

# The Bride of a God and other stories

L. Adams Beck

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*Title:* The Bride of a God and other stories

*Date of first publication:* 1924

*Author:* Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as L. (Lily) Adams Beck) (1862-1931)

*Date first posted:* Apr. 8, 2023

*Date last updated:* Apr. 8, 2023

Faded Page eBook #20230412

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines

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# THE BRIDE OF A GOD

[Atlantic Monthly, May, 1924]

## I

Two hundred years ago in India, many happy people dwelt in the little town of Krishnapur—happy because their belief was fixed and immutable and it brought them gladness; for in all innocence and devotion they worshiped Krishna the Beloved, the Herdsman of Brindaban, Lord of Love, whose name their little town carried like a jewel of price.

And certainly the God had gifted it with beauty. The terraced houses climbed the ways of a hill deeply wooded with tamarind and pippala trees, and down a deep ravine ran the little Bhadra River, falling from great heights to feed the blue lake below. The place lay in the sunshine, clear and bright as a painting on crystal brought by the Chinese merchants, and by the favor of the God a delicate coolness spread upward from the lake among the clustered houses. In its midst was a very small island, with a little temple lifting its shining gilded roof and spires among the palms. In this he was worshiped as the Flute-Player, an image of black basalt, very beautiful—a youth with the Flute forever at his lips; and

there were devout men and women who declared that, in the midnight silence, sounds of music comparable only to the music of Indra's heaven had been heard among the palm trees and mingled with the eternal song of the river. This report and the beauty and quiet of the fair little town brought a few pilgrims to bathe in the lake, crowding the broad low ghauts that led down to its pure waters with their flower-hued garments and the strong chanting of their prayers.

Many legends haunted the town of Krishnapur.

Now the Pandit Anand Das was a man learned in the Vedas and all the sacred books, and his heart glowed with a great devotion. Since his son, who should have inherited his learning, was dead, and it could not flow in that beloved channel, he resolved that, slight and frail as a woman's intellect must needs be, he would instruct his daughter Radha in the mysteries of the Holy Ones, as far as possible. He had named her Radha from his devotion to Sri Krishna; for Radha is the heart's love of the God, and in bestowing this name he had made offering and prayed that he might live to see her as beautiful, as true in devotion as the Crowned Lady. The prayer was answered.

Beautiful indeed was Radha, an image of golden ivory, with lips like a pomegranate bud before its sweetness is tasted, and great eyes dark as the midnight and lit by her stars. Beautiful the soft moulding of her rounded chin, and the shaping of the flower-face poised on its stem like a champak blossom that all the bees of love must seek, and the silk-soft brows and the heavy sweep of shadowy lashes. Flawless from head to rosy heel as the work of a mighty

craftsman who wills not that his name shall perish, so was Radha; and when the people saw her as she passed along the little street, they gave thanks to the Beautiful for her beauty. Fairer than fair, wiser than wise in all the matters of the Gods, she lived her quiet days among the palms and temples, and each day laid its gift at her feet.

Now the Brahman, her father, having, as it were, devoted her to the God, rejoiced to see that in her, *bhakti*—which is faith, love, and worship in a perfect unity—was a steadfast flame in her heart; nor was there any word to utter her burning devotion. As a child she would leave all play to sit before his feet and hear as he read of the divine Krishna,—

The story of the Lord of All  
Beginneth with a Pastoral,—

and her child's heart lived among the meadows of Brindaban with the marvelous Child whose very name is 'He who draws or attracts.'

And thus her learned father taught her.

'This Krishna is the true incarnation of the Preserver who upholds the universe. "For in him," says the Mahabharata Santeparva, "the worlds flutter like birds in water"; and of him did not Maheshwara the Destroyer say: "The divine and radiant Krishna must be beheld by him who desires to behold Me." Thus in Sri Krishna is all Deity sheathed in flesh, that the soul of man may dimly apprehend his glory. A Child—yet thus in the Holy Song does the Prince Arjun cry to him:

---

"God, in thy body I see all the Gods,  
And all the varied hosts of living things,  
The undivided Thou, the highest point  
Of human thought."

'Can such a Being be approached by mere humanity? No, he is too far away—the ear of man may not hear, and the eye of man may not see. How if he were born among us, if we might touch his feet, and show him in simple human ways our devotion? How if he would turn the common earth to beauty by breathing the air we breathe?

'And because it is so desired, it is done, and Krishna is born, the Herdsman of Brindaban, the Beloved of India.'

So reading day by day, he instructed her in the lovely story of the Childhood, and, with the ancient Pastoral, took her to the forests and rich cattle pastures where Jumna River flows wide and still to the sea. The people are kind and simple, the sacred cows are driven out at dawn to feed, and brought back in the brief glow of evening by the fair women who tend the gentle beasts; and this is Brindaban, the home on earth of the Lord of All, the utterly Adored.

So much a child! But when floods of rain threatened to sweep away the herds and their keepers, he raised the hill Govardhan on the palm of his small soft hand, and sheltered them from the torrents and the fighting winds. And, as she sat at his feet, the Pandit showed his child Radha pictures of



that other Child, darkly beautiful, who could poise the world on his shoulder.

## II

As she grew older, the story widened and deepened with her years. But as she came to girlhood, her anxious mother, Sita Bai, ventured with trembling to doubt if it were well to draw her heart yet closer to the radiant manhood of the young God; for now the story is to be mystically interpreted and read by the light of the wisdom of the old and learned.

'Was there not Mira Bai, who went mad for the love of him and could not leave his image or his temple, and dreamed of his sweetness night and day until she wasted to a shadow and died? And, my lord, is not his great temple as Jagannath, Lord of the World, but ten miles from us at the great town of Chaki; and is it not filled with bands of *devidasis*—the dancing girls? Would you have your daughter as one of them—sacred but—vile?'

She caught the word back on her lips and looked about her in terror. Then added passionately:—

'O my lord, is it well to kindle such a passion in her heart, and she little more than a child?'

'Better be possessed by that love than by the follies and wickednesses that haunt the hearts of women to their ruin

and ours. Woman, I know what I do. Be silent!' was all his answer.

So she was silent, and daily the story went onward and filled the soul of the girl. For now, as Krishna grew to manhood, beauty came upon him, irresistible, heart-compelling, the world's Desire, and on the banks of Jumna was sung the Song of Songs—the Lover, dark and glorious, to whom the souls of all the women of Brindaban, whether wife or maid, cling passionately, forgetful of self and of all but him. And the deepest symbol of the adoration of Krishna is the passion of man for woman and woman for man.

'Walk warily here, my child, if you would understand,' said the Pandit; 'for we move among pitfalls made by the mind of man fettered to his senses—the mind of man, that coin bearing the double superscription of spirit and flesh. Yet the story is plain for him who has ears to hear!'

And Radha, speechless, with dark eyes filled with adoring love, listened—listened, with no heart for aught else.

'Tell me more, more!' she said.

And he, seeing the divine Passion, the trembling of her lips, the fluttering of her heart, told on, imparting the desire of the God.

And when, as at this time, a marriage was spoken of for her with the son of the rich Brahman Narayan, she shrank from it with such shuddering horror that for very pity her

father put it by for a while. But her mother watched in great fear.

And every evening, when the light was calm and golden and her father laid his books aside, she would sit before him, putting all else aside that she might drink in the sweet nectar of his words.

And now he told of the Herd-maidens bathing in the clear ripple of the river where the trees hang in green shadow over the deep pools.

Their garments lie on the bank, forgotten in the joy of youth and life, as they sing the praises of the Beloved, until at length one remembers and looks, and lo! some thief has stolen the vesture, and they stand ashamed in the crystal lymph, their long locks gathered about them.

Who has so bereft them? For no man or woman should bathe uncovered; and they have sinned—they know it!

And then a voice calls from the world of leaves above their heads, and there sits the Desired, shining like a star caught in the topmost boughs, and before him are rolled the stolen garments, and when, all shamefaced, they entreat for their restoration, the Voice exhorts them:—

'And if it is for My sake you have bathed and purified yourselves, then come forth fearless, and receive your vesture from my hands.'

And he laid in her hand the picture of the Gopis fearing and adoring as they leave the lustral water, some shrinking in

humility, to receive their vesture from the Beautiful, who sits smiling far above them.

'And this, my daughter, is a very great mystery!' he said gravely. 'And its meaning is this: "Thy *Thou* is still with thee; if them wilt attain unto me, quit thyself, and come."'

And she said,—

'Father, surely the Self is withered into nothing when this dear worthy One calls. What were life, death—anything in the Three Worlds, compared with beholding his blissful countenance?'

And he replied,—

'Even so it is'; and laid aside his book and fell into a deep musing on the Perfections of the Lord; and Radha sat beside him.

So that night her mother said timidly,—

'Lord of my life, the girl is possessed by the God. I fear for her life. In her sleep she speaks aloud of him and stretches empty arms to the air, moaning. The color fades in her lips, her eyes are fixed on dreams. She has no peace. Should we not seek an earthly lover for her own, that she may forget this Divine that is all the world's?'

And he replied sternly,—

'Woman, lift up a grateful heart to the God that this girl is not as the rest, but consumed by the love of the Highest. I

have a thought unknown to you. All will be better than well.'

And she desisted in great fear and obedience; but the very next evening the story told of Radha—heart of the God's heart, the Beautiful whose name she herself bore! And she listened in an ecstasy.

It was a very still evening, the stars shining large and near the earth, the moon a mere crescent, such as when Maheshwara wears it in his hair and dreams on the mountain-peaks of Himalaya. They sat in the wide verandah, supported on wooden pillars bowered in the blossoms of the purple bougainvillaea and the white and scented constellations of jasmine. The wide transparent blinds of split cane were raised to admit the faintly perfumed breath of the garden; and by the Pandit's elbow, as he sat on his raised seat, burned a little oil lamp, that he might read the sacred pages.

Radha sat on her low cushion beside him, the sari of Dakka muslin threaded with gold fallen back from her head as she looked up.

"In the passion of their worship, the women of Brindaban are drawn out into the forest, each grieving if he do but turn his calm immortal eyes upon any other than herself. Therefore, only in the secret places of the forest is there now any joy. It has left the little houses and gone out to dwell by the river. They must follow, for they bear the world's wound in their heart, and he is its Balm.

"For a time his eyes rest on Radha the Beautiful, and she, transported with the pride of love, entreats that he will carry her in his arms. He stretches them to her with his mystic smile, and even as they touch her, he vanishes, and she is alone in a great darkness."

'Here again, my daughter, is the parable clear,' the Pandit interrupted the reading to say. 'Here is no room for spiritual pride and exclusive desire. Learn your place, proud soul! It is at his feet until he, unasked, shall raise you to the level of his heart.'

"So at the last she falters and falls, stunned with grief, the herdmaids weeping beside her, and—Suddenly the Light shines. He has returned. He speaks:—

""Now I have tried you. You have remembered and thought upon me.

""You have increased your affection like beggars made newly rich.

""You have chosen my service, abandoning the world and the Scriptures.

""How can I do you honor? I cannot reward you enough.

""Though I should live for a hundred of Brahma's years, yet I could not be free of my debt.""

### III

She sat in silence; and breaking upon it, they heard the soft tread of a man stop by their gate, and voices, and the servant who guarded the gate came in haste.

'Great Sir, here is the holy Brahman who is chief at the altar of great Jagan-nath in Chaki, and he would speak with you.'

'Bring him instantly hither. Stay! I go myself!' cried the Pandit, rising. He had forgotten his daughter.

'Father, have I your leave to go?' She drew the sari about her face.

'Daughter, no. This is a wise man and great. Be reverent and humble, and stay.'

She stood, trembling with fear to see one so holy. Surely it was a portent that the servant of the God should come on their reading. Yet she quieted her heart, and when her father, attending the great guest, placed him on his own seat, with the image of the wise Elephant-Headed One wreathing his trunk behind him, she bowed before him and touched his feet, for to her he was as Brahman and priest, an earthly God.

He was a man in middle life, tall and dignified in spite of a corpulence which gained upon him, and his features clear-cut in the proud lines that denoted his unstained ancestry. He knew himself the superior of kings. He would have spurned with his foot a jewel touched by the Moghul Emperor of India. Yet more. Had the Rajput Rana, a king of his own

faith, sun-descended, royal, cast his shadow on his food in passing, he had cast it, polluted, away. So great is the pride of the Brahmans.

'Namaskar, Maharaj! What is your honored pleasure?' asked the Pandit.

'I am on my way to Dilapur on the divine business,' he answered, with a voice like the lowest throbbing notes of the bronze temple gong. 'But I would have a word with you, Brother, as I go.'

'Has my daughter your leave to depart, Maharaj?'

'Certainly, friend, though it is of her I come to speak. May I behold the face of the maiden? A Brahmani has no need to veil it. They are not secluded like the Toorki women.'

'Unveil before the Presence, my daughter Radha.'

The guest started at the name so familiar to him in his devotions.

'It is singular, in view of my errand, that you should have given her this holy name, Pandit-ji.'

'She deserves it for the devoted love that she bears to Sri Krishna,' returned her father. 'Of her face I say nothing, but her heart is flawless.'

'It is well!' said the priest, Nilkant Rai, and turned gravely to Radha.



Many were the *devidasis*, the nautch girls of the God, in the Temple of Jagannath. His eyes, deep and glowing, were no strangers to beauty, for the fairest were gathered like flowers to adorn the altars of the God, to dance and sing before his divine dreams, in all things to abide his will.

Six thousand priests serve Sri Krishna as Jagannath, Lord of the Universe, at Chaki, for great is his splendor. The Raja of Dulai, royal though he be, is the sweeper of his house. More than twenty thousand men and women do his pleasure, and of the glories of his temple who can speak?

But never had Nilkant Rai beheld such beauty as trembled before him then—darkly lovely, whitely fair, the very arrows of desire shooting from the bow of her sweet lips, half-child, half-woman, wholly desirable.

His eyes roved from the wonder of her face to the delicate rounding of her young breasts and the limbs exquisitely expressed, yet hidden, by the sari.

He looked in silence, then turned to the Pandit.

'Surely she is an incarnation of Radha in face as in name. Brother, she has my leave to go.'

Yet, when she had fled like a shadow, Nilkant Rai did not hasten. The other waited respectfully. *Pañ*—the betel for chewing—was offered in a silver casket. A garland of flowers perfumed with attar of roses was placed about the guest's neck. Refreshments were served and refused.

At length he spoke, looking on the ground.

'Brother, it is known to you that the God makes choice when he will of a bride, favored above all earthly women. Beautiful must she be, pure as a dewdrop to reflect his glory and return it in broken radiance, young, devout—Surely, even in this land of devotion, it is not easy to find such a one!'

'It is not easy, holy one!' returned the Pandit, trembling as he foreknew the end.

The other continued calmly.

'Now it so chanced that the priest Balaram passed lately through this town, and going by the tank to the temple, he beheld your daughter, and returning, he came to me and said: "The God has shown the way. I have seen the Desire of his eyes."' "

'Great is the unlooked-for honor,' said the Pandit, trembling violently; 'so great that her father and mother bend and break beneath it. But consider, Holy One—she is an only child. Have pity and spare us! The desolate house—the empty days!' His voice trailed broken into silence.

'If this hides reluctance!' Nilkant Rai began sternly. 'If you have given a foul belief to any tale of the Temple—'

'I, holy Sir! I have heard nothing. What should I hear?' The old man's voice was feeble with fear. 'Do I disparage the honor? Sri Krishna forbid! No, it is but the dread of losing her—the empty, empty house!'

'And is she not at the age when marriage becomes a duty, and would she not leave you then? Unreasonable old man!'

'Holy Sir—Maharaj, I tremble before the honor. But if the girl married, she would bring her babe and make her boast and gladden our hearts. But thus she is lost to us. Have pity! There are other Brahmans rich in daughters. Take not the one from my poverty.'

Nilkant Rai rose to his feet with majesty.

'I go. Never shall the God be rejected and ask twice. But when your daughter, old and haggard, looks up at you, answer that it was her unworthy father who kept her as a drudge on earth, when he might have raised her to a throne in heaven.'

As the old man stood with clasped hands, Radha broke from the shadows and threw herself before him.

'My father, would you hold me back? What joy, what glory in all the world can befall your child like this? The bride of the God! O Father!'

The tears were running down her face like rain. They glittered in the lamplight. He could not meet her eyes. Nilkant Rai stood by, silent.

'She is beautiful as a nymph of Indra's heaven!' he thought. 'Not Urvasi and Menaka, the temptresses of sages, were more lovely!'

'The maiden is right. She is worthy of the God's embrace. Is there more to say?'

'Maharaj, I worship you!' said the old man submissively (and still he had not looked at his child). 'It is well. What orders?'

'Let her be perfumed and anointed daily. Let her food and drink be purer than the pure. Let her worship daily at the temple of Sri Krishna. The bridal shall be held in a month from this, that time being auspicious. The Car of her Lord shall come for her as the Queen she is, and all envy the Chosen.'

He turned to Radha, still at her father's feet.

'Farewell, happiest Lady. Joys earthly and celestial await you. Rest in the knowledge of the favor of Sri Krishna. Hear of him, dream of him, until the glad truth slays all dream.'

He moved slowly toward the steps. Her father pursued him.

'Maharaj. Forgive, forgive! I neglect my manners. Thanks a thousand-fold for the honor you have condescended to bring us this happy day. Your commands are ever before me.'

The words poured forth. He could not say enough.

'It is well, Pandit-ji. It is well. Say no more!' said the great guest, striding onward to the gate where two other Brahmans and his palki awaited him.

She stood in the shadows as the Pandit returned.

'Father, beloved, did I do wrong? Have you not taught me all my life that there is none like him—none?'

'My pearl, what is done is done. He cannot be resisted. It is well your heart goes with your feet. Now sleep.'

She passed in silently, and sat by the small cotton mattress laid on the floor all night. How could she sleep?

Nor was there sleep for the Pandit. Sita Bai needed little telling, for she had listened behind the curtains; and now, with a livid pallor upon her, she confronted him.

'Lord of my life, what is there to say? You know—you know!'

'I know,' he answered heavily.

Sita Bai was too dutiful a wife to reproach her husband with anything done; but his own thoughts returned to the long evenings spent in contemplating the Perfections of the God. He replied to his own thought.

'Yet had she never heard his name, it had been the same. Nothing could have saved her from the temple of Jagannath.'

'Saved.' He caught the word back from his own lips in deadly fear, and added in haste: 'Whom the God honors cannot set his Grace aside, and there is none who would. None in heaven or earth.'

'None,' echoed the woman faintly. Then, in a whisper scarcely to be heard, 'Whom Nilkant Rai chooses'—and steadily averted her eyes.

They dared say no more of this even in whispers to each other; for if this were reported, grief, ruin, death were the sure end.

One word more did Anand Pandit breathe:—

'She must keep her joy. It is the God's. If he love her, he yet may save her. Let no word be said.'

She touched his feet in token of submission. All night they sat in a bitter silence.

#### IV

Next day, all through the little holy town, bathing in its glad sunshine beneath the swaying palms, had run the news of this honor. Sita Bai, with a mask of gladness fixed on her face, visited the wife of the goldsmith, and begged her sympathy with the divine event. The gold bangles rang as she joined her hands; for she had come clad in splendor, and her sari was of purple silk of Paitan woven with strands of gold.

When Radha went with her mother to the temple, crowds of the simple people had gathered by the lake beneath the neems and tamarinds to behold the beauty beloved of the God. True, they had seen it before, but today it was strange

and new. Her throat rose like the stem of the lotus above the snowy folds of her sari, and like the purity of the lotus was her face with its downward eyes hidden in heavy lashes. She moved already like a bride, a little apart from her mother, to whom she had clung hitherto.

A voice shouted, 'Jai Krishna!' (Victory to Krishna), and many voices took up the cry. A woman, quivering with eagerness, flung a garland of wet marigolds about her neck. Flowers were strewn before her happy feet. Never before had a Bride been chosen from Krishnapur. It might well seem the benediction of the God.

A beautiful woman, in a sari of jade green and silver, pressed up close to her and whispered,—

'Pray for me, O Beautiful, when you lie in the arms of the God, for me Ramu, wife of Narayan the Sahoukhar, that I may bear a son. Surely he will grant it for a wedding gift!' She stooped to the feet of Radha to worship her.

'I will pray,' the bride answered, pacing gently onward.

Petitions poured in upon her as she moved through the dappled light and shadow of the trees, beside the melted jewels of the lake. A great gladness possessed her. It was as if the air upbore her light feet; and the people followed in crowding joy until she made the *ashtanga*—the great prostration before the Flute-Player, the Alone, the Beautiful, who moves through the world scattering joy and love with the far music of his Flute—He to whom all and none may draw near.

When the people were gone and the sun had set, and quiet breathed from the gray garments of evening, she entreated her father to read to her from the Song of Songs, written by the sweet-voiced singer Jayadeva, who has sounded all the secrets of love.

At first he hesitated, then with a strange look upward, he read.

"This is the story of the anguish of Radha.

"For Radha, jasmin-bosomed, beautiful, waited in vain for her immortal Lover, by the banks of Jumna. This is the Dark Night of the Soul, for the face of the Beloved is averted in eclipse. In her sight, joyous and joy-giving, he lingers on the banks of Jumna with the happy herd-maids, while the *koels* flute their soft *koo-hoo-oo* in the deep green shade. And the poet makes the invocation:—

"Krishna, Lord of Love, stoop from thy throne to aid us. Deign to lift up our hearts for the sake of this song that is the cry of all who shed the tears of desertion as Radha shed them.'

"And Radha cries aloud in her despair:—

"Wind of the Indian stream,  
A little, O a little, breathe once more  
The fragrance of his mouth. Blow from thy store  
One last word, as he fades into a dream.'



"But he, far away in his Heaven, is lost in the Infinite Bliss; while she, deceived, beholds him playing by the river. Yet, because the soul, fevered with illusion, cannot soar to him, he forsakes his throne, sending his messenger before him, thus to plead with her:—

"The lesson that thy faithful love has taught him  
He has heard.

The wind of spring, obeying thee has brought him  
At thy word.

What joy in all the Three Worlds was so precious  
To thy mind?

*Ma kuru manini manamayè*,<sup>[1]</sup>

O be kind!

[1] My proud one, do not indulge in scorn.

"He pleads, as it were, for forgiveness, the Divine reasoning with the soul and justifying his ways. And all is well, and joy leaps over the horizon like the sun that drives the dark with arrows of victory. For he comes.

"So then, Jayadeva writes of the high close, the mystic nuptials of the soul and her Bridegroom."

The old Pandit paused, his voice trembling, with the dark eyes of his Radha fixed upon him. Then read on:—

"Enter the House of Love, O Loveliest!  
Enter the marriage bower, most Beautiful,  
And take and give the joy that Krishna grants."

Again he paused, the words choking in his throat, and she laid a soft hand on his.

"Then she, no more delaying, entered straight;  
Shame, which had lingered in her downcast eyes,  
Departed shamed. And like the mighty deep  
Which sees the moon and rises, all his life  
Uprose to drink her beams."

He laid the book aside and extinguished the little lamp, so that only the moonlight was about them.

After a while, he said,—

'My daughter, the God leads you in strange ways. Yet, whatever the hearts of men, he is true. Offer him your heart in all purity, and in the end it shall be well with you. We will speak of this no more.'

'But, Father beloved, do you not share my joy?' she said tremulously.

He was silent.

The days went by very swiftly to the time of the divine marriage. Messengers came and went between the mighty temple of Jagannath and little Krishnapur, bearing gifts and jewels. Casting half-contemptuous glances, they passed by the little shrine where the Bride worshiped daily; but all contempt died when they were admitted to see her face.

'The God has chosen well!' they said, and looked at one another with meaning.

So the great day dawned in a passion of sunlight, and with flutes and drums and shouting the great Car of Jagannath waited for the Bride; and as she came forth, the pomegranate-blossom flush of joy rising in her golden cheek, her parents bowed before her and touched her feet in worship—no longer their daughter, but a goddess.

Ankleted and zoned with gold, clothed in woven gold so supple that it yielded to every breath, the sun-rays dazzled back from her upon the adoring crowd until they put up their hands to veil the splendor. And so she sat, a Radiance, for all the world to see, high on the Car wreathed and hung with flowers, the image of the Bridegroom beside her.

Oh, wonderful, terrible greatness for a woman! And so, with songs and triumph they bore her to her bridal.

Mighty is the Temple of Jagannath, where by the eternal sea the people crowd all day to worship the Lord of the Universe. In little Krishnapur, he is the Beloved, the

Herdsmen, the Beautiful. Here, he is far removed—too great for love or fear. Human thought quails before his Vastness.

The temple is in itself a city, and no feet but those of worshipers may pass even the strong outward walls. Very glorious are the carvings that adorn it. Terrible figures of Gods, many-headed, many-armed, bending giant bows, trampling giant enemies, brandishing awful weapons, dandling on their knees great Goddesses with slender loins and full breasts that overweight their swaying grace. Very awful are these figures, with clustering hair and crowns above their long eyes, and suns and moons rising and setting on their brows, and the symbols of their might scattered about them.

But it was night, and it was among the wildly tossing lights that the Bride approached the home of her Lord; and the temple was dreadful, for it was dark and all the intricate ways lit with flickering points of light like the eyes of beasts; and, lost among strangers, her heart turned to water; for it resembled a great cave of blackness, and she could see but the naked bodies of worshipers and giant images of the holy Gods hovering through thick air laden with incense fumes and burning *ghi* and the dung of the sacred animals and the pungent smell of rotting marigolds. And there were cauldrons with flames fed by wild worshipers from the hills, and these crowded about the *palki* wherein they brought her through the temple, and touched it with hands that made her tremble, imploring her prayers as she lay in the breast of the God. Bats hung from the roof or swooped in the gloom. Their sourness tainted the air, and men, dim as ghosts, slunk about the fearful ways.

Thus dwell the Gods.

And suddenly terror submerged her like an ocean wave, and she sank back and the world left her.

When sense and memory returned, she lay in her *palki* in the great Hall of Dancing—a mighty hall supported on many pillars; and around her stood in motionless bands the *devidasis*, the dancers of the God, chosen to delight his senses for their grace and beauty.

And, seeing her stretch her hands for help, the wild and flying dance began. They lifted her from the *palki* and she stood among them, shimmering in gold, and about her they wheeled, advancing and retiring, linking and unlinking like dancers in a dream. And they sang the marriage song she had heard in the quiet of her home; but now it was terrible as it burst from hundreds of throats, gonged and cymbaled, with clashing and a thunder-beat of drums.

'Enter, thrice-Happy, enter, thrice-Desired,  
And let the gates of Hari shut thee in.  
Tremble not. Lay thy lovely shame aside  
And love him with the love that knows not fear.  
Give him the drink of amrit from thy lips.'

She stood like one clinging to a surf-beaten rock as they tossed about her with wild hands and eyes, the whole world mad with noise and dance and color; then, dropping on her knees, she covered her eyes in terror.

And thus the servants of the God welcomed her to his arms.

## VI

Night, and a great quiet. A chamber of gold set with jewels glittering in the moonlight that came down some secret way, borne on a cool breath from the sea.

She lay alone in the golden place, and the jewels watched her like eyes. Was it terror, was it love that possessed her? A thousand images blurred her closed eyes—He, the Beautiful, with peacock crown, with eyes that draw the soul, with lips of indescribable sweetness. It could not be that she should lie close to the heart of the God. How dare flesh and blood aspire to that mystic marriage? Must they not perish in the awful contact? And, if it could be, how return to earth after that ecstasy?

'May I know and die!' she prayed. 'Oh, let me not pass unknowing! Let me know and die!'

And as the minutes dropped by, this prayer was all her thought, and it possessed her being.

Then, dividing the darkness, she heard the voice of a Flute very far off. Like a silver mist, it spread vaporous, a small fine music, but growing, drawing nearer, and, as it strengthened, clear drops of music fell through this mist like honey from the black bees' comb. It crept about her brain and

steeped her eyes as if in poppy juice, so sweet, so gliding, most infinitely wooing as it grew and filled the air with peace.

And in this high marvel was a blissful safety beyond all words, more sweet and delectable than any man may tell. The grace of his Childhood, of the dearworthy passage of his blessed Feet among men, returned to her with a joy that melted her heart with love. And so she rose and stood upon her feet, as one called, trembling with blissful longing.

Far down the long ways, passing through pools of moonlight and dark, came One whom the music followed. His face could not at first be seen; about him was a leopard skin. Naked but for this, beautiful and slender, his silent feet moved onward. Like one utterly alone in a great forest, he came,—slowly,—lost in some unutterable thought, made audible in sweet sound.

The Bride, the Lover, and between them, the music and the moonlight only. She would have knelt, but her feet were fixed; and he drew near with unseeing eyes—O Beautiful, O wholly desirable, to draw the hearts of men! And still the face divine was hidden.

But as he drew near and would have passed, she cried aloud with a passionate glad cry, 'My Lord indeed!' rejoicing suddenly.

And he turned and looked upon his Bride with heavens in his eyes. And as she saw what no words can utter, she fell

upon his feet and lay, slain sweetly with a bliss more keen than any pain.

But the Brahman, Nilkant Rai, waiting behind the pillar to seize his prey, had heard, had seen nothing of the Glory.

As she fell, he sprang like a tiger on a fawn, and lifted the fair dead body, and stumbled in the trailing hair, and knew his vileness conquered. And in that moment the Eye of Destruction opened upon him the beam that withers worlds and hurls them like shriveled leaves into the Abyss.

And he dropped her and stumbled screaming into the dark, a leper white as snow.

But when they came in the dawn to implore the will of the God from the happy lips that his had blessed, the Bride lay at rest on the dim straight golden bed, and between her breasts was a Flute set with strange jewels that no man could name. Nor shall they ever; for when they laid her body on the pyre they left this Flute in her bosom.

And when Anand Das heard what had befallen, he said this:—

'When did the Herdsman sleep on his guard or the Beloved fail the heart that loved Him? It is well, and better than well.'

And he who tells this story ends it thus:—



"Meditates the Herdsman ever.  
Seated by the sacred river.  
The mystic stream that o'er His feet  
Glides slow with murmurs low and sweet,"—

'and breast to breast with God, the soul that adores Him.'

## THE BUILDING OF THE TĀJ MAHAL

[Atlantic Monthly, March, 1921]

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful—the Smiting! A day when the soul shall know what it has sent on or kept back. A day when no soul shall control aught for another. And the bidding belongs to God.*

THE KORAN.

### I

Now the Shah-in-Shah, Shah Jahan, Emperor in India, loved his wife with a great love. And of all the wives of the Mogul Emperors surely this Lady Arjemand, Mumtaz-i-Mahal—the Chosen of the Palace—was the most worthy of

love. In the tresses of her silk-soft hair his heart was bound, and for none other had he so much as a passing thought since his soul had been submerged in her sweetness. Of her he said, using the words of the poet Faisi,—

'How shall I understand the magic of Love the Juggler?  
For he made thy beauty enter at that small gate  
the pupil of my eye,  
And now—and now my heart cannot contain it!'

But who should marvel? For those who have seen this Arjemand crowned with the crown the Padishah set upon her sweet low brows, with the lamps of great jewels lighting the dimples of her cheeks as they swung beside them, have most surely seen perfection. He who sat upon the Peacock Throne, where the outspread tail of massed gems is centred by that great ruby, 'The Eye of the Peacock, the Tribute of the World,' valued it not so much as one lock of the dark and perfumed tresses that rolled to her feet. Less to him the twelve throne columns set close with pearls than the little pearls she showed in her sweet laughter. For if this lady was all beauty, so too she was all goodness; and from the Shah-in-Shah to the poorest, all hearts of the world knelt in adoration before the Chosen of the Palace. She was, indeed, an extraordinary beauty, in that she had the soul of a child, and she alone remained unconscious of her power; and so she walked, crowned and clothed with humility.

Cold, haughty, and silent was the Shah-in-Shah before she blessed his arms—flattered, envied, but loved by none. But

the gift this Lady brought with her was love; and this, shining like the sun upon ice, melted his coldness, and he became indeed the kingly centre of a kingly court. May the Peace be upon her!

Now it was the dawn of a sorrowful day when the pains of the Lady Arjemand came strong, and terrible, and she travailed in agony. The hakims (physicians) stroked their beards and reasoned one with another; the wise women surrounded her, and remedies many and great were tried; and still her anguish grew, and in the hall without sat the Shah-in-Shah upon his divan, in anguish of spirit yet greater. The sweat ran on his brows, the knotted veins were thick on his temples, and his eyes, sunk in their caves, showed as those of a maddened man. He crouched on his cushions and stared at the purdah that divided him from the Lady; and all day the people came and went about him, and there was silence from the voice he longed to hear; for she would not moan, lest the sound should slay the Emperor. Her women besought her, fearing that her strong silence would break her heart; but still she lay, her hands clenched in one another, enduring; and the Emperor endured without. The Day of the Smiting!

So, as the time of the evening prayer drew nigh, a child was born, and the Empress, having done with pain, began to sink slowly into that profound sleep that is the shadow cast by the Last. May Allah the Upholder have mercy on our weakness! And the women, white with fear and watching, looked upon her, and whispered one to another, 'It is the end.'

And the aged mother of Abdul Mirza, standing at her head, said, 'She heeds not the cry of the child. She cannot

stay.'

And the newly wed wife of Saif Khan, standing at her feet, said, 'The voice of a beloved husband is as the Call of the Angel. Let the Padishah be summoned.'

So, the evening prayer being over (but the Emperor had not prayed), the wisest of the hakims, Kazim Sharif, went before him and spoke:—

'Inshallah! May the will of the Issuer of Decrees in all things be done! Ascribe unto the Creator glory, bowing before his Throne.'

He then remained silent; but the Padishah, haggard in his jewels, with his face hidden, answered thickly, 'The truth! For Allah has forgotten his slave.'

And Kazim Sharif, bowing at his feet and veiling his face with his hands, replied: 'The voice of the child cannot reach her, and the Lady of Delight departs. He who would speak with her must speak quickly.'

Then the Emperor rose to his feet unsteadily, like a man drunk with the forbidden juice; and when Kazim Sharif would have supported him, he flung aside his hands, and he stumbled, a man wounded to death, as it were, to the marble chamber where she lay.

In that white chamber it was dusk, and they had lit the little cressets so that a very faint light fell upon her face. A slender fountain a little cooled the hot, still air with its thin music and its sprinkled diamonds, and outside, the summer

lightnings were playing wide and blue on Jumna River; but so still was it that the dragging footsteps of the Emperor raised the hair on the flesh of those who heard. So the women who should, veiled themselves, and the others remained like pillars of stone.

