

UNDER THE EVENING LAMP

TO MAKE THIS YEAR THE BEST.

I stand upon the threshold of two years,
And backward look, and forward strain my eyes;
Upon the blotted record fall my tears,
While, brushing them aside, a sweet surprise
Breaks like a day dawn on my upturned face,
As I remember all Thy daily grace

Thou hast been good to me; the burdened past
Thou hast borne with me, and the future days
Are in Thy hands; I tremble not, but cast
My care upon Thee, and in prayer and praise
Prepare to make the coming year the best,
Because of noble work and sweeter rest.

A SON OF INDIA.

Samol sat down on the steps of the Temple, where the thick leaves of the banana trees could shelter him. He was an old man, and feeble, and the heat of the day was beginning to make him weary. But his face shone with eager interest as he took from his *gajha* a few ragged leaves, and held them close to his eyes. His sight had been growing dim this many a day, and now he was almost blind. He had never met a Christian, nor heard of Christ, until now, for all his life had been spent in the vast mountain district of Nagwanee, where none but warriors and the fierce devotees of Kalee lived. But somewhere lately he had picked up some torn fragments of the Gospels, printed in Hindustani, and here, there, and everywhere the old man had gone asking to know the Christ. But no one knew, or, if knowing, no one would speak of Him but in hatred or derision. He was *mulhid*, they told him, which meant unholy. But Samol would answer, shaking his head, "He cannot be that—he must be a god, this whom they call Christ." And every day Samol believed it the more, and his steps, as they went up toward the Eternal Hills, grew feebler with every new-born day.

He read aloud very softly, and with many pauses, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Samol looked up as if some one had spoken to him. He thought of the Ganges. Surely the rest must be there! Then he began to read again, so engrossed that he did not notice the approach of one of the priests of the Temple until his sandalled foot and one end of the rope which girdled him halted together on the steps. Then Samol lifted himself at once, though wearily, and bowed low.

"Thou art from the north," said Bhowanee, the priest, suspiciously. "I have heard of thee before. What dost thou here?"

"I am but resting, *padre*."

"And reading. What is't thou art reading?"

"It is *mulhid*," replied Samol, with courageous truthfulness.

Instantly the rope came down on his shoulders, and he was compelled to rise again and leave the Temple steps.

"I knew it," said Bhowanee in hot anger. "I can see the evil breath rising from thy page. How darest thou, a Christian dog, come near the steps of a sacred place! Go to, now, and may Buddha blight you and your family, and your family's families, for endless generations to come!"

Samol doggedly settled himself in the road, the tattered book still tightly held in his hand. "I am not a Christian," he said, speaking as if he were enquiring rather than denying. "What means'st thou? I know not what a Christian is. If thou dost know, *padre* he added almost pleadingly, "I pray thee tell me, for I am sore afraid that I shall die without hearing more about their god. I am such an old man now."

"And thou dost ask me—me!" said Bhowanee, rendered almost speechless by the audacity of the request, "to pollute my lips again by that name. *Chakrab*! but thou art mad! And because thou art mad I will tell thee, for thou dost not know the crime thou art committing. Christians are raging beasts in the shapes of men, speaking lies and blasphemy in the name of their God, and eating the flesh and drinking the blood of little children. They print books such as thou art reading now and dip them in fire, so that the name of Christ is burnt into the heart of him who reads, and that is why so many of India's sons leave their father's gods and are Christians because their souls have been set on fire."

The leaves dropped out of Samol's hands. His head sank on his breast.

"If I could," continued Bhowanee, "I would finish every dog of them, and throw their bodies into the sea. As he spoke he drew his hand across his throat with significant emphasis, and his whole frame dilated with fierce disdain. He was honest, this Buddhist priest, but the savage still lay waiting in his breast, and

truth, with its pure, quiet eyes, had had but little chance to pierce the shadows of that soul. Samol raised his head.

"What if thou art wrong?" he said, with an imploring gesture. "How can these Christians be so bad and their Christ so good?"

