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INDIA MAGAZINE

JULY 1957

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Main Contents

VOLUME 2: No. 5

JULY 1957

PRICE 36 nP.

Stories

SANTHA'S SAGACITY	5
A TOO COSTLY SECRET	10
DO UNTO OTHERS	16
THE HAND OF FATE	26
JEALOUSY'S TOLL	33
POETIC JUSTICE!	41
THE HOLIDAYS	47
WANTED: A HUSBAND!	51
IN SEARCH OF A BRIDE	60

Skits

ELUSIVE ENEMY	21
EXCUSE ME, PLEASE!	23
IS SILENCE GOLDEN?	29
ON BEING FAT!	45
THE TICKET INSPECTOR IN MUFTI	64

Articles

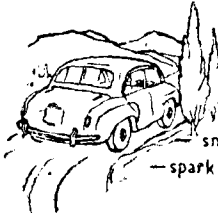
NEHRU'S MISSION OF PEACE (EDITORIAL)	3
YOUR BODY IS TOUGHER THAN YOU THINK!	14
QUEER REMEDIES FOR COMMON AILMENTS	19

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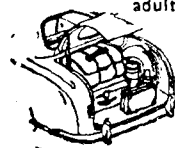
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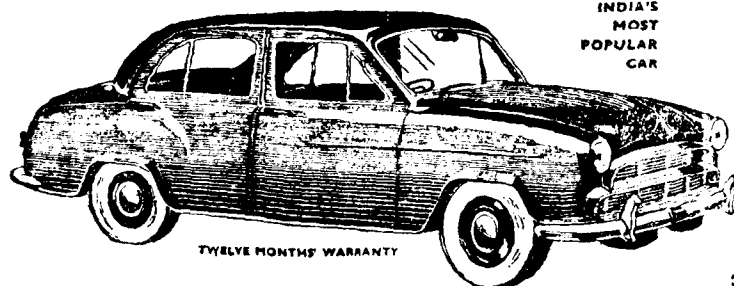
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VOLUME II }

JULY 1957

{ No. 5

NEHRU'S MISSION OF PEACE

THE Prime Minister of India has accepted the invitation to visit countries in Europe on his way to attend the session of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. Nehruji, speaking at a Danish reception, said that he has come to learn how in the social field the Scandinavian countries were more advanced than the Western nations with greater resources. India is now interested in the rate of progress of other countries ever since she embarked on a gigantic enterprise of industrialisation through her Second Five-Year Plan.

Not only Europe but all other democracies in the world are aware of India's problems of dwindling foreign exchange resources, deficit financing, and controlling inflationary tendencies. They also understand the needs of importing heavy machinery on a large scale to India from all countries irrespective of their differing social and political systems of democracy. Indian statesmen too have been alive to contingencies arising out of their Mixed Economy without any palliative circumstances to control as in the case of Capitalistic or Communist economy. But nations belonging to this Group or that Bloc are watching the Indian situation step by step anticipating what course of events would take place in one of the largest democracies in Asia adhering to the principles of Panch Shila and justice and fair play to all her citizens.

INDIA MAGAZINE

Answering questions put to him on India's problem of industrialisation at a reception held at Oslo, Norway, Pandit Nehru said: "The alternative to following an independent national policy was to surrender one's own judgment to somebody else. Surely, this is not a healthy state of affairs. At any event, it is not a democratic approach."

This statement reveals that the growth and development of his mission of peace depends on explaining India's Mixed Economy to others in a clear way. Nehruji thinks that not a national policy but an independent national policy is essential to peace. He wants to emphasise that no nation in the world should have an apprehension that whatever assistance rendered would be utilised in a partisan way either to the interests of Capital or Labour. His Government would not under any circumstances surrender her own judgment in a partial manner. In fact, there can arise no conflict but co-operation between the Private and Public Sector of Economy in India and no nation should have any cause for alarm that aid to India means fostering the interests of this class or group and not helping all interests in the country.

India also represents a "Healthy state of affairs" and Nehruji asks world statesmen to notice this fact.

Peace, according to him, is a mission of co-operative intelligence and not a conflicting instinctual drive. He emphasises that a democratic approach involves not being a Leader or a Follower and he has never the desire or ambition to play this role. With his independent judgment free from desires and ambitions, India can look forward to industrialisation in a peaceful way and contribute to world peace which often suffers from the alternatives of ambitions and desires to judgment.

RANGANATHAN was busy-thinking. 'Being a writer is not an easy job' he thought. What a mind! He was having a hundred ideas when he was at dinner.

It was not a new affair with Ranganathan. He was quite often faced with this trouble. His thoughtful mind would sail on all sides when he was engaged in something-else. While writing they would all fly away leaving his pen to scribble something on the paper or rest on his nose. He was not in a very well-to-do position, with his father's properties and father-in-law's dowry. But he never cared for an employment. He wanted to be a free writer.

But one thing would often tend him to leave that profession also. For, all his writings came back to him without any remarks! But he was not tired of it! He always spent his leisure in

writing.

"Ah! I have caught up something"—he cried, when his wife came there shouting.

"What—what exactly have you caught up? A snake or a scorpion....? A hundred times I have reminded you!" she thundered, "and yet you remain silent."

"I am sorry, Bama. Why can't you tell it to me now? I will do it!"

"WHAT do you mean to do with your daughter? Don't you know she is 19 this year. You do a hundred marriage everyday with your pen! But your daughter's, you carem.....m."

"Don't worry Bama. Today somebody is coming to see her. Make her up for the Girl Seeing!"

"Why can't you tell me earlier of this? I suspect you talk of something to evade" and she pined away.

Ranganathan was puzzled. The pen and papers went to



By N. B. S. MANIYAN

their places. He got up with a deep sigh and put on his blue shirt hanging there and started. Started where...? He does not himself know the answer. It was usual with him to have a quarrel of this sort daily and go away for a while to give some ventilation to his mind. Again, in the evening he would rush back with some fresh ideas to put down. But to-day the pressure given by his wife was something more.

RANGANATHAN walked down madly. His legs carried him straight to Viswanathan's house. Not noticing anything he straightaway made his way to the dining hall. Viswanathan was in the upstairs.

They talked of something and Ranganathan soon came to his normal. He talked of his works in writing and as usual chatted for a long time.

"Why can't you also try to write something, Visu?" he asked.

"Why? My earnings are quite enough for me. I don't want to vie with you for this little lucrative job" he smiled.

"O.K. Can you give me some suggestions in the marriage of my daughter. I am pretty well disgusted with my present status. A hundred reliefs it would be for me to get her married!" he spoke pitifully.

"Why don't you advertise in the papers?"

"Ah! A foolish idea. Do you want me to inform everyone in the world that I am an helpless poor having an aged daughter," he scorned.

"Alright, then why can't you approach a broker. I think he'll help you somehow."

"I have no money to pay him," he cut short.

"Then....."

"What are you going to do with your son. He is already 25. Why can't we help each other?" Ranganathan burst out impatiently.

VISWANATHAN was terribly shocked. He had spent over ten thousand to make a barrister of his son. Should he not collect that amount from his would-be *Samundhi*. But Ranganathan, a poor writer, would be no equal match for him.

"No, Rangan, I have no idea of his marriage this year and you need not wait for it. He wants to study something more" he spoke frankly. Ranganathan went away with a grim face. This was the first measure talked by Ranganathan for his daughter's marriage.

That evening Ranganathan made another visit to Viswanathan. This time his mind was filled with an idea. He



quite well knew what Viswanathan had in his mind. And he has hit upon a plan to overcome it!

"Good evening Mr. Viswanathan," he said. His tone indicated that he was in high spirits.

VISWANATHAN was well-bored with the morning talk. "Good evening," he grinned.

"Had you any tidings from your boy at Bombay?"—this was Ranganathan.

"Why? No. I had no information from him for the

last fortnight. But I know he carries on well."

"NOTHING... I was told by my uncle who came here last night that your son was going to get married this week or so. When do you start?" Ranganathan asked occasionally.

"Oh....What do you mean? My son to be married....And without my knowledge!... You prattle some irrelevant nonsense!"

"Not so, Mr. Visu. I had such news and thought it was true. Please bear with me

for insulting you. But be sure your son will get married this 8th with an Anglo-Indian girl! The world knows it!" Ranganathan was ferocious. Uttering these words he ran away.

Viswanathan was stunned. It was indeed an utter shame to him. His son getting married without his consent or even knowledge! He was horrified. How his ignorant young boy dared to act in this way. But anyhow this should be stopped. He cried after Ranganathan and soothing him asked of him to suggest some course out of this

Ranganathan was stern now. He avenged upon his neighbour for having teased him that morning.

"Hae! You fool! You dared to scorn me when I suggested an alliance this morning. Now I will see how you act. But one thing. You won't get a bride for your boy now, for the news is widespread!"

"RANGAN", Mr. Viswanathan sighed, "please hear me. I was proud of myself and my money and refused your request. But God is more powerful. None but you can help me. If you would accept I will send for my son now itself and take your daughter as my daughter-in-law. I do not want a penny by way of dowry."

"Mr. Viswanathan, do you want me to throw my dignity in the air? I won't, I will rather let my daughter remain a virgin than marry your unscrupulous son!"

VISWANATHAN came to his knees. "Rangan, would you not help me in this predicament. There is nothing worse or more shameful for me than being laughed at as having a wretched son. I surrender myself at your mercy. If you just say a word 'yes' I would see that all other arrangements are made".

"Mr. Viswanathan, you being my friend from the boyhood, I cannot see you in tears. Pray rise up. My daughter shall be your daughter-in-law. But mind you, I am penniless".

Viswanathan was pleased to the heart. He embraced his friend and at once sent a telegram to his son. He had given a false message that he was worst at bed.

Chandran--for that was Mr. Viswanathan's son--was worried at the news and rushed to the Railway station. All the way he had but one thought about his father.

When he arrived home he was greeted by his father at the doors. He was stupified to find his father in all his health, looking like a snake which had lately cast off its slough. Was he the same

Viswanathan 'dangerous in the telegram'? Then what was the matter with him to tell such a serious lie. He was as much astonished by this as by the arrangements taking place for a marriage. When he enquired, his mother acquainted him with the fact he was to be the "bridegroom". Though shocked by these unexpected news he raised no objection and kept silent over the matter for the bride was no new person to him! It was all his own beloved Santha, to whom he has given 'words'. But it was a pricking mystery to him why his father should adopt such a course to call him in.

THE marriage took place in all its pomp and splendour. Ranganathan was very happy that this marriage took place so easily. His wife prayed 'Venkatchalapathy' for having celebrated her daughter's marriage to her hearth's content and locked up a rupee coin in an yellow cloth".

The same was the condition with Viswanathan couple. Viswanathan felt he had turned his son's path by stopping his marriage with some other girl. But Chandran was more than pleased with his father's polite mood. How he so soon settled his marriage was a mystery to him. "What on earth changed his mind from dowry?" he thought.

When he was alone with Santha, his new wife, Chandar asked her what was

the mystery with his father's sudden change of mind.

"How, in heavens, he accepted to take you as daughter-in-law without a pie. I think there must be something."

SANTHA smiled with meaning. "Promise me that you won't be angry with me and I'll tell you the truth", she said with shy and fear.

"I--angry with you! No, never... Do tell me the truth. I am impatient"

"It was all my own tricks. My father and mother were very anxious to get me married. But your father was devilish in demanding dowry. I asked my father to tell yours that you were to be married with someone on this 8th at Bombay. At first, he denied to tell such a blunt lie but on my assurances he accepted. Is it not said that one may lie a hundred times to perform a marriage?"

"Yes, yes." Chandran nodded interestingly.

"I also wanted him not to give his consent for my marriage with you at the very first instance. He played his part correctly and my plan has succeeded. Only because your father was persistent and would not consent for our marriage that I played this plank. But I know you will

—Please see page 15

A TOO COSTLY SECRET

By DEVANANDAN

A SHORT, stocky middle-aged man burst into the hair-dresser's saloon. To the only man standing in the centre of the shop the stranger was brief and curt. "Hey, give me a quick hair-cut and faceshave," he said.

The man, who was thin and gray-haired, bowed low to the visitor and pointed to the clock on the wall. "It is 10 p.m., sir, and all my assistants have left. I am about to close my shop, sir, I will attend to you first thing in the morning at six sharp, to be sure."

But the visitor held up his hand, "Don't you close, I say," he shouted in an imperious tone. "I shall pay you double your usual charges. It is unfair to turn out a patron like this. In Calcutta, they attend to me at all hours and they are certainly more courteous." And he took out his fat purse and flaunted a five-rupee note.

The man bowed his head again. "As you please, sir," he replied with a smile. "Kindly take the first chair. It would be more comfortable.

I shall put on my overall. I am glad that you insisted on having the service in the most modern shop. And I don't mind being delayed by half-an-hour."

The stranger grunted as if in triumph, settled himself into the chair. "Ordinarily I don't hustle people like this but I have to catch the 11-30 passenger to reach Vanjoor before day break," he explained. "There is a marriage in the morning."

THE barber was already at work on the head of the stranger, snipping and clipping with his scissors. He was very deft with his fingers but he knew that it would take double the usual time. The bushy, bristly head was evidence that the stranger had not visited a saloon for three months. But, all the same, there was an air of affluence about this man. He was clad in a new suit and must have been handling a lot of money. The barber's curiosity was roused. "Just arrived from Calcutta, I suppose, sir?" he ventured respectfully.

"You have guessed right, my man," he answered. "Not exactly from Calcutta. I was working in a tea plantation near Shillong. I am coming direct from there, but couldn't find time to stay in Calcutta even for a day. That would explain why my head is so unkempt.

The barber held up his comb and scissors for a minute. "Surely you must have had an exciting time up on the jungle-covered hills, sir. I daresay you have encountered many a wild animal."

