TARA

"A Mahratta Tale"

By

Philip Meadows Taylor



ILLUSTRATED &

PUBLISHED BY

E-KİTAP PROJESİ & CHEAPEST BOOKS



www.cheapestboooks.com

www.facebook.com/EKitapProjesi

Copyright, 2016 by e-Kitap Projesi

Istanbul

ISBN: 978-625-6310-19-3

© All rights reserved. No part of this book shell be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or by any information or retrieval system, without written permission form the publisher.

CONTENTS:

EXTRACTS FROM SOME PRESS NOTICES OF "TARA." 6
PROLOGUE. 8
CHAPTER I 12
CHAPTER II. 20
CHAPTER III. 29
CHAPTER IV. 40
CHAPTER V. 48
CHAPTER VI. 57
CHAPTER VII. 65
CHAPTER VIII. 72
CHAPTER IX. 81
CHAPTER X. 86
CHAPTER XI. 92
CHAPTER XII. 103
CHAPTER XIII. 112
CHAPTER XIV. 121
CHAPTER XV. 125
CHAPTER XVI. 133
CHAPTER XVII. 140
CHAPTER XVIII. 148
CHAPTER XIX. 156
CHAPTER XX. 165
CHAPTER XXI. 176
CHAPTER XXII. 188
CHAPTER XXIII. 197
CHAPTER XXIV. 209
CHAPTER XXV. 215
CHAPTER XXVI. 221
CHAPTER XXVII. 230
CHAPTER XXVIII. 241
CHAPTER XXIX. 248

CHAPTER XXX......256
CHAPTER XXXI......262
CHAPTER XXXII. 270
CHAPTER XXXIII. 276
CHAPTER XXXIV......280
CHAPTER XXXV......286
CHAPTER XXXVI......291
CHAPTER XXXVII......296
CHAPTER XXXVIII......303
CHAPTER XXXIX......310
CHAPTER XL. 316
CHAPTER XLI. 323
CHAPTER XLII......331
CHAPTER XLIII......338
CHAPTER XLIV......344
CHAPTER XLV......350
CHAPTER XLVI......357
CHAPTER XLVII......363
CHAPTER XLVIII. 370
CHAPTER XLIX......375
CHAPTER L......383
CHAPTER LI......393
CHAPTER LII......398
CHAPTER LIII. 406
CHAPTER LIV. 410
CHAPTER LV. 415
CHAPTER LVI. 420
CHAPTER LVII......427
CHAPTER LVIII......438
CHAPTER LIX. 446
CHAPTER LX. 454
CHAPTER LXI. 462
CHAPTER LXII......472

CHAPTER LXIII. 479
CHAPTER LXIV. 486
CHAPTER LXV. 493
CHAPTER LXVI. 503
CHAPTER LXVII. 511
CHAPTER LXVIII. 517
CHAPTER LXIX. 522
CHAPTER LXX. 528
CHAPTER LXXI. 532
CHAPTER LXXII. 537
CHAPTER LXXIII. 543
CHAPTER LXXIV. 548
CHAPTER LXXV. 553
CHAPTER LXXVI. 560
CHAPTER LXXVII. 566
CHAPTER LXXVIII. 572
CHAPTER LXXIX. 582
CHAPTER LXXX. 590
CHAPTER LXXXI. 598
CHAPTER LXXXII. 606
CHAPTER LXXXIII. 615
CHAPTER LXXXIV. 624
CHAPTER LXXXV. 632
CHAPTER LXXXVI. 638
CHAPTER LXXXVII. 644
CHAPTER LXXXVIII. 651
CHAPTER LXXXIX. 658
CHAPTER XC. 666
CHAPTER XCI. 672
CHAPTER XCII. 679
CHAPTER XCIII. 686
EPILOGUE. 686
GLOSSARY. 695

EXTRACTS FROM SOME PRESS NOTICES OF "TARA."

The "Times."

"For its rapid action, in fact, we have seldom read a better story, or one which is more full of incidents, sanguinary, trenchant, and robust."

The "Daily Telegraph."

"A true and a wonderfully well-sustained piece of Oriental life and striking history."

The "Spectator."

"This is a very remarkable book. It is a determined attempt to bring the interior Hindoo and Mussulman life of a great Mahratta province during the most exciting times home to the hearts and understandings of Englishmen, to interest them in people with whom they have nothing except human nature in common."

"Morning Post."

"'Tara' is a unique work. There is nothing like it in the English literature of fiction. No other writer has ever attempted the portrayal of Indian life, society, and interests, entirely free from any European admixture of character or incident. The author himself now does so for the first time. 'The Confessions of a Thug' related to British jurisdiction in India. 'Tippoo Sultan' dealt with the gallant struggles of that monarch against the encroaching British power, but 'Tara' is all Indian."

"Saturday Review."

"It is seldom that we meet with a work of fiction executed with anything like the conscientious care and minute elaboration of Captain Meadows Taylor's Indian Tale. His characters have mostly the clearness and individuality

of portraits, and his scenery exhibits all the marked and decisive features of photographs taken on the spot. The work throughout is evidently that of a master of Oriental life and character in love with his subject, to whom nothing appears trivial or beneath notice that can illustrate the peculiar traits of Asiatic nature, or kindle an enthusiasm for knowing more of the history, manners, and usages of our fellow-subjects in the east."

The "Standard."

"In no one part of the work has Captain Taylor shown more thorough art than in those pages in which he details the features of the Hindoo and Mahomedan family life. He never overloads; his characters are not lay figures attired in triple folds of gorgeous robes to hide their nakedness. With a few subtle touches he shows us the interior life of each household, and the morning springs of every character, and he leaves us to fill in the obvious details for ourselves."

My Lord,

The scenes and characters which i have endeavoured to depict in these volumes will be necessarily new and strange to you; but if they excite interest in the native annals of a country of which i find but little real knowledge existing, the object of the work will have been attained; while, by the kind courtesy which permits me to dedicate it to you, your excellency confers upon me a very sincere gratification.

I have the honour to be,
Your Lordship's very faithful servant,
MEADOWS TAYLOR.

Old Court,
Harold's Cross, near Dublin,
August, 1863.

PROLOGUE.

In the year 1839, I became acquainted with the late Professor Wilson; and in course of conversation on the possibility of illustrating events in Indian history by works of fiction, the details of the present story, among other subjects, were slightly sketched out by me. He was interested in them, and suggested my writing the tale for "Blackwood's Magazine." I could not, however, then commence it, and deferred doing so till my return to India; but, falling into political and civil employment there, was never able to continue what I had begun, till my return home.

The history of the period of this tale, A.D. 1657, will be found at length in Scott's "Ferishta," and vol. i. of Grant Duff's "History of the Mahrattas;" and to these works I beg to refer such of my readers as may be curious in regard to its particulars, of which a slight sketch may not, perhaps, be altogether out of place.

In A.D. 1347, a great portion of the Dekhan was consolidated into a kingdom by Sultan Alla-oo-deen, who founded the Bahmuni dynasty. It was divided into three great provinces, Dowlatabad, Beejapoor, and Golconda, which, on the decay of the royal house, became separate kingdoms under their several viceroys, who successively declared their independence. Of these, Beejapoor was the largest, and became by far the most important and powerful. Yoosuf Adil Shah, a Turk of European descent, believed, indeed, to have been the son of a Sultan of Constantinople, threw off his allegiance to the Bahmuni dynasty in A.D. 1489, and established himself at Beejapoor, which afterwards rose to be the greatest, as it was the most magnificent, city of the Dekhan.

The prosperity of the Dekhan kingdoms excited the jealousy of the Moghul Emperors of Dehli, and their subjugation was projected by the Emperor Akbur; but it had made little progress at his death in A.D. 1605. In the reign of his grandson Shah Jehán, the State of Ahmednugger, or Dowlatabad, was finally subdued about 1630, and the Moghul power so far established in the Dekhan. His son, Aurungzeeb, pursued the reduction of the two remaining

kingdoms, Beejapoor and Golconda, with varying success, but untiring pertinacity; and, before his death in 1707, they had succumbed to him. Beejapoor fell on the 15th October, 1686; Golconda in September, 1687.

Amidst the struggles of the Mahomedans, the predatory power of the Mahratta people arose under Sivaji, and assumed a more definite form than it had ever before possessed; and, as the author of the Mahratta History observes, "stirred those latent embers till, like the parched grass kindled amidst the forests of the Syhadree mountains, they burst forth in spreading flame, and men afar wondered at the conflagration."

Of the many remarkable and romantic events connected with the rise of the Mahratta power, those which form the subject of the present tale are, of all, the most cherished by the people; and they are recited, or sung in ballads, with an interest which time does not diminish, and which has exalted the national hero, Sivaji Rajah, to the distinction almost of a demigod.

At the period of the tale, 1657, though the political foundations of Beejapoor were shaking, nothing had affected its material prosperity; and the palaces, mosques, mausoleums, and other public buildings of the capital, were in their greatest magnificence. The city itself, except its vast fortifications, which are still perfect, has now, for the most part, disappeared; and long lines of shapeless mounds, covering an immense area, mark where its streets existed. In some quarters there are villages, widely separated, which once formed part of the general masses of habitations; and there are everywhere remains of mosques, tombs, and palaces, which convey a true estimate of the wealth of those for whom they were constructed, and the taste and skill of the architects.

The citadel is still perfect as to walls, towers, and ditch, and is a very complete and picturesque specimen of Puthán fortification. The royal palaces situated in it, are, however, roofless, much ruined, and advancing to destruction; and the gardens and terraces, with their fountains, are covered by brushwood and tangled creepers. It is a happy thing, however, that the liberality of the Indian Government has arrested decay, wherever practicable, and that all the most beautiful buildings have been restored, while repairs continue to be made as needful.

The buildings so restored are—

The Mausoleum of Ibrahim Adil Shah, called the Ibrahim Roza;
The Mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah;
The Méhturi Mahal;
The Jumma Mosque;
The Assar Shureef;
The Royal Well, with its cloisters; and some others.

Of the above, the Assar Shureef is one of the ancient royal palaces, which contains some sacred relics; and, being in the actual condition in which it was left, is perhaps the most interesting of all.

By orders of Government also, drawings from actual measurement were made a few years ago by a clever civil engineer and architect, of all the principal buildings. These are now in the India Library in London; and, to any one curious on the subject, will give a far better idea of the superb Saracenic architecture of the Adil Shahy dynasty, than any description. Mahomedan architecture in India is always beautiful; but there is a combination of grandeur and grace about that of Beejapoor which is not approached elsewhere, and a beauty of ornament and execution nowhere exceeded. The Jumma Mosque, with its side aisles, was constructed for the accommodation of eight thousand persons at prayer; and the superb dome of the Mausoleum of Sultan Mahmood Adil Shah, built of hewn stone, is the largest in its outward diameter in the world.

With these noble remains, the country around them, and its population of all classes, I have been familiar for many years past; and such descriptions of scenery and character as may be found in these volumes, are the result of personal knowledge. The actors in my story are Hindus and Mahomedans; but the same passions and affections exist among them as among ourselves, and thus the motives and deeds of my characters may, at least, be intelligible. I can only hope they may prove of interest.

It was very strange, twenty-five years ago, to observe the remarkable interval of exactly one hundred years, between the attack of Sivaji on the Beejapoor Mahomedans in 1657, and the victory of Lord Clive over those of Bengal at Plassey in 1757. Both results led directly to the establishment of

powers widely differing in their aims and characters, but not the less irresistible by the Mahomedans; and the victory at Pertâbgurh was as directly conducive to the establishment and extension of the Mahratta authority, and the decadence of the Mahomedan, as that of Plassey has been to our own sovereignty, and to the political extinction of both. But this curious accordance of dates becomes still more interesting, when we observe that, on the anniversary of a third century, June, 1857, the heads of Mahomedan and Mahratta power were leagued against that which had subdued both; and know that their combined efforts however desperate, and their intrigues however virulent, proved alike futile.

CHAPTER I

"Tara, O Tara! where art thou?"

"Mother, I am here. Is it time?"

"Yes; we should go with the offerings to the temple. Come, thy father hath long been gone, and it will be broad day ere we can reach it. Come," said her mother, entering a small open verandah which skirted the inner court of the house, where the girl sat reading by the light of a lamp, now paling before the dawn which was fast spreading over the sky.

She shut her book with a reverential gesture, laid it aside in its quilted cover, and stood up. How beautiful she was! Let us describe this Brahmun girl to you, O reader! if we can, and tell you a little concerning her.

There were many fair women of her sect in Tooljapoor, and they are always the most remarkable of their country-women, but none so fair as Tara, the daughter of Vyas Shastree.[1] From her earliest childhood she had given promise of grace and beauty, and since that period—from the time when, hanging shyly to the skirt of her mother's garment, she passed daily through the crowded bazaar and street which led to the upper gate of the temple—to the present, she had ever been an object of remark and admiration; while the rank and learning of her father, and his position as chief priest, had maintained for her a continued and increasing interest as she grew up. None who had the privilege of addressing her ever omitted a loving greeting or respectful salutation: the public flower-sellers intrusted her with their choicest garlands or nosegays to offer up at the shrine—the confectioners had ever a delicate sweetmeat with which to tempt the child—and even the rudest peasant or soldier looked at her, as she passed him, in wonder, stretched out his hands to her, and kissed the tips of his fingers in a worshipful salutation and benediction.

The promise of the child was more than fulfilled in the girl now budding into early womanhood; and her appearance was so remarkable that, while

many of her old friends in the bazaar now rarely ventured to accost her, and even turned aside their heads reverently as she passed, she could not traverse the crowded street which led from her house to the temple, or, indeed, move anywhere during the day without attracting admiration from the crowds of strangers who, from all parts of India, visited that renowned shrine of which her father was the chief priest and manager. Many a pilgrim and worshipper gazed wonderingly upon the calm, gentle face which met him at the earliest dawn in its devotional perambulation round the temple, or followed with his eye the graceful figure which, carrying the daily sacrificial offerings, descended the flights of steps by which the shrine was approached; and, far away in his native village, under the snows of Himalaya, the burning sands of Raméshwur, or the green plains of Bengal, told of the beautiful vision, and never forgot it.

Tara has been up since before the false dawn. She has assisted her father with water to bathe, and in his private worship of the household gods. She has bathed herself, and is now dressed in the simple saree, or robe of all Hindu females. It is of dark blue silk, striped with a fainter blue, and has a broad border of a light but rich pattern harmonizing with the colours of the garment which, consisting of one long piece only, is wound round her several times to form a skirt, then passed about her body and over her head on the left side, whence the end, which is of rich gold tissue interwoven with crimson flowers and green leaves, hangs heavily over her right shoulder and back. Below the garment is a closely-fitting bodice of striped orange silk only; but no portion of it is visible except a little of the sleeve above the elbow. Tara is holding the border of her dress close to her cheek, as if to conceal it even from her mother; and the graceful outline of her arm may be followed, from the tips of the taper fingers past the wrist partly covered with purple bangles and a massive gold ring, along the soft round arm to the dimpled elbow, whence it is lost among the folds of the saree which falls over it.

