SUN-BABIES

CEREMONIES AND GREEN RUSHES—THE PLAY HOUR.

From a photograph by RAI VARMA, *India.*

[*Frontispiece.*

SUN-BABIES

STUDIES IN THE CHILD-LIFE OF INDIA

BY CORNELIA SORABJI

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TO

HER OF THE WEST

BECAUSE SHE UNDERSTANDS

'For the Melodies of the Dawn Star and the Evening Star are one."

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SUN-BABIES

I

MY MASTER'S SLAVE

"ROUSE yourselves, sons of sloth! the Sahib comes"—and the chaprassi, insignia of his office girt about him, would hoist the blue brief bag into the tum-tum waiting under the porch, while the "son of sloth," who sat in the dust, at the horse's head, would stretch himself upright and fidget about needlessly, duster at belt, rubbing up the harness, dusting the cushions, flicking away imaginary flies.

This happened every morning after breakfast, with the certainty, if the unpunctuality, of the sunrise. The "sons of sloth," waiting for audience with the "Fount of Wisdom" were many and various—the praise and prayer of a daily liturgy,—

most of the servants, for this seemed to the head Khidmatgar right and important; oddments of humanity with petitions; stray "box-wallahs" (pedlars), who sought to tempt the Sahib with that which had failed to attract the Miss Sahib; the grass-cut and grain-dealer with their bargainings for horse-food—the syce's special province; sometimes, the clerk dawdling to beg patronage for a poor relative or timid and rejected client—a goodly crowd.

And the Presence would stride past them all, oft vouchsafing never a word, eye scanning petition as he mounted his seat and took the reins, and was down the drive before the salaams were well over. Oft dismissing all in five minutes, —a word here, a kindly jest, an order there,—to each after his kind: but whatever he did, seemed right to the watchers. They would come next day should to-day prove inauspicious. Seldom was Eastern potentate more autocratic or more loved for his autocracy in his audience chamber.

But on a morning a thing smaller than usual waited with the rest; and it took its stand among the flower-pots and hanging ferns on the little low ledge of yellow wall by the creepers. It

looked like a saint in a niche, and it made a low obeisance, saying never a word.

"Who are you?" asked the Presence, and waited, looking at him. The chaprassi intervened—"Some *badzat*, Huzoor." Then, to the image—"Hat! begone."

But the old gardener, crooked scythe in hand, murmured a deprecating "*Gareeb-par-war*" from the background. The image smiled; he was not without a sponsor, it would seem.

"Who are you?" asked the Presence again of the image.

This time he spoke, descending from his pedestal. "Presence, I am a man-child. While my years were yet few, my mother turned me adrift to earn my living. I have never gone foodless; but the work I did was the work of a child. Now that mine years are many, I would do the work of a man."

He looked no more than seven: he had the face of a careworn angel, and a smile which was a benediction.

The Presence said nothing, regarding him; and the image continued.

"The Presence doubts my word? It is the

right of the Presence. But Chaudhari there knows the truth which I spake about my mother. For the other matter, my child-work, the Presence has but to send a note to Proudie Sahib, the merchantman, to be informed that it was indeed with him that I held service."

The Presence said never a word, just stood there regarding him, a slow smile creeping to the corners of his mouth. The image looked up in the silence for one brief moment, and then, head bent again, went on.

"The Presence wonders about that child-work. Two years, maybe three, have I sat at Proudie Sahib's door, being the hand to bear the note things to and fro; and much knowledge of the world have I thus gained. The Presence did do right to doubt; but now that I am come to man's estate, 'tis higher work should be my portion."

The Presence turned to mount his cart.

"I will attend here to-morrow at the same hour," said the image, "bearing in my hand the faithful witness of that Proudie Sahib of whom I spake; but it would be meet for the Presence to make enquiries on his own account."

"*Badzat!*" chorused the chaprassis. But

the image only smiled at the tum-tum half way down the drive.

Next morning he was there again, holding a crumpled little note straight out before him, ready for delivery, and frowning over it in silent aloofness. In vain did the others tempt him to conversation. His words were for the Presence alone.

"Here is the note, Presence," said he; "but" —beaming—"the Presence will not need it; the Presence did very wisely make his own enquiries."

"How the——" began the Presence.

"It was very right of the Presence to make his own enquiries, and even as I begged," continued the image, "I knew that the Presence would put my tale to test. It was no word of wonder to learn that fact from Proudie Sahib's gardener."

"Badzat!" under their breath, said the background of serfs, wagging their heads at each other. He was doing his own pleading, and this was not etiquette.

"What is your name?" asked the Presence.

"Pagal—the mad one," he replied sweetly. "And my caste, the gardener caste. But all

are one to me,"—looking round with the gracious patronage of a Queen new come to Queendom, —"all are one. . . . At what time should I attend upon my duties as body-servant to the Protector of the homeless. Command me, Presence."

Now the imp showed in this the prescience of the diplomat. The Presence had indeed not come at any decision; but seeing a passing thought thus held and clothed in words, he recognised it for his own, and—"Come to-morrow," he said; "the punkah in my chambers is a light one: you shall pull it."

"I am of the official household of the Presence," said the imp, tongue in cheek; hugging himself with joy, when the tum-tum's back was turned.

As became a man-child, he had bargainings to do concerning that same office; and he would deal with none but the Presence himself.

"Let my wages come to me," he begged, "in daily coppers. It is not good for a man-child to get into the claws of the money-lender. I deal with wayside grocers, and what is in mine hand, I spend."

In my ignorance I tried to arrange that his caste brother, the gardener, should "mess" him.

"Carry no anxiety on my account, Miss Sahib," he said politely. "Shall I, who have been these many years mine own provider, shall I be beholden to any? Besides, a man gets settled in his ways. I can cook for myself: in the day parched rice and earth-nuts are enough to kill the hunger, and when court rises and my work is done, the evening meal is well flavoured at my poor idle hands. . . . A man gets settled, yes, even in his ways of eating."

He had a room allotted to him in the servants' quarters. "I have moved my pots and pans and house-sticks there," he said. But he was not often in it.

Returned from court, he would wait in the garden till the Presence was safely off to the club; then he would retire to the mango tree of his choice, hang his robe of office on a bough, and give his mind to domesticities.

He had built himself a small brick fireplace, and an angry gardener conducted me to the *al fresco* kitchen.

Pagal was sitting on his heels; his black earthen pot of rice and pulse would soon be at the boil, and for appetiser he was grinding juicy beans of tamarind and bright red chillies into one soft squashy mess.

I watched him a moment: all housewifely concern was my careworn angel; he tilted forward on tiptoe, elbows still on shiny knees, and lifting the cover, shook his head—"A moment more it needeth, the space it takes a man to breathe, just that——" and then he turned and saw me.

"This is my kitchen, yes, Miss Sahib," he beamed; and with much presence of mind for that well-boiled rice, he uncovered the pot . . . "My kitchen!" He was not a whit abashed, yet seeing the gardener in the rear, suspected complaint, and changed his tone . . . "Yes! a lone man-child am I, wifeless, homeless. . . . Who is there in all the world, save the Sahib, to befriend me. I know the Sahib and his great lion-heart. 'Let him,' he would say, 'have as much licence in these matters as—as the birds yonder who live in my trees, and feed *all over* my garden, and sleep in the boughs at night-time.'" He had a shy way of speaking, tongue

in cheek, and head bent, while the bare toes of one foot clutched at grass or pebble, swinging backwards and forwards. But after he had spoken he would look straight into your face with the most bewitching of radiant smiles.

"You have a house-place, with a kitchen ready made, Pagal," I began with severity.

"I have, I have; the Miss Sahib speaks truth, but"—and that smile again—"I like this better."

I turned away weakly, leaving Pagal to his rice and chutney. What was the anger of the gardener in comparison with the coaxing of the little mad thing!

"He is the Sahib's property," I said, coward-like. "Make your plaints to the Sahib."

But I have never regained my place in Chaudhari's estimation since this shameful display of weakness.

To the Protector of the homeless, Pagal was a dog in devotion and loyalty: to the outside world, a fiend. More than once have I found him bullying the servants.

Here is one of many like scenes:—

Pagal—turning somersaults in the garden, in the cool of the early morning.

Khidmatgar (the service man — in a great bustle, looking worried)—"Pagal, take this note to the house opposite."

Pagal—"Not I. I'm the Sahib's punkah boy. Any moment may the Sahib want me. Such work, O witless chieftain, belongeth to the Sahib's chaprassi."

Khid.—"I know it; but that bearer of messages and wearer of a brass plate has already gone to court. (Coaxingly.) Come now, take it, such a fleet lively boy you are. You will be back before I snap my fingers."

Pagal—"Wisdom of Ages! employ another; an I be absent, who will receive my master's clients? 'Tis I who have the most important duties in this household. 'Boy,' forsooth! No boy am I." And he turned a double somersault.

Khid. (losing patience)—"Before the Presences an angel; but we, we know you for a sprite let loose from hell itself. I will report this matter to the Sahib, fiend."

Pagal (sweetly)—"And with no credence. Think you I know not that the Sahib will doubt your word. Very close in his affections doth my Sahib hold me."

Followed an interlude of wrangling, in which Pagal got far the better by reason of his tongue, and of his faith in his loved master.

In holidays, Pagal was boy enough to revel. He would condescend to mufti, and to my chota chaukidar for companion. Many glimpses had I of the pair in the garden, playing marbles or Indian hop-scotch. When they were tired, they would sit on their heels and gossip. Pagal was then the man of the world, instructing a babe.

"Ai Chota Chaukidar!" he would say; "much ground is to travel, before thou learnest wisdom. No man, however well instructed, is clever enough to stand on his own shoulders. Yet will I try and teach thee. I will lend thee the shoulders of me, for one little while. Thou shouldst watch me more, little brother. Garden things and insect things, and knowledge that pleaseth the Miss Sahib, thou hast truly—but avails this aught, thinkest thou, in the world of men?

"In truth, not a shell.

"Time and again hast thou thrown chances to

the wind. Watch me, I say. Now this morning, the Miss Sahib bought goods, a rupee's worth, from that bellowing *bakas*-wallah. Thou, being the Miss Sahib's boy, mightest have claimed a pice as *dustoori* on that purchase — and well able, too, was that fat pedlar to spare it. To me he gives a whole anna in every single rupee of the Sahib's purchasing. But then, I am of more consequence and necessity to the Sahib than art thou to the Miss Sahib: and the Sahib asks my mind, and holds my judgment high; they know that—the 'ripe' things. Still, as I say, a pice, at least, thou mightest have claimed. I am for justice and right dealing in all concerns. There is custom, in these matters, I tell thee, child,—custom: and custom is to us men of the world, even as the Shining Ones, a godling.

"*I* claim nothing on the Miss Sahib's purchasings; note that: the *dustoori* is the khidmatgar's to arrange as he will. But what a personal attendant should get is thine, chota chaukidar—the *dustoori* on *unexpected* purchases, the buyings of the Miss Sahib's idle moments.

"Is that plain now, little brother; is that plain?

See, I share my wisdom with a child. Art hoisted well on my shoulders now?"

He was silent awhile, and then chuckled, "I am too ripe and shrewd for these hirelings . . . that poor mashalchi, the torch-boy, he hath twice my years, and yet he gives *dustoori* on his pay, twelve times a twelvemonth, to the long-faced khidmatgar. 'I got you the place, boy,' he said. And he speaks truth, he did; and so the witless youngling lieth trapped in the net of custom. But I—I walked far from the net; and where the mashalchi curses, I say prayers. It is good to reverence custom, child. Keep that in mind—good, when wisdom puts a kōs or two between you and its nets. Thou hearest them always rating at me. 'Tis but this little matter, that I got myself my place; and I pay no man tribute for the fact. Yet, I care not for hirelings; close am I, as thou knowest, in affection to my Sahib's boundless heart." And he laughed softly to himself. My little chaukidar sat by, rapt and adoring. Before me he had vaunted his wisdom. But as Pagal had said, how far would the wisdom of garden people carry him in the great world of men! . . .

Secure in the affections of his master, even as he boasted, Pagal went far.

Coming home one afternoon earlier than usual from my daily game, I found Pagal taking a bath on the lowest step of the "Fount of Wisdom's" chambers, beside the *khas-khas tattis;* and he used for requisites the earthenware tub and pot kept to damp the khas-khas. *How* he gurgled and danced in his single wet garment, as he poured the water over his head, trying to catch it in his mouth on the way! The steps led into the garden, and though at the side of the house, were visible from the drive.

A ring of angry servants stood round, scolding and threatening; but Pagal cared nothing.

"Yes, yes," he said; "the water-carrier will have to fill the tubs anew in the morning—but what of that?"

And he ran round and round the ring to dry himself.

It was then that I appeared, and the servants exulted before the boy.

"Thank God! Now at last will the Presences know what manner of fiend thou art. Thank God."

Pagal, seeing me, broke through the circle to fetch his "mufti" from the mango tree, where it hung on a low-reaching branch. This garment was an old Union Jack, which had probably been used as bunting on some street decorating occasion, and which Pagal had got from Heaven knew where. He draped it about him, toga-wise, taking care first to wash and hang out the cloth in which he had bathed. It was the work of a minute or so, and he was back in decent seeming before me, and before his accusers; standing, head bent, scratching the ground with his toes in his usual manner.

"Pagal," I challenged, "what would the Sahib say if he saw you? You were visible from the drive—and you so careful about the honour of your Sahib's house! There was the well, or the pump, at which you might have bathed, near the servants' quarters."

"It is true," he said meekly, "but where should my master's slave live and move except upon his doorstep! Yesterday, I saw a little sparrow bathing in this self-same tub of water. And I—could I be of less value to my Sahib than that little sparrow thing? Surely not!"

Then, after a pause, and with his most innocent air: "I take great care not to invade the Miss Sahib's part of the building: the Miss Sahib knows that. The Miss Sahib will find the steps of her own rooms quite dry."

He shook off his quiet sadness, and beaming into my face his sweetest smile, went on scratch, scratching, his foot a-swing. . . .

But the clients he considered his very own province; and I never knew his greatness till by chance I watched his dealings with them.

He had prayed the Fount of Wisdom, some days earlier, to let him provide his own "department" with a hookah and some betel-nut. "They come from a distance, those base-born rustics. It behoves us to smoke and water them, that their hearts might be enlarged. That should be my care," he explained.

And the Fount let him have his way, forgetting the request as soon as it was granted. Not so his little henchman.

A party of *riayots* had come in with some mortgage cases from outlying villages. They were well to do, but had—it is usual—worn their oldest and most soiled garments to impress counsel

with their poverty; and they had left their *ekka* some way down the road, trudging in wearily, as if they had walked miles — their shoes slung over their shoulders. Pagal saw them, and his sense of justice demanded punishment.

He sat in his garment of office, on the front doorstep,—chin on palm, elbow on crooked-up knee, and he looked at the morning sun, between a blinking sweep of eyelash.

It was early, and neither munshis nor chaprassis as it happened were about, so the clients spoke to the boy.

"Child," said the spokesman, "is the Presence at home? We would have word with him."

Pagal said nothing, nor moved from his position; he still played *spy and catch* with the sunbeams.

"Speak," said the man, "if so be thou hast any knowledge. Is the Sahib at home?" Still no answer.

They looked about, but no one else was within hailing distance; the gardeners were at the well, and the servants' quarters were hidden away at the back of the house.

They tried conciliation.

"Wisdom-born," said another of the men, humbly, "is it your pleasure to inform us of the Sahib's whereabouts?"

Then did Pagal deign reply.

"You ask a mighty thing," he said, speaking slowly, "rustics from your span long fields. 'The Sahib and his whereabouts.' . . . And wherefore should I tell you? The Sahib may be playing 'crickut'; the Sahib may be engaged on great matters of the court; his clients are many and wealthy,—they go not about on foot; the Sahib may be taking his pleasure with his friends, or eating a meal, or having a bath—who are ye to ask me of the Sahib?"

"We have brought the Sahib our quarrels," they said meekly.

"Humph!" said Pagal. "So have said others —worthy men. What is the cause? Is it a civil or criminal matter?"

They told him.

"That would be *civil*," he decided. "What is the value of the land in dispute?"

They told him again, obedient.