THE stranger almost twisted his head to see the barber. "Yes, it was a thrilling experience. I have watched several beasts of the jungle coming out of their lair in the night. Once I bagged even a tiger. I worked only as a clerk there in the plantation. By the way, Sabesh is my name. I served for nearly twenty years and built up a small fortune. You know, in a plantation, far removed from the attractions of city life, one can save a lot if he is careful enough."

"That's true, sir. By God's grace, I earn a lot as proprie-

tor of this saloon but all that money disappears like steam from a kettle."

"I KNOW, I know," agreed Sabesh. "But even there, when you have a wife and home, you can't save much. In fact, I was running into debt as long as my wife was alive. But that is a different story." He shrugged his shoulders and subsided into silence.

The barber, who was sharpening his razor on the long leather strap hanging by the mirror, suddenly stopped and gazed at Sabesh, rather wistfully. "I am very sorry to hear that you lost your wife, sir. It must have been the most harrowing event of your life, I would say," he remarked.



Sabesh looked very sad. His eyes grew moist and he wiped them with a kerchief. But he coughed and cleared his throat. "I don't know why I am talking to you about all this. It looks as if I have known you for ages, and I shall tell you about my marital adventure also. It all happened about twenty years ago in the very heart of this city. I was twenty-two then, gay and foppish, and loafing about the streets night and day. I met a very attractive girl, Maheswari, by name. Her father was working in a factory. He was very old and almost worn out in the service of the company. He was involved in a serious accident and lost his right hand. Out of consideration for his long service, he was given the job of a watchman.

"MAHESWARI'S mother was going blind; something had gone wrong with her optical nerve. So the girl attended to all the household chores and afterwards took the food for her father in a big tiffin-carrier. At first, she resented my attentions and frowned me off. When I was persistent and followed her like a dog, offering to carry her burden part of the way and buy her the knick-knacks that girls like, she relented and became friendly."

"On her way back home in the evenings, she would readily go with me into parks and quite corners and we would

chat on for hours. In a few days, our friendship ripened into love. But one evening she told me that we would have to part for ever as her parents had settled her marriage. The wedding was to take place the following Sunday in a suburban temple. She was to be married off to a young businessman who had already sent them cash and jewels."

"SHE broke this news so quietly and without any emotion that I was staggered. It took me a whole day to persuade her to elope with me. And she did, on the eve of her marriage, and we ran away to Calcutta. After many days of tramping, I succeeded in getting job in an exporting firm, and after two years, I proceeded to Shillong on learning of a vacancy in a tea plantation. But my wife (we were married before a registrar) did not take kindly to the new surroundings. She often imagined that she had been taken to a world cut off from civilisation. She began to regret having stolen the cash and jewels that should have been returned to the businessman. Had she married this man, she told me once, he would have helped her parents and she would always have been near them."

"I suppose the parents received some monetary help from their daughter, though she couldn't be near them?" the barber interrupted.

"No, we were not that rich," asserted Sabesh with a scornful stare at the barber. "My wife became hysterical and often bewailed her inability to be of any help to them. You see, I made money only recently after starting a small venture of my own."

THAT, in brief, is my story, though there is a dramatic end to it. My wife passed away in her sleep on the same day her disconsolate parents died some hundreds of miles off. But I treasure the fondest memories of my first wife. And I always carry her photo with me. Don't you see how charming she looks? Well, this photo was taken eighteen years ago in Calcutta." And he took out a photo from his purse and showed it to the barber.

The barber respectfully took the photo and gazed at it for nearly a minute and handed it back to the owner without comment. He resumed his work with his razor, giving the finishing touches to the back of the head.

"Just a moment ago you said she was your first wife, sir, I presume...."

Sabesh softly laughed at his question. "Yes, by tomorrow that description will be more

apt. I am going to Vanjoer straight where a young bride is waiting for me. Didn't I say there is a marriage tomorrow? Well, well, you have cropped my head neatly. But you haven't told me your name....my God....Oh, what have you done, you scoundrel? Have you slashed off my right ear?"

SHOUTING and swearing,

Sabesh turned round to face the barber who was still holding the blood-stained razor in his hand. But he was still cool as a cucumber and courteous as usual. "My name is Madhav, sir," he said. "And I was in the tobacco business when I was to have married Maheshwari whom you seduced. Truth to tell, sir, I aimed the razor at your skull but it slipped and touched your ear, sir. That this should happen to you on the eve of your second marriage...."

With blood streaming down his cheek and neck, Sabesh bounded out of the saloon in a trice and disappeared into the darkness of the night. Madhav switched off the lights in the saloon, locked the door and walked out as if nothing unusual had happened to disturb the placidity of his life. **

YOUR BODY IS TOUGHER

THE human body is about as tough as any you can name. The pelvic ligaments, joining together the trunk and thighs, are so strong they will bear a load close to 1 000 pounds. The kneejoint is the strongest of all the joints.

While the number of bones varies with the individual—the average number being 222—the strongest of them all is the shinbone. It can support a load of 2,600 pounds. This means that a man's shin-bone could support a bandstand with 20 players in the band.

All mammals, with two rare exceptions, have just seven cervical vertebrae in the spine. Thus the tiniest mouse shares with the giraffe the same number of "spine bones." The quality of bone in these various animals is surprisingly similar particularly in regard, to relative strength. Bones are much more pliable than commonly believed. For example, the skull of a live person can be decreased in breadth by 10 per cent before cracking.

A red nucleus in the brain controls muscular tension. Contrary to popular belief, the body never wholly relaxes during life—not even during profound sleep. As a matter of fact, muscular tension increases with rest. The tired person has a sagging face, a drooping posture. The well

rested individual possesses toned-up muscle.

Man has 639 muscles. A square inch of muscle mass lifts from 56 to 140 pounds, depending upon training. Strongest muscles in man are the biting muscles. Their pressure is great enough to lift more than twice the weight of the individual.

Muscular co-ordinations can be very quick. A violinist executes 10 movements per second. According to Dr. Fritz Khan, a pianist, playing the "Minute Waltz," must move 740 keys with his right hand during one minute, and a great virtuoso can accomplish this feat in 35 seconds.

The smallest skeletal muscles are the speech muscles. They function at about 25 movements per second—not nearly so fast, of course, as the wing muscles of a housefly that can move its wings back and forth 330 times a second.

One of the hardest working muscles is the diaphragm—the "bellows" that fills and empties the lungs. It begins functioning at birth and never ceases until death. It makes approximately a half-billion movements in the course of three score years and ten.

Through diaphragmatic control, seasoned divers can remain under water as long as four and a half minutes.

THAN YOU THINK!

Every breath of fresh suburban air contains 125,000,000 dust particles; city air is much more heavily dust-laden. At the level of an adult's head there are about 5,000,000,000 dust particles to every breath; at a child's head-level 50,000,000,000. By the time, a smoker finishes a cigar in the library he fills the room with 4,000,000,000 soot bits.

The human body is able to withstand the invasion of these countless microscopic particles, thanks to the nose. In the course of lifetime, the nose filters out about 45 pounds of dust—preventing it from reaching the lungs by action of the ciliary hairs in the nasal lining. Workers in flour mills, quarries, and other heavily dust laden environments inhale about 100 pounds during a lifetime.

The capillaries of the human body are so numerous they defy counting. A metal tube, the size of a darning needle, could hold about 1,000 of them. Fifty times thinner than a hair from the crown of the head, they are about 1/50 of an inch long and, if put end to end, they would encircle the equator almost 50 times.

Through these capillaries and the veins and arteries course approximately 10 pints of blood, composed of 25,000,000,000 blood cells. Someone has said that if these were linked into a ball of yarn, it

would be sufficient to weave a rug of about 5,000 square yards. People living at an altitude of 13,000 feet have just about twice the number of blood cells as those living at sea level. 476

Thanks to ligaments, bones, muscles, capillaries and blood, we can walk on the average, 20,000 steps daily; almost half a billion by the time we reach 50 years—enough steps to encircle the earth six times. And that requires a tough body!—J. F. BENDER. *

SANTHA'S SAGACITY

—Continued from page 9

excuse me for this, for you are so loving to me," and she blushed away.

"Oh, Oh.... It is after all your mischief then. Isn't it. Alright I will tell my father about this." Chandran said jokingly.

"No need," came a loud voice. "I have overheard the whole story. I am fortunate to get a wise daughter-in-law like Santha. I should be very angry with you, Chandran, if you ever hurt her feelings." Chandran and Santha were appalled at the presence of Chandran's father there at that juncture. Viswanathan came up there and the young couple not knowing what to do prostrated before him! ***

DO UNTO OTHERS

THE sparkling rays of the summer sun shone with soft warmth as Meenakshi shook out the wet clothes she had brought to hang out on the washing line in her backyard. There was a song on her lips as she briskly went about her household duties. She prided herself on being 'a grand housewife'. She kept the little house, in which she lived with her father, spick and span as a new pin. Her garden was full of seasonal vegetables and her cabbages, onions and chillies found a ready sale on these fine summer days. The jasmynes and other fragrant flowers which overran the compound walls and formed a major part of her front garden, were sold every morn to the flower vendors thus bringing in a tidy sum for her household expenses.

She was indeed a fine manager not a bit like her sister Kamalakshi, the poor kind little creature, who could never save a penny, who was generous to the utmost degree. Kamalakshi was married and at first it had seemed a fine match but as years went by,

Fate had dealt many severe blows upon her. Her husband had fallen constantly ill. What with looking after an ailing husband and an increasing brood of children she had the hard task of making both ends meet with the small income. It was a constant strain upon both health and resource and knowing her sister's tightfistedness, she very rarely came to see her or her father unless desperation drove her.

LATER that day, Meenakshi had just received the money for the vegetables and the flowers. Three crisp five-rupee notes, when a shadow darkened the doorway momentarily. With a hasty movement she thrust the notes deep down into her blouse pocket in time to see her sister step across the doorway with a flushed and troubled face.

Her father had not yet returned from the temple where he went to listen to the Kalkshepam and she knew that her sister came in search of some help, monetary or other-

wise. Kamalakshi was thin almost to scragginess, her clothes much-washed and faded, such a contrast to the blossoming beautiful bride of a few years back. Her sister's heart wrenched with pity but when she opened her mouth she hardened it. 'I simply hate to ask you, Meena,' she whimpered, but I have to. It is for my Raja your nephew. He caught a cold some days back and tonics and medicines have dried up my meagre stock of money. If only he could be taken away to some country spot or seaside the fresh air would save him. I know," she ended with pathetic appeal, "you don't want a sick child here."

MEENAKSHI'S forehead contracted into a frown. "No," she said abruptly, "I could never bear to have youngsters pulling about the place and father is too old to be bothered with their noise." She had a veritable horror of Kamala's children when they came with her. They were such spoilt inquisitive monkeys always prying into cupboards pulling down the carefully arranged books from their shelves and spoiling the tidy appearance of her rooms.

Kamalakshi's face was white. "I don't know how I'll ever manage it," she said in a voice of despair. "I have no money to spare and it would mean at least fifteen rupees". Meenakshi's guilty

heart gave a stab as she thought of the rupees lying idly within the reach of her hand. Why should she give her lovely savings? She had even ear-marked the sari which she was going to buy with them. "I'm sorry we cannot help you now," she replied "Here's a rupee for your fare. Some other later time, I shall try to send you something substantial."

KAMALAKSHI went away dejectedly. Her father came home soon and Meenakshi went about preparing his food. She did not tell him of her sister's visit or her suggestion that Raja should come to them. She was afraid that he might want to bring the child for Kamalakshi had always been his pet to her infinite jealousy and chagrin.

Late that evening came the heart-rending news: little Raja had succumbed. His delicate physique unable to withstand the ravages of the severe chill he had contracted, had given up the struggle without a fight. Father and daughter went and returned from the ceremonies with leaden hearts. "If he had come to us," he repeated over and over again, "the milk and food we can spare here would have made a new person of him. Instead of which he is now gone from us like a whiff of breath upon the

By LALITA RAJAMONI

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sea." His words struck fresh wounds into her heart. Oh how cruel, how hard and selfish she had been. The tears kept streaming from her remorseful eyes.

AS in a trance, she worked.

She dipped all their clothes into the wash and lathered them, beat them, wrung them and shook them out to dry. As visitors poured in to condole with them, she sat chatting to them dolefully. As usual the flower and vegetable vendors brought their payment. She took it automatically and lifelessly. Her hands checked them like a machine as with a start she recollected the previous day's earnings. She looked around for the blouse she had worn. She had discarded it on receipt of the message of death and then came the hurried departure. Together with the rest of the soiled clothes that blouse precious in its contents had gone into the wash. She ran to it, billowing out in the evening air and pushed trembling fingers within its pocket. Nothing, nothing tangible at all except some mushy, sodden mass of what had been her jealously-hidden money. Her heart smote her a million times. She deserved it. She could have saved a life with it, but her rapacious avarice had lost it to her for ever by her own over-careful fingers. ***

INDIA MAGAZINE

QUEER REMEDIES FOR COMMON AILMENTS

"WILL you please give mother a nut to put a spider in?" was the queer request of a Kingweir child to a tradesman.

"What do you want it for?" asked the astonished man.

"Please, sir, baby's got whooping-cough!"

In the west country, this is still believed to be a charm, or cure, for whooping-cough. You get a live spider and a nut. Into the nutshell, you place the spider, tie the charm round the baby's neck and, when the spider dies, the cough goes.

Gipsies are said to swear by roast dormouse as a cure for whooping-cough and, in Lancashire, it used to be considered that no child could contract this disease who had ridden upon a bear.

In Cornwall, a sick child is sure to be cured if passed three times under a piebald horse!