Do you expect that her complexion will be fair like that of our own northern girls? Ah, no! that would not harmonize with the dress or the country; and yet it is very fair. Not a deep rich olive, but what seems at a first glance pale and colourless; yet the skin is so glossy and transparent that the warm glow of her blood is suffused under it with the least passing emotion or excitement, which, as it fades, leaves, as you think, a more beautiful tint behind.

And the features harmonized with the colour. To a casual observer their expression was almost one of habitual sadness, yet it was not so in reality: there was calm, which as yet had known no rude ruffling—a sweetness that was index to a simple, loving, trustful mind. True, she had cares beyond those of ordinary household occurrences, and these had no doubt increased the pensive expression always remarkable. So her countenance was not easy to describe: nor could you account very well for the patient, care-enduring look which met you from one so young. What every one saw first, were the soft brown eyes, shaded with long eyelashes which rested upon the cheek. Ordinarily perhaps, or if seen when cast down, these eyes appeared nowise remarkable; yet if passing emotions were noticed, they closed when she was merry, till only a bright spark of light remained glistening through the long lashes; and again, if surprise, wonder, or admiration were excited, they suddenly expanded, so that one looked into a depth of clear glowing colour, violet and brown, the expression of which could not be fathomed. But habitually they were modest, pensive, and gentle—full of intelligence, and seemed to correspond with a low musical cadence of voice perfectly natural, yet assisted, perhaps, by the habit of reading and studying aloud, which she had learned from her father. In those calm eyes there was as yet no passion of any kind. Some suffering, perhaps, but no rough awakening to the reality of life.

The rest of her face left nothing to be desired. The Brahmuns of Western India usually possess features more European in their character than those of the same sect in other parts of the country, and in this respect the women share them with the men, if they do not, indeed, exceed them. So Tara had a soft oval face, with small full lips and mouth, a thin straight nose with nostrils almost transparent, which seemed to obey the passing emotions of her countenance. Though the features were soft, they were neither insipid nor weak in character; on the contrary, they appeared full of a woman's best strength—endurance and patience; while, in the full glossy chin and throat, enough of determination was expressed to show firmness and consistency of no common order. Except the eyes, perhaps, there was no feature of the face which could be called exactly beautiful, yet the whole combined to create an expression which was irresistibly interesting and charming; and where all harmonized, separate portions were not remarked.

Every movement of her lithe form was displayed by the soft silk drapery which fell over it in those graceful folds which we see expressed in ancient statues, and it was cast in those full yet delicately rounded proportions which sculptors have best loved to imitate. Standing as she was, the girl had fallen into an attitude which was most expressive: her head raised and turned to meet her mother's entrance: a delicate naked foot, with a chain anklet of gold resting on it, put out from beneath her robe: her eyes open, yet not to their full width: and her lips apart, disclosing the even glistening teeth:—she appeared, in her arrested movement, as if she waited some further communication from her mother, or had herself one to make before she stirred.

No wonder that, as each morning she left the house with her mother to pay her devotions at the temple, and passed along with downcast eyes, her graceful figure attracted increased attention day by day. Many a good wish followed her—many a benediction from the aged poor of the town, to whom her charities were liberally dispensed; and it might be, too, that other admiration, less pure in its character, also rested upon her, and often, unknown to her, dogged her steps.

The contrast between Tara and her mother was in most respects a striking one. No one could deny that Anunda Bye was a handsome woman; her neighbours and gossips told her so, and she quite believed it. She looked, too, very young of her age; and as she sailed down or up the street leading to the temple, and received the humble salutations of shopkeepers, flower-sellers, and all the tradesmen of that busy quarter, with an air which plainly showed how much she considered it due to her rank and station—it would have been difficult to say whether the timid girl following her, and screening her face from the gaze of the people as she moved along, was her daughter or youngest sister. Either she might be, and it seemed more probable the latter, than the former.

Taller than her daughter as yet, Anunda Bye was not without much of the same grace of figure; but it was cast on a bolder scale. The features were more decided and prominent, the colour several shades darker. The face, handsome as it was, had little of the softening element of intellectuality in it; and Anunda was ignorant of everything but household management, in which she excelled, in all departments, to a degree that made her the envy of her female acquaintance, and her husband the envied of his male associates

whose domestic affairs were not conducted with the same regularity, and whose cookery was not so good.

Enter the Shastree's house at any time, and you were at once struck with its great neatness. The floor was always plastered with liquid clay by the women-servants when he was absent at the temple for morning worship, and retained a cool freshness while it dried, and, indeed, during the day. It was generally decorated by pretty designs in white and red chalk powder dropped between the finger and thumb, in the execution of which both mother and daughter were very expert and accomplished. The Shastree's seat, which was, in fact, a small raised dais at one side of the large room, was usually decked with flowers, while upon the floor before it, the greatest artistic skill was expended in ornament by Tara and her mother. Above it were pictures of favourite divinities, painted in distemper colour: the amorous blue-throated Krishna playing to the damsels of Muttra; the solemn four-armed Ganésha, sitting with a grave elephant's head on his shoulders; the beautiful Lakshmee and Suruswuti, the goddesses of wealth and learning, the objects of household adoration: and the terrible six-armed Bhowani in her contest with the demon Mahéshwur, in commemoration of which the temple had been erected—all surrounded by wreaths of flowers interwoven with delicate border patterns;—had been partly executed by the Shastree himself, and partly by Tara, who followed his tastes and accomplishments after a pretty fashion. Thus decorated, the dais had a cheerful effect in the room: and choice and intimate friends only were admitted to the privilege of sitting upon it.

The house itself was perhaps in no degree remarkable. Outside, facing the street, was a high wall, with a large door within a projecting porch or archway, which had a seat on either hand as you entered. The door-frame was richly carved, and on each side a horse's head projected from the upper corner. Above the door, in a space left for the purpose, was written in red Sanscrit letters, "Sree Martund Prussunn," "The holy Martund protects;" and Martund was one of the appellations of Siva. This legend was surrounded by wreaths of flowers in the same colour; and across the whole was a garland of mango leaves now withered, which had hung there since the last festival.

As you entered the court, the principal room was before you, on the basement of the house, which you ascended by three steps. It was a wide open verandah, extending the width of the court, supported upon seven wooden

pillars, also richly carved, on which crossed square capitals were fixed, and from these, beams were laid to form the roof. This verandah was double; the inner portion being raised a step above the other to form a dais, and at each end of the inner portion were two small rooms in the corners, one of which was the Shastree's library. The whole of these verandahs could be shut in closely by heavy curtains of quilted cotton, neatly ornamented by devices of birds and flowers, which hung between the pillars; but usually all was open, or closed only by transparent blinds of split cane suspended outside.

Having a northern aspect, this room was always cool, and was the ordinary resort of the Shastree. Here he received his friends and neighbours, held disputations, and instructed his pupils. The women seldom entered it except in the evenings when undisturbed; for, though unsecluded from men, a certain degree of reserve and retirement is always observable in the women of Hindu families. There was no ornament about the main apartment except the Shastree's dais, and the borders painted about the niches and architraves of the doors; but it was kept a pure white, and was scrupulously clean.

In the centre of the back wall of the inner verandah was a door which opened into a second court, round which was a verandah also open, and, leading from it on three sides, sleeping chambers and a bath-room. In this verandah there was nothing but a few spinning-wheels and their low stools; for Anunda Bye had no idea of allowing women-servants to be idle, and when they were not working otherwise, they were spinning cotton yarn for their own clothes. Anunda herself had her wheel, and Tara hers, and sometimes they spun yarn fine enough for the Shastree's waist-cloths.

On the fourth side of the court was the kitchen, and, passing by it, a door led into a third court, more private, though not so large as the second. In the centre of it was an altar painted in distemper, on which grew a bush of toolsee or sweet basil, grateful to the gods; and in the verandah, another altar, similar in form, on which burned the sacred fire never extinguished. Close to it was the door of the private temple of the house, which contained the household gods of the family. Here it was that Tara best loved to sit when her share of domestic affairs was completed. Here she tended the sacred fire, and offered worship, such as a woman could perform, in the temple. She had a small garden in one corner of the court, which contained a few jessamine bushes, marigolds, and other common flowers, which she cultivated for offer-

ings to the household gods in the daily worship. Here she could study undisturbed, and did so with all her heart—here, too, it was that her mother found her.

There was no decoration about the house, except, as we have already mentioned, border patterns and quaintly designed birds and flowers upon the walls. Furniture, such as we need, was unknown. A small cotton or woollen carpet laid down here and there, with a heavy cotton pillow covered with white calico, sufficed for sitting or reclining; and as the goddess Bhowani, in her incarnation at Tooljapoor, does not choose, as is believed, that any one in the town should lie upon a bed except herself, a cotton mattress on the floor, or a cool mat, sufficed for sleeping.

The house, therefore, would have appeared bare in any of my readers' eyes; but it was neat and pleasant to look at: and one can imagine, though decorated in a higher style of art, the Roman houses at Pompeii to have been similar in most respects of plan and domestic arrangement.

There was no evidence of wealth, yet the Shastree was a prosperous man; and could you have seen Anunda Bye's stores of copper and brass utensils—large vessels for boiling vast quantities of rice on festivals and household ceremonies—her brass lamps and candelabra, her silver plates for eating from, and silver drinking vessels;—could you have seen the contents of her private room, in which were sundry large chests, full of sarees, or women's garments, of great value; some heir-looms, woven with gold and silver thread, each having its peculiar history; the shawls which belonged to her husband, the gifts of princes and nobles, tributes to his learning, of which she was very proud;—could you have seen, too, the strong box that lay hidden among the clothes in the largest chest, full of family jewels and ornaments, among which were two necklaces of fine pearls, massive gold ornaments for ankles and wrists, for neck and ears;—could you have seen all these, and the heavy gold cinctures round Anunda's and Tara's trim waists, and their massive gold bracelets and anklets,—you would have been envious, my dear reader, of considerable wealth in this particular.

Otherwise, indeed, the Shastree was a man of substance. Being an only son, with no other sharers, at his father's death, he had inherited a considerable property. He had himself earned, by his scholarly abilities, a small estate in a neighbouring province, the rent of which was punctually paid, and was

improving, for he was a good landlord. He derived a handsome income from the temple service, and from the offerings made to him as head of the establishment. He farmed some land, too, near the town, on the bank of the small river Bóree, and had an excellent garden near the village of Sindphul, in the plain below the hills, the daily supply of vegetables from which was very profitable from the large and constant consumption in the town. Finally, as one of the most learned Sanscrit scholars of the Dekhan, his instruction was held in deserved repute, and his classes were attended by young Brahmuns from all parts of the country, from whom he received fees according to their means.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] For explanation of Oriental words, see Glossary.

CHAPTER II.

In many respects Vyas Shastree was a remarkable man, and, very deservedly, he was held in great respect throughout the country. No one could look on him without being conscious of his extreme good breeding and intellectuality. Well made, there was no appearance of great strength, though in the town gymnasium, as a youth, he had held his own among the wrestlers, and had even been famous as a sword-player. Those were troubled times, when a knowledge of weapons was needed by all men, and even peaceful merchants and priests did not neglect the use of them; but, as he grew older, the Shastree had laid aside these exercises, and spare, strong, muscular arms were perhaps the only evidence of them that remained. Certainly the head and face were fine. The forehead was high and broad, slightly wrinkled now, and furrowed by parallel lines. The head was shaved, except the lock behind, and its intellectual organs were prominent. The eyebrows, strongly marked, but not bushy, projected boldly over expressive eyes of a deep steel grey, which were very bright and clear, and a prominent nose of Roman character, which corresponded with a well-shaped mouth and chin. Certainly it was a handsome face—pale, sallow perhaps in colour, yet healthy, and which occasionally assumed a noble and even haughty expression; but, ordinarily, it was good-humoured: and evidently elevated and purified in character by intellectual pursuits.

The Shastree was a man of note, as we have said, as to learning and accomplishments. He was a profound Sanscrit scholar; and in law, grammar, and logic, with the deep metaphysics of the Védas, and their commentators, he had few superiors. With mathematics and astronomy to calculate eclipses and positions of planets, he had sufficient acquaintance to assist an old friend, who was infirm, in the arrangement of the "Tooljapoor Almanac," a task by no means easy, as it included calculation of the eclipses of the year, and astrological tables. Of the popular Poorans he had less knowledge, or perhaps did not believe them; and, as many do now in these later days, held more to the ancient Vedantic theism than to the modern idolatry of the Pooranic worship. The Shastree, as a devout Brahmun, had made pilgrimages, being ac-

companied by his wife; and in disputations at Benares, Nuddea in Bengal, and Gya—as well as at Madura and Conjevaram, in the south of India—had gained credit, if not renown.

In lighter accomplishments, too, such as music, he had a fair amount of knowledge, and sang sweetly the various Rāgs, Droopuds, and other measures of the classic styles. He considered, perhaps, ordinary songs below notice; yet when he relaxed, and was prevailed upon to sing some of the plaintive ballads of his own Mahratta country, to his own Vina accompaniment, or any of his own compositions, the effect was very charming. Tara had been carefully taught by him, and the neighbours often listened to her sweet voice in the morning and evening hymns, and chants of the service, in the little temple of the house. Yet with all this wealth, which he shared liberally with the poor—all this worldly good and honour—Vyas Shastree had two great cares which pressed upon him heavily, and were shared by his wife. The first was that he had no son; the second, that his beautiful daughter was already a virgin widow. And these were heavy griefs.

Anunda Bye had borne him two sons and a daughter, of which Tara was the first-born. The others had followed, and had died successively when giving promise of healthy childhood. In vain had the parents made pilgrimages to the shrines in the Dekhan after the death of the last son, and to Benares also, to propitiate Siva in his holiest of temples, and had from time to time remitted propitiatory gifts to his shrine—no further offspring followed. An heir was not only desirable for the property, which, in default of one, must devolve upon a very distant relative—but, in a higher degree, for the performance of those ceremonies for himself and his family after death, which could only be effectual from a son, real or adopted.

Often had Anunda urged him to marry again, and assured him of her love and protection to a young wife, as a mother or elder sister; and she had even named several parties of good family who would have considered an alliance with the Shastree a positive honour. Why should he not marry? He was yet comparatively young: men older than himself had married twice, nay thrice, or till the object of their desire was accomplished. Why should he not do the same? Was he too old at forty, nay, even less? So urged his wife and his best friends.

