



"Candida," she said, going close to her and bursting into tears, "I don't know—yes, I don't know what I should have done had you chosen to leave me. I should certainly have died or foundered like a ship in a storm. Come, Candida come, hold the sacred cross that you wear round your neck in your hand and swear by Jesus as we do by our *kushti* and *sudreh*, that come what may you will not leave me, that you will not yield to anyone's persuasion or pressure. Come, swear to me, or—or—I'll go mad." And there was another outburst of audible sobs and hot tears.

"*Chhokri*, child,—Mai ! Thritibai, what ails thee to-day ? You are very naughty. I have told you over and over again that death alone will part you and me. A day might come and that is sure to dawn, when living in your happy home with your husband you might wish—yes, even you, Thriti, might wish—to take up a smart young hussy for your attendant to do your bidding, run your errands, make up your dress and to knit and needle, but so long as there is life in this old carcase of mine, I will not leave you."

"Candida," said Jal, "when Thriti takes on like that, you know, I make it a point to run her down. But I cannot do it to-day ; for I am so uneasy myself.—No, no, don't say a word, ayah. It has nothing to do with the little sickness I had yesterday. It is an uneasiness, a sort of a fear, which I cannot shake off. But come, Thriti, all this is, I suppose, a freak of idle brains. The best thing is to occupy them, as our headmaster says. Come, I'll read to you, Thriti, Candida will prepare our bath. And you, Thriti, shall stroke Lizzy's hair. Rosy, put Thritibai's favourite into her lap."

The favourite, which was a poodle, taking her cue as it were from Jal jumped on to her mistress's lap. Thus comfortably settled Jal read out the story of—Fredoon and His Philosophy."



CHAPTER XXIV

FREDOON AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

*"I'll give thee armour to keep off that word,
Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy.
To comfort thee, though thou art banished."*

SHAKESPEARE.

FREDOON and Freany lived in Teheran, the principal city of Persia—the land of our ancestors. They were born in the same year and had lived and grown up like twins and meant to deliver up together their '*ravans*' or souls to Him who gave them. They were matched and mated by Dame Nature who had intended them as it were for each other.

Fredoon was poor in the worldly sense of the word but rich in the learned lore. When only sixteen, he was declared fit to sit on the councils of the *Anjuman*. In the olden Persian days, the *Anjuman* was an assembly of doctors, savants and law-givers. In those days, when most people lived by their sword, Fredoon lived by his pen. He preferred to spill the black fluid on paper rather than the red one on the battle-field. He was a poet and an author. This profession was then as now anything but lucrative. Freany had often tried to persuade Fredoon to lay down his pen and to exchange it for the sword. Fredoon, however, insisted that he would always carry on his battles on the field of paper with his pen and win such fame and fortune thereby as could never be won at the point of the sword. So there the matter ended;—Fredoon writing poems and prose and making just enough to make both ends meet.

There was a time when Fredoon was engaged in writing a great epic. He worked late and early. Freany would often sit



up with him when he was burning his midnight lamp and would not go to bed until overpowered by Morpheus. This made her ill. A skilful *hakim* or physician attended on her in her illness. This good old man, who was childless, had taken a great liking for this couple and spent hours in their company. He often advised Fredoon, if he had any regard for his health not to overwork himself. Whilst Fredoon was steadily poring head downwards over what he penned, the *hakim* would look steadily into his eyes for minutes.

"Fredoon," he suddenly exclaimed one day, "do not your eyes get tired? Do not clouds ever gather round them? How do you act when they do?"

Fredoon, who had looked up in surprise to the no little wonderment of Freany, replied that on such occasions he set aside his work and dipped his orbs in cold.

Without more ado the *hakim* rose from his seat, snatched the pen from Fredoon's hands, thrust it and the paper aside and said in a peremptory tone: "Well then, young man, if you don't wish the clouds to permanently overcloud your orbs, rise, wash them with this solution and go to bed. If you take my advice, bid farewell to these friends of yours whom you must now take to be your mortal foes."

Surgeons and surgery there were none in those days, and no spectacles. All the available skill was suited to the times. Fredoon went stone-blind. Even the old *hakim's* skill could avail him nothing. He had written verses on blindness but he never thought a day would dawn when he would have to compose verses on his own darkness. He could write verses and sell them. He could give those who may choose to have them, lines and thoughts accumulated in his mental store.

On the principle of misfortune never coming single the *hakim* died—died as poor as he had lived, for his was a life of charity. He never applied ointment or made wounds and healed them for the sake of money. He only took to bestow. So whilst the one was buried in a natural tomb the other was entombed as it we rein



a living grave. Freany's illness swallowed up all their savings. They sold off one thing after another. Even his finished manuscripts could get him nothing. His wife led him to the houses of all those who pretended to be book-worms and patrons of book-lore and invariably came away disappointed. One or two there were, who offered Fredoon a handsome return for some of his writings if he would give up all claims to them and allow them to pose as the makers thereof. These offers were of course declined ;—the result being that the wolf was soon at the door.

The bonds of affection are known even to break through the barriers of delicacy. Freany suggested that Fredoon should comit piecemeal to paper small bits of his valuable stock of poems and philosophy, his great sayings and grand observations and that they should sell them for a *derem*¹ each on market-days. Fredoon thus became as it were a vendor of philosophy, pert sayings and pithy observations. It was a pitiful but simple sight to see the young wife boldly pushing her way through the motley crowd in the bazaar where itinerant vendors of wearing apparel, crockery, trinket and trumpery exhibited their ware and plied their trade. The newcomers with their respectable looks and polished manners were thorns in their sides and they left no stone unturned to scare them away. Seeing, however, that their only ware or mercantile commodity was scraps of paper, they allowed them to be there on sufferance.

It was not an unusual sight for curiosity-mongers to exchange their *derems* for the small paper balls, only to throw them away or crush them under feet for want of brains to understand their contents. The deceased *hakim's* nephew, who was of a contemplative turn of mind and a book-worm to boot, a great reader and a great thinker, but who read only for his own delectation and buried his thoughts in his own bosom, happened to pass by the vendor and heard the plaintive voice of Freany crying out, " Will you not buy

¹ A small Persian coin.



our viands, Sir ? One single viand will give you vitality ! Read and rectify ! Consider and improve ! Great thoughts lead to great ends ! Only a *derem* for each ! Only a *derem* ! Buy our philosophy pills ! They will cure all mental ailments and purge your mind of all impurities ! They are simply matchless ! It's only blind Fredoon that can produce such philosophy ! Read and benefit ! Only a *derem* ! Only a *derem* !”

“What meanest thou, my good dame ?” asked Noshirvan—for that was the name of the *hakim*'s nephew. “Methinks this is hardly a place for philosophers or for thinkers either. Your husband—for I take the blind man to be such—has evidently seen good days and you must be fishes out of water here. Well, well, here are ten *derems*. Let me have five of those precious paper balls of yours.”

Fredoon handed him ten pills, whilst his wife took the *derems*.

“There, there,” said Noshirvan, “take these five back. You can sell them to someone else.”

“Nay, Sir,” remonstrated Freany, “even in penury we wish to preserve our just pride and never accept *backshees*.¹ Either take all the ten pills or let me return you five *derems*.”

“So be it,” said Noshirvan, “mayhap I shall go home and read them.” “Poor dear ! Poor dear !” he muttered as he pushed his way through the crowd. “I wish uncle *Hakim Hormuzd* were alive to look at them.”

Had he swallowed the pills instead of thrusting them in a corner of his capacious pocket or had he known the intimacy that existed between the vendor of philosophy and his deceased uncle, he would have said, “I wish Uncle *Hormuzd* were alive ; for he would never have allowed this matchless couple to trudge as they did now.” Why, he would have carried the couple triumphantly to his house and feasted them on ‘nan and kababs’² with accompaniment of ruby wine.

¹ Deserved or undeserved gratification or reward ; a gift.

² Rolled bread and minced meat balls.

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Noshirvan went home and never thought either of the pair or their pills until one day whilst searching in his pocket for a lost ring his hands touched the rolled-up pieces of paper. Immediately the poor couple's sorry looks and mournful plight haunted him for his neglect. He took out the crumpled pieces and gently unfolded them.

"Avan! Avan! My *sherbet*."¹ Whilst his lips sipped the sweet juice, his eyes gulped the contents of the paper pieces.

(1)

"When the pious soul endeavoureth to sever itself from its carcase only to fly into the arms of its Giver, what carest thou if thou die on a throne or on the bare earth?"

(2)

"Mix thou, O monarch, mercy with justice even as the great *Hakim Hormuzd* operated and healed."

(3)

"The glow of glory is mightier than the gild of gold. Why then crave for the one at the expense of the other?"

(4)

"Eyes are the centre of everything; eyes are the cause of all mischief and woe. It is idle to blame a man's heart or a man's mind. It is the eyes that give and receive the touch. Their sense is first affected; theirs is the sin; and they communicate it to the other senses of thought and feeling."

(5)

"I pity my poor heart that suffers so much for the sin of my eyes. What a plague is my heart, I ask? The eyes commit a sin,—they behold a sweet face; and the heart recalling it suffers."

(6)

"The heart is a slave to the eyes; and my suffering heart tormenting me makes me a bondman to itself."

(7)

"Eyes had and have their part in the tragedies and comedies of love."

¹ A sweet drink made of lime juice and sugar or other ingredients.



(8)

"Of cruel heart and eyes I long complain ;
What see mine eyes my heart recalls again.
I would I have a dagger short and bright,
To tear mine eyes and free my heart of pain."

(9)

"Of the Has-Beens there are many,
Of the Ne'er-Was more by far ;
The Going-to-Be are legion ;
But how scarce are those that Are ?"

(10)

"Speaking without thinking
Is shooting without aiming."
"Be fit to live that you may be fit to die."

"*Shabbash !* Praise be to Allah ! Am not I a greater blind than Fredoon ? For it's he and no one else ! There was a blind before my eyes which the blind man has removed. To think that I should have been so callous as not even to cast a glance or lay a stress over the great store that I carried in my pocket ! What must they have felt ? What should I feel if He decide to deprive me of light ? I must hurry ; I must reward and relieve. I shall sit at Fredoon's feet and drink at the fountain of his wisdom, shine by his thoughts and revel in the richness of his luxurious dainties. Many would call Fredoon poor. I say he is richer than the richest ;—richer in the wealth of learning and erudition, richer in the possession of a matchless wife. I have written, I have sung ; and yet how low I sink in comparison !"