In Sussex, the cure for whooping-cough is to flay

three fieldmice, draw them, roast one, and let the afflicted child eat it! That ought to cure anything. A European resident in Bangkok, who fell ill of a fever, had this prescription given to him by a native doctor. "Two small pieces of elephant's tusk and rhinoceros horn, the tooth of a tiger, a crocodile, and a bear, powdered bones of vultures, geese and ravens, a fragment of a stag, a bison's

BY

SARBERT HUDSON

horn, and a minute piece of sandalwood." The patient thought the cure worse than the disease and, rather than take it, promptly got well.

Some of the ancient remedies would be hard to come at in these days. "A halter wherewith anyone has been hanged, if tied about the head, will cure headache. Moss growing upon a human skull, if dried and powdered and taken as snuff, is no less efficacious." And the chips of a

INDIA MAGAZINE

19

gallows, tied on a string and worn round the neck, it appears, are a certain cure for ague. These days, such a cure would result in an attack of the cold shivers.

Tuberculosis is still rampant among us. Probably, this is because the proper remedy has not been used! Here it is: a peck of snails and a quart of green earthworms, the former washed in beer, and the latter salted. To this mess should be added angelica, agrimony, bears' feet, barberry, wormwood, saffron, rue-turmeric and milk. Two spoonfuls at a time is the dose. If the other things are hard to get, try the milk.

An Irish nobleman, taken ill in Paris at the end of the sixteenth century, applied to the French court physician; that worthy gave him a compound of musk, gold, pearl, and unicorn's horn, though where he procured the last is not stated. This was for internal use. Externally, pigeons were applied to the patient's side. It is not stated whether they were dead or alive! Anyway, the nobleman promptly expired.

Here are a few Chinese cure-alls. The blood-vessels of the eel are good for "moon-struck" cases, while boiled crickets are very efficacious as blood-purifiers. Snake skin, dragon skin—first catch your dragon—with the inside me-

mbrance of a well-seasoned and ancient egg are cures for jaundice, while all skin diseases yield to a decoction of spiders and green-snakes!

Pliny's cure for a cold in the head was three kisses on the mouth of a mule. If the mule were to give a kick for a kiss, the cure would be permanent!

Here is another ancient cure, but this time a donkey is required. "If a person bitten of a scorpion sitte upon an asse with his face towards the tayal, the asse will endure the pain and not he."

And the same authority gives this as a cure for "the morning after the night before" feeling. "Owl's eggs given in brine for three days to drunkards will make them loathe it." This seems highly probable!

In ordinary sailing vessels, where no passengers are carried, the captain acts as ships doctor. As a rule, a medicine-chest is carried, with directions as to how and when to use the various drugs. For instance, for dyspepsia, a dose of No. 7, for a sprain, No. 2, for rheumatism, No. 5, and so on. And there is an old story of how a skipper, when one of his crew complained of a pain in the region of his waistcoat, being out of No. 7, prescribed a mixture of No. 5, and No. 2, on the principle that five and two make seven. +

INDIA MAGAZINE



By PRABHAT VAIDYA

IT was said of England—in her pre-Egypt heydays, of course—that she lost all battles except the last one; that the last one she won by mistake. Something like that happened to me this morning as I was shaving myself. I had produced the shaving tackle and moistened my beard, when about to smear the soap on my dial, I experienced a pricking sensation (first blood to the enemy) on the side of my neck behind my ear, a portion of one's anatomy one rarely has the privilege to view. I touched the spot, and a mosquito soared away into my coat hanging on a nearby peg. I proceeded to work up a lather, never dreaming that this skirmish was to prove the "Jenkins' Ear" for protracted hostilities.

When the razor was assembled, however, the winged marauder returned to the fray and began hovering round my head, waiting to join issue but just out of

sight. Irritated by his persistent bellicosity, I did a quick about turn and, intent on despatching the adversary, slapped the spot where I thought he would be. But not only did this pincer action fail, it left me floundering in the backwash of my own campaign; for, the movement of my hand displaced a sizeable job of lather off my cheek and lodged it plumb into my right eye. It took me minutes to agonisingly rub it away and soothe my burning orb. The Anopheles, saved from slaughter, zoomed into the dark recesses of the room.

I LATHERED my map properly and went on for the next operation, when there was the intruder again, humming in the vicinity of the left ear. Exasperation once more got the better of my judgment; I was truly on the warpath, determined to sell my life dearly. I slashed at the dark invader, razor in my hand, massacre in my heart. But

the wily foe outmanoeuvred my tactics, and my counter-offensive spelt disaster only for myself, inasmuch as I cut the lobe of my own ear with my own weapon. I sent up a silent prayer I didn't use a "cut-throat", or I would really have been *hors de combat* and my buddies would in future have nicknamed me "One Ear."

ANON, having repaired the damage as best as I could with a chunk of alum, I went ahead with the oft-interrupted ritual of divesting myself of my stubble. I had reached that tricky portion below the nose which has been the bane of better men from Bernard Shaw to Bertie Wooster, when who should waft himself into sight—but our old friend the malaria-carrier, as large as on the 6-anna stamp! I now laid the razor carefully on the table and let go with my clenched fist. Crushing defeat, but the calamity befell me, because the strategy which I had considered to be brilliant-

ly conceived had backfired into wreaking damage and destruction on myself, my knuckles being skinned on the iron frame of my mirror.

THIS incident convinced me at last that discretion was the better part of valour and I decided to disregard as beneath contempt the big black bad bold beast; fighting with one born of a larva was *infra dig*. I plastered up my finger, brought a fresh mug of hot water, and continued the broken ablution by giving my clock a second razoring. When the insect emerged once again from his hide-out like a guerilla, I turned my Nelson eye on him; when he became too much of a nuisance, I merely waved my free hand to shoo him away. And—surprise, surprise!—the puffed-up enemy, now off his

guard due to his victories, was brushed into my mug of hot water and gave up his ghost without a murmur! By fluke, in the best British traditions, the gesture became the *coup de grace* that put paid and wrote finis to the commando raids.



INDIA MAGAZINE

EXCUSE ME, PLEASE!

by Sudha Ranganathan

I WISH there were books like, "Thousand proper excuses," "How to excuse yourself correctly," "Excuses for all occasion and other similar compilations. I am sure, quite a big market is waiting for them in all walks of life.

"Breathes there a man" who hath not excused himself sometime or other? After all, excusing is only a polite form of refusing what has been either requested or commanded of the other person. Not all our duties, in this vale of tears, can be considered to be a pleasure, and nobody is prepared to do willingly what he or she dislikes. And it is here, that excuses offer a form of escape.

Apart from obliging grandparents who are content to die off and on, as the circumstances demand, and the lasily caught "severe stomach upset." There should be more fertile inventions for students who want to take a day off. Students, especially, should take a hand in helping this shortage, in this dearth for polite regrets. None of us, who had even to undergo the 'torments' of formal education, can claim to have attended all the classes willingly.

INDIA MAGAZINE

The more daring amongst them used to, and still do "cut classes, but their lesser unfortunate brethren are still suffering. This statement does not apply to those who take their own leave, without the formal consent of their tutors, as they are not offering any excuse, but simply taking the law into their own hands.

I HAD a classmate who was really versatile in this art. I had known him for four years and never once had he repeated himself to the same professor. What was more wonderful, this extraordinary genius had excused himself out of most of the tests. From ordinary cold and fever, going through sudden demises of near relation's, he showed brilliant imagination when he "had to meet pen-friends arriving from foreign countries, or all of a sudden." Of course, if the tests were announced early, he also informed the professor soon enough for him to get out of it. These pen-friends moreover depended entirely on my friend to steer them clear of the strange perils of the Orient. Another advantage with this particular excuse was that it gave him two days off, one to see

23

them in and one to see them out. I could never think up anything more than "unavoidable circumstances". Once when I tried a "splitting headache," the professor gave me an aspirin tablet and asked me to take a laxative. Then he called me aside and advised me to have a make-up suitable to go with a headache—ruffled hair, red eyes (easily acquired by washing your eyes with a mild soap solution, or just rubbing and pressing the eyes for at least five minutes continuously), a slouching walk, and a habit of putting up the hands to the head frequently. I curbed my imagination, then and left this dubious art to my cleverer classmates. The genius I was telling you about all this time, was also adept at producing a swollen finger at a minute's notice. All he did was to hold his finger slightly that at the joint, and remembered not to straighten it. The thumb looks genuinely swollen in this method.

ATTENDING schools and offices, at least can be condoned under necessary social evils. It is the written invitation that cannot easily be got rid of, especially as it is in the form of a request.

"I have the pleasure of accepting your kind invitation," the present or whatever it is—these words are often used indiscriminately. Most often the person concerned

would have had greater pleasure in refusing. It is not every party that is pleasant, nor every inviter who is sincere. How many people send out invitations more as an ostentatious display of their wealth than for "the pleasure of your company with family and friends." For refusing the hypocritical insincere invitations, the mere insipid words "I regret that I cannot accept", can be considered inadequate, as it does not represent the true feelings.

ANY busy person who has to attend more than five functions a day, will admit that at least four of them are more-duty-bound-to-attend affairs. The nett result of having to rush to all the functions is that the person cannot stay long at the one place where he was sincerely invited and eagerly expected.

More often, the guests are in a predicament, because they cannot refuse for fear of offending the host. It is also likely that the host sent out the invitations because the others would be upset at not receiving them. How nice it would be (provided of course, that we are not at the receiving end) if these unnecessary hypocritical formalities could be dispensed with, and the reply—"I know what you mean and you know what I mean"—be given. There

should also be printed cards, for daring persons, braver souls who will risk the offense and say "I have great pleasure in refusing your invitation. I hope it gives you as much happiness as it does me."

THE politest excuses I have met so far is from editors of newspapers and magazines. They have printed forms with words positively glowing in kindness: "while this does not in any way reflect upon the merit of your work, we regret," "the editor presents his compliments but regrets," "Dear sir, we received your article, but as it is not suitable for our Magazine, we regret," and the brief, "With the editor's compliments and regrets", etc.

Anyway it is easier to write down the excuses than say them. When we speak, the tonal effect, the accent, the expression on the face, etc. have to be controlled, to give the correct effect. But if we submit our excuses in writing, we are spared the facial contortions of the receipt of our message, and we need not worry about our voice betraying us. Anyway I would be delighted to receive your excuses for not going through this article. What? You have not got the time to write it? What an excuse!

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THE HAND OF FATE

Short Story

by DOUGLAS MANUEL

VIJAY Desai sighed and seating himself on the river bank unconsciously became a part of the colour scheme of the Indian afternoon. His ruby silk *lungi* and orange head-kerchief were bright as tropical flowers against the varied foliage of feathery bamboos, tamarinds, vivid emerald of paddy fields, dark-leaved mangoes and the yellowish-green of elephant grass.

A many-hued butterfly fanned its wings on some flowers nearby. Vijay watched the insect, remembering the legend that butterflies were wandering souls of sleepers, then sighed again, recalling his own problems.

Puffing at his long cheroot he came to one definite decision. He would never marry Surya Datta, the girl of his father's selection, the girl he had never seen. Why didn't they allow him to make his own choice? Besides, he didn't want to be married just yet. Or did he?

Dusk fell, Vijay Desai knew that he was expected by now at home and remembering this his lips took a more obstinate line. His parents were giving a feast tonight ostensibly to celebrate the Diwali festival, actually to mark the meeting of their son and the girl chosen to be his wife.

But the prospective bridegroom would not be there. Vijay Desai decided: instead he would go down to the river, mix with the merry-making crowds, escape the ordeal of encountering someone who he was prepared to hate at first sight.

AS darkness thickened the village became a fairyland. Every house was outlined in tiny lamps. Every now and then came the splutter and bang of squibs and rockets with outbursts and the merry squeals of children.

On the bank of the river, men, women and children were laughing and chattering as they launched small boats made with a burning wick

floating in a saucer of oil, set upon a miniature wooden raft. They pushed them off carefully, clapping their hands joyfully when the rafts floated downstream, for if the little fire-boats burnt and sailed well, it meant good luck, meant that those who launched them would gain their dearest wishes.

Suddenly Vijay decided that he too would launch a fire boat. Perhaps it might make his real wish come true, without himself knowing what it was.

HE bought a candle and a little raft from one of the waterside booths, but turned away from the crowd and walked further up the bank where he would be alone with the night and the river.

He knelt among the mosses and ferns on the bank and carefully trimmed and lit the wick. Setting the raft on the water, he saw it twist and turn when caught by the current. And then, from the farthest side of the creek, came a soft rustling; the next moment a second boat was launched down the swift stream towards his own.

Vijay waited breathlessly. Would the two vessels collide, perhaps sink? Would their lights be extinguished and with them all hopes of good luck? In his intentness, the young man hardly realised that someone else was watching the boats with equal anxiety.

Until, from the farther side of the creek, came a low cry.

"Oh, don't let it sink—make my wish come true—do make it come true!"

Vijay looked up—and forgot the drifting, entangled boats, forgot his own wish. He could think of nothing except the soft voice which belonged to a girl who knelt on the bank not far from him.

Probably little younger than himself. She looked all the same very much a child still, with parted lips, showing tiny even teeth and wide eyes of dark velvety brown.

THE brown eyes, full of expectancy, met those of Vijay with clear frankness and childish appeal.

"Oh, can't you save them from sinking?" she begged, adding hastily: "No, no, you mustn't. That spoils it—to touch the wish-boats."

IS SILENCE GOLDEN?

"Look! They've come free—they've floated away from danger!" Vijay pointed eagerly. "Now, they're safe, both of them—see! They're sailing down the creek..... together."

MAN and girl watched as the boat, their lights burning valiantly still, drifted closely side by side out into the main stream, were carried by the tide on-and-on until their tiny twinkling flames were lost amid a myriad others.

The girl gave a long sigh of relief.

"They did burn-right out of sight," she said. "Oh, do wish that mine may come true and I'll do the same for you!"

"Is it so important?" Vijay asked softly.

"Very important. It's something I want more than anything else in the world, something that means....oh, just everything!"

