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Pioneer Story Readers

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TALES OF WIT AND WISDOM



JOHN BATEMAN

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(WITH ILLUSTRATIONS)

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS series of Story Readers is intended to be used as supplementary reading books not involving a detailed study. They are specially designed to foster a taste in young boys and girls for general reading by rousing their interest and sustaining it to the end. This has been sought to be achieved by the adoption of a style and diction akin to the language spoken by children—short, crisp sentences formed almost entirely of mono-syllables and of a way of telling that, by its directness of appeal and graceful simplicity, captures the hearts of children and unobtrusively enlarges the sympathies and widens the understanding. In the selection of the subject matter a wide range is kept in view, and a judicious choice is made among the most popular and entrancing stories of this country. The books in the series are in the main written by Englishmen, so that the native idiom and manner peculiar to the genius of the people and the language may be presented to the juvenile readers at the very outset.

The tales told in this book may be heard from the mouth of every grandfather, and of every grandmother too. They never cease to please the growing child. They bear repetitions easily. In fact, having once heard one of them—whichever it is—the child is sure, in nine cases out of ten, to ask for it again, in preference to a new story. It may be fairly presumed, therefore, that most, if not all of them, are old and familiar friends of our boys and girls at school, which are sure to find an eager welcome in the present form.



"It is not kingly. It is not just. It is cruel."—P. 16.



TALES OF WIT AND WISDOM

I

HOW BIRBAL BECAME THE KING'S FOOL

BIRBAL lived long, long ago. He was born in quite a small town. It stood on a river. The parents of Birbal died young. He was left an orphan. But he was a wise little fellow. He worked hard at his lessons. Older folk liked him. He earned their respect.

He grew up a fine young man. He married a fair maiden. Her father was the chief pandit in the town. Now the old man died. So Birbal became the chief pandit of the place.

But Birbal did not stay there long. "This is too small a place," he said, "The world is big. What do I know of it? Wise men live in the great world outside. What do I know of their learning? I will leave this small place. My mind has no chance to grow here."

So Birbal gave up his safe post. He packed up all his goods. With his wife he set

out for Delhi. For, even in those days, Delhi was famous. Here Birbal looked for a new post. He did not wait long. He became a priest in a rich man's house.

His duties did not take up all his time. Nor was Birbal lazy. "Life is a rare gift," he said, "I will not waste it. Man has many strange ways. I can observe them. Man has great powers. I can learn to use them."

Often Birbal spent his time in the bazaars. For here he could meet most people. He listened to them. His brain was keen. Day by day he grew wiser. He made his wit sharp by often talking with them.

At first he asked questions. Soon he began to answer them. His tongue grew sharp like a sword. His wisdom made wonder among men. Men showed great respect to him. They sought him out. They told him their troubles. He helped them with his advice.

Time went on. All men spoke of him. At last word reached the ears of the king. The king's name was Akbar. Now Akbar sent

for Birbal. And Birbal was made the court fool. Wisest of all men was Birbal. Great was his learning. Yet his speech was gay. His wisdom won the king's respect. But by his humour he won the king's love.

So Birbal stayed at the court of this king. Great honours were done to him. In him the king placed all trust. No fool was like Birbal in all the earth.

II

HOW BIRBAL MADE A LINE SHORTER

Now there were many wise men at the court. But they did not all agree. They were all vain of their wit. Each man said in his heart, "I am the best of them all." They grew jealous. They grew angry with one another. They set traps for each other. All this greatly amused the king.

One day the king called them all to his side. "How wise you all are!" he cried. "I burst with pride of you. No men are so wise in all the world. But one thing I do not know. Tell me now. Which is the wisest of you all?"

Then with one voice they cried, "I am that man." But Birbal said not a word. He just smiled to himself.

"I intend to find out myself," said the king smiling. "I will put you to the test."

So the king drew a long line along the floor of the court. "You see this line," he said. "Now make it shorter for me. But rub none of it out. Who is the first to try?"

But not one stepped out. Not one said a single word. One and all looked stupid. Akbar grinned with glee. Then out stepped Birbal. Not a smile showed on his face. Side by side with the long line, he drew a fresh line. This was longer still.

"Ah" said the king. "At last I have found a wise man. Is not my long line shorter now?"

"It is," they all agreed.

"Birbal is my fool," laughed the king. "But who now looks the fool?"

Then with one voice they cried, "I am that man."

"Quite so," said Akbar. "Birbal has made you fools. Yet he has made you wiser too."

