"What's your name?"
"Gadadharchandra Chakravarti."
"And your father's name?"
"It is no use my telling you his name, sir. You don't know him."
"Never mind, sir, I want your father's name."
"My father's name is Ramdev Chakravarti."
"Well, what's your occupation?"
"I go to school, sir."
"Who pays for your going to school?"
"Father—no, my sister, sir"
"You are not sure, which?"
"I am quite sure, my sister, sir, and I am ready to swear it."

"How funny! No, there is no need to swear."
And turning to the constable, who all the while had been laughing with his face turned away, the sub-inspector said, "Rames, do you know this fellow?"

"Yes, sir," said Rames. And he gave such an account of Gadadhar that the sub-inspector said at once, "Well, my dear fellow, I will see to your case. What's that woman's name again? But never mind her name. Now, do you say she has cut off your ears?"

Gadadhar unconscious raised his hand to his ear.
"Do you miss it?" asked the police officer, very much amused.

"No, sir; but she has threatened to cut off my ears."

"A woman has threatened to cut off your ears, and you are here to complain of her! Oh, I am ashamed of you."

"Not the sort of a woman you think her to be. If you saw her look as she did, as she shook her knife at me and swore at me, you would be afraid yourself."
"Oh, then she must be a terrible woman!"

"A most terrible woman, sir, she must be taught such a lesson as she will never forget in all her life."

"Yes, but you see we can’t do anything unless she has done some injury to you. So you had better go back and pick a quarrel with her again, and when she has cut off your ears, just come to me, and we shall see if we can get the law to hang her for it."

But as the sub-inspector said this in a tone which plainly showed that he was joking, Gadadhar exclaimed, "If you are not going to take up my case, I must go to the District Court."

"You had better do so, for yours is too big a case to be tried here."

Gadadhar looked offended, and was about to come away, when the officer, telling Rames in a whisper that he was going to have a bit of fun, called a constable, and said, pointing to Gadadhar, "To the lockup!"

"You order me to the lockup!" cried Gadadhar

"Hush! don’t make a fuss, sir," said the constable, Hari Sing, stepping up and forcibly leading him on by the arm.

"You shall regret it," cried Gadadhar, as he struggled to make him let go his arm.

"No resistance, sir, or I must handcuff you," said Hari Sing.

Gadadhar, having no idea of what handcuffs were like, and probably thinking that they must be something worse than the lockup, suffered himself to be quietly led on.

"You don’t know who I am," said Gadadhar, as they reached the door of the cell. He was about to say something about his respectable connections, when Hari Sing
most unceremoniously thrust him in and locked the door, saying, “Can't help it, sir, must do my duty.”

Gadadhar found the cell so dark and close that he screamed for fright and begged Harin Sing with many entreaties to let him out. No one heeded his cries, and there he was left shrieking and entreating and crying as hard as he might.

Some two hours afterwards the sub-inspector walked up to the door of the lockup. “Open the door,” he said to Harin Sing. No sooner was the order executed than out rushed Gadadhar, but the sub-inspector stopped him, and in a sufficiently severe tone said, “There, will you pick a quarrel with a woman again?”

“No, sir, never,” said Gadadhar, looking imploringly up to his face.

“Down on your knees and drag your nose along the ground up to the mark I am about to make on it.”

Gadadhar at once obeyed through sheer dread of the lockup.

“Rise,” said the police officer, “and begone, and let me hear of you no more.”

Sasibhusan had come home shortly after Gadadhar had gone to the police station. The cutchery had closed a little earlier that day. On his return, seeing that his wife was sullen he asked the cause of it. Pramada told him all save that she was the aggressor. Sasibhusan was indignant, and Pramada’s mother opportunely threw in a word or two. “But what did his anger signify? He could neither chastise Syama nor go to law to punish her insolence. It was wiser to pocket the insult, and so he held his tongue.”
CHAPTER XIV.

SASIBHUSHAN AND HIS MASTER'S ACCOUNTS

Sasibhushan prospered so well that he found himself a substantial man within a few years of his entrance into the service of the zamindar. He began on five rupees a month, but he quickly succeeded in securing such favour with his master that he got one lift after another, till he filled a very respectable post with a salary of five times the amount. He now needed but one more lift to make him deman. And not long afterwards the master began seriously to think of raising him to the highest post in his gift, not that its present occupant was incompetent, but that he believed Sasibhushan would manage far better, being a very intelligent man, and not one to continually trouble him with this, that, and the other thing. To look over accounts was a tedious task. The master loved pleasure far better than work, and wanted to have more leisure so that he might the better enjoy the company of his congenial friends. In this respect he did not follow the example of his forefathers, who had given no thought to pleasure and who working hard had managed with two or three hands in their employ better than he did with nearly a dozen.

1 The highest officer in the service of an influential zamindar.
SASIBHUSHAN: HIS MASTER'S ACCOUNTS

Sasibhushan had all those qualities which often help to make a man's fortune in the world. Though he had very few scruples, he was active and intelligent, shrewd in business, and well knew how to gratiate himself with one whose favour he wanted to gain. No wonder he succeeded so easily in winning a place in his master's heart.

The master had great confidence in Sasibhushan. All payments were made by him, and whatever he did was all right and did not require the master's inspection.

Having got ready the accounts of some construction works, Sasibhushan went to obtain his master's sanction before sending them away.

"What are those papers?" asked the master as Sasibhushan entered.

There was a drinking party in the sitting-room, and the brandy bottle was quickly transferred behind the couch at a look from the master.

"I have got the accounts of the construction works ready, sir," said Sasibhushan, walking up and standing before him, holding the papers in his hand.

"You are sure there is no mistake?"

"I do not think there is, but I cannot be certain until you have looked over the papers yourself."

The master took this as a compliment to himself, as rather implying that he was an adept at accounts.

"I don't want to look over them," he said. "I am sure the figures are all correct."

One of Sasibhushan's subordinates, who had accompanied him, gave him a significant look, but Sasibhushan at once met it with a frown, and the subordinate looked down to the ground.

"I think you had better get rid of them if there is
nothing else to look over," said one of the master's friends in a whisper.

The master paused a little and then said, "You do not wish me to look over anything else just now?"

"No, sir, but I am sure this will not take time," said Sasibhushan, turning the papers over very quickly in his hand.

There was the uncorked brandy bottle behind the couch, and there also was some liquor poured into the glass, which would lose its strength if allowed to stand for any length of time. So the master said, "There is no need to look over the accounts. I should just like to know the total cost."

"The total cost is thirty-one thousand three hundred and thirteen rupees," said Sasibhushan, whose voice shook a little as he told this downright lie.

"And what was the estimate?"

"Twenty-four thousand rupees." But the answer was made not without some hesitation. The master was rather surprised. But was it not rather lowering to look over the accounts for the matter of the difference of a few thousands in the presence of his friends? The master felt it was.

"The cost often exceeds the estimate," observed one of his companions.

For his vanity rather than for what his friend remarked, the master quietly took the papers from Sasibhushan's hand, signed them, and then handed them back with a look of supreme indifference.

Having gained what he wanted Sasibhushan returned to the office in high feather. In the evening he went home with his subordinates to divide the money thus got among themselves.
CHAPTER XV.

SASIBHUSHAN AND HIS PATERNAL HOME

Sasibhushan soon became head of the office. After Gadadhar and his mother had come, there was some inconvenience for want of sufficient accommodation in the house. There was the sitting-room in an unfinished state. Sasibhushan now thought that he must have it completed, and told his wife so. Pramada, however, was not of his mind. She hated his brother, and could not bear him to have his share of the room. She, therefore, said that if her advice was worth anything, she should like him to have a separate sitting-room of his own. Sasibhushan had not the moral courage to say nay, even if he would, and so there was nothing left but to do as his wife wished.

It shortly happened that Sasibhushan was offered a plot of land for sale in the neighbourhood, and agreed to purchase it for the new building. But the question was in whose name it should be bought. Not in his own name surely, as then his brother might want to get a share of it. Neither in the name of his wife for the same reason. This seemed a very important question to settle; but Sasibhushan never settled it; for when the plot of land was purchased it was, as one
might have anticipated, purchased in the name of his wife.

At first the intention was to have a single room only. But after the building work had commenced, Pramada showed how greatly they stood in need of a good comfortable house of their own, Sasibhusan had a plan drawn up, and in a few months a very decent two-storied house had been erected. To it Sasibhusan removed with his wife and children. But how was he to dispose of his share of his old paternal house? Personally he did not mind his brother having the whole house to himself. But he was not his own master, so he one day asked his wife.

Pramada looked up into her husband’s face as if to try to read his thoughts. “I should like to know first what you think,” she said, smiling.

“Why,” said Sasibhusan, looking away, as if he dared not look his wife in the face. “I think of giving up my share of the house to Bidhu. I think we can well afford to spare it now that we have got a house of our own.”

Just as he said this, he turned his eyes to his wife, and observed a cloud in her face where a moment ago there was not a trace of it. Sasibhusan was afraid that there might be trouble, and hastened to mend his speech. “Why, my dear,” he said, “I only meant to consult you on the matter. You know I am always ready to follow your advice in everything.”

“You are quite at liberty to do as you like,” said Pramada. “I have nothing to say to you.”

“I have always valued your advice, my dear. But let us drop the matter now. We will talk it over another time.”
CHAPTER XVI.

NILKAMAL TELLS A STORY TO SHOW THAT ALL THINGS HAPPEN BY FATE

We now return to Bidhubhusan and Nilkamal. The reader must remember that we left them at a village shop. There they passed that night. Early next morning they got up and resumed their journey. They travelled on in silence for some time, and then, fatigued, they went and sat down under the shade of a tree a little way off the road. Nilkamal looked rather sad, although he had appeared jolly enough the night before, and had sung a great deal. Bidhubhushan had more than once felt inclined to talk to him on the way, but had abstained for fear Nilkamal might think of his favourite song again, of which he had already begun to tire. Now, as they sat smoking, Bidhu asked, “What ails you, Nilkamal?”

Nilkamal said nothing. After a brief pause Bidhu repeated his query.

Without answering his question, Nilkamal said, “Good sir, do Christian missionaries always do what they say?”

“What do Christian missionaries say, Nilkamal?”

“Is it a fact that whoever becomes a Christian has a *bibi* (a European girl) given him for his wife?”
"I don't know, but if it be a fact, would you like to become a Christian?" said Bidhu, with a laugh.

"If it is a fact, it would be a great inducement I can tell you. But do you know the Brahma missionaries have handsome young girls to give in marriage to those who enter their religion?"

"I don't know," said Bidhu.

"But I should like to marry a bibi rather than a Brahma girl. Bibis are very pretty indeed. I prefer the colour of their skin, and then just think of their dress."

"Well," said Bidhu, "if you get a European for your wife, how are you to support her?"

"Ah, there's the difficulty. I have been thinking of that. But who knows but I may be able to make a fortune in a little time?"

"Who knows, indeed?"

When they had sufficiently rested their feet, they rose and resumed their journey. Nikamal again relapsed into a kind of moody silence. After a while, however, he very seriously said, "If I am destined to marry a European girl it must be so, for all things are ordered by fate, you know. There is a pretty story about it. I will tell it to you.

