

FRANCIS BAIN

A SYRUP OF
THE BEES

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Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	15

A Syrup of the Bees

TO

MRS. THEODORE BECK

And I rove on the breeze with the world of bees
like the shadow of a bee:
For a dead moonflower which the worms devour
is the tomb of the soul of me.

O the hum of the bees in the mango trees
it murmurs *taboo! taboo!*
Should a dead moonflower which the worms devour
smell sweet as the mangoes do?

What! shall I deem my flower a dream
when I do find, each morn,
Wet honey sips left on my lips,
and in my heart, a thorn?

PREFACE

The Young Barbarians, when Rome's ecclesiastical polity got hold of them, were persuaded by their anxious foster-mother to sell their Scandinavian birthright of imagination for an unintelligible, theopathic mess of mystic Græco-Syrian pottage. But the "demons," though driven generally from the field, lurked about in holes and corners, watching their opportunity. They took refuge in bypaths, leaving the high road: they lay in ambush in a thicket, whence nothing ever could dislodge them: that of fairy tales and fables.

In India, the "demons," *i. e.* the fairy tales and fables, have never had to hide. But the fairy tales of India differ from the fairy tales of England, much as their fairies do themselves. The fairies of Europe are children, little people: and it is to children that fairy stories are addressed. The child is the agent, as well as the appeal. In India it is otherwise: the fairy stories are addressed to the grown-up, and the fairies resemble their audience: they are grown up too. They form an intermediate, and so to say, irresponsible class of beings, half-way between the mortals and the gods. These last two are very serious things: they have their work to do: not so the fairies, who exist as it were for the sake of existence – "art for art's sake" – and have nothing to do but what people who have nothing to do always do do – to get themselves and other people into mischief. They are distinguished by three noteworthy characteristics. In the first place, they are *possessors of the sciences*, *i. e.* magic, and this it is which gives them their proper name (*Widyádharma*),¹ which is almost equivalent to our *wizard*. Secondly, every *Widyádharma* can change his shape at will into anything he pleases: they are all *shape-changers* (*Kámarupa*). And finally, their element is air: they live in the air, and are thus denominated *sky-goers*, *sky-roamers*, *air-wanderers*, in innumerable synonyms. These are the peculiar attributes of the fairies of Ind.

Like many other persons in India (and out of it) who are far from being either fairies or wizards, they are extraordinarily touchy, and violently resentful of scorn or slight: things not nice to anybody, but the Wizards are not Christians, and generally take dire revenge. A very trifling provocation will set them in a flame. The *Widyádharí* lady is jealousy incarnate. Jealousy, be it noted, is a thing that many people much misunderstand. Ask anyone the question, where in literature is jealousy best illustrated, and ninety-nine people in a hundred will reply, Othello. But, as Pushkin excellently says, Othello is not naturally a jealous man at all: he is his exact antipodes, a confiding, unsuspecting nature.² Jealousy not only distrusts on evidence; it distrusts before evidence and without it; it anticipates evidence and condemns without a trial: it does not wait even for "trifles light as air," but constructs them for itself out of nonentity. Its essence is causeless and irrational suspicion. Your true jealous nature never trusts anything or anybody for an instant. Othello is of noble soul: no jealous man ever was or could be. With women, it is not quite the same; but even here, real nobility of character excludes the possibility of jealousy, because it trusts, until it is deceived, and then its glass is shattered, and its love gone beyond recall: sympathy is annihilated. Compare Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth: the one, the noblest, the other, the meanest creature that ever sat upon a throne. Mary trusted even Darnley till she discovered that he was beneath every sentiment but one: Good Queen Bess never trusted anyone at all. *Mauvaise espèce de femme!*

And so, they are not much to be depended on, these Wizards; anybody taking up with one of them, male or female, had better be careful. You can never tell where you are with them; their

¹ Some kindly critics of these stories have objected to the W, here or elsewhere. The answer to this is, that European scholars have taught everybody to pronounce everything wrong, by *e. g.* introducing into Sanskrit a letter that it does not contain. There is no V in Sanskrit, nor can any Hindoo, without special training, pronounce it: he says, for instance, *walwe* for *valve*.

