

Choice Literature.

SILENCE.

Alone!
No kindred heart my lonely soul to greet
With voice of courage or of welcome sweet;
But all unknown
Among the crowd I wander, pass and meet,
Alone!

In vain,
Alas! I wait for that sweet sign,
But cares no other human heart for mine,
Till, urged by pain,
I look above, and lo! a light divine
Gleams thro' the rain.
James T. Shotwell, in The Week.
Strathroy, Ont.

THE WIDOW AND HER MONEY-BAGS.

A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION BY THE LATE LORD LAWRENCE.

It was my practice in India, where every one who wishes to preserve health either walks or rides early in the morning, instead of taking a mere constitutional, as it is called, to endeavor to join that object with business, or, at any rate, with amusement. There was always some end in view—a village to visit, a new road to be made, or an old one to be repaired, the spot where a murder had been perpetrated to be examined. If I was in tents making my annual visits in the interior, of the district, which seldom occupied less than five months of the year, there was plenty to engage the attention. I seldom failed to visit every village within a circle of seven or eight miles before the camp moved on another march. Their locality, the nature of their soil, their means of irrigation—a point of much importance in the East—the general appearance of the inhabitants, and the character they bore among their neighbours, were all points on which I was much interested; for all such information was of infinite value in the performance of my daily duties.

I had in truth so much to occupy me, or, what is pretty much the same thing, made so much occupation for myself, that, though often the sole European in the district, and literally without any one with whom I could exchange a word in my native tongue, I do not think that I ever felt listless for a day. I sometimes rode alone, but more frequently with a single horseman, who either carried my rifle or boar spear. Thus if anything in the way of game turned up, I did not lose a chance; and if a messenger was required, or any thing was to be done, an active fellow was always ready. More than once I have in this way brought home a buck, and many is the good run I have had with wolf, hyena, and wild boar. It would have no doubt enhanced the pleasure to have had a friend with whom to contest the spear and to talk over the turns and chances of the field when ended. Still, when I look back on those days, it is surprising how much I enjoyed them in my comparative solitude.

Nor was I thus always lonely. At times a friend or two from the nearest station would pass a week with me, or a rendezvous on the borders of contiguous districts would be arranged among us, and then the woods would ring with whoop and cry and wild halloo. Oh, those were pleasant days! I hope some are still in store for me, for the easy, quiet, jog-trot life does not answer for one who has lived a life of action. I recommend all my friends to think twice before they leave India; at any rate until they feel themselves growing old, or want a pair of crutches. It is but a melancholy pleasure, after all, merely looking back upon such scenes.

However, to return to my story, from which I have strangely digressed. My follower was instructed to ride at a respectful distance, so that I might freely converse with anyone I might pick up by the way. One or more of the head men, or some of the proprietors of the village I was visiting, usually mounted his mare, and rode with me to the

next village; thus acting as a guide, and at the same time beguiling the tedium of the way, often with useful information, at any rate with amusing gossip.

I had one morning mounted my horse for such an expedition, but had not proceeded far when I met the kotwal, or chief police officer, of the neighbouring town bustling along in quite unwonted haste. On seeing me, after making the usual salutations, he reported that a burglary had occurred in the town during the previous night, and that he was anxious that I should visit the spot myself, as neither he, nor any of the police could make anything of the case.

I at once assented, and as we rode along I ascertained that the party robbed was a poor widow, who, with her niece, lived in a large and substantial, but rather dilapidated house in the neighbouring town. The robbery, it seemed, had created much sensation, from the circumstance that the widow asserted that she had lost a large sum of money, whereas she had hitherto been deemed miserably poor. "Some of the neighbours," remarked the policeman, "deny that she has been robbed at all, and, indeed, to me it appears suspicious; I suspect there is some fable (deceit) in the matter. Where could such a helpless creature get so much money? It was but the other day that she was exempted from her quota of the watch-tax, as mooflis (a beggar), and now she asserts that she has lost one thousand and fifty rupees." "Well, well," said I, "that will do, we will hear what she has to say for herself. Don't you pretend to make out that she was not robbed. I suppose there are marks about the house of a forcible entry?" "Oh, yes," he replied, "I don't deny that there is a hole in the wall by which the door has been opened. There were two marks of foot-steps about the interior of the courtyard, but the ground was so hard we could make nothing of it. I have, however, sent for the khojia (tracker), and if anything is to be discovered, I am sure he is the man to do it."