Now, when those steps were heard, a faint color rose in the cheek of the Lady Arjemand; but she did not raise the heavy lashes, or move her hand. And he came up beside her, and the Shadow of God, who should kneel to none, knelt, and his head fell forward upon her breast; and in the hush the women glided out like ghosts, leaving the husband with the wife, excepting only that her foster-nurse stood far off, with eyes averted.

So the minutes drifted by, falling audibly one by one into eternity, and at the long last she slowly opened her eyes and, as from the depths of a dream, beheld the Emperor; and in a voice faint as the fall of a roseleaf she said the one word, 'Beloved!'

And he from between his clenched teeth, answered, 'Speak, wife.'

So she, who in all things had loved and served him,—she, Light of all hearts, dispeller of all gloom,—gathered her dying breath for consolation, and raised one hand slowly; it fell across his, and so remained.

Now, her beauty had been broken in the anguish like a rose in a storm; but it returned to her, doubtless that the Padishah might take comfort in its memory; and she looked like a

hour of Paradise who, kneeling beside the Zemsem Well, beholds the Waters of Peace. Not Fatmeh herself, the daughter of the Prophet of God, shone more sweetly. She repeated the word, 'Beloved'; and after a pause she whispered on with lips that scarcely stirred, 'King of the Age, this is the end.'

But still he was like a dead man, nor lifted his face.

'Surely all things pass. And though I go, in your heart I abide, and nothing can sever us. Take comfort.'

But there was no answer.

'Nothing but Love's own hand can slay Love. Therefore, remember me, and I shall live.'

And he answered from the darkness of her bosom, 'The whole world shall remember. But when shall I be united to thee? O Allah, how long wilt thou leave me to waste in this separation?'

And she: 'Beloved, what is time? We sleep and the night is gone. Now put your arms about me, for I sink into rest. What words are needed between us? Love is enough.'

So, making not the Profession of Faith,—and what need, since all her life was worship,—the Lady Arjemand turned into his arms like a child. And the night deepened.

Morning, with its arrows of golden light that struck the Jumna River to splendor! Morning, with its pure breath, its sunshine of joy, and the *koels* fluting in the Palace gardens!

Morning, divine and new from the hand of the Maker! And in the innermost chamber of marble a white silence; and the Lady, the Mirror of Goodness, lying in the Compassion of Allah, and a broken man stretched on the ground beside her. For all flesh, from the camel-driver to the Shah-in-Shah, is as one in the Day of the Smiting.

## II

For weeks the Emperor lay before the door of death; and had it opened to him, he had been blessed. So the weeks went by, and very slowly the strength returned to him; but his eyes were withered and the bones stood out in his cheeks. But he resumed his throne, and sat upon it kingly, black-bearded, eagle-eyed, terribly apart in his grief and his royalty; and so seated among his Usbeks, he declared his will.

'For this Lady (upon whom be peace), departed to the mercy of the Giver and Taker, shall a tomb-palace be made, the like of which is not found in the four corners of the world. Send forth therefore for craftsmen like the builders of the Temple of Solomon the Wise; for I will build.'

So, taking counsel, they sent in haste into Agra for Ustād Isā, the Master-Builder, a man of Shiraz; and he, being presented before the Padishah, received his instruction in these words:—

'I will that all the world shall remember the Flower of the World, that all hearts shall give thanks for her beauty, which was indeed the perfect Mirror of the Creator. And since it is abhorrent to Islam that any image be made in the likeness of anything that has life, make for me a palace-tomb, gracious as she was gracious, lovely as she was lovely. Not such as the tombs of the Kings and Conquerors, but of a divine sweetness. Make me a garden on the banks of Jumna, and build it there, where, sitting in my Pavilion of Marble, I may see it rise.'

And Ustād Isā, having heard, said, 'Upon my head and eyes!' and went out from the Presence.

So, musing upon the words of the Padishah, he went to his house in Agra, and there pondered the matter long and deeply; and for a whole day and night he refused all food and secluded himself from the society of all men; for he said:—

'This is a weighty thing, for this Lady (upon whom be peace) must visibly dwell in her tomb-palace on the shore of the river; and how shall I, who have never seen her, imagine the grace that was in her, and restore it to the world? Oh, had I but the memory of her face! Could I but see it as the Shah-in-Shah sees it, remembering the past! Prophet of God, intercede for me, that I may look through his eyes, if but for a moment!'

That night he slept, wearied and weakened with fasting; and whether it were that the body guarded no longer the gates of the soul, I cannot say; for, when the body fails, the



soul soars free above its weakness. But a strange marvel happened.

For, as it seemed to him, he awoke at the mid-noon of the night, and he was sitting, not in his own house, but upon the roof of the royal palace, looking down on the gliding Jumna, where the low moon slept in silver, and the light was alone upon the water; and there were no boats, but sleep and dream, hovering hand-in-hand, moved upon the air, and his heart was dilated in the great silence.

Yet he knew well that he waked in some supernatural sphere: for his eyes could see across the river as if the opposite shore lay at his feet; and he could distinguish every leaf on every tree, and the flowers moon-blanchéd and ghost-like. And there, in the blackest shade of the pippala boughs, he beheld a faint light like a pearl; and looking with unspeakable anxiety, he saw within the light, slowly growing, the figure of a lady exceedingly glorious in majesty and crowned with a rayed crown of mighty jewels of white and golden splendor. Her gold robe fell to her feet, and—very strange to tell—her feet touched not the ground, but hung a span's length above it, so that she floated in air.

But the marvel of marvels was her face—not, indeed, for its beauty, though that transcended all, but for its singular and compassionate sweetness, wherewith she looked toward the Palace beyond the river as if it held the heart of her heart, while death and its river lay between.

And Ustād Isā said:—

'O Dream, if this sweetness be but a dream, let me never wake! Let me see forever this exquisite work of Allah the Maker, before whom all the craftsmen are as children! For my knowledge is as nothing, and I am ashamed in its presence.'

And as he spoke, she turned those brimming eyes on him, and he saw her slowly absorbed into the glory of the moonlight; but as she faded into dream, he beheld, slowly rising, where her feet had hung in the blessed air, a palace of whiteness, warm as ivory, cold as chastity, domes and cupolas, slender minars, arches of marble fretted into sea-foam, screen within screen of purest marble, to hide the sleeping beauty of a great Queen—silence in the heart of it, and in every line a harmony beyond all music. Grace was about it—the grace of a Queen who prays and does not command; who, seated in her royalty yet inclines all hearts to love. And he saw that its grace was her grace, and its soul her soul, and that she gave it for the consolation of the Emperor.

And he fell on his face and worshiped the Master-Builder of the Universe, saying,—

'Praise cannot express thy Perfection. Thine Essence confounds thought. Surely I am but the tool in the hand of the Builder.'

And when he awoke, he was lying in his own secret chamber, but beside him was a drawing such as the craftsmen make of the work they have imagined in their hearts. And it was the Palace of the Tomb.

Henceforward, how should he waver? He was as a slave who obeys his master, and with haste he summoned to Agra his Army of Beauty.

Then were assembled all the master-craftsmen of India and of the outer world. From Delhi, from Shiraz, even from Bagdad and Syria, they came. Muhammad Hanif, the wise mason, came from Kandahar, Muhammad Sayyid from Mooltan. Amanāt Khan, and other great writers of the holy Koran, who should make the scripts of the Book upon fine marble. Inlayers from Kanauj, with fingers like those of the Spirits that bowed before Solomon the King, who should make beautiful the pure stone with inlay of jewels, as did their forefathers for the Rajah of Mewar; mighty dealers with agate, cornelian, and lapis lazuli. Came also, from Bokhara, Ata Muhammad and Shakri Muhammad, that they might carve the lilies of the field, very glorious, about that Flower of the World. Men of India, men of Persia, men of the outer lands, they came at the bidding of Ustād Isā, that the spirit of his vision might be made manifest.

And a great council was held among these servants of beauty. So they made a model in little of the glory that was to be, and laid it at the feet of the Shah-in-Shah; and he allowed it, though not as yet fully discerning their intent. And when it was approved, Ustād Isā called to him a man of Kashmir; and the very hand of the Creator was upon this man, for he could make gardens second only to the Gardens of Paradise, having been born by that Dāl Lake where are those roses of the earth, the Shalimar and the Nishāt Bagh; and to him said Ustād Isā,—

'Behold, Ram Lal Kashmiri, consider this design! Thus and thus shall a white palace, exquisite in perfection, arise on the banks of Jumna. Here, in little, in this model of sandalwood, see what shall be. Consider these domes, rounded as the Bosom of Beauty, recalling the mystic fruit of the lotos flower. Consider these four minars that stand about them like Spirits about the Throne. And remembering that all this shall stand upon a great dais of purest marble, and that the river shall be its mirror, repeating to everlasting its loveliness, make me a garden that shall be the throne room to this Queen.'

And Ram Lal Kashmiri salaamed and said, 'Obedience!' and went forth and pondered night and day, journeying even over the snows of the Pir Panjal to Kashmir, that he might bathe his eyes in beauty where she walks, naked and divine, upon the earth. And he it was who imagined the black tiles and white that made the way of approach.

So grew the palace that should murmur, like a sea-shell, in the ear of the world the secret of love.

Veiled had that loveliness been in the shadow of the palace; but now the sun should rise upon it and turn its ivory to gold, should set upon it and flush its snow with rose. The moon should lie upon it like the pearls upon her bosom, the visible grace of her presence breathe about it, the music of her voice hover in the birds and trees of the garden. Times there were when Ustād Isā despaired lest even these mighty servants of beauty should miss perfection. Yet it grew and grew, rising like the growth of a flower.

So on a certain day it stood completed, and in the small tomb in the sanctuary, veiled with screens of wrought marble so fine that they might lift in the breeze,—the veils of a Queen,—slept the Lady Arjemand; and above her a narrow coffer of white marble, enriched in a great script with the Ninety-Nine Wondrous Names of God. And the Shah-in-Shah, now gray and worn, entered and, standing by her, cried in a loud voice,—

'I ascribe to the Unity, the only Creator, the perfection of his handiwork made visible here by the hand of mortal man. For the beauty that was secret in my Palace is here revealed; and the Crowned Lady shall sit forever upon the banks of Jumna River. It was Love that commanded this Tomb.'

And the golden echo carried his voice up into the high dome, and it died away in whispers of music.

But Ustād Isā, standing far off in the throng (for what are craftsmen in the presence of the mighty?), said softly in his beard, 'It was Love also that built, and therefore it shall endure.'

Now it is told that, on a certain night in summer, when the moon is full, a man who lingers by the straight water, where the cypresses stand over their own image, may see a strange marvel—may see the Palace of the Tāj dissolve like a pearl, and so rise in a mist into the moonlight; and in its place, on her dais of white marble, he shall see the Lady Arjemand, Mumtaz-i-Mahal, the Chosen of the Palace, stand there in the white perfection of beauty, smiling as one who hath attained unto the Peace. For she is its soul.

And kneeling before the dais, he shall see Ustād Isā, who made this body of her beauty; and his face is hidden in his hands.

## FIRE OF BEAUTY

[Atlantic Monthly, September, 1920]

*Salutation to Ganesa the Lord of Wisdom, and to Saraswati the Lady of Sweet Speech!*

This story was composed by the Brahmin Vísravas, that dweller on the banks of holy Káshi; and though the events it records are long past, yet it is absolutely and immutably true because, by the power of his *yoga*, he summoned up every scene before him, and beheld the persons moving and speaking as in life. Thus he had nought to do but to set down what befell.

What follows, that hath he seen.

Wide was the plain, the morning sun shining full upon it, drinking up the dew as the Divine drinks up the spirit of man. Far it stretched, resembling the ocean, and riding upon it like a stately ship was the league-long Rock of Chitor. It is certainly by the favor of the Gods that this great fortress of the Rajput Kings thus rises from the plain, leagues in length, noble in height; and very strange it is to see the flat earth fall away from it like waters from the bows of a boat, as it soars into the sky with its burden of palaces and towers.

Here dwelt the Queen Padmini and her husband Bhimsi, the Rana of the Rajputs.

The sight of the holy ascetic Vísravas pierced even the secrets of the Rani's bower, where, in the inmost chamber of marble, carved until it appeared like lace or the foam of the sea, she was seated upon cushions of blue Bokhariot silk, like the lotus whose name she bore floating upon the blue depths of the lake. She had just risen from the shallow bath of marble at her feet.

Most beautiful was this Queen, a haughty beauty such as should be a Rajput lady; for the name 'Rajput' signifies Son of a King, and this lady was assuredly the daughter of Kings and of no lesser persons. And since that beauty is long since ashes (all things being transitory), it is permitted to describe the mellowed ivory of her body, the smooth curves of her hips, and the defiance of her glimmering bosom, half veiled by the long silken tresses of sandal-scented hair which a maiden on either side, bowing toward her, knotted upon her head. But even he who with his eyes has seen it can scarce tell the beauty of her face—the slender arched nose, the great

eyes like lakes of darkness in the reeds of her curled lashes, the mouth of roses, the glance, deerlike but proud, that courted and repelled admiration. This cannot be told, nor could the hand of man paint it. Scarcely could that fair wife of the Pandava Prince, Draupadi the Beautiful (who bore upon her perfect form every auspicious mark) excel this lady.

*(Ashes—ashes! May Maheshwara have mercy upon her rebirths!)*

Throughout India had run the fame of this beauty. In the bazaars of Kashmir they told of it. It was recorded in the palaces of Travancore, and all the lands that lay between; and in an evil hour—may the Gods curse the mother that bore him!—it reached the ears of Allah-u-Din, the Moslem dog, a very great fighting-man who sat in Middle India, looting and spoiling.

*(Ahi! for the beauty that is as a burning flame!)*

In the gardens beneath the windows of the Queen, the peacocks, those maharajas of the birds, were spreading the bronze and emerald of their tails. The sun shone on them as on heaps of jewels, so that they dazzled the eyes. They stood about the feet of the ancient Brahmin sage, he who had tutored the Queen in her childhood and given her wisdom as the crest-jewel of her loveliness. He, the Twice-born, sat under the shade of a neem tree, hearing the gurgle of the sacred waters from the Cow's Mouth, where the great tank shone under the custard-apple boughs; and, at peace with all the world, he read in the Scripture which affirms the



transience of all things drifting across the thought of the Supreme like clouds upon the surface of the Ocean.

*(Ahi! that, loveliness is also illusion!)*

Her women placed about the Queen—that Lotus of Women—a robe of silk of which none could say that it was green or blue, the noble colors so mingled into each other under the latticed gold work of Káshi. They set the jewels on her head, and wide thin rings of gold heavy with great pearls in her ears. Upon the swell of her bosom they clasped the necklace of table emeralds, large, deep, and full of green lights, which is the token of the Chitor queens. Upon her slender ankles they placed the *chooris* of pure soft gold, set also with grass-green emeralds, and the delicate soles of her feet they reddened with lac. Nor were her arms forgotten, but loaded with bangles so free from alloy that they could be bent between the hands of a child. Then with fine paste they painted the Symbol between her dark brows, and, rising, she shone divine as a nymph of heaven who should cause the righteous to stumble in his austerities, and arrest even the glances of Gods.

*(Ahi! that the Transient should be so fair!)*

## II

Now it was the hour that the Rana should visit her; for since the coming of the Lotus Lady, he had forgotten his

other women, and in her was all his heart. He came from the Hall of Audience where petitions were heard, and justice done to rich and poor; and as he came, the Queen, hearing his step on the stone, dismissed her women, and smiling to know her loveliness, bowed before him, even as the Goddess Umá bows before Him who is her other half.

Now he was a tall man, with the falcon look of the Hill Rajputs, and moustaches that curled up to his eyes, lion-waisted and lean in the flanks like Arjoon himself, a very ruler of men; and as he came, his hand was on the hilt of the sword that showed beneath his gold coat of Khincob. On the high cushions he sat, and the Rani a step beneath him; and she said, raising her lotus eyes:—

'Speak, Aryaputra, son of a gentleman—what hath befallen?'

And he, looking upon her beauty with fear, replied,—

'It is thy beauty, O wife, that brings disaster.'

'And how is this?' she asked very earnestly.

For a moment he paused, regarding her as might a stranger, as one who considers a beauty in which he hath no part; and, drawn by this strangeness, she rose and knelt beside him, pillowing her head upon his heart.

'Say on,' she said in her voice of music.

He unfurled a scroll that he had crushed in his strong right hand, and read aloud:—

"Thus says Allah-u-Din, Shadow of God, Wonder of the Age, Viceregent of Kings. We have heard that in the Treasury of Chitor is a jewel, the like of which is not in the Four Seas—the work of the hand of the Only God, to whom be praise! This jewel is thy Queen, the Lady Padmini. Now, since the sons of the Prophet are righteous, I desire but to look upon this jewel, and ascribing glory to the Creator, to depart in peace. Granted requests are the bonds of friendship; therefore lay the head of acquiescence in the dust of opportunity and name an auspicious day."

He crushed it again and flung it furiously from him on the marble.

'The insult is deadly. The *soor!* son of a debased mother! Well he knows that to the meanest Rajput his women are sacred, and how much more the daughters and wives of the Kings! The jackals feast on the tongue that speaks this shame! But it is a threat, Beloved—a threat! Give me thy counsel that never failed me yet.'

For the Rajputs take counsel with their women who are wise.

They were silent, each weighing the force of resistance that could be made; and this the Rani knew even as he.

'It cannot be,' she said; 'the very ashes of the dead would shudder to hear. Shall the Queens of India be made the sport of the barbarians?'

Her husband looked upon her fair face. She could feel his heart labor beneath her ear.

'True, wife; but the barbarians are strong. Our men are tigers, each one, but the red dogs of the Dekkan can pull down the tiger, for they are many, and he alone.'

Then that great Lady, accepting his words, and conscious of the danger, murmured this, clinging to her husband:—

'There was a Princess of our line whose beauty made all other women seem as waning moons in the sun's splendor. And many great Kings sought her, and there was contention and war. And, she, fearing that the Rajputs would be crushed to powder between the warring Kings, sent unto each this message: "Come on such and such a day, and thou shalt see my face and hear my choice." And they, coming, rejoiced exceedingly, thinking each one that he was the Chosen. So they came into the great Hall, and there was a table, and somewhat upon it covered with a gold cloth; and an old veiled woman lifted the gold, and the head of the Princess lay there with the lashes like night upon her cheek, and between her lips was a little scroll, saying this: "I have chosen my Lover and my Lord, and he is mightiest, for he is Death."—So the Kings went silently away. And there was Peace.'

The music of her voice ceased, and the Rana clasped her closer.

'This I cannot do. Better die together. Let us take counsel with the ancient Brahmin, thy *guru* [teacher], for he is very

wise.'

She clapped her hands, and the maidens returned, and, bowing, brought the venerable Prabhu Narayan into the Presence, and again those roses retired.

Respectful salutation was then offered by the King and the Queen to that saint, hoary with wisdom—he who had seen her grow into the loveliness of the sea-born Shri, yet had never seen that loveliness; for he had never raised his eyes above the chooris about her ankles. To him the King related his anxieties; and he sat wrapt in musing, and the two waited in dutiful silence until long minutes had fallen away; and at the last he lifted his head, weighted with wisdom, and spoke.

'O King, Descendant of Rama! this outrage cannot be. Yet, knowing the strength and desire of this obscene one and the weakness of our power, it is plain that only with cunning can cunning be met. Hear, therefore, the history of the Fox and the Drum.

'A certain Fox searched for food in the jungle, and so doing beheld a tree on which hung a drum; and when the boughs knocked upon the parchment, it sounded aloud. Considering, he believed that so round a form and so great a voice must portend much good feeding. Neglecting on this account a fowl that fed near by, he ascended to the drum. The drum being rent was but air and parchment, and meanwhile the fowl fled away. And from the eye of folly he shed the tear of disappointment, having bartered the substance for the shadow. So must we act with this *budmash* [scoundrel]. First, receiving his oath that he will depart without violence, bid

him hither to a great feast, and say that he shall behold the face of the Queen in a mirror. Provide that some fair woman of the city show her face, and then let him depart in peace, showing him friendship. He shall not know he hath not seen the beauty he would befoul.'

After consultation, no better way could be found; but the heart of that great Lady was heavy with foreboding.

*(Ahi! that Beauty should wander a pilgrim in the ways of sorrow!)*

To Allah-u-Din therefore did the King dispatch this letter by swift riders on mares of Mewar.

After salutations—'Now whereas thou hast said thou wouldst look upon the beauty of the Treasure of Chitor, know it is not the custom of the Rajputs that any eye should light upon their treasure. Yet assuredly, when requests arise between friends, there cannot fail to follow distress of mind and division of soul if these are ungranted. So, under promises that follow, I bid thee to a great feast at my poor house of Chitor, and thou shalt see that beauty reflected in a mirror, and so seeing, depart in peace from the house of a friend.'

This being writ by the Twice-Born, the Brahmin, did the Rana sign with bitter rage in his heart. And the days passed.

On a certain day found fortunate by the astrologers—a day of early winter, when the dawns were pure gold and the nights radiant with a cool moon—did a mighty troop of Moslems set their camp on the plain of Chitor. It was as if a city had blossomed in an hour. Those who looked from the walls muttered prayers to the Lord of the Trident; for these men seemed like the swarms of the locust-people, warriors all, fierce fighting-men. And in the ways of Chitor, and up the steep and winding causeway from the plains, were warriors also, the chosen of the Rajputs, thick as blades of corn hedging the path.

*(Ahi! that the blossom of beauty should have swords for thorns!)*

Then, leaving his camp, attended by many Chiefs,—may the mothers and sires that begot them be accursed!—came Allah-u-Din, riding toward the Lower Gate, and so upward along the causeway, between the two rows of men who neither looked nor spoke, standing like the carvings of war in the Caves of Ajunta. And the moon was rising through the sunset as he came beneath the last and seventh gate. Through the towers and palaces he rode with his following, but no woman, veiled or unveiled,—no, not even an outcast of the city,—was there to see him come; only the men, armed and silent. So he turned to Munim Khan that rode at his bridle, saying,—

'Let not the eye of watchfulness close this night on the pillow of forgetfulness!'

And thus he entered the palace.

Very great was the feast in Chitor, and the wines that those accursed should not drink (since the Outcast whom they call their Prophet forbade them) ran like water, and at the right hand of Allah-u-Din was set the great crystal Cup inlaid with gold by a craft that is now perished; and he filled and refilled it—may his own Prophet curse the swine!

But because the sons of Kings eat not with the outcast, the Rana entered after, clothed in chain armor of blue steel, and having greeted him, bid him to the sight of that Treasure. And Allah-u-Din, his eyes swimming with wine, and yet not drunken, followed, and the two went alone.

Purdahs [curtains] of great splendor were hung in the great Hall that is called the Raja's Hall, exceeding rich with gold, and in front of the opening was a kneeling-cushion, and on a gold stool before it a polished mirror.

*(Ahi! for gold and beauty, the scourges of the world!)*

And the Rana was pale to the lips.

Now as the Princes stood by the purdah, a veiled woman, shrouded in white so that no shape could be seen in her, came forth from within, and kneeling upon the cushion, she unveiled her face, bending until the mirror, like a pool of water, held it, and that only. And the King motioned his guest to look, and he looked over her veiled shoulder and saw. Very great was the bowed beauty that the mirror held, but Allah-u-Din turned to the Rana.



'By the Bread and the Salt, by the Guest-Right, by the Honor of thy House, I ask—is this the Treasure of Chitor?'

And since the Sun-Descended cannot lie, no, not though they perish, the Rana answered, flushing darkly,—

'This is not the Treasure. Wilt thou spare?'

But he would not, and the woman slipped like a shadow behind the purdah and no word said.

Then was heard the tinkling of chooris, and the little noise fell upon the silence like a fear, and, parting the curtains, came a woman veiled like the other. She did not kneel, but took the mirror in her hand, and Allah-u-Din drew up behind her back. From her face she raised the veil of gold Dakka webs, and gazed into the mirror, holding it high, and that Accursed stumbled back, blinded with beauty, saying this only,—

'I have seen the Treasure of Chitor.'

So the purdah fell about her.

The next day, after the Imaum of the Accursed had called them to prayer, they departed, and Allah-u-Din, paying thanks to the Rana for honors given and taken, and swearing friendship, besought him to ride to his camp, to see the marvels of gold and steel armor brought down from the passes, swearing also safe-conduct. And because the Rajputs trust the word even of a foe, he went.

*(Ahi! that honor should strike hands with traitors!)*

## IV

The hours went by, heavy-footed like mourners.

Padmini the Rani knelt by the window in her tower that overlooks the plains. Motionless she knelt there, as the Goddess Umá lost in her penances, and she saw her Lord ride forth, and the sparkle of steel where the sun shone on them, and the Standard of the Gold Disk on its black ground. So the camp of the Moslem swallowed them up, and they returned no more. Still she knelt and none dared speak with her; and as the first shade of evening fell across the hills of Rajasthan, she saw a horseman spurring over the flat; and he rode like the wind, and, seeing, she implored the Gods.

Then entered the Twice-Born, that saint of clear eyes, and he bore a scroll; and she rose and seated herself, and he stood by her, as her ladies cowered like frightened doves before the woe in his face as he read.

'To the Rose of Beauty, The Pearl among Women, the Chosen of the Palace. Who, having seen thy loveliness, can look on another? Who, having tasted the wine of the Houris, but thirsts forever? Behold, I have thy King as hostage. Come thou and deliver him. I have sworn that he shall return in thy place.'

And from a smaller scroll, the Brahmin read this:—

'I am fallen in the snare. Act thou as becomes a Rajputni.'

Then that Daughter of the Sun lifted her head, for the thronging of armed feet was heard in the Council Hall below. From the floor she caught her veil and veiled herself in haste, and the Brahmin with bowed head followed, while her women mourned aloud. And, descending, between the folds of the purdah she appeared white and veiled, and the Brahmin beside her, and the eyes of all the Princes were lowered to her shrouded feet, while the voice they had not heard fell silverly upon the air, and the echoes of the high roof repeated it.

'Chiefs of the Rajputs, what is your counsel?'

And he of Marwar stepped forward, and not raising his eyes above her feet, answered,—

'Queen, what is thine?'

For the Rajputs have ever heard the voice of their women.

And she said,—

'I counsel that I die and my head be sent to him, that my blood may quench his desire.'

And each talked eagerly with the other, but amid the tumult the Twice-Born said,—

'This is not good talk. In his rage he will slay the King. By my yoga, I have seen it. Seek another way.'

So they sought, but could determine nothing, and they feared to ride against the dog, for he held the life of the King;

and the tumult was great, but all were for the King's safety.

Then once more she spoke.

'Seeing it is determined that the King's life is more than my honor, I go this night. In your hand I leave my little son, the Prince Ajeysi. Prepare my litters, seven hundred of the best, for all my women go with me. Depart now, for I have a thought from the Gods.'

Then, returning to her bower, she spoke this letter to the saint, and he wrote it, and it was sent to the camp.

After salutations—'Wisdom and strength have attained their end. Have ready for release the Rana of Chitor, for this night I come with my ladies, the prize of the conqueror.'

When the sun sank, a great procession with torches descended the steep way of Chitor—seven hundred litters, and in the first was borne the Queen, and all her women followed.

All the streets were thronged with women, weeping and beating their breasts. Very greatly they wept, and no men were seen, for their livers were black within them for shame as the Treasure of Chitor departed, nor would they look upon the sight. And across the plains went that procession; as if the stars had fallen upon the earth, so glittered the sorrowful lights of the Queen.

But in the camp was great rejoicing, for the Barbarians knew that many fair women attended on her.

Now, before the entrance to the camp they had made a great *shamiana* [tent] ready, hung with shawls of Kashmir and the plunder of Delhi; and there was set a silk divan for the Rani, and beside it stood the Loser and the Gainer, Allah-u-Din and the King, awaiting the Treasure.

Veiled she entered, stepping proudly, and taking no heed of the Moslem, she stood before her husband, and even through the veil he could feel the eyes he knew.

And that Accursed spoke, laughing.

'I have won—I have won, O King! Bid farewell to the Chosen of the Palace—the Beloved of the Viceregent of Kings!'

Then she spoke softly, delicately, in her own tongue, that the outcast should not guess the matter of her speech.

'Stand by me. Stir not. And when I raise my arm, cry the cry of the Rajputs. NOW!'

And she flung her arm above her head, and instantly, like a lion roaring, he shouted, drawing his sword, and from every litter sprang an armed man, glittering in steel, and the bearers, humble of mien, were Rajput knights, every one.

Allah-u-Din thrust at the breast of the Queen; but around them surged the war, and she was hedged with swords like a rose in the thickets.

Very full of wine, dull with feasting and lust and surprise, the Moslems fled across the plains, streaming in a broken

rabble, cursing and shouting like low-caste women; and the Rajputs, wiping their swords, returned from the pursuit and laughed upon each other.

But what shall be said of the joy of the King and of her who had imagined this thing, instructed of the Goddess who is the other half of her Lord?

So the procession returned, singing, to Chitor with those Two in the midst; but among the dogs that fled was Allah-u-Din, his face blackened with shame and wrath, the curses choking in his foul throat.

*(Ahi! that the evil still walk the ways of the world!)*

## V

So the time went by and the beauty of the Queen grew, and her King could see none but hers. Like the moon she obscured the stars, and every day he remembered her wisdom, her valor, and his soul did homage at her feet, and there was great content in Chitor.

It chanced one day that the Queen, looking from her high window that like an eagle's nest overhung the precipice, saw, on the plain beneath, a train of men, walking like ants, and each carried a basket on his back, and behind them was a cloud of dust like a great army. Already the city was astir because of this thing, and the rumors came thick and the spies were sent out.

In the dark they returned, and the Rana entered the bower of Padmini, his eyes burning like coal with hate and wrath, and he flung his arm round his wife like a shield.

'He is returned, and in power. Counsel me again, O wife, for great is thy wisdom!'

But she answered only this,—

'Fight, for this time it is to the death.'

Then each day she watched how the baskets of earth, emptied upon the plain at first, made nothing, an ant-heap whereat fools might laugh. But each day as the trains of men came, spilling their baskets, the great earth-works grew and their height mounted. Day after day the Rajputs rode forth and slew; and as they slew it seemed that all the teeming millions of the earth came forth to take the places of the slain. And the Rajputs fell also, and under the pennons the thundering forces returned daily, thinned of their best.

*(Ahi! that Evil rules the world as God!)*

And still the earth grew up to the heights, and the protection of the hills was slowly withdrawn from Chitor, for on the heights they made they set their engines of war.

Then in a red dawn that great Saint Narayan came to the Queen, where she watched by her window, and spoke.

'O great lady, I have dreamed a fearful dream. Nay, rather have I seen a vision.'

With her face set like a sword, the Queen said,—

'Say on.'

'In a light red like blood, I waked, and beside me stood the Mother,—Durga,—awful to see, with a girdle of heads about her middle; and the drops fell thick and slow from That which she held in her hand, and in the other was her sickle of Doom. Nor did she speak, but my soul heard her words.'

'Narrate them.'

'She commanded: "Say this to the Rana: 'In Chitor is My altar; in Chitor is thy throne. If thou wouldst save either, send forth twelve crowned Kings of Chitor to die.'""

As he said this, the Rana, forespent with fighting, entered and heard the Divine word.

Now there were twelve princes of the Rajput blood, and the youngest was the son of Padmini. What choice had these most miserable but to appease the dreadful anger of the Goddess? So on each fourth day a King of Chitor was crowned, and for three days sat upon the throne, and on the fourth day, set in the front, went forth and died fighting. So perished eleven Kings of Chitor, and now there was left but the little Ajeysi, the son of the Queen.

And that day was a great Council called.

Few were there. On the plains many lay dead; holding the gates many watched; but the blood was red in their hearts and flowed like Indus in the melting of the snows. And to



them spoke the Rana, his hand clenched on his sword, and the other laid on the small dark head of the Prince Ajeysi, who stood between his knees. And as he spoke his voice gathered strength till it rang through the hall like the voice of Indra when he thunders in the heavens.

'Men of the Rajputs, this child shall not die. Are we become jackals that we fall upon the weak and tear them? When have we put our women and children in the forefront of the war? I—I only am King of Chitor. Narayan shall save this child for the time that will surely come. And for us—what shall we do? I die for Chitor!'

And like the hollow waves of a great sea they answered him,—

'We will die for Chitor.'

There was silence and Marwar spoke.

'The women?'

'Do they not know the duty of a Rajputni?' said the King. 'My household has demanded that the caves be prepared.'

And the men clashed stern joy with their swords, and the council dispersed.

Then that very great saint, the Twice-Born, put off the sacred thread that is the very soul of the Brahmin. In his turban he wound it secretly, and he stained his noble Aryan body until it resembled the Pariahs, foul for the pure to see, loathsome for the pure to touch, and he put on him the rags

of the lowest of the earth, and taking the Prince, he removed from the body of the child every trace of royal and Rajput birth, and he appeared like a child of the Bhils—the vile forest wanderers that shame not to defile their lips with carrion. And in this guise they stood before the Queen; and when she looked on the saint, the tears fell from her eyes like rain, not for grief for her son, nor for death, but that for their sake the pure should be made impure and the glory of the Brahminhood be defiled. And she fell at the old man's feet and laid her head on the ground before him.

'Rise, daughter!' he said, 'and take comfort! Are not the eyes of the Gods clear that they should distinguish?—and this day we stand before the God of Gods. Have not the Great Ones said, "That which causes life causes also decay and death"? Therefore we who go and you who stay are alike a part of the Divine. Embrace now thy child and bless him, for we depart. And it is on account of the sacrifice of the Twelve that he is saved alive.'

So, controlling her tears, she rose, and clasping the child to her bosom, she bade him be of good cheer since he went with the Gods. And that great saint took his hand from hers, and for the first time in the life of the Queen he raised his aged eyes to her face, and she gazed at him; but what she read, even the ascetic Visravas, who saw all by the power of his yoga, could not tell, for it was beyond speech. Very certainly the peace hereafter possessed her.

So those two went out by the secret ways of the rocks, and wandering far, were saved by the favor of Durga.

## VI

And the nights went by and the days, and the time came that no longer could they hold Chitor, and all hope was dead.

