



Hindoo Child in its Swing.

THE
DAWN OF LIGHT:

A Story of the Seneca Mission.

BY
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CHARACTERS INTRODUCED.

- { BABU RAJKUMAR BHATTACHARJYA, a Brahmin pundit.
- { KUMARI, wife of the pundit.
- { JODUNATH, brother of the pundit.
- { PROSONNO, wife of Jodunath.
- BOSHONTO, young widow of a brother of the pundit.
- PREMCHAND, }
PRIONATH, } Boys, the sons of the pundit.
- KAMINI, daughter of the pundit.
- TARAMONI, aunt of the pundit.
- HERANI, maid-servant.

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INTRODUCTION.

ABRIDGED FROM THAT OF REV. EDWARD E. STORROW
TO THE LONDON EDITION.

THE writer of "The Dawn of Light" is a voluntary laborer in female mission work in Bengal. Dwelling in the city where it is chiefly carried on, the noble impulses of feminine love and pity led her, as well as a few others, to seek access to a select number of respectable Hindoo families, and week by week to labor for their moral and intellectual enlightenment. Miss Leslie, therefore, has had unusual opportunities for becoming acquainted with the character, habits and wants of Hindoo ladies, and in the following story has depicted these with great accuracy. Boshonto, Kumari, Kamini, Prosonno and Premchand are veritable personages, though all the incidents associated with their names have not occurred.

The story is not only valuable as a faithful por-

traiture of Hindoo scenery, character and customs as they exist in Calcutta and vicinity; it is yet more valuable, as illustrative of the methods by which light and truth are now penetrating into the dark and sad recesses of many a zenana.

Of all the social revolutions occurring in various parts of the world, none, probably, is more important than that now passing over the condition of the women of India. Their state for centuries has been singularly deplorable. Their very birth is a disappointment. Morally and intellectually they are regarded as inferior to the other sex. Education is denied them. Married while yet children, they fall into the hands of those who, if poor, treat them as drudges and inferiors; if rich, as too weak, vain and foolish to be able to take care of themselves, and only safe from harm and evil as long as they have no free intercourse with the other sex, or with the great world outside of the walls of their own apartments. Should their husbands die, they as widows, however young, must subsist on poor and scanty diet and wear the plainest and coarsest attire to the end of life.

It need not be told how their state was deplored, especially by those who were laboring for India's enlightenment, but no remedy was at hand. Schools for girls were unknown. When first established,

only the very poorest and those of lowest caste could be bribed to send their daughters.

The very few who were sent to school were taken away at the time of marriage, before any permanent result could be looked for. Nor were adults more accessible. If they ventured to draw near the outskirts of a crowd of men who were listening to a missionary, they might be told contemptuously that, being *only* women, that which appealed to the mind and intellect was not for them; whilst respectable ladies, shut up in their zenanas, could neither be reached by the living voice of instruction nor read the books which occasionally penetrated into their dwellings. One half the population of all India was thus practically beyond our reach.

Happily, all this is now beginning to change, and it is alike important and instructive to trace the causes of a movement which, though limited at present to a few localities, is certain finally to revolutionize the entire structure of Hindoo society.

Around Calcutta the greatest indications of this change are observable; a statement, therefore, of what is occurring there will illustrate what is going on in a less degree in many other places.

Being the seat of government, and the centre of commerce between North-eastern India, with its eighty millions of population, and the civilized

world, it has drawn to itself a larger number of Europeans and respectable Hindoos than is anywhere else to be found. From the southern suburbs of the city to Chinsurah, twenty-eight miles north of Calcutta, and within three miles of each side of the river, there are at least a million and a half of people. In addition to ten thousand who are being taught in government and government-aided and mission schools in their own language, there are in superior schools and colleges more than fourteen thousand who are acquiring a knowledge of our Western literature, science and opinions through the English language. The latter nearly all belong to the middle and upper classes of society. In all these schools and colleges, both directly and indirectly, our ideas of morality, of the relations of the sexes, of the honor, love and courtesy due to womankind, are inculcated, and in mission schools and colleges where two-thirds at least of the above numbers attend, the Bible is a recognized class-book, and there are specific lessons on all the abuses and wrongs affecting native female society.

The effect of all this is beginning to be very marked. The contrast between their manners and customs and our own is soon observed. The more manifest evils inherent in their own are felt. And now there has grown up a fretting impatience at the

restraints imposed by immemorial custom, and a dislike to the wrongs and inconveniences from which they suffer. Young men enlightened by an English education cannot but observe a marked contrast between their own intellectual freedom and growth and the utter ignorance, superstition and narrowness of their mothers, sisters and wives. They find themselves married to those whom they would not have themselves chosen, and with whom they can have no sympathy. They see their little sisters given in marriage to perfect strangers who may be four or six times as old as their child-wives. They see widows whose husbands died in childhood, who are an encumbrance to their families, supposed to be cursed by gods and fate, yet whose marriage would be judged to be alike impious and unnatural. They see all this, and though unusually timid and conservative, they cannot shut their eyes to its evils, and are slowly preparing to eradicate them. Thus through the education of the boys and young men comes the most effective means of elevating the women.

Our tale exhibits some of the modes in which this social and moral revolution is operating. I have known many instances in which students wishing to parade their own learning, and to gratify the inquisitiveness of their wives, sisters or aunts, have

been led, like Premchand and Prionath in this story, to teach them to read. This was done secretly, for those at the head of families were of the old way of thinking, and the innovators were few and unimportant. The education of the better classes, however, for thirty years and more, has been mainly of the kind we have described. That women should be educated is now believed by thousands of native gentlemen, and, unlike numbers who a few years ago held this merely as a theory, they are giving it practical effect. Their ideas of propriety forbid that ladies should leave their houses frequently or without much protection; they are unwilling, therefore, as a rule, to send them to school, but they do not object to the visits of English and American ladies, or even of native teachers who are properly accredited. There is less inconvenience attendant on this mode of instruction than might be supposed, because the sons in a family when married, and even the grandsons, continue to live under the parental roof, and as Hindoo ladies have abundance of leisure, it is not difficult to find several in a family who are willing to listen to a teacher.

This is the general work in which many ladies are now engaged. Its importance can hardly be over-estimated. We are thus gaining access to that large class whose influence for good or ill is most potent, whose

enthralment and humiliation have been most complete, and who hitherto have been inaccessible as the summits of the Himalayas.

Whilst Hindoo women are thus receiving the blessings of knowledge and freedom, the men are preparing to advance yet farther in the same direction. They begin to feel that the prescribed age of marriage is much too early; there is a growing willingness to send their daughters to schools; on the question of perpetual widowhood they have advanced yet farther, and in spite of an intensity of opposition which it is difficult for foreigners to understand, have brought about several such marriages.

It should need only the statement of the simple facts of the case to obtain all that is required in the form of aid and agency, that every Hindoo family accessible to us may have its visitor, and that every girl who can be sent to school may be within reach of one.

Let it be distinctly remembered, however, that this auspicious work is confined to a very small part of India. The hopeful state of female education in Calcutta, Bengal and the Punjab is the exception, not the rule.

It is certain that not one Hindoo woman in two hundred can read or write. Then, of the thirty million young people who might be at school, at least

fifteen millions are girls, and of this vast number there is reason to believe that not one hundred thousand are really under instruction, or one in one hundred and fifty. Thus, whilst there are sixty million adult women in India who, with the rarest exceptions, are wholly uneducated, there are nearly thirty millions of their daughters who are growing up in the deepest ignorance.

This cannot be perpetuated. We who exult in our freedom and intelligence, who boast of the chivalrous, delicate and Christian sentiments we entertain for womankind, are bound alike by duty, honor and beneficence to seek the elevation of our magnificent Eastern empire, and Christian women especially should strive that their Hindoo sisters may share their freedom, cultivation, happiness and piety.

THE DAWN OF LIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOMESTEAD.

ABOUT ten miles beyond one of the suburbs of Calcutta is a large village, indeed almost a small town, inhabited chiefly by high-caste families, dwelling in substantial brick-built houses. There many Baboos, or native gentlemen, have their country residences. Availing themselves of one of the newly-opened lines of railway, they go every Monday morning to the city, and return to their families on Saturday afternoons. It is true they might, by using the same means of conveyance, go and return each day, but most Bengali gentlemen have their city as well as

their country houses, and they prefer being near their places of business throughout the week.

The railroad passes within a mile or two of the village, but the pleasantest way to it is by carriage. The road is very beautiful. Now you pass by a tank covered with the gorgeous blossoms of the crimson lotus—a flower so regal in its beauty that it seems to deserve the name of the Queen of Flowers far more than does the blushing rose; now you see a grove of mango trees, and if the time of the year be the cold season, each branch is tipped with the orange blossoms and crimson leaves of a wild orchid; farther on is a long range of bamboos, looking beautiful and soft in the ever-shifting alternations of cloud and sunshine; then you come to a field of a kind of pulse, blue with innumerable flowers of the richest, deepest azure; a field of yellow mustard succeeds, with its golden light and its peculiar yet grateful fragrance. In the rainy season every bank and bit of old wall is marvelously adorned with ferns of various kinds. The *Adiantum*

lunulatum, with its pale-green, crescent-shaped leaves, and its black, hair-like stems, beautifies every road. The maiden-hair, with its delicate, feather-like fronds, mantles every half-hidden, secluded wall. The very ditches on either side the road are beautiful, for in them grow arums of singular loveliness. The leaves of some of these arums are blotched with purple; some are veined with exquisite embroidery; but the most are of a rich uniform green. During a shower these beautiful leaves hollow themselves to receive the rain-drops, and then the succeeding burst of sunshine lights them up with extraordinary radiance.

The bazaar, or market, is situated at the entrance of the village. There, in the little stalls, may be seen all sorts of things exposed for sale. Here sits an old man with his stock of tiny looking-glasses, balls of white and colored thread put up in bottles, little round wooden boxes fantastically painted, heaps of necklaces, or *malas*, as they are called, strings of beads of various sizes and numberless bracelets of glass or lac. A mis-

cellaneous collection of nails, locks, cow-bells, tin boxes, conch shells, etc., completes his assortment of goods. Farther on is a pottery-shop, with earthen vessels of different sizes and shapes, some of them almost rivaling in beauty those of the famous Etruscan vases. Yet a little farther on is a sweetmeat shop. Great plates full of parched rice, and of butter, sugar and spices in every form of delectable preparation, are so arranged as to tempt the eyes of the passers-by. Beside it is a fruit shop, with bunches of golden plantains hanging up within, and an immense heap of green cocoanuts lying in front. And perhaps next to this is a stall for the flower garlands used in idol-worship. Here the worshiper, on his way to the river or the temple, for a few *cowries** may buy wreaths of white jessamine, crimson hibiscus or any other of the beautiful flowers of India which may happen to be in bloom.

Leaving the bazaar, we come to scattered

* A small shell, about eighty of which are exchanged for a copper pice, itself the smallest coin in common use, of less value than a cent.

brick houses, each one embosomed in trees. If the day be cool, we can get out and walk along the road. And what a walk that is! By one coming from the heart of the busy city the stillness is immediately felt as most delightful. The air is fresh and cool, and "the voice of the turtle is heard in the land," for stealing through the stillness may be heard the sweet yet mournful coo of the wild dove. Sometimes, too, the hoarse croak of a raven may be heard, and occasionally the singular cry of a half-mythical bird which no one professes to have ever seen, but whose nest, wonderful in size, is said to have been discovered.

In such a quiet and beautiful retreat was the homestead of Baboo Rajkumar Bhattacharjya. He was a Brahmin and a pundit, or teacher. Sanserit, the sacred language of the Hindoos, was nearly as familiar to him as Bengali. Its polysyllabic words had a strange charm for him, and nothing delighted him more than to have pupils who partook of his enthusiasm. A refined, polished man, he was a perfect gentleman; conversation

with him was a real pleasure, for with great intelligence he combined the most finished courtesy. He taught in one of the Calcutta colleges, and had besides some private pupils. On this account he stayed in Calcutta from Monday until Saturday, going to Gopalpore—for so we shall call the place—for the day of rest. Verily the Sabbath is a blessing, even to those who have not yet received into their hearts the Lord of the Sabbath!*

The pundit's household was not large. It consisted of his wife, Kumari;† his two sons, Premehand and Prionath; his daughter, Kamini; his brother, Jodunath, and his wife, Prosonno; and Boshonto, a young woman of eighteen, the widow of a younger brother who had died a few months be-

* Government and merchants' offices and all public schools being closed on the Sabbath, it is a day of rest to thousands who do not acknowledge its sanctity. It is now much used by such for meetings where moral and literary questions are discussed, and for worship by those who have discarded idolatry for some form of Theism.

† These Bengali names, ending in *i*, should be pronounced as if ending in *ee*, as Kaminee, Kumaree, etc.

fore. An old aunt, Taramoni, and a servant, Herani, completed the establishment.

Kumari was a sweet-looking woman, very fair and very gentle. Her age might have been about twenty-eight. She was slightly tattooed on her chin and nose, but these marks—the former resembling a *fleur-de-lis*, the latter a simple black line—seemed only to give to her face a more intellectual expression than it would otherwise have had. Her three children were her pride. Premchand was a queer little fellow of about twelve years of age. He had been carefully instructed, and was really very clever. Like all Bengali boys, his Bengali education commenced on the day he completed his fifth year. On that day his mother, according to native custom, dressed him in his best attire and sent him to the village *patshala*, or school. There he learned the alphabet, the multiplication table and the way to form the letters on strips of palm leaves. Naturally quick, he soon learned all that could be taught him at the *patshala*. Then his father

took him into the city with him every Monday morning, where he attended one of the large missionary institutions, and made rapid progress in every branch of education. English was speedily acquired, and so fond was the little fellow of the new language that whenever he met any one who could speak English, he preferred talking in it to Bengali. He even affected to despise the Bengali language and all Bengali books. Such was the progress he had made in understanding English that he could rapidly and accurately translate English into Bengali, and Bengali into English. He was the darling of his mother and the hope of his father. Every Saturday his favorite dishes and sweetmeats were prepared against his coming home, and the Sunday passed in listening to his tales of Calcutta and its wonders. Well was it for the boy that he had not his mother's petting all the week.

The second son, Prionath, was about eight, a merry laughing boy just able to read easy words. During the rainy season paper kites absorbed his heart; at other times his tops,

fishing-rods and pigeons formed the delights of his play-hours. Excepting when he was asleep, his presence at home afforded little satisfaction. Restless, active, domineering, he plagued his mother and aunt, teased Kamini and worried Boshouto. In his father's old aunt, however, he always found an unfailing friend. It was she who petted and spoiled him. After every misdemeanor he fled to her, and, big as he was, he always nestled in her arms, while the old woman sheltered him from the slaps he so richly deserved.

Kamini, the youngest, a child of four, was a very sweet little girl. She had glorious eyes. Very pretty did she look with her black hair nicely tied up, and her tiny *saree*, or dress, properly arranged—a veritable little woman. Her prattle was charming, and whenever she lisped out any sentence unusually long, or tried a new and difficult word, her mother's heart leaped for joy. "Just listen to Toki," she would say; for Toki was the name of endearment by which the child was called. Kumari dearly loved her, girl

though she was, and even the pundit, her father, was very fond of her.

Kumari had these three children living, but she had lost four others when infants. This is the case with most Hindoo women; indeed, generally speaking, for one they have living two are among the dead. And, sad though it be to think of the tears of the sorrowful mothers, yet we cannot but rejoice at the knowledge that thousands and thousands of little ones have thus passed away from these dark and dreary homes into the full blaze of the splendor of the throne of God.

Jodunath and his wife, Prosonno, come next. Jodunath was a younger brother of the pundit. He was a young man about thirty, without the abilities of his elder brother, yet like him quite a gentleman. He had a situation in one of the Calcutta offices, and earned eighty rupees* monthly. Prosonno was a young woman of twenty. She was good-tempered and affectionate in disposition, and little Kamini seemed to love her quite as much as she did her mother. From

* About forty dollars.

her birth the little creature had been continually with Prosonno, and almost the very first words she had learned were "*Boro Bow*" (chief wife), the name by which Prosonno went in the household. There was the best understanding between the sisters-in-law. Every one loved Prosonno; even that little rogue, Prionath, after plaguing her to the utmost degree, would go and throw his arms round her, and be forgiven and caressed. But loved as she was, Prosonno had one cause of sorrow—a child had been denied her. Puja (religious rite) after puja had been performed, a pilgrimage had even been undertaken, but still the longed-for blessing was withheld. Poor Prosonno! she feared her husband's love on this account was passing from her.

