THE VERDICT OF THE GODS

CHAPTER XI.—THE VERDICT OF PARAMESHWAR.

Know, O Son of Heaven, that when doubt like a cankerworm eats into the human heart each attempt to remove the doubt serves but to nerve it to new strength in its hold; each attempt to prove that it is false serves but to reveal new reasons to prove that it is true. Thus was it in the heart of Narayan Lal's master. Five times had he wrestled with and driven back the tempter at his ear, trying to believe that Narayan Lal was innocent; and five times the tempter had returned, bringing seven more tempters with him to show that Narayan Lal was guilty.

Thus, in this the last trial, he resolved to put Narayan Lal to such a test as would either cause his certain death, or prove his innocence beyond doubt. If Parameshwar had accepted the original terms of the ordeal, he would fulfil them in their entirety; would snatch back Narayan Lal from the jaws of death, even in the last hour, if he were truly innocent of guilt. Thus he resolved to make the test such that no human aid could succour him. Divine aid could, if it would; that would be the manifestation of Parameshwar. He would accept then that manifestation.

Forsooth long afterward men said that it was tempting fate; that it was demanding a sign from Parameshwar. But as against this, sages had answered that those who had long suffered and had submitted themselves to the Eternal design, had the right to such a sign in the crisis of their life. And this was, indeed, the crisis in the King's own life—not merely that of Narayan Lal.

For if the youth suffered death in this trial the King's own life would be wrecked for ever. He loved his daughter dearly, but not more dearly than he loved honor. The death of the youth would imply the death of the Princess—and his own everlasting despair. Thus indeed was this the crisis in each of three lives, not merely of one. Then when was there a greater right to a sign, if not now?

By royal proclamation all men were bidden to come to the ancient amphitheater that lay outside the city; why, it was not revealed to any; but all guessed that it was to witness Narayan Lal's death—or triumph.

Three hundred cubits north of the city there arose a line of hills, licking the blue sky with a thousand tongues of sal and toon; between the foot of the hills and the city wall lay the amphitheater.

It was a circular structure, a hundred and fifty cubits across. The outer wall was crumbling to dust. Well it might. Five-and-twenty centuries ago it had first witnessed the battles of the Ramayana and Mahabharata fought within it with sword and lance, even to the spilling of blood;* and in these latter days had witnessed scenes that were less heroic but more sensational.

(*Some of the episodes from the great national epics of India were once re-enacted with vivid realism.)

Within the circular wall arose tier upon tier of raised seats of the purest Nerbudda marble, above them seats of Agra sandstone. The arena, a level sandy space eighty cubits across, lay beneath, surrounded by a stout wall that rose ten cubits high, even to the base of the lowermost tier. At every dozen paces the wall was pierced for a tunnel, iron-gated at the entrance. Some were four cubits high, some eight. Within the dark caverns that lay beyond the iron bars timorous men had whispered with bated breath that they had seen crouching forms that had blinked and glared at them with fearful eyes.

On the day of the trial twice ten thousand men came to the amphitheater, the aristocracy and gentry filling the marble seats, the middle classes finding room upon the sandstone. But of the vulgar multitude twice that number clambered up the hillside opposite, and there sat upon the grass, eating cold chappaties, and laughing and chatting as if they had come to see a fine tamasha, not the death of a living man. They were bidden to come an hour before sunset; but the sun was scarce past the zenith when the hillside was a shimmering mass of red and purple, yellow and orange, against the green. Twice 20,000 men had come to make a holiday.

There were strange scenes that day in the city. A ceaseless stream of men filled the streets and by-lanes, all seeking the amphitheater on the hills. Here and there little groups of men stood by street corners, awaiting the arrival of friends. They spoke in low whispers, and in their eyes there was a strange gleam, such as in the eyes of those that had suddenly seen light in dark places.

"Brothers, this morn I was bathing in the sacred Ganges an hour before sunrise—"

"A very meritorious deed!" sneered a passer-by, pausing awhile to let the sneer rankle.

"—And even as the morning star was paling in the east, I saw—"

"What sawest thou, O Seer?" It was a sudden laugh from the back; for the little group had now swelled into a throng.

"—A ball of light falling from heaven far away on the west," finished the speaker, with a catch in his breath. He was a timorous man, and the terror in his voice matched the terror in his eye.

There was an instant hush. Signs in the heavens were the most solemn of portents.

"And then, O brother?"

"It came swiftly nearer the earth in a line of white light; then when it stood over the royal palace, it suddenly turned blood-red, and burst into ten thousand fragments. Yet, O brothers, I heard no sound!"

"Ay, but a moment later a gentle shower of rain fell, and blotted out the red sparks from the sky." It was a meek-faced Vishnuvite that gave this hope.

