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SHORT STORIES

In Four Volumes

MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

With a Foreword by
SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHAR

Volume I

First Edition: 1943

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FOREWORD

I am not a great reader. I have reasons to think that a good number of exquisitely beautiful short stories have been produced by men of genius which I have not read. Some of them may be better than Masti Venkatesa Ayyangar's Kannada short stories. But not many stories that I have read touched the strings of my heart as some of Masti's stories.

The author has conferred on me the honour of writing a foreword for this English rendering of his short stories. Some years ago I rendered into Tamil one of the stories included in this collection—the one called Masumatti—I gave it the title Venuganam in Tamil—and it was very well received by the Tamil people. There are many other gems in this collection, of no less merit.

Masti's short stories are conceived and shaped in every limb for the Kannada folk, his passionate love of whom has produced these stories. It is possible to attain a degree of success rendering them into Tamil or Telugu or any other similar tongue of the South. But it is impossible to do justice in English. We read in Boswell that Samuel Johnson once observed that poetry cannot

be done from one language into another. It is not only poetry; anything of artistic value, even though it be in prose, presents this insurmountable limitation.

Indifferent stuff can be translated without doing great harm! But no one cares to do it. It is the best specimens of art that people desire to read and want done from one language into another, and it is just these that present the greatest difficulty. Art is essentially form, not substance, and form is untranslatable. What is fresh and exquisitely beautiful and sustained in delicacy in all its length in Tamil or Kannada is, when done even with scrupulous care into English, tiresome and weary and without the fragrance of art. Apart from form, and even dealing with substance, we should remember that exact equivalents can be found in two languages only where the "brute" meaning of a word is important, as for instance in the case of arithmetical tables. What can be achieved satisfactorily in things impersonal cannot be done in literature the stuff of which is human feeling. Where we work with that material, we find often that the commonest word in the language of one people has no true equivalent in the language of another people. There is for many words what has been aptly called an adherent

meaning. Each word has its own associational connotation and atmosphere, its own literary, historic, mythological and mystic flavour, which cannot be reproduced in an equivalent in another language. The difficulties vary according to the pairs of languages dealt with. There may be practically no difficulty for transference from Tamil to Kannada, but the passage from either of these into English may well-nigh be impossible. Beauty cannot be captured and put in another language far removed from that in which the original was born. The chemistry of translation has not yet attained that capacity, if ever indeed it be possible. Yet, I suppose there is a secondary art growing, which enables more and more of men and women to read translations of works written in other languages than their own, and to see with the assistance of their own cultivated imagination, glimpses of the lustre and beauty of the original. This is the result of greater intercourse and mutual knowledge and greater powers of imagination, not any improvement in the art of translation. As I read in proof these stories rendered into English—and the translation is very creditably done—and as I follow in my mind the climbing vine of Masti's story, a feeling of sadness fills me. Alas, say I to myself, how different

from the thing itself, *i.e.*, how much less beautiful than the picture as the Kannada boy or girl or grown-up would see it listening to Masti's own Kannada. I say 'listen' deliberately, for Masti's style is the language of a good man talking to men and women whom he loves, which is modern prose.

I commend this collection to all those who cannot read the much more beautiful original Kannada. There is great beauty lying hidden in the simple lives of our people, which unfolds itself and moves us deeply when a man of genius helps us to see it.

Madras, }
August 21st, 1943. }

C. RAJAGOPALACHAR.

PREFACE

This is the first of four volumes of English renderings of the thirty-two short stories which I have so far published in Kannada. Indian and other friends, a small number, who do not know Kannada, have occasionally evinced some interest in my work and asked for English versions. I have taken this as indicating that there might be a reading public for such translations and have undertaken this publication.

The rendering of the first paragraph of the story "The judgment here" and of the whole of the story "Masumatti" are by my friend and elder Rajasevaprakashta Sri Navaratna Rama Rao. The other renderings are by myself.

I am aware that this is not a good time for such ventures and that other manners of publication might have been better from the point of view of sales and publicity. But the war is long and life is fleeting, and one has to work while it is day and use the years of his life as he finds them. One, too, should learn to be content with publication without the support of foreign publishing houses. I am hoping, all the same, that the book will reach some reasonable number of readers,

composed of Indians in other provinces interested in Karnatak, and non-Indians interested in Indian, life and letters.

Sri Navaratna Rama Rao was the first friend who put anything of mine into English. His rendering of "Masumatti" appeared in the Triveni of Madras some years ago and brought me some notice from non-Kannada readers. Sri Ramakotisvara Rao, Triveni's editor, on this, got two other friends, Sri K. Sampathgiri Rao and Sri V. M. Inamdar, to do some more renderings and gave them place in that magazine. Srimathi Sophia Wadia was good enough to publish "Another Old Story" in the Aryan Path. I am grateful to all these friends for their deep interest in me and my writing.

When I decided to publish these stories in English I wished, if possible, to have an introduction by a distinguished countryman. Sri Chakravarti Rajagopalachar, familiarly known as Rajaji, whose fame is now wide as the world itself, has shown interest in my work since I first met him seventeen years ago. As a former student of the Central College, Bangalore, he passed through the hands of that great teacher of English, Mr. J. G. Tait under whom it was my privilege to give shape to the little English that I know,

This and the fact that he is working in a sister language, Tamil, led me to approach him for the introduction. He agreed, though with some hesitation, and has enhanced the worth of my productions by a very valuable foreword. I am deeply grateful to him for this kindness, and wish to record my sense of the great honour he has done me by agreeing to associate his name with this book.

My friend Sri K. Sampathgiri Rao has given invaluable assistance by looking through the proofs and mending the language where necessary. I cannot thank him sufficiently for all he has done.

*Gavipur Extension,
Basavangudi,
(Bangalore),
26th August 1943* }

M. VENKATESA IYENGAR.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
RANGAPPA'S MARRIAGE	... 1
VENKAT RAO'S GHOST	 20
MY TEACHER	 41
THE CURDS-SELLER	 67
KRISHNAMURTHY'S WIFE	 92
THE JUDGMENT HERE	 131
WAS IT INDIRA?	 148
MASUMATTI	 164

The following notes may be of use to readers who are not familiar with the Kannada country

Karmk The Village accountant Often designated Shanbhog. **Ragi** A black or dark red grain of small size, the staple food of the country **Kumkum**. A red powder, as also the auspicious mark made with it on the face. **Daftar** A cloth bundle containing records **Vadda**. A community of earth or stone workers, generally speaking Telugu **Peepul** The *Aswatha* often called the sacred fig **Jatra**: A fair, gathering round a temple, generally once a year, partly religious and partly in the nature of a carnival and an exhibition and a *bazaar*.

Contents of the other Volumes

Vol. II - 1. Rangappa's Festival of Lights 2 That Woman. 3 The Shah's Judgment 4 An Old Story 5 A Story of The Holi Feast. 6 Lakshamma of Melur 7. Subedar in Danger 8 Ugrappa's New Year Day.

Vol III. - 1. Rangappa's Courtship 2 Rangasami's Folly 3 Venkatasami's Love 4 A Malnad Ghost 5 The Justice of Shah Abbas 6 The Return of Shakuntala 7 Sri Ramanuja's Wife 8 The Kalmadi Buffalo

Vol. IV - 1 The Queen of Nijagal 2 The Pandit's Will and Testament 3. Another Old Story 4. Jogy Anjappa's Fowl 5 The Krishna Idol of Penukonda. 6 The Last Days of Sariputra 7. The Last day of A Poet's Life. 8 A Letter of The Abbe Dubois.

RANGAPPA'S MARRIAGE

Reading this title you may say : "What a commonplace title for a story ! Could you not call it Prothalamium or Epithalamium of Ranganatha, or give it some other dignified title ?" Well, I admit I could have called it by some mouth-filling name ; with some effort I should have found even dignified and high-sounding titles. But, you know, the thing is in fact no such grand affair as any "thalamium". It is only about the marriage of Rangappa of our village that I wish to tell you. The matter is commonplace . naturally, the title is a common one

By our village I mean Hosahalli. Have you heard the name ? No ! Poor people ! How could you help it ? Our wonderful books of Geography do not mention our village at all I can understand how English people writing books from their country might be unaware of Hosahalli and not mention it. But even our people writing a book on Geography omit Hosahalli. What is to be done with this type of person who repeats everything of his master's including his errors ? When the Geography people have omitted the place, where is the chance for it in our maps ? There is no trace of our Hosahalli in the maps that I have seen.

Forgive this digression. It is my conviction that of the whole of India, Mysore is best, and that of this best Hosahalli is the very best. These two statements admit to my mind of no question or cavil. You are of course at liberty to believe them or not but I must say that it is not only I that praise my village. There is a physician in our village. His name is Gunda Bhatta. He also says that our village is the best in all Mysore. And, mind you, he is not a homestaying person. By this I do not mean to say that he has travelled to England. If you talk of travel to England he replies : "Travel to England and such like hoax, I leave entirely to you. I have seen merely our own country and I can tell you there is enough in it to see." This man, as I said, states that our village is the best in all our country.

There is a beautiful grove of trees in front of our village. There are some mango trees in it. Come to my village one day and I shall give you a mango. Eat it ; no, just bite it ; and see how the acid touches the depth of your being. There is nothing like these mangoes for pickles. Tasting them you realise how powerful is any little article grown in our village. If you are not careful this mango will give you a cough. It was when I was talking of this mango to our physician once

that he expressed his great opinion of our village.

Even like this mango, almost everything we have in our village is great in its class. The water in our pond for instance. How beautiful it is ! And the pond itself ; how beautiful with its growth of lotus ! The flowers are a delight to see. Supposing that about midday you find you have no leaves for eating from, you go to the pond to bathe and walk into the water and bring two lotus leaves ; and there is no need to bother about stitching little leaves for making a plate for dinner. Please do not weary of my enthusiasms. The fact is I am very proud of our village. You have merely to come and see to agree that my pride is justified. Come and see our village ; only give me notice of coming, so that I may look after you when you come.

What I am now telling you is a story of some ten years ago. There were then not many men in our village who knew English. Our *karmik* had taken his courage in both hands and for the first time sent his son to Bangalore to learn English. It is of course a different matter now, and there are ever so many of our boys, in the holidays particularly, going down the streets speaking to each other in English. We did not

have this hissing language amidst us in those days. Nor did we in speaking Kannada mix English words with our own. This has now grown to ridiculous lengths. A few days ago they bought a bundle of fuel in Sri Rama Rao's house. The boy came out to give the price to the woman who had brought the fire-wood and asked her how much was due to her. She said: "Six pice." The boy said: "We have no change now. Come and take it tomorrow," using the word "change" as if it were Kannada, much as if an Englishman in England knowing Indian languages should say to a countrywoman of his: "I have no *chullar*; come tomorrow." Change to the Kannada woman means neither more nor less than *chullar* to an English woman. This fuel woman did not understand what the boy said and went away muttering to herself. I was there too and did not know the meaning of this blessed word. I came to Rangappa's house later and asked him and he told me the meaning.

English had not, as I say, become common in our village in those days. So when Rangappa, after some stay in Bangalore, came back to our village, the place was all agog. "It seems the *karnik's* son has come back"—"Do you know, the boy who had gone to Bangalore to study has

come back?"—"I say, it seems Rangappa has come. Come along, let us see him"—cried old and young, and proceeded forthwith to the *karnik's* house. If a whole village is interested, how can one man be indifferent? So I too went. What a crowd was there! I wondered at so many people coming and said: "What do all these people mean by running here like this? Is any one exhibiting monkeys?" One of the boys turned round and said to me. "Why did you come?" What do you think of it?—the little fellow putting me this question in the presence of all that population? Utterly disrespectful and boyish it was. But then, times have changed and elderly people are not shown the respect that was usual in the past. So I said nothing.

Seeing all this crowd Rangappa came out of the house smiling. It was a good thing he did, for supposing we had gone in, there should have been a calamity as in the story of the black-hole given in history books. When Rangappa came to us outside, the whole crowd was astonished to see him. He seemed to be the same person that had gone to Bangalore six months previously. An old lady who was standing somewhat close to him walked up to him and put her hand on his chest to feel the sacred thread. It was there still! "Oh, he

has got the sacred thread still! They have not yet ruined his caste," she said, and went away hugely delighted. Rangappa laughed outright.

Seeing that Rangappa had his hands and feet, eyes and nose, all as before, that crowd dissolved like a piece of sugar in a child's mouth. I stayed on and when all had left spoke to Rangappa. "Well, Rangappa, how do you do?" Rangappa had not seen me earlier on account of the crowd. Now he came up to me and made his obeisance and said: "By your blessings, sir, I am well."

Rangappa had this fine quality. He knew how he should behave with everyone. In fact, he knew with whom it was worth while to talk. And then that salutation itself! It was not in the manner which has become common now-a-days: the head in the sky and eyes looking at the sun as though there was no possibility of bending at the waist, and putting the hands together at the most. It was in the good old style, bending low and touching the elder's feet and rising with the hands folded. I was very pleased with his ways and said: "May you marry soon!" and spoke another word or two and came home.

It was afternoon and I was in bed after food. Rangappa came to my house with two oranges.

It was a very good fellow, always thinking of little things which would please people. The kind of person, I said to myself, who, married properly, would be a fine householder and be of help to numbers of people.

When we had spoken of his life in Bangalore for some time I said: "Rangappa, when are you going to marry?"

"Not so soon."

"And why is that?"

"Well, I should like to have a suitable girl. You see, there is a Principal of ours. You know he is a much older man than I, nearly thirty years, and married only six months ago. And what do you think his wife's age is? Twenty-five years. Now, persons of that age can speak to each other with affection. Supposing I marry, I should marry a very little girl, and supposing by any chance I said some word of affection to her, she would be so innocent—she might think I was abusing her. I saw Shakuntala played in Bangalore. Imagine Shakuntala as one of these girls who are married among us in these days. How can Dushyanta love her, and where would be the beauty of Kalidasa's play? If I marry at all, I should marry rather a grown-up girl. Else I shall be a bachelor."

“Have you any other reason? ”

“Well, we ought to marry after meeting and loving each other. That is impossible among our people. Even supposing that we could meet the girls we might marry, what are we to love in those babes that are brought before us? With the mother’s milk not yet dry on their lips, the girls that are married among us now do not know how to say bo to a goose.”

“But why should they say bo? They do not marry geese.”

Ranga laughed. I was puzzled what to do with this young fellow. I was thinking of getting him a wife early and making him a householder, and this boy had strange notions in his head about girls, all derived no doubt from talk with those foreigners who taught him in his English school. But I must save him, I said to myself, and made up my mind how.

Rama Rao’s sister had left a daughter who was then in our village. She was about eleven years old and very handsome. Brought up in a town, she could play a little upon the veena and the harmonium, but her singing was even better, with a voice that was really sweet. She had lost her parents some time previously and her uncle had brought her to his house for a short stay.

She would be a very suitable bride for Ranga and Ranga himself would be a very suitable bridegroom for her.

I was very familiar with Rama Rao's household and this child treated me as a grandfather. Her name was Ratna, which means 'jewel.' The next morning, I went to Rama Rao's house and told his wife to send Ratnamma to my house. "We have some good curds," "I said and it might be useful to you."

Ratnamma came. As it was Friday she was wearing a good sari. I asked her to sit in my room and begged her to sing a song, and then sent word to Ranga. Ratnamma sang the song in which Purandara Dasa describes Krishna of Udupi. It is a song I love greatly and Ratnamma was singing it in her beautiful voice very gracefully. As she was singing it, Rangappa arrived. I was in the room. He came near the door but did not walk in. It was clear that he was afraid that, if he came in, the singing might stop. But he could not completely deny himself the pleasure of seeing who was singing: his curiosity was too great. So he looked in a little and withdrew. Ratnamma looked at the door when the light was obstructed, and, seeing that there was some stranger, stopped singing.

Rangappa was very disappointed. Have you eaten a large graft mango fruit? One has to pay a good price to get the fruit at all and then one wishes to get from it all that he can. So he eats it part by part, deliberately; the rind first; and then the substance of it tract by tract. Supposing you are negotiating a large fruit in this way with care, and it slips from your hand and falls into the dust? How greatly disappointed you would be! Something like it was the disappointment on Ranga's face. Seeing, however, that he had stopped the music by incautious peeping, Ranga decided at least to see the girl better. So he walked in, pretending to be unconcerned and saying: "It seems you wanted me." I asked him to be seated.

Ratnamma stood up with her head bent with a girl's usual shyness. Ranga looked at her several times. On one of these occasions, as he looked at her and withdrew his eyes, he met my eyes and seemed a little abashed. For quite a few minutes no one of us talked. Then Ranga said: "The singing stopped because I came. I shall go." But he did not go. He stuck to his chair as if he had no such intention either. Where are we to get speech to accord with conduct, and conduct to accord with speech in these

days which our elders have, no doubt properly, described as a degenerate age ?

Even the indirect reference to her by the young man made Ratnamma bashful. She ran out of the room. Rangappa sat mute for a little while and then asked . "Who is this girl, sir ?"

Do you know the story of the goat which had concealed itself in a temple and when a lion asked from outside , "Who is it inside ?" said : "How does it matter who ? I am a poor creature who has eaten nine male lions. I have a vow to eat a tenth. You seem to be a lion. Are you male or female ?" In the story, the lion took fright and fled. Much like that goat in the temple I parleyed with Rangappa : "How does it matter who ? It concerns neither of us. I have married and you are not marrying."

Ranga said : "Is that girl not married yet ?" This young man, who had no idea of marrying our simple girls, put the question in a tone which betrayed desire. Not that he wished to betray it, but I could notice it. "She was married a year ago."

Rangappa's face lost its light like a brinjal which has fallen on live coals. A few minutes later Rangappa said : "I have some little business. I shall come again" and went home.

The next morning I went to our Sastry, the astrologer. "Keep everything ready for predicting, I shall come in the afternoon" I said to him and told him a few other things that were necessary and came home.

Meeting Rangappa in the afternoon I said to him : 'Well, Rangappa, you seem to be very thoughtful. What is troubling you?' The young man did look somewhat dejected.

"Nothing," said Ranga.

"Have you a headache? I can take you to our physician."

"No," repeated Ranga.

"This is how I looked a little before my marriage when they were trying to settle a girl for me. I wanted the girl whom I afterwards married and was not sure whether the stars would agree. That made me look exactly like this. But, of course, there can be no such reason in your case."

Ranga looked hard at me.

"Come, let us go to the astrologer. We shall ask him to see how the stars and planets stand in your case."

Ranga seemed to agree to go to the astrologer, though saying nothing. So we went together to our Sastry. On seeing us the Sastry said : "Well, Shama, I have not seen you this many a day."

My readers guess of course that Shama is their humble servant who is telling this story.

I was angry. "What do you mean, Sastry? This morning.. " I should have proceeded, but the Sastry stopped me saying : "Just this morning you should have finished some work on which you were engaged. So, it is only now that you could come to me." Finishing the sentence in this way, the Sastry saved me from divulging that I had met him in the morning. If he had not, our little plot would have burst to pieces like a castor fruit exposed to the sun. This was also a warning to me to be careful thereafter.

"When did our *karnuk*'s son return from Bangalore ? " said the Sastry. "Can I do anything for him? It is so rarely that he comes to my house." And so courtesies were exchanged.

When this was over, I said : "Now take out your bundle. Our Rangappa is thinking hard about something. Can you tell us what it is? You astrologers make such boast about your powers. Let us have some proof of them." The Sastry brought out his bundle and untied it. The papers and the books, the cowries and the palm-leaf manuscripts, all came out. Spreading his properties to impress our client, the Sastry said, "You call it boasting, Shama, but really it is

speaking the truth," and began a story of some important prediction by some person in some forgotten age having impossibly come true. I could repeat his story to you, but then what is to become of my story? So, I shall tell it to you on some other occasion, if your inclination holds and I find the time. Getting everything ready in the meanwhile, the Sastry proceeded to play at prediction.

Having looked at his books a little, seemed to think a little, and counting the number of knuckles on his fingers a little, the Sastry asked Rangappa in what asterism he was born. Ranga said he did not know. The Sastry said that it did not matter, and again saw his books a little, moved his lips a little, and counted the joints on his fingers a little, and said: "It seems to me that our *karnuk*'s son is turning over in his mind some question regarding a bride." I must say that I do not believe any astrologer predicting anything. But astrology is extraordinarily useful as strategy in affairs. If you can get a man like our Sastry to join in a plot, and you can always get one to do it either from friendship or for consideration, you can get invaluable assistance from the things you can put into his mouth. He will say them in a serious manner

as based on his science and this brings people to believe much more easily than argument. I really felt like laughing at Sastry's airs as he announced his discovery.

Making my laugh at the Sastry look as if I was laughing at Rangappa, I said: "What is this, Rangappa? He seems to agree with me."

Rangappa said nothing.

"Well, Sastry," I said, "supposing you are right, what would the bride be like?"

The Sastry pretended to think for some time, and after again looking into his book said: "The text indicates a person whose name is related to the sea. Something born in the sea."

"Can it be Kamala?" Kamala is lotus.

"It is possible."

"What else might it be? Mutthu?" Mutthu is pearl.

"That is possible too; or 'jewel'."

"That is curious—the very name of the girl in our Rama Rao's house. That apart, how are the stars? Are they propitious? And is this bride whose name is the name of a thing related to the sea likely to be won?"

The Sastry looked into his books again and after further thought said: "The stars and planets

are very propitious. I should say that the marriage is a certainty."

Ranga's face was overflowing with wonder. Mingled with the wonder was pleasure. Seeing this I said ' But the girl is married, you know ' Ranga apparently had forgotten what I had told him about this. Now, when I repeated the statement his face lost its brightness

The Sastry said: "Well, with that I am not concerned. It may be the Ratna in some other house My book says she has some name of this kind. I have not had time to make enough calculations to say if it is the girl come to Rama Rao's house."