He rose, put on his long-flowing Persian robe, his silken *cum-merband*,¹ his graceful *faeta*² and his *makhmal*³ slippers and without a second thought walked out of the house. He went to the bazaar

¹ Waist-band.

² A graceful band wound in the shape of a turban round the head.

³ Velvet.



and was told that the couple were not seen there for a full week and more. He obtained their address and repaired thither.

There, with her head buried in her arms, her long-flowing and beautiful hair all dishevelled and shedding tears of bitter woe, was Freany. The thick carpet spread over the ground drowned the noise of the visitor's footsteps. Noshirvan stood transfixed to the spot. He was in doubt as to whether he should disturb this Madonna in mourning. He decided to wait. When she did raise her head she accosted him kindly. Taking him to be Fredoon's friend, she begged of him to be seated on a *takya*¹ and to make himself completely at home.

He told her that he was *Hakim* Hormuzd's nephew and reminded her of the day on which he was at the bazaar and bought the ten paper balls from them. All this while he was looking and wondering at the great beauty and the glorious outlines of her face and figure. He had discovered new beauties in them and was blaming himself for being blind to them at the first interview. Could he ever make this Madonna his own? He had never thought of any woman in that light before. Would she accept him? His mind misgave him. "No," he thought, "she would not;—I cannot be so fortunate."

"Alas, Sir," she said, "you have come to see Fredoon; but you will see him in this world no more. He is gone to his right place in Heaven and is gracing the assembly of God. His fellow-men did not appreciate his worth or virtues: the angels will. I am waiting to follow him and pray to God to take me into His great mercy."

"But may I know what you propose to do with yourself, *banoo*?² Have I your permission to be of service to you in this great hour of your sorrow? One of Fredoon's great thoughts tells me that he had a great admiration for my uncle *Hakim* Hormuzd and I love those who loved him."

"Alas, Sir! *Hakim* Hormuzd was the only friend we had in our days of downfall. He often spoke to us of your travels. Whilst

¹ Pillow.

² Lady.



you were a wanderer over the world he was a daily wayfarer at our house. He shared in our humble cheer and partook of our miseries. Why, he made them his own. It goes to my heart to think that we should not have known you and that you should have passed us by as strangers when we met in the bazaar. For me nothing is left in this life. I am practically no more. I can provide for my wants until this wretched body and soul hold together."

"*Banoo*, if you deign not to accept anything at my hands, at least you will let me comfort and console you. You will let me be the medium of the Lord's bounty. You have in your possession the written manuscripts of Fredoon's great thoughts and Fredoon's philosophy. They are a wealth in themselves and I shall pay any price you may please to put on them. That will make you independent for life; for it is the greatest inheritance Fredoon could have left you."

"Manuscripts! Wealth! Independence!" she said as if speaking more to herself than to anyone else. "Haven't I told you, saheb, that I care not for these? I only live on the wealth of his memory. I live only to follow in his wake. I look at his *tasbir*,¹ live in the greatness of his heart and head and in the glory of his great virtues. The manuscripts never brought him the fame or fortune that he so richly deserved. They shall, therefore, live and die with me. No eyes except mine shall fall on them."

"Live and die with you, *banoo*! Far be it from me to wound your just pride and prejudice. Bound am I to respect your grief and to deplore your grievances. Sympathy, such as mine is, cannot be deeper. But it would surely be the height of injustice not to let the great store of learning that your husband has left behind him, to see the light of day."

"Alas, Sir! It is now too late to go back. Kneeling before my husband's remains, which have been exposed according to our wont to the burning rays of *Aftab*² on yonder high hill, I swore in the

¹ Likeness.

² Sun.

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sight of the Almighty that come what may those who came to scoff at my husband should never remain to praise him now. What they denied to him in life, they have no right to give him during his defunct. It seemed to me, Sir, when I took that oath that my husband's calm and placid face which was even calmer in death smiled at me sweetly and approvingly. Something tells me that Allah will let the presentiment of coming death creep to my mind before it overtakes me. When it does come I shall tear the manuscripts to pieces and bury them underneath the earth of that high hill, which so nobly supports my husband's remains. It has been arranged that I should lie by him and whilst we dry and wither above, the scraps shall crumble and wither below."



CHAPTER XXV

THE MANOEUVRE

*"There's death in the cup—so beware!
Nay, more—there is danger in touching;
But who can avoid the fell snare?"*

BURNS.

"WHAT do you think of these words:—'Eyes are the centre of everything: theirs is the sin'?" asked Jal of Thríti when the story had ended.

"Why," answered Thríti, "there is so much in common amongst all the blind. The blind live in a world of their own. I am almost beginning to see what the blind see but the seeing do not. Just think, Jal, so many things have happened since Papa's death, some great, some small; so many mishaps have happened to us and so many bid fair to occur. Events apparently small may end in catastrophes. Fredoon had his philosophy, which whilst he lived brought him nothing; after his death it would have brought his wife a fortune. Now that I bethink me, Jal, I am much more lucky. With little or no qualifications, there are people who are willing to give me a lift and to oblige me."

"But was Freany right in entombing his manuscripts?" asked Jal.

"Yes—No," said Thríti. "Yes—from her own point of view: No—from the point of view of Neshirvan who wanted to buy up the manuscripts, from the point of view of students and thinkers and from the point of view of the name and fame, which when too late to benefit by, Fredoon would have won. But all the same it was a great sacrifice, almost a martyrdom, on the part of the wife, for ten to one



the sale of the manuscripts would have brought her comfort, nay, even affluence, for the remainder of her earthly existence."

"Now that you tell me, Thríti, that there is so much in common among all the blind, what if you get some one to lead you when that some one and you become one in the future? Why should Jamshed not lead you? In the story I just read out to you it was the fair sex that led the sterner one. In your case it will be more in the order of things—I mean, the sterner sex leading the fair sex."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Thríti.

"Impossible! Thríti," returned Jal. "Impossible in the case of the man you have promised to marry but all possible in the case of the one who wishes to marry you. A gentleman is more genteel at times than the gentler sex and so will..."

At this moment there was a gentle knock at the door;—so gentle that it had to be repeated over and over again before it could draw attention. It seemed as if the knocker was afraid of being detected or overheard. Thríti forgetting that she was blind sprang to her feet and going straight to the door threw it open. In walked Roshan shaking all over with fright.

"You here, so soon, Roshan?" cried the brother and sister in a breath. "What ails you? Why, you are feverish. Come, come, lay this burden aside, stretch yourself in that sofa; tell us the cause of this abrupt return from school."

There was very little to tell. As the reader is aware, though it was Roshan's birthday she had been ordered out to school. Whilst there, she felt faint and giddy; the schoolmistress pressed her to return home and walking all the way under the burden of the satchel she felt slightly feverish.

"Fever or no fever," said Jal, "you shall remain here for the day. Come what may, Thríti, she shall not stir from this room until evening. That cruel mother of hers will slay her alive if she sees her."

They had just finished speaking and put Roshan into an inner



room when there was another knock at the door. This time it was Jal that opened it, and O wonder of wonders! It was Meherbanoo's servant. He came with a present of fish, *dahi*¹ and *sev*,² in honor of Roshan's birthday. He said that the baisahebs upstairs would be very pleased, nay, obliged, if Thriti and Jal would dine with them.

As strange as it was singular. Yet neither Thriti nor Jal could find it in them to acquiesce. They made their excuses, such as they could;—not taken their bath, not dressed, not fit for table, not feeling well and so on. They tipped the servant and returned him with a bagful of apologies to the mighty mesdames.

After the servant had left, Jal and Roshan who were never tired of speaking to each other busied themselves looking over the album and discussing the looks and merits of the family ancestry. Thriti came out into the front room, opened her cupboard and was just engaged in arranging the things within with the help of her old ayah, when—lo! ting-ring went the small door bell. The ayah looked through the door apertures, which served as peepholes and recognized Sherbanoo. Quick as lightning she went in and taking Jal by the hand pushed him out of the inner room to the no little amazement of Roshan and closed the door on her. The front door was then thrown open and really and truly it was Baisaheb Sherbanoo that walked in.

“O Thriti, O Jal, why are you so stuck up? Why won't you condescend to take pot luck with us? Ardeshir and Erach are not here and we feel so lonely. I have come to invite you personally.”

Jal, boy as he was, had no inclination or intention to save other people's faces. Boy-like he exclaimed, “but, Sherbanoo, you forget you are counting without the host;—I should say without the guest of the day, Roshan, whose birthday you are about to celebrate. I was at the window when satchel by her side she walked out to school.”

¹ Curdled milk.

² Macaroni or vermicelli.



"O, tush ! you are harping on the same old tune, Jal. You know my mother is very strict and so am I. We both like regularity and punctuality. Roshan's is just the age to break children into harness. When she is out of frock she will be too old to mend or mould."

Jal would have involved himself in a bad dispute but for the old ayah who came to the rescue.

"Ba, dear boy, be quiet ; it does not behove you to raise disputes on such a day. It is children's duty to obey their parents. If they are not refractory it is none of our business to make them so."

In this the ayah was supported by her protégé.

"Jal dear, please do go and dine with them. I beg of you to do so ; there's a dear good boy ! Sherbanoo, we are so much beholden to you for this kindness. Jal shall certainly go. But please excuse me. You know I am so awkward. You see I have not yet bathed. I am so so shabby ; not at all fit for company."—And here Thriti tried to laugh but it died on her lips.

Jal was obedient and carried out his sister's behest. When they had gone out of the room, Thriti and her ayah put their heads together to find out the cause of so much courtesy, the old one rummaging the recesses of her old brains and the young one searching the corners of that valuable repository the head ; but all in vain.

"Thritibai," said the ayah after some time, "the pot over the stove must be boiling over. I must go and see it."

In her hurry she clean forgot to close the front door which had all this while stood ajar. Before the ayah had time to return, a female figure, which Thriti could not of course see, walked in carefully and timidly, and after looking about to see that nobody was watching her as carefully approached the cupboard, removed a small box, which looked like a jewel case, from under the folds of her sari, thrust it in a *chorkhana*¹ which happened to be open, and without

¹ Secret drawer in a cupboard.



essaying to close it gently and quietly tripped out of the doorway leaving Thriti no wiser as to what had happened.

"O, ayah, I feel so faint with thinking of the cause of that girl's visit. Some mischief is surely a-brewing," said Thriti when the ayah came into the room again.

"O, *chhokri*," returned the ayah, "why is that door open? Who opened it? Did you let anybody in?" Then remembering herself and Thriti's condition she quieted down, closed the door, drew Thriti close to herself and begging her pardon for her own irritability and setting it down to the score of age, she tried to assure her that nobody could have entered and gone out unnoticed within the few minutes that she was away.

