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**SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST**





# SIRI RAM REVOLUTIONIST

*A TRANSCRIPT FROM LIFE*

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**TO**  
**CECIL EATON**



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PART I	
THE COLLEGE . . . . .	I
PART II	
THE VILLAGE . . . . .	53
PART III	
THE CAVE . . . . .	133
PART IV	
THE KALI YUGA . . . . .	189
PART V	
THE SACRIFICE . . . . .	253



PART I  
THE COLLEGE

And he said, as he counted his beads and smiled,  
"God smite their souls to the depth of hell!"  
SIR ALFRED LYALL.





# I

SKENE'S resolution nearly failed him as he was driving to the meeting in the city. His pony wanted to turn into the Club gates, and a similar inclination nearly swung him round. He pulled up a moment to watch the tennis-four in which he ought to have been playing. It was a keen game, and he drove on reluctantly, feeling that he had been foolish to commit himself. What is life worth if one is immured from five to seven under a roof listening to talk? And it was the beginning of the cold weather. Exercise in the interval between work and dinner is as essential to an Englishman as air; but for the native of India talk is the only recreation—at a meeting if possible; if not, at his own or a neighbour's house. The Indian has no hobby. He is incapable of being bored.

For three years Skene had been pestered to preside at meetings, or "to grace" some "occasion" with his "august presence." But he was lamentably wanting in public spirit. This was only the second time he had undertaken to attend a gathering at Gandeshwar. He had shocked

## 4 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Lala Ram Prasad, "the energetic secretary" of the municipality, by saying that anything that needed to be said publicly might be said in a dozen words. His students did not sympathise with this trait in their Principal. Some of them he used to herd off to cricket and football in the evenings, but the majority were more voluble than their elders. The more active-minded, if they did anything at all, were happiest at a meeting, reading or listening to addresses, votes of confidence, memorials, resolutions—oceans of verbiage leading nowhither.

So while Lala Ram Prasad was haranguing the citizens in the Town Hall, saying that every right-minded and self-respecting individual viewed with horror and detestation the revolting and heinous crime of some bloodthirsty and abandoned anarchist, Banarsi Das would be declaiming at the college that it behoved each and every young man to shun the ways of wickedness and violence as they would the deadly adder and the hissing serpent.

The pony made an effort to turn down a side lane to the polo ground, but Skene held him citywards with grim humour, thinking of the last meeting he had attended three years before in a Gothic façade of red bricks with the ends of the girders protruding from the wall. He remembered the crowded hall, his ineffable weariness and the smell of tightly-packed

humanity with the thermometer at 104° in the shade. Every face set in a mould of serious complacency that made it seem the wildest dream in the world that any one of them could ever possibly connive at an end. They spoke for hours, and all the while he knew, and every one else knew, that nothing would be done to promote the worthy end in view beyond the expression of its desirability in the same sequence of platitudes. Still it was an opportunity for the ingenious application of strange idiom.

Skene hardened himself with the thought that it was his business to hear Narasimha Swami. No doubt it would be physically exhausting, but most of his students would be there, and he was interested to see the little superman who had gained such an extraordinary influence over the youth of India and to discover if possible where his magnetism lay. The Swami was going to give a religious address to the young men in Gandeshwar, and all the Europeans in the station had been invited. The man was known to be a dangerous agitator, but he was too clever to be run down. He was identified with the spiritual side of the revolutionary movement in the same way as Tilak was with the political. His influence in the north of India rivalled that of Arabindo Ghose in Bengal, and it was the more dangerous as the material he had to work upon was hardier and more robust.

## 6 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

When Skene arrived the Swami had begun his address. As he had expected, there was only one other European present, a missionary; but the hall was crammed with natives, among whom he recognised many of his students and professors. Nearly all the Hindus of the college were there and a sprinkling of Sikhs. It took him some seconds to realise that the meeting was different from anything he had imagined. He was in an atmosphere of intense excitement. He saw a thin, fragile little man standing alone on a platform, a palpable ascetic. And out of this weak frame issued a volume of sound which rang true with a genuine message. The Swami was informed with a spirit which seemed to shake him like a gust of wind. Sometimes, when he paused and threw out his arms and held them motionless after some burst of eloquence, you could see his thin, salmon-coloured shift vibrate with inward emotion like a dragon-fly's wing. The young men were spellbound by it. Not a word would he utter until the quivering was still. The outstretched hand thrust the question home at them as the thunder in which it had been delivered died away. He seemed to be waiting for one of them to answer him, but no answer was possible.

At last his hands dropped to his sides in the hush, and a sad, mirthless smile stole into his eyes, more eloquent than any declamation.

Every young man in the hall knew that he had been weighed and found wanting, as if the Swami had cried aloud, "Of course I know it all—I have always known it. And yet . . ."

Then, before the faint, irresistible appeal was raised again that was to swell into an organ note, every young man knew that he was forgiven, that there was hope, individually and for all.

Theatrical! Skene felt it was too harsh a word. This little husk of humanity, with his shrunken limbs and his bright eyes sunk deep in their sockets, was the most spiritual-looking man he had seen. Yet he felt somehow that the speech was disingenuous. There had not been a word about politics. The few allusions to Government, the British and the Christians had been moderate and natural. Yet there was more in it all than met the ear. He felt that a message had been conveyed to the young men that had passed over his head, and that they had responded.

After that vibrating silence the address became purely scriptural. The high, passionate ring died out of it, and for twenty minutes the Swami spoke in a hushed whisper, which penetrated every corner, as if he had just come through a hidden door through which he was going to lead them. But first he must prepare them for the sacred mysteries that lay the other

## 8 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

side. In another moment he would hold back the curtain. The Samagists believed that they were in the presence of a man who had seen what he was speaking of. It was impossible that they should not, for the slow, deliberate accents were conveyed in just that pitch of voice raised above a whisper which compels the belief of every soul in the room. The pauses were impressive for the fulness behind, the dammed-up welling stream, to be distributed when all channels were prepared but now withheld. The restraint was as effective as the Swami's control of the spirit that had seemed about to possess his feeble frame in the earlier part of the speech. He was telling them to go back to the Vedas.

"Go back to the Vedas," he said; "they contain all wisdom. Modern youths smile at them. 'Wild fantasies,' you call them. Ah, do not believe this. I myself was a young man and a scoffer once like some of you. But I have come to understand that the sayings of the Hindu religion are not false. I realise more and more the signs and symbols by which it has spoken. It is my will to take you with me that way. To help you to see those lights, to listen to those voices. You will hear in them the voice of the initiated speaking to the ignorant in fables. You are proud of the knowledge you are carrying away from your schools and colleges—Physics, Chemistry, Electricity, Evolution.

That is well. Glean what you can from your new teachers. But remember that in their search for truth they are groping now through the accumulated wisdom of centuries towards a plane of knowledge which the ancient Vedantists took at a leap. How? By conquest of the flesh; by victory over self; by communion with the spirits; by the realisation of the Infinite."

Again the hushed voice, the vibrating pause, the tremulous shift, the bright eyes sunk in their sockets.

"Now I am going to prove to you that the wildest dreams of modern Science were known to the Rishis.

"Take first three simple truths—the date of the Creation, the origin of sex, the magnetism of the earth.

"How many years is it since the last Pralaya—the last obscuration of life on the planet? I do not mean the first beginnings of life which we read of in the Book of Genesis in the Christian Bible. Genesis speaks of four thousand years since the Spirit, that is GOD, informed chaos and created the earth. Turn to the Vedas, you will find a date that harmonises more with scientific investigation—nineteen million years; not since the first creation but since the last Pralaya. And here, too, modern Science with its carefully sifted data tells us of cataclysms, upheavals, submergences, corresponding with



## 10 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

our Vedic Manvantara and Pralaya, earth-periods of energy and rest.

“And what do the Vedas teach you of the origin of sex? Not the Christian conception that mankind was always sexual, male and female, as you read in the Bible, from the beginning. Science tells us that is not so. In all forms of life there is first the a-sexual, then the bi-sexual, then the sexual. The Rishis knew this, but how were the ignorant to understand? It had to be explained to them in the parables which some of you in your ignorance despise.

“Then again, what of the magnetism of the earth? You are told in the Vedas, when you sleep, to lie with your head and feet north and south. ‘Why not east and west?’ you say. ‘Is not this all of a piece with the other mummary? Superstitious charlatanism—or at the least mere forms and rules, a ritual to impress barbarians?’ Ah! do not think it, my dear young friends! There is no babble in the Vedas. Believe me, it is wrong to lie east and west. Those grand old men, your ancestors, who found God in Nature, knew this. The properly sensitised body cannot sleep so. Many of us Indians cannot now. But we have lost our finer physical faculties. Like our souls they have become deadened. We are no longer attuned to the Universe. The old Rishis needed no compass. They felt the North in their veins.

And when they stretched themselves out to sleep their blood pulsed freely to the heart, and every nerve and vein and cell played in harmony with the mysterious current that pervades the earth and links it with the stars. It is against nature to sleep athwart this current. Thus we pervert our organism, as we have perverted our souls. Both are vessels which God has filled with the Essence of life which we spill and squander every day we live.

"In Europe a few years back Science proclaimed with great blare of trumpets the Magnetism of the Earth, the Circulation of the Blood. Dear young men, we are a fallen people. Thousands of years ago your ancestors, whose word you despise, knew these secrets, the fringe of which you are now inheriting with an alien culture. They did not publish them in intellectual pride—pride, indeed, is a modern birth—but every simple rule of life which they inculcated upon the people was inspired by these laws—laws which you now call mysterious, though to the old sages they were the facts of life which came without seeking. Free of the dross, the deceits, the illusions of the world, they were attuned to the Infinite. They could read the book of Nature, the orderings of life. The flesh did not enchain them. They communed with spirits. They dwelt in the future and the past. The beginning and the end were revealed

## 12 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

to them, from the first dim consciousness that informed matter to the ranging soul of man losing itself in the Infinite. The first groupings of the atoms, the energies that controlled them, and the part each electron played in the cosmic process upon which their fleeting lives were reflected as in a dream. And they have enshrined these truths in their sacred, obscure books for you to read. Ah! Go back to the Vedas. You will find all wisdom there."

Skene watched his students. Siri Ram, Banarsi Das, Lachmi Chand, the trio whom he believed to be most affected by political unrest, were clearly in the toils. His eyes did not deceive him. Siri Ram was glowing with the spiritual pride of his race. But he was perplexed. What of the present? How were the Hindus to take the place they should inherit by their ancient wisdom? Where was their power and strength?

Skene listened in vain for a breath of political discontent, but there was no hint of it. Only a few words about indolence and indifference, the need to send out teachers, the loss to the religion through apathy and disunion. But at these obvious truisms there was a stir in the assembly, "a little noiseless noise among the leaves," and the lecture was ended.

## II

SKENE had been deeply interested in the Swami, but he breathed the air of the Club with relief. He had not spoken to an Englishman all day. As he drove into the gates the impish, uniformed little boys in red caps were taking down the tennis nets, and the few men who had been playing were putting on their sweaters or drifting off to the bridge room or library. He was warmed by the way they greeted him. Working among Orientals makes a man observant of his own people: he notices distinctive traits, which folk at home take as a matter of course, with the acute perception of a foreigner. Skene enjoyed the atmosphere of friendly, personal chaff in which he found himself. He liked the easy way the Briton has of putting away serious things and his horror of the profession of a code. It was a relief to be among people who never "inaugurated" or "promoted" or "ameliorated" anything, though they did more honest work in a day than a regiment of propagandists.

No one looking at the two men who joined him would have known that either of them had

## 14 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

a thought outside polo or bridge or golf, yet Hobbs commanded a regiment, and Innes was Commissioner of the District. Their work was part of their tissue, and tradition sat lightly on them. Merivale, the smooth-faced little civilian on the chair, would have disowned an "ideal" as hotly as the imputation of having shot a pigeon sitting, and Innes, who had just fought a famine, had been overheard by his secretary profanely "damning causes" while waiting to receive a deputation.

Skene, upon cross-examination, pleaded guilty to having attended a seditious meeting. His defence was curiosity. He deprecated the argument that he, *quâ* Principal of a college, was himself a sedition-monger and an instiller of radical and subversive ideas into the callow young.

Hobbs demolished Narasimha in a few forcible phrases: "A mischievous agitator. A canting, hypocritical humbug. His religion is all eye-wash. Besides, these educated college fellows are not the men the people want."

The others laughed. It was the voice of the old school whose rule was comfortably paternal. There was no sophistry in it. "Treat 'em well, but no damned nonsense." A soothing echo to the modern official who moves in intricacies and knots. It would not have occurred to any of them to discuss "legitimate aspirations" with

Hobbs, but Moon, a young Cambridge missionary, who was standing near, overheard him and politely remonstrated.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I was at the lecture. There was really not a word of sedition in it. Narasimha is absolutely *pucca*."

Hobbs stared at him.

"Do a lot of good if we strung a few of those fellows up. Save trouble in the end."

Merivale intervened humanely.

"They didn't invite Englishmen to give themselves away. That was all a blind, of course. What do you think was said afterwards?" He appealed to Dean. "I suppose you had a man there."

"The lecture was probably only ground-bait," the policeman said. "Did he say anything about the English?"

"Yes, but in praise only."

"Did he say anything about our unity?"

Moon had to admit that he did.

"Then you may be quite sure that it was sedition. That is an old trick. They harp on the absence of co-operation. No doubt Narasimha lauded the English in this respect, and said that they trusted one another and hung together in an emergency in a way the Indians cannot do. And he flattered us by telling the meeting to take a leaf out of our book. But what did he mean? You are fifty times stronger

## 16 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

than the British if you combine your forces. Combine them, then, and kick them out."

"I really think you are mistaken in Narasimha," Moon objected. "He has often been over to the Mission. My impression is that he is a deeply religious man, very sincere and single-minded, and he is doing a lot of good here."

"A good bit too single-minded. My dear fellow, I have his record in the office. The man has all the instincts of a wolf. He has been home and all that, taken a degree, sipped tea in Bayswater drawing-rooms, read papers to the Asiatic Society, lectured in America; but he is a Bengali Lingayat still, and always will be. They draw their religion from the Tantras. They are just as fanatical as Wahabis, and far more bloodthirsty. I know the breed."

"Talking about wolves," Hobbs interrupted, yawning, "have you seen that borzoi of Mrs. Lee's?"

"Don't ride him off," Merivale whispered. "I want to hear about this fellow. What is he doing among the Arya Samaj?"<sup>1</sup>

"You may well ask. That is what damns him more than anything. They have nothing on earth in common. They are at opposite poles. Cats and dogs. Nothing would induce him to hunt with that pack but common hunger."

"The blood of an Englishman."

<sup>1</sup> See note at conclusion of volume.

"Of course. The union is political. His mission is to introduce the Bengal system into the Punjab. You know Narasimha is not his real name. He adopted it for convenience. You can't pin the man down to any dogma. He'll take what suits him from anywhere."

Moon, remembering the Swami's "Back to the Vedas" cry, which is the rallying-point of the Aryas, began to feel uncomfortable. Hobbs and Dean were drawn off to the bridge room, and he gravitated towards Skene, hoping for sympathy there. But Skene would not expatiate on Swaraj.

"I don't like talking about the fitness or unfitness of Indians for self-government," he said. "It sounds too much like cant. The country is ours after all, and we won it as fairly as countries ever have been won. There is no question of handing it over. When the Indians are strong enough to govern it, they will be strong enough to take it, and they won't ask us. But I don't think it will be in our time."

"But you wouldn't retard them?"

"Of course not. Let them make themselves fit. I do not respect a man who is not a nationalist."

"Then you respect Narasimha Swami?"

"Certainly I respect him. He is doing what he thinks the straight thing—the term is relative—for his country, but it is our business to draw



## 18 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

his teeth. If we hesitate on account of some vague humanitarian principles we are not playing the game. But I'm tired of politics. Let's play bridge."

Moon did not play. He went off wrapped up in ethical difficulties, and Skene was glad to be left alone. He lay back in a long chair in the verandah, ordered a drink, and watched his own kind. It amused him to compare the people he worked with and the people he played with. The people he worked with had no interests. Their minds were fallow when they were hitched off the particular routine that earned them a living. It soothed him and made him feel at home to spend the evening with his countrymen, though their preoccupations were little more logical, or creditable, if you analysed them, than the Indian's apathy. Nevertheless the plunge from one to the other was refreshing.

The door of the ladies' and men's bridge room opened into the verandah where he was sitting, and his chair commanded a view of two tables at close quarters. At one a woman with a stern, careworn face under a picture hat garlanded with sweet-peas reviewed her cards with evident perplexity. Her partner, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, was making furtive dabs at a plate of chipped potatoes which she shared with a very solid, gruff-voiced lady with three chins. The fourth, a heavy, sub-bovine girl with sloe eyes, enjoyed

a plate to herself owing to Dummy's preoccupation, and was making headway with it. When she had cleared the *débris* she asked—

"Did any one declare?"

"I left it to Sweet-peas." Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's rich provincial brogue decorated the commonplace. Spurred by her sally the sad, equine-faced lady looked up solemnly and made it spades.

The other table was more aristocratic, but there was less *bonhomie*. Skene heard the acid voice of the chaplain's wife, a palpable loser—

"I thought you were weak and weak."

"So I am."

"Then why discard a spade?"

"Wasn't it a club? I think it was."

"And didn't you see my call?"

The demure, frightened little mouse-like lady did not know what a call was, but she dared not admit it. In the meanwhile she had forgotten to ask if she might play. After a long pause the accusing silence of her partner awakened her to the new dilemma.

"Oh yes, please. I am sorry. I mean, may I play?" and she began to lay her cards on the table.

"You are not Dummy."

"Oh no, of course not, how stupid!"

The chaplain's wife, with an expression of infinite forbearance, asked the dealer if she

## 20 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

claimed that the cards were exposed. She did not, and Dummy laid her hand upon the table. Three aces and a suit of six, and they only wanted the odd. The little person was very near tears, feeling that the acerbity of the chaplain's wife implicated her somehow unfairly in the failure. Skene was sure that the padre's lady was mentally cancelling an order for a ham, or a new hat for one of the children. Even at those low points it meant that the padre would have to keep the lampshade in the dining-room, which was already in rags, another month. He was sorry for them both.

An uproar at the other table drew his attention to the more plebeian group. Sweet-peas had revoked. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy was hurling recriminations on her head. "You ought to look at your cards before you lay them on the table," she said, and with much unnecessary movement and calculated equilibrium of the back of her head she gathered up her skirts and swept out of the room.

The gruff lady with the three chins asked the sub-bovine girl to put the score in the box on the plea that she would not have time to change. As she waddled out of the room the Commissioner's wife, Dummy with the three aces, turned to the chaplain's wife and said—

"I didn't know people like that dressed for dinner."

"Did you see the good lady's hat?"

"Yes, and she played tennis in it."

There was a rush and a roar in the passage, and the folding door swung open to emit half-a-dozen juvenile middle-aged men. "Been weighing O'Shaughnessy," one of them shouted to Skene as he passed. "Eighteen stone without the brogue."

Skene smiled to think that two hundred thousand of these folk ruled three hundred million of the others by virtue of the vitality that was in them.

Narasimha Swami was saying much the same thing to his young men.

After the lecture a few earnest and religious youths were presented. Siri Ram was called up by his teacher. The Guru spoke to him apart.

"Are you a patriot?" he asked. "Do you love your country?"

Siri Ram testified his love.

"Are you prepared for sacrifice?"

Siri Ram was prepared for sacrifice.

"The youth of a nation are blessed, for in them lie its power and salvation. Youth is selfless; it does not calculate peril. In youth godliness first manifests itself; the perfection of manliness is attained. Who but young men have ever purified religion with their blood, baring their breasts to the sword of the

## 22 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

oppressor? In every country oppressed and trodden underfoot by an alien government it is the community of young men who have conquered resistance and oppression, created a new nation, and reanimated the spirit of their fathers and their pride of race."

The Swami fixed Siri Ram with a compassionate appraising eye. The boy hung his head.

"Is not the army of our young men the NRSINHA, the VAHARA, the KALKI incarnation of Vishnu, which is to rid India of the Mlecchas? Do you wish to be enrolled in that army? Are you aware that independence is at hand?"

Siri Ram wished to serve in the ranks, to be part of the coming incarnation of the god Vishnu. Thus the humblest is beatified.

"The sword which is unsheathed for the protection of right in the name of religion is invincible, but the weapon in the hands of a persecutor has no power at all. For who can destroy the seed of liberty when it has germinated in the blood of a patriot? To-day our religion is still of martyrdom; to-morrow it will be of victory. Consider, what are the numbers of our oppressors?"

"Less than two million."

"What are the numbers of our countrymen?"

"Three hundred million."

"Oh, glorious is the heritage of our young men! The country is yours. If a thousand of

you here and there cherish the desire of independence in your hearts, then in a single day you can bring English rule to an end. But there is the price. Are you strong enough to pay it?"

The Swami did not wait for Siri Ram's assurances. He turned to a heap of books by his side and chose six unbound pamphlets in Urdu, and bade the boy take them and consider and weigh them before he did anything in haste. If in a month's time he felt the true fire which could not be extinguished he must offer himself again, and a task would be allotted him proportionate to his love and zeal. He should pray to be worthy of the highest crown. In the meantime he must take his companions aside and instil into them true religious and political ideas. But he must work underground. There must be no open movement in the College. Students must be compliant and appear to imbibe the opinions of Government. Premature divulgence would injure the cause. There must be no general action till the flame had spread. For a little time it must burn secretly in hidden places until the conflagration became so great that it would consume all that was opposed to it.

"The saints of to-day are the guardians of the flame of liberty. Sacrifice yourself at that shrine. Without bloodshed the worship of the goddess cannot be accomplished."

## 24 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Siri Ram felt that these words, delivered by the Swami with such slow, solemn earnestness, were the formula of initiation. He departed swollen with pride. He slept ill that night in the boarding-house. His mind was distracted as he lay awake among his companions who were still slaves—slaves of the English, slaves of their families, slaves of their own pleasures. One of them had a portrait of the King from an illustrated paper pinned over his bed. Siri Ram got up and tore it from the wall. He felt himself steeped in anarchy. Remembering with what sacrifice the goddess of Independence must be worshipped, he pricked his hand with a nib and licked the blood. He did not know how to use a gun or a sword, yet he was dedicated.

When he fell asleep he was thinking of Kamala Kanta in the Shop of Fame—where nothing could be seen for the deep darkness. Kamala was calling to the vendor, but no voice could be heard; only the infinite roar of thunder, falling rocks and cannon striking terror into the hearts of all. In the faint light outside over the door he could read, "The Shop of Fame. For Sale, Eternal Glory. Price, Life."

### III

SIRI RAM was seven when his father's bullock cart and a neighbour's borrowed for the occasion took him and his parents to Gandeshwar. He had never, save once when he was a sleeping infant, been far from Mograon before that memorable journey; he had not even thought of exploring the cart track which connected it with the trunk road. He travelled in the hind cart with his mother under the red campanula-shaped purdah, and she held him at the parting of the curtains, whence he looked out stolidly on the world for the first time. The groaning of the unholed wheels and the rattling of the brass pots as the cart jolted in and out of the permanent rut were his lullaby for three days. Then he passed through a city gate where men were counting money and under the bastions of a fort. The carts traversed a network of narrow streets full of strange shops and temples, and serais with intricately-carved doors and fretted windows, and houses with flaming pictures daubed on the walls, of Rajahs, and tigers, and peacocks, and gods without animation or perspective.

An English boy at such a time would have been



## 26 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

restless, darting from one side of the cart to the other, or looking over his shoulder through the opposite chink afraid of missing something better on the other side of the road; but Siri Ram surveyed the traffic, dreamily content with what was thrown in front of his eye. He saw a camel-sowar with his bright belt and rifle, riding the largest and cleanest camel he had even seen, with bells jingling on its knees and chest, and a bridle studded with cowrie shells and favours. He passed through the metal bazaar, a whole street of shops, where spectacled old men sat in dark recesses hammering bowls and cauldrons of copper and brass. He saw a young blood on horseback with a falcon on his wrist; and in the square in front of the fort by the big cannon the cart had to pull up to let a Maharajah's body-guard sweep by, forty straight square-set men in green who passed on their cream-white chargers like one wave. In the street by Siva's temple Siri Ram saw more fakirs and holy men than he had seen in his life, some in ashen nakedness, and some in salmon-coloured shifts with bowls and staves and leopards' skins and matted hair. A shock-headed madman lurched along the street beside the cart, slowly revolving one arm and crying out with every revolution that he was the father of a devil. Beggars with lopped limbs and features all awry, with no eyes or one, and that often webbed or wounded, with

twisted lips or mouth like a fleshy ring into which the snout has fallen, squatted under the walls crying aloud for alms and stretching out their bowls with their hands in supplication. Then, strangest of all, a carriage drawn by two grey horses passed in front of them down a side street, and Siri Ram had a momentary vision of the white-and-pink face of a brazenly unabashed woman who leant back on her cushions laughing in the eye of all the world, the man by her side. She wore a black hat with a white plume in it, and the shape reminded Siri Ram of the large, shallow vessel in which his sister pounded turmeric. Yet it was worn on the head. Before the carriage had passed, his mother drew the purdah to with a modest, frightened movement and murmured "English." It was Siri Ram's first sight of them.

The next morning Siri Ram was taken to the great towered building which played so important a part in his life. The college was a landmark for miles. It so dominated the country that it left an impression even on the dull brain of his father, Mool Chand, who on an earlier journey had been led to remark that if he sent his son to school anywhere it should be at Gandeshwar under Iskeen Sahib. Thus it happened that Skene was the first Englishman whom the boy saw at close quarters.

The white world did not trouble him much in

## 28 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

those early days. His first encounter with the dominant race was one morning when his class was invaded by a sudden, strange, violent man. Siri Ram did not know it, but the lesson he was attending was designed to explain the physical features of the earth. The teacher had drawn a series of cones on the blackboard like the teeth of a saw, and he was leading the class in a kind of chanted litany.

"What are these? "

"Mountains."

"What are mountains? "

"Mountains are steep."

"What are plains? "

"Plains are low."

"What are these? "

"Mountains."

Siri Ram saw the teacher's back stiffen as he raised his voice to catch the sure response.

"What are these? "

"Mountains."

"Stand! "

The boys leapt up. Action in the hall was paralysed. The hot, red man filled the space between the two classes. He was speaking to Siri Ram's teacher, evidently displeased. Then he swung round to the class.

"Has any boy here ever seen a mountain? " he asked.

"Has any boy seen a mountain? " the teacher

repeated. "Those who have seen mountains hold up their hands. . . . Yes, it is very bad, no doubt, after all. Every boy ought to have seen a mountain. Teaching must be accompanied by observation, of course. Eye must work with brain. Other methods are wrong. In future. . . ."

But these scraps of training-school reminiscence did not pacify the sudden violent man. He stood there staring stonily at the class, very angry, it seemed, because no one had ever seen a mountain. Stillness and silence prevailed. At last Siri Ram shuffled forward. There was something in the boy that responded to an appeal. He held out his hand.

"That is right. You have seen a mountain. Tell us about it. Where was it?"

"Mountains are steep," he shrilled.

"The Principal Sahib asks you: Have you seen——?"

But the Principal Sahib waved him aside. Wrath was clearly dissolved. He had been seen to smile. At the same time a volcanic sound issued from his inside which puzzled everybody.

"Bring the class after you," he said. "I will show you all the mountains."

When the dreadful man's back was turned the urchins laughed and chattered as they followed him down the corridors and up a flight

## 80 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

of stone steps to the roof. It was a funny thing this being taken on the roof by the Principal Sahib instead of sitting in the class.

"There are the mountains," he said.

Siri Ram looked over the parapet and saw dark purple masses on the far north-eastern horizon lifted out of the clouds, palpable earth, with a white rim of snow on them. Rain had fallen in the night, and the wind blew keenly from the hills.

Had none of them ever seen it before? They did not know. Some said they had.

The Principal told them about the snow and how the rivers were formed in the mountains and cut their channels out into the plains, and then on into the sea where the water was salt and no one could drink it. Then he announced a game. "Some of us will stand on the roof," he said, "which is the mountain, and we will make a river; and some of us will stand by the waterpipe underneath, which is the plain, and see what the river does when it comes down; but first we will make a bed of sand for it to flow through." When the parties were divided Siri Ram saw him go up to a huge water-butt and overturn it unaided. They were not quick enough to escape the deluge as they ran to the parapet to see what would happen.

They did not return to their classes that day, for the red man, dreadful no more, declared in a loud voice that there should be cricket.

"Not play cricket? They must play cricket, they must play to-day—now."

"The Principal Sahib has ordered a contest of cricket. The competition will be the First and Second Primary on the one side and the Third Primary on the other. He has also said with honourable condescension that he will present a bat to the boy who makes the greatest number of runs."

Few of them were big enough or strong enough to hit the ball so far as to make a real run. But there were overthrows. Siri Ram stood in his fixed place in a kind of dream and made ineffectual dives at the ball when it came his way. It was his first initiation into the barbarous rites of his oppressors. The Principal himself umpired. His thick, sunburnt neck, broad shoulders and bulging calves, which seemed to stretch out his wide trousers, made him appear the impersonation of force. Siri Ram stared at him. He did not brood or think in those days, but this strange, unexplained phenomenon waylaid his rambling attention as often as his eye fell on the space it filled so amply. It was a memorable visitation, and there were many such. Everything was all mixed-up and topsy-turvy when the Englishman impinged on their lives. No one knew what would happen next.

Siri Ram remembered one dreadful morning

## 32 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

in the Fourth Primary. It was three years after this encounter. Nihal Singh had thrown a pellet of modelling clay across the classroom and it had hit Abdul Hamid in the eye and set him howling. The teacher was demanding that the boys in the quarter whence the missile issued should betray the culprit, and they had all left their benches and were dancing round him when the Principal entered upon the pandemonium like a hawk on a parliament of sparrows. The Head-master was called in with his cane. First the noisy were chastised. Then those who bore false witness, and all palpable fabricators of untruth. Two canes were broken upon these before the inquisition passed into an inspection of exercises. Siri Ram was called up, and watered his desk with tears when he discovered that he, too, was to receive six stinging cuts for saying that he had left his torn copy-book in an almirah and a rat had eaten it. It was the first time he had suffered intentional physical hurt, and he burned with resentment. The pellet thrower had not been dealt such harsh measure. It was a full hour before the boys discovered that the statement of unembellished fact paid better than the aptest embroidery. So after a time a kind of starveling truth emerged born of loss and pain. There was a feeling that the Principal had cheated, that he was angry at his failure to detect the mischief-maker at the

start and was avenging himself promiscuously. For how should it enter their heads that deceit and evasion assimilated with their mother's milk and inculcated indirectly every day by the teachers themselves meant anything that was not creditable. It was etiquette among the school-masters to talk a great deal about truth and lies as if they did not admire the cleverness of the deceit they practised at home; but every one knew that the importance of the verbal distinction was only make-believe on the teachers' part to help them to find out things. So the injustice of the chastisement rankled the more.

Apart from these invasions of the Principal, five years in the primary department passed uneventfully enough. Siri Ram was taught natural history through the medium of object lessons. He learnt to sew patterns of animals on cardboard with coloured threads, to model fruit in clay, and to draw goats and hares with stripes and collars. His decorative instinct survived the matter-of-fact accuracy of the kindergarten. In the four and fifth primary he learnt a little English. In the first middle he was taught composition. He sent a copy of one of his first exercises to his father, and the village writer translated it.

MY DEAR POPPA,

"I much glade seeing Gandeshwar College.  
I cannot write because it each part made with a



## 84 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

very beauty, two minarets on it both wings and its entrance has its name and date in which it estobelished upon its forehead. When I have seen the College I went in boarding-house there were all studdents very gentlemen and good they received me with a so love that I was their friend. All studdents here are civilised. When at last I leave it but my mind not say me that I leave it, please keep in this schole. I saw many things good because I had never see any things like these in our school teachers are very regular and punctual and they wish that our schole do more progress also they are all B.A. or F.A. trained nowadays I have good head master.

“Your lovely son,

“SIRI RAM.”

It was in the First Middle that Siri Ram ventured on his earliest propaganda. A Cow Agitator had moved the first stirrings of a cause in him. He bought a sheet of foolscap in the bazaar for the twelfth of a penny, and he cut it into small slips, on which he inscribed this warning—

“The sky says

that sav the cows unless you should die  
plese save the cows.”

These he posted in yellow envelopes, unstamped

and curiously addressed, to servants of the Crown.

As Siri Ram progressed in the collegiate school, English became almost a hobby with him. Copy-book headings and tags from his moral reader were translated into his essays and his daily speech. He became attached to particular words and idioms. There is safety in the made phrase. One cannot go far wrong when one is talking of "shuffling off one's mortal coil," or of being "brought to books," or "being made to eat the humble pie." So Siri Ram and his companions made free with the language of the hated barbarian. No one ever died at Gandeshwar; they "shuffled off their mortal coil amidst the unsuppressed wails of their family members and all their nears and dears." And no one ever improved; they "made up the deficiency." That was a phrase which permeated to the College and disturbed the equanimity of Skene. It was supposed to still all manner of reproach; to make idleness and ignorance of no account, and to turn defeat into victory. When Puran Singh fell a lap behind in the half-mile race at the College sports, Ram Sarup would pant after him on the other side of the ropes, crying out to him to "make up the deficiency."

In this way Siri Ram got a grip of the language, which was the one asset which had

## 86 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

stuck to him in the ten years' course from the infants' class to the entrance, whence he passed into the College. His mind had broadened very little during all these years. His moral code was drawn from certain vague formulas which had as little to do with his daily life as the culture which he was supposed to assimilate from his text-books in the college. And no coercing had seduced him into cricket or football or any of the games which might have brought him into genial relationship with the healthier-minded of his companions.

## IV

By the time Siri Ram had read two years in the College he had become a typical product of the age. His father was an orthodox Gat Hindu, or, as his class-mate, Banarsi Das, would have said, "an ignorant steeped in the Cimmerian darkness." His associates were members of the Arya Samaj, whose religious ideals might have helped him had they not been perverted into gall by his teachers for temporal ends. Religion in his circle had come to mean something approaching a deification of the early Hindus, and an assumption that the same stuff was latent in the modern youth of the country, and only needed a spark to kindle it into the divine fire. Against the sacred names of Rama and Arjun and Bhima were inscribed the names of such modern martyrs as Tilak, and Kanhya Lal and Kudiram Bose who murdered the English ladies at Mozaffarpur. History was going to repeat itself. The English were the Asuras again, who ravaged the Motherland, which was now in the birth pangs of a new breed of dragon slayers who were to rid her of the evil. So the religious man was the man who most execrated

## 38 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

the English, who most forswore English rule, and English piece-goods and English everything except ideas and idioms and the itinerant Labour Member and his political catchwords.

Skene felt that the patriotism underlying all this might have been good if there had been any clean courageous note in it; but the cant and conscious misinterpretation of facts sickened him. Still there was pathos enough in some of its manifestations. A Hindu strong man brought his circus to Gandeshwar, and he was apotheosised. He rode an elephant in the streets, preceded by bands and lictors. Rajahs summoned him and sent him gifts. Ladies threw strings of pearls to him from behind the purdah in the circus. The coolies in the bazaar whispered that he was another incarnation of Vishnu. And that, allowing for the difference of Aryan enlightenment, was very much what the students believed. They garlanded him and addressed him, and asked him to speak to them; and he raised his hoarse voice in their midst, swaying like an elephant in the pangs of articulation. They looked on the man as a revival, as a witness of their ancient strength, and an earnest of deliverance. And they lifted weights, wielded clubs, broke stones on their chests, and stood on one another's abdomens for weeks after he had gone.