On a certain day the Rana and the Rani stood for the last time in her bower, and looked down into the city; and in the streets were gathered in a very wonderful procession the women of Chitor; and not one was veiled. Flowers that had bloomed in the inner chambers, great ladies jeweled for a festival, young brides, aged mothers, and girl children clinging to the robes of their mothers who held their babes, crowded the ways. Even the low-caste women walked with measured steps and proudly, decked in what they had of best, their eyes lengthened with *soorma*, and flowers in the darkness of their hair.

The Queen was clothed in a gold robe of rejoicing, her bodice latticed with diamonds and great gems, and upon her bosom the necklace of table emeralds, alight with green fire, which is the jewel of the Queens of Chitor. So she stood radiant as a vision of Shri, and it appeared that rays encircled her person.

And the Rana, unarmed save for his sword, had the saffron dress of a bride-groom and the jeweled cap of the Rajput Kings, and below in the hall were the Princes and Chiefs, clad even as he.

Then, raising her lotus eyes to her lord, the Princess said,  
—

'Beloved, the time is come, and we have chosen rightly, for this is the way of honor, and it is but another link forged in the chain of existence; for until existence itself is ended and rebirth destroyed, still shall we meet in lives to come and still be husband and wife. What room then for despair?'

And he answered,—

'This is true. Go first, wife, and I follow. Let not the door swing to behind thee. But oh, to see thy beauty once more that is the very speech of Gods with men! Wilt thou surely come again to me and again be fair?'

And for all answer she smiled upon him, and at his feet performed the obeisance of a Rajput wife when she departs upon a journey; and they went out together, the Queen unveiled.

As she passed through the Princes, they lowered their eyes so that none saw her; but when she stood on the steps of the palace, the women all turned eagerly toward her like stars about the moon, and lifting their arms, they began to sing the dirge of the Rajput women.

So they marched, and in great companies they marched, company behind company, young and old, past the Queen, saluting her and drawing courage from the loveliness and kindness of her unveiled face.

In the rocks beneath the palaces of Chitor are very great caves—league-long and terrible, with ways of darkness no eyes have seen; and it is believed that in times past spirits have haunted them with strange wailings. In these was prepared great store of wood and oils and fragrant matters for burning. So to these caves they marched and, company by company, disappeared into the darkness; and the voice of their singing grew faint and hollow, and died away, as the men stood watching their women go.

Now, when this was done and the last had gone, the Rani descended the steps, and the Rana, taking a torch dipped in fragrant oils, followed her, and the Princes walked after, clad like bridegrooms but with no faces of bridal joy. At the entrance of the caves, having lit the torch, he gave it into her hand, and she, receiving it and smiling, turned once upon the threshold, and for the first time those Princes beheld the face of the Queen, but they hid their eyes with their hands when they had seen. So she departed within, and the Rana shut to the door and barred and bolted it, and the men with him flung down great rocks before it so that none should know the way, nor indeed is it known to this day; and with their hands on their swords they waited there, not speaking, until a great smoke rose between the crevices of the rocks, but no sound at all.

*(Ashes of roses—ashes of roses! Ah! for beauty that is but touched and remitted!)*

The sun was high when those men with their horses and on foot marched down the winding causeway beneath the seven gates, and so forth into the plains, and charging unarmed

upon the Moslems, they perished every man. After, it was asked of one who had seen the great slaughter,—

'Say how my King bore himself.'

And he who had seen told this:—

'Reaper of the harvest of battle, on the bed of honor he has spread a carpet of the slain! He sleeps ringed about by his enemies. How can the world tell of his deeds? The tongue is silent.'

When that Accursed, Allah-u-Din, came up the winding height of the hills, he found only a dead city, and his heart was sick within him.

Now this is the Sack of Chitor, and by the Oath of the Sack of Chitor do the Rajputs swear when they bind their honor.

But it is only the ascetic Vísravas who by the power of his yoga has heard every word, and with his eyes beheld that Flame of Beauty, who, for a brief space illuminating the world as a Queen, returns to birth in many a shape of sorrowful loveliness until the Blue-throated God shall in his favor destroy her rebirths.

*Salutation to Ganesa the Elephant-Headed One, and to Shri the Lady of Beauty!*

# THE GHOST-PLAYS OF JAPAN

[Atlantic Monthly, September, 1920]

## I

A day in Kyōto—the ancient and most beautiful City-Royal; an autumn day, the splendor of the maples dying down as if the lights were extinguished one by one before the quiet coming of the night of the world; the Kamo River flowing silently through its broad banks, and a mild gray sky leaning tenderly over the great hill of Hiei: that was the day when I saw my first Nō play in Japan, and received the gift of a beauty so strange and insubstantial that it can hold words but as lightly as the cobweb holds its strung diamonds before the sun vaporizes them into nothingness.

I had accepted an invitation from a society in Kyōto which exists for the purpose of producing these austere beautiful plays. They are one of the great arts of the world; no past dramatic experience can in the least prepare the mind for them, and there can be no place so good for initiation as Kyōto, because Kyōto is the home of faithful tradition, of dignified reverence for the noble gifts of the past. City-Royal is a precious casket wherein many jewels lie in safe-keeping;

and of these, many and glorious, not the least is the ghost-play of Japan.

So I went into the quiet dark hall, where the stage was stiffly set forth with minutest attention to traditional law. In ancient times the audience surrounded it; but, since the day of the great Shōgun Ieyasu, it has faced it as in the West; and it is said that beneath it are fixed large hollow vessels of earthenware, that the movements and the singing may have a deep resonant quality.

A small bridge—the famous 'Flower-path'—is placed that the actors may thus approach it; and on this are set three small pine trees in pots, the symbols of heaven, earth, and humanity. At the back of the stage is painted a pine tree—here symbolizing faithful endurance. This is all the scenery, and everything done is in full sight of the audience, which sits in the low enclosures that are the stalls of Japan, quiet, attentive, many of them studying the play in books brought from the treasured libraries of noble houses: each one an acolyte at a beloved ritual; and not only this, but a keen critic of any variation from a standard that the centuries have made immutable.

No atmosphere can be more favorable. There is nothing to distract eye or thought from the drama to be presented. Before us were only the symbols which represent the eternal verities of God and man; and the priest, spirits, and the young men who take the parts of women, are all masked in the historic masks designed by great artists for the parts they fill.



I am very certain that it is impossible to comprehend the deepest meaning of these ghostly Nō plays, and therefore to enjoy them to the full, unless the spectator has a real knowledge of the spirit and literature of Buddhism; and it is my object to give a hint of this in what I write now. For I cannot recall, in anything that has been written of these plays by those Occidentals who have studied them, more than a very passing reference to what really is the soul of the play. That there is a beauty which must appeal to any who can feel deeply, I do not at all deny. There is the strangest intellectual charm also—elusive, exquisite, a faint rainbow, smiling, weeping, fading on gray skies; but there is more than this—a theory of life and death. While it is true that the inception of this unique drama was probably the god-dance of the Shinto temples, the Nō play, as it has come down to us, owes all to Buddhism; and the better the Buddhist attitude to life and death is understood, the more certainly will this be felt.

This perhaps is the reason why the Nō plays, like all Far Eastern art, appear so strange to us at first. The belief at the base of them is alien—we do not know what they are driving at. We depict life in the studio, or on the stage, in relation to ourselves. To our minds all beauty exists for man. It pleads at his judgment bar—it is his lovely slave. But to the artist influenced by Buddhist teaching, man himself is but a small part of nature—a part of it only in the same sense as a tree or a flower; animated by the same spirit, no more, no less; passing to the same goal; subordinate, subjected to Law, as is a bough waving in the wind; a mountain-peak lost in drowning vapors. This belief has, of course, made the Far Eastern artists the greatest landscape and flower artists of the world, for they have recognized that the essence of nature

differs in no kind from their own, and have therefore painted as they knew.

But all this will be clearer as I describe some of the plays. I will choose some of the less-known ones, using the beautiful renderings of Professor Fenollosa, Mr. Pound, and Mr. Waley, and premising that the ghosts are not the somewhat solid spirits to be found in Elizabethan drama and elsewhere in the West: they are emanations of memory, of sorrow, of fear. They rise like a ghostly perfume, intangible, illusive; they are dead persons, but living passions, visualized for a moment before passing away into union with the Eternal. Their influence on earth, or on men, is no more than the fall of a dead leaf in a frost.

## II

Let me take first the *Nishikigi*—little known in the West. The characters are few—that is almost always the case in a *Nō* play, and in this they are but three: a wandering Buddhist priest and two ghosts; not armor-plated ghosts, like him who walked at Elsinore, but dim wistful voices, wandering unsatisfied in lonely air; two lives which, having never reached fruition on earth, have now become a sick craving for what life and death alike withheld. It is a story of love that never reached its earthly close.

Picture the deep, deep quiet of the listening audience, in an old hall in *Kyōto*, the shadows about it, the dimly lit stage,

the wailing music of the orchestra, the rigid Chorus—for there is a Chorus, as in the Greek plays, but more quiescent and, at the same time, more personal, taking up the actual words of the speaker and continuing them as if thinking aloud on his behalf; becoming as it were an orchestral representation of his thought—picture that setting—and this:

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A priest is wandering about the country that lies around Mount Shinobu; and now he is not far from little Kefu near the sea, and the evening is coming down upon him. He has been traveling long—perhaps his feet are a little weary. It seems that, when the body is weary, the defenses that guard it from the unseen are weakened. The spirit-lore of all the world testifies to this. At all events, he sees a man and woman coming toward him, apparently together, but, in truth, worlds apart. They speak to each other, but he does not hear. If he did, how could he understand that melancholy music?

The man speaks: 'Tangled—we are tangled. Whose fault was it, dear? We neither wake nor sleep. In our hearts there is much, and in our bodies nothing, and we do nothing at all, and only the waters of the river of tears flow quickly.'

And now the Chorus supplies the story.

Long, long ago these two were lovers. Nightly, according to the custom of Kefu, he brought to the door of the beloved the lacquered wands with love-signs painted upon them (*nishikigi*), the love-charm which, it was believed, no woman could resist. Every night, for three years, the passionate lover

brought his wand and laid it by the rest, hoping, hoping—at last, despairing. And every night the maiden sat weaving the narrow cloth known as *hosonuno*. Her door was shut against him. Was it fear, or modesty, or the tremulous holding-back from delight? Perhaps she herself did not know.

But he died, and they buried him in a cave with all his vain love-charms about him; and as for her—her weaving was all done, and the loom set aside, and her thwarted passion also drifted out into the void.

It was so long ago that now even the old custom of Kefu is forgotten; and death stepped tacitly and blotted them out like water spilt from a broken jar. Into the sand? No—for man is desire, limitless desire; and, when the brain no longer bounds it, it flows abroad and grows stronger: a crying in the wind, a moaning in the sea.

But now they draw nearer to the priest, and he wonders to see them in these lonely ways. It bewilders the old man a little. He says:—

'It is strange, seeing these two people here. I might suppose them two married people. The lady carries what might be a piece of cloth woven from bird's feathers, and the man a wand painted red. Strange merchandise!'

Stranger than he knows, for these are the symbols of their pain, the merchandise of broken lives.

So, pausing in the dusk, they tell him their story—not as if it were their own; only a sad old tale that haunts the

countryside.

'We know the funeral cave of such a man,' breathes the woman; 'one who watched out the thousand nights; a bright cave, for they buried him with all his wands.'

The priest is interested. He would like to see that cave. It would be a tale to tell his village when he returns. Will they show it?

So they wander on together—he himself becoming somewhat changed and ghostly under their weird influence, as they go. Night is coming; the air is cold with more than frost. Oh, bitter cold of the lonely heart wandering in desolate places! The Chorus, the thought of the play, cries aloud:—

'Autumn. Our feet are clogged  
In the dew-drenched matted leaves.  
The perpetual shadow is lonely.  
The owl cries out from the ivy  
That drags its weight on the pine.  
The hiding fox is now lord of that love-cave.'

The wanderers stand at last before it—the place the two must haunt, the focus of their spiritual being. And now they have vanished. The force that materialized them for vision is very slender: it can sustain them no longer; and the priest stands bewildered and alone. The place is strange; he knows not where to turn. He would sleep beside it, and cannot, for

the cry unsatisfied is heard in his heart also—it stirs, it calls him.

'It seems that I cannot sleep  
Under October wind, under pines, under night.  
I will do service to the Blessed One.'

And, rising, he performs the peace-giving ritual of the Lord Buddha.

But what is this—a cry of joy from a woman's voice, she herself invisible.

'Aie, honored priest,  
Hear soothsay!  
Now there is meeting between us,  
Between us who were until now  
In life and in after-life kept apart—  
A dream-bridge over wild grass.  
O Honored, do not awake me by force;  
I see that the Law is perfect.'

Perfect. This they had not known before—the Law had seemed a thwarting, a binding. Now the cravings of broken desire are stilled; and because they are stilled, the two are united with the Whole, and therefore with each other, and melt into perfect union—according to the Great Teaching. It is a Far Eastern rendering of 'In his Will is our peace.'

The Law is perfect. The quiet of the Blessed One  
submerges them like an ocean. And now the man's voice is  
heard:—

'It is a good service you have done, Sir—  
A service that spreads in two worlds  
And binds up an ancient love.'

And she:—

'The meeting comes now.  
This night has happened over and over;  
Now only comes the tryst.'

But what is happening? Slowly a warm light fills the  
funeral cave; shadows pass before it, as they might before a  
household fire seen from the cold without. It seems to  
become a happy home in the waste.

'Strange! [cries the priest] what seemed so very old a  
cave  
Is all glittering bright within  
Like the flicker of fire.  
It is like the inside of a house.  
They are setting up a loom,  
And heaping up charm-sticks. No!  
The hangings are of old time—  
Is it illusion—illusion?'

He is not able to tell. It shifts and changes, dreamlike. The spirits themselves cannot tell. The man's voice says slowly:

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'Our hearts have been in the dusk of the falling snow,  
We have been astray in the flurry.  
You should tell better than we  
How much is illusion.  
We have been in the whirl of those who are fading.'

But the priest cries aloud, passionately aroused now:—

'Let it be a dream or a vision—  
I care not!  
Only show me the old times past and snowed under,  
Now—soon—while the night lasts!'

And so he sees.

The loom is set up in the cave, as it might be by their fireside. The lover knocks with his wand upon a door whence, in the dead past, he had no answer. But now—now—the Chorus chants softly:—

'There he is carrying wands,  
And she has no need to be asked.  
See her within the cave.



With a cricket-like noise of weaving.  
*Churr, isho*, like the whirr of a loom; *churr!*'

The lover, speaking through the Chorus:—

'I lie, a body unknown to any other man,  
Like old wood buried in moss.  
We had no meeting;  
But tears have, it seems, brought out a bright blossom  
Upon the dyed tree of love.'

At last the priest may see into that strange secret bride-chamber of the tomb, where the joy that lies at the heart of the world's pain has conquered. And the man's voice comes again from a great distance:—

'Happy at last and well-starred,  
Now comes the eve of betrothal.'

And the Chorus:—

'How glorious the sleeves of the dance  
That are like snow-whirls!'

And the man:—

'Tread out the dance.'

And so it proceeds, with music and light and rejoicing; and suddenly—suddenly all stops. What is this? Darkness—faint light in the east; and now the Chorus, a wind shrilling in a waste place:—

'The dawn!

Come, we are out of place.

Let us go ere the light comes.

We ask you—Do not awake.

We all will wither away,

The wands and this cloth of a dream.

There is nothing here but this cave in the field's midst;

To-day's wind moves in the pines;

A wild place, unlit and unfilled.'

That is all. Were they happy? Did it all come right? Or was that, too, dream within dream? We cannot tell. The audience goes silently away, and the hall is left to the ghosts.

You see? For, says the Scripture of the Good Law, just as a man adds oil to a lamp and so renews the flame, so grows craving in the man who sets his heart on the things of this world. He cannot die, in the true and lovely sense. He can only live to mortal and immortal pain. But the desire relaxing its clutch, the oil emptying in the lamp—there is the peace of the Nirvana, whether in life or death.

### III

In the *Kakitsubata*, the cast is even smaller—a traveling priest, the ghost of a girl, and the Chorus. This is a very beautiful and colored play. You are to remember Narihira, a great man in the ancient Japan—noble, splendid, a great courtier, musician, and poet, and, later, wise among the wise; the light and love of many women; beloved, indeed, by the august Empress Takago—wife of the Emperor Seiwa—a thousand years ago. He has passed through so many women's lives, carelessly, lightly, as a man may gather an iris in a stream and cast it aside.

But there is one who remembers him—whose whole being has become a fixed passionate memory. She does not remember—she is memory, and nothing more. How then should she pass into the Peace?

So the priest—he might be the priest of *Nishikigi*—wanders through Mikawa to see the flowers of the iris in all their glory; for it is the season. They stand in noble ranks, and he muses beside them, he too not exempt from 'the old urge of sorrow' within him. And as he stands, he becomes aware of a young girl in the simple dress of the country. She asks what he is doing in that swamp—just as any girl might ask in passing. He is looking at the iris—what else? Where has he come to?

She tells him—to Yatsubashi of Mikawa, and adds: 'You have the best flowers before you there, those of the deepest color, as you would see if you had any power of feeling.'

Yes, the priest can see that. He believes these are the iris of an ancient legend. Who wrote the words? She knows. She replies:—

'By Yatsubashi, by the web of crossing waters, the iris scatters its petals. It was Narihira who said: "These flowers brought their court dress from China."'

The priest ponders: 'Then Narihira came here?' That is of interest—he was so great a man. 'What place was nearest to his heart?'

'This place,' the girl replies, and then:—

'The man who bound himself to me  
Returned times out of mind in his thought  
To me and this cobweb of waters.'

So you see—because he had remembered the iris and loved them a little for her sake; because she remembers nothing but that passion and loss, she is now a part of the flowers. They are the clothing of her spirit, and she can manifest herself only beside them; and this will be until she has rent the veil of illusion and is absorbed in the reality that lies behind it.

She bids the priest spend the night in her poor cottage—a very lowly place, but still a shelter. He accepts, little knowing what he is to see, and that he is stepping through the broken shell of one world into another. For the lady returns, no longer deceiving his eyes as a country maiden, but dressed in splendor, now her true self and the greatest lady of all that Narihira had loved in the vanished days. Her dress is symbolical, as dress in the Nō is, more or less, always. She wears an overdress of gauze, purple with golden flowers, an underdress of glaring orange, with green and gold pattern. She is now the spirit of the iris and also the love of Narihira—about her is the perfume of his memory of her.

The priest says in amazement:—

'How strange—in this tumble-down cottage, a lady in bright robes! What can this mean?'

He shall know. The spirit speaks:—

'This is the very dress brought from China  
(The court dress of the iris also!)  
The gown of the Empress Takago.  
She was Narihira's beloved.  
At eighteen she won him.  
She was the light of his youth.  
I come, clothed in a memory.'

And the priest: 'You had better put this aside. Who are you?'

'I am the spirit of the iris. The spirit of remembrance. And Narihira was the incarnation of music. Holy magic ran through his words, and even the grass and the flowers pray to him for the blessings of dew.'

And then the Chorus recites the glories of Narihira, in the old days that are dead: the Emperor's favor, his pomp and splendor. They speak for the man himself:—

'The waves, the billows return.  
But my glory comes not again.'

They proceed:—

'He was pledged with many a lady.  
The fireflies drift away,  
Scattering their little lights,  
And then flying, flying,  
Souls of fine ladies,  
Going up into heaven.  
And here in the underworld  
The autumn winds come blowing—blowing,  
And the wild ducks cry, Kari—Kari!'

So one sees it, like an illusive Chinese landscape: whirls of ghostly snow over the white plain; ghostly torn peaks showing here and there through clouds, and a sense of loss irreparable, weeping and crying in the wind. Is it a spirit, a

form impermanent, drifting, or only a flurry of rain in the night?

And now the Chorus chants a song of Narihira's own:—

'No moon!  
The Spring is not the Spring of the old days.  
My body  
Is not my body,  
But only a body grown old.  
Narihira, Narihira,  
My glory comes not again.'

But from the Chorus, from the priest, from the power of the memories thus evoked, the spirit of the lady has gathered power. He made these verses for the Empress. She will dance the dance he loved.

'Narihira knew me in old days.  
Doubt it not, stranger.  
And now I begin my dance.  
Wearing the ancient bright mantle.'

And the stately dance begins, holding all the past for her. She and the Chorus describe it alternately. And gradually, slowly, while you watch, the gray- and olive-robed Chorus obscures the bright dancer—the passion is dying down, the memory is fading, the essential falls out of the apparition,

saying: 'It is only the cracked husk of the locust.' And the Chorus closes the play:—

'Day comes; the purple flower  
Opens its heart of wisdom;  
It fades out of sight by its thought—  
The flower soul melts into Buddha.'

Even the perfume of the iris dies on the air; it is absorbed into the Passionless.

#### IV

Of course, by no means all the Nō plays are the habitations of ghosts; but many are the haunt of strange intuitions, of fallings from us, vanishings, worlds not realized; the moving within us of spirits who have moulded our being and whom we have never known. It is a twilight world, lit by waning moons. The ghosts who dwell there have been given over into the prison of their own Selfhood; their passions and memories have made their cage; and they have no escape, in life or death, until they accept the law of self-annihilation.

This is the Teaching. No doubt we have an echo of this in the West, where the miserable spirit lurks forever amid the pain it inflicted or received, bound on the wheel of its own torment; but in the Orient they understand, they have unraveled cause and effect; and it is a hard task for us to



learn who, as the Buddhist Scriptures say, 'belong to another sect, to another faith, to another discipline, and sit at the feet of another Teacher.' Yet it is surely a true teaching of the binding of the spirit, whether in life or death.

There is one very touching Nō where the brilliant Prince Genji, the Don Juan of the most famous ancient romance of Japan, adored of many women, returns, an empty ghost, to the seashore at Suma. He is there because it was to Suma that he fled from the Emperor's anger at a gross intrigue, knowing that banishment awaited him. There he had known sorrow for the first time in his shining life, and the shadow of sorrow is a sickness, an insanity that holds the soul captive, apart from the processional joy of the universe. He is dressed in poor garments, he who went so splendid in life; he manifests as a woodcutter of Suma. Suddenly, in the second scene, blooms out the old glory; the beauty of the rushing billows flows like wine in his veins; for a moment he forgets his grief and recalls the old splendor of the Court when before the Emperor he trod the measure of 'The Blue Sea Waves' crowned with maple leaves, himself 'a bright flower' as the ancient story of his loves describes him.

'How beautiful this sea is! When I trod the grass here I was called "Genji the Gleaming." I will dance the blue dance of the sea waves!'

And he dances, that the priest may see even in a vision the beauty lost in the years.

There is a strange and horrible Nō about the wife of Prince Genji, the most unhappy Lady Awoi—one of the heroines of

the thousand-year-old novel which records the loves of the Prince and is a classic in Japan. With a heart for so many, he had none for his wife, and she died forsaken. Such a disease of the soul as hers could not escape the Nō, for it gives the woman chained to her misery, as Prometheus to his rock. What is very singular is that she never appears in the play. She is represented by a red-flowered kimono, folded and laid at the front of the stage. You are to consider that her very garment is saturated and infected with the poison that is destroying her body as she dies.

What is seen is the spirit Princess Rokujo, whose liaison with Prince Genji is driving his wife to death; and yet,—most strange,—this is no fetich of the Princess herself: it is Awoi's jealous agony taking the shape of the woman who is killing her. That thought possesses her mind—it materializes in the loathed shape.

The scene is opened by a great Court official, the Daijin, who relates that the priest and exorcists have been called to aid the great lady and drive forth her disease; and immediately upon this appears the visible Jealousy—which yet will not speak the truth, but declares that she is the spirit of the Princess. She is splendidly costumed—the under kimono of black satin, embroidered with small, irregular, infrequent circles of flowers; the upper part of stiff gold brocade, shot through with purples, greens, and reds.

She speaks of her glories:—

'I had the moon for a mirror. I was drunk with color and perfume.'

Suddenly she sees the dying woman and rushes to attack her.

'This woman is hateful. I cannot keep back my blows.'  
And she strikes.

It is Awoi's own jealousy wounding her; she is her own destroyer.

'The flame of jealousy,' says the apparition, 'will turn on one's own hand and burn.'

And the exorcist advances, clashing and striking his wooden beads; and now the passion leaves the shape of the Princess and takes a more horrible shape. It is a *hannya*, a demon, a terrible mask with golden eyes, clothed in scarlet and white, faced by the exorcist, who thus describes himself:  
—

'Then he hung about his shoulders a cloak that had swept the dew of the seven jewels in climbing the peaks of Tai Kou and of Kori in Riobu. He wore the cassock of forbearance, to keep out unholy things. He took the beads of red wood, the square beads with hard corners, and, whirling and striking, said prayer.'

The *hannya* threatens him with worse than death. Awoi is possessed, indeed! But still he persists, he cries out the sonorous spells, the strong clashing names of the protecting spirits; and at last the horrible possession relaxes—the *hannya* totters, overcome.

'O terrible names of the spirits! this is my last time. I return here no more.'

And now Awoi nō Uye is sinking—sinking gently into the quiet of death; and the Chorus concludes the play:—

'By hearing the Scripture, the evil spirit is melted. The Blessed One came hither; his face was full of forbearance and pity. Pity has melted her soul, and she has passed into the Buddha. Thanksgiving!'

She will not dream of Genji any more in that translucent calm. She has out-soared the shadow of her hate.

There is another fearful Nō mentioned by Professor Fenollosa and Lafcadio Hearn. It is the story of a woman who inordinately desires the love of a young priest. He rejects her, flies from her, and hides under a great bronze temple-bell, such as may be seen at the Chion-in in Kyōto. She pursues, her fierce desire sweeping the woman out of her. It expresses itself as a raging dragon, glowing and spuming fire. As a dragon, she coils about the bell, biting the metal savagely in her madness, and the bell glows incandescent from the fire that is in her; and the wretch beneath is calcined into ash. For, in the Nō, thought is a creative thing, and therefore the dragon soul animates a dragon body.

But not all the spirit Nō plays are like this. There is *hagoramo*—pure delicate beauty, and rendered into

accessible loveliness by Mr. Waley. A moon-maiden has been dancing in lonely delight, on the beach by the pine woods of Mio—scarcely less lovely than her own aerial world. Like the swan-princess of Morris's 'East of the Sun, west of the Moon,' she has a magic robe of feathers, and this she has hung on a pine tree. The fisherman Hakuryō enters and sees it—wafting immortal fragrance. He seizes it, and the moon-maiden cries for her cloak—the wings by which alone she can climb the blue heights.

'How shall I tread  
The wing-ways of the air?'

But he hardens his heart against her pleading; and before his very eyes she droops like a dying flower. At last he softens: if she will dance for him the dance that mortal eyes have never seen, he will restore the cloak. Life radiant and shining flows in her veins again.

'I am happy, happy!  
And for thanksgiving I bequeath  
A dance of remembrance to the world.  
Give back my cloak.'

He refuses. The bird of heaven may fly away without the longed-for dance. She rebukes him with gentle dignity,

'Doubt is for mortals.  
There is no deceit in heaven'—

and he restores it. Then she begins the stately dance, and the Chorus accompanies it with a chant as lovely—recounting the ritual of the moon's changes:—

'In white dress, in black dress,  
Thrice ten angels,  
In two ranks divided,  
Thrice five for the waning,  
Thrice five for nights of the waxing moon.  
One heavenly lady, on each night of the moon,  
Does service and fulfills  
Her ritual task assigned.'

The Chorus calls on the wind to build cloud-walls about the sky, lest the vision leave the world to empty day. Can thought or words be more beautiful? I can never see the waxing or waning of the moon consciously, without recalling the gladness of these fair spirits who direct it. Every word of this *Nō* is exquisite music, and should be read, either in Mr. Waley's, or in Mr. Pound's and Professor Fenollosa's, translation.

'She is robed in a garment of mist, of spring mist,' says the Chorus; and now she rises, rises into the blue of the air, faintly seen over the pines of Mio, past the floating islands, through the lower clouds; then higher still, over the mountain of Ashitaka, the silver peak of Fuji; and again, but very faint, her form as heaven resumes its own—the mists receive her. And now—she is a lost star. It is over.

These Japanese ghosts are the most insubstantial in all the world. They can hold human shape with difficulty. Homer's ghosts, blown like dead leaves in hell, drinking the blood of beasts, are tangible in comparison. Dante's, suffering in singing flames and glacial hells, are solid beside them; for these are the tortures that conquerors inflict and the reason of man denies; but the Nō ghosts, inexpressible as an odor,—a faint dream gone with the dawn,—are to me the most real and terrible ghosts I know. For we have all felt them; we carry them, each of us, in our own bosom.

Who that has known the gnawing possession of jealousy, cruel as the grave, but must understand when the Lady Awoi's hate and agony take the visible shape of her rival, and so hunt her to death? What pangs of love denied but repeat themselves in the lonely wandering ghosts of *Nishikigi*? Is this wretchedness to be prolonged beyond death? Yes, the Nō replies, unless this knowledge is gained:—

As the fiery sparks from a forge are one by one  
extinguished,  
And no one knows where they have gone;  
So is it with those who have attained to complete  
emancipation,  
Who have crossed the flood of desire,  
Who have entered upon the calm delight—  
Of these no trace remains.

Theirs is the untracked path of the bird in pure air. Otherwise—there is no fever of longing and memory and sorrow that does not confront us in the Nō, and, as we look, they are the ghosts of our own hearts that meet us. There is much to think of in the Nō I have given, and in the many more of which I might write. Some noble, ringing with gallant courage and high instinct; some wistful and strangely beautiful, the flower of a faith that has moulded great nations, and must do it to the end of time.

These plays demand as much as they give: the audience must bring its gifts of imagination, intellect, knowledge, and poetic insight, and lay them before the stage, or the actors can do nothing for them. It is not so in other parts of the world, so far as I know. I see a Western audience; the glaring obvious stage, tricked out with decoration that overpowers the story; the players; the very thought (if there should be such an irrelevance!); every shade of feeling expressed in black and white before it can be absorbed by the heads that crowd the place. What does that audience bring? It has paid its money to be amused, thought for, taken in, and done for.

But why dwell upon what all know—the theatre of a commercial civilization throned in the midst of its dying arts. It may be said that the Nō was and is the pleasure of aristocrats of birth and intellect. Possibly. Our aristocrats, at all events, seek nothing like it; and in Japan true art in any of its branches has never been the monopoly of the great.

I think it was Mr. Gladstone who once drew the pitiful comparison between what pleased an average audience of ancient Athens—the mighty Æschylean or Sophoclean



drama, the clash and glitter of Aristophanic wit—and what pleases a modern audience. He made it his thesis that in the higher intellectual qualities man has degenerated since those great days; that the race then touched its high-water mark, and that ever since the tide has slowly ebbed. I should not say this myself. Knowing a little of thought that as yet is slightly considered among us,—the thought of the Orient,—I should rather say that the weeds of a gross civilization have choked the beauty which will grow only in conditions we no longer fulfill—no longer think even desirable.

'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' It remains to be seen whether we have lost the power as well as the will to learn.

So in memory I hold a quiet hall in old Kyōto, a little stage, grave and archaic in its setting, a few strange figures, and a stilled, waiting audience, some, book in hand, following spellbound a drama of the soul of man in life and death.

The night comes, soft-footed, outside; the lamps are lit; the Kamo River ripples softly beside the palaces and temples of the mighty dead who have made Japan's great present. She is great by reason of the faith that was in them. If the people relinquish this, and take for their god the golden idol of our market place—But the future is unknown to us. It is only the Great Gods who see it as one with the past and the present.

# THE HIDDEN ONE

[Atlantic Monthly, October, 1924]

(The Princess of this story was one of the great Moghul dynasty of Emperors in India and was born in 1639. She was granddaughter to the Emperor Shah Jahan and the lovely Lady who sleeps in the Taj Mahal, and daughter to the Emperor Aurungzib whose Moslem fanaticism was his ruin. The Princess's title was Zeb-un-Nissa—Glory of Women. She was beautiful and was, and is, a famous poet in India and Persia. She wrote under the pen name of Makhfi—the Hidden One. Her love adventures were such as I relate, though I have taken the liberty of transferring the fate of one lover to another.

For her quoted poems I use the charming translations by J. D. Westbrook, who has written a short memoir of this fascinating poet-Princess. She was a mystic of the Sufi order, and her verses, 'The Hunter of the Soul,' strangely anticipate the motif of Francis Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven.' The poems not specified as hers are a part of my story.)

## I

The office of hakim (physician) to the Moghul Emperors being hereditary in my family from the days of Babar the

Conquering Emperor, I was appointed physician to the Padshah known as Shah Jahan, and when His Majesty became a resident in Paradise (may his tomb be sanctified!) my office was continued by his Majesty Aurungzib, the Shahinshah, and rooms of nobility were bestowed on me in his palace, and by his abundant favor the health of the Begams (Queens) was placed in the hands of this suppliant and I came and went freely and was enlightened by the rays of his magnanimity. And my name is Abul Qasim.

But of all that Garden of Flowers, the Queens and Princesses, there was one whom my soul loved as a father his child, for she resembled that loveliest of all sweet ladies, the mother of her father—she who lies sleeping by Jumna River in the divine white glory of the Taj Mahal (may the lights of Allah be her testimony!). In the sisters of my Princess I have seen, as it were, a beam now and again of that lost beauty, but in her it abode as an unchanging moonlight and at her birth she received the name of Arjemand in honor of that beloved lady whose loss so clouded the universe that the day of her death is known only by its chronogram of 'grief.' And the child received also the title of 'Glory of Women' and such this Princess most truly was. Of her might it be said: 'For the mole upon thy cheek I would give the cities of Samarkhand and Bokhara.' And a poet of Persia, catching a glimpse of her in her garden, cried aloud in an ecstasy of verse:—

'O, golden zone that circles the Universe of Beauty,  
It were little to give the Universe itself for what  
thou circlest.'

Yet this surprising loveliness was the least of her perfections. But how shall this suppliant, who is but mortal man, describe her charm? Allah, when he made man and laid the world at his feet, decreed that one thing should be hidden from his understanding, so that still, for all his knowledge, he should own there is but one Searcher of Secrets, and this mystery is the heart and the enchantment of a woman. For if she be called the Other Half of man it is but as the Moon reflects the glory of her lord the Sun, and as a wise Hindu pundit told me for truth the Moon has a cold and dark side also where alone she revolves thoughts secret, silent, and perilous. Therefore to sift her in her secret spells is a foolhardy thing, and not in vain is it written by Aflatoun (Plato), the wise man of the Greeks, that the unhappy man who surprised a goddess bathing in the forest was rent in pieces by his own hounds.