Then the passer-by that had stopped to sneer, laughed aloud in his superior wisdom. "O foolish brothers! It was but a shooting-star. It burst not over the royal palace, but three kos (six miles) beyond, and a full kos from the earth; thus no sound was heard. And the rain came because of the disturbance in the clouds."

But a snow-bearded oracle that had heard all these things, rebuked him, saying.

"Thou dost see only with the eye of the body. Canst not read also with the eye of the soul? Canst not hear the voice of the Deity in the rolling thunder, and read his handwriting in the flashing lightning?"

Then amid the hushed silence, a small voice whispered:

"Read to us this message, O man of wisdom!"

"It means that a great wrong will be done this day; but, like a gentle shower of rain, mercy will come to right the wrong. I have spoken. Peace be with you."

Saying this, he departed. But even in that moment they had recognized him. For it was he that on the day of the first trial had spoken of a little infant found floating in a wicker basket on the bosom of the Ganges.

But ere this new hope could take root in their hearts other men came with omens of woe.

"Brothers, know you the big tigress in the royal menagerie that has given birth to two cubs? This morn she went mad, and killed and ate her own progeny; then suddenly realizing her deed, she grew madder still, and flung herself upon the iron bars in the frenzy of despair.

"Yea, brothers," added another, "seeing the people beyond, she tore at the bars with her fangs to get at them. And, methinks, had not the keepers beat her back from the outside with red-hot irons, she had killed herself in her rage."

Then others, more fanciful or more observant, took up the tale of woe with many embellishments.

"A sweet-voiced woman, singing behind pinjra lattice with the esthraj's dulcet harmony had suddenly hushed her voice, clung to her lord as if stricken with blindness, and lain in his arms cowering with fear. . . ."

"There is sorrow in the palace, O brothers. Thrice the king hath awakened from his sleep with a start, crying out: 'Begone, tempter!' He seemed to be wrestling with som evil spirit that tormented him."

And yet another came, and spoke of a pahari woman that had lost her son on his wedding-day, and had herself fallen dead in grief, crying out with her last breath that she would haunt the earth till she found her son—at which portent all that heard marvelled; for the soul of a pahari woman had no love, and was cruel and pitiless—even like unto the soul of the tigress that had killed her own progeny.

"A terrible day! A day of wrath!"

Saying this, the crowd dispersed—and went forth to the hillside to make holiday.

And now all eyes were upon the ivory throne. At the southern diameter of the arena, and facing the hills, was a tall archway, seven cubits wide and twice as high. It was also protected by an iron-barred gate that could be raised or lowered like a portcullis. The archway reached beyond the city wall, even to the adjoining court of the royal palace.

And above the dome of the gallery, and upon a marble dais, was the ivory throne, inlaid with gold, and incrusted at the arms and head with diamonds, rubies and sapphires. Over it there floated in the soft breeze a purple canopy of Dacca's loveliest brocade, embroidered with ten thousand stars and moons of alternate gold and silver.

Seeing this glory and pomp, all there wondered. Instinctively they felt that there was some hidden purpose in the heart of the king to make this scene linger in their memory for ages to come; why, they could not guess.

And the wonder grew all the greater when beside the throne, but a little below it, they caught a glimpse of a low divan beneath a pile of snawls, and upon them a dagger, a goblet, and a silken cord. What they signified none could tell; but some, shaking their heads dubiously, and shaking the dust off their feet, departed from the amphitheater, muttering that they approved not of such unbending sternness.

And then the heavy curtains behind the dais parted, and a tall figure in blue and scarlet stepped forth, and raising a silver trumpet to his lips sent forth a loud blast to the north. From the north the answer came, for suddenly another trumpeter had appeared across the amphitheater. Then another from the east, and another from the west.

While yet the echoes were mingling together among the hills, the curtains behind the dais were flung aside, revealing two rows of stalwart men that held their swords aloft to form an arch. Then from beneath it there appeared the king. He

"She Cut Frantically at the Cords That Bound Narayan Lal."

was robed in royal kincob, and crowned with a diamond aigrette upon his turban.

Erect in age, he walked to the throne with measured tread; then even as he sat upon it, he raised his right hand.

In almost instant response a dull grating sound was heard. Slowly the iron gate in the archway lifted, and from there came forth two men, with one other between them. They walked to the arena, turned and bowed to the king. Then without a word they led their prisoner to the center of the arena to a stake driven into the sand. There it had stood unnoticed so long, scarce large enough at that distance to merit attention. Making him face the king, they bound the prisoner to the stake with a stout cord, winding it first around each ankle, then upward around the knees, the thighs, the waist, the breast, the arms, even up to the neck. Thus they left him, and departed from the arena.