III

HOW BIRBAL WAS SAVED BY HIS WIFE'S WIT

ONE day the king sent for Birbal. "My good Birbal," he said, "You are a wise man. You know all things. You can do all things. Bring me, therefore, the milk of a bullock."

Then Birbal was at his wits' end. How could he bring the milk of a bullock? There is no such thing. Never could there be such a thing in all the world. But a king is a king. A king's fool must obey his lord. So Birbal said not a word to him. He bowed before him. Then he went his way.

But in his heart there was great grief. For there seemed no way out of the trouble. In his own house, he bowed his head with care. He said to himself. "This time the king has won. All my wit cannot save me now. The king will grow very angry. He will dismiss me for my failure. And all my life is ruined."

But Birbal was not alone. Had he not a loyal wife? Was she not the daughter of a chief pandit? And she was very wise too. She wanted to help him out of his grief. So she knelt at his feet. "Tell me, my dear lord," she begged. "What is your trouble now?"

Then Birbal sadly told her all his fears. "The king wants me to bring him the milk of a bullock," he said. "There is no such thing. Never could there be such a thing in all the world. All my wit cannot save me now. The king will be very greatly angry. He will dismiss me for my failure. And all my life is ruined."

At this, his brave wife smiled. "Be of good cheer, my lord. Your task is quite easy. But I want you to do one thing for me. Stay at home for seven days. I want you to be with me all that time. Promise me this, my lord."

Then Birbal gazed on his wife with a light heart. "I promise," he said. "Seven days I will rest with you at home. Only bring me the milk of a bullock for my master."

So Birbal stayed at home for seven days. Not once did he go to court. All this time his wife did nothing to help him. She looked for no bullock's milk. Of what use could that be? But Birbal kept a quiet mind. For he had great faith in his wife's wit. At last the seventh day came. Birbal's wife rose early. She put on her finest robes. She wore her richest gems. Then she set out for the court. But in her arms she bore a heap of soiled clothes. In front of the king's palace was a tank. To this tank went the wife of Birbal. In it she began to wash the soiled clothes.

Men stared at the sight. So fine a lady washed clothes in the tank! Her clothes were rich. She wore jewels of great price. Yet she washed foul clothes in a public place. The news spread from mouth to mouth. The tale soon reached the ears of the king himself. He came out to look. He stayed to ask her questions.

"Fair lady," he said. You are young. You seem wealthy too. Why do you wash dirty clothes in a public place? Tell me."



“ Why do you wash dirty clothes in a public place ? ” — P. 11

“Alas,” the lady cried. “Hard times have come to my lord and me. Our servant has fled. My lord is in bed. A child has just been born to him. Hence I came here to wash the soiled clothes.”

“May Allah save us!” cried Akbar. “What is wrong with the world? A man has borne a child! How can such a thing be?”

“It is quite true, O king,” replied the wife of Birbal. “For the world has come to a pretty pass. My lord has borne a child. That is strange. But that is not all. For a king cries out for the milk of a bullock. That is stranger still. Surely all is wrong with the world.”

“Ah” cried Akbar. “Now I know you. You are the wife of a great wit. And his name is Birbal. Surely his wit grows day by day.”

The king was much pleased with Birbal's craft. The wife of the fool was rewarded with rich gifts. Thus a woman's wit saved her husband from shame and sorrow.



IV

HOW REASON SAVED A MAN'S LIFE

ONE day Akbar sent for his fool. He said to Birbal, "Some men bring ill-luck to others. Look on the face of such a one. The act brings some evil. Tell me, Birbal. Do you believe in such men? Do you know of such a one in Delhi?"

"Such a one there is in Delhi," replied Birbal. "Men speak of him quite often. Look at his face in the morning; and you do not bite a crust of bread all the day."

"That is strange," cried the king "I want to see the man. Go now. Bring him back with you."

Then Birbal searched through the city for the man of bad luck. The man was found at last. Birbal brought him to the king's court. The man slept in the palace that night. Then Birbal made things right for the next day.

Before dawn, he left the man in the king's bedroom. There he stood beside the

king's bed. At last the king awoke. He rubbed his eyes. He opened them. He turned his royal head. And there, before him, stood the man of ill-luck. Him the king saw first that morning.

The man stayed at the palace all that day. Meanwhile the king went about his duties. He had a very busy day. From morning to night he had not a moment to spare. He had not even time to eat. Night came. Then the king thought of the man of ill-luck. And he said to himself, "The first thing I saw this morning was this man. All day I have eaten nothing. Surely the tales about this man are true. He is indeed a man of ill-luck. I must save my people from him. So I will put this man to death. No one else shall look upon his evil face again."

