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THE DURBAR PROCESSION.

रेणुकाराजं

A Romance of Ancient India

BY

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Author of "Power of Innocence," etc

ANNOTATED AND FURNISHED WITH
COMPREHENSIVE GLOSSARY

BOMBAY

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KALYANA (fair, lovely), Princess of Hastinapur, daughter of Ojas

UTPALA (water lily, lotus), a Sudra maid, reincarnation of Kalyana

AMORAPAMA (like a god), Raja of Panchala, afterwards Maharaja of Hastinapur

KAVI (wise, possessed of insight, seer, sage), Brahman priest, friend and confidant of Amorapama

AGRA (army leader), lover of Kalyana, and Raja of Grandhara

OJAS (strength, power), Maharaja of Hastinapur

KUMARA (eternally youthful god of war), son of Amorapama

CHOLA (deceit, pretence, disguise), cup bearer of Amorapama

SARPA (snake), trusted general of Amorapama

KUÇALA (able, clever, fit), an emissary

VIMARDA (destruction, disturbance), Raja of Dwaraka.

KARA (the busy one), faithful Sudra

CALYAKA (hedgehog), disowned son of Ojas

ULUPI, Sudra foster mother of Kumara

MAKIRU, High-priest of Rudra

रुद्रः

Book One—The Crime

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

A few introductory words will not be deemed amiss if their perusal shall help the reader to a better understanding of "Rudra"

The Rudra bird appearing so often in the story is merely a symbol, and, while we cannot point to any prototype in the writings of the Vedic Hindus, it is nevertheless believed to be consonant with the mysticism of this early people and times

In localizing places the excellent map of J Talboys Wheeler in his "History of India," was used, and the calculation of distances was made by the scale of that map

Kavi, the priest, is the forerunner of Buddha Gautama, the great religious philosopher and founder of Buddhism, and in the reincarnation of Kalyana use has been made of the basic principle of that very important religious philosophy

The character of Utpala may shock Twentieth Century

orthodoxy, yet is she thought a justifiable creation, for, when it is remembered that more than one third of the entire population of the world to-day are Buddhists, and consequently believers in the doctrine of reincarnation of the soul, the employment of this principle of faith for the purpose of developing the narrative will seem less extravagant if not entirely justifiable Nor should we brush aside contemptuously this belief whose dawn antedates Christianity by nearly six centuries and whose influence has been and is immeasurable

In the opening chapter of Book II, the reader sees the participants in the phantom banquet through Amorapama's eyes, and the dialogue is with persons who have existence only in realm of hallucination For this scene we have historical precedent in the life of Ludwig II of Bavaria, who, in the advanced period of his mental malady, held similar imaginary feasts with royal personages of French history

The incident of Amorapama's unhealable wound is intended to suggest the soul-hurt rendered incurable by remorse, and has its counterpart in the case of Amfortas, the wounded knight in Wagner's famous and last opera Parsifal, although for the manner of its employment to serve the uses of the narrative some originality is claimed.

With these few preliminary words as guides, we step into an imaginary tribune to watch the moving spectacle that shall be presented in the arena of stirring events.

CHAPTER II

A PREHISTORIC CITY[1]

In the region of the Maha Bharata[2] on the east bank of the Sacred River Ganges, scarce five and sixty miles northeast of ancient Delhi, and north by west some two hundred miles, or thereabouts, from Kanouj, inconspicuous and long forgotten mounds, broken, shapeless stones and shattered columns, in part hidden by rank weeds and low growing shrubbery, mark the spot where the Kuru tribe had built and once had stood and flourished one of the first cities of the Aryan colonies, Hastinapur. King Hastin gave to it his name

Here lived in state and ruled with justice, the aged Maharaja Ojas, whose vast territory was in part arable and pasture lands, and skirted by dense forest wilds and dark jungles, here dwelt fierce barbarian hordes called Rakshasas and Asuras

Betwixt these and the brave Aryans, a deep, insatiable hate and exterminating blood-lust, the marauds and depredations kept alive.

[1] See Maha Bharata Map of India—Wheeler's India, I

[2] The learned Brahmans—the Maha Bharata is ascribed to Vyasa—wove into two colossal verse poems, one for the west of India, one for the east, all the mass of tradition, demonology, and hero-worship The Maha Bharata has nearly 100,000 couplets It is the story of the "Great War" between the Kurus and Panchalas—Frazer's Lit. Hist. of India, p 213

The rajputs were of the warrior caste and owed allegiance to their raja, who was again in fealty bound to the Maharaja, or great raja, and, when the call to arms was sounded through the length and breadth of that unposted and uncharted waste of varied land, none was so bold as to dare refuse a prompt, unquestioning response

These fair-faced colonists must contend with savage, predatory hordes who stole their cattle and their wives and children, and with fierce brutality destroyed newbuilt villages, and, amid the smouldering wreck of erstwhile homes, held wild, animistic orgies, invoking their gods

Then came the rajputs' vengeance, quick, deadly and relentless, and many black, blood-stained bodies would mark the spot where Hindu ire had found its fearful vent Bold and swift in action, firm of purpose, and unflinching in time of danger were these warrior bands To these and their untiring, skilful labors, their patience and devoted industry, fair India owes the splendid dawn of her wondrous history

Wheresoever they went they drove out the black, flat-nosed, thick-lipped barbarian race, and carried their proud civilization, spreading their gentle religious faith, which differed from the superstitious idol worship and animism of these aborigines By process of expansion their rajes were extended northward to the foot hills of the majestic Himalayas, on the south as far as the slow flowing River Nerbudda, while the western limit ended at the Sacred Indus, and the River Ganges marked the eastern

The raja was the tribal chief, he was elected [1] and he governed with absolute power, save that he must obey as

[1] The king was elected from the chieftains, but the office soon became hereditary—Frazer's Lit Hist of Ind, p 21

his subjects must, the might of the Maharaja s will. Each in his raj held court, supported armies and exercised royal prerogatives

Hastinapur was walled about with heavy masonry many feet in thickness, and further served with ramparts, buttresses and watch-towers These defences were much needed, since savage tribes had no fear of iron-tipped, death-dealing arrow, nor javelin, nor gleaming spear, nor keen-edged sword Yet of the horse they were afraid It filled their superstitious minds with fear of supernatural prowess, for they believed it was a being of another world [1]

The streets of this prehistoric city were narrow, crooked, unpaved and flanked by houses of unequal height, some built of wood and others of stone and brick White and yellow, green and red being the predominant color tones, time in passing had imparted softness to their values

In the quarters where dwelt the poor in foul-smelling alleys, one-story wattle and daub huts in grotesque confusion gave indifferent shelter from the blistering sun and torrential rains In other streets, well kept and filled with gay-apparelled throngs, the traffic of the times was done, and splendid shops well furnished, orderly bazaars, lined these fair streets, and, with lure of pretty things that please the eye and move the covetousness of man, these streets made most popular resorts

Here in the afternoon and evening of a day, a merry, jostling, chattering crowd of men and women with their little ones was wont to congregate for barter and for gossip

In dazzling array were spread the crisp and shining

[1] See Rig Veda, IV, 38, 5, 8.

silks from China's looms, and skins, some striped, some mottled, in brown, yellow, gray and black, from the bodies of the jungle beasts and brought on human backs from Himalaya's frigid heights, were to be seen, and jewelry of exquisite design and skilful workmanship was here for purchase of the maids and matrons, their gallants and generous husbands, if such they had

Pearls, pale, delicate, like tear drops turned to precious stones, in necklace strung, vied with the gleaming sapphire's lustrous blue, and the pigeon-blood ruby, set in anklets, bracelets, brooch and earrings, made color riot to win the spendthrift prodigality of the rich

Iron breastplates burnished to a gleaming glow reflected the sun's bright rays and threw forth shafts of blinding light [1]

In the open space in the centre of the city was the market-place, where flesh of bull and ram and produce from the field, wheat and barley, were supplied to hungry Hindus for feast of raja and the meagre wants of Sudras. Here luscious fruits from distant orchards and Soma wine [2] for gods and men, were sold All these things and others, too, were displayed to tease the poor and please the rich

Here rajput warriors touched elbows with the despised Sudras, and often, too, on pleasant afternoons, when cooling winds dispelled the heat, great rajas would strut about with pompous pride Their retinues of courtiers, archers, charioteers and men-at-arms first clear the way for their lordly feet to walk The raja gazes with

[1] Wheeler's Hist. Ind, 25

[2] Beverage from Soma plant Used by gods and men Max Muller in Biography of Words, p 234, suggests that hops and Soma are the same thing

haughty eye at fair damsel or matron's well-moulded form, nor is beguiled by twinkling eye or soul-deep sighs the women have bestowed

On festal days, when the Maharaja, with display of piety, performed his public sacrificial duties to the gods, the public square before the palace gates would throng with motley multitudes that held each division of society, from lordly raja in splendid show of silks and spotless linen, to the wretched Sudras who to live must serve, that others living may be well served

The ignominious mountebank and juggler gathers round him curious, gaping, staring crowds whom superstitious awe holds in the thrall of wonder at the marvel of his tricks, and they pay him well for the antics, quaint and curious, which he dexterously performs

The grave-faced, white-robed priests lead the procession through the marble gates into the octagonal walled court and chant in passing Indra's [1] praises in unblent voices, but with solemn air Thus the god is importuned to send them rain that the land may give forth a generous harvest The numerous throng attuned to reverential thought, kneels in fervent prayer, while the priests intone afresh the Vedas' tender plea

"Oh, Lord of the Field! bestow on us sweet and pure and butter-like and delicious and copious rain, even as the cows give milk May the Lords of the Water bless us May the crops be sweet unto us, may the skies and the rains and the firmament be full of sweetness, may the Lord of the Fold be gracious to us We will follow him unharmed by foes"

[1] In his hand Indra carries the flaming lightning, he is seated upon a golden chariot and by his side the storm gods or Maruts ride through the heavens with all the rush and fury of tempests.—Frazer's Lit Hist of Ind, p 53

"Let the oxen work merrily, let the men work merrily; let the plough move merrily Fasten the traces merrily; ply the goad merrily"

"Oh, Suna and Sira accept this hymn Moisten the earth with the rain you have created in the sky"[1]

Then the Maharaja makes oblations, gives cakes and Soma wine wherewith the gods shall feast, and, in return for sacrificial gifts bestowed, bless the land, bless their arms and bless the "great raja," Ojas It is very solemn and all their hearts are lifted up, the great Truth inspires a noble faith, and Indra, Supreme God of the land, smiles and sends rich blessings

Ojas' palace[2] stood on a lofty eminence that overlooked the city and a splendid stretch of fertile valley beyond The far-off, rose-tinted hills are cut sharply on the luminous sky, the slow flowing Ganges sparkles like a bejewelled silver band in Vishnu's blaze

It was a massive, rectangular pile of white marble, grotesquely carved in pictorial legends of the heroic deeds of the House of Hastinapur

A circular dome of moderate height surmounted the vast structure, and around its base and on the palace[3] roof a dainty garden of rarest grace and indefinable charm was laid out Here grew tall palms with wide-spreading, fan-like leaves that cast a grateful shade, and gleaming gravel walks wound tortuously through blossoming beds and low cut shrubbery. Fountains shaped

[1] Rig Veda, IV, 57

[2] There are allusions in the Rig Veda to "Mansions with a thousand pillars"—Dutt, Ep Ind Hist, 22

[3] Kings sat decked with gold and jewels in a palace with a thousand pillars and a thousand doors.—Rig Veda, VIII, 5-38; I, 85, 8, X, 78-1.

like beings of another world, weirdly fantastic, threw up a crystal spray that fell with monotonous rhythm into the basin's limpid pool, flowers of unrivalled splendor breathed sweet odors, and birds in gorgeous plumage sang far into the soul-solacing calm of the starlit summer night

And when Varuna [1] spread his deep blue, star-gemmed mantle over the sleeping, breathing land and sent his royal favor in mellow, mystifying moonbeams upon the dome, then would it gleam like a burnished silver hemisphere, and the palace would appear white and spectral in the melodious shadows of the zephyr-kissed majestic palms

It was a sight to thrill, to awe, to stir the soul with grand emotions and move the mind to noblest thought.

Within the palace were many noble chambers to serve the various purposes for which they were designed.

A treasure vault, high-walled and strongly guarded, was set apart to keep safely the Maharaja's tax and tribute store. In simple mode were accurately kept the records of the rise and fall, the ebb and flow of the financial tide In strong, iron-bound chests Ojas' mighty show of wealth was stored

A dining hall one hundred feet in length, and not quite one-half again as wide, of carved and incrusted marble and ceiled with painted rafters, received its light by day and had its ventilation from tall arched window openings.

By night the hall was lit by flaming lamps that burned sweet incense as they flooded all with soft and mellow light.

Here rajas, rich in lands and cattle, were received with pomp and ceremonial, and fed on toothsome meats and

[1] God of night.

sweetened cakes, and copious libations to the grateful gods in India's soul-perfuming Soma wine were drunk far into the speeding night

The song of sweet-voiced singers filled the place, and dancing girls of tenderest beauty and fascinating charm, with lightsome foot and rhythmic sway of arms and body, ravished the senses. A smile would at such a time spread over the Maharaja's clear-cut face, and his deep-set, black, burning, penetrating eyes would gleam in merriment at some young raja's youth, which spoke in telltale flush and eyes' dilation as the dance revealed the beauty of the dancer

There were chambers for the night's repose and mid-day rest, and these in splendor housed the sleepers' dreams; and of their kind there were many, for Ojas had much need of them when for some solemn feast or treaty-making the rajput chiefs assembling came to make obeisance to the chief of chiefs—then talked of war impending or solemnized a feast of peace new made

Chambered all apart were games of chance with dice, the favorite sport of kings and men Here, on the fateful fall of the ivory cube, a favorite steed, a bag of gold or Zenana favorite might change[1] its owner Here in this secluded room scenes of bloody conflict were enacted, for the avarice of man is older than the oldest hills, and ill-favoring chance would beget a brawl in which one or another of the deluded fools was killed But there was small concern for this, since, happening so many times, it was no longer matter for wonder.

Secluded and shielded from inquisitive eye was the Maharaja's much coveted Zenana—the women's apartment, where safely housed in royal state were the great

[1] Maha Bharata—Wheeler Short Hist Ind, 14.

chief's most valued gems For, though old in years, his eye was still keen, his pulses beat in faster measure at sight of woman's heart-controlling charm

Beautiful were they and vain who had won the Maharaja's favoring glance, and had their ravishments approved

The erstwhile queen was long since gone to the realm of shades to abide in Yama's[1] kindly care

In a commodious chamber, adorned in gold and blue and hung with glowing draperies with fairest prospect of garden and mountain scene, over which Vishnu, the sun god, at eventide threw the tender spell of twilight and impressed his parting kiss on the western sky, dwelt the beautiful Kalyana, favorite daughter of the Maharaja.

Dearer than all the uncounted wealth in treasure vault, more prized than the purest jewel in his royal diadem, sweeter than the rarest flower that ever bloomed in Paradise, was the loving child to the doting father.

Kalyana, this queen of queens of his paternal love, was marvellously beautiful Her soft tinted, oval face was lit by two unfathomable, blue-black eyes, and her full, red lips wore a smile as delicate as a waft of perfumed air; the glow of her hair made rivalry with the glorious gloom of her shaded eyes, and in her rounded cheeks two sportive dimples played and made frolic with passing moods when she would smile,—which was a nearly constant thing, since she was light of heart and merry-mooded, and often, with a teeth-revealing smile or care-free laugh, lured from her father's face a frown, however trouble-deep its carving

Light, graceful, free as the blowing wind, was Kalyana, and the harmony of actions was resident in per-

[1] Yama, brother of Yami, was the ruler of the spirit world.

fect poise of her well-proportioned body She had just begun to feel the virgin thrill, and the velvety tones of her tender, thrilling voice spoke an inarticulate love as yet unset

Her maiden dreams were peopled with sweet thoughts of love, nor yet had found one on whom its precious gift was to be bestowed But the day of destiny Kama,[1] the mischievous god of love, appointed, was nearly come, and with its dawn a new life would begin

Her delicious thoughts would be freighted with a sense more tender than the vibration of perfected harmony Then she would quiver and be thrilled—tremble in the unresisted embrace of pure emotion

Floating on the placid waters of a pellucid sea while ravishing cadences fill the air, her world takes on the grandeur of a heaven perfected.

* * * * * *

The Maharaja had appointed a magnificent feast, to which were called the best young blood of the land There were to be tests of strength in handling war clubs of tremendous weight, trials of skill in archery and swordsmanship, conducted in the manner of the times as mock battles

Great was the concourse that had assembled at Ojas' invitation

In an arena fit to hold ten thousand souls and more the contest was waged At the end of the circular enclosure, and near one of the palace gates, a tribune, overhung with gold-embroidered, silken canopy, had been erected to receive the Maharaja and his gallant court. Around and on lower tiers, the non-contesting rajas and their followings found accommodation, while the arena's

[1]Kama, the Aryan Cupid.

centre, kept clear of trampling feet and rolled to perfect levelness, was set apart for the coming fray

The day dawned propitiously and a cooling wind blew from the west that set the palms and moss-grown deodars in gentle swaying motion

As each victory marked the one for victor, the pale-faced Hindu maiden beside the Maharaja sighed and tried to hide the tension of her nerves, for those blue-black eyes of hers had seen the man, and in that gaze the soul went forth and gave itself in fond imprisonment. And when the last trial passed accredited him the victor, she gasped aloud and with bated breath and thrilling sense repeated the herald's proclamation

"Agra is the victor"

The tumult of huzzas broke out afresh and Agra's name was on ten thousand tongues, while he, calm, though breathing hard from the strain just past, stood forth in blaze of burning sunlight, unmoved alike by the approving clamor as by the difficult feats he had performed His eyes were brilliant with excitement, and fixed their steady look upon the Maharaja's child, who he well knew would award the prize

With priestly escort he mounted the steps that led to the tribune, and as his foot rested upon the topmost step, the aged chief in deep and resonant tones to Agra spoke

"Agra, Raja of Gandhara, thy prowess with the battle club and sword, and thy skill in archery have earned our admiration and regard Fair, indeed, has been thy fame of which we heard, but this well earned victory makes it greater still Accept, young prince, the welcome due thy caste and merit Receive from the beautiful Kalyana the flower crown of victory"

The Maharaja's voice had scarce died away when the

popular acclaim was again renewed, and with tremendous shout attested approval of the great raja's fitting words.

Kalyana rose at signal from her sire, and the princess of the House of Hastinapur placed the wreath of flowers on Agra's sable locks, and in that fleeting moment four searching, hungry eyes were lost in a long, delicious gaze; two hearts in frantic beats their love entanglement confessed.

A sweet, soft, cooing voice, scarce more than whisper, said:

"Agra, I crown thee victor," and a deep but quavering voice pronounced the precious name.

"Kalyana."

CHAPTER III

RAJA AND PHILOSOPHER

On the east bank of the Ganges, a full two hundred miles southeast of Hastinapur, Amorapama, Raja of Panchala[1], held sway His father's then impending death had kept away the young prince from Ojas' feast.

He was bold, high-principled and much inclined to speculative thought Earnestly had he reflected on the philosophy of the Vedas, often disputed with his friend and priest, the noble Kavi, and though their discursive journeys were tortuous, no definite agreement had as yet been reached. Each believed his faith was right, and neither could swerve the other from doctrine firmly fixed. And though they disagreed, their arguments were always kindly meant, and their friendship never suffered from religious difference For both were honest in their thoughts, and each respected the other's views

Kavi took joy and pride in Amorapama's strength and skill, for which in early youth he had been far ahead of other boys of equal or of even greater age His manhood proved fulfilment of youth's prophecy, for the prince was counted among the best in all manly sports and athletic exercise Had Amorapama tried his mettle against Agra's skill, it is not likely he would have won so easily

Like Agra, Amorapama was young in years, scarce

[1] Maha Bharata, Map, Wheeler's Ind, I.

twenty, strong, lithe, and possessed of great nimbleness. His eye was keen, his nerve steady, which qualities combined made him a foe worthy the best antagonist None deadlier in aim, surer in stroke, or steadier in combat could be found in all the land of Panchala

His legs were corded with tough muscle, and his arms by constant practice in tension swelled to knotty mounds. Tall was he and finely formed, and vigor and agility gave him manly grace, and his fresh, strong face that spoke of character and resolution was framed in beard and flowing moustache His full, deep voice could win and woo the heart of captious maid or froward dame, and so of equal merit was he in battle or love's emprise

The Raja of Panchala, his father, had passed into the land where Yama is gentle to the man of merit in this life And by the raja's death the son succeeded to the father's place to rule the raj, command obedience from the rajput army, and gain fame in war and repute in peace And now that he was grown to proper age to wed, it soon would be his anxious care to find a mate through whom the line would be preserved, and an heir be born to follow in the father's honors and keep alive the traditions of the noble house

The prince was stern and of a mould in matters of the heart unmoved, yet had he learned to love his father well, for the raja, though like his son stern and fierce in rage, had been ever gentle to the growing boy, so in youth he had won his love, which manhood's better sense and judgment confirmed.

The solemn funeral rites were done, the pyre was cold and the honored ashes now reposed in cinerary urn that was beauteous in form and wrought in gold and set with resplendent gems.

Amorapama's accession had been made memorable by seven days of celebration when the palace was overrun by happy rioters, and great and small, rich and poor, made rivalry in bestowing honors and swearing loyal fealty even unto death

Amorapama was gratified to find himself so well esteemed and favored, and so, as was the time-honored custom, in honor of his new position, and to win the favoring will of all the gods, he made sacrifices and gave of bread and wine, and in charity bestowed large sums so that the poor might, with the better served, have participation in the joys of life

On the ninth day, in late afternoon, Amorapama sat at his chamber window, and with half-shut, meditative eyes, looked out upon the scene that lay solemn and calm before him The excitement of the passing days had now subsided, and a sense almost oppressive fell upon the young raja's mood He pondered long and deeply on life, on death and its hidden mystery, and the uncertain state that follows after death—of death and all its gruesome significance—on these and kindred things his strong mind dwelt, and as the departing day gave a regal greeting to Vivasvat[1], and lit the western sky with royal splendor, the curtains parted, and Kavi, his friend and confidant, in pure white robes that hung in graceful folds on his tall, slender form, stepped slowly in and stood still awhile until Amorapama by a subtle sense felt his presence, turning, he gave his friend a cordial greeting.

"Ah, good Kavi, thy coming is most opportune. The feasting past, my spirit is oppressed with sense of grave responsibility. How long shall I live? For what end

[1] The sky

was I a raja born? Canst thou with thy keen and philosophic mind ease the mental travail of thy friend?" and the raja smiled in gentle courtesy and bade his friend to sit beside him at the window seat

Kavi, with grave bow, sat down beside him, then slowly and with deliberation made reply

"Thou hast two grave questions asked—each a puzzle 'How long shalt thou live?' Ah, Amorapama, it may be from the greeting to the parting of the twins,[1] it may be for many moons, or it may be thou shalt dwell in this present sphere as long as did thy honored sire. The gods alone can answer thee, for they alone can know. And I think it were not wise for us to know the length of time we shall in this estate be suffered by the gods to live. Vishnu, the Great Preserver, has us all within his ken, and he might but will not give us sign or token of his hidden purpose Let this content thee, noble friend, each moment of our living may be the last, then so let us live our lives that we may have no vain regret they were not better lived, for whether spent in good or evil, our allotted days will return to us for no better spending"

"Which means that virtue should not be postponed," gravely Amorapama said, as if but speaking to himself

"Yea, Amorapama, it is even as thou supposest And now to answer thy second question 'For what purpose wert thou a raja born?' In birth we have no choice, and whether 'twice born'[2] or no, we can make no resistance to the law of nature, which is benevolent Indra's law. For good I take it we were born Life is a trust for us to keep, and of it such uses make that in the end the gods

[1] The Asvins—Light and Darkness

[2] The priest and warrior and merchant castes were "twice born" and wore the thread of the "twice born."

will have no cause to grieve. As living creatures we are a part of the Universal Soul; from it we come, to it we shall return in course of time, provided we shall live to purify ourselves of the resident evil in our hearts. That thou art raja born is surely due to no act of thine, and wert thou a low Sudra instead of prince, thou still wouldst be a part of this Universal Soul, and in this sense as raja thou art no greater than if Sudra born"

"A strange philosophy, good Kavi"

"Nay, not so strange, for see, it is decreed there always must be the high and low, the rich and poor, the wise and foolish, the noble and the mean, the just and the unjust, for of such incongruous elements is the sum total of life made up As part of the Universal Spirit we may be born again and even again, but in the end we shall return from whence we came In each state into which we come we must, by religious thought and holy living, please the gods and so attain an equal place in Yama's peaceful groves There will we be alike and caste shall cease to be"

"Then shall I be like the bartering Vaisyas[1] or the menial Sudras[2] in this after world of which thou speakest?"

"Truly, such is what I believe."

Amorapama grew silent and pondered deeply on Kavi's philosophy At last he spoke

"But Kavi, art quite convinced thy faith is true—that it is not some wretched man-made fallacy, some mental snare to catch our poor, uncertain thoughts? Dost thou believe the venerated gods we worship are in truth true gods? That what they teach is their real will and not

[1] Merchant class

[2] The lowest caste.

some priest-made juggle of the brain—some miserable phantasy got up by self-deluded dreamers or some charlatan's trick for our deluding?"

"Nay, what matter what it is so it shall serve to make us better men? If our gods are not true gods, if their teachings are not true, if they whom we revere are man-created phantasies—their teachings still are for our good, and in following their precepts, be the after-world a place of bliss or mere oblivion, we shall leave behind an aroma sweeter than the sandal-wood, and our righteous deeds are like to be graven monuments that unborn generations shall pause to study, emulate, and so be bettered because we lived before them. For it is written, 'In the beginning the Golden Child existed He was the Lord of all from his birth He placed the earth and sky in their proper places Whom shall we worship with offerings?'

"'Him who has given life and strength, whose will is obeyed by all gods, whose shadow is immortality, and whose slave is Death Whom shall we worship with offerings?'

"'Him who by his power is the sole king of all the living beings that see and move, him who is the Lord of all bipeds and quadrupeds Whom shall we worship with offerings?'[1]

"Thus speaks the Rig Veda, and canst thou further doubt, dear Amorapama?'

"Doubt? Yea, Kavi, I shall never cease to doubt, for it is in my nature ever to doubt", and Amorapama's face was marked with deep lines of thought

"Thou art a raja, rich and powerful, for what end? That those whose lives are dependent on thy power may

[1] Rig Veda, X, 121.

be better for its exercise in their behalf The d ' ence then between the high and low, rich and poor, i. re- sponsibility the nobler state begets This is the tr .st— thy birth, dear Amorapama, of which thou art a stew- ard", and Kavi smiled

" 'Tis a gentle philosophy, and good," Amorapama ac- quiesced

"How knowest thou then 'tis gentle and good?" Kavi asked with flashing eye and earnest mien

"Why—ah—I cannot say I feel it is—I know 'tis gentle and therefore good," Amorapama stammeringly replied

"Ah, this knowledge—this certain sense that comes to thee and says ' 'Tis gentle and 'tis good', is a fixed law within Atman [1], and, as we are but a part of the Uni- versal Essence, when we return to it, we must be as we began—be like that Universal Soul, else were we not so, gloriously encompassed"

"Saying which thou wouldst have me know that we can return to it only if we are as we came away Is it not so?"

"Yea, even so, Amorapama The true philosophy is to thee like milk that flows from mother's breast to nur- ture an infant nature"

"Friend," the raja began afresh and looked earnestly into the philosopher's calm face, "I often wonder at thee—wonder that thou hast led such strange, such un- common life Thou hast no joys like our joys, no griefs like our griefs, hast never known the passionate thrill of human love—hast not yielded and dost not give way to desire for amorous embrace Thou art apart, single, isolated, uncommon, noble—how came thou thus?"

[1] Soul

Kavi smiled and shook his head, then answered calmly:

"Because I was taught that our joys, whether of love or ambition, are like the toys we give to children for the time to occupy their little minds until they shall grow older and comprehend graver toys. So are our joys mere toys we play with, and in time shall cast away and take up with another kind, which, too, in turn we soon ignore, then part from with contempt. Thus, with joys, we are boys with toys, but older grown. But I was never boy with toy, nor ever boyish man, nor played with mannish toys, the joys of life—of love and ambition's game. In serious meditation my mental strength has been employed, and so, aloof from life in life, I live alone, yet not alone, and in making the joys of others my joys, their sorrows mine, I can do them more good, myself less harm, against a future state than if I joyed and loved as others do."

"A lonesome sort of living, Kavi."

"Nay, scarce that, for in having no joy, I have no sorrow, and in the lacking of the one, I have fair substitute for the other, and again the kindly philosopher smiled and his friend was puzzled.

"Vac[1] the eloquent goddess hath touched thy tongue and whispered the Gayatri[2] in thy noble ear." Then he spoke the great hymn with dignity, "'Tat Savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayat.'"

"Ah, it is indeed a wearisome task this reasoning—for it begins at somewhere, leadeth to anywhere, and at last arrives at nowhere. I——"

[1] Vac, Goddess of Speech, Rig Veda, X, 125.

[2] Gayatri was whispered as a birthright of the "twice born" in their ear by their spiritual preceptors, it means "Let us meditate on the to-be-longed-for light of the Inspirer, may it incite all our efforts."

The sentence remained unfinished, for a slave dashed in and fell prostrate before the raja, who at his unceremonious entrance had risen In consternation and with gasping breath he muttered·

"Oh, great raja, the Dasyu [1] are come upon our lands and burn our villages, kill our people and steal our cattle."

"What's this? Speak!" Amorapama asked huskily, for a tale of woe moved his quick sympathies to speedy action.

"Word hath come by courier just arrived, he waits an audience"

Amorapama looked at Kavi's unmoved face, then said.

"Bid the courier to come at once"

The slave departed and before the raja could frame his excited thoughts in speech, a dusty, pale-faced, haggard, travel-stained man had fallen at the raja's feet.

"Arise, good friend, and tell us of this report we have of the Dasyu revolt Speak!"

The courier slowly rose and his face twitched in pain and a dizziness was in his brain, yet by power of his strong will his mind cleared for a time, and he told the harrowing details of his message

"Three days since," the man with faltering speech began, "the Dasyu fell on our frontier fort at Kasi [2] They seemed more numerous than the jungle trees and near as tall and our poor force was all too weak to give them battle At call to arms the women and the children that could be reached in time were brought into the citadel,

[1] Dasyu or Dasa—the black aborigines whom the Aryans exterminated.

[2] Prehistoric city, probably site of present Benares.—Maha Bharata Map, Wheeler's Ind., I.

while the rajputs battled with the demon horde Terrible was the slaughter and after a gallant fight they were forced to fall behind our strong stockade, from which our arrows sped into the frenzied black-skinned tribe Then night came on and all was quiet for a time When the moon had risen we could see the camp that stretched almost around the hill on which our citadel is built Our sentinels were posted to guard against surprise and so with nerves at tension and in waking dread, we anxiously awaited the morning's dawn At last the eastern rim of sky was pierced by shafts of yellow light and the morning, warm and fair, had come I was standing at my post from which a good view of their camp was had Suddenly an ear-splitting scream tore the air and as I looked I saw—Oh Gods! the horrible sight—I see it now"

"Go on, go on, man, do not keep us in suspense—what didst thou see?" and Amorapama's eyes were blazing coals of fire

"The black demons," the man resumed in choking voice, "had seized a woman from whom the clothing had been torn and lifting her shrinking, quivering, writhing body, tied her to a pole and laid her on two crotched upright sticks, face downward Then they kindled a fire beneath, as the tongues of flame scorched her, she screamed in agony and the demons danced and yelled and stuck their pointed lances into her roasting flesh At last her cries were stilled and her charred body, now but a shapeless mass, collapsed into the smouldering fire Yama rest her soul!"

The man's voice died away in a piteous moan and his bleeding hands were spread across his face as if to shut from view the ghastly sight he had described

Appalled with horror, and trembling in the grip of

pent-up passion, Amorapama stood and waited for the ending of the gruesome tale

At last the courier's self-control was restored, and he resumed

"We knew unless some outside help would come we must fare as that poor woman did It was decided by our commandant someone should go to fetch succor and so I volunteered Quickly I saddled my favorite horse and was about to start when my child, but six years' old, with tears streaming from her eyes, asked for her mother I took my baby in my arms and we hunted for her mother, but she was nowhere to be found I guessed what inquiry failed to disclose Her desecrated ashes were out there in the field, the sport of passing winds My child is motherless—my wife is dead—burned by the demons—tortured—and her screams reached my ears and I did not know—could not save her Oh Gods! I cannot go on—I cannot and the grief-stricken warrior sobbed and moaned and rocked in grief's relentless grip

Amorapama's face was pallid now with emotion and Kavi's kindly face was clouded by a frown

'Enough!" Amorapama cried in horror, "thy tale would move a stone to tears Go, get thee food and drink and rest a while lest madness of grief dethrone thy reason" Then the black slaves led the fainting warrior from the room

"Come, Kavi—come to work" He paused, then lifting his hand to heaven said in muffled voice

"By Indra I swear this poor man's grief shall be avenged Hear me, Indra, and may thy destroying power turn my sword to thunderbolts that I may strike and kill" Followed by Kavi, he left the chamber.

Less than two hours sped their course and Amorapama

started at the head of a band of well-mounted men five hundred strong, some armed with bow and arrows and sheathed sword, while others bore long iron-tipped javelins and some carried spiked war-clubs, wherewith to do most deadly execution

They had heard the tale and nearly all of them were husbands and some of them fathers, too, so they needed no incentive but the deadly call of vengeance for the dastard deed described

Kavi astride a pure white horse with flowing mane and tail rode by the raja's side His eyes were veiled in sadness and his manner was subdued His sweet philosophy of a few hours gone was turned to bitter gall, while Amorapama's brain was seething with mad lust for blood Neither spoke now of benevolent forgiveness, of pure thinking and righteous living, but hate, cold, relentless, was their gospel now Avenging weapons were sharpened for the sacrificial service and the cruel, not the benevolent gods, were importuned

Far into the night they rode, then camped for a few hours' rest at a desert well where man and beast could be refreshed.

No one spoke and commands were given in hushed whispers and passed along from mouth to mouth for fear a spying ear might hear and bring the ruthless enemy from cover of a tree or hiding bush Thus day and night they rode across the desert waste, pausing only at intervals to give both men and horses needed food, drink and rest.

On the dawn of the third day, just as a pink glow like a dainty breath of color illumined the horizon line, the lofty citadel of Kasi came in sight Then muscles contracted so that they ached, and teeth were clenched until

jaws grew numb with pain while the thought of fearful vengeance filled each mind.

At base of the citadel's vine-grown hill, and encircling it, several thousand black-skinned fiends[1] awaited the taking of the fort, when would follow horrors unspeakable: battling warriors would be put to death, crying children slaughtered, and defenseless women used for animistic sacrifice, and, that the cruelty might be more maddening, within sight of husbands and the children were these acts of horror to be done

The black wretches are at their orisons They writhe and dance and squirm and twist and circle round their serpent idol posed on pedestal within their circling dance. Moaning and chanting in weirdest cadence, they fall prostrate and with their black, shining foreheads strike the earth in quick succession, then leaping to their feet with fiendish yell they resume their circling, groaning dance.

At the idol's base a blazing fire burns, and its sacrificial flames like serpent tongues are hissing for a human victim to be offered to mollify their fearful, coiling, mottle-skinned god.

The Hindus have reached a sheltered spot a dozen leagues removed from the demon camp, where in a shady grove behind a bit of rising ground and hid from sentinel view, they now invoke beneficent Indra to bless their arms.

The dismounted rajputs kneel around Kavi's tall, commanding form and in reverential mood lift up their

[1] So referred to in the Vedic hymns "Their ancient race-name Dasyu, or 'enemy,' thus grew to signify goblin or devil, as the old Teutonic word for enemy or the 'hater' (modern German feind) has become the English fiend"—Hunter, Br Hist Ind Peoples, 41

thoughts as good men should before embarking on a dangerous undertaking.

Amorapama, pale and stern, his black beard casting shadows, is, like the rest, upon his knees, but his mind is not on holy things, on Indra's mercy, or the beneficent god's potential aid His hot blood courses through his veins, his pulses beat in fearful riot and his clenched hand, grasping hilt of sword, is corded with straining sinews as with self-control he holds in check the fierce impulse that would impel to immediate action

Calmly the sweet voice of Kavi pronounced the Vedic prayer·

" 'Indra protects his A'rya worshipper in the wars He who protects him on countless occasions protects him in all wars He flays the enemy of his dark skin, kills him and reduces him to ashes He burns those who are harmful and cruel' [1]

'Oh, Destroyer of foes, collect together the heads of these marauding troops and crush them with thy wide foot Thy foot is wide'

'Oh, Indra! Destroy the power of these marauding troops Throw them into the vile pit, the vast and vile pit'

Oh, Indra! thou hast destroyed three times fifty such troops People extol thy deed, but it is as nothing to thy prowess' [2]

'Oh, Indra! Rishis still extol thy ancient deed of prowess. Thou hast destroyed many marauders to put an end to the war; thou hast stormed the towns of enemies who worship no gods' " [3]

[1] Rig Veda, I, 130, 8·
[2] Id, I, 133, 2-4.
[3] Id, I, 174, 7, 8

The chanting of Indra's praises done, then Kavi offers cakes and Soma wine and their simple devotions are complete, now they are ready for the other toil—the toil of life or death, for who among that splendid band shall escape the Asuras death-wooing arrow or crushing blow of spiked war club? Rud a knows, but he looks on and smiles at the havoc and destruction now impending

Amorapama, sitting firmly and like a war god on his sorrel mare, turns, and to his warriors speaks thus:

"Men of Panchala, it is a bloody work we are to do Remember your wives, your babes and let thought of these and what these demons would dare to do to them had they but chance, nerve every arm and stiffen every sinew, making each resolution indomitable in the art of killing Let each well-filled quiver mean as many souls to Sifra[1] River sped—each sword count twenty headless bodies—each war club as many crushed demon polls Remember no quarter, for death, sure, quick, relentless, is our command Indra smiles and will reward your toil"

The wretched, suffering people in the citadel have seen the rescuers, and those whom strength allows are cheering, while others fall on their knees and importune the beneficent god to bless the arms of the oncoming rescue host

And so they wait and watch in suppressed excitement the issue of the battle

The command Amorapama has given, and in solid ranks the rescuers gallop over the plain, and now the demon host has seen them on their splendid steeds, each

[1] Place of punishment after death

caparisoned with steel-mounted trappings that glisten brightly in the morning sun.

Terror, deep and demoralizing, falls upon the barbarians, for so many unearthly creatures they have never seen and their leaders find it hard to keep them to their deadly work[1]

Scarce a hundred yards now intervene and Amorapama issues another quick command; then horses bound in mad tilt full into the savage warriors and when they come together the carnage is frightful to behold

The swordsmen and the wielders of the war club lead and as they ride among the naked, yelling, cursing, demon army and crush them under horses' hoofs and strike and cut, heads are crushed to a shapeless mass or severed from black and bleeding bodies that writhe and twist in death's embrace Some run to save themselves, but the speeding arrows bring them down by hundreds and their pierced bodies fill the plain The din of yells and crash of steel and thud of war club fill the stifling air, and Amorapama as if given a hundred bodies is in as many places in the field at once True to his word when his keen-edged sword descends a head from torso is severed and the spurting blood besmears his horses' flanks

Amid blinding, burning sand and dust raised by the trampling horses' hoofs, yells of savage throats and groans of wounded and of dying men fill the choking air and the work of slaughter goes bravely on

Indra smiles, for he has heard their importuning prayers and gives succor to their arms while his thunderbolts strike terror to the aboriginal horde

It is all but over, for the vanquished are already

[1] Dutt, Ep Ind Hist, 16

routed and in flight, and Amorapama, panting, casts his watchful eye over the blood-stained field now strewn with countless bodies, and for a moment rests, when suddenly his ears perceive the song of a piercing dart, and before its destination is discerned, his beloved horse shakes its well-made frame, then sinks and rolls over on its side Its eyes tell tale of death, and the raja, caught firmly in the trappings, is imprisoned and held fast.

Just then a huge, black, sweating giant leaps to his side and his iron-spiked, blood-dripping war club is raised in mid-air and in an instant, and before Amorapama's guard is up to meet the crushing blow, it falls, breaking down the guard, the sword spins from the raja's grasp and the blow falls on Amorapama's head. The helmet saves the skull from smashing, but the impact's force has stunned and made a wound and Amorapama reels and sinks upon his knees beside his dying steed Again the club is raised, an instant poised, when he sees a flash of gleaming sword, and the hand that clasped the club, severed from the wrist but still gripping hard the handle, flying far from the blood-spurting stump. A fearful yell marks the mortal agony of the dying giant's hurt

Quick and lithe as a panther, Kavi leaps to the raja's side and with his left arm helps him to his feet while the right hand still clutches the dripping sword that cleaved the giant's wrist.

The battle done, the work of carnage is complete, the Hindu dead are buried on the field where slain, the Dasyu are left as carrion that hungry vultures may devour. The few, uninjured foes have fled and left their dying comrades to their fate Yells and groans of agony

are mingled with jubilant huzzas from the citadel where the rescued people shout or cry or pray, as is their nervous mood

Amorapama with aching head and pain-racked body is cared for by gentle priest's skilful ministering hand, for in him are soldier, priest and surgeon all combined

What a gruesome sight is this that meets the eye when the cloud dust settles and reveals the dead and dying men and horses lying in confused and jumbled heaps!

The physician gods, the Asvins, will care for wounded Hindu, while in Yama's groves the Hindu dead already dwell, but Sifra's river shall receive the disembodied spirits of the demon dead

Kavi has placed the wounded raja on a stretcher improvised with spreading blanket fixed between two ambling horses, and slowly they carry him to the citadel where Kavi's competent hands will further aid the healing of his wounds Beside the raja, the priest in blood-stained robes is walking and his eyes look on the battle-field and his heart is sad

The jolt of misstepping horse wakes Amorapama. Turning to his friend and savior, he says in trembling voice.

"Friend Kavi, but for thee I were now among the slain Accept my thanks—priest, soldier, friend."

Kavi smiled and walked beside the horse

CHAPTER IV

AGRA AND KALYANA

Agra's victory had brought him other joys beside the gratification of conquest Fêted by the Maharaja, fawned upon by sycophants, praised by courtiers and flattered by the languishing beauties of the Zenana, he found in these sufficient cause to stay his many times threatened departure But though these delights were very pleasing to his youth, and these courtesies appeasing to his vanity, yet greater than all and more fascinating in its lure, was the love he bore the beautiful Kalyana, whom favoring fortune helped him many times to meet.

These were precious moments to the youthful raja—moments full of ineffable delight So he lingered—each day finding some new reason why his going should be postponed

One day there was a tiger hunt in which Kalyana, mounted on a faithful elephant, was suffered to participate, for she was strong-nerved and not easily affrighted, nor did the sight of bleeding flesh and dying throes of jungle beast offend her feminine sense, since her royal parent had brought her up to be a Kshatriya's bride, for whom a sudden death was but an incident, and physical suffering was the inevitable law of nature and so must be borne without cry of pain, or tears or quavering fear.

Then there were jousts and other revels and feasts and

dice and many kindred sports wherewith the Maharaja was wont to entertain distinguished guests And it made Agra's stay the pleasanter to know he had found favor in the great Ojas' love, which was attested by many small but significant attentions At the royal board he sat beside Kalyana; the best elephant was assigned to him when tiger hunt was the purpose of the hour; and, surest sign of all, the Maharaja as a precious mark of his good will had given him the purest-blooded, swiftest, most mettlesome steed of which his stud did boast

Thus months went by and still he tarried, for each day the fascinations of the court had grown stronger and so his going more trying still

But the final day—the day for his departure—came. A regal feast had been prepared at which he was the honored guest There had been eating, drinking, delicious music and seductive dancing by the best, the fairest of the dancing maids And now this final day was nearly gone—the feast was done and at the setting of the full moon he must go away to leave behind a precious memory—to take away a weight of new-born love.

At even-tide, just as the glory of departing day draped the western firmament with splendor and nature sank to sweet repose, Kalyana stepped into the garden on the parapet and drank in copious draughts, the nectar of nature's brewing

The peace of the empurpled sky fell upon her spirit and the sigh that stole languishingly from her parted, full red lips was not of sorrow's making, but born of a sense so tender it was sweetly melancholy. As she sat upon the marble seat, enshrouded by the shadow of a majestic palm, and the flower world brought to her its odor gifts in willing, generous sacrifice, she sighed again, and in its

passing the sigh shaped itself into the dearest name in all the land, "Agra."

Scarce had she breathed the name when from the gloom, as if an echo of her inmost thought, she heard her name "Kalyana" whispered softly; yet the keen ear of love had heard and her maiden heart beat fast within her heaving breast and she was glad.

Varuna's[1] vast domain was lit by blaze of stars and mellow shimmer of the full moon and in this light and half-hidden flaring lantern's glow, Kalyana dreamed of maiden love and Agra's sworn devotion So when the names these happy mortals breathed commingled in the perfumed air of that Indian night, their souls were joined in an eternal union.

At sound of her name, she quickly rose and stood expectant in the shadow as his splendid figure loomed out of the heavy gloom He fell upon one knee and kissed the folds of her jewel-strewn garment that glittered and gleamed as the soft moonlight fell on the polished facets

Soft and tender as a bird song was the voice that framed these words

"Rise, Agra, for one so brave and noble need not kneel before Kalyana '

Again he kissed the jewelled robe, then rising to his full height, paused, speechless, the while his hungry eyes consumed her beauty in their voracious gaze

"Kalyana," he whispered unsteadily, for deep emotion surging in his breast made his voice to quaver, "I cannot grasp—my poor brain will not conceive why I, of all the noble lords who haunt thy father's court, should be so favored. What special merit do I possess that thou, the fairest flower that ever grew in India's royal garden spot,

[1] The sky by night.

couldst look with kindliness on one so undeserving as am I?"

"The merit which is sufficient for all needs is that thou art Agra," was the loving maiden's answer

"But others are more pleasing to the eye—and braver too, perhaps, and surely more skilled in arms and older in the service of the State."

"But they are not Agra"

"Others there are I am assured, who have the dainty art to please fair womankind—whose tongues are tipped with tickling flattery wherewith to win the maiden heart"

"But they are not Agra"

"And then again there must be some whose imposing wealth would give them claim to prompt acceptance by those who are not unmoved by earthly store"

"But, dear friend, not even these are Agra"

"Then why am I preferred to all of these?"

"Because thou art simply Agra," and a thrilling, merry laugh echoed through the gloomy groves

"Since in being he I am so much honored above all the other rajas in the Punjab land, I am content that I am simply Agra," and their laughter joined and made a happy echo that slowly died on the air of the summer night

"Art thou content without more proof than my unsupported word, that what I said is true?"

"Dared I to mistrust or doubt that word, unsupported though it be, I would deserve the mighty Rudra's vengeful wrath," he unwittingly replied.

"Is it not that what I said is easily believed by thee, because said of thee, rather than because of thy unquestioning faith in my poor word?"

The words were spoken in jest and at last it dawned upon him what she meant and so he frowned

"Kalyana is using stupid Agra for her bright mind's sport"

"Nay, Agra, be not offended with my attempt at wit I meant it not for hurt of thee, but laughter for us both"

"True—true—how supersensitive the heart that loves—how jealous of the favoring thought is every lover who truly loves!" he answered quickly, for the hurt as soon as felt was as quickly gone

"Tell me, dear Agra, has thy heart then ne'er before been touched by Kama's power?"

"Pray, why dost thou ask?"

"I suppose because I wish to know"

"Ah—of course Why then, before thee as though I were before the God of all, I must true answer make?"

"Yea, thou must."

"I have loved before."

"Oh!"

"That is, my sweet Kalyana, I thought I did"

"Indeed! and wert thou then not sure?"

"Nay, I thought then I was, but since found it was a grievous error"

"Grievous?"

"Yea, to her——"

"And thee?"

"Perhaps——"

"And why was it then an error for thee to think thyself in love?"

"Because I since have learnt I was not then in love at all."

"How learnst thou this?"

"I scarcely know"

"Indeed!"

"Yea—I learnt it through another's love."

"Another's love! Hadst thou then so many loves?"

"Nay, dear Kalyana, I had but two"

"Not three?"

"Nay, but two!"

"How came these then about?"

"She was forgetten when the other came"

"How lightly does Agra love! The one hath come, the other goes as the humming bird flits from flower to flower, forgetting the perfume of the one as soon as is the other smelt and saying not even 'farewell'"

'Not so! Thou makest false measure of my true love"

True love! Callest thou it so?"

'Yea, surely Why not?'

I had called it little more than passing fancy—not love at all"

"Thou dost misunderstand. The one was fancy, if thou wilt have it so, and I'll concede it was but little more, but the other, dear, is love, true, perfect, eternal"

'And its object, dear Agra?"

"Its precious object is a queen of queens, love of all loves, truer than truth, fairer than beauty, more constant still than constancy, Kalyana—thou art the only woman I ever loved"

"Agra!"

The sheltering shadows hid the blushes on the maiden cheek and the still night winds bore on their bosom the gossamer freight of a maiden's virgin kiss

With his arm about her slender waist, they walked in silence along the silvery, moonlit, shadow-studded gravel

paths and neither for a time had uttered sound, for each was then engaged in precious meditation

They reached the marble staircase that led to the grove below, and without a definite purpose they sauntered leisurely down the steps which the moon's mystifying light had turned to ghostly, dazzling white On they wandered, unmindful of their course and destination For such is the intoxication of love's early stage

On a stretch of level ground from which a wide expanse of view was had, a slumber house was built, made of fragile fabric hung with brilliant cloths to keep out the blazing sun of day Here they sat and watched in silent wonder the moving scene that spread like some huge picture before their enthralled gaze The Sacred Ganges wound its circuitous course through the fertile field-decked valley and, stretching beyond, the desert sands shone lemon-tinted in the luminous haze of the shimmering moon To the right, extended the Maharaja's vast preserves, where were safely kept behind strong stockade enclosure, a rare collection of fierce jungle beasts—the tiger, lion, panther and kindred brutes here living in seeming freedom and unconscious of captivity

The distant hills were sharply outlined on the northern sky. All was quiet save that while they talked in whispers there came upon the auricular sense a faint refrain of distant music that was wafted by the cooling night winds from the palace hall where the royal host was still entertaining some waggish guests; these loved the Soma wine to speed the laggard hour by night and to make heavy the hour of joy by day—but only, of course, as libations to the gods.

And as the polytheism of the Vedic Hindu was a nu-

merous collection, these draughts would last the night before all the gods had received their proper due

"Must thou really go, dear Agra?" and the voice was cooing in its tenderness

"Too long have I delayed in love's delightful dream. Duty, dear Kalyana, hath its claims and though we shall delay its service, its call must in the end be heard"

"Alas, I know this dreadful thing you soldiers do call duty. And is there then no higher law in all the world?"

"None, dear love, absolutely none"

"Not even love?"

"Ah, love is very sweet and in its nepenthic potency we often sacrifice our duty and grow indifferent to its demands but when we wake as from a pleasing dream, we start affrighted that we have overslept and kept our duty so long a time in waiting."

"How fine a thing it were," she softly said, "to be a man, if it were not for the crowding claim this cruel law makes on our happiness"

"Hath woman then no duties? No binding obligations she must at sacrifice of self, respect?"

"She hath, dear Agra—alas too many! and because I have learned them by their oppression, do I understand thy present mood"

"Spoken like a soldier's child! Yea, at setting of the moon I go upon my journey to the land now to me doubly dear, from which thy mother came There must I serve my time in war and peace as thou well knowest"

"Hast thou, too, the blood stain of the Rakshasas upon this good sword?"

She toyed with the scabbard of his heavy sword and drawing out its shining chased steel, in silence studied the quaint design

"A few, I hope. I kept no count, for in the rage and roar of battle, we strike and strike again and know we hit only when some obstruction stops the blow I do not pause to think of whom I strike or whether he survives the wound"

"'Tis a noble sword Thou must be very proud to wield so fine a blade"

"None better ever came from skilled armorer's hand 'Tis keen as woman's tongue, sharp as her cutting wit and true as is her loyal heart—a noble blade indeed!"

"I do not like the simile," and she made pretence of a clouding frown "It had been more pleasing hadst thou said, 'Keen as is a woman's sense, sharp as is her intuition, and true as her love for man'"

"Not much change in meaning, though some in words."

"I like not the 'sharp as a woman's cutting wit.'"

"But why dost thou not like that phrase?"

"Because it is the cutting truth—perhaps"

"I regret I said the words"

"Nay, do not regret to tell the truth"

"I do not believe it is the truth."

"Cunning flatterer! Yet thou wouldst have me think thou art not adept in the art of cozening speech."

"I have never tried to acquire this dangerous art of playing with live words"

"Why?"

"I could never be proficient"

"Nay, then art thou by law of nature already quite a master; I would not have thee more proficient"

"Why?"

"Thou mightest excel the sharpness of thy sword."

"I do not follow thee"

"Which is like a woman's cutting wit." They laughed aloud and were very happy.

"If I misjudge not thy age, soon must thou celebrate the Swayamvara?"[1]

"Yea, soon indeed!"

"And art thou pleased at thought of it?"

"Very! As any maiden might"

"Ah—why—I cannot understand how thou canst be pleased Dost thou not fear the risk of such a choice?"

"Nay, and I do not."

"Is it then thou art indifferent whom thou shalt wed?"

"Nay, but I am indifferent as to who shall come to wed"

"Ah, thou art too subtle for my poor brain I do not comprehend"

"Wilt thou then let me illuminate thy thoughts? At this Swayamvara many will come."

"Beyond the faintest doubt"

"And many will compete for the hand of Kalyana, princess of the House of Hastinapur"

"Truly there will be many—as many rajas will compete as I have cattle in my fields"

"Hast thou very many?"

"Oh, yes"

"How many?"

"I never took the labor to ascertain They increase so fast and I am very poor at figures"

"And abundant lands?"

"Miles and miles—but what matter?"

"Being but a woman, I confess myself quite inquisitive"

[1] A marriage festival at which trial of strength and skill determines who shall be the groom—Wheeler's Ind, 10.

"Is that the only reason?"

"I have no other—but to return—of the many suitors who will compete, but one can win?"

"But if the wrong one win?"

"That cannot be"

"It might"

"Nay, it might not"

'Why?"

"Because Agra will be in the arena, will he not?"

"By Indra, that I will," Agra jumped to his feet excitedly, "and I will win the sweet Kalyana as surely as I live and love thee to idolatry"

"Nay, not that——"

"What?'

"Idolatry"

"Why?"

"I would not be an idol—a thing of wood or stone the Rakshasas employ—cold, impassive, insensate, hideous, ugh! It is an awful thing I do not like the simile a whit better than the 'sword and woman's wit'"

"Ah, thou art a captious maid"

"Dost thou really think so?" and the pretty thing looked into his eyes with such dear tenderness, that he was moved to the very depth of feeling

"I will not call thee captious, since the word displeases thee I will say instead, which is the truth itself, that thou art the sweetest, purest, noblest, brightest flower that ever grew in earthly paradise"

"There—I like that very, very much better," and she chuckled and leaned her head against his breast

At last she whispered, as if the subject had not been spoken of before. "Agra"

"Well?"

"Dost thou really love me very much?"

"More than I can tell!"

"Then do not try."

"Try what?"

"To tell"

"Why?"

"Since thou couldst not tell—the attempt to tell might disappoint Leave it to my feminine sense to fathom the depth of thy love"

"And will that serve?"

"Better than tongue"

"How?"

"I shall measure it by my own and that shall content me, love"

"Ah! sweet Kalyana, hast thou no fear that I shall fail thee at the Swayamvara?"

"Nay, I know not such fear and did I have it, I would spurn it as unworthy of my love"

"But if, by mischance, some abler suitor should rob me of thy love, what then?"

"It shall not happen"

"Hast no misgiving?"

"None!"

"But if it did happen?"

"It will not"

"Oh, noble faith! I would that I could share it"

"Well, that thou canst, for have I not so much that giving part to thee would still leave me abundantly supplied?"

"Oh, glorious woman! Savitar[1] be with thee always"

[1] Savitar, the Quickener or Inspirer, who with his raised arms holds forth his blessing and gives hope to all—Macdonell, Tour. R. A. S. (1875), p. 95; Rig Veda, VI, 95, 1.

So concerned were Agra and Kalyana with each other's thoughts, they failed to note a skulking shadow moving stealthily to and fro, nor saw the two fiery circles cut into the gloom like bright rings of light, these shifted, disappeared and came again in another place a little nearer than before

"If some great danger should beset thee and I were near, hast thou no fear I would fail thee?"

"None, my love, none!"

"Sublime is the faith of a perfect love," and he kissed her hands, her arms, her ruddy lips rapturously

At last his trained ear became conscious of an ominous noise, the like of which he had often heard in jungle depths He listened acutely, but said not a word lest it might frighten her, for he had rightly guessed the cause of the terrifying sound

"And when in the arena I shall have won thee, thou wilt be my Queen Kalyana, mother of a long line of raja chiefs"

The sound was louder now He listened again and she too had heard and knew its purport She calmly said

"Sounds like a tiger's growl Didst hear it?"

"Yea, some time ago, but I mistrusted I heard correctly There—see the blazing eyes! Thou art right—those lights are eyes in a wild beast's head Come, let me take thee to safety"

He grasped his sword and drew it quickly from its jewelled scabbard She rose to go, but scarce was her body turned when the huge, tawny body came hurtling through the air and for an instant shone brightly in the lantern's wavering glare With a cry of horror, Agra dragged her from the spot where the beast would fall, for trained was he in the habits of these ferocious brutes.

Out of reach of harm, Kalyana turned and saw Hazim, her father's favorite Bengal tiger, preparing for another spring, which would mean sudden, mangling death. But Agra is alert, he waits—calm, cold, calculating time and distance with perfect accuracy His sword is ready, firmly gripped in his vise-like clutch, and now the striped brute vaults into the air—descends—and in its downward curve receives Agra's sword and it is sheathed in its fierce brute's heart With a fearful howl of deadly pain, it falls quivering at Kalyana's feet, blinks, stares wildly out of its fast glazing eyes, then rolls over and is dead

Agra draws the dripping steel from the quivering flesh of the beautiful creature and Hazim's body lies stiffening between them Her eyes are raised to his and though she is paler than she was, yet she smiles her thanks for the noble deed which had encompassed her deliverance from an awful death

Loud cries, wild shouting and bustling commotion are heard in the region of the Maharaja's preserves. Then Kara, the devoted Sudra, leaps from the shadows of the trees and, without seeing Hazim's prostrate, mangled form, in wild alarm cries out

"Fly—fly—Hazim, the Bengal tiger, the ferocious, man-eating tiger has escaped Fly——"

"Thou art wrong, Kara, Hazim has not escaped"

"But good my lord Agra, he has. An hour since we noted he was gone and so beat woods and shrubbery and have not found him yet He is still at large and will do horrible injury unless he is killed in time"

"Be content, good Kara, he will do no injury to anyone"

"Oh, but he will! He is the fiercest tiger in captiv-

ity. Oh, it is fine to be so brave, but not wise to be foolhardy, too! He is a fearful brute."

"Wrong again! He is as harmless as a sleeping jaguar cub"

"My lord, you trifle! I cannot delay He must be caught or killed."

"No need for that, for he is killed See!" and Agra pointed with his blood-stained sword at the tiger's lacerated throat

"Hazim dead!" the gentle Kara cried in pain and threw himself on Hazim's mutilated form

"Poor Hazim!" he moaned, as his head sank on the tiger's neck. "I loved thee so—Hazim, my poor Hazim, dead!" and Kara wept as if some precious love had passed away

"Yes, Kara," Agra said in sympathetic tones, for he knew the man and understood his generous love for the deadly beast

"He is indeed dead I killed him to save thy queen"

"Indra be praised!" the man in fervent tones replied.

The palace throng now crowded onto the parapet and in its midst the Maharaja stood Sternly he made inquiry

"What noise is this and at this hour? I heard a tiger growl What does it mean?" He had descended and stood beside the lovers, and courtiers, flushed of face and curious, crowded round

"Father," Kalyana cooed and threw herself upon his breast, "Hazim, thy favorte tiger, lies dead. Agra killed him but a few moments since"

"Hazim dead, and by Agra killed? What does this mean?" he scowled fiercely at Agra, whose tongue was

tied, but he need not speak since his cause was in better hands than his.

"Had he not killed fierce Hazim at risk of his own life, thy daughter, thy Kalyana, would now be lying where the dead Hazim lies—a mangled corpse. Thank him for thy daughter's life"

"Agra," the Maharaja's voice was kindly now, for gratitude had warmed its tones, "this debt of gratitude I cannot hope to repay Accept my thanks—a father's devoted gratitude, for words can neither lessen nor increase the measure of our debt"

Agra knelt and kissed Ojas' jewelled hand and when he rose, two blue-black, sparkling eyes looked into his and in that look was more of joy to him than gift of kingdoms in the fairest lands of India's vast domain could bestow on him

CHAPTER V

AMORAPAMA AND KAVI HAVE A DISCUSSION

Amorapama, whether in answer to the people's importuning prayers or by mere natural law and Kavi's nursing, soon found himself as well as when the fierce battle had begun They all rejoiced and made loyal demonstration of their gratitude for the timely deliverance, in gifts of Soma wine and sacrifical cakes

When well and strong and quite recovered of his serious hurt, Amorapâma started for home, but left behind in competent command some fifty of his best young warriors to protect enfeebled Kasi, should the demon horde renew their attack

Amid cheers and other proofs of their loyal mood, the raja began his homeward march, and Kavi was by his side as they passed through the heavy stockade gate

The philosopher remarked

"Noble Amorapama, well hast thou borne the test and strain of battle A true soldier, thou hast won the favor of the gods and maintained the fair traditions of thy noble house It was a righteous cause"

"Can it be righteous to take another man's life?"

"Yea, I can conceive such case, and this was one, for had our devastating hands not struck the blow, the helpless few must perish by miserable means Truly it was a righteous cause!" was Kavi's prompt response.

"And yet, hast ever thought, good Kavi, that we Hindus who make savage war on these savage men, are engaged in purpose of extermination? What right have we to their fair land? Were they not the first to possess it?"

"True, but this possession conferred no exclusive right to ownership of these same lands To the gods belong these lands and for all the human family are they intended When we came hither did they not make resistance as if they alone had such exclusive right? Steel must be met with steel Thus did we fight and still must fight to hold our share of conquered land"

The friends were riding in advance of the others and talked on in low but earnest tone on subjects not usually discussed by raja and his favorite priest

"Thou mayest be right, and here is an instance, for had not thy cleaving blade severed the giant's club hand from the stump, I now would be among the dead, and none to carry on the name and perpetuate the honors of Panchala's house. Thus thou in killing him didst save thy raja chief and let us hope in saving him thou didst the raj substantial service"

"I have no fear on that point, but not of the raja did I think when my sword did such successful execution, but of thee alone, thy danger and eventual certain death '

"I know it, friend, and honor thee for what thou hast so generously done."

"'Twas nothing generously done, but rather an all-compelling impulse, born of love, that had no thought save that of saving thee from the demon's savage blow."

"Thine eye, Kavi, was quite as quick to see and measure danger as was thy sword in the bloody work it did. Thou wert a soldier born."

"Nay, I am but priest"

"But an honest one, and in swordsmanship I like thee quite as well as at thy prayers and sacrifice How camest thou to be so expert with the sword?"

"I loved to practise sword-play as a boy and learned the gentle art of killing while I played at dealing death to an imaginary foe"

"Thou must have had a valiant and apt tutor while he had an apter pupil"

"Perhaps, but playing mimic war is vastly different from the actual thing."

"No doubt, yet sight of blood doth not offend nor fright thee How camest thou by that trait?"

"My father was born Kshatriya and I, his son, soon learnt the art of war, for he intended I should be a warrior, too"

"Then how camest thou a priest?"

"To take another's life except in need seemed wrong, and as I speculated on the matter with a boyish mind, I conceived the purpose to become a priest, for thus I could help man living better than I could if he were dead."

"A fine philosophy, Kavi, but I fear unpractical."

"Yea, I have found it so—ever will be, yet I am content my choice was made for deeds of mercy instead of deeds of blood."

"Yet, in a crucial moment, thou canst be soldier, too."

"Yea, if need be. Yet, must the need be very great—the cause in which I strike a righteous one."

Then silence fell and neither spoke for a time, each divining the other's thoughts, for sympathy had bound these friends with strongest cords and each rejoiced he was in such bondage.

In easy stages, with many rests, in shady spots by flowing stream or desert well, the journey home was made and Kavi, now the priest, was in his orisons quite as devout as in battle he was a ruthless warrior

Now days succeeded days—weeks—months—a year went by and each hour had its wise employ, nor need one think at his time of life the raja's only purpose was to toil, for in his hours of repose, and they were not infrequent, he let his soul expand and with the rest of those who were on pleasure bent made revel and enjoyed the good things of this life

Thus music, dancing, feasting, a game of dice, a tiger hunt, a royal visit or some sweet-faced ravishment, were all a part of his routine Amorapama was no holy man in that he scoffed at earthly joys, but wise was he since all his pleasures were taken not in mad excess, but modestly and in moderation Hence their zest was never lost nor did these pleasures pall upon the sense because of over-indulgence in their sweets.

His delight was in all things beautiful Music wielded over thought and mood a spell-like influence which to him was rapture of the supremest kind Flowers, their sweet perfume, rich color and feminine grace of form, made strong appeal to his æsthetic taste, and best of all, in woman's charms he found an ever-thrilling exaltation. Nor was this exaltation like that the sense-dulled voluptuary feels, but sympathy it was that drew him on a willing prisoner of woman's sportive will.

One trait he had which made him dangerous in battle and feared of men at other times. His temper when aroused was fierce, cruel and unreasoning, and for a time and until its heat wore off, a sort of madness held him enthralled. He knew he had this fault and knew that

fault it was, but though he sought by power of will to curb and check its all-controlling force, scarce had he willed he never would again give way, forthwith by some mean act or inattention broke out again Then he would be doubly mad—first at himself for being mad, then at the cause of making him grow mad

Often did he envy Kavi's self-control and imperturbability Him could nothing move to violent wrath and his sense of justice was never overthrown

In this, as in many other things, the friends were most unlike, and in this dissimilarity lay the secret of the tie that bound each to the other in a sturdy friendship that nothing ever shook

One day they walked together in the palace park and talked on many subjects, of which some ran in lighter vein, while others led to warm discussion

"Hast heard the news, my most impassive Kavi?"

"Of what news does my master speak?"

"Say not master, priest, for, if such relation between us did exist, it were I who am the servant, the master thou"

"Ah, Amorapama, thou speakest with much too fair a tongue to-day."

"Dost fear me fair of speech more than when I scold?"

"Not that—but in thy honied words, did I not know thee as I do, I would suspect sarcastic wit"

"Kavi, couldst thou so wrong me in thy thoughts, thy friendship would be much at fault"

"This never could be at fault."

"I know it—but to return The news wherewith I tried to startle thee—thou art not startled then?"

"Nay, but I am interested."

"Not curious?"

"Interested—" and they smiled at each other

'Well," said Amorapama, "the great Maharaja Ojas has sent a courteous invitation to his daughter's feast of Swayamvara"

"This is news indeed Knowest thou the maid?"

"By her repute, not otherwise"

"Pity thou hast not seen her"

"Pray, why is this a pity then?"

"She is so marvellously beautiful"

"Indeed! And hast thou seen her?"

"Yea, some three years since Her immaturity gave prophecy of a perfect womanhood"

"Indeed, Kavi! I never knew thee grow so warm on any subject heretofore"

"I never had so much to move me then Of course, thou wilt compete for sweet Kalyana's hand?"

"I had not thought of it"

"'Tis time that thou wert wed"

"Hasten not the sadly inevitable. I love the sex, Kavi, this I will not deny, but to marry—ah, that's a serious matter which needs a graver mood than my mind has as yet attained"

"But the time for thee to have a household is at hand and putting off the happy day will not remove the need thou hast to wed"

"Ah, I dare not"

"Dare not what?"

"Wed"

"Why?"

"I am a coward."

"A coward—thou art jesting."

Amorapama feigned a solemn mood and said:

"Ah, Kavi, confront me with the thousand-headed

Sesha,[1] or put me to Varahana's[2] task, or make me wrest with Bali's[3] demon strength, and I assure thee I shall not quake—but to marry—oh, Kavi! here my courage fails"

A smile lurked in the corners of his mouth and Kavi knew the words were meant in jest, but taking him by the literal meaning of his words, replied.

"Why shouldst thou fear to wed? I'm told 'tis quickly done and like taking a bitter draught it will, once swallowed, do thee good"

"But I'm so very well I do not need 'a bitter draught to do me good'—nay, not even the bitter draught of wedlock Perhaps thou thinkst my soul needs purging by some heavy penance What have I done that I must win the gods in such painful fashion?"

"I do not grasp thy meaning"

"Were not marrying penance for a heavy sin?"