"Once upon a time," began Nikamal, "there lived in a village a Brahman, who had a wife and an only child, a boy. One night, as he lay awake in bed, his wife and child being asleep near him, he thought he saw a rope hanging just before his eyes. He minded it not, and turned upon his side and tried to fall asleep. But slumber came not to him, and again opening his eyes, there he once more saw the rope. This time it seemed to be a little nearer to the ground. 'It must be the
NILKAMAL TELLS A STORY

mice,' said he to himself. But as he looked again, lo! the rope turned into a snake; and, before the Brahman could rouse his wife, the snake descended and bit the mother and child, who died instantly. The Brahman stood amazed and horrified at this. He saw the snake glide away through an opening in the door, and followed it. At daybreak it took the form of a tiger and sprang upon a peasant on the roadside. The tiger then changed itself into a bull and gored a boy to death. Shortly afterwards the bull assumed the form of an old man who was so bent with age that he could hardly walk. The Brahman, who had observed all this from a little distance, now came forward, and throwing himself at the old man's feet, 'Oh,' said he, 'do tell me who you are.' At first the old man would not tell him who he was, but, as the Brahman was persistent and would take no refusal, he said at last, 'I am Karmasutra. My mission is to take the life of a man as he is fated to lose it.'—'Do tell me then,' said the Brahman, 'how I am to die.' The old man positively refused to tell him that, but, as the Brahman would not quit hold of his feet until he was told what he wanted to know, he very reluctantly said, 'Know then that you will be devoured by a crocodile.'

"When the Brahman knew what he wanted, he felt it was no longer safe for him to live near the water. So on he went toward the east, intending to be as far as he could from the river which flowed past his native village, to which he now no longer had any inducement to return, having lost those who were nearest and dearest to him on earth. After several days' journey he passed the jurisdiction of one raja and entered that of another, where some one was kind enough to let him lodge in his house.
"Now, the raja of the country to which he had come had no children. And the Brahman went to him and asked his permission to do for him certain things, which would ensure a son being born to him.

"The raja complied with his request. And in a year's time, the rani, his wife, presented him with a boy as beautiful as the morning star.

"Now, the raja was so pleased that, instead of dismissing the Brahman with money, he wished him to stay, and the latter thankfully accepted his offer. When the little prince was old enough to learn, he became his tutor. And, when the Brahman had taught him all he knew himself, it was arranged that the young prince should go and visit foreign lands. The raja's son offered to take his tutor with him and to thus the Brahman consented, but said that he would not go near a river. Being asked why, he told his pupil the reason; and the young man laughed at it as altogether idle, though he said that he should be allowed to have his own way.

"Accompanied by his tutor, the prince travelled through foreign countries, and at last expressed his desire to go to the Ganges to bathe. The Brahman of course refused to go with him; but, said the youth, 'Why, sir, you are not going to be seized by a crocodile on land, that's certain. What could the Brahman do? He felt it was useless to refuse any longer, and so he went.

"The young prince came to a town on the Ganges and took a suitable house. Now, there was a yoga\(^1\) at hand, and for two or three days men and women had kept pouring in crowds from various places, far and near, to perform the sacred ceremony of ablution. And, when the day came on which the prince was to

\(^1\) A favourable conjunction of certain planets
bathe, the Brahman, on being asked, expressly refused to go with him. But at length the young man persuaded him, saying that he need have no reason to be anxious for his safety, as he was not to enter the water, but only to keep on the landing and dictate the ceremonial prayers. When they had reached the riverside, the sight of numerous people bathing together emboldened the Brahman to come down to the landing and dictate the words of prayer. But, as his pupil could not hear him for the hubbub, he bade him come nearer to him, saying that his men would stand around him with drawn swords. The Brahman did as he was asked, when the attendants immediately formed a ring around him. But when he had done dictating the usual prayers, 'I am the same Karmasutra,' cried the prince, and instantly changing himself into a crocodile threw him down and carried him off at one bound.'

"It is a strange story," said Bidhu, when Nilkamal had finished. After a while they came to a shop on the way.

"Friend shopkeeper," said Nilkamal, stepping up, "did you lodge two Brahmas in your shop?"

"Why, what do you mean by asking that?" said Bidhu.

"I just want to ask those fellows that question—the one that I asked you on the road"

"Brahmas? did you say, sir?" said the shopkeeper.

"No, Brahmas," said Nilkamal.

"Brahmas? That's a queer name; but I am sure there have been two Brahmins here"

Nilkamal said no more. He looked rather disappointed Bidhu was quite tired, and proposed that they should pass that night there.
CHAPTER XVII.

"CALCUTTA IS SUCH A DIRTY PLACE"

Next morning at sunrise Bidhu and Nilkamal resumed their journey. They had travelled a long distance and were now near Calcutta. And, as they went on, they were cheered by the prospect of quickly finding themselves in the great city where they were to try their fortune. Nilkamal knew nothing of Calcutta, and asked his companion what it was like.

"Very unlike anything you have ever seen, to be sure. But what do you mean? Do you mean how large is it or what?"

"I should like to know enough to have some idea of the place," said Nilkamal. "What colour is the clay there?"

"Why, I am sure it is the same as in your Rammager," said Bidhu, laughing aloud at this question.

"But they say that Calcutta is a very large town. I don't understand that."

"Well, that means that Calcutta is many times as big as your native village. There are big bazaars and countless shops and countless people there."

"Are there more people in Calcutta than are assembled in our market on fair days?"
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"Oh, infinitely more than you can have an idea of. Nowhere in this country are there more people than in Calcutta."

"Well, what days are market days there?"

"Markets! No such thing in Calcutta. There every day the people can buy whatever they want, for, as I have told you, there are shops out of number, and of all descriptions. Besides, in every part of the town there is a bazaar which is crowded with buyers every day."

"But I wonder how all these shops and bazars can have so many buyers every day. Our market is not held every day. We buy only two days in the week."

"Be quiet now," said Bidhu. "You will see by and by why there are customers every day."

They went on in silence for some minutes, and then Nilkamal, still wondering where such numbers of buyers came from, referred the question for solution to his companion.

"Don't prattle, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, in a rather rebuking tone. "I will never again answer your queries, if you don't hold your tongue when I tell you."

There was silence again for a good half hour. When they were within a mile of Calcutta, seeing a number of people pass, Nilkamal could hardly resist the temptation to ask where these people might be going to, and whether they were going to a play.

"Nonsense," said Bidhu. "Don't you see we are very near Calcutta?"

"Are these people then going to Calcutta?" inquired Nilkamal.

"Yes," said Bidhu, rather dryly.
There was another long pause, and it was not broken until they had entered the town and neared Syambazar.

"O good sir, what's that over there?" cried Nilkamal in astonishment, as his curious eye caught sight of a hackney coach that moved rapidly towards them with a rattling noise.

"Have you never seen a horse carriage before?" said Bidhu, with a laugh

"Why, I have seen Rohimbox's carriage. I have seen many other carriages too."

"I don't mean a bullock cart. Have you never seen a horse carriage?"

"A horse carriage? Is that a horse carriage?"

"Why, have you never been to Krishnagar? There are many horse carriages there."

"I am sure there are, but I never knew that a horse carriage was different from a bullock carriage."

Thus talking they crossed the canal by the Syambazar bridge. Just then more carriages drove up, and wheeled quickly past them.

"Look! look! one, two, three," exclaimed Nilkamal in ecstasy.

Nilkamal's eyes wandered from the road and he looked about him in surprise. Just then another coach drove up from behind, and was about to run over him, when the driver, calling out to him to get out of the way, gave him a quick sharp cut with his whip. Smarting with the pain, he looked behind as he uttered a loud scream, and ran to one side of the road.

"How awkward of you, Nilkamal!" cried Bidhu.

"Why, man, you have had a narrow escape. This is not your Krishnagar. Here you are like to risk your
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life at every step, if you don’t have your eyes about you."

Nilkamal had his skin cut in two places; and he was so afraid for his safety that he determined to stick close to his companion and not to be separated from him for a moment. Bidhu, however, persuaded him out of it by making him clearly understand that it was not safe for them to walk side by side, but that he would do well to keep just behind and let him lead the way.

"Come on," said Bidhu, as Nilkamal stopped to look at a fine horse on the way, "and don’t be staring at everything you see."

Though Bidhu had never been to Calcutta before, as he had more than once been to Krishnagar, nothing seemed strange or new to him.

"Nilkamal," said Bidhu, as they walked along, "let us go to Kalighat. It is a quieter place; and besides, I think, we ought first to visit it, as it is a holy place to which people come from every part of the country to pay their worship to the goddess."

"Let us go by all means," said Nilkamal, who still felt a smart from the cut he had got. "I have no wish to stay here. Calcutta is such a dirty place. There’s a filthy odour in the air everywhere. And in the street one must have one’s eyes about him, lest he should get a cut or be driven over."

"Kalighat," said Bidhu, "is just south of Calcutta. We shall have to keep straight on in the direction we are going."

"There are such numbers of beggars there."

"Yes," said Bidhu. "And they are the most unfortunate set of beggars."
"The Kali-bari," 1 said Nilkamal, "is not such a safe place as one may think it. It is easy to get into it, but to get out of it again with a whole skin—there's the rub."

"No fear of that," said Bidhu. "You are safe, while you are with me."

1 A temple erected to the Goddess Kali.
CHAPTER XVIII

SEPARATION OF BIDHU AND NILKAMAL

Bidhu and Nilkamal went on and on towards the south, till they came to the bazaar at Bhowanipur. "This is Kalighat, I think," said Bidhu. "Will you just inquire, Nilkamal?"

"Where is the temple, please?" Nilkamal asked a passer-by.

The man asked was a Dacca man, who was a rice merchant. It is not the way with a man of East Bengal to readily answer a question that one may ask in passing. Instead of obliging him by telling him directly what he wants to know, he is always sure to tire his patience with a number of questions which he has no business to ask.

"Where do you come from?" he asked Nilkamal, with an intonation such as is peculiar to people of East Bengal, without answering his question.

"Krishnagar," replied Nilkamal.

"Were you ever in Calcutta before?"

"I wouldn't ask you if I had been."

"Whither are you going?"

"What impertinence is this!" exclaimed Bidhu, who lacked patience, being greatly inconvenienced with heat and hunger and fatigue.
"Here is a nabob’s grandson, I see," said the Dacca man, being offended. "Why, you are such a good-tempered fellow that I think I ought to walk all the way with you to show you the temple. Find out as you best can. I won’t help you."

"We don’t care a straw for your help," said Bidhubhushan, as the Dacca man turned to pursue his way. "Come along, Nilkamal, we can find our way to the temple ourselves."

Walking a little distance, Bidhu thought it was foolish to be out of temper with any one on the road, when, on looking forward they noticed a Brahman, with a garland of sacred flowers hanging from his neck, and his forehead well besmeared with vermilion, coming space towards them. They stopped for him to come up, and then Bidhu asked, "Will you kindly direct us to the temple?"

"I am going there, my friend," said he, smiling and taking hold of Bidhu’s hand in a familiar way. "I shall be very glad to take you there."

Bidhu thanked him kindly for so good-naturedly offering, as he thought, to be their guide.

The Brahman was a guide from the temple as Bidhu soon afterwards discovered. He was very glad to have found what he had been eagerly on the lookout for. And now he walked along with them, talking and laughing merry like an old acquaintance.

On getting to Kalighat, Bidhu and Nilkamal went to bathe in the Adiganga. Nilkamal was filled with disgust at the sight of the filth and refuse floating all over on its muddy waters. "I fail to see," said he, "why people like to bathe in it. I much prefer the river at Hanskhali, for there one need have no fear of having
one's feet stuck deep in the mire, and, except during the rains, the water is sufficiently clear at all seasons"—
"Don't disparage it, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, as they both entered the water. "This holy river has helped numbers to go to heaven, and we may go to heaven as well, if only we have faith like them."