Yet this feat must be attempted for, if there is a thing it behooves man to know, it is the soul of this fair Mystery who moves submissive beside him and surrenders Heaven to him in a first kiss and the bitterness of the Hells in a last.

Therefore I essay a tale of this Princess, the Glory of Women, who was an epitome of her sex in that she was beautiful, a dreamer, a poet, and at times sweet in gentleness as a summer river kissing its banks in flowing, and at others

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But I write.

## II

Seeing her intelligence clear as a sword of Azerbaijan, her exalted father resolved that his jewel should not be dulled by lack of polishing and cutting, and he appointed the wise lady Miyabai to be her first teacher. And lo! at the age of seven she knew the Koran by heart, and in her honor a mighty feast was made for the army and for the poor. As she grew, aged and saintly teachers were given her, from whom she absorbed Arabic, mathematics, and astronomy as a rose drinks rain. No subject eluded her swift mind, no toil wearied her. Verses she wrote with careless ease in the foreign tongue of Arabia, but hearing from an Arab scholar that in a single line the exquisite skill betrayed an Indian idiom, she instantly discarded Arabic, because she would have perfection, and henceforward was a poet only in her mother tongue, Persian.

On this jewel no pains were spared, for the Emperor desired that her name might be splendid throughout Asia. And yet he drew her limit and sharply. For in her pride of learning she began a commentary on the holy Koran, and hearing this, he sternly forbade it. A woman might in her own sphere do much, he wrote, but such a creature of dust may not handle the Divine.

I, Abul Qasim, was with her when she received the Imperial order, and saw her take the fair manuscript and obediently tear it across, desiring that the rent leaves be offered to the Shadow of God in token of obedience. But those deep eyes of hers were not obedient beneath the veiling of silken lashes, and turning to me, to whom she told her

royal heart, she said, 'What the hand may not write the heart may think, for in the heart is no Emperor. It is free.'

Yet the Emperor made amends and noble, so far as his light led him. Not for a woman the mysteries of the faith of Islam, which he held of all things the greatest, but, fired by the praises of her tutors, he sent throughout India, Persia, and Kashmir for poets worthy of his poet-Princess, bidding them come to Delhi and Agra and there dwell. A fitting company he made for her.

So, veiled like the moon in clouds, the Princess Arjemand was permitted to be present in the great hall of the palace at tournaments where the weapons were the wit and beauty of words, when quotations and questions were flung about as it might be handfuls of stars, and a line given was capped with some perfect finishing of the moment's prompting and became a couplet unsurpassable; and so the poets and the wits broke their knees on each other, and often it was the golden voice from behind the veil that capped the wisest, and completed the most exquisite, and recited verses of her own which brought acclamation from the assembly.

'Not even Saadi (may Allah enlighten him!) nor Jalalu' din Rumi (may his eyes be gladdened in Paradise!) excelled this lady in the perfumed honey of words.' So with one voice they cried.

And this was not homage to the daughter of the Protector of the Universe. No indeed. For death has not washed out her name with the cold waters of oblivion; and now that she is no more beautiful, nor daughter to the Emperor, her verse is still

repeated where wise men and lovers meet in their own concourses, and the soul of the Hidden One, still beautiful and veiled, is among them.

It will be seen that her life in the secret Palace must needs be solitary, for there was none among the ladies who shared her pleasures. But she had one friend, Imami, daughter of Arshad Beg Khan, and this creature of mortality who writes these words was also accounted a friend, though unworthy to be the ground whereon she set her little foot. Day after day did the Princess Arjemand, with Imami, write and study, and the librarians of the Emperor had little peace because of the demands for the glorious manuscripts and books collected by her ancestors from all the ends of the earth.

Great and wonderful was the new Palace of the Emperor, with tall rods of lilies inlaid in the pure marble in stones so precious that they might have been the bosom adornments of some lesser beauty, and there were palms in tall vases brought by the merchants of Cathay, which made a green shade and coolness for two fountains, the one of the pure waters of the canal, the other of rose water, and they plashed beside a miniature lake of fretted marble rocks sunk in the floor, where white lotuses slept in the twilight.

But of all the jewels my Princess was the chief. Surely with small pains may the Great Moghul's daughter be a beauty, but had she been sold naked in the market place this lady had brought a royal price. Toorki and Indian and Persian blood mingled in her and each gave of its best. The silken dark hair tasseled with pearls that fell to her knees was an imperial crown. From the well-beloved lady who sleeps in

the Glory of Tombs she had received eyes whose glance of meditative sweetness not even the men of her own blood, excepting only her stern father, could resist, and of her rose-red lips, half sensuous, half childlike, might it be said:—

    Their honey was set as a snare and my heart,  
        a wandering bee,  
Clung and could not be satisfied, tasted and  
    returned home no more.

Of the soul within that delicious shrine her deeds must tell.

### III

So she sat and frowned with a letter from the Emperor in her hand, for again she was thwarted. She had desired to read the Memoirs of her ancestor, the Emperor Babar, and, hearing this, her imperial father wrote thus:—

'Happy Daughter of Sovereignty, there is one manner of reading for men who are the rulers, and for women who are the slaves another. It seems you go too far. What has a daughter of our House to do with our ancestor, Zahir-ud-din Muhammed Babar, the resident in Paradise? He writes as a man for men, and what profit for a woman? Plant not the herb of regret in the garden of affection lest I regret what is already given. The request is refused. Recall the verses:—



'Ride slowly and humbly and not in hurrying pride,  
For o'er the dusty bones of men the creature  
of dust must ride.

'What an Emperor writes is not for the Princesses. His duty is rule. Theirs, obedience.'

Her eyes flashed, and calling for her pen she wrote:—

'Exalted Emperor, father of the body of this creature of mortality, be pleased to hear this ignorant one's supplication. I represent that you have fed my mind on the bee's bread of wisdom, and from your own royal lips have I heard that the words of our ancestor (upon whom be the Peace!) are full of flavor and laughter, generous and kind, shining with honor and the valor of our family. Now, true it is that I am your female slave; yet may this worthless one bear one day a son to transmit your likeness to the prostrate ages. And since we do not breed lions from lambs, his mother should carry the laughter and fire of her race like a jewel in her heart. I repeat my petition to the holiest of Emperors from his suppliant daughter.'

'It will be granted,' said the Princess, 'even for the sake of that last word—the "holiest." He values that title more than to be called the Shahinshah. And with all my heart I would it were otherwise.'

'And why, great Lady?' cried Imami. 'Surely the Padshah is a saint, having with his own hand written the Koran out in

full, and his deeds and words will illumine Paradise.'

'I know little of Paradise, but I know, and my father might know, that to be so bitter a saint in our Moslem faith that he insults and persecutes all the others of the Empire is to break our dynasty to powder.'

The blood dropped from my face as I heard her because had these words been carried to the Padshah not even her rank, not even her daughterhood, could save the Princess, and in the Palace a bird of the air may carry the matter.

'Yes,' she went on, laughing coldly. 'Akbar Padshah had in all ways the tastes of Solomon the Wise, and his Palace of Queens was a garden. But observe! These Queens were chosen from every faith and each had the right (like Solomon's—the Peace on him!) to worship as she would. There were Indian Princesses who adored Maheshwara, the Great God, and Krishna, the Beloved. There was a Fair Persian who worshiped the Fire. There was—But in the zenana of my imperial Father—'

She paused and Imami continued, 'The Queens recite the holy Koran all day as becomes the ladies of an Emperor who sighs for the life of a fakir.'

'And would he had it!' cried the Princess with passion, 'for every day discontent grows among the Hindus that are taxed, beaten, and despised because they hold their fathers' faith. Is there one of them employed about the court or in the great offices as in Akbar's day? Not one. Yet Akbar Padshah in his

deep wisdom built up the empire which my father with holy hands destroys daily.'

'O, brilliant Lady, for the sake of the Prophet, be silent,' I said, for she terrified me by her insight. Better is it for a woman that she should not know, or knowing keep silence. 'If these words reached the Padshah—'

'I should at the least be imprisoned and nevermore see the light of day. But the end is sure.'

'What is the end?' whispered Imami.

'Misery for himself, though that matters little, for he will accept it as the robe of martyrdom, but ruin for the Moghul Empire in India, and that matters much, for the astrologers whisper of a great white race from the sunset who know all things but God and Beauty, and their heel shall be on our necks. Oh that I were a man!'

Her face lit up into such pride and valor that I also wished it, for I knew her words were true as truth. But in India a woman can do nothing, and I trembled for my Princess.

So I said, salaaming, 'Princess, when the happy day comes that you wed, you shall make your lord lord of the world with your wisdom.'

She laughed, but bitterly.

'I shall never marry, wise man of fidelity. I have had lovers, yes; for one, Suleiman, my cousin, son of the brother whom my father slew because he stood too near the throne.

By report I knew what he was, but I saw him and spoke with him that—'

'My Princess, and how?' I asked in astonishment, knowing that his presence in the Queens' Palace was death.

She looked at me with large calm eyes.

'My faithful servant, have you been so long about the Palace and know not that all things are possible? Prince Suleiman was veiled like a woman, and I saw his face and we spoke together. Should not cousins meet?'

I trembled when I heard, for had the Padshah guessed, what hope for her? His own three brothers had he slaughtered and Prince Suleiman was doomed, if this were known.

'And he saw your face, O Brilliant Lady?'

'Not he! And not for fear's sake, but because I liked him not at all. He stood and sighed, and said: "O Envy of the Moon, lift up your veil that I may adore the hidden lips like the rubies of Badakhshan, the musk-dark tresses, the cypress form. O Waving Willow of Beauty, be pitiful to your slave!" But I caught up my lute and sang these verses of my own making:—

'I will not lift my veil,  
For if I did, who knows—  
The bulbul might forsake the rose  
The Brahman worshiper,  
Adoring Lakshmi's grace,

Might turn, forsaking her,  
To see my face.

'My beauty might prevail.  
Think how within the flower  
Hidden as in a bower  
Her fragrant soul must be,  
And none can look on it.  
So me the world shall see  
Only within the verses I have writ.

'I will not lift the veil.

'And the fool caught me—*Me!* and would have torn it.  
And when I flung him off he swore a great oath that sooner  
or later he would have my face to see and my heart in his  
hand. A woman in fury as in dress! A contemptible creature,  
though beautiful as Yusuf, and my own cousin.'

'But, Lady of Beauty, what had you against him? He is  
brave as a sword of steel.'

'Do I not know all that goes on in this city? Do I not know  
that the Prince spends his nights and days in Shaitanpur  
(Devilsville), the quarter of pleasure, and was I to show my  
face to a man reeking from the embraces of the bazaar? No. I  
am Makhfi, the Hidden One; hidden I shall be until I am won  
by a deed unrivaled and a heart unfailing. I shall be no rival  
to Peri Mahal, the dancer, and such as she.'

And, even as she ended, a low voice at the curtain that veiled the doorway asked admittance; the heavy silk was drawn aside and a tall woman entered. The Princess scarcely looked up.

'Her slave prays for a word with the Marvel of the Age whose mind so lovely outshines even her fair face, and whose face so beautiful is the lamp that holds the light of her soul.'

'Warm for a woman!' said the Princess, and looked straight at the newcomer who stood salaaming with the utmost humility. She added impatiently:—

'There is no need of this ceremony. Remove your veil. The good physician, Abul Qasim, is privileged to see the faces of all in the Palace of Queens.'

In a flash the veil was torn off and a man's face appeared beneath it, young, bold, and beautiful, with the hawk features of the Imperial House. A splendid, dissolute young man with the down on his upper lip like the black astride the swan's bill. Prince Suleiman, son of Dara, the Padshah's brother.

'Ha, daughter of my uncle!' he cried. 'Did I not wager, did I not swear that I would see the Hidden One? And now I see her, face to face. Poets have sung you, cousin, and painters have praised you, and their words and colors were lies, for you are wholly a spark of Divinity. And having seen, I entreat for love's very sake that your beauty may be mine to worship until time is no more.'

He made toward her eagerly, disregarding Imami and me. I looked to see her confused or angry, but she spoke with a most misleading calm.

'Exalted cousin, you have won your wager and your bride. If her embrace is cold it is at least constant and—'

'Cold, with those burning lips of rose, those eyes filled with sleep? O loveliest, divinest, grant me one kiss for earnest if you would not have me die at your feet.'

I saw her sign with her hand to Imami, who glided away, flattening herself against the wall as if terrified. Then she spoke serenely.

'Exalted cousin, when were you last in Shaitanpur?'

It stopped him like a lightning flash. He stood arrested on the marble before her face. 'I know nothing of Shaitanpur,' he said breathlessly.

'No? Nor of Peri Mahal, the dancer, and her house with the courtyard of roses and the song she sings?'

Again she caught up her lute and sang in a low voice:—

'Black bee, strong bee, the honey-eater,  
Plunder my perfume, seek my heart!  
Cling to me, ravage me, make me sweeter!  
Tear the leaves of the rose apart.'

He stared, his eyes slowly dilating. That the daughter of the Emperor should sing the song of the bazaar, the song of the light women! Then it emboldened him. He threw himself forward to seize her hand.

'Maker of verses, this is a rose of your own garden. Till now I never heard it, but it speaks your heart. You shall not ask me twice, my rose, my pearl, my star.' He caught the hem of her veil.

Now I knew well from her eyes that he rushed on his fate, but it was written in the book of his destiny and who can avert fate?

She drew back a little and looked at him with soft eyes, wells of delicious darkness. Her voice was gentle as moonbeams and caressing, so that a man might well believe she would give all to please him whom she exalted with the sight of her. Said I not that the Moon has a side, dark, cold, and perilous?

'Fortunate cousin, I am a weak woman. How dare I face the wrath of the Padshah? He does not love your father's son. But if he did—' She drooped her head as with a soft shame overwhelming her in the depths of modesty. O very woman, divine, yet a child!

He, trembling, and with eyes fixed, stammered out, 'Alas, I have dreamed of your sweetness, and what is the dream to the truth? Oh, make it mine that in life and death it may enfold me, and that I may never again behold a lesser light, having once seen the Ineffable.'



And very softly, like the breathing of a flute, she said, 'O my cousin, how should we face the wrath of the Padshah?' And he, kissing her hands with frenzy, said in broken words, 'Ah, Moon of my delight, that knows no wane, let me but watch with you through the starry hours of one night, and then, then, if the Padshah's will be to slay me, at least I shall have lived before I die.'

'And I also,' she said, looking down like the feminine incarnation of modesty, so that, enraptured, he kissed her on the mouth as a man in the desert grasps the cup nor can sever his lips from it. And when he would permit her to speak she leaned her head backward to gain space, and said, 'What is my lord's will; in what shall I obey him?'

Now I, standing half hidden in the marble recess, would have warned him if it had been possible, that not thus—oh, not thus, does the proudest and wisest of women abandon herself to such as he. For I had pity on his manhood and the Imperial blood that he shared with her. But who was this suppliant to obstruct the design of the Princess? And indeed I became at last uncertain that I guessed her meaning, with such submissive sweetness did she take his hand in hers and touch it to her lovely brows. And trembling like a man in an ague, he replied:—

'O darling little slave, since you give me the right to command what is wholly mine—I say this, let my slave, whose slave I am, expect me to-night when the moonlight touches the western corner of the Diwan-i-Am, and I shall come to the hidden chamber, and my life, my soul, are in the hand of my slave whose feet I kiss.'

And throwing himself on the marble like a worshiper, he kissed the flower-soft feet that showed like bare gold beneath the hem of her robe, and so, rising to his knee, looked up at her as an idolater at his goddess.

But she looked beyond him at the curtain which veiled the door. It lifted and Imami stood there, ash-pale, with a dish of gold in her hand and standing thereon a great goblet of jeweled glass with rose-red sherbet of pomegranate juice brimming in it and rose petals floating on the surface, and beside it two golden cups flashing with diamond sparks, and on her knee she offered it to the Princess, who took the goblet and a cup, smiling.

'Fortunate cousin, since this is so, and I, my father's best-beloved child, shall pray him to grant me my heart's desire, let us drink the cup of betrothal in the presence of the Hakim Abul Qasim and the lady Imami. But I warn you that long and doubtful will be my suit and if a word too soon reach him my life will be the price. Heart of my heart, I pledge you.'

And setting the blossom of her lips to the cup she drank, and filled the other cup for him. Even as he set his lips to it, suddenly Imami sprang to her feet.

'The Padshah comes!' she said, and fell again on her knees, hiding her face in her hands.

## IV

I saw the dreadful terror that struck the color from the face of the lover. He knelt there with a glassy countenance like a man in the clutch of a nightmare. But Glory of Women, herself shuddering, caught him by the hand.

'There is but one way from these rooms and the Emperor closes it. To the room beyond my bedchamber, the room of the marble bath, and hide until he departs! Bismillah—in the name of Allah—flee!'

She pushed him from her and he fled. Then, most singular to see, she composed her veil, glancing in the mirror set in silver that was a gift from the Portuguese priests to the Emperor. The curtain lifted and Aurungzib Padshah entered and Imami prostrated herself and I also, but the Princess knelt.

Now I know not how this should be, but in a room where great events have just taken place it is as if the winds of passion beat about the walls and waft the garments of those who have shared them, and to my guilty heart it seemed as though the very lilies inlaid on the marble cried aloud, 'Majesty—Majesty, there is a man, a man in hiding!'

And certainly the Padshah halted and looked from one to the other of us with suspicion. He was ever a man of suspicion, narrow-browed, dry-lipped, sharp-eyed. The face of a man who sees not life as it is, but either as he hates or would have it—whom truth mocks in escaping. Weak; but of

all terrible things on earth, beware the strength of a weak man in the grip of his belief.

So, looking hard at the kneeling Glory of Women, he said coldly, 'In the name of the most Merciful and Beneficent, what is this disturbance? Speak, Princess, daughter of the family of chastity! It is revealed to this suppliant at the Throne of Allah that there is a hidden thing in these chambers. What is it?'

She answered, 'May joy attend my exalted father, the adorning of the gardens of happiness, the decorator of the rose-parterre of enjoyment. There is surely a hidden thing in these chambers: your unworthy daughter, who is known by your august favor as Makhfi, the Hidden One. And I have read aloud a poem newly completed which has moved the Hakim Abul Qasim to great delight since it dwells on the perfections of the Giver who gives unasked.'

'It is well, sincere daughter. Presently we shall hear it.'

I saw his eyes fix on the golden dish that lay on the table with one cup emptied and a stream of the sherbet like a bloodstain on the marble below. 'This was set down in haste,' he said through clipped lips.

'In haste, O Glory of Allah,' said the Princess with the cold sweat clamming the silken tendrils on her forehead. 'I drank, and was about to drink the second when your auspicious feet blessed the threshold.'

'You are thirsty, happy daughter of sovereignty? Then drink the remainder. Permission is granted.'

I saw the gleam in either black eye of him as he spoke, watching her sidelong. She lifted the cup to her lips with a hand that shook so that it rattled against her teeth, though she struggled to command herself.

'No, do not drink, royal daughter. It is stale,' he said, still smiling with his mouth but not his eyes.

And the Princess replied with terror scarcely to be hidden, 'Will not the Mirror of God be seated and partake of refreshments from the hand of his slave?'

'Willingly, but of that cup—no,' said the Padshah. And I knew his thought as if he had spoken it, and Imami crawled to the door like a thing released to fetch sherbet and fruits, and I to the latticed marble window, while the Emperor walked about the hall leaning on the shoulder of the Princess, and I marveled if Allah would support her lest she should fall and die at his feet.

He was later to attend the Am-Khas, the Hall of Audience, and was attired kingly. A chain of mighty pearls hung to his knees, and above all these jewels was his cold repelling dignity as of a King too great to be approached even by the favored child of his pride. Very terrible are the Moghul Emperors and this most of all, remote and lonely as a moon at midnight. At length he spoke, as if in meditation.

'Glory of Women, you have grown into beauty like the virgins of Paradise. Your long lashes need no antimony, your eyes are wells of delight, and in that robe of gulnar (pomegranate red) you resemble that princess who bewildered the senses of the mighty Suleiman, King of Israel. (I saw her eyes quiver as she bowed her head under the weight of praise.) Does not the rose long for the nightingale? Does not your heart, happy daughter, turn to love?'

With her eyes on the ground, she answered.

'Exhibitor of Perfection, my heart is set elsewhere. If I be remembered as a poet I ask no more of destiny save that the rank of daughter of the greatest of Emperors be attached to my name forever.'

And he, 'It is well, yet marriage must be considered. Fortunate daughter, have you bathed to-day?'

And she, ash-pale, 'Benignity of the Creator, no.'

He called to Imami, kneeling again by the door. 'Hasten, lady, and light the fire beneath the great water-vessel in the bathing-room of the Begam and I shall hear her verses until it be ready.' And Imami, casting a dreadful glance on the Princess, moved slowly to the inner chamber and it is the truth that my soul all but died within me, for oh, most terrible was the doom of the Padshah, and who could tell that this young man, worthless and dissolute, would know how a prince should die to preserve the honor of a lady?

So the Emperor, laying aside his awful majesty, made his presence sweet as moonlight in the precious chamber, saying, 'Exalted daughter, it is but seldom we have leisure to relax, and yet the olfactory of my soul inhales with delight the ambergris-perfumed breezes of affection and concord. Yes, even when absent—

'I sit beside thee in thought and my heart is at ease,  
For that is a union not followed by separation's pain.

'Read your verses to me that we may blend our souls in peace.'

She swayed as she knelt and leaned against the divan with closed eyes.

'Majesty, the perfume of the flowers and the rose-water fountain have given me faintness. May I retire with the Hakim to my inner chamber that he may give me a medicine. Then I return.'

He waved his hand and I came forward making the prescribed salutation, and helped the Princess to rise; she leaning on my ancient arm, and the lady Imami, kneeling, unrolled a Persian manuscript splendid with borders of illuminations in blue and crimson and gold while the Padshah composed himself with pleasure to listen, being, like all the Kings of his family, skilled in versifying.

As we moved forward, I supporting her, the Princess breathed in my ear, 'I meant his death for his insult, but Allah

knows I am guiltless of this hideous thing. Oh, Abul Qasim, is there aid in earth or heaven?'

What could I say? Only the Great Physician of the Hidden Dispensary could avail to that unfortunate! 'Inshalla ta Allah—if the sublime God wills!' What more?

Now this inner chamber was all of pearl-pure marble, and in the midst a deeply sunk bath of marble, wide and long, its sides decorated with lotus flowers and their leaves; and a silver pipe led the water to this from a mighty reservoir six feet in height, raised on great claws of silver, and below it a place for fire to heat the water, enclosed and fed with sweet-scented woods and balls of perfumed gums. And, O Allah, most merciful, there had the lady Imami set a light and within could be seen the brilliant blue flames crawling like snakes among the cedar wood. And releasing the Princess I stood like a graven image of terror, expecting that at any moment the Padshah would follow. She laid her hand on the silver, and amid the crackling of the flames she whispered like a dying woman, 'What is your duty, exalted cousin?'

And from within he answered in a voice—O most Compassionate, grant that never again may I hear the like!—'Silence. Yet because my love has loved me and I die for her, give me one word to carry with me to doom.'

So she fell on her knees as if before the Emperor. 'Keep silence if you love me, for honor is more than death. Yet take this with you. I love you, and for your sake no man shall kiss my lips. Only you are behind my veil forever.'



And he answered, 'On my head and eyes.'

By her command I gave her water to drink and applied an essence to her nostrils, and she rose and once more laid her hand on the silver. Then we came away and, clinging to me, she whispered, 'God send he keep silence, for the Emperor has worse torment in store than even this.' And the Padshah called us and we returned to where he sat in calm content, and he motioned my Princess to a seat, saying, 'I would hear your verses of "The Lover." What is the fate of a lover? It is to be crucified for the world's pleasure.'

And taking the manuscript from the hand of Imami, she read aloud:—

'Dust falls within the cup of Kaikhobad  
And King Jamshid.

Nor recks the world if they were sad or glad,  
Or what they did.

How many hearts, O Love, thy sword has slain,  
And yet shall slay.

They bless thee, nor to Allah they complain  
At Judgment Day.'

But here her voice broke, and she paused. 'Happy Father and Lord, there is a sweeter verse. Listen.

'O Love, I am thy thrall.  
As on the tulip's burning petal glows  
A spot, yet more intense, of deeper dye,

So in my heart a flower of passion blows,  
See the dark stain of its intensity.

Deeper than all.

'O blessed pain,  
O precious grief I keep and sweet unrest,  
Desire that dies not, longing past control.  
My heart is torn to pieces in my breast,  
And for the shining diamond of the soul  
I pine in vain.

'This is my pride—'

But her voice died away and she sank fainting at the  
Padshah's feet.

'Lay the Princess on the divan, and let the lady Imami  
continue the reading,' he commanded, and so it was done.  
She lay there, for a time unconscious, death-white and still,  
and the trembling voice of Imami continued with words so  
sweet that they might have moved the heart of an image of  
stone, and the Padshah sat immovable, hearing and praising  
for how long I know not nor shall ever know.

And at last he rose and said graciously, 'May the tree of  
hereditary affection watered by this hour of converse grow in  
leaf and fruit and overshadow us with peace. Go, exalted  
daughter, bathe your angelic person and rest with a soul  
sunned in the favor of the Emperor.'

And he went, we attending him to the door and beyond, and returning, we carried the Princess like a dead woman from the dreadful place, and the fire beneath the great vessel was red and silent, and within was silence also.

Of the days that followed I do not write.

## **HOW GREAT IS THE GLORY OF KWANNON!**

[Atlantic Monthly, October, 1920]

### I

O lovely One—O thou Flower! With Thy beautiful face, with Thy beautiful eyes, pour light upon the world!—  
*Adoration to Kwannon.*

In Japan, in the days of the remote Ancestors, near the little village of Shiobara, the river ran through rocks of a very strange blue color, and the bed of the river was also composed of these rocks, so that the clear water ran blue as turquoise gems to the sea.

The great forests murmured beside it, and through their swaying boughs was breathed the song of Eternity. Those who listen may hear if their ears are open. To others it is but the idle sighing of the wind.

Now, because of all this beauty, there stood in these forests a roughly built palace of unbarked wood, and here the great Emperor would come from City-Royal to seek rest for his doubtful thoughts and the cares of State, turning aside often to see the moonlight in Shiobara. He sought also the free air and the sound of falling water, yet dearer to him than the plucked strings of *shō* and *biwa*. For he said,—

'Where and how shall We find peace even for a moment, and afford Our heart refreshment even for a single second?'

And it seemed to him that he found such moments at Shiobara.

Only one of his great nobles would His Majesty bring with him—the Dainagon; and him he chose because he was a worthy and honorable person and very simple of heart.

There was yet another reason why the Son of Heaven inclined to the little Shiobara. It had reached the Emperor that a recluse of the utmost sanctity dwelt in that forest. His name was Semimaru. He had made himself a small hut in the deep woods, much as a decrepit silkworm might spin its last cocoon; and there had the Peace found him.

It had also reached His Majesty that, although blind, he was exceedingly skilled in the art of playing the *biwa*, both

in the Flowing Fount manner and the Woodpecker manner; and that, especially on nights when the moon was full, this aged man made such music as transported the soul. Such music His Majesty desired very greatly to hear.

Never had Semimaru left his hut save to gather wood or seek food, until the Divine Emperor commanded his attendance that he might soothe his august heart with music.

Now, on this night of nights the moon was full and the snow heavy on the pines, and the earth was white also; and when the moon shone through the boughs, it made a cold light like dawn, and the shadows of the trees were black upon it.

The attendants of His Majesty long since slept for sheer weariness, for the night was far spent; but the Emperor and the Dainagon still sat with their eyes fixed on the venerable Semimaru. For many hours he had played, drawing strange music from his biwa. Sometimes it had been like rain blowing over the plains of Adzuma, sometimes like the winds roaring down the passes of the Yoshino Mountains, and yet again like the voice of far cities. For many hours they listened without weariness, and thought that all the stories of the ancients might flow past them in that weird music which seemed to have neither beginning nor end.

'It is as the river that changes and changes not, and is ever and never the same,' said the Emperor in his own soul.

And certainly, had a voice announced to His Augustness that centuries were drifting by as he listened, he could have

felt no surprise. Before them, as they sat upon the silken floor-cushions, was a small shrine with a Buddha shelf, and a hanging picture of the Amida Buddha within it—the expression one of rapt peace. Figures of Fugen and Fudō were placed before the curtain doors of the shrine, looking up in adoration to the Blessed One. A small and aged pine tree was in a pot of gray porcelain from Chosen—the only ornament in the chamber.

Suddenly His Majesty became aware that the Dainagon as well had fallen asleep from weariness, and that the recluse was no longer playing, but was speaking in a still voice like a deeply flowing stream. The Emperor had observed no change from music to speech, nor could he recall when the music had ceased; so that it resembled a dream.

'When I first came here,' the Venerable One continued, 'it was not my intention to stay long in the forest. As each day dawned, I said, "In seven days I go." And again, "In seven." Yet have I not gone. The days glided by, and here have I attained to look on the beginnings of peace. Then wherefore should I go? for all life is within the soul. Shall the fish weary of his pool? And I, who through my blind eyes feel the moon illuming my forest by night and the sun by day, abide in peace, so that even the wild beasts press round to hear my music. I have come by a path overblown by autumn leaves. But I have come.'

Then said the Divine Emperor as if unconsciously,—

'Would that I also might come. But the august duties cannot easily be laid aside. And I have no wife—no son.'

And Semimaru, playing softly on the strings of his biwa, made no other answer; and His Majesty, collecting his thoughts, which had become, as it were, frozen with the cold and the quiet and the strange music, spoke thus, as in a waking dream:—

'Why have I not wedded? Because I have desired a bride beyond the women of earth, and of none such as I desire has the rumor reached me. Consider that Ancestor who wedded Her Shining Majesty. Evil and lovely was she, and the passions were loud about her. And so it is with women. Trouble and vexation of spirit, or instead a great weariness. But if the Blessed One would vouchsafe to my prayers a maiden of blossom and dew, with a heart as calm as moonlight, her would I wed. O Honorable One, whose wisdom surveys the universe, is there in all the world, near or far, such a one, that I may seek and find?'

And Semimaru, still making a very low music with his biwa, said this:—

'Supreme Master, where the Shiobara River breaks a way through the gorges to the sea dwelt a poor couple—the husband a wood-cutter. They had no children to aid in their toil, and daily the woman addressed her prayers for a son to the Bodhisattwa Kwannon, the Lady of Pity, who looketh down forever upon the sound of prayer. Very fervently she prayed, with such offerings as her poverty allowed; and on a certain night she dreamed this dream. At the shrine of the Senju Kwannon she knelt as was her custom, and that Great Lady, sitting enthroned upon the Lotos of Purity, opened her eyes slowly from her divine contemplation, and heard the

prayer of the wood-cutter's wife. Then, stooping like a blown willow bough, she gathered a bud from the golden lotos plant that stood upon her altar, and breathed upon it, and it became pure white and living, and it exhaled a perfume like the flowers of Paradise. This flower that Lady of Pity flung into the bosom of her petitioner, and, closing her eyes, returned into her divine dream, while the woman awoke weeping for joy.

But when she sought in her bosom for the lotos, it was gone. Of all this she boasted loudly to her folk and neighbors, and the more so when in due time she perceived herself to be with child; for, from that august favor she looked for nothing less than a son, radiant with the Five Ornaments of riches, health, longevity, beauty, and success. Yet, when her hour came, a girl was born, and blind.'

'Was she welcomed?' asked the dreaming voice of the Emperor.

'Augustness, but as a household drudge. For her food was cruelty and her drink tears. And the shrine of the Senju Kwannon was neglected by her parents because of the disappointment and shame of the unwanted gift. They believed that, lost in her divine contemplation, the Great Lady would not perceive this neglect. The Gods, however, are known by their great memories.'

'Her name?'

'Majesty, Tsuyu—Morning Dew. And like the morning dew, she shines in stillness. She has repaid good for evil to



her evil parents, serving them with unwearied service.'

'What distinguishes her from others?'

'Augustness, a great peace: doubtless the shadow of the dream of the Holy Kwannon. She works, she smiles, as one who has tasted of content.'

'Has she beauty?'

'Supreme Master, am I not blind? But it is said she has no beauty that men should desire her. Her face is flat and round, and her eyes blind.'

'And yet content?'

'Philosophers might envy her calm. And her blindness is without doubt a grace from the excelling Pity; for could she see her own exceeding ugliness, she must weep for shame. But her sight is inward, and she is well content.'

'Where does she dwell?'

'Supreme Majesty, far from here—where, in the heart of the woods, the river breaks through the rocks.'

'Venerable One, why have you told me this? I asked for a royal maiden, wise and beautiful, calm as the dawn, and you have told me of a wood-cutter's drudge, blind and ugly.'

And now Semimaru did not answer, but the tones of the biwa grew louder and clearer, and they rang like a song of

triumph, and the Emperor could hear these words in the voice of the strings.

'She is beautiful as the night crowned with the moon and stars, for him who has eyes to see. Princess Splendor was dim beside her; Prince Fireshine, gloom. Her Shining Majesty was but a darkened glory before this maid. All beauty shines within her hidden eyes.'

And having uttered this, the music became wordless once more, but it still flowed on more and more softly, like a river that flows into the far distance.

The Emperor stared at the mats, musing; the light of the lamp was burning low. His heart said within him,—

'This maiden, cast like a flower from the hand of Kwannon Sama, will I see.'

And as he said this, the music had faded away into a thread-like smallness; and when, after long thought he raised his august head, he was alone save for the Dainagon, sleeping on the mats behind him, and the chamber was in darkness. Semimaru had departed in silence, and His Majesty, looking forth into the broad moonlight, could see the track of his feet on the shining snow, and the music came back very thinly, like spring rain in the trees. Once more he looked at the whiteness of the night, and then, stretching his august person on the mats, he slept amid dreams of sweet sound.

## II

The next day, forbidding any to follow save the Dainagon, His Majesty went forth upon the frozen snow where the sun shone in a blinding whiteness. They followed the track of Semimaru's feet far under the pine trees so heavy with their load of snow that they were bowed as if with fruit. And the track led on, and the air was so still that the cracking of a bough was like the blow of a hammer, and the sliding of a load of snow from a branch like the fall of an avalanche. Nor did they speak as they went. They listened, nor could they say for what.