² This "detached reflection" of Russia's national poet is endorsed by Dostoyeffsky, the greatest master of jealousy that the world has ever seen.

affection is unstable; they are fickle, as might be expected from creatures of the air: their feelings are as variable as their shapes. They can be just as hideously ugly as unimaginably beautiful. The stories that deal with them contain a moral entirely in harmony with all Indian ideas: it is a mistake not to stick to your own caste. When two of different castes are thrown together, the trouble inevitably begins. The gipsies, who came apparently from Sind, brought this notion into Europe, in a form not previously familiar to it. That difference of kind is insurmountable, is the fundamental axiom of Indian theory and practice. The owl to the owl, the crow to the crow: otherwise, Nemesis and catastrophe. *A Syrup of the Bees*³ is another instance.

Everywhere to-day we hear people singing a very different song: from all sides is dinned into our ears the cant of humanity, "our common humanity." In the meantime, men differ in many ways more than they agree, and the differences of humanity are practically far more vital than the common base. Just as, though all men have weight, yet gravitation simply by reason of its universality does not constitute an element of politics, and is altogether a negligible quantity, fact though it be, so is it with humanity: the generic identity is nothing, the peculiar distinctions all. The world is not like a plain, but an irregular region such as that of the Alps or Himalaya, consisting of inaccessible peaks that separate deep valleys, at the bottom of which live parcels of humanity drowned in thick fogs or mists of totally different colours and intensities, that distort and transmogrify everything they see: so that if here and there any single individual succeeds in climbing, by dint of toil or special circumstances, to the tops, where in the clear ether all the situation lies spread out in its truth before his eye, he will find that he has thereby only cut himself absolutely off from communion and sympathy, not only with the denizens of his own valley, but that of all the others too. From that moment he ceases to be intelligible to the rest. No reasoning of his can ever touch them, or succeed in opening their eyes, because their error is not one of reason, but of perception: they cannot, because they do not, see things as he sees them: the mists,⁴ with all their refraction and delusive transformation, are always there. Say what he will, he will not awake them: he will gain nothing in return for all his efforts but ridicule, abuse, or neglect. So Disraeli, in his generation, seemed to himself to be like one pouring, from a golden goblet, water upon sand. To be above the level of humanity is to be counted, till after you are dead, as one who is below.

And this is the exact condition in the India of to-day. The irony of fate has thrown together, as though by some vast geological convulsion, the dwellers in two valleys, one of whom sees everything through, so to say, a red mist, and the other through a blue: they move about and mix in a way together, totally unable to see things in the same light: and all the while this melancholy cuckoo-cry of *common humanity* fills the air with its reiteration, and people persist in handling the situation with a wilful and almost criminal determination to ignore what stares them in the face, and by so doing, still further accentuate the very thing they will not see. If you take two men who are infinitely far from being brothers, and forcibly unite them, on the pretext that they are, you will produce by irritation an enmity between them that would never have existed, had they been let alone.

I stood, a little while since, on the very edge of a plateau, that fell down sheer four thousand feet or more, into the valley of Mysore. Far in the distance to the north, the dense dark green forest jungle stretched away like a carpet, intersected here and there by Moyar's silver streams, with here and there a velvet boss, where a rounded hill stood up out of the plain. That carpet, as it seemed from the height, so uniform and close in its texture, is made of great trees, under which wander wild elephants in herds. To right and left, the valley ran both ways out of sight, like a monster chasm with one side removed. And in the air below, above, around, light wreaths and ragged fragments of cloud and mist floated and streamed and drifted, casting the most beautifully deep blue shifting shadows

³ The title has a secondary meaning (with reference to its place in the series), *she that is loaded with the nectar of Maheshwara*, i.e. the moon that he wears.

⁴ No mere learning will remove them. Pundits, as a rule, end where they began, "lost in the gloom of uninspired research."

not only on the earth, but on the air, like waterfalls of colour, half hiding and half framing the distant view, and cutting the sunlight into intermittent fountains of a golden semi-purple rain that fell and changed, now here, now there, now, as you looked upon them, gone, now suddenly shooting out elsewhere to transform every colour that they touched into something other than it was, like a magic show suddenly thrown out by the Creator in the silent and unfrequented solitude of his hills, for sheer delight and as it were simply for his own amusement, not caring in the least whether there might be any eye open to catch and worship such a beautiful profusion of his power, or not. For, strange! the spell and mysterious appeal of all such momentary glimpses lies, not in what you see, but in what you do not hear: it is the dead silence, the stillness, that by a paradox seems to be the undertone, or background, of moving mist and lonely mountain peaks.

