

FRANCIS BAIN

A MINE OF
FAULTS

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F. W. Bain

A Mine of Faults

An Instrument of Policy

I

Hail to the Lord of the Moony Tire, whose throat derives its blue less from the Kalakuta which he drank but once to save the world, than from the cloud of colour that rests for ever like a ring around his neck, formed of dark glances from the shadowy eyes of the Daughter of the Snow, permanently fixed with indelible affection⁴ on his face!

Long ago, as the God of gods was playing in the evening on the edge of an awful precipice in Himálaya with his wife, it happened, that, all at once, that lotus-eyed Daughter of the Snowy Mountain fell into a brown study. And Maheshwara, by his magic power, penetrated her thoughts. Nevertheless, after a while, making as if he did not know, he enquired of her politely: Of what is my beloved thinking, with such intense abstraction? And hearing him speak, Párvatí started, and blushed, and hesitated. And presently she said: I was but thinking of my Father.⁵ And then, the Great God smiled. And he said, looking at her with unutterable affection: O thou Snowy one, I see, that thou also art but a mine of faults. Thou hast not told me the literal truth! For thou wast thinking, that thy own eyes resembled that great blue chasm in yonder ice, but that the eyes were superior. And it was true. Then Párvatí blushed again, while the god watched her with attention. And after a while, she said: Why didst thou say, that I also am a mine of faults? Then said Maheshwara: Every woman is a mine of faults, and thou art thyself a woman, although a goddess, being, as it were, Woman incarnate, the very type and pattern of them all. And it is very well. For if women had no faults, half their charm would disappear. For, *apropos*, thou hast already blushed twice, which thou wouldst not have done, at all, but for thy feminine preoccupation about thy own incomparable beauty, which led thee to compare thy lotus-eyes with the blue mountain ice, to its inferiority, and for thy shame, which led thee to endeavour to hide from me thy self-approval by telling me a fib. And thy blush is an ornament to thee, which I love to look at, resembling as it does the first kiss of early Dawn on thy father's snowy peaks.

And then, that lovely one blushed in confusion for the third time, deeper than before. And again she said: But why is every woman a mine of faults? Then said her lord: I could tell thee many instances to prove it, had I leisure: but as it is, just now, I have not time. And the goddess exclaimed: Out upon thee! Thou dost only tease me. What is Time to thee? Do I not know that thou thyself art Time itself? And she began to coax and wheedle and caress him, to gain her end, knowing her own power, and certain of success.

So then, after a while, Maheshwara said: See now, if even I, who am a god, even among gods, am utterly unable to resist the feminine cajolery incarnate in thy form, what are the miserable mortal men below to do, against it? Come, then, I will humour thee, by telling thee a tale. But first, I must provide against the mischief that would otherwise come about, by reason of my delay on thy account. For I can remedy the ill, which thou dost overlook, preferring thy own amusement to the business of the three worlds: but it is otherwise with men, who, cajoled and befooled by thy sisters in witchery below, often lose golden opportunities.

⁴ The word here used for *indelible affection* means also *deep blue*.

⁵ *i. e.*, the Himálaya mountain. This was, in a sense true: and yet, she prevaricated.

And then, by his magic power, he suspended the operation of the three worlds, so that everything, animate and inanimate, fell as it were suddenly into a magic sleep, and all action stopped, remaining suspended on the very brink of coming into being, like a mountain waterfall suddenly turned to ice. And he said: When the story is told, I will release things from the spell, and all will go on just as it would have done before. For time, uncounted, is the same as none at all. And then, he turned towards his wife, and said: And now, where shall we sit, to tell and hear? Then she said: I will listen on thy lap, as thou roamest through the air, for so I love to listen to thy tales.

And Maheshwara took her in his arms. And as they floated in space, she laid her head upon his breast, and played with his rosary of skulls, drinking his ocean-story⁶ with the shell of her little ear.

