

THE REDEMPTION

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OF THE  
BRAHMAN




RICHARD CARBE

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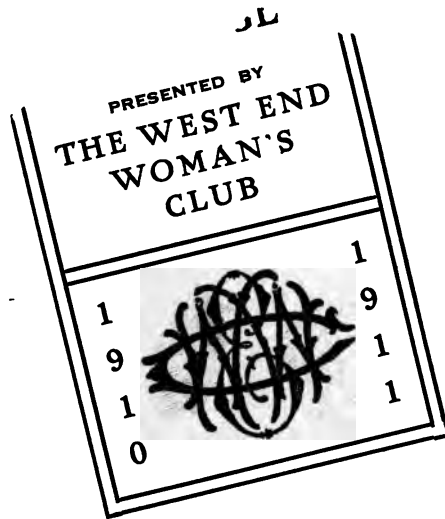
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# REDEMPTION OF THE BRAHMAN

A NOVEL

BY

RICHARD GARBE

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## I. THE FANATICS.

---

**L**ILAVATI, Gopa, make haste ! help me to bolt the door of the house, and fasten the windows of the ground floor ; I hear the feast-day processions coming, and I fear they will meet near by." Thus shouted the merchant Krishnadas to his sister and daughter, and the two women ran quickly out of the "zenana" down the stairway, for they knew there was danger in delay. When they had closed the strong wooden door, and secured it by means of an iron cross-bar, they breathed more freely.

It was in Benares, in October of the year 1840, at the Mohammedan feast of Muharram. As it not unfrequently happens, one of the numerous feasts of the Hindus fell upon the same day, and both sects were about to carry out the requirements of their religion by a procession. The Mohammedans moved toward the mosque of Aurangzeb, whose slender minarets tower high above the holy city of the Hindus ; the adherents of the native faith, toward the neighboring temple of Vishesharnath. The two processions had to pass from opposite directions through one of the narrow streets

leading from the *Chandi Chauk*, the Moonlight market, to the mosque.

On this street stood the house of Krishnadas. From the window of the upper story the family of the merchant looked out with breathless interest ; for on the left could be heard the mournful cries of the Mohammedans, "Alas, Hassan ! alas, Hussain !" in remembrance of the murder of the two sons of the Caliph Ali, and his wife Fatima ; while on the right the murmuring of the praying Hindus became more and more distinct. It was but a few moments and the two processions met before the very door of Krishnadas. Involuntarily the shouts and prayers ceased, and for a moment a deep expectant silence ensued.

Then, from the front rank of the Hindus, a tall young man with firm energetic features, of a strongly marked foreign type, stepped forward and spoke : " Make way, and let us pass ! "

But scarcely had he spoken when a howl of anger arose in the ranks of the Mohammedans : " Will you fall back, you unbelieving dogs ! " and the foremost of the Moslems leaped forward, swinging the clubs with which they had provided themselves in anticipation of a conflict.

The Hindus began to fall back muttering ; but the youth who had appointed himself their spokesman turned upon them a glance of boundless astonishment, drew himself up haughtily, and cried to his yielding comrades : " How now ? will we give up the field for

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the cowslayers, the unclean herd? Stand, and force them back!”

A howl of rage from the Mohammedans was the reply, and in a trice they had surrounded the bold youth and separated him from his companions. Then with a swift movement he seized the club from the nearest of his assailants, smote him to the ground, and before the Mohammedans could recover from their astonishment at the unprecedented occurrence, with lightning speed he struck down a second, third, and fourth. A cry of surprise escaped the lips of Gopa looking out of the window with breathless attention: “Look! look! it is Mahadeva who has come down to destroy all enemies of our faith!”

At this very moment she cried out anxiously, for the supposed god had received a fearful blow on the breast, and sank against the door of the house. A red-bearded Mollah with glittering eyes shouted above the tumult, “Let me through to kill the dog!”

Willingly they made room for the fanatic in whose uplifted fist a dagger gleamed, but before he reached his victim something unexpected happened; the house-door flew open, the unconscious Hindu disappeared, and in a few seconds the cross-bar grated behind the closed door. The Mohammedans were indignant and endeavored to break down the door, but the well-joined timbers withstood them. A few moments longer the uproar continued, until the guards of the public order appeared, led by the English officer under whose su-

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pervision the police were placed. The sight of the much feared magistrate, who was seen in the interior of the city only upon special occasions, had a quieting effect upon the excited throng. Several arrests were made, and the remainder dispersed, while the angry Englishman spoke thus to those departing: "One and all of you deserve that the graves of your fathers, your grandfathers, and your great grandfathers should be polluted with the blood of the Pariah dogs."

In the meantime the young Hindu had been lying without a sign of life upon the flag-stones of the entrance-hall. His turban had fallen off, and the heavy hair of deepest, glossiest black, hung tangled over his forehead and temples. The merchant who had rescued him gazed awhile upon the interesting face, and said to himself: "He is not a native of our place; I should like to know to what caste he belongs; he looks as if he were a descendant of our old warlike races." Then he called servants and ordered them to carry the wounded man into a sleeping-chamber.

Lilavati and Gopa hastened forward with fresh water, bathed him carefully, and soon they had the pleasure of seeing the stranger move uneasily and then open his eyes. The young man looked in astonishment about the room, drew a few deep breaths, then raised himself. "Whoever you are," said he, "you must have saved me. I thank you." There was something lofty and condescending in his manner of expression.

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“Tell us first who you are, and of what caste,” replied the merchant.

“I am called Ramchandra, and I am a Brahman from Jeypur in the Rajputana. I did not shun the long journey to the holy city, because I hoped to learn here from the most distinguished teachers of our land, what I could not learn at home.”

Krishnadas bowed his head in assent and stood silent for a time. Evidently he had expected different information, for the young man did not look like a student. “Have you been long in our city?”

“Only eight days. I am not yet accustomed to your ways, and I fear I never shall be. The people stare at me as they would at a wild animal.”

“Well, you certainly are a hot-headed man,” replied Krishnadas, smiling; “of that we have just had evidence. Thank the gods that they have saved you to-day from greater harm. But, before you depart—and being a Brahman, you will not willingly remain longer than necessary under my roof—hear our name. I am the merchant Krishnadas, this is my widowed sister, Lilavati, and this my daughter Gopa, whose husband lives at present in Kashmir.”

Lilavati had in the meantime veiled her face, not only to conceal from the stranger her pale, sorrowful features and her smooth shaven head, but also because the law of widowhood expressly commanded her to do so. Gopa, however, looked at the young Brahman steadily and without embarrassment. Since she had grown

up her father had not confined her to the "zenana," but permitted her to share in his affairs, and enjoy more social intercourse than is customary in a Hindu household. In this manner she had gradually lost the proverbial shyness of young Indian maids and wives. Gopa was surpassingly beautiful, of stately size and voluptuous form ; her features were nobly chiselled, and out of the large almond-shaped eyes shone cleverness and goodness. At her father's wish she had accustomed herself to veil her head only when she left the house, but within doors to present herself unveiled to the friends and guests of her father. Nor was she, according to the usual custom of the land, overladen with jewels ; only a tasteful golden ornament set with pearls hung upon her forehead, fastened in her waving hair, and upon her wrists she wore heavy silver bracelets whose fastenings were in the form of serpent heads.

Ramchandra gazed a long time as if blinded. Then he said : "By all the gods, no Brahman wife in Hindustan need be ashamed to be like you !"

Gopa would have been no true Hindu, had not her feminine vanity been gratified at this ingenuous expression of admiration. A scarcely perceptible smile of pleasure overspread her features, but she wished to deprive the young man of the idea that she regarded herself as inferior to him, so she replied : "I have never had a desire to belong to a higher caste, nor to



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be any other than a merchant's daughter, or a merchant's wife."

Ramchandra was astounded. Evidently the thought had never occurred to him that a woman lived upon earth who did not wish to have been born a Brahmani. With a bow to the women he turned to go, but he parted from Krishnadas with the words: "May the gods reward you for what you have done for me to-day! Salaam!"

## II. THE YOUNG BRAHMAN.

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**R**AMCHANDRA had begun his studies in Benares with several of the most distinguished teachers. Although he pursued the usual routine of education, and did not neglect the courses in higher grammar, rhetoric, and the like, yet from the beginning philosophy had most captivated his mind,—not the subtle teachings of logic, which the acuteness of the Hindus is wont most to enjoy, but the deeper wisdom of the great Indian Pantheism. He was not loved by his fellow students, so he did not attempt to become intimate with them; he lived to himself, and applied himself to his tasks with a genuine zeal. However, in spite of the pleasure which his literary activity gave him, after a few weeks a gloomy expression was noticeable upon his face.

Ramchandra had come to Benares with limited means and false expectations. He had not doubted that by earnest efforts he would soon succeed in finding an employment sufficiently lucrative to supply his small necessities during the years of study, but in this expectation he now saw that he had been deceived. Be-

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tween five and six thousand youths, with the same aim in life, lived in the holy city, almost all in the most moderate circumstances, hundreds of them quite without means, and compelled to acquire the barest necessities of life. Ramchandra had no connexions, and as a beginner attracted no special attention with his teachers. O, if he had only worked among them a couple of years, and had an opportunity to distinguish himself ! Then his chance would have been much better. His anxiety from month to month became more intense, until one day he counted his money and found that it was now barely sufficient for a return to his distant home. With a deep sigh he formed his unavoidable decision ; to give up his life ideal and return to his father's house. On the day following a caravan was to start for the principal city of Rajputana, and he determined to join it.

On the next morning after the prescribed bath in the holy stream, Ramchandra wandered with bowed head through the narrow streets. The noise of traffic did not disturb him in his sorrowful thoughts. Suddenly he stopped and looked up. Here was the very place where the conflict with the Mohammedans had occurred, and where he had learned with shame how cowardly the Hindu was. And there too stood the house of Krishnadas. Acting upon the impulse of the moment he knocked at the door. He would say farewell to the only man in Benares who had done him a favor,

www.Krishnadas.com  
Krishnadas received him joyfully, but at the same time expressed surprise to see him so melancholy. "What!" said he, "you are about to leave Benares after a sojourn of scarcely six months? What is your reason?"

"The basest of all cares drives me away from my newly begun studies," replied Ramchandra, "the need of daily bread."

Krishnadas seemed to reflect a moment, then he arose, laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, and said with heart-winning kindness: "Ramchandra, till now the gods have blessed my business; I have more wealth than I need."

Ramchandra attempted to rise, a deep blush overspread his countenance; but Krishnadas pressed him back upon the seat, and continued: "Mark you, I have never found time to devote myself to study, though if I could I should gladly have done so. If you would not refuse to enter the house of a merchant now and then of an evening, and relate to him the ancient history of our land, the great battles of our famous families, and other things worth knowing, the old merchant would be in your debt, not you in his. I beg of you, say nothing, but accept what I give."

