



PATCOLA

ENA FITZGERALD

The Lending Library
of
The Dorval Woman
Club

PATCOLA

LATEST FICTION

BARONESS ORCZY

BEAU BROCADE

GERALD BISS

BRANDED

HARRIS BURLAND

WORKERS IN DARKNESS

LUCAS CLEEVE

CARDINAL AND LADY SUSAN

HOUGHTON TOWNLEY

THE SPLENDID COWARD

CYRUS BRADY

BLUE OCEAN'S DAUGHTER

TRISTRAM COUTTS

THE PRODIGAL CITY

GURNER GILLMAN

A SUBURBAN SCANDAL

DAVID WHITELAW

THE GANG

HON. MRS. WALTER FORBES

LEROUX

M. Y. HALIDOM

ZOE'S REVENGE

F. BLOUNT MOTT

GOD IN SAN DAM

G. WHITLEY WARD

DRELMA

E. BLACK

BRENDAVALE

CECIL LOWIS

AVA MINING SYNDICATE

ERNEST SUFFLING

ROLLIN STONE

PETER EARLSTON

THE PLACE TAKER

PATCOLA

A TALE OF A DEAD CITY

BY

ENA FITZGERALD



LONDON
GREENING AND CO., LTD.

1908

DEDICATED

TO

MY OWN SWEET MOTHER

PREFACE

IN taking Vijayanagar as the subject of my story, I think I may safely say that it is the first written on that vast and mighty empire which outdid all other kingdoms, both eastern and western, in grandeur and magnificence. It was founded in 1336, when the Mohammedans were endeavouring to conquer all India, and had advanced even as far as the Krishna River. The Hindus then combined in the southern lands; and from that time Vijayanagar sprang up and prospered. For over 200 years the invaders were successfully kept at bay.

Of its monarchs there is no doubt that Krishna Deva Râya was pre-eminently distinguished for power and kingly wisdom, for bravery and winsome manners. Even Paes, a Portuguese, found the heathen monarch worthy of the highest praise: "He was perfect and gallant in all things." And in other writers we find evidence of his great courage and personal charm.

In his reign the power of the empire was at its zenith: its dominions were extended, until at last they stretched from sea to sea, and from the Dakhan to the most southerly cape. The vast armies were everywhere victorious, striking terror into the

hearts of the Mohammedan invaders. Nothing, indeed, could withstand Krishna, whether it was his sworn enemies of the Dakhan, beyond the river, or any single man who looked upon him face to face.

In the time of his successor Achyuta, these triumphs and glories speedily vanished, until with the death of Rama Râya the great capital itself fell into the hands of the jubilant invaders. At this day the name of Vijayanagar is wiped out of India. The proud City of Victory (which was the name given to it by its inhabitants) is entirely forgotten, and nothing remains but desolate ruins and broken walls. Though we have learnt much of the history of Vijayanagar from inscriptions and contemporary writers, doubtless there are many things we shall never know, and many events of which we have only a vague idea.

I am much indebted to a work entitled *Vijayanagar*, by Mr. R. Sewell, M.R.A.S., F.R.G.S., for several historical incidents. I think I have not deviated from history in any material point, except perhaps as to a few events in Achyuta's reign, the history of which is admitted to be very conflicting.

To-day what remains of the once magnificent capital may be seen near the little village of Hampe, where the plodding farmers till the rich soil, not knowing, or at least forgetting, the splendid, yet mournful history of their surroundings.

E. F.

INTRODUCTION

COME, ye who are so inclined ; let me take you by the hand and lead you forth. Let me set you down in that queen of noble cities—Vijayanagar, the City of Victory—Vijayanagar, the Forest of Learning—Vijayanagar, the greatest of Indian empires. Let me unfold to you the history of its mighty glories, the victories of its bravest kings, the pride of its worthy inhabitants.

Let the door of its treasury be open that the untold wealth may dazzle your eye. Turn the key of imagination in the lock of Time, and behold face to face the noblest and most perfect of Indian kings—Krishna the Great—“ Krishna, the Lord of the lords of India—King of the kings—Lord of the Great Three Seas—Lord of the land from the Dakhan to the most southerly Cape.”

Clap your hands at his deeds of wonder, lift your eyes in admiration to his fair and winning countenance. Then, loosen the key a little in the lock, and behold a land of desolation—a land of mocking silence, the home of wild beasts and screaming birds. Ye know it not? I tell you it is Vijayanagar the Forgotten—Vijayanagar the Perished—a city whose name is no longer known—the death-bed and grave of the City of Victory.

Cast your eye around, and note the gaunt but

standing walls—the desolated temples—the ruined porticoes—the image of the gods who look forth upon the dreary scene, marking the hour of their great revenge.

Tread softly upon the grass-grown ground—even yet softer—lest by any chance you awake the unhonoured dead, and set them wailing over their most violated soil. And if perchance you drop a silent tear upon their early doom, behold they who haunt those sacred walls, and shriek aloud at their lamented fall, may pause a moment in their dreary thoughts, and honour him, who in this busy life has wandered back and mourned upon their fate.

E. F.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. TRISTAM RADLEY	11
II. THE DAWNING OF KRISHNA	22
III. A STRANGE MEETING, AND THE RESULT THEREOF	41
IV. A MYSTERY CONCERNING THE RÂYA	56
V. THE MYSTERY CONTINUETH	73
VI. THE EXPLANATION THEREOF	88
VII. VACORA'S DREAM	100
VIII. THE AMULET	110
IX. 'WHERE ARE THE MEN OF THE STRONG HEART?'	123
X. KRISHNA ASKS A RIDDLE	136
XI. A SONG IN THE LONELY NIGHT	146
XII. EVIL AVERTED	158
XIII. THE DEATH ROSES	171
XIV. THE BEGINNING OF WOE IN THE CITY	180
XV. BROKEN THREADS	190
XVI. A VISION IN THE MIST	205
XVII. MOURN YE FOR THE LIGHT EXTINGUISHED!	216
XVIII. ACHYUTA RÂYA	226

CHAP.	PAGE
XIX. THE MESSAGE OF THE STARS, AND THE OUT- COME	240
XX. 'ART THOU SATISFIED?'	253
XXI. A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF WOE	270
XXII. BEHOLD, HOPE DAWNETH IN THE CITY	283
XXIII. AFTER MANY YEARS	294
XXIV. BEHOLD, THE DESOLATION !	305

PATCOLA

CHAPTER I

TRISTAM RADLEY

IN the year 1602, just after the time when the great East India Company was formed, and British rule in India founded, an English traveller, keen on exploration and a seeker after the wonderful, found his way, after a series of many adventures, into a small and insignificant village, by name Tagpûllee, lying near the northern banks of the Nurbudda River.

Born in luxury, on an estate that covered a great area in the central counties, and brought up under the stern *régime* of his proud old father, a blue-blooded aristocrat who might trace his ancestors among the chief nobles at the Court of William the Conqueror, Tristam Radley developed at an early age (like most boys) an extraordinary propensity for seeking adventures of any sort.

Yet, unlike the majority of youth, this inclination of his increased more and more as the days of

happy childhood passed away, giving place to years of laborious study.

To young Radley all things came easily, so that in time a great cleft grew between him and his elder brother, which at last separated them for ever.

Unlike in almost every sentiment, the two lads were seldom seen together, the one rushing off at any moment he might to his boon companions, seeking his pleasure in the company of such young gallants as found the punch-bowl ever handy, and never failed to unsheath the sword at any word which their muddled heads might term an insult to their honour.

So the elder Radley, like most youths who are ready to copy good or evil from those a few years their senior, entered into everything that my lord Villiers put his hand to, or assumed the nonchalant air of dashing Sir Henry Beaumont, from whose winning lips came in easy style the latest fashion in English oaths.

But for company of that kind, let it be said, Tristram had no liking, and, in those hours of gay revels, a solitary wander in the almost unlimited woods and parks belonging to his father's estate brought him the fullest enjoyment. If, in addition, he met in the seldom-trodden paths with anything strange in the way of pebbles or flowers, or if he chanced upon some hitherto unknown path, grotto or harbour, he would feel fully repaid for the little venture; and a great yearning would come into his

heart that a larger scope of exploration might one day be his, perchance in a land that was little known, where his fascinated imagination continually conjured up all manner of marvels.

But the time came when young Tristam became more eager concerning the slightest glance or bashful word bestowed on him by the eyes or lips of fair Mistress Isabel, the one and only daughter of the neighbouring squire. And so for a long time ventures and explorations were cast aside, for they proved of but small interest beside the winsome face of the fairest of fair maids.

In few things, however, is there an altogether smooth sailing, and in this particular circumstance it happened that young Radley found a rival in the person of his more handsome and dashing brother. For a long time neither knew that the other entertained a secret affection for Mistress Isabel, who, it seemed, had very little liking either way; apparently preferring the gallant attention of Sir Thomas Hardy, a man her senior by a few years, who had gained a special honour from the hands of Her Majesty for commendable service in some small military expedition.

Nevertheless, after the two brothers understood the feelings of each other, petty bickerings constantly broke out between them; though it must be said it was generally the elder who invented some cause for dissension. Therefore, it was not surprising, when the fire had been so long smouldering,

that a violent quarrel speedily resulted, which made reconciliation for ever impossible.

Just at this time the old squire died, and the elder Radley, as lawful heir, assumed the ownership of the vast estates and precious heirlooms for which the Radleys had been famous for many centuries. Then the news spread concerning the betrothal of Sir Thomas and Mistress Isabel, and the long-hovering change in Tristram's life came unexpectedly to a decisive crisis.

Seeing he might no longer remain too near his quarrelsome brother, Tristram gathered all his worldly wealth together, and quietly quitting the familiar parks and woods, set out to fulfil his youthful ambition for adventure.

Then, as luck would have it, strange stories came across the seas about mysterious India, which, with a liberal addition of seamen's imagination, made Tristram's heart leap up at the prospect of great adventures; and it is not surprising that soon after we find him already upon the seas, going as swiftly as the sailing-ship of the day would allow towards the great Eastern land, where ever wonderful things come to light, and, even to this day, its curiosities and marvels are but half told.

.

Now, behold two years have slipped away into the ever-eager hands of Time, and though it be a short space, yet many things have come into the life of Tristram Radley.

Lo, we are in the midst of the hills and the broad-spreading plains of India, following close on the heels of the wandering Englishman.

And now in this village of Tagpûllee, lying near the holy waters of the Nurbudda, we meet him face to face again, still searching for what is wonderful, still blotting out his heart's sorrow in the contemplation of mysteries, and in the hearing of strange happenings. Yet there were many hours, nay, even many days, when the dread spirit of loneliness seized hold on him, and he would hide himself from the sight of his servants, lamenting because of the inexorable fate that had robbed him of love and of kindly kinsmen; so that there was not one soul upon the earth that might mourn with a true heart's sorrow, if at any time death should come upon him. This was often Tristam's train of thought, till he regarded no position so desolate as his; and at such times a leaden despair would weigh him down, till his faithful Teraam, a lowly Hindu, whose life the Englishman had once saved, would draw aside in wonder, muttering to himself, thinking on some charm and praying to his favourite god to drive away the evil spirit that robbed his master of happiness.

It was on such a day when melancholy had again made Tristam her victim that Teraam stole softly to the Englishman's side, his honest, dusky face growing sad when he beheld how the "evil spirit"

had not ceased its workings, making his master surly of temper.

Now this Teraam was a man who could remain faithful where he had once known love of any kind; and his brain could rapidly evolve wise things, though his outward appearance bore little trace of the anxious, far-seeing mind that worked within. Therefore it was with a great plan in his heart that he approached his master timidly at this hour, his dark, piercing eyes gazing tenderly upon his face. For a few moments Tristram took no notice till the man made a slight patter with his naked feet upon the floor.

"What is it?" cried the Englishman sharply. "I have no want of thee as yet. Go into the village if thou wilt. I would be alone."

"Let not the Sahib be angry with his poor slave," answered the Hindu softly, making a deep salaam, his dusky eyes fixed dreamily upon the ground. Whereupon, knowing that the Englishman was fond of adventure, he told of a very aged man, it was believed of noble caste, living alone in the solitary outskirts of the village.

The age of this man was not known, neither anything concerning him, save that he was very wise, and sometimes the chief men would go to him when they were perplexed. But as to his name none had ever dared to ask it. Perchance he might conjure away the evil spirit that haunted the English Sahib, for he was skilled in all things, and few

would approach him because of their awe of him; yea, it was said that his spirit dwelt continually before the gods, though his body remained as yet on earth.

The Hindu's tale aroused the Englishman, and he felt his veins run with the warm blood of excitement. He questioned the man, who seemed to regard the ancient hermit with great adoration, speaking of him as higher than the chief Guru.

Radley, who loved such stories, listened attentively to all that Teraam said relating to this unknown hermit whose wisdom and power were so greatly famed. At last he bade Teraam think of some suitable present that would please the sage in case of a visit to his lonely habitation.

Then Teraam made another salaam, and departed outside, where he smiled joyfully to himself, rubbing his hands softly and muttering strange words under his breath.

Two days later Tristam Radley, under the guidance of his faithful Hindu, journeyed forth.

That afternoon, near the hour of sunset, two men sat together at the entrance of a low hut built of dried mud; one was Tristam Radley, the roaming Englishman, the other was the hermit, whose name we have to learn.

For some time the two had talked together, and the yellow light of the quickly descending sun now fell upon them, piercing in and out of the overhanging trees that stood on either side of the

humble hut. At this moment Tristam's countenance was happier than for a long time; and every now and then he would look sideways at the old man, a wondering light in his eyes. As for the hermit, he gazed straight into the clouds that gently gathered towards the slowly setting sun, his supple limbs drawn up under him, as is the custom of Indians, his white hair formed in a curious knot, while the eyes that flashed beneath the thick brow looked bright even like a young man's; and Tristam, glancing at him, understood that something great, something hidden, rested in them, for they were eyes that shone with great power, with tenderness, with sorrow, with fascination, but their depths were not easily known.

Presently the old man spoke, and his voice was soft and low, not cracked at all by age.

"Thou findest me a silent host, methinks," he cried, still looking out into the midst of the gradually colouring horizon; "but my visitors are few, and I like a knowledge of them; therefore in this silence have I learnt much."

"How meanest thou?" answered the Englishman. "We have not spoken for a long space."

"Knowledge is not altogether gained by speaking, nor by hearing, nor yet by reading, my brother," and the old man smiled gently to himself, bending his head so that the dazzling sun shone full upon him, through the openings in the thick leaves.

From that moment Tristam regarded the hermit in a different way, looking upon him almost like the Hindus as some one higher than only a wise old man. There was a potent charm about him that made Radley forget everything relating to himself; and he felt his melancholy, his desolation fly swiftly away, as at the touch of some magic power.

The fiery light played upon the old man's form, bathing it in a fierce glare; yet the calm eyes smiled out in great tenderness, and Tristam for the first time understood how a sweet and holy spirit might reveal itself even in a heathen.

"What has thy discernment told thee, my father?" continued Radley.

"That is not for me to tell," was the reply. "But say, what made thee seek out the old recluse who speaks as little as he may with man?"

"Thy repute goes among the villages and is in the mouths of the people. I heard of thee, and I sought thy wisdom."

Whereupon they talked for a long time together, till after the sun had set.

Tristam related certain parts of his own life and his travels, while the old man listened, and once, indeed, he thought he heard him sigh.

Thus it was that the Englishman opened up his heart to a heathen stranger, and his spirits soared into a happier plane under the fascination of the nameless one, so that day after day they sat many

hours together; and the other Hindus honoured the Englishman greatly, because of his intimacy with the ancient sage.

.....
About a month after the day when they first met the old man brought out a small casket of wonderful worth and design, wrapped in many linen cloths, so that the Englishman was astonished how such wealth could be found amid such poor surroundings.

Then for the first time the hermit opened his lips with regard to himself, telling his name, and how he had come from the more southerly lands, even from Vijayanagar, the City of Victory.

"I am Patcola," he cried, "who was once a raja in a King's court. Thou lookest with wonder upon this casket—nay, touch it not, for I have vowed that no finger shall be laid on it but mine own. Wouldst thou hear the tale concerning it, and this also?" and he drew from his neck a small jagged lump of gold of no shape, but very pure in metal.

"Ha, they seem commonplace things!" he cried again, lowering his voice a little, "yet, I say, a great history has been theirs, even as a great history has been mine. Look closely at the shapeless amulet if thou wilt, but the casket touch not, for it is sacred." And at once he covered it carefully with the yellow cloths.

"Thou hast heard speak of Vijayanagar, the

empire that lay between the Dakhan and Cape Comorin, and of its might; and again, thou hast heard of its terrible fall? Ah yes, but doubtless thou hast learnt it from stranger lips—from the lips of Moslems. Now let me commence my tale into thine ears only, telling how I was a proud son of that proud city; let me speak of its kings, of Krishna the Great, of his deeds, of his love, of Vacora the Beautiful. And then hearken sorrowfully to the evils which sent the City of Victory into the dust; so that because of its sacred name and its polluted soil, I mourn away the years that yet remain. Oh, Tristam, I open up my heart to thee because our spirits have been drawn one to the other. Listen, then, and if thou tell the tale to others let it be in a hushed voice.”

And so, sitting far into each night, the old man related the story, as it is set down in these after pages, of his younger, happier days. And as he spoke his blood leaped warm within him, so that when it concerned war, his voice rang with the cry of victory, and his eye flashed with a fiery gleam; or did he speak of love and death, he was impassioned, or wept and moaned in the spirit of his tale.

CHAPTER II

THE DAWNING OF KRISHNA

VIJAYANAGAR, as thou knowest, O brother, lies far south beyond this holy river Nurbudda. Doubtless, also, thou mayst have learnt how it was that the foundation of the empire was laid well-nigh three centuries ago, being named after the saying of an ancient sage, the meaning of whose name was "the Forest of Learning." And from that day the empire grew, till at last it stretched and stretched from north to south, from sea to sea.

Several enemies assaulted it at different times to cast it down, but it stood firm, so that in the days when I dwelt within the chief city, its power was unbounded, its wealth the greatest in all India.

Among the many kings that ruled over Vijayanagar, there came one of the name of Narasimha, the Beloved, a usurper, akin to a family of the name of Sâluva, and he was a great king, conquering much land and making fearful his rivals.

After a while Narasimha died of a strange sickness (for all the kings of Vijayanagar met death by the one disease), and his son Narasa reigned in his stead.

And when by reason of the same sickness it came to pass that Narasa knew his reign was done, and lay ill, he sent for Sâluva Timma, his minister, and addressed him, saying, "Thou perceivest my time is done; so go bring hither my son before me, for though he is only a child of little discretion, yet would I raise him up to be king after me. And into thy hands do I commit the charge that thou see he rule over Vijayanagar. But more, go into the place where abides Krishna, my brother, who perchance might come to be king; seize him, put out his eyes and bring them hither, and that right speedily, so I may see them before I die."

Now, this Sâluva Timma knew the royal Krishna, the Râya's brother, and his heart waxed angry at the King's speech.

"Spare him, O Narasa," he entreated, bowing before him. "The gods know I have served thee well; perchance there are other means besides, and perchance also he desires not to be king, or if——"

"Get thee gone instantly," interrupted the Râya angrily, "or else by another 'perchance' thou thyself shalt suffer. Thou knowest the word of my mouth is never returned, be it for good or evil."

Then Sâluva Timma, without saying another word, went out of the royal presence and arranged it so that he and the King's brother Krishna might have a private word together.

Accordingly after a while, when it was con-

venient, the minister went out into the open where he knew he should find Krishna, and making an obeisance before him, he greeted him kindly.

"Wherefore is it that thou desirest to see me privately? Behold, I am curious," cried Krishna, coming forward quickly.

"Hush, hush!" answered Sâluva softly, putting his fingers on his lips; "our words are not for other ears, and I have somewhat to say unto thee;" and drawing him aside out of the hearing of any that might be near, they passed down the avenue to a remoter spot.

"I pray thee speak, my lord," urged Krishna, as soon as they were alone. "Thy silence and thy face seem to forebode evil; is my life in peril?"

"Bend down thine ear, O most royal Krishna," and Sâluva at once told the story of Narasa's command, forgetting nothing.

As he listened the face of the youth grew hard and fixed, but he showed no trembling, for such had the gods made him, that fear found no resting-place within him.

"I thank thee for thy story—'tis a comfortable one," he added grimly, when the minister had finished; "but this must not be. Go tell the Râya my brother that I seek not his throne, though I would rule well; rather I would be a jogi outside the temple, or a seeker after sterner life. Go say these words; the life of kings is hard and tempts me not."

“Narasa’s words brook of no delay,” returned Sâluva, looking with admiration upon the countenance of Krishna; “but hearken,” and drawing closer he lowered his voice, “I have given thee the royal salute, and who is there that knows of the King’s command save thee and me? wherefore then should thy right not come unto thee?”

“The gods seem to have willed it otherwise,” was Krishna’s bitter reply, “seeing they have put it into the heart of Narasa my brother to rob me of my throne and sight.”

“But what if they have also willed it for me to save thee? Thou art of age, O Prince, whereas the King’s child is only eight years old.”

“Speak on.”

“I have a plot, most royal Krishna, thou king-to-be. Seest thou yon she-goat? Bid me take the eyes of the animal before the King in place of thine, and thou art free; for, behold, the same hour wherein Narasa dies, I have power enough to place thee wheresoever I will, even upon the throne of the City of Victory.”

“The King’s command, my lord, is not one to be broken, nor are thrones to be gained by fraud, however rightly they belong. Thy heart is kind; but thy dutifulness, I fear, weak.”

“Thou forgettest the message of the gods was thus to me,” rejoined Sâluva quietly, “and their words take precedence even before those of kings.”

Whereupon Krishna looked intently into the

minister's eyes, who did not flinch from his gaze. Presently the youth moved, his face set with thought. "I pray thee remain here a while till I return," he cried, and immediately he withdrew out of Sâluva's sight.

Then for the space of an hour did the minister sit in the silence, hearkening for the footsteps of the prince; but they came not; till at last in impatience he, too, passed forth out of seclusion into the path which the youth had taken.

Presently he halted quietly in his walk, silencing the word that rose to his lips; for there in the shadowy distance under the great branches of the spreading trees knelt Krishna the Royal One, the dark rustling foliage hanging like a canopy above, while the wild luxuriant growths of flowers seemed in beautiful harmony with his prayer. Sâluva drew back a little behind the shelter of a bush, watching unseen the comely face of the kneeling youth.

"Surely," he murmured to himself, "surely the gods speak with their chosen," for Krishna, with his hands clasped before him, looked steadfastly forth into the heavens, with an understanding expression, while his eyes shone with lustrous fire because of a vision that he alone saw.

In a little while Krishna arose from his knees, staying for a moment with arms outstretched towards the sky, appearing as if he received something from the hand of an invisible god.

And then, lo! a strange thing happened, for while he stood thus, behold a bird, white in every part, swept suddenly out of the midst of the fleecy clouds, lowering gently towards the earth, till at last it flew on a level with the prince's head. Thrice did it hover round, flying closer, till at the third time it stayed its wings, and, plucking a scarlet blossom out of the hand of Krishna, it turned its course and soared swiftly upwards again to the skies.

And both the youth and the watcher followed its strange flight, till at last it became a small speck in the far-off heights.

At the same moment out of the north came a dark form bearing rapidly towards the ascending bird.

Closer and yet closer it flew down upon the other, till at last they met in mid-air, and a faint scream sunk to the ears of the astonished watchers.

Round and round the birds swung, dark wings clutching the snowy white, till, even as when the dawn conquers the blackness of night, the strength of the flower-bearer prevailed, and she rose on her snowy wings, soaring up and up, till she vanished into the clouds.

Her black adversary from the north uttered a shrill scream, returning wearily whence it had come; and as it went, behold two feathers, one white as purest ivory, the other dark as the blackest ebony, floated softly down upon an equal level near

where Krishna stood. Slowly, very slowly, they descended, till at last they touched the earth with a little flutter. And, lo! as they rested together quietly upon the grass, the white lay upon the black, completely covering it. Whereupon immediately Krishna darted forward to pick them up, when they trembled, and even as he stretched his hand the black moved, and changing, suddenly rested fully upon the white.

The prince gathered them up without pausing, returning along the avenue to where he supposed Sâluva sat; and the minister, who had fled back as soon as the youth moved, noting his bearing, murmured to himself—

“Surely he is King already; have not the gods spoken with their chosen? so that the white bird has prevailed, and carried the scarlet flower even into their holy habitation.”

He marvelled, and busied himself with his betel pouch, awaiting the approach of Krishna.

“I fear the time has seemed long, my lord,” said Krishna, “for I have lingered much.”

“Speak not so, O Prince. Who can hasten from the presence of the gods? or stay the swift passage of their divine messenger?” Then he checked himself hastily, fearing he had said too much, when he observed the prince’s astonishment.

“What meanest thou?” asked Krishna quickly; “have I not been alone, or hast thou seen anything?”

"Nay, vex not thyself," cried Sâluva, "let thy pardon be upon me if I have seen the flight of the birds, and the fall of the feathers, the white upon the black." The minister had not stood close enough to behold that the black was at last uppermost; and as for Krishna he kept it to himself concerning the change.

"But what heard and sawest thou down yonder before Dawn conquered Night?" continued Sâluva. "I am a Brahman, thou knowest, and into my ears can anything be poured."

"Is the secret word to be regarded as a household speech?" queried Krishna, his eyes flashing with sudden fire. "Nay, to them who hear it I say, let them close their lips for ever."

"Truly said," answered the minister, salaaming deeply to hide the slight frown that puckered his brows. Under his breath he muttered to himself how strong was the will of the prince, and how kingly he seemed, though his life was in peril.

"Shall it be, O Prince," he continued, raising his head, "shall it be that the eyes of the goat take the place of thine own before Narasa? or what is thy word?"

"Let it be as thou hast said," replied Krishna, "and my thanks be with thee for thy thought. . . . But how fared my brother when thou didst leave him?"

"Ill, very ill; another hour, methinks, and then——"

Sâluva shrugged his shoulders, and, after another short speech with Krishna, went back into the house where the sick King lay.

Sâluva Timma was a very great man, so great, in fact, that the people regarded him as next to the Râya whose place he took in many of the courts, having the power of a chief judge, besides being lord of several cities and petty governments. He was an ambitious man, eager to gain the highest place, setting his mind even upon the royal throne, for himself if it were possible, but for his family in future years. I doubt not that at this time, when Narasa's son was of such few years, that he would have sought to become Râya; but, in the face of several mighty nobles who loved him not, it could not be. Therefore, knowing their mind, and understanding how much better it would be for Vijayanagar had they a King of full grown years, he allowed himself to disobey Narasa. There was also another cause, and it was this, that Sâluva had been stricken with admiration for the comeliness and proud bearing of Krishna, and a great love for him sprang up for a time in his ambitious heart.

After his speech with Prince Krishna, Sâluva Timma, the minister of Narasa the King, came into the palace again, and passed within the royal bedchamber, bearing on a platter the eyes of a she-goat. And Narasa was satisfied, and doubted not; and, having named his child of eight years

to sit in his place, passed into the presence of the gods.

Then came the days of mourning; the beating of many instruments, the lamentation of processional priests, the giving of alms, and lastly the burning of the Râya's body, as is the custom, together with the principal queens. After these things were accomplished, Sâluva, the chief minister, at once carried out his design, and made haste to proclaim Krishna as King before the people, and when they saw him they loved him with an open heart, and not one was there who had seen him could say any word against him.

Thus it was that Krishna Deva became Râya of the mighty empire, and every one looked to him, knowing he was destined to be great: had not the wise men prophesied? the astrologers consulted their wise books? and the gods named him among their chosen?

O, happy is a kingdom when the omens of happiness are seen, and the new light of things-to-be! Where there is darkness, and the clouds hang heavy, how welcome is the opening morn! And so it was with the City of Victory, that the people clapped their hands and went about with proud hearts, knowing that if the Dawn was so divinely bright, how might it be when the sun arose out of the deep shadows, and the blackness of night was utterly chased away?

O Krishna, we welcome thy dawning; make

haste and let thy sun rise speedily in great glory, for we watch and we wait with happy hearts, looking for things to come. O would that the light could know no change, rising for eternity out of the still night. But that may not be; sunset follows surely on the heels of all, of love, of great deeds, of kingdoms, of universes, and night comes again in many shapes.

As to what I am now about to tell, consider two full years to have passed away. Krishna the Râya reigns with power, holding himself proudly, even as a King should.

Sâluva Timma, as was expected, is the chief minister, being a favourite with the Râya; having much honour, so that he is reckoned the most powerful beside the Râya, who loves him as a father, because he had brought him up, and made him King, even though he disobeyed the word of the dead Narasa. Great good also has come upon the land, much alms have been given to the poor and the Brahmans, besides the erection of towers¹ and pillars in the temples.

Krishna, though he knows sternness, rules everywhere by love and gentleness, so that even the chiefs under him (and² he has many) honour him faithfully as their head. Nevertheless, he

¹ In commemoration of his coronation, Krishna built a tower at the entrance of the Pampapati Temple at Hampe, 1509.

² These vassals were the chiefs of Bâṅkapur, Gasopa, Calicut, Barkur, and Bhâtkal.

himself has not quitted the City of Victory for the greater part of two years, because during that time he has devoted himself entirely to learning all he might about the empire, studying well under the counsel of older men; because he said he would make himself worthy of his office, not ruling merely by reason of his right.

Up to this time I had no entrance into the royal Court, though my father, Semore Raja, was a great man there, for during the space of several moons I, in company with my uncle, had cause to sojourn in Pennukonda, a city far distant from the City of Victory; still we heard reports, and understood how noble was Krishna's every action. Inwardly in my heart I thanked the gods, knowing that the Dawn had now far risen, and presently the Sun would shine forth in great glory.

It chanced that some days after my return from Pennukonda, I, Patcola, went out into the streets, though for no set purpose. Yet methinks the gods caused me to do this thing, as thou wilt see hereafter. As I walked, many of my friends came to greet me with pleasure, seeing I had been absent so great a time from the City, and so we spoke together for a long while, till suddenly the word passed that a troop of the royal horse, with Krishna Deva at their head, would in a few moments come that way.

Whereupon I detached myself from my friends hastily, and, running, took up a position on the

lower steps of a pavilion, hoping that I might have an opportunity to behold the King near at hand, since hitherto only in the far distance had I seen him.

Quickly the news spread and passed from mouth to mouth, and though I understood that the Râya and his troop came not in state, the merchants left their stalls in the bazaars, and the people grouped themselves together on either side of the street, talking loudly, eyes fixed to the point where presently the King must appear.

Already we could hear the shouts at a little distance, but as for me I leant against the pillars a little in the shadows, because my heart seemed to beat so rapidly, and a strange excitement suddenly came upon me.

Presently the foremost horses rounded the corner of the wide street, and I eagerly went a little nearer the edge of the pavilion. At this instant the hoofs of the horses' feet sounded clear and Krishna Deva, the darling of the City of Victory, came before us, riding among his few attendants.

I fastened mine eyes eagerly upon his face, and what I beheld in that moment lies ever imprinted on my heart, because now I understood how it was that every man's love was with him, and I understood the reason why they spoke of him far and wide as the greatest of all Kings of the City of Victory and its mighty domains. Who was there who could look into those eyes and not obey him?

or observe the bravery, the kingliness, the kindness of his mien and not admire him?

As he rode slowly forward, speaking a word every now and then to those with him, I conjured up sweet visions in my brain of the great things to be done and the glories which were to immortalize Vijayanagar, for I ever held my country in my heart, praying for her greatness and for the goodwill of the gods.

While such thoughts coursed through my brain, Krishna of a sudden lifted his face towards me (noting, perhaps, that I stood alone in that part of the pavilion), when, lo! for one short instant our eyes met, and, to my astonishment, I saw him start violently. Recovering my presence of mind I salaamed deeply, retreating on an impulse into the shelter of the pillars; when all in a moment, even as I bowed, there was a sudden bellowing of elephants; a shout rose up from the crowd near at hand, and raising myself instantly I beheld in terror that the royal horse had reared its plumed head, flinging itself with a great stamp of its mighty hoofs out of the small troop of cavaliers. Krishna, I perceived, had lost control though he drew in the reins full tight, his lips uttering not a sound.

Quick as a fleeting thought, though my heart stood still within me, I ran lightly down the few steps, just as the horse dashed heedlessly past the pavilion, causing the Râya in his heavy trappings

to sway violently to one side. What I did next I can scarcely tell, save that after a breathless instant I found myself clinging tightly to the bridle. Then there was another swift lunge, an up-rearing that carried me well-nigh off my feet, and I stood still, placing my hand over the horse's eyes that it might not see.

Just at that moment several of the attendants, running forward, made low salaams, questioning excitedly whether the Râya was hurt and murmuring praises to the gods when they understood he was safe.

"Enough, enough," exclaimed Krishna, opening his lips for the first time, and speaking in a loud voice; "let some of you see if they can remedy the ill done" (and he held up a portion of the reins, which had burst in two), "though, doubt not," he added, "that I shall render mine own thanks in due time. Have ye never seen a horse take a will to itself before? But where is the young man who found the heart to reach out his hand while ye were considering the way to set about it?"

He turned in his saddle, looking over the heads of the crowd and his companions, searching for me with his keen eyes. For a time he found me not, because when I had brought the horse under control, leaving it in the hands of those with him, I had gone to a little distance and was watching from another part of the pavilion. Nevertheless,

the Râya spied me after a moment, and a smile flitted over his face as he pointed me out to an attendant, evidently showing where he might find me, for at the next instant the young courtier rode up to me, saying that the Râya desired I should go instantly to him.

And because of the trepidation in my heart I would have sought an excuse, but I could not find one, so I went forward, summoning up my courage since I had no cause for fear. Then, when I found myself in the midst of a great circle of people which had collected round the King, though at a wide distance, I salaamed reverently, noting that he held a rapid conversation with one of the lords who rode with him. "Patcola," I heard him repeat to himself, "a good name." And his attendants whispered some words I could not catch, though evidently they related to my rank, for I beheld Krishna's face lighten up, and he glanced at me with a bright smile.

"A worthy son of a worthy sire," he murmured half aloud, motioning for me to approach. "And what reward shall be bestowed for thy deed? Name what thou wilt; shall it be treasure in coin, in jewels, or a wife with a great dowry? Conjure up thy desires, and seek the most eager of them; yet understand that my thanks shall be ever thine, though words alone pay but small usury."

There was a moment of silence between us, and I observed that Krishna Deva minutely studied my

features, letting no detail escape him; and when at last I looked up to answer, I saw a puzzled look in his eyes, though the smile still lurked about his lips.

"I need no reward, O Râya," I answered proudly, making an obeisance as I spoke, "is it not enough honour that I stayed thy horse and received thy thanks? What further should thy servant want, seeing it is not every common day when there is need to stretch a hand to save a King?"

"What! what!" cried Krishna, leaning back in his saddle a little and scanning my face more closely, "is there nothing thou wilt accept, or is this a mere pretence on thy part so that others may think thee greater?"

"If thou thinkest so, O King," I answered quietly, drawing myself up and retreating a step or two, "if thou thinkest so, perchance thou wilt give thy servant leave to depart?"

"Nay, nay," returned the Râya, with a sudden smile, "think not that I have wronged thee, O thou brave Patcola," and he moved his horse a little nearer to me.

"There is no need for thine eye to flash," he went on, "to assure me of thy noble spirit, nor for thy voice to carry that proud tone to acquaint me with the verity of thy words, though I vow I was much astonished to hear thy refusal, for truly methought there was none who could find no desire for treasure of any sort. What say ye?"

and he smiled curiously, looking round upon the company.

"We must see thee again, O Patcola," he continued after a brief pause. "Take note that I shall send a messenger for thee at a convenient hour on the morrow. Come at the time I shall name to my palace: we know thy rank, thy parentage and—thy bearing. There is no need to question after that."

Before I had time to make obeisance he had moved off with his company. I, too, stayed not a moment longer than to look behind a single time, when I turned at the corner of the pavilion, and had gone a long way before the crowd had finished their acclamations as the Râya passed, or understood that I had gone, for I tarried not till I had reached my father's house.

Then to relieve my excitement I related everything to Shirishi, my sister, a girl of great loveliness, who in age was yet nothing but a child. And she clapped her hands in her pleasure, prophesying that I should become a great man as she had always believed; and she would have gone and recounted what I had said to the whole household and to Vacora, her chief friend, but I stopped her, knowing that the news would reach other ears with enough speed. As for Vacora, I determined to tell her myself at another time.

Just at this moment Semore, my father, returned from some transaction in the King's Court (he was

high in the Râya's favour), and immediately I went out on to the verandah to meet him, telling all that had passed an hour before.

"'Tis old news, my son," he answered, embracing me, "have I not heard some version from a score of lips wherever I have been? and have I not also rejoiced greatly as I returned home? I am glad thou took no reward at the King's hand; of a truth," he added proudly, "a son of my noble house can perform a service to any without a recompense. So the Râya has commanded thy presence on the morrow? It is well. I have always had cause to bless the gods that thou art my offspring, and always have I hoped great things for thee, and now maybe a path has been opened. Surely thy home-coming, my son, has been prosperous."

"I thank thee, my father," I answered; "it only wanted thy blessing to make my happiness complete."

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE MEETING, AND THE RESULT THEREOF

THAT same day, at a later hour, I went out for a little while into a friend's house.

Concerning this friend there is no need whatever to speak (save that his rank and caste were among the highest); for it is with regard to his daughter Vacora—a damsel of exquisite beauty and wit—that I have chiefly to speak. And I do not think I need give a further description of her. Rather in the tale I would prefer her character to unfold itself.

But before I continue further, it is necessary for me to travel back into the years before my birth, and the birth of the lady Vacora, when the two houses, entertaining love and friendliness one for the other, had made a bond at the time when this daughter was born (the youngest of several) marking our betrothal: vowing that at a convenient time they would bring about our marriage.

I was but a boy of ten years when our parents named this union, and in those days I cared for little but amusement and merriment with companions of mine age, though I studied much at set times under the guidance of a holy man. Nevertheless, when I

became older and wiser I understood this arrangement more fully, and I gradually came to regard Vacora in a different light, till at last a natural love sprang up between us, which is, unhappily, not always the case when a betrothal has been named in infancy. And I had cause to frequently bless the gods who had put this thought into our parents' hearts.

Therefore it was with a hope in my heart, to see her face again, that I went out on this day into her father's house.

But for a long time as we sat on the verandah, which opened out of a large apartment, I was forced to listen to the high-flown speech of her brother, who considered himself learned in several points of science. Whether it was so I know not, neither did I care, but I made short answers (some of which, I fear, were altogether out of place), catching at the lightest jingle of jewels in the corridor beyond.

After a short space, which seemed to me very long because of the tedious talk which I could scarcely follow, I heard a sudden jangling of anklets, the sound of which I knew so well; and immediately I endeavoured to lower our voices lest Vacora, thinking that it was some discussion between her brother's less intimate friends, might turn her steps, fearing to intrude. But it was not so, and in another instant I beheld a swish of the heavy draperies, and Vacora entered into the apartment beyond the verandah, followed by an old

woman who had been her nurse, carrying a great trail of scentless roses in her hand. Also at this same moment another entrance swung to and her father entered, coming into the open to us, and looking pleased when he beheld that I was there, for always did he entertain a great affection for me.

Then I saw Vacora hesitate a moment as to whether she should retreat, but seeing her father spoke no word against it, she slipped quietly in, busying herself by forming the roses into a lovely garland, not even turning her head once in our direction.

Nevertheless, while I talked with my lips mine ears heard every jingle of her bracelets, and mine eyes followed her gentle movements, though her face was turned aside from the place we sat. And so she twined the flowers in and out skilfully, while her brother, a man of many years, launched into another learned speech, thinking, perchance, that his talk was especially agreeable: giving curious reasons in explanation of certain things, which, not troubling to contradict, I let pass, smiling inwardly to myself at his vainglory.

Presently a servant entered with a message, and the two withdrew for a moment, leaving me alone on the verandah.