Skene was the only Englishman whom Siri Ram had spoken to, and somehow his general

abhorrence of the race was mitigated in the individual. It was true that the Principal was a flesh-eater, and his belly was a tomb, and he had other disgusting habits inseparable from a race given to "bloodthirst and matter-worship." But he had a way with him. He gave himself no airs; he had nothing of what Banarsi Das used to call "the false pride and unreal haughtiness of the Englishman." Most of the students liked him. He always appeared genuinely pleased to meet them outside the College, when he would stop and talk to them and ask them questions. He knew them all personally by name, and he remembered things they had said and done. He poked fun at them good-naturedly. His anger was sudden and unreasonable, but the storm passed quickly, and his smile was embracing. His lectures partook of the nature of a conversation, and he was always ready to answer any question on earth, relevant or irrelevant, for he felt that it was something to the good if a student took an interest in anything. He liked them unaffectedly. And there was much to like in their gentleness and natural dignity and patience and tact, and in their responsiveness to any kindness. He felt drawn to the cricket and football team. He could talk to them on common ground, and he coached them in both games and kept alive their flickering keenness. A mutual cause made them allies; he could count on their loyalty.

## 40 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

They had dash and spirit when their blood was up and things were going well, but they had no backbone. At the slightest reverse they went to pieces and became limp and apathetic, and they had to be inflated again like their own footballs. It was uphill work.

In the lecture room common ground was harder to seek; for their English text-books meant unthinking drudgery to the bulk of the students and offence to the intelligent few, among whom was the morose group typified by Siri Ram. Nothing but direct moral teaching could appeal to their sombre reason. The modern books they read must have been incomprehensible even if they could have had enough English to appreciate the subtleties of meaning. They read wantonness into the badinage of Lamb. Thackeray sinned by condoning too much. Shelley and Keats were frank sensualists. Even Stevenson in his canoe shocked them, for ever waving his handkerchief at unknown maidens on the bank. Nor could fiction, romantic or realistic, have any point for them, as it offered a criticism of an existence as remote from their own as cobwebs in the moon. The mischief of it was, as critics of education were always pointing out, that the books bore no conceivable relation with the students' own lives. The Universities were accused of grafting an alien culture, substituting foreign for indigenous ideas. "Not at all," was

Skene's caustic comment. "We supplant nothing. We fill a vacuum. For what culture or ideas would the like of Siri Ram gather from his own people?"

There is a popular fallacy that the Indian is imaginative. Nothing is farther from the truth. In spite of his habit of inaccuracy he is the most literal prosaic soul alive. Logic, philosophy, ethics he can understand, even humour when it touches his experience; but there is no film in his mind that is responsive to poetic fancy. Imagination means much the same to him as multiplication. It is a kind of magnifying glass through which he sees a swollen universe. The imaginative man is the man who thinks in crores and hecatombs and holocausts, in Kalpas of time and vast compartments of space. The light play of fancy does not touch him. Yet Siri Ram and Banarsi Das were made to wrestle with Shelley and Keats in a book of selections prescribed—or *proscribed*, as Skene would have said—for the first arts. Skene protested, but the Syndicate insisted upon "culture." So the spirit of Adonais was tortured and expired in his presence every day, and he was a paid accessory.

On the morning of the day when the Swami lectured to them upon the eternal truths hidden in the Vedas, Siri Ram and Banarsi Das had been construing the "Ode to the Nightingale." Siri Ram read out each stanza nasally, and at



## 42 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

the end Banarsi Das “consulted” the notes. Then he interpreted

“O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blissful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim  
And purple stained mouth ;  
That I might drink and leave the world unseen  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.”

The comments in the notes did not help them to the spirit of the piece. Still the central idea was clear. The poet wished to forget the world and to be with the nightingale in the forest. The means to this end were definitely expressed. Firstly, a long draught of wine; secondly, oblivion. Banarsi Das interpreted.

“The poet desired that he might drink the warm wine of South in a peg full of true fountain of Moses. He said that after intoxicating myself with above-mentioned wine I shall totally forget everything and be with you in the jungle.”

It was a fairly creditable effort for an F.A. student. The only bad blunder lay in the interpretation of “the blissful Hippocrene,” and that was due to a misprint in a locally annotated edition.

In the lecture room afterwards Skene discovered that the distinction between sensuousness and sensuality was too subtle for them, and his honest efforts to indicate a line of demarcation failed. The lover of the nightin-

gale was debauched, it seemed, and the only reason why he did not eat the bird after all, when he had pursued it into the forest and caught it, was that it was not good to eat.

“Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird,  
No hungry generations tread thee down.”

“Nightingale is not the game-bird for table,”  
Banarsi Das translated. “Therefore the hungry sportsmen spare to tread on it.”

Skene did not even smile. His sense of humour was long ago dried at the roots. He could still enjoy a parody of Owen Seaman, but this living among inverted ideals had parched up the true well of mirth. He had to live six months away from the College, he told himself, before he could replenish it. And when he found himself defining the particular kind of humour which he could no longer appreciate he shuddered at the bear's-hug of pedantry which loomed over him like a persistent nightmare, and he swore roundly to his dog for half-an-hour in the language of an Elizabethan bargee.

His students had unearthed a Hindu annotator who had analysed the ingredients of English humour, and who pointed out all the passages in the text-books which came or seemed to come under this head, so that they could tabulate them to a nicety. Skene came upon the scent of the mischief when he was reading Adonais with them. He had set the clearest-tongued to read the stanza beginning—

## 44 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"He hath outsoared the shadow of our night.  
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
And that unrest which men miscall delight  
Can touch him not and torture not again."

when Banarsi Das rose darkling from his seat and said—

"Sir, are not these lines humorous?"

"Good God," Skene began, but the youth caught him on the recoil.

"The humour lies in incongruity. Poet speaks of 'that unrest which men miscaall dee-light.'"

But it did not need Banarsi Das' discovery of a humorist in Shelley to show Skene how little their text-books brought his students into touch with his world.

His struggle with Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" was Siri Ram's last adventure in the fields of English literature. When he awoke the morning after the lecture he picked up his text-book from force of habit and found himself reading a poem about a little girl and a sparrow's nest.

"She looked at it as if she feared it,  
Still wishing, dreading to be near it."

He threw the book aside. The piece was so simple he did not give it another thought. If any one had asked him the meaning of the lines, he would have said that the European sparrow is a ferocious bird, and that Emmeline was afraid to provoke it by going too near its

nest. And he might have added, if there were any consequence in his broodings, some general reflections about European truculence in men and sparrows. There was plenty of material for it in the heap of pamphlets by his side which the Swami had given him. Siri Ram squatted at the end of his bed with his blanket pulled about his ears poring over them. There was no crime which the English had not inflicted upon his Motherland, no indignity which his people had not suffered at their hands. The Imperial Government was pictured as the monkey in the fable dividing a morsel of cheese between two cats. In spite of the scales, a specious show of justice behind which the hungry maw went on grinding, she swallowed the whole chunk herself. Then the story of Naboth's vineyard was adapted with advantages. Here was literature which Siri Ram could understand. He could be vastly allegorical over the wrongs of his country. History was retold, not as it was taught in the schools, but with coloured patches and all the statistics of fraud which made it clear how the hated foreigners were seated in authority. Here was set down the bribe to a rupee which each traitor had been paid as the price of his country. This was soothing to pride. It was not a question of three hundred thousand against three hundred million after all. His country had been filched from him by trickery and cunning.

## 46 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

One book described how a demon had drained the country of its wealth, sucked away the trade and industries from the people, and swallowed up all the products of the earth. Then, dropping allegory, figures were cited from which Siri Ram learnt that crores of rupees realised out of the earnings of Indians in their homes were sent to Europe every year, and that millions of white devils luxuriated in idleness upon them. The Indians, driven like cattle at the plough, sweated in the eye of the sun, while these pestilent *feringhis* squandered the fruits of their toil.

Another pamphlet elaborated the colour grievance with some eloquence. It was written in America, and addressed to Indian soldiers. They were taunted with being cowards and dupes and slaves, submissive to insult, living like animals, content with their miserable lot. Every point inflamed an old sore. Their very blackness was counted an offence.

“Miserable Indian soldier! Your eyes have grown pale, subsisting on pulse and *chapattis*. The redness and glow of your faces has faded. The prisoners of other nations are treated better than you. They have at least one meal a day. But you? Through bad pig-like diet your faces have become clay-coloured and mud-like. This is the reason the English call you black. You and the English belong to the same Aryan race. If they had given you the same food as their

own soldiers you would not be so black and ugly. The negroes in this country are given the same pay as the American; but you, wretched and miserable, are paid for colour and not for service."

Siri Ram had fallen on a text-book for "Political Missionaries." It was the first of a series of guides to disaffection, and it taught how to seduce the Indian Army. A second described how native soldiers had won England an empire, and how they had been treated. A third appealed to the worst passions of the Sikhs, calling upon them to drive out the British, whom they accused of lack of faith after the Second Sikh War and in their agreement with Dhulip Singh. It was made to appear that it was due to the Sikh support alone that the British Government had weathered the Mutiny, and that if this prop were removed the fabric must collapse. As Siri Ram read, he saw himself a missionary among soldiers. With this fuel to command he would have more power in the lines at Multan and Umballa than the red-headed, Satan-like, beef-eating English Colonels. He was a brand already lighted. The grizzled, bearded faces of the Khalsa<sup>1</sup> already shone, fired by his eloquence. In a year or two it would not be safe for an Englishman to set his foot upon the sacred soil of Bharat Mata.

<sup>1</sup> Sikh community.

## 48 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Or if they were admitted it would be to pay a poll-tax and a landing fee of a hundred pounds like the Chinese in New Zealand, and to travel in reserved compartments on the railway—reserved, oh, how differently!—lest *they* should pollute, because the *alien* was offensive and the carnivorous effluvium of him repulsive to sensitive noses.

But the next pamphlet took Siri Ram into a village, and he saw himself a pale-eyed Sadhu sitting by a well. The tillers of the soil, lean, vacuous, intense, encompassed him. The husbandmen gaped to hear how they had been deceived, as he discovered to them the Satanic craft of the English in every affliction of their lives. They learnt how the *feringhis* were afraid that the Indians were becoming too many, and how grain was being taken out of the country that there might be famine, and wells were being poisoned to spread the plague, and trains were being wrecked to reduce the numbers of the people. Already they were killing off the cows in the big cities. Soon children would cry out in vain for milk and curds, and a poor man would not find a bullock for his plough.

There was a special series with agonising illustrations devoted to the slaughter of the cow. Milton could not have described the savage truculence of the butcher. Blake could not

have captured the helpless innocence of the calf as its mother's scarlet blood spurted over its white coat, and it lifted a gentle protestant eye as the knife was raised again.

Siri Ram saw himself playing many parts in the village and the camp, and the mills and the bazaar; but in every environment he was reminded that missionary work was but a preparation. Sacrifice was needed, and the last sacrifice of all. It always came to that in the end. If one in five hundred gave up his life the poisonous stock would be extirpated; the country would be freed. The cost was small at any reckoning. Every year hundreds of thousands were taken away by plague and fever and famine and cholera in the Punjab alone. Tomorrow Siri Ram and his companions might be summoned by the small-pox goddess. Would it not be better to die like heroes to-day? But who would accompany him? Siri Ram looked round the dormitory and saw little hope there. None certainly in Ram Sarup, the bunniah's son. He was not inflammable. Ghi and molasses clogged his aspirations, if ever he had any. Nor in Hashmat Ali; Muhammadans were not to be trusted with these secret matters. There was even less hope in Puran Singh. He was captain of the cricket, an ally, if anything, of the Satan-like Mlecchas. He would rather defeat Government College by one



## 50 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

wicket than drive all the English into the sea. As Siri Ram's eyes searched his bed he saw the torn edge of the King's portrait protruding underneath, and he remembered how he had stripped the almanac from the wall in his passion the night before. And there was the bloodstain on his shirt where he had pricked his arm with a nib. He felt a little frightened at his work and the collision it must involve.

Siri Ram slept in his clothes. In the chill of the morning he had drawn his blanket and his stained quilt over his ears, and he sat motionless, brooding, like a bird on the edge of a tank, insensible to the thick reek of his companions' breath in the air-proof room and the perfume of stale hookah smoke and sweat-sodden clothes. The windows and doors were closed hermetically, as the boy's mind to true values. Pride and apprehension coursed dully through him, merged in a vague stream. He saw the handcuffs, and the Court with its splendid publicity, and the gallows; and he saw the crown beyond—his portrait handed round among the faithful, or in the zenana painted upon mirrors, or stamped upon home-spun shirts and pantaloons, an exhibit to incite children, and possibly, when the English were gone, a statue in the square. He fumbled in his locker and produced a small blurred hand-glass and gazed at himself with

solemn admiration. His companions awoke and saw him regarding his sullen swart features in dumb ecstasy, but it provoked no remark or surprise in that matter-of-fact crew. An Englishman observing him at the moment would have divined an intense wobbly soul given to moods and sullenness and passion; and there might have come the suggestion of a marish pool with the scum disturbed in the centre in such a way that there could be no re-settling of the viscous stuff or clearing of it away to the edges. But Siri Ram was enamoured of the image. He felt that his eye "pried through the portage of his head." He thought of Swami Dyanand, and believed that his lips had caught the straightened-bow curve of the evangelist, though his eyes had not the calm. He was engrossed in the lines of the chin and thinking of the obscure inky reproductions of them on a thousand cheap pill-boxes and parcels from druggists' stores, when he was rudely disturbed by Puran Singh standing over him.

"Why you have torn my picture?"

"It fell."

Siri Ram was taken unawares; the hero was dormant in him. Siri Ram was frail and weak; Puran Singh was tall and strong, five foot ten to the cord which bound his plaited hair. He was taller and stronger than many of the

## 52 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

English Siri Ram had seen. It was for the like of him to save the country. But he was a slave. He laughed and played with the *feringhis* and joined in their games, and because the Principal cared for him like one of his ponies, the foolish young man was pliant and obedient like a beast trained to the shaft or yoke. Some thought of this kind was struggling for utterance in Siri Ram when he blurted out in reply to thick recriminations—

“You are horse. You are bullock.”

“You are monkey. You will be beaten.”

“You are slave to worship white King.”

“You are ill-begotten bastard. Why you tear my picture? I will tear your book.”

Puran Singh snatched a copy of the Vedic magazine from Siri Ram's table and tore it in halves. Siri Ram, blind with indignation, seized an Indian club and raised it with a parody of menace; but Puran Singh wrested it from him and threw him back upon the bed. He struck his head against the table edge as he fell, breaking the skin at the back of his ear. He picked himself up with no little dignity and made a martyr's exit, aglow with this witness-bearing. It was a step.

He found Banarsi Das in his cubicle. Lachmi Chand had already joined him. His grievance, distorted already, precipitated the campaign.

## **PART II**

### **THE VILLAGE**

**"Or, where old-eyed oxen chew  
Speculation with the cud,  
Read their pool of vision through  
Back to hours when mind was mud."**

**GEORGE MEREDITH**



## I

SKENE'S tennis four was broken up again. The horoscope of Sirı Ram was dark reading; sinister influences threatened him on two sides. Merivale had marching orders at twelve hours' notice to the Harpur district where Magraon, our hero's village, lay. Plague was suspected at Mehlguhla near by, and it was said that the villagers were dying off like rats. Chauncey in the I.M.S. was detailed from Jullundur to work with him, and they met at a small wayside station, whence they rode out to Mehlguhla, fifteen hours on camels over ruts and sand.

They found a suppressed panic. The villagers were gathered in a conclave by the well outside the wall, and greeted the Englishmen suspiciously. It was a huddled, sinister crowd, darkly secretive, and fearing the meddling Sahib-log more than the plague itself. They denied all pestilence and fever.

"What are the flames at the ghat?" Merivale asked, alighting from his camel. "I am told the pyres are burning night and day."

"Death walks among us at all times," the

## 56 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

headman said, and he unfolded an embroidered tale of misadventure. An old woman had been bitten by a snake. A little girl had fallen down a well. A centenarian had crawled home from his pilgrimage to the Ganges at Hardwar, and his heart had ceased beating on the threshold of his home.

"We sprinkled the Gunga water he brought with him on his pyre," an old man with a goat's face added circumstantially.

"He died religiously," the headman added.

"Why are the Granthis reading the Book?" Merivale asked, and pointed to the village gate, whence a melancholy religious drone issued like an incantation. Merivale knew that it was a *path*, the reading of the scriptures from end to end, and that it was for no ordinary visitation. Two priests of the Khalsa sat side by side in an alcove of the arch. One intoned with the rapid dignity that priests alone attain. The other stared at the ground at his feet, looking like a physician who has been given a charge and waits the decree of the Almighty, confident that he has done his part.

"Why are they reading the Granth?" Merivale repeated.

"The Lumbadar of Razian has been near death, and he wishes to appease God. He has ordered the *path* in five villages."

Merivale called for the chowkidar to bring

the village register of births and deaths. After many mischances the chronicles were found. Merivale scanned them.

"Where is the snake-bite, and the drowned child, and the religiously dying pilgrim?"

The chowkidar mumbled a bewildered protest, resentful that his registers had played him such a trick. Then there rose a woman's wailing within the walls, a measured rhythmic ululation. Chauncey looked at Merivale. "We had better go in," he said. "Perhaps we may hear something."

The crowd followed them sullenly; one or two ran on quickly in front, casting furtive looks over their shoulders. The headman and the chowkidar followed on their heels. As they passed, the Granthi on duty in the arch did not raise his head. His companion eyed them stedfastly with a patient remote gaze as one regards some unexplained phenomenon, to which one has become accustomed from time to time. He waved his holy peacock-feather chauri over the book. Merivale had never seen such repose in movement. The oval beard, the far-seeking eyes under the turban wound in three flat plaits put him in mind of a priest in an old picture.

A figure was moving in the heat haze at the end of the street; it was one of the men who haḍ run on in front tearing down the threaded



## 58 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

neem leaves hung from house to house over the way to avert calamity. Then they passed some tell-tale funeral meats on the threshold of one of the first houses inside the gate. But they did not stop at these. They were guided by the woman's cries to the *mohalla*, where the trouble was the heaviest. Here they found her in her small mud-paved courtyard opening on the street, a poor uncomely hag, with unloosened hair grey with age and grit, squatting on her haunches and swaying backwards and forwards, crooning—

“Ahyee! Ahyee! I am accursed, abandoned.

The fields lie untilled; the fruit of the earth perishes.

He is gone who protected me, who looked to the tillage,

He is gone whom I bore with pain, and nurtured motherly.”

She wailed to a measure. It was a prescribed dirge. The simple words were not her own. They had been sung with variations by widows and mothers and orphans for ages untold—maybe on the Scythian steppes in the background of time, before the earliest Jat shepherd descended through the western passes into the Punjab. But the pathos was true. If the words had been spontaneous they could not have betrayed a deeper grief.

Merivale entered the courtyard and stood by her side until the lament was finished. Then

he asked her gently, "What is the matter, Mother?"

"Ahyee! Ahyee! I am accursed, abandoned!  
The fields are untilled . . ."

She rose and fumbled with some sticks for fuel and wailed her story intermittently. It was her son. He had died of a fever three days ago with a raging sore under his arm.

Merivale turned to the headman. "Is this your centenarian, your Gunga water-bringer?" he asked.

"Certainly it occurs to me after consideration that the pilgrim in question may have died at an earlier date."

"Enough! Enough! The doctor Sahib and I have come to rid you of this pest. We must purge the village, or you will all die like the house-rats in the drain. Come, now. Help to save yourselves."

The headman salaamed. "The Sahib is lord and master. Whatever he wishes will be done."

But this time-worn formula did not hide the sullen obstruction in the man's face. It was an angry, menacing crowd that dogged their steps in the search. In the first house they entered they found a corpse hidden away in a granary with the bubo on the groin. It must have been concealed by one of the furtive forerunners. They searched every house in that *mohalla* and every stack and courtyard. The pest had fallen

## 60 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

on the village like a flail. As they stumbled out of one death chamber into the *haveli* they heard a splash in the well and found the parched, scabby, thirst-maddened rats stretched limply on the stone coping. There was no scurry at their approach. Some lay where they had died with the smell of the water in their nostrils; others slid forward and dropped over, one by one, into the well—a prudent suicide. Chauncey, looking over the edge, saw the surface covered with their distended bellies and fattened paws, and to his horror he saw the upturned face of a woman with her lips parted and her hair floating among them. He learnt that a Ramdasia's wife, driven by the same mad thirst as they, had leapt to her repose on the noon of the day before.

In another dark hovel they barked their shins against a charpoy. They could see nothing in the gloom at first, but Chauncey knew they were in the presence of a corpse. Near at hand they could hear children's voices. As the darkness dwindled and revealed the long, low-raftered room, they unfolded the sheet from the figure on the bed and found a woman with the bubo behind the ear. On a charpoy beyond, where the passage led off to the stall of the cow, there was a man lying unconscious with his face uncovered. His eyes were open and staring, and devoid of intelligence; but for a momentary

twitching of the legs he might have been dead. Then, as they watch, he is shaken by a spasm of breathing, hurried, noisy, laboured, ending in a rattle in the throat and the last quiet.

It was only then that they discovered that the children were in the passage leading out of the chamber—three little urchins playing unconcernedly within reach almost of their parents' clay, two little girls and a boy making mud pies, shirtless, trouserless little mites, naked but for their little open coats covering the back to the buttocks. A small girl was playing with a sieve. She had made a circle in the dust with the rim of it, and was piecing out a coloured wheel with marigold petals and chili-pods and red powder for the spokes. Beside her were the ruins of a mud Persian well which she had just fashioned with care, the water still oozing out of the trough, the clay jar overturned by the infant's foot which was now menacing a segment of the wheel. It was her shrill protest that had merged with the rattle of the dying man. Looking up now from her serious employment, and seeing Merivale and Chauncey standing over her, she shrank to the wall, crying out in alarm to her mother, who could listen to her no more. Then she toddled into the empty room, looking back at the Englishmen suspiciously over her shoulder.

Merivale came out of that house a tyrant.

## 64 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

to. No one cared enough for the old lady to make a stand on her behalf, and it was with a poor heart that the nearest of kin intervened—

“No, Sahib. Do not move her. She is only a woman, and an old one. Let her stay. An old dame is worth half a pice, and it costs two pice to have her head shaved.”

The headman muttered something about the sanctity of *pardah*, and his fear of a disturbance if the women were touched. But Merivale answered so that all might hear.

“I understood that in the villages women went with their heads uncovered. But, perhaps, when they get to a certain age——”

The beldam was in the grip of the pest and beyond understanding, or Merivale’s chivalry might have lost him his point. His coarse jest raised a laugh, and in a few minutes the poor old bundle was being carried out.

A woman had been moved. It was the thin edge of the wedge. Merivale knew how thin, and that it was touch and go whether the whole village might not be up in arms. He had sent for fifty military police from Jullundur to form a cordon round the place, but they could not reach Mehlgahla for three days. The thing was started now, and there was no turning back. Nothing could save him but his own pluck and initiative and his good star. Defeat was disgrace. If the village was stirred to the

point of riot it must at least be saved. Government would not brook a burning sore, a hundred illegalities, the *purdah* violated, authority defied, prestige half-mast high, or lower, and an enduring precedent for resistance. But when everything was over, and the villagers responsive and reconciled, as they must be, and turning to the Englishman, as they always do, in a tight place, however jealously they may assert their rights in fair weather, authority might wink at Merivale's "You see, sir, we had to save these men: they were dying off like rats; but of course they didn't like it." Yet even this might mean a good deal of grumbling and little thanks.

Chauncey left his assistant in the camp and met Merivale at the gate. The beldame had been deposited, and a younger woman, heavily veiled, was being borne through the street. An angry man strode beside the litter crying out that foreigners were dogs, and calling on the bearers to stop. As the crowd pressed in, the man grasped the charpoy, and the bearers laid it down in the street. It seemed that every voice in Mehlghahla was raised at once. The headman was invisible. A gang was issuing from a side alley armed with sticks. A brick struck the arch by Chauncey's head. "They are going for us," he shouted to Merivale. "We must attack, or we won't have a chance."

## 66 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

As they ran through the gate a youth lifted an arm to bar their way. "We do not want you here," he said, and flung a disgusting insult at them. Chauncey knocked him down. The two sprang on the crowd, clearing a lane with their sticks. In a moment they had the street to themselves. The tide had receded to where the litter lay on the ground abandoned by the bearers. The side alleys leading to the *mohallas* were crowded with curious peeping faces. The young Jat who had encountered Chauncey's right arm lay on the ground as if dead. Chauncey stooped over him and felt his pulse. "Shamming," he cried to Merivale, and looking up he saw a providential waterman at the mouth of one of the alleys with a bulging skin on his back.

"Bring water quickly," he cried to him. "The young man has swooned."

The whole waterskin was emptied on the Jat's face, and he bore it with shut eyes and clenched teeth, lying still. "Another!"

He endured it manfully without the twitch of a limb. "Another!" But he opened his eyes to the spout of the third, leapt to his feet and fled, the most animated thing in Mehlghahla.

The little scene had been observed by all, and Merivale and Chauncey, bent double with laughter in the middle of the road, infected the crowd with their merriment. The hostile space

filled with grinning faces, and for the moment there was no talk of sticks.

The headman appeared from nowhere, the offending youth behind, pushed forward by the elders, expecting swift judgment and the gaol. He threw himself at the Sahib's feet, imploring pardon. But Merivale laughed again at the sight of him.

"Give him this to heal his pate," he said Fluellen-like. "The *tamasha* was worth it. I am not in court here." His jolly laugh and his composure were worth all the penalties of the law.

"Now to work," he said. "I do not wish to offend you, but the Sircar has ordered me to help you to save your own lives."

This raised another laugh, which was only half protesting, and the headman, seeing that it was a moment in which he might publicly discover himself on the side of authority, said that he had sent for the *budmash* who had stopped the litter, if it were the Sahib's pleasure that he should be punished.

"No. Let all be forgotten. The present danger must be met quickly, and we will work together bearing no grudges."

The litter was already moving, and by two o'clock the sick, man, woman and child, were all in the plague camp. But the trouble was not over. The Sahib had ordered that every



## 68 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

soul, sick or hale, must leave the village within twenty-four hours, and take with them what was needful for six weeks' stay in camp. All the afternoon, while Merivale was erecting huts and shelters for the sick, he was plagued with deputations. Now it was a farmer—

“Sahib, how can we do this thing? If we keep our cattle out at night they will die. How can we take out *turi* in one day to feed them for six weeks? Also the *turi* will be blown about by the wind and destroyed in different ways, and without cattle we will starve. Moreover, if they do not die they will be stolen.”

Then the bunniah—

“Sahib, I am a poor man. How can I remove my property in so short a time? I cannot pay for the labour. The food I have prepared to keep hunger from my poor children—and by your honour's grace they are many—the jars of treacle and the jars of *ghee* if they be taken out into the sun they will be spoilt. You are my father and mother, and would grieve if the little ones perished. Permit me to enter the village every third day and withdraw sufficient for the hour. Also there are moneys”—the fat man lowered his voice—“not of my own, but in my keeping—God knows I am a poor man. Moneys advanced for my shop, and now by my thrift and your honour's protection the advance with interest is almost ready to

be paid. If I take this into the fields it will be stolen; if I leave it in the house it will also be stolen."

Then the carpenter—

"Sahib, we have laid up wood for two seasons, deodar and shisham, timber of price. If we abandon it, it will be burnt or stolen. You are our lord and master. Of your mercy do not condemn us."

Then the chamar—

"Nourisher of the poor! If we go out into the fields we leave our tanning. Without labour day by day we cannot subsist, but if it is our lord's pleasure——"

All were heard with patience and dismissed. The farmer was told that the Sircar would be responsible for every head of cattle that was lost. He could get the turi in in time and stack it himself after the manner of his forefathers, so that it was not blown about by the wind. The bunniah was ordered to bring his shop into camp. The carriers would be paid, and the property that he left behind locked and sealed and a watchman put over it. Merivale would be responsible for everything left in the village. A special chowkidar would be given the carpenters for their wood. The chamars might go daily to their yard which lay outside the walls. But no one might enter the village save the watchmen, when once it was cleared.

## 70 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Any man else who passed the gate would be sent to the gaol to labour there without reward. In three days the police would arrive from Jullundur to keep the cordon. In the meanwhile the two Englishmen held patriarchal sway.

The pest was new in the Punjab. Merivale had never seen a plague case before; Chauncey had been through a bare month's training in Bombay; so they worked by the light of nature. They understood the people, which was the main thing. A strong hardy stock, assertive of their own rights, men of the toughest fibre, innocent of nerves, with little or no physical fear, but helpless as cattle when there was no one to lead them. Merivale laughed to think of their heads bobbing at the end of the alleys off the street after the fracas of the morning. Each of these lanes was a cul-de-sac leading to its own *mohalla* from which there was no exit, so that the village was honeycombed into different cells, the symbol of the Hindu's perpetual instinct of segregation, fear, suspicion, distrust of his neighbour, shrinking into himself. Had it been otherwise Merivale and Chauncey would never have seen Mehlghahla. They certainly would not have turned the village out into the fields. Yet it was done, and the peasants helped. In a few days the best of them had fallen into line and lent an ungrudging hand. And it was no small thing

for these folk, separated as they were from their sick friends, terrified by European medicines, their privacy disturbed, their roofs broken down to let in the purging air, their lares and penates and their very clothes soaked in the distressful phenyl, business at a standstill, the village cordoned round with police, and the harvest stayed while they assisted in these real evils and many more imaginary ones, born of their superstitions, which haunted them as persistently.

Chauncey worked day and night between the camps and the village. The purging of Mehlghahla was an epic task. He was followed everywhere by two men, always at his elbow, with lantern, keys, chisel and hammer, spare locks and pots of paint, tongs for dead rats, and kerosene oil and straw to burn them in. In the camps the very donkeys and goats were disinfected and plunged in their carbolic bath. And the villagers soon spoke of "phnail" as if it had always been a household property. The faint sting of it in their purifying baths gave them the confidence of a spell, and it became known that no one who had performed this rite was afterwards stricken down.

The disinfecting of the houses was more difficult. In many there was not an airhole even, and the roofs had to be breached to let in the sun. Every crevice and rat-hole was

## 72 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

scoured with phenyl, all the chests and the cupboards which were let into the wall, and the granaries and stalls for the cattle. For if the work was not thorough, if a rat-flea survived, the whole business was undone. What faith would the people have in the Sahibs and their *mantras* if the pest sprang up again in their steps?

It was the most unpleasant part of their campaign. Nothing was so much resented or so provocative to the peace. There was hardly a peasant who did not protest, though Merivale paid on the spot for any damage that was done. For the first day or two he picked his way warily through chattis of carbolic and the villagers' great iron cauldrons brimming with phenyl. Happily the disinfectant left no stain. The women's clothes, a blaze of embroidered flower-work, were laid on charpoys over the dun earth like a swarm of butterflies settling on a clay bank, and the relentless squirt played over all. The holy Granth in its rich silk wrappings alone was spared, but for another ordeal—to warp and blister on the roof in the sun. There were genuine grievances and misadventures. Chauncey never forgot an old hag who clung to his feet sobbing, clutching his ankles with her bony fingers and refusing to be removed. In the end she whimpered for leave to go on to

the roof for the last time before it was broken in. She clambered up the rough tree-trunk ladder feebly and still sobbing, and, gaining the top, she measured five spans with her fingers from the smoke-hole to the east in a line with the neem tree in the *haveli*. Then, with furtive looks to either side, she broke the surface of the caked mud and grubbed out her hoard—two or three rupees and some annas and pies. It was her secret purse, hidden away from her Goodman against some mysterious need of her own.

The work in the camps was no less heavy. Merivale had called in some *gharamis* from a neighbouring village to build up rude shanties, huts of reed matting nailed on a wooden frame, in place of the four stakes over which they had stretched their blankets, and he made the people help so that in a day or two they were able to build their own camp. It was his business, too, to see that the women suffered as little as need be. He provided grinding and spinning wheels for them, and took care of their jewellery. And when they complained of hunger he issued paper vouchers daily for two or three annas on his own authority. These were accepted by the bunniah, who exchanged them for grain on Merivale's word that the Sircar would honour them.

## **74 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST**

So in the grip of the plague with their back to the wall the villagers turned to Merivale as to a Providence. And his respect for them grew daily. He admired the magnificent calm with which they took their bludgeonings, and he was happy in their trust.

### III

IN twenty days they had left Mehlguhla to a staff of subordinates, every house disinfected and the village ringed in with police. By this time a large encampment had sprung up with nurses and apothecaries and babus, and assistants and all manner of stores. The sick were dead or recovering in the hospital camp. Those who had escaped infection were bringing in their harvest. The women were spinning and grinding corn. And the villagers knew the work had been good. Thirty-two had died in the three days before the evacuation and two only in all the days afterwards.

Innes, the Commissioner, paid a flying visit to the camp. He sanctioned evacuation "with tactful persuasion where necessary." Merivale was all attentive deference, but he had done the work already, and the Commissioner knew it, and was glad to have a man. The only thing that had given Merivale any real uneasiness was his budget; but he was given a liberal grant, and the vouchers and compensation were passed with merely formal objections—just the official salve



## 76 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

and break on the wheel. The Commissioner agreed with him that it was worth it.

Mehlgahla was saved. It was but one battle in a campaign which the Englishmen fought all through the hot weather. For the plague goddess was multicephalous. Barbers and pilgrims and leechwomen and Sadhus had carried her germs about before ever Merivale had set foot in Mehlgahla, and for the next six months he and Chauncey scoured the ravaged land searching out her tracks and exterminating them as best they might. Other citadels held out and capitulated, and bands of deputies were left behind to see that the work they had set afoot was carried out. The peasants were her allies as often as not; and when it became known that these cranky Sahibs were offering rewards to the man who first laid information of her presence in any new spot, corpses were introduced surreptitiously, and the vicious circle by which the goddess revolved was set spinning anew. Twice this trick was played, and the informer betrayed by a counter-informer and sentenced duly.

Everywhere Merivale found the relatives of the sick of every age and degree sitting round the bed. Thus the ball was set rolling. But in one or two small villages where the men were merely decimated the women perished almost to a soul. Here, it seems, an idea had spread

abroad that the suffering could be eased if all the women in the village bore their small share of it. So the goodwife called the cobbler woman in to open her bubo, and every gossip who came to condole with her touched the sore with the edge of her sheet, hoping to carry off a little of the pain. Sacrifice and charity met Merivale at the door where he had expected selfishness and indifference.

As the weeks passed the work grew, but it became easier. The fear of the peasants became more rational. One day Merivale came upon a village that was evacuating of itself; the people were literally running out. Soon it became the rule for the villagers to help; only the crabbed few lurked in their houses until they were made to budge. They had a wide beat, a hundred-mile point from east to west and stretching north almost to the foot of the Himalaya. One day they would be galloping off to a newly-infected village; the next returning on their tracks to inspect a camp they had left behind.

Siri Ram's village was inside the wide-infected circle. The pest had laid its tentacles all round, but spared Mograon. Merivale and Chauncey inspected it and reported it immune. They had speech with the old patriarch, Mool Chand, the boy's father, who told them about his son in Gandeshwar under "Iskeen Sahib," and showed them his horoscope, a sad one, and a blurred

## 78 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

photograph of a College group in which Siri Ram's thin, melancholy, resentful visage was decipherable. And there was a book which Skene had given him as a prize. Then he unrolled the boy's matriculation certificate from its tin case and held it upside down, scanning it curiously. He spoke of Siri Ram with qualified pride, a little puzzled at the unaccustomed product. He was a queer, sage lad, he said; but he had lost in reverence, and when at home he would sit alone idly brooding.

All the while they were talking Shiv Dai, the conspirator's small sister, watched the Englishmen with wide-open eyes. She did not speak or smile. When they rose Merivale felt in his pocket and produced a tiny hand-mirror and a coloured rag-book, which she accepted with the serious grace of a lady of quality.