The next member of the family was Boshonto. She was the widow of a brother younger than Jodunath. She was only eighteen, but a magnificent woman. Tall, large-limbed, large-eyed, fair, slow and languid in her movements, there was something majestic and fascinating about her. Her

husband had died three months before, and her face looked very sad oftentimes. But on her features there was not that look of strong despair so often visible on the face of Hindoo widows, for a hope glowed within her heart. She looked forward to having a baby of her own—a child to gladden the dreary years of her widowhood. She wished for a boy, and can we wonder at that? What good would a daughter be to her? In a few years she would have to part with her, sending her into a dark and, perhaps, joyless future. But a boy would be her own, her very own, as long as she lived. He would always care for her, always support her, always live with her. His young wife would be to her as a daughter, and his children would be brought up by her as if they were her own. Pleasant were Boshonto's day-dreams, and many were the prayers she offered to the gods entreating the blessing of a son.

The aunt, Taramoni, belonged to the old school. She was a genial old lady, tall, dark, with bright eyes and gray hair. She always had a pleasant word for every one, the whole

family venerated her and her influence on all was good. The children were much loved by her; indeed, she indulged them too much. She was considered a very holy woman, and had been on pilgrimage to Juggernath, to Gya, to Benares and other shrines. She ate only once a day, and much of her time was spent in devotions. But the house was all the brighter for her presence, and the whole village too. An old widow, she had the privilege of going about among the neighbors, and whenever any sickness occurred, the pundit's aunt was sent for, and by her knowledge of native medicines, many of which are really excellent, she was often able to give relief. In quarrels, too, she was often called in to arbitrate, and her decisions, sensible always, were generally accepted.

The servant was a distant relation of the family, a Brahmani and a widow. She cooked for them, brought their water, went to the bazaar and made their purchases, and did whatever else was wanted in and about the house. She was kindly treated, and provided with all she required in the way of

food and clothing, in return for her services, and not unfrequently would the pundit tell his wife to give poor Herani a four-anna bit, that she might have a few pice* to spend on anything she liked.

Such were the members of the family of Rajkumar Bhattacharjya. Now for the house itself. It was a large, upper-roomed, brick-built house, in the shape of a double quadrangle. Entering by a doorway from the south, you might see on the right hand the household temple, a large room with a niche in the wall, and an ugly idol in the niche. The other three sides had a verandah running all round, and small rooms opening into the verandah. Opposite the doorway, on the upper story, were latticed windows, through which the women might look down into the courtyard at any festivities which might be going on. On the left side a flight of steps led up to the reception-room, which extended along the whole of one side of the

* The anna is a sixteenth part of a rupee; the pice, a twelfth part of an anna. The four-anna piece is worth about twelve cents.

house. A dark passage beyond the steps led into the second court, and gave access to the women's domains. Here there were upper rooms on only two sides of the square; the other two afforded terraces for walking upon in the evenings. Down below were the kitchen, the cow-house and two or three rooms which were used chiefly for stores. Herani had one where she kept her few possessions. A back door gave access to an enclosed tank surrounded by a few flowering plants. The whole house was exceedingly comfortable, according to native ideas of comfort.

When the pundit and his brother were at home, much of their time was spent in the reception-room, sleeping or talking with their neighbors. This room was fitted up with mattresses and cushions upon which to recline. A few old worthless pictures, picked up in the curiosity-shops which abound in Calcutta, ornamented the walls, and a chandelier, which had seen its best days and was lighted up on grand occasions, hung from the roof. The women very rarely penetrated into this outer court. Old Taramoni sometimes

came and talked with her nephews, but generally even she kept within the inner court.

The mornings were spent by the women in bathing, attending to their household affairs, helping Herani in cooking and eating their mid-day meal. About one or two o'clock all the business was over for a while; then they slept or looked over their jewels, and the younger women oiled and tied up their long dark tresses—wealth which an Englishwoman might envy—with numberless strings called *dori*, twisted by them out of their own fallen locks. About six o'clock the preparations for the evening meal commenced; by eight or nine o'clock it was cooked and eaten. And then on clear, bright nights the women would sit on the terrace, and sometimes some of the neighbors from the village close by would come in, and gossip, the delight of Hindoo women, would be retailed in abundance, diversified now and then by a fairy tale. As sleep overcame them, one after another would retire into the verandah, lie down as they were dressed, and go to sleep. On cold nights the inner rooms

were chosen in preference to the verandah. These inner rooms were fitted up with *toktaposes*, or wooden bedsteads.

Monotonous is the life of a bird in its cage, yet it is scarcely more monotonous than the life of a Hindoo woman of high caste in her husband's house. While she is a child in the home of her father, she may visit the neighbors, and even go into the village close by, but in her husband's house she is kept a perfect prisoner. Her days glide on in a ceaseless round of domestic duties, varied only by an occasional quarrel or the low gossip of the old women of the neighborhood. No existence, save that of a captive doomed to perpetual imprisonment, can be more dull, colorless and unintellectual.

CHAPTER II.

BOSHONTO'S HOPE.

ONE Saturday evening, as the pundit and his brother came home, Prionath was at the station ready to greet them. He brought good news, and boy-like was in great haste to tell it. As soon as he saw them step down from the carriage he shouted out :

“The *Choto Bow* (younger wife) gave birth to a boy yesterday morning.”

“That is well,” said the pundit. “Happy is my poor dead brother, since a son has been born to keep up his memory. But what sort of a boy is it, Prionath?”

“Oh, a fine-looking boy, father, with very black hair, bright eyes and a fair face.”

No mention was made of the mother ; she was but a secondary consideration.

The two brothers walked to their home,

accompanied by the thoughtful Premchand and the merry Prionath. Premchand condescended to let down some of his dignity and really ran a race with his younger brother. It was a beautiful evening in February, the Indian spring-time—certainly the loveliest period of the Indian year. The air was fresh and balmy, the sky of a pale blue, with light transparent clouds like silver webs stretching over it here and there. The mango trees were laden with blossoms, filling the air with fragrance. Every tree was budding, and the flush of tender green over all was exquisite. The spirit-like voice of the *kokil*, the Indian cuckoo, might be heard at intervals. Indeed, it was the perfection of beauty. No wonder that one of the sweetest and most common Bengali names for women, Boshonto, is also the name given to this lovely season of the year.

When they had entered the inner court of the homestead, Kumari came forward and met her husband with the words:

“Has Prionath told you the good news?”

“Yes,” he said; “let us see the child.”

She took them to a little shed, erected in the courtyard—a lean-to it might be called—put aside the mat door and pointed within. There, in a place hardly fit for a goat, on the mud floor, was poor Boshonto, looking pale and exhausted indeed, but very content, with the babe on her lap. Beside her was a large wood fire, for such is the custom with the natives of India. The pundit and his brother spoke kindly to the poor girl, and each dropped a gold mohur into the hand of the unconscious child. Then the mat door was lifted back to its place, and Boshonto was left alone with the great wood fire and her baby.

For a week she stayed night and day in her dark hole, getting only occasional glimpses into the outer world when the nurse came to attend to her wants. After eight days she was allowed to leave the shed and take her child and lay it in the verandah in the sun. Its cradle was a large *soorp*, or winnowing fan. After being rubbed over with mustard oil, the little one was put out in the sun every day in this cradle. Bo-

shonto herself could not enter any room nor do any household work. No one might touch her, nor might she touch any one. The child might be handled and caressed by the members of the household, but contact with the mother had a defiling effect. Little Kamini ran up to caress her the day she first came out of her shed, but the child was hastily drawn away and made to bathe that the pollution might be removed. She was ceremonially unclean, and could not be cleansed until the expiration of twenty-one days. Strange it is to see among these people many of the old ceremonial laws of the Jews. All these twenty-one days Boshonto sat in the sun beside her baby, keeping away the flies and mosquitoes, and at night she retreated with her child into the shed. Yet she was very happy. She had a baby-boy, her own, all her own. No one could claim him from her.

On the twenty-first day after the child's birth there was a domestic festival. Boshonto was then purified. The process of purification was singular. Her nails were cut,

her hair tied up, she put into a palanquin, the bedding having been taken out, and carried to the Gauges, a distance of six miles. The bearers waded into the stream with their burden as far as they could go, and the sacred water gushed in, around and upon her, shut up in her dark box. She was then carried back all those six miles in her wet clothes, and such was the efficacy of the bath that from that time she was reckoned ceremonially clean. The neighbors were feasted with sweetmeats of different kinds. Puja was performed to the goddess Shoshti, the pundit himself officiating. And now Boshonto was free of the house, and could go where she liked. Prosonno was peculiarly pleased, for with her caressing nature it had been a hard thing for her to refrain from all demonstrations of affection. Boshonto, too, was glad, for now she could take her share of household work.

Week after week passed by, and the boy grew splendidly. Native children, freed from the restraints of clothing, seem to grow and get the use of their limbs much more

rapidly than English children. A primitive sort of swing was put up for him in the verandah of the inner court, made of coarse network, fastened by two ropes to the roof. A mat was laid on the network, and a bunch of colored balls hung above from the two ropes. In this mat the child was placed and daily swung to sleep. He was soon able to kick about and crow and laugh. He learned to know his mother surprisingly soon, and would follow her about everywhere with his beautiful black eyes. Oh how poor Boshonto loved her boy! Her whole soul seemed absorbed in him. She was jealous of her child. Kumari and Prosonno could not take him without her watching them most eagerly. Prionath was the terror of her life. He would often rush in, catch up the baby and run away with him, just to annoy the mother. At such times Boshonto used to get very angry, and then the boy always took refuge with Taramoni. His mother would scold him, but Taramoni would invariably fold him in her arms, and then no one dared to say a word.

Every one loved the poor little fatherless boy. The pundit, when he came home on Saturday evenings, used to carry him out into the village when he went to have a little gossip with the neighbors. He had loved his brother, and in this child he saw his brother alive again. He told Boshonto he would regard the child as his own son, and that in every respect he should be on a level with Premchand and Prionath. Rarely indeed did Saturday afternoon come round without his bringing some toy for the little one—a bright red ball, a brilliantly-green parrot, a fantastically-colored mud horse, a rag doll, or anything else he chanced to meet on his way home.

Six months passed, and the day for naming the baby came. It was quite a holiday. A Brahmin astrologer was sent for. The pundit informed him of the day, the hour and the moment of birth. The astrologer then cast the child's horoscope. The paper was handed to the pundit, the child's natural guardian, and the Brahmin received his fee, five rupees. Boshonto was naturally curious

to know the destiny of her child. She had heard a strange story of a god who always, on the sixth night after birth, approaches the unconscious child and writes its future on the babe's forehead. In confirmation of this story, a legend was told of a certain king who went out hunting. Somehow he became separated from his attendants, and night coming on, he took refuge in the house of a poor laborer. He was sheltered and provided with such accommodation as they had. The laborer had had a son born six days before. That night the king, perhaps owing to the poor bed or to the mosquitoes, could not sleep. Lying awake, therefore, he saw, about midnight, the god enter and write something on the child's forehead. The writing was to this effect, that at the end of twelve years the boy would be killed by a lion. The next morning the king told this to the father and went his way. The child grew up a fine, steady, spirited boy. When the twelve years were nearly completed, the king remembered his adventure, and, anxious to outwit the angel of destiny, sent a guard to bring the child to

the palace, charging them to take every care of the boy during the journey. A palanquin was sent for him. In it one of the attendants happened to put a shield, the boss of which was a lion's head. The boy knew of the writing which the king had read upon his forehead, and, spirited lad as he was, as soon as he was shut up in the palanquin and spied the lion's head, he doubled his little fist and said, "Ah, is it you who threatened to kill me? I'll strike you." He struck the lion's face; the spike which finished off the boss entered his hand, and there in the palanquin he bled to death, so that when they reached the palace and opened the doors they found a dead child. The destiny had been fulfilled.

Often had Boshonto pondered this story, and stroking her child's forehead, had wondered what destiny was written there in invisible characters. She hoped the horoscope would throw some light on her boy's future life. Great was her joy, therefore, when the pundit told her that from the conjunction of planetary influences at the time of his birth the astrologer predicted a life of happiness

and prosperity. Relieved in mind, her heart partook of the gladness of the day. Again were the neighbors invited; again were great plates of sweetmeats made and bought. The little one was arrayed in gossamer clothes for the first time in his life. A chain of silver circled his waist and tinkling anklets were put on his little feet; a necklet of charms enclosed in cases of gold and a pierced gold coin were placed round his neck; on his head was a curious cap, resembling a fool's cap with us. The pundit performed puja, and then the child was fed with a little boiled *atub* rice—rice grown on an island near Saugor, and considered sacred. All the relatives and friends assembled, and each one presented the boy with a piece of money or some toy; so they feasted. On this day the child received his name, Hurish Chondro.

That night Boshonto, lulling her boy to sleep, had a bitter cry. She thought of his father and of the pride he would have felt in his child on that day, and in the beautiful poetical language of the people she chanted between her bursts of tears:

“O my beloved, sun of my soul, star of my heart, lord of my affections, why didst thou go away? Did I not make thee happy? Did I not love thee? Was I not always near thee to comfort thee when thou wast weary? Why, then, didst thou not stay to name thy little boy? His eyes, his mouth, his nose, his forehead, all resemble thine. But, alas for him! he will never see his father’s face!”

While she was crying, Prosonno came up and caressed her, but this made the poor girl’s grief only the more violent. At length it sobbed itself to silence, and Boshonto fell asleep, holding her baby-boy tightly clasped in her arms.

CHAPTER III.

THE BREAK OF DAWN.

ONE Sunday afternoon Premchand was more than usually absorbed in his books. The weather was cool, so the boy, instead of sitting in the reception-room, had stretched himself full length on a mat spread on the terrace in the open sunlight. Boshonto was there, too, with her boy. The child had fallen asleep. She had employed herself during his slumber in combing, oiling and arranging her long black hair. This work being over, and not feeling sleepy, she had nothing to do, so she crept close to Premchand and asked him what he was reading.

“The story of Sacontola,” brusquely replied the boy.

“Read me a little, Premchand,” she said, coaxingly.

Had it been Prosonno, the boy would doubtless have complied at once and read her the whole story, but Boshonto's sorrow had made her proud, shy and reserved; she did not easily win love. Since her baby's birth, however, she had been more gentle and loving to the family, yet there was something about her which separated her from the rest. It was this that made Premchand pay no attention to her request. He went on quietly with his reading. Again she asked him, and this time backed her request with the promise of some sweetmeats. Premchand was not insensible to a bribe of this kind, so he began and read her the first two chapters. Very eagerly did she listen while he read about the Rajah Dushmanto and his hunting expedition—about the little fawn and its rescue—the beautiful hermitage with its lovely flowers and its fearless deer—the three young girls Sacontola, Anosuya and Priomboda, and their merry talk while watering their flowers—about the rajah's meeting with Sacontola, their mutual attraction and the gift of the ring, the inscription on which was imme-

diately read by Anosuya and Priomboda—the amusing conversation between the rajah and his friend Madhoba—and finally, the sending off of Madhoba to manage the affairs of the kingdom, while the rajah stayed behind to try and win the peerless Sacontala as his wife.

Here Premchand stopped, being tired, and threw the book down. Boshonto took it up and looked longingly at the mysterious signs. But the key was not hers; she could not unlock the gates of the hermitage and revel amidst its brightness and beauty, nor could she hear for herself the bird-like chatter of the three friends. A thought suddenly struck her: “Oh, if I could but read!” But how was it to be managed? Premchand was out of the question. Little prig as he was, he despised the “female mind,” as he was wont to term it, and would have laughed at poor Boshonto if she had ventured to make known to him her wish. At present she could bear no ridicule. She then thought of bribing Prionath during the week to get her a spelling-book and give her a few lessons. After

she had resolved on this, she got Premeland his sweetmeats. He was satisfied with the payment for his trouble, and as the sun was now not very far from setting, he put up his books and sauntered away to join the neighbors in their evening gossip.

