

Kim with wise saws and grave texts on that little understood beast, our Body, who, being but a delusion, insists on posing as the Soul, to the darkening of the Way, and the immense multiplication of unnecessary devils.

"Hail! hail! Let us talk of the woman from Kulu. Think you she will ask another charm for her grandsons? When I was a young man, a very long time ago, I was plagued with these vapours, and some others, and I went to an abbot—a very holy man and a seeker after truth, though then I knew it not. Sit up and listen, child of my soul! My tale was told. Said he to me, "Chela know this. There are many lies in the world, and not a few liars, but there are no liars like our bodies, except it be the sensations of our bodies." Considering this I was comforted, and of his great favour he suffered me to drink tea in his presence. Suffer me now to drink tea, for I am thirsty."

With a laugh above his tears, Kim kissed the lama's feet, and went about tea-making.

"Thou leanest on me in the body. Holy One, but I lean on thee for some other things. Dost know it?"

"I have guessed maybe," and the lama's eyes twinkled. "We must change that."

So, when with scuffings and scrapings and a hot air of importance, paddled up nothing less than the Sahiba's pet palanquin sent twenty miles, with that same grizzled old Oorya servant in charge, and when they reached the disorderly order of the long white rambling house behind Saharunpore, the lama took his own measures.

Said the Sahiba cheerily from an upper window, after compliments: "What is the good of an old woman's advice to an old man? I told thee—I told thee, Holy One, to keep an eye upon the chela. How didst thou do it? Never answer me! I know. He has been running among the women. Look at his eyes—hollow and sunk—and the Betraying Line from the nose down! He has been sifted out! Fie! Fie! And a priest, too!"

Kim looked up over-weary to smile, shaking his head in denial.

"Do not jest," said the lama. "That time is over. We are here upon great matters. A sickness of soul took me in the hills, and him a sickness of the body. Since then I have lived upon his strength—eating him."

"Children together—young and old," she sniffed, but forbore to make any new jokes. "May this present hospitality restore ye. Hold awhile and I will come to gossip of the good good hills."

At evening time—her son-in-law was returned, so she did not need to go on inspection round the farm—she won to the meat of the matter, explained low-voicedly by the lama. The two old heads nodded wisely together. Kim had reeled to a room with a cot in it, and was dozing soddenly. The lama had forbidden him to set blankets or get food.

"I know—I know. Who but I?" she cackled. "We who go down to the burning-ghats clutch at the hands of those coming up from the River of Life with full water-jars—yes, brimming water-jars. I did the boy wrong. He lent thee his strength? It is true that the old eat the young daily. 'Stands now we must restore him.'"

"Thou hast many times acquired merit—"

"My merit. What is it? Old bag of bones making curries for men who do not ask "Who cooked this?" Now if it were stored up for my grandson—"

"He that had the belly pain?"

"To think the Holy One remembers that! I must tell his mother. It is most singular honour! "He that had the belly pain"—straightway the Holy One remembered. She will be proud."

"My chela is to me as is a son to the unenlightened."

"Say grandson, rather. Mothers have not the wisdom of our years. If a child cries they say the heavens are falling. Now a grandmother is far enough separated from the pain of bearing and the pleasure of giving the breast to consider whether a cry is wickedness pure or the wind. And since thou speakest once again of wind, when last the Holy One was

here, maybe I offended in pressing for charms."

"Sister," said the lama, using that form of address a Buddhist monk may sometimes employ towards a nun, "if charms comfort thee—"

"They are better than ten thousand doctors."

"I say, if they comfort thee, I who was Abbot of Such-zen, will make as many as thou mayest desire. I have never seen thy face—"

"That even the monkeys who steal our loquats count for a gain. Heel hee!"

"But as he who sleeps there said," he nodded at the shut door of the guest chamber across the forecourt, "thou hast a heart of gold. . . . And he is in the spirit my very 'grandson' to me."

"Good! I am the Holy One's cow." This was pure Hinduism, but the lama never heeded. "I am old. I have borne sons in the body. Oh once I could please men. Now I can cure them." He heard her armlets tinkle as though she bared arms for action. "I will take over the boy and dose him, and stuff him, and make him all whole. Hail! hail! We old people know something yet."

Wherefore when Kim, aching in every bone, opened his eyes, and would go to the cook-house to get his master's food, he found strong coercion about him, and a veiled old figure at the door, flanked by the grizzled manservant, who told him precisely the very things that he was on no account to do.

"Thou must have—thou shalt have nothing. What? A locked box in which to keep holy books? Oh, that is another matter. Heavens forbid I should come between a priest and his prayers! It shall be brought, and thou shalt keep the key."

They pushed the coffer under his cot, and Kim shut away Mahub's pistol, the oilskin packet of letters, and the locked books and diaries, with a groan of relief. For some absurd reason their weight on his shoulders was nothing to their weight on his poor mind. His neck ached under it of nights.

"Thine is a sickness uncommon in youth these days: since young folk have given up tending their betters. The remedy is sleep, and certain drugs," said the Sahiba; and he was glad to give himself up to the blankness that half menaced and half soothed him.

She brewed them in some mysterious Asiatic equivalent to the still room—drinks that smelt pestilently and tasted worse. She stood over Kim till they went down and inquired exhaustively after they had come up. She laid a taboo upon the forecourt, and enforced it by means of an armed man. It is true he was seventy odd, that his scabbard sword ceased at the hilt, but he represented the authority of the Sahiba, and loaded wains, chattering servants, calves, dogs, hens, and the like, fetched a wide compass by those parts. Rest of all, when the body was cleared, she cut out from the mass of poor relations that crowded the back of the buildings—household dogs we name them—a cousin's widow, skilled in what Europeans, who know nothing about it, call massage. And the two of them, laying him east and west, that the mysterious earth currents which thrill the clay of our bodies might help and not hinder, took him to pieces all one long afternoon—bone by bone, muscle by muscle, ligament by ligament, and lastly nerve by nerve. Kneaded to irresponsible pulp, half hypnotised by the perpetual flick and readjustment of the uneasy chudlers that veiled their eyes, Kim slid ten thousand miles into slumber—thirty-six hours of it—sleep and soaked like rain after drought.