Vijay found himself smiling as one might at a child, as he looked into the lovely earnestness of her eyes.

"You must tell me your wish, if you want me to wish it for you, too," he said.

"It's just that I don't want to do what my parents have planned for me."

"Why, then you and I are alike in one way," Vijay said. "I don't want to do as my parents are arranging either;

that was my wish—that they'd let me go my way."

"What is that way?" the girl asked.

"Oh, there's a girl.....I've never seen her, and they want me to marry her. I, however, prefer to settle such matters on my own."

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "You see, my father and mother made just the same plan as your father and mother did: they want me to marry a boy, I've never seen before."

"Do they?" He opened his eyes wider.

"Yes. That's why I came out here, to escape."

"Oh, so did I! I mean.... tell me the name of the man they've chosen for you?"

"His name is Vijay Desai."

"And the name of the girl meant for my wife is....Surya Datta."

"Me?" It was the faintest of whispers.

"Yes. And I'm.....he."

FOR a moment there was no sound except those of the water and the wind in the trees. Then Vijay spoke. "So in running away from each other we met and our wish-boats sailed away together. Are you glad, Surya Datta.... or sorry?"

"Glad," she said softly. "Very glad Vijay Desai,"

I pride myself on being a through-going rationalist and do not believe in swearing by old sayings, however ancient they might be. They have, I believe, acquired the sanctity of truth, not so much because of their intrinsic merit as by the lapse of time, during which they have gone unchallenged. I venture to think that the proverb that 'silence is golden' is one such.

Is silence golden? I make bold to say: 'In nine cases out of ten, it is not,' and I will try to convince you why I think so. I will literally overwhelm you with instances which will shatter the sanctity of age-old proverb.

Suppose you are accused of an offence and the law is set in motion against you. How are you going to prove your innocence? By silence. If you do that, you will only get hanged—figuratively, I mean. There have been indeed men in the past who had preferred to die rather than defend themselves against an unjust accusation. We have indeed come across stories in our epic where weak and innocent men and women were prepared to die by maintaining a disdainful silence. They had such living faith in God and had such little regard for their own lives, that they left

everything to Him, and left it to His pleasure whether to prove their innocence in some mysterious manner—which we call a miracle—or send them to the gallows. We men of clay, are not made of such stuff and we need not be foolish enough to imitate such great men and women in these days and draw the noose round over necks when by breaking our silence, we could prove our innocence.

SILENCE, more often than not, irritates. It denotes ordinarily defiance, a hard heart, a guilty conscience, deep cunning and a host of other undesirable states of mind. It is only rarely that silence is associated with innocence.

Silence is considered by the criminal law as it stands today, as amounting to the accused having no explanation to offer in exculpation of the accusation made against him.

Again in civil law, silence is considered to be consent. It is said to be equivalent to saying 'yes'. The law expects you to speak out your mind, if you don't want to be saddled with a liability under a contract.

Again in criminal law, the presence of an accused coupled with his silence at the time of the perpetration of the crime may lend colour to a suspicion

that he was hand in glove with the other accused.

Suppose you yourself become a victim of some fraud or violence and went to seek redress. How can you get relief, if you are going to maintain silence at any costs?

I will give you an instance when silence may spell disaster to your entire future domestic life. Suppose you are shown an ugly duckling of a bride and are asked to say whether you are willing to marry her or not. If you keep silent, it means you are willing to marry her!

If your boss is satisfied with your work and asks you if you would accept a promotion you have got to accept it with thanks. If you keep silent, you are sure to be passed over; or again suppose you are called for an interview in connection with a vacancy for which you have applied and you are plied with a number of questions intended to test your intelligence. If you maintain a stony silence, you may be taken for an ignoramus and asked to clear out.

Let me remind you of the old story of how a new bridegroom who visited his father-in-law's house for the first time after his marriage, by maintaining an unbreakable silence sent the entire household into a fit of lamentation. He had been cautioned by his

parents not to talk too much while in his father-in-law's house for that might make him an object of familiarity and generate contempt for him in the minds of his wife's relations. The parents again had implicit faith in another age-old proverb viz., 'Familiarity breeds contempt'. The bridegroom took this advice literally to his heart and when he entered into his father-in-law's house, the first question he was naturally asked was whether his wife was hale and healthy. The bridegroom did not reply. He remained grave and silent. This alarmed his wife's relatives and they asked him anxiously if she was ill. The bridegroom still did not reply. Their worst fears were roused and they asked him with tears in their eyes whether she was fatally ill. The bridegroom even then did not break his silence, whereupon all the inmates burst into a loud wail, thinking that the bride was dead! Here at least is an instance when silence could work havoc on human hearts.

ASSUME again, you are in a tight corner—financially and you go to a friend for accommodation. How can you get it if you do not speak out? Surely you can't silently expand your hand, as if for alms?

What is mouth for, I ask, if not to make a proper use of it? If speaking is to be regarded as inferior to silence,

then how can the world progress with acquisition of knowledge. Can you contemplate with equanimity silent teachers, silent Bhagavathars and a host of other men whose duty is to impart knowledge, material and spiritual to others? Can you imagine a judge or magistrate keeping silent on the bench without questioning the accused and witnesses and without pronouncing judgments?

OF course, there have been great men like the late Ramana Maharishi who have been able to impart spiritual enlightenment by mere silence. But such instances are rare. When man's capacity to understand spoken words is so doubtful, silence can hardly be helpful.

If silence were golden, what is the place to be assigned to Bhajans and music? Silent prayer is all right for the advanced bhaktha but it is leud bhajans that will help ordinary mortals. Can we imagine a silent Narada? Had Lord Krishna observed silence on the battle front of Kurushetra, could we have the great Gita?

I will not cite more instances to prove the fallacy of this old saying for the instances I have already ought to be more than suffice. And I see that you, Reader, feel really feel crushed under load of the instances already given.

Having said as much against the proverb, I must admit, that it does contain a certain amount of truth. For, there are indeed occasions when it would be folly not to maintain silence and to be fair to the authors who were responsible for this saying, I will with equal impartiality cite instances to illustrate the partial truth ingrained in it. Silence is indeed golden in the case of people who cannot boast of much intelligence. Silence will make them appear to be wiser than they really are and help them to mask their ignorance.

Again silence is the very thing to be observed in certain places like the library and the reading room and places of devotion etc. so that other people may not feel any disturbance. Again on solemn occasions, silence has indeed to be observed. When we hear a speech from great and wise men we must observe pindrop silence. Silence is a great aid to better understanding.

It is also discreet to observe silence when you are asked an embarrassing question and the true answer is likely to wound the feelings of the questioner, or when you are unable to decide as to which of two view-points is the correct one. Silence is indicated because you want time to think it out. Any hasty

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answer would only betray your shallow intellect. If you have made a mistake, and you are taken to task for it, the only best thing you can do is to keep mum. Any lame excuse will only irritate your questioner.

There are also other occasions when we cannot speak out but have to maintain silence due to shyness, modesty etc. When a bride-elect is asked to indicate her consent to marry a particular bridegroom, she cannot but keep silent and has to choose some other form of indicating her consent-like the shaking of the head in an affirmative manner. Or suppose you are praised to your very face, about the 'real' qualities of your head and heart, naturally you feel embarrassed and find yourself tongue-tied.

Let me conclude. I don't propose to be wiser man than our ancestors and it is not my desire to expose them to ridicule. I only wish to point out that this proverb-like many others—is only just a rule of prudence and has to be understood with all its limitations. It only means that on certain occasions silence is better and sometimes more eloquent and wiser than speech. So I would like to introduce a slight amendment to this saying to remove any possible misunderstanding about it. I would like to have it as: 'Silence is sometimes golden.'—M.S.V. CHARI **

INDIA MAGAZINE



GREAT poets have said that life is a dream or tragedy. The latter statement was true in the case of poor Chander, whose life was a tragedy of the worst type, patiently borne and silently resigned to the will of God. He had loved his cousin Nirmala for years, from the time she was in skirt and blouse. Years added depth and beauty to his love; but neither was it returned nor acknowledged. Though Nirmala knew it to a certain extent, she took it for granted as her cousin's natural right. Only Chander's dearest friend Shekar knew of his secret love but neither helped him to win her nor left him the sole suitor. Unfortunately, intentionally or otherwise, he became his rival and won her. That was fifteen years ago and it was now ancient history to the three concerned.

"I wish I had some more money to manage the house,"

said Nirmala one day to her husband some six months after their marriage, as innocently as anyone would say. But Shekar's brow darkened.

"I think you wish to be Mrs. Chander, with pots of money to play with" Shekar hit back mercilessly and unreasonably. Nirmala's beautiful countenance too darkened in turn. She was simply shocked at her husband's nasty suggestion.

"YOU insult me and that noble soul my cousin," she said between clenched teeth. Then she added, "If you take it that way, what is the harm in wishing to be one better than myself?" quite venomously and went inside without looking back.

"I know, I know," muttered Shekar maliciously. After that episode, he found great pleasure in hinting at her old love, which he knew well to be one-sided and had been long convinced that the suff-

er was only Chander. Always possessed of jealousy, he repeatedly annoyed Nirmala and made her sad and tremble at the unjust accusations against noble Chander, whom she now revered and respected of all men.

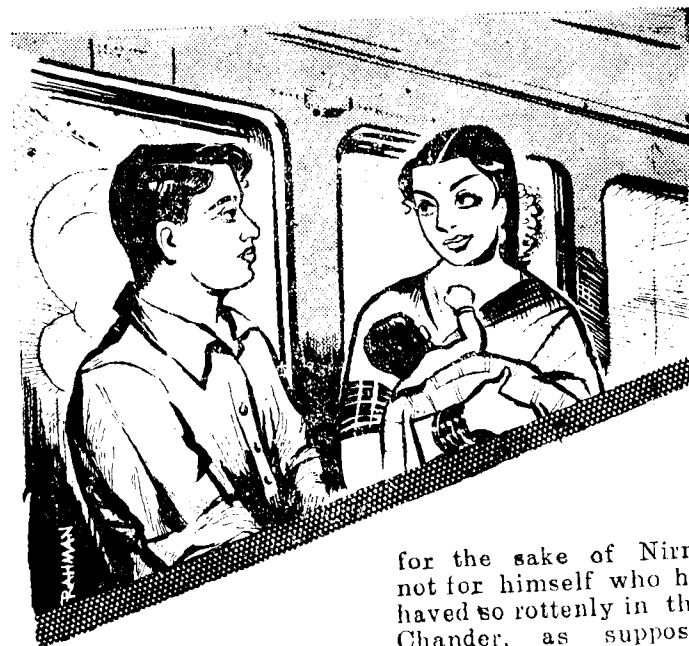
NIRMALA'S pure and innocent mind could not accept the idea of her cousin Chander being in love with her. Was she not Chander's companion from childhood, living and playing in the house during good or bad days and how could one love one who was like her own brother? Chander's father was the brother of Nirmala's mother and naturally the fond parents had hoped that one day both the houses will become one by their children's union. Nirmala, as the pet and only child of the family, had her own ways from childhood. Obstinacy was her inborn trait, that finally succumbed her to a whirlwind courtship and marriage to Shekar against severe opposition from the parents. Had she known of the blow she did give to her devoted Chander, she would have hesitated for a moment and might have changed her opinion to one of unalloyed happiness and devotion, but alas! she was to know of that deep-seated love only too late—yes, after years and years.

Poor Chander, disappointed in love, ceased his college studies despite his father's

entreaties and refused to marry anyone. His secret was buried in the innermost recesses of his broken heart. His rich father had made him a prosperous businessman with his great wealth, but Chander lived a hermit's life, secluded and alone with no particular love for anything. He bore his heartache to himself nobly and never blamed anybody.

PROVIDENCE willed that

Chander should meet Nirmala by chance after a year in the train. Nirmala was going back to her husband's house with her first-born. Her mother also was with her. He had to talk and laugh with them, but with how much heartache and anguish! Anyway, he had overcome the first embarrassing moment and it was a treat to his starved eyes to see his Nirmala once again. "You naughty cousin, why can't you marry? Do you think you are a little boy? Mind, you are twenty-six and a prosperous business-man," Nirmala teased him as of old, ignorant of the pain she created in his bleeding heart. Chander masked the bitterness of his soul with a gentle smile and replied that only some people were made for that great tie and dull chaps like him had no place in that world. His aunt read the bitterness with anguish but poor Nirmala could not under-



stand the dog-like devotion in those gentle and honest eyes.

DAYS passed and years too uneventful save for fresh money troubles in Nirmala's household. Her mother died of typhoid fever and her father followed her after two years, embittered at the sudden crash of the bank in which he had invested all his money. Nirmala got the big house with all the valuable furnitures and no money as Shekar had been expecting. With a growing family and normal pay, Shekar had financial troubles. He remembered his long-lost friend Chander, who was certain to help him

for the sake of Nirmala if not for himself who had behaved so rottenly in the past. Chander, as supposed by Shekar, helped him wholeheartedly knowing that he was helping Nirmala as well. After that, Chander was welcomed in the house even by Shekar, who found him to be a bank to draw on at will. Fortunately, Chander never married and Nirmala's four children called him 'Uncle' and loved him immensely, for he used to treat them frequently with sweets and toys.

FIFTEEN years of struggle left Nirmala rather haggard and weak. Now she was thirty-five. Her former arresting beauty and softness were replaced by a gently-worried look and a matured and full-bloomed beauty

INDIA MAGAZINE

35

possessed only by proud young mothers, gave her more charm. In her case, the good old saying, 'The school of affliction graduates rare scholars' was true. All her old arrogance, obstinacy and self-will had disappeared with years of suffering and pain, both mental and physical with no one to thank her for her troubles. She slaved herself for the sake of the family. Cutting down all possible luxuries and making herself burdened with the entire household worries, her health gradually deteriorated. In spite of her weakness and hardships, she refused to own her position and went on like an automaton. Shekar was never very considerate and never had been her companion in life, with all his shortcomings as a jealous, vindictive and indifferent type of husband. Even if she did tell her complaints, he might have advised her to see a doctor or go to a hospital.