"Narayan Lal, what is written upon thy brow from thy birth will be fulfilled to the very letter, heaven and earth notwithstanding. If it be death, then let it be death. A brave man should know how to die. Hast thou aught to say?" And there was not a tremor in the voice of the king as he said this.

But for an answer the prisoner glanced upward, and gazed upon the king—rather at some vision beyond the throne that he saw in the eye of the mind, not of the body. Yes, what was written upon his brow from his very birth! Was it for this that he was born—a traitor's death? Or, to sit upon a throne?

And then in his inmost heart there arose another yearning. For six long months his eyes had not beheld that vision of beauty which was truly the sole cause, the sole price, of his death. Then in this hour of final dereliction would he be denied its last comfort? Would his glazing eyes, as he yielded up his soul, be denied one glance of pity from her eyes? One little word of love, one single teardrop?

Then in that hour his manhood forsook him.

"Justice! Justice, O King! Give me justice!" It was a shriek of agony that broke from his lips. For a strong man, a brave man, losing his manhood is a terrible thing, and not good to see or hear or dream of.

But the stern level voice of the king answered him.

"What is written is written. Cry justice to Him that made thee, and not to me."

Then, whilst yet these words were undried upon his lips, there came a strange softness into his eyes; and when he spoke again his voice was hoarse and husky.

"Narayan Lal, to see thee die I desire much; but to see thee live—and triumph—I desire more. Pray that Parameswhar save thee." And there was a quiver in his voice that none but Narayan Lal could understand. For in that moment it was the father that spoke, not the king.

And now a sudden silence fell upon that vast multitude. Twice forty thousand men lost their tongues and gazed before them like dazed children.

A heavy, rumbling sound was heard, and a while later a dozen men appeared in the gallery, dragging by a hawser what seemed to be a car resting on four broad wheels, each scarce a foot off the ground. The car was about ten cubits long, six wide and seven high. What it contained none could tell; for it was covered over with straw matting. But from the sound it made all guessed that there was much iron about its make; yet not all iron.

They dragged the car and placed it before Narayan Lal, just two cubits away. Without a word they whipped off its straw covering, and, stopping aside, stood at attention.

And then there arose a cry of horror from a thousand lips; a thousand moans of pity were wrung out of a thousand hearts; a thousand—

But the cold, relentless voice of the king hushed them all.

"Narayan Lal, thou shalt be placed at the mery of thy enemy; yet not altogether within its reach. If within the hour, ere the sun goes down, it can reach thee, then thy death will be the just reward of thy guilt. But within the hour Parameshwar may save thee—if He so will. I have spoken."

Verily, Parameshwar alone could save him. For within the iron-barred cage was the selfsame tigress that had killed her own progeny and had sought to kill and kill and kill all men. An enormous beast, seven cubits long, such as the jungles yield but once in a generation.

Without a word the dozen guards stepped up to the cage, six on either side, and, placing their hands upon the edges, drew off the iron gratings; for verily, the iron bars were but an outer coating. The cage itself was of pliable bamboo, bound at the joints with Malacca cane.

It was but a slender hedge that stood between Narayan Lal and his savage foe.

And now, the dozen guards having departed and lowered the portcullis behind them, the two were left face to face.

For a moment the tigress hesitated. Accustomed to dwell within bars, she had failed to notice any change in their nature; and the sight of many men passing and repassing before her had been scarce worth attention.

But gradually it began to dawn upon her that there was now something strange and unwonted before her; for the more savage a beast is, the greater is its curiosity or its suspicion.

She saw a solitary man standing motionless before her cage; and the cage itself was not like unto her usual dwelling-place. Its walls were of the color of her own body, and seemed to be like unto things she vague remembered she had seen in the jungle in the days of freedom.

She rose up, stepped to the front of the cage, and stood up on her hind legs and scrutinized her victim. Suddenly she thrust out her right paw between the bamboo bars. It reached to within a span of Narayan Lal's face, the bars yielding to her efforts. A second thrust, a third, a fourth. The cage creaked and groaned; the bamboos bent and curved outwards—then as quickly sprang back to their original shape.

Suddenly there was a dull, grinding sound. She snapped at a vertical bamboo with her fangs, chewed it, tugged it—Snap!

It was a gaping space a foot square.

Without thought she plunged her head at it. One fierce push—her hind legs upon the floor, her back arched up above them—and half the head was out. And then—and then—

But the pliable bamboos sprang back in their elasticity. The top end of the broken rod pressed against her head, at the most sensitive part. The bottom end pressed upwards between her chin and throat—also an intensely sensitive part.