So as I stood, gazing, there came suddenly from the east, a whisper, a mutter; a low sound, that suggested a distant mixture of wind and sea. And I turned round, and looked, and I saw a sight that I never shall see again; such a sight as a man can hardly expect to see twice, in the time of a single life. Rain – but was it rain? – rain in a terrific wall, a dark precipice of appalling gloom, rain that rose like a colossal curtain from earth to heaven and north to south, was coming up the valley straight towards me, and it struck me, as I saw it, with a thrill that was almost dread. That was what the people saw, long ago, when the Deluge suddenly came upon them. It came on, steadily, swiftly, like a thing with orders to carry out, and a purpose to fulfil, cutting the valley athwart with the edge of its solid front, sharp as that of a knife laid on a slice of bread: a black ominous mass of elemental obliteration, out of which there came a voice like the rushing of a flood and the beating of wings, mixed with a kind of wail, like the noise of the cordage of a ship, in a gale at sea. It blotted out creation, and in the phrase of old Herodotus, day suddenly became night. A moment later, I stood in whirling rain and fog that made sight useless a yard away, as wet as one just risen from the sea, with a soul on the very verge of cursing the Creator, for so abruptly dropping the curtain on his show: forgetting, in my ingratitude, first, the favour he had done me; secondly, how many were those who had not seen; lastly, and above all, that it was the very dropping of that stupendous curtain that gave its finishing touch and climax to the show. For he knows best, after all. Introduce into Nature were it but a single atom of stint, of parsimony, of preservation, of regret for loss; and the power, and with it, the sublimity of the infinite is gone. Were Nature to pose, to attitudinise for contemplation, even for the fraction of a second, she would annihilate the condition on which reposes all her charm. Ruthless destruction, even of her own choicest works, is the badge of her inexhaustible omnipotence: add but a touch of pity, and you fall back to the littleness and feebleness of man.

And I mused, as I departed: how can that be communicated to others, which cannot even be described at all? And if so, in the things of the body, how much more with the things of the soul? Who shall convey to the souls that stumble and jostle in the foggy valleys, any glimpse of the visions, denied to them, above; any spark of comprehension of the things that they might discern, on the tops of the pure and silent hills, that stand uncomprehended, kissing heaven above the fog?

Poona, 1914

I

A TWILIGHT EPIPHANY

The three worlds worship the sound of the string that twanged of old like the hum of bees⁵ as it slipped from faint Love's faltering hand and fell at his feet unstrung, the bow unbent and the shaft unsped, as if to beg for mercy from that other shaft of scorching flame that shot from the bow-despising brow of the moony-crested god.

Far down in the southern quarter, at the very end of the Great Forest, just where the roots of its outmost trees are washed by the waves of the eastern sea, there was of old a city, which stood on the edge of land and water, like as the evening moon hangs where light and darkness meet. And just outside the city wall where the salt sand drifts in the wind, there was a little old ruined empty temple of the Lord of the Moony Tire, whose open door was as it were guarded by two sin-destroying images of the Deity and his wife, one on the right of the threshold and the other on the left, looking as if they had suddenly started asunder, surprised by the crowd of devotees, to make a way between. And on an evening long ago, when the sun had finished setting, Maheshwara was returning from Lanká to his own home on Kailás, with Umá in his arms. So as he went, he looked down, and saw the temple away below. And he said to his beloved: Come, now, let us go down, and revisit this little temple, which has stood so long without us. And it looks white in the moon's rays, as if it had turned pale, for fear that we have forgotten it.