"Noble Amorapama deigns to jest"

"Jest! yea, why not I'm in a mood for jest In such a mood I could jest at anything—at death—at marriage even"

"Thou hast a duty, Amorapama—remember that"

"Oh, hang up grim-faced duty for fools to tremble at! What care I for duty? I am young, rich—the world is fair—my faculties are keen, enjoyments have not yet begun to satiate—then why should I not laugh, laugh

[1] A thousand-headed serpent, emblem of eternity; called Ananta, the infinite He is king of the Noges or serpents in Palala

[2] Third incarnation of Vishnu, takes form of boar to deliver world from the demon Hiranyaksha who carried the earth to bottom of ocean He brings up earth on one of his tusks

[3] Had dominion of three worlds Vamana by a trick wrests the worlds from Bali and in compassion he is given the infernal world

even at thee, oh, solemn-faced monster men call Duty? Laugh with me, Kavi There's time enough for penitential tears when youth is gone and age has set its palsy on my limbs See, am I not strong?"

So saying he seized a sapling and with but little effort, tore it from its earth-born anchorage

"Yea, strong indeed—so strong thou wouldst surely win the maid"

"Oh, fearful doom, for whose avoidance I might pray for infant weakness rather than possess a giant's strength"

"Art thou then seriously averse to marriage?"

"Aye, tragically serious."

"Will not her pleading beauty move thee?"

"Have I not seen the fairest flowers that ever grew and shall I be surprised by more wondrous beauty than I ever saw?"

"Even so"

"Kavi, I think thee grown quite womanish"

"Womanish!"

"Aye, womanish in that thou hast acquired the faculty of exaggeration"

"Is that then peculiarly feminine?"

"Mostly Now thou wouldst have me believe this creature is beyond comparison—the fairest of the fair—witty, too, I take it, and with the wisest, able to measure minds, loving as ever woman was or ever could be, and through thy cold, priestly eyes, I am to view this paragon and at thy word acquire eternal admiration Dost think me so easily ignited—so inflammable, a pretty picture of mere words shall set me all ablaze? Nay, good Kavi, I burn not so quickly."

"If thou didst but see her, thou wouldst flame with passion."

"Wouldst have me fall victim to Kama's barb, that I might perchance escape Agni[1] ?"

"Trifle not, noble Amorapama! Thy eyes have not yet seen, thy ears have not yet heard, thy nerves have not yet been thrilled by touch of her warm flesh. Wait! when these shall be, then Amorapama the icy, will be Amorapama on fire."

"What a fearful fate! First thou wouldst affright me with threat of marriage, then consume me on the pyre of a passionate love In either case I would be burned ahead of time"

"Flippant still"

"Be merciful, noble priest Let me remain for yet a while unmarried When I am older and wiser and more stupid, then tell me I should marry As it is I am too young—too inexperienced—too shy Why, Kavi, I'm sure I lack sense for so grave an undertaking"

The raja's fine black eyes were twinkling with rare merriment, and he believed his well-assumed manner and his flippant speech were deceiving, but Kavi was too keen and worldly-wise to be so easily mislead Yet for his purpose he pursued his own deception

"Thou canst not well refuse the Maharaja's invitation"

"Why not?"

"It were dangerous Ojas is not to be lightly treated. His love were safer than his hate"

"Wouldst have me then afraid of him?"

[1] The god of fire, one of the triad Agni, Indra, Surya, who preside respectively over earth, air and sky The Vedas represent him as the conveyor of the sacrifices of mortals to the gods; protector against darkness and defender of homes.

"Aye."

"Never! I fear not him nor a hundred like Ojas. Fear cannot move me."

"Thou art not in fear of the father?"

"Nay, that am I not"

"But the daughter thou dost fear"

"Aye, woefully" Again he smiled

"Indeed, I knew that fear could not move thee Yet were it discourteous not to go"

"Ah, that is another view I would not seem rude to him Of course he knows that I am eligible and if I fail to compete, he might think I cared but little for his daughter"

"Even so"

"But that's just it I care but little for his daughter; in fact I do not care for her at all"

"No need to let him know that fact"

"True, but if I contest I would not care to lose, and if I win I lose my freedom by winning her Thus stands the dilemma; if I win, I am won to bondage—if I lose, I lose my self-respect, or reversing, if I win I lose my freedom, if I lose I win my own contempt A wretched coil! Is there no escape?"

"None"

"Then I am really doomed?"

"Utterly," and both smiled

"Ah, Kavi, thou art a merry rogue, for thou hast been cozening me even while I thought thee cozened. But I shall fool thee yet"

"How?"

"By proving that I am no coward."

"I need no proof of that"

"Eh, then is my cowardice accepted without proof?"

"Nay, thou art no coward"

"But I thought I had deluded thee by making thee believe I am."

"In this thou hast failed"

"Then I will not fail in showing thee how brave I am"

"And by what means?"

"By going to Hastinapur to the Swayamvara and winning the princess against all striving suitors"

"Worthily said! I am sure that thou wilt win"

"Oh, Kavi, Kavi, thou art a wretched comforter"

Amorapama made a grimace in mockery of his real state of mind For he had decided before the colloquy began he would accept Ojas' courteously veiled command and win for his bride the famed Kalyana, who well he knew, though he had not seen her yet, was incomparable in her isolated beauty And even were she much less fair—or not fair at all, he would not willingly have missed the thrill of contest, the delicious excitation that goes with trial of skill and strength

But Kavi, wise though he be, was not yet sure how the matter stood, so he slowly said as they mounted the palace steps·

"Art thou not the keenest swordsman in the land?"

"Alas! I have heard it said"

"Hast thou not vanquished every archer against whose aim thy arrow's flight was sent?"

"Aye, but why recount these painful facts?"

"Didst thou not tame the fiercest horse that India produced?"

"I do not now recall."

"Well then, I'm sure the princess will be thy bride"

"Poor princess!"

"Poor Amorapama!"

And they laughed lightly as they entered the palace corridor.

Three days later, Amorapama and Kavi at the head of a gallant cavalcade richly caparisoned, rode forth to the palace of Maharaja Ojas in Hastinapur, where the Swayamvara of the Princess Kalyana was to be celebrated seven days hence. And none in all that company of rajputs doubted their young lord's prowess to win for bride the mighty chief's lovely child.

For Amorapama, a new life was to begin and what the gods had prepared time alone could tell

CHAPTER VI

SWAYAMVARA—"SELF CHOICE"

Though accident of birth, at times so cruel, at others unreasonably kind, may cause a maiden to be a princess, and therefore lifted above the common folk, and the pomp and power that go with royal parentage may surround her with an isolating atmosphere, at heart, in all the dear emotions so precious to the sex, she is just as plainly human as the common Sudra maid who must perform the menial duties of her station.

Like the lowly born, her love is revealed in much the same symptoms as the "twice born" maid who owns the valued "thread" Her heart will leap in presence of her lover and his touch will send the warm blood tingling through her veins, her brain will reel in rapture at a kiss and she will long for marriage felicity and the full expression of that love which marriage permits

Death is deemed the Annihilator of all caste distinction, and in like degree is Love the Leveller of all rank For love will go not whither it is sent, but where it listeth and in this asserts an imperious will And the power of parental care, self-interest, material gain, will not control one solitary heart-beat that is by true love inspired.

Thus the Swayamvara served the Hindu purpose well. The rajas were invited by a royal summons to compete in trial of skill and strength, which was in form of swordsmanship, use of war club and subduing wild, un-

trained, unbridled steeds, and he who could in all these tests excel must be the favored one the gods approved, for in these gifts of strength and skill their favoring will was read.

The supremest test was made in archery. Upon a pole was set a golden fish, before whose shining scales a whirling chakra [1] confused the archer's aim. It was his task to send his flying dart through twirling ring and pierce the fish's eye. To this trial of skill, one of strength was added in drawing a bow of most unusual size and stiffness that would test the strongest arm He who bore this final test gave thus completest proof of fitness in all things the Hindu mind required of the perfect man, and so the victor won the royal bride for his reward

This was called the Swayamvara, or "Self Choice"

Kalyana had looked forward to her Swayamvara as any maid at coming of the groom, and happiness lay in the thought this fortunate one would be Agra

Him had she loved since that other feast at which she crowned him with the floral wreath and in that love was confidence that he would contest for her as he had wooed, and win her hand as he had won her heart

No fear of dangerous rivals marred the fabric of her dream of virgin joy, for none was so strong, so skilled, so competent as brave Agra.

The arena was made ready and the throne the Maharaja was to occupy was set upon a splendid tribune hung with canopy of bright-hued cloths of finest texture and worked in gold, while garlands of rarest flowers added charm and beauty to the whole. From this position a perfect view could be had of all the incidents of the arena.

[1] Quoit.

Beside the Maharaja's throne, a snow-white, silken canopied, but smaller throne was placed. Pure white flowers in wreaths and bands, emblematical of the virgin maid, were hung about the throne and breathed their perfumed welcome to the coming bride

The day before the fête was set the city took on a festive garb The broad, smooth streets were swept as clean as patient labor could accomplish, the house-fronts were arrayed in brilliant color of many flags and banners, while floral pieces of exquisite design and multi-colored blossoms were spread and hung in lavish prodigality along the balconies and porticos Plants in quaint red earthern pots were set on window ledges, thus adding to the general air of gay festivity Miles of streets afforded bright-hued vistas to the entranced eye The contesting suitors and their numerous throngs had begun to arrive some days before and camps were formed on the vast plains around the arena wall

Huge elephants, well trained and obedient to the mahout's pressure or his tickling prod, lumbered lazily and with ponderous tread along the crowded thoroughfares.

Behind the curtains of the howdahs the rajas bowed acknowledgment to the vociferous acclaim of the servile mob or smiled in recognition of the half-veiled charm the windows partly hid

Graceful, high-stepping horses from Arabia's sands were held in curb by expert horsemanship, and the riders watched the picturesque crowd with supercilious contempt

It was a merry, jostling, crowding, complacent throng that filled the streets and open squares, and once again Hastinapur, the city famed in Maha Bharata's verse, pos-

sessed the fascinating lure of charm of dress, of color riot and of life and movement for which its fair repute was long established in the land.

At dawn of day the festival was ordered to begin; the competing rajas made report and were entered in the list the master of ceremonies had prepared

Since their arrival in the city, they had been housed in Ojas' spacious palace and kept themselves secluded from the public gaze so far as this could be.

Shops were unshuttered and the alluring goods displayed to catch the willing, covetous eye of the Kshatriyas, the measuring, calculating Vaisyas, and the humble Sudras, who may look and with that look content themselves

Dealers made a fearful din at crying aloud the virtues of their wares, and the incautious passer-by was made a prisoner and must listen to the encomiums of the venders' goods, and so the merry, mercenary rivalry went on

Just as an orange line marked the horizon and rose-tinted shafts burst radiantly into the deep blue of the brightening heavens and the stars like dimming lamps were paling into invisibility, a crash of cymbals, blare of trumpets and roll of drum like distant Marut's[1] anger, betokened the given command that the Swayamvara of beautiful Kalyana was ready to begin

The white-robed priests, in column formed, with slow and measured tread descend the palace steps and in solemn intonation from the Rig Veda chant beneficent Indra's invocation.

"When the battle is nigh, and the warrior marches in his armor, he appears like the cloud! Warrior, let not

[1] Rudra's sons—storm gods—referred to in Vedic hymns as Youthful Rudras.

thy armor be pierced; be victorious, let thy armor protect thee."

"We will win the battle with the bow; we will win with the bow! May the bow foil the designs of the enemy. We will spread our conquests on all sides with the bow."

"The string of the bow when pulled approaches the ear of the archer. It whispers words of consolation to him, and it clasps the arrow with a sound, as a loving wife clasps her husband"

"The quiver is like the parent of many arrows, the arrows are like its children"

"It hangs, sounding, on the back of the warrior, it furnishes arrows in battle and conquers the enemy"

"The expert charioteer stands on his chariot and drives his horses wheresoever he will. The reins restrain the horses from behind Sing of their glory!"

"The horses raise the dust with their hoofs and career over the fields with their chariots with loud neighings. They do not retreat, but trample the marauding enemies under their hoofs"

"Indra destroys the enemy in battle, Varuna protects our pious rights We invoke you with our praises Bestow on us felicity, O Indra and Varuna"[1]

The priests have reached the wide piazza before the palace front and the procession forms Following the priests are the rajas in festive garb and full panoply of war Their breastplates and iron-bound bucklers wear a blinding polish on which Vishnu's smile in dazzling glare is reflected and their keen-edged swords, from jewel-set scabbards drawn, are bright and shine and flash like tongues of whitish flame.

They slowly march into the vast arena enclosed in

[1] Rig Veda, VI, 75

strong stockade behind the palace park. Here all the public shows and festivals are held and in this field Agra's victory in the exhibition of arms was attained.

The people, all dressed in the best which they possess that betokens rank and worldly means, are crowding now, with cries and shouts of laughter into the enclosed plain and in less time than a swift steed would run half a league, the place is filled to overflowing save for the central part which spearmen kept clear of the surging crowd.

The suitors now form in half-moon shape, each facing the tribune where the Maharaja and his court will sit and watch the forthcoming bloodless fray.

The people surge and sway and rise and fall like the rebellious tide moved to action by some Titanic force, and when at last the shrill blast from the herald's silver trumpet announces Ojas' coming, the mighty mass of packed humanity bursts out in lusty cheers.

There stands Ojas, majestic in his dignity, robed in jewelled gown that hangs in flowing folds down to his sandalled feet—his pale face framed in silvery beard and his massive head crowned with soft, silken, snowy locks that fall in ringlets on his broad shoulders.

He seemed a veritable god, and as he paused and looked out upon the seething crowd the discordant noises are quickly hushed to breathless silence and all attend with quickened ear to the words that fall like vocal jewels from his chiselled lips.

"Rajas, your sovereign gives you cordial greeting and a noble welcome. Yonder is the golden fish protected by the twirling chakra and beside it stands the monster bow. To him who will draw this bow and speed the arrow through the chakra into the fish's eye Kalyana, Princess

of Hastinapur, shall be given for bride. Thou, Kalyana, shalt cast the garland about his neck and so accept him for thy lord and bridegroom"

The princess, who stood beside her father, smiled and bowed, but her blue-black eyes were flashing searching glances into the raja throng and nowhere could she see 'Agra Her lips tightened but gave no sign of womanish alarm.

The rajas now split up in pairs and begin to wield their clubs in mimic war, each to show to best advantage all the skill of which he is possessed They fight with vigor, but soon one of each pair is forced to quit and so chagrined withdraws

Next the swords are drawn and now they swing in cut and parry and fill the scene with glare of light. This, too, is quickly done and more unfortunates are culled from the suitor band

The crowd cheers and jeers as each contest progresses and the vanquished ones retire, but the enthusiasm these fêtes inspire is not yet at its height, and with ill-suppressed impatience they await the things that are yet in store

Kalyana's eyes have ceased to roam, for she knows Agra is not there and so her interest wanes and listlessly she follows each change of contest, that eventually is to mean so much to her Of all that hopeful gathering of notables, but one remains as yet unvanquished. So fine of form is he, so full of ease and grace the swing of arm, so sure of every stroke, so effortless each thing he does, even the most impassive princess' interest is enticed and with open eyes of admiration watches the god-like man who alone remains to make the trial of the final test.

Before he can proceed a pause is taken, when sud-

denly across the yellow plain bright, glistening figures appear in the dazzling sun They gradually grow larger and a dust cloud follows like a luminous haze Splendidly mounted, the cavalcade soon covers the intervening distance, and with a shout from a hundred throats Agra, the belated, and his rajputs burst into the arena and dismount, then bow in unison before the throne

A crimson flush has bathed Kalyana's cheeks and a deep-drawn sigh escapes her parted lips. The tension has been great and now that it is past, she can feel the pain of it

She smiles at Agra and he has seen that smile and a mighty, surging cadence fills his throbbing heart and now he feels as if no task, however great it be, were too difficult for him to undertake He smiles at her and the agony of her suspense is lifted and the lowering cloud of disappointment is dispelled by the gentle breath of hope new-born

Agra draws his sword and makes a courteous salute to the one remaining unconquered suitor, then, signalling him to be on his guard, the sword play is begun They cut and parry—blows fall with crushing force, but are caught by the timely guard and so deflect and no harm is done. Then swords are raised again, but neither can break the protecting guard Around the arena circling they pursue the fight, but so evenly are they matched in skill and strength that neither can gain the advantage and the spell-bound multitude looks on and realizes this is indeed a worthy bout between two worthy adversaries.

Intent upon the issue, the crowd forgets to cheer, and silently it watches each move, each quick advance, each slow retreat The swords spit fire in showers of sparks as steel strikes steel, but the blades are well tempered

and, although they bend, they do not break. The arms that wield the swords are gifted with unusual strength and both contestants are of even endurance, so the fight goes on, neither gaining upon the other, and at last the master, seeing that to continue would no useful purpose serve, signals that the bout is closed

The princess' eyes are glittering now and her pale young face is marked with lines that tell of fearful but well-controlled excitement She smiles again and Agra sees and is rejuvenated, his waning strength and courage have returned

Who is this gallant raja who can so successfully contend with her invincible Agra?

She has no time to ask, for the master has arranged a new test

Two pearl-tinted steeds fresh from Arabia's plains, bound into the arena with snort and a defiant neigh and paw the sand, for they are wild, untamed, and neither has felt restraining rein nor curbing bit Graceful in every line, slender, clean-limbed, with short arched necks and flowing manes and long white tails that touch the ground, they seem like marble statues turned to life, come forth from ghostland's mystic realm

Calmly the suitors measure the fiery, galloping horses as they make a speeding tour about the arena's course. Each watches and draws conclusions how best to make the trial, for not only experience is needed here, but agility and power Nor is the element of danger lacking and its presence gives the quiet crowd the thrill it has been waiting for A step misguided, a leap too quickly or too slowly made, and quick, torturing death would be the dread reward for the attempt.

At signal from the master, Agra's foe draws forth the

coil of twirling rope and swings it slowly round his head in circling loops, then as the larger steed is rearing as if in fright, it wings its way, straight as a dart, at the horse's head, and in a flash too quick for human eye to follow, the line is drawn taut and the frantic beast is thrown and lies kicking in the clouding sand. A hearty cheer rewards the feat of skill. But this is not the end. The test requires the contestant now to catch his mount, leap on his back and unbridled bring him to subjection

The princess is leaning forward and with fixed stare watches the manœuvres of the man and beast The horse unloosed and free again from all restraint bounds forward, stops, then gallops madly round the arena's course.

Swiftly the man now follows and as the horse is passing him, he clutches firmly the flowing mane and for a space runs by the horse s side, then suddenly his body vaults upward and the rider sits astride the startled, maddened horse. Over he leans and grips the distended nostrils firmly and pulls the head down on its sweating chest. The animal is crazed by this strange curb and pain it suffers. It trembles, shakes itself to be released of the unwonted burden, then plunges, rears and almost falls back on its rigid rider. Thus runs the battle between man and beast, but finally the man has won.

Exhausted from the fruitless effort and the pain—sweating, panting, quivering in terror—the noble horse stands still bewildered, conquered by its rider.

Shout follows shout and cheer echoes cheer; then frenzied tumult waxes furious when the rider leaps from his mount and goes quickly toward the tribune, bows and walks modestly away. Kalyana has studied him with growing interest and, quite against her loyal will, admires

him as women always do admire manly prowess in any form.

And now it is Agra's turn

The lariat is poised an instant, then shoots out and coiling in graceful loops that cut the dust-burdened air, falls at last and twines around the galloping horse's quick, descending leg and with a jerk, quick, firm and sure, the beautiful animal is brought to earth and kicks and bites and tries in vain to rise

Scarce was he freed again when up he bounds across the course, and now Agra with practiced leap, lands squarely on his back and with his knees securely grips his hold. It was so quickly and expertly done the crowd hardly grasps the passing of swift-moving deeds

They love Agra, for he had won their admiration at the other feast when, honor laden, he left the field a flower-decked hero

At last they awaken from the spell and lusty cheers resound and men cast head-gears in the air and hug their women in frenzy of delight For it is Agra, their favorite, has done this thing and that so cleverly they are proud of him

Crowds are fickle and easily seduced and their varying moods are not controlled by reasoning appreciation of real worth.

Great joy warms Kalyana's heart, for her Agra, in whom her unwavering faith is fixed, has proved his horsemanship, and the shouts and cheers, unmusical though they are, sound in her ears like perfect harmonies.

But his mastery is not yet assured, for the maddened creature plunges forward and tries to bite the rider's legs and feet. He seizes it at the nostrils and draws

down its shapely head, but his grip must have been insecure for it breaks the hold and leaps into the air and as it lands, it stumbles, staggers, sways, then falls and throws its rider with fearful force and the thud his body makes is heard by all the crowd who gasp and then grow still again—for horror has choked all utterance and chilled their marrow as they think Agra, lying prostrate on the ground, is dead.

But no! an instant passes and before help comes, he rises quickly and then the pent-up feelings assert themselves and a mighty cheer displays their admiration of the man. A deathly pallor has spread across his face the pain there cuts unmistakable lines, but turning toward the tribune he smiles into the two horrified blue-black eyes and in that reassuring smile she reads a wordless message that stills the throbbing of her anxious heart and makes her shaken confidence grow strong again. Her dear Agra lives, is not defeated, and she is glad.

The horse's leg is broken, so in sight of the assembled throng, a death-dealing arrow ends its misery.

But the final test, the real Swayamvara, is yet to come.

Agra steps to the bow, so big and stiff it seemed no human arm could ever draw it.

His foe, calm, cool, collected, at command of the master takes the huge bow in hand and slowly, steadily, pulls the string until the arrow notch is close beside his ear. It sings to him of victory, of a lovely woman, who sits beside the Maharaja and watches him with twitching face —sings in harmonies so ravishing, he, answering, prays to Indra to speed the dart aright. Flushed with past success, he yearns this crowning effort may win for him the admiration of the princess, whom he has learned to love.

She is pale but calm, and the trembling of her body is not noticed, so no one knows the dreadful pain of this suspense.

Shall the bending bow be now released or should he pause to take still better aim? The audience are riveted, wildly staring and open-mouthed

Suddenly the air is torn by the twang of the bow released and the silver-tipped arrow head cuts through the intervening atmosphere and faster than eye can follow, surer than the vulture's flight, the arrow passes through the chakra and fairly pierces the fish's eye and there remains imprisoned in proof the aim was deadly true.

The fickle crowd is fairly won, for no better archery was ever seen and their wild huzzas attest their fullest admiration The stranger bows acknowledgment and quietly steps aside to give way to Agra's stalwart form.

Pale and haggard, the former idol walks slowly to the monster bow. The pain he suffers his twitching face and staring eyes proclaim, but he is not daunted, nor does his iron will yield to the pain-racked body its supremacy. His step is firm, his eyes are keen again and gleam, his nerves as steady as if no suffering tore his flesh. His strong hands seize the unyielding bow and fixing the arrow to the string, he draws it slowly, steadily toward his face, and see! the bow is bending gently, gracefully to the power his great muscles have applied Kalyana holds her breath and shuts her eyes, for she dares not follow the arrow's flight

An instant of agonizing, terrible suspense and the well-bent bow assures the archer it will do its duty well. Agra tries to see the whirling chakra, when suddenly a mist comes over his eyes and a trembling falls upon his sturdy legs. Then everything grows dim—then dark—

his nerveless fingers now release the captive string and at the sudden twang she nearly screamed, for she knows the dart is speeding on its way. But it descends, then falls inert—the force does not suffice—it drops beside the pole, and poor Agraj the favorite of the people and the lover of Kalyana sinks to the ground a helpless, broken man in death-like swoon, beside his victor.

A panic of consternation has seized the pent-up throng. They know not what to do. They surge and sway like billows in the grip of Maruts' rage. At last a deep-lunged groan, as if wrenched from the soul, breaks out and the people fall to jabbering senselessly, or weeping in hysterical excitement.

Kavi is by Agra's side and quickly takes account of his hurt. Kalyana, pale as death, has risen and one agonizing shriek escapes her pallid lips before she can command her agitation. Agra's eyes are open and he groans, but more in chagrin of failure than of pain

Amorapama, the victorious raja, steps before the throne and in clear, ringing voice, proclaims:

"Mighty Maharaja Ojas, hear me for I have need to speak Agra is badly hurt—for Kavi tells me his collar bone is shattered and so his defeat is due to accident and no want of skill I beg the Swayamvara may be postponed until Agra is restored. I, Amorapama of Panchala, pray thy favor for my suffering antagonist"

Wretched Kalyana stares blankly at the man who so generously speaks and wonderment has filled her mind and a kindly warmth is in her heart for noble Amorapama. Is this man human or a god in human form? So fine a combination of rare prowess and nobility she never yet has heard of nor has seen.

Ojas rises and on his words she hangs with bated

breath, for they will mean her love despoiled or hope revived. The Maharaja speaks·

"Noble Amorapama, thy deeds were splendid, thy generosity for thy fallen foe sublime. No better son could I ever have. The contest was in all things fairly waged and to each full opportunity was given. That our honored Agra fell when he so nearly won, we deplore, but let him take consolation that he was defeated by a worthy foe."

He resumed his seat and an agonized groan fell from Kalyana's trembling lips as the words her father spoke had fixed her fate Gone was the brightness of the day, and night, cold, black and cruel, had fallen on her soul. The bloom of love is withered in her hand—the song of love-bird has died unsung—life so beautiful an hour ago, so rich in promise and with love's joys replete, is now an empty surging void.

But she does not weep nor cry aloud in mortal pain. Bravely and with supreme effort of her strong young will, she abides by that she cannot change Fixed as the stars is her father's will, and so she must crush out the love she bore Agra, and give its unwilling joys to one she does not love—to Amorapama, whom she does not know, has never seen before and only heard of in the councils of her father's ministers And yet in this sad hour she did remember how fine of form, how brave, how skilful and how noble, too, he was Ah! he was a man a princess well might love But how could she tear from her heart the love that she had cherished and whose fruition her Agra's victory was to encompass?

And now it was all changed. Agra, hurt, suffering and in pain of grievous wound and mortal shame, has passed away from her—gone into the irretrievable.

Her father's warning look gives birth to sense of duty.

The assembled throng is still and calm and as Kalyana rises, Amorapama mounts the tribune steps and stands awaiting her favorable mood. With a voice her resolution has made steady, she says:

"Amorapama, raja of Panchala, I take thee as my lord and bridegroom."

Then she cast the floral garland round his neck He fell upon his knees and the multitude cheered until with cheering it grew tired.

Wretched Agra limps sadly on good Kavi's strong, supporting arm and the sounds die in his ear—the throb of wound is felt no more, for his heart is crushed—his life has become a hopeless spell of days and years For Kalyana is gone away—out of his life—lost to him forever—gone to another's arms—to be that other's bride. And he loved her so and she loved him—with this meagre comfort he must be content.

The Swayamvara he had looked forward to so full of hope is over, and he has ceased to live, for life without Kalyana, is but living death.

CHAPTER VII

THE BRIDAL FEAST

Soon after Agra's lamentable humiliation, the arena was empty and the vast jumble of humanity, which so recently witnessed a human tragedy, was dispersed as if blown to the four winds of heaven, leaving behind no trace save the accumulation of rubbish and down-trodden earth

For days the painful incidents of the Swayamvara and Agra's fall were the topic of all-absorbing interest on public square, the street and shop and at the pious householders' own fireside What a pity it seemed to all that poor Agra, so nobly fashioned, so nearly like their gods, should in the moment of surest triumph be struck down and utterly destroyed as a competitor for the lovely princess—adorable Kalyana! Surely it was the will of Indra, for the fall from the maddened horse had not been due to human fault, but to the purpose of an all-seeing god

The feast that followed the "Self-Choice" was attended by defeated candidates and all the imposing court, the tribal chiefs, the ministers and all the visiting host of rajas from far and near

The great dining hall was decked in floral splendor, while flags and standards and royal banners were arrayed and draped in graceful loops and folds to form festoons and other figures of brilliant colors.

Lamps of quaint design and wrought in iron, spread a mellow glow upon the scene.

Upon a dais the Maharaja sat and beside him on his right was pale Kalyana, to his left his future son, young Amorapama, had been placed, and on either side in gallant rows the other guests were ranged

Soft strains of music but faintly heard, stole on the sense like distant perfume, and incense from unseen censers breathed upon the air

A feast of toothsome viands and Soma wine was placed and all were bid to relish and enjoy it without constraint

Young Amorapama, flanked by Kavi, sat in solemn mood, nor joined in general talk of harvests and the cattle store and the marauds of the Rakshasas and Asuras, the Nagas and other relentless demon pests. His mind was taking an admeasurement of his Kalyana, who never smiled or spoke, but dumb, impassive, cold, unmoving, sat through all the feast and gave her bridegroom not even a passing thought, for certainly she gave him neither smile nor cheering word So he wondered at her mood, but failed to guess its painful cause That he had vanquished her dear lover he did not know and so attributed her froward manner to a passing whim and thought that like other whims of womankind this would dissolve in rapture of the bridegroom's kiss

Amorapama was content to wait and 'bide his time.

It was ordained by the Maharaja's will, the feast now going forward should be followed by the marriage ceremony, for whose celebration all provision had been made

The feasting ended, at signal from the master of ceremony, the heavy, glistening, gold-hinged doors were thrown open and the High Priest in jewelled vestments and preceded by two virgins all in white, who made

solemn music on the reeds they played, and followed by a priestly escort, in slow and measured step made one full circuit around the hall All were silent as if communing with the spirit world When the procession reached Ojas' throne, the High Priest intoned the Rig Veda, to which the priests made set responses in the manner of a formal conversation.

The Maharaja rose, which was the signal for the court and guests to rise, and then he spoke slowly and with clear and deep-toned voice, so all might hear and without effort

"Assembled chiefs, it is my will that my daughter, Princess Kalyana, be now wedded to Amorapama of Panchala, who by right of Swayamvara has won her hand, and so she takes him as her lord and bridegroom. Let them be wedded and Indra give them blessings in happiness of many sons, in lands and cattle, and prosper the people over whom they shall rule and reign Let the marriage rites proceed"

A deep silence fell upon the throng and the solemnity of the hour was keenly felt, as was evidenced by staring eyes and open mouths and by strain of painful pose

The High Priest faced the bride and groom, who standing side by side awaited his binding words In the short pause following, the music now grew louder but more solemn and its harmonies filled the great hall. Kalyana's cheeks were pale and red in turn, but her luminous blue-black eyes looked steadily before her, then were cast down again.

Her heart was full of pain and a terrible rebellion made havoc of her peace of mind. It seemed so false, unreasonable, so utterly unkind her father should require of her this sacrifice to formal custom. Why must her

heart of hearts be crushed with burden of this sorrow? Why must her young life serve as sacrifice to stern convention and to tribal usage? Why must she marry this stalwart, noble stranger, when she loved him not and loved instead Agra, hurt and suffering, whom in his trouble she could not visit nor give aid and comfort?

Kavi secretly and in violation of all rules of courtly etiquette had eased her mind—that Agra was not seriously hurt and would in the course of several moons be well again and quite as strong, with a playful twist of words he concluded

"He will soon be in form and strong as ever to win at some other Swayamvara"

The foolish priest saw not the rush of blood to pallid cheeks nor suspected anger in the flash of brilliant eyes. But what can priest be thought to know of women and their incomprehensible and varied moods?

The High Priest begins to chant in unison with the others, the solemn words of the Rig Veda

"O Varuna! with anxious heart I ask thee about my sins. I have gone to learned men to make the enquiry; the sages have all said to me 'Varuna is displeased with thee.'"

"O Varuna! for what deed of mine dost thou wish to destroy thy friend, thy worshipper? O, thou of inscrutable power, declare it to me, so that I may quickly bend in adoration and come to thee"

"O Varuna! deliver us from the sins of our father. Deliver us from the sins committed in our persons O royal Varuna! deliver Vasishtha like a calf from its tether, like a thief who has feasted on a stolen animal"

"O Varuna! all this sin is not wilfully committed by us. Error or wine, anger or dice, or even thoughtless-

ness has begotten sin. Even an elder brother leads his younger astray. Sin is begotten even in our dreams"

"Freed from all sin, I will serve as a slave, the god Varuna, who fulfills our wishes and supports us. We are ignorant. May the A'rya god bestow on us knowledge. May the wise deity accept our prayer and bestow on us wealth."[1]

This humble acknowledgment of human frailty completed, the High Priest turned to the bride and groom and spoke in grave and impressive tones the words that were to bind the destinies of these two souls indissolubly together. Once spoken, grim death alone could tear these two asunder. The words and responses were according to the Sacred Hymns and ran thus

"Do ye remain here together, do not be separated. Enjoy food of various kinds; remain in your own home and enjoy happiness in company of your children and grandchildren"

To these words Kalyana and Amorapama responded, the former listlessly and without concern of their meaning, the other clearly and with feeling:

"May Prajapati[2] bestow on us children, may Aryaman keep us united till old age"[3]

Then the High Priest said:

"Enter, O Bride, with auspicious signs the home of thy husband. Do good to our male servants and to our female servants and to our cattle. Be thy eyes free from anger; minister to the happiness of thy husband; do good to our cattle. May thy mind be cheerful, may

[1] Rig Veda, VII, 86.

[2] Lord of all creatures—was first sacrificer—Sat. Bra., III, 9.1 1

[3] Rig Veda, VII, 86.

thy beauty be bright. Be mother of heroic sons and be devoted to the gods. Do good to our male servants and to our female servants and to our cattle O Indra! make this lady fortunate and the mother of worthy sons. Let ten sons be born of her, so that there may be eleven men with the husband"

Then spoke the High Priest to the bride·

"May thou have influence over thy father-in-law and thy mother-in-law and be as a queen over thy sister-in-law and brother-in-law"

Then Kalyana and Amorapama replied·

"May all the gods unite our hearts, may Matarisvan and Dhatri and the goddess of speech unite us together."[1]

Then all knelt down and the High Priest fervently spoke these final words:

"May Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Aryman, grant us wealth and a spacious house. May the lustre of Aditi be harmless to us; we recite the praise of the divine Savitri"[2]

Before they could rise, suddenly and without warning, a large black bird, long-beaked with blood-red beady eyes and sharp-bent talons, flew into the hall and circled round and round and above the heads of the startled guests; then slowly and in graceful curves descended on Kalyana's head.

She screamed and tried to rise, but terror had paralyzed her limbs and so she stared in fright and trembled as if in the presence of some impending calamity. No one dared to move and the moment was tense and painful. Not even the High Priest took his affrighted eyes

[1] Rig Veda, X, 85, 42 to 47
[2] Id., VII, 83.

from the feathered intruder's gleaming gaze. Then it made a weird, shrill sound like the echo of derisive laughter, spread its shining black wings and, rising half to the ceiling, circled about, then flew out of the window through which it came.

The mystic spell that consternation wove and held the audience in its thrall, at last was broken by the loud, shrill voice of the High Priest, who cried:

"Rudra, the Thunderer, hath sent a message[1] It is Rudra, the great Destroyer has been here. Rudra is angry—the mighty god of destruction is displeased"

He raised his trembling hands above his head and fervently prayed

"Let not thy anger fall on her who is a bride to-day—let not thy anger fall on him who is the groom O Indra and Varuna, protect these two, this noble house, these lands and the people with your blessing and let not Rudra's curse afflict us"

They rose from their knees humbled and abashed and the feasting that followed was shadowed by the gloom the weird incident had wrought

The zest was gone and instead a superstitious awe fell on their spirits. Kalyana, too, felt its oppression and sat speechless beside the groom and longed to be apart—to leave this hateful scene—to hide away and be alone with her sorrow and the dreadful fear that took possession of her soul

Amorapama was too light of heart, of a buoyancy too resilient to be long affected by a gloomy silly bird that after all was but a bird and which if seen out in the daytime would have scarce been noticed.

[1] Birds were death's messengers.—Rig Veda, X, 165.4.

Rising he spoke in loud and cheering voice.

"Friends—rajas bold and brave I pour this libation to the noble gods."

Turning to Kalyana, he added:

"To the wife of Amorapama of Panchala, I pledge eternal faith and constancy."

They rose and drank the warming Soma wine from golden, jewel-studded chalices and many prayed the while the omen might be no portent of calamitous events. Thus was the gloom dispelled, the tension soon relieved and the merry mood, in part at least, restored

To further fright the gloomy shadows which the sable-feathered, ominous bird had left behind, the master ordered sprightly music and the sensuous dance

At the lower end the hall was platformed and draped in shining cloth Close to the marble wall a company of twenty dusky, low-browed men and women squatted and with reed and cymbal, pipe and stringed instruments, made pleasing music whose soft caress soon lulled the ruffled spirits and with tender cadence or by lightsome measure, cleared the fear-carved brow of foreboding gloom. The music of the blended instruments, accentuated with rhythmic beat of drum and cymbal, was soothing to the ear and thrilled the auditors and caused the muscles to relax in harmony's delight.

Then by unseen hands the silken, shimmering, jewelled curtains parted and ten dancing girls [1] came bounding in and whirled about in furious dance They wore jewel-studded girdles round the loins and for the rest their anointed, perfumed, shining bodies were quite nude

They spun about and circled, formed in grotesque figures, which as soon as formed dissolved again; they

[1] See Glossary, "Dancing."

were followed by still other groups, until at last all sank exhausted, smiling, panting, to the floor, amid shouts of laughter and applause

The chalices agleam in mellow light were refilled, libations were quickly drunk to all the many gods, pious man his thirst assuaged, and far into the gentle, patient night the merry revel was kept up

At last the time to put an end to merry-making came, and slowly and with some confusion, the feasted guests departed—some to start at once on homeward journey, while others abode for some time longer in Ojas' hospitable palace

Kalyana's heart was heavy, as followed by her women she went to her apartment now prepared for bridal hour

With utmost care the bed was blessed and Kama's [1] sheltering care was piously invoked, while pure, pale blossoms as if blown by kissing breeze were strewn upon the bed and crushed in order to exhale a faint and delicate aroma to ravish head and heart

The bride was bathed—her body perfumed with sweet-smelling oils and her glorious coils of shining hair were poised upon her head to please the tender eye of the impassioned groom [2]

And all the while these preparations were going forward, her brain reverberated with Agra's name. If it were only to be he instead of that unknown, unloved other one!

Yet, is he not as finely formed, as strong and brave,

[1] God of love

[2] "Women are described as well adorned, as wearing jewels, having their hair braided and well oiled"—Frazer's Lit. Hist Ind, 29.

as noble as Agra? Yea, quite, but as Kalyana hath often said, he is not Agra, and in that difference lay thought of Svarga[1] or Sifra's[2] turgid depths

Thought of Agra made her body quiver with an indefinable delight, and of Amorapama, inspired a shrinking loathing at the touch

What matter then if he were gifted with all the manly graces of ten thousand perfect men and had the wooing tenderness of an hundred impassioned hearts?—he would not be Agra and all the rest would count for naught The delights of all these bridal preparations would have been an ecstasy if they were for Agra, but for Amorapama they were brutal sacrifice

The maids have finished their task Her shimmering deep black hair is piled in splendid coils upon her shapely head—her perfect body breathed a sense-enrapturing odor of fresh plucked flowers, and her face, though shadowed with the frown of thought and pale, was beauteous in its moving pallor, and her dreamy, wistful, blue-black eyes, undimmed by senseless tears shone with a light that spoke of hopeless love and loveless hope—of love impossible—of love eternal

Kalyana dismissed her ministering maids, who kissed her hands and so went out The burning lamp which hung suspended from the ceiling shed a reddish flickering light that wove fanciful designs of mellow glow on the princess' skin of face and form.

She rose and sighed, then walked to the window hung with heavy folds and looked out on the moonlit scene. The palace walls of the eastern wing stood ghostly white in the moon's soft light, and the Sacred River Ganges

[1] Home of the blessed spirits—heaven of the righteous.
[2] Place of punishment of the wicked.

flowed slowly on and on as for eons it had flowed, minding not the griefs and joys in the homes of men upon its verdant banks.

Half hid in shadows of the gloomy folds of drapery, she dreamed and was oblivious of the stalwart form that cast its lengthened shadow on the rug.

Amorapama paused and looked entranced at the virgin figure behind the casement half enshrouded in the gloom A stray, caressing beam illumined her face and head and made her seem a spirit from another world. And Amorapama held his breath and feared some startling noise might fright the ethereal sprite away He saw and, speechless, stood gazing at the perfect form and face The mystic spell, the scene, the dim, uncertain light of lamp and moon and perfect beauty wove, was on his soul and in its gentle thrall he found a perfect happiness

In the palms below, a riotous feathered reveller was singing lustily to his mate, if mate he had, if not he wished he had, to share the charm of place; and clear as pearls of sound his notes came floating in and echoed in the hearts of two young beings so close together, yet so far apart

At last Amorapama spoke softly and with uncertain voice

"Kalyana," but she heard not the tone of tenderness that bore her name

"Kalyana!"

This time she heard and the soft and cooing voice pierced her heart as though a gleaming dagger had torn her flesh Her face was surged with burning heat, her body chilled and a tingling sense benumbed her finger tips She feigned she had not heard, for the strong

heart of Kalyana had grown craven and she dared not turn and face the groom.

Vile seemed the thought of foreordained events, for in that instant her passion had been chilled by the loathing sense she felt.

"Kalyana—princess—wife!" She turned as if stung by a serpent's tooth, for she knew she could no longer temporize with shame. Her unloved lover—husband, stood before her in the lamp's uncertain gleam

'Kalyana," he repeated the name he grew to love—to joy in speaking. "May I not be suffered to come in?"

"It is thy right I cannot deny thee this"

"Come to me, sweetheart—wife!" and his voice was tender and would have pleased less froward maid. He then stepped forward, but she stood rigid and would not move. She still gazed out into the glorious scene, but saw no part of its entrancing beauty

Slowly and almost timidly he went to her side and placed his warm hand on her bare, cold, rounded arm, and from the touch as though it meant contamination, the princess shrank He felt the involuntary movement of her quivering form and so without a word, he looked into her half-averted face and two young hearts were beating, two minds were working, but in opposite directions.

"Is this the end of what hath scarce begun?"

"It hath not yet begun so could not yet have any end."

"Thou speakest in riddles."

"No more than thou."

"Ah, sweet Kalyana, I did not think to find thee in such a mood."

"I did not think to be found by thee in any mood—like this!"

"What grievous thing have I been guilty of, that thou must be so cruel?"

"Thou hast done no grievous thing of which I am aware."

"Then why so cruel—so very cold?"

"It is inevitable"

"Why so?"

"That which is inevitable needs no reason for being so"

"But in this instance, I am convinced there is a reason"

"Yea, there is then a reason—perhaps there are many reasons—but they matter not"

"Whatsoever grieves Kalyana matters much."

"Not to thee——"

"Yea to me and to me most of all"

"Pray why?"

"Because by all the rites, thou art my wife."

"I cannot dispute this fact

"Are we not according to the law and holy custom wed?"

"I said I do not dispute the fact."

"Thou dost not because thou canst not Is it not so?"

"True!"

"Thou canst not, which doth not say thou wouldst not if thou couldst"

"I confess the matter lies in some such form."

"Thou art displeased I won thee at the feast?" She paused a moment, then sadly murmured·

"Yea——"

"Wert thou not the dhana?[1] Wert thou not fairly won?"

[1] Prize of the contest

"Fairly—truly!"

"Then why dost thou turn from me as though I were some hateful thing?"

The question stayed unanswered With all her strong aversion, there stole into her brain a sense of pity for the man and so she paused in telling the truth, well knowing it would wound him sorely

"Pray, come to me my bride Cast off this icy envelopment and be in fact and deed a bride to me"

"I cannot do this thing," she answered, quickly stepping back and wildly staring at him

"Cannot? Why not?"

"I—do—not—love—thee"

"Ah, so! Then that is the vexing trouble? I pity thee!"

"Thou pitiest me? Why?"

"For being wedded to the man thou dost not love"

"Indeed! Methinks thou shouldst have more pity for thyself for being wedded to a woman who can give no love in exchange for thine"

"Nay, not so! A man can bear so great a blow much better than a woman can'

"Pray why?"

"He hath a wise philosophy, while woman hath a poor one or none at all But why steal time from love's delight? Come, sweet Kalyana, let me have thy lips to kiss"

"Stop," and again she stepped away "I cannot suffer this to be done."

"But why not?"

"Oh, dost thou not understand?" she breathed fitfully. "I—loathe thee—thy touch is pain—thy presence

hurts—go—go!" and she covered her pain-distorted face with the trembling hands and turned away.

"Indeed, so stands the case," he said slowly and he, too, suffered as he spoke, from wounded pride, then pity for the suffering woman filled his heart.

"For the present, I choose to stay Canst thou not bear with me?"

"If thou insist, I suppose I must"

"Is thy heart then closed? Thinkst not in time it will open to receive me?"

"Never—never!"

"Hast thou a reason for believing so?"

"Yea—a terrible reason' Her eyes flashed like blazing orbs He drew closer, but she receded and would not suffer him to touch her

"Were it intruding too much into thy private thoughts if I asked to know the reason?" Amorapama felt the hot blood rushing through his veins His temper—that curse of his—was rising with each unjust act

"Thou shalt know it," she said at last in whispered tones

"Good! Tell me then and I will try to be content whatever it may be"

"I—love—another"

"Ah, I feared as much."

"How?"

"Thy manner at the Swayamvara—at the bridal feast, was proof enough, were proof indeed required"

"Indeed!" Her eyes were opened wide and stared in terror at the man she could not love

"And more, Kalyana, I half suspect the object of thy love."

"Thou art wrong——" she answered quickly.

"Not so! Thou art in love with—Agra" The name was slowly spoken and it hurt as though a nerve were bared. Her face reddened under his searching, flashing eyes. Then he drew her to him, she resisting still, and held her in his crushing grip

"Ah, no need to confess it, for thy cheeks confirm the accusation. Yet, speak! I would not be tortured by a single doubt."

"It is so"

Then tears in soothing mercy rose to her eyes and she was blinded nor saw the twitching of Amorapama's face, but felt the tremor of his hand and sorrowed for the cause.

"Kalyana—I love thee and will be to thee a loyal husband. I will wait until some future time when this madness for Agra shall have spent itself and thou wilt then be in truth, my bride. I will be patient—I will wait. At least before I go, let me have some hope that thou wilt try to love me"

"It were wrong to promise the impossible"

"The impossible!" he echoed

Then suddenly a surge of passion seized his brain and all his calmness vanished He crushed the rebellious woman madly to his breast, for all his better self was now subordinated to the madness of his passionate love Kalyana struggled to be free, but the more she writhed, the more she resisted his amorous embrace, the tighter grew his hold, and kiss after kiss was pressed upon her protesting lips. What mattered it to him now whom she loved, for she was his—he felt her gasping breath upon his cheek, her struggling form was in his arms—so what cared he for her Agra? He was far away—the woman

on his breast, an unwilling prisoner, yet there and that was bliss

At last and with supremest effort, she broke his hold and slipped through his arms with a snake-like twist, darted from him and drew from her girdle a dagger, that caught the lamp light's gleam and glinted ominously in her hand, as with blazing eyes and body aquiver with emotion, she raised the bright steel over her heart and cried

"I tell thee if thou shalt persist, as truly as I live and am Kalyana, this blade shall end my misery."

He looked into her eyes and his senses were restored. He saw again the true equation—saw, too, the desperation of her grief—saw and understood and was sorry for the infuriated woman, who panting still, was now staring down at the floor

Then came a strange revulsion of her feelings and with a moan she sank on the bridal bed The dagger fell from her unclenched hand She, too, had seen as in a lightning's flash, the truth that showed her utter selfishness and injustice to the man who loved her well What could she say? What reparation could she make? He knew she loved him not, but to another all her love was given How must he feel on this his bridal night—the night of nights? when love should be a joy of paradise, instead an empty board is set for him who had deserved a royal feast She groaned aloud and as he heard the tones of agony, he grieved and wished he could afford her peace of mind At last she raised her head and turned her tear-stained face to him and with utter melancholy in her voice, she said·

"Amorapama, my husband, I have done wrong—have hurt thee—I could not live with thee and live a lie. Take

me, for by the rites I must and do respect, I am thy bride—am thine to do with as best pleases thee Take me then—I shall resist no more My body shall be thine —my soul—its flight I cannot check Come, it shall be as thou wilt"

He stood before her amazed at her unusual demeanor. Her humility was more incomprehensible to him than had been her former mood

He said slowly and with well-chosen words.

"Nay, then, my gentle bride, thou dost not know thy Amorapama yet I would not have thee at such a price nor in such mood That I have yielded, though for a moment only, to the maddening impulse of my love, I now regret, but this cannot now be undone. But its repetition may be forestalled Thou art honest in not deceiving me, for wert thou like most others of thy sex, thou wouldst have led me into a fool's sweet paradise—a dainty dream, from whose awakening would be death. I will await thy pleasure, yet let this thought abide with thee. I must have by thee an heir as our holy laws demand Remember in joy or pain, in sickness or in death I will be to thee a lover and a husband. Farewell! When thou hast need of me, be thou assured I come."

Erect and firm of step, Amorapama strode from the apartment and said not another word to the wretched woman, who sank to the floor and buried her face in her hands and sobbed dryly, for a great grief weighted her young heart

When the storm had passed and she calmly thought it out, she found Amorapama ever crowding into the picture—manly, noble, generous, and in the end self-sacrificing; but in all these splendid qualities he was not Agra,

the only man she thought she ever could with truth and honesty adore

When at last exhausted nature demanded relief in sleep, her dreams were haunted by the man she loved, Agra, but Amorapama often crowded in and would insist on rights she could not well deny Yes, this much was true, she loved Agra, but her husband she respected, honored as no other man was ever honored

With piercing shriek she awoke and jumping from her bed, found herself alone Cold sweat covered her trembling form and her throat was dry and pain was in her body Then she understood It was a wretched phantasy of her brain, and so she closed her eyes and tried to sleep again She was alone—alone on her bridal night and for the first time in her young life, felt the sense of being lonesome

Then came upon her a sweet longing for the man she knew could never come, and when slumber kissed her closed eyes a smile stole across her lips and she whispered with a tender sigh the new word "Amorapama"

CHAPTER VIII

THE "YUVA-RAJA OR JOOBRAJ"[1]

'Amorapama had grown in the Maharaja's favor, for the elder man found much in the younger man to admire and esteem As months went by, Ojas' infirmities increased. His eyes were losing their erstwhile brilliancy and the body grew less responsive to the will. Yet his mind was as keen, as resourceful and tenacious of detail as it had been in his younger days

But he ceased to hunt the wild beast of the jungle and the pleasures of the flesh had lost their savor. He still loved music and the dance of pretty women had not yet palled upon his sense and so his palace was thronged with merry revellers who found it serviceable occupation to minister to the Maharaja's variable moods.

The charm of nature's beauties was, too, a source of pure delight and often of an afternoon and when the sun was setting in resplendent glory, he would sit in his accustomed favorite garden seat with its splendid view of river, mountain and orange-and-red tinted sky that mellowed in palest blue, and dream as old men love to dream of other days when youth sat smiling on a vigorous frame and his heart was bounding with youth's enthusiastic love of life and he was strong of body, alert in mind and

[1] This custom of appointing a Yuva-raja or Joobraj still prevails in Hindu courts. A similar custom existed among the later kings of Judah and Israel—Wheeler's Hist. Ind., 8.

proved to foeman in joust or battle a front of daring bravery that made him preëminent where such preeminence meant exceeding much

An old man's reverie resembles a well-thumbed, much-read book whose every page records a day of happiness or pain and each is part of some important chapter in his life, and death shall write the final words, the saddest in the history of a human life, "The End"—it is done—past recall and all the opportunities that came and quite unheeded were suffered to go by—the smiles of fortune all ignored—the waste of years spent in idle folly—these all combine as troup of evil spirits that haunt the final hour when the great Record Keeper of the world shall close the book and as it has been written, so must it too remain No time to make correction of mistakes, no chance to blot out the infamous record of days and nights misspent

Final and eternal the words shall blaze to curse or bless the memory of the dead

One afternoon while in the garden, young Amorapama found his father-in-law employed in soul communion with the past and when the Maharaja saw the fine, athletic, well-knit form of his young son-in-law, he smiled behind his silvered beard, for he remembered then how proud he had once been of just so fine a form and such manly grace and strength He loved proud Amorapama well, for he had found in him a living counterpart of his own self when of a corresponding age; and so he saw himself grown young in Amorapama's splendid youth.

Wise was Amorapama, noble, generous and just, which qualities the old man loved in any man and in his daughter's husband best of all.

"Ah, noble father, we are indeed well met. Thou findest in the Asvins[1] royal pleasure?"

"Their mood is very gracious and their smile lights up the deepening sky Yea, son, no finer sport than to wander in the labyrinth of memory at the evening hour of life as of the day, for then our faculties are in repose, our perceptions keen and attuned for nature's harmonies"

"Truly, noble Ojas, the scene is very fair Soon Varuna's[2] myriad, twinkling eyes will search in vain for the vanished Twins"

"Aye, it is true Come boy, sit beside me, for I would speak of serious things As I sat this day, I was minded of my growing age, for passing years though kind in passing, have left their precious burden of old age Methinks the time is opportune to make provision 'gainst the passing of my soul into Yama's[3] care"

"Ah, think not of leaving us so soon, good father"

"I must, my son To youth whose joys are incomplete and gifted with a pleasing zest, the coming death hath fright and terror, while to age it is but blessed, dreamless sleep for tired eyes and weary limbs Fool were I, who, knowing dissolution to be inevitable, ignored the coming end and so am unprepared when it shall come"

"Thy wisdom teaches me my folly I pray command me that I shall fulfill thy minutest wish"

"Amorapama, thou hast been a good son to an aged man. Would my own son were as worthy! And now I have a mind to be relieved of the pressing cares of state.

[1] The Twins, Dawn and Gloaming

[2] Varuna—sky by night

[3] Yama—God of the future world.

Too many worries now oppress and I am like to him who hath ended a long and tedious journey and would be at rest, for I find my nature is no longer as elastic as it was and toil has grown a painful grind of hours and days, while little things seem bigger as the eyes get weaker So I have decided the yuva-raja shall take place as soon as feasible and thou shalt be my heir and successor as Maharaja of this land"

"I!" and Amorapama, now surprised beyond the adequate use of words, jumped to his feet and mutely stared into the Maharaja's smiling face

"Aye, thou shalt be my heir and successor——"

"But thou hast a son, and I am most unprepared for so great an honor and responsibility"

"My son is unworthy so I sent him far away to other lands Now that I think on it I find it well that thou dost join in thought honor with responsibility, for they in fact are father and son—for doth not honor beget responsibility? I like thy speech and thy modesty commends itself to me most highly The over-confident are oft entrapped by rashness, while modesty takes caution by the hand and so is led in safety from the pitfalls into which the foolhardy leap to ruin Long have I pondered on thy fitness for the important state of Maharaja and I am pleased that in my appraisement I find a satisfactory availability Thou hast youth, strength of mind and body, courage, a just sense and fair admeasurement of right and wrong, all of which are godly gifts and inestimable and indispensable as well in one who would be ruler among men So I have concluded to thee shall fall the honor of the joobraj. I shall perchance be some while still with thee to aid with counsel, which experience

of many years shall make of profit, so that when alone the burdens must be borne, thou wilt be equipped to bear them without fear of succumbing to their weight."

"I hope I shall give thee no cause to repent this step."

"I fear none"

"Accept my gratitude and filial devotion, sire"

"I do accept these, boy, as precious gifts," and Ojas placed his wrinkled hand upon the other's sinewy one. Then as his fancy leaped to other things, he asked with graciousness and gentle curiosity

"How fares it with my daughter? Methinks she holds herself too much aloof from our festivities"

"She is well—I trust, was Amorapama's non-committal answer to a painful interrogation

"Ah, she is a splendid child She will be to thee as her mother was to me—a noble wife!"

"I have no doubt she will"

"Dost love her very tenderly, my son?" and Ojas' words were gently keyed in parental solicitude

"Aye, sire—very tenderly"

"And she—did she approve the way the gods made the selection?"

"I hope so"

"Dost not yet know? Ah, thou art a modest lad," and the old man smiled complacently.

"Who can dare to say he knows a woman's mind?" was Amorapama's interrogative reply.

"Wisely said! for a woman's mind hath as many hues as a sunset sky, but therein lies her chiefest charm."

"Aye, I have no doubt," and Amorapama looked away.

"It is the changing mood—the uncertainty of temper we find a constant delight in. Hast not found it so?"

"I have found the changing mood and uncertainty of temper, sire."

"Dost not like it then?"

"Nay, I think not of the changing mood, but the uncertainty of temper keeps one's mind too much employed."

The older man laughed heartily, then added when his merriment subsided.

"'Tis rather stimulating occupation"

"So is dodging a foeman's darts, guarding a swordsman's thrusts—an enemy's club"

"There's wit in thy simile. I like it. 'Tis settled then, my son. At birth of the new moon, the joobraj shall be held and thou shalt be the 'little raja' then."

"My heartfelt thanks I shall not forget" So both arose and arm in arm they sauntered through the park and before Varuna's lamps were lit, they entered the palace portal

The yuva-raja was a custom, which long usage had made a law By it, the Maharaja could select from those he deemed best suited for his purpose, a yuva-raja, or "little raja," as the word implied, who would succeed, as if a natural heir, the Maharaja at his death and so become the Maharaja in his stead Thus, too, it gave the one selected opportunity to learn the difficult science of government and enabled him to gain a better understanding of his duties and powers—the grave responsibilities the new estate begot It was, besides, the highest honor and by this selection of himself, Amorapama knew how well he stood in Ojas' estimation. By this he would be second in authority and in all affairs of state and polity his views must be respected and his commands obeyed.

On the day the Maharaja set, the rajas who were by their allegiance bound, at the royal summons hastened to Hastinapur to participate in the ceremony of yuva-raja. The ministers and priests to whom participation in the royal function was a duty, were present to add dignity and solemnity to the feast of state

In the throne room of the palace at the appointed time, the great men gathered and made obeisance to the Maharaja, who, arrayed in gorgeous robes of royalty, sat in solemn, solitary state upon his gold and ivory throne It was a numerous assembly and rich in color-tones and of stirring interest

The High Priest invoked the beneficent gods' favorable will and then at given signal, the yuva-raja, young Amorapama, clad in royal robes of white silk strewn with jewels, made entrance at a side door of heavy carved wood and bound in precious metals

A chorus of well-blended voices joined with stringed instruments, preceded the young raja to the throne

Here grouped the illustrious throng was hushed to silence as the aged Maharaja rose and slowly spoke his royal will.

"Men of the land who hold allegiance to the Maharaja as their king, give heed and hear our will Amorapama of Panchala, our beloved son and husband of our precious daughter, dear Kalyana, soon to be mother of a royal heir, has been appointed my successor as Maharaja of Hastinapur To him are bequeathed the lands, estates and all other properties of which I die possessed and the duties, responsibilities and powers and honors which now I hold. Until my death he shall assist in the government of the raj and full faith and credence shall be given to

his acts as if they were my own. In time of war and peace he is commandant of our army and his word shall be the law as is mine."

Turning to Amorapama beside him, he added feelingly:

"Amorapama, my noble and cherished son, I have conferred on thee these honors and responsibilities because my faith in thee tells me of thy worth, which is sufficient safeguard and guarantee for my people and their well-considered welfare Rule wisely, justly and with kingly moderation; may the land prosper, the people be rendered happy in thy keeping and the raj extend its vast domain and many cattle be added to the store. May plenty ever abide and the gods protect against the devastating plague. Thus I proclaim thee yuva-raja of Hastinapur."

Taking from the throne a sceptre all of silver and set with rubies and with sapphires and fashioned like his of gold, placed it in Amorapama's hand The yuva-raja mounted the steps of the throne and turning his pale face toward the gathered rajas, said

"I place my faith in all our gods and pray they guide my acts in all things for the best of all. The trust of my beloved father, Maharaja Ojas, I hope to warrant and to justify. I feel oppressed at sense of all that this investiture of power means but by the help and guidance of our gods, and your loyalty and zeal I hope to be a worthy ruler of this mighty raj Father of her I adore, I thank thee for this honor and trustingly shall I serve thy guiding will, and to thy aid until the end of all thy days I look with confident assurance, for thy wisdom and experience shall be a light in darkest places, a

certain help in times of grave uncertainty I accept the trust as yuva-raja and now invite your unreserved allegiance in the manner of our custom"

Loud were the cheers that followed Amorapama's words, for these had gone straight to their hearts and won their love by their sincerity

The rajas formed in single file and each in passing kissed the silver sceptre in token of submission to his will and fealty to the authority in him now vested And as the chiefs gave pledge according to the ancient form, the musicians played in martial strains inspiriting music whose cadenced harmonies filled the lofty place with waves of melodious sound

Amorapama spoke a private word to each raja chief in passing until they all had accounted of themselves and each performed the loyal rite

Thus was the yuva-raja made a king and Ojas looked on and smiled contentedly The old man's life was rounding out and his rich honors were thus safely placed

Released from further duty, the yuva-raja soon repaired to his apartment and in passing Kalyana's, found her standing in the corridor, her face agleam with happiness, her lips wreathed in a pleased smile He wondered but said naught, then marvelled at her words even more than at her unaccustomed mood

"Amorapama—husband—accept my congratulations, too. I may be the last to offer felicitations, but I trust this tardiness may make them not less acceptable"

"Nay, sweet wife, at any time they would be the most acceptable and welcome," was Amorapama's quick retort.

"Yuva-raja of Hastinapur, a long and prosperous

reign!" and she extended her small jewelled hand for him to take.

"I wish it long only if I have thy love, and prosperous will it be to me only in that case,' and he drew her now unresisting body in his arms and for the first time kissed her willing lips, and for an instant there was silence Then came a voice, that thrilled him as he had never yet been thrilled and softly murmuring, said

"Father of my unborn child," and for a moment all too swift in passing, she lay nestling in his arms and smiled with half-closed eyes into his flushed and happy face Then suddenly she tore herself away and ran into her own apartment

The hot blood leaped in Amorapama's veins and a glorious happiness filled his breast as he stared after the beautiful woman, and an impulse strong and moving, made him start in quick pursuit, but at her closed door he checked himself and paused in calm reflection

She did not bid him enter, so his pride fixed a barrier more insurmountable than any human hands could place between the woman and himself

He reasoned that this precious symptom was too dear to have its meaning marred by his impetuosity Her own emotions must work out the change and without aid of his, for by his meddling he might retard instead of hasten the birth of love

Time had been and gone when suddenly and without warning, the calm blue sky of prosperous peace grew overcast with ominous clouds of war which were casting lengthening shadows on the land. In Erachakra a rebel raja known to infamy as Sinda engaged in gath-

ering all his forces which amounted to near twenty thousand warriors, and this formidable army was augmented by alliance that swelled his forces to fifty thousand men or more, if rumor was to be believed. The plan, so it was said, was to make devastating war on Maharaja Ojas and break his power, end his reign, and place the rebel Sinda on the throne of Hastinapur

In these early times these wars of conquest were so very common and of such frequent happening they caused but little consternation in the land

At first the threat was counted too absurd for serious thought, yet as time went by came further rumors of coalition with some powerful and well-provided chiefs, and then the situation was considered grown to proportions that could no longer with reasonable safety be ignored.

A council of chiefs and ministers was called together; Amorapama as commandant presided at these deliberations.

Far into the night they sat and argued and discussed and at the break of day a definite plan had been arranged and provision made for quick, effective action. Couriers were dispatched to the neighboring rajas to send their quotas to the central point of junction they had agreed upon. Speed was urged as part of every raja's duty Hastinapur would be in readiness in less than sixty hours, for its command was always kept in marching order to strike a sudden and effective blow.

The morning after, the city filled with excited throngs who gathered at the plazas and the shops and with words and gestures fought the battle that would crush the enemy. They talked of Sinda and wondered what sort of man he was, and some promptly said he was of no

skill as commander, while some others claimed for him a high ability and gave instance of his worth, but little to the point, for no one really knew.

The mothers clutched their children to their breasts and grew gentler to their husbands, who they knew must soon depart, some nevermore to return. But as wars were plentiful the women understood their duty and gave but little outward sign of fear The aged men who had been scarred in battle deprecated this new need of war, for he who once hath seen and been a part of war's relentless horror, hath respect of it and is not blinded by the dazzle of its glory Thus old and young, the well and strong, the lame and halt, the rich and poor, the "twice born" and the Sudras all regretted the coming of another war

Amorapama's days and nights were filled with many deep concerns and necessary preparations Naught would he leave to chance that cunning foresight could prepare—naught leave to accident that ripe experience could prearrange

Hourly the word came from the neighboring towns and cities how work was there progressing and so in less than one moon's transition an army of near sixty thousand trained and well-armed warriors was available and in marching order for concentration at the place arranged. Hastinapur's quota of ten thousand men was in readiness and waited in the barracks command to march.

The new moon was but one day old when the expected order for the start was given. Now came the sad ordeal of parting, and fond hearts were wrenched and eyes were filled with tears and children's cries were mingled with the moans of suffering womanhood.

In the cool dawn of a perfect day when abundant nature smiled with promise of a plenteous harvest, the army of Hastinapur marched from the quarters through the wide main thoroughfare now decked in bunting and festooned flags and waving banners that were fluttering the passing host a gay farewell, and gaping, cheering, weeping crowds that lined the street were bidding them goodbye. It was an animated spectacle that greeted young Amoràpama's eyes, as he at the army's head and surrounded by his officers, rode proudly, smiling at the fathers, mothers, sisters and sweethearts of the soldiers in his ranks, and though their hearts were heavy, their faces wore exultant smiles.

Just as Amorapama reached the great North Gate, Kavi rushed to the yuva-raja's side and raised aloft a bundle of fine linen and soft lace For an instant Amorapama's face grew pale, then flushed again, and lifting up the precious weight of infantile humanity, he kissed it tenderly in presence of that numerous throng.

With lightning rapidity the thought was grasped that Amorapama held before them Hastinapur's new-born heir. Wild tumult followed and the joy of citizens and soldiers passed all bounds Cheer followed cheer and women cried in ecstasy of womanish delight, while men lost sense of action in the madness of their enthusiasm.

It was a glorious moment and in its swift passing, a new Amorapama had his birth. His pride was very great—his happiness supreme, as with timid gentleness he handed Kavi the son and heir whose parental greeting was commingled with his parting.

The good priest smiled into the father's beaming face, then stood aloof to let the martial pageant pass.

With uncovered head the young commandant passed

the mother's casement with the thought in his mind, was she behind the curtains watching him ride by and bidding him a voiceless sweet farewell?

Yea, the fact was as he had hoped, for as he passed, a gentle woman, hid in heavy folds of drapery, stood starry-eyed and watched him go away.

Was it a trick that the event was kept so well concealed until the crucial moment of his departure? Perhaps! A woman's will is inscrutable and whether she intended it for torture or delight was known to her alone.

This much he did divine—the division between pain and pleasure was an equal one To find the longed for come to pass and to be forced to leave at such a time was pain indeed To know a son was born to him—an heir was his in whom his name and honor and estates would be perpetuated—was a perfect happiness, and as the newmade father rode ahead of his fair glittering host, his mind was in a whirl of tenderest emotions and in the confusion he could not tell was his a merry or a melancholy mood.

In symptoms none too frequently displayed, he hoped in time to read the dawn of love, to which maternal instincts would serve as means of augmentation Thus ran the hopeful revery of this brave and patient man When he returned a hero and a victor crowned, then would he win her laggard love Amorapama was grown proud and happy and sentiment held his heart a willing prisoner.

The gleaming mass of men grew fainter and passed into a dust cloud of its own making, then gradually disappeared as tearlessly Kalyana stared and felt her muscles draw her throat until breath came in short and painful gasps.

In all this trying hour had no tear relieved the strain; but bright-eyed, gazing still intently at fast receding yellow, sunlit, shimmering cloud of dust, Kalyana stood unmoving—thinking—yearning, learning a great lesson in life's curriculum

Less than an hour passed and Hastinapur resumed its accustomed state

Men took up their daily tasks where they left off, the women turned their faces from the brave men gone and tried in mind-engrossing toil to shut the pain of memory from their hearts

In a day the festive decorations were removed and nothing then remained to call to mind the one-time exaltation of the army's gallant show

CHAPTER IX

KALYANA MAKES A DISCOVERY

Months went by and the baby raja grew apace Its foolish eyes which had stared uncomprehendingly into space, now showed the dawn of intelligence, and the pudgy, wrinkled, shapeless body was taking form and semblance of a tiny man It cooed and clawed the air and grasped at things and like an animal put everything into its mouth, no matter what it was, and it proclaimed its needs with lusty lungs, and so the tender heart of young maternity felt its tugging yearning and joyed in all the painful and unpleasing cares the mother state ordains

Kalyana laughed as silly mothers do, in sheer delight at baby's troubling nonsense, nor grew weary in ministering to the infant man

Often there would steal upon her a soothing, tender thought of Amorapama, and a wooing wonder filled her mind that she could ever have been indifferent, cold, unkind to him, who was in all things gentle, fair and generous And to this man she once had said she never dared to think of love for him She knew a mighty, purifying change was working out its end and purposes, and in time she grew to like this sense of kindliness that filled her when she thought of him by day and dreamed of him at night.

