

FRANCIS BAIN

A DIGIT OF THE
MOON

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F. W. Bain

A Digit of the Moon / A Hindoo Love Story

PREFATORY NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

The better to illustrate how, in Hindoo mythology, the ideas of *a beautiful woman, the Moon, and the Sea*, dissolve and disappear into one another, I have placed on the fly-leaf of this edition a single stanza, drawn from another part of my MS., which characteristically exemplifies that *dissolving view*: subjoining here, for the benefit of the uninitiated, a literal translation:

O thou lovely Incarnation of the Nectar-dropping Moon, come down from Heaven to lighten our Darkness: Delight of the Race of Man: retaining in thy Womanhood the dancing Play of the Waves of that Sea of Milk out of which thou wert originally churned by the Gods: we the Three Worlds (i. e. of Childhood, Manhood, and Age) do worship the Orb of thy Bosom that possesses for us a Threefold Mystical Feminine Energy¹ being a Pitcher of Milk for us, when we are Born: a Pillow for us, in the Middle of the Path of Life: and a Shrine, in which we take refuge to die at the last.

But we lose, in a literal prose version, the reverberation, and the echo of the Sea, which undertones the meaning of the words like the accompaniment to a song. This *sound* we might make some attempt to preserve, without doing violence to the *sense*, as follows;

Like a New MODE'S exquisite Incarnation,
In the Ebb and Flow of a Surging Sea,
Wave-breasted Beauty, the whole Creation
Wanes, and waxes, and rocks on thee!
For we rise and fall on thy Bosom's Billow
Whose heaving Swell is our Home Divine.
Our Chalice at Dawn, and our hot Noon's Pillow,
Our Evening's Shrine.

Woolacombe Bay, April 29, 1901.

¹ The last lines contain recondite philosophical allusions to the Creation, Preservation, and Destruction of the World, and other matters, in technical terms which defy translation. Life in Hindoo philosophy, as in that of the Middle Ages, carries about with it a perfume of death: there is in its atmosphere something melancholy, and even a little morbid, like the slow tolling of a bell.

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION,

A Digit of the Moon is the sixteenth part of a much longer work, entitled *The Churning of the Ocean of Time*². A well-known Hindoo legend recounts how the gods and antigods assembled to churn the ocean of milk³ for the nectar of immortality. After throwing in herbs of various kinds, they churned it with Mount Mandara, and obtained the nectar, with certain other things, one of which was the MOON, who by the way is often called 'the Lord of Herbs.'

But in Sanskrit, the Moon, like the Sun, is a male. Hindoo poets get over this difficulty, when they want a female Moon, by personifying his attributes, or making a part do duty for the whole. Thus, his disc is divided into sixteen parts, called '*streaks*' or '*digits*' and a beautiful woman is '*a digit of the moon*.'

The whole work, then, called '*The Churning of the Ocean of Time*,' is, like the Moon, divided into sixteen parts, each named after one of the digits of the Moon. The one now before the reader is called *A Digit of the Moon, turned red by the rays of the dawning Sun*⁴. The point lies in the play on the word red, which in the original also means '*enamoured*,' '*in love*.' That is to say, that the heroine of the story 'turns red,' *i. e.* falls in love with the hero, whose name, it will be found, is Sūryakānta, or 'Sunstone.'

I little thought, ten years ago, that it would ever be my lot to play, as it were, the part of Boccaccio, and bring forth meat from the eater, stories from a plague. Yet here also the unexpected came about, in the following way.

Considering how recently Europe has become aware of the very existence of a Sanskrit literature, I had often wondered whether there might not be hidden away, here and there, in the vast ocean of India, literary treasures still undiscovered, which future 'churning' might bring up. But I did not expect that my question would ever receive a practical answer. However, a few years ago, when the plague was decimating the city of Poona, carrying off its victims by hundreds a day, personal acquaintance with some of the officers appointed by Government to cope with the enemy put it into my power to do a slight service to an old Marátha Brahman, whose name, by his own particular desire, I suppress. My 'service' was indeed a mere trifle, a thing of which no Englishman would have thought twice. Hindoos, however, look on these matters with very different eyes. An Englishman's house may be his castle, but a Hindoo's house is a shrine, a holy of holies, which for unhallowed footsteps to invade is desecration. I was amused to find that my old Brahman regarded me almost as though I had preserved his family from nameless and everlasting infamy. And when he subsequently discovered that I was a humble student of the 'polished, sacred' language, and could make shift to admire his beloved Kálidás in the original, his esteem for me rose to a degree almost embarrassing. He came two or three times to see me, and took an obvious pleasure in dilating on the beauties of his ancient authors to one who was at least a good listener. But it struck me as curious, that every time he went away he seemed as it were labouring to deliver himself of some important communication, which nevertheless he shrank from discovering to me; and he always eventually departed, with an air

² *Sansára-ságara-manthanam*.

