

GOD OF THE GAMBLERS

AND OTHER SHORT STORIES

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Encouraged by the popularity of "Jaya Stoops to Conquer," we have brought out this new collection of short stories. They have been selected on the same plan, to appeal to a wide circle of readers.

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GOD OF THE GAMBLERS

Sivasambu was a pious Hindu. He never stirred out without his caste mark and whenever he went out, he was, always either at his post at office or the weekly lecture at the Triplicane mutts.

At one of these discourses in January last, the *Brahmasri* threw out a hint that God was kind even to thieves and gamblers and quoting a sloka from the Gita, held out that He blessed people according as they worshipped him.

The gambling epidemic was then acute in Madras. The Guindy season was in full swing and the Sports Clubs were receiving bets also for Bombay and Calcutta races, though secretly Sivasambu had heard that some fortunate people had made piles by investing a few annas. And if God is kind to them, why should He not come to the rescue of a devout worshipper like himself—specially when he had the additional anxiety of finding a bridegroom to his eldest girl ?

The lecturer's hint started this train of thought and before he reached home, his mind had been made up that he must try his luck.

Finding her lord engaged in unusually deep thought, the house-wife ventured to ask him what the matter was. Sivasambu made a clean breast of the whole episode ; but assured his wife that he would not venture a pie unless he consulted the family *purohit*.

On Monday morning, after the *Rahukalam* was over, Sivasambu went to the house of Subramania Sastri and asked him whether it is conceivable that God would assist thieves and gamblers; and wanted to know in particular whether he had so far come across any one winning at the races by sheer worship. The Sastri felt a little nonplussed but the innate cupidity of a *purohit* easily prevailed. If Sivasambu should, by chance, make a pile, would he forget his family priest?

The Sastri then waxed even more eloquently on the mysterious ways in which God helps his devotees. Do not merchants worship Satyanarayana and what is trade if not gamble?

Fortified with his assurance, Sivasambu went to his office already a bit late—and going straight to the “gentleman”, told him that urgent family business necessitated his absence for a week. As he had been one of the most regular clerks of the firm, the boss did not probe deeper into the application and granted it.

The next five days were marked by deep austerities in Sivasambu's house. Every one had a bath before sunrise and for long hours, all the *patams* in the house were worshipped. The wife and the eldest girl joined him in giving up the night meal, so that before Saturday morning enough merit had been accumulated—measured by any standard—to win at least one thousand rupees.

Before 9 A. M. all family jewels were safely lodged in the local Janopakara Nidhi and five hundred rupees obtained.

The official race card was brought exactly at twelve noon and at 1-22 P. M., the time accurately fixed by the *purohit*, Sivasambu got into the waiting taxi with a friend who undertook to initiate him into the mysteries of the electric totalisator in the first enclosure at Guindy.

Sivasambu did not take much time to decide which horse he was to back. As he was destined to win, the chances were that he would get the biggest dividends and so selected the

least backed horse for win. The place betting had no use for him.

The first race brought a slight disillusionment. The horse of his choice finished in the ruck.

But he was not disconcerted. He backed similarly for the second race then the third and the fourth. Two hundred rupees had vanished.

For the fifth race, he put a hundred, again on the least fancied horse; but this time, it flattered him a bit. It led all the way till the bend and then faded away.

To Sivasambu, the inference was obvious. God was trying his faith; his persistence had been almost rewarded. Did not the horse lead till one furlong from the winning post?

So with full confidence, he invested another hundred on the least fancied horse, Amber, and it finished second paying Rs. 126 for place.

Obviously he was coming nearer success.....or was he committing a mistake by betting only for win?

So for the last race, he backed rupees forty for win and fifty for place. He was certain of success and was actually counting his gains when the tape flew up. And to his horror, he found his chosen horse planted at the gate, refusing to move an inch.

Sivasambu almost instinctively put his hands into the pocket. Has God, whom he had so devoutly worshipped all his life—specially these six days—filled them mysteriously with notes? No-No-even there, he had been forsaken!

The race course was empty in a few minutes and the Restaurants were closing. In that distracted situation, Sivasambu thought a peg of whisky would be very hopeful; but when he entered the pavilion, he was not content with less than two.

Then he went to the eastern lawn which was quite empty by now and cogitated on his future course.

It did not take him long to decide that both the Brahmasri and Sastri had misled him. There is no God of the Gamblers, at any rate one that can always be relied on.

What was he to do ?

A happy thought struck him. Why not teach these misleading *purohits* a never to be forgotten lesson and pose as a martyr ? Unfortunately the Brahmasri had left Madras two days previously but the Sastri was still there.

Sivasambu realised that any violent action might land him into jail ; but he would go down to posterity as a martyr. He would surely be painted as such in the communal newspapers and the Brahmins will not in future dare to mislead gullible people. After all, he might escape on the plea of provocation.

The plan of campaign was ready in an instant. He had enough money still for a Jutka in which he would go straight to the Sastri's house and give him a severe thrashing.

On the way, at Saidapet, he got down at a fuel depot and took a stout casaurina stick. As he passed the toll gate, he strengthened his resolution by a peg of country liquor.

In his anxiety lest the Sastri should escape by absence from his house, he urged the Jutka driver to gallop and when he returned into the Chinnathambi Street, good fortune smiled on him for the first time on that dark day. The Sastri was sitting on the pial—awaiting his presents.

But alas ! The proverbial slip between the cup and the lip smashed all his plans ; when the Sastri saw Sivasambu approaching like a fury, with dishevelled hair, his bloodred eyes and the stout lathi raised up in the air, the quick-witted Brahmin read the situation in a minute ; and bolting inside the house, fastened the door in time.

Sivasambu was helpless. The door was too strong to be battered. A crowd had begun to gather round ; and to close the episode, the *purohit's* wife announced that Sastri had escaped safely by the door leading to the back street.

A few paces off lay Sivasambu's own house. His wife and daughter ignorant of the catastrophe, were still engaged in worship, declining to taste food until the head of the family returned home with wealth and completed the stipulated *puja*.

Puja there was ; but of quite a different type. In the twinkling of an eye, all the *patams* in the house were smashed to smithereens. His anger thus pacified, Sivasambu retired to his bed room and his wife was considerably relieved to find him snoring a few minutes.

The two ladies spent practically the whole night in clearing the debris and the corporation cartman received two annas the next day to remove them without making any fuss.

* * * * *

I heard the story at the time ; and gathered later that the misfortune had an excellent reaction on Sivasambu. Within eleven months he had two promotions.

Later I met him causally at the Marina and the bright look on his face encouraged me to ask him whether he still believed in the God of the Gamblers. He does not ; but is happy that he once did.

"Thanks to him, I am now drawing Rs. 95 /-a month and I have already recouped the loss sustained at Guindy."

He has even forgiven the Sastri.

M. S. K.

IN THE COURT SUPREME

The day's work began. The judge sat on his throne of justice and called out "the first case." He sat radiating peace and calm and joy around and a bright hallow shone behind his aged head. His silken white hair was gently playing about the mild breeze that blew slowly and softly in the hall of justice. His forehead shone with unusual lustre and his eyes were deep and penetrating, full of knowledge born of experience, capable of seeing far into the future. And a smile played on the ends of his sweet, thin, lips such as would have invited any child to run forward and embrace the holy figure. And in spite of the genial smile, his radiant face was too serious for any man to play the fool in the presence.

A side door opened slowly and a young girl came in and bowed reverently to the figure on the throne, and stood with folded hands in meek obedience. Her face was red and eyes swollen as if with weeping. She seemed to have suffered a lot and her now lifeless face indicated that she must once have looked pretty and graced the household of her parents. And as she stood, silent and speechless her delicate frame nervously shaking before the august presence of this Divine Judge, her bosom heaving and falling, with her tear-stained face bent downwards in girlish modesty and all the audience watching for what was coming forth, the reverend gentleman on the throne looked keenly at the girl for a moment and a tear trickled down his aged cheek as he questioned: "Well, child, what is thy grievance and how can I help thee? Speak, I bid thee, and without fear."

And the fair girl spoke:

"Father and grandsire for all worlds, friend of the friendless and helper of the helpless, listen to my story. When I was a child I was the pet of my parents and was quite happy. My

father was always greedy of money. When I became of marriageable age and all the household was anxious for my betrothal, it happened that one day an old gentleman, weak and sickly, who surely had been sixty summers came to our house and was talking to my father. For long they conferred together and at length the reverend gentleman took leave of my father.

"Having sent him off, my father returned, his face beaming with joy and he came to me where I was with my mother and imprinted a kiss on my forehead. He then told my mother how he had settled my marriage with the only son of the old gentleman, a handsome, educated youth with plenty of riches and how the wedding was to come off the next week. My mother felt very glad and so did my aunt and others and I felt happy too at the thought of all the fun and merriment, the rich clothing and the jewels that I was to get and of the attention that was to be paid to me by such a lot of people. And during the next few days immense preparations were going on and I felt an inward chuckle which I felt shy to express. Such richly garments of silk and lace as I had never seen before, jewels of immense value, the envy of a princess did my father purchase for me and mother, and my heart was throbbing with joy.

Some days before the auspicious day all my relatives began to assemble at our house. And in the opposite house, I was told, my bridegroom and his party had arrived. My childish heart beat with joy and I longed to have a sight of my would-be husband but whom could I ask? However, one day my father brought with him a handsome youth, fair-looking and well built and introduced him to me as the bride-groom and I felt quite satisfied. Day after day passed with increased preparations and every one about me was busily moving hither and thither; and I sat among my dreams of my future life.