Like two agreeable companions they talked as they bathed, and then they went to pay their adoration to the goddess, with the guide who had never left them for a minute walking before to lead the way. Nilkamal was not very pleased on seeing the temple, and great indeed was his disappointment when he looked upon the idol itself. "I will swear," said he, "the man who fashioned it did not at all understand his business."

He was about to make other remarks, but just then Bidhu said, "Hush, Nilkamal! spare your criticisms now, you have enough to do to mind what you are about."

However, having paid their worship, Bidhu and Nilkamal were coming away, when they were stopped at the door by a lean sinister-looking Brahmin demanding to be paid his due.

"What is there to pay?" Bidhu asked.

"The least to pay is eight annas, but if you can pay more, so much the better for you and for us too."

Bidhu untied the string of his purse, secured about his waist, and taking out a four-anna bit put it into the fellow's hand.

Nilkamal was coming away without paying anything, and when he was stopped, he readily answered that he was but the servant of the babu, upon which he was allowed to pass.

They had scarcely gone fifty steps from the door of
the temple, when they were stopped again by their guide, who now stretched out his hand, demanding to be paid in his turn.

"I have paid at the door," said Bidhu. "Why should I pay again?"

"I have nothing to do with that. Where is my reward for the service I have done you?"

Without another word Bidhu took out another four-anna bit, and had just put it into the man's hand, when some fifty persons, men and women, with clusters of garlands in their hands, made a rush towards them. Before the two travellers knew it, they came quickly around them, so as to effectually cut off their escape. Then in a moment they rushed to put garlands on their necks and to daub their foreheads with vermilion. And the rabble pressed so close around and upon them, making vociferous demands and uttering loud benedictions, that they found it hard work to get away. Whichever way they attempted to move they were pulled from the opposite side, and the clamour and confusion were such indeed that one who has never been there can scarcely picture the scene to himself.

Bidhu was soon quite tired of them, and wanting to be rid of them anyhow, he felt for his purse; but, to his great surprise, he found it was missing. In deep distress he cried to his companion, "I have been robbed, Nilkamal; oh! I have been robbed of my money!"

Nilkamal, too intent on how he could best make his escape to hear him properly, cried, "Help, help, master, I swear these fellows will be the death of me."

In fact, Nilkamal was in a more awful situation than Bidhu. He had his face so daubed with vermilion that he could hardly be recognised. For though everyone
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wanted to get at his forehead, there were many who missed it, and thus he received the colour in every possible part of his face. Some one chanced to run his finger into one of his eyes, which nearly blinded him. He was heavily loaded with garlands. With loud appeals to their mercy he begged the people to desist from their mad course and let him go, as he had not so much as a pice about him.

With great difficulty did Bidhu and Nilkamal at last succeed in getting away. On gaining the street they met, on looking around, an upcountry-man in just the same predicament as they had been in. Pointing behind, with looks which bespoke terror, Nilkamal cried, "Oh, here they come again. I will not stop one moment longer." And he took to his heels, leaving his companion to shift for himself as best he could. But just as he ran off, a hue-and-cry was raised after him. A number of men chased him with the cry of "Stop the man." Nilkamal ran for his life; and as he scudded away at a rapid pace, more and more men echoed the cry and joined in the pursuit. But his legs soon failed him. He had walked for three whole days and had eaten nothing since that morning. As he came to a turn in the street he was quite exhausted, and his legs giving way, down he came to the ground. Soon his pursuers were around him; but not one of them knew why he had run after him. Nilkamal was like a desperate man now. "Come," he cried, "put all your stock of garlands on me. I have nearly lost one eye, and I don't care at all if I lose the other." At these words, which seemed to have no meaning, the men took him for a mad man and went away laughing.

Nilkamal's eye was very painful now, and the water
flowed from it. Besides he had his skin cut and torn in more places than one on account of the bad tumble he had got. He sat there for a while, and then rising to his feet and dusting himself he turned to go to Bidhu. But he soon found that he had lost his way. During all that evening he tried in vain to find his way back to the temple, and at length got so tired that his legs could carry him no longer. Dragging himself along he sank down at the door of a house. And as he sat there and thought of his own forlorn condition he wept like a child.

"Who are you?" asked a voice, when he had sat there for a good half hour. The voice that inquired was that of the master of the house, who, seeing a strange man at the door on his return from his office, stopped to make an inquiry before entering.

"I am Nilkamal," said Nilkamal, crying and sobbing like a child.

"Why do you cry?" asked the master of the house.
"I have lost my way," said Nilkamal, still crying.
"Lost your way? How is that?"

Nilkamal now ceased weeping, and brushing away his tears gave an account of himself.

The babu took compassion on him, and entering kindly welcomed him into his house.

"Wait here," said he, showing him into a room, "till I bring you something to eat."

After he had eaten something Nilkamal felt much refreshed, and then he longed to tell the master of the house, as he thought it would greatly please him, that he could play well on his fiddle.

"Will you then just give us some proof of your skill?" said the babu, when he knew that he was a good player.
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Nilkamal at once took up his fiddle, but just as he removed the rag in which it was carefully wrapped, he suddenly exclaimed in a tone of deep regret, "What do I see? my instrument gone, and thus I am deprived of the only solace and comfort of my life!" As he uttered these words, he shed a flood of tears, for indeed he was pained beyond all measure to find his violin broken in two or three places and utterly useless.

The babu did really sympathise with him in his grief and kindly promised him a new one.

This somewhat comforted Nilkamal "I am very thankful, sir," said he, "but I am sure I can never get one like that I have lost."

The babu, however, said, "You can go with me to the bazaar, Nilkamal, and choose one for yourself." After a while Nilkamal was called to supper. He was afterwards very kindly supplied with a bed to sleep on; and as he stood much in need of rest, he went to bed and quickly fell asleep.

To return to Bidhubhushan. The loss of his purse weighed heavily upon his heart. He was amazed and almost horrified to see poor Nilkamal hunted by a number of men on the road, and for no earthly reason that he could guess. He wished he had not come there and was sorry he had done so. Through grief and hunger and fatigue he lost all heart and burst into tears. And as he turned his weary steps in the direction of the river he met the very man who had been his guide, and asked him where he might be supplied with food and shelter for the night. "You need not be troubled about that," said he. "Come on with me to the temple, and I will get you some of the food presented to the goddess by the worshippers." Bidhu followed him
thither, and there he waited for the food till it was ready for distribution among the people. After he had partaken of it, he went and laid him down in a corner of the temple to sleep.

Early next morning Bidhu rose and went to bathe. He afterwards went and waited in the corner where he had slept during the past night. He never exchanged a word with anybody, and nobody cared to look at him, much less to talk to him. In the end, however, he got tired of waiting and went to take a turn in the street. He knew the hour for the distribution of the food, and when it came, he went and had his share of it. Thus he lived on from day to day.
CHAPTER XIX.

BIPRADAS'S WILL.

It was just as Hem had predicted about his sister. By diligent application and perseverance, while her brother was away, Svarnalata soon made fair progress in reading and writing, and at length wrote a letter to her brother. Her brother was mightily glad to peruse her letter. It was short and simple, and so full of love. In it he was reminded of his promise. "And so, when he went home, he handed his sister, with a smile, a beautiful flower of gold of delicate workmanship for use as a hair ornament, and she was delighted with her prize. "I am so glad you have won it," he said, putting it on for her, and looking as though he was very proud to think that she was so gentle and loving and intelligent.

Biprasdas was out on some business when his son came home. But, as Hem was expected, he quickly returned after finishing his business. Hearing his son's voice as he entered, he went in full of joy. Svarna ran to her father as soon as she saw him. "I have got a prize from brother, papa," said Svarna, showing her father the flower of gold. "Look, how fine it is."

Biprasdas said nothing. He was perfectly happy in his children. And now he was moved to tears at the
grateful thought that they were so loving and good. A tear also started to Svarna’s eye, as she looked up to her father's face. Hem stood by looking down on the ground, respecting this outburst of parental love, which now found vent in tears.

After some minutes’ silence, Bipuradas entered into conversation with his son and talked till dinner time.

Hem assisted his sister with her lessons as before, and so rapid indeed had been her progress that her brother was astonished. Now and then they read interesting stories to each other. Their father, resting in bed, often watched them reading or talking together, with feelings of mingled love and gratitude.

The holidays were quickly at an end, and Hem must be gone.

"I will go down to Calcutta with you," said Bipuradas to his son.

"Why, father?" asked Hem, looking very pleased.

"Oh, I have some business with a lawyer, my son. I may tell you that I am going to make a will."

"A will, father?"

"Yes, a will, my son. I am now in the decline of life and must think of disposing of my property."

At first Hem was glad his father was going to accompany him, but when he knew why, his cheerfulness left him. He looked so sad; and his father said, "Don't be concerned about my going to make a will." At these words Hem burst into tears. "Come, come," said Bipuradas, "why should you thus make yourself miserable, my son? No one need die because he makes his will. One may make a will and change it as many times as he wants to. Who knows that I may not have many years of life yet before me."
BIPRADAS’S WILL

‘Hem brushed away the tears from his eyes. On the
appointed day he left for Calcutta with his father.
A day or two after his arrival there Bipradas went
and took a conveyance to Bhowampur, to see a friend,
a lawyer, who had formerly belonged to their village.
He soon arrived in his lodgings, and Babu Benoykrishna
Ghose (for that was the gentleman’s name) gave him a
most cordial reception. The two conversed together
for a while, and then Bipradas said, “I am an old
man now and must think of making my will.”
“Why, I think that’s good,” said Benoy babu. “I
think I can draft it and have it copied just when you
please. But how do you wish to divide your money?”
“What I have got I mean to divide equally between
my two children.”
“Will that not be an injustice to your son? Hem
is not going to get a share of his brother-in-law’s property
when his sister marries.”
“Of course, he is not. But he may live to make a
fortune, he may be very prosperous in life. My father,
you know, left me nothing. And Svarna—she may be
married to a poor man’s son, no one knows.”
“But how much have you got?”
“That you will know when you draft the will,” said
Bipradas, with a smile.
Bipradas did not mean to make any long stay that
day, so he bade his friend good-bye and returned to his
lodgings. In a few days again he called on him. The will
was drawn up and written out on stamped paper. To each
of the children was allotted the sum of fifteen thousand
rupees in promissory notes. When Hem should have
attained to his majority, and Svarna been given away in
marriage, they would be entitled to the benefit of the will.
CHAPTER XX.

GADADHAR AND SYAMA.

Though Gadadhar spoke not a word about the disgrace he had been in at the police station, he secretly meditated revenge on Syama and Sarala. Pramada also watched for an opportunity to make them pay dearly for their insolence. She determined not to pocket the insult timidly like her husband, but she would bring down the pride of the maid-servant, though neither she nor her brother, it must be said, had the courage to attack her openly.

One night Sarala and Syama, after they had taken their food, were in bed talking, and the door was ajar. It was near midnight, and Pramada, choosing her time, walked lightly to the old house in which her sister-in-law lived; then creeping on tiptoe, and looking cautiously about her, she reached the door of Sarala's bed-room and stood listening attentively to the chat that was going on.

"It is nearly three months since your master left home," said Sarala. "It is strange he hasn't sent a line to say how he is doing."

"You needn't be anxious, dear mistress," said Syama. "We are not sure he has been staying in the same
place these three months. Perhaps he has got a job in a jatra company. Possibly, too, he has been waiting for an opportunity to write, and now it may be we shall soon hear from him. One cannot write, you know, unless one has sufficient composure of mind for that purpose."