Later on Jal returned all in a huff, declined peevishly to answer Thriti's questions, said he would do so by and by, and straightway went in and was soon enough chatting with Roshan.



CHAPTER XXVI

THE VICTIMS OF VILLAINY

*"The breath
Of accusation kills an innocent name,
And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life,
Which is a mask without it."*

SHELLEY.

THIS brings us down to the day on which Bahadurshah's chauffeur carried news to him of the panic at Thriti's house and to the subsequent event of Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah's sudden departure thither. It was at this juncture that we had perforce to break the thread of our story and it is here that we must resume it.

On the day that followed Roshan's birthday, certain information was laid at the nearest police station by Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo and Erach against Jal and Thriti. A search warrant was applied for and granted. This explains the cause of the panic and the presence of Police Superintendent Mr. Macdermott and the Mahomedan detective at Thriti's house.

The loss of her eyes contributed in no small measure to Thriti's consternation. Were it not that her friends were by and did their level best to rally her she would have broken down completely. The Police Superintendent had a duty to perform but he did it with a delicacy and grace which are rarely put down to the credit of a policeman. He even went so far out of his way as to assure Thriti and Jal after the search was over that appearances were in many cases deceitful; that circumstantial evidence not infrequently is misleading and that he doubted not things would come round well in the end. He must, he said, arrest them and keep them at the police



station until they were liberated on bail. He would place them before the Magistrate that very day, who he felt sure would grant bails as a special case. So Jal and Thriti had to go with Mr. Macdermott first to the police station and thence to the Magistrate's court the same day.

The next day the following appeared in the Bombay papers under the head of Police Courts :—

At the Mazagaon Police Court yesterday, Police Superintendent Mr. Macdermott appeared before Mr. Minocheher Khurshed Modi, the Second Presidency Magistrate, with Khan Bahadur Mahomed Juseb of the Detective Force, and laid certain information on behalf of Bai Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal and her daughter Sherbanoo against one Jal Feroze Patel, a boy of about fifteen, and his sister Thriti, aged about twenty, charging the former with trespass and theft and the latter with aiding and abetting in the offence and receiving and retaining stolen property. The complainants and the accused were present in the court. The Superintendent said that the complainants lived at Grant Road, a short distance from the police station. On the 4th of the current month they called at the police station and lodged certain written information against Jal and Thriti, the elder complainant's nephew and niece and the younger one's cousins who lived on the ground floor of the same house and applied in writing for a search and arrest. Thereupon Mr. Macdermott accompanied by Khan Bahadur Mahomed Juseb went to Miss Patel's lodgings and examined the cupboard in which she kept her valuables, etc. The box of jewels which the Superintendent showed to the Magistrate and which the complainants recognized as their own was found concealed in a *chorkhana* or secret drawer of the cupboard. The Superintendent further said that the search was carried out and the box found in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah who resided at Malabar Hill, Miss Macgregor and Mr. Jamshed Aga, an advocate of the High Court. During the search, the Superintendent said he must say

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that the brother and sister behaved as people of genteel birth alone do. They were quiet and dignified, offered no opposition and pleaded their utter ignorance and absolute innocence of the offence. Had the box been not found in the *chorkhana*, the Superintendent could never have believed young Thriti and Jal to be guilty of the offence. The Magistrate remarked that the Superintendent must remember that he was there to prosecute and should not try to soften the charge. Mr. Macdermott proceeded to say that there was not the slightest doubt that the box was found in Miss Patel's cupboard, but he could not say how it came to be there. For aught he knew it may be a present from the complainants to the accused. It was for the Magistrate, the Superintendent said, after hearing the prosecution and the defence, to decide whether the box was abstracted by Jal and retained by Thriti.

The complainants' written statement was then read out. In it the senior complainant had said that the 3rd of the current month was her younger daughter Roshan's birthday. On the morning of that day she had sent her servant Rama with a present of sweets etc. to Miss Thriti Patel and invited them to go up and share the birthday repast with them. This invitation not having been accepted, her daughter Sherbanoo the second complainant at her bidding went downstairs to invite them personally. Thriti would not go but Jal did so a few minutes after. Early that day they had occasion to open the cupboard in which they kept their jewels and valuables; and setting aside a small case, which contained the ornaments they intended to wear that day, they left the door open and came out in the front room where they saw Jal and welcomed him. A few minutes after the repast was over, leaving Jal alone in the dining-room, they went to the cook-room to give certain orders for the day. On their return they found Jal up and ready to depart. He was pressed to remain but said he could not do so without offending his professors. They subsequently learnt that



it being a Thursday the St. Xavier's College which the accused attended was closed. After Jal's departure their attention was drawn to the door of the cupboard. They looked for the case of ornaments and found that it was not there. They felt sure it must have been abstracted by some one from the open cupboard. They suspected Jal with whose behaviour they had very grave reasons to be dissatisfied for some time past. They had no reason to suspect their servant Rama who was the only servant that was allowed to enter the room in which the cupboard containing the valuables stood and that too during cleaning hours only, which were late in the afternoon. They suspected Thrithi of aiding and abetting in the offence. She was now spoiling the boy as their parents had done before. Besides she (Thrithi) having lost her parents and gone blind had been reduced to serious straits and must want money. They the complainants had to make a hard fight with themselves before they could apply for the search warrant. It was in the interest of the accused themselves, however, that they at last made up their mind to do so. They were lone ladies and had no body to advise them.

The Magistrate here remarked that the complainant could not be a widow, as she did not wear the widow's weeds and enquired if her husband did not live with her and help her. The husband, Mr. Ardeshir who was present in the court, came forward at these words and said that he did live under the same roof with his wife but that unluckily his wife always took him to be dead, and though he was invariably present at the house in flesh and blood his wife always marked him absent in the home muster-roll. This evoked a loud laugh, which could not be suppressed until the *chaprasi*¹ cried 'cheep, cheep,' 'order order'.

The written complaint then proceeded to say that the complainants took it that if the search were successful and if they got back

¹ A court orderly.

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their valuables the matter would end there. As it turned out, however, it having been laid in the hands of the police, a police prosecution had to ensue.

Mr. Macdermott then said that he had been asked by the complainants to bring to the notice of His Worship that Mr. Jamshed Aga, advocate, who had appeared on behalf of the accused, was betrothed to one of the complainants—Bai Sherbanoo, that there was great friction between the parties and the complainants would be glad if the Magistrate could see his way to call upon the accused to place their defence in some other hands. The Magistrate expressed his surprise that the complainants should have preferred such a request. Mr. Aga was a very honourable member of the Bar and quite within his rights in undertaking the defence.

Mr. Aga then requested the Magistrate to grant witness summonses against the following :—Mr. Ardeshir Dalal and his daughter Roshan, Mr. and Mrs. Bahadurshah, Mr. and Mrs. Meheloogi, Miss Macgregor, Ayah Candida and Mr. Rustom Delaver. The Magistrate asked if the senior complainant's husband did not intend to depose on her behalf. He the Magistrate presumed that he was there on behalf of his wife and elder daughter. The husband replied that His Worship's presumption was not correct. He intended to depose on behalf of the accused. He would have liked to be neutral and to depose on neither side but his conscience dictated to him otherwise. If he could help it he would not depose in any court of law on this benighted earth. He would only leave it to the Lord to decide between himself and his family on the day of universal justice and mercy. There was another prolonged and hearty laugh, which required a louder *cheep, cheep* and a threat from the Magistrate to clear the court before it could be subdued.

Mr. Aga then said that the father and daughter would be most important witnesses in the case. This exasperated the complainants. The senior complainant so far forgot herself as to say that Mr. Aga



was mad. Roshan was her daughter, she was under age, and Mr. Aga had no right to ask her to depose on their side. The second complainant said that it was a fraud, a vulgar trick, a stratagem. His Worship ordered the complainants on pain of being charged with contempt of court to hold their peace. He then asked Mr. Aga to finish what he had to say.

“Your Worship,” said the advocate, “I have pondered over this matter deeply and anxious as I am to save Miss Roshan from the displeasure of her mother and sister, of which we all had a foretaste here, I cannot dispense with her evidence, as it will, I feel sure, throw important light and assist the court materially in unravelling the mystery of this marvellous prosecution. I would exhort the court to impress it on the complainants to let the young lady remain at their house under the eye of her father, and not to molest her or treat her cruelly or unmercifully.” He further said that he was in a position to show that Miss Roshan was anything but a favourite of the mother and the daughter, that she had all along been very harshly treated and that the prospect of her saying things on the side of the accused might aggravate the roughness of the treatment that was usually meted out to her. His Worship said that all he could do at present was to order witness summonses to be issued against Mr. Ardeshir, Miss Roshan and the other parties named by Mr. Aga. There was no charge of cruelty or rough treatment of Roshan then before him and he could not therefore make any order in that matter. He did not think respectable ladies of the birth and position of Bai Meherbanoo and Bai Sherbanoo could so far forget themselves as to ill-treat the child. But if otherwise, the father could exercise his authority and protect her until the storm had blown over. Mr. Ardeshir was heard to murmur that if the Magistrate knew the two women as well as he Ardeshir did he would never have said what he had just said. It was all he could do to guard his own skin and the responsibility of Roshan’s safety would surely crush him. There was

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something in the man's look so piteous that pity took the place of laughter.

Bails were then applied for by Mr. Aga on behalf of Jal and Thriti. After some discussion they were granted by the Magistrate under the peculiar circumstances of the case. Bahadurshah and Meheloogi stood substantial bails. The case was then adjourned.

So ended the newspaper reports, which ran under specially big and sensational headings.



CHAPTER XXVII

PROSECUTION OR PERSECUTION ?

*"What mighty magic can assuage
A woman's envy and a bigot's rage?"*

GRANVILLE.

WHEN Mr. Modi's court sat on Saturday following it was crowded to the very door. At the last hearing he had stated that this would be the first case he would take in hand that day and that he would give it a full day's hearing. Full two hours before he took his seat, throngs of anxious spectators, curiosity-mongers and idlers began to come in; and when the time for the hearing arrived there was room for no more. A fever of excitement and anxiety prevailed; and there was a continuous buzz all about the place like a disturbed wasps' nest or a rookery on a huge scale. But this was only short-lived; for when the proceedings commenced there was a breathless silence all round.