He laughed. "*That!* Go, there be vakils many to suit your purpose. My Presence deals in bigger

things. You mistake your house, my brothers. In the city you will find your man; go."

"Wisdom-born," they said, "you plead for us. Let but the Presence read our papers. We would have success this time. Oft have we lost."

"Humph!" he said, "and success has its price." He considered awhile, then—"There be benches; sit and wait."

He pointed to them, moving not himself from where he sat.

He thought to hear them talk among themselves, but they were silent, impressed no doubt by his boastings. After a time Pagal tired of this; besides, the chaprassi would soon arrive, and might anticipate him.

"Come," he said, "old Zemindar-jis,"—and his manner was that of the great host; "you are off a long journey; come with me, and while we wait the Sahib, I will give you smoke and water. Come."

And they were borne to the back regions, showering blessings on their guide for his kindness.

Here their tongues were unloosed; Pagal cross-

questioned them, and in their artlessness they bewrayed their true position.

It was what he thought. They should not cheat his Fount of Kindness with tales of poverty: he would see to that, trust him. But it was time now to tell the Presence.

"You are rested; I will go seek my master," he conceded.

"Speak for us, Wisdom-born," they begged, and settled once more to waiting.

Pagal sauntered to where he knew his Presence ate his early breakfast.

"Presence," he said, "some rustics with cases. They wear old garments; but be not deceived, Presence, they are not poor men. It is not needed that the Presence should deal kindness to them in the matter of *fees*. They own . . ."—and here followed the tale of their land,—"paying revenue to Government," so and so, "and their daughters were all married in a long past age."

Pagal is still favourite henchman to the Fount of Wisdom, and is like, in time, to wear the brass plate and badge of his highest ambition.

One more only of his sayings will be here

recorded. He spake in a parable to his old enemy the khidmatgar :—

"The owl and the hen waited together for the morning, chieftain," he said. "The light is of use to me," said the hen, "but of what use is it to you?"

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II

THE CHOTA CHAUKIDAR

THE "Chota Chaukidar" lived in the back regions, mostly under the *ber* tree, which dropped yellow plums, soft and juicy and stringent, for the jaded appetite of six years old. A cactus hedge and a feathery line of waving bamboo trees secured the stabling and the servants' enclosure from the observation of feudal lords and ladies; and if there were a "four-legs" or two under the tent-like "pipal" in the centre, with babies and dowager *chaukidarins* or coachman-*ins*, a-sprawl thereon—it was not our business to take cognisance of such things.

Sometimes I penetrated behind the screen, to examine the bandages of the horse that was weak-kneed, or had the *barsati*—the trouble that comes with the rains,—and on such occasions

the Chota Chaukidar was my bodyguard. But it was not there that we first made acquaintance: it was in the garden. We had just settled into our straggling yellow bungalow, with the bunches of deep orange honeysuckle festooning its wide porch, and my early mornings were given to amateur gardening. It was difficult, for the ancient and stiff-necked gardener, who lived in the hut by the well, wished to conserve all the bad old ways of a fifty years' do-nothingness. The garden meant to him naught beyond the mango or fruit groves and his beds of marigold for the gods of his own and his neighbours' homesteads. Responsibility for the mangoes lay with the one garmented lessee to whom our Babu landlord was in the habit of renting the grove. Of the leeches and bananas and plums and custard-apple the usufruct was his own; what waste of energy to care about anything else—about flowers for instance, which had neither a culinary nor an ecclesiastical value!

It was over that same one-garmented natureling that the Chota Chaukidar and I made friends. Emerging into the freshness of an early hot-weather morning, I found a firm-limbed gnome,

clad in a very big yellow turban and—an amulet, salaaming in the pathway.

"I am the Presence's Chota Chaukidar," he said. "The Presence may not know it, but I guard the Presence's slumbers in the hours of darkness. In the hours of light as well, would I be the on-guard-man, the man who keeps the watches of the sun. If mine eyes be not open, there be plenty who would disregard even the open eye of the sun, while they stole the things of the Presence, and sat in the Presence's 'holding.' Has the Presence knowledge of the one-garmented one, and the child who makes noises to the birds?

"They have taken the *khas-khas-ki-tatti*, the sweetly-scented grass screens, of the Presence's sometime using, and with these have they built themselves a dwelling-hut in the heart of the grove. And they sell the Presence's mangoes for large white pice to any stray comer and goer, making of our 'Palace' a place of trade, a common selling square. And, that calling-boy——"

He paused, speechless with indignation. "What of him?" I encouraged.

"He laughed at me, and made mock of me,

and shoo-ed me off with his bird-call, when I would have taken him by the neck, and thrust him out of our holding."

The "calling-boy" was just twice the size of my little watchman, and I wished I had seen the duel.

"Come and see him, Miss Sahib, and eject him," pleaded six-years. And he swaggered in front to show me the way.

Oh! a swagger in nature's outfit with the unnecessary adjuncts of a turban and a neck ornament is worth many pages of comedy.

The one-garmented one held under an old lease, I found, and could not be disturbed; but I contracted for a limitation of his rights as to the voice of the calling-boy, and as to intercourse with my bodyguard.

I fell a little, I could see, in that same bodyguard's estimation; compromise suggested weakness, an unexpected weakness in his Miss Sahib; he had counted on that ejection, possibly boasted of it in advance. But after pottering behind me for a while, brows knit in thought, he called back over his shoulder to the twain under the *khas-khas tatti*:—

"The Miss Sahib is pleased to have mercy, even as has the God who suffers you to inhabit this earth."

Thereafter every morning was the Chota Chaukidar a-squat, waiting for me, outside my door. We gardened together, and he would echo my orders and suggestions with a flourish of trumpets, chuckling when we got the better of the old gardener, and mimicking behind his back his favourite *Gareeb-par-war* (Protector of the poor). *Gareeb-par-war* was Chaudhari's one response, the inflection of his voice doing all that was conversationally necessary. "*Gareeb-par-war!!*" he would say in hurt surprise when I suggested a change displeasing to him—as the ruthless uprooting from my rose-beds of his over-odorous and brilliant marigolds.

"I know they are flowers that the gods love, Chaudhari," I would say, seeking to conciliate, "but the colour is not beautiful beside the pink roses. See; plant whole ranks of them by the well, near your house-place. I will give you that plot which we kept for the pumpkins. The gods will like it better so, I promise you."

And, "*Gar-r-eeb-par-r-war,*" he would say

soothingly; for he was unconvinced, and had not the slightest notion of obeying.

My bodyguard would interpret—"He will not do it; he does not want to walk so far when his friends come to beg marigolds of him. Here, they are near the gates by which the men-folk enter, and they walk past, picking, picking, and talking. Then they tie the flowers into their shoulder-cloths and go. If they had to seek them at the well and his house-place, Chaudhari must, by custom, give them smoke and water, and seat them for a talk, and share his greens and his bananas with them: and that he does not want.

"Command me to uproot them, Miss Sahib," he begged. But I uprooted them myself; and "*Gareeb—par-war!*" in sad reproach, was all that Chaudhari said. But the Chota Chaukidar danced round me with delight.

In the planting season I let him help me bury the seedlings, and I could not tell which of us rushed most eagerly next morning to see if the green shoots were already showing. The Chota Chaukidar from some high sense of honour would not inspect, except in my company; and

it must have meant great self-restraint to the little waiting figure a stone's throw from the beds, who had preceded my appearance by at least an hour. I offered to excuse him this courtesy; but he would not be excused.

Together too we bemoaned the line of dead spring-green sentinels, eaten prone by the white ants. But it was the Chota Chaukidar who found a remedy.

"It behoves us to call in a magic man," he said. "He will say charms to the white ants and will curse them, not forgetting to use some black tar and such things which are deadly to the ant-people."

"Could you and I not use the black tar and such things, Chota Chaukidar?" I asked.

"Maybe," he said, "but we could not say the words."

"But we shall; we'll say words of our own," I represented.

He thought a moment, then shook his head with melancholy energy.

"No, *no*, Miss Sahib; the father-grandfather ways are best always; and our father-grandfathers always called the magic men to this like

trouble. Besides," appeasingly, "of course though we-people know better than the magic men, the ant-people are senseless, and would not understand our language."

I was weak enough to submit, and the Chota Chaukidar was most important over a magic man whom he himself had fetched from the bazaar.

We stood by, interested, while he sprinkled the soil with some dry stuff, "blowing" incantations and making passes mysterious. Our next seedlings came up and lived, but how much was "curses" and how much the dry stuff,—of which he refused me the receipt,—I could never tell.

The sweet-peas grown against the trellis-work were otherwise besieged. "They were too close to the mango trees," as the Chota Chaukidar had pointed out to me, long ago; "for the squirrel-folk who are tame in these trees—the badmaāshes — might descend upon them, and nibble at them. There is much sweetness in green-pea younglings. . . . And they know that, the 'ripe' squirrel-things."

But I would have my way, and I got little sympathy from the Chota Chaukidar when I

found ragged nibblings just when every shoot was safely above ground. But he was generous. "See here, Miss Sahib," he devised, "Chaudhari says to put wire-netting to keep them away; but it is not good to break the legs of the little things, for they will of course come all the same though the wires be there, and they will try to wriggle inside them, and so get trapped. But we will try another plan; we will make little mountains of roasted grain close by the sweet-pea shoots. Squirrels love roasted grain: does the Miss Sahib know? And when they run down the trees to destroy our pea-shoots, they will find the little grain mountains, and will turn aside to grind the well-roasted seeds between their teeth: and so, eating their noisy fill, will quite forget about the tender younglings. Oh! it is a knowing plan," he chuckled; "oh, the wit of a man-child is too much for the wiles of even the grey-tails! And the gods also will be pleased, for they have loved the squirrel-people since the day that they began to carry on their backs the Great God's finger-marks. The gracious god-folk would be sorry to see them lamed."

The hot pre-monsoon days bring many dust

storms to the Mai-Gunga towns, and my Chota Chaukidar watched me curiously through my first experience of them. The servants were bolting doors and windows as fast as they could, and he had ventured indoors after me, in the confusion.

"The Miss Sahib has no knowledge of these storms?" he asked, putting down the book which he had carried. "I will tell her about them—to-morrow morning;" for the head-bearer was glowering at the child for his intrusion. "I but came now, because the Miss Sahib's many servants forgot this book-thing, which the wind might have lifted and taken away;" and the Chota Chaukidar retired with dignity.

In the morning I got the promised explanation. Some one, it seemed, in some far place,—he could not tell which, wherever the storm came from,—had killed a cow, and the gods were angry; and this was the breath of their angry words, telling the whole world that cow-killing was a sin. The words came thick and fast and loud, and lifted the dust in their journeyings, to attract the attention of ear-stopped, eye-dimmed men. "Who knows but that the man who killed the

cow may be in the dust storm, turned into dust himself, and whirling hither and thither," he suggested thrillingly.

Once, at mid-day, there came in the wake of a dust storm whole flights of locusts. My chief instructor, who had been snoozing in the back regions, rushed at the old punkah-wali — for I was indoors, and in my special sanctum, the while that *khas-khas* screens and fan-pullers made cool scented breezes blow through the house.

"I would see the Miss Sahib," he said; "it is a matter of urgency—the red-yellow, fruit-fed beasts are settling in the garden, and the Miss Sahib *must* see them." . . . I heard him through the green *jhilmili*.

"Go away!" she said; "a bold man-child art thou, seeking to disturb the Miss Sahib when the shutters are shut for the rest-time. Go away, and lift no sound of voices near the Miss Sahib's room door."

But he persisted.

"What know you of the Miss Sahib?" he sneered. "Do *you* attend her early mornings in the garden; do *you* ever teach her, as I do, about the things of us-people, and the things of the

god-people, and beast-people, and garden-people —*as I do?* Does the Miss Sahib listen to the noise of you? What for is your voice, but to *bak-bak-o* to jabber and quarrel among the women-folk of your kind? So is it with all women; but to a man-child does God give a voice with which to talk of the world-people even to such an one as the Miss Sahib. Send word to the Miss Sahib, I say. What know you of the Miss Sahib's desires and angers. Myself will be hostage—and while you waste words here, the locusts may fly," he concluded, almost with a sob.

"Badmaāsh!" she murmured; and I could hear her reaching with her free hand for some weapon to hurl at him, when I interposed.

"What is it, Chota Chaukidar?" I asked, reconnoitring from between the shutters.

"Presence," he beamed,—a sidelong triumphing thrown at the punkah-wali,—"the yellow-red fruit-feds are settling in the garden. Come and see, for their will is as the wind's will, and ere the sun cools they may be gone. Mangli, the sweeper, and his tribe of children are catching them in nets and with their hands, to roast and fry them, for they are food to that kind of caste-

men. And indeed the Presence-people eat them too. Is it the Miss Sahib's will to make experiment in eating? For, in that case, myself would be the catcher. To us-caste it is not permissible food," he added, "but it is not forbidden to catch the yellow-reds."

Then, thinking I might mistake the distinction as to diet—"Not but that some of us-caste might and do eat the locust, because it feeds only on green things and garden things, and so should be edible; but for myself, I keep the god-rules about not eating life. What would you, I am a religious!" . . .

But a greater excitement awaited me. It was my first monsoon in Northern India. The Chota Chaukidar and I often wondered through the hot breathless noondays when the rain would come, and I had to listen to many forecasts of that time of refreshment—"Wait and see when the earth is new washed!" . . .

All the seedlings we had planted uselessly were to come up then; even our mistakes were to blossom and bear fruit—the "meggurmint" (mignonette) that had been put down in the wrong admixture of soil, the dainty "cherry pie"

which should have been rock-bedded and underground-tunnelled with earthen waterpots; the white violets, their good manners corrupted by evil communications from the coarser purple type, were to return to their own aristocracy; the bad ingrafts were to triumph over our inferior surgery —and all because the rain would come, making all things new.

We had many false alarms, rumblings and thunderings, and a strong wind that chased away the rain-cloud; but at last it came, travelling over the horizon, darkening it, as the grateful shadows of eventide do darken the land where too fierce a sun has reigned.

The clashing of a thousand cymbals, the tobogganing of mail-clad giants down some asphalted hill-way, the blasting of a million rocks, the salutes from ten thousand guns, the angry voice of an angry demon—such was the thunder. And a mighty destroying light-bringer came on the track of the noisy one, turning on the search fire—now here, now there—a riband of brilliance across the sky, a sword of flame athwart the peaceful valley. And hide and seek they played thus, the thunder grumbling, the lightning showing

its teeth in sneers and sarcasms, till cymbals and guns and tobogganing giants mingled in one great clash—and down came the rain fast and furious.

There was something triumphal and joyous in this extravagance of nature. I longed to be out in the storm, pelted by it, lightning-struck trees notwithstanding—and I thought wistfully of my little small friend who must have been rolled up in a blanket, watching it from the verandah.

In the early morning I heard him fidgetting about, outside my door, questioning the servants as to when I would appear, boasting of all he had to show me, sniffing in the good earth smell, surveying the land with the air of one responsible for all its benefits.

The low salaam—head devoutly lowered for a stately two seconds—my usual greeting, was a very perfunctory performance indeed that day, as he led me to the sun-spot near the red plum tree. And there I found a collection of darling little red-velvety beetles which he had unearthed for my inspection. "See, Miss Sahib," he said, petting and admiring them. "See; does the Presence know what these things are, and whence they come?"

"Tell me," I begged.

"Did not the God of Rain drive his chariot through the sky last night?" he questioned.

"Yes, I knew that much. Well?"

"Must there not be some dust from the wheels of that chariot? This is the dust,"—and he fingered the crimson plush.

Other insect-people too came out of the earth, and for each he had some story.

The winged ants were emancipated earth slaves, souls of penitents to whom, their task completed, were given wings.

But when they left their wings behind them in the house and garden—"*Hugh!*" said he, "the Earth-Mother is so kind a mistress they throw away their freedom, and hie them back to serve her."

Every eclipse of sun or moon was carefully noted by the Chota Chaukidar. He was in truth a "religious," as he had said; for, though but a child and exempt from the rigours of Hindooism, he fasted like any devotee. Turning indoors from my garden wanderings one morning, I found him his usual "fruitling." But, with hands clasped tight behind his back, he shook his head wistfully.

"So you care for mangoes no more?" I asked, surprised.