"I think we haven't much left of our small sum," said Sarala.

"What we have left," said Syama, "is likely to support us for six months yet."

"But I don't like your keeping the money in that chest, as it wants a key."

"Why, who will know it wants a key?" said Syama.

"You may be sure it is as secure there as if we kept it safely locked up."

Pramada did not need to hear any more, so she immediately slunk away. She chuckled over the discovery she had made. She thought she would steal the money that very night. Would she be caught in the act? She thought she had better not do anything hastily, but consult her mother first.

The next morning after her husband had gone to his work, Pramada told her mother of the important discovery she had made. "Leave it to me, sister," exclaimed Gadadhar, "and I'll be sure to manage it as cleverly as you could with it."

"Softly, softly, Gadadhar-chandra," said his mother. Then looking around, and speaking as if the very walls had ears, she said, "For three or four days I have seen them go to bed with the door open. But take care how you put in your nose, my boy, if you find that Syama is awake. You well know the risk you run."

"You need fear nothing, mother," said Gadadhar.
"I will take the precaution to smear myself with oil; and if that ugly wench should seize me, why, she can’t keep her hold, that’s certain"

"Hush!" said Pramada, who was at the door watching, seeing Syama at a distance. As Syama came within hearing, she cried to Gadadhar, "You are going now?"

—"No, not now, I am going in the evening," cried Gadadhar, taking the hunt.

A little before sunset Gadadhar made the announcement that he was going home, and having dressed, left the house. At about eleven o’clock at night he returned. Walking round he slipped into the old house by the back-door which had no latch. It was the middle of summer. The moon was in the sky. There was not a breath of wind, for the night was hot and sultry. Sarala and Syama had gone to bed, leaving the door open. Between them Gopal was sleeping quietly. Gadadhar waited till all was still, then, taking his opportunity, he slyly entered the room, and having stolen the money, made off with it.

He hurried on and did not stop until he reached his house. The next morning he returned to his sister. On the way he wondered if they had missed the money. He was glad when he found that they had not. That day, as Sarala did not require any money, there was no occasion for opening the chest, and hence the money was not missed.

Next day, when going to lessons, Gopal asked his mother for his school fee, telling her how his teacher had bade him take care not to forget it. Sarala was busy cooking at the time. So she called to Syama and asked her to let Gopal have the money. On opening the chest, Syama, not finding the savings where they should have
been, thought that Sarala was joking, and had put the money elsewhere.

"Why, now, this is a good joke indeed," cried Syama.
"Come, tell me, mistress, where you have put the money"

"O Syama, what do you mean?" exclaimed Sarala, with surprise.

"I mean what I say," said Syama, rather solemnly.
"Now leave off joking and don't let us keep Gopal waiting for nothing"

"Oh, I am not joking, Syama. I haven't meddled with the chest these two or three days, but you surprise me."

Her looks and manner of speaking plainly showed that she was really serious. It seemed certain that the money was gone. They, however, both searched for it in the chest and all over the room, but it was nowhere to be found. In deep despair Sarala sank down on the floor. "Oh! what shall we do now?" she cried.

"As sure as I live," exclaimed Syama, "it is that cursed rascal of a Brahman who has stolen the money. Now I see why he suddenly went home the other day. It was only to avoid suspicion. Surely that very day he returned and stole the money. I remember they were talking together rather guardedly, and when I came near enough to them, they began to speak aloud so that I mightn't suspect anything. I will go to the police." And Syama bustled out of the room.

For two days Pramada and her mother and brother had been watching and expecting a fuss to be made about the lost money; and now they heard it, they laughed in their sleeve and very much enjoyed the trouble Sarala and Syama were in
"Gadadhar has stolen our money," cried Syama, stopping as she heard whispers in Pramada’s room. "Let him produce the money, I say, or I will call in the police."

"Charge me with theft, you insolent hussy!" cried Gadadhar, coming out. "I will go to the police. I will bring you down."

"Not you," cried Syama. "Didn’t you go to the police station the other day? Didn’t you?"

Gadadhar thought at once that Syama had heard of the disgrace he had been in when there, and retreated crestfallen.

As he re-entered his sister’s room, Syama continued, "Yes, you did; and what then? The police found you to be an idiot and sent you away. I will go and inform the police, and I will not spare your accomplices."

Upon this Syama bustled out of the house. She had not gone far when Sasibhusan, meeting her on his way home, and suspecting by her looks that there was something wrong, inquired, "What’s the matter now, Syama?"

"Gadadhar has stolen our money," said Syama, as she stopped, "and I am going to the police."

"There is no haste," said Sasibhusan. "You must let me enquire into the matter before you go to them. Now follow me."

Syama obeyed. When Sasibhusan had heard all from her, he made no remarks, but only put a rupee into her hand, saying, "You can pay Gopal’s school fee out of this money now, but I must enquire further into the matter."

After eating his meal, Sasibhusan talked with his wife for some time and grew very suspicious. But he
dared not say anything to her for fear of giving offence. When he was ready for work again he called Syama and said, "There is no very strong evidence against Gadadhar; but I will pay the money rather than you should make a fuss by calling in the police."

On his return from work Sasibhusan called Syama again and counted out the money to her.
CHAPTER XXI

GOPAL FINDS A NEW MOTHER

In the mornings and in the afternoons Gopal attended school at the house of Ramchandra Ghose. This gentleman, who lived a little way off from Bidhubhusan's house, had allowed the use of his chandimandap ¹ for the instruction of the little boys of the village. There were some sixty boys on the roll, and as they all squatted on the floor, each on his little square mat, noisily engaged in writing and ciphering, according to their different progress, on palm leaves, plantain leaves and paper, the master, the prominent figure in the whole group, seated in the midst of them, now and then struck the rod on the floor as he thundered, "Louder, boys, louder."

The boys, for the most part, were often at their loudest. Such as were in the palm-leaf class used bamboo pens. And they wrote, often making blots, and wiping out the ink with their fingers, rubbing the fingers on their heads or on their dhotis. There were others, little fellows, newly initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing, wallowing in blots and daubing themselves with ink up to the very roots of their hair. If any one of these by accident formed a letter properly,

¹ House of the Goddess Chandi.
he immediately smeared it out again with his arm in his preparations to make another. The writers on plantain leaves, who were more advanced, worked at arithmetic or spelt proper names, with a drawing and half nasal sound as they wrote them. But the most advanced were the writers on paper, who wrote a bold hand and solved difficult problems in arithmetic. They wrote with reed pens, and kept up a sort of humming noise as they copied, each with an eye to neatness, forms of agreements, accounts, and contracts, the paper used by them being extremely rough, and such as could be had at a very cheap price. The teacher, who was a hard smoker, was generally believed to be more fond of caning than teaching his pupils.

"Why are you late?" demanded he, in a voice like thunder, which made the boys at once start and look up to see who had come in, as one day a boy, whose name was Nidhiran, showed himself in the school at a somewhat late hour, carrying his mat in a long roll under his arm, with the palm leaves sticking out at one end, and his ink-pot suspended from strings.

"Come up, you little rogue," was the command of the formidable village preceptor, as he took up the rod at the same instant.

The master was not to be disobeyed. Slowly and tumbldly the poor boy moved up and stood before the judgment seat.

"You dog! do you choose this hour for coming to school?" said the schoolmaster, shaking the rod as he rose from his seat.

"Please, sir," said Nidhiran, who trembled in every limb, as he expected the rod to descend on his head each moment, "I have been preparing the tobacco
father brought from market this morning, as I wished to take you some of it"

"Oh, then I must test your tobacco," said the master, resuming his seat and handing his chillum to Nidhiram.

"Now, fill it. If I like your tobacco, I may spare the rod, but if I do not, I will make it fly to pieces on your back".

Coming away to do his bidding, and first leaving his bundle of palm leaves and his ink-pot in their usual place, Nidhiram stopped to draw a long and luxurious breath of relief. When the chillum had been got ready, he gave it two or three pulls on the sly, relishing them as one newly initiated into smoking would do, and then returned to the master, never doubting but that he would approve of the tobacco. Unfortunately for Nidhiram, however, the tobacco proved not to his liking, and, as the poor boy was going to sit down quietly in his place, the master cried, "So you have brought this worthless tobacco for me? Come up, you puppy"

Nidhiram's stars were evidently now against him. The poor boy, however, approached the dreaded seat, and stood pleading that he was not to blame, as it was not he but his father who had brought the tobacco; but the master would not listen to reason, and quickly enough saved him the trouble of proving his innocence by inflicting five or six cuts on his head and back, which sent him smarting and yelling to his seat.

Having flogged Nidhiram, he assumed a look of imperturbable gravity. "Now boys, come, bring up your parvan (allowance) one by one," he cried, looking around with an air of great dignity.

After the celebration of each festival in the almanac, each boy was to pay his parvan, that is one pice as
his mite of contribution for the benefit of the village pedagogue. If any defaulters pleaded as their excuse that their guardians would not pay it, they were taught to get it by theft. The boys, in short, would do anything to please their teacher.

Those who had brought their parvan went up and paid it one after the other.

"Yours, sir," Gopal was asked, in a somewhat stern voice.

"Please, sir," said Gopal, "I will bring it to-morrow."

" Didn't you say that yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, but I quite forgot it."

"Then, it seems, you must have a taste of the rod to make you remember it."

Gopal knew that his mother was not able to pay, yet his horrid dread of flogging made him say that he would bring it without fail "to-morrow," upon which he was let go with the warning, "Take care you don't forget again."

At the end of school hours, Gopal, going home with a boy named Bhuban, said, "Bhuban, would you please lend me a pace? I have promised to pay to-morrow, and if I fail you know what I must expect." And the poor boy shuddered at the very thought of it.

"Why not get it from your mother?" said Bhuban.

"If mother could pay, I wouldn't want to borrow from you."

"Then you can pay out of your lunch money."

"Oh, I get nothing of the sort."

"You don't eat your lunch?"

"No."

"What do you take after-going home from school? What are you going to eat to-day? You must be very hungry now."
"I don't know if there is anything, mother will let me have it. But I often go without lunch, and I don't mind it."

Bhuban was pained to hear his companion talk thus, and he said again, "You never ask your mother for it?"

"No, I mustn't, for then I should only distress her, and I would suffer anything rather than grieve my mother's heart. Oh, my poor mother! I cannot bear to see her weep. One day Bepin and I went home together. Bepin had his lunch, mother had nothing to give me, so she sat down and wept as though her heart would break. After that I never liked to walk home with Bepin. I always wait and linger by the way just to let Bepin have time to get home before me and eat his lunch, and then I follow him home and play with him." And the poor boy drew his hand quickly across his eyes.

"Bepin never likes to share his lunch with you?" said Bhuban, now greatly sympathising with his companion.

"Bepin is willing, but aunt will not allow it. She makes him eat his in her presence."

"Do please walk home with me. I will share my lunch with you, and then I can get you a piece from mother."

"No, don't ask your mother. You can lend it yourself if you like."

"All right, come along."

The two boys walked on in silence, and as soon as Bhuban got home, he went and told his mother all about Gopal.

The good woman at once stepped out with her son,
and noticing Gopal’s sad look, took him by both hands and said, “My child, you have come together from school, and you are waiting at the door!” She led him in with great kindness, and, making him sit down, gave him and her boy some sweetmeats, and water in two small drinking vessels.

Having done eating, Gopal drank off the water and asked for a little more.

“Whom do you ask, child?” said Bhuban’s mother.