After Mr. Macdermott and Khan Bahadur Juseb, came in Meharbanoo and Sherbanoo. They were in close converse with one Mr. Khanderao Madherao Khatkhate, a Maratha Hindu pleader of His Majesty's High Court of Judicature, who expected to be dubbed a Rao Bahadur these ten long years and more, looked for the welcome news in the papers every succeeding New Year's Day and King's Birthday, and being disappointed hoped and hoped and hoped in vain for the best. To his mind the Rao Bahadurship was a stepping-stone to the Magisterial Bench, on which vacancies occurred now and then. Now and again he cast a furtive and envious glance or two at Mr. Modi, who though a Parsi and much his junior, had the good fortune to ascend the



Bench. Mr. Khatkate never could think that any one, much less a junior, could be better fitted for the Bench than himself, particularly if he belonged to a nation other than his own. So he put down every senior or junior's rise to the credit of petticoat or back-stair influence or wire-pulling. He had so much faith in the efficacy of these ingredients that he never missed a single opportunity of giving them a trial. As ill-luck would have it, however, the petticoat peached, the stairs proved slippery or the wire broke; and Mr. Khatkate's hopes remained unrealised. The present case being a most interesting one, Mr. Khatkate thought, it would bring him name and fame and leave him only one step farther from the Bench and two from the Rao Bahadurship. So he undertook to lead the prosecution almost for the honour of it. If he won the case, which he felt sure of doing, he would get the considerable sum of rupees fifty for his trouble. If he did not, it would only be because the Magistrate was prejudiced and favoured the accused. These things did happen, Mr. Khatkate said, for after all Magistrates are but human beings.

Come what may, he had determined on this occasion to be at his best and to make an impression. He was clean-shaven. His head seemed as if it had just come out from a boiling-pan. Not a vestige of hair was within nose-range or adorned his face. Even the eyebrows were carefully shaved. His dress consisted of a second-hand tailcoat, a *surval* or close-fitting pants and a black cap which seemed to be a compromise between an Indian *topee* and a felt hat but which looked more like the latter. A worn-out shirt and jacket and an antiquated little tie, the colour of which it was difficult to distinguish, formed the inside adornments. Country-made boots and white stockings, much smeared and service-worn, graced the somewhat uncouth length of his long legs and feet.

Thrithi, Jal, Ardesbir, Magdalene, Mr. Bahadurshah, Roshan, and Shirin came in with Mr. Aga, the advocate. They looked resigned but resolute. Their appearance made a deep impression on the



spectators and on the court, who could not remove their eyes from them. Something told them that the young brother and sister were about to be immolated at the altar of family feud and foibles.

Roshan was a sight to see and admire. Slender, tall and well-featured, she had a grace and dignity of her own. On this occasion she was dressed in a plain but elegant blue silken *sari* with a border to match, the *sor* or upper end of which set off the beauty of her head and face and gracefully relieved part of her jet-black silken hair, which it would have been cruelty to cover up. There were traces of recent tears on her cheeks, which seemed to be well under her control now. Her gait was erect and her proud lips resolutely pursed. One could read in her face tender commiseration for injured innocence, mournful sorrow for the sins of the misguided and a strong determination to say the truth for the sake thereof.

The female group on the side of the defence stood out in glaring contrast to the two women on the side of the prosecution. The contrast was so vivid that it reminded one of the variegated opinion expressed by poets of the character of this tender part of humanity. Some have called women faithful, some unfaithful; some loyal, some disloyal; some moral, some immoral; some selfish, some selfless; some harsh, some gentle; some devoted, some fickle; some grateful, some ungrateful. Some have said that woman is the prop and pride of life; others have pronounced that she is the bane of life. Luckily for humanity there is the balance of power and equilibrium in the quality and character of women as in all things else in nature.

"Your Worship," said Mr. Macdermott, "Mr. Khatkhate has been engaged by Mrs. Dalal and her daughter on their behalf."

The Magistrate's attention was for the first time drawn to that learned limb of the law.



"Mr. Khatkhate," he said, "you have forgotten to remove your head-dress, though you are in English costume."

That learned individual who had a peculiar twang in his speech and spoke a little like a Spaniard and more like a German and whose speech we do not wish to stultify, replied :

"I beg Yar Worrorshipful Worrorship's most aabject and aapologetic pardon. I am in mourning, Yar Worrorship. My *gharwalli* died a week ago. I have clean-shaved in accordance with religion. My head is baald; and it would nat look nice to expose that to Yar Hanar's worrorshipful eyes."

"This is the first time I hear, Mr. Khatkhate, that you Hindus go into mourning for your landladies," said the Magistrate.

"Yar Worrorship, we cal our wives *gharwallis*." (Loud and uncontrollable laughter.)

"The court is sorry for your loss, Mr. Khatkhate; but it must ask you to remove that thing on your head. All it can do is to allow you, if you so desire, to fold your *ooperna*¹ round your head."

There were peals of laughter, which were controlled with difficulty. Taking advantage of this, Mr. Khatkhate removed his cap and tied up the *ooperna* over his pate.

"Yar Worrorship," he then proceeded to say, "I have a request to make on behalf of these highly respectable, influential, and val-to-do ladies, before I proceed with the prasecution. My clients desire to have only five minutes' taak with the witness Roshanbai; and Yar Worrorship will kindly make an arder to thiat effect."

"Miss Roshan," asked the Magistrate, "do you wish to see your mother in private?"

Without a moment's hesitation, the witness replied in English in fine clear accents and intonation : "Sir, I do not. I think I had better not."

"You see, Mr. Khatkhate, Miss Roshan does not wish to talk to

¹ A long white cloth band usually thrown over the shoulders by Hindus, and flowing downwards to the knees.



her mother ; and as she is here for the accused the court has no jurisdiction to force her to do so," said the Magistrate.

"Yar Worrorsnip," urged the man of law, "when you know al Yar Worrorsnip will change yar mind. A serias frad has been cancacted against these hanarable ladies. After the first hearing of the case vas over, Bai Meherbai's husband viary daaringly absconded the witness Roshan and concealed her and himself in some place unknown to these highly hanarable ladies. Yar Worrorsnip, this is disgraceful and viary unfair to my clients."

"I would warn you, Mr. Khatkhate, not to take up the time of the court in this way. You should also be very careful in the choice of your words. As the complainant's husband and her daughter Roshan wish to depose on the other side, I think they were quite right in not giving the complainants an opportunity of talking them over."

Mr. Khatkhate thereupon opened the examination-in chief. Bai Meherbanoo was the first to be examined. The Parsi prayer-book—Avesta—was handed to her. She held it in her hand and swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, in the sight of God and man.

She was not a bad-looking woman. She was medium-sized. Her person was carefully preserved, as much as to say, see, don't I take care of it ? Her head was well-poised and erect ; her features good. Her face and mouth were alike so ; but they were hard-set and rigid such as bespoke firmness and resolve, selfishness and self-will, even in a bad cause. She had a good voice and spoke freely and unnerved. Her dress though somewhat showy was in keeping with her age. Altogether she was a woman difficult to read, especially for those who did not know her. Those who knew her knew well that her life was and would be one long and wrong regret for her marriage with good Mr. Ardeshir. It was not infrequently that she cursed her parents for it. Ardeshir was not the sort of husband

she would have picked out for herself ; she could have, she thought, made a better match.

Mr. Khatkhate asked the Magistrate if he could give a chair to the complainant. In support of his request he said she was an elderly and a high-born lady, very influential and very rich, and the Magistrate would kindly see his way to comply with his request. The Magistrate replied that he was very sorry he could not do so. The lady looked pretty strong and quite able to go through her evidence in a standing pose. Besides the court made no difference between silk and cotton.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—Meherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal.

Q.—You know both the accused ?

A.—Yes, I have known them ever since they were babes. They are my sister's children.

Q.—Do they nat live in the same house with you ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How lang ?

A.—For the last seven years and more.

Q.—Do you charge them any riant ?

A.—Yes, I have been charging them rupees twenty only for rooms, which are now fully worth rupees forty and more per month.

Q.—Have you nat been on good terms with them ever since they have lived with you ?

A.—Yes, for a long time ; but they have been trying to seek quarrel with me on one pretext or another ever since they have been asked to give up the rooms in my house.

Q.—So you have asked them to give up the rooms ; why ?

A.—Increasing expenses, dearness of food and living, the prospect of getting my daughters married and such like considerations have compelled me to give them notice to quit.

Q.—When vas the naticce given to them ?



A.—Six months ago.

Q.—And why is it they have not yet left ?

A.—Owing to my sister's death I have not been very pressing.

Q.—Does your husband Mr. Ardeshir contribute to the household expenses ?

Mr. Jamshed Aga interposed that this question was irrelevant and that the Magistrate would kindly disallow it. The Magistrate said, Mr. Khatkhate might put the question in a different shape.

Q.—To whom does the house belong ? Does it belong to your husband or is it joint property ?

A.—It is my own property, handed to me by a distant relative of mine who had adopted me as a daughter.

Q.—Are you able to defray your expenses independently of your husband ?

A.—It is all I can do to do so.

Q.—What do you know of the 3rd day of the current month ?

A.—It was my daughter Roshan's birthday. We felt very lonely because of the absence of my husband and my little daughter Roshan who had perforce to go to school. We naturally did not like to dine alone on such a day ; and my daughter Shera pressing I sent my servant Rama to invite Thruti and Jal to dine with us. We had plenty of victuals ; and on such a day we did not like to throw them out of the window.

The Magistrate :—Why did you not give it to the beggars outside or send it to the Poor Parsis' *Dhurumshallah*¹ ? Are you not charitable ? (Loud laugh.)

Meherbanoo :—I hate beggars and cannot bear the sight of them.

The Magistrate :—Hatred is hateful ; it is a sin. Is it not ? (Peals of laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Your Worship, my client is giating nar-

¹Asylum for the poor.



vous at Yar Worrorsnip's remarks. She is nat aacustomed to atendance in cart.

The Magistrate :—Well, let her be used to it then.

Mr. Khatkhate :—So you sent yar servant Rama to invite Thriti and Jal ?

A.—Yes ; and as they did not come my daughter Sherbanoo offered to go and invite them personally.

Q.—Did they accept the invitation then ?

A.—Thrity did not ; but Jal came up soon after.

Q.—Vat haapened then ?

A.—We dined,—Jal, Shera and I. After dinner Shera and I had occasion to go to the cook-room.

Q.—How lang vas it before both of you returned to the dining room ?

A.—About four or five minutes.

The Magistrate :—Did you look at your watch ?

A.—No ; but I can say so much time must have passed.