The next day, when Prionath returned from the morning school, Boshonto called him aside and put some sweetmeats she had cooked for him into his hand; they were deliciously flavored and quite hot. The boy was surprised at her kindness, but made no remark, and ate the titbits with great relish. Then she began questioning him about his lessons, and asked him to show her his books. Step by step she went on coaxing, and ended at length by giving him some pice for a spelling-book, adding two for himself that he might buy a beautiful red painted top. The boy thought, "It will be long before Hurish wants a spelling-book; however, it is no business of mine." That afternoon he went to the schoolmaster, and presenting the pice, asked for a copy. "What has become of yours?" asked the schoolmaster. The child,

with the unscrupulousness of a Bengali boy, and without the slightest hesitation, said, "I dropped it into a ditch this morning on my way home from school." The master handed him the book, and he brought it home to Boshonto, giving it to her at a moment when no one was by.

She now set herself to learn the alphabet, bribing Prionath to tell her the letters. Sometimes she would promise him sweetmeats, sometimes she would cook him a favorite dish, sometimes she would give him some pice. It was slow work at first. Learning to repeat the alphabet was easy enough, but it was not easy to remember the forms of the different letters. She got on, however, slowly but surely, and with Prionath for her only teacher and confidant, she contrived to go right through the book.

What was she to read now? Prionath, merry, playful fellow as he was, had not yet got beyond this himself. Indeed, at the school no other book was used, the boys leaving the school as soon as they had mastered it and the first book of arithmetic.

One day—it was Sunday again—when Premchand was busy over his books in the verandah, she ventured near the boy and asked him to let her look over them. He was in an amiable mood and permitted her. There was that delightful Sacontala with its green cover. How pleased she felt at being able to spell out the name! The key fitted into the lock; soon she would be able to turn it. She opened the book, but, alas! she could make nothing of it. She next tried another; that, too, seemed incomprehensible. So in despair she thought she would confide her secret to Premchand and ask his advice. She was at a loss to know how to begin. At last she said:

“Premchand, do women ever learn to read?”

“Sometimes. All English ladies can read, and some of them have written books. But Bengali women are stupid.”

“I want to tell you something, Premchand. No one knows it yet but little Priornath. I have been trying to learn. I have gone through the spelling-book, and now I

don't know what to read ; your books seem to me too difficult."

"I should think so. But have you really learned the letters?"

"Yes, Premchand ; only try me."

She produced her book, and satisfied even the fastidious boy. He was disposed at first to laugh at her, but the love of patronizing was strong in him. So he went away to the men's apartments, and from some hidden corner dragged out an old tattered copy of the third part of a story which he had long ago thrown aside. He brought it, and came and sat down beside her, and gave her a lesson. Very proud did Boshonto feel when she found she could easily read about "the good boy and the bad boy," and heartily did she laugh at the petulance and willfulness of "the bad boy, Beni." Prosonno came upon them while thus employed. She expressed her surprise and vexation. But a few loving words set all right, and she sat down with them and began to listen. After the lesson was over, Premchand, delighted to show off even to women, began to read to them Sacon-

tola. Bright was that hour to the poor women. They forgot the present in the magical story of the past. He read to them of the loves of Sacontola and Dushmanto, of the curse of the fakcer, of Sacontola's loving and sorrowful farewell when leaving the hermitage for the court. The story of the little fawn pulling her back interested them greatly. The interview with the rajah, his strange forgetfulness, the discovery of the loss of the ring, the distress of Sacontola, her being caught away by the Apsaras, the finding of the ring by the fishermen, the removal of the spell from Dushmanto, his grief and long search for his beloved Sacontola, his coming upon the child and its mother unexpectedly,—all charmed Boshonto and Prosonno. When Premchand left them, after eating the sweetmeats which Boshonto had provided, Prosonno said to her sister-in-law :

“How nice it would be to be able to read such stories to one's self! I think I should like to learn.”

“Do,” said Boshonto, “let me teach you the first five letters to-day.”

And so the first lesson was given.

Slowly but steadily did they progress. Boshonto taught Prosonno all she knew, and she herself, by repeatedly bribing Premchand, managed to get a weekly lesson. She could soon read pretty well. Premchand was generally commissioned every fortnight to bring her a book from Calcutta. Alas! the books he brought, purchased from the native hawkers, were in vile type and getting up, and viler still in character. To Boshonto, however, who knew no better, they were treasures. Wonderful was it to see how life changed to both Boshonto and Prosonno now! As the increasing light in the east changes the aspect of all things around, so life changed for them with the acquisition of the delightful art of reading. They now both looked forward to the hour when their household duties would be over, that they might turn to their books, which were opening up a fresh world of interest to their awakening minds. The Saturday too was anticipated, for it brought Premchand, with his ready help and fresh purchases. He had begun to take a

real interest in their progress and a true delight in teaching such eager learners. Kumari knew of the reading, but though she did not join in it, she made no opposition. The pundit and his brother were ignorant of it. It is wonderful how little the men of a Bengali household often know of the daily life and occupations of the women.

CHAPTER IV.

BOSHONTO'S GRIEF.

IT was the rainy season. Vegetation was most abundant and beautiful. Wherever there was a garden plot, the lovely "fragrance of night" might be seen with its snowy blossoms. Over every hedge the large white-moon flower opened with the setting sun and made the night beautiful. The tanks were covered with the white and crimson lotus. Other smaller water-flowers starred with their tiny yet beautiful blossoms every bit of standing water. The rice-fields were like green seas round Gopalpore, gladdening the eye with their luxuriance and refreshing cool color. Not a day passed without its heavy shower, but in the intervals there were rich gleams of sunlight and glorious glimpses of blue sky, while the sunsets were awful in their wondrous beauty.

Beautiful is the rainy season in India, but treacherous in its beauty. The body becomes strangely enfeebled, languor and weariness take the place of activity and energy, and diseases of fearful malignity prevail.

One morning in September, when little Hurish was about two years and a half old, his mother was alarmed by seeing him look very languid. He would not run about and play, but just clung to her and fretted. Poor Boshonto was dreadfully alarmed, and her alarm increased when, about noon, strong fever came on. It was Saturday, and the coming of the pundit was anxiously desired. How slowly the hours sped! but at last he came, and immediately sent for the native doctor of the village. The doctor looked at the child, felt his pulse and said it was a bad case, but that he would undertake to cure the boy if twenty rupees were paid down to him at once. He got the money, uttered some *mantras*,* gave the child some medicine and promised to come again in the morning. But

* Prayers which are supposed to have the power of charms.

when morning dawned the child was worse. The terrible epidemic fever of Bengal had seized on him—that fever which, like the tiger, lurks in the jungles and morasses. Heavily did that day pass. On Monday he was still worse. The pundit and his brother did not go to Calcutta, but sent Premchand alone, charging him to make excuses for their absence. All through that day little Hurish lay in a state of semi-unconsciousness. His mother's voice alone had power to rouse him, and that for but a few moments. Toward evening he died, calmly and quietly, in poor Boshonto's arms.

Who can describe her agony then? She became frantic in her anguish, tearing her hair, beating her breasts and wailing most piteously :

“O my bird, why have you left me? Did I not love you? Were you not to me as sunlight to the earth? My little bird, my cherished, petted little bird, why have you flown away? Ah me! I am a most unhappy woman! My husband first left me, and now my little child has gone away. What sin did

I commit in a former state that I should be so heavily punished in this?"

And so it went on, bursts of heartbreaking weeping intermixed with such words of sorrow. Kunnari and Prosonno tried to comfort her, but what comfort had they to give? "It was written on your forehead; you cannot alter it; why, then, grieve so?" She would not listen to them, but pushed them away and recommenced her wail over her dead baby.

As soon as the child was ascertained to be really dead, preparations were commenced for the burning. The pundit went and bought the new cloth, the mat of *Kusa* grass, the rice, the ghee,* and the sandal-wood powder. Boshonto was forced to give up the loved little body; it was washed, anointed with ghee, smeared with sandal-wood powder, wrapped in pure white cloth and laid on the mat of *Kusa* grass. The rice was boiled, and a new little cot having been procured, the child was placed thereon. And now all was ready; Boshonto had only to consent to

* Butter made from the milk of buffaloes.

the parting. During all the preparations she had been sitting as if stupefied, looking on and saying nothing, but now again her grief found its way. She screamed in her agony, forbade them to remove her child, and the united force of Kumari and Prosonno and some of the neighbors was scarcely sufficient to hold her back. At last, however, the little cot was lifted and borne away amidst a tempest of wailing.

On reaching the burning-place, six miles distant, a funeral pile was erected. Half the boiled rice was scattered by the wayside for the crows, half made into a funeral cake and placed on the pile with the child. The pundit, after repeating some *mantras*, fired the pile; the flame shot up into the darkness (it was now nine o'clock), and in a short time the little loved, petted body was reduced to a heap of ashes. The two uncles and those who assisted bathed in the stream, changed their clothes and returned to their homes.

Poor Boshonto! how desolate she felt! For more than twenty-four hours she lay in

the courtyard overwhelmed with grief; she would touch no food nor allow a drop of water to pass her lips. Her hair was disheveled, her face quite altered, swollen with weeping and with dark circles formed under her haggard eyes. Her voice, too, became hoarse with continual crying. On the second day a heavy shower of rain fell; this forced her to get up and go into the house, and soon sheer faintness compelled her to eat her joyless portion. By degrees she began to go about as usual, with her eyes streaming, while every now and then her bitter wail might be heard coming from some empty room, or, sitting along with others, at unexpected times her anguish would find vent in a sudden cry, startling to those not used to it. With Hindoo women every feeling finds outward expression; the conventionalities of society teach us to "fold the robe o'er secret pain," to smile while the heart is breaking within. Which is better? The books were neglected; life became to her a burden. Sometimes she threatened to drown herself, sometimes to throw herself down from the

terrace, but her instinctive love of life saved her in these hours of frenzy.

We, to whom life and immortality have been brought to light by our Saviour Jesus Christ, little understand the hopeless agony of a Hindoo mother's heart. When our darlings leave us, though our arms may ache to hold their little forms again, yet we are content, knowing that the good Shepherd has gathered our lambs in his loving arms. We feel that they are better off with him in his sweet and blessed fold than with us in this world of darkness and sorrow, and we look forward with joy to the time when Christ will restore our loved ones to us, even as he restored her son to the widow at the gates of Nain. But when a Hindoo mother loses her child, she has no such thoughts to comfort her. The child was once hers, a part of her very self; she rejoiced in it, but now it is gone; all is completely at an end; she will never see it any more. It is in every sense lost—lost never to be found. And so she tries to forget it—to forget it as we forget some jewel which we once thought much of,

but which was one day irrecoverably lost, stolen by thieves or dropped by the wayside.

O God of infinite compassion, who didst pity Rachel mourning for her children and refusing to be comforted, pity the women of India, and let the light of thy glorious gospel speedily lighten their darkness! And thou who didst yearn over Ephraim bemoaning himself in anguish when his brave sons were cruelly slain, let thy heart yearn over the men of India when they too mourn sadly and hopelessly over the destruction of their brightest hopes!

CHAPTER V.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

ONE day, some months after the death of the child, a neighbor came in, brimming with news. She sat down, and the talk began :

“Have you heard of the robbery at Kashinauth’s?”

“No ; what about it?”

“Well, last night, when they were all asleep, somebody entered the house and took off all the ornaments from the Little Bow.”*

“Did she not wake?”

“Gopal’s mother says she remembers hearing the girl moving restlessly ; she drew her close to her and hushed her, but she knows nothing more. This morning, when they got up, they found the Bow without any

* Son’s wife.

ornaments; her ear-rings, anklets, bracelets, necklets and waist-chain all gone."

"At how much do they reckon the loss?"

"Forty rupees, they say. The ornaments were all silver, but very heavy. The waist-chain must have weighed fifteen rupees."

"Strange! Some one in the house must have committed the theft."

"So I say, but they think it could not have been so. Thieves must have entered from without, for the house-door was found broken open."

"That may have been done for a blind. I don't like that Gopal. I think he is a bad boy. I suspect he has been gambling lately, and must have been in want of money."

"Who knows? This is a strange world. Everything is changing. Have you seen Bungshi Baboo's Bow since she returned from Calcutta?"

"No; has she come back?"

"Yes; she returned on Friday. She was at home six months, and what do you think? she has learned to read and to do fancy-work."

“Astonishing! Have you seen any of her work?”

“Yes. She has brought her husband a pair of slippers and her father-in-law a cap, both worked by herself, and she says that in her father’s house every one is learning to read and work.”

“Wonderful! wonderful! How do they learn?”

“An English lady goes twice a week to teach them, and a native teacher, a learned woman, goes every day. The Bow says this English lady is about twenty, and not married.”

“Not married! What can her parents have been thinking about to allow her to be unmarried at such an age?”

“Oh, Oomoo says English parents have nothing at all to do with the marriage of their daughters, and that they never marry young, as we do. They generally marry when they are eighteen or twenty, and sometimes when they are even thirty, and then they only marry from love.”

“Strange people they must be! But tell

us about this English girl. What does Oomoo say she is like?"

"She is fair, with brown eyes and brown hair. And Oomoo says she has such a pleasant laugh and says such winning words."

Here poor Boshonto was aroused, and said, "I wish I could see her."

"Oomoo says she has asked her to come here and teach us all."

"Do you think she will come?"

"How can I tell? I hope she may, for I have never seen an English lady, even at a distance. But I must go now, for it is time to begin cooking."

So, having exhausted her stock of gossip, the old woman took her departure.

Some days passed. Boshonto often thought of the English girl with her pleasant laugh and wished she could see her. Prosonno longed to look at the work and learn how to do it. Kumari's curiosity also was aroused.

At last, one Thursday, Taramoni, who happened to have been out, came home in a state of great excitement :

"What do you think? That English lady

about whom Hecralal's mother told us the other day is at Bungshi Baboo's."

"Have you seen her?" said the three women together.

"Yes; she is very sweet. She looked at me so lovingly and spoke to me so kindly. She must be like the angels. And she has brought beautiful work with her, and pictures—oh, such wonderful pictures! She has a portrait of the queen of England, and, wonderful to say, she is *our* queen too. She is a widow now."

"Alas! poor woman!"

"Her husband died two years ago, and she loved him very dearly. But she has several children, princes and princesses. She has also two sons-in-law and one daughter-in-law who is very beautiful."

"Could you not ask the lady to come here, Pese Ma?" said Boshonto.

"Do! do!" called out Kumari and Prosonno. "Tell her we cannot go to see her, so beg of her to come and see us."

Taramoni departed on her errand, and the women waited in eager expectation. At

length, after half an hour had passed, the lady was seen approaching, followed by a long train of all the boys and girls of the place. "Come in! come in!" said the women, and they led her straight to the upper verandah looking down on the women's court. Kumari unceremoniously turned out the children, but admitted several women who came from the neighboring houses through back ways. Twenty eager faces crowded round the fair English girl, and in five minutes she had won all their hearts. Little Kamini was admired and caressed; Prosonno condoled with on her childless condition; and the pitying look with which the story of Boshonto's sufferings was heard went to the desolate widow's heart.