Then she fed him and the house spun to her clamour. She caused fowls to be slain. She sent for vegetables, and the sober, slow-thinking gardener, nigh as old as she, sweated for it; she took spices and milk, and onion, with little fish from the brooks—anon limes for sherbets, quails of the pit, then chicken livers upon a skewer, with sliced ginger between.

"I have seen something of this world," she said over the crowded trays, "and there are but two sorts of women in it—those who take the strength out of a man and those who put it back. Once I was that one, and now I am this. Nay, do not play the

priestling with me. Mine was but a jest. If it does not hold good now, it will when thou takest the road again. Cousin—this to the poor relation, never weary of extolling her patroness' charity—"he is getting a bloom on the skin of a new curried horse. Our work is like polishing jewels to be thrown to a dance girl—eh?"

Kim sat up and smiled. The terrible weakness had dropped from him like an old shoe. His tongue itched for free speech again, but a weak back the lightest word clogged it like ashes. The pain in his neck (the must have caught it from the lama)—had gone with the heavy dengue aches and the evil taste in the mouth. The two old women, a little, but not much more careful about their veils now, clucked as merrily as the hens that had entered picking through the open door.

"Where is my Holy One?" he demanded.

"Hear him! Thy Holy One is well," she snapped, viciously. "Though that is none of his merit. Knew I a charm to make him wise I'd sell my jewels and buy it. To refuse good food that I cooked myself—and to tumble into a brook at the end of it—call you that holiness? Then, when he has nearly broken what thou hast left of my heart with anxiety he tells me that he has acquired merit. Oh how like are all men! No, that was not it—he tells me that he is freed from all sin. I could have told him that before he wetted himself all over. He is well now—this happened a week ago—but burn me such holiness! A babe of three would do better. Do not fret thyself for the Holy One. He keeps both eyes on thee when he is not wading our brooks."

"I do not remember to have seen him. I remember that the days and nights passed like bars of white and black, opening and shutting. I was not sick; I was only tired."

"A lethargy that comes by right some few score years later. But it is all done now."

"Maharanee," Kim began, but led by the look in her eye, changed it to the title of plain *joor*—mother. I owe my life to thee. How shall I make thanks? Ten thousand blessings upon thy house and—"

"The house be unblessed." (It is impossible to give exactly the old lady's word.) "Thank the Gods as a priest if thou wilt, but thank me if thou carest as a son. Heavens above! Have I shifted thee and lifted thee and slapped and twisted thy ten toes to find texts flung at my head? Somewhere a mother must have borne thee to break her heart. What used thou to her—son?"

"I had no mother, my mother," said Kim. "She died, they tell me, after the bearing."

"Hail! hail! Then none can say I have robbed her of any right if—"

when thou takest the road again and this house is but one of a thousand used for shelter and forgotten, after an easy-flung blessing. No matter, I need no blessings, but—but— She stamped her foot at the poor relation: "Take up the trays to the house. What is the good of stale food in the room, oh woman of ill-omen?"

"I ha—have borne a son in my time too, but he died," whispered the bowed sister-figure behind the chudder. "Thou knowest he died. I only waited for the order to take away the tray," too, but he died. I only waited for the order to take away the tray."

"It is I that am the woman of ill-omen," cried the old lady penitently. "We that go down to the chattris (the big umbrellas above the burning-ghats where the priests take their last dues) clutch hard at the bearers of the chattris (water-jars—youth folk full of the pride of life, she meant; but the pun is clumsy.) When one cannot dance in the festival one must e'en look out of the window, and grandmothereing takes all a woman's time. Thy master gives me all the charms I now desire for my daughter's eldest, by reason—is it?—that he is wholly free from sin. The hakim is brought very low these days. He goes about poisoning my servants for lack of their betters."

"What hakim, mother?"

"That very Dacca man who gave me the pill which rent me in three pieces. He cast up like a strayed camel a week ago, cowing that he and thou had been blood brothers together up Kulu-way, and feigning great anxiety for thy health. He was very thin and hungry, so I gave orders to have him stuffed too—him and his anxiety!"

"I would see him if he is here."

"He eats five times a day, and lances boils for my minds to save himself from an apoplexy. He is so full of anxiety for thy health that he sticks to the cook-house door and stays himself with scraps. He will keep. We shall never get rid of him."

"Send him here, mother"—the twinkle returned to Kim's eye for a flash—"and I will try."

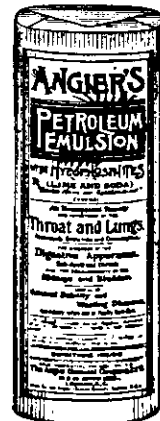
"I'll send him, but to chase him off is an ill turn. At least he had the sense to fish the Holy One out of the brook; thus, as the Holy One did not say, acquiring merit."

"He is a very wise hakim. Send him, mother."

"Priest praising priest? A miracle! If he is any friend of thine (ye squabbled at your last meeting) I'll hale him here with horse-ropes and—and give him a caste dinner afterwards, my son. . . . Get up and see the world! This lying abed is the mother of seventy devils. . . . my son! my son!"

(To be Concluded.)

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