The Magistrate made a note of this.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Where vas Jal when you returned ?

A.—He was in the dining-room.

Q.—Sitting or standing ?

A.—Standing and preparing to leave.

Q.—Vat did he look like ? Vas he compased ?

A.—He looked very nervous and excited, said it was time for him to go to college and though pressed to stay insisted on leaving immediately.

Q.—Did you natice anything unusual in his person or demeanour ?

A.—Yes ; one of his coat-pockets looked puffed up and he had his right hand over it.

Q.—Did you suspect anything wrang then ?

A.—No ; not then. But it seems to me now that he had concealed our jewel-case in his coat-pocket.



The Magistrate :—Why could it not be a plaitain or an apple? Boyish appetite disdains them not. Mr. Khatkhate, were you not fond of them when you were a boy? (Peals of laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yes, Yar Worrorsnip; but I did not steal them.

The Magistrate :—But what is there to show that Jal being poor did not steal them? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate then requested Mr. Macdermott to produce the case of valuables and to show it to the Magistrate.

The Magistrate to the witness :—What sort of coat had Jal on when he dined with you?

A.—Rather an oldish-looking coat of dark merino, with side pockets.

The Magistrate here asked the *chaprasi* to ask Master Jal to step into the court-room. Then addressing the witness he inquired if the coat which Jal then wore was the same that he had put on on Roshan's birthday. The witness being confused looked at Mr. Khatkhate as if to read the reply in his face. At a warning look from the Magistrate Mr. Khatkhate turned away from his client. The witness then replied that it looked much like the same coat but that she was not sure. Mr. Aga suggested that the Magistrate would kindly allow the coat to be kept in the court, as he thought it would be of great use to him in the complainant's cross-examination. The Magistrate agreeing, Mr. Aga dispatched his servant to run to Jal's house and get another coat for him.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat made you think the cias vas stolen by Jal? Why could it not be one of yar own men?

The Magistrate :—Mr. Ardeshir, for instance. (Roars of laughter.)

A.—Our servants are old and trustworthy and have orders to enter the private apartments at particular hours of the day only.

The Magistrate :—Servants are after all but servants. Don't they break orders oftener than they obey them? (Laughter again.)

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Q.—When did you make up yar mind that Jal vas the culprit ?

Mr. Aga objected to this question. He urged that Mr. Khatkhate was practically putting the words in his client's mouth that Jal was the culprit. The Magistrate stated that he could not allow the question to be put.

Mr. Khatkhate here said that Meherbanoo's examination was over. Sherbanoo was then called in.

Her appearance and manners were quite her own. It is said that the apparel oft proclaims the man. This was true in Sherbanoo's case. But we would go a step further and say that it proclaims a woman's mind, manners and tastes, in a marked degree. Her dress was in anything but good taste. It showed as if she thought she was going to a wedding or to an at-home. She wore jewels to show that she was determined to empty not only her own jewel-cases but those of her mother to boot. Her raiments were gaudy. Her features were not naturally unattractive but artificial aids had rendered them so. There was something in her face that created repugnance, as much as to say please don't approach us, we would rather not have anything to do with you. In simpler dress, she would certainly have looked better and much less uninviting.

We must now record her examination.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—Shera Dalal.

The Magistrate :—The complainant must give her full name. What is her father's name ?

A.—My own name is Sherbanoo. I always sign myself Shera Dalal.

The Magistrate :—But the court must know your full name. What is your father's name ?

A.—I don't call him my father.

The Magistrate :—But the court knows you have a father and the court must have his name.

A.—If the court knows it, why am I compelled to mention it ?



The Magistrate :—If you don't mention it, you will come in for contempt of the court and will be dealt with accordingly.

Mr. Khatkhate seemed as if he would say something to his client. But at a warning look from the Magistrate he abstained from doing so.

Sherbanoo being thus compelled said, "if you must have his name, well, it is Ardeshir."

The Magistrate :—Then I note that your full name is Sherbanoo Ardeshir Dalal. (The spectators here chuckled.)

Q.—You live with yar mother ?

A.—Yes; from my birth. She has never let me out of her sight.

The Magistrate :—And you have never been out of her mind.

At this the second complainant became furious and looked daggers at the Magistrate, who smiled but did not say anything further.

Q.—Vat do you know of the 3rd day of the current month ?

The second complainant here related all that her mother had stated in reply to similar questions that were put to her by her vakil.

Q.—Vat were yar relations with the accused until the afence vas committed ?

A.—Very friendly on our side; very unfriendly on theirs.

Q.—Did you give them caz to be unfriendly ?

A.—None that I know of.

Q.—You are an aducated young lady ?

A.—Well, I suppose so.

The Magistrate :—She looks to be too too educated.
(Laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate, taking this to be a compliment, said, "and viary palished too, Yar Hanar." (Loud laugh accompanied by a clapping of hands. *Chip, Chip*, from the *chaprasis*.)

"Over polished," said the Magistrate.

SUBLIME THOUGH BLIND

Q.—How were you received by the accused when you went to invite them ?

Mr. Aga said the question was not quite relevant but the Magistrate allowed it.

A.—Not as I should have been.

The Magistrate :—This is no answer. The witness must be more clear.

The witness :—Am I bound to do so ? I am a lady. The court should be more courteous to me. It should not be hard on ladies.

The Magistrate :—But when ladies choose to go to court, the court has a duty to perform and perform it this court shall. It therefore orders you to answer your pleader's question more clearly.

The complainant stamped her fist on the rail of the witness-box so furiously that it broke her glass-bangles. But she answered without more ado.

“They received me haughtily; almost rudely.”

The Magistrate :—Did they abuse you ?

The witness glared at the Magistrate.

A.—I think they did. But what they said was in such low tones that I did not catch the exact words.

The Magistrate reminded the witness that she was on oath and must be very careful as to all her statements.

Q.—Did they accept your invitation ?

A.—Yes ; the boy did ; but the girl did not. She played the high lady with me.

The Magistrate :—Not so much as you do with the court. (The spectators were convulsed with laughter.)

Q.—Jal dined with you. What happened then ?

The complainant here related all that her mother had said on the same subject.

Q.—Has there been any enmity between you and the accused ?

A.—None on our side. It was all on theirs. They have always been jealous because they are not like us.



The Magistrate :—What do you mean by 'not like us' ?—As clever and gorgeous or as rich and proud ?

The complainant having kept quiet, the Magistrate said she must answer the question on pain of fine.

A.—I don't know.

The Magistrate repeated his warning.

A.—Not so well-behaved and good as ourselves.

Q.—Vat do you think is Mr. Aga's aabject in taking up the caz of the aacused ?

The Magistrate at once overruled the pleader.

Q.—Have you anything mar to say ?

The Magistrate :—It is for you to extract it from her.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorsnip, I have nothing mar to ask her.

The Magistrate :—Well, then I note that your examination of the second complainant is over.

The second complainant then breezed out of the witness-box as grandly as she had sailed in.



CHAPTER XXVIII

MR. KHATKHATE'S KHATPAT¹: THE PROCEEDINGS PROCEED*"The dulness of the fool is the whetstone of his wits."*

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the court sat again, it was even more crowded than before. A distinct and noticeable feature about it was the predominance of Parsi audience, which included a goodly number of the weaker vessel.

Wherever these Parsi weaker ones go, they carry grace and add but *eclat* to the assemblage. They are attractive and carry attraction in their train. Their presence carries charm, grace and dignity with it. Their dress, buoyancy and demeanour rivet attention. The only regrettable point about it is that of late they have taken to be here, there and everywhere. They rush in quite impervious to the danger of being crushed or hemmed in. It is not a wonder then to see them often so hemmed in as to be a spoil to ungentlemanliness and indecorum. There is not a meeting or a *tamasha*, a gathering or a lecture, that is without them. A Magistrate's court is hardly a place for courteous or courtly reception of the fair sex. In justice, however, to the female element to which we now refer, it may be said that the exceptional and unusual nature of the case was a justifiable excuse for its presence in Mr. Modi's court on that day.

Long before the court hour, and even after it, people of all communities, caste, colour and creed continued to invade the precincts of the court and its compound. The interest in the case was

¹ Originally meaning 'agitation,' hence any unreasonable talk or unsound arguments. A war of words.



considerably intensified ; and the excitement engendered thereby had reached its climax.

Punctually at the hour of 11 A.M. the court-criers sent forth the usual warning-cry of *chip, chip*. The Magistrate's presence was then announced ; and he took his seat under the overwrought and anxious eyes and the buzzing and humming of the all-expectant human bees. The proceedings then commenced. A crude and clumsy figure in front of the complainants and by the side of the legal members of the court, arose as clumsily and was about to say something when the Magistrate looked wonderingly at Mr. Macdermott and enquired where Mr. Khatkhaté was and whether the complainants had put up another pleader in his stead. If his eyes did not deceive him, it was surely not Mr. Khatkhaté. As a matter of fact, however, the figure on which the magisterial eyes had landed was that self-same learned individual in flesh and blood.

Before Mr. Macdermott could reply, that gentleman himself said :

"Yar Worrorsnip, I am austanished that yar learned eyes should be so deceived. It is yar humble servant Khatkhaté himself."

The Magistrate and the crowd were surprise-stricken. They did not know if to laugh or to cry. At last the Magistrate found words to say :

"O, then it's you, Mr. Khatkhaté. I took it to be your ghost."

Peal upon peal of laughter. Even the Magistrate was a party to it. Even Mr. Khatkhaté, not catching the pointed raillery involved in it, was led away and joined the merriment. When the convulsion was over, he managed to say, but not before the Magistrate had put up his folded kerchief to his lips to prevent a recurrence of the hilarious feeling :

"Yar Worrorsnip, I have adaapted two castooms. I usually.

practise in the civil carts, I mean the small cases cart. This is the first time I have been in a criminal cart. I thank the Lord that he has given me an opportunity of appearing before your learned Worshipship."

I leave the reader to imagine the effect this singular speech had on the human contents of the cart. Mr. Khatkhate was on this occasion dressed in a long old fashioned white coat and a white *dhotie* or loin cloth somewhat soiled. There were no stockings and no boots. Their place was taken by *jodas*.¹ As if to avenge himself on the Magistrate for compelling him to go bare-headed on the previous day, his learned head was environed in a big and cumbersome white *dupatta*.² To save his striking personality his curious-looking face had made fresh acquaintance with the razor.