Kumari and Prosonno were full of questions. The work was exhibited. Beautiful slippers, rich with glowing roses; caps, brilliant with crimson cherries twisting round their borders; comforters, soft and warm, the delight of Hindoo gentlemen; rugs, hookah-carpets, etc. And then the pictures. A photographic album was produced. The portrait



The Zenana Lady.

of the queen elicited no end of questions. They were told how wisely she ruled her nation, how prudently she brought up her children, how devoted she had been to her husband in life, and now that he was gone, how she looked forward to meet him in a better land. A colored picture of the sweet princess of Wales was much admired; her lovely blue eyes and golden hair, the flowers in her hair and the diamonds round her neck, were all commented on. Picture after picture was shown to them, and something told about each. At length there came a little child sitting on a sofa, a baby of a year old. "Whose child is this?" The question was answered and the remark added: "He is now in heaven." This remark, however, seemed to attract no one but Boshonto, and even she, though an eager light shone in her eye and a question trembled on her lip, let it go unnoticed; so an hour passed away most rapidly and happily. Then the lady said, "I will sing to you." Great was their delight. She read to them a simple Bengali hymn about the happy land and its glories, and then sang. The

women listened eagerly; one old woman wept as she heard it. But Boshonto pressed nearer, entranced; she never forgot some of the lines.

Then came the question, "Will any of you learn to read and work?" Prosonno volunteered, and told all she knew. She was encouraged; a copy of "Gopal Kamini" and a piece of canvas were given to her, and she was taught a simple stiteh. Boshonto would not say anything; it seemed to her improper to be busy and happy when her little boy was reduced to a heap of ashes. Some of the women from the other houses also agreed to learn, and spelling-books and pieces of work were distributed. So the English lady went away, promising to come again in a fortnight. "Be sure you come!" was repeated to her on every side as she left the door.

And she did come; every fortnight did that brave English girl journey to Gopalpore, and Thursday, the day of her coming, was eagerly looked for. Prosonno, having the visit in prospect, prepared diligently, so that she might be able to read some pages

fluently and receive the approving smile and word. "Gopal Kamini" was soon finished; "Phulmani and Karuna" followed. Kumari expressed a wish to learn, and having obtained a small simple book, set to work. Boshonto, the cleverest, held back for a time. At length she also was tempted to read. All were eager to work. Very soon each had worked a pair of pretty slippers—Kumari and Prosonno for their husbands, and poor Boshonto for Premchand, her true friend, but one oftentimes difficult to manage. The women from the neighboring houses were learning also, and every other Thursday used to come to the pundit's, in order to see the English lady and be encouraged and helped by her.

Thus the life that had once been so dim and colorless brightened for these poor women. The gay-colored wools threw a gleam upon their daily paths; the books with their characters peopled the realms of their imagination. It was pleasant to see Kumari, Prosonno and Boshonto sitting on a mat in the verandah with their books and work. They

always read aloud, and Boshonto being the best reader, Kumari and Prosonno would work and listen while she was reading.

The pundit and his brother were now willing that their wives should learn something. Spending much of their time in Calcutta, they had been influenced in their views by the tide of reformation setting in there. Had they made any opposition, all would have gone wrong, for in the hands of the men lie the destinies of the women of India. Would that all were ready to accept the change, and were willing to elevate woman to her true social rank and position!

CHAPTER VI.

PROSONNO'S TROUBLE.

IT was well for Prosonno that she had learned to read and work, for a heavy sorrow was coming—the heaviest a Hindoo woman has to bear, short of losing her husband. She had been married when she was eight years old; four years after that, she had come to her husband's house to dwell, and now eight years had passed and no child had come to gladden her heart. Hindoo men long for a child, especially a son. Without a son they can look forward to no proper funeral obsequies, and as their future happiness depends on the ceremony then performed, this is a matter of great moment to them. Jodunath longed for a boy as much as any of his fellow-countrymen. Often in his anger about some trifling thing he remembered his greater wrong, as he chose to think it, and

abused Prosonno for not bearing him a son. Poor Prosonno! she would have given away every one of her jewels—her sole wealth—if she could thus have procured a son. She envied every woman she saw with a child, and oftentimes bemoaned her fate and cried in her sorrow.

One day Jodunath said, "It is of no use to wait any longer; Prosonno will never be a mother. I must marry another wife if I wish all to go right with me hereafter." The pundit agreed with him, and they determined to begin with telling Prosonno. So calling the women together, they told them what they were going to do. Prosonno said nothing, for childless women always keep their faces covered before their husbands, and may never be seen to speak to them. The pundit said he would send for a 'Ghottock* on going back to Calcutta, to make

* One who is employed by parents to look out for suitable partners for their children. The extreme rigidity of Hindoo custom relating to the early age of marriage, the families with which an alliance is alone permissible, the degrees of consanguinity which must be considered, and the seclusion of all respectable

arrangements. They then left the women to talk over the matter.

As soon as they were gone, Prosonno burst into tears. Then came a storm of indignation against her husband. "He does not love me, the bad man! Ah me! what a sad fate was written on my forehead! Why has not the Almighty given me a son?" So she went on.

The Thursday after this the English lady came. She noticed at once the cloud on Prosonno's usually bright and cheerful face, and asked her what was the matter. She was told. "Yours is a hard case," she said, "but let me tell you two stories about men who had two wives."

She then told her of Rachel and Leah; of Rachel's passionate desire for children, and how, when her desire was granted, her life went. Then of Hannah and Peninnah; of women, which makes a personal acquaintance with them impossible,—all render the employment of such persons expedient, if not in all cases necessary.

As a rule, Hindoos have but one wife, but their having no son is supposed to justify, if not necessitate, the selection of a second.

Hannah's prayer, of God giving her the child for whom she prayed, and of the surrendering of him back to God. Prosonno listened eagerly, and said, "Pray for me, pray very earnestly, that the Almighty would give me seven sons, and if he should do so, I promise you one to be brought up by you and to be made a Christian, if you wish it." She was reminded of Rachel, and told that perhaps God refused her a child out of love. This was a new idea to the poor woman—one she could not readily grasp. It is only Christianity that teaches us that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." To Christians only is it given to see through the disguise worn by blessings when they come to us in the appearance of sorrows.

One Saturday after this, when the Baboos returned, Boshonto contrived to draw Premchand aside and ask him what had been done. Prosonno remained within hearing, of course. He told her that the preliminaries had been settled. The Ghottock had mentioned two or three families where there

were eligible daughters. One in particular, a child of nine or ten, was described as being very pretty. "She was of a yellow color, had a nose like the flower of the sesamum, legs taper like the plantain tree, and eyes large, like the principal leaf of the lotus; her eyebrows extended to her ears, her lips were red like the young leaves of the mango tree, her face was like the full moon, her voice like the sound of the cuckoo, her arms reached to her knees, her throat was like that of a pigeon and her teeth were like the seeds of a pomegranate." The name of this beauty was Juggotariini, and her father was a wealthy man, a Brahmin, of course, for a Brahmin would not marry out of his caste. The Ghottock had gone to and fro between the houses, and the terms of marriage were nearly settled. The bride was to bring with her five hundred rupees' worth of jewels. Premchand said he believed the wedding would come off in a fortnight.

While this conversation was going on with Premchand, the pundit had called his wife into their sleeping-room and told her the

whole story. Woman-like, she showed her sadness in her face. He reproved her for her folly, said his brother ought to marry another wife, since so much of his future happiness depended on it, and told her she must reconcile Prosonno to her sister-wife.

Prosonno was a brave woman. She never spoke to her husband against the marriage. When he told her of it, she listened in silence, then only said, "Do just as you please." Yet every day she had a bitter cry in anticipation of the coming event.

That, however, did not take place as soon as Premchand expected. There were many things to be settled about the gifts on either side, and each party tried to make the best terms. Sometimes it seemed as if nothing would come of it; then, again, the Ghottock would go between, and it would appear definitely settled. At last, after two months of negotiation, all was arranged.

One Saturday evening the pundit told his wife that he and his brother had taken a week's holiday; the marriage would be celebrated that week; to-morrow they were going

to Calcutta and would return on Thursday, bringing the little Bow with them. They must receive her kindly and try to make her happy.

Accordingly, next day the two men started, accompanied by Premchand and Prionath. Prionath was full of glee; he had never been to the great city before, and it was a joy to go now, just when some good feasting and fun were at hand. Poor Prosonno saw them go in silence, but when they had gone, she sobbed and cried most piteously. It was long before she would be comforted. During the five days the men were absent much had to be done. Everything was put in order and a stock of nice things laid in. A number of toys was procured, that the little bride might have something to amuse her. Little Kamini was full of eagerness and curiosity; she seemed to be looking forward to having a playfellow.

Thursday came, and about four o'clock in the afternoon, Kamini, who had been watching, came running in, saying: "They are coming! they are coming!" A carriage

drawn by two wearied ponies stopped at the entrance. The pundit and his brother jumped out first, and then Jodunath lifted out the child-wife. She was followed by a female servant of the family to which she belonged. In another carriage were Premchand, Prionath and two members of the bride's family. The little bride was enveloped in a purple silk *saree*, which left nothing of her visible but her little ankleted feet. Taramoni received her, and led her into the women's court. There all the women gathered round her, for Prosonno even was not without curiosity. They lifted the veil from off her face and made their comments freely. The poor child was frightened, and burst into tears. "I want to go home," was all her cry. Taramoni and Kumari tried to soothe her, and even little Kamini did her best, but it was long before the little one could be comforted.* At last she fell asleep in the arms of the ser-

* Since every girl is married whilst yet a child, and widows are not allowed to marry, widowers and those choosing a second wife can only obtain wives who are mere children.

vant who had come with her. After an hour's sleep she awoke more cheerful, ate the sweetmeats provided for her and looked at the box of toys Kumari had brought. Little Kamini produced her box, and the two children were soon busily engaged comparing each other's toys. Every little girl possesses a box of toys. As she grows older a larger box is substituted for the little one, and these boxes, with their miscellaneous contents, are treasured even by grown-up, married women, and much of their time is spent in arranging and rearranging their possessions. In the course of years these possessions assume a peculiar character. In addition to the little dolls with which the boxes were stocked at first, there may be seen earthen imitations of fruits, winnowing fans, ovens, bits of gay chintz, pieces of colored glass, fragments of broken earthenware—in fact, everything bright and pretty which may have chanced to come in the way.

The bride was really very nice looking. She had large bright eyes; her hair was nicely oiled and tied, and her jewels seemed

quite to weigh her down. Her pretty ankles were circled with silver anklets, and each of her toes had a silver ring. To these anklets and rings silver bells were attached which made music as she walked. A heavy chain of silver was round her waist. A beautiful *chik* or necklace was round her neck, and below it hung a five-stranded chain of gold beads, called a *panchnoli*. Her ears had the usual complement of ear-rings, some of them very beautiful; her arms were covered with bracelets, above which were three kinds of armlets. On her head there was a beautiful yet peculiar ornament, called a *siti*, and in her nose a large ring set with a pearl and two rubies. All these were of gold, for silver is worn only on the waist and feet. She was very different from our white-robed, lovely brides, but yet she looked very pretty. She was much petted during the days she spent at Gopalpore by all but Prosonno, and though every now and then she cried and said she wanted to go home, she was on the whole tolerably happy. After nine days, her father and two elder brothers came to fetch her

home, and very glad she was to go with them. She was too young to realize that she would have to come after a time and stay altogether with her new friends, and with the husband of whom she knew nothing, toward whom her only feeling was one of fear. Poor little Juggottarini! what a dim, hazy future lies before thee! It may be lighted up with love or darkened with the bitterest hate and despair.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHAIN FASTENED IN HEAVEN.

ONE day, some weeks after the marriage, when Kumari, Prosonno, Boshonto and some women from the neighboring houses were busy working and reading, and the English lady was among them, a female singer entered the courtyard and asked if she might sing. She was a stranger at Gopalpore and had evidently come there as an experiment, thinking that her songs might be new to them. She was not mistaken. Hearing these singers is one of the few pleasures which native women have. The books and work were immediately thrown aside, and the lady was asked if she would listen also. She gladly consented, but stipulated that nothing unholy should be sung.

The woman commenced; she had in her

hands two little metal plates, connected by a chain, which she struck together at intervals, so marking time; her voice was clear and full, and every word was distinctly pronounced. She first sang a touching song about the heart, which, translated, ran thus :

“O Heart, although thou dwellest in this clay,
Thou seemst more severed from me every day;
For what I would not, that I do alway.

“The paths of evil-doing become mine;
I drink with eagerness sin’s crimson wine,
Feeling the while the horror of its shine.

“I aim aloft, I stretch my hands on high,
To grasp the moon set in the starry sky.
O Heart, thou bringst me down, and low I lie.

“What shall I do for all the burning smart,
The dreary trouble, thou dost aye impart,
Keeping me back from all I wish, O Heart?

“Wert thou but holy, Heart, thou wouldst not roam
From thing to thing, from land to ocean’s foam,
Seeking the jewel waiting thee at home.

“O Heart, be kind and merciful to me,
Then from this deadly fear I shall be free,
And calmly the Death-angel’s visage see.

“Let me, O Heart, but worship God aright,
Bending most truthfully before his sight,
Then evermore will shine round me his light.

“The hours speed on; death may come any day,
Making thee hasten from these scenes away:
O Heart, not many years hast thou to stay.

“Call thou on Krishna, Heart, ay, call, for he
Will never fail his worshippers; of thee
He will make such a heart as thou shouldst be.”

After this was duly applauded, she began another—the lament of a mother over her child. The Bengali seems untranslatable in its pathos and despair. Hearing it seems like listening to Rachel mourning over her children and refusing to be comforted:

“Why, Gopal, hast thou closed thine eyes?
Alas! alas! my Gopal!
Oh, let me hear thee call out, Mother!
It will revive my fainting heart.
Alas! alas! where shall I go?
Where shall I find my Gopal?
Thy moon-like face has withered away,
And my soul also pines away.”

The singer sang it sweetly and with deep feeling. Boshonto listened until her tears

began to rain down; with a bitter cry she rose up and rushed into one of the inner rooms. "Poor thing! she is crying about little Hurish," said Prosonno. "Let me go and speak to her," said the English lady; "perhaps I shall be able to comfort her." So she went and sat by the broken-hearted mother and began talking to her about her child. By degrees Boshonto became calmer, and told her all about his illness and death; then she dwelt on his winning ways, and repeated many little sayings of his, nothing at all in themselves, but very precious to the mother's heart, and then burst out into a wail, again repeating the words of the lament:

"Oh, let me hear thee call out, Mother!
It will revive my fainting heart."

"Would you like to know where he is?" was asked quietly.

Boshonto stopped her wail, and said, eagerly:

"Oh yes! Do you remember the first day you came, how you showed us the picture of a little child, and said, 'That child is now in

heaven' ? I have often thought of it and wondered what you meant."

"Well, if you will listen to me quietly, I will tell you all about it. We believe there is a place called heaven. It is very far away—how far no one knows, but it is beyond the clouds, beyond the sun, beyond the stars which we see at night. This heaven is a beautiful place—far more beautiful than this country or even England. There is never any night there; it is never cold and never hot, but the air is always soft and pleasant; the river of life flows through it, and there abound fountains of living water. The people who live there are holy people; they are always happy; they never get sick, never die, and we believe that all little children who die go to that beautiful country."

"But I don't understand; what country is this?"

"It is the home of God. God dwells and reigns there."

"But how am I to know that my little boy Hurish has gone there?"

"Our holy book teaches us that all little

children, when they die, go at once to heaven."

"Oh, I wish I believed in your book! Do not grown-up people, when they die, go there too?"

"Yes, if they take the right way. If you wish to go to any house, you cannot reach it unless you take the right way. Should you miss the right path and take a wrong turning, you may wander very far from the house and never reach it at all."

"But you say little children get there?"

"Yes; they have no knowledge, and so God leads them himself, and they cannot miss the right road."

"I wish you would teach me the way. I should so like to go and see my little Hurish again."

Here unfortunately there was an interruption. The singer, having gone through her stock of songs, wished to go away, and came to ask if the lady would give her a few pice. The pice were given, and it was thought best to say nothing more to Boshonto. They went back to the verandah, and the reading and

work proceeded. Before she left, the women were clamorous for a song, so she sang :

“Here we suffer grief and pain,”

explaining each verse. Boshonto drank in the words eagerly, and begged that the verse—

“Little children will be there”—

might be repeated two or three times, that she might learn it by heart.

