Englishman could not understand a word of what Shaibalini said, and asked in Hindustani, "What do you say?"

Shaibalini: (In Bengali) "I say, has (*Jom*) Pluto forgotten you?"

The Englishman said in Hindustani, "*Jom?* John you mean? I am not John, I am Lawrence."

Shaibalini: (In Bengali), "Well, I have learnt one English word at least—Lawrence means a monkey."

In the dusk of that evening, after being treated to a course of Indian abuse, Lawrence Foster returned to his own place. Descending the bank of the tank, he unfastened his horse from a mango-tree, flung himself across it and rode away. On his way a melody he had once heard mingling with the echoes of the hills on the banks of the Teviot came surging back into his memory. Now and again a thought flitted across his mind: The love of Mary Foster white as driven snow of that cold country, which overpowered me in my younger days, now appears like a dream. Does change of country beget a change of

taste? Is the snow-white Mary comparable with the flaming beauty of this warm region? Can't say.

After Foster had departed, Shaibalini slowly filled her pitcher and placing it on her hip, like a cloud riding on the spring breeze, traced back her slow steps home. Setting the pitcher in its accustomed place she entered the sleeping room.

There Shaibalini's husband, Chandrashekhar, squatting on a small square blanket, with his waist and knees fastened together with a cloth printed with the sacred names of the gods and an earthenware lamp in front, was poring over manuscripts of hand-made paper. A hundred years have now elapsed since the time we are talking of.

Chandrashekhar was about forty. He was tall of stature with a corresponding powerful frame. He had a massive head and a broad forehead marked with sandalwood paste.[1]

"What should I say," Shaibalini asked herself as she entered the house, "if he wanted to know the cause of my delay?" But when she went in, Chandrashekhar said nothing. At that time he was deeply engaged in elucidating the meaning of a particular verse of the Brahmasuttras.[2] Shaibalini laughed out.

Chandrashekhar looked up and said, "Why this untimely lightning flash?"

"I was thinking what an amount of scolding you would give me," said Shaibalini.

"Scold you for what?"

"Because I am late in returning from the ghât?"

"Exactly so. Are you just come? Why this delay?"

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[1] Marking the forehead with sandalwood paste forms part of the religious ceremonial of a Hindu.

[2] This is one of the sacred books of the Hindus.

"A white man appeared. Sister-in-law Sundari was on dry land and she ran away leaving me behind. I was in water; I could not get out through fear, and stood immersed up to my throat. When the man had gone away I got out and came."

"Don't come again," said Chandrashekhar in a fit of abstraction, and again bent his mind on the commentary of Shankar.

It was gone far into the night. Chandrashekhar was yet engaged in settling questions of real knowledge, illusion, archetype of sound, necessity and other similar matters. Placing her husband's plate of rice and curry near him as usual, Shaibalini finished her meal and lay down on a bed in a corner of the room and was soon fast asleep.

In this matter she had her husband's permission.[1] Chandrashekhar used to carry his studies deep into the night and he was not in the habit of retiring after finishing his evening meal early.

Suddenly the deep hooting of an owl from a neighbouring housetop was heard. Then Chandrashekhar became aware that night had far advanced and tied up his manuscripts. Keeping them in their wonted place he stood up to stretch his limbs. Through the open casement his eyes fell on Nature smiling in the rays of the moon. The pencilled moonbeams clustering through the window had fallen on the sleeping beauty of Shaibalini's face. Chandrashekhar saw with rapture in his heart, that in his house (likened to a tank) the lotus had bloomed in the light of the moon. He stood and stood, and with pleasure-dilated eyes drank in the irreproachable beauty of her countenance. Under the deep

[1] With the Bengali Hindus it is not usual for the wife to take her meal before the husband takes his.

black eyebrow like a pencilled bow, he observed her lotus-like eyes remaining closed like sleeping lotus-buds, and marked the soft parallel lines in the long eye-lashes. He marked the small delicate hand resting against the cheek under the influence of sleep, as if a multitude had been heaped on a mass of flowers. The pressure of the hand had parted a little the beautiful luscious lips red with the stain of betel juice partially disclosing the pearly rows of her teeth. Anon the sleeping Shaibalini seemed to smile in some pleasant dream, and it seemed as though a flash of lightning swept across a moonlight sheet, and again the face resumed its former deep-sleep calm. Tears began to flow from Chandrashekhar's eyes at the sight of the happy face of that girl of twenty reposing in the calm of deep slumber without a trace of voluptuousness about it.

The beauty of Shaibalini's face quiescent in a profound sleep melted him into tears. "Alas! why did I marry her?" he thought. "This flower would adorn a King's Crown. Why did I bring this jewel into the hut of a learned Brahmin? By bringing her here I have rendered myself happy no doubt, but what is her happiness in it! Considering my age it is impossible to expect any love from her. Nor is there any chance of my love satisfying the craving of her mind. Moreover, I am always busy with my books; when shall I think of her happiness? By handling my books what pleasure can a young girl like her have? I am extremely selfish about my own happiness, and that is what prompted me to marry her. What shall I do now? Shall I throw my books collected at so much trouble into water and make the lotus-like face of a woman the be-all and end-all of my existence? Fie! fie! I shall not be able to do that. Then will this innocent girl make the scape-

goat to expiate my sin? Did I sever this beautiful flower from its stem to be consumed in the fierce flames of a disappointed youth?"

In these thoughts Chandrashekhar forgot to take his meal. The next morning a message came from the Chief Secretary of the Nawab desiring him to come to Murshidabad. The Nawab had some business with him.

CHAPTER III.

LAWRENCE FOSTER.

CLOSE to Vedagram, in a village called Purandarpore, there was a small silk-factory belonging to the East India Company. Lawrence Foster was its factor. Disappointed in the love of Mary Foster, while yet very young, he accepted service under the East India Company and came out to Bengal. Just as various bodily ailments are bred in the Englishmen of the present day on their advent to India, similarly the air of Bengal used to breed in the Englishmen of those days the ailment of Avarice. Very soon Foster was attacked with this disease, consequently the image of Mary Foster was effaced from his mind. Once he had occasion to go to Vedagram on some business. In the waters of the Bheema the lovely lotus-like face of Shaibalini crossed his vision. At the sight of a white man Shaibalini had run away, but Foster returned to the factory meditating all the while. After much cogitation he came to the conclusion, that black eyes were better than blue eyes, black hair was better than fair hair. Suddenly he was reminded that woman was like a ship in the ocean of this mundane world; everyone ought to put her into requisition. Those Englishmen, who after coming out to India, defraud the priest and take Bengali beauties

for their pleasure, are not very far out. Several Bengali women have bartered their love to Englishmen for greed of money—would not Shaibalini do the same? Taking a factory clerk with him, Foster again went to Vedagram and lay concealed in a thicket. The clerk saw Shaibalini, followed her and found out her home.

Every Bengali child gets terrified at the mention of a Bogey; but there are some naughty children who want to see a Bogey. Such was the case with Shaibalini. After the accepted manner of the times she would at first precipitately run away at the sight of Foster. Then some one said to her :—"The English do not catch people and swallow them straight off—they are very curious animals—just have a look at them once." Shaibalini did look and found that the Englishman did not pounce upon her and eat her up. Thenceforward Shaibalini would not run away on the appearance of Foster, and gradually found courage even to talk to him. The reader knows it already.

In an evil moment Shaibalini took her birth in this world. In an evil moment did Chandrashekhar marry her. What Shaibalini is, we will tell later on; whatever that might be, Foster lost his labour.

Soon after, an order unexpectedly reached him from Calcutta to the following effect :—"Another man has been appointed to the factory of Purandarpore in your place, you should start for Calcutta at once. You will be deputed on special duty." His successor followed close upon the order. Foster had to start for Calcutta forthwith.

Shaibalini's beauty had taken entire possession of Foster's mind. He found that he must go away giving up all hopes of her. The Englishmen of Bengal in those days were incapable of two things only. They could

not overcome avarice and they could not own a defeat. They would never admit they could not succeed in an enterprise, and it was better to desist ; nor would they admit there was vice in any particular action and therefore they should not do it. Nowhere in the world can be found men equal in power and arbitrary will to the Englishmen who first established British dominion in India.

Lawrence Foster was a man of this type. He did not try to resist the temptation. Among the Englishmen in Bengal at that period, the word virtue was extinct. He did not consider the feasibility or unfeasibility of the action, but only thought, "now or never."

Thus resolved, on the night before he started for Calcutta, Foster, furnished with arms, palanquin, bearers, and some factory peons, set out after dusk in the direction of Vedagram.

That night the Vedagram folk heard with alarm that dacoits had attacked Chandrashekhar's house. Chandrashekhar was not at home ; he had gone to Murshidabad on receipt of a cordial invitation from one of the officials of the Nawab and had not yet returned. On hearing the noise, screams, crack of fire-arms and cries of weeping, the villagers left their bed, went out, and saw that dacoits were plundering Chandrashekhar's house and many torches were blazing. No one went forward. Standing at a distance they saw the dacoits file out one by one after plundering the house; they also saw with surprise some bearers emerge from the house carrying a palanquin on their shoulders. The doors of the palanquin were closed and the English factor of Purandarpore were walking along side. Seeing this, they silently moved away in fear.

After the dacoits had left, the neighbours entered the house, but did not find many of the articles missing—

most of them were there, but Shaibalini could not be found. "She must have hid herself somewhere," opined a few, "and will presently come out." "No, she will not come out any more," maintained the elderly among them, "and even if she did, Chandrashekhar would not take her back. The palanquin you saw carried her away."

Those who had expected that Shaibalini would return, remained standing for sometime and finally sat down. After sitting for a while they began to doze, and after dozing for sometime they got disgusted and went away. Shaibalini did not return.

The girl, by name Sundari, whom we have introduced already, left the place last. She was the daughter of a neighbour of Chandrashekhar's, by courtesy his sister, and an intimate friend of Shaibalini. We have given her account here, as we shall have need to speak of her later on.

After waiting for a long time, Sundari returned home at dawn and fell to weeping.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARBER-WOMAN.

FOSTER went in person with the planquin to the bank of the distant Bhagirathi. There a boat was waiting properly furnished, and he helped Shaibalini into it. He had engaged Hindu servants, of both sexes, and guards too. What is the use of Hindu servants any longer?[1]

Foster himself started for Calcutta in a different conveyance. He had to go quick, and it was impossible for him to reach Calcutta within a week in a big hulking

[1] By leaving her home with an Englishman, Shaibalini is supposed to have lost her caste.

boat heading its course against the winds. After making suitable arrangements for a conveyance for Shaibalini, so that a lady might comfortably travel, Foster himself set out in a different vehicle. There was no apprehension of any attempt at rescue by an attack on the boat in case he himself did not accompany her. No one would venture to approach the boat when he would have heard that it belonged to an Englishman. He left instructions for the boat to proceed to Monghyr. Riding on the ripplets driven by the morning breeze, the spacious boat of Shaibalini moved in a northerly direction, the soft sounding ripples dashing against the bottom with a fluttering sound. You can trust a cunning artful cheat as much as you like, but never put your trust on the morning breeze. It is very sweet, it steals on tip-toe like a thief, and gently wantons with a lotus here, a cluster of jasmine there, and sprigs of fragrant Bocul (*mimosus elengi*) elsewhere; it carries odour to some, draws the night-bred bodily humours of many, soothes the thought-oppressed forehead of others, and when it finds the clustering hair of a young girl, it bestows slight little puffs on it and scampers away. Are you a boat passenger? You will find the amiable frolicsome morning breeze embellishing the river with small ripples; you will find it clearing the sky by removing one or two patches of grey clouds; you will find it softly dancing the trees on the banks, sweetly coquetting with women engaged in bathing and discoursing sweet music at your ear as it slips under the boat; and you will imagine the breeze to be very sober, very sedate, very unostentatious, at the same time ever-cheerful. What is not possible in this world if everyone should behave like this? Unfasten the boat and let it along! The sun has risen; you find the sun

glistening on the ripples; they have now grown bigger than before; on them the geese are dancing along, the earthen pitchers of beautiful girls engrossed in rubbing themselves are restless, and are swaying just a little too much. Now the ripples are defiantly climbing up their shoulders, again they are flinging themselves at the feet of those who had got up on the bank, and there beating their heads as if to say, "vouchsafe the liberty of touching your gracious feet," (by way of conciliation) at the least besmearing themselves with the lacdye washed away from their feet. By slow degrees, you find the sound of the wind deepening, it no longer melts in the ear like the verse of Jayadeva, [1] no longer it softly plies its lute in your auricle in the melody of *Bhairabi.*[2] Gradually you find it intensifying into a howl with a flourish of roars. Suddenly the ripples are swollen, they shake their heads and dash along—and there is darkness. Adverse winds block the way, and catching hold of the prow lash the boat against the water and veer it round, and finding the outlook not very encouraging, you make your obeisance to the Wind-god and run your boat ashore.

Shaibalini's boat was placed in a like predicament. As morning wore on, the wind began to rise. The boat was large and could not make head against adverse winds; the guards moored it at Bhadrahatty.

Sometime after, a barber-woman approached. She was married, and clad in a rather short red-bordered sari, with a fringe of a similar hue, and holding a basket full of lacdye-cotton in her hand. Finding a large

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[1] An Indian poet who wrote Sanscrit verses of exquisite grace and melody.

[2] A Indian tune, very soft and sweet.

number of black beards[1] in the boat, she pulled her veil. The owners of the beards gazed at her in silence.

Shaibalini's food was cooking on an alluvial plat. She was still observing Hindu customs—a Brahmin was cooking. One cannot transform oneself into a Saheb's wife in the course of a single day. Foster knew that if Shaibalini did not escape or commit suicide, she must one day sit at table and relish Mahomedan cooking as a delicacy. But where was the hurry now? If he tried to force her hand, everything would be spoiled. With this idea, he had engaged a Brahmin cook for her, according to the suggestion of his servants. The Brahmin was cooking and a servant-woman standing by helped him. The barber-woman walked up to the latter and asked, "My friend, where are you coming from?"

The servant-woman got angry, specially as she received her wages from an Englishman and answered sharply, "What business have you to enquire, hussy? We are coming from Hilli, Delhi, or Mecca, if that will suit you."[2]

The barber-woman was put out of countenance and said, "It is not that; I mean I am a barber by profession, and I am asking if any lady in your boat would like to have my services."

The servant-woman was mollified, and said, "Very well, I will go and enquire." With these words she went to ask Shaibalini if she would like to paint her feet with lacdye.[3] Shaibalini had been devising schemes for

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[1] They are the Mahomedan boatmen.

[2] This is a medley of the names of possible and impossible places.

[3] This practice of painting the feet with lacdye is common with th Hindu married women of Bengal. It is done by painting the fringe of the soles about an inch deep including the nails as a personal decoration.

diverting her mind anyhow, and said, "Yes, I will." Then, with the guard's permission, the servant-woman sent the barber-woman inside the boat, herself remaining busy in the cooking-place as before.

On facing Shaibalini the barber-woman drew her veil a little deeper, and taking one of her feet began to paint. "Barber-woman, where do you live?" asked Shaibalini after surveying her for some time.

She did not answer. "Barber-woman what is your name?" again asked Shaibalini.

Still no answer.

"Barber-woman are you weeping?"

"No," came the soft reply.

"Yes, you are weeping," and Shaibalini pulled back the barber-woman's veil. She had been actually weeping; when the veil had been removed, she smiled softly.

"I made you out as soon as you came in," said Shaibalini. "A veil before me, you silly! Never mind, but where do you come from?'

The barber-woman was no other than sister-in-law Sundari. Wiping her tears she said, "Be off with you, quick. Now take my sari and put it on, I am taking it off for you. Take this lacdye-cotton basket, draw your veil close and clear out of the boat."

"How have you come?" vacantly repeated Shaibalini.

"Whence I have come, how I have come, I will explain to you later on, if I find a suitable time for it. I have come here in search of you. I was told that the palanquin had gone in the direction of the Ganges. I got up in the morning, and without exchanging a word with a single soul, walked up to the river. Then I came to know that the boat had started northwards. I was to have walked a long way, but my feet began to ache, when I hired a boat and followed you. Yours

is a big boat and slow, mine is a small one, so I caught you up quickly."

"How could you come alone?"

It was on the tip of Sundari's tongue to return, "You blackfaced! how could you come riding in an Englishman's palanquin alone?" But finding it ill-suited for the occasion she held back and said:—

"I have not come alone, my husband is with me. Leaving our boat a little way off I assumed the garb of a barber-woman and came."

"Well then?"

"Then put on my sari, take this lacdye-cotton basket, draw your veil close and get away; no one will know you. Follow the bank of the Ganges, you will find my husband in the boat. Don't feel ashamed on account of his being the husband of your husband's sister;[1] you will go straight into the boat. As soon as you reach there, he will row off and take you home."

Shaibalini reflected for a time and said, "Very well, I grant it shall be so, but then what will become of you?"

"Don't you trouble yourself for me. The Englishman, who can confine the Brahmin woman Sundari in a boat has not set his foot in Bengal yet. We are born of Brahmin parents, we are the wives of Brahmins, if our minds be firm there can be no danger for us in this world. Do you go, I will reach home in course of the night anyhow. The God who overcometh all evil is my hope. Don't delay any longer. My husband hasn't had his meal yet, I don't know whether he will have any to-day at all."

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[1] It is against the rules of domestic propriety among the Bengal Hindus, for a lady to appear before such a relation.

"Well, suppose I return home, do you think my husband will reinstate me?"

"Oh, ho! why shouldn't he do it? As if it is such an easy matter after all not to do it."

"But remember, I have been abducted by the Englishman, do I maintain my caste any longer?"

Sundari looked intently at her face in astonishment. She began to dart sharp soul-piercing glances at her, and the proud Shaibalini, like a serpent wincing under the touch of the medicinal root, dropped her face. "Will you speak the truth?" asked Sundari somewhat sternly.

"Yes, I will."

"Even on these waters of the Ganges?[1]

"Yes. There is no need of your asking, I will tell you without it. Up till now I have held the Englishman at arm's length. It cannot harm the religious scruples of my husband to take me back."

"Then make no doubt. He is a pious man, he will never do an unjust thing; what is the good of wasting time on unprofitable talk?"

Shaibalini remained buried in thought for a while and then water stood in her eyes.

"Supposing I do go," she said, wiping her tears. "suppose also, that my husband takes me back, but will my infamy be ever wiped away?"

Sundari made no answer. "Would not the little girls of the neighbourhood," continued Shaibalini, "hereafter point their fingers at me and say, 'look, there is she who was abducted by an Englishman!' God forbid! if a son is born to me, who will accept my invitation at his rice

[1] The Ganges is considered very sacred by the Hindus, and when a person makes a statement by touching its water, he is put on the highest form of oath.

ceremony[1] and come to dine at my house? Or, if a daughter is born, what good Brahmin will marry his son to her? If I return home now, who will believe that I have not fallen off from my religion? How shall I shew my face there?"

"What was in your destiny, has come to pass," said Sundari, "that cannot be undone. You shall have to suffer a little all your time, yet you will have the satisfaction of living in your own home."

"For what happiness? What hopes of happiness have I, that I shall return home and suffer so much misery? I have neither father, mother, friend—"

"Why, you have got your husband, else for whom is the life of a woman?"

"You know all—"

"Yes, I do know all. I know that of all the sinners in this world, there is not one greater than you. The husband, the like of whom rarely falls to the lot of a woman in this world, your mind is not satisfied with the love of such a husband. And why?—because he does not know how to fondle his wife like children who fondle their dolls in their mimic play-house; and why?—because the Creator has not made him a buffoon tricked out in tinsel tawdries—He has made him a man. Your husband is pious and learned, you are a wicked sinner—how can you like him? You are blind of the blind, and that is why you cannot understand that the love which he bears you, is rare in a woman's life. As the reward of great virtue in your antecedent birth, you have

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[1] It is a ceremony which generally takes place in the sixth month of a child's birth when the child happens to be male, and in the seventh month, when it happens to be female. The kinsmen, caste-people and friends are invited to dinner on the occasion. This is the occasion when the child is initiated into the mysteries of boiled rice.

earned such love from such a husband. However, let all that go, this is not the time for it. Even if he does not love you, still if you can pass your time in worshipping his feet, you will have lived to some purpose. Why do you dawdle?—my gorge is rising."

"Now listen to me," said Shaibalini. "While at home I used to think, that if I could know of any relative either agnate or cognate, I would leave my home and live with him, otherwise I would go to Benares and live there on begging, else, I would drown myself. Now I am on my way to Monghyr, let see what sort of a town it is; let me try if doles of charity can be had in the metropolis. If it is to be death, I will die; I carry it in the hollow of my palm. What else is left to me now, but death? But death or life, in any case, I have determined not to return home. For me you have taken all this trouble in vain—go back. I will not go. Consider me as dead—be sure I will die—go."

After this Sundari did not utter another word. Repressing her tears she stood up and said, "I hope you will soon die. I devoutly pray to the gods that you may find courage to die, that you may die even before you reach Monghyr! Be it in storm, be it in the angry waves, be it in a sinking boat, I pray that you may die before you reach Monghyr!"

With these words Sundari whisked out of the boat, threw the lacdye-cotton basket into the water and returned to her husband.

CHAPTER V.

CHANDRASHEKHAR'S RETURN.

CHANDRASHEKHAR had calculated the future. He said to the Nawab's officer, "Sir, you will be pleased to

inform the Nawab, that I have not been successful in my calculation."

"Why Sir?" asked the officer.

"Everything," replied Chandrashekhar, "cannot be ascertained by astrology; if that were so, man would be omniscient; moreover, I am not very clever in that science." "Or rather it is," said the officer, "that sensible men do not tell things unpleasant to the sovereign. However that may be, I will lay before the Nawab what you have said."

Chandrashekhar took his leave. The Nawab's officer did not venture to offer him his travelling expenses. Chandrashekhar was a Brahmin, a learned Brahmin, and not a common Brahmin.

He was not in the habit of receiving any gratuitous benefits, nor did he accept any gift from anybody.

On his way back Chandrashekhar descried his house from a distance. The very sight of it infused a joy into his mind. Chandrashekhar was a philosopher and a seeker of truth. He asked himself:—Why this influx of joy into the mind of a man when he returns home from a strange country? Have I suffered from privations of hunger and sleep all the while? What greater happiness can I expect at home than abroad? That I have fallen into the deep meshes of illusion at this time of my life, there is no doubt. In yonder house, lives my darling wife; is it for that I feel so joyous? This universe is identical with the Spirit of God. If that is so, then why this abundunce of love for some and aversion for others? If everything in this world is identical with that Immutable, Omniscient, All-blissful God, then how is it that not even for once do I feel the least inclination to turn my face on the man who is carrying my luggage;

on the other hand, why am I so very anxious to see that blooming lotus-like face of my wife? It is not that I make light of the Lord's word, but I am certainly getting involved in the inexhorable tangles of illusion, nor do I feel inclined to break through them. If I were to live up to eternity, yet up to that eternity I would desire to remain enveloped in this illusion. When shall I see Shaibalini again?

Suddenly a great fear crept into his mind. What if I should miss Shaibalini on reaching home? Why should I miss her? If she is ill? Everyone is liable to illness, she will get cured. Chandrashekhar meditated and asked himself—Why do I feel so much uneasiness at the mere idea of her illness? Who is above it? But then if she is seriously ill? Chandrashekhar quickened his pace. If she is ill, God will cure her; I will make propitiatory offerings for her cure. But if she be not cured? Tears started into Chandrashekhar's eyes. He thought—would God deprive me of this jewel at this time of my life after having once given it to me? Nothing is strange in that! Am I so much favoured of Him that He will dispense nothing but happiness for my lot? May be, there is a great sorrow in store for me, who knows? If on my return, I do not find Shaibalini, if I hear that in severe illness she has departed this life?—then surely I will not live. Chandrashekhar set himself to a brisk pace. On entering the village he observed the folk very gravely looking at his face,—he could not understand the meaning of that look. Seeing him, the boys quietly smiled. Some followed him at a distance, the elderly people turned round at his sight. Chandrashekhar was astonished; he was frightened, became abstracted, and without glancing on any side reached the door of his house.

The door was closed. On hearing his knock outside, the servant opened the door. At the sight of Chandrashekhar he set up a weeping. "What is the matter ?" anxiously enquired the former.

The servant without making any reply went away weeping.

Chandrashekhar inwardly offered up prayers to the god of his worship. He found the yard unswept, the hall-of-worship full of dust, burnt torches were lying about, and here and there were broken doors. He entered the inner house and found all the doors fastened from outside. The serving-woman slunk away on his appearance. He heard her loud cries of weeping, coming from beyond the house. Then he took his stand in the centre of the courtyard, and with a loud distorted voice called out "Shaibalini."

No one answered, Chandrashekhar's distorted voice quieted the weeping maid-servant.

He again called out. The sound of his voice was echoed back from the rooms ; no one answered.

By that time over Shaibalini's painted boat, tne red English flag was fluttering in a current of gentle breeze, which came skimming over the waters of the Ganges ; the oarsmen were singing their own peculiar boat song.

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Chandrashekhar heard everything. Thereupon, he carefully carried the stone family-idol in his house to Sundari's father and left it with him. He then called his poor neighbours together and distributed the crockery, clothes and other household articles to them. Upto dusk he remained busy in this way. At night-fall he brought out one by one and collected together all the books, both studied and unstudied and dear as his life-blood. One by one he began to pile them up in the

yard; now and again he would open a book and instantly tie it up unread, and ultimately collected them all in a heap. When the pile was made up he set fire to it.

The fire blazed up. The Puranas, History, Poetry, Rhetoric, Grammar, everything gradually took fire; the laws of Manu, Jagnavalka, and Parasara, the Darsanas, the Philosophy of Naya, Vedanta, Sankhya, etc., the Kalpa—Sutras, Arannyakas and the Upanishads,[1] one by one, all caught the flame and blazed up. Nothing but ashes was left of that mass of invaluable books collected with infinite pains and studied over a length of time.

By nine o'clock at night when the burning had been done with only a single scarf to wrap his body with, Chandrashekhar left his ancestral roof-tree. No one knew whither he went nor did any one enquire.

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[1] All these form part of the sacred literature of the Hindus.

PART II.

SIN.

CHAPTER I.

KULSAM.

"No, the bird will not dance. Now for your news."

With these words Dalani Begum gave a tug at the tail of a refractory peacock. Unclasping a diamond bracelet from her wrist, she fastened it round the neck of another peacock and scattered a rose-spray over the bill and eyes of a foul-mouthed cockatoo. The cockatoo retaliated shrieking out, "slave." This term of abuse Dalani had herself taught the bird.