Krishnadas opened an ironbound chest, and took from it a heavy leathern purse. For a moment the Brahman hesitated, then he stepped nearer Krishnadas and said "I thank you"; and the tone of his voice was gentler and warmer than before.

As Ramchandra left the house with glistening eyes and swinging steps, he vowed henceforward to strive with all his strength for an independent livelihood, and to give back as soon as possible to his noble-hearted helper the gift which he held concealed in his garment. Had he turned his head he would have seen that Gopa stood at the window looking after him.

From that time the young Brahman came often to the house of the merchant, but he did not partake of his meals, for in so doing he would have committed an inextinguishable wrong, and would have forfeited for all time the privileges of his caste.

### III. GOPA'S HUSBAND.

---

**A**LMOST four years have passed since the day on which our story opened. One who had not seen Krishnadas during that time could tell by a glance at his careworn countenance, that things must have greatly changed in his household. In the large front room of the first story, his bookkeeper, a bronze colored Bengali with large prominent lips, was making a business report.

After listening a long time in silence Krishnadas interrupted him with a gesture of impatience. "Enough! your words inform me that my affairs are constantly growing worse. Now, in Benares, only those are prosperous, who make respectable trade a side issue and lend all their available money to poor people at usurious rates. Matters have indeed reached a sad state."

"Keep up your courage, Master," said the bookkeeper cheerfully, "the prospect for the next month is favorable; the harvest will be better than for many years. And one who, like you, is diligent in establishing new relations, may expect rich returns this autumn."

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While the last words were spoken a servant appeared at the door and announced a visitor : "Sir, a man is at the gate who wishes to speak with you,—Lakshman of Cashmere."

Krishnadas sprang up joyfully and cried : "Ah, the friend of my youth ! most heartily welcome !" On the way to the door, however, he turned around once more and spoke to the bookkeeper, who, gathering up a quantity of papers was about to leave : "Do your utmost that the grain delivery to Nepal does not fail us."

The next moment the two friends met.

"Krishnadas !"

"Lakshman, is it really you ? Fully twenty years have passed since we saw each other, and yet how little you have changed in that long time !"

"And I," replied the stranger, "would have known you among a thousand. And yet I think that the 'gay Krishnadas'—you know we always called you that when a boy—is not so cheerful as of old. On the contrary,—the deep furrows on your forehead,—have things taken a bad turn with you ? Does your business trouble you ?"

"Yes, it does. But how is it with you ?"

"Very well, the gods be praised. I have never regretted that when a young man I took my little inheritance and went to Cashmere. The fine weavings of my new home always find a market. I am here now with goods worth more than a hundred thousand rupees. I have pitched my tents close to the city.

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You must come to-day to examine our fine stuff ; you will take pleasure in it." Here Lakshman paused, looked inquiringly at his friend for a time, then asked in a lower tone : "Krishnadas, was it really business alone that drew these wrinkles on your forehead ? And this sorrowful expression on your face,—speak, what troubles you ?"

"Come, sit down," said Krishnadas, "it is not to be told in a few words."

When the two men had seated themselves opposite each other upon two cushions, Lakshman remarked : "Eighteen years ago your wife died ; you wrote me of it ; she had just given life to a daughter."

Krishnadas's eyes lighted up. "Yes, to Gopa, to my only child. She is my sole delight. She is not only good-hearted, she has also grown beautiful, very beautiful, and clever." But with a sigh he gently added, "May she only grow happy !"

A few moments he was silent, looking thoughtfully on the ground. Then he bestirred himself, as if he would throw off a disagreeable thought, and began to talk. "You will scarcely remember, Lakshman, that I have a younger sister, Lilavati. When scarcely out of her cradle, she was wedded to a boy of our caste, a child just learning to talk, who knew not what a boy and maid are, much less what a husband and wife are. Two years after the marriage that boy died of small-pox."

Lakshman shook his head sadly. "A hard fate ;



very hard for the widow who has before her a long life of denial and sacrifice,—for the law forbids her to enter upon a new marriage. A wretched, sad existence, indeed! The Sahibs who now rule our land have not done well to forbid the ancient holy custom, in accordance with which the widow accompanied the dead husband upon the funeral pile. A quick death in the flames, with the assurance that she was cleansing herself and her husband from all sin, and that she would lead a happy life with him in Vishnu's heaven, is a far happier fate than the life of a widow upon earth."

Krishnadas nodded assent several times and continued: "I can scarcely bear to recall what my sister has endured since that time; how the poor little creature, without understanding what widowhood meant, was clad in a dark robe,—how she stood there, a pitiful sight, shorn of her beautiful hair. She herself knew not how she looked; she ran upon the streets to her playmates, and they,—how it rent my heart!—ran shrieking and horrified from her to avoid the sight of that evil omen, a widowed child. Strange people drove her back into the house with blows. This was repeated a few times; then poor Lilavati, conquered by fear, ever after remained at home, scarcely daring to look out of the window. So year after year passed. And then the poor, unsavory food, which is ordered for her as a widow, and the regular fast-days, upon which not a bit of food, not a drop of water, must pass her lips! And why all this?"

“It is not well,” interrupted Lakshman, “to torment your brains for this. The gods will it, and what the gods decree always serves a good end, even if we cannot understand it.” Lakshman was from head to foot a Hindu, quite after the liking of the Brahmans.

Krishnadas, however, appeared to disregard the remark of his fatalistic friend and went on with his story. “Since Lilavati has grown up and come to understanding, she has endured all with touching patience, done all that the Purohit, the household priest, has commanded; has fasted more than was necessary; often we have seen her sink down in utter exhaustion. Oh, how the sight of her silent misery cut me to the heart! And many times when I was unnoticed, did I observe her as she stole to the window when a joyous wedding procession was passing by our house, when a youth beaming with happiness was taking his blooming bride to his home. Then I saw how my unhappy sister’s bosom heaved, and how her fingers convulsively clutched her gown. She knew that all the happiness of life in this existence was forever denied her, but never a word of complaint escaped her lips. My parents died, and Lilavati came to my house to become a second mother to my child. I cannot tell how much I thank her, yet I could not brighten her existence. Truly, the Brahman law is hard, and still harder than the law is the Purohit, a rough man, who by the strength of his will has obtained such an influence in our community that no one dares to speak

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against him. The past month our trouble has increased : a cruel fever has seized my poor sister ; for weeks she has lain in pain, and is so exhausted that we know not how long she will be with us. And that is not all ; another heavy burden lies upon my heart."

"Still more, my poor friend?"

"Yes," said Krishnadas, "I wished at first to conceal it from you, but perhaps I may now learn from you, who have come from Cashmere, something about Champak."

Lakshman looked up in surprise. "About Champak, the manager of the vineyards of our Maharaja? I know him well ; but what is he to you?"

"He is my son-in-law, Gopa's husband."

With an expression of the greatest astonishment, Lakshman arose. "Champak your son-in-law!" But he quickly checked himself and continued in a careful manner. "Champak is a very important man and stands high in the favor of the young prince."

"And, it is said, that it is very gay at your court—"

"Oh, yes, people know how to live in Cashmere."

"And to associate with complaisant women? Do not dissemble, friend ; tell me what I have long foreboded ; what is Champak doing?"

"Well then," replied Lakshman, "since Champak is the trusted friend of the young prince, and lives near him night and day, we in Cashmere can no longer speak of him with respect. I am sorry for you and your daughter."

Krishnadas groaned aloud : "Ye great gods ! and that is Gopa's husband !"

Lakshman paced up and down the room a few times in excitement ; then he stepped close to Krishnadas who had covered his eyes with his right hand, and asked : "But of all men in the world how came you to have Champak ?"

Slowly Krishnadas raised himself and said : "How do we in this land come by our sons-in-law ? Gopa was known in our caste as a pretty, bright child, and I was considered wealthier than I was. So I had constant trouble to escape the attentions of the professional match-makers who overwhelmed me with proposals. The dreadful fate of my poor sister was a warning to me to defer the marriage of my daughter as long as possible. In spite of the fact that some in our caste were beginning to grumble, I yet indulged the hope that Gopa might become fully grown before I sought for her a suitable and worthy husband. Thus she came to be nine years old. Then there came to me one day messengers from our caste who explained to me that, since I had for years rejected all offers, they considered it their duty to inform me that according to the law of the caste, the extreme limit of time for Gopa's marriage had come. If she were not wedded to a husband within a month, I should no longer be one of them. I need not tell you what the loss of caste signifies to us. By it we are lost as merchants and as men. A crisis was now imminent ; in all

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haste I looked about, and at that time Champak presented himself, whom until that time I had scarcely known, a merchant's son of suitable age who was just entering, with fair prospects, in the service of the Maharaja of Cashmere. Nine years ago they were married in this house. It was agreed that in four years Champak should take his wife home, as is the custom. During the first years he came several times to visit us at Benares, and made a good impression. But now for five whole years I have waited in vain, and am tormented by the captious and half-insolent questions of my acquaintances: 'When is Champak coming?' 'Is your son-in-law never coming to take his wife away!' And the letters which he writes to me occasionally, full of excuses and subterfuges which any child would recognise! Now I know the whole sad truth. But hark—here comes my daughter."

During the last words Gopa hastily entered the room with the sorrowful cry "O Father, Father!" Suddenly she noticed the stranger and stopped.

"Lakshman of Cashmere, the friend of my youth," said Krishnadas. But Gopa, tossing her head, added bitterly: "Who supposedly has come to tell us how deeply Champak is longing for his bride."

Lakshman bowed with courtesy and replied: "I have not spoken with your husband, but I know him, and I doubt not that as soon as the burden of his business permits . . ."

But here Gopa interrupted him, looked steadily in

his face, and stepped a pace nearer. "You do not doubt? Lakshman, in this house truth is spoken."

Then turning to her father she informed him with a troubled face that the condition of the sick Lilavati had become much worse during the last few hours. She paid no further attention to the stranger who followed her with a look of astonishment and said to himself : "By all the gods, a wonderfully independent girl! If Champak only knew what a wife he possessed in Benares!"

#### IV. THE WIDOW'S DEATH.

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LAKSHMAN tarried with Krishnadas ; while Gopa alternately passed in and out. At last, approaching her father with a dejected countenance she said : “ Father, your sister grows constantly worse; she cries, she talks irrationally, and begs for water in her burning fever heat. She surely does not know that this is her fast day. Just now, exhausted, she sank into a sleep. I pray the gods will grant her a long and refreshing slumber.”

With tearful eyes Krishnadas turned to his friend. “You now see, Lakshman, the utter misery of my house.”

Lakshman thought it fit to depart when a servant entered and announced a new visitor : “ Ramchandra, the Brahman.”

“ He is welcome, as ever,” said Krishnadas ; but at the same time he urged his friend to remain. “ You must meet Ramchandra ; he is a remarkable man and one of high character. Notwithstanding his youth the fame of his learning fills the whole town, and in many branches of knowledge he surpasses his teachers.”