Yet the Shastree had not consented. The fact was, he loved Anunda very dearly; she had been a good and true wife to him. He feared, too, a certain imperious tone of temper which he could control, but which, in contact with a second and younger wife, might change to jealousy, and become, to say the least, inconvenient. Or, if he made new connections, there would be the usual tribe of new relations to provide for, or to trouble him with importunate demands. On the whole, it might be better to adopt a son of that distant cousin who lived at Nassuk, and bring him up as his own. In any form, his necessity was urgent, and Anunda grew more and more earnest about the matter, and had even induced Tara to join in it.

"If you had a son," she would say to her husband, "he would be a young man before you were old. Even if you died, the property would descend to him, and the ceremonies would be properly performed. If you grew old, and I were with you, he would take care of us and of Tara. Who will do this now?"

Yes, the echo in his heart was sad enough. Who would do so? There might be two widows, perhaps, mother and daughter, both left to the mercies of distant relatives who had no personal knowledge of them, and to whom they would be as ordinary widows only, no matter what amount of property they had brought with them—shaven, dressed in the coarsest and scantiest raiment, and used for menial offices—perhaps worse. Yes! the echo—"who would do so?"—often as the words were said, fell heavily on the Shastree's heart; and recently he had told his wife that—"he would think about it if his life were spared for another year; until after the next unfavourable conjunction of planets"—"he would think about it;" and so Anunda, without making any formal propositions, was yet collecting information as to the appearance, character, property, and accomplishments of many girls in the neighbourhood, and, in short, wherever she had any acquaintance.

Most heavily, however, of all domestic cares did the situation of his daughter oppress the Shastree. She was growing very beautiful; in his eyes supremely so. So kind, too, so loving, so thoughtful, so unselfish, so clever a scholar! She might have been a happy wife—ere this, perhaps, a happy mother—yet at sixteen she was a widow, with a gloomy future: not felt as yet; for the girl had grown up with him, had shared in his studies, and had in all respects so entirely enjoyed her young and peaceful life, that any thought of change had never occurred to her.

She had been married at an early age, according to the custom of her sect—when, indeed, she was little more than six years old—to a youth, the son of a friend, who was one of the chief priests of the temple of Punderpoor, a lucrative office, and one which would devolve upon his son by hereditary right. The family was opulent, and the young man gave promise of learning and of character. No matter now; he was dead. Three years after the marriage he had been cut off suddenly by a fever, to the grief of his family and to the extinction of the Shastree's hopes for his daughter. Since then, with no further worldly hope before her, Tara had betaken herself to the study of the holy books in which her father delighted; and, doomed as it were to a life of celibacy, had vowed it to the performance of religious exercises after the manner of her faith.

It was unusual then, that Brahmun girls were taught to read or write—more so than it is now; and in accordance with the rules of the sect and the customs of the country, Tara, had her husband lived, would ere now have joined him, and become mistress of his household—a sufficient distinction for a Brahmun girl; but before that event, the application of the child to such rudimental teaching as her father had given her was so remarkable, that in process of years the conventional rules of the caste had been set aside, and it was a loving and grateful task to the father to lead his widowed daughter through the difficult mazes of Sanscrit lore, and find in hers an intellect and comprehension little short of his own.

Many of his friends shrugged their shoulders at this strange innovation of ordinary custom, and argued astutely, that it was a dangerous thing to fill a girl's mind with learning. Others, his enemies, were loud in their condemnation of the precedent it would afford to many, and the bad uses it could be put to; and in disputes upon the subject, texts were hurled at the Shastree by angry parties, to be answered, however, by appeals to ancient times, as illustrated in holy books, when women were deep scholars and emulated the men; and so Tara's desultory education went on. "After all, what does it matter?" said her father very frequently, if hard pressed by caste clamour; "she does not belong to the world now: God has seen it good to cut off her hopes: she has devoted herself to a religious life, and I am teaching her and preparing her for it."

But this did not satisfy the adverse Pundits, still less the fact that Tara as yet wore ordinary clothes, and her head as yet had not been shaved. The degradation of Brahmun widowhood had not been put on her; and she was too beautiful to escape notice, or the envious comments of others, both male and female. The rites of widowhood must be performed some time or other. Her father and mother both knew that; they would have to take her to Punderpoor, or to Benares, or to Nassuk, or other holy city, and after ceremonials of purification, all that beautiful hair must be cut off and burned, the pretty chaste bodice discarded, and she must be wrapped, ever after, in a coarse white cotton—or silk—or woollen—sheet, and all other dresses of every kind or colour be unknown to her.

Ah! it seemed cruel to disfigure that sweet face which they had looked upon since she was a child, and had watched in all its growing beauty! Any other less pure, less powerful parents, would long ago have been obliged to comply with those cruel customs; and were they not performed every day at the temple itself? "Why should the rite be delayed?" said many; "the girl is too handsome; she will be a scandal to the caste. The excuses of going to Benares, or to Nassuk, are mere devices to gain time, and sinful." "The matter must be noticed to the Shastree himself, and he must be publicly urged and warned to remove the scandal from his house and from the sect, which had been growing worse day by day for the last three years."

Yes, it was true—quite true. Tara herself knew it to be true, and often urged it. What had she before her but a dreary widowhood? Why should she yet be as one who ostensibly lived in the world, and yet did not belong to it? For whom was she to dress herself and to braid her hair every day? For whom deck herself in jewels? She did not remember her husband so as to regret his memory. She had had no love for him. Married as a child, she had seen him but a few times afterwards, when he came to perform needful annual ceremonies in the house, and she had then looked up to him with awe. He had rarely spoken to her, for she was still a child when he died. Once she remembered, when he was on a visit, her father had made her recite Sanscrit verses to him, and read and expound portions of the Bhugwat Geeta, and had said in joke that she would be a better Pundit than he was.

She remembered this incident better than any other, and soon after its occurrence he had died. Now she felt that, had he lived, she might have loved

him, and the reproach of widowhood would not have belonged to her. These thoughts welled up often from her heart with grief, and yearning only known to herself, and as yet only half admitted: yet which increased sensibly with time, and recurred, too, more frequently and painfully, as girls of her own age, honoured wives and happy mothers—girls who had already taken their places in life—met her at the temple with laughing crowing children on their hips, proud of their young maternity: or came to visit her, and spoke of domestic matters commonly—interests which she could never create or enjoy, and yet for which the natural yearning was ever present.

"Why did he go from me?" she would cry to herself, often with low moaning; "why leave me alone? Why did they not make me Sutee with him? Could I not even now be burned, and go to him?" And if these thoughts changed, it was to the idea of a new wife for her father, who, perhaps, would be as a sister. If a brother were born, what a new source of pleasant care and occupation! Yet this had its dark side also. "Would she be friendly to her and her mother? and if not——"

Her father and mother observed when gloomy thoughts beset her, and when she became excitable and nervous in her manner, and they did their best to cheer them away. "She might yet be happy in doing charitable acts," they said, "in reading holy books, in meditation, in pilgrimages; and they would go with her to Benares and live there." "Why not," the Shastree would say; "why not, daughter? We have but thee, and thou hast only us; it will be good to live and die in the holy city."

Well, it sufficed for the time, and there were intervals when people's tongues were quiet, and these were happy days because so tranquil, and Tara had given herself and her destiny into her father's hands.

"Do with me as thou wilt, O father," she said; "what is good to thee is best for me; but do not risk anything of thy honoured name for one so hopeless as I am. Why should I be a mockery to myself? It may cost me a pang to part with all these;" and she would pass her hand through those long, glossy, curling tresses; "and ye too will grieve to see them gone, and your poor Tara shaved and degraded; but there is no help for it, and the honour of your house is more to your daughter than these ornaments. Without them I should be a comfort to ye, and at peace with the world and with myself; with them, only a

source of disgrace and calumny, and I were better dead. Yes, let us go to Benares, to Nassuk—anywhere—so that I leave my shame behind me."

If that poor struggling heart were laid open, was there nothing in its depths which, as she spoke it, combated this resolve fiercely and unremittingly? If it had not been so, she would have been more than human. There was the natural repugnant dread of this disfigurement and disgrace. Worse, far worse, the endurance of the after-life—the life of childless barren widowhood of which she knew and saw daily sad examples. She knew of the bitter experience of such widows, when all modest retirement, respect, and honour of virgin or married life was discarded with the ceremonial rites, and men's insult and women's contempt took their place: and that from this there was no refuge till death.

When she shuddered at these truths—they were no delusions, and her soul rebelled against them—some ideal being, mingling his life with hers, caressing the beauty she was conscious of possessing, would present himself in dreamy visions, waking or sleeping, and beset her in terribly seductive contrasts. The very books she read offered such to her imagination. There were no demigods now, no heroes fighting for the glory of Hinduism, as related in the Ramayun; but there were ideal examples of nobility—of bravery—of beauty, which enthralled her fancy, and led it to portray to her realities. Yet there was no reality, and could be none. She had not seen any one to love, and never could see any one. Who would care for her—a widow—who could love a widow? And yet the dreams came nevertheless, and her poor heart suffered terribly in these contests with its necessity. After all, it was more the calmness of despair than conviction of higher motive which brought to her lips words such as we have recorded:—"she would leave her shame behind her."

But her parents did not go, and the rites were deferred indefinitely. Last year they were to have gone to Nassuk for the purpose to their relatives; but the planets were not propitious, or the business of the temple and its ceremonies interfered. This year, when the cold season was nearly over, in the spring, at the Bussunt festival, if the conjunctions were favourable, "they would see about it." They did not get over the—"if."

So here were the two great cares of the household. Which was the heaviest? To the Shastree, certainly, Tara's ceremony of widowhood. His own

marriage was a thing which concerned himself only, and, at the worst, he could adopt an heir; but that Tara should be a reproach to him, the revered Shastree and priest, and remain a reproach among women—it could not be. The caste were becoming urgent, and the Gooroo, or spiritual prince, the "Shunkar Bhartee Swâmi," whose agents travelled about enforcing discipline and reporting moral and ceremonial transgressions, sent him word, privately and kindly, that the matter should not be delayed. He quite approved of the ceremony being performed at Benares or at Nassuk, out of sight, for the old man knew Tara—knew her sad history, and admired her learning and perseverance in study. At his last visit, two years before, he had put up in the Shastree's house, and had treated the girl as his daughter; but the requirements of the caste were absolute, and were she his own daughter he dared not to have hesitated.

But we have made a long digression.

"Come, daughter," said Anunda, "cast that sheet about thy head. It strikes me that men look at thee too earnestly now as we pass the bazaar, and the morning air is chill from the night rain."

"Nay, dear mother, not so. Am I a Toorki woman to veil my face?" said Tara, quickly. "Am I ashamed of it? Art thou, mother?"

"If thou wert not so beautiful, Tara. I dread men's evil eyes on thee, my child, and I dread men's tongues more."

"Ah, mother! I dread neither," replied the girl. "They have done me no harm as yet, and if my heart is pure and 'sutee' before God and the Holy Mother, she will protect me. She has told me so often, and I believe it. Come—I think—I think," she added, with an excited manner, as she clasped her heavy gold zone about her waist, her bosom heaving rapidly beneath the silken folds over it, and her eyes glowing strangely, "I think, mother, she came to me last night in my dream. She was very beautiful, O, very beautiful! She took hold of my hair, and said, 'Serve me, Tara, I will keep it for thee.'"

"Tara! art thou dreaming still?" exclaimed Anunda. "Holy Mother! what light is in thine eyes? Put the thought far from thee, O dearest; it is but the echo of what thy father said last night when he comforted us both—it will pass away."

"Perhaps so, mother," answered the girl, abstractedly. "Yet it seemed so real, I think I feel the touch on my hair still. I looked at it when I rose, and combed it out, but I saw nothing. Yes, it will pass away—everything passes away."

"And what was she like, Tara?" asked her mother, unable to repress her curiosity.

"O mother, I was almost too dazzled to see. I am even now dazzled, and if I shut my eyes the vision is there. There!" cried the girl, closing her eyes and pointing forward, "there, as I saw it! The features are the same; she is small, shining like silver, and her eyes glowing, but not with red fire like those in the temple. O mother, she is gone!" she continued, after a pause, "she is gone, and I cannot describe her."

"Didst thou tell this to him—to thy father, Tara?" asked her mother, much excited.

"Yes, mother. I awoke before him and could not sleep again. I got up and drew water for him to bathe. I tended the fire, and sat down to read. Then he went and bathed; and when he had come out of the temple[2] and put on dry clothes, I read part of the 'Geeta' to him, but I was trembling, and he thought I was cold. Gradually I told him——"

"And what said he, daughter?" asked her mother, interrupting her.

"He seemed troubled, mother, and yet glad, I could not say which. He said he would ask 'the Mother' after the morning hymn was ended."

"Come then, Tara, we will go to him at once. Nay, girl, as thou art, thy words have given me strength, my pearl; come."

CHAPTER III.

The Poorans relate that the goddess Doorga, Kalee, or Bhowani, the wife of Siva, once slew a frightful giant named Muhésha, having the head of a wild buffalo, to the great relief of the people who suffered from its existence; and Hindus generally believe that this event took place at Tooljapoor in the Dekhan. Toolja is another name for Bhowani or Kalee, and hence Tooljapoor—the city of Toolja. After the monster was slain, and the presence of the goddess was no longer required on earth, she left the form she had appeared in as witness of what had been done, changed it to stone, and it was in after years discovered in the ravine where the monster had been slain.

The image still remains where it is alleged to have been first found, and where certain miraculous indications of its presence were made. A temple was built over it, and a town gradually gathered round the temple, which became famous throughout India, and is frequented by pilgrims from all quarters. It is now the idol worshipped there, and is a figure of black marble, or perhaps basalt, highly polished, small, but of elegant proportions, with features of the pure Hindu type. The eyes are composed of large uncut rubies; and, as the image stands upon its altar, clothed in a woman's garment, in the small dark sanctum of the temple, they have always a strange, weird, and, to the worshippers, a fascinating appearance, glittering through the gloom, and smoke of lamps and incense always burning.

The temple is a very picturesque object, from its situation in a deep glen, the bottom of which is nearly filled by it. Pious worshippers, and votaries from time to time, have enriched it by buildings and courts surrounded by cloisters, ascending one above the other, connected by flights of steps: and in these courts are several cisterns, filled from springs in the sides of the hill. One of them, peculiarly sacred, as believed to come from the Ganges, gushes from a cow's mouth carved in the rock, and enters a large basin and reservoir: and in all these cisterns pilgrims to the shrine, both male and female, must bathe before they can worship the image. Crowded by these pilgrims from all parts of India, of various colours and physiognomies, languages and cos-

tumes, men and women,—bathing, ascending or descending the broad flights of steps, pouring into the lower courts in dense throngs, chanting mystic adorations, and singing hymns in different languages and accents; it is impossible to conceive a more picturesque or exciting scene than they present on occasions of particular festivals, or, in general, on the day of the full moon of every month.