Rangappa and I came away. We had to walk past Rama Rao's house, and as we came there Ratna was standing near the door I told Rangappa that I would walk in for a minute and come back. He stood outside. I went in and said a word or two to Rama Rao's wife and Ratna and came out and joined Ranga. I then told him what, as you know, I had known all the time. "What a wonderful thing this is! It seems this girl is not married. Somebody told me some time ago that she was. It looks now as if our Sastry's prediction has some sense after all." Then I said: "Rangappa, I cannot believe that you could have

been thinking about this girl, she is so young and so simple. Now, will you tell me in the name of our Acharya, and not conceal anything from me? Is what the Sastry said true?"

I do not know if any other person would have admitted the truth. But Rangappa was a simple soul and said · "The Sastry, sir, knows a good deal more than we think. What the astrologer said is true."

That evening I met our astrologer near the well and said jocularly · "Well, my great Sastry, you repeated the lesson fairly well. Only you overdid the pretence of thinking. But yours is a wonderful science you know. There is no fear of your losing any of your knuckles and remaining unaware of it for more than a day." The Sastry said : 'You fancy, Shama, that if you had not put me up, I could not have known the facts. That is your folly It is true you told me, but you told me nothing that I could not have found out by proper calculation. It would have taken me more time, but every bit of what you told me could have been ascertained. Our science tells us all the truth and more. After all, what you told me was very little. I really told you, if you remember, such a lot more.'

Are you astonished at such conduct? You do not know astrology.

* * * *

Three days ago Rangappa came to invite me to dinner in his house. I asked him what the dinner was about.

"It is Shama's birthday," he said. "He has now completed three years."

"Has he really?" I said. "I could not have imagined it. Now, see what you have gone and done, calling him Shama. I am black like a log of blackwood and it is a good enough name for me. The child is like a measure made of gold and you go and call him by this name. You are strange people, both you and Ratna, irresponsible and thoughtless. What else are we to expect from these English customs like having a god-father and all the rest of it? I suppose you have invited a number of people. Ratna must be expecting confinement shortly. Who is to help your mother in this dinner?"

"Did you not know? My sister came with my mother."

* * * *

I went to the dinner. Shama ran up to me and clasped me and put his head against my

knees. I took him up and kissed him and put a small gold ring on his little finger.

And now, I have finished my story and hope you like it. If you care, I can tell you more, but I am afraid you might think them boring.

VENKAT RAO'S GHOST

Venkat Rao lived with Paduge Krishna Rao when he was in Bangalore for his studies. Krishna Rao was a distant relation of his mother's. That was how Venkat Rao became a charge on Krishna Rao. The fact that there is no English school in our village has made such emigration necessary and after Rangappa started this practice of going to Bangalore for studying English, other boys from our village have at intervals followed him. These boys are generally young when they leave the protection of the parental home, and grow up somewhat in loneliness in the houses of such relatives as Krishna Rao in a distant city.

This loneliness produces certain consequences. One of them is an intensification of the fear of ghosts. I have seen no boy who was not afraid of a ghost; in particular, boys of the castes which wear a sacred thread develop this fear without exception. The father has the sacred thread. The child observes it there early in its life. "Father, what is this thread for?" "See," says the father, "there is this sacred knot in it. If you show it, a ghost runs away." This decides for the boy the existence of a ghost and the possibility of its coming to a man. Whether on its appearing you can show it the knot of the sacred

thread and it runs away on seeing the knot, remains a matter for verification. In such things there is in children a tendency to believe harm even without such help from outside. So these boys, while still children, become quite certain that there is such a thing as a ghost and that it comes to harm man. Venkat Rao accordingly believed in ghosts. The boy had to sleep alone in his room and to go out alone in the dark when there was anything to do. Thinking on these occasions of ghosts, he made them very real beings for himself.

The reason for my talking of this now is that a few days ago his nuptials were celebrated. When years ago, the relatives of the girl who is now his wife came to talk of the marriage, Venkat Rao did a thing to one of the party which comes to my mind ; and it strikes me it may be worth while for me to tell you the story. It helps me to spend some time and may interest you. But then I must give you warning This is a ghost story. If it should frighten you, do not blame me afterwards.

This was seven years ago. Venkat Rao was then perhaps fifteen years old. He was a handsome-looking boy and was studying in an English school. So, naturally, there were a number of

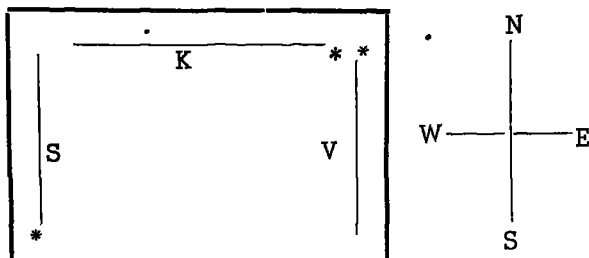
offers of marriage to him from parents of girls. Venkat Rao's prospective father-in-law came to our village and asked the boy's father for his horoscope. The father said: "Please go and see the boy. If you think him suitable and he is willing we shall see about the horoscopes later." The father-in-law took the address of Venkat Rao and, on hearing of Paduge Krishna Rao, said that he knew the gentleman, and that as the boy was in that house he was as good as his own boy, and went to Bangalore. As a matter of fact he was right when he said that the boy belonged to him, for the marriage took place. But before it took place there was some little difficulty on account of an occurrence, and it is of that occurrence that I wish to speak to you.

Srinivasa Rao—this was the girl's father—took one Krishnappa with him when he went to see Venkat Rao. On all such occasions a companion seems absolutely necessary. The two saw the boy and liked him. Paduge Krishna Rao said to Venkat Rao: "This gentleman will be your father-in-law, Venkat Rao." The boy felt too proud for words. His self-respect seemed to multiply in a moment with the feeling that he had reached the years of marriage. But courtesy required disavowal; so he said: "I do not propose

to marry so soon." Everybody understood that he had no serious objection. Srinivasa Rao and Krishnappa took food there that night, intending to leave the next morning. The only room available for them was the room upstairs which Venkat Rao was using. So, Srinivasa Rao and Krishnappa spread their beds in the same room and went to sleep.

Krishna Rao's house faces east. The street, of course, runs north and south. Krishna Rao's house was the only house in the street with a first floor. It was the fourth house in the line. Though the room upstairs was not very high, you could, through its window, see the whole line of houses in the street lower down. It was a fairly long line of houses. On that night when these visitors shared his room, Venkat Rao lay near this window close to the wall with his head to the east. Krishnappa lay north and south with his head near Venkat Rao's. Srinivasa Rao lay near the northern wall with his head to the west. It is essential that you should have an idea of the places taken by the three people to understand the story. Supposing I were there also and took a corresponding position to Krishnappa the four of us would have lain on the four sides of a square : my head and Srinivasa Rao's head in one corner

and Krishnappa's and Venkat Rao's heads in the corner opposite. Necessarily of course my feet and Venkat Rao's feet would have been in one corner and Srinivasa Rao's and Krishnappa's feet in the opposite corner. I may just as well give you a drawing.



I hope you will not laugh at this illustration. I have not learnt drawing. Besides, I drew a picture like this for Gundu Bhatta when I told him the story. He said: "You see, Shamanna, it is not difficult for smart people to understand a common thing like this. When one smart fellow is describing, another smart fellow can always understand. See now, you gave a description and you have drawn this figure and I have understood the thing perfectly. Many people do not understand so easily. This is what we call intelligence. If a man has intelligence, he needs no drawing or other nonsense. Supposing he has not intelligence, the God of learning might come

and describe, but the fellow will not understand." As you, my readers, are all intelligent, I am sure you have understood these observations of Gunda Bhatta

I have told you that there was a window in the wall by which Venkat Rao was sleeping. As you looked through that window down the street, the fourth house from Krishna Rao's house had an evil reputation on account of a ghost or ghosts. That house had belonged to a merchant. He had a wife and no children. One day when he came in the evening from his shop, he saw some stranger talking to his wife. He made a fuss and there was a quarrel. Whether this man did some harm to the wife, or she herself, unable to bear the disgrace of the evening's quarrel, wished to die, we do not know. The woman died that night; for when, the next morning, the servant woman came and pushed open the door of the worship room, she found that a rope had been tied to the beam and the woman of the household was hanging from its end dead. The servant woman cried out in terror. The man of the house left his bed just then and came out and asked her what had happened. She told him and he came and saw the corpse and then and there fell in a swoon. Then they dragged him

to a court. I do not remember if the man was punished or acquitted. Some time later he returned to the house. Many of his friends said: "Don't." The man said: "She who made my life worthwhile is dead; what do I care?" He, however, consulted the astrologers and came to the house on a day which they recommended as good. But that same night his life came to a close. For when, the next morning, the servant woman—this was another woman—opened the worship room, she found this man hanging by a rope tied to the same beam at almost the same point as his wife previously. Again there was an enquiry and investigation. On the previous occasion they could drag the husband to the court; now there were in the house only this man of the house and his servant. As the deceased was not the wife of the living person, there was, as you might say, no reason to suspect that living person. Well, somebody came along and took out the corpse and cremated it and every thing was over.

But the house acquired a reputation for ghosts. The story about it grew apace, and details were added to it with the speed seen in a story relating to a holy place. Soon it was established belief in the street and all around that

the merchant had hanged his wife on the first occasion; and that, when he returned to the house after some time, that wife's ghost took revenge by hanging him; and that now you could at the proper hour on any night of the week see the two ghosts inside the house playing at hanging each other. Nobody told the story exactly as he heard it, and details were varied and multiplied and the whole narrative became fixed as the history of the house. The people of the street disliked passing in front of the house after dark. Those who had to do so would not turn their face towards the house and would look straight ahead or turn the other way. Those who, along with fear, felt some curiosity would look towards the house after they had gone some steps and passed its limits. They might not see anything, but the fear that they might made them uneasy. They would therefore be startled by almost anything that they could see or imagine, and would shiver a little, and turn the head quickly away and walk away faster.

As ill-luck would have it, Venkat Rao had only this window to look out of his room from. On almost every night he would look through this window and see that house and remember the story. The first time he heard the story he

wondered what he should do if one of the ghosts should come in through the window and trouble him while asleep. Not that he actually thought that a ghost might come in. It was merely a question. Supposing it does? But a supposition is quite good enough for giving you a shiver. While things were in this condition, it happened that some students took that house for rent. Though a fairly big house, its bad reputation had put down the rent. The boys were glad to get so much accommodation so cheap. One of those boys should have been like Venkat Rao. The story about the house must have worried him. A very few days after the boys came in, this particular boy woke up in the middle of the night screaming. The others sprang from their beds and ran up asking what had happened. Nothing had happened that they could see except that the boy was in a swoon and was frothing at the mouth. A doctor was called in but the boy came to no harm whether from the disease or the doctor. Yet the boys could not make up their minds to continue in the house. Though they had paid a month's rent in advance they thought it better to go away, and disappeared that very afternoon. Venkat Rao was aware of this occurrence and this made his ideas of the ghost more unpleasant than ever.

All this had occurred some little time prior to Srinivasa Rao's coming to see if Venkat Rao would be suitable as a bride-groom for his daughter. A little before going to bed that night Venkat Rao looked through the window. The night was rather more silent than usual. It must have been a night near the new-moon day. The ghost-house seemed stiller and more fearful than ever. Everything was dark but the house seemed cram-full of darkness. It really was a dreadful house. It was bad enough to make not two ghosts but ten play at hanging. With this thought in his mind, Venkat Rao turned away from the window. Just that moment he heard a weird sound coming from the direction of that house. It was an owl. Venkat Rao shivered and went to rest.

It must have been the middle of the night. Venkat Rao felt as though he was wakened by something. There was some faint sound somewhere. Where was it? It was outside the window. He became alert and listened. There seemed to be no sound then. But when he wished to go to sleep the sound recurred. He tried to make sure and felt that there was a sound. It looked as though somebody was walking on the tiles of the neighbouring house. But who could it be walking on the tiles? Might it be the ghost?

Rubbish! A ghost and walk! He then gathered some courage and turned towards the window and watched with his eyes wide open. Nothing appeared though the sound of steps on the tiles was audible. Very gentle stepping it was. It also seemed as if the steps were coming nearer and nearer to the window. Venkat Rao felt some fear and would not turn his eyes away from the window. The sound came still closer and, just as it reached the window, stopped. As it came up to the window and stopped there, Venkat Rao thought that the next thing would be for the ghost to look in. Would it look in? He watched for some time. Nothing appeared. But suddenly a face became visible. A big black face, fearful-looking, the teeth showing and the tongue lolling out. From the eyes there came a kind of yellow light. Venkat Rao shivered from fright. He tried to cry out. His voice failed him. Those eyes with the yellow light looked steadily and hard at Venkat Rao's eyes and seemed to deprive him of the power of speech. Unable to see this frightful face any longer Venkat Rao tried to shut his eyes. He could not shut them. He tried to turn away his eyes. He could not do that either. He perspired through fear and was wondering what would happen next, when the face jumped on to the window-sill.

Venkat Rao's vital powers sank in dread. He lay like a log, unable to move, merely watching the movements of the arrival. He wished that he were insensible like a log. As it was, his fear seemed to know no limit. And that face itself ! It was a face and no more. No body ; no limbs ; nothing but just a face. What was this frightful thing going to do ? It sat on the window-sill for a few minutes and looked steadily at Venkat Rao. Then it made its eyes wider and jumped in.

Jumping in and touching the ground of the room, it ceased to be a face and became a cat !

"Cat ?" you will say. "Then of course there was no reason to fear." But you are mistaken. How does it matter whether the ghost that comes into your room appears as a face or as a cat ?

From the point where it touched the ground, the cat began to walk slowly up towards the poor boy's head. If it had moved in front of him he might have endured the terror better, but the cat did a funny thing. Venkat Rao was lying on his left side, face to the window. The cat jumping from the window to somewhere near his knee in front, passed across the knee to behind Venkat Rao and began its journey there (If you have any difficulty in following this, please see the drawing). Preferring to have the devil play his tricks in front rather than

behind, Venkat Rao tried to turn over to his right. He could not move and had the discomfiture of feeling that the ghost could do whatever harm it would, behind his back. Venkat Rao's tongue dried up. He did not know what to do and lay helpless, paralysed by terror.

The ghost would move a short distance—very short—indeed not more than a step. Then it would stay still for a moment. Then it would move another step and again be still for a moment. Thus it moved slowly to about the level of Venkat Rao's waist. What graceful slowness of movement it was! How does it matter whether it is a ghost or a woman? Grace of movement is grace of movement. It should be movement of this kind that the poets have admired and praised with such enthusiasm in their descriptions of beauty in women. By the time that the ghost reached the level of his waist Venkat Rao began to hear the sound it was making in its body. "Why should the ghost make this sound?" you ask. You see, if the ghost becomes a cat, it should have the qualities of a cat. Venkat Rao was grateful to this sound for one reason. He could understand by it how far the ghost had moved in its progress towards his head. He was thus aware of the ghost's coming to the level of

his back, of his shoulders, of his neck and finally of his head. Having reached that point it made a movement as if it would step further, but withdrew the paw and stayed where it was.

Venkat Rao was terribly afraid.

"Why was he afraid?" some of you will say. "He should have been born a girl." To those of you who are inclined to say so, I give a suggestion. Please try it and tell me. Please read the thing I am writing here in the night. I do not say, in the middle of the night. Read it at about ten o'clock in the night. Only, sit alone in your room, after all your household has gone to sleep, to read it. Do not sit in the room in which your wife or your child is sleeping. If you do that, the confidence that in case you cry out your wife will come to your help, or the feeling that there is another living person in the room, will sustain you. You should sit alone in the room, keep the doors and windows open, and read this. You will also feel some fear, I am sure.

Venkat Rao could hear the sound proceeding from within the cat continuously. He wondered what the ghost's next act would be. Whatever it might be, he determined that he should meet it boldly. As he was keeping thoroughly alert,

Venkat Rao noticed that the sound increased. When the sound had reached a certain pitch the ghost ceased to be a cat and became again a face "How did he see with the back of his head?" Well, I do not know. What you need to be able to see a ghost is not eyes, but fear. Venkat Rao saw the same fearsome face with long teeth and lolling tongue. In a few moments it became a cat. Venkat Rao noticed that the ghost assumed these shapes alternately thrice or four times. Finally it became the face again, and stayed so for a very long time. Venkat Rao made up his mind that the next time it became a cat he should attack it; he did not feel sufficiently courageous to attack it when it was a face. But the face remained a face and did not become a cat. Venkat Rao therefore began to doubt whether it would become a cat again at all. While he was thinking this it did become a cat. He wished to get up and attack it but it became a face. He was hesitating and it became a cat again.

Venkat Rao made up his mind that it was no use waiting for the ghost to remain as a cat. He got up from his bed and—

Children play a game which they call the game of the cap. You have perhaps seen it. This is how it is played. Some of them sit in a

circle. A cloth is well twisted and made into a good thick whip and given to the hand of one boy. This fellow goes round the circle and places the improvised whip behind someone in the circle. If he completes the next circle and finds the whip still there, he takes it up and beats with it the boy behind whom it had been thrown and who was inattentive. If the other boy is attentive and becomes aware of the whip before the runner has completed the circle, he picks it up and chases the runner and beats him with it until he slips into the vacancy in the circle. This is the game. The substance of it is that either of the boys gives the other a good beating with the improvised whip. Venkat Rao was an adept in this game. He had played it frequently and was known to whip very well.

Venkat Rao got up from his bed and pulled up his shawl, and quickly twisted it and made a stout whip, and swung it with all his might at the point where the cat was. He did all this in less time than I am taking to tell you. No wood-cutter gave more lusty blows to a tree, nor lightning split a rock with more vigour than the young fellow rained blows upon the cat—face—ghost. Venkat Rao's intention was to make the attack so fierce that the ghost should have no

interval between blow and blow to spring at him. As he was thus hitting he saw that there was no cat in front of him but that in place of it there was a face.

A face but not the fearful face of the ghost. It really was the face of poor Krishnappa, who was sleeping along the eastern wall. He was full of consternation, like a man whom his wife has abused without reason. What had happened is this.

Old Krishnappa had got sleep rather late. He was a snorer and was exercising the privilege. I have a theory about snoring, which I may as well state here. I refuse to consider snoring as a noise made by the breath in the nasal passages, in consequence of some peculiarity in their structure. Snoring is really a way in which the body and indeed the soul express their intense satisfaction at getting rest which they sorely need. The thing nearest to it is the sound produced by a cat which has nursed its hunger, watching the children eating all they want, and tasting the little that they have occasionally thrown to it, and then, finding that the mistress of the house has left the full pail of milk uncovered, steps up to it, and, believing in its innocence that so much milk could have been

kept open only for its use, begins to drink it in joyous self-satisfaction. So our soul and body express delight through the nose which is made pure by continual passage of air. My wife, of course, laughs at the theory I propound. She says it is absurd, for, it seems, I snore, and snore even before I am really asleep; or even before lying to rest.* Nothing can be farther from the truth than the suggestion that I snore before I go to sleep or lie in bed. For I have never heard myself snoring. I am, besides, utterly unable to accept the argument. For then my theory would go to pieces. As Krishnappa's soul was in this manner indicating the delight which the peace of sleep had brought to it, a thing occurred to it very much like what occurs to the cat while drinking the milk. There the mistress of the house beats it with a stick. Here Venkat Rao hit Krishnappa's head with his improvised whip. As Venkat Rao was thinking that it was a ghost, the blows were much more severe and the similitude was completed a little too perfectly.

Krishnappa was an old man. Yet when these blows administered by Venkat Rao rained upon him, he got up with an alacrity that no boy could have excelled. The blows made it hard to get up; yet he managed it. Sitting up and recovering

from the effects of the blows he shouted to Venkat Rao : "I say, I say, what is the matter? Why are you beating me?"

The shouts roused Srinivasa Rao also.

Venkat Rao was tired of the exertion of beating the ghost. The activity had also made him awake. By the time Srinivasa Rao got up, Venkat Rao had realised what he had done. To have answered Krishnappa or given explanation would have established him as a fool. When all is said and done he was a quick fellow. So he thought that the best thing was to pretend that he did it all in sleep. So he lay down unloosening his shawl and covered himself with it and went to sleep. Krishnappa felt himself over his head and face and made sure that no serious damage was done to his features. "Why did this occur?" he thought to himself. "Might the boy be insane? Who knows?" he said to himself again. He had forgotten to repeat the names of God in the evening; that should have been why he got these blows in the night.

When the question whether Srinivasa Rao's daughter should be married to Venkat Rao was further debated, Krishnappa described the beating he had received and suggested that the boy might be insane; but then this did not come in

the way of the marriage. Some time after that the marriage took place and, as I said a short time ago, the nuptials also were celebrated.

On the latter occasion Krishnappa and I sat together at meals. He said to me "It is desirable for one of us to sleep near the door of the bed room."

"Why?" I asked.

Krishnappa said, "Supposing in the middle of the night the boy wakes up and begins to beat his wife."

Venkat Rao had told me of how he had beaten poor Krishnappa, but I pretended not to know and asked the old man why he thought the boy would beat his wife. He described the other instance and the details that he gave agreed with Venkat Rao's story. I then said "What, Krishnappa, if a young man beats you or me, will he beat his wife? A man may beat a street dog, but not a pet parrot."

"Anyhow," said the old man, "We might be near to help, if necessary."

"Your and my help is not necessary. Drop the notion," I said, and he dropped it.