Then I also arose, and entering into the inner room, passed across to where Vacora and her servant sat.

"What dost thou do?" I cried, after giving a salutation.

"Making garlands, as thou seest," she answered; "perchance I shall hang them round the neck of the sacred cows when I have finished; but I did not think that thou hadst perceived our entrance."

"Didst thou?" I answered, smiling; "then thou must, I fear, have a poor opinion of me; why, mine eyes have never left thee, and I think some good spirit must have caused a message to be brought to thy illustrious father, so that I might have a private word with thee."

Whereupon I related the incident that had taken place near the pavilion, and how the Râya had bade my attendance in the palace at a later hour, watching her face light up with excitement and pleasure.

"Very glad am I," she returned softly; "I had already heard of thy bravery in the matter of the King's horse, but with many a variation in the telling; for, as thou knowest, no tale can lose a whit in repetition."

"And what did they say?"

"Oh, different things, no two mouths spoke alike; some saying the Râya ordered a gift of treasure to be given to thee, because thou hast caught him as he fell. Oh, I know not what; for some magnified the accident greatly, giving many reasons why the horse fled."

"None of which are right, methinks," I replied, vexed how the tale was misconstrued; "and truly none could arrive at the right conclusion, seeing that no one stood by save the immediate courtiers, for the crowd were at a great distance when Krishna called me from the pavilion to him."

"I am glad thou didst act so nobly, especially in accepting no reward," cried Vacora, a happy smile lighting upon her face. "And now I long to know what words the King may have to say to thee. At any rate, from this day, thou wilt not only be the son of a great lord, but great thyself."

"Aye," I cried; "but rejoice in a double sense, for will it not make thee more highly honoured when thou art mine?"

Whereupon she made no answer, but bent a little closer over her work, so that her face was hidden; and also at that moment her father returned into the room, explaining his absence, and immediately we went on to the verandah again.

At last I arose to go, for I knew I had yet to prepare for my appearance in the Râya's presence, when Vacora's brother also came upon us, and would have discussed the accuracy of some numerical problem, pointing out his method of solving, when I excused myself hastily, saying I had a great work on hand; but adding that another day I should deem it an honour to listen to such a learned instructor, when my brain would be clear

from excitement, and I might drink in every word that proceeded from his wise and careful thoughts.

After I left, I wondered if he had understood the touch of irony in my speech, but I think not, for I remembered how he had nodded with pleasure, a smile of gratification passing over his face. And when I had turned after I had gone a little distance, I, too, smiled (though in a different way), for I beheld him sitting again in the verandah, a betel pouch at his side, writing materials near at hand, and a far-away look in his eyes; and I knew another problem of science had presented itself to him. Then I laughed well-nigh outright, knowing that sooner or later I should hear a solution to some unexplained point, or a carefully worded lecture on the science and mysteries of astronomy, for he loved to show his learning at any time, though generally I noticed his hearers were drawn from such as could not gainsay any of his words. And I do not think he would have ventured any of his philosophy before me, only that rarely did I question any of his theories, preferring rather to listen quietly (when I was obliged) than to rouse his temper in some foolish argument.

A short time after, in all the state which our noble house required, I arrived at the outer gates of the royal palace, where I stayed in the courtyard while certain ones went forward to tell of my coming. And during that time I noticed how many

eyes were directed toward me, for hitherto I had not been seen at any important functions in the City of Victory; and in general my father's household was simple in all its arrangements, and brooked of no magnificence save what was necessary for the upkeep of our rank and caste. Therefore, up till now I had not entered into the company of courtiers, preferring one special friend, whom I could trust, than a large body of indifferent companions.

Nevertheless, it was ordained that this day was to be the beginning of a wonderful change in my life; and sometimes I question whether, if I had known of the things which were to come to pass, I should have been pleased to accept it all.

Though it robbed me of many things I may not name, and the measure of tears far outweighed the measure of joy, yet I think I should have gone forward, even as I have done, for who, perchance, can say I have not striven to accomplish all things right? And if I have failed, or if I have gone against any of the laws, either written or eternal, think kindly on me, knowing it is neither for thee nor me to judge.

Presently the messengers returned, bearing word that I was to approach instantly, and it was also whispered in my ear that Krishna Deva had ordained that I should see him privately. Thereupon I felt my heart beat violently again, partly because of my excitement and partly because of

the curious glances and whispers that went on around me.

When we had reached the palace itself (which is beyond a courtyard surrounded by verandahs, where any who go to see the King wait) there was another short halt, and I went forward under the guidance of a single officer.

Presently I found myself passing in and out of several corridors, and a long maze of winding passages, each resplendent with pillars, carved and ornamented, set here and there with shining jewels, that glittered out of the darker corners like eyes of fire, appearing like silent watchers looking upon the deeds of men.

Yet it was after I had grown more accustomed to life in the palace that I noticed these splendours, and the wonders of the mighty building, with the great life-size statues of men, poised in different ways, dancers, tigers, elephants and panthers, all carved out of beautiful stones; and then there were the draperies hanging as curtains, all dyed in the brightest colours, caught up by great festoons, so that the eye always rested on something lovely. On this day my brain could take no notice of such things, and I went forward without speaking a word, keeping up with the swift footsteps of the guide, who turned the corridors without moving his head once to look behind at me.

The only time that any words passed his lips was when he whispered to the guards we met at

different points, and they would fall back before us, clanking their arms.

Presently we halted, and a man carrying a sword and shield issued out of the shadows, a door opened rapidly, some one pushed me gently forward, and I stood within a vast apartment of dazzling richness, where the sudden brilliant light so blinded my eyes after the dimmer corridors, that I stood still, scarce knowing where I was.

A moment later I heard a voice mention my name in such glad tones that caused my heart to thrill, and I made a deep obeisance, knowing I stood once again in the presence of Krishna the Râya!

But, strange to say, from this moment all undue nervousness left me; and never again did such an extraordinary excitement come over me, though I have passed through perils and dangers enough to make any strong man afraid.

Just then some one touched me lightly on the arm, drawing me forward, nearer to the centre of the room.

"Welcome, thrice welcome," I heard the Râya say from where he lay at ease on an ivory couch plated with gold in fantastic shapes, while an attendant stood on one side waving a graceful fan.

"Perchance thou art surprised at the manner of thy reception? but I have preferred this way, seeing I wished to speak with thee privately rather than in the great audience-chamber."

"None should be surprised at the doings of the Râya," I answered; "if the lord calls, the servant answers, and it matters not in the servant's eyes what manner of room or place he steps in; he looks only into the face of his master."

"Ah," returned the Râya, with a low chuckle, raising himself from the couch; "I have always boasted that I read a man's character at first glance, and of a truth I made no mistake when I saw thee on the steps of the pavilion, and I told myself that a man of peculiar mind stood there. I sent for thee," he cried again after a pause, motioning the one who fanned him to retire, "I sent for thee for two reasons, first because my spirit told me I should know thee better—of the other I will speak later. I can understand that thou art no ordinary man—nay, murmur no words of confused modesty, for possibly thou knowest it already. Now answer. What have the invisible spirits that dwell within us told thee concerning thyself?"

"I know not, O Râya," I answered after a pause; "thou speakest in enigmas, and I am not a philosopher to interpret hard sayings, nor wise enough to fathom hard riddles."

"Thou dost not comprehend?" and I thought a smile flitted across the face of Krishna for an instant; "shall I then hazard a guess? Have they told thee to be ambitious as to thy power, thy influence, the magnificence of thy proud house? or hast thou learnt to appreciate other things? Dost

thou see light where to others it is nought but darkness? Canst thou find pleasure where others see labour, and do thy thoughts companion thee so that thou art never lonely? Say have I spoken aright, or do I mistake thee for a man of a different sort?"

"Thou hast spoken aright, O Râya," I answered, much taken aback at his manner, for he arose hastily, walking several times up and down the floor. Then suddenly he turned and faced me, and I beheld a strange light shining in the midst of his dark eyes.

"I rejoice greatly, then," he cried, laying his hand on my shoulder; "thou knowest not how long I have sought for such as thee, and how I have desired to have the acquaintance of one who could refuse reward for a worthy deed, because sometimes kings, thou knowest, tire of but one company," and he smiled faintly. "Now, in return for this thy deed of bravery, I offer thee henceforth eternal friendship, not as king to subject, not as lord to lord, but as man to man, as brother to brother. Oh, thou canst not know how long I have waited for thee as a friend, as one who can love, not because of my treasure, my throne, and my vast lands, the valuable presents and governorships my hand can bestow. Wilt thou accept? The choosing is in thy hands. What! Canst thou not answer? or have I insulted thee by offering any reward, though of a different sort?"

"O Krishna Deva," I said, as soon as I had found my voice, and could recover from my amazement at the suddenness of his strange speech. "What shall I say? I am altogether overwhelmed. Nevertheless, happy am I to accept this unlooked-for favour; and I pray I may not find it as nought but some sweet dream which has carried me for a short time into the heavens."

"'Tis no dream on my part," returned Krishna, with a soft laugh, tenderness creeping into his eyes. "We are friends henceforth in a new sense to what I am accustomed, as brother to brother?"

"As thou sayest, O Râya," I answered, "as brother to brother."

Our eyes met; and from that instant all the love in my heart leaped out toward this king (though I was still puzzled as to his strange manner), and I loved him, not because of his great rank, but with all the fervour that one man can feel towards another. Then a sudden thought came into my mind.

"But O Râya," I cried, "I am a stranger in thy courts. Can it be that thou dost offer me all this with such slight knowledge of me?"

"I make no mistake in this case. But to free thee from all anxiety," he added, with a laugh, "shall I relate how it was I specially came to fix on thee, apart from thy rescue of the horse?"

"As thou wilt," I answered; "it is not for me to command."

Whereupon he took his seat upon the couch, pausing a moment before he spoke again.

"Many moons ago, soon after I came into my heritage as king, ofttimes when in the seclusion of mine own chamber a kind of melancholy has seized hold on me, and I have tried to count how many hearts would remain staunch to me, if by any chance I should cease to be what I am. And I would name two or three (not counting the lord Sâluva Timma, who I look upon as a father in many ways), picking their character to pieces in my mind.

"Then sometimes I have thought there was no flaw, and I was happy; until, perchance, some day—maybe a long while after, I have beheld some little incident, or a faint undercurrent in the speech, and I have sighed, because I had not found the perfect friend. Oh, I have been deceived in several at different times, for I observe the little things well, though few may think it."

"And how dost thou know, O Râya," I cried, "that I shall not be as one of these?"

"That thou hast to learn," he answered; "I have not yet finished my tale. Now, it was on a certain night, a long, long while ago, it seems to me, that a strange vision came before me—what it was I may not say, for it is sacred; nevertheless, it was in that vision that I beheld thee first; though I understood nothing concerning thy rank, thy name, or where thou dwelt, for it was only thy

face that I saw. And besides, several other things were revealed, so that I knew that it was ordained that thou shouldst cross my path; though how or when I could not tell. Thrice did this same revelation pass before me; thrice did I see thy face; but I have kept it to myself till this instant, waiting for thee to fulfil thy part. Now, therefore perchance, thou canst understand how much I marvelled when I saw thee standing alone in that part of the pavilion. In fact, I have my doubts as to whether the horse did not rear because of the violent jerk I must have given, for it was with difficulty that I could keep enough control upon myself. That is my tale. Say, is everything clear to thee?"

But I was so astonished at the Râya's words that I could find few words wherewith to answer, and I marvelled how perfectly he had conducted himself on that day when my appearance must in reality have caused a great excitement in his heart, and I prayed that I might be worthy of his love.

When our conversation drew to an end, and I had moved to depart, Krishna looked at me with a sweet smile, and his voice was very tender by reason of his emotion.

"Henceforward," he cried, "henceforward in the sight of others we are but king and subject—in the company of ourselves alone, we stand as brothers."

Thus it was that strange events came to pass, through the will of the invisible gods; and from

that day a new life was mine. The past was gone; I stepped forth with a new heart, and for a time I scarcely looked back into the older days, so happy was I, not because any ambition for wealth was gratified, but because I had found the most perfect man the gods had made, whose ideas, whose thoughts, whose nature harmonized with mine; and who as a king could find no equal, no, not even among those who had lived in ancient days.

CHAPTER IV

A MYSTERY CONCERNING THE RÂYA

THREE moons have now gone by, and behold we are on the eve of a great war; and a sense of excitement runs through every man and woman in the City of Victory.

When Krishna first came to the throne, I have said how he secluded himself for the greater part of two years, so that he might learn all he could concerning his kingdom; and it seems that during that time, when he was searching among the testaments of bygone kings, he found one written by order of Narasimha, wherein he bade any who came after him to go out against three fortresses which by rights belonged to Vijayanagar (they having been seized at an unguarded moment). And because a sickness had come upon him and he could not go out to reconquer them himself, he (Narasimha) passed a command on to future kings that they should fulfil his desire.

When Krishna read this testament and saw how the rulers before him had neglected to carry it out, he was very angry, and vowed he would not rest until the three cities should be restored, and their

names were Udayagiri in the land of Orissa, Raichur and Mudkal in Bijapur.

Hence it was now that we summoned our forces and prepared to attack Udayagiri, which had fallen to the king of Orissa.

As for myself, my life every day became happier; I was always in the King's company when possible, and though before others we employed ceremony, yet in privacy we acted as brothers. The only one who harboured any jealousy towards me was the son of Sâluva Timma, the chief minister, who perchance envied my friendliness with Krishna. Still, it may be I was mistaken, if so, I pray the gods may forgive that I have spoken.

Yet another thing had taken place. Behold, Vacora the Beautiful is mine. We were wedded two moons back in great ceremony, and the Râya presented us with a gift, which I prized above all others. Surely the sun never shone so brightly in my sky before, and there was only a tiny cloud that crept up, telling me I must bid farewell to my love for a little while, because I followed with the Râya's great forces into the land of Orissa. And now the last day had come; to-morrow we were to journey out at an early hour. Therefore it was on this day preceding that I had to take leave of all my friends and acquaintances, hurrying as much as possible, so that I might spend the greater time in the company of Vacora, my wife.

At yet an early hour in the same evening, I quitted the company of all others, and fled into the gardens, where I knew I should find Vacora, for I had told her of my coming at a certain hour. And being eager to meet my love, I hastened my steps through the labyrinth of paths, under the many trees, till I came to a natural arbour near a tiny ornamental pool, where the pure water-lilies lifted up their heads before the face of the quickly dawning moon.

I heard a gentle flutter from within, a tinkle of bracelets, and in another instant Vacora lay in my arms.

"Art thou alone, my love—my roṣe?" I cried, kissing her brow and perfumed hair; "I thought possibly I should not find thee here as yet, seeing I have come before the time I said."

"I am alone," she answered softly, "and up till now I have been waiting for thee with an excitement in my heart. And now, my lord, I pray thee, relieve my impatience, telling me all the news that bears on to-morrow, for the women all distort their tales, so that I know not which to believe."

"There be but little to add to that which thou knowest already, save that Krishna Deva (may the gods be with him!) has decreed that I shall ride next to his own saddle. 'Tis an unlooked-for honour."

"But thou art worthy of them all," she answered,

her great eyes shining with delight; "and do Sâluva Timma and the chief Brahmins also go?"

"Aye," I cried, "and I with them, for Krishna vows he will not part with me; and yet, methinks, I am over-young to mix with all these so much, for their years are double or treble of mine. I pray it may not cause dissension."

"Wherefore should it, my husband?" she answered, with a sudden flash; "and does thy illustrious father also go?"

"Nay, he remains, Vacora; and thou mayest see much of him during my absence, for I would not have thee lonely in any way. Go over to see thy relations when thou canst."

"I thank thee," she answered; "but I shall not by any means be lonely. I have my amusements, my pets, and then I have the pleasure of looking for thy return."

"I fear that may be a long way ahead," I cried sadly.

And I was right, for it was more than a year and a half before I returned.

"Almost I would I were a man," she broke in suddenly, with a little laugh, "that I might wield a sword in the name of so great a king."

"Nevertheless," I cried, smiling at her enthusiasm, "the virtues and beauty of the sweet Vacora are of greater value to the City of Victory than the addition of a single fighting man. But I have

a request to make : see that thou petition the gods continually for our safety and our victory."

"I am assured of that," she answered, "I have seen much in a dream, and know that the omen is good. Yet even now I know not the exact hour of thy departure."

"As the sun leaps up in the heavens, Vacora, in the coming morn, so in that hour do the companies of Krishna Deva sally forth to the land of Orissa."

"Then I will watch thee depart from the tower, for from thence I can follow thee with mine eyes a long way."

After this we remained a long while together, though it seemed to me but a short space; and we spoke of many things, such as were sacred between ourselves.

Then suddenly the moon flooded the heavens with its pure light, smiling down upon the earth, and our voices dropped away into silence, and we did not speak, but looked forth into the great wide space in front of us, where the rustling trees cast their shadows, murmuring lightly to themselves as the wind passed through, going whither we could not tell. And the little lake of water smiled also, shaking her burden of lilies as the ripples came. And we beheld it all, clasping each other's hands, till suddenly the sound of distant rejoicings broke upon us, so that the pure silence of the

MYSTERY CONCERNING THE RÂYA 61

moment fled; and we arose, walking up and down between the trees.

After we had paced thus several times, we moved into quite a different path, and one which would have exposed us (had it been daylight) to the eyes of others; but at this time the outer parts were deserted, seeing the people had gathered either in their neighbours' houses, or in the public market-place.

"Everything is beautiful to-night, Vacora," I cried at last; "when has the air been so laden with perfume before? or when has the moon shown so radiant a face?"

"'Tis ever so," she answered, with a smile. "When comes the time of departure, then comes the time also when we more closely examine the things round us; finding new beauties where we had scarcely looked before."

I was about to answer, when suddenly she clutched my arm violently, pointing into the distance with her finger.

"What was that? Didst thou see nought?" she whispered.

"What? what?" I replied, alarmed at her manner, "what dost thou see?"

"It is gone, but I fancied I saw the shadow of a man passing rapidly in and out among the outer trees."

"Thou art overwrought, my rose," I answered,

scanning the place in front. "And, besides, if it were some one, there is no need for this sudden alarm. Perchance it might be one of the men who depart to-morrow, and he returns home after bidding his friends farewell."

"If it is so, his manner was strange and not like one who walks openly; nevertheless, thy pardon; after all it may be as thou sayest, or nought but my imagination."

But even as she spoke I too started back at seeing a figure move among the trees. Then suddenly the moon gleamed forth in greater radiancy, and I looked upon a man, closely robed, and his face concealed by a dark head-dress.

Now at ordinary times I should have taken no further notice, although this byway was not much used after dark. Nevertheless, as Vacora said, there was something strange about this passer, and somehow the whole bearing seemed familiar.

Even as the thoughts played within me, and I was about to speak, the wind caught and played with the loose flap of the head-dress that hid his countenance, and as it fell off, revealing his features; I stood as one carven in stone, for there in the full gleam of the shining moon *I beheld the face of Krishna the King!*

Another instant and the clouds covered the light of the heavens; a step sounded on the grass, and when I looked again nought was revealed, save the heavy masses of areca-palms and the soft patches

MYSTERY CONCERNING THE RÂYA 63

of sweet-smelling, half-closed flowers. Then the darkening cloud passed altogether over the edge of the moon; and again we stood alone beneath the pomegranate-trees, in the midst of perfect silence, save when the wind bore down upon us the song of the doleful night bird.

"Thou sawest?" whispered Vacora, grasping my arm; "is it but a vision, or did truly the face of the living King gleam out before us? But it cannot be, 'tis some spirit we have beheld; Krishna would not venture abroad thus in the darkness of night."

"Yet am I assured, Vacora," I answered, "that we looked upon the countenance of the Râya, and it were no vision. Surely he is abroad on some secret errand, perchance in disguise mixing with the army. The purpose were good, for did ye not see how the gods threw their mantle of darkness upon him, as if it were to shield his sacred face from our bewildered gaze?"

"It may be 'tis so; nevertheless, the incident seems strange to me."

"Nay, my love," I answered, tenderly kissing her, "the thought of war has unstrung thee. Ponder no more over this matter, only pray for the day when I shall accompany Krishna in the victorious return. But say nought concerning this, and I will do likewise."

Then at once we hastened our steps, and having left Vacora in her apartment, telling her to retire

at her usual hour, not waiting for me, because I still had work to accomplish, I hurried through the streets back into the palace. Yet I could not forget the sudden appearance of Krishna beneath the areca-palms, nor put aside my curiosity about his purpose. I determined, however, to keep the matter secret, until such time when the Râya of his own will should satisfy me, for we who were as brothers had hitherto hidden no secrets. Suddenly, as I passed round the carven pillars which formed the entrance to another passage, I beheld the heavy form of Sâluva Timma, the chief minister, approaching from beyond the marble stairs.

"Surely the palace is deserted this night," he began, with a harsh laugh. "I have here some writings to set before the Râya, but I have argued with yon fools before the royal door, and it would seem their orders are to admit none until an hour hence. Thus they say. But I deem it strange, for I can hear no sound within the apartment, and yesternight this same thing also chanced to be."

Now at these words of Sâluva Timma I started, and it was well the light from the hanging lamps fell not full upon my countenance.

"He has told thee nought?" continued the minister, with a narrow glance, "for it seems that he confides much in thee."

"Nought," I answered boldly; "doubtless the Râya is at rest, or forming some plan of battle. Or perchance he is in the Zenana."

"He is not," he snapped sharply; "I have sought everywhere, and I like not these secret doings, for hitherto he has always confided in me. Thou art sure he has told thee nought?"

"By thy head, no," I answered coldly, yet I saw by his manner that he believed me not and thought I hid something from him.

Then we looked into each other's eyes: what he saw in mine I know not, but in his I read many things, which were to bring forth their fruits in after years.

"I must see to my final duties," I murmured, averting my eyes, "for the night is already too short."

"That is so," returned the minister, and we passed our several ways.

I commenced to ascend the marble stairs, ornamented with carven stone. Suddenly methought I heard in the half darkness a soft swish of garments, and turning my head sharply, seeking the cause, I beheld a hand linger for an instant on the balustrade. Then it vanished, the rustling died away into silence; but I had seen enough to make me feel amazed, for, lo! the ring upon the middle finger of that hand was the ring of Krishna the King.

"What can it be that the Râya keep so secret?" I said to myself, glad that the minister was not present; but I lingered no longer, and, reaching the apartment I sought, I set about to do some

writings, which needed to be finished before our departure. And so for a time the mystery passed from my mind.

.

Two hours before dawn every man in the City was astir, making ready the final things, and as for the priests they lifted up their voices in prayer, making great sacrifices before the holy gods.

As the sun gleamed forth from the clouds, and flashed its light on all the gilded temple domes, Krishna, arrayed in the dress of a warrior-king, leapt into the saddle of his horse, and lifting up his voice, sweet yet awful in majesty, cried aloud to the soldiers :

“O, ye captains and men of victory, already is it known unto you wherefore we do this thing. Now let us go forward to victory, confident in the keeping of the gods. The pagodas have shown the sign of our triumph, my brothers; holy Brahmans accompany us on our way; nevertheless, if there be any here whose heart is not with us in this thing, let him separate himself at once, before the full rise of the sacred sun; for of such as be afraid or who are of a half heart, I have no need.”

But the men, every one of them, raised their weapons and shields on high and shouted the salute; neither was there fear written on the face of any. And Krishna looked upon them and smiled, as a father to a child, though his years

were fewer than those of many who went out to battle.

Then there was a moment of silence as the light of the sun streamed down upon us, and Krishna, raising his hand aloft, cried once more, "Now forth into the land of Orissa, into the arms of victory."

And at once we moved forward, regiment after regiment, division after division; and the war-cry passed from lip to lip, as they repeated the Râya's word.

All the City came forward to witness the departure of these men of strength; and they all cried out with admiration as they beheld the flash of the silver shields, the gilded bows of the archers, the velvet trappings of the horsemen, the musical bells of the many elephants, and the sign of might which rested on the countenance of every man. But as for me I saw little of the shouting crowd, rather mine eyes rested on a white-robed figure on a distant tower, the figure of Vacora, my love. Thus with the image of her in my mind did I pass out of the City and enter in a war-like spirit into another land.

Now I will not weary you with the tale of our marchings (for such things are of no account save to such as I), but after many days, during which time Krishna was much with his soldiers, we came near to the City of Udayagiri. Here the Râya commanded the camps to be pitched, and we

remained in this part many moons, besieging the city. And at last, after little bloodshed (for Krishna's heart was tender as a woman's, and sought not war for the sake of conquered blood), we entered into the fortress and took it, together with many prisoners and much spoil, for the King of Orissa came not to defend his own. Then, as soon as this thing was done, Krishna the Royal One arose, and giving thanks to the gods for an easy victory, passed in and out among the conquered people, ordering the release of women and restoration of property, besides giving much alms to such as needed it. And I followed wheresoever the Râya went.

Now it happened on a certain day, near the time when we left Udayagiri, that in company with Krishna I ascended a hill, overlooking all the city, for the Râya wished to make plans for its defence. And when he had finished doing this, he came forward and touched me heavily upon the arm, and I beheld that his countenance was sad.

"Behold this fair city, Patcola," he cried, raising his arm and pointing into the valley below. "What say ye? Do ye not mourn that its King is a coward? Surely the land is too fair, and its people too brave to be ruled by such as he. It was too easily conquered, methinks. I pray not one foot of our most sacred soil may ever bear such a reproach as this." Then he paused a moment, and

I saw that his eyes were filled with tears of compassion and sorrow.

"Wherefore these words, O King?" I cried in astonishment; "how could the City of Victory be likened unto this?"

"Nay, Patcola, think no more on my words, they have no meaning; nevertheless, it was thou thyself who set this current of thought running within me."

"I? O Râya, and what foolish saying has that been?"

"Ah! but thou couldst not help thyself. It was many moons ago at a time when I heard thee sing. It was a strange song, and understood by few; nevertheless, something had prompted those words and music, and it set my mind running on a different path, and—— What! Art sad? Then let our speech be merrier. Come, let us descend instantly; methinks I see the captains awaiting us below." And immediately we walked down the slopes until we came to the royal camp.

The meaning of Krishna Deva's speech was this: As it chanced, the gods had favoured me with a goodly voice, and a mind that could frame words and make music on an instrument as I sang. In fact, scarcely did I ever perform well, save when the song was of mine own construction. Therefore, as soon as Krishna had learnt of my ability, he had often commanded me to sing to him in private, and I would weave a song either merry or sad,

according to my mood. But several nights before we quitted for Orissa, it chanced that a deep melancholy had laid hold on my spirits; and the words that I sang before Krishna I remember not, only I know they spoke of many things, of love, of death, of mysteries that are not known, of things eternal, of things unseen; and then by some means the melancholy deepened on my soul; the tune changed, and I put visions into my music, visions of hate, of wasted love, of war, of rivers flowing with blood of dead, of cast down hopes, of sullied glory, of death by honour and dishonour, of evils, of darkness. When the last note had died into silence I remembered how I had seen Krishna's eyes glisten with unshed tears, and he had sighed deeply, saying that such as I, who had hitherto passed through no evil, should let no such sadness dwell in my thoughts, but let those things force themselves only upon the older. And now, when I found how he had ever since treasured up that song in his heart, I could have bitten out my tongue in anger with myself, to think that I, who thought only of my King's happiness and honour, should have caused him to feel a sadness of heart.

Now after this day we stayed not long in Udayagiri, for Krishna, having finished that which he had set himself to do, gave word to quit the city, for he desired to visit Kondâvid and force the King of Orissa to fight with him. For this enemy had

done much harm to Vijayanagar in former days, and had broken even the bond of peace.

Therefore, leaving a force for protection of the fortress, the King's regiments and all his great companies pushed forward to the outskirts of Kondâvid, a chief city of Orissa. And it chanced that when the King of Orissa knew of this thing that he collected his men, and marched forth to defend his dominions. But from what I heard at another time he was urged by his captains to bring an army, for his cowardice filled his heart so, that he stood afraid.

So Krishna the Royal One, hearing of the approach of the King, mustered his men and went forward to meet him, even to the banks of a river (leaving the city of Kondâvid surrounded by a small force), for he was wishful to meet in war this ancient enemy of Vijayanagar.

Then he sent him a message in terms of courtesy, saying he would take back his army to the distance of two leagues, so that the King, his enemy, might cross and fight. But Orissa abused the messenger, and sent him back with words of disdain. Then Krishna's wrath arose so that he crossed the river with his forces, and at once we entered into battle with beatings of music, the ringing of bells and the blowing of many trumpets.

Now the fight was long and hard, for the men of Orissa were even greater than the forces of Krishna; nevertheless, we were more skilled in the

devices of war, and in the end our might prevailed, so that the King of Orissa fled, he and all his men.

Thus it was sunset before the doings of the day were finished, and we rested that night with a thankful heart, knowing the gods were with us.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY CONTINUETH

Now, after giving rest to all the camp for a short space, Krishna the Royal One consulted with his captains and chief officers of the forces in his own camp. And they advised that it was best to return to the siege of Kondâvid, and after it was finished, to attack Kondapalle, the chief city of the land of Orissa. But at these words Krishna demurred, saying he sought not war for the love of war; nevertheless, the captains in the end prevailed upon him, for they loved to war on an ancient foe of Vijayanagar. So in the end it was ordained that the brother of Sâluva Timma, the Râya's minister, be left as governor of Udayagiri, while the King and greater forces went up against Kondapalle, chief city of Orissa. This was done, and everywhere the Râya passed, victory lay in his path, for the people were undefended, because their ruler put out no hand to save them.

So at last we even advanced far into the kingdom, capturing much spoil on the way and meeting many poor to whom Krishna gave alms.

While one day together we inspected the chief things in the city a messenger came hurriedly from a chief captain, saying that the wife and son of Orissa, while endeavouring to flee from the city, had been captured by the band of guards.

What was the King's will in this matter?

Then Krishna was astonished, and turning to the company of those around him, cried aloud, saying, "What manner of King can this King be, that he sits still, even when his family fall into the hands of the enemy? Surely, methinks, such a coward is not worthy of a royal foe, nor of the protection of the gods."

He then passed the word to the messenger that the Queen and her son should be treated with all proper courtesy, and sent forward under an escort into the City of Victory. At the same time Krishna despatched messengers to run swiftly to the King of Orissa, bidding him come forth and fight if his fear would let him.

But if he came not forth, "let him be known as the man of a woman's heart and weak blood. Let him be known as the King who was vanquished before he fought, and fled before the face of Krishna, before Krishna the Son of Victory. Let also the name of the King of Orissa become a by-word for any who would be cowardly, and run where women stay; let him be held up to scorn and his fair land to disgrace."

Such were the words of Krishna the Râya,

spoken in his wrath, Krishna the lord of lords, concerning Orissa the Vanquished, the Coward.

And though we stayed long in the land awaiting an answer to the challenge, nevertheless, none came, and though the King sent many times the King of Orissa hid himself, even as a jackal before a lion.

Then Krishna Deva, filled with anger, caused an inscription to be placed on a Temple, which he had erected in the city, so that all might see it. And the meaning of the words was this—

“Attend ye that pass this way. These are the words of Krishna Deva, Râya of Vijayanagar, lord of the greater lords of India, King of the kings, to him who calls himself King of Orissa, but who has fled, casting his royalty down to the dirt.

*“Perchance when these letters are decayed, and no longer seen by the eye of man, he will give battle to the Râya of Vijayanagar. Till then let them stand as a reproach, neither let them be moved by the hand of the King of Orissa when at last he steals back on the outgoing of the King of Victory, for if so be, then shall his Queen be given to the smith who shoes the horses of the mighty Krishna.”*¹

When the Râya had finished his work, made defences for the captured fortresses and given alms to the many poor, he mustered his men, with the

¹ See *Vijayanagar: A Forgotten Empire*, by Mr. Sewell.

help of Sâluva Timma, his minister, and leaving certain forces with his captains he set his face once again towards the City of Victory. So we and greater part of the elephants, horsemen and archers returned by the same way by which we came, giving thanks to the gods for greatness of mercy.

When we came in sight of our own beloved city, behold, we forget all, and we press forward, with the heralds running before us, proclaiming the coming of Krishna, the Brave, the Mighty.

The gates of the City are thrown open, and we enter, bearing aloft the trophies of victory, and leaving behind a cloud of dust that abated not for the space of an hour. Then the shouts of the people, the blare of triumphant music, the neighing of horses, the bellowing of elephants.

Surely the noise was as great as on the day we went forward to battle against Orissa, for I have since heard the saying, that the birds even fell to the earth with the sound of the many voices.

Such was the coming of our army, and the glory of our coming.

After all these things feasts were proclaimed throughout the city, to which came all the nobles, the great men and the priests. But I thought little of these things, seeking where possible to escape into the company of Shirishi, and Vacora, my wife. They greeted me with tears, and I beheld

them pale and worn, because the war had kept us a long time apart. And I sat happily in their company.

Now, sometime after the day of our return, the Râya called into his presence the son of the King of Orissa, whom he had taken, together with his mother. He spoke kindly to him, inquiring after his health. At first the young man was silent, and answered not a word, for, as was natural, he harboured in his heart a hate of Krishna the Conqueror. And the King put forth the power that lay in his speech and the light which smiled in his eyes, so that the Prince's anger was appeased, and he opened up his heart, even as a blossom which unfolds at the first ray of the rising sun. In the conversation that took place Krishna learnt that the Prince was skilled in fencing and the art of the sword, begging him to give an exhibit of his powers.

Whereupon the Prince was pleased that the Râya should have asked this thing; and immediately he demanded that a skilled fencer might be found as his opponent. So his Highness commanded that Sâluva Timma should search out for a man skilled in the arts; which he did, sending a messenger for the one he named.

I fancied there was a scornful smile on the minister's face, and I doubt not that inwardly he derided Krishna for his kindness towards the young Prince. Whether the Râya noted it also

I know not, nevertheless, all the time I stood in the room, the strange look remained, and I could not help wondering to myself.

“Behold, I lend thee my sword,” I heard the Râya say, “I believe it to be worthy of such a comely prince,” and, rising, he unbuckled the jewelled weapon and handed it to the young man. “Ever am I glad to behold the play of swords,” he continued; “’tis a goodly amusement, and strengthens the muscle against the time of need. Another time, perchance, thou and I will have a round.”

“I thank thee, O King,” returned the Prince, as he admired the sparkling sword; “this is truly a King’s weapon, and I trust my poor skill will do it justice.” Then for a short while we awaited the coming of Sâluva’s chosen opponent, and, having little else to do, I studied the form and features of the young Prince. His figure was slight and supple, like a young tree.

I looked into the dark eyes, and methought I saw in them a suppressed fire needing little to set the temper in a blaze. Otherwise his features were mild and comely, smaller than those of Krishna. I was also pleased to note that there was no touch of cowardice in his demeanour, for, like his Highness, I saw he was happy in those things which required the skill and valour of man.

“A hot-tempered youth,” I remarked to myself, “and one who would act recklessly.” I little

knew how well I read his character, or how soon my thoughts were to be utterly proved.

Just at this moment the appointed fencer entered into the presence-chamber, and I was astonished that the minister should have chosen a man of such humble birth—for such he was—and one hardly fit to fight with a royal adversary. I wondered if Krishna would alter the minister's choice, but as yet he did not seem to have noticed the man's entrance, being busied in conversation. Whereupon I remembered the scornful smile on the face of Sâluva Timma, and thought on the many times of late when he had cunningly endeavoured to have a part in all the Râya's actions or to gainsay his decisions, for he was often opposed to Krishna's softness of heart—he who had learnt that strength lies in mercy as well as in war-like arms. And sometimes I wondered if he had known what the Râya's power would be in everything, whether he would have substituted the goat's eyes for the eyes of the Prince. Possibly he had hoped Krishna might prove a puppet in his hands, so that he might climb his way to greater power and fulfil the ambition that lurked continually in his mind. Since my entry into the court Sâluva Timma's manner had somewhat changed, and a secret antagonism (which I sought to quench) always stood between us, and sometimes I have considered whether it was well for the Râya or for me that I should remain. Yet I will say that it was, I

believe, the minister's son who, envious of my place, goaded his father to hate me.

Now, just at this moment, when the fencer entered and the scornful smile again lurked on Sâluva Timma's face, because of the Râya's familiarity with the young Prince, it seemed to me that a voice spoke from the midst of my heart into the midst of his heart, and methinks it said, "Ambition may over-reach itself at last, the eagle may seek to pluck out the eyes of the lion, the tree may reach out its branches to the clouds envying their height; also the venturesome eagle may fall under the paw of the lion, and the tree will perchance snap before the onslaught of the unconquerable wind."

And the minister somehow heard the silent words, for I put my will into them, and stretching out my power forced them into his heart. Then I beheld his countenance pale, and he glanced aside. Another instant and he had cast away the silent warning and strode majestically up the hall.

"Get ready thy sword, O Prince," I heard him cry, "here is the skilled opponent."

Then a strange thing happened, and just as the Râya opened his mouth to speak he stopped, and all the company fell into silence, gazing in bewilderment. For the Prince had risen slowly from his seat, his black eyes flashing, and he pointed to the astonished fencer. Then, after the space of a moment, the young Prince lifted up his voice and

spake, and even now I can hear the fury lying beneath the calm tones.

"Who is this?" he cried, "who is this, I say, that ye have brought to fence with me? Have I come down to such a level, I, a king's son, that I should fight with one who is other than the blood royal? O would that I were within my father's house again. Methinks then I would give an answer in proportion to the insult. Yet am I helpless, and bidden to fight with such as that," and he extended the sword full in the face of the frightened man.

Then all at once his manner changed, and his words came in different tones.

"Nevertheless," he went on, "I triumph. I seek a fighter of the blood royal, and thus do I journey to meet him."

And while we remained as petrified (even Krishna himself) before the infuriated Prince, he raised the sword aloft for an instant, making it glitter in the sunshine, and drove it with full force into his own breast.

One moment he remained thus; then, as his breath flew from him, he fell prone beside the royal seat, even at the foot of Krishna. Then was there a moment of silence, for we were too astonished to speak. When I next glanced up I beheld that the Râya's face was fixed and drawn. Nevertheless, he found voice to bid one of us call the outside guard, saying, "Let them remove the

body of the young Prince, and let the sword be taken with him. I have no more use for it. But methinks he hurled himself to destruction for but a small purpose. Let the body be treated royally," he cried, as the armed men drew near, "and accorded a worthy funeral."

Then, as the body was borne hence, we remained in silence; but I looked again at the face of Sâluva Timma, and though it was filled with bewilderment yet the evil smile was still lurking about the lips.

"I would the gods might thus cause to perish every enemy of Vijayanagar," he cried, as the doors closed again on the body of the poor Prince.

But Krishna Deva turned sharply upon him, "Thy loyalty has overcome thee, my lord Sâluva," he answered coldly, and I thought he gave him a keen glance from beneath his heavy brows. But Sâluva Timma returned the gaze unconcerned, murmuring that his heart was always with his country, and, therefore, doubtless he had spoken hastily.

After this Krishna waved his hand and bade his nobles farewell till such a time when he should summons them again. Then they departed, even to Sâluva Timma, who seemed anxious to quit the royal presence—perhaps he repented of his unkind feeling, but I think not. And I noted that as he went he and his son turned and glanced frowningly at me, doubtless because his Highness had bidden me stay.

When the entrance was closed Krishna descended the steps and came towards me, and I noted that his voice was heavy and his eyes sad.

"Seest thou that?" he cried, putting his hand on my arm and pointing toward the steps of the seat he had just quitted. And there, behold, on the lowest step, were five small drops of glistening blood all of equal size, in a group together, and yet an equal distance apart.

"I like not the meaning of this—the omen is not good; on the steps of my chair thou seest, and nowhere else——"

"Aye, O King; but surely this is nothing, seeing such a sword must needs cut deep."

"Nevertheless, I like it not, and thou, Patcola, understandest me, though thy lips will not frame the words."

In truth the Râya was right—I liked not the omen.