Mool Chand showed them the dark recesses of his home. It was like every other dwelling in that mud world. You went through the gate into the *haveli*, a cramped courtyard strewn with cow fodder, save where a little mud wall divides off a square for cooking. The mud floor here is scrupulously polished; the five brass vessels, as scrupulously clean, are laid beside the chula where the pulse is being cooked for the family, or some sort of herbal concoction for the cow. The ashes of the fire under the pot are invisible for the intense glare. In the shrine-like cup-

board of clay let into the wall and protruding like a peaked cowl the boiled smoked milk is kept all day immune from the sun. From the sacred hearth you creep through a low door into a long, low, mud-walled room with a roof of beams and twigs caked with clay pierced sometimes with a smoke hole to let out the smoke or to let in a shaft of light. Coming in out of the sun you have to wait awhile before you can see what is round you, the chattis of water propped against the wall, the second hearth for winter cooking, the cupboard for grain, the square chest for clothes, the charpoys laid against the wall, the low, square, six-inch stool of matted twine where the housewife sits tending the fire. A minute will have passed before the geometrically designed peacocks in their bas-relief of clay take shape out of the gloom.

An open door leads into a darker chamber beyond for the cow, almost as comfortable, and a chamber beyond that for the *turi*, its provender. The cow walks through the dwelling room to reach the outside, picking her way through the urchins sleeping on the floor. Yet there is an instinct of cleanliness followed everywhere to a certain point. The floor is a composition of mud and cow-dung plastered into a smooth polished surface—"lepai'ed" as they call it, and brushed carefully. The hearth outside is lepai'ed, and sometimes the part of the

## 80 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

*haveli* nearest the threshold. The greater part of the housewife's life is taken up with *lepai-ing*. The faint warm smell of it pervades the village, and is not unpleasant. Apart from the little shisham wood that is needed for the props and doors and beams, and the little brass for the hearth, mud and cow-dung supply every need and elegance of the home. Every house is the same, built of mud inside and out, and there is little that does not shade into that hue from Mool Chand's skin to the rubble by the well and the banyan trees outside the village. The crumpled leaves of the neem, the garbage heap, the plough, every utensil in the house or the street except the brass cooking things is the colour of dust or mud. The cow, the buffalo, the cat, the children, the pig, the sleeping pariah dog, all more or less prostrated by the sun, look as if they had been modelled out of the different strata of discoloured clay in the blistered, cracked hollow which has served for the village pond. "Dust to dust" is easy to understand in Mograon. Every hour of the villagers' lives is a text for that sermon. Eye and mouth and nostril inform the brain of little else. The stages between being gathered out of the clay and being gathered into it are so little distinguishable that birth and death and toil and sleep and resignation are part of the same slow-moving dream in which different states merge

indifferently. Nowhere does life look so much like some phase of an excrescence exuded from the earth, a hummock of gritty soil disturbed by ants of the same hue. As you watch, you cannot distinguish the insect from the particle of clay it is carrying to the new earthworks on the path, which the first wayfarer will crush just as the plague goddess will plant a careless foot on Mograon and pass on.

If a child of this clay is ever stirred to think at all, it is only natural that it should be of first and last things, of first things when there is still a little sap in him; of last things only too soon, at an age when a boy in England is getting some grip of life. Think of Siri Ram in his mud hutch reading of beaux and coquettes and of Belinda's toilet, and the conquests of Blanche Amory and Ethel Newcome. Think of him among the clay and the cow-dung under the eternal blistering sun spelling out "The Rape of the Lock."

"Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,  
Or some frail china jar receive a flaw,  
Or stain her honour, or her new brocade,  
Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade,  
Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball,  
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall."

Siri Ram knew one kind of man and woman only, one kind of food, one kind of house, and one kind of thought born of physical urgency or

## 82 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

the puzzle of being. An Englishman or woman was nothing to him but a violent gross phenomenon. Yet the mill of his mind was set slowly grinding on Thackeray and Pope and Stevenson as an introduction to life.

For hours of every day in his first College vacation he would squat under the air-hole mumbling each dainty passage like a *mantra*, as if light came that way, with the same unintelligent sing-song cadence. Heaven knows with what dim, vague suggestions or stirrings of the heart he read of that bevy of girls on the river bank at Pr  cy, corseted and ribboned, a company of coquettes under arms, that convinced the Cigarette and the Arethusa at once of being fallible males; or how in his mud hutch where children and kine were procreated indifferently, and flea-bitten rats ran over both, he visualised the foremost of the three Graces of Origny Sainte-Beno  te, she of the neat ankles, more of a Venus than a Diana, who leapt on to a tree trunk and kissed her hand to the canoeists and called to them to come back, or whether it was through any pangs of thwarted appetite that he crushed the persistent cockroach between the leaves of his book in the middle of the passage where Stevenson conjures up his visionary menu of oyster-patties and Sauterne at Compi  gne.

One can imagine the astonishment of Merivale when a much-bethumbed copy of *An Inland*

*Voyage* dropped out of the chest in Mool Chand's house on to the floor. He could conceive the husks of wit and grace and laughter, words without the spirit, solid chunks of Nuttall and Webster, all baked into the mind like flowers in a child's mud pie. For in Mograon mud doesn't stop at matter; it permeates mind. The spirit that informs the dust here has something of its hue and consistency, coarsened to sustain the resisting dross, like the little, soft crabs that move the clay about in the bed of an estuary. Education is supposed to quicken it, and it does beyond doubt, but the early phases of the process are too ugly to dwell on. Here and there a father, moved by the same self-protective evolutionary instinct that assimilates crustaceans to some new strata laid open by a river current, sends his son to school and the boy becomes an F.A., and perhaps afterwards a B.A. The Hobbs half of Anglo-India resents the hybrid and all dabbling in organic chemistry for such ends, but there is no doubt that the B.A., however clumsily or absurdly contrived, is a better man in the end than the untortured product of sunburnt clay, though at first sight he may not appear as lovable.

Mool Chand, you would say, is a dear old man, slow-moving, slow-speaking, patient, strong, enduring, unbent in adversity. He is like an old prophet, clear-eyed, grizzled in the



## 84 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

sun, the brow and beard of Abraham, the gestures of an apostle. He salaams with a submissive dignity, raising both hands. The Commissioner loves him as his horse. But he would leave his aunt, or his little girl, at a pinch, to die in her plague-bed alone. The odds against that sort of thing increases with a lad's grade in school or college, though grace is at first perfunctory. Skene could give you the exact statistics of it.

But Mool Chand did not consider the formative influences of Gandeshwar. He sent Siri Ram there as one invests a bit of money in a life insurance. As an F.A. he would be worth thirty rupees a month, as a B.A. from fifty to eighty any day in the week, whereas the whole profits of Mool Chand's land might be covered by three hundred rupees in a good year. Knowing nothing of the vagaries of enlightenment, the Jat looked on his son as a safe investment. He did not know that Siri Ram, rejected of co-ordinated progress, was already drifting home, pledged to his shameful and unremunerative campaign. He was indeed contemplating how much his heir could contribute in three years towards the expenses of his small sister's marriage when the young patriot was trudging darkly out of Gandeshwar, the personified bankruptcy of his father's hopes.

But worse ills awaited his house.

## IV

SIRI RAM and Barnasi Das and Lachmi Chand found consolation in the pamphlets of the Swami. If any beam of happiness could enter Siri Ram's head it must radiate from some such pyramidical grievance as this. Siri Ram had been building in the air, loose architecture which impressed few of his companions. But here was a substantial fabric, plinth on plinth of cunning masonry. A monumental grievance. And they were to put the apex on it so that the blindest must see; the most subservient, sycophantic, shoe-licking slave of the English must understand how the Indians were being deceived.

Siri Ram had never dreamt of such body for his vapourings. He was almost drunk with it and his late witness-bearing. He was for calling all the students together that very day and persuading them to take an oath never to wear any foreign cloth, never to salaam to an Englishman, never to let a chance go by of instilling true political ideas into the people. The unfolding of the ideas would be their province. Then he would call for volunteers among the true patriots who were willing to take the life of

## 86 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

an Englishman. Siri Ram had forgotten the Swami's advice to work underground.

"You must not worship goddess in open manner," Banarsi Das reminded him; "in this way the cabal will be bruited to extremities. It will be bruited to Comorin and to similar city in north of map, and you would be expelled the University. English people are very cunning."

Banarsi Das had already made up his mind to serve the goddess as a school-master, a safer if less glorious part. He was not a man of blood.

Lachmi Chand was also for deliberation.

"Siri Ram is awfully a hasty gentleman," he said; "he is like the individual who sits on the branch of some tree with axe in his hand and cuts the root at the trunk, by which he is probable to fall down."

Banarsi Das was in sympathy with this criticism. Neither he nor Siri Ram saw the weakness of Lachmi Chand's metaphor. The Swami's warning came into the conspirator's mind, to appear to imbibe the opinions of Government until the day of awakening should come, and so he capitulated.

"First let us know what is in these books," Lachmi Chand continued. "Then when some patriot is sent to gaol let us hold a meeting. We would know what to say."

The occasion fell opportunely before many days had passed, when the two Punjabi secessionists were deported for tampering with the Sikh regiments and stirring up trouble in the canal colonies.

They met in the boarding-house reading-room to discuss Justice, as Banarsi Das announced, hoping to discourage students who cared nothing about politics, and who might be a danger to them, yet fearing to make the thing too secret lest it should attract scoffers like Puran Singh. Whatever happened there was no fear of any student betraying them.

The hour was six on a sultry May evening, a time when no abstract question would have kept an English youth indoors. Siri Ram was in the chair. Banarsi Das on his right, Lachmi Chand on his left, and all down the long benches of the reading table a company of capped and turbaned youths, with here and there a red fez. Many waited in the verandah and courtyard outside, whence they would drop in at any time of the proceedings, for it was the custom at Gandeshwar for every one to wait for some one else to begin. In this case the cause had begotten initiative, and the dawdlers missed the opening of Banarsi Das' speech.

Politics was a hobby with this young man; he was drawn to it as a means to the self-assertion which was his only need in life. Speech

## 88 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

was his forte. He had none of Siri Ram's burning sincerity, no rankling bitterness in his heart. He was a vain, meddling, town-bred youth, superficially cocksure and alert, inwardly dense as the mud of Mograon, which had not mixed its melancholy with his clay. In the College he was half leader, half clown, and spoke glibly with an inconsequent, muddle-headed stream of verbiage which impressed his companions. No argument could take the bottom out of his conceit, and his temerity led him into paths of eloquence which delighted Skene, and bred a kind of amused liking in him for the youth as a rather pathetic type of the hybrid we are responsible for. And the liking was reciprocated. Banarsi Das was flattered by the interest the Principal took in him. He was human enough after all. He could not have endured the sight of a weapon, and it would have made him quite sick to see a drop of blood shed, whether of an Englishman or any one else. This did not impair his sanguinary declamation.

Called upon by the chair, Banarsi Das rose with a self-assured air, his little brown cap pushed back over his short-cropped hair, and smiling under his spectacles like a swimmer about to take the stream and conscious of his strength.

"Gentlemen, it is not enough for us to place upon record our loathing and detestation of the

cowardly and dastardly crime of British Government, who have removed this high-souled and noble-spirited patriot out of our middle to rot in chains somewhere else. Poet has said, 'Stone bars do not make prison.' No, they do not make prison for soul. This is familiar to you. We are met here for a great purpose. Gentlemen, we are potent if we are unanimous to make the English not to stay in this country.

"The English are jungly and weak. By union only they have attained empire. Gentlemen, I put question to you, are they as plentiful as the blackberries and ants upon the seashore? No, they are not as plentiful. As Emerson says, The Englishman is a 'rarer avis' in this country. It is easy to muzzle him and to turn him into sea.

"Why he is ruling over us? Why you are afraid of Englishmen? They are not gods but men like yourselves, or rather monsters who have ravaged Sita-like beauty of your country. If there be any Rama among you, let him come forth to bring back your Sita."

Banarsi Das paused to mark the effect of his appeal. His vanity was satisfied.

"Who are Englishmen?" he went on; "how they have become our rulers? They have not taken India by sword. They have thrown noose of dependence round us by cunning. The ornament of a man is a weapon, but they have taken all these away from us. Now are all Indians

## 90 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

worthless, they have become timid and afraid eunuchs. They are worse than women. They are accounted criminals for using the article of their native country.

“Gentlemen, when I look upon foreign-made things my whole body catches fire. I wish to kill one of these Satans who defile sugar with the bones of pig and cow and any dead animal to make Hindus and Muhammadans faithless alike.

“Are we to be taught courage by Bengal——”

Banarsi Das was skilfully preparing the meeting for the Swadeshi vow. When he sat down after a moving peroration the forty students still in the room took it without demur. It was a formula in language less impressive than his own.

“I swear this very day in the presence of my Guru (or my priest or in the name of the goddess of Independence) never to wear any foreign-made cloth or to eat any foreign-made food or to keep money in English banks or to purchase any promissory notes. Also that I will consider every Indian, whatever his caste or creed, as my real brother, and that I will sacrifice myself for my country and devise means to uproot the enemy by secret bands, and to ruin the Feringhi all at once after making preparations for a suitable date which can fall within ten years if we work as one people.”

This was strong meat for the novices, but

none save a red fez or two dared refuse or slink out of the room. One hysterical youth stood up, stripped his *wilaiti*<sup>1</sup> shirt off his back, tore it into shreds, flung it on the floor, and buttoned his coat over a naked breast.

The milder Lachmi Chand followed with his religious appeal. He was a gentle, patient-looking youth with a sad face, and his melancholy was vested in the spiritual decay of the Aryans. Political dependence did not distress him so much as the cause of it, the falling away of his people from the ancient stock whom he saw telescopically magnified. Giants in stature and in soul striding over the mountains to occupy their birthright, men whose strength lay in their nearness to God, and who spent three parts of their lives in serving Him, giving a fourth part only to the family and the home. He spoke always of the Golden Country and the Aryan revival and the Lahore Samaj. The deported martyr was his text.

"India's golden land has not lost all her heroes. They are springing up in our midst, though brutal imprisonment reduce them to skeletons. The English are making us forget our old faith, they are making us forget our old learning, they are leading us along the path of sin. It is shame for them to think that with swords and guns they can shut in the Vedas.

<sup>1</sup> Foreign.



## 92 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

It is shame for them to think that with bricks and stones they can lock in the truth. What is that truth? It is the truth that consoled people hundreds of thousands of years before the Koran and the Bible, when the ancestors of these demons were in disgusting state of barbarism. The truth that gave light to the people lakhs of years before Zoroaster. They are fools who believe they can lock in the Vedas."

Siri Ram rose with a bundle of notes, but he did not look at them. He had learnt his speech too well. He kept his eyes strained upon the wall, as if he saw the goddess of Independence materialised there above his companions' heads. First he drew a picture of the innocent patriot condemned without a trial to rot in chains, and his family members and nears and dears weeping and disconsolate. Then he expatiated upon the barbarity and injustice of the English, dwelling particularly on the slaughter of cows, and the deliberate impoverishment of the land that they might hold it the more easily. "A dragon is sucking the life-blood of our Bharat Mata," he cried. "She is weeping. Her wound is ours. Shall we sit still at our meals amid laughter and merry-making without care? Or shall we not rather give up our pleasures and smear our bodies with ashes every day until we have rescued her and trampled the demon under our foot?"

Then he went through the Swami's pamphlets one by one, all the old lies about the economic drain, which he half believed, and the perverted history of the occupation. How the English took the country step by step with fraud and broken faith, and how the native army won an empire for them and were despised and down-trodden for their pains. When he had probed every old sore and added new venom to race-hatred with the catchwords of the hour he began to repeat the names of the patriot heroes of the world, coupling Nana Sahib with Garibaldi. And this brought him to the Mutiny of '57, and the impending anniversary of it which the English were preparing for themselves.

"Thirty crores will not be idle. They will wash the land again in blood, and not an English head will rise from the slaughter-pit. Our country was the crown of all countries, and was called the Golden Land. Her hour has come again. Drums are beating. Heroes and martyrs are preceding. See to Sivaji, and Napoleon Buonaparte, and other heroes in Germany and France. See to Japan. Take only a life for a life. If one thousand sacrifice themselves——"

But here a gross impersonation of British force blocked the door at Siri Ram's back. The students shuffled to their feet, and he saw in their faces what had happened. Turning round,

## **94 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST**

he looked into the large, inquiring eyes of Skene. For a moment not a word was said. An irresponsible youth at the far end of the room slipped out at the door opposite, betraying his guilt. The rest stood their ground shamefacedly.

## V

"WHAT does this mean?" Skene asked. But Siri Ram only looked at him with shifty defiance, too confused to speak. Banarsi Das, entering the breach, explained glibly—

"Sir, we held meeting of Students'-Improvement Society. The aim of Society is to provide lecture and discussion of moral and religious problem. It also serves purpose of English B. paper by improving idioms and etiquettes."

"I know too much about what is going on," Skene interrupted. "I have been suspecting it for some time, and I'm afraid some of you must suffer. Now stay here and listen to me. You have been taught a great deal about the English lately, haven't you? They are cruel, unjust, cunning, godless, selfish, matter-worshippers, bloodthirsty—you see, I know your text-books—and it is your duty as patriots to hate them. How many English have you met?"

The conspirators were silent.

"You know me, and perhaps some officers who have come here to play cricket. Now you must judge people by how you find them, not by

## 96 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

what professional politicians tell you. Ask your fathers and grandfathers what dealings they have had with the English, and whether they have found them honest, true and sympathetic, and ready to give of their very best to the people, no matter of what caste or creed.

"Mind you, I am not here to defend the English; we are strong enough to take care of ourselves. Stronger, indeed, than we were fifty years ago." Here Skene looked at Siri Ram. "Only it is better that we should be friends when we have to work together, and not go about with bitter, suspicious thoughts in our hearts.

"I'll tell you about these canal colonies some other time. Government, as you know, have turned hundreds of thousands of acres of desert land into cultivation, and they have given this land free of charge to cultivators, and the only conditions they have put upon the tenure are framed to preserve the property in the families it is intended for, so that it may pass from father to son, and not be whittled away, as too often happens, by usurers and lawyers.

"Well, your deportee and his friends have been let loose among these folk like snakes in Eden, and they have maddened them with lies and misrepresentations until they are on the point of rebellion. These are the firebrands that have been removed or, as your newspapers say, 'spirited away to rot in chains without trial.'

Any other Government would have hanged them on the nearest tree. But you may be quite sure they will be well cared for in prison, and released as soon as it is safe.

“But this is only a side issue. What I wish you to understand is how we have won India, and with what right and justice we hold it. I know all about these seditious leaflets that have been circulated among you. I have seen them myself. We must have these charges sifted above ground. Bring the pamphlets to me. I will expose each lie and distortion of fact, point by point. You may ask me as many questions as you like, I won’t be angry. And when I have done, I think you will agree with me that the British have been straight and honourable in their dealings with you. Clive played one dirty trick, it is true, and we are all-ashamed of it. It is a single black blot in an otherwise clean record, the blacker because it is so utterly foreign to the national character and traditions that Englishmen become hot to-day when they think of it. But for that, you will find that the English have always tried to do the straight and disinterested thing.

“India for the Indian nation is a fine rallying cry, and I don’t wonder it appeals to you. But a nation is not merely a geographical term; it implies a compact people, united and inspired by common aims and traditions. India, as you

## 98 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

know, is not one people any more than Europe is one people. If ever she does become one, with a genuine sense of nationality, and the courage and unselfishness to defend it without any thought of individual interest or class privilege, she will be strong enough to take the reins from us, and no shame to us to drop them, seeing that it is we who have taught her to drive. But you are not going the right way to work. You must look facts in the face. Every one respects an honest nationalist, but you must *be* the thing first before you can enjoy its privileges. No nation was ever built on lies.

“Don’t think I want you to believe that India is a distressful burden which we bow under from a sense of duty only. I hate cant. India is as much the property of the English as the estate of one of your zemindars is the property of the landlord whose ancestor won it by the sword, or was given it for service. Tell your zemindar he must divide his property among his tenants because they are becoming fit to manage it themselves, and hear what he will say. Yet this is what some of our politicians are saying about India. It is quite true that if we left the country each community would be at the other’s throat. This is one good reason for our staying. But it is not *the* reason. We are here because it is our country. Incidentally it happens to be our way to recognise our obligations to our

tenants as no other rulers have done or are ever likely to."

Skene had never talked politics to his students before. He shrank from it; for, when all is said and done, the case resolves itself in the end to the privilege of the weak to be ruled by the strong, and this is a very difficult thing for an Englishman to say without suspicion of brutality or pride. Skene was not pleased with his effort. In some of the students' faces he fancied he saw intelligent sympathy, but others were sheepish and sullen, obstinately grieved, as he might well have been if the situation had been reversed. He felt that he had bungled it somehow, but anything was better than saying nothing. Only he wished that one of them would speak. It would be so easy to put the case to them if they were not Indians.

Clive once behaved like a Bengali politician, and it left a stain on our honour like a drop of ink in a phial of pure water. But where was the diplomatist in their ranks who would have behaved like Admiral Watson?

It was impossible to suggest the shadow of the thought.

In the meanwhile there were Siri Ram, Banarsi Das and Lachmi Chand to be dealt with. Skene passed sentence on the spot. He expelled Siri Ram from the University, and he rusticated Banarsi Das and Lachmi Chand for a year.



## 100 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"I am sorry for you," he said, "but you must go. I have warned you once, and I can't have the College spoilt like this. I will help you as far as I can because I think you have been misled, and really believe the mischievous lies which your heads have been stuffed with. Anyhow I hope that you are too honest to circulate charges which you know are false. Banarsi Das and Lachmi Chand may rejoin the College after a year provided there is nothing new against them. And you, Siri Ram, come to my office to-morrow morning at ten, and I'll see what I can do for you."

As Skene left the boarding-house the suppressed murmur of the students became an angry babel. It had been one of the most depressing moments he had known in Gandeshwar. For the first few years his relations with his pupils had been friendly and unstrained, but he had gradually become aware of a hostile element which was part of the growing trouble all over India. On the whole he was rather glad that things had come to a head, for it might relieve the charged atmosphere. Everything depended on his personality. If the students ceased to like him he could do nothing with them.

As he crossed the football field the cloud in his mind lightened. The College were playing a regimental team, and he reached the corner flag just in time to see Puran Singh take a neat

pass from the half-back, dribble through to front of goal with the ball at his feet, and make a clean shot along the ground just inside the posts. The cheering all round was like a tonic. He could have slapped Puran Singh on the back.

"Shabash, Puran Singh," he shouted. "That is better than lifting it over the bar, isn't it?"

Puran Singh beamed when he saw the Principal had been watching his feat, and every one laughed at Skene's chaffing allusion to a match against Government College, lost by a high, wild kick in the air when Puran Singh had the goal at his mercy. Skene had taught him after that to shoot clean and low in front of goal with a straightened instep or with the side of his foot.

"You are playing tennis with me to-morrow against the regiment. Don't forget."

"Thank you, sir."

Skene was almost pleased with the way things were going when he reached the Club and met Dean the policeman coming down the steps.

"You got hold of the right men," he said. "Thanks for the information. I've fired one out and rusticated the other two. Had to do it, but I am devilish sorry for them. Children all three."

"What is the expelled youth going to do? I'd keep an eye on him."

"I was thinking of sending him to Everitt in the XIXth. He wants a clerk on his own."

## 102 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"That's the man on the mule transport registration in the Hills, isn't it?"

"Yes. He has to trek half the year at the back of beyond, and his Babu stays down at headquarters in Sialkote. Government won't sanction another clerk."

"I shouldn't risk it. He can do a lot of harm in those little States."

"Are they touched?"

"You haven't heard of Blimba? People wondered where the resurrected Dhandora leaflets came from. Well, they had a small press up there. There were only two Babus in the State, but they worked it all right, and sent five hundred copies every week into Simla in *khiltas* covered with apricots and pomegranates.

"They had the time of their lives. The little Rajah man hates the English. He was fed up with his salute, and thought it a huge joke. There was no fear of a surprise. You can see the white road winding seven miles through the pines into Blimba, and a topee or a policeman's cap would have sent the whole warren skiddadling down the khud, press and all."

Skene learnt a lot about sedition before dinner. Dean turned back into the Club with him, and they sat on a garden seat overshadowed by hibiscus and *duranta*, while he unfolded the schemes of the extremist gang in Lahore.

It was the most complicated organisation, and

the police believed that the whole body of the Arya Samaj was involved in the nexus, so that every postal and telegraph clerk and every subordinate on the railway knew exactly what he had to do on the day of reckoning. Many Aryas, of course, cared nothing for politics, but those who were well-disposed to Government dared not betray their associates if they would, so it was impossible to say how many knew what was going on in the inner ring.

"And the best of it is," Dean went on, "in some of these centres they have got a register in which they have booked all the best appointments for the fraternity after we have been wiped out. They have done us the honour to preserve our system, and the salaries will stand as they are. A hospital assistant at Jullundur on eight rupees a month will be P.M.O. of the Sirhind Brigade, and a Jemadar of the Nth Punjabis is to be Station Staff Officer at Dalhousie."

"And who is to command the Division?"

"That is still in the lucky bag. The General is not nominated yet. They have chucked in a few Muhammadans just to look well, but they daren't give the command to one, and they daren't give it to a Sikh or a Dogra, as they know the Pathans would be at their throats."

"And the Constitution?"

"A limited Monarchy. The beggars have had the impudence to approach Nepaul."

## 104 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"Pharaoh's feet, what a muddle! What wouldn't I give to be at the first Parliament! It would be almost worth being a disembodied spirit."

"Yes, I dare say. This paper Empire won't do much harm, but they are doing a lot of real mischief. Take the Hills alone. They are working them pretty thoroughly with their political missionaries as they call them."

Skene learnt that young men in the guise of Sannyasis were being sent to every little hill State and Zemindari ostensibly as pilgrims to visit Gangotri or Kedarnath, or to circumambulate Kailas, or to scatter flowers on Siva's frozen spring in the ice caves of Amarnath, but in reality to spread the tale that the white throne was tottering in Hindustan, that Englishmen were held of no account, and that all lonely Sahibs who visited the solitudes of the mountains should be done away with singly. That Sahibs fallen over cliffs, or shaken from rope bridges, or shot in ambush could tell no tale, and that merit and reward would fall to their assassins in this world and the next.

"If you sent Siri Ram you would be playing into their hands," Dean said. "Everitt wouldn't have the ghost of an idea what was going on."

"Poor little devil," Skene thought. "He has no luck."

But Siri Ram's horoscope was cast in sadder

lines that Skene knew. A day or two after Merivale's visit the pest had fallen on Mograon like a flail. It broke out in Uttam Singh, the headman's, house, and Shiv Dai, Siri Ram's little sister, must have caught it when she was combing Uttam Singh's wife's hair. A leech-woman from Mehlgahla had brought it into the village. She had got through somehow in the early days unsuspected at the time before the cordon was formed, and passed from village to village putting leeches on the buboes of the sick and trailing the plague after her. In three days Mool Chand's *mohalla* was decimated. The rats crept out of their holes and lay dying in the street and in the houses, indifferent to man, and the fleas swarmed over them till they were cold, and then sought warmer pasture.

Siri Ram's mother had been one of the first stricken, and lay unconscious several days, but survived, and rose a crazy skeleton from her bed. Then his little sister, Shiv Dai, lay in the toils. When Mool Chand felt the gland on her groin, a smooth, round, movable tumour like an egg, he thought her doomed; the little girl was so thin and frail. For two days she lay unconscious almost, with her eyes half-closed, sleepless, restless, for ever moving her arms and legs, raising her knee slowly and then straightening it out again and moaning in her pain. Soon she passed into a stage of muttering delirium. She tried to fling herself off her bed, and Mool

## 106 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Chand tied her down with his turban. The presence of death was felt everywhere. Day and night the wailing of mourners rose from the houses all round. Soon Mool Chand's neighbours were all running out into the fields. The fear gripped him, and he felt that he, too, must go. He put some chappates and water by Shiv Dai's bed, more to appease the lemures of the hearth than for any good it might do her, and he shambled out into the street supporting his wife.

He left the corn in the locker and the milk in the alcove by the hearth, and the square chest with the family clothes. He drove the cow out before him and left Shiv Dai alone to die. "If she is to die, why disturb her?" he said. "And if she lives——" He thought of the sorrow in the house when the woman-child was born, and the coming marriage expenses. It would be three years before Siri Ram, a full-blown B.A., could contribute.

He did not know that Siri Ram had been expelled from the college after all his outlay, and that he was an unmarketable product and a source of insecurity to quiet folk rather than profit.

## VI

MERIVALE was back on his tracks at Mehlguhla again. There had been no rain, but the moon was barely visible for the dense air, and not a star was to be seen. The villagers were drooping like sick crows, sprawling on their charpoys, and pitched forward on their haunches like birds on a bough, suspiring for air. But there was not a breath anywhere.

After a hard day Merivale had arrived in Mehlguhla before his tent and kit. The villagers came out to meet him. Some clutched at his feet and knees and greeted him as their saviour. They brought him warm smoked milk and eggs and *chapattis*. He dined off them. Then he braced himself to go round the camp. The quarantine was nearly over, and the plague had not touched a soul since he left. The unaffected pleasure of everybody at the merest glimpse of him kept him upright, and he had a smile and a joke for them all in spite of the trouble he had to keep on his feet. For the clogging air had to be resisted, and Merivale



## 108 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

had not had more than three hours' broken sleep any night of the week.

He lay on the rickety charpoy he had borrowed from the headman, watching the moon, waiting for the haze to clear which filled his throat and nose and eyes with hot particles of grit. Yet he dreaded the moon more, for he could not sleep under her malignant rays, and cover was stifling. She was an enemy in Mehlghahla, red, bloody, passionate, exacting, exhaling weariness. Not the same Cynthia who swims over quickening hazel copses and primrose dells at home, and peeps into dimpled becks breasting cool clouds. Cynthia and Diana there, silvery and chaste; here a bronze pan of fire, phantom of the destroyer, the reverse of Durga's shield, more malignant than the Sun-god because stealthier and more insidious in her embrace. Merivale felt sick inwardly to think of the primroses glimmering palely in a meadow he knew well by an old ivied church in Devon under the caressing moonlight. On hot-weather nights he always thought of the old country in the freshness of spring.

He shut his eyes to a hot wave of air that flickered over him. But darkness was hotter, and he opened them soon to watch the brazen sphere slowly concentrating her light—and her heat, it seemed—as the mist thinned. In the coppery haze the hot, gritty stars glowed dully

like exhausted embers. The night sky of June burnt itself into his mind through those interminable hot-weather vigils. Corvus and Corona and Scorpio and Boötes were sparks that added their rays to his firepit. It was only at Mehlgahla that he came to know the constellations, but he had the map in his head long afterwards. Sometimes even by lakes and above cool mountains Scorpio would unfold her scaly length for him over the segregation camp, and a feeling would come to him that if he wanted to inspect the cordon he must steer for the plough.

He was waiting for the last star of Scorpio to rise above the mango clump when he heard the creaking of bullock carts in a rutty lane. It was his belated camp. He recognised the heavy, premeditated tramp of his new orderly, who was conscious of the dignity of boots and lifted them with pain like an honourable burden. Merivale called the man to him and told him to take his meal at once and go to sleep, and pitch tents in the morning. Then as an afterthought he asked him if there were any news.

"The plague is at Mograon. Many have died, and there is great fear. The people all went out before midnight yesterday."

"Is it far?"

"Perhaps eighteen miles."

## 110 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"You need not unload the carts. We go there to-morrow."

A chaprassi arrived as he spoke, dragging his feet wearily. Wishing to be of some account, he supplemented the orderly's tale.

"Ah, Sahib, and they have left one woman behind."

"They have, have they? Then we go to-night."

Merivale sat up on his charpoy and thought of means. Both his ponies were dead beat, and one had not come in from the last stage. He sent to the headman for camels, and in a few minutes he was swinging through the night again. The hair and saddle of the brute were hotter than his bed, and when once he was mounted the sleep he had sought so long came uninvited, and he found it hard to throw off his drowsiness. A fall to earth might mean a broken limb, so he hung on and began to think he was swimming through a hot sea in which sleep was death, and port the scene of more toil, with sleep perhaps afterwards. Every time the camel lurched forward he breasted a wave, and in this mood his spirit became numb, and he ceased to care for anything, feeling like a bit of flotsam, cast here and there by the waves as he watched the strange veering pilot neck of the camel, so dainty and so gross and so

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eternally indifferent, swaying between him and the last star of Scorpio.

After five or six hours of this travail the leading camel pulled up and swerved round alongside of him, and the driver waved his whip at a clump of trees on the right and called out in his profoundly melancholy voice, "Mograon."

There was a small plank over a nullah, by crossing which Merivale would save half a mile. He sent the camels round and took the footpath, and in a few minutes found himself alone in the deserted village. The sky was now clear, and, in the intense moonlight, the shadows of the posts and eaves and the thin kikar leaves lay etched in the white street with pin-point clearness. The doors of all the houses were chained and barred. The place was abandoned. There was no sound save the tread of the retreating camels beyond the nullah, and not a stir save where a furtive pariah slunk by with its shadow double. The very dogs, affected by the ghostly silence of the place, would not bark.

Merivale recognised the house in which the old Jat had given him milk and spoken of his firstborn, the morose Gandeshwar student who brooded in his holidays—for choice on the nature of God and of necessity upon the coquettes of Précý and the Graces of Origny Sainte-Benoîte. It was a favourite passage he

## 112 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

had come upon 'in Siri Ram's book so unexpectedly discovered in that mud world, and the picture rose again in his mind as he sat down on the threshold for very weariness, and wondered how he was going to find the woman they had left behind, and whether she would be alive or dead.

His head kept falling sideways against the doorpost as sleep captured him, and he almost forgot his errand, dreaming all the while of the girl on the tree stump so fresh and clean and cool and far away, waving her hand to the Arethusa and Cigarette. He saw the willows dripping over the stream and heard the church bells of Pont. Then, falling forwards on to the step, he thrust a hand forward to save himself, and clutched something cold and dead. It was a plague rat. He left the infested corner and wandered down the alley looking for an open door or some sign of life.

Under a neem tree in the next street he came upon a huddled figure crouching over a drain. It was an old woman, who turned an emaciated face to him in the moonlight. She had been sobbing tearlessly. Merivale awoke her from her sad dreams.

"Why, Mother ! What is the matter ? Why do you stay here alone ? "

"Why should I go ? I shall not find my sons there."

"When did you last eat anything?"

"It may have been the day before yesterday."

"You should come now. Can you walk? We will look after you in the camp to-morrow."

"They said 'Come,' but I would not. What should I gain there?"

"It is better to live than to starve."

"If it is fated that I am to die, I shall die like the others."

Merivale tried to explain that there was no need to die, but she was unconvinced, and his argument sounded vain to himself. The wisdom learnt of suffering upsets all values. She knew her own plight best, and the saving of the poor old thing could only be perfunctory. He asked her about her sons. Two had died in one night. He learnt that there was no one else left in the village save the small daughter of Mool Chand in the next *mohalla*. But it was probable that she too was dead.

He left the old woman with words of sympathy and the promise to return—vain utterances, he knew, in the face of such sorrow—and he made his way back to the Jat's house near which he had slept. He found the door of the *haveli* locked, and wrenched the rivet open with the broken yoke of a plough. The inner door was ajar, and as he entered he heard the girl's voice calling for her mother, and thanked God he was not too late. He struck a match and found

## 114 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

a tiny clay lamp in an alcove of the wall—a wick floating in oil—and he lighted it. Shiv Dai lay still, her large black eyes open and staring. She looked at him without fear or wonder, too exhausted for either. She called for her mother again, feebly looking at the door, and mumbled of her thirst. Did she know her parents had abandoned her? He took the empty bowl by her side and filled it from the chatti in the *haveli*, and she drank from his hand, defiled as the vessel was by his touch. He felt her wrist. The fever had left her. Then he unloosened the turban by which she was bound to the bed. Mool Chand had not thought of untying it before he left, though he had been careful to lock the door. "I am going to take you to your mother," he said. But it is doubtful if Shiv Dai heard or understood. He lifted her wasted little body in his arms, and carried her into the street and out of the village. He hoped to see the camp fires of the plague fugitives from the embankment above the nullah.

Merivale ran into a clerkly youth on the plank across the nullah. He was astonished to see a brown cap and cropped hair at that hour and place.