The town of Tooljapoor adjoins the temple walls on three sides, and ascends from them—the terraced houses clinging, as it were, to ledges of the rugged glen—on the north and south. On the east, the ascent is more regular; and the principal street slopes from the crest of the tableland down to the first flight of steps leading to the first court, and thence down successive flights of steps, through other courts, to the lowest, which is the largest, and in which stands the principal shrine, surrounded by cloisters and other buildings. Large tamarind, peepul, and other trees, have grown accidentally among the cliffs around, or have been planted in the courts, and have flourished kindly, affording grateful shade; so the result, in the mingling of foliage and buildings of many styles in the temple—surrounded by the rugged sides of the ravine, occasionally precipitous:—and the terraced houses, temples, and other buildings of the town above them—is remarkably picturesque, and even beautiful.

The temple ravine opens into another of large dimensions, which, in the form of an irregular semicircle, is perhaps a mile long by nearly half of a mile at the broadest part of the diameter, narrowing to its mouth. It is called the Ram Durra, and opens gradually beyond the hills, upon one of the great undulating plains of the Dekhan. To the north, the large ravine presents the appearance of an amphitheatre with precipitous sides, from which, in rainy weather, a number of small but lofty cascades descend from the tableland above, and form the head of a small river which eventually falls into the Bheema.

The hills which bound the ravine are about four hundred feet high, and are, in fact, the edge of a very extensive plateau called the Bâlâ Ghaut, which extends nearly a hundred miles, with only a slight descent, towards the east; and, after ascending to the town of Tooljapoor from the ravine, a flat plain is reached, on which the greater portion of the town stands. One promontory of the entrance of the great ravine juts out past and bounds the temple on the left or south side, and along its face is the road by which the ascent is made from

the plain below. The hill then turns round sharp to the east, with precipitous sides, leaving a level plain of a few hundred yards in width between the town and the declivity.

On the edge of this precipitous side, to the south, are two other temples, also holy. One, a tall octagon building, now covers the rock on which the goddess is stated to have alighted from heaven when she came to engage the monster who lived in the adjoining ravine; and the other, a little further on, and much more ancient, is situated at, and encloses the head of a spring which fills a cistern, as it trickles down the precipice at all seasons of the year. This is also a sacred place, and is called "Pâp-nâs," or "the sin destroyer;" and the legend says that the goddess bathed in this spring, and washed the monster's blood from her hands, after she had slain him; so it is held sacred.

Truly the whole corner of the plateau is very beautiful. The quaint old town hanging literally on the mountain edge: the deep gloomy ravine of the temple opening out to the larger one: the precipices and rugged hills to the west and north, and the beautiful undulating plain to the south, over which the eye wanders as over a map for fifty miles or more, checkered with thriving villages and their rich fields and gardens,—form a striking assemblage of objects. But the interest centres in the temple itself, with its gilded spires and picturesque groups of buildings, as well as its strange effect in the position in which it has been placed, attesting, no doubt, in the opinion of the people—if there were any question on the subject, the truth of the legend.

It will be understood from the foregoing, that the town is situated considerably above the temple, and part of it on the level ground of the plateau or plain. The Shastree's house was on the edge of the crest of the ground, looking to the south over the ravine of the temple, the cliffs, and a portion of the town beyond, across the small plain which lay between the edge of the temple ravine and the precipitous side of the mountain, and thence over the plain which, in the far distance, mingled with the sky. To the south-east the line of hills was rugged and broken, descending by steep spurs into the lower plain; but from its edge, all round to the north, the eye followed a fair, rich country, sloping eastwards, covered with grain-fields, through which the small river Bóree, here only a brook, pursued a quiet course among the town gardens. Again, to the north and west, looking into and across the large wild ravine,

were the precipices of the Ram Durra, and the rugged basalt hills beyond them. So, wherever you turned, it was a fair or wild scene alternately; and standing upon the terrace of the Shastree's house, or sitting in a small chamber which had been built over one of the corner rooms, you could see all that has been told; and very beautiful it was.

The Shastree had travelled in his pilgrimages all over India. He had seen wilder and grander scenes perhaps, but none pleasanter to live in, than this cool, breezy, healthful mountain town, enhanced by the presence of one of the holiest shrines in the country. Here he must bear his misfortune calmly; and though his necessity urged the change we have alluded to, he never issued from his door and looked over the fair prospect about him, or performed the sacrificial ceremonies at the temple, without being strengthened in his desire to live and die here; and therefore the struggle in regard to his daughter was the more bitter.

That morning he had risen unrefreshed—his sleep had been restless. Something in one of the books he had been explaining to Tara in the evening had brought up the subject of widowhood and its consequences and obligations, and the message of his spiritual prince had been discussed with much grief and misery to all. There seemed to be no evasion of them possible—the rites must be fulfilled; and he had again spoken of Benares, and Tara had simply and meekly given herself into his hands, and prostrated herself before him and her mother in submission. She was no doubt excited; and her first communication in the morning startled him exceedingly.

You, O Christian reader! must not try his feelings by your own standard. You live under a holier and simpler faith. If in the ordinary occurrences of life, and its joys and sorrows, there is little difference between you, it is very different in regard to faith. You have but one object of calm, loving, trustful, humble adoration. He, as all educated Hindus, believed in the same one God, but it was overlaid by a gorgeous and picturesque mythology, and two distinctions of—as he believed them to be—heavenly beings, to whom separately and collectively worship was due, and yet whose interests and designs were so different and apparently irreconcilable.

His household faith was for the most part a pure theism; but circumstances arising out of hereditary rights had placed him at the head of the local worship of the dread goddess, whom, either lovingly or in deprecation of her

possible wrath, he worshipped daily. But the worship of Doorga or Bhowani, as the wife of the creating and preserving power in her beneficence, and of the same power in her destroying aspect—in her wrath terrible and unrelenting—is perhaps more fascinating to women than to men; and, alternating with both aspects, a woman, in all moods and in all necessities, may most naturally perhaps apply to another woman, in whose power she believes, for sympathy and assistance. Has it not ever been so? Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Indian—nay, even Christian?

Nevertheless the Shastree believed, not lovingly perhaps, but in deprecation of wrath; while his wife and daughter, unable to follow the mystically subtle metaphysical creeds of the Véds and Shastras, saw in their goddess enough to fill their hearts with practical faith in, and reliance upon, her power over their destinies. To her, both had addressed their vows and daily supplications, very simply and earnestly, for this devotion of their lives to her was all they could give, if their prayers were granted.

What wonder, then, that Tara's vision agitated him? The Shastree knew of many women on whom the spirit of the goddess in divine afflatus had descended. They were possessed by her: they spoke and prophesied when they were full of her presence: and he dreaded them while he worshipped the power displayed. As Tara told him her dream, and the service the goddess had asked, could it be real? Could his daughter, as an inspired priestess, ever speak before the image? That, however, must be tried without delay, and he hastened more rapidly than usual to the temple, having bid her follow when her mother was ready.

He arrived as the ceremonies of bathing and dressing the image were being performed by the inferior priesthood, and, these concluded, the morning service began. We need not detail it—the decking of the altar with flowers, the marking the forehead of the image with the sacred colours, the offerings of daily food and sacred elements with flowers, and the singing of mystic hymns. Vyas Shastree was speedily joined by other Brahmuns and priests, and bare-headed, naked to the waist, carrying the sacred fire and sacrificial offerings, and chanting hymns with the accompaniment of clashing cymbals and lutes. Thus the procession was passing round and round the temple, and the simple but strange melody rising and falling amidst the buildings, trees,

and cliffs, and filling the ravine with sound, as Tara and her mother gained the outer gate, and began to descend the steps which led to the lower court.

Ordinarily they did not bathe in the sacred cistern where, from the carved stone cow's mouth, the stream of the holy spring gushed sparkling into the basin; but Tara paused as they passed it. She had felt more and more excited as she neared the temple, and the melody of the hymn and the clashing of the cymbals, as they came up together through the trees in the still air, had added to the effect already produced in her mind by her dream.

"Mother," she said, hesitatingly—"mother, ought I not to bathe here? Can I go into the presence, even with these garments on me, after what the Holy Mother said last night? They should be wet and pure."

"It is too cold for thee, my child," replied Anunda. "Come, Tara, come on; the hymn will be finished ere we can join—come."

"No, mother, I am hot—burning; something urges me to the well, and I cannot resist it. Mother, I must be pure before the shrine. May I go?"

"The spirit of the goddess is with her, truly," thought her mother. "Go, Tara, it may refresh thee," she said; "and there are dry clothes in the temple. Go, be quick, my child!"

The girl descended the steps into the basin, and, turning to the east, poured libations from her hands to the four quarters of the earth; then the three libations to the sun, saying a short hymn from the Véda. Then followed her prayer to the goddess. "Holy Mother, do what thou wilt with me; take me, leave me, or use me as thou wilt, but do not cast me away! Behold, I come!" Then she stepped forth from the basin, her silk garment clinging to her sweet form, and revealing its perfect proportions more than the innate modesty of her mind permitted; hastily, therefore, she shook it free from her limbs, while her mother wrung the water from the ends.

"I am ready now," she said, simply; "come, mother, I will go to her pure, and sit before her. If she wants Tara she will speak. Come!"

Her mother had observed her glistening eye and glowing cheek, which even the chill of the water did not subdue, and seeing the expression of her face, as she ascended from the basin, was changed from its habitual sadness to one of excited triumph, she caught the infection herself, and seized Tara by

the hand. "Come," she cried, "Jey Kalee," "Victory to Kalee!" And so they descended the steps more rapidly, while the music of the hymn and the clash of the deep-toned cymbals resounded through the lower court, and seemed to be echoed and repeated in the cliffs and buildings above and around them.

The procession of Brahmuns and priests was turning the corner of the temple as Tara and her mother met it in the full swell of the music. Usually the girl and her mother fell in behind, reverentially and calmly, and followed it as it passed round. Now, however, the Shastree and his companions were amazed to see Tara separate herself from her mother, and put herself at the head of the party, toss her arms into the air, and join in the hymn they were singing—leading them on more rapidly than they had moved before. The Shastree marked that she had bathed, and that her wet garments dripped as she went along. "She is pure," he thought; "she has prepared herself, and if the goddess will take her, it is her will. There is something in this that cannot be stayed."

The other Brahmuns stopped, still chanting, and looked to Vyas Shastree with wonder for some explanation, which was as quickly given. "The goddess spoke to her last night, and will not be repelled," he said. "Go on, do not stop her; let her do as she lists."

No one dared stop her, or touch Tara. The height of excitement, or, as they thought, inspiration, was in her eye, and that sweet face was lifted up with a holy rapture. She seemed to fly rather than to walk, so completely had her feelings carried her forward; and as she moved she looked behind to those following, still chanting with them, her arms waved above her head, and beckoning them onwards. They could not resist the influence. So they passed on, round and round the temple, still singing. Other morning worshippers, attracted by the strange sight, joined them, or stood by wondering till the hymn was finished. Then Tara, noticing no one, entered the porch of the temple rapidly, and advancing alone, knelt down before the door of the inner shrine in front of the image, and they watched her silently.

What did she see to cause that earnest look? The image was familiar to all. The light of the lamps within shone out strongly on the kneeling figure, shrouded in its wet clinging drapery, but hardly illuminated the gloomy space in the deep outer vestibule, around which the spectators arranged themselves reverentially. The ruby eyes of the goddess glittered with a weird brilliance

from among the cloud of incense burning before her; and the fragrant smoke, issuing from the door, wreathed itself about her form and ascended to the roof, and hung about the pillars of the room.

Those looking on almost expected the image would move, or speak, in greeting or in reprehension of the young votary, and the silence was becoming almost oppressive when the girl's lips moved: "Mother," she cried, in her low musical voice—"Mother! O Holy Mother! Tara is here before thee. What wouldst thou of her?" And she leant forward, swinging her body to and fro restlessly, and stretching forth her hands. "Mother, take me or leave me, but do not cast me away!" She could only repeat this simple prayer, for the yearning at her heart could find no other words; but her bosom heaved as though it would burst the bodice, and her hands and arms, with her whole frame, trembled violently.

"She is possessed, brother," said another priest to her father. "What hath come to her? When did this happen?"

"Peace," said the father, in a hoarse whisper; "disturb her not: let what will happen, even if she die. She is in hands more powerful than ours, and we are helpless. O Tara, my child! my child!"

"Mother, dost thou hear? I will do thy bidding," again murmured the girl. "Come, come! as thou wast in my dream. So come to Tara! Ah, yes, she comes to me! Yes, Holy Mother, I am with thee;" and, stretching forth her arms, she sank down on her face, shuddering.

"She is dying; my child! my pearl!" cried her mother, frantically, who had been with difficulty restrained and who rushed forward. "Will none of ye help?"

"Touch her not, Anunda," exclaimed her husband, holding her back; "this brooks no interference. Let her lie and do as the Mother would wish her; this will pass away." So they gathered round Tara and watched her. She was tranquil now, not shuddering: the fair round arms were stretched out towards the shrine, and the light fell on the rippled glossy hair, which had escaped from the knot behind, and hung over her face and neck, shrouding them in its heavy waves.

"Let us chant the hymn to the praise of Doorga," said the old Pundit who had before spoken; "brothers, this is no ordinary occurrence. Many come and feign the divine afflatus, but there hath been nothing so strange as this in my memory;" and, striking a few chords on the vina he held in his hand, the hymn—a strange wild cadence—was begun. The sound filled the vaulted chamber, and was taken up by those outside, who crowded the entrance. Still she moved not, but lay tranquilly; the full chorus of the men's voices and the clashing of the cymbals were not apparently heeded by her. As it died away, there was a faint movement of the arms, and gradually she raised herself to her knees, tossed back the hair from her face and neck, which fell over her shoulders and back, and looked around her wildly for a moment; then, seeing her mother, she leaned towards her as she advanced, and, stretching forth her arms and clasping her knees, hid her face in her garment, and sobbed convulsively.

"My child, I am here; I am with thee," said Anunda, supporting her, and herself sobbing hysterically. "Speak! what is it? What hast thou seen? My daughter, my sweet one, O speak to us!"

"Water, mother, water! my throat is parched! I cannot speak. Is she gone?"

"Who, Tara?"

"The Holy Mother; she was with me—she entered into me. O mother, what can I do? Where am I?"

"Here is water for thee, Tara; drink."