Then Krishna went into his own apartment, neither was I with him again till the morrow; he desired rest; indeed, methought he appeared more worn than after the first fight with Orissa's men.

I, myself, went where my will took me, till at last I sought sympathy and comfort in the company of Vacora, my love; a heavy foreboding seemed to have seized on my spirit, and a great shadow twined itself about my soul.

On the evening of the same day I, having returned to the palace after bidding Vacora farewell,

wandered in and out among the many avenues and paths, pausing here and there by some tiny lake, drawing in the perfume of the whispering flowers, for at this hour I felt I must commune alone with myself, and as yet I had not cast off the sorrow I felt at the Prince's death. Also I kept in that portion of the garden where I was less likely to meet with any one, for I sought to be seen by none, rather choosing to companion myself in the half-light among the rustling branches and flitting fire-flies, seeking if possible to throw off the melancholy. And in this I was partly successful, for, as the moon gleamed brighter and brighter in the heavens making the silent waters and shining leaves dazzle in the glorious light, methought a single finger of some mysterious fire penetrated in the heart of the shadow of my soul, and as it came I realized new hopes and foresaw new things, and once again everything gleamed and glittered even as the quiet earth shone bright beneath the face of the holy moon. Then I stood still beneath the branches of a pomegranate-tree and lifted up my voice in the silence to the gods. And once again I felt the presence of the powers around, even as in a time before I had well-nigh gazed into the eternal homes of the eternal gods.

Suddenly I ceased speaking and stood silent; I could find no words to utter in the presence of these holy Ones. And even as I stood a light breeze swept gently among the circling trees, bending the

slender, overhanging branches till they touched my upturned face. And all at once the stars sprang out from behind their misty veils, making the heavens glad, and I felt as if the power of the gods had entered into the snowy blossoms which had softly kissed my brow.

So I arose in thankfulness with a light heart, and at that moment the wind passed as suddenly as it came and all was still.

After this I made my way carefully through the scented groves, nearing the palace, when, as I came to the last avenue, I turned round, seeking a final glance at the garden of peace.

And behold, as I stood, I heard the sound of quick feet near at hand, and, lo! at the edge of the further path, lined with mighty trees, passed Krishna the Râya, his face half hidden in the shadow of his head-dress, and his appearance such as I had seen once before when, with Vacora, we had watched him pass quickly down the little-used path.

I drew back into the dark and watched, for I understood not this thing. But the King moved swiftly down the grove and vanished through another turning, where I knew not. As I stood thus I heard another movement from beneath the palms, and another figure passed in the Râya's footsteps, creeping stealthily under the darkened foliage. And the moon, which had veiled itself behind a cloud, suddenly shot forth the rays of its

pale light, and I beheld the face of Sâluva Timma, the lord of his household.

“Surely he seeks to spy upon the King?” Then as he hesitated a moment, seeking which way to follow (for Krishna Deva had quickly vanished on the other side of the grove), I knew his mind was not altogether good, and that he sought to stealthily watch the actions of his King. But I in that second determined that this thing should not be. So I stepped forward from beneath the shelter of the dark shadows, and treading across the grass stood before the stealthy figure of the King’s minister, giving him greeting. He started and would have pretended he was not who he was, for my presence made him afraid. But I called him again by name, and he, seeking a subterfuge, answered me angrily, asking wherefore he could not enjoy the pleasures of the garden of peace undisturbed. But I knew that he spoke not the truth, so I spake of certain writings which awaited him in the palace, making much of their importance. Then he bade me see him on the morrow, and would have passed from my side in the Râya’s footsteps, but I would not be so answered; whereupon his manner changed and he spoke sweetly, saying he was weary and sought to rest his mind alone within the garden, otherwise he would have asked for the pleasure of my company.

And still I would not be satisfied, so seeing no other way I put forth all my power making him

return with me, even into the palace. Then, knowing that the Râya would accomplish his journey safely, I left him and went my own way, though still I wondered why it was that the King made these journeys so secret, and always took his path where the deepest shadows lay.

CHAPTER VI

THE EXPLANATION THEREOF

It chanced that on a certain morning, after Krishna Deva had despatched his business, he summoned me into his presence, and I knew by the manner of the message he wished me to keep it secret that I was going to him. So at his word I betook myself eagerly to his apartment feeling I was to learn something of importance. Therefore it surprised me not when I perceived that his manner was agitated and his countenance perplexed.

And when at last the curtains had swung into place, after my entrance into his chamber, I waited for him to speak; but as yet he took no notice, continuing to turn his face towards the window-place, though I am sure he knew full well that I was there.

Therefore I stood still for a little, watching him, knowing he would speak in his own time. And when after a short pause he called me by name, I passed down the length of the tiled floor, and stood by his side. He questioned me on certain messages that I had taken from his hand, and his

words I answered accordingly, knowing it was not these things that caused such a heavy weight upon his mind.

Then at last he opened up his speech.

"Ever since the early days of my reign," he began, "thou and I have dwelt as brothers, bearing the inner secrets of each other's hearts; and now, behold, I have another to add to thy keeping. Perchance even it had been better if I had spoken before."

"Glad am I to be thus favoured, O Râya," I answered; "if it pleases thee, unburden thy mind, I pray thee, for thou knowest whatsoever enters from thy mouth into my heart is sealed for ever."

"I know it, O Patcola, else should I not have trusted thee with former things. Nevertheless, this is a somewhat difficult subject, yet, King as I am, I know not why it should be so." Then he lapsed again into silence for a short space, letting his eyes wander over the long winding paths and the avenues, bordered by trees, and the sweet-smelling flowers. "I would tell thee a tale, O Patcola," he cried again at last, fumbling with the ends of his girdle. "Listen well: There was a certain young man of noble birth passing his days quietly, having but a small circle of companions; and during those years he chanced to meet a woman of humble birth, who was very beautiful and of great fascination, and he grew to love her though a wide gulf lay between their rank of blood. Nevertheless, their

love grew great, and the young man vowed that if ever by the hand of the gods he came into his heritage, and had cast off those enemies who would seize his place, that he would take her as a chief wife to himself. And so it chanced that a short time after he made this vow that the young man came into his own, occupying the place of his ancestors, and his heart still went out to the young woman he loved; but he feared to make the matter public, knowing her rank and birth. Say, O Patcola (for thou art wise for thy years), shall the young man stand by the saying of his noble companions, marrying only in the high blood and sealing his heart for ever, or shall he put such things aside and cleave to the one long-loved, making her a lady of high degree? Consider and reason well, for on thy answer, perchance, much hangs thereby."

Krishna paused in his speech, and I, having listened well, revolved his words in my mind, fixing my eyes on him. And as I looked my wisdom came to me.

"Thy riddle is easy to expound, O Râya," I answered at lât, looking him full in the eyes; "surely *thou* shouldst follow the inclinations of thine own heart in this matter, not seeking the advice of any." Whereupon Krishna Deva glanced up quickly, smiling, and I knew I had spoken aright.

"I marvel," he said, "thy reading has been

true. The tale of the young man is even the history of Krishna. But glad am I that thou hast understood, for I thought by thy countenance I must have opened the riddle before thee. Nevertheless, it is revealed to me, that it is not always the features that display the feelings and understanding of the mind. But now, my brother, since thou hast eased my speech, open thine ears and let me tell thee all."

And after this I sat in the Râya's company a long, long while, even till the shadows of the sun had moved far into other places.

And in that hour he told me much, of all his love for Nâgalâ, a woman of citizen birth (for this was the name of his betrothed), also of her beauty, above the beauty of Hindu women, of her virtues, of the form of her figure, and the exceeding grace thereof. So I let him deliver his speech, and as for me, I uttered no word as yet, for it pleased the King to have a ready listener.

Then, when he had continued long, he made known to me the plans he had laid to visit her secretly, without the palace, giving command to his officers to be left in peace for certain times. And when it was thought he rested within his apartments, in disguise he would let himself out by a secret path by the light of the moon into the girl's house, for her parents were acquainted of this thing, shutting their mouths.

As he spoke of this, my heart leapt up, for now

was revealed unto me the reason whereof I had witnessed the figure of Krishna passing swiftly down through the areca groves by the side of the little-used avenue. Twice had I beheld the same thing—nay thrice, for in the corridors after quitting Vacora, my wife, I have mentioned how I spake with Sâluva Timma, seeing the flash of the ringed hand staying for a moment upon the pillar.

And now that I knew all, my astonishment was great, for little had I thought that the King had hidden such a thing in his heart; nevertheless, I rejoiced with him, and sought to see a way whereby he might more easily bring his desire to pass. Perchance also Krishna saw a light of knowledge spring to my face when he spake of his visits by evening. For he smiled, and touched me on the arm, saying how on one occasion he had known of my presence under the pomegranate-trees, also in a certain corridor, and questioned me as to whether he had been discerned.

Then I in my turn opened up my speech, telling the King of all that I had seen in the garden and in the palace. Also I spake of the presence of Vacora, my love, and how she had vowed not to open her lips on this matter, though she wondered much. But nought said I concerning Sâluva Timma, his minister, for I liked not to speak against another, and I feared lest perchance the King might think I spoke out of a jealous heart. Nevertheless, I was not altogether allowed to keep

my knowledge to myself, and I suppose Krishna knew I hid something, for he suddenly questioned me concerning the minister, and as to whether I had not spoken with him once in the corridors when he (the King) went by another way. This I was forced to admit, but I said nothing, save when he actually questioned me.

"And now my heart is perplexed," he continued, "as to what my nobles shall say concerning this matter. But I am glad, Patcola, that thou understandest and art with me."

Whereupon Krishna arose hastily, pacing up and down the chamber, as was his wont when in doubt of mind.

"There should be no difficulty in thy way, O Râya, seeing this is no wrong thing," I observed at last, watching him from my position near the open window-place; "thou art a king: who shall gainsay any word of thine? Surely such a monarch as thou, hast never been so greatly feared; and since thou lovest, wherefore shouldst thou quench that love, because of the saying of a few nobles?"

"A king thou sayest, Patcola?" he cried, suddenly wheeling round towards me, "and yet what is a king? Is he not after all a slave a thousand times more than a servant of the lowest caste? A king—a king, forsooth, truly that am I; and yet am I not, though the nation shout my titles till they break the clouds, and the birds hush their wings and fall to the earth in wonder,

because of the noise thereof. Do I not hold all the land from the kingdoms of the Dakhan to Cape Comorin? Have I not a million of armed men ready to obey my voice? What regiments can compare with the army of the City of Victory? Behold its glitter, the flash of the silver shields, the golden bows, and say whose eye can bear the dazzle of such a show! Is not my array, the costliness of my palace, my jewels and my treasures the most wonderful of all kings? One word from these lips of mine, and what would not be? Yet for all this, Patcola, I say I am not king enough to do the things I would."

Krishna flung back his head, and sternness gathered round his lips. I saw a sadness come into his eyes, but at that moment I could not find any word wherewith to answer, knowing after all that he spoke aright.

But I revolved many things in my mind, construing plans to lay before him, yet I cast them aside as worthless, knowing they were of little use.

"Thy countenance is thoughtful, my brother; it even assumes the look of a white-haired councillor. Say what is thy word?"

"I have but little wisdom to offer," I cried, "save that thou cast aside all dismal thoughts, and speedily make known thy desire to the lord Sâluva and the other chief nobles. Wherefore should they say thee nay, O Krishna."

"Thy words are comfortable, Patcola," he re-

turned, "and thy reasoning right. It were indeed best to use boldness in this matter, as in all things, for the one who trembles and cries aloud succeeds but little. So be it. On the morrow will I disclose the lovely Nâgalâ as my chosen bride. Nevertheless, Sâluva Timma already knows of this, for he had suspicion and followed me a few nights back. It was impossible to keep it secret from his keen eyes."

Here the Râya smiled, I fancied, a little scornfully, but I may be mistaken. Yet I made no answer, though inwardly I was not surprised, since I had myself twice intercepted the minister's footsteps.

"And now," Krishna continued, "let us seek some lively diversion in a game of skill. Go, call the courtiers into the garden. The sun is lowered in the heavens, and methinks we should find some shady place."

Thus we passed a merry time under the cool trees, and the Râya did not make any further mention of the things he had told me, rather we sought pleasure in the company of the merry lords. And, indeed, methought I had seldom seen him in such high spirits: his laugh rang with joyousness of heart, and his skill in the games exceeded the skill of former days.

The next day, after the morning business had been performed in the House of the Zenana, Krishna Deva called all his chief nobles and councillors together, and made known to them his

secret, such as he had told to me. But I stood not at that hour in his presence, for I had certain matters to perform for him privately, and maybe it was best that mine ears heard not his speech.

Nevertheless, I would have given much to have witnessed its reception on the countenances of the nobles. But Semore, my father, who had been in the presence, told me all, and how the lords, though altogether astonished, had, after some questioning and deliberation, agreed with the Râya in his desire, notwithstanding that they showed some anger at first. And so in my heart I rejoiced at the King's good fortune, for I had expected much more opposition.

So after my father had told me of the Râya's speech, his manner, and of all the doings of the nobles, we parted for a time, I making my way into the courtyard, for there had I seen a noble to whom I carried a message. And, behold, while I walked, Krishna Deva the Râya came upon me, and we stood long together in conversation.

"I see thou knowest all," he cried, after he had repeated his speech before the lords. "The news will spread swiftly, methinks. How fares the lady Vacora this day?" he asked of a sudden.

"Well, indeed, when I left her this morning."

"What doest thou now?"

"Fulfilling thy commands, Biruda,¹ despatching

¹ One of Krishna's many titles = "Lord of Four Oceans."

thy private matters which thou hast been pleased to place in my hands."

"And art thou finished?"

"Even now, I have but to deliver a message into the hands of the Captain Rama."

"Then speed thou, and after, return to thy wife Vacora in my name, giving her this jewel. For she too must take a share in my rejoicing, thou knowest, seeing she partly knew of my secret, and shut her mouth. And that is a difficult matter for a woman," he added, with a smile. "But haste now, and relieve her curiosity, and bid her wear this as a gift from Krishna. Now farewell for a time, for I have much business on hand," and he hurried swiftly back to the portal, leaving me in great surprise, for in my hand lay a sparkling bangle, beautiful enough to grace the arm of the noblest and richest lady in the land. Surely the cost thereof must have nearly equalled the worth of the royal elephants, with all their jewels and trappings. And I was pleased that the Râya had thought on Vacora; but at all times his heart was gallant, and he knew not what he did for the pleasure of another.

So I hurried to fulfil the last of my duties, and then made my way joyfully into the chamber of Vacora. And there I stayed long, for we had much to say, though I will not disclose our speech. Let it suffice for me to say, that Vacora received the

jewel with happy and graceful gratitude, entrusting me with a message of thanks to the King, for as she naïvely remarked, "A single jewel from the hands of so great a jewel was surely to be more valued than all the gold and gems which lay in the City of Victory." And I could not but smile at her words, feeling glad for her sake. Yet a prick from the dagger of jealousy smote me in the heart, and made me wonder whether she cared more for Krishna Deva's bangle than all the many jewels which my poor hand had bestowed. But the thought passed even as swiftly as it came, for who after all does not prize a gift from a kingly hand, especially when it comes from such a noble one as our great lord?

.

In a few words I must now say that the Râya married Nâgalâ, his early love, amid great rejoicing. And I was glad to note that Sâluva Timma, the chief minister and lord of the household, assisted in this matter kindly, though I have cause to know that he had rebuked the Râya severely when he had first knowledge of it.

And for a time I saw little of Krishna, seeing he stayed as much as he could in the company of Nâgalâ, his bride, who, methinks, was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, except Vacora and Shirishi my sister, who was yet but a child though already noted for her loveliness.

And thus also, after much mystery, came about the completion of the Râya's happiness, who loved this wife more than all his others, and because of his love he built a city,¹ bearing her name, near at hand to the City of Victory.

¹ Called Nâgalpûr in those days. The modern Hospett.

CHAPTER VII

VACORA'S DREAM

AFTER several moons had elapsed, and Sâluva Timma had returned from a distant city where he had been staying, so as to put matters right for its government, Krishna Deva declared before his council that he sought to fulfil the testament of Narasimha and attack Raichur, a city in the dominion of the Âdil Shâh. Was not the fortress theirs by right, as it had been theirs in former days? Wherefore then should the arm of victory not strike into Bijapur, even as it had struck death into the kingdom of Orissa? Yet for all his desire he knew not how to bring it to pass, as there existed a peace between the two Kingdoms made by a former ruler. Now, therefore, he asked the advice of his Councillors and Lords.

This and much more did Krishna the Royal One, Krishna the Warrior-King, speak to his nobles. They one and all gave him the salaam, many differing from him in his desire for war. And those that did agree, could find no means whereby the peace might be broken, till Sâluva Timma, the chief minister, and lord of the Household, stood up and cried aloud, saying, " Where-

by are ye troubled in this matter, Krishna Deva? for surely I can bring proof enough before thine eyes so that ye will see the peace is already broken even by the hand of the Âdil Shâh himself. Mind ye the words of the peace? Behold it was set forth thus—that the warriors of the Kingdom of Bijapur and the fighting-men of the Vijayanagar should not meet in war, nor let fly the spear in enmity, so long as the words of the treaty were minded on either side. And one thing among many was decreed, and, lo! it said that no fugitive from one country should be harboured and received in the other; for if it so came to pass, then the peace was held broken and became as of no account. Now mark, O Râya and Councillors, in Bijapur even at this day lie many who at different times, and for fear of thy royal wrath, have fled from hence, and set their feet running into the shelter of Bijapur. What further proof want ye? and wherefore should the hand of the Râya be withheld against his desire? Now at once send letters into Bijapur with all speed, saying that all who have fled into those domains be sent back forthwith. And when ye find they will not do this thing which ye ask (and my spirit tells me they will not), why, then prepare thine array, and at thine own appointed time pour into Bijapur. Does my poor speech please thee?"

"Even so, my lord Sâluva," returned the Râya, "the thing whereof thou speakest shall be

done immediately. And now let us contain ourselves in patience, till an answer be accorded to our letters. In the meantime exhort the gods that they may pour upon us their enlightening wisdom, and render our strength of amazing value."

Whereupon the Râya, Sâluva Timma, the Chief Scribe, and myself passed down the midst of the nobles, into a more private apartment where letters were written to Bijapur, in the name of Krishna Deva. And when he had affixed the sign of his royalty, messengers of the swiftest were despatched, bearing his letters to the Âdil Shâh.

On the day when the messengers returned to the City of Victory, we assembled again at the bidding of the Râya, and the letters were read before us by Sâluva Timma, the chief minister.

Therein the Âdil Shâh, monarch of Bijapur, gave greeting to Krishna Deva of Vijayanagar, but would not by any means do the thing which he asked, for a descendant of the great Mahomet (whom they worship) was among those who had fled. And such a one should stay under his protection, and not be suffered to return among his enemies of Vijayanagar.

When Krishna Deva heard these words, he arose in great wrath, and in this moment of anger he seemed even more kingly, even more mighty.

"Ye have heard these words," he cried, "and have seen how the Âdil Shâh bids us defiance. But, I say, a day shall come when he shall find

it more to his benefit to answer us with better courtesy. He shall find us no weakling when he flies before our war-cry. Now require we indeed no further proof—we know the peace is broken. So be it. Mudkal and Raichur are ours according to the command of Narasimha Râya. We go but to take them. What! nobles, are we all silent? Have ye no word to offer?"

The King paused suddenly, and looked down upon the many faces.

"Again, I say, speak. Has the defiance from Bijapur so worked itself into your hearts, and made ye speechless?"

"Nay, O Krishna Deva," answered one who stood near, "we breathe defiance for defiance, and we send warriors where warriors be. 'Tis thou, surely, who has robbed us of our speech, seeing ye spoke for us. Also the majesty of thy wrath was great and the face of a comely king is good to look on, especially when it be fired with thoughts of might and glory."

"Enough, enough," cried Krishna, with a smile, "keep thy fair words to bestow on the maidens, for they are undeserved here. But are ye all agreed, and do ye be willing to continue by my saying?"

After this there was a long discussion, for many were against the war; nevertheless, in the end, seeing the Râya's determination they gave in, offering helpful advice.

"It is well," returned Krishna Deva, after they had agreed, "at once will I despatch letters to every chief in my empire, bidding them prepare for war."

Thus it was that we made ready to march against Raichur, and the battle of Raichur had a great bearing on the history of our land.

.

Many days later, nearer the time when it was arranged we should go forth against Bijapur, it happened that I had a long conversation with Vacora which is worth recording, because of its strangeness. Once again, we sat in her favourite place in the gardens, and once more also the light of the holy moon shone down upon us. For some time we had been talking, until at last Vacora grew silent, and looking at her I saw a strange look come over her face.

"What is it?" I cried quickly; "art thou not well?"

"I know not," she answered slowly, "my mind has seemed troubled because of a curious dream I have had. It makes me fearful of many things."

"Tell it to me, then, and perchance I may find a brighter meaning in it than thou hast found."

"I fear me not. But the strange vision came to me this day, a few hours back, when unknowingly I had fallen asleep. Methought I stood in some place, where a great curtain of mist seemed to hang down from the heavens to the earth. And

behind this curtain in the midst of the utter silence, there came a sudden tingling sound, so slight that one might scarcely notice it. But gradually it grew and grew, until the noise was so great and confused that it filled the whole skies, and brought an echo from the distant parts. And while I stood wondering at it all, the hanging mist parted in the centre, so that I could see what lay beyond. And what did I see? By Vishnu, I saw things that made me well-nigh scream with fear and terror. For I beheld a great space, near a wide river; but the waters thereof were red, red with the blood of men. I could see moving masses of warriors, and hear the noise of voices, many voices—even the voice of Krishna the King. Then the picture changed somewhat, and I heard the sound of running feet, and saw great heaps of slain gleaming out of the fiery vapour. Who could recognize them, for they were many? Yet, methinks, I knew the faces, faces I shall see no more henceforth. Once again the countenance of Krishna Deva loomed out before me, a great fire burning in his eyes; and as I looked, lo! a spear suddenly shot out towards him, seeming to strike upon his royal breast. Whether he fell, I know not, for the mist covered him up. Then mine eyes for an instant looked upon thee, my lord, and thy face was full of sadness. And while I still strained mine eyes to see more, lo! the picture passed gradually away; the warriors became less distinct;

the red river sunk beyond my view, and yet alight with his divine smile, I beheld the face of Krishna the King shining out of the midst of the fiery clouds. Then I awoke with a scream, and the women ran into my chamber; but I have told it to no one till now."

"That is well, or it might breed fear," I answered, marvelling at her vision, yet not liking to say my thoughts.

"And what is the meaning of it according to thy mind?"

"O hast thou not guessed? Verily I believe it has a bearing on the coming battle. And yet, perchance, I ought not to have told thee; as it is, keep it to thyself."

"Of that thou mayest be assured," I answered quickly, "but as thou sayest, the omen is not altogether good."

"Yea, and the end was not clear, though Krishna Deva smiled at the last. Shall I tell thee what I think concerning the dream?"

"Aye," I cried eagerly.

"I fear it is a foreboding that the Râya's life shall not be without some danger in the war; and I beseech thee if thou canst, that thou warn him against his usual reckless bravery."

"The gods forbid such an evil," I answered fervently, "but the Râya, I fear, will do as he wishes in such things. None can check him when war enters into his mind."

"Yet thou canst warn him. Suppose by chance a spear should strike him down; O think, my husband."

"I cannot think," I answered rather hastily, "such a thought is more than I can bear," and I arose for a moment from the seat.

Presently Vacora called me, and I went to her side.

"See here," she said, detaching a charm from a chain round her neck, "to help our prayers, I would that thou give the Râya this. 'Tis of but small value for royal wear, and yet, methinks, it may outdo the value of all greater jewels. Say to him that it is an amulet of holy worth, and a shield against all evil. Perchance he may not take it as an affront if thou say those words."

"Doubtless he has already many such as these," I began, "and besides——"

But she placed the charm within my hand, and would hear of no denials.

"I think thou art enough in his favour," she cried, "to ensure its acceptance. But I warn ye, let not its worth be gainsaid, or spoken lightly of, or else perchance the good might revert to evil."

Before I could speak another word, Vacora rose and ran down the garden; leaving the amulet in my palm. A sudden thought struck me, and I called her name.

"What charm hast thou to ensure my safety?" I asked.

"Nought," she answered, with a smile, "thou needest none—yet I know not," and coming back once more to where I sat, she kissed me.

"There, that should surely prove an amulet of great and noble worth."

Then she turned again, and I was left alone.

And while I sat thus all the wonderful vision came into my mind, and I attempted to piece out the details for some definite end. But in this I failed, for, as Vacora had said, the mist enveloped that which was not meant to be revealed; and perchance it were best so, for what might we weak flitting spirits do against an evil when we are aware it will overcome us? And also would it not cause us to forget to strive, when we are aware there is nought but good in store? Therefore I would not by any means let my heart go down, but rather the hope of victory rooted itself more deeply, for an evil, however great, may be overcome if the fight is valiant. So I reasoned.

And as I made my way back to the royal palace, my spirits rose even higher, and I knew that my heart smiled.

At a later hour I presented myself before Krishna Deva, and I found he was very glad to see me. Then it was that after much consideration I presented Vacora's amulet, telling of its holy worth and its ancient age, though my lips were sealed as to the reason which prompted its giving.

"Take back a message of greeting and thanks,"

cried Krishna, when I had finished; and I was glad to note that he was pleased. "Surely in such times we have need of prayers and charms to dis-spirit the evil ones. But this is worthy of double thanks, as it comes from such a fair hand, and such a loving heart. I trust she herself may not suffer from its loss."

Now these last words I treasured up to convey to Vacora, who I knew would be pleased at the message.

"So," continued the Râya, "we are on the eve of leaving our dear loves; but think ye not, that they love us all the more when we return, after passing through a great adventure?"

.

A few days later all the great companies, and the regiments of Krishna Deva passed out of Vijayanagar, setting their faces towards the north; and we said farewell to the friends we left, though many and many, I mourn to say, cried it aloud for the last time.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMULET

WE left the City of Victory and set our faces towards the north, and the appearance of the King's army was of might and splendour, with a vast number of men and archers; and the elephants far exceeded the array which many moons ago had set their foot in the kingdom of Orissa.

So we went forth in a procession of wonder, stretching over a path which none might measure in a glance. The chief of the Guards (a man noble and valiant) stood first with his archers and his men on foot, and the number of these alone formed a small army. After these came horsemen and men on elephants, the Râya with his own guards, beside many spearmen and wielders of swords. Also with us went a company of priestly men from the pagodas, so that throughout the battles they might continually entreat the favour of the gods. Every man on foot carried a shield plated with silver, large enough to cover the whole body, while every archer's bow was plated and tipped with gold, for, as I have said, the wealth of Vijayanagar was great,

and outbid all the kingdoms of the Indies for splendour.

Besides this, every elephant and horse carried a necklace of bells, fringes of silk, and trappings of velvet, while on the tusks of the former were bound knives of great length and sharpness, so that when the animals entered into battle they did much harm. Every man, mounted or on foot, carried a sword strapped at the waist besides other weapons.

When we moved in one body out of the city, scarce an eye could look upon us, for the sun smiled upon the face of every shield, and upon the jewels of the King's saddle, upon the knives of the great elephants, the gilded bows of the archers, the axes, the spears, and the forehead plates of the war-horses, making it seem as a river of living fire, or as a molten stream poured by the hand of the heavens. I have related much about the wonders of the royal army; yet have I not told all, for in front were men to the number of twelve thousand, bearing water-skins, and these stood stationed along the road to give a supply of water, so that none might go thirsty. Also merchants went forth with supplies, and of washermen there journeyed many hundreds.

After we had marched many days, through the great cotton plains, and along many roads, we came within a league of the fortress of Raichur, and here the Râya gave orders to form a camp. This was done, the quarters of Krishna Deva being

placed in the centre, together with the priests, and round this circle the army took their stand in regular order. And all the camp was divided into regular streets, with markets for the sellers and smiths, where all kinds of things could be obtained either in food, apparel or ornament. So the camp seemed as a peaceful city.

Here we halted for a long time, waiting for the gods to give sign of victory through the mouth of the priests; and also because we expected certain armies to unite with us. And, during this time, the camp resembled a city for trade and commerce; yet all things were in perfect order, and no man did anything save what was right, so well did they obey every word of Krishna Deva, their great commander.

After a while the priests came into the Râya's presence with joyful news, for the holy Ones had given a token in response to their prayers and sacrifices; therefore might the army advance in safety. Krishna Deva was pleased, and the word travelled throughout the camp, to arise and march at the dawning of day. So on the morrow the army set out with much music, which continued till we had crossed the short distance which lay between our camp and the city of Raichur.

We commenced the siege at once, using our weapons upon the city, yet it proved strong for us—we, who had an army of numbers and great strength. Day by day our soldiers on this side of

the wall fought against the regiments on the other, yet we came but little nearer to its capture, for the city was mighty and skilled in war, and our strivings seemed of small avail.

Now, on a certain night after three moons, Krishna Deva sent a message for me to abide a while in his tent. So I threaded my way in and out of the many camps, till I came to his.

"I bade thee come, Patcola," he cried as soon as I entered, "for I have need of thy company. 'Tis ever enlivening."

"Glad am I that Krishna Deva deems me worthy of his royal presence;" but the Râya said no more until we had seated ourselves.

"The siege goes ill," he continued, and I heard his breast heave, "yet it might go worse. Nevertheless, I understand it not, the gods continue by the mouth of the priests to give sign of favour. Yet each day we advance but little or nought. And many be slain, and others fall sick."

"It will be a greater victory in the end, O Râya," I returned; "mighty deeds would be accomplished with too much ease were they finished in an hour. Keep up thy heart, O Krishna, and thy sons and thy sons' sons will hallow the days of thy great reign."

"I embrace thee for thy words, thou seest good in all things; think not that my spirit is discouraged, else should I not be worthy of the name of Warrior-King. But at certain times, as thou

knowest, even the strongest and most mighty are apt to feel a sinking in the spirit. I would we might engage in a battle, for these fights and petty skirmishes behind the cover of walls go not well with the patience of such as I. Who comes here?"

We turned, and beheld the flap of the tent fall back to reveal the figure of a chief captain.

"Enter, Kama Naik," continued the Râya, and the man issued beneath the flare of the hanging lamps.

"Greeting and honour to Biruda,"¹ began Kama. "Behold, I have news of mighty worth."

"Speak, then," returned Krishna Deva eagerly; "mine ears are ever open. I note that thy countenance bears witness of thy yet unspoken words."

"Then know that accursed enemy, the Âdil Shâh, has crossed the river, and arrives even at this moment within a little distance of our camp."

There was a silence during the space of an instant, and we regarded each other without a word.

"O Râya," I cried, being the first to speak, "methinks thy hope is about to be obtained, and thy desire for an open battle will now be altogether satisfied."

"Thou art right," he returned; "and my heart is once more joyful. Surely the wish had but scarcely left these lips of mine before the most noble

¹ "Lord of Four Oceans."

and most amiable Naik brings news of its speedy fulfilment. Thou sayest the Mussulmans are pitching their tents? Well, so be it. For a while I also remain in my place watching their doings. How fares the army? are all things in order, and the watchmen ever on the alert?"

"Everything is according to thy command: the sentries are vigilant at their posts, and men sleep in peace, though I learn that they long to try their weapons upon yonder encampment," and he waved his arm in the direction where the Âdil Shâh had lately arrived.

"May their desire come speedily to pass," broke in the Râya; "for truly have they practised long enough on those stern walls. Now take this word to every chief and captain. To-morrow morn let a muster be made, and the number and strength thereof be brought before me. Let all be in readiness, for who knows that the Shâh might not with all his forces meditate a combined attack."

"This shall be done according to thy word."

"Thou hast brought me good news," continued the Râya; "and now haste thee to rest, for thou knowest not what the dawning of to-morrow's sun may bring forth."

"I go; but let one who has fought in many battles warn the King to follow his own good advice; for, as thou art aware, thy brain orders the actions of every man, and it must not fail thee in the hour of need."

“Think not that I shall waste the short night of rest in idleness,” replied Krishna Deva, with a smile; “but the mind sometimes requires other strength than that which derives from sleep, and this most worthy Patcola carries within him a heart of mirth, sprinkled evenly with careful discretion. So it is good to talk on lighter things a while, and then seek rest, having cleansed the thoughts of all that bespeaks of weeping war and stern encounters.”

“Surely the Râya’s reply is too wise to admit of further answer,” answered Kama Naik, “for out of thy lips and thy heart, we know, issues no rash thing. But if thou speakest and do all things in wisdom in these thy yet young days, when thou arrivest to aged years, at what point shall thy knowledge cease? Forsooth, thy name will become as a household word even when times have succeeded time, and yon walls go down under the hand of decay.”

“Save thy fair words, I pray thee,” returned Krishna, smiling. “I treasure the hope that I may never fall below thy good opinion; nevertheless, keep it in mind that, as a rule, kings are the least perfect than the most humble of their subjects. And now farewell till to-morrow’s sun shines upon thy goodly countenance.”

Then Kama Naik retreated from the royal tent, and I let mine eyes follow his figure, for I saw much in his mien to admire and praise. The next

moment a rattle of arms fell upon our ears, and we knew that the sentries saluted his passing.

“A most valiant man,” remarked Krishna Deva, “and worthy of all his rewards. It needs but one glance to behold in him a true son of the City of Victory. Now bring forward yon fruit and wine, a light refreshment would be no despised thing.”

I went to a small table near the centre of the tent, and bore a large supply of wine and figs nearer for the Râya's convenience.

The next moment I saw a thing which surprised me much, for Krishna Deva had laid Vacora's amulet in the palm of his hand, and sat in silence looking intently upon it. I observed the curious expression on his face, for the incident of the charm had altogether passed from my memory. And in the midst of terrible war, this sudden remembrance agitated me; for at the sight of the golden amulet, marked with a holy sign, a vision of its giver seemed to rise up before me, and once more I sat beneath the trees, and felt her warm lips.

“Surely,” I murmured to myself, “surely her spirit has entered into the sacred thing and followed us, even into these wild parts.”

Suddenly, while I recalled Vacora's strange dream which she had related to me in the garden, the sound of the Râya's voice rose all at once upon my ear, the shadowy wraiths passed before it, and I returned slowly and with much lingering into the things of the present hour.

"Patcola, Patcola, has thy hearing left thee?" I heard the Râya cry, and it came to my mind that he had already spoken before; "art thou so weary of bearing me company, that thou must needs fall asleep with thine eyes awake and gazing into space?"

"Thy pardon," I cried, starting quickly; "thou knowest it is otherwise, but I remained in silence seeing thee occupied, and in doing so I fell into thought, and, I fear, heard not thy call."

"'Tis unlike thee to fall into a dream in a sudden moment, but doubtless thou art somewhat aweary, though thy lips deny the charge, but I understand that thou hast done much this day, therefore I excuse thy strange conduct. Now sit down, for after all I cannot rebuke thee, seeing I too passed as it were from the present, while gazing on this holy charm. I wear it always here beneath this tunic, and sometimes a spirit, I imagine, moves within it, therefore I entreat the gods upon it that they may see a way to prosper me and mine."

While he spoke, Krishna Deva, the Royal One, held out the amulet towards me formed out of one piece of gold, and as I bent down over his hand, looking upon the sacred signs engraved thereon, there fell upon mine ear a strange hissing sound from beside the royal couch. I raised my eyes, looking upon Krishna Deva's face, and it seemed that he heard it also, for he turned and searched keenly among the hangings round the couch.

Then, behold, even as he did so, I saw a sudden flash of fire, a swift rustling motion, and the head of a deadly serpent reared itself nigh within a handbreadth of the Râya's body, seeking to fascinate his power from him with its burning eyes.

Without speaking a word, I stretched out my hand, and gripping the chilly reptile just below the head, flung it down upon the ground with such great force that it lay lifeless for a moment.

As we paused, a strange thing happened; for as the Râya had risen from his couch when we first heard the hissing sound, the amulet which had rested in his hand had fallen upon the ground, lying near the place where I had cast the snake.

And whilst we watched, behold, the eyes of the reptile caught on the face of the glittering charm. Thrice it turned its head away, and yet thrice it looked again; and at the third time the creature moved as if in fear. Then there was a convulsive tightening of the coils, a trembling hiss, and, rearing itself, it flung itself far into a darkened corner. Seeing this, I crossed over to watch it, when, lo! it had vanished altogether from our view, and though we questioned the guard outside yet we heard nothing of it nor of any other serpent that was seen within the camp.

Suddenly I remembered the amulet, and bent down to pick it up, when I stayed my hand in astonishment, for even beneath the glare of the

hanging lamps it glowered like an eye of living fire.

But, as I looked, a sudden change came upon it, the light on its surface went out, and lifting it carefully I placed it again in the hand of Krishna the Râya.

Now, whether he had also witnessed the strange dazzle of golden fire I know not; yet, methinks, he saw something, for in taking it from my hand I beheld his face filled with calmness, and his eyes rested on the sacred thing with holy, yet wondering comprehension. Then he put it without a word into its former place, and I saw no more of it for many days.

"Strange happenings enough for any day," he commented, breaking the silence for the first time; "and again I have to thank thee for thy bravery, though thou laid thy hand upon a sacred reptile."

"No," I answered boldly; "something tells me it was not holy; else why did it shudder and vanish at the sight of yon amulet? I think the gods will not be angry. My spirit whispers so."

The Râya looked astonished, but said nothing.

He sat down again, and was loath to let me go, so we talked together for a short time. But I noted with surprise that he opened not his lips once on the matter of the deadly snake, but remained rather quiet in his manner, and thoughtful.

"Take yon instrument, Patcola," he suggested

after a while, and render a song in thy best fashion."

I was glad that the Râya had asked me to do this thing, for song has great power of soothing, of making afraid, or of provoking mirth. Therefore I brought to my memory the happiest music, speaking of joy and feasting, of laughter and love, striving to render him lighter of heart, and to bring a smile upon his countenance.

In this, however, I utterly failed, for when I had finished Krishna Deva bade me sing again something in another mood.

"That thing befits not with thy spirit to-night; thou seekest mirth out of a vale of tears. Therefore render that alone which lies within thy soul."

At once I stayed my hand upon the strings, and thought a while, waiting for music of a different kind. When at last it came I struck upon the instrument till it throbbed with life, and my heart in song spoke out its dreams. But the words themselves I remember not, for, as with all things, they have passed away leaving nought but a memory behind.

And thus I continued for a long time, till I broke without knowledge into a strain of a wilder sort, that seemed to moan out some dirgeful tune. Why it came, I know not, save that my mood was in keeping with the song, and would not brook another.

When I had finished I noticed Krishna was

pleased, though he spoke little, save to remark, with a smile, that now I had relieved the sighing in my soul and the weeping in my heart.

And he bade me farewell, and I passed out of the royal tent, and stood a while under the shining heavens in the midst of the stillness of night.

CHAPTER IX

‘WHERE ARE THE MEN OF THE STRONG HEART?’

FOR several days after the news was brought into the Râya's camp that Âdil Shâh had already arrived with an army mighty and powerful, to within a little distance of us, we still remained with our tents pitched, showing no sign of battle. For Krishna Deva had given orders to watch the enemy's movements a while. And the time of anxious watching was the least liked in all our campaign, for, as thou mayest imagine, the knowledge of a subtle adversary agrees not well with impatient minds. But in that time we strengthened our army in many points, keeping our spirits up, and indeed the regiments were like unto tethered lions longing to fly upon their prey.

Every captain had much to accomplish, and I, too, spent no idle moments; and as for the Râya, he placed himself continually in the most trying preparations, though the officers besought him otherwise.

Yet, methinks, he was wise in doing this, for the soldiers grew to love him even more, and shouted

his name on amongst themselves, pledging their lives for his.

Now, after we had remained thus for a few days, certain men who had been set to spy upon the men of Bijapur rode swiftly back into our camp bearing a report, saying that the Âdil Shâh was strengthening his forces, and making entrenchments round about.