To his salaam "Who are you?" the lad answered in English—

"I am the son of an agriculturist of this

village, I come now from Gandeshwar College."

"Who is your father?"

"He is cultivator."

"It is you who read Stevenson, *The Inland Voyage*, isn't it? You are Mool Chand's son?"

"Ye—es, no doubt after all."

"Then this is your sister. She is recovering from plague. They left her behind in the village."

"Certainly that is very ba-ad. It is the duty of every one——"

Siri Ram was answering the indignation in the Englishman's voice, but Merivale cut him short.

"Take her," he said, holding out the tiny frail bundle, "while I go and find out the camp."

Siri Ram hesitated. "Sir, if you would put her on the ground," he said, "it would be more sateesfactory."

"Afraid of infection! Well, some one will have to look after her till we fix up a hospital camp. Stay with her, anyhow, until I come back."

Merivale laid her gently on the earth. Siri Ram said he would stay. He watched the retreating form of the civilian with inward bitterness.



## 116 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Here was a man risking his life and forfeiting his sleep to save an Indian girl abandoned by her own people, and he was pleasant in his speech and there was no pride in him. Siri Ram did not put the whole case to himself like this, for he hated the Englishman and felt ashamed and uncomfortable in his presence.

It never occurred to him to analyse his sense of uneasiness or to sift prejudice from fact; for if he had he might have found in Merivale the practical contradiction of his most cherished grievances. And the man was the type of the race. The only questions Siri Ram asked himself were: "Why is this hated foreigner here at all? How is he superior to the Aryans? Is it his white skin that gives him authority to come to my village and send my people here and there and meddle with their affairs, and to carry my sister about in his arms as if she were of no account?"

Also it was a bitter thought that his father, Mool Chand, an ignorant who knew nothing about Mill and Burke and John Morley and advanced liberal thought, would greet the *feringhi* salaaming with both hands, with tears in his eyes, as if the English were the divinely appointed guardians of the Bharat Mata.

Siri Ram would not go with Merivale and Shiv Dai to his father. Greatly wavering, he was resolute in that. He feared the rage of

the rude cultivator. Somehow he had half known that he would not see his parents again when he left Gandeshwar led by an undefined homing instinct to his village. He would have liked to see the house and the cow and to speak to his mother and to visit all his old haunts again, but he could not explain his new life to anybody. They would be very angry, and they would not understand.

He made up his mind to go away and write to them, but first he must learn what had happened to his father and mother. The dreadful thought came to him that he might have to stay and perform their funeral rites.

Dawn broke at last, and Siri Ram could hear the distant camp of the villagers wakening. A speck of dust advanced from the direction in which Merivale had disappeared. Soon it disclosed a boy driving a donkey with baskets on its back to collect the humble offerings of the cow for the domestic hearth. Siri Ram learnt from the urchin that his mother had been stricken, but had recovered, and that Mool Chand was well. So there was no need to stay. He turned to Shiv Dai, but could not make her understand anything. She was awake, but half crazy, it seemed. He reasoned with himself that the English pig would soon come back, and that no harm could come to her now in the daylight. Then he turned wearily on his tracks to

## 118 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Gandeshwar, hungry and sad at heart in spite of his mission.

In a few days Mool Chand received a letter from his son in Urdu, and he summoned the village writer to read it.

"The Bharat Mata calls, so it behoves me not to stay at home any more. Is this the time to stay at College? Now do I leave College, but not my learning. I leave my home and relatives, and perhaps I do this for ever. I shall again return to Gandeshwar, but not to my home in this life if I cannot finish my work. I am going alone, and must go alone if no one follows hearing me. Many will say many things. Parents and sister will weep, but it will not do if I look to them any more. What do I fear, and where is my sorrow, when I am going into the lap of her who is the mother of three hundred millions of men."

The three conspirators had put their heads together over it. They had drunk deep of the well of Bengal. The Swami did not sow seed in waste ground. And he knew it was not in vain that he watched the zigzag path to his cave every day for the dejected face of Siri Ram.

## VII

SHIV DAI lived, and the old hag whom Merivale found in the gutter was restored to her folk to see another summer, but Chauncey was sickening of the plague and at death's door.

The two had taken war risks all the while. The serum—then in its tentative stage, a disputed prophylactic—did not arrive from Bombay until three weeks after they had started their campaign, and Chauncey's work was so exacting he could not spare the day or two needed to lie up after the inoculation. There had always been some new outbreak to grapple with, and as soon as he had got the pest under in one village and organised the camps he was off to another.

Merivale got the news in Mograon, and he arrived just in time. Chauncey had come in from the segregation camp looking well, the hospital assistant told him, but he felt cold in his joints. Soon he was very sick and the ague shook him. He lay on his bed holding his forehead, and for hours he would not utter a

## 120 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

word except now and then to ask for Merivale with laboured and hesitating speech, breathing painfully. Merivale, when he came, was not sure that Chauncey recognised him. He tried to say something, but stopped in the middle of his sentence with a blank look, and turned over on his side. He threw off his sheet and kept his arm away from the gland in his armpit, and when Merivale brought him water he poured some of it over his body.

Merivale sat by his side all night trying to soothe his restlessness, his own wits sunk in exhaustion. From time to time Chauncey muttered incoherently. His pain was pitiful. One could see the straining of his heart. At the end he beckoned to Merivale to lean over him, and gasped out as if each syllable were an intolerable strain—

“Get inoculated, old man. This is hell.”

Merivale pressed his hand. “Don’t talk,” he said, “if it hurts,” and he let a tear fall on his burning wrist. Chauncey clutched his friend’s palm as if he had spoken.

“Thanks!” he said. And Merivale knew it was his farewell. Soon a heavy drowsiness fell on him which deepened into a coma, from which he never woke.

Merivale was tired out. He had kept himself going somehow through those long nights, but

now exhaustion acted on him like an opiate, easing his distress. The whole thing seemed like some vague, remote nightmare. Only Chauncey had gone, and they were building a stone over his grave at Mehlghahla.

The saddest part of it was that he was almost the last to die—one of those “dropping cases,” as the doctors call them, which come in the dog days at the end of the visitation when the sun seems to burn the virus out once for all.

Merivale had now only to stay and wind up. It was all routine office work, disbanding the camps, paying the bunniahs, allotting compensation. Things went very smoothly in the villages. Chauncey and Merivale had laughed over the bilious comments of the vernacular Press and their echoes in Parliament, but now Chauncey was dead they jarred on his friend.

He had been “the fatted doctor,” and Merivale “the fat-salaried bureaucrat,” and between them they had swallowed up half the collection which might have fed the poor. “Every Indian knows,” shrieked the *Sahaik*, “that the plague is a pest brought by the English, and is due to the poverty of the people and their physical weakness, caused by the miserable condition to which they have been reduced.”

“The plague is a disease which thrives specially amidst poverty,” cries our philosophical Radical in the House, “and its fresh

## 122 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

outbreak in India on a large scale is in itself a warning against optimism, plague being now endemic under our rule." Whence he argues with glum satisfaction that all is not so well with our great Eastern Dependency as some would have us believe.

"How do the bureaucrats explain the pest?" shrilled the *Koel*. "They lay it to the door of the poor harmless rat, just as they attribute malaria, which was never so rife as under their rule, to the innocent mosquito." Whence the unphilosophic revolutionist goes on to hint what was being openly proclaimed by itinerant "missionaries" in the villages, that the plague patients were being poisoned in the hospitals, and Government was making deliberate attempts to spread the disease.

"Only a question of degree," Merivale observed. "The spirit is the same. Each goes as far as he dare. Listen to this—

"The cunning English are preparing a fluid which they pretend to be charmed, and this is to be squirted into the poor through a hole made in the arm. Thousands of gallons of this mixture, which contains all kinds of pollution destructive to caste, are being distributed among the villages, and lakhs of rupees are going into the pockets of English shopkeepers and chemists. In the same way lakhs' worth of

quinine is being sold to poor Indians that English manufacturers may fatten.' ”

It was *The Koel* that described how a body of pampered bureaucrats sat in the clouds on the heights of Simla under the name of a Commission, drinking wine and brandy, and dancing with half-clothed women, and how in the interests of debauchery they devised means to develop the trade in drugs and to deceive the poor. The tax gatherers were busy, for one night's orgy would impoverish a village for a year.

Chauncey had sent the cutting to Merivale with a picture of Higgins, his precise, Presbyterian, bald-headed P.M.O., waving an empty brandy bottle at his *décolletée* vis-a-vis. The blameless, vacant head of old Fooks in the Secretariat protruded from under a neighbouring chair where he lay supine.

But Merivale could not wax merry over these things any more. When the mail came in he was surprised to find that there was quite a pother at Home about Chauncey and himself, and that Mehlgahla had become a household word. He had never realised the bitterness, and meanness, and ignorance of the Little England group in the House before. The same agitators who had screamed in the Punjab Press had written in more moderate terms to Radical



## 124 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Members of Parliament who were known to be sympathetic.

Dr. Byleman asked the Under Secretary of State whether it was true that Mr. Merivale, a Punjab civilian, and Captain Chauncey of the Indian Medical Service had forcibly entered the houses of high-caste villagers during the plague operations and violated the privacy of the zenana; and whether such profanation of the Indian reverence for home and women would be tolerated by the Government.

The Under Secretary of State said that full inquiries were being made into the case. He understood that *purdah* was not observed as a rule in Jat villages.

Dr. Byleman rose a second time in the same week and asked whether the charges had been substantiated, and if so, whether under the circumstances the two officers would be retained in the Service.

The case cropped up in one way or another once or twice a week. The home Radical papers made capital out of it with their headlines of "outrage" and "violence" and the "high-handed insolence of Anglo-Indian officialdom." And every little rag in Bengal and Poona and Madras echoed the cry, and every school-boy who read believed. For how could the charges be false if they were brought by the English against their own people? Dr. Byleman had

reason for elation. He had knocked more nails into the coffin of our prestige than anybody could count.

Perhaps the only district in which the charges did no harm was in Mehlgahla itself and in the villages round. Political "missionaries" were sent there, but they did no good. Mool Chand only looked perplexed when it was explained to him that his house had been forcibly entered and the privacy of his zenana outraged.

"But the Sahib saved my little daughter," he said. The truth of it was, the people were grateful. They were too stupid to understand their own wrongs. Merivale cannot go through that country now without a pageant, and Chauncey's grave is honoured like a shrine. They buried him on a mound outside Mehlgahla, as he had wished, and built an obelisk over his tomb, and the people scatter marigolds at the foot as they pass. It was Innes, the Commissioner of the District, who said, "He is doing good work even in his grave." Thousands died, but the villagers did not doubt that Merivale and Chauncey saved the Punjab from a far greater scourge.

Government, however, took the hint from the agitators. Nowadays methods are changed. There is no searching of houses or general disinfection or forced evacuation. Inoculation and health camps are the rule. Persuasion is dis-

## 126 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

couraged, and the plague rages with little check. In the Punjab the villagers have learnt to evacuate for themselves. And perhaps the new system is as well. It would be impossible for any one to do what Merivale and Chauncey did without their tact and sympathy and knowledge of the people. The breed that yap at Westminster—to use Hobbs' phrase—would make the most unholy mess of it.

The rains had broken, and a stray Memsahib or two had come down from the Hills when Merivale found himself again in the Club. It was more by luck than any sparing of himself that he survived, presumably to increase "the pampered annuitants of Cheltenham and Whitehall." He had not spoken to an Englishman since Chauncey died, and he hungered for his kind. The first person he saw was the equine-faced lady, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's partner, in her huge black picture hat. The mould of the superstructure was the same; only roses had displaced sweet-peas. Merivale made a dive down a side passage to escape her, and almost ran into the Chaplain's wife.

"Why, it is Mr. Merivale!" she gasped; "where have you been all these months? Famine, wasn't it?"

Merivale explained that it was plague.

"But how romant-ic! Is it near here? And have they plague carts and red crosses on the

doors? I suppose it is all dirt; clean people don't get it, do they?"

"We lost Captain Chauncey in the I.M.S."

"But oh, how dreadful! He had to go near them, of course, hadn't he?"

Merivale was grateful to the Providence which made the lady answer her own questions.

"And what is Government going to do?" she went on. "Teach them to be clean, I suppose. Prevention is so much better than cure, isn't it?"

But Merivale couldn't wait to bandy eternal truths with the padre's wife. Besides, he was afraid she would ask him to play Badminton, and he was a pitiful prevaricator.

"I've got to go and write a report on it," he said, and made a gesture of escape as if the pen and ink lay ready for him on the table, and the chaprassie waited at the door. "Shall I send you a copy of the Blue book?" he called back, when he had a safe start.

"Oh, thank you, that would be so ni-ice."

The Chaplain's wife regarded his retreating back sadly. Badminton had been in her mind. She reflected that Mr. Merivale was not quite at his ease in ladies' society. "It's a pity," she thought, "because he is such a nice man. It must be because he is so much in the jungle." And she began to devise plots for his socialisation of which he was happily unaware.

## 128 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

A thirst for cold drinks and human companionship drove him along the passage to the men's Bridge room. He saw Skene and Hobbs through the glass door playing at the familiar corner table. And there were several strange faces. A new regiment had come in since he left. He pushed the door open slowly with that little catch of joy and excitement with which one surprises old friends, and he stood on the mat waiting for one of them to look up.

"Merivale!"

"Hullo, Skene! Hullo, Colonel!"

"Killed the plague?"

"Scotched it, I hope."

"Had much *dik*?"

"Bit of a swat. Good chaps, though, these Jats. Behaved well."

"Come and cut in. You're dining with me to-night. Boy! Four whiskies and sodas, and bring plenty of ice."

Thus was Merivale restored to the lap of civilisation with little comment, but much inward relish. Skene had heard something of his plague adventures from Innes, but he knew it would be difficult to make him talk. Little by little, perhaps, by leading questions, he might piece out a story.

"Did you see they had been baiting you in the House?" he asked, when the rubber was finished.

"Dr. Byleman, yes."

"It's a compliment to be yapped at by that rabble," Hobbs observed.

Skene thought of the pariahs at the tail of his bulldog in the bazaar. But metaphor was not in his line.

"How many questions has he asked?"

"Five, I think. It won't do me any harm. He leaves Chauncey out now."

"Wonderful delicacy!"

"It ought to be a good advertisement if the sun-dried bureaucrat has a sense of humour."


"Did you see the question in yesterday's *Pioneer*? Dr. Byleman asked the Under Secretary of State if the food in Alipur gaol was strictly vegetarian, or whether it was true that the Brahmin anarchist under trial for the Hughli bomb outrage had been made to eat rice cooked in fat."

"Put up to it by a native rag. If a school-boy in the bazaar writes Byleman an anonymous letter, he'll get up on his hind legs about it in the House. And the sedition-mongers know it."

"Why don't they snub them?"

"Can't afford it. Means votes."

"It is a mistake to hang these anarchists," Hobbs interrupted. "They like it. A martyr's crown, and all that. A life sentence is the thing. Solitary confinement. And take 'em



## 180 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

out once a month on the anniversary and give 'em a dozen with the cat. Just a little reminder."

Merivale laughed. It was jolly to hear the old fellow again. But Hobbs' partner, a very young subaltern, ventured—

"But, sir, wouldn't that be a bit mediæval?"

Hobbs glared at him.

"Mediæval? Common sense! Humanity! Take the glory out of them. Ridicule is the only thing that kills. You'd soon stop it."

"What has happened to Narasimha Swami?" Merivale asked.

"Disappeared. 'Spirited away,' as the Radical papers say of the deportees. No one has seen him since he came here. He gave the police the slip."

"I believe they've got enough against him for the Andamans."

"The High Court would quash it," Hobbs said.

"He got at your students, didn't he, Skene?"

Skene nodded. "One or two, but they've gone."

"By the way," Merivale said, "I ran against one of your hopefuls in his village. An odd youth not particularly endowed with the family affections, I should say. He read Stevenson."

"Where was it?"

"Mograon."

"That would be Siri Ram. What has happened to him?"

"Gone clean off like our friend Narasimha. His father is an old Jat farmer, a nice old fellow. He counted on the youth to support the whole family in a year, and he is naturally cut up."

"I had to expel him, you know. He was one of Narasimha Swami's victims. He wouldn't come to me for a job."

"Here's Dean, he can probably tell you where Siri Ram is."

Merivale greeted the policeman with laconic warmth.

"Have you got Siri Ram on your register?" Skene asked.

"Yes, he is in the city somewhere now."

"Better keep an eye on him," Hobbs said. "He'll be pinking one of us soon."

"He has never seen a firearm," said Skene. "He couldn't hit a tree."

"It is easy enough to jab a revolver into any one in a crowd and pull the trigger, isn't it, Dean?"

Dean laughed. He would have been dead if a certain revolver had not jammed.

"I always tell you, Skene," Hobbs went on. "It's all you College fellows. You turn out anarchists as quick as sausages in Chicago. They ought to stop education. Shut up all the



## 132 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

schools and use the savings to police the district where the trouble is. By Gad, I wish I were Viceroy——”

Skene's explosive rumble of a laugh startled every one in the room.

“Come along and dine,” he said. “I am jolly glad you are not.”

## PART III

### THE CAVE

"I asked a wild yogi  
With dust in his hair  
As thin as a bogey  
And cross as a bear,  
But this funny old fogey  
Did nothing but stare.  
If you meet a wild yogi,  
Dear children, beware."

*Santa Claus' Geography.*



## I

THE goatherds of Zoipal would come and peep at Narasimha. Great was his reputation for occult power. He could project himself across the valley, they said, render himself invisible or dual, pass through a chink in the wall, and endure a month without food. The bowls of milk, the handfuls of grain, the little bundles of firewood they placed in front of the cave were often found untouched in the morning.

He would sit for hours, his eyes fixed on two pebbles at his feet, restraining his breath until the material world slipped away from him and his spirit floated in ether, looking down indifferently upon his shrunken body and his bowl and his staff and the grey sheep beside the stream as passing phenomena detached for the moment as the atoms cohere in the dance of matter and are reflected in the glass of illusion. Soon nothing objective would remain, and he would be drawn to the centre of light, conscious only of the rush and beat of wings as he was swept along with the eternal energy which informs all life.

Power and influence came out of these trances.

## 136 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

The Swami owed much of his magnetism to them and the extraordinary hold he had upon the affections and imagination of his countrymen. Long ago before he visited Europe he had practised Yoga at Ujjain. Then he had studied the Vedanta philosophy nine years at Benares. Thus he became a kind of superman in his own country. Images of him carved in wood and stone and cast in metal were sold in the idol shops of Kashi, where he had a great name for piety and transcendental power.

When he went to Europe the extreme forms of yoga asceticism which he had practised at Ujjain had left their print on his character and his face. He had a great deal of what is called in the jargon of the séance psychic force. He was of the stuff that founds sects among impressionable people, and in any other country than England he would have had disciples to apotheosise him. As it was, he became something of a lion. He addressed societies and sipped tea in fashionable boudoirs; romantic hostesses felt that he brought more of the mystery and repose of the East into their drawing-rooms than a shelf-ful of bronze Buddhas, and more than one emotional woman, English and Russian and American, embarrassed him with chelaship. A spiritualistic lady in Notting Hill literally knelt at his feet and offered herself to him wholly.

At Cambridge he lectured on Sanskrit and Indian philosophy. He spent two years on the Continent, and learnt to speak French and German and Russian and Italian fluently. He was six months at Göttingen. Then he went to the States and preached Vedantism. He was a figure in the West, and he found himself in danger of becoming the centre of a coterie of faddists, seekers after a new thing, women and degenerates, who would make him their Guru and call themselves Hindus. Esoteric was a word they were fond of using, though they would not have wasted an hour on the subtlest of philosophers if it had suddenly been made the State religion, or if they had been born under its orthodox sway. The Swami measured them and went his way.

In the end he took more from the West than he gave it. He never lost his transcendentalism, but his spirit became tempered like a sword, his ideals were crystallised. He remembered that the Vedas and all that they stood for were embodied in his own people. Gradually his flame-like energy became narrowed and concentrated into a cause. Nationalism became a religion with him.

The Swami was proud of his race and the stock to whom the eternal verities had been revealed, and in whose heart alone truth could germinate. When Narasimha's history became

## 138 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

known the Englishmen who had met him in the West could not associate the dreamer and mystic with the revolutionist who pulled the strings of the Bharat Red Flag Society. But the Swami was an anarchist because he believed that his people could not become regenerate until they were free, a much more dangerous doctrine than that they could not be free until they became regenerate. He had no scruples. He would sacrifice a thousand Siri Rams and foster a nursery of young murderers. And no service rendered to his people could lessen his hate of the English. The most disinterested reformers must go with the others; they were, in fact, more dangerous because they stemmed the tide, and he would devote them and the Hobbsses, the "martial-law-and-no-damned-nonsense-wallahs," indifferently to the bomb. His father, the Lingayat, would not have hesitated between a black and white goat at the altar, and Narasimha had a good deal of the old Lingayat in him yet; only the crude religious fanaticism of the sect had been diverted into politics. Dean was right. The man had all the instincts of a wolf. "To sacrifice a white goat to Kali," that is, to dedicate an Englishman to the altar of independence, the ironical catchword of young Bengal, had emanated from him.

He had despised the English even before the

demon of anarchy had entered into his head. He hated their materialism and insensibility. Save for a scholar or two whom he respected, his associates had been mostly shallow dabblers in the occult, key-hole peepers, without power of abnegation or self-forgetfulness. The yogi would sweep aside the curtain while they fumbled with the woof, seeking an interstice in the hope that the light behind might steal through somehow upon their blind eyes. The best of England, the true tempered steel of the country, he did not meet and could never have understood. And Demos was an unclean beast he could not touch, projected obliquely across his vision like the ugly figures on the frieze of a temple wall that one passes by. The monster was symbolised for him sometimes in his memory by a country bumpkin in cap and gown, who had brushed up rudely against him in the Petty Cury at Cambridge and called him "a damned nigger."

He had more in common with the Gaelic American of the Western States.

On his return to India Narasimha was irresistible. He had studied man in two hemispheres, and to the open appeal of mystic and reformer was added the hidden one of the revolutionary. He was the superman who alone could unite and direct the dissipated energies of the national spirit. He captured the imagina-



## 140 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

tion of the people. He preached to young Bengal, and he based his message on the teachings of Krishna to Arjun in the Bhagavad Gita. It was an insidious appeal, this doctrine of *yoga* by action and death in the discharge of one's own *dharma*, rousing passion by the creed which preaches freedom from passion and denounces anger and fear and all manner of attachment, and giving secret murder the sanction of divine law.

From Bengal Narasimha carried the message north, preaching to a hardier and more dogged, if less subtle and impressionable, stock. Among the young men who were being put into the mould was Siri Ram. The Swami knew that he would come.

Sometimes when he was exhausted by *yoga* Narasimha would walk knee-deep through meadows of fritillary and iris and yellow spurge to the frozen stream where the striped lizards flicked in and out of the crevice between the rock and the snow. He would look down on the marg speckled with grey stones and sheep while the eagles swept under him, swerving from his feet by the turn of a point of a feather. Or he would go down the valley to the last outpost of the silver birches which hung over the Zojpat stream. Here he would sit in a sunny belt of thyme which fringed the shadow of a lonely tree like a fairy ring, or in a warm, close-cropped

hollow bright with forget-me-not and marjoram and meadow rue and turreted with the yellow spires of the mullein. Fritillaries and tortoiseshells lighted on his bowl; the murmur of bees soothed him into a trance. The silence and the space carried his mind far away until he was without attachment, at rest in *brahm*, and all the colour and life that danced and quivered before his eyes became a vague, illusory, opalescent gleam cast upon the plane his spirit traversed.

Narasimha's flight to Zojpal had fulfilled the religious bent of his mind. He was life-weary; he needed peace. For the last few years politics had been the most Sisyphean task. And he had not practised *yoga* since Ujjain. Once more he sat on the antelope skin, head erect, immovable, his gaze fixed steadily on his feet, controlling the incoming and outgoing breath, free of attachment, closing the passage to each sense. When the herdsmen brought him his bowl in the evening he would be performing the *pranayam*, and he would look at them without speech, or rather over and through them, and they would depart in awe.

As darkness gathered he climbed the mountain-side to perform another exercise, an unspiritual one—to prepare his physical escape. Every night he dug with the axe-head of his staff at the foot of a great rock. The herdsmen

## **142 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST**

would have been frightened if they had seen the sprite-like little man delving in the moonlight as if he had found a passage to the unseen. The Swami was loosening a pinnacle of the cliff which held back a mass of tumbled shale, and if dislodged would precipitate an avalanche upon the cave.

## II

SIRI RAM did not go to Skene for help and advice when he returned from Mograon. He had dreams of personal as well as national independence. He did not want an appointment. He thought that if he gave himself up to the cause the Society might help him. It was not likely to be for long. Government offered board and a roof for conspirators. It might be Amritsar gaol; it might be the Andamans; he rather hoped that he would become a political deportee. There would be pride and glory in that as well as comfort. He could have forgiven the Imperial Government their "barbarous unconstitutionality" if this particular kind of martyrdom had fallen on himself. He brooded much on the future, but the gallows always loomed at the end of these vistas.

He lingered in the city several days, and the students visited him surreptitiously. He and Banarsi Das and Lachmi Chand got themselves photographed, singly and in a group, and he enjoyed the first taste of hero-worship. He was a conspirator and capable of hurt. That inert

## 144 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Leviathan, the Government, would soon receive a prick from him. He would have been flattered if he had known that the C.I.D. had a copy of his photograph. But his thoughts always returned to the Swami, who had disappeared so mysteriously and completely after his lectures at Gandeshwar. If he could find him he felt certain of being put on the right track.

Every morning he climbed the rickety stairs to the chamber of Ramji Das, the secretary of the Achar Sadhani or the "Students' Improvement Club," as the local branch of the Bharat Red Flag Society was named. Ramji Das, the bunniah, lived in a kind of wooden doll's house above a druggist's shop in the bazaar. The ends of the iron girders protruded into the street, giving the flimsy second storey of wood built upon brick a much more substantial basis than it appeared to need. The balcony was painted in bright blue and yellow and green stripes, and roofed with strips of kerosene oil tins. The interior of the house was no more beautiful than the outside, and the fat bunniah who lurked within was a fitting complement to the dwelling.

Ramji Das was always sitting in the same corner. He would greet Siri Ram suavely, and seemed to encourage his coming, but said nothing directly helpful. They would talk politics. Economic grievances were the

bunniah's forte, though he owed his great riches to British rule. Under no other Government could he have amassed wealth openly, nor achieved the three chins and three paunches which in his thrifty class always indicate immense reserves.

His grandfather would have been afraid to be so fat, lest he should become a too palpable object for loot, official and otherwise. But Ramji Das kept a bank openly, and sent his son to a technical school, and owed his security to the police and his growing business to improved communications.

Yet he sat on his oily mat and oozed venom and spleen.

"Do not use currency notes, Siri Ram."

"No, I will not use."

"It is easy to make a piece of paper and sell it for rupees fifty, or hundred, or thousand. By this means they take money away from the peoples of Hindustan. If they leave India we have then nothing left in our hand but pieces of paper."

"I would rather leave the mineral wealth buried in the bowels of the mother," Siri Ram remarked sententiously, "than have it dug out by *feringhis*."

"You have the true political ideas. You read the *Kali Yuga*?"

"Yes, I have written a letter to it."

## 146 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"You see this morning the death of poor Indians has risen from twenty-two to thirty-four per thousand under British Government?"

"Yes, I saw."

"Do not forget that when you go to the villages. Also the poor have only one meal since the Mlecchas are come here. Remember that also. How does it sound? The ryots toil through hard times by tightening up their bellies."

Siri Ram looked at the folds of the bunniah's paunch. He wore no shirt; he had ample breasts like a woman.

"You will see I am qualified to spread ideas of independence. Swami-ji called me to him. He gave me books. I want to become political missionary."

Siri Ram spoke almost pleadingly. He felt sure that Ramji Das knew where the Swami was hiding, but he could learn nothing from him. He had a feeling that Narasimha had discussed him with Ramji Das, and that he was part of a reserve force to be used in an emergency. But surely his witness-bearing and expulsion from the College had qualified him for the cause.

One morning he noticed a difference in Ramji Das' manner which made him more hopeful. The bunniah admitted that he had heard from the Swami. The police were searching for him;

there was evidence at last. An informer had implicated him in a political dacoity in Bengal. He was in a very safe place, hundreds of miles beyond the frontier, living in a cave amongst the ice and snow. But it was difficult to communicate with him.

The Society wanted a few young men who could be trusted like the youths who had devoted themselves in Bengal.

Siri Ram volunteered to go.

"You must be a very secret man. Can you be confidential?"

Siri Ram could.

"Have you any money?"

Siri Ram had not.

"You have a father?"

"I have left him. He is pig-head, he will do nothing."

Ramji Das considered his bulging calves. "The Society is very poor," he said, "perhaps a subscription among friends. Your ticket to Rawalpindi. It will cost three rupees. After that you will beg."

Siri Ram looked at him with inquiring wonder.

"You will go as Sadhu," the bunniah explained. "You will accompany the pilgrims on thorny path. Narasimha will meet you at Amarnath. You understand? You must be secret man. If you go in full blaze of public



gaze it would not be poleetical. And use your cautions at Rawalpindi. Spies will be roaming there."

Siri Ram was almost happy.

"You had better go to-night. The pilgrimage is starting, and if you go separate you will attract noteece. I will send quarter anna postcard to Jaganath in Rawalpindi—

"Despatch homespun cloth, Sadhu-wear.' He will understand. I do not waste money on postal tickets. Besides, the police open letters."

There was a scarcely perceptible twitching of the folds of the lower part of the bunniah's face, which in other men might have been a smile. It did not travel as far as his eye.

"You go to his shop in Sadar Bazaar. He will make you Sadhu. He receives all our young men."

"And my ticket?" Siri Ram asked, "who will pay?"

Very slowly the bunniah unfastened the knot in his loin cloth and drew out three rupees and handed them reluctantly to Siri Ram one by one. Then he got up and waddled across the room to a safe in the corner. It was the first time Siri Ram had seen him on his legs. He took out a small parcel sewn up in oiled cloth.

"You will take care of thees," he said, "it is the Swami's dâk. Eef you lose it, he and a

number of others will be hanged before we kick bastard foreigners into sea."

Siri Ram clutched the packet reverently.

"Narasimha is living in cave," the bunniah continued. "The pilgrims will pass under it two days before they reach to Amarnath. Do not leave the path or pay attention to it. Narasimha will come down. He will be walking with the pilgrims. The name of the place is——"

Ramji Das searched among some papers on the floor. "'It is at Zoipal,'" he read out slowly in Urdu, "'below the goojar's track to Wardwan, two hundred paces south of the second bend in the path.' Narasimha is preeceise.

"Also if you hear that Narasimha has shaken off the coil," the bunniah added as an afterthought, "do not turn back. He may have another eencarnation."

Again Siri Ram saw the tightening of the folds of flesh as if they had been moved by some involuntary twitching of a thread inside which held cheeks and chins together. He was shocked to hear the Swami spoken of so lightly. "I do not understand," he said.

"It is nothing at all. A mere sop in the pan, only do not return if you hear that Narasimha has breathed his latest. Also when you leave the railway station do not go straight to

## 150 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Jaganath's. Go first to the Hindu Ashram. You will find a brother there who will take you to the shop after it is dark. I will send him message in ciphers. Jaganath will give you the incognito—when you leave the shop you will be the Sadhu."

As Siri Ram was descending the steps into the inner courtyard Ramji Das called him back.

"Keep cautions," he said. "Remember 'Namaste' will open all the doors. I had forgotten," he added, "there is another young man, a poleetical missionary like yourself. Very clever. He was in this shop last week. You will look out for this young man, Mohan Roy, on the road. His bodical structure is very small; he has three golden nails in his front teeth; and he is fond of living in the English costume."

Siri Ram was exalted. He was a political missionary at last. Ramji Das had styled him so. The Swami had remembered and trusted him and chosen him for this mission. He gripped the little packet in his coat.

### III

WHEN Siri Ram had left the shop of Jagath he had discarded the sacred thread, and cut off the tuft of hair on his crown, and he wore the *rudraksha*, the necklace of beads, emblem of Siva.

Siri Ram ate away the miles slowly and with pain. His pilgrim muscles were of later growth; he dawdled by the road and spent the first night at the dusty village of Barakao, fourteen miles from the city. On the third evening he crawled painfully into Murree. These were the first hills he had seen since Skene pointed out the long, white line of the Himalayas that cold winter morning from the College roof. He might have seen that distant outline often, but Siri Ram was not an observant youth; he did not notice the different colours of the hills, the smoky blue of the pines under rain, the extraordinarily delicate, almost timid freshness of the young rice beneath the gathering storm-cloud. The Jhelum almost in flood raced by him. The white horses reared and plunged round the bends, tossing the great

## 152 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

pine-logs forwards and sideways like splinters of wood, and the spray fell on the rocks at his feet. But he did not notice the timber or the freshets; he was conscious only of a volume of water and a noise in his head, and he remembered that the road had tunnelled in places through the rock. Yet he must have carried in his head some impression of a strange land, for at Baramulla he wrote to Banarsi Das: "The sceneries of this happy valley have benefited me, the ambrosial retreats of nature are not far off."

Truly he had entered a land different from anything he had ever seen. In the last few miles before Baramulla the torrent had become a wide, unbroken stream; the valley broadened out in rich pasture-land. He might look in vain for the starved kikar and shisham of Mograon. Large, generous trees spread a bountiful shade on the well-nurtured land. Walnut and willows and elms enfolded snug villages. In the heat of noon Siri Ram would lie under the thick foliage of the chenar. His daily tramp led him through straight poplar avenues. Mile upon mile of graceful, tapering white-stemmed trees from Patan to Srinagar. Snow glittered in the gap at the end of the long vista, and rocks seamed with frozen water-courses, a mesh of silver that disappeared in the black forest underneath. Lush marsh flowers twinkled in the

ditch at his feet. The wraith of Nanga Parbat hung between earth and sky; the massive dromedary back of Haramokh and many a crenellated peak shut in the plain with firm buttresses.

Trees and flowers and snowy peaks were new to Siri Ram, if there can be new or old to such a mind. Day after day he marched dully on, the personification of a wrong, looking neither to left nor right, nor up nor down, wrapped solely in his broodings. For in abstraction or contemplation—call it what you will—he was already the perfect Sadhu.

Seventeen days after he had left Rawalpindi he saw a low golden hill with a yellow fort scrambling over it, glowing in the slant rays of the sun and etched vividly against the hills which loomed dark under the storm-clouds. It was Hari Parbat, a landmark that even a Sadhu must see. Siri Ram learnt that he had reached Srinagar. The greater part of his journey was done. The cave of Amarnath where the Swami was to meet him lay among the glaciers to the north, now only eight marches distant.

He stayed two nights in Srinagar in the ancient serai of Bhairon Asthan, a three-storied, balconied, latticed caravanserai with windows fretted and carved, and a roof overgrown with moss and irises. The Mahunt had gone on to

## 154 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Amarnath, but Siri Ram met other pilgrims in the serai, the last few stragglers to be herded in the great camp that was gathering at Pahlgam.

On the road to Islamabad he overtook large camps of Sadhus. At Pampoor there were three hundred naked Vishnuites from Mooltan; at Avantipur a hundred and eighty Shivaïtes from Nepal, but he had speech with none of them. Then he met a group of musicians under a tree. A family of bangle-sellers went by, hung with their wares in long strings from head to foot and glittering like ringed serpents. A Muhammadan woman overtook him in a white *burka* with a purple crown, astraddle on a piebald tat hung with favours, her husband striding by the rein. Farther on he passed a group of Kashmir Pundits, hard, keen, unspiritual-looking men, priests and usurers in one. They sat by the roadside under the shade of a chenar in a ring of stone lingams—their spiritual ware—which were covered over with faded flowers and smeared with paint like blood.

