



*Sudreh*<sup>1</sup> round his waist :

“I am a Zoroastrian. I am a believer in one God. I agree to follow the precepts and sing the praises of my own religion. I ardently love and glory in good thoughts, good words and good deeds. I am the true follower of the benign Zoroastrian creed, which aims at the spread of peace and plenty, the laying down of deadly strifes and bloody weapons of war and which is the creator of self-respect and self-reliance and above all of purity and virtue. I conscientiously believe that the Zoroastrian creed, of which I am a devout follower, is the sublimest of all that have been or existed in the past, the sublimest of those that are now existing and the sublimest of those that may exist hereafter.”

A thrill of pleasure went through the audience when the name of Roshan Ardeshir Dalal was called out. Roshan the Bright brought nothing but *roshni* (light) into the law-ridden atmosphere of the court-room and brightened the faces of friends and foes alike.

The Interpreter as usual administered the oath to her. The Avesta being given to her she held it in her hand and repeated the following words as bid by the Interpreter :

*MANASHNI, GAVASHNI, KUNASHNI*

(Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.)

Roshan looked undisturbed and unmoved. All eyes were centred on her. She was composure itself. Even Mr. Khatkhate could not get his eyes off her. When asked if she wanted the services of an interpreter she firmly said, “No”. The Magistrate

<sup>1</sup> *Sudreh*, which means righteous path, is a garment made of white muslin and reaching upto the knees. It enjoins and is a symbol of purity and virtue. *Kushti*, is a long and woven thread, a sort of a *kummerband* or waist-band made of the wool of white sheep. It is supposed to say ‘gird up your loins, ye Zoroastrians, fight ceaselessly for all that is good and great and strike down all that is impure and evil.’ The thread is wound and unwound each time we offer up prayers to the one Holy God.



however observed that the Interpreter would be by and would help her when required.

Mr. Aga to the witness:—What is your name?

A.—Roshan Ardesbir Dalal.

Q.—Do you know what you are here for to-day?

A.—I do certainly know it. I am here on oath to say the truth and to help the right cause.

Q.—Can you tell us if you have understood the full intent and purport of the oath that has just been administered to you?

A.—Yes. I have learnt what it means and I mean to follow it.

Q.—Do you know what would be the consequences if you tell an untruth here or try to shield the accused?

A.—Yes. I know that in that case I shall either be fined or imprisoned.

Q.—Will you tell us what the charges against Jal and Thriti are?

A.—Yes. Jal is charged with committing theft of a jewel case from my mother's cupboard on my last birthday and Thriti is charged with receiving and retaining the stolen property.

Q.—Do you not believe the charges to be true?

At this question the face of the witness glowed and her fine eyes flashed.

A.—Certainly not. They are entirely false.

Q.—Can you prove that they are false?

A.—I will try to do so.

Q.—Who persuaded you to come and give evidence here?

A.—No one. I am doing it of my own free will.

Q.—Did any one instruct you what to say here?

A.—No.

Q.—What makes you think that the charges are false?

A.—At about nine o'clock on my birthday I was asked by my mother to leave for school, because I had not said the *patet* prayer and I obeyed.





Q.—Why did you not say your prayers ?

A.—I said other prayers, not the *patet*, which I am told is a prayer of penitence for sinners.

Q.—Were you at school the whole day ?

A.—No. I was very unwell on that day and got somewhat worse on reaching school. My teacher seeing me so, insisted on my returning home.

Q.—Would you not have done so if your teacher had not insisted on it ?

A.—I would not have dared to do so for fear of incurring the displeasure of my mother.

Q.—What form does your mother's displeasure take ? Mere angry words, I suppose ?

The witness hesitated and stood quiet.

Q.—You do not answer. So it is something more than mere angry words ; is it not ?

A.—Can you not avoid this question, Sir ? Why would you have me answer it ?

Mr. Aga :—I am very sorry but I must ask you to reply to it in the interests of the accused.

A.—Then I must tell you, Sir, that my mother's displeasure sometimes assumes a very unpleasant form.

She then hung her head and remained silent.

Q.—Then she is violent ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorskip, this question is viary irrelevant. Yar Hanar should nat allow it.

The Magistrate :—You are right Mr. Khatkate but the exigencies of the case demand that I should allow it.

Mr. Khatkhate :—But, Yar Worrorskipful Hanar, I aabject viary straangly.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Khatkhate, all I can do is to note down your objection.

The witness was then asked to reply to the last question.

A.—Alas, Sir, it is not her fault. She does not know what



she is at when her temper is up.

Q.—O, then she has a temper? Can you tell us if she is ever violent with your sister?

A.—No. She dare not do so.

Q.—Why can she not dare?

A.—O, Sir, you are hard again. If I knew you would put me this question I would not have said it.

Q.—I have already told you that I have to be hard with you in the interests of the accused.

A.—My mother does not treat Sherbanoo as myself for she is afraid of her.

The Magistrate :—Do you mean to say, my little maiden, that Sherbanoo would pay her mother back, I mean ill-treat her in return?

A.—Yes, Sir, I think so.

The Magistrate :—Has it ever happened to your knowledge?

A.—It has not actually happened but it has often threatened to be so. My mother on such occasions always gives way.

The Magistrate :—Does she not give way with you and your father?

A.—No, Sir; unfortunately never.

The Magistrate :—Does she not like you?

A.—No, Sir; I fear she does not.

Mr. Aga :—Did you go straight to your mother when you returned from school on your birthday?

A.—I—I—Sir, dared not do it. I have just told you why.

Q.—Well then, where did you go?

A.—I went straight to Miss Thrity's room and asked if I should go upstairs but she pressed me to stay with her.

Q.—What was Miss Thrity doing when you went to her?

A.—She was arranging her things in her cupboard with the help of her ayah.

Q.—Was Jal at home at the time?

A.—Yes.





Q.—What did he do ?

A.—He took me into the next room and we busied ourselves looking at the family album ?

Q.—Tell us what followed ?

A.—A few minutes after there was a knock at the door. Jal got up to his feet and locked me in. When he returned I was told our Rama had come to invite him and Thrithi to dine with my mother and sister but that they had declined the invitation. Sherbanoo had then, I was told, personally come down and pressed the invitation. Thrithi would not go but Jal at her bidding had agreed to do so.

Q.—Did Jal go up ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What did you do when Jal was away ?

A.—I kept to the same room. The door was just enough open to enable me to peep into the front-room where Thrithi was sitting. A little while after, the girl Rosy came in and informed her mother that the pot in the kitchen was boiling over. At this the ayah ran to the kitchen. A minute or two more and I saw some one approaching the front door of Thrithi's room. I was seized with a sudden fright. What if I were found out ? So I immediately closed the door of my room and looked through the key-hole. The female figure approached the cupboard near which Thrithi was sitting. In hardly a minute she walked out as quietly as she had come in.

Q.—How do you know the figure came in and went out quietly ?

A.—Because I heard no noise of footsteps and I afterwards learnt that Thrithi was entirely ignorant that any one had come in.

Q.—What happened after the figure left ?

A.—The ayah returned to Thrithi's room and took her to task for keeping the front door open. The next minute she observed that it was her own fault that she had not closed it for how could Thrithi know that it was open ?

Q.—How do you know it was a female figure and not a male ? You say you were seized with a sudden fright.



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A.—Yes. But I had just time enough before I shut the door to see that it was a female figure.

Q.—What was she dressed like? A Mahomedan or a Feringi woman?

A.—Quite like a Parsi lady.

Q.—Could you not look at her face through the key-hole?

A.—No. I could have done so if she were a child. I could only see the lower portion of her dress through the key-hole.

Q.—What was the colour of her *sari*?

A.—It was pale blue.

Q.—Was it a plain *sari*?

A.—No. It was not a plain one. Silk *boottis*<sup>1</sup> with *tilis*<sup>2</sup> were worked on it in variegated colours.

Q.—Did you see such a *sari* for the first time then?

A.—No. I had seen such a *sari* before.

Q.—Where?

A.—My own sister has such a *sari*.

Q.—Then why could it not be your sister's *sari*?

A.—I cannot say.

Q.—When did you see your sister wearing it?

A.—O, at first it was a visiting dress *sari*. I have had heard my sister telling our mother that it was no longer fit to be used at visits or weddings and that she meant to wear it at home.

Q.—So your sister is wearing such a *sari* at home?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And yet you cannot say that it was Sherbanoo that you saw entering Thriti's room?

A.—Yes. I cannot say it because I had not the slightest idea it was she.

Q.—When did Jal return?

A.—In about two hours.

<sup>1</sup> Little buds or unblossomed flowers.

<sup>2</sup> Round tiny bits of shining metal sheets, silver or gold.





Q.—Did you ask Jal if he were pleased with his visit to your mother and sister ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And what was his reply ?

A.—He said he wished he had not gone. He also said, to use his own words, he wished he could vomit out what he had taken in. He felt sure, he said, that they had some object in inviting him. He was angry with Thriti and the ayah for forcing him to go. He would not answer any more questions.

The Magistrate :—Do you think all that you have just told us is quite correct ?—That you have concealed or omitted nothing ? Is your memory good ?

A.—Yes, my memory is very good. I am known for it at school. They all envy me for it. I bless God for it as it has enabled me to omit nothing to-day.

The Magistrate :—What rank do you generally keep in your class ? Can you produce a certificate of good behaviour and good memory from the heads of your school ?

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I have taken care to get such a certificate and also her school-register of marks from the Principal of her school. Your Worship will see from these that she is always at the top of her form and that her conduct is exemplary.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—When did you return to your mother on that eventful day ?

A.—I went up at about 5-30 which is my usual hour of return from school.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Var you nat aashamed of cheating yar maadhar and sister ? You made them believe that you were at school all day.

The blood rushed into Roshan's face and she was about to reply when the Magistrate interposed :

“ I cannot allow you, Mr. Khatkhate, to put this question now. You can do it if you like when crossing the witness.”



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Q.—Do you know Mr. Erach Aspendiar Aga ?

A.—Yes. He is my cousin.

Q.—What do you think of him ?

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorsnip, I aabject viary straangly to this question.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga will modify the question.

Q.—Do you like Mr. Erach ?

A.—No. I don't. He has never done anything that could please my father or myself. He has done nothing to help the charges against the accused. O ! yes, that he has.

Q.—How do you know that ?

A.—I once overheard them talking about it when they did not know I had returned from school.

Q.—And when was that ?

A.—The day after my birthday. They were all in my mother's room, where the cupboard of valuables stands. Rama was not there to inform them of my return. He was scolded for not doing so.

Q.—Scolded by whom ?

A.—By my mother, sister and Mr. Erach.

Q.—What did you do on your return from school ?

A.—I was going to take the cold cup of tea which stood for me on the dining-table unseen by them.

Q.—Did you not ask Rama to put it over the stove and warm it for you ?

A.—No. For he would not have done it. Servants have orders not to do it for me.