Then at once Krishna Deva arose, and sent orders to all the chief captains in every part of the camp.

This was his command—that the men and the companies were to be divided into seven divisions under the allotted chiefs, and as soon as this was done, at the sound of much music, the army should push forward at dawn into full sight of the Âdil Shâh, ready for battle. So the division was made speedily, the Râya himself commanding the second division.

Then we marched out towards the enemy to the beating of drums, the blowing of instruments, the bellowing of elephants and horses, and the prayers of the holy priests. And the noise was so great that a voice might not be heard, while birds of the air dropped upon us, stricken with fear. But after this, for a while all seemed confused before mine eyes, till I saw the flash of shields against shields, of axes against swords, and swords against knives.

Then I knew the fight had begun in full earnest,

and I entered into the spirit of the battle with all my might.

The sight was wonderful as the masses surged and leapt together, one party engaging with another party, some falling to rise no more, others rushing forward to take their places; all eager, all confident, all shouting their own war-cry; each seeking to overpower his adversary. Hindu against Mussulman, Mussulman against Hindu.

Then above this din I heard the roar of the black cannon, saw the flash of the deadly arrow, and strove to determine which way the battle went. But as yet this was well-nigh impossible, for neither of the forces fell back, but rather they fought and wrestled with mighty power, neither resisting nor desisting.

As for Krishna the Râya, I beheld him in the midst of the fiery fray, unsparing of his safety, and sending forth his orders in the spirit of a mighty conqueror, for his courage was great and equalled by few. But even at this moment a great cry broke upon mine ear, and I turned my head sharply at the sound, for I feared evil.

And, lo! in the front of the ranks, I beheld a strange confusion, and my heart stood still within me, for I saw our men fall back before the swords and fire-arms of Bijapur.

Then in agony I spurred my horse and rode forward, calling Krishna Deva's name aloud that they might hear, and rallying, cease their flight.

But it was of no avail, the great roar of cannon and many voices swallowed up my efforts, and one man seeing another flee, followed on without thought, even like sheep who walk into the panther's lair, if one does but assume the leading. Yet, methinks, they who ran fared worse than those who stood their ground; for the Mussulmans, eager at the victory, broke into disorder, and charged on the heels of the flying companies.

Then suddenly a mighty voice rang out above the din, and the words were these: "*Who is there that stands with Krishna Deva the Râya? Behold the women fly—where are the Men of the Strong Heart?*"

Then the cry ceased; and looking around, I saw a certain captain by the name of Râma galloping near at hand, his sword gleaming aloft. But the cowards paid no heed, only massed together in greater confusion, falling beneath the flashing swords.

At this moment I remembered the safety of Krishna Deva, and rode to his side, for as yet his own guards and many others remained faithful.

As I entered the circle round him, I beheld his eyes blaze out in awful fury, and I heard the shout break forth from his lips: "*Who is there that ranges himself with me? Who?*"

And immediately the cry went down the ranks by the mouth of the steadfast:

"*Who is there that stands for Krishna Deva*

the King? Who casts his lot with Biruda? Who?"

Then several who fled heard the words, and together with the lords and the captains we rallied a tiny force round the Râya.

"Shall we lose all the men of Vijayanagar? or shall we stand still and be slain?"

Thus cried Krishna Deva, holding his sword aloft as we gathered round him: "Shall we stand still to be slain? Will ye follow me now into the arms of death?"

"Yea, yea," we answered, one and all, and he continued:

"Then at once let us charge amongst the cowards. They run before the sword of the Âdil Shâh, let them now flee faster before the sword of Krishna Deva. Behold a day has come when a Mussulman shall boast that he has slain the greatest lord on earth, but never, I say, shall he boast that he has vanquished him! Order yourselves into companies, O ye captains."

While this was being accomplished Krishna Deva turned towards me.

"Prepare to go on thy last mission for me, O Patcola," he cried. "Glad am I to behold thee yet safe, but seize the freshest horse thou mayest, and carry this ring back into the City of Victory, even to the queens in the Zenana. Bid them pass through the fiery gates to meet me in the Beyond, for I go to fight my last fight. Tell my people

how the battle went, and how the Children of Victory became as the Sons of Cowards. Say this, besides all the things thou hast seen. But forget not also to tell that brave hearts died with me. And now farewell, O my brother, for thy friendship has been very, very sweet to me, and thy conduct valiant."

Whereupon he turned his face away that he might not lose calmness.

"Stay, stay thy words, O Krishna Deva," I cried; "all—all is not yet lost," and even as I spoke the amulet round his neck fell from its place with a little rattle, and rested upon his outer tunic. Then we remained for a moment silent, for throughout the battle both had forgotten the matter of the charm.

"Not lost!" echoed the Râya; "but what term ye this?" and he waved his hand to the place where the men were fleeing. Nevertheless, I thought I saw a new light dawn upon his countenance. "Now what would ye have me do?"

"Even as thou hast said," I answered; "but despatch me not as a messenger to Vijayanagar, I pray thee, till the actual need. Thou hast rallied round thee a steadfast faithful few; play thy hand with them, O Krishna Deva, and Indra surely will not forsake his own."

Then my voice broke in the anguish of the moment, and I could say no more; but Krishna Deva smiled.

"Now is new strength put into me; I see new hopes. They shall feel the touch of this my sword, whose kiss is death. Therefore, remain ye here for a time, while we work havoc in yonder ranks, till when ye see me fall, then at once spur thy swiftest into the City of Victory, bearing my words, and saying that Krishna is no more."

"Thou shalt not fall, O Râya," I answered in a voice that seemed like a moan in my own ears; "but I pray thee let me not be separate from thee in this wild dash: let me even share thy small triumph."

"Triumph! Triumph!" echoed Krishna Deva. "The word is blotted out! Now such men as I have are placed in better order. Therefore farewell, but start not on this thy last mission for me until ye see we are utterly destroyed."

"I would I might be with thee," I urged again, for I yearned to be with him in this wild rush.

"But I have decreed it otherwise," returned the Râya, turning his horse. "Forward in the name of the gods!"

Then immediately the little troop swept past me on the wings of wind, and my heart went out with them, for the odds were very great. But as for me, I stayed on my horse waiting for the outcome, according to the command of Krishna, leaping up on my horse the better to watch the fray.

In that brief space while the Râya and his faithful divisions played vengeance on the cowards and

the men of Bijapur, Vacora's dream passed rapidly before mine eyes, and methinks that many years passed over my head, and my blood grew old in my veins, so that I felt no longer young. For behold the life of a king—the like of whom had never been seen before—the fall of a mighty nation—the glory of its deadly enemies, the passing away of hope, of joy, of freedom, of all that a warrior or a child of the gods holds dear. These hung like a straw in the balance of Time, trembling aloft. Now, O ye gods, stretch forth your hands and weigh it down, for we are desolate!

How shall I continue the story of Krishna Deva's daring? How shall I find words to declare the doings of his valiant troop? or of the agony I endured in the time of watching? But let that pass. Let me tell only of the things I saw in the distance, how I beheld the Râya in the midst of the fiery fray, sparing neither the cowards who fled, or the Mussulmans who came within reach of his angry sword. And mine eyes started forth from my head to follow his movements, for often I lost him utterly, and despair would seize upon me.

Then perchance I should behold him in another part, amid a clash of swords, never flinching, neither swerving, always taking the leadership of his gallant little band.

Only once did I perceive him halt for an instant, and my heart leapt up, for I thought him wounded,

yet again the gods placed a shield over their chosen, so that his horse was slain, and he changed for another, uninjured.

Now, after I had remained thus for a long while, straining mine eyes to follow the fight more closely, I beheld certain things in the midst of the conflict that made a shout of joy leap to my lips, and tears crept up to my eyes; and the horse I rode understood something also, methinks, for it reared and pranced about till I was forced to tighten the reins. For behold the men who had fled before the sword and fire of the Mussulmans, either through sorrow at their cowardice, or fear of the Râya's slaughter, turned, and I saw them unite with his gallant little troop, placing themselves once more under his command.

Yet again I beheld another change, and, lo! the regiments of Vijayanagar formed into a mighty band. And together I saw them turn their faces, and charge into the midst of the pursuing enemy, who were in disorder, and unprepared for a sudden attack. So that they in their turn fell back and fled, even towards the banks of the river. But the troops stayed not their hand at this, for they followed them even into the roaring waters, fearing nought, now that their courage had returned.

Yet through this strange and unlooked-for victory, Krishna's mighty form and skilful actions stood out amid the struggling thousands, and I gave forth a prayer of thanksgiving at his safety;

for surely the gods had stretched forth their hands, and shielded us in the hour of our desolation.

A little longer I stayed and watched, knowing that the City of Victory might keep her name. Also I rejoiced greatly that the Râya had altered his command concerning my return as a messenger of evil tidings as he had first said.

Now presently I saw that Krishna withdrew his men out of the river of blood; and instantly I prepared myself to ride out a short way to greet his triumph.

It was afterwards from one of the captains (Rama, who had married a daughter of Krishna) that I learnt the cause of this sudden retreat, for it seemed that the Râya gave the command, taking pity on the perishing Mussulmans and having no desire to slay for the love of war. But I was by no means astonished at this, for Krishna Deva was never known to do anything but what was gallant or generous, either to man or beast.

Then slowly the companies, when they had reformed into better order, turned and made for the camp which the Âdil Shâh had hurriedly left at the time when he fled before the swords of the Men of Victory. When I saw this, I gave the word to my horse, and at once we flew down to where the army ranged.

But as I came nearer to the scene of battle (strong of heart though I be), yet methinks few men ever looked upon such a field of death, or a river that

flowed so red with crimson blood. And when presently the sun on the point of set flared upon us with a lurid light, the terrors seemed even more ghastly beneath the flood of purple rays. But I turned my head aside, for I could not look, and made a way through the shouting troops to the part where Krishna Deva sat on his horse speaking with one of the captains.

“Welcome, welcome, most noble Patcola,” he cried; “welcome thrice in this mine hour of triumph. Ah, see what one brief hour can bring about. Behold, it may see the rise of a nation, or its fall and utter destruction. But a short space ago, I bade thee farewell for ever, mourning because verily I believed I should see thy face no more, and now——”

“And now, O King,” I answered, finding my voice at last, for my speech had failed me for joy as we met together, “and now thou art more than ever conqueror. It is only for me to mourn, seeing I beheld thy glory, but shared it not.”

“Shared it not, thou faithful friend?” replied the Râya, suddenly embracing me, “shared it not, thou sayest? What thinkest thou when I affirm before all these captains and nobles, that but for thy prompt word, the whole had been lost? Henceforth let Patcola, the son of a noble, be known as a noble of the highest rank. He shall be granted a governorship. What think ye, O captains, is not this thing just?”

"It is, it is," they answered, and I was pleased to note that Sâluva Timma spoke his word without the usual tone of envy, also he looked at me with greater kindness in his eyes. And this perchance gladdened me as much as the Râya's honour, for hitherto the minister had never failed to look upon me with jealousy.

Whereupon the Râya took a ring from off his finger, and placed it on mine, in the sight of all; and as for me, I knew not what to say, for my heart was full.

"Enter into my tent after an hour," he cried again; "I have something important to say unto thee."

This he spoke in a lower tone, and looking into his eyes I read much, and wondered at his serious meaning. Then he added in a louder voice so that all might hear:

"Join this most valiant captain in his errand of mercy, for many are the wounded on both sides, but he and thee have kind hearts, and methinks your treatment of them will give proof of your generous spirits. As for me, I will seek my camp a while. No drink has passed these lips for many hours, and I am well-nigh exhausted."

He turned his horse, and together with many of the captains, the chiefs of the guards and vassal kings, they entered into the very tent used by the Âdil Shâh little more than an hour before.

Among many of the men of Bijapur who lay on

the field of battle, I heard words of wonder arise from their lips as to the great things done by the King of Vijayanagar when all had fled his ranks. One in particular, who seemed a man of rank, told me how Krishna's troops had ridden down into the midst of confusion with the fury of a storm when it rages at its height, and how many when they beheld the turn of the battle, shrieked aloud that it was a god and no living man who rode into the centre of death.

"A kingly king thou hast," he cried; "surely his sword was given from on high, for never was such might seen as rose in the arm of thy great King."

CHAPTER X

KRISHNA ASKS A RIDDLE

Now, when I thought it would be time to attend on the Râya, I betook myself to the entrance of the tent, and, giving word to the guards, passed therein. As I entered I perceived that Sâluva Timma was on the point of leaving the royal enclosure, and I wondered somewhat, for I read an expression of joy in his countenance.

Presently, when a herald returned with a message apprising me that the Râya was alone and desirous of my instant approach, I went in beyond the hangings where he lay at rest on the ivory couch of the Âdil Shâh.

"So thou art come," he cried, as soon as he perceived my entrance; "how fares the field at this moment?—and the wounded, are they all tended?"

"Even so, O King," I answered; "bodies of men still roam searching for the helpless, and the dead are made ready for the burnings. The spoil, too, is collected and the most precious placed aside for thy treasury."

"A good report, a good report of a deadly fight.

Ah, how many souls have passed from hence to perform another journey?"

"I fear many thousands, and the vultures already would mark another feast."

"Let us pass from these horrors, they make me sick at heart; and when one is weary in frame and mind they can be little borne. Sit ye here, for as I warned thee, I have much to say. But that in mine own time. Methinks the Shâh knew well how to live in luxury; note yon jewelled fringe, and this couch; who has seen ivory better carved than that?"

"Truly he and magnificence could not part even in time of war," I answered, casting my eyes on every side of the tent with much admiration, for every point, from the exquisite moulding of the lamps, to the heavy gems on the splendid couch, put one in mind rather of a palace chamber than a mere camping tent on the scene of battle.

Drinking cups of fluted gold; massive hangings wrought with silver and precious gems; carpets, cushions patterned by the skilled hand of a craftsman,—all this remained of the splendour of the Âdil Shâh, of his mirth and his luxury; for from tidings which reached me at different times, I learned that his mind went ever out to riches and wine, so that he could not prevail on himself to depart from them.

"When I beheld thy dear and amiable face after the enemy had fled, I told thee that I sought

my tent for rest. But as yet I have had none of it, seeing the captains have continually plied me with advice, or asking my commands on certain things. Now, as it chances, I have placed Sâluva Timma in a good frame of mind, since I have given him another governorship, and therefore another title to his name."

Now, when the Râya told me of this, I at once understood the expression on the minister's face. But I kept my silence, bethinking only that truly this pleased him in a double purpose; for surely step by step an ambitious man in general, be he good or evil, reaches his hope at last.

"Ah, well, I mind that he has done much in his time, and has a brave heart in all things. Art thou and he good friends? He has a son near to thine own age, thou knowest."

"Aye, O Krishna," I answered, for I would not disclose my mind; "but we meet little save in time of business. I fear it is not in me to make many friends."

Krishna Deva smiled.

"The captains tell me," he continued, "that the army is anxious to fight again. I questioned whether I was ruler of jungle brutes, or of the renowned sons of Vijayanagar that I should fall upon the utterly defeated. Even then they were little satisfied, and spake much concerning their natural love of a finished victory. But they soon gave over when I asked if when they had dyed the

clear waters of a river with crimson blood, whether they would also seek to change the colour of the sea. Ah, Patcola, I like not such feelings towards a foe; let the sword fall, say I, where it is needed, and when that is finished, then arrest thy hand. Even Indra himself could scarcely find a fault in such a day as this. A man if he is gallant, brave and generous, must understand these things, for only a tyrant revels in the flood-gates he has opened, or in the number of heads severed by his cruel blade."

Presently the Râya took a flat irregular piece of gold from his tunic and placed it in the palm of my hand.

"Now, Patcola, thou diviner," he cried at last, with a laugh, tell me what that is."

"A lump of the pure metal, found in the deserted camp, perchance," I answered.

He laughed again.

"Nay thou hast not it yet; try again."

"How can I guess, O Râya?" I cried once more; "'tis of no shape, and the marks are such that it might well have endured fire. But if I hazard more, thou wouldst mock at me."

"Now hast thou arrived at something akin to the answer. This thing, indeed, has passed through fire, but search more diligently into it."

Then he paused with a happy smile at my bewilderment, and I continued to examine the metal without speaking, for I knew that the Râya

delighted in any riddle when he might hold the secret to the end.

"And is there no more to say upon it, thou most mystified one?" he said at last, "when so often thou hast held it in thy hand and gazed upon it with those wondering eyes of thine. Aha, surely thou forgettest old friends."

"But, O Râya," I answered hastily, "surely thou art mistaken. Never till this moment have I seen this strange thing; if it were so, I should not so easily forget."

"Now, what if I tell thee that thou hast handled it time after time within my presence, shouldst thou say I were mad?"

"The Râya's words brook of no dispute," I replied, though I wondered if indeed his mind had slackened beneath the strain of battle.

"There, I have carried my riddle far enough, though it has roused my mirth to see thee puzzle upon it as if thou wert propounding on some serious matter of state," and Krishna Deva leant back on the couch and laughed loudly.

"Now, most amiable Patcola, wilt thou know this strange, shapeless thing, when I tell thee—it is the amulet!"

"The amulet!" I ejaculated, starting, "the amulet! But how came it thus?"

"Now I have somewhat appeased thy curiosity, I will explain its strange appearance. 'Tis but short. Thou knowest when I set out with the small troop,

after it seemed that all were lost, and my horse fell beneath me in the midst. Now, while I was down, my life was well-nigh robbed of me, methinks, for one of those wild infidels struck at me with his full might upon the breast. Then, even when I cut his sword in half, he desisted not, but lunged again, bringing the iron knob of an axe straight upon me, and the force thereof was so great that I fell backward against the body of the dead horse. When I arose the man had fallen also, and the amulet, which had caught the first of the blow, appeared like this. 'Tis truly wonderful, for surely the gods must have guided the force of the blow upon this slight thing, since these frail bones must needs have collapsed in an instant."

"And art thou by no means hurt, O Krishna?" I asked in astonishment, as soon as he had finished his story; "for such a marvel has scarcely ever been known."

"Nay, I am not injured, a heavy bruise and scratch is all that remains now. But methought I should have some difficulty in persuading thee to recognize the charm. It is more worth to me in its strange state than all the jewels which are encrusted on my sword."

"What say the captains and nobles of this marvel?"

"Nought," he replied, "for as yet I have not revealed it."

With a smile he added: "I have kept it where-

with to puzzle thee. Of a truth the lady Vacora must have a handsome reward. What shall it be?"

"I am certain that she will accept nothing," I answered; "it is enough for her to know what service the amulet has done."

"Ah, I forgot," returned Krishna Deva, with a smile; "she follows in the footsteps of her lord. Nevertheless, all that I bestow on thee, or her, is given as a bond of friendliness and good-will. And in that spirit shalt thou accept whatever I think fit. Would that every noble in my vast empire were as worthy to grace the ranks as thou."

"Thou dost over-estimate the poor qualities of thy servant, and out of thy fair heart thou blottest out his follies."

"So thou sayest, but now we must curb ourselves, else shall we carry this counter game of gallantry far into the night."

Suddenly an officer advanced from behind the wall of hangings, and announced that certain captains, together with Sâluva Timma, sought a private word with the Râya.

"Bid them enter," said Krishna Deva to the man, and at once I moved from my seat.

"Nay, depart not," cried the Râya.

"I would have retired because I perceived the messenger declared the words of the captains would be private. But at thy bidding I remain."

"Doubtless the captains only seek my further wishes on some point of war. Hark, they stand

without," and immediately the sound of heavy footsteps echoed beyond the entrance curtains, which the next instant were flung aside to admit their coming, and I noticed that Rama (who had married Krishna Deva's daughter and behaved so gallantly at the battle of Raichur) stood among the group.

"What seek ye at this hour?" cried the Râya.

"'Tis somewhat important," replied Sâluva Timma, advancing, "else should we not disturb thy enjoyment this night," and he glanced slightly towards me.

"I summon whom I will into my presence," returned Krishna, frowning; "and as for enjoyments, the lord Patcola affords me good companionship at hours when I most need it. But thy communication?"

"The noble Rama perchance may render it better, seeing he has a greater knowledge of war than I," returned the minister, looking somewhat vexed.

"We seek thy further commands as to our doings here," responded the captain instantly. "Is it thy will to rest here a while, or wilt thou immediately return to the siege of Raichur? Thou knowest that city has yet to be attained. We ask thee this night, seeing that for either course there must be much preparation. If thou decidest to return instantly to Raichur, how shall we place the Shâh's generals and the other captives?"

"I have considered thy communication,"

returned Krishna Deva, after a short pause, "and methinks it were well to return instantly to the taking of Raichur; that is, after the burnings of the dead are finished, besides prayers and sacrifices offered for our great delivery. As for the captives, let them be sent by road to the City of Victory. What think ye? Is not my saying good?"

"It is well," they answered; "it were best, indeed, to complete the conquest of this fortress Raichur, for by rights it belongs to thy dominion."

"Then immediately thou mayest begin thy preparations, and bring me word to-morrow saying when it may be possible to set out again, having accomplished all things that are necessary here."

"It shall be done," they answered, "and we are glad to have thy commands in this matter."

When a short time had passed, we quitted the camp of the Âdil Shâh (whom the Râya thought to be dead) and betook ourselves again to the siege of Raichur, which, after a strong resistance, fell into our hands, even as other fortresses had done in their time. But in this last conquest we were aided by a body of Feringhees, the leader of which had come on an embassy to the Râya. These foreigners held the governorship of certain forts¹ on the coasts in the name of their Râya.²

¹ Goa.

² The King of Portugal, who had a large trade with Vijayanagar.

Now, throughout the siege Krishna Deva showed clemency towards the people, and when the city fell, methinks he did more good therein than its former ruler; so that by the time he left it, it was in a more prosperous condition than had been known for many years.

All these things done, the army was re-mustered, and we departed, setting our feet once more upon the paths which led to the City of Victory.

CHAPTER XI

A SONG IN THE LONELY NIGHT

“VIJAYANAGAR, *the City of Victory, Vijayanagar, the Forest of Learning.* Hail and honour to thy sacred name!

Thou star bright and gleaming set among a world of empires: thou flower white and beautiful, climbing ever upwards, reaching ever higher.

When wilt thou stay thy expansion? When wilt thou, O City of Wonder, cease to blind the eye with thy glory?

But advance, O queen of all empires, thou who hast sprung up out of very nothing, thou blessed of the gods.

Mayest thou never sink because of the doings of thy sons; mayest thou pass on into many generations, thou of the yet young birth, and of proud bearing; may thy glory be untarnished in the years to come.

May thy praises be sung by every lip, and thy breath be blown beyond the seas.

For in thy hand lies the strength, in thy mouth the wisdom; and from wisdom and strength come glory and honour, blessings and joy. What

A SONG IN THE LONELY NIGHT 147

further need have ye? Arise, arise, thou undefiled; thou holder of the Sons of Victory; thou mother of a million men; thou fountain of the holy worship.

May the sun of thy splendour know no eclipse; may the shadows not pass over thy face, nor the voices of fury find an echo within thy courts.

Bid thy sons sing of victory. Let their song be caught up in the clouds, let it be echoed in the habitation of thunder.

Waft it to the winds, waft it high and low, let the joy of Vijayanagar be known.

Adorn yourselves, ye people, in your brightest garb, let the jewels flash forth from your brow.

Flash your swords on high, ye warriors; dance, ye women; sing, ye children; let the tinkling of your anklets be heard.

Let thy name be called forth in the heights; let it find an echo below in the depths.

Let the soft wind whisper a name—the name of Vijayanagar and Krishna the Great.

Let the fires leap up on the hill-tops, let the musicians give forth a song."

These words I, Patcola, the son of Semore and a new lord in the City of Victory caused to issue forth from my inner heart on the evening of our return into the chief city after many moons of weary sojourn in the land of Bijapur.

As was sometimes my wont, I had ascended one of those hills which rise here and there in numbers,

and of varied heights, from the midst of fertile plains, lending wild happy relief of green herbage to the more cultivated and orderly groves below. So I looked forth through the glistening moonlight, down upon the noble city, traversed by many conduits, and protected by forts and watch-towers on every side. The land seemed all the sweeter, the beauty of the scene fairer, because of a lengthened stay in a foreign land.

Truly after absence the eye finds new delights in things which hitherto had passed our notice because we saw them not. And at this time my soul went out with a greater love towards this sacred soil so that the words which rose in my heart were forced to find an outlet by my lips. None were at hand to catch the rapturous praise, as I gazed down upon the happy city, or raised mine eyes in ecstasy towards the holy moon.

I named the city an abode of gods on earth, where every reflection of a gilded pagoda, the splendour of the carved gates, the glittering homes of the chief nobles, the thatched roofs of the smaller ones between, the noble array of its thronging inhabitants; all told of peaceful prosperity—in truth, of a perfect city, whose ruler was a perfect king. Now and then a rush of wind crept up to where I stood, bearing the delicious perfume of orange groves, or rustling among the feathery palms.

Then I looked down again upon the blue and whispering rivers, the eternally sparkling temples,

the strange wild gardens ; those happy homes of a thousand open-eyed and radiant blossoms, the distant outline of the mysterious towering heights, or the nearer hills which stood clothed with natural groups of forest trees and were the lonely birthplace of a score of tiny streams.

Now all at once another wind arose violently and swept with a chill sighing over the happy scene, so that my robe clung closer to me because of its strength. And in that moment while it blew, a voice seemed to speak out of its midst, a voice soft and dreamy, and I, who stood alone, heard the whisper and understood the flutter in its accents. For it seemed that the words were these : " Behold, thou dreamer, thou hast cried aloud out of the fulness of thy heart to the City, and the gods whose shield is laid upon it. Therefore I answer thus. Listen as my voice sweeps by. The City of Victory has risen, she shall rise. She has stretched forth her hands, and they have reached into the Holy Dominion. A golden chain has been let down, and see, the lowest link has stayed itself upon the City. Now, let it be that none cut it asunder, for the doings of her sons shall mould the kingdom, be it for good or evil."

Then methought the voice ceased, the wind blew more violently before it swept away into utter silence, making the palm-trees moan and whisper among themselves. Fire-flies flittered before my face, tinklings of music bore down upon my ear,

the moon shot forth into greater brilliancy, and the growling of beasts was heard in the far-off distance, so that as I looked, I saw no strangeness, neither heard any sound save the faint incomprehensible babbling of trees, night insects, or the unsatiated seekers of prey.

Then I, who know no fear with an open enemy, felt my courage of a sudden forsake me, because of the weirdness of the moment, so that I fled from the spot quickly, neither were my footsteps stayed till I came again into the streets which branch off at countless points, where the sellers of goods and many craftsmen in the daytime place their wares. But I passed on, keeping well in the shadow of the pavilions, for I knew my path without the aid of a lighted torch, which it is the custom to use in these parts.

Now, as I found my way, it seemed that a soft movement took place in a dark shadow cast by tall, frowning walls.

The next instant as I looked again, I heard a quick patter of light feet near at hand, and a figure veiled heavily from head to foot placed itself swiftly in the midst of my path, and a voice spoke in hurried tones from beneath the coverings.

"My lord Patcola," it began, but I could not recognize the woman as one I knew: though the words were soft and very sweet.

"My lord Patcola, a word in thine ear."

"Who art thou?" I cried.

"Wilt thou retreat a little in the shadows?" she said again, and her voice was very low; "the matter is private."

"Nay, I move not," I answered, fearing by the strangeness in her manner that this might be some treachery, for there were certain ones that hated me. "What thou sayest, say here; the light is safer, and I pray you beware if any evil is on foot."

"Evil is on foot, my lord," she returned, "therefore defying danger I have sought thee to give thee a warning, bidding thee to travel to thy home by another way. I tell thee thou hast enemies, jealous of thy rise, and ever eager for thy downfall; now, a plot is on hand whereby certain ones would say that thou secretly think of doing evil upon the Râya, and therefore they would vow thou passest the night among thy fellow-conspirators. This hour they lie in wait on yonder road, and when they have seen thee they will declare they found certain treasonable writings in thy possession, therefore made thy arrest because they (being ever wishful of Krishna Deva's safety) had a suspicion as to thine intentions."

"Is this a true thing thou speakest, lady?" I cried out in astonishment; "how shall I know that there is not some guile in thy heart—in fact, that thou art not one of those concerned in this trap?"

"Nay, my lord, I have no proof," she answered, and I perceived that her voice was not

as the voice of a false speaker; "what shall I say unto thee that thou mayest know I speak aright? I pray thee follow my words, and go by another path, for there is danger."

"No danger that I need fear, thou unknown one."

"But they are stronger than thou."

"Then the Râya (all honour be upon his name) would not believe any such false charge."

"So thou sayest," she cried eagerly; "but think ye not that kings' hearts can sometimes change? Thine enemies are well skilled in their evil. Make not my strivings in vain, I pray thee. I could tell thee other things, but I may not stay, for woe is me if I am missed."

"Stay," I cried, as she turned, and would have swiftly vanished, "why hast thou done all this because of me? Of a surety I must learn thy name."

"Of a surety thou shalt not," she returned, with a soft laugh; "but flatter not thy heart that I warned thee only because of thyself, for after all, perchance I did it by reason of the love I bear thy family. Nevertheless, keep this meeting secret, if thou dost not follow on the warning of thy poor servant. Farewell."

Before I could speak another word she had slipped behind the deep shadows, and the next moment not even the patter of her feet might be heard, though I tried to follow.

After her swift departure I stood still a while, casting over in my mind all the strange things so lately revealed to me, for it was difficult to believe that any one could wish to do me such an evil, though I knew many were jealous of the favours I received at the Râya's hands.

Thus I wondered much, yet I learnt no more of this matter till such a time as you shall hear.

Nevertheless, after some consideration, I turned my steps and reached my home by another way.

That same evening I spent in company with mine own immediate friends. And amongst these was Vacora's brother, whose peculiarity of character I have described before. Nevertheless, on this occasion he did not display his knowledge in a long speech, but listened quietly as I related several things that had happened in the land of Bijapur. And when with emotion in my voice I retold the awful terrors at the battle of Raichur, he clasped his hands before him, and forgot even to chew the betel, which he always did when he himself was not talking.

Thus we sat for a long while, and for the time all those strange things which I had seen and heard earlier passed altogether from my mind.

Now, during these days, feasting and rejoicings went on throughout all the city, for the people were glad, and made much of those who had been out to the war. As for Krishna Deva, he went to

his palace in the New City (which he had built out of love to his wife Nâgalâ), and while he was there, news was brought that an ambassador had arrived from the realms of the Âdil Shâh. When the Râya knew it, he would not see him for a time, but sent him a present, bidding him remain in the city a while.

At his own appointed time Krishna Deva called all the nobles together for the reception of this ambassador, which took place in the hall where the great throne stood. The splendour of the court on this day was wonderful; and as for Krishna Deva, scarce an eye could look upon his apparel, so covered was it with gold embroidery, diamonds, and other stones.

Presently we heard music beating in the distance, gradually coming nearer till the sound thereof became almost deafening. A little later the doors opened and Matuestam, the ambassador, a man dark and handsome, swept up towards the seat of state, followed by a train of his own countrymen as richly arrayed as he.

Once again the trumpets blared forth, the heralds shouted his names, and the messenger made an obeisance as the Râya gave the greeting. Another moment of silence followed—a moment in which methinks the Court of Vijayanagar appeared at its best, filled as it was with every splendour, and blazing with every jewel that was considered worthy to flash on either robe or sword.

Of a sudden the voice of the Râya rang out in the silence.

"Thou ambassador of the Âdil Shâh, welcome to these my courts. I pray thee give thy message freely, for our ears are open."

Again the ambassador made an obeisance, drawing a few paces nearer to the royal daïs.

"Thus speaks my master," he said in a loud voice, "the Commander of the Faithful in Bijapur, to Krishna Deva the Râya of Vijayanagar. Restore unto Bijapur the fortress of Raichur, the elephants, the captives thou hast taken, the wealth, the tents, and other spoil, for know that unto him it rightly belongs. And if thou wilt do this, then thou wilt have my master for a loyal friend, for before Allah he bears good-will towards thee. These are the words of my master the Âdil Shâh."

"Is this all thy message, most noble Matu-estam?" questioned the King, and I perceived that his eyes flashed fire; "does thy lord condescend to do this and no more?"

"These are all his words, save that he knows thee to be the most powerful of all monarchs, and he admires thy wondrous virtues, hoping to receive justice at thy hands."

These last words the ambassador spoke in wheedling tones, like an evil person who, being caught at last, seeks a refuge in sweet words to aid him out of the snare.

"Hold," cried Krishna Deva, as the man would

have continued further, "we tolerate no flattery from the mouth of the Âdil Shâh. I like to see a foe brave in deed and word, even when he is fallen. But since thy lord finds it so easy to abase himself, possibly he will lower himself a little further to obtain the things he has asked, and that—to kiss even my foot."

Whereupon the Râya rose from his seat for a moment, and though his voice was outwardly calm, yet his wrathful majesty seemed all the greater because of the forced calmness in his tones.

"Marshalla! Thy words are hard," ventured Matuestam.

"Hard! thou sayest. Methinks thy master will not find it so hard. This is my message; send it in writing to Bijapur, while thou thyself remain here."

"I would seek to carry the words myself," began the ambassador, when Krishna Deva cut him short.

"Nay, thou shalt remain here in all courtesy till thy messengers have returned. For the present thou hast thy dismissal."

At a wave from his hand the company reformed, the trumpets blared out again, and Matuestam passed out from before the Râya. Krishna Deva with a sudden thought arose again, and he too strode out by another door in company with his minister, Sâluva Timma. But me he called not, and at this I was somewhat sorry, for I might have

endeavoured to calm his strange fury as so often I had done at other times.

Now at all the things which the Râya had just said and done, I was astonished and pained to behold, for methinks never before had he done weakly in my eyes, and I wondered how it came to pass that such haughtiness found a place in his heart. Yet I kept my thought to myself, for after all, how might I presume to gainsay the voice of so great a King? Therefore, telling myself that his wisdom had only departed for a short time, I went my way performing my duties; and when I had finished, and might call the hours my own, I sought the silence of an apartment far from others, passing the time till the setting of the sun in supplication before the gods, for, having had strange visions and omens, my heart became exceedingly heavy and sorrowful within me.

CHAPTER XII

EVIL AVERTED

AFTER his speech with the ambassador at the royal palace in the new city (Nâgalapûr), the Râya was seen very little by his nobles; he occupied himself busily in affairs of state, setting certain things in order, confirming new decrees, or planning how he might strengthen his kingdom. He also instituted a greater number of sacrifices at his own expense, and gave richer alms to the divine priests, who by turns prayed and sang continually at the shrine of the gods in the pagodas, so that at all times the sound of singing and prayers fell upon our ears.

During these days Krishna Deva shut himself up in the company of the lord Sâluva Timma and the wise men, acting upon the sayings of those skilled in astrology. When the Râya summoned me into his presence, it was only in the company of others that I saw him. So our conversation was necessarily more formal in character.

Now whilst all this was going on, certain messengers returned from Bijapur with letters from Âdil Shâh, which, being placed in the care of

Matuestam, who had taken up his abode near the palace, in turn came before the Râya.

As it happened it was the time of the salaam when the ambassador again sought the presence of the Râya. As soon as Krishna Deva knew by the mouth of Sâluva Timma that Matuestam waited, he passed his eye along the lines of nobles, and bade him speak without fear. Then immediately the ambassador salaamed again, and coming forward stood near the King's seat.

"Behold, O King," he said, "the messenger has this day returned from Bijapur, bringing a letter from the hands of the Âdil Shâh, my master. May his answer find favour in thy sight."

"Open it and read, most amiable ambassador," said the Râya, for the envoy would have placed it in the hands of Sâluva Timma.

"Let us hear the words from thy master's hand."

But Matuestam rather demurred, whereupon Krishna Deva took the writings and read for himself.

Then we learnt that the Adil Shâh was even willing to do as the Râya wished, so the fortress Raichur, the spoil, and the captives might be restored. Nevertheless, he asked how the conditions could be observed, as the Âdil Shâh might not come to Krishna in the City of Victory, though he was ready to do as the King said.

When this letter had been read, Matuestam stood forward and addressed Krishna.

"Behold," he cried, "the Âdil Shâh, my sovereign, would ask that thou and thy retinue proceed to the borders of thy kingdom, so that ye may look upon each other's face. Shall I send word that thou wilt abide by this? for let peace, I pray thee, be made speedily."

"I am somewhat astonished, O noble ambassador, at the letters of thy master," returned Krishna Deva. "Nevertheless, since he finds no fault in thus debasing himself, let him approach our presence on our northern borders at such time as I shall appoint. But warn him that he turns not back, for our wrath is great, and our royalty will brook no affront."

"Then I have thy leave to quit the city," asked Matuestam, "bearing this message to the Shâh?"

"Even so, O ambassador, immediately; and gifts shall be bestowed in thine hand. Therefore, thy commission being fulfilled, thou hast thy dismissal, though even in my wrath I have somewhat pitied thee."

"Wherefore?" cried Matuestam. "I am on my master's business."

"Wherefore! thou sayest?" returned Krishna Deva, looking closely upon the man. "Wherefore?— But no; I will give thee no reasons, for in my fury I might forget I am a king. Only, I say, I pity thee having such a master—thine own

mind should reflect my thoughts, making clear the things I have not uttered. Go, bear him my word, let him travel to my northern boundary, for I swear," continued the Râya, half rising, "I swear he shall do me homage in the way I have said, since he is so willing for it himself."

"Swear not so, O King," I cried, going forward a pace or two, when the Râya raised his hand.

"I have sworn it," he answered, with a frown; "keep silent in this matter."

I saw Sâluva Timma smile across to one of his sons as I retreated quietly to my place.

"Depart, and leave us to ourselves," continued Krishna Deva, turning to the ambassador. So, after receiving presents, he departed, and began his journey back to the land of Bijapur.

For days after this incident I saw no more of the Râya, and it made me heavy in heart, for we had always been as brothers, speaking together concerning our innermost secrets. Therefore I began to conjecture many things, and sought means to turn his strangeness of manner, making my supplication before the gods. For such was my character that I would do anything for a friend I loved. But I resolved to rid myself of grief, for why should I count myself worthy to rank with a king, or to be continually in his sight?

With these thoughts I calmed my heart; and yet, for all this, the spirit of joyfulness would not return within me.

After some little time had passed, Krishna the Royal One travelled with an escort north of the dominions, even to the borders which adjoined Bijapur, that he might meet the Âdil Shâh face to face. I was not sorry that I was not among the company, for it seemed to me the deed was rash and foolish, and was the result of encouragement by several nobles who were haughty by nature, and, being filled with riches, glory, and arrogance, sought to establish the power of themselves and their city by inflicting a further disgrace on a fallen enemy.

On the same day that Krishna the Râya with his escort had set out for the borderland of Bijapur, I laboured much on certain affairs I had on hand, until, as the sun sank low in the heavens, all things being done, I sought out the company of my father, for I felt I needed the companionship of an intimate friend. Vacora I might not see, for she had gone to a distant part of the city on a visit to Shirishi, who was now wedded to a captain of high rank. Therefore I went where I knew I should find Semore, my father. But he was not at home, so I questioned a guardsman at hand, and I learnt that he had but lately passed through the portico on his way to the gardens.

Presently I perceived him in the distance sitting on a stone seat in the shadow of a great tree, for the day was still hot.

He seemed somewhat thoughtful. He remained

with his knees crossed, his face resting in his hands and his eyes gazing into the slowly colouring skies. Even as I drew nearer he perceived me not till, as a twig crackled beneath my feet, he moved his head, and, seeing me coming, he smiled and stretched forth his hand with an expression of pleasure.

"Welcome, my son," he exclaimed, as, coming closer, I took a seat below him on the thick grass. "Welcome, indeed, for thou and I see but little of each other in these busy times. Glad am I that thou sought me, Patcola, for I was feeling wearied. But didst thou ever behold a more splendid night scene than this? Surely the air is sweet with the breath of the heavens."