At hand a serving-maid was trying to make the birds dance; to her Dalani had said, "now for your news."

"The news is not much," began Kulsam. "Two cargo-boats laden with arms have landed. An Englishman is in charge. These boats have been seized. Ali Ibrahim Khan is of opinion that they should be allowed to proceed. For no good there will be war with the English if their progress is obstructed. Gurgan Khan maintains—let there be war, if necessary, he will not release the boats."

"Where are these arms going to?"

"To the factory at Patna. If war should break out, it would first break out there. To guard against sudden dispossession the English are sending arms. This is rife within the fort."

"But why does Gurgan Khan want to capture the boats?"

"He says that if so much arms are allowed to collect there, it will be difficult to defeat the English. The enemy should not be allowed to grow strong. Ali Ibrahim Khan is of opinion that, whatever we might do we could not defeat the English. Therefore, it is better we should not go into war. If that be so, why bring about war by seizing the boats? That in the main is no doubt true; there is no escaping the hands of the English. I am afraid the scenes of Nawab Serajudowlla's time will be acted over again."

Dalani remained buried in thought for a time, and ultimately said, "Kulsam, are you game for a dangerous adventure?"

"What is it? Have I got to eat the *Hilsa* fish,[1] or take a plunge in cold water?"

"Go to, it is no joke. If it reaches the Nawab's ears, then both of us will be trampled under elephant's feet.

"*If* it reaches his ear, then! Why, I have made away with so much *attar*, rosewater, gold and silver, and yet no one has been able to know of it. My idea is that the eyes of man have been put in his head as a mere decoration, he cannot see with them. Why, when has a man been able to detect a woman's guile? I have not seen such a case."

"Tut! I am not talking of the eunuch guards The Nawab is not like other men; what can escape his notice?"

"But what is there which I cannot hide? What do you want me to do?"

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[1] The *Hilsa* fish is hard to digest.

"A letter has got to be taken to Gurgan Khan."

Kulsam remained mute in astonishment.

"What do you say to it?" asked Dalani.

"Who will send the letter?"

"I."

"What, have you gone mad?"

"Nearly."

Both sat silent for a time. The two peacocks finding them speechless perched upon their respective roosts. The cockatoo set up a stupid scream. The remaining birds busied themselves in pecking their rations.

"The deed is very simple," said Kulsam after a time. "If a eunuch is tipped a bit, he will carry the letter at once. But that is very risky. Should the Nawab come to know, then both of us would be killed. However, you know your own business best, I am a mere servant. Let me have the letter and—some cash."

Kulsam then went away with the letter. Providence made this letter the thread which knitted the destiny of Dalani and Shaibalini together.

CHAPTER II.

GURGAN KHAN.

THE name of the addressee of Dalani's letter was Gurgan Khan.

Of all the state-officers who were employed in Bengal at that time, Gurgan Khan was one of the highest and best. By nationality he was an Armenian; Ispahan was his birthplace. A report is current that in early-life he was a clothier, but he was a man of great genius and extraordinary talents. Within a short time of his service, he rose to the rank of Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Not only that, soon after he came

to his new position, he formed an artillery force. He had it properly trained and equipped after European methods; the guns and muskets he manufactured turned out to be even superior to those manufactured in Europe. His artillery force became in every respect equal to the European artillery soldiers. Mir Kasim too, had his hopes that with Gurgan Khan to help him, he would be able to defeat the English. With his rise, Gurgan Khan's influence increased apace. Mir Kasim would not engage in any undertaking without his advice. He would not listen to anybody who spoke contrary to it. In a word Gurgan Khan grew up to a little Nawab himself; naturally the Mahomedan officials became jealous.

It was midnight; but Gurgan Khan had not yet retired. Alone in lamplight he was reading some letters. They were from certain Armenians at Calcutta. After finishing the letters he called to a servant. A footman came and awaited orders. Gurgan Khan asked:

"Have all the doors been kept open?"

"Yes," answered the footman.

"If any one should like to see me, he must not be obstructed or asked who he was. Have you explained this?"

"Your Excellency's order has been carried out," replied the footman.

"Very well, you can go."

After the footman had gone Gurgan Khan tied up the letters and secreted them in a fitting place. Then he began to meditate. "Now which path to follow? This Hindusthan is now like a sea, whoever dives most, will pick up the largest number of gems. What is the good of counting the waves from the shore? Take my case: I used to measure out cloth with the yard-stick and sell it. Now all India is trembl-

ing at my name. I am the master of Bengal. Am I really the master of Bengal? Then who if not I? No, the English merchants are the master, and Mir Kasim is their slave. I am the slave of Mir Kasim, therefore, I am the slave of the master's slave. A very high position indeed! Why shouldn't I be the master of Bengal? Who can stand before my guns? The English? Let me once catch them! But unless I cast them out of this country I cannot be the master. I want to be the ruler of Bengal. I don't mind Mir Kasim; I will tear him away from the throne the very day I shall wish it. He is merely my ladder to mount up to my exalted position. Now that I have got up to the terrace, I can safely kick it. The rascally English are the only thorn. They want to have me under their thumb, I want to have them under mine. But they will never come under my thumb; therefore, I must drive them away. Let Mir Kasim continue on the throne for the present; I will co-operate with him and obliterate the British name from Bengal. With that object I am contriving to bring about this war; all this done, I will bid adieu to Mir Kasim. This is the right path. But why do I get this letter so unexpectedly to-day? Why has this girl launched in this reckless adventure?"

Just then the person who occupied his mind entered appearance and stood before him. Gurgan Khan conducted her to a separate seat. She was Dalani Begum.

"I am very glad," said Gurgan Khan, "to see you after such a length of time. I have not had the pleasure of seeing you since you entered the Nawab's seraglio. But why have you embarked in this mad adventure?"

"How mad?" asked Dalani.

"You, the Nawab's Begum," replied Gurgan Khan, "have secretly stolen out at night to my place; if the Nawab should come to know of it, he would kill us—both you and me."

"If he at all comes to know of it, I will disclose our relationship. After that there will be no further cause for his displeasure."

"You are a mere girl, therefore you expect such a thing. We have not disclosed our relationship to any one up to this time. That you know me, or that I know you, none of us have yet revealed; and if at the time of danger it is made public, who will believe it? People will call it a subterfuge for escape. You have not done well to come here."

"What is the chance of the Nawab's knowing of it? The sentries are all under your control, and they have let me pass on seeing your token. I have come to ask one word only. Is it a fact that there will be war with the English?"

"Don't you hear it talked about in the fort?"

"Yes I do. It is current there that war with the English is inevitable, and you have brought it about—why?"

"You are a mere girl, how shall you understand it?"

"Am I talking like a girl, or am I in the habit of acting as such? When you yourself have planted me in the seraglio as an instrument of your self-advancement, then what is the good of ignoring me as a girl?"

"Let there be war. This war with the English can neither harm you nor me. If it should be war, let it be."

"Do you expect to be victorious?"

"Our victory is most likely."

"Who has been able to defeat the English up to the present moment?"

"How many Gurgan Khans have they fought?"

"Serajuddowla also thought in a similar strain. However, let that go. I am a woman, I believe in what my mind prompts me to. To my mind it seems, that in our war with the English we shall never come off victorious. This war will be our ruin. Therefore, I have come to beseech you—do not advise this war."

"In matters like this a woman's advice is not to be accepted."

"Oh, do listen to me! Be my saviour, I see darkness all around!" and Dalani began to weep.

Gurgan Khan was astonished. "Why do you weep?" he asked. "Suppose Mir Kasim should lose his throne, I would take you back to our native country."

Dalani's eyes flashed fire. In a paroxysm of rage she cried, "Dost thou forget that Mir Kasim is my husband?"

A trifle taken aback and confused, Gurgan Khanr replied, "No, I do not. But no one's husband lives for ever. After the first, one can take a second husband. I entertain hopes that one day you will be another Nurjehan of India."

Trembling with passion Dalani stood up. She stifled her tears and with dilated eyes and trembling limbs, she began to pour forth:—

"Perdition take you! In an evil moment was I born your sister; in an evil moment did I pledge myself to help you. That a woman is capable of charity, affection, and virtue, does not enter your head. If you desist from instigating this war, well and good; if not, from this day forth, I will disclaim you; or why disclaim only, henceforth I will look upon you as my enemy. I will consider you as my 'dearest foe,' and I wish you

also, to know me as such. I will remain your mortal enemy in the palace."

With these words Dalani flung out of the room and went away.

When Dalani had gone away Gurgan Khan began to reflect. He knew that Dalani was no longer his, she was Mir Kasim's. She might have a sister's affection for him but her love for Mir Kasim was far stronger. When she has known, or will know, that the brother is no well-wisher of the husband, she might do the brother an ill-turn for the good of the husband. Therefore, she must not be allowed to enter the fort again. With this decision Gurgan Khan called to a servant.

One of the armed attendants appeared. Gurgan Khan sent orders through him that the sentries must not allow Dalani to enter the fort.

On horseback the courier reached the gate of the fort in advance. Dalani duly arrived there, and was told that her admittance had been forbidden.

At this, she slowly sank on the ground like a torn creeper. Torrents of tears flowed from her eyes, and she exclaimed, "Alas, my brother! you have made me completely desolate."

"Come," suggested Kulsam, " et us go back to the Commander-in-Chief's house."

"You can go if you like," said Dalani, "I will take shelter within the billows of the Ganges."

In that dark night Dalani stood on the public highway and wept. The stars were shimmering overhead; the scent of new-blown flowers came floating from the trees; the leaves, mantled in darkness were rustling in a current of gentle breeze; and Dalani, through her tears muttered " Kulsam."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT BECAME OF DALANI?

AT night, with only a single female attendant, the queen stood on the public highway and wept.

"What will you do now?" enquired Kulsam.

"Come let us stand under yonder tree," replied Dalani wiping her tears, "and wait till daybreak."

"If we allow the night to dawn upon us here, we are sure to be found out."

"What is the fear in that? Of what misdeed am I guilty that I shall be afraid?"

"We have stolen out of the palace like thieves. Why we have done it, is best known to you. But just imagine what people will think and the Nawab too."

"Whatever the Nawab may think, God is my only judge—I care not for other judgment. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall only die. What is the harm?"

"But what earthly purpose will be served by standing here?"

"I shall be caught, and that is why I purpose to stand here. I want to be caught. Where can I be taken to when I am caught?"

"To the Nawab, I suppose."

"To my lord? That is the place where I want to go. I have nowhere else to go to. Should he order my death, still with my last breath I shall be able to tell him that I am innocent. Rather, let us go to the fort-gate and take our seat there; we shall be caught there all the sooner."

Just at this moment, both observed with apprehension, the tall figure of a man moving in the darkness towards the Ganges. On this they betook themselves to the foot

of a tree and lay concealed in the gloom. Again they noticed with alarm, the man turn from his path and advance towards the sheltering trees. At this, both dived into deeper darkness.

The man came just to the very same spot. "Who are you here?" he asked. Immediately after, it seemed as if he muttered to himself in a low tone, "Who can this hapless creature be that wakes the night in the public streets like myself?"

The tall stature of the man had at first generated a fear in the minds of the women, but the sound of his voice soon re-assured them; it was very sweet—full of sadness and pity.

"We are women, who are you pray?" said Kulsam.

"We!" cried the man, "how many are you?"

"We are only two," replied Kulsam.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" asked the man.

"We are ill-fated women," interposed Dalani. "What is the good of your hearing the tale of our sorrow?"

"Even a very insignificant person," averred the stranger, "can sometimes render service; if you are in trouble, I can try to help you as far as it lies in my power."

"To help us," said Dalani, "is almost next to impossible. Who are you?"

"I am an insignificant man," replied the stranger "a poor Brahmin only—an ascetic."

"Whoever you might be," said Dalani, "your words invite our confidence. A drowning man never discusses the strength of his support. If you want to hear the tale of our sorrow, then step aside a little; one cannot be sure who might be about in the night. We cannot guard our secret too carefully against chance auditors."

"Then follow me," said the ascetic

With these words he led the way, and accompanied them to the town. Stopping in front of a small house he knocked at the door and called out, "Ramcharan." Ramcharan came and unfastened the door. The ascetic directed him to strike a light.

After lighting a lamp, Ramcharan made his obeisance to the ascetic by prostrating himself at his feet. The ascetic dismissed him saying, "Now you can go back to your sleep." Ramcharan bestowed a glance on Dalani and Kulsam and went away. Superfluous to say, that he could not sleep that night anymore. Why had the ascetic brought these two young women with him at such a late hour of the night, became uppermost in his mind. He looked upon the ascetic as a god. He knew him to be a man who had subjugated his senses—that faith of his was not shaken. He at last came to this conclusion—"Perhaps, these two women have lately become widows. The ascetic has called them here to persuade them to follow their husbands into the funeral pyre. Confound it all! I could not make out this simple thing all this time!"

The ascetic squatted on a piece of square blanket, the women sat on the bare ground. First of all, Dalani gave an account of herself, then she described all the events of the night without reserve.

After hearing her, the ascetic said to himself, "Who can cancel the inevitable? What is fated must happen, yet no one should overlook the free-will of man. I must do my duty."

Alas, ascetic! why did you burn your books? All books can be burnt to ashes, but never the book of the heart. Addressing Dalani, he said, "This is my advice—you should not present yourself before the

Nawab all at once. First of all, you should inform him of all the details by a letter. If he loves you, he is sure to believe your statements. Then, after getting his permission you can appear before him."

"But who is to carry the letter ?"

"I will have it sent."

Dalani then asked for pen and paper. The ascetic waked up Ramcharan again. The latter brought paper, pen, and other writing materials and left. Dalani began to write.

In the meantime the ascetic went on, "This house is not mine, but you can stay here so long as you do not hear the commands of the Nawab. No one will know or question."

Circumstances forced the ladies to agree to it. When the letter had been finished, Dalani handed it to the ascetic. The latter went away with it after leaving all necessary instructions with Ramcharan regarding the comforts of the ladies.

He was well known to all the Hindu and Mussalman officers of the Nawab at Monghyr and they all respected him.

Secretary Ram Gobinda Ray held him in great reverence. After daybreak he entered the fort, saw Ram Gobinda and handed over Dalani's letter to him. "Don't mention my name please," he warned Ram Gobinda as he gave the letter. "Only say a Brahmin brought it."

"Come round for the reply to-morrow, please," said the Secretary. The Secretary did not know whose letter it was. The ascetic then returned to his house. He saw Dalani and said, "The reply will come to-morrow. You must manage to pass your time somehow to-day."

In the morning Ramcharan came, and found that no preparations had been made for the self-immolation of the ladies.

In the upper story of the house another man was sleeping. It is necessary to give some account of him here. In delineating his character, this pen of mine tainted with the stain of Shaibalini's sin, will be hallowed.

CHAPTER. IV.

PROTAP.

IN high dudgeon indeed, Sundari had left Shaibalini's boat. The whole of her return-journey she railed at Shaibalini to her husband. Investing her with such endearing epithets as, "ill-starred," "black face," "oven-faced," and other good set terms, she materially contributed to his amusement. On returning home she wept long. Then Chandrashekhar returned and abandoned his native village. After that came a lull for a few days. No news of Shaibalini or Chandrashekhar could be obtained. Then Sundari donned her Dacca *sari* and began to put on her ornaments.

We have said that Sundari was the daughter of one of Chandrashekhar's neighbours, by courtesy his sister. Her father was not entirely without means. As a rule, Sundari used to live with her father. Without exactly being a domesticated[1] son-in-law, her husband Sreenath occasionally lived with her father. We have also said that Sreenath was living in Vedagram at the time of Shaibalini's misfortune. Sundari was practically the mistress of the house as her mother was a confirmed

[1] In India rich parents sometimes marry their daughters to poor men and maintain the sons-in-law in their own house.

invalid. Sundari had a younger sister by name Rupasi who lived with her husband.

With her Dacca *sari*[1] donned and her ornaments on, Sundari said to her father, "I wish to pay a visit to Rupasi. I have had very bad dreams about her." Sundari's father, Krishna Kamal Chakravartti, was an indulgent parent, and after a slight demur he gave his consent. Sundari then went to Rupasi. Sreenath started home.

Who is Rupasi's husband? He is the self-same Protap. After his marriage with Shaibalini, Chandrashekhar used to meet his neighbour's son Protap every now and then and he learnt to appreciate Protap's character. When Sundari's sister Rupasi grew up to maturity, he contrived to bring about her marriage with Protap. Not only that, Chandrashekhar as tutor of Mir Kasim had great influence with him, and he secured a post for Protap under Mir Kasim's government. By dint of his own merit Protap began to prosper day by day. He was now a zemindar. He owned a big mansion and a widespread name. Sundari's palanquin entered Protap's house. On meeting Sundari, Rupasi made her salutation and cordially welcomed her into the house. Protap also came out and gave her a facetious welcome.

At a suitable hour Protap asked Sundari all about Vedagram, and after talking on sundry matters, he enquired about Chandrashekhar.

"That is exactly what I have come to tell you about," said Sundari, "Now listen."

With these words she related in detail the expatriation of Chandrashekhar and Shaibalini. Protap was struck

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[1] *Saris* made at Dacca are famous for their fine texture.

dumb in astonishment. After a while he looked up and asked with a slight acerbity in his tone.

"Why, didn't you send me timely information about it?"

"Why, what's the good of that?"

"What's the good, you ask? You are a woman, I should not boast to you. If you had informed me in time, something could have been done."

"How could I know that you would stir in the matter?"

"Why, don't you know that I owe everything to Chandrashekhar?"

"I know that. But I have heard it said that people are apt to forget their previous history in their days of prosperity."

Protap grew impatient and speechless with indignation and abruptly went away. Sundari was very much pleased at this sudden outburst.

Next day with only a cook and a servant, Protap left for Monghyr. The servant was Ramcharan. Where he went, Protap did not disclose. He only said to Rupasi, "I am going in quest of Chandrashekhar and Shaibalini. I will not return till I ascertain their whereabouts."

The house at Monghyr where the ascetic had left Dalani, was Protap's lodging-house.

Sundari stayed with her sister for some time and railed at Shaibalini to her heart's content. Morning, noon and night, she would lay herself out in demonstrating to Rupasi that a woman more wicked and ill-fated than Shaibalini was never born. One day Rupasi remarked:—

"All that is true no doubt, but why do you bother yourself by running about for her?"

"Because I want to knock her head off," replied Sundari. "I want to see her sent to Pluto's abode; I want to apply the funeral torch to her face, &c., &c."

"Sister, you are a bit of a scold," said Rupasi.

"It is she who has made me so," returned Sundari.

CHAPTER V.

On the Bank of the Ganges.

The Council at Calcutta had decided on war with the Nawab. It was necessary to send some arms to the factory at Patna soon. For that purpose a boat laden with arms was got ready.

It had also become necessary to send some secret instructions to Mr. Ellis, the Agent at the Patna factory. Mr. Amyatt was at Monghyr to settle the differences with the Nawab. No definite instructions could be given to Mr. Ellis without ascertaining what Mr. Amyatt was doing there, and how he understood the posture of affairs. It became, therefore, necessary to send an astute officer. He would visit Mr. Amyatt, take instructions from him, and go to Mr. Ellis, and then explain to him the views of the Council at Calcutta and those of Amyatt.

With this object Governor Vansittart had called Mr. Foster back from Purandarpur. He was to go in charge of the boat of arms, and after visiting Amyatt proceed to Patna. Consequently, Foster had to start up-country as soon as he reached Calcutta. He got intimation about these things beforehand, and consequently sent Shaibalini to Monghyr in advance. On his way to Patna he met Shaibalini.

With Shaibalini and the boat of arms, Foster came to Monghyr, where he moored. After visiting Mr. Amyatt,

he had just taken his leave, when Gurgan Khan seized one of his boats. Recriminations followed between Amyatt and the Nawab. At last it was settled between Amyatt and Foster that, if the Nawab would release the boat in the meantime, well and good; otherwise, the next morning, Foster would leave the boat of arms behind, and pursue his journey to Patna.

Both the boats of Foster had been fastened to the bank of the river. One was a country junk, very large, and the other, a barge. On the junk a few of the Nawab's sepoys were mounting guard. A few more sepoys were also stationed on the bank. This was the boat in which arms had been stowed away and Gurgan Khan wanted to intercept.

The barge did not carry any arms. It was lying about fifty cubits off the junk. There was no guard of the Nawab on it. An English sentry, commonly called Telinga, was sitting on the roof and keeping watch.

It was nearly half-past one in the morning. The night was dark, but clear. The sentries on the barge now stood up, then sat down, and again drowsily nodded. On the bank was a small reed-copse. Behind it a man was watching. The watcher was Protap Ray himself.

Protap Ray marked the sentry's drowsy nodding and he quietly glided into the water. Hearing the splash, the sentry drowsily called out, "who come there"? Protap Ray did not answer. The sentry went on nodding away as before. Inside the boat, Foster lay in vigilant wakefulness. At the sentry's challenge, he threw his eyes round from within the barge and saw a man had got into the water for a bath.

At this moment suddenly the crack of a musket was heard in the direction of the reed-thicket. The sentry on the barge, hit by the bullet, fell into the water

Protap then moved away in the shadow of the barge and stood immersed in water up to the lips.

At the report of the musket the sepoys of the junk noisily shouted out, "what is up there?" All the other men in the boat were roused. Foster came out, musket in hand.

He began to look round on all sides. He saw that the Telinga sentry had vanished, and in the starlight he found his dead body floating on the water. His first thought was that the Nawab's sepoys had hit the Telinga, but the next moment, he discovered a slight trail of smoke in the direction of the reed-thicket. He also found that the men of the other boat were running up to learn what the matter was. The stars were glimmering in the sky, lights were burning in the city, hundreds of large boats along the bank of the Ganges lay motionless in the dark like sleeping ogresses, and the ever-flowing Ganges ran past bubbling along. In that current the sentry's corpse floated down. Foster saw all this in a trice.

Foster noticed a thin streak of smoke hovering on the copse ; he raised the musket in his hand and began to take aim in that direction. He had been perfectly convinced that behind the thicket lay the lurking foe. He knew also that the enemy who had killed the sentry unseen might also kill him at that very moment. But Foster had come out to India after the battle of Plassey. That an Indian could dare aim at an Englishman, found no lodgment in his mind. Moreover, for an Englishman, death was preferable rather than be afraid of an Indian enemy. With this idea he took his stand there, and had just raised his musket, when out flashed a gun from the thicket. Again the crack of a firearm was heard, and struck in the head Foster fell into the current below like the

sentry before him, the gun in his hand falling on the boat with a crash.

At that very instant, Protap unsheathed a knife from his girdle and cut the rope which confined the barge. The water being shallow at that place and the current being feeble, the boatmen did not cast anchor ; and even if they had done so, it could not stand in the way of the supple-fingered and powerful Protap. Then at one bound Protap sprang into the boat.

All these happened within a hundreth part of the time taken in narrating these events. The fall of the sentry, the coming out of Foster, then his fall, and again the entrance of Protap into the boat, all these happened before the men in the other boat could come up. But they did come at last.

They found that Protap's skill had set the barge adrift. One of them tried to swim up and overtake it, but Protap took up a pole and struck him on the head. This sent him spinning back and no one else made any further attempt. Protap punted the boat, the boat veered into a deep current and darted off in an easterly direction.

Pole in hand, Protap turned round and saw that another Telinga sepoy resting his knee against the roof of the boat was taking aim at him. Protap raised his pole aloft and struck him on the hand. Disabled by the stroke, the gun fell from his hands. Protap took it up, and also the one which had fallen from Foster's hands, and then addressed the men of the boat in the following words :—

"Now listen to me ! Know me as Protap Ray. Even the Nawab does not despise me. With these two guns and my pole, I think, I alone can settle you all. If you follow my advice, I will not molest you. I am

going at the helm, let the crew take the oars. The rest of you shall remain where you are. Budge an inch, and you are dead men; otherwise, there is no fear."

With these words Protap Ray poked the crew up with his pole and set them about. Shrinking in fear they applied themselves to the oars. Protap himself took the helm; no one spoke a word after that. The boat spun along. Some random shots were fired from the junk, but no one being able to take proper aim in the starlight, they instantly ceased.

A few men belonging to the junk got into a *dinghey* with muskets and tried to tackle the barge. At first Protap did not oppose them, but when they had come sufficiently near, he aimed both his guns at them and fired. Two men were wounded, and the rest taking fright put about the boat and withdrew.

When Ramcharan, who lay concealed in the reed-thicket, found that Protap was out of harm's way and certain sepoys of the junk were approaching to search the copse, he quietly turned on his heel.

CHAPTER VI.

THE THUNDER-STROKE.

THE boat was gliding over the Ganges at night and Shaibalini woke up from her sleep.

There were two cabins in the boat, one was occupied by Foster, and the other by Shaibalini and her maid. Shaibalini had not yet reduced herself into a European lady. She had still her black-bordered *sari* on. She retained the bangles on her arm, the anklets on her feet, and the Purandarpore maid Parvati was keeping her company. Shaibalini had been sleeping, and she saw a vision. The trees on the banks of the Bheema,

with their water-prone branches, had formed a dark fringe round the tank. In it Shaibalini's face was floating as a lotus. At the further end a golden swan was gliding along, and on the bank a white boar was roaming about The swan had caught her fancy and she was anxious to get at it, but it turned off and moved along, while the boar prowled about on the bank to catch the lotus (Shaibalini). The face of the swan could not be seen, but that of the boar gave an idea as if it resembled Foster. Shaibalini wanted to get at the swan, but her feet stuck in the water like the stalk of the lotus—her locomotion had gone. Here again, the boar had been crying out to her, "come to me, I will get you the swan." At the first report of the gun Shaibalini's slumber was broken. Then she heard the splash of the sentry's fall. In the opiate fumes of unfinished and interrupted slumber, she could not collect her wits for a while, the swan and the boar coming back to her with recurrent persistency. The second gunshot and a great clamour roused her completely. She came to the outer cabin and looked out. Yet she could not make out anything. Then she returned to her own cabin. A lamp was burning there, and Parvati had also got up. Shaibalini asked her,—

"Do you understand what is going on there?"

"Not much," said Parvati. "It appears from the men's talk that the boat has been set upon by pirates—the Englishman has been killed. This is the consequence of our folly."

"How can the death of the Englishman be the consequence of our folly? Surely it is his, if anybody's."

"When the pirates have attacked, ours is the danger."

"What is the danger? Hitherto we had been in the company of one set, now it will be another. If we can

get out of the clutches of the white pirate and then fall into the hands of black pirates, we shall not be any the worse for it."