All eyes were turned towards the visitor, who now greeted Krishnadas and Gopa, and inquired sympathetically after the welfare of the sick widow.

"I fear, Ramchandra," replied Krishnadas sadly, "that it is ill with Lilavati, very ill."

"Ah, I regret it deeply," said the Brahman. "But I see that you have a guest; I am interrupting you."

"No, Ramchandra, stay. It is an old friend from the distant Northwest."

Lakshman bowed profoundly, and said: "A high honor for this house, that a Brahman youth visits it as a friend."

But Ramchandra objected with a modest gesture.

"Oh no! I am bound to this house by all the bonds of gratitude;" and checking the reply which Krishnadas attempted to make, he went on: "Let me speak! he who says that I confer an honor upon this house shall learn what you have done for me. Not only do I owe my life to Krishnadas, but I also should not have had means to complete my studies if he had not . . . ."

Here, however, Krishnadas quickly interrupted him: "Enough, enough, Ramchandra!"

"No, Krishnadas," he continued steadily, "you shall and must learn why I speak to you of these things to-day. You know that for a few weeks past I have been instructing the new magistrate of our city, White Sahib."



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“Yes, I had heard of it,” said Krishnadas, “how do you get along with each other?”

“I confess that I was distrustful when I was first invited to impart instruction to this man concerning our ancient traditions. The government officials use every means to inform themselves as to the disposition of the people. So at first I thought that my Sahib was studying our ancient holy books as a mere pretext to make cunning inquiries of me as to what the Brahmans think and say of the government.”

“And is it not so?” asked Gopa, who had been listening with rapt attention.

“No, decidedly not,” answered Ramchandra, “his motive is a sincere desire for knowledge, just as it was mine when I first came from Jeypore. And besides, notwithstanding his high position, he is a friendly man, of frank manners, quite different from the usual cold and condescending ways of the Sahibs.”

“We all know them,” put in Krishnadas indignantly, “by every word and look we are made to feel how these high and mighty rulers despise us.”

“My Sahib is the opposite of this; he conducts himself just as if I were his equal, and calls me friend. And daily I feel myself more touched by his manner, and I frequently upbraid myself that I have so much affection for one who is unclean. But when he tries with such true zeal to understand the deepest lore of our people . . . .”

“And you reveal it all to this barbarian!” said

Lakshman, whose astonishment increased each moment. "Is this right?"

"I do not think it is wrong," replied the Brahman ; "times have changed. The wisdom which was once the sole possession of my caste, has now become a common property. They are beginning to print our ancient sacred books in our own land ; every one can buy them, and whoever knows our language can read them. Tell me, if the Sahib of whom we speak *will* study our wisdom, is it not better that he should understand than misunderstand it? I help him to understand it. If the wisdom of the Brahmans is promulgated in the West, is it better that it should be a cloudy mass of indistinct ideas, at which all wonder and shake their heads, or that it should shine as the brightness of the sun, so that the thinkers of the sunset lands shall point to India and say : 'Thence comes our light'?"

Gopa looked with beaming eyes at Ramchandra, whose voice had an irresistible ring when he spoke with enthusiasm ; one could see clearly that she agreed with him. But Lakshman spoke angrily : "What interest can the Brahman wisdom have for the Sahibs? What do they care for India?"

"The Sahibs are different from us," replied Ramchandra ; "we have lived from the earliest times as if no other land or people existed. And truly there is, upon the whole wide earth, no other such people as we, the chosen of Brahma, since the first creation. But in the Sahibs a consuming fire burns which drives them

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to seek out the most hidden corners of the earth, and subject them to their sway. I believe they now rule over almost all the world, and they are seeking ways of reaching the stars, to conquer them. But not only do they wish to *possess* all ; the best among them wish to *know* all—all that was and is.”

“Yes, it is true,” affirmed Krishnadas, they are a wonderful people, and they have given our land many good things.”

Lakshman frowned ; he saw in the home of his old friend the spirit of a new time rising, to which he was deeply opposed.

But Ramchandra persisted in returning to the starting-point of the conversation on the English magistrate, and said : “At first I would not consent to be paid for my service to this stranger, who, from a true, noble thirst for knowledge, devoted himself to our philosophy. But I then thought I ought not to lose this opportunity of giving back to you, Krishnadas, what you had so generously lent me ; and so I took his money. Here is the first ; it is not much.”

With these words he handed Krishnadas a purse. But Krishnadas looked at him in astonishment. “You offend me, Ramchandra ; you must know that I do not lend money, and least of all to you. Put back your money in your pocket, and never speak of it to me again.”

Ramchandra colored. “Krishnadas, do not shame me. What shall I do with money ? I have already

enough for my needs. And shall I, the unmarried, accumulate property?"

"Then I can advise you," interrupted Gopa smiling. "Go, Ramchandra, carry your earnings to the bazaar where the books are sold, so large and thick that the poor worldling is frightened at their sight."

Ramchandra looked with a glance of gratitude at Gopa, who had guessed his dearest wish. "O you good, noble people, how I thank you! Ah, how often has it pained me that the chains of caste prevent me from coming as near to you as my heart desires."

Krishnadas nodded approvingly, and said: "Yes, it would indeed be delightful, Ramchandra, if you belonged to our caste, and were not compelled to avoid the meals of our house. Then you could be a regular guest at my table, and had we met sooner I should have given you Gopa in marriage. I could then be more secure about the future than I am now."

A flaming red colored Gopa's cheeks at these words. But the confusion which overcame her was soon displaced by a feeling of terror, for from the next room was heard a wailing voice which came nearer and nearer. A moment later the sick Lilavati came in, tottering and clinging to the pillars. Her cheeks were sunken and she stared hollow-eyed into the distance. As Krishnadas and Gopa, who hastened to her, assisted her with slow steps to a resting place, she spoke wearily and brokenly, uttering after every few words a pitiful wail.

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 "I could not stay any longer in my chamber. . . . When I awoke, I was so frightened, so fearfully frightened. . . . I saw infernal demons with horrible claws coming toward me . . . . they laughed grimly and said . . . . that to-day was my wedding-day. . . . that Mrityu, the god of death, would come and marry me. . . . O Krishnadas!" . . . . With a shriek the fever-sufferer sprang to her brother's arms, who sought to quiet her, while Gopa wrung her hands in despair. "Oh, how it burns! O Krishnadas, Gopa, give me to drink!"

Krishnadas spoke with hesitation. "Poor Lilavati! Dear sister, this is your fast-day."

"What do you say?" groaned the sick one, "my fast-day? Yes, it is true. Tell me, Krishnadas, how much longer will this day last?"

"Eight hours yet, Lilavati."

"Eight hours yet!" she repeated with a shrill cry. "No, I cannot stand it. . . . But one drop, brother. . . . I beg of you just one drop."

With great self-command Krishnadas bade her to suppress her desire. "Lilavati, dear sister, think. Your whole life long you have obeyed the laws of widowhood as no other widow has. All these long years you have done as the Purohit directed. It was a consolation to us that by your dutiful conduct you should share the highest happiness in the next existence. Think, dear Lilavati; as soon as you get well you would reproach yourself and us most bitterly if we should to-day fulfil your request."

“In the next existence,” said Lilavati after a pause, “in the future life, you say, Krishnadas. What if there is no future life!”

A shudder passed through those present. But Ramchandra whispered, “O, if it were true, what the sick one says! What a boon it would be for all creatures not to be hunted through thousands and thousands of painful lives!”

Lilavati tried to raise herself, groped about with uncertain touch and wept. “Gopa, Krishnadas, . . . so you will let me die . . . . you . . . . you . . . . that is your thanks . . . . for all that I have done for you year after year . . . . your thanks, Krishnadas, that I have raised Gopa to be a noble, good woman . . . .” Her voice sank, her breath came in gasps, and she convulsively pressed her finger to her burning lips. At the same time she cried out faintly, “Water . . . . water!”

“I can stand it no longer, Father,” said Gopa, “no, I will bring her water.” And Krishnadas answered, “Gopa, I will not hinder you.”

The young Brahman scarcely believed his ears; Gopa was hastening past him when he turned with a quick movement, stepped in her way, and cried: “Gopa, unhappy one, what do you do? Is the wish of a sick woman more to you than the decrees of the gods?”

But with scornful eyes Gopa answered: “Do *you* speak thus, Ramchandra, you, whom I had thought

good,—nay better than other men ! Have you a heart of stone ? Does not her misery appeal to you ? A greater misery earth has not seen. My inmost soul is pierced as with a thousand swords, and you preach to me about the will of the gods ! ”

Ramchandra was beside himself ; he seized her arm and said in a suppressed tone : “ You know not what you say. ”

But she broke away and in a moment was coming back with a water-jug from the adjoining room. Suddenly she stood as if petrified ; her arms sank heavily ; in the door stood the Purohit.

“ My blessings on you ! ” sounded his deep voice. “ I have just performed the divine service in your temple-room. ” He stopped and looked about in astonishment. “ What is this ? ”

Faintly gasping sounded Lilavati’s prayer from the couch, “ Water, . . . only a drop of water. ” And Krishnadas pointed to the sufferer with the words : “ Look, worthy priest, on the wretchedness of my poor sister, my only sister. ”

“ Sad, indeed, ” replied the Purohit ; “ still it is her fast-day. Ha ! now I understand the horror on these faces before me. I see you, Gopa, with the jug in your hand. Blind woman, would you burden yourself and Lilavati with such a terrible crime ? ”

Ever weaker became the cry of the dying widow, “ Water, water ! ”

Then Gopa recovered herself, and starting past the

Purohit, cried, "Yes, with any crime in the world, if only I can alleviate this anguish!"

But when she reached Lilavati, a higher power had ended the indescribable suffering of the widow for all time. Gopa sank prostrate on the couch, and the men were deeply agitated. Only the Purohit spoke in solemn calmness: "Well for her that she died without breaking the divine law; but upon you, Gopa, I must impose a penance." With that he walked out of the door.

But Krishnadas imploringly stretched his hands to heaven and cried: "Oh ye great gods above us, take from me, if you will, all I have,—but spare me one thing—*the life of Gopa's husband!*"



## V. THE DURGA FESTIVAL.

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IT was the day of the great Durga festival, which was usually celebrated in a renowned temple in the southern part of Benares, founded in the preceding century by a pious queen, and down to the present day called the Monkey Temple. Not only the building itself, but also the banks of the square walled tank which lay near it, and the giant trees hard by, were filled with thousands and thousands of shrieking, chattering monkeys, who tumbled about joyously, conscious of their sacredness, and revelling in the food received from the faithful Hindus. Should a person have dared to kill one of these monkeys, he would have been guilty of a crime against the dread goddess, and must have expected speedy revenge from an excited people. Only recently has the English government felt strong enough to remove the great mass of the monkeys and to confine the remainder to the interior of the temple. High, smooth walls, forming a square, surround the holy place; the side of the chief entrance is marked in the centre by a half sphere with a dome at each corner. Through the small portal

wone passes into a porch, or vestibule, which is supported by twelve carved pillars, and from this a few steps lead down to the open temple court, where the sacrifices take place. In the centre of this court stands the temple proper, an oddly intricate piece of architecture, which contains the dreadful image of the bloodthirsty Durga. In perfect harmony with the character of the goddess the whole temple is colored red.