Maddened with rage and somehow seeking to vent it upon the only living creature before her, she strove to thrust out her neck from between the shoulders. An inch, two inches, three inches—and the projecting bamboo grazed along three inches of her head. She twisted her neck round, shot out her head recklessly—and the jagged end of the lower bamboo bit her throat like a hundred teeth. Her jaws opened wide, and snapped fiercely at the air; but for the intervening span she had crunched her victim's head in that snap.

And all the while Narayan Lal stood before her, powerless to recede an inch. He felt a spasm in his heart; something arose in his throat, and seemed to shut out the breath of life; something arose as a mist before his eyes, enveloping and magnifying the terror they beheld.

He saw those frightful fangs, those sawing jaws keeping hideous time with the yellow blinking eyes; in his dulled ear he heard the sound of creaking bamboo and bursting cane—and thought it to be the sound of crunching bones and tearing flesh. His bones, his flesh.

Inch by inch he saw that cruel face come nearer and nearer. He felt her horrible breath upon his brow, his cheeks, his lips—he felt that a while later her enormous jaws would engulf his head in a single bite. Into that moment the agony of a thousand years was encompassed, for he stood powerless to move a single finger to save his life! Oh, if he were but free to do battle for that life! Then he would sell his life dearly; would fight with his bare hands where fire and sword might have availed naught.

And now the sweat of death stood in beads over his brow; the first shock of terror quaked his limbs and twitched his face. For the bravest man might quail to meet such a death, to yield up his life in such impotence. He closed his eyes in that first shock of terror. * * *

But a moment after something whispered in his ear, and reminded him of the decree of fate; reminded him that the will of Parameshwar would be done, kings and potentates notwithstanding; reminded him also that twice forty thousand men were gazing upon his dying moments. In that thought his manhood was given back to him. If die he must, he would stare death in the face unmoved.

He opened his eyes and saw the tigress now half a span before him; from the far distance they seemed to be face upon face—like two long-parted lovers kissing each other. To him the kiss would come in but a moment. And in that kiss he would lose, not his heart, but his head; for the tigress would embrace his whole head in that kiss.

What though he felt the seconds grow into hours, and the minutes into years? All too soon the embrace would come. Was he awaiting his bride? Behold, even now his bride was opening her lips to close upon his own.

What though he felt the fascination of her eyes, felt their terrible beauty overpower him and engulf his senses in coming torpor? Behold, it was the ecstasy of the bridegroom that felt the sweet breath of his beloved upon his face.

What though he heard in his swooning ears the sound of creaking, crackling—snapping—bursting reeds? In that moment he heard the sweet tinkling of jewels upon his bride's arms, and upon her brow and bosom. * * *

And then there arose a cry of agony that thrilled through twice forty thousand hearts. For it came, not from the dying man, but from his judge! His king, his master!

With tottering feet he stood up before his throne—striving to point one trembling hand at something that he saw before him. And then, ere his parched lips could find utterance, all there saw—and felt—and realized.

It seemed to be a bundle of white that dropped from the wall into the arena below. It lay still a moment as it reached the sand; then casting off the white cloak, it arose and ran swiftly toward the cage—a slender form draped in mauve and purple! It held a small glittering thing above its head. A Dakheen dagger.

She cut frantically at the cords that bound Narayan Lal—and the coils spun round and round, and released him from the stake.

"Devala!"

"My love."

Like a drunken man he reeled aside—then grasped the post to steady himself. Verily, it was his bride that had come to him. It was her breath that he felt upon his face—his brow, his cheeks, his lips, his heart. It was indeed the tinkle of her jewels that he heard in his ear, and felt their sweet touch upon his bosom.

"Come, my love—come away!" In that moment it was she that spoke first. Of the two her strength was the greater.

But he only shook his head, still holding the post.

"Why, beloved?"

Something laid hands of ice upon her heart. She saw the vacant glassy stare in his eyes—and felt a constriction at her heart, staying its beat. Were his senses gone forever? In that cruel agony had he lost his reason?

"Because of the beast, my love!"

But like a sleepy child he laid his head upon his arm, seeking rest.

Then she came to his side and entwined her arms around him. She dared not look beside her; for beside her the jaws of the tigress were hungering for their prey. From before the face of death she snatched away her beloved.

"Canst walk, my heart?" She entwined one arm around his waist, and placed his head upon her shoulder with the other. Thus holding him to her, she snatched him from the jaws of death.

"Where goest, beloved? I am so tired."

He stopped half-way to the wall, and leaned upon her breast. And what, mattered had he reached the wall itself? He could not escape.

Then sighing helplessly, her own strength gave way. Slowly they bent and bent, clinging to each other—then suddenly sank upon their knees, upon the sand. She laid his head upon her breast, rocking him there and speaking words that were foolish and senseless. Her eyes glistened but refused to weep.