Q.—What did you overhear ? Were you near enough to overhear it ?

A.—Yes. I was at the end of the table near my mother's private room. I overheard Mr. Erach saying, 'Hurrah, they are now in our clutches.' My sister replied, 'Yes, we will now make these proud ones go down on their knees.'

Q.—Did your mother say nothing ?





A.—She said, ‘we should not be sure until we get them punished.’

Q.—How can you tell to whom they were referring ?

A.—They were referring to Thriti and Jal and the charges laid against them. Mr. Erach said soon after, “*Fuiji*, before I help you I must extract a promise from you both.” “What promise ?” my mother and sister asked. Mr. Erach replied, “I ask you, cousin Shera, to promise me that you will marry me and you *Fuiji* that you will not hinder Shera from doing so, after we have won the case ; I cannot marry that girl Thriti, nor would I like to call that boy Jal my brother-in-law, after they are convicted.” (A murmur of rage and hate pervaded the court.)

Mr. Aga :—Can you tell us what reply your mother and sister gave ?

A.—Yes. My mother said she could not agree to this. My sister said she saw no objection to it. I did not wait to hear more for fear of being found out. Luckily I had not drunk the tea and I put the cup where it was before and went to the cook-room. I told Rama I had just returned from school and asked him to inform them about it. He did so. They then came out. Mr. Erach then caught me by the neck and asked me what business I had to return from school so soon. I told him it was the usual hour and begged of him to release me as I was suffocating! ‘Serve you right,’ my sister said. ‘You little devil,’ roared my mother, ‘you must have overheard us ; that man must have put you up to do it.’ Had not my father come home just in the nick of time I shudder to think what would have happened. See, Sir, there must be marks of that man’s fingers on my throat yet, however faint.

Tears here rose into her eyes and slid fast down her cheeks. A feeling of rage ran through the crowd, so much so that some of them even rose to their feet. The Magistrate then asked the Interpreter to conduct Miss Roshan up to him. He examined her neck and throat and could not help noticing faint traces of the outrage.



The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, did not her father take her to a Doctor ?

Mr. Aga :—That he did, Sir. I have here a certificate of Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy, M.B., B.S.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Worrorsnip will have no aabjection to let me see the sartificate ?

The Magistrate :—Certainly.

Mr. Khatkhate having seen it the Magistrate admitted it as evidence. The certificate said that on a particular day (which tallied with the date given by the witness Roshan) at about 6-15 of the evening Mr. Ardeshir Edulji Dalal and his daughter Roshan paid him a visit at his consulting rooms at Grant Road. Mr. Ardeshir asked him to examine his daughter's neck and throat which was covered by her silk handkerchief and to give his opinion. He did so and found fresh nail-marks and finger-impressions on them. He could say that a heavy hand, that of a male, must have clutched her by the throat and neck strongly within the last hour or so.

Q.—Well, Miss Roshan, will you tell us what followed ?

A.—When Mr. Erach saw my father approaching he immediately released me. My father was wild with rage. He would have thrashed Mr. Erach but I rushed into his arms and prevented him from doing so. My mother and sister being afraid of the consequences dragged Mr. Erach out of the room.

Q.—Well, what next ?

A.—My father took me to Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy.

Q.—Is that all you have to say ?

A.—Only a few words more. I was sorry for having told a lie to my mother and sister that I had only that moment returned from school. But for the attack—.

Q.—What attack ?

A.—The attack made on me by that man. (There was a bitterness in the girl's tone and a look on her face which were more than justified by circumstances.)





Q.—You were going to say that but for the attack—.

A.—Yes, I was going to say that but for the attack I would have made a clean breast of it before them.

A solemn silence took possession of all in the room. The sympathy of all centered on Roshan.

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I have no more questions to put to this young lady.

The invincible Mr. Khatkhate then arose. He looked at Miss Roshan furiously as if to say, it is my turn now, you can't escape me. He adjusted his *dupatta* properly over his head and gracefully arranged the *ooperna* over his shoulders. He then passed his right hand over his upper lip, just to give his moustaches an extra twirl or two. But to his great chagrin he found they were missing. His hand then travelled to his eyebrows; he would smooth them and soothe his ire-irritated brains. But they too were not there. To make up for this he screwed his nose with his fingers and out came a loud sneeze, which moved the court into a loud laugh.

Miss Roshan put her folded handkerchief to her mouth and smothered an outburst. Even the Magistrate was pleased with this little relaxation and said, "Mr. Khatkhate, if you were standing in one of those Mahomedan *adalats* you would have had to pay for that sneeze with your nose." (Vociferous laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate laughed too and said, "thiat was in the old old days."

Mr. Khatkhate then approached the window, threw out the chewed heap of *pan* and *supari* in his mouth, returned with his lips all red, cleared his throat with a loud snort by way of warning and then opened his fire.

Q.—Well, Miss Roshan, do you still aattend the school?

A.—No.

Q.—Why nat?

A.—My mother would not allow me to do it any longer.





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Q.—Why nat?

A.—She thinks schools are not for girls in *saris*.

Q.—Is thiat al? Yar maadher had no other reasons? Did she nat withdra you fram school far biad behaviour?

A.—I never behaved badly.

Q.—Vas nat yar maadher aafraid of yar meeting the second accused on yar way to and back fram school and caatching his biad ways?

A.—She would have told me that if she were really so afraid. Jal never met me in that way. He is too good for that.

Q.—Who is Jal?

A.—He who is so faalsely accused.

Q.—Why do you say 'faalsely'? You are only an inexperienced girrul.

The Magistrate :—An inexperienced young 'lady', you want to say, Mr. Khatkhate?

Mr. Khatkhate :—If thiat be better, yes, Sir.

Q.—You have said thiat yar maadher does nat like you. Have you ever tried to please her?

A.—Yes; always.

Q.—Then why does she nat like you?

A.—She would like me if I give up my father, not do as he may advise me and take sides with her when she and Sherbanoo are insulting him.

Q.—But is it not their business? You are but a child. Why should you interfere?

A.—What would you have done if your mother treated your father so? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate thinking discretion the better part of valour shifted to other matters.

Q.—You have said yar maadher is violent at times. Will you give some instances?

A.—Yes. Once I was in my study-room and Jal came to see





me. Seeing the door closed he called out to me to open it. This enraged my mother who came into the room and treated me roughly. On another occasion the same treatment was meted out to me when I asked permission to accompany Sherbanoo to a wedding party.

Q.—But you must nat have been invited ?

A.—I was.

Q.—Had you a separate invitation-carrud ?

A.—No. It was the old-fashioned invitation card to mother requesting her to attend with her family.

The Magistrate :—You will excuse me, Mr. Khatkhate, but as your client treats her husband like a baby she must have allowed him to accompany Sherbanoo to the wedding. (Laugh.)

Mr. Khatkhate smiled by way of answer.

Mr. Khakhate :—Rough treatment and violence are viary vague terms. Please explain them mar clearly.

The Magistrate :—Which can only mean, Mr. Khatkhate, that she should expose your client more emphatically. You must know violence and rough treatment mean, beating with hand or cane, abusing, etc., in one word, assaulting.

Mr. Khatkhate bowed low.

Q.—If yar father and maadher live separate will you nat consider it yar duty to live with yar maadher ?

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, this question is entirely irrelevant ; besides the court already knows that Miss Roshan sides with her father.

Q.—When the ayah of the second accused was in the cook-room on the 3rd day of the current month you say a female figure entered the room in which the second accused was. Why did you nat come immediately out of yar hiding and make siar who it vas ? Would it nat have relieved yar doubts ?

A.—It did not occur to me to do so.

Q.—Do nat other Parsi ladies wear sari similar to thiat



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worn by that female figure ? Have you not seen others doing it ?

A.—I may have ; but I do not remember where and when I have seen them.

Q.—Did you see Mr. Erach overturning the Taady-glass on the day of the Taady-party at Mr. Meheloogi's quite by accident ?

A.—Yes. I saw it but it was not an accident. It was done intentionally.

Q.—Did not the second -accused make you all believe on the Taady-party day that she was much hurt and much ill than she really was ?

A.—No. If anything she showed as if she was less hurt and less ill.

Q.—When Bai Jerbanoo came to Mr. Meheloogi's did she say why she had come there ?

A.—She said, she had received a telephone message from Mr. Meheloogi's to be there immediately.

Q.—Did she say who sent the message ?

A.—All she said was that our ayah brought her the message and from the voice the ayah guessed it was from Mr. Erach.

Q.—Were you at Bai Jerbanoo's first day's *patherna* ?

A.—Yes, I was.

Q.—Where were you sitting ?

A.—I was sitting close to my mother and sister and very near Miss Thriti.

Q.—And you doubtless heard Thritibai, Mrs. Meheloogi and Mrs. Bahadurshah abusing your mother and sister ?

A.—Neither Mrs. Meheloogi nor Mrs. Bahadurshah attended the first day's *patherna*. There were no abuses from anyone. Bai Jerbanoo hated all quarrels and bickerings on such occasions.

Q.—How do you know that ?

A.—I had heard her telling Thriti about it so often.

Q.—What do you think about the relations of your family with the family of the accused ?





A.—Very friendly on my father's side ; very unfriendly on the side of my mother and sister.

Q.—Is thiat yar opinion, or has any one put it into yar head ?

A.—It is my own opinion.

Q.—With whom have you been living after the first hearing of this case by His Worrorsnip ?

A.—I have been living with my father.

Q.—Where ? He must be living with some one else ?

A.—I am not going to tell it to you.

Q.—But you must.

Mr. Aga :—You cannot force her to do so.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga is right. I cannot allow the question.

Q.—Are you nat aashamed of working against yar maadher and sister ?

A.—There can be no shame in telling the truth ; you know I have been sworn in this court to do it. (Low cheers from the crowd.)

Q.—Where vas the second aacused sitting when the tree fell down at the Taady-party ? Vas she nat sitting near Mr. Jamshed Aga ?

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, I can only allow this question if you have no objection to it.

Mr. Aga :—Your Worship, I have no objection to it. I will reply to the question myself if you will allow it.

The Magistrate :—Mr. Aga, you can write your reply and give it to me.

Mr. Aga complied.

Miss Roshan was then asked to answer the pleader's question.

A.—Miss Thrity was not sitting by Mr. Jamshed Aga. She was sitting between my father and Miss Macgregor.

The Magistrate to the witness :—And where was Mr. Erach sitting ?

A.—He was sitting between my mother and my sister.



The Magistrate :—How long ?

A.—All the while until the tree came down.

The Magistrate here read Mr. Aga's written reply :—" All through the Toddy-party and until the tree came down Miss Thrithi Patel was seated opposite to Bai Meherbanoo and Bai Sherbanoo and Mr. Erach. Mr. Ardeshir Dalal and Miss Macgregor were seated on either side of Miss Patel. I was sitting next to Mr. Meheloogi in the same row."