"It is not so, Presence," he made answer, "but does not the Presence know that to-day Rahu the Seizer fights with the Sun, and I must stand by and fast and pray that the Sun may win, for if I would buy merit for him, even water may not pass my lips." Then would follow some long story of how Rahu stole the nectar of the gods, and was cut in twain by Vishnu, but revenged himself periodically, thuswise.

When "the highest high," our Queen Victoria, was ill, in the same faithful way did my little Chaukidar fast "to win her merit." And the untoward issue never ceased to be a puzzle to him. But, like many other Easterns, he just does not believe in his heart of hearts that she did die. "The tale of her 'going out' was all a *banawat*, a wicked invention," he confided to me.

One day he came to me with a difficulty. "Where does God live?" he asked. "My brother says He lives in the sky; but I think He must live in the kitchen, for does He not feed us from day to day."

But I have not yet explained his name and

self-appointed office. A Chaukidar is a night-watchman. He is reported to have come of a race of thieves, and his chief use is to keep his old fraternity away from your house, for it would not be etiquette for them to thieve where an ex-thief guarded. He walks round the house o' nights, clearing his throat in a manner supposed to be peculiarly safeguarding, and making other hideous noises meant to impress you with a sense of his wakefulness. He also shakes the doors at intervals, and thumps along the verandahs with a heavy stick, and sings snatches of weird songs to enliven his own loneliness, and calls across to his friends in neighbouring gardens, and altogether does his best to dissipate any illusions you may have entertained about "the silence of the sleep-time."

But, as I said, there is just that etiquette which protects you and your possessions, or protects them *as a rule;* for every now and again the Chaukidar does certainly let a thief or two run round your garden while he gives chase ("catch them, sons of foxes!"); and all the house is up and afoot, just to show you how useful he is, and from what he saves you.

Well, the Chota Chaukidar, or small Chau-

kidar, was the son of this night-watchman of ours, and the child's great ambition in life was to be even as his father. He would sleep in the day that he might go the rounds at night. Very amusing was it to hear the pitter-patter of his small feet, and the feeble thud of his little stick, as he followed in his father's wake. And when a tiny fist tried the bolts, you turned in your snug bed with a sense of blame, that your security should be in nursery keeping. It was some comfort to reflect that he would soon tire of it, and be curled up on the verandah, or in the moonlit garden—for nothing would induce him to seek his "four-legs" in the servants' quarters. He loved to tell me about his nightly duties. "I've heard of a robbery at No. 8, Miss Sahib, and we only two doors off! What might have happened, had I not been awake and taking care of you — God alone, He knows!" Or it was something more circumstantial. "The gang came, and I gave them chase with my father's big stick, and they lay prone—yes! all of them, their heads in Alliston Sahib's holding, their feet in ours. With one blow split I all their heads in twain!"

There was a night, however, when the thieves

did really come, and were frightened away by the big Chaukidar—they did no damage, but made a hole in the wall of a disused outhouse, and a great "uplifting of noise" in the garden. Yet the next morning a very small and crestfallen shadow awaited me on the doorstep.

"I will tell you no more stories about thieves for many days to come," it said; "for when the real people came yesterday, I was asleep, and they did not feel the weight of my stick. But," he added brightly, "of course they knew I was asleep; that is why they dared to come!"

A great puzzle was how to reconcile his nightly work with his desire for school. "I cannot be both a Chaukidar and a scholar," he would say; "for people go to school in the daytime; but in the daytime must I sleep, like my father, if I would watch you at night. Yet," he added wistfully, "I should like to read in books, like the Presence reads." . . .

His good little heart induced the nicest of manners. Sometimes indeed it was even difficult to follow the subtlety of his kind sensitiveness for others, as for instance on this occasion. It was an elder sister, who came to stay with us.

And my little Chaukidar, after observing her respectfully for a few days, approached me with a half apology. . . "The Presence's elderling," he said, "will have to be *my* Miss Sahib." I waited for further explanation. "It is a pity," he continued, "that she should not belong to somebody, should be just a Miss Sahib. Now the Presence lives for ever in the brother-'holding,' so is his, that is *the Sahib's* Miss Sahib, and was," he added pathetically, "my Miss Sahib too. But we cannot leave the Presence's little elderling all by herself; so she will have to be *my* Miss Sahib." And thereafter a proud little Chaukidar was he to be allowed to run errands in the service of his adoption. It was about this time that, greeting him in the dawn hour, I found a Chota Chaukidar advanced several inches in dignity and self-importance, as he held by the hand a larger boy, aged possibly nine years, his head hidden in a yellow turban three sizes too big for him, and his lean lithe body be-garmented in a white cotton coat with the draped netherings of the grown man. My Chota Chaukidar wore the little uniform, green and gold, which we had given him, but which,

as a rule, he discarded, except to sleep in, o' winter nights. By this fact alone did I know that the occasion was exceeding ceremonious.

"This," said he, indicating his companion, "is my brother—the same who had a dispute with me about the dwelling place of the Most High. He is now of a fit age to be a householder and tyrant, so he goes to be married. Our father, the Chaukidar, has found him a mate."

The bridegroom stood before me, sheepish.

"Make your obeisances, mannerless one," he commanded, giving him a clout across his head. Then, apologising to me — "The Presence must have mercy. He knows not the ways of behaviour before Presence folk. But of the matter of his marriage, I will have more to say later. Now, I go to be witness to the joy-making."

"The more" that remained to be said was on this wise. After a description of the ceremony and the clothes and appearance of the girl, and what had been paid as bride money to that ex-thief his father, he concluded—"And so it is now of necessity that I should be a wage-earning man—being advanced in years by this joy-making of my brother's. I will still, if the

Presence so pleasures, attend her morning gardening; but the hour of the third watch is idle, and I would then do wage-earning work."

"But what can you do, Chota Chaukidar?" I asked.

"I am a man-child. Is there any limit to what I can do?" he answered proudly.

So I bethought me. It was clear that he did really wish to earn a wage; presents would have degraded him.

"You might be a picker up of balls, when we play beat-ball (tennis)," I suggested.

The idea enthralled him. So, thenceforward he bore the dignity of a white drill costume, with bright red cap and waist-bands. . . . But clothes of any sort always fettered his spirit, and as often as he dared, he would return to the turban and amulet. When no outsider was there it mattered little, and I took no notice. One afternoon, however, there was to be a tennis party ("crickut," as the little ball-picker persisted in calling it), and he was greatly excited. "We must look our best," he said, and he worried all the servants, the old gardener in particular; scolding after him to sweep away every tiniest leaf with which a high wind

was bestrewing the courts. He had a secret too, of which he was very proud. "Have I told it you?" he would ask me many times, wistfully, as though he would be glad to have me drag it out of him. And again, "But did I tell it?"

"No!" I would say; "don't tell; I can wait till the afternoon."

When the afternoon and our guests did arrive, the chief little performer was nowhere to be seen. The chaprassis did his work, and I saw a knot of servants hustling out of sight something small and protesting near the guava trees beyond the tennis courts. I found afterwards that it was indeed my small Chaukidar upon whom they were using "the hand of force." He had appeared in the costume of his "secret"—the amulet, a wisp of muslin wound about his loins, and a pair of long white cotton stockings, much too large for him! The stockings needed upholding—he gave a hand to each: to buy the pair he had saved the wages of a week, he told me afterwards; and he was very hurt and rueful that I should prefer his little bare legs.

"It was not so—as I thought of beautiful

vision," he said, sighing; "I am afraid the Miss Sahib did not like my white foot gloves!"

A day will come, I suppose, alas! when my little Chaukidar himself will grow to the age of a "tyrant," and be mated, and go through his apprenticeship to the god of thieves, that he might retire to the fealty of house-dog in cantonments; but I vow I will pre-empt him for my service.

III

FLEETFOOT

IT was really owing to the Khansamah that I came across "Fleetfoot"; so it behoves me to speak first of him.

We had just decided on occupying that same yellow bungalow with the wealth of orange gold honeysuckle festooning the entrance, when relays of servants besieged us—servants of every description, one for each single task within the house and without, that the wit of man or woman could devise.

There was the *dhobi*, in clean white clothes, standing like some river stork on one leg, his brother in tow—"he who had equal success in the management of an iron and a wife" (the word is the same in the vernacular), he boasted, with a clumsy attempt at a pun, when he was assured of your service.

There were *khansamahs* galore, each with the attendant selection of *khidmatgars* and *mashalchis* and bottle-washers — mostly relatives, — for it were well to live at peace with your fellow burden-bearers, at least in a new home where God alone knew the "health" (temper) of the mistress awaiting you.

Saises like the conjoint articles of modern economical furnishing, with veiled women for wives, who were not above pulling the Presence's punkah on the hot dark nights of midsummer, as they were careful to explain for your allurement; gardeners, watchmen . . . . and what not —even to the *munshi* who would teach you the language, and the other munshi who had been clerk to generations of "ballister-sahibs" and knew the ways of the old *sadr-adalat* as well as of the new-fangled courts.

These last brought you petitions written in quaint English on parcel-wrapping paper, or illuminated vellum, according to their estimate of your mental capacity. "If your master is a fool, move him to pity by your poverty; if a wise man, move him to admiration by your attainments," was their code—and all of them brought

you "chits"—much-thumbed recommendations from old employers.

Very friendly were these would-be ministers to each other. "Speak a word for me, Munshiji;" . . . or from the *khit* to his inferiors: "It may be that I will pray the Presence to employ you, if——" and then some "merchanting," to which I did not listen. For I was watching the crowd from behind the green reed screen which veiled the open front door. . . . Eventually the selection was made, on a somewhat eccentric and very individual principle. The "chits" we disregarded entirely. They were mostly communal property, as you found by the simplest of devices. "What is your name?" you would ask of the man who handed them to you.

"Khalil," he would say, pat. But the chits commended one "Juglal"—a man not even of the same caste as Khalil, as your knowledge of the country would assure you. . . . So, as I say, we put them aside, not inviting the owners to lie in reconciliation of the discrepancies.

The most irrelevant of the petitions gave us our munshi. He was a dear old Moslem, almost decrepit, as we recognised too late, and he had

served many briefless ones, whom some strange fate had elevated — one to a chief justiceship because his father had governed a province, one to a judgment writership because he was a good tennis player, one . . . but the list was long. None of these "ballisters" apparently had done his duty by the vernacular, but he hoped much of his present providences.

"I should like to be in your service," ran the petition, "because I hear on exalted word of faithful men that your honour is of a most respectful family."

For our "master of the stores" and cook we chose an old man, bent almost double, and we chose him partly because he had come without attendant satellites, and we thought his faith in our "temper" worth reward, partly because he looked most interesting, had been through the Mutiny, saving the wife and children and silver —he was proudest of the silver—of his Colonel Sahib.

He was, we reflected, as good as a historic monument, or the original manuscripts of a Record Office, and he was irresistibly picturesque.

You should have seen him running round the

THE KHANSAMAH.

From a drawing made at Allahabad by Miss E. A. Manning.

[*To face p.* 50.

garden to show us that for all that accident of his bent back, bent with the weight of eighty years, he was as sprightly as the veriest infant among them.

So that was how we got the khansamah, and from the day of his installation he took me in hand.

"The Presence has perhaps never kept house before?" he asked.

"No," I said, "khansamah; in my part of the country it was done for me."

"Without doubt," he said contemptuously, "by a thieving Portuguese; I know the kind,—a Bombay 'boy.' But have no fear, Miss Sahib, I will make the Miss Sahib learned in these matters."

First, then, I was to keep daily accounts. He would instruct me what to write, every evening.

	Rs.		
A good fat hen, not past laying, let him who will deny it	3	0	0
Greens, fresher than the gaol gardens could supply them, if the biggest criminal had tried his hand at growing—yes! and the Dr Sahib at supervising	0	4	0

"Has the Presence written it all as I say? It must be written."

Sweetbreads	0	8	0

And so on, with a daily total, and a daily adjustment of his balance in hand. And I wrote it even as he said.

After things had been on this wise for a while—"The Presence," he ventured, "might order the 'tum-tum' (dog-cart) to-morrow, before the heat-time of the sun, and drive to the market-place. The Presence will there find the prices of things, and be able to weigh in the balance of knowledge the truth of my accounts."

"Oh, no! khansamah," I said. "I believe you. Why should I test your word."

"Such is the graciousness of the Miss Sahib," he ejaculated. "But go, Presence. It would be an amusement to the Presence who likes to know the customs and ways of us brute-people."

So I went. It certainly was interesting, driving through the city on market-day. Here were carpet-sellers beating out their glorious coloured wares; here yellow and blue and red-garmented cotton cleaners, sitting by an upright "harp," "twang, twang," a mountain of driven snow beside them; here pyramids of brass, gleaming in the sunshine; here the wax-worker, tracing his pattern on the indigo-blue tablecloth—a brush

his only implement, his eye and imagination his only guide; now a dyer lifting the heavy masses of moist drapery out of the transforming pan; now,—but we were approaching the heart of the city, and all my attention had to be given to my driving. Were ever such people for getting in the way! The *sais* stood on the step behind, holding an umbrella over my head, and shouting, "Woman, who holdeth an infant in each hand, make way! Ai-ji, old grandfather, whose hair hath ripened at the temples, better employed wert thou —yes!—lying abed. Make way, make way."

"Imps of the evil one, dancing shameless in the path of the Presence, remove yourselves. A long and 'speaking' whip doth inhabit the right hand of me!" And he lashed deftly at the crowd of little children, but they dodged him, and—

"*Thàlaam-a-thàlaam-a, Hùzoor-a-hùzoor-a, Màdhàm-a-màdhàm-a,*" said they, slapping their thighs and running after the tum-tum. They were boys, but one girl, Fleetfoot, was among them—a slight wisp of a thing of eight years, in a green checked saree, draped about her body, Maratha-wise, dispensing with the need for any other garment. She slapped her thighs too, vigorously,

and, "*Madhàm-a, Madhàm-a, Madhàm-a,*" said she, running as swiftly as any of them. So she was from the West; no child of the North country would have said *Madhàma* with just that intonation. Her tongue bewrayed her.

We drew up at the entrance to the market. Much to the *sais's* disgust, the children gathered around me.

"Send away the base-borns, Huzoor," he begged. But I liked the "base-borns," and they adopted me forthwith.

"I will be your guide in the market-place," said the most important of them, a boy of nine. He wore a fat green turban, and in his hand was a wide-mouthed basket, produced from I could not tell what convenient hiding-hole. "I will be your guide, Huzoor. I know what fruits and vegetables are good to buy, and *at what prices*, for 'new faces, new figures,' is the way of these crafty market folk. Take me, Miss Sahib; two pice to carry the purchasings, and no dustoori."

I looked round at the eager little faces.

"Yes! take him," said one, sharper than the others, interpreting my thought. "He leads us, and he is always fair about dividing the gains.

Moreover, he does know most about the market, even as he boasted. We-people have never the 'feelings of the foreigner' toward each other; we are not jealous."

But the little girl danced with eagerness, and was biting her lips to keep from speaking. It was famine-time, and they looked such a pinched and dirty little crowd.

"See here," I said, "your way-shower will I take to-day, even as you wish. But for the rest of you, go wash at that pump, and there will be coppers for clean faces, when I return."

The instinct of even a gutter-snipe prevents staring in the East, but after a moment of silent astonishment,—how eccentric I must have seemed—

"*Thalaam-a-Thalaam-ā, Huzoor-a, Huzoor-a,*" came from them, as in a twinkling they were half-way to the pump.

Grave and protecting was the guide left to me. He made a beautiful wide lane, pushing the crowd right and left as he preceded me.

"Senseless! See who comes! Thank the gods that my strong arm can move you, ere you defile the pathway of the most exalted." Then to me

in an aside, for we had got to the *sabzi-mandi*, or market of green things: "Let not the Huzoor look at these selling people, except in contempt. Let her walk through to the top there, so shall we make a desire in them to sell to us. They will produce their best." And it was even as he said. For on either side eager sellers pressed forward, entreating — "Stay here, Presence;" "Make this the end of your journeyings;" "Look at my green *karelas;*" "See my tender spring onions;" "From a cool place of peace came my long and fleshly beans;" "From a shady white-flowered tree, my drum-sticks."[1]

"Bring the Presence here, child," said some. They were mostly women who entreated. And the little "way-shower" strutted with a fine dignity.