Then shaking the braided locks of her small head trailing behind her shoulders, she strode with a soft delicate smile and installed herself in her small couch.

"I can scarcely bear your smile at such a moment," cried Parvati.

"If you cannot," said Shaibalini "there is the Ganges ready for you; you are welcome to drown yourself. The time for my smiling has come, and I will smile. Do call one of the pirates please, will you? I should like to have a talk."

"They do not want to be called," answered Parvati in a pet, "they will come without it."

Sometime passed, but no pirates came. "Look at our luck," said Shaibalini in an injured tone, "even the pirates do not take any notice of us." Parvati had been trembling in fear.

A long while after, the boat stopped at an alluvial plat. It waited there sometime before some clubmen brought a palanquin with Ramcharan at their head.

The bearers set the palanquin on the ground. Ramcharan got into the barge and approached Protap. With Protap's instructions he entered the cabin. His eyes first lighted on Parvati's face, then he saw Shaibalini. Addressing the latter he said, "Will it please you madam, to come out?"

"Who are you?" asked Shaibalini. "Where do you want me to go?"

"Your servant, madam," replied Ramcharan, "do not be afraid—come with me. The Englishman is dead."

Quietly Shaibalini stood up and followed Ramcharan, and together went out of the boat. Parvati was

following, but Ramcharan forbade and warned her off. In fear she abided in the boat. At Ramcharan's request Shaibalini got into the palanquin. He took it to Protap's house.

Dalani and Kulsam were still staying in that house. Lest there should be any interruption to their sleep, Ramcharan avoided them and took Shaibalini upstairs, and with a request that she might take her rest, he set a light before her, made her obeisance, and left the place after closing the door behind him.

Shaibalini had asked—"whose house is this?"—but it suited Ramcharan to pay a deaf ear to it.

Contrary to Protap's instructions, Ramcharan in the exercise of his own discretion, had taken Shaibalini to Protap's house. Protap had told him to take the palan quin to Jagat Shetth's house. On the way it struck Ram charan—"Who knows if I should find the gate of Jagat Shetth's house open at this time of night? Would the gatekeeper give us admittance? How should we introduce ourselves when asked? Should I invite my own ruin by giving a true account? It is much safer to avoid all that and go to our own lodging." With this decision he had taken the palanquin to Protap's house.

When Protap found that the palanquin was fairly out of sight, he got out of the boat. Hitherto the sight of the guns in Protap's hand had made the men hold their tongue, but now the presence of the clubmen effectually silenced them. Alighting from the boat, Protap took the way to his lodging. Reaching the door of his house he gave a knock. Ramcharan came and opened the door. That Ramcharan had acted against his instructions, he heard as soon as he reached home from Ramcharan himself. He was a little put out and said, "There is time yet, take her to Jagat Shetth's house. Go fetch her."

Reader, you will be astonished to hear, Ramcharan went and found Shaibalini asleep. Surely, no sleep is possible under such circumstances! Possible or not, we cannot say; we are writing just as it happened. Without rousing Shaibalini, Ramcharan cameback to Protap and said, "She is sleeping, shall I wake her up?" Protap was astounded and thought that the savant Chanakya left his famous couplet about woman incomplete[1]—a woman's sleep is sixteen-fold greater than man's. Aloud he said, "There is no need for pushing matters to that extent, you can go to sleep—we had no end of trouble to-night; I myself too must take a little rest." Ramcharan went away to sleep. Night had not yet altogether spent. The house, the city beyond, everywhere, there was stillness and darkness. Alone, Protap silently went upstairs and walked towards his own bedchamber. Reaching his room, he opened the door and saw Shaibalini lying on his bed. Ramcharan had forgotten to tell him that he had left Shaibalini in his bedroom.

In the light of the lamp it seemed to him as if some one had heaped pure blooming flowers on his white bed; as if some one had cast adrift white smiling lilies on the still white expanse of the Ganges during the rains. What tranquil soul-entrancing loveliness! Once seen, Protap could not turn his eyes. Not that he was bewitched by the charm of beauty, or that his senses were overpowered by any sensuous feeling, but in sheer abstraction he gazed as one spell-bound. Events of long by-gone days were conjured up in his mind; suddenly the sea of his memory was churned and sent up billows on billows.

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[1] The allusion is to a famous couplet in Sanskrit by Pundit Chanakya, an aphorist, in which he described some of the principal characteristics of man and woman.

Shaibalini did not sleep—she was meditating her plight with eyes shut. Ramcharan had come to the conclusion from her closed eyes that she was asleep. Her deep absorption prevented her from hearing Protap's footfall. Protap had come up with the musket in his hand. Presently he leaned it up against the wall. His mind was a little distraught, and he had placed it rather carelessly; the result was, it slipped down. At the sound Shaibalini opened her eyes and saw Protap; she rubbed her eyes and sat up, and with a loud exclamation cried —

"What is this! who are you?"

With these words she fainted away on her bed. Protap fetched some water and sprinkled the face of the lifeless Shaibalini. Bathed in water, her face beamed like a dew-washed lotus. The water coursing down her tresses rendered them moist and flaccid and began to drip, and the hair shone like conferva clinging to the lotus.

Soon Shaibalini was brought to. Protap got up on his feet. Quietly she asked him, "Who are you? Are you Protap or some Divinity come to try me in the shape of man?"

"Yes, I am Protap," said Protap.

"For once in the boat it seemed to me, I heard your voice; but instantly I thought it must be a mere fancy. I had waked up in the midst of a dream, and that is why I mistook it for a fancy."

With these words she uttered a deep sigh and remained silent. Finding her thoroughly recovered, Protap was silently leaving the room, when Shaibalini called out, "Don't go yet."

Reluctantly Protap turned back.

"Why have you come here?" asked Shaibalini.

"This is my lodging," answered Protap.

As a matter of fact Shaibalini had not yet recovered. A fire was burning within her; she was trembling to the tips of her nails, and a thrill was passing through her entire being. She remained silent for a little while, and somewhat recovered, she resumed,

"Who has brought me here?"

"We have brought you?"

"We! who are the we!"

"I and my servant."

"Why have you brought me here? What do you want with me?"

Protap got very much irritated and said,

"One should not look upon the face of a miserable sinner like you. I have saved you from the hands of the Englishman, and you ask me, 'why have you brought me here?"

Shaibalini did not return passion for passion. In a tearful voice she meekly said:—

"If the Englishman's company seemed to you such an abomination for me, then why didn't you put an end to my life then and there? You had the gun in your hand."

Protap was further incensed and said,

"I would have done that even, but the sin of a woman's death stayed my hand; nevertheless, it is better you should die."

Shaibalini wept. After stanching her tears, she went on, 'Yes, it is better I should die, but let others say what they like, you shouldn't say so. Who is the author of this miserable plight of mine?—you. Who has rendered my

life full of darkness?—you. Despaired of all hopes of happiness for whom did I lose all sense of right and wrong?—it is for you. For whom am I thus miserable?—it is for you. For whom was I not able to fix my mind on my domestic duties?—it is for you. You should not scold me."

"You are a vile sinner," replied Protap, "therefore, I reproach you. Is it my fault? God knows, I am not guilty in any way. Heaven only knows how of late I have shunned your path in terror as of a serpent. In dread of your venom I left Vedagram. Your own heart is at fault. Your own inclinations are to blame. You are a wicked sinner, therefore you blame me. What harm have I done to you?"

Shaibalini flared up, and continued, "What harm you have done, you ask? Why, why did you again hold up that matchless divine figure of yours before my eyes? In my budding youth swelling in bloom why did you light the flame of your beauty before me. What I once forgot, why did you kindle up? Oh, why did I see you! If I did see you, then why couldn't I get you! If I couldn't get you, then why didn't I die! Don't you know that in contemplation of your beauty my home was converted into a wilderness for me? Don't you know that in a vague uncertain hope of getting you, I snapped all ties with you in connection with Vedagram and left my home, otherwise who is Foster to me?"

At these words it seemed as if a thunder-bolt had come down on Protap's head. He shot out of the place like one stung by a scorpion.

At that time there was a great tumult at the outer gate.

CHAPTER VII.

GALSTAUN AND JOHNSON.

WHEN Ramcharan had gone away with Shaibalini, and Protap had left the boat, the Telinga sepoy who was sitting on the roof with his arm disabled by Protap's blow, slowly got up on the bank. He took the way of Shaibalini's palanquin, and keeping at a safe distance, marked and followed it. He belonged to the Mahomedan persuasion; Bakaullah Khan was his name. The Indian troops that accompanied Clive in his first expedition to Bengal had come from Madras (Telingana), hence all the Indian soldiers belonging to the British army in Bengal at that time were called Telingas. Many up-country Hindus and Mussalmans had enlisted in the British army since then. Bakaullah's home was near about Gazipur.

Bakaullah followed the palanquin unperceived to Protap's lodging, and saw it enter the house. He then bent his steps to Amyatt's quarters.

He found a great excitement there. Amyatt had heard all about the barge incident. Bakaullah was told that Amyatt had promised a reward of thousand rupees to any one who would bring him information about the offenders. Bakaullah then went to Amyatt, and gave him the whole history, adding, "I can point out the house of the bandit." Amyatt's face brightened up, the pucker of his eyebrows relaxed, and he ordered four sepoys and a sergeant to accompany Bakaullah, enjoining on them to bring the miscreants arrested to him. "In that case," suggested Bakaullah, "send two Englishmen with us. Protap Roy is the very devil

incarnate, the natives of this country will not be able to cope with him."

According to Amyatt's orders, two Englishmen by name Galstaun and Johnson accompanied Bakaullah armed.

When they were about to start Galstaun asked Bakaullah—

"Had you ever been inside the house?"

"No," said Bakaullah.

Then addressing Johnson, Galstaun said, "In that case take some candles and matches with you. Hindus do not burn oil for expense."

Johnson took some candles and matches in his pocket.

Then they began to step the public highway in the solemn tramp of a British march. No one spoke a word. Four sepoys, the sergeant and Bakaullah, brought up the rear. The city watchman shrank away in fear on their appearance. Galstaun and Johnson together with the sepoys silently approached Protap's house and gave low knocks on the door. Ramcharan got up and came to answer the door.

Ramcharan was a peerless servant. In shampooing, in anointing the oil, he was a finished hand. In plaiting the wearing cloth, in getting up the toilet, he was extremely clever. In looking after the lights and furniture, he had no match. In striking a bargain, the like of him was rare. But these were his minor qualifications. He was well-known all over Murshidabad for weilding the club; many Hindus and Mussalmans had measured the ground under the charm of his arm. How quick he was with his gun, and of what unerring aim, had been written with the blood of Foster on the waters of the Ganges.

But above all, Ramcharan had yet another seasonable qualification—his cunning. He was cunning as a fox, but at the same time of unparallelled faith and devotion to his master.

On his way to open the door he thought, "who should be knocking at the door at this time of the night? Is it the ascetic? Not unlikely! Whatever that might be, we have done some mischief; I should not open the door without making sure."

With this decision he quietly came and stood at the door for a while and listened. He heard two persons whispering in a foreign tongue. Ramcharan designated it as *Indil Mindil*; now people call it English. He said to himself, "Wait my boy! If I should at all open the door I must have my gun in hand. Dub me a wife's brother,[1] if you catch me trusting *Indil Mindil*!"

"I am afraid one gun will not do," further thought, Ramcharan, "let me call the master." With this idea he turned back to call Protap.

By this time the Englishmen's patience had been lost. "Why do you wait?" cried Johnson, "kick away. the Indian door cannot resist the British kick."

Galstaun gave a kick. The door shook and rattled. Ramcharan begun to run. The noise had reached Protap's ears, and he came down the steps. The door did not give way now.

Then Johnson gave another kick. The door burst away and fell down.

"Thus," said the Englishmen, "let all India tumble down at the British kick," and they triumphantly entered the house. The sepoys followed.

Protap met Ramcharan on the stairs. Ramcharan whispered to him, "Go hide yourself in the dark, the

[1] Wife's brother in Bengali is a term of abuse.

Englishmen have come, perhaps from Ambat's[1] factory." Ramcharan used to pronounce Amyatt, as Ambat.

"What is the fear?

"There are eight men."

"If I am to hide myself, what will become of the women who are in the house? Go, fetch my gun."

If Ramcharan had known the English well, he would not have advised Protap to hide himself. By the time the above conversation had been going on, the house was suddenly filled with light. Johnson gave a burning candle into the hand of a sepoy. In the light of the candle the Englishmen saw two men standing on the steps.

"What, are these the men?" asked Johnson of Bakaullah.

Bakaullah could not exactly make out. He had seen Protap and Ramcharan in a dark night, consequently he could not clearly recognize. But the pain of his broken arm had become insufferable; some one must pay for it and he said, "Yes, they are the men," without any further hesitation.

Then like a tiger the Englishmen bounced up the stairs. When Ramcharan found that the sepoys were following, he flew headlong up the steps to fetch Protap's gun.

Johnson saw it, aimed his pistol, and fired. Shot in the leg, Ramcharan lost his locomotion, and he plumped down on the ground.

Protap was unarmed but loath to run away; moreover he saw what happened to Ramcharan in the attempt.

"Who are you?" quietly asked Protap, "What brings you here?"

[1] It is a Bengali word which means nettlerash.

"Who are you?" asked Johnson in return.

"I am Protap Roy," answered Protap. Bakaullah remembered that name. Gun in hand, Protap had proudly held forth on the barge, "Listen, my name is Protap." At once Bakaullah cried out, "Master, that man is the ringleader."

Johnson caught Protap by one arm, Galstaun took the other. Protap found that resistance was useless. He quietly bore all. The sergeant had the handcuffs with him, and he fastened them on Protap's hands. Pointing at the prostrate Ramcharan, Galstaun said, "Why do you leave that fellow?" Johnson ordered two sepoys to take him also, and they dragged Ramcharan along.

The tumult had roused Dalani and Kulsam from their sleep and put them into a great fright. With the door of their chamber slightly ajar they had been peeping out and observing everything. Their sleeping-room adjoined the stairs.

When the Englishmen descended with Ramcharan, the light from a candle in the hand of a sepoy, suddenly fell through the slightly parted door on the sapphire eyes of Dalani. Bakaullah saw those eyes and at once cried out, "There, there is the mistress of Mr. Foster!"

"Exactly so, where is she?" asked Galstaun.

Pointing at the aforesaid door, Bakaullah said, "There, in that room."

Johnson and Galstaun entered the room and observing Dalani and Kulsam said, "You must come with us."

In terror and bewilderment Dalani and Kulsam followed them.

Shaibalini was left alone in the house. She too had seen everything.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRANGE COURSE OF SIN.

JUST as the daughters of Islam were peeping from their chamber through the slightly parted door, Shaibalini was also similarly engaged in her own chamber. All three were women and all three were oppressed with the same womanly curiosity; at the same time a great terror weighed upon their mind. But the peculiar characteristic of terror is such that it continually draws you on to a sight of the object of it again and again. Thus Shaibalini saw everything from the beginning to the end. When every one had left, finding herself alone in the house, she sat on her bed and fell into a muse.

"What shall I do now?" she thought, "I am alone, but what is the fear in that?—I have nothing to be afraid of in this earth. There is no worse calamity than death. She who is yearning for it day and night, what is there for her to be afraid of? Ah! why don't I meet that death? Suicide seems to be easy enough, but is it really so? Why, I passed so many days on the water and yet not for a single day could I attempt to drown myself? When every one was asleep at night, I could easily steal out of my cabin and drop into the water—who could prevent me? True, there was a chance of detection, there was the guard. But I never made any attempt. There was the wish for death, but no attempt. Even then I had some hope, and hope does not allow a person to die. But to-day?—yes, this is the fitting time for death. But then Protap has been taken away in durance—I cannot die without knowing his fate. What can happen to Protap? Whatever should chance, how could it affect *me*?—who is Protap to me? I am no better than a vile sinner in his eyes—who is he to me? Who, I

do not know, but he is the burning flame which draws the moth Shaibalini. In this desert of my life he is the first lightning flash in the midst of a parching drought—he is my death. Alas! why did I leave my home and come away with a man of alien religion, why did I not go back with Sundari?" She smote her forehead with the palm of her hand and began to shed tears. The house at Vedagram rose before her mind. The sweet-oleander planted with her own hands along the boundary wall, its tallest spray with its crimson spread at the top reaching beyond the wall and nodding in aspiration of the blue skies, with the bumble-bee and the little birds ever and anon lighting among them, came back to her mind. The platform of the holy basil with its clean swept grounds, the domestic cat, the talking-bird in the cage, the big mango trees of sapid fruit beside the house, all began to be depicted on the canvas of her memory. What a panorama of sweet impressions was unrolled before her mind's eye! How often she sat on the terrace of her house and gazed at the beautiful azure of cloudless skies; how many white, blooming, sweet-scented flowers she used to wash in clear water and keep in potfuls for Chandrashekhar's devotional use; how frequently she inhaled the soft, balmy, fragrant breeze, on the banks of the Bheema; how often she watched the tiny ripples throw up their crystal spray and listened to the cuckoo call on the banks! She again heaved a sigh, and pursued the train of her thought—"I had an idea that as soon as I left home I should be able to meet Protap; I thought that some day I would go back to the Purandarpore factory, which is close to Protap's house, and there sitting at my window I would spread the snare of my glances and inveigle my bird Protap; that with a favourable chance I would

run away from the Englishman and fall prostrate at Protap's feet. But I was like a caged bird, I knew not the ways of the world; I knew not that man proposeth but Providence disposeth; that the English cage is made of iron—what power have I to break through it? For no good have I earned this infamy, for nothing have I lost my caste, for nothing have I ruined the prospects of a future life." It never occurred to the vile woman to consider whether vice should succeed or defeat itself—much rather it should defeat itself. But one day she will understand it; one day she will be ready to lay down the very bones of her body to accomplish her expiation. If we had no such hope we should not have introduced this picture of sin. Again she thought, "The future life?—I lost it the very day I set my eyes on Protap. That very day the All-knowing Providence wrote hell for my lot. Even in this life I am in hell—my mind is my hell—else why am I suffering so much? Why did I suffer so long the company of the Englishman—my very eye-sore? Nor is that all; it seems even the very objects of my affection are blighted by my contact; that is perhaps why Protap is in this dangerous plight. Oh, why did I not die?"

Shaibalini again wept; a little while after, she dried her eyes. She frowned, bit her underlip, and for a time her blooming lotus-like face wore an aspect of terrible beauty like the spreading hood of an infuriate serpent. Again she said to herself, "Why did I not die?" Suddenly she took out a pouch from her waist; in it was a sharp small knife. She took the knife, and unclasping the blade began to play with it on her thumb. "Did I take this knife in vain?" she continued, "Why didn't I plant it into my wretched bosom so long? Only because I was deluded by hope! But now?"—and she pressed the point of the blade against her breast. The knife remained in that

condition for some time. She began to muse again, "Another day I held the knife in the same way on the breast of the sleeping Foster. I could not kill him—I had not the courage. To-day also I do not find courage for self-destruction. This knife could tame the fierce Englishman; he knew that if he had entered my chamber, this knife would have killed either him or me. The terror of it could hold him back, but how is it that my savage heart quails before it now? Shall I die? No, not to-day. If I am to die at all, I will go to Vedagram first, and then die. There I will tell Sundari that I have lost my caste, I have disgraced my family name, but I have not lost my virtue, and then I will die. But him—he who is my husband—what shall I tell him before my death? I cannot think of anything. The very idea is like the sting of a hundred thousand scorpions, and sends a fire coursing through every vein in my body. I am not worthy of him, and that is why I left him. Has it pained him? Is he sorry for it? No, I am nothing to him—his manuscripts are his all—he cannot grieve for me. Oh, how fondly I wish some one would tell me how he is and what he is doing now! I never loved him and never shall, yet if I have hurt him in any way, then the cargo of my sins becomes heavier still. One other matter I should like to tell him very much, but Foster is dead, who will bear testimony to it, who will believe my word?"

Shaibalini laid herself down on her bed and remained buried in thoughts of a kindred nature. Towards morning sleep came to her. In that sleep she saw diverse evil dreams. Day had advanced when she woke. The sun had been streaming into the room through the open casement. She opened her eyes, and what she saw before her amazed and staggered her, and held her spell-bound—she saw Chandrashekhar.

PART III.

THE TOUCH OF HOLINESS.

CHAPTER I.

RAMANANDA SWAMI.

IN a monastery at Monghyr a monk was passing a few days. His name was Ramananda Swami. The ascetic we have alluded to before, was deferentially talking to him. Many believed Ramananda Swami to be emancipated. Certainly he was second to none in wisdom. It was said that he alone knew the extinct philosophy and sciences of India. He said :—

"Listen, my son Chandrashekhar. Use the knowledge you have gained with caution. Let not misery find place in your heart, as there is no such thing as absolute pain. Pleasure and pain are equal, or rather the wise consider them to be equal. If you make any distinction, then those who are known as virtuous or happy will be found miserable all their lives."

In illustration, he slightly adverted to the cases of Jajati, Harish Chandra, Dasarath and other ancient kings of India. He briefly referred to Ramchandra, Yudhisthira, Nala and others. He pointed out that even very pious kings, ruling over extensive empires, were miserable all their lives and seldom happy. Then he slightly mentioned Vashistha, Vishwamitra, and other sages, and showed that they too were

miserable. He cited Indra and other gods oppressed by the demons and lying under a curse, and shewed that even heaven itself was full of misery. And lastly, in a ravishing language of inspiration, he began to search into the workings of the Eternal, Unknowable, Creative Mind. He shewed how the Omniscient is bound to feel eternal sympathy for the endless sorrows of this limitless universe. He who is all-merciful, can he remain impervious to this mass of suffering? If so, then how all-merciful? There is a permanent bond between mercy and misery—without misery how can mercy be? He who is full of infinite mercy, must feel everlasting sorrow for the immeasurable misery of this boundless universe, otherwise he is not all-merciful. If you ask, that God is beyond all passion—how can He feel sorrow? The answer will be, that if God is beyond passion, if He is unconcerned in the creation, its preservation, and its destruction, He cannot be called the Creator and Ruler. If there be a creator and ruler, he cannot be without passion—he must be full of sorrow. But that is not possible, as God is all-blissful. Therefore there is no such thing as misery."

"If the existence of misery is admitted," continued Ramananda Swami, "then is there no remedy for this all-pervading evil? No, there is none; but then if every one should try to remove one another's misery, certainly it could be alleviated. You see Providence Himself is active day and night in removing the sufferings of His creatures. With the alleviation of the misery of this Universe is the alleviation of the Divine Sorrow. The gods are busy in removing the sufferings of the created beings and therein is their only godly happiness, else the gods who are beyond all passion and sensuous feelings would have no other happiness." Then after praising the

philanthropy of the Sages, he dilated on the benevolence of heroes such as Bhishma and others. He explained how only the benevolent are happy and others are not. Then he began to eulogise in a hundred ways the superior merit of altruism. He ransacked the entire range of religious books, the Vedas, History both sacred and profane, and other branches of knowledge, and freely cited illustration after illustration. He strung into a garland hundreds of mellifluous words pregnant with deep meaning after churning the ocean of his extensive vocabulary; he pillaged the whole store-house of literature and flung out verse after verse of succulent poetry, full of meaning and pure imagery; and over all he spread a halo instinct with an over-powering glow of his own unfeigned spiritual fervour. The strange words coming out of his musical throat, uttered in a faultless accent, sounded in the ears of Chandrashekhar like a trumpet-blast. Now they swelled into the deep rumblings of clouds and anon they melted into the sweet strains of the lute. The ascetic was amazed and charmed; a thrill passed across his frame; he stood up and reverentially touching Ramananda Swami's feet said, "Lord teacher! from this day I take my initiation from you."

Ramananda Swami embraced Chandrashekhar.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW INTRODUCTION.

MEANWHILE the letter carried by the ascetic had been duly laid before the Nawab. He came to know where Dalani was. To fetch her and Kulsam, palanquins were despatched to Protap's house.

Morning had pretty far gone at the time. No one was in the house except Shaibalini. The Nawab's people took her for the Begum.

Shaibalini was told that she must accompany them to the fort. Suddenly a mischievous idea struck her mind. The poets go mad in chanting the praises of Hope. She is the source, no doubt, of much happiness in this world, but she is alone responsible for all misery. Whatever sins are committed, are done in the hope of gain. Only virtuous acts are not done with any such motive. The actions of those who are prompted to them by the hope of earning heaven cannot be called virtuous. Deluded by this very Hope, without any demur, Shaibalini got into the palanquin.

The eunuch first took her into the fort and then carried her within the harem into the Nawab's presence. The Nawab found she was not Dalani, he further found that Dalani was not so wonderfully beautiful; over and above, he found that there was none so bewitching in his whole harem.

"Who are you?" asked the Nawab.

"I am a Brahmin woman."

"Why have you come here?"

"Your Highness' servants have brought me."

"They mistook you for the Begum. Why hasn't the Begum come?"

"She is not there."

"Then where is she?"

Shaibalini had seen Galstaun and Johnson carry Dalani and Kulsam away from Protap's house. She did not know who the ladies were. She had taken them for serving-maids or dancing-girls. But when the Nawab's men informed her that the Begum was in that house and Shaibalini's presence was required before

the Nawab, then it occurred to her that the Begum had been taken away by the Englishmen. Shaibalini fell into a brown study.

"Have you seen her?" asked the Nawab when he found her silent.

"Yes, I have."

"Where did you see her?"

"In the place where we were last night."

"Where is that? In Protap Roy's house?"

"Yes, if you please."

"Do you know where the Begum has gone from there?"

"Two Englishmen have forcibly carried her away."

"What do you say?"

Shaibalini repeated her answer. The Nawab remained silent. He bit his underlip, tore his beard, and sent for Gurgan Khan.

"Do you know," continued the Nawab, "why the Englishmen took the Begum away?"

"No, I do not."

"Where was Protap at the time?"

"He also has been taken away in that company."

"Was there any one else in his house?"

"There was a servant, and he too has been taken away.

"Can you tell me," again asked the Nawab, "why they have been taken away?"

Hitherto Shaibalini had kept to the truth, now she began falsehoods and said, "No, I can not."

"Who is Protap? Where does he come from?"

"Shaibalini gave a correct account of him."

"Why did he come here?"

"He was in search of employment under your Highness."

"How is he related to you?"

"He is my husband."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Rupasi."

Shaibalini gave the above answer with the greatest ease. The wretched sinner had gone there for that very purpose.

"Very well," said the Nawab, "you can go home now."

"What home have I got?" cried Shaibalini, "Where shall I go?"

The Nawab remained silent in thought for a second and the next moment asked,

"Then where do you propose to go?"