Mr. Khatkhate :—How could Mr. Meheloogi have invited yar maadher and sister to the party if he knew thiat they var unfriendly to the aacused, unless he vaanted to sow mar seeds of discard ?

A.—He may have thought the Toddy-party would bring them together and make them friends.

Mr. Khatkhate scratched his forehead for more questions but none seemed to occur to him. He therefore said that the witness could retire.

Next to be called in was Mr. Ardeshir Dalal. So there he was a finely-built, nice-looking, simple-behaved and simply-clad man. There was nothing uncouth or uncourteous about him. To look at him was to be pleased and to be put at your ease. Old and young, child and infant, alike trusted him. Babes struggled for a transfer to his arms from those of their mothers. His figure, face and features were well-moulded. It did not require a long or a second look at him to scan his nature or to read his character for they were written as it were in gold letters on his face. They were *Manashni*, *Gharashni*, *Kunashni*.

A word about his profession. His wife and his eldest daughter and Erach threw it often in his teeth. They pricked him on it. They urged that all share-brokers were alike and that he Ardeshir was not an exception. Good as he was, Ardeshir did not retort for he knew that those who knew him well knew him to be otherwise. When too far irritated he simply told them that he treated their taunts with the contempt they deserved. Even the worst of pro-





fessions, he said, could be turned into the best.

As is the world so is the law court. It has its saints and satans. It has good and truthful men and evil-disposed and bad men to administer the verdict of the law to the good and the bad alike. How often are the good there the victims of the bad on earth? How often is it that the law wittingly or unwittingly supports the latter and sacrifices the former, because it happens to be law? How often is it that the ends of justice are perverted and misdirected? How often is it that good and honest folks, perfectly innocent, are made to drag on a miserable existence till the end of existence until a certain law long known to be faulty is amended?

Look at the law of matrimony. Its defects are the same here as in England. Here as there these defects which are unmistakable and ignominious are under consideration for years for modifications and amendment. How often is it that such modifications are mercilessly prolonged, simply because those who should come to support remain to slay?

The Parsons in long robes and in short have raised a hue and cry against any modification in the British Marriage Act. May be, they are wrong—may be they are right for there are many who think that the law of matrimony as it now stands is for the largest good of the largest number and must be worked so, even at the sacrifice of a few. Weaken the fibres and the fabric will collapse—they say. We certainly do not want our women to marry A, B, C or X, Y, Z to give them up and to re-marry them in turn and out, like the Yankee or the French women. The fact remains, however, that our Marriage Act is faulty. We do not want to unscrew the hinges but to recast and refix them with better screws.

The Parsi Matrimonial Act which is based on the lines of that in England has defects in common with the latter. Men and women, young and hopeful, but victims of parental mandate or unlucky choice, are afraid to go to court to disunite and unite again



in happier wedlock, for the law is so harsh and hard, so hard and fast ! It would rather kill than save. How often is it that under the guise of Judicial Separation, as high-sounding as senseless, good and honest lives have been blighted and blasted ?

Are we Parsis unaware of the defects in our Marriage Laws ? Are they not apparent and appalling ? Have they not sent strings of people straight to the grave ? Have they not doomed youthful lives to living deaths ? Our good men and great men, our rich men and ripe men, our big men and bold men, our round men and square men, our rising and risen men, our men of law and men of erudition, our elite and elate, know it and feel it. They have known it and felt it and will go on knowing and feeling the same, may be to the cost of strangers, may be to the sacrifice of their own kith and kin ; and yet they will not raise so much as their last finger to save this most graceless and life-killing situation.

There was poor Ardeshir ; there was Meherbanoo—the victims of an unhappy union. How often did they wish that that union could be dissolved ?—Dissolved without actual disgrace, dissolved without proof of actual misbehaviour—adultery which is the only ground in the eye of the law for a tangible disunion of the sexes and which is in some cases trumped-up to break through the bonds of eternal bondage ? The man and even sometimes the woman, innocent though they be, intentionally take the burden of this sin on themselves, because the law does not allow a simpler or sinless course. Jamshed and Thriti, Erach and Sherbanoo, were standing as it were on the edge of the dangerous precipice of this dire doom. Luckily for them, their parents had only bethrothed them ! They had initiated but not completed the iniquity. It was perhaps good for Jamshed and Thriti that Meherbanoo and Shera, in conformity with Erach had worked up that sin of sorrow and pain, that shameful attack against the innocents ; for did it not help to snap the bonds and





snatch them from eternal bondage?

But to proceed with the examination of Mr. Ardeshir.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Your name?

A.—Ardeshir Edulji Dalal.

Q.—Your vocation?

A.—Share and stock-broker.

Q.—Do you remember the 3rd day of the current month?

A.—Yes; very vividly,—so vividly that I shall never forget it.

Q.—Why do you say so?

A.—Because I take it to be a black-letter day in the history of my family.

Q.—What makes you say that?

A.—Because it was the day marked by a black deed.

Q.—What is that black deed to which you refer?

A.—The black deed was the effort to blacken the good name and fame of two innocents. I mean those who unfortunately stand as the accused in this court to-day.

Q.—Please be more direct. What is the effort to which you refer and by whom was it made?

A.—The effort is the false charge of theft against Jal and the false charge of aiding and abetting against Thruti made by my wife Meherbanoo and my daughter Sherbanoo with the help of their relation and friend Erach Aspendiar Aga.

Q.—Why do you call them false charges?

A.—Because I know them to be so and hope to be able to aid you in proving them to be so.

Q.—What are your grounds for saying so? Were you an unwilling party to it and subsequently withdrew for fear of going to purgatory? (Laughter.)

A.—God forbid, I was never a party to it but I was an unwilling and unseen witness and heard all that was being hatched on a particular day to compromise these two innocents.





Q.—Will you narrate as briefly and as accurately as possible all that you heard about the hatching of the plot ?

The witness here narrated clearly and lucidly all that he had heard at Meher Villa on that eventful day, when he was a self-made prisoner in the bathroom of his own house.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Did you ever talk to anybody of this incident before these proceedings were instituted ?

A.—Yes, that I did.

Q.—To whom did you speak about it ?

A.—I spoke about it to Miss Macgregor, Thrithi and Jal, when Mr. Rustom Delaver was also present.

Q.—When was that ?

A.—It was on the 5th of July last.

Q.—What made you tell them about it that day ?

A.—It was a letter addressed to Miss Macgregor by the second complainant.

Q.—What was that letter ?

A.—A letter from my daughter Sherbanoo to Miss Macgregor asking her if she would undertake to give tuition to my second daughter Roshan. I am told that this letter has already been entered as evidence in this case.

The Magistrate :—I must ask the witness how that letter could have led him to reveal the occurrence which he has narrated to the court.

A.—Your Worship, the letter made me to think that the complainants had two aims in writing it, namely, to win over Miss Macgregor on their side and if she did not change sides to give her a bad name and dismiss her.

Mr. Aga to the witness :—What reason have you to suppose that the present charge is the outcome of the particular deliberation and discussion between your wife and daughter on that particular day ?

A.—I take it to be the direct outcome of that deliberation and discussion because subsequent events go to confirm it.





Q.—What object could Mr. Erach have in going against the accused though he is their cousin and engaged to one of them ?

A.—Though Erach has been betrothed to Thrithi he hates her and dislikes her. He would have broken the match off long ago were it not for what I have just narrated to you.

Q.—Is there anyone else whom Mr. Erach likes better than Thrithi ? Has Thrithi a rival ?

A.—Yes. He prefers my daughter Sherbanoo to Thrithi and would move heaven and earth to marry her.

Q.—Do you like and love Roshan more than Sherbanoo ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you not like and love Sherbanoo ? She is also your daughter ?

A.—No, because she does not allow me to like and love her.  
(Laughter.)

Q.—Does your wife love you ?

A.—No. She never loved me.

Q.—Why so ?

A.—For more reasons than one. She thinks I should not like or help her sister's children. She thinks that I am not rich enough for her. She thinks she will be able to make a better match if she become a widow. (Laughter.)

The Magistrate :—Why don't you oblige her in that matter

A.—I would do so if Your Worship would only help me or show me how to do it. (Roars of laughter.)

Mr. Aga to the witness :—Do you contribute to the household expenses ?

A.—Yes ; I contribute Rs. 150 per month.

Q.—Your wife has said here that you contribute rupees one hundred only ?

A.—Then she has told you an untruth.

Q.—Why did you send Roshan to school on her birthday ?

A.—It was not I that did it. It was her mother.



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Q.—Why did your wife do it?

A.—Perhaps because she wished to be cruel and perhaps because she wanted her to be out of the way.

Q.—Be more explicit.

A.—My wife must have thought that if Roshan stayed at home she would not be able to carry out her plans against Jal and Thriti. Besides it would give her one more opportunity of being cruel to Roshan and thus indirectly taking revenge on me.

Q.—Is that the kind of cruelty she has always exercised over Roshan?

A.—No. She and the second complainant used to cane and beat her.

Q.—Did the complainants beat her after they laid the accusation against Thriti and Jal?

A.—No. Since that man Erach's beastly behaviour towards her I and Roshan have not been near them.

Q.—What do you mean by not having been near them?

A.—We have been living apart.

Q.—What was that beastly behaviour of Mr. Erach to which you refer?

A.—On the 4th day of the current month when I returned home in the evening I found my daughter Roshan in Erach's clutches. He was holding her by the neck and almost suffocating her. At sight of me he let her go. But for Roshan who held my hands and but for the fear of taking the law in my own hands I should have given him a sound drubbing. (There were murmurs of 'Pity you did not do it.') I took her to Dr. J. Jeejeebhoy and showed him the nail and finger marks on her neck. The Doctor certified that they must be the result of an assault committed by a strong hand, likely that of a male.

Mr. Aga to the Magistrate :—Your Worship, it is the same certificate that you have entered as evidence in Miss Roshan's examination.





The witness completed the answer by saying, to prevent a repetition of such cowardly attacks he and Roshan were now living apart.

Mr. Khatkhate :—But, Yar Worrorsnip, the witness has enticed away thiat little girrul Roshan fram her maadher's control.

The Magistrate :—Miss Roshan has as much right to be with her father as with her mother. It is open to the mother to bring a separate charge against the father for it. Why don't you advise her to do it ? (Loud laugh.)

Mr. Aga here declared that Mr. Ardeshir's examination was over.

Mr. Khatkhate said he had only a few questions to put to the witness.

Q.—You have said, Mr. Ardeshir, thiat Mr. Erach hates Thritibai and thiat he would like to marry yar dater Sherbanoo. You must be an expert in reading other people's minds ?

A.—It requires no mental effort to know it. The very fact of Erach appearing as a witness against the accused and for the complainants proves it.

Q.—But vat if he is doing it in the caz of truth and justice, just on the same grounds on which you aalege to have aasposed the caz of the aacused ?

A.—But I have not hatched any plot nor harassed the complainants. They have harassed me.

