

POETRY

THE DIAMOND.—A TALE OF BENARES.

"Towards sunset I found myself approaching the beautiful rose gardens of Ghuzepoor; and I passed the night in a pagoda on the banks of the Ganges, where lamps were burning before some monstrous divinity. A low melancholy chaunt that seemed to rise from the bed of the river, awakened me. I looked out from behind the colossal idol to ascertain from whence it proceeded. A dying Brahman was laid upon a bed of cusa grass, near the river's brink; and as life gradually ebbed away, they sprinkled him with the holy water of the Ganges, and chanted the sacred verses of the Bedas. He expired with a deep groan, and they covered the body with flowers and perfumes; then lighted a funeral pile singing as they performed these last offices.

I waited till these sacrifices were over, when a group of pilgrims came to perform their abutions in the sacred stream. I dared not venture from my hiding place, fearful lest my miner's frock and tattered garments might excite suspicion.

Suddenly one of the pilgrims advanced into the water with a heavy weight hanging from each shoulder. As might have been expected he speedily began to sink. No one assisted him, and, rising his head once above the water, he gave a loud cry of exultation, and disappeared. The other pilgrims, apparently by no means astonished at this voluntary immolation, retired, singing the praises of their gods.

I now ventured out of the temple, and perceiving the cloak of the pilgrim lying upon the grass, hastily enveloped myself in it; I found in the pouch of the dress several pieces of coin, and appropriated them without hesitation. Thus disguised, I walked boldly forward, returning the salute of the passing traveller. Towards noon, I hailed a boat which was passing down the river, with wind and current in its favour.

The day was brilliant, the breeze was fresh, the river was bright with the silken streamers of the little boats that covered it, the peasants on the banks were clad in their holiday garbs, in honour of the great Hindoo festival of Rama and Soeta, which was that day celebrated. I had formed no plans for the future, but I enjoyed my existence with rapture as the boat glided swiftly on her way, while my fellow pilgrims were earnestly engaged in their devotions.

At length the city of Benares appeared in sight, with its lofty domes and minarets, its carved temples and gilded shrines, gleaming in the sun. When I found myself in the

midst of the moving multitudes which thronged the street of Benares, my eyes grew dazzled and my head grew dizzy with the noise, and the variety of sights and sounds, animate and inanimate; the gardens, pagodas, tanks, and richly carved temples; the houses adorned with verandahs. But I must hasten through my story, for see the sun shows but a tip of crimson above the waters of the Ganges.

In the evening I repaired to a bazaar to dispose of my diamond. The jeweller to whom I offered it, looked at it admiringly, as he examined it I trembled each moment lest some suspicion should fall upon me; but the pilgrims who visit Benares are frequently wealthy, and my statement that I had purchased it from a Golcondah merchant was unquestioned; the bargain was quickly struck, and I became master of what appeared to me a boundless fortune.

My first care was to order a splendid suit of clothes—my next, to repair to the caravansary, and order a supper fit for the Emperor Akbar. In a few days I purchased a handsome house, with fine gardens, an Arab horse, a gorgeous palanquin. I hired servants and train-bearers; and when I rode forth, transformed as by the wand of a magician, I felt that I had reached the goal of my wishes. I was, however, ashamed of my ignorance, and applied myself to study secretly and diligently. I listened attentively to the discourses of the learned Brahmins, as they publicly taught under the trees; and by my respect towards them, and, above all, by my liberality, soon silenced the wonder and enquiry which my sudden appearance had at first excited.

I entered into partnership with a wealthy merchant. He had an only daughter, beautiful as the day; and though years had passed since then, and age has sprinkled thy raven tresses with snow, yet art thou, my Zillah, lovely in my eyes as on the happy day when first I wooed and won thee.

And now would I indeed have been happy, could I have forgotten the means by which that happiness was acquired; but there it was for ever pursuing me; the one black drop in the cup of prosperity, weighed down my spirit like an incubus.

One day a merchant from Pannah came to visit me. I started like a convicted criminal as my eyes fell upon him, for I at once recognised the features of the monster of the caravan from which I had fled! But when I had considered how many years must have changed my appearance, and how unlikely my guest was to suspect the wealthiest merchant in Benares to be the poor tattered lad who drove his camels, I gradually became reassured.

All at once, in the course of conversation, he began to descant upon the exceeding splendour of the diamond which adorned the Rajah's turban, adding, that its marvellous brilliancy had induced him to make inquiries respecting it; that he understood it had been purchased from a jeweller of the city, and that he intended to visit the bazaar on the following day.

As he spoke my mind misgave me, and it is probable that my confusion was visible on my countenance, for it struck me that my visitor looked suspiciously at me. How the discovery was made, I know not; but the next day reports were afloat concerning me; my story was made public; and as I was quietly walking in the garden, with my wife and children, one of the servants came breathlessly to tell me that I was suspected of robbery, and that the officers of justice would presently be at my house.