An English subaltern rode by on his ambling Kashmir tat, a slim, keen, untroubled youth returning from first leave, his face and knees dark with the sun and snowdrift of Ladakh. As he passed, one of the spiritual robbers with the triple brand of Siva on his forehead advanced towards him from the shade, calling

after him in a half insolent, half cringing voice.

"*Hum Padree ha!* Holy man. . . . All Sahibs give backsheesh." The boy rode on without answer, a trifle perhaps added to the sum of his contempt. Siri Ram was ashamed.

The road left the river and stretched through a desert, stony plain under the parched hills, then joined it again, skirted by willows and sedges and flowering rushes. The scent of hot water-weed penetrated the shade; racing streamlets babbled of coolness. At noon the heat haze danced; the glare was blinding; and Siri Ram's throat and eyes were filled with dust. Light showers fell at sunset. Pearly mists rose out of the valley and hung in the jagged clefts of the hills, catching the slanting lights and etherealising everything. But Siri Ram was not uplifted or depressed. Bharat Mata, the mother of whom he talked always, was an abstraction to him. To bask in her loveliness, to gaze on her physical beauty, gave him no thrill.

It was at Islamabad that Siri Ram met Mohan Roy. They had passed each other often on the road, but Siri Ram had forgotten to look out for the Bengali. He had been too engrossed in his own mission. Chance only revealed his fellow conspirator, or was it Mohan Roy's intuition? Siri Ram was sitting under



## 156 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

a willow by the sacred spring of Ananti-Nag, when he looked up and saw the little man on the grass quite close to him eating a pear. He would not have noticed the Bengali even then if it had not been for the glint of gold in his teeth, which recalled somehow the rickety stairs over the druggist's shop and something Ramji Das had said to him about the road. There was a clue somewhere in teeth and gold. Siri Ram regarded the Bengali more closely, his grey chequered cotton trousers and coat, his bare head and short cropped hair, his glare spectacles and the necklace of tulsi beads, and the trifala, mark of Vishnu, on his forehead, made up a picture which seemed familiar. Suddenly Siri Ram remembered the conspirator he was to look out for on the road with three golden nails in his front teeth. Mohan Roy was grinning, he showed them clearly. Certainly his "bodical structure" was small, and he was living in the English costume.

"Namaste," said Siri Ram. It was the key to open all doors.

"Namaste," said Mohan Roy.

"Ramji Das told me to look for you." It was a safe thing to say. There are five thousand Ramji Dases in the Punjab.

"He told me, too, you might come after. You have the foreign letter?"

Siri Ram clutched his cloak nervously. They

were silent a little. Then Siri Ram said awkwardly—

“You love Swaraj, is it not? Why you wear the *wilaiti* clothes?”

“I like these clothes,” Mohan Roy said. “I would wear them if Shaitan made them.”

Siri Ram was angry.

“You belong to the cause of independence, do you not?” he asked.

“How do you define independence?”

“Certainly, it is fredom, liberty.”

“Yes, I belong. I am free—free to choose the clothes I wear and other things.”

Siri Ram did not understand badinage or the Bengali's inconsistencies. There was no life-weariness in this bright-eyed little man. He seemed to have a zest for pilgrimage. Though a rationalist and a philosopher, he spent half his days on the road, passing from shrine to shrine, and endured all manner of hardships in order to kneel before some monstrous image in a cave, or scatter flowers upon a lingam hidden away in the innermost recesses of the hills. And he did not even try to square his inclinations with his faith, as so many of the educated, emancipated and orthodox do. Only he argued that his caste mark and trifala and his badges of pilgrimage, and the regularity of his wandering life from shrine to shrine threw off suspicion, and made his revolutionary work

## 158 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

the easier. He even affected a sect and repeated a special version of the Gyatri, and had the symbols of Vishnu, the conch shell and the discus and the lotus and the club, branded on his right arm.

Siri Ram wondered. It had been the fashion in his hybrid student set to despise these things. The Aryas rejected them. When he left Gandeshwar he did not know the difference between a Sivaite and a Vishnuite. And his mistakes mattered little on the road, for there was room for every kind of anomaly in that motley pilgrim crew; men who put on the Sadhu's robe to escape the police or the discipline of work as well as the temptations of the world.

Mohan Roy had to be at Thaneswar for the eclipse and at Amritsar for the Dewali, and he would be at Hardwar during the Holi in the spring. He led a life of freedom with no one to annoy him except the plague inspection officers on the road. It was the true independence; Siri Ram was impressed. He sat under the willow for an hour listening to a tale of adventure, and when he took the road again he knew that the Bengali was reckless and daring, and indifferent to life. He had been tried often and found sufficient. When they left Islamabad they separated.

"We had better not be seen together," Mohan

Roy said, "for if one of us is discovered it will be more difficult for the other."

Siri Ram was proud of the dual "we." But he was soon overwhelmed with shame. Mohan Roy passed him on the road a mile outside the city.

"You had better take this," he said, handing him the oiled cloth packet with a smile. "You left it on the ground when you were feeding the fish."

From Islamabad the pilgrims turned up the Lidar river, the loveliest, greenest, and sweetest-scented valley in the hills, past the blue springs of Bawan, where the pilgrims feed the holy carp, and the rock caves of Bomtzu, and the temple of the sun. It was a green world, and bubbling streams chattered among the poplars and walnut trees and ran underneath the road. The blue stars of the succory shone in the little grassy banks between the rice. Siri Ram might have seen a pageant of English flowers if he had had eyes for anything besides his wrongs, borage and milfoil and mullein and bladder campion and the tall lousewort which smells like a hayfield and beanfield in one. He slept that night on the terrace of the monastery at Eismakhan.

The next morning he passed through the walnut village of Patkote, before the sun had entered the valley, and by noon he had reached

## 160 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

the great camp under the limestone cliffs of Pahlgam. Here he pitched his umbrella on a rock and sat, Sadhu-like, feeling more lonely among these seven thousand holy men than he had ever felt in his life.

His companions on either side, low-browed, naked, ash-strewn mendicants, sat motionless, with silent movements of the lips as if they had worked themselves into a trance. Half hypnotized by their stillness, half deafened by the roar of the torrent, Siri Ram sat dreaming through the hours in a sort of numb physical Nirvana.

Shivaites and Vishnuites, Sannyasis and Bairagis squatted in little groups, and drew circles round their fires, and when intoxicated enough with *charas*, beat any one who came within the ring.

At twilight a thick veil of smoke hung over the valley, but the Sadhus' cooking fire suggested spare diet. A ten-foot blaze on the bank opposite, the pyre of one of them, looked cheerier. Siri Ram became used to these beacons to the faithful at every camp.

The next morning he found himself in a strange human medley. It was a burning hot march up the valley to Tanin. The rocky path was a serpentine thread of black and white and yellow where the umbrellas of the faithful wound along the valley. The slaty-blue stream

leapt between the dark pines below. Sometimes the track descended to it, and the torrent swirling by drove the fresh, icy spray across the six-foot path between the bank and the cliff. Siri Ram would have lingered here, but he was borne along in the human stream to Amarnath.

Troops of Sadhus of different sects followed the road with different kinds of staffs and pails and water jugs. There were men sick to death carried on coolies' backs. Old ladies in light palanquins with red-tented covers peeping through the folds, young ladies pulling the folds back, little girls curled up in baskets and half asleep; old women and young, plain and weather-beaten, drawn to the cave in the hope of motherhood, riding astride on peaked cloth saddles, their anxious husbands walking by the rein. Sadhunis who alone in all that crowd obey Diana's law, and who may not ride or be carried, striding along in one shift, saffron- or scarlet- or wallflower-coloured, tied in at the waist and opening in a modest V at the bosom. Siri Ram passed along among all these unheeding. It was one of his vows as a Sadhu that he must not look at or speak to a woman.

A mile below Tanin a sheltered-snowdrift lay across the path. A Sadhu dislodged a chunk with the axe-head of his staff and carried it in his hand and moistened his lips with it, and

## 162 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

every pilgrim who came after followed suit. It was the first snow Siri Ram had touched.

The next day the pilgrims left the forest. The zig-zag up from Tanin was a trial of faith. Siri Ram panted up it for hours. At the top the path led through narrow defiles beneath the cliff, and he looked down upon the Zojpat tunnelling under the snow bridges a thousand feet beneath. He had soon passed the last straggling outpost of the birches. High up in the mountains above Zojpal, east of the goojars' track to Wardwan, Siri Ram looked for the Swami's cave in vain. He lingered by the stream until he met a cowherd tending his flock. He asked him if there was a hermit dwelling in the cave above the valley.

"The cave is destroyed, the hermit is dead," the goojar told him.

"When did he die?" Siri asked, with a sinking heart.

"Nearly a month ago. Part of the hill fell down in the night. They found his drinking vessel and his cloak outside. They called to him in the morning, but there was no sound within. It is certain that he was crushed by the falling rock."

The goojar pointed to a bare scar on the hill-side, the track of an avalanche, and a heap of *débris* on a terrace where his flock were feeding.

"The cave was behind that," he said.

Tears started to Siri Ram's eyes.

"Do not be distressed or turn back," a voice said by his side in English. "He had work to do. Eef he has kicked the bucket, he may have another eencarnation."

Siri Ram started. It was the voice of the bunniah. Looking up, he met the ironic gaze of Mohan Roy.

"He told you, too?" he asked.

"Surely he told me."

The Bengali stooped to drink from the spring in the rock. Then he went on, leaving Siri Ram to the cowherd and his perplexity.

That night they camped at Shisha Nag. Even Siri Ram was uplifted. Flowers and fruits and trees, lights and shadows, the delicate greenery of the earth, left him unmoved. But here was the peace of the eternal. He recognised the hand of God at last, the region of the spirits. But at night the physical need of warmth gripped him. He sat up for hours shivering in his blanket. The image of Jupiter, a long red torch, lay in the shallow basin to the west. The moon rose above the Koh-i-noor and suffused the lake. The clean shadow of a rock cut the water in half with a line as clear as doom. Then the shadow of a hand was thrown upon the precipice, firm and sinister, pointing down the valley. It frightened the



## 164 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

pilgrims; an excited chatter arose from the Sita-Ramis just as the camp was sinking into sleep. Whenever Siri Ram lifted his head from the blanket he saw the hand there, a palpable menace warning them back. It crept along the rock. Hours afterwards, when the moon was swimming overhead, it had disappeared. But Siri Ram was beyond wonder or fear or anything but cold.

In the morning all the pilgrims bathed in the lake.

The path rose from Shisha Nag and wound gently up to a pass still under snow. "Man's country is passed," they said, as they looked beyond; "now we enter the country of the gods." The last tree had been left a march behind; even the swart juniper had disappeared; the flowers became smaller and brighter. They had crossed the water-shed. The grey and buff and ochre rocks which hemmed in the valley became wilder and more fantastic. Splintered towers guarded the ravine. Streams flowed into the valley from the glaciers to the east, and the Sadhu who looked aside from the path might see the abode of the gods.

For what other purpose could these massive sky-communing mountains serve, approached by vast untrodden fields of snow, and visitable only to the eagles and the wandering spirits?

At last the road bends down into a valley

which seems to be closed in on both sides in the far distance by a barren mountain too steep for snow to lie on. A small red path ascends it into the clouds. It is the end of all things save mist and shadow and ice and snow. Hidden somewhere in that tumbled chaos is the cave of Amarnath whence the divine creative energy proceeds which fashions mind and clay.

But Siri Ram thought only of one deity to whom he addressed his wrongs. At Panjitani, on the eve of Amarnath, he wrote the letter he had promised Lachmi Chand.

"May the goddess of Independence be pleased," it began, "I have given up all pleasures and smear my body with ashes every day. The water of this place is very bad. It conduces to shortness of breath. Also there are a great number of flowers whose smells create sickness among the pilgrims. I have a number of unpleasant feelings in my inside. But I do not care at all for the so-called bowels and other obscure parts if I can serve my mother. There are thousands of pilgrims here, but they are all nearly ignorants, and worship stalks and stones. I have conversed with some who are serving the mother. They are here performing her business. I hope I would meet the good man to-morrow, your understanding will tell you who I mean. He will not return soon. Government are looking at him with a black eye."

## 166 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Siri Ram had not scattered flowers on the lingam since he was a child, when his mother used to take him to a little shrine under a banyan tree near Mograon. Faded marigolds and hibiscus and greasy red paint smeared over the black stone always carried him back there. But there were no marigolds at Amarnath. He gathered the grey-blue harebell and purple geranium and the mauve heads of the wild onion instead. He thought of his classmates as he toiled up to the cave, Aryas and scoffers at superstition, who would affect ignorance of the very attributes of Vishnu or Siva, and if approached on any point of sect or Puranic lore would repeat some platitude about the oneness of God. But all things were honourable in the service of the Mother; so Siri Ram found himself drilled in the line; jammed in between a gross, low-caste, charas-smoking Bairagi, "a very menial man," who knew nothing of the Vedas and could not read or write, and a naked yogi, a husk of humanity, who, the pilgrims said, practised the last austerities, and had renounced even speech.

Siri Ram could not help being infected a little with the atmosphere of the place, and the magnetism of that rapt, inspiring crowd. It was a world unlike any he had dreamed of, savage and untamed, terrible in its rugged uncompromising bleakness. He had not thought of

the surface of the earth as unapproachable to man anywhere. No wonder the superstitious people these valleys with spirits or the grosser manifestation of a personal God.

The strain on body and spirit began to tell. Siri Ram saw a Sadhini swoon by the road and the hospital Babu consign her to a basket in which she was borne quickly back to Panjitani from the very threshold of the god. An emaciated grey skeleton threw itself on the sharp stones and progressed to the cave by the *asthangam*, the progression of the eight members, dragging its heels to the spot where its forehead had rested in little jerks like a wounded caterpillar. The only flesh on the man was a pendulous goitre which trailed on the ground, a ninth member, lacerated by the sharp stones so that you might have tracked the man by his blood. The pilgrims stepped over him with half-envious wonder. As they approached the cave the auspicious pigeons flew out, and they uttered a loud cry, which was repeated all down the line; for the birds were Shiv's messengers, and the Sadhus knew that the pilgrimage was acceptable and their travail not in vain.

The cave compelled wonder. The brow of the rock, its roof, could only have been conceived by a god for his dwelling-place. The solid shafts supporting it were built for eternity.

## 168 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Such a vault must shroud the Primal Cause, the green mysterious ice lingam in which all energy and force reside. Even Siri Ram, the rationalist fed on text-books and annotations, could have believed as he approached to scatter his flowers on the ice, that the cave was no mere haphazard design of the changing strata of the earth, but a mansion built by hands at the nod of Shiv.

In this atmosphere of the marvellous Siri Ram thought he heard the dumb man behind him speak. He believed that he was being addressed, and there was something familiar in the voice that stirred him, something bass and vibrant, brought up from the depths, disproportioned to the frame. He looked behind him. The eyes of the man, sunk in their sockets, stared straight in front with no sign of recognition, but the voice carried without a movement of the lips.

"Stay behind at the overhanging rock of Goojam."

Siri Ram started. It was the voice of Narasimha. The Swami himself, but how changed! He had become a Lingayat mendicant, naked, ash-strewn, with the casket on his neck and the little tinkling bell on his arm. The flowing white prophet's beard had vanished. There was less pathos in the face without it, but more force. Siri Ram recognised the sad, earnest

gaze which the Swami had fixed on the students at Gandeshwar. There was less appeal in it now; the chin and eye dictated. He looked thinner without the salmon shift, the quivering shell of a man. He had become a voice, an influence, an energy personified, like the lingam in the cave.

## IV

SIRI RAM blinked downwards, fixing his eyes on the top of his nose, and thinking of nothing till his head swam, and he fell into something like a trance. Like Narasimha Swami he was life-weary. At times he almost forgot his dedication. The first days at Amarnath were the happiest he had known. Here abstraction was a merit, action a remote dream. He had never realised before how troublesome temporal cares had become. Here he could let go his hold on life. The escape from it was what he had needed all along. He felt born to Yoga. He watched Narasimha and imitated him always, believing that the Swami had escaped the mesh of desire.

Narasimha watched Siri Ram. He saw that he was not likely to carry anything to an end. He was a moody, impulsive youth, capable of resentment. There might be work in him of a kind at the proper moment, but he was a tool that needed careful sharpening, and one easily blunted; to be used, perhaps, and thrown away. He would not advertently betray a trust.

Narasimha warmed him with confidences. Under the snows of Amarnath the Gaelic-American-Indian plot gathered. Siva's mansion had become the Swami's office. The oiled cloth packet lay open at his feet; the floor was littered with his torn correspondence; envelopes with the American postmark fluttered on to the ice lingam. Siri Ram collected them in the evening with pious pride; there were letters from Paris and Dublin and Seattle and Portland and Los Angeles, envelopes with strange stamps—postal tickets Siri Ram called them. The cave had become the hub of the universe; the civilised world was conspiring with his master to set his country free. Sometimes Narasimha would hand the boy a private letter as carefully as he would lay a bit of juniper scrub on the dying embers. "Read this, remember it, and burn it," he would say. Siri Ram would read it and remember every word. Sometimes it would be a letter from an Indian in Paris or London, or an Irish professor in an American University, or some well-meaning Radical in the House of Commons.

"My dear Swami," the professor wrote, "the last mail brought sad news. The Rawalpindi *émeute* fell flat because the people were not ready. It was a little premature. You must have a day, a definite day, and fix it well ahead. Three years, four years, five years, ten years



## 172 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

even, but we must all work steadily for that. All our forces in one channel, and let there be no leakage of energy in the meanwhile. We will send you the arms—you will distribute the men.

"A thousand fires will break out in one day—in a city where there are ten English there will be ten thousand desperadoes, and many of them will be armed. They need not even come to close quarters. You can leave the large cantonments, where the British troops are, alone. Your own army will come in when they see what you have done.

"Where shall the outbreak begin? Not in Peshawar or Rawalpindi; my friends here tell me that was a mistake, and the Pathans would take everything from you. Not in Delhi—the name is as sinister for us as for them. I hope you liked my leaflet to the Sikh regiment. The colour stigma was a good touch. It will sting them up. Read Garibaldi, Henderson's *Art of War*, and Hewitt's *Christianity and Civilisation in the East*, and make your young men read them. You know Bruce-Morton's little book, I see Sowaran Singh has translated it into Gurmukhi. It ought to have a good effect among the Sepoys. Ramji tells me the Punjab University have set Seeley's *Expansion of England* for the F.A. course. That is a capital joke."

Mohan Roy read it and smiled.

"They will be putting Ramji Das on the Text-book Committee," he said.

Mohan Roy was always smiling. The more he smiled, the more resentful was Siri Ram's brooding. There can be no occasion for laughter, he thought, when the Mother is bleeding.

Mohan Roy laughed at the Labour Member's letter. He read it aloud slowly, with appreciative pauses and comments.

"He wishes to create suffragettes among our toiling sisters !

" 'The labour movement is not a sex movement,' he read ; 'you should not exclude women from any organisation you may form in the future. They should sit side by side with you in Council. If you ask for benefits you must ask them both for women and men too.' "

Mohan Roy smiled to think of the washer-women and the female mill-hands sitting beside the Swami voicing their wrongs.

"Ah, this is personal—most complimentary, I am sure."

"I enjoyed your friend Mr. Mohan Roy's article in *The Eastern Review*. His generous tribute to our party's liberal interpretation of our obligations to your countrymen was much appreciated in political circles here ; though the bureaucrats will not enjoy some of his strictures.

## 174 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"The very ideas of National Progress and National Advancement have come into being in India only after the spread of English education." Such sentiments from the lips of an Indian patriot in these troubled times are most encouraging. I showed the article to Dr. Byleman, who is going to pay a hurried visit to India next December. He wishes to study Indian questions on the spot, so that he may secure a thorough grasp of the difficult problems which are facing us at this parting of the ways. It may be hoped that on his return his voice will carry even more authority in the House of Commons than it does at the present moment. He will be in Bengal three weeks. During this time he will require the services of a bright young Secretary who will be able to put him into touch with the inner life of the teeming millions of our great Eastern Dependency. He is especially anxious to study the question of the suffrage and representative government from inside. Dr. Byleman was very much struck with your brilliant young friend's article, and I suggested to him that Mr. Mohan Roy would be a very suitable young man for the work. Will you kindly ascertain if he is ready to accept the appointment? The salary would be at the rate of £20 a month; it will be provided out of party funds. Dr. Byleman will be leaving Bombay early in January.'

"Yes, I accept," Mohan Roy said with a grin. "You may tell Dr. Bylesman Mohan Roy is willing."

The Bengali's levity incensed Siri Ram. He saw nothing humorous in the letter. He had been told that Dr. Byleman, though a *feringhi*, was one of his country's saviours, like Tilak or Arabindo Ghose or Bepin Chandra Pal, with whom he fought in line. Good should come of his visit. Freedom, perhaps, without blood.

To the Swami all this talk of reform was so much meaningless patter. He was, if anything, opposed to it. He tolerated the meddling of sympathetic politicians because to detach himself from them too openly would be to show his hand. But he wanted no gifts, no concessions. They only delayed the millennium. The Indians must take everything for themselves. Repression was a dam against which the silent waters were gathering ready to burst.

He watched Siri Ram and understood his thoughts. He fed him with another scrap, a piece of brown paper, the outside of a bag, redolent of coarse sugar and the bunniah's shop. Siri Ram read.

"Send a strong robust sepoy shirt to take charge from Mr. Khaddar (homespun cloth), so that there may be no derangement in our store work.'"

"Can you translate?" the Swami asked.

## 176 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Siri Ram remembered the bunniah's postcard to Jaganath, in which he had been called "homespun cloth, Sadhu wear." With this clue he slowly interpreted the metaphor.

"Some patriot is leaving an employment where he is useful to the Society, and they are asking for another patriot, a bolder one, to take his place. No doubt it is some dangerous work."

The Swami commended him.

No commendation was so sweet. He loved the cabalistic touch with its honeyed irony and the jargon of anarchists—"the bridegroom and the bride" for the destined victim and the bomb or pistol he was hurrying to meet. "Marriage expenditure"—on picric acid and chlorate of potash! And the "sweets prepared in every city and village in the land for the day of thanksgiving." He himself would prepare "the sweets," or distribute them. He heard their deafening detonations in the thunder of the avalanche which awoke him from his dreams.

Sometimes Narasimha translated for him. The letters from the Secretary of the Red Flag Society in America were in cipher. One told of the export of five hundred revolvers packed in sewing machine cases and among condensed milk tins, booked through foreign houses in Bombay, and distributed among small retail merchants "in sympathy with the cause." A

cryptic letter from a Bengali in the Calcutta Customs advised him with the most extraordinary circumlocution of the receipt of seventy Browning Automatic Pistols and thirteen Derringers smuggled in by Chinamen through the Lascars of Penang.

Thus the Swami fed him day by day with just the scraps that were good for him, sufficient to keep his resentment warm and swell his pride and fill him with a sense of the strength of the organisation behind him. It was only in the cave that he began to understand the magnitude of the scheme, the width of the web Narasimha was weaving. One day his imagination would be fired; then, the next, it all seemed so far away, so hopeless, and life so short and effort so exhausting. He fell back into the Yogi mood. He did not wish to live, but he did not wish to die violently.

The Swami watched him, and saw he was not ripe. Mohan Roy observed him with his caustic smile. "He is a goat," he said to the Swami. "He may be useful for a sacrifice, but you will have to lead him right up to the altar."

And he told the Swami of the meeting at Islamabad.

When Siri Ram saw the Swami and Mohan Roy talking together he was jealous. He hated the Bengali, who made him feel insufficient. He distrusted his humour, and was uncomfortable

## 178 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

under his smile, and he felt that he was too familiar with the Swami. He had disliked him from the first, and had not forgiven him easily for finding the oiled cloth packet by the sacred tank. And he hated his English clothes. One day when his patience had been overtried by a long muttered conference from which he was excluded he broke out into passionate protest.

"Why you still wear *wilaiti* clothes," he said, "which are polluted with the blood and fat of animals? You swear by the Mother, and then you go and disobey her and defile her temples."

Mohan Roy heard him with a smile. He only said : "I like these clothes. I am habituated to them."

Siri Ram got up sulkily and walked out of the cave. He sat brooding among the wild leeks and geraniums and dwarf willow scrub. The choughs sailed over him, crying plaintively. A russet-bosomed marmot sat up by her burrow over the snow-ridge and piped her shrill menace.

Siri Ram was tired of everything. He wanted to become a Sannyasi. Mohan Roy had smiled at his exercises in Yoga. The Bengali always smiled. Yet he had the ear of the Swami; he could hold his attention for hours. The Swami would sit silent listening while he talked, and Siri Ram would squat in the far corner of the cave watching the glint of the "golden nails" in his teeth as if there was some occult spell in

them. Sometimes the two would glance across with mutual understanding to where he sat by the small ice lingam of Ganesh, and he knew they were talking of him. Narasimha was always considerate, But Siri Ram felt that he took less interest in him than at first, and he attributed his diminished esteem to Mohan Roy, whom he hated.

He was counting the little pinnacles on the bluff of the cliff opposite, his resentment merged in dull abstraction, when he heard the Bengali's unwelcome voice behind him.

"I hope I do not intrude upon *Raja Yoga*. Or are you contemplating the beautiful scenery?"

Siri Ram did not speak. The Bengali seated himself on a stone by his side.

"No doubt you have already made the acquaintance of this lethal weapon?" he said.

Siri Ram saw that he held a dark black metal thing in his hand. He looked at it fascinated.

"It is revolver?" he said, with a question in his voice. It was the first he had seen out of a picture, though he had often held them in his dreams.

"You are cracked marksman, no doubt?"

"No. I have not used."

"Take it. I will teach you. Patriots must learn to shoot."

Siri Ram held out his hand. He was cold



## 180 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

with fear, but he was ashamed to shrink. It lay in his open palm; he dared not press any part of it. Mohan Roy showed him how to grip it, and placed his first finger on the trigger-guard.

"Now," he said. "You see that *janwar* there." And he pointed to the marmot, which still sat upright by her burrow, uttering her shrill warning pipe.

"Consider that is his Excellency. He is safe, as you are amateur. Point the deadly missile at his breast."

Siri Ram took the revolver and held it out at arm's length. "Do I look down pipe?" he said after a long pause.

"Yes. And put your finger on the hook underneath."

Again there was a long pause. The revolver was not cocked, and Siri Ram dared not pull hard enough.

"I will lift the trigger," Mohan Roy said. "It will explode easier."

Siri Ram took it a third time. Immediately there was a deafening explosion, which echoed through the narrow ravine like the roar of a distant avalanche. The bullet was thrown high up against the opposite cliff, and bits of splintered rock rolled slowly down to the ice roof of the stream. Mother marmot dived into her burrow as if she had been shot. There was a

smell of burning. At the last moment Siri Ram had brought his left wrist up to the barrel to steady it, and his sleeve was burnt and his wrist singed. Drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"His Excellency has fled," Mohan Roy said. "Never mind. You will be cracked shot soon. Some of the volunteers only shoot touching."

He went away smiling, and Siri Ram hated him more than ever.

The next morning when he woke in the cave he saw that Mohan Roy had gone, and he felt injured because he did not know why. All the morning the Swami was wrapt in an ecstatic trance, and afterwards when he spoke to Siri Ram he made no mention of the Bengali. Mohan Roy had vanished on some mysterious political errand, and he who at the first call had become a martyr to the cause was left in the cold. Siri Ram was sunk in gloom. He could not understand in what way he was inferior to the dwarfish Bengali. In the evening when the Swami was stirring he approached him, awkward and self-conscious.

"I wish to practise Yoga," he said.

"You have other work."

"Have you work for me?"

"Proportionate to your love and zeal. You must have patience."

"It is not diminished."

## 182 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"Your hour will come."

Narasimha poked the fire with the axehead of his staff and stared fixedly into the ashes. Siri Ram knew that he must ask no more.

"Why do you wish to practise Yoga?" the Guru asked after a long pause.

"I want to become spiritual man."

"You wish to escape from yourself?"

Siri Ram could not answer.

"I am a Yogi first of all for the cause. I strengthen myself thus. By this means I can communicate with others hundreds of miles away. To-day while you were gathering fuel I sent a message to Bengal. You can never attain this power."

"Can Mohan Roy send air messages?"

"I can communicate with him."

Siri Ram knew at once that his spiritual hopes were vain.

"The true *Yog* is attained through concentration, not through abstraction. It is for the master, not for the servant. You have not the strength. It will be your part to act and obey. Your business is with the action now, not with the fruit. You will be found a task, and you will perform it. Nobly, I have no doubt."

Once more Siri Ram felt drawn within the fold. Content shone in his eyes.

Narasimha observed him, and he remembered that he had neglected him. He had barely

noticed him for days. Now he must make amends. He must lead the goat a little further on the path towards the altar.

"You wish to know why Mohan Roy has gone?"

Siri Ram started. The Swami read his mind always like a scroll.

"Mohan Roy has gone for two reasons. First he will discover whether my tracks are covered, whether I can safely go back. I must finish my work in Bengal. You know, it is believed that I have perished in a fall of stones. Afterwards he will find means to let me know. It will be difficult. He himself, I think, will not return."

There was a note of deepened dejection and pathos in the Swami's voice which recalled the lecture at Gandeshwar.

"Why he will not come back?" Siri Ram asked.

"He will die, I think, but the future is not clear."

Siri Ram gaped for more.

"You have heard of Ghulam Ali of the Criminal Investigation Department in Bengal. He has learnt too much; he is dangerous to the cause. Mohan Roy has gone for that. He is clever and bold, but it will be difficult for him to escape."

Siri Ram looked into the Swami's eyes

## 184 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

and dropped his own. A cold fear crept over him.

"You wish me——" he began falteringly.

"No, you are not ripe for this work yet. Besides there is only this one, and Mohan Roy will not fail. You understand. We kill informers and spies only now, and we kill them because we must—not because we hate them, but because they hinder us. The Englishmen will fall later, all together. Perhaps your turn will come then. We want Government to sleep now. A sacrifice here and there does more harm than good. It prepares them, and it frightens the Liberals in England."

"Will Byleman give us freedom without blood?" Siri Ram asked innocently.

"Do not hope it. Do not care for their gifts. Scorn them rather. They mean nothing to true patriots. The Mother can be delivered only by her own sons. But we must not frighten them yet. When they are frightened it is more difficult for us, because they do not hold Government back, they do not oppose the reactionaries. The army budget is increased; troops are quartered where we do not want them; it is more difficult in a hundred ways."

Siri Ram thought of the Professor's letter. "You must have a definite day and fix it well ahead. We will send you the arms. You will distribute the men."

"Can you repeat it?" the Swami asked.

Siri Ram started. When the Guru looked at him intently he felt that a searching light was thrown upon his mind. Nothing could be hidden from Narasimha. Men's thoughts were naked for him to read.

"Ye-es. I have committed it to memory. 'Dear Swami, the last mail brought sad news. The Rawalpindi emmoot——' He droned it out word for word, as he would have repeated a page of annotator's stuff at Gandeshwar.

"That is well done. Keep it in your mind. We had decided on this course before you brought the Professor's letter. Remember. The awakening will come in one day. The sword of your country is in your hand. Shrink not. What if ye fall! There is no other door of admission into life after death."

When Siri Ram fell asleep that night the Sadhu was submerged in him. Again he was the conspirator and patriot.

The next week the snow lay lower on the mountains. Fuel was scarce and the cold intense. The ibex came down to within a bow-shot of the cave. Siri Ram wandered down the valley to collect juniper scrub, and climbed back over the frozen stream. The work was good for him. He brooded less, and often when he returned to his rice and mess of leeks thoroughly tired out he sank into a mood of something like

## 186 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

passive cheerfulness. On these frosty evenings by the flickering fire in the cave the Swami would devote an hour sometimes to his education.

At Amarnath Siri Ram learnt the whole of the Bhagavad Gita. He would chant it in the cave. Sometimes the Swami's full, rich voice would take up the hymns, vibrating with passion, and they would sing alternately, and then as the echoes died away the Swami would become exalted, and he would preach to Siri Ram as if he were a great company, just as he had preached at Gandeshwar, as if all the youth of India were in the cave listening at his feet.

"Remember the teaching of Krishna to Arjun and you will not draw back. This dweller in the body is invulnerable. Slain, thou wilt obtain Swarga; victorious, thou wilt enjoy the earth; therefore stand up, resolute to fight.

"Shrink not from blood. Heed not the voice of the weaklings who chatter of 'rebellion.' You cannot commit this sin. Against whom can ye rebel? Tell me. Can a *feringhi* rule in Hindustan whose very touch, whose very shadow compels Hindus to purify themselves?

"Every patriot who removes one of these pale fiends from the sacred soil of Hindustan becomes a Saint.

"Listen to the sacred Shastras. It is in the

young men alone that the salvation of the country lies. Blessed is your birthright. You are the Valki—the god is incarnated in you who will rid India of the Mlecchas.

“Come, offer your sacrifices before the altar in chorus, and let all white serpents perish in the flames ye are kindling even as the vipers perished in the serpent-slaying sacrifice of Janmayog.”

It was an impressive scene—this wraith of a man illumined by the dancing firelight which threw the shadow of his uplifted hand against the dark, dripping, buttressed rock above the lingam, a lighted husk, a bursting chrysalis, too weak almost to hold the straining spirit within. And the voice which issued from this shell was rich and vibrant, and it awoke echoes which beat along the massy roof of the cavern like lapping waves until they escaped into the eternal frosty silence of the starlight and the snow. And the message was delivered to the youth of the nation, to the Valki incarnation of Vishnu, which was personified in Siri Ram. It was enough to inspire the dullest and send him hot foot on any sacrifice.

But Siri Ram's hour had not yet come; the fire that the Swami had lighted in him must smoulder long. In the morning he was sent on a homely errand. He had to descend twenty miles to Zojpal to bring back white bark for the



## 188 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Swami's letters, and to find some empty gujar's hut for him to dwell in. For the time had come to abandon the cave. The snow was encroaching. Soon all exit from the valley would be blocked. The herdsmen below had already driven down their flocks, and the reign of the eternal stillness was already spreading wider, a sovereignty to be disturbed by no living voice until the snows melted in the margs in the spring.

Siri Ram slept in a gujar's empty stone hut and returned on the evening of the second day with the bark. As he approached he saw Narasimha standing in the entrance to the cave as if he expected him, and looking cold and thin. The Swami took the bark from Siri Ram with a quiet word of greeting, and sat down by the fire and wrote in cipher for an hour.

"Wrap this in your loincloth," he said, "and give it to Ramji Das. Go with the dawn."

Then, seeing his chela's surprise and dismay, he added—

"Mohan Roy has been quick. He is dead. Both are dead. I had a message in the night."

## PART IV

### THE 'KALI-YUGA'

The determinate reason is but one in this mortal life,  
Many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the  
irresolute.

*The Bhagavad Gita.*

The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the  
foolish whose knowledge is imperfect.

*The Bhagavad Gita.*

(Mrs. Besant's Translation).



## I

SIRI RAM did little in the cold weather for the cause. The Swami's birch-bark letter to Ramji Das repeated Mohan Roy's estimate. He was wobbly and unstable. One could never tell what foolishness he might commit, undoing with one hand what he did with the other. But to Banarsi Das, still at a loose end, he was something of a hero. That glib youth tersely defined the progress of the three conspirators when he said, "I am still seeking an employment. Lachmi Chand has become unpaid teacher in the Gurukul. And Siri Ram has taken the bitch between his teeth."

When half his term of rustication was over Banarsi Das approached Skene for pardon. First came the petition, a lengthy screed with capitals in red and the weightiest words in capitals. Skene was humbly reminded that he was a moral father. Banarsi Das solicited an opportunity of "ameliorating" himself "under his kind control." "I cannot thole this misfortune," he added, "I hope you would be my father. I think I have not gone worse than the

## 192 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

prodigal son." The conclusion showed signs of a maturer hand.

"In the end I beg to invite your kind attention to the notorious lines of Mr. Shakespeare, Esq., and request that you would be kindly disposed to pardon me for the sake of the master who taught us this lesson—

"The Quality of Mercy is not Strained."