She tried to do so, but gasped at every attempt; at last she swallowed a little, and was relieved. "She was not angry, mother," she said, smiling. "Did you not hear her speak? What did I answer?"

"No, my child," said her father; "thou wert silent, and we feared the goddess had taken thy spirit; but thou livest, and we are grateful."

Tara turned to her father with an imploring look for silence, and again, but now calmly, prostrated herself before the image, while the brilliant ruby eyes seemed, to those who beheld them, to glow still more brightly through the smoke of the incense.

"Holy Mother of the gods," she said, in a low voice of prayer, "I am thy slave. I fear thee no longer. Blessed Mother, I will love thee, who art kind to Tara.... Here will I live and die with thee according to thy word." Then she arose and continued to him: "Come, father; behold, I am calm now."

"She is accepted, brethren," said the old priest, turning to the others; "let us do her honour. With no life for the world, let her widowhood remain in the Mother's keeping: she has chosen her, let no man gainsay it. Come, daughter, let me mark thee as she would have it done;" and, entering the shrine, he took several of the garlands from the neck of the image, and a small vessel containing water in which were the leaves of the sacred Toolsee; dipping his finger into which, he marked her gently on the forehead, sprinkling some on her head, on which he placed his hands as he said the incantation which denoted the presence of the divinity. Then he hung the garlands about her neck, and the fragrant red powder of the morning sacrifice being handed to him, he drew some gently across her forehead and bade her stand up.

"Jey Toolja!" "Victory to Toolja!" was shouted by the attendant priests and worshippers. "Victory to the Holy Mother!" "Victory to her votary!" "Let us take her in procession!" "Let us go with her!" cried all around.

"Ah, no, friends," said the girl, rising modestly; "ye see but a poor helpless child who was in grief, and whom the Mother has comforted. Leave me! let me go! I would go home. Mother, take me away! Father, do thou come with me!"

"It may not be, daughter," said the old priest, kindly; "we must neglect nothing, else it were dangerous for thee and for us. Bring a palkee," he shouted to the attendant priests, "and get the music ready, and flowers too, and offerings for the Pâp-nâs. Yes, brother," he continued to her father, "for once I usurp thy office; thou knowest what is needed. Come, let us not delay."

Tara looked imploringly at her father; she would fain have escaped the public procession if she could. She only wanted now to get home unperceived, and to hide herself in her chamber. What had she done to be so honoured—to be so noticed?

"It must be, my child," he said; "this cannot be begun and abandoned; let not thy heart fail thee, the Holy Mother will be with thee. Come!"

Tara yielded: she bent reverently before the old priest, and touched his feet, then her father's, and going round the Brahmuns assembled she did the same; last of all her mother's, who was sobbing, yet not in sorrow. "Come," she said, "I am ready; do with me as ye list. Ye are my elders, and I obey."

FOOTNOTE:

[2] Most Brahmuns perform their early morning worship after bathing in cold water, and with their garments still wet.

CHAPTER IV.

So they led Tara forth and placed her in the open palankeen, and, as they decked her with flowers, and strewed garlands over its canopy, the temple music struck up a joyous marriage measure. Then, as the bearers moved gently forward, her father and mother holding the sides of the litter, the priests arranged themselves on all sides of it, and began another solemn chant of victory to the goddess.

By this time, news of the event had passed on into the town, and it was the hour when all the people were astir. Men and women, collected in groups, heard strange tales of how the goddess had appeared to Tara and taken her away to heaven; again, that she had died before the shrine, and they were bringing away her body. The general conviction was, that she had died, and many women, collected in knots, were weeping bitterly and beating their breasts. But as the temple trumpets and conchs blew a sudden and quivering blast, and the glad music was heard with the chant, now rising, now falling, as the procession slowly ascended the steps, and traversed the court,—and at last, as it emerged from the gateway and entered the broad street which led to the centre of the town,—the popular enthusiasm knew no bounds. "Jey Toolja!" "Jey Kalee!" "Bome! Bome!" the cries of victory—were taken up from those who led the procession, leaping and shouting. Many ran for incense or for garlands: men and women thronged from street and alley and joined the procession as it moved up; others stood upon the terraces of their houses and waved garments or handkerchiefs, or hung out cloths from the balconies and windows. "Jey Toolja!" "Jey Bhowani!" shouted all who came. Pilgrims from the Ganges, Sunniasis holding aloft their withered arms; Gosaees with their orange clothes and matted locks, strange, wild, eerie folk,—issued from archways where they had slept, or vaults where they had lodged; and still the crowd swelled, and the shouting, and through all, and over all, the solemn chant and the hoarse and shrill quivering notes of the trumpets.

Few knew why this was, but the procession advanced out of the temple gate, so it belonged to it; and as the girl passed, seated calmly now in her lit-

ter, flowers were cast on her, incense was burned before her, and fragrant powder thrown over her, with blessings. Her old friends, the flower-sellers, emptied their morning baskets of jessamine over her, and touched her feet reverentially; and the old confectioner, who had always kept a sweet morsel for his young friend, threw showers of comfits upon her litter, and in his excitement generously flung the contents of his baskets among the crowd.

So they passed on, through the eastern gate, and over the plain which led to the Pâp-nâs temple, and the sun was now rising over the distant purple hills in great glory among gorgeous golden clouds. As the first beams fell upon the procession, the priests changed their hymn to that in adoration of the Sun, from the Védas, which we adopt from a free translation:—

"Risen in majestic blaze,
Lo, the Universe's eye,
Vast and wondrous host of rays,
Shineth brightly in the sky.

"See, he followeth the Dawn,
Brilliant in the path above,
As a youth by beauty drawn
Seeks the maiden of his love.

"Hear us, O ye gods, this day!
Hear us graciously, we pray;
As the Sun his state begins,
Free us from all heinous sins.

"Mitra, Varun, Aditi—
Hear, O hear us graciously!
Powers of Ocean, Earth, and Air,
Listen, listen, to our prayer."[3]

And the people still shouted the cry of the goddess, or joined in the hymn of the priests, till the small temple was reached.

The ceremonies there were brief and simple. Tara bathed in the sin-cleansing basin, but she would not change her wet garments, still resisting her mother. Once more were holy texts and incantations said over her by all the priests collectively; and for the last time they led her round and round the little shrine and court of the spring, chanting a hymn of praise; her father leading, but submitting to the old priest who has already been mentioned. It was finished, and her new life began. The excitement which had possessed her and carried her on was already passing away, and giving place to a sick weariness and irrepressible languor, which not only her face but her limbs expressed.

"She will need careful tending for a long time, brother," said the old priest to her father. "Give her a cooling drink of toolsee and tamarinds, sweetened with honey; put her into dry clothes, and let her rest quietly; she may not even speak for many days; for so I have known it. Let us take her home."

"I am thankful to ye all, friends and brethren," said the Shastree, much affected. "This manifestation hath filled me with many cares, for we were not votaries of the goddess. Now she hath come into the house, and the service she exacts is rigid, yet we will obey and do her will. If ye will depart and leave us, take my blessing."

"Nay, say not so," cried all who were near. "Let us take her home; and in honour and duty let this rite be finished." So the procession was again formed, and in the same order that it had reached the temple, it again returned to the town-gate, and wound through the streets, thronged with curious gazers, to the door of the Shastree's dwelling, where the priest and Brahmuns were dismissed with thanks and those only remained who were specially bidden to do so.

Tara's exhaustion had been increasing since the ceremony was concluded; and the wet garments about her, which had not been felt while the excitement lasted, now struck a chill into her which even dry clothes, cast over her by her mother, did not remove. She could not speak, and could hardly move from the litter as it was set down; and when, supported by her mother and the servants, she reached the inner apartment, she sank helplessly in her mother's arms. But she was now in gentle, careful hands, and at rest; and though she did not speak as yet, her grateful looks ere long expressed all the consciousness her mother longed to see.

She had ever after only a confused recollection of what had occurred; and even as they came home there was a vacancy in her look which had seriously alarmed her parents. Her father could remember many such votaries, in whom the light of reason had been utterly quenched, and he trembled for his daughter. We can account for the occurrence by rational causes: a long-continued mental excitement and suppressed care brought on by the nature of her own belief in, to her, that goddess of dread power, yet of sympathy with human requirements,—and its hysterical effect; but to her father, and more so to her mother, as also to all the priests of the temple and people of the town, it was a manifestation of the divine interest, and a claiming of the girl for her own peculiar service.

We will not follow the conference between the Shastree and his friends, which related to ceremonies to be performed and sacrifices to be offered: nothing must be neglected. One of them was the resident agent of the spiritual prince before alluded to, who had only a few days before delivered the friendly warning, now unneeded. "The Mother hath settled this matter herself, friends," he said, "and no one can resist it; we will write collectively to the 'Swâmi,' and tell him of it; he, too, will be assured that this divine favour is the result of Vyas Shastree's piety, and his daughter's devotion to religious rites; better this than worldly allurements and ties, sweet as they are."

There was no dissentient voice. Nor in the town, nor among the caste, could any one impugn the act. It had been involuntary and public. Thousands had witnessed it, and they bore testimony of the holy fervour which had animated all who accompanied Tara from the temple. All seemed to have caught a portion of the divine manifestation and enthusiasm.

So every one said that the beautiful daughter of Vyas Shastree had become a Moorlee or priestess of the temple, and that the goddess herself had called her from her disgrace of widowhood to the glory of her own service. Was not this better than worldly ties? Now she was free!

Did Tara think so? It was many weeks ere the feverish excitement passed away, during which the loving eyes glowed with unnatural lustre, and a fierce fire seemed to possess her. It was to be expected; and she had skilful and tender attendance. With perfect rest and quiet, and simple remedies, it would pass away, they said, and it did so gradually, and Tara arose weaker, but calm. By-and-by she would be allowed to make her sacrificial offerings, but

not yet; and till then her beloved books, the household worship, and occupation, were enough to occupy her.

"Time enough," said the old Pundit, who frequently visited her and had become interested in her, "with a life of service to be done. When you are strong you shall come to us, but not till then."

Was Tara satisfied? If the dread of her shame had been removed, the void in her heart had not as yet been filled; but the new life had to begin, and she would do her best, and so she comforted herself.

Were others satisfied? Yes. As we have said, most who knew her envied her lot, but some sneered, and already shook their heads.

One man had looked at the distraught girl, as she was placed in the litter and covered with garlands, who was satisfied, yet not as the rest. More beautiful in the unconsciousness of her excitement than he had ever seen her before,—far more so, to his sight, than she had ever appeared while ordinarily attending the temple worship with her mother, and where he had watched her for months past, Moro Trimmul had joined the throng in order to observe her better. Being a Brahmun, he had closed up to the edge of the litter bareheaded and unnoticed, singing the hymns as one of the attendant priests, and had thus been able to accompany the procession, gloating upon the girl's loveliness with an unholy desire. As the litter was taken up he fell out of the procession, and, watching it depart, sat down alone on the edge of the cliff looking over the plain, and by the side of the small stream which, issuing from the Pâp-nâs temple, fell down the face of the rock in a sheet of foam. A girl's voice aroused him from a reverie which we dare not follow.

"So the Pundit is not dancing back to the town as he came out, before the new Moorlee," she said ironically.

"Nor thou either, Gunga. Dost thou not welcome a new priestess?"

"I marvel at it," she continued, with a sneer; "thou wast looking enough at her. I dance before her? When she dances with us before the Mother, then she will be a true Moorlee—not else. Now I hate her; I shall always hate her."

"Ah! she will never join ye," he returned; "she is of another sort than the rest of ye: Gunga, thou art jealous of her beauty, girl."

"By the Holy Mother, she shall not remain so, Moro Trimmul. She—a widow—to think of setting herself above us! That cat-faced girl! If she has chosen to serve the Mother she must obey her rules, and be one of us. Think ye we will let her come there unless she is?"

The Brahmun shook his head. "I was thinking about her," he said, absently.

The girl sighed. "I thought so," she replied, "and thou wilt love me no more—no more now. Is it not so? say it, if it is to be so."

"Love thee!" returned the man, bitterly—"yes, as thou canst be loved—by gold. Hark ye, Gunga, make her as thou art; get her into my power, and I will give thee a waist-belt of gold."

"As heavy as hers?" cried the girl, excitedly.

"Thou shalt weigh the one against the other and thine shalt turn the scale—will that content thee?"

"Wilt thou?—shall it? Swear on my neck and my feet to give this, and I will do thy will. Yes, to humble her pride and her father's—who drove me from the temple one day, and I have hated him ever since. I shall hate thee too, afterwards; yet I will do it," cried the girl, excitedly, clapping her hands—"yet I will do it."

"I swear," said the man, touching her neck. "Come and sit here by me." She did so, but neither spoke for some time.

"Thou hast a sister, Moro Pundit, and she is beautiful. She ought to have been married ere this. A little more time, and can it be done?" she said, breaking the silence.

The Brahmun winced. "She was betrothed once," he said, "but the man died."

"Perhaps she was married," continued the girl, with a sneer, "and she is as Tara Bye, or worse. Is it not so?"

"No! by the Holy Mother, no!" cried the Pundit, sharply, and with flashing eyes. "Breathe such a thing and I will have thy life. Beware what thou sayest, even to me! A word more, and I fling thee down the precipice!"

"O, I fear not for my life," said the girl, carelessly, "the Mother takes care of that, and I will say nothing, lest I should lose my pretty gold zone. But what of thy sister? The Shastree wants a new wife, we hear; Anunda Bye wants a son to cheer her and him, and why should not thy sister be taken there? If I do not err, she can have her chance. She is of a good age—why not? Could she understand what to do? Could she be taught?"

"Ah!" said the Pundit, abstractedly, "I had thought of it too, but it seemed impossible. I do not know him—yes—if——"

"If?—why if? Art thou afraid? The girl is here—let me see her and know her, and leave the rest to us."

"Gunga," said the Brahmun, after a pause. "If thou canst bring this about—if thou canst get me speech of this Shastree——"

"Let me speak to the girl first. 'Radha,' that is her name, is it not? Let me see if she is resolute and as I hear of her. If she be, she shall have her desire; thou shalt have thine; and I—ah, yes! I will have more gold. Yes," she cried, clapping her hands again, "more gold! I will have gold anklets, like Tara's. Why should she wear gold anklets and mine be only silver? Wilt thou give them?—all I can hope, now she hath taken thy love from me——"

"When my sister is Vyas Shastree's wife thou mayst have what thou wilt, Gunga. I swear it to thee on thy neck and feet. Art thou content? Yes, thou shalt see her now. Manage the matter as ye will, women's wits are sharper than mine. Now follow me unobserved," he said, rising.

"Once more, Moro Pundit," continued Gunga, "tell me if the marriage can be performed now? Is there a fitting conjunction of planets?—within a month?"