"The auspicious day came. The joy of all the assembled people was every moment rising as the tide on a new moon. Every-where could be heard the sound of drums and

trumpets and pipes of gold and all were happy. I was taken to my seat dressed in bridal robes. The bridegroom was also on the opposite seat and a screen held by two priests separated me from my love. Ah! how I wished the screen would drop soon and reveal to me the sweet face of my young husband! After a long chant of mantras and songs when the sacred moment had arrived, the screen dropped and two hands tied round my neck the holy knot and my heart was a thrill. The bridegroom then sat before me and with the corner of my eye, I satisfied my childish curiosity, but, oh, could I believe my eyes? Or was it all a dream, the bridegroom before me was not the handsome youth whom I saw the day before, but the old ugly looking man who had been talking with my father a week ago. And I felt my body all ablaze with anger and shame and I cried out in wild agony, 'Father, who is this that sits before me instead of that youth?' My father was not to be seen nor my mother and the priest told me gently that he was my avowed husband whom I had married with my full consent in the presence of Agni and that it would be foolish if I insulted him. I felt so wild at the thought of all this double dealing both on the part of my parents and these priests and I protested that I had never consented to marry this gentleman but that a handsome youth was shown to me on the previous day as the bridegroom, I shouted words of agony but none would care for me, and I burst out weeping."

And the girl was choked in her tears as she came to this part of the story and all the audience felt pity for her. A keen observer would have seen the eyes of even the old Judge dimmed with moisture and a tear was held in check lest if one came down, another and yet another should follow. Having recovered, the little girl continued :

"The days of marriage ended. I was ashamed to raise my head and my heart was burning in pain and shame. The festivity, the lights and music no longer tempted me. On the con-

trary, I felt they added to my agony like fuel to fire. When I gained a little leisure I went up to my father and fell prostrate at his feet which were bathed in my tears. And he gently raised me and asked me why I wept. I rose and burning with shame and anger asked 'Art thou father or demon? Why did'st thou show me a youth and deceive me vilely ?

"And quietly did he say, 'child, cease weeping. Thy husband old though he be, is very rich and will make thee happy as happiness itself and surround thee with the comforts of a princess' Slowly he pushed me aside and went away leaving me to my wild thoughts. My mother came up to me and taking me in her arms wept profoundly saying that she was also deceived as I was and would not have consented to this match if she had known the truth. And she comforted me saying it is all the will of Ishwara.

"The next day I was told that my husband wished to take me with him to his home and I was to be sent away to a place which I dreaded but there was no other way. We parted sadly and soon I was with my husband, in his rich house, surrounded by all comforts. The gentleman, now and then wished to talk to me but I hated his presence.

"Three months passed. It was a day in winter and my husband had caught a cold in his head and coughed incessantly. In my new home I spent miserable days and restless, sleepless nights. The cough grew worse and worse and a week passed thus. And at midnight one day, I was awakened by my sister-in-law and was told that my husband was dead. I did not know whether I felt happy or sad.

"I was then taken to his side and while the household wept I felt happy at the thought of going back to my home, to my good mother. The funeral was all over, and my parents had come to condole me. After all the formalities I asked to be taken home but my father refused saying that he was going on a pilgrimage with my mother and would not be back until a couple of months. What was I to do in this forsaken house ?

"My parents left me soon and I was alone among strangers. I was asked to do all the household work while the others lounged about easily. And they talked among themselves about me as the 'purchased bullock' and I understood it not. One day it so happened that I felt ill and no one would care for me. At last it was suggested that I should return to my parents, but where were they? As my illness grew more and more they grumbled more too, until at last one day one of them came up to me and said that I should somehow get back to my parents within a week. I protested that my parents were not at home. Then she said 'but your father did not hesitate in asking for an enormous price for you'. And a sudden revelation dawned upon my mind and I asked eagerly 'how much did he get?' And she answered to my surprise 'twenty thousand, my dear, twenty thousand.'

"Now the whole affair became clear to me and I understood it at all. My father sold me to this old man for that enormous amount. He did not mind the ruin of his daughter, if he could make gold out of it for himself. And now I saw his motive in this marriage was not so unselfish as I thought. And as this fact became more and more painfully clear, I felt a rush of energy within me, energy unbounded, and rising slowly I felt my way towards the door and down the steps into the street.

"It so happened that, at this moment a neighbour was going out of his house walking in my direction. But on seeing me he had a wry face and went back into his house saying to himself 'a widow, just as I start'; and more painful than ever came to me the realisation that I was no longer a play girl but a widow, an ill omen to every one, a dispised creature and my heart was about to burst.

"I could no longer seek happiness in life. My parents became my enemies. They had made a fortune on my ruin. My husband was dead. Every one, even a child, looked upon me with contempt, as an evil omen. My husband's people considered me a burden. My decision was made. Sick and weak, all

my body burning in shame and agony I moved on and on aimlessly and in an hour was out of human habitation.

"It was past evening by this time. On the eastern sky were a few white clouds and the full moon was just rising large and yellow. The dew began to fall on the leaves and the grass and the moon made them glitter. I was on the brink of a stream of clear, running water.

"I sat under a tree enveloped in my thoughts. The moon rose higher and higher and the sky became spotless. And in the distance I saw two figures walking hand in hand in the cool moonlight and I knew them to be Kamala, my neighbour, and her husband. Ah! I was deprived of that privilege for ever, younger though I was. And again I gave way to sobs and my heart was near to breaking. It was calm everywhere, only interrupted now and then by the chirping of birds. I rose and slowly walked down to the water, and with a prayer on my lips and my hands folded across my breast I stepped into the stream and moved forward gradually. And lord! now I was off my feet and carried down the current. A gentle peace came over me and I felt vaguely that I rose higher and higher and looked at my body drifting along with the stream dashing against the rocks and enveloped among the weeds. As I rose I felt lighter and happier and as if flying through subtle and ethereal regions, and as I flew I heard sweet voices saying melodies and a fragrant perfume pervaded the atmosphere. A moment later, a figure dressed in white, smiling and radiant, a bright halo palying about his head, accosted me: 'Young one, follow me'. And I followed him through regions infinitely finer and subtler than those I had already crossed, and I beheld more and many more young girls like me, suffering similar agony.

"And as I speeded through faster than ever, I asked my guide why these girls were there wailing so. Sweetly did he make reply: 'Child, this one here has lost her husband who was young, only a month after her betrothal. She grew older and older and the time came for her to know sex and its pleasure and she

was burning with passion. But she could not find any means of satisfaction, for the rules of her community like yours did not allow her to wed twice. And as her passion grew more and more, she resorted to illegal means and satisfied herself. 'When this was found out, her relatives and parents drove her away from home for fear of shame, and homeless, foodless, she wandered along until she put an end to her life and now here she is.'

"We passed on and came to another girl wailing more than the other and I inquired of my guide about her. 'This girl here was married when very young, to a youth who was related to her, against her will. He was ugly, uneducated and cruel and she hated him. But her parents forced her into the contract because he was a near relative and his mother was very anxious for this union. A few years later, when the girl was living with her husband, it happened one day that he detected her talking to a servant boy and falsely accusing her of illegal connection, vilely murdered her and here she wails and moans.'

"As we went along we saw more and more girls weeping and wailing and pitied them. Further on, we met a very young girl who could be well called a child sitting on a rock weeping. My guide explained: 'Look you here, friend, this girl was given in marriage to a man who had desired to marry again when he was already past fifty; and a year or two after the marriage she was widowed. Her parents were too poor to support her and she lived by begging.'

" 'Why, was not her husband rich at least? If not why was she married to him instead of a proper youth?'

" 'Her husband was poor too. But her parents were too poor to afford the enormous dowry claimed by youthful bridegrooms while this old gentleman demanded nothing. So they had to yield.'

" 'And who is this one, pray?'

" 'Oh, this girl was married to a young man when she was eleven. She attained womanhood at twelve and in her thir-

teenth gave birth to a child, a child herself as she was. And unable to bear the strain, her body gave way and the infant died soon after the mother.'

"And on and on we moved faster and faster than ever and I heard moans and groans, and wails and sobs everywhere and little souls of girls were found all about in pathetic condition.

" 'And this little one here,' continued my guide, 'was married to a man who was ennuich and her passion is overpowering her and she groans under its weight without any way of satisfying her need.'

"Thus we saw numberless cases of young girls suffering untold agony and many a thing besides did we see.

"At last my guide came to a stop and turning round asked me what more I wished to see; And I asked him to lead me to where the Lord of Destiny abides and without a word he started again and in the course of a few moments he brought me to the gates of his huge court of justice and asked me to stay in the other room until the door should open. I did accordingly and now my lord I am here, at Thy feet, seeking counsel and comfort.

"Is it thy will, my Lord, that we should suffer agonies like this under the pressure of cruel human laws? While other girls enjoy life happily with their husbands, are we to look at them enviously with despair, and die consumed by our passions? Oh, what is this torture Thou hast decreed, this play of Thine? While our sisters of foreign lands have better social laws, is it Thy pleasure to see us groan under the weight of these superstitions that crush all happiness out of our lives? Speak, I pray thee, speak, when will this suffering end for my sisters and me? Speak or I die here at Thy feet; for I can bear it no longer."

And the girl, advancing slowly forward, fell prostrate at the feet of the Divine Judge, the Lord of Destiny, and all the

audience gave vent to their feelings and burst out into sobs of pity. The kind Judge could not bear to hear the sorrows of this young girl barely fourteen, and rising from his throne gently helped the child to rise and gave her seat next to the throne.

"Child" said he, "Thy story has pained my heart much. Thy country has been in evil days for some time past and many are the sufferings of the poor people. The troubles shall be soon remedied by Me and Mine. I have already sent a few of my devoted workers down to the Earth and soon shall I myself be there. Thou hast indeed suffered much and also seen the sufferings of others besides. Dost thou like to help thy sisters to get out of their trouble?"

"Father, I would do anything to become happy again and help others to recover their lost happiness, if only Thou commandest."

And the Grandsire waved his gentle hand over her head, blest her thrice and there was silence. For the brief space of a moment, no sound was made and all the hearts that witnessed the scene rose in silent prayer for the happiness of this little child with a big soul; and a radiance brighter than the sun filled the hall for that moment.

And shrill and sharp, the voice of the Divine Judge broke the solemn silence: "The second case?"

VYASA RAM.