Then, when they had gone a very great way, the track ceased suddenly, as if cut off, and at this spot, under the pines furred with snow, His Majesty became aware of a perfume so sweet that it was as if all the flowers of the earth haunted the place with their presence, and a music like the biwa of Semimaru was heard in the tree-tops. This sounded far off, like the whispering of rain when it falls in very small leaves; and presently it died away, and a voice followed after, singing, alone in the wood, so that the silence appeared to have been created that such a music might possess the world. So the Emperor stopped instantly, and the Dainagon behind him, and he heard these words:—

'In me the Heavenly Lotos grew.  
The fibres ran from head to feet,  
And my heart was the august Blossom.

Therefore the sweetness flowed through the  
veins of my flesh,  
And I breathed peace upon all the world.  
And about me was my fragrance shed  
That the souls of men should desire me.'

Now, as he listened, there came through the wood a maiden, bare-footed, save for grass sandals, and clad in coarse clothing, and she came up and passed them, still singing.

And when she had passed, His Majesty put up his hand to his eyes, like one dreaming, and said,—

'What have you seen?'

And the Dainagon answered,—

'Augustness, a country wench, flat-faced, ugly, and blind, and with a voice like a crow. Has not your Majesty seen this?'

The Emperor, still shading his eyes, replied,—

'I saw a maiden so beautiful that Her Shining Majesty would be a black blot beside her. As she went, the spring and all its sweetness blew from her garments. Her robe was green with small gold flowers. Her eyes were closed, but she resembled a cherry tree, snowy with bloom and dew. Her voice was like the singing flowers of Paradise.'

The Dainagon looked at him with fear and compassion.

'Augustness, how should such a lady carry in her arms a bundle of firewood?'

'She bore in her hand three lotos flowers, and where each foot fell I saw a lotos bloom and vanish.'

They retraced their steps through the wood—His Majesty radiant as Prince Fireshine with the joy that filled his soul; the Dainagon darkened as Prince Firefade with fear, believing that the strange music of Semimaru had bewitched His Majesty, or that the maiden herself might have the power of the fox to bewilder and deceive, by shape-changing. Very sorrowful and care-full was his heart, for he loved his master.

That night His Majesty dreamed that he stood before the *kakemono* of the Amida Buddha, and that, as he raised his eyes in adoration to the Blessed Face, he beheld the images of Fugen and Fudō rise up and bow down before that One Who Is. Then, gliding in, before these Holinesses stood a figure, and it was the wood-cutter's daughter, homely and blinded. She stretched her hands upward as if invoking the Supreme Buddha, and then, turning to His Majesty, she smiled upon him, her eyes closed as in bliss unutterable. And he said aloud, 'Would that I might see her eyes!'; and so saying, awoke in a great stillness of snow and moonlight.

Having waked, he said within himself,—

'This marvel will I wed, and she shall be my Empress be she lower than the Eta, and whether her face be lovely or

homely. For she is certainly a flower dropped from the hand of the Divine.'

So, when the sun was high, His Majesty, again followed by the Dainagon, went through the forest, swiftly and like a man who sees his goal; and when they reached the place where the maiden went by, His Majesty straitly commanded the Dainagon that he should draw apart and leave him to speak with the maiden; yet that he should watch what befell.

So the Dainagon watched, and again he saw her come, very poorly clad and with bare feet that shrank from the snow in her grass sandals, bowed beneath a heavy load of wood upon her shoulders, and her face flat and homely, like a girl of the people, and her eyes blind and shut. As she came, she sang this:—

'The Eternal Way lies before him,  
The Way that is made manifest in the Wise.  
The Heart that loves reveals itself to man.  
For now he draws nigh to the Source.  
The night advances fast,  
And lo! the moon shines bright.'

And to the Dainagon it seemed a harsh crying, nor could he distinguish any words at all.

But what His Majesty beheld was this. The evening had come and the moon was rising. The snow had melted. It was the full glory of spring, and the flowers sprang thick as stars

upon the grass, and among them lotos flowers, great as the wheel of a chariot, white and shining with the luminance of the pearl, and within each of these was seated an incarnate Holiness, looking upward with joined hands. In the trees were the voices of the mystic Birds that are the utterance of the Blessed One, proclaiming in harmony the Five Virtues, the Five Powers, the Seven Steps ascending to perfect Illumination, the Noble Eightfold Path, and all the Law. And, hearing, in the heart of the Son of Heaven awoke the Three Remembrances—the Remembrance of Him who is Blessed, Remembrance of the Law, and Remembrance of the Communion of the Assembly.

So, looking upward to the heavens, he beheld the Infinite Buddha, high and lifted up in a great raying glory. About Him were the exalted Bodhisattwas, the mighty Disciples, great Arhats all, and all the countless Angelhood. These rose up into the infinite until they could be seen but as a point of fire against the moon. With this golden multitude beyond all numbering was He.

Then, as His Majesty had seen in the dream of the night, the wood-cutter's daughter, moving through the flowers, like one blind that gropes his way, advanced before the Blessed Feet, and uplifting her hands did adoration; and her face he could not see, but his heart went with her, adoring also the Infinite Buddha seated in the calms of boundless light.

And enlightenment entered at his eyes, as a man that wakes from sleep, and suddenly he beheld the Maiden crowned, robed, and terrible in beauty, and her feet were stayed upon an open lotos, and his soul knew the Senju

Kwannon herself, myriad-armed for the helping of mankind—even the love of the Buddha made manifest in flesh.

And turning, she smiled as in the vision; but his eyes being now clear, her blinded eyes were opened, and that glory who shall tell, as those living founts of Wisdom rayed upon him their ineffable light! In that ocean was his being drowned, and so, bowed before the Infinite Buddha, he received the Greater Illumination.

How great is the Glory of Kwannon!

When the radiance and the vision were withdrawn, and only the moon looked over the trees, His Majesty rose upon his feet, and standing on the snow, surrounded with calm, he called to the Dainagon, and asked this:—

'What have you seen?'

'Augustness, nothing but the country wench, and moon and snow.'

'And heard?'

'Augustness, nothing but the harsh voice of the wood-cutter's daughter.'

'And felt?'

'Augustness, nothing but the bone-piercing cold.'

So His Majesty adored That which cannot be uttered, saying,—



'So Wisdom, so Glory encompass us about, and we see them not, for we are blinded with illusion. Yet every stone is a jewel, and every clod is spirit, and to the hems of the Infinite Buddha all cling. Through the compassion of that supernal Mercy that walks the earth as the Bodhisattwa Kwannon am I admitted to wisdom and given sight and hearing. And what is all the world to that happy one who has beheld her eyes?'

And His Majesty returned through the forest.

When, the next day, he sent for the venerable Semimaru, that holy recluse had departed and none knew where. But still, when the moon is full, a strange music moves in the tree-tops of Shiobara.

### III

Then His Sacred Majesty returned to City-Royal, having determined to retire into the quiet life, and there, abandoning the throne to a kinsman wise in greatness, he became a dweller in the deserted hut of Semimaru. His life, like a descending moon, approaching the hill that should hide it, was passed in meditation on that Incarnate Love and Compassion whose glory had augustly been made manifest to him; and having cast aside all save the image of the Divine from his soul, His Majesty became even as that man who desired enlightenment of the Blessed One.

For that man, desiring instruction, gathered precious flowers, and journeyed to present them as an offering to the Gautama Buddha. Standing before Him he stretched forth both his hands, holding the flowers.

Then said the Holy One, looking upon his petitioner's right hand,—

'Loose your hold of these.'

And the man dropped the flowers from his right hand.

And again the Holy One said,—

'Loose your hold of these,' looking upon his left hand.

And, sorrowing, he dropped the flowers from his left hand.

And again the Master said,—

'Loose your hold of that which is neither in the right nor in the left.'

And the disciple said very pitifully,—

'Lord, of what should I loose my hold, for I have nothing left?'

And He looked upon him steadfastly.

Therefore, at last understanding, he emptied his soul of desire, and of fear that is the shadow of desire, and being enlightened, relinquished all burdens.

So was it also with His Majesty. In peace he dwelt; and becoming a great Arhat, in peace he departed to that Uttermost Joy where is that Blessed One made manifest in Pure Light.

As for the parents of that maiden, they entered after sore troubles into peace, having been remembered by the Infinite. For it is certain that the enemies also of the Supreme Buddha go to salvation by thinking on Him, even though it be against Him.

And he who tells this story makes this prayer to the Lady of Pity:—

'Grant me, I pray,  
One dewdrop from Thy willow spray.  
And in the double Lotos keep  
My hidden heart asleep!'

How great is the Glory of Kwannon!

## **THE INCOMPARABLE LADY**

### **A STORY OF ANCIENT CHINA**

[Atlantic Monthly, August, 1920]

# I

It is recorded that, when the Pearl Empress (his mother) asked of the philosophic Yellow Emperor which he considered the most beautiful of the Imperial concubines, he replied instantly, 'The Lady A-kuei'; and when the Royal Parent, in profound astonishment, demanded how this could be, having regard to the exquisite beauties in question, the Emperor replied,—

'I have never seen her. It was dark when I entered the Dragon Chamber, and dusk of dawn when I rose and left her.'

Then said the Pearl Empress, 'Possibly the harmony of her voice solaced the Son of Heaven?'

But he replied, 'She spoke not.'

'Her cheeks then are doubtless softer than the kingfisher's plumage?' rejoined the Pearl Empress.

But the Yellow Emperor replied, 'Doubtless. Yet I have not touched them; I have been immersed in reflection upon the Yin and the Yang.'

The Pearl Empress was silent from very great astonishment, not daring to question further, but marveling how the thing might be. And seeing this, the Yellow Emperor recited a poem to the following effect,—

'It is said that Power ruleth the world and who  
shall gainsay it?  
But Loveliness is the head-jewel upon the brow  
of Power.'

And when the Empress had listened with reverence to the Imperial Poet she quitted the August Presence.

Immediately, having entered her own palace of the Tranquil Motherly Virtues, she caused the Lady A-kuei to be summoned to her presence, who came, habited in a purple robe and with pins of jade and coral in her hair. And the Pearl Empress considered her attentively, recalling the perfect features of the White Jade Concubine, the ambrosial smile of the Princess of Feminine Propriety, and the willow-leaf eyebrows of the Lady of Chen; and her astonishment was excessive, because the Lady A-kuei could not in beauty approach any one of these ladies. Reflecting further, she then placed her behind the screen and summoned the Court Artist, Lo Cheng, who had formerly been commissioned to paint the heavenly features of the Emperor's ladies mirrored in still water, though he had naturally not been permitted to view the beauties themselves.

Of him the Empress demanded, 'Who is the most beautiful—which the most priceless jewel of the dwellers in the Dragon Palace?'

And with humility Lo Cheng replied, 'What mortal man shall decide between the white crane and the swan, or

between the peony flower and the lotus?'

Having thus said, he remained silent, and in him was no help.

Finally, and after exhortation, the Pearl Empress condescended to threaten him with the loss of a head so useless to himself and to Her Majesty. Then, in great fear and haste he replied,—

'Of all the flowers that adorn the garden of the Son of Heaven, the Lady A-kuei is the fittest to be gathered by the Imperial Hand, and this is my deliberate opinion.'

Now, hearing this statement, the Pearl Empress was submerged in bewilderment, knowing that the Lady A-kuei had modestly retired when the artist had depicted the reflection of the assembled loveliness of the Inner Chambers, as not counting herself worthy of immortality, and her features were therefore unknown to him. Nor could the Empress question the artist further, for when she had done so, he replied only, 'This is the secret of the Son of Heaven.' And, having gained permission, he swiftly departed.

Nor could the Lady A-kuei herself aid her Imperial Majesty; for on being questioned, she was overwhelmed with modesty and confusion, and with stammering lips could only repeat, 'This is the secret of his Divine Majesty,' imploring, with the utmost humility, forgiveness from the Imperial Mother.

The Pearl Empress was unable to eat her supper. In vain were spread before her the delicacies of the Empire. She could but trifle with a shark's fin, and a 'silver-ear' fungus, and a dish of slugs entrapped upon roses with the dew-like pearls upon them. Her burning curiosity had wholly deprived her of appetite, nor could the amusing exertions of the palace mimes or a lantern fête on the lake restore her to any composure.

'This circumstance will cause my flight on the Dragon [death],' she said to herself, 'unless I succeed in unveiling the mystery. What, therefore, should be my next proceeding?'

So, deeply reflecting, she caused the Chief of the Eunuchs to summon the White Jade Concubine, the Princess of Feminine Propriety, and all the other exalted beauties of the Heavenly Palace.

In due course of time these ladies arrived, paying suitable respect and obeisance to the Mother of his Divine Majesty. They were resplendent in kingfisher ornaments, in jewels of jade, crystal, and coral, in robes of silk and gauze, and still more resplendent in charms that not the Celestial Empire itself could equal, setting aside entirely all countries of the foreign barbarians. And in grace and elegance of manners, in skill in the arts of poetry and the lute, what could surpass them?

Like a garden of flowers they surrounded Her Majesty, and awaited her pleasure with perfect decorum, when, having saluted them with affability, she thus addressed them:—

'Lovely ones, ladies distinguished by the particular attention of your Sovereign and mine, I have sent for you to resolve a doubt and a difficulty. On questioning our Sovereign as to whom he regarded as the loveliest of his garden of beauty, he benignantly replied, "The Lady A-kuei is incomparable"; and though this might well be, he further graciously added that he had never seen her. Nor, on pursuing the subject, could I learn the Imperial reason. The artist, Lo Cheng, follows in the footsteps of his Master, he also never having seen the favored lady; and he and she alike reply to me that this is an Imperial secret. Declare to me, therefore, if your perspicacity and the feminine interest properly taken by every lady in the other can unravel this mystery, for my liver is tormented with anxiety beyond measure.'

As soon as the Pearl Empress had spoken, she realized that she had committed a great indiscretion. A babel of voices, cries, questions, and contradictions instantly arose. Decorum was abandoned. The Lady of Chen swooned, nor could be revived for an hour, and the Princess of Feminine Propriety and the White Jade Concubine could be dragged apart only by the efforts of the palace matrons, so great was their fury the one with the other, each accusing each of having encouraged the pretensions of the Lady A-kuei. So also with the remaining ladies. Shrieks rang through the Apartment of Virtuous Tranquillity, and when the Pearl Empress attempted to pour oil on the troubled waters by speaking soothing and comfortable words, the august voice was entirely inaudible in the tumult.



All sought at length, in united indignation, the Lady A-kuei; but she had modestly withdrawn to the Pearl pavilion in the garden, and, foreseeing anxieties, had there secured herself, on hearing the opening of the Royal speech.

Finally, the ladies were led away by their attendants, weeping, raging, lamenting, according to their several dispositions, and the Pearl Empress, left with her own women, beheld the floor strewn with jade pins, kingfisher and coral jewels, and even with fragments of silk and gauze; nor was she any nearer the solution of the desired secret.

## II

That night she tossed upon her bed, sleepless though heaped with down, and her mind raged like a fire up and down all possible answers to the riddle; but none would serve. Then, at the dawn, raising herself upon one august elbow, she called to her venerable nurse and foster-mother, the Lady Ma, wise and resourceful in the affairs and difficulties of women, and, repeating the circumstances, demanded her counsel.

The Lady Ma, considering the matter long and deeply, slowly replied,—

'This is a great riddle and dangerous; for to intermeddle with the Divine secrets is the high road to the Yellow Springs [death]. But the child of my breasts and my August Mistress

shall never ask in vain, for well I know that a thwarted curiosity is as dangerous as a suppressed fever. I will conceal myself nightly in the Dragon Chamber, and this will certainly unveil the truth. And if I perish, I perish.'

It is impossible to describe how the Empress heaped the Lady Ma with costly jewels and silken brocades and tael of silver beyond measuring; how she placed on her breast the amulet of jade that had guarded herself from all evil influences; how she called the ancestral spirits to witness that she would provide for the Lady Ma's remotest descendants if she lost her life in this sublime devotion to duty.

That night the Lady Ma concealed herself behind the Imperial couch in the Dragon Chamber, to await the coming of the Son of Heaven. Slowly dripped the water-clock as the minutes dragged away; sorely ached the venerable limbs of the Lady Ma as she crouched in the shadows and saw the rising moon scattering silver through the elegantly carved traceries of ebony and ivory; wildly beat her heart as delicately tripping footsteps approached the Dragon Chamber, and the Princess of Feminine Propriety entered, attended by her maidens, and dismissed them.

Yet no sweet repose awaited this lovely lady. The Lady Ma could hear her smothered sobs, her muttered exclamations—nay, could even feel the couch itself tremble as the Princess uttered the hated name of the Lady A-kuei, the poison of jealousy running in every vein. It was indeed impossible for the Lady Ma to decide which was the more virulent, this, or the poison of curiosity in the heart of the Pearl Empress.

Though she loved not the Princess, she was compelled to pity such suffering.

But all thought was banished by the approach of the Yellow Emperor, prepared for repose and unattended, in simple but divine grandeur. It cannot indeed be supposed that a Celestial Emperor is human, yet there was mortality in the start which his Augustness gave when the Princess of Feminine Propriety threw herself at his feet and with tears that flowed like that river which is known as 'the Sorrow of China,' demanded to know what she had done that another should be preferred before her, reciting in frantic haste such imperfections as she could recall—or invent—in the hurry of that agitating moment.

'That one of her eyes is larger than the other, no human being can doubt,' sobbed the lady; 'and surely your Imperial Majesty cannot be aware that her hair reaches but to her waist, and that there is a brown mole on the nape of her neck? When she sings, it resembles the croak of the crow. It is true that most of the palace ladies are chosen for anything rather than beauty, yet she is the most ill-favored. And it is this—this bat-faced lady who is preferred to me! Would I had never been born! Yet even Your Majesty's own lips have told me I am fair.'

The Yellow Emperor supported the form of the Princess in his arms. There are moments when even a Son of Heaven is human.

'Fair as the rainbow!' he murmured, and the Princess faintly smiled. Then, gathering the resolution of the

philosopher, he added manfully, 'But the Lady A-kuei is incomparable. And the reason is—'

The Lady Ma eagerly stretched her head forward with a hand to either ear.

But the Princess of Feminine Propriety, with one shriek, had swooned, and in the hurry of summoning attendants and causing her to be conveyed to her own apartments, that precious sentence was never completed.

Still Lady Ma groveled behind the Dragon Couch, as the Son of Heaven, left alone, approached the balcony and, apostrophizing the moon, murmured,—

'O loveliest pale watcher of the destinies of men, illuminate the beauty of the Lady A-kuei, and grant that I, who have never seen that beauty, may never see it, but remain its constant admirer!'

So saying, he sought his solitary couch and slept, while the Lady Ma, in a torment of bewilderment, glided from the room.

The matter remained in suspense for several days. The White Jade Concubine was the next lady commanded to the Dragon Chamber, and again the Lady Ma was in her post of observation. Much she heard and much she saw that was not to the point; but the scene ended, as before, by the dismissal of the lady in tears, and the departure of the Lady Ma in ignorance of the secret.

The Emperor's peace was ended.

The singular circumstance was that the Lady A-kuei was never summoned by the Emperor. Eagerly as the Pearl Empress watched, no token of affection for her was ever visible. Nothing could be detected. It was inexplicable. Finally, devoured by curiosity that gave her no respite, she resolved on a stratagem that should dispel the mystery, though it carried with it a risk on which she trembled to reflect.

### III

It was the afternoon of a languid summer day, and the Emperor, almost unattended, had come to pay a visit of filial respect to the Pearl Empress. She received him with all the ceremony due to her sovereign, in the porcelain pavilion of the Eastern Gardens, with the Lotus Fishponds before them, and a faint breeze occasionally tinkling the crystal wind-bells that decorated the shrubs on the cloud- and dragon-wrought slopes of the marble approach. A bird of brilliant plumage uttered a cry of reverence from its golden cage as the Son of Heaven entered.

As was his occasional custom, and after suitable inquiries as to his parent's health, the attendants were all dismissed out of earshot, and the Emperor leaned on his cushions and gazed reflectively into the sunlit garden. In this posture had the Court Artist represented him as 'The Incarnation of Philosophic Calm.'

'These gardens are fair,' said the Empress after a respectful silence, moving her fan, illustrated with the emblem of immortality, the Hō Bird.

'Fair indeed,' returned the Emperor. 'It might be supposed that all sorrow and disturbance would be shut without the Forbidden Precincts. But it is not so, and although the figures of my ladies moving among the flowers appear at this distance instinct with joy, yet—'

There was a painful silence.

'They know not,' resumed the Empress with solemnity, 'that Death entered the Forbidden Precincts last night. A disembodied spirit has returned to its place and doubtless exists in bliss.'

'Indeed?' returned the Yellow Emperor with indifference. 'Yet if the spirit is absorbed into the source whence it came, and the bones crumbled into nothingness, where does the Ego exist? The dead are venerable, but no longer of interest.'

'Not even when they were loved in life?' asked the Empress, caressing the bird in its cage with one jeweled finger, but attentively observing her son from the corner of her august eye.

'They were; they are not,' he remarked sententiously and stifling a yawn; it was a drowsy afternoon. 'But who is it that has abandoned us? Surely not the Lady Ma, Your Majesty's faithful foster-mother?'

'A younger—a lovelier spirit has sought the Yellow Springs,' replied the trembling Empress. 'I regret to inform Your Majesty that a sudden convulsion last night deprived the Lady A-kuei of life. I would not permit the news to reach you lest it should break your august night's rest.'

There was a silence during which she tried in vain to decipher the Emperor's expression. Could it possibly be one of relief? He turned his eyes serenely upon his Imperial Mother.

'That the statement of my august parent is merely—let us say—allegorical does not detract from its interest. But had the Lady A-kuei in truth departed to the Yellow Springs, I should none the less have received the news without uneasiness. What though the sun set—is not the memory of his light all-surpassing?'

No longer could the Pearl Empress endure the madness of her curiosity. Deeply kow-towing, imploring pardon, with raised hands and tears which no dutiful son dare neglect, she besought the Emperor to enlighten her as to this mystery, recounting his praises of the lady, followed by his admission that he had never seen her, and all the circumstances connected with this remarkable episode. She omitted only, from motives of delicacy (and others), the vigils of the Lady Ma in the Dragon Chamber.

The Emperor, sighing, looked upon the ground and for a time was silent; then he replied as follows:—

'Willingly would I have kept silence, but what child dare withstand the plea of a parent? Is it necessary to inform the Heavenly Empress that beauty seen is beauty made familiar, and that familiarity is the foe of delight? How is it possible that I should see the Princess of Feminine Propriety, for instance, by night and day, without becoming sensible of her imperfections as well as her graces? How partake of the society of any woman without finding her chattering as the crane, avid of admiration, jealous, destructive of philosophy, fatal to composure, fevered with curiosity; a creature, in short, a little above the gibbon but infinitely below the sage; useless, indeed, save as a temporary measure of amusement in itself unworthy the philosopher? The faces of all my ladies are known to me. All are fair and all alike. But one night, as I lay on the Dragon couch, lost in speculation, absorbed in contemplation of the Yin and the Yang, the night passed for the solitary dreamer as a dream. In the darkness of the dawn I rose, still dreaming, and departed to the Lotus Pavilion in the Garden, and there remained an hour, viewing the sunrise and experiencing ineffable opinions on the destiny of the race. Returning then to a couch which I believed to have been that of the solitary philosopher, I observed on it a jade hairpin such as is worn by my junior beauties, and, seeing it, recalled that the usual command for attendance had not been canceled. Petrified with amazement, I perceived that, lost in my thoughts, I had had an unimagined companion and that this gentle reminder was from her timid hand. But whom? I knew not. I then observed Lo Cheng, the Court Artist, in attendance, and immediately despatched him to make a secret inquiry and ascertain the name and circumstances of that beauty who, unknown, had shared my vigil. I learned on his return that it was the Lady A-kuei. I had entered the



Dragon Chamber in a low moonlight, and guessed not her presence. She spoke no word. Finding her Imperial Master thus absorbed, she invited no attention. Scarcely did she draw breath. The night passed, and I remained entirely unconscious of her presence; yet out of respect she would not sleep, but remained reverently and modestly awake, assisting, if so it may be expressed, at a humble distance, in the speculations that held me prisoner. What a pearl was here! On learning these details by Lo Cheng from her own roseate lips, I despatched an august rescript to this favored lady, conferring on her the degree of Incomparable Beauty of the First Rank—on condition of secrecy.'

The Pearl Empress, still in deepest bewilderment, besought His Majesty to proceed. He did so, with his usual dignity.

'Though my mind could not wholly restrain its admiration, yet secrecy was necessary, for had the facts been known, every lady, from the Princess of Feminine Propriety to the Junior Beauty of the Bedchamber, would henceforward have observed only silence and a frigid decorum in the Dragon Chamber. And though the Emperor be a philosopher, yet a philosopher is also a man.'

The Emperor paused discreetly; then resumed: 'The world should not be composed entirely of A-kueis; yet in my mind I behold that Incomparable Lady fair beyond expression. Like the moon, she sits glorious in the heavens, to be adored only in vision as the one woman who could respect the absorption of her Emperor, and of whose beauty the philosopher could remain unconscious and therefore

untroubled. To see her, to find her earthly, would be an experience for which the Emperor might have courage, but the philosopher never! And attached to all this there is a moral!

The Pearl Empress urgently inquired its nature.

'Let the wisdom of my August Parent discern it,' said the Emperor sententiously.

'And the future?' she asked.

'The—let us call it—parable, with which Your Majesty was good enough to entertain me,' said the Emperor courteously, 'has suggested a precaution to my mind. I see a lovely form moving among the flowers. It is possible that it may be the Incomparable Lady, or that at any moment I may come upon her and risk the shattering of my ideal. This must be safeguarded. I might command her retirement to her native province, but who shall ensure me against the weakness of my own heart, demanding her return? No. Let Your Majesty's own words, spoken—well—in parable, be fulfilled in truth. I shall give orders to the Chief Eunuch that the Incomparable Lady to-night shall drink the Draught of Crushed Pearls, and be thus restored to the sphere that alone is worthy of her. Thus are all anxieties soothed, and the honors offered to her virtuous spirit shall be a glorious repayment for the ideal that shall forever illuminate my soul.'

The Empress was speechless. She had borne the Emperor in her womb, but the philosopher outsoared her comprehension. She retired, leaving the Emperor in a reverie,

endeavoring herself to grasp the moral of which he had spoken, for the guidance of herself and the ladies concerned. But whether it inculcated reserve or the reverse in the Dragon Chamber, and what the Imperial ladies should follow as an example, she was to the end of her life totally unable to say. Philosophy, indeed, walks upon the heights. We cannot all expect to follow it.

That night the Incomparable Lady drank the Draught of Crushed Pearls.

The Princess of Feminine Propriety and the White Jade Concubine, learning these circumstances, redoubled their charms, their coquetries, and their efforts to occupy what may be described as the inner sanctuary of the Emperor's esteem. Both lived to a green old age, wealthy and honored, alike firm in the conviction that if the Incomparable Lady had not shown herself so superior, the Emperor might have been on the whole better pleased, whatever the sufferings of the philosopher. Both were assiduous in their devotions before the spirit tablet of the departed lady, and in recommending her example of reserve and humility to every damsel whom it might concern.

It will probably occur to the reader of this unique but veracious story that there is more in it than meets the eye, and more than the one moral alluded to by the Emperor, according to the point of view of the different actors.

To the discernment of the reader it must, therefore, be left.

# **THE INTERPRETER**

## **A ROMANCE OF THE EAST**

[Atlantic Monthly, July and August, 1921]

### **PART I**

#### **I**

There are strange things in this story, but, so far as I understand them, I tell the truth. If you measure the East with a Western foot-rule, you will say, 'Impossible.' I should have said it myself.

Of myself I will say as little as I can, for this story is of Vanna Loring. I am an incident only, though I did not know that at first.

My name is Stephen Clifden, and I was eight-and-thirty; plenty of money, sound in wind and limb. I had been by way of being a writer before the war, the hobby of a rich man; but if I picked up anything in the welter in France, it was that real work is the only salvation this mad world has to offer; so

I meant to begin at the beginning, and learn my trade like a journeyman laborer.

I had come to the right place. A very wonderful city is Peshawar—the Key of India, and a city of Romance, which stands at every corner, and cries aloud in the market-place. But there was society here, and I was swept into it—there was chatter, and it galled me.

I was beginning to feel that I had missed my mark, and must go farther afield, perhaps up into Central Asia, when I met Vanna Loring. If I say that her hair was soft and dark; that she had the deepest hazel eyes I have ever seen, and a sensitive, tender mouth; that she moved with a flowing grace like 'a wave of the sea'—it sounds like the portrait of a beauty, and she was never that. Also, incidentally, it gives none of her charm. I never heard anyone get any further than that she was 'oddly attractive'—let us leave it at that. She was certainly attractive to me.

She was the governess of little Winifred Meryon, whose father held the august position of General Commanding the Frontier Forces, and her mother the more commanding position of the reigning beauty of Northern India, generally speaking.

But Vanna—I gleaned her story by bits when I came across her with the child in the gardens. I was beginning to piece it together now.

Her love of the strange and beautiful she had inherited from a young Italian mother, daughter of a political refugee;

her childhood had been spent in a remote little village in the West of England; half reluctantly she told me how she had brought herself up after her mother's death and her father's second marriage. Little was said of that, but I gathered that it had been a grief to her, a factor in her flight to the East.

'So when I came to three-and-twenty,' she said slowly, 'I felt I must break away from our narrow life. I had a call to India stronger than anything on earth. You would not understand, but that was so, and I had spent every spare moment in teaching myself India—its history, legends, religions, everything! And I was not wanted at home, and I had grown afraid.'

'What were you afraid of?'

'Of growing old and missing what was waiting for me out here. But I could not get away like other people. No money, you see. So I thought I would come out and teach here. Dare I? Would they let me? I knew I was fighting life and chances and risks if I did it; but it was death if I stayed there. And then—Do you really care to hear?'

'Of course. Tell me how you broke your chain.'

'I spare you the family quarrels. I can never go back. But I was spurred—spurred to take some wild leap; and I took it. So six years ago I came out. First I went to a doctor and his wife at Cawnpore. They had a wonderful knowledge of the Indian peoples, and there I learned Hindustani and much else. Then he died. But an aunt had left me two hundred

pounds, and I could wait a little and choose; and so I came here.'

It interested me. The courage that pale elastic type of woman has!

'Have you ever regretted it? Would they take you back if you failed?'

'Never, to both questions,' she said, smiling. 'Life is glorious. I've drunk of a cup I never thought to taste; and if I died to-morrow I should know I had done right. I rejoice in every moment I live—even when Winifred and I are wrestling with arithmetic.'

'I shouldn't have thought life was very easy with Lady Meryon.'

'Oh, she is kind enough in an indifferent sort of way. I am not the persecuted Jane Eyre sort of governess at all. But that is all on the surface and does not matter. It is India I care for—the people, the sun, the infinite beauty. It was coming home. You would laugh if I told you I knew Peshawar long before I came here. Knew it—walked here, lived. Before there were English in India at all.' She broke off. 'You won't understand.'

'Oh, I have had that feeling, too,' I said patronizingly. 'If one has read very much about a place—'

'That was not quite what I meant. Never mind. The people, the place—that is the real thing to me. All this is the dream.'

The sweep of her hand took in not only Winifred and myself, but the general's stately residence, which to blaspheme in Peshawar is rank infidelity.

'By George, I would give thousands to feel that! I can't get out of Europe here. I want to write, Miss Loring,' I found myself saying. 'I'd done a bit, and then the war came and blew my life to pieces. Now I want to get inside the skin of the East, and I can't do it. I see it from outside, with a pane of glass between. No life in it. If you feel as you say, for God's sake be my interpreter!'

'Interpret?' she said, looking at me with clear hazel eyes; 'how could I? You were in the native city yesterday. What did you miss?'

'Everything! I saw masses of color, light, movement. Brilliantly picturesque people. Children like Asiatic angels. Magnificently scowling ruffians in sheepskin coats. In fact, a movie staged for my benefit. I was afraid they would ring down the curtain before I had had enough. It had no meaning. When I got back to my diggings I tried to put down what I had just seen, and I swear there's more inspiration in the guide-book.'

'Did you go alone?'

'Yes, I certainly would not go sightseeing with the Meryon crowd. Tell me what you felt when you saw it first.'

'I went with Sir John's uncle. He was a great traveler. The color struck me dumb. It flames—it sings. Think of the gray



pinched life in the West! I saw a grave dark potter turning his wheel, while his little girl stood by, glad at our pleasure, her head veiled like a miniature woman, tiny baggy trousers, and a silver nose-stud, like a star, in one delicate nostril. In her thin arms she held a heavy baby in a gilt cap, like a monkey. And the wheel turned and whirled until it seemed to be spinning dreams, thick as motes in the sun. The clay rose in smooth spirals, under his hand, and the wheel sang, "Shall the vessel reprove him who made one to honor and one to dishonor?" And I saw the potter thumping his wet clay, and the clay, plastic as dream-stuff, shaped swift as light, and the three Fates stood at his shoulder. Dreams, dreams, and all in the spinning of the wheel, and the rich shadows of the old broken courtyard where he sat. And the wheel stopped and the thread broke, and the little new shapes he had made stood all about him, and he was only a potter in Peshawar.'

Her voice was like a song. She had utterly forgotten my existence. I did not dislike it at the moment, for I wanted to hear more, and the impersonal is the rarest gift a woman can give a man.

'Did you buy anything?'

'He gave me a gift—a flawed jar of turquoise blue, faint turquoise green round the lip. He saw I understood. And then I bought a little gold cap and a wooden box of jade-green Kabul grapes. About a rupee, all told. But it was Eastern merchandise, and I was trading from Balsora and Baghdad, and Eleazar's camels were swaying down from Damascus along the Khyber Pass, and coming in at the great Darwazah,

and friends' eyes met me everywhere. I am *profoundly* happy here.'

The sinking sun lit an almost ecstatic face.

'It may be very beautiful on the surface,' I said morosely; 'but there's a lot of misery below—hateful, they tell me.'

'Of course, I shall get to work one day. But look at the sunset. It opens like a mysterious flower. I must take Winifred home now.'

'One moment,' I pleaded; 'I can only see it through your eyes. I feel it while you speak, and then the good minute goes.'