But something cold and chilling told her this was not love such as she cherished for Agra, and this consciousness was pain

One languorous afternoon when gentle breezes from the west were waving palms and long-stemmed plants in gentle undulations, and the air was heavy with a feast of floral odors, Kalyana and her child were in the garden on the palace roof, while cool and grateful shadows sprayed the gravel paths The tiny man had grown amazingly within the short duration since his birth and in the mother soul was sweetest music and her being filled with perfect harmonies as with a heavenly balm.

The child had learned to know its mother as the giver of all human comfort and in this Kalyana in her turn rejoiced.

She seized it in a passion of delight and talked to it and gazed into its deep black staring eyes and thought she read in their resplendent depths the love the father bore

Just then the white-robed priest, the kindly Kavi, happened by He made a deep obeisance, which the queen acknowledged with a gracious smile and bade the holy man to tarry for a time in pleasant intercourse

"Ah, good Kavi, much I joy to see thee here. 'Tis many days since we have had the pleasure of thy company. Thou keepest thyself too much aloof. Is then our company so little to thy liking? Or is woman's prattle too insubstantial diet for thy hungry mind?" Such was Kalyana's mood, she found it easy to be pleasant to her husband's friend.

"Nay, noble queen, thou art too gracious and too condescending to one who is unworthy as am I."

"Tut! fair speech, but hardly rich in wit. Thy gracious and most condescending queen, as thou art pleased to call me, would find more compliment in thy presence than she does in thy self-imposed absence Art thou not noble Amorapama's friend?"

"Yea, that I am and pride myself to feel such worthy friendship"

"And is not his then also mine?"

"I hope it is, and I have sought to merit so great a favor from the kindly gods"

"Thine is a fine enthusiasm, Kavi, and sounds like music in my ears"

"No sweeter is the music in thy ear than is the friendship glorious harmony in my soul"

"Was ever man so nobly loved?"

"So nobly has no man of love deserved"

"Splendid, splendid! Thy words are apt and painted with an eloquence that stirs the mind with keenest pleasure."

"I scarcely dare to trust thy words sincere." He spoke the words in tone almost of reproach

"Fie on thee—for shame! Dost think I trifle with thy love for gentle Amorapama?"

"I would not like to think it"

"Nay, Kavi, I would not, could not if I would. Is then thy friend so much deserving of this splendid friendship?"

The queen was playing with the priest in this She wished to see how truly Amorapama could deserve his love, for she had come to this auspicious stage—she liked to hear good things said of the man.

"Were my devoted friendship vast as is the Thur,[1] as

[1] A desert in Hindustan.

limitless as Mitra's[1] proud domain, as gloriously fair as is Varuna's smile, as generously beneficent as Indra's love, it would not then suffice to do full justice to the worth of him who called it forth."

"Were he a woman—thou a man who loved her, thy words could not sound fairer than they do in friendship's generous employ" Then after a pause in which she smiled into the priest's kind face.

"Hast known him long?" and the curiosity of woman lay in the question quiveringly exposed

"Since he was little older than his son, have I known my noble master"

"Art thou so much the elder then?"

"Nay, I exceed him only by a few short years."

"So! Thou wert a boy when he was but a child? And all these years you were together?"

"Nay, in early youth we were compelled to part, but in manhood were united"

"Dost think him then so very worthy, Kavi?" and there was yearning in the interrogatory she propounded.

"Most worthy, gracious queen! No better, truer, nobler lord the land of India ever knew. I speak not in vain extravagances but in truth, for in my life my eyes being ever open and my ears alert, I learned to measure and adjudge the worth of men."

"Thou art very wise," and there was awed wonderment in her soft tones.

"They who have ears to hear and hear, and they who have eyes to see and see, and learn by hearing and seeing and so understand, are destined to grow wise. It is they whose eyes are open and see not, for they are

[1] The sky by day.

blind, and whose ears perceive and yet do not learn to understand, shall never gain in wisdom."

A thoughtful silence fell between them and the sleeping baby lay contentedly in the mother's lap.

"Is he then also brave?"

"None braver ever lived!"

"And loyal, too?"

"Amorapama spells perfect loyalty."

"And noble?"

"The gods could not more noble be."

"And true?"

"He is truth itself"

"And—tender?"

"The bleating lamb—the chirping bird—the sighing night wind could not be tenderer than he"

"And honest, Kavi, is he very honest?"

"Yea, he is indeed honest in thought, in act, in words. He would not cause a sorrow, for it were stealing another's happiness—nor do injustice, for that were robbing another of his rights—nor speak evil for that were filching another's reputation, nor hurt the humblest thing, for that were trespassing upon its due Nay, I cannot in poor words, frame thought of Amorapama's honesty."

"And—one thing more," and the woman in her nature made tremulous her words, "Is he constant, Kavi?"

"His love when set is fixed, unmoving as the noblest jewel in Varuna's blazing diadem; calumny were unavailing; hatred would not serve; self-interest were too insignificant, for as is yonder Ganges in its steady flow, so is the constancy of him I love and for whom to suffer countless deaths were countless joys."

Kalyana's eyes were opened wide in dear amazement

and the quick intake of breath told of the tension strong emotion had created At last like one who speaks in sleep, she slowly said.

"Ah! for such a faith as thine, what would I not give and do? Against such friendship, how very mean appears the love of sex? I scarcely know do I admire him whom thou so gloriously dost describe, or thee for giving such description"

"Amorapama, not I, deserves all thy noblest thoughts, thy tenderest care, thy truest, strongest love," was Kavi's firmly spoken answer to the wondering wife, whose interest in the description was auguring well for birth of love as yet but in travail. Then spoke the queen:

"Ah, Kavi, just one thing more—this war in which he is engaged, thinkest he will—come home—to me?"

"I hope he will—for the rest we must trust in our beneficent gods whose will in all such matters is supreme. If it be by them decreed he shall return and bless thee with a multitude of connubial years, we may rejoice—if not——"

"Ah—do not say it——"

"What—dear queen?"

"The alternative is terrible," and Kalyana, the one-time cold and froward, covered her twitching face with trembling hands and breathed in hard, short gasps

"Yet we must face it for it is before us all the time. A warrior's joys lie in a victory, a well-fought cause, a struggle for the right that shall succeed, but death is ever by his side. The singing arrow may speed his soul to Yama's groves; the crushing war club's fall may spill his brains and end a great career; the javelin may pierce his heart and give the soul escape in gaping tear of mortal wound This is the lesson of his life—he sees his

comrades fall and knoweth not how soon he too will join the uncounted dead, who in their living have served their fellow men, in dying leave a heritage of noble deeds whose emulation makes posterity the better that they once have lived and so gloriously have died."

"But death is so cruel to the heart that loves" A solemn dread was on her soul

"True, it is a hurt that for a time must cause a pain, but all must die and love itself has met this fate"

"True love can never die—it is immortal"

"So swears the lover to his love and straightway loves another and swears again as fervently I have always had misgivings in the matter"

"Then thou hast never loved, else hadst thou no such doubts"

But Kavi smiled and slowly asked

"Were it not best that love should have a gentle death —like a song bird breathing out its soul in one long, lingering tender note?

"Perhaps! I do not know—but Amorapama, will he risk so much his life shall ever be in danger?"

"He is not foolhardy, for he values life at its true worth and will not wantonly put it in jeopardy, yet he cannot know when his soul like some imprisoned bird that finds its cage thrown open, shall fly away to freedom in the dim, uncertain sphere where spirits dwell."

"Oh! oh! I cannot endure the thought of Amorapama's death Suppose he should be brought to me a mangled corpse—his gaping, bleeding wounds all choked with blood that ceased to flow and I—I cannot cry my repentance into his deaf ears—I cannot make his silent brain to understand the tenderness of love I feel—the stilled heart to know the beautiful new love that I have

learned and find so very sweet. Oh, Kavi—it were too terrible, too dreadful to believe!" and beautiful, glistening tears lay in her blue-black eyes and her lips, one time so severely set, were quivering with the sense of pain. The change for which her husband longed—the wondrous transformation for which he earnestly had prayed—the unloving, froward bride merged in the loving wife and mother—had come to pass And Kavi, whom his friend had begged to stay and guard the mother and the child —guard them as he knew they would be guarded to the limit of a brave, devoted friend's ability, smiled into the repentant woman's now radiant face and whispered words of consolation that spoke of hope of Amorapama's safety and return—of many days in earthly paradise.

She clutched the child with passionate, maternal tenderness to her heart and kissed its soft white forehead whereon the tousled, silken hair cast fitful shadows. Then turning to the kindly friend said with solemn emphasis:

"Kavi, I am quite conquered. And he no doubt hath told thee, there was a time I did not love thy friend, for I then loved another and our bridal bed was loveless, but now all things are changed. I feel within a happiness I dared not hope to feel again, for it was felt for but one man so long ago it now seems in a former life. There is a song within my heart whose cadence thrills the sense and ravishingly transports my being into splendor-tinted realms—that vibrates in my brain and makes me long for something never longed for before, not even for Agra. 'Tis a song more sweetly moving than the chorus of a thousand nightingales, more ecstatic than the paroxysm of a virgin's joy, more loving even than the perfume of the rose whom cruel winds tear from the bleed-

ing petal. Kavi, I love—I love—I love thy friend—my husband, his father—my Amorapama, and I am happy—happy—happy Oh! so very, very happy."

Her eyes were all agleam with rapture and her face shone with the radiance of a holy passion

"It is well, for thou art in the paroxysm of a great joy—the sort of joy that makes our being born some measure of atonement In this new mental state the world takes on a precious value and living is a blessing, which before was but a curse For in such manner is our judgment warped—by pleasure or by pain, each giving to the eye a wrong proportion and a color value quite unreal Yet is it not wise to quarrel with this compensatory plan in life, for with our joys we are rewarded for our griefs, just as we give a child a toy to ease a toothache. 'Tis a homely thought, but methinks it fits"

"Ah, Kavi, were I but wise as thou!"

"Then wouldst thou be denied thy present happiness"

"Then dost thou know no happiness because thou art so wise?"

'Not that—but being wise, I suffer neither joy nor grief to ruffle the calm surface of my mind In that I am denied great joys, I spare myself great griefs"

"A wise philosophy, perhaps—but Kavi, I would not, after all is said, exchange with thee"

"Thou wouldst not have a landscape all in gray, but rather lights of joy and passing shadows of some sorrow to make a perfect scene of human life?" and Kavi smiled indulgently

"Aye, even so 'Tis thus I would have set my case had I thy wit and art of fair expression"

Rudely interrupting their colloquy, a waiting-maid came suddenly upon them from the palace. She was

white with fright and her eyes were big with horror of some calamitous event, as she threw herself at Kalyana's feet and cried aloud:

"Queen, my noble queen, a messenger has just arrived with dreadful news that noble Amorapama while leading his army into battle, was struck by a speeding javelin and——"

"It wounded him?" Kavi asked in breathless fear.

"Nay, killed him!"

A moan broke from Kalyana's ashen lips Her face grew deathly pale—her great eyes stared at the prostrate messenger that told of death to all her new-found happiness—to love—to all that loving woman holds dear in life She clenched her hand, while with her arm she crushed the sleeping infant to her heaving breast

There was a tearing of the chords, a rending of the bonds and a noiseless wreck of all her glorious joy-lit world. She stared a moment at the gentle priest, her friend, and with a melancholy smile upon her lips, she softly said

"Kavi, thy philosophy hath its value after all Yet for the few moments of perfect love, I willingly will pay in years of anguished widowhood and not complain."

"Art sure the messenger was well informed?" Kavi asked.

"Yea, he is but newly come from distant battlefields and made report to the Maharaja, who is prostrate at the dreadful news"

"Farewell, good Kavi, I go to mourn my dead, but I shall be brave even as he would have me be; for am I not a Kshatriya's bride, a warrior's widow, now?" and kissing the sleeping child, the stricken woman left the sor-

rowing philosopher and went into the palace to nurse her wounds in solitude

And Kavi gazed after the graceful form borne up by strength of will, and shook his head in sadness, and the pain that tugged at his heart would not be assuaged by all the nobleness of his philosophy Amorapama living was his inspiration—Amorapama dead, his life-long grief.

CHAPTER X

OATH OF RUDRA

In the far-off north where the River Ganges has its source, there lies a vast, wild stretch of mountain territory, where savage beasts abound and snow-chilled winds blow from Himalaya's heights Here are peaks so high their summits pierce the azure dome of heaven and are seldom visible to the eye, here a deep ravine that beds the raging mountain torrent cuts so deeply into the earth's uneven face that it appears a monstrous, unhealed wound Tall trees grow in patches from the mountain's base far up the sides, then snow belts that were never known to melt begin and vegetation stops while the summits are enfolded in an icy sheet

Here foot of man has seldom and in some places never trod and nature here is in its primeval state

Through a deep gorge where footing is had with difficulty, where everlasting gloom which Vishnu's smile cannot dispel lies heavy like a pall upon the scene, a mighty kupa[1] carved deep by some fierce sort of nature in the bowels of the earth is found and its aperture, small, jagged and nearly circular, is overgrown with tangled vegetation and strewn with sharp boulders that make an entrance dangerous. It was a place which Panis[2] might have used.

[1] Cave—hole—well.

[2] Panis were the robber chiefs who held the clouds or cows

Carnivorous birds of sable plumage here make their eerie homes and reptiles crawl from crag and fissure in the mountain side. It is a noisome place made weirder still by rush of water that breaks in cataracts, then leaps from rock to rock and seeths and boils and casts its snow-white spray far up into the air. Hoot of owl and growl of beast and cry of dying animal in clutch of death fill the air with uncanny and terrifying sounds.

In folk-lore 'tis told this place is haunted by the Evil One who here abides and with his fellow spirits holds high carnival at certain seasons of the year and when the moon is in first quarter Here Rudra,[1] the Destroyer, dwells, so legend says, and therefore men avoid the place as though infested by the plague, for threat of Rudra's wrath was ever quite enough to chill the blood and make men's cheeks to blanch and set sturdy limbs atrembling.

In this foul, uninhabitable place, twelve stalwart, fearless warriors assembled to initiate a thirteenth into their oath-bound band In the center of the spacious cavern floor a large, flat boulder stood, on which a blazing fire burned and lit the place with weird, uncertain, flickering light that cast upon the bearded faces of the men a reddish tinge. Behind the flames and ministering to Agni's wants a wretched creature scarcely human stood

His frightful face was cut across with a lipless gash, from which two yellow fangs protruded, while saliva oozed from his cavernous mouth Two burning eyes, to which the fire's glare lent an unearthly reddish tint, blinked with ferocious fury, and on his huge, misshapen

deep hidden in the cave where Vala, Demon of the Cave had concealed them, and Sarama was sent by Indra to demand release—Oldenberg, Rel des Vedas, p 151

[1] Rudra—god of destruction—third in the Vedic triad, Indra, Vishnu and Rudra.

head a shock of long, black and unkempt hair fell across his bulging forehead and down his short, thick neck almost entirely hidden by a long, black, scrawny beard. A cone-like hump sat squarely on his back, and crooked, short, fat legs that ended in two monstrous feet supported his short, fat body like two overweighted pegs.

He was naked, save that a black, loose gown charitably obscured in part at least his hideous deformities

This freak of human hideousness was Rudra's faithful priest—gifted, so it was said, with skill in weaving sorcerous spells and brewing deadly poisons from foul-smelling herbs that brought a lingering or a speedy death, as he desired He, too, professed the soothsayer's mystic art and divined with ease what the future had in store for man

The stern-faced men had formed in circle around the altar fire, and the priest Makiru chants in high-pitched, cracked tones the invocation to his wicked god At intervals he strikes a loud-clanging gong, whose deep and heavy tones reverberate throughout the cave, and at the sound the men fall on their knees and thus remain until Makiru bids them rise again

The cavern is enwrapped in deepest gloom, save where the fire's flickering flare lights up the place At sound of piercing shriek, a huge, black bird with fiery, glaring eyes and pointed reddish beak and claw-like talons, with whir and flutter of huge wings, flies toward the light and hovers over the altar blaze, then circles round and round until the watching eyes of the twelve men are grown unsteady, when suddenly Makiru brings forth from underneath the folds of his black gown, a snow-white, pink-eyed dove and with a shriek of fiendish laughter, casts it fluttering into space.

Quick as lightning's flash the black bird's talons fasten on the helpless creature, and its pure white feathers fall into the altar fire and the mangled, bleeding body is carried into the cavern's gloom to be devoured by the bird of prey Ere it had time to feel its mortal danger, it was dead

The chief, a swarthy, tall and strong-limbed man, in hard, metallic tones commanded

"Bring forth the neophyte"

The dwarf priest chuckled harshly and vanished into the darkness of the cave and instantly returned and half pushed, half led a blindfolded man into the luminous circle of the altar fire Here Makiru left him standing with hands securely bound, then putting embers on the sputtering blaze, awaited further orders from the chief. Slowly came the solemn questions which the neophyte must answer

"Art thou then prepared and willing to proceed, come what may?"

There was a pause—a death-like silence, broken only by the crackling fire and the hard-breathing of the neophyte Then in steady, clear and ringing tones, he answered

"I am prepared and willing"

"Though torture of the body be inflicted?"

"Yea"

"Though death shall end thy misery?"

"Yea"

"Hast thou no lingering fear to take the awful, solemn, binding and irrevocable oath to Rudra, the great Destroyer of all things"

"None."

"If false to this oath, a fearful death awaits, and tor-

ture in the after-world o'er which the cruel Rudra reigns —and knowing this, art thou still willing to proceed?"

"Yea, still willing," and a smile spread over the masked man's face

"Does nothing terrify thee here on earth or in Sifra's realm?"

"Nothing"

"Then shalt thou be tried and woe if thou hast boasted overmuch or if vanity gave tongue to thy brave words"

"I am unafraid"

'Remove the bandage, priest, that he may see and learn and so prove whether he is worthy"

Makiru snatched the cloth from the neophyte's now blinking eyes, staring unsteadily, first into the fire's light, then at the circle of half-lit faces, at last he gazed into the gloom around The clanging bell awoke the trembling echoes and filled the noisome cave with discordant sound

"The oath, the oath," was repeated by twelve voices pitched in various keys

The priest then put the oath

"With my life, I pledge to obey the word of my exalted chief and yield willingly and without question to his command. I will do, wheresoever I may be, his bidding and loyally undertake whatever task I am commanded by him to perform I will toil for the common good of all in whatsoever sphere I may be called and I will die if need be in the performance of my duty So long as I shall live this oath will bind and nothing shall absolve I call on Rudra, the Destroyer, to hear me and bear witness of this oath, and if I prove false or fail in anything I have been commanded, because of mortal fear or cowardice, may Sifra's turgid depths envelop me,

and the wrath of the avenging god pursue me to the end of time."

The neophyte repeated slowly the oath just as the priest pronounced it, by no quaver of the voice or twitch of face was fear evinced, but firm, bold and unflinching was the man and all were pleased to have so brave a brother among them

The neophyte's hands were loosed and he swung his arms about in pleasure at their freedom. Makiru drew from the altar fire a red-hot brand in shape of flying bird —the emblem of the destructive god—and, tearing the apparel from the man's chest, pressed the iron on the naked flesh It sizzled, smoked and gave a nauseating stench, but he to whom this torture was applied neither flinched nor quailed, but calmly stood and suffered all the torturing pain without a murmur or a groan

The fire's uncertain light showed him pale, but the mouth was rigid and his eyes were bright and gave no proof of suffering.

"Kissed by Agni, be thou faithful till the scar he leaves shall fade away," the priest said and then poured a dark-blue liquid on the charred flesh that would in healing leave an ineradicable imprint of the sacred bird.

The rite was now complete. The neophyte drew his clothing into place and suffered silently the agony the wound inflicted. The chief continued:

"Brothers of the Order of Rudra, give heed, for I have much to tell you. Since the rajasuya[1] there has been a deadly feud against a neighboring raj, due to causes we all know and therefore need not mention here.

[1] It was a royal banquet given to all the neighboring rajas as an assertion of independent sovereignty.—Wheeler's Hist. of Ind, p 14.

We are not numerous or strong enough to declare a war. By other and far subtler means then must our vengeance be attained and this ancient feud appeased. Is it your will such vengeance shall be taken?"

"It is," "it is," came the unhesitating answer from all save him who had just taken the oath, he held his peace, which was not strange, since he was not advised of what the others so well knew.

"Listen then," the chief went on, "I have had word an heir has been born unto the royal pair who soon will rule when the hated one is dead, and he is very old and soon must pass away. This child is held in high esteem by him we wish to strike and through this child I hope to satisfy our wrongs the Maharaja wrought when the Aswamedha[1] made us subjects, where before we were in all things free."

"Good!" they cried,—all save the one

"This child must be stolen and brought here to our raj and through and by it we will purchase our independence. Is it not so?"

"Yea, the very truth," they cried exultantly

"Then let us lay our plans for this one end to gain possession of this heir. 'Twill be no easy task and he who undertakes it may lose his life, but if so it be, another shall be sent to take his place and ere we all have perished, surely one will have succeeded"

"Who shall be the first to venture?" a stalwart warrior asked.

[1] Feast of the horse. A horse was loosed and into whatever raj it went, that raj made war. When all the rajas were vanquished, the victor summoned the vanquished to his board where all partook of horse flesh in token of submission.—Wheeler's Hist. of Ind., 26.

"The choice we leave to mighty Rudra's will, for he surely cannot err. Shall it be so?"

"Yea," "yea," they cried, but one there was who did not join in their cries of prompt approval, for the wretched plan was all too plain to leave much room for doubt. So he persisted in his silence, while the others planned

"Then it is agreed?"

"Yea, it is agreed"

"And is there no one who objects?"

Still there was silence and the golden opportunity for speech was all too quickly passed Nor did the chief give time for thought, for doubt, or anyone's misgivings to take shape in words of protest. He next commanded the priest and said.

"Priest, loose the bird, Rudra's favorite messenger, for he it is who shall decide. He on whom the bird alights, shall be the one selected to make first venture I divine Rudra's[1] will in such a mode."

"Excellently devised," they cried

The huge, black bird was now worried by the priest to leave its perch set in a darksome hole in the ancient cave. As if unwilling to perform the task, it flew about quite aimlessly and passed again without the circle of the assembled men who stood ranged in ring shape round the altar flames now burning low. Again the priest drove the affrighted bird into the air, but with no better end.

The third time it rose and flew about in narrowing circles and all eyes were following its gyrations. Grad-

[1] Rudra in Vedic times was the demon bred in forests and mountains, bearer of dreaded message of fever and disease.—Oldenberg, Rel. des Vedas, p. 223

ually it sank in flight and lit upon the neophyte who cried aloud, at which the others were surprised and angry.

"What's this? Dost thou not deem it honor to serve our cause?"

"Yea, truly that I do, but,—" and he stopped, for he was made speechless by the beating of his heart At last he asked:

"Who is the Maharaja on whom you would in such fearful manner be avenged?"

"Ojas of Hastinapur," was the chief's prompt reply.

The man's cheeks paled and his great form shook.

"'Tis as I feared. I protest I cannot,—dare not do this awful thing. 'Tis Kalyana's child you would destroy."

"Yea, it is as thou sayst and what matter whose child it is since it is heir to Ojas' throne and is beloved of him we hate?"

"I cannot do it,—it were dastardly."

"It were dastardly in thee, wert thou to refuse."

"Nay, you do not understand. Why, it would be impossible to rob Kalyana of her only child and I do it,—oh! it were a villainy beyond all words."

"Strange words from one so recently admitted to our cause. Hast thou so soon repented of this step? Hast thou already forgotten the oath?"

"Nay, I have not forgot. Ask me to do anything, risk anything,—die if it will serve your cause, but this,—oh! spare me chief, from doing this."

"We have no other task for thee to do, nor would we entrust thee with another since the first imposed receives such scant respect. Thou wilt do this as thou hast sworn."

"But I did not know thou wert to demand this awful thing."

"There were no mental reservations in thy oath?" sternly asked the chief, now angered by the other's strange unwillingness.

"Listen, men, and then judge. Believe me, I am no coward,—" but a derisive groan was all the answer his words evoked This nettled him and stabbed his pride; so straightening to his fullest height, with flashing eyes and commanding mien, he cried out

"I am Agra of Gandhara and my name and fame are as fair as any here to-day No one yet has dared to call me coward, nor have I ever broken faith or been false to a given word I do protest," and his words were vibrant with emotion, "had I known this foul purpose, all the gods, not even Rudra, could have drawn me to your band I am here, have taken the oath and as I am no poltroon and fear not death, I will abide by what I so unwittingly have done But it is just to me and due to you who are soldiers and are brave, that I shall tell you why I feel so deep aversion to this work."

The tide of their resentment now was ebbing and he knew instinctively their hearts were true and noble for all the dastard deed they were sworn to do

"Kalyana,—the mother of this child, was once my love. We were to wed and each had faith that at the Maharaja's feast of Swayamvara I would win the bride. Men, she loved me and I loved her and would have made her a devoted husband, but the gods ordained it otherwise At the feast an accident robbed me of my fair bride and,—she went into another's,—Amorapama's arms, and as the contest was in all things honorably waged, I had to yield to the inevitable."

"Why not kill this Amoropama and win for thee this bride, since she doth love thee as thou hast proclaimed?"

one of the number asked and others all approved the sentiment.

"Nay, friends, this were a viler thing than you have decided on,—if that could be Amorapama is a noble, honorable man and worthy foe, for when my hurt was made known to him, he importuned the Maharaja that the Swayamvara be postponed until my hurt was cured."

"Splendid!" "Noble Amorapama!"—and the chief could only frown his disapproval.

"And now I am condemned to rob the mother of her babe, the father of his heir,—the one I loved, the other honored for his worth Can you not understand how I feel?"

"Aye," "aye,' the tide was indeed turning

"But I will be true to the oath I took Remember I seek no sympathy to make escape from a dangerous emprise. Fear cannot deter, but love and justice make me waver,—but this too is past. I have cast my lot with you, whether wisely or not it matters not since the act is done. But this I swear, if I succeed and bring the child away, I will protect it with my life, and he who dares to do it harm though it be our honored chief, shall die and by my hand"

He strode from the cave and they stared in open-eyed admiration after him. They knew Agra was a noble Kshatriya and would be true

CHAPTER XI

THE CURSE OF RUDRA

The lowering sky was heavy with the Maruts'[1] wrath and the firmament was gashed at intervals with lightning flashes whose pale blue gleam enveloped nature in a bath of luminous atmosphere Departing Vishnu[2] flamed his greeting into the heavens and fringed the cloud embankments with an edge of gold

The clouds grew ominously dark, then the sun was blotted out and all the scene took on a yellow haze; night came on ahead of time and threw its terrifying gloom upon the land

The Sacred Ganges,[3] borrowing color from the sky, flowed black and troublous, for the rising wind was cresting waves that in their pitch and roll were beating into spray upon the sandy shore

The distant thunder marked the coming storm and now the blowing, screeching wind tore through the trees and raised dust clouds in the streets, and leaves were eddying in the air, while cattle in the fields and stockade enclosures took instinctive fright and huddled close together as if nearness could avert the danger their brutish instinct told them was impending.

[1] Maruts—sons of Rudra—storm gods.

[2] Vishnu—the sun

[3] Those who before death could be bathed in the waters of the river were saved and blest in the other world.

Rudra's gloom was everywhere and his Marut sons, obedient to his will, were turning day to night, the peace of an Indian day became a chaos of disordered nature. The elements were running wild and roused to vengeful tyranny, the streets of Hastinapur were deserted, for the elemental war struck deep terror into the hearts of men, and in the distorted face of nature they beheld the anger of their gods.

One there was oblivious of these terrifying phenomena Too much absorbed in grief to care for nature's moods,—Kalyana,—who sat in her apartment and silently and disconsolately stared into space—saw no lightning tear the clouds to fiery shreds and blaze the chamber with a spectral glare, heard not the muffled rumble of the thunder, for though her eyes were opened wide they did not see, and her ears, though hearing, did not perceive, and so she sat unheeding, mutely staring into the realm of death from which no thought returns save it shall wear the impress of a hallowed grief.

She turned her sorrow-laden eyes upon an urn of delicate design and wrought in burnished gold, set with jewels that caught the lightning's fire and cast forth its gleam in color spray

The queen was pale and very sad. Within her breast a mighty soul storm waged and the havoc of its fury was in every line of her perfect face Her deep, blue-black eyes were still fixed upon the urn that stood upon an ivory pedestal, her red lips opened and in the one word uttered, breathed a prayer of filial tenderness:

"Father!"

Then precious, soothing tears welled up, and poor Kalyana wept in silent grief

But recently a widow, now was she an orphan too.

The old Maharaja's life had run its course much faster than had been expected and it was said the shortening of his days was due to news of Amorapama's death, for him he loved as with a father's love, and so the king passed into kind Yama's[1] care where now he dwells in peace so well deserved

In revery the stricken woman speaks

"Once these insignificant, insensate and unmeaning ashes wore the glorious semblance of a man,—my noble, gentle, kingly father, now this urn holds all that eye can see, that sense can know A short while since he breathed, talked, walked, laughed, wept, and in an instant the god-like power that made him human vanished and he was become ashes that the frolicking breezes scatter and in their gentleness possess a will that the great Maharaja cannot control and bid them stay Whence went that power that made him man, which in leaving left him cold, unfeeling and unintelligent clay? What was that which changed the whole mechanism of his being which once made proud men humble, that now the Sudras' patent scorn is unabashed? Whither went that something which was my father, the all-powerful, and raised him from the common level to be ruler over men? Whence went that spark that he is laid so low and made meaner than a vile pandala[2]? Oh father! father! where art thou now? Hast thou a soul and doth it know, feel and understand? Is it here with me housed in my heart or is it dead and cold as are thy ashes in that all-embracing urn? Oh! how useless after all is this life of ours since in an instant, too short to measure in the

[1] Yama—god of the land of death, first mortal to find the after-world

[2] Man of most despised class; Sudra father and Brahman mother.

mind, and without our leave, it is gone forever and beyond recall because the gods have willed it so. What purpose serves the gods in changing us from living creatures to the dead? What pleasures have they in our dying and our death? A breath it was that made the new-born babe a living entity, a breath that is the last changes all and makes the mighty king contemptible in the royal vestments of expired power Asu[1],—a breath,—it is a soul,—a breath,—and passing speeds a soul to whence it came Yet from whence then did it come? The unborn child still cradled in the garbhar[2], hath it a soul that dying ere 'tis born shall pass to Yama's groves in life eternal? Oh! the wretched coil! the eternal question that for eons hath been asked and hath not been answered yet"

Leaping to her feet she cried in utter bitterness·

"Life is a sham, a fraud, a vain delusion, yea, a fantastic dream, a purpose-serving mirage, cozening our paltry brains with hope divine that never will and cannot be realized Father! father! thou art there in that ill-serving urn, but where,—where doth Amorapama, my husband, dwell? Oh king of my heart, master spirit of a realm of love that never shall cease to be,—where art thou now?"

Her despairing voice sank to a tender protest tone:

"Why do I not feel thy presence here with me now? Why art thou not beside me to comfort and support me?" And hope had perished in the heart of her who rebelliously cried· "Ah! that my soul might wing its flight to where my father and my lover dwell I am

[1] Death, the going forth of his breath—Oldenberg, Rel des Veda, p. 525.

[2] Conceiving womb

weary,—weary of this poor, unsatisfying world; I am afraid to walk its paths alone. Oh, noble, gentle Indra, give me peace and speed my days, for I am tired,—oh! so tired," and she sank into her pillows and dryly sobbed; her face sank in her hands, her graceful body shaking in a tearful grief too terrible for further utterance

"Queen,—noble queen, thou hast sent for me,—I am here."

Slowly the wretched woman raised her head and looked into the priest's calm face

"Ah, Kavi, I am glad that thou hast come Pray sit I am very sore at heart Hast thou no balm in all thy sweet philosophy to ease the pain,—to heal my wounds? No solace-giving words to rekindle hope like an eternal flame upon the now cold altar of my love? The world is very dark, the night impenetrable and peopled with a thousand phantom horrors my mind cannot conceive, and yet they fright my soul, the wind is blowing from the north and very cold and it freezes the marrow in my bones, see how cold I am!" She laid her icy hand on his and sadly smiled, then said

"Dost thou remember,—'tis not so very long ago,—when we were sitting in the garden yonder and thou didst teach me how to love? Why was I such an apt, quick-learning pupil since the lesson learned has brought its awful curse? Had it not been better I had never loved? then I would have been spared this present grief."

"Daughter," calmly, kindly spoke the gentle priest, "thy thoughts are steeds that have not learned the curb of another's will Thy mind has lost its balance; thou art like a rudderless and therefore helpless ship that cannot guide itself against the whirling tides of memory. Be of good cheer, dear queen, for thou shalt have recom-

pense for this great sorrow whose weight is nigh to crushing thee. Death is not the end,—it is the beginning rather of a perfect life The days on earth are short and but a preparation time. Thou shalt be happy, the clouds will break, clear and pass away, the sun shall burst forth in splendor and bathe thy soul in bliss Sorrows are the shadows of our joys as they stand between the divine light and our to-day The closer we shall stand to the light, the darker this shadow is sure to be Thy new-born love,—a perfect joy,—stood near the divine light, so now thy sorrow is so very dark Passing from the light, the shadows lengthen and grow dimmer until at last they are dissolved in the light eternal So give not thy sorrow rein, but master and control it, for only then wilt thou be worthy of thy lord who awaits thee in a better land than this"

The clear tones of the priest rang like music through the silent chamber She answered as if but half conscious of her words

"Perhaps, but I am without the solace of so comforting a thought Kavi, last night I dreamed,—it was a vivid, life-like, startling dream, for in it I did awake and found my noble Amorapama by my side and kissing me. His lips were hot,—each kiss burned and left a sting as does a vandal wasp Gently he said 'Sweet Kalyana, let us wander in the land where spirits dwell,' and I, who seemed to be quite unafraid, replied, 'Whither thou leadest me, I gladly follow,' and so he took my hand in his and straightway we were in a grove of golden trees from which the glinting, sparkling crystal fruit hung low suspended and the shimmer of great pearls like dew was in the silver foliage. We came upon a brook of liquid emerald with crested waves sprayed with the dust of

sparkling diamonds. Then children came and strewed our path with blushing flowers that gave their perfume in willing sacrifice as we in passing crushed them under foot We reached a wondrous bush that bore ten thousand blood-red blossoms, yet in this gay array a modest flower of snowy whiteness reared its conspicuous head; leaning forward, my Amorapama plucked it from its mother stem and smiling sadly said: 'See, sweetheart, here is one of perfect color which is designed for thee and by it I proclaim thee pure and holy in my sight. So long as thou art so the blossom will not wilt nor die, but shouldst thou prove untrue its petals will turn and wither and in their death pronounce thy doom' He took me to his breast and kissed me fervently and when I looked, —behold! the blossom withered in my hand, the petals rolled up and shriveled as if blighted, and it was dead. I shrieked in horror and he laughed derisively and with his cruel laugh still sounding in my ear I awoke Oh Kavi!" the shuddering queen continued, "tell me what does it mean? Canst give no explanation, no divination of this dream?"

"I question if it hath a meaning, and then——"

"Tell me, hast thou some secret thought,—tell me! for I am crazed with weird misgivings"

"What are these weird misgivings?"

"That Amorapama lives," she panted with failing breath.

"Well?" he asked.

"And thinks me false."

"Nay, these are the vagaries of overwrought and jangling nerves, give no room to such idle phantasies."

"Art sure this dream does not mean some dreadful thing like that?"

"Of that I am convinced. Amorapama living were too noble to ever think thee false, and Amorapama dead would know thee true."

"I thank thee, friend; thou givest me the consolation for which my heart has yearned," and the gentle woman sighed as if relieved of some oppressive burden.

"And now that thou hast told me thine, hear thou my unusual and suggestive dream. I walked out in the garden there when suddenly I saw our Amorapama coming slowly and with head bowed down, through the shadowy vista of the trees. He seemed in deepest meditation Reaching me he stopped and raising up his smiling face, he said 'Good Kavi, gentle friend,—go tell her how I love her, for I am not dead but will return and we will be the happiest in our happy land', then he vanished and I awoke."

"How very wonderful! Hath thy fair dream no meaning either?"

"Nay, I cannot, dare not say, and yet——"

"Ah, thou hast some doubts,—thou wilt not say it hath, nor wilt thou say that it hath none"

"This much I will admit Since waking and against my will a thought hath fixed itself upon my mind and will not be dispelled,—that Amorapama lives and will return."

"Ah, Kavi, Kavi! if this were to come true," and the queen's great eyes grew wide in hope and joyful wonderment.

"Of course I would not raise in thee false hopes, for this were cruelty refined, yet the thought is there and will not budge, though reason tells me it were folly for us thus to hope. So pray think no more of it, for it were worse than wickedness to give thee hope that might become despair."

"How very strange it is! I too have felt since I did dream my wondrous dream, that Amorapama would return and am like thee,—I cannot shake the feeling off."

"Let us not now wrestle longer with this problem, for late the hour is and nature is in rebellious mood and the roll of thunder is louder grown and the lightning cuts the sky like blazing blade. I will go and ponder on what thou hast told me and if I find a fair solution, I will tell it to thee on the morrow. Be comforted, the sun has sunk and all is dark, but to-morrow the fair, life-giving god will rise again and make the world seem brighter for the passing darkness that has intervened I pray the gods to give thee gentle sleep and consolation for thy griefs. Remember, noble queen, no more dreams!" and Kavi smiled and raised a warning finger, "for I have now enough of them to ponder over"

"Good night, kind friend, and Indra be praised for such devotion as is thine"

They parted and his retiring footsteps died away; all was quiet in the palace wing, but the raging storm was tumultuous still

The infant's wail aroused the mother from her revery and she hastened to the inner chamber where it lay.

Appalled she stood, her powers numbed by shock of her surprise, for there in the uncertain light of the blazing lamp a man in armor and well armed stood bending silently over the sleeping child. He felt her presence for he rose to his full height and turning slowly, calmly looked into Kalyana's startled face. A stifled scream broke from her lips that slowly framed the once dear name, "Agra."

She reeled and would have fallen had not the heavy hangings given her support. A deadly pause,—and two

young lives were in its compass measuring their hours. Then softly came upon her ears like echo of a long forgotten time the word:

"Kalyana."

Instinctively she knew his presence was for no good to her or hers, and, in the danger which oppressed her with its burdening sense, she drew her scattered faculties together and made brave show of courage, though her poor heart quaked and her legs were trembling under her diaphanous silken robe.

"What,—what seekest thou here?" Her voice was vibrant, though it trembled, and her dilated eyes told of the terror in her heart

"Kalyana," came a pleading voice in softest tones, "pray forgive me!"

"I know not what I shall forgive unless it be the rudeness of thy presence in my private chamber, for which I can find no excuse" There was hauteur in her manner and dignity in her soft voice

"True, there is none"

"Then why art thou in the palace at this time of night, an unbidden guest, and in my apartment too, in which no one dares enter save my husband and the priest?"

"How shall I tell thee?"

"I know not, nor can I give thee aid to make the telling less difficult."

"This is even as I feared and yet I hoped it might be otherwise"

"Agra was not wont to speak in riddles" Her voice was cold, almost sneering, as she spoke

"Aye, it is indeed a riddle; a tragic problem brings me here, and solve it as I may, in its solution lies my own and thy undoing."

"Grave and puzzling words; I cannot grasp their meaning."

"Would thou hadst not been here to have it told to thee."

"I am aweary of this mystery. If thou hast aught to say, then say it quickly and begone!" A flash of eyes accompanied her imperious words.

"Listen then, Kalyana, and for the love of which I dare not now to speak, I beg a gentle judgment"

"It shall be just,—I cannot promise gentleness."

"I am in a fearful plight, I am committed to an act the beneficent gods can ne'er forgive and thou wilt not absolve me from." Turning from her he groaned,

"Oh, I cannot tell her, it will break her heart!"

"Speak!" she commanded briefly, "let me know the worst, for this suspense is like impending death. What have I to do with thy plight,—to what fearful act art thou committed that I should be concerned in it or thy forgiveness? Speak! I command thee to unloose thy tongue and end this wretched dread of an uncertainty"

"Kalyana,"—and the strong man trembled and his pale and pain-distorted face was twitching as he spoke—"Kalyana, I have come,—to steal thy child,—to carry it away from here,—but I swear to thee before the grim god Rudra, I will guard it with my life."

She stared at him a moment as she thought the man bereft of reason, then she stepped aside and was about to give alarm, which he perceiving calmly said.

"Pray call for help. It were better so, for it would only mean my death and that were better than be faithless to my oath."

She paused, for his quick willingness to die told her he was bound by some unholy tie. And it was true that

her must die if she should give alarm,—die by tedious and torturing process from which not even she, the queen, could save him if she would. She thought him now possessed of demons and so not to be held accountable for what he said or did. Her mind grew calm at sense of danger. By strategy alone could she control the current of events and warp the evil purpose of the man from its intent But what to do or say, that was an appalling coil. She waited and his bloodshot, feverish, roving eyes were fixed now like an asp's upon her own. Then she slowly asked:

"Why, Agra, wouldst thou do this fearful deed? What have I done to thee that thou wouldst stab my mother heart? What wrong could justify so base an act?"

"Oh Kalyama! I am the most abominably vile, inhuman monster in all the world of miserable men. I am pledged, bound by an oath I fear far more than death, to fetch thy child away,—to take it from its mother's breast to serve some miserable purposes of state,—satisfy an ancient feud that had its origin ere thou and I were born. Oh, have pity,—pity,—pity!" and the wretched man fell on his knees and wrung his hands in abject misery.

"Arise, Agra," she said in pitying tones, "I will not call for help, for that would be thy end. Tell me what has brought thee to so vile a plight; what could have made Agra undertake this inhuman task?"

"When thou wert taken from me by ill-favoring chance and I returned to my own raj, I brooded sorely and grew indifferent to my duties as Gandhara's chief. My enemies made much of this and forced me to relinquish all my honors and my powers, and another soon was

found to take my place. I could have put an end to all their cavil and retained my honorable position, but so sore of heart was I, I did not care and went away never more to return. I wandered then from raj to raj and found at last a band of noble men with whom I made my stay. Their purposes I did not understand, nor did I then concern my mind with what they were until one day I was prevailed upon to take an oath in Rudra's dreadful cave and ere I knew their design, I was bound by the awful oath. When the fatal words had passed my lips I learned their purposes, but then it was too late,—too late!" He paused and his bosom heaved and his muscles strained.

"What oath didst thou take?" and the Hindu maid was pale as death, for well she knew the fatal potency of the one oath she dreaded it to be.

"Rudra's oath—see!"

He tore his corselet open and she saw the awful emblem burned upon Agra's breast. She groaned in agony, for now she knew how hopeless had become the deadly mischief of their lives. She knew she faced two terrible alternatives: To make him false would mean a torture after death a hundred times more terrible than as many deaths would be. To let him serve the vengeful god whom he had sworn to serve, would mean the loss of child,—the tearing of the mother ties.

"Oh Indra!" she prayed in silence, "beneficent and ever merciful god of us poor afflicted mortals, give me aid to solve this wretched mystery. I would not hurt Agra, yet I cannot lose my child. Indra, hear the cry of one in the madness of despair!"

He stared at her upturned face and knew from its rapt

expression that her soul was speaking to her god and he joined his prayer with hers, that she find help at any cost,—his life if need be, so he but help her and hers.

As Kalyana prayed, there stole into her being, memory of the love that once had made her life so sweet,—that gilded all her maiden dreams and filled her pretty world of virgin fancy with the glory of immortal joy. She opened wide her startled eyes and drank in all his manly grace,—drank as does a desert traveller whose tongue is parched and blistered and whose brain is reeling in the agony of unslaked thirst,—drank and shivered. Should she condemn him to the fate of Rudra's curse,—to torturing death,—to worse than death in Sifra's realm? No! her heart revolted from this dread alternative and yet, her pretty, muling child,—her Amorapama's child, should she abandon her own orphaned offspring? This could not, must not be! She would fight as would a tigress in the jungle depths to save its precious young,—fight as the beast would fight until in death the fight shall end.

Then stole into her chaotic mind a fearful thought. It chilled her blood and made her flesh run cold and all her body quivered as she saw herself engaged in its terrible undertaking She knew there was no middle path by which she could escape,—by which her child and Agra could both be saved She must make choice at once,—to save her lover from the awful curse and protect her child from worse than deadly harm. Yes, she would do it, brave it out as would the tigress in its lair to save its savage cub from being torn from mother breast.

She spoke and her sweet voice was almost tender and the strong man wondered what it did portend

"Agra, thou standest in a dangerous place. This

dreadful oath doth bind thee and from it there is no absolution?"

"None, Kalyana, none! and therein lies the bitterness of it all."

"I know it and therefore understand. Thou art too brave,—too noble to have planned this theft and so I do not hate thee as perhaps I should"

"Ah, gentle, sweet Kalyana, was there ever such a noble woman in this world before?" and Agra gazed in wonder at the glorious creature by his side.

"Know this, Agra, that I dare not ask thee to betray thy oath—its consequences were too dreadful and I would not have so great a guilt upon my soul"

"Stop! thou drivest me to madness This is worse than tears and protests would have been I cannot suffer this great sacrifice No! by all the gods I cannot Better far that all the torments of the avenging god fall on me than that thou be made the victim of my rashness and my folly Hear me, Rudra, Destroying God, I do recant, I spurn the oath, I will not do this foul, inhuman act!"

Kalyana tried to shut in the words from utterance by placing her hand upon his mouth

A flash of lightning tore the sky and a reverberating thunder peal cracked the dome of heaven and above the warring elements rose a woman's wild, protesting scream.

Unnoticed by the frightened twain, a huge, black bird sat on the window ledge and gazed with blinking, beady, reddish eyes into the room and opened its blood-red beak, but made no sound.

In the lightning flash and crash of thunder, they read as they were schooled by ages of tradition and religious teaching, Rudra's wrath at the man forsworn; the god of

the wicked world had spoken and his anger was made known.

They stared into each other's faces and neither for a time dared speak The woman trembled and breathed fitfully and the man for once felt touch of fear. With quavering voice she murmured hoarsely.

"This is horrible,—horrible!"

"It is too late to mend, I have spoken the words," and there was noble resignation in his tones and fear was gone

"Nay, nay, perhaps thou canst make some amends Thou hast not yet failed——"

"There is but one alternative now to appease the angry god."

"To keep thy vow?"

"Yes, that is the only way.'

"And thou wilt do it?" she whispered hoarsely. "Say thou wilt, say it, Agra, and save thy perjured soul!"

Agra, torn by fierce emotions, sank upon the divan beside the window casement and stared wildly at the beautiful woman who now tempted him to save his soul. Death were better than the Destroyer's wrath,—to fail by death were absolution of his oath, then would the tortures of the after-world be stayed

Kalyana sank beside the man whom once she loved so tenderly and gazed into his troubled face; she read the pain that racked his soul and made him suffer more than mortal injury could do How noble, true and generous did he seem,—how sublime in his self-abnegation that could bravely face the Destroyer's wrath to spare her mortal agony! He was Agra still and in his nobility she saw her maiden love vindicated. Then the appalling thought returned and gripped her with a serpent's giant

folds. She knew it was the only desperate thing to do, and that she would do it was as inevitable as the will of Indra.[1]

"Agra, let us think no more of this. See, so angered as I was before, so glad am I that thou art with me now."

"Kalyana! what mean these words?"

"Canst thou remember yet the glorious day so long ago when in the garden we did plight our troth?"

"Aye, but I cannot understand thee"

"No matter if thou canst or no I am but thinking of the joy we felt when love grew up between us and we swore eternal constancy."

"Aye, we did, but I betrayed thy faith in me even as I now betray my oath"

"Hush! it was no fault of thine Thy hurt and not thy want of strength and skill made thee to lose my hand."

"Kalyana, thou forgettest now thy husband, Amorapama, he is not here?"

"Nay, he is dead," and the gentle words were flaming in her soul

"Dead?"

"Aye, he died in battle so 'tis said."

"Recently?"

"Some few months agone. Our raj is now at war and at his army's head and leading on to battle my poor Amorapama died."

She sighed and tears were choking speech and little did Agra dream how deep the grief she felt

"Amorapama dead! and thou art widow then?" The

[1] Indra—the first of the Vedic triad—the great god The Vedic Hindus worshipped one god but not one alone. Their singers exalted the one invoked against all others Thus one time Indra was exalted, then Varuna and even Soma was called great God.—Hunter, Hist. of Indian Peoples, 56.

words came slowly from his lips as if he were communing with himself.

"Yea, even so" She went toward him and sat beside her erstwhile lover "I am so lonely, so unhappy since he went away and now I am disconsolate at his sudden and untimely death"

"Didst learn to love him then?"

"Speak not of this, I pray thee" He mistook her meaning and pursuing his own thought went on

"Is there then still left in thee a sweet refrain,—a gentle echo of the love that once was mine?"

"No woman who has really loved can ever cease to love."

"Ah, sweet queen, then thou dost love me still? I feel it in my soul,—thou dost!" and in rapturous vehemence he seized her icy hand and pressed it fervently to his hot lips. And she, the faithful woman, who tenaciously clung to the memory of her dead, suffered it to be done and said no word of protest But her face was turned away and he saw not the light of resolution in her blue-black eyes He said tenderly

"Speak to me, sweet Kalyana, that my ears may hear the music of thy voice"

"What can I say that was not said so long ago?" She tried to smile into his flushed and eager face.

"Tell me again what once thou saidst and in saying which gave the world a glory never worn before and life a value never counted until then. Tell me thou dost love me, sweet!"

"Were it not wrong,—disloyal too?"

"What matter if 'twere right or wrong? Thou wast for me intended, for our love placed thee in willing bondage to my soul and that I lost thee was a mere mischance,

—a trick of fate Yea, thou art in truth my very own and all that happened is as nothing to the consciousness of thy love. All my soul proclaims thee mine,—mine!"

"Ah, Agra, it was a glorious dream!" and she sighed and drew toward him in willing yielding to a power she could not then control

"A dream, yea,—a rudely broken one but to be made whole again. Come into my arms, my love, my precious queen," and the love-drunk man forgot his oath, his honor, all, in the mad revel of his passionate love. And she, the woman who had made a firm resolution to remain a widow, suffered all his kisses on her burning lips and by no word or act gave sign they were revolting.

She laid her body on his surging breast while her bared arms closed round his neck Reclining on his knee, she toyed in tender dalliance with his sable curls and with ravishing caresses stole his wits from the dread purpose of his solemn oath Her eyes shone unwonted fire, and he thought, as in their glorious depths he looked, that the light he saw was all of love for him

Her right arm being disengaged, with fumbling hand she searched behind his back to find the jeweled dagger at his side, and still she yielded to his wild and unconstrained endearments as if to her they were as pleasing as to him

Gently from the scabbard the sharp blade is drawn and her soft hand grips the cold, rough hilt of carved ivory.

The anger of the elements had passed and Varuna's softened mood beamed on the land in silvery light; it bathed the scene in mellow, mystifying glory and cast a shimmering, quivering sheen upon the now placid Ganges.

Into the queen's apartment streamed the radiance of

the summer night and paled the lamp light's yellow flame, while in the luminous splash upon the wall the shadows of the twain were rioting in mockery of their tragic folly.

The tumult in Agra's heart grew madder as flesh touched flesh and passion burned in his soul

Kalyana's face was pale and deepening shadows marked the corners of her mouth and told of the deadly purpose fixed

"If thou, Agra, art untrue to Rudra's oath, what then must come to pass?" Her one-time soft and cooing voice was trembling and unsteady as she spoke.

"A torturing death and worse than deadly torture after death," he quickly answered, little guessing the real drift of her engrossing thoughts.

"Then if thou wert to die in doing what thy vow required, wouldst thou be spared the wrath of Rudra in the after-world?"

"Aye, so' tis said by those who say they know."

"And,—art thou not afraid to die?"

"Not if I die an honorable death"

"But thou hast fear of Rudra's wrath?"

"Aye, that I have"

"And death were preferable to his dreadful vengeance, were it not?"

"It were indeed, but why dost thou ask, Kalyana? Let us not think of Rudra, but Kama let us worship now"

So engrossed were they in their concern, they noted not the rising tumult in the distant court nor heard the sound of blowing horn and loud huzzas

"And if thy soul should now be speeded, couldst thou be unafraid?"

"Yea, quite unafraid, for since I was a boy I looked

so often in the face of death, I have lost all sense of danger and death itself hath now no power to shake my soul."

"Ah!" she sighed in wonderment that one could be so brave. "Kiss me, Agra, kiss me until I cry for mercy," and Agra seized her recumbent body in his arms and pressed her to his breast with such fierce passion that she gasped in pain, and when he turned he saw in gruesome shadow drawn upon the brilliant moonlit space a woman's hand holding a dagger poised in readiness to pierce his heart. He started from his seat but ere he could discern the substance that had cast the startling shadow, the gold embroidered drapery parted and Amorapama stood transfixed by what he saw

They jumped up at sight of Amorapama's flushed and twitching face, and the dagger that in an instant more had pierced Agra's heart fell with loud crash on the floor and in that tense and painful moment three lives were wrenched apart

The Maharaja's presence seemed like Rudra's will and served a damning accusation.

On the livid face of Amorapama, the flickering light played fitfully, the muscles of his temples swelled, his corded throat was drawn to painful tightness and his flashing eye consumed the startled pair that stared in speechless wonderment which he mistook for conscious guilt

The gloomy bird cawed loudly and flew out into the starlit night

Agra's eyes lost their startled stare, and his drawn face grew calm, his posture was full of grace; his manner though respectful was that of an equal deferring right of speech through sense of courtesy

Amorapama still unspeaking, firmly and without haste of emotion, drew the shining blade from jewelled scabbard and by a motion known to swordsmen, gave the signal to be on guard.

Kalyana's bulging eyes were fixed on her husband's face, then shaking off the lethargy of dread she rushed toward him and with protesting gesture and unsteady voice, cried:

"Amorapama,—husband,—lover,—it is a sad mistake; thou dost not understand, thou canst not know the truth. Do not I beseech thee, do the dreadful deed thy eyes proclaim thee now intending"

In a voice that chilled her blood and made her know the futility of her purpose to restrain his will, he answered without taking further note of her.

"Peace, woman, stand aside! Agra, be on thy guard!"

Ere the last word had grown cold, the air was rent with flash of flaming steel, and crash of deadly weapons filled the chamber with a fearful din Agra, holding his opponent in his comprehending gaze, took the defensive and slowly, cautiously and warily retreated in a circle round the room in graceful ease, showing in all his movements the trained swordsman

Amorapama, his brain ablaze with frenzied fury and a mad resentment, pushed his foe with vigor, and the power of his blows would soon have ended a less adroit and weaker antagonist than young Agra was.

Kalyana watched the dreadful contest with wide-open eyes and muscles strained, and a deadly heaviness was on her riotously beating heart. She knew that in the end one or the other must succumb, and groaning, dying, lie at her feet, and she, the guiltless woman would be thought at fault. Agra, reasoning, must condemn her

for the lie and lure intended for his undoing, and the outraged husband saw himself made a cuckold by her whom he had loved, and all the significance of the dangerous days of separation was crowded in that gorgeous chamber and encompassed in the holding of a few swiftly flying moments of their intermingled lives

Mutely she begged, but all her tongueless importuning was ignored Then came the thought that all that was occurring was ordained, and she, poor, hapless woman, could no more restrain the current of events than could the fluttering wing of nightingale control the tempest's blow It was a wretched, maddening tangle which her crowded brain could not straighten out

The curse of Rudra was upon them and the Hindu woman felt the paralyzing terror which this consciousness begets What would it serve if she cried out her innocence and dared proclaim Agra's guiltlessness, since he was deaf to every sound save crashing steel, blind to all but rage-created phantoms, and dead to sense save bloodlust against the rival of his love,—the thief who pilfered all his honor and stole his happiness,—the miserable cheat that cozened his dear wife from chastity to incontinence?

With growing fury the battle of the hard-breathing men went on, but each to the other was a perfect match in strength and skill, so neither gained upon the other It must be then a test of sheer endurance The sweat was pouring from their tense, strong bodies and the matted hair fell on their stern and savage faces. They breathed in short, quick gasps but still they battled on.

To be so long restrained by Agra's defensive skill, enraged the angry Amorapama all the more, and so even fiercer grew his attack and superhuman power inspired his blows; but each time his heavy sword would fall it

met Agra's perfect guard and harmlessly the blow was warded off to be an instant later again renewed.

Amorapama's was a madman's strength against which no human power could for long endure

Agra now began to feel the demoralizing sense of sure defeat, his guard was growing weaker and his movements were no longer agile, but still he kept himself from Amorapama's searching blade Kalyana, seeing that the end was near, rushed thoughtlessly between her husband and her lover even at the risk of her own life

Amorapama's sword is raised in air,—it falls, and ere Agra can raise up his guard, Kalyana stepped within the circle of the swinging steel Agra could not raise his weapon without cutting her and so the end had come To save Kalyana from his circling sword, he dropped his arm and with head bowed down in sacrificial attitude, received, before his adversary could restrain the descending sword, the crushing blow

The keen-edged blade cut through the skull and split Agra's brain He staggered and without a cry or moan sank at Kalyana's feet She screamed and threw herself on the dying man's quivering body and hot tears of pity fell on his paling cheek His fast glazing eyes looked into hers and with a smile upon his lips he groaned her name in mortal pain, rolled over on his back, and lay there,—dead

Amorapama, his sword beside him dripping blood upon the silken rug, stood still and watched without emotion brave Agra's death now sweetened by the presence of the woman whom he loved What mattered it to Amorapama that Agra lay there dead and his dear wife was by his side and with her pitying sympathy had given

peace to the parting soul? What cared he for this,—for anything? The rival dead, the sullied woman,—

He gripped Kalyana's arm and raised her up and made her look him in the eye His quick-beating heart grew normal and a deadly calm sat on his furrowed brow. As he stood before the woman, he seemed to her excited mind the incarnation of the avenging god

She trembled, but from no sense of guilt The noble woman who would kill her lover to save his soul and thus preserve her child, stood before the angry husband adjudged, condemned He spoke slowly and with cutting emphasis

"Well, what fate dost thou expect?"

"I care not much what be my fate."[1]

"Since *he* is dead?"

"Yea, since he is dead"

"So!"

"And *thou* hast ceased to love me"

"What concern hath my love ever been to thee?" and bitterness lay in each word

"At first but little I confess,—of late everything"

"Perjurer! Thy tongue befouls the word when thou dost speak it Thinkst thou canst save thyself by thus beguiling me?"

"Nay, I have no such intent"

"Indeed! and that is well According to our laws for faithless wives,[2] there is but one unalterable punishment."

"I know it," she calmly answered

"And thou hast no fear to die?"

[1] Place of punishment for faithless wives referred to in R V, IV, 5 5

[2] There is evidence of the faithlessness of wives See Pischel and Geldner "Vedische Studien" for existence of *hetaræ*.

"None"

"Ah, thou hopest to meet thy lover in the other world," —the soul of Amorapama was ablaze with jealousy

"Nay, I have no fear of death because I am not faithless and deserve not of the law's dread sanction"

"Have I no eyes? Thinkst I did not see? Wouldst have me think myself the victim of delusion?"

"Nay, that were worse than folly What thou didst see was seeming guilt, but merely seeming, and not guilt"

"Have done!"

Amorapama had grown impatient and was in no mood to argue with the woman whether hers was guilt or only seeming guilt What he had seen in that one all-embracing sweep of eye when parted draperies showed him Agra and Kalyana in clinging attitude of tenderness, fully sufficed to lull all doubt of guilt, and made conclusion of her wrong as fixed and unshakable as is the highest Himalayan peak

With ill-concealed emotion he looked into her face the while, and watched each tell-tale flush and twitch of muscle to give him confirmation of what was now with him conviction

"Thy life has been a lie—let not thy tongue keep it vile company Kalyana—" he spoke this name as if his soul filled it with sweet significance——

"Oh! how I once did love to mouth that name that now I do detest, abhor, abominate, I loathe it as I hate thee,—a thing unclean, corrupt, polluted, dead, decayed, a moral carrion fit only to be food for lecherous beasts of prey that feed on unchastity,—I shall kill thee, for it is decreed and I would save mine honor"

"Kill me!" she cried; "thou canst not kill what is already dead."

He started, stopped and stared.

"Thy words have done more deadly execution than a thousand pointed, keen-edged swords could do. Kill me! let this heart but stop to beat and I am dead,—I tell thee since in thee thy love has died and in its place a filthy thought of my uncleanness hath its place, Kalyana is no more, this wretched body which confines and holds imprisoned my poor soul, what care I for it? Hack it,—cut it into pieces and feed it to flesh-eating birds,—torture me even if thou wilt, for in the end my peace will come in death and the liberated soul will go its way where the pure gods shall will Go on, dear Amorapama, kill thy Kalyana and she will welcome the quick killing blow, for she doth love thee even as the hand shall fall"

His ears were closed to moving speech, he thought her vile, and all her noble seeming but a trick to beguile his vengeance from its just intent He stepped before her and his gleaming, passion-blinded eyes were devouring her loveliness. The pure, sweet scented body he had longed to fondle and caress was loathsome as if blotched with festering, filthy sores, the blushing, half-parted lips he longed to kiss, were hateful for the lies they helped into the world and for the greater and inexcusable offense of having cushioned the dead Agra's lips.

In passing his foot struck the jeweled dagger which Kalyana dropped at Amorapama's entrance.

A vengeful thought flashed in his burning brain He picked the dagger up and gazed an instant at its cunning workmanship, its glistening jewels that bestudded the carved ivory hilt and the Gandhara coat of arms that was emblazoned on the blade. He turned to her and said:

"With this beautiful instrument that once was his,—thy lover's,—I shall kill thee."

He raised the dagger at arm's length above the woman's head and she looked calmly into her husband's eyes and never flinched nor moved, but with a smile upon her lips awaited the instant when the steel would sink into her warm, soft, clinging flesh But it never fell, for as he stared at her, his great frame trembled and he shut his eyes and clenched his fist and his teeth sank into his lips as if to keep from uttering the cry of agony

He dropped the dagger and with a dull and muffled thud it fell upon the blood-stained rug

"No,—this death were much too great a mercy,—too quick,—too sudden,—too painlessly wouldst thou expire to join the wretch that lies there dead For thee I have another and far juster and more fitting end Into the desert thou shalt go,—there to die of hunger and of thirst and be food for desert beasts Thus shalt thou expiate thy foul, soul-polluting crime"

"Oh, Amorapama,—husband,—lover, not that, not that! I am willing—ready even to die, but not by such dreadful means Oh, be merciful for I have done thee no wrong. Before the avenging god, I swear to thee that I am clean and pure as when thou didst go away to war"

Hers was a moving plea, but it served her not, for now enraged like some wild animal he cried

"Stop; do not forswear thy soul, I know the truth. When I did wed thee, thou wast bound to Agra by the ties of love. For this I bore thee no ill will. Then when the child was born, I thought I noted signs of growing love and I was overjoyed and bade myself to wait. I went to war and when I am returned, I find thee in his

arms,—thy lips clinging to his,—each telling the other of the love restored, for I was thought then out of the way,—each swearing by all the false gods of love eternal constancy."

"Oh, lover mine, hear me, for I love thee better than I ever loved Agra in my girlish days. Whilst thou wert gone, I learnt the glorious lesson of a new,—a precious love Agra is forgotten,—thou alone art part of my life, my heart,—my soul is thine, for I confess now what my lips have never said and I believed would never say, husband, I do love thee, love thee, love thee!" and with a deep tenderness that was a pleading prayer, the proud young woman, who unfearing had awaited death, now humbled by the subtle power of her love, sank at his feet and her head was bowed as if a willing sacrifice awaiting death

"Cease thy foolish words, they will not serve, I do not believe thee though thou swearest on thy jarai's[1] body thou wast not false, I would hold thee false despite it all To the desert thou shalt go at sinking of the moon Be ready, for the guard shall fetch thee at that hour"

He turned to go, but in her frenzy she grew bold and seizing his arm in clutch of terror cried in the dread agony of a mother's breaking heart.

"Oh, do not separate me from my child! If not for me, have pity for thy child I am its mother, and it hath need of me,—of all a mother's care and tenderness. Spare me for thy child! See, it sleeps calmly, sweetly. Let its closed eyes plead for us as my poor tongue cannot plead, let its tiny fingers clutch thy heart and may its precious baby love soften thy cruel mind. Oh! have mercy

[1] Paramour.

for thy baby's sake,—for the poor baby do recant thy dreadful sentence."

The wretched mother tore her hair in agony and wrung her hands as on her knees, with tear-dimmed eyes that in their pleading tenderness would move a demon heart to pity she gazed into his cold, unmoving and unpitying countenance and, seeing her words were all in vain, a terrible grief-laden groan broke from her lips.

At mention of his child, his face grew darker and a new,—a terrible thought now gripped his brain. He went to the sleeping child and looked intently into its calm and smiling, chubby, pink-hued face. But even this moving sight had no effect save that it hardened him the more. He seized the child roughly and threw it into her open arms and with a voice the tones of which she never heard before, he said:

"Thy prayer is granted. I will not separate the mother from her child. It shall abide with thee so long as thou shalt live and then with thee it shall find peace in death I hold no grudge against this wretched thing for it is not to blame for its own shame

"Stop! stop!" she cried and bounded to her feet.

"Take it with thee, for it were wrong to separate the mother from her child. The world shall be purged of thee and of the fruit of thy vile lust,—take it!"

"Oh, husband, it is thy child which thou condemnest to a dreadful death"

"Thou liest! It is thy bastard and its father there lies dead. Thus shall perish the whole nest of vipers."

Pointing his finger at her contemptuously he cried scornfully,

"Abhi! abhi!"[1]

[1] Abhi—unfaithful (spoken of a wife).

Without another word he strode from the room and left behind a wretched, terror-stricken mother for whom the mode of death proposed held all the terrors of a vivid and schooled fancy.

Still clutching her now crying babe, she fell into a long and death-like swoon.

CHAPTER XII

THE DESERT OF THUR

The women whom the infant's cry at last aroused from sleep, found Kalyana prostrate by the dead man's side, her garments stained in his blood At sight of Agra's broken head and jagged wound from which the brain was oozing mixed with blood, the women screamed in horror and some fell down and swooned

In consternation, the affrighted ones rushed forth crying aloud their mistress' death, for so they believed her Then came the strong of heart and iron-nerved who soon revived the fainting woman and removed the corpse and cleansed the place where murder had been done

News was brought to Amorapama, but the Maharaja would not be disturbed and so behind his bolted door gave himself up to terrible reflection Nor would he eat or drink, for Kara having received his dreadful order and to its faithful execution taken a solemn oath, the king, now broken-hearted, had no need for food or wine since he was dead and all the concerns of life had ceased to be.

His brain was not yet cleared of passion clouds that obscured the vision of his soul Too full of hate and shame to grieve for his own loss,—the loss of her he once had loved,—he only sighed for vengeance. The awful doom to which his unbalanced will had consigned

the child and mother seemed too inadequate for the grave offense of which he honestly believed the woman guilty.

When Kavi knocked he found the door remained unopened to the call of friendship, and this was strange, for so close stood he to the young king it was not thought that anything could keep him from his side

Two hours before the dawn would light the eastern sky, Kara started on his oath-bound undertaking He was loyal to the royal will for he had won by strict fidelity Ojas' favor, and so Amorapama felt of all the Hindu servants he was best to trust with the commission.

Kalyana with her babe in arms, was placed as gently and as kindly as the painful duty would permit upon an ambling bay, and two sworn warriors of the king's own bodyguard stood at attention, waiting for the word to start

With womanish concern the low born Sudra with a Kshatriya's soul enwrapped the shivering woman in a soft, warm shawl, then the word was given and the cavalcade began its tragic journey to the Thur Desert

This was a vast, untracked, uncharted, sandy waste, but seldom crossed by slow moving caravan, and here one might be lost as utterly as on the mighty ocean where no guide posts tell the wandering, puzzled traveller the way that he should go, for those who have gone the way before have left no blaze or trace behind

The night was dark, for the full moon had long since passed out of the sky and myriad stars though visible were lustreless Soon dawn would draw the draperies of night asunder and the heavens be kissed by Vishnu's radiant lips.

The guards rode on ahead while Kara stayed beside the queen, in part obeying the royal will, but more to comfort

her whose loneliness and eventual doom struck terror in the heart of the soldier-servant. The horses' hoofs made hollow rhythmic sounds as on they went toward the trackless desert shores

"Kara," Kalyana's voice was hollow and its quaver told the keen-sensed man of sympathy the horror which the woman felt.

"Yea, sweet queen," and bending forward, he leaned deferentially to await her words.

"Is—there no escape from this—this dreadful mode of death?"

"Alas!" and Kara's voice was full of sympathy, "I know of none, the Maharaja's word is given,—his order is supreme,—none dare to disobey for all are bound by an oath."

"That dreadful oath again!" and the queen sighed, for well she knew the hopelessness of her doom since this irrevocable oath enmeshed her thus

"Kara," after a short pause she spoke again, "how long can I live without food and drink?"

"Oh, I pray thee, queen, forbear! My task is such I would have rather died than do it"

"I know it, Kara. It is no fault of thine, and thy poor queen holds it no offense that thou must obey thy king's command. Yet answer me, for thou well knowest what I wish to know."