During the festival the heavy beating of drums in the porch near the entrance was to be heard, while in the presence of the divine image two great bells of shrill sound were rung by the priests. The ground reeked with blood. Hourly after sunrise great herds of oxen, goats, and sheep were driven into the temple by the pious Hindus, till the arms of the priests who had to strike with long swords the necks of the victims fastened in strong wooden forks, were worn out. Without, at a little distance from the temple, stood the venders of the favorite grain of the monkeys, which they offered for sale in large baskets. The pilgrims here dutifully purchased food for the sacred animals of the goddess, and if they themselves possessed no vessel, used smooth brazen platters which they borrowed of the venders. The monkeys that were not already overfed crowded in herds to meet the new-comers, and grasped greedily the food in the vessels presented to them. Often it happened that a long-tailed reveller would snatch the platter from the hands of a worship-

per, and with a joyful shriek, spilling half its contents, swing himself upon a tree, and from there to the top of the temple. And the other monkeys, not allowing him to enjoy alone his plunder, would run shrieking after him, and begin a fierce battle for its possession. Then, not unfrequently, the metal plate would fall clattering down from the roof of the temple upon the heads of the Hindus crowding at the entrance below, and thus increase the general tumult and confusion. Those who were fortunate enough to get within the temple, made their way, pushing, reviling, and shrieking, to the space before the image of the goddess, stretching out her tongue and staring at her worshippers with gloating eyes. With prostrations and shouts of "Hail, Durga, great mother!" they placed before her wreaths of flowers, or poured milk, rice, and grain on the floor without discrimination.

The glowing sun shone down upon the heap of offerings, decomposed the stuff, and created a fearful stench, of which the thronging masses did not seem to take notice. Before they passed out they threw silver and copper coins upon a great pewter plate which stood under the special care of a greedily watching priest. With eagerness he looked at it and cried at intervals with a loud voice sounding above the shrill clang of the bell and the shouts of the throng: "Durga, the mother of us all is not pleased with you. You have given her to eat and drink, but you give not money enough, and for this the goddess will let you perish,

you and your children. If she is to conquer in the conflict with the demons we must support her with our offerings, and so we need money, much money.”

Then the departing ones would put their hands into their garments and the coins would clatter upon the plate, which, as soon as it was nearly filled, was emptied by the priest with a sly, unnoticed movement.

Among those present were also two Europeans, who, standing aside, looked with unconcealed disgust at the confusion before the temple. They were the collector of Benares, and the officer who commanded the English battalion quartered outside the city. “Let us not go in,” said the former, “I cannot endure the ear-splitting noise and the vile odor; having seen it once is quite enough.”

The officer assented, and remarked scornfully: “Now this is the people whose ‘wisdom’ our good White takes the trouble to study. Day by day he sits at home and gives up to a nigger all the leisure hours which he denies to our company. If he would only come occasionally and play billiards with us! I cannot understand such a man.”

“I knew White at Oxford where we studied together,” said the collector. “He is a clever man, and was by far the best in his year. But he was always somewhat eccentric, and even at that time shunned the companionship of his comrades. About twelve years ago he told me that he intended to enter the civil service in India solely to have an opportunity of

[www.libtool.com.cn](http://www.libtool.com.cn) investigating Hindu philosophy. To that end he diligently studied Sanskrit. He has his own peculiar ways, but he is consistent and does not stray from them. Our chief officers esteem him highly on account of his brilliant examinations, otherwise he would not, being so young, hold so lucrative a position."

This, however, did not seem to impress the officer, who only repeated with a haughty sneer: "Hindu philosophy!" and added, pointing to several Hindus near by who reverently bowing were feeding the monkeys, "a beautiful philosophy which teaches people to worship brutes!"

"Yes," replied the collector, laughing, "But I suppose the standpoint of the Brahman with whom White is heart and soul is somewhat higher."

"I don't believe it," said the officer with the air of a man who thinks his own judgment is final upon matters unknown to him, "nigger is nigger."

The two gentlemen did not know how near was the Brahman of whom they spoke; for just then Ramchandra was passing along with the Purohit with whom we became acquainted at the house of Krishnadas. The latter cast a glance at the temple and remarked: "Here the rabble of our city and their priests abide. It is good that in our country we can serve the gods in different manners, the lower classes in this and the higher classes in another. But what a contrast! How otherwise appears the character of divinity to us, the learned Brahmins, than to these uneducated priests of

the public temples. True, we must recognise them also as Brahmans, Brahmans they are without doubt,—but they stand further from Brahma than we. They know nothing of our sacred books, and their modes of divine worship are foolish. But one thing I must praise ; they understand how to rule the minds of the masses. In this respect we might learn from them. Oh Ramchandra, we must not weary in our work of holding the better classes under control, least of all now while oppressed by the Sahibs. But, Ramchandra, what ails you? You do not seem to hear me !”

Ramchandra started from his reverie, and excused himself. “I was absent-minded while you were speaking. Alas! never has anything so moved me as that which I saw yesterday at the house of Krishnadas. I did not sleep a moment during the whole night, and when I arose and took a book to quiet myself, my head swam ; I heard the despairing cry of Lilavati,—I hear it yet,—oh, it is fearful !”

“Ramchandra,” said the Purohit, “you are young and impressionable. When you are as old as I, you will have learned that worse things can happen to men than what you saw yesterday. Pray to Brahma to give to your mind that calmness which is becoming to one belonging to his chosen caste,—the calmness with which the sacred Ganga has flowed past our city for thousands and thousands of years.”

“I tried to pray,” answered Ramchandra gloomily, “but I could not. There rang constantly in my ears,

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‘Water, water, only one drop of water!’ Why must yesterday, just yesterday, have been the widow’s fast-day?”

“Why? Do you ask, Ramchandra? Do you think that the regular course of day and night could be changed for a fever-stricken widow? Because a man is dying, shall the order of the universe be changed?” Thus spoke the Purohit impressively. Then he paused, and asked in a sterner tone: “Tell me, Ramchandra, when Gopa in her blindness yesterday was about to fetch water to the patient, did you do your duty and endeavor to restrain her?”

“Yes, I did; but I doubt whether it was right.”

“You doubt whether it was right!” continued the Purohit. “You yourself are fever-stricken, if you say that, Ramchandra, you, by whom formerly our holy laws were regarded as the highest. I advise you to go home and to sleep.”

“But tell me,” said Ramchandra, slowly, who had scarcely noticed the indignation of the Purohit, “if, as our faith teaches, man, in all things which he experiences or suffers, is but earning the fruit of his own deeds, if he receives only the reward of the works he has done in this and earlier existences, of what consequence then are the gods to us?”

The Purohit replied: “They assign the rewards for the works and lead the pious to good deeds. They look into the heart of man, for they are all-knowing and almighty.”

Ramchandra interrupted the Purohit : "All-knowing,—then they must have known that Lilavati, the widow, would die on the fast-day. Almighty,—then they could have prevented it. I thought the highest attribute of the gods was mercy, but it was a mistake, else they would not have permitted Lilavati to perish."

"Hold, Ramchandra, blasphemer!" cried the Purohit, now full of agitation. "The gods are merciful. Can you, with your dull eyes, understand their ways? You look over this one short life and think not of the cycle of unnumbered births in which creatures are tried and educated by the gods, until, purified from the dust of earthly things, they approach them, and at the end of their career, enter into the great rest of Brahma. However, do not talk of the kindness and mercy of the gods; think rather of their ordinances and laws. Upon them rests the world! The Sahibs always speak of their kind and merciful God. That's it, indeed! Now it is all clear to me! The constant intercourse with the Sahib has spoiled you. I wish this accursed barbarian—"

Ramchandra at once interrupted the angry man with the words: "Stop. You do not know him. The Sahib is good; as good as you."

"You are irreverent, Ramchandra," said the Purohit, immediately; "the rapid success of your studies has blinded you. You no longer respect age and experience; I have long noticed it with regret."

Ramchandra felt himself abashed. He knew that



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he had gone too far, and answered : " Pardon me, worthy sir, but I fear I shall not be able to change. When any one does an injustice to me or another, wrath overcomes me as a typhoon which throws the billows of the ocean to the sky. I cannot restrain it."

The Purohit was silent for a time, then he said in a milder tone : " Ramchandra, why do you not follow my advice? You should take a wife ; believe me, an unwedded life is not good for a fiery soul, like you."

Ramchandra made an impatient gesture with his hand, but the Purohit continued : " I am sorry that your parents did not marry you when a child ; but still nothing is lost. The most distinguished families of our caste would gladly give you one of their daughters."

" Why do you press *me* ?" returned Ramchandra. " Do not many Brahmans remain unmarried during their whole life? I will do the same."

" Very few choose the state of celibacy," said the Purohit, significantly, " and they are of a different nature from yours,—quiet, gentle men, who find the highest happiness of life in the renunciation of the world, in god-given contemplation."

" You know," said the young man, " I have an ardent love of knowledge ; I am also ambitious ; I hate bonds. No, married life is not for me."

" Is that the only reason, Ramchandra ?" asked the Purohit, searchingly ; and when the young man, looking up with surprise, frankly replied : " Yes ; cer-

tainly!" he was evidently relieved. "I believe you, Ramchandra. For my own part, I do not think that wife and children would hinder you from study and investigation; but perhaps they might cure you of the habit of brooding. You think too much. Our ways separate here. Farewell!"

The Purohit left his young companion in the vicinity of the Ghats—those quay-like structures along the Ganges. Ramchandra still continued his way, for he desired to attend the cremation of the body of Lilavati, which should take place a few hours before sunset.

## VI. THE SAHIB AND THE AGHORI.

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THE sun was already sinking in the west when Ramchandra approached the well-known Burning-Ghat on the bank. He was musing at the last words of the Purohit and spoke half aloud :

“I think too much ! Should I not be allowed to do that ? Does not the whole world and all that is in it challenge thinking ? Wherever I turn there is a chain of unsolved riddles. The course of nature, is it not a mystery, and shall it not concern me ? Even our sacred books, are they not full of problems, and, as it seems to me, of contradictions ? The teachers indeed explain all contradictions as only apparent, or as intentionally thrown in, so that the inquiring student shall exert himself to find the truth. And yet, it often seems to me that the context does not admit of the teacher’s explanation. Alas ! I am yet far, far from the other shore of our wisdom, where peace dwells. I struggle with the flood, and I *will* pass over, but many times the current seizes me, as if it would force me down into the fearful deep. Peace, Ramchandra ! You will not sink, if you cling to the one

thing which is firmly grounded, which has defied and will defy all storms,—the laws of Brahmanism.”