"Women have a talkative tongue," he soliloquised; "but for solid sense and straight dealing in business things, I never knew one. Greatly love they to be busy—to be merchantmen, but was there ever any merchanting which they did not spoil? Watch for those who say nothing, Miss Sahib. Such are least dangerous."

[1] Drum-sticks are a kind of vegetable.

"I will give you a lapful of new potatoes if you bring the Presence here," shrieked one.

"Hugh! that and more is my right anywhere," he rejoined. Then to me, "That one is indecent. These things which are the custom should not be shouted in the market-place."

"Do they then give you dustoori?" I asked.

"Without doubt. Men of business give nothing; they sell. And how else should we live? They pay in green things and such like; and at the going-down time of the sun, the little Fleetfoot she cooks us men a meal with some of that karela-stuff" — and he pointed to the wrinkled green vegetable, — "karelas, ground down with the eye-winking sour tamarind, for an appetiser. Oh! she is good as women things go, that Fleetfoot."

"Where did you find her?" I asked, imprudently, for I should have remembered that even this child would dislike discussing a woman-thing in public.

"If it is the will of the Huzoor," he said with courteous dignity, "that will be told when there is leisure. The gateways of my base body must

now be given to the business of buying—ears, eyes, tongue, . . . all."

At a clean-looking stall, we halted. "This is more like to please the Presence," he said. Tomatoes, red and yellow, were arranged like the cone of a shrine; here was a dome of new potatoes, here were cool-looking pumpkins, lying flat as in a river bed: *bringals*, with a bloom as of purple heather upon their smooth young cheeks, and fresh green salad leaves, curling crisply.

We made our purchasings, passing on to the fruit markets, and walking past the meat and poultry vendors, just to attest the prices, as my old khansamah had advised.

"How are hens selling to-day?" the child would ask.

"Two rupees and a half," would answer the poulterer.

"Lying tongue! Twelve annas," would correct the boy. And the men would wink at each other with approval.

"He's a 'ripe' one. Do *boni*, make a bargain, Presence. The boy knows the birds that eat best. This winged thing would melt in the mouth.". . . But we passed on.

Back to the tum-tum then, where, in the net under the seat, the child helped to store the purchasings. They were waiting for me, the rest, some with streaky faces, Fleetfoot clean and glowing, — all excited, but with that curious non-committal restrained excitement of the East. "Fleetfoot" alone hopped and danced, now on one foot, now on another.

The promised coppers were received with gratitude. "Come again, Miss Sahib," they begged, as though they were hosts of all the city and the entire market-place; "come again." And, "*Thàlaam-a, Thàlaam-a, Huzoor-a, Huzoora, Màdhama, Màdham-a,*" they shouted, running after the tum-tum as we drove away, much to the disgust of the *sais*, who would have made his whip "speak," an he dared.

They accompanied us to the city gateway, and then disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed them—quaint little earthlings.

To my evening interview with the master of the stores I did not look forward: but he was perfectly at his ease.

"The Miss Sahib did pay to the market," he asked, "that visit of my advising?"

"Yes," I said, and fell silent.

"The Miss Sahib will have discovered that my prices and the market prices were not one?"

"I did so discover," I replied, depressed.

"It was the wish of her slave that the Presence should find his not-to-be-trustedness," he continued.

"But, khansamah——" I began, puzzled and sorry.

"Yes!" he said, "the prices were not *one word*, theirs and mine. And I know what the Miss Sahib would say. I am an old man, whose hair has ripened, and whose back is in two, and who saved the Colonel Sahib's Memsahib, and little children, and all his silver — and the Miss Sahib trusted me; I know. And,"—proudly —"I am not unmeet to be trusted. But life is short, and it may be otherwise with the many who will come after me in the service of the Presence. Moreover, did not the Presence command me to teach her the way of keeping house? This is the very beginning of the teaching, that one should never write down what is told one. Ai! Miss Sahibji, but *never*. Write just one-fourth: that is a safe rule among Hindustanis.

But if I had told this thing beforehand to the Presence, she would not have taken notice or held remembrance of it. Now she will never forget. One-fourth . . ." and he sighed.

"Therefore did I entreat the Miss Sahib that she might find my words false in the market-place But I am not dishonest—no! It was but by way of teaching the Huzoor. The Huzoor must forgive the foolish ways of teaching that belong to the ignorant slave-people. But the Huzoor did trust me to teach her. What would you? Yet, was I not dishonest." Then, as I still kept silence—

"Oh! Miss Sahibji," he said with a twinkle in his faded old eye, "it was dull work giving accounts to a Presence who believed everything. And it was hard work too, for my poor head, making the figures right afterwards. The Presence will find her slave an honest man. I took no money, Huzoor, beyond the true price; the rest was put to the coal account. See here, Presence," and he produced, with a flourish, a thumbed old account book kept according to the Indian method.

From my chagrin at being duped, I had

recovered sufficiently to see the humour of the situation.

"Khansamah," I laughed, "I fear me, the weight of eighty years and the Colonel Sahib's silver notwithstanding, you are but a badmaāsh like the rest. But what, then, would you have me do?"

"Why, this, Presence. Let it be forgiven to me that I instruct the Presence, even as the Presence wished: but this. When I said the fat hen cost me three rupees,—

"'Oh! khansamah,' you would say, 'but no! Surely only a rupee and a half?'

"And I would join my hands and make answer: 'If the Presence so wills, a rupee and a half was it, and nothing else? This slave is dumb before his father and mother.' And the Presence would say: 'But, khansamah, perhaps, after all, it was only twelve annas.'

"And I would lift my joined hands to my forehead, and say: 'What prescience is there like unto the prescience of the Miss Sahib! Twelve annas was it, Huzoor, and not a pie more.' Then the Miss Sahib feels she has made a bargain, and the khansamah knows that the

Miss Sahib has wisdom, and is not to be deceived. And there is happiness and peace and enjoyment in the house."

"But, khansamah," I gasped, "am I to go through this play-acting over every item in the accounts?"

"But it is as the Presence wills—only that is good housekeeping," he said dismally, fearing revolt; "and it was even in accordance with mine orders that I spake."

Finally we compromised. I guessed the right price immediately, and, "Now, was ever any one gifted with such wisdom as the Huzoor!" he would ejaculate piously.

But to the market-place I often went, although the truth of the khansamah's price-list was no longer in the weighing scales. For the people and my little knot of babies attracted me. Always did the "way-shower" carry my purchases and do the bargainings, but with gracious magnanimity did he let Fleetfoot come too. Together they took me to the stall of the kabuli, the sturdy-built vendor of dried fruits, from the north. And one morning, while he was choosing for me his juiciest raisins and figs and apricots

two cultivators rushed into the market-place, and stood suppliant before him.

"Justice," they said, "justice!"

"What, you!" said the kabuli; "wait then, till I have done my business of serving the Presence. Stand aside."

"But tell me what they ask of you?" I questioned.

"A little thing and easy: justice, nothing more. The Presence must know that with this stall did I buy the right to administer justice to the entire market."

"But do you know how?" I asked.

"It is a little thing, Presence," he said again. "It goes with the stall. To him who buys the stall, the gods show the way."

"I would see you administer justice," I said. He beamed with pride. Then he turned to the man, and his whole attitude changed. He was domineering, curt, judicial.

"Which is the plaintiff, and which the defendant?" he asked. "What is the cause? Speak."

The plaintiff told his story.

"My field," he said, "lies north of the thana-

dar's holding,—the distance of the lowing of a cow from the place of the Five Wells. His field adjoins it. My ploughing beast strayed into his field and ate his corn. He has taken my beast for his own, and refuses to restore him: albeit that I promise to pay for the damage that he did—thieving beast of a thieving ancestry—yet mine, all mine."

"And thou?" said the kabuli to the defendant; "what sayest thou to his story?"

"'Tis false," said the man shortly. "The beast is mine, not his." Then, cunningly—"Would I not take payment for the damage were it his? Am I such an one as would forego payments of any kind? But I refuse to be paid for the damage done by mine own beast. See, Saudagar-ji, there's proof."

There were no witnesses, but they explained that a boy was in attendance with the beast, for it was the kabuli's rule that the thing in contention must be produced, if possible.

We saw the beast through the open archway, a heavy-eyed red-horned creature, bellowing his discontent with the crowd of buyers and sellers.

The kabuli looked from one to another, and said not a word.

"Hi!" continued the defendant; "*his* beast, forsooth! when my hands have painted those dangerous horns, my children patted his forehead, year in, year out, from the day he was calved in the early dawn hour, close by the threshing floor. I mind me that day very well, for his mother was of my father's herd, and a favourite in the house-place."

The plaintiff said nothing; and the kabuli still looked from one to the other with furrowed brow.

At last—"Peace!" he said, "no babbling. To lie is to leap from the housetop. Seek not to remember what another has seen. The beast was his, restore it. More—since you have lied, and lied thus, senseless, I forgive him those damages for which he was willing to pay: and on your head be the judgment-fees, both for himself and for you.

"Sound judgment," murmured the plaintiff. "God rights him who is in the right." The defendant looked resigned, and opening a tight and dirty knot in his shoulder-cloth, produced

his court fees, a whole rupee. The kabuli took it, tossed it in the air to test it, and turned away from the "parties" with a gesture of dismissal.

"I did my best," said the defendant; and, "Come, brother, our ways lie together." And they hobbled away in company, talking of the vices of meek-eyed bulls, as if never a bull had been in dispute between them. But the plaintiff said a blessing on the kabuli, and thrusting forward a tiny silver coin—"Bestow that in charity, in the name of justice," he begged.

"Did I give right judgment, Huzoor?" asked the kabuli of me.

"It seemed so," I made answer. "Do they never dispute your verdict? Do they never produce witnesses?"

"Why should they?" he said; "that way of justice is to be had in the great red courts of the Sahib log. They know that to me the gods have given, with this stall, the power to judge between right and wrong."

"But if you ever should make a mistake. What then?"

"Even then do not they dispute the verdict,"

he said. "It would seem to them punishment for a sin unconfessed. Some such must there ever be in the life of a man."

But Fleetfoot and my gang of babies led me to other haunts. There was the bricklayers' square—"The Tuileries," near fields and fields of yellow waving corn, with narrow pathways of separation, pathways bordered with wild flowers—rare Indian wild flowers, and leading to the bathing tank, bamboo sheltered with great banyan trees for sentinel, across the road. We walked there, the sunset in our eyes, while Fleetfoot told me her story. Yes! she was from the hilly West Country. But what would you? The plague it was, drove them from place to place. Ah!—but it was many years ago. The rain came not, and the Earth Mother in anger gave forth no gifts whatever;—first failed one kind of grain, then another; their hope was in the rice fields,—floods would come and swamp them: but they came not.

Then the beasts were sold, and were bought again when a shower came, but only to die, for it was one poor paltry shower.

And in its wake came "the sickness"; her father they carried to some place of the Govern-

ment, her mother accompanying him, weeping. She and two little brothers wandered, seeking alms, moving from one village to another, eating what they could get. One brother was caught stealing a handful of grain; "we were so hungry," she pleaded. "But they took him to the Police Court, and where he is now I know not. The other brother died of being tired, and I left him —what would you?—in a stream hard by the place where he fell." She shuddered at the memory. "I know not the name of the stream, but maybe it was one which would carry him to Mai Gunga." Yes! it was on the road to Pryag —the place of sacrifice—that she knew, for she fell in with some pilgrims bound thither, and in their company had come to this town of the two sacred rivers. . . . The "way-shower" took up the tale: "And we people were wanting a house-place, and some woman-thing to cook and wash and do the duties for which women are made. So, finding this one,"—he pointed at her,—"at the great fair, wandering homeless and trying her fortune with lighted lamps on the sacred river, we told her that she might be our fellow-feeler, and since then it has been as the Presence finds."

They had cleaned out a deserted hut and there Fleetfoot made for the gang a little house-place. Their wants were few,—earthen cooking pots, a daily meal, a blanket a-piece for the cold winter nights, a wisp of loin-cloth for the boys—that was all. Fleetfoot's saree still served its purpose, "but it will not last much longer; it has not much more strength in it," sighed the "way-shower."

The future troubled Fleetfoot not at all; but the "way-shower" being a man of the world, discussed it with me. "She and I we will some day walk the seven footsteps round the marriage fire," he said, "but not yet. She knows our ways —the brothers' and mine, and she cooks well, and I have taught her so that she speaks little; and—she is fleet of foot, sharing our games, and playing like one of us in the street, the while she keeps her woman's ways in the house-place." And indeed the change was noticeable. "In her country," he continued, "the women are free and unveiled, and Fleetfoot would be such here also. But that is not good, except she sell in the market-place, and this I like not for her—it behoves her to be veiled. But when the time for marrying comes, we will make that plain. Now it matters little."

So every morning Fleetfoot, the eight-year old house-mother, rose betimes and sprinkled the ground with the water of oblation, and worshipped the god of the Maratha country, and drew her menfolk a draught of water, and went with them to the market square.

But when the sun set they hied them to the house-place, and there Fleetfoot cooked them dainty messes, even as the "way-shower" had boasted, and on cold nights they would light themselves a fire, sitting round it awhile to tell stories.

The cat story was their favourite:—

"There was once a childless Rajah, who said he would kill all his queens unless a child appeared in the palace. One of the queens announced that she had a little daughter, who was to be shut away for twelve years; and this appeased the Rajah, so that the queens all lived. But alas! she was only a cat, and the fact must be known when the hour for her marriage should come.

"Now, in the north country, in the month of Kartik, is worshipped by the womenfolk that terrible god Bhishma. Lighted lamps must be placed at the cross-roads of the village, under the sacred fig-tree, at the shrine of Shiva; and one

little lighted lamp is sent adrift on a raft in the village tank. When the lamps have burned low, it is good to rub the black from the wicks under the eye. It keeps away the evil one.

"Now, on a festival of Bhishma the Terrible, it so happened that the village Brahmins forgot to keep the wicks alight in the five little lamps of dough. But the cat-girl went herself and raised the wicks with her paws and tail, and so the godling was worshipped with due honour. In his gratitude he turned her into a real girl, and even her tail dropped off on the evening of her wedding day."

It was the "way-shower" who told the story —always, always; but it was Fleetfoot who added the postscript, always, always:—

"So that is why, to this day, we women put the black beneath our eyes."

But indeed it was Fleetfoot herself and not "the black beneath the eye" which kept the evil spirits away from the little house-place. Fleetfoot with her eyes of light and her mother ways, Fleetfoot ever ready to be a boy herself, in the big market world, ever content to slip

back to service in the privacy of the house-place. Tyrannising at times — as when they played marbles, there, in the lane near the Tuileries, for there is no tyranny like the tyranny of efficiency — and Fleetfoot could drive a longer drive than the "way-shower" himself: but with a fine tact never venturing even an opinion on the game in her character of "womankind."

Sometimes the "way-shower" would put her to the test. "We played marbles this evening," he would venture.

"Did you?"

"Yes! in the lane yonder, these menfolk and I, and—one other. I won!"—he would challenge. He had not won; it was Fleetfoot: but,—

"Without doubt," she would say, her eyes on the floor. Oh! Fleetfoot was a worthy "*home*" for any man, albeit the "way-shower" would impress on you that it was the gang that had trained her. And to this day, I warrant it is she who fills up the measure for each one of her little comrades, wherein they fall short of what they might have been. Is it not meet, therefore, that her name, and none other, should be written upon this story?

IV

THE DOLL FESTIVAL

PIYARI was the name that was written in her horoscope—that mysterious paper which she wore in her birth amulet. Her little hand was always clutching at the quaint triangular jewel, pendant from a dirty string—so you could not help noticing it.

And *Piyari* means *the loved one.* But it was *the loving one* they should have called her. For, looking upon her, even the casual passer-by would feel an uplift, saying to himself: "But *how* that child can love!"

Yet neither "the loved" nor "the loving" was the name by which she went; but "Bhengi," the little Squint-eye. For they were her eyes which were so passing wonderful, and the simple village folk used all their cunning to cheat the gods about this fact.