She laughed.

'And so must I. Come, Winifred. Look, there's an owl; not like the owls in the summer dark in England—

'Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping,  
Wavy in the dark, lit by one low star.'

Suddenly she turned again and looked at me half wistfully.

'It is good to talk to you. You want to know. You are so near it all. I wish I could help you; I am so exquisitely happy myself.'

My writing was at a standstill. It seemed the groping of a blind man in a radiant world. Once perhaps I had felt that life was good in itself—when the guns came thundering toward the Vimy Ridge in a mad gallop of horses, and men shouting and swearing and frantically urging them on. Then, riding for more than life, I had tasted life for an instant. Not before or since. But this woman had the secret.

Lady Meryon, with her escort of girls and subalterns, came daintily past the hotel compound, and startled me from my brooding with her pretty silvery voice.

'Dreaming, Mr. Clifden? It isn't at all wholesome to dream in the East. Come and dine with us to-morrow. A tiny dance afterwards, you know; or bridge for those who like it.'

I had not the faintest notion whether governesses dined with the family or came in afterward with the coffee; but it was a sporting chance, and I took it.

Then Sir John came up and joined us.

'You can't well dance to-morrow, Kitty,' he said to his wife. 'There's been an outpost affair in the Swat Hills, and young Fitzgerald has been shot. Come to dinner of course, Clifden. Glad to see you. But no dancing, I think.'

Next evening I went into Lady Meryon's flower-scented drawing-room.

Governesses dine, it appeared, only to fill an unexpected place, or make a decorous entry afterward, to play accompaniments. Fortunately Kitty Meryon sang, in a pinched little soprano, not nearly so pretty as her silver ripple of talk.

It was when the party had settled down to bridge and I was standing out, that I ventured to go up to her as she sat knitting by a window—not unwatched by the quick blue flash of Lady Meryon's eyes as I did it.

'I think you hypnotize me, Miss Loring. When I hear anything, I straightway want to know what you will say. Have you heard of Fitzgerald's death?'

'That is why we are not dancing to-night. To-morrow the cable will reach his home in England. He was an only child, and they are the great people of the village where we are little people. I knew his mother as one knows a great lady who is kind to all the village folk. It may kill her. It is traveling to-night like a bullet to her heart, and she does not know.'

'His father?'

'A brave man—a soldier himself. He will know it was a good death and that Harry would not fail. He did not at Ypres. He would not here. But all joy and hope will be dead in that house to-morrow.'

'And what do *you* think?'

'I am not sorry for Harry, if you mean that. He knew—we all know—that he was on guard here holding the outposts against blood and treachery and terrible things—playing the Great Game. One never loses at that game if one plays it straight, and I am sure that at the last it was joy he felt and not fear. He has not lost. Did you notice in the church a niche before every soldier's seat to hold his loaded gun? And the tablets on the walls: "Killed at Kabu River, aged 22."—"Killed on outpost duty."—"Murdered by an Afghan fanatic." This will be one memory more. Why be sorry?'

Presently:—

'I am going up to the hills to-morrow, to the Malakhand Fort, with Mrs. Delany, Lady Meryon's aunt, and we shall see the wonderful Tahkt-i-Bahi Monastery on the way. You should do that run before you go. The fort is the last but one on the way to Chitral, and beyond that the road is so beset that only soldiers may go farther, and indeed the regiments escort each other up and down. But it is an early start, for we must be back in Peshawar at six for fear of raiding natives.'

'I know; they hauled me up in the dusk the other day, and told me I should be swept off to the hills if I fooled about after dusk. But I say—is it safe for you to go? You ought to have a man. Could I go, too?'

I thought she did not look enthusiastic at the proposal.

'Ask. You know I settle nothing. I go where I am sent.'

She left the room; and when the bridge was over, I made my request. Lady Meryon shrugged her shoulders and declared it would be a terribly dull run—the scenery nothing, 'and only' (she whispered) 'Aunt Selina and poor Miss Loring.'

Of course I saw at once that she did not like it; but Sir John was all for my going, and that saved the situation.

I certainly could have dispensed with Aunt Selina when the automobile drew up in the golden river of the sunrise at the hotel. There were only the driver, a personal servant, and the two ladies: Mrs. Delany, comely, pleasant, talkative, and Vanna—

We glided along the straight military road from Peshawar to Nowshera, the gold-bright sun dazzling in its whiteness—a strange drive through the flat, burned country, with the ominous Kabul River flowing through it. Military preparations everywhere, and the hills looking watchfully down—alive, as it were, with keen, hostile eyes. War was as present about us as behind the lines in France; and when we crossed the Kabul River on a bridge of boats, and I saw its haunted waters, I began to feel the atmosphere of the place closing down upon me. It had a sinister beauty; it breathed suspense; and I wished, as I was sure Vanna did, for silence that was not at our command.

For Mrs. Delany felt nothing of it. A bright shallow ripple of talk was her contribution to the joys of the day; though it was, fortunately, enough for her happiness if we listened and agreed. I knew Vanna listened only in show. Her intent eyes

were fixed on the Tahkt-i-Bahi hills after we had swept out of Nowshera; and when the car drew up at the rough track, she had a strange look of suspense and pallor. I remember I wondered at the time if she were nervous in the wild open country.

'Now pray don't be shocked,' said Mrs. Delany comfortably; 'but you two young people may go up to the monastery, and I shall stay here. I am dreadfully ashamed of myself, but the sight of that hill is enough for me. Don't hurry. I may have a little doze, and be all the better company when you get back. No, don't try to persuade me, Mr. Clifden. It isn't the part of a friend.'

I cannot say I was sorry, though I had a moment of panic when Vanna offered to stay with her—very much, too, as if she really meant it. So we set out perforce, Vanna leading steadily, as if she knew the way. She never looked up, and her wish for silence was so evident, that I followed, lending my hand mutely when the difficulties obliged it, she accepting absently, and as if her thoughts were far away.

Suddenly she quickened her pace. We had climbed about nine hundred feet, and now the narrow track twisted through the rocks—a track that looked as age-worn as no doubt it was. We threaded it, and struggled over the ridge, and looked down victorious on the other side.

There she stopped. A very wonderful sight, of which I had never seen the like, lay below us. Rock and waste and towering crags, and the mighty ruin of the monastery set in the fangs of the mountain like a robber baron's castle,

looking far away to the blue mountains of the Debatable Land—the land of mystery and danger. It stood there—the great ruin of a vast habitation of men. Building after building, mysterious and broken, corridors, halls, refectories, cells; the dwelling of a faith so alien that I could not reconstruct the life that gave it being. And all sinking gently into ruin that in a century more would confound it with the roots of the mountains. Gray and wonderful, it clung to the heights and looked with eyeless windows at the past. Somehow I found it infinitely pathetic: the very faith it expressed is dead in India, and none left so poor to do it reverence.

But Vanna knew her way. Unerringly she led me from point to point, and she was visibly at home in the intricacies. Such knowledge in a young woman bewildered me. Could she have studied the plans in the Museum? How else should she know where the abbot lived, or where the refractory brothers were punished?

Once I missed her, while I stooped to examine some scroll-work, and following, found her before one of the few images of the Buddha that the rapacious Museum had spared—a singularly beautiful bas-relief, the hand raised to enforce the truth the calm lips were speaking, the drapery falling in stately folds to the bare feet. As I came up, she had an air as if she had just ceased from movement, and I had a distinct feeling that she had knelt before it—I saw the look of worship! The thing troubled me like a dream, haunting, impossible, but real.



'How beautiful!' I said in spite of myself, as she pointed to the image. 'In this utter solitude it seems the very spirit of the place.'

'He was. He is,' said Vanna.

'Explain to me. I don't understand. I know so little of him. What is the subject?'

She hesitated; then chose her words as if for a beginner:—

'It is the Blessed One preaching to the Tree-Spirits. See how eagerly they lean from the boughs to listen. This other relief represents him in the state of mystic vision. Here he is drowned in peace. See how it overflows from the closed eyes; the closed lips. The air is filled with his quiet.'

'What is he dreaming?'

'Not dreaming—seeing. Peace. He sits at the point where time and infinity meet. To attain that vision was the aim of the monks who lived here.'

'Did they attain?' I found myself speaking as if she could certainly answer.

'A few. There was one, Vasettha, the Brahmin, a young man who had renounced all his possessions and riches, and seated here before this image of the Blessed One, he fell often into the mystic state. He had a strange vision at one time of the future of India, which will surely be fulfilled. He did not forget it in his rebirths. He remembers—'

She broke off suddenly and said with forced indifference,  
—

'He would sit here often looking out over the mountains; the monks sat at his feet to hear. He became abbot while still young. But his story is a sad one.'

'I entreat you to tell me.'

She looked away over the mountains.

'While he was abbot here,—still a young man,—a famous Chinese pilgrim came down through Kashmir to visit the Holy Places in India. The abbot went forward with him to Peshawar, that he might make him welcome. And there came a dancer to Peshawar, named Lilavanti, most beautiful! I dare not tell you her beauty. I tremble now to think—'

Again she paused, and again the faint creeping sense of mystery invaded me. She resumed:—

'The abbot saw her and he loved her. He was young still, you remember. She was a woman of the Hindu faith and hated Buddhism. It swept him down into the lower worlds of storm and desire. He fled with Lilavanti and never returned here. So in his rebirth he fell—'

She stopped dead; her face pale as death.

'How do you know? Where have you read it? If I could only find what you find and know what you know! The East is like an open book to you. Tell me the rest.'

'How should I know any more?' she said hurriedly. 'We must be going back. You should study the plans of this place at Peshawar. They were very learned monks who lived here. It is famous for learning.'

The life had gone out of her words—out of the ruins. There was no more to be said.

We clambered down the hill in the hot sunshine, speaking only of the view, the strange shrubs and flowers, and, once, the swift gliding of a snake, and found Mrs. Delany blissfully asleep in the most padded corner of the car. The spirit of the East vanished in her comfortable presence, and luncheon seemed the only matter of moment.

'I wonder, my dears,' she said, 'if you would be very disappointed and think me very dense if I proposed our giving up the Malakhand Fort? Mr. Clifden can lunch with the officers at Nowshera and come any day. I know I am an atrocity.'

That night I resolutely began my packing, and wrote a note of farewell to Lady Meryon. The next morning I furiously undid it, and destroyed the note. And that afternoon I took the shortest way to the Sunset Road to lounge about and wait for Vanna and Winifred. She never came, and I was as unreasonably angry as if I had deserved the blessing of her presence. Next day I could see that she tried, gently but clearly, to discourage our meeting; and for three days I never

saw her at all. Yet I knew that in her solitary life our talks counted for a pleasure.

### III

On the day when things became clear to me, I was walking toward the Meryons' gates when I met her coming alone along the Sunset Road, in the late gold of the afternoon. She looked pale and a little wearied, and I remember that I wished I did not know every change of her face as I did.

'So you have been up the Khyber Pass,' she said as I fell into step at her side. 'Tell me—was it as wonderful as you expected?'

'No, no—you tell me. It will give me what I missed. Begin at the beginning. Tell me what I saw.'

I could not miss the delight of her words, and she laughed, knowing my whim.

'Oh, that pass! But did you go on Tuesday or Friday?'

For these are the only two days in the week when the Khyber can be safely entered. The British then turn out the Khyber Rifles and man every crag, and the loaded caravans move like a tide, and go up and down the narrow road on their occasions.

'Tuesday. But make a picture for me.'

'You went up to Jumrood Fort at the entrance. Did they tell you it is an old Sikh fort and has been on duty in that turbulent place for five hundred years? And did you see the machine-guns in the court? And everyone armed—even the boys, with belts of cartridges? Then you went up the narrow winding track between the mountains, and you said to yourself, "This is the road of pure romance. It goes up to silken Samarcand, and I can ride to Bokhara of the beautiful women, and to all the dreams. Am I alive and is it real?" You felt that?'

'All, every bit. Go on!'

She smiled with pleasure.

'And you saw the little forts on the crags and the men on guard all along—rifles ready! You could hear the guns rattle as they saluted. Do you know that up there men plough with rifles loaded beside them? They have to be men, indeed.'

'Do you mean to imply that we are not men?'

'Different men, at least. This is life in a Border ballad. Such a life as you knew in France, but beautiful in a wild-hawk sort of way. Don't the Khyber Rifles bewilder you? They are drawn from these very Hill tribes, and will shoot their own fathers and brothers in the way of duty as comfortably as if they were jackals. Once there was a scrap here and one of the tribesmen sniped our men unbearably. What do you suppose happened? A Khyber Rifle came to the colonel and said, "Let me put an end to him, Colonel Sahib. I

know exactly where he sits. He is my grandfather." And he did it.'

'The bond of bread and salt?'

'Yes, and discipline. I'm sometimes half frightened of discipline. It moulds a man like wax. Even God doesn't do that. Well—then you saw the traders: wild shaggy men in sheepskin, and women in massive jewelry of silver and turquoise—great earrings, heavy bracelets loading their arms, wild, fierce, handsome. And the camels,—thousands of them,—some going up, some coming down,—a mass of human and animal life. Above you, moving figures against the keen blue sky, or deep below you in the ravines. The camels were swaying along with huge bales of goods, and with dark beautiful women in wicker cages perched on them. Silks and carpets from Bokhara, and blue-eyed Persian cats, and bluer Persian turquoises. Wonderful! And the dust—gilded by the sunshine—makes a vaporous golden atmosphere for it all.'

'What was the most wonderful thing you saw there?' I asked her.

'The most beautiful of all, I think, was a man—a splendid dark ruffian, lounging along. He wanted to show off, and his swagger was perfect. Long black onyx eyes, and a tumble of black curls, and teeth like almonds. But what do you think he carried on his wrist? A hawk with fierce yellow eyes, ringed and chained. Hawking is a favorite sport in the hills. Oh, why doesn't some great painter come and paint it all before they

take to trains and cars? I long to see it all again, but I never shall.'

'Surely Sir John can get you up there any day.'

'I am leaving.'

'Leaving?' My heart gave a leap. 'Why? Where?'

'I had rather not tell you.'

'I shall ask Lady Meryon.'

'I forbid you.'

And then the unexpected happened, and an unbearable impulse swept me into folly—or was it wisdom?

'Listen to me. I would not have said it yet, but this settles it. I want you to marry me. I want it *atrociously!*'

It was a strange word. What I felt for her at that moment was difficult to describe.

She looked at me in transparent astonishment.

'Mr. Clifden, are you dreaming? You can't mean what you say.'

'Why can't I? I do. I want you. You have the key of all I care for.'

'Surely you have all the world can give? What do you want more?'

'The power to enjoy it—to understand it. I want you always with me to interpret, like a guide to a blind fellow. I am no better.'

'Say like a dog, at once!' she interrupted. 'At least, you are frank enough to put it on that ground. You have not said that you love me. You could not say it.'

'I don't know whether I do or not. I know nothing about love. I want you. Indescribably. Perhaps that is love—is it? I never wanted anyone before. I have tried to get away and I can't.'

'Why have you tried?'

'Because every man likes freedom. But I like you better.'

'I can tell you the reason,' she said, in her gentle, unwavering voice. 'I am Lady Meryon's governess, and an undesirable. You have felt that?'

'Don't make me out such a snob. No—yes. You force me into honesty. I did feel it at first. But I could kick myself when I think of that now. It is utterly forgotten. Take me and make me what you will, and forgive me. Only tell me your secret of joy. How is it you understand everything alive or dead? I want to live—to see, to know.'

It was a rhapsody like a boy's. Yet at the moment I was not even ashamed of it, so sharp was my need.



'I think,' she said, slowly, looking straight before her, 'that I had better be quite frank. I don't love you. I don't know what love means in the Western sense. It has a very different meaning for me. Your voice comes to me from an immense distance when you speak in that way. You want me—but never with a thought of what *I* might want. Is that love? I like you very deeply as a friend, but we are of different races. There is a gulf.'

'A gulf? You are English.'

'By birth, yes. In mind, no. And there are things that go deeper, that you could not understand. So I refuse quite definitely, and our ways part here, for in a few days I go. I shall not see you again, but I wished to say good-bye.'

I felt as if my all were deserting me—a sickening feeling of loneliness.

'I entreat you to tell me why, and where.'

'Since you have made me this offer, I will tell you why. Lady Meryon objected to my friendship with you, and objected in a way which—'

She stopped, flushing palely. I caught her hand.

'That settles it, that she should have dared! I'll go up this minute and tell her we are engaged. Vanna—Vanna!'

For she disengaged her hand.

'On no account. How can I make it more plain to you? I should have gone soon in any case. My place is in the native city—that is the life I want. I have work there; I knew it before I came out. My sympathies are all with them. They know what life is—why, even the beggars, poorer than poor, are perfectly happy, basking in the great generous sun. Oh, the splendor and riot of life and color! That's my life—I sicken of this.'

'But I will give it to you. Marry me, and we will travel till you're tired of it.'

'And look on as at a play. No, I'm going to work there.'

'For God's sake, how? Let me come, too.'

'You can't. You're not in it. I am going to attach myself to the medical mission at Lahore and learn nursing, and then I shall go to my own people.'

'Missionaries?'

'They teach what I want. Mr. Clifden, I shall not come this way again. If I remember—I'll write to you, and tell you what the real world is like.'

She smiled, the absorbed little smile I knew and feared.

'Vanna, before you go, give me your gift of sight. Interpret for me. Stay with me a little and make me see.'

'What do you mean, exactly?' she asked in her gentlest voice, half turning to me.

'Make one journey with me, as my sister, if you will do no more. Though I warn you that all the time I shall be trying to win my wife. But come with me once, and after that—if you will go, you must. Say yes.'

She hesitated—a hesitation full of hope—and looked at me with intent eyes.

'I will tell you frankly,' she said at last, 'that I know my knowledge of the East and kinship with it goes far beyond mere words. In my case the doors were not shut. I believe—I *know* that long ago this was my life. If I spoke forever, I could not make you understand how much I know, and why. So I shall quite certainly go back to it. Nothing—you, least of all—can hold me. But you are my friend—that is a true bond. And if you would wish me to give you two months before I go, I might do that if it would in any way help you. As your friend only—you clearly understand. You would not reproach me afterward when I left you, as I should most certainly do?'

'I swear I would not. I swear I would protect you even from myself. I want you forever; but if you will only give me two months—Come! But have you thought that people will talk? I'm not worth that, God knows.'

She spoke very quietly.

'That does not trouble me. It would only trouble me if you asked what I have not to give. For two months I would travel with you as a friend, if, like a friend, I paid my own expenses.—No, I must do as I say; I would go on no other

terms. It would be hard if, because we are man and woman, I might not do one act of friendship for you before we part. For though I refuse your offer utterly, I appreciate it, and I would make what little return I can. It would be a sharp pain to me to distress you.'

Her gentleness and calm, the magnitude of the offer she was making, stunned me so that I could scarcely speak. She gave me such opportunities as the most ardent lover might in his wildest dream desire, and with the remoteness in her eyes and her still voice she deprived them of all hope.

'Vanna, is it a promise? You mean it?'

'If you wish it, yes. But I warn you that I think it will not make it easier for you when the time is over.'

'Why two months?'

'Partly because I can afford no more. No! I know what you would say. Partly because I can spare no more time. I think it unwise for you. I would protect you if I could—indeed I would!'

It was my turn to hesitate now. Would it not be better to let her go before she had become a part of my daily experience? I began to fear I was courting my own shipwreck. She read my thoughts clearly.

'Indeed you would be wise to decide against it. Release me from my promise. It was a mad scheme.'

The superiority—or so I felt it—of her gentleness maddened me. It might have been I who needed protection, who was running the risk of misjudgment—not she, a lonely woman. I felt utterly exiled from the real purpose of her life.

'I will never release you. I claim your promise. I hold to it.'

She extended her hand, cool as a snowflake, and was gone, walking swiftly up the road. Ah, let a man beware when his wishes fulfilled rain down upon him!

To what had I committed myself?

Strange she is and secret,  
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold and as cold  
sea-shells.

Yet I would risk it.

Next day this reached me:—

DEAR MR. CLIFDEN,—

I am going to some Indian friends for a time. On the 15th of June I shall be at Srinagar in Kashmir. A friend has allowed me to take her little houseboat, the Kedarnath. If you like this plan, we will share the cost for two months. I warn you it is not luxurious, but I think you will like it. I shall do this whether you come or no, for I want a quiet time before I take up my nursing in Lahore. In thinking of all this, will you

remember that I am not a girl but a woman? I shall be twenty-nine my next birthday.

Sincerely yours,  
VANNA LORING.

P.S. But I still think you would be wiser not to come. I hope to hear you will not.

I replied only this:—

DEAR MISS LORING,—

I think I understand the position fully. I will be there. I thank you with all my heart.

Gratefully yours,  
STEPHEN CLIFDEN.

#### IV

On the 15th of June, I found myself riding into Srinagar in Kashmir, through the pure, tremulous green of the mighty poplars that hedge the road into the city. The beauty of the country had half stunned me when I entered the mountain barrier of Baramula and saw the snowy peaks that guard the

Happy Valley, with the Jhelum flowing through its tranquil loveliness. The flush of the almond-blossom was over, but the iris, like a sea of peace, had overflowed the world, and the blue meadows smiled at the radiant sky. Such blossom! the blue shading into clear violet, like a shoaling sea. The earth, like a cup held in the hand of a god, brimmed with the draught of youth and summer and—love? But no. For me the very word was sinister. Vanna's face, immutably calm, confronted it.

The night I had slept in a boat at Sopor had been my first in Kashmir; and I remember that, waking at midnight, I looked out and saw a mountain with a gloriole of hazy silver about it, misty and faint as a cobweb threaded with dew. The river, there spreading into a lake, was dark under it, flowing in a deep, smooth blackness of shadow, and every thing waited—for what? Even while I looked, the moon floated serenely above the peak, and all was bathed in pure light, the water rippling in broken silver and pearl. So had Vanna floated into my life, sweet, remote, luminous.

I rode past the lovely wooden bridges, where the balconied houses totter to each other across the canals in a dim splendor of carving and age; where the many-colored native life crowds down to the river-steps and cleanses its flower-bright robes, its gold-bright brass vessels, in the shining stream; and my heart said only, 'Vanna, Vanna!'

My servant dismounted and led his horse, asking from everyone where the Kedarnath could be found; and two little bronze images detached themselves from the crowd of boys and ran, fleet as fauns, before us.

Above the last bridge the Jhelum broadens out into a stately river, controlled at one side by the banked walk known as the Bund, with the Club House upon it and the line of houseboats beneath. She would not be here; my heart told me that; and sure enough the boys were leading across the bridge, and by a quiet shady way to one of the many backwaters that the great river makes in the enchanting city. There is one waterway stretching on and afar to the Dal Lake. It looks like a river—it is the very haunt of peace. Under those mighty chenar or plane trees, that are the glory of Kashmir, clouding the water with deep green shadows, the sun can scarcely pierce, save in a dipping sparkle here and there, to intensify the green gloom. The murmur of the city, the chatter of the club, are hundreds of miles away.

We rode downward under the towering trees, and dismounting, saw a little houseboat tethered to the bank. It was not of the richer sort that haunts the Bund, where the native servants follow in a separate boat, and even the electric light is turned on as part of the luxury. This was a long, low craft, very broad, thatched like a country cottage afloat. In the after part the native owner and his family lived—our crew, our cooks and servants; for they played many parts in our service. And in the forepart, room for a life, a dream, the joy or curse of my days to be.

But then, I saw only one thing—Vanna sat under the trees, reading, or looking at the cool, dim, watery vista, with a single boat, loaded to the river's edge with melons and scarlet tomatoes, punting lazily down to Srinagar in the sleepy afternoon.



For the first time I knew she was beautiful. Beauty shone in her like the flame in an alabaster lamp, serene, diffused in the very air about her, so that to me she moved in a mild radiance. She rose to meet me with both hands outstretched—the kindest, most cordial welcome. Not an eyelash flickered, not a trace of self-consciousness.

I tried, with a hopeless pretence, to follow her example and hide what I felt, where she had nothing to hide.

'What a place you have found! Why, it's like the deep heart of a wood.'

I threw myself on the grass beside her with a feeling of perfect rest.

The very spirit of Quiet seemed to be drowsing in those branches towering up into the blue, dipping their green fingers into the crystal of the water. What a heaven!

I shut my eyes and see still that first meal of my new life. The little table that Pir Baksh, breathing full East in his jade-green turban, set before her, with its cloth worked in a pattern of the chenar leaves that are the symbol of Kashmir; the brown cakes made by Ahmed Khan in a miraculous kitchen of his own invention—a few holes burrowed in the river-bank, a smouldering fire beneath them, and a width of canvas for a roof. But it served, and no more need be asked of luxury. And Vanna, making it mysteriously the first home I ever had known, the central joy of it all. Oh, wonderful days of life that breathe the spirit of immortality and pass so quickly—surely they must be treasured somewhere in

Eternity, that we may look upon their beloved light once more!

'Now you must see the boat. The Kedarnath is not a Dreadnought, but she is broad and very comfortable. And we have many chaperons. They all live in the stern, and exist simply to protect the Sahib-log from all discomfort; and very well they do it. That is Ahmed Khan by the kitchen. He cooks for us. Salama owns the boat, and steers her and engages the men to tow us when we move. And when I arrived, he aired a little English and said piously, "The Lord help me to give you no trouble, and the Lord help you!" That is his wife sitting on the bank. She speaks little but Kashmiri, but I know a little of that. Look at the hundred rat-tail plaits of her hair, lengthened with wool; and see her silver and turquoise jewelry! She wears much of the family fortune and is quite a walking bank. Salama, Ahmed Khan, and I talk by the hour. Ahmed comes from Fyzabad. Look at Salama's boy—I call him the Orange Imp. Did you ever see anything so beautiful?'

I looked in sheer delight, and grasped my camera. Sitting near us was a lovely little Kashmiri boy of about eight, in a faded orange coat, and a turban exactly like his father's. His curled black eyelashes were so long that they made a soft gloom over the upper part of the little golden face. The perfect bow of the scarlet lips, the long eyes, the shy smile, suggested an Indian Eros. He sat dipping his feet in the water, with little pigeon-like cries of content.

'He paddles at the bow of our little shikara boat, with a paddle exactly like a water-lily leaf. Do you like our friends?'

I love them already, and know all their affairs.—And now for the boat.'

'One moment. If we are friends on a great adventure, I must call you Vanna, and you me Stephen.'

'Yes, I suppose that is part of it,' she said, smiling. 'Come, Stephen.'

It was like music, but a cold music that chilled me. She should have hesitated, should have flushed—it was I who trembled.

So I followed her across the broad plank into our new home.

'This is our sitting-room. Look, how charming!'

It was better than charming: it was home, indeed. Windows at each side opening down almost to the water; a little table for meals, with a gray pot of irises in the middle; another table for writing, photographing, and all the little pursuits of travel; a bookshelf, with some well-worn friends; two low, cushioned chairs, two others for meals, and a Bokhara rug, soft and pleasant for the feet. The interior was plain unpainted wood, but set so that the grain showed like satin in the rippling lights from the water.

'It is perfect,' was all I said, as she waved her hand proudly to show it; 'it is home.'

We dined on the bank that evening, the lamp burning steadily in the still air and throwing broken reflections in the

water, while the moon looked in upon us among the leaves. I felt extraordinarily young and happy.

The quiet of her voice was as soft as the little lap of water against the bank; and Kahdra, the Orange Imp, was singing a little wordless song to himself as he washed the plates beside us.

'The wealth of the world could not buy this,' I said; and was silent.

## V

And so began a life of sheer enchantment. Looking back, I know in what a wonder-world I was privileged to live. Vanna could talk with all our shipmates. She did not move apart, a condescending or indifferent foreigner. Little Kahdra would come to her knee and chatter to her of the great snake that lived up on Mahadeo, to devour erring boys who omitted to say their prayers at proper Moslem intervals. She would sit with the baby in her lap, while the mother busied herself in the sunny boat with the mysterious dishes that smelt so good to a hungry man.

'I am graduating as a nurse,' she would say laughing, as she bent over the lean arm of some weirdly wrinkled old lady, bandaging and soothing at the same time. Her reward would be some bit of folk-lore, some quaintness of gratitude,

which I noted down in the little book I kept for remembrance—and do not need, for every word is in my heart.

We pulled down through the city next day, Salama rowing, and Kahdra lazily paddling at the bow. A wonderful city, with its narrow ways begrimed with the dirt of ages, and its balconied houses looking as if disease and sin had soaked into them and given them a vicious, tottering beauty, horrible, yet lovely too. We saw the swarming life of the bazaar; the white turbans coming and going, diversified by the rose and yellow Hindu turbans; the fine aquiline faces and the caste-marks, orange and red, on the dark brows. I saw two women—girls—painted and tired like Jezebel, looking out of one window carved and old, and the gray burnished doves flying about it. They leaned indolently, like all the old, old wickedness of the East that yet is ever young—'Flowers of Delight,' with smooth black hair braided with gold and blossoms, and covered with pale-rose veils, and gold-embossed disks swinging like lamps beside the olive cheeks, the great eyes artificially lengthened and darkened with *soorma*, and the curves of the full lips emphasized with vermilion. They looked down on us with apathy, a dull weariness that held all the old evil of the wicked, humming city. It had taken shape in those indolent bodies and heavy eyes, which could flash into life as a snake wakes into fierce darting energy when the time comes to spring—direct inheritrixes from Lilith, in the fittest setting in the world—the almost exhausted vice of an Oriental city as old as time.

'Look—below here,' said Vanna, pointing to one of the great ghats—long rugged steps running down to the river. 'When I came yesterday, a great broken crowd was collected,

almost shouldering each other into the water, where a boat lay rocking. In it was the body of a man, brutally murdered for the sake of a few rupees and flung into the river. I could see the poor brown body stark in the boat, with a friend weeping beside it. On the lovely deodar bridge people leaned over, watching with grim, open-mouthed curiosity, and business went on gayly where the jewelers make the silver bangles for slender wrists, and the rows of silver coins that make the necks like "the Tower of Damascus builded for an armory." It was all very wild and cruel. I went down to them —'

'Vanna—you went down? Horrible!'

'No; you see I heard them say the wife was almost a child and needed help. So I went. Once, long ago, at Peshawar, I saw the same thing happen, and they came and took the child for the service of the gods, for she was most lovely, and she clung to the feet of a man in terror, and the priest stabbed her to the heart. She died in my arms.'

'Good God!' I said, shuddering; 'what a sight for you! Did they never hang him?'

'He was not punished. I told you it was a very long time ago.'

She said no more. But in her words and the terrible crowding of its life, Srinagar seemed to me more of a nightmare than anything I had seen, excepting only Benares; for the holy Benares is a memory of horror, with a sense of

blood hidden under its frantic, crazy devotion, and not far hidden, either.

Our own green shade, when we pulled back to it in the evening cool, was a refuge of unspeakable quiet. She read aloud to me that evening, by the small light of our lamp beneath the trees; and, singularly, she read of joy.

'I have drunk of the Cup of the Ineffable,  
I have found the Key of the Mystery;  
Traveling by no track, I have come to the  
Sorrowless Land; very easily has the mercy of  
the great Lord come upon me.  
Wonder is that Land of rest to which no merit  
can win.  
There have I seen joy filled to the brim,  
perfection of joy.  
He dances in rapture and waves of form arise  
from his dance.  
He holds all within his bliss.'

'What is that?' I asked, when the music ceased for a moment.

'It is from the songs of the great Indian mystic—Kabir. Let me read you more. It is like the singing of a lark, lost in the infinite of light and heaven.'

So in the soft darkness I heard for the first time those immortal words; and hearing, a faint glimmer of

understanding broke upon me as to the source of the peace that surrounded her. I had accepted it as an emanation of her own heart, when it was the pulsing of the tide of the Divine. She read, choosing a verse here and there, and I listened with absorption. Suppose I had been wrong in believing that sorrow is the key-note of life; that pain is the road of ascent, if road there be; that an implacable Nature presides over all our pitiful struggles and writes a black 'Finis' to the holograph of our existence? What then? Was she teaching me that joy is the only truth,—the only reality,—and all else illusion? Was she the Interpreter of a Beauty eternal in the heavens and reflected in broken prisms in the beauty that walked visible beside me? I listened as a man to an unknown tongue; but I listened, though I ventured my protest.

'In India, in this strange country where men have time and will for speculation, such thoughts may be natural. Can they be found in the West?'

'This is from the West—might not Kabir himself have said it? Certainly he would have felt it. "Happy is he who seeks not to understand the Mystery of God, but who, merging his spirit into thine, sings to thy Face, O Lord, like a harp, understanding how difficult it is to know—how easy to love Thee." We debate and argue, and the Vision passes us by. We try to prove it, and kill it in the laboratory of our minds, when on the altar of our souls it will dwell forever.'

Silence—and I pondered. Finally she laid the book aside and repeated from memory and in a tone of perfect music: 'Kabir says, "I shall go to the House of my Lord with my Love at my side; then shall I sound the trumpet of triumph."'



When she left me alone, the old doubts came back—the fear that I saw only through her eyes; and I began to believe in joy, only because I loved her. I remember that I wrote in the little book that I kept for my stray thoughts these words, which are not mine but reflect my vision of her.

'Thine is the skill of the Fairy Woman, and the virtue of St. Bride, and the faith of Mary the Mild, and the gracious way of the Greek woman, and the beauty of lovely Emer, and the tenderness of heart-sweet Deirdre, and the courage of Maev the great Queen, and the charm of Mouth-of-Music.'

Yes, all that and more; but I feared lest I should see the heaven of joy through her eyes only, and find it mirage, as I had found so much else.

## **MIHINTALE—A PILGRIMAGE**

[Atlantic Monthly, January, 1921]

### **I**

Ceylon—and the glory of the tropics flooding the senses like a breaking wave of light and color. Life so urgent, so luxuriant, that surely these forest trees crowded with bloom,

these vines trailing their splendors, cannot have the cool virginal sap of temperate zones flowing in their veins. The current of their life must be burning blood, pouring in a torrent from the mighty heart of Nature. The very leaves—huge carved leaves, thickly ribbed, and mottled like snakes with vivid splashes of color—are heavy with voluptuous languor, bathing themselves in the milk-warm air.

