

PRIZE ESSAY.

Folk-tales of Bengal.

IV.—THE BRIDE OF THE SERPENT-PRINCE.

A king had two queens—the *Duo* (*i.e.* not-loved) and the *Suo* (*i.e.* well-loved). The two wives lived in eternal enmity to one another and the king could not find a moment's rest as he had always to hear the complaints of his so called consorts. Time rolled on and there was no lull in the storm. At last the *Suo*-queen by her stratagem compelled the king to banish the *duo*-queen for life. The *Duo*-queen with a daughter which she had borne to the king made for the forest. They had no place where to rest their heads. But it was not the will of providence that they should be starved to death. An old wood-cutter of the forest took kindly to them. They were lodged in his house and had a share of his meals. The old man always treated them as his own children and they had no reason to complain of a want of charity or kindness in their old benefactor. Thus they lived in happiness for a few years. But now the time came when nature determined to disturb their peace and tranquillity and Pluto helped her by snatching away the old man from her little family. The *Duo*-queen (though now she was not a queen but simply the daughter of a wood-cutter) with her daughter who was by this time fourteen years of age, performed the funeral obsequies of the old man. Indeed they were assisted by all the wood-cutters of the forest.

Now the little fortune left by the deceased wood-cutter became theirs and they continued to live in tolerable comfort. A year elapsed and nothing happened worthy of notice. After that something happened which we must note here.

One day the daughter who was now in the prime of youth and of surpassing beauty, went to the neighbouring river to bathe.

When she had just finished her ablutions, the Serpent-King who resided in that river saw her. At once her "graceful head with ringlets bright which tossed in the breeze with a play of light," and her "eyes in whose glistening laughter lay, no faint remembrance of dull decay," charmed him and captivated his heart and he determined to marry the girl or starve himself to death.

An envoy was sent to propose the marriage and the mother had no objection to her daughter's being the consort of the mighty King of Serpents. Everything was settled and the nuptial knot was tied by the serpent-priest in an auspicious moment. When the bridegroom came in the form of a huge serpent, every one cursed the mother for giving consent to such a match; but the mother's faith in the serpent-king remained unbroken. The young bride was made to sleep on the same bed with the huge and monster-like serpent. As soon as the doors of the compartment were bolted from inside the serpent was no longer a serpent but a fair-looking young man who was worthy of being the consort of such a beautiful damsel. The night elapsed and the morning beheld the damsel covered cap-a-pie with beautiful ornaments of gold studded with jewels, pearls and precious stones worth the treasures of seven kings—which sent forth their lustre as so many stars of the first magnitude.

A fine palatial building was erected in that forest for the newly wedded couple. Of course the mother was also lodged in the same building and she was now the mistress of the little family. They lived in that forest for sometime and their peace was not disturbed.

Now let us return to the king and his *Suo*-queen. By this time the *Suo*-queen had also a daughter of marriageable age. When the news of the *Duo*-queen's prosperity reached the ears of the *Suo*-queen, she determined to try her fortune. Accordingly a huge serpent was caught in some forest and brought to the *Suo*-queen. One night she cast her daughter into the same compartment with the serpent and herself kept watch. She heard a cry from inside, "Oh, my mother, my hand is gone." "Put on ornaments" resounded the mother. Again came

the cry "Oh, my mother, my leg is gone." And the same reply resounded "Put on ornaments, my darling." No more cry came out. And the mother thought that the happy pair had fallen asleep. But one understands that this time the head is gone. When the day dawned and the door of the compartment in which slept the serpent with his wife was thrown open, the serpent came out hissing. No one ventured to oppose him and he made for the forest. But what was seen inside the room? Oh! Horror of Horrors!! A scene of terrible cruelty had been enacted!! Instead of the much longed-for ornamented daughter they found a flesh-less skeleton lying flat as if to reproach the mother—apathetic, unfeeling and envious. The news reached the ear of the king and the *Suo*-queen was buried alive, the *Duo*-queen was brought from the forest and restored to honour. The serpent king and his wife were also brought to the palace. They all lived there happily.

সন্ধ্যাসমাগমে ।

গেছে চলে দিনমণি হিয়ার সর্ব্ব দিয়ে
 এখনো গগনে তার জাগিতেছে বিদায়ের হাসি ।
 হসিত অধর খানি ডুবে গেছে সন্ধ্যাছায়ে
 পশ্চিম সায়ারে তবু ভাসিতেছে অমৃতের রাশি ।

গাহিয়া গাহিয়া গান বিহঙ্গ উড়িয়া গেছে
 সন্ধ্যাবধু কুঞ্জে বসি শিহরিছে এখনো সে গানে ।
 প্রতিধ্বনি ছুটে ছুটে সুদূর প্রান্তর পথে
 এখনো যে পাগলিনী ভুলে আছে সে মধুর তানে ।

হাসিয়া ফুটিয়া ফুল হাসিয়া ঝরিয়া গেছে
 পরিমল রহিয়াছে এখনোত মলয়ের বৃকে
 যে ষাবার হেসে গেছে অঁধারে ডুবায়ৈ বিশ্ব
 শুধু এ তিমিরে স্মৃতি চমকিছে পোড়াইছে স্মৃথে ।

DINESCHANDRA CHAUDHURI,

Third Year Class.