Banarsi Das quoted the whole passage.

The position of the hybrid weighed heavily on Skene, for he understood the pathos of it more than most Englishmen. He was genuinely sorry for the youth, and he could not see what place there was for him and his fellows in the general scheme. Banarsi Das followed up the petition—which had been sped shaftlike in advance to penetrate official callousness, by a personal interview. He wanted to be recommended for a teachership. Skene told him to come back to the College after his year's rustication and start again with a clean slate. He would find an opening for him somewhere, but he advised him to give up the idea of educational work.

"You must see," he explained, "that with these ideas in your head you would be out of place in a school."

But Banarsi Das did not see. Since he had been away from the College his education had progressed on lines prescribed by the Students' Improvement Society. He had swallowed

chunks of undigested history washed down with heady libations of political tracts.

"Sir," he ventured, "if you were an Early Briton would you not resist to the Romans? If you were an Italian would you not resist to Austrian tyrants?"

Skene smiled sadly.

"If I were an early Briton resisting the Romans, I should not think it reasonable to ask them for an appointment, certainly not an educational one."

But this was vindictive evasiveness to Banarsi Das. He was really incapable of seeing a point turned against himself.

"I would not openly preach against Government," he began.

"Where is Siri Ram?" Skene interrupted.

"Sir, he contemplated the adoption of the teaching profession. I hear he is walking in the Academe's groves with Mr. Lachmi Chand."

Banarsi Das shuffled his feet, self-consciously pleased at the successful delivery of so neatly-turned a trope. He watched for the effect of it in Skene's face, and noticed a slight muscular movement at the corner of his mouth which he took for approbation. The gift of eloquence atones for much.

He retired, not discomfited, and answered an advertisement in *The Tribune* for a Teachership in a Native State.

## 194 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"SIR,

"I am young man of commanding appearance and winning personality. I have read up to F.A. I sometimes use the English costume. To enable you to get at the true idea of my managing capacity and other abilities I send under separate cover photo of myself in College group. The sixth one, second row, commencing from left, with crossing legs, head bare, and right hand grasping firmly with the wrist bone of the left is my own photo. I hope if you would kindly appoint me to situation under your kind control you would find me ornament who would pull on with you. A postal ticket of  $\frac{1}{2}$  an anna is sent herewith and intended for sharp reply."

Skene was relieved to hear the news of Siri Ram. The Gurukul at Hardwar was perhaps the best melting-pot for him if he had the patience to endure it. The school is the nursery of the Arya Samaj, and its aim is the realisation in modern life of the "Back to the Vedas" cry. They believe that in the golden days, before Self was made a god, the Indians were lords of the earth and of themselves and of all knowledge. The Vedas were the repositories of all Science, and there was no modern revelation that did not lurk in some cryptic saying of the Rishis. And the conquest that this implied arose out of the conquest of Self. So long as

they remained their courage and purity and austerity of mind the splendour remained with them; when they became enmeshed in the web of delusion, given over to gratification of desire, it passed away.

The only way to recapture the lost heritage was a return to the discipline of life which made it possible. That was the truest and sanest form of patriotism, the only sure road to political independence, and better for body and soul than any wheedling of authority for privilege and concession. The wiser half of the Samaj—even the Aryas were divided—had the courage to face the fact which Skene had explained to his students, that they must be the thing before they could enjoy its privileges. If there is any health in this survival, Skene thought, nothing could fall out better for Siri Ram than that he should be caught up in it.

Lachmi Chand wrote happily from Kangri. The austerity of the life was in keeping with the deeply religious bent of his mind, for the ideal at the Gurukul was nothing less than a return to the old Bramacharya system of Vedic times. Lachmi Chand was Superintendent of a group of boys, and lived under the same discipline as his pupils, sharing their spare diet, sleeping on a plank bed, rising at four every morning, and bathing in the river and performing the same physical and devotional exercises.



## 196 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

It was a sixteen-year course for the young Bramacharis, who were admitted in their eighth year, after which they were cut off from all outside influences, and not allowed to go to their homes or write to their parents or receive letters from them until they were twenty-five. They were eight years old when they took the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience, and their guardians pledged themselves not to remove them.

Siri Ram did not feel drawn towards Hårdwar. The life was too tedious and obscure, the fruition too remote, and the patience and self-discipline beyond his resources, though he would not have admitted it even to himself. But the months passed, and he was not called upon to do any desperate thing. The revolutionists were very quiet; there had been no political assassination since Mohan Roy had despatched Ghulam Ali in Hooghly railway station, winged a Moravian missionary and shot himself. All this time Siri Ram supported himself on twelve rupees a month by teaching the son of a cloth merchant in the bazaar. The prospect of the pedestal receded. He ascended the steps into Ramji Das' chamber almost daily, but that obese worthy blinked at him unconcernedly from his corner like an overfed spider, and gave him no material encouragement. If he was to remain a Nationalist, it seemed that

he must fall into line with the band of silent workers whose sacrifice was unheeded, and whose names were never heard—a sad anticlimax for Siri Ram.

In the train he felt half afraid that he might be persuaded to stay at the Gurukul. Lachmi Chand expected it. His letter glowed with zeal and devotion. He spoke of the great anniversary when thousands would flock to the camp by the Ganges. Siri Ram was to meet him in the Punjab students' serai in time for the first day's celebration. Banarsi Das would be there, and they were to go to the *pandal* together to hear the lecture on "Service and Sacrifice."

It was the time of the Holi festival and the pilgrim train carried a double stream to Hardwar. Hordes of the enlightened were going to the anniversary, but the superstitious outnumbered them. Siri Ram found himself with three other Samajists jammed in a carriage full of his illiterate countrymen, priest-ridden idolaters groping in the dark and unconscious of their degradation. These simple folk were going to bathe in Mother Gunga and wash away their sins. It was an opportunity for missionary zeal.

They were a bewildered crowd, taxed and bullied by the police and the subordinate railway officials. Herds of them were penned in at every station, and not allowed to pass the barrier

## 198 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

until they had paid some imaginary toll. Then the train would start off as they were clambering in, and they would be thrust back roughly by the guard to await another turn, perhaps twelve hours afterwards, when the weakest were likely to go to the wall again. Some of them had camped outside the station platform for two or three days.

A group of sad-eyed villagers ran in a dazed way beside a first-class carriage, staring blankly at the strange forbidden emptiness in which a subaltern reclined alone with his little bear-like dog and fishing rods and bedding. The boy, looking up, saw an old man's forlorn face just in time to pull him into the passage at the end of his carriage and make a sign to his three sons, laden with pots and pans and blankets and sugar-cane, to jump in behind as the train moved off. A disgusted official ran alongside protesting, but they were already squatting on the floor, stolid and expressionless, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and secure until the next junction, where the subaltern found room for them in a carriage.

All these venturesome ones who hoped to reach Hardwar quickly by the iron road, performing a journey of weeks in one or two days, knew that they had submitted to an unseen agency which was all-powerful but perverse and capricious, and to be circumvented by rites

which the policemen and ticket collectors alone understood. At every station there was confusion and bullying and apparent resentment that the pilgrims should take the train at all. It was "*Hat jao. Hat jao.* Get out of the way. Make room." Then the glib sedition-monger slipped in among them. They were ready to listen to any tale, though they had not taken it much amiss when they were mulcted at the barrier, knowing that every coveted door in Hindustan, whether of courts or shrines or offices, is guarded now as it always has been by some initiate priest or parawalla who is happily appeasable.

There were an old man and woman in Siri Ram's carriage who had come from their village with a concession for a party of twenty-four. The youth with the ticket had been lost in the crowd at the junction, and some of them had already been discovered and turned back. The old couple hoped to get through undetected. Their case was discussed in the frequent sidings.

"You will have to pay again," a clerkly Sikh said to the old man.

"I cannot pay, and the paper was to take us all back."

A tear rolled down the old woman's nose and broke on the quoit-like earring which covered her wrinkled face from ear to mouth.

## 200 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"See how they treat you," Siri Ram said. "The Sircar only want your money. They don't care whether you see Hardwar or not."

"Or whether you live or die," the clerkly Sikh added.

One of the Samajists began to talk at the old man.

"Did you hear of the railway accident last week?" he said to Siri Ram. "It was to kill off the black men. I heard it from a labourer who is working on the line. A red-faced man with white hair asked him to remove a rail, but he would not."

Siri Ram recognised a trained hand, perhaps a Bharat Red Flag man. He tried the sitting sign, the thumb resting two seconds on the right knee, the first finger on the shinbone. The man repeated the sign on the left.

"It is these big trains they destroy most often killing hundreds at a time. There are too many black men, they say."

"They will be enough to eat up the *feringhis* soon."

"Whoever heard of an Englishman being destroyed in a railway accident?"

"Indeed, the road is better."

The train drew up in a siding with a violent jerk, flinging the Samajists and pilgrims together pell-mell. Each man thought it was his end.

They reached Hardwar eighteen hours late. They had been shunted into sidings for every goods or passenger train that passed. The engine had jibbed and started and stopped dead as if it knew the cheapness of the human freight behind. The hustled carriages had charged into each other at intervals, and the couplings resisted with a straining and clanking which might have awakened the dead. The pilgrims who had been shaken together with violence all the night emerged in the noonday heat instead of in the cool of the vigil.

## II

THE belated Samajists hurried off to the camp at Kangri, five miles away, but Siri Ram was drawn with the superstitious into the city. He loitered dreamily by the bathing ghat. He stood on the bridge and looked down on the clear stream of the Ganges and the crowds of pilgrims waist-deep in the cold water. He had been taken there when a child by his mother, when he had been plunged in like the little howling black-haired urchin, clasped to the breast of the enormous matron underneath, lost almost against the ample folds of the pale bosom. He watched the happy naked crowd with a kind of envy, until he was drawn to the ghat and became one of them, dancing youths, slim maidens, wizened old men, mountainous matrons, wading out to Hari's Island temple. He circumambulated it with them, and patted the stones, round and round in the ecstatic queue, and it made him happy to feel the stream lapping his waist and the great holy fish nosing his legs, as the Brahmins threw in the *atta* from the bridge.

When he had bathed he sat on the Island in the dry breeze that followed the stream, looking

north to the woods where the River Houses of the Chiefs ended in the scarlet dhâk forest at the foot of the hills. The tender green of a Shisham plantation in the river bed spoke of spring, while the sâl forest of the Sewaliks on either bank formed an amphitheatre glinting with the red and gold of the turn of the year. In the far background the purple mountains were lifted up, cleft by Gunga. If Siri Ram marked them, it was only in a vague dreamy way with an inner consciousness that he was in a land associated with the beginnings of things, and a thrill of something like pride that he walked in the country of his old gods. His day dreams were rudely disturbed.

"Why you have been bathing at the temple? You are a superstitious."

It was Shiv Narain, an acquaintance of his own Samaj. But Siri Ram had not time to think of anything to say before the superior youth had passed on and was lost in the crowd.

"Am I polytheistic heathen?" he asked himself. "No, I was heated and unclean. Why not in the waters of Ganges?" Then he remembered a newspaper article he had read, and he wanted to run after Shiv Narain to explain to him how the Ganges water had been analysed by Bengali chemists, and had been pronounced purer than any other water, having no germs but rather a virtue that destroyed them, so that



## 204 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

those who were "habituated" to bathe in it and drink of it lived healthily and attained a ripe old age.

"Sound mind may be had in the sound body, no doubt," he muttered.

He thought of Swami-ji's lecture. It was another proof that the old Rishis knew by direct revelation what western scientists have been groping after for thirty centuries in the dark. And they knew more.

"Yes, I am going back to the Vedas," he said, with a reminiscence of Swami-ji. "When I bathe in the Ganges I am obeying purely rationalistic principles of health, revealed to ancient sages, and inculcated by them upon ignorant masses in allegorical shape."

But he found it hard to be esoteric all alone. The human throng appealed to him. He looked at the sea-green bottles for the holy water on the stalls, and the baskets and the lingams and the flowers for the shrines, and he thought he remembered being led by his mother past the shops when a tiny child, and he felt a faint regret that these things had ceased to mean anything for him. He wandered into the courtyard of Sarvvanath's temple, and he was nearly knocked down in the gate by a band of singing Sadhus, who had smeared one another all over with the scarlet paint and were emerging with a triumphant chant, dancing and swaying and

posturing and waving their open palms, running at passers-by and daubing their clothes and faces, or pouring their brass lotahs full of the purple dye down their backs. Siri Ram shrank into a corner of the arcade and regarded them sadly. His sleeve was stained with carmine.

Before evening the stones of Hardwar and Kankhal were dyed red and purple, doorsteps and lintels, stalls and booths, even the sacred bulls were smeared so that one seemed to be looking at everything through crimson-stained glasses. And the companies of bacchanals came rolling out of the great houses, singing their indecent songs, leaping and beating drums with an inhuman flame-like glow on them like fiends in a devil's smithy.

The hours had slipped by. Siri Ram was due at the Gurukul at five. He had promised to meet Lachmi Chand and Banarsi Das in the Punjab Students' Camp and go with them to the *pandal* to hear the lecture on Service and Sacrifice; but the Pundit was half-way through his discourse when Siri Ram was passing the Mahatma's house at Khankhal, star-gazing as was his wont, looking up vacantly into the bare wintry twigs of the pipal and the green flowers of the mango and toon, whose fragrance scented the road.

At the end of the street a cart track tilted down the bank of the river, where an unfinished

## 206 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

causeway led over the Ganges bed towards the distant flag of the Gurukul. Here Siri Ram met another stream of people toiling home on foot, and in slow, labouring bullock-carts through the boulders and deep sand. These were the Aryan Protestants returning from the camp : a sombre-clad procession. In Khankhal the two streams mixed, the thread of grey and black was soon lost among the Bacchanals—as a mountain stream debouches into a yellow silted torrent, and flows beside it a moment before its clear waters are merged in it. If Siri Ram had been given to parables he would have seen in the current from the Gurukul the beginnings of the Reformed Church which was to purge the nation, and in the opposing stream the stains of superstition which were ultimately to be absorbed in the increasing volume which flowed from the direction of the Vedic flag. And he might have reproached himself with “the unlit lamp, the ungirt loin.” As it was, he remembered that he had failed to keep his tryst with Lachmi Chand, and that he had lingered a whole day among the superstitious, attracted by their empty gawds, while he might have been listening to the discourse of the Pundit. He was ashamed of the vermilion stains on his coat, and he kept to the left of the track, so as to hide his sleeve as much as possible from the Reformers.

The sun was almost setting when he crossed the wattle bridge over the third channel and was near enough the flag to decipher the mystic *Om*. In the courtyard the young Bramacharis were sitting round the white fires, chanting their mantras, and casting their rice and *ghee* into the flames, just as their Aryan ancestors had done long ages ago, centuries before the Puranas, when they streamed across the Peninsula from the mountains in the full pride of their race, singing glad hymns as they camped among their herds by the river-side. It was the first time Siri Ram had seen the sacrifice of *Hôm*, the oldest surviving ritual in the world. "It is no superstitious rite," Lachmi Chand explained, "but the symbol of purification. They keep no idols or lingams here, they do not worship stalks and stones. It was in this way the old Aryans used to purge the air."

Lachmi Chand was already a devout convert. The Pundit's lecture, though it had offended most of the Samaj, had left a deep impression upon him. The gist of his dismal creed had been that the Indians had lost their country because they were not worthy of it. They had no character. They could not trust one another even in little things, not at all in great things. They had no sense of duty, responsibility, discipline, organisation. And until they had developed these characteristics in the way

## 208 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Englishmen have done, they could not hope to do anything. They must wait for a new generation—a distant generation, when the system of Bramacharya which was being taught in the Gurukul had leavened the whole nation and recaptured some of its past glories, before they could dream even of Swaraj. In the meantime they must serve the British Government faithfully, and they must imitate the good qualities of Englishmen, and learn to speak the truth and depend on one another, and to do their duty for its own sake, wherever they were placed, apart from selfish motives, and they must be ready to forget their mutual differences when their country was in danger or in need of them.

In theory, the Pundit went on, no people were more thorough and systematic than the Indians. They could draw up schemes and societies, and rules of life, appoint leaders and office-bearers, and issue eloquent appeals towards union and nationalisation. But in practice nothing came of it. Every new community was divided up into half-a-dozen different opposing factions before it had been in existence a month, according as its members were influenced by pride or greed or envy, or the hope of personal gain, or class privileges. Societies whose professed aim was solidarity afforded fresh examples of disintegration. Reformers who were always talk-

ing of self-effacement and national self-consciousness cared more for the glitter and prominence of their position at the head of their ineffectual factions than for any real good to the cause. And this was not so much due to calculating selfishness as to lack of character and steadfastness. Young men were carried away by their dramatic sense and the heady and superficial emotions which quickly-assimilated ideas always bring to the surface. The ideal of Progress and national advancement which was on everybody's lips was a new cry which had not been heard in India before the spread of English education.

This was strong meat for the Samajists. Their leaders had talked a great deal about the degradation of the country, but always as due to British influence and education. The aim of their teaching was to impress the Bramacharis with the sense of their glorious national heritage, and to lead them back to it and away from the meretricious glitter of western refinement. They believed that it would be India's part some day to rescue Europe from the slough of materialism into which she was sinking. This was to come in the age of universal Bramacharya.

So, as the Pundit continued, discontent grew louder. It was felt that he had exceeded decent

## 210 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

bounds. He was destitute of national self-respect. Young men at the edge of the *pandal* interrupted loudly. Ready catch-words, some in English, often tags of text-book reminiscence, were exchanged. "Sycophant, time-server, lick-spittle, subserviency, fouler of his nest"—and such burrs as stick to graduates who have struggled through the tangled idiom of our classics. It was a bitter draught, but there was worse to follow.

"It is not enough to found a Sabha or Samaj and call yourselves patriots. We must change ourselves before we can change others. It is because the Englishmen possess these qualities which we do not possess that a million of them are able to control three hundred lakhs of Indians just as one small boy can control a hundred sheep which nourish the blind life within the brain, because he is morally and intellectually on a higher plane than the dumb animals. And just as sheep cannot escape from the control of the boy as long as they are sheep, in the same way the Indians——"

But the Pundit was not allowed to finish his speech.

"He was drowned in stream of angry vocables discharged with torrential violence." So Banarsi Das described the scene in his letter to a friend. The Pundit may have spoken

sincerely. Or it may have been strategy, another way of rousing the young men against the English. His speech certainly had this effect on Siri Ram, though he only heard the diluted version from Lachmi Chand, who had taken it in literal earnest. But, disingenuous or not, it had incensed the Aryas.

Lachmi Chand took Siri Ram over the "Academy," and showed him the Library and Laboratory and the huge cow-sheds and dormitories furnished only with plank beds. Then he took him to the great *pandal* where the meetings were held and the Visitors' Camp, a mile almost of whitewashed, tin-roofed sheds and thatched wattle outhouses. He had approached the Guru about his friend, and there was a humble office, almost menial, which Siri Ram might have at once. Lachmi Chand was full of zeal. Siri Ram had to run by his side to keep up with him. He was busy from morning to night, and at the next bell he had to be with his *brachmacharis*, a tender group of novices which he was shepherding.

As they strode back they met a continual stream of visitors going towards the river. Lachmi Chand took Siri Ram on to the roof of a shed and pointed to the plain where a sea of black- and white-robed Aryas, swollen by tributaries from every side, extended for over a



## 2 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONARY

ile. "It is the initiation ceremony of the first Muhammadan convert," he said proudly. But somehow Siri Ram was not uplifted like his companion. He was strangely depressed. The mountains laboured with these birth pangs for so small a mouse. He thought of Narasimha Swami and Mohan Roy, and even longed for Marnath, forgetting his jealous humours there. And all the while Lachmi Chand was informing and preparing him, as he panted by his side, talking as if he were already dedicated.

"We rise at four in response to the tintinnulation of the bell. In winter it is four-thirty. After bathing there is drill. The exercises are very profitable to the body. Then *yagna* and *agni Hotra*. Milk is at seven. Then teaching at ten-thirty. In the interval——"

Siri Ram was relieved at the thought of the interval. He admired rather than envied his friend's service. He wished to dream and moralise and talk until the hour of his call, and then to do his work all at once and with one stroke. Suddenly a bell "tintinnabulated," interrupting his friend's discourse and his own apprehensions. Lachmi Chand started from him running, and calling back to him to be ready in the courtyard at four in the morning.

It would be wrong to say that Siri Ram slept on it. He knew already that he would drift

along some other current. When he thought he was wondering whether to stay or not he was only wondering how he could escape without appearing lukewarm. He dreaded the routine and discipline of the place, but he had not the courage to admit his shrinking. In the end he did what most young men of his temperament would do. He said he would come, and went away meaning not to come. He persuaded himself that the machinery of the Gurukul was too slow, and that he would go back to Gandeshwar and do some desperate thing.

The next morning, having bathed with his charges, Lachmi Chand saw Siri Ram to the bridge, happy at the prospect of reclaiming his friend. He had the true pastoral spirit. They walked hand in hand.

"You will return in three days?" Lachmi Chand asked.

"Yes, I will return. I have a few businesses."

"And your father? Are you going to Mograon?"

"I will write a letter. I shall not mind him."

They unclasped hands. Siri Ram turned his back on the Vedic flag and pursued his vacillating path over the rough boulders of the old channel. Without raising his head he followed the line of least resistance, which would have

## **214 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST**

brought him back to the island if Lachmi Chand had not called after him, pointing to the ford. Siri Ram swerved on to the track again. By the time he had become a wobbling black dot on the sand Lachmi Chand knew in his heart that he would not come back.

### III

A WEEK after the anniversary at Gurukul Siri Ram was given his chance. Much frequenting of Ramji Das' staircase had brought him preferment. He was appointed acting scapegoat prison-editor of the *Kali-Yuga*. The post did not carry a salary, and it required no special gifts. The issue was prepared for the new Editor, who had to be on the spot when the press was raided, and claim responsibility. The reward was honourable confinement.

The *Kali-Yuga*,<sup>1</sup> as the name implied, was a political journal of a pessimistic turn. It was the policy of the gentlemen who financed the organ to sail as near the wind as possible, and occasionally to let the bark capsize, when they would throw some callow youth overboard to right her. Several immature patriots had already been sacrificed, while the nebulous authors of the enterprise escaped. But they did not get off scot-free. The press had been confiscated, and the profits had been inconsiderable. Still the sheet emerged in a new quarter under a new name—the *Kali-Yuga*, the present incarnation of the local spirit of disaffection,

<sup>1</sup> Era of Darkness.

## 216 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

was also to go. The people needed waking up. A red-hot number had been prepared. The lamps in the temple of Independence were to be lighted again. It was a commination service, and Siri Ram was chosen High Priest.

The policy of the *Kali-Yuga* was opposed to Narasimha's method. The Swami wanted to let the Flame burn secretly. Ramji Das and his circle were for noise and advertisement. They were all for a panic. If one talks enough about revolution, they said, it will come. It was half the battle to get the people used to the idea, and a murder here and there, and a few flaming leaflets would go a long way. They liked to see officialdom agitated and suspicious. They chuckled at all open signs of uneasiness, talking with their tongue in their cheek of "a flutter in the Anglo-Indian dovecotes." That was a phrase that occurred two or three times in an issue in their most moderate organs. They felt that they had gained a point when any of the less responsible Anglo-Indian journals lent themselves to the scare, unable to resist a bid for sensationalism.

Siri Ram had wits enough to see that Narasimha would have condemned the *Kali-Yuga*. He remembered the Swami's conversation in the cave, and his warning that the time had not yet come to act, and that Government should sleep. Narasimha had never impressed his

imagination so much as on that morning. He wished now that he could serve him, though his errands were perilous, rather than the pampered, worldly-looking bunniah. But no word had come of the Swami for months past. He had been ill in the mountains in the cold weather, and his name was not heard in the conspirators' talk so often as it had been.

The *Kali-Yuga* was not badly edited. Its harmony of tone and idea might have extracted admiration from a connoisseur. Hate had distorted its features into a kind of consistency. The notes, correspondence, telegrams, leaders, even the advertisements and notices, were all the complement of one another, so that it had the physiognomy of an astutely edited London paper which comes out every day pervaded with some one idea, its features regular and proportionate, its expression set in the smirk or smile or frown demanded by the moment. It did not subscribe to Reuter, but items of European news which would interest Indians were telegraphed by a correspondent in Allahabad within an hour of their appearance in *The Pioneer*. The weekly London letter, by an Indian barrister in the Temple, which was taken up with India in Parliament and the sayings and doings of retired bureaucrats, generally narrowed down into an attack on Lord Curzon, who was still the "Aunt Sally" of Indian journalists. When-

## 218 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

ever "His Ex-Magnificence" made an after-dinner speech or wrote a letter to *The Times*, the London correspondent's letter was full of it. The *Kali-Yuga* and a dozen other sheets were never tired of throwing mud at him. It was not strange that Siri Ram's next obsession, after his anti-cow-killing campaign in the school, should have been Lord Curzon, and that he should have come to regard him as the author of all evil. Whenever he saw the headlines: "Cock-a-doodle-doo," "The Prancing Proconsul," "The Arch-Panjandrum," he longed to be an editor himself, and lacerate the feelings of ex-Viceroy. Ramji Das had warned the proprietor that Siri Ram was a strange, obstinate youth, and it might spoil everything if he were thwarted. So, as part of his reward over and above the glory of martyrdom, he was allowed one column for his own lucubrations. He had thought of giving a paragraph to Banarsi Das.

Siri Ram had often frequented the offices as an interested loiterer. He had nearly left a finger in the lithograph roller, and one day he had fallen into the machine for making ink. The premises of the *Kali-Yuga* took up three sides of a courtyard, and were approached by a remote alley, leading out of a *mohalla* in the bazaar. The rooms were small and cell-like and filled with tables of type, or stacks of superfluous forms and circulars, and dirty-looking paper

which dry-rotted in every corner. In the yard one tripped over broken stone slabs for lithographs and the remains of prehistoric hand-presses. The third side of the building was taken up by the press, and the fourth by the engine, which also worked a flour-mill, the only one in Gandeshwar which did not belong to Ramji Das, for that astute capitalist was not going to be mixed up even indirectly with such machinery.

When Siri Ram's instructions were complete, he was left in the editorial chair. The portentous issue of the *Kali-Yuga*, for which he was to stand sponsor, was already in type save only his own column, which was still unfinished, an advertisement or two—payment uncertain—and the telegrams from Allahabad. It was an eloquent appeal, an open bid for revolution, as defiant and outspoken as any document that had seen the light in the Punjab. The leaders opened with an appeal by Narasimha Swami: "Which way does Salvation lie?" It was the work of an inspired fanatic, strong, nervous, impassioned, all trumpet-call and drum-beat, without a flourish to weaken it or a superfluous trope. The Swami had delivered the address at a secret meeting in Gandeshwar two years before, but held it too provocative at the time for publication. Now the Society decided that the moment for it had come, and the prophet's



## 220 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

wishes were forgotten. The second article was in a different vein, bitter and cynical. Its text was a train outrage in which a young subaltern of a British regiment had deposited a portly Bengali grandee out of his carriage on to the platform of Howrah station. As ill-luck would have it, the gentleman was a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, and, as the *Kali-Yuga* pointed out, probably of much more ancient lineage than his ill-bred assailant. Beginning thus painfully in the right, the editor went on to enlarge upon the different law that held everywhere for "black and white" in the face of Christian professions of brotherhood. He glanced off to the case of the Indians in the Transvaal, speaking of black men in mental inverted commas, and playing on the delicate theme with such skill that the brown-skinned man who read might well run amok at the first white face he saw. A white man could not read it without feeling guilty and sick. Siri Ram, to whom man's equality was an undebatable fact, rose in his chair as he read and called out to the foreman and the type-setters in his craving for indignant sympathy. But none of his staff had come.

The third article offered a salve to his inflamed resentment. It was headed, "The Awakening of the Agricultural Classes," and it held out hints none too vague as to how the

awakening might be completed. It ended with this sinister peroration—

"The *Feringhee* does not yet know us. He has long dealt with us, but no amount of familiarity has grown between him and us. Hidden amongst the mango groves of Plassey, without having even a semblance of battle, and by fraud, forgery and deceptive means, they have taken possession of Bharat Mata. That is why they fail to understand us. Now they have the audacity to tread on the tail of the cobra. The very sedition cases of which we now hear will start the 'fire.' *Feringhee!* let us tell you beforehand that you will soon know for yourself of how much each and every heart in Hindustan is capable. We know that you are thick-skinned, and cannot understand subtle words. The Indian now seeks to settle accounts with you. We thought of understanding one another's feelings in an altogether different way. But you would not let that be. You seek introduction to us by treading on our tail. Do whatever you please. Only remember the hideous cobra and its sting."

The Notes and Comments were equally virulent. A new Honours list had just been published, and there was a caustic paragraph on the Indian gentlemen who had been given titles, which had come to mean "nothing but the price of sycophancy and subservience."

## 222 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

More venom was spilt on the Anglophiles than on the English themselves. Muhammadans, who were counting on British favour and privileges over the Hindus, were warned to prepare themselves for that rude awakening which might come any moment without any notice or warning. To a letter published in the *Pioneer* from a native of a disaffected district upholding the justice and consideration of Government, the *Kali-Yuga* published a reply pointing out that the writer was a candidate for Government service, and that his application was still pending. Empire-Day celebrations brought down a shower of scornful gibes. The *Kali-Yuga* derided the "Flunkeyism" of Lahore. As a lesson to "Empire-Day-wallahs" it resuscitated a grievance which ought to have been "an eye-opener to all who were not ashamed to take part in such—for Indians—meaningless demonstrations."

Siri Ram read on fascinated. He did not notice the inconsistencies of his chiefs, the column of abuse evoked by the letter of a person "whose opinion is of no consequence," and the demand for extradition and a trial in British Courts for the political suspects who were taking their chance before the tribunal of a native State.

It was not till noon, when the telegrams were coming in from Allahabad, that he began to

realise that his foreman had failed him. He sent for the man, but the old press chowkidar returned half-an-hour later with the news that he was drunk. Siri Ram was in a desperate plight. The proof-reader had already made off, fearing to be involved in the prosecution. The editor was beyond call, making good a distant alibi. It was understood that no written word should pass between them. The drunken foreman was now his only stand-by. There were still three blank columns to fill; the mails north and south carrying the spawn of the *Kali-Yuga* to Bombay, Calcutta and Lahore passed through Gandeshwar between nine and ten in the night, and Siri Ram was left to see the complex business through with two or three gaping assistants who knew no English, and could not be trusted even to set type.

Responsibility, it is said, stiffens the most fibreless, and Siri Ram was responsible. He came to decisions and rose almost to initiative, investing himself with the dignity of office. He distributed the telegrams among the type-setters, he sent the chowkidar to the foreman again, praying him to awake from his drunken stupor, and he made up his mind to let the uncertain advertisements go and use the space for his own fiery rodомontade.

Three o'clock struck, the pressmen were still setting up the telegrams, the foreman had not

listened to his prayer, when a bright idea struck him. He looked up "Drunkenness" in the dingy old office Encyclopædia, and sent the chowkidar a third time with a note praying his debauched assistant "for the love of the Almighty to take an emetic." Then he began fumbling in the type boxes on the sloping tables. In five minutes he had set four words and bungled these, mixing up different sizes of type and putting them in backwards and upside down. In the middle of this he remembered Lord Curzon, and ran back to his den, hot all over with the fear that his lordship might escape his castigation.

The office to which he retired was little more than a pigeon-hole, littered with files and old proofs up to the small barred window which looked out on to the courtyard. Here he sat in state patching up for the hundredth time the long-considered attack upon "His Ex-Magnificence," which had been rejected of many editors and which he was now at last to father himself. It was a mosaic of the most haphazard kind; for Siri Ram had pieced together all the abusive catchwords of Indian journalism which had been levelled against his political *bête-noir* since his retirement. And as all his most cherished epithets and phrases had been culled from different journals on different occasions, the result was the oddest mixture of "moderate"

and "extreme," shrieks and playful irony in the same breath, the hysteria of the fanatic, and the sad smile of the injured friend. Siri Ram threw vitriol with the smirk of tolerance. He was the mentor and assassin in one.

"Who is Lord Curzon?" he asked. Lord Curzon was a "Satan" and a "high and dry imperialist" and a "prancing pro-consul." He was "a sun-dried bureaucrat" and an "Imperial Bounder." He was a "Judas," an "Arch-Panjandrum," "a superior Purzon" and "the common Enemy of Man." And he was a "Barnum." Siri Ram looked up "Barnum" in Cassell's *Concise Dictionary*, and not finding it, he respected the word more, feeling certain that the shaft would tell.

He ended moderately, having learnt the trick of restraint in climax, a common device in the journals of his school, with its inimitable suggestion of tolerant aloofness and power withheld. He had intended to write—

"It is true we have not been accustomed to blow Lord Curzon's trumpet or to praise him with faint damns. Though it seems he has not learnt humility, his Lordship may now chew the cud of his thoughts for some days to come."

But much of this pure salt was thrown away. The pressmen blundered, and the dark Philippic through which he had held the torch

## 226 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

to Curzonicide ended in an advertisement of Dr. Huri Natn's pills.

"Only see. A single dose will produce the desired effect in the marginally-noted diseases. Its effect is like thunderbolt."

The Proconsul, if these lines ever met his eyes, must have shuddered at the grim innuendo. Siri Ram cannot have been aware that they gave point to his eloquence. Had he perceived their extra-minatory significance, he would have hesitated to add a word that might have restored the peace of mind of his lacerated victim. As it was, he inserted a slip in all the copies that had not gone to press.

"NO L I O E.

"We regret to say that by mistake of Pressman first eight pages of this journal were printed in a wrong order. The readers are requested to read such forms according to the number put on the head of the page, and not according to the place they at present occupy, as mistake has unfortunately been found out too late for the correction. The Editor begs to be excused for the inconvenience to our readers by the above-mentioned Pressman. Also in some parts of the columns the horse precedes cart. In each and every such case the readers would

kindly do likewise. With some little trouble he may do the needful.

"EDITOR."

Siri Ram had no luck. Nevertheless he was filled with pride. When he discovered the mistake at the last moment, he thought that his Notice would make everything right. The foreman had arrived at six o'clock, touched perhaps by Siri Ram's appeal. He certainly looked as if he had tried the remedy. He spoke no word, but drifted solemnly round the press with injured gravity. The man had a drop of white blood in him which may have explained his debauched habits. He was extraordinarily competent. In a few minutes the engines were working, and the whole shed throbbed with the song of triumph. Siri Ram watched the advance and retreat of the rollers, certain and deliberate almost as fate. He had set them in motion, and they gave him a sense of power, of finality even, which he had never felt before. He listened to the rhythmic pulse of the crank. He stood by the press as the sheets were delivered, watching the birth of its prodigious issue with the pride of a parent.



## IV

MERIVALE tried Siri Ram, the "Prison-editor" of the *Kali-Yuga*. The unhappy youth only presided at the birth of one issue, but he was a most competent scapegoat. He stood his trial manfully, and gave no one away. The prosecution found him obstinately loyal. He burnt every page of manuscript on the premises except his own incriminating essay, to which he owned up with pride. The police found him sitting beside the conflagration when they raided the office. It was Dean's first actual encounter with the youth. He told Merivale he had never seen any one so much on the defensive. Siri Ram rose up to confront them as if he expected to be led off to the gallows out of hand. At first his manner was an odd mixture of aggressiveness and "funk"; then human pride crept in. Perhaps he felt that he had scored a point, and could afford to be generous. Before they had finished turning out the office he had shown them one or two small details of the press on his own initiative, as if he had it in his mind to be hospitable.

In the street his manner was perfect. His

friends had come to see him taken; hundreds of sympathisers lined the road. His face was bright and smiling; he looked as if he had expected an ovation, and bowed to the crowd with little jerks of the head which would have made Dean shriek with laughter if the whole thing had not been so pathetic.