³ For *milk* the author has substituted a technical word which means *the world considered as the scene of never-ending transmigrations*. ('O world! O life! O time!') By this he implies that the *nectar* of his work is the residuum of much churning of life and experience of the world, and that it is destined to be immortal.

⁴ I have never experienced a stranger or more delightful sensation than when, as I was translating this work, I saw this very phenomenon on the Ghauts at Mahábaleshwar: a blood-red Moon going down into the hills at early dawn, with the Sun rising on the opposite peaks. Only the redness which the poet ascribes to the Sun was of course due to the haze of the atmosphere.

of some confusion, and his secret left untold. I thought at the time that he was only nerving himself to make some request of me, of which he doubted the reception, and was unable to screw his courage to the sticking-point. But I was mistaken.

Our interviews came to an abrupt conclusion. The plague stepped in and swept his family clean away, carrying off his wife, all his children, and various others of his kin, leaving him alone untouched – but not for long. One evening, when I came home late, having been out nearly all day, I found on my doorstep a messenger who had been waiting for me, with the inexhaustible patience of an Oriental, for many hours. The plague had remembered my old Brahman at last, and he had sent to ask me to come and see him, 'on business of importance.' I went off accordingly to a segregate camp, whither he had been removed, and, much to my relief, arrived in time to find him conscious: for he was a fine old gentleman, and when a Brahman is a gentleman, he is a striking type of humanity. He confused me by thanking me, for the hundredth time, for my good offices, adding, however, that they had been, in a certain sense, wasted, as he was the only one left of his family, and now he also, he was glad to say, was going the same way. He said, that he had been anxious to see me before he died, because he had something of value to give me. Hereupon he produced what the uninitiated might have taken for a packet of ladies' long six-button gloves, pressed together between two strips of wood about the size of a cheroot box, and tied round with string; but which from experience I knew to be a manuscript⁵. He handed it to me, observing that it had been in the possession of his family from a time beyond memory, and that nothing would ever have induced him to part with it, had any of that family remained to possess it; but as they were all gone, and as, moreover, it would certainly be burned by the plague authorities as soon as he was dead, it was mine, if I cared to accept it. If not, he said, with an effort to smile, no matter: it could, like a faithful wife, enter the fire on the death of its owner: yet that would be a pity, for it was worth preserving. I accepted his present, and he bade me farewell. I took leave of the old man, not without emotion, for grief and approaching death had converted his face to the very incarnation of misery; and I learned on enquiry that he died, about thirty-six hours afterwards, in the early morning.

Notwithstanding the hints let fall by its former owner, I own I was dubious as to the value of my MS., for Hindoos will admire anything in Sanskrit. But when – after having redeemed it with difficulty from the ordeal of fire and the plague authorities by subjecting it to severe fumigations – I fell to examining it⁶, I apologised to the *manes* of my old Brahman for doubting his judgment, and blessed him for his present, which is, I will venture to say, unique in literature. But I will leave the reader to judge of it for himself⁷, warning him only that no language loses so much by translation as the Sanskrit; and advising him, for his own sake, to read it consecutively through, or he will lose much⁸. I cannot refrain from observing, however, that it differs from the general run of classical Sanskrit productions in two very striking particulars – the simplicity of its style, and the originality of its matter. As to the last, every body knows that classical Sanskrit authors have no originality. They do but rhetorically reset and embellish notorious themes: such originality as they exhibit lying, not in their subject, but its treatment. Our author is an exception. Whoever he was, he must have possessed the gift of imagination: for though the plan of the story was doubtless suggested by the *Wétála-panchawimshatiká*, yet so novel and poetical is the use made of it that it may fairly claim to owe but little to its source, while all the particular stories are curious and original. The book differs, again, in a remarkable manner from other classical products of the Hindoo Muse in the simplicity of its style. The author would seem to have deliberately chosen the epic⁹ rather than the classic style as

⁵ Though I make no attempt to assign a date to this MS., the reader should observe that in India printing has not superseded hand work. The Hindoos have religious prejudices against printed books, and they will not use them in their temples, or for sacred purposes.

⁶ A well written MS. in the *Dévanágarī* character, is hardly if at all, inferior to print.

⁷ At some future time I hope to translate the remainder, or part of it.

