

ful. The labour of the day is over. A gentle failure of the perceptions comes creeping over one; the spirit of consciousness disengages itself more and more with slow degrees, like a mother detaching her hand from a sleeping infant. The mind seems to have a balmy lid closing over it like the eye. 'Tis closing—'tis closed; and the mysterious spirit has gone to take its airy rounds."

I don't know, however, about the spirit's "airy rounds." I rather suspect the spirit remains between the sheets; but during this gentle slumber the brain has renewed its power, the capillaries their contractility, and the body at length awakes refreshed, buoyant, and happy, and ready to resume the labours of the day with pleasure, just as you used to awake, reader, when a boy.

Contrast this with the condition of a man suffering from insomnia. He needs rest, oh! so much. His mind needs it; his weary frame needs it; but his over-stretched brain-capillaries fail to contract; so he tosses about on his bed in vain. Hour after hour goes by, and still he sleeps not; while troublesome, tiring thoughts chase each other through his burning brain, until—perhaps towards morning—nature exhausted at last, his busy thoughts resolve themselves into harassing dreams, and he sinks for awhile into insensibility (we cannot call it sleep), to rise from his couch more tired and unrefreshed than when he lay down.

Sleep is oftentimes banished by persons going to bed with an empty stomach; and if one has been lying awake for half the night, sleep can in most cases be induced by eating a small sandwich, and drinking a dessert-spoonful of brandy in a small quantity of water.

Having a hot-water bottle in bed is a bad practice, and often incites instead of calming the nerves; but bathing the feet in hot water, and sponging the body with tepid or cold, has generally a very good effect. So has a rag dipped in cold water, and placed on the forehead and eyes.

A bottle of soda-water, with fifteen grains of carbonate of soda dissolved in it, is a good narcotic. So is a hard mattress, with a sparing amount of bed-clothes.

If you are sleeplessly inclined when you lie down, as most people are at times, you may try with success some of the following plans of dropping off:—Imagine yourself starting for a walk, along some once familiar, but now half-forgotten road—say, for instance, the path that used to lead you to school. Go over in imagination every bit of the way, and endeavour to call to mind all the landmarks, such as houses, woods, &c. You will not have gone very far before slumber overtakes you. Or, string a row of nouns together, the first that come into your head—the names, say, of people, professions, or animals—and first repeat them several times singly, and in the same order, as dog, donkey, parson, judge, &c.; then to each word attach some definition, as, the dog that barks and bites, the donkey with long ears, the parson in the pulpit, the judge in a wig. Repeat this over and over again; you will be able to retain the right definition to each noun for some time. Presently, however, you will waver and make mistakes. The dog will have the judge's wig, the judge will bark and bite, and in the full assurance that there is nothing ludicrous or out of place in the confusion, you will drop calmly off to sleep.

TWO WHOM THE GODS LOVED.

A STORY OF THE SINGING-FISH.



IN the account of Ceylon by Sir James Emerson Tennent occurs the following passage: "On the occasion of a visit which I made to Batticalon in 1848, I made some inquiries

relative to a story which had reached me of musical sounds said to be often heard issuing from the bottom of the lake, and which the natives suppose to proceed

from some fish in the locality. . . . In the evening, when the moon rose, I took a boat, accompanied by some fishermen proceeded to the spot. On coming to the point mentioned, I distinctly heard the sounds in question. They came up from the water like the gentle thrills of a musical chord, or the faint vibrations of a wine-glass when its rim is rubbed by a moistened finger."

In connection with this notice of the singing-fish of Batticalon, there is a tradition current along that coast which, though replete with the fiction peculiar to Oriental peoples, is so prettily conceived and fashioned as to be worth rescuing from the oblivion too often the fate of unwritten legends. The ancient literature of the East, preserved through many centuries in books of dried palm-leaves, deals copiously with the larger events of early times, when native kings were numerous, powerful, and wealthy. In these well-preserved records of bygone ages are recitals of battles fought, of cities founded, of palaces and temples built, of public works executed; but they contain no trace of domestic life, and but few memorials of family incidents. Tradition has taken much of these matters

into its keeping, and amongst others the "Story of the Singing-fish," telling of the fate of "Two whom the Gods loved," and took early.

In the early days of Lanka, when Arab traders frequenting the island knew it as Serendib, there ruled along the eastern coast a king whose territory extended from the treacherous rocks off Kirinde, where now the Basses light-ship floats, in warning to mariners, as far as the great fresh-water lakes beyond the Bay of Batticalon, and stretching inland from the golden seashore fringed with palm-trees to the lofty mountains, the guarded barriers of the Kandyan country. No vestiges now remain to tell where cities stood, where hamlets lined the way along those wooded plains, from south to north, so thickly that when the early dawn gilded the horizon, the first cock-crow was taken up and passed from house to homestead to the farthest limits of this monarch's rule. The quiet inland lakes, whose glassy waters slumber to-day amidst a solitude broken only by the cry of wild fowl, or the heavy plash of lazy crocodiles, in those far-off times were teeming with life and industry, that meant abundance and contentment.

The great Yahlai river rolled down its noisy waters to the sea through myriad fields and gardens, o'er which it scattered rich fertility. The hunting-grounds beyond, past the great Tanks, stretching to where the Ouvah country looked down from craig and mountain-peak, were full of savage life. There for many a wooded league were roaming the lordly elephants, the wary panthers, the spotted deer, so graceful, yet so swift; and amongst them, fully as wild, with no redeeming traits of form or nobleness, the poor outcast Veddahs, the wandering hunters, the last degraded remnants of Lanka's aborigines.