Q.—Has nat the second aacused preferred someone ialse to Mr. Erach ? Would she nat have married thiat someone ialse laang ago if she could have done it with her maadher's consent ?

A.—If I were a girl and unmarried I would certainly give up at any risk a bad fiancé in favour of a good one.

Q.—You are nat a coward, witness ; the viary fiact of yar appearing against yar wife and daater shows thiat you are nat ?

A.—I am not a coward ; I know when to assert myself.

Q.—Well then, when you var in the bathroom and heard yar wife and daater hiatching a plaat as you say, vas it nat yar duty to





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boldly caanfront them and to save them fram the consequences ?

A.—I did not then quite know the nature of the plot, nor precisely against whom it was being hatched.

Q.—When you heard vat the accused var charged with why did you nat stap yar wife and daater fram taking iaction against them ? Could you nat have thereby iacted in the best interests of both the parties ?

A.—If you knew my wife and daughter as I do or if you were in my place you would not have tried the game yourself. (Laughter.)

Q.—Thiat is nat a reply. You must tell me why you did nat do it.

A.—I did not do it because it would not have improved matters. Besides the charge was laid at the police-station and the matter was in the hands of the police.

The witness was here told that he was wanted no more and he withdrew.

Mr. Aga was about to call the other witnesses on behalf of the accused, when the Magistrate observed that so far as he was concerned the evidence already adduced was more than sufficient to enable him to come to a decision. He would of course hear further evidence if Mr. Aga insisted on it but he thought it would be much like beating a dead dog and more like firing volleys into a carcase.

Mr. Aga :—I quite agree with Your Worship but I think we should know what my learned friend there has to say about it.

Mr. Khatkhate :—Yar Hanar, I have nothing to urge against the prapojal.

The Magistrate then asked Mr. Aga and Mr. Khatkhate if they proposed to address the court before he gave his decision. They having both replied in the affirmative the Magistrate said he would hear them the next day.





## CHAPTER XXXVI

## THE BAHADURSHAHS AGAIN

*"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,  
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet."*

SHAKESPEARE

BAHADUR Mahal was indeed a brave little place. It had grown old with age and yet defying its ravages reared its head firmly over the rocky elevation on which it stood. Behman, the present owner, had handsome offers for it but he flatly declined to sell it for the property was dear to him as life. The family was an old one. It had gone through various freaks of fortune and vicissitudes, yet had survived and sustained its glory. Behman had the credit of saving the situation at a time when absolute ruin stared the family in the face. It was the time of the share mania, which ruined so many and raised but a few. The house was not very big but its situation was charming. It was unpretentious and yet pretentious. It was commodious and comfortable and was the pride of its proprietors. Behman took care to preserve its old exterior without endangering its stability. With an oldish look and with the weight of years on its shoulders, the house was quite bright and young within. It was tastefully decorated and its adornments and conveniences were well selected and well arranged. Order seemed to be the pass-word in everything.

It was a Sunday, the Sunday preceding the day on which the Magistrate was to give his decision in the much-talked-of and minutely discussed case of blood *versus* blood. The shades of evening were falling fast. The sun, the glorious regent of the skies, was preparing to hide its glory beyond the western horizon and was





giving place to the nightly shadows which were gently stealing across the ethereal firmament. Birds and beasts and flowers, in the words of the hymn, were preparing to be asleep. Rapt in deep meditation, Behman Bahadurshah stood on the rear verandah of his house, which faced the sea, leaning his tall person against the balustrade and resting his glorious head on his right hand. He was as much a matter for study as the impending changes in nature which he was looking at so admiringly.

"I wish," he murmured, "I could stroll out with Rodolph and with my sheltering materials. It is an evening for strolling out across the hills and losing oneself in the environments of the Hanging Gardens.<sup>1</sup> But, no. I shall wait for Shirin. She is already late. What could be the matter with the child? I would lose everything in the world than lose her. There, there, am not I doing injustice to her who has carried me through thick and thin so strenuously? Life would be hardly worth living for her and for me without Shirin. She is fast growing. We must get her married some day. And then, what then? Well, I suppose, she must then leave us. It would be quite in the order of things. I'll then have to console myself with my wife, this old edifice with its old and dear associations and that four-footed Rodolph which are all so very dear to me."

Just then a delicate hand was laid on his shoulder. He started and looked back.

"Bahadur, why do you start? Have I disturbed you?" His wife frequently called him by his family name of Bahadur in preference to Behman. She said it befitted him more for was he not *bahadur*, brave, every inch of him? Her husband was even as kind as the Yezd Behman who watches over and protects the animal creation all over the world. Both the names started with a B and both sat so well on him, thought the wife.

<sup>1</sup> A beautiful garden laid out on the slopy heights of Malabar Hill. It has now been decided to call it the Sir Pherozsha Mehta Garden in honour of that renowned Municipal Councillor and politician.





"No, dearie, you have not disturbed me. I was thinking, as I have always been, of the three—my wife, my daughter and my darling. The darling, you know, is this darling house of mine. Though inanimate, it breathes of life and all that is lovely in the lifeless. It has fought with me and with you the fights of fickle fortune, which has at last condescended to favour us. I was also thinking of this faithful friend of mine who has grown old in my service."

He placed his hand kindly and unconsciously on his big four-footed who had crept up to him and laid himself down fondly at his feet, as if quite understanding what the bipeds were talking about.

"I sometimes think, Dina, that this quadruped is wiser than many of our Parsis of the day. He reads our minds but the Parsis do not read theirs. He knows our wants and wishes; the Parsis do not know theirs. Dost thou remember what the Persian poethath said :—

"The son of Kohan<sup>1</sup> associated with bad men and the family virtue of prophecy was for ever lost to him. The dog of mountainous men adopted the company of wise men and became a wise mortal."

Our communal bark is now in the hands of a few who drift it here and drift it there and threaten to sink it in the turbid waters of ignorance, fanaticism and fatalism. Those who can steer it safely across are so engrossed in their own aggrandizement that they would rather see a general drowning than dive deep to save it. The demand for suitable house accommodation for Parsis is far in excess of the actual supply. Remember, Dina, if the Parsis don't look sharp, God forbid, but the day is not far off when the middle and poor classes will be ejected by greedy landlords into the

<sup>1</sup> The richest man in ancient Persian history. It is said that the family of Kohan had the gift of prophecy, which was lost after the death of Kohan in consequence of his son having taken to bad ways.



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streets like so many vagrants. But to the point, Dina. I was also thinking, what a glorious evening it is."

His wife looked dubious at the last words.

"You call it a glorious evening, Bahadur? To my mind it is the reverse. God alone knows how it will all end to-morrow. I fear me the weather betokens evil. I have never liked such weather."

"And yet, you have not always been in the right. I take it as only the storm before the sunshine, the precursor of the sun that is to shine over the fortunes of Jal and Thrithi to-morrow, of the glorious sunshine which it will reveal over them."

At this moment the sky was overcast. The sun, after a vain but valiant struggle to peep through the fleeting clouds, disappeared in despair. The wind struck up a most weird music and the yonder sea enraptured by its supernatural melody danced a most weird dance to its accompaniment. The wind screeched and the waves overlapped each other in a fantastic manner; the wind howled and the waves went up and down, high and low, till they broke forth their hoary heads in majestic sprays on the rugged shore. The rain came down helter-skelter and threatened to deluge the earth. The performance was most bewitching, and pleased the gods in the heavens who encored it by incessant peals of thunder and flashes of lightning. Nature seemed to be bent upon a spree; but its conviviality was of a short duration. After a short time the wind stopped its music, the waves their dancing and the gods their encores. The rain alone continued to pour for a while longer, but it soon made its exit in desperation of loneliness. There remained not a vestige of Nature's feast, except broken trees and muddy puddles. The sky cleared up, and the stars twinkled merrily, released from their recent bondage.

Mrs. Bahadurshah breathed a sigh of relief at the change in the weather. Her face cleared up and she looked at her husband demurely as if conscious of her own defeat.

"Well, what sayest thou now, Dina? Do you still feel doubt-





ful of the result? See how it has cleared up. But where is the child? It is so late. What could have detained her?"

In ran at that moment, the child, who was in fact little short of a woman now. Two pair of hands were at once parted and stretched out to receive her. The child did not know into which pair to run first. Then as if led by nature it was those of the female parent into which she first ran. The male parent, as if approving of the action, fell back a step or two, only to lock her in his embrace the next minute.

"Where hast thou been, child, so long? We were getting so nervous about you. I feel almost like a woman where you are concerned."

"Papaji, I was about to leave Thriti's, when it commenced to rain. They would not trust me to it. There were Thriti, Jal, the ayah, Miss Macgregor, and—and Rusi, I mean Rustomji."

The child almost lisped the word Rustomji, perhaps because she felt she was wrong in calling him Rusi and perhaps because she thought her father would not approve of her doing so for Rusi was no relative of theirs. Her mother had also told her that she did not like familiarity between growing persons.

"Oh! He was there also!" said the father half-questioningly, half-musingly.

"Yes, Papaji, Mr. Rustom was also there. He is such fun when he likes. He amused us immensely."

"That he did; did he? I wish he would do better for his own sake. Amusing others is not the only duty of a young man. It is not a necessity. We don't live for it."

"Papaji, don't you think him, I mean Mr. Rustom, to be a good man?"

"That depends, my dear, on one's idea of goodness. The man whom a child of your age may think to be good is not infrequently considered to be the contrary of it by persons of age and experience."



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"O, Papaji, your experience is so great. Do you think Rustom is not good? Do you think he is bad?"

"What does it matter to you, child, if he be good or bad? What have you got to do with him?" interposed the mother.

The girl's face clouded a bit. She seemed to be sorry for the difficulty her mother had raised. She looked appealingly at her father, who drew her to him, stroked her head lovingly and came to her rescue as usual.

"You ask me, darling, what I think of Rustom. I think you are not wrong in doing it. Well then, let me tell you, I do not think he is what a young man ought to be. He has splendid chances if he would only avail himself of them. He is playing with life, aye, frittering it away. Friend Mehelooji would have adopted him long ago as his son and heir but for his follies."

"But, Papaji, you don't think him to be absolutely bad? Is he so bad after all? Cannot you, cannot Mehelooji, improve him?"

"We have tried to do so, girl, but failed. The tender offices of a woman, say a mother alone could do it. But he had the misfortune to be an orphan very early in life. He must be now twenty-five though he looks as if he were older. Evidently the kind of life he leads does not suit him."

"Does he then lead a bad life, Papa? You have not told me if he is absolutely bad."

"There, there, child, you will not be little Silla, if you were not occasionally silly. If you must know it, well, I will say those who were good at Rustom's age and are now double his age must and will think Rustom to be bad. I must tell you, child, that I have no reason to suppose he is absolutely bad. There are circumstances both extenuating and relieving. Likely enough, the softening influence of a partner in life will save him some day. Mehelooji would like him to marry and settle down in life. But he will not do it. The greater fool he. I have seen that softening influence working wonders. There, now, that's enough. Let us





turn to other things.”