WHEN she had nothing else to do in the kitchen, instead of taking rest for a while, she would be seen with her work basket, mending her children's or husband's clothes. Nirmala knew that she could not afford to discard the old clothes but mending them would lengthen their life for a still more period and prolong the dreaded day of compelled shopping. Nobody but her close friends and relatives knew the real position of their finance. She had borne

all misfortunes and hardships with patience and silence. Some little thing or other engaged her throughout the day and she was never idle.

Chander was now a frequent visitor even in the absence of Shekar, who had an office tour every month for a week. Chander's visits had become an established factor in the house and the little children looked forward to them with genuine love and eagerness.

It was a very hot and disagreeable day in May. The dogs in the streets ran about uneasily with hanging, parched tongue threatening to bite those who walked by their side. The women at the taps were trying hard to fill their pots with the slow, dripping water from them. Streets were full of fan sellers, who were the only successful traders then. Nobody dared to come out in the sunbaked streets to sell their wares,—not even the cucumber and melon vendors. They were sitting idly under shady trees heedless of customers, eating and gossiping. As usual, Nirmala was straining hard at some sewing. Chander walked up to the corner of the verandah where Nirmala sat in her old armchair. Chander at heart bled to see her,—still the queen of his heart, though so changed and ageing, constantly drudging and slaving for the family. The only comfort she had was the cool, spacious bungalow and the

fine furnitures left by her parents. The garden was extensive and Nirmala cultivated the backyard and planted vegetables in her leisure time with her children. She was rewarded for her pains and she got plenty of vegetables and fruits enough for her home and even for the market at times. Nirmala's old servant had seen that the extra vegetables were sold rather than wasted. Nirmala took delight in her pickles and preserves and even tried a few cool drinks and sherbets. With her endless and untiring efforts, she managed the house admirably with whatever she had.

"NIRMALA, I think your eyes need consulting a doctor. As an elementary precaution, cease your everlasting sewing and mending. I notice that you squint at times and sometimes you look closely that are sure signs of eye weakness." Chander said thoughtfully with the deepest concern.

Nirmala's wry smile was lifeless and she was touched by her cousin's deep concern. She learnt with regret how true her husband was in suspecting the love hidden in the quiet bosom of Chander. Veiling her confusion, she set aside her sewing. "It is little Komala's blouse that needs a button or two. A housewife cannot think or hope to be idle. It is her right and duty though precious hard sometimes," she said

carelessly but the last part of her sentence hinted indirectly at a part of her sufferings.

"THE day is so hot that I feel thirsty in spite of emptying two glasses of lemonade just before starting ten minutes back. A glass of water, Nirmala," said Chander and Nirmala gave him a glass of her home-made sarsaparilla sherbet. She placed her work-basket on the shelf and sat down with a sigh.

"So you have arranged everything, cousin? I'm so happy and relieved. When are we to be there and how are we going?" Nirmala asked anxiously.

"Can't you keep out of this foolish idea, Nirmala? God, you are as obstinate as you were twentyfive years ago. Anyway, I am forced to do it for your sake. We go by electric train and must be there by eleven. Now, it is ten. There is hardly a moment to lose if you are bent upon it. Dress up soon and get moving," Chander said resignedly picking up the paper. "Well, has Shekar gone on camp? When is he due? Tomorrow? Well and good," he said with a certain amount of relief. Then he closed his eyes and recollected the little incident in their garden one fine evening twenty five years back.

Nirmala was a sweet little beauty of about ten then. Chander was a handsome boy of fifteen full of mischief. One

evening he was sitting on the topmost branch of the guava tree eating juicy fruits. He refused to give one to Nirmala saying that little girls ought to beg and not to order for what they wanted. Nirmala was stubborn and she stood underneath the tree for over an hour simply to beat and pinch Chander for his refusal. Yes, she was such a stubborn little Amazon in her early days and Chander was surprised at the change in Nirmala but still that little touch of obstinacy. If only he knew of a way to lessen her troubles and worries! But he was quite powerless and quietly watched her wasting away as it were.

NIRMALA locked the doors, instructed the old cook and was ready in ten minutes. She was dressed in a plain blue silk sari with a blouse of the darker shade.

"Well, let us start," she said and walked first from the verandah to the little gate beyond the garden. Chander followed her meekly. He had the one satisfaction of accompanying Nirmala, although he was worried a lot about his present mission.

Shekar arrived home unexpectedly by 12-30. To his surprise the house was locked and the old cook was sleeping in the verandah. After rousing up the old woman, Shekar learnt from her the strange news that his wife had gone

out with Chander. Shekar showed the worst type of anger by actually kicking the old woman. The latter of course wondered at her master's strange behaviour since she found nothing strange in her poor mistress going out with the best of men,—Chander. God knows how many times he gave her money to buy her daily betel and tobacco.

"SO this is the kind of life she enjoys in my absence with her old lover," he muttered savagely. There was no key left with the servant and throwing his suitcase and hold-all in a corner he walked towards the station and sat expectantly, he knew not for what on a vacant seat. He looked at every female about Nirmala's build and a male like Chander. Half an hour passed in this fashion and then suddenly he got up and ran towards the electric train, when a strong man was helping a weak-looking lady to alight from the train. He was more or less supporting her with one of his hands; for the lady looked ghastly white and pale, unable to walk steadily. Then the unexpected thing happened. Shekar walking wildly with long strides reached the just alighted pair and muttering something between his teeth, struck the feeble woman with such force that she sank on the platform without even a cry or look. She lay there exhausted, — a pitiable little

woman for all the world to gaze and pity. Shekar turned towards Chander and raised his hand to strike when the latter commanded him to stop and hurried to phone for an ambulance. By then someone in the crowd took Shekar aside.

"SHE is my wife and I have a right to do anything. Take your hands off." Shekar shouted in rage.

"She may be your wife but we are also human beings who cannot stand by watching a man murdering his wife before our very eyes" the other replied calmly.

With the assistance of a few sympathetic men from the crowd, Nirmala was carried to the ambulance when it arrived. Shekar gazed at Chander with hatred but the latter motioned him to get into the ambulance with him. Nirmala seemed to breathe weakly and one of her hands was a little red and swollen. A thin line of blood oozed from the cut on her brow when she fell down on the platform and traced its way down to her neck and then to her blue silk sari. The blood stain on the sari grew bigger and bigger as though accusing the culprit silently. But Shekar was not moved a bit. He only looked at her angrily without pity or remorse.

Chander uttered a hoarse laugh, very odd it seemed at that moment. Shekar grew

more furious. "You villain, you act your shameless drama under my very nose. You..." he cried afresh with raised hand once again.

"You fool, do you know where we had been and what your precious wife had done there? Oh, you never will guess, why should you? She had saved her life for you and your children, denying all comforts and happiness...!"

"And so you thought of giving her a fine time by sneaking into my house in my absence and taking her out shamelessly..." burst out Shekar.

"SHUT up, man. Your jealousy has over-stepped its bounds. I am her cousin and you know that she means more than that. But I am not a cad. I only think of her happiness and welfare and even pray for your long life and prosperity simply for her sake. Your wife refused a loan from me to pay back the chowkar to whom you owe a good sum. That rascal worried her day in and day out when you were in the office and she was fed up with his trouble. She found only one solution to escape him and she took it up. Of course she could not accept anything from me for fear of your cursed hints and suspicion. So she ventured a thing against my will. I refused to listen to her, seeing her weakness, but she was obstinate and re-

solute. She rather preferred to sacrifice her life than face the chowkar. I had to take her to the Sanatorium, where she gave her life blood to a rich Rajput lady who wanted only the blood of a gentle woman. She was prepared to pay a good sum of money and poor Nirmala was lured by that advertisement that appeared last Saturday. To save your name and family she had risked her very life in that attempt. You have thanked

her properly for her sacrifice. Now it is up to you to take her to the hospital. You will find the money in her hand bag, still clutched in those weak fingers. Now, driver, please stop for a while!" Chander cried with emotion, bitterness choking him for the moment. Then when the ambulance stopped, he got out with only a long, lingering look at the pathetic figure of his beloved one, whose eyes were still closed in the agony of the pain and exhaustion. She had not even the power to accuse her ungrateful husband.

SOMETHING like a groan escaped Shekar's lips when the full force of the reality dawned upon his cruel and jealous mind. He sat down heavily by the side of the sacred woman whom he had wronged so irreparably. He supported his rumbling, whirling head with both his hands, while unknown to him wild bitter tears flowed thickly from his eyes blinding him for the moment. True, a jealous lover lights his torch from the firebrand of the fiend. O jealousy, thou magnifier of trifles!

The blood stain widened and deepened in colour, mocking at Shekar's thankless, heartless action. With the deepest reverence and love, Shekar placed the gentle head on his lap and wiped the blood from her, fair, pale brow with his kerchief. * * *



PATIENT: "Every time I recover from this fever I forget everything."

DOCTOR: "But don't you ever forget to pay the bill!"

POETIC JUSTICE!

CHARLES Thambidurai was of course, a devout Christian. But that did not stand in the way of his trying to steal a pearl necklace from a Department Store in Pondicherry, and being a novice in the matter, he was promptly apprehended by the man at the counter and handed over to the local Police. Ironically enough, two previous unsolved thefts were laid at the door of this first offender, and a stiff sentence of six years was the result of Charles' abortive attempt to get rich quickly.

Charles was an enterprising man by nature. In his young days when out of compulsion from his parents, he had to attend school, he had caused many a headache to his masters who, in his view, were trying to impose hugely impossible tasks on poor youngsters. Within a short time of his admission into the local school, he was known to be the ringleader of stonethrowing orgies and similar subversive activities which, in the Headmaster's words, were aimed at overthrowing the peace and well-being of the whole school. It was his father's influence which kept Thambidurai at school even after repeated

atrocities manoeuvred by himself and some trusted associates of his.

But his rise to stardom in ringleadership was sudden and permanent. The effect of it all was that he was expelled from school with a character certificate which was a shining example of restrained disgust on the part of the party issuing the certificate. And left to his own resources by his doting father, who still believed that

By R. PATTABIRAMAN

something could be made out of his offspring, he found too much of time hanging on his hands. The father's petty allowance was much too little for Charles' tastes and expenses. The idea of earning an honest penny by engaging himself in some work never struck Charles at all. And it is another matter whether he could have succeeded in securing a job even if he had tried for one.

WELL, all that was years ago. And in his twenty-fifth year, Charles had his first conviction which also proved, as mentioned earlier, to be a

conviction for two other offences in which he had no hand at all. And six years is quite a long period for a young man of Charles' type to spend in prison. Always keen to find a way out of troubles, Charles evolved a way out of his prison, ere he had spent two full years. His plan was simple. The prison doctor accompanied by a puny constable, would come every other week for a routine medical check-up and if he could manage to be left alone with the policeman for some time, the rest would be easy for him.

It is said that some people can will things their own way and Charles must be one of them. For, barely a month had passed when he had the desired opportunity and he was left alone with the policeman by the doctor, who had forgotten his medicine chest. It was the work of a few seconds for Charles to take the constable unawares with a full-fledged sledge-hammer left hook which was caught by the unsuspecting policeman full in the face. The constable, it was reported later, took full two hours to recover from Charles' knock-out treatment, and in the meanwhile, Charles had removed his clothing and was quickly dressed in the constable's uniform. He made a little bundle of his own clothes, draped the prostrate figure of the constable in a bed-sheet and locked him up

in the cell with the keys which the policeman had obligingly kept in his pocket. And then to assume an air of importance and walk out in a hurry was very easy for Charles. Once out of the prison walls, he broke into a run and kept on running till he was clearly out of the city.

His guess proved right. It was not before the day was out that the prison authorities noted the absence of the young man. Meanwhile, Charles had taken a sumptuous meal out of the change found in the constable's pockets and grinned in a satisfied mood when he found a substantial sum in the same place. Here he was, at sunset within a furlong or two from the French border, and a quick walk can take him out of the place within, say, half an hour. He had funds with him which would, if he lived economically, last him a fortnight. Meanwhile, he could cross over to Indian territory and think of ways and means to earn a living.

The sun had set and it was pitch dark except for the flicker of the pale yellow roadside electric lights which seemed to proclaim their unwillingness to give too much light to the streets. Charles kept to the ditch which ran alongside the road and did not venture on the road, though it was comparatively quiet. Occasionally, a car or two coming from the Indian

border threw a flood of light on the asphalted road, and Charles felt extremely uncomfortable when the brilliant light picked him out in bold relief for an agonising fraction of a minute, when the cars were very near.

In his early childhood, one of his favourite sports had been to cross the Indian border and be back by a way known to himself and some of his friends. It involved crossing a wire fence some six feet high, but it could be managed by a little tact and this was known to Thambidurai. Even in darkness, he could pick up the particular position where there would be no sentry on duty. It would be, at the most, about five minutes' walk from the place to come to the Indian border and then—ah! safety from the prying looks of Pondicherry policemen.