A tree stood beside me, fern-fronded like an acacia, but dripping with scarlet trails of blossom; and beyond it the oxidized silver of the gnarled pagoda trees, the chalices of their ivory flowers censuring the air with the mystic perfume that in India and Ceylon breathes worship as they stand about the temples. Above, an ecstatic sky of unfathomable blue, raining down light upon the breaking jewels of the sea, the deeps of the all-surrounding jungle.

Here is a land of the Gods.

They have left their footprints very plain upon this ardent loveliness as they came and went. Ceylon has known many generations of them. Rama, the God-King of India, incarnation in human flesh of Vishnu the Preserver, here fought a war of the Gods and Titans to recover his divine wife, that lovely Sita whose name is a household word in India. Here, Havana, the Demon King of Ceylon, held her in captivity; and in that older fight to recover a purer Helen, the army of Rama strode across the great bridge of scattered rocks between Ceylon and India. Still may be seen the gap that no strength, human or divine, could mend, where the mighty host was stayed until a little tree-squirrel, for love of Rama, laid his small body in the hollow, and because love is

the bridge eternal between the Two Worlds, the host passed over it, triumphant. But Rama, stooping from his godhead, bent over it and touched the dead fur tenderly as he passed, and to this day the tree-squirrels bear the marks of the divine fingers upon their coats of gray.

There is no demarcation in Asia between so-called animal and human life. Rama himself had passed through the animal incarnations of the upward way, and knew well what beats in the little heart beneath fur and feather.

In the wonderful Birth-Stories of the Lord Buddha he has recorded his memories of the incarnations of bird, animal, and lesser lives, through which a steadfast evolution led him to the Ten Perfections. How should he not know, and, knowing, love? Is it not written by one of the greatest of Buddhist saints, 'To the eye of flesh, plants and trees appear to be gross matter; but to the eye of the Buddha they are composed of minute spiritual particles; grass, trees, countries, the earth itself, shall enter wholly into Buddhahood'? And does not science, faltering far behind the wisdom of the mighty, adumbrate these truths in its later revelations?

We know too little of the wisdom of the East. The Magi still journey to Bethlehem, but only those who have the heart of the Child may receive their gold, myrrh, and frankincense.

Yet, for mere beauty's sake, these stories of the East should be read. Men thrill to the mighty thunder-roll of Homer's verse, but the two supreme epics of India are little known. If the West would gather about the story-teller as the East

gathers, in bazaar or temple court, the stories should be told from these and other sources, until Rama stands beside the knightly Hector, and Sita's star is set in the same heaven where shines the lonely splendor of Antigone.

When the rapturous peace of the Lord Buddha could no longer be contained within the heart of India, it overflowed, and like a rising tide submerged Ceylon. And now, although India has forgotten and has returned to the more ancient faiths, Ceylon remembers. The Lotos of the Good Law blossoms in every forest pool. The invocation to the Jewel in the Lotos is daily heard from every monastery of the Faith, where the yellow-robed Brethren still follow the Way marked for them by the Blessed One who in Uruvela attained to that supernal enlightenment of which he said, 'And that deep knowledge have I made my own—that knowledge, hard to perceive, hard to understand, peace-giving, not to be gained by mere reason, which is deeper than the depths, and accessible only to the wise. Yet, among living men are some whose eyes are but a little darkened with dust. To them shall the truth be manifest.'

If it be an aim of travel to see what is beautiful and strange, it may be also an aim to seek that spiritual beauty where it sits enthroned in its own high places; and my hope in Ceylon was to visit the land where that strait and narrow way of Buddhism is held which is known as the Hinayana—or the Lesser Vehicle. In Thibet, China, and Japan, I had known the efflorescence of the Buddhist Faith where, recognizing the mystic emanations of the Buddhas, it becomes the Greater Vehicle and breaks into gorgeous ritual and symbolism, extraordinarily beautiful in themselves, and

yet more so in their teaching. Buddhism, in those countries, like the Bride of the Canticles, goes beautifully in jewels of gold and raiment of fine needlework, within her ivory palaces. In Ceylon, like the Lady Poverty of Saint Francis of Assisi, she walks with bared feet, bowed head, her begging-bowl in hand, simple and austere in the yellow robe of the Master—her rock-temples and shrines as he himself might have blessed them in their stern humility. Save at the Temple of the Tooth, the splendors she heaps upon his altars are those of her flowers. With these she may be lavish because his life was wreathed with their beauty. He was born in a garden, beneath a Tree he attained Wisdom, in a garden he died. A faith that is held by nearly every tenth living man or woman is surely worthy of reverence and study, even in these hurrying days when gold, not wisdom, is the measure of attainment.

So I came to Ceylon.

## II

Near a little town in the hills stands a Wihara—a monastery—dreaming in the silent sunshine. The palms are grouped close about the simple roofs—so close that the passing tourist could never guess that the Head of the Buddhist Faith in Ceylon, a great saint, a great ruler of seven thousand priests, dwelt there in so secret, so complete an austerity.

He was a very old man when I came, but his ninety-two years sat lightly on him and each year had laid its tribute of love and honor at his feet. He was known as the Maha Nayaka Thero; and in religion, for love of the Master, he had taken the Master's human name of Siddartha. It was strange indeed to see the simplicity of his surroundings—to me it appeared singularly beautiful: it breathed the spiritual purity that had made him beloved throughout the island.

A great scholar, deeply learned in Sanskrit and Pali and in the abstruse philosophy that is for the elders of the Law, he was yet the gentlest of men, and his very learning and strength were all fused into a benignant radiance that sunned the griefs of the world he had cast so far behind him.

I was glad to wander about in the quiet monastery—the little one-storied quadrangle on the side of the hill. It offered—it invited—the life of meditation, of clear thought, of delicate austerity. The noise of great events (so-called) was like the dim murmur of a shell when they reached the Wihara and the ear of Sri Siddartha. But he heard, he noted the progress of science, even to the possibilities of aviation, because to a Buddhist saint all spheres of knowledge are one, and all nothing, in the Ocean of Omniscience.

So the people brought their grievances and troubles to the aged Archbishop. You were in the presence of a very great gentleman when you entered and found him seated, his scribe cross-legged at his feet to record what passed. The people would approach him softly and with the deepest reverence, and with permission would seat themselves on the ground at a due distance.

'Venerable Sir, we are in trouble. We seek your counsel.' That was the cry. And always, in spite of his many years, he listened and counseled and comforted.

Soon after my arrival his birthday was celebrated with much rejoicing. The Bhikkus (monks) had put up little festive bamboo arches, fluttering with split palm-leaves like ribbons, all about the Wihara, and troops of Bhikkus came to lay their homage at his feet. The roads were sunshiny with their yellow robes as they flocked in from remote places—jungle, cave-temples, and far mountains. The laity came also, crowding to see the Venerable One. He received them all with serene joy, and pursued his quiet way, thinking, reading, meditating on the Three Jewels—the Lord, the Law, and the Communion of Saints. And the Bhikkus departed, believing that he might be among them for many days.

But so it was not to be; for, a few days later, while he was sweeping the garden walks, a duty he had made his own, he felt a sudden loss of strength, and lying down, in two hours he passed painlessly away.

I was permitted to visit Sri Siddartha as he lay in death. The room was very simple and bare. Many of his Bhikkus stood about him, and there were flowers, flowers, everywhere. Beside him burned a perfumed gum, sending up its thin blue spirals of fragrance.

I was received with perfect kindness, and especially by his favorite disciple and pupil—a young monk with a worn ascetic face, who stood in deep meditation at the head of his Master. He looked up and smiled, and raised the face-cloth

that I might see, and looked down again at the brown face, calm as a mask of Wisdom with its closed lips and eyes. Even closed, they looked old—old. A Bhikku, standing by, told me that all had loved him and were bereaved in his going; 'But for him—he is in the Nirvana of Paradise.'

The strange phrase awoke in my mind the words of the Blessed One, and I repeated them as I stood beside that quiet sleep.

'But this, O Bhikkus, is the highest, this is the holiest wisdom—to know that all suffering has vanished away. He has found the true deliverance that lies beyond the reach of change.'

And I remembered the symbolic fresco in Ceylon, representing the Lord Buddha borne dead on a chariot in a garden. The gardener digs his grave, but the Lord awakes from death, and bids the man know he is not dead but living. The Buddha stands majestic by the open grave—the gardener recoils in fear. Death has no more dominion.

So I left Sri Siddartha lying in the mystery where all the wisdoms are one.

In the garden, in the riot of tropical blossom and beauty, a Bhikku was standing in the perfect stillness that is a part of the discipline. He greeted me, and we spoke of my quest.

'Go,' he said, 'to Mihintale, where the Law first came to this island by the hands of Mahinda. Seek also the great Dagoba where stand the images of the Buddhas that have



been and of Him who is to come. And under the Tree which is a part of that Tree beneath which the Blessed One received illumination, meditate on Truth.'

I delayed only that I might see the flames receive the discarded body of the Venerable One; and the ceremony took place next day amid a vast gathering of the people and the great companies of the Bhikkus. They flooded the ways with sunshine in every shade of yellow, from deep primrose to a tawny orange. The roads were strewn with rice like snowflakes, stamped into star-shapes. A strange, melancholy music went with us. So, climbing a steep hill, we came to the pyre, heaped with the scented and aromatic woods of the jungles, and closed from human view by a high scaffolding draped with bright colors. On this pyre he was laid, and one of his own blood, holding a torch, applied the pure element to the wood; and, as he did so, the assembly raised a cry of 'Sadhu, Sadhu!' and with that ascription of holiness a sheet of flame swept up into the crowns of the palms, and the scent of spices filled the air. And even as the body of the Blessed One passed into gray ash, passed also the worn-out dwelling of Sri Siddartha.

I made my way next day to a temple hollowed in the rock, the ceiling of which is frescoed with gods and heroes. It is taught that here the Canon of the Buddhist Scriptures was first committed to writing about 450 B.C. Here five hundred priests, learned in the Faith, assembled, and collating the Scriptures, chanted every word, while the scribes recorded them with stylus and palm-leaf as they heard. Burmese, Thibetans, Indians, all were present, that so the Law might be

carried over Asia, and the Peace of the Blessed One be made known to men.

Here, too, the discipline was fixed. The Bhikku must not be touched by a woman's hand. He must eat but twice a day, and not after noon. He must keep the rule of the Lady Poverty as did Saint Francis. He must sleep nowhere but in Wiharas and other appointed places. And these are but a few of the commands. Yet, if the rule is too hard for him, the Bhikku may relinquish it at his will, and return to the world a free man—a fettered man, as the Master would have said, but free according to the rule of the Transient World. It is said that few accept this permission.

It took little imagination to people the silent temple with the Assembly—the keen intellectual Indian faces, the yellow robe and the bared shoulder, seated in close ranks in the twilight of the temple. Now it was silent and empty, but a mysterious aura filled it. The buildings of men's hands pass away, but the rock, worn not at all, save where feet come and go, preserves the aspect of its great day, when it was the fountain-head of the Truth.

A solemn gladness filled the air. Surely the West is waking to the message of the East—that message, flowing through the marvelous art of China and Japan, through the deep philosophies of India, the great Scriptures of the Buddhist Faith, and many more such channels. And we who have entered the many mansions through another gate may share and rejoice in the truths that are a world-heritage.

### III

It was time now that I should visit the holy places, and I took the road through the jungle, intending to stay at the little rest-houses which exist to shelter travelers. The way is green with grass in the middle; there are two tracks for wheels—narrow and little used. Even the native huts may sometimes be forty miles apart. And on either side runs the huge wall of the jungle, holding its secrets well.

Great trees, knotted with vines and dark with heavy undergrowth, shut me in. Sometimes a troop of silver-gray monkeys swept chattering overhead; sometimes a few red deer would cross the road, or a blue shrike flutter radiantly from one shelter to another. Mostly, the jungle was silent as the grave, but living, breathing, a vast and terrible personality; an ocean, and with the same illimitable might and majesty. Traveling through it, I was as a fish that swims through the green depths of water.

So I journeyed in a little bullock cart—and suddenly, abruptly, as if dropped from heaven, sprang out of the ocean of the jungle that bathed its feet a huge cube of rock nearly five hundred feet high, with lesser rocks spilt about it that would have been gigantic were it not for the first—the famous Sigurya.

An ancient people, led by a parricide king, took this strange place and made of it a mighty fortress. They cut

galleries in the living rock that, like ants, they might pass up and down unharmed from below; and on the head of the rock—a space four acres in extent—they set a king's palace and pleasance, with a bathing-tank to cool the torrid air. Then, still desiring beauty, this people frescoed the sheer planes of this precipitous rock of Sigurya with pictures that modern Sinhalese art cannot rival. These vast pictures represent a procession of royal and noble ladies to a shrine, with attendants bearing offerings. Only from the waist upward are the figures visible; they rise from clouds as if floating in the sky. The faces have an archaic beauty and dignity. One, a queen, crowned and bare-bosomed, followed by attendants bearing stiff lotos blooms, is beautiful indeed, but in no Sinhalese or Indian fashion—a face dark, exotic, and heavy-lidded, like a pale shadowed orchid. It is believed the whole rock was thus frescoed into a picture-gallery, but time and weather have taken toll of the rest.

The government has put steps and climbing rails, that the height may be reached. Half-way up is a natural flatness, and above it soars the remainder of the citadel, to be climbed only by notches cut in the rock, and hand-rails as a safeguard from the sheer fall below. And here this dead people had done a wonderful thing. They had built a lion of brick, so colossal that the head towered to the full height of the ascent. It has fallen into ruin, but the proportion of the great cat-paws that remain indicate a beast some two hundred feet high. There is a gate between the paws, and in the old days they clambered up through the body of the lion and finally through his throat, into the daylight of the top. Only the paws are left, complete even to the little cat-claw at the back of each. Surely one of the strangest approaches in the world!

Here and there the shelving of the rock overhangs the ascent, and drops of water fall in a bright crystal rain perpetually over the jungle so far below.

Standing upon the height, it was weirdly lovely to see the eternal jungle monotonously swaying and waving beneath. I thought of the strange feet that had followed these ways, with hopes and fears so like our own. And now their fortress is but a sunny day's amusement for travelers from lands unknown, and the city sitteth desolate, and the strength of their building is resumed into the heart of nature. The places where men have lived are dead indeed in their ruin, but the places where men have worshiped and lifted their hands to the Infinite are never dead. The Spirit that is Life Eternal hovers about them, and the green that binds their broken pillars is the green of an immortal hope.

The evening was now at hand, and, after the sun-steeped day, the jungle gave out its good smells, beautiful earth-warm smells like a Nature-Goddess, rising from the vast tangle of life in the mysterious depths. You may gather the flowers on their edge and wonder what the inmost flowers are like that you will never see—rich, labyrinthine, beyond all thought to paint.

The jungle is as terrible as an army with banners. Sleeping in the little rest-house when the night has fallen, it comes close up to you, creeping, leaning over you, calling, whispering, vibrating with secret life. A word more,—only one,—a movement, and you would know the meaning and be gathered into the heart of it; but always there is something

fine, impalpable, between, and you catch but a breath of the whisper.

Very wonderful is the jungle! In the moonlight of a small clearing I saw the huge bulk of three wild elephants feeding. They vanished like wraiths into the depths. The fireflies were hosting in the air like flitting diamonds. Stealthy life and movement were about me: the jungle, wideawake and aware, moving on its own occasions.

A few days later I was at Anaradhapura. Once a million people dwelt in the teeming city. Now it is a village, but inexpressibly holy because it contains in its own temple the sacred Bodhi Tree which is an offshoot of that very Tree beneath which the Lord Buddha received the Perfect Wisdom. Ceylon desired this treasure, and they tried to break a branch from the Tree, but dared not, for it resisted the sacrilege. But the Princess Sanghamitta, in great awe and with trembling hand, drew a line of vermilion about the bough, and at that line it separated from the Tree, and the Princess planted it in perfumed earth in a golden vase, and so brought it, attended by honors human and superhuman, to Ceylon—to this place, where it still stands. It is believed to be 2230 years old.

With infinite reverence I was given two leaves, collected as they fell; and it is difficult to look on them unmoved if indeed this Tree be directly descended from that other, which sheltered the triumphant conflict with evil.

The city itself is drowned in the jungle. In the green twilight you meet a queen's palace, with reeling pillars and

fallen capitals, beautiful with carved moonstones, for so are called the steps of ascent. Or lost in tangle, a manger fifty feet long for the royal elephants, or a nobly planned bath for the queens, where it is but to close the eyes and dream that dead loveliness floating in the waters once so jealously guarded, now mirroring the wild wood-ways. A little creeper is stronger than all our strength, and our armies are as nothing before the silent legions of the grass.

Later, I stood before the image of that Buddha who is to come—who in the Unchanging awaits his hour: Maitreya, the Buddha of Love. A majestic figure, robed like a king, for he will be royal. In his face, calm as the Sphinx, must the world decipher its hope, if it may. Strangely, in most of his images this Savior who shall be is seated like a man of the West, not like an Asiatic, and many learned in the Faith believe that this Star shall rise in the West. May he come quickly!

#### IV

I set out next day for Mihintale, in a world dewy, virginal, washed with morning gold, the sun shooting bright arrows into the green shade of the trees—a cloud of butterflies lovely as little flower-angels going with me. One splendor, rose-red, velvet-black, alighted with quivering wings on the mouse-gray shoulder of the meek little bull that drew my cart.

The Hill of Mihintale rises abruptly as Sigurya from the forests, and the very air about it is holy, for it was on this great hill that Mahinda, mysteriously transported from India, alighted bewildered as one waking from a dream. Here the King, Tissa, seeing the saint seated beneath a tree, heard a voice he could not gainsay that called his name three times; and so, approaching with his nobles, he received the Teaching of the Blessed One.

The hill is climbed by wonderful carved shallow steps, broken now, but most beautiful with an overgrowth of green. At the sides are beds of the Sensitive Plant, with its frail pink flowers. They faint and fall if touched, and here you would not even breathe roughly upon them, for the Buddhists regard the shrinking creatures as living and hold it sinful to cause such evident suffering.

Descending the gray steps, the shade and sunshine dappling his yellow robe and bared shoulder with noble color, came a priest, on his way to visit the sick of the little village. He stopped and spoke. I told him I had come from visiting the shrines of Burma, and he desired me to give him a description of some matters I had seen there. I did so, and we talked for some time, and it was then mentioned that my food, like his own, necessitated no taking of life. Instantly his whole face softened as he said that was glad news to hear. It was the fulfilling of a high commandment. Would I receive his blessing, and his prayer that the truth might enlighten me in all things? He bestowed both, and, having made his gift, went upon his way with the dignity of perfect serenity. That little circumstance of food (as some would call it) has opened many a closed door to me in Asia.



At the top of the hill is a deep shadowy rock-pool, with a brow of cliff overhanging it; and this is named the Cobra's Bath, for it is believed that in the past there was a cobra who used, with his outspread hood, to shelter the saint, Mahinda, from the torrid sun, and who was also so much a little servant of the Law that none feared and all mourned him when he passed upon his upward way in the chain of existences. Here, above the pool where he loved to lie in the clear cool, they sculptured a great cobra, with three hooded heads, rising, as it were, from the water. It was most sinuously beautiful and looked like the work of a great and ancient people, gathering the very emblem of Fear into the great Peace. On the topmost height was the stupa, or shrine, of Mahinda, encasing its holy relic, and the caves where his priests dwelt and still dwell. I entered one, at the invitation of a Bhikku, an old man with singularly beautiful eyes, set in a face of wistful delicacy. He touched my engraved ring and asked what it might mean. Little enough to such as he, whose minds are winged things and flutter in the blue tranquillities far above the earth!

The caves are many, with a rock-roof so low that one cannot stand upright—a strange, dim life, it would seem, but this Bhikku spoke only of the peace of it, the calm that falls with sunset and that each dawn renews. I could not doubt this—it was written upon his every gesture. He gave me his blessing, and his prayer that I might walk forever in the Way of Peace. With such friends as these the soul is at home. Peace. It is indeed the salutation of Asia, which does not greet you with a desire for health or prosperity as in the West, but only—Peace.

I would willingly tell more of my seekings and findings in Ceylon, for they were many and great. But I pass on to the little drowsy hill-town of Budalla, where the small bungalows nest in their gardens of glorious flowers and vines. I sat in the churchyard, where the quiet graves of English and Sinhalese are sinking peacefully into oblivion. It was Sunday, with a Sabbath calm upon the world. A winding path led up to the open door of the little English church, a sweet breeze swayed the boughs and ruffled the long grass of the graves; the butterflies, small Psyches, fluttered their parable in the air about me. A clear voice from the church repeated the Lord's Prayer, and many young voices followed. It was a service for the Sinhalese children who have been baptized into the Christian Faith. They sang of how they had been brought out of darkness and the shadow of death and their feet set upon the Way of Peace.

Surely it is so. When was that Way closed to any who sought? But because man must follow his own categorical imperative, I repeated to myself, when they were silent, the words of the poet Abdul Fazl, which he wrote at the command of the Emperor Akbar as an inscription for a Temple in Kashmir:—

O God, in every temple I see people that see Thee, and in every language they praise Thee.

If it be a mosque, men murmur the holy prayer, and if it be a Christian church they ring the bell from love to Thee.

Sometimes I frequent the Christian cloister, and sometimes the mosque, but it is Thou whom I seek from temple to temple.

Thine elect have no dealing with heresy or orthodoxy, for neither of these stands behind the screen of thy Truth.

Heresy to the heretic and religion to the orthodox!

But the dust of the rose-petal belongs to the heart of the perfume-seller.

Yes—and an ancient Japanese poet, going yet deeper, says this thing: 'So long as the mind of a man is in accord with the Truth, the Gods will hear him though he do not pray.'

## **THE ROUND-FACED BEAUTY**

### **A STORY OF THE CHINESE COURT**

[Atlantic Monthly, December, 1921]

In the city of Chang-an music filled the palaces, and the festivities of the Emperor were measured by its beat. Night, and the full moon swimming like a gold-fish in the garden

lakes, gave the signal for the Feather Jacket and Rainbow Skirt dances. Morning, with the rising sun, summoned the court again to the feast and wine-cup in the floating gardens.

The Emperor Chung Tsu favored this city before all others. The Yen Tower soaring heavenward, the Drum Towers, the Pearl Pagoda, were the only fit surroundings of his magnificence; and in the Pavilion of Tranquil Learning were held those discussions which enlightened the world and spread the fame of the Jade Emperor far and wide. In all respects he adorned the Dragon Throne—in all but one; for Nature, bestowing so much, withheld one gift, and the Imperial heart, as precious as jade, was also as hard, and he eschewed utterly the company of the Hidden Palace Flowers.

Yet the Inner Chambers were filled with ladies chosen from all parts of the Celestial Empire—ladies of the most exquisite and torturing beauty, moons of loveliness, moving coquettishly on little feet, with all the grace of willow branches in a light breeze. They were sprinkled with perfumes, adorned with jewels, robed in silks woven with gold and embroidered with designs of flowers and birds. Their faces were painted and their eyebrows formed into slender and perfect arches whence the soul of man might well slip to perdition, and a breath of sweet odor followed each wherever she moved. Every one might have been the Empress of some lesser kingdom; but though rumors reached the Son of Heaven from time to time of their charms,—especially when some new blossom was added to the Imperial bouquet,—he had dismissed them from his august thoughts, and they languished in a neglect so complete that the Great Cold Palaces of the Moon were not more empty

than their hearts. They remained under the supervision of the Princess of Han, August Aunt of the Emperor, knowing that their Lord considered the company of sleeve-dogs and macaws more pleasant than their own. Nor had he as yet chosen an Empress, and it was evident that without some miracle, such as the intervention of the Municipal God, no heir to the throne could be hoped for.

Yet the Emperor one day remembered his imprisoned beauties, and it crossed the Imperial thoughts that even these inferior creatures might afford such interest as may be found in the gambols of trained fleas or other insects of no natural attainments.

Accordingly, he commanded that the subject last discussed in his presence should be transferred to the Inner Chambers, and it was his Order that the ladies should also discuss it, and their opinions be engraved on ivory, bound together with red silk and tassels, and thus presented at the Dragon feet. The subject chosen was the following:—

*Describe the Qualities of the  
Ideal Man*

Now when this command was laid before the August Aunt, the guardian of the Inner Chambers, she was much perturbed in mind, for such a thing was unheard of in all the annals of the Empire. Recovering herself, she ventured to say that the discussion of such a question might raise very disquieting thoughts in the minds of the ladies, who could

not be supposed to have any opinions at all on such a subject. Nor was it desirable that they should have. To every woman her husband and no other is and must be the Ideal Man. So it was always in the past; so it must ever be. There are certain things which it is dangerous to question or discuss, and how can ladies who have never spoken with any other man than a parent or a brother judge such matters?

'How, indeed,' asked this lady of exalted merit, 'can the bat form an idea of the sunlight, or the carp of the motion of wings? If his Celestial Majesty had commanded a discussion on the Superior Woman and the virtues which should adorn her, some sentiments not wholly unworthy might have been offered. But this is a calamity. They come unexpectedly, springing up like mushrooms, and this one is probably due to the lack of virtue of the inelegant and unintellectual person who is now speaking.'

This she uttered in the presence of the principal beauties of the Inner Chambers. They sat or reclined about her in attitudes of perfect loveliness. Two, embroidering silver pheasants, paused with their needles suspended above the stretched silk, to hear the August Aunt. One, threading beads of jewel jade, permitted them to slip from the string and so distended the rose of her mouth in surprise that the small pearl-shells were visible within. The Lady Tortoise, caressing a scarlet and azure macaw, in her agitation so twitched the feathers that the bird, shrieking, bit her finger. The Lady Golden Bells blushed deeply at the thought of what was required of them; and the little Lady Summer Dress, youngest of all the assembled beauties, was so alarmed at the

prospect that she began to sob aloud, until she met the eye of the August Aunt and abruptly ceased.

'It is not, however, to be supposed,' said the August Aunt, opening her snuff-bottle of painted crystal, 'that the minds of our deplorable and unattractive sex are wholly incapable of forming opinions. But speech is a grave matter for women, naturally slow-witted and feeble-minded as they are. This unenlightened person recalls the Odes as saying:—

'A flaw in a piece of white jade  
May be ground away,  
But when a woman has spoken foolishly  
Nothing can be done—

a consideration which should make every lady here and throughout the world think anxiously before speech.'

So anxiously did the assembled beauties think, that all remained mute as fish in a pool, and the August Aunt continued:—

'Let Ts[u-breve]-ss[u-breve] be summoned. It is my intention to suggest to the Dragon Emperor that the virtues of women be the subject of our discourse, and I will myself open and conclude the discussion.'

Ts[u-breve]-ss[u-breve] was not long in kowtowing before the August Aunt, who dispatched her message with the proper ceremonial due to its Imperial destination; and meanwhile, in much agitation, the beauties could but twitter

and whisper in each other's ears, and await the response like condemned prisoners who yet hope for a reprieve.

Scarce an hour had dripped away on the water-clock when an Imperial Missive bound with yellow silk arrived, and the August Aunt, rising, kotowed nine times before she received it in her jeweled hand with its delicate and lengthy nails ensheathed in pure gold set with gems of the first water. She then read it aloud, the ladies prostrating themselves.

*To the Princess of Han, the August Aunt, the Lady of the Nine Superior Virtues:—*

Having deeply reflected on the wisdom submitted, We thus reply. Women should not be the judges of their own virtues, since these exist only in relation to men. Let Our Command therefore be executed, and tablets presented before us seven days hence, with the name of each lady appended to her tablet.

It was indeed pitiable to see the anxiety of the ladies! A sacrifice to Kwan-Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, of a jewel from each, with intercession for aid, was proposed by the Lustrous Lady; but the majority shook their heads sadly. The August Aunt, tossing her head, declared that, as the Son of Heaven had made no comment on her proposal of opening and closing the discussion, she should take no part other than safeguarding the interests of propriety. This much increased



the alarm, and, kneeling at her feet, the swan-like beauties, Deep Snow and Winter Moon, implored her aid and compassion. But, rising indignantly, the August Aunt sought her own apartments, and for the first time the inmates of the Pepper Chamber saw with regret the golden dragons embroidered on her back.

It was then that the Round-Faced Beauty ventured a remark. This maiden, having been born in the far-off province of Ssuch-uan, was considered a rustic by the distinguished elegance of the Palace and, therefore, had never spoken unless decorum required. Still, even her detractors were compelled to admit the charms that had gained her her name. Her face had the flawless outline of the pearl, and like the blossom of the plum was the purity of her complexion, upon which the darkness of her eyebrows resembled two silk-moths alighted to flutter above the brilliance of her eyes—eyes which even the August Aunt had commended after a banquet of unsurpassed variety. Her hair had been compared to the crow's plumage; her waist was like a roll of silk, and her discretion in habiting herself was such that even the Lustrous Lady and the Lady Tortoise drew instruction from the splendors of her robes. It created, however, a general astonishment when she spoke.

'Paragons of beauty, what is this dull and opaque-witted person that she should speak?'

'What, indeed!' said the Celestial Sister. 'This entirely undistinguished person cannot even imagine!'

A distressing pause followed, during which many whispered anxiously. The Lustrous Lady broke it.

'It is true that the highly ornamental Round-Faced Beauty is but lately come, yet even the intelligent Ant may assist the Dragon; and in the presence of alarm, what is decorum? With a tiger behind one, who can recall the Book of Rites and act with befitting elegance?'

'The high-born will at all times remember the Rites!' retorted the Celestial Sister. 'Have we not heard the August Aunt observe: "Those who understand do not speak. Those who speak do not understand"?''

The Round-Faced Beauty collected her courage.

'Doubtless this is wisdom; yet if the wise do not speak, who should instruct us? The August Aunt herself would be silent.'

All were confounded by this dilemma, and the little Lady Summer-Dress, still weeping, entreated that the Round-Faced Beauty might be heard. The Heavenly Blossoms then prepared to listen and assumed attitudes of attention, which so disconcerted the Round-Faced Beauty that she blushed like a spring tulip in speaking.

'Beautiful ladies, our Lord, who is unknown to us all, has issued an august command. It cannot be disputed, for the whisper of disobedience is heard as thunder in the Imperial Presence. Should we not aid each other? If any lady has formed a dream in her soul of the Ideal Man, might not such

a picture aid us all? Let us not be "say-nothing-do-nothing," but act!

They hung their heads and smiled, but none would allow that she had formed such an image. The little Lady Tortoise, laughing behind her fan of sandalwood, said roguishly: 'The Ideal Man should be handsome, liberal in giving, and assuredly he should appreciate the beauty of his wives. But this we cannot say to the Divine Emperor.'

A sigh rustled through the Pepper Chamber. The Celestial Sister looked angrily at the speaker. 'This is the talk of children,' she said. 'Does no one remember Kung-fu-tse's [Confucius] description of the Superior Man?'

Unfortunately none did—not even the Celestial Sister herself.

'Is it not probable,' asked the Round-Faced Beauty, 'that the Divine Emperor remembers it himself and wishes—'

But the Celestial Sister, yawning audibly, summoned the attendants to bring rose-leaves in honey, and would hear no more.

The Round-Faced Beauty therefore wandered forth among the mossy rocks and drooping willows of the Imperial Garden, deeply considering the matter. She ascended the bow-curved bridge of marble which crossed the Pool of Clear Weather, and from the top idly observed the reflection of her rose-and-gold coat in the water while, with her taper fingers, she crumbled cake for the fortunate gold-fish that

dwelt in it. And, so doing, she remarked one fish, four-tailed among the six-tailed, and in no way distinguished by elegance, which secured by far the largest share of the crumbs dropped into the pool. Bending lower, she observed this singular fish and its methods.

The others crowded about the spot where the crumbs fell, all herded together. In their eagerness and stupidity they remained like a cloud of gold in one spot, slowly waving their tails. But this fish, concealing itself behind a miniature rock, waited, looking upward, until the crumbs were falling, and then, rushing forth with the speed of an arrow, scattered the stupid mass of fish, and bore off the crumbs to its shelter, where it instantly devoured them.

'This is notable,' said the Round-Faced Beauty. 'Observation enlightens the mind. To be apart—to be distinguished—secures notice!' And she plunged into thought again, wandering, herself a flower, among the gorgeous tree pæonias.

On the following day the August Aunt commanded that a writer among the palace attendants should, with brush and ink, be summoned to transcribe the wisdom of the ladies. She requested that each would give three days to thought, relating the following anecdote. 'There was a man who, taking a piece of ivory, carved it into a mulberry leaf, spending three years on the task. When finished it could not be told from the original, and was a gift suitable for the Brother of the Sun and Moon. Do likewise!'

'But yet, O Augustness!' said the Celestial Sister, 'if the Lord of Heaven took as long with each leaf, there would be few leaves on the trees, and if—'

The August Aunt immediately commanded silence and retired. On the third day she seated herself in her chair of carved ebony, while the attendant placed himself by her feet and prepared to record her words.

'This insignificant person has decided,' began her Augustness, looking round and unscrewing the amber top of her snuff-bottle, 'to take an unintelligent part in these proceedings. An example should be set. Attendant, write!'

She then dictated as follows: 'The Ideal Man is he who now decorates the Imperial Throne, or he who in all humility ventures to resemble the incomparable Emperor. Though he may not hope to attain, his endeavor is his merit. No further description is needed.' With complacency she inhaled the perfumed snuff, as the writer appended the elegant characters of her Imperial name.

If it be permissible to say that the faces of the beauties lengthened visibly, it should now be said. For it had been the intention of every lady to make an allusion to the Celestial Emperor and depict him as the Ideal Man. Nor had they expected that the August Aunt would take any part in the matter.

'Oh, but it was the intention of this commonplace and undignified person to say this very thing!' cried the Lustrous Lady, with tears in the jewels of her eyes. 'I thought no other

high-minded and distinguished lady would for a moment think of it!

'And it was my intention also!' fluttered the little Lady Tortoise, wringing her hands! 'What now shall this most unlucky and unendurable person do? For three nights has sleep forsaken my unattractive eyelids, and, tossing and turning on a couch deprived of all comfort, I could only repeat, "The Ideal Man is the Divine Dragon Emperor!"'

'May one of entirely contemptible attainments make a suggestion in this assemblage of scintillating wit and beauty?' inquired the Celestial Sister. 'My superficial opinion is that it would be well to prepare a single paper to which all names should be appended, stating that His Majesty in his Dragon Divinity comprises all ideals in his sacred Person.'

'Let those words be recorded,' said the August Aunt. 'What else should any lady of discretion and propriety say? In this Palace of Virtuous Peace, where all is consecrated to the Son of Heaven, though he deigns not to enter it, what other thought dare be breathed? Has any lady ventured to step outside such a limit? If so, let her declare herself!'