"Hush! don't mention her eyes, except in abuse," urged the old grandmother, the very day they opened on this puzzling world. She had been grumbling that the child was not a boy. "Here, give it me," she said roughly, "the child of my first-born nevertheless! Let me ask, before it forgets, whether any sons are coming in its wake"—and she clutched at the tiny bundle.

Piyari opened her eyes full in her face. The old woman staggered.

"Hush! hush!" she said, "*Squint-eye!*" And "Squint-eye" was she called ever after. But the mad old priest sitting in the sunlight by the temple gave her her real name to hide away in an amulet.

There is a dear and beautiful legend of the Himalayan country that the sun smiled at a drop of water lying in the cleft of a dark rock; and the little drop, keeping for ever the memory of that smile, grew into the thing which men call now a sun-stone or topaz.

Looking upon Piyari I recalled the legend. God smiled at her as she lay hidden in the dark unknown, and she had kept the memory of that smile for ever—a little sun-stone incarnate, a god-

stone, a love-stone. Slight was she, delicate-featured, firm-limbed; her hair a blue-black profusion which her mother braided in tight bands about the temples. They dressed her, by some natural instinct, mostly in yellows—the red-gold colour of the sun as it set, or the white-yellow tinge of its mid-day blaze, or the light-veiled brightness of its first coming. And every one would look for that glint of yellow drapery, there where Piyari filled the hours with play, in the potter's busy back yard.

Simple were her playthings—bits of glass or broken pottery, wreaths of dead marigolds, serving but yesterday the potter's favourite godling, mica or any little glittering stone found in the dust of the roadway. But when she was two years old, "Thou shalt have, my child," said her mother, "a yearly rag doll, which I shall buy thee, at the Fair, by the sacred river." And now that she was six, four dear decrepit doddering dolls were her proud portion.

Her mother had a reason in the gift, by which same token were they decrepit; but of that you shall hear anon. Meanwhile the dolls lived in a hiding-hole, on the lowest rafter of the roof-tree.

At first Piyari had to climb up to stow them there, but the years were kind, and without any thought-taking on her part, were bringing her hand within tiptoeing reach of the sturdy beam.

Her father had a pet partridge—'tis odd, but they are mostly the men who keep pet animals in India—a little speckled homely thing that walked behind him soberly, what time he carried his wares to the city. He would rise betimes to find it toothsome wormlings and grass-crickets, in the luxurious pasturing of the "company gardens." And Piyari always went with him.

It grieved her at first that he should catch the little insect-people, and tie them up in that large red handkerchief whence was no way of escape; but she supposed they loved being there, since her father it was who caught them.

Among her puzzles was the loneliness of things, —human, animal, vegetable. The ideal grouping was three—a father and a mother and one other; but the little partridge now, it was all alone, with no father and mother to love: and the old mad priest by the temple, *he* was alone—no woman to mind him and feed him and serve him, no small child to love him,—it was very puzzling: and the

only answer to the puzzle seemed to lie in being extra nice and loving to the lonely things—the "one-things," as she called them.

You would almost choose to be a "one-thing" yourself, an you knew the extra niceness of little sensitive Piyari.

"How many sunrises have I known, mother?" she asked one day.

"Hark at her then," said her mother to the potter; "her tongue is not as the tongues of other children. She asks strange things in her questionings. . . Thou hast six years, child Squint-eye, six whole years. How should I know how many sunrises! And four times have we been to the Fair, and prayed for thee at the shrine of the ever-living Tree . . . four times! but sunrises, how should I know how many! Yet, old enough art thou to go to school; we'll send her, father of my child," she continued, "shall we not? She must be more like other children ere the time comes for marrying."

The mystic-eyed old potter turned his gaze upon her.

"Hither, child," he said, and Piyari climbed

upon his knee, and rubbed her cheek against the sharp clean-shaven chin.

She had the ways of a young animal, rubbing up against you to caress you; and there was one little rub, starting from your eye downwards, which was the ecstasy of a caress. She did it now, and the potter just purred with content.

"No!" he said, "our loved one is not as other children, eh, little Squint-eye! But would you have her like them, soul of me?"

"Nay," she said; "it is not what I would have, but you know the nature of the cousin-*ji*. 'Make the difference good in the bride-price,' he will say."

The potter frowned. "Maybe we shall not let him have her for his slow-witted lout," he said, an-angered.

And Piyari's face was travelling gently up and down his cheek.

"She'll learn to sing and read and write and play," continued the mother, "at least *that;* and when she is safely married, she will forget it all; but the cousin's wife was boasting but yesterday that all these things can *Azizan* do, —Azizan, daughter of the wheelwright."

"So — that is the new plan, is it?" said the potter; "the wheelwright's daughter. So the Cousin-*ji* would leave the sweet morsel to lick his hand, would he? Well, let him then. Though the cock crows not, the dawn comes."

But Piyari's face was travelling gently up and down his cheek.

"Wouldst go to school, child?" he asked; and the mystic eyes were gently mystic once again, losing their unwonted anger.

"But what is that?" asked Piyari. "Where the children go each day, to make a noise?"

She had heard them shouting fractional tables —"In one and a quarter are five quarters," and so on. What could it mean to her?

"Yes!" said her father; "there — with the other children, to grow like them. Wouldst go?"

"All is one to me," she said, "you tell me."

And her little face went travelling up and down his cheek. . . .

The potter fell to musing, and there was silence in the low-roofed room.

It was very simple, this living-room of theirs. Against the wall stood brightly burnished pots

and pans, on the clean floor a few chalk marks defined their dining-table — a sacramental spot to Hinduism; for easy chairs and lounges were nice fat bolsters. At the potter's elbow stood his one luxury, his *huqqa*, but to-night he did not turn to it for inspiration; for Piyari's little face still travelled up and down his cheek, a-soothing him.

"We'll let her go then, wife," he decided, finally. "Because not even *that* would make our Piyari like to other children." But, next morning, "What need of hurry? wait a year," he said; "the clay is yet too tender for the world's coarse wheel."

A year of grace — Piyari spent it in her own peculiar aloofness. She played with her dolls, and with the partridge; she had long talks with the old mad priest, sitting in the sunlight, and she loved and gladdened everything and everybody in her little world, — happiness made flesh.

The teachings of the priest took mostly the form of mythology. There is very little of the "Thou shalt not" in any ethical teachings in the East. Piyari had no catalogue of sins, for no

commandments were ever handed to her. She had no conception of sin, for she had no conception of a law which could be broken.

There were gods many — this she knew, for did not one live in the little shrine in the house-place? Her mother said a prayer to Dharti Mai, the Earth Mother, the moment she opened her eyes of a morning; the first draught of water drawn, the first stream of milk yielded, belonged to her.

And then there was the god of all the godlings, of whom her father talked, when his eyes went the long journey of his meditations, and the darkness closed in about the little house-place.

"But tell me more things, Guru-ji," she'd ask. And he, nothing loth:—

"Child, there are the gods, the Shining Ones, whom we love. There are others, godlings whom we fear, and there are spirits whom we sometimes love and sometimes fear. The 'Shining Ones' alone are for thee. For the Great Creator made thee, child of love, for love, and in thee is no fear at all.

"Hist! This sees the old mad priest in the

chart of the little Piyari. For all born of women in this world—that house of clay which men call life—it hath two doors, an incoming, an outgoing. Hist! child Piyari, no outgoing door is in thy chart. The way of Love is the way of life . . . death-devouring Love, shade-dispelling Light"; and he would drone into a text:—

"'Light and darkness—these are thought the world's eternal paths: by the one he goeth who returneth not; by the other, he who returneth again.'

"'*Returneth again*' . . . but wherefore, if no darkness be to conquer? . . . One door to the House of Love, one door. . . ."

And Piyari would sit by, blinking in the sunlight, peaceful and happy, understanding little, yet liking all.

"Little Piyari, desire nothing. He attaineth peace, into whom all desires flow, as rivers flow into the ocean, which is filled with water, but remaineth unmoved; not he who desireth desire. . . ."

"Tell me, Guru-ji," she would beg, "tell me the Sun story." . . . And the old man would shake himself free of his droning and dreaming, and taking the child on his knee, would make his words fit her understanding.

"Surya, the Sun-God, is the child of the bright sky. Ushas, the dawn is his wife; and he moves through the heavens in a glittering chariot, drawn by seven ruddy mares."

"Does Ushas go with him in the chariot?" she would ask.

And the priest, puzzled,—

"No! for who would mind the children? Does your mother go with the potter when he sets forth to market with his wares? Even so."

Then she again, "Who is the child whom the dawn-wife stays to mind?"

And he, "The Dawn-Star. Wake on a morning when the mist hangs grey upon the mountains, grey before Ushas has threaded it with colour, blushing for joy in the presence of her lord, the Sun: rise then, and you will see the Dawn-Star, twinkling noisily; 'But my father and mother are coming,' it says."

"Does it, Guru-ji, *does* it? And the seven ruddy mares?"

"Oh! they? They toss their heads and gallop so furiously, the Sun-God must needs stand in his chariot to keep them in check. For, look you, the quicker they go, the quicker comes the

sleeptime when the Sun-God must shut his seeing eye upon the world people whom he loves."

"Does he then love us, Guru-ji?"

"Yea! and most of all his sun-child, Piyari."

And Piyari would smile happily, lifting her little face to the sunbeams, and so, raying light herself, would travel homewards.

With her dolls she played soberly. They had names and personalities, they kept all the sacred feasts of which she had ken, and they married and were given in marriage with due ceremony.

So passed the year, and school was inevitable. Had Piyari not been steeped in sunlight, a time of trouble might now have come for her. But it was only a time of puzzlement through which she laughed a merry solution. Her attitude towards others was never anything but a question of manners, and she could not understand the attempt of her teachers to make it a question of morals or religion. As little understood were life's injustices.

"You slapped Chhoti, the little one," would challenge an ill-judged teacher, to explain the shrillings of a neglected baby. And Piyari would

smile upon her, attempting no denial, but cuddling the baby into her arms, and soon soothing it back to laughter. The pity of it was that, finding her quiescent, the naughty ones among the children made her scapegoat for worse charges.

A whole pot of ink was spilt on the tidy-registers, lying ready for the annual inspector, one morning.

"Piyari did it," said the culprit.

And the teacher to Piyari—"Confess; I give you till to-morrow; only confess."

Piyari took the puzzle to the old priestling. "I did not do it, Guru-ji; but the teacher would be so unhappy if I did not confess to doing it. 'Confess and make me glad,' she said. It hurts me not to make people glad."

And "Make her glad then, child," was the counsel of him they called "mad." But he sought the teacher, and left her ashamed for her blindness.

"What! blaze of noonday, and you took it for night—*night!* Had you thought it moonlight, you who know no better, then might I have found forgiveness: but night——! Hi! hi! men and women may dip in the sea of learning, but they

get only as much water as their vessels will hold—cracked pots at best are they, all cracked." . . .

It was at school too that she first learned of the malignant influences, from knowledge of which the Guru took such pains to guard her. Yet they but made plays for her dolls; her life they touched not, for as the Guru had said, she was absolutely without fear.

The debtor and creditor game was a favourite one. Piyari could take only one doll at a time to school, and when she came home in the evening, the play would be that the dolls left behind would rush at the returning one, crying: "You owe us a day of Piyari's life, you owe us a day; give us our day." And Piyari, laughing, would draw the *gururu*, the magic circle, round herself and it; and the dolls would not let her pass the ring till she had given them a promise to make good that day, some other time.

Piyari herself looked every one in the face fearlessly, but the dolls respected omens. "An oilman! Cover thy eyes in this early morning hour, little daughter," she would say, drawing her saree over the doll she carried. "But consider well that sweeper-man; his face is lucky;" or,

"Now comes a Brahmin; look first at his feet: so shall good come to thee."

But the great festival of the year was the *Guriya Mela*—the Doll Festival, and that was something more than play. To Piyari it had always been a sadness, half understood, always atoned for in the silence of doll *tête-à-têtes*.

On the evening of the Doll Day, just before the seven ruddy mares had brought Piyari's Sun-God to the end of his chariot race, when they were tossing their manes in one last blaze of colour, all the little children of her village under twelve years of age would be taken by their mothers to the side of a river, each child carrying her best beloved doll-thing. These would they place on the bank, and beat with sticks hard and long, while the mothers in the background put the little parable into prayers for their children.

"Drive out from among us the evil spirits which assail the children," they said. For each little doll on that great Doll Day was the evil genius of its mistress, and offered its sawdust body to be beaten for her salvation.

Sometimes the dolls were piled into one great mountain, all of them, for the public beating; but

Piyari liked this not at all, for some one else's stick might hurt her own peculiar treasure. And though the other children drowned their poor dead dollies, she took hers home to love and croon over, and to coax back to friendship.

So that was how, when Piyari came to that twelfth year of freedom, every battered little creature she had ever owned went down with her to the water's edge, for that last festival of doll-life.

"And this time," said her mother, "thou must drown them all, little thing, for to-morrow, or next day, or the next, come the cousin-*ji* and his lout to make the wedding bargainings, and no evil spirits must we carry into that new life. Not that any ever do come nigh thee, child of my love, but cousin-*jis* have wives with tongues; and thou—thou wouldst not have them blame thy doll-things for any evil which might befall their luckless selves. Wouldst thou now?"

And Piyari would smile through her tears, and hug the dear decrepit doddering dolls.

"Yea! that kind of folk are they who, when they slip and fall, cry 'Lo! it is the ground that is unlucky.' . . . So take the doll-things, child,

show them the Sun-God, and the finish of the chariot race, and then lay them to sleep in the clear cool water. They will like that better than the curses of the cousin-*ji*, I promise thee."

. . . . . .

The little children had broken their sticks over their patient doll-things, and with shouts of laughter had thrown the corpses into the stream. Then they hied them home to sleep the sleep of the heartless.

Piyari stood by her treasures, her face turned to the raying West, drinking in its wonder. The dying sun had set the sky on fire, the white snake of a streamlet gliding to the valleys caught and held the sun-rays, blood-red, blush-pink, saffron—responsive to the cloudlets drifting overhead; each tiny leaf, each blade of grass seemed a-quiver with the thrill of the moment, with the peace of it.

In Piyari's eyes was the glad light of love. She turned to her mother sitting patient by. "Mother," she said, "the earth is crying '*Wah! Khub!*' 'Well done,' to the Sun-God who has conquered in his race, and come safe home again. If I put my dear doll-things in the water, see!

the sun will kiss their faces, and will give them peace." . . .

And the sadness of the sacrifice was past.

But when, in after years, she made a little song of love to the Sun-God, and sang it at the hour when he dipped below the earth-line, what was it, think you, but the requiem of her doll-things?

Somewhat like this, was the song:—

The sunset takes its colouring from earth's woes,
Its rayings are earth's laughter and earth's love,
Its ecstasy of tone, its bloom, repose,
Are God's dear broodings, sun-mist interwove.
Ah! Who can wrest
Its homing secrets from the light-crowned West?

Dye then its brilliance deeper with your pain,
From flint of love and joy strike quickening rays,
God's stamp upon it—take your day again;
Great silence, pulse-throb, thee my soul doth praise,
For, thou dost wrest
Its homing secrets from the light-crowned West.

V

CEREMONIES AND GREEN ROOMS

FOUR little ceremonies preceded Uma's birth. The fifth was performed on the day when she made her primal protest against life. It was an interesting ceremony this — the Brahmins of the Maratha country called it *the Birth Ceremony.*

Uma's father was fetched by an excited old grandame that he might name the child.

"Give it me," he said, and he rocked it awkwardly while it yelled.

He was waiting inspiration. Suddenly, a thought — and in his satisfaction with himself he nearly dropped the little bundle, and then clutching at it again, nearly put it down on the iron pan of red-hot coals where its little wrappings were a-warming.

But the grandmother saved it in time, and he ran to his wife's bedside. "Mother of my

child, I know what name we must give it," he said, and he whispered in her ear. For, till the twelfth day, of those two alone and of the gods is it the secret.

So they hid away in their hearts that beautiful name—"*Uma.*" So was called the wife of the god Shiva, the Destroyer. The mother would have named her child after the wife of the Preserver, had she chosen; but her lord explained that in this wicked world it was more necessary to destroy than to preserve.

He was three parts cynic, was Uma's father, and somewhat poet too; and what was happy was his unconsciousness of either fact.