"Yes; till the Now Râtree; after that not for a long time."

"Enough to do, enough to do, in the time," muttered the girl to herself. "Hast thou any women with thee—any relations?"

"Yes, her mother's sister—a widow; no more. Our mother is dead, my father is dead, and there are only ourselves left of a large family."

"Then the Shastree will like the connection all the better, and—ye are rich, they say. Yes, I will bring the widow and Anunda together."

"We have enough. In that respect I can satisfy the Shastree fully."

"Ah! he will ask no questions. His wife is shrewd and clever, and will guide him," she replied; "but he will be careful about the horoscope of thy sister, for he is a great astrologer."

"My aunt is wise, as you will find when you know her; and as for the rest, Gunga, it is in my hands. I, too, am an astrologer and can cast Radha's nativity as I please."

The girl laughed heartily. "Yes, it will answer," she said. "Now go by that path; we must not be seen together. I will come to thee before noon; we have no time to lose. Only remember thine oath, Moro Trimmul, and beware how thou triest to evade or deceive me. I would not hurt thee willingly; and for the sake of——. No matter now," she continued, gulping down what was rising in her throat, "no matter now. It is gone—I see no more of it in thine eyes."

"I am in thy hands, Gunga, and may be trusted," he replied; "nay, more, there may be better days for thee yet, girl——"

"No—no more. No more like the old ones," she said, shaking her head mournfully. "Only the gold now—only the gold!"

FOOTNOTE:

[3] "Specimens of Old Indian Poetry, translated from the original Sanskrit." By R. T. H. Griffith, A.M.

CHAPTER V.

"Yes, surely it is strange that the two nativities should fit so exactly,"

said Vyas Shastree to himself, some days after the events recorded in the last chapter, as, seated by himself upon his dais, and having given orders not to be disturbed, he appeared absorbed in a table of nativity which lay before him; "yes, it is strange indeed. The date of birth, the signs under which she was born, and the few calculations which have been made by a master hand, all agree, as they ought to do; and the result, as I have worked it out, is clear enough. This girl, born at Wye, an utter stranger to me hitherto, and brought here by a chance pilgrimage, is proposed for me; and Anunda, Tara, and the old Josee will have it so. Yes, it is a curious coincidence indeed; but let me test these formulæ again; there may be error."

While the Shastree is busy with some curiously abstruse calculations upon his own and the other horoscope he is considering, we must digress a little, to show by what steps Gunga's plans, roughly shadowed out to Moro Trimmul, as we have recorded, were apparently fast approaching a satisfactory completion.

Negotiations had been satisfactorily opened by Anunda with Sukya Bye, the aunt of Moro Trimmul. This lady had, indeed, already become a great favourite with Anunda and Tara, and she had been guided in her intercourse with them by the directions of Gunga. Eventually, the question of marriage, or otherwise, having passed the ladies favourably, rested with the Shastree himself.

The contrivances by which this result had been brought about were apparently too simple to cause suspicion. Yet they had been produced by carefully designed arrangement. It was first of all necessary to get Sukya Bye and Anunda acquainted, and this was brought about at the temple on the night of the ceremonies of the last full moon. The wife of the chief priest had the power to render the performance of the necessary worship convenient to any one she pleased. She could direct special attendance by assistant priests on her friends, and could reserve seats for them, on which they could see and

hear to the best advantage. So as Sukya Bye, whose figure and dress bespoke her rank and respectability, was apparently vainly endeavouring to reach the shrine to make her offerings with other women,—Gunga, seeing her hustled and pushed about, assisted her as far as possible; and, feigning to be unable to do more, appealed to Anunda, who had herself noticed the old lady's struggles, for assistance to her.

Sukya Bye was one with whom it was no degradation to be seen associating. Her tall figure, dressed in the richest of plain silk garments, and the heavy gold rings she wore round her arms, wrists, and ankles, betokened wealth, as did her shaved head that she was a widow; and the stout Mahratta serving-men, who, armed with sword and buckler, attended her, proved that she was of some rank, certainly of very respectable position.

Gunga had left her under Anunda's care, and ere the ceremony was concluded the ladies had become excellent friends. It will be remembered that Anunda herself was from the western provinces of the Dekhan, and the dialect and intonation of the lady Sukya sounded pleasantly in her ears. Questions were asked, some mutual acquaintances discovered, and a visit by Anunda soon followed.

Moro Trimmul, his aunt, and sister, lived or lodged but a short distance from the Shastree, and it soon came to pass that the ladies visited each other frequently. Sukya had a point to gain, so had her niece Radha, and both worked in concert with the girl Gunga, to whom whatever happened was related. Her fresh instructions from day to day guided them perfectly, not only to gaining the good will of mother and daughter, but of establishing a more affectionate interest in their concerns than would otherwise have arisen out of a common acquaintance.

Sukya, proud of her own birth and connections, found Anunda perfectly in accord with herself on that subject. She saw the wealth and comfort of the house, she led Anunda to detail their domestic cares, and offered her sympathy, which was accepted. "Ah, yes, if the Shastree would only marry again!" said Anunda to her in confidence, "and there should be a son born, they would take him to Benares and devote him to Siva. They had wealth; yet without this it was a weight and a care to them, which increased rather than diminished."

During these visits of confidence between the elders, Tara and Radha had their own pleasant time too, and Tara's trustful nature was easily won by the other. Radha was ignorant, it was true, but she was to all appearance open-hearted and simple, and she soon learned to feign that reverential yet intimate association with the beautiful widow and her mother, which Gunga counselled, and which was indeed necessary to the success of the whole scheme.

For some days Anunda made no communication to Sukya Bye of the subject nearest her heart; but as she saw the intimacy of the two girls increase, and that the intercourse had served to turn Tara's thoughts into new channels, and also that she herself, as she gradually gained strength, always found some pretext for a daily visit to her young friend, the thought gradually pressed the more upon her mind, that here was a connection which was most desirable for her husband; and, finally, the question alone remained, whether Radha's family would consent.

Tara had no objection either. Indeed, from the first sight of Radha's present extreme beauty, and promise of its development—from her respectful, nay reverential, demeanour to her mother, and her apparently loving trustfulness of herself—she, too, began to think that a better selection could not be made, if her father were willing to take a second wife, than this girl. So she grew to wish it.

Therefore, with much exhortation to privacy, and in the fullest assurance of confidence, Anunda had ventured to ask Sukya Bye, after all reserve had been broken down, whether the alliance might be hoped for. She dwelt at length upon her husband's accomplishments and his wealth. He was not old; many men married far beyond his age. Money was no object—it could be paid if necessary; and she herself would be as a mother, and Tara a sister, to the new wife. In short, Anunda opened her whole heart to her new friend, and in the end found the sympathy she had expected. Yes, the more Sukya Bye considered the matter, the more, as she told Anunda, was she convinced it would be an admirable arrangement. Radha had once been betrothed as a mere child; the person had died lately, else they were to have been married this year. Delay had occurred because the intended husband was poor. He had not sufficient to pay the expenses of the ceremonies. Then Radha's father had died, then her mother, when Moro Trimmul was as yet a youth. He had made no provision for his sister. How could he? So she remained unmarried. An-

other connection must have been sought for this year, and Anunda's proposal was admirably timed.

Now, all this was true enough in some respects, but not entirely. It was enough, however, for two persons to believe, whose affections were already enlisted in the progress of the matter; and such inquiries as they could make from people who knew Wye, confirmed what had been told them by their new acquaintance. Was the girl herself willing? Apparently she was. And she received, with all the bashfulness and interest necessary to the occasion, the proposal made to her by Tara on the part of her mother. Anunda had had her fears on this subject, lest the young and beautiful girl should refuse to ratify what her aunt had proposed; but beyond a natural shyness there seemed no objection.

One doubt only remained,—were the horoscopes of the parties in good accordance? "Moro Trimmul," Sukya Bye said, "would never consent to give his sister where the planets did not provide good fortune—in short, till he was satisfied there was no ceremonial objection or direct hindrance. And before the proposition was made to the Shastree—before, in short, the men were to discuss the proposed arrangement, Moro Trimmul wished to see the Shastree's horoscope, in order that the last point of doubt should be removed." He also would give his sister's to the Shastree, if the proposal were to be persevered in.

Very unsuspectingly, therefore, did Anunda take the scheme of her husband's nativity, his "Junum Putr," from the casket in which it was kept, and, with many injunctions as to its safety, gave it to Sukya Bye. It was not long detained; and she was gratified by hearing that the Josee, seated in an adjoining apartment, considered it a most happy one. "Might he copy a few portions? they had been so admirably calculated." And the dame had no objection.

Certainly the plan had been well laid, and as yet well executed. No very deep persuasions were necessary with these simple unsuspecting people. The mother and daughter had yielded long ago; and the result of the examination of the Shastree's Junum Putr had removed the last obstacle which concerned him. The matter, as arranged, should be broken to him that evening on his return from the temple. And the lady Sukya suggested that he should examine her niece's horoscope as corroborative of his own.

So Moro Trimmul had that day put the finishing touch to his work. He had been concealed when the lady Anunda brought the paper we have mentioned; he had rapidly copied the principal points in the table, and noted all the most remarkable of the latter indications exhibited; and he knew that, before evening, he could prepare a corresponding document regarding his sister, which the Shastree himself could not detect. This was a branch of science which Moro Trimmul had studied deeply; and it was with perfect confidence that he followed the astrological combinations relating to the Shastree, and constructed, yet not with too minute detail, the table in his sister's name.

Few Hindu parents care to have the Junum Putr, or "birth letter," of their daughters worked out; but after Moro Trimmul had cast the table itself on an imaginary date of birth, two years later than the real age of his sister, and as if it had been done carelessly and then abandoned, he followed up several of the formulæ indicated, leaving the last incomplete. He felt assured, therefore, when the paper was submitted to the Shastree, that he would himself carry out the last calculation, which had been so arranged as to lead to the present time, and to a combination with his own.

All had been finished. The paper on which it was written was new, but it was not paper of that part of the country; it was from his own district. An ornamental border was quickly drawn round it, in red, black, and yellow lines; the signatures of the witnesses to his sister's original and true Junum Putr were carefully copied; finally, the whole document was held over wood-smoke till it was of a proper brown colour, then rubbed and frayed at the edges, and creased here and there as if it had been often examined; and, lastly, it was perfumed with camphor to remove the smell of wood-smoke, and with the odour of benzoin and sweet pastille. No one, without much difficulty, could have detected the forgery; and, without suspicion, the Shastree had set himself to work out the problem left unfinished—the occupation which we have already noted.

On leaving their friends, after this early visit, in which the Junum Putr was taken, Anunda and Tara had determined to lose no further time in breaking the matter to the Shastree. It was a fortunate day, as they had been told by the old astrologer, the Shastree's friend, whom they had consulted as they went home; whatever they did was sure to prosper. The Shastree was in good humour with himself, with them, and with the world generally, and for many

reasons. His greatest care about Tara had been removed. She had been accepted as a votary of the goddess, and had already recovered from her excitement. He had written with others a joint petition to the "Swâmi" on the subject, and she had been duly recognized by her spiritual prince. No fear of reproach now existed; and if the Shastree had at first winced at the idea of his daughter becoming a Moorlee, a public votary at the temple, the feeling was passing away. The gods forbid she should become as other girls, who were devoted to the temple service! No; she desired to be pure, and should continue so.

The long and expensive journey to Nassuk, or worse, to Benares, had been saved, and half a year's rent had just come in from his estate. The crops were fine; there were no remissions needed; prices were high, and the rent had been punctually paid. The produce of the gardens and farms was also good this year, and the fees and dues from pilgrims were abundant. This was a special year for pilgrimages to the shrine, and full moon after full moon the crowd would increase.

"What are we to do with it all?" Anunda would ask, as day after day the bag containing the Shastree's dues was brought from the temple by the attendant clerk, or as her husband gave over to her the liberal gifts presented to him by wealthy visitors to the shrine.

As she asked this question of him, the Shastree laughed, and told her it must increase, for the Now Râtree, or nine nights of the goddess, then coming on, were attended by a wonderful conjunction of planets foreboding marvellous events, and which could not indeed occur again in many years—indeed, not under less than a cycle. There would be thousands upon thousands of worshippers there, and the gain would be enormous. What, indeed, were they to do with it all? "We must spend it upon poor Brahmuns, dig wells in desert places, and give marriage portions—all good works, and pleasing to the gods: what have Brahmuns to do with wealth?" said the Shastree.

"Nay; but we will have a marriage at home," thought Anunda; and from the time the alliance was shaped into form she began to hoard every rupee she could get. Never had the gardeners found her so active in coming down to Sindphul to look after the fruit and vegetables in the garden there. Never had the sellers in the Bazar known her to be so keen after the returns of sale. As she said to herself, if there is a marriage, my lord shall have a good one.

This very plethora of wealth brought about the question with her husband. "What can we do with it?" he said one day, on receiving an unusually large gift.

"We will marry you," said the wife. "Tara and I have determined upon it in our own minds; and oh, my dear honoured husband, you are not to object! We have kept this from you as yet; but if you will agree, we have found a treasure, a jewel, such as we can give to you, and be proud and thankful to see you wear."

There was no circumlocution in the matter. Anunda, watching her opportunity, as a wife best knows how to do, had gone direct to the point, and, seconded by Tara, had smoothed away all difficulties and won the victory.

The Shastree made but one condition—that which Moro Trimmul had expected, and for which he had provided. "I care not for wealth or for beauty," he said to his wife. "We are rich—too rich; and thou, Anunda, art more beautiful than ever; but the 'birth letter' must accord; and she must be pure and high in blood."

So Anunda had told him that, as to the first, she would ask for the "birth letter," and hope it would be good; as to the second, what doubt at all? She could vouch for good birth, as good as their own, and for wealth if that were needed.

Now, therefore, that the matter all hinged upon the fitness or otherwise of Radha's "birth letter," and the last link in Anunda's chain was to be completed or for ever broken, it may be conceived that she awaited her husband's decision on the subject with much anxiety. He had requested not to be disturbed while he made the examination. So Anunda and Tara waited within. The outer door of the court had been fastened as well as that of the school, and he was, as we found him at the beginning of this chapter, alone on his dais, absorbed in the contents of the document before him.

"Yes," he said again aloud, "that it is strangely coincident, there can be no doubt. Again and again I have checked these formulæ, and they are right, and the abandoned calculation leads direct into my own. Ho, Tara! Anunda!" he cried, "bring my Junum Putr, quick; I need it." And Anunda took it, and, laying it before him, did not venture to stay or to speak; but she saw by the expression of his face that he was deeply interested, and she again withdrew.