He kept up this demeanour through the trial and forgot his sullen broodings. He had become positive, almost alert, as if for once he were on the winning side. When the Counsel for the Prosecution examined him after his statement in the hope that he might draw his instigators into the case, he hugged his criminality and quoted Mazzini and Garibaldi sententiously. The gaol as yet had no terrors for him.

The *Kali-Yuga* trial was followed with great interest in the Club. The confiscated issue with Siri Ram's Curzon article in it became a treasured possession, and every evening Merivale was expected to entertain his friends with new humours. He and Skene alone, perhaps, saw the true pathos of it.

Siri Ram an editor! Skene remembered the nightingale, the "bird that lived in thicket," neglected of hungry sportsmen, and encouraged debauchery in poets. "Can't you track the other fellows down?" he asked Merivale. He and Dean and Merivale and the very young subaltern

## 230 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

were drinking tea in the verandah after a hard set of tennis. "I suppose the whole thing was in type before they let him into the office."

"Yes, but we can't get hold of them. I can only confiscate the press."

"You'll let him off light?"

"Two years, perhaps. I can't make it less. The scapegoat ruse is too convenient."

"He is a game little beggar. I didn't think he had it in him."

"He plays up like all of them," Dean said, "when people are looking on. Hullo, here's the Colonel man."

Hobbs approached Skene sadly.

"One of your fellows, isn't it? What did I tell you? I see they are going to have Board Schools now for the little sweeper boys."

He laid a hand on Skene's broad shoulders with mock reproach, and tried to sway him backwards and forwards. The burly pedagogue rocked sympathetically.

"No place for a soldier. Eh, old man? We all know what you are going to say."

"No. I'm damned if it is."

"It may be soon." Merivale was thinking of the enemy within the gate. "Our own Press run the *Kali-Yuga* hard," he said. "Did you see that article in *The Planet*, 'Can we hold India? Probably not.'"

"That sort of sensation-mongering does more harm than Radical slop."

"Of course. We couldn't play into their hands better. It is just what these agitators want—to make the people think we feel jumpy. Once let them think we are on the edge, and they'll try to push us over."

"Do you think they'd put up a fight?" said the very young subaltern. "I don't suppose they'd have a chance."

"Not in the long run, perhaps. But we don't want another mutiny."

"The sooner we have a little blood-letting the better," Hobbs said. "It'll quieten things down a bit. Come and play Bridge."

Skene refused. "I'm too sleepy," he said. "I'd revoke."

Dean stayed with him, and they discussed the *Kali-Yuga*.

"Do you think Narasimha had anything to do with this?" Skene asked.

"No, not directly, though part of it reads like his style. You remember Mohan Roy?"

"The man who shot Ghulam Ali at Hooghly and blew his own brains out?"

"Yes. Siri Ram was seen with him in Kashmir, and Mohan Roy was here in Gandeshwar two days before he did it, asking about Narasimha Swami. He had just left him, but he wanted to find out if we knew anything."

## 282 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

"The avalanche business was all a ruse, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Mohan Roy's visit was a feeler. The Swami sent him here to find out if it was safe for him to come back."

"And he decided it was not?"

"I am not sure. Anyhow he is beyond harm now."

"Have the Kashmir people caught him?"

"No. He is dying, I hear, up in the hills. Pneumonia after exposure."

"That may be a ruse too."

"I don't think so. Anyhow, he is an extraordinarily single-minded man. I can't help admiring him."

"My students would follow him like the Pied Piper."

"It's only natural. They love to see a superman among their own people. 'In Vishnu-land what avatar?' Yet I don't believe he made a single friend in Europe."

"Talking about colour prejudice. Don't you think it is rather a misnomer? I mean the whole thing is chemical. You might as well talk of the prejudices of acids and alkaloids."

"Simple as litmus paper." Dean knocked the ashes out of his pipe and left his friend to his moralisings.

"Oh, Hades!" Skene muttered. "Have I got liver?" And he reminded himself of the

physical origin of depression and the inconsistency of humours. "This is Tuesday," he said. "If history repeats itself I shall be smiling on Thursday at the forlornness of my condition, but I'm dashed if I see it now."

The truth was, Skene was life-weary like Narasimha. He was tired, and the Siri Ram trial had made him think. He liked his young men. They were friendly and responsive, but he had become a little sceptical about his influence. He felt stale and off his work. It was like pumping air into a football with a huge puncture.

Skene did not turn to his own kind for comfort. The instinct of the wet blanket was too strong in him; he subsided into a long chair in the verandah and watched the crowd. He saw Mrs. O'Shaughnessy stalk into the ladies' room followed by the Chaplain's wife, whom men called "The Voucher," because of her suspicions and her great concern.

Skene would have laughed if he had known the common peril that had drawn these strange allies together. They were discussing the sub-bovine girl. The trouble was about the scores in the Ladies' Bridge box, of which the monthly account had just been posted on the wall.

"I know I was up at the end of the month," the padre's lady was saying. "It isn't safe to leave a chit with her when she loses. I'm

## 284 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

sure she tears them up when she gets the chance."

Here Mrs. Innes, the Commissioner's wife, the "*burra-mem*"<sup>1</sup> of the station, passed through the room from the verandah, and was appealed to as an oracle.

"I should be very careful another time," she ventured graciously, with an air that indicated her aloofness.

"Another time indeed!" the Voucher sniffed when Mrs. Innes was out of hearing. "I refuse to play with the girl. The point is—can we put it right? Hadn't some one better speak to the Secretary?"

Here Mrs. Waddilove, the gruff-voiced lady with the three chins, entered, following in Mrs. Innes' wake, but was detached and initiated into the scandal. She recommended caution. It might have been a mistake. Perhaps she really forgot.

The Irishwoman's voice rose high in challenge. "Forget! Don't you believe it, she's no chicken."

Here the conversation became subtly disparaging. The girl was stripped of her sparse plumage. If she *had* been a chicken she would not have had a feather left. It was noted that she had been almost partnerless at the last dance, and the padre's wife was evidently glad.

"She has seventeen pads in her hair," Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> Great lady.

O'Shaughnessy screamed. "Sweet-peas went to see her when she had influenza, and counted them."

"Hssh!" the Voucher protested. The social sense in her warned the natural woman that she was being smirched. "It is never safe to say anything in Gandeshwar," she added, "unless you are standing in the middle of the maidan."

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy looked uneasily at the door in the corner and through the jalousies at the much-partitioned verandah which was divided into recesses as if for perpetual "sitting out." A young subaltern was having tea with a dark-haired, Semitic-looking girl in a habit, whose air of nonchalance was meant to dispel the idea of an assignation. In the sudden hush scraps of their conversation were borne across to the card-room.

"They're the limit," the subaltern was saying. "I don't mind padres as a rule, but any one can see he is a bit hairy about the heel." He looked approvingly at his neat ankles, and socks which matched his tie. "And she's all fluff and claw," he added.

"All women are cats," the habit agreed sweetly.

"Did you hear that?" Mrs. O'Shaughnessy asked. "The Passover girl. And talking of limits, too. Well, I'm O-P-H."



## 286 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

But in the doorway she nearly ran into the dreamy, substantial young lady they had been discussing. The girl stood still to prevent a collision. She had the knack of looking sleepy and startled at the same time.

"I owe you two-eight," she said stolidly.

The unexpected avowal nearly took their breath away.

"That's all right," Mrs. O'Shaughnessy said in her cheerful brogue. "Come to tea here to-morrow, anyhow. You can have your revenge."

"Thanks. I'm sorry I didn't put it in. I only found the chit last night in a book I was reading."

Then she turned to the Chaplain's wife.

"And I owe you two-ten. Shall I put it in this month's account, or pay you now?"

"Oh, please don't bother. I had forgotten about it." The wife of the "man of God" spoke with laboured indifference. Then she added as an afterthought, "Oh, I forgot. It *would* be convenient, if you don't mind. I've got to go into Spratt's on the way home about a lampshade."

Skene witnessed the settling up, and remembered the lady's apt nickname. He tried to picture her in her husband's parish, if he ever had one.

"Gad, how India does spoil them," was his

inward comment. "You wouldn't think they were the same breed. I wonder if they'd get any of the virtue back if they were transplanted."

One of his recurrent fits of homesickness came on him with the thought of the Englishwomen he knew in their own country; women who worked and gardened and hunted and visited the poor. He thought of their fresh, untroubled, open-air faces; the peace and sympathy in their eyes, the tones of their voices, rich and deep as an old bell; the way they had of entering a cottage and talking to the folk inside. The memory was so vivid that he could see the path to the door with its phlox and sunflower borders and low box hedges. A girl on a moor came into the picture leaning against the wind like Diana of the Uplands, and a slim woman riding to a meet with her neck turned away from the blustering gusts of the east wind which flung the raindrops from the dead leaves into her face. And he thought of the insides of their homes, the new books on the table, the bowls of daffodils or snowdrops, the hostess sitting by the fire, a woman with a dozen different interests in life, who could work for a cause and keep her sense of humour at the same time.

Skene was like the sailor dedicated to the sea who never ceased to long for the wet furrow and the heath and pine-woods and the autumn

## 288 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

coverts which shed their leaves all at once and at the proper time. He devoured books that smelt of the English soil. *Tess*; *Puck of Pook's Hill*; *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. He had a new novel by Mrs. Humphry Ward under his arm. He would dine alone, inspect the College Boarding-house, and then give half the night to it. The women she drew were just the corrective he needed. The strong English air of the book inspired him. Pagan as he was, he could even envy Mrs. Ward's clergymen. A scene in the story brought to his mind a particular church in the low meadows by a Norfolk river. A lime avenue led up to it from a road where there was a ruined priory; the old monks used to traverse the path daily to chant their hymns or catch the fat pike under the reeds. He remembered the sweet June scent in the air, the moths hovering among the blossoms, the snipe booming in the marshes, the barrier of sedge and flowering rush by the water's edge, and the streaks of red light reflected in the water, and broken by the rising fish as the sun set under dark clouds. He had envied the vicar of the place. "I would captain the village cricket team," he thought, "and fish on Mondays and perhaps Thursdays, and go round every day bucking everybody up. Why shouldn't I? I could do it as well as any one else." And there was nothing to stand in his way save a few

words in the Creed and some films of dogma which he could not swear to, but for which he would have been as ready to die as Lyall's agnostic if a Mussulman captor had offered him Islam or the denial of his faith.

"By Gad," he said as his reverie became articulate, "I'd give my hat to be a Christian."

His great rumble of a laugh echoed down the passage, and every one who heard was infected by it. Hobbs, playing Bridge in the next room, said, "Listen to old Skene." And the Chaplain's wife, looking up from *The Ladies' Field*, saw him sitting alone and grinning to himself. He met her envious stare, and remembered that she had started the train of thought. "The most priest-like thing I can do," he thought, with a weary smile, "would be to go and see that poor little devil in gaol."

## V

MERIVALE convicted Siri Ram of conspiracy to deprive his Imperial Majesty the King Emperor of India of the sovereignty of British India, and of attempting to promote feelings of enmity and hatred between different classes of his subjects. He sentenced him to two years' rigorous imprisonment.

Every day during his trial he had been led by two policemen between the lock-up and the court along the same streets by which he had entered Gandeshwar with Mool Chand as a child peeping between the folds of his mother's purdah. He passed the treasury where men were counting money, and under the bastions of the fort where the maimed beggars sat, along the street of the cloth merchants, and through the metal bazaar where the same grizzled, spectacled old men were hammering brass and copper in the dim recesses of their shops.

Public safety demanded that he should be handcuffed. At first he was attended by large and sympathetic crowds, but as the trial dragged on with constant interruptions his friends grew indifferent. There were days when he did not

meet a single student on the road. As he passed the shopkeepers did not look up from their bales. Siri Ram tasted the bitterness of disillusion. Only on the day of his sentence there was a faint revival of zeal, some timid plaudits from the back of the crowd, which helped him for a time to wear his manacles and prison-clothes as a crown and garland.

But the utter dreariness and desolation of the place soon closed in on his spirit. In the day-time he ground corn with the other prisoners, and in the evening he was shut into one of a row of cells from which men looked at each other through bars across a courtyard like caged beasts. Beyond lay untilled, sandy spaces interrupted by the long, dormitory roofs with their tiaras of iron ventilators. On Sundays when Siri Ram kept his cell he could see the shadow of the watch-tower fall across them, and the everlasting kites over the roof of the kitchen and the white wings of the pigeons fluttering beyond the adobe walls. There was no other stimulus to the mind in that drab, dun-coloured world, save as he passed to and from the mill the glimpse of the condemned cells in a far distant corner with the little green-bordered pathway to the garden where the gallows stood.

This, then, was the scene of the exit he had pictured. Siri Ram had touched a condemned man. In the Registration Office where they had

## 242 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

filed his record, and given him his prison cap and pyjamas, the convict in front of him had been a murderer who had torn the jewellery from a little girl and thrown her down a well. The details were entered on a small folded cardboard sheet with a green label like the one which held his own record, and he had seen the furtive-looking brute with his sullen, earth-bound scowl limp through the porch and heard the bolt clang behind him. The murderer was alone now in one of those solitary cells by the garden, and in a few days he was to be taken out and destroyed with calculated violence. The saviours of his country died in the same way. It was gradually borne in on Siri Ram that the glory of martyrdom must be self-natured in solitude. He might be the mirror of patriots; his image might be enshrined in zenanas, his picture sold in the bazaar, but no reflected light could enter his cell; he could not read his achievement in the hard faces of the warders.

Solitary confinement at night alternated with periods in one of the dormitories, where he slept with casteless vagabonds, gipsies and eaters of snakes and crows. There was a whole gang of them in his ward, all sentenced in the same riot. He tried to proselytise among them, but when he spoke they would break out into a jargon he did not understand, or they would look at him

with a passing concern as they might examine one of their own hobbled donkeys which browsed too near their earthen pots. All day he laboured with these men grinding corn, and in the evening he was mewed up with them. There were only three other "literates" in the dormitory besides himself. Siri Ram had seen them arrive spick and span in clean raiment, their hair long and smooth, men sensible to refinement and courtesy: Now in their prison clothes they looked coarse and degraded with low cares, hardly distinguishable from the habitual convicts. They might have seen a similar change in Siri Ram if they had observed him at all, but they formed a sullen group apart, and did not respond to his tentative advances.

It was a relief almost to be in his cell again. Here he could brood, and it was all he wanted. Often he forgot his country's wrongs in his own. His burden had become intolerable. He hated Merivale, of whom he was always thinking. In the days when he frequented Ramji Das' staircase he and Banarsi Das had often seen the smooth-faced civilian driving past in his trap, spotlessly accoutred, cool, complacent, superior, masterful, infinitely remote. The young conspirators, newly fledged in liberal principles and the equality of man and inflated with a diet of Mill, would look up from some squalid clerkly threshold as he passed and hate



## 244 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

him for material and abstract reasons. Siri Ram cursed him now in his cell, thinking of him as his inquisitor and judge, or as an alien parasite sucking the life-blood of his Bharat-Mata, or perhaps with more bitter resentment, as he had seen him first in Mograon carrying his small sister Shiv Dai in his arms across the plank bridge.

Skene found him one Sunday afternoon in a black mood, squatting on his oblong bed of mud-plastered brick built into the floor, the size of a coffin. He would not rise or respond, but pretended to be wrapped in a religious trance. The depressing picture recurred to the Englishman for months afterwards.

As the days passed Siri Ram sought escape in Yoga; but it was more difficult in his prison cell than in Shiv's rock-hewn mansion under Amarnath. "The dweller in the body is invulnerable," he reminded himself, and recalled the rich tones of Narasimha in the cave. No message had come from the Swami for months before the trial. Siri Ram had heard that he was ill. Often as he lay in his narrow cell he thought of his guru wandering in the illimitable hills, and how sometimes when he was gathering juniper fuel he used to look for his salmon-coloured shift across the valley, a faint speck barely distinguishable from the lichen patches on the streaked rock. He and the marmots and

the ravens were all part of that spirit-haunted ravine.

Siri Ram did not know that the Swami had left the gujar's hut in November, bitten by the cold, and drifted down the valley to Tanin and Patkote. The monks had found him insensible in the snow under the walnut trees at Eismakhan. They took him into the monastery, where he lay all the winter, his spirit at the ebb. It was not until the fruit-trees blossomed and the purple irises were flowering on the roof that he knew he was still capable of desire. His soul thirsted for the plains.

"I should be delusion-free," he said; "this wish is contact-born." But the folk of the monastery took his longing for a behest. They had the palanquin of a lame Sadhini woman who had died at Amarnath. One morning his chela showed it to him and said, "We will carry you to Hindustan."

But the Swami demurred.

"He is at peace," he said, "into whom all desires flow and are still as rivers perish in the sea."

"But see," the chela continued, "suffer me to lift you thus. You are no more burden than a small bird in its nest poised on the bough of a tree."

Indeed, the Swami did not weigh more than a peasant's winter clothes. A boy might

## 246 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

have carried him all day in a basket on his back.

So the next morning, when the air was warm, they bore him down the Lidar valley to the sacred spring of Anantinag. His carriers rested under the very same willow tree under which Siri Ram had met Mohan Roy when he left Ramji Das' oilskin packet in the grass. All the third day the great valley of Kashmir narrowed in front of them until it became a thin rift in the hills below the Banihal. The path rose gently through a rich country dotted with shady villages. Fat marsh flowers bordered the dykes, green lanes led off to hamlets on either side through willow avenues. The trees were all lopped of their twigs, which had been cut as winter provender for sheep when the snow was on the ground, and were stacked now in huge bundles, looking black and ugly, between the upright boughs to dry. They crossed the twelve rivulets that make the Jhelum and saw the bare red flank of Achibal in the east crowned with larch and pine, and beyond it the snows of the Brahma peaks and the Nun Kun. That evening they reached the orchard village of Vernag at the foot of the pass, and laid a bed for the Swami in one of the latticed chambers over the aqueduct in the old Mogul garden. The stream babbled under him all night as it leapt from the basin of the sacred spring chant-

ing a mantra to him of continual life in death, ebbing and flowing and renewing, to which his tired spirit responded but not his mind.

In the morning the Swami appeared to be sinking. The ague had gripped him; he was chilled to the bone. The devoted chela, who had come with him from Eismakhan, carried him to the cloisters built in the rock wall of the spring; he spread a charpoy for him and stayed by him all day, dragging him over the flag-stones round the tank, pursuing the sun. The holy carp crowded to his shadow, expectant of grain, a wriggling, scrambling swarm. In the evenings he drew Narasimha into one of the cells and lighted a charcoal fire in the wicker-covered *kangar* by his feet.

It was weeks before the sun had strength to warm the Swami into life; he lay so still that the kingfishers perched on his bed and plumbed the clear spring from it. To his ranging mind the flash of their dripping wings was merged in the iridescent gleam of Swarga.<sup>1</sup> In those days the spirit almost escaped its husk. The parcelling of the earth between the fat and lean was no more his concern. His mind was well poised. The particular was lost in the infinite. Siri Ram, Mohan Roy, Ramji Das were nothing more than busy spectres.

In the dark half of Bhadon he was able to sit

<sup>1</sup> Heaven.

## 248 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

out a little in the fruit gardens. He would walk a few steps and then rest his back against one of the ruined marble bridges that spanned the conduits, sunning himself like a lizard. And when his blood was warm the desire came back to him to see the open stretches of the plains. He longed for the evening smells and cries of the villages, the sun rising and setting on a level with his eyes, the homing cattle, and the dust in their track caught in a web of light, and the dull red gleams of sunset flickering through the mango leaves like fairy lamps.

When he spoke of going the chela obeyed; not that he thought that his guru had recovered sufficiently to move, but because he knew his heart was in the south, and that he would never be so strong again.

For safety's sake the Eismakhan monks had urged him to cross the frontier as a high-caste purdah lady, belonging to the household of a pundit in Jammu. But now the Swami would not.

"There is no need," he said. "They would not take me, seeing that I must leave this empty shell upon their hands. It would work them more ill than good."

So he travelled openly along the unfrequented route. On the Banihal Pass he turned his back for the last time on the beauty of the snows. The pure white summits of Kolahoi, Haramokh and Nanga Parbat fell behind the ridge, and

the carriers dropped into a hot, bare, treeless valley. For three days they followed the Bechlari stream by Ramsu and Digdool to the Chenab. The path, which was cut out of the sheer rock, hung over the torrent, and pursued every tributary deep into the enfolding hills. The Swami lay with the curtain of the palanquin drawn back, steeped in the sun, his eyes burning with a quiet fire deep in their sockets. The narrow track was often blocked by gangs of road-menders or drovers with their pack bullocks, carrying piece goods into Kashmir, or herds of promontory goats standing on end and stretching out for the sparse blades of grass on the bright mica-strewn rock.

In the Chenab valley at Ramband they were almost on a level with the Punjab. The sand and blistering sun, the dry parched scent of the earth and the smell of cow dung in the fires, the low pomegranate bushes rooted mysteriously in the hot, gritty soil made Narasimha feel that he was on the threshold of the plains. He who had attained Yoga was in the end earthbound.

He husbanded his spirit for the goal, coaxing the ebbing breath which strained to break its thin warped chrysalis shell. His tired brain revolved many images. Hour after hour in the garden at Vernag he had sat beside the conduits watching the water flow by, and now he felt like a weed in a stream sucked through a

## 250 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

sluice. He was being drawn towards the land of his birth, his Bharat Mata, the womb of *avatars*, nurse of his spiritual life. Would the weak tissues of his mortal envelope hold together till he reached the gate? There was another spur to pass and fifty miles of devious mountain paths before he reached the foot hills at Udhampur.

Two days afterwards on the Looralari ridge above Batot he saw the Sewaliks and the plains glimmering beyond. The heat hung visibly over the valley. There were a few stunted firs and deodars on the top of the pass, and the carriers rested in the shade drawing in the last breath of mountain air.

They passed Chineni and Dramtal, and on the evening of the next day struck into the Sewaliks at Udhampur. After this they forded many torrents, and the Swami was sometimes lifted shoulder high. Between the streams the land was not rocky; it was a rock—unbroken for miles, save for an interstice here and there where a spring bubbled or a palm rose like a promise, or a patch of intense green caught the eye where the water lay shimmering in the scooped shallow depressions that made the oasis. Where the solid rock ended, crumbling, torn chasms fretted the earth, filled with the *débris* of the hills. The bearers toiled through these chasms, which became wider and hotter

and more boulder-strewn as they neared the plains.

The parched, gritty hillocks of loose sand, which looked as if they had been shovelled there from the refuse of some firepit and were still smouldering, refracted heat like Satan's marl. The Swami slept through these burning miles. His soul was comforted; he was entering the door of his escape. When his eyes opened they searched the south patiently, but there was always some obscuring ridge thrown between.

The hour came when his spirit was almost sped. In the intense heat of an August noon the curtain of his palanquin was drawn aside, and the mortal husk of Narasimha was lifted up in his couch by pious hands. He saw a yellow fortress on a rock, the hold of Jammu, running out into the mist of the plains like a headland between an estuary and the sea. It was the gate of the Punjab.

A train of baggage camels swayed between him and the revetment, laden with neem branches for their evening meal, their uncouth necks hung with strings of coloured beads. The unsubstantial world rocked to the Swami in rhythm with their mincing steps. His eyes became dim. The fortress flickered and was blotted out; he had a sense of moving mountains. One of the beasts bent a nozzle over the litter, fastidious and inquisitive, scenting some dry



## 252 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

provender. The driver struck the beast on the head, swearing volubly.

"It is enough," the Swami said, raising himself on one arm. "I have seen. Our caravan has made a bed with the dead in sleep." Then he fell back into the arms of his chela.

## PART V

### THE SACRIFICE

“And you shall see how the devil spends,  
A fire God gave for other ends.”

BROWNING.



## I

SIRI RAM wondered why liberty was not sweet. The fruit he had pined for was insipid. There was no ovation for him at the gate; it seemed that no one cared for his goings and comings. Yet day after day, week after week, for eighteen months the end of his term had seemed to offer him a blessed rebirth. Then he had fallen ill; he had become too tired to care; his spirit was numbed. The gaol had made him less philosophical, and the presence of the English became more and more a personal wrong. His hate was concentrated on Merivale. On the day when his clothes were restored to him and the few rupees he had earned from the *Kali-Yuga*, when the door clanged behind him and he was free, he had never felt so much alone in his life.

His friends might have welcomed him, but his release was unexpected. Good conduct marks, little as he had sought them, had reduced his term by thirteen days. No one knew of his release except Ramji Das, who was in touch with tentacles of the Society everywhere, and had sent a scout along the road between the

## 256 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

city and the gaol to intercept him. Siri Ram missed the bunniah's emissary. He went to a house frequented by Banarsi Das, but learnt that he had gone to his village. He drifted despondingly to the chamber above the drug shop in the bazaar. He did not love Ramji Das, but he did not know where else to go. He felt that he ought to be fêted and garlanded, but that God hated him and that he was betrayed. The moment he laid a hand on the bannisters of the staircase in the courtyard a servant ran out, crying excitedly—

"The door is closed. You must not come here."

Siri Ram stood at the foot of the stairs bewildered. The sweets of liberty were turned to gall. "Pity it is," he murmured to the empty courtyard; "he is afraid Government will look at him with a jaundiced eye. I am old tool after all, no doubt."

He passed dejectedly into the street, wondering what in the world he was to do and where he was to go.

Ramji Das had not forgotten him. He and his confederates were awaiting him at that moment in another house which the Society frequented in a deserted quarter of the city. Siri Ram was no disused tool; he was still serviceable to the Cause. While he sat morosely brooding on an iron seat in the public gardens,

they were discussing his worth, which to the bunniah's appraising eye was much enhanced. He remembered Mohan Roy's caustic comment. Siri Ram was a goat which might be useful for sacrifice, but he must be led right up to the altar.

"He is now at the very steps," he thought. "If we are careful we may lift him up between the knife and the stone."

All were agreed that something must be done quickly, something that would be cried aloud from end to end of Hindustan. The lull had been too long. No white man had been sacrificed for seven months; the waverers would be becoming indifferent; the people must be shown their strength. And here was the inflammable, self-devoted Siri Ram coming out of gaol, ripe for murder and marked out for it.

"He may be broken-spirited," one of the conspirators, a too-cautious wakil, objected.

"I think not. He broods much. We shall see."

"We must be careful with him."

"He will come straight here. He will see no one alone." Ramji Das was quietly persuasive. He put the lacquered stem of his hookah to his fat lips and inhaled. Then he added as an afterthought, "We can make him think it is the day." As he spoke he watched the effect of his strategy upon his lieutenants. His small

## 258 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

dull eyes were quite expressionless in their fleshy folds. His chest and paunch heaved. Only the eyes were oddly still.

As the possibilities of the manœuvre began to dawn on the conspirators, they regarded the amorphous fat heap in the corner with increased respect. The vakil gaped in admiration. Dr. Hari Chand, the least adventurous of the crew, was visibly excited. Here was generalship. If Siri Ram could be made to think it was the day nothing would stop him.

"He will not leave the house until the moment has come," Ramji Das continued. "When he enters the street you will keep him in view."

"I have heard that he is timid and weak-willed," the vakil said.

"It is true that he may bungle, but whom else will you find?"

"Even if he fails the attempt will strike terror. In any case we gain."

"Except for our danger."

"He will not betray us."

"But if they use violence."

"You will see. I will provide against discovery."

The overcautious one was persuaded.

"Let us leave all to Ramji Das," Dr. Hari Chand said. "What time does the bridegroom start?"

"The mail to Bombay goes at ten in the

night. He goes to his own Motherland. May he go farther."

"Have you got the bride?"

Ramji Das produced a small revolver. "It is a Browning Automatic," he said. "The zenana is full. It contains brides for six, and you may carry it concealed in your hand."

His own flabby palm closed over it. He looked at his watch. "Siri Ram ought to be here," he said; "we will receive him with honour. It will be best if he is elated. The Society will provide a Red Flag banquet." He called a servant from below.

"Are the *balu-shahi* prepared? Do not forget the garlands."

The word awoke Dr. Hari Chand from his meditations. "If we cannot have *the* day, let us at least have *a* day," he said.

Every one knew what was in his mind. Bloodlessness was the hobby the Doctor rode. His theory was that liberty could be won by work among the depressed classes. In the public eye he was an honoured propagandist. He had lectured on the improvement of the condition of the poor; he was the author of pamphlets. After his speech on "The Degradation of the Untouchables" the *Kali-Yuga* had called him the Wilberforce of the Punjab, and associated him with "the moderate camp." Still officialdom remained curiously unsympathetic. Ramji Das



## 260 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

and his fellow opportunists had flirted with his ideas before he became one of them. Now he had met the Red Flag half way. He did not mind sacrifice if there were no blood. He objected to the idea of weapons or wounds on either side, but poison was a compromise.

They discussed Dr. Hari Chand's day.

"What will you mix with the tonic pills?" the vakil asked.

"Hydrocyanic acid." Being on scientific ground the Doctor forsook the vernacular. "Even if a hundred taste they will be no more. We can despatch them from post offices where we have our own men; all officials will receive them the same morning. There will be a circular letter in the packet from some European drug store saying, 'Tonic Pills are sent you. Please state your experience after tasting.'"

The vakil admired the plan, seeing in it the minimum of risk with the maximum of success. "No one need fall into law's clutches," he remarked in the speech of the hated foreigner.

Ramji Das did not think the Europeans would take the pills. He believed in surgery more than medicine, and said so, with a curious wrinkling of the cheek and chin which nearly travelled into a smile, but stopped short of the eye in a way which made the physician feel uncomfortable.

"I have the labels of Smith for the packets," he said uneasily.

"It would be better to remove the informers and spies first," the vakil suggested. "If you strike terror into the traitor camp the officials will be left helpless so that they cannot carry out their plans in any way."

Meanwhile the bunniah's confidential agent had found Siri Ram. His "*Namaste*" startled the brooder on his seat in his melancholy dreams.

"Ramji Das sent me to you," he said. "Have you spoken to any one since you came out?"

Siri Ram gave him a sullen "No."

"Then you have not heard! Ramji Das will tell you all. The English are not long for here."

Siri Ram's dull resentful stare lightened in a moment.

"I have been in the tomb," he said. "Tell me what has happened. Is the Swami here?"

"He is dead. But we must not be seen speaking here together. These are secret times. They have prepared to garland you. You are the hero in this city. There is a ticca ghari waiting for you by the lamp-post at the entrance to the vegetable bazaar opposite the Mori Gate. Get into it; the man will drive you to the place."

As he walked away he added without looking

## 262 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

round, "I have come to this stall for betel nut. Go now without me."

As the ghari rattled through the streets Siri Ram's self-respect came back to him and his devotion to the cause, the keener for his own wrongs. Why had he doubted? He had been a hero all the time. He thought of the English falling singly and in bands or being led in chains to the prisons. He thought of Merivale shackled. There was retributive justice in that. Perhaps it would be possible to see him in his cell. Hope and doubt visited him in turn.

The ghari, after some seemingly aimless deviations, drew up in a silent, sunbaked square deserted in the heat of noon. The driver called to Siri Ram to alight, and, pointing to the mouth of an alley too narrow for wheels, drove off without waiting for his fare. Siri Ram was surprised to find the bunniah's agent loitering by a passage near the entrance. The man started walking as he approached, and beckoned him to follow. Siri Ram found himself in an unfamiliar quarter. They threaded a network of narrow passages where they could not walk abreast without treading on the garbage heaped against the wall. It was a *mohalla* of rich men's houses, presenting dead walls or barred windows to the street. The great brass-studded gateways of carved Shisham wood were closed or ajar, giving glimpses of the mysterious silent

life within, a world of sleepy and drowsy capitulation to the invading sun. The pungent smells from the choked kennels thickening as they receded from the area of main thoroughfares told Siri Ram that they were approaching one of the city's endless *culs de sac*.

The guide paused by an archway with his hand on the wicket gate. Looking round, he asked Siri Ram if he knew the *mohalla* or the house.

Siri Ram did not.

They entered the spacious deserted *haveli* and felt their way up a corkscrew stair; the walls were smoothed and blackened with groping hands. Siri Ram heard voices in the upper storey. A door was thrown open, and he felt that he was among a company. To his surprise the room was dark. Figures were rising from the floor all round, approaching him, hailing him, strange familiar voices. Men were hanging wreaths of jasmine round his neck; he was almost overpowered with the sweet scent. He thought he recognised the fugitive Editor of the *Kali-Yuga*. Then he heard the throaty voice of Ramji Das. Even the bunniah, who for physical reasons was generally quiescent, upheaved himself pantingly to greet the restored hero.

"Welcome to our meedst, Siri Ram!" he said, relapsing into English. For with all his

## 264 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

*swadeshi* and *swaraj* there was something western and hybrid about the youth which even in the dark provoked that tongue.

He listened to sugared flattery, questions about his health and his treatment in gaol, sweet compliments embalmed in affected ignorance or surprise, insinuations of the greater triumph imminent and the share in the fruition by those who had sown the seed.

His eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom, and he was beginning to see the features of them dimly where a mote-shotten beam of light from a chink in the shutters hung across the room, when Rāmji Das called out to the servant to show him the chamber where the food had been prepared, and he went off, impatient of the interlude, famished as he was.

He found the richest banquet spread on the floor. Beside the usual substantial messes there were flattering delicacies and sweets of every kind, *balu-shahi* and rose-scented *qala qund* and ice, and bottles of pink raspberryade and sherbets flavoured with strange essences from the aerated water shop in the bazaar. Siri Ram sat and ate and drank and wondered.

## II

WHEN he returned, the shutters had been thrown open, the room was light; the conspirators had gone; Ramji Das sat in a corner alone. Siri Ram was the first to speak.

"Can it be true that the end is so near?" he asked.

"It is true."

"Who were the people who have gone?"

"They came to honour you. Also they came to learn if imprisonment had weakened your resolve, if it had reconciled you any more to the Mlecchas. Have you lost any of your boldness?"

Siri Ram said that he had not.

"We thought so. I said your body would be on fire. Also," he added reflectively, "it would not have been so easy for you to obtain a living wage. What were you going to do?"

Siri Ram did not know.

"You are a great patriot. Are you still ready to serve the Cause?"

"I am ready. But how?" The thought of the glory-proof gaol walls appalled him.

"All that you saw here just now have their

## 266 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

bridegrooms to meet to-night. The troops will rise when the first Europeans fall."

Siri Ram's heart throbbed. He remembered Narasimha's dream of the day of liberty, and he believed Ramji Das; or if he only half believed him he kept the doubt that would creep into his mind the other side of the threshold.

"Why was the room dark?" he asked inconsequently. He could not have explained why his mind lighted on this obscure detail in such a crisis of confused revelation. The bunniah looked at him curiously.

"The patriots always meet now in a darkened room," he answered slowly. "If one is taken it is easy to deny knowledge of the others. To the police, to the magistrate, to the judge the answer is always one: 'The room was dark. I could not see.' You could not see any of them?"

"No."

"And they could not see you. You could not see me. You do not know what house you are in. You were taken here blindfolded."

Siri Ram admitted the advantage of darkness to conspirators. The art of silence under cross-examination was simplified. It had not been so easy in the *Kali-Yuga* case.

"It has become our habit," Ramji Das added, "though to-day there was surely no need. To-morrow we shall be answerable to no man."

"Tell me. How will it burst out? How has it come so soon?"

"We have not been idle. The people are moving about the streets like angry wasps. Many of the Society are in gaol or in the Andamans."

Ramji Das noticed an involuntary recoil in the scapegoat. "But to-morrow they are the victors," he added, seeing fear uppermost. It was necessary to draw the rope a little tighter.

"Siri Ram, if you are taken do not resist. The day of the trial may be fixed, but when the courts are held we shall be the judges. The prison doors will be thrown open, and those who have led the way——"

"If I am taken?" Siri Ram faltered. "Do you mean to-night?"

The bunniah was impressively still. The pupils of his eyes were filmed with a dull moisture like wet beads; the streaky whites were almost hidden under the sagging lids.

"We have waited for you, Siri Ram," he said. "The organisation is perfect. To-night in every city young men will be ready. Hundreds of other officials will fall at the same time."

"Other officials?"