All shook their heads, and the August Aunt proceeded: 'Let the writer record this as the opinion of every lady of the Imperial Household, and let each name be separately appended.'

Had any desired to object, none dared to confront the August Aunt; but apparently no beauty so desired, for after

three nights' sleepless meditation, no other thought than this had occurred to any.

Accordingly, the writer moved from lady to lady and, under the supervision of the August Aunt, transcribed the following: 'The Ideal Man is the earthly likeness of the Divine Emperor. How should it be otherwise?' And under this sentence wrote the name of each lovely one in succession. The papers were then placed in the hanging sleeves of the August Aunt for safety.

By the decree of Fate, the father of the Round-Faced Beauty had, before he became an ancestral spirit, been a scholar of distinction, having graduated at the age of seventy-two with a composition commended by the Grand Examiner. Having no gold and silver to give his daughter, he had formed her mind, and had presented her with the sole jewel of his family—a pearl as large as a bean. Such was her sole dower, but the accomplished Ant may excel the indolent Prince.

Yet, before the thought in her mind, she hesitated and trembled, recalling the lesson of the gold-fish; and it was with anxiety that paled her roseate lips that, on a certain day, she had sought the Willow Bridge Pavilion. There had awaited her a palace attendant skilled with the brush, and there in secrecy and dire affright, hearing the footstep of the August Aunt in every rustle of leafage, and her voice in the call of every crow, did the Round-Faced Beauty dictate the following composition:—

'Though the sky rain pearls, it cannot equal the beneficence of the Son of Heaven. Though the sky rain jade, it cannot equal his magnificence. He has commanded his slave to describe the qualities of the Ideal Man. How should I, a mere woman, do this? I, who have not seen the Divine Emperor, how should I know what is virtue? I, who have not seen the glory of his countenance, how should I know what is beauty? Report speaks of his excellences, but I who live in the dark know not. But to the Ideal Woman, the very vices of her husband are virtues. Should he exalt another, this is a mark of his superior taste. Should he dismiss his slave, this is justice. To the Ideal Woman there is but one Ideal Man—and that is her lord. From the day she crosses his threshold, to the day when they clothe her in the garments of Immortality, this is her sole opinion. Yet would that she might receive instruction of what only are beauty and virtue in his adorable presence.'

This being written, she presented her one pearl to the attendant and fled, not looking behind her, as quickly as her delicate feet would permit. On the seventh day the compositions, engraved on ivory and bound with red silk and tassels, were presented to the Emperor, and for seven days more he forgot their existence. On the eighth the High Chamberlain ventured to recall them to the Imperial memory, and the Emperor glancing slightly at one after another, threw them aside, yawning as he did so. Finally, one arrested his eyes, and reading it more than once, he laid it before him and meditated. An hour passed in this way while the forgotten Lord Chamberlain continued to kneel. The Son of Heaven, then raising his head, pronounced these words: 'In the society of the Ideal Woman, she to whom jealousy is unknown,



tranquillity might possibly be obtained. Let prayer be made before the Ancestors with the customary offerings, for this is a matter deserving attention.'

A few days passed, and an Imperial attendant, escorted by two mandarins of the peacock-feather and crystal-button rank, desired an audience of the August Aunt, and, speaking before the curtain, informed her that his Imperial Majesty would pay a visit that evening to the Hall of Tranquil Longevity. Such, was her agitation at this honor that she immediately swooned; but, reviving, summoned all the attendants and gave orders for a banquet and musicians.

Lanterns painted with pheasants and exquisite landscapes were hung on all the pavilions. Tapestries of rose, decorated with the Five-Clawed Dragons, adorned the chambers; and upon the High Seat was placed a robe of yellow satin embroidered with pearls. All was hurry and excitement. The Blossoms of the Palace were so exquisitely decked that one grain more of powder would have made them too lily-like, and one touch more of rouge, too rose-cheeked. It was indeed perfection, and, like lotuses upon a lake, or Asian birds, gorgeous of plumage, they stood ranged in the outer chamber while the Celestial Emperor took his seat.

The Round-Faced Beauty wore no jewels, having bartered her pearl for her opportunity; but her long coat of jade-green, embroidered with golden willows, and her trousers of palest rose left nothing to be desired. In her hair two golden pæonias were fastened with pins of kingfisher work. The Son of Heaven was seated upon the throne as the ladies approached, marshaled by the August Aunt. He was attired in

the Yellow Robe with the Flying Dragons, and upon the Imperial Head was the Cap, ornamented with one hundred and forty-four priceless gems. From it hung the twelve pendants of strings of pearls, partly concealing the august eyes of the Jade Emperor. No greater splendor can strike awe into the soul of man.

At his command the August Aunt took her seat upon a lesser chair at the Celestial Feet. Her mien was majestic, and struck awe into the assembled beauties, whose names she spoke aloud as each approached and prostrated herself. She then pronounced these words: 'Beautiful ones, the Emperor, having considered the opinions submitted by you on the subject of the Superior Man, is pleased to express his august commendation. Dismiss, therefore, anxiety from your minds, and prepare to assist at the humble concert of music we have prepared for his Divine pleasure.'

Slightly raising himself in his chair, the Son of Heaven looked down upon that Garden of Beauty, holding in his hand an ivory tablet bound with red silk.

'Lovely ladies,' he began, in a voice that assuaged fear, 'who among you was it that laid before our feet a composition beginning thus—"Though the sky rain pearls"?''

The August Aunt immediately rose. 'Imperial Majesty, none! These eyes supervised every composition. No impropriety was permitted.'

The Son of Heaven resumed: 'Let that Lady stand forth.'

The words were few, but sufficient. Trembling in every limb, the Round-Faced Beauty separated herself from her companions and prostrated herself, amid the breathless amazement of the Blossoms of the Palace. He looked down upon her as she knelt, pale as a lady carved in ivory, but lovely as the lotus of Chang-su. He turned to the August Aunt. 'Princess of Han, my Imperial Aunt, I would speak with this lady alone.'

Decorum itself and the custom of Palaces could not conceal the indignation of the August Aunt as she rose and retired, driving the ladies before her as a shepherd drives his sheep.

The Hall of Tranquil Longevity being now empty, the Jade Emperor extended his hand and beckoned the Round-Faced Beauty to approach. This she did, hanging her head like a flower surcharged with dew and swaying gracefully as a wind-bell, and knelt on the lowest step of the Seat of State.

'Loveliest One,' said the Emperor, 'I have read your composition. I would know the truth. Did any aid you as you spoke it? Was it the thought of your own heart?'

'None aided, Divine,' said she, almost fainting with fear. 'It was indeed the thought of this illiterate slave, consumed with an unwarranted but uncontrollable passion.'

'And have you in truth desired to see your Lord?'

'As a prisoner in a dungeon desires the light, so was it with this low person.'

'And having seen?'

'Augustness, the dull eyes of this slave are blinded with beauty.'

She laid her head before his feet.

'Yet you have depicted, not the ideal Man, but the Ideal Woman. This was not the Celestial command. How was this?'

'Because, O versatile and auspicious Emperor, the blind cannot behold the sunlight, and it is only the Ideal Woman who is worthy to comprehend and worship the Ideal Man. For this alone is she created.'

A smile began to illumine the Imperial Countenance. 'And how, O Round-Faced Beauty, did you evade the vigilance of the August Aunt?'

She hung her head lower, speaking almost in a whisper. 'With her one pearl did this person buy the secrecy of the writer; and when the August Aunt slept, did I conceal the paper in her sleeve with the rest, and her own Imperial hand gave it to the engraver of ivory.'

She veiled her face with two jade-white hands that trembled excessively. On hearing this statement the Celestial Emperor broke at once into a very great laughter, and he laughed loud and long as a tiller of wheat. The Round-Faced Beauty heard it demurely until, catching the Imperial eye, decorum was forgotten and she too laughed uncontrollably. So they continued, and finally the Emperor leaned back,

drying the tears in his eyes with his august sleeve, and the lady, resuming her gravity, hid her face in her hands, yet regarded him through her fingers.

When the August Aunt returned at the end of an hour with the ladies, surrounded by the attendants with their instruments of music, the Round-Faced Beauty was seated in the chair that she herself had occupied, and on the whiteness of her brow was hung the chain of pearls, which had formed the frontal of the Cap of the Emperor.

It is recorded that, advancing from honor to honor, the Round-Faced Beauty was eventually chosen Empress and became the mother of the Imperial Prince. The celestial purity of her mind and the absence of all flaws of jealousy and anger warranted this distinction. But it is also recorded that, after her elevation, no other lady was ever exalted in the Imperial favor or received the slightest notice from the Emperor. For the Empress, now well acquainted with the Ideal Man, judged it better that his experiences of the Ideal Woman should be drawn from herself alone. And as she decreed, so it was done. Doubtless Her Majesty did well.

It is known that the Emperor departed to the Ancestral Spirits at an early age, seeking, as the August Aunt observed, that repose which on earth could never more be his. But no one has asserted that *this* lady's disposition was free from the ordinary blemishes of humanity.

As for the Celestial Empress (who survives in history as one of the most astute rulers who ever adorned the Dragon

Throne), she continued to rule her son and the Empire, surrounded by the respectful admiration of all.

## THE WONDERFUL PILGRIMAGE TO AMARNATH

[The Atlantic Monthly, December 1920]

### I

In all India there is nothing more wonderful than the pilgrimages of millions, which set like tidal waves at certain seasons to certain sacrosanct places—the throngs that flock to holy Benares, to Hardwar, and to that meeting of the waters at Prayag, where the lustral rites purify soul and body, and the pilgrims return shriven and glad. But of all the pilgrimages in India the most touching, the most marvelous, is that to Amarnath, nearly twelve thousand feet up in the Himalayas. The cruel difficulties to be surmounted, the august heights to be climbed (for the way is much higher than the height at which the Cave stands), the wild and terrible beauty of the journey, and the glorious close when the Cave is reached, make this pilgrimage the experience of a lifetime even for a European. What must it not be for a true believer? Yet, in the deepest sense, I should advise none to make it who is not a true believer—who cannot sympathize

to the uttermost with the wave of faith and devotion that sends these poor pilgrims climbing on torn and wearied feet to the great Himalayan heights, where they not infrequently lay down their lives before reaching the silver pinnacles that hold their hearts' desire.

I have myself made the pilgrimage, and it was one of the deepest experiences of my life; while, as for the beauty and wonder of the journey, all words break down under the effort to express them.

But first a few words about the God who is the object of devotion. The Cave is sacred to Siva—the Third Person of the Hindu Trinity; that Destroyer who, in his other aspects, is the Creator and Preserver. He is the God especially of the Himalayas—the Blue-Throated God, from the blue mists of the mountains that veil him. The Crescent in his hair is the young moon, resting on the peak that is neighbor to the stars. The Ganges wanders in the matted forests of his hair before the maddening torrents fling their riches to the Indian plains, even as the snow-rivers wander in the mountain pine forests. He is also Nataraja—Lord of the Cosmic Dance; and one of the strangest and deepest-wrought parables in the world is that famous image where, in a wild ecstasy, arms flung out, head flung back in a passion of motion, he dances the Tandava, the whole rapt figure signifying the cosmic activities, Creation, Preservation, and Destruction. 'For,' says a Tamil text, 'our Lord is a Dancer, who, like the heat latent in firewood, diffuses his power in mind and matter, and makes them dance in their turn.'

The strange affinity of this conception with the discoveries of science relating to the eternal dance of atom and electron gives it the deepest interest. I would choose this aspect of the God as that which should fill the mind of the Amarnath pilgrim. Let him see the Great God Mahadeo (Magnus Deus), with the drum in one hand which symbolizes creative sound—the world built, as it were, to rhythm and music. Another hand is upraised bidding the worshiper, 'Fear not!' A third hand points to his foot, the refuge where the soul may cling. The right foot rests lightly on a demon—to his strength, what is it? A nothing, the mere illusion of reality! In his hair, crowned with the crescent moon, sits the Ganges, a nymph entangled in its forest. This is the aspect of Mahadeo which I carried in my own mind as I made the pilgrimage, for thus is embodied a very high mysticism, common to all the faiths.

Siva is also Lord of the Daughter of the Himalayas—Uma, Parvati, Gauri, Girija, to give only a few of the beautiful names of the Mystic Mother of India. As Uma, she is especially Himalayan. In the freezing Himalayan lake she did her age-long penance when she would win the heart of the Great Ascetic—her lovely body floating like a lotus upon its icy deeps. She is the lover of mountains, the Dweller in the Windhya Hills; and so dear are she and her Lord the one to the other, that they are represented often as a single image, of which the one half is man, the other woman; the dual nature is perfect unity in the Divine.

The Cave at Amarnath is sacred because a spring, eternally frozen, has in its rush taken the shape of the holy Lingam, which is the symbol of reproduction and therefore



of Life. This is also the Pillar of the Universe—that Pillar which the Gods sought to measure, the one flying upward, the other downward, for æons, seeking the beginning and the end, and finding none. Yet again, it is the Tree of Life, which has its roots in Eternity, and branches through the mythology of many peoples. And if there are degenerated forms of this worship, surely the same may be said of many others.

## II

The pilgrimage can be made only in July and August. Before and after, a barrier of snow and ice closes the way, and makes the Cave a desolation.

The start is made from Pahlgam, a tiny village on the banks of the Lidar River in Kashmir, where it leaps from the great glacier of Kolahoi to join the Jhelum River in the Happy Valley. Pahlgam itself stands at a height of about eight thousand feet.

The day before we started there was a great thunderstorm, the grandest I have ever known. The mountains were so close on each side that they tossed the thunder backwards and forwards to each other, and the shattering and roaring of the echoes was like the battles of the Gods; while the continuous blue glare of the lightning was almost appalling. It was strange to feel only a little web of canvas between ourselves and that elemental strife when the rain followed as if the fountains of the great deep were broken up—cold as snow,

stinging like hail, and so steady that it looked like crystal harpstrings as it fell. Yet next day we waked to a silver rain-washed world, sparkling with prisms of rain and dew; fresh snow on the mountains, and delicate webs of soft blue mist caught like smoke in the pines.

So we set forth from Pahlgam, with our cavalcade of rough hill ponies carrying the tents and provisions and all our substance, and began our march by climbing up the river that flows from those eternal heights into the Pahlgam valley. Much of the way can be ridden if one rides very slowly and carefully; for these wonderful animals are sure-footed as cats; but the track is often terrifying—broken boulders and the like. If the ponies were not marvels, it could not be done; and if one were not a safe rider, one certainly could not stick on. The pony gives a strong hoist of his fore-legs, and you are up one rock and hanging on by his withers; then a strong hoist of the hind-legs and you are nearly over his neck; and this goes on for hours; and when it is beyond the pony, you climb on your feet, and ford the torrents as best you may.

Up and up the steep banks of the river we climbed, among the pines and mighty tumbled boulders. Up by the cliffs, where the path hangs and trembles over the water roaring beneath. On the opposite side the mountains soared above the birches and pines, and the torrents hung down them like mist, falling, falling from crag to crag, and shattering like spray-dust as they fell. Once a great eagle soared above us, balancing on the wind, and then floated away without a single motion of his wings—wonderful to see; and the spread of his wings was greater than the height of the tallest man.

We had long passed the last few huts, and the track wound steadily higher, when, suddenly growing on us, I heard a deep musical roar like the underlying bass of an orchestra—the full-chorded voice of many waters. And as we turned a corner where the trail hung like a line round the cliff, behold, a mighty gorge of pines and uplifted hills, and the river pouring down in a tremendous waterfall, boiling and foaming white as it fell into the raging pit beneath.

What a sight! We stopped and looked, every sense steeped in the wonder of it. For the air was cool with the coolness that comes like breath off a river; our ears were full of the soft thunder; the smell of pines was like the taste of a young world in one's mouth; yet it was all phantasmal, in a way, as if it could not be real. I watched the lovely phantom, for it hung like a thing unreal between heaven and earth, until it grew dreamlike to me and dyed my brain with sound and color, and it was hard indeed to pass on.

That night we camped in a mountain valley some two thousand feet above Pahlgam. It was like climbing from story to story in a House of Wonder. The river was rushing by our tents when they were pitched, pale green and curling back upon itself, as if it were loath to leave these pure heights, and the mountains stood about us like a prison, almost as if we might go no farther. And when I stood outside my tent just before turning in, a tremulous star was poised on one of the peaks, like the topmost light on a Christmas tree, and the Great Bear lay across the sky glittering frostily in the blue-blackness.

I had a narrow escape that day; for, as I was leading the cavalcade, I met a wild hill-rider in the trail between two great rocks, and his unbroken pony kicked out at me savagely with his fore-leg and caught me above the ankle. Luckily, they do not shoe their horses here; but it was pretty bad for a bit, and I was glad of the night's rest.

### III

Next day we started and rounded out of the tiny valley; and lo! on the other side another river, flowing apparently out of a great arch in the mountainside. Out it poured, rejoicing to be free; and when I looked, it was flowing, not from the mountain but from a snow-bridge. Mighty falls of snow had piled up at the foot of the mountain, as they slipped from its steeps; and then the snow, melting above, had come down as a torrent and eaten its way through the wide arch of this cave. Often one must cross a river on these snow-bridges, and at a certain stage of melting they are most dangerous; for, if the snow should give, there may be frightful depths beneath.

Here first I noticed how beautiful were the flowers of the heights. The men gathered and brought me tremulous white and blue columbines, and wild wallflowers, orange-colored and so deeply scented that I could close my eyes and call up a cottage garden, and the bee-hives standing in sedate rows under the thatched eaves. And there was a glorious thistle, new to me, as tall as a man, and with blue-green silvered

spears and a head of spiky rays. Bushes, also, like great laurels, but loaded with rosy berries that the Kashmiris love.

We turned then round a huge fallen rock, green and moist with hanging ferns, and shining with the spray of the river, and before us was a mountain, and an incredible little trail winding up it, and that was our way. I looked and doubted. It is called the Pisu, or Flea Ascent, on the ground that it takes a flea's activity to negotiate it. Of course, it was beyond the ponies, except here and there, on what I called breathers, and so we dismounted. The men advised us to clutch the ponies' tails, and but for that help it would have been difficult to manage. My heart was pumping in my throat, and I could feel the little pulses beating in my eyes, before I had gone far, and every few minutes we had to stop; for even the guides were speechless from the climb, and I could see the ponies' hearts beating hard and fast under the smooth coats.

But still we held on, and now beside us were blooming the flower-gardens of the brief and brilliant Himalayan summer—beds of delicate purple anemones, gorgeous golden ranunculus holding its gold shields to the sun, orange poppies, masses of forget-me-nots of a deep, glowing blue—a *burning* blue, not like the fair azure of the Western flower, but like the royal blue of the Virgin's robe in a Flemish missal. And above these swayed the bells of the columbines on their slender stems, ranging from purest white, through a faint, misty blue, to a deep, glooming purple. We could hardly go on for the joy of the flowers. It was a marvel to see all these lovely things growing wild and uncared for, flinging their sweetness on the pure air, and clothing the ways with beauty. And at each turn fresh snow-peaks emerged against

the infinite blue of the sky—some with frail wisps of white cloud caught in the spires, and some bold and clear as giants ranged for battle.

And so we climbed up and reached another story, and lay down to rest and breathe before we went farther up into wonderland.

The top was a grassy 'marg,' or meadow, cloven down to the heart of the earth by a fierce river. Around it was a vast amphitheatre of wild crags and peaks; and beneath these, but ever upward, lay our trail. But the meadow was like that field in Sicily where Persephone was gathering flowers when she was snatched away by Dis to reign in the Underworld. I remembered Leighton's picture of her, floating up from the dead dark, pale like a withered flower, and stretching her hands to the blossoms of earth once more. I never saw such flowers: they could scarcely be seen elsewhere.

The snow had slipped off the meadow,—was rushing away in the thundering river far below,—and the flowers were crowding each other, rejoicing in the brief gladness of summer before they should be shrouded again under the chilly whiteness. But their color took revenge on it now. They glowed, they sang and shouted for joy—such was the vibration of their radiance! I have never dreamed of such a thing before.

And then came our next bad climb, up the bed of a ragged mountain torrent and across it, with the water lashing at us like a whip. I do not know how the ponies did it. They were clutched and dragged by the ears and tails, and a man seized

me by the arms and hauled me up and round the face of a precipice, where to miss one step on the loose stones would have been to plunge into depths I preferred not to look at. Then another ascent like the Flea, but shorter, and we were a story higher, in another wild marg, all frosted silver with edelweiss, and glorious with the flowers of another zone—flowers that cling to the bare and lichened rock and ask no foothold of earth.

That was a wild way. We climbed and climbed steadfastly, sometimes riding, sometimes walking, and round us were rocks clothed with rose-red saxifrage, shaded into pink, and myriads of snowy stars, each with a star of ruby in its heart. Clouds still of the wonderful forget-me-not climbed with us. Such rock gardens! No earthly hand could plant those glowing masses and set them against the warm russets and golds of the lower crags, lifted up into this mighty sky-world. The tenderness of the soft form and radiant color of these little flowers in the cruel grasp of the rocks, yet softening them into grace with the short summer of their lives, is exquisitely touching. It has the pathos of all fragility and brief beauty.

Later we climbed a great horn of rock, and rounded a slender trail, and before us was another camping-place—the Shisha-Nag Lake among the peaks. We saw its green river first, bursting through a rocky gateway, and then, far below, the lake itself,—

Green as a clouded chrysoprase  
And lonely as a dream of God,—

reflecting the snowy pinnacles above it. The splintered peaks stand about it. Until July it is polished ice, and out of one side opens a solemn ante-chapel blocked with snow. The lake itself is swept clear and empty. The moon climbs the peaks and looks down, and the constellations swing above it. A terrible, lonely place, peopled only by the shadows. It was awful to think of the poms of sunrise, noon, and sunset passing over it, and leaving it to the night and dream which are its only true companions. It should never be day there—always black, immovable night, crouching among the snows and staring down with all her starlight eyes into that polished icy mirror.

We camped above it, and it was cold—cold! A bitter wind blew through the rocks—a wind shrilling in a waste land. Now and then it shifted a little and brought the hoarse roar of some distant torrent or the crash of an avalanche. And then, for the first time, I heard the cry of the marmot—a piercing note which intensifies the desolation. We saw them too, sitting by their burrows; and then they shrieked and dived and were gone.

We made a little stir of life for a while—the men pitching our tents and running here and there to gather stunted juniper bushes for fuel, and get water from an icy stream that rippled by. But I knew we were only interlopers. We would be gone next day, and the cold silence would settle down on our blackened camp-fires.

In the piercing cold that cut like a knife I went out at night, to see the lake, a solemn stillness under the moon. I cannot express the awe of the solitudes. As long as I could bear the



cold, I intruded my small humanity; and then one could but huddle into the camp-bed and try to shut out the immensities, and sleep our little human sleep, with the camp-fires flickering through the curtains, and the freezing stars above.

Next day we had to climb a very great story higher. Up and up the track went steadily, with a sheer fall at one side and a towering wall on the other. We forded a river where my feet swung into it as the pony, held by two men, plunged through. It is giddy, dazzling work to ford these swift rivers. The pony seems to be stationary; only the glitter of the river sweeps by, and the great stones trip the pony. You think you are gone, and then somehow and suddenly you are at the other side.

#### IV

And here a strange thing happened. When the morning came, we found that a *sadhu*—a wandering pilgrim—had reached the same height on his way to the Cave. He was resting by the way, very wearied, and shuddering with the cold. So I ventured to speak to him and welcome him to our fire and to such food (rice) as he could accept from some of our men; and there, when we stopped for the midday meal, he sat among us like a strange bird dropped from alien skies. Sometimes these men are repulsive enough, but this one—I could have thought it was Kabir himself! Scrupulously clean, though as poor as human being could be. He would have come up from the burning plains with his poor breast bare to

the scarring wind, but that some charitable native had given him a little cotton coat. A turban, a loin-cloth looped between the legs, leaving them naked, grass sandals on feet coarse with traveling, and a string of roughly carved wooden beads, were all his possessions, except the little wallet that carried his food—rice and a kind of lentil. I thought of Epictetus, the saint of ancient Rome, and his one tattered cloak.

This was a man of about fifty-five, tall, thin, with a sensitive face, yet with something soldierly about him; dignified and quiet, with fine hawk-like features and strained bright eyes in hollow caves behind the gaunt cheek-bones. A beautiful face in both line and expression; a true mystic, if ever I saw one!

He told me he had walked all the way from Bengal (look at the map and see what that means!), and that the poor people were very kind and gave him a little rice sometimes, when they had it, and sometimes a tiny coin, asking only his prayers in return. That he needed very little, never touching meat or fish or eggs, which he did not think could be pleasing to the God. For sixteen years he had been thus passing from one sacred place to the other—from the holy Benares to Hardwar, where the Ganges leaves the hills, and farther still, praying—praying to the One. 'There is One God,' he said; and again I thought of Kabir, the supreme mystic, the incarnate Joy, who also wandered through India,

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He has looked upon God, and his eyeballs are clear;  
There was One, there is One, and but One, saith Kabir,

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striving, like this man,

To learn and discern of his brother the clod,  
And his brother the beast, and his brother the God.

I asked if he had any children, and he threw out his hands palm upward with a strange gesture, and said, 'Empty.'

But does it not fill one with thoughts? That man had a soul at rest and a clear purpose. And Christ and Buddha were sadhus; and if it seem waste to spend the sunset of a life in prayer, that may be the grossest of errors. We do not know the rules of the Great Game. How should we judge? So he came with us, striding behind the ponies with his long, steadfast stride, and his company was pleasing to me.

That was a wondrous climb. Had any God ever such an approach to his sanctuary as this great God of the heights? We climbed through a huge amphitheatre of snows, above us the ribbed and crocketed crags of a mighty mountain. It was wild architecture—fearful buttresses, springing arches, and terrible foundations rooted in the earth's heart; and, above, a high clerestory, where the Dawn might walk and look down through the hollow eyeholes of the windows into the deeps of the precipice below.

I suppose the architect was the soft persistence of water, for I could see deep beach-marks on the giant walls. But there it stood, crowned with snow, and we toiled up it, and

landed on the next story, the very water-shed of these high places—a point much higher than the goal of our journey. And that was very marvelous, for we were now in the bare upper world, with only the sky above us, blue and burning on the snow, the very backbone of the range; and, like the Great Divide, the rivers were flowing both ways, according to the inclination of the source.

Before us lay snow which must be crossed, and endless streams and rivers half or wholly buried in snow. That was a difficult time. The ponies were slipping, sliding, stumbling, yet brave, capable, wary as could be. I shall forever respect these mountain ponies. They are sure-footed as goats and brave as lions and nothing else would serve in these high places. In Thibet they have been known to climb to the height of 20,000 feet.

Sometimes the snow was rotten, and we sank in; sometimes it was firm, and then we slipped along; sometimes riding was impossible, and then we picked our way with alpenstocks. But everywhere in the Pass summer had its brief victory, and the rivers were set free to feed the sultry Indian plains.

At last we won through to another high marg, a pocket of grass and blossom in the crags; and there, at Panjitarni, we camped. Of course, we had long been above all trees, but nothing seemed to daunt the flowers. This marg lay basking in the sun, without one fragment of shade except when the sun fell behind the peaks in the evening. But the flowers quivered, glowed, expanded. My feet were set on edelweiss, and the buttercups were pure gold. The stream ran before me

pure as at the day-dawn of the world, and from all this innocent beauty I looked up to the untrodden snow, so near, yet where only the eagle's wings could take her.

Next day was an enforced rest, for everyone, man and beast, was weary; so we basked in the sun, reading and writing, and but for the July snow and the awful peaks, it was hard to believe that one was in the upper chambers of the King's Palace. Yet the air was strange, the water was strange, and it was like a wild fairy-tale to look down from my camp-bed and see the gray edelweiss growing thick beside it, and hear the shriek of the marmot.

Next day we should reach the Cave, and the morning looked down upon us sweet and still—a perfect dawn.

First we crossed the marg, shining with buttercups, and climbed a little way up a hill under the snows, and then dropped down to the river-bed under caves of snow, for the path above was blocked. It was strange to wade along through the swift, icy waters, with the snow-caves arching above us, sending their chill through us in the glowing sunlight. The light in these caves is a wonderful lambent green, for the reflected water is malachite green itself; but I was glad when the passage was over, for it looked as if some impending mass must fall and crush us.

We climbed painfully out of the water, and in front was a track winding straight up the mountain. It was clear that we could not ride up; but we could not delay, so we started as steadily as the ponies. I hardly know how they did it—the men dragged and encouraged them somehow. And still less

do I know how we did it. The strain was great. At one point I felt as if my muscles would crack and my heart burst. We did the worst in tiny stages, resting every few minutes, and always before us was the sadhu winning steadily up the height. It was a weary, long climb, new elevations revealing themselves at every turn of the track. Finally, I fell on the top and lay for a bit, to get my wind, speechless but triumphant.

We rode then along the face of the hill—an awful depth below, and beside us flowers even exceeding those we had seen. Purple asters, great pearl-white Christmas roses weighting their stems, orange-red ranunculus. It was a broken rainbow scattered on the grass. And above this heaven of color was the Amarnath mountain at last—the goal.

Then came a descent when I hardly dared to look below me. That too could not be ridden. In parts the track had slipped away, and it was only about six inches wide. In others we had to climb over the gaps where it had slipped. At the foot we reached a mighty mountain ravine—a great cleft hewn in the mountain, filled, like a bowl, to a fourth of its huge depth with snow, and with streams and rivers rushing beneath. We could hear them roaring hollowly, and see them now and then in bare places. And at the end of the ravine, perhaps two miles off, a great cliff blocked the way, and in it a black hole—and this was the Shrine.

The snow was so hard that we could ride much of the way, but with infinite difficulty, climbing and slipping where the water beneath had rotted the snow. In fact, this glen is one vast snow-bridge, so undermined is it by torrents. The

narrowness of it and the towering mountains on each side make it a tremendous approach to the Shrine.

A snow-bridge broke suddenly under my pony and I thought I was gone; but a man caught me by the arm, and the pony made a wild effort and struggled to the rocks. And so we went on.

The Cave is high up the cliff, and I could see the sadhu's figure striding swiftly on, as if nothing could hold him back.

## V

We dismounted before the Cave, and began the last climb, to the mouth. I got there first, almost done, and lo! a great arch like that of the choir of a cathedral; and inside, a cave eaten by water into the rock, lighted by the vast arch, and shallow in comparison with its height of 150 feet. At the back, frozen springs issuing from the mountain. One of the springs, the culminating point of adoration, is the Lingam as it is seen in the temples of India—a very singular natural frost sculpture. Degraded in the associations of modern ignorance, the mystic and the educated behold in this small pillar of purest ice the symbol of the Pillar of Cosmic Ascent, rooted in rapture of creation, rising to the rapture of the Immeasurable. It represents That within the circumference of which the universe swings to its eternal rhythm—That which, in the words of Dante, moves the sun and the other

stars. It is the stranger here because before it the clear ice has frozen into a flat, shallow altar.

The sadhu knelt before it, tranced in prayer. He had laid some flowers on the altar, and, head thrown back and eyes closed, was far away—in what strange heaven, who shall say? Unconscious of place or person, of himself, of everything but the Deity, he knelt, the perfect symbol of the perfect place. I could see his lips move—Was it the song of Kabir to the Eternal Dancer?—

He is pure and eternal,  
His form is infinite and fathomless.  
He dances in rapture and waves of form arise  
from his dance.  
The body and mind cannot contain themselves  
when touched by his divine joy.  
He holds all within his bliss.

What better praise for such a worshiper before him in whose ecstasy the worlds dance for delight—here where, in the great silence, the Great God broods on things divine?

I laid my flowers on the altar of ice beside his. Who could fail to be moved where such adoration is given after such a pilgrimage? And if some call the Many-Named 'God,' and some 'Siva,' what matter? To all it is the Immanent God. And when I thought of the long winter and the snow falling, falling, in the secret places of the mountains, and shrouding this temple in white, the majesty of the solitudes and of the Divine filled me with awe.



Later we climbed down into the snowy glen beneath the Cave, and ate our meal under a rock, with the marmots shrilling about us, and I found at my feet—what? A tuft of bright golden violets—all the delicate penciling in the heart, but shining gold. I remembered Ulysses in the Garden of Circe, where the *moly* is enshrined in the long thundering roll of Homer's verse:—

For in another land it beareth a golden flower,  
but not in this.

It is a shock of joy and surprise to find so lovely a marvel in the awful heights.

We were too weary to talk. We watched the marmots, red-brown like chestnuts, on the rocks outside their holes, till everything became indistinct and we fell asleep from utter fatigue.

The way back was as toilsome, only with the ascents and descents reversed; and so we returned to Panjitarni.

Next day we rested; for not only was it necessary from fatigue, but some of our men were mountain-sick because of the height. This most trying ailment affects sleep and appetite, and makes the least exertion a painful effort. Some felt it less, some more, and it was startling to see our strong young men panting as their hearts labored almost to bursting. The native cure is to chew a clove of garlic; whether it is a faith cure or no I cannot tell, but it succeeded.

Of the journey down I will say little. Our sadhu journeyed with us and was as kind and helpful on the way as man could be. He stayed at our camp for two days when we reached Pahlgam; for he was all but worn out, and we begged him to rest. It touched me to see the weary body and indomitable soul.

At last the time came for parting. He stood under a pine, with his small bundle under his arm, his stick in his hand, and his thin feet shod for the road in grass sandals. His face was serenely calm and beautiful. I said I hoped God would be good to him in all his wanderings; and he replied that he hoped this too, and he would never forget to speak to Him of us and to ask that we might find the Straight Way home. For himself, he would wander until he died—probably in some village where his name would be unknown but where they would be good to him for the sake of the God.

So he salaamed and went, and we saw him no more. But always I see him, lessening along the great roads of India, with the same set face—set to a goal that he will doubtless attain. Was it not the mighty Akbar who said, 'I never saw any man lost in a straight road'?

Thus I have tried to give some dim picture of the wonders of that wonderful pilgrimage. But who can express the faith, the devotion that sends the poorer pilgrims to those heights? We had all the help that money can give. They do it as that sadhu did it. Silence and deep thought are surely the only fitting comments on such a sight.

[The end of *The Bride of a God and other stories* by  
Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as L. (Lily) Adams Beck)]