And he said: There lived of old, in the northern quarter, two kings, who were neighbours, and hereditary enemies; and one was of the race of the Moon, and the other of the Sun; and one was king of the hill country, and the other, king of the plains. And the name of the one was Mitra, and that of the other, Chand.⁷ And as fate would have it, King Mitra was a man of peace, and a lover of songs and pictures, and poetry, and ease. And he married a beautiful wife, whom he loved better than his own soul, and lived with her deliciously until at last she died, leaving him with a broken heart and nothing to console him except her recollection, as it were incarnate in a daughter who resembled her exactly in everything but years. But on the contrary, Chand was a lover of war. And he spent his whole life in fighting everlasting battles with all surrounding kings, never resting for a moment: and he reduced them, one by one, to submission and obedience, bending down their stubborn heads till their crowns were reflected all together in a ring in the jewels of his toes as they humbly knelt before him, like a crown composed of crowns: for his military skill was like his stature, gigantic. And he married unwillingly, only for the sake of continuing the line of his descent; and having once obtained a son, he turned his back upon his wife, and went away, leaving her behind him, alone in his capital, and carrying away with him his son, whom he brought up in his camp, making him a warrior, and teaching him, both by continual precept and his own example, utter contempt for every peaceful occupation, and above all, for women. And so he went on, year by year, until at last, when his son was eighteen, and still unmarried,⁸ for his father kept putting off his marriage, saying: What is the need of hurry? a necessary evil is better still deferred: King Chand was suddenly killed, in the field of battle. And he just had time to murmur to his son: Follow in my footsteps: recollect my lessons: guard the kingdom: conquer the regions, and above all, beware of women: when Death took him, as it were, by the throat while he was speaking, and he set out instantly along the Great Road.

So, then, when his son, who was named after his father, had performed his father's obsequies according to the rites, he continued to live, exactly as his father had, before. And after a while, his ministers came to him one day, and said: Maháráj, this is well, that the son should continue to run, like a wheel, in the rut his father made. But still there is a difference, between thee and thy father, which escapes thy observation. Then said Chand: What is that? And they said: He carried about with him everywhere, a son. And Chand said: Ha! so he did. Then said his ministers: It is high time that thy marriage also took place: and then in due time, the parallel between thy father and thyself will be exact, and thou wilt resemble him as closely as the moon resembles his own image in the water.

⁶ This epithet refers to his story-telling abundance. Shiwa is credited with the invention of all the stories in literature.

⁷ Pronounce to rhyme with "stunned." (As these names will constantly recur, I have, for the benefit of the English reader, cut them down, retaining only their core. At length, they are names of the moon and sun, meaning respectively the Friend of the Lotuses, and the Fierce fire of the Sun.)

⁸ Notwithstanding the system of very early marriage, cases of this kind are common in the old stories: as is necessary: for in fairy tales, unmarried heroines and heroes are *sine quibus non*.

And then, Chand laughed, and he exclaimed: As if it were necessary to get married, in order to obtain a son! And his ministers said: It is absolutely necessary. For a son that is truly a son can be begotten only of a wife truly a wife, led by thee around the sacred fire.

Then said Chand: Ye are all mere fools. For if I choose, cannot I adopt a son, as many of my ancestors have done before me? And this is by far the better way. For who can tell beforehand what his own begotten son will be like? For many times a bad son has issued from the loins of a good father. But he who chooses a son, like one that chooses a horse, knows what he is doing: since he takes him for his qualities, visible and sure, out of all that he can find. And in this way, the object is attained, without having recourse to the expedient of a wife.

Then said his ministers: O King, if all men were to follow thy example, the world would come to an end. For even adopted sons cannot be adopted, until they are begotten. And if thou wilt not marry, others must: or else thy plan is impossible and vain.