"Who says their Christ is good?" shouted Bhowanee.

Samol pointed to the fragments at his feet. "That does," he said.

"That! Have I not told thee already what *that* is? Thou art a fool—go! Thou dost poison the very air I breathe."

Bhowanee took hold of the rope and raised it, and Samol knew that in another moment it would fall on him again. He rose painfully, and his eyes sought the fragments lying on the ground, with a wistfulness more pathetic than words. He went a step away, and then looked back. He would have given his life to have believed them true! His frame shook as if with cold. Involuntarily he made a movement toward them again. Bhowanee held the rope high over his head.

"If thou dost—" he cried, threateningly.

Samol hesitated. He was not afraid of the priest, nor of the rope; he feared only to do the wrong. Then he stretched out his hand and stooped down. "I will take one of them," he said, as if speaking to himself. Instantly the rope, with its metallic end, came down across his head, and with the touch of the lash it seemed as if a new spirit awoke within the old man. His eyes flashed, and he stooped again with the ease and swiftness of youth. "I will take two!" he said.

Then as Bhowanee broke into a volley of curses, and plied the lash without stint, Samol's soul burst through its bonds and looked out, just then, upon a glorious world.

"I will take them all!" he cried, throwing himself down and gathering the pieces together with a kind of fierce joy.

"Take that, too, then, and that, and that, fool that thou art," cried Bhowanee, lashing the rope furiously.

Samol rose to his feet, heedless of the blows, and waved his treasure over his head. "I will have a new god—a god thou knowest not of!" he said, triumphantly. Then he moved away, chanting, as he walked, one of the songs of the mountain warriors. But he had not left Bhowanee long before his head sank again on his breast, and the bitterness of his fears returned. He sat down by the dusty roadside and took the leaves from his *gajha* once more. He felt them as if, for him at least, time were drawing to an end.

He commenced to read again, laboriously, as before. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Samol sighed. How could there be rest in life? If only he could ask one of the English—to Samol the English were all Christians—something about their Christ! A struggle was going on within him, a desperate one such as a free-born mind can seldom rightly gauge, or know enough to sympathize with it. It was the horror at the thought of losing caste. To break through these solemn bands meant poverty, disgrace, isolation, and perhaps eternal darkness.

Samol closed his eyes, as he had once seen them do when passing the mission school, and folded his hands as they had done. "O thou Christian's God," he said simply, speaking as if the Christ were close beside him. "I am an old man now, and am near my journey's end. I know not Buddha, nor Brahma, nor Kalee, for I have been a *Sadh Jat* all my life and have worshipped the one God, who made me and made all. But they say that thou art He, and that Thou dost love me, and hast been once on the earth to tell all men the story of Thy love. Give me a sign, I pray Thee! Show me a man who will help me, and if it be that I must loose caste to speak to him, still, I will go without fear. Hear me, Jesus Sahib! Hear me! I am old Samol from Nagwanee."

Samol opened his eyes, and looked down the road. He had all a heathen's simplicity of faith. And even as he looked, he saw, coming round the bend of the road, a *ricksaw*, borne by a swift and tireless coolie, who was literally coated with the dust which the noiseless wheels scattered on every side. In the vehicle was seated a man whom Samol knew to be a Christian and a "foreigner," or Englishman. It was a missionary named Steere, from the neighboring town of Bunwanee. Samol stood up, his face alight, and bowed with reverence as the *ricksaw* passed. The clergyman did not see him. He probably had not noticed the old man at all, for the wayside travellers of India are an innumerable host. A look of bitter disappointment came into Samol's face, and for a moment he stood rooted to the spot. Then he put the leaflet into his girdle again. "I will go to his house," he murmured, "and I will ask him what is true." So Samol, at one stroke cutting the prejudices of a long lifetime, plunged into the glare of the sun, and set his face resolutely toward Bunwanee. It was distant some miles, and, soon he was covered with dust as with a garment, so that he looked like a part of the road, moving slowly on to another world.

(Concluded next issue.)