The naming ceremony outrivalled the birth ceremony. It was a thrilling social function, and all the great ladies of the neighbourhood were bidden to it.

Oh! the preparations for that sumptuous mid-day dinner!—the bustling about of aunts and grandames and second cousins, the grinding of spices, the seasoning of spring greens;—it was the best "name-day" meal which they had ever eaten, said the guests, when they left their blessings behind them at sunset time.

But now they were coming in a long procession, walking gracefully to the stirring strains of an ex-sepoy band.

"Something Charlie is my name," the band was playing, all out of time and tune. But the ladies thought it was *taza-ba-taza*, and they said it was very pretty.

Yes, the procession was long; for Uma's mother was much beloved, and Uma's father much respected, and the dear ladies would not for the world have missed showing their pleasure at the god-gift to the childless household. So they came, bearing each some little present, the grace after meals of every good Hindoo — betel-nuts, leaves, and spices, as had prescribed the ancients, and together with these triflings, clothes and ornaments for the child,—a custom engendered by the luxury of innovation.

"Welcome!" said the grandmother, addressing each lady by her name, as she entered the little courtyard. "Mother of sons," to the first lady, "lucky is your foot; the house is blessed indeed."

The courtyard had been laid with fresh cow-dung early in the morning, and one of the great-

aunts had herself made the signs of good omen — fishes and such like, pretty decorations in white chalk.

The grandame went further; it was the special magic of her part of the West country. She had dipped her hand in red powder, and made a mark on the wall of the room where Uma was born.

It was a powerful scarer of evil spirits, that hand: and it left her quite happy as to the future.

And now, awaited a confirmation of the good luck. "The mother of sons," stepping over the threshold, *sneezed!* Could the omens have been better?

"May a thousand years of life be your reward," said all the woman, congratulating the sneezer. For, had not that sneeze cleared the air of every little lurking demon?

Uma's mother lay on a string bed, a "four-legs" in a corner of the room.

She wore a new saree, and her glossy hair, though plastered over her forehead in the unbecoming fashion of the goddesses of Hindoo mythology, could not spoil the sweetness of her expression.

Between her eyebrows was the red mark of wifehood.

She pressed her guests to her bosom, in smiling greeting, as they jingled to her "four-legs" to inspect the baby lying at her side. But they did not say, "It is a fine baby," for despite that sneeze and the little fishes and the good red hand, they were afraid. "Seat them, mother," she commissioned; and when all were assembled, the ceremony began.

The women chanted the birth songs, and then the oldest friends among them lifted the little Uma and put her into her cradle, swinging it gently to the music.

Now this was the first time that Uma had lain in a cradle, for among the orthodox it is not proper that she should be conducted thither except thus, with all the pomp and circumstance of the name-day ritual. It was as if her individuality could be recognised only with the naming of her. But now a separate sleeping place and a separate life were hers indeed.

The next duty was entrusted to the best loved friend. Into her ear whispered the child's mother that name which she and her dear

lord had chosen; and she, stepping daintily across to the cradle—how breathlessly they watched, those watchers—breathed the secret straightway into Uma's ear. Uma smiled into her face.

"*Búr-re burre*," said the woman, wagging her head; "all is well." Then she turned towards the assemblage. "The name is Uma, friends," she said; "*Uma*, and may the triad of the Shining Ones defend her!"

"A good name," said they all; "a good one."

"My paternal uncle's cousin's wife had it," said one.

"And my sister's mother-in-law's maternal niece——"

"I would have given it to mine own yearling," said a third. And so they chattered into reminiscence.

But their real moment of excitement had been that whispering into Uma's ear; for if the baby cried, it would have meant that some dead person in the family had been born again, in this little creature: and they would have had to go on whispering to it the names of all its dead ancestors and cousin-folk, until the child stopped crying at any particular name, declaring thus its

wish and its origin; and that name, alas! would have had to be hers, spite of the choice and the ceremony.

The mother smiled at the successful issue of the test, for she was glad to think that her little Uma was her very own belonging, and not some dead relative come to life again with its senile habits and its debit account of unrequited sins.

So now you know all about Uma from the day on which she became a personage. She grew into a lean-featured, clever strip of a thing, with the beauty of hand and foot and well-fringed eye of her hill-born race. She was not pretty; no!—but if you looked at her, you would look again; and if you caught her eye, yet once again.

In the old Hindoo legends, children are born with sandalwood bracelet or golden necklet, or some such thing, and the astrologer says with great solemnity:—

"Your child is no common babe; guard that necklet—her soul is in it."

Now Uma's soul was in her eyes, and you wanted no astrologer to tell you that, for the

older she grew the less shy was the little soul of peeping through its hiding-place. Uma had a trick of putting the shutters half way down, and then the soul would peep through the eye-lash lattice—a glint of sunshine between the stormy cloudbanks, and as grateful as the sunbeams on a stormy day.

When she was about six years old her father died. He had lost all his savings, and they were very poor; so Uma's mother took her fate into her own hands. They would go to the high-caste school in the city, she and Uma together.

It was a beautiful greystone building in the heart of the noisy, close-packed city. Once inside the great guarded gateway, you forgot all about cities and overcrowding, about insanitary dwellings and low-roofed huts. For here were well-laid gardens, and open spaces, and playing grounds, and beautiful airy class-rooms with every possible aid to healthful learning, and long rows of dormitories, and "caste" kitchens and dwelling-places. . . . Oh! life within those gateways was ideal; and Uma and her mother were received with gladness, for was it not for such as they that the "High School" had been built? So Uma foregathered

with the babies, and her mother with the grown-ups, and life was pleasant and communal—the two growing into happy comradeship as fellow-students.

But Uma climbed yearly, had indeed to be prevented from climbing too fast; while her gentle little mother sat on the bottom step of the ladder and found it hard work even sitting there at all.

Uma was very patient with her, would steal moments from the play-hour to teach her her letters, making them in the sand, and sometimes building them with smooth white pebbles glaring into your face, a challenging "Surely you know me now!" out from the brown dust of the pathways.

But alas! the letter acquired one week was forgotten the next; the one thing that never got lost being Uma's patience and cheerfulness, and the one thing that grew rapidly—her mother's adoration for this clever child of hers. "She could not learn—no! but the child could, and the child was hers, *so*——" But her logic failed to find further expression; only the feeling at the back of her mind was that after all she did have her part

CEREMONIES AND GREEN RUSHES—UMA TEACHING HER MOTHER TO COUNT.

From a photograph by RAI VARMA, *India.*] [*To face p.* 100.

in this glory of learning and knowledge. And who would deny it? The vicarious can bring a keener throb of pleasure than anything personal to some folk. Mothers, methinks, are in that category.

The idea had been that Uma's mother should be trained as a teacher and get appointed to some village school, supporting thus, in course of time, her daughter and herself. But it was Uma who was likely soon to do the supporting. When she was twelve her mother had just mastered her letters and "conjoint" letters, and could string little sentences together on the reading sheets—if the illustrations were numerous and helpful. But Uma was in the upper school with girls and women many years her senior. She learned English and Sanskrit, she did sums in "profit and loss," she recited scenes from Shakespeare, she read *Kalidasa*, and could work you a fine problem in Euclid. But, better than all, she could make you her very own "Ode to the Spring" in Sanskrit metre of the most pleasing, though the most complicated variety.

Notwithstanding all these accomplishments, however, she was still a child at heart.

Her companions at play were, by her own choice, the babies; and she led the admiring throng into many gardens of delight, and also into many harmless scrapes—for she was brimming over with fun and spirits. But, as she pointed out to her providences, the blame for all the mischief was hers by reason of her years and the sense of the sixth form; and had you suggested their sharing her punishment, she would have defended the little tribe like a young tigress.

They had a garden of their own at one end of the school compound, and for this Uma wrested many seedlings and rarities from the stern close-fistedness of the old gardener. The garden was a strip, the size of an old-fashioned pew in a country church, but it had been laid out with care,—the "flower-pot" garden, as Uma called it, at one corner, and the nursery at another, with walks in between! For statue they had "nandi," a toy bull, because the bull is Shiva's animal, and Shiva was Uma's patron saint. The garden faced well away from the ill-omened south, but there was a south gateway. "We carry the dead flowers and shoots out through that," explained Uma to me, "for the south is the kingdom of death."

When I visited their garden it was in the early rains, and the green shoots in the "nursery" were nearly ready to be potted. Uma was in great glee over some trophies which they had stolen from under the very eyes of the crabbed gardener. He had been sitting on his heels, planting a line of what he called "*Nastrum*" (nasturtiums); his plants lay in a heap beside him, and he travelled down the line, still on his heels, crooked knee following crooked knee as he did his deft planting. Uma and her satellites came up on tiptoe, finger at lip, to watch him. Leisurely did he work, knees wide apart, elbows planted firmly against them. He made a hole in the soil with one horny forefinger, and then lifted in the seedling, patting the earth tidy after each interment. And so he moved, his diminishing pile carried with him, and the row of planted things growing steadily. There must have been about a dozen roots left when the little thieves drew near, and those were in Uma's firm clutch before he knew, for his head was tied up against a rheumatic wind, and he had not heard the children coming. "Whoop!" they said, darting away from him, dancing with

glee, and showing him the seedlings; "whoop! catch us, and you may have these back again."

They loved defying him, for they had the fear of him at their very hearts.

He threatened immediate report to the authorities, and the most rigid of pains and penalties. But they cared not. "A fair offer," they said; "retake them. He who has not power to keep, should not possess."

So that was how there came to be a nasturtium walk in Uma's garden; and yet a further addition, a pot of violets, which the old gardener, pleased with defiance in a world where none had dared to defy, had brought them his very self. One little bud had opened its eye, and this was gathered and bestowed upon me, with hospitable generosity.

But the garden was not my only entertainment. Uma had a surprise in store—a play. Uma conceived it, and Uma stage-managed it; Uma acted the chief characters herself, and it was Uma who taught to the babies such parts as she required of them, and Uma, again, who made the dresses. It was not written; no! but it was in her head, which was better.

The theatre was the largest of the class-rooms. For curtain she had a delightful device. Two tall girls—the only grown-ups pressed into the service—stood side by side in front of the stage, holding the other ends of two lengths of drapery, the "one" ends of which were fastened to nails in the wall, on either side. When it was time for the curtain to rise, Uma rang a bell, and the two girls stepped slowly back to the wall, in the most dignified of movements.

I found the whole school as audience. Uma explained to me that as the famine was in need of funds, she had admitted them at a farthing a head—the money was indeed duly collected and sent to the fund,—but on me, as a special favour, had she bestowed a complimentary ticket to the first row of the stalls.

The play was really very clever, and most amusing. It was the story of a hard-hearted money-lender, and the way that a good prince taught him mercy and rectitude.

The first scene was the shop of the niggardly extortioner. The poor who came to borrow were sent away with curses and the application of his metal-studded red shoe. Ignorant villagers found

that they had parted with the entire interest in all their fields for the beggarly loan of a twenty-rupee note at a crucial moment. Before the great would the lender cringe; and the second scene showed the Prince's Prime Minister come, by order of his master, to borrow of this man who was oppressing the people.

"The dust of your feet, exalted one," cringed the money-lender, "owns nothing that is not yours. How much would you, to-day?"

In Scene III., by a process which has escaped my memory, the money-lender was in the dock, *abject*, while one after another of his victims accused him to the Judge.

The curtain falls on the money-lender being whipped out of court by the man who had suffered most at his hands.

Exceedingly clever was the cross-examination, and indeed the whole scene was full of fun. Uma was money-lender and Prince by turns, and looked and spoke quite differently in either character.

The change was made simply by her clothes, for of course she had no made-up box; and she was very accurate and careful about the different

CEREMONIES AND GREEN RUSHES—A DRESS REHEARSAL.

From a photograph by RAI VARMA, *Ladies.*] [*To face p.* 106.

kinds of turban that should be worn, and such like details.

The money-lender, I should add, was one-eyed, because that is unlucky amongst Hindoos; and the way in which Uma maintained the position of that screwed-up left eye was comedy in itself.

But Uma was poet as well as dramatist. I remember another entertainment in the open air, when I was amused with kindergarten songs and games ending up with a selection from Uma's own compositions.

Her attempts at English verse with illustrations were naturally more amusing than correct. But the ideas were always good.

There was one very clever skit in which she had memorialised the terror of the school, mothers included, over a sham snake, which she and one of her pet babies had introduced into the darkest of the class-rooms.

They got the others to try and hunt it out with candles and sticks and incantations; and they laughed till they cried at the final inevitable discovery.

Among Uma's more serious fads was a debat-

ing society. She had founded it herself, and the rules converted the little body into a religious order.

Qualification for membership included "No tale-telling," and "No ill speaking behind a person's back."

You were never, I gathered, to make any accusation of another except to herself. Criticism, and rather free-tongued criticism, was allowed you, but never *in absentia.*

"To set quarrels" was a greater offence than even to quarrel, though the *habit* of quarrelling was a disqualification.

Election was on this wise. Uma, in the chair, would announce:—

"So-and-so seeks election to our society; the rules enjoin . . . ." and she would read each, with impressive pauses for self- or communal-examination. "Speak! Are you eligible under this rule?"

If the candidate said "Yes,"—

"Do the honourable members consider that she has answered truthfully?" would come next.

And upon assent, Uma would pass to Rule No. 2. . . . and so on.

Sometimes Uma herself knew that the candidate was not eligible under a particular head; but she would not tempt her to lie.

"In my opinion," she would say, "she is not eligible under this rule, except by consent of the honourable members. Shall she be excused this?"

And if they agreed that she should be so excused,—

"A first offence means exclusion for six months," would announce the president; "a second, exclusion for a year; a third, expulsion."

For Uma was a great reformer, and she would not altogether avoid the unworthy.

Of their subjects of debate, I once had a list. It included:—

"The place of women in creation."

"The uselessness of learning."

"The incompetence of examiners."

And I remember a lively debate on the proposal that "Queen Victoria was a Brahmin in her first genesis."

It was carried by a large majority, only her special friends, for friendship's sake, standing by the shamefaced opposer.

I think Uma, though strongly for the motion, was a bit disappointed in her debate-loving soul that the fight had not been keener, for, as we dispersed, I heard her say to the opposer:—

"Do not take hold of sword-grass; but if you do, grasp it tight, my friend."

CHAPTER VI

MERA—THE STUDY OF A PARSEE CHILD

HER Parsee name was "Mera," but we always called her "Misery." She wore her hair in a pigtail down her back. It was the sweetest of little glad faces, round as any baby's, and with eyes that seemed to open for you the secrets of all mysteries—so large, so round, and of a blackness! . . . The lashes swept the shadows under them, gently, daintily, as if they would hide this sign of weakness from the gaze of the curious. When quite a child, she dressed in a "smock" of soft oriental satin, embroidered at neck and wrists with quaint Chinese patternings, and from beneath the smock, the legs of her little drawers challenged the eye, in silk of daring brightness. Over play and work alike was she the most serious of small creations. I can see her now, puckering her forehead into wrinkles—her whole soul in her face,

running races and playing ball as if her life depended on either, or practising at the piano, patiently and laboriously, or head and shoulders crowded, over a copybook.

That copywriting was the funniest sight. She would screw the little mouth in, biting the sides, and moving her lips in the form of every single letter. The earnestness of the earnest was she at these moments. When she first began to feel herself responsible for all her world I cannot tell you, but it must have been very early, and certainly was long before the age at which she was allowed a Zoroastrian conscience. She would go round the nursery, tidying away things needlessly, to save the servants, or finishing neglected tasks for her younger sisters—bearing their burdens, but always leaving their benefits to their own manipulation,—nay, throwing in her own to swell the scale. Of course she was obstinate,—all good people are,—and obstinate with the resignation to God's will, of the true fatalist.

When "her clock had sounded eight," as she herself would have put it, the old family priest declared Mera fit for the thread ceremony. This is the formal initiation into Zoroastrianism; a

child may then wear her "sudra,"—a dainty white embroidered net garment,—and her "kusthi," the fine thread made of lambs' wool: seventy-two silken strands for the names of the seventy-two angels, and the seventy-two chapters of the sacred book—a strand a name or chapter. The wives and mothers of the priesthood wove it, sitting in their doorways, their faces to a rising or a setting sun, praying many prayers for the unknown "devotee" who might use it.