The name of Mr. Erach Aspendiar Aga, one of the witnesses on the side of the complainants, was then called out. He was a middle-sized, thick-set, wheat-coloured man, dressed or rather overdressed in up-to-date English costume. His thick black hair, which appeared to be specially trimmed for the occasion, was plucked on to his precious pate with an extra dose of pomatum. His nose was corked; his cheeks puffed; and his face somewhat swollen, which indicated familiarity with strong drinks. His eyes were small, keen and cunning. There was something in him that at once repelled and rejected. Such was the individual; and yet it was him that the highly placed and up-to-date Sherbanoo preferred to the model man Aga. It is one of God's own secrets, which reminds us of what the poet has said, that 'the proper study of mankind is man'. All that our experience has been able to scan is that a bad man generally prefers a bad woman and a bad woman a bad man, though it not infrequently happens that a bad man runs after a good woman and a bad woman entraps a good man.

¹ Country-made shoes.

² A long white band folded round the head to serve as a turban or *pugdi*.



But to come to the mighty man's munching verbiage. He told the Magistrate that though the witness was an educated man he was rather nervous and wanted the interpreter to help him. This was allowed, the witness's examination being conducted partly in the tongue of the ruling race and partly in that of the country which is Gujarati.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—Erach Aspendiar Aga.

Q.—Vat is yar relationship to the accused's pleader ?

The Magistrate :—Counsel, if you please, Mr. Khatkhate.

Mr. Khatkhate :—I beg Yar Worrorsnip's most aabject and aapologatic pardon ; I meant aadvokiati.

The Magistrate :—You should proffer your apology to that gentleman there and not to me.

The legal luminary was confused. He looked from the Magistrate to the counsel and from the counsel to the Magistrate. When he managed to say something it was drowned in the huge laughter that the occurrence evoked.

Q.—Vat is yar relationship to the accused's counsel ?

A.—He is my cousin.

The Magistrate :—Are you related to the complainants ?

A.—Yes. The first complainant is my paternal aunt and the second complainant my cousin.

The Magistrate :—Are you related to the accused ?

A.—Yes. They are also my cousins.

The Magistrate :—Is there no further connection between you and the second accused Miss Thrithi ?

The witness looked confused, but said, "No."

The Magistrate :—Witness, you should remember you are on oath here ; you know, I mean connection from a matrimonial point of view.

A.—Well, if you must have it—

The Magistrate :—You are disrespectful to the court. It is

not a question of my having it but it is a question of your having it out.

A.—I am betrothed to the second accused.

The Magistrate noted the above questions and answers.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat do you know of the third day of the current month? Were you present at the complainants' house when the first accused committed the theft?

The Magistrate, correcting the pleader, said, 'is alleged to have committed the theft'.

A.—No, I was not. But I went there shortly after the accused left the complainants' quarters on that day and learnt all about it from the complainants.

Q.—And vat vas that al?

The witness here related what the complainants had told him about the theft.

Q.—Vat vas yar feeling when you heard it? Did you believe vat the complainants told you?

A.—Yes, I believed every word of it. I was roused and exasperated. My temper was up.

The Magistrate :—Would you have killed the accused if you had got hold of him? (Laughter.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Had you any doubt about the guilt of the accused?

A.—None whatever.

Q.—Why nat?

A.—Because my belief is my belief.

The Magistrate :—Just as my ship my order. Witness, you are insulting your pleader by not giving a direct answer to his question. I order you to give it.

A.—I believed it and do believe it, because they are ill-bred and ill-brought-up.

The Magistrate :—Why do you think them to be so?

A.—Because I know and feel it.

The Magistrate :—What is your standard of education and



bringing-up? I don't ask about breeding, because the accused and you belong to the same family.

A.—The court is taxing my patience.

The Magistrate :—You are taxing the patience of the court by evading its questions. The court wants to tax the truth of your statements.

A.—My ideas of education and bringing-up are my own. How can I describe them?

The Magistrate :—Well, then, what is your own education?

A.—I ... I ... have studied upto the English Seventh Standard. I failed in the Matric.

The Magistrate :—Failure is no qualification. By whom were you brought up?

A.—I was brought up by my widowed mother.

The Magistrate :—Are not widowed mothers known for their over-partiality to their offsprings and for spoiling them?

The witness stamped his foot furiously on the ground but said nothing.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorsnip, the witness here is a viary good jiantliman but somevat nervous and excitable. If the cart keep questioning him it will spaail his case.

The Magistrate :—That's the court's business, Mr. Khatkhate. You forget you are insulting the court.

Mr. Khatkhate was about to ask a long pardon but the Magistrate stopped it.

Q.—You know the first complainant's husband?

A.—I think I am supposed to know him, especially as God has willed him to be my *fua*.¹ (Roars of laughter.)

The Magistrate :—But you can break His commandments and disown him. (Uncontrollable laughter.)

Q.—Is he not on viary biad terms with you and his wife and his elder daater? Does he nat hiarass them and you?

¹ The husband of one's paternal aunt.

Mr. Aga observed that the pleader was practically prompting the witness.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, you can put your question in another shape.

Mr. Khatkhate :—You have no reason to dislike yar *fua*?

A.—I have every reason to do so. He behaves like a beast towards us.

The Magistrate :—Why do you say 'us'?

A.—I mean towards myself and towards the complainants.

The Magistrate :—Are you not a match for him? (Loud laugh.)

A.—But I have not the power and the means to oppress, which that individual holds.

The Magistrate :—Perhaps you are undervaluing your resources. You may be oppressing some one less important. (Roars of laughter.)

Q.—The learned counsel there (pointing to Mr. Aga) is said to be betrayed to the second complainant. Do you know this to be true?

A.—I know that to be true. But I don't know that he is learned. That is still to be proved.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you are insulting the advocate. Your pleader did not ask an imperfectly educated man to sit in judgment on his learned friend.

Then without waiting for the witness's reply he asked Mr. Khatkhate what he was driving at by asking such questions to the witness.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Hanar, I want to prove bias and animus.

The Magistrate :—But you must cut it short.

Q.—Do you think that that little lady Roshanbai has appeared as a witness on the other side of her own accord?

A.—Certainly not. She would never have done it, had she



not been instigated and put up by her wily father.

The Magistrate :—Witness, you must desist from applying such wily adjectives to the witnesses on the other side or I shall be compelled to punish you.

Q.—Vat is yar aabject in helping the complainants in this caz ? Do you do it of yar own free will or only becaz they have asked you to do it ?

A.—I do it of my own free will, because they have all along been very kind to me, helped me in my difficulties and because the man who should have stood by their side has mercilessly deserted them.

Mr. Khatkhate here declared that he wanted the witness no more, and the witness thereupon tramped out pompously with an air of doubtful triumph. The next to be called in was the complainants' servant Rama.

This man belonged to a sect known as *Lallyas*, who are a lower class of servants, mostly household drudges. They speak corrupt Gujarati and are thoroughly illiterate. His evidence had of course to be interpreted.

Q.—Yar name ?

A.—*Are sab* (O, Sir), what have you got to do with a poor man's name ?

Q.—But you must give yar name ?

A.—My name is Rama ; if you like, *Chhipa* ; if you like, *Bhulia*.

Q.—How do yar *Baisahabs* cal you ?

A.—*Baisabs* call me Rama.

Q.—Vat is yar father's name ?

A.—O, Sir, please don't do *coolam*¹ on me. I will give his name but never my wife's. (Loud laugh.) My mother's husband's name was Rakhma.

Q.—Yar age ?

¹ Oppression.



A.—Age? How am I to know it? I was born five years after my eldest brother's death and two years before my sister's birth. (Roars of laughter.)

The Magistrate remarked that Rama's age was not of any consequence and that Mr. Khatkhate ought to know better at his age.

Q.—How laang have you been in the service of the complainants?

A.—May be three years, may be two years, may be ten months.

Q.—Do you remember the third day of the current month which was Roshanbai's birthday?

A.—How should I not?

Q.—Do you remember vat haapened that day?

A.—Yes. I swept the floor; I cleaned the furniture, washed the utensils, ate, drank and slept. (Loud laugh.)

Q.—Vat else did you do?

A.—How could I tell? You ask me and I will answer.

Q.—Did yar *Baisahebs* send you down to invite somebody to partake of the dinner?

A.—Yes, such a thing did occur. The *Baisabs* sent me down to Thritibai and Jal.

Q.—Vat far?

A.—To ask them to go up and dine with them.

Q.—Did they go?

A.—No. They said they could not do so.

Q.—Did anyone else go to invite them?

A.—How can I say? In our country such invitations are proffered only once. (Roars of laughter.)

Q.—Viary well. Did you see Thritibai and Jal dine with yar mistresses?

A.—Don't you know Thritibai is blind? How could she go? But Jalbaba did dine with my ladies.



Q.—Vat haapened after the dinner vas over ?

A.—What a question ? You seem never to have been at a dinner. I gave them ice, soda, *limblet* (lemonade), rice-pudding and fruit.

Q.—Vat haapened then ?

A.—Then all was over. I helped to clear the table and being very hungry helped myself with the remains. No want of *khana* in this house, Sir, plenty to eat ; plenty to eat.

The Magistrate :—And not plenty to drink ? (Loud laugh.)

Rama :—What does the *Bara Sab* say ?

The Interpreter :—The *Saheb* wants to know if you don't get plenty of drink there.

A.—The *Baisab* does give us *bevda*¹ on birthdays and new year days. I had plenty of *limblet* on that day and plenty of *bevda* too.

The Magistrate :—After the midday feast attended by Jalbaba was over ?

The *Lallya* was so pleased that *Lallya-like* he answered pompously, “ O, yetch. I took some from the *Mhota Bai*,² told *Chera Bai*³ I had none from her, who thereupon gave me two glassfuls. The cook and the ayah gave me some from their own.”

The Magistrate :—And you kept quite sober ?

A.—How could I, Sir ? Was it not a day to eat, drink and make merry ? I got a little drunk and being a singer kept singing.

The Magistrate :—Did not your *Baisaheb* blame you ?

A.—Of course she did but I was too far gone to care for it.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, I have noted the drink business. You may now proceed with the examination.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat haapened then ?

A.—The *Mhota Bai* called me to the dining-room and asked me to wait there till she and *Chera Bai* returned from the cook-room where they were wanted by the cook.

¹ Country-made strong drink.

² The elder mistress of the house.

³ The younger mistress of the house.

Q.—Vat haapened niast ?

A.—Yah, how long am I to go on answering you ? There's all the sweeping and cleaning waiting for me there.

Q.—You need nat be aufraid. The *Baisaheb* will nat blame you, and I will nat be viary lang now. Vat haapened niast ?