POL'S PROPHECY

One November day there appeared at the gates of the building at the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Mr. Cotton in Nellore District, a ragged and grotesque looking hag about sixty years old, by occupation a 'fence' and by name 'Poli'. Some times she was addressed as a Singi (gipsy fortune teller). She was having a basket in her left hand and she dropped it as she drew near the gates.

As soon as she had reached the gate, she said with the greatest assurance that she wished to see the Dy. S. P. This request aroused successively, resistance in the orderlies who had assembled there at sight of her, derision in the servants and doubt and hesitation in the constable on patrol, before finally coming to the officer's notice. This gentleman possessed a kindly disposition and he gave order that the 'Sangi' should be allowed to enter.

The gipsy accordingly came into the officer's presence and bowed before him after her own rustic fashion.

"Sir, I have come here to claim the Rs. 1,000."

"What thousand rupees?"

"The reward offered by proclamation a few days ago for any one who gave a description of 'Subbadu' "

"Then do you know him?"

"No, sir, but I have met him."

"How?" the gentleman enquired.

"I searched for him and saw him as clearly as I see you now and now I claim the reward."

"Are you sure you have seen him?"

Mr. Cotton, asked with a queer interest that overlaid his doubts.

The gipsy laughed. "Yes. Yesterday Sir."

"But do you know he is as elusive as a devil? And do you realise that to see him is to die an evil death on the hills."

The 'Singi' laughed and said :

"Not only have I seen him but have even talked with him."

"Where?"

"Near the hills."

"How can you testify to the truth?"

"Listen sir, a week ago, I went to the forest on the hill above that copse to gather wood and some rogues captured me. They bound me securely and I was led to an opening in a rock which showed clearly it was no better than a den. I was afraid they would kill me or at least blind my eyes for the brute has sworn that 'dead men tell no tales' more than once. But fortunately, I met him there soon. He slapped on the back, shook my head with a grig on my brittle hairs and said: 'I am Subbadu. What do you want?'"

"When I heard this, I fell down with sheer fright. The rogue laughed once again and said: 'Who are you?'"

"I said he was a most generous hearted man and added 'let me embrace you my son. I am gipsy, son, a gipsy earning a pie a day. I can teach trees to speak and—'"

Mr. Cotton could not contain his laughter. Then he asked. "What was his reply to this?"

"He roared with laughter as you are doing now."

"He whistled and in the twinkling of an eye I found myself surrounded by guns. 'Noble sir,' I cried 'protect me. I am a poor woman helpless and hopeless.' To which he cried 'Now leave us alone, boys. We are safe here'. They all went away and the robber chief offering his hand asked to tell his fortune. I took his hand and scrutinizing it carefully said 'you will be shot dead, mind you, within a month from this date!'"

"I know that" he replied.

"Then he added slowly, 'you will remain with me for one month and if I don't get hanged by that time, I shall hang you instead.'

"I was led into the cave, tied up and left there. Subbadu whistled and disappeared out of my sight."

"Now I see" put in Mr. Cotton. "So you escaped and is he dead?"

"No—he is alive" put in the gipsy. "A few days later he came to me and said 'you must know that we are all so busy. I really know nothing of what I do sometimes.'

"So through constant asking and also by seeming to tell fortune for him and some of my guards, I persuaded him to let me out of the cave and tie me to a tree. But even then, the guards were by my side. One evening about five o'clock, the brigands who were off duty returned to the camp dragging a farmer. He was evidently very poor and though he pleaded innocence, they wouldn't spare him. 'Friends', he said, 'Subbadu will never come to hear this' at which the rogues pricked, their ears paused at last, convinced of the truth, kicked him with their toes and growled 'Off with you, fellow.' I tried to draw his attention but in vain. He bolted away from the scene and the guards vowed that they would never tell him, their master, that they had captured a farmer.

"But half an hour later, Subbadu appeared dragging him by the neck. He pointed his gun at the guards, and said: 'Fools, to rob him of his small money. Fie upon you. What chances are there that I don't kill you all,' and turning to the Farmer, said 'If you had not informed me of it, you could never have got it. Now, off, good man. The man embraced him and went away rejoicing. But he was called back again. 'Do you know Subbadu' the robber enquired. 'No' he protested. 'You lie. I am he' he drew out his revolver and fired both barrels point blank at him. The fellow dropped down dead.

'Now, with his money, you fellows' he said to his guards' you, dared to leave him. If I had not met him on the way, he would have sacked us'.

"But the death of the farmer, effected my release. The shot passed through his body, and hit the cord. I pretended as if I was still bound though it was thrown loose about me.

"While they were eating their supper with their backs to me, I escaped. It was now night and I ran as fast as my heels could carry me. Therefore, Sir, please to give me the required sum and I shall give the description of Subbadu". The 'Singi' described minutely the brigand-chief, was promised the reward and left the place. The Dy. S. P. was left in a state of amazement.

It now remained to be verified whether what 'the Poli' said relative to Subbadu was wrong or right.

Five days after this scene, the people of Nellore were delighted to see a large posse of constables armed with rifles marching leisurely past to the town-hall. The interest and emotion shown by the crowd were remarkable and there was a singular, solemn stillness reigning in the crowd as they gazed at these olympians. Such was the panic Subbadu had inspired in the whole of Nellore.

"How do you account for Samy's disappearance" said one P. C. to another.

"Why, they say that Subbadu has hanged him. His body was found hanging from one of the arches of the bridge."

At this moment the gipsy 'Poli' happened to pass by and like every one else stopped to look on. The P. C. Bommudu who first suggested that there must be some reason which could account for Samy's disappearance looked at her. Poli's glance fell on him, and the gipsy gave a yell, leaped into the air and rushed towards the town-hall.

Bommudu raised his carbine and aimed at the gipsy. Another by his side brushed it away and the bullet spent itself harmlessly in the air.

Every one thought the man had lost his head and they rushed at him. Sergeants soon disarmed him. He soon regained his composure.

Meanwhile the 'Poli' was taken to the Dy. S. P.

"Take good care, Subbha does not kill me" she said to him.

"Subba. What do you mean" ?

"If you will come with me, you will see."

So saying, she conducted him to the regiment and she pointed to P. C. Bommadu.

"There he is".

Mr. Cotton stood confused. It was so dramatic. But as they were conversing in low tones, Subbadu wrenching himself free from others gave the slip. But a shot from a Sergeant soon brought him down.

Poli was right. Subbadu alias Bommudu had met his fate within the month.

He had been shot dead.

M. G. ROWE.

"NIDHI PARAMBU"

The great Moplah riots and disturbances that had devastated North Malabar had been quelled and peace resumed. And the Government realising that the rioters had proved difficult of capture and that the soldiers had been put to serious handicap for want of proper means of communication had decided to open up the country from Shoranur up to Nilambur. The rich persons who have no vested interests in the locality but who are big officials or merchants elsewhere felt a great delight at the thought that they need not in future undergo untold sufferings and miseries in their journey in a bullock cart. But the poor and those who had vested interests in the locality felt great consternation at the thought that their huts and small lands would be acquired by the authorities and they would be left to drift for themselves.

My friend Mr. Veeraraghavan was one of these victims. His father left him nothing but a few acres of land that had been in the possession of the family, no one knows how long since. Veeraraghavan had a large family to support and from the small income he was getting from the land, aided by the scrupulous economy of his wife, he was able to make both ends meet in a way. But the Railway authorities were coming to encroach upon his lands. The line from Shoranur to Nilambur had been surveyed to run right across the big tank which fed Veeraraghavan's fields. Between the tank and the fields there was a barren piece of ground quite unused and Veeraraghavan requested the surveying authorities to see that their line ran across that plot. But they were unmoved and Veeraraghavan was at a loss to know what to do. One evening he was sitting on the veranda of his small house indulging in gloomy thoughts when his friend Durai invited him to come out for a walk. Veeraraghavan said he was in no mood for it. Thereupon Durai came to him and asked him what troubled him.

"As if you don't know. How many times should I tell it to you? I am thinking what would become of me if my reservoir is allowed to be used by the railway men. I shall have then no provision of water for my crops during summer. I asked those incorrigible people to use my barren parambu but whoever hears poor men's words," said Veeraraghavan very despondingly.

"Oh, that barren parambu. Nidhi Parambu they call it. Is it not?" asked Mr. Durai.

"Yes, the very same. What a nice thing it would be if they run their lines across it instead of blocking up my tank," rejoined Veeraraghavan.

"By the bye, why do they call it Nidhi Parambu" asked Durai.

"Oh, that is an old story. My grandfather told me, that his grandfather told him that there was a treasure, Nidhi, hid in some place in that field," replied Veeraraghavan.

"Well and good. Why then did not your grand—father, or your father or you yourself dig up and take possession of the treasure?"

"I don't know; But we are all afraid. They say that a big serpent, some say ghost—I do not know which—guards the treasure and immediately puts to death any one who attempts to rifle the treasure."

At last Durai's face beamed with a thought that was passing in his mind. 'Hallo' my chap—cheer up. I shall see that you either don't lose your tank or have one in its stead."

"How can it be! Do you think you could move those incorrigible fellows?" questioned Veeraraghavan.

"Never mind how I accomplish the object. Come with me to-morrow morning to your fields and I will tell you how it is."

The next morning Durai and Veeraraghavan started to the fields where the railway officials were measuring and recording

their results. Other busy preparations were going on. In their midst Durai went and stood and calling Veeraraghavan loudly, said, "I say, Veera, why do they call that plot of ground Nidhi Parambu?"

"How many times am I to tell you? They say that there is a treasure hid somewhere in that field; and so they call it the treasure field or Nidhi Parambu."

"Treasure in that field! why man. Then you and I might dig up and possess ourselves of it" said Durai still loudly.

"Oh, no! The man dies who lifts up a spade in that ground. A serpent or a ghost guards the treasure."

"Serpents and ghosts! All myths. If there is treasure I will rifle it. But do you know for certain that treasure is hid in that field?"