So when they had descended, Maheshwara said again: See how these two rude and mutilated effigies that are meant for thee and me stand, as it were, waiting, like bodies for their souls. Let us enter in, and occupy, and sanctify these images,⁶ and rest for a little while, before proceeding to thy father's peaks. And if I am not mistaken, our presence will be opportune, and this deserted temple will presently be visited by somebody who stands in sore need of our assistance, which as long as they remain untenanted these our images cannot give him, since they have even lost their hands.⁷ And accordingly they entered, each into his own image, and remained absolutely still, as though the stone was just the stone it always was, and nothing more. And yet those stony deities glistened in the full moon's light, as though the presence of deity had lent them lustre of their own, that laughed as though to say: See, now we are as white as the very foam at our feet.

So as they stood, silent, and listening to the sound of the sea, all at once there came a man who ran towards them. And taking off his turban, he cast it at the great god's feet, and fell on his face himself. And after a while, he looked up, and joined his hands, and said: O thou Enemy of Love, now there is absolutely no help for me but in the sole of thy foot. For when the sun rose this morning, the Queen was found lying drowned, and all broken to pieces, in the sea foam under the palace wall. And when they ran to tell the King, they found him also lying dead, where he sleeps on his palace roof that hangs over the sea, with a dagger in his heart. And the city is all in uproar, for loss to understand it, and Gangádhara the minister has made of me a victim, by reason of an old grudge. And now my head will be the forfeit, unless I can discover the guilty before the rising of another sun. And thou who knowest all things, past, present, or to come, art become my only refuge. Grant me, of thy favour, a boon, and reveal to me the secret, for who but thyself can possibly discover how the King and Queen have come to this extraordinary end.

So as he spoke, gazing as if in desperation at Maheshwara, all at once, as if moved to compassion, that image of the Deity turned from the wall towards him, and nodded at him its stony

⁵ The bowstring of Love's bow is made of a line of bees. Love was reduced to ashes by fire from Shiwa's extra eye, for audaciously attempting to subject that great ascetic to his own power.

⁶ The real divinity of a Hindoo temple is not the images outside on its walls, but the symbol (whatever it be) inside.

⁷ A common feature throughout India. Everywhere they went, the devotees of the Korán used to smash and maim the Hindoo idols.

head: so that in his terror that unhappy mortal nearly left his own body, and fell to the ground in a swoon. And Maheshwara gazed at him intently, as he lay, and put him, by his *yoga*,⁸ asleep. And the Daughter of the Snow said softly: O Moony-crested, who is this unlucky person, and what is the truth of this whole matter, for I am curious to know? And Maheshwara said slowly: O Snowy One, this is the chief of the night watch of the city; and be under no alarm. For while he sleeps, I will reveal the truth to him, in a magic dream: making him as it were a third person, to overhear our conversation. And I will do the same to the prime minister, so that in the morning, finding their two dreams tally, he will gain credit and save his life. Thereupon Párvatí said again: O Lord of creation, save mine also. For I am as it were dying of curiosity, to hear how all this came about.

So then, after a while, that omniscient Deity said slowly: All this has come about, by reason of a dream. And Gauri said: How could a dream be the cause of death, both to the King and Queen? Then said Maheshwara: Not only is there danger in dreaming, but the greatest. Hast thou not seen thy father's woody sides reflected in the still mirror of his own tarns? And the goddess said: What then? And Maheshwara said: Hast thou not marked how the reflection painted on the water contains beauty, drawn as it were from its depths, greater by far than does the very thing it echoes, of which it is nothing but an exact copy? And Párvatí said: Aye, so it does. Then said Maheshwara: So it is with dreams. For their danger lies in this very beauty, and like pictures upon quiet water, which contains absolutely nothing at all, below, they show men, sleeping, visions of unrealisable beauty, which, being nothing whatever but copies of what they have seen, awake, possess notwithstanding an additional fascination, not to be found in the originals, which fills them with insatiable longing and an utter contempt of all that their waking life contains, as in the present instance: so that they sacrifice all in pursuit of a hollow phantom, trying to achieve impossibility, by bringing mind-begotten dream into the sphere of reality, whither it cannot enter but by ceasing to be dream. But the worst of all is, as in this King's case, when dreaming is intermingled with the reminiscences of a former birth: for then it becomes fatality. And Párvatí said: How is that? Then said Maheshwara: Every soul that is born anew lies buried in oblivion, having utterly forgotten all its previous existence, which has become for it as a thing that has never been. And yet, sometimes, when impressions are very vivid, and memory very strong, here and there an individual soul, steeped as it were in the vat of its own experience, and becoming permanently dyed, as if with indigo, will laugh, so to say, at oblivion, and carry over indelible impressions, from one birth to another, and so live on, haunted by dim recollections that throng his memory like ghosts, and resembling one striving vainly to recall the loveliness and colour of a flower of which he can remember absolutely nothing but the scent, whose lost fragrance hangs about him, goading memory to ineffectual effort, and thus filling him with melancholy which he can never either dispel or understand.