Rama seemed to be quite at sea at this question. He scratched his head and seemed as if in doubt what to say. At last gathering his wits he answered :

“ O yes, yes, I remember. Jalbaba got up from his chair and went into the room.”

Q.—Vat room ?

A.—Next room. You don't understand room ?

Q.—How many rooms open on to the dining-room ?

A.—Two on one side and one on the other.

The Magistrate :—What are these three rooms ?

A.—One is a dressing-room, one a big bathroom and one the *Baisab's* own room.

The Magistrate :—Then which room did he go in ?

The *Lallya* seemed confused again but soon answered—

“ He went into the bathroom.”

The Magistrate noted this down.

Mr. Khatkate to the witness :—Is there not a dar-way between the bathroom and the *Baisaheb's* private room where she keeps her cupboard of arnaments and her safe ?

Mr. Aga :—Mr. Khatkate is prompting the witness.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Interpreter, please ask the witness if there is a door-way to the bathroom.

The witness :—Yes, there is another doorway between the bathroom and the *Baisaheb's* own room.

Mr. Khatkate :—Vas it laacked or open when Jalbaba went into the bathroom ?

A.—Yes — No — Oh yes, it was open — No — it must be locked.



Q.—Do you know vat yar *Baisaheb* keeps in the private room?

A.—There is a writing table, there is a sofa, there is a safe, a cupboard, also her *sari* and her blouse and slipper and some chairs.

Q.—Did you not tell Jalbaba he should not go into the private room?

A.—How could I? He went into the bathroom. Yes—Yes—I told him he should not go into the private room.

Q.—Can you tell us why he went into the bathroom?

A.—Why? Likely because he wanted to clean out his mouth. Likely because he wanted a draught of cold water from the *mutka*.¹ Our *mutka* is a Surti *mutka*; it keeps the water so cool. (Vivacious hilarity.)

Q.—Vat dar did he come out of? The dar of the bathroom or the dar of the private room?

Another scratch of the head and then an answer:

“Door of the private room.”

The Magistrate to the Interpreter:—Tell the man to think well before he replies.

The Interpreter:—You remember, witness, you are on oath here. We want to know if Jalbaba came out of the bathroom door or from the private room door.

A.—Why do you bother a poor man so? Has not he enough troubles of his own? His little girl died two months ago. His wife and her mother-in-law worry him and the former fixes her nails in his flesh and tears it out.

The Interpreter:—The court is sorry for your troubles. But you must answer the question clearly.

A.—Well then, I don't know. May be he came out of the bathroom door, may be he came out of the private room door.

The Magistrate noted this.

Mr. Khatkhate:—Where were you standing when Jalbaba came out of the bathroom? Were you facing the bathroom and the

¹ An earthen pot to hold water, made in Surat.

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the private room or the *Baisaheb's* dressing-room on the other side?

A.—I don't quite remember. But I think I was facing the private room.

Q.—Did you suspect anything when Jalhaba came out of the bathroom?

A.—How could I? He is not a *chor* (thief). Yes—yes—I am told he is a *chor*.

The Magistrate :—Told by whom?

A.—By all in the house.

The Magistrate ?—All in the house? Did Ardeshir Sheth and Roshanbai tell you so,

A.—How could they? They are all fighting daily. Ardeshir Sheth and Roshanbai never speak to me except when they want me to do something for them. They don't like me.

The Magistrate :—You say they are all fighting. What do you mean by all. The cook and the ayah and the boy?

A.—O, you are so green. I mean the *Chheth Sab*, the *Baisab* and *Cherabai*.

The Magistrate :—Did they fight on Roshanbai's birthday also?

A.—O *yechh*, they fought and fought very loudly too. They never did like that before.

The Magistrate :—What did they fight about?

A.—O! the *Baisabs* wanted to send Roshanbai to school; the *Sethsab* would not have it. Then there was the *chori*.¹

The Magistrate :—What *chori*?

A.—The *chori* committed by Jalhaba.

The Magistrate to Mr. Khatkhate :—I am sorry, Mr. Khatkhate, to disturb you so often. But Rama though a servant is an important witness and besides he is such a troublesome witness for you that I should like to relieve you of the bother of his examination as much

¹ Theft.



as possible. (The spectators chuckled.)

Mr. Khatkhate felt very uneasy and thought as if he were sinking in the floor. He almost wished the floor would open and swallow him. His reverie was disturbed by the Magistrate who said he could now proceed with the examination.

Q.—Did you suspect anything when Jalbaba came out of the private room?

A.—I said it was well he came out of the room so soon for if the *Baisabs* had seen him coming out of the room they would have devoured him and me alive.

The Magistrate :—Are they cannibals? (Vociferous laughter, some clapping of hands and some cries of "To be sure they are, to be sure they are.")

Q.—How laang vas he before he came out of the room?

A.—As long as it takes to open the *mutka*, drink water from it and close it.

The Magistrate :—Did you hear Jal removing the plate from the *mutka* and replacing it? Is it a glass-plate or a copper plate?

A.—O, a thick glass plate, rather cracked and with a red border. The *Sab* knows such a plate when put over a *mutka* makes a noise.

The Magistrate :—And you heard the noise in the dining-room?

A.—To be sure I did. I am not deaf. I am a little lame. I had a fall when I was a boy and my right leg slightly drags. But I am such a fellow, I drag it. I am the master; not he. (Those in the room, Mr. Khatkhate including, were literally convulsed.)

Mr. Khatkhate :—Vat haapened then? Did you think Jalbaba had removed anything on the sly from the private room?

A.—How am I to know it? I do not know if the *kabat* were open or not. He had nothing in his hands but he may have had something in his pocket. I have not four eyes that I could look into his pocket.

The Magistrate :—Then you personally know nothing about the theft ?

A.—O, why not ? Did not the *Mhota Bai* and *Chota Bai*¹ tell me all about it after *Jalbaba* left ? They blamed me for being so careless, blamed me that I should have allowed him to go into the private room, said I would have to give evidence in the court and that they would dismiss me if I did not tell the truth here.

Mr. Khatkhate :—When did the *Baisahebs* return from the cook room ?

A.—As soon as *Jalbaba* returned to the dining-room.

Q.—Vat haapened niast ?

A.—*Jalbaba* said he was going. They pressed him to stay till tea-time but he would not. I was feeling very sleepy and being very anxious to lie down was preparing to leave the room when *Jalbaba* left.

Q.—Vas *Jalbaba* sitting or standing when the ladies returned to the dining-room ?

A.—O, to be sure, he was sitting.

Mr. Khatkhate said the examination was over and the witness was asked to leave the box. He was very nervous and shaky and looked as if he would fall. The *chaprasi* led him out of the room.

The examination-in-chief being now over, the proceedings were adjourned to the following day.

¹ The younger mistress of the house.



CHAPTER XXIX

MEHELOOJI IN BROWN STUDY

*"No profit grows, where is no pleasure ta'en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."*

SHAKESPEARE'S *The Taming of the Shrew*.

HAVE I told you that our friend Mr. Mehelooji was a wee bit of a philosopher and a little of a poet? I don't think I have. Well then, take him to be so and you will understand him better. You see him seated in his fine little library to-day, lost in meditation. A glass of fine milk-white toddy stood by him on a stand. It was so fresh that it was bubbling over. But he did not care for it.

To-day he was not his usual self; quiet, contented and considerate. To-day he was determined to look into the inmost recesses of his heart, determined to rummage his brains and to cudgel them for something he wanted to but could not solve; something which puzzled and annoyed him. Determined he was to turn his heart and head inside out. He was sitting to-day in judgment on himself. He was holding a mental court of enquiry of his own, wherein he himself was judge, jury and accused.

So far out with himself was he that he did not even notice the presence of his wife, who had walked in quietly to talk to him but seeing him lost in reverie had quietly seated herself in a corner of the room. From there she looked at her mate with her beautiful, large, dark orbs intently fixed on him. They seemed to say, I am anxious, husband mine, to share your woes and worries if you would only allow it. It was this lady's wont not to disturb her husband or interfere with his meditations or reading but to wait patiently until he was free to listen to her. Her husband was her

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friend, philosopher and guide. In one respect she was in nowise changed. She loves him, loved him, loved him first and last, and will love him on for ever ;—now she knows, she will love him always. She had no reason for this than a woman's reason. She adored him, she said, because she did adore him. Upon her face there was the tint of grief, the settled shadow of an inward strife. She would have risen and going to her husband would have thrown her arms round his neck but just then that worthy began to give a more tangible form and expression to his thoughts.

“Am not I rich?” he muttered as if addressing himself. “Am not I strong and healthy? Am not I influential? Do I not hold sway over this large tract of land and lord it over so many, ready to be at my beck and call? Have not I a little bit of a head over my shoulders? Have not I form and features and a cut and figure that so many envy and so many feel jealous of? Am not I good and charitable? Have I ever done good to beget good? Am not I loved, loved and liked by all and sundry, loved by my own people and above all loved by a strictly pure and tender soul?—Oh! Love is too soft a word for that love which is the outcome of a holy Zoroastrian union—the love of a wife, a wife who has in me her all in all, who has never looked to anyone for love and loved no one but me. And yet what is the use of all this?

“Don't you see,” he muttered a bit louder as if now addressing some one else; some invisible spirits in the air or in the skies; “and yet I ask, what is the use and what the object of all this? Is money the be-all and end-all of existence? Oh, childless! Childless! Sonless! Daughterless! How very relentless! A father without a son!—A millionaire without a successor! Childless! Childless! I wonder, how I have not gone mad, not become heartless and indifferent, not become cruel and callous, not become godless!

“Is not a father without a son like a house without an exit; like a city without citizens, like a medicine without virtue?



Times were when a luckless man like me took to himself more than one wife. With the Parsi law coming in, polygamy has gone out for good and monogamy has come in, come in to stay perhaps to the happiness of wives, perhaps to the happiness of husbands but surely not for the happiness of such miserables as me. Oh, what am I saying? Am not I blaspheming? Am not I disloyal? Am not I inconsistent? Am not I sinning without being sinned against? Does that angel of a Chandan deserve all this? Is she not an angel? Could I afford to lose her for a daughter or even for a son? No; something within me says, no! I remember some one saying :

‘It’s true, perfection none can hope to find
In all this world, much less in womankind.’