"As sure as I am a man; for my grand-father told me in secret." Now Veeraraghavan spoke a little lower: "Many years ago when a great plunder of the land by Tippu's soldiers took place, a vast quantity of treasure was hid in that field by the villagers."

Durai was inwardly delighted. "Is it so?" he bawled out. "You are sure that the villagers hid a big quantity of money and gold and jewels during the riots by Tippu's soldiers?"

"Don't talk so loud. It is a secret told by my grand-father" said Veeraraghavan.

"Then alright; in ten days I will have hundred men dig in this place and fetch me the treasure" said Durai loudly.

All the while Durai was turning this side and that side and making himself sure that the trap he was laying was having its effect. At last he said to Veeraraghavan. "Come, let us go". But Veeran murmured. "What is your assurance that I will either not lose my tank or have a new one in its stead."

"Come on. You will have a new tank" said Durai.

Veeran thought that Durai was joking with him, but not being in any humour to bandy more words with him he followed and both the friends went away.

Soon after they had gone, the contractor signed to the Surveyor and called him aside.

“ I say. Did you mark their words ? They say that there is a treasure hid in that plot of ground, for which reason they call it Nidhi Parambu or the treasure field. But Veeraraghavan is a superstitious chap and he has not made himself sure of the treasure in spite of the field having remained in his possession so long. But Durai is a shrewder chap except that he is a little indiscreet. What fool must he be to cry out so loudly that the treasure is hid in the ground and that he will rifle it with a hundred men in ten days ? I heard all their talk. I have a plan to deceive these stupid men. I shall apply formally for leave to dig up the plot and the earth so dug up might be used for blocking up the tank over which you had planned the rail road to run, and you will sanction it. I will employ hundreds of men and in a few days we will have the treasure for ourselves. And after ten days when our friends come with labourers to dig up, we will say that we had dug up the ground for blocking up the tank, At the worst, we might hush them up by giving them a very negligible part of the immense treasure.”

The surveyor readily agreed. Every thing went on as arranged. In a few days they dug up the whole Nidhi Parambu to a considerable depth but treasure they found none. They were wise enough not to communicate their disappointment to any. They consoled themselves saying that the labour was not after all thrown away as it provided them with earth to cover up the original tank for laying out the rail road.

Exactly after ten days Durai came along with Veeraraghavan but he did not bring with him the promised 100 labourers ; and what was Veeran's surprise when he found that the Nidhi

Parambu was dug up and it looked a beautiful tank with a fairly great depth of water.

"And so you dug up the field and got the treasure" he blurted out to Durai.

"I did not dig up. I had the contractor and Surveyor dig it up for me" coolly replied Durai.

"What do you mean? So you entered into a conspiracy with them and deprived me of my profits" rejoined Veeran angrily.

"My dear friend, do not be angry. I promised you shall have a new tank without your having to dig for it. There you are. As for how I achieved it I will tell you if you patiently hear."

And Durai told all the circumstances of the story, how the curious name of the field suggested the stratagem, how he had from the beginning no belief in the existence of the treasure and how he only dissembled to make the contractor and Surveyor credulous and how they had in their greediness dug up the field and made it a beautiful tank for his benefit.

"And now" concluded Durai. "the name Nidhi Parambu shall not go in vain. We will have our share of the Nidhi however."

"How?" asked Veeran quite surprised.

"Wait; I'll tell you. The surveyor and the contractor dug up your field without giving due warning to you. You might complain to the authorities that much as you agreed to their taking away the original tank for laying out the rails, you could on no account allow them to dig your field (Nidhi Parambu) without your permission and that they must pay a sum of Rs. 10,000 as damages for the encroachment."

Veeraraghavan accepted the wisdom of his proposal. Accordingly he wrote a petition to the authorities. But Durai said he would carry the petition to the proper personages. Veeran

consented. Durai took it to the contractor and surveyor and told them that they would incur severe punishments, if Government thought it advisable to take any action on the petition. But he had a way also of getting them out of the difficulty. It was that he could induce his friend to drop the matter if they agreed to make a contribution of Rs.500 to the owner and Rs. 250 to himself. The two culprits murmured that the amounts were rather too big for such petty officials. Thereupon Durai said that he was prepared to forego a part of his emoluments but never would Veeran take anything less than Rs.500. Very unwilling, but forced by necessity, the two miscreants shelled out the money and elated Durai took the Rs. 500 to his friend and appropriated Rs. 200 for himself having, as he said, 'out of his own munificence cut off his original and stipulated emoluments by Rs. 50.

When Veeraraghavan saw the tinkling silver, he exclaimed. "After all, my grandfather was not far wrong when he said that treasure was hid in that field."

"Nor was I wrong" Durai rejoined "when I said that if there was treasure I would rifle it."

"True, true", replied Veeran, and both the friends laughed over the interesting affair.

THAT WATERY FLASK.

"You must have your eyes about you when you stride through the office in that lordly fashion", said the enraged Superintendent, who felt mortification, anger and thirst for vengeance in a single bound.

"Sorry sir, but the thing was on the verge of the table and you see there is not much space to move about between the tables".

"You have a piece of argument up your sleeve every time you do some clumsy job."

"When a man has done an untoward thing, not wantonly of course, all that he can do is to say a 'heart-felt-sorry' and mend himself. I will be on the look out for flasks, sir, when I go anywhere in this office."

The assurance of good conduct, nay decorous demeanour calculated to irritate his boss, had the desired effect.

"I don't want your saucy talk, do you hear?"

"Very well, sir, I close my talk."

The foregoing dialogue or altercation took place between the Superintendent and a junior clerk in a big office in a big city of this big land.

Rangaswamy had some propensity for mischief and Kumarasawmy Sastry, the Superintendent, had materials for fun in him. So, as a community with a talent and enterprise for exploiting the natural resources of their domain and with the caution and prudence characteristic of that race of men known as clerks, they had appointed Mr. Ranga as the official tormentor of their respected Superintendent.

Mr. Sastri was very austere and frugal in his habits—stern, unrelenting and punctilious in the discharge of his duties and a 19th century pedant every inch of him. As a biographer it does not become me to record what is not authentically known of

him but envy whispered that he was closefisted. I have seen him never vary in his outfit. The dhoti tucked and folded in the orthodox way had acquired a halo of its own through long absence of washing. The greasy coat had lost some of its buttons and the soiled neck of the shirt promised to reveal the ravages of dirt and decay if the coat were removed. A mull turban completed the ensemble.

But that is not our purpose. Though slandering tongues said that he was miserly, yet he brought puri and barley milk in a flask. Rangaswamy constantly said that his Superintendent was a huge humbug and he brought hot water in the flask. He also further maintained that Mr Sastri had made use of his extensive knowledge of co-operation in acquiring that flask. Some firms advertised that they would send gratis a flask to any one who bought six at a time. Eloquent and shrewd, he had no trouble in persuading his clerks about the durability and utility of those articles. He collected money from his clerks, brought the articles for them and got that flask "damn free".

Rangaswamy swore that Mr Sastri brought water in the flask and his talk about barley milk was an unadulterated lie. The others wanted proof positive and Ranga undertook to unearth the matter. The boss had just opened the flask and placed the lid on the table, the cork lightly kept on the mouth of the flask. Ranga appeared to be in a hurry and rushed through the narrow space between the tables and knocked the flask down. Down it fell with a crash and lo, there flew pure water out of it ! All the clerks crowded near the table; some gently remonstrated with the young man for his careless manner of walking, while others talked of the congested way in which the tables were arranged but all were unanimous in demanding that he should replace the flask. The crest-fallen Superintendent could not be consoled by the prospect of his flask being restored. His prestige was gone and steamer-full of flasks bound for India could not restore it.

The dutiful subordinates sympathetically offered their condolence for the unexpected and untimely loss of a brand new flask and all went to their respective seats and serenely re-commenced work. Every one of them turned a furtive glance across his table to the other side.

"The mischievous ape has done me this," thought Sastri. "He will smart for this. I will book him."

Plans after plans were conceived to sack that presumptuous young puppy. Like all men whose self-possession never forsakes them, Sastri was apparently unperturbed; but his dynamic mind was coolly meditating on the dismissal of the flask-breaker. That day all the papers submitted by Ranga were scrutinised with extra official care and his joy knew no bounds when he pitched upon an error in calculation committed by Ranga.

"Peon, call Ranga Aiyer."

Ranga Aiyer promptly made his appearance.

"Look here, young man, the Dorai will send you away if you are so careless" said the Superintendent, the morning incident lending zest to every word.

"What is that please," asked the unabashed youth.

"A blunder committed by an easy going clerk, Sir" roared the chief.

"A thousand rupees skipped over in adding! This means that the mofussil office can misappropriate the whole sum and get scot free in the bargain."

"My compto was out of order last week and we got it repaired only yesterday and it gives trouble even now."

"Your machine is always out of order and it is out of order with every scamp."

"Come, come. A chief must know his place as well as a clerk. You must not call me a scamp, please. If I am a scamp my superintendant is the worse one."

"Dare you bandy words with me, you young coxcomb? I will have you booked."

"Do your worst, please. I will have your superannuated pate broken by way of reciprocity."

Mr Sastri who had by this time realised that he was the losing party in the altercation assumed an abrupt and dignified silence and Ranga went to his seat.

Sastri prepared a big note setting forth in detail the careless work of the new clerk, his insubordinate disposition and the latest instance of both.

A council of war hastily assembled, the clerks considered ways and means to free their compatriot from the scrape. One proposed a bold onset, another asked him not to proceed with the matter while yet another advised pacification. While these things were being deliberated upon, the object of their anxiety, the master-mind, was hatching a plot ready.

"Now I have got an idea, a big idea, a suitable idea" blurted out the impatient Ranga.

"What is that?"

"Ramachandran is a favourite of our boss. Let him go and insinuate that the Coramandal Bank is about to liquidate. He has got all his fortune in that bank. Nothing can disturb the miser's nerves more".

"How can it help you?"

"He will consult me. He knows I have somebody there and has already done it on some other occasions."