Gopal modestly replied that he meant her, upon which she said with a smile, “Tell me who I am.”

He blushed and hung down his head.

“I will not hear you,” she said, “unless you say, ‘Ma, give me a little water.’”

Gopal’s lips quivered with emotion as he repeated the words in a rather hoarse voice.

Bhuban’s mother at once took him up in her arms, and, having kissed his forehead, gave him some water. For a while Gopal could see nothing for his tears. Resting his head on her shoulder, he closed his eyes and kept quite still. Tears were also in the eyes of Bhuban’s mother. They fell plentifully and even wet Gopal’s arms.

“You also are a mother, Pramada!”

For a long time she held him in her arms; then, setting him down and taking both his hands in hers, she said, “Will you promise, Gopal, to see me every day on your way home from your lessons?”

Gopal very humbly saying that he would do as she wished him, she pressed a rupee into his hand and said, “Go and play now, my child; but let me see you once again before you go home.”
CHAPTER XXII.

NILKAMAL AT A JATTRA

NILKAMAL was allowed to stay at the gentleman's house at Kalighat, where he earned his meals by making himself useful in the house. The babu had kindly bought him a new fiddle, and over it Nilkamal screeched in his leisure time regularly after mid-day. Whenever anyone inquired of the babu about Nilkamal, before the babu could reply, Nilkamal would readily say that he was a musician, at which the babu would only smile.

Nilkamal often inquired of hawkers passing by the door if they knew of a play being performed anywhere. No hawker, once asked, would pay heed to his words again. Nilkamal thought that hawkers who went to every house ought to have all the news. Weeks passed, and he could get no information. He wanted so much to go to a play that he could think of nothing else, and he often dreamed or talked of it in his sleep at night. Much as he wished to go about for the information he so earnestly desired, he dared not leave the house for fear of losing his way.

One morning Nilkamal was smoking his hookah when the babu called, "Nilkamal, Nilkamal."

Nilkamal was quite lost in the one thought that was
constantly uppermost in his mind, and consequently did not hear the babu.

The babu walked up to his room and called again. Nilkamal turned with a start, and, seeing that the babu had on his walking suit, inquired, "Where are you going, sir?"

"Going to a jattra. I hear you want very much to see one, and I wish you to go with me."

Nilkamal eagerly clutched at the proposal. Assuring the babu that he felt very thankful, he put away his hookah and chillum, and was ready in a minute to follow him out of the house.

"Where is the performance?" Nilkamal asked, as leaving his house the babu took the road leading to the temple.

"A little way off, near the temple."

"Very close to the temple do you say, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then I am not going, sir," said Nilkamal, in a rather decided tone.

"Not going? Why not?" asked the babu.

"Because I have not eyes of stone in my head, sir."

"Well, what do you mean by that?"

Nilkamal briefly related his troubles in and out of the courtyard of the temple, and concluded by saying that he wished his eyes had been made of stone instead of flesh, as then he would not be afraid.

"But I assure you," said the babu, laughing, "you are quite safe while you are with me."

"Why, hadn't I the same assurance from my friend?"

"Your companion, like yourself, being fresh from the
country has as much need of help himself as you have. But I assure you, you are quite safe in going with me."

Nilkamal, as the reader can easily think, did not require much persuasion to go. On finding himself in the house where the play was going on, he was struck with admiration at the dazzling splendour of the chandeliers suspended overhead by cords, in which here and there a few flickering lights were still allowed to burn, shedding a pale lustre around. His eyes were now never at rest. At one moment they looked on the swarming crowds around, then at the actors, and at other times wandered among the pictures, with which the walls and pillars were decorated. He bored the babu with no end of questions, to the great disturbance and annoyance of those sitting near him.

After waiting about an hour and a half, the babu said to Nilkamal, "I want to be going now. Do you?"

"No," said Nilkamal, "I mean to wait till the end."

"Just as you please," said the babu. "I cannot wait any longer, as it is getting late, and I have to attend my office."

With these words the babu was about to leave when he turned and said to Nilkamal, "Do you think you can find your way back?"

"If I cannot, I can ask," said Nilkamal.

"Where will you ask for?"

"For the babu's house."

"What babu?"

"Why, the babu who goes to his office."

"Nonsense," said the babu, laughing. "How is any one to know whom you mean unless you give the name of the person you want?"
"For whom am I to ask then?"
"Ask to be directed to Rameswara babu's house."
"Rameswara?"
"Yes, that's my name," said the babu. "Now, don't forget it."

When the babu had said that, he left him; and Nilkamal tried hard to remember his name, going over it again and again till he had mastered his lesson. He next wanted to know the name of the head of the jattra company, and asked one who stood close by with his back turned towards him. Failing, however, to draw his attention, he gave him a squeeze such as made him at once turn round in pain, crying out, "Who is that?"

"I only wanted to know the name of the manager of the company," said Nilkamal.

"What do you mean by pinchung me like that?" said the man, angrily.

"Have I hurt you? You can pinch me if you like. But I meant you no harm, I can tell you."

Just at this time an upcountryman stood up and bade them all be quiet.

Nilkamal now dared not ask anyone else. He looked anxiously around, when two men rose to leave, and, as they passed by him, one said to the other, "Govinda Adhucari has lost the charm of his name." As Nilkamal heard that remark he thought within himself, "Ah! my old friend, Govinda Adhicari. A lucky chance has once more put me in his way. I will watch him, and if by any chance his eyes meet mine, I shall give him a nod of recognition, and he will be sure to sign to me to come up. The fellow here, who was just now in a passion with me, will then know what I am worth."
Nilkamal watched Govinda Adhicari for a long time until tired, he turned and twisted and coughed so as to attract his attention, and would have continued these operations for some time, but just then the play broke up, and there was a rush of people leaving. Nilkamal then went up and took his seat among the players.
CHAPTER XXIII.

BIDHUBHUSHAN JOINS A PANCHALI PARTY

After a few days' stay at Kalighat, Bidhubhushan's mind was made up to seek employment in a company of players. But luck, it seemed, was against him. For though he tried hard to secure some such engagement, he had nothing but disappointment for his pains. He continued to have his meals as before, but his clothes were now so dirty that he felt ashamed to go out in them. His friend, the guide, would have had him follow the occupation, but he could not fancy it, for he wanted to do something by which he could get his living honestly.

One day as Bidhubhushan was alone with his melancholy thoughts, he said to himself, "What a hard life is mine! Hard enough to try, not infrequently, the best of us. My health is impaired, my spirits are damped by disappointment. And these dirty ragged court do they not speak against me, and make me perhaps as worthless as a beggar in the eyes of one who never had to feel the pinch of hunger? But what has become of poor Nilmakamal? How strange was the circumstance that caused our separation! Poor Sarala! had she been married to another, she might have been happier." The thought of his wife moved him deeply; tears gushed,...
down his cheeks. But soon his looks changed to an expression of anger as the thought of his brother and sister-in-law crossed his mind. His lips were compressed, his hands clenched with spasmodic violence. His face, however, relaxed as he thought of Gadadhar and his mother, and then there came a smile on his lips.

The face is the mirror in which are reflected any feelings that are roused in the heart.

Bidhubhushan was so deep in his own thoughts that he did not notice that there was one close by whose eyes were fixed on him. This man was no other than his friend, the guide. "You seem to be losing your senses!" he said, walking up to Bidhubhushan, having observed fleeting expressions of grief, anger, and pleasure chase one another across his face.

Bidhubhushan turned with a start. "What?" said he.

"I am going to a panchali," and I wish you would accompany me."

Bidhubhushan was quickly ready. As they walked together, his friend said, "You want to join a company of players?"

"Yes; but it is so hard to get anything, and that makes me feel so miserable, you know."

"I tell you what," said his friend. "There is a panchali party here from our village. They are going to give a public performance to-night. Why, man, here is your chance. Don't miss it, that's all I can tell you."

"Miss it? Not I. But tell me more about it."

1 A party of singers representing in songs the deeds and amours of the principal characters in Hindu mythology.
"Well, I saw the head of the company this morning. He belongs to our village. He wants a man who can play well on the dhole. I spoke to him about you. If he likes you, he will be glad to have you as a partner. 'Bring him over as soon as possible,' were his last words to me when I told him that you were just the man for him. Now, don't miss this opportunity!"

Bidhubhusan wanted words to express his gratitude. His looks, however, told what he could not speak. They soon saw the head of the company, and the guide introduced his friend, saying, "Here is the man I spoke to you about."

Bidhubhusan's clothes were so dirty that at first the manager looked as though he would have nothing to do with him. But presently he put on a pleasant face, and said, as he reached him a dhole, "Let us see what you can do." Bidhubhusan played to the best of his ability. The headman was well pleased with his performance, but he was rather cautious in expressing his opinion, and only said, looking very grave, "I think you will do."

He next turned to the guide and said, "He accepts our terms?"

"Yes," said Bidhubhusan's friend, "he is willing to join as a partner."

"Well, when would you be able to join?" the headman asked Bidhubhusan.

"Just when you please," said Bidhubhusan.

"Why not now, if it suits you? The sooner the better."

"I am ready," said Bidhubhusan.

Shortly after Bidhubhusan had joined, fortune began to smile on the company. Even after two or three public performances the company began to be talked of
very highly, and thus they were speedily put in the way of making plenty of money and winning a name for themselves. Their fame soon spread far and wide Bidhubhushan was now a different man from what he had been a short time back. His clothes were clean and good, and he had regained his former health and activity. Over and above all this he had grown to be very much liked and even respected by the petty. But for all that his heart yearned for his home. How keenly at times he felt the separation from his wife and boy! A great change had now taken place in Bidhubhushan’s character. His at one time frivolous nature had been replaced by the stead and sober thoughts of the man. The battle of life had aged him and formed his character. To-day a young man is as gay as a butterfly, caring for nothing but pleasure, to-morrow he may be sobered by some sad, unforeseen incident over which he has no control. Bidhubhushan had had troubles which had moulded him anew.

As soon as Bidhubhushan had received his share of the first night’s profits, he sent a letter and some money to his wife. As he never had taken any pains to write well, he wasted a deal of paper before he could produce a letter to his satisfaction. The first letter he wrote was rejected because it was not neat enough. The second also he destroyed because he did not like the wording of it, and the third he spoiled altogether by spilling the ink over it. The last one to which no accident had happened satisfied him. He read it from beginning to end. How delighted his wife would be to receive his letter! His eyes filled with tears as he thought of it.

Bidhu then proceeded to get the letter duly registered and posted. After that with what eagerness he awaited
a letter from his wife! He visited the post office daily in the hope of hearing from home. But when more than a week had passed, and there was no letter, he began to be very uneasy. It suddenly occurred to him that his wife did not know how to write, but he thought again that his own boy might, by this time, have learnt to write tolerably well.

This thought supported him. He would rather live in hope than die in despair. He persistently continued his visits to the post office, till one day the postmaster said to him, "We have had the receipt at last."

'Have you?' eagerly inquired Bidhubhusan.

The postmaster showed him the receipt. In distinct letters there was the name Gopalchandra Chatterjee.

For a while Bidhubhusan looked at the signature with a deep and affectionate interest. He then asked the postmaster if he could part with the paper.

"I am sorry I cannot, sir," said he. "This receipt has to be kept in the office."

Bidhubhusan's eyes were once more bent upon the signature. And when at last he took them away, his heart was full and he quickly brushed away the tears from his eyes. He, however, felt easy when he left, saying good-bye to the postmaster.
CHAPTER XXIV.