Venkat Rao and his wife came to our house after the function a few days ago. My wife to

whom I had reported Krishnappa's remark asked Venkat Rao in jest ; "What, Yentee, poor Mr. Krishnappa was afraid that you might beat your wife. I hope you did not beat her."

Venkat Kao and his wife looked at each other and smiled. Neither the look nor the smile indicated that either beat the other. They indicated, on the contrary, that each loved the other more than heart could hold.

And now will you give your servant leave ?

MY TEACHER

It was a Thursday. I was late for the school and was walking rather fast. Lakshmi was following me. She was a little creature and was stepping as briskly as she could with her dainty feet to keep up with me. It was late even as I left home. So I wanted to take Lakshmi with me as an excuse for delay and went to her house. She had not even left her bed and getting her ready added to the delay. As we were thus running up, I saw some distance ahead of me our poor teacher walking fairly leisurely. "If the teacher himself is going to the school now, why should we be in a hurry?" I thought, and slackened speed. Lakshmi caught me up and we crawled leisurely along.

Presently, old Mr. Sastry walked up from another direction and saw our teacher and asked, "Well, Venkataramaniah, I suppose you are on your way to the school."

"Yes, sir," said the teacher, "I am going to the school. May I have a pinch of snuff?"

"Certainly," said Sastry, offering his snuff box. "What is the news? You are rather late, aren't you?"

"So I am," said the teacher. "My wife said that there was no salt in the house. I said I could

not go to the shop now, as it would be late for the school. She said twenty things in reply. It struck me that it would have taken much less time to go to the shop and bring the salt than it had to exchange these words. What can we do? This is life!"

Sastry said: "What a small matter? If you like, I shall send one of my boys to buy salt and take it to your house. Give me the money."

As they were talking in this way, it struck me that we might as well make use of the time. The teacher himself was here. What should I do going to the school before him, except perhaps quarrel with the other girls? It was much better to play with Lakshmi just where we were. So we sat down. We were soon absorbed in the play, however, and did not know when our teacher finished his talk with Sastry and moved off to the school. When we finished one game and noticed this, I rose and asked Lakshmi to get up and run with me, otherwise we should be very late.

Lakshmi would not get up. She had lost all her bits of pencil to me in the game and began crying. I had won the bits of pencil perfectly fairly. The fact was: I could play that game very well and she was a child and could not. Naturally, she lost. So, when I asked her to get

up and come to the school, she merely cried, "my pencils, my pencils" and wept. I argued with her ever so much but she would not listen. Neither reason nor justice mattered. "My pencils, my pencils" was all she said. The fact that she had lost the pencils to me in a fair game seemed to be of no significance to her. As I needed her as an excuse for delay, I gave her back all the bits of pencil I had won from her and said, "Come now my dear, let us go to school." Even then she would not come. "Give me all my pencils," she said. I told her I had given her all but she said: "There are more in your pocket." It was true that there were more pieces of pencil in my pocket, but they were mine; of her pencils, I had not kept a single bit. But when I told her that all the pencil I still had was mine and that I had it previously, she did not agree. Finally, to make peace with her, I had to give up all my pencils to her. If I did not take her to the school, I should have no explanation when the teacher reproved me for coming late! I had to purchase the excuse with my pencils. I won the game but Lakshmi won the pencils. The previous year in the school, Saraswathi had got more marks than Gowri from the Inspector, though Gowri was the better student. The dispute between me and Lakshmi had ended similarly. However, having given all

my pencils also to Lakshmi, I was able to persuade her to accompany me and was glad to have her with me when I reached the school some minutes later.

By the time we got into the school, the teacher was prescribing a lesson to the First class. Myself and Lakshmi slipped quietly in and sat in our places. The teacher noticed us all the same and turned towards my class and said to Gowri: "Gowramma, why has not Seethamma come yet?"

I myself answered, "I have come, Master."

"Oh! You have come, little mother," said the teacher; "you are a very good girl. Come a little earlier hereafter." As I turned towards Lakshmi to make my excuse for having come late he proceeded "I see, you brought Lakshmi, I suppose. You are late every day, because you bring Lakshmi. For some time hereafter, start early to pick her up and reach here in time. The Inspector may be expected any day and the school should be running well. All of you, my children, pray come into the school well in time, and do your lessons well. The Inspector who comes this year is a new Inspector. To all who do well in the examination, he will send pearl necklaces as presents. Saraswathi, you should do your lessons

more studiously, and read fluently, as Gowramma does.”

Saraswathi said: “Let her be the one that reads fluently, Master, I don’t mind it, I am not squint-eyed.”

All the girls burst into wild laughter. I did not wish to laugh, but I could not help it and joined the others. Lakshmi from her class clapped her hands in glee and chortled in abundance. Hearing her laughter, the teacher—poor man—was himself led to laugh but he restrained himself and said to Saraswathi: “Child, you ought not to talk like that.”

This was Saraswathi’s weakness. She had good features and was proud of them. Gowri had a slight squint in her eye. So, Saraswathi would constantly poke fun at her expense. I had good features myself, so had Lakshmi, so had most of the girls in the school. There was no reason why Saraswathi should be so conceited about normal features. Yet, she was very proud of not being squint-eyed. It looks as if most girls have the same notion. They think that it is all-sufficient to have regular features and a pair of good eyes and a straight nose. Woman’s main business is to attract man. That which is required for this purpose, she thinks adequate for all other purposes

in life. It is the same with man. Suppose a young fellow has passed his B. A. examination. He may have only one eye; he may be ever so dark in complexion; and so ugly in features. Merely because he has passed the B. A. examination, he thinks that any girl should like him for a husband. His business is to earn bread. That which is sufficient for earning bread, he thinks, is sufficient for all other purposes. Man does not know that good education is not good features, and thinks that a first class degree is equal to a first class face. Our Saraswathi, similarly, could not read. She cared nothing for reading and the credit it brought however, merely because she had good features.

As luck would have it, a thing that occurred when the Inspector visited the school the previous year had encouraged her in this attitude. She had not studied but all the same had received the Inspector's praise. Gowri and Saraswathi had indeed been quite good friends till then, but from that day they became deadly enemies. The Inspector asked the class "My children, what is a river?" Saraswathi did not answer. She had not got the definition by heart, so she could not open her mouth. The Inspector turned towards Gowri. Gowri had got the definition as it appears in the text-book of Geography absolutely by heart

and repeated it word for word. None of us had any objection to Gowri receiving praise, because she was a better student than any of us. Then the Inspector asked "How does the river come into existence?" Gowri could not answer this question. When Saraswathi's turn came, she said: "The water that drops here and there and in all places gathers together and becomes a river." The Inspector said, "This is beautiful" and, turning to the teacher, added: "You have trained this girl very well, Teacher" The master had really trained Gowri. He had done nothing to Saraswathi, but the Inspector praised Saraswathi and gave the master credit for something he had not done. The teacher, however, thought that the Inspector referred to Gowri and said: "Yes, sir. I have taken a lot of trouble. Only your wisdom can really understand how much trouble I have taken. You may ask that girl for anything that is found in the Geography book and she will repeat it." The Inspector saw that the teacher was talking of Gowramma and corrected him and said, "You mean this girl. What is your name, child? Gowramma? You mean Gowramma. Yes, she has read well, but I am referring to this other girl. What is your name, child?" Saraswathi said, "Saraswathi Bai" The Inspector went on

"I mean Saraswathi Bai. You have taken a lot of trouble about her." The teacher said, "Yes, sir. I have become a skeleton in teaching her." The teacher meant no harm, but what he said was true. It was no small business to teach Saraswathi anything. Almost any other girl would learn lessons better than Saraswathi. Thus, Saraswathi, not having learnt what the teacher had taught and knowing nothing of what the book contained, but merely talking vaguely out of her head, had received the encomiums of the Inspector. This naturally caused much heart-burning in Gowri and from that day they started a bitter feud. Gowri said to Saraswathi "What does this encomium cost? You did not study to get the praise. Why should any one be so conceited about praise so got?" Saraswathi had only one text in reply to this. "Yes, my friend what shall I do? I have not got a squint eye. My eyes unfortunately are all right" So these two would go on exchanging words. The teacher was not aware of these skirmishes behind the veil. So that day, wishing to impress upon Saraswathi the need for being a good student, he asked her to do as Gowri did and this gave Saraswathi an opportunity for making the whole school laugh at poor Gowri's squint-eye.

Having rebuked Saraswathi mildly for talking as she did, the teacher, to make us forget the incident, called us one after another and prescribed lessons to us. We girls, in spite of this, thought again and again of the horrible jest of Saraswathi and looked at each other, whispered to each other, and laughed. In fact, we did everything except read our lessons. One important thing that all of us did was to eat as quietly as possible, yet unable to prevent the sound of eating being heard by others, the fried corn and other hard stuff that we had brought from our houses as usual, not having time to eat them at home. Alone of all of us Gowri sat quiet and seemed to be minding her lesson but I believe even she was not minding it for she was greatly hurt by Saraswathi's insult. All of us spent some time like this, waiting to be called up by the teacher to do our reading. It was usual for him to call me up first; so I was most alert for the call. In the meanwhile, I was signalling to Lakshmi in a very friendly and kindly way asking for my bits of pencil. We were at a distance from each other and Lakshmi would not even look at me; so my signals were of no use. In no mood to read the lesson and vexed with my failure to get back my bits of pencil, I was feeling quite weary.

The teacher himself seemed to have forgotten that he had to call us up for the lesson. It is likely that he was thinking of the morning's incident in his household. He had come away without arranging for some salt being taken to the house. It was just as likely that he was thinking of some spiritual matter, for when a man finds he cannot do much in the world, he naturally turns to his spirit. While he was deep in thought on the question of the salt or some other matter, a lady made her appearance at the door. As soon as the teacher saw her, he felt that the trouble which he thought he had left at home had pursued him to the school. He got up in some distress and tried to speak but before he could utter any words, his wife broke out: "I told you there was no salt in the house. Yet you came away to the school saying nothing and doing nothing. What do you think I should do for salt?" The teacher said: "Should you come to the school for that reason?" The wife answered: "Whenever I ask that something should be brought, you run into your school as into a fort and tell me that whatever happens I ought not to come here! What can I do but come to the school? I am not going to care for all this hereafter. You may be in your school,

you may be amidst your friends, you may be anywhere ; if I want something for the household, I shall simply walk in and ask you to bring it. I am not going to stand upon your decency."

"Can you not," said the teacher, "have brought some salt from a neighbour? Supposing somebody walks into the school now, I shall be losing the little prestige I have."

"You are thinking of your own prestige," said his wife : "it will be lost if somebody walks into the school, but what about my prestige? It is being lost without anybody coming to the house. I have to go out and lose it day after day. I have borrowed rice from one house, dhal from another, salt from a third, three days out of every week. I am tired of it. I shall not go to anyone's house hereafter to borrow anything. If you have money, bring the thing ; if you have not, say you cannot bring it. Don't leave me helpless and run away. If you cannot bring anything, we shall get on without it. If you have no money now for buying salt, we shall eat our food without salt."

By this time, the school had got desperately out of hand and each of us was talking just what she liked and as loudly as she liked. All on a sudden little Garud walked mewing to the school door,

"What is little Garud?" you ask. Well, I shall tell you.

Little Garud was a kitten. He was very young and very pretty. He seemed more keen on coming to the school than any human of much bigger age. He was the great pet of all the girls in the school. One of us would take a broomstick and play it about in front of him and the fellow would play at catching mice with the greatest possible warmth and seriousness. Some others of us would play with his tail making him go round and round and finally lose his temper and snarl. Little Garud's compensation for all this consisted in all of us giving him some share of the eatables we brought from home every day. Catching mice was of course something he wished to play at for his own good, to train himself for his job in life. So, in a sense, the school was a school even for him. Getting the tail pulled was not an operation of any benefit. He underwent this purely for getting our eatables and, in spite of our pulling his tail, liked us greatly. Best of all of us, he liked Lakshmi for a special reason. She had once brought some sweetened flour to the school. I must say that all of it could not have been given by her mother. It was such a quantity. Myself, Saraswathi and Gowri noticed what a lot

she had brought and were planning to get a good part of it for ourselves. (This was before Gowri and Saraswathi had fallen out.) It happened that little Garud was somewhere near and Lakshmi placed the whole of the sweetened flour in front of him for fun. Little Garud did not know it was in fun and he took the ball of sweetened flour seriously as a gift and held it between his forepaws and began to eat it. We tried to rescue the ball for our own use, but little Garud had developed very definite opinions about property and snarled and offered to scratch us. Very soon, besides, he had licked the ball all round so that, even if we got it out of his hands, we could not have eaten it. Ever since that day, the fellow thought Lakshmi a girl to whom it was worthwhile going. Lakshmi herself, silly girl that she was, seemed to think that it was a great matter to be the favourite of the kitten. She should have seen that to be so distinguished by a little cat was not worth the price of a ball of sweetened flour. She did not, and she and little Garud were therefore very great friends. She would catch hold of the kitten, kiss him, hold him to her breast and take his life in two hundred little ways. It was she, as a matter of fact, that had given him the title "Garud". I must say that little

Garud deserved all this fondling. He was partly dark grey, partly bright white, creamy white near the neck and brighter white near the snout and on the forehead. The snout itself was red like ripe papaya fruit. The eyes were bright like any precious stone and the fellow had nails whose sharpness only those who had got scratched by him knew. Well, now, I have told you what little Garud was.

Lakshmi saw little Garud as he came near the door and ran out and caught him up and brought him in. We others joined her and sat round the little fellow and were playing with him. In the joy of this play, I did not notice what happened in the school. The teacher and his wife must have exchanged more words; but, suddenly, he called out: "Steady, my children, get into your places." As his voice rang out, all of us got back to our places, caught up our books not knowing what had happened or why we should be at attention. Lakshmi, I noticed, put little Garud against her bosom and covered him up with the end of her sari; and the whole school, in a moment, became trim and business-like.

Raising my head after this, I saw what had made the teacher call out. Framed by the door

there stood a gentleman of 'more than middle age, looking very grave and as if he owned the place. The teacher had stood up and seemed to be fearing a reprimand. After surveying the school, the gentleman looked steadily at the teacher and asked: "Are you the teacher in charge?"

I need not tell you that the gentleman was the Inspector of Schools. No one else talks to schoolmasters in that tone and manner. All the world addresses these teachers in a different manner and tone. Alone of mankind an Inspector of Schools talks to them in this way. I hope no one will feel offended by what I am saying. In fact, I am saying it partly in fun. Just as cats have peculiar domain over mice, so Inspectors of schools have dominion over school teachers. Our teacher must have suspected, even before, that this gentleman was the Inspector; when the question came he knew for certain that this was the case. So he said: "Yes, Your honour."

The Inspector said: "Put on your head-dress, man. Why are you standing bare-headed?"

Our teacher knew the Shastra and the Veda. He could repeat the Raghuvamsa from any point to any point. He knew a lot of philosophy: as a matter of fact, I believe he could have taught it

to very many learned men. But he was a very simple man. I have known something of man's nature since those days. I have watched my own little children grow and have seen how pure, how innocent, how tender their spirit is. I had always loved our teacher for his simplicity ; but it is only now that I could see that his spirit was pure, innocent and tender like the spirit of a child. The man was poor but he had a kindly heart and would often give up the few pices he had to help some poorer fellow. That was how he would sometimes find himself without cash for salt. I doubt if there are many people with minds so free from crookedness as our teacher. In a sense, he was a man of great courage too. Once as he was walking along the road he noticed that a serpent was approaching a spot where some children were playing and, though he held the belief that a serpent is not to be killed and knew for certain that if he hit it and missed, it would rush on him and would finish him, he walked up to it very deliberately and hit it on its head with his stick and killed it. A crowd gathered round and was praising this middle-aged Brahmin's valour. The teacher, quite unmindful of the praise of these people, walked up to the serpent, took a pinch of snuff from his snuff-box and put it over the

serpent's head. Our teacher had heard that snake-charmers, when they wish to catch snakes, put a little snuff over the head of the snake and make it giddy, that then they catch hold of it and pull out its poison fangs. He believed that this correctly described the process of conquering snakes. That was why he put some snuff on the head of the dead snake, not knowing that, if a snake is sufficiently killed to lie motionless when you go near, he is too dead to feel the taste of snuff. So utterly simple was our teacher. Though so courageous, our teacher feared two things: one of them was his wife and the other was the Inspector. To his misfortune, his wife had come a little earlier this very day and the Inspector came now. As the Inspector told him to put on his head-dress, the teacher realised what enormity of disrespect he had been guilty of. He took up his head-dress from the table and, in the hurry, put it on the wrong way. He was perspiring from fear. I felt a great pity for the poor man, though he looked very funny with his head-wear worn wrong side foremost. Noticing that this was the case, the Inspector said: "Wear it right." This upset the teacher. He took it up to wear it right; but, unfortunately, it got loose. Poor man, he was already sufficiently discomposed. This

made it worse. He fell into a consternation, with his head-dress loose and the Inspector appearing to be angry. The children besides had not prepared sufficiently well for the inspection! The Inspector might feel dissatisfied with the progress of the classes and remove this man from teacher-ship! To make things worse, his wife had sat inside the school. Supposing the Inspector discovered that it was the wife, what would he think and what would be the consequence? Supposing he asked for the name of this student or that student and that, and noticing a grown up person in one of the classes asked who she was! What was he to say? You have to imagine the depth of the confusion into which the teacher had fallen. I am unable to describe it. The Inspector turned, all on a sudden, towards the teacher's wife and said: "Who is this? Is she also a teacher?"

The teacher was yet not prepared for the question! Pretending to be troubling with his head-dress, he merely said: "Your honour."

What else the Inspector might have said and what else might have occurred, thereafter, it is hard to say. The teacher's wife discovered that what she had done had led to greater harm than she had thought and made up her mind to

get out of the mess somehow. Seeing that her husband could not answer, she said very opportunely: "No."

"What then? a student!", asked the Inspector.

The teacher said: "Your honour."

The teacher's wife said: "Yes".

The Inspector turned to the Master and said: "Well, I say, you have caught hold of quite a grown up proposition!"

The teacher said: "Your honour"

The teacher's wife was very angry.

The Inspector turned to her and asked: "What class are you in, young lady?"

The teacher's wife said nothing, then. She was looking very angry and walked straight to the door; and turning back for a moment before getting out said: "What language! Grown up proposition indeed!" With that she passed out. The Inspector did not understand. "What is this, teacher? She has left the school! What class is she in?"

The teacher merely repeated: "Your honour."

The Inspector was weary of this repetition of "Your honour". "I say, teacher, what is the

matter with you? You are saying simply your honour, again and again. What has come to you?"

The teacher said: "Your honour"

The Inspector asked: "I say, teacher, did she take offence?"

The teacher said: "It looks as if she did, Your honour."

The Inspector said: "Quite so! I ought not to have said 'grown up proposition'. Well, well, let us think of other things now: What class is this? May I examine this class?"

"Your honour", said the teacher, "has come just now and must be tired with the long journey. It might be better if the inspection is made tomorrow."

"Very well, then", said the Inspector; "now, let me hear a song which the children have learnt to sing well. Let one of the girls sing it: any one of them who sings well."

The girl that could sing well was Lakshmi. The teacher turned to her and said "Lakshamma, sing a song to the Inspector. Sing 'Our great King'."

Lakshmi stood up and began the song You remember little Garud lay against her bosom.

To hear her sing, the Inspector walked up to her. When Lakshmi began singing, little Garud who had gone to sleep in the interval woke up and, not willing to stay where he was, moved in an attempt to come out.

The Inspector saw that something was moving within the cloth. "What is it, child?" he asked, pointing with his finger. Lakshmi did not know whether to tell or not. She looked at me but before I could signal to her to tell, the Inspector jestingly said: "Is it your child?" and put his hand into the cloth. You know, Lakshmi was a little child and there was no idea in the Inspector's mind of any disrespect. He must have had grand-children of Lakshmi's age.

Little Garud had tried to come out; he had been prevented and got angry. In a moment he would have scratched poor Lakshmi's bosom; but, before he could decide on that course, the Inspector's hand arrived. Little Garud had experience of things like this. They generally came to pull him by the tail. He thought now that this was one such hand and, jumping up in terror, scratched the poor Inspector's hand severely. The Inspector pulled out his hand in great haste.

I have told you that only those knew little Garud's nails who had got scratched by him. The Inspector now made acquaintance with the nails. He was greatly vexed and turned to the teacher and said: "I say, teacher, what kind of school is this of yours? That girl went away angry. This girl has a kitten in her bosom. What is all this? Is this a school?"

The teacher said: "Your honour, I am unable to describe to you the hardships through which I have to pass. God alone knows what it is I am going through. When the girls grow up, they develop tempers, one cannot open his mouth to them. If you say a word to them, they leave the school and walk away. When they are little, they don't read: their only interest is a kitten or a pup: if you tell them not to bring one to the school they cease coming to the school. Your honour is giving me my livelihood: I am true to the salt and am running the school; otherwise, I don't know where I should have been. Your honour sees that in these ten minutes there has been such disorder in this school. I have taught and taught and taught in this school and poured out my life-blood for nothing."

"I say, teacher," said the Inspector, "what is your pay?"

The teacher said: "Sir, I labour for thirty days and get at the end of it ten rupees."

"Look here, teacher, I am going to write and say today that you should get twelve rupees. You certainly should get at least two rupees more for running such a menagerie."

With this, for that day, the school closed.

This was some years ago. Three days ago, my old teacher came to my house. Before I came away from my village, I went to his house to say farewell. The teacher said: "Seethamma, my child, I told you long ago that you would have a good husband and my word has come true. May you be happy. Some time, perhaps, I shall come to your house. Remember me." That was why he came three days ago. He asked me to tell my husband to speak to the Inspector—it is some other Inspector now,—and get him a further promotion. He asked my husband himself. I also asked him to help my old teacher. In this context I told him of the Thursday in the school which had brought the teacher his previous promotion. I learnt to-day that the poor man was given an addition of three rupees a month. When asking for the promotion the teacher said: "Whatever help you give, Seethamma, my mother, it can be of no use to her."