"To my husband. Have the goodness to send me to him. You are the sovereign, I am laying my grievance before you. My husband has been forcibly carried off by the English, either procure his release or send me to him. If you turn a deaf ear to my prayer and refuse to give me redress, then in this very spot, in your presence, I will kill myself. That is the object of my coming here."

Gurgan Khan was announced.

"Very well, you can wait here, I am coming," and the Nawab left Shaibalini and went away.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE FREAK.

AFTER enquiring of Gurgan Khan about sundry affairs the Nawab said—

"Rupture with the English seems to be the best course. To my mind Amyatt should be arrested before hostilities begin as he is my chief enemy. What do you say?"

"I am always ready for war," said Gurgan Khan. "But an ambassador is inviolable and any ill-treatment of him will brand us with breach of faith. Moreover—"

"Last night," interrupted the Nawab, "Amyatt attacked the house of a certain person in the town and forcibly carried the inmates away; why should I not punish a man who commits a crime within my dominions?—may be he is an ambassador."

"If he has done so, then certainly he is punishable. But how shall I arrest him?"

"Why, send some sepoys and guns to his house forthwith and have him arrested with all his party."

"They are not in the town. They left at noon to-day."

"How is that?—without giving any notice?"

"One Mr. Hay has been left behind to send the information."

"What is the cause of this sudden departure without our permission? This is certainly an affront to us and they must have done it deliberately."

"Last night some one killed the Englishman in charge of their boat of arms. Amyatt says our men have done it, hence he went away in anger. He says, life is unsafe in this place."

"Do you know who has done it?"

"A man by name Protap Roy."

"Extremely well done! When I find him I will reward him, where is he?"

"They have all been taken away under arrest; whether they have gone in the Englishmen's company, or have been sent to Patna, I am not sure."

"Why didn't you inform me about these things before?"

"I have just now heard."

This was false. Gurgan Khan knew everything from start to finish. Amyatt could on no account have left Monghyr without his permission. But Gurgan Khan had two objects in view: First, it was better Dalani

should be out of Monghyr; next, it was desirable to keep Amyatt in hand a little—he might be of service later on.

The Nawab dismissed Gurgan Khan from his presence. While the latter retired the Nawab threw a furtive glance at him as if to say, "I will keep my own counsel for the present—you are my chief weapon in the war; once it is over, I will pay off the debt of Dalani's wrong with your blood."

The Nawab then sent for the Chief Secretary and passed an order to the following effect:—

That a mandate should go to Mahammed Taqui Khan at Murshidabad to arrest Amyatt as soon as his boat reached Murshidabad and send his prisoners to the Nawab. It must be further noted that the matter is to be managed by skill, and not by open violence. The mandate should go *viâ* land route in the hands of a courier, so that it might reach beforehand.

On his return to the harem, the Nawab sent for Shaibalini again. "Just now," said he, "your husband's release cannot be effected. The Englishmen have started with him for Calcutta. I have sent orders to Murshidabad, they will be arrested there, you can now———."

Shaibalini broke in, and with folded hands said, "You will pardon the volubility of a woman's tongue—could not they be captured if men were despatched now?"

"A handful of men will not do to capture the Englishmen, and a big boat is necessary to send more men with arms. The Englishmen are sure to reach Murshidabad before we can come up to them. Then again, who knows they would not kill the prisoners when they should find preparations going on for a serious struggle? There are clever officers at Murshidabad, they will manage the business by skill."

Shaibalini knew her pretty face had stood her in good stead. Her handsome looks had procured the faith of the Nawab on her words and made him exceptionally kind, else why should he take the trouble of explaining so much? She felt emboldened, and with folded palms resumed—

"If you have been so very gracious to this helpless woman, you will kindly excuse another prayer of hers. My husband's rescue is very easy. He is a brave man himself and if he had been armed the Englishmen could never have arrested him. Even now, if he gets arms, no one will be able to keep him under confinement. If some one could carry arms to him, not only would he extricate himself, but his companions as well."

"You are a mere girl," said the Nawab with a smile, "you do not know the English, who will dare carry arms to him in the Englishmen's boat?"

"With your leave I will go myself," softly muttered Shaibalini with down-cast looks."

The Nawab burst out into a loud laugh. At the sound of the laugh Shaibalini contracted her eyebrows and said, "My Lord! If I do not succeed, I shall die; no one will be the worse for it. But if I do succeed, then the object of both will have been gained."

The frowning beauty of Shaibalini's face convinced the Nawab that she was not an ordinary woman. "Let her die," he said to himself, "if she will. What is that to me? If she succeeds, well and good; if not, Mahammad Taqui will finish the business at Murshidabad." Then aloud he asked Shaibalini, "Will you go alone?"

"I am a woman, I cannot go alone. If you are so kind, then give me a serving-maid and a guard to accompany me."

The Nawab thought for a while and sent for a trusty, strong, and courageous eunuch. The eunuch came and made his bow. Addressing him the Nawab said, "Take a Hindu maid-servant and go with this lady. Take any weapons she wants. Go to the overseer of boats and get a fast craft, and with these start for Murshidabad at once."

"What particular work have I got to accomplish?" asked Masibuddin.

"Do whatever this lady asks you to," said the Nawab. "You shall respect her as a Begum. Should you come across Delani Begum, bring her with you."

Then they both made their bow to the Nawab after the customary style and took their leave. Shaibalini imitated the eunuch and backed out with receding steps, touching the ground with her hand to make her *salaam*. The Nawab laughed.

While Shaibalini was going out the Nawab cried out to her, "Madam, remember, if you are ever in trouble, come to Mir Kasim."

Shaibalini again made her bow and said to herself, "Certainly I shall come to you; may be, I shall come to you with Rupasi for a decision as to who should have Protap for her husband."

Masibuddin secured the serving-maid and the boat. According to Shaibalini's instructions, he took muskets, shot, powder, pistols, swords, and daggers. He could not venture to enquire why they were taken and thought, "She must be a second Chand Sultana." [1]

That very night they started in the boat.

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[1] A heroic Queen of Ahmednagar who defended her capital against the forces of the Mogul Empire. Clad in complete armour she fought sword in hand at the breach made by the Mogul artillery and was killed fighting. *Vide* "A Noble Queen," by Meadows Taylor.

CHAPTER IV.

WEEPING.

THE moon was shedding her silver light. Extensive tracts of sandy plain stretched far away on either side of the Ganges. In the light of the moon the sand ranges had assumed a whiter hue and the water of the Ganges had attained a deeper blue. The water of the river was deep blue, the rows of trees on the banks were deep green and the firmament above was a blue sheet set with gems. At such a moment the mind is often affected with a sense of vastness all around. The eternal river, eluding the utmost range of vision, like the dimly visible destiny of man, has faded away into the unknown. The limitless river below, the endless tracts of sand on the flanks, the countless trees on the banks, the infinite sky overhead with its wreaths of stars without reckoning—who ever counts his own personality at such a supreme moment! Is man more glorious than the particles of sand on the bank along which the line of boats was fastened?

Among this line, a big barge could be seen with a guard of sepoys on it. Two sepoys with rifles across their shoulders stood still like carved statues. In the interior, costly carpets of different variety, bedsteads, pictures, figures, and other articles were shining in the soft effulgence of crystal lamps. Inside were a few Englishmen. Two of them were playing at chess, the third was sipping his glass and reading, and the fourth was playing on a musical instrument.

Suddenly every one was startled. All at once a piercing wail came shooting across the stillness of the night.

In placing a check Amyatt asked Johnson, "What is that?" "Whose check has captured the king, yours or mine?" abstractedly asked Johnson in return.

The wail waxed sharper. The voice was not unpleasant, but in that silent waste of waters this nocturnal cry appeared hideous.

Amyatt left the game and stood up. He went out and looked round. He could see no one; nor was there any cremation-ground near by anywhere. The sound started from somewhere in the middle of the sandy plain.

Amyatt alighted from the boat and followed the sound. After proceeding a little, he saw somebody sitting alone in that sandy plain.

He drew near and found a woman wailing aloud. Amyatt did not know Hindustani well. "Who are you?" he asked, "Why are you crying?"

The woman could not understand anything of his Hindustani and continued to cry lustily.

Unable to get any answer time after time, he waved her to follow him. The woman got on her feet. Amyatt went in advance and she walked behind weeping. The woman was no other than that vile sinner Shaibalini.

CHAPTER V.

LAUGHING.

On returning to the barge Amyatt said to Galstaun, "This woman was crying alone on the sandy plain. She does not understand my language nor do I understand hers, you had better question her."

Galstaun was about equally learned with Amyatt, but he had a high reputation among his own people for his

proficiency in Hindustani, and he asked, "Who are you?"

Shaibalini did not answer, she wept on.

"Why do you weep?"

Still Shaibalini did not answer, but wept on.

"Where is your home?"

She was silent as before.

"Why have you come here?"

She continued in the same state.

Galstaun owned himself defeated. Failing to extract any answer from her, the Englishmen bade her go away. She did not understand that even, and would not move but kept standing.

"She does not understand our words," said Amyatt, "nor do we understand hers. From her dress she appears to be a Bengali woman. Just call a Bengali and ask him to question her."

The servants of Englishmen are as a rule Bengali Mahomedans. Amyatt called one of his servants and told him to speak to her.

"Why do you weep?" asked the servant. Shaibalini burst out into a maniacal laughter. The servant explained to the Englishmen that she was mad.

Then the Englishmen said, "Ask her what she wants."

The servant did as directed.

"I am hungry," said Shaibalini in reply. After the servant had explained to the Englishmen, Amyatt said, "Give her something to eat."

It was with too glad a heart that the servant took her to the boat reserved for cooking. With a glad heart, because Shaibalini was exceedingly handsome. But she would not take anything. "Do take something please," urged the servant. "I am a Brahmin

woman," demurred Shaibalini, "how can I take food touched by you?"[1]

The servant went away and informed the Englishmen about the matter. "Isn't there any Brahmin in any of the boats?" enquired Amyatt.

"There is a Brahmin sepoy," said the servant, "and there is a Brahmin prisoner also."

"If any of them has got boiled rice, let her have some," said the Englishmen.

At first the servant took her to the sepoy. The sepoy had nothing to give. Then he took her to the boat where the Brahmin prisoner had been kept.

The prisoner was Protap Roy. In a small skiff Protap Roy was alone. Sentries were mounting guard fore, aft and all, and inside there was darkness.

"Ho, Brahmin, are you there?" shouted the servant.

"What do you want?" asked Protap.

"Have you got any rice left in your pot?"

"Why?"

"A Brahmin woman is fasting, can you let her have some?"

Protap also had no rice left. But he did not acknowledge it and said, "Yes, I can. Ask somebody to take off my handcuffs."

The servant asked one of the sentries to remove the handcuffs. "Get me the order first," objected the latter.

The servant went away to procure the necessary order. Who ever took the trouble of bothering himself so much for a stranger? Particularly, Peer Bux was an Englishman's servant, and he would not willingly do a

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[1] According to the caste rules of the Hindus a Brahmin cannot take food touched by a non-Hindu.

good turn to anybody if he could help it. Of all the different varieties of people inhabiting this globe, the Massalman servants of Englishmen are about the worst lot. But in this instance Peer Bux had some object. He thought that when this woman had taken her food, he would take her to the servants' quarters. He was very eager to purchase her good-will by looking after her meal. Shaibalini remained standing on the deck of Protap's boat, while the servant went away to get the order from Mr. Amyatt. She stood with her veil on.

A pretty face is all-conquering. Especially, when the owner of it happens to be a young girl it at once becomes a weapon of the surest execution. Amyatt found that this gentoo woman was a matchless beauty; over and above, he felt a little compassion for her when he heard about her madness.

So he sent orders to the officer of the guard to take off Protap's manacles and to allow Shaibalini to go inside the boat.

The servant brought a light. The sentry took off Protap's handcuffs. The latter warned the servant not to enter his boat,[1] and with the help of the light made a pretence of turning out the rice into a platter. His object was escape.

Shaibalini went into the boat, the sentries were mounting guard outside, so that the interior was not visible to them. On entering the cabin she approached Protap and removing her veil sat down.

When the first shock of surprise had been over Protap found Shaibalini biting her underlip; a light glow of joy had suffused her countenance, and her face bore the

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[1] It is defilement for a Mahomedan to enter a Hindu's place of eating or cooking-place.

impress of calm determination. Protap confessed to himself, she is indeed a tigress worthy of a tiger!

In a very low voice Shaibalini whispered in his ear, "Wash your hands. Do you take me for a miserable suppliant for boiled rice?"

Protap did as suggested. While he was thus engaged, Shaibalini continued in the same tone—

"Now get off. The small boat you will find on turning the bend is for you."

"You should go first," suggested Protap in a similar voice, "otherwise you will get into trouble."

"Be off with you, quick. Once the handcuffs are on flight will be impossible. Be quick, jump into the water. Don't delay, for once let me guide you. They know me as insane, I will jump into the water first, you will follow to my rescue."

With these words she gave a loud laugh and immediately after exclaimed with a broad grin, "I won't take the rice." The very next moment she came out weeping and cried, "Alas! they have made me eat rice defiled by a Mahomedan's touch. O mother Ganges! take me," and she leapt into the current.

"What is up, what is up?" screamed Protap and came out of the boat. The sentry stepped in front and tried to stop him. "Scoundrel!" cried Protap, "A woman is being drowned and you are quietly looking on," and he gave him a kick which sent him spinning out of the boat. The sepoy fell from larboard. "O save a woman," cried Protap, and jumped into the water from port. The accomplished swimmer Shaibalini went on in advance, Protap followed.

"The prisoner has fled," bawled out the sentry aft and lifted his gun to aim at Protap. At that time Protap was swimming.

"Don't you fret yourself," cried back Protap, "I am not going to escape. I want to pull this woman out. How can I bear to see a woman kill herself before my eyes? My dear man you are a Hindu, have a care before you kill a Brahmin!"[1] The sepoy lowered his gun.

At that time Shaibalini was swimming along the hindmost boat. As her eyes fell on it, she suddenly gave a start. It was the very same boat in which she had lived sometime with Foster.

For a while she kept gazing at it in a tremble. She saw in the moonlight an Englishman lying in a half-reclining posture on a small bed on the roof of the boat. The rays of the moon had fallen on his face. Shaibalini recognised Lawrence Foster and gave a loud scream.

Foster also gazed at the swimming woman for sometime and recognised Shaibalini. "There, seize her, seize her!" loudly cried Foster, "she is my mistress." Foster was now sickly, emaciated, weak, bed-ridden and incapable of locomotion.

At the sound of his voice four or five men leapt into the water to catch Shaibalini. Protap was then far ahead of them. "Catch her, catch her," they cried out to him, "Mr. Foster will reward you." Protap said to himself, "I also have rewarded Mr. Foster once before, and I have a mind to reward him again." Aloud he cried back to them, "I will catch her, you can get out."

They all turned back relying on his word. Foster had no idea that the man in front was Protap. His brain was yet in a muddle on account of his recent illness.

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[1] For a Hindu to kill a Brahmin is an unpardonable offence.

CHAPTER VI.

SWIMMING IN DEEP WATER.

BOTH had swam off pretty far. What a lovely sight! What an ocean of felicity they were swimming in! Floating on the bosom of the infinite-embracing ample-breasted, ripple-tossed, azure-hued river, and bathed in a sea of moonlight, Protap's eyes fell on the infinite cerulean deep above, and he began to muse. Why is man not destined to swim in that ocean? Why is he not permitted to cleave those billows of clouds? What merit in an antecedent life can secure for me an ether-sailing existence? Swimming? How unprofitable to swim in this mundane river! Ever since my birth I have been swimming in the inexorable ocean of time dashing wave against wave and floating about like a straw from billow to billow. What more swimming after that! Shaibalini was thinking—this water has got its bottom, but I have been floating on fathomless waters.

Whether you fancy or no, Nature must have her way and beauty will not be concealed. Whatever sea you might swim in, the beauty of the blue waters will not tarnish, the chain of ripples will not be broken, the stars will shimmer to the "last syllable of recorded time," the trees on the banks will sway in their wonted style, and the moonbeams will wanton in the water as ever. Oh, the tyranny of Nature! Like the fond mother she is ever ready to fondle you.

Such were the impressions on Protap's mind, but not so on Shaibalini's. The sickly emaciated white face which she had seen on the boat, was haunting her mind. She was swimming like an automatic doll; she had no peace. Both were clever in swimming, but in that swimming the sea of ecstasy was brimming over in Protap.

"Shaibalini—Sai!"[1] cried Protap. She started, and her heart fluttered. In her childhood Protap used to address her as "Sai." Again that endearing address came. Oh, what an age! Can time be measured by years? No, it is the mood of the moment which furnishes its true estimate. Those few years, when Shaibalini had not heard that sound, seemed a cycle to her. Now at that sound she closed her eyes in that immeasurable multitude of waters; at heart she invoked the moon and the stars and with her eyes shut she said, "Protap, why this moonlight flicker even to-day on the slender stream of the river?"[2]

"The moon, you say?—no, the sun is up. Sai, we are now safe, no one is pursuing us."

"Then come let us get up on the shore. Sai?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember?"

"What?"

"How another day we swam like this."

Shaibalini did not reply. A big log was floating by and she caught hold of it. "Hold and rest," said Shaibalini, "it will bear your weight." Protap laid hold of it and said,

"Do you remember how you could not sink, but I sank?" "Yes, I do," said Shaibalini.

"If you had not called me again by that name to-night, I would have made amends for it. Oh! why did you call me by that name?"

"Then you know very well that I can drown myself if I choose."

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[1] It is an abbreviated form of Shaibalini.

[2] Shaibalini means to say, "Why, stir up the sweet memories o childhood in my withered heart," but Protap thought that Shaibalin had mistaken the rising sun for the moon and hence the reply, "The moon you say, etc."

Shaibalini was frightened and said, "Why Protap, why should you drown yourself? Come let us get up on the bank."

"I am not going to do it. I am determined to die to-day."

Protap loosed his hold of the log.

"Why, Protap?"

"I am serious. I will surely die—it all depends on you."

"What do you want, Protap? Tell me, I will do whatever you wish."

"First make a solemn promise, then I will get out."

"What promise, Protap?"

Shaibalini also let go her hold of the log. In her eyes the stars died out, the moon wore a dun complexion, the blue water of the Ganges began to burn like blue fire, and Foster came and stood before her with a naked sword. "What promise, Protap?" she repeated panting.

Both had left the log and were swimming side by side. In the bubbling, purling waters this awful conversation was going on and amidst the surrounding, scattering spray the moon was smiling. Oh, the tyranny of Nature!

"What promise, Protap?" again asked Shaibalini.

"Swear by these waters of the Ganges.'

"What is the Ganges to me?"

"Then swear by your religion—"

"What religion have I got?"

"Then swear by me."

"Come closer, give me your hand."

Protap drew near; after an age he took her hand in his. It became very hard for them to keep themselves afloat. They caught hold of the log again.

"Now go on," said Shaibalini. "I am ready to swear anything you ask me to. Oh! after how long, Protap?"

"Swear by me, or I die. What is this life worth? Who cares to carry the burden of this sinful existence! What greater happiness than to lay down the load of this life in such a moonlight on the bosom of this placid Ganges!"

The moon was smiling overhead.

"I swear by you," said Shaibalini. "What shall I say?"

"Swear; touch me and swear that you are responsible for my life and death, my weal and woe."

"I swear by you—whatever you should decide for me I would abide by during the rest of my life."

Protap suggested a terrible promise. It was an extremely difficult promise for Shaibalini; it was extremely hard and its fulfilment was impossible; it meant practically her destruction. Shaibalini could not make the promise and said, "Protap, who in this world is so miserable as I?"

"Why, I myself."

"You have got wealth, you have got power, fame, friends, and hope; you have got your Rupasi; what have I got, Protap?

"Nothing. Then let us both sink."

Shaibalini pondered for a while, and in the result adverse waves were tossed up for the first time in the stream of her life! "What harm if I die?" she thought, "but why should Protap die for me?" Then aloud she said, "Come let us get up on the bank."

Protap left the support of the log and sank. His hand lay yet enclasped in hers; she gave a jerk and Protap came up.

"Yes, I will swear," gasped Shaibalini. "But just consider, you are taking away my all. I do not want you, but why should I be made to forego all thought of you?"

Protap snatched away his hand; Shaibalini took it again. Then in a very deep, distinct voice hoarse with tears she began to speak, and said,

"Protap, hold my hand firm. Listen Protap, I touch you and swear—I am responsible for your life and death, for your weal and woe. Listen Protap, I swear by you. From to-day I will forget you, from to-day I bid adieu to all happiness, from to-day I will curb my mind, to-day Shaibalini dies."

Shaibalini drew her hand away and left the log.

"Come," said Protap in a husky voice, "let us get up on the bank."

Both got up on the bank.

They cleared the bend on foot. A skiff lay close by. Both got into it and pushed off. None of the two knew that Ramananda Swami had been keenly watching them.

The men in the English boat thought that the prisoner had escaped. They went in pursuit, but the skiff soon went out of sight.

Before the plaint against Rupasi was filed, Shaibalini had lost her case.[1]

CHAPTER VII.

RAMCHARAN'S RELEASE.

AFTER Protap's escape, Ramcharan's release became easy. He did not remain in the English boat as a prisoner. No one knew that his bullet had wounded

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[1] For the allusion see page 80, lines 22-24.

Foster and brought about the sentry's end. Taking him for a common menial, Amyatt had given him leave to depart when he started from Monghyr. "Your master is a great scoundrel," he said, "we will punish him, but we have no concern with you; you can go wherever you choose." In reply, with folded hands Ramcharan salaamed and said, "I am a rustic cow-keeper, I do not know how to talk, you will excuse me, I should like to know if I am in any way related to you."

When some one had explained, Amyatt asked, "Why?"

"Otherwise why should you be poking fun at me?"

"What fun you mean?"

"When you break my leg, and then ask me to go about wherever I choose—doesn't it show that I am related to you by marriage? I am a cowherd's son, if I were to marry an Englishman's sister I should lose my caste." [1]

In spite of the interpreter's explanation Amyatt could not grasp anything. He took it in the light of a particular species of Indian flattery. Just as the Indians called them mother, father, brother, and such other terms of kinship for humouring them, Ramcharan was similarly calling him brother-in-law. Amyatt wasnot very much displeased, and asked, "What do you want?"

"Order my leg to be set straight," said Ramcharan.

"Very well," said Amyatt smiling, "you had better stay with us for some time, we shall have you looked after."

Ramcharan wanted exactly that much; Protap was going as a prisoner, and Ramcharan wanted to accompany him. Thus Ramcharan had accompanied Amyatt of his own free-will and not as a prisoner.

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1 This is an indirect way of calling Mr. Amyatt wife's brother, which in Bengali, is a term of abuse.

The night Protap effected his escape, Ramcharan quietly left the boat and slowly walked off. On his way he muttered defamatory words with regard to the parents and sister of *Indil Mindil* (Englishmen). The leg had been made straight.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the Hill.

The orb of night was not visible in the firmament to-night. Clouds came and covered up the moon, the stars, the milky-way and the blue sky. They were compact, all-embracing and dark grey with aqueous vapours. Below an infinite darkness. A dense immense all-pervading gloom enshrouded the river, the beach, the shore and the hill-ranges along the banks. In that darkness Shaibalini was alone in a hill valley.

Towards the close of night the boat had halted ashore, leaving the pursuing English boat far behind. The banks of large rivers abound in solitary recesses. In such a recess the skiff was kept. No sooner the boat halted than Shaibalini slipped away from it. On this occasion she had no vicious motive. The same terror which drives a wild animal from a burning forest, also drove Shaibalini from Protap's company. For her very life she abandoned this world so full of happiness, beauty, affection and other joys of life. Happiness, beauty, love and Protap—in these she had no longer any part or hope—even the very desire had been interdicted. Who could live in close proximity to the object of his desire and yet deny himself! What thirsty wayfarer in a desert could help drinking the cool, clear fragrant water! With the terrible ravenous devil-fish inhabiting the sea-bottom

which Victor Hugo has described, greed or desire seems to form the essential constituent of its nature. It lives in very clear crystal water. On the floor of its habitation beautiful red ochre and other minerals softly shine refulgent with a tender and delicate light. How many precious pearls and corals spread their lustre in the interior !—but it sucks human blood. No sooner a person charmed with the beauty of its habitation enters it, than the hundred-armed monster puts forth its arms one by one and seizes its prey ; once caught, there is no escape. With its hundred arms and thousand ligaments, it embraces its victim, and then the monster applies its thousand blood-sucking discs to the body of the hapless being and drinks up his blood.

Considering herself unequal to the combat, Shaibalini retired from the field. She had her apprehensions lest Protap should try to find her out when he came to know of her escape. For this reason, without stopping at a nearer place, she walked as far as her legs could carry. Not very far, she spied the ranges of hills which girdle India like a waist-band. To avoid observation, she did not attempt the hill during day-time and lay concealed in a wood. The whole day passed without food ; evening went away ; now it will be dark, and then the stars will appear by degrees. In darkness Shaibalini began her ascent. Her feet were lacerated with the splinters of rock in the obscurity. No passage could be found through the low shrubs and creepers, and their thorns, the edges of broken twigs, and the ends of root stumps, tore her hands and feet and caused them to bleed. Shaibalini's atonement had begun.

But Shaibalini was not sorry for it. Out of her own free-will she had chosen this atonement. Of her own

free-will she had abandoned the world and entered this hill-forest full of horrid brambles and ferocious beasts. So long she had been steeped in profound sin —would her sufferings now atone for it in any way?

Therefore, with lacerated feet and bloody limbs, oppressed with hunger and thirst, Shaibalini began her ascent. There was no pathway; as it was, it was difficult to find one's way through the shrubs, creepers and crowd of stones even during day-time; now it was dark, consequently with great effort she could only advance a little.

In the meantime the clouds gathered in great strength. A solid, compact, endless, extensive black shroud sealed the face of the sky. Darkness fell on darkness and enveloped the hill-ranges, the underlying forests, and the distant river. The world became one essential mass of darkness and it seemed to Shaibalini as if there was nothing in this universe save stones, brambles and darkness. It was useless to attempt any further ascent. In despair, Shaibalini sank on a thicket of brambles.

From the centre to the extreme verge of the horizon, from there again to the centre, the lightning flashed. How terrible! Deep roars of clouds started simultaneously. Shaibalini knew that a fearful summer gale would soon blow across the tableland. What was the harm?

In that body of the hill, many trees, branches, leaves, flowers and things of like nature, would be torn from their places and destroyed. Must not Shaibalini be permitted to participate in that cold comfort of destruction?