By this time we had arrived at the house, where we found some policemen, some of the neighbours, and the widow. The khojia, or personage celebrated far and near for his powers of recognizing and tracing the marks of biped and quadruped, had already examined the premises. He informed me that the foot-steps were difficult to trace from the hardness of the soil, as well as from the passing and repassing of the people; but that he had satisfied himself that there had been two thieves, that the two had entered the house, but that only one appeared to have left it, and that he had followed those traces, through various turnings and windings, till they finally stopped at the house of a man who was said to be the nephew of the widow herself. He then showed me the different marks, from the interior of the widow's house, up to the very threshold of that of the nephew. There were certainly some traces, but so very indistinct to my eye that I could form no opinion. The tracker, however, seemed perfectly convinced. "One foot," he observed, "is small and delicate, which goes to the nephew's house; the other, a large, broad foot, I cannot trace beyond the courtyard." The nephew was summoned, his foot was compared with the print, the khojia insisted that it exactly corresponded, and it certainly answered to the description he had previously given.

We then entered the house and carefully examined the premises. The thieves, it seemed, had picked a small hole in the side of the wall, so as to admit a man's hand, and had thus opened the outer door. It was clear that the theft was perpetrated by some one who was well acquainted with the premises, for the money had been concealed in three earthen pots, buried in the ground within a small recess. The ground had been dug up in the exact spot where the pots lay, and it must have been the work of only a few minutes, for they were close to the surface. It seemed that there was some suspicion of the nephew in the mind of both the old

woman and her neighbour, for he was a man of reckless and dissolute habits. "But, widow," I said, "did he know of your treasures? Did he know of the place where you concealed them?" "No," she replied to my query, "I can't say he did. I never let him come into the house for many years, though he has sometimes come as near as the door and asked me to make friends; but I was afraid of him, and never let him pass my threshold." "Well," I remarked, "it seems a bad business. That you have been robbed is evident, but there seems no clue as to who did it, and as to your loss, you must have told a lie, for I hear it was only a few months ago, that under the plea of destitution, you were exempted from the watch-tax." "My Lord," replied the widow, "it is very true that I pleaded poverty, and poor enough I am; nevertheless, I have been robbed of a thousand and fifty rupees. You may believe me or not, as you please; my history is this. Some forty years ago, or more, my husband was a merchant well-to-do in this town; but after a time his affairs fell into disorder, and when he died his creditors seized everything but this house in payment for his debts. When dying he told me that certain moneys had long been due to him in the holy city of Muthra. Accordingly I went there, and collected something more than two thousand rupees, with which I returned here; and I have lived ever since on this sum." "What?" I interrupted, "have you lived on this money for forty years, and yet have a thousand and fifty rupees, nearly half, left?" "Yes," said she; "I opened my treasure once a month and took out two rupees, which lasted me and my niece for the month." "Why," I remarked, "at this rate you had enough for the next forty years. Why could you not pay the tax?—how much was it?" "Two pice a month," she replied, "and all widows are exempt." "Yes," remarked a bystander, "if they are poor; but you are as rich as Lakhismi (the Hindoo goddess of fortune). I believe that Kali has sent this misfortune on you for your lying. Do you recollect, when you were assessed at one anna, how you wept and tore your hair, and said that you were starving? You are a sad liar by your own account, and are well served. I hope if you ever recover your money the Sahib will make you pay it up with arrears." "Oh," said the widow, clasping her hands, "restore me my money, and I will pay for the rest of my life."