⁸ Its principal beauty lies in the skill of its climax, which is lost by neglecting the order.

⁹ The poem is written in *shlókas*, or *anushubh*, with occasional deviations (as e.g. the conclusion) into more elaborate metres.

his model. We find here none of that artificiality, that straining and effort at style for its own sake, that perverse elaboration, those insipid intolerable *shléhas* and interminable compounds which reach a climax in the appalling concatenations of e.g. the *Kédambarí*. Mature Hindoo literature exhibits precisely the same tendency as its architecture: ornament is piled on ornament with aimless, tasteless extravagance, till the whole becomes nauseous, and all unity is smothered and annihilated under a load of rhetorical gewgaws. Just as the rank and luxuriant growth of a creeper will sometimes drain of its juices, dry up, and destroy the tree it was designed to adorn, so the over development of gaudy rhetorical blossoms and effeminate literary prettinesses has desiccated and broken the spring of the Hindoo mind. The best things in the literature are just those which are simplest, and therefore as a rule oldest. Literary arabesque nearly always indicates and springs from the absence of anything to say; a poverty of creative ideas. But our author has really a story to tell, and can therefore afford to exhibit it in naked unadorned simplicity.

Finally, the words which stand as a motto on the title-page have a history of their own. They are the closing lines of the *Shakuntalá*, and they mean, briefly: *O Shiwa, grant that I may never be born again*. There is a *curiosa felicitas* in their application to the conclusion of the story, where indeed I found them, scribbled in the margin by another hand; and though it cannot be proved, I am convinced that they were placed there by my old Brahman himself (who had Kálidás by heart), when he took his farewell of the MS., in an access of grief and despair at feeling his family annihilated and himself deprived of all that had made his life worth living, by the plague. Let us hope that the old man has had his wish, and that '*the purple-tinted god*' has '*destroyed his rebirth*.'

Mahábaleshwar, 1898.

INTRODUCTION

INVOCATION ¹⁰

May the kindly three-eyed god[¹¹], who stained his throat deep-purple by the draught of deadly poison which he swallowed for the preservation of the world, preserve you. May the Elephant-faced One ¹² sweep away with his trunk all impediments to my thoughts, and may Wání ¹³ inspire into my mind for every thought its proper word.

There lived formerly, in a certain country, a king, called Súryakánta¹⁴. And his armies, guided by Valour and Policy, had penetrated in all directions to the shore of the ocean, and his intellect had gone to the further shore of all the sciences, so that one thing only was unknown to him, woman, and the love of woman. He was, as it were, the very incarnation of the spirit of misogyny, beautiful exceedingly himself, to scorch with the hot rays of his glory the despairing hearts of all fair women who might chance to cast eyes upon him, yet himself cold as snow to their own melting glances. And as time went on, his ministers became full of concern for the future of the kingdom, for they said: The King has no son, and if he should die, everything will go to ruin for want of an heir. So they took counsel among themselves, and sending for them wherever they could find them, they threw in his way temptations in the form of beautiful women, raining on him as it were showers of the quintessence of all the female beauty in the world. But all was of no avail: for no matter what shape it took, the celestial loveliness of those ladies made no more impression on the King's mind than a forest leaf falling on the back of a wild elephant. Then the ministers fell into despair, exclaiming: Truly there is a point at which virtues become vices. It is well for a King to avoid the wiles of women; but out on this woman-hating king! the kingdom will be undone for him. And they took counsel again among themselves, and made representations to the King, exhorting him to marriage. But he would not listen to anything they could say. So being at their wits' end, they caused it to be bruited about without the King's knowledge, by means of their spies, that they would give a crore¹⁵ of gold pieces to any one who could produce a change in the mind of the King, and inspire him with an inclination for marriage. But though many charlatans presented themselves and performed incantations and other such devices, no one could be found able to effect the desired end. On the contrary, the King's hostility to the other sex increased so much, that he punished every woman who came within the range of his sight by banishing her from the kingdom. And in their fear lest the kingdom should be wholly deprived of its women, the ministers had to place spies about the King, who ran before him wherever he went, and made all the women keep out of his way. And this task was as difficult as standing on the edge of a sword, for all the women in the kingdom were drawn to see him by love and curiosity as if he were a magnet¹⁶ and they so many pieces of iron.

¹⁰ Some such benedictory exordium as this is regarded as indispensable by every Sanskrit author: yet it is remarkable that Kálidás is careless of the rule; e. g. his *Cloud* and his *Seasons* begin at once without any invocation at all.

¹¹ Shiwa.