What is this impact of cold felt along the body? It is only a drop of rain. Drip, drip, drip!—and then a

confused roar of sounds embracing the farthest quarters of the globe. That roar was the combined effect of the wind, rain and clouds; along with it were heard the crack of snapping branches, the shriek of terrified animals, the rumble of up-rooted boulders rolling down the hill and the tumult of the frantic waves of the Ganges afar. On a hill-stone Shaibalini sat crouching with her head hanging down, the cold rain driving against it all the time. Branches of trees, creepers, and shrubs dashed and re-dashed against her body and currents of water flowing from the summit with fearful rapidity drenched her up to the hips and ran along.

Thou inanimate Nature! Millions of bows to thee! Thou hast no mercy, no tenderness, no love, no compunction for the destruction of beings. Thou art the mother of endless misery, and yet from thee flows all the blessings of life! Thou art the source of all happiness! Thou art all-beneficent, all-supplying, all-beautiful! My bows to thee! O awfully terrible, many-shaped goddess! Yesterday you fascinated the creation with the moon as the beauty-spot on your forehead, the tiara of stars on your head and your world-bewitching smile. You strung garlands of ripples on the Ganges and hung pendant moons on the ripple-links; you inflamed millions of diamonds in the sands of the beach; you poured a blue pigment into the heart of the Ganges, and on it how happily you floated young youths and maidens—as though you knew well to caress and well you did caress! But what a change to-day! You are a treacherous destroyer. What makes you play with the lives of created beings I do not know. You have neither intelligence, reason nor animation, but you are all-pervading, all-mastering, all-destructive and all-powerful. Thou art the illusory shroud of the Creative Impulse, thou art the

monument of the Creative Genius, thou art invincible! Millions of bows to thee!

The rain ceased after a long while but not the storm, only its fury abated. Darkness seemed to gather in deeper shades. Shaibalini knew that ascent or descent of the moist slippery hill was equally impracticable. Remaining where she was, she began to shiver in cold. Her husband's home at Vedagram full of domestic comforts rose in her memory. "If I could but once more see that abode of happiness before my death," she thought, "I should still die in peace! But it is a far cry; I am afraid I am not destined to see the sunrise again. That king of terrors, whom I have invited so often is now at hand." Who could it be, that at such a moment, in that unfrequented hill, in that impenetrable forest, in that profound darkness, touched Shaibalini with his hand?

At first Shaibalini thought it was some wild animal and moved away. Again the hand touched her—it was the distinct touch of a human hand—but nothing could be seen in the dark. "Who are you?" she cried in a voice distorted with terror, "God or man?" She was not afraid of man but she had a dread of the gods, for the gods deal out rewards and punishments.

No answer. But Shaibalini was aware that God or man, he was seizing her with both hands. The contact of the warm breath was felt along her shoulders. She felt one hand placed against her back and the other gathering up her feet. Then she perceived that she was being lifted up. She gave a little scream. Man or God, she could understand that she was being carried to some place in his arms. A little while after she could perceive that taking her in his arms he was picking his way up the hill. Shaibalini thought whoever he might be, he was not Lawrence Foster any way.

PART IV.

THE ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT PROTAP DID.

PROTAP was a Zemindar and Protap was a robber. At the time we are talking of, most Zemindars belonged to this class. Darwin says that man is the great-grandson of the monkey. If no one would take offence at it, we dare say no Zemindar would take umbrage at our disparaging remarks of his forefathers. After all, it does not seem to be a slur to come of such a stock, as elsewhere we find the robber family held in the highest estimation. The descendants of the notorious marauder Tamerlane came to occupy the first rank in family pedigree in the world. In England, those who take a special pride in their ancestry, always trace their descent from the Norman or Scandinavian pirates. In ancient India the Kurus were particularly regarded, but they were cow-stealers—they stole cows from the northern cowshed of King Virat.[1] Some of our Bengali Zemindars have got a touch of this ancestry.

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[1] The Kurus and the Pandavas were the two rival factions in the great war described in the Mohabharata. Both came of a princely stock. King Virat had an extensive cow-house consisting of myriads of cows. The Kurus in course of the war once attempted to take away these cows.

But Protap's case was somewhat different from other ancient Zemindars. To save his own property, or to chastise a powerful foe, he would have recourse to bandits, but never for the sake of wanton oppression or spoliation. He would often resort to these acts of violence inspired with a desire to uphold the weak and the oppressed. Now he was ready to follow that course again.

At the first blush of the morning after Shaibalini's flight from the skiff, Protap rose from his sleep and was glad to find Ramcharan had come. But he grew uneasy for Shaibalini. He waited for her for some time, and when she did not turn up he began to search. He looked for her along the bank of the river, but with no result. It had now gone pretty far into the day; Protap despaired of finding her out and came to the conclusion that Shaibalini must have drowned herself. He knew that in the then frame of her mind it was not an unlikely eventuality.

Now Protap began to meditate: "I am the cause of Shaibalini's death," was his first thought. "How am I to blame?" he further thought. "I have never swerved from the path of rectitude; whatever might have led to her death I could not prevent it." Therefore, Protap could not find any reason to get angry with himself. He grew a little displeased with Chandrashekhar—why did he marry Shaibalini? He felt slightly annoyed with Rupasi—why was he married to her and not to Shaibalini? He became angry with Sundari—if she had not set him on to this quest, there would have been no swimming in the Ganges with Shaibalini and Shaibalini would not have died. But above all was his ire at Foster—if he had not haled Shaibalini away from her home, none of these things would have

happened. But then if the English had not made their appearance in Bengal, Shaibalini would never have fallen into the hands of Lawrence Foster. Therefore, his exasperation against the English became irrepressible, and Protap concluded that Foster must be caught once more and killed; and this time a cremation should be arranged for him, else he might come to life again—he might force his way up through the grave. The next conclusion he arrived at was, that the English must be extirpated from Bengal as there were many Fosters among them.

With these thoughts he went back to Monghyr in the very same skiff.

He went into the fort and found that the Nawab was going to fight the English and mighty preparations were afoot.

Protap's heart was gladdened. "Wouldn't the Nawab be able to drive these ruffians from Bengal?" he asked himself. "Wouldn't Foster be caught?"

"Everyone" he went on, "ought to help the Nawab in this affair as much as it lies in his power. Even a squirrel might bridge an ocean." [1]

"Can I do any service? What can I do?" he next asked himself.

"I have no disciplined troops," he again thought, "I have only clubmen—a band of desperados. Can they do any service?"

"If nothing else could be done," he continued, "at least, the plundering was possible. I could make raids on the villages which would help the English; I could

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[1] The allusion is to a story in the Ramayana where a squirrel is said to have worked in its own humble way in the construction of a bridge between India and Ceylon so that Rama and his army might have an easy passage to the latter place for attacking Ravana.

intercept and plunder the English provisions wherever I should find them ; I could take to pillage wherever I should come across English goods on their way. If I could do this even, I should have helped the Nawab considerably. Victory in open fight is only a common way of destroying the enemy. To harass the enemy in the rear and to bring about a scarcity of provisions are the chief ways. I will do that as far as possible."

"Why should I do all this ?" he finally asked himself. "Yes, I must do it, there are various reasons for it. In the first place, the English have been the ruin of Chandrashekhar ; secondly, Shaibalini is dead ; thirdly, they kept me in durance ; fourthly, they have done similar injury to others and are likely to do it over again ; lastly, if I could render this service, the Nawab might reward me with a few big districts for my trouble. Therefore, I must do it," was the final conclusion.

By currying favour with the ministers he managed to procure an interview with the Nawab What passed between him and the latter, did not transpire. The interview over, he started for home.

On Protap's return after a prolonged absence, Rupasi was relieved of a terrible anxiety, but she was grieved at the news of Shaibalini's death. Sundari came to see him as soon as she heard of his return. She was extremely pained at the news of Shaibalini's demise and said, "The inevitable has come to pass, but Shaibalini's troubles are now over. How can I persuade myself to believe that after all death has not been better for her than life ?"

After his meeting with Rupasi and Sundari, Protap again left home. Soon the whole country-side rang with the news that all the clubmen and bandits from Katwa

to Monghyr were being banded together and Protap Roy was collecting them.

Gurgan Khan grew anxious at the news.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT SHAIBALINI DID.

IN an intensely dark rocky cave, Shaibalini was lying on a bed of sharp piercing stones. The stalwart individual had left her there. The wind and rain had ceased, but inside the cave was darkness—nothing but darkness, and in that darkness a deep stillness reigned. Shut your eyes, open them, the same darkness still. Silence! Only here and there drops of water trickling down the rocky fissures on the stony pavement below occasionally emitted a dripping sound, and inside some creature—man or beast, who knows?—seemed to draw breath.

Shaibalini now lay under a fear. Fear?—it is not exactly that. There is a limit to the equipoise of man's soul and Shaibalini had outstripped that limit. She had no fear, for life had become unbearable to her, it had become an insufferable burden—to lay it down was a relief. Whatever was left—happiness, religion, caste, family-name and honour—had all gone. What else had she to lose? What was the fear?

But the hope which she had carefully and secretly nourished in her innermost heart from her infancy upwards, that day or even before, she had plucked out; him, for whom she had given up her all, even him she had now given up; her mind was entirely out of gear and altogether prostrate. Then again, for nearly two days she had gone without food; over and above, were the

fatigue of the journey, the exhaustion of the hill ascent, the hardships of wind and rain, her nerves completely unstrung and her body altogether enfeebled. On top of these came this horrid supernatural event, at least Shaibalini thought so—how long can the human mind retain its balance? Her system failed, so did her mind, and she remained in a state of suspended animation betwixt sleep and wakefulness, the splinters of the rock pricking her back.

When she had lost her senses completely she saw a vision. Before her eyes was a limitless river, but without any water. Overflowing either bank a current of blood was running along. In that current, bones, decomposed corpses, human skulls and skeletons were floating about; crocodile-like creatures composed only of bones and large fierce glittering eyes, without any flesh or skin, were gliding about and feasting out of those putrid corpses. Shaibalini found that the same stalwart individual who had carried her away from the hill-side, also carried her and placed her on the river-bank. In that region neither the sun did shine nor did the moon smile; no stars, no clouds; not a scintilla of light and yet no darkness. Everything could be seen but in a hazy and indistinct way. The bloody river, the decomposed corpses, the current-driven skeletons, the bony crocodiles all were visible in that awful gloom. There was no sand on the bank, and instead, were iron needles bristling their sharp ends up. The stalwart individual placed Shaibalini there and bade her cross the river. There was no means of crossing—neither ferry nor bridge. He told her to swim across—she knew to swim—many a time she had swam in the Ganges with Protap. But how could Shaibalini swim in that bloody river? Then the stalwart individual lifted the cane in his hand

to strike her. With terror Shaibalini saw that the cane was made of flaming red-hot iron. Finding her hesitating he began to belabour her back. The strokes began to burn her body. Unable to bear them she jumped into the sanguine current. At once the bony crocodiles darted at her, but left her untouched. Shaibalini swam on, the bloody current trickling into her mouth. The stalwart individual walked by her side across the crimson flood without sinking. Now and again, stinking putrid corpses came drifting against her body. In this way Shaibalini reached the opposite bank. No sooner she stepped on the shore and looked round, than she shrieked out, "Save me, oh, save me!" What she saw in front had neither limit, figure, colour, nor name. Here the light was extremely faint, but so hot that as soon as it fell on Shaibalini's eyes they seemed to burst and burn as if by poison. Such a terrible stench stank in her nostrils,that in spite of the covering she had on her nose, she became wild. Piercing, discordant, terrific sounds simultaneously entered her ears; heart-rending wails, demoniacal cachinnations, horrid shouts, splitting of rocks, crash of thunder, grating of stones, tumult of waters, hissing of fire, plaintive outcries of the dying—all simultaneously began to split her ears. Right in front, violent blasts, every now and then, rushed with a dismal sound alternately scorching her limbs as if by flames of fire and lacerating them in an intense biting cold as if with a hundred thousand knives. "I die, oh, save me!" cried out Shaibalini. Then a big ugly worm with an insufferable stench tried to enter her mouth. "Oh save me!" screamed Shaibalini. "This is hell; is there no means of escape from this place?"

"Yes, there is," came the answer from the stalwart individual. Her own cries in her dream had broken

her stupor. But her mind was still wandering and the stones were pricking her back. Yet labouring under an illusion, though completely awake, she cried—

"What will become of me? Is there no means for my salvation?"

"Yes, there is," came the sonorous reply from the cave.

What is this? Was Shaibalini really in hell? Confused, bewildered and terrified, Shaibalini asked, "What means?"

"Take a twelve-year vow of expiation," said the voice from the cave again.

What, is it an oracle? Shaibalini went on in a woeful tone—

"What is that vow? Who is to initiate me?"

"I will."

"Who are you?"

"Take the vow."

"What have I got to do?"

"Put off your silk cloth and take the one I am giving you. Now stretch out your hand."

Shaibalini did as told. A piece of cloth was placed on her out-stretched hand; she cast off the old cloth and after putting on the new said,

"What else have I got to do?"

"Where is your husband's home?"

"In Vedagram. Have I got to go there?"

"Yes; go there and build yourself a hut at one end of the village."

"Anything else?"

"You shall sleep on the ground."

"What more?"

"You shall eat nothing but fruits and vegetables, and that only once a day."

"What next?"

"You shall let your hair grow on to matted locks."

"Anything further?"

"Only once at the close of day you shall go out in the village for alms, and in course of your begging you shall recount your evil deeds from village to village."

"My evil deeds cannot bear recounting. Is there no other expiation?"

"Yes, there is."

"What is it?"

"Death."

"I prefer to take the vow—who are you?"

Shaibalini got no answer. In a plaintive voice, again she said, "Whoever you might be I am not anxious to know, but I take you for one of the hill-gods and I make my bow to you. Kindly tell me one thing more—where is my husband?"

"Why?"

"Shall I not meet him again?"

"You shall meet him when your expiation is over."

"After twelve years?"

"Yes, after twelve years."

"How long can I live after taking this vow? If I should die in the meantime?"

"Then you shall meet him in your last moments."

"Could I not by any means get sight of him before that? you are a god, you must know."

"If you want to meet him now, then you must live in this cave day and night, all alone, for a week. This week you must think of your husband daily and hourly, no other thought should find place in your mind. During this time you shall go out once in a day at the fall of dusk to gather fruits and vegetables, You must not eat your fill with them, so that your hunger may remain

unappeased. You shall not go to any human being, nor shall you hold converse with any, should you meet one. If you can live in this dark cave for a week and incessantly meditate on your husband with a sincere and single-minded devotion, then you can hope to meet him."

CHAPTER III.

THE WIND ROSE.

Shaibalini did as advised. For seven days she did not leave the cave; only once in a day towards evening, she went out in search of fruits and vegetables. For seven days she held no converse with any human being. Well-nigh starved she began to meditate on her husband in that dreadful darkness with her senses in abeyance. She could see nothing, hear nothing, touch nothing. The senses locked up, the mind absorbed, her imagination filled the air with her husband's image. The husband became the sole centre round which all the faculties of her mind converged. Nothing could she see in the darkness during the space of a whole week except his face.

In that awful stillness she could hear nothing save and except his loving discourse so full of wisdom. Her nostrils smelt nothing but the odour of the flowers in his flower-pot, her skin felt nothing but the touch of Chandrashekhar's caressing embrace. She had no other hope and in nothing else, and remained solely confined to the one single desire of seeing him. Her memory circled round and round his countenance adorned with a beard and fronted with a broad forehead, just in the same way as the bumble-bee with its wings bruised by the brambles wheels heavily round and round the rare

aromatic flowering plant. Whoever might have advised this vow, had surely a thorough insight into the deep recesses of the human heart. A lonely silent darkness devoid of human presence, added to that an exhausted frame afflicted with hunger and the mind absorbed in one single idea, at such a moment whatever object the mind fixes upon, it becomes saturated with it after a persistent meditation. In these circumstances with a worn-out frame and mind, in a concentrated meditation on her husband, Shaibalini lost her consciousness.

Was it really a cessation of consciousness or the bursting of the spiritual vision? From out of the innermost recesses of her soul she saw with her new eyes—oh, what a figure! That figure shaming the *sal* tree in stature, with its finely moulded arms, its handsome proportions, full of strength and grace—oh, what a peak of beauty! That forehead, extensive, anointed with sandal-wood paste, furrowed with the lines of thought, is fit for the resting place of *Saraswati*,[1] the battlefield of *Indra*,[2] the pleasure-bower of *Madan*,[3] the throne of *Lakshmi*[4]—what is Protap to this! Fie! Fie! the Ganges compared with the ocean! Those sparkling, laughing, shifting, swimming eyes, at once large and wide-open, piercing but placid, full of tenderness and pity, with a slight touch of humour, and ever inquisitive—can Protap's eyes be compared with these? Oh, why was I tempted, why did I yield, why did I fall! That handsome, powerful figure, like the *sal* tree with its green shoots, like the deodar entwined with the *racemosa*, like a hill covered with blossoms—

[1] The Goddess of Learning.
[2] The chief of the terrestrial gods.
[3] The God of Love.
[4] The Goddess of Wealth.

half beauty, half strength—half Luna, half Sol—half *Gauri*,[1] half *Shankara*—half *Radha*,[2] half *Syam*—half hope, half fear—half light, half shade—half fire, half smoke—what is Protap compared with this? Oh, why did I not see it before, why was I tempted, why did I fall! That language, chaste, articulate, illumined with smile, tinged with humour, full of tenderness, soft, sweet and clear—what is Protap's in comparison? Oh, why was I tempted, why did I fall, why did I sacrifice my honour! That smile, like the jasmine in yonder flower-pot, like the lightning-flash amidst clouds, like the worship of *Durga*[3] in a year of scarcity, like my own dream of happiness—oh, why did I not see it before, why was I tempted, why did I ruin myself, why could I not understand! That love which is like the ocean, impassable, immeasurable, unfathomable, pulsating in its own strength, yet placidly calm, solemn and full of loveliness, overflowing the shores in its agitation, terrible with tossing waves, impervious, unconquerable and awful—oh, why did I not understand it, why did I not cherish it to my heart, why did I not lay down my life at the sacrifice of my all! Who am I? Am I worthy of him? An ignorant, illiterate, sinful girl as I am, I am incapable of appreciating his worth. What am I by his side?—a snail in the sea, a worm in the flower, the spots in the moon, the dust in the feet. What am I by his side?—an evil dream in life, a slip in the memory, an impediment to happiness, a doubt in hope. What am I by his side?—the mud in the tank, the thorn in

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[1] The consort of Mahadeva (Shankara).

[2] The beloved of Krishna (Syam).

[3] Among the Bengal Hindus the annual worship of the goddess Durga is a festive occasion of great mirth and hilarity. In a year of scarcity when people are sad and dejected it comes as a great relief.

the lotus, the dust in the air, an insect in the fire. Oh! why was I tempted, why did I not die?

He who had told her to meditate on her husband in this way, was a veritable pilot in the illimitable ocean of the human heart—he knew every thing. He knew that this mystic charm could turn the ever-flowing river into a new channel, that the rock is split with this thunder-bolt, the sea is drained at such a draught, the air is stilled by such a spell. The ever-flowing river of Shaibalini's heart turned, the rock gave way, the sea was dried up and the air was stilled; Shaibalini forgot Protap and began to love Chandrashekhar.

Let man close all the avenues of his senses, let him obliterate them altogether and control his mind with all its functions withdrawn, and then let it run in one fixed course after closing up all other passages—in such a state what can the mind do? It must follow the same single course, the mind must settle in it and must adhere to it. On the fifth day, Shaibalini did not touch the fruits and vegetables she had gathered; on the sixth, she did not go out for them; and on the morning of the seventh, she said to herself, "Whether I get sight of my husband or not I am determined to die to-day." At night it seemed to her as if in her heart a lotus had bloomed and Chandrashekhar was sitting on it in a posture of divine contemplation, while Shaibalini transformed into a bumble-bee was buzzing about his lotus-like feet.

On the seventh night, a silent darkness reigned. In that cave of rough stones, alone in the midst of her meditation, Shaibalini lost her senses. She saw divers visions. Now she found herself sunk in a terrible hell; countless serpents, hundred cubits long, spreading their ten thousand hoods coiled round her body. With their ten thousand jaws spread out, they moved on to swallow

her up and their mingling breath sounded like a fierce hurricane. Chandrashekhar came and stood planting his feet on the hood of a huge serpent, and at once the serpents slipped away like the subsidence of an inundation. Again she found a mountain-like fire burn in an immeasurable pit, the flames shooting up to the skies and herself being consumed in it. Just at this moment Chandrashekhar came and sprinkled a handful of water on that mountain of fire, and instantly the fire went out; a cool breeze then sprang up, a clear bubbling stream issued from the pit, on its brink the flowers burst in bloom, on the water big lotuses blossomed and Chandrashekhar stood on them and was drifted along. Anon she found a huge tiger come and take her up a hill in its mouth; Chandrashekhar came and taking up a flower from his pot of worship threw it at the tiger; forthwith its head was severed and the tiger expired. Shaibalini found that its face resembled Foster's.

Towards the close of night, it seemed to Shaibalini as if she was dead, yet conscious. The ghouls flew up the dark skies with her corpse. They caught her up by the hair and flew across vast regions of black clouds and lightning fires. Aërial fairies peeped out of the cloud-billows and laughed at her. Luminous sky-roving goddesses riding on golden clouds, their golden figures decked with garlands of lightning and tiaras of stars fixed round their forehead covered with black tresses, glided along, and the air fouled with the contact of Shaibalini's sinful body obscured their brightness. Terrible sky-dwelling ogresses reclining their inky bodies against huge masses of black clouds gambolled in vortices of furious hurricanes and with their mouths watering at the sight of the putrid-smelling corpse of Shaibalini hurried up with outspread jaws to swallow it up. Glowing

shadows, devoid of darkness, cast by the chariots of gods and goddesses had fallen on the clouds, and as if for fear lest their purity coming in contact with the shadow of the sinful Shaibalini should lessen her sins, they moved their chariots away. The star-beauties leaning their tiny heads out of the blue canopy, all pointed one to another at Shaibalini's corpse with their gleaming fingers and said, "Look sister, look; just fancy, there is unchastity even among the human worms." Here one star closed her eyes with a shudder, there another hid her face in the clouds for shame, and a third faded away at the very mention of an unchaste woman. The ghouls soared up high, higher and yet higher, across more clouds and more stars. They went on as they wanted to go up very very high to throw down Shaibalini's corpse into the abyss of hell. In that region where they reached at last, there was only darkness and cold—no clouds, no stars, no light, no air, no sound. Sure enough there was no sound, but suddenly there came from very far far below a deep terrific rumbling noise as if at some great distance down below, a hundred thousand oceans roared simultaneously.

"There is the hubbub of hell," said the ghouls. "Let us throw the corpse from here," and they kicked at Shaibalini's head. The corpse rolled down in a spin, and down and down Shaibalini went. With the increasing depth of the fall, the whirl gradually grew in rapidity, till at last the corpse spun round like a potter's wheel—the mouth and nostrils vomiting blood all the while. Gradually the roar of hell grew nearer, the putrid stench increased and suddenly the dead-alive Shaibalini saw hell at a distance. At once her eyes lost their sight, her ears their sense of sound. Then she began to meditate on Chandrashekhar, and thus mentally apostrophised

him :—"Where art thou my husband, where art thou my lord, the refuge of a woman's life, the god of my worship, my all, the source of all my good? Where art thou Chandrashekhar, a thousand and thousand and thousand bows to thee! Oh, save me! By wronging thee I am falling into this hell-pit. If thou dost not, then no god will be able to save me. Oh, save me, do save me, I beseech thee! Be generous; come to me and sprinkle the dust of thy feet on my head, and then I am sure, I shall be saved from this hell."

Blinded, deafened and dead, it seemed to Shaibalini, as if some one had lifted her on his lap, the fragrance of his body suffusing the surrounding space. The hideous hell-sound suddenly vanished, and instead of the putrid stench, scent of flowers floated up. Suddenly her deafness was cured, the eyes recovered their sight, and all at once it seemed to her—it was not death but a new life, it was not a horrid dream but a pleasant reality. Shaibalini had recovered her senses.

On opening her eyes, she saw that a faint light had streamed into the cave. The morning carol of the birds outside was heard, but what is this? On whose lap did her head rest? Whose face, like a full-orbed moon in the sky was bending over her and shedding its lustre on the morning twilight? Shaibalini recognised him. He was Chandrashekhar—Chandrashekhar in an ascetic garb.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOAT SANK.

"Shaibalini," cried Chandrashekhar.

Shaibalini sat up and began to stare at Chandrashekhar. Her head swam and she fell down knocking

her face against his feet. Chandrashekhar lifted her up and seated her with the support of his body.

Shaibalini wept and loudly wept. She fell at Chandrashekhar's feet and cried, "Tell me, what is to become of me now."

"Why did you want to see me?" asked Chandrashekhar. Shaibalini dried her eyes and stanching her tears calmly said, "I think my days are numbered." She shuddered ; the dream came back to her. For a brief space she kept silent, the palm of her hand clapped on her forehead, and again went on, "I am sure, I shall not live long." "Before my death I felt a longing to see you once again. Who will believe it—and why? She who had gone astray and left her husband, how could she feel any longing to see that husband again?"

She ended with a bitter laugh of intense anguish.

"I don't distrust your words," said Chandrashekhar, "I know you were forcibly carried away?"

"That is not true; I came away with Foster out of my own free will. Before Foster attacked the house he had sent me word."

Chandrashekhar dropped his head in shame. He gently laid her down again. Then he quietly got up, and while turning back he said in a soft and sweet voice, "Pursue your expiation for twelve years. If at the end of that time both of us happen to be alive, we shall meet again. Thus far now."

"Sit down once more," she appealed with folded hands. "Perhaps I am not destined to accomplish the expiation." Again that dream came to her and again she appealed, "Do sit down please—let me look on you for a while."

Chandra shekhar resumed his seat.

"Is there any sin in suicide?" asked Shaibalini. She had been gazing intently at Chandrashekhar, and her bright lotus-like eyes were swimming with tears.

"Yes, there is. Why do you want to die?"

Shaibalini again shuddered and said, "Oh! I can not die, I shall fall into that hell."

"By your expiation, I am sure you will be saved from this hell."

"But what is the expiation to save oneself from this mental hell?"

"What do you mean?"

"The gods are in the habit of frequenting this hill. I do not know what they have done to me; day and night I am dreaming of hell."