Then said Chand: Let the others all do exactly as they please, and so will I: for I at least will be an exception to this universal rule of marriage. For if women, as it seems, are indispensable, in this matter of procuring sons, I see no other use in them whatever. What is a woman but a mine of faults? For she cannot fight, and is destitute of valour; and she is absolutely nothing whatever but a man deprived of his manhood, a weakling, a coward, and a dwarf, and as it were, a misincarnation of impotence, accidentally formed by the Creator in a moment of fatigue, or forgetfulness, or hurry, or it may be, out of irony and sport: for there is absolutely nothing whatever worth doing, which a woman can do: nor can she do anything whatever, which a man cannot do far better than herself. And linked to a man, what is she, but a load, and as it were, a fetter or a chain to him, and like a very heavy burden tied to the leg of one running in a race? And therefore, I see no use in her at all, but very much the contrary. For in addition to her incapacity, she is as it were endowed by the Creator with a multitude of positive defects: for she is everlastingly shedding tears, and scolding, and what is utterly intolerable, never stops talking about absolutely nothing, so that the mere presence of a woman is a curse. Moreover, she is as fickle and inconstant and capricious as the wind, and less to be trusted than a cobra; and over and over again, women have deceived and betrayed even their own husbands, both in love and war. But the very worst of all is, that they love a man less, in exact proportion to his worth, preferring almost anyone, no matter what he be, who flatters and courts and overvalues them, to even a hero who does not, abandoning, like flies, everything, to flock to that honey which alone attracts them, and demanding the sacrifice of everything noble to their craving appetite for frivolity and sweets. Therefore for my part I will live, never having anything whatever to do with any one of them: nor shall any jackal of you all persuade me to put off the natural colour I was born with, and by plunging into the vat of matrimony, come out dyed all over an intolerable blue.⁹

And hearing him speak, his ministers looked at one another, laughing in their sleeves. And they said to one another, behind his back: How well does this young lion roar, repeating by rote, as if he were a parrot, exactly what the old one taught him! For what, forsooth! does he know of woman, who has hardly been allowed to see were it even so much as her shadow? Truly, he resembles a young black bee, kept in ignorance of flowers and their honey, and taught to call it poison, conceitedly lecturing older bees, his brothers, about what he does not understand. But we shall see, whether, in due time, we shall not have the laugh on our side. And in the meanwhile, always provided he is not killed like his father, beforehand, his error is, at any rate, an error on the better side. For many a young king-bee, in his position, would long ago have rushed into the opposite extreme, rifling every lotus within his reach, till he died of intoxication and exhaustion and excess. But as for him, lucky will that lotus be, that first succeeds in opening his eyes to what a lotus really is: for he will give her, not the dregs of his satiety, but real devotion springing from an uncontaminated well, pure and delicious, of which

⁹ This refers to a story in the *Panchatantra*, well known in Europe as the fable of the fox who had lost his tail.

no one has ever been allowed to drink before. And in the meantime, we will wait, in expectation of the change, which is certain to arrive.

So they waited: but time went on, and Chand still continued as before, thinking only of battle, and observing the *brahmachari*¹⁰ vow, just as if there were no such thing as a woman in the world.

Then said Párvatí softly to her lord: Sure I am, that the god of the flowery bow¹¹ would have punished him severely for his presumption, had he only heard him so outrageously vituperating his sworn allies and darling weapons as thou sayest.

And Maheshwara said: O Daughter of the Snow, he was punished, sufficiently, as thou wilt learn in due time. For few indeed are the young men or women that the Bodiless god overlooks, seeing that of all of us, he is by far the most jealous in exacting homage to his divinity, as if he doubted it himself, and greedy of extorting from everyone acknowledgment, like a woman uncertain of the affection of her lover, insatiably craving to hear its avowal, over and over again, from his lips. And yet, perhaps the greatest punishment of all would have been, to leave him alone: since of all my creatures, those are most to be pitied, whom love utterly neglects, leaving them as it were in a night to which there never comes a dawn. And who knows this better than thyself, by reason of thy own extraordinary torture,¹² before I had to burn Love's body for his own presumption, with fire from my eye. But now, hush! and lie still, and listen to the remainder of the tale.