Then Akbar ordered his men to put the man of ill-luck to death. But Birbal's face became grave. "Oh king of kings," he cried. "Hear my words. You saw this man's face as the first thing in the morning. And you did not eat anything all day. But why?

Not because you saw this man. He did nothing to you at all. But because you are a good king. Because you performed all your duties. Because you found no time to eat. But the meals were spread for you. They were banquets fit for you. O king! The man did not make you poor. He did not take your food away from you. Why then do you hang him? It is not kingly. It is not just. It is cruel."

The great king liked the words of his fool. For there was sound reason in them. So the man of ill-luck was set free. On this day the poor man was in good luck. For he found a wise man. That was Birbal. And he found a just king also. That was Akbar.

V

HOW WIT PROVED THE BEST WEAPON

ONE day, the men at court discussed fighting. One said, "The sword is the best weapon in a fight." Another said, "I like a spear in my hand. For a spear can be thrown. Its reach is long. The sword's reach is not so long."

A third man said, "A spear cannot reach far at all. What do you say of the bow with its flying arrows?" Each man had his own pet weapon. Each praised it in turn. All day they argued and argued. But they could not agree.

At last the king turned to Birbal. "What do you think of all this, O Birbal? Tell me. Which weapon do you prefer?"

Then Birbal answered with a smile, "Keep your sword. Keep your spear. Keep also your bows and arrows. I want no weapon but my own wits."

At this the king laughed loud and long. "What a fool you are, Birbal! A man's wits amuse us in court. With our wits we please the ladies. But say, what use are they in a fight? Not a bit of use! Give me a sword. Give me a spear. Give me a bow with arrows. Any weapon is better than a man's wits. The bluntest sword hits harder than the sharpest wit."

Still Birbal smiled; he said "Time will prove my words."

The very next day brought the proof. A great elephant went mad. It broke its chains in two. It broke down the doors of the stable. It ran through the town at full speed. Right in its path stood Birbal.

Now Birbal had no weapon at all with him. Empty were his hands. But his head was by no means empty. For he always had his wits about him. The great beast charged straight towards him. It made Birbal to fear. But he turned not a hair. Near him lay a dead dog. This Birbal flung in the face of the mad beast. It struck the beast in the face. With a wild snort of fear, the elephant turned tail. It did not stop on the way. It was glad to get back to its stable. There its keeper made it fast once more.

This tale reached the ears of Akbar. "Birbal," said the king, "You spoke rightly. A man's wits can be a fine weapon indeed."



VI

HOW BIRBAL PUNISHED THE GUARDS

ONE day Birbal went to the court of his king. At the gate stood two guards. Birbal wanted to go in. But the guards stood firm. "You cannot go in," they said.

"Do you not know me?" asked Birbal.

"We do not care about that," they replied. "You cannot go in," For these men were rogues. They held out their hands for bribes.

"Listen to me, my good men," said Birbal. "The king gives me many fine presents. He will give me some to-day. Do not stop me now at the gate. To one of you I will give one-half of my present. To the other, I will give one-fourth. Does that suit you?"

"That suits us quite well," the two rogues agreed. "But keep your faith with us."

"My word is my bond," said Birbal simply. So Birbal passed through the gates of the palace.

That day the king was greatly amused by the wit of Birbal. Loud and long he laughed.

The king was in a good mood. "Birbal, you are a gem to-day," he said. "Tell me now ; what present do you want ?"

"Oh king ! Live for ever " said Birbal. "One thing only I want. Please grant me one thousand blows with a shoe."

"A strange request !" cried the king. "But you can have them with pleasure." The king then turned to a servant. "Go with the good Birbal," he bade. Give him one thousand blows with a shoe. Birbal himself shall tell you how."

So Birbal left with the servant. He led the way to gate. There stood the two rogues. "Now " smiled Birbal, "This man wants one-half of the king's gift. Give the rogue five hundred blows with your shoe. That man wants one-fourth of the king's gift. Give him, therefore, two hundred and fifty blows with your shoe. One-fourth is still left. Keep them in reserve. They will serve some other day." In this way Birbal kept his word. In this way the two rogues were punished.

VII

HOW BIRBAL STOOD THE TEST

Now many tales were told of Birbal. Day by day his fame grew. Few indeed had not heard of his wit and wisdom. Akbar, the king, grew fonder of him. No man enjoyed so much of the king's favour as Birbal.

This did not please the men at court. Some were wild with envy. One of them swore to shame Birbal. His name was Khaja Sara. He was a mean fellow. He wished to take Birbal's place in the king's heart.