In this selfcomplacent mood, he was startled to hear the noise of crunching wheels on the gravel path. The darkness made it impossible for him to see anything, but he heard the slow rumbling of the wheels and from the steadiness of the noise he could guess that it was a bullock cart. No... some-time later he had to change his opinion for it was more than a cart which was coming towards him. Always ready and quick-witted, it did not take him long to conclude that it was a patrol party of policemen. Maybe they be-

longed to the Pondicherry police force, or again, they might be members of the Indian side. His escape must have been brought to the notice of the police, and they might be already on a search for him. Legally, outside the fence, in the no-man's-land, the Pondicherry police would not have the right to arrest him, but, if they *did* happen to do that bit of illegality, Charles would not have the right to make much about the right or wrong of their action. He would just have to follow them sheepishly without protest. Unfortunately for him he could not find any bush or tree worth its name which could offer a place to hide himself, from the searching eyes of the prowling patrols. He was wondering what on earth he could do... when he remembered suddenly the dress he was in. Surely, no policeman would suspect him of being an escaped convict in that dress. Even if they had been warned that the escaped convict might be found in a constable's uniform, a bit of courage could do him a lot of help and he could always take them out of their purpose. He could claim to be a policeman himself in search of the convict. Fear which had suddenly gripped him a moment ago, gave way to brazenness and self-confidence. — Straightening his head-gear, he went to the middle of the road and await-

ed the arrival of the cart or carts.

HE was right. From the first bullock cart that was leading two or three others, he could dimly pick out the outline of some policemen. On keener scrutiny, he satisfied himself that they were wearing Pondicherry uniform and besides the driver, who was also in the police dress, there were four more in the cart. Summoning all his courage, he shouted to the driver to stop the cart.

The sudden brilliance of the electric torch that was switched on blinded even Charles Thambidurai. He was contemplating what to talk to the policemen so as to quell their suspicions if any, when, without a warning, a bullet rang out of the bullock-cart, and struck Charles on

his forehead. Poor Charles could not understand since when the Pondicherry policemen started shooting at their fellow policemen without any warning. To his dying moment he could not understand how those people knew he was the escaped convict.

POOR Charles! How could he know that it was a smugglers' cart and that the constables in that cart were also fake constables, who on sighting Charles, and on hearing his order to stop, had mistaken him for a real policeman! And, in sheer self-defence, to get their smuggled things through without any hitch, the driver of the cart had shot, unerringly, at the person whom he took to be the upholder of the law on the Pondicherry side. Talk of Poetic Justice—what?

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ON BEING FAT!

I am fat. In justice to myself and my parents, I must add that I was not born fat. Fat was thrust into me by my early exertions at the breakfast table. I was too provident and like my extreme, the ant, I went on providing in advance for the wintry day. Physiology was not my hobby just then: no wonder I mistook the stomach for the mouth-pouch of the monkey. After all it is not quite false to say that the stomach is the best tiffin-carrier.

As the stomach grows the man groans. It makes locomotion a serious problem. Gymnastics was out of the question and the drill classes had to do without me. I disliked showing myself oftener than absolutely necessary. My suits never suited me. The tailor was not to blame. His coats were there constant. But I was progressing too fast. Now cotton may delay a country's progress, but it is powerless against human growth. Indeed I was developing abnormally not only in size but in sensitiveness also. I imagined sundry on-

lookers talking of me; stray talks about pumpkins and footballs somehow stung me to the quick. At home, I was not happier. Whenever I sat to eat, I had to choose a place near a pillar or some such support. The lever principle is a principal one. I sometimes think that the western system of dining tables is better at least for people my of ilk (bulk, shall I say).

EVERY morning I used to stand before a mirror and survey such portions of myself as were visible. I then felt that I was giving a turn to the globe that they have in schools. I determined to launch on a campaign of fat reduction. I went to the root of the problem (the stomach). Fain would I have squeezed it down to proper proportions. But God locked it up inside. The stomach grows by what it feeds on. I nerved myself to start on an experiment in diet. Someone said that salt must be eschewed. Others advised change over to wheat. Many prohibited water-drinking between and some, during meals. My religious neighbour, advocated the virtues spiritual and worldly, of fasting; but illogical fellow! he would

not allow me to fittingly observe the festivities. A prescription from a water-cure specialist made me take two tub-baths. Which resulted in two things. My purse was lightened as a result of my efforts to get at a big tub enough to hold me (perhaps that was the reduction he meant!) and secondly I learnt by experience the principle of Archimedes. I now thank God that there was no friend to advise me to take the skin to reduce weight for I could have re-enacted the horrors experienced by Pyecraft and so well expressed by Wells. I degraded myself to the condition of a country labourer. I took noly one meal a day. All in vain. I was getting fatter.

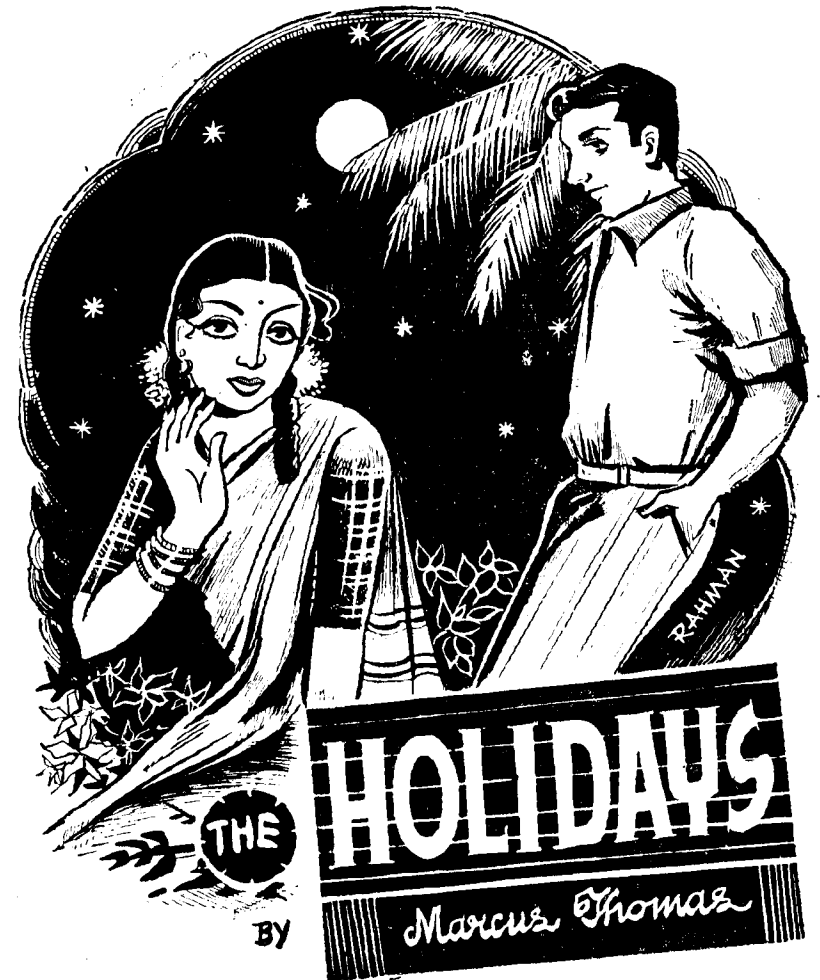
"Now to exercise" I said one morning in a really deep voice. Dumb-bells, Indian-clubs, football, tennis, walking, running were all indulged in by me. I was alarmed and disgusted to find myself fatter than ever before. The doctor said that it was only swelling due to strain. The sun melts ice but is no fat melter. Bandaging is useless: it gives greater prominence. Starving is harmful: it only increases tomorrow's appetite.

I sought consolation in books. The first book I took read: "More people die of obesity than of starvation". I tried patent medicines. But they make one mistake—they identify us too much with our purses. And it is the purse that they reduce!

IN despair I turned to God. But He seems to have ordained my obesity. The theory of the pre-destined constitution singular or dual was hurled at me. But I said that I was weak while a baby. "Right" says my doctor whose manners are worse than his medicine "you are picking up".

I am now a hardened believer in Fate and Fat. "What God has put together let no man put asunder." After all fat is not without its advantages. Apart from narrow school benches and travelling accommodation it has few inconveniences. Obesity adds to personality. Naturally our words carry more weight. Fat is a symbol of aristocratic birth. Look at your emaciated friends. A photo of them reminds you of X-ray. Lean fellows are dishonest, cannot keep secrets, they cannot hide even their bones!

The neckless disdain, the majestic bearing, the fine proportion, the steady gait of the bulky man is ever the envy of the lean long-legger. It is far better to be a pot than a pole!—M.K.S.



HOLIDAYS are a blessing, especially after tiresome work. So it was with extreme relief that I went to the countryside to stay with my parents, during the vacation.

Two year's lecturing in a college will sap the life of any average man, surely. At

first I had a liking for my classes, but you see, routine cuts the best pleasure off us and I was feeling a bit disgusted. That was why I remarked that holidays were at godsend, not only for the student but for the teacher as well.

You know how villagers exaggerate. My mother bragged to the whole village about my intelligence and dignity, I am afraid, with a view to finding a suitable bride for me. In those days even graduates were rare. In such villages, then consider my position, an M. A. with two years of teaching experience. I was considered something of an intellectual figure, heaven knows the truth about it.

SUCH deference and status conferred on me, made me embarrassed. With my brand-new bicycle I would fly round the countryside, sipping the beauteous in nature and avoiding the bucolic mob who harassed me as mentioned above.

It happened on a Tuesday. The sun was just sinking, the sky wits scarlet. I was calmly pedalling through a thick wooded part of the village the gentle breeze blowing against me. I felt that, cycling in such wonderful surroundings was a sin, and therefore, jumped down, sat under a huge mango tree and observed the different shades of colour in the heavens.

I was so absorbed that, when the rustle of leaves behind me woke me, I turned back with a start. About fifty yards to my left I saw a girl clad in a bluish green sari with her back towards me. She was watering a small

rose-bed, with a cheerful calm, I hid myself among the bushes and watched, obtrusely an indecent manoeuvre for a cultured lecturer of twenty-seven. As I said, I could see only her back, but her figure was able to turn the head of any bachelor, it seemed to me. Those white hands which held the pot were angelic, no doubt, pouring water with such fine grace.

Then she turned! Oh! what light played upon her features. She was really 'a phantom of delight'. The only blemish, if it was a blemish at all, which one could detect, was her childlike simplicity. She was docile, sublime, radiant and what not? . . .

I held my breath. She was looking at the sunset, with a sort of vacant gaze. Maybe the sun was blushing at her beauty, I thought. Her eyes were calm, yet one could discern tumult inside the dark pupils. She was all beauty and light, an eternity of pleasure to look at.

THEN, I knew not how, she vanished into the jungle. I made a search, coming out of my hiding place. Then I saw; she ran into a lone cottage.

Heaving a sigh, I rode my bicycle home. "You are very late, son," my mother mildly scolded me. "Oh! I went for a long ride, I said."

That night I could not sleep, try however I might. I was distressed—twenty cigarette stubs testified to the fact.

DREAMING is the gift of gods for the lovers. I dreamt. I saw her bending over me, and kissing my forehead, her profuse hair falling all about me. Her lips were hot. I saw her shedding two tears—I know not for what. Then it was over.

You know how it feels to be in love. The whole day, I languished in bed, longing, dreaming, caressing her imaginary hair. I was happy when evening came, and off I went on my bike. I could not explain the anxiety which enveloped me. I hastily dismounted at the former place and looked about in search of my lady love; if I am given the liberty to call her so.

"Yes! she was there, watering her rose bed. How ecstatic I was! It was the same girl, and she had changed her blue green sari to an orange coloured one. Every colour suited her, I thought.

She was humming a sort of melancholy tune. I wanted desperately to talk to her, but I could not bring myself to act. At last, after a struggle, I made bold. Advancing towards her, I stammered "Some water to drink, please."

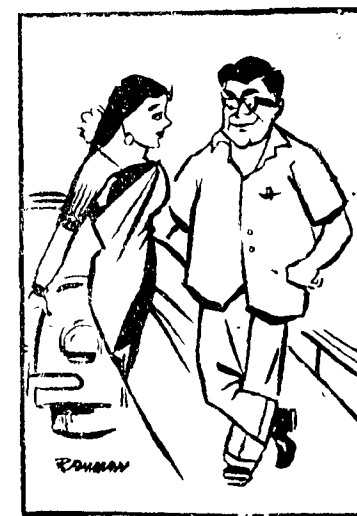
I thought that she would shudder at the sight of a stranger. But she did not.

Instead, fixing her diamond eyes on me, she queried "What did you say?"

Her voice! It was my dream voice. I am sure no girl in the country could warble like that. "Some water to drink please," I mechanically answered.

"Wait here," she said and went to her cottage. I had not long to wait, for she appeared with a water-can within minutes. "Here" she cooed "drink this."

I DRANK two glasses of liquid pleasure. "Thank you" I said.



"I will keep on standing like this on one leg until you say 'yes'".

I don't exactly remember what we said to each other. When I rode back, I knew her name was Prema and she knew mine to be Suku.

ON the third day also we met. By this time we were quite familiar and discussed many subjects. When my opportunity came, I spoke about my love. "I love you. I can't help it," I said. She was silent. I knew that she never disliked me.

"Yes" she smiled at me.

"Do you love me?" I ventured. She looked tenderly into my eyes and whispered "I love everybody."

"But...—I remonstrated.

"Good night" she said and sped into the cottage.

I scolded myself for being too presumptuous and went back.

For a week, I kept inside. But my love got the better of me and I found myself pedalling towards the wood, involuntarily. I waited for her, one hour, two hours. But she did not appear. I was about to return home, when she appeared. She was not searching for me, it was evident.

By that time the moon had come out. The place seemed so unearthly. Prema, swathed in moonshine, went towards a tree, as I watched. She sat down there, evidently musing. The breeze was ruf-

fling her hair and sari, but she seemed callous. I could not go near, I don't know why.

I watched that angel face with painful pleasure.

Oh! What a pity! She was crying, tears rolling down her cheeks, getting reflected in the moonlight.

I rushed to her. She stood up, and wiped her face and affected a laugh.

"Oh! It is you."

I kept silent. Then I found myself asking "You said that you love everybody. Am I included in the list?"

THAT was unfortunate. On came a flood of sighs and tears.

I seemed very cruel. "Speak to the point" was my surly query.

She stopped. "It is good to love some one, Suku" she replied with that divine ambiguity.