II

Now in the meantime, all this while King Mitra continued, living in his capital among the hills, just as if King Chand had never been born, with a soul that was divided, as it were, with exact precision, between his dead wife and his living daughter, who resembled one another like the two Twilights,¹³ so closely, that he could not look at his daughter, without thinking of his wife, nor call his wife back to his recollection without bringing his daughter with her, like a shadow of herself. And between them his soul hovered, going backwards and forwards, till he was hardly able to discern, of the present and the past, which was the reality, and which only a dream. And so as he continued, one day there came to see him in his palace his prime minister, Yogeshwara. Now this minister was well named, being very old and very crafty, and in spite of the King's inattention, he had borne the kingdom on his own shoulders all his life, preserving it intact. For his wisdom resembled his white head, and there was not a black hair in the one, nor a weak spot in the other: since both had reached the perfect state of being without a flaw.

So when he entered, he said slowly to the King: O Maháráj, certainly thy kingdom hangs over the very brink or ruin. And then, the old King looked at him with a smile. And he said: O Yogeshwara, I know of nothing in the world that could utterly destroy this kingdom, except thy own death. For then, indeed, it would be not merely on the brink, but lost and already lying at the very bottom of the abyss. But as it is, I see thee there before me, in vigour and health. How, then, can any ruin be impending? And Yogeshwara said: O King, here is Chand, the son of Chand, the very image of his father, for he has all his father's warlike ability, with youth and its energy superadded, about to fall upon thy kingdom like a thunderstorm. And during his father's lifetime, though my hair turned white, as if with terror, and my ear-root wrinkled, as if with anxiety, nevertheless I managed, somehow or other, by the aid of thy royal fortune and the Lord of Obstacles, to turn his attack always upon others, and keep him busy at a distance from our territory. But now, all other kings being subdued, this young Chand, burning to outdo his father, has determined to fall at last on thee, being as it were ravenous

¹⁰ *i. e.*, of virginity.

¹¹ *i. e.*, the God of Love.

¹² *v.* the *Kumára Sambhawa*, for a full account of Párvatí's wooing.

¹³ Dusk and Dawn.

for still more earth,¹⁴ in the form of these thy hills. And he has sent a message, saying: That unless King Mitra will instantly make submission and pay tribute, he will hear the tread of King Chand's armies coming up towards the hills¹⁵ like the roar of the rains in the burst of their flood. Nor is there any hope that he can be resisted by force, for he and his armies will sweep away ours, like a wind scattering a heap of leaves.

So when he had spoken, the old King looked at him again, smiling exactly as before. And he said: O Yogeshwara, certainly this cloud seems to threaten a devastating storm. And yet, I am ready to stake my whole kingdom, that thou hast already devised a means of averting the catastrophe: nay, of even turning it to our advantage, so that this Chand-cloud, instead of sweeping away all our crops in ruin, will on the contrary water all our fields for another harvest.

Then said Yogeshwara: Maháráj, something indeed I have meditated. And yet, all search would have been vain, and all deliberation idle, had I not, by the special favour of the Elephant-faced deity, discovered a diplomatist far abler than myself. And the old King laughed; and he exclaimed: Ha! that is news indeed! O Yogeshwara, tell me quickly, whether this wonder of diplomacy is young. For the time must come, though long may it be coming, when, like every other man, thou too wilt have to change thy birth for another: and then I shall require him to replace thee. And little did I dream, that my kingdom contained within it another such as thou art. Truly, I am curious to see him. Then said Yogeshwara: Say rather, her: and often hast thou seen her, for it is no other than thy own daughter.