Chandrashekhar saw that Shaibalini's eyes had been set in a stare on the further end of the cave, as if they were straining after some distant object. He found her thin face had dried up, the eyes were swelling out, the lids were fixed, her nostrils contracted and dilated alternately, a thrill was passing through her frame and she was trembling all over.

"What are you gazing at?" asked Chandrashekhar.

Shaibalini remained speechless and kept staring as before.

"Why are you frightened?" again asked Chandrashekhar.

She sat as one struck to stone. Chandrashekhar was amazed and in silence he gazed for a while at Shaibalini's face.

He could not make out anything. Suddenly Shaibalini gave a hideous scream and cried, "Lord! save me, save me; thou art my husband, who can do it, if not thou!" and she fainted on the ground.

From a neighbouring spring Chandrashekhar fetched water and sprinkled her face. He fanned her with his wrapping scarf, and after a time Shaibalini recovered her senses. She sat up and wept in silence.

"What were you staring at?" asked Chandrashekhar.

"Oh, that hell!" cried Shaibalini.

Chandrashekhar found that Shaibalini had begun to suffer the agonies of hell even in this very life.

"I cannot die," she said after a short silence, "I am in dread of a terrible hell. I am sure to go there as soon as I die, therefore I must live. But how shall I live for twelve years all alone? Conscious or unconscious, I see nothing but hell."

"You need not be frightened," said Chandrashekhar. "Fasting and mental suffering are the root of your present distemper. The physicians call it nervous disorder. Go to Vedagram and build yourself a hut at one end of the village. Sundari will be able to look after you there and place you in the hands of a doctor.

All of a sudden Shaibalini closed her eyes. At the further end of the cave it seemed to her, as if the figure of Sundari, carved out of stone, stood with uplifted finger. Shaibalini found that Sundari had grown very tall, and gradually she grew up to the height of a palm-tree. She looked terrible; suddenly a hell was created there; again that same putrid smell, that same fearful crackling of fire, the same heat, the same cold, the same wilderness of serpents and the same sky darkened with the same hideous worms. In that hell the ghouls descended carrying ropes of thorns and canes of scorpions in their hands; they bound Shaibalini with the rope and dragged her along striking her all the while with the scorpion-canes. The stony Sundari tall as a palm-tree, raised her arm and cheered them on. "Lay on, lay on; I

dissuaded her, I went to the boat to turn her back, she did not listen. Strike, strike, strike as much as you can, I am a witness to her sin, oh, beat her, beat her." With folded hands, her face upturned and with streaming eyes, Shaibalini implored her to desist, but Sundari would not relent and only cried out, "Strike, strike, strike the unchaste one. I am chaste, but she is not; lay on, lay on." Again her face withered up, again her dilated eyes were fixed in a stare, and Shaibalini remained as one spell-bound. Chandrashekhar grew anxious and knew that the symptoms boded no good.

"Shaibalini, come with me," said Chandrashekhar.

At first Shaibalini did not hear him. Then Chandrashekhar caught her with his hands, and shaking her once or twice, repeated, "Come with me."

Suddenly Shaibalini stood up and in a scared voice cried, "Come, come, come; be quick, let us leave this place at once." With these words she quickly ran towards the mouth of the cave. Without waiting for Chandrashekhar, she walked with rapid steps, and in her haste the flints in the cave hurt her feet in the dim light. Presently she slipped her foot and fell down senseless. Her speech was gone and Chandrashekhar found that she had again swooned.

Then Chandrashekhar took her up in his arms, and going out of the cave carried her to a spot where an exiguous rill silently welled out of the hill-side.

The sprinkling of water on her face and the free air of the open space soon brought her round, and opening her eyes she asked, "Where am I?"

"I have brought you out of the cave," replied Chandrashekhar.

Shaibalini shuddered and was again terrified. "Who are you?" she asked. Chandrashekhar grew concerned

and said, "Why do you behave like that? Can't you make me out, I am your husband?"

Shaibalini laughed out a loud *ha, ha*, and reciting the following rhyme :—

"My husband is a golden bee,
From flower to flower about he roams.
Hast strayed I ween unknowingly
Dear love, 'mong prickly cactus blooms."

Said, "Are you Lawrence Foster?"

Chandrashekhar found that the divinity whose presence makes the human frame so charming had left Shaibalini; a fearful madness was possessing her golden temple. Chandrashekhar wept, and with soft accents and an unspeakable tenderness he again cried out, "Shaibalini!"

Again Shaibalini laughed out and said, "Who is Shaibalini? Wait, wait. There was a little girl, her name was Shaibalini, and there was a little boy, his name was Protap. One night the boy was changed into a serpent and went to the woods, the girl followed as a frog and the serpent swallowed it up. I have seen this with my own eyes. I say Englishman, are you Lawrence Foster?"

With a voice quivering with emotion Chandrashekhar pathetically cried out, "O my spiritual guide! what is this, what have you done!"

Shaibalini started singing—

"What hast thou done, friend of my soul,
By catching the thief who stole my heart?
The river of love without control,
Has flooded its banks though far apart."

"Who is this heart thief?" she raved on. "It is Chandrashekhar. Who was caught?—Chandrashekhar. Who

was swept away ?—Chandrashekhar. What are the two banks ?—I cannot say." Then turning to Chandrashekhar she asked, "Do you know Chandrashekhar ?"

"I am Chandrashekhar myself," said Chandrashekhar in reply.

Like a tigress, at one bound she fastened herself to his neck, and without uttering another word began to weep. Oh how long she wept ! Chandrashekhar's back, throat, breast, dress and arms, were all flooded. Chandrashekhar also wept.

"I will go with you," said Shaibalini weeping.

"Then come," said Chandrashekhar.

"You will not beat me, will you ?" asked Shaibalini.

"No, certainly not," said Chandrashekhar.

Chandrashekhar elaborated a sigh and stood up. Shaibalini also rose. With a mournful countenance Chandrashekhar went in advance, the maniac followed. She laughed, wept and sang, as suited her fancy.

PART V.

THE VEIL.

CHAPTER I.

AMYATT'S END.

THE English boats arrived at Murshidabad in due course. The news of Amyatt's arrival reached Mahammad Taqui Khan, the Lieutenant of Mir Kasim. With a profuse display of pomp and show he visited Amyatt. Amyatt felt highly gratified and Taqui Khan ended his interview by inviting Amyatt to dinner. For the sake of decency, Amyatt had to accept the invitation, although not very willingly. Meanwhile Mahammad Taqui had secretly posted sentries to watch, so that the English boats might not slip away.

After Mahammad Taqui had left, the Englishmen took counsel of one another—whether to attend the invitation or not. Galstaun and Johnson were of opinion that an Englishman is and must be a stranger to fear, therefore, they should attend the invitation. Amyatt maintained that when war was about to be declared and misunderstandings had reached the breaking point, he failed to see how he was bound to observe the formalities of etiquette. Amyatt decided not to attend the invitation.

The news of the invitation had already found way into the boat where Dalani and Kulsam had been kept as close prisoners. They were talking in whispers.

"Kulsam, have you heard?" said Dalani. "It seems our deliverance is at hand."

"How?"

"You seem not to understand anything. When those who brought the Nawab's Begum in durance, have got such a cordial invitation from him, there must be some deep meaning in it. I suspect they will breathe their last to-day."

"Do you feel joyous at the idea?"

"Why not? I would much rather there should not be any bloodshed if it could be helped, but if the death of those who needlessly brought us under confinement could procure our deliverance, I should be glad, instead of sorry for it."

"But why are you so anxious for your deliverance? They can have no other motive than keeping us in confinement. They do not maltreat us in any way—only there is the confinement—but we are women, wherever we might go, we have got the same confinement for us in some shape or other."

Dalani was extremely wrath and said, "When I am confined in my own house, I am Dalani Begum still. In the Englishmen's boat I am nothing but a slave. I have half a mind not to exchange words with you any more. Can you tell me the cause of our confinement?"

"Why, they haven't made a secret of it; just as Mr. Hay is confined at Monghyr as a hostage for the good behaviour of the English, so we are confined here as hostages for the Nawab. No sooner Mr. Hay is released, than they will set us free. If any harm is done to Mr. Hay then we must come in for similar treatment in our turn, otherwise there is no fear."

Dalani grew still more angry and said, "I do not know your Mr. Hay, nor do I care to listen to your

advocacy of the English. I presume you would not care to go even when released."

Kulsam did not get angry. "Supposing I do not go," she said smiling, "would you leave me behind?"

"Are you anxious for that also?" asked Dalani with growing anger.

"Who can say what is written in the book of Fate?" gravely replied Kulsam.

Dalani drew in her eyebrows, and with great vigour raised her small fist aloft. She did not discharge it now but kept it in reserve. Then balancing her clenched fist like a lotus-bud behind her ear, which coming in contact with her black tresses shone like a full-blown flower with the bumble-bee, said with menace in her air—

"Now look here, two days you were sent for by Amyatt—why? Mind you, speak the truth."

"I have already told you the truth. He wanted to inquire if you felt any inconvenience. Their desire is that so long we are with them, we should live in comfort. Would to God, they do not set us free!"

"Would to God, you meet your end soon!" retorted Dalani raising her fist still higher.

"If the Englishmen set us free," said Kulsam, "we are sure to fall into the Nawab's hands. He might pardon you if he likes, but he will never pardon me that is certain. I shouldn't like to go to him if I could get a home elsewhere."

Dalani dropped her anger and with a tremulous voice said, "I have no other way. If I should at all die, I would lay down my life at his feet."

Amyatt meanwhile ordered the sepoys under his command to hold themselves in readiness. "We are not so strong here, wouldn't it be better to take the boats near the Residency?" suggested Johnson.

"The day on which one single Englishman will flee before the Indian," said Amyatt, "that very day the hope of establishing British Empire in India will be gone."

"If we should move our boats from here the Mussalmans would think we took fright and fled. Better face death standing here, but never flee in fear. But Foster is ill, he cannot die fighting, therefore, let him shift to the Residency. Let the Begum and her companion be transferred to his boat with two sepoys to escort them. It is not right for them to remain in the place of action."

When the sepoys were ready, everyone took his post according to Amyatt's order under cover of the boat. Holes are easily found in the wicker covering of a boat. Each sepoy sat with a musket at his hole. Dalani and Kulsam got into Foster's boat according to Amyatt's orders. Under the escort of the two sepoys Foster set sail to his boat. Mahammad Taqui's sentries saw it and forthwith went to inform him.

On hearing this and the time for the Englishmen's arrival having expired, Mohammad Taqui sent a footman to accompany them to his place. Amyatt sent back word to say that for certain reasons he was not willing to leave his boat.

After having gone a little way from the boat, the footman fired a blank cartridge. Along with that firing ten or twelve muskets roared from the bank. Amyatt found that bullets were pouring on his boat and in some places they had penetrated it. Then the English sepoys replied. The guns of the combatants discharged at one another, produced a terrific detonation. Both parties were fighting under cover. The Mussalmans lay concealed behind the houses and other protections on the bank; the Englishmen and their sepoys were hidden in their boats. In such

a fight there was hardly any chance of any immediate result except the expenditure of powder and shot.

At last the Mussalmans left their protections, and with sword and spear they rushed with a yell on Amyatt's boat. The determined Englishmen were nothing daunted.

Amyatt, Galstaun and Johnson took up their muskets, deliberately aimed from their boat at the rapidly descending Mussalmans and fired; and all with the surest execution. Every one of them laid a Mussalman prostrate on the sand at each shot.

By this time, like waves upon waves, parties of Mussalmans began to descend. Then Amyatt said, "By no earthly means can we save ourselves, come let us end our lives with pagan blood."

The enemy had in the meantime, got into Amyatt's boat. The three Englishmen pressed close together and fired simultaneously. The Mussalmans who had entered the boat were scattered and fell into the water as if riven by a trident.

They now began to pour into the boat in still larger numbers. Some hammered at the bottom with heavy clubs, and as it gave way, the water gurgled in, gradually filling up the hold.

Then addressing his companions Amyatt said, "Why suffer ourselves to be drowned like cows and sheep? Come, let us go out and die like heroes, sword in hand."

Now the three intrepid Englishmen sallied forth sword in hand, and took their stand before countless Mussalmans. One of the enemy saluting Amyatt with a low bow said, "Why should you die? Surrender and follow us."

"Yes, we are determined to die," said Amyatt. "If we die here to-day, it will kindle such a flame in India

as will consume the Mussalman kingdom altogether. When the earth is saturated with our gore, the royal standard of George III will be planted all the easier in it."

"Then die," and with one stroke of his sword the Pathan gashed Amyatt's head. At once with a quick hand Galstaun severed the Pathan's head from his shoulders.

Presently ten or twelve Mussalmans surrounded Galstaun and began to hack him. Overcome by the blows of so many men, both Galstaun and Johnson soon succumbed and lay dead on the boat.

Foster had started before that.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAME AGAIN.

WHEN Lawrence Foster fell into the Ganges after being struck by Ramcharan's bullet and Protap had set his barge loose, the crew of the junk jumped into the water and searched out Foster's body which floated by. They kept him in their boat and informed Amyatt. Amyatt came and found Foster lying unconscious, but life was not yet extinct; the wound in his head had made him lose his consciousness. The chances of death were great, but he might survive. Amyatt knew the healing art and took up the case in right earnest. Acting on Bakaullah's information he found out Foster's boat and brought it to the landing-place. When Amyatt left Monghyr he carried the dying Foster in that boat.

The last sands of Foster's life had yet to run, and Amyatt's treatment saved his life for the nonce. He was destined to live, hence he escaped the hands of the

Mussalmans at Mursidabad this time also. But now he was sickly and enfeebled; he had no longer his old courage, no longer his old defiance. He was in a mortal funk for his life and was fleeing to save it. The wound in his head had somewhat obfuscated his intellect.

He urged his boat with all possible speed as he had a suspicion that the Mussalmans would pursue him. At first he thought of taking shelter in the Kasimbazar Residency, but he was afraid lest they should attack that place, hence he gave up the idea. Foster was justified in his apprehensions here, for soon after, the Mussalmans went to Kasimbazar and attacked and plundered the Residency.

He rapidly cleared Kasimbazar, Farasdanga, Saidabad and Rangamati. Yet his fear was not gone; whenever he saw a vessel behind him, he at once took it for a Mussalman boat. Soon after, a small boat appeared to be persistently following him.

Foster then cast about for means of saving himself. In his distraction several ideas occurred to him. For once he thought, "Let me leave the boat and effect my escape by land." "I cannot do that," it struck him the next moment, "I haven't got the strength for it." "Why not drown myself?" came a second inspiration, and instantly it flashed on him that it was not a satisfactory solution of the difficulty, as in that case he would not save himself. "Let me throw these two women overboard," was his last thought, "the boat will be lighter and run all the faster for it."

Suddenly a wrong-headed idea took possession of his mind. It was his firm belief that the Mussalmans were coming in pursuit of him for these women. He had heard that Dalani was the Nawab's Begum, and he thought that it was for her sake alone that the Mussalmans

had attacked the English boats. Therefore if he released the Begum there would be no further difficulty. He made up his mind to leave Dalani on the shore.

"Do you see that small boat coming in our rear?" faltered Foster as he drew Dalani's attention to it.

"Yes, I do," answered Dalani.

"That is a boat belonging to your people, and it is coming to your rescue," said Foster.

Had Foster really any ground for thinking so? His diseased imagination was the only ground. He mistook a piece of rope for a snake. If Dalani had carefully thought over the matter she would have at once found reason for doubt. But the mere mention of the coveted thing is enough to make one lose his head, and blinded hope is reason defeated. Duped by hope, Dalani readily fell in with the idea and said:

"If that be so, then why don't you transfer us to that boat, we will give you plenty of money."

"I cannot do that," said Foster, "if they once capture my boat, they are sure to kill me."

"I will stop them," said Dalani.

"They would not listen to you. The people of your country have no respect for a lady's request," said Foster.

In her eagerness, Dalani lost her reason. She never thought of untoward possibilities; she never thought what she would do if the vessel turned out to be a private boat. That it might not belong to the Nawab's Government, never struck her mind. Her impatience stranded her in a dangerous situation and she said, "In that case you can drop us on the shore and then follow your way."

Foster joyfully agreed to the proposal and ordered the boat to pull for the shore.

"I am not going to alight," said Kulsam. "Who can say what is in store for me when I fall into the Nawab's hands! I have made up my mind to go to Calcutta with the Englishman. I have got some acquaintances there."

"You need not be afraid," said Dalani. "If I live you shall also live."

"*If* you live, then!" said Kulsam.

Nothing in the world could induce Kulsam to alight from the boat. Dalani earnestly entreated her, but she was determined.

"Who can say that the boat will not follow us for your sake? You had better get down also," suggested Foster to Kulsam.

"If you insist on my leaving the boat," said Kulsam, "then after going into the other boat I will take pretty good care that the people over there do not let you alone."

Foster was frightened. He did not utter another word after that. Dalani shed tears for Kulsam and alighted from the boat. Foster sailed away. It was not long before the sun went down after that.

Foster's boat gradually went out of sight. The small vessel, the mistaken identity of which as a boat belonging to the Nawab's Government had led Foster to leave Dalani on the shore, also approached. Every moment Dalani expected it to pull for the shore to take her up, but it did not. Then in her doubt if she had been seen or not, she began to wave the end of her cloth on high; yet the boat did not turn from its course, but rowed past her. Like a lightning flash it at once flashed on her mind: "How could I conclude that the boat belonged to the Nawab's Government? It might belong to some other party." Then in a loud voice she frantically called

out to the crew. "Sorry, no room for you," said they in reply and sailed away.

Dalani felt as if a thunderbolt had struck her. By that time Foster's boat had gone out of sight, yet she ran along the shore with the hope of overtaking it. She ran a long way, but ultimately failed. Night had already set in, and it became dark. Nothing could be seen on the face of the river—only the gurgling of the fresh current after the recent rains was heard. Then like a plant torn up by the roots Dalani sank down in despair.

After a while, when Dalani found it useless to sit in the river-bed, she stood up and slowly ascended the bank. In the darkness no pathway could be found. Stumbling once or twice she got up on the bank. In the dim star-glimmer she looked round. No sign of a village or a hamlet anywhere—only a limitless plain and that gurgling river. Not to speak of any human being, not even a light could be seen on any side; not a village, no tree, no pathway; not an animal excepting jackals and dogs; only the stars could be seen dancing in the river current. Dalani made sure of certain death.

Not very far from the river Dalani sat down on a plain. At hand the beetle droned and the jackal howled. Gradually night deepened and the darkness grew weird and gruesome. At midnight Dalani was terrified to see a tall man roaming alone in that plain. Without uttering a word he came and sat by her side.

The same tall individual again. This is the man who had lifted Shaibalini up and slowly ascended the hill in the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

Dancing and Music.

In a spacious edifice at Monghyr, lived the brothers Swarup Chand Jagatshetth and Mahatab Chand Jagatshetth. Hundreds of lights were burning in the house at night. In the cool of a vaulted apartment overlaid with marble, countless lights were reflected from the jewellery of a dancing-girl. Water accumulates water, and the bright accumulates brightness. In the dazzling marble columns, in the brilliant *musnud* embroidered with gold and pearls, in the scent-holders set with sparkling diamonds and precious jewels, in the bright massive pearl-strings hanging round the Shetths' necks, and in the dancing-girl's jewellery on the forearm, throat, hair and ears, the light was flashing and strains of delicious music floated across the room, mingling the bright with the sweet. The bright mingled with the sweet! When the moon rises in the blue sky at night, then the bright mingles with the sweet; when lightning glances shoot from beauty's languishing eyes, soft as the nelumbo bathed in water, then the bright mingles with the sweet; when the blooming lotus-cluster reposes on the clear blue water of a tank pierced with the golden shafts of the rising sun, when the long rays of Phœbus slant on the ripplets of blue water and inflame the liquid drops on the lotus leaves, when Dan Sol awakens the strains of the water-fowls, part the lips of the water-lily and peep in, then the bright mingles with the sweet; and again when the sun tumbles about in the diamond-cut anklets round the feet of your lady, then the bright mingles with the sweet. Once more when at the fall of day the clouds chase the dying sun in the sky ever eluding their grasp, then the bright mingles with the sweet; and yet again when your good lady

dangling her ear-drops rushes after you with her flaming tongue, then also the bright mingles with the sweet. When the water of the Ganges is lit up by the moon and the foaming crests of waves thrown up by the wind glitter in the moonlight, then the bright mingles with the sweet; and when the sparkling champagne fizzes up and glistens in its crystal glass, then again the bright mingles with the sweet. When the soft south-breeze mingles with the star-lit night, when the dining-fee[1] of a Bramhin is kept in silver on the leaf-plate corner filled with delicate sweets, then also the bright mingles with the sweet. When the spring cuckoo trills away in a flush of joy at the advent of the morning sun, and lastly, when a woman resplendent with jewels sings in the radiance of rows of lights, then also the bright mingles with the sweet.

The bright mingled with the sweet, but none of that mingled with the heart of the Shetths. What mingled with theirs was Gurgan Khan.

The flames of war had now been kindled throughout Bengal. Without waiting for any orders from Calcutta, Mr. Ellis of Patna had attacked the fort there. At first he succeeded in taking it, but the Mussalman forces despatched from Monghyr combining with the Patna garrison soon recovered it for the Nawab. Ellis and the other Englishmen at Patna, who fell into their hands, were taken as prisoners to Monghyr. Both parties were now preparing for war in right earnest. Gurgan Khan was talking with the Shetths on this subject. The dancing and music was a mere blind; neither the Jagatshetths nor Gurgan Khan paid the least attention to it. They were only following the beaten track—

[1] Among the Hindus the feeding of a Bramhin is regarded as a meritorious act and it is usually accompanied by a dining-fee.

who ever organised a musical party for the sake of the music?

Gurgan Khan had obtained his heart's desire. He made up his mind to possess the throne of Bengal after defeating both parties when they had been weakened by war. But the first thing necessary to that end was to have the soldiery under his control. The soldiers again, could not be controlled without money; and money could not be had without the help of the Shetth millionaires. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary for him to confer with the Shetths.

Mir Kasim also knew very well that on whomsoever the favour of the millionaire brothers would shine, that party was sure to succeed. He further knew that the Jagatshetths were at heart not friendly towards him, as he had not treated them well. They had been kept closely guarded as prisoners at Monghyr on suspicion. He was quite sure that they would go over to the enemy on the first opportunity; hence he was trying to shut them up within the Fort. But the Shetths had got scent of the plan. Out of fear they had kept clear of all active hostility against Mir Kasim, but now they could find no other means of saving themselves, hence they joined Gurgan Khan. Both had the same object—the ruin of Mir Kasim.

But lest any meeting with them without any apparent cause, should rouse the Nawab's suspicions, the Jagatshetths had got up this party and invited Gurgan Khan along with the other ministers.

Gurgan Khan came with the Nawab's leave and sat apart from the other ministers. The Jagatshetths, in doing the honours, talked and stayed with him just as long as they did with the other guests and no more. But the talk with Gurgan Khan was carried on in an undertone,

so that others might not overhear. It was to this effect :—

"I want to start a factory with you," said Gurgan Khan.

"What's your object?" asked Mahatab Chand.

"To suppress the Nawab's factory at Monghyr."

"We must do it I suppose. We don't find any means of getting on without starting a new business like that."

"If you agree," said Gurgan Khan, "then you must supply the capital, I shall do the labour."

Just at this moment, the *danseuse* Mania approached, and sang in a peculiar strain: "Thou hast learnt guile well, &c., &c." "For whom is it meant?" asked Mahatab smiling. Then turning to Gurgan, he resumed the conversation: "Very well, we agree. We shall be satisfied if our principal and interest are secure. We only want that we don't get into trouble."

While on the one hand, the *danseuse* sang in different varieties of Indian tunes, such as *Kedar*, *Hambir*, *Chhayanat*, &c.; on the other, Gurgan Khan and the Jagatsetths settled their terms with the help of such artful words as rupee, loss, money-present, &c. When everything had been settled, Gurgan Khan said:

"Have you heard that a new merchant is going to open a factory?"

"No, we haven't," said Mahatab. "Is it Indian or English?"

"Indian."

"At what place?"

"In all places from Monghyr to Murshidabad. Wherever there is a hill, jungle or plain, there will be a branch."

"What sort of a capitalist is he?"

"He is not a rich capitalist yet, but one can't say what might happen."

"What firm does he carry his dealings with?"

"With the Government factory at Monghyr."

"Is he a Mussalman or a Hindu?"

"He is a Hindu."

"What is his name?"

"Protap Roy."

"Where does he come from?"

"From a place near Murshidabad."

"I have heard his name, he is an ordinary man."

"He is a terrible man."

"What is his object in rushing into this venture so suddenly?"

"He has done it to spite the Company's factory at Calcutta."

"He must be secured; what tempts him most, can you say?"

"It is difficult to say without knowing what prompted him to this enterprise. If he has set about it as a paid servant then he can be bought up in no time. We can give him all kind of landed properties, but if there be something else, it will be a different matter."

"What else can there be? What other object can he have in rushing into this enterprise?"

At this time the *danseuse* sang: "The nose-ring shines on the fair, fair face, &c."

"Is that so?" said Mahatab Chand. "Who is the fair-faced one, pray?"

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT DID DALANI DO.

THE tall individual came and silently sat by Dalani's side.

Dalani had been weeping, but terror had dried up her tears and she remained motionless. The stranger also remained silent.

During the time all this happened another heavy calamity had been brewing for her elsewhere.

Secret orders had been sent to Mahammad Taqui Khan to send Dalani to Monghyr after rescuing her from the hands of the English. Taqui had thought that as soon as the Englishmen were captured or killed, Dalani would naturally fall into his hands; therefore, he did not think it necessary to give any special instructions to his people with regard to her. Subsequently when he discovered that the Begum was not in the boat of the defunct Englishmen, he found himself in a quandary. One cannot tell what unknown miseries the Nawab's wrath might prepare for him on account of his remissness and neglect. Oppressed with this apprehension he boldly struck out a plan to hoodwink the Nawab. A rumour had been afloat that as soon as war broke out, the English would release Mir Jafar from his captivity and replace him on the throne. If the English came out victorious, then Mir Kasim's subsequent knowledge of the deception could not possibly harm him. It was enough if he could save his neck for the present. If, on the other hand, Mir Kasim turned out victorious, then some means must be devised for keeping the truth from him. One must be careful to guard against any severe orders for the present. When he had fixed on this wicked resolve, he

sent a report to the Nawab that very night bristling with a tissue of falsehoods.