“Whoever said so, it is wrong, downright wrong; he should have said ‘much less in humankind.’ The woman is no better than the man and the man is no better than the woman, some say. The man’s experience is that woman is better than man. The woman’s experience is that man is better than woman. Conclusion :—there are women worse than the worst of men and there are men worse than the worst of women. They say you can improve a depraved man but never a depraved woman and that woman once fallen in the path of vice is fallen for ever.”

The woman in that corner there who erstwhile was for moving stuck more closely to her seat. She was speechless but eager to hear, to hear what came next. And she had not long to wait for the speaker began anon.

“That angel Chandan has something on her mind. She knows she wants a child and she knows I must be wanting one, more than she. Were we living in the olden times, which some call good and some call bad, she would have herself asked me to take unto me another wife. She would ask me now to take unto me a son. If it were left to me I would take him for a son whom she has in mind. Does she read my mind as I do hers? Perhaps

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she does ; perhaps she does not. I am afraid to speak out my mind and she is afraid to speak out hers for her fear is the same as mine. That boy—that brother of hers—is going bad ways, they say. We know he is not and yet we are so afraid ! Rustom—Rusi would be a jewel of a boy were he steady.”

There was another and a longer pause, during which his thoughts appeared to have gone off at a tangent.

“ Is Rustom the only lad of his kind in the community ? Are not there so many, oh, so very many, with the outward halo of religion and reform, who are yet worse than he ? What dark soul and foul thoughts do they not hide beneath ! But why about boys alone ? What about the girls ? What about the community itself ? Are we progressing on the onward path of name and fame ; of religion and reform ; of demarcation and distinction or are we going down the downward path of impotence and inability ; demoralisation and depravity ; disunion and degradation ; disintegration and extinction ? There are some who not knowing what religion is call themselves religious. It is the so-called orthodox sect. They try to do good but work evil. There are others who call themselves progressive. They know what religion is ; they know what reform is and though calling themselves reformers they will not help to raise and reform those who depend on them for true religion and righteous reformation. What is true of the orthodox and of the reformer is true of their organs.”

The soliloquiser here glanced meaningly at some of the Parsi dailies and weeklies which were strewn about him—looked at them with an air of pity and concern—an air of commiseration. He then broke out again.

“ We Parsis were the pioneers of the press and the paper. What is the business of the press ? It is to press forward truth and suppress untruth. They did it years ago ; they do the reverse now. They lived for truth before ; they live for untruth now.”



Lifting one after another of the newspapers about him he went on : " May be this is wrong ; may be this is right. May be that is wrong ; may be that is right. Oh, how I wish, how I long for them to be all right. One says, ' Right is might ; I am right-ful and therefore I am mighty.' ' Another says like the German Zohak, ' might is right,' ' I am mighty and therefore I am right.' It is a sad pass the community has come to betwixt them all. They know it ; they see it ; they feel it and yet they will not improve it. They have eyes but they will not see. They have ears but they will not hear. We say we are charitable and yet we are not. I have given a thousand here and five thousand there, ten thousand here and twenty thousand there but nothing for a solid purpose, a solid good, an everlasting blessing to the community."

Just when he was coming to himself his fingers travelled to a newspaper and he lifted it up. His eyes caught a heading which set him soliloquising again, ' Firdausi's ¹ Memorial ! ' He did not stop to read further for he knew what it was.

" Oh ! How disloyal we are ! " he murmured.—" Disloyal to that great man who has sung at the opening of his great epic, the Shah-Nameh ² :—

' For thirty long years have I toiled and moiled and suffered privations.

To revive Persia amongst the Parsis.'

" We are stamped fire-worshippers. Was it not that self-same immortal man that extricated us from this charge ? For hath he not said further on in his great book :—

' Say not they were worshippers of Fire,

Say they were worshippers of the One Great God.'

" But why talk of Firdausi alone ? What about the two great Parsis of the age—the heroes who lived with the people and for the people—the heroes who laid down their lives in the

¹ The great epic poet of Persia.

² The record of Persian kings and heroes, Firdausi's great epic.

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service of the people ? Dadabhai¹ and Mehta,² men of immortal fame, what must their souls be thinking of their countrymen now ? What have their co-religionists done for them ? Oh ! Disgrace ! Disgrace ! Disgrace for the Parsis ! Disgrace for the Hindus ! Disgrace for the Mahomedans ! Disgrace for all those who run after less important individualities and vote funds and statues to perpetuate their memory !”

The soliloquiser stopped only to gather breath and then launched into a bit of poetry. ‘Thou shalt, Mehelooji,’ he murmured, ‘thou shalt at any rate vote an ode to their memory’ :—

“Hail ! Patriots triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise,
Whose honours with increase of ages grow
As streams roll down enlarging as they flow !
Countrymen unborn your mighty names shall sound
And world’s applause that may not yet be found.”

He then suddenly stopped and sank back into the chair. Then sitting up as suddenly he burst out :—

“O Yezdah³ ! Yezdah ! what are we coming to ? What has Aheriman brought us to ? Where are we drifting to ? Where are our fifty lakhs a year going to ? We sow and we do not reap. We do not prevent waste so that we may not want. Where we can spend a pie we waste a pound. The means that we adopt to make our community are the very ones that mar it. Our charities are without organization. Our schemes of education and advancement are but a myth. Our social reform is a misnomer ; our progress a platitude. We go a thinking and beget nothing. We let things slide and we are sliding slowly and surely. We aim at

¹ The great Parsi social and political reformer, the first Indian member of Parliament.

² The Hon’ble Sir P. M. Mehta, whose untiring devotion to the people of Bombay and India in general and whose political career of nigh upon half a century are matters of Indian history.

³ The Almighty God.



existence but work at extinction. We have the wish and the will but will not act. We have means and money but will only ill spend them. Though grown-up we play at toys and dolls. Year in and year out we are tired of them like children and throw them away or break them only to get new ones. We have a new *bahoo*¹ every year. We are forced to obey not by fair words and good counsel but by fright and fabrications. The reformers say they are rich and wise. They can guide and lead but they will not be leaders. They can organize but they will not be organisers. They have an eye to the main chance and will not give a chance to their people. The orthodox lamentably lack sense and judgment. They work for good and produce but evil. They know how to organize but end in disorganisation and disorder. Who is then to blame? The orthodox or the reformer or the medley of interlopers—the self-styled *Soshiants*² of the community—who though outwardly Zorastrians are still not so? They say they work for the spread of Zorastrianism and peace but they confess to have worked only paganism and pauperism. For the spread and enlargement of a new-fangled creed of their own, the *Soshiants* and the interlopers do not allow the orthodox and the reformer to meet on a common platform and to unite and work for the common weal of the community. They surely are at the bottom of the mischief. But I cannot exonerate the reformer. He is more to blame than the orthodox. For by the mere lifting of his last finger he could put his foot down on the mischief-makers and crush them.

“Ah me ! Ah me ! for the frailty of human wishes ! Oh that Zoraster were alive to enliven us ! Oh for a real out-and-out *Soshiant* to be born amongst us and for him to outstrip and bury the false ones of the day ! Let us hope the eyes of the hoodwinked

¹ A phantom.

² According to the ancient Persian tradition, they are men destined to be born in after ages to reform and rejuvenate the world and its religion.

and the hoodwinker, the fallen and the benighted will open ; that the light of truth will drive away the gloom of untruth ; that apathy will give way to energy and that a day will dawn when we will rise again and find ourselves really great and good, working for the good of the community and for the restoration of its time-honoured purity and progress, working for the abolition of prejudices and superstitious practices and the removal of excrescences that have gathered round our great religion which is at once religion, science, poetry, sanitation, hygiene, philosophy and above all sound common sense, purity and virtue.

“ We have associations and club-doms in shoals. They abound like mushrooms. Goodness knows where they come from, whither they are bound and how and for what they manage to exist. Lucky it is that the majority of them are harmless though they are no use to themselves or to those they pretend to benefit. The few, however, that pose as pioneers of social, moral and religious reforms are the most mischievous”—the speaker tarried here a minute, slightly bent his head, dropped his eyelids, pressed his fingers against them and gave them a goodly rub as if to shake off his lethargy. He then exclaimed as suddenly—“ Avount on them ! Nobody cares to enquire into their fitness and qualifications. They are a mixture of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Theosophism and what not ? They poke their noses and are in eternal evidence here, there and everywhere—*Atashbehrâms* and *Agiâries* not excepted—and put in the thin end of their Theosophical wedge under the name of religious, moral and social reform. They take good care to see that nobody enquires into their uprise, origin, number, resources, rules and regulations and their principles and organisation, if any. Occasionally a misguided *Dastoor* presides at their *tamashas* and makes a show of siding with them but he goes into sulks soon enough and slides away. It is not an unusual sight to see these self-constituted *Soshiants*, these cheap popularity-



seekers, these players to the gallery, get in at the front door of an *Atashbehrâm* or *Agiâry* for preaching an homily to their victims in embryo and getting out at the back door only to mount the steps of the fire horse and swiftly slide over the iron path in company with a number of half-witted crazy Parsi women to visit the Hindoo *Mandirs* and prostrate themselves at the feet of *Gosais* and *Bavas*, to squat on *patlas*, go into *samathi* in *langots* and leave on *dal* and *bhaji* at Kashi, Benares and at Adyar which is the principal seat of their patron saint Anne Bessant, the famous successor-in-chief and the only accredited agent on this earth of Colonel Olcott and Madam Blavatsky of Theosophical fame."

The speaker here rose and roared :—"Beware ! Parsis beware "—he thundered—"Ye fathers and mothers, ye guardians and wards, ye aunts and uncles, beware ! Under the name of *humbandgi*, *bhakti* and *kirtan* your children are being slyly but surely broken into the harness of Theosophism, Buddhism, Hinduism and what is more, rank superstition and superstitious practices. Under the guise of *akagrah bundgî*, which means concentration of mind whilst praying, they point to and preach but idol worship. They take care to instil and impress on the juvenile mind words drawn from Hindu religious books as if their synonyms did not exist in our books of religion. They use the word *Parmaatma* for *Hormuzd*, *Bhakti* and *Kirtan* for *Bundgis* and *Shan Bhuvan* for *Atashbehrâms* and *Agiâries*.

"O God ! O God ! Bless us and save us from these so-called friends of ours. It is these men that hold *jayantis* or anniversary days of great Parsis and exhort young Parsis to walk in their footsteps but they vote not a pie to commemorate their memory or to help their memorial buildings or institutions. They have erected a memorial column at Sanjan to mark the defeat and flight and not the victory of Parsi emigrants from the land of Iran to the land of idol worshippers. Likely enough they will put up a similar column at the same place or at Div Bunder to