The strong man's lips were trembling when he answered.

"Perhaps three days, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Oh, I cannot tell thee!"

"I insist!"

"Unless the wild beasts of the desert fall upon thee ere that time is up," and Kara choked, for grief was tugging at his resolute heart.

"Then,—there are wild beasts there,—lions?" And Kara nodded, for he could not speak

"Tigers?" Again he nodded and gulped to stifle the cry of pain that gripped him now

"Serpents?"

"Oh, stop! stop! I beg thee, queen I shall go mad with grief To think that I, I who love thee so, must serve this fearful purpose of the king!"

"And how much food and drink hast thou brought with thee?" the queen relentlessly continued

"Enough for two days; such was the Maharaja's strict command"

There fell a silence between them and the horses moved swiftly on Again the queen addressed her unwilling executioner

"Is there no oasis in this dreadful desert?"

"None that I know or ever heard of, still I am quite sure there is"

"And the prince,—how long dost think that he will stand the heat?"

"I cannot tell,—I cannot tell," and the man groaned at the thought the woman's question aroused His eyes were filled with tears, which she observing, in a soothing voice said

"Peace, my good, my noble Kara Thy grief is very sweet, for it tells me I am not without a friend Thou art sworn to do thy duty and must faithfully perform it"

"And I know too well how I am bound by this fearful oath and what it would mean to me were I to be false.

But this makes my misery the keener, for I see no help,—no means of escape,—nowhere to go to shift the dread responsibility"

"Let us be patient, Kara, it is all we can do," her tones were soft and reassuring, and the tender, faithful Kara dared to take heart For despair finds no hospitality in the minds of those who were born to be brave

The glory of the sunrise was in the heavens, shafts of orange, rose and yellow pierced the deepening blue of sky and the warming radiance of an Indian day was on the waste of sand The Twins were in a merry mood, and lit their sentinel fires, they burned in many colors into the azure firmament, the stars paled to invisibility

It was like a monstrous palette of some gigantic painter making ready for the work of day

The last vestige of vegetation had long since been passed, the land grew flat and deep with fine, yellow sand and as the eye roved around the majestic circle of the horizon, it beheld no tree, no water, no evidence of human life,—sand everywhere and naught to break the crushing monotony of sameness

An hour before the sun had reached meridian, they halted to refresh their horses and took food and drink for which the overheated body yearned Glad was Kalyana to dismount and stretch her stiffened legs and nurse the fretful child whom heat and thirst had set to whining. Kara solicitously made the queen as comfortable as the circumstances would permit He helped her to the food and Soma wine with water mixed, and did his best to give her cheer he felt so little of himself

His grief remained, yet in his wisdom he tried to be as lightsome as he could to help his queen and keep her thoughts from dwelling on the tragic end in store for her.

He talked with animation of the royal hunts in jungle deep, of dangers he encountered and but narrowly escaped, of merry incidents of life in camps and other things, and by these gentle means he kept Kalyana from her gloomy thoughts and often he beguiled a smile when he narrated some droll incident in which he had figured foolishly Kara was cheerful now, for he had formed a firm resolve that he would lighten to the extent that he was able, the burden of his queen

The halt ended and the journey was resumed The wind that blew from time to time in fitful gusts was laden with a fine and irritating sand that made Kalyana and her infant cough, for delicately nurtured as they were, the mother and the child were ill-prepared for torture that became each moment more unbearable

Her awful penance was begun, and the one question was, how long would its duration be, until nature gave relief in death Her soul was soothed by a gentle resignation that gave a calm and unresisting sense which thought of her impending dissolution could not dispel.

There was at first a bitterness against the man who so outraged her innocence, but it was succeeded by a surge of love that asked for nothing more than that he should know that she was pure and noble and had not smirched his honorable name

Then came a comforting reflection that eased her tortured mind Kavi, the gentle friend and priest, knew that she was true and loyal to her husband, for he was present and a witness at love's birth He would teach the angry Amorapama all the truth and convince him of her perfect love and that she was what he would wish her to be as wife and mother of his child Thus consolation found a home in her broken heart.

The afternoon waned into twilight and the scorching heat subsided while a gentle breeze sprang up and cooled the air They had reached by hard and steady riding at the end of a day, a large, flat rock that stood in the midst of this ocean of hot sand as if it were a board to be set for royal feast. Here Kara made his journey's end. He reckoned by the time consumed in travel the distance they had traversed, and so believed he had fulfilled the Maharaja's definite behest

They paused, refreshed their horses and ate of what they brought,—the water in huge bullock skins, the food in bags used by the army off to war

Kalyana knew the hour of parting was at hand and a dull oppressive dread of being left alone besieged her mind. The time was come when Kara and the rest would pass below the distant horizon, and she would be there,—alone. No one with whom to speak to speed the laggard hours, none to keep her company and help her bear her troubles by the magic of true sympathy The thought was now appalling, and strange it seemed she had not thought of this before Now she realized how skillful had been Kara's ministrations in that they kept from her this paralyzing fear Until now she had not thought of these three rough but loyal men as gone away,—gone never to return. Alone with the unconscious prince, whom lack of comprehension saved a multitude of pains, upon this desolate, unshaded rock, and here to wait in agony the final and unknown end! To wait and wonder and to be afraid, dreading the impending doom, yet knowing not the form and manner of that doom. On this blistering rock, nowhere a blade of grass, no shading palm to give her shelter against the burning rays of the sun; food growing daily scantier,—water nearing too

its end, and then,—what then? She cried in voiceless horror, as she watched the men prepare to start for home, —home! how sweet the word

Whispered orders that Kara gave made the soldiers stir about and make ready for the homeward journey. Turning to the queen, the noble Sudra said

"Gentle Queen Kalyana, the time for us to leave has come, I must go Here is a blanket which will shield thee in the night, and the food and wine are here Last, I give thee this sharp knife to serve thee in thy need. Good-bye, sweet queen, good-bye," and the man, succumbing to the tide of tenderest emotion, fell upon his knees and kissed her garments and sobbed like some poor stricken child that has been punished for a wrong; and the others turned away to hide the tears that in their shedding ennobled them as royal favors could not have done

"Friends, your sympathy for me and mine hath touched me deeply Be not afraid, your queen can die as she has lived, quite unafraid Death is easy when the conscience is not burdened with the consciousness of guilt We all must die,—you on the battlefield or in your beds surrounded by your loved ones I, here, alone,—yet is not your prince my dear companion in this trying hour?"

She thought of them now not as subjects but as human beings like herself whom royal will would take away and leave her in the desert all alone

The rested steeds are saddled and await with impatient champ of bit and stamp of hoof the riders' mount and spur prick signal to be off. Kara found a tender consolation at the parting from the queen in the resolve he silently had made and of which, with Hindu reticence, he breathed no word

"Farewell, kind friends, and,—Kara!" At the word the leader reined his horse and paused.

"Go tell thy king his queen is now resigned to her fate and a soul-deep love commends his soul to the beneficent Almighty Presence, for of anger none is left, but of pity for his error much Farewell!"

A dry sob choked the Sudra's utterance, so with bow and downcast head, he rode rapidly away and his companions knew their leader was as sore at heart as they.

Kalyana, holding in a crushing tenderness the prince who slept, stood looking after the fast-moving horsemen whose dark forms the gloom soon swallowed up, then even sound of horses' hoofs was heard no more and she knew herself alone

With the sensuous thrill of languor and sweet drowsiness that presages sleep, a chill of horror stole into her mind that froze the blood in veins that burned in fever,—dread of what would chance if she asleep were to become the food of ravenous beasts, and worse, of what would be the fate of the young prince

But even terror of impending ill and dread of present danger will in time succumb to nature's law, and so exhausted, Kalyana lay on the still warm, hard, flat rock and clutching her dear burden to her breast, closed her tear-moist eyelids in sleep.

And guardian stars looked down and watched in sentinel array the fair young sleeper and her child Then gentle, playing breezes toyed with her hair and kissed with cooling sweetness her parched and bleeding lips

Exhausted nature gave a temporary surcease of suffering and the supersensitive nerves that carried pain-laden messages to the poor victim's aching brain are numbed in dreamless sleep.

In the afternoon of night and as the waning stars proclaimed the coming dawn, the whining of the restless child aroused the mother from the kindly bondage of her sleep. Half rising and resting her body on her elbow, she gazed around bewildered by her strange surroundings, her truant mind at first failing to respond to the command of will.

Over the sharp edge of the flat rock, but hidden in the gloom, a huge object slowly moved about, and with each twist came nearer to where she lay. Quick as lightning flash came her intuition that sensed the presence of a wild beast lured by hunger to the spot.

She seized the dagger which the thoughtful Kara had given and with a calmness born of desperation, she awaited the attack Slowly she arose, and placing the still sleeping infant in the hollow of her left arm, clutched firmly the keen-edged weapon and waited. The hungry brute's ferocious eyes were like burning disks in the darkness, and as the crouching, stealthily moving, noiseless creature came nearer, Kalyana prayed to Indra for timely succor in her dreadful need.

The beast had traversed several feet, and so had shortened the intervening space, and as it moved along the flat and barren rock, she moved away as slowly until she neared the precipice that cast its heavy shadow on the sands beneath

A sudden leap, a tearing of the flesh and crunching jaws that crushed the bones to pulp and all would be over and Kalyana and her babe would lie two mangled forms, and what the beast would leave the scavenger birds would soon devour.

The dreaded spring must come,—it came! and then the stillness is rudely jarred by twang of bow-string as a

speeding arrow strikes the brute behind the shoulder where it firmly holds, while gush of blood marks well the sureness of the bowman's aim. The stricken brute roars in pain, and for an instant turns upon the intruder, whom it sees, but cannot reach. The rankling barb holds fast to quivering flesh, and oft-repeated roar tells the pain the arrow is inflicting The barb was well seated and the flowing blood that poured from gaping tear of skin and flesh, proved the hurt to be a fatal one The pain-crazed brute with mighty roar and wide open jaws leaped toward the cowering woman But before it reached its victim a dark, lithe figure sprang upon the rock and then there followed a fierce and deadly combat between the tiger and the man.

Again and again the blade was thrust into the quivering side, and still the wounded beast gave battle Stepping on the blood-smeared rock the man fell and in an instant the brute was upon him The deadly claws sank into the flesh, and crushed the man's chest A deep groan came from the paling lips

With superhuman effort he drew back the sword to give the needed space to strike, then, nerving himself and gathering his fast-waning strength, buried the long steel in the tawny chest and, without sound, the great beast rolled over and was dead

Awakening from the sleep of dread, Kalyana rushed to where the groaning man lay bleeding and gasping in the throes of death In the glimmer of the first hour of the dawn, the queen saw and recognized her deliverer.

"Kara," she cried, "my poor, my faithful Kara, to thee I owe my life,—my child's!" and overcome with emotion, the queen knelt by the Sudra's side and raised his head

in her arms and gazed tenderly into the dimming eyes. He smiled and feebly answered:

"Beloved queen, I am happy to die in service for thee. I thank the gods I die in such a labor."

"Noble, generous Kara!" and she wiped the blood from face and hands and gently held him in her arms until the end came to relieve his pain

Before the man was dead the carrion-loving black feathered scavengers of the desert gathered round and with beady, gleaming eyes stared blinkingly at the dying man and waited for the moment when their feast would begin

The day had dawned and with each hour the heat increased. Kalyana took her child, the food and water to the extreme end of the flat rock and, with loathing, watched the progress of the carrion festival. An hundred birds[1] or more were gathered round the man and beast, and amid melancholy cries that sounded almost human in their shrill and penetrating tones, the devouring of the dead went on Back and forth and up and down they flew and quarreled, beating each other's wings and clawing with their talons, then settled down again and set to work at rending flesh till bared and shining the skeletons shone forth

Before the day was well begun naught but the grinning skull and fleshless bones of man and beast remained. So horrible the sight, the queen, though sickened, could not remove her eyes from the gruesome spectacle Then came the thought that she and the prince would share this fate.

[1] "Expectant flights of vultures hover o'er the darkness and clap their wings with hope."—Wilson, "Theatre of the Hindus," Vol. II, p 248.

More from a sense of duty than desire for food, Kalyana broke her fast and with utmost care and calculation partook of just enough of food and drink as her physical demands required, having forethought for the time when her last crumb and drop would be exhausted and starvation and the agony of thirst would come upon them

Slowly the day of horror passed, and so absorbed was she no further need for food was felt, mutely she sat and dreamed of other days, of happiness in childhood time, of love's young dream, of sweet maternity and kindred memories The blood upon the rock dried up and left a reddish blot in which the bared and glistening bones of man and beast lay bleaching

In soul communion the first long day in desert exile passed and the unfelt blaze of scorching sun had passed and given over to the calm and cooling atmosphere of on-coming night The gyrating vultures had passed away into the vast unknown, and the stillness of the great expanse was all unbroken

Awakening as from a dream-haunted sleep, Kalyana aroused herself to full consciousness, when all the dread of loneliness and the deadly hazard of her isolation crushed the waning courage from her heart She ate, but without zest or joy of an appeased hunger, and drank but merely to relieve the pain of thirst, and as she nursed the child and felt the warm and clinging infant lips upon her flesh, a tenderness filled her heart, and she thanked Indra for the joy and pain of motherhood

Then night came on like a soothing ministrant, bathing the feverish woman and her babe with cooling balm and gave of her store of mercy a gentle drowsiness that lulled and pacified,—and so Kalyana and the baby prince were wrapped in refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

AMORAPAMA'S DISCOVERY

Amorapama leaped from his couch on which he had been lying fully dressed, and with rapid strides crossed and recrossed the vast apartment The rage that fired his brain had now subsided. He thought of Kalyana as one who had just passed away The hate that jealousy had born to him was superseded by a rankling grief For as he reasoned now, he found in every phase of the distressing coil he was the culprit and not she. Her soulful protestation of innocence rang like an echo in his heart, and try as he did to prove her false, his heart would whisper she was true and loyal

In such travail of mind, the suffering, disillusioned husband spent the days and nights, and now he was no better fixed in mind, no surer of himself and the justice of his act than on the first day of his repentance When his mind would hold her guiltless, the awful doom to which his passion had consigned her made his strong form tremble in a mighty terror and an impulse born of strong revulsion came over him to undo what he had done.

He wandered over the way-worn paths in search of evidence of her certain guilt and when each item had been weighed, each significant fact admeasured, he would hold fast to some self-deluding but incriminating circum-

stance and try for comfort in the thought that she had wronged him and that what he did was after all no worse than it should be There was consolation in the thought, for it made him seem a little better in his own condemning judgment of himself

But this was only a trick of his self-serving will, for underlying all was fixed his faith in her, and strangle it though he tried by every means at his command, it would arise and call him liar Such then was the paradox. Her guilt was needful for his justification and if she were innocent his crime was beyond pardon or even extenuation.

Thus the mighty Maharaja Amorapama, before the judgment of his conscience, stood a criminal for whom no intercession could avail

The suffering through which the strong man passed was evidenced in lines that carved with the relentlessness of fate the record of his mental pain His black, gleaming eyes were lusterless and dark shadows rimmed the sockets, the jangling of the nerves was shown by his twitching mouth and his gasping and uneven respiration.

He felt no hunger, was not athirst, and longed only for rest, yet was forced to restless action and when in motion yearned for rest again

In such tragic mood, the gentle Kavi found his friend the second day since Agra's death.

So swift had been the Maharaja's vengeance that the kindly friend and priest was not aware of Amorapama's deed until it was accomplished.

When Kavi knocked this day Amorapama admitted him, and so face to face they stood for the first time since the shadow of the great tragedy had fallen. Without a

word, Amorapama put out his hand and turned away, for he saw condemnation in the priest's soft eyes Kavi seized the outstretched hand and without word of reproach clasped it warmly in his own, for he read Amorapama's misery in the furrowed face and lack-lustre eyes

The words of blame he had come to speak were left unspoken and the angry thoughts with which he came were now absorbed in an all-embracing sympathy

As they looked into each other's eyes, Amorapama's head sank on his loyal friend's shoulder and for a time they did not speak, each too much moved to trust his thoughts to speech

"Kavi," Amorapama at last began and his voice was hollow and his manner listless and distraught

"I am glad that thou hast come to me, I am lonesome,—very, very lonesome"

"I came before, but was not then admitted."

"I did not know that, for I did not hear thy summons I have great need of thy advice and sympathy"

"My best advice and sympathy are always thine, my Amorapama The more now since thou hast suffered"

"Yea, I have suffered as I never thought to suffer But so it is and what is worse, to this suffering there is to be no end The irrevocable hath come and from it there is no escape Where is thy philosophy, oh priest! since thou hast no counsel in thy vast treasure store of wisdom to give me one moment of surcease of bitter pain?"

"As thou didst sow, so must thou reap.[1] If thou shalt make a wound, will it not bleed? The light obstructing substance, will it not cast a shadow? Fixed are the laws the gods have made and from their sanction

[1] See note, Glossary, "Karma"

none can escape. From this no philosophy can give release."

"Then is thy philosophy of little use. If it cannot bind up our wounds and ease our pain, of what service is thy healing art?"

"There is balm to heal thy wound"

"Then name it, Kavi, name it," Amorapama spoke with eagerness.

"Repentance for thy deed and healing time will serve thy purpose best"

"Ah! repentance,—how that word hath manacled my soul. Time,—how shall that serve for present pain? I would have ease now, not a thousand long years hence. Besides, I know not if I should repent, for if she sinned, her fate were but deserved—then would I never wish to repent."

"Then thou art not sure thy deed was just?"

"Sure? Yea, if I saw aright—if what I saw was not an optic trick, then am I sure, else—" He stopped short and paused, then the priest enquired

"Then if thou sawest truly and madest a correct deduction, why dost thou grieve?"

"Ah, Kavi, how can I tell? I believe her false—I believe her true Love whispers she is honest, while my senses cry aloud that she is base. Between these fierce emotions am I buffeted and tortured all the while."

"Noble Amorapama," and Kavi spoke in solemn tone and manner, "know this and be at peace—thy sweet Kalyana loves thee and is true—true."

"Loves me? Is true?" Amorapama echoed Kavi's words and stared into the calm, fair countenance. He paled and trembled, then sank groaning on the couch

and spread his hands to hide his twitching face. After a painful pause he lowered his hands and let them fall disconsolately and the priest went on

"She loves thee, friend, and in that certain love lies safety to thine honor"

Haltingly the Maharaja made reply

"Thou speakest like one who speaks the truth—like one who knows that it is truth he speaks."

"I speak from firm conviction born of knowledge,—hence I speak as of a certainty"

"Oh Rudra! curse me for a brutal fiend—if this be true"

"Listen then and judge when thou hast heard and know before I speak that what I say is true"

"Ah! that I know, my noble friend Would I were as sure of everything that gives me doubt as I am of thy truthfulness"

And Amorapama listened to the words that spelt his doom—heard as in a voice of thunder his condemnation, for as the truth-unfolding tale that Kavi told burned in his throbbing brain, he saw himself the passion-cursed —the fury-fooled, whom jealousy had made its victim

At conclusion of the tale Amorapama leaped to his feet like one possessed of evil spirits and moaned and beat his forehead, raved and ranted until the startled priest believed him mad And so he seemed, for his eyes were blazing, his massive frame was seized with trembling and his chest rose and fell in deep drawn respirations like a runner spent, his hands were clenched so hard the sinews swelled like bow-string drawn to speed the arrow on its flight

Placing his hands upon the priest's slim shoulders and holding him in painful grip, he hoarsely said:

"Kavi, if I thought that thou art lying, art cozening me to ease my pain on whatsoever purpose thy mind were bent, I would this instant kill thee for a wanton, loose-tongued rogue"

"Were I to turn thy faith to such an use, I would well deserve the death I trifle not with emotions that are sacred as are our prayers."

Amorapama's arms fell by his side as if a great exhaustion were upon his fine physique Staggering like one who has received a blow, he sank onto the couch and without another sign or word heard Kavi's tale to its painful end

"In her paroxysmal joy the gates of Yama's realm were opened and she caught a glimpse of paradise Scarce had she felt the sense, half pain, half happiness, when word came that her husband—thou—wert dead—slain in battle at head of thy conquering host Then I saw the grandeur of her soul exposed—'twas but a fleeting glimpse, but it sufficed to show me how much a woman and a noble queen Kalyana was The words she spoke at parting have haunted me by their nobility"

"What—what did she say?"

"'Kavi, thy philosophy hath its value after all Yet for the few moments of perfect love, I willingly pay in years of anguished widowhood!' Then she added as she went into the palace, 'Farewell, good Kavi I go to mourn my dead, but I shall be brave even as he would have me be, for am I not a Kshatriya's bride—a warrior's widow now?'"

"What a vile, a monstrous fiend I am!" he muttered through his clenched teeth. He sat as if he had been transformed to stone. His pale, drawn face proclaimed the torment of the mind, but Kavi had not yet told him

all the tale. Warming to the subject, he continued slowly and well weighing every word.

"Oh Amorapama! how she yearned for thee. Couldst thou have seen her as I saw her then, no thought of guilt would have found lodgment in thy brain As surely as Vishnu shines in yonder heaven, I protest that our queen Kalyana was as pure as Sita[1] was, and as unsullied as a virgin bud in early spring"

"Enough—enough! I believe thee—have believed thee all the while I know it, for my soul has been telling me that she is pure and yet I dared to think her false—dared to think it just to make my crime seem less hideous in my eyes Oh Kavi! I have killed my noble, beautiful Kalyana—killed her with a foul suspicion more deadly than the torturing pangs of hunger or the agony of thirst Killed her, Kavi! dost hear? Killed her! I who loved her as a flower loves the sunshine—I killed her with my baseness—my utter damned vileness Oh! why have the gods not struck me blind?[2] If thou art in truth a friend as thou hast oft protested, if thou hast but a vestige of that love for thy wretched Amorapama, do him one final service for which his dying gratitude shall requite thee—take this sword and kill me—kill me that in the world of Yama I may search for her and make some atonement for my base crime Strike, if thou dost love me"

"Nay, Amorapama, I will not add my crime to thine. Thou must live and must be brave in living even as she was when she believed thee dead Besides, who knows but she may yet be living? 'Tis but two days

[1] Wife of Rama—of the epic Ramayana See Glossary, "Sita"

[2] The gods were supposed to blind the evil-doer whom the Asvins might again cure.—Frazer's Lit Hist. of Ind, p. 3.

since thy men returned She may have escaped the wild beasts' fangs, the desert's killing heat—she yet may live. Go! instead of dying, live and save thy queen or if that happiness be denied thee, try at least and the attempt, though it shall fail of its intended purpose, will be medicinal in its soothing efficacy. Go, Amorapama, go!"

"Kavi, am I dreaming or but awaking from a fearful dream? Thy words are giving me new hope I thought of her as dead Kalyana—living—for me to make atonement by a life of devotion? Oh Indra! hear my unworthy prayer—let me find her find her alive, find my child. Come! there is indeed merit in thy philosophy, for it preaches action and that is some relief."

The crazed man rushed from the apartment and in a few moments, Amorapama and the faithful priest were riding madly over the sunlit desert plain in search of her whom they prayed they might reach in time to save.

CHAPTER XIV

KALYANA AND THE PRINCE

Kalyana had settled in her mind the question of escape, for hope that lingered for a while had died and with its taking off a mental wreck was left—a wild, staring, panting, thirsting woman whose mind was growing giddy and with whom all human circumstance was matter of indifference, for she no longer cared One thing alone still made her cling to life—the love she bore her child that gasped and feebly moaned as she crushed the nearly lifeless form to her maternal heart and kissed its hot, blistered, little lips in frenzy of a mother's passionate and undying love And so she stumbled on, her blistered, bleeding feet now bare, were leaving sanguine tracks in the yellow sand

Suddenly she stopped and wildly stared about like some hunted, frightened animal whom huntsmen bloodthirstily pursue, for a wild, agonizing thought had crept into her addled mind to give another and a keener torture still If she should die before the child, what would be its fate?

Should she not rather kill it with the dagger Kara left? Would this not be better, kinder than to leave it to a lingering death?

The last drop of water had been sucked from the skin long hours ago and of food there was none and she had

not eaten all that day Weakened in body and half-crazed, she wandered painfully on, she knew and cared not whither since in motion of the body she felt some relief

Two days and nights she had stayed upon the blood-stained rock when inaction could be borne no longer and she started on her aimless tramp into the vast wilderness of scorching sand And now exhaustion crept upon her and she sank a breathless, crushed, scarce human heap. She did not hear the baby's wretched whine—her ears were deaf, her eyes beheld not the blinding blaze of the sunlit firmament, her body ached, her feet were burning and so she thought her end was come

It was a swoon that robbed her for a time of consciousness, the infant tugged at the mother breast but she felt it not The foolish, uncomprehending little creature rebelled that its call should be unheeded, fretting, struggling and whimpering, but still the mother heart that never yet had failed to answer to its cry, remained unmoving, for the swoon was deep and lasted long and offended nature took her stern revenge

The deadly lethargy wore off at last, the wretched woman woke to consciousness and her misery was augmented for the brief surcease of pain Intuitively and as if but partly conscious of the act and without the customary joy, she answered to the infant's wants and so its cries were stilled as its cravings were supplied Kalyana knew that soon the time would come when she could serve these needs no more; when her distress of body would communicate itself to the child, and starving and athirst the two must miserably perish without human sympathy—alone.

"Oh Indra, Indra! gentle god, have mercy—let the

end come soon—soon!" she mumbled, scarcely knowing what she prayed. Then a fierce yearning for water seized her and she stared about and tried to moisten her parched, cracked lips with her dry tongue, while crushing, cruel memories of happy days when she had drunk Soma wine at her father's board, haunted, mocked and tortured her

How she longed and longed for some of those good things she then had eaten and drunk and scarcely cared about! For neither hungry nor thirsty had Ojas' daughter ever been before She strove to forget her thirst and drive thought of food from her mind and for a time succeeded, but the fearful craving again returned, each time with an augmented poignancy

Suddenly her dazed and uncertain gaze fixed on the western rim of the horizon and she saw cut clearly against the deep blue sky, huge, waving palms that seemed to find their roots in the deep blue ether and rise in majestic height into the vaulted dome At first she only blinked like one whose unaccustomed eyes behold the light; her brain too numb to comprehend the seeming truth that help was beckoning with its alluring smile

Rigid and without movement she stared as if afraid to stir lest by so doing she might fright the vision off. And all the while the midday sun blazed down upon her and her body cut deep shadows in the sand about

Then she understood, and with a wild, delirious cry more animal than human, she leaped to her feet and clutching her precious burden to her breast, began her unsteady course toward the hope-reviving oasis that spread its hospitality out before her.

Hour after hour she wandered staggeringly on, yet

pausing now and then to catch her breath, for the stifling heat choked and respiration grew a painful operation. The sun now lay like a gigantic, luminous ball upon the desert bosom and she wondered would it roll along and crush her under its great weight.

But in the west the palms still waved a welcome and now a tent, tall, white and trimmed in brilliant colors rose—clear and distinct it was and hope warmed into life, the heart beat full again and a flush spread over her wan and sunken cheeks. She smiled as thought of her misery past filled her mind. The torturing heat shall torment her no more, her feet no longer ache and burn and her throbbing head shall cool, and water, precious boon, shall be hers to drink of as much as she shall wish and no one to stay her hand. Yea, she must hurry on to reach the oasis before the night comes on Friendly people are there to help her, for they understand her troubles and the misery she has endured She shall find food aplenty and the child be well cared for by the kind friends whom she shall meet out yonder where the green palms wave and the great white tent spreads out its mighty wings like a monstrous snowy bird.

Hope sat enthroned in his rightful place and blessed the dying woman with the balm of a generous delusion.

A shriek rent the stifling air and Kalyana disillusioned sank beside a mass of broken rocks and barren boulders that rose out of the sea of sand like an island from the ocean's bosom. She fell to pulling out her hair in madness of despair, she muttered to herself an unintelligible gibberish—talked of foolish things and laughed aloud—then shrieked again and fell to mumbling incoherently

"A mirage—a mirage!" she cried in agony and then lay still, her stony stare fixed on the heavens. Then the

thirst-created fever burned in her brain and she was mad—utterly, hopelessly mad.

Seizing her baby by the hair she held it aloof and screamed in laughter at its cries of pain. At last she threw it roughly from her as if in fear of it and screamed anew with merriment as it rolled like a ball in the scorching sand The prince cried loudly; the mother's eyes burned in delirium as she slowly drew Kara's dagger from her belt and ran her thumb along its gleaming edge, she gazed fixedly at the sprawling child, then rising to her knees slowly, sternly said, as if speaking to her lover:

"Agra, thou art doomed to death. To die at my hands will save thy soul from Rudra's hate. Be thankful I am here to do this gentle service See! Amorapama comes and welcomes us—he smiles and bids us be unterrified. He will not harm us—he loves me and he knows I love thee too"

Stealthily the crazed woman crept toward the child and there was murderous earnestness in her glittering eyes as she saw Agra in the life before her. She cried aloud imperiously

"Stand there, Agra, for this dagger the kind god Indra fashioned for thy soul's salvation See! it is very keen, its point is sharp and ere thou feelest the twinge of pain thy soul will find its way out through the opening the steel will make. It will not hurt thee very much, I hope, and then besides, art thou not brave?—so brave, so fearless, that to die is not the dreadful thing cowards make us think it is I will follow thee and this same key shall unlock the door and give my suffering soul deliverance from its earthly goal. Oh, Amorapama—Amorapama! thou dost approve I know—come let me

kiss thee, that I may surely know thou dost approve. Farewell, Agra—farewell, dear Amorapama—it is the end!"

She raised the dagger over the screaming child; it falls! but the nerveless hand that clutched the hilt is open and the blade shoots harmlessly into the sand.

Kalyana has fallen prone across the child—her body straightens, her eyes are closed.

Gradually and very gently the coma following her delirium wore off and she feels a cool moisture on her dry, cracked lips and her aching temples are being bathed with something divinely cool and soothing and ere the spell hath released its hold upon her senses, she fancies herself in the royal palace where assembled maidens are anointing her for the coming of the bridegroom

Struggling to be rid of the delusive sense, her eyes open and she looks about but fails to comprehend. Her infant is pillowed on her breast and beside her kneels a strange, dark-skinned, black-haired woman whose soft, animal-like eyes are looking kindly into hers as she bathes the temples and the feverish lips Slowly the mist is blown from the fever-twisted brain—the phantoms of her madness scamper off and full consciousness returns.

She understands; she knows that she is dying and this woman in mercy ministers to her last small wants. Yea, she is dying—she is convinced of this—in fact she is nearly dead.

The touch of moisture brings the mad craving thirst to life and so almost inaudibly she murmurs:

"Drink, give me drink—water, water!" and the woman, in whose gentle eyes the tears are brimming, raises the earthen vessel to Kalyana's lips while her supporting

arm holds up the body in a half-sitting posture. The madness of desire for a moment dulls the finer sense, but ere she can satisfy her thirst, the infant cries and then the yearning tenderness of maternity surges in her heart—she pushes the life-giving hand away and taking up the thirsty babe gives it to drink before her own torturing thirst can be supplied.

For of such unselfishness is maternity made

The thirsty child, its greedy thirst supplied, cooed and pawed with foolish hands and in playfulness, just when the mother placing the vessel to her lips began to drink, it seized the quaintly fashioned handle that had caught its infant fancy and jerked it hard and before a saving hand can intervene, the mother's feeble grip is loosened and the vessel falls on the stones and smashes into many pieces

The precious water is quickly sucked up by the thirsty sands.

A cry of horror broke from the startled woman who understood in that instant the fatal significance of this untoward event She looked into the stricken woman's pale and tortured face but no complaint escaped those closely pressed and bleeding lips The wretched suffering mother understands and smiles

Her child for whom no sacrifice had been too great, unwittingly is become her executioner. What matter since Rudra so ordained, whether the end would come through one agency or another, since come it must.

A dry sob is torn from her soul and Kalyana sinks back on the woman's arm and for a time lies still and rigid and her eyes are closed. The woman thinks her dead, she cries in terror as she chafes the queen's hot hands;

"Pray, good lady, please do not die!" She pauses and receiving no response, excitedly continues

"I will fetch more water—it will take some time, for the well is several miles away, but I will bring it if thou canst but wait," and the sympathetic creature wept

"Nay, my friend, I cannot wait I know I stand upon the threshold of the great Unknown—the spirit world o'er which kind Yama reigns I am thankful, oh! so thankful I do not die alone in this dreadful place My child—the prince—where, where is he?" The frightened woman placed the child into the mother's arms Contentedly Kalyana smiles at sense of the precious burden; then for a time lies still Her pains are lessening, her weary legs still aching are growing cold, she is becoming tired—drowsy—then she asked in earnest tones·

"Art thou a mother?" and looked steadily into the woman's face

"Yea, many times."

"Then, then thou wilt understand I give my darling boy to thee; thou wilt take him, and promise to care for him—promise! and thou wilt ease a mother's pain at parting."

"Yea," the sobbing woman answers.

"Care for him as for the child thou lovest best of all thou hast. He is a prince."

"A prince?" and the astonished woman's eyes dilate with wonderment and awe

"Yea, I am the queen of Hastinapur and Panchala—he is my son—the Maharaja Amorapama is his royal father."

"A queen! Oh, merciful gods! what ill fortune brings thee to such a plight?"

"I lost my way, my child—keep it like thine own; thou

art a mother, thou canst understand a mother's feelings at such a time as this Let me kiss my baby—my ba—"

The royal lady, now intensely human in her suffering, sank on the woman's arm. Her eyes are staring fixedly at the child, then the body stiffened and her head sank back, her staring eyes half open, and Kalyana had reached her journey's end.

The woman laid her gently, reverently, on the sand and tears of sympathy fell on the upturned face of the departed queen

CHAPTER XV

AMORAPAMA AND KALYANA

Hours passed and neither spoke. Kavi's tongue was stilled by sympathetic grief too deep for words and 'Amorapama spoke not, for his heart's blood was slowly ebbing and the last word that despair may utter had long ago been said His misery—his self-reproach—the deep-rooted consciousness of the heinous crime his unreasoning passion made him commit—these were matters for which the soul hath no vernacular.

As silently they rode on, the guide (one who had been with Kara on the fatal mission) gave no word of nearness to the spot where he had parted from the queen, the hope that Amorapama felt at starting was growing weaker, yet the tender yearning for Kalyana, to find her living, that he might purge his soul by devotion no mortal ever proved—kept his hope alive.

It was like a mirage picture that lured him to the unrealizable oasis in the desert of his life.

Far into the night they rode without a halt or stay, for his impatience admitted no mortal weakness nor could his horses' needs bring him to pause until he noticed the fagged and jaded manner of his mount; then from necessity and fearing endurance spent and overstepped might cause even more delay, he yielded and ordered that a halt be made.

Impatience gnawed at Amorapama's heart—a fear poison-like was eating into his soul—that at this moment of necessary pause, Kalyana might be in mortal need of him and this delay cause the frustration of his repentant purposes. He thought of her—the lovely, lovable and noble-minded woman—and she rose before him vision-like and he wondered at his own brutality, and that the kindly gods permitted him to consign her to such an abominable fate.

As these horrible phantoms of his guilty soul were torturing him, he breathed a fervent prayer to Indra to stay the hand of destiny his madness had invoked—to stop if but for a moment the smooth working mechanism of the inevitable that he, the passion-deluded man, might reach her side in time to save her and lure the soul back to its outraged temple with tenderest caress.

Calm and still the Indian night which was in contrast with the storm then raging in his heart. It was due to the mastery of his mind he constrained himself to silence, for he wished to scream—to curse his evil fortune—to rave as madmen do

Kavi joined the Maharaja and in subdued tones remarked:

"'Twere better we were starting since the time elapsing will curtail our opportunity of finding her—in time."

"True—let us by all means go. Are the horses fed and rested?"

"All is in readiness"

"Send the guide to me," and Amorapama went toward his beautiful steed and laid his head for just a moment on his sleek and shining neck. The guide approached.

"Guide, art sure thou canst remember Kara's course?"

"Aye, your Majesty. By the stars 'twas fixed. I

have them all in mind, we cannot fail by high noon on the morrow to come upon the rock where—"

"What became of Kara? He did not return"

"Nay, we had been riding for a time when suddenly we missed him and our search proved futile, we could not find him so we returned without him"

"Enough; get the horses ready, we start at once."

Then spoke the Maharaja to his friend, the priest, as they rode forth:

"Kavi, through all the vicissitudes of my life hast thou been monitor and friend. In this, the last despairing effort, I find thee at my side, watchful, mindful and ready still by word and deed to prove thyself my loyal purohita.[1] I have thought long and earnestly about thy unwavering devotion; no matter what the time, if good or evil—when the sky is bright with happiness or dark and lowering with clouds of misery—always hast thou been at hand with merry companionship or tearful sympathy to help the need of passing hour Why art thou to me the clinging shadow, the rain and sunshine of the grateful flower?"

"I am thy friend because I could not be otherwise; thy companion because in thy company I find congenial atmosphere wherein true friendship thrives, and then besides all that thou hast said I am to thee, with equal and even greater truth art thou to me, dear Amorapama That I have not joyed and suffered as thou hast is due to my philosophy which by elimination of myself from life, makes me no part of its concerns, yet were I like thee to joy and sorrow, were I in and of the world like

[1] "By the king's side stood his priestly counterpart, the 'purohita.'"—Frazer's Lit Hist of Ind., p 21; S B E, Vol 42, pp. 46 & 58.

thee and thou by process of reversal I, then wouldst thou, as I to thee, be to me the loyal friend and tried companion"

"As thou expoundest it, so do I feel Kavi, in loyal friendship lies more honest happiness than in pursuit and gain of power and the dear delights of love. See how my tender passion hath come to grief! In the long ago once thou and I discussed in wanton wit the subject now we touch upon and thou didst urge me then to love. I loved and was not loved in turn, and then just when I dreamed the heavens opened, that the froward wife was turning toward my heart even as the grateful flower leans and turns its face toward the life-giving sun, there comes an obscuration of the light of heaven and the world is dark and night sets in I must grope my allotted days in wretchedness—food only for remorse"

"But, noble friend, hast thou then put aside the hope that thou shalt find her yet—alive—and so restore her and her love to happiness supreme?" Kavi looked with concern into his friend's drawn face They rode on rapidly and the stars shone brightly, while Vayu[1] blew gently and refreshingly over the desert plain.

"Yea and nay, I hope—I do not hope I am between two thoughts I grasp for one and it is gone and the other one comes into my grasp I hold to hope as does the dying coward on the promised joys of the after-world[2], and ere I am aware, it vanishes and I think how useless is this sweet delusion which can eventuate only in despair. 'Tis well to hope, but when its futility is

[1] Vayu—the wind

[2] The Vedic Hindu believed in a future state of happiness "Worship Yama—all men go to him He takes men of virtuous deeds to the realm of happiness"—Rig Veda, X. 14.

manifest, then comes the blighting reaction—then were I better dead."

"Lose not thy hope; it is the light the gods vouchsafe to illumine man's path in life Without this light, dark indeed would be our lives, and in that we hope when the heart seems crushed in pain and the soul is lacerated by our agony, we are the superior of the brute, who hath naught but his instinct for a guide and by whom hope is not needed since he lives only in the present His master, man, by his mental process is godlike in his vision of the future and this vision we call hope. It is the heart of the soul"

Again silence fell between them, but though their tongues were still, their thoughts pursued their several ways. Then Amorapama spoke in the manner of one who communes with himself in spoken thought

"When death hath come is this the end, that the soul, if soul we have, dies with the body and passes into nothingness? Is the law in man as in the brute creation ended when the body hath ceased to live? Does the breath that leaves the body, which we call the soul, come to its end and like the wanton breeze blown into space nevermore to take on corporeal form and proportion? Is there in fact a soul, and if there is, what chances when on the breath of death it flies into the immeasurable infinitude?"

Thoughtfully the priest replied.

"In our day and in the days gone by, men have believed that they had souls—that Indra is the beneficent and watchful god whose eyes see everything and who for man and his good fortune is ever concerned and helpful. Then too man doth believe there is a god[1] and that after

[1] Chandogya Upanishad.

death there is a new estate into which the soul projected lives on according to the deserts earned in the life. O'er this land Yama presides and gives in celestial joys a sure reward.[1] This is fair and hopeful faith And too, the wicked in this world shall not go unpunished after death, but in the black stream[2] must dwell to serve their time in payment for their earthly sins"

"And dost thou believe in this fair fashion as the others do and have believed?"

"I did so believe and in part do yet believe in such manner, but in some respects my reflection hath changed this one-time firmly fixed and readily accepted belief. Now my thoughts have crystalized and become a firm conviction."

"And this conviction?" Amorapama asked with eagerness

Slowly Kavi answered as his eyes roved round the wide sweep of the horizon

"I who have observed and keenly watched and noted and reflected discovered that in our world no thing, however inconsequent and insignificant, is lost or utterly destroyed. We burn it and it is gone but only in its original form hath it from our vision vanished. In other forms —in smoke, in gases and ashes that the winds blow into unrecoverableness—the component parts still *are*—still have existence Thus we know that not fire, not rust nor decay and worms can destroy, but only help in the immutable processes of transformation. If this be true, and this I do believe is true of all material things, why should it then be less true of our skandas,[3] which are,

[1] Rig Veda, X, 14, 7 to 9

[2] Sifra's stream where the evil dwell in punishment.

[3] "Material qualities, sensations, abstract ideas, tendencies of mind, and mental powers"—Rhys David's Buddhism, p. 105.

in fact, the essential part—the dominant element of our being? If our bodies cannot be destroyed and death can only change us from the living creature to a heap or handful of mere ashes, shall our essential and dominant souls yield more easily to the destructive forces than our bodies, and be destroyed and cease to be? Nay, the soul, like the decomposing body, takes on another form as the decaying body becomes mere dust in course of years —ashes, if you please,[1] yet the dust still *is* and the ashes still *are*—they exist, have their being, so the soul is changed, transformed, and takes on another form and *lives on*. It *is* and has not died—has not ceased to *be*, but transformed into another shape, housed in another body, continues to live on earth"[2].

"And the end, there surely must be an end?" Amorapama inquired.

"For the soul that hath attained arahatship[3] by many successive stages, there is reward, the transmigration of the soul will cease—the Universal Soul—the Mighty Essense—will swallow up the soul, and oblivion is the final end and this is the great reward the gods shall grant the righteous in the flesh."

"Dost mean that if I die my soul shall come again upon the earth—shall tenant another body and live through another life, and dying live on again and again in a succession of rebirths from which the gods in oblivion will give me rest eternal?"[4]

[1] In later Vedic times, Hindus burned their dead, as did the Romans and the Greeks—Hunter, Hist. of Ind Peoples, 57

[2] The Vedic Hindu believed in reincarnation and metempsychosis.—Frazer's Lit. Hist. of Ind., p. 124; also Chan. Up., V, 10, 7 S B E, Vol. 1.

[3] Sainthood.

[4] After passing through various worlds, the purified soul approaches god.—Kaushitaki-Bra. Upanishad.

"Yea, that is my belief," Kavi answered as one convinced beyond the possibility of doubt

"But thou art quite alone in thy belief. We are not taught thus by our religious teachers." Amorapama wondered as he spoke, for this was novel teaching and close though he stood in friendly relationship he had not heard the kindly, thoughtful priest enunciate such doctrine before

"True, we were not and are not now so taught, but time will come when countless millions will so believe." [1]

"Art thou then sure of this?"

"As sure as I am that now I am and live, so certain am I that when I shall die my soul will take on another corporeal form and live again"

Then the priest smiled into the troubled face of his companion and another silence fraught with earnest meditation followed. The thoughts which Kavi's reasoning roused were food for Amorapama's aching brain and served a grateful purpose in aiding him for a time to forget the object of his quest and the possible horror of a failure.

That night the feverish and overwrought brain was intelligently active in the realm of dreams The thoughts, the powerful emotions of his waking hours bore strongly on his inner sense and peopled his brain with a host of phantasies. He lived in dreams—his soul sang into his sleeping brain the song of hope He saw as if in life Kalyana—well, strong, winsome. She was radiant in a

[1] "For he who—free from superstition and vanity, from hope and fear, passion and avarice, love and hatred—lives in purity, who has wholly overcome the longing after existence and has obtained true knowledge, will put an end to sorrow and new birth and enter Peace Supernal"—Parnirvanam. See also 183 verse of the Dharmapadam

hitherto uncomprehended beauty. She was, yet she was not she, but in what respect she was so much otherwise, was puzzling and the dream gave no explanation. She was Kalyana, yet was not the sweet voice hers—her face wore not the lineaments with each of which he was familiar and her form, as beautiful, yea, more beautiful was not Kalyana's perfect form, yet was she Kalyana still Her laugh—for in his dream she laughed—was hers, but he had never heard her laugh like that before.

Then came a twist and the fair picture changed. They were mounting a high Himalayan peak on which a glorious flower grew, whose plucking would give the plucker immortality and in that make him like the gods themselves. Rough, tortuous, painful was the ascent, but ever in their sight this flower that grew upon a huge, unsightly tree. They reached the last elevation and Kalyana's feet were faltering, her breath came short and unevenly and weariness like deathly lethargy lay on her trembling body. Then Amorapama seized her in his arms and pillowing her on his breast, began the last climb burdened by her precious weight A faintness fell upon him as his swimming eyes are gazing on the stunted tree that bore the blossom, and a giddiness whirled in his brain. He seized the rough, projecting roots and pulled himself upon the ledge of barren rock. Firmly then he stood beside the tree and spell-bound gazed upon the flower of immortality His hand went out to pluck it when Kalyana sighed, he turned and looked into her pained and quivering face. Taking her hand he guided it to the flower and with a glad cry she plucked the stem. It gushed forth blood that spattered on her snowy robe and where the red blood fell the garment burst into tiny flames. In horror Amorapama tried to extinguish them,

but without avail, for when one went out, an hundred more burst forth. An instant more and she was enveloped in a conflagration. Her face without the body rose in the smoke; she smiled and Amorapama screamed and shut his eyes, he opened them, the torrential rains descended and he was drenched. Shivering and held in thrall of horror, he stared at the heap of ashes that once was his beloved bride. With a heart-broken cry he threw himself upon the spot where she had perished and—awoke.

"What is it—hast thou been tortured by unkindly dream?"

The voice sounded as if coming from afar off; Amorapama's eyes were opened and he saw the white-robed priest standing by his side He half rose and cried:

"Where—where am I?"

"Here in the desert of Thur Thou hast slept and dreamed. I heard thy cry and came to help thee if I could."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks! Yea, I dreamed—such a dream! so beautiful and yet so horrible I cannot think of it without a shudder. Dost think that dreams have meanings and may be read—that they are prophetic of events as yet unborn? Tell me, Kavi"

"As once I answered the dear queen when she propounded the like question—I do not know. Sometimes I am constrained to think they do presage and then again I am convinced they come from our disordered nerves that work upon our brains. 'Tis best to think they have no meaning, since we have no ken of their significance—no key wherewith to unlock their mystery. To ponder on them is therefore unserving labor. Think no more about it; I think that were best."

Amorapama rose and trembled, for the dream-spell was still on him.

"Kavi," he cried at last and gripped the priest's bare arm; "Kavi, I have a feeling—a conviction that Kalyana lives and will forgive me, then will die before I can give her needed help"

"If even this were so, it were a favor of the gods If thou wert present at the dissolution—when the soul forsakes its earthly habitation—though thou couldst not stay its flight, 'twould give thee consolation, peace, which mere repentance unforgiven cannot give If this the reading of thy dream, may the good gods grant it so; then would it be a happy augury for which we would be grateful." Kavi spoke feelingly.

"Perhaps, but this I fear would not content me, for I want her living—want her, Kavi, as I never wanted anything in life before, want her, to make atonement, to live my life for her and her alone. Nothing—not even the gods themselves—shall come between her and my all-encompassing love. Yea, though she were a thousand times untrue with a multitude of men, I could—I would love her still. Oh, friend! canst not understand how much I want her—my noble, precious wife, the beautiful woman whose body and whose soul I worship and deify and pray to as thou makest orisons to thy dearest gods? I shall go mad—mad, for my heart is breaking—breaking."

The stricken man pressed his shaking hands across his face and groaned in abject misery.

At high noon just as the calculating guide predicted, they arrived at the flat rock where faithful Kara had died and Kalyana spent her first two nights in dreadful soli-

tude. They saw the records of the deadly struggle that had run its course.

There lay the skeletons of man and beast, and as Amorapama gazed, his eyes enlarged with horror and his ashy face betokened his misery It was as if a crushing weight were lifted from his heart when examination proved the identity of the man

Kalyana had not perished here, nor had the prince, else were their remains there with poor Kara's, and the king breathed freely in relief at the assurance

Whither now to turn they did not know and the guide could help no more His services were ended, for beyond this point he could give no clue of where the mother and the child had gone They halted for a rest and the baffled friends took counsel in the pause

It was finally decided to travel toward the east[1] for that was the region of the gods

It was a chance and slim indeed it seemed, but as it was as likely as all others and no other course presented greater promise, toward the east then they turned their horses' heads and galloped swiftly over the trackless sands

"If—if we shall find her desecrated bones—what, Kavi, shall I do, what can I do?"

Kavi did not answer, but his face spoke eloquently of the pain he suffered and this warmed Amorapama's heart.

"Dost think it wrong, my Kavi, if I shall kill myself?" Amorapama spoke with calmness as if debating some affair of state impersonally

[1] East was the region of the gods, north the quarter of men; south (loose soil) deceased ancestors—Sat Bra, I, 2, 5, 4 and 1, 2, 5, 6

"Yea, it were very wrong indeed. The gods would ne'er forgive such wanton crime. I beg thee turn thy mind from such a thought"

"But, friend, why should I suffer on for years in hopeless misery? twice cursed, by loss of her, by maddening remorse for having caused that loss"

"Thou hast duties which bind thee to this life. It is not for thee to say 'I would be dead' and solve the problem of thy being with a swift blow of blade or slower poison draught Thy grave responsibilities cannot be shifted thus. The Maharaja Ojas placed the raj into thy keeping and as its faithful steward thou must acquit thyself Thy people and their need of thee must stay the hand engaged in self-destruction Besides—"

"Besides what—speak, for I desire no consideration even from the friend whose mercy is as great as is his love."

"It were a coward's means to cast off the grief the gods impose. And it was no coward the Maharaja selected to be his yuva-raja long ago"

Kavi earnestly scanned Amorapama's face to read the effect his words were making on the other's mind

"In face of my appalling grief, I am a coward, Kavi, dost understand me? I am a self-confessed coward, as I know myself a murderer."

"Not yet art thou a murderer, nor yet a coward either Hope on and fix thy eyes on that one never-failing star."

Kavi deemed it best to say no more, for time had come when words were instruments of torture to the mind

Another day had passed and Varuna's glory sprayed with stars the deepening blue of the vaulted firmament.

The star-bejeweled path across the dome was marked in glittering white against the dark blue sky. The steady gleam of the planet host lit up the heavens and the pure flame of the risen moon bathed all the limitless expanse of desert plain in soft and gentle glow and the yellow sand grew pale

Still, calm and fearful was the night; their polished weapons and metal accoutrements gleamed fitfully; the guide had ridden several horses' lengths ahead Suddenly he stopped and quickly leaped from his horse and stooped, rose to his height and unmoving like a thing of stone, stood waiting for the king and priest to come up to him A stifled cry rose to the Maharaja's lips and in a moment more they too were dismounted and stood still, each staring at the gruesome object lit by the bluish light the moon was shedding

Amorapama turned away and groaned, for his inner sense had told him all the truth

No need to look again—no use to guess, to conjecture and conclude—he knew it all

Kavi fell upon his knees and scanned attentively the bleached, bare skeleton for proof of its identity, still hoping that the worst he feared might not be as he feared

Drawn by the fascination the horrible wields, Amorapama went to his friend and leaned over the bending form, while the guide went away and turned his face from the sight.

So complete the work of scavenger birds, not a vestige save the skeleton and skull remained

Kavi rose and gazed in horror at the stolid face of Amorapama by his side. His eyes were deeply shadowed

and his stare was vacant and unseeing. Without twitch of muscle or movement of the body, Amorapama stood and looked upon the poor remains.

Awakening from the spell, he fell upon his knees and gazed intently at a quaintly wrought unjewelled band that once was worn around the arm. Then came a piercing cry and Amorapama fell across the whitish bones of her he once had called his bride and queen

Rigid for a time Amorapama stayed and not a sound, save the heavy breathing could be heard and the appalling stillness of the night was unbroken in those dreadful moments that in passing carved their misery on the Maharaja's soul. Wounds were opening that time would never heal and Kavi watched and suffered

Slowly Amorapama raised himself and placed his arm beneath the wretched skull of the once beautiful woman and fell to kissing it with all the fervent passion of first love. Then Kavi feared the worst and drawing toward his prostrate friend, spoke in gentlest, tenderest tones his name. But Amorapama heard not the voice of friendship, saw not the mellow moonlight flood in tragic beam the bones of dead Kalyana.

He heard only the voice that once breathed through those even, snowy teeth, saw only the blue-black eyes that filled those dark, deep holes, felt the soft, warm flesh that once had clothed those bones. With ever growing tenderness he pressed his burning lips upon the frontal bone and felt it not hard and cold, but soft and smooth as if the birds had not torn off the covering flesh. He spoke in agonized whisper:

"Kalyana, sweetheart, I have wronged thee with a foul suspicion—with a wicked thought that thou couldst be untrue. I know now how base I was, how horrible

my conduct must have seemed to thee. Forgive me—oh! forgive. See, I do confess my guilt and humbly, abjectly beg forgiveness. Thou art the queen of my kingdom, but better, holier, thou art queen of my heart. Ah, sweet one, answer me, say I am pardoned."

A fearful silence fell and then the clouds that had mercifully obscured his visual sense were lifted and he leaped to his feet and turning on his friend, cried in utter wretchedness·

"Kavi, Kavi, that is Kalyana—that—those bones—that dreadful skull was my beautiful queen—my wife!" Then he broke into a wild laugh.

"I have killed her, Kavi, I have murdered her—I, who loved her, killed her—first with a vile accusation, then sent her out here to die a wretched death—I, the fiend, have done this thing, horrible, horrible!"

Ere the friend could stay the hand, a dagger flashed in the moonlight and with a groan the agonized lover-husband sank beside his love—to die.

But Kavi tore the dagger blade from the gushing wound and staunched the flow of blood, he bound the wound so that the murderous purpose was frustrated and the Maharaja Amorapama was saved for his kingdom, his people, and his remorse

Book Two—The Expiation

CHAPTER XVI

A ROYAL FEAST

Amorapama stood at the window. His roving eye took in the prospect of hill and vale, lit by Vishnu's parting smile. Banked on the horizon were gold fringed clouds and where the rays of setting sun cut through, red shafts burst into the flaming sky.

The city's noises were but faintly heard; feathered roysterers made revel in the trees that margined the walks and stood in gossiping clusters in the Palace Park

Kavi sat beside his friend and sadly noted how the king was aging; the score of years now gone, had left in passing their imperishable imprint on the king.

The years, though fraught with strange vicissitudes, had failed to dull the poignancy of Amorapama's grief and Kavi wondered he had stood the strain so well, for though the hair was turning gray and pain-carved lines marked his pale face, still was he vigorous and bodily in perfect health, save for the self-inflicted wound.

This without was healed, within was bleeding still.

So it happened that at times a grievous pain would mark the place where the dagger point had sought the vital spark. These spasms came at first in regular, well

timed intervals, as come the changes of the seasons; then their coming, though not less frequent, in passing caused a deeper suffering than before

The wisest doctors[1] failed to make a cure or find the cause of Amorapama's ill, and even Kavi with all his skill and love combined could not relieve when once the pain was come, to lengthen even the period between each attack and the next So the priest-physician grieved at his want of skill, that nature unyielding baffled all his efforts

Amorapama at first thought it strange no aid had availed, but now instead he felt a deep sense of guilt and in this found solution of the problem of his incurability The grim avenger Rudra had set his mark of disapproval on his act and for living punishment had made the wound unhealable from within It was Rudra's curse, Amorapama reasoned, and it was left to him to conjecture how and when and what the end In the other world what had the relentless and destroying god in store for him?

"How calm the evening, Kavi, how calm! One would not think it possible the peaceful world as it now lies before us could ever be storm bound, wind cursed, and heat afflicted, that disease could stalk abroad and desolate, that man, whose heritage it is, would ever find it other than just now, a place of precious beauty—a haven of all-consoling peace"

He paused in speech—held in silence by the spell that nature wove around his spirit Kavi checked the answer he would give, for much he feared his words would

[1] Physicians are mentioned in the Rig Veda X, 97 6, they knew the medicinal properties of herbs and with these and magic effected cures

intrude on his friend's reflections. When Amorapama turned and sadly smiled, the priest made answer in his gentlest tone

"This peaceful scene which solaces thy wounded heart, the benevolent gods have made for man, for him to live in, to be moved and thrilled and lifted up, to gather strength and store it up for the coming storm, that it may not o'erwhelm him, but bending, suffer it to pass As universal nature, so too our psychic is subject to change and our hearts are but an individual world in which our emotions have their being—their storms of grief and periods of repose"

"Thou dost wisely speak" Amorapama gazed into the slowly deepening gloom

From the park below came up the melodious strains of the devotional procession The words in Indra's praise, set in rhythmic phrase, were clear, distinct, and the responses spoken in simple chant rose and fell like waves of melody

They listened and the king was strongly moved, for a gentle serenity possessed his soul He sighed and whispered the precious name "Kalyana" as if meant for unseen ears to hear.

The chanting pilgrims passed and the moving cadence of their invocation left his world of thought vibrating with tender memories.

A solemn hush fell on them and for a time neither spake, each filled with wordless longing

"I cannot grasp it yet, my Kavi, although my mind hath dwelt upon the thought and gazed upon it from all sides—I cannot measure up to thy belief that souls escaping from this wretched body must inhabit another and more wretched body still."

Amorapama looked with grave and searching gaze into the priest's calm countenance. Slowly Kavi answered:

"All that is veiled in mystery, incomprehensible and beyond understanding, must be bridged by faith We cannot reason out the transmigration of the soul as we shall calculate the distance of a given place from yet another No more shall we be able to tell the features and the form of our souls Once accepted as a finality that there is a soul, we need not distress our minds with vain conjecture what is its heighth, its breadth and thickness, but saying and believing that it is, there rest content In like manner, must we come to the belief, the soul shall not in death of our bodies die, but as the body still maintains existence in its segregated parts, so shall the soul of man continue in its being"

"But why shall it pass into another earthly form—another body, and in another life, live on?"

"Dost thou remember I once told thee that in this universe naught is destroyed—annihilated? that the corruptible body again becomes a part of earth, the gases take their places in the atmosphere and the flames that have consumed the body cease to be, and only ashes then remain and these the winds blow whither they please? Yet these infinitesimal parts—the inconsequent and seemingly useless molecules go into another body or aggregation of their kind, the gases pass into atomic conglomeration and exist on and each in turn continues its usefulness in whatever sphere the law of destiny hath ordained. Then if this be so—and that it is I am convinced—why should the dominant soul escaping the order of the universe based on service and utility float about in ether aimlessly without a purpose or definite intent?

Nay, the soul is more essential than the molecules of dust and unmeasurable gas. It hath a graver use than merely be and nothing more."

"But by thy theory thou takest away the individuality of the soul My soul is not my soul, but is another resident in me I, Amorapama of Hastinapur, have no soul that is mine own. I, the Maharaja, own a soul that may have dwelt in a Sudra's body or for aught I know may once have inhabited a criminal's."

"It hath its individuality nor can aught happen to take from it this personal and definite character. When it came away from the Universal Soul it had, it took on its personality and retains it throughout its earthly wanderings and only ceases to possess it when it returns to and again becomes a part of this Universal Soul Then ends its individual existence and terminates its separate and personal career"

After a thoughtful silence Amorapama spoke·

"For nearly a score of years hast thou proclaimed to me this uncommon faith, yet I am not ready to accept it, though I have profound respect for its unusual teaching as I surely have sincerest love for its expounder"

"Let this not disturb thee, for faith is like a tree, a shoot, it springs from seed, which is a thought, then grows until in its complete development it hath fulfilled the purpose of its being. So with thy faith, 'twill grow and in good time thou wilt believe as I do and as firmly."

"Hast thou enunciated this belief to others?"

"Nay, the time to do so is not yet propitious I or another will plant the seed and from it will grow a mighty congregation whose numbers shall be millions. In our time a few like thee and me will so believe, then in the lapse of years others will be added and when the

soil is ready and the seed at hand, the unborn husbandman[1] will come and sow and reap a harvest greater, vaster, mightier than we can comprehend. He will teach the 'Four Noble Truths' and the 'Eightfold Path'."[2]

Kavi smiled and emphasized his words with slow shaking of his head

"It is a grand, a thrilling thought and grips me by its own inherent power—charms me by its poetic beauty, yet fails in this, it doth not convince the mind"

"This will come in time, I am content, for now the thought doth move thee—doth hold thee with the fascination of its charm The rest will come"

"Then if I die," Amorapama reiterated as if to make by repetition the concept clearer in his mind, "this body passing into decay gives up its resident soul and it in turn shall be born anew and take on another human form."

"Yea."

"And shall my earthly estate determine the reincarnation of my soul? Shall it in being born again dwell in the body of a king?"

"Nay, that no one can say I think—and remember it is only my individual thought for whose verity I have no proof—the present material estate shall not influence the state of the other birth Thus thy soul may be born into a Sudra's and a Sudra's soul may become a king's."

"I do not like this feature of thy reasoning"

"Not thou But thinkst the Sudra will not like it?" and the priest smiled pleasantly.

[1] Buddha Gautama, founder of Buddhism, born 557 B C, proclaimed his creed at Benares, 522 B C, attained Nirvana about 478 B C.

[2] See Glossary, "Buddhism"

"Probably"

"Yea, he will. But let us not forget that in the philosophy of the soul-life, material things shall count for nothing. The soul, apart from the body, hath its existence and is not made better nor yet worse, higher or lower in the final estimation by the worldly condition of the body it inhabits. Thus the Sudra's soul may be a nobler one than is the king's."

"A strange thought and not easily is it understood."

"Easy it is to understand if we remember that the purpose of the soul's migration is its purification and when this shall be accomplished, be the body that of a low or 'twice born', it will return to the Mighty Essence and there the estate in life is of no account."

Amorapama reflected for a time. The light had faded from the western sky and night set in. They sat in the deepening shadows of the room Awakening from his revery, Amorapama inquired:

"Then as thou sayest, the soul of Amorapama reborn and dwelling in a Sudra's would still be Amorapama's soul, and if noble would be noble, if base, would still be base though dwelling in the body of a king?"

"Yea, even so," the priest rejoined

"But didst not say our souls came from the Universal Soul?"

"Yea, I did"

"Then is not this Universal Soul perfection?"

"Yea," Kavi smiled, well knowing whither Amorapama's argument was tending.

"And can a part be less perfect than the whole?"

Amorapama paused. He thought he had the priest enmeshed in the threads of his own argument But Kavi was prepared, for this very question had at first

much troubled him, but he believed he had found an answer that sufficed. He replied:

"We must not think the atman[1] as separate from the body in all respects; 'tis separate but only in so far as its destiny is concerned, but in its rise or fall in moral standing is an integral part of the body in which it dwells, and so as the body, which is influenced by the mind that governs it, is evil, so must and will the soul be evil, and only by process of transmigration, if the individual by righteous living shall lift up his character, shall the soul be lifted up, and so too if the individual by vicious living shall go downward, his soul will change and grow farther removed from the pure estate in which it came away from the bhumiyah atman[2] that always was, is self-created and will ever be."

"I do not quite agree with thee, perhaps because I do not fully understand," Amorapama answered.

"Perhaps if I shall illustrate, my meaning will be better understood. Take then a seed that comes from a perfect plant. 'Tis placed into the earth, springs forth and in its birth shows signs of disease, malformation, and is in no sense like the perfect plant from which it sprang. Why this change?"

"That is simple enough. The ground that nurtured it, the elements that influenced its growth to maturity, have militated against its perfection."

"Precisely. Then as the ground and elements have served an evil purpose in the growth of our suppositious plant, so the resident evil in the man hath warped in its growth the new-born soul, and as these circumstances continue, the soul grows worse, and as they shall grow

[1] Atman—soul, self. See Glossary, "Atman"
[2] Rig Ved., I, 164, 4. See Glossary, "Atman."

better or be removed it will improve until at last it is as it was when it came away—a perfect soul."[1]

"Now do I understand thee. 'Tis a beautiful conception; yet I do not claim, like thee, as yet to believe in it in its entirety"

"It hath been written 'Self cannot be gained by the Veda nor by the understanding, nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained The Self chooses him'."[2]

There fell another silence between the twain. Still they sat and each was giving his reflection scope. Kavi thought of the noble things of life and after death—the soul and its evolution, while Amorapama's mind had wandered from the subject of this discourse into realms that have no being save in the domain of illusions.

These spells of melancholy came at intervals and resulted in hallucinations for which the priest could find no cure. In this, as in the curing of the physical hurt, was Kavi's skill quite unavailing.

The fearful shock of long ago, when Kalyana's bones were found and Amorapama knew himself a murderer, had left its havoc in the brain.

Thus would he brood and fall into a mental state from which no friendly office, nor affairs of state could rouse; and lest his aberration become known to those who would make ill use of it, the priest, who understood, would stay and hold him in seclusion where only those of sworn fidelity were suffered to serve and see the king.

In such a state Amorapama was now, as Kavi well

[1] This is the Buddhist Karma, or moral state arrived at in previous incarnation. (See Glossary, "Karma.")

[2] Kaha Up, 1, 2, 23.

knew from symptoms long since learned and gauged He grew distraught, his great black eyes in normal state so steady in their gaze, were shifty and burned with unnatural fire, the voice took on a metallic ring but sunk to hushed, awed mutterings The facial muscles twitched as if in pain and his manner was nervous, supersensitive and overwrought

Kavi remained silent, for he knew these fits must run their course and nothing he could do would stay, relieve in passing, or hasten restoration He sat still nor by a sound disturbed the meditations of his friend Then Amorapama spoke in low tones and there was mystery in his voice and an expression in his eyes that told he was looking into the shadow world and saw not things of earth

"Kavi, I hear her voice, she is speaking—listen, dost hear her now? She is saying something to me I cannot understand Dost not hear her?'

"Yea, I hear her," was Kavi's calm reply.

"She—yea now I understand She will come to me to-night She will bring her father with her We will have a feast, my Kavi, a royal, merry feast and thou, my friend, shalt be a guest at our celebration Thou wilt be our guest, Kavi?"

"Yea, and thank thee for the invitation," he answered gently.

"There shall be rare dishes served on royal plate and viands fit for the gods shall please the palate Soma wine, rich and inspiriting to warm our hearts, thrill our nerves and make love flourish in immortal youth."

Looking at him seriously he added sententiously:

"Thou shalt eat and drink with us, Kavi?"

"Yea, that I will with pleasure I will be of your

number and with thee and Kalyana spend the fleeting hours of the night."

"Thou wilt see that all is made in readiness for the feast. Spare naught. There must be the rarest fruits and delicious cakes wherewith to feast the gods. The light shall be mellow, soft and soothing, not garish, vulgarly brilliant, nor too glittering—for there shall be naught dazzling—but mellow, Kavi, just a rich mellowness, to steal upon the sense like tenderest caress Provide for us sweet music, priest, the best thou canst procure, for they will play for Kalyana, Hastinapur's beautiful queen—remember that—and place them invisibly that we may only hear their pleading harmonies."

"It shall be done as thou desirest."

After a reflective pause.

"And Kavi, another thing. She loves the perfume of rare flowers. Deck the private chamber with the fairest blossoms of the floral park, let there be a beauty congress of the flowers 'Tis a fantastic thought, their odors shall delight her and fill her soul with ecstasy. Oh, I would be happy this one—this blessed night. Happy—happy—see, I am already changed in spirit The heavy burden of my cares is lifted and lightsome merriment is master of my heart. My hurt is silent and makes no throb of pain My brain is clear and I shall be witty. Kavi—shall please her mood by fitting speech and move her soul with the story of my love It will be fine, indeed, eh?"

The deluded king rose quickly and with light, elastic tread, traversed the chamber several times. Then turning, paused before the sad-faced priest whose thoughts though acquiescent were uttered in a saddened tone. It caused pain too deep for words to see his friend in such

pathetic state—the brain enshrouded by the gloom of madness

"Kavi, I would please her eye. A lover, if he is wise, will seek to please the eye as he does the ear of her he loves, so let me be apparelled in my robes of state with gleaming jewels set, and of fairest, rarest texture made. Thou knowest the one in which I look the best. My hair must be set in order and perfumed. Naught shall be lacking Then will Kalyana say with pride and exultation, 'My Amorapama is the fairest king in all the land and I deserve so fair a king for am I not as fair a queen?' Ah, what woman ever could withstand the fascination of a handsome man?"

His voice rose to its proudest pitch.