"Indeed, my father," I answered, "it is very fair." And I cast mine eyes around, letting them rest in turn on the slowly lowering sun, which in another hour or so would have passed altogether beyond the sight of man; the misty hills clothed with shrubs and youthful palms; then, nearer, the tiny artificial lakes dotted here and there with the beautiful water-lily; and, within a stretch of our hands, nodding dreamy flowers of a hundred kinds in between the rank, rustling grass.

"When I think of thee and thy favour in the Râya's sight," continued my father after a little pause, "my old heart leaps up with pride and happiness, and I rejoice in possessing such a son as thee."

"I thank thee, my father," I answered, "thy words are sweet indeed."

"An honour art thou to the noble house, and surely to such as I, who can only boast of thee and thy sister as nearest kin; 'tis pleasant to have a reward in my old days."

"Thou art not as yet aged," I cried; "thine eye is as keen, thy step as firm, as one in the prime of youth."

"But the heart is old, my son, and the mind is weary and worn; we cannot live for ever. One comes, another goes, such is the path of life."

"Thou speakest of sad things, my father; thy spirits have fallen, I fear; let me enliven thee if I may, I pray thee."

"And yet I speak of no sad things, my son, if we think on its other side. But thy life is little spent. So be it. Make good use of the part which yet remains, and thy father's spirit will bless thee."

"Talk not of spirits, I have little besides thee, thou knowest——"

After this there was a long pause, and my father became again thoughtful for a while. As for me, I looked upon his countenance and it astonished me, for I saw things I had not noticed there before. And I saw that his features had an old look, as of one whose life is about to depart, and I marvelled that mine eyes had not observed this at other times; but I realized the truth of his words, and

for the first time I thought seriously of them, remembering his great age.

"Art thou friendly with the sons of Sâluva Timma?" asked my father at last.

"Nay, I care not for their company, nor the company they keep; yet when we meet we are most courteous."

"Thou art right in thy discretion, it may serve thee one day in good stead. They and many others are none too well pleased at the favour the Râya shows thee, and sometimes I have quaked for thy safety. Moreover, thy proud and reserved bearing goes not well with them. Hast thou not seen this for thyself?"

"I have understood a little," I answered; "but thou knowest I hold little intercourse with them, therefore their opinion is nothing to me."

"'Tis well to take it thus, my son. It appears they fear my power; but who can say in the time when I am gone how things will be? Even the Râya's favour may easily swerve. But I warn thee look to thyself in all things, for Ganda Raja, I tell thee, is no friend of thine."

"I thank thee for thy care, my father," and I longed to tell of the strange things which had befallen on the night of our return from Bijapur, and of Krishna's sudden coolness. But I could not, knowing how it would add to my father's anxiety.

"When thinkest thou the Râya will return from

the borderland?" I asked, wishing to change the subject.

"I know not; 'tis a foolhardy deed he has done, to my thinking, and an arrogant one, though I count it due to other influence. What is thy opinion?"

"The same, my father, only up till now I have kept such thoughts to myself."

"'Tis wise, at least for a time; but I am glad to find that thou hast cherished the same idea, for it seems it is the only foolish thing I have ever known him do, and I pray it may be the last. For of all the rulers of Vijayanagar, such a one as the royal Krishna has never been before."

"Thou admirest him not more than does thy son," I answered. "He is perfect."

"Or had been save for this one thing, thou meanest. But perhaps we find too much fault."

"And thinkest thou the fortress Raichur will again return into the hands of Bijapur?"

"Never," replied my father, with vehemence. "Never. Certain properties may be restored, but never the city, for which a river ran with blood."

"Yet by the conditions it has been agreed to restore it."

"But they will never be fulfilled. Think ye that the Sons of Victory would not cry aloud at such an outrage? No, perhaps the Râya may offer some more honourable terms, when at last they meet face to face, or may be the Âdil Shâh

will seek to let matters be as they are without any further ado, and therefore not arrive at the appointed time. More I cannot say."

After this we remained silent till at last my father arose, and together we trod the flowery paths, till we came in sight of the verandah, where we again halted.

"Thou wilt partake of a meal with me now that thou art come? It would be pleasant to have it here in the cool shadows."

"As thou wishest," I answered, and, turning round to one who waited, he bade that the repast might be brought in.

When it came and had been set before us, we seated ourselves on the verandah, and were about to eat when a servant came upon us suddenly with a message for my father.

"It seems, my son, I must leave thee a while; there is some business of importance awaiting my attention. But do not trouble about me; I will return as soon as I may, or else sup at another time."

He arose, and I went with him through the apartment down to the corridor, for I perceived that his steps were somewhat more feeble to-day than usual.

Presently, when I returned to the apartment, a strange sight met mine eyes. There, on the verandah, where the food lay ready for our eating, hovered two great birds, seeking to snatch it away.

And as I was on the point of crying out so as to frighten them, the birds for an instant came nearer, and dipping down their wings seized a large portion of rice from off my platter. Whereupon I dashed forward with a clapping of hands, and immediately they flew swiftly away. After I had regarded their flight for a moment, I would have called for another supply, seeing the food was now polluted, when I heard a strange cry and a flutter in the distance. And I perceived that the two birds lay upon the ground, beating their wings, and screaming in a way I could not understand. It continued for a short time, when, of a sudden, one of the birds darted a short way in the air with a great cry, and immediately fell again, and moved no more. Presently the other ceased its struggles, and I ran down the verandah into the gardens to learn the cause of this strange sight, for at first I thought some reptile had, unseen by me, inflicted some injury.

I soon knew it was not so, for on looking closer, it needed little to show me they had perished by a poison of some deadly kind, and by their appearance they had suffered much.

For a few moments I could scarcely comprehend what I had seen. Yet I could not be deceived. Some enemy had sought by this wicked means to get rid of me; and my father's words came before me so that in that instant, while I stood beside the dead birds, many things coursed through my brain,

and the names of several men came to my lips ; but of the truth of my conjecture I had no proof ; and I could not accuse at hazard. I could only think that some evil-minded person had taken advantage of the Râya's absence to compass my death, because, at such a time, possibly there would be less inquiry into the matter.

Suddenly a thought came to me, and, leaving the birds, I strode quickly back to the verandah and examined the food carefully ; first that on my platter, and then my father's. But the poison had been absorbed skilfully, and I could not perceive any trace of it. Still I was eager to know if this wickedness had also been played upon my aged sire, so I went out to a smaller apartment, where I knew a tame bird often appeared at my call, and, returning, I dipped its beak in the rice on my father's platter, making it eat. Then I watched, placing it on the ground before me. But nothing happened, except that the bird chirped more sweetly, giving its thanks. Whereupon I was more satisfied, knowing that my life alone had been attempted.

Presently the bird which I had made eat flew away, and in the silence which came after its songs had departed, I rendered many thanks to the holy Ones who had cast their shield over me. Then I arose, and taking the dish wherein the poison lay I went out quietly, and hid it in a place where it might never be found. But the other I scattered

about, that the birds might consume it, because it was not right it should be wasted.

At once I stood back, and immediately there came a darkening mass from the heavens, a motley of cries broke upon my ear, and birds of many kinds devoured it till the last morsel. When they arose nought remained save a tiny tuft of plumage, broken, perchance, from the wing of one of the eager crowd.

Now, even this evil incident for a time I kept to myself, since I could not accuse any one definitely. Though at first I bethought me to seek out those who had the preparing of the food, but, after reflection, I let it be. But thenceforward neither drink nor food passed my lips except what was cooked by one man, to whom I knew I could trust my life, for he loved me, because in the time of a famine I had nourished him as he lay nigh unto death.

To him alone I related the story of the poisoned birds, and he with vehemence vowed by his life that he would see to it none should have access to my food. So I gave him power, making him my personal attendant. He also promised not to reveal the tale till I should give him permission, as I had taken it upon myself to watch continually, so that I might by some means seize on the offender and bring him before the seat of justice.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEATH ROSES

AFTER many days had elapsed, heralds arrived hastily at the entrance to the great gates of the city, crying aloud that the Râya was returning with his troops from the land of Bijapur. Immediately the gates were thrown open, and the people made ready a welcome with music and great shouting. Then the messenger related before the nobles who had remained in Vijayanagar the things which had befallen the Râya's party since the day he had set out. And it seemed that the Âdil Shâh had not come out to the meeting-place, nor had they by any chance seen each other's face, though an ambassador of the name of Asada Khân, a man of great fame, had brought a message, after which he fled, because it was found that his message was false.

Krishna Deva was angry at the affront, and would by some means have forced the appearance of the Âdil Shâh; but the water, of which the supply was small, had run out, so that they might not tarry.

Presently the troops entered the city, and Krishna Deva instantly proceeded to the palace.

That evening a messenger came, bidding me come into the Râya's presence.

As I went, I could not but wonder what kind of reception I might have, since for a long time before Krishna Deva went forth to Bijapur, he had not called me, as had been his wont. And also I could not be sure that some enemy had not turned the Râya's affection from me; because I had knowledge that many were eager to take my place in the royal favour.

Therefore I was much surprised when, on entering his apartment, he greeted me with a greater show of affection than usual. But it pained me to notice how worn his features were, and how his eye had lost the flash of merry youth.

"Thou comest to me at a time when I most need thee," he began wearily.

"I am sorrowful to behold thee thus," I answered; "surely thou hast exhausted thyself."

"'Tis nought. And how fared ye during this long while? Thou seemest to carry a sadder countenance than when I beheld thee last."

"Most things have gone well," I answered.

"Surely I am glad to see thee again," continued the Râya, "and I grieve that before my journey I did not have more of thy company. Perchance thy wisdom might have been of use to me at Bijapur just now, for I have not forgotten how at that great battle of Raichur thou didst see things with a different eye from all others.

Nevertheless, I am sure thou didst pray for a good outcome to this enterprise, a better one, indeed, than the gods have accorded."

"I prayed for thy safety," I answered with emphasis.

"I thank thee. I know thy blessing was invoked on me and my doings."

"Not on thy doings, O Râya, but on thee."

"Bold words, indeed," he cried, turning suddenly round in his seat; "of a truth, none but thee should say this before my face. But speak on, for thy licence is unending. So thou didst not approve of my late dealings with Bijapur? I ask thee why?"

"My reasoning told me that it befitted not with thy usual character," I replied, for I was not afraid to speak my thoughts, knowing that the Râya would receive them in good faith. "Thine intentions were not such as would raise thee in the eyes of other rulers."

"Continue thy reasons fully," broke in the Râya, as I paused a moment.

"The people counted thee perfect in all things, and few before have reached that standing in the hearts of their subjects."

"They were with me in this thing," he broke in. "I love—I am loved. What more might any monarch desire?"

"That they keep that love."

Again there was a silence between us, and I

observed that Krishna Deva was weighing in his mind the truth of my words. Presently he spoke again.

“Thy words are harsh, and, as I have said, none but thee should dare speak thus. But I perceive thou hast spoken out of the faithfulness in thy heart. Nevertheless, I swear I will die having no worse a character, for I will see to it that henceforth I lose not another grain of goodness. Thou hast placed things before me lighting them with a different lamp, and I thank thee. Possibly the deed was somewhat rash, but, as thou knowest, the cringing message of the Âdil Shâh provoked me to wrath. Let a man when he is fallen bear himself bravely, say I, then he is not altogether vanquished. Now I would tell thee of another thing which I have kept to myself for some little time. Thou art aware that the Râyas of Vijayanagar die all by the one disease? This sickness is already drawing slowly upon me. Nay, do not speak—but hear me to the end. For a long while I have seen the signs, and kept it secret, until at last I saw I must make preparations against the time when I finally depart. Therefore I have resolved to name my son as King while yet I live, so that I may know all things are in order, and that there will be no dispute in the days to come. I am aware that my son is but a child, still he is being trained as a Râya of Vijayanagar should be, and, I doubt not, will follow in my foot-

steps when I die. Now, what thinkest thou of my plan? for none as yet know of it save Sâluva Timma."

"A good one indeed," I answered sadly; "thy speech has made me mournful, but thou knowest whether it is necessary to do as thou sayest."

"It is," he said gravely; "hitherto my life has been as an unwinding cord; but now, behold, I see the end thereof, and there is no hope."

We fell into silence, and I could not prevent the sorrow that leapt to my heart. And methinks the Râya saw it, for he smiled, and commenced to speak again.

"And now," he cried, "I feel I need a rest after all my labours, for, as thou knowest, I have led a warrior's life all my days. At Raichur I thought thou wouldst have accomplished thy last mission for me, but now it seems the time has come when I can give thee another. It is this—if thou canst, remain with the Prince, my son, when I am no more, and mould his ruling according to thy discretion."

"Thou hast put a difficult task upon me; perchance others may come between me and him, and he would not listen to any word of mine."

"I will arrange it otherwise, thou needst have no fear. Thy companionship has been very, very dear to me, Patcola, and in many ways, perhaps unconsciously, thou hast made me what I am."

That same afternoon I went out of the city into a more lonely part, on the side of a hill where the trees grew thick and uncultured, and the flowers blossomed in wild luxuriance. Several times I had been here before, because the place was so quiet, and very pleasant when I was obliged to think deeply on any matter.

But on this day I came for another purpose; the instructor of my youth (a very wise Brahman, whom I dearly loved) had sent me a message that morning, saying he had some important communication to make to me in private. Therefore he suggested that to ensure our being undisturbed in any way, we should repair to this secluded spot at the time he said.

So it chanced that I arrived a long while before the appointed hour; but methinks the gods had a hand in this, as thou wilt see hereafter.

It was very pleasant to wander slowly over the short grass which grew thicker and higher as the trees became denser; and knowing I should have to wait, I did not hurry, but enjoyed the loneliness of the place in contrast to the noisy never-resting city.

Suddenly I beheld the figure of a man moving carefully in and out of the trees, a little in front, and I should have taken no further notice, had it not been that his walk was stealthy, and he looked from side to side furtively, as if he hoped he might not be seen.

Just then he glanced round in my direction (yet without seeing me), and I was astonished to behold that it was Ganda Raja, one of the sons of Sâluva Timma.

Now, before I go any further, I will say a little concerning this Ganda Raja, because it was he indeed more than all the others, who bore such jealousy towards me, for the only reason that in all things I had outdone him. Even in our early youth, when we were taught under the same instructor (whom I hoped to meet this day), his hatred had shown itself, and when we came to years of discretion, and held high offices in the Râya's court, still it lay between us. Ofttimes I had thought it possible that it might be he who had caused the poison to be placed in the dish of rice.

Therefore on this day, seeing his stealthy manner, I became curious and suspicious, especially as I remembered that in the earlier part of the day I had, in his presence, refused an invitation from a friend, giving as my reason that I had promised at a certain hour to meet the aged Brahman of whom I have spoken; I had not considered it necessary to keep the knowledge of it private. Nevertheless, when I perceived Ganda in this place, all that I had said came back to my mind, and I drew into the shelter of the trees and watched a while.

Once more I saw him look keenly on every side,

and then bring out two large roses from beneath his tunic and examine them. Whereupon he turned his back a moment to the place from where I watched, and I could not distinguish his movements. Only I know he bent a long while over the blossoms; at last, binding them together with grass, he laid them on a great stone bank, where they would be easily seen, especially as there were no such flowers round about.

All at once a smile passed over his face, and I, watching, must have let a twig snap beneath my feet, for I saw him start, look around once, and then walk swiftly up a path which led back again towards the city.

I emerged from my hiding-place, and went across to the strange flowers, examining them carefully at a little distance, for I was very suspicious as to their presence.

Presently I went a little nearer and touched them with a piece of stick, when they fell off the bank, and as I stooped a little lower over them I felt a sudden giddiness pass over my brain, and a strange heavy perfume creep up my nostrils. But it passed, as I staggered away a pace or two from the roses. And then all was clear to me, and I saw how Ganda had placed a deadly poison in their midst, hoping that I should come upon them and take them up, and then——

Having a good knowledge of medicine and anything relating to physic, I understood the nature

of this rare poison, which was so deadly that to breathe it thrice would end in certain death. And as I stood there I thanked the gods because they had brought me to this place before the appointed time, for verily I might have fallen into the evil trap.

Just at that moment I beheld a man hurrying towards me down the path by which I came. And on his approaching nearer, I saw he was a servant of the household of the priest I had come to meet.

I went to meet him, leaving the roses on the ground; and I learnt that his master had been seized with a sudden illness, and could not come, but would see me in his house in the evening an hour before sunset.

After the messenger had departed, I went back to where the flowers lay, and a quick thought suddenly flashed through my mind.

I plucked a great leaf from a branch of a tree, and gathered up the roses in it, being careful not to take breath near them. Then, holding them behind my back, I ran forward very quickly in an opposite direction to that which Ganda had taken, for I knew by thus doing I must presently come upon him face to face, as he had gone one side of a circle and I the other.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BEGINNING OF WOE IN THE CITY

IN a little while I beheld him at some distance unconsciously coming nearer to me, so I kept in the shelter of the hedges until I came within a few paces of him.

Then I emerged, and, going forward, saluted him in a loud voice, still keeping the roses at my back.

He started violently, and I saw a look of evil astonishment come over his face; but having great power over himself, he put his thoughts behind a cover of sweetness, asking which way I had come.

I answered him in the same friendly manner, telling him the reason I was there (but this he already knew), and the message that had been brought to me.

Whereupon he would have bidden me farewell, and retraced his steps (possibly to take up the flowers, lest they should work their poison on any one who came that way, for verily I believe he would have done no other person harm), when I stopped him, saying that surely there was no need for hurry.

"Besides," I continued, "if thou wert returning because thou hast dropped something that belongs to thee, I think I may save thee that trouble. On my way I found these lying in my path, and deeming them too beautiful to be cast aside, I brought them with me."

I uncovered the leaf from the roses, and held them out at arms' length, seeming to admire them, yet all the time I watched his face narrowly, and I saw him start backwards, muttering something under his breath.

"They are thine?" I asked again, and so well did I manage my voice that I believe he did not think I knew they were poisoned.

"Mine? Mine? No!" he cried roughly; "why should I carry such things about except on feast days? I leave them for the women."

"These are beautiful," I answered, pretending not to notice his agitation. "But of a surety they have been plucked from thy garden; the perfume is unlike any other. Wilt thou enjoy it?"

And I thrust the flowers nearer to him. But with a yell he jumped back two paces.

"What, art thou afraid of a rose, my friend? dost thou think some evil spirit lurks therein?"

"I am not afraid, but a sudden pain overcame me."

"Doubtless," I said, smiling; "and these sweet roses would not only bring about a sudden pain, but something more, eh?"

We looked at each other, and he saw I knew they were poisoned; whereupon he began to tremble violently, staring at me wildly.

"Thou needst have no fear of me as yet," I continued sternly. "The gods have protected me, and brought thy evil design to nought," and I related how I had seen him placing the roses in my path. "Also," I cried, "some time past I came upon a poisoned dish set down for——"

"How?" he interrupted, "how didst thou know?"

"I did not know till now, but thine own mouth hast condemned thee. That matter I kept to myself, and, since, I have watched, though I never thought that one of thy caste would do this thing. Hast thou no heart?"

He made no answer, standing as if rooted to the earth.

"The death roses I keep," I went on. "Now get thee away out of my sight, thou unworthy man, knowing that at any time I can lay my proofs before the Râya. As it is, remember that the gods have seen thy deed; make a penance before them, and then perchance in time to come I may find a way to forgive. Thou art not worthy yet to die, thou disgracer of thy caste, hence I allow thee another chance."

"A noble kindness," he answered sullenly. "I could not live if my life is hanging upon a single word of thine."

“Thou needst have no fear so long as thy future deeds are honourable. Though think not that it is altogether for thy sake. I remember thy children, and certain members of thy family whom I love. Only thank the gods that thy deed was known in time; I never did the harm to merit such a death as this. Now go, and perchance I may see thee at another time when I hope thy mind will be more fit.”

Whereupon he looked at me half curiously and then turned, and without a word walked slowly down the grass with his head bent.

The things of which I now tell happened one moon after the meeting with Ganda Raja.

Behold, Krishna Deva has named his son as Râya in his stead, and has himself even made obeisance before him. Most of the nobles are pleased, though hoping as I do that Krishna Deva may live a long while. Only Sâluva Timma is wrathful, because, as I have said, he has for a long time cherished an ambition towards the throne, or at least would see his son safely set thereon. And many a time when, unknown to him, I have seen him in company with his chosen friends, his rage has been terrible to behold; so that verily, I believe he hates the little prince.

Would I might have discerned the evil which at this time lay in his heart, then perchance I might not have spent my days in mourning, weeping over

what could not return, nor lamenting upon the sorrows of a fallen race. Truly one man may raise a kingdom with his might, but also may he cast it down by reason of his wickedness.

But push back, O my spirit, and pick up the thread of unsullied honour; neither at this time let the tears of sorrow creep up as a mist before thine eye, for the evil has yet to come. Behold, it hangs like the clouds of a tempest upon us, nevertheless for a time we perceive it not, for the gleam of the sun is yet strong, and it shoots forth its rays from the depths of the unknown East.

On a certain day it happened that I was speaking with Rama Aliya¹ (to whom I have alluded before) in the courtyard of the palace, when Krishna Deva himself came towards us.

Soon after, one of the guards belonging to the outer gate approached us with a puzzled look upon his face, and having made an obeisance before the Râya, stated that some lady of high rank waited in her litter beyond the gates, demanding either to see the Râya or myself. It seemed that she had something of importance to say, for she would not leave.

On questioning the man further we learnt her name, and what was my astonishment when I heard it was Vacora herself who waited without.

“But,” I cried, “she has gone on a journey this

¹ “Aliya” = son-in-law. By this name Rama was often known.

morning to a distant part of the city, and will not return before night."

"Thou hadst best go and see," said the Râya, turning to me; but as I bowed and turned to walk hurriedly to the gates, Krishna Deva called me back.

"Let the bearers bring her litter here," he commanded. "I will see her for myself."

Then he waited without a word, though I was filled with wonder, not knowing whether to be angry with Vacora.

Presently I saw the litter approaching through the inner gates, and when it was half-way to us, I went forward.

"What is this, Vacora?" I asked through the half-open curtains. "What mad thing can have possessed thee?"

But she made no answer, only, catching sight of the Râya, gave a little scream, and before I knew what had happened, she flung herself out of the litter and ran towards him.

"O Krishna Deva," I heard her cry. "I pray that I am not too late. Is the Prince, thy son, safe?"

"Safe?" echoed the Râya. "What meanest thou, lady?"

"Command instantly," she continued in an excited voice, "command one whom thou canst trust to go to him; for there be danger afoot, O Râya, by thy head I swear it."

"Danger!" cried Krishna Deva, with sudden sternness; "continue with what thou hast to say."

Then he turned to Rama; "go thyself or send to the Prince and see that all is well with him."

"Aye, go swiftly, and see to it, for there is no time to lose," broke in Vacora. "I have been delayed by things I could not help, else my tale should have been told an hour back."

Whereupon she swayed heavily to one side, and I caught her in my arms.

"Come on to the pavilion," commanded the Râya; "'tis shady there, and I see thou art exhausted."

So Krishna Deva took a seat thereon, while I stood with Vacora before him.

"Now, perchance, we may hear thy tale, for at the word of danger to my son I feel my blood leap up. Calm thyself if thou canst. Say, who is at the head of this plot? But I pray it may be a false report."

"'Tis no false report," cried Vacora shrilly. "What I have heard, I have heard, and only the gods themselves can prevent the issue."

"Tell thy tale," I cried in her ear, for I saw that Krishna Deva was impatient.

"It is short," she answered; "this morning I went on a journey to a friend's house which lies in the north quarter of the city. And as we were walking along the paths of the great garden, this

friend was obliged to leave me for a little while, and return to the house. Whereupon I walked alone along a narrow avenue enclosed by tall hedges, so thick that none could see through it. Presently I heard men's voices coming from the other side, and I would have retreated, only that I heard certain words which made me stay my steps. I looked through a tiny hole in the hedge, and, lo! I beheld thy minister and his two sons talking together, and the look on their faces was the look of evil."

"What!" shouted Krishna Deva; "thou dost not mean that they are traitors? if it be so, by the gods—— But I pray thee proceed, and that swiftly; I am impatient."

"By their speech," continued Vacora, "I understood that a plot was on foot to slay this thy eldest son by poison, so that there might be no heir of any years. And it seems that their plot was to be fulfilled this day, and they laughed, saying that the City would have strange news sung in its ears to-night. This was all, for they moved a little aside, so that only a name and an occasional word fell on mine ears."

"What names?" questioned Krishna Deva in a strange voice.

"Even the name of this my lord," and she looked towards me; "and I could tell they were very wrathful against him. Why, I know not. After that, I bade farewell to my friend without

giving any reason for my departure, and came here before thy Highness. And now I am glad I am not too late; thy son must be safe, else the news would——”

But the words died on her lips, for at this moment we heard the sound of quick feet upon the stones, and Rama came hurriedly towards us, followed by a small group of lords and servants. Their faces? Ah, they were pale as death, and I saw Rama open his mouth to speak when his lips were frozen.

So we stared at each other for an awful moment, feeling a foreboding of evil, yet not daring to speak a single word; till Krishna Deva arose from his seat, an awful sternness written upon his face.

“The Prince—what of the Prince?” he cried. “Are ye all dumb?”

Again Rama (that strong man who could look upon death without flinching) opened his mouth to speak, then covered his face with his hands.

But Krishna Deva, beside himself with anger and impatience, unsheathed his sword, and brought it down heavily upon the pillars, so that a great piece of the carved work fell off, shattered into fragments. The noise of the blow roused our senses, for Rama immediately raised his head, and coming forward knelt at the King’s feet, clasping his hand in his.

“Thy son,” he cried brokenly, “thy son—woe

unto me that I should be a bearer of ill news—but he is no more.”

When the awful words were uttered, we remained silent, and Krishna Deva he neither moved nor spoke, but stared vacantly in front like one who is moulded in stone.

Then of a sudden we heard a shrill scream, and Vacora fell prone upon the ground.

And the Râya also heard the cry, for it somewhat roused him from the depths of blankness; and afterwards I could not but think that perchance the noise took him a little out of himself, and so saved him from a loss of reason.

Suddenly a wild cry broke from his lips, till at last it seemed as a kind of dirge wailing up and down the courts.

“My son, my son,” he cried. “Woe is come upon me in the midst of joy. My son, my son.”

Then the echoes in the arches caught it up, and the grief of a strong man found an answering voice.

CHAPTER XV

BROKEN THREADS

THAT same night Krishna Deva laid command upon the few who knew of the treachery of Sâluva Timma and his sons, that they should not reveal their knowledge until such time as he should name. For he desired to accuse the minister in his own way.

Therefore many rumours went about as to the manner in which the Prince died, some thinking it was the issue of an accident.

And it seemed that Vacora's warning came but a very short time too late, since at the moment she entered the palace gates, he must have eaten of the poisoned dish. Thus had the hope of Vijayanagar departed.

It was very late that night when I reached home and found Vacora fully robed, waiting for me in her chamber.

"What, art thou yet up?" I cried. "Dost thou know the hours quickly pass toward the morning?"

"I could not sleep, my lord," she answered, "though I seem weary."

"Aye, my rose, this has been a terrible day for

thee; but get to rest as quickly as thou canst, for on the morrow the Râya has commanded that I take thee with me to the palace at the time when he summons Sâluva Timma."

"And what think ye will come to pass with regard to the minister and his sons?"

"I know not," I answered. "Whatsoever Krishna wills—that is law. Nevertheless, I doubt not that the traitors will be, of a truth, surprised when they learn that their plot is known, and the method of its being known. Perchance they hoped it might have been put upon another, as doubtless it would have been done but for thee, my rose."

"And yet, as I proved too late in my warning," she answered, clasping her hands before her, "I would almost I had not heard their speech, for O my lord, besides this plot, they spoke of thee with awful words, and there were some things I could not understand, for they mentioned some evil which had failed to work upon thee. Hast thou known nought of this?"

"What were their words concerning me?" I questioned, before giving an answer.

"Only, my lord, that they supposed thou hadst worn a charm against the evil, seeing that nought else could withstand it."

Then I told her all concerning the poisoned dish, and the death roses I had seen placed near the path in the thick woods. Also I told her how I had confronted Ganda Raja with the deed.

“Why didst thou not tell me of all this before?” she cried when I had finished; “surely thou oughtest to have taken me into the secret. O my lord, if I had known of this, methinks I should not have rested till the offender had been brought to justice; and yet thou wert able to accept such a thing in calmness, and with little fear. What if the gods had not cast their shield upon thee?”

And overcome she flung herself into my arms, weeping and naming me with words of affection.

“Nay, my love,” I soothed her; “calm thyself, I pray thee. Glad am I that the evil deed was not known by thee before, for, in truth, thou couldst not possibly have contained thyself. Thou wouldst have eaten out thy heart with anxious care. Now, I pray thee, my love, let not thy heart have any cause to be fearful for me. If thy sorrow at the Prince’s death will allow, cast away these unhappy thoughts.”

“I thank thee,” she answered softly; “thou art ever good. Still, apart from mourning that the hope of the city has passed away, there seems a heavy sorrow, or rather a strange foreboding come upon me.”

“Thou art overwrought, and dreams and unhappy thoughts will come at such times. Thou wert ever fanciful in thy reckonings, and dreaming of things to come and things past.”

“But my dreamings, as thou callest them, my

lord, have not proved themselves to be mere idle wanderings."

"Nay, I know," I answered, forcing a smile, "thy imagination is keen, ever ready to dive into something thou dost not understand; and yet, if it pleases thee, continue, only I would thou might see fancied pictures of a more lively kind, and one able to bring a light into those dear eyes, or a smile to play upon those sweet lips."

Once again we spoke of Sâluva Timma.

"Yea," I cried, "methinks this once he has played with a desperate hand, he has aimed his ambition at too high a peg. It has fallen; so has he."

"Verily," she answered quietly; "yet what man is there who, continually gazing upon the stars, does not meet some hindrance in the path, and, stumbling, break his neck? Yet it were better than the man who, doing nothing but grovel, does not see the rising road by which he might ascend."

To this I made no answer, but I knew not that in the years to come I should have cause to think on her words concerning two men—one casting his eyes upwards, seeing nought before his feet; the other, without ambition or even self-respect, content to plod in the midst of mire when a bramble but barred the way to the higher slopes. Perchance for thyself ye may read the meaning after my tale is done. Till then let it be as a riddle, whereof the answer weaves itself from the midst

of a tangled mass, some of whose threads are short, while others stretch a long, long way.

Next morning I took Vacora with me to the palace, and having left her in the ante-chamber with her women, I went down the corridors, when suddenly I met Rama Aliya face to face.

"How fares the Râya this morn?" I asked.

"Better than I expected from his appearance yesternight," he answered. "Nevertheless, henceforth the light has vanished from his eye, and the smile from off his lips. It was his only son, thou knowest, save the babe still in his mother's arms."

"I know," and we stood for a moment clasping each other's hands.

"This morning as thou art aware," continued Rama, "Sâluva Timma and his sons have been summoned before the Râya, having no knowledge of the reason of the summons. Perchance they think it is to confer some new honour upon them, for the message was couched in terms that were more than usually courteous." And Rama laughed to himself.

"What hope has the city now?" I exclaimed, reflecting that there was no heir except certain brothers of Krishna Deva, and more distant relatives, of whom report did not speak well.

Then suddenly Rama became very thoughtful, and I questioned him as to the reason. But he vouchsafed no answer, only looked me steadfastly in the eyes,

"Thou and I may have occasion for another speech in no far distant time," he observed, "other than the mere chance talk of courtiers. Who can tell its bearing?"

And while I was still pondering on his words he passed me by without another word, and I watched him closely till his noble figure had vanished altogether from sight.

Less than an hour later I stood in the great company of nobles before the Râya, with Vacora by my side.

Sâluva Timma and his sons had just entered, and I saw Krishna Deva receive him in a friendly manner, though with a strange look.

In a little while, after the dead silence, the voice of the Râya broke suddenly upon our ears, startling, for there was something in his tones, which I can liken to nought save a quiet sea, which for a time seems calm and passionless, nevertheless, we know that fury lies beneath ready to wreak its vengeance.

"Welcome and greeting, my lord," he cried after a pause, turning his eyes full upon the minister; "surely I was never so glad, most noble servant, to behold thee here, and these thy sons."

"I do thy bidding," rejoined Sâluva Timma with a deep salaam, "I and my sons. Our service is altogether in thy hands."

"I know it, O most faithful ones, I know it, and thou shall never have cause to say that I did not

requite thee fully ! As it chances, it is for this purpose that we have caused thee to appear before these my lords, for though it is a time of mourning (and thy heart, I know, weeps greatly for us in our sorrow), still, thy great deeds and thy loving kindness call for a great reward, so that before my chiefs I would invest thee with another honour, befitting thee and thine, who have ever been faithful, and ever sought to further the glory of thy ruler, and all that appertains to his dominions. Thy sons, too, I have not forgotten, for they have inherited thy character."

"How can I answer thy kindness?" cried Sâluva. "Surely I and my sons do not deserve thy gifts; and yet it shows thy great heart that thou shouldst think of us at such a time when weeping and mourning has befallen thee, though doubt not, were it possible, willingly would I altogether bear thy sorrow."

"I know it," cried the Râya; and I perceived with wonder how perfectly he disguised his anger, so that his words appeared to proceed out of a grateful heart. "I know it," he continued, "and it is a pleasure to reward thee according to thy faithful deeds, though apparently thou hast not yet guessed the reason wherefore I specially requite thee."

There was deep silence for a moment, when the Râya suddenly altered his tones, and I knew the storm had come at last.

"What! Wretches that ye are! How dare your false hearts speak thus? Thou slayers of the king-to-be——"

These last words Krishna Deva shouted in a loud voice, so that every one within the hall trembled.

"I——?" began the minister in well-feigned astonishment and reproof, though I perceived that his hands worked nervously. But Krishna cut his speech short, and now I saw that the sea was no longer calm, and the fury which had been hidden showed itself, seeming all the greater because of its former quiet. The fire in his eyes flashed out, and I remembered that once when his men fled from him at Bijapur, he had appeared thus.

"So confident hast thou been in thy trickery that thou didst not perceive the trickery in my words of praise. Hear me now, thou and thy sons, and if ye can, show that ye are not guilty, for behold, I have proof that thou and thy family didst cause the prince, mine only heir, to die the death by poison."

The Râya paused a moment, and Sâluva Timma had already opened his mouth to deny the accusation, when Ganda, his son, seeing that all was known, could not even make a show of courage, but falling forward, called on the Râya's name, shrieking for mercy, and declaring his thought had not prompted the deed.

"Mercy thou askest?" cried Krishna, "then of a truth thou hast already condemned thyself while thy father seeks for words. And now," he continued, turning upon the minister, "what hast thou to say when thy son has confessed for thee?"

"Nought," he answered, seeing denials were of no avail, "save that I would know the source of thy information."

"That thou shalt learn later. Hast thou no word in thy defence?"

"I bandy no words," returned Timma coldly. "Doubtless thy favourites are delighted to see me thus, therefore I will not give them further pleasure."

He glanced around, resting his eyes on me.

"Hold thy base tongue," cried Krishna Deva furiously; "thou darest assume this bearing because thou art a Brahman, and one that may not be put to death. Also thou darest speak of favourites, but forsooth, I term them friends, one and all, and none but the worthy will I have about me. When I perceive a weed I pluck it out. Now hearken, for it is known to me that thou didst plot against one of these my faithful servants—which, thou knowest best—but as it came to nought, I deal only with the mightier offence, which shall at least rid us of thy presence."

There was a moment of silence, and Krishna the Râya turned aside, methinks to hide a sudden stab of grief.

"Thou base one," he cried again at last, "what shall I say unto thee? I held thee in esteem during all my life, giving thee governorships, gifts and great honours, and yet I would rather thou hadst put out mine eyes when ye were so commanded—rather than I should reign in glory, and have mine old age and the time of mine infirmity turned into sorrow. But I will make no show of grief before thee and thine. Lady," he continued, turning to Vacora, and pointing to the minister and his sons, "these were they who spake within thy hearing concerning this plot?"

"Yea," she answered quietly; and I perceived Sâluva Timma's face light up with an evil look.

"Is this the one, O Râya, who has informed against me?" he cried.

"The gods by some means put it in her way to overhear thy designs," answered Krishna Deva, "though it proved too late to prevent them."

"But by right I should learn how she heard her information," returned the minister with a change of manner. "I pray thee, do not deny me that boon."

Whereupon the Râya bade Vacora relate certain parts of her story, together with the manner of her knowledge.

"A noble deed," commented Krishna Deva to himself when it was told how she hurried with all speed to the palace bearing a message of warning.

"Truly noble," repeated Sâluva Timma, with a

sneer, catching at the muttered words, "and one worthy of a great reward."

Suddenly he made a quick movement; a wild scream rent the air, and Vacora fell heavily upon the ground.

Sâluva Timma stood above her with his arm outstretched, a long dagger flashing in his clenched hand.

A wild look was upon his face, and his whole body quivered with rage. With a loud cry I ran forward, but the minister stepped back quickly and took his stand on a large carved chest that stood in a corner. Bending forward with his arms upraised, he looked down mockingly at the crowd of nobles who rushed to the place. Then all was commotion and noise, while Sâluva Timma twirled the dagger over their heads, towering over them, and swaying to and fro.

Madness was written in his eyes; madness upon his face; and the whole company recoiled with horror at the sight. Once those in the front endeavoured to seize him, but he twisted out of their reach like a snake, and thrust the long dagger at them with such speed that it seemed like one continued flash.

Suddenly the Râya's voice rang out. He alone had remained calm, but now he arose and strode across the floor.

"Back, back, my lords," he cried. "Give us place."

At the sound of his voice Sâluva Timma paused. He ceased swaying; his mad eyes looked into the distance, and he put his head on one side like one who listens.

“Hark!” he cried shrilly. “Who would speak with me? I cannot hear. A thousand voices are calling to me—voices dead and living. They drown the speaker whom I would hear. What do they say? Their voices make a motley of sound. Krishna’s son I see, and he stands at the head of others talking to me, always talking. ‘Who art thou,’ he cries, ‘that thou shouldst remain side by side with the pure and honourable?’”

He rocked himself to and fro in his madness.

“Behold,” he continued, “I am the King’s high minister, Sâluva Timma the Brahman. I have issued from Brahma the Invisible—I am twice-born. I am pure, having been born pure. Who is so high as a Brahman? Who?”

He paused and commenced to brandish the dagger, darting it at any who came near.

His voice rose again like a wild shriek.

“And the King’s son saith unto me, ‘Who art thou to talk of honour? Who art thou to talk of purity? A Soodra is higher than thou!’ The Prince comes, and would gaze in my eyes, but I will not—cannot look.”

With a howl Sâluva Timma leapt from the chest, and stood quivering and wild-eyed upon the floor. His hands hung limp, and the dagger, sliding

from their grasp, fell to the ground. The nobles ran forward to him, but Krishna held up his hand and advanced alone.

Then he grasped the minister and stamped loudly upon the floor. Immediately the doors opened and the guards entered. Sâluva Timma wrenched himself free and fell into their midst.

"Some one has touched me," he howled, "some one akin to the King's dead son. I know the touch, and it burns my blood."

Without a word the Râya waved his hand, and part of the guard closed in round the madman and took him hence. Then the King turned to the minister's sons, who stood trembling with fright.

"See how the wrath of Heaven has fallen on thy father, so that he babbles of spirits that haunt him," he said, speaking with forced calmness. "Repent, lest it fall on you likewise. Behold, thee and thy parent have caused the death of thy ruler's son by a subtle art; others have been plotted against, and blood has been spilled in my presence. For these sins ye shall be taken forth and placed where there shall be no escape; never again shall ye walk in freedom, O evil-doers. I would ye were not Brahmans, for then my power would be greater; as it is we have no power upon your lives. Malice drinketh one-half of its own poison. Remember that. Now, what I have decreed, let it be done, for my word is spoken."

Then the remaining guards closed round them and bore them from the royal presence.

So this was the last I ever saw of the minister or his sons.