He opened it, that strange shadowing of his life which, with a fascination he could not resist, he had occasionally examined, yet without daring to pry into the future. Enough that he could follow the past as nearly as might be from the fallible nature of the science. Now, he laid both papers together; and his eye passed from one to another rapidly, as his chest heaved and his pulses throbbed with an excitement to which he had long been a stranger, forcing from him the exclamations of wonder which we have recorded.

"Marvellous and mysterious agents in our existence," he continued, "who can withstand ye? who can refuse your directions? Here I bow before ye, O mystic fates, lead me as ye will; this happiness, aided by these heavenly indications, I dare not resist. Anunda! Tara! O wife! O child!" he continued as they entered, stretching out his hands towards them, "be it as ye will, beloved!"

That was a happy evening for the three. It was not too late to ratify the act, and then the preparations were soon made. A few lumps of sugar-candy and some spices were placed on a silver salver, and garlands of fresh flowers procured from the flower-sellers. Anunda dressed herself in one of her best suits, and Tara put on a simple new garment befitting her position. Several of the servants who had suspected the matter, poured forth their congratulations. A marriage, with all the new clothes, and feasting; oh, it would be delightful! And now the betrothal sugar was to be taken, so the matter was decided. Might they accompany the lady? Yes, they were all to come, and one was to go and prepare the lady Sukya; and so, finally, preceded by a pipe and tabor, the little procession went forth into the street.

No concealment now. As the neighbours gathered at their doors they knew why the lady Anunda and Tara went forth. Some wondered, some sneered; but the majority thought Anunda wise. The Shastree was to marry again, and there might again be a male child in the house.

The preparation by Sukya had been made, and the girl Radha, dressed by her aunt and Gunga, who was there, in a rich saree of orange and gold, with wreaths of flowers hanging about her, had been placed on the dais in the house where they lodged. She wore heavy ornaments of gold, and Anunda felt proud of her selection for her lord, as well for Radha's great beauty as for the wealth of which she had evidence. No, she was no common girl. Here

were no crowds of poor relations; even money was needless; but they would be too well bred to refuse it.

So they were. The music continued to play a merry measure suited to the ceremony. The girl's forehead was marked with the sacred colours; a fragrant paste rubbed upon her hands and arms, neck and bosom, by Anunda and Tara. Rice and other grain, emblems of fertility, sprinkled over her head, money poured into her lap, and sugar put into her mouth; while the sacred hymn and incantation from the Véda was chanted by Tara and her mother, and joined in by those who had collected around.

Then all went into the household temple of the dwelling and paid their adoration to Bhowani and Lakshmee, and the rite was finished. Radha was the betrothed wife of Vyas Shastree.

"Mayst thou be happy, O my sister!" said Moro Trimmul, who, though present, had not interfered further than to direct the ceremonies. "Surely this is a fortunate day for us all. Now I go to the temple to lay my offerings before the Mother, and, with your permission, lady, I will visit the Shastree tomorrow. Long have I desired to know him, for the fame of his learning has gone far and wide; but who would make a stranger known to him? and surely it is providential that our houses have thus been united."

"You will be welcome, sir," said Anunda, as she rose to take her departure.

CHAPTER VI.

Anunda was not a person to allow useless time to elapse between the ascertained necessity of any act and its completion, and the preparation for the marriage went on merrily. What stores of flour, and rice and ghee, and condiments were laid in! What gorgeous dresses selected! Ah, young English ladies, and indeed I may include mothers also, who may read these pages, you are not to believe that wedding trousseaux are confined to your own country and society! Very far from it. A young Hindu lady, or Mahomedan either—there is not much to choose between them in this respect—is as full of hope of a liberal, a handsome, outfit on her marriage, as any fashionable young lady of Belgravia or Mayfair; and believe me, is as proportionably delighted if it be so.

There was much to spend, and no grudging. So one old cloth-seller had been dispatched to Sholapoor, and another to Wyrāg; one to Nuldroog also, then a large camp and emporium: and the result was, as we may say, an overplus of riches. It was hard to select from the bales on bales which were sent up from the shops; still, piece by piece, the dresses accumulated, and were indeed lovely. Silk and gold sarees; silk and cotton mixed; plain cotton with silk borders; bodice pieces, stiff with gold and brocade—all betokening wealth and comfort. No milliner required here. The garments of one piece, only remarkable for their richness and diversity of colour and pattern, were such as were, and are still, worn by the better classes of society. Anunda was determined that no fault could be found with her own and Tara's selection, and certainly it was better to be on the liberal side.

Then how busy the goldsmiths were! In the Shastree's school court, half-a-dozen men, sometimes more, were to be seen sitting over pans of charcoal, blowpipe in hand, beating silver or gold on small anvils, and fashioning them into massive and quaintly beautiful ornaments. Anunda had given some of her old things to be broken up and re-made. We will not say how many ounces of virgin gold were added, but here too the good lady was liberal—very liberal; and Tara, of her own accord, had added from her own store some val-

uable jewels. Yes, the arrangements for the marriage were to be pushed on; it must be completed within a month, for after that, there was a "gutt" or planetary conjunction averse to marriage, which was to last long. As yet the day had not been fixed, but it must soon be; and the Shastree was passive when it was mentioned. Not so those with whom he had now irrevocably connected himself.

On the other side, preparations had been as active, though simpler. Moro Trimmul's object was haste, and he had desired his aunt and sister to spare nothing within their means. Strangers as they were in the town, they found the girl Gunga, with whom, since the ceremony at the temple, Sukya Bye had become intimate, a very useful ally. She knew what Anunda was preparing. Her gossips—the flower-sellers, the cloth-merchants, and the goldsmiths—detailed all that was being done, and to aunt and niece they were amply satisfactory. They knew the Shastree was wealthy, but the profusion they heard of surprised them.

"The Shastree loves thee, girl," the lady Sukya would say. "He will spend his wealth on thee. What lucky chance brought us here, who can tell? else who would have cared for thee? To whom could we have given thee? Be content; he is not old; he will love thee, for thou art beautiful. Wait and see."

Truly she was so! Not Tara's tranquil, pensive beauty; not Anunda's even in her prime. This girl was very different from both. She was darker than either—a warm, richly-tinted, clear, golden brown, with a skin like velvet; a small head, oval face—perhaps more round than oval—and a mass of thick wavy hair, which, if loosened, fell far below her waist, curling at the ends; a low broad forehead, strongly marked arched eyebrows, and a nose straight and delicate in outline, were perhaps the ordinary possessions of a good-looking, well-bred Mahratta girl; but the eyes and mouth were more remarkable, because they gave an index to her character.

"We will not tell what she is like," Anunda said, as her husband frequently asked her of Radha, for as yet he had not seen her. Perhaps he was indifferent on the subject, yet hardly so; it would have been unnatural not to care at all. Certainly, as the days passed, the Shastree grew somewhat curious, and he had to wait many more ere he should see her.

"Content thyself, husband," Anunda would say, as he questioned her; "I have told thee she is beautiful, else I had not noticed her: she hath a shape like a nymph, eyes like a deer, and a mouth like that of Kāmdeo. What need to say more? Wait and see." So the Shastree waited patiently. Another would have followed the girl—contrived to see her by some means not perhaps over scrupulously; but the Shastree was very honourable, and such an alternative did not even suggest itself to him.

But they were right. What Anunda had noticed, and Tara too, were only the eyes and mouth and the figure. Who could pass them by unheeded? Such eyes—so large, so soft in their velvet blackness when at rest, yet if excited, how different! The long, thick lashes, which were positively heavy in character, shaded them ordinarily, and produced a soft, dreamy effect; but if the girl looked up, or was interested, or suddenly roused, these eyes seemed to glow internally, and to assume a character almost oppressively fascinating.

Radha well knew their power: since she was a child she had been told of the beauty of her eyes, and she believed it—nay, added to their expression by slightly staining the inner portion of her eyelids, which gave to the already heavy lashes a softer character if the eyes were at rest, or increased their effect if they were excited. Lately a habit had grown upon her of contracting her brows, and dilating her eyes till their effect was almost fierce, which both her brother and aunt had tried to check, but it did not leave her easily. Sometimes it gave place to a look of dreamy languor inexpressibly touching, and so sorrowful in character that, had the girl been older, it might have been attributed to some great grief lying at her heart, or some painful recollection. As it was, it was unsuspected, except by those who knew the cause.

The mouth followed the eyes. When they were excited by any emotion, the lips at once closed and were firmly compressed; but ordinarily they remained a little open in the centre, showing teeth white, pure, and glistening with a pearly lustre. The lips were full, red, and moist—the upper deeply arched and curved, with the corners falling back into deep dimples; yet the mouth was small and delicate, pouting, and decidedly voluptuous when at rest or smiling, yet capable of being hardened into an expression of self-will and obstinacy, which indicated an inflexible determination should there be occasion to exercise it. No wonder that, seeing her in her most placable moods—for the girl from the first had appeared charmed by the prospect of

her marriage—Anunda and Tara had been captivated by beauty so remarkable. It would have been well, perhaps, could they have seen the face under other expressions, and so been saved from what, under different circumstances, had an irresistible fascination.

Need her figure be described? Being younger than Tara, there was not the same development of form. The arms and throat were less rounded, yet the lines were as graceful and full of promise of perfection as hers. Eventually they would be about the same height—Radha, perhaps, a shade taller, and both slighter than Anunda ever had been. Her hands and feet were small and beautifully formed, more so, perhaps, than Tara's; they were indeed, remarkable features in her figure—so much so that, as Tara was bathing her one day, and washing them, she had held them to her lips and kissed them in succession involuntarily.

It was difficult to tell her age. Her "birth letter" told the Shastree she was not yet twelve. Had she exceeded much that age, to their knowledge, Anunda would have objected to the marriage; indeed, she could not have been married at all. But she was in reality fourteen, nay more. Sometimes, when her features relaxed, her eyes soft and dreamy, her mouth smiling, and her whole face assuming a loving tenderness of expression, she appeared hardly the age she was said to be; but when there was any change, and the rigid look already noticed took its place, she appeared considerably older.

Now, Anunda was by no means desirous of a very young girl for her husband's new wife. Many had been offered of very tender age indeed, whom she had invariably declined. She could not be troubled with a child; and if a thought that Radha might be older than she was represented to be, ever crossed her mind, a bright smile, a tender caress from the girl at once removed the doubt, and restored confidence. As to her figure, it did but furnish earnest of mature development. And were not many girls precocious? She had been so herself. Yes, Radha was very beautiful; and, as day after day passed, Anunda longed the more for the time when she should be able to clothe her in one of those gorgeous dresses, to deck her with flowers and jewels, and to present her to her husband a bride worthy of him—worthy of her own affection—the most precious gift she could make to him.

We have said that Radha was older than she was represented—and perhaps a brief sketch of her previous history is needful. She had been an in-

dulged and precocious child, of a vain, weak, but beautiful mother. Her father, one of the hereditary Josees, or astrologers, of Wye, had died some years before, and her mother shortly after him. Moro Trimmul, on succeeding to the care of the house, had given charge of his sister to his aunt, and betaken himself to the company of certain wild associates, with whom, from his powers of learning, he had become an especial favourite. The head of these was the Rajah Sivaji, whose rapid career to independence was one of the remarkable events of the times; and the wild exploits of the young prince, his raids against the Moghuls and Mahomedans in general, had long since enlisted the sympathies of the Mahratta people.

Sivaji's early career had been dissolute, but that was a venial fault among the people. His companions were the young Mahratta gentry,—yeomen, and farmers, whom he best loved to draw about him; above all, young Brahmuns who would join him, whether as priests or soldiers, or both, in his wild enterprises. Moro Trimmul was one of these—one who had grown into his deepest confidence. So long as Moro's father lived, he had in some degree restrained his son; but his private meetings with his prince were still frequent; and in the plays and recitations, of which Sivaji was passionately fond, Moro was generally an actor and reciter. Thus it was that Sivaji frequently came to Wye, and put up at the Josee's house; and so he came to know Radha—a beautiful child then, whom he could caress without hindrance. He a Mahratta, she a Brahmun—any union was impossible; and yet she grew to be more than interesting to him as she advanced in age.

Eventually Radha's betrothed husband died. Other offers were made for her, but were always refused, so peremptorily, that people believed the report designedly set afoot by her brother and Sukya Bye, that she was to be married to a distant relative who, now absent on pilgrimages, would return and claim her, or she would have to be taken to him. And so the girl grew, the time for marriage passed, and the Rajah's visits, often clandestine, were encouraged by aunt and nephew, with what ultimate hope of result might be imagined. Yet both were careful there should be no scandal.

Perhaps their scheme might have succeeded had not Sivaji himself, now feeling his way to power, seen the peril of the connection. Was she wife or widow, there might have been fewer scruples, but, an unmarried Brahmun girl would be a burden, a disgrace, which he dared not encounter—one that

would not fail to be resented by the priests, whom it was his aim to gain. He could not spare one so devoted, so able, and so unscrupulous as Moro Trimmul, nor could he replace him; he needed many such, and he loved him too much to break with him on this point.

It was a hard struggle. But the young prince, whose firm will and self-control finally won him a kingdom, successfully resisted the opportunities deliberately offered. As the girl grew, as his intercourse with the house became more and more unreserved, it was clear to him that her love for him was growing as part of her existence. The girl, for whom he had always a kind word and free greeting, who claimed the privilege of serving "her Rajah," when he put up at their house, became by degrees shy and reserved; cried if he spoke kindly to her, and trembled if he approached her. He could not be mistaken in those eyes: they told their own story—love.

Under such circumstances, among such people, love is passion. It has no medium except in maturer age and constant association. The girl—still a child in years—loved deeply, passionately; and as she grew older, month by month, day by day, the news of her prince's exploits, now beginning to be sung in ballads through the country, excited her fearfully. Her aunt and brother had detected her in more than one attempt to escape to him, and, fearful of the result, had prevented it. Had he taken her away, would they have pursued? Surely not; but he was careful—he admitted his own danger to himself—and he gradually avoided the house, though he clung the more closely to Moro Trimmul. Radha found means to send occasional messages to him—a child's love, a child's yearning for him were told to him; and we know that, in some instances, a child's love—there and here the same—is more passionate, because more pure and more absorbing, than a woman's. What was marriage to her? If she could only be with her Rajah—to serve him, to live with him, to ride, nay, to fight with him—she would go, or die.

The last time Sivaji had seen her she had grown desperate. She had never spoken so to him before; but she had told him she must die if he did not take her away. "Nay, but I will come with thee," she cried, "even if thou cast me out among thy servants." And he confided this to her brother. "For my sake," he said, impressively, "if not for thine and hers, keep her safe; take her away and have her married; the farther away from hence the better. It is no use speaking to her. Moro Trimmul! save me from the temptation, thyself from

the contumely this would bring upon us. I know what is in thy heart; but, beautiful as she is, it cannot be."