"None fairer lives, my king I have as keen a pride in thy fine face and form as in thy nobility as king"

"Well said, priest I shall reward thee for so good a speech Ah, thou art more courtier than a priest—more excellent as diplomat than man of prayers"

The king laughed harshly at this sally as if it were the cleverest, merriest thing he ever said, instead of cruelty to the devoted friend But the friend well bore his friend's strange humor and was not angered by the insult which the words conveyed

He simply answered

"I shall be proud to receive proof of thy approval in such form as my gracious king may deign to give"

"Aye, aye, thou deservest well of me, my Kavi. I care not much for thy priestly office but thy companionship doth much to aid the pleasant passing of the laggard hours Yet as I think of thee, thou art given overmuch to serious reflection Reflection is fatal to digestion. Reflect no more and thy appetite will much improve.

Great thinkers are always thin for their thoughts are poor food for their bodies. Besides, I like thee merry and not sour-faced and full of meditative gloom. Thou dost not laugh enough—aye, now I think on it, thou dost not laugh at all, thou dost only smile. To smile where one should laugh, is showing discourtesy to the cause of merriment. I like not thy smile, for 'tis at times too supercilious and doth not show the respect which is the due of kings"

"I will try to make amends I will laugh when I have warrant and shall abjure the smile as though it were a hateful thing, since it displeases thee"

"Well said, my wily courtier, mummer of flatteries that lull suspicion and give room to schemes and intrigue."

Then in a burst of rage he cried out

"Oh, I know the whole horde of courtly liars and thou —thou art the master spirit of them all"

Then Amorapama laughed loudly and shook his finger at the priest

"Nay, thou dost me wrong, noble sire," said Kavi, "I may be one of these liars as thou art pleased to say, but I cannot claim so great distinction as the master spirit of the whole host of expert liars"

"Excellently said, my priest Thou shalt be made a chamberlain. Thy talents are misplaced in playing priest for of what use are priestly functions? Rot, sir. 'Tis waste of time to prate of death when we should be thinking of the living Let the dead be dead and leave them to their own devices Gods! What are they, priest? Man-made phantoms to addle our brains, befuddle our consciences and make us tremble at the fool god Rudra's wrath—ghosts, Kavi, silly ghosts of the brain—creatures

of our morbid fancies we ourselves create for no better purpose than to scare ourselves into virtue. Come, priest —laugh, laugh—laugh loudly as do I," and Amorapama roared with laughter and Kavi laughed a hollow, forced and torturing laugh, at which the king was pleased.

The king and Kavi stood confronting and the friend waited until the king's mood would change into a pleasanter one, which well he knew must surely be, for so it had been before and so it would be again, until the wretched curse be lifted from the soul of the remorseful king.

"Kavi," and Amorapama led him to the casement. "Out there she is, canst not guess sir, whom I mean? Thy queen, dull fool—Kalyana is out there in the shadow of the park Oh, she loves me and why should a woman not love a man like me? Am I not the Maharaja, a mightier king than her foolish, dotaged father ever was —eh, Kavi?" and he nudged him slyly who groaned in spirit, but slowly and approvingly replied

"Yea, thou art as mighty a king as ever sat on Hastinapur's throne"

"Well said, thou clever flatterer How well thou mouthest the set formula the courtly liars all employ. Thou hast practised with some profit Ah, no dullard thou, for well thou knowest the full value of well ordered speech Oh, ye tribe of false-hearted courtiers Ye think we kings are fooled by your precious lies? Do ye think we do not see through the veil of pretense to the heart of your desires and measure justly your unworthiness? eh! priest? Dost thou think we kings are fools?"

"Some are, I doubt not, but the great Amorapama is not one of them"

"Good, excellent, thou prince of liars, I shall give thee

distinction at my court—thou shalt be tutor to my inefficient horde of liars; shalt teach them the art in which thou art their master, shalt teach them until they are an improved order of courtly prevaricators—jugglers of the truth I like proficiency—excellence in everything, for even a liar should be an artist—and art thou not an artist, eh?"

Amorapama laughed aloud again, then suddenly fell into a brooding silence and Kavi marked the change and knew aforetime the next phase of Amorapama's mind. His voice was soft and pleading now

"Kavi! Kalyana—our Kalyana—for in our love for her we are real brothers, our Kalyana will be here to-night. My noble, devoted friend, let us make ready for her coming. Come," and taking Kavi by the arm, he led him gently from the apartment

The chamber where Amorapama dined in private, was dressed for the reception of his honored guests By Kavi's order to certain selected servitors who were with care culled from the palace entourage, the service of this function was entrusted They were pledged to secrecy by solemn oath which as a precaution Kavi himself administered to each, hence were not likely to disclose what they well knew in advance would happen on that night.

The feast was laid for several guests and the golden plates and chalices gleamed and sparkled in the soft and subdued light that fell from rose-tinted shaded lamps. Flowers of the rarest species, richest perfume and deepest color graced the walls. In an alcove in the corner of the chamber, that hung with gold embroidered drapery, a company of singers and musicians sat and at command played music sweetly soothing, soul solacing, just as the priest had ordered it.

The hour was late and Varuna's glory was in the night sky and his royal gems twinkled in the dome of deepest bluish black A gentle breeze lazily murmured through the listening trees, and flowering shrubs that margined gravel paths of the Palace Park breathed perfume incense on the night, birds of the night carolled lustily in the deep foliage gloom The marble statues of departed kings gleamed in the shimmering light of the splendid moon, and cast attenuated shadows on the green of lawn now splashed with silvery light

At the second hour before the dawn, the Maharaja Amorapama, arrayed in robes of state that sparkled with priceless gems—with necklace of wrought gold and deepest sapphires encircling his strong and sinewy neck, entered the apartment leading Kalyana[1] lightly by the hand Then followed Kavi and Ojas and a courtier band Ojas wore the robes he wore when his fair daughter was made queen, and Kavi's simple garment of white made pleasing contrast to the show of royalty

Kalyana was gowned in white gauze interwoven with golden threads in intricate design, and girdled in a gemmed band from which hung a medallion shaped and set with diamonds of bluish white, their facets threw forth spears of colored fire that changed with each movement of her lithe and graceful body Her face was radiant and a happy smile played round her full, red, half-parted lips

The servitors gave no sign or token of amazement at the ghostly function they were waiting on, but served the

[1] Women were not curtailed of their freedom or confined to solitude of their homes as is present (Mohammedan) custom.—Frazer's Lit Hist of Ind, p 31 Also R. V, X, 27.12. See Glossary, "Women."

guests as if they really were, and with obsequious servility went through each portion of their several tasks.

Seated at the head was Amorapama and at his right the beauteous queen, while at the left Ojas sat and by his side, the gentle priest The rest sat to the right and left and made a goodly show to Amorapama's glistening eyes

Turning to the queen in deferential tones, Amorapama inquired

"And is my dyumant[1] queen in perfect health this glorious night of nights? Ah, I might have guessed as much for in thy cheeks and blushing lips and sparkling eyes I read the signs of perfect health and in thy smile lurks merriment well suited to this delightful hour"

Turning to the aged Maharaja then, he said

"Thou art looking well, my noble father We have missed thee sorely from councils and festivals. Yea, it is as thou sayest—the rest from cares of state hath served thee well. Soon will I long for such repose, but I alas! am not like thee I have no Yuva-raja[2] to entrust with my succession. But let us not dwell on the disappointments of our lives else would we forget the blessings the good gods have vouchsafed so generously"

Then silence fell, which Kavi's command filled with seductive strains. While the sweet music rose and fell they partook of the rich viands set for the guests.

Amorapama smiled at the priest in proof of satisfaction, and Kavi sadly smiled in turn, for his, in this dutiful performance, was no easy or pleasant task. No untoward circumstance must jar the nerves of the king nor cause

[1] Heavenly bright

[2] A custom the same as joobraj, by which a king selected his successor to the throne.

displeasure among the guests whom the distracted mind of Amorapama had marshalled to the feast No word should be unseemly or out of place, and each thing must so be done that in the doing, nothing needful was left undone nor was overdone Each must do his part in such accustomed manner that the king would be content.

And in such manner each thing was done, for Kavi's training of the servitors was thorough and each well understood the need of tactfulness and ease of manner.

The wine was sparkling in the jeweled chalices; Amorapama raised his and looking into the queen's bright eyes, drank deeply

Amorapama spoke to the Maharaja then·

"Yea, good Ojas, my reign hath been blest with length of peace and freedom from the dreaded plague Verily are we indebted to the gods for such good fortune that we scarce know how fittingly to prove our gratitude."

Amorapama smiled as he continued·

"Our gratitude keeps Kavi well employed in making hymns of praise and offering sacrifices to the gods. Yea, Kavi doth compose most excellent hymns."

Then turning to Kalyana, he added

"Indeed! So thou hast brought a prophet to our board? Most opportune. Pity my good Kavi makes no pretense at prognostication, not that I would believe him if he did, but 'twould be a fine diversion. Nay, I do not believe in prophecy It hath its uses with the ignorant and I hold no doubt it serves some useful purposes, but for me—well, I look upon it with suspicion, if not contempt"

Then Kavi spoke in measured tones:

"Prophecy is but small part of priestly functions and they who profess it are too often charlatans who practise

on the gullible Of course, I mean no disrespect to our noble guest, for of him it may be said with truth, he doth believe in what he doth foretell, and this robs a wrong foretelling of its offence"

"Our friend, the prophet, will take thy doubtful compliment in grievous part, I fear And this were most unfortunate, for let us not forget he serves Kalyana, and if he hath her confidence, then hath he made of prophecy a benevolent—a noble art"

Amorapama smiled benignly at the prophet and made reply to his fitting answer

"As thou sayest, prophet, thy skill tells us aforetime what shall come to pass and not always doth it happen as ye say it will, in which respect there is a fault in the prophecy or in the thing so prophesied I pray do not take from our well meant words ground for displeasure. It was not meant for discourtesy"

Turning to Kavi he said, while a smile of scorn curled up his lip:

"Dost hear, priest? He saith there is to be a plague in our land—that thousands will perish and our people be reduced to such misery they will kill themselves that they escape the agony of the plague A harrowing tale he tells. Dost thou believe it, eh?"

"Nay, I do not believe it"

But as he spake, the color left his cheek and fear lit up his eyes, for of the dreaded plague the gentle humanitarian was in deadly fear. He read in Amorapama's words more than mere vagaries of a disordered intellect. He feared it might be the means the gods employ to harbinger the calamity. He was in secret much distressed.

Amorapama's observant eyes had noted the pallor, whereupon he banteringly remarked

"Wouldst let thy tell-tale cheeks proclaim thy credence of this foolish tale? Nay, I held thee in better judgment"

With a bow to the prophet he added·

"Of course, I mean no disrespect to thee, good prophet, for as I said before, I believe in prophecy when it doth come to pass, and until it doth—I wait. Come, let us have music to chase the phantom fears our discourse hath engendered Ho there! music, and in lightsome measure let it be played, for we are come for merrymaking and not for solemn funeral feast"

The music played a teasing melody whose rhythm caught the nerves and set one's mind in unison with its lively beat It pleased the Maharaja and so with sway of body he kept time with the swing of the tuneful lay.

"Ah, this is better—it warms the heart, lightens our thoughts, makes us think of lissom dancers. Is it not so, dear Kalyana? Oh, I felt assured that thou, too, wouldst like it better than that doleful tune they played before."

When the playing had ceased Amorapama said·

"And now, good friends, I do propose an unusual treat wherewith to thrill the nerve, move heart to beat in quicker measure, and woo the fancy—Kavi, ah, do not protest, for well we know thy excellent modesty, but in this thou must yield to us"

To the others he added

"Kavi, besides being a noble priest, a skilful surgeon and the best of friends, is a story-teller of great merit. Now, dear Kavi, do not interrupt with thy modest depre-

cation. We know thy worth in all that we have said. Come now, woo us from the cares of life by telling us the pathetic story—let me see, what didst thou call it? Ah, 'The Vengeful Maharaja whom the Curse of Rudra damned'. A stirring title, eh? Ah, but the title is less thrilling than the narrative. Come, Kavi, we await thy pleasure"

"Nay, may I not be spared this ordeal—or better, may I not spare thy guests the ordeal of the telling?"

"Nay, we would rather not be spared 'Tis a way he hath to whet our appetites Ye will be moved, I warrant." This to Kalyana and the guests

Slowly, sorrowfully, Kavi arose, then looking fixedly into Amorapama's eyes, began·

"There was a young raja once, noble and handsome, who wooed and won at the Swayamvara the hand but not the heart of a lovely bride"

"Her name, Kavi, what was her name?" Amorapama asked.

"Her name is of no importance in the tale She was young, fair and winsome and when he saw the maid, he straightway loved At the feast another prince, her lover, was contestant for the prize, and, in all things equal to the raja, was the lover of the maid An accident befell and robbed him of her love and so, as is the law of custom, her hand went to the raja while her heart remained her lover's They were wed, and happy was the groom, but wretched the bride, for she did not love her lord and bridegroom but loved instead the other A child was born unto the loveless pair upon the very day a war tore them apart, and in the parting the father first saw his child. It was a pretty creature, and though he grieved at parting, yet was happy in his new paternity.

"Long stayed he in the wars, when on a day, the baby having grown apace, the mother learned to love the father, and the moment when this noble love was born, word came the raja had been slain"

Turning to Kalyana, Amorapama whispered:

"Is it not a touching tale? I knew thou wouldst enjoy it Go on, Kavi Thou tellest it very well to-day Oh yes, I've heard it all before and could tell it, but not so well as Kavi Proceed"

"One night the raja coming home—the rumor of his death being false—he found the wife in her lover's arms for reasons unexplained, whereon a furious combat ended in the lover's death"

"Splendid! Just retribution for the perfidious wretch Thinkst not so, my dear Kalyana? Of course, we are of one mind on such a theme Go on, Kavi, thy story is well told to-day"

'There is little more to tell The raja, thinking his good wife was false, sent her and her sweet babe, whose birth the husband thought was tainted, out into the desert where she perished in dreadful agony. Naught but the bones were found'

'What became of the young raja? Faster, Kavi, thou laggest in the telling The suspense is growing painful"

Amorapama's manner changed the nervous tension was apparent in the flash of eye—the twitching muscles of the mouth He leaned forward and drank in each word that Kavi spake

Kavi's voice was lowered and he spoke more slowly than before.

"The repentant lover-husband found her poor remains half covered by the blowing desert sands He knew her by an arm-band the wife and mother wore The shock

robbed the raja of his reason and in a paroxysm flung himself upon her bones and kissed with frenzied tenderness, the glistening skull and thought her in the flesh—alive. At last he woke to consciousness"

"What did he do—why dost thou halt, priest? Dost not see we are held in the spell of thy grave words? Quicker—quicker—what did the poor young raja do?"

"He plucked his dagger from its scabbard and plunged it madly in his side. He fell beside his love to die"

"Did he die?" came hoarsely from the king

"Nay, his friend pulled out the dagger from the wound and saved his life'

"Then—then what happened?"

"He lives in sorrow to atone the cruel crime committed"

There fell a terrible stillness and the king breathed hard and unevenly At last he groaned Then his eyes were raised and he gazed at the window ledge whereon a great black bird had perched and blinked into the room It flapped its wings, cawed weirdly thrice and soared away into the night

Amorapama leaped from his seat in horror, crying wildly:

"That bird—I have seen that bird before When—when?"

He paused and beat his forehead viciously

"At our wedding feast It sat upon Kalyana's head—then flew away Look, Kavi, there he is—Agra—his face in the window grinning at me—I killed him—killed him because he—"

Kavi stood beside the trembling king. His forehead glistened with icy sweat and he shivered. Turning like one awakening from a dream, he stared about, then he

beheld his friend He closed his eyes and sighed Then opening them again, said slowly

"They are gone, Kalyana, Ojas, the prophet who foretold the plague, gone and we are here—alone"

Amorapama sank upon the couch and groaned, while Kavi, standing by his side, awaited the oft repeated dawn of reason

CHAPTER XVII

A PROPHECY FULFILLED

The dreaded plague had fallen on the land It ravaged with fearful virulence throughout the raj of Hastinapur and in the city of that name tens of thousands died Here in the crowded quarters where filth and utter disregard of nature's laws prevailed, the greatest numbers were counted among the dead As is the manner of these plagues, a famine due to the drought had preceded it So it fell out that many whom the famine had spared the plague destroyed

As fast as death set in the cadaver was thrown into a large, deep hole, without regard of contamination of the living, along with hundreds who had already died In time this hole filled up with decomposing flesh that raised a sickening stench

In the second month since the plague broke out, a score or more such holes were filled and new ones dug to receive those still to come and no supa [1] marked the place of burial. These cesspools lay on the northern outskirts and when the wind blew from that quarter, the noisome odors grew unbearable

Amorapama worked by day and night to stay the hand of death with all the means at his command The royal granaries were opened to the starving people and the

[1] Burial mound.

best skull from far and near in all the land was called and bribed with princely offers of reward, to aid in ending Hastinapur's dreadful visitation.

With Kavi for his sole companion, the Maharaja made his rounds among the habitations of the poor and with his own hands helped in the labor of relief.

The priest, who knew the plague from study and experience, was versed in all its symptoms, course and treatment, and knew the danger of infection, had often warned the king and begged him to refrain But to such pleas he was unheeding—deaf in sight of suffering, and of death quite unafraid Kavi saw the peace of mind the labor gave, so in time desisted, yet when some especial risk was taken he would remonstrate, saying·

'Noble Amorapama, it serves the people ill for thee to jeopardize thy life—a life so precious to the raj and them. Amorapama dead cannot be replaced and in this lies a greater danger to the land than the plague itself."

"Friend, I know thy words are kindly meant, else I would be angered by their utterance 'Tis little I can do to help the wretched, stricken people in this hour of affliction, but so much as the gods permit, it surely is my solemn duty for me to do, and this I am determined I shall do"

"Ah, but the risk is great, the infection deadly and once taken, no cure can save thee, though thou art the Maharaja."

"Thinkst Kavi, I fear to die?" and Amorapama smiled into the troubled face of the anxious friend.

"'Twere late for me to learn this when I have seen thee imperil thy life a hundred times and more. Nay, I know thou hast no fear to die, but though thou wert

willing even, it is thy duty to thy raj to live, for only in thy living canst thou be of service"

"True,—true I understand thy meaning and agree, but if the gods think I am of need to those they love,—my people,—then those same gods will see I am preserved, if not, the gods will let me die and there will be an end of it As for me, Kavi, living hath more dread than death itself"

Against such reasoning, the priest had no argument, so must suffer the Maharaja to continue in his humane work, however great the hazard

As months went by and the census of the dead increased, the king was overwhelmed with horror and a great fear took hold of him that he, their ruler, guide, judge and friend was in some way at fault, then would he ask himself, was this calamity due to some wrong by him committed, or was it the long delayed but certain retribution of the avenging god for the murder of the queen? In such frame of mind he was one day when Kavi, who just returned from the poorer quarters to make report of what he had that day beheld, came in.

"Friend, I have been sorely vexed since thou wert gone. I am in wretched mind, for I cannot shake the feeling off, that this affliction[1] is in some manner due to my appalling crime. Hast ever thought of this?"

"Yea, Amorapama, much and often, but I do not take thy view of it. We know these plagues are common in this land, and were it not unreasonable to think each time it come, 'twas due to the Maharaja's personal fault? Besides, plagues have come when a good king ruled as

[1] Rama, in the Hindu epic Ramayana, believes a famine that fell upon the land was due to some crime committed in the royal family—Hunter, Hist. Indian Peoples, 70-71.

now, and they have not come when tyrants ruled. How, Amorapama, wouldst thou reconcile this with thy fear that this one is due to thee?"

"I cannot answer, but the dread is on me and doth oppress."

"Pray give thyself no uneasiness on this account. The gods in their great wisdom have ordained this terrible disorder for purposes to us inscrutable, so we must bear their anger as best we may, praying only that the heavy hand may soon be lifted and the people saved from further harm"

"Thou mayst be right,—indeed I hope thou art Yet strange it is, I have had fears of just such happenings for many years and could ascribe no reason for this fear, for then naught had occurred to warn of this disaster. Yet it was with me then and now that which I dreaded as a possibility hath come to pass Hast thou with prayers and offerings and sacrifices importuned the gods?"

"Yea, with utmost diligence and fervor Be thou content with this The plague must run its course as others have Meanwhile, we do the best we can to hurry its cessation by prayer and sacrifice, but not forgetting preventives of its spread"

"Do what thou canst, remembering all my earthly store, my private fortune and wealth of which the treasury boasts, are all at thy command to do with as thou thinkst best, to relieve,—to save my unfortunate and afflicted people"

"I know it Thy generosity has ne'er been doubted by those who know the truth Thy people honor thee for the humane king thou art"

"Hush, Kavi, for my conscience tells me thy words, though kindly meant, are not deserved. So speak not in

such manner. It hurts, and well thou knowest why it hurts."

"I will not again offend. May I now report what I saw to-day?"

"Yea, proceed. It makes me suffer to hear, yet would I hear."

"This morning," the priest began, "I wandered without purpose through a narrow, ill-kept street,—there where our artisans dwell I came upon a wattled, one-story house, neatly kept and showing by its outward look that those who dwelt within were thrifty and of cleanly habit. On a settle beside the door, a child, perhaps a little less than ten, sat looking steadily into space, nor spake, nor moved, nor did her face change its fixed expression. There was that in her face, her manner or her stolidity, I know not what it was, caught my attention and held it with most tenacious grip. The child possessed a subtle power I could not, though I tried, resist. Walking to her I spake to her and asked her name and age and who her people were. 'Amorapama, when she turned her great eyes upon me and answered in a voice so rich and sweet, so unchildish in its tone, I was startled beyond power of words to describe. She told me that her father died of the plague and her mother was then sick, but she did not know whereof, since the poor woman was much ill. She was asleep and so the child went out of doors that she might make no noise to awaken her. The pretty thing spake calmly and with sympathy, but not in childish grief or terror as one might expect."

Amorapama listened with growing interest.

"What else didst thou do?"

"I dared not enter lest I should waken her. In fact,

I think she would not have let me had I wished, she seemed so set of purpose and determined in her manner I spake for some time longer, delighted with the child and drawn by her beauty, but more by the fascination of her unusual personality. And strangest thing of all, she was not of our race,—not of our type, for she hath dark blue eyes and golden hair that hangs in shimmering strands unbound about her neck and shoulders Truly she is the most remarkable,—most wonderful child I ever saw. Even now I feel the power of her influence."

"Come, let me see this wonderful child Thy enthusiasm is infectious and hath aroused my curiosity. Come, take me to her"

They started for the remote street the priest described, where had dwelt the armorer whose child she was As they walked slowly through the deserted streets that once were teeming with life and bustle, 'Amorapama's heart grew heavy

Shop windows had their shutters up and the business and the pleasures of the city all had ceased. The doors were closed, no windows made display to win attention of the passerby and lure him to extravagance Everywhere the hand of death was visible and the few whom they met, were hollow-eyed and dejected as if they had lost all interest in life and its activities

Weary, heavy-footed, they wandered aimlessly about or sat before their doors and merely mutely stared. Occasionally they passed a woman nurse or soldier engaged in mercy's office, and these made obeisance when they recognized the king, then hurried on.

How different, thought the Maharaja, this scene of

blight and desolation from that which was on festal or even ordinary days before this dreadful visitation came upon the city!

Then there was life and animation in the scene, the people took deep interest in passing events, rejoiced in their lives according to the reason or the mood laughed, sang, wooed, married, while now the living were lifeless, the dead in number vastly increasing and each one living wondered when his turn would come

Few had hope more felt despair and Hastinapur the gayest city in the Gangetic vale, was now the dreaded city of the dead

After many windings and turnings into crooked, narrow streets, then into still crookeder and narrower ones they came upon the house where the armorer had lived Over the door a metal shield on which the armorer's name had been inscribed, hung swingingly suspended from a javelin that stuck out from the wall to mark the place and trade of him who dwelt therein

As Kavi had described, everything about the place, though humble and very poor, spoke of orderliness and patient care It was a low, one-story, thatched dwelling built of plaster walls and two windows flanked a door, now open to admit the air

Beside the entrance on the settle, sat the child with sapphire-tinted eyes and golden hair just as the priest described, as if she had not moved since Kavi left.

As they approached she slowly rose and walked into the house. There was but one, low-ceiled, small chamber and their eyes unused to darkness, saw but little that the room contained Growing accustomed to the gloom, at last they saw in the corner a bed of straw covered with a bright-hued blanket of coarse material on which a black-

haired, dark-eyed, low-browed woman lay, wan and wasted. Beside her knelt the child The mother and child were then engaged in prayer and neither seemed to note the presence of the strangers

They waited and as they stood a sense of awe oppressed them for instinctively they knew themselves in presence of impending death

The woman's eyes were open now and for a time stared fixedly at Amorapama and the priest; then she tried to speak, but her weak voice seemed failing her They stepped nearer, and Kavi, taking her hand, gently said

"Good woman, can we do anything to comfort thee? I fear thy end is near The Maharaja bids me ask can he not grant some dear and final wish which in the granting will ease thy mind?"

The child had crept into a gloomy corner and remained in silence a witness of the tragic scene She was like some impassive spectator of her mother's dissolution, for by no word or motion gave she evidence of how she felt Her deep blue eyes undimmed by tears, shone clear, her skin like carved alabaster gleamed as if illumined by a light within

"Nay," the dying woman faintly said, "for that long journey I now enter on, I have no needs to trouble on the way I have no son[1] to appease the gods with offerings, no husband to mourn when I am gone I leave my soul with those kind gods who in my life have been my comfort and my guide and my child will importune the gods with offerings Good sirs, I have no fear."

[1] It was the duty of the son to make offerings to the gods for the peace of the parent's soul Hence to have male issue was a solemn duty of the Hindu —Oldenberg, Rel. des Vedas, V, p. 529.

She faintly smiled and added:

"In Yama's land my Koka dwells. He went before—he will await me and together we shall dwell in glorious peace[1] He was a good husband and worthy father"

She paused, then looked earnestly into the face of the sympathetic priest and slowly said:

"Thou art the good priest Kavi. I have seen thee at thy labors of mercy many, many times Thou hast a noble heart and gentle mercy, the noble gods are pleased with thee Come closer, I fear I shall not last long It pains me now to speak"

Kavi leaned over while the king looked on and suffered as those who sympathize will always suffer

"My child, my Utpala! I bore her—she is a good and gentle child but she is not of our race—see, her skin is white and fair, her hair is yellow like the desert sands, and her eyes are blue as the sky on a moonlight night She is not like us—lived not like other children, played not with them, only dreamed, dreamed with open eyes as if she saw the things we cannot see. I loved her tenderly as mothers love their own, but—I am afraid of her."

She spoke in awed whispers

"How old is she?" the priest inquired

"Ten years at next high moon She was born and I had no pains of her. She is a strange and unnatural child."

"Is she thy first?" the king inquired.

"Yea, noble Maharaja, my first, and no others came to be companions to this one. She lives alone—apart, and

[1] The Vedic Hindu believed in a heaven—Yama's groves—where dwelt the righteous in this life—Rig Veda, X, 14.7 to 9. The Riga Veda mentions no hell

never was like other children I have often wondered how it came about"

"Let us not delve into the mysteries of the gods. They sent thee this uncommon offspring for some purpose of their own. Thou art the instrument of some divine intent. Let that content thee. Thou art surely favored of the gods"

"Dost really think so, noble priest?"

"Yea, I do indeed"

"Then I shall die in peace"

There followed a long and trying silence through which the child sat like a figure of stone. Her eyes were wide open and stared as if the scene enacting bore no relation to her life Just before her soul's release, the mother whispered to the king

"Pray, noble Maharaja, look kindly on my strange, unusual child She hath no friends to whom she can go, no relatives to care for her Wilt thou be mindful of my orphan?"

"Yea, that I will, my poor woman. In the palace shall she be reared into lovely womanhood As if my own will I have care of her Rest in peace"

With this comforting assurance the woman died and her remains were disposed with such respectful consideration as the wretched state of the scourged land allowed.

And when they put her away according to the custom in such dire times, the tearless, blue-eyed child, as if speaking to herself, said in steady voice:

"They who are dead are better served than they who live. Death is endless peace, living, chastisement for human sin. They who are born should grieve, they who die, rejoice"

They wondered at the words, but more at her who uttered them Looking at each other neither spoke his thoughts, the mother's words were true, the child was a strange creature and the marvel was how such as she could spring from such a stock It was plain to Amorapama, Kavi was right when he told the dying mother, the child was destined for some momentous duty and the gods knew the purpose of her birth

The fearful plague had run its course Though Amorapama and his friend had toiled without ceasing to relieve the stress and suffering, nothing could they do to stay the devastating hand of Rudra

Scenes of horror were everywhere at hand The dying died unattended since fear overshadowed natural love and human pity The symptoms were understood by the most ignorant for when the throbbing pains in head and body and delirium set in, the wretch afflicted knew that he was doomed and human skill was unavailing The body decayed in life, and from the foul corruption rose sickening odors of mortifying flesh

On their journey to the palace, the orphan walking silently beside them, they passed through many filthy streets filled with reek and offal From one of these hovels they brought out a recent victim The body, lank and lean, was covered with many festering sores, from the perforated abdomen the intestines bulged and hung bleeding.

Upon a crudely made, cloth covered stretcher, they bore the cadaver to the burial place with none to pay the last respects due the dead Perhaps he was the last, or if he left a family, too much in terror of infection to give their feelings scope, they stayed aloof and so without

funeral show, the dead must journey to his last abiding place

Sick at heart and in body, the Maharaja, without a word and followed by the priest and maid, hastened from the nauseating sight, he was glad to reach the palace steps over which the monster had not yet stalked, and this was strange, since both the king and priest were constantly exposed to infection in their rounds among the sick and dying

Utpala's eyes roved over the beauties of the scene that now confronted her Never had she seen the flower-decked grottos, serpentine walks with flanking trees and blossoming shrubs, the spraying fountains that made soft music as the water fell with rhythmic regularity into the white marble basins keyed in melodic intervals, the snow-white, gleaming palace with its dome that rose into the blue of heaven

When she was led into the palace with its vast corridors, mosaic floors and panelled walls in vari-colored stones, and beheld the splendid hangings in woven gold and silver that glistened in the softened light, the dining hall, the apartments of the king, and last the great zenana, her wonderment was quite complete Yet she said nothing nor gave expression to her feelings

She felt no strangeness—no sense like that one feels who enters a place of grandeur never pictured in the mind before She felt at home and by her manner showed her new surroundings had impressed, but not intimidated In this again, she proved herself unusual, which Amorapama noted and was puzzled at the rare phenomenon

The transition from rank poverty to regal magnificence left the maiden calm, composed, though speechless, which

might have been due to her reticence as much as to amazement at the change.

She was given into the care of a matron, with instructions that she receive the best attention and be given everything good for her body and her mind The matron smiled with kindliness upon the child, who accepted all the show of solicitude in manner of one accustomed to attentions

Amorapama and Kavi went into the king's apartment, where the former in sheer weariness of body threw himself upon a couch and for a time with closed eyes thought of the wretched plight of his beloved raj, then his mind reverted to the maid, her strangeness and unusual beauty both of mind and person Who was this blonde, blue-eyed creature, born of Sudra[1] parentage to whom by neither type nor character she belonged

How inscrutable the pranks of nature that will set off from all the rest, one of a family and mark it both in body and in mind an outcast from the whole Though child in years—scarce more than ten—her mind, betokened by her speech, bore evidence of maturity

It puzzled him, and speaking his troublesome thoughts, he said:

"What thinkest thou now of the strange creature we have found? On closer study, doth she aid thy wisdom? She seems to belong to another world She affects me oddly."

"Thus, too, did she impress her personality on me. That she hath an exceptional and well-formed character is in all things apparent She might have been a princess instead of a Sudra."

"Truly it is a mystifying trick of nature. I cannot

[1] See Glossary, "Sudra"

shake the impression off that she is somehow come into my life to fill a purpose"

"Dost pity the poor child?"

"Nay, 'tis not pity 'Tis more and yet I do not know how I shall define the sense"

"Perhaps thou art overwrought The nerves may be in tension and so thy mind is supersensitive to all impressions, which become exaggerated thereby 'Tis often so with all of us"

"Didst note the depth of her dark blue eyes—the pink upon her marble cheek, the dainty red of her soft lips, her hands how finely chiselled and her fingers, how they tapered as though carved in transparent stone by a master hand?"

"She is truly remarkable But let not thy nervousness impart importance beyond the real Thou wilt keep her?"

"Yea, surely I would not part with her for anything that thou couldst name I shall nurture her as though she were my very flesh and blood '

Then after a pause, the Maharaja said

"If thou art correct, and I am not yet prepared to say thou art not, then were an explanation of the phenomenon not hard to find"

"Yea, I have thought of it myself"

"Indeed, how?"

"Since first I saw her seated calmly by her door, I have thought her one who is possessed of a regal soul—that in a former state she was of a nobler birth than now"

"What! wouldst have me think her princess in a second or later birth?"

Amorapama smiled incredulously at the priest

"Perhaps. Who knows? That she is not of her family

a normal member, thou wilt allow; that her type, her face and form and her complexion all speak of another state But the surest sign is her mind, which for a child of ten is most unusual"

"In such manner have my thoughts run But I cannot yet accept it as a truth. Would it not be unbelievable that this poor waif, born into wretchedness and poverty and the lowest caste, were in some former state of noble birth? Ah, it is too fantastic to believe No, I cannot credit it as yet, my friend, though I will say, I may be as convinced of it as thou—some day."

By the king's command, Utpala was brought in She wore dress becoming her new condition as a palace resident She took her place in the chamber where the warm flooding light made her hair resemble strands of threaded gold. Her deep blue eyes were shining and her manner calm and unafraid She waited for the king to speak

"Thy name, child," the king asked kindly, all the while his eyes were making careful study of her every move, expression of her intellectual face, and his ears drank in the rich full tones of her unchildish mellow voice.

"Utpala, noble king," she answered calmly

"Thy age is nearly ten?"

"So my mother hath often told me, sire"

She stood unmoving in the spot where first she took her place.

"Didst love thy mother?"

"Yea."

"Truly, deeply?"

"I cannot say."

"What, thou canst not say thou didst truly, deeply love thy mother?"

"Nay, for who can measure depth of human love? It

hath no form, no shape, no heighth, no breadth nor thickness nor thinness—it is a sense, we know not whence it came nor whither it shall go when it is gone. Who can say one truly, deeply loves?"

Amorapama looked at Kavi, who smiled in turn but held his peace

"Who taught thee, child, to make such answer?"

"No one I was not taught in anything save work."

"Work! At what didst thou work?"

"Polishing the armor which my father made or mended, cleaning in the house, baking bread and sewing when there was need and keeping the sacred fire lit"

"And who taught thee these?"

"Sometimes and in some things, my father, in others, mother did"

"Was thy father kind to thee?"

"Yea, very."

"And thy mother?"

"Yea, very"

"Then thou hadst reason to love them both?"

"Reason indeed I had'

"And didst thou, too?"

"I cannot say"

"Did they not love thee?"

"If being treated kindly is a proof of love, then love me truly they both did"

Turning to Kavi, Amorapama said

"How oddly the child replies Canst understand her mind?"

"Not quite I am groping, but I think in time that I shall fathom her She is well worth the effort."

Kavi's face was lit with warmest interest

"Thou art unlike the children of thy age"

"I know it."

"Thou dost know it?"

"Yea, for my parents oft have told me so."

"Hast no other means of knowing?"

"Yea, the children of my age would never play with me. They could not understand me nor could I take kindly to their ways."

"H'm! What dost thou count thy pleasantest employ?"

"To think."

"To think?"

"Yea. To think of things young children never have been known to think"

"And what are these things?"

"I think sometimes on death and wonder why we die. I think of what my parents called a soul, and marvel what it is. How is it shaped, how doth it look, and why I never saw a soul, and then sometimes I think if I should see a soul, would I then know it was a soul and whose it was."

"Strange; go on"

"Sometimes I think myself a queen—a beautiful and gracious queen and then I make gifts unto the poor, bestow happiness on every one I know—my parents, my friends"

"Then thou hast friends?"

"Yea, but not living friends I think of someone I have never known or seen, then I learn to love that one—it is my friend and when I think myself a queen, I bestow these favors on that friend"

"Didst ever speak in this manner to thy parents?"

"Yea, but they merely smiled and shook their heads and seemed quite as puzzled as art thou, great king, and thou most noble priest."

All she said was uttered with a naturalness and composure becoming an adult, in this child were mystifying qualities that pricked the king to further questioning.

"When art thou happiest?"

"When I dream."

"Art thou, and at thy years, too, afflicted with these phantoms of sleep?"

"They are no affliction They are my chiefest joy."

"Then thy dreams are always pleasant ones?"

"Mostly, but sometimes, too, they are so sad," and her voice for the first time quavered with deep feeling. These wise and thoughtful men were learning things from a Sudra child they never thought of in their mature reflections.

"Tell me of thy dreams, little one"

The king's voice was lowered to a sympathetic tone, whereat she smiled as if she understood his purpose and began:

"Long ago, when I was but a child," she said, and Amorapama smiling, she explained.

"I am, of course, even now in years but a child, but now I understand what then was mystery I dreamed I was in some far off place, I know not where I had not been in such a place before—not since I was born—and there I saw a noble lord snatch from his side a weapon and strike himself a wound that bled and bled, and nothing for a time would stop the flow. He sank upon the ground and groaned, expecting then to die. when another man came to his relief and bound the wound and stopped the flow of blood and so the wounded man was saved. He was so tall, so handsome, so regal in his carriage, I knew he could do no wrong. When I woke I was in tears and mother said I had cried out as if in

pain. I only laughed and told her it was nothing—that I dreamed and so no more was said. But I have not forgotten that strange dream and never shall."

"How did he look?" Amorapama breathlessly inquired.

"Ah, that I cannot remember. Many times I tried to bring him to my mind, but he will not return. I only know he looked very noble and I thought he must be good."

"Why?"

"I do not know. 'Twas an impression, but I cannot say what it was that made it on my mind."

Amorapama's face grew gray, a great pain surged in his wound. It shot hot, torturing shafts into his quivering side. His head sank on his breast as with a stifled groan he lay back on the couch and closed his eyes, while his clutching hands pressed on the wound.

Suddenly Utpala cried aloud, her eyes ablaze with deep emotion, and with arm extended, her finger pointing to the place of Amorapama's wound

"There is where the man was hurt—there, where the king is pressing now—there the dagger stuck until the other man pulled it out and blood poured forth and drenched his clothes and left a reddish spot on the sand."

"Go, child—go—go Kavi—take her away Go—go," and Amorapama groaned.

Kavi led the child away, but as she reached the door she turned and softly said·

"I heard that groan before."

Amorapama fell into deep melancholy. His soul was torn with fierce emotions and his heart was heavy. Many days he stayed secluded, for when these moods were on him, no one, not even Kavi's sympathy, could rouse him from the lethargy of grief.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SHADOW ON THE THRONE

The scourge had spent itself and left its blight in wreck of homes, in death and desolation. Scarce a one-time happy home in Hastinapur but felt the deadly grip of the monster plague And those whom kindly gods had spared for sorrows less or worse to come, had looked on death and took from it the woeful lines of grief

But now the rainy season set in and from the leaden sky torrential rains descended and Indra, sky that rains, bestowed his gentle blessing as if thereby to make assuagement of the suffering that had preceded it

Day by day the rain unceasing fell and parched old earth drank greedily to quench her long thirst the pestilential drought Sushma[1] had created In the course of time she gave of her fertility and then the fields were enriched with life-giving grain, the flowers bloomed afresh and gentle nature smiled her benediction on the stricken land.

The wounds were healing and those whom the plague had claimed grew into tender memories, that softened human nature.

The gods had sent the plague for some wise purpose not revealed to man, and folly were it to seek to know this purpose, for the effort, if not futile, would but poorly serve the seeker.

[1] See Glossary, "Indra"

Now that the plague had passed and left the raj sore and bleeding, in time, as is the way of earthly things, these wounds would heal and all the land, kissed by the favor of the gods, will smile anew

The years that followed Kalyana's tragic end had been peace-blest and no untoward event foreshadowed the coming of a storm that was to serve an ambitious man to power

Ojas had a wayward son by Madi, his one time wife and zenana favorite [1] His vicious life convinced Ojas of his unfitness to succeed him to the throne For Ojas needed one on whom he could rely—in whom his faith could fix These requirements Calyaka could not fulfil. He was a youth of violent passion, dissolute in living, cruel to friends and tyrannical to foes, hence the father found it necessary that the son be banished to a distant place, where a liberal endowment made the young libertine more comfortable than he deserved

Since Amorapama's selection as yuva-raja, no word of the banished son had been received and those who thought of him with bitter memory for grievous wrongs inflicted, believed or hoped him dead Those again who took concern in affairs of state, regarded the voluptuary a menace to the welfare of the raj and so were overjoyed when aged Ojas placed his son-in-law in the other's place.

It happened that those who were so willing to believe Calyaka dead and thus removed from rendering harm to Hastinapur's throne, were deluded, for he was not dead, but instead was grown to full maturity. He was dwelling in luxurious state in a distant raj.

[1] See Glossary, "Women"

His eyes were fixed on the throne and he was waiting for the time to come when by intrigue or force, or both, he would claim the rights of which he believed himself wrongfully deprived.

He was a patient soul, for though many years had passed and events had occurred to discourage hope, he waited still and hoped and filled the time with careful watching, measuring and adjudging Bitter was his hate against the man whom his father had preferred

He never doubted that some day he would be Hastinapur's king, but how it was to come to pass, he did not know, so kept himself informed on secret matters by purchased spies who brought him news of everything transpiring

One day the people wishing change for no better reason than to escape the monotony of peace and happiness, would turn their eyes toward him and he, if ready, would with ease ascend his father's throne, and if in doing so he must step over the dead body of the noblest Maharaja Hastinapur ever had, it would not matter, if he but reached the dizzy height of his ambition

Thus far the intrigue escaped the priest's vigilance, who while he felt that danger lurked, could not locate its whereabouts nor sense its nature or its nearness to the throne

He withheld his suspicions, for had he spoken, Amorapama's confiding, unsuspicious soul would have scoffed at treason in his household Noble minds think nobly and will not readily believe evil of another, and with such a faith once fixed, it is not easily moved.

Though Kavi held his peace, his watchfulness was unabated, his sagacity as ever on the alert to learn the news of what he feared must sooner or later come about.

To be prepared for the event when it occurred, was the policy of his caution.

The time was near at hand and nearer than Kavi thought, when the volcanic forces held so long in check would be loosed to overwhelm the throne

Trusted messengers were passing to and fro and carrying mystifying words whose key of meaning only the recipient had.

In far off Dwaraka, on the western coast of Hind, there is a place, almost an island, that projects into the sea. Here Calyaka, Ojas' son, had made his long abode and hither came the tired messengers from Hastinapur more than six hundred miles northwest across the great Bhil country.

Such journeys took many days and their perils tried the bravest soul, but there were those who braved the dangers, and though many died in travel, others made the journey and were rewarded in such manner that they were content. The service was liberally paid in promises, for well Calyaka knew their fulfillment could only be required if he succeeded, and if he did he well could keep his word, if not, demands would then be worthless.

The annual allowance Ojas made his unworthy son was more than plenty to keep him in luxury, but not content with gratifying each purchasable wish, he cast his covetous and greedy eyes upon the throne And to gain his purpose, no patient waiting was too trying, no labor too onerous, no undertaking too hazardous.

Assembled in the council chamber were Amorapama and his council of advisers. There were five of them, bronzed, strong of limb, bearded, keen-eyed and full of manly grace and vigor for whom a deadly conflict was a keener pleasure than dalliance in a woman's arms.

Sarpa, the eldest, bravest, most trusted and best beloved of Amorapama, sat beside the Maharaja. He gave wise counsel, drawn from the vast store of experience. His was a long and honored service and so he grew in time to be the Maharaja's chief dependence in time of war and the needs of peace Thus was he counted Amorapama's favorite and envied by those who strove to have his place

Before them lay spread out, huge papyrus leaves on which were wrought quaint symbols and curious signs intelligible only to the initiated few, denoting the boundary lines of all the neighboring rajes and the rajas' names who governed them The valuable records were of great importance, both for peace and war In peace, these were carefully kept for need in war, for in these unsettled and uncertain times, a conflict with some ambitious raja was nearly always pending or at least imminent, hence must the army be maintained in condition of efficiency to strike at shortest notice a blow so heavy the adversary would not soon recover

Turning to Sarpa, Amorapama asked:

"What is our present strength?"

"A good one hundred thousand men, which will, of course, include the allied armies, divided into two parts, of which the one, say ten thousand, will be cavalry, the rest on foot"

"And are they well in hand so that at shortest notice they could be mobilized?"

"Yea, my exalted Maharaja. They are well armed, drilled, equipped with rations and so stationed that in ten days' time half can be upon the march and for the rest, say ten days more will quite suffice to place them in striking order."

"Ten days—that is too long, my good Sarpa, pray make it not more than five. Ten days were long advantage time to give a foe. I have, as all well know, abiding faith in thy ability, so make it not more than five"

"It shall be as thou commandest I am more than honored by thy favor," the soldier replied, and grew a shade or two paler as the royal praise marked him by its distinction The others envied him, but each of them held fast to hope one day to win such verbal laurels in trial of war or by fidelity and patient effort in times of peace

Turning to the others, Amorapama said

"It is my wish that full preparedness be at all times maintained. Let not these peaceful days beget sloth or carelessness We never know when war will come and our safety lies in being ready, as you warriors well know I depend on the Kshatriyas' honor to uphold the throne"

They cried aloud their protests of loyalty—all save the favorite, who stayed in silent thought and stared upon the papyrus maps before him on the rug His silence was not noticed in the general tumult by either king or his companions.

After a pause Amorapama resumed

My spies have brought me word that much unrest prevails in Dwaraka,[1] our ancient enemy, whom Ojas humbled long years ago. I am advised that were they strong enough, they would at once make war to win their independence back again. Have you heard of it?"

"Yea," spoke Chola, an aged but most highly honored prince, whom growing years and infirmities had removed from actual participation in military service. His wis-

[1] This city was sacred to Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu At least one writer claims that Krishna in the Maha Bharata was intended to teach Christianity, which reached India in the second and third century A.D—Frazer, Lit. Hist Ind, p. 231.

dom was deemed of value in the councils and in token of appreciation for past service he had been made cup-bearer to the king, an honor highly prized, for it carried with it perfect trust

He who serves the king in this must be well tried and true to guard the king from poison draught—a constant danger in this land, where intrigue and treachery must be recognized as present evils and so guarded against.

Chola was a man of courage, was deemed wise and able, which qualities the Maharaja held in high esteem

"I have heard it said they hope for their independence, that they would shake off the sovereignty which the great Ojas won But this is a vain and idle hope, for they number scarcely ten thousand fighting men," Chola said.

"But hast thou in mind, my noble Chola, they may increase their strength by coalition?"

"'Tis hardly likely and their geographic isolation makes an alliance both unlikely and unsafe"

"Well, thou mayest be right I hope so Our unhappy land hath had enough of sorrow from the famine and the plague, to deserve continuing peace Hath the plague been felt in our ranks?"

Sarpa slowly answered:

Some, but not much—not enough seriously to affect our strength Their favorable position hath served them well"

"Good. Thy foresight, my noble warrior, is everywhere in evidence It does thee credit, thou art vigilant"

"Nay, I do not deserve so much commendation," and the soldier flushed a deeper red and the others looked on and wondered

"Tut, tut I like thy modesty. It is by no means the least of thy good qualities. Thy example in this as in

thy worthy deeds is of greatest value to us all. 'Tis good for the morale of the army to know that real merit does not pass unnoticed and unrewarded. I am minded at this time to give thee better proof of my affection than idle words."

Sarpa sprang excitedly to his feet and protestingly exclaimed.

"Nay, nay, I beg thee, generous king, do not load me with thy gifts that are undeserved, their weight would crush me."

Amorapama smiled, first at Sarpa's vehemence, then at the others, to whom he said smilingly:

"Ye see, my good soldiers, how our worthy friend puts two excellent qualities into one, modesty and merit, merit and modesty Well, then, I will spare thee of this dread oppression of my proferred gifts—for the present."

Amorapama approvingly placed his hand on his favorite's shoulder and under the weight of it, the wretched man sank into his place and stared aimlessly at the maps.

At this juncture the hangings parted and the white robed priest walked in. He made obeisance to the king, the lords of war, then in calm, unruffled voice inquired

"Pray, noble Maharaja, do I intrude?"

"Nay, thou couldst never intrude on me Thy welcome is too certain everywhere for that"

"My deepest thanks. But I have not come to measure courtly civilities but to apprize thee of something of moment. I find it fortunate thy military counselors are with thee at this time. May I be permitted to submit the matter of my anxiety?"

"Speak. We attend," the Maharaja answered graciously, and with a sign bade the priest be seated by his side.

"A friendly priest," Kavi began, "hath just returned from a pilgrimage to Dwaraka and informs me that the times are troublous in that raj, that in the parks, piazzas and the public squares, he heard much excited talk of war, of independence, of the need of action They hate the power of Hastinapur's throne."

"We've heard of it, my Kavi, for our spies have brought us news of this from time to time Thus thy information doth confirm my own"

"But this is not all The priest, who is a clever and sagacious man, in conference with his colleagues learned that Calyaka is making propaganda among the people and using their resentment and rebellious spirit for his own ends."

"Ah, that I scarce believe He is well provided for and should be content to live on his liberal allowance. What more could he wish or ask for?"

"The throne and the power this confers," Kavi quickly answered

Two men in that gathering breathed hard and fitfully and their faces, if studied, would have set a thoughtful observer thinking, but in the absorption of mind at the news, they were not noticed by the rest and least of all by Amorapama, whom these symptoms specially concerned

"Nay, Kavi I think thou must be misled Thy priest informant is too zealous in the gathering of news and adds from his imagination what facts are lacking, to give them color of the truth"

"Ah, noble king, thy unsuspiciousness is a graceful, royal attribute, but in this instance, I must protest 'twere safer to be wary, by giving credence to the tale, if only to make investigation of the report."

"Good Thou art quite right In these tales there may be germs of truth Sarpa, I commission thee to investigate Send thy trusted messengers to Dwaraka and find out the purpose of the people and if it be as is reported, we'll make short work of Calyaka's budding hopes"

The soldier on whom this honor fell bowed to hide the changing color of his face, and at signal all arose and Amorapama in dismissing them, by way of parting, said

"Each to his task and let each bring to its performance his best ability and devotion Thus will you serve your country and your king It is my wish that when the rainy season shall have passed a feast in honor to the gods be given Let all the rajas and their goodly following be invited to attend The poor shall not be forgotten, on them shall be bestowed gifts, and feasting and merrymaking shall go forward for six days Kavi, order prayers and make the Great Sacrifice in gratitude for the gracious gods deliverance of our raj Everyone within our gates shall feel the grateful will of the Maharaja and share in the joy he feels that the plague is past My counsellors, you are dismissed, take with you the appreciation of your king"

They strode from the chamber, bowing profoundly as they went

Amorapama and Kavi, arm in arm, went into the king's apartment to discuss affairs in which they had a common interest

The rainy season was nearly spent and prolonged periods of cloudless sky informed the weather-wise that soon the rain would cease and the long dry season set in.

Sarpa, one late afternoon, took shelter from the blazing heat beneath the shading arch of the northern gate His face was clouded and his nervous manner told of a troubled mind Searching glances took in the sea of sand and the distant hills that cut the sky in undulating lines His manner was expectant, anxious The heat had grown intense, the ominous clouds rolled up against the firmament and through these the sun shone yellow on the land. The frightened birds flitted to and fro and searched for shelter in the neighboring trees against the coming storm

An aged beggar, dressed in rags that showed his body through the many gaping rents, and carrying a knotty staff, came slowly up and paused beside the warrior, who had at first ignored him The beggar coughed thrice and placed his arms across his breast, while casting furtive glances to the right and left to be assured they were not being spied upon Stepping closer, he softly whispered:

"Manu!"[1]

Sarpa started, then gazing sharply at the beggar, answered

'We give our daughters in marriage"

"To those who fight," the beggar answered, thus completing the identifying formula This being correct, the soldier quietly asked, keeping watch with eye and ear:

"Who art thou?"

"A beggar"

"In appearance surely, but in fact?"

"A messenger"

"From whence?"

"Dwaraka."

[1] Held sacred in Indian literature From him all men had sprung. He was the Noah of India See Glossary, "Manu"

"Thou art a friend?"

"I have proven it and will further prove if I required."

"I am content. What word?"

"The time is ripe to act Art ready?"

"Aye, but by whose order dost thou speak?"

"Calyaka—the king. Is that enough?"

"Aye, it is."

The soldier made deep obeisance which the beggar scarcely noted, then added:

"To-night we meet—thou and Chola at the armorer's deserted hut. Be cautious and discreet and have thy companion with thee in the first hour of the full moon."

"Aye."

The beggar, bending heavily upon his staff, slunk by and soon was lost in Hastinapur's crowded thoroughfares. The bent and grizzly figure was jostled and elbowed by the throng and none suspected his identity. He seemed a beggar, and that sufficed to earn for him a beggar's due—cold indifference and surly words, with ungentle buffetings All these he bore as should a true philosopher who doth regard the world a playground where all must play the game of give and take and be content that what is bad is not even worse He took his cuffs and scoldings with equanimity, a smile, an humble apology and side-long glance of deep significance, and so passed on.

As was portended, ere Vishnu's courtesy had faded from the heavens, the lowering clouds belched forked lightning and the Maruts tore through the trees and bent them low, scattering birds and fowls and frightened beasts that huddled close. Then came the flooding rain

and in an instant the thronged streets were bare of human life and Hastinapur seemed again as in the time of plague, a city of the dead. The palace loomed ghostly in the quick descending gloom.

Night set in with marked rapidity, then all was dark. The city's windows blinked out into the night. The thunder followed fast upon the lightning's flash and vengeful gods that joy in wreck and ruin held high carnival in this elemental war

Sheltered from the raging storm, two men were seated side by side in the armorer's hut, their gloomy faces taking on a deeper hue from the torch's flickering light. Without speech they sat for a time. Then one looked up and said:

"Art sure he hath a message from the prince?"

"Aye, a message commanding us to act I met his courier to-day, who, giving signs and words, bid us to meet him here"

"What said he?" Chola asked with bated breath

"To meet him here The time is ripe, he said—we must be ready"

"We are ready, are we not?"

"Yea, I am"

"And so am I"

After a pause Sarpa said:

"It cannot fail The plans have been maturing many years and if we but execute them as conceived, there is no danger in this venture. Besides, the people of this raj are anxious for a change. Amorapama's accession was only a surface popularity"

"And—and the reward—what said he about that?"

"It is arranged," Sarpa replied.

Then, to cloak his feelings, Chola turned toward the general a sweeping and contemptuous look, which made the other wince

"Thou needst not be so proud We do this thing for no personal spite or grievance, but for gain"

"I like not that part of it Amorapama is a noble king, a generous and loyal friend Were it not needful this change be made, I'd have no part in bringing it about"

"Pshaw—twaddle Thou wouldst hide thy dastard deed in righteous robes, but 'tis no use, for I do measure thee as thou dost me and we are both alike, save I am frank and thou a hypocrite, my good friend Chola"

Sarpa smiled sneeringly Chola half drawing his sword, leaped to his feet, his face distorted by his rage

"Sir!"

"Stay thy hand, my supersensitive and most righteous friend We have other business than killing one another Too soon we may die in fruit of our folly, but let not thou or I be executioner Put up thy sword. I meant no hurt Thy show of honest indignation is pretty, but is lost on me I know thee far too well"

"Have a care"

"I have. One who can betray a friend and king should not pose in saintliness"

"Oh, cease thy sharp tongued words, lest I forget myself and do what I shall be sorry for"

"We are pledged to do what we should both be sorry for, but it is too late or too soon for us to repent Let be. I think I heard a sound like footsteps. Hark!"

The wind moaned sadly past the shaking door and the falling rain beat hard against the fragile walls of the wattle hut. Then came a scraping noise of uncertain

feet, and the beggar, drenched and dripping, entered cautiously and slammed the door to shut out the intruding storm.

"The gods are in an angry mood, my friends," the beggar said, and placed his staff against the wall.

"Are we alone?" he added, looking searchingly into the gloom.

"Aye, quite This place is feared. Here died the armorer and his wife"

"Good The place was ordered by one who knows, hence our meeting here. We fear no plague, eh, save one in human form, and that we came here to cure." He smiled behind his heavy beard and took a place opposite the other two Then looking from one to the other asked

"Thou art Sarpa, the Maharaja's favorite?"

"I am." The man quailed at the words, but more at the sinister tone of him who spake them.

"Good! And thou art Chola, the cupbearer?" and he turned his smiling face on the other man, who scowled and said:

"I am he"

"Good. Now then, the plan I am commissioned by the prince, Calyaka, to say his forces are in readiness and his arrangements for cooperation all complete. There is to be a pageant followed by an audience of the princes who have come to honor Amorapama and make sacrifices to the gods in recognition of their mercy. Is it not so?"

"It is so"

"You are to cooperate with the prince's army that awaits the word when it will be rushed upon your city. How many hast thou in thy command?"

"Eight thousand horse—four thousand bow and spearmen."

"Can they be depended on to do thy command?"

"Beyond a doubt, so they do not know they fight against their king."

"That shall be arranged The gods have helped us wondrously. Praised be the gods," and he made a mock obeisance.

"When and how shall we strike?"

"Patience—patience—'tis all ordained as it must occur."

"Thou," turning sharply on the cupbearer, "art trusted by the Maharaja?"

"Aye."

"Thy duty makes thee custodian of the royal cup?"

"Aye."

"At the feast which will follow on the pageant thou wilt serve the king?"

"It is so intended as a custom immemorial"

"Good. You see, good sires, I have the details all in hand. Now were it not possible for thee while filling the royal beaker with Soma wine to add another ingredient to give it better flavor?"

"I do not follow thee"

"Well know then, that Amorapama is ill in mind, since Kalyana, your noble queen, died a score or more years ago. It were a mercy he be spared to suffer on interminably."

"Thou wouldst have me poison him?" Chola asked, aghast.

"Aye, even so," the beggar calmly answered.

"Oh, ye gods!" Chola cried, and shuddered

"Thou hast a tender heart. It does thee credit." Then the beggar added:

"Now in the commotion following the king's demise thy trusted soldiers shall surround the palace, disarm the guards or kill them, and the prince in hiding will appear at the head of his host and be proclaimed king. Simple enough, eh?" Again he smiled with confidence into the troubled faces of the men.

"Very, and full of hazard, too."

"Ah, since when hath it become the mode for Hastinapur's veterans to speak of hazard? Are they grown craven? We know no such word as danger in my land"

Sarpa winced. They remained silent and stared into the torch's flaring glare Then the beggar resumed

"As for thee, favorite, and thee, cupbearer of the king, your reward hath been arranged. The services you render to the king shall not be forgotten. Each shall name three wishes and from these, the prince, when king, shall make selection which to grant Remember, he is generous in love, but inexorable in his hate"

"How have we the prince's assurance?"

"By his word"

"And the proof?"

"The prince himself"

Quick as a flash the beggar tore off his masking beard and threw aside his beggar's garb and stood before the startled men, Calyaka, the pretender to Hastinapur's throne.

"The prince!" they cried in awed amazement, and stared at him. There was command in his voice, strength in every move of his lithe and sinewy body, but a cruel light burned in his flashing eyes before which the two conspirators dropped their gaze—ensnared.

"Well, my friends, are my plans in tune with your moods?"

There fell a silence, for neither wished to be the first to speak.

"Come, be not cowards. You've gone too far to pause. A word from me and both would be condemned You must go on—on to victory. Follow my fortune Amorapama is gata-prana[1] Long live the king Calyaka, no more pretender, but the king in fact by right of birth and fair tradition Come, do you pledge me your cooperation as 'tis planned?"

Slowly the cupbearer spake

"It was not foul assassination I was pledged to do Gladly would I have risked my life in battle, but to poison our king—" he paused and his searching mind measured the act according to its worth

"Tut! What matter whether he find death in a friendly draught of Soma wine or by the sword, in either case the country is well rid of him. Besides, by the means proposed thousands who would die in battle will be saved, so if thou sacrifice but one, the others whose lives thou savest will be bound in duty and in gratitude by the value of their salvation"

Chola shook his head as if not yet convinced Then the prince concluded:

"Know ye not that the gods have sent the famine and the plague in punishment of Amorapama's crime of murder?"

"Murder!" they cried in horror.

"Yea, murder—murder of the queen, Kalyana."

"Amorapama murdered the queen Kalyana? Oh, this is monstrous," cried Sarpa.

[1] One whose breath is gone—dead.

"Even so He sent Kalyana to the desert, there to find a wretched death and after all these years—for this was nearly twenty years ago—the gods have sent the scourge in chastisement for the dastard crime. Know ye not this?"

"Nay, nay, we never heard of it"

"Well, I have it from one who knows"

The prince laughed mockingly, then cried aloud:

"Fools! fools! How the priest hath cozened ye. 'Tis as I say and for a proof of it go ask Kavi, who well knows the truth"

"Horrible! Who would have thought our gentle Amorapama capable of such a crime?"

"No one need think, for it is so Now is it not need that he should die? His crime hath left the raj without an heir. Is then the poison not a gentle death for one, who could permit such cruel ending for your queen?"

They wavered in their judgment, but in the end were won The prince foresaw this happening, so rising, drew his sword and said

"Place your hands upon the blade and pledge me in an oath, you will not dare to break Repeat: 'We swear by Rudra to stand loyally for the promise we have made, each to do what he hath promised, and we invoke the avenging god to strike and give us torture in the afterworld if we prove false or recreant to this vow'"

They kissed the blade. A flash of lightning lit up the room and a thunder peal shook walls and roof and their bronzed faces paled but the prince only smiled He added:

"Here is the gentle potion that will cure the Maharaja's earthly ills and may the noble gods give him safe conduct to a better world in Yama's groves Thou upon

signal of his death, shalt have thy minions burst into the audience chamber and subdue the turbulent and await my coming"

Then, looking searchingly into their faces, concluded: "'Tis understood?"

"Yea, we will do as we have sworn"

"Good"

The prince resumed his beggar's garb and in a twinkling was gone out into the raging storm.

The conspirators looked at each other, each seeking in the other sign of fear that both men felt

"We are pledged—we cannot but go on," Chola whispered.

"Aye, it is too late now to withdraw Besides, the oath!"

"Didst note the angry god's comment in lightning flash and thunder peal?"

"Aye, it was Rudra spake."

Slowly and with trembling legs and coward souls they left the hut and parted

The torch burned low, flickered and went out The room was now in total darkness

From behind a chest a figure stepped and carefully peering into the night, went out and hurried to the palace gate, where by a word it opened and the figure disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DURBAR, A PAGEANT OF GREAT SPLENDOR

At last the rainy season ended and Vishnu blazed in his glory on the stricken land It responded to the greeting in a plenteous harvest that filled the granaries and made the husbandmen rejoice Thus abundance followed on pale-faced famine that had dragged its emaciated and blighted form through Hastinapur's deserted streets.

The change from plague to health, from hunger to repletion, showed itself in happy faces, gleaming eyes and bounding step

Anorapama looked from a palace window and saw with joy the transformation His noble soul expanded with a deep sense of gratitude His heart was lifted to Indra, God of Love, and a tender song sang in his breast.

With beaming face he greeted Kavi The gentle priest smiled kindly and found joy in his master's mood.

"How good it seems to see Vishnu in the heavens once again I rejoice the rainy season is past, for while it lasted the world seemed very dreary"

"But the blessed rain was needed, and in sending it the gods did us a great kindness"

"Verily But what is necessary is not always pleasant."

"Pain is needed to teach us we are ill. Yet no one thanks the gods for pain"

"Nor yet for being sick."

"Yet sickness is as much a part of life as health."

"True, and were we not at times a little ill I fear we would not understand the worth of health"

"'Tis the same in all the affairs of life. The law of contrast makes us joy in health because we have been ill and this joy again is compared with misery and by it is made sweeter. Thus one emotion gives birth to others"

"Truly. 'Tis a fundamental law from which humanity cannot escape."

After a pause he added

"Has the summons gone forth for the great Durbar we have planned?"

"Yea, and from all India have the answers been received. I think it will be the grandest pageant ever held."

"And so it should be. The occasion of its occurrence gives it a distinction none before has had Make it strong in religious flavor, for I would have the people know it is to celebrate the ending of the plague, this gathering of princes of the land is to take place"

"I have instructed all the priests, their contribution will not be least of many interesting features of the spectacle. The mercy of the gods in giving us release from suffering shall be brought to mind and heart of all Of this thou mayest rest assured"

"This is as it should be. No nation in this world deserves to prosper in material things which knows no gods, or knowing, ignores their claims"

"If all the rajas felt as thou dost I think the land would be more blest and prosperous."

Meditatively, Amorapama said:

"I have thought much of thy theory of reincarnation.

The Vedic hymns instruct us that we shall pass at death into a state of reward.[1] Thy views, I take it, differ from this in many things"

"Surely. There is no realm where we shall have reward for good done in the flesh nor is rebirth intended as a termination of a transitory reward, but rather a renewal of opportunity, through our experiences, to cleanse the soul from sin and bring it to a higher plane of virtue Thus, as we rapidly improve and rise, the number of rebirths is lessened and Nirvana[2] brought closer to the aspiring soul"

"Nirvana! What meanest thou by Nirvana?"

"Nirvana is the end—perfection of the soul being attained, no more births are needed, hence the end—Nirvana, which is peace, or nothingness, oblivion, where the conscious soul shall cease to be and being swallowed up in the Universal Soul, its individual being is there ended This is Nirvana Of course, this doctrine is ahead of time Countless years will pass before this form of religious thought shall be accepted by our people, but it will come. Someone will teach it and the world will hearken and accept it as a truth"

"Then why dost thou not preach this doctrine now?"

"Because I dare not conflict with the purposes of our gods. It is not for me to preach this truth Another, an enlightened one, a Buddha,[3] one whom the gods appoint, shall do the work and do it well"

"And art thou certain thou art not that one?"

"Certain The gods will make known their purposes

[1] Rig Veda, X, 14, 7 to 9.

[2] The end of reincarnation—oblivion

[3] Gautama Buddha See Glossary, "Buddhism"

to men and those for whom a mission is ordained shall know it and perform it as the gods have willed I am not that one."

Kavi smiled

"How canst be so sure of this?"

"A consciousness the gods have given. I am but a forerunner of him who will come to do this exalted work of reformation."

"If I were to judge, friend Kavi, I would say of thee, thou art by excellence and wisdom fit for such a mission, for no better, nobler man has ever lived, and if righteousness be part of fitness, thou shouldst be the Buddha, the enlightened one, to preach this new salvation to the world Thou hast the deva-linga."[1]

"Nay, nay; thy loyal friendship blinds thee to my faults."

"Well, have thy way I will not love thee less because thou art so modest of thyself—so blind to thy excellence."

Amorapama smiled kindly and Kavi, with serious face, looked out upon the busy street After a pause, Amorapama asked.

"How fares thy pupil, Utpala?"

"She is scarcely pupil any more. She hath grown in stature of the body but in mind her maturity was long ago attained. She needs but little teaching at my hands; she learns by intuition or some subtler process still, and things which I explain to her, she hath already half comprehended. I do not understand the maid at all."

"Uncommon surely. She reconciles me to thy reincarnation and belief in a purva-janman.[2] It is as if a

[1] God-characteristic.
[2] Former birth.

royal jiva[1] were housed within a Sudra's body"

"I sit with her to discuss her tasks, I look into her wondrous eyes so deep, unfathomable and so intensely blue, and think myself communing with a creature of another world—some goddess come to earth to fill a purpose and do some errand of the gods"

"She doth impress me strangely, Kavi, strangely," Amorapama slowly answered, then adding, "hers is a strong, a definite, conscious influence which she wields, especially when my wound distresses and my mind is heavy with bitter memories Then is she a soothing, ministering personality that comforts and refreshes the jaded spirit"

"She is much attached to thee," Kavi, after a long pause, irrelevantly remarked

"I know it, because 'tis felt I am drawn to her by a mysterious power I cannot analyze Whether this is the love a parent hath for his child, or the pure love of man for woman, I cannot say But she is dear to me, very, very dear"

They pondered for a while in silence, then Amorapama said:

"Come, Kavi, let us stroll into the park. The open arms of nature invite us"

They walked out into the vast domain which encompasses the palace. Calm and peaceful was the scene and the quiet soothed and acted like a gentle balm on mind and heart The birds sang in the lofty trees and insects hummed and droned in lazy inactivity.

"Hath thy courier returned from Dwaraka?"

"Not yet. 'Tis hardly time Besides his mission is.

[1] Principle of life—individual soul

no simple one He may be many months engaged in gathering the information we desire."

"Canst depend on him?" Amorapama asked.

"Perfectly He was my menial, I, his guru.[1] He is both intelligent and trustworthy, else would I not have selected him"

Then Kavi added.

"I have of late had premonition of serious trouble from that source Not that 'tis based on idle fears, but somehow, the unrest of the people of that raj, the presence of Calyaka, these together have oppressed me with the apprehension of a danger. It were best, as I have already told thee, to keep the raj in hand Treachery in thy household, while 'tis not likely, yet is possible and should not be overlooked For the present, I see no reason to be seriously alarmed"

"I am not alarmed, but I will not sleep in fancied security"

"I am sure that thou wilt not"

As they sauntered slowly on, they became simultaneously aware of someone sitting behind a flowering bush. A turn in the walk enabled them to recognize Utpala at her play.