Then of a sudden I felt that the Râya was looking compassionately upon me, and rising, he commanded that the assembly should dismiss and the body of Vacora be given into proper care, so that it might be made ready for the ceremonials.

And while all this was done he strode towards me, laying his hand on my shoulder. When I looked up I beheld that his eyes shone with sympathy, and his smile was kindly though sorrowful.

And methinks in that moment when he laid his hand so compassionately upon me that I loved him even more, if that were possible, knowing that he could war as a lion when there was need, yet be gentle as a woman in the time of affliction.

Then he drew me forth without a word, till we came into another apartment. Still our speech could not come for the fulness in our hearts; but we clasped each other by the hand, and I was grateful to the Râya for the silence, for methinks his embrace and kindly eyes added more in the healing of my broken heart than if he had mourned openly with me.

All seemed blank before me—the lamp of my life had gone out; a great void lay in my heart; darkness encompassed my soul, and I seemed sinking into some great space that had no boundary,

neither any light. Then all at once the countenance of the Royal Krishna shone out in the midst of the darkness; his hand grasped mine more tightly, so that I came back into the present time of things, and where there was blackness before, a small star shot out into brilliancy, and my utter despair having left me, I became once more as a man, carrying my grief in a more noble style.

CHAPTER XVI

A VISION IN THE MIST

Two days later I sat with the Râya in his private apartment, when the subject of our conversation turned to Vacora's sudden death.

"O, my brother!" he cried, "what shall I say unto thee? Surely thou and I should find comfort in each other, as we are mourners together—thee for a wife, I for a son. With thee there is, however, some difference, for behold, thou art yet young, and canst marry again and raise up issue; as for me, I am old—perchance even nigh unto death—and I have no child to reign after my years are done. Therefore I am most desolate, and my kingdom with me."

"Aye, O Krishna Deva, my grief in many ways cannot compare with thine, yet each one mourns according to his own heart."

"Well said," he answered, turning so that we had a full view of the palace gardens and the pagodas that lay beyond. I thought how many times I had in his company looked forth upon the same scene. But then our hearts were glad and our speech mirthful, so that we beheld joy in everything.

"Well said," he repeated, after a short pause.

“Thou dost always speak wise thoughts. Thou shouldst have belonged to the body of priests, for there is the making of a priest in thee. Thy teachings and thy explanations of the Holy Vedas would have gained much praise, both in spiritual kind as well as from the lips of men.”

“Yet my calling has not been that way. But I have determined to dedicate certain portions of my wealth for the maintenance of a priestly body for the pagoda. Yet has it crossed my mind that since this sorrow has come upon me I would willingly become a recluse, a seeker after divine things, having speech with none, but fasting and praying always.”

“I should mourn to lose thee, Patcola. The thought is noble. But thou hast not altogether decided?”

“Nay, my allegiance is to thee. Therefore have I cast those intentions aside till another time, when, perchance, my own actions have no bearing upon any other, and I am alone without any kinsmen or friend.”

“I pray such a time may never be,” returned the Râya fervently. “Glad am I that thou dost not yield to thine intentions, though I would by no means stand between thee and thy holy thoughts. Thou hast witnessed my coming in, may thou also see my going out.”

“I would by no means outlive thee,” I answered hastily,

"Say not so," he cried, raising his hand. "Thou art younger than I by many years; if I remember rightly, thou wert but a youth at the time I first saw thee. How well I remember the strangeness of that meeting."

To this I made no answer, remaining with my hands clasped, and my brain revolving many things, waiting for the Râya to continue. I found it somewhat of a comfort to think of his sorrow together with mine own, knowing that my loss applied only to myself and my children, whereas the death of the young Prince might by no means be overcome.

"Now behold," he cried after a little pause, "I am much perturbed in the matter of a succeeding ruler. I have consulted the astrologers, but they give me little advice. Therefore, having considered all things, it must needs be that Achyuta, my brother and the next of blood, who has attained to years of discretion, succeed in my place."

"Thou speakest as if we were instantly to be cast into mourning again," I cried; "thou talkest continually of death."

"Which is not to be feared," he answered quickly. "But the succession must be settled speedily, for thou knowest the Râyas of Vijayanagar generally die but in one way; each is afflicted by the same sickness,¹ and I already—well, thou knowest——"

¹ So says history.

Now when Krishna Deva, the Royal One, mentioned the name of his brother as heir I was by no means astonished, since of late he had been the subject of talk. The little I had learnt of his character told me it was nothing akin to that of Krishna.

“In a short time,” he continued, with a sigh, “I must see to it that he be installed as ruler, even as my poor son was installed, for he now stands next as heir. Ah! methinks those servants of evil, Sâluva Timma and his sons, are guilty of a greater sin than they may think, for behold, they have changed the destiny of a mighty nation, and have caused us to pass out of our present incarnation with sorrow, not for one alone, but with a multiplied mourning, because the line of kings is not as it should be. Hast thou nought to say on this matter, O Patcola?” he cried when I made no answer or comment of any kind. “Dost thou halt for permission to speak? Thou knowest that thou alone hast all privilege belonging to a brother. I pray thee advise me in this matter if thou canst, notwithstanding I have consulted my wise men. But I would abide by that saying which thou art aware has a true bearing—‘Listen to the wisdom of others, and reject it not because it is obtainable without cost.’”

“Thou needst no words from me. ’Tis difficult to arrange such things for the benefit of thy people; yet, as ever, thy discretion is good, notwithstand-

ing many difficulties have forced themselves upon thee through the hand of evil-doers. Being of thy blood, perchance the Royal Achyuta is a pattern of thee."

"I fear his temperament is opposite to mine," returned the Krishna Deva. "Nevertheless, I doubt not that he will abide by certain requests that I shall place before him, as to those things of importance which I would have him do. In a little while I will make all things right, and at such time when the stars be more propitious, for at present the astrologers advise me to put my hand as yet to nothing. Now, I pray thee, Patcola, leave me for a while, and send Rama into my presence instantly."

Thereupon I went out and sought for Rama, telling him of the King's desire; and immediately I withdrew myself from my friends, seeking to be alone.

I withdrew myself into a far corner of a verandah where a branch from a pomegranate-tree from the outside hung down forming an arch. Here I sat down upon the floor, after spreading a mat, and let my mind reflect on many things. Suddenly I heard a great rustle among the trees beyond.

And while I looked, behold a mist fell before me, blotting out all save the dim outline of the towering palms. The mist continued in intensity, spreading over a great space till everything was shut out from view. Whereupon I would have risen because my

astonishment was great, when I saw that the cloud moved in many directions, like to the fingers of a great hand which opened and closed alternately, sometimes with a quickening speed.

Then gradually, very gradually, shapes of many kinds loomed forth out of the misty mass, and I beheld a procession of horsemen differently arrayed passing in a circle before me. But I saw no face as yet, for the cloud was altogether too great, so that only the silent figures seated upon galloping horses became visible. Also I discerned that every head turned towards the centre of the circle, where a vast column of vapour arose, towering above them till it stretched over the skies, covering them, though I noticed that it became fairer at the top, and more transparent, while the heart remained as a fountain of black smoke, so that no eye could pierce it.

Then, lo! one layer of mist passed away like a veil that is suddenly dragged from the face of an image, and I beheld that the procession was divided into companies. When I looked, behold they were six in number. Now of a sudden the companies ceased marching, the mist hung denser upon them, and the cloud extended yet closer towards the heavens, and I knew that the shapes were moving, though in a different manner. Presently the vapour rose again, and, lo! a still stranger sight fell before mine eyes, for the regiments on one side turned, and set themselves upon the numbers

on the other, so that five companies stood and were arrayed against one.

Again the mist lifted, but only upon the side where the one company stood, and I beheld with wonder that the sons of the City of Victory formed its ranks. The others I knew not, only that their regiments were five in number, for the vapour lay very heavily upon them. And while I looked, behold they joined themselves in battle, warring savagely upon each other, but the issue I could not determine, neither could I recognize any, save one, and, lo! it was Rama Aliya that stood in command of the Men of Victory.

Even as I looked upon him he faded away altogether; the vapour rose, becoming thicker, and I saw that the slain fell behind it so that none ever lay upon the field of battle.

Whereupon of a sudden the masses separated, the companies arranged themselves in order, the procession reformed, the mist grew denser in the centre, and the divisions to the number of six passed slowly round the central fountain. Suddenly they passed behind the curtains of mist and vanished.

Then I glanced towards the midst of the denser cloud which hung in the centre, and it became smaller, passing upwards. And as it passed I discerned that buildings of many kinds went with it, mounted as it were upon wings, till they vanished into nothingness in the higher air. And

though little was visible before mine eyes concerning the appearance of these buildings, yet I knew that the temples and the houses were those in which the people of the City of Victory dwelt, even at the hour when I beheld the vision. Therefore I gazed in fascination, watching the vapour melt away into smaller space, carrying many things upon it, till it had mounted a short way, when it would pass from mine eyes entirely. In a little while I beheld that the mist carried nothing with it, so that what remained formed into a great bubble, growing large and round in form.

Then a mighty noise broke upon mine ear; the ball of vapour burst into nothingness; something fell with force upon my face, and I awoke, trembling, and finding by the position of the sun's shadow that I had slept for a long while.

Then my hand came upon the thing which had struck me as I awakened, and behold, it was a cold green leaf fallen from a tree above. Seeing it was rolled in a peculiar fashion, out of curiosity I hastened to open it, when, lo! a flash of many colours rose from its midst, a rustle of tiny wings stirred the silence, and a large butterfly stretched its gaudy wings, and sailed away far into the midst of the dazzling sunshine.

I fastened my eyes eagerly upon it as it passed towards the north, through the space where I had beheld the cloud of vapour but an instant before. Presently it mounted higher, so that it came on a

level with the top branches of a mango-tree; whereupon it passed altogether from my sight.

"Hope has entered into my dwelling-place," I cried to myself; "surely it is a good omen." Then I thought of the bubble of vapour which had burst in my dream, floating away into nothingness.

"Hope followed on the heels of misfortune," I cried again; "I will not let my mind become disturbed."

"Art thou asleep?" said a voice close to my ear, and starting violently I saw that Rama stood within a hand's stretch. Quickly I recovered myself.

"Thou ponderest on deep things," he said, coming nearer and squatting down beside me. "Surely for the space wherein three-score might have been counted thou hast stood rigid as yon stone statue."

"I thought on many things," I answered; "I have cause to do so."

"Indeed thou hast," and he glanced rather curiously at me; "but I have brought thee tidings lately issued from the Maharâya's gracious mouth. Art thou prepared to hear them?"

"Even so, I pray thee disclose them," I cried; "goodly words ever proceed from the mouth of his Highness."

"Let us first move from this place, something hangs upon it that makes me shudder. Faugh! I sneeze, an omen that some wandering spirit is

lurking. Let us hence." And immediately he snapped his fingers, calling out the mystic word.

I silently followed him, till we came into another part. Then we seated ourselves, and Rama leant his hand upon my shoulder, speaking in low tones.

"I bear tidings of a great honour which has befallen thee and thy family; what think ye? Krishna Deva has given word that the body of thy wife, the lady Vacora, shall be burned according to the usual ceremonies, but the ashes that remain are ordained to be placed in a casket, golden, and much bejewelled. Also an inscription shall be placed thereon, telling how a daughter of the City of Victory shall henceforth be famed for her bravery because she risked much, and performed much to save the King's son. 'And though she failed,' says Krishna Deva, 'nevertheless, I vow this thing shall be as a perpetual memory before the people, and a thank-offering to her spirit.' These are his words."

"Truly the Râya honours my house too highly. I will convey my thanks when next he bids me come into his presence."

"Surely this will cause much talk in the city, my friend," continued Rama; "for what woman has yet attained to such a high degree of favour without being subject for ill-natured gossip?"

I made no answer, but continued sitting in silence looking before me.

"Hast thou nought else to say?" I cried at last, seeing how he had stayed his flow of words, for as a rule he was a man who loved to talk continually, debating and discussing many subjects with his friends.

"Nought else to say?" he repeated in astonishment, "nought else to say? What more wouldst thou? Methought I had told enough for at least a day, but thou talkest as if I had related a small thing. But let me leave thee, lest thou hast no time to consider and deliberate on my tidings," and he walked briskly away, and did not turn his head once to look back.

A little longer I stayed before I followed in his footsteps, and I could not but smile at his manner. Perchance he wondered that I mourned so continually, for as a rule the death of a woman is counted as little. But in this I was unlike my twice-born brothers, for I only understood the great worth of Vacora, and I cherished her memory, vowing never to wed again, since she had left me daughters and a son who might carry on my name.

CHAPTER XVII

MOURN YE FOR THE LIGHT EXTINGUISHED

SEVERAL moons have passed away, and behold, the news has gone throughout every part of the kingdom, and a wail rises up in every man's heart, for, lo! Krishna the Great Maharâya is dying, and no hand can save him!

And though the sickness has laid so heavily upon him, yet has he put all things in order ready for his departure, and Achyuta his brother has been named as the succeeding Râya.

The one subject in men's mouths concerns the sorrow which must so surely come upon us, for all love him dearly, save a certain few who secretly say that his deeds were stern and haughty, and that the glory over his enemies had puffed him up. Yet even these silenced their tongues after a time; and I upbraided any who I knew thought on such things, for I would not suffer my King to be spoken of thus.

Although he did one rash thing according to my mind, yet it was not for me nor others to openly vaunt their opinion on such a King, and one who performed great things in every hour, according

to the promptings of his lofty, noble heart. There are always those who can do nought but speak evil of others, seeking out the tiniest flaw in another's actions, not considering how the great things and the good things outbalance the tiny speck; and after all, who is perfect? Yet in my eyes Krishna Deva, the Royal One, stands ever as the most perfect of rulers, the most valiant of men, and the most favoured of the gods.

But again, as many a time before, my tongue must have a check laid upon it, else should I not continue quickly enough with my tale, which draws nigh to its awful close; for ever am I ready to sing out a song of praise on the glories of the mighty Maharâya.

On a certain day I had a summons to appear instantly before him; so immediately I went to the chamber where he lay ill, stretched upon his couch, and I was very grieved to note the change in his appearance.

He addressed me in a kindly voice.

"Of a surety, Patcola," he said, smiling faintly, "I behold thee for the first time with a touch of age upon thy brow."

"Aye," I cried, "I had not hoped to live for ever in the arms of youth, and wouldst thou have me smile, when I perceive thee lying as thou art, ill of a slow disease?"

"Mourn not for me," he answered, and his voice became somewhat feeble. "I have seen that every-

thing is in good order within my kingdom, and I have named a ruler that is of my blood, though not my issue." For a moment he turned away, covering his face with his hands in silent grief, and I also felt a moisture creep into mine eyes, and a hardness come up in my throat. Nevertheless, I said nothing, only stood with folded arms, till such time as the Râya might continue his speech.

Presently he leant forward quietly on his elbow, and I saw that he was studying my features carefully, for his eyes were very keen and piercing, as they had been in the days when he would sit in all glory upon the golden shimmering throne, robed in all majesty and splendour.

"I have called thee at this time," he continued at last in a low voice, "because perchance thou and I may not meet again. Nevertheless, I would not that we part without a whispered word in each other's ear."

"Would that I might by some means save thee, O Râya," I said brokenly; "how shall I endure after I behold thy countenance no more? If sacrifice, if fastings, if prayers might avail, then I pray thee give me thy command to carry out my desire."

"It is of no use, O Patcola," he returned, grasping my hand with fervour; "nevertheless, I am glad to have heard this testimony of thy friendship, and my soul shall mount up with greater joy because I am certain I have at least

thy love, which I value next to the affection of the Ranee Nâgalâ. And because of the regard I bear to thee, behold I have spoken with the Royal Achyuta, the King-to-be, telling him of thy name, thy rank, and of the esteem of which I have always considered thee worthy, for I would that he also have a regard towards thee. Nevertheless, I cannot make sure of my desire, as I shall have no word in his rule."

Now, when he told that he had done this because of his love towards me, I could no longer restrain myself, and I fell beside the couch, lifting up my voice in mourning because I knew that in a little while I should see his face no more.

"Nay," he cried, perceiving my grief, "methinks thy heart has known enough mourning for a time, therefore calm thyself if thou canst, lest I forget those things whereof I have to speak, while yet the time remains. As for myself I grieve not, for I have accomplished much in my day, always striving to perform anything which might render my kingdom a greater kingdom, and my people a greater people. In this, thee and others have aided me much, though in the goodness of thy heart thou saw fit to rebuke me for my final dealings with the state of Bijapur, and——"

"Forget it, O Râya," I cried out in agony. "Forget it, for I had no right——"

"There is no need to forget," he answered gently, "though at the time I entertained a wrath-

ful spirit against thee—I, who have never suffered my word or my doings to be gainsaid. But listen carefully, I pray thee, for I must give thee a message of importance to deliver in my name.’

“I hearken, O Râya,” I declared, raising my head, which had sunk upon my breast; “thy servant has his ears open to hear thy word, and his lips are ever ready to remain sealed, if it be thy bidding.”

“Draw nearer, O thou friend of my bosom,” he returned. “I would have none other hear my words; for they are concerning the future ruling of my brother Achyuta. I have laid certain obligations upon him, bidding him increase the might of the City of Victory even as I and his fathers have done before him. But if by any chance he should forget my words, then I bid thee enter his presence bearing a ring which I shall give thee. Place it into his hand, saying that thou comest as a messenger from the dead King Krishna—the Lord that was. Why I say this I shall give no reason. It matters not, only follow and remember my words.”

Here the Royal One took a ring from his finger, putting it into my palm, also a packet small and square bound round with cusa grass.

“Also,” the Râya cried again, “give this letter which I have written into his hand; pray him to read it in my name, and to consider its contents. Nevertheless, fulfil my commands only if thou

knowest that evil hangs upon the city by reason of his rule. Thy discretion has been ever good, I pray thee exercise it in this case, for it is the last thing that I may ask of thee, O thou ready one, thou most faithful of the Men of Victory."

"I bind myself to do thy bidding," I answered; "whatsoever thou sayest, it shall be done."

"I thank thee; but now hide the package and ring within thy robe, and by no means disclose thy mission (not even to thy dearest friend) till it be needed. And if thou seest there be no cause to deliver it, then I bid thee bury them in a secret place where no one may find them, for I would not have my writing read save in a case of need. Besides, thy safety might be in peril if it were known that thou bore such things upon thee."

"It shall be done," I answered again, but my words were few; grief would scarcely allow me to speak.

"I know it," returned the Râya softly, "therefore I perform my journey in peace, and with an easy mind. Yet another thing have I to deliver into thy care," and lifting his robe at the neck he detached something, placing it within my palm.

"Take this," he went on, "'tis thine by right," and, lo! when I looked down, the shapeless form of the amulet lay shimmering and glittering in my palm.

"Now that I have finished with things of

importance," the Maharâya continued after the pause of an instant, "bring thyself into the right mood for a song—the same, if thou canst, which I heard when first I met thee, for it is an inspiring one."

I thought in silence for a moment, till I launched out on the wings of poetry, chanting even as my heart bade me.

And Krishna Deva was pleased, and raised himself on his side and smiled.

"I thank thee," he cried when I had finished; "perchance it is the last I may hear from thy lips. Now leave me for a little; when I need thee again I will send a messenger—till then, farewell. Yet another word: make sure that none steal thy secret from thee."

"Thy bidding has sufficed," I answered; "nevertheless, by my father's house I swear that if I guard it not carefully, or use it without discretion, then may the holy Ones fling their wrath upon me, and the spirits haunt me in my dreams. Is it enough?"

"It is enough."

Then I passed silently out of his presence, hiding the ring and package carefully beneath my robe. And immediately I betook myself to my house, where I placed the things in a secret place, hoping I might never have occasion to bring them to light. Indeed, I could scarcely understand what kind of forebodings the Râya had had.

On the morrow, three hours after the rising of the sun, a wild cry was heard throughout the city.

“ Krishna Deva the Râya is dead. The light of the city has faded out. Mourn ye! Mourn ye, for Krishna the Great is dead!”

And the cry passed on like a shrill wail, and soon the voices of the mourners were lifted up in lamentations, and a great noise filled every part of the city.

The words smote into my heart, and I sought seclusion from all.

Willingly I would have followed in my King's footsteps, but something whispered to me that my time was not yet accomplished. Whereupon I reflected on the happiness of his soul—that unborn part—and how it had passed into the holy heavens, where there is eternal day, where everything is radiant, where there is pleasure and delight, where the mighty waters roll, where there is everlasting youth, where the golden worlds are fixed, where he dwelt amid the great and holy. Thus were my thoughts for many hours, as I sat in the apartment that led into the greater verandah.

The sun set, but I heeded it not, and when the moon rose in its place, yet I still remained in thought.

Then the wind arose, rustling among the trees. The stars came forth one by one in the midst of the peerless heavens, but I paid no heed. And it

seemed to my mournful imagining mind that the trees, the shrubs and the flowers shared in my lamentation. In the rustle of the darkening masses their voice cried out, "Farewell." Their leaves lowered in grief; the sweet-smelling blossoms gave out a richer perfume as a sacrifice before his honoured name, the wind moaned softly, crying, "Farewell, farewell." Then it would lull its voice for an instant, sobbing again at the next, or whispering to every plant from the thinnest blade to the top of the highest palm the nature of its lament, bidding them unite in grief because the great Râya of Vijayanagar was no more. Then of a sudden I cast mine eyes upwards upon the heavens, and behold the stars shot forth with a mighty radiance, lighting up the endless plains of the endless skies.

Then I remembered that he dwelt behind the shining orbs in the midst of happiness. And methinks the wind, the trees, and the mourning grasses remembered it also, for immediately the cry of their lamentations died away, till presently there fell upon us a silence—a silence even more mournful than sobbing grief, wherein there broke not a sound of a falling twig, or the chirping song of an invisible night bird.

Then I arose after the hours of silent mourning, bidding farewell to the holy moon, the gleaming stars, and the land which had fallen into the depth of silence.

At the allotted time we made preparations for the burnings according to our custom, and they of the lower caste laid ready the pyre to a great height, placing oil and clarified butter thereon, with wood dried and brittle. Then the queens having consented to pass beyond the fiery gates into the company of their lord, the priests chanted praises of their sacrifice, naming them as blessed.

And at the hour appointed, the body of the Royal Krishna was borne in state till it was placed in the midst of the lofty pile together with the honourable women, who counted the pain of the fire as nought because their happiness was sure.

Then, while I stood with others looking upon the scene, the bearers ran forward at the cry of the priests, and I watched the fiery tongues shoot out around the pyre, leaping higher and higher, enveloping all.

Thereupon I retreated to a little distance, where I stayed till the heap became as a pile of smouldering ashes, starting into a flickering flame when the breath of the wind passed lightly on it. Then for the last time I cried, "Farewell," for the perfect one, the lord of Virtues, had gone beyond the bridge that lies across the everlasting flood, and I might behold his face no more, neither hear his voice out of the regions of the Eternal Day.

CHAPTER XVIII

ACHYUTA RÂYA

AFTER the burning of Krishna Deva the Royal One, the Lamented One, and the performance of the Holy Suttee, it fell upon me to quit the city for a time on certain matters of importance, so that I was absent from the city a long while, even to the length of four moons. During that time I pictured my reception at the hands of the Royal Achyuta, when I should return. Yet these thoughts I endeavoured to cast away; for the things over which one ponders, are they not in a general way contrary to the things which actually happen?

Presently I came in the midst of my train to the gates of the city, where a great crowd of people of all castes hailed me with welcome, and verily I believe they loved me, and not because of my high estate. I returned their salutation, looking among the faces for any familiar friend with whom I might exchange a word. But of mine own associates as yet I perceived none. Therefore I rode on through the shouting mass, with the sound of welcome ringing in my ears, till I came to the innermost gate,

where, at a little distance, I discerned the stately figure of a priest, the instructor of my youth.

I immediately alighted, and went quickly towards him as he stood discussing some holy theme with a young disciple in the shelter of a little archway, for the sun had by now risen full in the heavens, lighting upon us with great heat.

"Glad am I to behold thee, my son," he said. "What a welcome thou hast had from the lips of many this day. I believed at first it was the entry of the Royal Achyuta himself, and were he not already King and sworn upon the sacred horse, it would be with difficulty that he could restrain from envy. But has all gone well with thee, my son?"

"Even so, O my father," I answered, and I related several incidents concerning my doings out of the city.

"It is well," he cried, looking beyond my head and pointing towards the crowd. "What! Can they not cease their acclamations for a moment?" And turning in the direction of his hand I beheld the crowd eagerly watching at a little distance (for they dared not approach too close to the Holy Priest), and clapping their hands, while at every moment rose the half-subdued exclamation of welcome.

"My good wishes are with thee, O my son," continued the aged teacher, with a suppressed sigh. "It is well to be beloved and to have thy name

cried from every lip when thou returnest from a journey," and he bent his head, muttering some holy text, the words of which I could not hear. Wondering at his manner, I looked keenly at him for an instant, but he sighed again, continuing to chant a verse from one of the Holy Vedas, with his eyes turned towards the north.

I waited in silence, not daring to disturb his meditations. It then occurred to me that it would have been better for me had I been allowed to enter the city quietly.

"Thou hast not yet, of course, waited upon the Royal Achyuta?" he asked, turning sharply round and passing his hand along the string of beads and amulets that hung about his neck.

"I have not, my father," I answered; "I quitted the city immediately after the burning of Krishna Deva (may his soul wander peacefully!) and the Suttee. Therefore I have not beheld the countenance of Achyuta since his accession."

"Thou hast not lost much, my son," he answered, drawing closer; "for there is little enough to behold; but I would only say this in thy ear. Now my blessing be upon thee, for I must move from hence to a quieter part where my meditations may not be disturbed."

I watched his stately figure passing down near the bazaar, where a score or more of his followers ran out from different parts, begging his benediction or presenting him with gifts which it is

right for every one to bestow, according to their rank or caste.

I also turned, after watching a lowly Soodra offer his gift to the Holy Man, and, joining my waiting attendants, who immediately took up their positions round me, pressed further on into the heart of the city, where it was a great pleasure for me to again behold the booths, bazaars, and all the familiar faces, which I greeted joyously as I passed.

After a short journey by a broad path, alongside of the lake, which Krishna Deva had built in the early days of his reign, I came within sight of mine own house, and methinks it had never appeared so fair in these eyes as when I beheld it after the moons of travel, surrounded by the great verandahs, wrought with many figures, all the work of men skilled in the art. Also the great gardens by the side, filled with masses of purple amaranth and poppies, made my heart smile with joy because of the repose and purity that lay in the scene.

Presently, when I had dismounted and entered into the outer verandah, I beheld my father reclining on a low seat, waiting eagerly and with outstretched hands for me to approach. And immediately I went forward to his side.

"My son," he cried, after we had embraced, "I would by no means miss seeing thee enter into thy house, so I ordered my bearers to bring me here,

for I daily become more feeble in frame, though mine eye is as keen as ever, especially to behold thy form in the distance. Dost thou know that I have watched thee for a long time, even before thou hadst quitted the road which leads to the north bazaar?"

"Woe is me," I returned, "that these eyes beheld thee not. But I had no thought of meeting thee here. Nevertheless, I cannot but chide myself for my slow discernment."

"Cease thy self-reproach," he answered gently, calling an attendant to raise him a little. "When thy heralds entered, saying that thou wouldst arrive in less than an hour, I bade the men carry me to the top of yon tower. And what did I behold? What did I hear? Of a truth, I saw my son, but thy entry was as the entry of a Maharâya, and thy welcome royal. Why! were I a stranger within the gates, I should have declared it was the coming of Achyuta himself. Honoured am I and my house to have reared such a son; and surely this old heart has waxed warm this day, the blood ran anew in my veins, and my voice became lusty, not as the sound from a vessel cracked and worn. Ah, it was good—it was good."

"Verily, my father," I exclaimed, after he had finished his long speech with many gestures of delight, "verily, my father, thou wilt force me to have a mighty opinion of myself, so that I shall believe I am greater than I am."

“Faugh!” replied my father abruptly, looking up into my face; “thou sayest it out of thy bashfulness; nevertheless, know that were thou of a weak mind, and one easily bent by the wind of flattery, even as grass is swayed beneath the passing westerly gale, I should not have spoken thus. Nay, I believe thy ideals and thy actions cannot easily be altered by fair words.”

“Not altogether,” I answered, with a smile, “except by fair words that proceed from fair lips.”

“That is as it should be,” cried my father, also smiling; “thou mayest be influenced, but I will never believe overcome. Is not that Rama Raja at the entrance, Patcola, or are these old eyes mistaken?”

“It is, indeed,” I answered, turning in the direction of the gates, “and unattended. I will go forward to meet him.”

“Do so, and bring him hither.”

I went to the end of the verandah, and on to the outer slopes, when, as soon as Rama Raja perceived me, he hastened his steps, embracing me when we met; we were great friends.

“An old friend am I always glad to welcome,” he said. “I knew of thy coming, and heard it too, for that matter, but many things prevented me from greeting thee earlier as I had intended.”

“I thank thee for thy friendship,” I answered; “but I am ashamed that thou shouldst enter

unattended. I marvel to think how my servants could have behaved thus."

"Pooh! let it be. I entered without ceremony; in fact, I came quietly so that I fancy few perceived me. But thy health, my friend?"

"It is good. Now, I pray thee, let me show hospitality. I will see to it that thou art no longer in lack of what my poor house can bestow. Let us hasten to my father; he first perceived thy coming, and longs, I know, to have a word with thee."

So we retraced our steps to the verandah where my father reclined. After they had greeted each other, we sat a long while together relating many things, and amusing ourselves in a pleasing way. For Rama was a man who could talk on most things, and loved an argument on any point worthy of debate. Thus my father and he agreed well together, since both were learned and fluent of speech; while I, as a rule, remained listening, revolving in my mind all that was said, and only occasionally putting my thoughts into words. And so we remained, till at last my father called for his bearers, saying he must journey home instantly, as he felt rather weary.

We also arose, and having seen him ascend safely into the litter, we accompanied it as far as the gates, after which we returned to our cushions on the verandah. I saw that Rama had something important on his mind.

"When dost thou enter the presence of the Râya?" he asked after a short pause, taking a portion of betel from the pouch I passed to him.

"I know not the exact hour, but I imagine on the morrow; the business I have transacted was for the most part on behalf of the State, therefore of great importance to the Râya."

"Doubtless," he answered shortly, dipping his hand again into the betel pouch; "and thy transactions, have they all passed well?"

"Exceedingly so. Hadst thou some misgivings, O Rama? Thy manner betrayeth some anxiety."

"Nay, it is nought," he remarked, with a short laugh. "But thou hast not yet raised any question as to what has happened in the city during thy absence. Hast thou no curiosity, my friend?"

"A fair degree. Well, and what of thy news?"

"Little enough," he answered slowly, lifting his eyes to mine, "save that Achyuta is the Râya."

"Is that all?" I cried. "I knew that before I departed. Thy speech is stale in my ears, even as bread which has become dried after many days."

"Thou lookest only on the words, my friend," answered Rama, with a faint smile, which the next instant fled before a sadness which leapt to his eyes. "I say again," he continued, "that Achyuta is ruler, and Krishna Deva is dead—having died doubly. Methought thee something of a philosopher."

Then I glanced upon his countenance, which

was raised to mine, and a great light dawned upon me.

“I understand now,” I said at last; “thou meanest that the virtues that made Krishna Deva great have passed with him through the fiery gates, and the inheritance of the present Râya in them is small. Thou meanest, in fact, that the one is little akin to the other. Have I given an answer fit to stand beside thy wondrous riddle?”

“Thou hast to some degree, but it might have been better unasked. I would by no means give thee a false idea of——”

“Nay, but it is well that I should hear what hangs on thy lips. I have been long absent, and little have I heard of any tidings in my travels, save a few rumours which cannot be believed. Therefore I pray thee disclose thy mind with regard to the Râya.”

“I will, immediately. Nevertheless, it has astonished me to see thee ask so few questions. Of a surety I myself should have found it necessary to inquire into all things after so long an absence. I believe thou didst quit the city soon after the burning of Krishna Deva and the Holy Suttée?”

“Even so, at the next sunrise. Therefore have I not yet entered into the presence of the Râya. Is he beloved?”

“In a degree, and especially at the time when he first ruled; he pleased all by his fair promises; also he was more regarded as being one of such

close kinship to the dead Krishna. Thou knowest he has taken Salavanay, a relative of the traitor, Sâluva Timma, for his minister?"

"Aye, I understood as much from certain ones I have met beyond."

"It pleases not the people," he continued, "as thou mightest conjecture. His actions, too, have changed since the day when he was sworn upon the sacred horse, and though openly little is said, yet the whispers fly from mouth to mouth, and the murmurs leap from ear to ear."

"But it is natural," I cried, "that the Men of Victory could believe none so perfect as the beloved Krishna, for thou knowest of all the Kings of Vijayanagar none could take such a high place in the hearts of his subjects. Why, his very smile or the glance of his eye spoke more than any commands. Of a truth, thou hast had luck in becoming the relative of such a one. Perchance he is unaccustomed to the seat of ruling. But thou hast not yet shown the source of the complaint. What things has he done? I am sure thou wilt not criticise with harshness."

"Little enough," answered Rama, clasping his hands in front of him. "Little enough—therefore the complaint; because he seeks to do nothing but listen continually to the beating of music or the clattering anklets of the dancing-girls, and he hurries affairs of importance with his council for the purpose of his own amusement."

“ Was it so from the first ?”

“ Nay, he applied himself diligently to work for three full moons, and listened well to all advice.”

“ And hast thou been in his presence, O Rama ?” I questioned, “ so that thou knowest these things for a certainty (though I would by no means doubt thy word) ? Yet it is full early to judge ; he can scarce have learnt all that a king must learn and what took the Royal Krishna twelve moons and the half of twelve moons.”

“ Aye, I know,” he answered somewhat gruffly ; “ but I verily believe thou wouldst seek for good under the thickest layer of evil. Nevertheless, I have seen for myself, and my words are by no means weighed down by the murmurings of others. This also would I tell thee that the people have been long questioning the time of thy return, saying perchance thou mightest become to the present Râya even what thou wert to the Royal Krishna ; and I perceive that they gave thee a welcome such as few experience who enter beyond the city gates.”

“ Thou speakest as if my influence with kings was weighty, O Rama. Dost thou know that it would be no wonder to me if Achyuta Deva gave me but scant courtesy if it be true that his character be of that kind ? Did he receive thee well ?”

“ Aye, my friend, his manner was kind, though of a truth his words fall harshly from his lips, and there is something more—— But enough, I will

no longer prejudice thee. The rest thou must find for thyself."

Whereupon, having somewhat relieved the anxieties so long pent up in his mind, he arose to depart.

"My greetings to all thy household, O Rama," I cried as we bade each other farewell.

"I thank thee," he answered; "the gods look kindly upon thee."

He turned towards the gates while I continued to stand near the entrance of the verandah. A moment later I saw him pause in his walk as if at the remembrance of a forgotten thing.

"He will return," I murmured to myself; "it is useless for me to enter. I perceive his speech is not yet exhausted." And I was right; the next moment he had turned his face towards me, calling my name.

"Behold," he said on nearing me, "something of importance I have forgotten to relate, for maybe thou hast not heard the latest rumour?"

"Nay, I pray thee enlighten me."

"It has reached our ears that the Âdil Shâh of Bijapur, having knowledge of the death of Krishna Deva, prepares an army for a speedy recapture of the fortress Raichur."

"What!" I said in alarm, the breath catching in my throat. "Is it so? Does he suppose our strength is gone?"

"It is but a rumour amongst us as yet. It came

from the mouths of travelling merchants, and the tale somewhat varies, some saying that the Âdil Shâh has already numbered his men, and is setting out instantly. But we may fear nothing till the news comes from better hands. The Râya himself laughs at the tale."

"Well, he may come," I replied carelessly; "the Men of Victory love to stand face to face with their foes."

"Aye," he answered, setting out again for the gates, "he may come, even as the jackals may come and mock before the face of a fettered lion!"

"What meanest thou?" I asked, starting at the expression on his countenance. But the words did not fall on his ears, for he had already passed from me, and a moment after had altogether vanished from before mine eyes. Nevertheless, I stood for some time, gazing after him, wondering at his words. Then I laughed softly to myself, remembering how often he loved propounding riddles of many answers, and strange sayings of many meanings.

"Even now," I murmured, "Rama has left his speech unfinished."

I left the verandah and entered into an inner room. Soon after I sat in company with my son, a youth of sixteen years, finding his talk pleasant, for his intelligence was very great. Also my daughter I beheld with pleasure, though as yet she was little more than an infant. But in the midst

of this happiness I could not altogether forget Rama's words.

And while I was dwelling on the subject, a messenger came from the palace, bidding me appear before the Râya on the morrow.

When he had gone, such a conflict of thought came into my brain, that I went out into the secret place where I had hidden the ring and package of the dead Krishna Deva; and removing them for a moment I handled them carefully, praying that I might never have occasion to bring them before the eyes of Achyuta Râya.

Then I replaced them and went out into the hot and dusty streets.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MESSAGE OF THE STARS, AND THE OUTCOME

THAT night sleep came but little to mine eyes; therefore I arose at an early hour, long before the rising of the sun, and went out on the verandah, breathing into my nostrils the cool and pure air. I remained a long while thus, glad that I could be utterly alone. And I felt my restless mind grow calm and less excited as I looked forth upon the new-born day, and upon the clouds, which burst at the rising of the sun, and continued moving slowly in many shapes, like to the Holy Kine roaming at their will in the midst of the heavenly pastures. And I thought on Brahma the Invisible seated on the lotus-throne, surrounded by the tribes of the Rishis.

Then gradually I let mine eyes fall to the earth again, upon the hills, the blue and rippling lakes, the sacred banyan-trees, the winding course of the glittering river, that ran even at the foot of the slopes whereon my house lay. And while I looked, the sun (that Eye of Heaven) shot forth with its mighty rays, piercing the thin grey mist that hung as purple in the distance, laying open the glories of the hills.

Therefore it appeared that the land smiled in joy, and the trees stirred by the hand of the soft south wind, rustled a message of greeting towards the skies, sighing peacefully as one who has arisen from a deep sleep; stretching forth its arms with joy, because the darkness has altogether passed away, and the Dawn and the Earth once more had kissed each other.

Then I, too, felt my heart swell out with happiness, and a calmness that could not be thrust away penetrated my soul, so that I smiled in harmony with the shining land, and flung out my arms in exultation towards the skies; for by nature I was one who dwelt deeply on things, finding out many answers to a riddle which others might perchance pass over, and especially rejoicing when I might ponder alone amid the glories of silence.

When I came to myself—for I loved to let my mind roam at will in the land of the dreamy unknown—I beheld that the earth had become even more glorious, for every flower had now opened its eyes; the sun had cast aside its shining cloudy mantle; the birds spoke one to another, giving greeting; the mist had altogether disappeared from the hills; blue streams rushed forward under the hand of Varuna; sounds of music floated upwards from the pagodas; the owls and bats had long ceased their crying, hiding their dark forms in some unholy cave; the spirits rushed back before

the lightened heavens, and the world and the inhabitants thereof awoke; Silence fled mournfully, seeking some place where she might rest. My spirit told me that she sought the heart of the thickest jungle, but the lions, tigers, and the voice of the whispering swamp turned her away. The forests, too, shook their heads at her, and the birds sang; the waters roared, making swifter their motion; the wind moaned in the midst of the smiling hills; the grasses waved their heads, and cried her nay, so that where at last she went, I know not. Perchance it was in some dark, dark region that she hid her face, in the dismal depths of the Under Seas, where the stillness knows no change, or in a hollow cave where none might disturb, or even an echo shriek aloud its voice.

Yet after all I parted from her in sorrow, for I had sought her friendship in times when my heart was weary, and I mourned when I beheld her a wanderer, passing on her noiseless wings to a place of desolate refuge.

Presently I roused from thought and re-entered the house.