She heard a sound that come to her as the sentence of death. It was a roar of pain and rage that suddenly seemed to swell into a roar of triumph. She also heard another sound that arose before her, behind her, all around her—a confused sound of eight myriad men that having lost their tongues had found them in the same moment.

"To the rescue, O brothers! To the rescue!"

"Ye fools—ye cowards—come!"

"See! Half the beast is out of the cage!"

"Art afraid of a beast when a woman dies?"

"Throw him a sword—a lance!"

"Him, ye fools? Her. Can ye not see he has swooned?"

"To the rescue! To the rescue!"

"Harr! Harr! Mahadeo!"

"Jai! Jai! Kali Mai!"

"To the Princess. To the Princess!"

A thousand swords leapt in the air. A thousand men rushed to the parapet. A thousand men stood upon it, taking breath to hurl themselves upon the sand—

"Stay! Let no man move—at the peril of his life!"

It was a deep hollow voice that checked them all.

Tall, towering, pale and emaciated, the King stood before the throne. In his eyes there shone a strange unearthly light; his breast heaved with some nameless emotion that struggled within and refused to be stifled.

"Let this be her trial also. It were but a choice of death. Let no man move!"

Then a great fear came upon them all; for in that moment they realized for the first time that indeed the Princess also was upon her trial; that at best it was but a choice of death between the beast—and the dagger, the cup, or the silken cord.

"Let it be the beast—if Parameshwar so decrees." And sitting down upon the throne the King stared before him, seeing and not seeing; like one that was stricken with sudden blindness.

And now with a frantic roar—and a crash and a snap—the tigress cleared the cage. She fell upon the sand to the left of the stake, gazed upon the multitude straight before her, blinked and glared at the setting sun. Conscious only of the sensation of the moment, the first sense that came to her was the sense of liberty. The sight of many men was not altogether new to her; the sense of liberty was.

She leaped and gamboiled, curving and then straightening out her limbs like steel springs, and throwing off the sand from beneath her velvet paws in a shower around her. She rejoiced in her new-found freedom. She had forgotten her victims.

Then suddenly she espied them; being toward the side and thirty cubits away, they had escaped her notice so far. But now she saw them—and in a moment her nature changed. A cruel look came into her eyes—the look of a wild beast sighting its prey. Her back arched up behind her, and her forepaws met before her. Her tail swung to the right, to the left, then straightened out behind. From that distance she prepared to leap. And then—and then—

"Come, my heart, awaken! The hour is at hand." It was the voice of the maiden calling her beloved. At that supreme moment her strength came back to her.

What mattered it to her now that her dream was ended? For six long months she too had struggled—struggled silently, voicelessly, unseen by men. Her beloved had struggled before a King and a nation. She had fought silently within stone walls.

And now the end had come; the end of all her hopes, her prayers, her tears. She was no longer a Princess; rather a simple maiden that had loved truly, and for her love was about to die.

"Beloved, awaken! Canst not hear me? The beast is upon us!" Her heart went out in that cry.

And hearing that cry, her beloved awakened. He raised his head from her lap where it had lain in his swoon, and gazed before him. Then light came back to his soul. Then also his strength was given back to him.

And now they knelt upon the sand, hand in hand. From that distance they seemed not like a youth and a maiden; rather like two little children that were lost, and had none to claim them. They faced the beast, and knelt down side by side, resting upon their heels and bowing their heads.

And never a word escaped their lips. What was in their hearts none could tell; holding each other by the hand—seeing death together face to face—seeking to mingle their life-blood together in their dying moment—what was in their hearts none could tell. Perchance it was a hymn of joy. What finer death could they have than that?

The tigress leapt. Up, up in the air—then down in a fearful curve. With a soft thud she fell upon the sand, and gathered herself up for the last spring. Full half the distance she had spanned in that single leap.

"Beloved, art afraid of death?"

"Not with thee, dearest. Let this be my—suttee."

And then the maiden broke down utterly, belying her brave words. She that had held up her courage whilst he lay swooning in her arms, broke into sobs and tears when he had regained his manhood. For now that he was a man, she herself had become a woman.

"Close thine eyes, beloved, the tigress leaps!" And saying this, he calmly arose to place himself before the maiden.

But she checked him with a hand, seeking to die together, not after him. "It will not be long, dearest. Even now it comes!"

And even in that moment a cry of wonder broke from the multitude.

"Look, O brothers! The beast is mad!"

"—Has lost her senses."

"—Her strength!"

For suddenly the tigress had changed her purpose. Relaxing her arched back from its rigid tension, she lurched sideways and came circling round them.

"She only plays with them like a cat—"

"And will kill them like a mouse."

"But see again, O brothers. She cannot leap!"

For stopping suddenly, she crouched before them, lashed her tail from side to side in rising fury—then as suddenly swerved round and continued in her course. And all the while the youth and the maiden knelt upon the sand, hand in hand.