I need not say of whom he was talking ; the older generation never referred to any one but the wife in that familiar way. I said : "Why, Master ?" He said : "She died, Seethamma, she gave birth to a daughter and died. That child is left to me to look after." He wept for thought of the wife that was dead. A moment later, he said : "She died in want, Seethamma. Supposing she had been alive and a promotion came, I could have bought her a good sari, she would have worn it and felt happy. That was not to be ; I am denied the privilege." I could say nothing in reply. These simple things are the great matters in life : that one whom we loved and who is dead cannot eat the thing we eat or wear a cloth that we buy. The teacher continued : "How she loved me, Seethamma ! A little before death, she asked me to come near and caught my feet and said : 'I am dying. I have been cruel to you very often. Don't keep any anger in your mind against me. I need your forgiveness.' She upset me, mother. I sat down and took her hand and said : 'When were you cruel to me ? Never that I remember. In fact, marrying an old man, you lost all chance of joy in life'. She said in reply : 'You don't know. I was happy enough, though, perhaps, I I did not remember it always. Now all too soon

I must leave you. I realise now how happy I was and how good you were.' Hers was pure and deep love, Seethamma, very pure and very deep. What a transparent nature was hers, mother ! Her words were sometimes harsh but no heart could be more tender. Think of that transparency. You remember the day that the Inspector came and there was all that hubbub in the school? When I went home, I told her that the Inspector would give me a promotion of two rupees and described all that occurred. She said : 'He may be thinking that I was also a student and this promotion which he is giving may be due to this belief. Don't take a promotion leaving him in ignorance of facts. Tell him I am not a student. If he gives the promotion after that, well and good ; if not, it does not matter.' I told her that the Inspector was greatly concerned over having referred to her in disrespectful terms and the possibility of people knowing about it. 'He was wrong,' she said, 'to have spoken as he did. No man should speak like that in a school for girls, but that is his affair. What he is does not matter to us. Let us do what is right.' Tell him the truth about me.' Seethamma, I went to the Inspector that evening and told him that the woman he had seen in the school was not a

student but my wife. He was at first very angry but on further thought laughed a great deal and said : 'I say, teacher, I said that you should have a promotion of two rupees for having to deal with such students. If I had known that she was your wife, I would have recommended promotion by another three rupees. Is she your wife ? What a wife to have !' The poor man did not know how good she was, Seethamma. He did not know that she was so good a woman."

The teacher was silent for a few minutes, thinking of the goodness of his wife.

THE CURDS-SELLER

Mangamma has been supplying curds to us for several years now. Our relations are of the kind usual in this city. In other places the curds-seller supplies the curds you require day after day and takes payment at the end of a month. Here, supplying and payment take place on the same day and you are not bound to take any quantity every day. The curds-woman passes by our house most days. On such days she gets into the house and asks if we want any curds. We buy if we need it and pay at the rate prevailing on the day or at the latest pay her next day. Her village is close to Avalur. I forget its name : Venkapur or something like it. As I talked sympathetically Mangamma sometimes visited me both on her way to the city and back to her village. She would sit in the yard and say a few words about one thing or another, chew betel leaf and nut or ask for it, and after resting for some time start for her village. If I had the time she would tell me of the troubles in her household and ask me to tell her of mine. What trouble had I to report to her ? By God's grace everything is well with me. The worst I can report would be that the cat came and drank up the milk or that the rats ate the cucumber overnight. When I told her of such

things Mangamma would say : " Alas, that is the way of the world ", and that would start her on a discourse regarding her experience and hints for managing this world of refractory ways. Mangamma and myself thus came to be very intimate companions.

One day about a month ago Mangamma came and called out as usual asking if I wanted curds. I was within. My little boy said . " Yes. We want curds ", and walking up to her and stretching his hand out asked : " Give it ". Mangamma sat down and took out a piece of good thick curd and put it in his hand. " Ask mother to come soon ", she told him, ' I have to go ". By that time I came out. Mangamma said . " Mother, you have a child precious as gold. You are so good and your child is worthy of you. But, mother, what is the use of all this ? It lasts only till he grows up. When he does grow up some creature comes along to own him The boy who calls one, mother, mother, so prettily will not ask then whether the mother is alive or dead ". I said : " Why, Mangamma ? What has happened ? Did your son refuse to do something you told him ? " " Let it be, mother," said Mangamma, " the man who held my hand in marriage did not heed my wish ; how much can a son heed it ? " " Did not

your husband heed your wish, Mangamma?" I said. "That", said Mangamma, "is a long story. You know, mother, I did not wear a showy sari; another woman wore it. He was carried away by the colour of it and went to her. I did not mind. A man has to live as he will. A woman should be content with having a house and a husband and calling them hers. So I put up with it. But then, mother, I committed sin. I sold elixir and lost my man. What is to be done? I got what I had asked for and that was over. But, mother, I pray you, take heed about your own household life. By the time your husband comes in the evening, change your clothes and wear a good sari. A man's mind is very unsteady, mother. You should wear a sari or a bodice of a bright colour such as will please the husband's eye. Buy flowers and scents and make yourself bright and sweet and satisfy his mind. The sari you are wearing now, for instance, it is all right for use in the house when you are working; but by the evening you ought to put on something bright". I smiled to hear Mangamma's wisdom, but was aware of the deep sagacity born of experience that lay behind her advice. I realised, too, that that experience had been painful, and felt a little sorry for the poor woman. "Yes, Mangamma," I said:

“what you say is true”. Mangamma went on :
“See mother, there are four things to be done if you wish to keep a husband in hand. Silly people will tell you to give drugs and pills But really in this matter the proverb is wiser : drug a man and make a corpse. Do not listen to such nonsense. Rather, prepare something tasty occasionally and give it to him to eat. Wear something pretty and smile and move before him gracefully. Get what you need for the house once together and avoid asking for two hundred bits day after day. Save up a pie today and a pie another day and when he is in need hand over some of it. This, mother, is the best drug and the best pill If the wife of the house does these things, the husband will be like its dog. If she does not do it, he wanders like one in the street”. I was greatly struck with Mangamma’s sageness. We exchanged a few words more and then she left.

Some two weeks later I noticed that Mangamma was looking very unhappy. “Why, Mangamma ?” I said, “You are looking so weary”. “Oh, mother”, she said, “what shall I say ? No one wants me”. With that she collected a tear from her eye with a finger. I was alarmed and asked : “Why, Mangamma, won’t you tell me what happened ? Did your son say anything ? ”

"Yes, mother, he did." said Mangamma: "His wife beat that little innocent, her son, for something that he did. I could not bear to see him beaten. So I said: 'You hard-hearted woman, why are you beating the poor fellow like an ogress?' For this she fell foul of me and reviled me. I objected and said that she could not talk so to me, her husband's mother. 'Let your husband come and I shall tell him', I said. The husband came home and I told him: 'She beats the child mercilessly and I tell her not to and she reviles me. Please advise her a little'. She would not let him speak. 'What is the advice he should give me? If my son does some mischief have I not the right to spank him? Did I not bear the boy as you bore this husband? Let there be no talk of advising and such other nonsense' And, mother, you know what happened. When all is said and done I am only the mother where as she is the wife. Supposing he rebukes her, she will reply. Me he can rebuke without any fear. He said to me: 'Yes, mother. She beats the child that she has borne. Why do you interfere? If you wish to say anything say it to me' 'Was I then wrong in remonstrating with her?' I asked. 'Wrong or right, mother, is another matter. But a woman must be free to deal with the son she has borne'.

This upset me, mother, and some words slipped from my mouth. 'What is this you are saying, son, in the glamour which your wife has cast over you? Are you prepared to let her belabour her son or revile me as she likes? Things have come to a pretty pass. If tomorrow she tells you to send me out of the house, I suppose you will do it?' My son said: 'What else shall I do, mother? If you say that you cannot stay with me if the wife is with me and that my wife should not stay if you are to be with me, what shall I do with that helpless woman?' 'Am I not helpless?' I asked. 'Oh, no, mother', he said. 'You have the cattle, the curds, and money and things. You do not need to be fed by me'. 'Son', I said, 'are you asking me to live apart?' 'That is as you like, mother,' he said. 'If you wish to live apart I shall not say, do not. I have had enough of these quarrels of yours'. 'Well, son,' I said: 'if that is your wish I shall live apart from this afternoon. You and your wife may be happy without me'. And I have come with the curds to sell". Finishing her narration Mangamma cried to her heart's content. I was very sorry for her and said some words to soothe her. "Don't think too much of these things, Mangamma" I said. "Go home and get about as usual and things will be

all right". I then took some curds and paid for it and she left.

Next day Mangamma seemed less unhappy, but she did not seem happy as usual. So I asked if the quarrel had been made up. "How can it be made up, mother?" said Mangamma. "Will that daughter-in-law of mine allow a quarrel between me and my son to be made up? By the time I went home yesterday after selling the curds, she had taken out a set of vessels and things for me and kept them to a side. She had also placed some *ragi* in one large pot, some salt and chillies and other things in other little pots, all for my use. She and her husband had finished their meal and she was looking very unconcerned. How could the quarrel be made up, mother? I prepared some food in a part of the house and ate it all by myself. I made the mistake of saying it. Husband and wife said, 'That will do very well.' A son is no son after his marriage, mother, and if he does not need me I should not throw myself on him? 'All right' I said, and I am now living apart. Daily when I started from the house with the curds I used to give a little to my grandson and then come this way. Today by the time I could do this she had taken him away somewhere. She has made up her mind that I

should not see my grandson And this is how she is managing it". I was astonished to learn that so small a matter had taken this turn. But there was nothing that I could do in the case. So I spoke of other things to Mangamma and sent her away.

For two or three days we did not talk of the home again ; but I understood from Mangamma's ways that she was still living apart. The third or fourth day Mangamma said to me : " Mother, this velvet cloth which you are wearing, how much is it per yard ? " " Why, Mangamma ? " I asked. " You see, mother ", said Mangamma, " all these days I was putting the coins together for my son and grandson. Why should I now ? I also shall have a velvet jacket like yours and go about in it ". I told Mangamma that a jacket in that stuff might cost seven or eight rupees. That very day Mangamma bought enough of that cloth for a jacket for herself and gave it to the tailor. The next day I saw her in it on her way to the village. " See, mother ", she said, " how well I look, tricked out in the best of clothes. When my husband was alive I did not buy a costly sari and he went after a woman who wore something better than I. I added pie to pie for the sake of this son and lost my husband, and now this son

has got past my hands. And look at me, pretty with my new found decoration”.

It struck me that loss of her son in a sense had affected Mangamma's wits. Much anger or much distress does make people a little mad. I said nothing to Mangamma, but this jacket of hers brought her quarrels with other people. It seems that a boy of her village is studying in the city. He is a civilized person, wearing as all our educated people do, after the manner of English people, collar and tie and other fashionable things. When he saw Mangamma he said. “Well, mother Mangamma, you have become very fashionable, wearing a velvet jacket”. “What is this, young fellow?” said Mangamma “You are forgetting your manners. Why have you got that thing round your neck and why shall not I have a jacket if I please?” That was the beginning of a colloquy between them, which made some people who were standing near laugh. The incident put Mangamma hopelessly out of temper.

The next day Mangamma recounted all of this to me. Not only did other people say this but that daughter-in-law of hers said things in her hearing just to vex her. “Look at my mother-in-law”, she said, “when we were together she would not give me an ordinary bodice. Now she

is living apart and is wearing a velvet jacket herself". Mangamma had not really been indifferent to what her daughter-in-law wore. She had given her at the time of marriage her ear-rings, wristlet, a crest jewel, a necklace and belt, and other things that she had had for long years but had rarely worn. Every year after the marriage she had got some small jewel or other made for the daughter-in-law. But that daughter-in-law remembered none of all this, she was aware only of the velvet jacket which Mangamma was now wearing. The old woman suffered the insult once or twice without taking notice, but when it was repeated she was unable to bear it. So she went to her son in the evening and said: "Your wife is jawing about me, saying that I am now wearing a jacket but did not give her even a bodice when we were together. Did I not give her anything at all when I lived with her? What about my wristlet, my ear-ring, my necklace, my crest ornament and belt, and the other things I gave?" The daughter-in-law replied before the son could say anything. "If a woman whose husband is dead should like to have ear-ring and belt, let her take them and wear them. I do not want them". The husband rebuked her. "What is this, woman? You are talking too much".

Addressing the mother he said : "Mother, I am tired of this fight between you two. Pray, do whatever you consider is proper. If you want the ear-ring and belt and other things, please take them" Mangamma said to me : "See mother ; this son of mine was not prepared to tell his wife not to talk to everybody in the village about me. He was prepared to say that I might take the ornaments if I liked. He was more ready to put the blame on me than to correct his wife. Why should I live after this ?"

I who heard the story felt ever so unhappy. This poor woman was old and helpless ; and that son was her only son . why did not that wife of his treat the husband and the husband's mother with a little more kindness ? Why so much fuss and misunderstanding ? Why did it arise ? Because the old woman told the daughter-in-law not to beat the grandson. "Why do people behave in this way ?" I asked myself. And then it appeared to me that everywhere a quarrel arises in the same way. If two people do not like one another, anything is enough to set them at loggerheads. A quarrel develops from step to step and in the end is a result for which you see no real reason and all the persons involved in it are made unhappy.

Some days later, Mangamma said to me: "Mother, you are a good woman. I have a little money of mine. I shall be grateful if you would kindly deposit it for me in one of these places that they call a bank. Fellows in my village are thinking of the money I have". I asked her what made her say this. "You see, mother", said Mangamma: "There is a person of the name of Rangappa in my village. He and some other people gamble and fight. He is a man of tastes. As I was coming up with the curds yesterday he met me as if by chance at a point on the way and asked 'How are you, Mangamma? Happy and well?' 'What happiness have I, Rangappa, that you are not aware of?' I said. 'That's true' says he, 'you are right. In the way in which people behave these days, what is the chance for happiness? These young fellows must forget their manners and old people like us are left to feel hurt, wondering what has come to the world. We have to endure this'. We walked some distance together. There is a grove of trees on the way, with a well towards the pit. It is rather lonely there and I was fearing what this man might do to me there. I had some money in this little purse. That's why. When we reached the place, Rangappa asked me if I

could give him a little *chunam*. I gave it to him and he took it and went away. Today again as I was on my way here he joined me at nearly the same place, and walked up with me to the grove talking of one thing and another, and said to me at the end : ' Mangamma, I am in need of a little money. Would you kindly lend it to me ? I shall repay it as soon as I harvest my *ragi* this year '. ' Oh, brother ', said I. ' how can I have any money to lend to you ? ' ' Ah ', said he : ' Don't I know, Mangamma ? What do you get by burying coin in one place or another ? Lend it to me and you will help me to live and will yourself get some interest '. A minute later he says. ' If you and your son had lived together I could not have asked you. You would have needed the cash for making some little tinket for your daughter-in-law. But now, you know, you are free from that burden and therefore I am asking you '. See, mother," said Mangamma, "let a woman stand alone and everyone will cast his eyes on her ". I told Mangamma that I would ask my husband what we could do for her.

I could not speak to my husband about this that day. The next day, when she had given the curds we wanted, Mangamma took out a small purse from her hamper and put it before me and

said : "Mother, please take this into the house and count how much there is". I told her I had not yet spoken to my husband and asked her to bring the money again. She said : "Oh, no, mother. I am afraid of carrying it about with me. You know this Rangappa met me on the way today also. When we reached the grove I have told you of he sat down on a stone and asked me to sit down, saying : 'What is the hurry? Sit down for a few moments'. As I had this money with me my heart was beating fast. Supposing I refused and walked on, he might hold me and stop me and what should I do then? So I sat. The man talked of my household. He then talked of other things. Then he took hold of my hand and said how pretty I was. Do you hear, my mother? When I was young and handsome, the man I called husband gave up holding this hand. Not another held it afterwards. Years later, today, this fellow holds it. I withdrew my hand and said : 'What is this, Rangappa? You are feeling lusty. Do you think you and I have become lovers for you to say this to me?' With that I got up and came away at a great pace. Yesterday he asked for my money ; today he asked for my person. He with whom I sat on the marriage seat and shared blessings for a happy life, he left

me for the other world long ago. He would not touch me when I was willing. Another woman in those circumstances might have said, 'If the husband will not, find the lover who will' and played, I do not know, what tricks. I thought, however, of my self-respect and bore that neglect. Now when my youth is gone and I am old, this loafer comes along and catches me by the hand as if he were more than my husband and I his wedded wife".

It struck me that this story of Mangamma's was developing in strange ways. "Mangamma", I said, "why are you risking all this trouble? Why not go back to your son and suffer whatever comes?"

"I might be willing to do that, mother. But would my daughter-in-law allow it?"

"Tell your son these things about Rangappa."

"Oh, my mother, what a thing that would be to do. It would just help my daughter-in-law to shout in the streets and get me thrown out of caste. It is getting late, mother. I must be going. Please arrange about this thing being put into a bank and tell me tomorrow". With that the poor woman went away. Within an hour she came again. "Mother", she said, "a thing occurred today. What shall I do?"

"What thing?"

"You see, mother, I wanted some sweets for the child and bought a small packet and put it in my hamper". As Mangamma had told me that her grand-child had been prevented from coming to her I did not quite follow what she was saying. So I said : "You said the child was not coming to you. Why did you want any sweetmeat?" "Oh", said Mangamma, "that was some days ago. If the mother does not want him to go to me, is he going to give me up? He comes to me, mother, when she is not looking on. He drinks the milk I give him and asks for the curds. When I give it he dances for joy. When he makes any noise I tell him his mother will hear, and, would you believe it, my mother, he shuts up immediately. There is nothing, mother, to equal the play of children. So I bought a little sweetmeat for him and kept it in the hamper. You know this Shankarapur here. As I was passing through it, a crow from a mango tree swooped on to my head and flew away with the packet of sweetmeat. What is to be done now?" "Why do you make so much of the loss of some sweetmeat? Buy another packet", I said. "No, mother", said Mangamma, "that is not what I am thinking of. People say that a crow should not touch a person. That is why I am upset". "What is the harm of a crow touching

a person?" I said. "They say that it portends death", said Mangamma: "the thing that the crow did today makes me fear that my days are run. Of course I have also said to myself that, if they are, it is so much the better. No one wants me to live. What is the harm if I go and gather into the feet of my God?" "What nonsense are you talking, Mangamma!" I said: "You keep a packet of sweetmeat, tempting a crow to take it, and walk along a roadway to make sure that some crow sees it, and when the crow comes and takes the packet you say your days are done. Is this sense? Do not waste time on such thought. Go home and play with your grandson" "So" asked Mangamma, "there is no reason for fear?" "Not at all," I said: "What is the fear? The more one quarrels the longer one lives. Do not think about the crow and the sweetmeat again. Go home smiling".

Mangamma left for her village. I thought of the state of her mind and wondered at this poor woman loving now her son, now her daughter-in-law, now her grandson, but wishing more than anything else that they should treat her as mistress and show her regard. No one is free from love of power, none from love of life. One may feel tired of life; but one never wishes to

die ; but one is not prepared to show that he does not wish it. These people are supposed to be village people, simple, unsophisticated, not spoilt by education and with no concealment and camouflage. Yet in their minds there is veil behind veil and fold behind fold and cover concealing cover. What drama is this, I thought.

When Mangamma came next time she told me further incidents in her new life. That grandson of hers that day had refused to go to his mother and father and had stayed with the grand-mother. The old woman was happy beyond description. "Look at the young fellow's courage", she said : "He is hardly two feet high, my mother. Would any ordinary child give up its mother when it is so small? But this youngster did. He came to me in the after-noon yesterday and would not go back. When he did not return in the evening, his mother came and made a fuss. 'Come along', she said to her son, 'and let me give you a spanking'. He stoutly refused to go and clung to my feet. I told him ever so often to go to her. His father came and called him but the little fellow refused. He stayed with me the whole day. For ten days I lay alone in the house and was feeling afraid. Last night I felt a strange courage as the little boy was sleeping with me.

When all is said and done, my mother, there is a great deal in having a male about the house. See God's grace in so young a fellow being so determined to stay with me. The son whom I brought up gave me up. But this little slip of a grandson comes in his place and says 'Do not fear'. That daughter-in-law of mine, my mother, made a *Ramayana* the whole night. The little fellow would not budge. In the morning as I started for here I told him that he should not be alone in the house and took him to his mother's house and left him near the door. Then he went in, mother, and I came this way".

"That is good, Mangamma", I said. "but what will you do if she beats the child?"

"Oh, mother", said Mangamma, "why would she beat him? She would really be happy that her son has come to her house at least for a morning. If your child is always about you, you feel sometimes as if you would give him a spanking. Not when you get him only occasionally. Look, for example, how it is with me. When I and my daughter-in-law lived in the same house I never noticed how handsome she was. Now I see her from a distance and I like her looks so greatly. Sometimes, when she knits her brows, she looks a little strange. But, normally, what a face and

what grace ! I can now see what it is that has made a slave of my son. And he too, mother. When I was in that house I did not take much notice of his going out and his coming in. Now that I live apart, I sit in front of my house and wonder why he has not yet returned to his house or why he has started so soon for the field. It ought to be the same with her. 'Supposing she beats the little fellow today, there is the danger of his not going to her tomorrow when I start for the city. Supposing I bring him away she would lose even the few hours she could have him with her. She has borne the fellow for months in her womb and suffered pains and given him being. How can she agree to lose him, mother ?'