So as he spoke, there came past the temple door a young man of the Shabara caste, resembling a tree for his height, carrying towards the forest a young woman of slender limbs, who was struggling as he held her, and begging to be released; to which he answered only by laughing as he held her tighter, and giving her every now and then a kiss as he went along, so that as they passed by, there fell from her hair a *champak* flower, which lay on the ground unheeded after they disappeared. And the Daughter of the Mountain exclaimed: See, O Moony-crested, this flower laid as it were at thy feet as a suppliant for her protection: for this is a case for thy interference, to save innocence from evil-doing.

And Maheshwara looked at her with affection in his smile. And he said: Not so, O mountain-born: thou art deceived: since this is a case where interference would be bitterly resented, not only by the robber, but his prey: for notwithstanding all her feigned reluctance, this slender one is inwardly delighted, and desires nothing less than to be taken at her word. For this also is a pair of lovers, who resemble very closely those other lovers, whose story I am just about to tell thee: as indeed all lovers are very much the same. For Love is tyranny, and the essence of the sweetness of its nectar is a

⁸ What we should call, in such a case, mesmerism: the power of concentrated will. There is something in it, after all.

despotic authority that is equally delicious to master and to slave. For just as every male lover loves to play the tyrant, so does every woman love to play the slave, so much, that unless her love contains for her the consciousness of slavery, it is less than nothing in her own eyes, and she does not love at all. And know, that as nothing in the world is so hateful to a woman as force, exerted on her by a man she does not love, so nothing fills her with such supreme intoxication as to be masterfully made by her lover to go along the road of her own inclination, since so she gets her way without seeming to consent, and is extricated from the dilemma of deciding between her scruples and her wish. For indecision is the very nature of every woman, and it is a torture to her, to decide, no matter how. And even when she does decide, she does so, generally as a victim, driven by circumstances or desperation, and never as a judge, as in the case of both those women who determined the destiny of this dead King, the one deciding in his favour, precisely because he would allow her no choice, and the other very much against him indeed: and yet both, so to say, without any good reason at all. For women resemble yonder waves of the sea, things compounded of passion and emotion, with impulses for arguments, and agitation for energy, for ever playing, fretting and moaning with laughter and tears of brine and foam: and like feminine incarnations of the instability of water, one and the same essence running through a multitude of contradictory and beautiful qualities and forms: being cold and hard as ice, and soft and white as snow, and still as pools, and crooked as rivers, now floating in heaven like clouds and mists and vapours, and now plunging, like cataracts and waterfalls, into the abyss of hell. Is not the same water bitter as death to the drowning man, and sweeter than a draught of nectar, saving the life of the traveller dying of thirst in the desert sand.

So, now, listen, while I tell thee the story of this King.

And as he began to speak, the wind fell, and the sea slumbered, and the moon crept silently further up and up the sky. And little by little, the dark shadows stole out stealthily, moving as it were on tiptoe, and hung in corners, here and there, like ghosts about the little shrine, before which the sleeping man lay white in the moon's rays, as still as if he were a corpse. And the deep tones of the Great God's voice seemed like a muttered spell, to lull to sleep the living and assemble the dead to hear, with demons for *dwárapálas* at the door of an ashy tomb.

II AN INCOMPLETE OBLIVION

I

Know, then, that this King, who was found dead in the early morning, with a dagger in his heart, was named Arunodaya.⁹ For his father said, when he was born: This son is, as it were, the sunrise of our hopes. And yet, by the decree of destiny, it turned out altogether contrary to his expectation. For as it happened, his father, in whose family it was an hereditary custom to have only one queen at a time, grew gradually tired of his only wife. But being as cowardly in crime as he was weak in constancy, he did not dare to bring about his wishes by any violence or practice of his own, but lay as it were in wait, for some suitable opportunity or occasion to present itself, by means of which he might succeed in getting rid of her, without incurring any blame, or running any risk. For such souls as his was, think to throw dust in the eyes of Chitrugupta,¹⁰ not knowing that he does but add cowardice to the total of their guilt.