Taqui wrote that the Begum had been found in Amyatt's boat. He had brought her with all due honour and kept her in the fort. But he could not send her to the Nawab without special orders. He had heard from the Englishmen's comrades, servants, crew, sepoys, and other survivors, that the Begum had lived in the boat as Amyatt's mistress. Both had slept on the same bed. The Begum herself had admitted all this. She was now a Christian, and refused to go to Monghyr. "Don't force me," says she, "let me go my own way, please. I have a mind to go to Calcutta and live with Mr. Amyatt's friends. If you do not let me go I will try to escape, and if you attempt to send me to Monghyr by force, I am sure to commit suicide." Whether she should be sent to Monghyr under these circumstances, or kept there, or allowed to go her own way, were matters for which he awaited orders. No sooner the orders came than he would proceed to their carrying out. To this effect Taqui indited a report.

That very night a mounted courier started with the report for Monghyr.

People say that our mind sometimes shadows forth distant and unknown calamities. Not that it is true: but the moment the mounted courier left Murshidabad with the report, a thrill ran across Dalani's frame. That very moment the tall individual by her side spoke the first words. Whether it was his voice, or the first quickenings of an approaching calamity, whatever it might be, that very moment she felt a cold shiver shoot across her body.

"I know you," began the man at her side, "you are Dalani Begum."

Dalani gave a start.

"I know you have been abandoned in this lonely place by a wicked scoundrel," continued the man.

The torrent from her eyes again broke loose and the stranger resumed,

"Where do you intend to go now?"

Suddenly the fear left her. Dalani had found good reasons for it. She again wept. The tall man repeated his question.

"Where shall I go!" cried Dalani. "I have no place to go to. There is only one place, but that is very far, who will take me there?"

"You had better give up all idea of going to the Nawab," said the stranger.

Dalani was amazed and tremulously asked, "Why do you say so?"

"You are sure to get into danger," said the stranger.

"Let there be danger," she replied with a shudder, "I do not mind, I have no other refuge. Better danger by the side of one's husband, than safety elsewhere."

"Then get up," said the stranger. "I will leave you with Mahammad Taqui at Murshidabad, he will send you to Monghyr. But follow my advice yet. War has already begun. The Nawab is making arrangements for sending his household to the Fort of Rhotasgarh. Do not go to Monghyr now."

"Whatever might befall, I am determined to go."

"You are not destined to visit Monghyr."

Dalani was very much perturbed. "Who knows what is written in the book of Fate!" she exclaimed, "Come, I am ready to follow you to Murshidabad. So long there is life in me, I will not give up hopes of seeing the Nawab."

"I know that very well, come," said the stranger. In the dark night the two started for Murshidabad. The moth rushed towards the flame.

PART VI.

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT.

CHAPTER I.

OLD ACCOUNTS.

WHAT I have omitted in the foregoing narrative, I shall now tell in brief. That Chandrashekhar is the ascetic alluded to before must be clear enough to the reader.

The day Amyatt left Monghyr, accompanied with Foster, Ramananda Swami came to know in the course of his enquiries, that the latter along with Dalani Begum and others had gone with Amyatt. On the bank of the Ganges, Ramananda Swami met Chandrashekhar. After imparting this news to him he said, "What's the good of your staying here any longer? You had better go back to your home. I will send Shaibalini to Benares. Now begin to act according to your vow of living for others. This daughter of Islam is virtuous; she is now in danger, you had better follow her. Don't lose any opportunity of rescuing her. Protap is also related to you in some sort and is your well-wisher; it is only for your sake that he is in this miserable plight. You shouldn't forsake him now; go, follow them." Chandrashekhar wanted to inform the Nawab, but Ramananda Swami advised him not to do it and said, "I will see to that myself." The behest of his spiritual guide left Chandrashekhar no choice, and taking a small skiff he

followed Amyatt. Ramananda Swami also went about in search of a reliable disciple for sending Shaibalini to Benares. Quite unexpectedly it came to his knowledge that Shaibalini was going after the Englishmen in a separate boat. Ramananda Swami found himself in a fix. Whom was this wretched woman following—Foster or Chandrashekhar? "I am afraid," thought Ramananda Swami, "I shall have to mix myself up with the affairs of the world for Chandrashekhar's sake." Having made up his mind he also went the same way.

Ramananda Swami had travelled in various countries all his life on foot, consequently he was an excellent pedestrian. Walking along the bank he soon left Shaibalini behind. As a rule, he never allowed the cravings for food and sleep to get the upperhand of him, for by constant habit he had succeeded in bringing them under control. By degrees he overtook Chandrashekhar. When the latter found him going along the river-bank he went up to him and made his obeisance.

"I have a mind to visit the Pundits at Nadia," said Ramananda Swami, "hence I have decided to go to Bengal. I think it is better I should go with you." With these words he got into Chandrashekhar's boat.

When they came across the line of the English flotilla they conducted their own skiff to a hidden recess and went on the shore. They found Shaibalini's boat also glide up and occupy a similar position. Both of them remained hidden on the shore and began to watch. They saw Protap and Shaibalini swim away and effect their escape. They further saw them take a boat and get off. Then they got into their own boat and began to follow. When Protap and Shaibalini brought their boat to a stand, they also did the same at a little distance. Ramananda

Swami was a man of infinite resource, and addressing Chandrashekhar said,

"Could you hear what conversation went on between Protap and Shaibalini while they were swimming?"

"No, I could not."

"Then don't sleep to-night. Keep an eye on them."

Both kept awake, and towards morning they found Shaibalini quietly leave the boat, dip into a thicket on the bank and vanish. It now came close upon dawn, yet Shaibalini did not return. Then addressing Chandrashekhar, Ramananda Swami said, "I do not quite understand this. Who knows what she has got in her mind! come, let us follow her."

Then both cautiously went after her. At nightfall when Ramananda Swami saw the clouds massing together he asked,

"How much strength do you carry in your arms?"

Chandrashekhar smiled and taking up a big stone with one hand flung it to a distance.

"Good," said Ramananda Swami. "Now go to Shaibalini and keep close to her unperceived. In the coming storm if she does not get any help, she is sure to be killed. Not far there is a cave; I know the way to it. On a hint from me, you shall take her in your arms and follow me."

"Presently there will be great darkness, how shall I be able to find my way?"

"I will be at hand. You will hold one end of my staff in your hand and the other end will remain in mine."

After Chandrashekhar had come out of the cave, leaving Shaibalini there, Ramananda Swami began to muse: "I have studied the *shastras* ever so long, I have mixed with all manner of people, but all to no purpose. This girl's mind baffles me altogether—has this sea no

bottom?" Then he said to Chandrashekhar, "You will find a hill-monastery close by, go there and rest for the night. After you have done your duty by Shaibalini you shall again follow the Mussalman lady. Remember, you have no other duty than serving your fellow-creatures. Don't be anxious about Shaibalini, I will be here to look after her. But take care, do not see her without my permission. If you follow my advice, the chances are she will be highly benefited."

After the above conversation, Chandrashekhar took his leave; Ramananda Swami then entered the cave in the darkness unseen.

The reader knows all that happened afterwards. Chandrashekhar took the raving Shaibalini to the monastery before Ramananda Swami and with tears in his eyes said,

"O my spiritual guide! what hast thou done?"

Ramananda Swami closely observed Shaibalini's condition and replied with a slight smile,

"That's all right. Don't be anxious. Rest here for a day or two and then go back to your home with her. You should keep her in the same house where she used to live. See that her old companions keep constantly about her. Ask Protap also to see her now and again. I will follow later on."

Chandrashekhar took Shaibalini home according to the instructions of his spiritual guide.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORDER.

WAR with the English had broken out and Mir Kasim's downfall commenced. At the very outset he lost the battle of Katwa. Then Gurgan Khan's treachery

came to light. His last hope was gone. At this juncture his intellect began to give way. Mir Kasim made up his mind to massacre the English prisoners. His treatment of others became atrocious. As ill luck would have it, Mahammad Taqui sent the news about Dalani precisely at this moment. Clarified butter was poured into the blazing fire. The English were treacherous, the commander of his army seemed to be of doubtful integrity, the Goddess of Fortune was perfidious and to crown all Dalani had proved faithless. The cup was full. Mir Kasim wrote back to Taqui Khan, "There is no need of sending Dalani to me, finish her with poison."

Mahammad Taqui took the poison bowl with his own hand to Dalani. Dalani was astonished to find him in her presence, and indignantly exclaimed, "What's this my Lord! Why this outrage on a lady's privacy?"

"Fate!" cried Mahammad Taqui, clapping his hands on his forehead, "the Nawab is ungracious to you."

"Who told you so?" said Dalani with a smile.

"If you don't believe me, you can see the order for yourself," answered Mahammad Taqui.

"Then you must have misread it," said Dalani.

Taqui handed over the order to her. After reading it Dalani smiled a little, and flinging away the paper said, "This is a forgery. Why this fun with me? Do you wish to die?"

"Don't frighten yourself, I can save you," said Taqui.

"Oh, I see!" cried Dalani, "you have got a design. You have come to frighten me with this forged letter."

"Then listen," said Taqui. "I wrote to the Nawab that you lived in Amyatt's boat as his mistress. That is why this order has been issued."

Dalani contracted her eyebrows. Like the ripples on the placid water of the Ganges, wrinkles gathered on her forehead; the string of thought was tied to the bow of her eyebrow and Mahammad Taqui felt the ground sliding from under him. "Why did you write that?" she asked. In reply Mahammad Taqui related everything from the beginning to the end.

"Come," said Dalani, "let me see the order once more, please."

Mahammad Taqui handed over the document again. After carefully perusing it she found it to be genuine and not forged. "Where is the poison?" she asked. Her words took Mahammad Taqui by surprise and he asked, "What do you want the poison for?"

"What does the order direct?"

"To administer poison to you."

"Then let me have it."

"Do you seriously mean to take it?"

"Why not? It is the order of my King. Why shouldn't I obey it?"

Mahammad Taqui felt in his heart of hearts as if he was dying for very shame and said, "What is done, can not be undone; you shall not have to take the poison, I will see to that."

Dalani's eyes flashed fire and straightening up her slender figure she stood up and said,

"Whoever takes the gift of life at the hand of such a vile wretch as you, is herself a greater wretch; come, let me have the poison."

Mahammad Taqui gazed at Dalani in admiration—Dalani, beautiful—Dalani young—the stream of beauty just beginning to fill up in the rainy torrent of youth, the full spring of youth opening in their fullest bloom her blossoming limbs. The spring had blended with the

rainy season. The object of your desire is bursting in agony, but what a pleasure for you to look on! O God! why hast thou made sorrow so beautiful? This girl in distress, a blushing flower driven by the wind, a pleasure-boat tossed by billows—what shall a man do with her?—where keep her? The devil whispered in Taqui's ear, "In the heart."

"Listen my beautiful, follow me and you shall not have to take the poison," said Taqui.

At this, we blush to write, Dalani gave Mahammad Taqui a kick.

Mahammad Taqui could not administer the poison, and throwing half-glances at Dalani slowly turned back.

After he had left, Dalani flung herself on the ground, and writhing in agony wept and exclaimed,

"O my King of Kings, Shah of Shahs, Padishah of Padishahs! what is the meaning of this order to your humble slave? Shall I take poison? If you order, why should I not? Your love is my nectar, your anger is my poison. When you are angry, then the poison has been taken. Is poison more painful than your displeasure? O monarch of monarchs, the light of the world, the sole hope of the destitute, the lord of the world, the vicegerent of God, the very ocean of kindness!—where are you now? When it is your order, I will take the poison with a smiling face, but you cannot stand by and look on, is my only regret."

A serving-maid, by name Kariman, had been engaged to wait on Dalani. Summoning the maid to her presence, she gave all her jewels into her hands and said, "Go to the doctor quietly and get me a sleeping-draught; mind you, so that I might sleep for ever, never to wake again. Sell these and pay the doctor, the balance you can keep for yourself."

From her tearful eyes Kariman understood everything. At first she would not consent, but Dalani's repeated urging, backed by a large sum of money, made the foolish tempted woman yield at last.

The doctor gave the potion. A peon privately informed Taqui that the slave Kariman had just purchased poison from Dr. Mirza Habib.

Taqui pressed Kariman hard and she confessed everything.

"I have made over the poison to Dalani Begum,', said Kariman.

Forthwith Mahammad Taqui went to Dalani. He found her resting on a seat with her hands folded, face upturned and eyes uplifted. The flood-gates had been let loose from her full, large, lotus-leaf eyes, the tears ran down her cheeks on to her dress, and an empty bowl stood in front. Dalani had drunk off the poison.

"What is this bowl lying here ?" asked Mahammad Taqui.

"That is the poison," answered Dalani. "I am not a traitorous wretch like you—I obey the orders of my lord. You ought to—come, drink the rest and follow me."

Mahammad Taqui stood speechless. Slowly, slowly, Dalani laid herself down; her eyes closed, all became dark, and Dalani Begum passed away.

CHAPTER III.

THE SOVEREIGN REDUCED TO A COWRIE.

MIR KASIM's army had retreated after its defeat in the battle of Katwa. His broken fortunes further broke on the field of Gheria. Again the Mussalman army

was scattered before the British power like dust before the wind. The remnants sought their safety at Udaynala. They entrenched themselves there for checking the progress of the British forces.

Mir Kasim had gone there in person. While there, one Syed Amir Hossein went to him and brought word that a prisoner was extremely anxious for an interview. The prisoner had some important information to give, but the person would not disclose it to any one excepting to His Highness.

"What is he?" asked Mir Kasim.

"She is a woman come from Calcutta," answered Amir Hossein. "Mr. Warren Hastings has sent her with a letter. She is not a regular prisoner. Your humble servant has taken the letter as it was sent before the war. If he is guilty of any impropriety, he awaits your Highness' pleasure." With these words, Amir Hossein read over the letter to the Nawab.

Warren Hastings wrote as follows :—

"I do not know this woman. She came to me in great distress and said that she was alone and helpless in Calcutta, and that if I sent her to you she would be saved. War is about to break out, but my nation has no quarrel with women, therefore I send this woman to you. I know nothing about her, good, bad or indifferent."

After hearing the letter, the Nawab ordered the woman to be brought to him. Syed Amir Hossein went out and fetched her. The Nawab found she was Kulsam.

"What do you want, slave?" said the Nawab fiercely. "Do you wish to die?"

Kulsam calmly fixed her eyes on the Nawab and said, "Nawab, where is your Begum, can you tell me?

Where is Dalani Bibi?" The tone and manner of Kulsam made Amir Hossein apprehensive, and he left the place bowing.

"You shall soon go where that vile sinner is," said Mir Kasim.

"Yes, I and you too I suppose," said Kulsam. "I have come here for that purpose. On my way I heard that a rumour had been going round that Dalani Begum has committed suicide. Is that true?"

"Suicide!" cried the Nawab. "No, she has been punished under royal warrant. You are the abettor of her crime, you shall be devoured by dogs."

Kulsam flung herself on the ground and set up an agonized wail of lamentation. She abused the Nawab with whatever came uppermost. At the noise, soldiers, ministers, attendants, guards and all the rest, rushed in. One of them tried to lift Kulsam by her hair but the Nawab stopped him—he had been amazed. The man let go his hold of her. Then Kulsam began, "It is well, you are all here. I will unfold a strange tale, listen. I know the order for my death will be soon passed, but after I leave this world no one will know of it. Therefore, listen to it now."

"Listen; over the Provinces of Bengal and Bihar, reigns a fool of a Nawab named Mir Kasim. He had a Begum named Dalani; she was the sister of Gurgan Khan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Nawab's army."

No one made any further attempt to seize her after that. Every one began to look at one another's face. Their curiosity grew apace. The Nawab also did not speak. Kulsam went on,

"Gurgan Khan and Dalani concerted a plan and left Ispahan for Bengal in search of employment. When Dalani entered Mir Kasim's household as a slave, the

brother and sister had bound themselves to a compact for mutual support."

Then she related in detail all the occurrences of the night when she and Dalani went to Gurgan's house. She also repeated the conversation between Dalani and Gurgan Khan which she had heard from the former. Then she described their return to the fort, their shutting out, the ascetic's help, their abode in Protap's house, the attack of the English, the mistaken apprehension of Dalani for Shaibalini, their confinement in the boat, the death of Amyatt and others, their flight with Foster, and lastly, Foster's desertion of Dalani on the bank of the Ganges. After relating all these she wound up in the following words :—

"The devil was in me at the time I have no doubt; otherwise why should I forsake the Begum at such a moment? Touched with compassion at the sufferings of the wicked Englishman I felt towards him— I thought— never mind, it does not matter. I was confident that the Government boat which was coming behind would pick up the Begum, otherwise why should I let her go. But I have got my deserts for my folly. For soon after I earnestly entreated Foster to put me down on the shore, but he refused. On reaching Calcutta I beseeched everyone I met to send me here, but no one paid any heed. Then I was told that Mr. Hastings was a very kind-hearted man. I went to him, fell at his feet and wept. By his favour alone I am here to-day. Now I am ready. You can give your orders for my death. I have no desire to live."

After delivering herself thus, Kulsam began to weep.

On a costly throne, buried in a profusion of jewels flashing out their thousand beams, the Nawab of Bengal sat with down-cast looks. The sceptre of his

extensive empire was slipping from his grasp—his best efforts could not keep it. But that unconquerable empire which could be governed without the least trouble —where was that empire gone? He had neglected the flower and cherished the thorn. Kulsam was right—the Nawab of Bengal was a fool.

Addressing the nobles the Nawab said, "Now listen to me all of you. This kingdom is not fit to be governed by me. What this slave has said is perfectly true—the Nawab of Bengal is a fool. You can guard and defend these provinces if you can, I am off. I will go in hiding among the women at Rhotasgarh, or I will renounce the world and go out as a *fakir*." In delivering these words, his powerful frame shook like a piece of bamboo fixed in a current. Choking his tears, Mir Kasim went on, "Listen my friends, if I am not killed by the English or their creatures like Shiraj-ud-dowla, then bury me by the side of Dalani's grave—this is my request to you. I cannot speak further; you can now go. Nay, I would ask you to carry out an order of mine—I should like to see Taqui Khan once more."

"Ali Ibrahim Khan!" called out the Nawab.

Ali Ibrahim Khan answered to the call. "I have not got another friend like you in this world," said the Nawab. "This is my request to you—bring Taqui Khan to me."

Ali Ibrahim Khan made his salute and going out of the tent mounted his horse and rode away.

"Is any one else willing to serve me?" enquired the Nawab.

Everyone responded, and awaited his pleasure with folded hands. "Can any of you bring that man Foster to me?" asked the Nawab.

"I will start for Calcutta at once to find him out," said Amir Hossein.

The Nawab remained absorbed in thought for a while and then continued, "And that woman Shaibalini? Could any of you bring her to me?"

"By this time," said Mahammad Irfan with folded hands, "she must have gone back to her home. I will go and fetch her." Irfan took his leave preliminary to his departure.

"Could any of you," further inquired the Nawab, "find out the ascetic who gave shelter to the Begum at Monghyr?"

"If it pleases Your Highness," said Irfan, "I will go to Monghyr for him after finding out Shaibalini."

"How far is Gurgan Khan?" he inquired last of all.

"We hear that he is coming to Udaynala with the army," said the ministers, "but he has not arrived yet."

"Army, army, whose army!" muttered the Nawab to himself.

Someone whispered, "His."

The ministers took their leave.

Then the Nawab rose from his jewelled throne, threw his diamond head-gear at a distance, tore off the pearl-strings from his neck, flung away the jewelled dress from his body, and rolling on the ground wept aloud, "Dalani, Dalani, O my Dalani!"

Such is the glory of a Nawab of this mundane world.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN STALKARTT.

IT has transpired in the foregoing chapter that Kulsam had an interview with Warren Hastings. In giving the details of her own story she had to describe Foster's doings *in extenso*.

History has given Warren Hastings the character of a tyrant. Men of action are sometimes forced into acts of oppression in obedience to a call of duty. He who is charged with the administration of a government, though himself a just and generous man, is often compelled to these acts of oppression for the good of the empire. When he finds that the entire kingdom is likely to be benefited by the oppression of a few, then he considers that oppression to be a part of his duty. At all events it does not stand to reason that those who like Warren Hastings are capable of building empires are not generous and just. He who has no justice and generosity in his composition, is incapable of attaining such high achievements as the creation of an empire or the like, as from his very nature he is not exalted but ignoble, and such achievements are not for the ignoble.

Warren Hastings was both generous and just. He was not the Governor yet. After dismissing Kulsam he bent his mind on hunting out Foster; when he found him Foster was ill. The first thing he did was to place him in the hands of a doctor. With the care and treatment of a good physician Foster soon recovered.

Then he began to investigate into his conduct. Through fright Foster confessed his guilt. Warren Hastings laid his case before the council and got him dismissed. He had a mind to bring him up before a court of law, but no trace of the witnesses could be found; moreover, Foster had amply paid for his misdeeds, hence he desisted.

But Foster could not appreciate this nobility; he was too narrow-minded. He imagined that he had been severely punished for a trivial offence. Like all petty-minded guilty servants he began to nourish a mortal grudge against his quondam masters, and was firmly determined to wreak his vengeance.

A Swiss or a German, named Dyes Sombre commonly known as 'Samru,' had enlisted under the banners of Mir Kasim. In the Mussalman camp at Udaynala Samru was present with his soldiers. Foster went to him. At first he artfully sent a messenger to Samru. Samru thought that he would be able to penetrate the secrets of the English through this man and he took Foster up. Concealing his real name, Foster gave himself out as one Mr. John Stalkartt and entered Samru's tent. When Amir Hossein was busy in finding out Foster, the latter was there.

After bestowing Kulsam in a suitable place, Amir Hossein went out in search of Foster. He had heard from the attendants about him that a very strange thing had happened—an Englishman had enlisted in the Mussalman army and he was to be found in Samru's tent. Amir Hossein bent his steps in that direction.

When Amir Hossein entered the tent, Samru and Foster were talking together. After he had taken his seat, Samru introduced Foster to him as Mr. John Stalkartt and Amir Hossein fell into a conversation with him.

After talking on various subjects Amir Hossein asked, "Do you know an Englishman named Lawrence Foster?"

Foster's face flushed crimson, and fixing his eyes on the ground he faltered out in a husky voice :

"Lawrence Foster you say? Why, I don't know any such man."

"Have you never heard his name?"

"Name! Lawrence Foster! Yes! Why? No!" stammered out Foster after a moment's hesitation.

Amir Hossein did not pursue the subject any further, and began to talk on other matters. But he observed that Stalkartt had ceased to take any interest in the

conversation, and once or twice, he tried to get away. Amir Hossein prevailed on Stalkartt to stay a little longer. The conclusion he arrived at was that the man knew all about Foster, but would not tell.

A short time after, Foster fetched his hat and sat down covered. Amir Hossein knew that this was against English etiquette. Moreover, while Foster adjusted his hat, Amir Hossein's eyes fell on a bald scar in his head. Did Foster put his hat on to hide the mark?

Amir Hossein took his leave. Returning to his tent he had Kulsam brought to him and said, "Come with me." Kulsam followed.

He again entered Samru's tent; Kulsam waited outside. Foster had not left the tent yet. Addressing Samru, Amir Hossein said, "If you have no objection, a slave-girl would pay her respects to you—she has got some important business."

Samru gave his permission. Foster's heart went pit-apat and he rose to depart. Amir Hossein caught him by an arm with a smile and urged him to resume his seat. Then he called Kulsam. Kulsam came in and stood motionless at the sight of Foster.

"Who is this man?" asked Amir Hossein of Kulsam.

"He is Lawrence Foster," was the ready answer.

Amir Hossein seized Foster's arm. "What have I done?" protested Foster.

Without deigning a reply, Amir Hossein addressed Samru and said, "Sir, there is an order of the Nawab to arrest this man; kindly direct some sepoys to bring him with me."

"What's the matter?" asked Samru in surprise.

"I will tell you later on," said Amir Hossein.

Samru gave some guards with him and Foster was taken closely secured.

CHAPTER V.

IN VEDAGRAM AGAIN.

WITH great difficulty Chandrashekhar had brought Shaibalini home.

After a long absence he again entered his house. He found it more frightful than a forest. Hardly any straw was left on the thatch—most of it had been blown off by the wind. In some places the thatch had given way, in others, cattle had eaten off the straw, and the neighbours had helped themselves to the bamboo frame-work for their fuel. The yard was overgrown with a thick jungly growth, reptiles fearlessly glided about, and the door leaves had been all taken away by thieves. In the open rooms not a single article of furniture could be found; some had been stolen, and the rest Sundari had removed to her own house. Rain had found admission into the rooms and rendered them damp; here the rot had settled, there the mould had fastened. Rats, cockroaches, bats, roamed about in shoals. With a heavy sigh, Chandrashekhar entered the house taking Shaibalini by the hand.

He viewed the spot where he had once stood and watched his mass of books gradually reduce themselves into ashes. Chandrashekhar cried "Shaibalini!"

Shaibalini did not answer. Seated at the door of a room, she gazed at the sweet-oleander, as if seen in some past dream. She did not reply to a single word of what Chandrashekhar said and began to look round with wide-open eyes. Now and again a faint smile flickered on her mouth and for once it seemed she pointed her finger at some imaginary object with a distinct smile.

The village was now alive with the news of Chandrashekhar's return home with Shaibalini. People flocked to see them; Sundari came first.

Sundari knew nothing of Shaibalini's insanity. She first of all made her obeisance to Chandrashekhar whom she found in an ascetic garb. Then directing her eyes to Shaibalini she said, "You have done well in bringing her back. Everything will be made straight by going through an expiation."

But Sundari was astonished that although Chandrashekhar was present, Shaibalini would neither move away nor draw her veil; on the other hand, she bent her eyes on Sundari and began to giggle. "Perhaps this is the English way," thought Sundari. "Shaibalini must have picked it up in the Englishman's company."[1] Then Sundari went close to her and yet far enough to keep her dress from coming in contact with Shaibalini and sat down.[2] "La, Shaibalini, do you recognise me?" said Sundari smiling.

"Certainly I do, you are Parvati," answered Shaibalini.

"A plague upon you! you have forgotten me so soon," said Sundari.

"Why should I forget you? Don't you remember how I smashed you to atoms when you touched my rice-pot? Sister Parvati, do sing a song please." Instantly she herself began to sing:—

"And that's my secret, love, and that alone,
From Krishna's side loved Radha fair is gone.
From the lap of the cloud smiles not the moon,
Vainly have I laid the love-trap so soon."

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[1] It is a custom with Hindu women to appear before their husbands with their veil on in the presence of all persons excepting their own children and certain other relations.

[2] Contact with Shaibalini meant defilement, as she had left her home with a Christian.