So a plan was quickly arranged between them. Moro had an intimate acquaintance with the Mahratta gentry of the Dekhan, and he was despatched to canvass them. This necessitated journeys from place to place. He was well provided with money, and he travelled, as one under vows of pilgrimage, to different shrines. Thus opportunity might occur for marrying Radha; and, leaving all servants behind him but a few men in whom he had perfect confidence, he took his aunt Sukya Bye with him as protection to his sister. No one cared to inquire who the young prince's envoy and counsellor was, or what his family affairs were. Enough that he had a sister and an aunt with him, and was conducting his secret mission with admirable policy and address.

Thus he at length arrived at Tooljapoor alone. The rainy season had set in, and travelling was no longer pleasant or easy. The town was a good position for his purpose, and there were many rich families and landholders in the "Bâlâ Ghaut" province to be brought over. For a time he secluded himself, and lived humbly in a hired lodging or in one of the courts of the temple. Here he had seen Gunga, and here also he daily watched Tara as she and her mother performed their worship. Even thus early the advantage of marrying his sister to the Shastree, of whose household circumstances Gunga had told him, had appeared most desirable; but as his passion for Tara grew, it was a thing to be accomplished at all hazards. Gunga did not appear able to help him, for it was clear that neither the Shastree nor his wife noticed the inferior priestesses of her class, and Tara never spoke to them. He therefore secured a good house for some months, and sent for his aunt and Radha from Punderpoor, where he had left them: and, till their arrival, had busied himself in obtaining local information for the furtherance of his future designs.

On leaving their home at Wye, and after Radha's first paroxysms of disappointment were past, Sukya Bye and Moro Trimmul had instructed the girl what to do. Perhaps, in despair of accomplishing her ends, or with the desire of all Hindu girls for an early settlement, she was an apt scholar. Radha was to deny all knowledge of her age, to assume a childish demeanour, to acquiesce modestly, and as she saw other girls do, if she were proposed for. She was assured she would be given to none but a man of wealth—her beauty

would secure her this. If possible he should be young; but this was a difficult point, and what matter if he were old? She could have jewels, rich clothes, an establishment of her own—she would have all these secured to her, and afterwards would be her own mistress.

But if she refused, or opposed these efforts in her behalf, she would soon be too old to be assisted at all. As it was, few would believe her to be within the marriageable period for Brahmun girls. In a year, nay less, her marriage would be impossible, and she must be treated like a widow, shaven and degraded, or married to a dagger,[4] and turned into a temple to shift for herself.

Was it wonderful that the girl submitted to, nay, even assisted in, their deceptions, or that those eyes looked dreamily after her own prince, while her spirit, chafing within, carried her, in those moments of abstraction, away into his glorious mountains, to be loved and caressed as she felt he, and, he only, could love and caress her if she were with him?

FOOTNOTE:

[4] Female devotees are married to a sword or dagger, as emblematical of union to the divinity to which they have been devoted.

CHAPTER VII.

After preparations for the Shastree's marriage had been actively commenced on both sides, there was no further hindrance. Moro Trimmul having been made known to the Shastree by Anunda, as she had promised, the two men soon found a day in the calendar, so far unexceptionable as regarded planetary influences, that they at once fixed upon it; and the ladies, having been consulted, declared there were no objections or hindrances now, for on both sides of the houses everything was prepared.

Meanwhile his new acquaintance was a delightful addition to Vyas Shastree's circle of friends. Who more accomplished for his age than Moro Trimmul, more fascinating in manner, or astute in argument and judgment? He had not the refined beauty of his sister, except that his eyes were, like hers, large, soft, and very black, with the same habit of dilation, relaxing into an almost womanish tenderness: but when aroused, their excited expression was infinitely more fierce than Radha's, even to savage cruelty. The mouth was always coarse and sensual, but there was at least good-humour about it if he were not angered, and a strength of character in the countenance which could not be mistaken. Now, nothing occurred to cause even a passing cloud, and the days which intervened between the betrothal and the marriage were pleasantly spent by all. Even Radha was interested, and clung more closely to Tara than ever; for with Anunda, as with her aunt, she preserved the habitual reserve and respect required by their positions.

"I will go to the temple, daughter," said Anunda one evening, "and keep thy father there. Do thou bring Radha here, and let her look at the dresses and jewels: if there is anything she wants in addition, tell me, and we will get it." The good lady could not do too much.

Kind Anunda! it was so considerate. Could any doubt of her ultimate happiness remain in the girl's heart? What other "sister wife" would have cared so for her?

Oh, the girl's delight at those gorgeous clothes and jewels! She had heard of splendid gifts at marriages, and there was one at Wye in which she had

helped to deck the bride; and when she had seen her—she was but a mere child—dressed in a brocade garment stiff with gold, she had wondered whether it would ever be possible to possess one like it. There were several—green and gold, crimson and gold, purple and gold. The most glossy of Py-etun silks, soft muslin sarees from Narrainpett and Dhunwar, of which she had heard, but had never seen; they did not come to her country: all were beautiful.

Then the ornaments. There were massive gold chain anklets, with small bells to them, armlets, bracelets, ear-rings, necklaces. There was the sacred "talee," which would be tied round her neck. Tara showed them all as they were laid out in cotton upon a tray covered with red muslin. How beautiful they were! and all would belong to her; they would be put on her the day of the ceremony, and her own taken off as she entered the house. Then the place where she was to be bathed and dressed was newly coloured and plastered, and the comfort of the house and its pretty decorations—all satisfied the girl's longing. It was what she had pictured to herself; and Tara said her father was kind, so kind—he would love his little wife after his quiet fashion, and deny her nothing.

So it was not to be wondered at if any repugnance which she had felt was fast passing away, and if, when her brother asked her whether she would be content, she told him she was grateful for what he had done; and for the time perhaps she was so.

Sukya Bye had told her nephew of Radha's visit to the Shastree's house by stealth with Tara: she was afraid he might hear of it otherwise, perhaps through the servants or Gunga, and was rejoiced that he considered it a happy circumstance. "She will be satisfied with the wealth," he said, "and all that she sees will excite the desire for more, and so, aunt, we shall best hold her to our purposes. She cannot recede now; and, while moulding the Shastree to her will, by-and-by she need not forget Sivaji Rajah." But he did not tell this to Radha; and neither by her brother, nor Sukya Bye, was any reference made to the past. When all was beyond chance of disturbance, he would set her to work to compass his own ends.

The Shastree and Pundit were of different schools of philosophy; the former, as we know, belonged to the ancient, and, as he considered, orthodox, Vedantic school of Véda Vasa; the Pundit to the more modern Mimansa

school of Jomiai, and to the doctrines and mythological histories of the Poorans. So they had discussions, in which other Brahmuns of the town joined, while the ladies sat behind a screen and heard their disputations, and Tara explained to them what she could follow. Or the friends played at chess, both having excellent skill;—the Shastree calm and steady, the Pundit fiery and impetuous, as were their natures; and so they had many an earnest battle.

It was not long before the politics which then agitated the country began to be discussed between them. They lived under the same Mahomedan government, that of Beejapoor: but while Tooljapoor and the districts around it were as yet in entire subjection, those to the west—particularly the wild rugged country beyond Wye, the Mawuls or mountain-valleys of the Ghauts, stretching into the Dekhan—owed but a slight allegiance to the Mahomedan dynasty, and perhaps had never been completely subdued. Here it was that many of the oldest Mahratta families had taken refuge after the overthrow of the Hindu dynasty of Deogurh, the modern Dowlutabad, and the subsequent subjection of the country by the Mahomedan Emperors of Delhi; and it was among these families, the Bhóslays, Nimbalkurs, Morays, Ghoreparays, and others, that the germs of that combination to resist—to them an oppressive and corrupt government—existed, which was presently to be ripened into a successful revolution.

On the other hand, this dynasty of Beejapoor had already been attacked by the immense power of the Emperors of Delhi; and while the independent kingdom of Ahmednugger—itself at one period little inferior in splendour to that of Beejapoor—had been entirely subdued, and the princes of its house annihilated by the Moghuls, any combination to resist them by the two states had not only been rendered impossible, but it was clear that Beejapoor would follow its example: and those were not wanting who hoped, under a new power, to regain many privileges which hitherto had been withheld from them.

But it was in the antagonism of the two contending Mahomedan powers that the Hindu families of the Dekhan saw the means of emancipation from both. It might be a work of time, and of immense labour and skill: but the opportunity seemed to present itself; and while feigning submission alike to the Moghuls, as after the conquest of Ahmednugger their forces were poured into the provinces which had formed that kingdom, and, on the other hand, to

the older-established dynasty of Beejapoor, a stirring spirit began to be aroused among the Mahrattas; and that secret combination silently progressed, of which Moro Pundit was one among many other agents employed by Sivaji, the prince to whom all now looked as the present head, if not the instigator, of the movement.

It had, in fact, already been some time covertly in progress. Shahji Bhóslay, the father, of Sivaji, had commenced it in a series of wild irregular forays and raids from his patrimonial estate, which was situated among the Mawuls west of Poona, against the Mahomedan posts and garrisons of the western provinces of Beejapoor. For a time he was successful, but only as a mere freebooter; and in the end he was defeated, taken prisoner, and confined in a dungeon in Beejapoor for several years by the monarch Mahmood Adil Shah, the father of the king reigning at Beejapoor at the period of our tale. But Mahmood was not implacable. On the intercession of his mother, by whose wise counsels he had often been guided, Shahji was not only released but raised to a high command, and during the subsequent invasion of Beejapoor by the Moghuls did good service, and so the progress of the Mahratta power was stayed.

Of his two sons, Sivaji early took the lead, and, encouraged by his mother, a lady of high family and ambition, and admirable judgment, he aspired to be the head of a Mahratta confederacy. What progress he eventually made is already matter of history, which will have no record in these pages; but at the time of which we write, he was strengthening himself in his own wild country, collecting adherents, canvassing those who still held aloof, fortifying rugged and inaccessible strongholds, and, by the suddenness and successful issue of his continuous forays, was rendering himself famous in the eyes of the people. While he treated with both of the rival Mahomedan powers by turns, he took his own course; and yielding alternately to each whenever their force was locally in excess of his own, was in reality faithful to neither.

To Sivaji, also, belonged the prestige which none else had dared to assume—that of receiving aid from heavenly powers. The goddess Bhowani was the tutelar deity of his family; and it was the popular belief that she had chosen his father as the champion of her faith, but that he had transgressed warnings and visions, and, implacable as she was believed to be, she had cast him off. It was otherwise, however, with his second son Sivaji. She had cho-

sen him to be the scourge of the cow-slaying, impure, and licentious Mahomedans. The cries of her votaries had arisen to her, and the land was to be purged of uncleanness. Temples would be again filled with Brahmuns, and the sweet incense of pure sacrifice would ascend to her. The mother of Sivaji, it was reported, saw and recorded visions, too glorious to relate, in which her son was a victorious conqueror, and the infidel Mahomedans were slain in tens of thousands by the Mahratta people in those great battles which were to ensue. And these visions were believed.

As yet these prophecies were circulated privately among the people, but there was not a Mahratta, far or near, who did not know of them. Ballads were written about them, and sung at fairs and markets. Women composed and chanted extempore verses as the household mills flew merrily round in the early morning. Men sang them to their oxen as they ploughed, or drew water from their wells; and so a spirit spread through the people which eventually became irresistibly powerful.

In this excitement, too, existed the incentive to the worship of Bhowani at all her most celebrated shrines; and everywhere—to gather her votaries together, to excite them to action, and to warn them to be ready when the time arrived—were agents such as Moro Trimmul, despatched by the young chieftain. Nothing appeared on the surface. Experience had taught extreme caution. There were no assemblies of armed men, no displays of force: an occasional successful raid or resistance by Sivaji kept up what might well be called the national spirit; but all delayed to strike, till, in the expressive Mahratta phrase, Dônguras, lavilé Déva, "the fire was on the hills."

Very dexterously, therefore, and after having prepared him for the communication, did Moro Trimmul confide to the Shastree some of the popularly-reported plans of his friend and prince, and sought his counsel and assistance, and partly also the purport of his own mission. He asked information as to the families of the Bâlâ Ghaut, the Nimbalkurs of Wasi, the Kallays of Nelinga, the Bhóslays and Ghoreparays of Akalkote, all neighbours; and also respecting the wealthy yeomen and farmers of the country. He did not mention Pahar Singh, with whom, through the Gosaees of Kullianee, and their agency at Tooljapoor, he had already opened negotiations, and found the robber chieftain fickle and undecided, extravagant in his demands for estates, for high command, and other rewards.

Nor did he disclose that weightier secret, known to his prince and himself, on which, for the present, the success of their enterprise rested. Khan Mahomed, the Wuzeer, or Prime Minister, of Beejapoor, might be detached, it was said, from the royal interest of his house; and he was then, with a large army, lying at and about Nuldroog, little more than twenty miles distant from Tooljapoor. To this man, at his own request, in phrases only to be interpreted by himself, a letter had been forwarded through the Gosaee banker's agent at Tooljapoor; but no reply had been received. Nor was Moro Trimmul sanguine on the subject, for reports of the Wuzeer's intrigues in other quarters were in men's mouths. No; it was from the Mahratta families alone that he had expectations; and he knew that at the ensuing festival, all or most of the province would assemble at Tooljapoor.

To say that he found a zealous coadjutor, or hoped for one, in the Shastree, would not be correct. The Shastree was not ambitious. He enjoyed already, as we know, a very lucrative and prominent position, in which he was honoured and respected. He avoided all Mahomedans upon principle; but the governors of the province often sought his advice and assistance in civil and judicial matters regarding Hindus, and he was not only never molested, but, on the contrary, respected and treated with consideration, and had even been invited to court. He had, therefore, no quarrel with the Mahomedans, and he well knew their power. He had watched Shahji's failures, and he had noted the effect of Sivaji's efforts; still he admitted there was more chance of success now than before; and he agreed to assist Moro Trimmul, by bringing him into communication with the gentry of the province, provided he were not required to take any prominent part in what should follow. To say that Vyas Shastree was indifferent in this matter, would be incorrect; but to anticipate enthusiasm or personal zeal would have been impossible from his character, and Moro Trimmul did not expect them.

"After the ceremony," he said to the Shastree, "Radha, of course, will remain with you. Sukya Bye will return to Wye with the servants. Give me, then, letters to the Nimbalkurs of Wasi, and to such others as you please, and I will go alone. Introduce me as a reciter of plays, and I will make my own way unnoticed and unsuspected. Here I can be of no use, and may even attract suspicion."

To this plan Vyas Shastree gave his cordial consent. Moro Trimmul would go before the Now Râtree, and return for the festival.