¹² Ganésha or Ganapati. See Day 1.

¹³ Saraswatí, the goddess of speech.

¹⁴ i. e. 'sun-beloved'; the name of a fabulous gem 'sunstone' (cp. 'moonstone'), said to possess magical properties and exhibit them when acted upon by the rays of the sun.

¹⁵ Ten millions.

¹⁶ A kind of play on the King's name: *lóhakánta* means a loadstone.

Then one day there came to the capital a certain painter¹⁷. And he, as soon as he arrived, made enquiries as to the wonders of that city. Then the people told him: The greatest wonder in our city is our King, Sūryakānta, himself. For though he is a king, nothing will induce him to have anything to do with women, from the peacock of whose beauty he flies as if he were a snake. And yet he is himself like a second god of love, so that here is the marvel: that one whom the Fish-bannered god¹⁸ has created as a sixth weapon to cleave the hearts of the female sex should have no curiosity to exert his power. Should the sun refuse to warm, or the wind to blow? But when the painter heard this he laughed, and said: I possess a charm that would act like the sun upon its gem¹⁹. And one of the spies of the ministers heard him, and went and told them of his arrival and his brag. And they immediately summoned that painter and questioned him, telling him the whole state of the case, and promising him the reward if he could make his words good. And the painter said: Contrive that the King shall send for me, and leave the rest to me.

So the ministers went and told the King: Sire, there has arrived in your capital a painter, whose equal in skill is not to be found in the three worlds. And when the King heard it he was delighted, for he was himself skilled in the art of painting and all other arts; and he caused the painter to be brought into his presence. But he, when he came, was amazed at the extraordinary beauty of the King, and he exclaimed: O King, you have caused me to obtain the fruit of my birth in bestowing on me the priceless boon of a sight of your incomparable beauty. And now only one more thing remains. I implore your Majesty to let me make a copy of it, in order that in future I may never be without it. For the sun warms even when reflected in a poor mirror. Then the King said: Show me first specimens of your skill. But beware that you show me no women, otherwise it will be worse for you. So the painter showed him a collection of pictures of all the countries in the world, but among them he had secretly placed the portrait of a woman. And as the King was turning over the pictures, one by one, he suddenly came upon that portrait. But the moment he looked at it, he fell to the ground in a swoon.

Then the painter laughed, and said to the ministers: The cure is effected: pay the physician his fee. But they replied: We must first be sure that the patient is really cured. The painter replied: You will soon find that out. Look to the King, and restore him, and see what he says when he comes to himself and finds that I am not here. For in the meanwhile I will go out of the room.

Then the ministers summoned attendants, who fanned the King with palm-leaves, and sprinkled him with water scented with sandal. And the King revived, and instantly looking round, exclaimed: The painter, the painter! The ministers said: Sire, he is gone. But when the King heard that, he changed colour, and his voice trembled, and he said: If you have allowed him to escape, I will have you all trampled to death by elephants before the sun goes down. So they went out quickly and found the painter, and fetched him in again before the King. And he fell at the King's feet, saying: May the King forgive me! Alas! my evil fortune must have mixed up that lady's portrait among my other pictures, to bring me to destruction. But the King said: O most admirable of all painters, past, present, or to come, know that you have conferred a benefit upon me by exhibiting that portrait to me, which I could not repay even with my whole kingdom. And beyond doubt, that lady must have been my wife in a previous existence, for emotions such as these point unmistakeably to a former life. Now then, tell me, of what land is her father the king? For certain I am, that it is a portrait, for such beauty as hers could not have been conceived by any mortal brain. None but the Creator himself could have fashioned her. Then the painter smiled, and said: O King, be warned by me. Dismiss this lady from your mind, and think of her no more; otherwise my carelessness may turn out to have been the cause of your ruin. But the King said: Painter, no more. Choose, either to tell me who she is, and be loaded

¹⁷ This method of bringing lovers together is part of a Hindoo story-teller's romantic machinery.

¹⁸ The Hindoo Cupid, who is said to possess five bewildering weapons.

¹⁹ Alluding to the King's name: see n. p. 1. [11](#) *i. e.* 'the passion, or the rosy-blush, of love.' (Pronounce the two first syllables to rhyme with 'among,' with a north-country g.)

with gold; or not; an I will load you with chains, and imprison you in a loathsome dungeon, with neither food nor water, till you do.