And as the King started, Yogeshwara said again: O King, there are circumstances, in which sex makes all the difference between wisdom and folly: and cases, in which a woman, just because she is a woman, will make a more invincible negotiator than all the ministers, from Dhritaráshtra¹⁶ down, that ever lived. And this is such a case, and all the more, because the woman is such a woman as thy daughter, whom I think that the Creator must have framed, with an eye to this very situation. And now, then, I will tell thee, that I foresaw this from the first, and I kept it as it were stored in reserve as a resource in the hour of exigency, to be, if the Lord of Obstacles were only favourable, the triumph of my policy and its crown, and the copingstone of my career. And with this very object it was, that long ago, as thou knowest, I obtained thy permission to cultivate thy daughter, and to train her, and to tutor her; and as I watched her growing, I said within myself: Some day, this sowing of thine, aided by my culture, will be fruitful, and it may be, she will prove an instrument of policy, to save the kingdom from destruction, when every other instrument has failed. And very apt indeed was my pupil, and yet there is another Master, who has done infinitely more for her, in this matter of diplomacy, than I. For I think that the very God of Love himself has befriended this kingdom, and conspired to assist it in its need, lending his aid to supplement my own insufficient efforts, and mixing in thy daughter's composition some bewildering ingredient, peculiar to herself.

And then, all at once, the King exclaimed: Ah! no, not so. O Yogeshwara, thou art mistaken, for he took it from her mother. Ah! cunning god, well he knew, where to find the fascination he required. O her voice! and her eyes! and the smile upon her lips! and O alas! for the sweetness that is gone for ever! Aye! indeed, there breathed from every part of her something that I cannot name, some spell, some property, some fragrance, flung as it were from some intoxicating source within her soul, to drive me to despair.

And as the King stopped, sadly fixing his eyes upon the ground, Yogeshwara said again: Maháráj, whether the Deity took it, as thou sayest, from the Queen her mother, or invented it afresh, I cannot tell: but certain it is, that the feminine delusion in thy daughter is the very masterpiece of a Deity skilled beyond all others in the production of the irresistible: and old as I am, and versed in all the varieties and ways of women, I never saw anything that resembled it before. And often, as I

¹⁴ The special duty of a king, according to the old Hindoo sages, is to hunger and thirst after earth, like Ovid's Eresichthon.

¹⁵ The monsoon which travels N.E.

¹⁶ One of the heroes in the Mahabhárata.