That night it was very warm. The women lay out upon the terrace and fell asleep under the light of the stars. Boshonto was awake several hours. She looked up at the beautiful sky, and thought of the country which was beyond those stars. “How strange that there the heat of the sun is never felt!” she thought. “It must be a beautiful place. I think the lady spoke of fountains and springs of water. I wish we had some of those lovely fountains and springs here. Our tanks are drying up, owing to the long drought. I should like to read the Christians’ holy book. I think they must have so much comfort. My poor little Hurish! I never before thought of his being in such a beautiful place—never

thought I should see him again. Now, if all this should be true, I may see him again. I wonder if he will put his arms around my neck and kiss me as he used to do? O Hurish, my bird, why did you leave me at all when you were so fond of me? But the lady said there was only one way to heaven, and if I did not find that way, I should not reach heaven, after all. I wish that singer had not come in and interrupted us just then. I should have liked to have heard about the way. I fear I shall not have another opportunity of asking about it, for the lady said something about soon going away."

So thinking, Boshonto lost herself and fell asleep. In her sleep she dreamed she was taken up past the clouds, through a rainbow, past the sun, past the stars, and that through a great gate of gold she entered into the beautiful country. She saw numbers of little children playing about near its fountains of living water. The ground was carpeted with flowers, and there were no snakes lurking amid the blossoms. Each little child was watched by a beautiful angel. As she was

looking at them, wondering if Hurish was there, she saw a little boy just the age of her darling run up to her. As he came nearer she saw it was her lost boy; she clasped him in her arms; she felt his little arms about her neck, his kisses on her lips. In the fullness of her joy she awoke, and, behold, it was a dream. But the stars were still shining brightly, and the light of them brought back the thought of the country beyond.

And so that night a chain was fastened in heaven. One end was held, as it were, by the little boy in the good Shepherd's arms; the other had been caught by the lonely mother on earth. She never lost her hold. The good Shepherd himself drew it closer and closer, until one day, earth having approximated so near to heaven, Boshonto stepped across, and with her child stood in the presence of God.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT TO CALCUTTA.

SOME time after this the pundit told his wife that he wished them all to go to Calcutta for three months, and had made arrangements for their going on the Monday following. What a pleasure for the poor women! They could not expect to see much, but the change was something to which to look forward. They might possibly make some new acquaintances and get a sight of the great city. The week passed by very slowly, and glad were they when the eventful day came. They wished much to go by rail, but the men objected: it would be too public, they said; so two carriages were obtained, and at about four o'clock in the afternoon they set off—the pundit, his brother and the two boys in one; Kumari, Prosouno, Boshonto, Taramoni and little Kamini in

the other. Herani was left behind to take care of the house during their absence.

Very pleasant to all was that drive. There was a sense of exhilaration in going to the great city and catching even a distant glimpse of its splendors. The women were curious, and kept peeping out through the nearly-closed doors. They saw the beautiful cathedral, and wondered what sort of worship that of the Christians could be, since it required such a large building. Among the Hindoos no spacious temples are necessary. The worshipers never congregate to unite in prayer and praise; they go singly, each with his offering. The palace-like buildings of Chowringhee fascinated them. Each carriage as it passed by was peered into, that they might have a sight of its occupants. On and on they went, and at length the princely buildings were all left behind, and they entered the native part of the city. The house was at Jorasanko, not far from the presidency college. The carriages stopped at a doorway, then servants came forward holding thick red cloths in their hands. With these they

formed a curtain on each side, and through the passage thus made the women passed in.

The house was similar to that at Gopalpore, though perhaps newer and better furnished. The reception-room had better furniture, but the women's apartments were the same. They had, however, a staircase by which they could ascend to the roof, which was a great acquisition.

It was evening when they arrived, and everything seemed dreary. The little girl was troublesome, and there was much to be done. At length the evening meal was ready; the men partook first: the weary women had to wait until their lords had done. Such is the barbarous custom of India.

The next day, after the pundit and his brother had gone to their work, there came a long succession of women with wares to sell. First there was the bracelet woman, with her bracelets of colored glass and lac. Little Kamini was gladdened by having a dozen placed on each of her little fat arms. It is true they soon broke, but they were bright and pretty while they lasted. Next was a

woman with a basket of sweetmeats—confections new to Gopalpore. Then the female barber appeared, and all of them had their feet stained crimson with *atta*. After this came a woman with books; she had heard that the ladies of the household were “learned.” So it went on all day, and each newcomer had a bit of gossip to retail. The day passed very rapidly, and in the evening, when it began to grow dusk, the women went up to the roof; from thence they could see the majestic ships lying in the stream. Often and often did they wish they could go on board and see the cabins and other arrangements, but the wish was vain.

Little Kanini could roam at will among the neighboring houses. One day she rushed in to say she had discovered a school for little girls like herself. They were all learning to read and write and sing pretty rhymes; might she go too? Her mother gave her consent, and having dressed her in her pretty little pink *saree*, told her to go. It was a relief to have her out of the house, she had such restless little ways.

The child had now always plenty to tell of what she had learned during the day, and of what her teacher had said to her. Boshonto's curiosity was raised, and she told her to beg the teacher to come in for a few minutes. She came, a comely native woman, and of course was immediately questioned about her family, her income, etc. She answered all their questions good-humoredly, and then in her turn made some inquiries. She was told of Boshonto's sorrow, and said,

"It is a dreadful thing to lose our children."

"Have any of yours died?"

"Three; two of them when little infants, and one, a pretty little girl, when she was seven years old. But my little girl wanted to die."

"Why was that?"

"She said she wished to go to heaven and be with the Lord Jesus Christ. She was ill a long time, and used often to say, 'I want to go to be with Jesus Christ. Heaven is such a beautiful place, and my Lord who died for me is there. I want to go.'"

“How wonderful in a child to speak so!”

“Yes, and I often heard her praying when she thought she was alone. She used to join her little hands together and say, ‘O Lord, wash my heart in thy precious blood. Forgive all my sins and let me go to heaven.’ Often she said to me, ‘Oh, mother, don’t cry; I am going to the Lord who died for us.’”

“You Christians must be a strange people. Who ever heard a child amongst us speaking in that way? And did you not cry when she died?”

“Yes, I cried, but I was comforted too in thinking that she had gone to heaven.”

Boshonto here spoke:

“Do you think you will see your child again?”

“Yes, I know I shall when I go to heaven.”

“How much you must wish to go!”

“Sometimes I do want to go very much, but I must wait until my Lord calls me.”

Saying this, she got up and took her leave of the family.

Long did Boshonto think about all this.

She wanted to read the Christians' holy book, but did not know how to get a copy without exciting suspicion. At last she thought she would ask Premchand; he might be able to tell her how to get one. So one evening she sat down by him and asked him to let her look over his books. Most of them were in English, and he condescendingly informed her of what they were about.

"This is a book on geography," he said.

"Geography! what is that?"

"A description of the earth's surface. By reading this book you would know how many rivers there are in the world, how many cities, mountains and different countries."

"And this book, Premchand?"

"This is on mathematics. Women cannot understand that at all."

"And this little thick book with small print?"

"That the English call a Bible. It is their holy book, their Shaster."

"Have you read it, Premchand?"

"Yes; I am obliged to read it, in order to be able to prepare some of my lessons."

“What sort of a book is it?”

“A very good sort of a book, but you know I don’t believe in it, and for that matter I don’t know that I believe in our Shasters, either.”

“Oh, Premchand, don’t say such a thing!”

“Why not? I learn many things at school which make me see that the Shasters are not true.”

“What things?”

“Why, when an eclipse takes place, the Shasters say it is caused by some giant swallowing either the sun or the moon. That is absurd. When the moon is eclipsed, it is caused by the shadow of the earth falling upon it, and when the sun is eclipsed, the moon comes between the earth and the sun, and that causes the eclipse. Then, again, the earth is round like an orange, but the Shasters say it is flat. And there are numbers of other things said in the Shasters which are equally absurd.”

“Is there anything absurd in the Christian Shaster?”

“I have not seen anything yet. I do not

believe in all the stories, but still I must say there is nothing in it which appears impossible."

"Premchand, I should like to see this book. Could you lend me your copy?"

"Mine is in English, and that you will not be able to read."

"Is it not translated into Bengali?"

"Oh yes, and I dare say I could easily get you one if you gave me the money."

"How much would it cost?"

"The whole Bible would, I think, cost a good deal, but I could get you a New Testament for a few annas."

"Well, here is an eight-anna bit. I have had it a long time, and intended buying several books with it, but I am very curious to see this holy book of the Christians. Do try and get it for me."

"Very good; I will see what I can do tomorrow, but mind you have something nice for me when I bring you the book."

"I will not forget."

Premchand kept his word. He made inquiries among his fellow-students, and found

one who had a Bengali New Testament and was willing to sell it for four annas. Premchand paid the money, and coolly told Boshonto that he had paid eight annas for it, so making a profit of four annas. Besides this, he had the sweetmeats Boshonto had prepared for him.

Very glad was she when she got her book. It was not the gladness of one who feels that he has gained possession of a guide to the way of life, but of one who is curious and has obtained something that will satisfy his curiosity. Perhaps one thing which rejoiced her was the thought that the book might possibly tell her something about the heaven to which her little child was gone.

That very night, when all the rest were sitting on the terrace enjoying the moonlight, Boshonto lighted her lamp and sat down in her room to read. The first chapter of St. Matthew disheartened her. She could make nothing of the list of names. However she went on bravely till she came to the verses telling about the birth of Emmanuel, God with us. "This is wonderful," she thought;

“I suppose this is Christ, the God of the Christians.” She read on about the star and the wise men, about the slaughter of the little ones and the mourning of their mothers. “Poor women! well, they had cause to weep and to refuse to be comforted. Think of having their little children killed before their eyes!” This set her thinking about her little Hurish. She shut the book, extinguished her lamp and went out to enjoy the beauty of the night. The sight of the moon and stars brought back to her mind the country which is very far off.

Rapidly the days passed by. The neighbors used to come in and gossip, and little Kamini, on her return from school, had always much to tell of what she had learned.

“What an old woman this is!” her mother said one day. “She pretends to know more than we do. Just listen to her. Who was the first man, Kamini?”

“Adam.”

“And his wife?”

“Eve.”

“What else do you know?”

“God put them into a garden and told them they might eat of every tree but one, and if they ate of that they should die. Then Satan came like a snake and told them to eat of it, and said they would not die. And they did eat, and so death entered into the world.”

“What a pity they ate that fruit!”

Another day little Kamini said, “Oh, mother, do you know what the rainbow is?”

“No, old woman; can you tell?”

“Yes; I have learned about it to-day. At one time all the people in the world became very wicked, so God said he must destroy them. But there was one good man who had a wife and three sons and their three *Bows*. God said he would not destroy them. So he told him to make a very large ship, and fill it with a great many beasts and birds, and to go into it himself with his family. He built the ship and got all the animals in, then he and his family went in, and God himself shut the door. And then it began to rain; it rained forty days and forty nights. Did you ever hear of such rain? And the water rose fif-

teen hands above the mountains, and all the men and animals died, excepting those in the ship. And after the waters subsided the good man and his family and the birds and beasts came out of the ship. And on that day God put the rainbow in the cloud and told Noah—that was the good man's name—that it was for a sign that the earth should never again be destroyed by water."

"Well, that is a good thing."

"But oh, mother, the teacher told us that one day it will be destroyed by a flood of fire."

"God grant it may not be in our time!"

Many such stories were told by the child every day on her return from school, but usually they awakened little curiosity. Boshonto sometimes wondered if they were got out of the Christians' holy book, but thought it best not to inquire. Every night, however, she read her Testament. She did not understand the chapters about the baptism and temptation of Christ, but some of the others interested her very much. The miracles especially fascinated her; she would sometimes

read them over and over again. "If this Christ had only been in India when my little Hurish was ill and died, he would either have healed him or raised him from the dead, and my boy would now be with me," was her thought when reading about Jairus' daughter. "I should like to know where this *Thakoor* [God] can be found," she thought another time. "I must ask Premchand about it."

So one evening she called Premchand aside, and said :

"I want to ask you something, Premchand. I have been reading the book you bought for me—at least, I have read a little. I want to know who Christ is, and whether he lives in England. I think he must be there, and must give the English such extraordinary power."

Premchand burst out laughing, and said : "Truly women are fools! This Christ is the God of the Christians. They say that he is now in heaven, and yet that he is everywhere present. Have you not read about his death?"

"No; did he die, Premchand?"

“Yes; he was put to death on a cross, like a criminal. Now men are hanged, but then they used to be put to death by being nailed to a cross.”

“But did he do anything wrong?”

“I don’t see that he did. Even the judge said there was no fault to be found in him.”

“Then why did he condemn him?”

“That I can scarcely say. The Jews hated him, and the judge was afraid of them, so he ordered him to be put to death.”

“But he was always so kind; I cannot understand why they hated him.”

“Neither do I. But he said himself that he came into the world to die for the sins of all the people in the world. And he said, too, that he died voluntarily.”

“Well, but you said he was in heaven.”

“Yes; three days after his death he rose from the dead, and after being with his disciples forty days, he went to heaven.”

“You said he was the God of the Christians; do they pray to him?”

“Yes, and they say that whoever believes in him and prays to him will go to heaven,

and that there is no way of being saved but through him.”

“These are strange stories. Tell me more, Premchand.”

“Not I. I am very sleepy, and you have got them all in that book. Read for yourself.”

The boy settled himself to sleep, and Boshonto went to her lamp and her book. That night she read the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of St. Matthew. A feeling of awe came over her as she read. “This Son of man is Christ. He will come one day in a chariot of clouds. I think I shall be frightened every day when I see the clouds. Before him will be gathered all nations. I wonder if I shall be there? I wonder if he will tell me to go away from him to hell, or to go with him to heaven? But why do I think such things? I am not a believer in Christ; my gods are good enough for me.”

So she tried to forget, but often in the visions of the night there came dreams of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.

Their stay at Calcutta had now reached an

end. They were going back to Gopalpore in a day or two, taking little Juggotarini with them. The last few days were very busy and Boshonto had no time to read. Kamini was greatly distressed to leave her school, but Boshonto and Prosonno both promised to teach her, and for this purpose they provided themselves with some easy books. At last everything was arranged, and they set off on their homeward journey.

CHAPTER IX.

DOUBTS.

IT was the month of October, when the great festival of the goddess Durga is celebrated. The pundit and his brother were to be at home for ten days, and owing to his prosperous second marriage, the festivities were to be conducted on an unusually grand scale.

A month previous, orders had been given for the preparation of an image of Durga. The children were in ecstasies when it came home. There was the terrific goddess, ten-armed, each arm grasping a weapon; one leg rested on a lion, the other on the giant Mahisa, whom she was represented as having conquered, and into whose heart a cobra, held by one of her hands, was inserting his fangs. Beside her were her daughters, Soroshoti and

Luckhi, and beyond them, on either side, stood Gunesh with his elephant head, and Kartiek riding on a peaeock. Above them all rose an arch. The whole image was very gay, decked with abundance of gold and silver tinsel, and shining in all the colors of the rainbow. It was placed in the reception-room, and all the neighbors crowded in to see and admire it. But it was not a thing to be worshiped in that stage of its life. It must first be animated with the spirit of Durga.

At length the day came. A multitude of ceremonies were performed, and then the pundit declared that the spirit of Durga had descended into the clay image; and that henceforth it demanded worship. The day after the animation was one of peculiar solemnity. The idol was bathed and sacrifices were offered. On this day all widows fast, as by so doing they expect a special blessing. Boshonto fasted, but she did it with a very sad heart. She remembered doing so twice during Hurish's lifetime with great earnestness, for it was said that she would thus obtain a blessing for him as well as for herself. But

where was the blessing? Had he not been taken away from her, passing into a state of nothingness and gloom? For three days the pujas went on, and every night there was feasting. On the fourth day, after a great round of adorations, the pundit dismissed the spirit of Durga, entreating her to return next year at the time of her worship. The image was then taken up, the women wailing in sorrow at her departure, and was carried away all the six miles to the river, and there thrown in. The pundit went also, and returned, bringing with him some of the river water, with which he sprinkled the women of the household and the people who were gathered in the courtyard.