Then the painter said: King, since there is no help for it, and your fate will have it so, learn, that this is the portrait of Anangarágá¹¹, the daughter of a brother of the King of the Nagas²⁰, who lives by herself in a palace in the forest, two months' journey from here. And what her beauty is, you yourself partly know by personal experience of the effect which even in a picture it produced upon you: yet what picture could be equal to the reality? For every one that sees her instantly falls in love with her, and many swoon away, as you did, and there are some who have even died. And yet the Creator, when he made her a casket of beauty so inimitably lovely, placed within it a heart of adamant, so hard, that it laughs at all the efforts of the flowery-arrowed god to pierce it. For innumerable suitors have sought her in marriage, coming from all the quarters of the world, and she receives them all with scornful indifference, yet entertains them magnificently for twenty-one days, on this condition, that every day they ask her a riddle²¹. And if any suitor should succeed in asking her something that she cannot answer, then she herself is to be the prize; but if within the stipulated time he fails, then he becomes her slave, to be disposed of how she will. And no one has ever yet succeeded in asking her anything she cannot answer; for she is of superhuman intelligence, and learned in all the sciences; but of the countless suitors who have tried and failed, some she has sent away, and others she retains about her person as slaves, pitilessly showing them every day that beauty which is for ever unattainable to them, so that their lot is infinitely worse than that of beasts. And therefore, O King, I warned you, lest the same thing should happen also to you. O be wise, and shun her, before it is too late. For I think that no lot can be more wretched than that of those who are doomed to everlasting regret, for having lost what nevertheless they see ever before them, as it were within their reach.

Then King Sūryakānta laughed aloud, and he said: Painter, your judgment is not equal to your skill in your own art. For there is a lot infinitely more miserable, and it is that of one who passes his whole life in regret for an object which, with daring and resolution, he might have attained. Let me rather pine for ever miserable in the contemplation of such beauty, than weakly abandon my chance of enjoying it. Then the King gave that painter three crores of gold pieces, as the price of the portrait of the Princess, which he took away from him; and, after allowing him to paint his own portrait, dismissed him. And he said to his ministers: Make all ready: for this very night I start in quest of the Princess Anangarágá. Then his ministers deliberated together, and said to each other: Certainly, if the King should fail in his object and never return, the kingdom will be ruined. Yet, the same will be the case if he remains here, and scorning the society of all other women, never has a son. Therefore it is better as it is. For of two evils, the least is a good. Moreover, he may possibly succeed.

So that very night, burning with the fierce fire of impatience, the King transferred the burden of his government to the shoulders of his ministers, and set out, with the portrait of his beloved, to win or lose her. And he would have taken nobody with him. But as he was preparing to depart, his boon companion, Rasakósha²², said to him: Sire, would you go alone? And the King said: My friend, I may fail, and never return. Why should I drag others with me into the jaws of destruction? I will go by myself. Then Rasakósha said: King, what are you about? You leave yourself behind, if you leave me. That half of you which inhabits your own body is altogether gone upon²³ the Princess, and wholly intent upon her, so as to think of nothing else: then how will you baffle her, without that other

²⁰ These Nagas are beings of serpent nature, but often confounded with men: *e. g.* in Kathá Saritságara, I. 6, the nephew of the King of the Nágas is said to be a Brahman. Their women are of inconceivable loveliness.

²¹ Very few of the stories are really riddles, but they all give the Princess an opportunity of displaying her ready judgment and acumen. It will also be seen, that owing to the device with which the story concludes, there are really only nineteen days, instead of twenty-one.

²² Pronounce *Russakósh*. The name refers to the part he will play in the story: it means both 'a ball of mercury,' and 'a treasury of taste, wit, literary sentiments or flavours,' a sort of walking encyclopædia. The King's companion is a salient figure in Hindoo drama: he is a sort of Sancho Panza, *minus* the vulgarity and the humour.

²³ This colloquialism is an exact facsimile of the Sanskrit expression.

half of you which lives in me, and is always ready for your service? And what am I to do without my better half? And even if you *do* fail, what will you do without me? for even prosperity without a friend is tasteless²⁴: how much more adversity! Then the King said: Well, be it so. Come, let us be off. But Rasakósha said: Did I not say that your mind was wandering? Would you start on such a perilous adventure, without first securing the aid of Wináyaka²⁵? Who ever succeeded in anything that neglected him? And the King said: It is true. In my eagerness I had almost forgotten him. So he praised Ganésha, saying: Hail, O thou lord of the Elephant Face, whose trunk is uplifted in the dance! Hail to thee, before whom obstacles melt away like the mists of night before the morning sun! Hail to thee, aided by whom even the weak triumph over the strong! Hail to thee, without whom all prudence is vain, and all wisdom, folly! Hail, O thou whose basket ears flap like banners of victory in the wind!