have watched her, innocently casting what thou hast called her fragrance about her in the air, with none to note it, and all unconscious of her own inexplicable charm, like a great blue lonely lotus-flower growing on a silent mirror of black water in an undiscovered forest-pool, never even dreaming of looking at its own reflection in the water, towards which all the time it bends, as if to kiss it, absolutely blind to the loveliness that almost touches it, and issues from itself, depriving everyone that sees it of his reason, I have striven in wonder to discover, exactly in what the charm consisted, and in what part of her it lay: and yet I could not, so craftily has the Creator distributed it everywhere about her. And yet, musing over it alone, it has seemed to me to be a thing compounded, as it were, of contradiction. For as you listen to her, you are amazed by her intelligence, and when you look at her, you smile as it were against your will, and yet with an inclination to laugh, from pure delight, so strange and so surprising and somehow or other, absurdly delicious does it seem, for such sagacity to lodge, incongruously, in such a casket, so dainty, and so delicate, and so curiously and beautifully mocking as it were the cruder mould of all her ordinary sisters, that it leaves you puzzled and perplexed and doubtful, whether to treat her as a woman or a child, or something altogether different from both. And there is a sort of exhilarating, and as it were, caressing sweetness, and a sound resembling liquid laughter, falling far away and yet lurking, somewhere or other, in the tone of her voice, as it gives utterance to aphorisms worthy of Brihaspati,¹⁷ that flatters and intoxicates the ear, stealing through it straight into the soul, and lending to everything she says, even were it nonsense, a power of persuasion not its own. And as if this, coupled to her beauty, were not enough, there is something affectionate, and confiding, and as it were, an appealing submission that is mixed, I cannot tell how, with a kind of proud and half playful, half serious defiance, that flatters and delights and bribes and corrupts you in her behaviour, and would utterly disarm you, even if you were, what is absolutely impossible, her enemy; so that if once you looked at her, you would be helpless, and wholly unable to be angry with her, no matter what she did; for she would laugh at your anger and beguile it, like a bewitching child endeavouring to play with incomparable grace the part of a woman, and challenging you to find fault with her on any ground whatever. And yet she has the cunning of her sex in so large a measure, that she seems to have monopolised it all. And now I am a booby, and all my experience is of less value than a straw, if there is even one young man in the eight quarters of the world capable of looking at her for an instant without losing all his senses at one blow; were he even the very incarnation of asceticism. But as to this young Chand, I have followed him from his childhood, by means of my spies, and know him; and very cheap do I hold his professions of misogyny and *brahmacharyam*, now that his father is away. For an old misogynist may be in earnest, and actually mean what he says, having been deceived and betrayed and disgusted, by reason of his experience of some women in particular, with all. But the man whose wisdom is taken at second-hand from another, and who is filled only with the conceit of a knowledge not drawn from his experience, finds it crumble to pieces as a rule at the very first touch of reality and life, like sand: since a single shock to any part of his imaginary fortress brings the whole to the ground with a run. For finding it untrustworthy in any one point, he distrusts it all, and is left utterly defenceless, at the mercy of his antagonist. And of all kinds of conceit, that of a youth, himself, as Chand is, formed as it were of amber, on purpose to attract the sex, like grass, who boasts himself proof against a woman's glamour, never even dreaming what it is or what it means, is the greatest, and the shortest, and the most easily annihilated, and the most easily abandoned, and forgotten and forgiven, both by women and the world. And thy daughter will bring him to his senses, and deprive him of his reason, in the same instant that he sees her: for then he will suddenly discover what a woman means: since till now, she has been to him nothing but a word. And now, O King, I have told thee: and now all rests with thee alone. For thy daughter must in any case marry somebody: and where could be found for her a better husband than this very Chand, whose alliance would be the salvation of the state?

¹⁷ The preceptor of the gods; as we should say, a Solon.

And when he ended, after a while, the King said, very slowly: Old friend, thy words resembled a sword, driven into my heart. And as I listened to thy voice, holding up before me, like a skilful painter, the picture of my daughter's charm, I saw in it, as in a mirror, another standing all the while beside her, looking at me all the while with the affection in her eyes that I shall never see again. And I flew back in an instant, carried on thy voice, to old sweet idle hours, when like thee I used to sit and watch and muse, striving to discover the essence and the secret of that very self-same charm. And I would give a hundred lives only to be young Chand, and have that charm employed on me, again. And if he is able to resist it, I do not envy him, nor think the more of him on that account. But let us try, and see. For as to the wisdom and the policy of what thou hast proposed, there cannot be a doubt of it: and my daughter must alas! be married, as thou sayest, either to another, or to him. Only they say, that this young Chand is so declared an enemy of women, as never even to suffer any one of them so much as to approach him. And how, then, is the charm to work? For in magic of this kind, the spell will not act, unless the magician be in contact with his object. And how, then, shall we bring about the meeting of the charmer and the charmed?

Then said Yogeshwara: O King, I have a stratagem to meet that very difficulty, which, if my experience is not utterly at fault, is the real, and the only one before us. For could we only place them in proximity, I am ready to cut my own head off, if he can ever get away. And thy daughter will fall into the scheme, and understand it, almost before we begin to tell her, and require no instructions, since this is a matter in which she is wiser than us all: and to go about to tell a young beauty how to lay her snares for her natural and proper prey would be to give lessons to the spider how to make his web. Moreover, I do not doubt that she will take part in the plot not merely with avidity, but something more. For she has heard, as who has not? of this young Chand, and nothing is so attractive to the curiosity of a woman as a young woman-hater: since every woman thinks, in her heart, that she could perhaps persuade him to count her an exception to his rule, and every woman in her heart partly agrees with him, since, if she could have chosen, she would have preferred to be a man. And women have been adorers, since the beginning, of exactly such young warriors of whom he is the type.