I heard Mangamma's talk with more and more wonder. How far her thought went ! By the same token it struck me that this quarrel between the old woman and the son and daughter-in-law would soon end.

And that is what happened in fact. For two days the little grandson went to the mother's house in the morning. The third day he offered to go with the grandmother to the city. She could not bring him with any ease and begged him to stay with his mother. But he was obstinate. Mangamma did not know what to do. The son and

daughter-in-law then came up and said: "If in some foolish moment we do something wrong should you not forgive us?" Four people from the village came up and said similar words. So Mangamma was mollified and returned to live with her son and daughter-in-law. But this grandson insisted upon accompanying his grandmother. This led to a new arrangement. This selling of curds had been Mangamma's business. Even after her daughter-in-law came into the family, Mangamma kept it in her own hands. The ostensible reason was that the daughter-in-law of the house was the mistress and should rule in it, while she, the mother-in-law, could only go about. The real reason was that it was tedious staying at home and that if she sold the curds and milk she would be able to handle some money. When the little grandson insisted upon being with his grandmother the daughter-in-law said: "Why should you go up and down in the sun? How long can a person do this who is growing old? Be you the mistress of the house, looking after everything. I shall go to the city and sell the curds". Mangamma could not well refuse the arrangement. She agreed. "Once in a way I shall relieve you," she said. "but you may do this most days". One day, therefore, the mother-

in-law and the daughter-in-law came in company. One of them carried the curds and the other the child. "Mother", said Mangamma, "this is my daughter-in-law. She has been very considerate to me and has taken me back to her house, and saved her old mother-in-law the trouble of cooking for herself. She does not like that I should have to go about in the sun. I have agreed. So it is she will bring the curds hereafter". With this Mangamma handed us over to her daughter-in-law. I said a few kindly words to both of them and advised them to remain friends and gave them some betel leaf and nut and sent them away. Nowadays the younger woman is bringing us curds.

All that has been said so far is from the point of view of the mother-in-law. What might be the case for the daughter-in-law? So I asked the young woman one day "Nanjamma", I said, "you seem such a sensible sort. Why did you go and drive that poor woman from the house?"

"Mother", said Nanjamma, "do not say it. Do you think I am an ogress to drive my mother-in-law out? This mother-in-law of mine would not allow me to do anything. She put herself in my way in every little affair and would not allow my husband to go about as a man. She

was master and mistress together. It is all right now, but when she leaves us, how can this man play the master, and what kind of wife could I be if he is no man at all? I put up with this for months and months, saying that after all she had borne him and brought him up and that if she wanted to be master I could not object. But she went further and denied me the right to touch my child. If I submitted to that what would be left for me of daughter-in-law-dom even?"

"You do not say, Nanjamma," I said, "that beating a child is the only way of showing your right over him?"

"Oh, mother", said Nanjamma, "beating or fondling, how did it matter? She objected to my beating him one day. She might object to my fondling him another day. Who is to set limits to what a mother-in-law might do? If she admits that the child is mine he is my child. If she permits my husband to be mine he is my husband. If she does not allow this poor creature who has come to the house as daughter-in-law to say a word to the husband or give a blow to the child, what kind of daughter-in-law would I be?"

As I had felt when Mangamma spoke that she was in the right, I felt now that there was something to be said for Nanjamma's view also.

"What you say", I said, "is also true. So now you have some freedom in the house?"

"Yes, mother", said Nanjamma. "Things have improved after the quarrel. We have to manage somehow, mother. Supposing I do not put up with my mother-in-law's ways and we quarrel again, what is the gain? Some other people will swallow up what money she has got. There is a man of the name Rangappa in my village. In the few days that my mother-in-law lived apart, this fellow, you know, went and asked her for a loan of her money and the old woman agreed. When Rangappa said this in the village to satisfy some creditors of his, I was frightened. Then I told my little boy to go to his grandmother. She would give him sweetmeats and curds and other things. I told him not to come to my house again until I signalled him. I hoped that somehow the quarrel would be made up. So I left the little fellow with her for some days". "Oh!" I said: "Then the child did not go to the grandmother of its own accord?" "He did, mother", said Nanjamma, "and I sent him". "Did you tell your husband that you did this?" I asked. "Mother", said Nanjamma, "what is the good of telling men about these things? They would not understand."

Altogether I felt that Nanjamma was not less astute than her mother-in-law. In their house today there is this struggle for superiority going on. The central object about which this struggle is proceeding is that man of the house, son to one, husband to the other. That mother wishes not to give up her control over her son. This wife is determined to get control over him and retain it. This is a struggle that is going on everywhere. And no one can predict how it will end in any case. Like the crocodile in the water who has caught hold of the child's foot is the daughter-in-law; like the mother in the boat, holding that child by its arms is the mother-in-law. Only, the position of the husband between the two is rather uncomfortable. This occurs in the village in the house of Mangamma selling curds, in the city in the house of Rangamma buying curds. Thus in town and country is going on this drama that does not know the last act.

KRISHNAMURTHY'S WIFE

October 15

From the day I came to this place on transfer my sole occupation outside office has been to find a house to live in. It is not difficult to find a house in the old town, but the houses there are built so close and the crowding is horrible. I grew up in a village with its large spaces of field and fallow and played as a boy on the spacious sands of our river. All this has made it impossible for me to feel easy in narrow streets. This natural dislike of limited space was made worse by experience of Bombay life where you have one person for every square foot of ground. There is no want of extensions in this town and the houses there are very good but who can pay the rent that they ask for these houses? So I had to look here and search there before I could find a house that would do in this small group of houses. These houses are in a small corner in the space between the old town and the extension named Madhavapur. It is a neat-looking group of houses with its two lines of tenements facing each other. There are six tenements in each line. It seems some person, charitably disposed, built these houses and gave them as gifts to some worthy people in the past. The tenement I have taken is in the line to the

right. It is not very convenient but the situation is very good, the houses being more or less apart from houses either in the old town or in the extension. Between the two lines of tenements there is a large courtyard with a draw-well in the middle. To a side of the well is the pedestal for the basil plant. Further away at the end is a platform with a peepul tree and a margosa as its companion. Just in front of my house is a big tree of the fragrant margosa. The great advantage to me in this house is that when I walk out of the doorway I do not see a street in which crowds of men are walking and carts are jostling. Another advantage of the situation is that if you walk for five minutes from our houses you will be in the midst of the betel and cocoanut gardens of the place. The gardens are really places of beauty. There is also a little hill on this side of the country with a grove of trees at the bottom and a temple in it. Attached to the temple is a pond with a flower garden which the pond has supported. On another side of the little hill is another grove of trees, which has another pond. I find that when I get up of a morning I could go for my morning ablution to any of the cocoanut gardens with a pond or to these other ponds in the groves at the bottom of the hill. On the

whole I have felt that my life in this group of tenements is something like the peaceful life of our village. My search and seeking have ended well and I have found a neat enough house. I can now go and bring my wife and children or write to them to come along. As the festival also is now over my wife can leave her parent's house without any difficulty.

October 16

I wrote to my people this morning to say that they may come. To-day is the eleventh day of the bright fortnight and if they are brisk they can come away the day after tomorrow. But just as I have been feeling happy at having got a good house I have discovered that there is a fly in the ointment even here. I spent the whole afternoon in the town and came home after lights had been lit. Just as I came up to our houses I heard someone singing in a tenement in the line opposite. My God! What singing and what a voice! The tune seemed all right but the voice was something horrible. As a matter of fact, even the voice would seem good for a minute. The next minute one could not stand it. And this person sang and sang and sang. When I had sat in the house for five minutes, listening to this horror, I felt as if I

should abandon the house and run away somewhere. It looks as if someone who has gone mad is singing in that house. If I had known this fact before, I should certainly not have taken this house. What strange fate is this that there should be this unimaginable defect in a place otherwise so suitable? It seems to me that the world is a large temple of Somnathapur! Every figure in the temple is beautiful in every way, but each figure is mutilated in one small part or other. One of them with a finger broken off; another with a lip cut; a third with a nose slashed away. It is believed that the figures in that temple were mutilated to make the structure stay on the ground. But for the imperfections, it would, it seems, have floated up to heaven. I suppose that is why God has installed some imperfection in everything on this earth. The imperfection in the case of this fine tenement is this music in the tenement in the line opposite.

October 17

The house from which the music comes is exactly opposite mine. It is difficult to say what the age of the person singing may be. This morning I saw in front of that house a somewhat aged lady and a young one. It did not look as if either of them could be the musician of the

previous night. If the musician is one of these two persons, I only wish that it should be the elder lady, not the young one. This young lady is exceedingly handsome. As I got up in the morning and walked out to go to the wells, she was standing in front of her house. From the glance I had I felt as if I had seen her somewhere before. She is a tallish and thin person. The face is somewhat long and is moderately full. The eyes are large. She was looking in some other direction as I walked out, and noticed me and turned towards me. What lustre in those eyes! She is still very young. Yet, in the light of these eyes and in the firmness of those lips you see the marks of a grown-up woman. She had not the auspicious mark on her forehead. I wonder why. Yet her cheek looked like still knowing the use of saffron. It is possible she had just got up from bed and came out without having put on the mark on the forehead.

Lakshmi will be coming in a day or two. What will she think when she reads these sentences in my diary? That I stand in the street and look at all the women that walk in the street up and down? Well and why not? If every woman were a creature of beauty like this young woman, it is worth while looking on and doing nothing else. But, then, not many are so beautiful.

October 18

My God ! Why should the thing that we imagine and dislike and push off as unpleasant turn out to be fact ? And besides, who would have thought that this sad story was so close to my life ? This evening I came to the house rather early and made acquaintance with the Sastry of the house next to mine. We had not spoken to each other before, but we could not be neighbours for long in a place like this without someone breaking the formality of new acquaintance. This gentleman apparently decided that he ought to begin friendship with me and said . "Good evening, sir. I suppose you are coming from the office?" I was glad he talked to me and said, "Good evening to you. Yes, I came from the office". The gentleman said "I suppose your family have not yet come?" and walked in with me and sat on a chau. I said: "No. They have not. They should come in two or three days at the most" The Sastry said: "How do you like the music?" Now, I was not prepared to discuss our neighbours with this gentleman on such short notice. So I grinned as the best way of saving an answer. He continued: "You see, we people in this group of tenements greatly desire that persons of some standing should come and live in these houses. Men like you come and

we are happy. But few of them stay here more than three days. And the reason for their running away is this music". I said nothing. The Sastry continued: "You may ask why I also do not run away. But, sir, my grandfather was a *pundit* and in those days he got this house in which I live as a gift. For some *karma* of mine that house is now mine. I cannot leave it and go. I have not the advantage that you have of being free to give up this house and go elsewhere". I could not be silent after all this and said. "Who are those people?" The Sastry replied: "I do not know much about them. They are a mother and a daughter. They do not visit us. But in the night, day after day, this agony of music is repeated". By this time I had changed my clothes and sat upon another chair. The Sastry asked me: "Where did you pass, sir, Bombay or Madras?" I said: "Bombay". "Then", said the Sastry, "it is possible that you knew this girl's husband. He also studied for law in Bombay. He was somewhat thin and of a fair complexion. He had come here for a day some time ago. Recently I heard some news. I do not know if it is true, but I did see the mother crying one day and I fear it may be true".

This gentleman's talk of Bombay and the law examination, of the thin fair young man and of

bad news disturbed me. The more particularly because I had felt that I had seen the girl somewhere. I said, "What was the young man's name? Not Krishnamurthy?" I was hoping that he would say "No". But the Sastry said, "Yes. That's the name"

So this girl was the wife of Krishnamurthy? It was right to call her singing agony. Why at all was the poor creature singing?

"Poor thing" I said. "So this girl is the wife of that boy?" I got up. I was not inclined to any further talk of poor Krishnamurthy. The Sastry also got up. When my neighbour had left me I went over the story of poor Krishnamurthy in my mind.

Krishnamurthy was the son of the Amildar of Avalur. His mother came from Mavinahally. She used to go to that village now and then. Ramaswamia, who was Shekdar at Mavinahally, was of the same community. He had married from the house of a distant relative who was well-to-do. Krishnamurthy's mother's father and this Shekdar Ramaswamia were good friends. Ramaswamia had an only daughter. Some time when this child and Krishnamurthy were still very young Krishnamurthy's grandfather seems to have said that the boy and girl would make a

good match. Soon after this it was more or less agreed that they should marry when they grew up. The boy and girl also knew this. The young fellow grew up very smart and the girl became a handsome young creature. Being already related they were obviously meant for each other. At any rate when the talk was first seriously broached no one could suggest any objection. Soon after this the girl's father wanted to celebrate her marriage. Krishnamurthy by this time had reached the F.A. class at college. An Amildar's son studying in the F.A. class is in no want of suitable girls from almost any household; why should he marry a poor Shekdar's daughter? That Ramaswamia was only a Shekdar seemed now an objection. As a matter of fact several other people placed much higher in life came forward offering their daughters in marriage and Krishnamurthy's father desired to accept one of them. Ramaswamia heard of this and by way of bringing matters to a head pressed the boy's grandfather for a final decision. The old man talked to his Amildar son-in-law and finding that he had set his mind in some other direction said to Ramaswamia purely by way of a pretext for breaking off negotiations: "Your father-in-law's household has a strain of insanity. My son-in-law

is unwilling to take a girl connected with that household as his daughter-in-law". A little before this the girl's mother's brother had died after a spell of what had seemed insanity. The Amildar or his father-in-law really used this as a pretext only. Pretext or something more, this definitely broke off the idea of Krishnamurthy marrying the girl and the two households went their way.

In most cases a story like this should end here. The girl should find another husband and the boy another wife. But the story developed differently in this case. The boy's mother was willing to take this girl in marriage and the girl herself was smarter than usual. One day when Krishnamurthy's mother and the women of the Shekdar's household had gone to some other house for some function, Lakshmi sang a song. She had a wonderful voice and her manner of singing was extraordinarily impressive. Krishnamurthy's mother felt as if, after all, she should have the girl as daughter-in-law. But then, her husband had refused the relationship once. How could she talk of it again? Coming away, however, she could not help saying: "You sang beautifully, my child. I do not know what fortunate youth will marry you". The girl, without a moment's hesitation, said in reply: "Then why did you not

take me for Kitchami ? ” She was very young and did not know what she might say and what she might not. Krishnamurthy’s mother was taken aback but having to say a word in reply, asked . “My child, do you wish to marry my son ?” The girl said nothing. Krishnamurthy’s mother went home determined that this girl should marry her son, and some time after this the marriage took place. Krishnamurthy’s father was against it but the innocent girl’s talk to the boy’s mother had settled the question. Some time after this again, the girl’s father was transferred as a Shekdar to the place where the boy’s father was Amildar and the two families came to live together in the same town

I have said that the boy and girl loved each other greatly. Krishnamurthy would go home for each vacation four days before it began and would return to college four days after it had begun work again. When he and I were students in the college at Myelur we lived in the same room in the hostel. I remember that he generally got a letter from his wife once every three days. Wise people among us say that boys ought not to be married when they are studying. From my observation of Krishnamurthy as a married youth I am inclined to say that this view is correct. If

the wife's letter was delayed one day in coming I could notice that this young man would be dull. That day his study was spoilt. If the letters came regularly there was no one more steadily at work than Krishnamurthy. I believe he also wrote as regularly to his wife and that in this way the love between the two grew in a way somewhat unusual. Krishnamurthy was one class lower than I at college, so that when I passed the B. A. and went to Bombay, I left Krishnamurthy behind. He joined me the next year at Bombay but we did not live in the same room as we did in Myelur. He and the law students of his year engaged rooms together in another part of the city and lived there. We lived at some distance from each other and met occasionally. Krishnamurthy at first seemed the same as I had known him at Myelur. Some time later I noticed that there was a change. I learnt that his father-in-law died. I gathered also that between Krishnamurthy's household and the father-in-law's household there was some misunderstanding. It would appear that for some time the father had said that he would not get the daughter-in-law to their house at all. Krishnamurthy was generally a man of few words. Also I did not meet him very often. It was therefore nearly as much as I could

do to learn even this little. Some time after this I finished my examination and came back. A few months later—about this time last month—I heard that Krishnamurthy was seriously ill in Bombay. Not long after I learnt that he died there.

Krishnamurthy was married when he and I were inmates of the same room in the hostel at Myelur. I was present at the marriage and saw the girl. She has grown since then but still I could recollect the face. That was how when I saw her a few days ago I thought I had seen her somewhere before.

October 19

When I learnt twenty days ago that Krishnamurthy died I felt very grieved. I remembered the story of his romantic marriage and was unhappy to think of all the joy which he might have had in life as a result of the romance and which had now become impossible. But since I learnt yesterday that this girl in the house in front of mine is the poor fellow's widow, I am almost unable to bear the thought of his death. I am feeling as if somebody had lit a huge fire within me. My thought since yesterday has been: let alone the young man who is dead, what of this young woman with all her life in front of her? And I am unable to bear the weight of this thought.

. .

This morning I intended to go to Madhavapur and have food in a relative's house and go to the office. When I came out of my house Krishnamurthy's wife was standing near the door of her house. My servant had kept my bicycle leaning against the wall. I had to turn round to see where it was. When, after taking up the bicycle, I chanced to look up again I noticed that the girl was still there, looking intently at me. Thinking of her singing while Krishnamurthy was dead so short a time ago in Bombay, and of the horrible and uneven voice with which she sang and also of the way in which she stood at her door and looked at me, I wondered whether she was perfectly sane. Was it possible that in a body that looked so well the mind had gone astray? I took my bicycle and walked out. The young woman walked briskly in my direction. I noticed what seemed a mark of *kumkum* on her forehead. "What is the matter?" I said to myself and got on to my bicycle and rode quickly off. It could not be that she was wearing the auspicious mark on her face? And then it struck me that there need not be any insanity in her looking at me or moving towards me. She might have wished to say something to me. But then what could there be for her to say to me? Alas! Poor thing! I

had seen her as a young bride seated with her husband on the wedding seat, singing songs of fun and frolic, and playing the innocent games of calf love usual in our marriages. What a face was that of the happy young bride, and what a face this of the young widow, not very long after, saddened by thought of loss, looking on a hapless future, a stranger ever more to all of fun and frolic ! What a difference to come in so short a time ! My child ! My sister ! Why could not God who has scattered so much sorrow over this world spare poor mankind this one sorrow ?

Fullmoon day

All the moments of my life now are filled with the thought of this girl's sorrow. I am unwilling to come to my house because it is so close to hers. Last night I came here very late. This morning I got up and went away to Madhavapur very early. But how long can I do this ? It seems to me that I am a hopeless coward. I cannot relieve sorrow; so I run away from it. But I am unable to give my mind to any work. After coming home late last night, I wrote just the few lines of my diary and felt weary and went to bed. To-day I picked up a book and was unable to read. I have picked up my diary and read what I wrote yesterday. And I am astonished at my

own folly. Why do I consider widowhood something made by God? Society, for some reason, good or bad, has prescribed that a woman losing her husband should not marry again. Nor is it all society that does that. If some societies have such a rule why should God be blamed for it? It lies in the power of society to cure the evil. Since the day when Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar took courage in his hands and began the remarriage of widows in our country, some few of the afflicted, if not a large number, have found relief from this sorrow. As the custom becomes more common the cases of unrelieved sorrow will be fewer. But again I say to myself: "This also is folly". Supposing a widow marries another man, can she feel that the dead husband had returned? Can she forget that she lived with another man? How could this girl, for instance, feel to another man as she felt to Krishnamurthy? You plant on the same day a little peepul tree and a little margosa one on the same platform and water them and bring them up. They grow in companionship, intertwining their branches in love and friendliness, sucking life from the same soil, breathing life from the same air, cleaving together all the moments of their growth and life. If one of them should for some reason die and you plant another in its place

can the old tree and the new one be friends as the old couple were? Would the branches make room for each other in the same way? The new life would not be the same as the growth in mutual understanding that you had in the old couple. Alas for man! Death is not to be remedied in this way and this sorrow of widowhood is in truth eternal.

October 21

Last night I broke off in the middle of what I had intended to write. When I had finished that particular sentence somebody tapped on the door. My fear, the first moment, was that the young woman had come. Her conduct earlier had given me the impression that she was somewhat unconventional in her ways. She had tried to approach me previously. She might now have come to see me. So I hesitated to go out ; after all it was not good either for her or me that we should be seen talking at such an hour. So I called out to the servant to open the door. He should have been asleep and did not answer. . By this time the conviction grew on me that the person who had come was the young woman. Why had she come? Whatever she had come for, it might after all be best for me to see her myself and advise her to go home. Why should

anyone else know of her coming? So I went to the door and opened it. Only a little light from the room fell on the doorway. In it I saw not the young woman but her mother

I had prepared words for talking to the young woman, not her mother. So I stood still. The lady looked all round once, moved into the shadow and said in a low tone, "I want to say a thing to you. May I come in?"

I said: "I am alone in the house, madam. My wife and children have not come".

She said: "It does not do for me to come at any other hour. I wish to say only a word. I shall say it and go."

I replied that she was welcome and walked in. She came in immediately. I gave her a chair, but she would not sit. I could not sit while she was standing; so I also stood at a little distance and waited for her to speak.

"I do not know", she said, "If you remember us. We, however, remember you very well".

I said: "I also remember".

"There is nothing for wonder", she said, "if you should not remember. Between then and now we are greatly changed. It must be hard for friends who knew us then to make us out in

our present condition". Saying this she wept quietly.

"Madam", I said, "I know that you have had sorrow though I do not know the details. I did hear the news about your poor husband".

"What about this news?" she asked.

"I heard this also some days ago".