Suddenly his thoughts took another turn. “But what did the Purohit mean when he looked so searchingly at me, and asked whether my ambitious thirst for knowledge was the only reason for my unwedded life? What could he mean? Nonsense!”

He slackened his pace, for he had now almost reached the Burning-Ghat. “To-day shall the body of Lilavati be consigned to the flames,” he mused. “She herself tarries elsewhere and enjoys the purest happiness which is her portion as a reward for her dutiful life. But what a life it was! More miserable than that of a jackal or a Pariah dog, who gnaws bones and moistens its thirsty tongue with water as often as he pleases. And how many thousands, millions, of poor widows have thus endured and suffered! Even Gopa might—unendurable thought!”

His lips quivered, and he looked up. There he saw Mr. White, the Judge, his pupil, sitting upon a block of stone, and holding a tablet in his hand, on which he sketched the dilapidated structures which fringed the banks of the river.

Ramchandra approached and addressed him: “Salaam, Sahib!”

Mr. White raised his head and said: “Well met, Ramchandra, salaam! Sit down with me a while. I like this place and have been here this morning to look at the bathing Hindus. As often as I come down

THE REDEMPTION OF THE BRAHMAN.

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early to the Ghats, I see with new delight this in gay costumes. A truly wonderful picture! I were an artist and could paint it."

"See, Sahib," answered the Brahman, "when I look upon the morning-bath of the Hindus, what a different feeling stirs me. To me the devotion of the masses is elevating; a hymn springs to my lips when I see how thousands are impelled by holy inspiration—"

Mr. White smiled: "Or by the power of habit."

Ramchandra frowned, but, without heeding the interruption, continued: "To wash away the sins of the preceding day by a bath in the Ganges. And you, you say 'a wonderful picture,' and wish to paint it. I shall never understand you."

"The better I understand you."

"Well," said Ramchandra, "you have the advantage of knowing more of our, than I of your, people. Tell me, Sahib," he continued, after a few moments of reflexion, "how it is that you, who place so much value on purity; you, who go always in painfully neat clothing, can eat and drink in the presence of people who are not of your class? Do you not feel the pollution?"

"No, Ramchandra," replied the European, laughing, "why should we. With you the idea is inculcated, perhaps inborn; inherited from generation to generation during centuries, since the custom was introduced."

“The custom!” exclaimed Ramchandra, “since the custom was introduced! You do not believe, then, that the law is as old as the world, that it was the will of the Creator from the beginning, upon this holy ground of India, to separate the castes in all the necessities of life? But no, you cannot understand it, so let us not discuss the subject. Tell me something else. You Sahibs, who are so political and world-wise, who have subdued the earth, who understand how to bring the mysterious forces of nature under your control, how is it that you are so blinded as to watch so little the virtue of your wives, man’s most sacred possession. Your women live as you do, do what seems good to them, go where they please; they jest with other men as with their own husbands—”

“And, nevertheless, are as virtuous as your Indian women,” interrupted Mr. White. “True virtue needs no guardian, it protects itself. Learn to know our women, Ramchandra, and their nature will be a revelation to you.”

“I believe you, Sahib, for I know that you do not deceive me,” said Ramchandra. Shaking his head he continued: “But it is strange, most wonderful. Think you that the Indian women could bear unlimited freedom?”

“Certainly, if they were educated as ours are.”

“That is impossible, of course. Your customs are odd, incomprehensible. As you all eat and drink together, so you marry promiscuously, so that one can-

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not say of your children, of what class, or what nature they are !”

“Yes, Ramchandra,” answered the Englishman, “we marry, as you say, promiscuously, just as education, circumstances, and above all, affection draw us together.”

“And you approve of that? I will not refer to our lawbooks, for they are nothing to you. But look about you in nature. Does it not teach the divine law? Do you not see that in the world of animals each species lives by itself? Do they not shun the companionship of each other? Does the tiger mate with the panther, or the eagle with the vulture? And in the world of men shall the Brahman wed the merchant’s daughter, the merchant wed the soldier’s daughter, or the soldier be married to a coolie maiden?”

“Incomprehensible blindness !”

“No, Sahib, *you* are blind, that you do not see the bounds which have been established by the celestial gods. You, in your foolishness, have destroyed them, and therefore redemption is beyond your reach for all time.”

“There again, Ramchandra,” said Mr. White calmly, “you touch upon something about which I hold a different opinion from you. The redemption, that is, the emancipation of the individual soul from the pains of mundane existence, all your systems which I have studied with you, propose to attain through the medium of the intellect, through this or that knowl-

edge. I seek redemption by morality, and I believe that every one may attain to it in this life. The disciples of Buddha, the enlightened one, whom you Brahmans have driven out of your land, have approached nearer to the true understanding of redemption than you. Do not be angered again, Ramchandra, but answer me one more question. Do not all those whom you have mentioned, the Brahman, the merchant, the soldier, the coolie, and all your other numerous castes, belong to the one race of man ?”

“No,” replied Ramchandra, with decision, “the word *man* only designates similarity of structure, it means a being which has head, trunk, arms, and legs, but it does not mean race.”

“I ought to have been prepared for that answer from you,” said the Judge. He was thoughtfully silent for a time and then questioned : “Of course you do not doubt, Ramchandra, that you have perfectly pure and unmixed Brahman blood in your veins ?”

“I do not !” answered Ramchandra earnestly, “and I request you not to doubt it. It touches my most sacred, my only possession.”

But Mr. White was not accustomed, when he had something on his mind, to give up the pursuit. “Have you ever,” he queried, “seen your countenance in a mirror ?”

“Certainly,” replied the Brahman, angrily, “but what has that to do with it ?”

“Then you must have seen that your features are



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very different from those of the Brahmins in this land."

"No wonder ; I am a native of Rajputana."

"Yet there is a peculiarity in your face which I have not found in any other Brahman countenance in other parts of India. Just listen quietly to what I have to say to you, Ramchandra. Do you not know that in olden times, before your present law books came into authority, there were not such strict laws in your land concerning marriage as at present? If a man married as his first wife a maiden of his own caste, he was allowed to take other wives out of the lower castes, and all the children, from which ever mother they were descended, followed the caste of the father. So a woman of the soldier or peasant caste could have a Brahman son. Now, remember, Ramchandra, how few Brahmins there are in Rajputana, and think of the noble, distinguished soldier-families of your fatherland. Do you not believe that your ancestors might have been attracted by the proud daughters of that caste, at a time when this was allowable? Believe me, there flows more soldier blood than Brahman blood in your veins, and your whole character shows it. Were I in your place I should be proud of such an admixture of strength."

Ramchandra's brow was contracted, and his face bore a gloomy expression. He had never thought of these things, which had now been so clearly set before him. Why should he indeed? Even in our day the

Brahmans are so sensitive upon this point, that they are angry if one applies these simple facts to their ancestry. But how should he refute the Sahib? At last Ramchandra replied: "To know descent and blood one must belong to our people. A strong voice within me tells me that you are wrong."

The two men, absorbed in conversation, did not notice that during the latter part of their talk they had been observed. Five or six Brahmans who passed that way stood at a little distance, looking at them with no kindly glances.

"There is Ramchandra again with the Sahib; the two seem to be quite inseparable," remarked one of them.

"I do not trust Ramchandra," said a second one; and after a pause he added: "I hate Ramchandra."

The first suggested ironically: "Of course, since the Sahib, after a few days of your instruction, dismissed you and chose Ramchandra. He seems to understand his part better."

The insulted man cast at the speaker a venomous glance, which clearly showed how deeply the thrust had wounded him, and replied: "The Sahib's conduct displeased me, and on that account I left him. But I should think that you above all had little cause for such scorn. Perhaps you think we do not know that a few weeks ago you were unsuccessful in the competition with Ramchandra for the prize offered by the Raja of Darbhanga."

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A third Brahman stepped between them to settle the quarrel: "Do not be angry; we all have cause enough to dislike the haughty Ramchandra. He always speaks to us as if he were better than we."

"And the torrent of his speech," put in another, "cuts short every discussion. It is annoying to be silenced by him, who is so young a man. Look at him! he speaks now just as haughtily to the Sahib."

The one who was first ridiculed here saw his chance of taunting all who had before mocked him, and said: "Only that the Sahib laughs and is not silenced."

The speaker did not notice the remark, but only expressed his surprise at White's behavior. "I cannot understand the Sahib; his countrymen usually do not tolerate such conduct on the part of our people."

Suddenly there was a movement, and the Brahmans dispersed, for from one of the streets which lead into that vicinity sounded the warning cry: "An Aghori! The blind Aghori! take care of yourselves!"

At the place where the Brahmans had just expressed their grudge against Ramchandra's importance and superiority, a blind old man, clad in rags, came groping along with a cane. He was known in that region as a member of a class of men whom the Brahmanic Hindu hears mentioned only with a shudder. Of all the Pariahs, the Aghori stands lowest in Northern India. His daily food is the abhorrence of all men who are not branded with the same descent; even the other Pariahs turn away from him with contempt.

The unfortunate old man remained standing, wailing loudly. "Woe is me! where am I? In the throng of the bazaar, into which I was unwillingly led, my boy was torn from my hands. How shall I find my way? On every hand I hear men running with cries of horror from me. Oh, why was I born, a curse to all creation?"

Mr. White noticed the cry of distress and saw the blind man. "Look at that poor blind man, who has evidently lost his guide. How every one shuns him! What does it mean?"

Ramchandra turned his face away to the river and answered: "It is an Aghori, Sahib; I know him well. He ought to avoid coming into the presence of men and polluting others by his sight. The Brahman law prescribes that the outcast shall dwell in barren and desolate places. In former times he would not have dared to tread the ground of our holy city; men would have stoned him. But since you foreigners rule our land, much is allowed which is bad, and much is forbidden that is good."

"According to your way of thinking," said the Englishman, indignantly. "Have you any other accusation against this man than that he was born an Aghori?"

"I should think that is quite enough."

Mr. White grew impatient. "The old man is groping his way toward the river; if he continues, he must drown."

“It would not matter much for the scum,” said Ramchandra, in a surly, spiteful tone, “but I should be sorry for the sake of the holy water.”

The Judge was full of indignation. With flashing eyes and a voice full of threatening severity he exclaimed: “He is a man, Ramchandra; a man like you! and a man who needs the assistance of another.” Saying this, he stepped forward, while the Brahman stared at him, and seized the arm of the blind Aghori, who in the meantime had come nearer.

“I thank you,” said the old man, “you are an Aghori, also?”

“No, friend. Come, let us go home. Where do you live?”

The blind man stood still in boundless astonishment, as if he could not comprehend what had happened to him; then, overcome with emotion, he poured forth these words: “You are not an Aghori, and you touch me! Ye Gods, ye almighty Gods be thanked. At the end of my days this unspeakable happiness! A man, a man who is not an Aghori, touches me and calls me friend. Yes, it is true, ye celestial ones are merciful; after all, ye are merciful.” And tears of joy started from his eyes.