Four hours later I arrived with my attendants at the Râya's palace, and in company with several other nobles, I entered into the House of the Zenana where he sat. For a moment he took no notice of our entrance, so occupied was he in conversation with one of his favourites.

In one feature only did Achyuta resemble his

brother the beloved Krishna, and this was in his eyes; but the power that lay therein was not the same, neither was the smile winning. And though the lips were well formed, yet a gross coarseness lay upon them; as for his voice, it was not sweet, but instead harshly cold. Then I understood more fully Rama Raja's words—that of a truth Krishna Deva had died doubly, because he had altogether departed, leaving no trace of himself in any of his kin, since Achyuta seemed not as his brother, save in the goodliness of the eyes. For a little while no sound was heard within the Hall except the gentle swaying of fans, and I saw the Râya cast his eyes among the company of nobles, till at last his gaze rested on me.

Then he addressed several questions to certain ones present, Salavanay, his minister, standing near.

In a short time I heard him call my name aloud, bidding me come nearer. This I did, and raising my eyes looked him full in the face.

“Let the others depart,” he ordered; “they have their dismissal.”

Whereupon slowly the company passed in order through the entrance, leaving me standing in my place and alone in the Râya's presence, save for Salavanay the minister, and the attendants who constantly waited on his person.

“Advance,” he commanded, turning to me. “Art thou he who stood continually by the side of my brother in preference to his own kinsmen?”

“The Râya named me as one of his servants,” I answered quietly, meeting the eyes that were fixed directly upon me; “and he honoured me with a friendship of which I was unworthy, but did my best to return.”

“At least thou knowest how to give an answer to an uncomfortable question,” cried Achyuta, with a smile, and I perceived that the harshness had somewhat passed out of his tones. “Of a truth,” he continued, “I marvel not that the Râya my brother should have taken thee for a friend. He chose his friends, I choose mine; but I should imagine that mirth and thou have long parted, if ye ever came together at all. And I love mirth at all times. Wherefore am I a King that I should not have pleasure?”

“In the time of thy royal brother, O Râya,” I replied without fear, “there were things to be accomplished, and things to be done, conquests to be made, and cities to be built. Therefore mirth was entertained but little, and only at the time of feasts.”

“What! Dost thou speak thus to our face, and with reproach in thy voice?” the Râya cried, his eyes blazing with sudden fire. “But I must give thee for a time more licence, seeing thou forgettest that I sit here in the place of Krishna my brother, and I perceive that there is something unusual about thee, which I have not found in other courtiers.”

"Nay," I thought to myself, "never shall I cease to remember that thou, in the place of the beloved Krishna, art King."

"I have no wish to offend thee," I answered, "but I have some business concerning the State to place before thee when thou wilt," and I drew forth from my bosom certain letters.

"Of those later," he said, with a frown, waving his hand; "such things tire me, and of a surety, some of my captains are continually pouring into mine ears speeches concerning things which need no immediate thought. I intend at a future hour to look into all affairs, changing much for the betterment of my people. I understand that thy word was held in great esteem by Krishna my brother, and that thou canst put forth thy philosophy and wisdom when it is needed. Now, I love a man who can bring out a witty saying from a dull thing."

"Thou hast been somewhat misled concerning thy servant," I answered quietly, keeping away the anger that rose to my lips, because of his speech and manner. "Discretion I endeavour to exercise in all things; philosophy comes from those greater than I, and wisdom from the mouth of the gods."

"Well said, indeed," Achyuta exclaimed; "of a truth it is a change of amusement to hear the way in which thou answerest all things. Now, with an addition of mirth, and a smile, thou mightest

surpass all men, saving our royal self. Hast thou never laughed, thou Man of Wisdom?"

"Aye," I cried; "when the heart smileth, then may the countenance show forth pleasure."

"What! Art thou sad? Then we must teach thee to laugh. O my lord Salavanay," continued the Râya, turning to his minister and they who stood around, "I must chide thee and thy company because ye told me not all concerning this noble Patcola."

Then it came upon me suddenly that during my absence from the city jealousy might have risen up, prompting many to speak indifferently of me, and Salavanay, the kinsman of Sâluva Timma, would bear little friendship towards me.

But to this speech of Achyuta's no answer was forthcoming, save that the minister and the attendants cried how great was the Râya, and how wonderful his wisdom.

"We must have thee to the feasts," continued the Râya; "thou must hear tales to make thee feel mirthful, and witness the wonders of my dancing girls; thou wouldst not be thyself after that."

"My thanks be unto the generous Achyuta," I cried; "always shall I deem it an honour to wait at his hand, but my friends are few, and I seek no change whatever in my life. Those I know are ones to be trusted, and I am fully contented."

"Faugh! So thou sayest"—and Achyuta's brows drew together—"we have willed it other-

wise. I must remould thee after my own fashion; thou has learnt too much seriousness at the court of Krishna Deva, methinks. Therefore, thankful should thou and these lords be, because I have deemed more pleasure necessary in my palace. Now, I pray thee, O Patcola, lend thyself more to mirth, and it would be well if certain others followed this advice."

I opened my mouth to speak, but stayed myself, thinking better of my words, lest they might rouse the Râya to anger, for it was easy to perceive that it would take little to provoke his wrath.

"Well, on what thinkest thou?" continued Achyuta. "Hast thou no words on thy lips?"

"I wait thy commands," I answered, folding my arms.

"Then we bid thee to the next feast held in our halls. See that thou art there," he cried. "I can promise all sorts of amusements which can put joy into thy heart. By the seriousness of thy face it would seem that thou hast never turned thy face on pleasure."

"Nay," I answered, smiling, for his words rather amused me. "I have laughed long and loud in my time, O Achyuta, therefore think not that mirth and I are altogether strangers."

"It is good to hear even that; one philosopher at a court is of a surety enough, and I have many, for nigh at every hour several come to me, beseeching that I attend instantly to certain things; and

now that they have tired of speaking with regard to one thing, they seek to give an alarm, saying that Mudkal and Raichur are in likelihood of danger, when we have full knowledge of their security. Our power is too great for the Âdil Shâh to dare to oppose. Say, is it not so?" he demanded, turning to his minister.

"It is," they answered in one breath; "mighty is the Royal Achyuta—his words are wonderful."

"Aye," continued the Râya, "we entertain no fear on any matter. Krishna my brother accomplished his conquests well. That is good. Our dominions are all the greater, and now pleasure must ensue on toil and hardship. Even thou, O Philosopher, canst not see evil in small recreations. It is right to laugh as well as to work."

Although the others clapped their hands, applauding his words, I remained silent and unmoved. My heart recoiled from these vain flatterers, mostly lords who had risen to high office under the hand of Achyuta, and to whom he gave preference, rather than to older men of good discretion; and even some of these elders could not find the courage in their hearts to speak against his actions.

"What hast thou to say?" he cried, with a half-mocking smile; "thou shouldst also have thy word, and not leave it altogether for these men of younger years."

"Nay," I answered quietly. "Doubtless these answers have pleased thy heart. Thy dominions,

it is true, are great, O Râya; nevertheless, they that seem secure sometimes are the least safe."

"What! Darest thou suppose we should allow one foot of our most sacred soil to become defiled? Didst thou dare address the Royal Krishnâ Deva in his time with such words, O thou son of boldness?"

"There was no need, O Achyuta," I returned calmly, and I saw the Râya lay his hand on his sword for an instant; whereupon I gazed at him steadfastly out of mine eyes, putting forth such power as I possessed, and immediately the heaviness of his brows disappeared, the sudden anger gradually passed away, and for a moment there was a deep silence amongst us; even Salavanay, his minister, seemed to have no word to say. As for me, I stood in the same position, neither speaking nor altering my manner in any way. Presently the Râya addressed me again, but I noticed that he looked upon me with some bewilderment.

"We would bid thee farewell," he cried at last; "another time doubt not but that we shall be pleased with thy company," and he nodded sweetly towards me, when Salavanay, his minister, bent and whispered something in his ear.

"Aye," he continued, as if struck by a sudden thought, "the letters—I had forgotten them; leave them, I pray thee, in our hands, we will peruse them at our leisure, though we are aware that thou hast fulfilled thy business well."

Without another word I made a deep obeisance,

and passed slowly out of the chamber, knowing that all eyes rested upon me curiously. And I myself was filled with wonder because of the result of mine own power, and the boldness I had displayed. And I was glad I had given such answers to Achyuta, for I felt that the gods had put the words into my mouth.

Outside in the open, I happened to perceive mine aged instructor coming swiftly towards me with a strange look in his eyes.

"My son," he cried eagerly as soon as he came up, "I have longed to behold thee for the space of an hour."

"I worship thee," I answered, making an obeisance.

"Hast thou just come from the palace?" he questioned, resting himself on his staff, for his age was great, and he seemed to have exerted himself unduly.

"I have," I answered, "even from the presence of the Râya himself."

"Thanks be unto the gods," he murmured fervently, "thanks be unto the gods. And is all well? Thy words are sealed in my ears, thou knowest."

"I know it, O Holy One."

Thereupon I related a great part of the conversation which had taken place within the palace, and as I finished I heard the old priest heave a great sigh, the staff shaking between his aged hands.

"I rejoice," he murmured to himself, "I rejoice; for I had somewhat feared for thee during this last hour."

"Wherefore, my father?" I asked quickly, and the priest drew a little nearer to me, first looking around to see that none stood by.

"The signs were against thee," he cried in a lower voice; "this morning thy name was continually leaping up into my mind, and thy face appeared before me several times, till at last I sought wisdom from the stars, especially as it came to mine ears that on this day thou was entering for the first time after thy journey into the presence of the Râya. I guessed that thy bearing would not altogether suit with such as he. Therefore I was somewhat affrighted when I beheld that the heavens were against thee on this day, unless by thine own will thou overcamest the evils that hung upon thee, for what I saw made me instantly seek thee out, and when I found that thou hadst already departed, my heart gave a great leap, and I could not rest."

The old priest heaved another sigh, but his staff trembled less violently in his hands.

"What didst thou see, my father?" I asked, wondering at the agitation in his manner.

"Nay, that I may not disclose, Patcola; perchance it were not well for thine ears to hear. But I rejoice at thy safety——"

"Was it in peril?"

“Indeed, indeed; never did I behold the stars so against any one man. But enough! Thou hast overcome thy Fates, thou hast led them by the hand, and well is it with a man when he can turn such a balance in his favour. Though woe, and ten thousand woes, upon any man who wantonly insulted thy high caste.” And he placed his hand upon me, regarding me with affection, his eyes dim with emotion.

“I thank thee exceeding for thy care, and I worship thee; but it was well I did not know thy readings at the beginning, else my courage might have failed.”

“Aye,” he repeated softly, “it is well, and I marvel at the outcome of the readings; for woe if thou hadst failed to overcome!” And he turned away reciting a prayer, leaving me to wonder at the nature of the evils which so unknowingly I had brought to nought. After this, still buried in thought, I passed with my attendants into the streets, but took little notice of anything, neither did I exchange a single word with any of those who bore me company.

CHAPTER XX

'ART THOU SATISFIED?'

THE moon has passed from the dark quarter into the full, and from the full into the dark, since the events I have related last. And though incidents of little import have come about in the time between, still to many their significance has been great; for they have taught the Mên of Victory much concerning the Râya, and the nobles of older minds murmur greatly amongst themselves, but dare not let their speech be public, because they and their families might thereby stand in peril. Achyuta, it seems, at certain times takes a delight in mocking at their wise sayings, but his character changes much, so that one day he appears as a tyrant with his mind steeped in revelry and mirth; at other times he is gentle and painstaking, making many promises to be performed later.

Feasting to excess takes place in the palace as often as the Râya finds it convenient, and the revelry has gone far into the night, and the sounds of dancing and laughter has pierced even to the palace grounds. Then, when the morrow comes, he is yet weary, neither willing nor able to

attend to affairs of State. Whereupon he seeks the company of his many wives, and they would relate things to him such as he delights in, dancing before him with jingling anklets, crooning a song of love, so that he is never at a loss for amusement of many kinds. Several times I also have been bidden to these feasts by the mouth of the Râya himself, who seeks, according to his own words which he spake before, "to remodel me after his own fashion, so that mirth may find an entrance into my serious character." Therefore have I, against mine own inclinations, borne him company in these revels, till at last, under the pain of incurring his anger, I have slipped noiselessly out when the thoughts of the Râya and his friends had passed altogether out of my direction.

Once, indeed, my absence was noticed, and Achyuta Deva caused an inquiry to be made. I sent a message by the hand of a servant, saying a temporary sickness had seized me. Of a truth my heart was attacked by a sickness which none might cure.

Thenceforward I was bidden less frequently to the feasts, and Achyuta assumed a quieter manner when I was in his presence.

But he tyrannized without ceasing over any who, even in a small way, had incurred his displeasure, and his outbursts of rage became more frequent, so that many were afraid for their lives.

I myself always endeavoured to show no fear

before him, though I accorded him honour because it was his right by reason of his royalty.

It was on a certain day about this time, when his wrath had proved more violent than usual, that on leaving the palace I perceived a group of nobles and other men of high caste standing together in the midst of the large courtyard, talking with agitation and vehemence amongst themselves. Though wondering at their manner and the excitement in their faces, I would have passed by on another side, for if their speech was private I had no wish to force myself upon them. I had already commenced to turn my steps in a different direction, when one of their number called my name aloud, and Ranji Siva (of whom I have more to say presently) hurried towards me.

"We seek for thee to join us," he cried eagerly; "it is a matter of earnest discussion amongst us."

Whereupon together we walked across the courtyard, where the circle of men opened up, making room for me to enter.

"What is it, my brothers?" I asked, as soon as I came near; "is it some grave news?"

"It is grave news indeed," answered Ranji Siva, stepping forward quickly, "and we fear that in a little while it will be still more grave."

"Yea," shouted several together, stamping on the ground with vehemence, "our blood boils at the very thought."

"Behold," continued Ranji Siva, turning to me,

“this news have we from a trustworthy source, that Raichur and Mudkal—those fortresses which have been regained by the blood of many—are even at this moment in danger of attack from Bijapur, our ancient enemy.”

“Ah,” I cried, starting at the news, “then the rumour that came to us long ago was not without foundation. What are the Râya’s commands concerning its defence?”

“Dost thou ask that question out of mockery?” returned Ranji sternly. “What think ye? the Râya still laughs at our entreaties that an army be instantly despatched before too much time has passed. We have sent messages to him, but he will put his hand to nought but feasting and dancing-girls, and his wives in the Zenana. Faugh! I could go mad with anger that the Men of Victory should be forced to eat dirt even from the hands of a King.”

“Has Achyuta Deva returned no message?”

“Aye, if thou canst call it such; as for me, I name it—but I must control my tongue. The Râya’s words are thus: ‘*Raichur and Mudkal have defence enough from our royal hands, let the men therein defend their own city. It will try their skill.*’ O ye gods! ‘*Defence enough!*’ When an army of a hundred thousand strong can come against them! ‘*Let them try their own skill!*’ Hark at the words, brothers! Is it thought that a wolf can fight against an elephant even if his

bravery be superior? Is the spirit of Krishna Deva amongst us to hear of this? Nay, I pray that he is spared the knowing, else would he mourn in the midst of his joys, and his soul would weep continually. Is there no means of turning the Râya's mind? Yah! my brothers, I spit in disgust! I stamp in rage! It is not within me to remain still!”

He was forced to pause an instant for breath, seeing that throughout the whole of his speech he had never ceased to wave his arms aloft, or to smite his feet upon the ground, while his eyes blazed as coals of fire, and his words came loudly from his mouth.

“What are the number of fighting men in Raichur?” I asked as quietly as possible, hoping he might calm himself speedily, lest his rage should by any chance cause others to act in madness.

“Numbers?” yelled Ranji Siva, still gasping for breath, “nought but a handful against the armies of Bijapur; and unless Achyuta goes forth, or sends his captains, nothing can secure the cities, save the defenders thereof could drink of the *amritar* as did the *devas* by the word of Holy Vishnu. Ho, my brothers,” he continued, gathering up renewed wrath. “Shall it be that we send another message to Achyuta, risking his anger? Let not the gods have cause to think upon us in rage, and afflict us because we did not strive our utmost. We are the Sons of Victory; let us keep

that name, or we lose all. Is thy mind with me, O my brothers, or do I speak in vain?"

"Nay," they cried, raising their hands aloft, a current of passion sweeping through them. "We are with thee. Let the petition be sent."

"Who is there who will go in our name?" shouted Ranji, looking around; "but let me think—I have named it—I myself will go."

"Nay, nay," I cried, going forward instantly; "it is not wise for thee. Thou art not calm, and though I do not wish to offend thee, yet thy wrath might seek an outlet even in the presence of the Râya. The one who can act with graciousness and whose mind is unperturbed, let him go." Then a sudden thought came to me, and I added, "and if he fail, then I pray thee send me afterwards."

"Thou hast spoken rightly," cried several, understanding my meaning, and immediately they chose one of their number, giving him a message in their name.

For a little while we waited till the messenger should return; some dividing up into groups talking amongst themselves, at times loudly, whilst a few like myself stood apart remaining in silence with folded arms, dwelling upon things which we did not utter. Ranji Siva still muttered angrily to himself, pacing rapidly up and down the court at a short stretch from us.

Presently while I stood watching him, studying whether by some means I might not calm him, I

felt a light touch on my arm; a low voice spoke in mine ear, and turning instantly, I perceived standing near a court official, by name Senyтора, a man famed for his discretion and war-like powers.

“What think ye of this?” he asked softly, bending himself towards me; “methinks I have never seen such a strange commotion.”

“Aye,” I answered, “it is a difficult matter; canst thou not conjure up from thy wise head an idea which might bring things to a better pass?”

“I am not a magician,” he returned, his countenance for a moment throwing off the veil of seriousness; “nevertheless, I shall this day seek the advice of a learned friend, one who is skilled in matters relating to the stars. Perchance they may give out some sign. Hast thou known Ranji to cry aloud in such rage before? Methought till now he was a man of quiet demeanour; it is more like Rama to vent his wrath.”

I looked across to where Rama stood alone, his arms folded upon his chest, and a look of meditation in his eyes.

“He thinks deeply,” I remarked, noting how sometimes his countenance hung heavy with frowns, although a faint smile would now and then pass across his lips. “I wonder in what way his thoughts run.”

“I know not,” returned Senyтора, with a slight laugh, “though thou and I might guess. He succeeds well in his present position, but whether a

higher office would befit him I know not. Dost thou understand?"

"Somewhat," I said after a pause, for my friend's words sounded strange in mine ears. "Dost thou think——?"

"Nay, I think nothing," broke in Senytora sharply, "only certain events have caused me to have a perhaps unfounded idea. Achyuta seems to please the people ill, therefore is the court divided in its love, and who can speak as to the distant future?" and he looked across at Rama's tall figure with an understanding smile.

A sudden thought came to me that Senytora might deem Rama willing to perform an evil deed for his own gains, as has been done many times before when one party rises up against another. Therefore I hastened to put this idea aside.

"He is honourable," I cried warmly; "wickedness issues not from him."

"Thou mistakest me," returned Senytora calmly, without turning his head. "Woe is me if I should think unjustly of him. He will wait his time. The one who waits, thou knowest, wins at last."

"I understand," I cried. Nevertheless, from that day I thought on Rama in a different light, and I wondered——

"It were well, perchance, if we close this matter," continued Senytora; "it is dangerous ground."

“With me it is safe, my brother,” I answered; “by thy head and yon sacred cow it shall go no further.”

“I know it,” he said; “we cannot exercise discretion too much at this time, for my spirit tells me that there is more to follow.”

Just then Rama drew himself out of his thoughts, and coming over towards us commenced to speak of Bijapur. So we were forced to close our mouths for a time, and enter into conversation with him.

Presently a voice ringing across the courtyard called aloud, saying: “The messenger. Behold, the messenger.”

Whereupon we cast all other things from our minds, and drawing together in a circle, we waited for the Râya’s answer. In a moment the man approached, and Rama took it upon himself to question concerning the news.

“The Râya has read our entreaty?” he demanded.

“The Râya has read it,” answered the bearer; “thy letter was taken into his presence by the hand of Salavanay, the minister, who came to receive me in the Râya’s name as soon as I had made known that I bore a message.”

“The answer?” continued Rama quickly, seeing he carried nothing in his hand. “Hast thou no written answer, or is it by word of mouth?”

“By word of mouth, to be spoken before all

the Brahmans and other nobles who had any hand in sending the message."

"Speak," we cried; "our ears are open, and we are assembled."

"These are the Râya's words—first, that he seeks not to be disturbed in the hour of his pleasure on matters of trivial importance; and secondly, that he has already given his commands concerning this same matter, and it shall not be altered."

"Is that all?" questioned Rama in a quiet voice; "hast thou spoken all?"

"I have spoken all," answered the messenger, making an obeisance; "I have forgotten nothing."

A long silence fell upon us, and not even Ranji could loose his tongue, though his eyes flashed.

Presently Rama spoke again, and his voice was very cold and hard, unlike his usual tones.

"Our ears have heard the words of Achyuta Deva Râya," he cried; "we bow before his commands. Now let the divine priests pray without ceasing for the strengthening of Mudkal and Raichur. Let the gods descend, casting a shield upon their people, and leave them not desolate."

His lips tightened grimly together, and he turned away and left our midst. And I watched him go, his head held proudly, his weapons gleaming at every step; and many things passed through my mind at that moment.

When he had gone, every eye turned expect-

antly upon me, and I stepped forward even as Ranji opened his mouth to speak.

“My brothers,” I cried, “I have offered to go into the Râya’s presence and seek to turn his mind.”

“Nay,” answered several together, “it would be of no avail; he might wreak his wrath on thee.”

“I have no fear,” I said again; “at a later hour I will seek speech with him.”

Whereupon some cried out in favour of my going, while others shook their heads, saying it would be of little use. Nevertheless, in the end they agreed on my making a trial, wishing me good luck; and immediately I quitted them, seeking a private chamber, where I spent a long while in prayer.

Then I went out after spending a little while in meditation, seeking the company of the aged priest who had instructed me in my youth, since I desired to keep myself aloof from others for a short time, realizing that I had set myself a difficult task. Also I knew it was useless for me to attempt it at once, seeing the Râya would still be wrathful because of the entreaties of his captains.

So at a time when I knew Achyuta would be more willing to receive me, I returned home, and adorning my dress in a way fit to enter his presence, I sought out the secret place where I had hidden the package given me by Krishna Deva. Placing it in my robe, I hurried out, and went with my

train to the royal palace, sending a herald before me begging a speech with his Highness.

In a little while a message came into the outer courtyard, where I waited, saying that the Râya Achyuta had granted my entreaty, and desired my entrance immediately.

I hastened, and when I came into the apartment where the Râya sat, I was astonished to behold that no others stood in the chamber.

"Greeting," he cried; "what seeks my servant? Thou seest I have arranged for us to be alone, treating thee as a close friend."

"Great is the honour," I answered in an even voice; nevertheless, I guessed it was for another reason that none but ourselves remained in the room, for once before I had somewhat overpowered the Râya in a way I have described, and that in the face of his minister and several that waited. Hence I smiled inwardly, for I now knew that Achyuta feared me, though his outer bearing was lively, and his speech gay.

"I had intended to send for thee this day," he cried, moving round a trifle uneasily, while I looked full at him. "Thy company be altogether a change and one to be enjoyed alone."

Again I smiled to myself, but as yet I made no answer of any kind, but narrowly watched the Râya's countenance, keeping one hand in my bosom upon the packet of Krishna, my King.

And as I touched the sacred thing it seemed that

a spirit moved therein, and a heart beat violently in its midst.

“Surely,” I murmured to myself, “surely the breath of the Royal One remains upon it, making it live.”

Then the voice of Achyuta broke upon me harshly, and I was forced to cease my roamings in imagination.

“It seems,” he cried, “that thou desire to speak some word in my presence. If it be concerning Raichur and Mudkal, open not thy mouth. I will not hear it. Day after day, nay, hour after hour, one or other of the nobles cry aloud making much of little. Are they afraid because of a threat? By the Aditya, I laugh at them. They have not yet learnt my ways of ruling; why, they would have me continually listening and thinking of nothing but affairs of State. And they dare speak thus to a ruler.”

Achyuta arose for a moment, his voice loud by reason of his passion. “Raichur and Mudkal have defence enough for a time, and when it is needed, I will arise, and all Bijapur and all Vijayanagar, for that matter, shall be dazzled by my splendour. Ho! I will show them my might, this hand and this sword shall rule. But when *I* go forth, the tale of the wonders I shall do, and the riches of my state, shall go down by the mouth of them that come after. Father shall tell it to son, and Achyuta shall be termed the Mighty—the Lord of the

Earth. Let it not be thought that I shall forget anything. I plan, and my planning is good."

"Aye, O Râya," I answered quietly, "but it is always better to build one house than to plan ten."

Then I waited, expecting his wrath, but it came not, and I think he could not have heard my words, so firm were his feet on the paths of boasting.

"And also," continued the Râya, seating himself again, "I shall increase my kingdom in many ways. But I forget, thou hast not yet said the reason wherefore thou camest here. If, as I have said, it be anything to do with these cities, utter it not."

"Nay," I answered, advancing a few paces. "It is altogether of a different sort, O Râya. I am a bearer of sealed letters of great importance, which are to be placed in thy hands."

"What!" cried Achyuta eagerly, "wherefore hast thou not spoken before? From whom are the writings, thou neglectful man? How is it that thou hast made no mention?"

"They are from one whom thou hast known. The writings will explain for themselves."

So saying, I drew out the package and the ring, placing them at his feet. Then I withdrew to one side, watching him as he picked them up, and carefully examined the twain. Finally, with some muttered word and an expression of astonishment,

he laid the ring on a convenient place, and turning, so that I might not behold his countenance, broke the fastenings of the sacred letter.

For a short time a great silence fell upon us, for the Râya spoke no word, neither did I hear any other sound. So I stood, fixing mine eyes on his back, noticing how strangely quiet his manner seemed, and wondering what message the Royal Krishna had put his hand to write.

Presently a faint cry rose up out of the distance, a cry that was weird and mournful; a cry that was full of lamentation. Then it increased in sound, coming nearer the palace so that it seemed as if it proceeded from the outer courtyard.

Whereupon I bent mine ear to distinguish better, for I could not understand the reason of it, when it ceased altogether, neither while I hearkened did it come again. At this moment Achyuta turned his face for the first time towards me, and, lo! it was like the face of one that is dead; the package slipped out of his shaking hands, rolling down on the floor at my feet, and his eyes were as the eyes of one wild in the brain, so that I could do nothing but watch in astonishment.

He opened his mouth to speak, but his voice was strange and fearful, like to the awful cry of a wandering spirit. And what he would have said I know not, for as he turned, another shout broke upon us from the courts below, voices called rapidly one to another, weapons clanked, as if the

owners beat them violently upon the ground. Then of a sudden I heard the sound of running feet, hurrying towards the royal chamber. Again the Râya started violently, demanding to know what the noise meant. Then, just as I opened my lips to speak, the doors were flung back, and Salavanay, the minister, entered with little ceremony crying out that the Râya might hear the news of a messenger who had ridden far.

"Bid him here instantly," answered Achyuta, seeing the minister's face was strange; but even as he turned to obey the royal command, I heard a great wail rise up from the depth of the outer court, and a voice rushed despairingly upon mine ear: "*Woe, woe unto us. Raichur and Mudkal are lost—the Cities of Blood are ours no more. Woe, woe unto us.*"

Then the cry ceased, passing to a little distance, where I heard it again, like a mournful wind wailing loudly in a great wilderness, till it dropped away altogether with a doleful shriek, leaving behind a silence that could make even strong men feel afraid.

Then I turned towards Achyuta Deva, who stood like a statue carven in stone.

"Thou hast heard the message, O Râya," I cried out of the bitterness in my heart. "*Art thou satisfied?*"

And immediately, without another word, I strode out of the chamber, leaving him thus, for he made

no answer, neither did he turn his head again in my direction.

So I fled, not speaking to the many who would have arrested my steps, and the mournful cry of the unknown voice followed close upon my heels, so that I could hear no sound but the words of doom: “*Raichur is fallen. Mudkal is ours no more. Lament, lament.*”

Then I shut myself for a while in an apartment little used, where none might find me, for I am ashamed to say that I became as a woman, so that mine eyes grew dim with burning tears; the despairing words echoed continually in mine ears; a numbness took hold of my brain; the moons and the years rolled back, and I stood once again on the plains at the conquest of Raichur; the rivers of blood gleamed mockingly before mine eyes; the war-cries passed along from mouth to mouth; and the sounds of the awful conflict rattled within my brain.

Then of a sudden the figure of Krishna Deva—the beloved Râya—loomed before me; our eyes looked with recognition one upon the other; his lips parted with a radiant smile; his arms extended towards me, and with a great cry I arose to fling myself at his feet, when something struck me heavily on the head, darkness entered swiftly into my brain, and I fell forward upon the hard cold ground, forgetting all.

CHAPTER XXI

A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF WOE

WHEN I came to, I found that I had fallen sideways on the ground, having struck my head violently on a projection in the wall, and a dull pain shot instantly near my temples. Then I roused myself, putting my hand to my head, and behold, it was wet, for the wound had caused a little blood to flow down the side of my face.

Finding by the position of the sun that I must have lain a long time unconscious, I rose hastily and left the palace, passing into the busy streets, where the people stood in groups at the bazaar corners talking ceaselessly, very often concerning Raichur and Mudkal—those fallen cities. Many times I heard the sounds of gay laughter mingle strangely with the words of lamentation, so that together with the shouts of the vendors, the rattling of women's anklets, the distant chant of hymns in the pagoda, the shrill whistle of the light wind as it turned the corners of the bazaar, the juggler calling for all to come and see; all this confusion of sounds beat upon my brain, and the lurid glare

of the scarlet sun gradually spreading a wider path in the heavens, looked upon us with gleaming fiery eyes that watch silently.

At that moment I fain would have leapt up into those fiery clouds, and like a spirit wander in the Infinite Space. But I cast the thought from me, for as yet my time was not accomplished; for though the soul longs and is weary, it may not follow in the path it would desire; because by the method of our lives we weave a chain to heaven, and so the soul rises upward. Woe to the man who has ceased his labour, for what if the length of the chain is short, even when he has mounted a great way and the floods pour down upon him?

Then, though he catch sight of the heavens and the lotus face of the divine Vishnu, yet there are none to aid him on, the eternal waters open their heavy gates and he cannot leap above them, the chain is not caught up by holy hands, and he sinks down beneath the roaring flooding waves,¹ till he passes into another mind, striving, always striving, till at last the chain is strong and lengthy, he is pulled beyond the everlasting waters, the gods become visible to his sight, the sacred cows wander in the midst of the heavenly pastures, the eye does not tire nor the body become weary, and he enters into the divine essence, a soul purified of its dross, pure and holy, living eternally. Thus does one

¹ The above paragraph only expresses Hindu ideas, and the author does not wish them to be regarded in any other light.

incarnation follow another till every soul is undefiled, the hells have become empty as a void place, Yama's work is all accomplished, Vishnu appears again before the eyes of men, the light of the many worlds drop out, the last yuga has passed away, the four heavens are filled with the hosts of men, the Moksham shall be eternal, and the holy paradises shall have no end.

Once more the time has sped on, and behold twelve years have passed away. Strange things, aye, and great evils, have befallen the city. Men speak violently against the Râya; many nobles have made themselves independent of him, and above all, Rama has increased in power and strengthened his position.

Bijapur has not ceased to come against us, and evil has fallen on evil, so that even Nâgalapûr has become despoiled. Yet Achyuta will stir no hand, preferring to make peace with the Âdil Shâh, giving him a great amount of treasure, when with his large armies he could have altogether overwhelmed him. Then, to recover this treasure, Achyuta has put heavy taxes on the people and the captains, so that the nation groans beneath the weight of the oppression. And no man can live in safety, not knowing what day the Râya may not bring some false charge against him because he is wealthy, and a possessor of much land. Semore, my father, has long since departed, and I his son

watched him vanish through the fiery gates, and saw the smoke rise up from the sweet-smelling woods.

As for me, I go very little into the palace now, and I am by no means sorry, as my days are more my own. Yet Ranji Siva—that passionate man—still holds a high position before the Râya, and comes to my house as often as he may, telling me all that has taken place.

It was on one of these days, when I chanced to be standing alone at the entrance to the verandah, that I perceived Ranji and Rama coming up the slopes towards my house, and guessing by their manner that they were bearers of news, I went forward a little way to meet them.

“There is news of some sort, my brothers?” I asked, as we walked back to the verandah.

“News enough, by thy head,” answered Ranji gruffly; “and when is there not in these wild days? But neither thou nor any others need be glad to hear it.”

“Ah, now thou hast raised my curiosity,” I cried, with a smile. “I pray thee continue.”

“We have several things to tell thee,” broke in Rama; “and amongst them it seems that the Râya and his minister, hearing that the Âdil Shâh is about to make another attack on these dominions, seek to prevent it by sending another gift of treasure to Bijapur. And all we captains and warriors long to try our arm in war; but our swords

may rust and dishonour cover our name before the Râya will stir a hand."

"Hush!" I cried in alarm, for Rama's voice had grown rather loud; "thou knowest not who may hear thee."

"Nay, and we care not," broke in Ranji sharply. "As for me, I have become hardened to such slight things; why, on this very morn the Râya came well nigh to put his sword in my breast, because I could not stay my tongue at an unjust thing."

"Why, then, I am relieved to find thee safe," I answered; "thou hast been fortunate."

"Fortunate! Nay," he cried; "methinks it was Achyuta's fortune. My sword is as sharp as his, thou knowest."

"Such talk befits thee not," I broke in sternly. "Achyuta is Krishna's kin, and he reigns."

"As thou wilt," returned Ranji, "thou generally hast thy way with me. But Rama has other news to impart; hearken to him, and I will try to calm myself as best I may."

Whereupon I turned to him, begging that he might speak.

"I fear that it somewhat concerns thee," he began, fixing his eyes on the ground.

"Ah! What of it?"

"Thou knowest the golden casket bearing the ashes of the lady Vacora, which has hitherto stood in the middle hall of the palace. On this morning the Râya took an evil dislike to it, and ordered it

to be cast away into a secret place—the inscription with it. He vowed it must have been a mad thought that made Krishna Deva consider the deeds of any woman so highly, as to merit her name to be placed in a public place.”

“And what of it? Is it cast away?” I asked entreatingly.

“Nay, nay, think not too hardly on this matter; those who took it down were friends of thine, and they have shut it in a quiet and honoured part. I will show thee presently if thou wilt. But let me tell thee that it was because he murmured at the Râya’s command that the noble Ranji came nigh to be cut down. His tongue ran somewhat swiftly, as thou knowest it can.”

“I would the casket were in mine own hands,” I cried; “I, at least, would suffer it to remain undefiled. I would look upon it as my richest treasure, as I looked upon her whose ashes they are, when she was mine in breathing life.”

“Thou art a strange man,” replied Rama; “few, indeed, would live like thee in loneliness. Canst thou never love again? The daughters of the Forest of Learning are fair, thou knowest.”

“Aye, I know,” I answered; “but the beauty of one alone stands ever before me, two divine eyes look continually upon me, and I hear no music but the harmony that breathed out of her very soul. Canst thou understand, my brothers? or does it sound strange in your ears?”

"I understand," answered Ranji softly, who had been listening well; "thou meanest that thou may not pluck another blossom while the fragrance of the lotus is in thy mind." And turning, I saw that his eyes were gentle, and the roughness had altogether passed out of his voice. As for Rama, he made no answer.

Thus it was that I learnt for the first time that Ranji's outer temperament was but the covering of a sweet and sympathetic soul, like to a thorny bush, I thought, lying above and sheltering a group of white and fragrant blooms. I was glad to have found it so, and henceforth I regarded him in a different way, understanding that fiery words and roughness of manner might be put aside at any moment if there was need.

"Let us speak no more on this subject, since it causes thee sorrow," cried Rama suddenly; "as thou sayest, it may sound strange in our ears, but every man to his own will in such things, say I. Now I have another tale to tell thee—'tis sad enough if it be true. But speaking of the casket somewhat drew it from my mind. Thou knowest Senytora Naik?"

"Yea," I cried; "a most worthy man, and honourable in all things."

"Yesternight the Râya, being envious of his goods, brought some charge against him for his arrest. It is rumoured this morning that Senytora, rather than submit to Achyuta, had slain his wife

and his children and then himself; but remember that as yet the news is not confirmed."

"O ye gods!" I cried, starting in alarm. "Can this thing be? I pray it may be false news. Why, he was one of the very chiefest of chiefs in the kingdom, and a man of great wisdom and discernment."

"We shall speedily learn if it be true," said Ranji; "as for me, I doubt it not. Senyтора was a man who would brook no affront, even from the Râya himself."

"Achyuta had best exercise care," broke in Rama; "as it is, the people are divided into two parts, but the majority murmur against him, so that he can only lean on petty lords anxious for gain and revelry. Dost thou know that even thou and I with our few friends could muster an army that could put the King to flight? I myself have command of many thousands. They need but the word, and then—— This cannot last long."

And I could not find it in my heart to check his words, knowing how sorely the Men of Victory were oppressed.

"Affairs of every sort are utterly neglected," he continued, "except anything relating to a new amusement. Why, yester-morning, some poor man—a Sudra, I believe, by caste—entreated the Râya to listen to a certain grievance of his. It seemed that he had become heir to certain possessions, but another relative, being jealous, was continually

seeking to rob him of it. I know not all the details, but what think ye? Why, Achyuta laughed in his face, and dismissed him for an insolent and slovenly dog. That same night he sent a troop to the man's house, who seized everything of worth they could lay their hands on. And now, if ye will go and look, ye will find his house in desolation, with not even a servant at any door."

"What of the man?" I asked; "can he obtain no redress?"

"None," answered Rama shortly; "at the lower slopes of his garden thou wilt find a well, and this morning if thou hadst searched therein, thou mightest have seen a sight to make thee turn and flee." And Rama Aliya arose hastily and paced several times up and down the flat paths.

"Tell me no more," I entreated, "they make the heart sick."

"More than that," continued Rama, ceasing in his walk, "they make the heart think of things that never before have entered into our minds. Methinks I feel the fiery blood of the noble Ranji flow within me. I for one will not see might, power, honour and riches pass away from us thus. Are we men of high caste to bend our necks thus? O for the arm of Krishna Deva and a trusty sword, then what Mussulman might stand against us? Here we sit as idle men with the armies of Bijapur marching against our lands, and snatching great portions like greedy dogs."

"Yea," broke in Ranji, his hand on his sword, as was his wont when excited, "the noble Rama has spoken aright. These things shall not go on. I say, let the word be given to the people, and ye'll see how they will flock to our brave banners. But one word, and we will have an army fit to conquer a thousand Bijapurs, or defend a thousand cities."

"Speak softly, I beseech thee," I exclaimed in alarm, for both my friends were heedless of their voices in the extent of their fury. "What if spies hear thee? Achyuta's power is yet great, and I fear each one of us is not without an enemy."

"To the winds with thy caution," replied Ranji, with a laugh; "we are alone." Whereupon he again broke out into a torrent of words, so that even Rama was obliged to cease and be amazed.

"Faugh!" he cried after he had exhausted himself. "I vow that in a little while there shall be an uprising among the Men of Victory. Achyuta shall flee before a mighty arm."

"Where?" I asked, more because I knew not what to say.

"To Bijapur, if he will—we shall not want him here. Methinks there shall be a new dynasty."

"The gods save us from warring one upon the other," I answered.

"The gods aid us to hold the honour, nay the very soil of the City of Victory, the land of which it is the capital," returned Ranji; "the gods——"

“Hold!” I cried, suddenly starting and looking behind; “what is that?”

“Nought,” answered Ranji carelessly; “it was but the wind moaning in the midst of yonder trees.”

“It was not,” I cried. “It was not.” And immediately I ran to the spot where I had heard the noise, while my two friends followed speedily, seeing my alarm.

In an instant we had gained the bushes, a tall thick group, reaching up to the first branches of the spreading oaks.