Around her wrist a serpent coiled, and as she grasped it just behind the head, the beady eyes spit fire and the forked, red tongue protruded from its open mouth So intent was she upon her sport she did not note the presence of the king and priest. She murmured an abracadabra, and as she stroked the head and gazed intently into the reptile's eyes, they closed, the coils relaxed and she

[1] Instructor of youth; the student lived with the guru, performed service and when studies were completed, he became a householder by marriage. Dutt, Ep. Ind. Hist. 85.

laid it in the grass, rigid and unmoving Her eyes were raised and she beheld the king Jumping up, she ran toward him with a glad cry of welcome. The king greeted her cordially, but sternly said

"Child, thou hast selected an unusual plaything Art not afraid?"

"Nay, why should I be, my royal father?" and she mouthed the words so tenderly the men exchanged swift glances and the king remarked

"Yea, Kavi, without thy knowledge and consent, I have adopted our little friend She is my napti,[1] art thou not?"

"Yea, and I am proud to be"

"There! Is not that assurance enough to satisfy the vanity of the paternal heart?"

Amorapama laughed lightly at Kavi's wondering face.

"I think, Utpala, it were better thou foundest some other plaything Snakes are not safe for thee Wilt give them up?"

"If thou wilt have me But they are so beautiful, so intelligent and, so dangerous There is a thrill, a charm in bringing them under my spell I picked this sarpa[2] up but a few moments since and see him now—harmless as a kitten. Of course at first it was very savage and tried to strike, but I was too quick and so I mastered it Is it not a pleasure to feel one can master someone else, even though it be but a sarpa?"

Amorapama answered slowly·

"Yea, but in asserting mastery, the object of its exercise must be important and for some good. It is well enough to master a poor snake, but as it is of no use to

[1] Daughter.
[2] Snake

do so, the danger of the enterprise will condemn its undertaking."

"But is it not well to do a thing successfully, no matter what it may be?"

"Effort expended successfully hath its use, but for an improper purpose spent it would be wrong. The end sought must justify the risk, else were the risk assumed a sin. Is it not so, Kavi?"

"Surely, I am in accord with thee. Foolhardiness is never heroic and a wanton risk of life or health deserves no commendation, however much the danger proves indifference to consequence"

"Rightly put See, my daughter, our noble priest and I condemn this gentle pastime, so we will say no more about it."

They walked leisurely along and Amorapama held the child, now almost woman grown, by her hand. They reached the slumber house and sat down upon the skin covered divan that ran along the walls The view was very charming; the bluish mountains leaned against the sky and the tortuous Ganges wound its silvery path through the yellow desert waste. A swarm of large, white birds was flying lazily through the air and distant cattle lowed. Bees were humming and the butterflies flitted nervously from flower to flower and bathed their brilliant wings in the moisture of the petals.

Utpala spoke. She rested her chin on her hands and gazing into the Maharaja's face, began:

"Last night I dreamed; it was a strong, vivid, life-like dream. It was as though I entered a chamber in the palace and as I drew the curtains, I saw and recognized it as one I had often visited before. The feeling came upon me that I had been in that room in other dreams,

had lived in it and knew each thing the room contained. It was as though I had come home after absence of some years. The hangings, their color and their pattern, the rugs, the furniture, the windows, and the splendid view, all these I recognized and the strangest thing is, that I dreamt that dream so many times before and when I went into the room—yes, I went to it and found it without trouble—found it as it was pictured in my dream—I felt the same sense of being in my home. I have thought of it all day and cannot make it out at all"

"Canst thou give an explanation, Kavi?" she asked, and turned her deep blue eyes upon the priest.

He paused in thought before he dared reply:

"Perhaps—mind I do not say 'tis so—I only say perhaps our dreams are the awakening and our liberated souls are living and experiencing the events our dreams are picturing to the brain[1] Thus might it be that thy disembodied spirit journeyed to the palace and found entrance to the room Each visit, thy soul was drawn to it, when a dream alike to the predecessor dream occurred Then when thou didst in waking see the chamber it was not unfamiliar to thy material sense, since the subconscious eye had already in dreams beheld it. Thus was it to thee like home—familiar in all its parts. This might be an explanation, but of course I do not claim it is Pray do not accept it merely because I have said it, for I would not teach thee what I am not sure about, nor lead thy mind in fallacious thought."

[1] "In sleep are seen visions of well-known faces, scenes are fancied forth; joys and fears come and go, yet as man moves not, the first solution is that something—the breath, the spirit or soul—has gone forth to wander free." This was the Vedic Hindu's belief in dreams—Frazer's Lit. Hist. of Ind, p 104.

Amorapama's eyes looked into hers and there was deep intensity in his voice as he inquired:

"What room was it thou didst visit in thy dream?"

"I was told," the maid replied, "it was the bedchamber of the queen, the beautiful Kalyana, long since dead."

There was a twitch in Amorapama's mouth and his pale face took on a grayer tone when his met Kavi's serious eyes. Two minds were wrestling with a vital problem and she, whose words had exorcised the spirit of the past, waited and wondered why her words had met such strange reception.

In Kavi's mind, thoughts were awakened that dwelt not there before. It was in some degree a confirmation of what he to Amorapama had so many times asserted. Yet what had she, this Sudra child, to do with soul wanderings that took her spirit to the queen's apartment so many times? This question fixed itself in Kavi's brain, and revolve it, twist and turn it as he did, it still remained to puzzle and confound.

Amorapama reached a conclusion quicker than his friend, but this made him no surer right But though he formed a conclusion, it satisfied him not one whit more than Kavi's thoughts did him Both were drifting to a point which now was veiled, but which in good time would be as clear as the noonday sun, and until this veil was lifted—the appointed time had come—the two must wait in patience as best they could

They might reason until their poor brains ached, but the gods could not be hurried nor their decrees foreseen, for they are immortal and infinite, man mortal and merely finite.

"Art sure," Amorapama at last broke in upon their

reverie, "thou never with thy father, the armorer, wert in the chamber of the queen?"

"Never"

"And did thy father never describe this chamber while it was being set in order for the queen?"

"Nay, for when I told him of my dream and asked him how the queen's apartment looked, he answered he did not know for he had never seen it."

"'Tis most astounding!" Amorapama exclaimed

"Hast any knowledge of thy ancestors, my child?" Hast ever heard from father or mother who their forebears were?"

"Nay, good father They never told me of such matters When I asked, which once or twice I did, they said I need not know nor was there anything worth knowing to be known, and father added he was what his father was before him and who in turn had taken his father's trade. Thus had it been as far back as it was possible to delve into the past"

"Thou art an incomprehensible child, and possibly 'tis this doth make me so fond of thee Come, child, kiss me"

She backed away and would not be persuaded, though the Maharaja pleaded Then turning to the priest, remarked

"Hast ever seen such a child before?"

"Never and never will again"

The king would not be thwarted by the froward maid, so seizing her resisting, writhing form, with a vigorous pull brought her to his arms. Ere she could prevent he pressed on her pouting lips a long and tender kiss and then he let her go. She leaped like some hunted animal.

far from his capturing embrace, and ran away with foot as light as any antelope, and before they were recovered from their surprise, Utpala was gone.[1]

In that stolen kiss his mind received a shock that left the uncomprehending king in a maze of torturing doubt. The thrill of it went through his frame and his veins seemed filled with molten metal, while his heart beat tumultuously. Only once a kiss affected him like that, and it was many years ago, but he remembered as if it were a something recently occurring

How could this be? Why did this child's kiss affect him so much like the other one? The other one was forced on the lips of his unwilling bride—this on a Sudra orphan child.

Neither spake as they entered the palace.

The morning of the heralded Durbar dawned propitiously. A cloudless sky smiled on the land while gentle breezes from the west dispelled the heat. The palms were swaying in the palace park and birds sang lustily as if they, too, were conscious of the importance of the day.

All Hastinapur was out betimes and long before the third hour had passed, the streets were filled with a merry, well-dressed, chattering throng. Friend met friend with friendly greeting because of the day—the Durbar—the gathering of the princes from all the land of Hind.[2]

The wide avenue that marked the course the pageant

[1] The caste barrier between the king and the Sudra had been removed by his intense love and the Buddhistic teachings of Kavi, who taught, like Gautama, the brotherhood of man But for these Amorapama's act were impossible. See Glossary, "Caste" and "Buddhism."

[2] Hindustan.

was arranged to take, was gay in flags of many colors and quaint and curious designs. From every window hung a bright-hued cloth, and garlands of flowers stretched from door to door, thus imparting continuity to the general effect of all the decoration. Miles of avenues were dressed to give a splendid welcome to the princes of the land.

These were vying with each other in a lavish prodigality and disregard of cost, to outshine in gorgeousness of bejewelled dress, number and the richness of the caparison of their gaja-gana,[1] their gayly plumed, well uniformed and heavily armed retinues

The marble palace was decked from dome to entrance gate with bunting and waving flags and over each arched window hung an escutcheon shield that bore the arms of the House of Hastinapur.

Before the main portal on a marble landing, a great canopied throne in red and gold had been erected, and half surrounding it were gold pillows for ancient Maharajas, rajas and the diplomatic guests

Over the noble portal hung flapping in the breeze, a white and gold trimmed banner which in flaming characters blazed the word that bid the multitude of visitors a royal welcome to the city

Streamers of colored ribbon sprayed with blossoms hung suspended from the corners of the banners and behind the throne, upon a velvet cloth of deepest purple and wrought in gold, the crest of Panchala, Amorapama's ancient coat of arms, brightly shone

All about were naked slaves, who waved their perfumed fans to keep away the insects and impart a pleasing odor to the moving atmosphere.

[1] Elephant troupe

Rows of tall, well-armed and warlike spearmen stood like figures carved, on either side of the marble steps that led up to the throne. They neither moved nor changed the stern expression of their bronzed faces, but with eyes fixed and muscles set awaited the beginning of the day's festivities.

These were the choice of Amorapama's bodyguard and it was counted highest honor to be thus selected, though the ordeal of rigid repose was not a little trying on the nerves

Below and on both sides of the wide avenue the crowds were surging and though the hour was early and the beginning of the pageant some time off, each spot of vantage had been fought for by the present holder, nor would he move lest some covetous neighbor take his place. And yet it was a kindly and well ordered crowd

At the fourth hour since dawn, a herald dressed in red with golden mountings, astride a bay stallion, galloped through the street and blew a fanfare on his trumpet as a warning to the pushing crowd The Durbar was about to start

A moment later, preceded by a company of trumpeters who blew lustily on their silver instruments, the Maharaja Amorapama and his court emerged from the palace and took their places At sight of him whom all classes loved, a lusty cheer broke out, banners were raised, hats thrown up in the tumult of excitement, and men and women and children joined in the deafening chorus of loyal welcome which the king, with gracious smile and courtly bow, acknowledged before he sat upon his throne to review the greatest Durbar ever held.

Beside the king sat white-robed Kavi and to his left his ward and foster-daughter, Utpala, who, in festal

dress, seemed taller and more beautiful than ever she had seemed before.

The melancholy, priestly chant now broke upon the air and all that vast multitude of assembled citizens was hushed in reverential awe

In solemn measure and with rhythmic tread, two hundred priests of Indra, assembled from every raj in India and preceded by the High Priest, robed in white and gold, chanted as they slowly marched, Rig Veda's solemn hymn

"We sing the heroic deeds which were done by Indra, the thunderer He destroyed the Ahi [1] and caused the rains to descend and opened out the paths for mountain streams to roll"

"Indra slew the Ahi resting on the mountains, Tvashtri had made the far-reaching thunder-bolt for him. Water in torrents flowed toward the sea, as cows run eagerly towards their calves"

"Impetuous as a bull, Indra quaffed the Soma juice; he drank the Soma libations offered in the sacrifices He then took the thunder-bolt and thereby slew the eldest of the Ahis"

"Indra, with the all-destructive thunder-bolt, slew the darkling Vritra [2] and lopped his limbs Ahi now lies touching the earth like the trunk of a tree felled by the axe"

"Glad waters are bounding over the prostrate body as rivers flow over fallen banks Vritra when alive, had withheld the waters by his powers Ahi now lies prostrate under the waters" [3]

[1] Clouds

[2] Clouds

[3] Rig Veda, I, 32.

Then as their voices rose. they blended into supplicating measure:

"Worship Yama, the son of Vivasvat,[1] with offerings. All men go to him. He takes men of virtuous deeds to the realm of happiness. He clears the way for many."

"Yama first discovered the path for us The path will not be destroyed again. All living things will, according to their acts, follow by the path by which our forefathers have gone"

"Flowing Soma! Take us to that immortal and imperishable abode where light dwells eternal and which is heaven. Flow Soma! for Indra"[2]

The priestly order having passed, a regiment of Amorapama's veterans, bronzed, stalwart and with martial bearing, marched. Some of these had fought at Kasi and helped save it from a fearful fate; and all were fearless soldiers, tried and true, and well deserved the cheers and plaudits their fine array evoked

Preceded by a corps of drummers who beat their drums with vigor, and escorted by his flaming retinue, came Bhima, the raja of Varanavata, mounted on a patient, well trained elephant. The gold mountings of his howdah glittered and shone resplendent in the morning sun Robed in white and silver cloth, a huge sapphire gleaming in his twisted turban, he looked superb and pleased the populace who shouted their acclaim; whereat the doughty raja bowed and smiled and accepted the fair courtesy with gracious condescension as if it were his due. In passing the Maharaja he bowed in deep obeisance and received the king's acknowledgment for answer.

[1] The sky
[2] Rig Veda, I, 33

Many elephants in richest trappings, carried his lords, and each took to himself some share of the applause

Next followed a company of charioteers in shining bronze and gold and silver mounted chariots drawn by mettlesome, prancing steeds, held in command by expert drivers. The chariot fronts were covered with blazing emblems and their hubs and spokes were sprayed in gold. The drivers wore white sleeveless tunics. They made a splendid show and Amorapama noted their appearance and would later give them praise

Hundreds of princes on gayly ornamented elephants went by and smiled in passing and made obeisance to the Maharaja as was prescribed by ancient rule Then Kickaka, from a distant raj, came riding by, escorted by a troop of horses Famed was he in war and council and his valor and his wisdom were well known throughout the land He was a salpati[1] on his black, free-limbed Arabian horse, whose every poise of head and neck, spoke of its birth and noble training The impressionable crowd roared itself hoarse and the bronzed face of the veteran grew a deeper red, for he was proud and knew his worth as well as others did.

More elephants with well filled howdahs and managed by expert mahouts came on slowly and so for hours, the mighty pageant passed

The crowd was won by the fine appearance one thousand well trained archers made The tallest men in all the land were recruited for this regiment Their bare, tanned bodies shone and their backs were burdened with heavy quivers filled with iron-tipped darts, while slung over their left arms and resting on their shoulders were

[1] Strong ruler

their large bows, too stiff for other than the strongest men to draw.

Famed were these men in war and joust and all along the line of march the people cheered them for their recorded deeds, but more for the daring of their manner and the splendor of their fine physiques.

Not one of them but would gladly die for the glory of the raj, to serve the Maharaja and keep from harm the old men, wives and children of that appreciative throng.

Sarpa, at the head of five thousand gallant club and swordsmen, next marched past the throne and looked not to the right or left, while sullen indifference flashed from his deep set eyes as the people cheered, and the Maharaja smiled a courteous greeting to his favorite chief While seeming to be looking nowhere, all the while his eyes were searching in the faces of the throng—searching but not finding His sullenness settled in a gloomy frown, which the enthusiasm of the assembled friends could not dispel

A harvest wagon drawn by white bullocks, next lumbered by. It was filled with many bags of yellow grain. Husbandmen marched by its side and every little while, those in the wagon threw into the lines of shouting people small bags of grain which were caught amid laughter

To please the people and delight the children, a trained black Himalayan bear, in care of clownish keepers, performed antics as he went by Cries of childish merriment his tricks provoked and in mock solemnity the mountebanks bestowed their curtsies right and left and this aroused the multitude to roars of laughter.

Five thousand horsemen carrying iron-mounted shields and armed with heavy swords, sat their mounts like statues They looked straight before them and pretended

not to hear the warm acclaim along the line of march. They raised their polished swords in grave salute as they rode past the throne and the king bestowed on them the honor of a nod and smile

"They look to do a deadly service in time of need," was Amorapama's comment to the priest, as they rode by.

"A fine body, surely," Kavi answered, still looking after the cloud of yellow dust the horses' hoofs had raised

"Here comes the loyal Chola with the makers of the Soma wine A good fellow and a faithful I regard him highly"

"Aye, he doth look well and is deserving of thy trust—no doubt"

Perched on a huge bullock skin that was made to resemble the animal in life, a dwarf in motley dress, on a wagon, went slowly past He threw among the scrambling crowds skins filled with wine The people cheered, cried and laughed, then stretched and leaned forward to catch the skins And when with special aim, one struck some unwary lout, the populace would scream with laughter, while the target of such good marksmanship blinked foolishly and rubbed the bruised spot

Last came a troop of trained war elephants bearing on their backs in well protected howdahs a special guard of marksmen who in battle served an excellent and well designed purpose There were some two hundred elephants, mounted by near five hundred men, all trained to shoot with unerring aim

"They would do deadly execution They are a valuable arm of our forces," Amorapama said

"They have proved their worth The Dasyu cannot stand against their formidable front"

Many hours had gone and none in the excited throng

seemed conscious of the growing heat The sun stood high in the heavens and the cooling breeze having died away, left the city in a sweltering glow

Slowly the crowds dispersed Amorapama lingered to talk to those about him

"Didst like it, child?" he asked of Utpala, whose eyes were big and shining

"Very, very much I thank thee for the great pleasure I have had" And her eyes roved in the crowd with searching glance

A polished, soft spoken diplomat in colored silk and covered with decorations, turned to the Maharaja, saying:

"Most exalted king, my humble congratulations on this, the most glorious Durbar ever witnessed There is but one Hastinapur in all India, and only one great Maharaja Amorapama"

"Flatterer! thou hast made fine speech an art and dost profess it with finesse. Kavi, couldst thou but make thy orisons one half so well as he doth master soothing flattery, thou wouldst become a god"

'Excellence," Kavi promptly answered, "is worthy and our diplomatic friend in regarding the art of pleasing speech a valuable possession is justified by ages of diplomacy."

"Aye truly thou art right, priest"

"Accept my thanks, most exalted ruler, and to thee, good priest, I am a debtor," spake the fawning juggler of fair speech He bowed to the king, who smiled goodnaturedly and Kavi merely nodded but spake no more.

The royal party had arisen and were talking in animated groups. Slowly and with heavy steps the beggar, bent of figure and leaning on a stout and rugged staff,

slouched past the palace gate His whitish beard fell on his chest and his tattered dress hung loosely on what seemed an attenuated form. None noticed him, although he stood for a time and stared at the throne so long, it was strange he was not remarked

Just then Utpala's eyes met his She leaped to her feet Her face flushed and pointing with her finger at the grizzly mask of poverty, cried out.

"See—see, it is the beggar"

No one heeded her What cared the distinguished men and women there, for the senseless words of a child

The Durbar was over and by all who saw and were able to make appraisement it was proclaimed the grandest India ever saw

CHAPTER XX

AN AUDIENCE AND ITS TRAGIC COURSE

The Great Sacrifice to the Aryan gods being made, their anger was appeased, their favor for the future, by gifts of wine and cakes secured, and the people, thinking themselves and their lives in harmony with Divine Intent, rejoiced

The exalted High Priest and his subordinates, maintained by Amorapama's generosity, had performed their sacred offices with solemn pomp and ritualistic ceremonial, made libations to the gods, and with earnest prayers had importuned the blessings of abundant harvests, increase of cattle and plague-free length of days And as these came to pass, their prayers were deemed answered and the priestly powers thus increased

The people had dispersed and gone to their homes where Amorapama's bounty gave them opportunity to revel and make merry, thank their gods and pray for Amorapama's long continuing reign For, though noble had been Ojas as their king, yet nobler still was Amorapama and throughout the land, from Himalaya's snowy peaks to far off Dwaraka and distant Kasi, his name was held in honor

The royal audience to which India's princes had been summoned was yet to come

Noble was the throng of visitors and gorgeous the

splendor of the assembled chiefs who in display of wealth made rivalry with the result expected—an audience of unprecedented grandeur.

Appareled in their silks, embroidered in golden threads and set with blazing jewels that made a feast of color for the dazzled eye, they sauntered pompously through Hastinapur's streets, attended by their retinues and slaves

A balmy night set in and Varuna's splendor lit the festive scene and the resplendent moon shed mellow glory on the land

The palace now was thronged with guests from far and near to honor Amorapama's invitation Rich and poor, great and humble rajas came and made the best show of worldly circumstance their purses would permit and the evening air was filled with laughter and outbursts of enthusiastic joy.

The palace park was lit with many torches and musicians, hidden in the deep green shadows, thrilled the sense with gentle music

In the throne room, preparations were completed and the expectant attendants stood about, awaiting the beginning of the fête

At the middle of the long side of the oblong hall, stood the gold and ivory throne, supported by two massive golden lions with wide open jaws and fiercely glaring eyes set with gleaming rubies Overhead a canopy in deep blue silken cloth and sprayed with golden stars, cast a deep shadow in the recess back of the royal seat Heavy chains of gold held the graceful wings on either side and marble steps reached from the mosaic floor up to the tiled platform Soft rugs were spread about upon the floor Lamps of gold and set with jewels hung on massive chains, incense burned in graceful bowls and

all about were lights whose mellow glow lit up the splendor of the room

The encrusted marble walls were broken by high arched windows, through which the evening breezes stole and bore the pilfered odor treasure from the flower beds and blooming shrubs

Around the sides ranged rich, upholstered divans, soft and clinging, on which the weary might recline or the haughty sit in solemn state

Soft strains of music came from an unseen source and added mystic charm that caused a mental exaltation

Soldiers, fully armed with burnished swords and javelins and shining breastplates, were stationed in rows, less for their need than for the martial air and dignity their presence gave Their polished instruments of death gleamed in the light and their impassive faces masked well the feelings in their breasts

A crash of cymbals, roll of drum and screech of fife broke on the perfumed chambered air—the signal for the great festival to begin

In double file, straight in line and erect in body, a troop of soldiers now filed in and took their places in set groups about the throne Sarpa was in command of these and of the king's bodyguard Their evolutions, made with rhythmic unison and in perfect form, spoke well for him who had these men in hand

The priests in robes of white and gold, came in and chanted as was their wont great Indra's praise, and their presence spread a solemn air. And none so callous but felt the hour was pregnant with stirring events. In gossiping groups and irregularly, the princes followed the priests and ranged themselves wherever they pleased and continued in subdued voices the conversations previously

begun. Some, whom the scene impressed, stood in silence and let their eyes rove around, while the busy brain took in the grandeur of the scene.

The hidden music taking direction from unheard command, ceased, and silence, tense and heavy, followed the dying echoes of melodious sound.

Another crash of cymbals, louder than before, announced the entrance of the Maharaja, who on Kavi's arm and followed by Utpala in festal robes and the women of the zenana, walked slowly and with majestic stride through files of salaaming princes, and mounted the marble steps leading to the throne The posture of humility was held until the cymbals ceased their clangor and the Maharaja in deep, full voice, proclaimed:

"Princes of the land of Hind, I give you royal welcome"

Whereat, as was the loyal custom, the assembled chiefs in unison replied

"Long live and prosperously reign, the noble king, the Maharaja Amorapama, Ruler of Hastinapur and Panchala and Lord of the realm of India."

Amorapama now sat upon his throne and let his deep set, gleaming eyes rest on the scene It was a smile of conscious power born of deeds well done, that rested on his heavily shaded, firm, set lips Amorapama was a king as kings should be, to whom prerogatives are a trust, power an honored tradition and their just employ a duty mellowed into immutability of law.

The music resumed its pleasing labors and conversation took its unfettered course

"A goodly gathering and most inspiring. What says my solemn friend and priest?" Amorapama asked and smiled, for excellent was his humor.

"Yea, a splendid audience Not one of all the rajas summoned refused the invitation This augurs well for Amorapama's popularity"

"Peace is with us and I trust it will long abide Hast had no news?"

"Yea, to-day—an hour since I would have been with thee sooner but was denied"

"Is it good or bad?"

"Scarce good nor yet so bad"

"Ah, a riddle," and Amorapama laughed softly and looked about contentedly

"The people of Dwaraka are in a state of rebellion. There is strong talk inspired by Calyaka, but my messenger saith it is but a passing cloud and will soon lose itself in the dissolving sunshine of perfect peace"

"Thy news is fair and I had feared it would be much worse. Yet—" and he paused and thought a moment, "it will be well to give this raj consideration Perhaps a visit—of peace, of course—might check the tide of discontent"

"Yea, some such action were well advised"

The music ceased and silence followed As though moved by one strong impulse, the rajas now formed in order and proceeded toward the throne Each in turn fell on one knee and murmured the words of fealty:

"I acknowledge the sovereign power of the Maharaja and pledge myself to his support"

Proud and humble uttered this formula as was the time-honored custom, and as the words were spoken, the king's sword rested lightly on the head in token of the authority which the acknowledged power of the victorious sword conferred.

This ceremony completed, the rajas having resumed their places, Amorapama rose and said

"Lords of the realm, it is my royal wish to make provision against the exigency of the future and to confer an honor where that honor is most deserved"

He paused and the wondering princes gazed at each other, then at the king, and conjectured variously on the purpose of the words

"As you are aware, I have no heir on whom I can confer the crown and it is well to guard the realm against the danger of disruption"

The purpose now was dawning on their minds

"Were I to die to-day, now, the great kingdom would be the prey of the designing and unworthy, in whose efforts to seize and hold the crown, the people would suffer, the land be cursed with strife and years would pass ere peace could be restored"

Yea, the purpose was patent now But who would be the favored one?"

"Hence, and in conformity with the ancient law, I have decided to appoint this day a yuva-raja"

Deep and unbroken silence fell and Amorapama looked with steadfast eyes into the throng Then cries of approval broke the stillness of the room and when the king resumed, all sound was hushed

"For years the selection of the proper one to succeed me has been considered To rule this raj, to fill the grave responsibilities of Maharaja, needs a man of firmness and of justice"

Cries of "aye" and "yea" filled the room

"A man of noble mind, strong character and unflinching courage—are we agreed on this?"

"Yea—yea," the assembled chiefs as one replied.

A gripping sense of excitation seized the throng Hearts beat in quicker measure, eyes grew big with wonder and many there breathed hard and fast All understood the gravity of the moment and each prince thought himself the best, the only one possessed of the attributes the Maharaja named

"Him whom I have selected, I have known for many years"

Faces fell, for the words excluded many who had cherished hopes No one dared to interrupt.

"Him have I learned to love as friend and honor for his worth"

More hopeful ones fell at these words and thought themselves abused, their worth and merit were so little in the royal mind

"Him I have found possessed of every attribute a king requires, a noble mind, strong character, unflinching courage, and best of all, he is a man of inflexible firmness and in all things just Will such an one meet your approval and have your devotion as yuva-raja in like degree as I have had?"

"Yea—yea," came loudly from those who had not hoped.

"Him then whom I appoint as yuva-raja of our land, is one who combines all the excellent qualities needed in a soldier and a priest Kavi, thou art appointed yuva-raja. Kneel and receive from thy king, the knightly honors thou dost so well deserve"

Flushed and trembling, yet not daring to rebel by word or act against the dominant will of the king, but much against his wish, Kavi knelt and hardly heard against the tumultuous beating of his heart, the words. "I make thee prince," nor felt the cold touch of the accolate sword.

White as the robe he wore and trembling still with an excitement he could not well command, he rose and turned upon the now hushed audience as the king concluded

"Behold, Prince Kavi, my well beloved successor."

As in a dream he stood and received the homage of the rajas in the manner prescribed by custom of the land

Lastly Amorapama descended and embraced his friend and impressed upon his forehead the kiss of royal favor.

All the while the priest had not spoken a word, for imperturbable though he was, so swift the tide of passing events, he had no time to gather thought, to measure and to judge, and so for once had lost his mental poise

The surprise Amorapama planned had been complete and he rejoiced at the success of his fair deed At last Kavi found his tongue to say

"My noble master Maharaja Amorapama, and princes of India I protest this is the most overwhelmingly surprising moment of my life Had I but known this great distinction, which I realize all too well is most undeserved, was in our Maharaja's mind, I would have sought by every means to forestall this happening, but now, of course, such effort were disloyal I can do no more nor less than bow to the will of our righteous king and with gratitude and fear accept the trust imposed, with this assurance, that with the aid of our glorious gods, I will endeavor to discharge the duties and so use the powers that none shall have cause justly to quarrel with the king's decree and he have no reason to regret"

They cheered loudly, for his modest words went to their hearts and of his worth they were too well aware to doubt the wisdom of Amorapama's choice.

One there was whose great blue eyes and tense expres-

sion told of absorbing interest in all that was going forward—Utpala. Her deep, sapphire-tinted eyes shone lustrously and her alabaster skin took on a sea-shell flush the while her half open mouth revealed her shining teeth, as she stood beside the king and listened, watched and waited.

At a signal from the king the adhvaryu [1] prepared for the havya [2] The Soma wine was poured upon the altar on which the holy fire burned and solemn prayers were spoken that importuned the favoring gods to bless the yuva-raja and his career

The ceremony, short but solemn, being ended, Chola made quick preparation for the libations then to be drunk to the protecting deities

Without word he left the audience hall The time for him to keep or break his dreadful vow had come Many servitors in bright hued uniforms and carrying splendid chalices which Chola had filled with rich Soma wine, returned and awaited the further signal of their chief The royal cup, a gem of the artificer's highest art and set with many rubies, emeralds and sapphires, and wrought in heraldic pattern, was brought in by Chola who alone was suffered to bear it or with it wait upon the king

The servitors proceeded round the circle of the waiting guests while he went to the throne and at the steps fell on his knees and mouthed the formula·

"May the gods give blessing on this noble Soma wine and spare thee many days in health, in peace and prosperity."

Weak and hollow was the voice that spake the words much repetition had made monotonous. Amorapama

[1] Officiating priest who does the actual work of the sacrifice
[2] Oblation.

seized the beautiful chalice which was many generations old and which he prized as his most precious heirloom Standing beside the throne, his body erect, his face aglow with happiness, his eyes ablaze with the fire of enthusiasm, his head thrown back, his heavy shining locks framing his strong, well shaped head, he seemed more a god than mortal king

He raised the cup and its jewels caught the light and threw it out in spears of fire until the beaker seemed enveloped in a blaze of colored flames

"Princes of India, to the noble gods, the best friends of man"

Many hundred gleaming chalices were raised

A deeper pallor spread over Chola's face and Sarpa moved toward the door where he stood still, scarce breathing, to await the fore-ordained events

Before the king could drink, Utpala, bending forward, softly whispered

"Father, may I not pledge the gods?"

Amorapama started, then turning to her, whom in the exciting moments he had quite forgot, smilingly replied:

"Wouldst thou drink before the king?"

"Yea," she earnestly replied

Amorapama paused an instant pondering on this unusual request The guests with many smiles and nudgings, waited for the king's reply

"Ha!" and Amorapama laughed aloud, "Lords, here is a maid who doth assert authority at the age of four and ten Behold our kanya [1] would precede the king"

The princes were amused at the maid's conceit. Some laughed, others wondered at the king's complacent mood —and two were dumb and cold with dread.

[1] Girl, maiden, daughter

"Thou wilt make an imperious queen Since we drink to the gods we love and in love the woman reigns supreme, the king doth abdicate, this kanya-natna[1] shall drink with you and pledge the gods in favor of our new-made prince Drink, my precious daughter, for I know thou standest higher in the gods' esteem than I"

Chola, rigid with horror, his face distorted with shame and dread, stood at the steps and stared with open eyes into the alabaster face of the spirit-like maid whose gleaming curls shone in the light and framed her face in golden radiance and a delicate flush suffused her cheeks

In steady, penetrating gaze she transfixed the wretched Chola, who now began to tremble in demoralizing fright as her voice rang in his guilty brain

"Chola, cup-bearer of the king, hast thou partaken of this wine as usage doth require?"

Chola nodded the power of speech had left him—his tongue was paralyzed

"Hast found it good and safe for the Maharaja's use?"

There was that in Utpala's voice and manner the gathering was awed—held in the spell of her portentous words

Chola again nodded in affirmation

"Then I will drink and pledge the gods, but if thou hast Chola the curse of Rudra which thou didst invoke on the unsheathed blade of the beggar's sword, be upon thee, for thou shalt be cast into the awful depths, into the terrifying darkness from which thou never shalt emerge[2]

Still holding Chola's soul imprisoned in her gaze, she raised the chalice and in another instant would have drunk the treacherous draught, when Chola, awaking

[1] Gem, jewel, excellent-maiden
[2] Rig Veda, VII, 104.3.

from the lethargy of horror, screamed in agony and staggering up the marble steps, snatched the royal cup from Utpala's hands and before anyone could grasp the meaning or intervene, drank of the wine—staggered down the steps again, turned a reddish purple and with a moan fell on the floor The cup fell with a crash and spilled its poisoned contents on the silken rug

His eyes rolled in their sockets, he clutched his throat convulsively, and in another moment lay still in death

Horror and consternation were on every face A smile was on Utpala's face and a look of triumph none could understand, lit up her deep blue eyes Again she said as if speaking to the god

"Indra hath heard my prayer—praised be Indra The king is saved, the guilty one is punished"

Amorapama was the first to grasp the meaning of it all Turning, he asked in wonderment

"Utpala, didst know the wine was poisoned?"

"Yea"

"And wouldst have drunk had not that wretch's guilty conscience been his undoing?"

"Yea"

"To what end?" he asked in horror

"To save my king and father"

The maid smiled tenderly and looked with childish innocence into the Maharaja's startled face Gradually he roused himself from the spell of her noble words, when he commanded

"Remove the dead"

The command was soon obeyed and Chola, once the trusted favorite of the king, was carried out, self-slaughtered and by the gods condemned.

Sarpa trembled in his martial dress and the brave soldier who had often faced death without a thrill of fear was made a coward by the consciousness of guilt. He knew his doom was near for the maid would be his accuser. In that dreadful moment he even wondered how that doom would fall He hoped, man-like, the stroke prepared might yet be stayed—that Calyaka would intervene by some miraculous, now unguessed means to save him from his fate

"Lords of India, my daughter, whom in love and mercy I adopted, repays my love and mercy and hath saved your king"

Cheers burst forth that made the maiden blush with joy and pride and Kavi seized her by the hand and bending over it as though she were a queen, in deep emotion, kissed it in acknowledgment of the gratitude he felt For it meant more to him than death of a thousand kings

Her eyes were watchful and they noted Sarpa's movement toward the door

"I pray thee father," Utpala cried, "Let not Sarpa leave"

The king commanded·

"Sarpa, come hither"

The man now knew no hope was left—his escape was barred—his perfidy was known and punishment swift and relentless would be meted out

Schooled in self-control, he slowly but with firm step, walked toward the throne and bowed, then paused and waited.

Utpala had whispered a few pregnant words in Amorapama's ear. His face was drawn into a lowering frown, his eyes flashed deadly fire, his temples throbbed. Soon would his temper master him.

As Sarpa stood before his king, the guests drew near and watched the man condemned, for though they knew not how he had transgressed, they rightly conjectured his participation in Chola's hateful crime.

Stolidly and without show of fear he awaited the fall of doom

Amorapama's face was flushed with rage and hard and cold the voice that said

"Sarpa, thou wert once a brave and worthy soldier and by strict fidelity didst win our confidence and love. Now I find thee plotting for my death Is this true?"

Sarpa made no answer but hung his head His shame was worse than death

"How camest thou to enter this intrigue? Speak!" the king sternly commanded

Slowly the wretched man replied

"Calyaka, with promises and flattery, won my favor first, then my support"

"And thou wouldst put an end to me, thy friend and benefactor, to put him on the throne?"

"Yea"

"Hast taken into account the consequences of thy treasonable plot?"

"Yea"

"And art thou then prepared for what must be thy punishment?"

"Yea, I am prepared"

It mattered not to him now what happened, since he was disgraced As yet he felt no real repentance for his dastard act—no regret he was engaged in killing his best friend This one thought held him up, he must not show to those assembled slightest sign of fear Thus pride upheld where fear and shame would crush him down.

Amorapama's voice was filled with reproach as he next said:

"Did I not trust thee well? reward, promote thee as thy worth deserved? Did I not give thee honor, position, power, as thy deserts did warrant?"

"Yea"

"Still thou wouldst see me killed—poisoned by my trusted friend to put the usurper on the throne"

Slowly, steadily, the temper of the king was rising The twitching muscles and cold, hard tones told of the rage he held in check with infinite labor and much pain"

"Yea"

"Why? What would the pretender have done which I have failed to do?"

The wretched man stayed silent Then suddenly a fierce rage possessed him as he cried

'In vengeance for the deed thou didst against our queen"

That ended Amorapama's wavering judgment In the presence of the princes, quick justice would be done Amorapama glowered at the general then said slowly

"Let Sarpa be disgraced

Two stalwart soldiers stepped beside their fallen commander and tore from his body the uniform he had so proudly worn and left him stripped and naked in his shame.

The dishonored sword was placed in Amorapama's hands

"Flog him," came from the compressed lips of the king.

Tying his hands with leather thongs, the executioner was brought, who, with instrument of torture made of strips of leather to whose ends were fastened bits of jagged stone and which in turn were held together by a

long wooden handle in the whipper's hand, would do the king's command

He was a tall and brawny man, with heart of stone and arms of iron, who now let fall upon the naked back of Sarpa, blow after blow, with the second, the flesh was torn and the blood began to flow in tiny rivulets that marked the places where the thongs and stones had done their torturing work

No word of protest, no groan of pain or other evidence of suffering escaped the culprit's lips He bore his punishment with fortitude and though they knew his fate was just, not one of all that gaping throng but felt pity and some admiration for the brave unflinching man

Utpala stared with wide open eyes upon the dreadful spectacle but said no word nor showed compassion for the man Her heart was made hard against the pangs of pity by the thought of his perfidy In this she showed a mind beyond her years—a mind so full of justice that womanish compassion had no place

Blow followed blow until his back was torn and the flesh hung in bleeding shreds and yet he made no outcry of his pain His pallor and the sinking of his head and swaying body told that nature was well nigh exhausted and would give relief in death-like swoon

A sign from Amorapama and the executioner had stayed his uplifted hand, whose stroke was never struck

"Brand him for a traitor"

A groan as if torn from a breaking soul rose to Sarpa's lips, now colorless and twitching in agony of mind and body They pitied him, forgetting all too soon the danger of the king and child But pity hath a power to lull the memory of wrong and present suffering is more moving than that which was or has been escaped and is past.

The executioner brought in the branding iron heated red and which when applied would put a blistering circle on the forehead of the condemned Thus branded and disgraced, he must go forth shunned and evermore accursed until self-inflicted death shall end the living torture worse than an hundred deaths

Amorapama, with cold, unmoving face, leaned forward to see the brand applied when suddenly and without warning a fearful, stabbing pain shot through his side and made him gasp and turn pale

He raised his hand to stay the executioner

The king sank back against his throne and stared in silence at the bleeding wretch whom two soldiers were supporting

He now remembered His blinding rage dissolved, he thanked the gods this timely warning had been sent His passion gave way to quiet sorrow, his hate to great compassion for the blinded man whom once he had called friend

"Let the torture—not proceed"

A great sigh rose from the hearts of those assembled, for all their anger against the man was swallowed up in admiration for his unyielding will, that could command his agony and still his lips The king's command met with their full approval

"It is enough—too much Let him be clothed as he was before and bring him to me for judgment"

They led the tottering warrior to the side and clothed him in his uniform and shortly brought him to the king. Sarpa's lack-lustre eyes looked straight into the Maharaja's face. His pale lips trembled, but he uttered not a sound, for now he no longer cared what be his fate, since

nothing more to come were worse than the disgrace he had already borne

"Sarpa," gently spake the king, "once thou wert my companion-in-arms, my friend, my best, my most trusted soldier. Reduced to shame by foul conspiracy, I am required to give judgment for thy crime"

He paused and looked sadly into the man's ghastly face, then added

"Thou wast tempted by a bribe—thou who shouldst have killed the bribe-giver with a swift, resenting blow—yet, thou wert willing to be bribed with promises and flattery. He knew thy weakness and made such use of it that thou didst fall like any fool might fall Thou wert more fool than traitor, for I think thee good at heart"

They gasped in astonishment at the changed manner of their king What had happened to alter the purpose of his judgment they did not guess Amorapama knew his curse—the brand upon his soul—the dreadful passion he had been born with, now checked, he realized that rage was not justice, and passion-madness was not retribution

The more he looked upon the wretch, the softer grew his heart and the burning question now beseiged his mind, would he, the king, if placed in Sarpa's place, have been a better man?

"I think," he said with feeling, "the lesson now administered will quite suffice, justice hath been done, our laws are vindicated and for the rest I will leave thee to prove if I have erred in showing mercy I give thee time to learn repentance, for in this alone lies true atonement for thy sin. I will look upon thy error as due to momentary madness the evil gods have cursed thee with, and

remember thee, my Sarpa, only as once thou wert, a brave, loyal, true soldier

An oppressive stillness fell upon the throng in which the strong man's sobs were heard throughout the great apartment

"I will aid thee to recover from thy mental illness by showing confidence in thy reformation Hence, forgetting thy disgrace, I give thee back thy sword, assured thou wilt not again make use of it except in service of thy country and thy king Fight as a soldier and when thy trustworthiness is proved, thou shalt be restored to all thy honors and our confidence"

Sarpa could control himself no more. He fell upon the steps and sobbed and moaned as wounds inflicted could not make him sob and moan Kindness had made him soft where cruelty only made him hard, mercy moved where severity struck dumb

"Arise, Sarpa, take thy sword and with it the forgiveness of thy friend and king"

The crushed and stricken man arose, took his sword with bowed head and waited the further pleasure of the king.

"Go forth—I know thy sin no more"

Sarpa, a chastened man, whom ambition had brought to sorry plight, went out and in his after life merited the mercy and the confidence the Maharaja showed

The princes thought the king too lenient—too much inclined to mercy, yet in the heart of each there dwelt a sentiment that the king was nobler in his mercy than his wrath.

The dreadful strain had passed and now the guests, in groups discussed the happenings just past

The chalices were filled afresh and with a hearty cheer

that took in Amorapama and Kavi and Utpala, they drank and all were happy that the great audience had ended as it did.

Utpala, now that the excitement had subsided, nestled on her father's breast and looking tenderly into his unclouded, smiling face, she murmured in a voice so low that none but he could hear

"Father, I am so happy the gods did save thy life"

"Ah, child, and I thank them not only for my life but more for the gentle means they did employ in saving it Precious—precious napti," [1] and Amorapama kissed her many times She smiled and was very, very happy in her father's love

[1] Daughter

CHAPTER XXI

THE ORACLE

Under Amorapama's kindly, ministering watchfulness, Utpala came to womanhood with ease and gracefully Instructed in such matters as it was the custom that the royal women should be taught, she grew in mental as in physical stature, and before her foster-father was aware, she was a beautiful, accomplished woman—to him a source of happiness and congratulation

Of her beauty he was as proud as if she were his very flesh and in her mental evolution he rejoiced as does a conscientious gardener who sees his favorite patuli[1] prosper in his guardianship

Daily she grew to Amorapama more important, for in every affair of life he found her presence welcome and her mind a source of help and often of inspiration

Her golden hair and deep blue eyes that often turned to purple in some favoring light, her pure white skin untanned of sun and tropic heat, and softly tinted in a pinkish flush when some special word would give occasion, the small red-lipped mouth, straight nose and delicate small ears and perfect form and measure of her supple body—all spoke of the pure Aryan race[2] Hers

[1] Trumpet flower

[2] The word Arya means noble. They were "a tall fair-complexioned dolichocephalic and presumably leptorrhine race"—Risley, Study of Ethnology in India, p. 249.

were racial characteristics that set her apart from older stock, for it, though fair also, was in fairness much excelled by her

Her courage showed itself in a definite and fixed resoluteness from which no argument, threat or consciousness of danger could make her swerve As in the days of childhood she saved her foster-father from the poisoned draught without that terror children feel when accident gives them a hold on facts—a crying out for help and leaving it to elders to avert the danger—so in her maturity she was fit for any place where courage was required and decisive action needed to avert calamity

Her influence on Amorapama was growing daily stronger and the charm to which he had confessed the first time he beheld her, was now a fascination he would not if he could shake off Her hold was now complete and absolute

Toward her menials her attitude was of a superior to one beneath yet tempered with a gentleness and condescension that won their affections and made their service more devoted and spontaneous

Summed up then, her character was made up of kindness to all who served, sympathy for those who suffered and devotion toward those who needed and deserved

To the king her gentle, all-embracing sympathy was of greatest service when the oft recurring pain of his unhealed wound called forth her grief

When the pain was severest she would sit with him and talk in gentle, soothing tones of things that would divert the mind and draw it from his wound and help him to forget She never asked him how he came by such a serious hurt, but waited until the time would come

when he, of his own will, would tell her the circumstances of its infliction.

Utpala had faith in dreams. Her early training was perhaps accountable for this She agreed with the priest's uncertain view that they were soul activities, that when the weary body lay in sleep, the liberated soul took on its wanderings and made immeasurable journeys over incalculable space For the soul there were no restrictions as of space, but like a thought the spirit once projected could traverse the universe and in the twinkling of an eye return into the body before its sleep-release had ended in the waking of the brain

Thus she explained her oft recurring dream of being where a man fell bleeding of a desperate wound he had inflicted was due to her soul's presence when the action of the dream transpired So sincere, so fixed and undoubting was she, that as her explanation could not be refuted it was deemed as likely to be right as wrong

One day she startled both Amorapama and the priest by saying·

"Father, it is my firm conviction thou canst be cured of thy distressing wound"

"Pray, child, what makes thee think this at all likely?"

"'Tis not with me a thought of what might or might not be, it is a truth I feel and cannot be made to doubt"

She spoke gently but with firmness and her manner more than speech impressed the men.

"And what is thy plan, my charming doctor? One who saved my life is worthy of respect in an offer of a cure"

Amorapama smiled at her graciously, whereat she quickly answered·

"I have dreamed, 'tis now three times, that thou and

I went to the northern mountains, where in a dark and noisome cave we found a priest whom the gods gave power of divination and the means to cure the ills that afflict the flesh Him did we see and he gave thee cure and when I woke I was in tears of joy that thou wert well again"

"Hm! Odd thou shouldst have such a dream. Canst give an explanation, Kavi, or is it merely due to nerves as thou art wont to say when I do dream?"

Amorapama smiled at the friend, who with serious face replied.

"I am not able to explain the things the gods desire to be kept from human understanding nor can I more than conjecture why the gods should wish we do not know these things our finite minds are wrestling with. I will not say our charming dreamer is quite wrong in her interpretation of her dream, for since I cannot prove her faith unfounded it were wrong to scoff and call it false Besides, my thoughts are in some measure like her own in this"

After a pause she asked, her eyes bright with deep emotion.

"Tell me is it true there is a cave in the great mountains of the north, where a great priest dwells?"

"I have heard that one Makiru, priest to Rudra, dwells somewhere in the mountains," Kavi answered

"And dwells in a dark and noisome cave, as I have dreamed?"

"I think so doth the rumor run"

"Then, my dearest, kindest, noblest, suffering father, let me prove the merit of my dream"

"How wilt thou prove this merit?" Amorapama asked.

"By going with me as thou didst go with me in the

dream—by visiting the priest to make trial of his skill in curing thee"

"Ah, dear, this were a serious and a difficult enterprise not easily accomplished, for the distance is very great and the danger not inconsiderable, especially for thee"

"What care I for dangers if thou art cured? Go—I beg of thee to go and be cured by this priest, for surely that is the reading of my oft recurring dream"

"Suppose, Kavi, our Utpala were in her dreams informed of things to which thy mind and mine are closed—that there really were a cure for me, that the gracious gods believing I had in suffering atoned, used this means to make their pardon known If this were so would I not affront the gods if I resist merely because I did not approve the mode employed in making these wishes known?'

Kavi looked straight before him, deep in thought and did not answer the inquiry of his friend Turning then to Utpala, Amorapama asked

"Why art thou so anxious to be of the party—why so willing to undertake the hardships such a journey would impose?"

"I know that I can find the priest—can make him do my bidding and compel him to give the cure should he refuse; which much I fear he will—at first"

"Ah, thou art a determined duhitr[1] and in thy love I find a precious charm in life I long have felt the loss of"

Amorapama, moved to tenderness, toyed with her golden strands and smiled tenderly into her thoughtful, upturned face

Then Kavi spake and with deliberation.

[1] Daughter.

"Perhaps, dear Amorapama, it were best that thou shalt go to this distant cave. It may be, as thou sayest, the way the gods have chosen to make known the purposes they have for thy deliverance But Utpala need not go—it were too long, too hazardous a journey. Not that I fail to honor her devotion, but——"

"But it is necessary, Kavi, and I shall be very sad if I am denied the pleasure of accompanying my father to the priest"

"Be it so, then," Amorapama cried, "she shall go with me Have a guard of ten accompany us to the mountains Thou shalt take my place as yuva-raja while I am gone In thee, my friend, I place undoubting trust. See how wise I was to make thee my successor Already have we in this adventure cause to applaud my act which thou wouldst have prevented with thy wise and forceful reasoning, had I given thee the opportunity For once I was wiser than my wise friend.

Kavi smiled and so the matter was disposed of Utpala was the happiest maid in Hind that her sweet will had been permitted to prevail

Ten days later the preparations were completed and the time to start had come

At the first hour of the dawn, the cavalcade set out and Kavi at the northern gate bade them farewell and wished them happy issue of the undertaking.

Amorapama's spirits rose at freedom from the cares of state—the fret and worry his royal duties brought. It was release he knew his mind and body would profit by, even though the purpose of the journey failed. To revel in the vast expanse of nature was no mean delight to one who loved to live close to her mighty heart that gave so much and asked so little in return.

At halting time Utpala and Amorapama sat together and partook of food, she waited on him with small attentions which in turn delighted him and so both were very happy

"How long dost think 'twill take to reach the mountains?" she asked, as they sat beneath the wide spreading coronated palm and looked out upon the flat land before them.

"'Twill take perhaps a change of moon—say eight and twenty days But long before that time the mountains will appear and 'twill be a splendid sight, I warrant Art curious to see them, my kupola?'[1]

"Very I, too, have heard my father's friends, the soldiers, speak of them They must be very awe-inspiring"

"So they are and thinkst thou wilt not weary of the journey ere 'tis done?"

"Of that, dear father, I have no fear, besides if our quest be but rewarded, what shall matter a little hardship And then the change will do us good Out here in the world of nature where man's ingenuity is not known we come face to face with the great achievements of the gods and this uplifts and makes us better Dost not think so, too?"

"Yea Now that we are committed to the task I rejoice I yielded to thy importunity"

Day succeeded day and night followed night in a succession of days and nights and still they journeyed on across the desert stretch nor saw as yet the foot-hills of the Himalaya range

One afternoon, as they were riding through a stretch of jungle where no trail was made and deep green shad-

[1] Dove.

ows lurked and forest silence sank like balm into their natures, imparting sense of peace, the outriders halted suddenly, then gave a call well known to huntsmen that meant, "be prepared, for big game has been stalked"

Amorapama sat upon his favorite steed and Utpala by his side was all aquiver with excitement, for this was something not included in her expectations He with trained swiftness made ready his huge bow and set an arrow to the thong, then waited with watchful eyes and ears for what would come across his path

Suddenly a fierce, wild boar leaped into the clearing and passed close by Utpala's side Her horse reared, but was soon controlled On the other side a guardsman stood and drove the snorting beast back into the opening Calmly Amorapama aimed and faster than eye could follow an arrow sped toward its victim and caught it ·ust behind the shoulder, it fell over and expired

Utpala clapped her hands and cried aloud in her excitement, then patted Amorapama's hand in token of approval He leaped from his mount to examine the quarry It was a fine specimen and the men, expert in labor of the kind, skinned it and hung the pelt where it would be found when they returned, safe-guarding it against the preying birds

Amorapama took their congratulations graciously, but the admiration of Utpala filled him with a deeper sense of pleasure

"Splendid," she cried, "oh, it must be fine to be so expert Some time wilt teach me how to use the bow, dear father?"

"If thou hast interest in the sport"

"Indeed I have. I heard it said, one time thou were the best archer in the land. Is it so?"

"It was so said But I am forced to add, much of this reputation is but exaggeration of the truth Still—" he stopped, as memory of the Swayamvara and Agra flashed into his mind There was pain in his heart at this, he turned away to hide his face from Utpala's eyes, but her words pursued him

"'Tis also said thy marksmanship won thee the queen This was long ago?"

"Let us speak no more of it"

For once she noted brusqueness in his manner and wondered at the cause Her subtle, feminine sense made her aware her inquiry had trespassed on a domain too hallowed for reminiscent colloquy—too painful for discussion

King and daughter were resting after a hard, hot day's ride, when the guide was summoned and Amorapama interrogated him

"Guide, thou art a mountaineer, I m told?"

"Yea, mighty Maharaja"

"Of the Himalayas of the north?"

"Yea, 'twas there among the barbarian Kandhas I was born"

"Hast ever heard of Makiru, Rudra's priest?"

"I have heard of him since I was but a boy"

"What knowest thou of him?"

"Little enough, for little of him is known by anyone. 'Tis said he doth abide in a gloomy cave, where he serves his dreaded master, the Destroyer, Rudra"

"Hast seen him?"

"Nay As a boy, I was told to see him was to be blinded—as a man, I learned to know him cruel"

"So Dost know the way to his abode?"

"Yea His cave is well known to all who dwell in

these mountains The way to it is rough and dangerous. I can find it well enough"

"Good 'Tis thither we would go, so have in mind the quickest, safest, surest way"

"Aye, my king I shall not forget"

He bowed low and joined his fellows at some distance off, where their camp was made

Amorapama lay stretched upon soft-haired skins, his accoutrements by his hand, and gazing into Varuna's realm, let memory play until he seemed asleep, then there floated on his sense a sound as sweet as bird song It roused him into consciousness and sitting upright, with breathless eagerness, drank in the crystal tones It sounded as if coming from afar—from heaven—from the throat of a gandharva,[1] and made him sigh with precious melancholy The voice ran the gamut of thrilling notes and each dying was swallowed up by another born, as clear, as pure as the one preceding it The singer ceased and silence deep and oppressive followed and heavier seemed the night hush for the melodious rapture that had filled the air He was about to rise, when pure and perfect came the voice again It was a song whose every note seemed drenched in tears, each quaver was a half stifled sigh and its ending was like a groan wrenched from a broken heart

Amorapama felt his throat contract, his pulses leap, his temples throb and bounding to his feet, cried out in agony

"Who sings—who sings?"

"It is only I, dear father," and Utpala came out of the darkness to where the torch stood flickering, and awaited smilingly her father's further words

[1] Heavenly singers belonging to Indra's court

"Ah, it is thou," he sighed Then after a pause added "Have the gods bestowed on thee every art to torture—and to bless?"

"I did not intend my singing for a torture—in fact, I did not think that thou wouldst hear, thou wert asleep when I arose to leave"

"Come, sit here It is passed—this pain—the grip of anguish now is loosed Thy song—that last one—was the saddest ever heard, it hurt me, it was too beautiful for human ears it was the cry of the finite in the silent world of the infinite Come, sit here, napti [1]

They sat together Amorapama seized her hand caressingly and looked up into Varuna's face, he was thrilled, awed and an anguish too poignant for mere words to tell possessed him Then came upon him a feeling of exaltation—a sweet content the clasp of her hand imparted It was a new sensation and one he never felt even in the days of love for dear Kalyana That love was true, ennobling, but this was vaster, deeper, more ennobling still—this love he felt for Utpala—this father love, devoid of sex, so pure, so holy

He sighed and drawing her to his breast, kissed her tenderly and said

"Sweet child, thou dost fill a void that years ago came into my life Thou takest the place of one who once was so dear to me I thought no other could ever take her place, yet in my love for thee, this holy, perfect, unselfish love, I find myself uplifted and made a better man My soul expands, my heart is heavy with a precious tenderness, the gods are good to have given me, unworthy though I am, this love of thine Kiss me! Thou art to

[1] Daughter

ine tri-kola,[1] a mercy sent by heaven to ease the pain of many years Yea, in thee I see the gods' all encompassing compassion, in thee is hope renewed and life refreshed as after a long, deep sleep Here beneath Varuna's twinkling eyes I pledge thee a father's pure and undying love"

"And I to thee a devoted daughter's"

When their lips met the intake of their breath was a commingled sigh that spoke of supremest joy

Before sleep took captive Amorapama's mind, the memory of the little child he threw so roughly into its mother's arms, came surging up from the haunting past, and he wondered would he in meeting him, his own flesh, have such delight of paternity as Utpala's love bestowed?

At Ushas'[2] birth the camp was astir and made ready for the start

Utpala, fresh as a flower that closes up its petals in the night, is awakened by the song of birds, and bathes in the morning dew, was a bright and merry ministrant to her father's little wants

Their breakfast over, the cavalcade set out in the gray coolness of the dawn with lightsome hearts and hope new born

Since starting Amorapama had no recurrence of his pain and he asked himself would it return?

Later in the morning, a mist hung like a vaporous veil upon the land Cloud embankments obscured the light and the Himalaya peaks were enfolded in dense and heavy storm-portending clouds But as the day advanced, Vishnu's powerful rays broke through the clouds and cast a

[1] Past, present, future

[2] Personification of Dawn

yellowish light upon the land. Then they parted like a monstrous curtain drawn aside, and behold! the great shimmering peaks stood forth like huge sentinels awaiting in silent impassiveness the end of time, when warring gods destroy the universe and make of it a soundless, boundless void

Range upon range they stood, each succeeding one with higher peaks until the last and furthest from the eye pierced the azure dome of heaven with its glistening, shimmering snow-tipped point

Ponderous, majestic and wearing the awful habiliments of infinitude, they stood in sublime grandeur and their anchorage was Eternity

Theirs was a mighty wonder and in the presence of nature's magnificent handiwork, their minds were appalled by sheer vastness of immensity

"How incalculable the power of the gods to fashion such monstrous things," said Utpala with thrilled enthusiasm

"Incomprehensible to our mortal minds, this force the gods employed to create these stupendous monuments"

They stared eyes riveted on the inspiring scene, as on they rode, each hour making the outlines clearer, the heights loftier the bodies vaster and more immeasurable to the eye

That night they camped in a grove of tall, shading palms that fringed a pale green shallow lake in which were tiny islets overgrown with underbrush and straight, tall trees. Behind and at some distance towered the Himalaya range The sun in setting cast a dark red tinge upon the water and turned its green to purple and where the shadows fell to deepest bluish black

Aquatic plants in blossom, sprinkled its bosom with spatterings of purest white and palest yellow

Night came but slowly Shadows deepened and grew longer and the hush of cradled nature was everywhere The leaves stirred by the languid breeze, sighed softly an invocation to the god of sleep Stillness was unbroken, save for the lonesome jambuka[1] cry or trill of belated songster of the trees

They sat down to their evening meal and neither spake, for the solemn serenity made speech seem violative of the sacred atmosphere in nature's holy sanctuary. They felt what could not have been told in words and so they ate in silence, but their eyes spoke in voiceless language

Amorapama interviewed the guide and was much pleased to learn that five hours' ride would bring them to the gulch up which the dizzy climb led to the cave where Makiru held weird orgies to the god

Next day in early afternoon Amorapama, leaving Utpala in the care of trusted men, set out with only the guide for company, to find the far-famed cave It was a rough and tedious ascent along the mountain side, then up the overgrown and unpathed way that led to the mouth of the cave The roar of mountain torrent was in their ears and deeper grew the ravine which cauldron-like held the splashing, spraying waters that pitched over smooth-worn rocks into a bottomless abyss

After a breath-exhausting climb they came upon the rough, moss-grown and lichen-covered stone that marked the entrance to the cave Amorapama, almost winded by his exertions, sat on a boulder and took in with measuring eye the wild, inspiring scene

[1] Jackal

At his command the guide went in to announce the presence of the king and make offer to the priest of generous gifts of wine and food and cattle of much value to stir the mind of the seer into far-seeing activity

Returning, the guide escorted Amorapama to the priest. With difficulty Amorapama choked utterance of his loathing as he beheld the black-gowned, big-mouthed, evil-eyed, hunchback priest of Rudra

The colloquy that followed was short and swiftly phrased and brought to the purpose of its end with no waste of words

"Thou art Amorapama, Maharaja of Hastinapur, one time raja of Panchala I have heard of thee,' Makiru said in high-pitched, rasping voice that grated on the ears and made the nerves jump as if in pain.

"I am he"

"Know then I am Makiru, high priest of Rudra—the terrible Destroyer, and am gifted by the god I serve with faculties no mortal has possessed"

"So thy far-reaching fame proclaims"

"My fame is indeed far-reaching, else wert thou not here I can at pleasure project my soul into the mind of absent ones and make them know my will"

"Indeed!"

"Now then, thou wouldst be healed of thy self-inflicted wound?"

Amorapama started, the priest leered and the guide on signal, made obeisance and retired, then stood on guard without the cave

"Hast brought a sacrifice wherewith to please the god I serve?"

"Yea—cakes, Soma wine for thy noble god, and cattle and gold for thee"

"'Tis well—'tis well The god will reward thee—aye, will reward thee, have no fear—have no fear—cattle saidst thou?

"Aye"

"How many?"

"A dozen head"

"Good, good, and gold, how much?[1]

"A bag as big as thy monstrous head and heavier if I may judge"

"Excellent—excellent—the god will give reward—he likes not niggards, but is pleased with those whom generosity moves to act"

The pleased high priest showed his appreciation of Amorapama's gifts by much leering, gesticulating and rubbing of his dirty hands After a pause he continued, saying

"Thou hast a wound—'twas self-inflicted Remorse compelled the act Thou didst try to kill thyself in passion of self-hate What caused that hate?" and Makiru threw back his head and looked up toward the ceiling of the cave as if in thought Amorapama answered

"A vile—a heinous deed"

"True—true—Kalyana, thy queen, whom thou didst foully murder Enough, enough!" the wretch cried out, and croaked like some unearthly beast

"Now wouldst thou have me take the sting from out thy wound and make thee whole again?"

[1] "Trade was carried on by barter, and although the medium of exchange was the cow, gold pieces are referred to, as are also usurers, yet there was no recognized coinage"—Frazer's Lit. Hist Ind, 28 At a contest of words Janaka Videha offered the prize to competing Brahmans of 1,000 cows and ten pieces of gold fastened to each pair of horns.—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

The high priest laughed shrilly, danced about as if in glee, then pausing, glared into the king's pale face

"Thou wouldst be cured of this wound, eh? Well, then, I shall intercede with mighty Rudra in thy behalf We'll see—we'll see," he cried Thereupon he disappeared and left the king in darkness, gazing into the gloom.

At last the ugly priest returned and placed a coiling, hissing reptile, mottled and covered with silvery scales, upon the altar rock in the centre of the chamber-cave

"Ahi and Vritra [1] know all things and will speak Ahi raiseth up his beautiful head and opens his mouth to show his deadly fangs"

Makiru made some passes with his bony hand, and the reptile's head sank to the rock and lay there still as if asleep or dead

"Ahi ponders on thy hurt—come hither at the hour of midnight and—alone Then will I give answer if the god is pleased to hear thy prayer"

Glad to escape from the filthy, gruesome cave, Amorapama hastened into the sunlight and blinked confusedly before he grasped the things just passed

Quickly they descended, but before they were out of view of the cave Amorapama felt himself impelled to turn and almost cried aloud in horror, for there on a sharp rock beside the opening of the cave, sat the huge black bird with beady, red, glaring eyes and bloody beak as if it had just made feast of some bleeding thing It gazed at him, opened wide its beak, and cawed in tones so weird and humanly it made the flesh creep

Amorapama hurried down, glad when an intervening rock hid the bird and cave from view.

[1] Ahi the snake, and Vritra the demon, are aids to Sushma the Drought.—Hopkins, Rel. of India, p. 92.

Utpala awaited him with tender solicitude in her deep blue eyes. Before he could speak, she asked gently, the while her hand was on his arm·

"Hast seen him, father?"

"Yea"

"And hath—hath he healed thee?"

"I know not whether he can and will He must consult his oracle and I shall return at midnight and hear my fate"

"Must thou return at midnight—at midnight?"

"Aye and alone"

"Alone? Her eyes were big with terror and she shuddered as she asked

"Art not afraid?"

"Whereof, my kupola?"[1] and Amorapama smiled

'Ah, I know not at what—the dreadful cave, the horrid priest, the angry god," she paused, her voice dying in a horrified whisper

Then Amorapama reassuringly replied

"Nay—they will not harm me Neither the cave the priest, the god, none will do me hurt Give thyself no concern Besides, since when hath my Utpala grown so womanish in her fears?"

'Since I learned to love thee, father For things of earth and of the spirit world I have no fear, but of this priest, this awful god, I am in fear"

"Pshaw, mere nervous phantasies"

They ate their meal together and Amorapama tried by every art to cheer the maid and take her thoughts from the things that filled her mind with terror When they were satisfied and night stillness suggested to the weary, sweet repose, Amorapama said

[1] Dove

"Come, sing for me to while away the hours"

She sang in merry measure and Amorapama listened and was thrilled, delighted with the song, the singing, but best of all he loved the sweet singer

Candra[1] rose and bathed the land in mellow light At the appointed time Amorapama entered the high priest's cave, where Makiru awaited him

"Hast brought the gifts?"

"Aye, they await thy pleasure at the entrance to the gulch

"Good, leave them there I know that I can trust thee for the god I serve would curse thee if thou didst lie or prove false Come"

He led the way into the cave The altar fire burned brightly and cast blotches of yellowish, unsteady light upon the walls On the far end of the rock lay a disemboweled goat The entrails were spread out, while dried up blood marked the spot where the sacrificial creature died.

Makiru spoke an abracadabra and closed his eyes while his lips moved in silent prayer Then his deep-sunk eyes were opened and he gazed again intently into the entrail oracle from which he would divine the purpose of the god.

Suddenly he leaped toward Amorapama and tore open the dress and pointing to the red scar, cried exultantly

"'Tis the finger-mark of Rudra It will never fade. While life shall last this mark must linger and not fade out. Listen, king, to what grim Rudra bids thee know"

He returned to the sacrifice and lifting up an entrail on his finger slowly said, while his right hand pointed to the wound

[1] Moon god

"Thy wound cannot be healed save by the hand of her who caused it to be inflicted. Begone—begone"

Crushed and hopeless, Amorapama hastened from the cave and the words the priest had spoken were to him the words of doom They proclaimed his wound incurable. For the hand that caused its infliction was gone from reach of affording help Yea, it was as he had feared, as he believed these many years

He stumbled down the steep incline and often nearly fell, all the while in his mind were the burning words

"Thy wound cannot be healed save by the hand of her who caused it to be inflicted"

CHAPTER XXII

THE WAR DECLARED—A GREAT SURPRISE

Since Amorapama left in quest of health, Kavi found his time much occupied The multitudinous and multifarious duties of his statecraft being new to him, he found each moment of the day and many hours of the night employed Torn from his solemn meditations he gave the best of mind and body to the wise administration of the raj

Added to the regular routine which in itself made strenuous demands upon his energies, was the revolt of Dwaraka Calyaka, the would-be usurper who had escaped from Hastinapur when his well-laid plans had failed in the death and disgrace of his discovered coconspirators, was organizing his forces, and since assassination failed, war was to be declared To this end, thus the rumor ran, he had enlisted Dwaraka's raja and his whole military strength, which with some nearby alliances would make a formidable host to send to battle against the Maharaja s army

Spies had been dispatched to the distant raj to ascertain the strength of its army, the reputed skill of its commanders, the mood and attitude of the people, and whether Calyaka would himself take the field

Kavi being well enough informed to gauge the matter correctly as it stood, decided to send on a duta[1] of

[1] Duta—messenger, ambassador, envoy

peace to avert, if possible, an open breach and smooth away any real or fictitious cause of war which had impelled the raja to action.

Anxiously awaiting the courier's return, he filled the time most advisedly in making preparation for the conflict should it prove to be inevitable Thus reports were received, census of the army taken, couriers despatched to loyal rajas that they make ready and be prepared to mobilize at call to arms

Hastinapur took on a new activity, and Panchala being called upon, with special pride in Amorapama their own raja, determined to acquit itself with credit and honor to their favorite son

While Kavi made his warlike preparations with greatest and most comprehensive care he never ceased to hope and pray the gods would yet avert conflict, or if this could not be, to delay its coming until Amorapama had returned Nor was he moved in this by fear nor shrunk from danger or responsibility, but he hated war for the suffering and bloodshed it entails

At last Kuçala his emissary returned and hastened to make report to Kavi, who received him in Amorapama's apartment and there they were closeted far into the night.