REUNION OF BIDHUBHUSHAN AND NILKAMA

There was a large programme of entertainments at a religious festival held at Devipur, a village in the district ofHugh. From five o'clock in the afternoon till ten o'clock at night there was a panchali. The songs were well sung, but what elicited the loudest applause from all was the performance of him who played on the dholak.

The dholeman was Bidhubhushan, who was now the head of the company.

Next there was a jatra which commenced a little after midnight. There was a large audience. Early in the morning Bidhubhushan and his party went to hear it. They arrived just as the music, which was a comic character had begun. When the band stopped, a little fellow in a satin jacket and pyjamae of chinos stood up and exclaimed, "Hanuman, where are you now! Oh! come and help me." He impersonated Rama, and was thin and very pale, and apparently extremely tired. When he had uttered those words, all noise was hushed into silence, and everyone was on the tip-toe of expectation to see Hanuman.

1 Chief of the monkey heroes who fought for Rama.
appear Hanuman, however, not making his appearance, Rama called again and again till he was hoarse, but there was no response. Poor Rama! he was badly in need of rest. But he must have his Hanuman's aid. Without him the fight could not go on. One of the players rose and quickly left to fetch Hanuman.

Now let us follow this man into the green-room and see what is the matter with Hanuman. The man selected to play the part of Hanuman is no other than our daft Nikkamal, and how he came to be here is easily told. When he last had an interview with Govinda Adhicari, he had induced that gentleman to get him an appointment. But he was good-for-nothing, and Govinda Adhicari, wishing to be rid of him, had him employed where he now was. Here he had a salary of four rupees a month, and was more useful in preparing chillums of tobacco than in assisting at a play. He had never taken part in a play before, but on this occasion, being short of hands, the manager had asked him to play the character of Hanuman. Nikkamal was offended. He felt ashamed of appearing in such a part, and though he had the mask and the tail on, he stood fast at the door of the green-room and refused to move a step further.

"Come, come, none of your follies now," said the manager, rather coaxingly. "You will mar the play if you persist in your obstinacy."

"What do I care for that!" said Nikkamal. "Do you think I am going to act the monkey and be the laughing-stock of the whole assembly? Why, if I must play a part, it should be the part of a hero."

"Nonsense! A hero or Hanuman, it is all one to a player. Now, come along, do, and don't keep the audience waiting."
"I would rather not stay with you," said Nilkamal, being still held back by shame, which he found it hard to overcome.

The manager was perplexed. Rama still kept calling for Hanuman's aid, and he felt that the situation was a most trying and provoking one. At last, in the midst of this dilemma, the manager exclaimed, "Nilkamal, I will raise your pay to five rupees."

Nilkamal was quick to feel the temptation, but he still lingered at the door as though he could hardly get the better of his shame. The manager and his men, however, soon lost all patience, and Nilkamal was forcibly led into the ring. "Ah, what could keep you so long, child," said Rama, addressing Hanuman. Hanuman was about to make the answer that was put into his mouth, but looking around his eyes lighted upon Bidhubhusan. No one could be more startled at suddenly seeing a serpent than was Nilkamal at the sight of Bidhubhusan. Nilkamal at once thought that Bidhubhusan had probably heard that he had been found good-for-nothing by Govinda Adhucari, and also of his present plight. No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than he felt such shame and humiliation that he told the audience that he had never agreed to personate Hanuman, but had been forced against his will to appear as such.

There was a roar of laughter when Nilkamal said this. But raising his voice he continued, "You don't believe me, sirs, but I assure you that what I have said is the truth and nothing but the truth. Pray, don't call me Hanuman. My name is Nilkamal."

A deafening laugh went again; and Nilkamal sat down from very vexation and shame.
"Dear Hanuman!" said Rama, addressing Hanuman.
"Nonsense, I am an honest inhabitant of Rampagar, and I want the gentlemen around to know it," said Nilkamal.
"My worthy friend, Hanuman," said Rama again, "be good enough to help in the fight"
"What do I care for your fight? What right have you, I say, to call me Hanuman?"
The audience was greatly amused by Hanuman's words, and it was now difficult to restore order. By flattery and promises of a considerable increase in his pay, however, Hanuman was at last persuaded to help, but the help was nominal, and the fight was brought to a close by Rama dropping as he took up his bow and arrow. But the effect of the play had been completely marred, noise and confusion prevailed, and the manager had to propose that the play should be stopped.
Accordingly, after one or two songs, the play came to an end. When the crowds had dispersed, Bidhubhushan rose and went up to Nilkamal. Nilkamal had flung aside the mask and was sullen. "How have you got here, Nilkamal?" said Bidhubhushan, sitting down near him.
Nilkamal was offended. "I have nothing to say to you, sir," he said, turning his face away.
"What have I done to offend you, Nilkamal?"
"What have you done! How could you laugh, sir! How could you who know what I am worth!"
"Oh, I couldn't help it."
"Why, I am not a mad man."
"Who says you are a mad man?"
"I don't want to be among these fellows any longer," said Nilkamal.
"How would you like to make one among us, Nilkamal?" said Bidhubhusan. "We should be very glad to have you. But what pay do you get here?"

"Six rupees." Nilkamal told him what was not true.

Bidhubhusan, who now was the head of the company, said on leaving, "Well, you shall have six rupees a month. Get your dues and come over with your things as soon as possible."

Nilkamal now wished he had asked for a little more, thinking how readily Bidhu agreed to let him have six rupees a month.

Seeing the manager he said, "Let me have my dues, I will not stay with you."

The manager was greatly displeased with Nilkamal, and was not at all sorry he was going away. When he had got his dues, Nilkamal went and got his fiddle and left at once to join the panchal's party.

"I bid you farewell," said Nilkamal, as soon as he saw Bidhubhusan. "I am going off."

"Going off? Where?"

"Anywhere my steps may lead me to."

"Why, aren't you going to join our company, Nilkamal?"

"My mind was made up to go with you, but now I have changed it."

"Why, what has come over you?" inquired Bidhubhusan.

"As I was coming here some rude boys shouted after me, 'Hanuman, Hanuman.' I was so annoyed how I should like to have given them each a good thrashing. But I would rather live among strangers."
What guarantee is there you will not call me by that name if I go with you?"

"Why, Nilkamal, you certainly should know me better than to talk like that"

"Oh, you are very good I know, but what assurance have I that the others will be as good as you?"

"Depend on me, you have nothing to fear." There was a faint smile on Budhushan's lips as he uttered these words. Noticing this, Nilkamal exclaimed,

"Why, now, I see what your assurances are worth."

"I didn't say anything," said Budhushan, looking as serious as he could.

"I cannot bear being made game of in that way. Come, will you promise never to call me by that name?"

"I do promise you that"

"But that's not all, you must get your men to promise it too."

"Well, that's easily done." And Budhushan rose and left him. Nilkamal now bethought himself of his favourite song, which he kept humming to himself till Budhushan returned. And then, without leaving off singing, he asked him by signs if it was all right.

Budhushan looked at him with a smile to find him in such good spirits. Nilkamal, however, was quickly offended. "You can't blame me, Nilkamal," said Budhushan.

"Why!" asked Nilkamal.

"Do you know what that song refers to?"

"No, and I don't care."

"Don't be offended, Nilkamal. I will tell you. When Ramchandra fought his enemy, Ravana, who was invincible in arms, he wanted to invoke the aid of
Durga, and sent forth Hanuman to fetch blue lotuses to offer her in worship. The song has reference to that."

"Oh, I see, I see," exclaimed Nikamal. "I will not sing that song any more. But what success had you with the men, my friend?"

"Oh, I easily got them to promise."

"And I promise never to have anything more to do with that song," said Nikamal, looking very serious.
CHAPTER XXV.

"WHAT HAS SYAMA DONE?"

After Bidhubhushan's departure from home four years passed, during which Sarala never for a moment forgot her husband. Days passed, weeks passed, months passed, and great was her concern for Bidhubhushan. One, two, three months, and finally four years had rolled away without even a word from him in whom all her happiness was centered. Many a time and oft Sarala had knelt before the guardian deities of the village to pray for the welfare of her dear husband. How many sleepless nights had she spent! What a profusion of tears had she shed! This had gone on for a long time, but at last her health gave way. And then an unwillingness to move due to a dull and depressing feeling of lassitude, possessed her. She was frequently to be seen sitting by herself—a picture of utter hopelessness. Her appetite fell away, and she scarcely had any sleep at night. Often at night, even in the very depth of winter, she was bathed in perspiration, the sheets being wet with it. But strange to say, the more she sank, as if under a load of weariness, the lovelier seemed her sweet face. Though she looked well in the mornings, later in the afternoon her face
was all in a glow, the eyes looking bright and feverish. Slowly but surely Sarala was going into a consumption.

When they had nearly exhausted the savings of Syama, Sarala was very much concerned. With the anxiety in her heart, eating into her vitals, and with Want for her companion, she grew from bad to worse till she was too weak to bear the least exertion of any sort. Then was it that Syama became as a mother to Sarala and her child. Each morning, as soon as she was up, her first care was to make them as comfortable as she could, and then she went out in the neighbourhood to earn food for both mother and child. When she had fed them, she would go out again to have her own meal. Thus did she manage to save the mother and child from starvation.

Saabhushan was now living comfortably with his family in his new house. Since moving to it, immediately after its completion, Sarala had often had to stay alone in the old house, and at first was not at all afraid. But when at last she had grown so weak as to be confined to her bed, a vague superstitious fear laid hold of her. She fancied she saw a figure approach her bed and look on her with a frown. Her weak, unsteady head conjured up other frightful visions before her eyes, and she started in bed. Gopal now never left his mother, but always watched by her bedside, with a sad expression on his face.

"What did you start at, dear mamma? What ails you?" anxiously inquired Gopal.

"Oh, nothing, dear. But have you been with me all along?" said Sarala.

"Yes, dear mamma. How can I leave you now when you seem so unwell?"
"What has Syama done?"

"How long have you been here? You won't run out to play, darling?"

"I never play now, mamma."

At times Sarala's memory failed her. When she had spoken these words she closed her eyes and seemed quietly to go to sleep. Soon afterwards she woke up again with a start and began to look around eagerly.

"What are you looking at, mamma?" said Gopal.

"Oh, nothing, my child. Have you been waiting here all the time?"

"Yes, dear mamma. I have never left your bed."

"Yes, yes, I quite forgot it," said Sarala, as though she had been roused from a dream. "You haven't had anything to eat, dear?"

"No, mamma, but Syama will soon be back, it is near time."

"Such a good soul! Why, she seems not of this earth, my child. Oh, we can never repay her kindness. How hard she works for us. Out in the morning and back again at noon, then out again and back at dusk. Will you promise, Gopal——?"

"Promise what, dear mamma?"

"That you will never forget Syama; that you will always use her kindly when I am gone from this world, child?"

"Oh, dear mamma, how could I do otherwise? She couldn't be kinder if she were my own mother."

Sarala was deeply moved. She shut her eyes while tears gently flowed down her cheeks. Gopal affectionately bent over his mother and wiped the rolling tears away. "Will you put the pillows one upon the other, darling?" said Sarala, after a while.

Gopal laid the pillows one above the other. "That
will do, dear," said his mother, as supporting herself on her arms she slowly raised herself to a sitting posture. The exertion made her breathe convulsively for over a minute. When she had quite got over it, she washed her boy to sit on her lap.

"I can bear it yet," she said. "A few days more and I may be deprived even of that happiness"

Gopal moved not. With eyes looking away from her, which overflowed with tears, he remained perfectly still. His mother drew him fondly to her side, and he rested his head against her bosom and wept in silence.