Now Khaja said to himself, "I can make an ass of Birbal. I can make him silly before the king. I will put him hard questions. Such questions no man can answer. All men will mock at him. I will then have his place."

One day Khaja came before the king. He said, "O king of kings, no king is half so great. You are blessed with a fine fool too. No fool is so merry. No fool on earth is so wise. His wit never fails him. But I have

three hard questions to ask him. I wish to test his power."

Now the king loved these tests of wit. So he smiled to Khaja, "Say on, good Khaja. Put those questions to Birbal the Fool. For I am sure he can answer them."

Then Khaja asked, "First, where is the centre of the earth? Second, how many stars are in the sky? Third, how many men are there in the whole world?"

At this the whole court laughed in joy. For many envied the witty Birbal. Birbal showed no sign of fear. He did not even pause to think. His eyes looked straight before him. His nerves kept quite unmoved. He simply picked up a stick. He stuck the stick in the ground at his feet. "This is the centre of the earth," he declared. "Khaja is not sure of it? But he can prove it for himself. Tramp round the world, O Khaja. Count your steps. Then you will know. Here, I say, is the true centre of the earth."

Then Birbal called for a bushy ram. The beast was at once brought to him. "See the hairs of this beast, O Khaja," he said. "Count them one by one for yourself. For their number is the number of the stars in the sky. Do you doubt it? Then count the stars and see."

"Now, 'how many men are there in the whole world?' That is indeed a hard question. Yet Khaja can find it out for himself. Go, Khaja. Kill all the men on the earth but two. Then you can count them right."

At these replies the king and all burst into laughter. Birbal was now more in favour than before. And Khaja Sara fled from the court in shame.



VIII

HOW BIRBAL BECAME A BABY

A GREAT event took place at the court. For Akbar held a great durbar. To the court came great men from all parts of his realm. Not a grand person was absent. Yet, one was

absent. That was Birbal. For Birbal the king waited in vain.

What was the matter? Was he ill?

The king turned to his guards. "Go now to Birbal's house. Bid him come to court. Bring him back with you. Waste no time. I command you. Go at once."

The guards went. Some time later they came back. Birbal was at their side. With a calm face he took his seat.

"You are late," cried the king in anger.

"I am late," agreed Birbal.

"Why?" asked the king.

"I will explain, my king," said Birbal.

"It was not my fault. It was due to my little son. He kept me for hours."

"Nonsense," raged Akbar. "Can a baby turn aside a great man from his duty?"

But Birbal showed no fear for the anger of his king. He went on, "To-day I got up early from bed. I was ready to come to court. But my little boy was cross. All this long

time I tried to comfort him. I could not leave him before."

"Worse, and worse," roared the king. "I cannot believe such rubbish. It is easy to comfort a child."

"What do you know of babies, my lord? You have no children. A king does not look after his own children. To comfort a child needs much wit. Believe me."

"Bah!" cried the king. "No such thing. I could comfort a child in a moment."

Then spoke the fool, "My Lord, I was wrong. You have many sons and daughters. For, all your subjects are your children. I too am your son. I am just a baby. Comfort me then, my lord?"

The jest pleased the king. He forgot his anger. He even laughed. He strode up to Birbal the baby. His voice was quite soft.

"Why do you cry, my little one?" he asked. "Do you want a toy?" Do you want some fruit? Or do you want some pretty flower? Tell me. I will get it at once."

But the baby cried still more. After a long cry it said, "I want a sugar-cane."

The king smiled in triumph. He had won. He did not send for one. He sent for dozens. "Now, my darling, have your pick," he said.

At last the baby picked one up. But now it cried all the more.

"What do you want now?" cried Akbar. "You have your sugar-cane."

"I do not like this," cried the baby. "Cut it into thin slices for me."

The king cut it into slices. He gave them to the baby. The baby's cries became worse. Never was there such a fearful din. "What is the matter with you now?" asked the king. His patience was gone.

"Make my sugar-cane whole again." screamed baby Birbal.

"You win," said the king, laughing loudly. "A small child is a great trouble even to a wise man."

IX

HOW IDIOTS ARE DUPED

Two men lived in a town. All the people were sorry for these men. For they had no sense. Nothing made them wiser. No man could teach them anything. They were poor idiots.

One day, a man beat a big drum in the street. What a grand din it made! The two idiots clapped their hands in joy. They danced down the street after it. The drummer came back home. He placed his drum near his hearth. Then he went off to the bazaar.

The two idiots went softly into the house of the drummer. They looked at the big drum. "What a lovely noise it made!" said one.

"A grand noise," agreed the other.