Then they set out on their journey. And they fared on day and night through the forest, full of wild beasts, apes, and Shabaras²⁶ as the sea is of jewels: but the King in his preoccupation for many days neither spoke nor ate nor drank, living only on air and the portrait of the Princess, which night and day he devoured with his eyes.

Then one day, as they rested at noon beneath the thick shade of a *Kadamba*²⁷ tree, the King gazed for a long time at the portrait of his mistress. And suddenly he broke silence, and said: Rasakósha, this is a woman. Now, a woman is the one thing about which I know nothing. Tell me, what is the nature of women? Then Rasakósha smiled, and said: King, you should certainly keep this question to ask the Princess; for it is a hard question. A very terrible creature indeed is a woman, and one formed of strange elements. *Apropos*, I will tell you a story: listen.

In the beginning, when Twashtri²⁸ came to the creation of woman, he found that he had exhausted his materials in the making of man, and that no solid elements were left. In this dilemma, after profound meditation, he did as follows. He took the rotundity of the moon, and the curves of creepers, and the clinging of tendrils, and the trembling of grass, and the slenderness of the reed, and the bloom of flowers, and the lightness of leaves, and the tapering of the elephant's trunk, and the glances of deer, and the clustering of rows of bees²⁹, and the joyous gaiety of sunbeams, and the weeping of clouds, and the fickleness of the winds, and the timidity of the hare, and the vanity of the peacock, and the softness of the parrot's bosom, and the hardness of adamant, and the sweetness of honey, and the cruelty of the tiger, and the warm glow of fire, and the coldness of snow, and the chattering of jays, and the cooing of the *kókila*³⁰, and the hypocrisy of the crane, and the fidelity of the *chakrawáka*; and compounding all these together, he made woman, and gave her to man. But after one week, man came to him, and said: Lord, this creature that you have given me makes my life miserable. She chatters incessantly, and teases me beyond endurance, never leaving me alone: and she requires incessant attention, and takes all my time up, and cries about nothing, and is always idle; and so I have come to give her back again, as I cannot live with her. So Twashtri said: Very well: and he took her back. Then after another week, man came again to him, and said: Lord, I find that my life is very lonely since I gave you back that creature. I remember how she used to dance and sing to me, and look at me out of the corner of her eye, and play with me, and cling to me; and her laughter was music, and she was beautiful to look at, and soft to touch: so give her back to me again. So Twashtri said: Very well: and gave her back again. Then after only three days, man came back to him again,

²⁴ A play upon his own name.

²⁵ Ganésha, the god of obstacles and success. See Day 1.

²⁶ An old name for Bhíls and other wild tribes.

²⁷ 'A tree with orange-coloured fragrant blossoms.'

²⁸ The Hindoo Vulcan, sometimes, as here, used for the Creator, *dhatrí* = Plato's [Greek: demiourgos]. Sanskrit literature is the key to Plato; much of his philosophy is only the moonlike reflection of Hindoo mythology.

²⁹ Hindoo poets see a resemblance between rows of bees and eye-glances.

³⁰ The Indian cuckoo. The crane is a by-word for inward villainy and sanctimonious exterior. The *chakrawáka*, or Brahmany drake, is fabled to pass the night sorrowing for the absence of his mate and she for him.

and said: Lord, I know not how it is; but after all, I have come to the conclusion that she is more of a trouble than a pleasure to me: so please take her back again. But Twashtri said: Out on you! Be off! I will have no more of this. You must manage how you can. Then man said: But I cannot live with her. And Twashtri replied: Neither could you live without her. And he turned his back on man, and went on with his work. Then man said: What is to be done? for I cannot live either with or without her³¹.

And Rasakósha ceased, and looked at the King. But the King remained silent, gazing intently at the portrait of the Princess.

And thus travelling on, day by day, through the forest, at length they drew near to the palace of the Princess Anangarágá.

³¹ The very echo of Martial.

DAY 1

Then, when the towers of the palace rose over the trees, and gleamed like gold on their eyes in the beams of the morning sun, King Sūryakānta suddenly exclaimed: Ha! I am undone. And Rasakósha said: How is that? Then the King said: Alas! I have been absolutely possessed by the image of my beloved, night and day, waking and sleeping, so that I have thought of nothing in the world beside. And now here we are at the end of our journey, but at the beginning of difficulties. For as to what I shall ask the Princess, I have not the shadow of an idea. And if the thought of her has such power to bewilder me at a distance, the sight of her will utterly deprive me of my reason, so that I am lost already. Then Rasakósha said: O King, this is exactly why the Princess has hitherto baffled all her lovers. The spell of her beauty robs them of their intellect, and chains up their invention, and thus they fall an easy prey. But fortunate are you, that while your best half has been absent from its body, your other half³² has been watching over the empty case. Be under no concern: but when we are introduced into the presence of the Princess, tell her that you speak by my mouth, and leave all to me. So the King was relieved, and dismissing all other subjects from his mind, he again became wholly immersed in meditating on his mistress.