"The fall of this tyrant will be a match to light the conflagration."

"Which tyrant?"

"Who has oppressed you, Siri Ram?"



"Merivale?"

"We have preserved him for you."

At the name Siri Ram's flickering resistance gave out. It was easier to yield; the current was too strong. He did not fully believe Ramji Das, who had been speaking strangely in a high-flown Urdu, and in a voice which sounded unnatural, like a wheezy parody of Narasimha. Still he snatched at the dream. What else was there left?

He barely listened as Ramji Das held forth on the honours in store, how the heroic sons of Bharat Mata would be garlanded and memorialised, and crowned as the saviours of their country, their persons sacred, the highest offices or the most retired leisure open to their choice. For the moment he thought only of himself and Merivale, oppressor and oppressed. The Cause had narrowed down to that.

Ramji Das unfolded the plot. Siri Ram should carry his revolver in a bunch of marigolds. The barrel in the centre would be concealed by the stalk of one thrust up to the calyx. His finger would be on the trigger inside the paper fold, so that he could hold it straight to Merivale's breast.

Siri Ram did not like the idea of the marigolds. Ramji Das found him obstinate.

"So many flowers will turn away the bullet," he objected.

The bunniah reassured him.

"One little stalk in the barrel," he said. "It is nothing. Or it may be a hollow wreath." He described the trial of Merivale who had been condemned by a court of patriots. He was to be executed by the man he had wronged, the innocent victim of his tyranny. That had been decided before the conspiracy had come to a head. By the laws of retribution Siri Ram had been chosen for the deed. He must employ the means that were most certain.

Siri Ram remembered the hint that Mohan Roy had given him, and asked the bunniah for a wafer of poison to conceal in his ear.

"I can give it, Siri Ram, but there is no need."

Ramji Das watched his resistance ebb out. His fear was that the victim might become too limp. It was but a step to the sacrificial stone.

"You understand; it is funeral wreath. Mari-golds are at the sacrifice."

As the tension became less he relapsed into English again. He was more insidious and intriguing in that tongue. His spurious exaltation had not seemed natural.

The strange pair sat opposite each other all the afternoon. Siri Ram made one or two efforts to escape. He wanted to find Banarsi Das, to wander in old haunts, to see the streets and shops and the free crowd, but the bunniah's

## 270 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

eye fascinated him. He could not turn his back on it.

Long minutes passed in silence. Ramji Das looked at him doubtfully. He feared his nerve, but not his loyalty.

"Siri Ram, is your body still on fire?"

"I will give my bones to the goddess like Dadhichi."

He was thinking of the hero who offered his ribs to the gods to make a thunderbolt to slay the giant Britasura, but as he spoke he wished he were bearing witness before Narasimha. He did not like the bunniah's eye. Even in the dark he felt its watchful cynicism.

At seven a second meal was prepared. This time the bunniah shared it with him; he gorged noisily. Two thin wicks flickering in an earthen saucer were lighted in the niche above his head, and he was illumined fitfully like some triple-paunched idol in a cave. When he had finished he wiped his hands and sank back again into his vigilant repose. He spoke less and less. Siri Ram was hypnotised. Thoughts revolved like wheels in his head. He could not fix his mind or separate the sense of what he had to do, what he had been through, the reward and suffering, the heights and deeps before him. Every now and then the bunniah punctuated the silence with some slowly-delivered caution.

"Do not be at all premature, Siri Ram."

"You have Browning Automatic?" "Do not put your finger in paper handle in the street."

It seemed almost midnight when the servant entered and called him to the door, and the bunniah quavered benedictions. Siri Ram followed the man down the corkscrew stair clenching his bouquet, and through the wicket gate into the street. A figure was waiting at the end of the alley with a lantern. He pursued the light, which paused and hovered like a will-o'-the-wisp, through a maze of turnings. Soon they crossed a familiar thoroughfare, and Siri Ram saw an Englishman in a white dinner jacket driving a dogcart, and looking confident and unconcerned though he was alone amidst thousands of Asiatics. His syce stood on the step behind and called rudely to the crowd to make way. Cold misgivings crept into Siri Ram's mind again as he followed his guide into another warren of alleys on the far side of the crossing. The echo of his lonely footsteps frightened him, and when he stopped to listen he thought he heard other footsteps following. He wanted to throw his garland into the gutter and hide, or run back into the open, lighted street.

### III

As Siri Ram passed darkling through the streets his intended victim was being fêted at the Club. It was a stifling May evening, and the odd dozen Englishmen left in Gandeshwar had collected to give Merivale a send-off.

The hot weather grip was in the air. Every day the sun's tentacles let go their hold of the earth with more reluctance. Old night was like a worsted wrestler weakened with every new bout. There was no vigour in her. Darkness had ceased to be refreshing save for the half-hour before dawn.

The punkah-proof lamps on the table, the smell of the Khuskus tattis, the white dinner jackets all round, Merivale's furlough, awoke nostalgia in every one, and reminded them that for many weeks the pleasure of living would become more fugitive in Gandeshwar every day.

Skene and Merivale talked of home. They were both Devonshire men, and had the knack of remembering little things which one forgets—things which call up a picture.

“Do you remember what a basketful of trout

looks like when you spill them on a bank of primroses?" Merivale asked.

Skene recalled the smell of hot mint in September stubble on a cub-hunting morning.

Merivale capped him with the purple fields of scabious by the Torridge.

Both thought of old Homer, and from purple fields their minds travelled to Asphodel—the Bog Asphodel on Dartmoor, the vivid green moss under the rose-coloured wilderness of ling, the stone circle in the mysterious hour of sunset with Yes Tor limned up behind it.

"You know Rattle Brook?" Skene asked.

"You are going to tell me about the snipe at the corner where it joins that other stream."

If Skene had been a Frenchman he would have kissed Merivale. There is no endearment like that which grows out of the common love of earth. They tried to dovetail in their leave so that they might shoot there together. If Merivale got extension and Skene furlough combined with vacation they might do it.

Skene looked at his friend with envy. "Good heavens, man! Do you know that in less than three weeks you will be walking on turf?"

"Where flowers grow on their stalks out of the grass, and are not shrivelled up."

"And virtue oozes out of the earth."

Merivale laughed. "Old Jones says he is

## 274 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

coming home for three months to get straight. He is fed up with this Municipal Inquiry."

"Feeling a bit choked, I expect," Skene muttered, with a confused image in his head of the compressed air in a diving-bell. He tugged at his collar, which had become pulp, and wondered how much crookedness and indirection the cursed clime was accountable for.

"How long do you think we could hang on to the country," he said, "if we stayed here and bred and reared our children in it?"

"Four generations, perhaps."

"Human tissue couldn't stand more. It never has or will."

"Not with education?" Dean suggested, looking across at Skene with friendly irony. The conversation had become general.

"No, not with education."

Here's an educationist who does not believe in education," Hobbs broke in.

"Oh yes, I do. It must come, and it all helps, but it can't charge the battery."

"It can't give fibre, you mean," Merivale suggested. "That only comes from the soil."

"Exactly."

Skene was not a pessimist. He believed that it would all pan out right in the end—after many incarnations—with the slow wave of evolution, though the line had unexpected kinks and curves in it. In the meantime his own

particular concern was with the hybrid, the forced product.

"I'm tired of 'whipping and wheedling the reluctant East,'" he confessed to Merivale with a smile.

"Don't let your cubs get on your nerves," Merivale said. "They are all right. I like them better than the Mission crew with their self-conscious, bulging ideals. But about Dartmoor. Where shall we put up? Chagford?"

The two cronies fell to their Devonshire duet.

On Merivale's left Hobbs was instructing the very young subaltern across the table on the probable effects of the changed military situation in the case of another mutiny. Sedition and revolution were in the air. Skene caught snatches of the Colonel's argument. No guns. Shortage of ammunition. No cohesion. What could they do in the long run? They haven't got a navy, aeroplanes, wireless.

"What about education, sir; wouldn't that give them a better chance?"

"Whoever heard of education stiffening an Asiatic!" Hobbs bawled out.

The boy steeped his prunes in his finger glass sadly and engaged his right-hand neighbour. A moment afterwards Skene heard him say in his high, assured voice—

"She's the vulgarest woman I have ever been seriously introduced to."



His resonant laugh roused the table. Every one looked at him smiling, and began to laugh too, and to stamp on the floor and cry, "Skene! A speech!" though Skene had never been known to make a speech in his life. He looked towards O'Shaughnessy at the other end of the table, hoping he had not heard. The Irishman caught his eye, happily unconscious, and lifted his glass: "Here's to you, Skene." The table rose and gave him the same musical honours they had given Merivale five minutes before. Then they sang "Auld Lang Syne," and called to him again for a speech.

The big man met the demand with an evasion. He made a sign to Hobbs, and between them they picked up little Merivale and carried him round the room struggling on their shoulders and crying, "Time! Time!"

"Time, what for? A speech?"

"Time for anything you like," Skene panted; "the bosun, the briny, chalk cliffs, hayfields, strawberries. Try to bear up."

Other voices caught up the litany, vying with one another for what was homeliest.

"Trout."

"Clover."

"Soles." Skene recognised the padre's unprofessional voice, and knew that he was innocent of the *double entendre*.

"Shrimps. Mixed bathing."

"Mussels and cockles alive, alive, O!"

"Some one suppress that youth," Merivale gasped. It was the very young subaltern. A digression was made towards the buttery hatch, through which the cub was thrust like a crumpled envelope. They carried Merivale to the porch and deposited him in Innes' brougham.

The Club servants followed the jostling swaying crowd into the verandah. Abdul Karim and Mustafa Khan, greybeards of Islam, stood above the steps in their turbans and starched *chupkuns*, virginally white, and made solemn salutation. Mustafa approached with the gravity and gait of Abraham and the wisdom of all the Orient in his disillusioned eyes. The little old man, Mouse, of shrivelled dignity, who had never smiled, salaamed gently to his lord borne on high.

"Good-bye, Mouse," Merivale called out in Hindustani. "I should like to take you too."

Mouse saluted again sadly, tenderly almost, but without elation.

You might have thought that Merivale Sahib, Judge and Protector of the Poor, was always carried thus on strong men's shoulders from room to room, his hair ruffled, his collar broken, his helpless feet dangling in the air.

## IV

HALF Gandeshwar was at the station to see Merivale off. The Club disgorged its diners, and there were scores of his Indian friends. Native officialdom was there, magistrates, tehsildars, barristers, judges and minor folk, many of whom had come with addresses and applications, leaving things to the last after the manner of their kind. Some bore wreaths of threaded jasmine which they hung round his neck, and large bouquets of flowers without leaves packed into a tight ball. An old native physician squirted scent on to his coat. Chaprassies brought rupees on handkerchiefs, which he touched regally as if it were a king's healing. Lala Dwaka Das, M.A., Barrister-at-law, produced a framed illuminated address, a panegyric in high-flown Persian, in which the letters of Merivale's name were designed like a fish, and the verses that bespoke his virtues rose like smoke from a censer or curled up into geometrical rosebuds, or spread themselves like parrots flying. Then a Treasury clerk offered a scroll with a petition for increase of pay.

Merivale glanced at it and handed it to Skene with a tired smile.

"The charming and fascinating way in which you magnetise your subordinates has been noticed by me. Sir, I do not wish to use studied and culpable flattery or to bandy oriental adulation, but pity it is that the rumour of your departure has recently collected into dismal cloud of fact. But our loss, your gain.

"Happy have we met,  
Happy have we been,  
Happy may we part,  
And happy meet again."

Your honour knows the narrowness of my hand. My motherless children and I are sitting in the corner of adversity guarding our empty pockets. I hope your grace would look sharp and do the needful by securing desired increment."

Skene wondered if this were the composition of Banarsi Das.

Then a pitiful little old man with a stoop came up and presented a poem. He was a schoolmaster. The hair under his turban was white, and his birdlike face was puckered and wrinkled with the passive resistance of years. Merivale recognised him, and said the right words. He looked at the poem and saw that it was entitled "Valedictory Verses," and that each stanza ended with the same burden—

## 280 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

“The greatest work of God on high,  
Is Mr. Merivale kind.”

The gentle old thing had the knack of looking only momentarily happy, as if bliss could be reflected but in the sunshine of Merivale's presence, and it were worth waiting for. His smile had survived two score years of the din and drudgery of school-rooms, and he continued to make it appear that the sadness in it was half for his own distress, half for the passing of Merivale, his patron.

“My dear fellow,” Skene replied to an unsympathetic comment of Hobbs', “he feels it, or thinks he does, and he thinks Merivale will like it, and he likes Merivale. It comes to the same thing.”

He mentally summed up the old man's position.

“Eighteen rupees a month—no rise for twenty-five years. Five children at school. Retires in six months on half-pay—that's nine rupees, what we pay for milk or bread or boots or socks, and he has to clothe himself and look clean. It's rot to talk of humbug. For the moment Merivale is his god. He stands for immanent power.” Skene turned to Merivale. “Send him to me to-morrow. I have a vacancy on twenty-two rupees. That would mean he retires on eleven. He is no good, of course, but he can't do much harm in six months.”

Merivale explained the arrangement to the obsequious old man, who detached himself from the group with difficulty, his smile set permanent.

"Here is another," Hobbs said. "I'm d—d if I would stand it. Why do you let 'em dik you?"

"I wouldn't mind the show if we could fix them all up like that," Merivale said, feeling that the pedagogue's smile would linger with him to Bombay.

Skene, seeing Lala Ram Prasad bearing down on them, intervened.

"Look here, old chap, you've had enough. We'd better ring you in."

"No, it's all right, it's only for a few minutes. Here's Ram Prasad. He would be hurt if I did not speak to him, and he's a very decent little fellow. Works like a horse, if only he didn't *bukh* so much."

A short and portly official approached with a step that suggested the consciousness of a grave charge.

"Mr. Merivale," he said, "can you spare me a few minutes of your valuable time upon a matter of grave urgency?"

Merivale allowed himself to be led away, suspecting some municipal entanglement. They walked through the crowd conversing, until the

## 282 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Indian's discourse became a monologue of carefully chosen phrases. Merivale soon discovered that it was a matter that might have been left to his successor. Lala Ram Prasad had glanced off on to half-a-dozen side questions before they had reached the lonely end of the platform. He liked to listen to his own voice and monopolise an important official.

Merivale listened carelessly. He was thinking of the mile of trout fishing he had hired at home. There had been a drought in Devonshire the year before, and it was lucky his leave had been put off. The alders would want trimming a bit on the far bank.

They passed Mrs. O'Shaughnessy in command of a hand-barrow laden with crates of cackling chickens. She smiled sympathetically as Merivale took off his hat. "My husband is coming to see you off," she called after him.

Lala Ram Prasad was delivering a sonorous indictment on a bogus claim for a building site on municipal ground.

They entered the dimly-lit spaces at the end of the station. The huddled groups of passengers became fewer. It was an interminable platform, stretching away almost to the distant signals. It might have been built for a metropolis. The passing trains were few, but

all night long the cracked voice of a coolie was calling out, "Line clear," and aimless engines seemed to be eternally shunting goods trucks in the different sidings. Merivale wondered why they made these stations so big. At the far end humanity was packed thick, and there was a babel of shrill tongues, but the desert itself seemed to close in on the platform before the last lamp. A string of empty horse-boxes was drawn up on the right, the doors down on the coping littered with straw and hay. The smell was homelike, and sent Merivale's thoughts wandering back to the Torridge while Lala Ram Prasad blew his loud bassoon. Would the old pedagogue still be teaching the multiplication table while he waded in the cool stream? Was his pension all right? he wondered. He felt strangely depressed, wasting a deal of needless pity as was his wont. Then he remembered that his neck was hung with wreaths of flowers. What an absurd figure! An Englishman in a dress-suit garlanded like a beast for sacrifice.

As they turned back he saw another belated bouquet emerge into the lamplight from the direction of the empty horse-boxes, a huge garland of marigolds, massed like solid flesh as only Indians tie them. The youth behind this yellow ægis tacked towards him uncertainly



## 284 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

out of the darkness with a reluctance that consorted oddly with his enormous signal of good-will.

For a moment Merivale could not remember why the face was so familiar to him. The thought of the plague village came into his mind, and the tail of Scorpio and the long hot embankment beside the nulla, bridged by a plank. Then the court-house, and the tragic-comedy of the *Kali-Yuga*, and the pathetic defence of Siri Ram. What is this child of megrims doing here? Merivale asked himself. Is it irony or amendment or gratitude for Shiv Dai, or a tentative bid for favour? He dismissed each suggestion as it entered his head. The Municipal Secretary continued his harangue, clipping this syllable, rolling that, with the complacency of an artist.

“Regarding the lighting charges. The cost of illuminations to commemorate happy and auspicious occasion of His gracious King Emperor’s . . .”

Merivale noticed that Siri Ram was clasping an iron pillar with his free hand, and stayed his approach as if resisting an invisible current. His attention wandered off to Mrs. O’Shaughnessy, who was bending over her crate of fowls amongst the lumber on the platform where the goods van drew up. He had observed a bag

of grain tied to the wicker-work of the lid and an empty tin pan, with the inscription "Please feed us." "A little water, please." "We are thirsty too." The Irishwoman was giving them a send-off herself. She scattered the grain and filled the water-pan, and tied up the bag again in a precise workmanlike way that was almost graceful. Merivale noticed that her corsetière had given her a shelf-like bust that protruded from the neck. He was the victim of one of those unaccountable waves of depression in which the ugly details of life gather at the threshold of the mind, crowding out comfort. He wondered why he was so unhappy. He was going home, yet somehow he did not believe in it, but felt like a goldfish in a globe as he circled round with Lala Ram Prasad in a current of futility.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy was closing in on him, and there was the feeling of Siri Ram with his absurd bouquet behind, a presentiment almost. All these things were soon to be shaken off; for the moment they demanded a pretence of consideration. Lala Ram Prasad had begun to discuss the drain by the Mori Gate and the removal of the dhobies' ghat, but Merivale was wondering if the hurdle-gap was still in the thick sloe hedge at Oakley Bottom. It was such an infernal nuisance going round as you walked

## 286 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

up-stream when the light was failing. One lost the best five minutes of the day.

"The road would be widened, no doubt, if the drain were removed to the other side," the Municipal Secretary was saying.

Merivale made a movement of escape towards his friends at the farther end of the platform.

"It would necessitate the removal of sundry stalls for the barter of country produce."

Merivale heard the patter of Siri Ram's feet behind him. The dejected youth had let go of the post, and was breaking into a shuffling trot to catch him up. Lala Ram Prasad was astonished to see him present his bouquet to the small of the magistrate's back. Merivale, swinging round, saw Siri Ram's face, and knew by a flash of intuition that the trout stream and buttercup meadows and the alders dipping their dingy twigs into the ripple were unattainable. He saw these things as through some dark green glass, which was splintering in on him with a resounding crash as the station roof and walls and girders swayed inwards, enveloping him. He sank to the ground on one arm, and tried to fix his gaze on Siri Ram and Lala Ram Prasad, who were swinging past him automatically. He wondered if they were riding bicycles. The noise of a train entering the station suggested to his flickering senses the idea of wheels. Then

the supporting arm gave way under him, and he felt a twinge like a hot needle in his back.

"Bit of glass," he murmured. His bewildered eyes closed and his head collapsed.

Siri Ram stood at bay, drunk with achievement, and waved his sinister bouquet in rapid circles like a bacchanal. His fingers still clutched the trigger. Another bullet hit the stone coping at his feet and ricocheted into an empty goods train. Lala Ram Prasad, taking cover behind an iron pillar, cried out to him—

"Place it down, place it down. It is heinous, abominable!"

The bouquet was hanging from the trigger guard. For a moment these two had the drama to themselves. In the din of shrieking engines and the clang of couplings no one recognised the sound of the revolver shot. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy was the first to see Merivale down and realise what had happened. She ran forward like a bull and struck at the murderous yellow catherine wheel. She threw her whole weight on Siri Ram and hurled him to the ground and knelt on his neck and wrenched the garland from him. A bullet was flung high over her head into the girders of the roof.

The crowd rushed in and pinioned him.

Merivale had not stirred. The bullet had struck him in the spine. It was the only time

## 288 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

in Siri Ram's fruitless little life that chance had intervened to help his aim.

"Did he say anything?" Skene asked Lala Ram Prasad; "you were there."

"He talked something about a glass. I did not understand. It is a crying crime indeed. All India will be shocked."

Skene lifted Merivale's head. He and Dean and Hobbs and O'Shaughnessy carried him on their shoulders to the gate. A parallel procession halted to let them pass. Skene watched Siri Ram with disgust; the miserable youth had a jaunty air: he looked ahead with an effort at complacency as if expecting an ovation, and then aside at the spectators; he would have strutted if he had not been so roughly handled. He tried to address the crowd. Shrill sentences were jerked out of him as he was dragged along between two constables.

"Oh yes, you may put me in prison, but you will see. English are not long for this country."

A lanky policeman followed, carrying the bouquet and the disclosed pistol.

They carried Merivale to Innes' brougham, which was to have taken them back to the Club, and drove him to his bungalow. Skene laid his friend's helpless head on his shoulder and steadied him with a strong arm round the waist. Hobbs leant over from the back seat and held

his knees. He had not spoken a word. The Bombay mail with its freight of homeward-bound passengers rattled over the railway arch as they drove under. The metallic throb as it became faint in the distance sounded to them both like the knell of everything.

## V

SIRI RAM showed a calm spirit in gaol. He had gone through the trial with credit to the conspirators. Banarsi Das wondered at his coolness. He was imperturbable; he betrayed no one; he held his head up even when he was told that he would be hanged by the neck until he died. And he had learnt by heart the defiant heroic little speech he was to make to the Judge.

"You may hang me to-morrow, but you cannot destroy my spirit. That will pass into another frame, and in fifteen years if there are any Mlecchas left, it will be fighting against them then as now. The usurpers are doomed. They——"

But Siri Ram was led out declaiming. His vision of triumph had come to pass, the handcuffs and the gaol, the sacrifice and martyrdom, the sea of upturned faces, the witness-bearing in the crowded court. He was apotheosised. They were selling his picture in the street. Banarsi Das was in the crowd that pressed round him. He said that Siri Ram was looking glad.

"I saw my brother coming in a company of police. The scene passed before my eyes; he

was a martyr going to stake and saying ' I am glad.' I was very proud to see him strong. His face was so bright on account of his innocence that I could not recognise him. In contrast the faces of the guards were pale and moroseful."

Siri Ram had purchased eternal fame, and the price might not be called for. The army of young men were tarrying, but if Ramji Das had spoken the truth he would be garlanded and not hanged. The bunniah and his friends alone understood the secret of his calm. His counsel who had visited him daily in the lock-up had explained that "the day " had been put off. There had been a hitch, but the end was the more sure. Ramji Das had tried to stop Siri Ram, but the messenger had come too late. The rising would be in fifteen days. The European gaolers would be the first to be killed, and the prisoners would be set free.

As the days passed, Siri Ram nourished a lean hope. In the long evenings in his cell he used to listen for the guns. He would ask the warder if the English were still lords. A rumour spread that he was mad, and his friends put up the plea of insanity. The vernacular papers demanded a medical board. Siri Ram noticed a change in the manner of the prison staff.

The superintendent who had passed on his rounds with a bare word to him or none, would



## 292 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

spend a few minutes in his cell every morning. At first Siri Ram thought he was spying. He answered no questions, fearing to betray his companions. Then he became sure that it was interest in himself that attracted him. It was natural enough. He was hero, martyr, patriot. The thoughts of millions were centred on him. The major could no longer pass him by.

He would stop and talk ethics with him, and ask him a dozen questions every day.

"Were you glad when you struck? Do you think it right to do wrong that good should come?"

Siri Ram answered these questions in the same set phrase of the tyrannicide, proud, obstinate, impenitent. They awoke the witness-bearer who had answered the judge. He was primed in that catechism.

The Major was so impressed that one day he brought another gentleman to see Siri Ram, a taller gentleman who was addressed as Colonel. The Colonel was more interested in Siri Ram than the Major. He spoke to him with gentle respect, thinking no doubt that he was some *avatar*, the embodied scourge of his country's foes.

"Do you ever hear voices?" he asked. "Have you ever been visited at night in your cell? Is it true that you received a messenger who told you to kill this Englishman?"

Siri Ram was insensibly flattered. When they left him, he heard their voices in the corridor outside. One of them said, "All right," and the other, "No trace of it." And after that nobody took any interest in him again. He listened day and night for the guns. The warder grinned when he asked if the English were still lords.

In his condemned cell he could not look out on his fellow creatures. His heavy bars opened on a small, solitary yard shut off from the world by a black door. He could see the kites through his iron clerestory window, which shut to with a sudden clang in the afternoon when he was not expecting it, and drew his mind, which had been mercifully ranging, back to the thoughts of solitude and death. Then he would circle round his cell like a revolving bird, his dull thoughts shot with vague apprehensions which gathered into images of fear and pain. In the plaster of the wall by his bed some doomed soul had scratched his last calendar. Siri Ram counted twenty-one notches. Did they lead him out after that, he wondered; did he keep his tally to the end? He himself had reckoned eighteen nights and mornings, or was it nineteen?

He threw himself down on his brick bed and felt for the little wafer which he had hidden in the crevice under the plaster. He had carried

## 294 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

it in his ear from the court; it was a precaution he had learnt from Mohan Roy. As he was feeling for it he heard the warder's step, and started guiltily. To his "Are you there?" he answered, "Yes, I am here. How many days have I been here?" But the automaton passed on indifferent to his term of life, and the night wore on in silence, broken only by the frightful cries for liberty of a lunatic in a distant cell, shrill and spasmodic like an enraged orang-outang. The man had wits enough to know that he was caged and helpless and alone.

As the days passed he became the prey of fear. He forgot politics. Hope deserted him. Everything slipped away from him but the bare walls of his cell. The universe and his Bharat Mata had sunk to that. He sought escape in Yoga, but could not concentrate his mind. He thought of Narasimha chanting his holy song.

"Beings are manifest in their origin; manifest in their midmost state. Unmanifest are they likewise in their dissolution. What room is there then for lamentation?"

There was no longer comfort in the words. Solitude and the cold fear of death strip formulas bare. The doomed trunk is paramount, the mind its shrunken attendant. Siri Ram saw himself with infinite pity, a lone spirit fearful of damage to its shell, caught in a whirl of unsympathetic matter which swept it slowly to

its end, the cruel man-ordained ejection with violence in the chill of the morning when the sun had barely risen.

One evening the attendant reminded him that it would probably be in three days. Siri Ram slept, overcome with weariness. Early in the morning before it was light a tramping warder awoke him. The abyss of emptiness still yawned round him, and a mist of the spirit through which the vanity of the physical world loomed like a mountain. Often had he lain thus in doubt and fear, the consciousness of self slowly returning, the spirit stretching out in vain for hope and warm comfort in the grey interval before the magic lantern in the brain has time to throw its coloured pictures on the wall.

But on this morning there were no pictures to cheat him till he slept again. The sense of identity gathered slowly out of the mist with cruel definiteness. "I am Siri-Ram," he thought. "Though I am alive, I am dead. My body feels the bed, its hard and soft. Once more, perhaps, shall I sleep. After to-night my body will lie somewhere, but there will be no hard or soft. Iron spikes or wood or down will be one." The thought of the flames was comfortable. He put his hand over his heart to feel the throbbing. He tried to revive the warmth of pride. He reminded himself that he was already haloed. He thought of Kamala Kanta

## 296 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

and the Shop of Fame. His features were well known; thousands of cheap prints of him would be circulated in Bengal; the ladies in the zenanas who had given up wearing silk would be weeping for him. He was the equal of Mohan Roy, but——

Voices outside sent the ice into his blood. He heard a thin, hungry, mocking howl, tasting of teeth and worms and the last indignity of human clay. It was the jackal chorus which in a land of shallow graves makes men fear God more than they love Him.

While his spirit cowered, Siri Ram thought of instant escape with relief. He felt in the crevice of the bed for the little wafer of poison. He was calm and master of himself; the horror he had feared had gone. He opened the packet almost indifferently. A grain or two fell on the blanket, and he licked it up with his tongue, afraid that there might not be enough. Part had become paste and stuck to the folds of the paper. He detached it carefully with his finger. Then he threw his head back in the way Mohan Roy had showed him and shook it down his throat.

## VI

A RAINLESS June had succeeded a rainless April and May at Gandeshwar. The thermometer was 116° in the shade. Work in the College began at six and ended at eleven, but there was not a cool breath of air at night or even in the early morning. The *Ode to the Nightingale* had come round again with the revolving year, inevitable as the season.

It was a stifling June morning when Skene entered the class-room to lecture on "the immortal bird." The crows outside were open-mouthed with the heat. Every now and then a burning blast of air broke through the Venetian blind, filling the room with glare and dust and the breath of a furnace. The punkah rope swung idly on an unoiled pulley. The sickly scent of the khuskus pervaded the air and filled the room with a tepid, ineffectual moisture. As Skene passed to his desk a student's notebook caught his eye, scribbled over with some Hindu annotator's ruthless logic. At the top of the page was written—

"Title. Nightingale, a bird that sings in  
thicket."

## 298 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

Skene told the student, a sleepy youth with large calves, stockings with embroidered flowers and patent leather slippers, to read the first stanza. He read raucously with the grating undulations of a saw—

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk :  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-wingèd dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot,  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.”

The words carried him away far in a daydream to a hazel copse festooned with dog-roses and traveller's joy, the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves—in which the rasping voice of the unhappy young man who read became a subconscious menace. Then he was wading through deep hedge-parsley under the elms to a brook where the pike lay motionless among the water-weeds in the sun. The scent of water-mint and willow-herb perfumed the air, and all along the banks of the osier bed a forest of lush umbelliferous weeds starred with convolvulus and hemp-agrimony and purple loosestrife.

When he awoke to reality after this merciful anæsthetic of associations, the profane mono-

tone had ceased, and the student had relapsed into the cocksure accent of exposition which he employed in prose.

"The poet calling nightingale 'light-winged druid of the trees' says further, 'I am not sad because of envy a low person might feel with bird for its sweet song.'"

"Yes. You have got the idea," Skene said. "But you must remember it is 'Dryad,' not 'Druid,' " and he explained the difference.

Then he read some notes which he had written on the stanza years ago. He could not consciously murder the piece again. In every stanza flowers withered, embodied loveliness was mortified, the ghosts of passion were dissolved in pain. So he read mechanically, and let his thoughts wander far away. Thus only could he escape remorse.

The hot reek of stable manure came to him from the cricket field, which he had been returfing, and the smell was homely and welcome. It carried with it sweet early-morning memories of hunting days in Devon when he used to get up in the frosty starlight and find his mare ready saddled in the stable, her coat warm and sweet-smelling like a morocco-bound book; the long ride to the meet in late autumn, the glistening scarlet of the wild cherry and the guelder rose, the babbling brook in the wood with its ferny



## 300 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

banks under the holly trees and the naked silver birches.

Necessity had taught Skene to let his mind set three ways at once. Mixed with these images, which were intermittent with the business of dictation, he had a sense of being watched which was associated somehow in his mind with a feeling of deep depression that had hung over him for weeks. Some one was peeping into his class-room from behind a pillar in the verandah. Between the approach and retreat of the punkah he caught a glimpse of a brown cap and spectacles, and thought he recognised the penitent, uneasy figure of Banarsi Das, long forbidden the College precincts. He was going to drive him to the gaol to bid farewell to Siri Ram, and he had promised to take him back into the College afterwards. Skene could not think of Banarsi Das as a serious menace to the British Raj, or believe that he had the stomach for conspiracy. If he had, the condemned cell would lay any ghost in him of missionary or proselyte.

He looked at his watch. There were twenty minutes to the end of the lecture. He would take Banarsi Das then.

The student who had been reading had stopped, and was speaking in unrhythmical prose. The change into the expository accent

warned Skene that he must be an accessory to the murder of another stanza.

"Fly away and I will dog thy steps, but I will not come to thee by taking seat in the carriage of God of Wine and Leopard. I will accompany you in flying by reciting and writing poetries."

"You have misunderstood the second line," Skene said. "What is the literal meaning of 'not charioted by Bacchus and his pards'?"

The youth looked blankly at him, and as he hesitated another student, the most daring adventurer in those unfamiliar lands, rose and volunteered.

"Sir, may I? The poet says boastfully, 'I will not intoxicate myself like drunkard in order to be with nightingale in the jungle. I will go to sweet songster on wings of the poetry.'"

"Yes. That is the idea."

Skene smiled sadly. His physical discomfort was an anodyne. It was gathering for a dust storm outside, and a thin draught reached him from the chink of a window at his back like the hot puffs of air a dentist blows into the roots of a tooth from his indiarubber bulb. The sweat stood on his face. When he wrote he moved a blotting-pad up and down with his hand: the contact of skin and paper meant pulp. The ink was smudged in his register and notebook where

his finger had touched the page. The little pocket edition of Keats on his table was warped like a dry leaf.

The next stanza carried him far away—

“I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild ;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine ;  
Fast fading violets covered up with leaves.”

After the first lines he heard nothing. He was in a canoe in Byron's pool under the dappled shade of a willow. The fragrance of meadowsweet permeated the air, and the river smell rose from the weedy shallows. A water rat was performing his toilet on a crooked alder stump, and he pinched the leaves of the book he was carrying—the pocket Keats on the table—lest a rustle should disturb him. Near by a mill wheel ceased suddenly, and a distant echo of children in the Grandchester meadows rose and fell and seemed to be connected in his mind somehow with a patch of buttercups on a shelving bank. He was wondering how long it would be before the shelf tumbled over into the pool when he saw the College chaprassie pass the window towards the gong.

“Read the next stanza,” he said, and shut his

ears to the lines which enshrine romance for all time—

“Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for  
home,  
She stood in tears among the alien corn :  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faëry lands forlorn.”

The gong struck knell-like. Skene took up his warped Keats. He had found a midge pressed between the leaves in the middle of the stanza where

“haply the Queen-moon is on her throne  
Clustered around by all her starry fays.”

It had once danced with the motes of a sunbeam on a June morning in Grandchester.

He rose and threw the bar down which had kept the door shut against the growing typhoon. The hot air rushed in. The students crowded round him from behind, begging to be allowed to go to their homes before the storm could come to a head. He let them go, and beckoned to Banarsi Das, who had been shivering by his pillar, to follow him. They drove off on their miserable errand to the gaol.

As they entered the passage Skene was surprised to see the door of the outer cell open. The Superintendent met them on the threshold

## 304 SIRI RAM—REVOLUTIONIST

and drew Skene aside. Banarsi Das heard them talking in low tones. He began to be afraid that they had already hanged Siri Ram; he almost hoped they had. A hospital assistant came out of the cell as he waited with a basin and a bottle and a long tube. Banarsi Das was sick with fear. He heard the Superintendent say, "Perhaps you had better let his friend see him."

He entered the inner cell with Skene. Siri Ram was lying quite still on his hard bed. Banarsi Das spoke to him, but he did not answer. He took him by the shoulder and swayed him gently to and fro, but his head fell over inertly on one side. He bent over him and shouted in his ear.

"Siri Ram! Siri Ram! Siri Ram!"

He shook him almost roughly, and called again, raising his voice each time—

"Siri Ra-am! Siri Ra-am!"

But Skene laid his hand on the boy's arm. "We are too late," he said.

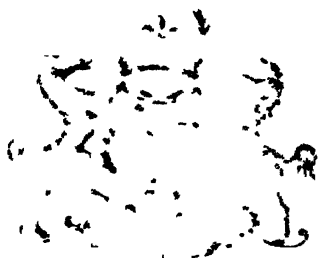
Banarsi Das' voice broke, and he began to weep.

"He has shaken off mortal coil! He has shaken off mortal coil!"

"Poor little devil," was Skene's inward comment. "He never had a dog's chance."

He led Banarsi Das out of the cell. The storm

had spent itself in a few drops of rain, just the scent of it without the relief. The air was hot and gritty. Ineffectual thunder rumbled in the distance. As they drove back to the College without a word Banarsi Das was shaken with silent weeping.



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