She said: "Sir, five years ago there was nothing to trouble me. We were happy. My husband toiled and earned our bread. I ate and gave what I could to anyone that came. We had an only daughter and she was married. What did we lack? Two years ago, my husband, returning from some inspection on a rainy day, stood under a tree for shelter. A thunderbolt fell on the tree and he was killed. There were a hundred reasons why I could not go to my father's house, but I said to myself: "This is only for a short time. When my son-in-law passes his examination and settles down my cares will end." So, with my daughter, I went to my father's house. Some time later, however, I set up separately. We came to this house some eight months ago. When my husband was still alive my son-in-law's father retired from service and there was some misunderstanding between us and them about the

remittance of help to our son-in-law. Things went so far that the young man's relatives actually stopped coming to us. When my husband died, not one of them came to condole with me. They left me alone in my sorrow. They went so far as to talk of the young man contracting another marriage. Fortunately he stood out against it and that talk ceased. It caused, however, a breach between the father and the son. About this time our son-in-law also stopped coming to our house. Lakshmi, however, continued to write him letters and he used to write to her. I cannot praise my son-in-law sufficiently, sir, he was such a noble-hearted young man. I am grieved to think that my poor child has not been allowed the joy of living with so good a husband".

The lady began to cry. I felt deeply unhappy but did not know what words of comfort I could say. Helplessly I said: "Madam, what can any one do against that which is fated? We have to suffer the sorrow that is our portion. Weeping only makes it worse".

"As the son-in-law was considerate to the girl I took courage and refused to think of other things. Some time after we took this house the young gentleman visited us after a long interval.

He was going to Bombay soon after. He had always loved his wife deeply. She is like a goddess and how she used to sing! You heard her in those days, didn't you? She sang beautifully in the marriage. Do you remember?"

"Yes, madam I remember. She did sing beautifully".

"Her husband, sir, was proud of her talent. Unfortunately for us, do you know that, as she grew up, the voice underwent a sad change? Something like it had happened to me when I was young. But in a few years I recovered my voice. As they were talking of a second marriage and this girl had lost her voice I really feared that some calamity was in store for us. Of course the son-in-law did not know of the change in her voice. He was not then coming to us. I almost felt it a mercy that something or other prevented him from visiting us. When he visited us prior to leaving for Bombay, none of us was in a mood for any music. But supposing he asked his wife to sing, what should happen? This thought was worrying me. As luck would have it the young gentleman did ask the girl to sing. Probably he wished to seem as like his old self as possible. The girl herself does not seem to know that her voice has gone wrong and she sang that day. The young

gentleman heard her sing a song through. When she began another song he stood up and said that he had some business in the city and went out. That same night he left for Bombay. Until we received a letter from him, I was very nervous about the effect of the change in my daughter's voice. Something in the manner of the young gentleman on that day made the girl also a little anxious. When the first letter came, I asked Lakshmi if he was well and wrote as usual. She said. 'Yes' From that day she began to practise music more than ever. Two or three days later she said 'Mother, teach me all the songs you know. He says that I should improve my voice and learn to sing well, that, otherwise, a good voice will have been wasted'. He should have written this in his letter. The letters continued to come twice a week without fail and Lakshmi recovered her brightness. I also began to feel easy and, sir, this has happened now. I am now wishing that these letters had not come so regularly. As they have not come for one month, Lakshmi says: 'Why has he not written? Is he ill? What has happened?' And daily she is pressing me to take her to Bombay to find out".

I did not get the old lady's meaning. "Does not your daughter know the news?" I said.

"No, sir. When he fell ill he asked a friend to write to me. I saw the letter and thinking that I should upset her by the news kept it to myself. Eight days later, that same friend wrote me another letter saying that the young gentleman was no more. I could not muster courage to tell my daughter. I feared that if I told her she might go and drown herself in a well or might hang herself. Even now that is my feeling and she is on tenterhooks for want of news".

'Madam', I said, "I think your daughter knows. The day before yesterday, when she was standing near your door, I noticed she had no mark of . . ." Not liking the idea of completing the sentence I was silent.

"Sir," said the old lady, "that is her way. She is as obstinate as obstinate can be. She read somewhere, she told me, that the red mark on woman's face is the symbol of the husband's love for her. The husband has written no letter. That means that he does not love you. If he is not loving you where is the meaning of the red mark on the face? That is her argument. When for this reason she would not wear the mark I had not the tongue, knowing what had happened, to ask her to wear it. So I was silent. The next day, I do not know what made her do it, she wore

it herself. She made up her hair and wore flowers. This also I allowed in silence. If we go on like this for some time she will be reconciled to not receiving the letters. Then I shall tell her what has happened”.

“Well, madam, it is not for me to advise. But I doubt, if it is any use keeping the news from your daughter. I am almost sure that it is not good to conceal the truth from her. How long can you guard her from hearing it? When she finally hears it what is it that will stem her sorrow? The longer you delay, the greater will be the shock when she hears. The best thing is to tell her soon and let her grieve as she will”.

“Sir”, said the lady, “I do not like to imagine the way she will look when I give her the news. Let another fifteen days pass and we shall tell her. Really I did not first know in what way to tell her. All the people here have remained strangers to us. Now you have come and I have your guidance. It is God's mercy that you should have come to us in our hour of sorrow. Let your wife and children come too. Lakshmi will visit your household and have some company. If, some days later, we tell her, you are here and your wife will be here, and you two can speak

words of consolation. It is a great thing to have friends near when one hears news of such loss. Supposing we tell her now, you cannot come and console her. I am alone. She might do something desperate without our being able to prevent it. And supposing, sir, something happens to her, what is left for me in life? Whether she is in sorrow or in joy I want her to live. That is all I wish. She is to me both son and daughter. Help me in preserving her. If she should know that her husband is dead, she is certain to do something desperate”.

“Madam”, I said, “why would I go and tell this poor child what has occurred?”

“Thank you, sir”, said the lady. “On the very day that you came she suggested to me that we should come to you. She made you out the moment she saw you. I told her to wait. She has been pressing me ever since and I have been saying that it would not be proper to force ourselves on you immediately after your coming and before your household has come. She said that, if I felt any hesitation in seeing you because you are alone, she would herself meet you. Then I told her that I would meet you myself. It was in her eagerness to speak to you that yesterday she moved towards you when you came out of your

house. By some good fortune you got on your bicycle quickly and rode off. I promised to her that I would see you as soon as you returned in the evening. We waited long for your arrival. But I believe you came very late. This morning also you were away before we expected. I said 'So much the better'. Supposing you had not gone away and I came to you and she insisted on accompanying me. I have dreaded the thought of her seeing you before I had made this request to you. Now also you were late in returning. We took our food and retired. As soon as I saw that she was asleep, I got up and came here. By God's grace I have been able to speak to you alone. Sir, promise me only this. We shall have to tell her some lie for some ten days more: that her husband is busy with his examination or is preparing for it or something like it. Teach me what to tell her and I shall repeat it. Let a fortnight pass. It is possible that she will distrust me and come to you. You will also have to tell the same story. You will thus have saved a poor woman the precious life of her only child".

As the lady was talking to me in this strain I somehow had an uncanny feeling that we were being overheard by some person standing outside. I cannot say what made me feel so. I really

did not know. Only I had that feeling very distinctly. As the lady was alone with me in the room I did not shut the door. So it was ajar. When she stopped talking I said : "We shall say that he is busy with his examination".

Something seemed to drop outside. I raised my head and chanced to look at the window. Against the light that passed through it I saw the beautiful face of the newly widowed girl, the mark of red which guaranteed a husband's love shining bright on it. It was just a glimpse. Beautiful though it looked, the face startled me. I had not expected it there. I walked out to see if the girl was outside. I saw no one. The moonlight was obscured by a mass of clouds and most of the yard was in shadow. A little of the light pouring through a chink in the clouds passed through the leaves of the fragrant maigosa close to my door and made white and dark patches on the ground. Finding no one outside, I went in.

"What did you go out to see ?" asked the lady.

"Nothing," I said "I thought that something dropped outside and wished to see what it was". If, for some feeling or reason, I thought I saw the girl's face at the window why should I tell this poor woman about it ? She had told me

that the girl was in bed. What I saw must have been some hallucination. That was the trend of my thought.

The lady said: "Yes. As you say, we may tell her that the young gentleman is busy with his examination. But, then, is it likely that she does not know when the examination should take place? Many days ago she was saying that the examination was near".

"That is true", I said. "The examination was over several days ago. But it happens at times that for some reason or other an examination is postponed. For example, the college is closed for some unexpected reason for ten days or a fortnight. Then the term is extended by that period and so the examination is delayed. You may tell her this. If she doubts, tell her that you will ask me again. And then you can say that it was postponed. This will give you further time".

"Sir", said the lady, "may you be always happy! How helpful you are in a poor woman's perplexity. This is why they say that each house should have a man to look after it. Supposing you had not come here how helpless I should have been now! When is your wife coming?"

"She may come tomorrow".

"That's very good. If she also is with us I shall be free of all anxiety. I shall bring my daughter here and make them friends. Some fifteen or twenty days later, we shall break the news to her in some quiet way. We shall then be able to control the outburst of her grief and I shall still have something left to live for. If God who has brought you here will keep you here for some time, my poor child will learn to love your wife and children and talk and play with them and get used to her lot. Now, sir, shall I take leave? You know what to say when she sees you?"

Like a person who had lost her way in a wood and had found a path was this poor woman, almost happy in spite of her trouble. As she left the house I said to myself "Poor woman! It may be all right while she is alive and can look after her daughter. She does not consider what is to happen to the child when she has closed her eyes". In thus criticizing the mother, I had raised a sad thought for my own rumination and sat on thinking and wondering how things would develop.

I sat thinking of this for some time and put out the light and went to bed. It was fairly late; yet I did not get sleep immediately. When after some time I had slid into a kind of half-sleep, I began to dream of the occurrences of the night.

At one point I had the feeling that the lady had come again and was talking to me. In the middle of the talk, she seemed inconsequently to call out "sir, sir". I came out of sleep startled, but the voice continued. For the first few seconds I remained under the impression that it was still dream. Then I realised that the lady was really tapping on the door and calling to me. I wondered why she had come again so soon after going home and why she was calling out so loudly. I got up and opened the door. The lady said something. Her voice was trembling and sounded strange. I said : "Madam, what is the matter ?"

The lady said to me "Sir, I am trembling all over. My daughter is not in the house".

A strange thrill of fear ran down my spine. 'She is not in the house ?' I said. "You said she was in bed".

"Yes. When I came out to speak to you she was in bed. When I finished talking here and went home and lay down I assumed that she was in her bed. I did not get sleep for some time and then felt somehow that I did not hear her breathing. So I put my hand out and felt the bed. There was only the rug there. I got up and lit the lamp and looked at the bed. She was not there. I called out and there was no

answer. I thought that possibly she had gone out to the backyard, and went out with the lamp and saw all over the place. She is not there. I am unable to breathe or move. Alas for me, what has happened to my dear child?" The poor lady sat in front of the door crying and wailing.

While the lady was telling me this, my neighbour had walked up to me and was standing by me and listening to her. At the end of it he said: "Why, madam? Why are you so afraid? Go and see again".

"Sir, I have finished seeing. You may go and see".

My neighbour took a lantern from my house and went to the draw-well in the yard in front of our houses. I understood what he had in mind and followed him. She also knew what we were thinking of and, crying and wailing in that tremulous voice of hers, came behind us.

The Sastry held the lantern within the well as deep down as he could. It could not light the lower levels. I went and brought a rope. We tied the lantern to it and lowered the light to the level of the water. The waters were asleep. There was nothing there.

I heaved a sigh of relief. My neighbour whispered to me: "If all the wells near about

should be like this, it will be time to feel relieved. If your servant is here please call him up. Let us go and see”.

Shivering and wailing, the old lady said to us: “Brothers, pray do not whisper to each other. Let me hear what you say. Let us go wherever it is necessary and search”.

The Sastry went to the front of the lady's house and cried out aloud. “Lakshamma” half a dozen times.

There was no answer.

Roused by the voice of my neighbour people from other houses came out. We then took my servant and another servant from a neighbour's house, and started out with ropes and bamboos, some six persons towards the pond in the grove and another six towards the pond beside the temple.

By this time there was no doubt in my mind about what had happened to the widowed girl. It was clear enough that what I thought was hallucination was simple fact. The face that I saw through the window was the girl's. She could not have been asleep when her mother started to come to me and should have followed her. By the curious insight which is natural to

real love she should have been aware that evil had happened and that her mother was concealing it, and stood outside, wishing to hear what the mother might say to me. At one point in the colloquy she should have peeped into the room and I should have looked up by chance and noticed her. If I had made a complete search when I came out, it is possible I should have found her. I did not do this. Seeing nothing, whether because of the light and shade or because the poor girl stood behind the fragrant margosa, I had gone in. I ought to have searched more. As this conviction came upon me on our way to the wells, I ached with sorrow to think that I had failed at a vital moment. Why did I not make a full search? What folly was this of thinking that a face seen when one was fully awake might be a hallucination? Even if I had not the sense for this, could I not have told the old lady when I went in again that I had thought that I saw the young woman's face but it was an error. If I had, the old lady would no doubt have gone to her house immediately and seen if the daughter was there. By over-subtle wisdom I had achieved the death of this poor girl. A man less sage would have acted less foolishly. What I am now recording occurred only yesterday. But

I am feeling as though it was so long ago. I now do not remember with any clearness our walk to the pond. Every inch of that ground is familiar to me as I have seen it day after day but I passed over the whole of it, unaware of the world of space.

In the pond the water seemed still as in sleep, or if there was any movement it was the imperceptible little wavelet playing on the surface ever so gently. The moon was moving to the horizon but still fairly high. Two of the men put bamboos into the water and began to play them. Disturbed by the arrival of people, an owl started from a tree near by and flew away to some distance. The usual chirruping of crickets occupied the air.

The playing of the bamboos caused a commotion in the waters and the moon's reflection which had been one was now in a hundred pieces. After some time one of the servants said : "Sir, it is unnecessary to look here any longer".

The Sastry said : "You go to the other well, sir. I shall search here a little more and come along".

I started for the other well. The old lady came with me saying : "Sir, why not go and search in the garden wells ?"

I said nothing. To enable her to keep up with me I walked slow. In a few minutes we reached the other well.

The search had been fruitless here also. One of the men said: "There is a crevice between the stones here. The bamboo does not move easily in it. If it dawns, I shall be able to dive and see".

The mother cried out: "Oh, sis, if you wait till the morning she will not be alive. Please see now alone".

The man looked at me as if to say that the girl could not be alive even that movement if she had dropped into the water when she had left the house. I saw his meaning and said: "Try with the bamboo again". Some one said: "Shall we go to the gardens?" Another replied: "There is no need".

No one would use the word 'she' or 'her' and say 'could she have gone to one of the garden wells' or 'she could not have gone there'. No one liked to make a mention of her.

Some little time later some one said: "We might as well see the little pond in the flower garden of the temple".

Some one replied: "What is the water there? It is a shallow pond".

By this time it was past four o'clock. The moon was much nearer the horizon. The approach of day had made him dull and the chirrup of the crickets had stopped.

As we had found nothing in both the large wells, it struck me that there was something in the suggestion that we might see the pond in the flower garden beside the temple. Going towards it we moved back in the direction of the other well. As I was walking that way with the old lady the Sastry met us. "Well, sir", he asked

"It was no use", I said. "So we are going to the pond in the flower garden".

"What a pity we did not think of it earlier", said the Sastry "A few of us could have gone there then alone".

I also felt that it was a pity. Why could not two of us have gone to this pond as others to the wells? It struck me that in this search for the poor widowed girl something more strong than we had been leading our steps to the wrong place every time. We walked fast and reached the garden. The wind was blowing past a *pauijat* tree and carrying its cool and sweet scent. Some flowers had dropped on the ground. The jasmine creepers were full of leaves but had no flower. The chrysanthemum plots had one or two flowers

here and there. The basil in its plot was luxuriant in leaves. In the farther corner was the pond. I and the Sastiy went to it and stood on the brink. The lady also came up and stood beside us.

I did not see it. The lady saw. Crying out "Oh, my child", she rushed into the water. The Sastiy caught hold of her, pushed her back and said: "One is enough, madam, please stand there"

I looked closely. The face could be seen, most of it, above the surface of the water: that fair brow, that damp hair and the sail bulging over the water and possibly helping to float the body. The girl had given up her life in this spot.

Prevented from approaching the body the old mother cried out "Oh, my child, have you abandoned me and gone," and fell on the ground in a heap.

The mother's cry woke up the birds in the groves earlier than their hour. They cried out from their trees. The mist of early morning now appeared. The Sastiy said: "Please look after the lady, sir," and walked into the water and brought the body out.

The mother was not aware of what was happening.

Her cry had been heard by our companions near both the wells. All of them now ran up to our pond.

We did all we could, but life did not return. Much before we saw her, the poor thing had finished living.

We gave up all hope and thought of what further had to be done. The moon went down and the mist deepened. I allotted tasks to various persons and started for the house to get a priest and make other arrangements.

The town was getting awake and the hum of its daily life grew and began to be heard like the sound of a distant sea. Some people going to the wells as usual met me on the way.

As I approached the house I saw the sun coming up, scattering the mist and looking as if it was the moon who had gone down the other horizon coming up thus one in brighter glory. Like tear-drops or small pearls, the dew of morning could be seen on the tips of the grass. Bright and soft and pure, weak but firm and self-possessed, each of these drops, awaiting to give itself up as soon as it saw the light, seemed to my eyes like a symbol of the spirit of the girl-widow.

My wife and children had arrived at the house. My wife's name is also Lakshmi. Hearing this

story my wife desired that the old lady should be brought to our house and asked to stay with us. The poor woman has grown twenty years older between last evening and this evening. When she came home and my wife took her by the hand, she said : "Little mother, you are my sole refuge. May you and your husband and your children be all happy. I have no one else now, my mother. You are my Lakshmi".

THE JUDGMENT HERE

1

My grandfather was Mr. Courtenay's Judicial Clerk, or Jodi-Shawl Sheristedar, as we call that official, substituting words we know for unfamiliar ones. Quite recently, while rummaging among old *daftars* in my house to sort out useless papers for destruction, I happened upon a file of documents relating to my grandfather's days, and found among them parts of a diary kept by Mr. Courtenay. I had seen Mr. Courtenay and have recollections of a gift or two of sweetmeats from him. He was a good and kindly man. I opened the diary which I found at random and glanced over a few pages. What I saw interested me and I read the whole of a section of it forthwith. It was short and I could finish at a sitting. I give it here in the hope that it may interest you.

2

I gave a decision in a case today. The complainant in it was Mr. Arthur Henry, a missionary; the accused were Thimmaboyee and Ramaboyee, Vaddas. I am inclined to say that Mr. Arthur Henry should also have been accused; but I could give punishment only to Thimma and Rama boyees, not to Mr. Henry. Mr. Henry's

sense of right and wrong will now or later give rise to some repentance in his heart and that will be the punishment for him. He has also lost some articles of value from his church: that is what one might call a fine for his offence. I do not know if the God who watches our actions, right and wrong, may not, as Mr. Henry himself preaches, award him some punishment later still. Today at any rate the only persons charged for offence and awarded punishment were Thimma-booyee and Ramaboyee, the Vaddas.

These two men are residents of Rampur in the Bumigi taluk of Chandrapur division. Rampur is a small village of some fifty or sixty houses. Some thirty of the families are of the Vokkaliga community, the large land-owning class of this part of the country. The others too have small plots of land and raise vegetables. Some few of the families are of the Vadda community. Though small the village is fairly well-to-do; and being on the main road it has a busy look. There is a temple of Rama on a hillock at a little distance from the village which enjoys some prestige as a centre of pilgrimage. The village is therefore prosperous beyond its size. The life of the Vadda people is more or less of the same sort as that of the other communities. They own some little

land or cultivate lands belonging to others. They are however considered as settlers come from elsewhere and 'are treated and treat themselves as such. As a rule, however, and except when they are drunk they are well-behaved enough, and to people who do not interfere with them they are good enough neighbours. They would do the right if it is not very inconvenient. If the rains should be fair and the crops reasonable they will not steal. Even if they saw some corn lying somewhere and no one was watching they would not take it. Altogether, when not inconvenient, something they call religion holds their allegiance and keeps them fairly straight.

In religion as these Vadda people understand it, devotion to the image of Rama in the temple I have referred to is a great part. These Vaddas would not hesitate to break any promise made to you or me, but a thing they promise to the God of that temple they would not fail to give under any conditions. They may at a pinch cheat us of ten rupees but never their God of ten pies. Not only are they faithful to promise as between their God and themselves; they keep faith similarly as between themselves. They may cheat members of another community, give them trouble, and break promise, but no Vadda will do this to

another Vadda. I have often wondered whether their being so honest with their God is due to a belief that God is a Vadda: the more particularly because even our minds run that way. Take our countrymen for example. They are decent enough people to fellow Englishmen, but to an Indian some of them can be cruel in the extreme, and even as the Boyees to their temple we are honest to our churches. Whether this attitude is right or wrong, the fact is there. On the whole these Vaddas hold their religion and ethic with a naive faith and devotion and, when not pressed by unfortunate circumstance, act fairly reasonably in society and are useful and decent citizens.