A day or two after the Durga puja was the Luckhi puja. A basket filled with paddy (rice) and wreathed with flowers was hung up and then worshiped. On the night following the day of the puja, all the family, with the exception of Boshonto, had made arrangements to sit up, in the expectation that at some time the goddess would pass over the house and bless all who were awake. Bo-

shonto's heart was very full of bitterness; she said, "What prosperity can I look for? I have performed pujas innumerable, but I have got no good. The gods and goddesses can do no more evil to me than they have already done."

After the evening meal, Premchand went to her and asked if she would read to him for a little while from the Testament he had got for her. She was surprised at his question, and thinking it was a plan to entrap her into sitting up, after her expressed determination not to do so, she said, impetuously,

"I will not watch for Luckhi."

"But every one is going to sit up, Boshonto."

"Premchand, do you believe Luckhi will come?"

"Not I, indeed. Do you think I am so foolish as to believe in the worship of a basket of paddy?"

"Then why are you going to watch?"

"I don't want to vex my mother; she thinks I shall get some good, and I expect

to be very tired, so do read a little, Boshonto, to while away the time."

"Well, I don't mind reading a little while, but, I tell you, I don't want to watch."

So she went and got her New Testament, and Premchand provided himself with a copy of Vishnu Surma's *Hitopadesha*, in case troublesome inquiries might be made. The chapter was the twenty-sixth of Matthew. She read about the breaking of the alabaster box of ointment, and her comment was: "How kind Jesus always was to poor women!"

Then she read about the Last Supper, and Premchand remarked: "I hear that the Christians, from time to time, eat bread and drink wine in this way in memory of Jesus."

"Have you ever seen it done, Premchand?"

"No; how could I have seen it? I have never been into any of their places of worship, but I mean to go some day."

Then came the story of Gethsemane and its awful agony. Boshonto said, "I suppose Jesus was afraid of dying?"

"Not a bit of it. He need not have died.

He who raised others from the dead, could he not have saved himself?"

"Then why was he going to die, Premchand?"

"He was going to die in order to save others, and at that time he was bearing the punishment of the sins of the world."

"You know a great deal, Premchand!"

"Of course; I have been to school. But go on."

She read on about the coming of Judas, the taking of Jesus, the mock trial, the denial of Peter. When she came to the end of the chapter, Premchand said:

"Now let me read."

So he took it up and read all about the death of Christ, interspersing his own explanations. When he finished, Boshonto said:

"And he died for us, you say?"

"So the Bible says; so Christians say."

"But how did his dying do us any good?"

"Why, you see all men are sinners. God had said that if men sinned they should be punished and go to hell. Jesus loved and

pitied men, so he said he would come to earth as a man, would suffer the punishment of their sin, and then, if any believed on him, they should be saved."

"But I don't understand. How could the death of *one* atone for the sins of *many*?"

"Because that One was greater than the many. Jesus, they say, was God as well as man."

"Then is that why in the first chapter of this book he is called Immanuel, or God with us?"

"Yes, I think so. Does not all this seem incomprehensible to you, Boshonto?"

"It seems very wonderful, but I don't think it impossible, for in our own Shasters we have stories of the gods assuming the forms of men. But then Jesus was always so good and kind; none of our gods were like him. I want to know what happened after his death. If you are not tired, would you read me a little more?"

So he read on about the glorious resurrection, about the Lord's appearances to the women and to the apostles, and about the

last command given to them by Jesus. Then Premchand said :

“The missionaries say that it is in obedience to this command that they have come from England to tell us about Jesus.”

“What does baptism mean?”

“It is something—I don’t quite know what—which is done when any one becomes a Christian. But I will go away now,” he added.

“Very well,” said Boshonto, dreamily, and extinguishing her light, she retired to rest. When Premchand joined the others, he was asked what he had been doing.

“Reading the Hitopadesha with Boshonto,” was his reply as he produced his book.

“What a boy that is for books!” said his mother, proudly, and the pundit gave him his blessing.

Boshonto lay down, but she could not sleep. “How different the Christian religion is from ours!” she thought. “Here we have been keeping the Durga puja. I wonder what Durga ever did for us? She killed the giant Mahisa, it is true, but what have I to

do with that? It has done me no good. And soon the Kali puja will be coming, but what did Kali* ever do for me? I am inclined to think with Premchand that our religion is full of falsehoods. But how very beautiful is the character of Jesus! He was always so gentle, so loving! He never got angry. Think of his appearing to those women after he rose, and speaking to them so kindly! And just think of his dying—dying, too, like a criminal, only to save us! I wish the English lady had not gone away. I should so much like to ask her some questions.”

Thinking over these and other thoughts, she fell asleep. Premchand, during his vigils, had his thoughts too. A great disgust and weariness were growing up in his mind against all the ceremonies of Hindooism, and he was longing to shake himself free from them.

The other festivals came on. The Kali puja was the first. Hideous beyond expres-

* Often written Karlee, the cruel and blood-loving goddess.

sion was the image of the black, four-armed goddess; her neck encircled with a necklet of skulls, her waist clasped with a zone of dead hands, two corpses hanging as ear-rings from her ears, her red tongue lolling out and her feet upon her husband's body. Terrible and bloody as the goddess were the rites performed in her honor. The worship of Kartick, the god of war, came next in order, and then the Ras Jatra, the festival commemorative of the vile loves of Krishna. Boshonto was in the midst of these things all day; in the evening she sat alone and read about Jesus. Many doubts entered her mind. Sometimes she scarcely dared to entertain them. "What have I, a woman, to do with such thoughts? I have only to do as my forefathers did." Then again she would read about some loving act of Jesus, and would contrast him with what she knew of Krishna. "How pure, how holy, how loving, Jesus Christ was! I feel almost afraid to name him with Krishna, who certainly was not holy."

Once she said to herself: "I wish I had

been born a Christian. I cannot help thinking I should have been happier then than I am now. Now I don't know what to believe. Here is the pundit; he is so wise and good, yet he believes in all these gods. I have believed in them all my life, but I confess I have never got any good from them. And now my mind is all unsettled. I perform my pujas with only half a heart, and I am always thinking Durga and Luckhi and Mahadeb, and the rest of them, cannot hear me at all. I think I will give up reading the Christians' holy book for a few days." And so for some time the book was laid aside. But one Sunday night Premchand came to her again, and asked her if she was going to read.

"No," she said, sulkily.

"Why not?"

"I feel so disturbed and troubled in mind; I don't know what to believe."

"Have you finished the book?"

"Oh no; not yet."

"Well, bring it. It is cold to-night, and I don't want to go out. The rest are all busy."

She yielded, and brought her Testament, and they sat down by the lamp. Boshonto had by this time read through the Gospels of Mark and Luke, and part of John. Her mark was at the fourteenth of St. John. Premehand opened at the place and began to read :

“ Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in me.”

“ Oh, Premehand,” broke in Boshonto, “ is he saying that to me ?”

“ Don’t interrupt,” was his ungracious answer, though the same question was in his own heart.

“ In my Father’s house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

“ What did he mean by his Father’s house, Premehand ?”

“ Heaven, I suppose.”

“ And he says he has gone to prepare rooms for us there ?”

“ Yes ; but let me go on.”

“ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto

myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

"Wait a moment, Premchand: how will he come again? On a chariot of clouds?"

"I have heard that this coming means the hour of death. And I have heard too that Christians are not afraid to die."

"Not afraid to die? That is astonishing! However, I must say that if they believe that at death they will go to Christ and be with him for ever in heaven, I don't wonder. Go on."

"And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

"I was going to ask the same question that Thomas asked. So Jesus is the way to heaven. I wonder what that means?"

"How foolish you are! It just means that it is only by believing in him we can get to heaven."

Thus the reading went on. When he read

those blessed words: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you," Boshonto exclaimed:

"I am comfortless. If I were a Christian, I should not be so."

The promise of the Holy Spirit elicited many questions. Does he come and stay with Christians? Does he teach them? How does he teach them? Do they hear a voice? Do they see any visible appearance? To all these questions Premchand had to reply that he did not know; perhaps the Christians themselves could tell.

They had not time to read more than this chapter, for the pundit called his son away, some friends having come to have a little gossip. And Boshonto felt she had enough to think about.

Four months had passed since their return from Calcutta. Many doubts had taken root in Boshonto's heart. Premchand had his doubts too, more than he had ever let Boshonto suspect. But outwardly all was going on as usual. When the mountain looks the greenest, the fire may be working within.

CHAPTER X.

PROGRESS.

THE months passed by, to some rapidly, to others slowly. Again the Indian spring had come and gone; the voice of the kokil had been heard; the trees had budded and renewed their glorious beauty. The hot weather succeeded. The days were very hot, but then the nights were glorious. There was little reading at night during these hot months. The strong south wind put out the lamps; besides, it was such a pleasure to sit out on the terrace, enjoying the luxury of that delicious wind. Every evening, at set of sun, it came up from the south, blowing from the sea, bringing with it refreshing and reviving. And then the cloudless moonlight and starlight nights! It was quite a joy to watch the heavens.

One night, though, there was a terrible

storm. It was a Sunday evening, and the men were at home. A huge bank of dark clouds rose up in the north-west, and in an incredibly short time overspread the sky. When the wind began to blow, it brought clouds of dust, but in a few minutes the wind was succeeded by rain, which fell in torrents. The lightning and thunder were terrific. The women huddled together in one of the inner rooms, and the men even came and joined them. At every flash the room was lighted up with a blue glare, and immediately after the light came the fearful thunder.

After it was all over, Boshonto went out upon the terrace, and Premchand followed. She asked Premchand what caused the thunder.

He said :

“Don't we believe that the gods and goddesses are playing at ball in the sky?”

“Yes; that is what we say, Premchand, but do you think so?”

“Not I. I have read the true reason.”

“What is it?”

“I don't think you will understand it, but

I will tell you. There is a fluid which seems to be everywhere; it is called the electric fluid. It is in us, it is in the earth, it is in the clouds, it is everywhere. But if there is more of it in one place than another, it passes from that place to the other. The lightning is this fluid made visible. Sometimes it passes from one cloud to another, and sometimes it goes from the clouds to the earth. As it thus passes from one cloud to another, or goes from the clouds to the earth, the atmosphere is rent by it, and the concussion of the air produces the sound we call thunder. Now do you understand?"

"Partly. Oh, Premchand, how many things you know that I don't!"

"Of course; you have not been to school."

"Did you feel frightened, Premchand?"

"Why should I have been frightened, you goose?"

"Well, I was. Don't you remember telling me only yesterday how two men were killed by the lightning striking a house in Calcutta? I could not help thinking that I might be killed, and then I felt so terrified."

“Why?”

“Well, to tell you the truth, Premchand, I doubt very much if our religion is true. I heard all the rest calling out, Ram! Ram! and I thought perhaps there is no such being, and, if not, of course he cannot save.”

“Then did you call on the God of the Christians, on Jesus Christ?”

“Oh no, no, Premchand! how could I do that? I don't believe in him. I feel as if I were on the river in a little boat all alone in the midst of a storm. I don't know to whom to look to save me. Oh, Premchand, I feel as if my boat will go down and I shall be drowned!”

“Have you read any of the Testament lately?”

“No; I am almost afraid to touch it. I sometimes feel sorry I asked you to get it for me, for it has so unsettled my mind. What do you think I ought to do?”

“Will you give me the Testament?”

“No; I think not. I should like to read it through.”

“Well, you must do as you please.”

With this the conversation ended, and Premchand and Boshonto went their different ways.

After this the rainy season set in, with its delightful showers, its brilliant skies and fragrant scents. There was a bokul tree near the tank belonging to the house, and every night it absolutely laded the air with fragrance. It was one of little Kamini's pleasures to go out every morning to gather the fallen flowers and string them into wreaths to wear during the day. At this season the bushes of small jessamine planted round the tank were also in flower.

The strong south wind having ceased, Boshonto was able to read again at night, and went on with her Testament in earnest. Night after night she read the record of the doings of the apostles with wonderment. "These apostles," she thought, "were like the missionaries we have in India. They went about everywhere preaching the true God and Jesus Christ. I sometimes wish I were not one of the respectable class. If I were only like Lydia, a seller of purple, why

I might go to Calcutta and hear them preaching some day. But, alas! I can never hear them, shut up as I am!"

Ever since they had returned from Calcutta, Prionath had been attending the mission school with Premchand, going every Monday and returning every Saturday. He made tolerable progress, though he was too full of fun to apply himself steadily like Premchand. He was a bright boy, and always enlivened the house, constantly learning some new song, and shouting it out for the gratification of his mother and aunts. One Saturday evening they were all sitting out in the bright moonlight. The gossip of the week had been talked over, and then Kumari said:

"What new song have you learnt, Prionath?"

"This time I have learnt a Christian song. I heard two of the boys singing it, and I liked it so much that I gave them a few marbles for teaching it me."

"Let us hear it."

And the boy, regardless of the holy words he was singing, sang thus:

Jesus is the true riches!
Then trust in him, my soul.

The Lord of all, he came from heaven to earth,
For thy sake, O my soul!
And took on him thy form and human birth.

What sorrows bore he in Gethsemane,
For thy sins, O my soul!
Upon the cross what nameless agony!

The Lord, he is the treasure true of hope!
Oh seek him then, my soul;
The light of life! wilt thou in darkness grope?

Who trusts in Christ finds in him wealth for ever!
Trust thou, and find, O soul!
The jewel priceless, riches wasting never!

Sinful art thou? Yet humbly seek his grace.
Thy Saviour, O my soul!
Himself will crown thee—thou shalt see his face!

Jesus is the true riches!
Then trust in him, my soul.

As the sweet hymn went on, sung very imperfectly indeed, Boshonto listened eagerly, and the words of the refrain sank deep into her mind. "So Jesus is the true riches," she thought. "If I can only get him, I shall be

happy. Somehow these Christians have very sweet and holy words among them. How different this song is from many that Prionath sings! I wish I could learn it." And the next day she bribed Prionath to teach her a verse or two. By repeated bribings she managed in time to learn the whole, and then she would often sit out on the terrace at night a little apart from the others crooning to herself the earnest verses. Obtaining "a crown" in heaven seemed a very desirable thing, and many longings and wishes arose in her heart.

Day after day the light grew brighter and brighter. The thick darkness which had covered her mind began to disperse. Still, as yet she only saw men as trees walking. But as nothing can hinder the light of day from pouring its beauty over the whole earth, so, blessed be God! nothing can hinder the light of his gospel, when once it begins to rise, from filling the human heart.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHAIN DRAWN CLOSER.

ABOUT the end of September a severe attack of illness seized Boshonto. For some weeks she was quite prostrated, and life seemed doubtful. She had every care and attention from Kumari and Prosonno, yet when the women from the neighboring houses used to come in to inquire about her, they could not help sympathizing with them when they said: "Poor thing! it will be well for her when she dies! A widow's life is a dreadful thing." Boshonto often heard these remarks, and she used to lie and wonder if it would really be better for her to die.

A short time before she would have wished for death, but now she thought she would like to live till she had settled in her own mind the truth of either Christianity or Hin-

doomism. Perhaps it was this wish to live that enabled her to rally. Life in the contest at length gained the victory, but it was long before strength came. She sometimes got out her books, but often she could do nothing but look at the covers. Little Kamini would occasionally read to her some easy story out of her little books, and would laugh merrily at what she read, but though Boshonto smiled on the little girl, she felt no interest in her little stories. Prosonno once suggested reading Sacontola, but she did not care for it. She would have liked to hear something about Christ, but she did not dare ask Prosonno to read to her from the New Testament, and she could not read for herself, as the small print hurt her weakened eyes. So day after day she lay in silence, thinking, wondering.

Her little Hurish was much in her thoughts. His pretty little ways and words recurred to her mind, and she thought: "What would I not give for the hope of seeing my boy again? If I were a Christian, I should have that hope, but now all is darkness and dreariness."

Then she thought again: "I wish I could find out the places in the Bible which tell about heaven. When Premchand comes, I must ask him." Premchand had not been home for some weeks; he said the examination was approaching, and he must study hard, and could not manage to give up his Saturdays and Sundays.