Then drawing nearer by degrees, at length they entered the precincts of the palace. And there they were met by warders, who enquired who they were. And they went and announced to the Princess that King Sūryakānta had arrived as a suitor for her hand. So she sent chamberlains and others, who conducted the King to a pleasure-house of white marble in a garden beautiful with a lake and crystal baths, shady with trees, perfumed with breezes loaded with the fragrance of flowers, and musical with the songs of innumerable birds. There they passed the day. But the King, consumed with the fever of his burning desire to see the Princess, had neither eyes nor ears for anything but the portrait.

And when the sun set, King Sūryakānta and Rasakósha went to the palace of the Princess, and entered the hall of audience, whose floor, inlaid with slabs of dark-blue crystal, reflected their feet, and whose walls flashed back from the facets of their jewels the light of innumerable lamps. And there they saw Anangarágá, sitting on a golden throne, clad in a robe of sea-green, and a bodice studded with coral, looking like Lakshmi³³ fresh from ocean. And her eyes were as long as a row of bees, and their lashes jet black with collyrium, and her lips were like freshly painted vermilion, and from her high bosom came the fragrance of sandal. And round her slender waist was a girdle of gold, and on her wrists and ankles gold bangles and anklets, and the soles of her little feet were red with lac, and in her black hair was a gold tiara in the form of a snake, with eyes of rubies, and a tongue of emerald. And in the radiance of her beauty she looked scornfully at the King, and, turning away her head, said, without waiting to be addressed: Propose your question. But the King, struck by the thunderbolt of her stupefying loveliness, sank mute and trembling upon a couch opposite to her, and gazed at her like a bird fascinated by a serpent. Then Rasakósha came forward, and prostrated himself at her feet, and said: Lady, this unworthy mortal is the King's mouth. Is it permitted him to speak? So the Princess said: Proceed. Then Rasakósha rose up, and stood before her, and began:

Lady, there lived formerly, in a certain country, a Chárwāka³⁴, who was about to be married. And while he was making preparations for the ceremony, one of his friends came to him, and gave him advice, saying: Propitiate Genésha, in order that nothing untoward may occur to interfere with your marriage. Then that Chárwāka laughed in derision, and replied: My good Sir, you are a fool. Do I not know that knaves and fools invented the *Wédas*, and instituted the sacrificial rites for their own

³² *i. e.* Rasakósha himself. The allusion is to a power, possessed by adepts in Yoga, of detaching the soul from the body. See Day 11.

³³ The goddess of fortune and wealth, who was churned up out of the ocean, and according to some, appeared reclining on an open lotus. Coral is one of the nine gems.

³⁴ *i. e.* an atheist. The opinions of this philosophical school may be found sketched in the Sarwa-Darshana-Sangraha, § 1.

advantage? All these foolish tales about the gods are merely the dreams of madmen, or the livelihood of rogues. As for this Ganésa that you speak of, what is the use of him? Or how can there be a man with the head of an elephant? And what has he to do with success? He, who forms his plans with prudence, and executes them with wisdom, may count on success. Out on your Ganésa! I will ensure my own success.

So he spoke, but that lord of the Elephant Face heard him, and laughed to himself, gently waving his trunk. And the Chárwáka went on with his preparations. But when all was ready, and the lucky day fixed, then on the morning of that day Ganapati spoke to a certain cow that used to wander at will about the streets, saying: Cow, go and drop your sacred excrement on that Chárwáka's doorstep. And the cow went and did so. And when the Chárwáka came forth from his house, he put his foot on the cow-dung, and slipped and fell, and broke his leg. So they took him up and carried him in again. And before his leg was cured, his bride died.