There was a pause of two or three minutes, which passed in silence, and during which the father, mother and daughter seemed to be lost in their own thoughts. The parents wondered why the child felt so deeply about Rustom. It was not the first time she had done so. The daughter's face, if anything, had become even more cloudy at her father's concluding words. Her sorrow seemed to have deepened. Her eyes moistened and she almost wished she had not abstracted his opinion of Rustom from her father.

“Well, child, how is Thríti? Is she not joyous? Is she not hopeful? How does Jal look at the oncoming decision?”

“Oh, Papa!” cried the girl, “Thríti was very down-hearted. But that blind doctor of hers, Mr. B—, knows how to manage her. He came in just when she was very despondent and lifted her up out of the abyss of her despair, just as you used to lift me up in your arms and kiss me.”

“Don't you like Mr. B—?” asked the mother. “He is a great favourite of your friend Roshan.”

“O yes, *Maiji*, I do like him; if not more, as much as Roshan does. He has so much to say and solves our difficulties just as *Bavaji* does. He sang to us ‘The Troubadour’ and ‘Just before theattle Mother,’ to-day. Thríti accompanied him on the piano, Jal played violin and we joined in the chorus. Even the deaf man clapped his hands.”

“The deaf man? Who was he?” asked the mother. “The deaf do not hear. How could he then clap his hands?”

“Easy enough!” said the father. “Particularly if he happens to be the one I know. Was he not Khurshed Nariman?”

“Yes, Father dear, it was he.”

“That's it. That young man is a jewel; steady, obedient, intelligent and hard-working. He had the making of a great man in him but the loss of hearing has spoiled it all. His father is a man of means and keeps up a big office. Khurshed is his only son.



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There was ample excuse for him to have stayed by his side. But he went on the war and fought for his King. He made a name, but lost a gift—the great gift of hearing.”

“But it’s not so bad as blindness, Papa?” asked the wise daughter of the wiser father. “Mr. Rustom thinks it is worse than blindness. He told Thrithi he would rather go blind than go deaf. He used a big word,—let me see, I will try to remember it; yes, there it is—he said the auscultatory sense is more valuable.”

The parents exchanged glances. The daughter seemed to be once again taking on favourably to Rustom. The young man, they thought, had made an impression on her. But the subject was so deeply interesting that the father did not like to break the thread of it.

“Well! And did Mr. Rustom give his reasons for so thinking?” enquired he.

The girl had waited only for this little encouragement to proceed.

“To be sure, that he did; and so cleverly too, Papa. His face shone, he stood erect and he seemed like a *Dastur* singing the *Gathas*<sup>1</sup>. He was quite in his element. He began by asking us, which handicaps the more?—deafness or blindness? Then without waiting for our reply he went on, ‘I say deafness; though the contrary view is the more general. The mind is comparatively much more sensitive to auditory stimuli than to visual stimuli. In other words what we hear makes more impression upon us than what we see. There are innumerable kinds of pleasant and unpleasant sights and sounds so that it would be impracticable for any one person to enumerate them all, but here are examples to illustrate what I mean.

“We can read about a person being in pain or watch a person being hurt and be sorry or feel genuinely sympathetic. Or

<sup>1</sup> A series of prayers which were composed by Zoraster himself. They are highly inspiring and inspiring.





we can even see a person drowning and want to help or do something of assistance, but it isn't until we hear the groan of an injured person or the cry for help that we are stirred to the depths of our being to aid instantly.

“ ‘It seems as though we had to be aroused to action through our ears rather than through our eyes. And perhaps the most potent influence is the human voice. This is well illustrated in child-training when we see how stubbornly a child will resist a cross or impatient command while the kindly or patient request brings willing compliance. The same thing works out in the shop where men jump to help the cheerful call for aid but are morose and sullen if the boss grouches. And how we all hate to be bawled at by our superiors? We will do anything rather than get called to account for poor work, and on the other hand we want our good work appreciated. It helps tremendously to have the word of commendation occasionally, and kindly criticism in private is also well taken.

“ ‘A fire in a tall office building or warehouse is a thrilling sight from a distance, but as we approach and hear the clanging of the fire engines' bells, the shouts of the firemen, the swish of the streams of water and the calls or screams for assistance, we realise that it is a dreadful thing after all.

“ ‘I have seen men hurt in lots of football games and often see them carried senseless from the field, and have not been much impressed; but I will never forget a certain game in which a player had his left leg broken. The snapping of the bone could be heard all over the stadium, and was very startling; but the suddenness of the break caused the tackled man to cry out like a hurt rabbit and that cry sickened the whole crowd of spectators and players. It was some time before the players regained sufficient nerve to go on with the game.

“ ‘The war-cry of the American Indians was intended to inspire terror in the hearts of those who heard it; and it had that effect.





The war dances of the Indians and the wild dances of the negroes in Africa as well as similar religious ceremonial dances in other parts of the world begin with low humming and the light beating of tom-toms and gradually increase in intensity until the participants have worked themselves up into a frenzy.

“ Besides savage breasts there are savage beasts that can be tamed by suitable music. The animal trainers depend much more upon the hearing than upon the vision of their animals. The simplest and most obvious illustration of this is the equestrians whose horses shift from two steps to waltz as the circus band changes its time or air. Dogs know at once from the inflection of a stranger's voice whether he is kindly disposed or not.

“ However, there are a great many pleasant sounds as well as unpleasant ones. Therapeutically it has been often proved that music has very beneficial effects, especially during convalescence. Soothing melodies are quite healing in their results. How we love the old familiar airs and hymn tunes we learned as children. The electrical effect of singing “ Nearer my God to Thee ” during theatre fire panics has been proved many times. The sight of a calm man in a turmoil is no doubt reassuring, but the sound of a firm confident voice in a crisis is much more effective. The good physician well knows the great value of firm confident positive assertions to his patients.’ ”

“ Mr. Rustom further said that it is remarkable how the intensity of a sound will affect those hearing it. “ Of course pleasant surroundings are nice and help towards comfort. We like good pictures in our homes, especially those that have a deep perspective, such as mountain or marine views ; but even more restful than these and more relaxing is the quiet happy voice of a loved member of the household. Perhaps we can never trace just what the evolution of the senses has been ; but it seems as though primitive men must have relied more upon hearing





than seeing, especially as they were more given to night prowling than we are.' Hence Mr. Rustom would rather possess his sense of hearing than his sense of sight."

It seemed as if the girl had caught Rustom's inspiration. She looked so eloquent, so grand and so proud as she spoke; proud as it were of the man whose utterances she was repeating. When it was over, there was another exchange of glances between the parents. Was it their own darling that was speaking or was it a fairy from the sky? Could the man who had so inspired her be so bad after all, mused the father. Were not vilification and wild tongues at work? Was not calumny on his track? Was he not the victim of slander which travels faster than a fiery steed, faster than lightning itself? Was he not himself young once and had he not suffered? Was he not despised and deserted, disconsolate and distressed? Aye, aye, would he not have succumbed if he had not by Hormuzd's grace faced the crisis boldly and saved the situation? Had he not the help of his better-half, which Rustom lacks and lacks so badly? Could not a wife like his,—Shirin for instance, but he dismissed the idea instantly,—save him? He felt a tingling and then a softening all over. He drew his daughter towards him and kissed her gently on the forehead. The mother felt drawn also and went through the osculatory ceremony on her own behalf. The father became more indulgent and said:

"So, Rusi can be serious when he chooses."

"And so amusing too, Papa. He told us that Thriti and Roshan are beautiful names, that Thriti reminds us naturally of our Prophet and Roshan of his Light and Leading, the candle of which will burn for ever. But, he said, the name Shirin is so grandly eloquent of its simplicity and sweetness; for does not the Persian word *shirin* mean all that is sweet on *terra firma*? He said he wanted to make a tour round the world. That is his beau ideal. He would go to Iran and read *Shah-nameh* in the very land of the



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great Shahs. He knows Persian well ; doesn't he, father ? Where could he have studied it ? He makes time for study in the midst of hissprees, he says. He would then go to the wilds of Africa and to America. When there, he would take unto himself a dozen wives and he would call one of them Shirin, another Magdalene, another Thrity, another Roshan, and the rest of them by less charming names in the order of mental calibre and importance. He would have a group taken of these one dozen wives with himself as their head and send it down to us for our delectation. Won't you look at it, Mamma, when it is sent to us ? Shall we not send him, each of us, a separate letter of congratulation ? O Papa, how I wish we could also go to Iran and America ! I long for the day. I long to move. It would be so grand and so entertaining."

The father was overcome.

"Yes, darling," he said, "I am myself anxious to do that and see how Rustom fares there. He will not marry a single Red Indian, or a nigger either. But if he is good and persevering he can marry an American heiress or a Persian *huri*."

The girl's face clouded once more. She was too young to love, and her heart was entirely free and unassailed. She had never considered what love is. She had thought, it only helped authors to write stories. And yet there was an instinctive feeling in her when her father spoke of Rustom marrying an heiress or a *huri*. She took the one dozen wives business to be nothing but a myth.

"But, my dear," said the father, "now that I bethink me, how could you have committed Rusi's long lecture so well to memory ? It could not have been an exchange of brains ; though yours I am sure are anything but dull."

"Oh, that's simple enough, Papa. Whilst Rusi spoke Jal who wants to be an expert took notes in shorthand. Directly the speech was over he went to the typewriter and typed it away in





long hand, four copies in all, you know. He gave one to Thriti, one to the deaf man, and one to me, and kept the fourth for himself. See, here is that copy, Papa. All the while that it was raining I was hard at work committing the contents to memory. I did the same driving down here. Mr. Rusi said it reminded him of what Voltaire has said that 'of all robberies robbing another man's ideas is the least dangerous to society.' But, you know, Papa, I have not stolen his ideas. Won't you return that copy to me, Papa? Though it's not in his own hand I have vowed to preserve it."

The Papa was puzzled. Would it be wise to return the copy? And why not? he thought. It was all in the girl's memory as fast as it was on paper, and she could reproduce it. Besides it would be churlish not to return it.

"There, take it, child," he said, "there is no harm in preserving it. It is possible that it is someone else's ideas that Mr. Rustom has collected in the course of his reading. But that does not matter; for the matter of that we all live on other people's ideas."

At this minute Mr. Bahadurshah was seen to refer to his watch.

"In the name of Zoraster," he said, "it is half-past-eight. Time for dinner at nine. We must hie and offer up our prayers to the Giver of all bounties. Run, *beta*, ask Kavla to bring water here. We will perform *padiab*<sup>1</sup> and *kushti*."

<sup>1</sup> Applies to the process of ablution or the cleaning of the exposed portion of the body, i.e., the feet, the hands and the face, with clean water. It is done before prayers, after answering the calls of nature, and even before luncheon and dinner.