"How did it make such a grand noise?" asked the first idiot.

"I know. The drummer made the noise with a big stick."

"He did not. How could he? Can a stick make a noise?"

“There is a man inside the drum.”

“You are right. The drummer beats the man. And the man cries out.”

“That is true. I shall find him for you.”

“And I shall find him for you.”

An idiot stood on each side of the drum. Each tore great hole in the flat skin on his side. Each thrust in his hand. Each felt the hand of his friend. Each took a tight hold of the other's hand. “Ah!” cried each at once. “I have the rogue. I have a tight hold of his hand. He cannot escape.”

Just then the drummer came home. He saw the two idiots. He saw the torn, useless drum. He reached for his drum-stick. With it he beat the two fools. They made a great noise. Then he turned them out of his house.

A man with no sense is soon duped. He can even dupe himself. Even the wisest man can teach him nothing.

X

HOW A ROGUE WAS TOO CLEVER

ONCE two merchants lived in a town. One of them was called Dur-buddhi. The name of his friend was Su buddhi. They left their own town. They went to far-off lands. They bought much goods at a cheap price. They sold them for a big price. They made much gain. Soon they became very rich men. Back they came to their own place. They brought home a large treasure. And they trusted no man.

So Dur-buddhi said to his friend: "We have great riches here. Thieves are many. Let us hide our wealth. Beyond the walls of the city is a large tree. Let us dig a deep hole at its roots. Let us bury our riches there. We can share them afterwards."

"That is good sense," said Su-buddhi.

So they carried their store of wealth outside the city walls. At the foot of a great tree they dug a hole. They buried their treasure deep. No one saw them. They went back to

their homes. Their friends were glad to see them again. They told many tales of their travels. But they said not a word of the great riches.

But Dur-buddhi was not content. He was a rich man. But he wanted to be richer still. The thought of the buried gold filled his mind always. He could not shake it off. He lay awake at nights to think of it. He rolled in his bed from side to side. But he could not put the thought of gold away. He wished to have all the heavy bags to himself.

So one dark night he left his house in secret. With soft steps he passed through the city gates. He came to the big tree.

From the folds of his robe he took a spade. He looked round with care. No one was near. He began to dig. Soon he took out the bags.

The hole was now empty. Dur-buddhi filled it up with earth. Then he threw away the dirty spade. He took the bags of treasure on his back. He returned to his own house.

There he hid all the gold. Each day he went to look at it. His eyes were full of joy.

A few days passed. Su-buddhi came to see his friend. "Dur-buddhi, let us go to our hidden bags. Let us make sure of our treasure. Perhaps a thief has found the place. Perhaps we have been robbed."

"No, no," said the sly Dur-buddhi. "That cannot be. Who knows the place? Who can guess it? But I shall put your mind at rest. I shall go with you gladly."

They came to the tree. They dug up the ground. Deeper and deeper did they dig. But no treasure was to be found. Not a coin was left. No bag was there.

Then Dur-buddhi blamed his friend Su-buddhi. "You are afraid of thieves! That is not strange. For you yourself are the thief."

Then Dur-buddhi dragged his friend before a judge. "O Judge," he begged. "Hear my case. This Su-buddhi was my old friend. I gave him all my trust. Together we made much wealth. We hid it under a tree. But in the

night my false friend rises from his bed. He goes alone to the place. He takes all the treasure. Not the smallest coin, not even the cheapest gem, is left, I am ruined."

"Those are harsh words," said the judge. "Prove them."

"The tree itself shall say the truth," said Dur-buddhi boldly.

"In the morning, I will come," agreed the judge. "Be there, both of you."

That night, Dur-buddhi went up to his father. He told him the tale. He told him of a plan. The old man was much afraid. But he loved his son dearly. He could not say 'No' to his wish. So he went with him to the tree.

The tree was hollow. Into the hollow the old man got in. He was hid from all eyes. There Dur-buddhi left him. He went home to his warm bed.

In the morning came the judge and Su-buddhi. Dur-buddhi came soon after. The three men stood near the great tree. The

judge asked. Tell me, O Tree, who stole this rich treasure ? ”

O, what a wonder ! For the tree made answer. “ Subuddhi stole the treasure ! ” It spoke in a clear voice.

“ This is very queer,” thought the judge. Then he cried. “ Bring me some dry sticks.” Dry sticks were brought. “ Place them against the trunk of the tree,” he said. And the sticks were piled against the tree. “ Now set fire to them,” he said. And fire was set to the dry sticks. They blazed up at once. Dense smoke rolled up in clouds. The flames caught the old trunk. It split in two. Out fell a corpse. It was the body of the father of Durbuddhi.