## VII. THE FUNERAL.

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WHILE the Englishman slowly accompanied the blind Pariah, Ramchandra stood as if paralysed, a mighty conflict agitating his soul. His eyes stared at the departing men, but he did not see them ; a veil was spread before him. At last his confused ideas began to arrange themselves. “What was that ? What is going on here ? Am I dreaming, or awake ? But no, it is the truth. The Sahib is gone. What were those words he spoke to me, with a look and tone that pierced my very soul like a flame of fire ? ‘It is a man, Ramchandra, a man like you ?’ And how the Aghori thanked the gods with such fervor, that a man not of his class had touched him and called him friend. That such feelings should dwell in the Pariah, whom we are wont to regard as lower than the crawling worm,—feelings of which no Brahman need be ashamed. Oh, ye gods, give me understanding ! But no ; however often I cry to you, you remain silent and answer my prayers by no sign. You are hard ; as hard as your laws. Your laws ? Your commandments ? And what if it be true, as the Sahib says, that the sacred laws

are not given by the gods, but are the work of men? No, no, it is not possible that by human laws millions of creatures are condemned to filthy misery, despair, and starvation! I shall go mad if I think of it!"

"*Rdm, rdm, sat hai*,—God, God alone, is truth," sounded from a distance in monotonous repetition, then nearer and nearer. Six bearers, ever speaking these words in unison, carried upon a woven mat a body covered with a gray cloth. They brought it to the Burning-Ghat, and laid it upon the funeral pile already prepared. A man belonging to a lower order of the church, whose inherited and commissioned business it was to kindle the funeral piles of Benares, stood with a torch, awaiting the signal to perform his office. Ramchandra arose and betook himself to the place. He knew that it was Lilavati's body because in the circle of friends he saw Krishnadas standing with bowed head. As he approached, he heard the merchant saying, "Only a short time now, and the ashes of my poor sister will mingle with the waters of the holy Ganga."

"You should consider her happy, Krishnadas," spoke Ramchandra; "one who has passed from such a life now leads a more delightful existence than any of us."

"I thank you," answered Krishnadas, "but for a brother who saw her years of suffering, and nothing but suffering, it is hard to forget the past."

Behind him stood Lakshman, looking on, in a seem-

ing state of indecision. "The poor man! But I must not be silent; he must know it," he murmured, and stepped a pace forward, "Krishnadas," he said, half aloud.

The man addressed turned round and said: "You, too, Lakshman! I thank you. I knew you would not fail me to-day. But you have something different on your mind, it seems!"

"I am sorry to say I have. I received a letter to-day from Cashmere, with much important news. There was also something in it about—Champak, your son-in-law."

"Nothing good, I suppose," said Krishnadas with a gloomy countenance. "I can imagine that—"

"No, nothing good." Lakshman paused. It was harder for him to deliver the message than he supposed. "But you will want to know it,—you *must* know it."

Krishnadas was greatly terrified. "Is he ill, is he very ill?" questioned he with breathless interest, and as Lakshman bowed his head affirmatively, he cried out: "No, no, Lakshman, do not say that! Anything but that! Tell me that Champak has stolen,—that he sits behind lock and bolt as a robber, even for life,—only do not say that he is ill."

He stretched his hands imploringly toward his friend, as the latter spoke again in a low voice: "As was his custom, Champak accompanied the Maharaja on a recent hunt. The young prince is hasty, impetu-



ous, and heedless. . . His shot, aimed at a stag, pierced Champak's breast, and he died immediately."

Krishnadas sank down unconscious, and those standing near caught him up. The reflexion from the funeral pile which was now ablaze, lighted his pain-stricken features. But Ramchandra hastened to him with the cry: "Almighty gods, what do I hear? Champak is dead, and Gopa a widow!"

## VIII. THE JUDGE AT HOME.

---

**A**T the time of our story the English officials in India were not so overburdened with duties as are those of to-day, to whom leisure has become almost unknown. At that time even the highest officials found time to attend to their favorite studies with success. At about noon Mr. White had usually completed his official work, and could pursue his studies leisurely during the remainder of the day.

A few days after the conversation he had with Ramchandra at the ghats, we find him in his comfortable study in his bungalow, which, like most of the European homes in that region, was not elegant, but provided with all the conveniences requisite in a tropical climate. The opposite window and doors were opened to afford as free an entrance as possible to the air, shaded only with mats of fine straw weaving. Over the head of the Englishman rustled in regular vibrations the punkah, the great native fanning-machine, which, by means of a rope passing to the veranda, was kept in motion by the coolies squatting there. Upon the floor of the room several tiger-skins were spread, and on the walls

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were hung antelope-horns and a few other trophies of the chase.

Mr. White sat reading at his table ; presently he looked at his watch. “ Ramchandra keeps me waiting to-day. A wonderful change has taken place in him, since I first knew him. At first he always looked at me askance, as if he were afraid of I know not what. And whenever I asked a question which did not relate directly to our studies, he would scarcely answer a word. But now . . . the matters on which he has asked my opinion during the last few days indicate that his mind is in a peculiar state of agitation ; I hope I shall be pleased with Ramchandra. . . . But I shall employ the time to call my servants to account.”

He called loudly from his seat to the man who acted as his housekeeper, addressing him, as is usual in India, by the name of his position : “ Khansamah ! ”

The man who was called, appeared, bowing profoundly, while he touched his forehead with both hands. “ Salaam, Sahib, what is your desire ? ”

“ Who broke that glass upon the table ? ”

“ Sahib, it fell of itself,” answered the servant.

“ Of itself,— as usual,” repeated the Judge with a sneer. “ Did the lamp also break of itself ? ”

“ No, Sahib, a muskrat ran against it and broke it.”

Mr. White had long ago learned to accept such explanations from his servants with the coolness which all Europeans must acquire in India, if they wish to avoid constant vexation.

www.library.com on Well, then, said he, "go to the bazaar and buy a new lamp; but I tell you if ever again things break of themselves in my house, or a rat runs against anything,—"

"Sahib, it shall never occur again."

"Now, render your account. What did you pay out to-day?" continued Mr. White.

"Seven rupees to the tailor, and six besides, namely, four for meat, vegetables, bread, and milk, and two for shoeing your riding-horse. Altogether, fifteen rupees."

"How many are seven and six?"

This query of his master, put in a stern tone, made the servant quake, and he humbly said: "Oh, thirteen, Sahib! Pardon me, we poor people count badly."

"Silence!" shouted Mr. White. "I know you can count better than I." The Judge looked significantly at his whip.

The culprit stretched out his hands anxiously, in an attitude of petition. "Ah, Sahib, do not be angry with me. You are my father and mother. May the gods make you the Maharaja of Europe!"

"Very probable!" mocked the Judge, and turning to another servant, who appeared at the door, he said: "Well, what do you bring, Sudin?"

"Salaam Sahib,!" answered the latter. "A boy stands without who does not dare to come in. He has brought you a basket of fruit as a gift, and says that

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you led his blind father home out of the throng of the streets."

The Englishman looked up in surprise and said : "At last I find gratitude, so long sought for in vain in India, among the lowest classes of this people. Bring the fruit in."

The man addressed did not stir, and the Judge added : "Will you do it at once?"

"It is an Aghori boy, Sahib," the servant apologised, and the other servant heard the announcement with evident horror.

"Just so," said Mr. White, "and his touch would defile you. You, too, Khansamah?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"Now see! You lie to me and deceive me; that does not defile you! But to take a basket of fruit from an innocent child, that defiles you!"

"Yes, Sahib," one of them said with assurance, "if it is an Aghori."

Mr. White arose. "Then I will go myself. Oh, the dark power of superstition which rules in Benares!"

When he had left the room, the two servants passed out through another door with restrained laughter. "There is something wrong with all Sahibs," said one of them. "They think that cheating defiles!"

"And," argued the other, "if we do not cheat them, whom shall we cheat?"

Just then Mr. White returned with the fruit in his

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hand, followed by Ramchandra, who had just come up and had met him upon the veranda. The young Brahman looked very miserable. "Be seated, Ramchandra. How are you?"

"I believe not as well as usual," he replied, in a strangely weak voice. "Let us begin." He opened the book he had brought with him, and looked at it with an unsteady gaze, while the Judge, holding a pen in his hand, looked searchingly at him. After a time Ramchandra declared that he did not understand the passage.

"That is the first time I ever heard you say that," answered Mr. White, and continued sympathetically, "we will not work to-day; you are sick, Ramchandra."

"No, I am not sick; but I have had sad experiences."

"Yes," interrupted Mr. White, "you told me of the sorrow in the home of our friend Krishnadas. Your grief honors you, Ramchandra."

"Ah, you do not yet know all," explained the other, "Gopa's husband is dead; Gopa is a widow. Krishnadas is in despair. I believe I cannot endure it either."

Both were silent for a time; then the Englishman asked: "Have you seen Gopa often?"

"Oh, yes, very often. Her father has not confined her to the women's room as much as most of the women of our people are. Gopa is very sensible. Krish-

nadas is wont to converse with her upon all subjects and desires her presence when he has a visit from a friend."

"Is Gopa very beautiful?" inquired Mr. White further, in a subdued tone; and Ramchandra exclaimed with enthusiasm: "Beautiful as the goddess Lakshmir, when she rose from the foam of the ocean!"

"Shall I tell you, Ramchandra, the cause of your trouble? . . . You love Gopa."

The words were spoken gently and in a manner indicative of hearty sympathy. But the Brahman arose with a wild start, as if wounded to death.

"What do you say, Sahib? Do you not know that I am a Brahman; that Gopa is a merchant's daughter and a widow besides?"

"But first of all I know this," answered the Judge, with quiet earnestness, "that you are a man, and a young man with a warm heart in your breast. When such a young man, wherever it may be, meets socially with a lovable young woman, he is irresistibly drawn to her. It is the will of the Creator."

"You call that the will of the Creator?" queried Ramchandra, with a vacant look, as if he had not heard aright.

"Yes! And what does Gopa's widowhood signify? Tell me, Ramchandra, did she live with her husband?"

"No, never. She was a child when she was married and when Champak left her."

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“But tell me, what makes the maid a wife? Do you not know? Is it the priestly ceremonies?”

The Brahman, who gave the last answer with bowed head, was almost ready to fly into a passion, and cried: “Do not ridicule my religion, Sahib.”

“I do not,” replied the latter, “for religious customs are not religion. Believe me, Ramchandra, you are in the true path to enlightenment. It will not be long before you, too, can distinguish between the will of God and the laws of Brahmanism. Friend, do not look so distressed; what you feel is no disgrace to you; but doubt no longer, you love Gopa.”

Ramchandra sprang up in fearful excitement. “If what you say is true, then I am a lost man.” And with that he staggered out of the door. On the following day Mr. White waited in vain for the Brahman at the appointed hour.