As I suspected from the different circumstances which had transpired, that the nephew was in some way connected with the robbery, I directed his house to be searched, but nothing which could in any way implicate him was found. Despairing, then, of discovering the criminal, I mounted my horse and after telling the police to be on the look-out, I set off towards my tent. I had ridden some little way, coming the matter over in my mind, when it struck me how very singular it was that the khojia should persist in it that only one of the thieves had left the house. As the walls were very high, and as there was but the one door to the courtyard, it seemed as if the thief must still be inside. "Pooh, pooh!" I cried, "the thing is out of the question. Did we not search the house? And after all, what could a thief be doing there? The khojia is trying to mystify me." However, I was not satisfied; after riding a little farther, I turned round and galloped back. I said to the police, who had not yet left, "We must have another search, and upon this my myrmidons spread themselves over the premises. While they were searching I began to pace up and down with some little impatience, I confess, as the thought struck me of the bootless errand on which I had returned.

Suddenly I heard a policeman exclaim, "I have not seen him, but I have seen his eye," and as he spoke he pointed to one of the courtyards near where he stood. On examining the spot we discovered what appeared to be a small air-hole to some vaults, and from this the man persisted he had seen an eye glis-

ten. Turning to the widow, I demanded what places there were underground, when she explained that there were subterranean vaults which had never been open since her husband's death, and which she had not thought of mentioning when we first searched the house. "A second case of Guy Fawkes," thought I. "Show me the entrance. I dare say some one is down there, though why anyone should be such a fool as to hide there, passes my understanding." The old dame accordingly showed me a small door in a retired part of the courtyard, which had hitherto escaped observation. By it we descended to some very extensive vaults and after some search, dragged out a man. He had not the money about his person, but after some little hesitation showed us where it was concealed, at the foot of one of the pillars. He confessed that he belonged to a village in the vicinity, that the nephew had induced him to join in robbing the old lady, whose treasures he had for a long time suspected. It seemed that the thief had slept part of the night in the nephew's house, and they had been prevented from effecting the robbery till late in the night from the numbers of the people who were about, and consequently the morning had broken before they had time to divide the booty, or dispose of it in any safe place. In the hurry and confusion it had seemed best that he should hide in the vaults, where it was supposed that none would think of looking; for the nephew was afraid to conceal him in his own house, or allow him to pass out of town with such a large sum in silver, lest, being recognized by some of the guards at the postern as a stranger, he should be stopped and searched. When the nephew was confronted with his accomplice his effrontery forsook him and he confessed that he had seen the old woman smoothing the earth in the recess one day as he stood at the threshold, and from this circumstance, coupled with her always being in that part of the house, he had suspected that she had properly concealed.

When the coin was produced, the woman recognized her money-bags; and on opening and counting the money we found the exact sum she had stated, namely, one thousand and fifty rupees, or about one hundred and fifty pounds in English money; so that this poor creature had lived on about four shillings a month, and even supported part of that time a little niece! While the money was being counted and her receipt written out, I said, "You had much better give this money to a banker, who will allow you seven or eight per cent. for it, and in whose hands it will be perfectly safe; otherwise, now that folks know you are so rich, being a lonely, helpless old woman, you will certainly have your throat cut."

"No, no!" cried the old harridan, as she grasped her bags in an agony lest I should take them from her; "no, no! I will bury it where no one will ever know." I accordingly allowed her to go off with her treasures, and out she trotted, bending under the weight of her money-bags. I may have failed in giving an interest to this story, but it certainly made a considerable impression on my mind at the time. The avarice and parsimony of the old woman who, bending under the weight of old age, and possessed of wealth which she could never hope to enjoy, yet grudging the payment of two pice a month to defend her from spoliation, if not from being murdered; the villany of the nephew with his utter want of common sense and prudence in concealing his accomplice in the very premises which they had just robbed; the acuteness and discernment of the tracker in so ably, I may say, deciphering the history of the transaction from the very faint footmarks, altogether formed a picture which it was not uninteresting to contemplate. Of the subsequent fate of the widow I do not recollect anything, as I shortly afterwards left that part of the country; but if she escaped being robbed, she concealed her treasures in some out-of-the-way place which, when she dies, her heirs will fail to discover. In this way, no doubt, large sums are annually lost, for although property is remarkably safe in this country, and a very large rate of interest always to be got, the people are very much addicted to concealing coin and jewels, probably from habits they acquired in former times, when seldom a year passed that a village or even town was not laid under contribution or stormed and plundered by the Mahratta and Pindari hordes—*Leisure Hour*.