## CHAPTER XXXVII

## HEARTS THAT MEET, WEEP, WEAVE AND WIN

*"Such is the use and noble end of friendship,  
To bear a part in every storm of fate,  
And, by dividing, make the lighter weight."*

HIGGINS.

THAT night Shirin was a bit silly. Shall we blame her for it? No. Why not? Because she did not know and did not wish to be silly. This silly condition of mind is not unusual in case of grown-up folk. In case of youth it is only stronger and more frequent.

It was bed-time. Silla was in her cosy little boudoir, which was all her own. A beautiful little lamp burned under a green shade. On ordinary occasions she would have betaken herself to her bed and would have been fast asleep. To-night she only betook herself to a chair near the lamp, removed a folded piece of paper which she had carefully stowed away where love-stricken girls usually do, unfolded it carefully and was seen deep down into it. The reader must have divined what paper it was. She had already learnt by heart the contents thereof; and all that was expected was that she would look it up. But, no. She read it once, read it twice and read it fifty times over with occasional lapses of moody thoughts. Goodness knows how long the performance had continued but there was a disturbance.

"Shirinbai, what are you at? Have the *saheb loks* won the war? Or are the German *loks* here and are we all to die? *Jesu, Jesu*, may thou keep that day from us." The utterer whoever it was kissed the sacred cross which hung round her neck by a





string of glass beads and crossed herself devoutly. "But even if it be war news, *chhokri*, it surely cannot require so much reading. You read such big newspapers soon enough."

Who was the speaker? It was Shirin's ayah, Verodina; a middle-aged, respectable and trustworthy servant of long standing, who usually slept in her little *Baisaheb's* room. This worthy servant, like others of her class, was sitting up in her bed and offering up prayers before allowing Morpheus to overpower her. The prayers were long over and she waited in the hope of Shirin finishing her reading but when it looked as if it would never be finished she thought it time to interfere. It was good that she did so for it roused Shirin who soon collected her wondering thoughts and was herself again. Taking her tiny little key out of her pocket she unlocked her nice little *escritoire*, put the dear little piece of paper in it, locked it up and after assuring herself that it was quite secure she soon fell a-speaking.

"Ayah dear, it is not war news. It is—it is something more important, something which I wanted to carefully study. It is a lesson. The Germans are not coming here, Verodina dear; they never shall. You may make your mind easy about it."

"Make my mind easy, *chhokri*? You think there are no other troubles except the war. God has placed you and yours in ease and affluence and may He keep you so for ever and aye. But out there in our country there are other evils; influenza, plague, famine and cholera. The houses and even some of the streets are filled with the dead and the dying. *Chhokri, chhokri*, why would you not let me go and be near my dear ones? It is only my carcase that is here; my life and soul are there."

The *chhokri* appealed to thought of nothing but the ayah's words. The dear little paper and its contents were forgotten. She rose, threw her arms round the ayah's neck and mingled her own tears with hers. *Bara ladies and baises* in British India and Britain will turn up their noses, contract their eyebrows and scowl



and growl at this natural exhibition of human feelings as pure, as grand and as good as nature itself, feelings which serve to bring together the high and the low, the mean and the mighty, feelings which are not infrequently felt on fields of war and in the midst of human worries and above all which bring us nearer and nearer unto God.

"Ayah dear, it is no use your asking to leave us. It will do no good to them or to you. You shall go but not now. We would be sinners if we allow you to go now. It would simply be sending you to certain death."

"If death is to come, it will, *chhokri*, *Jesu* looks to us all ; and there is this to comfort us." She held up the cross before the girl's eyes. The girl was a strict Zoroastrian, but was not above admiring and honouring the simple convert's adopted faith.

"Ayah dear," she said, "yes, go on believing in that and you will be happy. No woe will betide them at Goa or befall you here. See, ayah dear, here is something that Mamma and Papa gave me on my birthday ; it is of no use to me but will be of great use to you." The same moment the girl emptied a little purse into the ayah's hand. "Nay, don't refuse it, it is not for you ; it is for those at Goa. I am free to do what I like with my own. If you like I will tell Mamma and Papa that I have forced it on you and they will not blame me for spending it in such a good cause."

So Shirin had preferred idealizing the real to realizing the ideal. She then betook herself to bed and slept the sleep of sweet innocence.





## CHAPTER XXXVIII

## UNDER THE CLEAR CANOPY OF HEAVEN

*"Humble love  
And not proud reason, keeps the door of heaven!"*

*YOUNG'S Night Thoughts.*

THE inmates of Bahadur Mahal were early risers. The master of the Mahal had taken care to inculcate in the minds of those round him the saying of Poor Richard, "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Shirin had gone to bed late that night but on the day following she rose even earlier than usual; rose fresh as the morn and radiant as the sun. She had slept the sleep of innocence, slept sound and undisturbed. Before the incidents of the previous day could invade her mind again she drew the *sor* of her wollen *sari* close over her head, pinned it under her pretty chin, threw her warm shawl over her shoulders, flew out into the compound and was soon at the gates.

She looked out into the long length of Pedder Road. It was so early that it was practically deserted. One end led to Mahalaxmi and the other met the Gowalia Tank and the Gibbs Roads. Rodolph had run after her unperceived and stood by quietly watching his mistress's movements. There were occasional sounds of the barking of dogs and the singing of birds. The only wayfarers were milkmen carrying pails of milk, sweeping women leisurely and lustily sweeping the road, *powwallas* carrying basketfuls of *pows* or loaves, barbers and Feringi butlers in their master's cast-off clothes going out to the market. Occasionally a motor was seen to glide swiftly by. There were a horseman or two who, whilst they passed by, nodded gallantly to Shirin and showed as if they would



have stopped and talked to her if she were so inclined. But she was not so inclined. She was a modest girl. She had never been within the inside of clubs and gymkhanas. She was not taught to court introduction or to introduce herself to any Bejan or Burjor, Pesi or Pheroze, who may like to rivet her attention or force his on hers. Clubs and the pell-mell comingling and conglomeration on male visitors' days of young men and women of different caste, colour and creed had not found favour with her father. Clubs, he said, were not for the young. They must be, he said, for men advanced in years who would otherwise vegetate and wither away in the unrelieved silence of their homes. They were certainly not for girls or even young ladies, Mr. Bahadurshah would urge, unless they wanted to be young reprobates. He hated the tone and tendency of the boys and girls of the period, their laxity and their luxuriousness, their unfinished morals and manners, their increasing taste or mania as he said for dances and tableaux and above all for their fantastic mode of dress and hair dressing.

Shirin was about to return to the house when Rodolph gave evidence of his presence. He pulled and tugged at his mistress's *sari* and showed as if he wanted to draw her attention to some one who was approaching from the Mahalaxmi end of the road. The next moment the dog ran to welcome the approacher who was no other than Rusi. He was within a few yards of the house now and his eyes met those of the girl standing at the gate. He removed his felt hat and bowed low to the lady in his usual semi-serious, semi-jocular fashion, making his friend Rodolph walk along with him on his hind legs. Shirin hesitated for a moment, then showed as if she had not recognized Rustom, turned away and was making her way to the house, when she heard Rustom calling out :

“Silla, Shirin, Shirinbai, please don't run away ; I am not a German—I am to go to Africa and America, not to Germany ; you know I told you all about it yesterday.”

There was no alternative now for Shirin but to stop and meet





Rustom. Within the few moments that they had espied each other, her father's opinion of Rustom had rushed to her mind. He must have risen by this time or must rise shortly and miss her. It was not usual for her to stroll out so early. What would he think if he saw her with Rustom? Would he not take it that it was all pre-concerted? There was a warm glow on her cheeks and she blushed. She would not extend her hand to Rustom but could not refuse to take his which was extended towards her. The meeting of the hands made the man the master. He made for a bench which stood under a cluster of trees and the girl feeling a peculiar sensation creeping all over her, a sensation of strange pleasure which she could not divine, walked as if in a daze by his side.

They seated themselves on the bench, the four-footed mounting and seating himself between them. A pretty morning picture it was. There was a silence which Rustom broke. He had not failed to notice that the girl had recognized him and wanted to avoid him. He could have waited the whole day, aye even for days, and could not have divined the cause. He had not the slightest idea of what was passing in his companion's mind. He wished he could read it but he was helpless. He wished the Blind Doctor were by his side. He would have read her mind as he had read that of Thrithi. But he was not to be daunted and he went boldly at it.

"Well, Shirin, is the ugly man so very ugly to-day, that the fair lady would not so much as look at him? You know the ugly beast is going to betake himself to the jungles shortly and will trouble your ladyship's eyes no more."

"Mr. Rustom, Rustomji, you don't mean to say I wanted to avoid you! I—I—" and then she stopped.

"Untruth cannot walk in the path of truth," observed Rustom. "You were about to say something, Shirin, that would not have been truthful and like the true daughter of a true father you stopped. You were so free and frank with me yesterday. You were in the same stall with us yesterday; you are in the reserved



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box to-day and are looking on this biped and this quadruped as stage-players from a distance."

"I—I did not mean to be reserved. I am not so proud or changeable either," faltered the girl.

"Then it must be I that has changed. I was bad enough yesterday, for I bored you all with a big tirade ; and I must be worse to-day, for I am boring you now."

Shirin tried to speak but she could not.

"Come, *Baishaheb*," said Rustom, "tell me the truth. I see from your face that you want to do it. But I see you are afraid of someone, perhaps your father, disapproving of it."

Rustom felt that he was hard. He had no right to stand in the light of a Father Confessor to the girl and to force a confession from her. He had never dreamt of being in love with her. If anything he thought she was too young and innocent to love anyone, much less 'the wayward beast' as he styled himself. But he could see that there was a burden on her mind, which she could not lift herself ; but she would not be displeased if someone else helped her to remove it. He was not joking when he told people that he would be leaving Bombay for a long time to come ; and he could not bear to think that anyone of his select set should think ill of him. For all others he did not care.

"Shirin," he proceeded, "if I am not changed or gone from bad to worse between last evening and this morning, sure enough someone has been speaking to you about me and painting me bad, someone that likes me and yet tries to persuade himself that he does not. I say 'he', because I don't think it's a 'she'.

The girl's look expressed surprise. She fixed her black orbs fully on the man that was addressing her. Her lips moved as if in silent prayer. It was not prayer, however, but admiration ;—admiration for the man whom she had so freely admired before her father only last evening ; admiration for the man who was now reading her all over like a book.





"Rus—Rustomji, I have never thought ill of you and I—I will try never to do it say what they will."

"But if your father says it, will you not then believe it? Is he not always right? Do not the best of men at times judge from appearances and are not appearances often deceitful? I will not blame your father, Shirin, if he has told you that I am bad and that you should not associate with me. If he were Rustom and I Behman, I might perhaps have done the same."

This was a poser. The girl tried to reply. It was not in her nature to prevaricate. All she could do was to melt into tears. Rustom unconsciously extended his hand and she took it, sister-like if you will so have it. The reserve, if any, on her side vanished into the thin morning breeze, vanished as if on the wings of the dove.