## IX. CAST OUT.

---

TEN or twelve distinguished merchants of Benares, whom Lakshman had joined, surrounded the sorely tried Krishnadas in his dwelling. The unfortunate man with bowed head leaned upon a table, and replied to the condolences of his professional comrades. "Accept my thanks, dear friends, but now, I pray you, leave me alone.—But it seems you wish something more ; speak out !"

Hesitatingly began the oldest of the visitors who had been appointed by his caste as spokesman. "Eight days have passed since the sad message reached us of the death of your son-in-law."

"Eight days ?" repeated Krishnadas, "it may be ; I have not counted how often the sun has risen, and the night drawn on . . . the night, which to me is no consoler, as it is called."

A pause followed ; then the spokesman of the merchants inquired : "Krishnadas, is it true, as people say, that Gopa, your daughter, still goes about in gay clothing, and that you have not yet shorn her head as becomes a widow ?"

“It is true,” affirmed Krishnadas, “I forbade it; speak no more about it.”

“It is our duty to speak of it, to rouse you from your useless sorrow, and to warn you of what the laws of our caste command.”

“My heart commands otherwise,” responded Krishnadas, “I cannot! Pity me; grant me only this!”

Again followed a painful pause which was ended by one quite near to Krishnadas who said: “Remember, consider who and what you are. It pains us all, but it must be.”

“No,” cried the tortured one, “it must not be! No! If Gopa, my beautiful child, should be robbed of the glorious hair which falls on her shoulders, and condemned to all the wretchedness which my sister endured, I shall go insane. Yes, by the gods, I feel it. I shall go mad!”

Then the leader of the delegation spoke earnestly. “Krishnadas, we stand here not only as your friends, but also as your judges. We are the ones who have been appointed by our caste, who to-day held a consultation, and sent us.”

“Ha! is it so?” cried Krishnadas, “you threaten me!”

“I regret it, we must. Here we have no choice. Friend, come to your senses and promise that before to-morrow Gopa . . .”

Krishnadas did not permit him to finish, but cried out in utter despair: “No! and always no!”

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“Is this, spoken with full knowledge, your last word?”

“My last! I will endure all, will strive to endure whatever may come!”

Then the speaker raised his voice and with angry earnestness and great force said: “Since you foolishly despise the commands of the gods, hear the judgment of our caste. From this day on, no merchant shall enter your house, no one shall do business with you; and if we meet you upon the street we shall turn from you as if we had never known you. Come, friends, we have done our duty.” And without taking leave of Krishnadas, the merchants departed.

The unhappy man was expelled from his caste, but he did not yet understand that even the friend of his youth could entirely ignore him. “You, too, Lakshman,” he exclaimed, “even you leave me without a greeting?”

Half turning round, the latter answered: “The will of the gods stands higher in my mind than the friendship of men,” and left, as the last, the now disdained house.

At the same moment Gopa hastily entered, and, running up to her father, impulsively flung her arms about him. “Oh, Father, Father, I have heard it all; we are lost!”

“I fear, child, we are,” replied Krishnadas, weakly. “I know these hard men; they will write to-day to all with whom I have connexions. My business is ruined.”

[www.libtool.com.cn](http://www.libtool.com.cn) “No, Father, no!” cried Gopa then. “I will hasten to dress myself in widow’s garments and to shave my head.”

“You shall not! I will not allow it!”

“Oh, father, let me, I implore you. If I show myself to-day in widow’s garb, the caste will reverse their decision, and rest content with some slight penalty.”

But Krishnadas would not yield. “No, my daughter, rather let us die together, if it must be so.”

The servant stood loitering in the door. “What is it?” demanded Krishnadas, “you disturb me.”

“Master, only a word,” he begged. “Just now when the merchants were leaving you, they went to your bookkeeper in the wareroom, and spoke low to him. After a time he left the house and ordered me to say to you . . . .”

He stopped, and when Krishnadas, quivering with impatience, shouted, “Well, what? out with your speech!” he anxiously stepped back a pace.

“Ah, sir, I am afraid. Do not look so sternly at me. I tremble in every limb.”

“Speak, wretch! What did he say?”

“That you must find another bookkeeper among the Pariahs.”

Scarcely had the servant spoken these words, when he disappeared from the door. Gopa groaned aloud, but Krishnadas gnashed his teeth with rage. “Oh that villain! that dog of a villain, to whom I have done nothing but good, whom I received into my house years

ago when he was starving! But I will make haste to see if he has added to his infamy by stealing from me."

Gopa remained alone and walked up and down the room, wringing her hands. "All this misery on my account!" thought she; "yet, what have I done to bring it about? That I took Champak for a husband? I was a mere child; I did not know him. The caste gave him to me—the same caste that now wishes to ruin me and my father. And had I been able to resist, would I have dared to do so? Ah, no! And is it our fault that Champak died? Let the young Prince of Cashmere suffer, who shot him! But we, why we?"

She heard her name called and turned around. Her face brightened, for, unnoticed by her, Ramchandra had entered. "Ah, you, Ramchandra," said she, going to meet him; "this is kind of you. We have not seen you for many days. . . . We shall no longer see you in the future." Her voice trembled with agitation, as she spoke the last words.

Ramchandra looked at her in astonishment. "What do you mean, Gopa; why should you not?"

"You must know it," answered Gopa, sadly. "My father has been expelled from his caste, for refusing to allow me to suffer the widow's fate of Lilavati."

The Brahman started back. "That is hard; I can hardly believe it. . . . Your father would. . . ."

"You know it now, go! I suppose I shall never see you again in this house."

www.ifi That remains to be seen, Gopa," said Ramchandra, with a sudden impulse. "I have not yet expressed to you my condolence on the death of your husband. You thought in a short time you would go away to your new home. Does it grieve you deeply?"

"Not more than the death of other men. What was my husband to me? Did I know him? I believe that I have scarcely exchanged ten words with him."

"And, perhaps," said Ramchandra, consolingly, "you would not have found happiness at his side."

"I believe myself that I should not. But what matters the happiness of women in this land?" said Gopa, bitterly. "And yet, if I could, through a long life, have endured, as the wife of Champak, all the trouble which the heart of a woman can endure, I would willingly have done it for my father's sake. My poor, poor father! He speaks of death; and that would be best for us. In a few weeks we shall be beggars. Champak's death was the worst that could happen to us." Tears choked her utterances; she turned her head and covered it.

Then Ramchandra felt his blood seethe through his veins and pressed his right hand upon his beating heart, which seemed like to burst. All his self-control was gone. He rushed to the maiden and folded her in his arms, with the cry, "Oh, Gopa, Gopa!"

The same moment he staggered back. Gopa had freed herself and stood erect in all her dignity. With scornful eyes she looked upon the Brahman, who

scarcely knew what had happened, and said in a voice trembling with indignation : “ Back, vile man ! Was that your friendship ? Was that the reason for which the Brahman’s kindness honored this house ? You Brahmans, you chosen ones of the great gods, are you not ashamed of yourselves ? Did not my father save your life ? I wish he had not done it ; that he had left you before our door to be beaten to death like a mad dog. Has not my father enabled you to become what you are ? And this is your thanks ! Answer nothing ; not a word ! The sound of your voice disgraces this house. My father and I—we were never good enough for you to share a meal with us, because the silly laws of your caste,—no, not laws,—because your pride forbade you. Yes, hear it from the lips of a woman ! Open your ears and hear the truth ! Oh, the Pariah who sweeps the filth from the streets is better than you ! I say it to you ; I, a widow, whom you and all of your class despise. . . .”

Ramchandra stood in feverish excitement ; in vain had he several times attempted to interrupt the wild torrent of words in which her wrath found expression. “ No, Gopa, no ! I protest, by all the gods ! Listen to me. . . .”

“ I will hear nothing more from you,” cried she, “ but one thing more I will say to you, and then—go ! In the short time that has elapsed since Lilavati’s death, this has become perfectly clear to me. The divine laws, of which you Brahmans are always talking, and whose

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most distinguished conservator you desire to be, are nothing but lies and deceits ! The pitiful existence to which you condemn the poor Pariahs was formerly established as a law by your class through base selfishness. And the mass, the ignorant mass, has believed your words and has languished in these fetters from century to century. You Brahmins are not the protectors, you are the scourges of our people."

Ramchandra was dumfounded. "Whence has come to the maiden this revelation, which is even now knocking at the door of my heart?"

"No, no more!" continued the angry Gopa; "you are worse than the vicious wolf which breaks in upon the herd; for we can protect ourselves from a wolf, but not from you! With your solemn faces, you stand there unassailable and say: 'It is the will of the gods that the widow must live in misery and despair.' I tell you, more tears have flowed from the eyes of the widows of our land, than waters from the Ganges into the sea! But that does not move you; sooner will the lofty glaciers of the Himalaya melt, than the icy coat of cold indifference around a Brahmin heart. . . . But in secret you can steal into our homes and approach even the widow, whose honor you do not respect. Oh, it is too much!" Finally, the friendly feeling she had cherished for Ramchandra for years so far returned, that her anger gave place to a deep sense of pain. "And that even you! Even you, Ramchandra, whom



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I have trusted so long, are no better than the rest of them !”

Sobbing, she left the room.

The Brahman stood there, deeply agitated, but at the same time a feeling of freedom came over his heart. “From the lips of a woman,” thought he, “the truth has been shown to me, and the truth will conquer and must conquer. I see redemption dawning upon us. But she does me an injustice. From this hour I am no longer a Brahman, but a man.”

## X. A NEW LIFE.

---

AT the moment when Gopa, in her anger, had left Ramchandra, Krishnadas returned and greeted the young Brahman with sorrowful friendliness. "I am glad to see you once more ; let us take leave forever."

"No, my fatherly friend," answered Ramchandra, cheerfully, "I know what has happened ; Gopa has told me ; and more than that, I see that your meal is ready. I have not eaten yet ; permit me to share it with you."

"Are you out of your mind, Ramchandra ?" exclaimed Krishnadas.

"No, I am more nearly in my right mind than ever before."

The merchant was greatly astonished and pleased. Still, he thought it his duty to impress thoroughly on the impetuous young man the significance of his resolve. "What a change, friend. Truly a noble step, but think : if you eat at that table yonder, will not all the Brahmans, yes, even your own father and brothers turn from you with disgust ?"

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For a moment it seemed as if Ramchandra, in view of the recollections awakened by Krishnadas, might weaken in his decision. With a groan he cried out : "My poor old father! My dear mother! Shall I never hear your voices nor my brothers' again in this life?" Then he quickly recovered himself, and with the words, "In spite of all, I see my way," he stepped to the table. Still he hesitated a moment ; for this act signified a separation from all his former associations and all his former aims in life. Then he ate a few bites while Krishnadas looked silently on with earnest eyes. "So now it is done," said he, "the chains of superstition have fallen from me, and I am free!"