I passed over my hurried explanations to my wife, her kindness and sympathy, her despair and my own. With her assistance I concealed myself in the innermost recess of a pagoda; and when night came I assumed the disguise of a pilgrim, as I had once before done, mounted the fleetest of my horses, and fled along the banks of the river, in the direction of Chunar.

In the morning I dismounted, took off my horse's saddle and bridle and allowed him to go loose; hired a boat, and soon after arrived at Chunar. In the neighbourhood of that city there is an extensive wood. Thither I bent my steps, and concealed myself in its most impenetrable recesses. I shuddered as I recollected the last night I had spent in a similar manner; when just as I was preparing to seek the protection and shelter of one of the loftiest trees, a low groan attracted my attention.

Judge of my surprise when, by the light of the moon, which streamed through the dark foliage, I perceived the merchant of Pannah lying on the ground wounded and apparently dying. The grass was slippery with his blood. It oozed from a deep gash in his side. He was speechless, and the sight of his sufferings checked the fury which was raging in my heart against him.

I knelt down to examine his wounds, when a party of horsemen rode up, surrounded, and took me prisoner. The next day, branded as a robber and a murderer, I found myself lodged in the state prison of Chunar. So rapidly had past events succeeded one another, that I had scarcely found time to reflect on the horrors of my situation. Now, in the solitude of my dungeon, I thought of my wife and children, of my ruined character, of the public execution that awaited me;

and burying my face in my hands, I gave way to an agony of grief.

Suddenly a deep low voice sounded through the gloom. 'Weep not,' it said; 'Tears are for women and children. Men wear swords.' I turned hastily round to view the speaker, and by the faint moonbeams which struggled through the prison window, I perceived a figure of gigantic height, and of noble and commanding air. He had a swarthy complexion, eyes black and piercing, and hair dark as night. He wore a purple and gold turban, with a white heron's plume, a dress of embroidered muslin, a crimson girdle, and a short dagger. Never have I seen a more striking figure, or a more dauntless expression of countenance.

'Rouse up, my friend,' said he, 'fate has thrown us together! I was asleep in yonder corner when your groans awakened me. Tell me what accident has brought you hither, and I shall then be able to judge whether we can be of service to one another.—In me you behold the rebel chief, who for years has held the invaders at bay, and for whose apprehension ten thousand rupees were offered by government. They have me at last in their toils; but shall they keep me there? No! neither stone walls nor grated windows shall hold me.'

A ray of hope shone upon me as I listened to this man, and without hesitation related all that had befallen me. When I came to the murder of the merchant he smiled.—'Cheer up, my fellow prisoner,' said he, 'It is now my duty to aid you, as it was before my inclination. That murder was performed by my emissaries; and here is his silver-mounted hookah, to evince the truth of what I state. You start with joy. It is true, my evidence can clear you of that crime, and it shall. I am condemned to death, and a crime, more or less, is nothing in the catalogue of my offences. Yet, consider for a moment. Your reputation is gone. If not a murderer, you are a robber; and the government in its tender mercies will send you back to the mines, with the simple addition of chains. Now listen: this very night all is prepared for my escape. My trusty emissaries, in disguise, have stifled our jailor with opium. You shall accompany me,—and judge of our forest life.'

I hesitated, but not long. At midnight we effected our escape, passed through the sleeping guardians of the prison, and fled.—I would willingly omit the remainder of my history. I found myself the companion of a lawless band of robbers, to whom every scene of bloodshed and act of plunder were familiar.

One night, when I had assisted in robbing a caravan, (do not shrink from me, my father, for long years of penitence have passed since then) we were feasting in our strong hold, and singing snatches of rude songs, when, as a goblet of wine was raised to my head, I pledged the health of our leader, a low knock at the gate caused every man to start to his feet, and lay his hand on his dagger's hilt.

'Unbar the gate,' said a soft voice; 'it is a woman.' They cautiously undrew the bolts; and never shall I forget my emotion, when my wife entered, carrying our infant in her arms. She seemed like an angel amongst evil spirits, so pure, so bright, so graceful was her aspect. She fixed her tender and mournful gaze upon me, and advancing close to me, without casting a glance at my companions, 'Rusnaid,' said she, 'what do you here?'

The rude men seemed spell-bound, and remained standing and gazing upon her.—'Zillah,' said I, 'this is no place for you.'—'No place for me where my husband is?' she interrupted. 'My feet are weary and bleeding, and my garments are torn with the brambles and wild briar, yet I have not faltered. Where you go there will I go also. Where you live there shall I live. And when you die, then shall I also yield up my spirit. But oh! Rusnaid, shall your wife inhabit a robber's den? At these words the men murmured fiercely, but the chief motioned them to silence, and with a proud courtesy, handed Zillah to a bench.

I now explained to her all that had occurred to me, and the situation in which I stood. My wife listened attentively, and then exclaimed in a fearless voice,—'Rusnaid, return with me, and stand the chance of the law. Thanks be to Ramah, I press an unpolluted hand.'