"O Rusi," she murmured, "I knew you were keen and wise but I did not know you were much wiser. I did not want to tell you an untruth and will not do so even though I find myself in a predicament now. Someone told me," she proceeded, gently withdrawing her hand from his and looking down much abashed, "you are not so good and so wise as he would wish you to be;—someone who thinks you could be better and wiser if you choose."

"And that someone is the speaker's father, the owner of Bahadur Mahal. Am not I right, Shirin?"

The Shirin appealed to remained silent, which implied consent.

"And did that someone tell you," continued the questioner, "why he thinks me to be so bad? Does he take me to be incorrigible? Is there no hope of redemption for the reprobate?"

The woman was all in the man's hands now; and she murmured half to herself and half to the man.

"He said if you had not the misfortune to be an orphan so early in life the tender offices of your mother would have stood you in capital stead."



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"It would have kept me from going bad or prevented me from becoming worse ; is it not ? But he knows I have no mother who could improve me ; what then ?"

The girl hesitated a moment and then said, "The softening influence of a partner in life. I do not say it myself, Rustomji. I only repeat what my father said."

"And if the partner in life does not come seeking me, what then ? Did he say I must go seeking her ?"

Strange and diverse feelings fought for victory in the girl's heart. She wished she could know herself. She wished she could divine the undefinable that was rising from her heart to her throat and almost choking her.

As Shirin remained silent Rustom repeated his question which elicited a clever reply.

"Well, I did not ask him to say that and he did not say it."

"Well, but what do you say to it ? If a partner in life does not come seeking me must I go seeking her ?"

"How can I answer that ? But I suppose you must, or at least you should set about it carefully," said the girl.

"Set about it carefully ? Would my lady deign to explain it ?"

The my lady so addressed looked at her feet and not at the questioner's face.

"I cannot explain it myself ; but if it were left to my father, whose thoughts and ideas are almost my own now, I think he would say, Mr. Rustom, you are of that age now when you should abandon once and for ever all your lighter ways, careless habits, little follies and unlovely doings, and change—O, what shall I say ?—I cannot find the exact words."

"Let me supply them then. Change from the idler to the industrious, from the go-me-where to the sit-at-home and sticker-to-the-official-stool, from the wayward to the wiseacre, from the bold stander-up for innocence and suppressor of bullyism to the devil-may-care, disdainful and conceited coxcomb, in short from





the selfless Samaritan to the selfish live-for-self and die-for-self."

This was spoken in that peculiar tone which was Rustom's own, spoken so seriously and yet so jocularly that for the first time after their morning-meeting the clouded face of the girl cleared, the merry twinkle returned to her eyes and the sweet little smile to her rosy lips.

"O Rusi!" And the words seemed to jump smilingly out of her lips. "O Rusi! It's not quite what my father would have said. He would have said, Rustomji, before you go seeking a nice little partner in life, one who would make you happy, deserve before you desire. Be you serious, steady, industrious and earning. O, but I forgot my father's most important remark. It was that long ere this you could have stood in the light of a son and heir to Mehelooji, who would have adopted you but——"

"— but for my nasty ways and ill-doings : is it not ? I have great respect for your father, Shirin, and deference for his opinion ; but if becoming Mehelooji's son and heir mean anything like being serious, steady, industrious and earning, I would rather not be his son at all. Being adopted son to a wealthy man means to my mind, plain and simple, falling flat on the adopted father's shoulders. An adopted son must be an adept : he may or may not like his adopted father or his ways but he must please him and pat him, flatter him and fawn on him, believe one thing and make him believe another. I have no faith in this *palak*<sup>1</sup> business, Shirin. If I ever take an adopted father or become his *palak* I would certainly be Mehelooji's. But, you see, there are serious objections to that. Becoming his *palak* means being doomed down to Bombay, rolling in ease and comfort, practising the rôle of *Shethia*<sup>2</sup> and patron, and in brief never moving hand or foot to uplift one's own self nor to uplift those who want to be uplifted. Then again, you see, Silla,—"

<sup>1</sup> An adopted son.

<sup>2</sup> A big-wig or a leading man of the community.



At the word Silla a quick change passed over Shirin's face. It was quick to come but not so quick to disappear. Her frame seemed to shake. The word seemed to tingle her whole being. She unconsciously wished she would go on hearing that sweet little word from Rusi's mouth for ever. Rustom did not know what it all meant and went on to say :

"Then, again, you see, Silla, becoming Mehelooji's son and heir means that I should be son to my own sister and to my brother-in-law. I should have to call them mother and father. Luckily I am not their senior ; but were I ten years their elder I suppose our *revaj*<sup>1</sup> would have bidden me to be their son all the same. I have known of uncles being adopted as their younger nephews' sons."

Shirin laughed and her laughter seemed to inspire her four-footed companion who looked up joyfully into her face and romped about her.

"As to my nasty ways and evil doings, Silla, I will tell you what !" proceeded Rustom. "I was once fined rupees fifty for thrashing within an inch of his life a rich Parsi bravado who used to thrash his poor over-obedient wife for any imaginary sin of omission or commission. The Magistrate whilst fining me seemed as if he approved of what I had done ; for at times he showed as if he would jump out of his chair and give a taste of his dog-whip to the complainant. On another occasion I was taken up for giving a taste of his own whip to a *garivalla* who was insulting a lady passenger. On this occasion the Magistrate was pleased to take a different view of the offence and fined the *garivalla* rupees twenty. The lady passenger, who was a rich Parsi lady, being told by an over-obliging person that I was poor, sent me five rupees for my trouble, which I very thankfully returned to her. I was once charged with obstructing a policeman in the discharge of his duty. It was twelve noon, and I saw the policeman roughly handling a poor labour-cart-

<sup>1</sup> A custom in vogue or usage, an observance as opposed to religion.





driver and charging him with driving on the wrong side of the road. When being so handled the cartman was on the right side of the road. I told the policeman that the man could not have flown from the wrong to the right side all in a moment. The matter was taken to the court and the case was discharged by the Magistrate on the evidence of a respectable eye-witness, who was no other than Miss Shirin Bahadursbah's humble and apologetic servant Rustom Delaver. The charge of obstruction against me which was next on the list of hearing was then withdrawn by the police. Some of my other nasty things, Shirin, are that I don't increase the Government revenue by taking to dice, drink and tobacco, like many Parsi young men of the day, or don't increase the over-increased revenues of the Turf Club of the *gora sahebs* in Bombay and Poona by going to those slaughter-alive races, which our wise Government so wisely and so judiciously protract for the utter ruin of their countrymen, who do not know where to stove away the heaps they collect. I have never seen the inside of a jail or ever ruined or harmed a creditor by taking advantage of the over-indulgent Insolvent Debtors' Act. This Act is another masterful piece of British wisdom. Why, what brings me here to-day, Silla ? ”

Silla who was deeply taken with that sweet word from Rustom's mouth did not answer but looked demure.

“ Why have I come here to-day, Silla ? ” Rustom went on. “ It is to return a certain amount which your father was good enough to lend me on my mere word of mouth and which I wanted to give to a friend in distress. Your father never bargained for time or interest and never reminded me about the loan. But I have come all the same to refund it to him. You seem surprised, Silla ! Where has this money come from, you would ask ? It is the savings from my income from contributions to the press.”

“ It is very creditable to you, Rusi,” said Silla.

“ I wish your father would say so, Shirin. Times were when





he would have said so but times are different now. Times were when sitting in yonder verandah of that beautiful bungalow your father took pleasure in relating to me all the worries and troubles of his young days, his reverses and retreats, his rises and onward moves, his runs and his scores, his bowled-outs and bailed-outs in the battle of life and such like entertaining and encouraging stories. He had told me of his disappointments and hopes and ultimate success in the fray; above all he had ended by saying, do all, Rusi, so long as you do nothing to disgrace yourself or your family. I was then what I am now. That edifice stands where it is now. This dog here is the same faithful quadruped now that he was then and—and—you, Silla, are as innocent, kind, loving and affectionate now in that beautiful *sari* of yours as when a rather big-looking doll over-growing her frock. Your father is the same now that he then was except in one thing; and that one thing is his opinion of poor me. What was then youth, courage and emboldenment is now rashness, roughness, indecorum and indignity in his eyes. Thank God, Mehelooji is different. He does not take me to be a pattern of virtue, nor an embodiment of youthful vices or all that is bad in youth. He does not take me to be incorrigible."

If ever Rusi was serious, or if ever he looked mournful, Shirin felt that it was now. It moved her to tears, which Rusi was not slow to notice. She felt irresistibly drawn towards him at that moment. And were is the girl that would not have? One of her tiny little hands was placed over his shoulder and she murmured:

"Believe me, Rusi, standing out under this clear canopy of heaven and in the sight of Him who hears all I tell you that, if ever I felt doubtful about you those doubts are from this day forward shattered and I scatter them to the winds even as this dust on Rody's back." With her right hand on Rusi's shoulder with her left she cleaned out the dust from the back of this quadruped, who as if knowing what was passing was gazing wonderfully into theirs eyes.





"Rusi," proceeded Shirin, "I don't know if you have ever liked me; but—but—let me tell you that I have always—"

"—disliked me," put in Rustom.

The next moment, seeing the pang in her face, he changed. "No, Silla, I was only joking. I see that you have always liked me, and that you have never taken me to be so bad or incorrigible as I have been painted. I feel for you and will avoid meeting you alone as your father might misconstrue it. It is possible we may not meet again before I leave Bombay for a long long time to come." He took her hand and shook it affectionately.

"But you will go in, Rusi, you will go in with me to my father. You forget you want to return him the money. Go in with me you shall. I shall certainly tell my father all that you have told me now."

"Sorry if I displease you, Shirin, but I had rather not go in with you. I have changed my mind and you will oblige me if you really like me by not pressing me to accompany you. All the same this money here shall go to your father to-day with a letterful of my heartfelt thanks."

His left hand unconsciously strayed to his pocket and brought out a little bundle of bank-notes before the tear-dimmed eyes of his companion.

"Come, give it to me, Rusi," she said firmly as if determined not to accept a refusal. "Give it to me. I shall give it to my father. It will tell him what you had come for. It will prevent me from keeping back from him a full and free account of our meeting and telling him frankly that I do not agree with him in his opinion of you."

"But, Shirin, you will surely count the money and assure yourself that it is all right."

"It must be so, Rusi; but if there be a deficit I shall make it up. I shall not merely tell you that you are a little goose, just a wee bit of a rogue for cheating me, but will call upon you to



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repay that deficit with interest."