Three O' clock found Mr. Sastri with a panic-stricken face, anxiety visibly written on every line of it.

"Peon, call Ranga Aiyer," was his first order.

Ranga put on an air of offended dignity and a distant cold look and presented himself at the table.

"Mr. Ranga Aiyer, take your seat, make yourself comfortable".

The senior—most clerk would have considered it a unique privilege to sit near the old boss. But Ranga who had almost railed against him the very morning received the bench near the table.

"You have got er....." the words choked in his throat, "er somebody in the Coramandal Bank" finished the Superintendent with an effort.

"Yes, my cousin is a shroff there".

"What about the rumour that it is about to liquidate ? "

"There is something, I am sure. I cannot say whether it will have to liquidate. The secretary's son misappropriated some lacs. Probably it has been made good."

"Mr. Ranga Aiyer, you will be saving me from utter ruin if you can bring me word about its actual position. If it is not too late I will withdraw my money."

"Yes. I do this instant."

"Wait, have change for the bus fare"

"No, I have got my bike"

Out started Ranga whistling a jovial air, refreshed himself at his restaurant and re-entered at 5 O' clock. The Superintendent was waiting for him in utter suspense.

"Glad news"

"Thank God" sighed Mr. Sastri.

"My cousin refuses to tell me anything concerning the defalcation but he has promised to see that in case the worst happens your money is safely withdrawn. Meanwhile this is quite confidential. If more people know it, your money is gone."

No liquidation ; no defalcation ; but Ranga got scot free.

SHE WINS BOTH PRIZES

When he received the letter from the Secretary of the M. R. High School requesting him to preside over the prize distribution ceremony of the school on Wednesday, Mr. Naidu certainly couldn't believe his eyes. He had never dreamed of ever doing anything like it, as he was yet to make his mark. It was, therefore, a great puzzle to him why, out of the hundred and one distinguished people available to them, the choice should fall on such an insignificant individual as himself who was only on the threshold of his career and had yet to prove his worth. The solution was all the more difficult because it was inconceivable that the old, conservative Secretary of the school, Mr. S. B. Kar would ever consent to invite any whose political views were so pronouncedly extremist as his for the fear that his institution may incur the wrath of the Education Department.

Anyhow, the invitation was accepted and it was duly announced in the papers that he was to preside on the happy occasion.

As the fateful day approached, Mr. Naidu was very nervous. This was his first appearance in public and that with a student public! He was very apprehensive of his success.

It was Wednesday evening. His hour of trial had come. On his arrival at the school he was received by his friend, the Principal, and introduced to the sedate Secretary. They managed not to show their inner feelings at the time and adjourned into the hall.

The students cheered their young President with an extra dose of vociferous claps. Probably, their principal has suggested it! The bright things had gathered on all sides of the dais: their merry faces were peeping in from above and below. In the hall itself, half the space was reserved for ladies and the other for gentlemen. The whole scene, lit up with electric lights,

was very gorgeous and colourful. But the president's face was sour! He had never expected such a mixed audience. The ladies seemed to oust the mere males; they were so strong in number.

The first item on the programme. was a prayer song. Three girls of the school appeared on the dais and to the accompaniment of the organ, lifted their gentle voice in chorus. As the notes of the song fell in sonorous cadence, admirably rendered by the little girls, Mr. Naidu entered into the spirit of it and prayed for his own success!

After a welcome song came a pair of girls as Vasanti and Atreyi to bring before the audience the skill of Bhavabuti. And as he watched their dialogue in Sanskrit, his memories wandered to those forest ashrams and the flower bedecked forest maidens, which the famous dramatist had so beautifully rendered in his works. He only watched; his spirit was away.

The last item in this entertainment was a presentation of the Camp Fire by the Girl Guides of the school. The President watched with wonder when the girls in their teens, mounted the dais for the piece and sang their song of welcome in chorus. What confidence, what ease, what grace in this! So thought the President and when one by one the Guides declared their identity as "I'm the branch of Cheer and I add my own to the fire," his spirit thrilled with their meaning and for a moment went beyond that hall. "If only they brought these branches to the 'Fire of Life' in our every day work, how happy would be the nation" he muttered to himself.

With this the students' part came to an end. It was the President's turn. He, too, must act his part. He mounted the dais with much confidence only to lose it when they cheered him with thunderous applause; he, however, managed to take the chair and listen to the superintendant's report on the working of the school. Then, the prizes were to be distributed.

Here was his crucial test. The school was, if not a fore-runner of co-education, a doughty champion of it. One-third of the school population was the fair sex and the students of both the sexes seemed to be doing wonderfully well. Amongst the prize winners of the school there were many vivacious girls who came with a wonderful gaiety and ease of manner to receive their awards. Our President was all 'life' at the time. Standing behind the table he was seen smiling, but one could easily detect a certain sense of uneasiness in his demeanour. Why? The plain truth was he had never taken part in any such mixed gathering. He had not exchanged a word of compliment or courtesy with any girl hitherto. He was brought up in the old school and they didn't believe in co-education.

The prize winners, one by one, they came. Boys so small that the President had to stoop down to hand them their awards; boys so tall that he himself looked a dwarf. And they received their prizes in so many different ways! Some simply saluted and went past! Others merely thanked and marched past; yet others were bold enough to shake hands with him; and those of them that were boy scouts stuck to their own style and the President had to repeat the same! And one such, and that a bright boy put the audience into great humour making the President salute scout wise every time he came to receive a prize!

But when besides all these, came the girls, the President nearly sank within himself! And among them there was one who simply sapped all life out of the President by her very demeanour. She seemed to have stopped right out of one of Ravi Varma's enchanting pictures, with her flowing saree, sparkling eyes and cheery countenance; a veritable flower in bloom. The first time she flew in to receive her prize, he managed to acknowledge her sweet 'Thank you' somehow, but when she came round with a monotonous regularity to receive her innumerable awards, he lost all his ground, especially as with her smiling "Thank you's" every time and her pretty

namaskara, she seemed to draw out the President's self confidence little by little; and what's worse, she seemed not only conscious of her mischief but also proud of it. Such a jolly little brute she was. Our President got so shy that he once even forgot to respond to her courtesy as she transfixed him with her merry eyes. And the boys were not to miss this! They burst out in a peel of laughter at the President's plight and she even joined in it with a zest!

The prizes were all distributed and it was his turn to address the house. He was a veritable phantom then. No doubt he was a good speaker; the Principal knew it but just then he had lost all his power of speech. His tongue simply got glued to his cheeks. He rose and was acclaimed with thundrous applause. But he couldn't speak! With very great effort he got so far as "Ladies and Gentlemen" and then came to a standstill. He didn't know what was wrong with him. Seconds seemed to fly past into minutes which seemed as real hours. There was a little mummering on all sides. Old Mr. Kar who sat by him eyed him with innate surprise.

Mr Naidu, with his face flushed looked around. There she was, that Mohini who like her counterpart, had enticed all his confidence from him, leaning against the wall with much elegance, surrounded by her admiring friends. As their eyes met he cast his look down. He seemed to have found out the clue for his awkwardness. It was she who had disturbed his wonted clamness. He lifted his eyes again. This time he could espy some sympathy in her eyes. She seemed to regret something and her eyes were pouring out pity. The Mohini in her had gone—there was manifest in her the budding Mother. She seemed to sympathise with his shyness and wished he would get over it. He did. Her sympathy had reacted on him. The current of self-confidence returned. Taking a long breath he began:

"My young friends, it gives me great pleasure, indeed to be among you and to share with you your happiness on this occa-

sion. I might as well confess to a sense of some shyness because, while I was at school, there were not many girls there; in fact there was none (laughter). But, like you, I was also fortunate; for there was one in my class but she was the niece of the Head Master (laughter and applause). In our form, we sat in such a way that invariably she sat right opposite me, past the teacher. As the first boy in the class, I was at one end and she sat at the other, not that she was not bright, but because she was bright! (Renewed laughter) And she proved our great evil spirit! (laughter) For, every time anybody looked at her she started smiling and you know my friends, laughter is so infectious! That brought us in clash with the teacher which inevitably ended with the cane! (laughter, applause and "Silence please". Sedate Mr. Kar was also seen bursting with laughter)

"As if this was not enough for us, it so happened, my friends, that one day the headmaster himself asked me to call her from somewhere near by. You can as well imagine my predicament. I hadn't spoken a word to her, nor had I ever addressed her! I was scratching my head, but there was no evading the request. It was the Head Master! (Laughter) So, I went on my omnibus mission and approaching her, blurted out "Mercy, your uncle wants you" and then ran away with heart throbbing. (laughter). But things are so different now a days, my friends. We have moved fast, and we must move fast for there is so much ground to cover. And therefore, it gives me much satisfaction to congratulate your school in so successfully trying out this problem of Co-education, especially as it conduces so much to take away the 'Shyness of our girls and the beastliness of our boys'" (Applause)

He also spoke a few words on the other aspects of the report and after wishing them well, sank back in the chair with a sense of great relief. Old Mr. Kar seemed to be much elated and his gloomy forebodings of that extremist politician not having materialised, he really felt glad and in a speech that was inaudi-

ble, thanked the youthful President for his taking part in the proceedings of that evening. Then the organ again played and a pair from among the girls rendered that soul stirring hymn of "Vande Mataram" and as its delightful cadence, full of real music fell from one pitch to another, our President stood still with emotion, absorbed in its inner meaning and rendered his worship to the Mother. He prayed for the hastening of that day when the darkness that envelopes the sons and daughters of Mother India would have lifted and they would once again join to make the Mother again the beloved of all the nations of the World.

With that the prize distribution came to an end and as he was going out to take the salute of the 'Cubs', the President eyed that comely prize-winner again, whom he considered as the symbol of the growing, enlightened womanhood of Mother India. She stood smiling. He held out his hand; she responded. And he said: "I congratulate you on your success and wish you a happy and brighter career". She looked at him and knew he did not wish only these. On his part he read her correct message. And as they were not alone, he hurried past. A finishing touch to his evening career that day was given by the 'Howl' of the Cubs.