I was mad with anxiety. I shook her with both my hands and shouted, "Give me your answer?"

She eluded my grasp with the agility of a cat. Her face lost that vacant loveliness. She seemed very stern. "Young man" and spoke with cruelty, it seemed to me.

—Please see page 63

INDIA MAGAZINE

WANTED: A HUSBAND!

By GORDON BIRRELL

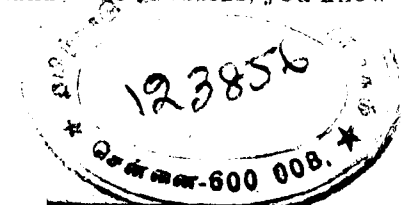
SUSAN Foster slammed the door of the little farmhouse. It is satisfying, somehow, to relieve one's feelings in such a trivial way. For Susan was not quite sure she had really come off best in the argument that had just ended. True! He *had* gone and she *had* slammed the door. But there! The demon of doubt remained. And Susan hated to be worsted in anything.

She turned, her cheeks flaming, to retrace her steps towards the cosy living-room. "The big brute! How dared he? After all, it was her privilege to choose the man she wanted to marry. Nobody had any right to influence her in the matter." Two high spots of angry red burned on her cheeks as his parting words kept drumming through her head. "You haven't seen the last of me, you little Spitfire. I'll come and take you willy-nilly." Susan stamped her foot. She was ruffled, decidedly ruffled. But then, this was quite a normal state of affairs. That pretty head of hers harboured the very devil of a temper.

The gleam of battle was still in her eyes as she entered the living-room to face an agitated, little woman stand-

ing with arms akimbo waiting for her return. "A truce, Aunt Prue, a truce," cried Susan in mock dismay. One glance had told her that, though she had routed one enemy, another more formidable one remained.

"S—SUSAN F—Foster," stammered her aunt. Aunt Prue always stammered when she was very angry. It never failed to amuse Susan. Somehow she couldn't manage to restrain a giggle. To tell the truth, it was funny to see the usually mild little lady so worked up that the torrent of words jumbled up in her active brain just wouldn't pass those tremulous lips. Susan was reminded forcibly of the wind-whipped waters of a mighty dam finding a quite inadequate vent through a tiny hole in a small sluiceway. She stood awaiting the onslaught. "S—Susan F—Foster, I'm ashamed of you! You're a spoilt, little baggage, you are! There you go refusing one young man after another! And Robert the nicest of them all, too! I wonder he put up with your rudeness!" "Had to take it, Auntie," said Susan flippantly. "Beggars can't be choosers, you know!"



Aunt Prue grew angrier than ever. "Beggars, S—Susan! Robert is not a beggar!" Oh yes, Auntie; he comes begging my hand." "S—Susan, you're incorrigible! What did he do?" "Went away, Auntie," answered Susan sweetly. "But not with his tail between his legs, I will admit." Aunt Prue smiled grimly. "I should think not, my girl. If I were Robert, I should put you over my knee and spank you hard." Susan's eyes gleamed dangerously. "Good job you're not Robert!" she said meaningly. Then, under her breath, she added pregnantly "Just let him try it!"

MEANWHILE, the cause of all this domestic discord was striding moodily along the country road. His brows were drawn in a frown, though the vestige of a humorous smile hovered over his lips. Susan was adorable when she was roused. He reflected ruefully all the same that she always seemed to be in that condition when he accosted her. Perhaps it was his own fault he inevitably approached her with but one thought in his head and one question on the tip of his tongue. He couldn't help it. He had to say it or burst. This was the seventh time Robert Everitt had asked Susan Foster to marry him. It was also the seventh time he had been rebuffed. He was determined she shouldn't get the chance again. To refuse him, he meant. For he was

going to ask her again. He was nothing if not resolute. His chin stuck out. A hard glint showed in his eyes. "You pretty, little wild-cat!" he muttered. "I'll earn the right to tame you yet, or I'm a Dutchman." And future events proved he was no Dutchman.

SUSAN sighed. She was standing in front of the wardrobe mirror in her bedroom. Her auburn hair tumbled in tousled profusion over her ears and neck. The dainty pyjama suit she was wearing showed off her slim, rounded figure to perfection. "What a cat-and-dog life this is," she thought mournfully. Though whether Aunt Prue was the cat and she the dog or vice-versa she wasn't just very sure. If she had asked Aunt Prue, she would soon have learned who was which. But then, it's quite normal isn't it, for one woman to call another member of her own sex a "cat"? Susan sighed again. It was a good thing Robert wasn't there to see her. He would have been hard pushed to restrain himself from doing what Aunt Prue had deemed advisable. It would have been balm to his hurt self-esteem to have administered the chastisement the old lady had advocated. That pyjama suit was just the right thinness for the job.

Susan lay thinking deeply. Her head nestled in the cool, white pillow; one arm

sprawled over the warm, heavy eiderdown quilt. She would have to do something about it. Things couldn't go on like this. It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Aunt Prue's flesh and blood, she meant. The old lady would surely take apoplexy. And Susan didn't want that to happen. For she was very fond of dear Aunt Prue, though she didn't see eye-to-eye with her in this contentious affair of the heart. A smile illumined her piquant, little face. "I'll do it," she murmured gleefully. "It's original, anyway, and it should produce the hero." It was a wicked idea she had thought of. Susan was, as her Aunt Prue had hinted, a self-willed little minx. And Aunt Prue knew her Susan. She had tried her best to mother her ever since she had been orphaned when still fairly young.

THE young clerk at the back of the counter regarded Susan interestedly. With too much interest, thought Susan, as she stood chic and confident on the other side. One would almost believe he had seen her before. Susan was dead sure she had never seen him. She wouldn't have come to this agency if she had thought there might be anyone likely to recognise her. But there couldn't be. It must just be the inevitable attraction of a pretty female for a susceptible male. "I want to rent a sin-

gle room in town as an office for two days," she told the clerk. "Yes, miss." He was sure she wasn't married. Her left hand, when she removed her gloves, boasted no wedding-ring. He produced a ledger, copied an address on to a slip of paste-board, received payment, and handed over the card and a key to Susan. She smiled well-pleased. Now for the great adventure. The clerk studied her back thoughtfully as she disappeared through the street door of the agency. Picking up the telephone, he dialled, and was soon talking earnestly to someone at the far end of the wire.

DEPOSITING her attache case on the one table in the small room she had rented, Susan considered her plan of action. First, she would 'phone Aunt Prue and tell her she would be rather late in arriving back home the next day. Meeting an old friend in town would be good excuse. Aunt Prue was a suspicious old lady, especially where Susan was concerned. Who could blame her? But such an excuse was beyond cavil. Susan was troubled with no qualms of conscience. Next, the advertisement for the newspaper. That was easy. "Sandwichman wanted immediately" and the address of her temporary office were all that was required. Now to avoid all risk of discovery.

Susan spent the ensuing half-hour in elaborate dressing operations. That attache case held a useful assortment of "props" borrowed surreptitiously from the local dramatic society of which she was an enthusiastic member. The deed done. Susan surveyed herself with many contortions in the diminutive mirror from her handbag. Good! Even Aunt Prue wouldn't know her own Susan. The girl at the newspaper office accepted the advertisement without demur. Susan returned to her office and sat back expectantly to wait developments. The newspaper she had selected providentially kept a space open for late insertions. She shouldn't have very long to wait.

"SEE 'ere, missy, is this a stunt?" Susan regarded with distaste the rather disreputable individual in her office. She bristled. That temper of hers needed very little provocation. "My good man," she replied testily. "I propose to employ you as a sandwichman not a King's Counsel. Questions are barred." The man regarded her reflectively. "No go, missy," he said. "I buy no pigs in pokes." So that was that! One applicant after another refused the job with much the same remarks. Susan began to despair. Had all men lost their spirit of adventure? She would never get a husband at this rate.

THE door opened and in walked the eighth applicant. Susan's eyes lit up. This one looked more determined. They regarded each other for some seconds across the table. Susan had an odd feeling she had met him before. She studied the shabby suit, unshaven face, down-at-the-heel boots, dirty cap, and thick, faintly coloured spectacles. She felt reassured. He was decidedly a stranger. On his part, the object of her scrutiny had been just as intently giving his prospective employer the once over. A glint of admiration might have been observed creeping into his eyes beneath the blue glasses. But Susan couldn't be expected to see that.

"I want you to parade the principal streets of the city with two sandwich boards over your shoulders." Susan paused. "Go on, miss," said the young man. "What'll be on the boards?" "Just this," replied Susan with a faint smile. "Susie wants a husband." The young man gasped involuntarily. If looks could have killed, Susan would have been a dead woman. What a fool he would look carrying that legend around! He hesitated. Then something seemed to steel his resolution. "I'll do it, miss. Down-and-outs can't afford to be choosy. I'll try anything once." Susan almost clapped her hands. In her joy she promised him a substantial reward at the end of

the two days. The bargain was clinched.

LONDONERS, used to all sorts of queer happenings and people, rubbed their eyes when they saw the unknown sandwichman with his odd message. "Blimey, mate," said one Cockney to his pal. "Susie wants a husband. The missus wants rid o' 'ers. Wot a baht it?" "Garn, Bill,"

retorted the other. "It's a fast'un. Kime on. Let's beat it." For a long space of time nobody bit. It was amusing to watch the reactions of the crowd. Some made to approach the sandwichman with flushed cheeks and wary, sidelong glances, but the amused smiles of the passers-by usually caused them hastily to reverse their intentions. He was a bold, unselfconscious man who would stop the itinerant advertiser and demand further details. Susan had planned well. Those who replied to her request would be men worth studying anyway. There might be among them a future husband after her own heart. Business was

INDIA MAGAZINE



HUSBAND: "Write to your mother that I, am down with flu and ask her not to come!"

not brisk. But at least a dozen men received from the sandwichman a little slip of cardboard telling them where to go. And the address they got was not the address of Susan's office.

AUNT Prue was bustling about the little farmhouse in a very bewildered fashion. She didn't know whether

she was on her head or her heels. Susan had been away a whole day and night. Aunt Prue wasn't expecting her back until late that evening, so the telephone message had said anyway. The little, irresponsible baggage! Aunt Prue's mind was fully made up. Robert Everitt would have to administer that spanking. She didn't feel sufficiently callous to do it herself. Susan was her own flesh and blood after all. But a spanking she deserved and a spanking she was going to get. Robert could be trusted to do the needful all right. Aunt Prue didn't care if he did err on the generous side. Generous in the way of vig-

our, she meant. But she had first to persuade him to do it.

AUNT Prue had had visitors that day. Hence her state of extreme agitation. A whole dozen of them. Young men she had never set eyes on before. And all armed with the address of the farmhouse. It was Susan who had sent them. There could be no doubt of that. The handwriting on the cards they showed her hadn't been disguised in any way. Aunt Prue was not averse to practical jokes, but this one was just too much. Besides, it might very easily have repercussions she wouldn't approve of. For Aunt Prue had set her heart on Susan marrying Robert Everitt.

It had been a very busy day for the little, old lady. Twelve healthy, young men, the invited guests of her niece, couldn't be turned away without a bite to eat. Six of them still remained. The ardour or curiosity of the others had failed to survive the time of waiting. So they had departed accompanied by sighs of relief from Aunt Prue. But there still remained the problem of the stickers. Where were they to sleep? The spare rooms were not fit for visitors. They hadn't been used for a long time. Susan and her aunt didn't have many close friends. Any who did stay the night with them either shared the old lady's or Susan's own room.

Fortunately, although most of the farm buildings had been knocked down before Susan and her aunt had come to live there, a fairly big, weather-tight barn still stood not far from the house. Thither, on the instructions of Aunt Prue, six rather bitter and crestfallen young men repaired to spend the night.

It was in the barn that Susan found them. She knew they would be there. That is, if any of the respondents to her advertisement had had the guts to wait for her appearance. There was nowhere else for them to go. So it was to the barn that Susan went immediately on her return from the city. She approached it cautiously, and peeped through the window. She almost whistled in astonishment. One young man was sitting on the straw nonchalantly reading a book by the light of a swing hurricane lamp suspended from the rafters above. Susan wouldn't have been too happy could she have glimpsed the title of that book. The young man was grimly savouring the advice of the anonymous author on "How to Deal with Recalcitrant Females." The other aspirants for Susan's hand were engaged in eyeing each other with keen disfavour. Spite and animosity burned in their glares. It's strange how men will become sworn enemies for the possession of a coveted female! Part of Raw Nature's scheme

for the survival of the fittest, no doubt! But decidedly undignified by all proper civilised standards! Besides, if hot-headed males would pause awhile to think things over, they would soon conclude that after all there's always another eligible and alluring female to be picked up somewhere. Two of the suitors were actually intent on eliminating one or the other with their fists. There was a thud. The door opened and Susan observed the defeated Don Juan stalk moodily out of the arena. That left five to be dealt with. Five prospective husbands! Susan smiled and prepared to put the rest of her methods of narrowing down the choice into practice.

FIFTEEN minutes later she stood on the bank of the small rivulet that flowed past the farmhouse only a hundred yards or so from the big barn. Her subsequent actions were rather irrational. Screaming at the top of her not insignificant voice "Help, help! I'm drowning!" she waited until the door of the barn disgorged five young men rushing for the river. Then, taking off the heavy coat she was wearing, she slid noiselessly into the water and struck out for the middle of the current. Five young men stood irresolute, staring at the bobbed head in mid-stream. At least four of them were decidedly hesitant. The fifth, taking in the situation at a glance,

smiled to himself, padded along the river's edge a few yards, scrambled into a moored punt, and paddled leisurely towards the drowning Susan.