She laughed, or rather forced out a little bit of a laugh. Rustom catching the infection laughed too. By way of silent approval the dog lifted himself on his hind legs and licked her hands lovingly. Rustom moved the dog away and cleaned the girl's hands with his kerchief. The Parsis are a peculiarly cleanly race. They will not rest or feel easy until they have washed out the loving lick even of a little poodle. This sense of purity is inherent in them. It is the basis of Zoroastrianism, which inculcates and enjoins purity of person, purity of mind, purity of heart, speech and action. There was a water-tap close by. They put their hands under it and cleaned them. The clean hands of two clean consciences met once again.

"Good-bye, Rusi," said the girl.

"Good-bye, Silla, and God bless you," said the youth.

There were tears in the eyes of the tender one and the eyes of the harder one were not undimmed. And so they parted company; the man all unconscious of the feelings with which he had inspired the girl and the girl all unconscious of the nature of but overpowered by the intensity of her own feelings. The dog ran to the gate to see the guest off.

From that day forward Silla the divine was Silla the sulky. She spoke but little and at times not until she was spoken to. She became thoughtful and was occasionally very moody. What she was thinking of, the reader can easily imagine. She was seen to be looking often and for long minutes into a picture album and was displeased when she was disturbed. The female parent tried to find the cause of her sudden fondness for the album but she could not. The male parent was more 'cute and not so slow to know the cause. Silla had run to answer the door-bell once and in her hurry to see who it was that was ringing she had left the album open. The father who was in the room took the album, looked at the particular page and the photo in it and learnt what he wanted





to, all in a trice. Before Shirin could return he had replaced the album where it was. She had told him of her meeting with Rusi and told him all that had passed between them. She had told him how she had tried to keep his opinion of Rusi from him and how courteously and cleverly he had abstracted it from her. All this was said so freely and frankly and withal so resolutely that he could not find it in him to blame her or to disapprove of what she had done. She had not asked him if after all that she had narrated to him he had changed his opinion of Rustom in justice to him. No, that she had not and would not do. She was her father's daughter and so like him. But if she had asked him what then? Would he have informed her that he had changed his opinion of Rustom and that Rustom was not so bad after all? Perhaps he would have and perhaps he would not have. Parents have very grave duties to perform by their children and very solemn responsibilities to discharge. If you are a parent, reader, you will know it all easily.





## CHAPTER XXXIX

## THE PAIN WITHOUT THE PEACE OF DEATH

*" Truth crushed to earth shall rise again ;  
The eternal years of God are hers ;  
But error wounded writhes in pain,  
And dies among her worshippers."*

BYRANT'S *The Battlefield.*

THE old order changeth, yielding place to new ; and God fulfils Himself in many ways. This is true all over the world. Why should it not then be in the case of Sherbanoo Dalal ? The hand of God seemed to be in her illness and through it it wanted to work a great reformation in a small but turbulent family. The turbid waters were to be drifted asunder.

Shera's illness rose to a pitch. Sudden illness becomes as suddenly serious. The family Doctor, when he called again in the night, found his patient worse and would not leave her. Magdalene was there and so was Mrs. Mortimer. They sat up with the patient in turns. Magdalene had dispatched short and hasty epistles to her father and her friends and not the least to Ardeshir and Roshan.

Some strange feeling, a something indefinable within her which she could not herself understand, had led Shera on to apply to that ministering angel Magdalene who though not a nurse by profession was still Shera knew a great Sister of Mercy. It seemed as if she wanted to make up for the injustice that she had done to Magdalene even at the risk of submitting her to the taunts of Meherbanoo and Erach.

It is said that there are always two parties to a quarrel. They are not, however, always on a par. They are both either equal or unequal participants in the





fray. They may be both active, or one active and the other passive. They may be both guilty, or one guilty and the other entirely innocent, aye, even ignorant of the real cause of the fray. And yet it has perforce to participate. All this was true of Meherbanoo and Sherbanoo, who as the reader knows were seekers of the quarrel with those with whom they should have lived in peace and amity, with the aid of their plenty, which is said to be the promoter of those two elements of human happiness. All this was true of Ardeshir and Roshan, of Jerbanoo, Thrity and Jal, of Jamshed and Magdalene. But the greatest analogy that stands elevated before us here, is that, the aggressive party knowing that the aggressed is innocent yet presses the quarrel hard on him, even takes it to his very door. This was also true in the case of those with whom we are now concerned. But it weighed heavily on the vanquished. Shera found herself vanquished sooner than her mother did and she collapsed. It went home to her with singular avidity that the quarrel was of their own seeking and that those whom they had dragged into it certainly did not want it. It also came home to her that the draggers were now the dragged for she knew that both her mother and herself had dragged themselves into the mire of shame and humiliation.

Poor Shera! Could those who knew her, could those who had seen her only twenty-four hours before, aye, could even her own mother say it was the self-same head-strong, frantic girl that was lying now on that bed, helpless as a babe? Where had all her pride gone? It had only gone before destruction, dissolution you might say; for it was that that stared her in the face. There were times when she lay quiet with Magdalene's hand clasped in her own. There were times when she was delirious and raved; raved against herself, raved against her mother and raved against Erach. She had her moments of sense and moments of entire aberration of mind. During the former she would not allow either her mother or the one on whom she was



always so sweet to approach her. She showed her open disgust for them. She became excited if they did not leave her. This excited those two. They offered small slights, even insults, by means of hints and innuendos, to Magdalene. But she showed as if she did not understand them.

"Look at that mother of Christ. Look at that Saviour. Is this not a Parsi house, Meherbanoo? Are there not Christian houses to go to?" Erach would ask. And the addressee would reply, "Oh! She has mistaken the place, mistaken her vocation; she has come to the wrong shop, may be she will find it out soon enough." Luckily for Shera, the saviour had found the speakers out and she meant to stick to her post bravely. Every time serves for the matter that is then born in it, but time does not wait; when one matter is over another is born to it. Shera went from bad to worse and from worse to bad, until she went worst, so worst that her life was despaired of. If anything was wanted to break the pride of the mother and the pride of the lover, it was this. They were unnerved and crushed. The misguided mother begged of the Doctor, begged of the consultant, begged of the nurse, begged even of Magdalene, to save her. There were moments when she would have given years of her life to do so.

Friendship can but smoothe the front of despair. Magdalene was a real friend; she had stood at many a bedside and many a deathside. Her friendship for the one, who was so unfriendly to her at first but who had invoked it in the time of her dire necessity, was too sincere to be doubted. So the human hands present did their best but God's own good hand was withheld. Where glory recommends the grief, despair disdains the healing. They told Shera that her illness was not serious at all but she did not seem to listen. Her thoughts were far away.





## CHAPTER XL

## THE SUNBURST IN THE STORM OF DEATH

*"When lovely woman stoops to folly  
And finds too late that men betray,  
What charm can soothe her melancholy,  
What art can wash her guilt away?  
The only art her guilt to cover,  
To hide her shame from every eye,  
To give repentance to her lover,  
And wring his bosom is—to die."*

GOLDSMITH.

TIME thus wore on until it came to the point where it had to bid good-bye to the matter of Shera and take up another matter. A full week had rolled on during which Magdalene had only thrice visited her father. The Bahadurshahs and the Meheloojis and Rustom looked after him and left Magdalene free to look after Shera. Things fall in in the order of good and evil. It was all had before; it was all good now. The evil was evanescent; the good promised to be lasting. It had come to stay.

It was the day on which the Magistrate was to give his decision in that mighty case of blood *versus* blood. The decision was to be given at the opening of the court. The Magistrate was told that the complainants could not attend owing to the serious illness, the almost impending death of the second complainant. Thus when the scene of the decision was being enacted at the court, one of quite a different nature was being enacted at the abode of the complainants. The decision was to show that the real culprits were not the accused but the complainants. The ends of justice were being adjudicated at the same time, though in two different places; one the human court and the other the divine. It was an



SUBLIME THOUGH BLIND

irony of fate. Shera had often asked both in her ravings and in her awakenings if the decision had been given. She had then gone on to say, it must be the acquittal of the innocents and the conviction of the guilty. She said that guilt was hardest when it was nearest home, that it was already near enough to her and therefore but too hard for her to bear. She said that God had yoked misery to guilt; she was guilty and therefore very very miserable. Death alone could end it.

"Miss Macgregor, Magdalene, can I hope for your pardon? Will they also pardon me? I mean, my father and sister, who are so very very dear to me now. Magdalene, I am going now. It is no use your trying to make me believe I am not. Something tells me, God tells me, I must be with Him. Thank God, He has called me to Him before I became a hardened sinner. May His mercy move my mother's heart also. May she see the follies of her ways and repent for her mistakes. And may—may Erach repent and be good for ever after."

What could poor Magdalene say or do? She could only weep and go on weeping. Shera pressed her for the pardon.

"I have nothing to pardon you for, Sherbanoo," said Magdalene. Sherbanoo raised her poor emaciated hand with difficulty and put it over the speaker's mouth. The speaker pressed it gently to her lips and kissed it.

"Won't you call me dear Shera, Magdalene, if but for once only, though I don't deserve it?" It was a signal for another outburst of tears for Magdalene. She laid her hand gently on the invalid's breast and said between her tears:

"Dearest, dearest Shera, I do pardon you, pardon you with all my heart and soul as I am a true Christian and so help me God." Her listener was not quiet yet.

"But what about the others?" she asked. "Will they also pardon me? O my poor father! O my poor sister! How have I hurt you both! How have I harmed you! How unjust and unfair





I was to you ! Why are they not here, dearest Magdalene ? ”

“ Here we are,” said two voices near her. They were those of Ardeshir and Roshan. The voices were shaken and weak with grief. They were both overpowered. They went up to Shera and the spell was broken. The forsaken father had come to the daughter and the long forgotten little sister to the elder one who had so long forsaken them both. The tall figure of the father bent low and was soon locked into the daughter’s embrace. The sister was not slow to follow. It was a scene that could have moved the hardest sinner. It was a tableau for the pen of a poet or the brush of a painter. It was at once heart-rending and heart-joining. Magdalene stood by, singularly affected. She was devout and her lips moved in prayer. Sorrow and silence are strong and for a minute or two they ruled supreme in the room. Who was Magdalene that she should disturb them ? She continued to pray until the father himself broke the silence.

“ Shera, darling, you will believe me when I tell you that you are dearer to me now than my own self. O, that we had never been estranged ! O, that we had never quarrelled ! Quarrel is Satan’s own work and he has been the victor. But with God’s help we will yet vanquish him. You shall live, Shera. The Almighty cannot be so cruel. He must have done this to bring us together.”

“ Don’t deceive yourself, father dear,” said the girl faltering. “ Dearest sister ! O, let me drink in the sweet of these words, let me drink them to the full, drain them to the last drop. For, I have never tasted of their sweet nor drunk of them before.”

It was Roshan that was now on her breast. She was speechless. It seemed that life and soul had both left her. But she could listen and she did it intently.

“ Roshan, my own dear Roshan, you are *roshni* (light) itself ; let me look for it. Look at me ; there, I see it in your eyes. Oh, what world of love have I lost ? The Lord forgive her and