One Saturday afternoon, however, when Boshonto was considerably better, he came with his father and brother and uncle. After his mother had looked at him, studying every look and coming to the conclusion that over-study made him thin and pale, and after he had been petted to her heart's content, he asked how Boshonto was. "She is better now, though very weak," said his mother. "I think she is lying in the upper verandah; you had better go and see her while I look after cooking you something very nice, my boy." Then addressing Prosonno, she added: "Choto Bow, come and help me; that stupid Herani will be sure to spoil the curry and cakes."

Premchand went up stairs. He was shocked



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Premchand and Kaminee.

to see the alteration in Boshonto, and sitting down near her, gently asked how she was. She told him, and then said,

“I am very glad to see you, Premchand. You are always so kind to me. How have your studies been getting on? Do you think you will pass the examination?”

“I hope so. I have been working very hard. I suppose you have read nothing lately?”

“No; I have been too weak to see well. Oh, Premchand, do you know in what part of the New Testament I could find a description of heaven? When I was so ill, I thought I should die, and I wished so to know something about heaven. I have been very miserable, Premchand.”

“Give me the Testament.”

“Here it is, under my pillow. When I heard your voice down stairs, I crept away and managed to get it from my hiding-place.”

Premchand opened it toward the end, turned down two or three of the pages hastily, and said:

“I have marked the places for you.”

Then leaning over the verandah balustrade, he looked down into the court-yard. Seeing them all busy, he resumed his place by her side, and opening at the seventh chapter of the book of the Revelation, began to read those glorious words, interspersing sundry little comments by way of explanation. He had just time to finish when voices were heard approaching, and the book was restored to its place under her pillow. Kumari, having arranged everything, had come up with Kamini to have some more talk with her darling. Prosonno speedily joined them, and Premchand had soon enough to do answering all their questions.

When the time came for the evening meal, they all went down stairs, and Boshonto was left alone. She had not yet eaten rice, but lived simply on bread and sugar. She took advantage of her opportunity, lighted her lamp and turned to one of the marks. Again she read to herself the wonderful words:

“After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and

tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

She was tired, and closed the book, putting it away and extinguishing the lamp. She lay down again on her mat, and thought of the white raiment, the crowns, the palms and the glorious song of praise. She thought, too, of the loving Lamb feeding them, and of God wiping away all tears from their eyes. "Well, one thing is certain, even if Christianity is not true, the Christians are better off than we are, they are so much happier. No wonder they don't fear to die! no wonder they oftentimes desire to go, since they have the hope of such a beautiful country before them! And so they say my boy is there! I wonder how he looks in the white raiment, with the crown on his brow and the palm branch in his hand? His voice was such a sweet one. I suppose it is heard in that song, 'Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' He used sometimes to cry when with me. He does not cry now, for

God has wiped away all his tears. He has no more hunger nor thirst, and in heaven there is no terrible scorching heat, such as we have here in the hot weather. Oh, my little bird, if I only believed all this as the Christians do, I don't think I would cry any more for you, nor wish to have you in my arms again."

And so she went on thinking till she fell asleep.

The next day was the Sabbath. Premchand watched his opportunity, and managed to see her alone. He asked for her New Testament, and read to her parts of the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of the Revelation of St. John :

"And (the angel) carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names

written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. . . . And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor unto it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but

they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

“And he showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month : and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse ; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it ; and his servants shall serve him ; and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light ; and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

Boshonto listened to these words with great attention. When he finished, she said :

“Premchand, I should so like to be a Christian.”

The boy was startled. It was the echo of his own thought—a thought to which he had not yet given a living voice. But he said,

“That is impossible, Boshonto.”

“Why?”

“How can you leave the religion in which your forefathers have lived and died?”

“But, Premeliand, others have done it, and they must be happier than we are.”

“Well, never mind; don’t let us talk any more about this. Have you liked what I have read?”

“Oh yes, very much. I only wish I knew that I was going to that heaven. I should then be quite happy, I think.”

The young man knitted his brows: he looked lost in thought; then he said:

“Boshonto, I will tell you one thing which you must never repeat.”

“I promise.”

“I feel just as you do. I, too, am very unhappy. I long to be able to believe in Christianity. I have not been quite honest in saying that my studies kept me from coming here for some weeks. It is true I have studied hard; my Saturdays, even until sunset, have been spent in study. But the Sunday has been otherwise spent. I have read

the Bible, and oh, Boshonto, I have even ventured into Christian places of worship.”

“I am very glad to hear you say this, Premchand. You are a man, and are learned; you will be able to teach me. But tell me first what these Christians do in their places of worship; I am so curious to know.”

“Well, one Sabbath evening, after I had been reading and thinking all day, I went out after dark to see if I could get into any place of worship unobserved. I found one lighted up, and I went in and sat down at the very back. A hymn was given out, and I saw all the people stand up to sing. I stood also, and a gentleman handed me a hymn book. It was a beautiful hymn—all about Jesus. Then the minister rose up in a sort of box at one end of the chapel, and read a chapter about some of the miracles of Jesus, and after that he prayed. I never heard a Christian prayer before, and I thought it so beautiful. He seemed to feel the presence of God. He called God our Father, and he spoke to God as a little child would speak to his father. How I wished I could pray like

that! Then there was another beautiful hymn. After this the minister again rose up, and read about the healing of the blind man. Wait; I will find you the passage.

“‘And it came to pass, as he was come nigh unto Jerieho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside begging: and hearing the multitudes pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him, and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.’

“The minister applied all this to us. He

said: 'We are like that poor blind man; our eyes, the eyes of our mind, are blinded, and we cannot see the love and the glory of Christ. But Jesus calls us to him, and we have but to ask him to give us sight, and we shall see.' On closing his sermon he said: 'My friends, Jesus is now passing by. You can all hear him passing, but many of you cannot see his majesty, his glory. You do not see him as your Saviour. Call out to him, as the blind man did. He will stop; he will call you to go near him; he will say to you, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" And then you have but to say, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." If you pray thus, Jesus will answer, "Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee."'

"After the sermon there was a short prayer; then a hymn; then some loving words of blessing. As soon as these were uttered I hurried away."

"How wonderful all this is! Did you ever go again?"

"Yes; the next Sunday I thought I would go to a Bengali chapel. So I managed to

make inquiries during the week, and on Sunday afternoon I went to the one farthest off from our house, that no one might see and recognize me. There were no English gentlemen there; they were all Bengalis. There the service was just the same—beautiful hymns, and the same loving, impassioned prayers. The text was, ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.’ The native minister told us that if we asked anything spiritual in the name of Jesus, God would surely give it to us. He would give us the Holy Spirit to teach us. He would give us strength to resist temptation and to serve him aright; he would make us holy. We have only to ask in the name of Christ in order to receive.

“I was so fearful lest any of the Christians should speak to me that I crept away before the end of the last prayer. It was quite early still, so I thought I would take a walk, and walking on, I came to an English burial-ground. I went in out of curiosity. In these burial-grounds they have tombs with inscriptions. I cannot tell you how I felt as

I wandered about reading the inscriptions; they were so full of hope and gladness."

"Cannot you remember some?"

"No; I cannot remember particular inscriptions. But they seemed chiefly passages of Scripture telling about the resurrection and about heaven. Next time I go I will try and write some of them down."

"I like the plan of burying the dead."

"Yes; so do I. How much better it is than our custom of burning our dead! I have read that in some places burial-grounds are called God's fields. The dead are put into the ground, like seed, to wait for the resurrection."

"Premchand, are you a Christian?"

"No, Boshonto."

"Of course not. I forgot; you must first eat beef."*

"This is quite false, Boshonto. Christianity has nothing to do with eating and drinking. I have made my inquiries. Many who

* To a Hindoo the cow is a sacred animal; to kill one is murder; to eat its flesh is an atrocious and horrible crime.

are Christians never eat beef, but they can do so if they like. Christianity means believing in Jesus Christ and serving and worshipping the one true God."

Here they were interrupted, and the conversation, long as it had been, was left unfinished. The next day Premchand returned to Calcutta, after saying a warning word to Boshonto to keep all that had passed secret.

But the chain which had long ago been fastened in heaven by means of little Hurish was drawn closer. The little one was in the arms of Jesus, and the love which united the mother and child had drawn the mother to Christ. How often this is the case!

The Lord is kind in all his ways
When most they seem severe;
He frowns, and scourges, and rebukes,
That we may learn his fear.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RIVETING OF THE CHAIN.

BOSHONTO had become very thoughtful now, and also very loving and tender. As soon as her strength returned she began to take her part in the daily household duties. She helped Kumari and Prosonno, heard little Kamini read every day, taught Juggottarini, and made herself generally useful, so becoming a favorite with every one.

One thing was noticeable in her. She ceased to take an interest in the numerous pujas which went on in the house. She would bring the flowers and light the lamps, but she did not seem to care to repeat the prayers. Her former religiousness made this the more observable. Kumari once remarked it to her. Her only answer was, "What have I to pray

for now? I have neither husband nor child, and as for myself, I have all I want."

She spent a good part of each day in reading. All her old books were read and re-read constantly. She felt little interest in them, but she did this that she might get a reputation for learning, so that no suspicion might be excited by her nightly readings, for it was only at night that she was able to read her New Testament.

On Sundays, alternate Sundays, for Premchand generally managed to remain in Calcutta every other Sunday, none but Boshonto knowing his true reason, she usually had a little quiet talk with her nephew. They were both groping after the truth. He told her what place of worship he had attended, what he had heard, his doubts, his perplexities, his hopes. These conversations were eagerly looked forward to by both, for both were really in earnest. One Sunday Premchand said to her,

"A few days ago I went to the old China bazaar to try and get a book on algebra. In hunting among the book-shops I found a

small old book with this title, 'The Test of Truth.' I bought it for two annas, and took it home and read it all that day. It was written by an English lady. She says at one time she became an infidel—that is, she did not believe in the Bible nor in any hereafter. Yet she felt very miserable, for as long as she believed in the Bible she had been singularly happy. At last, one day, she thought of that promise in the seventh chapter of St. Matthew: 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.' She thought, 'How easily I can test the Bible and see if it is true! I have but to ask for the Holy Spirit. If I receive him, I shall know that the Bible is true.' So she prayed for the Spirit, pleading this promise. In answer to her prayer the Holy Spirit was given to her. He taught her, he removed her difficulties, he helped her again to believe in the Bible. She again looked to God as her Father, to Christ as her Saviour, to heaven as her home, and she was happy."

"Premchand, this is very easy. Have you so tested the Bible?"

“Not yet; I am thinking and waiting.”

No more could be said, and he went away the next day. Boshonto, however, resolved not to think and wait, but to act. So that very night she prayed thus:

“O Lord of heaven and earth, all powerful, all wise! thou hast said in the holy book, ‘Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.’ I come to ask thee to teach me by thy Spirit what is truth. Do not put away my request. I wish to be taught which is the right way. I want to be saved. Oh, I want to see my little Hurish again in heaven. Lord, teach me!”

She opened her New Testament. She had commenced reading it again, and had reached as far as the twenty-sixth of St. Matthew. She read that chapter and the next two eagerly. She never understood what she read so well before.

Next night she prayed again; indeed, the whole day had been one of constant inward prayer. When she sat down to read, her book opened, of its own accord as it were, at

the twentieth chapter of John. She had often turned to the last chapters of this Gospel; therefore it was not remarkable that this should have happened so. She thought she would read that chapter before going on in her usual course. She read of Christ's appearance to Mary in the garden; his calling her by name and her joyous recognition when she exclaimed, "Rabboni!" She went on to the record of Christ's tenderness to Thomas—poor, unbelieving Thomas!—when, after giving him the proofs he had desired, he said, "Be not faithless, but believing," and how Thomas, looking on the once crucified but then risen Saviour, said, "My Lord and my God!" She read the next verse: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!" Here she laid the book down, involuntarily clasped her hands and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, my Lord and my God!" Again she lifted the book and read: "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ,

the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name." Once more she exclaimed, "Lord, I believe! Give me life through Christ's name."

Very glad was her heart that night. She extinguished her lamp, and lay thinking of all the Saviour's acts of love and mercy. Again and again she uttered the words of faith and love, "My Lord and my God!" She wondered that she had not believed in him long, long before. She never for one moment doubted that he would receive her, would forgive her, would bless her, would finally take her to him in heaven. She believed in him, she loved him; hence she rejoiced with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. That night she prayed thus:

"O Lord Jesus Christ! I thank thee for having taken my little Hurish to thyself. If he had stayed with me, he would have grown up worshiping idols, and I too should have gone on worshiping them. If he, my pet bird, had not flown to thine arms, and been sheltered in thy breast, I should never have tried to get to thee. O Lord, my boy

is with thee: take my soul into thy keeping. It is a precious jewel God has given to me. I cannot take care of it, but thou canst. Wash away all its sins in thy precious blood, and keep it until the day of judgment, and in that day say, 'This soul is mine, for I have redeemed it.' Amen."

The prayer was heard. Christ took charge of that which was committed to him against that day, and in his keeping it was safe, for has he not said, "I give unto them eternal life, and none shall pluck them from my hand"? Oh the joy of this surrender! Boshonto was at peace now. The peace of God which passeth all understanding took possession of her, ruling her soul. It shone out of her eyes; it pervaded her whole being.

From this time the chain was riveted in heaven. It had passed from the hand of the babe to the hand of Christ. He held it fast with a grasp that could never relax.

After this night the change in Boshonto was very great. Her face, which had been so grave and thoughtful, often sorrowful, now became full of gladness. She seemed to have

a hidden spring of joy within her. The women wondered and held their peace.

When Premchand next came home, a fortnight later, he too noticed the change, and at the first convenient opportunity, he said: "What is the matter with you, Boshonto? You look so happy."

"I have done what the lady did, Premchand. I have tested the Bible, and have found it to be all true. I have said to Christ, 'My Lord and my God!' I am now a Christian, Premchand."

"The tortoise has outstripped the hare! And has this given you such gladness, Boshonto?"

"Yes; I have comfort and peace. And oh, Premchand, I shall see my boy again. When I die and go to heaven, Jesus will give him back to me."

Then noticing the look of sadness on Premchand's face, she added:

"Have you not tested the Bible yet, Premchand?"

"No, Boshonto; I have been afraid. I want to believe in Christianity, yet somehow

I dread being a Christian. But I will do it at once."

And he left her. No one saw him again that day. In the evening he returned, and his father asked him where he had been. "Taking a long walk and sitting in a mango grove," was his answer. This was true, but he did not tell who had met with him that bright Sabbath day under the trees. In the lonely place Christ had manifested himself to him, and he, too, had exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" A quick glance of intelligence revealed all this to Boshonto.

Christ has different ways of manifesting himself to those whom he calls. Yet all to whom he reveals himself must exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" Anything short of this proves that there has been no manifestation of God to the soul.

Boshonto and Premchand, led to Christ by different ways, yet both taught by the Holy Ghost, called Jesus "Lord." From this time, therefore, they were both his. They had troubles and sorrows before them, perhaps bitter persecutions also, but what did it matter?

Better to be reproached by one's dearest and nearest here than to lose the crown of glory hereafter. Better to be disowned by all one's family here than at the last day to hear Christ say, "Depart from me; I never knew you."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW LIFE.

MONTHS rolled by peacefully. Boshonto was a mystery. She seemed very happy. Kamini, now a girl of ten and soon about to be married, clung to her as much as she had done to Prosonno. Boshonto was always ready to help her and to teach her. Prionath left off plaguing her, for he found she bore so patiently with his tricks that there was no more fun. Herani, the servant, felt the change very sensibly, and used to go to her with her troubles, sure of sympathy and comfort. Kumari and Prosonno often wondered and thought, "What has come over Boshonto? We never hear her abusing now. She has given up blaming God, and crying over her husband and Hurish." Prosonno once remarked, "She does not perform the

pujas at any time, nor does she even help us by bringing the flowers."

"She must please herself," was Kumari's laconic rejoinder. With her shrewdness, she suspected that Boshonto's faith in Hindooism was gone, but she did not want to know it as a fact.

About this time an event took place which caused a terrible commotion throughout the little town. Several of the more respectable families had imbibed Brahmist views; they had given up keeping the pujas; they worshiped only one God; they thought caste a bad thing, and were trying by degrees to free themselves from its trammels; and now a marriage was contemplated between the son of one family and the daughter of another, the son a widower, the daughter a widow.