SAFE in the punt, Susan glared reproachfully at her rescuer. It was the sandwichman she had engaged in town. After all, he had as good a right as any other to try his luck on the matrimonial market. Susan admitted that readily enough. What piqued her was his method of rescue. "You cheat!" she stormed. "I might have sunk for the last time while you were unloosing that punt. A he-man? Bah! There aint no such animal nowadays." The rescuer grinned amiably. "No use two folks getting soaked in a theatrical stunt, miss," he said cheerfully. Susan gasped. "Theatrical stunt?" she queried. "Young ladies don't usually go for a swim at this time of night, miss," he replied unruffled. "Nor do they attempt to commit suicide clad only in a scanty bathing suit." Tears of mortification stung Susan's eyes. He was too clever by half, this young Adonis. Still he was her last hope. She glanced towards the bank of the river. No one was in sight. Four young hopefuls had deemed discretion to be the better part of valour.

Aunt Prue was past caring about shocks. She had received

ed so many recently that her mind simply refused to register any more. Consequently she didn't go off into hysterics when rescuer and rescued presented themselves at the farmhouse door. Rushing her niece upstairs, she left her to dry herself and change into clean, warm things in her bedroom. Meanwhile, the young man waited for the old lady's return to the living-room. Removing his spectacles, he bestowed a very expressive wink on the astonished Aunt Prue. A hurried council of war followed. Aunt Prue tip-toed upstairs, shut the door of Susan's bedroom, and locked it quietly from the outside. Five minutes later she was joined outside the door by the young man with the pale-tinted spectacles.

SUSAN stood beside the electric fire toasting her dainty little slippered feet. She wore a chic, gay pyjama suit over which she had thrown a warm dressing-gown fastened with a girdle. There was a knock at the door. "Who is it?" demanded Susan. "It's me, Aunt Prue, Darling. Let me in, please." Susan opened the door. Aunt Prue had al-

ready unobtrusively unlocked it. In walked the young man in the coloured glasses. Calmly pushing the door almost shut behind him, he advanced towards the attractive but highly incensed Susan. "You," she spluttered. "What are you doing here in my bedroom?" The young man proceeded to remove his spectacles. Susan blinked, pinched herself hard, and blinked again. "Robert Everitt," she fumed, "I hate you. Get out of my sight at once."

THE command produced no effect. At least, not the effect Susan desired. Alarm began to appear in her eyes. "What are you going to do?" she said fearfully. Robert advanced towards her, picked her up, just like a terrier picks up a helpless rabbit, carried her struggling body to a nearby chair, sat down, and laid her fair and square across his knees, face downwards. "Susan Foster," he said firmly, "for the eighth time I'm going to ask you to marry me. My technique will be slightly different this time." He removed one of the slippers from her wildly-kicking feet. "I shall punctuate each word of my proposal," he said meaningly, "with an application of this convenient slip-

per to your dainty posterior." Susan almost shrieked. "Just you dare! If you do, I'll never look at you again!" Robert proceeded undeterred. "Susan—smack, Foster—smack, will—smack, you—smack—." Behind the door Aunt Prue smiled delightedly. She waited expectantly, "marry—smack, me—smack, tomorrow—smack?" Aunt Prue couldn't hear any answer from Susan. Instead, she caught Robert's voice proclaiming, "I shall repeat the procedure until successful." "Susan—smack, Foster—smack, will—smack, you—smack—." A glint of unwilling admiration crept into Aunt Prue's eyes. The little baggage! She had spirit! However, she consoled herself, it is sometimes necessary to be cruel in order to be kind. "marry—smack, me—smack, tomorrow—." Aunt Prue waited. No sound of a smack followed the last word. She peeped round the door.

SUSAN was on Robert's knee, the right way up this time. He was gently wiping away the tears from her eyes. Although that dressing gown was fairly thick, he knew he had hit perhaps rather harder

than he had intended. But a lot of past forbearance had just cried out to be atoned for in that smacking process. "You adorable darling," he was murmuring in her ear, as his lips caressed her soft hair. "You've made me the happiest man in all the world." Aunt Prue heard Susan ask in a still, small voice, "How did you get to know of my plan, Robert?" "Easy, Darling," he answered fondly. "That clerk in the agency is a friend of mine. He knew you from my descriptions of you. It was advisable, wasn't it, that he should inform me of your strange goings-on?" The vestige of a glare appeared in Susan's eyes. The old spirit was re-asserting itself. "I will go and see that young man, Robert," she said. Robert picked up the slipper again. "Only to thank him for telling you," she added hastily. Robert replaced the slipper on her foot, helplessly. Susan smirked triumphantly. She had got the last word anyway. Now to be magnanimous. Tilting up Robert's face, she planted an ardent kiss full on his lips. Susan Foster no longer wanted a husband.—(Copyright.)



WE all knew him as "Sampangi". If at all he had any other name, it was lost in the mists of familiarity.

Reaching the ripe age of 45, when the pincer movement of old age was gaining strategic positions in the field of his youth, Sampangi had a sudden brain-wave to get married. The idea was not his own, but something instilled into him through the incessant loquaciousness of a marriage broker - a distant cousin of his.

"Well-well, I want to see her first and then we will decide what to do" he told the agent.

"Why not—any time convenient to you—What about this Sunday?"

"Yes, it will be all right"—he voiced his approval.

On Saturday Sampangi came to me and his staccato stuttering told me about his

decision to plunge headlong into the buffeting bliss of marital felicity.

He wanted me to accompany him on the occasion of the pre-darshan of his future consort.

POOR Sampangi was so much infatuated with the idea of marriage that it had almost become an obsession with him.

Dressing up smartly as the occasion demanded, Sampangi came to the Railway Station, where I was waiting for him, five minutes after the departure of the first train. He had so much relied on his no-jewelled wrist-watch, that the Railway time appeared to him as wrong and unreliable.

Three hours we had to wait for the next train.

When we reached T... the "guide" was patiently awaiting our arrival.

I was impressed by the two bald-pated alpaca-coated gentlemen companions of the woman conductor.

We had to go eight miles upcountry and the bus, overwhelmingly crowded, was waiting for us pre-arranged. We did not actually get into the bus but were shoved in. Apparently my companions were accustomed to such journeys, and I found their faces and behaviour unaffected and serene. Perhaps the forthcoming adventure of seeing his future spouse had so much occupied Mr. Sampangi's thoughts that he was quite unaware of the existing inconveniences of the bus travel. He sat glum.

From the talk of those two intelligent faced gentlemen I could gather only the current rate of coconuts, dearth of fresh fish and such common and puerile talk which belied their appearance.

THE nerve-racking experience of that long bus ride is still fresh in my mind. Sampangi's pleasant, exciting and fanciful reveries came to a sudden end when our companions drew our attention to the fact that we had reached our journey's end.

We stepped out lively but with certain minor abrasions to our well perspiring torsos

and major rents to the clothes we had on.

THERE amidst the rustic surroundings, stood a decent building. We were welcomed by the loud barks of a chained-up dog which had no pedigree to boast of.

A light Sussex breed cock with its 3 or 4 local hens ogled at us queerly, cackled and left its perch on the chair arms and shambled away majestically.

I saw a peering inquisitive face behind the window curtains and heard the tinkling of bangles as the face disappeared hurriedly scrutinising my staring orbs.

I heard whispers too—in-audible whispers — which naturally ought to have been about our arrival, I concluded.

Cool drinks (water melon concoction) were brought down to us and Sampangi, casting aside conventions in the face of parched up necessities, consumed three glasses at a stretch and hiccupped his delight and satisfaction.

I got annoyed at the fellow's impudence, but I had to swallow my chagrin and offer a serene unaffected countenance.

I, being a well-seasoned married man, was given the first chance to see the bride-to-be.

"Mr. Chandran — a word please"—the broker called me in.

"She is sitting there."

BEING very busily engaged in mending her torn kestos, she was quite unaware of my proximity.

A fair-complexioned good-looking girl, vibrant with all the freshness of unfledged juvenility, sat before me. Suddenly she turned her head and saw me standing by. She stood up. Shyness painted her cheeks red. She hung her head.

"Sit down dear-what is your name?"

"Kamala"—a half whisper.

"Are you still in school?"

"No."

"You have passed?"

"S.S.L.C."

"Thank you, dear—sorry for inconveniencing you."

I came back. Sampangi wanted to ask me so many questions. His facial expression actually excelled Joe E. Brown at his best.

SAMPANGI came back after his short interview with a beaming smile on his lips and I understood he was fully satisfied.

When the question of dinner was popped up, Sampangi, without the least doubt, hesitation or compunction, accepted the offer. We were quite unaware then that to take meals from the would-be bride's house, more or less was a sign of consent for the marriage.

On our way back, Sampangi told me.

"The girl is all right—but you know according to Vatsyayana if a girl's second toe is longer than the big toe, it portends evil. I noticed her toes."

I was really astounded at the imbecility of my dear friend.

"My dear chap, you have no use for her toes. You have other more important parts to think of and cherish for. Leave her toes alone".

"By the way, she could at least have put on a sari instead of the dirty clothes she was wearing," Sampangi commented.

"What-put on a sari?-what was she wearing then?"

"Why-of course a double dhoti and blouse."

I REALISED then the blunder Sampangi had made. He had taken all the trouble to see and approve of the servant maid.

Goodness gracious - have you ever come across anybody of Sampangi's calibre?



LADY: "Do you recommend this sleeping mixture?"

CHEMIST: "Yes, madam we give away an alarm clock with every bottle."

HOLIDAYS

—Continued from page 50

"Don't touch me." I took my hands off her and apologized for my conduct.

"You want to know my love," she panted. "All" right, follow me."

I followed her to the hut. She pushed open the door.

It was a clean little hut. In the central room, which formed the bulk of the building, a man lay writhing on a cot.

"Meet my husband," she smiled at me. The man on the cot was coughing deafeningly. Prema propped up a pillow to support him in a reclining position.

He asked me about my job. I replied that I was a lecturer. In turn I asked about his illness. Prema replied for him. "Sati shis suffering from lung T. B."

SATISH turned to me. "I thank you very much for keeping company with my lonely wife and cheering her up."

I rose up to go. Prema also stood up, her eyes downcast.

"Good-bye!" I mumbled.

When I stepped out of the hut, a cold breeze welcomed me.

The holidays, for me, were over. * *

Skit

THE TICKET INSPECTOR IN MUFTI

THE newly-arrived Italian unit was just moving out of Saidapet when I managed to board it. It was peak traffic hour of office and college going passengers and so there was just enough space to stand on one leg like a stork in meditation.

Someone patted me on the back. I turned my head to find out who it was. Some person clad in a kurta and lungi asked me, "Ticket please." I was just wondering who the hell he was to ask me for my ticket when suddenly I remembered that, to check "honorary travellers", the Railways introduced surprise checking by inspectors in mufti. I showed the inspector my season ticket and he passed on to look for his "prey" amongst the other passengers.

The train stopped at Mambalam and again resumed its journey, having ejected out some of the contents and taken in others. Now a T.T.I. in uniform got into the compartment here and began his job. At this halt I could manage to get a seat which fell vacant.

When the T.T.I came to me I thrust my hand into the pocket of my pant and lo! my purse was not there! I was perplexed and the inspector was looking at me suspiciously thinking that I was putting on an act. He asked for the ticket of my neighbour and that person produced my season ticket! And who do you think the fellow was? None other than the "inspector in mufti!"

I looked puzzled and told the T.T.I. in uniform that the ticket being shown by my neighbour was mine. I also told him that this person was himself an inspector in mufti.

The T.T.I. stared at me and asked what I meant by that. I explained the matter.

“ You know what happened? This “ mufti ” fellow was actually a bogus cheat, an expert pick-pocket, and he impersonated as an inspector in mufti though actually he was travelling ticketless! Of course, after due investigation he was brought to book and I got back my purse intact.—G. KAMESWARA RAO

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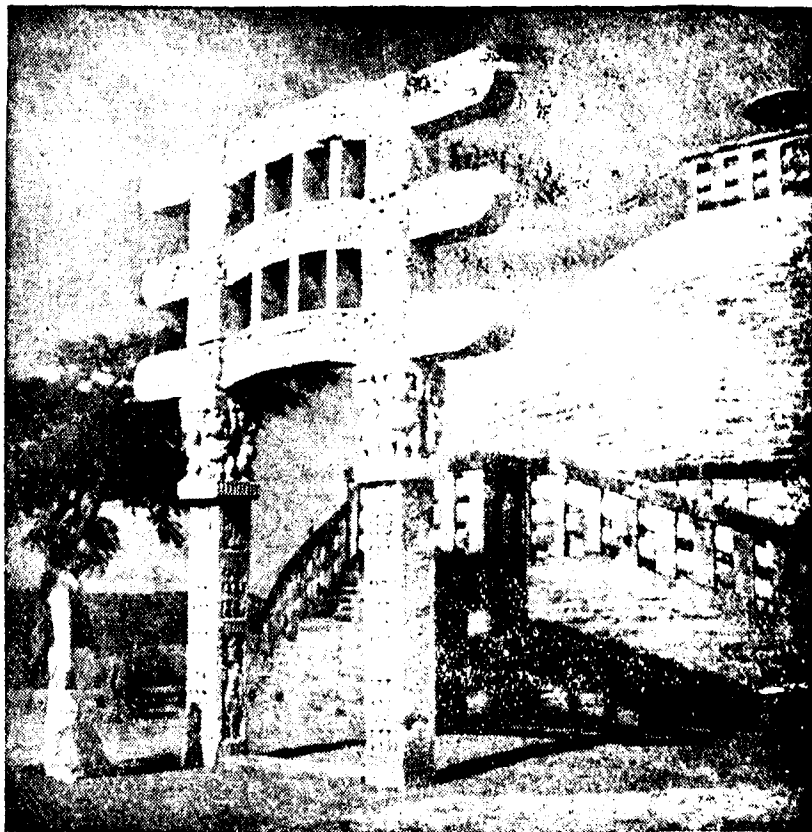


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