“ I thought so,” said the judge in anger. Durbuddhi himself is the thief. He was clever. He put the blame on Subuddhi. But he was too clever. For trees do not speak. All know it. But he did not think of it.

So Subuddhi got all the treasure to himself. Durbuddhi lost his share of the treasure ; and he lost his father too.

“Do not ask me. That is your affair,” said the other. “Give me back my elephant alive.” How could that be done ?

But the owner took his case to the court of law. The judge advised him. But it was no use at all. The owner still cried, “Give me back my elephant alive.”

Now the judge was Mariada Rama. Wise and just was he. All children know that. For many tales have been told of him. Now Mariada thought, “This owner is a rogue. His beast was ill. That was the cause of its death. It was not the fault of this rich man.” So Mariada thought out a plan. He said to the rich man, “Do not come to court tomorrow. Stay at home. Find all your broken pots. Put them all in a big jar. Place it behind your door. Leave the door shut all day. The owner of the elephant will come for you. He will be in a bad temper. He will be in a hurry. He will push open your door. The door will fly back. It will strike the jar. Your pots will break to pieces. Show them to him. Get into a rage with him.

Then come with him to court. Then I shall pass orders."

The plan worked well. The rich man stayed at home. The owner of the beast called for him. He pushed open the door. It crashed against the jar. There was a fearful din.

"You have broken my pots," cried the rich man. "Come with me to the judge. I want them all again as before. You must give me these very pots."

The two men came before the wise judge. The rich man was in a great rage. "Hear me, O Judge," he cried. "This man broke all my pots. My pots were the finest in the world. I will not take gold for them. He must give me back my pots whole."

"But how can I do that?" cried the owner of the elephant.

"Do not ask him," said Mariada Rama. "That is your affair. Ah? You rogue! You cannot give them back whole. He cannot give back your beast alive. So the pots can

pay for your elephant. Be off with you at once."

XII

HOW THE LAW PROVED AT FAULT

IN a certain town lived a Mussalman. One night his house was robbed. No one saw the deed. For it was done in the dark. The Mussalman was soundly sleeping in his bed then.

For days the Mussalman sought for his stolen goods. In the end he traced some to a certain house. Here lived a rogue. His evil deeds were well-known in the town. He had a bad name. He was the thief. There was no doubt about it. Did the Mussalman's goods walk there? Of course they did not. The rogue stole them in the dark of the night.

So thought the Mussalman. He was no fool. He took the rogue at once before the judge. The judge asked the Mussalman many questions.

"Have you found your goods?" was the first question.

"I have found some of them. They were in this man's house," was the answer.

"Who was the thief?" was the next question.

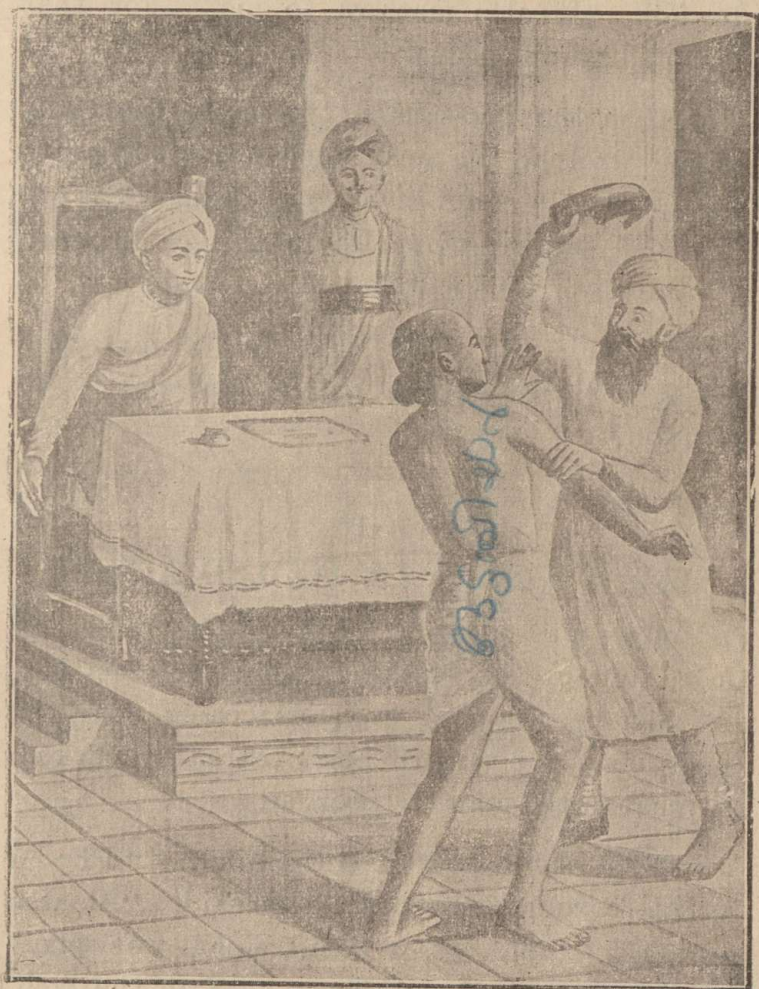
"No one saw the theft," was the reply. "He stole them in the dark of the night. At that time all good men were asleep."