"Well," Kavi in unruffled tones inquired, "thy news is good I hope"

"Nay, my noble prince, the news I bring is far from good"

"Indeed! proceed"

"I arrived at Dwaraka after a tedious and wearisome journey and at once presented my credentials I was told by the minister that I must wait, as the noble raja Vimarda was then engaged in the zenana and would not see me for several days I waited, impatiently of course, for

I suspected from the first it was a ruse to hinder and delay me and in the end exasperate me to make an open break"

"This thou didst forestall of course"

"Verily I held myself in patience and employed my waiting time looking about and so obtained an understanding of Dwarka's defences and a fair estimate of the raja's strength Each day I applied to be received, a silly and pretended reason was vouchsafed as excuse Seven days I thus delayed and tarried I realized to longer wait and suffer patiently the indignities would be reflection on my dignity as duta[1] of this raj, so stated to the minister I must be received or I would regard a further deferrence as an insult which I would report This forced the issue That day I was received, but not with the dignity to which a representative accredited is entitled, but as a messenger, with contumely I was incensed at this of course, but realizing my responsibilities, placed my duty first my private feelings last I held my temper under control and made the representations I was commissioned with"

'And they were received?"

"With scant courtesy I announced I came with offer of a peace to be put in form of treaty, but this was disregarded by Vimarda, saying he had no love for treaty-making and must refuse to be bound in any form"

"So—what else?"

"Turning to a noble, who I suspect was Calyaka, he remarked in sneering tones and contemptuously, 'Are we in so great a need of Amorapama's friendship that we must bind ourselves to love him whether we have reason to or no?' to which the other replied enigmatically, in-

[1] Messenger ambassador, envoy

tended for me, but which was well understood by raja Vimarda, 'The friendship of those we hate is like to be more dangerous than the hate of those we love,' at which Vimarda smiled and said, 'Thy words express my mind as I had spoken them,' then turning to me he said with no great show of kindness or respect, 'Sir, say this to our noble neighbor, the Maharaja Amorapama, we cherish his good will, but will not pledge ours in return by treaty or by covenant.' I knew full well what both by this intended"

"What?"

"War It was a declaration as surely as if they had invaded our raj I saw I could serve no useful purpose by remaining, so at once came away, nor waited for the usual formalities due me as thy commissioned treaty emissary This is my report"

Kuçala rose, made obeisance and retired, leaving Kavi in profoundest meditation It was as he had feared, a war was now inevitable For years Vimarda with the aid and counsel of Calyaka had been preparing for the conflict, and being now in readiness, decided at once to strike The Maharaja once defeated, his prestige would be gone, his popularity destroyed, and he, the usurper, would with fair chances of success make a bold dash for Hastinapur's throne Once seated on it he would, by a well-organized and pliant army, hold his seat by force of arms until such time as the complacent people, weary of war, became accustomed, and in consequence of habit accepted him for their lawful king

But if Amorapama was successful, and this Kavi confidently expected, the raj of Dwaraka would be a spoil of war and so become a part of Hastinapur Thus the realm would be extended and its power increased.

Couriers on swift horses were now sent forth in all directions to summon the princes who owed allegiance to the Maharaja, to attend at once a conference in preparation of the coming war Hastinapur, the City Beautiful, Pearl of the Ganges, was made ready for a siege, for Kavi rightly judged, to capture this, the residence city, was the strategic purpose of his foes

Wells were dug to increase the city's water supply, old wells now fallen into bad repair were cleaned and their water-store augmented, the ancient walls that, owing to the long years of peace, had fallen to decay, were strengthened and in part rebuilt, and so made ready for attack of battering ram and scaling ladders Towers were erected at even distances apart along the wall, from which the defenders could pour showers of arrows and huge stones on the attacking force [1]

Day after day from outlying towns and farms and cattle ranges droves of cattle, sheep and goats were driven within the walls and preparations made for their housing The granaries were filled with wheat and rye and other cereals to save the people from starvation The unprotected towns were invited to seek shelter in Hastinapur's impregnable, protecting walls

In time the spies returned and brought news of Vimarda's strength in archers, swordsmen, spearmen, clubmen, charioteers, and roughly summed there were a good fifty thousand fighting men of all kinds prepared for war.

As Kavi calculated Amorapama's return, his eagerness to have him head his army and so win the laurels he

[1] Of Indra-prastha's defences we read "the turrets along the wall were filled with armed men in course of training And the walls were lined with numerous warriors along their whole length."—Adi Parva, pp 577-8.

knew were awaiting, increased with each day's dawn It found him searching the horizon in watch for the coming of his friend And each day's end saw Kavi disappointed.

One by one the summoned rajas came and when the last expected one arrived, Kavi convened a council to formulate the plans for the campaign He had mapped out a course which now he laid before the warrior chiefs as was the custom, though the power to decide was absolute in him

Far into the night they argued and discussed, and every move Kavi submitted was canvassed and examined from all sides and measured in the light of every contingency, and in the end they were constrained to give complete approval, for none had a better plan to offer in the place of the one considered

The point of junction and the day when all the forces were to move were agreed upon when they parted, and there was little more for Kavi left to do but wait and hope for Amorapama's return

The morning when the city's army, five and twenty thousand men led by the soldier-priest, marched through the northern gate, dawned most propitiously, and the superstitious ones read in the brightness of the day Indra s favoring will The city was astir betimes to speed the soldiers on with shout and cheer Farewells were said, parting kisses given, tears were shed, the gods were importuned by chanting priests and private prayer and offerings on the altar of the householders high and low,[1]

[1] Five daily rites were prescribed for him (householder) consisting of offerings to the gods and departed fathers and lastly to Supreme Being The pious householder was enjoined to perform these duties before he tasted his daily food—Dutt, Ep Hist Ind, p 85

rich and poor, for each held some relation—had some dear entanglement in the forthcoming war

Kavi, his priestly robes discarded, rode at the army's head in full panoply of war Scarce had the vanguard reached the open gate amid loud huzzas of the assembled multitudes that drowned in their acclaim the sobbing and the lamentation, when out of a yellow dust cloud hardly distinguishable at first, emerged and now grew more clear, a form well known in all the land All along the lines the word was passed and soon the gaping crowds knew something had occurred Kavi, ahead of all the rest, was sure there was no mistake, so cried aloud while swinging his sword

"'Tis Amorapama, our king"

Then the crowd grew mad with joy, they shouted, wept and hugged each other, while the army in well-ordered cheers gave vent to loves oppression Kavi, putting spurs into his horse, rode out at great speed to meet the friend and king

A mile or two removed they met and dismounting embraced like loving, reunited brothers The story was soon told and Amorapama without wait or pause rode to the city and was received with every mark of enthusiastic appreciation and genuine love

Hastening to the palace, with aid of Kavi and attendant servitors, his accoutrements were quickly put on, and leaving word for Utpala, whom he left behind when Kavi's message arrived and told the news, started forth to lead his army to victory or death

"It was a very joyful journey, this of ours to the northern mountains, and gave me happy opportunity to more fully learn the worth of our ward. She is more won-

derful than I had ever thought I need not tell thee, Kavi, she hath grown dearer to me in the days of our companionship"

"And the wound—what about the wound?" Kavi anxiously inquired

"Ah," and Amorapama sighed, "'twas as I supposed There is no help for me this side of Yama's realm The gods have set their hearts against me. I cannot—never will be cured"

He gazed out over the broad lands and fertile fields and remained silent The friend beside sorrowed that the end was so different from what had been expected

"What said the priest?" Kavi at last found heart to ask

"Words that pronounced my fate I shall carry my unhealed wound to my funeral pyre"[1]

"Art sure there was no hidden meaning? Oracles are wont to be in language mystifying to the lay and untutored mind"

"Nay! a child could comprehend its meaning Hear the words Makiru spake 'Thy wound cannot be healed, save by the hand of her who caused it to be inflicted' No mystery about that, I take it Kavi 'Tis as plain and simple as a nursery song She who caused its infliction was Kalyana and Kalyana is dead—her hand is now beyond the reach to help Hence the gods in this manner say I shall not be cured

Kavi replied 'It is written 'The Supreme Lord and Ordainer of all, ordaineth everything in respect of the

[1] "Burial was probably the first form of funeral ceremony among ancient Hindus, but this was soon followed by cremation and the ashes were then buried in the earth"—Dutt, Ep. Ind Hist, p 25

weal and woe of all creatures even prior to their births'"[1]

A long silence fell. Then after the pause, and as if to drive the gloomy thoughts away and give room to pleasant ones, enthusiastically he exclaimed

"Kavi, I tell thee there is something in Utpala we do not understand She is a being all apart—dyumant[2] There never was another like her She loves me better than flesh-and-blood child ever loved a father In her deep blue eyes I read a love no words can tell—no sense, however keen, can ever sound—she is a paragon."

"Yea, she is indeed remarkable," Kavi echoed, then after another long silence, repeated to himself half in a whisper, well weighing every word

"Thy wound cannot be healed save by the hand of her who caused it to be inflicted"

'Dost find another reading?"

"Nay, not yet Another time perhaps."

"Ah, good friend, I know thy amiable tricks to keep up hope even when hope is useless Thou wouldst cozen me with false hopes to ease my disappointment Nay, mine is a hurt the soul received, it is a wound not of the flesh, but of the spirit, for which no human skill can serve This pain I feel at times is but a physical expression of the agony of my soul which goans in pain of a deadly remorse for the deed I've done Let us think no more about it I shall bear my burden as best I may and still thank all the gods they gave me so great an offsetting joy in my precious child, fair substitute for him I lost when I scarce felt myself a father."

The long army trailed behind them like a glittering

[1] Vana Parva, pp 28-30

[2] Heavenly, bright, splendid.

serpent whose scales are glistening in the morning sun, and as the king looked back, his heart beat with a noble pride at sight of his trained and well-armed commands

For days the army marched south-west toward the Vindhya [1] mountains, when one night the scouts reported the enemy in sight and approaching them They crossed the Betwa [2] Soon the armies would be in striking distance from each other Commands were passed and the order of battle issued to the several commandants as Kavi s approved plan had set down

The junction having been according to arrangement made Amorapama's army mustered now its fullest strength

The friends stood side by side and watched the army go to rest Pickets were stationed, but no tents were pitched, as by day-break they must be off again and by forced marches reach a place of vantage Amorapama had selected near the Plateau of Malwa [3]

Amorapama's army now exceeded Vimarda's by some twenty thousand, and if a righteous cause and excess of numbers and efficiency shall count he surely must prevail

The peace of oncoming night was on the scene, the great army went to rest

Amorapama turned to Kavi and in low voice said

"Time was when this array of military might would thrill me and give eagerness for battle, but now—it seems

[1] A range in the middle west of India between latitude 70° and 80° and longitude 20° and 30° Altitude between 2,000 and 3,000 feet

[2] A tributary of the Jumna, having its source in the Vindhya mountains

[3] A plateau about 2600 feet above sea level and part of the Vindhya mountains.

a brutal slaughter—not war at all. I was younger then and the great sorrow had not then come into my life My nature hath undergone a change Yea, Kavi, thy Amorapama of to-day is not the Amorapama of a score of years ago. The anguish of my remorse hath eaten into my soul and left its ineradicable mark Until recently I cared not when I died so it be but soon, but now"—Amorapama paused and sighed His mind was in the palace with a golden-haired, blue-eyed maiden whom he had learned to love with a holy passion, and so to die seemed different now

'Utpala hath softened thy nature"

"Much indeed How came this change about I wonder."

"That were difficult to say What matter how it came about since come it did, and I think the influence hath done thee good by giving thee new interest in life and by furnishing thy affections a sure anchorage"

"Even so Perhaps it is this softening that makes me so averse to the bloodshed which must come when the armies meet I know not why, but 'tis with reluctance I shall enter into battle'

After a pause he added

"Thinkst, Kavi, I've grown a coward?"

"Nay, nay, not that My Amorapama could not be a coward, no more than could a tiger 'Tis not in thee. Let that thought content thee"

"I hope that thou art right, although I have my doubts—grave doubts However, a few days will tell, perhaps to-morrow I'd rather die than be a craven"

"Which proves thou art no craven, else wouldst thou be unwilling to die"

By hurried marches on the fourth day they reached

and camped on Betwa plain. The armies now were face to face That night the enemy's long chain of camp fires could be seen, like fiery insects, along a range of hills As marked by the blazing line, the opposing army took in many miles of undulating ground and in position were in half moon shape Two wings, a right and left, were posted each on a rise of ground that sloped up toward a hillock of some height These, Vimarda had intended to strike the flanks, should his front be broken by Amorapama's main attack They were in readiness as all betokened, and the scouts confirmed by their reports.

Night set in, and at the dawn or shortly after the battle would begin Both armies went to rest, each sleeping on its arms, for neither trusted the other to keep the peace that night.

The night was calm, still, motionless the atmosphere. The muffled tread of sentinel and muttered pass words were the only sounds save chirping insects and the weird and distant kukkura[1] bark The heat like a veil hung on the plain, and though breezeless the night, the brave men slept and dreamed perhaps of the loved ones at home whom some of them would see no more

Amorapama could not sleep, so rising from his couch, he left his tent and slowly walked toward the little lake that shimmered in the moon's soft beam He stood and pondered on his life, and all its great events He groaned as he thought of it all, and when he raised his eyes toward the lake he thought he saw a white object come toward the opposite bank and there stand still.

Against the gloom of the dense forest growth the figure gleamed and threw out a radiance all its own. A chill as of death passed over him and he tried to call, but his

[1] Dog

tongue lay dormant and would not respond to the call of will. As his eyes grew accustomed to the light that enfolded the white object he recognized with horror the features of Kalyana He saw her smile at him and then she waved her arms as if beckoning Drawn by an incomprehensible power he walked unwittingly to the water's edge. Still the ghostly figure waved her arms and beckoned him to come With a cry he plunged into the water and was gone

When he rose to the surface Kalyana's spirit had disappeared, but he heard coming from the gloom of deep shadows a cry of pain as of some one in agony Then all was still again and Amorapama swam to the shore and in dripping clothes went to his tent

As he thought about the apparition he believed it was an omen—a warning from the gods that in to-morrow's battle his end would come

A voice softly speaking his name came through the opening of the tent

"Amorapama, art awake?"

"Yea"

"May I come in?"

"Yea, and welcome"

Kavi entered and the twain sat in the darkness and looked out upon the moonlit scene and neither spake for a time Then Kavi whispered

"I heard thee leave thy tent Hast thou not slept?"

"Nay, I think not My nerves are overwrought I cannot understand myself I felt not so before"

"It will pass To-morrow when the battle starts my Amorapama will be as always in the thickest of the fight. 'Twere better thou didst get some rest"

"It is no use to try I shall not sleep I would think.

In sleep I might dream and that were worse than waking"

"Then I will keep thee company, if that will serve thee"

"Yea, it will I'd rather not be left alone, for even my waking thoughts are torture to-night"

All through the remainder of the night the friends talked in whispers and Kavi, knowing well the trouble of his friend, did his best to draw the other's mind from gloomy thoughts

When the first shafts of light cut into the heavens the quick commands brought the army to readiness for battle.

Kavi and Amorapama took their places in the van where all might see and be inspired by the sight

Flags were flying, drums were beating, commands were shouted and repeated all along the line Just as the gray dawn made objects clearly visible they marched out into the open in vast columns and the enemy was there to receive them

Then came the crash and roar, the shouts and cries of triumph and of death, the battle hymn that made the laggard coward forget his cowardice and, elbow touching elbow, face death without fear, was sung The deadly swish of thousand arrows sped at once sounded above the din and thousands more were sped, each time the deadly sound was heard, hundreds, pierced and dying, fell to be replaced by others ready to die such glorious death.

Spearmen now in solid ranks rushed on the foe and the air was filled with crash of weapons and the maddened cries from ten thousand throats, clubmen wielded their heavy clubs and battle axes that crushed the polls of all that came within their reach

Cavalry full tilt with pointed lances galloped at each

other and in the fierce encounter thousands fell and many who were unhorsed unwounded, found their death beneath horses' hoofs Elephants with mounted guards filled in the gaps and slaughtered with their trampling hoofs all who could not find escape in time

Back and forth the tide of victory went and everywhere Amorapama was in full view with Kavi by his side to guard his person and head off death, should it dare step too near.

In a loud voice he cried the incantation toward the person of the king·

"Preta jayanta nara ugra vah santu bahavah Tik snesavo abala dhanvano hata urga ayudha abalan ugrabahavah" [1]

Twice were arrows broken on his breastplate and another struck his shoulder which in the delirium of war he never felt nor even knew of until the battle ended

Now Vimarda's wings were ordered forward, but Amorapama was prepared for them, he sent his strong reserve to strengthen the weakened flanks and these, fresh and eager (these were the trusted veterans of his guard), beat back the wings and crushed them utterly. They broke and those who could, fled inglorious from the field The sharpshooters sent showers into the routed, fleeing columns and many died in trying to escape

Vimarda ordered forward his reserves and these in turn met a similar fate, for everywhere Amorapama labored and brought his lagging legions up to their best

[1] "Let now your arms be fierce—strike down with pointed arrows the weak bowmen, strike with fierce weapons the powerless foe"

achievements by example of his courage and the animating influence of his cheering presence in their midst.

Then Amorapama issued a command that was repeated all along the line, and all the remaining troops not yet in action were formed into one solid line which at command rushed forward, first cavalry, then chariots, and lastly, the great infantry.

This was too much for Vimarda's army. Terror entered every heart and demoralized the wavering, panting troops. They retreated, still facing their relentless foe, fighting with the valor of despair—holding every inch of ground until it could be held no more, and many thousand bodies stiffened in the grip of death to mark the place where they had so gallantly fought

A youth in breastplate, helmet and swinging a great war sword singled Amorapama out and made a pass, which, if not parried, would have cut him in two Up went his guard and caught the quick descending blade, deflected it and then they fought in deadly earnest Neither on the other gained The energy of brutal hate nerved each man's arm and twice Amorapama's noble horse was struck The combat between the man and youth went on

Then Kavi, Amorapama's purohita [1] rode up, disarmed the youth, who turned his horse and galloped into his ranks and was soon lost in the confusion of retreat

Vimarda's army, though not routed nor defeated, was badly bruised, and at signal it fell back in good order and the battle of the day was done

[1] It was custom in battle for the purohita or court priest to protect the body of the king by incantations to the gods and inspire the soldiers with martial spirit—Frazer's Lit Hist Ind., p. 23.

A horrible spectacle spread out on the blood-stained, corpse-strewn plain. As when the autumn wind covers old mother earth with a pall of leaves, so was the campagna strewn with dead and dying soldiers who had fought that day

In the truce that followed, the wounded were cared for, but the dead were left to rot or become food for carrion-eating birds who were already whirring overhead in cloud-like masses waiting to descend.

That night Kavi dressed Amorapama's wound, which proved to be but slight There was a look of contentment on the latter's tired face He even smiled as Kavi cut the flesh to draw the barb and cleanse the wound. He never flinched or even trembled as the rankling barb tore out the flesh, but smiling still, remarked

"Thy touch is gentle and thy knife is sharp, and skilful are thy hands, but—" and Amorapama winced as a nerve was pulled

"Doth it hurt thee very much?"

"Well, it isn't quite as pleasant as dalliance in pramadavana,[1] still thou dost very well"

"It must be done, as well thou knowest"

"Yea, and well art thou doing it There," he said with a sigh of relief, "I am not exactly sorry it is finished" And again he smiled

"Well, it was a splendid fight, but oh, what frightful carnage!"

"Terrible it was indeed," Kavi replied as he cleaned his implements and threw the blood-stained rags into a corner of the tent

"Didst hear the news?" he asked as he returned and folded up the cloth that held the instruments.

[1] A pleasure grove (of the wives of a prince).

"What news?"

"Calyaka was killed by a stray arrow and 'tis said it was sped by one of Vimarda's men in revenge"

"Indeed. Well that simplifies the problem For with him dead, Vimarda's fighting spirit will soon die out I believe this war was not of his making"

"So have I always thought But Vimarda will not so easily give up. He will fight as long as he can He hath a reputation to maintain, and then besides he knows that his defeat will compel allegiance to thy throne and that were galling to his pride"

"Well, if he insists on fighting, I suppose we must accommodate him"

When all was still and the tired army slept Amorapama again wandered from his tent, lured by a fascination he could not comprehend He waited on the water's edge The night wind sighed and the leaves rustled in the trees, when in a twinkling the figure in white took up its place as on the night before and beckoned him with waving arm Amorapama stood rigid, stared, held in a spell, nor moved a muscle and scarcely breathed. Then beside him a soft voice whispered

"Amorapama, it were well thou take some rest, thy wound, though not severe, may not be quite ignored"

"Kavi," Amorapama cried, "dost see it there on the other side—Kalyana's spirit all in white? She waves her arms for me to come Thus did she beckon me last night and in the self-same place I must go to her—I must."

Amorapama would have leaped into the lake, had not Kavi's restraining hand checked and held him back

Still looking in the direction where he had seen Kalyana, Amorapama suffered himself to be led, trembling

all the while, back to his tent, where he fell upon his couch and lay there motionless

Suddenly he leaped to his feet and glaring wildly at his friend, cried in subdued tones

"Kavi, there shall be no more bloodshed Something tells me Kalyana does not approve Oh, it is horrible I could not live through such another day Summon the commandants at once and send a messenger"

Kavi left to execute the Maharaja's strange command. He feared his friend bereft, but found himself unable this time to stay the hand of destiny

A messenger arrived and received instructions and a flag of truce The message was to be delivered and the answer brought without delay

Soon after the sleepy commandants entered Amorapama's tent Some with difficulty suppressed a yawn, while others rubbed their eyes to get themselves awake Without formality the king addressed them, saying

"Noble rajas, I have decided there shall be no further slaughter of our brave and loyal men It is a brutal thing, this war, and it shall end by individual combat He who shall prevail, to his army the victory shall be given"

They stared at each other in amazement, for the day had nearly blessed their arms and another day like the one just past would see the end of Vimarda's power. Yet they dared not speak against the royal will Amorapama resumed

"My messenger hath been despatched He will soon return I have no doubt Vimarda will accept the terms, for in doing so he hath advantage which he will gladly take Meantime let us decide on whom shall fall the honor of the combat"

Each raja volunteered, but to each the Maharaja made

objection One had a wife, another a beloved child, while others had fathers and mothers to whom the brave son's death would mean a sad bereavement.

Then Amorapama made a proposal, it should be left to the gods in a test of chance

Reeds were cut of even length, while one was made shorter than the rest, the one who drew this reed must battle for the raj The reeds were then tied up and only the ends were shown

The drawing at once began Kavi was the first, then one after another the reeds were pulled from the bundle and all were of an even length

Amorapama stepped to draw when Kavi stayed his hand and whispered in his ear so none but he could hear:

"It is not thy duty thus to risk thy life, it is thy duty to live Remember Utpala will mourn if thou art killed"

Amorapama answered in like manner

"Utpala would despise a coward father," and forthwith drew out the reed that was the shortest of them all

A murmur of consternation ran through the throng which Amorapama silenced with an imperious look, and as the messenger had been announced, on his entering asked

"Well, man, what answer bringst thou?"

"Vimarda saith he is agreed that the second hour after dawn, he whom thou shalt send will meet his champion and to the victor's side the issue of the war shall be conceded"

"Go"

The messenger hastily retired

"Rajas," Amorapama sternly said, "if I am killed, the raj is in worthy and efficient hands and I ask ye give to the yuva-raja your loyal support He shall make such

treaty with Vimarda as will be for the raj's best interest My private fortune will suffice to buy Vimarda's claim of victory. Good night."

The rajas, crestfallen and disheartened, left, but not to sleep, for far into the night they talked about the Maharaja's extraordinary conduct to end the war

Kavi tarried and looked out into the night, when Amorapama placed his hand upon his shoulder and gently said·

"Friend, it is better so"

"Perhaps, but I am not satisfied It seems a wanton risk."

"I am resolved it was the best, most humane thing to do. Think of the fearful suffering another battle would entail—think of the weeping widows and the crying children another day would make I am convinced the gods approve—that Kalyana wills it so"

"I hope 'twill prove that thou art right. I have my doubts. Think of thy wound. Thou art in no condition to meet a worthy swordsman."

"A scratch, Kavi—a mere scratch. Dost think this sufficient to disable me?"

Amorapama smiled confidently into his friend's sad face

"It is not serious, I'll admit, but puts thee at a disadvantage to thy foe."

"Thy love for me makes thee a coward in my affairs"

"'Tis not that—but if thou art slain?"

"Then there are but two to mourn against the thousands if the war goes on. Thou and Utpala. I shall not quarrel if thou shalt mourn—a little—mind only for a day or two—no more."

He smiled again, then his manner changed, and he softly said:

"I give her to thee I know thou wilt protect her as thine own"

The strong men embraced and parted

That night Amorapama slept peacefully and no torturing dreams disturbed his rest

At break of day the roll of drums and bugle call woke up the army

At the second hour, when the morning mists had lifted and the sun shone warmly on the land, the two great armies lined up as if for battle, when word was passed the king would fight alone to put an end to further slaughter. Hearts were heavy and though some rejoiced, not many but would have gladly taken the Maharaja's place that day

And he who would have most willingly served in this enterprise was Kavi, whose gentle face was cloaked in sadness, for to him the issue meant more than to anyone Never had he importuned the gracious Indra as he had that night to place victory on Amorapama's arm

Vimarda and the priest settled the preliminaries and this done, Amorapama stepped forth cased in his breastplate only and carrying his favorite sword that in days gone by had brought him many a victory Would it serve him well to-day? The answer was with the gods and they gave no sign

From the opposing ranks stepped a stalwart warrior, lithe of limb, strong in wind and he carried himself like a conqueror.

Amorapama measured him with an expert's eye and was pleased to note he had a worthy blade with whom

to fight. There was a smile of confidence on the young man's face, which Amorapama saw and smiled in turn

It was youth against experience, strength against great science Amorapama had no fear

There were loud huzzas like deep rolls of thunder as the two men faced each other and waited for the signal to begin Hearts were clutched in tension of suspense and strong men prayed for victory

And now the signal falls The battle to the death is on

Amorapama took the defensive to gauge the strength and method of his adversary Ere the tenth blow had fallen he knew he had an able swordsman for his foe

Amorapama parried skilfully and swift as a panther though the other was, Amorapama's blade was ever ready to receive the blow It glided off the parrying blade and left the guard unbroken It did no harm, save that it sapped his strength

At each show of skill, the excited armies cheered, but many wondered why Amorapama did not change his tactics He had his reason and it was well understood by those who have fought such contests and therefore knew the purpose of the king

When Amorapama had the other's measure, he took the aggressive and then there fell a shower of blows that made the sparks fly up, while the flashing steel caught the sun's bright rays and made them seem blades of fire Back he forced the lithe young giant, but he met the swift descending cut in perfect guard, though not so deftly as did Amorapama, but well enough to keep from his foe's sharp sword The pace grew faster and for a time it seemed that neither gained upon the other But at last the other's youth gave him advantage which

Amorapama's skill could not counter-balance Again he was forced to shift and defend against the other's attack and slowly he retreated to get out of reach Giddiness seized Amorapama's brain, his parries were no longer lightning-like, and Kavi groaned, for now he believed the end must come and all too soon He knew the wound in Amorapama's shoulder must have opened and was bleeding fast But the warrior instinct came to Amorapama's aid By a mighty force of will his brain was cleared and though breathing hard he battled on Quick as a flash he saw an opening—his sword shot through and came down with crushing force upon his adversary's shoulder It made a fearful gash from which the blood spurted as from a fountain

Wild with delight the army cheered and yelled and the other groaned, but the battling men heard nothing but the crash of steel and the short, quick gasps as each struggled for his breath

Maddened by the pain the wound inflicted and half blinded with sweat, the youth fought on and his blows grew stronger, while Amorapama's grew weaker with each blow

The young man, nerving himself to a final effort, swung up his sword and quicker than eye could follow it descended with such force that it half broke Amorapama's guard and caught him on the head It made a gaping gash from which the blood trickled into his face and eyes Kavi started for his friend, but before he could traverse the intervening space the dripping sword to which a lock of Amorapama's hair still clung, was raised again and was arrested there by a woman's scream

So pent and silent was the vast concourse the sound of the scream filled all that space

Before they had recovered from surprise a dishevelled woman, staring wildly, rushed between the fighting men and seizing the young man's sword arm, cried in terror:

"Stay—stay thy hand—he is thy father"

Amorapama reeled and swooned in Kavi's arms The sword fell from the young man's hand, he stood there mute, amazed and dazed by surprise and horror

CHAPTER XXIII

FATHER AND SON

The Maharaja's injury proved more serious than was at first supposed For days he lay in an unconscious state, and fever setting in, his mind was lost in vagaries of delirium At times he talked rationally, then suddenly his brain would cloud and he rambled in his talk He spoke incoherently about the incidents of his life and of death, then the phantom pictures much distorting truth, afflicted him, and in his fever-twisted brain lived all the important incidents through which he had passed

Kavi, sitting faithfully beside his couch, watched over him with a physician's anxious care, noting each change through which he passed, and applied the remedies in whose virtues he was schooled by years of observation, study and experience

Many times Amorapama started from his sleep and staring wildly sawed the air with enfeebled arm as though he stood before his foe again, engaged in mortal combat. Quieting drugs served to lull the nerves that had stirred the brain cells to activity

So the illness consequent upon the wound his so-called son administered ran through its varying stages until the crisis passed and he was on the way to recovery. And though he suffered fearful pain, in his normal state, he

never would complain, but patiently bore all his suffering.

The contest, which had ended so unexpectedly, finished, Kavi had taken up the matter of a truce with Vimarda Calyaka being slain, Vimarda felt no longer any eagerness to war with Amorapama, whose strength and resources so much exceeded his.

At a conference of princes it was decreed that as Vimarda's forces almost won by Amorapama's near defeat consideration should be extended Vimarda made a treaty of peace for ten years at least, and received from Amorapama's private coffers a satisfactory indemnity to reimburse him for the war costs he incurred A further condition was imposed that in case of need Vimarda must when called upon place at the Maharaja's disposal a troop of not less than five thousand well-armed, trained and provisioned warriors to serve in his command

This treaty made, Vimarda, all honors and distinctions due his rank having been bestowed, returned to his raj at head of his depleted ranks

Amorapama's reputed son and the woman who proclaimed his parentage remained to wait the further pleasure of the king

She was called Ulupi by her people and the young warrior who had been regarded as her son was known as Kumara. Both were well cared for and the young giant soon won the hearts of all by his gentle manner, kindly humor and modesty of deportment, no less than by the skill and prowess he had shown in contest with the king His treatment was befitting a prince and heir.

All these honors and grave courtesy the boy accepted with a modest grace Affairs stood still, awaiting Amorapama's restoration, and until this was accomplished the

truth or falsity of Ulupi's story could not be established.

A month elapsed before the king's recovery was assured, and still weak in body and none too strong in mind, he resumed the duties of his royal office and in the watchful care of Kavi was allowed so many hours each day to attend to the affairs of state, but lest he overtax himself, the friend was ever at his elbow to warn him when he had done enough

In the long days and nights preceding his recovery and when the brain was unclouded by the phantoms of delirium, Amorapama revolved in his mind the wondrous story he had heard at the moment of his swooning, and he never could convince himself whether it was the blow or the woman's statement caused the swoon

Each day spent in waiting for return of strength saw Amorapama grow more impatient for the truth So when he thought the woman's tale was true a mighty surge of joy possessed his heart, but as his mind dwelt on each detail and weighed the probabilities, his doubts would rise, and heavy-hearted he dismissed the matter, only to return to it with renewed and ever rising hope

Thus betwixt hope and fear he hung for weeks, but now the time had come when of a certainty he would know

Before the woman summoned to appear had come, Amorapama, careworn and nervous, spake to Kavi slowly

"Friend, I cannot tell thee how this woman's tale oppresses me. Hour after hour have I pondered on the possibilities, but always end my reflections by increasing doubt Canst understand what it would mean to me, if it were true?"

"Yea, dear friend, I can understand. It were to thee

as if the gods had sent thee proof of their special favor. It were a joy unspeakable for thee to have thy son—Kalyana's son—restored"

"Yea, yea—ah, I cannot, dare not believe it Didst note how fine a lad he is?"

"Yea"

"And how excellently he uses his sword? Oh, he were a prince of whom I and the nation could be proud—if it were only true"

"Yea, thou couldst well be proud to own so fine a boy for son I've spoken to him often and find he has a mind and character of as fine a texture as is his manly form"

"Indeed! Then if he have thy approval he would be dearer to me still"

"There's one who hath already accepted him as prince"

"Who?"

"Utpala hath confessed to me that she believes the story of the woman"

"My daughter—my Utpala believes he is my son?"

Amorapama sat up excitedly and looked at the priest in wonderment.

"Yea, so she hath told me Hers is a mind so keen, so penetrating, so able to measure and adjudge I am much influenced by her views," Kavi thoughtfully replied.

"And so am I I find in thy approval of her wit a comfort since it doth confirm my own uncertain estimate"

"I tell thee, Amorapama," Kavi said with emphasis, 'the more I know the princess and judge her truly, the more convinced I am she is not merely an armorer's child —the surer is my conviction she hath come into thy life not merely as an accident which ministers to thy happiness, but for a god-created purpose which we in time shall understand"

"What could that god-created purpose be?"

"That I cannot say nor yet conjecture at this time," was Kavi's slow and thoughtful answer. After a pause in which both men were deeply thinking, Amorapama, as if following the friend's line of reasoning, said partly to himself:

"I am almost convinced that Utpala is not a mere Sudra, born of Sudra parents, with no higher purpose in this life than have Sudra children Her mind, her beauty, her wonderful personality, speak for a nobler end. But what that higher end—there is the wall that hems our reason in and this wall we cannot surmount, this the barrier our minds cannot o'erstep"

At this Ulupi came, and after making deep obeisance to the king and priest, stood upright and waited like a culprit doomed to judgment Amorapama measured her from head to foot He noted her gentle, animal-like eyes, her low, wide forehead, her humble clothing and rough, heavy hands

"Pray be not afraid," were Amorapama's reassuring words, for he observed the startled look and nervous twitch of hand and face She stood before him none the less frightened because of his gentle words She waited for the inquisition to begin

"Dost know how the law doth punish those who lie?"[1]

"Yea, your majesty."

"How?"

"By cutting out the tongue"

"Yea, that was the law. In my time we have made no

[1] Truth-telling was prescribed by the religion of the Vedas and even later Hindus, and is commanded by the Upanishads, thus in the Taittiriyaka Upanishad this command appears "Speak the truth, do thy duty," and again, "Do not swerve from truth."

use of it, which speaks well for the honesty of our subjects. How long hast thou known the boy?"

He spake slowly that she might grasp the whole meaning of his questions.

"Since—since he was a little mite of pinkish flesh, scarce two years old."

"From whom," Amorapama continued, his mind impressed by her manifest sincerity, "didst receive the child? Come, tell the whole story—truthfully, straightforwardly and without undue length"

Ulupi paused before she spoke. She tried to think clearly and to remember all that transpired so long ago. That she was honest and desired to tell the truth, both king and priest believed

"A long—a very long time ago, I do not remember just how long ago it was, I left the oasis of the Bhil country where the tribe to which I belonged was staying. I do not now remember what my purpose was, although I now believe I went in answer to the gods' command Toward evening of that day, I came by chance upon a woman beautifully dressed who was lying by a mass of stones asleep, or in a swoon, an infant crying by her side I bent over her and found she was not sleeping but was overcome and near the end. I bathed her temples and her lips with the water from the jug I carried, when after a time her dull but beautiful eyes were opened and she moaned as one in awful pain I raised the child and placed it in her arms Her first thought when her mind returned was for the child, and for it cried and clutched it to her breast when she found it in her arms. I saw that she was starved and crazed with thirst, and so, when she begged for water, I placed the jug up to her lips, but ere

she could drink the baby moaned and mother-like she gave it first to drink"

The woman, overcome by memory, softly wept After a time her composure being restored, she continued, looking with her honest eyes into Amorapama's pale face and horror-filled eyes.

"When its small wants were satisfied she raised the jug with feverish haste and trembling hands to her own mouth, when the foolish child in play clutched at the handle and it fell on the rocks and smashed to pieces"

Amorapama groaned and closed his eyes; his great frame shook with emotion, which Kavi, noting, prayed silently the harrowing tale might not bring on the mind's oblivion

The woman then went on·

"There's little more to tell. The woman, knowing her end had to come, asked if I knew a mother's feelings, and being told I had been many times a mother, she gave me the child and said, just as her spirit was about to leave her beautiful body, 'I am Kalyana—queen of Hastinapur —Amorapama is his name, and Amorapama—king of Hastinapur—is his father—he is a prince—heir to a throne,' or some such words as that, and then she died"

Amorapama covered his face with his trembling hands and sobbed aloud The sympathetic woman wept in part at the memory of the scene narrated, but more for the suffering of the king

"Enough—enough. I am convinced, Kavi—it was Kalyana died out there—suffering frightful torment Oh, why do the righteous gods not strike me dead!" and Amorapama rocked in terrible grief. The woman did not understand the meaning of the Maharaja's words, so

continued

"Before she died I asked her how she came in such evil straits"

Amorapama jumped up and cried in alarm:

"What did she say?"

The frightened woman answered:

"She said she had lost her way."

Amorapama sank into the cushions and mutely stared. Then the woman told the rest·

"I took the child and brought it up even as my own. I gave it all a mother's care and it looked upon me as its mother 'Twas treated as were the others and they learned to call him brother When he grew old enough he was enlisted with my other boys and so became a soldier, and ere he was a man his skill in archery and swordsmanship brought him to the noble raja's notice He grew in the prince's favor and in time became commandant of a troop in recognition of his skill and bravery in making war upon the aborigines. He trained his troop in warlike exercise and so skilled grew they their reputation spread and became the raja's special pride. I was called away to wait upon a dying relative, and when I returned to Dwaraka, learned the war begun and hurried to the front, for, noble sirs, I knew the boy whom I had learned to love as a mother loves her own would be in battle and in the most conspicuous place of danger and my mother's heart was sore oppressed. The morning of the contest I reached our camp and was paralyzed with dread when I learned my boy had been selected. Just as the combat neared the fatal end I learned 'twas the noble Maharaja was battling with his son. The rest you know"

Amorapama, deadly pale and with nervously twitching face, turned to his friend and in misery muttered:

"Kavi, think of it, my poor Kalyana dying in the des-

ert, leaving her precious baby to this good woman's care, and I—I——" His voice died away as Kavi interrupting him said soothingly:

"My friend, what is past cannot now be mended. Pray be resigned, think no more of her who passed to her reward in spirit-land, but rather of him—thy son—Kalyana's child, whom the generous gods restore to thee Think only of him—the prince—heir to thy throne—young Amorapama. Let him console thee for the grief the past inflicted Kalyana rejoices at this reunion and, who knows, hath helped in bringing it about."

Amorapama controlled his grief and so composed himself.

"Wise is thy counsel, friend I will, as thou dost admonish me, think only of the precious boy—her boy—my boy, our child—my noble, noble son I shall draw new hope from his restoration to his birthright, that the gentle mother may in truth have helped to bring this all about. Ah, what a glorious, beneficent, soul-soothing thought, for in it I read her message of comfort which will change the current of my life"

Lowering his voice and speaking in awed tones in Kavi's ear, said

"Kavi, think of it! Suppose Kalyana really knew and by her intercession with the gods had my son restored. 'Twould mean forgiveness—forgiveness——" And Amorapama's eyes were opened wide as if they saw things mortal eye hath never seen After a pause he turned to Ulupi and with deep feeling in his voice said

"Ulupi, thou hast given me one of thy numerous brood. Thy sorrows should be assuaged by the consciousness of the joy thy loss hath given me From henceforth thou and thine shall be my personal care. As for thee, thou

shalt become the princess' special servant. Will that please thee?"

"O noble king!" and the woman was overcome with joyful emotion. She kissed with fervor the Maharaja's gown and so with tears of gratitude streaming down her kindly face she was dismissed.

When Kumara entered by command of Amorapama, Kavi and he were looking out of the window engaged in earnest conversation.

The tall, athletic youth, with deep black eyes, clear-cut features that suggested noble birth, black, wavy hair falling in careless confusion about his well-shaped head, stood in the centre of the room and awaited the attention of the king Not yet had the proofs of his royal birth been furnished him To believe the story of the woman whom all his life he looked upon as mother was too great a strain on his credulity, so as is the manner of careless youth, had not thought deeply whether he was prince or lowly born

For Amorapama, as is natural, he felt no tenderness as he stood in the room and measured him whom he must hereafter know and treat as father As he had never known a father, no parental love experienced, he was at a loss how to comport himself.

When Amorapama turned his parental love devoured the handsome lad They looked into each other's eyes, each searching in the other some proof from nature that they were indeed flesh and blood

Amorapama stepped forward, and, taking Kumara's hands in his, drew him toward him At last with quavering tones the father cried·

"My boy, dost know I am thy father?"

"I have heard it said, but do not know as yet whether the word is true."

"And if it were, what were thy feelings?"

The youth paused to think out an honest answer. At last he said

"I would rejoice"

"Because of the wealth, the power and position this would bring?"

"Nay, I do not hanker for these"

"Then why?"

"I would rejoice as any son to find his rightful father, whatever be that father's state"

"My boy—my boy, come to my breast"

Amorapama, overcome with love, took the youth into his arms and tears fell in those precious moments when father and son were united by the gods

When at last the tide of glad emotion ebbed, Amorapama, with pride sparkling in his eye, to Kavi said

"Kavi, look—my boy—Kalyana's son. Take him to thy heart as though he were thine own I would have thee love my friend, good Kavi, as a second father, for he is more worthy far than I"

Kavi took the lad in his arms and there was a great joy in his heart when he said

"Thou art indeed thy father's son He is worthy to have thee for a son and thou art worthy to have him for a father. He is a noble king and deserving of thy most devoted, filial love"

Then growing reminiscent said·

"When last I saw thee thou wert a little child scarce two years old Thou wert a great happiness to the queen, thy noble mother. I thank the gods for this reunion."

There was in the youth's manner a dignity his supposed low birth did not warrant While he did not respond as yet in a filial sense to his father's love, yet he felt assured that this would come, since he was already drawn toward this man who called him son and was happy in doing so.

"Now art thou a prince of Hastinapur My noble friend will instruct thee in thy duties and deportment needful to thy new station Trust him, my son He will win, and having won, will deserve thy fullest confidence He hath been more than brother to me Love him as thy elder brother"

"I will do so and if I gauge my feelings at their present value rightly, I shall have no trouble in learning to love him as my elder brother and thee as my honored father."

"Is he not a fine, a noble lad?" and the father's admiring gaze swept the youth's manly form and face

"Father, I protest Thou wilt make me vain My training in camp and field hath given me no opportunity for self-admiration"

"Modest, I declare—eh, Kavi?" and Amorapama laughed softly, all the while feasting his hungry eyes on Kumara.

"My boy, I'll trust thee not to grow vain If there be merit in the worth of heredity, thou art born to be a noble prince of whom so womanish a vice can be no part Thy mother was the most beautiful woman in the land, yet never vain I'll woo the danger of seeing thy head turned by parental pride"

Then changing the subject, quickly continued·

"Thy foster-mother, Ulupi, was she good to thee?"

"Aye, father, very. Though her maternal love was di-

vided among many, yet had she so much to give we none of us fell short. She is a good and honest woman and if natural worth were to be measured at its actual value, she would be deserving of a higher place."

"Excellent sentiments Are they not, Kavi—just what thou wouldst have said? They honor thee, my son, and make me prouder still of thee, for hadst thou belittled her I would have felt hurt."

"And I would deserve contempt," the lad promptly added Amorapama placed his hand upon his shoulder and after a pause added·

"A noble character is not the prank of birth, but rather a great gift of the gods, and they who are thus blest are worthy, though they be of Sudra birth. Is it not so, Kavi?"

"Yea, verily Real worth is not dependent on our birth, but birth is honored by our worth"

"Aye, for see, a wicked man born to be a king is a meaner man, in fact, than a good man born a slave Such splendid, humane doctrine hath Kavi taught At first I thought but ill of it, for we are born in a time and in a land where birth is everything and real merit must depend on birth, but now I like the sentiment, for it makes of man a man—no matter in what state or caste he may be born"

"Then thou dost not believe in caste?"

"Nay, not as our world believes," the father answered.

"Caste is an arbitrary division of the human family and is unjust because it often sets the unworthy in palaces and the worthy must bear the odium, disgrace and shame of a birth they are in no way responsible for"

"A humane view and one I can readily accept, since I was nobly born but humbly reared. I like this manner of

measuring man. For by this means a man's incentive to raise himself will count for something, but by the other, the hope to rise above one's birth being impossible, ambition is killed by its futility."

"Even so, my son. In proof of this we think of our foster-child, our Utpala, than whom no nobler maid was ever born to king, as though she were in fact of royal birth.

"Yea. She is a queen at heart and her humble birth detracts not from that which in fact she is," Kavi added.

"Rightly spoken, Kavi"

Then turning to his son, asked:

"Hast met the maid?"

"Yea, and spoken with her"

"And what thinkst of her?"

"I cannot say, my father"

"Cannot say! Why?" and Amorapama smiled at Kavi, who smiled in turn

"I know not why"

"Dost not think well of her?"

"Yea"

"Then what ails thee, boy?"

"I think her very beautiful"

"Aye, and so she is."

To Kavi and aside.

"He hath good eyes and judgment, too," then to his son continued

"But though she is fair to please the eye, she is fairer still within to captivate the heart"

"Yea, I have found her so"

A flush spread over the youth's face, at which the elder men exchanged knowing glances Then playfully Amorapama asked.

"Dost think that thou and she will find the palace large enough to abide in peace together within its walls?"

"I find the palace for this purpose much too large."

"How now?" Amorapama pretended not to understand.

"It gives her much too great an opportunity to escape me and hold herself aloof"

Whereat the elder men laughed heartily

"Thou wouldst lock her in a cage so she could not escape?"

"Aye, if I be in the cage myself."

Again they laughed and the lad blushed crimson, but smiled as Amorapama asked·

"The maid doth please thee then?"

"Very much"

"And what saith she? Dost thou please her?"

"If I shall judge by her behavior, I would say that I do not"

"Ah," Amorapama sighed regretfully, but smiled at Kavi all the while"

"Fear not, my boy Her mind is in all things just, and if she find thee worthy, she will look on thee as thou deservest"

"Yea, indeed," Kavi said, "but I'm of opinion, in which, of course, I may be wrong, she never will look on Kumara other than as a friend and foster-brother"

"Well, that should suffice Thinkst not so, my son?"

"Nay, that would not suffice at all"

"How?"

"If I am hungry, shall I be content to look upon a feast and say 'tis excellently cooked, while someone else shall eat?"

"Good, good," Amorapama cried, "the lad hath wit," then added

"And wouldst thou fight to win her hand?"

"Aye—dost think me a Rakshasa?" [1]

"Nay, nay, the gods forbid I have no cause—for well do I remember thy skill and courage to my cost. What saith our wise counsellor?"

Kavi was serious now and thoughtfully replied

"If I be permitted to give advice to our young prince, I would say, using his simile, 'If thou art hungry and wouldst eat, look not upon the feast, however well 'tis cooked, if it be not for thee to eat.'"

The words long lingered in Kumara's brain and twist and turn them any way he did, he could not grasp the subtle meaning he knew they must contain It was a puzzle he could not solve and he might have found some satisfaction, had he but known the words were just as mystifying to his father as to him

Many moons had come and gone since Kumara had become a member of the royal household The king was light of heart and but for the racking pains his wound from time to time occasioned, was really happy in his divided loves—his splendid son and lovely foster-daughter

One evening the friends were seated in the slumber house with its lovely view of sunset glory and the moving pageant of Varuna's ascension to the throne of night The air was cool and a gentle breeze played lazily in the leaves while birds sang their parting songs in neighboring boughs A soothing peace lay on the scene and the

[1] Meaning a coward The man who stole away a daughter without fighting the father was a coward and Rakshasa (term of contempt applied to the aborigines) —*Manu*, III, 26, 3, 2, 31. Sh. Hist of Ind (Wheeler), p 3

friends were in the spell that eventide weaves over natures attuned to beauty's harmonies and its voiceless oratory.

The moon had not yet risen to blaze her glory into the purpling sky, so shadows deep and heavy spread their gloom Too sweet the calm for speech, so both in silence did commune with the spirit world and received the peace that holy thoughts impart.

From out the gloom of the park soft voices floated, and whether they willed or no the friends perforce must listen to the youthful pair who, all unconscious of the unwilling eavesdroppers, dwelt on the precious things that make the day of youth to take on the glory-gilding of young hope which, like all gilding, in the years of maturity wears off.

"Nay, I will not deny that thy favor doth make strong appeal to me and yet——"

"And yet thou holdst me off as if I were some unworthy wretch in whom it were presumption if he raise his eyes to thee"

"Ah, that is a cruel speech," came in soft, reproachful tones.

"Not more cruel than thou art to me, nor even half as much."

"Is it my fault, dear brother, my heart will not respond to thy appeal?"

"It is, if thou shut out the voice and wilt not let it plead."

"But I do not shut it out"

"If thou wilt not hear, then dost thou shut it out"

"But I do hear and yet thy words do not, nor can they, woo Not that I am not honored by thy gracious offer —still—it cannot be"

"Art in love then with another?"

"Yea and nay"

"How canst thou put it thus, if it is yea, it is not nay, and if——"

"Thou canst not understand"

"Thou givest me no opportunity to understand"

"Thou couldst not if I did. Pray let us speak no more about the matter It only vexes thee and I would not cause thee even an unpleasant thought I cannot, dare not yield It were all wrong."

"Why?"

"I cannot say"

"Ah, Utpala, I think thou art much pleased to use me for thy amusement"

"Nay, I would not do such a despicable thing I am not heartless in this, though thou thinkst I am I would not hurt thee for the dearest thing on earth I cannot love, and without love I could not wed thee—brother mine."

"I care not if thou dost love me now or not I will win thy love. I will not take this answer as thy final word. One day, if I persist, thy heart will change"

"Never—never, alas! never."

Then their voices died away and their argument was heard no more by those who sat in silence and had heard the tender tragedy of love spoken by the tongues of youth Out of the gloom came Kavi's whispering voice

"Amorapama—if Utpala were to say yea, wouldst thou consent?"

"Yea."

"Without a pain?"

"I cannot say. Yet I know not why I should not be pleased."

"But wouldst thou be?"

"I fear, Kavi—I have a bitter dread I would not be pleased"

"I thought as much."

"Indeed! Why?"

"No matter since I did I have thought deeply on the matter and I am convinced thou never wouldst consent."

"I will not say that, for their happiness is very dear, and yet——"

"Yet this unanswerable doubt. I understand I comprehend thy predicament even better than thou dost."

"Pray let us say no more about it"

"It were better surely," Kavi thoughtfully replied.

Then silence fell and the grand Indian moon rose full and radiant and bathed the land in silvery glory, the mystery of which thrilled man's nature with the ecstasy of pain.

That night Kumara asked an audience with his father. They sat in Amorapama's private cabinet where only members of his household were received Here, reclining on a couch, was Amorapama, his mind sunk in deepest revery. The flickering lamp suspended from the ceiling on heavy silver chains threw an unsteady, mellow glow upon his serious face

As Kumara entered he greeted his father with affection and sitting on a cushioned seat beside his father, began the story for the telling of which he had come

"Father," he began falteringly, "wilt thou be angered if I confess a secret?"

Amorapama smiled and said

"Nay, to confess a secret is no wrong unless its keeping is the property of another But whom better couldst confide in than thy father?"

"No one, surely. But I will not try thy patience by beating about. Know then, dear father, I am in love"

Amorapama feigned surprise

"Indeed. When did this calamity befall?"

He smiled kindly at the boy now flushed and eager

"Long since—a month or two. I scarcely know how long ago"

"Love makes no record of the time?"

"Nay, it doth not Since I came to the palace and first beheld my lovely foster-sister, Utpala, I loved her with all my heart"

"Indeed! and she, what saith the maid to thy address?"

"She refuses me Saith she is in love and yet is not in love and I can come to no conclusion"

"Well, what can thy poor father do in such a coil?"

"I thought if thou wouldst speak to her, knowing how much she honors thee, she might be moved to yield"

"Ah! so lies the matter. My son, in matters of the heart 'tis best for parents to hold aloof. Thou wouldst not have her against her will?"

"I hardly know. If I but have her, methinks I can then move her will."

"But thinkst if I command in such a tender matter she would yield?"

"Yea."

"So. If I command! Noble child! Was ever such another? Yet let me tell thee this, there is no happiness in loveless wedlock, as well I know, for when I won thy mother at the Swayamvara she loved another and though she was a noble queen and mother, no joy for her or me was in the union"

"Yet afterward did she not learn to love thee?"

Amorapama started.

"Who told thee this?"

"No one I merely asked"

"Ah, so Well, she did, 'tis true, but then it was too late"

And Amorapama sighed as all the bitter memories of his loveless youth were conjured up The old wound was opened by the child he loved, and it was bleeding still

"Still she learned to love thee?"

The young inquisitor inexorably went on, little dreaming of the pain the answer caused

"Yea," he repeated, "but when she did it was too late"

"Too late! how meanest thou this?" and the boy wondered

Amorapama grew pale and the great pain in his side was starting up afresh He turned and tried to hide his face, then with a sigh that was almost a groan he answered

"When I learned she loved me, she was already dead"

The boy was mystified and his perplexity and grief were in his voice when he asked

"How did she die?"

Amorapama groaned again and Kumara thought it was the memory of her death alone that caused his father's suffering Not yet had he learned of that bodily wound that filled his father's life with excruciating torment

Amorapama turned from his son to hide the tell-tale lines which were in part due to physical but more to mental suffering The foolish uncomprehending boy repeated the cruel question to which at last the tortured father answered

"She died in the desert when thou wert but a child in arms"

"In the desert!" the boy exclaimed in horror, then added

"How came she there?"

Amorapama knew he must confess To lie were worse than lose his dear son's love This love had not yet taken root and in the damning knowledge it must die he knew Yet every sense within rebelled against deception, so he slowly answered

"I—I sent her there"

The cruel words were spoken, their logic of destruction could not be escaped He sat before his son a confessed criminal He cowered before the young man's flashing eyes Slowly he asked

"Didst know that she must die?"

Amorapama only nodded affirmation His tongue forsook its office

"Then thou, my father, didst send her to the desert to die in agony"

Amorapama did not answer His silence was sufficient proof of the son s suspicion He cried in agony

"Why—why didst thou do this abominable thing?"

Slowly, each word being a stab of torture, Amorapama answered hoarsely

"Because I thought her guilty"

"Guilty! of what?"

"Of polluting her marriage bed with her former lover Agra, whom I killed"

"Oh, god! oh, god! Indra turn not thy face from me," the wretched, horrified son cried out in misery

Then in the silence of that moment a great, unconquerable rage possessed him He stared at his crushed and spirit-broken father and with unspeakable contempt and loathing cried·

"Thou art a murderer"

Amorapama nodded The wrath of the gods had fallen .How well it had been arranged His son restored, was used to damn him with accusation A terrible pain was on Amorapama's face—a pain so palpable his passion-blinded son must see But the beloved son did not see—his poor brain reeled in the horror of his fearful discovery He thought not of himself as part of the great tragedy, but only of her he did not know, but loved because she was his mother He thought of her dying in torture in the desert whither she had been sent by the cringing, cowering man before him he had learned to call father and begun to love Oh, how he loathed the name—the name that had sounded so sweet before!

"She died in agony of hunger and thirst and thou—thou didst do it to avenge a wrong"

"A fancied—not a real wrong, my son—for thy mother was as pure as a perfect lily"

"Then why didst thou destroy her if she was innocent?"

"I did not know her to be innocent until too late. I tried to save her afterward, but it was not to be I found her bleaching bones upon the desert sands"

Kumara sprang to his feet and blinded with his inherited passion drew his dagger and rushed upon his father, who rose at sight of his intent

"Wretch," the boy cried in a fearful rage and would have struck the fatal blow, but Amorapama halted him with a strong, unflinching look, and the uplifted arm fell by his side The boy's face was purple, twitched nervously, while the temple veins bulged out as if they were great lacing cords

Amorapama saw himself reflected in his offspring's passion madness.

Slowly and with fearful bitterness, he said:

"My son, wait, do not strike, at least not now. First hear what I must say, then kill me, for I am willing, most willing thou shalt be the avenger of the gods. I welcome death—have longed for it for twenty years, for the agony of my remorse is such, death is but release In such unreasoning passion as thou art in I consigned thy noble mother to her doom I, like thee, was moved to desperation by what I deemed a deadly wrong Too late I found my error and my punishment hath been severe, though not severe enough for what I did I loved thy mother as I love thee, yet rather would I die at thy hand than live and bear thy hate and scorn I only ask thee to forgive me ere I die—forgive me as I prayed that she might forgive I had no answer from the gods until thou camest, then I hoped, oh fool that I was, they sent thee as a token of Kalyana's pardon I see my folly now. The gods' wrath is still upon me I thought thee a messenger of mercy—thou art the executioner of the divine will I long to die now since my own beloved son is willing to be my executioner Give me the word of thy forgiveness, then strike and thy father's last breath will bless thee for a gentle mercy which is greater than he deserves"

Tearing open his shirt, he bared his breast to receive the dagger's blade

Kumara's rage was fast leaving him His staring eyes fell on the crimson scar in Amorapama's side He pointed at it and mutely asked its meaning Amorapama understood.

"Here my clumsy hand endeavored to make an open-

ing to give my poor soul release—here I tried to do that which I pray the gods thou wilt better do"

The horrified boy hoarsely cried·

"Thou didst try to kill thyself?"

"Yea, when I beheld thy mother's bones"

Kumara groaned The dagger fell from his unnerved fingers He pressed his hand across his eyes and trembled as if in fear.

Amorapama saw that again his effort to end his suffering in death had failed Timidly he took the boy by the hand and pressed it tenderly

Then there came into the young man's heart a great love which the good gods sent—a love which years of parental tenderness could not have earned With a heart-broken cry he threw himself into his father's outstretched arms, and sobbing bitterly, he moaned

"My father—my poor father, how thou must have suffered!"

CHAPTER XXIV

KUMARA'S PLEA DENIED

The friends were seated in a spacious grotto cut into the side of a hill overlooking a peaceful lake of crystal purity Aquatic plants and flowers studded its polished surface, snowy swans swam on its bosom gracefully and without apparent effort Bordering this lake were clustering rhododendrons that cast their long deep shadows on the water

Here on sultry days the Maharaja used to spend the middle of the day, for here the air was cool, the quiet conducive to midday slumber, while the prospect from the opening was a perpetual delight to the watching eye. The song of birds, the aroma of sweet-smelling flowers, the hum of bees, the gentle rustling of the leaves, the call of a belated song bird and answer from its waiting mate, these and many other soothing influences made for somnolent rest

But not for sleep were the friends come to this charming retreat, but for serious talk and meditation on things of life and death were they met together on this hot, oppressive day

Softly and like distant music came the mellow tones of the fountains just without the cave They were provided with marble basins in differing sizes and each in

a higher key, so that the spraying water drops in falling, sounded the tones which with the splash made pleasing, harmonious sounds

Before them in gold and silver receptacles were rich fruits, Soma wine in earthen jars to keep it cool and seasoned cakes and other dainties were spread to tempt the appetite

They reclined on skin-covered couches and talked in undertones when the servitors had been dismissed

They had been speaking of Kumara

"Strange his early training militated not against the development of his character Too often children are influenced by their environment With him it seems to have been different," Amorapama said, then asked, "How doth he with thee?"

"Exceedingly well His mind is keen and grasps most readily and his memory is tenacious, and so a fact once gripped is held against the crowding influence of other thoughts He will be a worthy successor to his father and will rule with honor and maintain the traditions of thy house"

"But, Kavi, thou, not he shall be my successor He shall be given other honors with which he will be well content"

"Nay, my gracious friend and king. That were all wrong and a dangerous precedent besides He shall succeed thee as our laws require I shall abdicate to him, but in such manner as I may, and he will let me—assuming I outlive thee I will be his guide and mentor and will serve in whatever place I can be of use with as much devotion as I tried to serve thee"

Amorapama pressed his hand fervently, then said·

"Thou art one in a thousand, yea in a million. There

never was a more unselfish friend, like Bhishma thou dost sacrifice thyself"[1]

He smiled at Kavi After a time Amorapama said:

"How calm and peaceful are our affairs It seems the gods have special purpose in favoring my reign Thus is the famine passed, the plague hath ceased, the war with Dwaraka is dissolved in a long and honorable peace, the evil spirit of Calyaka can conspire no more, and so the dangers are all removed"

Amorapama sat thinking deeply. Then after a pause he asked

"If my loved Kalyana were to be reincarnated as thou sayest we all shall be and always have been, what form, what place, what station would she occupy?"

"No one can tell As well seek reason why the west wind shifts to the north, why the monsoon comes each year; why the tides will ebb and flow, the stars at stated intervals will reappear, why night doth follow day These things are controlled by powers we cannot know except that they are—they happen, but whence that power? What it is or how it came to be we never will know"

"But if thy theory is correct, then when Kalyana perished her soul at once took on a human form and is to-day in life—a being—a person Is it not so?"

"Yea. But it does not follow her soul was reborn at once."

Amorapama spoke animatedly:

[1] In the Maha Bharata, Bhishma to facilitate the Maharaja's second marriage took a vow never to marry He kept his "dreadful" vow and became his stepbrother's guardian and the protector of his father's widow He placed the son on the throne (thus foregoing his own right) and aided and assisted him through life. See detailed narrative in Wheeler's Hist. of Ind., pp. 2-3.

"And shall I some time see her—know her for Kalyana—my queen, my wife, in another form?"

"Perhaps"

"But how shall I come by such knowledge?"

"That rests with the gods"

"But will they in their mercy let me know—give me a sign—a token wherewith I may learn their will?"

"Perhaps"

"Or shall I live through all my allotted days, and living perhaps beside her, be in her presence, speak to her, and yet not know her for Kalyana?"

Amorapama was deeply moved as his thoughts raced over the beaten path

"I cannot say"

"Ah, how I wish thou couldst give sure account of this—but as thou sayest this is not revealed to thee"

After a pause Kavi answered

"It is not revealed as thou dost say, for then would I be certain and could speak without a doubt, but I may give thee opinion, and this, though open to grave error, may serve thee for what it may be worth"

"Then give it me—give it I am like one who falleth from a great height and in passing through space grasps at the air to hold himself suspended. Tell me what is thy thought on this?"

"That when thou shalt meet Kalyana in the reincarnation thou wilt know her."

Amorapama leaped excitedly from his seat and stood looking at the priest, then asked·

"Kavi, dost really believe that could be—that I would know her in a new life—Kalyana reincarnated to come to me—speak to me and I be made aware of her identity? Why, priest, thou in this hast torn the veil asunder and

givest me a glimpse behind the mighty shadow—the mysteries of death."

He trembled with emotion, then sank onto the couch and stared blankly into space The words of the priest had opened mental vistas as yet undreamed of by the king Then he spoke softly·

"Thou who hast searched in the deep mysteries of life; hast watched night after night the advance of the moon through Nakshatras' circle,[1] thou who art so wise, tell me, where shall I look for her—how speed the time until I find her—how shall I know her—by what means will her identity be revealed?"

"These questions I cannot answer, but I do believe the time will come when thou shalt meet Kalyana, if not in this life, then in another, but meet thou and Kalyana surely will, for the great, strong, golden bond of love that bound your souls together hath not parted, it still binds —still holds you fast to a common destiny Thou wilt meet, know and love her, for did not Krishna become Vishnu's incarnation?"[2]

"Oh what marvels dost thou preach, marvels too vast, too beautiful for the mind of man to grasp—to hold—to understand"

[1] The Vedic Hindus were far advanced in astronomical knowledge and in the Epic Epoch made further progress They divided the year into twelve lunar months and a thirteenth month was added to every fifth year to adjust the solar year Progress of sun was noted and the position of the solstitial points was marked. They were also learned in grammar, etymology, phonetics, and prosody—Dutt, Ep Ind Hist, 63

[2] "Krishna, the deity glorified as an incarnation of the Vedic Vishnu, who strode through the three spaces, placing his last footstep over the heavens"—Frazer, Lit Hist. Ind, p 224. See also Glossary, Krishna.

Kavi smiled calmly at his friend's tumultuous emotions

"What thinkst thou of Kumara's love for Utpala?" he asked

"It worries me At first I rather liked the thought of those two beings whom I love so well, united in a mutual love, but when the boy prayed me to command her approval of his suit, I told him it would serve him ill"

"What changed thy mood from favor to disfavor?"

"I know not The more I reflected the less pleasing did the thought become Utpala wedded to my son seemed a proper thing and yet——"

"Something within rebels against it?" Kavi asked.

"Yea"

"What is that something?"

"Ah, that I cannot say, for I do not myself comprehend It is a subtle, indefinable, ever-present yet inexplicable sense 'Tis a quarrel 'twixt the head and heart, for my head saith yea, since my wisdom tells me such a union were good, then my heart saith nay, but gives no reason, and I therefore do not know why I should disapprove As it is written, 'Thy self is seated in the body as in a chariot, the intellect drives, the mind becomes the reins, yet the senses are vicious horses which speed it along over a road strewn with objects of sense'"[1]

Kavi looked silently out on the lake on whose unruffled deep green bosom the swans were slowly gliding from shore to shore with many duckings and pluckings of their wing feathers

An almost imperceptible smile flitted across his face as

[1] Katha Up, 1, 3, 4.

if he had found a needed link in the chain of argument that brings premise and conclusion together

Kavi spake softly as he said:

"Hast thou forgotten what the oracle of Rudra told?"

"Nay, I have not. I would I might forget, for it tells me only how hopeless is my hurt"

"And yet in other things the gods have shown thee favor"

"Yea, but in this one thing I fear they will not yield. It is for me a living reminder of my wicked crime against the best-loved woman I ever knew"

"What was it the oracle proclaimed?"

"'The wound shall ne'er be healed, saved by the hand of her who caused it to be inflicted'"

"The hand which caused it to be inflicted was Kalyana—that is, remorse for her was cause of thy self-inflicted wound"

"Yea, but why dost thou dwell on this? It can but mean one thing."

"Well?"

"That Kalyana being dead, caused my remorse to strike the wound, and as she is passed away her hand can never heal the wound."

"But if Kalyana, as we supposed, were living and by some act were to heal the wound, would not that serve for identification?"

"Aye, it would, but where shall I find the hand that shall heal the wound?"

"Patience What is not may yet come to pass. More wonders are in our world than the great gods have given us knowledge of"

"Ah, thou art a splendid dreamer and dost set my lag-

gard mind in new avenues of speculation Now shall I be looking for some hand to heal the wound 'Tis a new hope, but like the others it will die of its own hopelessness"

"Who knows As I said, be patient The time may be much nearer than we suppose when thy aching wound shall unlock a secret of the gods now kept well guarded from thy prying eyes"

"May it soon come, then were my happiness complete; not only for the relief from pain, for that alone I could bear with fortitude, but in the cure of it would be assured of forgiveness and perhaps—recognition of the queen"

Amorapama sighed Gentle breezes blew and the heat of day had given way to the coolness of the evening Caressing winds came across the flower beds and in the passing stole in kisses their rich perfume-treasure and bore it triumphantly into the grotto to refresh and regale the king and priest

Now came floating on the air the notes of a distant singer They listened and Kavi was surprised for such delicious songs he had never heard before For a time they remained speechless, then the long-drawn, trembling notes that vibrated with deep emotion, stole on their hearing and died away in a melodious sigh

Amorapama, thrilled and awed, whispered to his friend

"Utpala thus sang one night out in the desert a song so sadly melancholy I nearly cried aloud in pain This is not that song, for 'tis not near so sad as the other was. Listen"

Then the singer sang a wooing song that seemed reminiscent of a glorious past, it lifted up and filled the soul

with exaltation, then sadly died away and was heard no more

The listeners breathed fitfully Amorapama sighed, rose and followed by his friend, left the grotto and walked toward the palace As they passed the flower bed they found her surrounded by gorgeous blossoms that seemed to stretch themselves to be the first whom her soft hand should pluck So beautiful she was, with the glory of the sunset in her radiant face, her golden hair agleam with light, her eyes as bright as glowing sapphire—the men stood still and gazed entranced, as though she were a vision

She turned and saw them and with a glad cry ran toward the king and said, her face masked by crimson flush

"See, father, these flowers I have plucked for thee to make thee think of me when thou shalt go to sleep They shall be on guard and breathe to thee in fragrance thy Utpala's name, they will whisper with their perfume tongues 'Utpala,' 'Utpala', they will softly call and the night winds carry the message to thy ears"

She looked into his face, her own aglow with love and happiness

Amorapama took her in his arms and felt his nerves twitch and his body tremble while flashes of heat burned in his face As he stooped and kissed her expectant, upturned lips he sighed again and without word they passed into the palace.