The youth was about twenty-two years of age. His name was Bhoobun Mohun Banerjea, and he had been married when he was eighteen to a little child-wife of eight. Two years after, the child-wife died. He did not seem anxious to marry again directly, and as he and his father were adopting the new sen-

timents, they let matters alone for the time being. In the family next door to them was a young widow of sixteen. Her husband had died five years previously. She was a charming girl, and had been tolerably well taught. The young man, who had entered enthusiastically into the sentiments of the pundit Bidyasagor, had frequent opportunities of seeing the girl, and at length told his father he would like her for his wife. Several such marriages had taken place, but in this case there seemed to be difficulties. They were, however, removed, and finally it was settled that Bhoobun Mohun Banerjea and Sreemoti Mookto Keshi should be married.

The news flew like wildfire, and the talk seemed endless. In every household the subject was discussed and rediscussed. Many disapproved, and said they would never again have anything to do with the two families; they would not speak to them, would not eat with them, would regard them as outcasts. Others said, "Let them please themselves; they say there is nothing in our Shasters against it, and certainly it is not a bad thing.

But at any rate, we shall have nothing to do with it." A few approved, and hoped the innovation would be universally adopted.

In the pundit's family the matter was of course talked about. The pundit and his brother did not regard it with much approbation, but Premchand had a good deal to say in its favor. His mother had an unbounded admiration for her son. She thought him perfection, and so whatever he thought right she was inclined to think right also. Thus it happened that in the women's apartments, at least, the marriage was regarded with interest and pleasure. They contrived to send Herani on several pretexts to the different households, and on her return always questioned her eagerly; every little scrap of news was welcomed.

At length the day of the marriage approached. The pundit and his family, with many others, were invited. The women were very anxious to go, but did not know what the pundit would do. However, after due consideration, he announced his intention to be present, and their glee was great. On the

morning of the marriage-day Kumari and Prosonno dressed themselves in their purple silks, put on their jewels and had their feet stained with *atta*. Poor Boshonto could not wear any jewels, but she was allowed to have a silk *saree*. Her bare arms, ringless nose and unadorned ears and neck contrasted sadly with the jewelry of Kumari and Prosonno. Still, she looked very queenly in her majestic beauty. Little Kamini had on her pink *saree*, and looked very pretty. They were taken to the house in covered palanquins, and on alighting disappeared within the women's apartments. Mookto Keshi's mother had to undergo no end of questions as to how she felt about her widowed daughter's marriage. Her answer was the same to all: "Mookto Keshi's father wishes it. He is a learned man; he says there is nothing in the Shasters against it. Bhoobun Mohun has been to me like a son. What can I say? My child will be happy." The shy bride would not say anything, but looked very contented whenever they managed to get a glimpse of her face.

The ceremonies were much the same as in all marriages, and everything passed off well. The women feasted by themselves, the men by themselves, and there was great rejoicing.

Among the guests were many men from Calcutta. One of them was a great friend of Premchand. He was older than Premchand, but between the precocious boy and the young Babu a close friendship had existed for several months. The fact was, the same thoughts had been smouldering in both their hearts. They had both been seeking something better than Hindooism could give. Unconsciously they had been helping each other to get to the truth, yet, strange to say, unknown to each other, had both arrived at the knowledge of the truth. Each had found the treasure, yet each was rejoicing over it in secret. On this occasion there was of course but one topic of conversation, the singular marriage which they had met together to celebrate. The young Babu, whose age was about twenty-five, had lost his young wife of eighteen about two years previously. He had loved her very dearly, and had made her a companion for

himself by teaching her to read and write. After losing an infant child she had another, and this time it was the mother's life that was surrendered; the child, a fine little girl, lived, cared for and cherished by its father's mother. His family had wished him to marry again immediately, but he had not felt inclined. But during this visit to Gopalpore he thought, "If I could meet with an educated young woman—a widow, for anything I care—I think I would marry her." He happened to mention this to Premchand, and the boy quickly replied, "My aunt Boshonto would be just the wife for you."

"Indeed! What is her age? Tell me all about her."

"She is now twenty-four—a year younger than yourself. She can read and write, and is very nice."

"Is she pretty?"

"I think so, and she is also intelligent and very sweet tempered."

"I wish I could see her. Is she in the verandah?"

The boy looked up, but did not see her.

After thinking a little, he wrote on a slip of paper these words:

“You have often heard me speak of my friend Bishonauth Mukarjea. Look down into the courtyard and you will see him talking to me.”

Folding up the paper, he gave it to a child and directed him to take it to Boshonto. It was done, and presently Boshonto appeared. She had time for a good look at him, but he got only a glimpse of her, for as soon as he looked up she drew back. But the glimpse was very pleasant, and Bishonauth said to Premchand,

“I like her face and figure very much. Do you think if I asked they would let me marry her?”

“That I cannot say. You had better speak to my father about it after all this is over.”

It was not difficult to introduce the subject, for, indeed, the marriage of widows was the one thing talked about everywhere. When the young man came to see the pundit, he asked about his family. He told them that his wife was dead, and that he had a little

child who was being reared by his parents. The pundit asked him if he did not intend to marry again.

“I have lately been thinking about it. When my wife died, my father and mother wished me to marry at once, but somehow I did not care about having a child for my wife. The marriage that has taken place has made me wonder if I too could not marry a widow like Bloobun Mohun.”

“I don’t know what to think of this. It seems to me dangerous to make any change in our existing customs. I have always noticed that in a family when even the slightest change is once introduced other and more important changes speedily follow.”

“But the marriage of widows is not opposed to the Shasters, is it? I have lately read the writings of Ishwer Chunder Bidyasagor, and I feel convinced that it is not forbidden in the Shasters.”

“Are you seriously thinking about marrying a widow?”

“Well, I think of it.”

“Have you any one in view?”

“I fear you will be vexed if I tell you who is in my thoughts.”

“Why should I be vexed?”

“Then I will tell you. Yesterday I saw your widowed sister-in-law. Your son pointed her out to me looking down from the verandah. I was much struck with her noble look. Your son tells me she can read and write, and from all I have heard of her, I think she would be to me such a wife as I should like, and a fitting mother for my little child.”

The pundit was stupefied with wonder: “What shall I say? Who ever heard of such a thing?”

“Would you consent?”

“I don't know. Let me recover my astonishment. Think of Boshonto being asked for in marriage! Who ever could have thought it? Why, Boshonto has too much love for our religion to think of such a thing!”

“If your sister-in-law were told that marrying again was not forbidden by the Shasters, do you think she would object?”

“How can I tell? Women are foolish creatures. Wah! wah! wah!”

The young man rose to leave; he saw that he had gone far enough. He went back to Calcutta, but he did not forget Boshonto. The pundit also did not forget the extraordinary request. He told his wife about it. Her indignation at first was extreme. Woman-like, however, she did not keep the secret to herself. She told Boshonto about it the next day. To her surprise, Boshonto heard her in silence. She remarked:

“You say nothing, sister. Are you not angry?”

“Why should I be angry? I confess I should be very glad if the custom of widow marriage were to become general.”

“Why?”

“Oh, sister, don't you see how many widows are yearly ruined? You have been kind to me, and have kept me among you, but what should I have done if you had turned me out or been unkind to me? Remember Koylas' Bow. When her husband died, her mother-in-law ill-treated and beat her.

And what was the result? As soon as Keder-nauth Babu spoke a kind word to her over the wall, she went to him. And then, again, Pooshopi's mother. When her husband and child died, she was so miserable, hearing every day the reproaches of her father-in-law and mother-in-law, that she ran away. And what is she now? These two cases have occurred this very month, and you know how many before. If there had been any hope of their being married again, this would never have happened."

"Very true, sister, but you know widow marriage is not in accordance with our customs."

"Still, there is nothing in the Shasters against it, and if a custom is bad, why should we keep it up?"

"Well, what do you think about Bishonauth Babu's proposal?"

"What does the pundit say?"

"He says he does not know what to think about it."

"If my brother-in-law give his consent, I will not refuse."

It was out! Kumari and Prosonno looked aghast. They did not in reality disapprove of the thing, but they wondered at her courage.

A fortnight passed. At the end of that time a Ghottock came with a formal proposal of marriage. The terms offered were very favorable. The pundit called together his friends and held a consultation. Some approved; some were indifferent; some thought the whole thing very wrong. Sometimes it seemed that the answer would be a decided negative; at other times that it would be brought about. The Ghottock passed to and fro for nearly a month, but at length the preliminaries were arranged. Premchand was in reality the one who managed the affair. He used all his influence with his father and mother. He was their darling son, their pride, their joy. They thought everything of his learning.

The father often said, "Well, my boy, you know more than I do. I trust to you not to lead me astray."

He was the medium of communication be-

tween Bishonauth and Boshonto, and his stories about them to each other made them very anxious to be acquainted. There could be no intercourse between them until marriage, yet hearing so much about each other, they felt as if they knew all about one another. To Boshonto, Premchand had confided his suspicion that Bishonauth was a Christian, and she wished for the marriage, expecting to find a helper of her faith in her husband. Bishonauth looked only for a friend and companion, as Premchand, for some inexplicable reason, had not told him that Boshonto was a Christian.

The day came at last. Bishonauth came, accompanied by his father and cousins and several other friends. Boshonto was again arrayed in her jewels, and again wore the nose-ring. It seemed so strange to put them on again after they had been laid aside so long. The customary rites were gone through, and then on the third day Bishonauth returned to Calcutta with his wife. She was always to stay with him henceforth; "For," said he, joyfully, "we shall have no second marriage

ceremonies." Kamini cried very bitterly at losing her aunt, and was only consoled by a promise that she should one day go to Calcutta and see her.

Thus they went away. Premchand alone saw them go away with a glad heart. All the rest had doubts and misgivings as to whether they had done right.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

WHEN they reached their Calcutta home, Bishonauth's mother received her daughter-in-law very warmly. She put her arms round Boshonto's neck, kissed her and said: "I wish my son had married one not a widow, but since he has chosen you and is pleased, I am happy. May the Almighty give me to see a son of yours on my lap!" Then Bishonauth took his little girl, now a little over two years old, and put her into Boshonto's arms. She embraced her and kissed her, and said to her husband, "She is like what my Hurish was when God took him away. She will be to me in his place."

That night Boshonto saw her husband reading after he had had his dinner. She went and sat down by him near the lamp, but did not speak.

"You can read, Boshonto?"

"Yes."

"Let me hear you. I have a very interesting book here."

He put into her hands the New Testament open at the tenth chapter of the gospel by John. She read the chapter through slowly and distinctly.

"Very good," was his comment. "Boshonto, have you ever heard anything about Christianity or read the New Testament?"

"Yes; I have a copy."

"Let me see it."

She went and brought it and put it into his hands.

"Why, this is one I got for Premchand a long time ago."

"I dare say. He got it for me."

"Have you read it all through?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"Will you be angry?"

"No; tell me, Boshonto."

"I believe in it. I am a Christian."

"So am I. Oh, Boshonto, I am so glad

you are a Christian. Tell me how you became one."

"After my little Hurish died I was very miserable. One day an English lady who used to come and teach us, seeing my sorrow, told me that my boy was in heaven, and that, if I believed in Jesus Christ, I should go there too, and see him, and have him in my arms again. This made me wish to know something about Jesus Christ. So I asked Premchand to get me a Testament, and I read it. Then I felt that the Christian religion was true. I saw that I could not be saved from hell by any of our gods and goddesses, but that Jesus Christ alone could save me. I was in great perplexity for a long time, wishing to believe and yet not wishing to do so. At last, one night, I prayed to Jesus Christ, and immediately a weight was taken off my mind, and I believed he would save me. I have prayed to him ever since."

"But have you not performed pujas?"

"No."

"Did any in your house know you were a Christian?"

“Premchand did. He is a Christian also. I never told the others, but I think Kumari and Prosonno suspected it.”

“I wonder why Premchand did not tell me?”

“I don’t know. He told me he thought you were a Christian, and this made me wish to marry you.”

“We shall read the Bible together every night, Boshonto.”

“Very well. Don’t you pray to Jesus?”

“Yes.”

“I should so like you to do so. I have never heard any one pray to Christ.”

“I will.”

And he prayed thus :

“O Lord Jesus Christ, we believe in thee. We bless thee for thy love in dying for us, and for the world. We thank thee for bringing us to know about thee and to love thee. We give our hearts again to thee to-night. O Lord, save us, and wash away our sins in thy precious blood. Help us to serve thee and to love thee. Bring others to know thee as the forgiver of sins. O God, the Father

of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless us and love us, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Gladsome indeed was Boshonto's heart. "I am very happy," she said to her husband.

Very popular was Boshonto in the household. Merry as the kokil she went about all her household duties. She would not allow her mother-in-law to do anything, always saying, "I am your daughter, you know, mother, and you must let me work for you." The child became very fond of her—so fond that the grandmother seemed almost jealous at times. For her husband she had a worshipping love.

Bishonauth soon began to teach his wife English, and their evenings passed very pleasantly, he teaching and she learning. Oftentimes the old mother used to come and sit down by them, and then, after the lesson was over, the son used to read to her from the Bible. The old woman used to seem much interested in the stories, but she never would stay long. Bishonauth often said to her, "Oh, mother, if I had married a child, as you wished me to do, should I have been as

happy as I am now with my dear wife, who can read to me and with me?"

And she would respond, "Boshonto makes you a good wife, my son, blessed be God!"

Weeks and months passed on very happily. Kamini paid her promised visit, and Premchand was a frequent evening guest.

Boshonto was very happy—happy in her present peace and comfort, and happy in the prospect of future gladness. God was going to give her a child of her own, and they were all very glad. At length the baby came—a boy. Bishonauth would not allow his wife to be treated as Hindoo women are at such times. She remained in her own room, and was carefully tended. There were no idolatrous ceremonies performed, and the neighbors did not expect any, for the household had long been known as one that had renounced all pujas, and worshiped the one true God. The child was named Anondo Chondro—the moon of joy.

When he was about two months old, an important event took place. It was brought about in this way.

One night Boshonto was reading the English Testament to her husband. She could read tolerably well, and had reached the tenth chapter of St. Matthew. She read the thirty-second and thirty-third verses :

“ Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

“ What does this mean ?” she asked her husband.

“ It means that if we acknowledge Christ as our God and Saviour here, he will acknowledge us as his disciples at the last day. And if we don't own him now, he will not own us then.”

“ But what does this mean, ‘ Before men ’ ?”

“ Before other people.”

“ Then I fear Christ will not own us as his disciples.”

“ Why not ?”

“ Because we have not confessed him before men.”

Bishonauth said nothing. After some con-

siderable silence he rose and went out, and Boshonto went to nurse her boy.

When they met again, it was time for their evening prayer. They knelt together, and Bishonauth prayed thus :

“O Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer! we have been guilty of great sin in not confessing thee before men. Thou mightest justly refuse to confess us before thy Father in heaven. But we come to ask forgiveness for this our sin. We pray that thy precious blood may wash it and all our other sins away. We ask thee to give us strength to acknowledge thee, not caring about what our friends may say. And now, before thee, we resolve to do it. O Lord, confess us before thy Father and the holy angels when thou comest in thy glory. O God, our Father in heaven, receive us for the sake of thy dear Son our Saviour. And keep us steadfast unto the end, and at the end welcome us into thy kingdom, for Jesus' sake. Amen.”

They kept their resolution. The next day their friends were called together, and were

told that they were Christians. Then Bishonauth went to a Christian minister and told him of all the loving dealings of Christ with him and his wife. And shortly after, in Christ's own appointed way, they "witnessed a good profession before many witnesses," being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Farther we will not follow them. Peace and joy were theirs—the "peace of God which passeth all understanding," and the "joy unspeakable and full of glory." And they had, besides, the prospect of "glory, honor and immortality" in the world to come.

God grant us all grace so to learn of Jesus and confess him before men, and so to live on earth, that we too may attain to that glory, for Christ's sake! Amen.

THE END.