'Return and betray us!' cried the men; 'never, by the soul of the prophet! We would not betray you,' said Zillah, 'but your haunts are more than suspected, else how could I have discovered them?'

'Zillah,' said I, in going with you I return to death, for never will I betray the name of —.' 'It shall not, indeed be so,' cried the chief, who had stood mournfully regarding us. 'I shall give myself up to justice, for I am weary of this vicious and unhappy life—so take your wife, go and be happy.'

The sound of the trampling of horses' feet caused the chief to pause abruptly. He climbed up to the casement, and perceived a detachment of soldiers advancing towards the ruin. The chief officer of the detachment rode forward, as if to survey its position. The Mussulman called for his pistols, and a ball whizzed close to the head of the officer. He was startled but not hurt.

'A parley,' cried the chief from the casement. 'I will yield myself up but on certain conditions.' 'Name them,' said the officer. 'First, liberty and free pardon for my men; without me they will disperse.'—'Granted,' said the officer; 'our orders are to seize you; our commission goes no further.' 'Protection for my prisoners, a Hindoo, his wife and child. Moreover, attention to my solemn declaration that he is guiltless of the murder of a merchant, whereof he is falsely accused.'

'Most falsely!' said a voice in the crowd, 'since I am here willing to befriend Rusnaid, and to make him amends for the evils into which I have brought him.' 'That point being settled, said the chief, I pray you, my friends walk out, and I shall follow you when I have made my last arrangements.'

The men obeyed in silence, and each as he passed his leader, grasped his hand and bade him farewell. When it came to my turn, he took leave of me in a cheerful voice; but as my wife passed him, he pressed her hand to his lips, and a tear fell upon it.

We waited for him to come from the fortress, when suddenly a bright light arose; and the chief stood at the window, waving his hand to us from amongst the flames. It was impossible to save him; he had thrown a lighted match into a chest of gunpowder. The explosion was terrible. We turned away with sad hearts.

The merchant kept his word, and procured my pardon from the Maharajah. I never again entered Benares. We purchased this small dwelling, and for fifteen years have subsisted by the labour of our hands.

The Hindoo ceased to speak. They rose silently and re-entered their lowly dwelling. The next morning the missionary blessed them, and departed on his way.

COURT OF REQUESTS.

Alexander Alexander appeared to answer the complaint of James Bagnall, a venerable dealer in swine's flesh.

Commissioner.—What is your demand against Alexander?

Bagnall.—Why, your vorship sees as how I makes pork out of pigs, and as I was going to market t'other morning to buy one of them ere hanimals, I borrowed a sack of Mr Alexander, to fetch the porker home in, and left half a crown in pledge for it. When the chap was done for I brought the bag to him; and I never seen the color of my coin since.

Mrs Alexander pleaded with all the energy of a half-crown lawyer, that she herself paid the money in question to the complainant.

Commissioner.—Perhaps he forgot this.—Was he sober at the time?

Mrs Alexander.—He was after the market, and looked a little refreshed or so.

Bagnall.—There's an insinuation! Bless your vorships, I never luses none at all whatsomdever; there's no one more respected in the pig-market these forty years than Jem Bagnall.

Commissioner.—Will you swear you did not get the money?

Bagnall.—Not a doubt of it your vorship.

Mrs. Alexander.—If you do you ought to be ashamed to look a pig straight in the face as long as you live.

The complainant was, however, sworn, and an order made accordingly.

SIAMESE TWINS.

Visitor.—Are you endowed with separate, or influenced by the same mind.

Twins.—our habits of thinking are very similar, but we undoubtedly possess distinct minds.

Visitor.—I was led to suppose, from your striking similarity of thought, taste, and inclination, that your minds were identical.

2nd Visitor.—(Who had been somewhat rude before.) "That is not likely! They have got two bodies, and if there is but one mind, one of the bodies must be without a mind."

Twins.—(bowing to the last Visitor.) Such a thing is not impossible, Sir. In our travels we have occasionally seen BODIES WITHOUT MINDS.

AN OFFICIAL 'MALAPROP.'—In the year 1788, just previous to the French war, the Mayor of Dublin was in a coffee-house, when a gentleman was reading in a newspaper, among other items of news, that the French had "taken Umbrage." The worthy wise man of Gotha, who believed that 'UMBRAGE' was some fortified town, when he went home consulted his Gazetteer, and failing in his search, asked one of his friends where 'Umbrage' was situated. The story got abroad, and the caricaturists immediately took advantage of it. A droll picture appeared,—'CASTLE UMBRAGE,' situated on an eminence and the Mayor, with the Police, and the posse comitatus marching in procession to invest it! The story, as is the case with all good stories, lived on the Mayor till the hour of his death.

A French lady of rank lately died of hydrophobia, in consequence of allowing a favourite lap dog to lick a pimple she had on her face.