"Ho! The beast is blind. She does not see them!"

For now the tigress paused before them, not six cubits away, and gazed above their heads. Out in the far distance the sun was sinking upon a bank of cloud in a ball of fire. And the poor mad beast that had killed her own progeny, gazed upon the sinking sun—and forgot her victims.

Perchance in that moment some dumb instinct awakened to life within her; some instinct that had long lain dormant; some instinct finer than the instinct of ferocity and bloodshed.

Perchance the remembrance came back to her of the days of freedom and happiness in the jungle—for even beasts have moments of happiness—when hungering herself, she had given her breast to her free-born cubs at the hour of sunset. For verily, gazing upon the setting sun, had she eaten a ball of sand in her hunger*—and had fed her cubs with the milk of her breast.

(*A popular belief in India.)

Lowering her eyes from the sun, she saw the kneeling forms before her, even at her feet; saw their bowed heads that now lay together, bent low upon the sand. Then something burst in her mighty heart, and gurgled up through her throat. It was a pietous whine of incontrollable pain and anguish.

Then she licked their faces, their hands, their feet, and burrowed in the sand before them, trying to lift them to her bosom.

"See, he has charmed the beast!" It was an awe-stricken voice from the lowermost tier.

"No! She takes them for her cubs."

"Wrong again. It is the soul of the pahari woman that has entered into the tigress."

Then someone added: "Verily, the soul of the woman that had lost her son on his wedding-day, and having died herself, had sworn to return."

"And the maiden is his bride."

Then, seeing this marvel, however, it might have been caused, a great stillness fell over them all. They clutched at their beating hearts, and forgot to breathe.

Hark! What was that? A dull thud, a distant shriek; the clanging and rattling of chains. The sound from afar, from somewhere beyond the arena. The dense multitude sat impotent and still, scarce realizing its import.

Suddenly a man, sitting beneath the royal dais, arose from his seat. Ere the multitude understood his purpose, he gained the wall and leapt into the arena. Arising from the fall, he ran swiftly forward, drawing his sword as he went.

"At last I have reached thee! Die, traitor!"

He thrust with his blade—but a moment sooner Narayan Lal had leapt to his feet. Lifting the maiden in his arms, he sprang to the other side of the reclining tigress.

Thus the two men faced each other a moment—across the beast. Though he recognized his assailant, Narayon Lal knew not why he sought his life, even at the peril of his own. Perchance the assailant's own life was doomed, unless he slew Narayan Lal; thus his purpose was to kill the youth, and take the chance of escaping the tigress and the multitude afterward. All this passed through Narayan's mind in the instant's flash.

Hearing the sound of words, the reclining tigress gazed up from the sand and saw the intruder. Vaguely she seemed to realize that she had found her cubs already; and this was not one of them. She raised herself upon her forepaws and stretched forth her head—

A confused clamor, a roar of voices, the crash of falling metal. The iron-barred gate beneath the archway came clanging down as it uprooted by some ponderous battering-ram. An ominous snorting, trumpeting, like the blast of a cracked horn—and a huge elephant burst into the arena.

The spell was broken. The multitude that had sat still like dazed children, broke forth in a babel of words.

"The high executioner!"

"The inflicter of death on traitors!"

"But see, it is in musth!"

Then in new terror they saw that the beast had broken loose from its heel-chains; and its mahout was not upon its head. Perhaps his mangled body was lying in yonder courtyard. For a male elephant in musth is worse than a raging tigress. Naught may appease its frenzy, save to kill and kill and kill.

O Bhugwan, what marvellous sight was this! With the instinct of her nature the tigress recognized her hereditary foe of the jungle. Her back arched up on the instant, her limbs became like tense steel. She forgot the human intruder and faced the mad elephant. On her other side were her new-found cubs.

And at sight of the elephant, the inflicter of death on traitors, a sudden panic seized the intruder's heart. Narayan Lal's assailant fled before the wind, and sought shelter behind the bamboo cage.

The elephant came hurtling along, digging up the sand with its tusks. Reeling drunkenly, blinking its little red eyes in the sudden glare, it saw nothing; its vengeance was for the sand. Thus it went headlong to the center of the area—and lurching up against the bamboo cage; the first definite object it had noticed.

For one brief moment it paused. The little tail switched; the huge trunk curled upward; the drooping ears flapped up like a pair of wings—then in mad frenzy the elephant charged.

With a groan and a crash the cage went over bodily. From beneath the falling bamboo the man escaped and fled terror-stricken to the side of the arena—the elephant in full chase behind.