We are likely to think that this religion and this ethic are based on no sound philosophy and cannot uplift mankind. We are sophisticated and only complex things appeal to us. Simple and naive faith like the faith of these Vaddas does not win our hearts. This is the essence of civilization. I have been unable at times to make up my mind whether this is good or the contrary. Simple people rejoice in the single note of the cuckoos' call; they do not seem to mind its being only one note. For our hearts to feel any joy the symphonies of Beethoven are inadequate. We are cultured, we are civilised. We examine Ramaboyee

and his outlook and feel that the fellow has not got religion which can uplift him and wish to make him like ourselves. This is the point of view of Mr. Arthur Henry. He has come to India from England with the specific object of saving her people from their present darkness and giving them his light. It must be allowed that he has done some good to the people but occasionally he has gone the wrong way about doing the good. Whether on this account or because it is necessary that trouble should come to the good, he incurred some loss, and, incidentally and I may say as a consequence of his teaching, Rama and Thimma stood before me as criminals.

The temple of Rama, I have said, is on a hillock at some distance from the village. I have seen it often. The surroundings of Rampur are very beautiful. The country is to the south-west of Bumigi. The road which passes through Bumigi and beside this village is a good one. The effort of our officers and the belief of the people of this country that it brings merit to raise shade trees by pathways have made it possible to have a noble avenue on this road as on others. Just before reaching Rampur, the road passes on the bund of the tank belonging to the village. In front of the village are great trees, noble as those

in the avenues. You find among them the banyan the jambolan and the peepul. Standing in groups they have an appearance of dignity that it would be difficult to describe. To stand of a morning and look at the trees is to lose your heart to them. The wide-spreading banyans standing so reposeful and serene, those upstanding peepul trees with the leaves shivering to the gentlest touch of the slow-moving breeze ; how grand they look, bathed alike in the bright light of the early sun. You go into the village and find the houses built in no regular way. There are no long lines of houses facing one another. That kind of thing might be all right in a town ; it would make the village expose its smallness. The people of each house have cleaned up the space in front and before most of the houses you find the ground decorated with drawings of creepers in flour. Depending upon the hour you go out, you may see the women drawing these creepers in front of their houses, or the men going out with their sickles or ploughs, or the cattle of the village moving out to their grazing. You leave the village and go on to see long stretches of fields dotted with spots of green. Some half mile away is the river ; it runs on three sides of the village almost. From behind the village you can see the course it takes. In the

bend of the stream some half mile from the village is the little hillock with the temple, looking as though it had strayed in from somewhere. The temple has given the hillock its name. To go from the village to the hillock you follow a cart track or walk across the fields.

I have gone to this hillock often, on horse-back. Sometimes I have tied my horse to some tree at the foot and gone up and spent quite an hour or two unaware of time passing. What a beautiful prospect one sees from the top of this little eminence! Here and here and there and further on are little hillocks; between them, emerald patches of field and garden; at the foot and on the top of the hills, shady groves, and great tall trees at intervals all over the country. You see on all this area people engaged in their various tasks, with a peace on their foreheads deep even as the peace of their mother this earth. Cattle on the free land near each village graze unhurriedly on good pasturage. The river also moves unhurried, looking almost like a live thing which goes round to make enquiries of the villages and the people and the cattle. The birds in the groves share in this peace and happiness. The light of the sun covers all this variety of being and gives it a character. One who sees all this

from the top of the hill, and realises that the hill itself is merged in this spacious beauty and that he himself is a speck on the hill merged in the ocean of peace in which all this is floating, experiences a joy which words cannot describe. Standing on this hill and feeling this joy I have on many an occasion said to myself: "These people are very wise. They know what it is in man's heart that makes religion a necessity; and have found places that would satisfy that need and built temples there. The power of this people to experience beauty has no parallel". At other times I have said: "Having come to this hill, could they not look around for a vision of God! What folly to put up a crude structure here, place an image in it, fix the eyes on that, and say God, God. These people do not know where to look for God. Do they need an image even in such a place?" After an hour or two spent in this fashion at the top I have reluctantly returned to my camp. The river, approaching the hill from one side and running on practically three sides of it and moving slowly away on the other side, has on such occasions seemed to me to go all round to see if it could climb the hill which it loves at any point and move away seeing that the privilege of going up did not belong to it. "However

good the place", it has seemed to say, "this is not where I should be. The fulfilment of my being lies elsewhere".

It is the Rama of the temple on this hill that the Boyees believe in with their great faith. For some reason that is not known the temple is treated as specially theirs and managed by them nearly all the year round and given up for worship by Brahmin priests for one fortnight in the year when the annual *jatra* takes place. I do not believe that we attribute to the godhead the peculiar powers that these Vadda people do to their God in this temple. This God of theirs is on the whole a good God, but if He wishes to do harm He can be very troublesome. To people who walk in the right he is kind beyond their deserts; to those who do wrong He does not hesitate to mete out punishment. Such people may obtain forgiveness if they pay a fine. Any person in sickness or trouble may go and take a vow before the God and place before Him or offer to give later something in indication of submission. The sickness or trouble would surely pass away. Some men of the community may do something against the interests of the community ever so secretly. If they are brought and made to stand before this God their tongue is forced to confess the

truth. Thus the Rama of this temple has to these people become a kind of powerful chief of the clan. A human chief may waver or slacken but this divine one is incapable of swerving a hair's breadth from His law. This is the kind of belief that the Vaddas have in the God of this temple. This belief has generally kept them straight, and they have ordinarily no need to go to courts and offices for settling their disputes. They have certainly never gone to a court as accused persons as these two men did today, the complainant being a person who has come a long distance to lead them to right and truth.

Mr. Henry made the following statement. He has worked as a missionary here for several years now. He has known Ramaboyee and Thimmaboyee for a long time. When Mr. Henry visited Rampur occasionally, and particularly in the annual fair in connection with the temple, to preach Christ, these two young men used to be among the crowd. On the first few occasions they interfered with his preaching, saying boisterously that their Rama was the greater God. The other Vaddas and some other liberal people advised the young men not to interfere. Let the teacher talk of his God, they had said: one need not listen if he did not like, but one should not object to

his praising his God as they praised theirs. On this the young men had quieted down. After hearing Mr. Henry preach for some time, they had stopped going to the temple and said that they had no belief in Rama. This had made Mr. Henry very happy. He thought that it should soon be possible to convert them to his religion. But suddenly everything went wrong. These two young men came to Mr. Henry in Bumigi one day, heard his preaching and said in the evening that they were returning to their village. In fact, however, they did not do this, but wandered about there for some time and in the night entered Mr. Henry's church and stole some silver things belonging to the church and some other silver articles belonging to Mr. Henry and kept in the church. The next morning the preacher discovered his loss and gave a complaint to the police. Search led the police to the houses of Ramaboyee and Thimmaboyee. Several of the things stolen were found in these two houses. They had arrested the young men and filed a charge sheet. Mr. Henry was not very anxious to prosecute the young men, but once he had given a complaint to the police, the matter was in their hands and he had no option. Besides, Ramaboyee and Thimmaboyee showed no repentance for what they had done; they were talking

like confirmed villains. That change of heart which Mr. Henry was expecting in these people seemed far away. Mr. Henry, therefore, thought that it might do them good to receive some punishment for their offence. That might teach them a lesson. It was in this hope that Mr. Henry was at all making this statement before the court

As Mr. Henry was giving his statement I was looking at the young boyees. The two of them stood like two carved images. You might say this of all the people of the East. Whether it is ignorance or courage I cannot say, for perfect ignorance and perfect courage are equally unmoved in the face of danger. Looking at them, I thought of the great Socrates walking with even steps into the hall of death. I ought not to say it, but it really brought to my mind the picture of that greater and more perfect person, Jesus the son of God, facing the Roman Consul in dignity and strength. Looking at the young men so unmoved I was moved to deep pity. I wondered why these two calm persons who had felt the need for changing their religion had resolved to steal anything. When Mr. Henry had finished his statement I asked him: "Did these men say that they would embrace Christianity?"

"No."

"Why did you think that they would do so?"

"It was these two who first lost faith in their God of the hill. They had the firmest belief before, but listening to me they got free of it the earliest. This was clear in everything they said and did. The others who ceased to believe continued to visit the temple. These men on ceasing to believe, ceased also to visit the temple."

"I see," said I, and turning to Ramaboyee and Thimmaboyee, asked them: "Well, Rama and Thimma, will you not engage counsel to defend you?"

Ramaboyee said: "No, sir; why that now? We have committed the offence. We need no counsel."

"You need not admit anything now," said I, warning him. "If you like, you may question the statement given by this gentleman and show that it is not correct."

"Sir," said Ramaboyee, "the teacher does not speak untruth. Nor do we wish to escape after having committed the offence. What is the use? And you know, sir, it would be wrong."

"Talk of yourself," I said; "do not implicate your friend in your confession."

Thimmaboyee said: "I say the same, sir. I say nothing else. We did it together."

I said: "Then wait a little. I shall write down something here and then record your statement." I then wrote the charge and read it to them and asked them if they pleaded guilty. Each of them pleaded guilty. I recorded the plea and said: "Ramaboyee, you two wished to become Christians. Why did you commit this theft?"

Ramaboyee said: "We had no intention to give up our caste, sir."

"It seems you gave up your God."

Ramaboyee said: "So we did, sir. This teacher said: 'Look at your God. If you do not light a lamp he stays in the dark. If you do not clean his room he sits in dirt. He has not the power to clean or light his small chamber.' We wished to see if this was true. Our leaders remonstrated. We persisted and locked up the temple door by force. Ten days we kept the doors locked up and went in and saw. It was exactly as the teacher had said. Some mud had dropped on the image. God had not pushed it off. We gave up the temple of our people and one day stole the vessels from it. Nothing

happened to us. Then we saw that there was no power in the God of that temple."

"If there was no power in the God of that temple why should you have committed theft in this temple?"

"In this temple, sir, there is no God at all. If there is nothing to fear in that temple where there is a God, what is there to fear in this temple where there is none? So I and Thimmaboyee got into this temple that Sunday night and stole the articles."

"And you see that God has brought you to trouble."

"Oh, no, sir. The teacher gave a complaint. What could God do? There is no truth either in that God or in this one. The teacher looks after the belongings of this temple. The head of our clan looks after the belongings of the other temple. When we have suffered the punishment you will give us for this offence, we shall have to pay a fine to the clan for the offence done to that temple. The head of our clan has decided this."

I turned to Mr. Henry. "I suppose you used that argument to weaken the faith of these people in their God Rama."

"Yes" said Mr. Henry. "I wished to say to them that the image was not God. Some of these younger people shut up the temple to test the truth of what I was saying. But I did not know of their having stolen any vessels from that temple. Nor did it occur to me that they would argue further in the way they have explained and commit this crime in our church."

I asked Ramaboyee and Thimmaboyee if they would pay a small fine and go away

"No, sir," they said "We are poor people. We shall have to pay a fine to our God later. Even that will be difficult. We do not wish to pay any more".

"Then I have to give you a sentence of imprisonment. In view of your ignorance I shall make it simple".

"Sir" said Thimmaboyee, "we cannot sit idle in a place. Pray, make the imprisonment rigorous. We shall be able to spend the time".

After much thought and with much regret, I gave to each man rigorous imprisonment for fifteen days.

After pronouncing the sentence I turned to Mr. Henry and asked "Mr. Henry, why did you go and show these people where the silverware

was in the church ? ” Mr. Henry said : “ I took them to the church one day and, just to interest them, showed them the beautiful work on our silver things. They seemed very pleased to see it and so, whenever they came, I exhibited the articles just to give them some pleasure. Let them come to the church for any reason, I thought, and hear the word of God. I see that the whole thing went wrong ”.

Obviously, the whole thing had gone wrong. I, of course, awarded punishment to the Boyces. I could do nothing else. But quite clearly half at least of the responsibility for the theft belongs to Mr. Henry

I must admit that my mind has lost its peace today, thinking of life's mischances. One man walks in twilight and has inevitably strayed. Another man comes along and offers to give him some light and, without intending it, pushes him into a pit. A third man comes up and beats the fallen man with a rod for the offence of having dropped into the pit. How foolish all this seems !

And foolish without a doubt all of it is. But there is One who knows all, greater than all. In His hand is the final and eternal arbitrament. We can but administer the justice here.

WAS IT INDIRA ?

Narayanamurthy had lost all joy in life. Without the house he had no rest ; within the house, no peace. His mind was full of aches and pains, specially these few days. That particular day he had returned from office rather late, and after eating a little of what was served as a meal he had gone and sat in his room. His wife was still attending to household work. "Poor thing", he thought to himself: "she has to do all the work herself. She has no one to help. What is the pleasure that even she has in life?" From that his thought flowed further: "What about Indira ? She too had had all the work of the house. But she used to be smiling all the time. Of course she did not have to look after so many children. Children ! Oh, these children ! Those who have none pray to God for them. He had children but was not happy. Alas, that boy whom he had taken to the isolation shed three days ago, was he not his child like these other children who were lying in their bed in the room ? Yet Savitri had not thought that life as valuable as these lives. Would Indira have done so ? Who could tell ?"

His thought running in this way, Narayana-murthy dozed as he sat in his chair. A weary mind

and a tired body both needed rest. As he sat there in a slumber Indira came to him.

I should tell you what Indira was like for you really to understand all that her coming meant. Indira was a very handsome young woman. The face was somewhat longish and of a complexion very like the olive-tinted white of the cream of milk. The beauty of the forehead seemed to pour between those eye-brows, to fill the eyes and flow all round the black bee-like pupil. How bright the white of those eyes was and how it was emphasised by the lustrous pupils ! Those eyelids, shutting and opening, looked as if they were playing with a bee caught in a flower. The nose was longish and shapely and was exceedingly beautiful. Exceedingly beautiful too was that mouth, a little rose bud just a little open. Shapely again were the cheek and chin. The teeth looked like grains of white rice placed side by side. The cheek was of a deep gold tint because of the saffron. On the forehead, a little above the eye-brows, was a small mark of red. It seemed to speak and challenge the loving one to come and kiss just there. Altogether it was a feast to the eyes to see Indira's face. She was not tall, was indeed of rather less than normal height, but she had a body proportionate to her height and struck whoever saw her as exceedingly handsome.

Indira walked up smiling. Whoever saw her smile should have felt infinitely happy. That manner of her coming and that smile were sure to cure Narayanamurthy of any vexation or anger. He in fact felt his aches and restlessness going as Indira came. But he was somehow not inclined to respond to her. So, though she came near, he sat still.

Indira moved nearer, and noticing his silence and seeming indifference, said: "What is this? Are you asleep so soon?" With this she took his face between her hands and looked into his eyes with her winsome smile. As Narayanamurthy did not relent, she said "You will not speak, won't you? Well then, this is the remedy for silence." With this she sat on his lap and put an arm round his neck.

Love is a great transmuter. To change copper into gold is not so great a matter as changing vexation into friendliness. Yet love like Indira's can effect this change. When like a star from the heavens she dropped into Narayanamurthy's lap, his mind, in his own despite, felt a peace like the peace of the moonlit night. His vexation disappeared; his aches and pains disappeared. Feeling a deep peace Narayanamurthy put his arms round Indira and said: "Indira".

"Look now. You did not answer when I spoke to you. Now that you speak, I shall not answer. Say Indira, Indira, twenty times and see if I shall open my mouth."

"Indira."

"Did I not tell you that I shall not open my mouth?"

"Do you not open your mouth and yet utter so many words?"

"I said that merely to make you call me Indira twenty times."

"What pleasure does it give you to hear me call your name?"

"I do not know. But the oftener you call me the more happy I feel."

"Really?"

"Really and truly. What is the difference between real and unreal in this?"

"Then we shall say that it is unreal."

Indira placed her head on Narayanamurthy's shoulder. He felt her breath playing on his cheek. He turned his head, held her face in his hands and looked at her eyes. How beautiful was the face! How pretty the mouth! And in those eyes, what depth of affection, what unparalleled

friendliness ! He sat back again and put his arms round her.

"Can you say why it gives you so much pleasure when I call your name?"

"No."

"Oh, but you should be able to tell why a thing is pleasant."

"That is metaphysics. If you teach me I shall tell."

"To tell that which you have been taught, you need not be such a clever person."

"So I am clever ? Then I shall tell you why. You feel some pleasure when I play on the *veena*?"

"Your playing on the *veena* ? It is long since I heard. Yes, it gives pleasure."

"Why does it do that ?"

"Because a sweet sound proceeds from the *veena*."

"To what is that due ?"

"You."

"When you say 'Indira', I feel as if you touched a string within my heart and it emits a sweet sound that my ears alone can hear. It is that that gives me joy."

Narayanamurthy sat in silence. Indira too remained silent. To lovers, proximity gives joy as much in silence as in speech.

Some minutes later Narayanamurthy said :
"Indira."

"Yes."

"How you love me, my dear !"

Narayanamurthy wanted to hear his wife telling him that she loved him greatly. What husband does not ?

"I do not love you."

"No? Why ?"

Narayanamurthy felt crest-fallen. His wife had not given the reply he expected.

"No. I do not *love* you. I am mad about you." Indira gave a little laugh and put her cheek against Narayanamurthy's.

Narayanamurthy felt a surge of warmth in his being. How full this little body of his wife's was of love for him ! What dear little ways she had of showing that love ! He felt that Indira would willingly give up her life for him. Men say that there is great power and variety of meaning in sacred symbols like 'Om' and the rest. To Narayanamurthy it seemed as if all the

meaning of love was symbolised in the three syllables of the name Indira - endless affection ; endless devotion ; endless pity ; glamour and playfulness without end. He felt as if the blood in his body began to move in rhythm to the sounds of Indira's name.

Narayanamurthy passed many minutes in this way, his beloved Indira's head resting on his shoulder and her liquid eyes looking at him. He held her close and, with his head a little bent down, looked on her face unmoving. How long he sat in this way he could not have told. As he sat thus he experienced a deep peace of mind. Such peace is known only to a heart which nothing is agitating. Not often does a man experience it, but when it is experienced one realises that there is no joy to equal it. Drinking in this peace of soul, Narayanamurthy sat still.

Soon, however, a thought came up to disturb the calm. At first it was indistinct, but speedily it shaped itself into a question. It is not one of the first impulses of man's nature to doubt the reality of any joy that life brings. But it is a second impulse, and that impulse grew in Narayanamurthy. Indira was with him now and he was happy. What was it that had happened previously ? Previously ? What was it previously ?

Narayanamurthy was unable to recollect exactly what it was. Though he could not recollect exactly he had a vague feeling that it was something distressing. "Indira is here now," his mind said, "where was she before ?" It seemed to him for a fraction of a moment that he knew what had happened. But forgetfulness supervened too quickly for him to wade to a clear impression. As he was struggling with his memory in this way, he seemed to get on to some of the facts. Oh, God ! That son in the isolation shed ; those other children in the house, the mother of those children ; the mother of that boy. Again the veil was drawn across. Failing to get the facts from memory Narayanamurthy turned to Indira and said . "Indira."

"Yes."

"When did you come?"

"Now."

"When you came into this room ?" !

"Yes."

"Where did you come from ?"

"Why that ?"

"Where had you gone ?"

"Where had I gone ?" ?

"What is the matter with me ? I feel it is very long since I saw you."

"Yes ?"

"Wait. Oh yes, I have got it all back. Yes, I have." With this Narayanamurthy trembled, touched Indira with his hand and asked : "Indira, are you really here ?"

"This is fine. I am here without being really here ?"

"Well then, shall I tell you what is coming to my mind ?"

"Yes."

"We married and set up house and my father and mother were with us."

"Yes."

"Then my mother died ; then my father. In his last moments he asked you to sit near him."

"Yes."

"He was very fond of our son and said : 'My son, look after the little boy well. My daughter, look after the little fellow well. Be kind to him always on my account'."

"Yes."

"We two looked after the little fellow very well. I at least used occasionally to say a hard

'word to him and on just one day I beat him. But I never heard you say a single harsh word, let alone beating him."

"Harsh word to him? You did it for his good."

"That is not what I was thinking of. I was thinking of the great affection which we lavished on the boy. 'One day you lay down in fever."

"Yes."

"I did all I could to cure you of the fever. But you went on being ill and one day,—was it dream or fact?—one day..."

"Yes."

Narayanamurthy held Indira hard and said :
"One day you you left."

"Left?"

"There was no one to look after the boy. I was very unhappy. I wept for many days, Indira. I wailed and groaned."

"Alas!"

"I groaned and moaned and was like one brainless."

Narayanamurthy was silent for a moment. He had again become dense like one brainless. He was aware that Indira was sitting near him and he was talking to her. But she had gone somewhere that day long ago. She had gone.

Where had she gone? She had gone somewhere that day. This sentence seemed to go round in his mind. She had gone ; she had gone Underneath was the question . "Where had she gone?" but the answer was not coming up.

In the state of half-sleep in which Narayana-murthy was at that moment, man's mind works in, as it were, a number of layers. Some of the layers are awake and some asleep, and even in any one layer parts are awake and parts still asleep. The things that occur to us in our lives go into the mind like pebbles thrown into a pond into the mud and sink deeper and deeper as the days pass, each to settle down at some place in the layer it has reached. When we are in this kind of half slumber and some layers or parts of layers are awake and some asleep, the mind becomes aware of the things that are settled in the wakeful parts, and is not aware of the things in the layers or parts of the layers which are in sleep. Just this had happened to Narayanamurthy at this moment. That Indira was gone was in a part of the mind that was awake. Where she had gone was in the twilight. He was trying to recollect, but from languor or other reasons the effort was not successful. He was, however, sure that the thing was something distressing.

"Then one day there was no one in the house and the boy had nothing to eat. When I came back from office he was sitting down crying. I was very unhappy to see that he had been hungry and could not get food."

"Yes."

"If there were somebody in the house the boy would have been given food. Who was to care for him ? So I thought but could not make up my mind. One day uncle came and said that there was a suitable girl and asked me to marry her."

Indira did not answer.

"I did not wish to marry the girl. I did not know why. Uncle pressed me. He said that the girl was very handsome. He brought her and showed her to me. It was Savitri. She was handsome, but I did not wish to marry her."