So while he waited, time went on, and year succeeded year. And little by little he and his queen grew gradually older, and his son changed slowly from a boy into a man.

And then, at last, one day it happened, that the King and Queen were sitting together on the palace roof. And all at once, the Queen started to her feet with a cry. And as the King looked towards her, with wonder and curiosity, she said slowly: Aryaputra,¹¹ know, that I have suddenly recollected my former birth. And now, I long to tell thee all about it; and yet I am afraid. For this is the law, that if anybody suddenly remembers his former birth, and tells it to another, that very moment he must die. And if I die, I must leave thee: for if not, what could death do to me, since that is the only thing in the three worlds of which I am afraid?

So as she looked at him, with regret and affection in her eyes – for she was as devoted to her husband as if he had been worthy, as indeed he was utterly unworthy, of her devotion – all at once the King's heart leaped in his breast. And he said to himself: Ha! Here, as it seems, is that very opportunity, for which I have been waiting all these years: till I thought that my soul would almost part from my body, for sheer impatience and disgust. And in an instant, he also sprang to his feet, exclaiming as he did so, with an ecstasy that was only half feigned: Strange! can it be? For I, too, have suddenly remembered my former birth: as if this recollection of thine had been the spark required, to set fire to the memory of my own. So now, then, let us very quickly tell each other all, and so take leave together of these miserable bodies, into which we must, beyond a doubt, have fallen, by reason of a curse.

So then, deceived by the display of his hypocritical affection, the Queen told him very quickly all that she recollected of her former birth. And when she had finished, the King looked at her steadily for a while, and his face fell. And he said, with difficulty: Alas! alas! I was utterly mistaken: and as I think, I took fire falsely, out of sympathy with thee. And now I have fallen unwittingly into an irreparable disaster. For as to my own former birth, I remember absolutely nothing about anything at all.

So as he spoke, he looked at the Queen, and their eyes met. And in that instant, she understood; and caught, like a flash of lightning, the falsehood in his soul. And she gazed at him, for a while,

⁹ (Pronounce *daya* as *die*, with accent on preceding *o*.) It means *the rising of red dawn*.

¹⁰ The Recorder, who keeps account of all the sins that each soul must answer for, at the end of every birth.

¹¹ i. e. *son of a nobleman*, the term used by a queen in addressing her husband.

fixedly, with eyes that resembled an incarnation of scrutiny that was mingled with reproach, till all at once he turned away, unable to endure the detection of his own baseness, reflected as it were in the calm mirror of her own pure gaze. And after a while, she said slowly: Son, not of a noble, but an outcast, know, that thou hast doomed not me only, but thyself. And now, because thou hast betrayed me to my death, thy son also shall die as I do, and on the very same spot, by the agency of one who stands to him in the very same relation that I do to thee: and the husband shall pay for the wife. And the consequence of works shall dog thee, in the form of the total extinction of thy race. But as for me, now I see only too clearly that this birth has been a blunder, and a punishment, and a delusion, resembling a scene played upon a stage, whose king turns out, when the curtain falls, to be but a sorry rascal after all. And all the while, I have given my devotion to the wrong husband, and like a foolish benefactor, have wasted alms on a pitiful impostor. I feared, but one short moment since, to leave thee, and to part from thee; but now, thou hast suddenly changed regret into relief. See, whether separation will be thy blessing or thy curse.

So as she spoke, she tottered, and her soul suddenly left its body, which sank to the ground abandoned, like a creeper that collapses when the trunk it clung to falls, and saying as if to mock him: Seek now for the core that is gone, within the hollow husk.