"Sister Parvati, I can't make out anything. It seems as if I miss some body—as if I had some one, but he is gone—as if some one is coming, but comes not—as if I have come somewhere, but not where I want to be—as if I am looking out for somebody, but I know not whom."

Sundari was amazed and looked inquiringly at Chandrashekhar. He motioned her to him. "She has gone mad," whispered Chandrashekhar in her ear when she approached him.

Then everything became clear to her. She remained silent for some time. At first her eyes glistened, then a moisture gathered under the lids and lastly drops of tear began to trickle down. Sundari wept. Womanhood is the very jewel of this earth. Another day this very Sundari had devoutly prayed that Shaibalini might find a watery grave along with her boat, but to-day no one felt more keenly for Shaibalini than she.

Wiping her tears Sundari slowly went to Shaibalini and sat close to her. Softly she spoke and gently she reminded her of past events. Nothing came back to Shaibalini; her memory was not altogether gone—else how could Parvati's name occur to her?—but the real facts went out of her grasp, they were twisted out of shape and came back in a confused juxtaposition with the wrong ones. She remembered Sundari but could not recognise her.

First of all Sundari sent Chandrashekhar to her house for his bath and meal. Then she busied herself in fitting up the shattered habitation for Shaibalini. Gradually the female neighbours came in one after another and lent a hand; the necessary articles flowed in.

In the meantime Protap returned home from Monghyr after disposing the clubmen in their proper position. On his arrival he heard that Chandrashekhar

had returned. He lost no time in visiting Chandrashekhar at Vedagram.

On the same day Ramananda Swami had put in an appearance there before him. With a joyful heart Sundari heard that Chandrashekhar would administer medicine to Shaibalini according to Ramananda Swami's instructions. An auspicious hour had been fixed upon for the purpose.

CHAPTER VI.

YOGA OR PSYCHIC FORCE?

WHAT the medicine was we cannot say; but Chandrashekhar had carefully undergone a purification for administering it. Ordinarily he was a man without passions. He had succeeded in bringing his appetites under control more than others. But on the present occasion he had prepared himself with an extra course of hard fasting. For some days past he had employed his mind in divine contemplation; no worldly thought could find place in it during that time.

At the appointed hour Chandrashekhar set about in administering the medicine. He directed a bed to be made for Shaibalini; the serving-maid appointed by Sundari did the work.

Then Chandrashekhar directed Shaibalini to be laid on the bed. Sundari had to do it by force, as otherwise Shaibalini would not obey. Sundari had made up her mind to purify herself by a bath on her return home—it was not a trouble, she was in the habit of doing it every day. [1]

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1 Sundari regarded Shaibalini as an outcast for having left her home with a Christian, and contact with an outcast is defilement to a Hindu, hence a purification by a bath was necessary.

Addressing everyone present Chandrashekhar said, "Leave me for a while. You shall come in when I call."

When every body had gone out, Chandrashekhar placed the medicine pot on the ground. "Now get up and be seated," he said to Shaibalini.

For all answer Shaibalini softly hummed a tune—she did not get up. Then fixing her with a steadfast gaze, he gently transferred the medicine to her lips with the hollow of his palm. Ramananda Swami had declared the medicine to be nothing but the water in his gourd. "What good can it do?" Chandrashekhar had enquired. "With it the girl will be indued with psychic force," was Ramananda Swami's reply.

Chandrashekhar then began to make passes in a variety of oblique evolutions over her forehead, eyes and other parts. After a time her eyelids fell; soon she began to nod, and at last she was carried into a profound sleep.

"Shaibalini!" cried Chandrashekhar.

"Yes Sir," came the answer from Shaibalini in her trance.

"Can you tell me who I am?" asked Chandrashekhar.

"You are my husband," replied Shaibalini in her trance as before.

"Who are you?"

"I am Shaibalini."

"What place is this?"

"It is Vedagram, your home."

"What persons are waiting outside?"

"Protap, Sundari and others."

"Why did you leave this place?"

"Because Foster carried me away."

"Why couldn't you remember all these things before?"

"I could remember, but my ideas got confused, I couldn't arrange them."

"Why?"

"On account of my madness."

"Are you really mad or only shamming?"

"I am really mad, there is no sham about it."

"What are you now? Are you still mad?"

"Now it is all a dream. I have recovered my faculties through your kindness."

"Then will you speak the truth?"

"Yes, I will."

"Why did you go away with Foster?"

"For Protap."

Chandrashekhar shuddered. He began to see past events in the clearest light and continued,

"Is Protap your lover?"

"Oh, for shame, what a question!"

"Then what is he?"

"We were two flowers on one stock. We bloomed in the same wilderness. Why did you tear us asunder?"

Chandrashekhar fetched a profound sigh. Nothing escaped his deep penetration. He went on,

"Do you remember the day when Protap fled from the Englishman's boat and you two swam in the Ganges?"

"Yes, I do."

"What conversation took place then?"

Shaibalini described everything from the beginning to the end. Protap went up very high in Chandrashekhar's estimation. He again went on,

"Then why did you abide in Foster's company?"

"It was company in name. I did so in the hope of meeting Protap if I went to Purandarpore."

"Company in name, you say! Then are you chaste?"

"In my mind, I surrendered myself completely to Protap, hence I cannot be called chaste. I am a vile sinner."

"Otherwise?"

"Otherwise I am perfectly chaste."

"How with regard to Foster?"

"I am chaste, body and soul."

Chandrashekhar threw sharp, quick glances along with the passes and said, "Mind you, speak the truth."

The slumbering girl caught a sudden contraction of the brow and said, "I have told you the truth and the truth alone."

Chandrashekhar again heaved a sigh and said,

"Then what led you a Brahmin girl to lose your caste?"

"You are versed in all the *Shastras*, I will ask you to say if I have lost my caste. I didn't partake of the Englishman's food, I didn't drink water touched by him, every day I used to cook my own food and a Hindu serving-woman used to help me. I lived in the same boat no doubt, but that was on the Ganges."[1]

Chandrashekhar bowed down his head. He reflected for a while and then exclaimed, "Alas! alas! what a grievous wrong have I done, I well-nigh killed a woman!" A little while after he again began:

"Why didn't you disclose all these things?"

"Who would care to put faith on my words?"

"Does any one know about them?"

"Yes, Foster and Parvati."

"Where is Parvati?"

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[1] The Ganges is considered by the Hindus to be sacred, and many light transgressions are purged away if committed on its waters.

"It is now a month since she died at Monghyr."

"Where is Foster?"

"He is in the Nawab's camp at Udaynala."

Chandrashekhar pondered for a while and then, pursued his questions.

"Do you think you will get cured of your disease?"

"You have indued me with psychic force; I have acquired the power of second sight, and with it I have a prevision of events. Your blessings to help, I am sure to be cured by the medicine you have given me."

"Where would you like to go after your cure?"

"I should like to take poison if I could get it, but I am afraid of hell."

"Why do you wish to die?"

"Else, where can I find a refuge in this world?"

"Why, with me."

"Would you care to take me back?"

"What, if I do?"

"Then with my body and soul I will serve you. But I am afraid you will be disgraced."

At this time the distant tramp of a horse was heard. Chandrashekhar said, "I haven't got any psychic power of my own. What you have got in you now, is Ramananda Swami's power. Tell me what that sound is."

"It is the sound of horse's hoofs."

"Who is coming?"

"Mahammad Irfan, an officer of the Nawab."

"Why is he coming?"

"To take me—the Nawab has expressed a wish to see me."

"When did he do it? Was it before Foster went there or after?"

"No, it is neither before nor after; he passed his orders simultaneously for taking Foster and me to him."

"You needn't be anxious, sleep on."

After the above dialogue, Chandrashekhar asked those who remained outside to come in. When they had entered the room he said, "She is sleeping now. As soon as she wakes up give her the medicine in the pot. An officer of the Nawab is now on his way here, he will take her away to-morrow, you had better accompany her."

Every one was astounded and frightened. "Why should she be taken to the Nawab?" they inquired.

"You needn't be anxious," answered Chandrashekhar. "You will presently learn everything."

On Mahammad Irfan's arrival, Protap busied himself in according him a suitable reception. Chandrashekhar privately told Ramananda Swami everything from the beginning to the end. The Swami said to Chandrashekhar, "To-morrow both of us must be present at the Nawab's *Durbar*."

CHAPTER VII.

In the Durbar.

In a spacious tent sat the last sovereign of Bengal in royal state—the last sovereign, because those who assumed the title of Nawab after him never actually reigned.

Elevated on a seat enriched with pearls, corals, silver and gold, and in an array of pearls and diamonds, sat Nawab Mir Kasim Ali Khan at his Durbar, his head-gear lustrous with the brightest diamond in the whole assemblage and dazzling like the sun. Along his side stood rows of

attendants with folded palms, and with his accorded permission sat the silent ministers with bended knees. "Are the prisoners present?" enquired the Nawab.

"Every one is present," responded Mahammad Irfan. The Nawab ordered Foster to be brought first.

Foster was brought in and placed before the Nawab.

"Who are you?" asked the Nawab.

Lawrence Foster knew that his fate had now been sealed. Rather late in life, he said to himself, "Hitherto I have disgraced the British name, now I will die like an Englishman."

"I am Lawrence Foster," said Foster.

"What nation do you belong to?"

"I am an Englishman."

"The English are my enemy. Being an enemy, why did you enter my camp?

"Yes, I did enter. For that you can do whatever you like with me, I am now in your power; there is no need of asking why I entered, and even if you did ask, you wouldn't get any answer."

Instead of getting angry the Nawab smiled and said, "You are bold, that's clear; but will you be able to speak the truth?"

"An Englishman never utters a falsehood."

"Indeed! we shall see presently."

Looking round, the Nawab enquired, "Who said that Chandrashekhar was present? If he is here, let him be brought in."

Mahammad Irfan brought Chandrashekhar in. On seeing the latter the Nawab asked Foster, "Do you know this man?"

"I have heard his name, but I do not know him."

"Very well, where is the slave Kulsam?"

Kulsam also appeared.

"Do you know this slave?" asked the Nawab.

"Yes, I do."

"Who is she?"

"She is your slave."

"Call Mahammad Taqui," said the Nawab.

Mahammad Irfan brought in Taqui Khan in chains.

Taqui Khan had wavered all his time; he could not make up his mind which side to join, consequently he had not gone over to the enemy yet. But the Nawab's generals knowing him to be a man of doubtful integrity had narrowly watched his proceedings. Hence Ali Ibrahim Khan found no difficulty in bringing him under arrest.

Without casting a look on Taqui the Nawab said,

"Kulsam, tell us how you went to Calcutta from Monghyr."

Kulsam described every thing in detail and told all about Dalani Begum. After finishing her story, with folded hands and tearful eyes she said in a loud voice, "My Liege! in this tent of public audience, I charge this scoundrel, this woman-murderer, Mahammad Taqui. Deign to admit my suit. He deceived my master with a false accusation against the character of his wife, and has crushed like an ant the very pearl of her kind in this world—the Begum Dalani. My Liege! I say he has done it, and I pray that this wretch might in his turn be as pitilessly crushed."

"That is false," faltered Taqui in a choking voice. "Who is your witness?"

With dilated eyes Kulsam yelled out, "You want my witness? Look above—my witness is God. Lay thy hand on thy heart and then ask—even thou art my witness! If any other testimony is required, then ask that Englishman there."

"Now Englishman, what do you say?" asked the Nawab. "Does the woman there speak the truth? You also were with Amyatt. Mind, an Englishman never tells an untruth."

Foster faithfully told all he knew. Everyone now saw that Dalani was unimpeachable. Taqui's looks fell.

At this moment Chandrashekhar advanced and addressing the Nawab said, "Incarnation of Justice! I am also another witness. This woman's words are quite true. I am that ascetic."

"Yes, he is the man," said Kulsam when she recognized him.

"Your Highness!" continued Chandrashekhar, "if this Englishman is truthful, kindly ask him a question or two more."

The Nawab read Chandrashekhar's mind and said, "You can ask yourself, the interpreter will explain every thing to him."

Then Chandrashekhar asked, "You said that you have heard Chandrashekhar's name. I am that Chandrashekhar. Did you—?"

Before he had finished Foster broke in, "You need not trouble yourself. I am a free man, I am not afraid of death. It depends on me here to answer your questions. I decline to answer them."

"Let Shaibalini be brought in," said the Nawab.

Shaibalini came in. At first Foster could not recognise her. She was pale, sickly and lean. She wore a short thread-bare *sari*, her hair was neglected, her body was smeared with dust and her skin was rough and dry. The hair was dirty and dishevelled, a maniac's laugh was on her face and the questioning look of madness was in her eyes. Foster shuddered at the sight.

"Do you know her?" asked the Nawab.

"Yes, I do."

"Who is she?"

"She is Shaibalini, Chandrashekhar's wife."

"How do you know her?"

"You can order any punishment you choose, I am not going to answer your questions any more."

"My choice is that you be devoured by dogs."

Foster's face withered up, his hands and feet began to tremble; but he soon recovered himself and said, "If you have decided upon my destruction, then kindly direct some other form of death."

"No," said the Nawab. "A tradition of an old punishment is current in this country. The culprit is first buried in the earth waist-deep. Then trained dogs are let loose upon him. When he is torn by the dogs, salt is scattered over the wounded parts. The dogs retire after gorging themselves with the flesh and the culprit is allowed to continue half dead and half consumed till the dogs return with renewed hunger and finish off the remainder. I direct that you and Taqui Khan do meet such a death."

A loud yell, like that of a wounded animal, went out of the captive Taqui. Foster bent his knees on the ground and with upturned eyes and clasped hands offered up a silent prayer: "I never prayed to you before, O God! I never even thought of you but have only sinned all my life. That you exist, never occurred to me. But to-day I am helpless and I call on you. O Thou support of the forlorn, refuge of the destitute., save me, O save me!"

None need be surprised. He who has no faith in God, in times of difficulty, even he calls on Him, and calls in all sincerity of heart. Foster also did the same.

His prayer over, while his eyes sank earthwards, their glance wandered beyond the tent. Quite unexpectedly he found a man with matted locks, clad in a crimson cloth, with a white beard and besmeared with holy ashes, standing with his gaze fixed upon him. Foster's eyes were held captive by that gaze. Gradually his mind was overpowered by it, the eyes fell, and a heavy drowsiness paralysed his body. It seemed to him as if the lips of the being in matted locks moved in a mutter. Then a deep voice like the rumble of rain-clouds entered his ears and Foster heard as if some one was saying, "I will save you from the death by dogs, answer me truly. Are you Shaibalini's lover?"

For once Foster directed his eyes to the begrimed maniac and said, "No, I am not."

Every one heard the words, "No, I am not Shaibalini's lover."

In that same thundering voice again came another question. Whether it was the Nawab, Chandrashekhar, or some body else who asked it, Foster could not make out; he only heard a question uttered in a deep tone—"Then why did Shaibalini stay in your boat?" "I was bewitched by Shaibalini's beauty," answered Foster in a loud voice, "and bore her off by force from her home. I kept her in my boat. I was under the impression that she had an attachment for me, but I found quite the reverse—she owned a decided aversion. At our first meeting in the boat she took out a knife and threateningly said to me, 'If you enter my cabin then this knife will put an end to us both. You must look upon me as if I were your mother.' I could not approach her after that, neither did I touch her." Everyone present heard the above.

"How could you manage to make her eat food prepared by an outcast?" asked Chandrashekhar.

"Not for a single day did she eat my food or food toushed by me," said Foster in a tone of regret. "She used to cook her own food."

"What did she cook?" came a further question.

"Only rice," answered Foster, "she never took anything with it except milk."

"Did she drink water?" came a question again.

"Yes she did, but she used to draw it herself from the Ganges," said Foster.

At this time there was a sudden sound—"boom, boom, boom."

"What is that?" enquired the Nawab.

"What else but the English guns," said Irfan in a melancholy tone. The English have attacked the camp."

Suddenly people began to rush out of the tent. Again the cannon roared "boom, boom, boom." Again and again many guns pealed together. The terrific din leapt forward in bounds. The martial music struck up and a universal hubbub filled the place. The tramp of horses, the clangour of arms, the victorious shouts of an exultant soldiery, together roared like ocean billows and a cloud of smoke covered the skies and filled the horizon. It seemed as if an unsuspecting sleeper suddenly found himself surrounded by an angry sea with its heaving and tumultuous waters.

At once the Nawab's ministers and servants hustled out of the camp, some to battle, some to flight. Kulsam, Chandrashekhar and Shaibalini also went out. Only the Nawab and the captive Taqui remained inside.

Cannon-balls began to fall into the tent. Then the Nawab unsheathed his sword from his belt and drove it home into Taqui's bosom. Thus did Taqui meet his end. The Nawab then went out of the tent.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE BATTLE-FIELD.

WHEN Chandrashekhar came out of the tent with Shaibalini, he found Ramananda Swami waiting. "Chandrashekhar, what do you propose to do now ?" asked the *Swami.*

"How to save Shaibalini, is the question now," said Chandrashekhar. "Cannon-balls are raining all around, the smoke has covered up all space; where to go is the problem now."

"Don't be uneasy," said the *Swami.* "Do you mark the way the Mussalmans are flying. Where there is flight before battle, the chances of victory can be well imagined. These English are extremely fortunate. I find them powerful and full of stratagem. In all likelihood they will one day possess the whole of India. Come let us follow the flying Mussalmans. You need not be anxious for me, but I am very much concerned about the safety of this girl."

The three followed together in the wake of the flying Mussalmans. Suddenly they saw in front a body of well-accoutred and armed Hindu soldiers filing impetuously out of a hard rocky defile eager to meet the English. In the centre was their leader on horseback. They all knew him at once to be Protap. At the sight of Protap, Chandrashekhar became agitated, and soon after with a throbbing heart he said, "Protap, why do I find you in this hopeless fight? Go back."

"I was coming in search of you," said Protap. "Come, let me lead you to a place of safety."

With these words Protap placed the trio in the centre of his small band and marched back. He was perfectly acquainted with all the defiles in that hill-

range. Soon he took them far away from the scene of battle. On the way he heard from Chandrashekhar all that had transpired at the Durbar including the details. At the end Chandrashekhar said, "All honour to thee, Protap! I know every thing."

Protap was astonished and kept staring at him.

"I now know," continued Chandrashekhar with a voice choking with rheum "that this girl is pure. If I am required to undergo any expiatory ceremony for the sake of society, I will do it and then take her back; but I can never be happy any more."

"Why, has not the Swami's medicine done her any good?" asked Protap.

"No, not yet," replied Chandrashekhar.

Protap saddened and tears started in his eyes. Shaibalini saw everything through her veil. She moved aside a little and beckoned to him with her finger. Protap dismounted and went to her. "Will you listen to a word of mine?" she said in a whisper. "I am not going to propose anything wrong."

"Is your madness a sham?" asked Protap in astonishment.

"It is so for the time being," replied Shaibalini. "Since I left my bed in the morning things are getting clear. Have I been really mad all this while?"

Protap's face brightened up. Shaibalini divined what was passing in his mind and said, "Hush! don't say anything now. I will tell them everything myself. It all depends on your advice."

"Why my advice?"

"If my husband takes me back, do you think it will be right for me to conceal from him my sinful thoughts and allow him to bestow his unsuspecting love on me?"

"What do you propose?"

"I want to tell him all about the past and ask his forgiveness."

Protap reflected for a while and said, "Yes, do tell him. I bless you—may you be happy henceforth!" and he shed silent tears.

"I cannot be happy," said Shaibalini, "there is no happiness for me so long you are in this world."

"How is that, Shaibalini?" asked Protap.

"You shouldn't see me again so long you are alive," said Shaibalini. "A woman's mind is rotten to the very core; how long it will stand firm I do not know. You should never see me again in this life."

Protap did not reply. He laid the whip on his horse and set out at a brisk pace for the battle-field. His soldiers ran after him.

"Where do you go?" called out Chandrashekhar after him as he went.

"To the battle," answered back Protap.

In a loud voice Chandrashekhar eagerly called out to him, "Don't go, don't go. It is certain death to fight the English."

"Foster is yet alive," said Protap, "and I am going for his destruction."

Chandrashekhar ran up to him and catching hold of the bridle said:

"Brother, what is the good of killing Foster? God will deal with the wicked. Who are you or I to usurp His office? The base and ignoble revenge on their enemy, the noble and magnanimous forgive."

Protap was struck with admiration and was charmed. He had never heard anyone utter such noble language before. Alighting from his horse he reverentially touched Chandrashekhar's feet with his hand to scrape off the

dust and putting the dust on his head he said,[1] "Thou art a prince of men, I give you my word, I will not harm Foster in any way."

With these words Protap remounted his steed and pursued his way towards the battle.

"For what else do you go to the battle-field Protap?" asked Chandrashekhar. Protap faced round and smiling a soft and sweet smile said, "I have got some business there." With these words he whipped his horse and quickly disappeared.

Ramananda Swami felt very much perturbed at that smile. Addressing Chandrashekhar he said, "Take your wife home with you. I will start for a bath in the Ganges. After a day or two I will meet you again."

"My mind is very much troubled for Protap," remarked Chandrashekhar. "I will soon follow with his news," said Ramananda Swami.

After bidding them farewell, Ramananda Swami started for the battle-field. In that terrible field of slaughter, horrid with the wail of the wounded, amidst a cloud of smoke and a rain of fire Ramananda Swami moved about in search of Protap. Heaps of the slain lay piled upon one another, some altogether dead, some half dead, some with mutilated bodies, some pierced in the breast and some plaintively crying out, "Water, water, Oh, for a drop of water!" Some were calling out by name on their parents, brothers, friends and other dear ones in doleful lamentation. Among these Ramananda Swami searched for Protap, but could not find him. He saw riders with gory limbs fling their weapons down and fly on the back of their bleeding

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[1] This is a mode of shewing one's veneration for another, and the dust is supposed to carry a blessing.

horses trampling to death the hapless wounded who chanced to fall under the hoofs. In this crowd also, Ramananda Swami looked for Protap, but with equal success. He also saw many of the infantry bathed in blood and with empty hands running away in precipitate flight. Among these again, he looked for Protap, but with no better success.

Tired with the search Ramananda Swami sat down at the foot of a tree; a sepoy ran past him. Accosting the latter he said, "I see everyone of you running away, who has done the fighting then?"

"No one," answered the sepoy, "Only a Hindu has fought very bravely."

"Where is he?" inquired the Swami. "You will find him near the trenches," said the sepoy as he fled.

Ramananda Swami went in the direction suggested. He saw no fighting there; the dead bodies of a few Englishmen and Hindus were lying together in a heap. The Swami began to search for Protap among these. From some one among the fallen Hindus a deep groan was heard. Ramananda Swami pulled him out and found he was Protap—Protap wounded, dying, but not dead.

He fetched some water and sprinkled his face. Protap recognised him and tried to lift his arm in salutation but failed.

"I bless you even without the salutation and wish you a speedy cure," said the Swami.

"Cure!" groaned Protap. "That is not very far off. Will you kindly put the dust of your feet on my head?

"We all dissuaded you," said Ramananda Swami. "Why did you come to this impossible battle? Did Shaibalini put you up to it?"

"You should not say so," remonstrated Protap.

"While you were talking with Shaibalini," said Ramananda Swami, "from her gestures and movements I could gather that she was no longer mad, and it further seemed to me that she had not altogether forgotten you."

"Shaibalini told me," said Protap, "that I should not meet her again in this world. I was certain that so long I was alive, there could be no happiness for her and Chandrashekhar. I decided that my life should not stand as a thorn in the side of those who are extremely dear to me and who are my greatest benefactors. Therefore, in spite of your injunctions I came to this battle-field to lay down my life. If I were to live, there was yet a chance of Shaibalini's mind being unsettled some time or other. Hence I take my leave."

Ramananda Swami was melted into tears. No one else had ever seen that generous flow in Ramananda's eyes before. "You are a true philanthropist in this world," said Ramananda Swami, "we are mere sham. In the life to come yours is certain heaven—heaven eternal and without diminution.'

After a short silence Ramanada Swami continued, 'Listen my son, I have penetrated your heart. The conquest of the world itself cannot compare with the conquest of your passions. Did you love Shaibalini?"

The sleeping lion was roused. The corpse-like Protap suddenly grew strong and electrified, and roared out in a frenzied vehemence. "What canst thou understand, thou ascetic! Who is there in this world that can comprehend this love of mine? Who can appreciate how passionately I have loved Shaibalini for the last sixteen years! My attachment is not of the flesh—it is another name for a yearning for self-sacrifice. In my veins, in my blood, in my very bones, this love has

circulated day and night. Man did never know of it, and never could. Oh, why did you introduce this subject in my parting moments! I know that this love is destined only to bring forth evil, therefore I resign my being. My mind is tainted. Who can say Shaibalini's mind will not fail again! There is no remedy for it except my death; hence I surrender my life. You are now in possession of this hidden secret—you are wise, you are familiar with the *Shastras*, tell me what is the atonement for my sin. Am I guilty in the eye of God? If so, can my present atonement wipe off my guilt?"

"I do not know," replied Ramananda Swami. "Human intelligence is powerless here; the *Shastras* are mute; it is only the Lord of that sphere where you are going, who can answer this question. But this much I can tell you, that if there is any merit in the subjugation of the senses, then eternal heaven is yours. If there is any virtue in the control of feelings, then even the gods are not virtuous like you. If there is heaven in self-abnegation, then your right to it is even greater than that of *Dadhichi*.[1] May I be as successful in the subjugation of the senses in my life to come, is my earnest prayer!"

Ramananda Swami ceased. Slowly Protap's life ebbed out. On a grassy bed lay the golden tree of spotless brilliancy.

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[1] Once on a time, so says the *Mahabharata*, the gods were hard pressed by the demons. The former then went to Bramha, the creator, for advice and redress. Bramha told them to go to a holy sage by name Dadhichi and ask for his bones, by which they would be able to make thunderbolts for the destruction of the demons. On the gods approaching Dadhichi and representing to him the sore straits in which they had been placed by the demons, he gladly yielded up his breath. The gods then took his bones, made thunderbolts out of them and drove the demons away.

Adieu, adieu to thee, O Protap! Go to the eternal home; go, where there is no trouble in the subjugation of the senses; where there is no glamour in beauty; where there is no sin in love; where beauty is infinite, love boundless, happiness inexhaustible, and in that happiness endless virtue. Go there, where one feels for another; where one's duties are performed by another; where one sings the praise of another; where one is not made to suffer for another. Go to that abode of supreme glory; a hundred thousand Shaibalinis at the end of your feet will not tempt you to a woman's love again.