"Then I am sorry," said the judge. "For I cannot punish him. You have no proof of his guilt. No one saw the theft. Then no man can swear to the real thief."

At this the Mussalman looked grave. Then he took out his shoe. With that he beat the rogue.

"What is this?" cried the judge. He was in a wild rage. "How dare you strike this man? Your case was not proved."

Then the crafty Mussalman said, "O great judge, I do not beat him for his theft. His theft does not matter to the law. It does not matter to me. But this man did not warn me of his deed. So I could not place a witness there to see the theft. That makes the law



He took out his shoe. With that he beat the rogue.—P. 38.

to fail. It also matters to me. For that alone I beat the rogue."

Then the Mussalman turned to the thief. "You wretch, the next time fail not to warn me. Then I can prove your crime. So the law will punish you. Do not forget to warn me in time. Or I will punish you again."

To this the judge could make no reply. What could he say? For the law was sadly at fault.

XIII

HOW A SMALL BOY FOOLED A THIEF

A boy sat on the brink of a well. He cried and cried. Nothing could stop his cry. A thief passed that way. He came near the poor boy. He saw the boy's tears. He asked, "What is the matter, poor lad?"

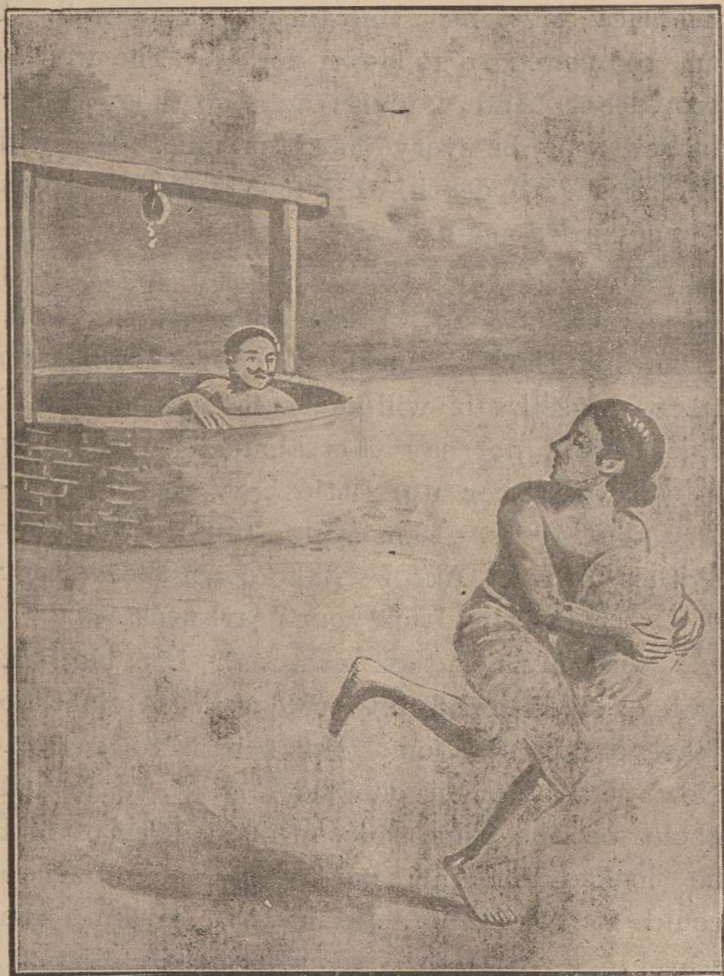
The boy looked up at the thief. "I had a necklace round my neck," he said. "It was worth lots and lots of gold. For it was made of fine pearls. I sat down here at the well. The string snapped round my neck. The

necklace fell into this deep, deep well. I am too young to go down for it. The well is too deep. And I dare not go home. My father will be very hard on me. He will thrash me to death. I know it well." Then the boy cried again.