"Don't be concerned for me, my darling," said Sarala, kissing his tears away and trying to laugh. "I shall soon be well. How can you think, dearest, your own mother can leave you alone in this world?"

These words rather increased his pain, and his tears ran the faster now. His mother put her arms round him and kissed him over and over again.

Shortly afterwards Syama returned. She was simply joyous when for the first time for many days she saw a smile on Sarala's face. "You are much better, dear?" she said, approaching her bed, and sitting down near it.

"Why, dear mistress, if you talk to Gopal and take him on your lap every day for a while I will warrant that in a few days you will be your former self again."

"I feel much better to-day, Syama," said Sarala. "Can any one have such a good daughter as Syama and such a good boy as my own Gopal and not feel better?"

"Why speak you of Syama? What has Syama done?" said Syama in her usual blunt way of speaking, as she rose and moved to the door.

"Syama has done more than one's own daughter could do," said Sarala. "What more can anyone do?"
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No sooner had she spoken these words than Syama left the room. Syama could never stand by and hear herself being praised. She never liked to refer to any act of kindness which she might do. What she gave she gave in private. She loved to do her work in a quiet unostentatious way, and expected no reward for it. Many men are fond of making a parade of their good deeds. They like the papers to talk of them. Such good deeds are destined to perish with the papers which record them. O Syama, thou best of women, thy good deeds are registered in heaven on imperishable paper, and in characters that will never fade!
CHAPTER XXVI.

SASIBHUSHAN'S NEW HOUSE

In Sasibhusan's new house Gadadhar had a pretty little outer room for his own use. The floor was covered with a valuable carpet, over which was spread a costly sheet with a bolster on it. Right in front of the bolster were the hookahs in their stands, the shells of which were mounted with silver. Behind the bolster and close to the wall stood a clothes-horse on which hung two or three fine Simla cloths with coloured borders, two shirts and one scarf. On one side of the clothes-horse, which had on its under-shelf two pair of shoes, was a walking stick resting against the corner, and on the other side there was a rough chest made of the wood of the mango tree.

'What was the matter with Gadadhar to-day? Why was he at home at this hour? He was one who loved to move in the dark. He was a regular night-bird. To-day he seemed restless and anxious—something was wrong. Sitting or standing or lying down he could hardly remain in the same position for five minutes. Now he sat down, now he rose again and paced impatiently up and down the room. He kept putting his head out of the window and looking up and down the path as
though he expected some one. No one, however, appeared. "Hang this business," he said to himself, as he stepped up to the clothes-horse, and taking down a cloth and a shirt, put them on, and then opened the chest and took out a bottle and a glass. Pouring some of the contents of the bottle into the glass, he drank it off at once, making a wry face as he did so.

"That wretched Ramdhan! I asked for brandy and he has sent me rum," he muttered between his teeth, as he put the glass aside. But did he stop there, because it was rum and not brandy? No. He poured out some more of the liquor, and mixing it up with a little water, took it. Then he took a third and a fourth glass. He felt that it was quite enough for the present, so he corked the bottle again, but, before putting it away, he held it against the light and said, "There is still enough left." He then took his scarf and left, stick in hand.

Gadadhar’s room communicated with that of Sasi-bhushan. In a rich man’s family, the relations of the master of the house, even the most worthless of them, are all persons of importance. As Gadadhar went on, a man came up and humbly begged a favour of him. He, however, dismissed him, saying that, as he was very busy, he must call another time. He had not walked many paces when he met the man he had been most eagerly expecting, coming up the pathway. "Hallo! Rames babu," cried Gadadhar, coming quickly up to him. "Right glad am I that you have kept your promise.

"When I gave you my word, I meant to keep it, you know," said Rames

Gadadhar led Rames into his sitting-room. Opening the chest he poured out some more of the liquor and
handed it to Rames, after diluting it, as before, with a little water.

"What is it?" asked Rames, taking the glass in his hand

"Rum," said Gadadhar

"You have put water in it?"

"Yes"

"Then you had better take it yourself," said Rames, handing back the glass "I will take it raw. We, police officers always take it that way you know."

Gadadhar drank that glass himself. Rames then poured out some of the liquor for himself and took it raw.

As Gadadhar was about to replace the bottle and the glass in the chest, Rames said, "Why are you putting them away, do you wish me to say good-bye?"

"Oh, no," said Gadadhar, laughing. "But there is no harm in using a little precaution, I think. We can take them out again when we want them."

"Well, you may do as you like. But let me have another glass before you put away the bottle."

Suiting the action to the word, Rames filled a second glass for himself and drank it.

"Now let us come to the point," said Gadadhar, replacing the bottle and the glass and shutting up the chest.

"Well, we, police officers, are men of few words."

Gadadhar was somewhat offended. "It is too bad of you," he said. "You want to be on the safe side and yet have the lion's share? That's not fair."

"Fair or not fair I must have two-thirds of the money," said Rames. "And I am sure, if I choose to tell the lad's mother, she will not mind my having
whatever I like to ask for. They are in such distress that any sum, however small, will be most welcome to them."

"Oh, certainly," said Gadadhar. "But really that letter has dampened my spirits. When last there came a registered letter, the postman, on delivering it to me, inquired what relation I was to the sender of it. I said, 'I am his younger brother.' Now, just think of all I have done. I have lied, I have forged, and it is hard that you who have done none of these things must have two-thirds of the money."

"True, you have lied and forged, but who put the idea into your head, I want to know," said Rames.

"Not you, I will swear. When I showed the first registered letter to my sister, it was she who advised me to keep it and sign the receipt."

"But who advised you not to sign your own name but put Gopal's instead, so as to make the postman think that you were the identical person to whom the letter was addressed?"

"It was you, I admit," said Gadadhar, "but if I had never consulted you, you would never have known anything about it."

"No, but it was very fortunate for you consulted me, for if you had signed your own name, the police would have arrested you long ago."

"But for all that, you must admit that your demand is most unreasonable. You see, if you have four hundred rupees out of six, I have only two hundred left. And then there is half of it to go to my sister. Do you think I would have cared to run such a risk as that for a hundred rupees?"

"I won't have anything," said Rames, rising and
pretending to be angry. "Let all the money, that you and I have got, be put together and made over to Gopal's mother."

"A very good idea," said Gadadhari, laughing. "But there is no hurry about that, I suppose. Come, sit down, old boy, we must finish that bottle."

Rames sat down. Now let us leave him and his most worthy friend and see what had been the fate of Bidhubhushan's registered letters. Bidhubhushan's intention was not to return home until he had earned enough money to make his family comfortable. From time to time he had sent remittances to his wife, and he naturally thought that they had reached her all right when he saw what he believed to be his own boy's signature on the receipt. He thought it possible that his boy had not yet learnt how to write a letter, though he might have been taught to write his own name. To this rather than anything else he ascribed his wife's silence.

Bidhubhushan's first registered letter fell into Gadadhari's hands. This worthy gentleman broke it open, and, on finding currency notes in it, went to his sister, who advised him to keep the letter and sign the receipt. Gadadhari came away, thinking he would sign his own name, but on meeting Rames, who had just come to pay a visit, he took him aside to consult him on the matter. Rames showed how very foolish it would be to sign his own name, and advised him to put Gopal's instead.

Rames often bragged of his shrewdness as a police officer. And well he might do so; for though, after the commission of the above mentioned crime he seemed to be on very intimate terms with Gadadhari, yet he was
shrewd enough to talk very guardedly to him in company.

Every time a registered letter came from Budhubhushan, Gadadhar intercepted it. "We are now living in that house," he said to the postman one day, pointing to Sasibhushan's new house, to which they had recently removed. As the office of the postmaster, who also had to do the duties of a pound-keeper, was within the confines of the police station, Rames, being on the lookout for a registered letter from Budhubhushan, was sure to know when one came from him.

Hitherto Gadadhar and Rames had had equal shares of the misspent money.

In his last letter Budhubhushan had said that he was going to come home very soon. On receiving the letter in the morning, Gadadhar opened it at once, and, as he read it, his countenance fell and his hand trembled visibly. This naturally led the postman to suspect that the letter contained some bad news. So he asked Gadadhar, saying, "Who is this letter from, Gopal babu?"—"My father," replied Gadadhar.

"No bad news, I hope?" again asked the postman.

"No," said Gadadhar, without looking up.

Gadadhar quickly found Rames and showed him the letter. When Rames had seen it, like the scoundrel he was, he seized the opportunity to work on Gadadhar's fears by threatening to betray him if he did not have two hundred rupees more.

Gadadhar was offended. "Pay you two hundred rupees!" he said. "Why, aren't you in it? You are as much concerned in this business as I am."

"Absurd! I never received any money."

"O Rames babu, what is this you say!" exclaimed...
Gadadhar, in astonishment "Do you say you had no share of the money!"

"Have you any witness to prove it?"

"Witness? Witness, I will swear in court that you had a half share of the money"

"You are the defendant. Your evidence is worthless," said Rames, with the cool composure of a police officer.

Gadadhar now began to feel like a lost man. Rames had already had half of the stolen money, amounting to six hundred rupees. And now he wanted another two hundred. After many entreaties, however, Gadadhar got him to come down to one hundred.

On leaving, Gadadhar had asked Rames to see him in the afternoon. Rames had said, assuming a look of gravity, that he would try to come if he had leisure.

After returning home, Gadadhar sent to Rames almost every hour requesting him to come as soon as he could. Rames, however, never appeared till it was near dark. Gadadhar had taken care to provide himself with a bottle of liquor for the entertainment of his friend. He had sent for brandy, but, as Ramdhan had none, had got a bottle of rum instead.

Now, as we have said, when Rames rose, pretending he was offended, Gadadhar persuaded him to sit down, saying that they must finish the bottle. Rames sat down, but refused to take a third glass when it was offered him, on the plea of his having much work to do, though, as he said, he might wait a little longer if Gadadhar would keep his word.

Gadadhar wrapped his pota¹ round Rames's hands.

¹ The holy thread or badge of honour worn by Brahmans and other high caste Hindus.
and in a tone of deep distress begged that he would not press him for the money, as his sister having got all there was, it would be very hard to get anything out of her. Having thus made an appeal to his kindness he abruptly let go his hands and falling on his knees caught hold of his feet, crying convulsively like a child.

"For shame, let go my feet, Gadadhar babu," said Rames, nothing moved by his tears. "Remember, sir, I am a police officer, and there is no putting me off with such excuses as these. Come, quit hold of my feet or I will tell all!"

Gadadhar seemed to pay no heed to his words. He still clung to his feet while his face was bathed in tears. "Are you so hard-hearted that nothing can move you?" he said after a little while. "Oh, be not hard upon me!"

Rames was not one to be put off in that way. But he said nothing, and Gadadhar, taking his silence as a sign of his being disposed to be kind, quitted hold of his feet, and getting on his legs again, said, "I throw myself upon your mercy!"

"Nonsense," said Rames. "I want the cash—one hundred rupees!"

"Why, you are the most cruel and hard-hearted man I have ever seen!"

"Perhaps I am," said Rames. Gadadhar felt that it was useless to urge him any more, so telling his friend to wait, he stepped into the house.

"The wretch!" said Rames to himself, "to live an altogether worthless life at the expense of his brother-in-law, and be always on the look-out for some mischief to be up to. But I won't stop here. I will see him go to jail. Yes, prison will take all the merriment out of him."
In about half an hour Gadadhar returned.

"Well, what success?" inquired Rames.