Next day, Mr. Naidu was at his office earlier than usual and for about an hour or so, had been idling with the morning mail, when the 'Boy' handed him smilingly the 'card' from the first caller. He read the name: Miss Kantha. Mr. Naidu recognized the name at once. It was that little imp, the Prize Winner.

And as the door opened he muttered: "Come in please" and pointing to the chair in front of him, "Sit down, please. What can I do for you?" She sat down and after adjusting the upper end of her saree, looked at him. He was awaiting to hear from her and was wondering what her mission might be.

Her face was flushed. She seemed to be at a loss as to where she should begin. After a few minutes she spoke "Excuse me, Sir, for disturbing you. I remembered this morning—I forgot to thank you for your congratulations last evening and so thought, better drop in and do it now."

He was leaning back in the chair when she was saying this, but as she closed the sentence, he came forward and gently asked: "Only for this?"

And at this question her face became still more ruddy. He seemed to have guessed right. There was some other reason. She was gasping for breath in excitement. Mr. Naidu noted all these.

She didn't know what to do. How to tell him why really she had come? He came to her rescue.

"What is the matter with you, Miss Kantha?" he asked. "You seem to be much ruffled at my question".

"Just the same as you were last night" she replied, agitated her voice trembling with emotion.

"That was because of you" he confessed.

"And this is perhaps because of you", she added with a jest. She had regained her composure a little. He was laughing. "True to tell you, I felt some urge to meet you, for what I didn't know, but it seemed to me that if I did, you may feel comforted after your miserable disposition last evening, and I owed this to you"; and then she naively asked: "Pray, how do you feel, Sir?"

"How do I feel?" he repeated the question letter by letter. "Excellent, it is really a pleasure to meet you. But I wish you had not come" he said gazing over her head.

"Why so please"? she asked quivering.

He closed his eyes and replied her softly: "I would have cherished you in my memory only and would be happy in that remembrance".

The two young hearts across the table were beating faster in sympathy with each other. Their thoughts were almost plain to each other, only they dared not openly confess it.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. She was almost in tears and pleadingly she answered "But you seemed to need me?"

It was a tense moment. Anyone else at that time would have closed in with the offer. But that shyness in him made him hesitate to do it. He closed his eyes and lisped out in a sort of regretful tone "We need many things....."

That was enough for her. She had analysed his mind, that shyness kept him back. So before he closed the sentence, she spoke out : "And I came to offer myself."

Saying so, she held out her tender hands across the table. He opened his eyes and taking hold of them, added : "I knew it. May I accept the offer?"

"With pleasure, indeed." She answered and cast her eyes down.

He kissed her hands very warmly and in a minute was beside her. And as he drew her nearer still, she resisted not but leaned on him, and within his folded arms, felt her spirit comforted and drank deep of that joy which rushes forth when two eager, understanding hearts join each other for the first time ; and when a moment later he laid his head close on her shoulder, she felt proud of her charge and the opportunity to be not only a wife to him but also a Mother !

THE PHANTOM FLUTE

Not often are story-tellers as eager in their narration as are they who listen to them, but Rairu and I shared the force of the zeal—he, in narrating and I, in listening—equally between us. “You are indeed a *Tusitala*,” would I say to him. “There’s such magical charm in the glorious romance of your country that seems to belong to a land of dreams. And you recount a tale so realistically as to make me feel you are the protagonist therein.”

“Oh! Oh! my friend,” he replied smilingly, “You exaggerate my powers too greatly” and proceeded :

“You remember the village of Arakanur where the mysterious *Hat-stone* stands. A league or so to the east of that lies the hamlet of Arookizhay. To-day Arookizhay is almost transformed into a town, but there is a part in it, a long low-lying stretch of land overgrown with bushes and umbrageous trees of all kinds which remains as it was many, many years ago. Mankind trembles to intrude upon this desolate tract; for, with its weird aspect is connected a story as weird. At dead of night the wind carries the strange strains of a music from this place and its uncanny cadence seems to proceed from a flute. The villagers ascribe this to the *Phantom Flute-player of the Night*.

“Well,” I broke in. “I suppose you did not meet this ghostly flutist and ask it to sing to you, as you did to that one who told a tale and then tried to choke out your life?”

“No, no,” he replied laughing, “this one, the villagers say, is elusive. And now to its history.

“Years, years ago, when neither my great-great grandfather nor yours had seen the light of this world, there stood in the aforesaid land a thatched building of huge dimensions. This was the *Tarwad* house of the Ayoli Nairs, and at the time when

the incidents of this story happened, its *Karnavar* (the autocratic head) was one Panku Nair. Now, allow me to digress a little and explain to you what *Tarwad* and *Karnavar* are. A Nair *Tarwad* corresponds pretty closely to what the Romans called a *gens*, with this important distinction, however, that whereas in Rome, all members of the *gens* traced their decent in the male line, the members of the *Tarwad* trace their decent in a female line from a common ancestress. And a *Karnavar* is the Nair counterpart of the Roman *Pater Familias*.

"Well, the *Tarwad* consisted of Panku Nair, the *Karnavar* and sole surviving member of it, his three sisters and a niece. Two of the sisters were old maids while the third one had a husband and her daughter was the *Karnavar*'s only niece. The *Tarwad* was opulent; old Panku Nair was a veritable tiger and a terror to those who knew him and in his presence you could feel the curious prehensile influence of the man of bald head and reddish oricular eyes whom none could soften except his beautiful niece, Ittyatha.

"Beautiful, I say. Of the complexion of the dew-drenched jasmine blossom; cloudy tresses rolling down her back in waves; eyes as dark and lustrous as the bees; a shapely nose, a small mouth and a rotund chin; a flicker of white impeccable clothes, —that was Ittyatha, the sweet-love-breathing-seventeen at this time.

"She was the light of her home as well as the light of her old uncle's eyes. At least a dozen Nair swains of the village nursed high hopes of possessing her for himself, but none had the courage to ask her hand of her amiable guardian.

"*Onam* with its carnival of red, yellow, white and violet flowers, came, and along with it brought a stranger to the village. A handsome fellow he was, of the type that has attracted women always and impressed older men. Panku first met him playing on a bamboo flute melodiously in the village temple, next in the village tank where he had gone for his morning

bath and then in the fields strolling alone. An acquaintance sprung up between the two which developed soon into intimacy and the stranger, who called himself Sanku and said he hailed from Kallay, a pretty village in the Zamorin's territory, became a daily visitor to Panku Nair's house.

"And Ittyatha began to see much of the young man and he of her. The village gossips, meanwhile, had united the two in their talk, but they wondered how the stranger managed so easily to win the *Karnawar's* heart, a heart which never before had known the feelings of a close friendship. Besides, it seemed to them that there was such a mystery enshrouding the young man. Perhaps they wondered his skill as a flute-player, much more than that, his handsome person, won over the old man. And it never came as a surprise to them, the announcement of Sanku's *Sambandam* with Ittyatha.

"The grandeur of the affair was indeed great. And at its close Panku Nair considered himself the blessed of all mortals for the happiness of his beloved niece was complete.

"Ten blissful years rolled away, during which period, God was kind enough to give the beautiful Ittyatha four children, two boys and two girls,—the former very like their father and the latter their mother. Old Panku was relieved of all his onerous duties; everything was looked to by Sanku with an assiduity that astonished him; but more than all this what made him think Sanku, by the side of others in the village, a superman was his dexterity as a flutist, in tunes which he could modulate to whatever feeling, plaintive, painful or joyous. And Ittyatha was never so happy as when her husband was playing to her some sweet song about the heroes and heroines of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, or listening to his charming talk about his native village, the splendour of the Zamorin's palace or the various pastimes of that chief. But when she asked him whether he had no relatives, an uncle, a brother or a sister perhaps, then would his manner alter and a strange and

haunted look appear in his eyes. And he would say with a forced laugh, " why, what are they to you, dear ? To me it is only *you* and I and so let it be to you, I and *you*." With this, poor Ittyatha had to be content and her further coaxing him on this one point, only made him behave unhusband-like.

" It was harvest time. In the big front yard of Panku Nair's house, hillocks of paddy rose, some threshed and some winnowed. Strawricks, full and half made, dotted the compound ; around the barn the poultry pecked at the chaff ; and the lowing of the heifers in the pen made this pastoral scene pulsate with life.

" At dusk, one evening of this season, a middle-aged man was seen walking along the lane in front of the house. The soft strains of a music now floated in the air flowing from the house and with a look of strange interest he stopped short near the quaintly constructed bamboo stile, the gate-way of the house. For about ten minutes he stopped thus at the end of which, nodding his head as if confirming some decision he had formed within himself, he crossed the stile and walked towards the building. He reached the portico and accosted Panku Nair who was sitting there, abruptly and without ceremony, " Is not that Kore, the *Pallichan*, that is playing on the flute ? Such melody none else can produce."

" What ? " snapped Panku Nair with all a Karnavar's fiery superiority, " Kore, the *Pallichan* ! Such low-caste man in *my* house, the house of a *high caste Kiriam Nair* ! How dare you ?"

" But the stranger only laughed and called loudly " Ay, Kore ! Kore ! And so you've come to this place too. But you are discovered, rogue."

" He finished when suddenly the tune broke off ; a sigh of intense despair was heard ; and in the faint light of the now rising harvest moon, a form could be seen hurtling through space from the balcony of the house and disappearing into a marsh nearby.

"The rest of the tale is soon told. Slowly did the stranger (a man of the impostor's parts) unfold to the *Karnavar* and the others of the *Tarwad* of the true caste of the man, of his real name, of his influence over the evil spirits which enabled him to play to such perfection on the flute and make himself the endeared of all, and of his several other malpractices for which, after a severe punishment, he was driven by the Zamorin out of his territory, not to return on pain of death. But the wretched Ittyatha only cried, "I never, never, will believe this. He is of the same high caste as I." But the handsome impostor was nowhere to be seen to prove the dear one's faith. The marsh had sucked him to its bosom; he had hidden his grotesque deception from every eye for ever.