Now the thief thought in his heart. "I am a strong man. I can go down the well. I can find the pearl necklace. And I will keep it for myself. It will make me a rich man." But he did not say this aloud. To the boy he said, "Cheer up, little boy. Do not cry. Dry your tears. I am your friend. Hold my clothes for me. And I will go down the well for you. I will bring back your pearl necklace."

So the thief took away all his clothes. Naked, he stepped into the well. At last he reached the bottom. He began to search. Now he looked on one side. Now he looked about on the other side. On all sides of him he looked for the necklace. But nowhere could it be found. He had to give up the search.

Up and up he climbed out of the well. "Are you sure about the necklace, little boy?"



By a trick this small boy duped the thief—P.43.

he shouted. "Perhaps it fell on the ground just outside the well."

But the boy said not a word. For no boy was there. He was far off by this time. All the thief's clothes were with him. By a trick this small boy duped the thief.

XIV

HOW READY WIT CAN SAVE A MAN

A CERTAIN king had a fair garden. The king took great pride in it. The garden was full of blooms. It was a beautiful sight. Here the king spent all his spare time. He loved the place. He loved each bloom in it. He loved his garden as his best friend.

One of the king's servants had a son. The young man went into the king's garden each day. Often he plucked a few flowers. Now there were thousands of blooms there. No one could count them. Yet the king missed these few flowers. His love for them was so true. He said, "Some one steals them. I am sure of it. I can feel their absence."

So the king set a watch on the garden. Guards were placed there in hiding. They soon found out the thief. The young man was marched up to the court of the king. There, at the gate, was his own father.

“Father,” cried the young man. “These men call me a thief of flowers in the king’s garden. Save me, my dear father.”

“What does it matter?” smiled his father. “You can come to no harm. Have you not a mouth?”

“A mouth!” laughed the guards. “The boy’s mouth cannot save him. We caught him with the flowers in his hand. He has them now. His mouth may utter any falsehood. But it will be found out.”

But lo! Where were the flowers now? The young man’s hands were empty now. The flowers were not on the ground too. To take the boy before the king was useless. For their proof of his theft was gone.

But how was that? I will tell you how. The young man’s words did not save him.

But his mouth did. For he put the flowers in his mouth. He ate them all. Thus he destroyed the proof of his guilt. His ready wit saved him from harm.

XV

HOW APPAJI SOLVED A HARD PROBLEM

A MERCHANT had three sons. He was very rich. He was very old, too. So he made ready for his death. He called his three sons to his side by the bed.

“My dear sons,” he said, “Very soon I shall leave for the next world. I cannot take my goods with me. I leave them all to you. Yours are my gold and my jewels. Yours are my horses and my cows. Yours are my lands and my houses. Divide these in equal shares. But I have elephants too. There are seventeen of them. Divide them in this way. One-half I give to my eldest son. One-third I give to my second son. One-ninth I give to my youngest son.”

Soon after, the old man died. The sons buried him with great pomp. Many people



"Now," said Appaji, "there are eighteen elephants."—P. 48.

came to the feast. Much gold was given to the poor. Each son got his equal share of his father's property. But how could the sons divide the elephants? How can one take a half of seventeen? How can one take a third of seventeen? How can one take a ninth of seventeen? Could they cut up the great beasts into pieces? The three young men were at their wit's end.

But they were not silly. They asked for advice. Yet no one could help them. The matter was too hard for man's wit. At last the eldest thought of Appaji Raya. He surely could solve the difficulty!

So they went to Appaji. They told their difficulty to him. They begged for his help. At his feet they placed good gifts.

"Go home again, my friends," said Appaji. "To-morrow I will come to you. Then you can carry out the wishes of your dead father."

The next morning Appaji went to them. He rode upon a fine elephant. The elephant

was his own. The young men were very glad to see him.

“Bring me out the seventeen elephants,” said Appaji. “Place them along in a line.”

This was done.

“Now take my own beast. Place this at the end of the line,” said the old sage.

And they did so.

“Now,” said Appaji, “there are eighteen beasts. Let each man take his share of them.”

Then the eldest took nine. For nine is one-half of eighteen. The next took six. For six is one-third of eighteen. The youngest took two. For two is one-ninth of eighteen.

Then Appaji asked, “Has each got his full share?”

The young men answered, “Yes.”

Then Appaji smiled, “So I can take back my own beast after all.” He then mounted his elephant. On its back he rode home again. Thus Appaji solved this matter. Could you have done it?

This book is very good

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