Krishnadas stepped to his side, laid a hand upon his shoulder, and said with deep feeling : "May you never regret it, my brave Ramchandra ; but if you do, you may be sure that no one will ever hear from my lips what I have seen."

"I shall not regret it," replied Ramchandra, "but the surprise expressed in your face will become still greater, when you hear what I ask of you. Fate seems to decree that I shall be indebted to you for all the best gifts of my life."

"Speak, friend, what do you wish? I do not understand you."

"In these days," continued Ramchandra, "it has filled my whole being with more than human strength, since I have understood in my heart the voice of nature,—that voice which people in our land do not hear,

because it is deadened by the laws of Brahmanism—  
Krishnadas, I ask of you your daughter Gopa as my  
wife.”

“Ramchandra, what do I hear?” answered the  
merchant in painful perplexity. “What am I to un-  
derstand? How can you think of that? Gopa is a  
widow!”

Ramchandra made a gesture of remonstrance. “No,  
she is not, even if every one of our people declares  
that she is. Gopa is a maiden according to divine  
and human right. And besides, if she were a widow  
she might become the wife of another man.”

“Ramchandra, your affection leads you astray. It  
cannot be. No priest in our land would unite you ;  
and besides, Gopa would not wish it ; she is pious and  
regards the law.”

Then cried Ramchandra with brightening eyes :  
“If she does not wish it, I shall go on my knees be-  
fore her, and beseech her until the fiery flame of my  
love shall touch her heart also. I will not leave her,  
though I must contend with the whole world. But I  
hope she will wish it, she must wish it. True, we shall  
not be able to find a priest of our people who will marry  
an outcast Brahman, and a widow, the daughter of an  
outcast merchant. But the Sahib,—the Judge,—he  
will do it, and the marriage which he performs is valid,  
if not to our former friends,—what are they to us now,  
or we to them?—at least it is valid to us, just as good  
as any marriage ceremony performed in our land.”

Shaking his head, Krishnadas went to the door to speak to his daughter. "I cannot believe it," he murmured. "Gopa, are you there?"

The maiden appeared at once, still pale with excitement. She cast a wrathful glance at Ramchandra who she supposed had left the house, and pointing to him with outstretched arm, said to her father: "Protect yourself from that man, from the Brahman who dares to attack the honor of this house."

Ramchandra wished to speak, but restrained himself and was silent. Krishnadas, however, was shocked at his daughter, and feared that her burden of sorrow had broken down her mind. He gazed with astonishment now at her and now at Ramchandra, and then suddenly he turned to the maiden: "Come, Gopa, listen to me! He whom you call a Brahman, is no longer a Brahman; a few moments ago he ate at that table."

Gopa stepped back. "Did you do that, you Ramchandra?"

"I tried to prevent it," said Krishnadas, "but he would not heed me. He has given up his caste, his parents, his brothers and sisters, in order to be our friend in this adversity."

Gopa's lips quivered. She would speak, but restrained herself.

"Another thing I have to tell you, Gopa. But prepare yourself for the greatest surprise you ever had

in your life. Ramchandra asks for your hand,—he desires you to become his wife.”

Gopa's glance sank to the floor, a tremor passed over her whole frame. Then Ramchandra slowly approached her and said in a gentle voice: “I always loved you, Gopa, but I knew it only a few days ago.”

The maiden lifted her happy eyes, leaned upon his shoulder and whispered: “I always loved you, and always knew it.”

As Krishnadas saw the two standing in silent embrace, he lifted his hands in thanksgiving: “O ye heavenly beings, receive my thanks that after such sorrow you permit me to see this happy hour. If the will of the gods has ever been done upon earth, it is done now.” Suddenly he listened. “I hear footsteps, stand apart, my children.”

Ramchandra and Gopa had barely time to step away from each other when the door opened. The next moment Krishnadas and Gopa exclaimed as with one voice, “The Purohit!”

Ramchandra stood firm. He knew that a severe contest was before him, but he felt himself prepared. The Purohit had entered without the usual blessing, and now addressed himself only to Ramchandra.

“Is it known to you, Ramchandra, that the house in which you tarry is unclean?”

“I know,” replied the latter calmly, “that it has been visited by misfortune. But it is not unclean.”

[www.jibteel.com.cn](http://www.jibteel.com.cn) "I tell you it is unclean, because that woman yonder . . . ."

Ramchandra interrupted the malicious words of the Purohit : "No word about her ! I think you have to do only with me, not with my friends."

"Admirable friends ! Next I suppose we may look for you in the huts of the Pariahs. But I tell you, if you ever cross this threshold again you must do penance for it more severely than you think. Now leave this place at once."

"No !"

"What ? You dare to defy me ? Once more I command you to leave this house !"

With a calmness quite unexpected to Krishnadas and the daughter anxiously clinging to her father, Ramchandra answered : "Only those should give commands who have power to compel their execution. You weaklings have allowed this power to be taken from your hands ; the Sahibs rule this land."

"Aha ! that is it !" remarked the Purohit with bitter sarcasm, "you have become a flatterer of the Sahibs. Next we shall hear that Ramchandra, the learned Brahman, has accepted the Christian faith."

"Oh no," said Ramchandra, "rest assured I shall not become a Christian. But one thing I see, that the Sahibs rule our land wisely and justly."

"And mildly," added the Purohit disdainfully. "Mildly at least they deal with you, Ramchandra, their spy."

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This was too much for Ramchandra. His well-restrained indignation now broke forth in full strength. "Silence! if your slanderous tongue utters another such word, you shall feel my hand in your face!"

With uplifted right hand he started upon the Purohit, but Krishnadas seized his arm, held him back, and begged him to control himself. The Purohit spoke in scornful tones: "You cannot offend me, raging boy. Await your punishment!" And with that he turned to go.

"Wait," said Ramchandra, "listen to another thing which you must consider in the assembly of the caste called for the assignment of my punishment, I ate to-day at the table of my friend Krishnadas, and I shall take his daughter Gopa to be my wife."

An expression of indescribable contempt overspread the face of the Purohit, as he heard these words. "Fie upon you!" he cried; "even to-day will the decision of the caste hang over your guilty head. No one has ever so fully deserved it as you who in criminal insolence have trodden in the dust the highest commands of the gods."

"The gods!" repeated Ramchandra. "I do not fear them. Even the gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, are not the highest in the universe, far above them stands the great One who has no equal."

The Purohit trembled with wrath. "Oh that your tongue may cleave to the roof of your mouth! How dare you excuse your sinful passion by the deepest



wisdom of our people? I curse you! May all sorrows attend you through this life and a thousand others, . . . nay, may you never find redemption!"

"Redemption?" Ramchandra cried while his superior indignantly left the room, "I have found it. There is but one in India, the redemption from the fetters of your delusion, from the soul-smothering bonds of Brahmanism."

Gopa approached Ramchandra with admiring glances; she clung to him and said: "Dearest, it was fearful, but you fought like a hero, nay, like a god." And with a smile she added, "You appeared to me like a god of ancient times when I first saw you in your conflict with the Moslems."

The countenance of Krishnadas wore a sorrowful expression. "Children," said he earnestly, "your whole life will be a conflict, and a hard one, I fear. May your strength never fail. I see with sorrow that I cannot help you much in your tribulations."

"Oh, father," said Gopa tenderly, "do not let it trouble you; we shall be a support to you as far as we are able, for you have been the founder of all our happiness." And Ramchandra added, "We shall never forget it. Trust my strength and look into the dark future with hopeful courage, as we do."

"You are young," answered Krishnadas, "and may live to see things change in our land. I shall not; and it is not necessary. Having once partaken of such happiness as has been mine to-day, I have not lived in

vain. Come, children, we must calmly consider what is to be done."

No sooner had the three seated themselves for a consultation, than an unexpected visitor caused them to rise again with an expression of astonishment, for the man who was entering with every indication of anxiety was no other than Mr. White. But the next moment the face of the visitor brightened, though he seemed no less surprised than they. "So you are here, Ramchandra, alive and well, God be praised," said he; and, turning to Krishnadas, he added: "and, pardon me, sir, for entering your house; it was on account of my anxiety for Ramchandra."

Krishnadas bowed low. "Your entrance into this house, Sahib, is an honor to us. You are highly welcome."

"I thank you, Krishnadas," replied the Englishman. "This is Gopa, is it not?"

"That is my name, Sahib; how do you know me?" asked the maiden, with a smile.

"As if a friend of Ramchandra would not know you!" said he, and, not noticing Gopa's blushes, he turned to Ramchandra: "I have grown anxious about you lately, because of your not coming to me as usual at the appointed hours. The last time you were at my house, I thought you were ill. So I went to-day to your home and found it empty. The people directed me here to the house of Krishnadas; at the entrance I found the people in a state of peculiar excitement, and

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received evasive answers to my questions. Fearing some misfortune, I entered and see with joy that I am mistaken."

"Ah, Sahib," apologised Ramchandra, "I should have sent you a message that I could not come. Pardon my neglect. So much has happened that absorbed my entire attention. This day is the most momentous of my life."

"You will tell the Sahib all?" said Gopa to her lover, in embarrassment. "Please, do not."

"Let me, Gopa; he will understand us," said Ramchandra. "Look, Sahib, the Brahman cord still hangs about my neck." He threw back his outer garment, took off the single white woolen cord, which is the sacred emblem of Brahmanism, broke it, and threw it from him. "There it lies in shreds, the last outward sign which binds me to my caste. My Brahmanhood is gone."

"Ramchandra, explain to me," asked the Englishman, who had listened to him with amazement.

"It is told in a few words," answered Ramchandra. "Krishnadas, the best and noblest man who was ever born in our land, is to-day thrust out of his caste because he followed the inclinations of his heart and spared his daughter the undeserved pain, the endless misery of an imaginary widowhood. I bless him for it."

"Ah, I begin to understand," exclaimed the Judge, and as Ramchandra continued, drawing the embarrassed Gopa to his side, "so have I also this day

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broken the fetters of my caste ; Gopa is to be my wife," his face lighted with inner satisfaction.

"Heaven be praised ! the first trait of true humanity in Benares," he whispered, filled with that happiness which is found only in unselfish interest.

Ramchandra continued : "And now I am determined to brave whatever may come. We are poor, but I feel within me the strength for hard work. If it be necessary, I shall labor in the fields as a coolie."

"An honorable decision, Ramchandra ; I admire you," said the Englishman. "But you need not be anxious about your means of support ; there are always Europeans here who wish to be instructed in the wisdom of your ancestors."

Gopa threw herself at the feet of the Judge : "Oh, Sahib ; oh, protector of the poor, you are great and good !"

The Englishman lifted her up with the gentle reproach : "Gopa, rise ; one must not kneel before man." And, turning to Ramchandra, he said : "You do not know yet what *I* owe *you*. You have restored in me the belief in your people, which I had lost. In you I see the future of this country."

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