"Didn't I tell you it was not easy to get anything out of her?"

"I don't want to listen to your nonsense. I want to know if she has agreed to pay the money. I cannot afford to wait any longer. Do you know that you are robbing the police while you detain me here?"

"I know I have had great difficulty in persuading her to give the money. She would not consent to pay more than fifty rupees, but by many entreaties I got her at last to comply with my request. She has agreed to pay a hundred and one rupees, one rupee, you know, being the price of that bottle of rum."

"Go and bring the money then."

"Not to-day," said Gadadhar. "You will have it to-morrow."

"That's no good. To speak the truth I tremble at the very thought of that letter. I shouldn't at all wonder if you or both of us have to go to jail. I, however, think I shall get off scot-free myself if I go and inform the police now, but I won't do that, because as a friend I do not wish to get you into any serious trouble. But if it were not you I would not take less than five hundred rupees to hold my tongue about it. And what are you to pay? Only a hundred rupees more. And you talk of putting it off until to-morrow!"

Gadadhar made no answer, but rose as if mechanically, and went into the house. In an hour he returned with one hundred rupees, which he put into Rames's hand. Having received the money Rames rose and left him in haste.
CHAPTER XXVII

BIDHUBHUSHAN RETURNS HOME

It was a quiet but rather unpleasant evening about the middle of August. For seven days in succession there had been continual rain, and now it was drizzling. The road was covered with mud and filled with ruts containing dirty water. Let a wayfarer carelessly tread upon one of them and the water would shoot up as from a spurt and soil his clothes. There was in the air a stench of decayed leaves where the trees were growing rather thick on the roadside. The smoke of houses standing at a little distance was rising among the foliage. Here and there light glimmered, and indicated the approach of dusk. The mosquitoes and other insects were on the wing, and the croaking of the frogs was almost deafening. There was not a stray sheep or cow to be seen, and very few men were stirring.

At this time two travellers were moving slowly in the direction of Krishnagar. Each carried a small bag in his left hand, and in his right hand an umbrella to protect him from the rain. They had no shoes on their feet, but they had shirts on, and their scarves were wrapped round their heads in the shape of a pagree. They trudged on, one keeping before, and the other
just behind. They had walked several miles and were
tired, and particularly so was the one that walked
behind, as could be seen by his weary gait. Night over-
took them as they entered a village. "Let us stop here
for to-night," said the one that walked before, to his
companion. These words were spoken in a low cautious
tone as if the speaker was afraid of something. The
reader, of course, need not be told that the speaker is
Nilkamal, and the person to whom these words were
addressed is our friend, Budhubhusan.

Not receiving any answer, he said again, "It is not
advisable, my friend, to travel in the night, and specially
when the Durga puja festival is at hand, when one does
not feel quite so safe on the road. Come let us find a
place where we can rest for to-night, for we can get up
before daybreak to-morrow and be off."

"Why, Nilkamal," said Budhu, "you were not afraid
of anything before."

"No, but now I am worth something."

"We are near Hanskhali," said Budhu, "and our
village is only about two miles from there. Let us go on.
I say, for depend on it, there is no fear of our being
robbed on the road near Krishnagar."

"Let us go on then," said Nilkamal, rather reluctantly.

Budhu took the lead, and Nilkamal followed with some
hesitation. A little way on Budhu said, pointing with
his finger, "Do you remember that tree, Nilkamal? It
was there I made your acquaintance."

"Ah, my friend, it reminds me of my days of
trouble."

As they came to the tree, Budhu said, "Let us rest here
for a little time."

They sat down under the tree. "You sit just where
you sat before,” said Nilkamal to Bidhu “I remember you got frightened at the sight of me”

Bidhu looked round and sighed. Four years had passed since he had first sat in this lonely place, and felt like one cast adrift upon the world. What a terrible time he had gone through since his separation from his brother! What a gay jolly fellow he had been when he lived with his brother, and when his brother was kind to him. Since then he had experienced the brunt of life’s battles. He had been through troubles that had given a very different mould to his character.

Nilkamal got a chillum of tobacco ready. “Take a smoke, my friend,” he said, as he handed it to Bidhu. When their legs were sufficiently rested, they got on their way again.

Picture to yourself a man, who has been away from home for four years and is about to be reunited with those who are dearest to him on earth. His face is lighted up in joy as he hopes to find them all safe and sound. Again it suddenly becomes overcast as he grows apprehensive lest any evil may have befallen them. Bidhubhushan’s heart leaped with joy as he approached his native village. But at the same moment he anxiously asked himself, “Is Sarala well? May be,” he thought again, “she is dangerously ill. May be——,” but that thought he could not bear. When he came and stood before his own paternal house at last, he was struck by a sort of gloomy stillness reigning over it. Four years ago it was full of noise, when there were more heads than could be conveniently accommodated in the house. Now it looked so dark and gloomy that his mind misgave him cruelly. He sank down on the ground. “Call, Nilkamal,” he faltered. “Who is
there!" Nilkamal cried, standing at the door and knocking. No answer, and the stillness that prevailed seemed only the more striking. "Oh, what means this silence, Nilkamal!" exclaimed Bidhu, as if he dared not give utterance to his worst suspicion. Nilkamal knocked and called again. "Who is there?" inquired a voice from within. It was the voice of Syama, who now walked up to the door and again inquired, "Who are you knocking at the door at this late hour of the night?"

"Come out and see," said Nilkamal. Syama opened the door cautiously, and saw two persons, one sitting on the ground, and the other standing close by the door.

"All well, Syama?" inquired Bidhu, picking up courage.

Syama instantly knew the speaker by his voice. Struck with sudden surprise and emotion she cried, "Oh, master, is it you! where have you come from?"

"Hush! Tell me, are all well?" said Bidhu.

Syama paused for a moment. "Yes, we live, but where have you come from?" she said.

"Oh, thank God!" said Bidhu, rising to his feet and drawing a long deep breath of relief. "But why do you ask where I have come from? Did you not receive the letters I sent you?"

"Not a line from you since you went from here," said Syama. "And mistress, poor dear creature—she is almost reduced to the verge of death owing to her anxiety for you."

"And how is Gopal?"

"He is well. Such a good dear!"

"Then let us go into the house."

"No, you must wait here while I go and prepare
her,” said Syama. “For if you go and see her without warning, the excitement may make her faint away.”

“O Syama, is Sarala so very weak?”

“Too weak, indeed,” said Syama. And she left them at the door and went in again.

Bidhubhushan felt a secret pleasure when he heard that Sarala’s condition was due to her concern for him. Alas! how little he dreamed that her anxiety, eating into her vitals, had led her gradually to become a prey to consumption.

In about half an hour Syama returned. Bidhubhushan followed her in. What happy moments were those to him! All the way, and up to the door of Sarala’s bedroom he wore a smile on his face, but just as he entered the room he sank down as one struck by a heavy blow. Sarala was worn to a shadow. Yet she had found strength enough to sit up in bed when she was told of Bidhubhushan’s return home. “You have come, and I am so happy,” she said, with a sweet smile.

“O Sarala,” said Bidhu, his feelings giving a hoarseness to his voice, “it was the sweet dear thought of you that cheered me and helped me to bear up under all trials, it has been, as it were, the sustaining food of my existence during the long years of my absence from home. But how worn out and altered you are! I had not the most distant thought of finding you reduced to this!”

Sarala smiled and said, “Now I shall soon recover.” As she was tired of sitting up, Syama smoothed her pillow and helped her to lie down again, when she rearranged her hair, tying it in a knot.

Next morning Sarala felt so refreshed and easy that
she was able to leave her bed, and Syama was simply overjoyed to see it. She was convinced that nothing serious was the matter with her, and that she would soon recover. "Why, you see, mistress, my prediction has come true," said Syama to Sarala.

"What prediction, Syama?" asked Sarala, with a smile.

"Why, I said you would be all right when master came home."

"You are so very good," said Sarala. "Whatever you say seems to come true."

She had hardly said this when Syama made an excuse to leave the house. For Syama never liked to hear herself praised.

In the night Bidhubhushan could hardly get any sleep because of the concern he felt for his wife, and it was not until morning that he fell asleep. When he got out of bed it was late, and the sun was shining brightly, and Syama was busy getting things ready for use in the kitchen. His joy knew no bounds when he found his wife up from bed, and looking so easy and cheerful. Though a frail ghost of her former self, indeed, Sarala moved with such ease and talked with such cheerfulness that there seemed to be no doubt that in a short time she would be herself again. She offered to prepare the meal, but Syama would not listen to it for a moment, and said she would call in Granny Digambhari.

"Will she come?" said Sarala.

"Of course she will," said Syama. And she said again, "What do we care now? What can't money buy?"

When Digambhari knew that Bidhubhushan had come home, and was now worth something, she readily
came away with Syama, without waiting to be asked twice. Seeing Sarala she said, "You are so reduced, Sarala, and you never let me hear a word of it!"

Sarala only smiled and said nothing.

Soon there was the rumour in the village that Bidhubhusan had come home with plenty of money. Everyone now wanted to see him. To him went his neighbours and his former associates. To him also came those who had never condescended to exchange a word with him in his days of want and privation. Even Gadadharchandra was not behindhand. In fact, everyone now seemed anxious to gain the friendship of the man for whom they had never cared before.

The day passed in conversation, and at dusk Bidhubhusan rose to go to his wife.

In the morning Sarala had found such strength that she fancied she was as well as ever. The whole morning she was busy doing this, that, and the other thing; but afterwards she got tired, and soon felt such languor and relaxation of the limbs that she was obliged to take to her bed. Syama now never attended to anything without keeping her eyes constantly upon Sarala. She immediately went to her and said, "What ails you now, dear mistress? Why have you lain down again?"

"I got no sleep last night, Syama. I feel so drowsy now." And she turned upon her side and composed herself to sleep.

After a time Syama went again to the bedside of Sarala. She was sleeping, sleeping as peacefully as a child. On her serene brow there was not a trace of anxiety. Though she was so terribly reduced, and you could count her ribs with your finger, yet how sweet was the expression of her face in sleep. There had been
plenty of rain and the air was quite cool, yet she perspired copiously. Syama rubbed her hand clean, then stooping she gently felt her forehead. It was cold as ice. Sarala started, and fearing that she might wake her, Syama left the room with a noiseless tread. "The air is quite cool, and still she is covered with sweat!" said Syama to herself. But she thought again that it might be due to her having been busy, and hoped she would feel refreshed after her sleep.

Night approached, but Sarala slept on. "She is still asleep?" Budhubhushan asked Syama as he came in. "Yes," said Syama. Budhubhushan looked rather concerned. He walked up, and, sitting down by the bedside of Sarala, felt her forehead. Oh, how cold it was! Budhubhushan was frightened. "Sarala, Sarala," he called out in great concern.

She opened her eyes. "Who are you?" she said, looking strangely at Budhubhushan. As Budhubhushan was about to speak, she said again, "Yes, yes, I know you. You have come to take my darling! But you shall not have him. No, you shall not, but I shall come." And she shut her eyes again.

Sarala was delirious. Budhubhushan was alarmed. "Sarala, Sarala," he now called a little louder, bending over her, and again feeling her skin, which felt like ice.

"Why do you disturb me so? I shall come, I shall come presently," she said, opening her eyes, only to shut them again the next moment.

Budhubhushan left the room, weeping. "O Syama," he cried, hastily appearing before her. "Sarala is so very bad just now, and I am so afraid. Hasten to her, I must run for a doctor!"

Syama at once bounded to the bedside of Sarala.