Full half the circumference he ran; then the outstretched trunk, gaining upon him at each stride, caught him up by the middle—swung him aloft an instant, then hurled him to the ground. The next instant the huge forepaw reached him—half buried him in the sand by the stupendous pressure. A traitor's death!

The elephant stepped back, gazed down an instant, and grunted in approval of its work. Three strides more, kicking the sand in wanton sport, and the mad beast had come within range of its unnoticed foe.

An angry growl, a hissing snarl, a terrific roar—the tigress hurled herself through the air. With a sudden lurch the elephant recoiled upon its haunches; with the moment's instinct its trunk went up, slashing frantically at the huge yellow form soaring aloft to its head. But the tigress came aslant; the elephant's trunk just flickered her flank. She passed beyond the head, and fell upon the sand on the other side. More nimble than her unwieldy foe, and turning more quickly, she leapt again at short range and gained the elephant's back, its head. There she fastened her fangs with the grip of death. Her forepaws came down on either side of her jaws, tore at the thick hide, seeking to reach the brain.

In mad terror the elephant ran, trumpeting shrilly, bearing the tigress upon its head. Thrice round the circumference it careered in its frenzy, its life-blood oozing from the wound in its head. Deeper and deeper sank the tigress's fangs and claws. The mad beast's trumpetings grew feebler and feebler; for its strength, mighty and irresistible a while ago, was now ebbing fast. Its foe had gripped it in its one vital part.

Suddenly its knees gave way, the trumpeting ceased. Slowly, inch by inch, it began to sink upon the sand. Its huge body shook in a gigantic tremor, then came down inch by inch upon its bended knees. Oh, Parameshwar, verily this was Thy deed, this Thy creation! A mighty fine-tusked elephant, the monarch of the jungle and lord of the battle-line, dying slowly, drop by drop, in silent majesty before the gace of twice forty thousand men struck dumb in speechless wonder! Verily this was Thy verdict, Thy manifestation, in Thy inscrutable wisdom! * * *

With the sweat of death upon his brow, the elephant made its last frantic effort. Endowed with an intelligence second only to man's, that intelligence had been obscured in the moment of panic. Now in the moment of death it returned with tenfold clearness. With its last ebbing strength the elephant curled up its trunk, felt softly beneath the tigress's throat with the delicacy of a man's finger—curled the trunk around the tigress's neck—tore her bodily away from its head, held her aloft an instant, brought her down before its bended knees. There the two swayed a moment in the air in the elephant's last spasmodic tremor. Then the trunk touched the sand, the huge beast bent slowly forward—and fell prone upon the arena, upon the tigress. Thus locked in death together the two monarchs of the jungle lay silent and still before the gaze of man.

But, O Parameshwar, Thy manifestation was not yet over. There still remained the youth and the maiden in the arena. Locked in each other's arms, upon bended knees, they still awaited Thy verdict. What though the youth's last trial was over, his innocence proved? Verily he still awaited Thy fullest proclamation, O Parameshwar! * * *

Then suddenly amid the hushed silence a deep guttural voice shouted across the amphitheater:

"Jai! Jai! Pertab Sinhji!"

The multitude gazed upon one another's faces and wondered what this could mean.

"Jai! Jai! Raj Kumar ke jai! Shout, ye men, shout to the heavens!"

There, across the amphitheater, stood a man upon the lowermost tier, leaning against the parapet and pointing a thin, fleshless hand at the youth in the arena. He was robed in a choga of embroidered gold, and wore a turban of the richest silk. But upon his brow there was written still in vermillion the broad trident of Vishnu. Then all knew him to be the pundit, the sage—him they had long known as Rama Krishna. Now a pundit no more, but the commander of many men.

"Shout, ye men! Shout Victory to the Royal Prince!"

Then that vast multitude lost their heads and shouted—they knew not why. Twice forty thousand men shouted to the mountains, the plains, the fields, the forests, the rivers, the valleys, even unto the clouds above.

"Jai! Jai! Rai Kamur ke jai!"

As one in a dream, the king gazed before him. What cry was this—"Jai! Jai!" To whom did they give that salutation that among mortals could only be given to a monarch upon his throne?

The cry of the multitude answered him. A hundred men leapt to the arena and escorted the youth and the maiden to the dais above. There, awakening from his dream, the king placed them upon the divan beside his throne. And placing a bridal veil over the maiden's head and nine rows of pearls around her neck—the selfsame necklace that Hira Lal of Benares had given him, to be kept for the maiden's bridal day—he joined her hand to that of the youth.

Then Rama Krishna, standing up before the king, told a wondrous tale. How once a noble queen had placed her new-born infant upon his dead father's throne; and commanded all to do him homage; but that being vanquished by an upstart usurper who sought the life of the child, she had entrusted him to the sacred Ganges—and had made sutete of herself to join her dead husband.