So, then, by Yogeshwara's advice, King Mitra sent an answer to the message of King Chand, saying: That King Mitra was ready to accede to all King Chand's demands, and pay him tribute in any such form as he might choose, if only King Chand would come up in person, under the safe-conduct of King Mitra, to require it. For the matter would touch, in its adjustment, the honour of both families, and the hereditary differences could only be determined by personal arrangement on the spot.

And when Chand got his answer, he said to his ministers: See, now, everything is settled, though I would rather have settled it by arms. But as it is, now, by all means, I will go up, and give him the personal interview he asks. For I have never yet been among his hills, nor seen his capital: moreover, it is only fair to make concessions to pride willing to be humbled, and families careful of their honour.

And his ministers consulted together, and they said: Maháráj, doubtless, the safe-conduct of King Mitra is unexceptionable, and above suspicion: for he is a man of his word. And yet, be on thy guard. For though King Mitra be incapable of deceit, his minister, Yogeshwara, has almost as much craft as the Creator. For though he could not make a world, he could preserve it, once it was made, almost as well as its maker, so unfathomable is his policy and guile. Moreover, King Mitra has a daughter, who resembles his minister in being an incarnation of deception, only in a different form. For feminine beauty has befooled more men than were ever beguiled by any other form of fascination or illusion. Therefore beware! for we think it probable that a snare has been prepared for thee.

And Chand laughed, and exclaimed: I am obliged to ye all, for your wisdom and advice, and now I am warned. But the matter is very simple, being wholly an affair of force, and mine is by far the greater. Therefore there is no room at all for me to be beguiled, even by Yogeshwara. And as to the daughter, little do I fear her. For I have an armour of proof around my heart, so thick, that never an arrow from her quiver can so much as reach it, were it sharpened even by the very God of Love.

And then, the God, whose banner bears a bull on it,¹⁸ paused. And he said: O Snowy one, it chanced, that when Chand uttered this brag, it was the season of Spring, who, with his flowers and his buds, was all around him as he spoke. And as fate would have it, he was overheard by Love himself, who was hovering near him in the air; for he happened to be paying a visit to his friend.¹⁹

So when that god of the bee-strung bow heard him, he said to Madhu: O Madhu, who is this boaster, who claims, notwithstanding his extreme youth, to be proof against me and my weapons?²⁰ For thou hast been here longer than I, who have only just arrived.

And Madhu told him all about King Chand, and his antipathy to women.

And when Love heard it, he looked at Chand for a long time, with very great attention. And after a while, he said: O Madhu, it is very singular to hear such overweening and presumptuous words, falling from the mouth of such a youth as this. For he is exactly the man who in my hands would be a deadly weapon against almost any member of that sex, which he fancies himself able to resist.

Then said Madhu: Perhaps it is not only fancy. For often have I laid snares for him, but always without success.

And Love laughed, with lips that curled in derision like his own bow. And he said: Dear Madhu, thou shouldst have come to me, for aid. Thou art but half thyself, without thy friend. And he looked at Chand, out of the long corner of his eye, that resembled a woman's. And he said: I have an affection for these arrogant youths, for it is my hobby and my delight to bring them to submission. And now I will teach him a lesson, in his own art of war, that he has still to learn, not to despise his enemy; and prove to him, by my own favourite method of ocular demonstration, that a woman and my deity are more than match for greater force than his. And indeed, the conjunction²¹

¹⁸ *i. e.*, Maheshwara.

¹⁹ *i. e.*, Spring. Kāma and Madhu – Love and Spring – are sworn friends in Hindoo mythology: an obvious poetical allegory, like the *ver* and *Venus* of the old Romans.

²⁰ *i. e.*, women.

²¹ An astrological term, which in modern Marathi, well known to the god, means a marriage.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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