Indira was silent.

"But I grew weary, Indira. I grew tired of being alone. You had gone and I was lonely and weary of being alone. When another day uncle came and told me that he was thinking not of me but of the boy, and of somebody who could take care of him, and pressed me to marry the girl..."

"Yes."

"I agreed..."

"Yes."

"And married her. Savitri came. For some time she seemed a second you, but this changed later. When she got a child of her own she began to look at the boy with a dislike. I blamed her. She grew angry. From that day peace left the house."

Indira did not answer. Narayanamurthy had the feeling that she was crying.

"Though her children and the boy were the same in my eyes, they seemed to her to be opponents. I was not in a position to attend to the boy. It was her part to give him his food or give him a bath. What could I do? I saw her neglecting him but was unable to help."

Indira was listening silently.

"The day before yesterday the boy returned from play and lay down in fever. I sent for the doctor. He came and said it was plague. If he stayed at home everyone in the house would be in danger of infection. But if I took him to the shed he would be neglected. Whom should I think of? Of the boy or of these children? As I was turning this over in my mind, Savitri insisted that I should take the boy to the isolation shed."

"Yes."

" I took him to the shed and left him there. Uncle came to the shed and is attending on the boy. I wished to stay there but Savitri does not agree. She says that, rather than that I should, she will go there and watch near him. She says that I should not run any risk. Savitri's heart is very hard, Indira. It is exceedingly hard."

Indira seemed not even to breathe.

" This evening I went and saw the boy. He was restless because of the fever. I could not bear to look on him. Partly for that reason and partly because here in this house, at the end of the town, Savitri and the children are alone, I came away early. Besides, the boy was calling out : 'Mother'. Where is 'mother' ? Alas, how restless, he was !"

" Do not worry. He is now well."

" You are saying so to comfort me. He was so restless in the evening. How can he be well now ? No matter, you at least have come. This is to the good. You can look after him now."

" Yes "

" And I have no worry. I am seeing you."

With this Narayanamurthy again held Indira close and caressed her. After a moment he asked : "Is the boy well ?" ,

"Yes."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes. Would you?"

"Yes."

"See."

Indira pointed towards the door. Narayanamurthy turned that way and saw Gopal standing just beyond the door. The boy seemed to be free from fever. Narayanamurthy did not reason or question. He felt happy and wondered that the boy should look so well.

With the shock of joy that Gopal was well Narayanamurthy turned to look at Indira. Indira's form had faded. With rising dread within his heart Narayanamurthy called out 'Indira' and tried to hold her. Like a youngster who is on a hill-top for once and, seeing a piece of the mountain mist pass in front of him, puts his hand out to it with intent to hold it in his palm, Narayanamurthy was unable to hold Indira. Crying out 'Indira' he came out of his slumber.

Indira had been dead ten years.

Narayanamurthy had lost that wife ten years previously and had suffered the sorrow of widowhood for days that had no end. Today

that wife had come back to him in dream, repeating the words which she had spoken to him on various occasions in their life together. She had come again, in dream, and again had disappeared, and this loss of her from a dream brought back to Narayanamurthy the sorrow of the first loss in all its strength. Grief surged in his heart like the rising tide of the sea ; flowing over, not to be held in. Narayanamurthy looked out of the window. How calm the night was ! The light of the full moon filled the sky, and the moon, in the midst of his stars, rode the clear firmament, smiling in the height of joy. That joy of his seemed to flow all round the earth and make it float. Oh, what joy it was ; what peace ; what calm !

Narayanamurthy did not then know that the boy Gopal had, in that calm night of the bright full moon, stretched his soul to the endless peace to which his mother had gone ten years before.

MASUMATTI

1

This is another part of Mr. Courtenay's diary

2

There is a beautiful story current among the Hindu people. After slaying Ravana, Sri Rama, it is said, meant to go to Lanka to place Vibhishana on the throne, but, at the gate of the conquered city, he saw a lovely sapphire which awakened in him such strong desire that his mind misgave him as to the temptations that awaited him within. This made him forbear to enter and send Lakshmana instead to attend to the business of installation.

This country is as Lanka to us, but we are not as Rama. It is as though the call from the East "Give up all and follow me" was really the lure of wealth, for, from the very outset, our intercourse with this country has led to the gradual transfer of its substance to us. We never see a beautiful object here, but we wish to take it home.

Here is what set me thinking of this. Last week, my sister Emily and her husband came to spend a few days with me. John Farquhar loves this land. I know none other of our people who

loves it so well. He knows the people, their speech, their ways. He knows all that is best in this hoary civilisation; he understands and loves the sculptured perfection of these temples. To name him is to recall his services in interpreting this country to ours, in giving to our people an idea of the beauty of this age-long culture and the wonderful way in which it endures and permeates the everyday lives of this people. He has visited all places where there is anything to see—ancient temples and monasteries, remains of palaces and royal dynasties, and everywhere he has sought and seen old pictures, antique statues, ancient works of art. His heart has gone out to all he saw, and whoso reads his glowing pages must understand and appreciate, even as he did. The people of India must feel grateful to him; and, in all he has done, Emily has been with him and has learnt to love this country.

Farquhar has got together a fairly large number of pictures and statues from wherever he could beg or buy them and it is his hope to form a museum of his own when his collection is complete. On their way to me, they visited the Ajanta caves and Farquhar could talk of nothing else; but Emily was so silent that I asked her why. She was quite delighted, she said; yet

there was a thing that made her sad. What thing ? I asked.

"Oh, hardly a thing;" she said, "a mere thought; perhaps no more than a fancy. I said to myself: these excellent men who painted, couldn't they have painted on paper or canvas? For so, we could have bought the pictures, at whatever price, and called them ours and taken them home. Whatever made them paint on rocks to awaken but mock our wishes?"

I smiled, for what Emily said seemed to me quite natural and proper, coming as it did from a laudable enthusiasm for Indian art. To desire the beautiful is, I suppose, human nature.

The talk came round to the temples and places of historical interest in my division.

"I have heard there's a place called Masumatti in your division," said Farquhar, "and I am told there's a man there that has some splendid old pictures. (He proceeded to give the man's name and other details). I should like to get a picture or two from him if I can. Do you think you can help me?"

I consented, for I was only too glad to help in anything which could make the world see the true greatness of this country. And so we went to Masumatti yesterday.

Masumatti is now a mere hamlet. it has decayed as far as a village can decay without becoming *bechirakh*—lightless—the word by which these people denote the night-desolation of an uninhabited village. Besides the few straggling houses in the outskirts, there are but ten or fifteen in the village itself. The inhabitants are all cultivators. When I had gone there a few days earlier, I met an old man sunning himself on the verandah of his house. I asked him why the village had come to this pass. I do not know how it happens, but these people, even the humblest, have a grasp of basic truths and there is philosophy in their ordinary talk. Their peasants have the manners of princes and there is a deep inward peace in their everyday lives. Well, when I asked the old man why his village was decaying,

“This is what all towns do,” he answered.

“Why?” said I: “Are’nt there some that grow?”

“They grow in growing time, and, that over, they decay.”

“Had your town a growing time?” I asked. It was a foolish question, but I wanted to get the

old man to talk of his village. He smiled as he made answer.

“Can age come unless youth has gone before?”

And then he went on to say that this crumbling village had been the far-famed Mahishmati Nagara of the Puranas where Kartivirya Arjuna had once reigned in his glory and where hundreds of royal houses had succeeded him and flourished and fallen in their turn, till, finally, it had been overwhelmed fighting against Mussalman invaders and dwindled into a hamlet. It had continued on its downward way till, as one could see, there were but ten houses left. It seemed strange to identify this all but *bechurakh* village with the Mahishmati of ancient story, but the old man had no doubt whatever on the subject. He showed me a stone *mantap* where Arjuna of the thousand arms had been wont to take his exercise. He showed me likewise the pond where the hero used to perform his daily ablutions, and the temple where he rendered daily worship. He told me that Ravana had been held prisoner in another *mantap* and made to dance for the amusement of the populace of Mahishmati as a great glittering ten-headed monster. The captive had at first refused to perform, but Arjuna had

struck him so, that he started up in rage and pain striking ten dents with his ten heads into the stone ceiling of the prison. The dents could be seen to this day. That is the way with these people. No village is too small or insignificant for association with gods and heroes, and the days are not past when divine beings trod the earth. This old man was only talking as is usual with him and his sort; but, no doubt, this village had been a mighty town in its day. Look at the *mantap*, for instance, described as the many-armed hero's gymnasium, and at the multi-pillared prison of the Rakshasa. They are low-roofed to be sure; but what immense stones, what solidity and cleanness of build! This was the work of no feeble men. The pond, which was once Arjuna's bathing place, is a hundred and fifty yards square, with broad steps of dressed stone so well placed and so truly jointed that the hundreds of years which have desolated countries and destroyed dynasties have wrought hardly a change in the structure. This was without a doubt the work of builders who had gloried in their skill and known the joy of creating beautiful edifices. There is yet a little water in that pond and it laps the foot of the same tier of steps all round, so justly have they been built and so

little has time touched them. And then, that temple. To eyes accustomed to the exquisite lines of Greek art and the massive majesty of our own architecture, there is at first a disappointing sense of something crude and inconsequential in Indian building and sculpture, but take a temple as a whole and the effect is far from unsatisfying. This temple I am speaking of is of the usual type, carefully built and finished; the slabs and stones fitted with workman-like neatness and precision. It is still in a fair state of preservation. There is an image in the temple, but no worship has taken place for years.

And in the village itself, there are long lines of crumbling foundations of what must have been great houses, laid out in streets, in the goodly order of a well-planned town. My old friend pointed out what had been the Brahmana street; another row of ruins had been the jewellers' street, and so on

Now, mere emptiness and silence; even the imagination can hardly people that wilderness of crumbling walls.

When yesterday we made enquiries about the pictures my brother-in-law wished to see, I found that my old friend was the owner of them. We sent for him. He came out and, saluting us

with old-world courtesy, begged us to enter. This man had a lofty graciousness which seemed to spring from an innate nobility of soul.

"Are you Mr. Krishnayya?" asked Farquhar.

"Yes, sir."

"I have some business with you. That's why we came."

"I am at your service."

"I have heard that you have some beautiful old pictures. I have come to see them if I may."

"I have'nt many, but such as I have you are welcome to see. Pray, come in and be seated."

We took our seats in the *hazara*—hall. The old gentleman went in and brought a few pictures. They were painted with very ordinary colours on indifferent canvas made by laying some waxy paste on cloth. The lines were flowing and graceful. Some pictures looked as though parts had been erased and redrawn, while others remained as they had come from the inspired mind of the artist. His touch must have been wonderfully light and sure. One of them was a picture of Gopalakrishna. A look at it sufficed to tell you how real the cowherd god must have been to the artist.

What words can express the beauty of the pose, the daintiness of the fingers which held the

flute to the wooing lips, the infinite tenderness of the eyes! The body was gracefully poised on one foot, so that the garland hung a little aslant on the bosom. All this is easy to describe, but who can describe the atmosphere of rapt and silent absorption—as though all sound, all sense, all nature, had been merged and lost in an infinite harmony, the listening stillness of the trees, the various pose of cow and calf, entranced and spell-bound in the act of grazing or gambol, the ecstatic groups of gods and *rishis* and *gopikas*. This man, surely, saw his God as he painted him! Emily and Farquhar were in raptures.

“Whose work is this?”

“My grandfather’s.”

“He had genius.”

“My family has not produced such another.”

“Did he paint other pictures?”

“Oh, he painted a good many; but they were most of them like this one, pictures of Gopala-krishna. He delighted in making pictures of the God. Well, he painted, and painted . . . and this is what remains of it all”.

The old man went in and brought out a *daftar*, which we found to contain a number of pictures of the God, differing but little from one

another. Some were almost replicas of one another, while others differed only in general effect. There were sixteen of them altogether.

"He made them and he put each by sadly, as not quite the vision that had been vouchsafed to him. Then he began another. After a long time he made this—the one you have already seen."

Furquhar looked up with interest.

"Did he say he was satisfied that this picture expressed his vision?" he asked.

"No. Sometime later he started painting another. I heard that, before he put his hand to it, he was for ten or twelve days wrapped up in worship and meditation. It was a strange life, sir, my grandfather's. At the end of that time, he started up from meditation crying, 'my God is come,' and bade his wife bring cocoanuts, and flowers, and fruits for worship. Then he sat down to paint. The day was far stepped into the afternoon and he was still at his picture. Later, his elder brother who had finished his daily worship came and sat silently near him. All the children—and my grandmother, who being big with my father was not allowed to remain fasting—had long since finished their meal. My grandfather and his brother were the only people who had not dined. It was almost evening, and

my grandfather continued working at his picture. Then came a cry that the marauders were upon the village. Its gates were closed, and the whole place swarmed to the ramparts. My grandfather was a man of great courage. He rose up saying, 'perhaps it is not God's pleasure that this picture should be finished to-day', and with a lingering look at it, he seized his bow and quiver and went out. Our women, it seems, begged my grandfather to dine before going out, he laughed and said that the meal might wait, but the fight would not, and so went out. His brother also said, 'never mind, he'll be coming back presently', and waited for him. I have heard that my grandfather so far yielded to the importunities of the women as to eat one of the plantains used for worship, and that was all. The raiders were in great force and we were but few; the wiser part would have been to bibe them to leave us alone. To this they would have been nothing loath, and some there were that counselled this course; but my grandfather was a man of spirit, and with a few men of like heart, he ran up and down the ramparts seeking to organise defence. Some robber marked him, and shot him down with a match-lock. Presently, help came to the defenders from our men who hastened back from their fields

and we beat off the marauders. When it was all over, they brought my grandfather home. The bullet had entered his breast, and there was no more than a faint spark of life when they brought him in. They say he opened his eyes once and said, 'Oh ! yes, I'll come back presently, I must finish my picture', and his spirit passed. His mind should have gone back to his leaving the picture to go to the fight. My grand-uncle, who was so much the elder that he had been as a father to the younger brother, beat his breast and cried, 'O my boy, my boy, could I not give you a mouthful of food before sending you to your death', and was broken-hearted. To make a sad story short, they cremated the body and performed the obsequies, but my grand-uncle was never the same man again. He spent most of his time at the door as though in expectation of somebody ; and as he oldened, he took to muttering strange things such as, 'no, he won't come', 'who knows what was in his mind', 'O, but he will'; and so he too passed away."

The old man ceased, and we respected his silence. After a while, Farquhar said in a low voice :

"Where is the picture painted that day ?"

"It is inside."

"Would you kindly show it to us ?"

"I have heard my elders say it should not be shown."

"Why?"

"It is unfinished, and there may be faults in it. People might say it is not a good piece of work and that would vex a workman. It might lower the artist in the estimation of people—"

"My dear sir, your artist was a hero and a genius, and has nothing to fear from detractors; and we, you can see, are not detractors. Do let us see the picture."

"Very well; so be it. I doubt whether I should have shown it if you masters had come by yourselves, but I do not wish to disoblige the lady, and she is eager to see. There was another reason—it may seem fanciful to you—why my grand-uncle was unwilling to let this picture be seen. His brother's last words had been that he would come again and finish the picture, and my grand-uncle believed he would do so"

"Did your grandfather say he would come back?"

"So they understood him. And it grew into a feeling in our house that our grand-father would be reborn in our midst to complete his picture. We did not wish to show it to others till he should

come back and complete it. When my father was born, it is said my grand-uncle anxiously watched him for evidences of his father's genius, as a token that he had come again in his son to take up the unfinished work. But no. When I came, he looked for them in me. But again, no. He said, 'my brother was a boy of his word, he is sure to come some day; take good care of the pictures,' and so he died. My father showed it once to our Guru and now I show it again as something in the lady's face makes me feel I might do so without harm."

He went inside the house again and brought two pictures of which he placed one before us.

It was another beautiful picture. There was magic in each line and I despair to convey it in words. It was as though the artist had caught and fixed the air, all tremulous and undulating with the music of the flute.

The details were as in the other pictures we had seen, yet there was some indefinable difference which made it instinct with life and unearthly beauty. Emily gazed on it in rapture.

"Could this be the unfinished picture?" she asked at last.

"No. This other—" and the old man placed the second picture before us.

"My God!" said Emily with a gasp.

We looked at it in silence for a while. It was a supreme picture.

"What did the artist intend painting below this cow, I wonder?" said Farquhar when he found his voice. There were faint wavy lines as of an outline commenced and broken off.

"We don't know. It was just as he was about to fill the canvas there that the alarm came, and he went out to die." I looked again, and it seemed to me that the artist had meant to put in another cow there; but one couldn't be sure. Emily was still regarding the picture in silence. I asked the old man if no one had tried to guess what the artist's intention might have been.

"There is my daughter's little boy", said the old man; "he said something. Nobody else could make anything of it."

"Sir," said Farquhar, "if you could sell me that picture, I would take it home with me, and make your grandfather's name famous in my country. Will you give it to me?"

"Sir, how can I? My grand-uncle forbade us even to show it!"

"It is not for my own use or pleasure that I ask it; it is to secure to your grandfather the

recognition that is his due. It is for the glory of your village and your country."

"But what if he returns as he promised?"

"Your grandfather? Venerable sir, can you for a moment believe it? Just think."

"What matters our thinking?" rejoined the old man. "He knows best who promised. Our duty is to keep the picture here waiting for him and that was the wish of our elders also. The rest is as God wills."

Farquhar said: "Very well, but please think about it again. We are not in a hurry. We come again in four or five days, and shall be very pleased to hear your decision."

Emily did not seem to have heard this talk. She suddenly looked up from the picture.

"Shall I tell you what was in the artist's mind to paint here?"

"Do," I said

"It seems to me," said Emily, with a flush on her cheeks, "it seems to me there should have been here a calf, on its eager way to the mother's milk, held in mid career, and fed with the divine melody. Whoso is fed with milk—even mother's milk—hungers again; but the nectar from the

flute fills for evermore. Look, how all things in the picture show that the melody has just begun. The other picture is conventional, this one has seized the moment when the music began . . . ”

“ Then what my grand-child said was true ! ” exclaimed the old man.

“ What did he say ? ” we cried.

“ He said : look how the Lord has even now conceived a thought, and raised the flute to his lips to give it expression , see how the first notes have enchanted the air, and look at this calf surprised on its way to the mother, and fed with music sweeter than milk ! That was what the boy said. And that is what Madam here says now.”

We marvelled at the boy's perception ; for, really, the air seemed thrilling with music, and there was dawning inspiration on the brow of the divine flutist

Farquhar said “ Bring up this boy of yours to be a painter, reverend sir ; believe me he will make a great one. And tell us, when we come again four days hence, whether you will give us the picture.”

Emily said nothing. Presently we rose to go, and the old gentleman saw us off with the usual parting gift of betel leaves and nuts.

But we have now no thought of going again for the picture. We still want it as keenly as ever and it is also possible the old man may not resist the temptation of a high price, but we are not going, and this is why

On our way back yesterday, Emily sat for a while on the stone steps of Kartivirya's pond. Farquhar fetched out our tiffin basket and we had tea.

"What a beautiful pond!" said Emily

"Beautiful enough," I replied; "but there isn't much water in it now, and look, some fellow has prised off a few stones over there, to build an ugly little house with, very probably."

"Brother," said Emily, "does it not occur to you that we are doing very much the same kind of thing? There isn't much water in the pond, it is true; but the pond is here nevertheless; and if only some one cared for it and saw that weeds did not spring up and loosen the joints, some day—perhaps years hence—when water came, the pond would be there to hold it. I can almost hear the tinkling anklets and the rings of the generations of sweet joyous girls who must have passed up and down these beautiful steps. They may come again, as water may come again, if but

the pond continued whole and good ; but once pull out the stones, deface and desecrate the pond, and lo, it is but an ugly ditch which all will shun, and which can only become noisome with the return of water !”

“Quite true, Emily, but ‘what do you say we are doing ?”

“What, do you ask ? This. We take away this picture, because it is good ; that statue, because it is beautiful, and that other thing, because it is desirable. What remains to this unfortunate country when she comes to herself, I should like to know ? What is the good we shall have done her ?”

“Don’t you see we take these things only to proclaim the greatness of this country to the world, and not through mere lust of possession ?”

“Much good will that be to her ! You tell this man to make his little boy a painter, and you take away his picture. Will that help him greatly to bring up the boy ?”

We got on our horses, and rode slowly homewards. When we had gone some little way Emily said to me : “Have you heard of a belief among these people that sometimes the soul goes wandering forth from its body, leaving it temporarily untenanted but intending to return to it ?

It may happen that in the interval some other spirit usurps that body to the deprivation of its proper owner."

I said I had heard of such a belief.

"They call it *entry into another's body*. Supposing a soul leaves its body for a while purposing to return, if this body should be hidden away or disfigured beyond recognition so that the soul returning cannot find or know it, that homeless soul, they say, must wander forlorn in space!"

"True; but what a fancy!"

"Brother, it seems to me that the lovely lady they call Mother India is now in a trance, and that her children are seated weeping about her. It seems also as if, even now, her brow is flushing with the return of soul. Shall we, at such a moment, deface her, and remove from her person the things she holds auspicious and beautiful, her necklace and rings and bracelets, with the result that the returning soul cannot recognise its own tenement? Is it not as bad as though we rapt the body away? The mother's soul may return to wipe her children's tears but what if it should fail to find the body or finding it to know it? Shall we, friends and well-wishers orphan the children? Ought we to do this!"

And Emily's eyes filled with tears. Farquhar looked away, his thoughts had probably gone to his little George. We rode home in silence.

Emily is right. It may be that we can substitute our civilisation for the one these people have lost, but that would be really the usurpation by an alien soul of a body which is waiting for the return of its own