The song birds in the park echoed the melody in Amorapama's heart

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The rippling waters of the sacred Ganges gleamed in the moon's soft light Shadows of the sentinel oak and

ebony, the golden-crowned campaka and fruit-bearing palms, all standing like soldier-ranks along the gently sloping shore, fell athwart the illumined bosom of the winding river. Along the banks in stretches of great length were poppy fields whose brilliant red was mellowed to softest pink in the moonlight's shimmering sheen Giant bamboos that towered toward the sky swayed in the blowing wind now coming from the northwest and freighted with its perfume cargo, laden in the Palace Park

Gradually the wind died out and left behind its infant breezes, who in frolicsome humors made merry in the summer night Softly, tremblingly, and clinging tenderly to the air were strains of music So faintly sweet they were, as if a bird had breathed the music of its dying soul upon the listening night The rhythmic swing of the oarsmen's song from time to time fell on the ear and splash of oar at well-timed intervals marked how the bark progressed along the sparkling way

When the song died out and the music of stringed instruments had ceased and a solemn hush was left, then a woman's voice broke forth in melody and the wanton breezes ceased their frolic and harkened in wrapt stillness and the night birds held their breath in ecstasy.

Full-toned and clear the voice rose and fell in the phrasing of a song, tenderly appealing, mysteriously, moving, melodiously majestic.

A boat manned by ten swarthy slaves whose bodies glistened in the light came gliding by. Long and wide it was, while in the stern perched high, a canopied and gilded throne, hung with purple drapery, was occupied by two young persons, behind and kept an unvarying dis-

tance off, another boat filled with musicians followed the royal bark.

Slowly the boats moved on the placid waters of the holy river, overhead the stars agleam, filled all the mighty dome of heaven with the glory of Varuna's [1] nocturnal court Fragrant wild flowers that grew unheeded and uncared for on the river's bank breathed on the air a mingling multitude of odors

Calm, still and solemn the night, and Utpala and Kumara felt the mystic spell that nature casts upon romantic youth and makes the splendor of a paradise seem nearer; for in the heart of hearts is a kingdom of joyous love

How sweet is love in youth, how precious in old age

Utpala in raptures cried out

"Is not—is not this night a happy dream? How sad it is such loveliness must pass and give room to the garish light of day"

"Yea," he softly answered, "how sweet it were if thus we could float on through life, care-free, never wearying of each other's company"

Utpala sadly smiled, but Kumara could not see her face

"How very much thou art in love, my dear brother What a pity"

"I need no pity—envy rather, for I am happier than a king when thou art by my side"

[1] "From around the altars of the Vedic Aryans older deities pass away and are forgotten, newer deities inspire the poets' praise—Dyaus, the sky, the Father of the Silent Heavens, and Mother Earth herself early vanish from the scene So also Trita sinks to rest, while the great encompassing Sky, the ancient Varuna, the Avestan Ahura Mazda, gives place as a popular deity to Indra, as the Sun-god Mitra, the Avestan Mithra, does to Savitar"—Frazer, Lit Hist of Ind, p 50 & 51, Hopkins, Rel of India, pp 71 & 72

"But art thou content to have me by thy side, even though I cannot return thy love?"

"Why worry about such abstruse matters I am happy in my love for thee, sweet sister, and I believe in time thou wilt regard me with more kindliness."

"Am I not then kindly?"

"Yea, very—hence I am happy."

"And quite content?"

"Not quite For wert thou in love with me as I with thee, my happiness were greater still and surer my content But since I cannot have all of happiness I will try to be content"

"Wise art thou in love's philosophy They who thus live, live happily, and yet, my gentle brother, 'tis a form of self-deception, for I can never love as thou wouldst have me love"

"Then dost not love me at all?"

"Yea, I do"

"Merely as a sister doth a brother?"

"More than that"

"Ah," and his exclamation was full of hope

"But not as thou wouldst have me love Listen then I am strangely drawn to thee, was so when first I beheld thee, but I could not love thee as—a wife"

"How then, if not as sister or as wife, would my adorable Utpala love her Kumara?"

"Thou wilt laugh I know, if I shall tell thee"

"Nay, I promise not to laugh, though it were so funny that old Rudra split his sides with merriment Besides, the subject is too serious to warrant flippancy Now then, how dost thou love me, sweet?"

He leaned over and gazed into her moonlit face.

"As mother might a child"

In spite of his promise the prince broke out in laughter and the princess frowned.

"There I knew that thou wouldst laugh."

"Ah, but I could not help it Thou who art younger than I——" And he broke out afresh and the echo of his mirth came back in oft-repeated mockery. At last she said

"It may seem strange, ridiculous perhaps, yet so it is"

Still smiling, for he thought it only a womanish conceit, he said.

"No lover yet found his wooing chilled in such a way. Still I will not lose heart, for in the womb of destiny are many things as yet unborn and who can say but that it will one day give birth to a more perfect love"

"There is none more perfect than I feel, dear brother"

"That is as thou sayest, but it gives me no enlightenment since I cannot be expected to understand how mothers love."

Again his laughter woke the river echoes when suddenly he checked himself and both grew silent, while the bark moved slowly on

They had reached a point just opposite the palace park, the lights shone through the windows like so many burning eyes; they turned toward the palace and Utpala, thrilled by the beauty of the picture, cried

"How splendid is the palace there! 'Tis like some monstrous snowy bulb protruding from bouquet of dark leaves See how the palace dome doth catch the silvery moonlight and make it shine like polished metal Is it not exquisite?"

"Yea truly Thou hast a poet's sense of things Indeed, thou art an incomprehensible, but adorable young person, sister mine."

Then for a time neither spake, each moved to silence by the solemn serenity of the scene.

The oarsmen in response to a given command increased their speed, and so their bodies quickly rose and fell and the bark moved swiftly through the water against scarce perceptible resistance

The river widened just beyond the palace park Its glassy surface lay spread out before them like a silver-spangled cloth Behind, the instruments tuned up, and soon a flood of melody came lullingly from the distance

The gods were playing in some merry sport and two young hearts were toys in their game and neither dreamed to what solemn end they then were drifting Neither could have defined the strong emotions within their hearts, and though they seemed floating to a common end, they were in fact moving apart

"Hast thou ever heard of our father's wound?" Kumara asked when the music ceased

"Yea, 'twas I who moved him to take counsel from the Rudra priest"

"Indeed Dost know how he came by it?"

"Nay, he never told me that"

He sighed, relieved at this, then added

"I feared he might have told thee 'Tis better for thee he did not"

"Alas, he is not cured as I had hoped he would be," she said mournfully, then after a pause she sadly added, "I had great hope in my oft-repeated dream of his certain cure"

"Strange, I rarely dream"

"I dream much and I know my soul goeth whither it pleaseth The perfect memory of my waking tells me where the soul hath been."

"My dreams are always foolish," the young man answered. "Thus sometimes I dream an arrow pierced my breast and I cannot draw it out, then when I wake I have a cold that hurts my chest Again, I stand upon a precipice and someone pushes me Then I go hurtling through the air and when I land I wake and find I have rolled out of bed But once I had another kind of dream —one not at all pleasant, for it seemed to me I had fallen in love"

"Was that much worse than falling out of bed?"

"Nay, but it left me quite breathless, for I pursued a lovely maid through fields of wheat, then into rock-strewn gorges, always keeping her in sight Often she would turn and wave her hand for me to follow her. At last, when I was all but spent, I fell upon the ground, and she stood over me and tickled me until I screamed I must have kicked, for when I woke my bedfellow stood over me and asked if I was through and added rather savagely, if I persisted in kicking him, I might sleep alone, for he was done with me I laughed loudly, at which he grew indignant, but when I told him of my dream, we laughed together Then I promised to forswear the sex and we were reconciled"

Utpala smiled despite her serious mood, then said

"Such is not the kind of dreams that haunt my sleep Mine are real and have a meaning"

"No doubt So did mine—mine meant indigestion Thus much I know, if 'twas my liberated soul ran after another liberated soul in a vain effort to catch up with love, then must my soul have had a mighty strenuous exercise I was quite winded as if I had been running hard."

"I fear my ungracious brother is too flippant and looks not on our soul affairs with seriousness"

"Oh, 'tis not that. Better say it is due to lack of understanding Remember, my dear Utpala, my life in camp and field was not given to speculation on the nocturnal habits of the soul. With me it was a soldier's routine—drill, practice with arms, eating, drinking, a little sleep and very little time to play. Judge me, therefore, with gentleness, fair judge"

The bark neared the landing place; it slowed down, The water swirled in widening eddies as the oars went up and a quick turn of the rudder brought it alongside the wharf Two slaves leaped out and fastened it with hempen ropes A rug-covered plank was laid and Kumara stepped out and assisted Utpala to alight The slaves resumed their stations at the oars, a quick command was given, the oars slid into the water and the light boat sped round and soon was lost in the darkness of night

Softly the lover spake·

"Utpala, thou deemest our father very wise, dost not?"

"Yea, very wise and just"

"Learned in many things in life and versed in some of the things after death which Kavi taught him?"

"Yea"

Utpala wondered whither his mind was wandering.

"Thou art very young as well as beautiful"

"I confess to youth—the other accusation—I ignore."

Darkness veiled the smile of satisfaction his words provoked.

"And hast had but little opportunity to know the world."

"That, too, I grant, but whither is thy mind now travelling?"

"Wait, soon shalt thou learn."

They sauntered on through the dark lanes whose gloom enfolded them. Kumara went on:

"Wilt thou not grant our wise, experienced father can better judge what is best for thee?"

Now she saw and understood his meaning. Promptly but thoughtfully she replied

"I do admit our father is both wise and hath learned much of life, yet I doubt—yea, gravely doubt—if either he or the priest can better judge of what is best for me than I can myself"

"Ah, such is the vanity of woman"

"Nay, it is not vanity It is a feeling sure and certain, a knowledge born of intuition which tells me what is best for me."

"Yet thou wouldst not in wantonness cause me to suffer?"

"That I surely would not"

"And if it were to do a thing and in doing it thou couldst make another supremely happy, even though for a time thou gainest no happiness in return, wouldst not wish to do that thing?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On circumstances."

"And they are?"

"On the all-important question how much of good my sacrifice would bring."

"Ah, that is just what I had thought Thou wouldst make the sacrifice if it were necessary?"

"Yea, if it were necessary."

"How could the necessity be proved?"

"That I cannot say."

"Then let me put it in another way. Thou knowest well how much I love thee?"

"Yea, thou hast enough protested this great love and I have no reason to doubt thy word"

"Now then, if becoming my bride, thou couldst make me happy beyond human tongue to tell, wouldst not be willing to make the sacrifice?"

"Ah, that is a very delicate query for me to answer."

"But, my precious sister, do—do answer it"

After a pause she said

"If I were only to consider my own happiness or possible loss of it against thy great happiness I might find it easy to decide As it is I cannot"

"As it is! Dost love another," he eagerly cried, and the flush that spread over her face was hidden in the shadows of the night

"Oh, do not—do not ask me that."

"But I will I must ask it It concerns my life—my future—everything Why I would rather die to-day than live a life of years without thee Utpala, canst not comprehend how I adore thee—how I worship thee?"

"Yea, I know it and know, too, how this sweet declaration would have thrilled me were things otherwise"

"Who, my gentle sister, who hath won thy maiden heart before I came—name him?"

"What purpose would be served by naming him?"

"I would challenge him and win thee by the sword as is our ancient custom"[1]

"Nay, him whom I love thou couldst not challenge."

[1] Vedic Hindus fought for their wives.—Dutt, Ep Ind. Hist., 89.

"Why?"

"I cannot say"

"Why dost thou torture me with this mystery?"

"I do not wish to torture thee. Do not, my dear brother, think that I find pleasure in thy suffering."

"I would not like to think it, yet I am almost tempted to regard thee fickle."

"Brother!"

Her voice was reproachful and its tone brought him to his proper plane Humbly he went on·

"Dearest, forgive me I would rather split my tongue than use it in unkindly speech to thee"

"I know thou didst not mean thy impatient words But all this talk will do us little good It surely will come to nothing and will end where it hath ended many times before. I cannot do thy bidding, for I do not—cannot love thee as a wife should love her husband. Pray let us desist and be good friends as we always were."

"How cruel a woman can be when she confronts a man who loves."

Kumara tore the flowers from the bushes and crushed them cruelly in his hand. Utpala sighed, for she knew not what to say to comfort him. To see him suffer made her suffer too, but as she felt then, there was naught she could do or say to ease the pain she knew was torturing him.

"Pray do not think me cruel Nothing would I wish less to be than cruel to one I hold in such high esteem. If I could yield to thee without wrong to another I would not be so firm, but——"

"Then why wilt not tell me who is that other?"

"I could not have thee fight. Nor couldst thou if thou wouldst."

"Oh, have done with these wretched riddles I cannot solve them. I am a soldier and my mind is trained to fight with the body not with the mind"

She only sighed. He seized her hand. They were walking toward the palace steps. A great rage seized the impatient youth.

"Utpala, I swear by all our venerated gods I will not rest until I find my rival out and when I do—either he or I will die"

"Oh, do not speak so, my brother. It is ignoble to cherish hate against one who hath not wronged thee"

"Wrong or no wrong—I will know him—find him out, and when I have succeeded——"

"Peace, I pray thee, Kumara Thy impotent rage shames thee. It is not becoming in a prince, son of the noble Maharaja, to lose thy temper like a fretful child. Be patient and resigned That which thou grievest over is beyond our power to mend"

"One thing more and that is the very last. Wilt thou leave this matter in our father's hands to decide?"

"How meanest thou this?"

"Thou and I will go before the king, our father, and each will tell just how we feel. Then if he saith it were best for thee to wed me, thou shalt abide by it, and I in turn, should he declare against my suit, will promise never more to cross thy path or urge thee to my mind."

"Wouldst then go away?"

"Perhaps"

"Ah, that were a dreadful grief"

"To whom?"

"To thy father and to me."

"To thee?" scornfully.

"Yea, to me."

"I cannot understand thee"

"If thou wilt promise, should the decision be adverse, not to go away, then will I consent to leave it to our father to decide"

"I promise, noble princess"

The jubilant young man fell on his knees and covered her hands with kisses

Utpala said naught, but wept Dyaus[1] gave his sympathy in darkness of the night that hid her show of grief.

[1] Dyaus—the sky, father of the silent heaven

CHAPTER XXV

THE ORACLE FULFILLED

'Amorapama sat in his cabinet Maps and charts lay in heaps and spread out before him His chin sunk on his chest, his eyes were staring unseeing into space He had been many hours engaged on matters of state.

Reports had been received of conditions in distant rajes, the state and spirit of the people had been considered and such reforms as were best suited were decided on.

Priests had given full account of the morals of the state and the recommendations had been passed upon, some approved and others rejected as impracticable

The army had been studied and its proper care provided for in wise directions to those entrusted with their execution Its present state, equipment, arms, recruiting, distribution, strength of posts to hold the aborigines in subjection, all these tedious but important matters the Maharaja had attended to

Thus every detail of his vast responsibilities was brought to his attention, and to each, however minute and seemingly trivial, he gave his best, most conscientious thought.

Himself responsible, he must do the work himself and do it well. He wished to leave the raj in such a state that his successor, following the lines laid down, the plans mapped out, the policies defined, would make his reign successful by the maintenance of peace with honor, and

the proper exercise by all the people of all their rights [1]

To uphold the highest ideal of government engaged his most serious thought, his most constant energy and comprehensive prudence, all of which he bestowed that those he ruled might be well ruled.

The arduous labors of the day were done and so he gave his mind release and let it wander to those other things that had to do with them he loved—his son—his daughter—Kavi, and beloved Kalyana on whom he lingered with tenderest reminiscence.

Over twenty years had passed since she had met her fearful end, and yet it seemed but yesterday he held her splendid form in his young arms and for the first time kissed her unresisting lips. How sweet it was—that lonesome kiss—now all the dearer since there was but one With him there had been no surfeit of love's sweets, no days and nights spent in love's ecstasy, no fierce love-madness that is akin to a delirium, yet so sweet the fever no lover did or ever will wish to be cured

Stern had been his life At first the manly duties much engrossed his mind and love held no kingdom in his heart Then came the Swayamvara and his fate was set, as too was hers, by his prowess and the law's decree Then when love did come, as did his son and heir, away from his kingdom and his loves was he, and when at last a truce enabled him to return he found her in another's arms in seeming guilt that for a time deceived his judgment and made of love a bitter hate.

Then came remorse, the maddening consciousness of guilt; the sight of her poor bones out in the desert sands

[1] The king was the great father over his people and so as patriarch must discharge his duties to his subjects as a father to his children.

—his wound he himself inflicted—all these tragic incidents were now before his inner sense and tortured him as they always did when his unoccupied mind gave memory full scope

How different his life might have been—how much more of joy and less of misery his youth presaged, how simple it would have been if he had lost the Swayamvara and Agra had been victor and won the princess' hand! Then, thought he, she would be living now, the mother of a numerous brood—a tender husband—their father by her side to guide and counsel and give aid with the moral strength of a strong character Thus it might have been and easily if poor Agra had not had his nearly fatal fall

Thus all the evil chain was made, the first link welded in Agra's accident, the last in Amorapama's grief and torturing remorse

When he thought of the events which recently had taken place—the sweet young child now woman grown, his daughter Utpala, whose love for him and his for her, he could not accurately define, the son to manhood grown, who in battle nearly caused his death—of these two tender blossoms that grew in wondrous beauty in the arid garden of his wasted life, unhappily entangled in a love that meant for one great happiness, for the other perhaps a life of hopeless years—he questioned after all these blessings

Were they in fact real blessings or new tortures invented by the gods to inflict severer punishment than any yet experienced?

The wound that afflicted still and by the oracle was doomed never to heal was there, an ever-present memory of Kalyana's dreadful end

Since her death Amorapama had felt no love for wom-

ankind, and though the fairest maids in Kuru[1] were his to love, he turned from all, however worthy be their claims to royal favor

Marriage with daughters of his lords was offered and would have been counted favor if accepted, was with extreme politeness warded off, for he had no heart for love's emprize—no wish to place another in Kalyana's place.

There was but one fair niche in the temple of his heart and that the memory of Kalyana filled

It was a painful reverie, a mental process full of bitterness, yet he made no effort of the will to change his thoughts to fairer things Often in the still watches of the night, when the great city slept, its king would wake and live in memory a lifetime of remorse. In those long hours he longed for no consolation; not even Kavi with his friendly office could serve to lift the deadly burden from his aching heart.

Long he sat this day and suffered the melancholy procession of events to pass At times he groaned in spirit and pressed his hands upon his face, but it was of no avail, for the condemning finger of his conscience was ever there and nowhere in this world could he find a hiding place where his guilt would not search him out and scourge his bleeding soul.

"Thy wound shall never heal, save by the hand of her who caused it to be inflicted," he muttered to himself, when the curtains parted and the smiling, gentle friend looked in and softly said:

"May I come in and interrupt thy meditations?"

He stepped in and looked into the dull eyes and without aid of words surmised the cause of Amorapama's

[1] The land over which he as Maharaja ruled.

mental state Such meetings were so frequent in the many years now gone, the sympathetic friend knew every symptom by which to gauge his beloved friend

"Come in, I have need of thee These many hours have I been cursed with painful memories, since my labor's done, I gave my mind its way I am glad thou didst look me up. Yea, thy presence is a great relief I have been unusually sad—my thoughts were more than ever cruel Canst assign a reason?"

"The reason lies in thy new-born happiness, for darkest is the shadow near the light"

"It is not that I have a feeling that oppresses me—shall I call it a presentiment—a foreboding of some evil? See, my hand is cold Is it so from fear?"

Amorapama laid his icy hand upon the priest's, who gently pressed it and replied

"Thou art nervous—too much mental application—too much of sad reflection These will give us all apprehensions and forebodings, premonitions and kindred dreads, for they are born of disordered nerves Drive them out They are unworthy companions for the thoughts of my good king"

Kavi's face was lit by kindly thoughts from which the other took heart and said

"Thou mayst be right, at any rate I hope thou art Thy cheering words are like daylight to my coward soul"

"Pray do not abuse my king, lest I prove traitor by rebelling against his mental tyranny Come, rouse thyself The light of a new day is in the sky—a happy and miraculously glorious dawn. Thou hast the boy—thy Kalyana's son—thou hast a sweet and noble child, a daughter than whom no king ever had a fairer, better"

"True these are great blessings, but I am so much

afraid, I know not why, that these are but a mockery of the gods—a brutal device wherewith to lift me up into a lofty place to cast me down again into the unfathomable abyss of despair."

"Nay, nay—mere fancies—foolish phantoms self-begot, that haunt thy brain. Come, shake off this vile brood of cankerous thoughts and rejoice, for great happiness is in store I almost feel I am a messenger that brings news of peace with all the gods"

Amorapama looked up amazed, for so enthusiastic had he never seen the placid priest He rose and shook himself and paced the room with heavy and lengthened strides. He stopped before his friend and asked:

"What puts thee in such fine humor? I never saw thee in such mood before"

"As thou, my Amorapama, art cast down, so am I lifted up. An oppression of forthcoming evil weighs thee down, while with me presage of happiness lifts me up."

"Canst give no reason for thy elation?"

"No more than thou for thy dejection"

"Ah, for my dejection I have cause enough"

"Then for my exaltation, too, is there a cause"

"But for sadness, have I not bitter memories?"

"And for my cheerfulness, have I not forthcoming happiness?"

Amorapama was mystified and looking into the priest's smiling face, drew his deductions Half smiling, he replied·

"Were I not sure thy moderation is almost an abstinence, I would ascribe thy humor to bright-eyed Soma." [1]

[1] God of (Soma) wine—the Hindu Bacchus of the Roman, the Dionysius of the Greeks

Kavi laughed outright.

"Nay, good friend, I am not in Soma's thrall. I have not sinned as the gods are known to sin." [1]

"Then why art thou so light of heart?"

"Ah, Amorapama, if I but dared to tell thee, thy heart like mine would expand and thou wouldst cry aloud in very frenzy of delight"

"Tut. I fear thou art but making sport of me, mocking my poor mood, seeking to flatter me into a happier mental state. I do know thee, priest, for a designing, capable and at times unscrupulous friend"

"Unscrupulous," but Kavi only smiled.

"Yea, unscrupulous to a degree."

"Pray explain"

"Thou wouldst stop at nothing as a friend to make me happy"

"I confess myself in fullest guilt. But I only ask thee to wait; a day—a week—a year perhaps, and then the gods will speak Then wilt thou think of me to-night and say, the rascal priest knew all the while, but kept his peace, for though he knew, he felt it not wise to speak his mind."

"Then why wilt thou not speak thy mind? Art not yet convinced?"

"Yea, but not yet sure I may not be wrong."

"What matter then if thou wert wrong, for it would not be thy fault?"

"It were a fault did I raise false hopes."

"Art sure they are false?"

"If I knew they were, I would have no hope."

[1] Rig Veda, VIII, 58, 11, refers to all the gods as being drunk; Ait. Brah V, 11, states that at the mid-day libation the gods are totally drunk.

"In mercy's name, relieve my uncertainty. Have done with mystery. What is't doth please thee so very much?"

"Well then, I will confess Now hold me not in evil judgment if I be wrong. I am of the mind, one day—when I cannot say—thou wilt again see Kalyana"

Kavi grew silent, his face took on a sober expression and his eyes shone with unusual fire Amorapama was strangely moved

"Hast thou no proof of this?"

"None."

"Yet speakest thou as one who knows."

"Yea."

"But dost thou surely know?"

"Nay."

"Then why dost thou speak in such certain manner?"

Amorapama frowned.

"Amorapama, I have a sense—a feeling I cannot now explain—that what I say will come to pass."

"Did I not know thee for a noble and devoted friend, I would call thy manner but a pretence—thy words a wicked lie."

"Wait, dear friend—wait. Thou shalt learn I speak the truth."

"Oh, have done My poor head throbs with pain of too much lucubration. Let us go I must have change. Out in the garden—there will I find peace in nature's sanitarium. Come."

Willingly Kavi joined his friend, for anything that gave him comfort was welcome to him now.

Before they reached the curtain Utpala, followed by the prince, made obeisance and stood still. Then Kura spoke excitedly:

"Noble father, we have come to gain thy consent. May we be heard?"

Kavi was about to leave, when the prince remarked: "Pray, good Kavi, we would have thee stay."

Amorapama resumed his seat upon the divan, while Kavi stood beside and studied the earnest faces of the two and wondered—yet almost guessed the purpose of the boy's request

"Father," the boy began, "as thou dost already know, I am enamored of the princess Utpala"

Amorapama nodded, then slowly answered·

"Yea, I have known that fact some little time"

"Well, then, the other night it was agreed that we would speak to thee about our troublesome affair"

"Troublesome! Is love ever troublesome?"

"Yea, ours is, I fear I love the princess with undying love and for her love would give of this life the best I have"

"Aye, so should any lover, if he be worthy of the name"

"But she, dear father, saith she does not love"

"Seems as if that ends the tale 'Tis soon begun, but sooner ended What wouldst have me do?"

"She saith she loves another, but will not name the man"

"If she did, what wouldst thou do?"

"Fight I am no coward"

"Nay, I never thought thee one. What saith the blushing culprit to this awful accusation?"

"Nothing gentle, father"

"Nothing! That is little enough. Dost thou not·love him?"

"Nay," and Utpala shook her pretty head

"Canst thou in time not learn to love him? It sometimes happens that a loveless wedding makes a loving wedlock."

"This could not be"

"Art thou so sure?"

"Positive"

"Hm! and why?"

"As he hath said, I love another"

"Ah," Amorapama cried and looked with reminiscent eyes at Kavi

"That is a serious—a dangerous obstacle Does he whom thou honorest know of thy love?"

"Not in the form I feel it"

"More enigmas. Not in the form! What dost thou mean by these puzzling words?"

"I cannot—dare not say"

Turning to the prince the king at last inquired

"What wouldst have me do, young man? Thinkst I can guide her love and make it go to thee as if I sent a duta?[1] It were folly to attempt it Though I am a king and powerful, I cannot command the heart-beats of this maiden I fear, my son, thou hast placed thy faith upon a weak support"

"Nay, father, I have not We have agreed that if thou shalt command her to wed me, she will obey"

"Oho! and thinkst that would suffice?"

"For the present. Once she were mine I would teach her how to love"

"Hast thou no misgivings?"

"None."

[1] Messenger

Turning to Kavi, Amorapama sadly smiled as he said:

"Such is the blind confidence of youth. Would we had such faith in our ability. Experience makes us cowards and begets a doubt where it should father resolution."

Turning to the expectant couple then he said:

"It is my parental purpose to see that both of you are happy. Thou, my son, art a gift of God for which I am most grateful, thou, my precious daughter, standest in a different relation. I love thee just as much as I love him, but differently. Yet this difference I could not define."

Utpala looked beseechingly at the king She paled and flushed by turns She knew the king's decision would mean happiness or sorrow With bated breath she listened, praying all the while the king might favor her against his son.

As the subject now was brought squarely before his adjudging mind a great rebellion entered his heart—a strong unwillingness that she should be Kumara's bride by his decree Never before had he felt so strongly—always he hoped he would bring himself to approve, for it seemed proper they should be wed Now he saw it all in a strange, new light With clouding face he said.

"It were wrong for me to urge this maid against her will."

He paused and looked them in the face His eyes lingered in Utpala's in a long and tender gaze, then he said:

"I will tell a tale and in its telling you will read my mind. In the long, long ago there was a young, ambitious, world-loving raja who at Swayamvara won a bride."

Kavi and Kumara looked at each other and understood, but Utpala, to whom the tale was new, only listened, for it would speak her fate.

"The maiden had been won by one who loved her and whom in turn she loved An evil chance tore their loves apart and put the maiden into the unloved raja's arms Theirs was a loveless wedlock At last a precious child was born and that changed their lives, and while the husband was away in war the mother learned to love the father of her child This of course he did not know, so when he returned he found his wife—he thought her false and sent her to the desert, there to die of hunger and of thirst The child went with her, for he thought its birth was tainted The mother died, and when too late, he learned his fearful error He searched the desert then to save her, but he only found her whitened bones. In a fit of madness he tried to kill himself—he plunged his dagger in his side"

Amorapama had portrayed the scene with telling gesture, as the hand fell to strike the blow Utpala cried and pointed her finger at the king

"And thou wert that husband!"

Amorapama leaped to his feet in terror and trembled: then the fierce hot palms, like heated irons burning in his flesh, came on him, and he groaned and closed his eyes and sank, his hands pressing against the wound, back on the divan. His eyes stared wildly, for the agony was nigh to maddening.

At last the king collapsed.

Utpala crept to his side and throwing herself into his arms cried:

"Father, father, 'tis thee I love—thee—that is why I cannot wed thy son."

Amorapama stared and groaned again. His eyes were rolling in their sockets He turned to Kavi and gasped in pain

"She loves me—Kavi—dost hear? What doth it mean—have all the gods conspired to bring confusion into my life?"

Again he tried to stifle a deep groan Then Utpala spake in tender tones

"Father, I have confessed I have done wrong—do as thou wilt with me, but pray—pray, ere thy judgment falls, let me see thy wound "

"It would be useless "

"Oh, I beseech—I implore thee, let me look upon thy hurt "

Reluctantly he pulled the shirt aside, and there in sight of all was the blood red scar of the ancient wound

A sigh of pity rose to Utpala's lips Then came another twinge of fearful pain, and Amorapama compressed his lips to keep back the cry Utpala placed her soft warm hand gently on the scar to soothe the suffering man

He straightened up—his eyes grew wild and rolled—then he trembled like one seized by death Hoarsely he cried·

"Kavi, Kavi, the pain—is—gone—'tis gone! The oracle saith 'twould never heal save by the hand—"

He stopped and looked into the horror stricken faces.

"The pain hath left me—Utpala healed the wound—Utpala loves me—the oracle is fulfilled "

Leaping to his feet he seized her in his arms and covered her with passionate kisses. At last he held her from him and looked into her shining eyes and murmured:

"Kalyana—'tis Kalyana—thou wert right, priest—thou wert right."

Kumara sank into Kavi's arms.

Through the open window flew a huge black bird and fell at Utpala's feet. A golden arrow had pierced its heart.

Aditi, "the Limitless" She is the protector of children and cattle, she is the supporter of the heavens, the sustainer of the earth and the sovereign of the universe Although the wife of Vishnu, she was his mother in his dwarf incarnation Indra also acknowledges her as his mother—Authors' Digest, Vol XVIII (Mythology), p 2

Agni First of all the gods He is the great, loved god of the Aryans, to whom the opening hymn of the Vedas is addressed. Yet though Agni is father of all the gods, he is but a younger deity (Oldenberg, p 104), for originally Fire merely consumed the offerings left from the repast of the gods, so he is son (R V, I, III, 134) to all the other gods, and had no part in drinking the Soma juice Thrice born was he From the heavens he fell to earth as lightning, on earth he is produced by the rubbing of the fire-sticks together He finds his place in the three sacrifical fires (R V, V, 31) and at the domestic hearth he is worshipped three times a day

To him the sinner prays

"Whatever sin, O youngest god, we have committed against thee in thoughtlessness, men as we are, make thou us sinless before Aditi, release us from guilt on all sides, O Agni"—Rig Veda, IV, 124 (Oldenberg tr S B E, Vol XLVI)

Ahi Referred to in the Rig Veda, I, 32, as the Cloud, but also known as the Snake

"In his hand Indra carries the flaming lightning; he is seated upon a golden chariot, and by his side the storm gods, or 'Maruts,' ride through the heavens, with all the rush and fury of tempests As he advances to slay Sushma the Drought, and Ahi the Snake, and Vitra the Demon, he shines with all the beauty of the dawn, with all the glory of the sun; he speaks in thunder, he gleams like lightning"—Frazer, Lit. Hist. of Ind, p. 54, also Hopkins, Rel. of India, p. 9.21.

Architecture For our ideas of architecture in the Vedic age, we must depend largely upon our imagination, aided by such meagre suggestion as we find in a Vedic reference to "mansions with a thousand pillars" The same source of information refers to royal palaces, while in the epic Maha Bharata mention is made of music-rooms, kitchens and other important divisions of the palace buildings—Wheeler's S Hist. of India, p 17

Dutt in Ep of Ind Hist. writes briefly as follows

"The earliest specimens of Hindu architecture, which still exist, belong to the Buddhist period, of which we are now speaking Architecture in stone, previous to the Buddhist age, was confined mostly to engineering works, such as city walls, gates, bridges and embankments If palaces and public edifices were also sometimes constructed of stone, no specimens of such have come down to us And it may be safely asserted that the construction of religious edifices in stone was unknown to the Hindus before the Buddhist era, because temples and images were unknown to the Hindus of the pre-Buddhist ages" (Page 121)

Stone architecture finds a fuller development in the Buddhist age, for in this era monasteries, topes, rails and gateways, etc., sprang up, and splendid specimens are still extant in various parts of India in an almost perfect state of preservation.

Later Buddhism led to image worship, which in turn developed architecture. Early Hindus knew but little of sculpture, but in this age sculpture received a significant and effective impetus. See in proof of this the sculpture of Buddhist temples at Benares and other cities of India

Aryan A prehistoric race, who, in south central Asia, reached a high order of civilization, and from this the people of Europe are descended. The ancient civilizations were set apart in spots or localities. Thus, in the Valley of the Nile, was the Egyptian; in the Valley of the Euphrates and Tigris, the Semitic nations, the Assyrians and the Babylonians flourished, the Valley of Hoang-Ho and Yangtse-Kiang witnessed the growth of the Turanian; and in the Valley of the Indus (India), the Aryan civilization had its wonderful development.

Thus the Hindu prides himself to-day on his Aryan descent, although it is very doubtful if this is not mere pretence The Aryans who migrated into northern India brought with them their religion, which was pure nature worship, was non-idolatrous and the priesthood non-hereditary In later times this changed, for the religion became idolatrous and the priesthood (Brahmans) hereditary

These Aryans (Hindus) were intelligent, thrifty, ambitious, and attained to considerable knowledge in the arts, artistry and science They had mastered many of the mysteries of nature, and phenomena of the heavens were at least partially understood

In the lapse of centuries their power increased, nations were founded, dynasties established, and wherever they went their armies were victorious Patriarchal simplicity gave way to the pomp and ceremony of courts, and the tribal chiefs of the Vedic age (2000 to 1400 B.C.) would have felt foolish in the splendid palaces of the Maharajas of the Epic Epoch (1400 to 1000 B.C.)

Between 1000 and 320 B.C., the Hindus (Aryans) spread over northern India, and later by conquest Hinduized middle and southern India as well

Then in the sixth century, B.C., came Buddha Gautama, who founded Buddhism, a religion which to-day numbers among its votaries upwards of one-third of the world's entire population This is known as the Buddhist Epoch, and takes in the growth of the dominant ruling power The dynasty in Magadha flourished and Chandragupta established his reign in northern India and united under his vigorous rule all the warring nations

The last epoch is the Puranic (A.D. 400-800), which marked the end of ancient Hindu history.

Asvins Twin gods of the Rig Veda "Light and darkness naturally suggested to the early Aryans the idea of twin gods. The Sky (Vivasvat) is the father, and the Dawn (Saranyu) is the mother of the twin Asvins, and the legend goes on to say that Saranyu ran away from Vivasvat before she gave birth to the twins We have the same legend in Greek mythology, and Erinnys (answering philologically to Saranyu) ran away from her lover, and gave birth to Areion and Des-

poina. The original idea is that the ruddy nymph (Dawn and Gloaming) disappears, and gives birth to Light and Darkness"—Dutt, Ep Ind Hist., pp 30, 31

Later, these twins lost their primitive character, as set forth above, and, instead, became physician gods who ministered to the sick with great kindness. To them were ascribed remarkable chirurgic achievements, as "Straight ye gave Vispala a leg of iron that she might move what time the conflict opened."—Rig Veda, I, 116.15

Aswamedha (Feast of the Horse) The Maha Bharata described such a feast as occurring after Yudhishthira and his brothers became conquerors Wheeler (Sh Hist of India, pp 23, 24, 26) describes it as follows "When they had brought their conquests to a close, they celebrated a horse feast, or sacrifice, known as Aswamedha, it was an assertion of their sovereignty over the empire of India. All the rajas whom they conquered were summoned to Indra-prastha to pay their homage to the conquerors, and to feast on horse-flesh, after the manner of the ancient Kshatriyas . The primitive idea of an Aswamedha was to let a horse loose for a year as a challenge to all the neighboring rajas Whenever the horse wandered into the territory of another raja, there was a battle for the supremacy. If a warrior gained a succession of victories, he slaughtered the horse, and served it up at a great feast to all the conquered rajas"

Atman, Soul or Self (Rig. Veda, I, 1151): Here the sun, which holds the life breath of mortals, is something more It is the Self or Atman of all that "moves and moves not, of all that fills the heavens and the earth. Of man, the Atman is smaller than small, greater than great, hidden in the heart of that creature."

A man who is free from desires and free from grief sees the majesty of Self by the grace of the Creator. (Dhatu prasad; see Max Müller, Vedanta, p. 50)

It is this Atman, or Self, more abstract in its conception than Soul, Psyche or "anima," that becomes also the Universal Self, the Self of the World, "bhumiyah atman," of which the Veda speaks "when that which had no bones bore him who has bones, when that which was formless took shape and form."—Rig Veda, I, 164.4.

Frazer (Lit Hist Ind., p 106) says "the Indian sage, seeking out the primal cause of creation, had first to sweep away all that which had been produced, even the gods themselves, and to his gaze there remained but the neuter essence, Brahman, from which all things issued forth, and into which all things resolve themselves. There remained also the Self, the Soul, the Atman of man There was but one step further to be reached by the Indian mind, and that was taken when all duality vanished and the Brahman became the Great Self, the 'Puram-Atman,' the Universal Self, into which was merged the Atman, or Self of man"

B

Brahma As elsewhere stated, this deity (deification of a very wise priest) succeeded Indra in first place of the Hindu triad Indra, Vishnu and Rudra, thus changing it to Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra and latterly Shiva or Siva

"He is the supreme sacrificing priest, who intercedes with the gods in behalf of men, and protects them against the wicked As the prototype of the sacerdotal order, and as family priest of the gods themselves, he is called the father of gods and men, and extended creative power is attributed to him"—Authors' Digest, p 20

Brahmanism As elsewhere stated, the priesthood was not in the early Vedic age hereditary, the householder was priest of his household, and the king was high priest of his people Later, however, when ritualism and the composing and memorizing of the Vedic hymns was incorporated into religious formalism, the priesthood, by reason of their skill in this respect, grew in importance, their craft became a sacred calling and by a skilful manipulation of the primitive mind absorbed power when the Brahman caste was permanently established They became a people apart, their persons were deemed inviolable, their will crystallized into law when in the end (as was and is inevitable with priests the world over and in all times) they branched out of the narrow realm of sacerdotalism and seized with no gentle hand secular power By marriage restrictions they augmented this power, and kept (so the pretence runs even in this day) their Aryan (Hindu) strain pure from the contami-

nation of the low-born Thus, in time, they became the first caste, and have ever since held this place in the popular mind and the secular affairs of India.

By monopolizing learning, and keeping the people in darkest ignorance, their influence over them was fixed and their own worldly power was accepted without question.

Their earliest religious writings were the Vedic Hymns, later followed by Brahmanas, of which there are many These were commentaries of the Hymns

A rivalry between kingly and priestly religious zeal resulted in the production of the Upanishads

Of these, the German philosopher, Schopenhauer, writes: "From every sentence, deep, original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit Indian air surrounds us and original thoughts of kindred spirits It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death"

We next come to consider the Puranas (400-800 A.D), which inculcate a new form of Hinduism. These Puranas, or Itihasa-Puranas, are devoted to the ancient legends and historical narratives, and form a conspicuous part of early Hindu literature. They are said to have been composed in the age of Vikramaditya and Siladitya, but, of course, have been increased in volume by later accretions They were originally eighteen in number, and even after the Mohammedan conquest held their place in the esteem of the people

In the run of years they became mere disputations between the various sects.

After the great work of Manu had lost its place, Vedic sacrifices went out of fashion, and image-worship was introduced and the new Dharma Sastras became necessary They belong to the fourth or fifth century, A D.

We have yet to mention among the religious writings of the Brahmans the Tantras, which were the product of a sect of Siva worshippers. They describe the dark and cruel practices for the acquisition of supernatural powers. By this time, the Hindu mind had sufficiently degenerated to make this form of composition possible

Buddhism In its purity it deserves the name of "religion of renunciation" When founded by Siddhartha, a Sakyan prince,

in the sixth century before Christ, it was non-idolatrous, highly moral, ethically noble, in its teachings humane, and the fundamental principle was a broad humanity It shared the fate of all religions (the Christian not excepted), of degenerating from the principles of its founder, and so has become idolatrous.

The family name of this reformer was Gautama, and he is known to the world's history as Buddha (enlightened) Gautama (sometimes Gotama) His doctrines spread rapidly, and to-day upwards of one-third of the world's population is Buddhist.

Abstraction, meditation, charity, brotherly love, reincarnation, purification and eventual Nirvana are among the tenets of this creed

Brahmanism, which he attacked, and from which he earned a bitter hate, had among its tenets reincarnation and metempsychosis

He substituted Self for Soul and discarded the latter

Nirvana (a sinless state and consequent cessation of rebirth) was attained by the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path

The Four Truths are that life is suffering, that the thirst for life is the cause of suffering, that the cessation of this thirst is cessation of suffering, that this salvation can be secured by following the path of duty—the Eightfold Path, or Middle Path, as it is sometimes called It is called Eightfold, because it prescribes right beliefs, aspirations, speech, and conduct and right living, exertion, thought and contemplation, and it is called the Middle Path, because it avoids sensuality on the one hand and needless penances and mortification on the other The rules of self-culture are elaborate and minute.

Thus the Dhammapada tells us:

"There is no suffering for him who has finished his journey and abandoned grief, who has freed himself on all sides, and thrown off all fetters.

"They depart with their thoughts well collected, they are not happy with their abode; like swans who have left their lake, they leave their house and home

"Tranquil is his thought, tranquil are his words and deed,

who has been freed by true knowledge, who has become a tranquil man."

The Buddhist does not look beyond Nirvana, no heaven elates, no hell disturbs. When, by righteous living in many reincarnations, he has attained the smless state in this life, his rebirths cease, he is at rest—oblivion or a state of nothingness is his reward.

It is not our purpose nor will space permit us to go more deeply into the consideration of this very beautiful philosophy, and the interested reader is referred to the writers on the subject.

Buddhism with Theosophy based upon it tends to solve many vexed problems which have caused the learned (and otherwise) writers and preachers on Christianity such infinite trouble and vexation of spirit.

While these two great world religions have nothing in common, yet if one lived truly according to Gautama's teachings, he would be entitled to a place in the Christian heaven.

The teachings of the two, Christ and Gautama, touch each other at many points, as do their personalities, save that the one is said to have claimed divinity, the other not.

Both were noble, unselfish and true to the highest ideal; the one gave up a kingdom in heaven, the other a kingdom on earth, to preach a gospel of human amelioration

The temptation to pursue this comparison is strong, but in the interest of the reader's patience we will resist and leave him to pursue the subject (if he cares to) with abler exponents for his guides.

This may be added, that Gautama taught, like Christ, the brotherhood of man, and struck a terrible blow at the caste system created and fostered by the Brahman priests

For an excellent (because thoroughly competent) analysis of Buddhism see Gospel of Buddha by Dr Paul Carus (Open Court Pub. Co.).

Caste· The Vedic Hindus were divided into four great castes; viz., Brahmans or priests, Kshatriyas or soldiers, Vaisyas or merchants, and Sudras or cultivators and menials. These are

again distributed into a number of subdivisions, which are also called families, tribes, castes—Wheeler, S Hist of I. (F. N), p 13

Rajputs, who in the later history of India became conquerors, claimed to be Kshatriyas.—Id. (F N), 11

The first three castes named were "twice born" (so called from the initiatory ceremony), and were entitled to wear the thread of the twice born

This initiation marked the division between the twice born and Sudras, and signified, according to the Vedas, conservation of a male who "is desirous of and can make use of sacred knowledge" (Apast I, 1 1 8)

The initiation for a Brahman occurred at the age of eight to sixteen He was invested with a girdle of sacred grass and taught the holy verse to Savitri, Kshatriyas, from eleven to twenty, when receiving a girdle made of a bowstring; Vaisyas, from twelve to twenty-one, who received a girdle of wool Before this initiation, he was looked upon as a Sudra (Gautama, II, 1) After initiation, the twice-born Aryan passed from care of father to a teacher, or "guru," with whom he lived as a menial, to be instructed in sacred duties During this preparation, the pupil must remain restrained in all his acts, be chaste, refrain from spirituous liquors, and live on food obtained by begging (Gautama, II, 20) He was under absolute control of his "guru," who was to be revered The course ended, the "guru" received a fee, and the pupil underwent a new rite, that of ceremonial bathing, which set him free to face the world He then became a householder, and took a wife Three wives for the Brahman (Gautama, XIV, 13), two for Kshatriya, and one for Vaisya

Civilization (2000-1400 B.C) The Hindus (Aryans) had at this early age attained a high civilization They were, of necessity, an agricultural people, as the Vedas abundantly attest. They worshipped their gods at their own firesides, and the householder was his own priest Libations to the gods and cakes and flesh of victims were the offerings. Their deities were deification of natural phenomena They were great warriors and skillful husbandmen. Their staples were barley and wheat, and animal food, consisting of bull and ram, was eaten.

They were expert carpenters and weavers, their ornaments and weapons of war showed them expert artisans

Thus the Rig Veda (VI, 27 6) refers to armor, helmets, javelins, swords and arrows, while three thousand warriors in mail are described. Again, in other verses (V, 53 and 54), necklaces, bracelets and anklets, gold plates for the breast, and gold crowns for the head, are spoken of

Women participated in the sacrifices, and even composed hymns.

Spinsters obtained share in paternal property, and widows could remarry after the husband's death.

Sons inherited from the father, and in default of sons the daughter's son or an adopted son became the lawful heir.

Burial was the first form of funeral ceremony, but was soon followed by cremation, and the ashes were buried in the earth

The Hymns prescribe the burial ritual thus: "O ye shades! leave this place, go away, move away. For the forefathers have prepared a place for the deceased That place is beautiful with day, with sparkling waters and light Yama assigns the place for the dead."—Rig Veda, X, 14.7 to 9.

There is no mention of Hell in the Rig Veda

There were but four castes in the Vedic Era These ancient Hindus composed their hymns, fought their battles, and ploughed their fields when the castes of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were formed.

Dancing Was practised on solemn and merry occasions. Dancing and song accompany the temple deity when he is brought forth in his splendid car It is then the dancing girls, with measured step and mystic gesture, go before, singing the deeds the god has done and the joys of which its worshippers partake (Rig Veda, I, 10 1 1, 9.24, Artharva Veda, XII, 1.41) "Every step and every motion, every sign of the upheld hands and every movement of the dancing girl's body, the dramatic gestures and rhythmic movements,—all denote an advance in reasoned thought far beyond the fierce dances of the wild, untamed tribesmen, who still live in the hill tracks in their barbaric freedom."—Frazer, Lit Hist. Ind., p. 266.

Dasyu or Dasa Dark aborigines, who fought with the obstinacy and skill of barbarians Indra is often invoked to aid in their destruction

"Indra, with his thunderbolt, and full of vigor, has destroyed the towns of the Dasyus and wandered freely O holder of the thunderbolt, be thou cognizant of our hymns and cast thy weapon against the Dasyu and increase the vigor and fame of the A'rya"—Rig Veda, I, 103.3

Gambling This was an ancient vice It plays an important part in the Maha Bharata, where Duryodhana challenges Yudhishthira to a game In this game, Sakuni, who threw the dice for his nephew, won everything, including the other's birthright, his brothers and his wife

From this incident developed important dramatic events which have tremendous bearing on the lives of the principals in this poetic drama

In the Rig Veda, X, 34, a despairing gambler pours out his lament over his losses and consequent disgrace with his wife

Other instances could be enumerated (See Muir, V, 4 26, 7)

H

Horse (war)—Dadhikra The war-horses of the Hindus inspired the black aborigines of India with terror They believed them preternatural beings Dadhikra was a deified war-horse referred to in Rig Veda, IV, 38 5, 8.

I

Indra-prastha (modern Delhi) Is described in the epic Maha Bharata as "adorned with palatial mansions and numerous gates, each furnished with a couple of panels resembling the outstretched wings of a garuda, and the streets were all wide and laid out excellently And there was no fear in them of accidents And decked with innumerable mansions, the city became like unto Amaravati and came to be called Indraprastha (like unto Indra's city). And in a delightful and

auspicious part of the city rose the palace of the Pandavas, filled with every kind of wealth."—Adi Parva, pp 577-8

Indra It was in the arid, lowland plains, that Indra, the God of Rain, became the Aryan tribesman's champion—the god who won their battles, broke open the heavenly fortress, and let the waters forth to cool the parched fields.—Frazer, Lit. Hist. I, p 18.

Also a god of vengeance, for in Rig Veda, VII, 104.3, he is importuned to cast the wicked into the depths, into a darkness profound, from which they emerge not. Again in another verse (Rig Veda, IV, 5 5), it is said that a deep place has been made for those maidens without brothers who wander about doing evil, for women who deceive their husbands, who are sinful, unrighteous and untruthful

Again, he is asked to destroy the aborigines without sacrificial rites, hated of Indra and *Brahman* (prayer). Rig Veda, X, 87 2

He slew the dreaded Drought Sushma, which held back the light and waters—Oldenberg, Rel des Vedas, p. 151.

Kama The God of Love Not strictly an Aryan or Turanian conception, but rooted in the Hindu hearts from remote antiquity Wheeler states (S H of Ind, p 64) they—Kuvera (god of wealth), Kartikeia (god of war), and Kama (god of love)—are apparently the outcome of astrological ideas, and may possibly be the personification and deification of supposed planetary influences.

He is the son of Darma (Justice) by Shradda (Faith). Again, he springs from Brahma's heart. He is armed with bow of sugar-cane and five arrows, each tipped with a different flower and symbolizing the five senses He rides on a parrot or sparrow, and is attended by nymphs. His wife is Rati (pleasure) or Priti (affection), his daughter Trishna (thirst, or desire), and his son Aniruddha (the unrestrained). —Authors' Digest, Vol XVIII (Mythology), p 39

Karma Buddha says: "If a Bhikkshu (disciple) should desire, brethren, to see with pure and heavenly vision, surpassing that of men, beings as they pass from one state of existence

and take form in others; beings base or noble, good-looking or ill-favored, happy or miserable, according to the *Karma* they inherit—(if he should desire to be able to say)—these beings, reverend sirs, by their bad conduct in action, by their bad conduct in word, by their bad conduct in thought, by their speaking evil of the Noble Ones (those walking in the Eightfold Path), by their adhesion to false doctrine, or by their acquiring the Karma of false doctrine, have been reborn, on the dissolution of the body after death, in some unhappy state of suffering or woe"—Akankheyya Sutta, S B E., XI, p 217

Huxley writes: "Every sentient being is reaping as it has sown, if not in this life, then in one or other of the infinite series of antecedent existences of which it is the latest term" It was the act or character of individuals "which passed from life to life, and linked them in the chain of transmigrations; and they (Buddhists) held that it is modified in each life, not merely by confluence of parentage, but by its own acts They were, in fact, strong believers in the theory, so much disputed at present, of the hereditary transmission of acquired character. That the manifestations of the tendencies of a character may be greatly facilitated or impeded by conditions of which self-discipline, or the absence of it, are among the most important, is indubitable, but that the character itself is modified in this way, is by no means so certain It is not so sure that the *transmitted character* of an evil-liver is worse, or that of a righteous man better, than that which he received Indian philosophy, however, did not admit of any doubt on this subject, the belief in the influence of conditions, notably of self-discipline, on the Karma, was not merely a necessary postulate of its theory of retribution, but it presented the only way of escape from the endless round of transmigrations"—Huxley's Romanes Lecture, pp 14 to 19.

Krishna The reincarnation of Vishnu Has been referred to by modern writers as the Christ of the Hindus, in that he was an incarnation of the Supreme God of the Hindus as Christ was the Man God of Christianity (Doom of Dogma, Frank, p 208.)

His father was Vasu-deva, his mother Devaki, a woman of the Yahava tribe, his elder brother was Balarama. His birth

is described as follows "On the day of his birth the horizon was radiant with light and happiness, and the waves of the sea joined their music with the songs of the spirit and nymphs of earth and heaven, who danced with joy The gods walking through the sky showered down flowers upon the earth, and the holy sacrificial fires glowed with gentler flame. The child was born with the complexion of the lotus, had four arms, and the mystic sign upon his breast."

His first wife, according to the Bhagavata-purana, was Rhoda, but he afterward married innumerable damsels His escapades compare favorably with those of Zeus and Jupiter

He figures conspicuously in the Maha Bharata, and helps the Pandavas to conquer the Kauravas The ceremonies practised in his honor to-day in India are elaborate, the worship of the "dark god" is marked by hideous obscenities

The Krishna cult has been established in several states of the United States It would be well for women before becoming members to learn more of this god and his worship This might save them disgusting experiences

M

Maha Bharata Is ascribed to a learned and cultured Brahman Vyasa, who wove into two colossal verse poems, one for the West of India, one for the East, all the mass of tradition, demonology and hero-worship This epic runs to 100,000 couplets, in eighteen sections, it is the story of the "great war" between the Kurus and Panchalas—Frazer's Lit Hist of I, p 213

Manu He is the Noah of the Old Testament, with marked dissimilarities One day he seized a fish, who spoke and prayed to be saved, promising in return to serve Manu whenever he should be in trouble The danger predicted was a flood that would destroy all living things He kept the fish, and when it grew large, it told the time of the flood, and warned Manu to build a ship and enter into it, promising to save him Manu did as he was told, and, accordingly, the flood came, and the fish towed the ship, cabled to its horn, to the Northern Mountain, where the ship was made fast to a

tree When the waters sank, Manu found himself alone, but safe

He, "being desirious of offspring, engaged in worshipping and austerities, during this time he also performed the 'paka' sacrifice, he offered up in the waters clarified butter, sour milk, whey and curds Thence a woman was produced in a year"

She said "I am the blessing, make use of me (Sat. Bra., I, 1.4, 16-17) at the sacrifice, thou wilt become rich in offspring and cattle"

Through her (Sat. Brah I, 8 1, 10) he generated her race, which is the race of Manu, and whatever blessing he asked through her was granted to him

Manu of literary fame was the writer of many important religious texts, among which is the Dharma Sastras, to this day recognized as the most authoritative code of Hindu laws, and wrote also on taxation, history and political economy.

Maruts Storm gods and sons of Rudra They are slayers of demons (Rig Veda, I, 64, 2) They are seven, thrice seven, and again thrice sixty in number (Hopkins, Rel of India, p 98) To few their birth is known, it is a secret possessed perhaps only by the wise (Rig Veda, VII, 56 2, 4.)

Metempsychosis The translation of the soul after death into the form of a lower animal, according to the deeds done in the body

Chandogya Upanishad (V, 10, 7, S B E, Vol. I) says: "Those whose conduct here has been good, will quickly attain some good birth—the birth of a Brahman or of a Kshatriya or a Vaisya But those whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth—the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a chandalla (offspring of a Sudra and a Brahman woman)" In another Upanishad "According to his deeds, he is born again as a worm, or as an insect, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a boar, or as a serpent, or as a tiger, or as a man, or as something else in different places"

Prof Rhys Davids (Hibbert Lectures, p 86) remarks: "Thus the soul is tossed about, from life to life, from billow to billow, in the great ocean of transmigration. And there is no escape, save for the very few who, during their birth as men, obtain to a right knowledge of the Great Spirit and then enter

into immortality, or, as the later philosophies taught, are absorbed in the Divine Essence."

Buddhism made a great change in this doctrine (see Buddhism) and accomplished by reincarnation the purification of the soul, thus fitting it in the end for Nirvana.

It is stated that metempsychosis is still accepted as a creed by many in India to-day—Frazer's Lit Hist. of Ind, p 126.

Mitra or Mithra (of Zend): "The Aryans looked up to the Beauteous and bright sky, and worshipped it under the name of Dyu, equivalent to the Greek Zeus and the first syllable of the Latin Jupiter. They also called the sky of day by the name of Mitra, corresponding to the Zend Mithra, and they called the sky of night Varuna, corresponding to the Greek Quranos These common names, under which the sky-god was worshipped by the different Aryan nations of the ancient times, prove that the sky was worshipped under these names by the primitive Aryans in their original home"—Dutt, Ep of Ind. H, p 26

Prajapati, "Lord of Creatures" A name applied in Rig Veda to the Supreme God, later identified with Brahma of philosophical speculation Other gods were also denominated Prajapati, and the name was given to a god presiding over procreation—Authors' Digest, Vol XVIII (Mythol), p 47

Purohita A poet-priest, who accompanied the king in battle, and by his inspiriting incantations brought the warriors up to the highest of martial efficiency

Thus "May this prayer of mine be successful; may the vigor and strength be complete, may the power be perfect, undecaying and victorious of those of whom I am the priest (purohita) . . . Ye with the sharp arrows smite those whose bows are powerless; ye whose weapons and arms are terrible, (smite) the feeble. When discharged, fly forth, O arrow, sped by prayer. Vanquish the foes, assail, slay all the choicest of them, let not one escape"—Muir, O S T, pp. 283-4; Artharva-Veda, III, 19.1.

"Headed by their chosen king or chieftain, the tribes ad-

vanced to battle, and, as they marched, the proud song of the king's elected "purohita," or poet-priest, rang in their ears. Not by the king's valor, nor by his well-known heroic might, not by the impetuous rush of the conquering tribes, was victory to be gained It was the incantations of the haughty "purohita," who summoned the gods to hover near and win the day, that cheered on the clansmen and made them sure of victory"—Rig Veda, I, 65 4

Rudra Father of the Maruts (storm gods) Represented to the Hindu mind the destructive forces of nature He was the third of the original Aryan triad; Indra (creator), Vishnu (preserver), Rudra (destroyer)

In later times Indra gave way to Brahma, and Rudra to Siva, or Shiva

He is referred to in the Hymns as the loud-sounding father of the Maruts, is the Thunderer, and in later times became the Destroyer of all living beings

His position was of importance and his power in this and the after world was greatly feared

S

Sacrifice The sacrifice was an important part in the Vedic Hindus' life As may be expected, it was an invention of the priest, and it served at least two practical purposes it exaggerated the importance of the priesthood, and served to fill his coffers with liberal pay In this respect, man and the priesthood have not changed much in three thousand years. We call the sacrifice by other names, but it is just as lucrative

The Aryan householder observed forty great sacrifices, of which nineteen were domestic ceremonies, seven Paka, seven Havir, and seven Soma sacrifices

The householder's domestic life began with the lighting of the sacred fire, and then followed his daily duty of worshipping the gods, the manes, the goblins and sages of old; to recite such portions of the Veda as he had learned from his "Guru" and perform his sacrifices

Yet the forty sacrifices would not avail if he were deficient in eight good qualities comparable with the Buddhist Eightfold Path (see Buddhism) These were compassion on all creatures, forbearance, freedom from anger, purity, quietism, auspiciousness, freedom from avarice and freedom from covetousness (Apastamba, I, 8.23, 6)

Frazer (Lit. Hist of Ind., 6 163) says "The path for the Aryan was made easy, he had but to take the place allotted to him by the Brahmans, and all would go well with him"

To the same effect, Hopkins (Rel of India, p 255) "He, forsooth, who is sanctified by a few only of these forty sacraments, and whose soul is endowed with the eight excellent qualities, will be united with Brahma and will dwell in his heaven."

Savitar· It is as Savitar, the Quickener, the Inspirer, that the sun "stands forth as the golden deity, yellow-haired, surrounded by a golden lustre and with upraised arms holds forth blessings and hope to his worshippers"—Muir, Vol. V, pp. 162-63

"Uprisen is Savitar, this god to quicken Priest, neglect not this most constant duty To the gods verily he gives rich treasure, and blesses him who calls them to the banquet" —Griffith, R. V, II, 38.1, 2

Sesha· According to Jaya Deva's descriptive poem, Vishnu descended to earth the second time in the form of a Tortoise, on whose back was suspended the mountain Mandara, round which was wound the huge thousand-headed serpent Sesha, to form a rope that gods and demons might churn the waters of the flood and bring to the surface the fourteen treasures lost during the deluge.

Sîfra A dark and turgid stream, where the evil dwell in punishment. Set apart chiefly for the hated aborigines. Frequent reference to this in the Hymns.

Sita: The gentle, devoted and patient wife of Rama; and her trials form the central motive of the later Hindu Epic Ramayana (1000 B.C., according to Gen. Cunningham). Rama and Sita are banished from Ayodha for fourteen years. They take refuge in a forest; Sita is stolen and carried away by force by a fierce, ten-headed monster, Ravanna, King of Lanka, supposed to be the Island of Ceylon.

After Rama's restoration, Sita's virtue while in the power of Ravanna is questioned, and she is cast off Subsequently her purity is established, and a reconciliation follows The Ramayana may be regarded as an epic of wifely devotion

Soma. A wine made of a plant Max Muller tries to identify it with hops, from it an intoxicating beverage was made, which was generally drunk and used for libations to the gods Soma became deified, and corresponds to the Latin Bacchus and Greek Dionysus

Rig Veda, X, 27, 12, speaks of the wedding of Soma and Surya, the Moon and Sun, as an idealized type of human marriage

He was worshipped as a god having benificent powers Thus "Take me where there are pleasures and joys and delights, and where every desire of the anxious heart is satiated Take me there and make me immortal Flow, Soma! for Indra"—Rig Veda, XI, 113

Later the name was applied to the moon

Sudra The position of this unfortunate caste (aborigines found in possession of India by Aryans on their arrival from Southern Asia) was indeed lamentable in Vedic times, and the run of years and changed political conditions have not done much for their amelioration

Apastamba, one of the ancient writers (I, 3, 9, 9, see also Nesishta, XVIII, 14-15) says "Let no one give advice to a Sudra, nor eat what remains from his table, nor let him explain the holy law to such a man nor order him (to perform) a penance"—Manu, IX 80-81, see also Glossary, "Caste"

Swayamvara A marriage festival, at which the Princess Draupadi, in the Maha Bharata, selects a husband after a contest of arms It is one of the very dramatic scenes of the great Epic It is called "self-choice," because the damsel was supposed to have a choice in the matter This, however, was but a fiction, as her hand was given to the victor and he could not be chosen in advance The Swayamvara of Draupadi was celebrated at Kampilya At later festivals the contest of arms was omitted For description of the Maha Bharata Swayamvara, see Wheeler's Hist of Ind, pp 10-12.

Vac In the Vedic Hymns, speech became personified as the Goddess Vac The reader should not lose sight of the significant fact that speech is personified by a woman, which suggests that the woman of Vedic times resembled woman in this tender attribute in all subsequent times Nor is modesty a part of her make-up, for she says of herself, without a blush

"I am the greatest of all deities I am the queen, the first of all those worthy of worship I am she to whom the gods have given many places, set in many homes, and sent for abroad . . I tell that which is to be believed"—Rig Veda, X, 125.

In the "Sat Brah," Vac becomes "the mother of the Vedas" (III, 8, 8, 5)

Varuna The sky of night corresponds with the Greek Quronos He was worshipped by the Aryans in their original homes Sometimes called the "Encompasser," in the Rig Veda, to the Supreme Aditya. He rules the night as Mitra rules the day. He is the judge who sometimes punishes and forgives sins In later Hindu literature, he is honored merely as the god of the waters—Authors' Digest, Vol XVIII (Mythol), p 53

Vedas The Vedas comprise ten hundred and twenty-eight verses, or one hundred and fifty-three thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six words These represent all the literature of ancient India Together they are called Rig Veda, and consist of (1) Rig Veda, whole compilation, (2) Sama Veda, sacrificial chants; (3) Yajur Veda, formulæ used by officiating priests at special sacrifices and in later times, (4) Atharva Veda, the most luminously descriptive composition, sometimes called the Fourth Veda.

The Vedas were compiled early in the Epic Age—(Dutts Ep In H. 49.) By all orthodox Hindus they are held as a divine revelation. Making them accessible to others than "twice-born," was deemed a profanation by the pious We read in Gautama (not the Buddha), Chap 4-6, S B E, Vol. II, "that a Sudra (low-born menial), or one of non-Aryan blood, who dared to listen to a recitation of the Vedic Hymns should have his ears filled with molten tin or lac, should the

Sudra repeat the words, his tongue should be cut out, should he remember the sound, his body should be split in twain"

It was Nature that held the imagination of the newly arrived Aryans in India spellbound, and it was to glorify her, and to seek the aid of her powers, vaguely personified as "devas," "deities," or "bright ones," that the Vedic poets composed their songs of praise Of history, the hymns tell but little—Frazer, Lit. Hist of Ind, 18

Vishnu In later mythology, the solar deity emerges from the brotherhood of all the Vedic gods as Vishnu, the Preserver, who moves in three steps over the universe, bearing in his hand as symbol of his origin the solar disk, and having by his side the heavenly bird Garuda

Oldenberg (Rel des Vedas, p 228) considers Vishnu to be the vast wideness of space, and names him the "Wanderer"

He is variously known as Brahman, and Narayana, and is endowed with all good qualities, intelligence being his chief attribute He is all-knowing, all merciful, all pervading and all powerful, matter and soul being the very essential elements of his nature, though but in a germinal state till creation occurs (Thibaut, S B E., Vol XXXIV, p 29)

"At the beginning of great 'Kalpas,' or periods of creation, this Lord, by his own volition, acts on unevolved matter and non-manifest soul, so that the former becomes manifest, and souls acquire material bodies corresponding to their good or bad deeds in previous existences According to this doctrine of modified non-duality, Vishnu, Brahma or the Lord, is by nature a personal deity, evolving the world and individual soul out from himself The soul remains personally existent, and on its release from migration, passes into an undisturbed bliss in Heaven"—Frazer, Lit Hist of I, 206

Vivasvat The Sky is the father, and the Dawn (Saranyu) is the mother of the twin Asvins, and the legend goes that Saranyu ran away from Vivasvat before she gave birth to the twins—Dutt, Ep Ind Hist, p 30

Vritra Sometimes a cloud, generally the great Demon against whom Indra wages war for the benefit of mankind. (See quotation under "Ahi")

Vyasa The "Arranger" (see Maha Bharata) After the last battle appears as a Brahman sage to console the women who

have lost either husbands or lovers or brothers. Stands on the bank of the Ganges and invokes the dead warriors by their names, in answer to which they appear in glory.—Wheeler, S Hist of Ind, pp 26-27.

W

Woman To show woman's position in Vedic times, we can do no better than quote *in extenso* from Frazer's Literary History of India, at page 31, as follows.

"Polygamy was no doubt common in Vedic times, yet the general custom seems to have favored monogamy, either from necessity or from the growth of a refined sentiment

"The woman who was handsome is recorded to have been allowed to choose her own friend or lover (R. V, X, 27-12); and the hymn which records the custom states, with dry humor, that no one would object to a man carrying off the blind daughter of another

"There is no evidence to show that women were in these early times curtailed of their freedom or confined in the solitude of their own homes, as is the custom now in India among the respectable Hindu families, a custom primarily due to fear of insult from foreign conquerors In one Vedic hymn (R. V, X, 86) the story is told of the wrath of the wife of Indra, whose path was obstructed by an offending demon The goddess rails that, great as were her swelling charms, great as her joy in Indra's love, the demon had checked her course, although she urges that it was the custom for women to go openly to the festivals and to the place of sacrifice

"More suggestive of the true position held by woman in this early period are the verses (R V, X, 85) recited at the wedding of Soma and Surya, the Moon and Sun, an idealized type of all earthly ones For the bride and bridegroom, fortune, prosperity, and sons are besought, for the bride, it is prayed that she may rule her household and bear affection to her husband. The assembled guests are prayed to bid the bride good fortune, and as the bridegroom takes her by the hand, he declares that the gods have appointed her head of his household, to share his joys, to twine her arms around

him and love him fitly, so that both may reach old age together At the threshold of her new home, the bride is bidden to enter, and bring down a blessing on all who dwell there, so that the home may grow full of happiness, full of joy and mirth, full of sons and grandsons.

"The ancient custom of the participation of women (Gobhila Grihya Sutras, I, 3, 15) in harvest offerings as well as harvest festivals, is in the above text clearly referred to as being remembered at the time of Brahmanic sacrifice, although, for priestly reasons, it was overlooked, or but obscurely hinted at."

The explanation of this appearance of women on the scene arises from the fact (Jevons Intro to "The Hist of Religion," pp 240-1) that in primitive times the duties of agriculture lay, for the most part, in the hands of women Frazer (Lit. Hist. of I, pp 84-85, Jevon, ibid) says. "It is therefore an easy guess that the cultivation of plants was one of woman's contributions to the development of civilization; and it is in harmony with this conjecture that the cereal deities are usually, both in the Old World and the New, female"

Yama The first mortal who passed the portals of death (Rig Veda, X, 14.) Yama and Yami were twins (children of the same parents, Sky and Dawn, and originally implying Light and Darkness), who have changed their original characters Of Yami, we hear little, but Yama is the Ruler of the future world, the beneficent king of the departed.

Often referred to as the "Asvins"

Yuva-raja, or Joobraj We read in the Maha Bharata how the Maharaja Dhritarashtra appointed Yudhishthira to be the *yuva raja*, or "little raja," whose business it was to learn government, assist in governing, and who, at the death of the Maharaja, inherited the throne

We learn that this custom is still respected and practised in India. A similar custom existed among the later kings of Judah and Israel, and Roman history furnishes like instances.