"Let there be light," they said, "on the new little life as it comes: and light, a very flood of light, as it goes. And for the times of darkness let there be memory of the light—memory and faith—the glad assurance that the light will come again, even as it came once . . . light, light and warmth and life." . . .

Always they pictured the kind of child who would use the "thread," and the world of shadows being very close to these daughters of the Sun-God, they would "prevent" it with thoughts of good. "Yes! she told the lie, she forgot: what would you, a child? But when this little thread slips through her fingers she will remember her vow of truth.

"Utter not deceit with thy tongue, and commit no blemishing deeds."

Light for her—light to see the way to retake that untrue word. . . .

"And now she is older. A good heart for her, this second vow—the spirit of purity shining through all the gates of the body. . . as one sun illumineth the whole earth, even so may one spirit of the One All-Pure enlighten the imaginations of men's hearts."

So Mera, all unconscious of the rays of sunlight woven into it, came to the using of her dainty thread. With much ceremony at the Fire Temple was it given her.

At the farther end of the lofty building stood the white-robed priest, burning the fragrant sandalwood, its odour the eloquence of the sun-born.

"My feet in the earth, it was you who helped me to grow; I stretched wide arms to you in gladness; each smile of yours, nay e'en each look, each fierce reproof—those mid-May rays—found here a place and lodgment, and made for me this sweetness. Behold the fire sets free my voice—I speak." That was the meaning of the incense cloud.

And round a square of carpet at a little distance

from the altar, the sweet odour a breath enfolding them, sat the officiating priests, with Mera on a little stool in their midst.

In the outer enclosure were father and mother and friends—faithful witnesses. The preliminaries were all over, Mera had sipped the *Nerang-i-din*, or sacred nectar, and had chewed a pomegranate leaf—"I will drink my inspiration from God, and be fruitful in deeds that speak for themselves," it meant, that little sacrament. And now the chief priest was investing her with the garment of the good and beneficial way. As she held the little shirt with both hands—"I charge you to make confession of Faith," he said. "Praise be to the relation created by the holiness, the purity, and the wisdom of Ahuramuzda." And Mera, serious-eyed, pledged her soul in silence.

So they dressed her; a fine white garment next her skin—fine and exquisite for memory of the God-birth of every little soul; white for token that thus, unstained, must lives be rendered back to God, spite of all the soiling of this mud-bogged world; transparent and single, that so, like truth, might be all deeds and words.

And now the thread, double-knotted before and behind, one knot for the tenets, another for the practice of religion. The priest he bound the thread about her waist—a sacred girdle confining thought, word, and deed. "May the Good God, Ahuramuzda, be Lord, and Aharman the Evil One, may he be smitten and defeated. God is the Lord. Of all sin I am in renunciation; of all kinds of evil words and thoughts and deeds which were spoken and said by me, and which happened through me, and were originated through me in the world.

"Righteousness is the best good: a blessing it is; a blessing be to that which is righteous; a blessing to perfect rectitude." . . .

In a short sermon the chief priest summed up the meaning of the little ritual: "See that you keep your vows, Mera!"

Gifts to the priest then, and the party adjourned to the banqueting hall near by, to feed on costly meats, and to drink draughts of liquid sunlight . . . but Mera thought on all those things which had been done in the temple, and she pondered them in her mind.

The zeal of the initiated was hers, from local

authority she appealed to God in every simplest duty. The situation made puzzles, as this one: God, appealed to about that tedious practising, sent no immediate accession of ability. And Mera, working out this problem, brows knit, found solution: "It was not God's will that she should learn music, of course. If it had been, she would have been given the power. . . . Well! she must do God's will, she would practise no more!"

But, warring against this was some dim conception that duty and dislike ran in the same channel. So she sat at the piano, chin in hand, thinking, thinking. Finally she concluded: "If God sends a carriage down the drive—any kind of carriage, or even a cart, or" (evidently to make the test quite easy), "yes! even the Mali's wheelbarrow of dead leaves—if He sends any of these down the drive while I count ten, He means me not to practise any more." . . .

Her little body quivered with excitement. "One—two," she began, solemnly as became one in the performance of a divine manifestation . . . and the rattle of a springless "bharothi" left no doubt about God's will.

"Well, that settles it!" she panted, glad and relieved, and yet realising that the proper sentiment was resignation. She climbed down from her stool and stood idly at the window, trying to feel that radiant happiness which should be hers to whom God Himself has given a holiday. She called to the birds, and stretched out her hands to the flowers and butterflies; but they took no notice of her.

Enter then her governess. "Mera!—what! not practising?"

Mera.—"No; the carriage settled it."

Gov.—"What *do* you mean, child?"

Mera—(Her hands behind her back, her face very set), "No. It is God's will; I must obey. I asked God to send a carriage down the drive—any kind of carriage—if—if—if the scale I was practising was to be the last scale I ever played in my life; and I asked Him to send it while I counted ten . . . and—it came at the *two-th* count!"

Gov.—"Nonsense, Mera! You sit down to that piano at once, or I shall tell your mother."

Mera took the alternative. But she drew in her breath hard and fast; for she knew that her

mother was the one person in the world whose will was stronger than hers. "But I must not give in," she said—"it is God's will"—and she hardened her heart. "I must not look at her eyes," she added, remembering; "they make you *do* things." So the little face was very fiercely set, and the eyes were on the floor, when came the moment of contest. Nothing would persuade her to practise, and nothing would persuade her to look into her mother's face.

When she was cuddled into the kind strong arms for the quiet talk which usually ended all such scenes, Mera shut her eyes very tight and made her little body rigid. It was hopeless. "I will have to punish you, Mera," said her mother, "and you know that hurts me, more than it does you."

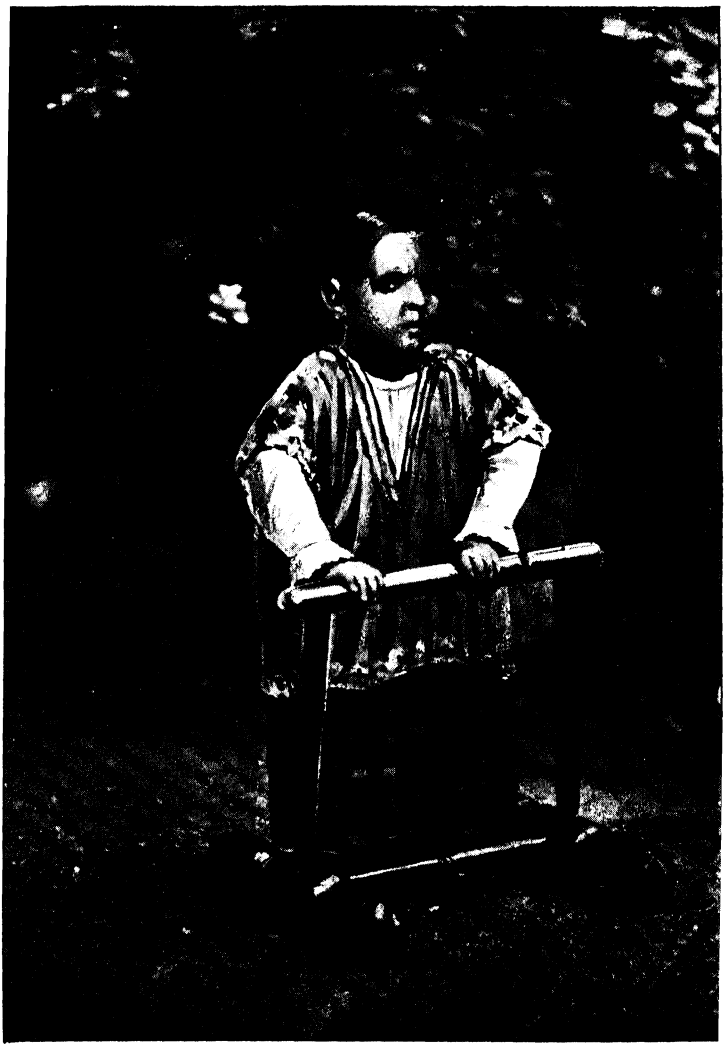
Yes, she knew that; it was just why she did not dare look into her mother's eyes when they were sad, as they must be now. God's will was beginning to be as hard as—the chromatic scale. Eventually, however, the difficulty settled itself —for a wise mother devised as punishment the teaching of that same disputed scale to her sister: and Mera's sense of duty to a weaker

smaller thing, prevailed over even the will of God.

Of her sisters Mera was exceeding proud—as indeed she was of all her family. But she would not for the world let them know this; it would have spoilt them. "We are a *hideous* family," she would say whenever she thought any one of her sisters was looking particularly pretty. Yet, in their absence she would boast—"You should see my So-and-so . . . " "My Shéreen can do everything," and "my Pheroze can sing like a bulbul." "My Ave has the face of an angel." . . .

As she grew up she developed an extraordinary talent for languages; but never did she arrive at conceit about this, or deem her knowledge cleverness. "Oh! you mean my sister So-and-so," she would say, if any one complimented her on her attainments. "*She's* clever."

"Do tell me what we ought to be miserable about," was another and constant question. She revelled in calamities, from some Spartan feeling as to bearing them well. And yet her face belied all this charnel-house of woe. *There* lay the charm! Another of her games was to imagine



MERA.

From a photograph by RAI VARMA, *India*

[*To face p.* 120.

a series of things, dreadful and terrible, as happening to those she loved, and she would rock herself with woe over these stories. "How I wish we were all safely dead and buried!" was her cheerful conclusion of it all; "nothing could happen to any of us then."

She has given me, the little thing, many a text for thought—once incidentally. She always made coffee for her father and a young friend of his over their daily game of chess, and she always made it as she herself liked it—milk and cream and sugar in earnest. "Thank you," murmured the friend, after much long-suffering of this unpalatable concoction; "thank you for making my coffee to your liking!"

You should have seen Mera's face as it broke into smiles. She enjoyed a joke against herself as much as any onlooker. Here was a case where doing as you would be done by had not succeeded. In some ways I think she was an epitome of all women. I remember finding her miserable over a task she loved, but which had been labelled duty. "I enjoy doing it so much, it can't be right. I ought to be neglecting it and bearing the wretchedness!" she said.

And now she is no longer a child, alas! but I think indeed she is not any different from those childish days. She still spends her life in penances for others' sins, in doing what others have left undone, in wearing herself to a shadow, that she might buy rest or peace or enjoyment, or even wholly unreasonable whims, for some one else—all with the old sweet seriousness, all with the old earnestness.

She holds in her lips as she writes, as of yore, and I laughed softly to see her even frame the written words with that screwed-up mouth, keeping wriggling pace with the quicklier moving pen. And, above all, still with the most brisk anxiety, does she beg to be told of something about which she may make herself enjoyably miserable.

CHAPTER VII

SON-OF-THE-WIND

THERE are two kinds of Monkey People who live up in the Himalayan hills—the Greys and the Browns; and it was many years ago that they divided their territory, and treated most politely about not treading on each other's toes. The old priest at the Monkey Temple on Jakko, told me all about it.

It was, I think, in the second century that the fight began. Grey Monkeys scratched Brown ones, and Brown Monkeys pulled Grey Tails, and no one could ever determine who did what, and when it was time to stop.

So the oldest among the Monkey People put their wise heads together, and "This is not seemly," they said. "The hills are many, let us divide; the Greys to the Grey, and the Browns

to the Brown—so shall we live many years, and be at peace."

So *Son-of-the-Wind*, who was their little henchman, and gold-stick-in-waiting, and drummer-boy, and trumpeter, and champion-chatterer, and many other things besides, was sent to summon a Council, and very funnily he did it too.

He was a dear little Brownie, with a withered old face (they were his duties made him anxious), and a long, long tail, out of which the Monkeys had pulled every single hair; for he used to lend his tail to the Baby Monkeys, both Greys and Browns, that they might climb by it, and sometimes skip with, or swing upon it.

Son-of-the-Wind would be sitting up in one of those great trees with large soft leaves and squashy figs, grown specially for Monkey Folk, and he would be taking a quiet snooze after his work and dinner, when the Babies would come and "Oh, *Son-of-the-Wind*," they would say, "all our mothers are snoozing too, and we want to eat some soft red figs! Lend us your tail to climb with."

And *Son-of-the-Wind* would open just one little eye, and would say, "My man-faced little

ones, I will shake the branch, and the figs will fall and you can eat them."

But the Babies would say, "Oh, but *Son-of-the-Wind*, we want to climb and get them for ourselves, and you have a beautiful long tail, *Son-of-the-Wind*; no one has a tail like yours."

So *Son-of-the-Wind* would open his other eye, and would screw up his nose, and look at the little Baby Monkeys—so small and so brave—and it pleased him that they were brave; and, still lying on the branch, he would uncurl his great long tail, and let it down to them, slowly, slowly. How they jumped to catch it! And one Baby after another would swarm up, tugging at the tail. But *Son-of-the-Wind* sat quite still and steady, though it hurt him very much; and when they were all up the length of it, he would put all his strength into his tail, and swing it on to a high, high branch, and the Baby Monkeys would chatter and chuckle and pluck a great feast of ripe red figs, and tumble on to *Son-of-the-Wind's* back, and altogether have a great and glorious time till their mothers came to carry them away, and to scold *Son-of-the-Wind* for letting their babies climb those dangerous high branches.

And *Son-of-the-Wind* would say never a word, but lend his long tail to the Babies whom he loved, to help them down again.

But I have forgotten his message. When the Wise Ones sent him to summon a Council on that morning in the second century, he took two little drums, each about a span long, with nice tight hide covers, and red bandagings to them. They were his great-great-grandfather's drums, and they made a lovely big noise. Well, he took these, one under each little arm, and he swung himself along from one tree of the forest to another, until he got to the tallest tree on the highest hill of all, and he sat on a branch that shot right up into the sky, and he looked on all the Monkey world, and saw the Browns and the Greys squabbling as usual, and he shook his withered little head and said, "Only the very little ones, the Babies who climb up my tail, and the very old ones, who sent me on this errand, have understanding and wisdom; all the rest are fools. Life is going to rob them of half their hills. The Wise Ones will suffer too, but that is ever the way." And he heaved a great sigh and put his little elbows on his knees,

hugging his drums tight; and he put his chin in his hands and looked all over the Monkey world, dotted Grey and Brown, for the last time. And as he sat, he thought many thoughts, and the sum of them all was just this:—

"But the Wise Ones are made wise by their sufferings; so the fools are of use after all!" And that thought made him so happy, that he pulled out his drums with a flourish and

"Dhum-a-ka-dhum!
Dhum-a-ka-dhum!
Dhum-dhum!"

He played upon them so merrily, that "Some glad thing is to happen," said the Monkeys, Grey and Brown: and one and all, they swung themselves along the branches, higher and higher, till they came to Jakko, where the Wise Ones sat in Council.

The Wise Ones sat in solemn line, each one with his tail across his lap, like a lady's dress, and his hands folded sedately; but they were not looking grave and solemn as they had meant to look: for *Son-of-the-Wind's* drumming had made *them* happy too. So each Wise One sat smiling and trying to conceal the smile. But the Monkey

People had seen the smile, and soon the Monkeys Grey and Brown were chattering and swaying with merriment. Then *Son-of-the-Wind* came into the Council, with his two little drums under his arm; and his tight little skin stretched in a broad grin across his withered little face —for, you see, it was his own private joke, and they were all laughing at it without knowing it! and he walked to his place beside the Wise Ones and he put his drums down and sat upon them. One drum was upright and the other lay on its side. He sat on the upright one, and the other made a rest for his knees, propping them up. Then he lifted his hands and scratched his sides, which meant, "I am very happy." And all the Monkey Folk, the Wise Ones too, did the same. For, you see, the happiest person among any people—Children People, or Monkey People—always leads the rest. Only the solemn scratchings of the Wise Ones were so very, *very* funny, that all the Council, and the Brown and Grey Monkey Folk, chattered and rocked with joy: and every one was in so good a temper that it seemed to *Son-of-the-Wind* the right moment for the Council to speak. So he lifted

the drum which lay on its side, and played on it :—

"*Dhum-a-ka-dhum!*"

just once, which means—

"Quiet, my children! hear the Wise Ones!" And every little monkey straightened himself to listen.