II

So then, when her funeral obsequies were over, that widowed King, strange to say! fell into melancholy, deceiving all his subjects, as if by express design. For they pitied him exceedingly, each saying to the other: See, now, how this good Queen's death has robbed this poor deserted King as it were of his own soul: as well, indeed, it might. For she was a *patidewatá*,¹² and a Sawitri, not only in her name, but in her nature, and rather than outlive him, preferred to go before. Whereas, on the contrary, that King's decline arose, not from regret, but from remorse, mixed with anxiety and the apprehension of his coming doom. For this is the way of the weak, that they yield to evil impulse, and yet repent of their own doings, taking fright at the sight of them, as soon as they are done, and discovering the terrible consequences of works, too late. For a deed that is done, is divided from what it was, before it was done, by all eternity, in the fraction of a second: as this King found to his cost. For even as he gazed at the body of his queen, lying dead on the floor beside him, remorse rose up as it were out of her body and took him by the throat. And at that moment, he would have thrown away his kingdom like a blade of grass, to bring her back to life. And his longing to get rid of her changed, like a flash of lightning, into a passionate yearning to repossess her, dead. And he said to himself, as he looked at her: Where in the world shall I find another resembling her in the least degree, and what shall I do, to save myself from the ripening of her curse? For destiny listens in silence to the prayers of a pure woman, and she, beyond all doubt, was one.

So then, from that very moment, every thought of replacing her by another queen abandoned him, as if her life, in leaving her, had drawn with it his own. And all his taste for life at all, and all desires whatever, suddenly left him in a body, as if out of disgust at his behaviour. And he sank into despair, and pined and waned like an old moon, and grew gradually dimmer, and thinner, and more gloomy, till there was hardly anything left of him at all, but skin and bone. And finally, seeing its opportunity, a burning fever arising from a chill entered in and took possession of all his limbs, as if to give him a foretaste of the flames of his own pyre.

And then at last, perceiving that Yama had caught him in his noose, and finding himself in the mouth of death, he summoned his prime minister, together with his son. And when they came, he said to them: Since I am on the very point of following my wife, as, had I gone before her, she

¹² i. e. a wife who makes a god of her husband: the highest of all possible praises. Sawitri is the Hindoo Alcestis.

would have followed me, *sati*¹³ that she was, there is no time to lose. Do thou, my son, get married, as quickly as thou canst, for the god of death has clutched us both, as if he was in a hurry, just at the very moment when we were thinking of procuring thee a wife. And as it is, I am sore afraid of going to meet my ancestors, who will angrily reproach me for placing them in jeopardy, by neglecting to provide for them in time. And when they ask me, saying: Where is thy son's son? what answer shall I make? And therefore, O my minister, I leave this son of mine and his marriage as a deposit in thy hands, which I shall require of thee in the other world. Postpone all other policy to the duty of finding him a wife: and if thou canst, let her resemble his mother, that was mine.

So having spoken, in a little while he died, leaving everybody in his kingdom wondering at his affection for his wife. For nobody knew the truth, which was as it were burned up and utterly annihilated by the fires that consumed the body of his wife and his own. And he left behind him a reputation for fidelity that was absolutely false. For none but the Deity can penetrate the disguise of hypocrisy. And yet, though he deceived all the subjects in his kingdom, he did not succeed in blinding the eyes of Dharma,¹⁴ who caught his soul in his noose, and doomed it, for his treachery, to be born again in the body of a worm.

III

So, then, when his funeral obsequies were over, and the due time prescribed by the *shastras* had elapsed, his son Arunodaya mounted the throne, and became king in his room.

And no sooner was the crown placed upon his head, and the water sprinkled over him, than the prime minister, who was named Gangádhara, came to him privately, and said: Maháráj, now there is yet another ceremony which remains as it were crying to be performed, with the least possible delay; and that is thy own marriage. And now it is for thee and me to seek out some maiden that will make a royal match for thee, and lead her round the fire, and so let thy father's spirit rest. And there cannot be any difficulty at all. For all the neighbouring kings, who possess daughters, are watching thee like clouds around a mountain top, ready to rain daughters as it were upon thy head; since thou art superior in power to them all. And as for the daughters, the painters, and the rumours of thy beauty, have turned them all into so many *abhisárikas*

¹³ *Sati*, which means *a good woman*, is always understood by Europeans to refer to what is only the last manifestation of her quality, the burning herself on her dead lord's pyre. But the term does not necessarily contain any reference to that stern climax of her virtue.

¹⁴ Another name for Yama, the god of death, which we may here take as equivalent to "Justice."

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