Then his friend came to him again, and said: See what comes of neglecting to worship Ganapati. But the Chárwáka answered: Go to; you are an idiot. Who could possibly foresee that a miserable cow would cast its dung on my doorstep? What has Ganapati to do with it? Does he, forsooth! look after and direct the excretions of all the cows in the world? A pleasant idea, to be sure! So saying, he drove his friend away, refusing to listen to him. And when his leg was well, he found another bride, and made preparations for another marriage. And he hired a band of sweepers to go before him and sweep all clean before his feet. But when the day came, Ganapati sent for a crow that eat the daily offerings, and said to him: Crow, there is a Chárwáka going to be married to-day. Now, there is an arch over a certain street, beneath which he will pass: and on it there is an image of myself, of stone, which is very old, and the rain and heat have loosened and cracked it, so that it is on the point of falling. Do you watch, therefore, and when you see the Chárwáka passing under, then seat yourself upon me, and I will fall. So the crow flew off, and watching his opportunity, seated himself upon the stone image of Ganapati; and it fell on the Chárwáka as he passed below, and broke his arm. So they took him up and carried him back to his house. And before his arm was well, his bride died.

Then his friend came once more to him and said: Is this your wisdom? What did I tell you? Is it not plain now, who it is that is thwarting your efforts? Then the Chárwáka flew into a rage, and said: Enough of your babbling! I will get married in spite of Ganapati. But what can be anticipated in this miserable city, whose cows befoul the streets, and whose buildings are tumble-down. I will provide against any similar accident happening again. So when he was well, he discovered another bride, and again made preparations for his wedding. And he arranged to go to the bride's house by a circuitous route outside the walls of the city, avoiding the streets altogether. But on the morning of the day, Ganapati went to Indra, and said: Wajradhara³⁵, there is a Chárwáka going to get married to-day. But he must pass over a certain water-course, which is now dry. Lend me your rain-clouds, for I must teach this infidel a lesson. So Indra sent his clouds, and rained furiously on the hills. And as the Chárwáka was passing over the water-course, the river rose suddenly, and swept down in torrents from the hills and carried him away and drowned him.

And Ganapati saw it and smiled. But on a sudden he wept violently.

Now tell me, Princess, why did the lord of obstacles laugh and weep? And Rasakósha ceased. Then the Princess answered: He laughed when he thought of the folly, blindness, and insolence of that miserable infidel. But suddenly great pity came over him, when he remembered the terrible punishment that awaited that foolish fellow in the future, and all those who like him prepare by their own actions a fearful retribution in other lives and another world: and so he wept³⁶.

³⁵ 'Wielder of the thunderbolt,' an epithet of Indra, the god of rain.

³⁶ Perhaps only a Hindoo could appreciate the dexterity with which this story is placed first, and thus the favour of Ganapati, as it were, secured for the rest.

And when the Princess had said this, she rose up and went out, dismissing the King without looking at him, with a wave of her hand: and the King's heart went with her. But the King and Rasakósha returned to their own apartments.

DAY 2

Then the King said to Rasakósha: My friend, although the Princess has answered your question, and you have lost me a day, yet I forgive you, for the sake of the wave of her hand which she made as she went away. Oh! it resembled the bowing of a blossom-loaded spray of creeper in a breeze. But if it were not for the portrait, it would be utterly impossible for me to endure the torture of separation from her till to-morrow. And he passed the night in a state of intoxication³⁷, drunk with the beauty of the Princess, gazing incessantly at the portrait. And he said: Certainly, this painter was master of his art. This is no picture, but a mirror. There is the very scorn on her lip. And when at last the sun rose, the King rose also, and passed the day with Rasakósha in the garden, longing for the moment of reunion. Then when the sun set, they went again to the hall of audience. And there they saw the Princess, clad in a red robe, with a bodice studded with pearls, and her crown and other ornaments, sitting on her throne. And the King trembled as she looked at him, and he sank upon a couch, speechless and fascinated, gazing at her loveliness. Then Rasakósha came forward, and standing before her, began again:

Lady, once upon a time there lived, in the country of a king called Dharmásana³⁸, an old Brahman who had three sons. And he possessed nothing in the world but nineteen cows. And when he was about to die, he called his sons around him, and said to them: My sons, I am in the mouth of death, therefore listen attentively to what I am going to say. All that I have to give you is these cows. Divide them amongst you; and let the eldest of you take half of them; and the next, a quarter of them; and the youngest, a fifth part of them. But if there should be any remainder left over, you must all three of you eat it; if not, all the cows are to be given to the King, and my curse will rest upon you, for disobedience to my last wishes. And having said this, that old Brahman died. And his sons performed his obsequies, and burned him in accordance with the rites.

³⁷ Just as the clothes of the Princess change colour every day, so does the state of the King's mind, which goes through a regular series of transitory emotions (wyabhichári).

³⁸ *i. e.* 'seat of justice.' The meaning is important, as the sequel shows. It does the Princess credit that she notes and remembers it.

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