Then *Son-of-the-Wind* beat time like a Band-master, and bowed; and when he bowed, all the Wise Ones spoke together.

"Children—Browns and Greys," they said, "we have a word to say." And they waited and looked at *Son-of-the-Wind*, who pointed a drum-stick at the chiefest and oldest Wise One, bowing very politely all the time. And the chiefest and oldest Wise One said in a quavering voice, for he was very old, "My little children, you know the reason why—let us divide: the hills are many—let us divide, the Greys to the Grey, and the Browns to the Brown. So shall we live many years and be at peace."

And the Greys and the Browns looked at the good land which might have been all theirs and "both" theirs, and they were sad; but they

did not know the reason why, so they just wiped away their tears with their little soft tails, and stood waiting for the Wise Ones to speak again.

And the Wise Ones all spoke together, standing up and holding their tails out of each other's way. "Let us divide," they said, "the Greys to the Grey, and the Browns to the Brown. So shall we live many years, and be at peace."

And all the Monkey-People shouted, "The Greys to the Grey, and the Browns to the Brown."

Then each monkey turned to his brother, embracing him: but the baby-monkeys gathered round *Son-of-the-Wind's* tail, stroking it. For they knew that they would never again climb up that dear tail together, so happily, *so* happily!

Then the Chiefest Wise One spoke again, "My children, the Browns go to the East, and the Greys to the West. Teach the treaty to your children, and to your children's children: and let each monkey keep it. Ye know the reason." And the Monkey-Folk said altogether: "We will keep it. We know the reason."

And so they parted, going solemnly this time, to a sad little *Dhum-a-ka-dhum! Dhum-a-ka-dhum!* which *Son-of-the-Wind* played bravely to cheer them on their way.

But it was really *he* who was saddest of all, because of the Babies; and it was a good thing that his tail was so long, for he could whisk away the tears without moving his fingers from his drum.

You should have seen his tail flying over now this shoulder, now that. It amused the Babies so, that they ran away chattering and happy, their arms round their mothers' necks and their little feet round their mothers' waists—which is the way of Baby Monkeys on a journey.

And they clutched so tightly that they did not fall, although the mothers jumped from tree to tree as before, till they got to the far side, east and west, of the Monkey Temple.

But *Son-of-the-Wind* sat watching till the last tails had disappeared, and he stroked that very own tail of his, so long, so long: and he remembered all the dear Baby Monkeys, and knew that he could not bear the fig-trees without them both together, Greys and Browns, a-scramble, a-scramble up his tail.

So he went to the Wise Ones, and he laid down his drums at their feet, and also his gold-stick of office, and his little gold-lace uniform which he wore for the service of the Monkey-god, and he prayed leave to go on a journey to the Monkey Temple in the South, near the bridge which the monkeys built, long and long ago.

And the Wise Ones gave him leave, and he went, nursing his tail and its memories.

Many were his wanderings and adventures—but they will be written in another book—how he rode in a circus, and acted chief lady in a drama, and saved a human baby from drowning, and did many other things: and how finally he had great honour in the Monkey land of the South. But always, always did he nurse his long tail, and love best of all the dear Babies—Grey and Brown—who had climbed the length of it, in the dear Himalayan Mountains.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FEAST OF LIGHTS

"*Daisy, Daīsy, gimme-yar-ans-er-tōruw*
I m half craīzy, all fur-a-luv-a-yeuw,
I ka-ant affor a ker-ridge,
I ka-ant affor a ker-ridge,
I ka-ant affor, I kan affor
A bycyky built-for teuw."

That, as nearly as I can articulate it, was the awful gibberish which broke upon the breathless stillness of the noonday hour, late in the hot month of May. It was sung in a child's shrill voice, with an odd base note accompanying it here and there like an accidental, and after the verse came a sound of jingling as if some one, bells about her ankles, were dancing with naked feet there in the burning sand of the roadway.

Then that mad travesty would begin again.

"*Hat!*" said the yawning voice of my old

punkah-wali without. "Move!—go!—ye casteless mongrels! Know ye not that this is the rest-time of the Miss Sahib, and that your senseless noise makes entrance through the shutters to disturb her slumbers."

But they evidently heeded not, for nearer the house and nearer came the voices and the little jingling step-dance.

Then more yawns from my she-dragon, showing that I was not the only one disturbed in mid-day slumber, and a vigorous pulling of my punkah-rope, with renewed though lazy attempts at ejectment. But the "*Daīsy, Daīsy,*" continued remorselessly.

My punkah-wali pushed back the wooden packing-case on which she sat, and the thing jarred horribly. Rest was murdered and died shrieking.

Through the darkened room I found my way to the door, which overlooked the trespassers, and I peeped between the green shutters. Such grotesque little oddments they were! The girl an albino, and as uncanny as an albino Jap-puppy with pink eyes and a "skinned" look about its coat—you know the kind. Her hair

was ash-coloured, her eyes were of the palest greeny-blue, her complexion the bleached white of leprosy — though she was not a leper, poor child—and she wore a little green-checked-cotton *saree*, draped after the manner of the outcaste, about her little person. One end slipped over her left shoulder and down to her feet, as she danced under that pitiless sun: protection for her head she had none. It was a pathetic little face, when you could conquer repulsion sufficiently to examine it—its only incident a deep fringe of black eyelash, lending some sort of point to the pathos, and its only value the freakishness which in itself was a deformity.

How old was she? "Maybe six, maybe sixty," as remarked my old punkah-wali. "Six or eight," was my own guess, and the boy was a twelvemonth older. There was nothing uncanny about him; indeed the wizened little commonplace Hindoo rendering of his nomad soul—jet black hair included—was a relief and a beauty beside her rarities.

The old punkah-wali jumped when I called to her; for, like all the screens behind which women shelter in India, my *jhilmili* were

useful peep-holes for those within, for those without, were dead-green walls—so that she saw me not approaching.

"Shut-to their noise-makings," I said, "and bid them come nearer; I would speak to them."

She, reluctant and disapproving, did as I bade.

The catechism was short, for the little albino thing had not the picturesque and circuitous wit of the true Indian in her speech.

God knew whence she came — she and this boy had their home near the barracks and made a living there, by singing for a woman who called herself their mother. The Handsome Ones, the English troopers, sang that song. She learnt it through oft hearing of it, and thought that it would bring more copper pice than the quaint litttle dronings of her mother-tongue. The boy her brother was stupid; he could only sound a low-down note here and there. His music, like all his thoughts, lived in the place where he stowed his food. Hers?—oh, in her throat of course. The *bulbul's* voice lived in its throat, did it not? It was where voices

should live. And was she not sweet-throated, *Khush-gulu?* she asked with some anxiety.

She was very proud that she could make her voice so "thin," and "fine," and high.

Her name? Oh! just that—*Khush-gulu*, the Sweet-Throated One. And her mother had been a dancing-girl and taught her those steps. But she was not good at dancing; no!—it was "throating" was her talent.

But her mother!—one should see *her*. Sometimes she danced for the Handsome Ones, wearing a full red skirt bordered with gold, and round her arms and ankles many circlets of gold and silver, which went a-jingling to the noise of the blind man's drum.

Did I know him, that drummer?

He made beautiful "dum-dummings" at the gates of the Sahibs' houses, whenever there was an auction sale — and the Sahibs were always having auction sales; I must have heard him.

The boy? Oh! he was stupid, could not sing, could do nothing. But he took care of the pice, tied them into his waist-cloth (his one garment), and carried them safely home to their mother. Sometimes he had food to carry too,

for they were casteless, and might eat from any hand.

Ah! bits of juicy water-melons were best in this tyranny of heat.

They soon went, the little boy burdened in both the ways of which I had had delicate suggestion; and I said that they might come—yes—once a week, if only they would cease from singing, or would sing me some quaint Indian things. But *that*, my songstress felt bound to deny me; it was an insult to the talent that had adopted the songs of the Handsome Ones. The boy, I found, had a talking voice which was pleasant to the ear. I encouraged him to talk, and the more readily, since to watch him was no effort; while she, alas! grew no whit less repulsive for oft seeing.

One day he brought me word of a special festival which his mother kept all by herself—the Worship of Musical Instruments. She borrowed the blind drummer's drum, and a trumpet or two from the bandsmen of the Handsome Ones. They made the loan, not knowing its meaning,

and reckoning the ceremony, no doubt, among the subtle flirtations of the country. But it was only the dancing-girl's form of prayer — the worship of her tools.

She always did that way, said the boy, at the time of the Feast of Lights.

Had I been through the bazaar on that big great day of the Feast of Lights? Oh! but I should go—he was going.

"Tchut!" said the girl, "it is nothing. The old woman who lives in the hut next ours takes a corn-sieve and a house-broom, and she beats them in every corner of the house, and mutters something; and then she takes her broom outside far from the hut, and throws it away, looking towards the rising of the sun. *That's* nothing."

But I smiled, content; it was a great deal. Surely the girl was not all Eastern, or she would have guessed the symbolism.

"A poor woman, poorer than we are, wasting her broom," she continued.

But that was just the reason of it all—her poverty. The corn-sieve meant blessing, increase, prosperity, and that broom was a scarer of demons and ill-luck. So she was muttering to herself, no

doubt: "Plenty, come to this house, and the demons of poverty depart!"

And when she threw away the broom, it was as a scapegoat, that it might bear with it all the trouble and leanness of that little household.

Oh! how I wish that the tale had been my chota chaukidar's! I should have had a beautiful legend woven out of it all. It was imagination that was so sadly to seek in the albino's composition.

The boy waited awhile, and then, secure in his own enthusiasm, he explained himself with much dreamy gentleness.

"I meant the Feasts of Lights," he said, "what time I wander about the bazaars in the wake of the Handsome Ones. You come not with me then, little sister, so you know not—how should you? But"—and he turned to me—"my friend the writer tells me many stories about lights and snakes and gods and devils, which are very good to hear."

Here the "Sweet-Throated" chimed in:—

The writer was the man who sat under the tree outside the post-office gate. He wrote "money-ārder" for people, and letters and

addresses, and he read them such news as the post-bags brought them.

Yes, he was a very clever man. "And I am his friend," said the boy, proudly. "In Canning Road, Khush-gulu sings alone, for that-like people love her; me they do not like. They call me—oh! just abusings. So Khush-gulu goes alone, and I sit by the writer-man, and his favour is upon me. We go early to Canning Road, at morning post time; for then these Sahib log are in their houses, and their Memsahibs sitting on the verandahs or the terraces in the garden. So I see everything of the business of a writer-man, everything from the very beginning. First he spreads his carpet and sits down flat, his legs crossed, and his inkstand and paper beside him. His pen, it lives behind his ear.

"Then people come. They are mostly merchant men who have written letters about their merchandise to distant towns; and they come every day to see if the answer has perchance been brought them by the lightning post and fire-carriage; and sometimes they are servants, waiting for their Sahib's daily mail. But they come and sit by my writer, all of them; and he makes a

place for me, close beside him, by his knee. For he lets me dust his paper with glistening sand, when the ink lies wet between the lines; and if the letters are not 'bearing,' he lets me put the stamps upon them. And then they smoke, and we fellow-citizens have a business talk. They say to him 'Muharrir-ji,' or sometimes 'Rātur-ji' (writer-ji)—oh! he is a big man, this friend of mine—'tell us the news.' And he tells them the things which he has read or written in the letters of the day previous. Then have they things to be written too . . . and so the morning wears away among us men-folk, while Khush-gulu sings for coppers in the houses of the clerks and railway-men of Canning Road."

He paused, and the crickets chirped noisily in the hot silence of mid-day.

"To-morrow," continued the boy, "my friend is to tell me the story of the Feast of Lamps. I will tell it you next time we come," he promised.

"Do," I begged, and the pair trotted off. I heard the shrill, "*Daīsy, Daīsy,*" from across the road; for alas! I had not acquired any prescription of silence over other people's compounds.

In due time I heard my story.

Once upon a time there was a Rajah of whom it was foretold that he should die of snakebite, on the new moon of a night in November. So he sent for the wisest of the astrologers, and begged them to avert the evil.

"Let the houses, streets, and lanes be kept both sweet and clean," said they, "and command that lights be lighted everywhere—at the king's door should there be lights, a thousand, and lights at the four corners of his bed."

And if, by any chance whatever, the lights upon the kingly threshold should expire, the king would know his hour had come in very truth, and no one then might save him but his wife. And she, when the snake should glide into the house to kill her lord, would greet him in song, bravely, and with many praises of his beauty. And the snake would swell with pleasure, and would tell the queen to ask him what she would, and she should have it. . . . Well, all happened as the astrologers said. And when the queen was given her choice, "Give long life," said she, "to this my lord."

The snake wriggled his tail in sadness, for life and death were not his own to give. "But,"

said he, "because of my word will I do this thing, O Queen! I will treat with Yama, the King of Death."

So the Queen watched by her husband's lifeless corpse what time the snake did carry his spirit and the passport of his life to the gates of the Great King's palace.

Now, the snake was not only kind, but cunning also and inventive—which was more useful than mere kindness; moreover, he was even businesslike, for on that passport paper he did cleverly insert a 7 before the 0 which stood for the number of years that remained yet of life unto the king. And Yama, looking at the paper, said: "Pooh!—bah! you've brought me here a man to whom remain still seventy years of earth-life. Go! take him hence."

So the good snake carried back to the Queen the spirit of her lord, and they lived happily for all those extra seventy years of life, and never once did they forget to celebrate their Festival of Lights.

"And even now, the dead come back on every Feast of Lights Day," said the boy, "and that is why we light the lights as did

the Queen for her dear lord returning from the dead.

"But in bazaars the people do some other things as well. I asked my 'Rater' of these matters. He says they worship trade things, to show their dead friends how they earn their living, and also because this is two festivals in one—'The Feast of Lights' and the 'Feast of the Goddess of Wealth.'

"Card games and dice-throwing and money-making—these are the things she loves, and that is why the Handsome Ones do gamble with badmaāshes in the lighted streets."

Then he would look shyly at his sister. "One Feast of Lights custom," he said, "is for sisters to worship brothers. I told Khush-gulu this thing, but she did laugh at me.

"Yet did she make a mark upon my forehead, and feed me with gram and sweetmeats, who knows but what I might live many years—yea, even as the King.

"But Khush-gulu will not do the brother ceremonies."

"Tut!" said the albino contemptuously. "It is child's play, not I. I would I knew to gamble

like the Handsome Ones. *That* kind of Feast of Lights I should keep indeed."

No, Khush-gulu was not Eastern; that speech decided me.

Of her brother I never had a doubt, and his end was characteristic.

Yama Raja, the King of the Dead, did one day find a tiny suppliant at his gate, who, death-passport in hand, sought swift admittance. He had been playing his usual Feast of Lights game, watching for the spirit of the queen who saved her lord; and, tired with watching, he slept —there alas! among the lights and leaping flames of death, whence no kind snake redeemed his spirit, forging royal life-deeds.

But when my servants light their "dead" lights in the little garden of my Indian habitation—I apportion them to the wandering soul of that small Eastern who so loved the Festival of Lights.

And here my child-tales have an ending.

Peace be to all worlds!

GLOSSARY

Badmaāsh . . An evil character : a worthless one : a rake

Badzat . . . Ignoble one.

Bak-bak . . . Chatter : foolish talk.

Banawat . . . Invention.

Chaudhari . . (lit.) A headman.

Chaukidar . . A watchman.

Chaprassi . . A messenger (so called from his wearing a *chaprās* or plate engraved with the name of his master).

Dustoori . . . Commission.

Dhobi . . . A washerman.

Ekka . . . A cart.

Gareeb-par-war . Protector of the poor.

Guriya . . . A doll.

Gururu . . . A magic circle.

Guru . . . A religious teacher.

Hugga . . . Indian smoking-pipe.

Jhilmili . . . Shutters.

Ji . . . . An honorific suffix of respect.

Khansamah . . The master of the stores.
Khidmatgar . . Service man.
Kōs . . . Two miles.

Mashalchi . . Torch-bearer.

Riayots . . . Cultivators.

Sais . . Groom.
Saudagar . . . Merchant.
Shiva . . . The name of the third god in the Hindu Triad—the Destroyer.

Thanadar . . A police officer.

Wala . . . A suffix denoting man.
Wali . . . A suffix denoting woman.

Zemindar . . Landlord.