"O, O, O," wailed poor Panku Nair. "That it should have come to this! A low-caste man has lived with my child for ten years. O! the pure blood of of a high and respectable *Tarwad* has been tainted. Die us all rather than live and be jeered at for our lowliness."

"A big pit was dug in the back-yard of the house into which heaps after heaps of faggots were thrown and set fire to. Into this man, woman and child of the *Tarwad* precipitated; and unknowing of the precious hearts it was devouring, the crimson conflagration rolled on.

"Slowly the house decayed and fell; and the place where it stood and its surroundings are now a desolate woody tract. Even to-day the villagers hear the weird melody of the flute in the middle of the night and recall the incidents that gave its birth. Some have gone so far as to express that they have seen at this hour people precipitating themselves into a burning pit, at which time the tune is of an intensely wailing, heart-rending kind, expressive of the repentance of the deceiver whom no fire-baptism could purify. Whether this is mere hallucination or reality only psychists can say."

MANJERI S. ISWARAN.

THAT FATEFUL SIMON HARTAL

As the huge Rolls Royce car swept out into the beach road there was hardly any stir anywhere. But a few yards from Napier Bridge the car was surrounded by a band of ruffians. The driver blew the horn loudly, but it was apparent they had sinister intentions. They were all armed with stout lathis and so considering defiance unavailing, he stopped the car. The next moment he was dragged to the ground by a score of hands. Blow after blow fell heavily on his head and he sank down unconscious without being able to even to raise an alarm.

It was now that the "Hooligans" directed their attention to the other inmates. Clutching the leathern straps of the cushions, there was seated inside a young lady, richly dressed. She was but a feeble little maiden and a deathly pallor was visible on her face. The side doors were quickly opened and with uncouth gestures one approached her. Her jewels, she thought, would save her and willingly unclasped them. Suddenly, one sturdy stroke from an invisible hand felled the rude assailant to the floor. He was quickly kicked out and seizing his staff, a smart young man sprang up to the foot-board. At once he was attacked by the rest but by brandishing the stout lathi vigourously, he was able to ward off their blows for some time. The road seemed to be unusually deserted that day, and the youth felt he could not hold out longer. He leapt into the driver's seat and started the car. The attackers now doubled their strokes and were successful in inflicting a deep wound on his forehead. Bright red blood gushed forth copiously as the car began to move on. The strong and trusty automobile heeded not aught, and gaily tripped over the bodies of many who threw themselves before it. Smarting with agony, he rested his reclining head on the steering wheel and drove on.

When he reached Pycrofts Road corner, he enquired of the lady within whither he was to take her. "Number—Hunter's Road, Vepery", she feebly answered; but he did not

change his direction. His idea was to get as far away from the 'rowdies' as possible. They shot forward with lightning swiftness.

A drop of blood accidentally falling on her face roused her into action.

"Are you wounded, sir?" She asked tenderly. But he was unable to answer and so she rose up from her seat. His face and garments were dripping red. She was terrified at the sight of human blood and requested him to stop the car; and then she tore a piece of her saree, carefully wiped off the clotted blood from his face, and bound up the wound. He felt considerably relieved.

Safe at last they reached their destination. They drew up before a palatial building facing a park. The lady stepped out lightly saying, 'please wait here a minute'. I will inform father and send for the doctor'. He knew he would shortly be overwhelmed with thanks. Better now to make good an escape; thought he. He staggered into the road and hailed a passing tram.

When he woke up it was night. A kind nurse was gazing at him and he felt stretched on an iron cot. "Where am I" he enquired of the nurse. "In the Government Hospital, Royapuram". "How came I here" was his next question. "The ambulance" she said, "brought you here from Royapuram Tram shed". "Ah yes" he said, "I remember I was walking along the Marina—I do not remember what happened".

Asked as to whether any of his friends or relatives ought to be informed of his plight, which the nurse assured him was not in any way dangerous, he said that he did not like to trouble anybody. But on account of profuse loss of blood his health had been utterly shattered. Thirty days later, he was discharged from the Hospital.

The first thing he learned when he returned to his mess was that his name had been removed from the college register. His friends had lost all hopes of seeing him again, and feared

the worst. Now they were overjoyed to have him in their midst. However, of his one month's doings he never spoke a word. He strove hard to regain his lost strength; and out of all the past, the vision of a loving-face anxious at his pains and wounds ever remained before his eyes.

Weeks and weeks later, as he was squatting one evening by the footpath in front of Queen Mary's College, the sight of the old Rolls Royce arrested his attention. He rose up to convince himself and could scarce believe his eyes when he beheld the vision of his dreams seated inside. Intuitively he turned back, but she had not failed to observe him. She was certainly delighted to see him; for under the strange circumstances in which the two had previously met, it was but natural, that she would greatly admire the man who had rescued her from death and shame. This time escape was impossible and he was forced to accompany her. He was duly introduced to her father as the 'hero' whom he had vainly sought after far and wide...and then of course the unavoidable consequences followed. The two were in holy wedlock bound.

At a garden party after the wedding, the barristers were unanimous in decrying the conduct of Congressmen in boycotting the Commission. "Only a few hooligans made the best use of the opportunity" remarked one. "Such things promote communal hatred" added another. "But" said a third "the Government has gained a considerable sum of money as fines imposed on students and others. Why, in one college alone they collected more than eight hundred and fifty rupees as fines."

The bridegroom, who was hearing all these remarks, drew her nearer and said, "The barristers are all wrong about it. Can you tell who gained most?" "I" she replied blushing. "Nay" he said, "I have profited most since I have gained you."

B. S. BASU.

BEFORE THE BEACON FIRE

"Our money purse is gone!" ejaculated Vihar, flinging out his hands in despair. We all started shell-shocked like and checked our entry into the coffee hotel.

The grand Krithigai feast of Trinomali had lured us from Madras. The money-bag, now stolen from Vihar, had contained all our money. With our combined finances gone with the missing money purse, we stood next door to complete and over-whelming want. We could not possibly get a loan in an unfamiliar place to meet our immediate needs and our return train fare.

A miracle must happen or we should have to beg or do something more disgraceful, to avert the impending calamity. A common purse had brought us to such a sorrowful state. But we had the consolation of suffering in company.

The charm of Trinomali hills with the alluring scenery and the grandeur of its architectural temple were lost to us. No more for us our pre-arranged programme of adventurous amusements on the hills.

Ramshanker, inimitable and ever resourceful, was one of us. Albeit, he had kept himself aloof, till now, with the air of complete unconcern. But when he realised that our despondency was reaching its climax, he broke the spell.

"I suspect the stranger who travelled with us last night," he began. "He was very clever though I thought his rather too many yarns were not genuine. Further, the way he kept stroking his moustache very frequently, as if to assure himself it was there, looked suspicious. While we were all yet asleep, this morning, he had left the waiting room." All this was news to us.

"But how does that help us now?" I asked.

"Exactly," he replied, and after a brief pause, asked. "How do we stand now?"

"No money, worn out, hungry and desperate," I told him. All others nodded acquiescence.

"How much shall we require now?" was his next question. This looked mischievous and irritating at the moment.

"Have a magic wand?" I retorted.

"No, I thought I might go about that villain and get the money," he explained.

"I expect he is moving on a train by now."

"Certainly not" he asserted. "This Beacon Fire Festival is the hope of all the pick-pockets in the Presidency—too strong a bait for our friend to leave Trinomali before to-night. When more than twenty thousand people visit this place, he would have promised himself at least ten times what we had kept in our money purse. I shall get you money, any way, whether I catch the thief or no."

"But how?" I asked.

"That is my secret" he answered, "but don't follow me any of you, for a few minutes" he beseeched us as he left suddenly.

We went for our morning bath in the tank.

A large crowd had collected in front of a peepul tree and we joined it. At the foot of the tree was seated a good-looking devotee, besmearing his body with holy ashes. Beads adorned his neck and shoulders. His hair was done into a vertical knot. He cleared his throat as we entered and sang a national song. His voice was wonderfully melodious.

The song over, he stood up,—a tall, athletic figure in loin cloth,—and addressed the audience. An unusual thing with a street singer. His palms joined above his head and he bowed:

"I sing, my lords, for my food, and my good voice is the gift of God. But I pray that you do not go away until you have heard my last song. First I shall sing some songs which I call unpleasant; pleasant songs will follow. Then will come the love song—the last one. While singing it, I shall come round to every one of you for your benevolence. Then, you can bestow upon me your money or your blessings whichever you please." He made this strange request in exceedingly good taste.

All sat down and there was still silence.

Followed exquisite music of a moving voice. The 'unpleasant' songs left us tearful; the pleasant ones kept our very bones aglow with ecstasy. At last came the pathetic song of a lover's longing for his departed beloved.

The singer came round, stopped searchingly for a moment in front of everyone, and passed on—no matter whether he got any money or not. He came to us too. But when each of us, in turn, disclosed empty pockets, the beggar, to our utter discomfiture, laughed.

We dragged our wearied feet to our meeting place in the temple and what greetings!

There was standing Ramshanker, displaying his trophy—our lost money bag regained.

A tall, wiry police constable was holding a thick set, bald-headed man in hand-cuffs.

"I have earned this by honest work," observed Ramshanker, as he handed to me, in addition to our own money purse, a big bundle of money consisting of coins of different value.

We were all dumbfounded.

"Before the Beacon Firelights," Ramshanker commanded the manacled man threateningly, "you must leave Trinomali or I shall put you in Jail"

Then turning to us, he said, "this is our missing fellow-passenger who had walked away with your money, *sans* his false moustache and wig."

A doubt crossed my mind and I looked closely at Ramshanker. There were still marks of beads on his shoulders and remnants of ashes on his back.

That loquacious singer ! I understood.

A capital idea but too daring for a Brahmin.

A great actor and an excellent songster, Ramshanker always had a cross-cut for doing things. This time his talent for music was our saviour. His perfect make-up had easily deceived prying eyes.