“Look!” I cried, pointing to a little heap of damp earth behind the clustering bushes, and my voice sounded strange in my own ears, “What is that?”

“Footprints,” answered Rama excitedly, bending forward; “footprints of naked feet, and a man’s. By Krishna, we have been spied upon. Patcola, canst thou——?”

But I did not wait for him to finish his words, but rushed hastily into a narrow avenue commanding a better view of the paths behind the bushes.

At a little distance lay a higher slope whereon was placed an out-house. Here the trees became more scattered, so that if any one had fled from the inner garden they must needs pass along that way.

Suddenly we beheld a large branch of a birch-tree sway violently to one side; there was a quick flash of a dark arm; a slight crackling among the

leaves, and all became quiet again in an instant. In our eagerness we made a rush forward, but our steps were stayed by a great stone barrier that lay between, besides an entangling mass of impenetrable shrubs, so that it was impossible to reach the place except by another way.

"This is some treachery," cried Ranji in a hissing whisper. "Would that my strong sword had come into play."

"O my friends," I cried in anguish, "I fear there is some evil afoot. Doubtless either the Râya or some secret enemy has done this thing."

"The outcome will be speedy, whate'er it be," answered Ranji grimly. "Were my words loud enough to be heard on all sides?"

"Aye," I said; "I fear that every whit of our conversation has reached the ears of a spy. I think I am no coward, but, oh, I fear exceedingly for you and me."

"Let the hatred of our enemies descend upon us," answered Ranji; "our arm is strong, thou knowest. We are loved by many, even though they may openly profess for Achyuta."

"Ah, but remember Senytora. His was perchance a case of treachery. Let us return to the house, it is no use waiting here."

We walked slowly back, and though I offered hospitality to my friends, they refused with courtesy, saying they had several affairs on hand.

Then, looking at me with a strange meaning in

their eyes, they turned away, and I little knew what things should take place before I saw them again.

That same night I was stricken with the symptoms of a high fever, the cause whereof I could not ascertain.

CHAPTER XXII

BEHOLD, HOPE DAWNETH IN THE CITY

ON a certain morning a long while (so I was told) after the day when Ranji, Rama, and myself spake together in the inner garden, I opened my eyes with astonishment at finding two Brahmans sitting on either side of my couch, their legs crossed, and a sacred image in their hands, while I could hear them chanting prayers, sometimes in unison, sometimes in antiphony. I closed mine eyes and listened, wondering much, till at last my memory came back, and I knew a sickness had laid hold on me. I felt my limbs very weak, and my tongue was hard and dry between my teeth.

Presently the voices ceased, and the two holy men (whom I recognized as well skilled in medicine) withdrew to a little distance, talking together in low tones. What were the words I knew not, but many times out of my half-closed eyes I beheld them nodding their heads towards my couch, as if they could not altogether understand me.

Suddenly one of them advanced, laying his cool hand gently on my brow; whereupon I moved my head slightly, and the Brahman muttered some words to his friend.

"He is about to awake," he cried; "the potion has worked well; the fever seems to have altogether passed."

"Have I slept long?" I asked, trying to speak loudly, yet my voice was a mere whisper.

"A long while," the Brahman returned soothingly; "exert not thyself, but drink this if thou canst." And he placed the lip of a drinking vessel to my mouth. After this I felt more strength come into my frame, and though the Brahmans would have prevented me, I persisted in asking questions concerning my sickness, as my memory had by no means become clear.

Then they told me how, during the space of two weeks, the fever had raged sorely in me, so that I talked incessantly, and at one time they had despaired of my life. Nevertheless, with the aid of many prayers and skilfully prepared potions, I had fallen into a deep sleep, and how I awoke I have already told.

"I have spoken much during the fever, thou sayest," I cried, when he had finished the tale, "wilt thou tell me the significance of those words?"

This I asked, for I feared that I might have revealed certain things which I would wish to keep secret.

"Only strange sentences strung together, think no more on it," he said in answer; but I noticed that he gave me a somewhat curious look. Since he would say no more, I was forced to be content.

Once again the elder Brahman recited prayers, and a great drowsiness seizing me, I fell asleep.

Within a few days my strength returned gradually but surely, and then at my request the attendants arranged my couch in the cool verandah where I could lie for many hours.

It was on one of these days, when Shirishi, my sister, had come to see me, that my mind went back to the awful day when in company with Ranji and Rama I had beheld the footprints of a spy in the damp earth beneath the network of bushes. Then, calling Shirishi closer to me, I questioned her as to the state of the city.

"Thou art excited, my brother," she answered gently; "thou must not think on outside things, for the physicians declare that the fever might return if thou wert otherwise than calm. Speak if it pleases thee on some light subject, or if I may, I will sing thee to sleep."

But her words only roused me more fully.

"I cannot sleep," I answered, with more sharpness than I had intended; "the fever will be more likely to return if thou wilt not relieve my mind."

"How?" she asked. "What shall I tell thee?"

"How fares it with Ranji Siva and Rama Raja?" I asked, rising on my elbow; "are they safe and well?"

"Safe enough," she answered, with a strange smile, "and well also; but I shall leave thee if thou

wilt continue to excite thyself thus. The physician forbade much talking."

"I care not," I cried again; "what dost thou mean by looking at me thus? There is something thou art hiding from me, and I have reason to ask concerning Ranji and Rama. Tell me all that has befallen them since I fell sick, as I cannot rest."

In my excitement I found that I had overdone my strength, so that I was forced to lie quiet for a few moments on my couch.

"Come," said Shirishi, approaching me, "if thou wilt assure me of remaining calm, I will tell thee a strange tale."

"Hasten, my sister, mine ears are open."

"Then I will commence from the time when thou wert seized with the fever. Three days after, it became known about the city that these thy two friends had been arrested secretly by the Râya's guards through the word of some enemy who had by reason of jealousy set spies upon them. A charge of treason was brought against them, and it seems they were bound and taken by night, because Achyuta feared the people."

"O ye gods," I broke in, clasping my hands in anguish; "O thou who art our guardian, look upon us! It is as I feared: my noble friends are no more."

"Hush," smiled Shirishi, "have I not said that they are well and safe? It seems they were kept several days without the people knowing of

their arrest; for their families were forced to swear they would not reveal it as yet, and to say they had gone on a long journey. What happened within the palace walls I know not, save that certain witnesses, especially one man, spoke of having heard treasonable words against the Râya and his lords. Then they were placed under a strong guard till the next day. Apparently on that same night the Râya was seized with a sudden illness, and I know no more, save that on the morrow the word went forth throughout all the city that Achyuta was dead."

"What! my sister," I exclaimed, "are thy words true? Achyuta dead?"

"By thy head I swear it," she answered; "calm thyself, for my news is not yet all told. When it was known that Achyuta reigned no more, Sâdasiva, the heir, was named in his place. But what thinkest thou? the greater part of the people would not have him—or at least acknowledge him as king—so they arose in their numbers; and here my story ends. Sâdasiva is almost a prisoner, and Rama, with the majority of the nobles on his side, has taken the power into his own hands, and virtually reigns as Râya——"

"Rama so easily a King!" I shouted, breaking in upon her words. Then, remembering how many strange events had led up to it, I was less amazed, though it seemed curious it should have happened during the time I was ill of the fever.

"Surely news enough has reached mine ears this day," I continued, trying to smile; "and Ranji Siva—he is, of course, restored to his former position with all honour?"

"It is so, and Rama the Râya—for that he is, although a great many acknowledge Sâdasiva as the true Râya—has caused men of all castes to shout anew, because he has sworn revenge on Bijapur; he vows he will do great things, and as thou knowest, his word is never broken. Raichur, Mudkal and Nâgalapûr shall be ours again, for so it is decreed."

"The gods prosper all his actions," I cried fervently; "but would I had for myself seen and heard all these things; they are almost too wonderful to understand."

"It is so, my brother," she answered slowly; "already has Rama the Râya removed the burdensome taxes laid on us by Achyuta; and another thing I must tell thee that will please thee: thou dost not know that he sent his own physician to thee, and ascertained after thy health himself when it was convenient."

"What!" I cried, "has he honoured my poor house by entering therein?"

"Twice, indeed," answered my sister; "thou wert ill indeed, but he saw thy face, and bade the physicians perform their uttermost for thy recovery, and I am certain nothing that might by any chance be worked for thy good has been neglected."

“Thanks be to the gods, and may it be that in a short time I may stand upright.” Whereupon I in my turn made known to Shirishi Senyтора’s speech of twelve years ago, when he prophesied what would befall Rama. I told, too, of the footprints in the damp earth behind the bushes on the outer slopes of the garden. But my words in this case were in vain; for it seemed that she already knew of it, partly because in the fever I had talked much on all these things.

“What else have I said during that time, O my sister?” I cried, for I was not altogether satisfied.

“Little or nought,” she answered; “the sickness would make thee speak of strange things, and whatever thou hast said was poured into trusted ears.”

“What strange things?” I questioned eagerly. “Come, I know thou hast not told all.”

“Then, my brother, be not angry” (and I saw her manner was slightly confused); “but there was mention of a great secret entrusted to thee by Krishna Deva concerning a package of writing. And thou spokest anxiously about it, and sometimes a moan broke from thy lips, and in anguish thou wouldst pray aloud that the letters might not have to be revealed. But anything else concerning them was not learnt.”

“Who has heard my words?” I asked.

“None but the Brahman who attended on thee;

I believe it was the one sent from the Râya's palace. But I pray thee be not distressed; if it be a secret concerning some matter thou wouldst by no means have known, then consider that the lips of those who heard thy words are sealed."

"Nay, I care not," I answered; "but I am glad to have understood all this." Whereupon, seeing it was no longer necessary to remain silent, I told her how the package was placed in my care, and how, seeing the actions of Achyuta, I had fulfilled the trust.

And I was very glad she had revealed my speech, for now I understood, wherefore the Brahmans had looked so curiously at me, when I spoke with them at the first.

Just then, perceiving she had been with me a long while, my sister arose saying she must depart. And bidding each other farewell till another day she left the verandah, sending an attendant to take her place. Although she had told me to seek sleep a while, yet I could not, and long after the tinkling of her golden anklets had left mine ear I lay gazing unseeingly at the scanty yellow grass, which became greener as it passed within the shadow of the overhanging trees, pondering on the strange things I had heard in a few short hours. Then I closed mine eyes, shutting out the glare of the scorching sun, and a sweet vision of things-to-be came before my mind.

"Rama virtually the Râya! Sâdasiva a cap-

tive ! The Men of Victory shouting for very joy ! O ye gods ! O Indra and guardian gods ! Hasten the day when we shall cry : ' Raichur and Mudkal are ours once more. Nâgalapûr is free from pollution.' Set our honour again in a high place : let none crawl up to cast it down. Let the Men of Victory be altogether mighty ; let them be strong as if they had drunk of the *amritar*. Let it be when they go forth to fight that the spirit of the War-god shall go with them. Bijapur shall see their face, and they shall flee. Vijayanagar comes in wrath to claim her own, for the mighty elephant has broken its tether, and the frightened jackal shall fly to a secret lair because of the fury of the unbound beast. Restore our honour and we shall be satisfied, so that our grief may be turned to joy. Our shouts, the beatings of our instruments, the joy of our song shall mount on the wings of the wind into the midst of the very heavens ; it shall soar among the thunder clouds, it shall dip even into the awful abode of Silence. Like to the shout that went forth at the conquest of Raichur, so shall it be when we call it our own again. Make us once more like a river that winds and stretches, and has many arms, so that when it roars it is mighty, and when it is at rest it is strong. O ye Holy Ones, look upon us, O thou that ridest upon the Peacock, be our guardian !''

And in the intensity of my passion and the love I bore to my country I found I had uttered these

last words aloud, my hands clasped fervently above my head.

"A wise prayer, my son," said a voice suddenly at the side of my couch, and looking round with a start, I beheld an aged priest whom I knew well sitting near at hand.

"I honour thee," I cried. "I may not rise to salute thee; but tell me, I pray thee, how thou camest here, for I heard no sound whatever."

"So it appears, my son," he returned; "two bearers brought me hither, but thou sawest not; I rustled my robes and yet thou didst not turn. At first I thought by the look of thee that thou wert seized with some strange sickness, but I find thee better than even reports which go about concerning thy health. I beheld thee even with a smile playing about thy mouth. Is it some secret joy, my son? or hast thou found it in thy heart to love again?"

"I thought about the future, O Holy One," I answered; "dost thou know that I have but lately heard from the lips of Shirishi the wonders which have taken place within the city? O my father, we are as a strong beast untethered. Even already I feel the strength creeping into these gaunt limbs, and I love to dwell on the future. Krishna Deva's work shall not be altogether undone: it shall increase, and I look for the day. Therefore a song was in my heart when thou camest in, and sweet visions passed before my eager eyes."

“Ever a dreamer,” he observed, smiling; “when wilt thou cease thy dreaming? Yet, after all, it befits thee well. Glad am I to behold such a sudden change in thee. So Shirishi, thy sister, has told thee concerning the state of the city? Now, I came to do so, but I find it done, and thee, as if thou hadst drunk of some life-giving beverage.”

“And dost thou not also feel thy heart smile?” I asked, noticing that he was somewhat thoughtful. “Rama, we know, is a man of power and of great courage.”

“Now thou hast put a difficult question, but I will discuss nothing with thee as yet. Our speech must be light and cheerful.”

Presently the old priest left me, when I fell into a soothing sleep, and from that day marked a steady return of strength.

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER MANY YEARS

BEHOLD, since I spoke last, a great time has passed away. Year upon year have heaped themselves up to the number of twenty-three, so that in age I have become as an old man of three-score ten and six; yet my memory is as keen as in the former days, and I sit in idleness wandering back into happy paths, forgetting for a time the things present. Then I feel my old blood surge violently in my veins, the voice of an ancient friend murmurs aloud in mine ear, these undimmed eyes rest lovingly on some well-known face which confronts me from the spirit-land. And sometimes I stretch out my arms longingly, till I remember that there is nought to clasp, and I sigh dolefully.

Then strange visions pass before me, and the people smile at my strange manner; but I care not, since often the sweet face of Vacora looms at a little distance, and sometimes she will come softly up to the place where I sit, smiling mournfully out of her great dark eyes, then—is it a moaning in yonder trees, or is it a cry that breaks from her spirit lips? Methinks it is that. Methinks she

is beckoning with her soft hand, calling me to come to the Great Beyond, and I sigh in turn, knowing she is lonely within the heavens. And I ask myself how long the great Flood-Gates must hang between.

Then suddenly she will flit away, and I watch till a misty cloud leaps up between us; something whispers dreamily in my ear, and I know that my time is not yet accomplished, and I wonder what further work the gods have ordained for me to do.

Against my will I am forced to quit the realms of imagination, a holy seal is set upon the things of former days, my happy wanderings come abruptly to an end, and I rush back to the present time, remembering how few I have to call my own, as I make no new friends, and of late I have become more silent, living the days of my life quietly, seeking acquaintance with the spirit friends rather than with those who live.

But now let me dwell on things other than these sweet visions, for, lo! I have come nigh to the end of my tale, and still there be much to tell, and the time is short.

My daughters do I see no more, for they in turn were given in marriage, and had become widows. Therefore they also have passed out by Holy Suttee. Hence I have but few kinsmen to call my own, and of these Shirishi, my sister (a woman of younger years than I, the wife of a rich noble), and my son, a man now full grown in years, are

very dear to me. And often though I would have him seek the company of younger friends, yet he will not, and sometimes I fear that he follows too much in my footsteps, for he loves to let his imagination play in the habitation of silence rather than to talk on any enlivening subject. But on this I seek to lay a check, for I in my youth could laugh and join in the merriest talk, and I like not to see a man of too young years give himself up to dreaming, however sweet he may find it. In the matter of an old man like myself it is well, for is not my life drawing on to its end? But who will say that I have wasted my younger years? Before the gods I have striven to do that which was right, and willingly would I have yielded up my life if it would in any way benefit our sacred soil. Krishna Deva I have loved and served—he was my King. The City of Victory also have I given my best endeavours, therefore I would that I might rest in peace, weary after the days of labour.

But it may not be, for behold another cloud has risen in the already darkened sky; sweet memories must be cast aside, and for my feeble hands there is yet perchance a work to do. Whate'er it be, let me put mine whole strength therein, so that the gods may not say in the time of my departure, when their messengers have sought me out, that I flinched from doing a thing fully.

Rama the Râya still reigns, and in the three-

and-twenty years that have passed, making us both old men, many things of a strange character have come about in the city—nay, even in the whole of Vijayanagar—and Rama the Râya, we have found, is a different man to Rama the Commander of the Forces.

What shall I say concerning him? Behold he is brave; he has borne himself ever as a friend to me, offering me a great position, but I would not accept it. His mind is not set on amusements nor on light things; yet for all his virtues, and the mighty love we bear one towards the other, I say that the Rama of former days can find no likeness in Rama the King.

Now, as I have said, Vijayanagar in the days of Achyuta was filled with distress because of the inroads of Bijapur. Raichur and Mudkal had been taken, Nâgalapûr had they laid low, therefore the people hailed Rama in joy because he was strong. Yea, he was strong, very strong, and armed in his strength he went forth, making the Mussulmans tremble, so that the dishonouring peace was swept away, and the Men of Victory held their heads high, and went out in the spirit of the valiant King. And so it was that Vijayanagar fought continually in petty battles against her enemies of the Dakhan, encroaching on every land. This, to my mind, was not needful, and reminded one of an animal that continually worried another. Also the Râya bore scant courtesy to any embassies, heaping contempt

upon their heads. Yet none should think hardly of him, for after all, had not many things entered into his life to make him bitter? Had it not fallen upon him to restore that honour which he had beheld crumbling away before his very eyes? Therefore have I loved him with a full heart because of his strength and his valour, and I would he had been ruler at an earlier date, following on the heels of the perfect Krishna.

However, as I have said, another cloud has gathered on the already darkening sky, and it is a well-known thing that the five Sultans of the Dakhan—those infidels—have conspired together for the overthrow of the City of Victory. Whereupon Rama has risen, and with him all the might of Vijayanagar, and, lo! in a mighty array they have gone forth even to Talikota, a place which lieth near our sacred soil, to meet the league of the five powers. Also he had sent his brothers to hold the ford of the Krishna River, so that at this time but a small force remained in the City of Victory, seeing that every man who was fit has joined himself to the armies of Rama Râya; and a goodly sight they made, for I watched them depart, straining mine eyes till the last flash of the silver shields was hidden behind the rising dust.

Then I sighed for my younger days, when I, too, might have ridden in that bright array; but Rama Râya, when I stood in his presence on the eve of departure, bade me keep no sad heart, say-

ing they who had accomplished so much in former times might of a surety sit before their own door in peace. And when I was sorrowful because he, being likewise of a great age, must needs go out to battle, I beheld all the sternness die out of his face as he answered gently: "It may not be; I am not a Râya to leave my army to battle alone, even when four-score and sixteen years hang heavily on me."

Whereupon he had embraced me as a brother, bidding me look for the day when he might return in victory. So after I had sat alone on the evening of the battle-to-be, thinking of things present, and on things past, I went out of my house into the streets, seeking to speak with aged friends who stayed behind from the battle. And I was pleased to see how the people carried a merry countenance, and spake gaily one to the other concerning the return of the Râya.

Presently I heard a youth cry aloud that it were best to prepare the garlands and the banners at once, seeing that they might soon be needed.

"Let us first behold the dust rising in the distance," answered another, and I considered his answer wise. Nevertheless, I felt young blood leap into me as I thought on the looked-for news of a great victory, for the place of battle was not far from the city, and a speedy messenger might arrive at any hour with joyful tidings.

Therefore, at the time we expected the approach

of heralds, several of those who remained mounted on to the high towers commanding a long view. And I was about to follow them when I beheld Shirishi, my sister, whose husband had gone out to Talikota, hurrying towards me.

"Dost thou mount the towers, my brother?" she cried when she had gained breath.

"Even so," I answered; "wouldst thou go also?"

"Gladly; guessing thine intention I have run to meet thee, and I have nought else to do."

So together we slowly trod the stony steps, till at last we stood upon the flat top surrounded by its narrow wall.

"At what hour is it supposed we may see messengers?" she asked after a short space.

"It cannot be known," I replied; "and as for myself, I mounted these steps to obtain a different picture of scenery, not because I look for a messenger at any special time."

"I do," she said, twirling the bracelets round her arm; "the sounds of battle have already finished," and straining my ear in the direction of Talikota I heard no noise of the great cannons which had boomed continuously during the earlier part of the day.

"It seems that thou art right, Shirishi," I answered; "nevertheless, while we watch we——"

"Let us occupy ourselves in conversation," she interrupted, with a smile. "I would sing to thee,"

my brother, but youth is past, and with it the music has died out of my voice. Shall it, therefore, be some magic tale?"

"Nay," I cried, "let it be a song, it will fit better with my mood and thine."

Whereupon, though there was no instrument to accompany her words, she lifted up her voice in melody, singing a song I had often heard in her girlhood days, and I listened attentively, lending my ear with pleasure, and in after years, as thou wilt see, I was glad to have a remembrance of this hour. For though her younger days had fled away, yet the melody still abode in her voice, and her tones were rich and very sweet. As to the words I recall them not of late years, but their bearing told of many things concerning love and joy, wisdom and knowledge, legends, and deeds of strange wonder, of births, of deaths, of things springing up, of things dying down; of things leaping into life, of things fading and withering away. Then somehow her voice dropped into softer tones, and I was led gently into some holy place, where I could feel the breath of the gods upon me; mighty waters rolled on every side; murmuring music echoed across from the far distant plains, and I rocked myself quietly to and fro, shutting out all except the mysteries of her magic song, when of a sudden it ceased abruptly; I felt something clutch me tightly on the arm, and rousing with a start, I perceived that Shirishi was pointing

into the distance, calling for me to follow with her hand.

"Look," she cried in a low voice, "what canst thou see?"

Rising hastily to my feet, I looked around, for I saw by her face that this was something of importance.

"Nay, my sister," I answered, "I see nothing, and yet——" Then suddenly I checked my words, for far, far beyond, where the eyes could scarcely pierce, a tiny flickering cloud of dust moved swiftly towards the City of Victory.

"A bearer of tidings," I cried joyfully, clapping my hands; "let us watch from this position for a little while."

We leant eagerly forward upon the low stone walls, keeping our eyes continually fixed on the one point, watching the little cloud.

"Surely, Shirishi," I cried after a few moments, "surely there might not be so much dust because of the coming of one rider, however speedily he might ride."

"Nay, perchance there are several," she answered; "we shall understand better when they approach nearer." And she was right, for as yet groves of trees, rising slopes, and tall structures came continually before our eyes.

Suddenly, just as we were about to have a better view, the dust somewhat disappeared, and we knew that the troops had turned into a road which led

straight for the city gates. We waited in eager impatience, turning our eyes in the direction whence we knew they must soon issue. And all this time we heard shouts going up from round about us, for the watchers on the other towers had called aloud the news, and the people, hurrying forward, ran to fling open the great entrance.

Then, after a time that we counted long, the body of men came in sight again in the distance in the midst of great shouting. Next I heard a scream from Shirishi's lips, for, lo! these were no heralds of good tidings that rushed swiftly towards us, but a company of disordered men flying upon us with a mighty noise—fear written upon their faces, not one man staying beside his neighbour, but hurrying on as best he might.

Then I heard a cry break out, and in the confusion of sound I understood that the Men of Victory had been routed, and had turned their backs, flying from the battle of Talikota. Also it was shouted that the Mussulmans were following in the distance.

Shirishi and I looked at each other without speaking; and I doubt not that the agony written in our faces might have scared any one who knew not the cause. My sister stood utterly still, her great eyes gazing with terror on to the slopes below the tower, her hands clenched tightly upon her breast. Yet, as the noise increased in strength, new life and new thoughts entered into us, and I

would have turned to rush down the steps when she laid a cold hand upon my arm, and her voice sounded unnatural in my ear.

“What of the Râya, my brother? for I perceive him not in the midst of these.” Then my heart stood strangely still, and a new terror seized on me, and leaning over the low wall, I tried to make my voice heard above the great din. None answered, so flinging my staff aside, I well-nigh threw myself down the many steps, only turning to shout a word to Shirishi.

But my speech was of no avail. She had fallen prone upon the hard cold ground in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XXIV

BEHOLD, THE DESOLATION

WHEN at last I stood in safety outside the tower, I came nigh to be overwhelmed because of the many noises, the rushings to and fro, the screams of which as yet I did not understand the meaning. Suddenly, as I looked around, I perceived a soldier belonging to the Râya's army, a man with whom I had a slight acquaintance.

"Hold!" I cried, as he rushed violently past me, and so suddenly did I force him to stop, that had it not been for my arm he would certainly have fallen upon the ground.

"Ho, my master," he answered, as soon as his breath would let him speak, "I salute thee, but in what way have I offended thee that thou put such strength in thy arm? I perceive my wife in the distance, I pray thee let me go."

"Not before thou hast answered my questions," I cried, drawing him rapidly out of the crowd into a little archway. "Speak, and say wherefore the Râya has not yet returned. Is it well with him? Tell me all concerning this—this——" But I could not finish the sentence, and only waved my arm about.

The man covered his face with his hands. "Ask me not, my master," he cried at last. "Oh, what have we done for so great an evil to fall upon us?" And he would have turned away, but I held him firmly. Then, as I waited, I heard a great voice from a far-off corner shriek aloud the awful words: "*Wail, wail for Vijayanagar. Wail for Rama the King. Wail for the City of Victory. Let the tears flow from your eyes because the wrath of the gods has fallen upon us.*"

And turning to the place from whence the sound came, I perceived a holy priest of feeble years, leaning upon his staff, his knees tottering beneath him, yet his voice proclaiming in a few words the news of the awful day.

Then I learnt from the man how Rama had fought against the mighty league, commanding his men with skill, till seeing how hardly his companies were pressed, he had seated himself on a gorgeous throne, surrounded by heaps of coins of gold and silver and jewels of great worth. And with these he rewarded his bravest followers, promising guerdon to those who fought faithfully, putting out their whole strength. And it seems that after this action the advantage lay with the Hindus until of a sudden the Mussulmans made a quick rush, breaking through the middle ranks. Thereupon the power of the men of Vijayanagar was broken, and they were forced to fly before the swords and fire. Hastily the Râya entered a

litter, and the bearers sought to carry him out of the battle, the Mussulmans pressing hard behind; when by some unlucky chance an elephant belonging to one of the infidel Shâhs and furious with pain, caused the men to drop the litter.

Before there was time to mount a horse, Rama Râya was secure in the hands of the enemy. Then, after a short time a cry went up that sent further terror into the hearts of the routed troops; they saw the head of their chief fixed on a spear and flaunted before their maddened eyes.

Seeing their leader was dead, and believing no further hope remained, they fled faster, the Mussulmans shouting, and following close upon their heels till they came nigh to the outskirts of the city, when the foes stayed their steps. Nevertheless, it was known that they would arrive later.

“O Indra,” I cried, wringing my hands in anguish, “wherefore hast thou forsaken us? O ye gods, why has this come upon us?”

But little else could I say at the time, my heart being too stricken by reason of the awful news. I stood for a few moments gazing in silence before I could realize that the army of our proud city was broken; for never had a king gone out more confident of victory than the dead Rama. Now I understood the reasons of the wild lamentations, and silently I mourned—mourned for Rama my friend—for Rama, the man of a great mind. I knew that the power of the City of Victory was

crushed for ever, as there were none to take command, neither had the few remaining men of the glorious army any heart to fight again.

And as I thought on all this, knowing that at least at present it was useless to turn the confusion into order, the cry of the aged priest broke out again like a frenzied shriek, and a wild groan swept over the beautiful city, stopping not, because it could find no place wherein to rest, so filled were the streets with answering groans.

Then all my strange visions leapt before mine eyes; the years and the times rolled back, and I stood with the Royal Krishna beside the ivory seat, looking down upon the five drops of blood that glistened thereon.

Now I understood the meaning of the mystic five, and the dream of the five armies coming against the one army.

"What wilt thou seek to do now?" I asked the man, who stood silently before me.

"Go to my family," he answered gruffly; "we have no strength to fight again. If it comes to the worst, why then we must away on some sturdy beast out of the reach of the Mussulman dogs, for we have knowledge that at any hour they may fly upon us."

"Go, and the gods be with thee and thine," I cried, releasing my hold on the man's arm; "yet I thought not that the Sons of Victory should ever flee from this sacred soil."

"There are no men save a mere handful. What can we do? But, my master, I pray thee also follow in my path: if thou wilt I will become thy servant on the journey. Come while thou canst, my master. It is not ordained for thee to remain here."

"Not as yet," I replied, touched by the man's entreaty; "go thou. As for me, I must see about several things, and perchance after all I may find that the sacred city is not without defence."

Then I turned from the man, bidding him farewell, and in another instant he had fled through the crowd, looking once back at me with sorrowful eyes.

I also went out of the shelter of the archway into the open streets and the bazaars, where the people talked wildly, running to and fro, mad with excitement.

Two hours later I returned to my house, where I found Shirishi, now fully recovered from her swoon.

"Prepare thyself," I cried, "to go on a far journey. The city, I find, has no defence; the army has been well-nigh swept away."

"Then we have no hope, my brother?"

"None whatever, it seems," I answered as calmly as I could. "The people are mad. No one commands in the city, every one strives for himself."

"These terrors frighten me, my brother, but I will force myself to be brave."

"I know thou wilt," I said, and bending down I kissed her. Then I left her hastily, saying I would return presently. But scarce had I gained the entrance when I beheld the figure of my son rushing swiftly by.

"Hold," I cried, "where goest thou?"

"I honour thee, my father," he answered, staying his steps; "I was on my way looking for thee, but the city is in such utter confusion that I scarce know where to turn my head."

"What are the latest tidings?"

"Only that people of all castes prepare to quit the city as speedily as they may. But dost thou know that in the chief bazaar certain ones are making long speeches, calling aloud for the people to rally?"

"Ah," I cried, "and what success attends the venture?"

"Poor enough, for the men only shake their heads, saying that to fight would mean certain death, and they prefer to live a while."

"Cowards!" I cried vehemently; "yet, after all, it would take many thousands to stand against these vile Mussulmans. But I forget, hast thou heard any news concerning Sadâsiva?"

"Taken to Penukonda by Tirumala Raja with much treasure."

"Go thou, my son," I exclaimed, "and such of

thy wealth as thou canst, for if the Mussulmans come I also do not intend to remain on this defiled soil."

Whereupon he went one way and I another; and many were the friends I met carrying treasures of gold and silver, while the priests belonging to the holy pagodas hid away the sacred things of worth far from the reach of polluting hands.

As for me, I went quietly into the place where lay the casket holding Vacora's ashes, and wrapping it in a linen cloth, I hastened back to my house, where I stayed for a long while, giving directions on every hand, seeking to calm those whom fright had stricken. Also that night there was not rest because of the continual wailing in the streets; the noise and rushings to and fro, the cries of women who sought in vain for their husbands among the few remaining troops.

So at dawn I arose hastily from the slight sleep I had obtained, sending word to Shirishi that she should be ready to depart out of the city soon, in the company of her husband, myself and the household; when, lo! the messenger I had sent returned swiftly as I stepped out of the entrance. Then I learnt from him that Shirishi was dead of a sudden death. Thereupon, without saying a word because of the sorrow in my heart, I gave command that my servants should quit the city without me, because now I had a mind to remain a while.

So I made every man a gift of treasure, not hearkening to their words of entreaty.

In a short time every one who owned a horse had fled, and those that stayed hid their gold and silver in a secret place; while others even ended their lives in the waters of the deep dark wells. But I was glad afterwards that my son and I remained within the city, for we heard a report that the Mussulmans met many of those who fled to refuge, and put them to the sword.

Carrying the tiny casket with some treasure beneath my robe, and the amulet about my neck, I went in and out of the many streets, rendering such aid as I could. My son followed with me, for he like myself was careless as to his life, desiring rather to remain upon the sacred soil until the City dying had become a City dead. The wailing cry of the old priest rang out upon us near at hand, and we heard others belonging to the temple, who would not flee, take up his words till every street was filled with the echo of the mournful sounds and every heart repeated it. Then, lo! another cry was raised of a different sort, telling that part of the Mussulman force had arrived; and so the cry of warning mingled strangely with the cry of wailing, for the old priest ceased not, nor moved from his place.

As for us, we retreated swiftly and without a word into another part that we deemed more safe, and mounting into a high tree we drew the big

leaves closer upon us, so that I think any one passing at the foot would have had no knowledge of our refuge. For some time we remained thus, seeing nothing, since the garden wherein we sheltered was deserted, and the shrubs and trees grew very thick together along the sides of the narrow avenues. Nevertheless, we could hear many noises that turned our hearts sick, for none might mistake the victorious shouts of the yelling Mussulmans. Then came wild shrieks, and we knew how many times their swords were dipped in living blood.

Only once after this was heard the doleful cry of the old priest lifting up his aged voice in mourning: "*Wail for the City of Victory. Wail for a perishing City. Wail for the Flower of Indian Empires. O Wail! Wail!*"

Of a sudden his voice died out, and we guessed a sword had found its way into his saintly heart. Yet the echo of his words remained with us, and in the years that followed, I have heard the sound of his ghostly cry waking up in the land of silence, and opening up the ancient wounds.

"What shall we do, my father?" whispered my son; "we cannot remain here for a long while, and the Mussulmans may come here at any time."

"Let them come," I answered bitterly, "methinks we are beyond perception. When we descend, let the gods show us where to tread."

"So be it, my father," he returned, "and this

is better than a cold death. But if this is only a small portion of the enemies' army (would that we had power enough to wipe them out !), what shall it be when the Shâhs themselves come against us ?”

To this I could make no answer; and we remained silent, lest any one lurking below might hear our voices. As we sat among the branches, hearkening to the distant shouts, a different cry broke upon us, like to the death-cry of a wounded city that had sighed out its strength in mourning.

I craned forth my head where the leaves parted a little, and what did I see? I tell thee, a sight that made me cover my face with my hands, quenching a groan. For, lo! a tongue of fire had shot out round about the chief pagoda, rearing itself like a snake towards the sky, and though we might only see the upper parts because of the trees and walls that lay between, yet we gazed in fascination till presently the flame shot out on the other side, and the two snakes twined themselves into many coils, rushing with a mighty hiss round and round the sacred domes that flashed and quivered in the lurid glare. I heard the shouts of the desecrating foe as the place of the holy gods became no more; and I would that the dust and ashes might have been possessed with a divine life to rise up and bury the assailers underneath.

But I knew that the gods waited their own time; but woe to them who at the appointed hour felt the strength of their avenging hand !

Then the wind came across in little puffs, and I felt the hot breath of the fiery snakes touch me lightly on the face; and I think if it had not been for my son's safety, I would have rushed headlong into the midst of the slaughtering foe. Rather would I have perished amid the leaping flames than stand silent near at hand, watching the Holy Shrine with its splendour levelled to the dust.

After the space of many hours, when the flames and the shouts had partly died down, we descended from the sheltering trees. And though my son was curious to know what I should do, I answered him not, bidding him only remain close at my side and keep a brave face.

We walked on through the unpolluted avenues into the more open parts where the soldiers had ceased their work.

As for the city, I cannot describe it; already it seemed as a perished land, whose soul had fled in the pains of death. Temple courts strewn with statues and broken stone, smouldering ashes leaping into a tiny flame; dead priests clasping a holy image; rude invaders desecrating this most sacred soil.

"O where is the land of desolation, if it be not here?" I moaned. "O let the gods depart from hence, for there is no hallowed spot whereon they may rest. Let the breath of the wind pass lightly; let it kiss thee, O City of Victory, with a mournful

kiss, for thou art no more. Vijayanagar, thy splendour has gone down into the very dust. Fire and sword, death and desolation, is there not one to avenge thy wrongs?"

These were the words that my soul uttered. Yet if all this evil fell upon us to-day, what should it be on the morrow, when the great forces came against us?

Presently I heard a shout at a little distance, and I knew we had been perceived. So we moved forward, coming near a score of soldiers laughing joyfully at their work, and at the lamentations of the surviving inhabitants.

As we came nearer, several ceased their laughter and began to stare curiously at us.

"Behold," cried one of them, dangling his sword before my face. "Is it some belated priest or holy devotee arrived in time for the rejoicing? There shall be another feast on the morrow when the great Shâhs themselves come. We are but heralds preparing for their entry."

To his words I made no answer, only glanced him full in the face, taking hold of my son's arm. Thus we stood for one moment facing the wanton soldiers, when I heard the trot of horses' feet behind, and the next instant a cavalier in gay apparel wheeled round close by and began to question the men. The words themselves I could not hear, as they were spoken softly. I saw, however, by the men's manner that they debated as to what

they should do, thinking, maybe, that I was a noble who had some hand in ruling the city.

The chief on horseback rode over to where I stood.

"Who art thou?" he cried, glancing at the richness of my dress.

"What is that to thee?" I answered in a calm voice; "enough is it for thee to know that as ye have laid your hands in desecration on yon temple, so surely will the gods bring about the hour of their great revenge. As for me and my son, we desire to quit for ever this polluted spot."

"Marshalla! Whom have we here to affront us with such words?" he cried, drawing his sword, while the others looked on in amazement. "Dost thou know my rank and name, thou man of boldness?"

"Nay, and I care not," I answered.

He raised his sword aloft for an instant, muttering that indeed he would aid me out of the city, when I stepped aside, drawing my son with me. And calling forth the power that lay within me, I forced the man to look me full in the face.

The men around drew back; they became afraid, seeing their leader immovable before my gaze.

"Conduct us safely beyond the gates," I said to him, "and command that a horse be brought for my son. As for me, I take this one," and instantly I leapt quickly into the seat, releasing

mine eyes from the man's face. Then immediately in an unnatural voice he bade one of those who stood by to bring a fresh horse, and the soldiers, not altogether understanding what had happened, obeyed with a show of fear, not daring to come too close to our persons.

"Lead the way," I cried again in his ear, having arranged our small packages on the beasts; and so at my will he turned, walking before us, while I could see the soldiers looked upon me as a wizard.

Presently we came to the gates where lolled a few Mussulman troops, but we passed them by in safety, my son and I, for they dared not assail us in the presence of their captain. And so I let him lead us for some distance beyond the walls; when, putting our horses to speed, I bade him return, knowing my power would hold till he reached the inner gates again.

Thus it was we fled quietly and in honour out of the City of Victory-that-had-been, and we smiled together, my son and I, at the strange manner of our exit, first thanking the gods for safety.

.

Now, behold, my story of Vijayanagar has come to an end, and it will take but a very short time to finish and to say what befell us after.

Doubtless it would weary you if I related how we travelled in many parts, meeting many adven-

tures; hearing what horrors had taken place in the city when the allies came upon it; living at times with the humblest, looking upon strange sights, sometimes being forced to leave one place and journey to another, yet always guarded in safety by the hands of the gods, nor wanting for food or drink.

Yet again after a long while I came to mourn for the last time, for, lo! my son was taken from me by a sudden death. After that I wandered on alone without a kinsman of any kind;—I, who had been a chief noble in the City of Victory, threw off my names and my rank, keeping only my caste pure.

Then, when I had become aweary of the sight of man, I sought an abode where I might finish my days in peace, paving by holiness a way into the higher heavens. And so thou hast found me, O thou stranger friend, and thou hast heard the tale of perished glory—even of a city that has fallen till it scarce retains its name.

Now, when thou comest into thine own country, tell the tale as it came from these my lips. Tell it softly, and in a hushed voice, and if there be tears in thy hearers' eyes, know that the souls of the dead Men of Victory gather them up, happy because their names are not altogether forgotten, though the sacred city is fallen into the very dust. Bid them seek out that which is good in the mournful tale, learning wisdom by the crushing of one,

and the uprising of another. For though ye be of another religion, yet ye may find a likeness therein to your own lives. If this be so, and if ye have derived any benefit therefrom, then Patcola the Wanderer-Lord has spoken no word in vain.

THE END