"But who art thou, Oh, pundit, that thou dost know these things?"

And Rama Krishna answered the king. "The Dewan (Prime Minister) of the child's dead father. I took up the beggar's gourd, to watch over the life of the child."

"And the man killed by the elephant, the inflicter of death upon traitors?" the king asked again.

Rama Krishna waved his hand, and a dozen men fetched the body from the arena and exposed the face. It was Jemadar of the Palace!

"A double-dyed traitor, a spy in the guise within the very palace—a secret emissary of the upstart usurper. He arisen to power in thy service, being sent by his master to slay the child secretly, or lose his own life. But the child escaped him by the decree of Fate.

"And now, O King," Rama Krishna said again, joining his hands to his brow and bowing his head even to the feet of the youth, "the child has grown to be a man—the same that thou hast long known as Narayan Lal."

And the king proclaimed to the world, "Yea, Narayan Lal no more, but Pertab Sinhji for ever—by the right of his forefathers. And henceforth, by the rights of my adoption, Yuvoraj Kumar Prithiraj—that is, Young King, Royal Prince, Heir of Supreme King.

Then a veiled form came from the back of the divan and knelt at the feet of the Princess Devala. And the princess turned to her father and whispered into his ear.

The king waved his hand graciously, and Harman Das, the Captain of the Guards, approached from the other side and knelt at his master's feet. The king joined his hand to Leila's, and the process took from her bosom a row of diamonds and as a bridal dower clasped it upon that of the maiden who had served her so faithfully—whilst the multitude shouted to the heavens, and went forth to hold high carouse far into the night with palace bounty that was showered upon them so lavishly because of the double bridal.

"Thus endeth my tale, Oh, Splendour of the Earth!" the Story-teller concluded, kissing the fringe of the silken sheet.

And the Great King, raising himself from his pillow, replied, "So also my sickness; for thy words of wisdom have taught me that a man may be in the jaws of death, and may yet escape."

Then taking the pearls from around his neck, even according to his promise, he placed them himself upon the neck of the Story-teller.

And to me, his faithful chronicler, he turned and said, "And thou, O truth-teller, record of many marvels, go forth to the world, and make known these things unto all men!"

Thus, O best beloved readers, have I unto you. And some day perchance I shall return to the favor of your countenances and tell you many more marvels. O my beloved. Meanwhile, salaam alikhum—peace be with you!

No Escaping Trouble.

Tommy—When I grow up I ain't going' to have ter wash me face.

Johnny—Aw, g'on! How kin yer help it?

Tommy—I'm a-goin' ter grow whiskers all over it.

Johnny—Aw, dat'll be worse. Den yer have to comb de knots outer yer face.—Philadelphia Press.

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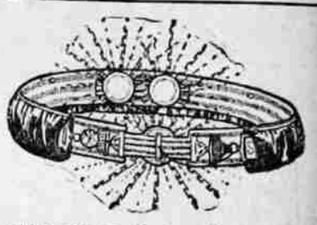

I point with just pride to my invention which during 40 years has enabled more than 100,000 sick men and women to regain their health and vigor—a record to be proud of. I say record, because I have the proof always open to inspection for those interested. Since discovering the marvellous curing powers of electricity 40 years ago, I have faithfully and persistently labored to bring it to the notice of sufferers who need building up mentally and physically, who are troubled with Nervousness, Rheumatism, Lame Back, Wrecked Stomach, Varicocele, etc., and how well I have succeeded is best shown by the fact that the Dr. Sanden Electric Herculex is now standard in every part of the world. I admit the first 30 years was hard work, but I am now enjoying the success and satisfaction I feel is due me.

I do not believe that there today is a grown person who doubts the wonderful curative power of electricity—in fact, I take it for granted there is not. I therefore only find it necessary to give a few hints as to its application. To restore strength and vigor to a worn out system, to feed the brain and nerves, to drive uric acid out of the blood, to strengthen a muscular center, as in lame back, to give renewed and healthy action to the stomach, liver and kidneys—in short, to really renew the life forces of the whole body, the continuous galvanic current must be used and applied in a mild, prolonged manner, to allow the system to absorb it. The strong, harsh current applied from the ordinary battery is mostly wasted, as the system only accepts a small portion of it, just as the sudden heavy shower mostly runs off, while a gentle, prolonged rain is thoroughly absorbed. My invention does exactly as explained above. You put it on when going to bed and take it off on rising in the morning. It gives a soothing, exhilarating current you instantly feel, but not sufficient to in the least disturb you. It fills you with new life, and electrifies every nerve and drop of blood in your body. As weakness and disease is a LACK of electricity, how can you wear my Electric Herculex without receiving benefit? I know you cannot, therefore, I invite you to send for it on absolute free trial.

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