The rest he told us.

"I could not recognise this thief without the moustache and wig ; hence my strange request. That way I could scrutinise every money purse as it was drawn out and with luck on my side, spot out the man who should exhibit ours. There was the remotest chance of this thief also coming to hear my songs, but I counted on his professed taste for music."

It was now evening—a glorious evening.

The big beacon fire lighted, on the hill top four miles above us, shedding its light far and wide. Revealed to us was the sublime vision of the grand architectural temple, in all its pristine glory, with thousands of electric lights illumining it like so many stars.

The next day was our day of days—surpassing our wildest imaginations of holiday amusements ; a swimming bath in the falls ; an exciting climb up the hill ; the vision of the *yogis* and then to the unique festival down below.

THE NYMPH OF THE RIVER

Romantic marriages are possible in India. A Bank Clerk in Madras can testify to it from his own most pleasant experience.

A few weeks ago, he had been on leave, aimlessly wandering about, when his eyes fell on a very unexpected sight. In a small boat, a young woman was passing her time in the river, rowing about from shore to shore.

That was a strange spectacle—at any rate in India; and the clerk was rooted to the spot by the charm of the girl. It was a secluded spot and at the first shock, he wondered whether she might not have been a nymph.

His mind was soon made up. He must find out her identity and who knows what might not happen?

It was his intention, when he first came to the small town to stay there a few hours. But that evening, he told the hotel keeper that he might extend his sojourn by some days.

Every afternoon he would go to the spot and watch her drifting about playfully. She noticed him some times; but it was only a casual glance. Towards sunset she would moor the boat to a tree and then vanish into a thickly grown tope.

He had not the courage to follow her—even enter the tope. Who knows what might be the consequences?

A week passed away: and the youth grew desperate. His leave was coming to a close and he had not been able even to find out her identity.

That night he could get no sleep. His brain was being racked by various plans, some of which were desperate, by which he must get to her notice. Finally, he hit upon the idea of appearing before her as her saviour—in a carefully laid plot—such as rescuing her from a villain; but he had to abandon most of his schemes as too dangerous. What will happen if his tool gives out the whole show?

The next day, he took his stand by the river at an early hour. Obviously she liked to row about both morning and evening. He also found, that she had her mid-day nap in the boat.

That intelligence at once led him to the plan of action. The river was full and he had seen that a few miles down, it fell across a small dam.

The next afternoon, when the girl woke up, after the nap she was in strange surroundings. The boat was going swiftly down the river. She turned to the oar; and that was not to be found. What had happened?

She tried in vain to row the boat to one side by her hands; the current was too strong. At the distance she also saw the dam! It seemed almost certain that the boat would be crushed down. Instantly she decided on her course of action. She was a swimmer. She got up; tied her sarees securely and was about to take the plunge, when she saw another boat coming towards her; and it was being rowed furiously.

Its only occupant, our youthful friend, cried out to her that he was coming to her rescue. The girl immediately set to work to check the movement of her own boat; and in a few minutes, the help came and the two landed safely—at a short distance from the falls.

The hero offered to see her back at her house; and the offer was of course accepted. But strangely enough, the two miles were passed without exchanging a word. She too had obviously begun to feel the consequences of the impact.

When they reached home, a pleasant surprise awaited the young clerk. The girl's mother to whom she explained the adventure, was his mother's cousin sister though the widowed lady could not recognise him first. She had seen him as a youngster; now he was fully grown.

When he explained his identity, she grew delirious with joy. On the death of her sister, she had lost all trace of the child: and

a cruel fate had decreed that, unable to tolerate the cruelties of the step-mother, the young boy should run away to Madras and there continue his studies on public charity. On his part he knew that he had a rich aunt and that she had had a charming daughter ; but it never entered his brain that she could remain unmarried so long. Nor did he, in any of his wild dreams identify her with this fairy creature.

The rest is easily guessed. He had of course to extend his leave and in the interval, there was the most pleasant function of his life. He has rejoined duty ; but the lure of that river with its idyllic surroundings threatens even now to overpower all other considerations.

THE BEST IS YET TO BE!

Coming events cast their shadows before. Early last year Jappu lost his mother. A few weeks later he lost his younger sister. It was only three days since he came out of the General Hospital, where he was lying as an in-patient because of a fracture in his left arm—fractured on account of a fall when playing volley ball. Jappu was the only son of a District Munsiff. His mother was a consumptive patient and so with the idea of satisfying an ardent desire of his mother, he married, last December, Leela, an under-graduate of the Bombay University.

Leela was the daughter of a Deputy Collector. He was first a barrister and consequently was a most modern man, social reformer also, and so, much against the will of the people, he had all his children given English education. Leela was the eldest of the daughters.

It was sixth of March. The honours examination was to begin on the 22nd of the same month for which Jappu was to appear. As he was in the hospital for more than a fortnight, he had little time to prepare for his examination. Now that he had come out of the hospital he was a bit weak and so, was little disposed to study. He was very much worried about this day and night; the idea of the examination was teasing him. Sometimes, he even wept, saying: "I have been dogged by ill-luck from the very beginning of last year. I lost my mother - I lost my sister - I broke my arm and at this rate, I am afraid, I will fail in the examination."

Only the previous day, he had a letter from his father in which after a big sermon, he had concluded "you know your duty better. I am sure you will pass with distinction." This put him out to some extent. As if to add oil to the burning fuel, just that morning he had received a letter from Leela, his better half. She wrote.....

"Ananda Bhavan,"
Poona, 4th March 32.

Dearest,

I do not want to divert your mind when you are busy with your books by writing you a long letter. I write this letter just to wish you all luck.

My dear, it is a fortnight since you wrote to me last. How I wish you could find time to write to me every day? How I wish you were with me always? I yearn to receive your letter which pictures you before me. Let me stop this. I am afraid you will take me for a silly girl if I should continue in this strain "Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaketh."

Dear, how I wish you will pass your honours exam. with first class. Then you will surely get your I. C. S. next year. That will be the happy day for me. My one and only ambition will then be fulfilled. I will be the happiest woman on earth that day.

Indeed—I am no pessimist. But it is no good being an optimist always. Hence the idea. Suppose you fail—I pray that such a thing might never happened—what then is our fate? We will then be a hopeless couple. Our status will sink low. No body will care for us—none will respect us. This and such other ideas creep into my mind and worry me a lot. Let us pray and hope.

My love, I close this letter, I wish you best of luck. I pray for your success day and night. My brothers and sisters send their respects to you. I send you my thousand kisses.

Lovingly yours,

Leela.

P. S.—My dear parents send you their best wishes.

Jappu was lying flat on his camp cot with this letter in hand. Every time he was convinced that there is not the devil of a chance of his success. He covered his face with

both his hands and wept bitterly. He sighed—he brooded. He sat on his armchair weeping. Suddenly an idea got into his head. He cried out “I have found it”. With this he dressed up and went out with some coins jingling in his pocket. There was an inconceivable change in his face. He was happy. He smiled at every one that passed by.

He got into a chemist shop. “Good evening ! Mr. Vasu ” he accosted the attender. Mr. Vasu was an old classmate of Jappu. The doctor was out. Jappu was happier still on this score.

“ Mr. Vasu, these rats are a veritable nuisance to me. They have eaten away most of my books. Can't you help me by giving me some As.” The ignorant attender with the idea of helping his friend gave a good bit of it rolled in a piece of paper. “ Mr. Jappu, please don't show this to my boss. It is highly poisonous and so we are not allowed to give it to anybody like this. Because it is *you* I give it. Please go away soon, before the doctor comes ”.

From the chemist shop, he went straight to his room and without even pulling out his neck tie and coat, he pulled out his letter pad and scribbled a number of letters. One letter he wrote legibly and coolly and that was to Leela, his dear wife. It ran :

Dear Leela,

I am disgusted with life and so I have behaved so very cowardly. I am sorry I could not fulfil your ambitions. Don't weep for me but pray for my soul. I wish you all good.

With love,

Jappu.

The day was drawing to a close. He looked into his wrist watch. It was 6-45. He muttered to himself “ it is time ”. The letters he left, all addressed, on the table and closed the doors and windows. Then he sat on his bed and with folded

arms looked at straight at the photo of Sri Krishna and said "O my Lord, I know I am sinning. I know that suicide is a mark of cowardice. But I can't help it. I am disgusted with life. I am not prepared to disappoint all my kith and kin who expect a lot from me. I am sure I can't stand that shock. I can neither endure nor avoid that shock. So, I yield, I yield to death. I die, give my soul peace."

With this Jappu opened the packet given by his friend Vasu which was carefully wrapped in a piece of paper. By mere chance his eyes fell on some printed matter in that paper. In haste he read it. He read it again. He was not satisfied and so he read it again. Jappu's mind was disturbed. He did not know what to do. "Am I to believe this?" he said to himself. He sat meditating over it for some time. Suddenly he got up and tore off all the letters he wrote only a few minutes back. He took the cutting of the couplet from the piece of paper and pasted it just below the photo of Sri Krishna. It read :

"Grow old along with me.

The best is yet to be....."



"MY MOTHERLAND"

PAMPHLETS

- (1) Mahatma Gandhi : Superman of the Age.
- (2) Sri Ramana Maharshi and His Ashram.
- (3) First Principles of Health.
- (4) Quintessence of Gandhism.
- (5) Why India is Miserable : Bartering Food for Poison.
- (6) Sri Aravinda Ghose and His Ashram.
- (7) A Crime Against Humanity—Wanton Bloodshed in India.
- (8) Daridranarayan or Gandhian Economics.
- (9) Sexual Relations: What You Ought to Know.
- (10) Reverse Councils Loot and the Exchange Mystery.
- (11) Ramdas, the Patriot Saint and Shivaji.
- (12) Gandhiji on Hinduism and Varnashrama.
- (13) Keep off the Doctor: Simple Cures for Ailments.
- (14) Gandhism in Battle Field—The Flaming Sword.
- (15) Shantiniketan and its Founder.
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