But brighter than all the flowers that blossomed in the royal garden, more graceful in limb than any deer that grazed within the sovereign parks, sweeter in voice than any song-bird of the woods, was Maie, the king's only child and daughter. Her face was resplendent as the moon, her bosom resembled the Timborrata fruit, her feet were small and delicate as the lotus, her teeth were as pearls. The princess was dearer to Rohana, the king, than his crown. He delighted to hear her voice, and never was he so happy as when his daughter's bird-like songs were wafted from her chambers to the royal audience-hall, by early morning breeze, or floated on the air at mid-day.

As might have been anticipated, the fame of her beauty and her accomplishments, the story of her winning ways and loving disposition, was not confined to the capital, or even to the king's territory. Princes and rulers of other lands heard of the Princess Maie, whose name was in the mouths of travellers and traders as something that might well be spoken of. More than one of these sent embassies to Rohana, with presents and friendly messages, as was the fashion in those days, to ask of the king that they might have his only child as their queen. But Rohana's heart yearned towards his daughter, so that after entertaining these messengers as became his own state and hospitality, he sent them away with presents in return, with precious

stones, and ivory, and gums, and peacocks, but without a promise of his daughter's hand. She, too, wished to remain in her father's palace, for the time had not come when home-love should give place to another and a stronger emotion within her bosom. And so she continued to sing, to weave garlands of flowers amidst her maidens, to bathe in the cool shady fountain by the grassy knoll, and to live as happy as a bird upon the wing, as joyous as a young fawn in wooded dell. And all who looked upon her on great festival days felt that she was loved of the gods.

Her fame still travelled abroad, until one powerful and wealthy king, far in the north, heard of her goodness and beauty, and resolved to obtain her hand in marriage. With this object he arranged an embassy, and selected many rare and costly gifts, with which to plead his cause; and to make still more certain of his end, he chose one of the most accomplished of his nobles to be his ambassador to Rohana's court, a young man, handsome, well-favoured, of good repute, and gifted in speech. So when the retinue was arranged, and Asela the ambassador charged with his mission, they set forth on their journey of many days, having sundry great rivers to cross, and many lofty hills to ascend. It was the noon of the tropic summer, when the mid-day sun shone fiercely, when travellers hid them on their way by moon-light, or by torch-light, ere the day dawned. But Asela halted not, neither did he grow faint or weary by the way; for he was minded to be about his sovereign's work, to do it well and swiftly. On one of his many days of travel, when the noon-tide sun was pitiless in its scorching heat, when even insect life was hushed and still, when the morning breeze had died of tropic listlessness, and leaves hung motionless from the branches overhead, Asela slept upon a grassy bank beside a rippling stream. He dreamed a dream, and in the vision that he saw was a choice garden and a fountain, and by its crystal waters was seated a maiden of surpassing loveliness, such as he had never set eyes on. He made an effort to speak, to move nearer to her, to make certain she was what she seemed to be, and as he strove he awoke, and found it but a dream. He journeyed onward, and with changing scenes, and toil, and hunting, essayed to drive away the memory of that dream, but vainly. Ever the same figure appeared before him: the pleasant garden, the crystal fountain, were with him on the sandy plain, or in the mountain pathway. And thus he journeyed, and thus at length he reached Rohana's capital.

As was the custom in all Eastern countries, messengers had gone before him to prepare the way; so that when he halted, as was right to do, outside the city's limits, he found shelter and food prepared, that he might there bide the time when the king could receive him with all proper honours. When the appointed time came that the ambassador of the northern king should be received, the city was alive with crowds assembled to witness the entry and the reception. It was a day of jubilee in Rohana's capital, but a time of trouble and deep concern in the palace, where the monarch, not less than the princess, wished

the occasion had never arisen. Still an outward show of gaiety was apparent on all sides. Festive arches of leaves and flowers spanned the principal thoroughfares of the city, and around each were grouped a party of chiefs and flag-bearers. The population lined the streets, and as Asela set forth from his temporary resting-place for the royal abode, attended by a goodly retinue bearing his sovereign's gifts, the king's body-guard and band went before him, accompanied by chiefs, priests, and standard-bearers.

Outwardly nothing was wanting to make the reception cordial and pleasant to the ambassador, the more so that the answer resolved on was to be unfavourable. Games were played, after an exchange of gifts, music echoed through the royal halls, nautches were given by the female attendants of the nearest dewale, and all went merry with the crowd. The thoughts of Rohana were in his young daughter's chamber. Asela dreamt still of the garden, the fountain, and the nymph. He was lodged that night in a wing of the palace, in apartments spacious, lofty, and pleasant. But in vain he courted sleep: in vain his eyelids closed. His busy thoughts were ever on the one unvarying theme. Night slowly wore away before advancing day-dawn, and as the first notes of jungle minstrelsy came fresh upon the dewy breath of morn, Asela stole forth in quest of he knew not what, wandering he cared not whither. A tope of palms and then a wooded copse were passed, then round the margin of a little lake, amongst flower-beds, and into another palm-tope, and outside that a grassy knoll and a broad cluster of jambo-trees, and feathery bamboos, and—Asela halts!—notes soft and low steal upon his ear, the voice of a young damsel, surpassingly sweet. He glides gently and slowly onwards, and then, rooted to the spot, looks upon the fairy form of his dream, washing her feet in a pool.

Looking up, the princess saw him, and at first made as though she would have risen and fled; but there was such a calm dignity in his features, he stood so still, that emboldened, she beckoned to him to approach, motioned him to be seated on the grass close by, and woman-like questioned him as to his name and mission, at the same time telling him her own. On learning that the beautiful girl before him, the idol of his thoughts, was the Princess Maie, whose hand he had come so great a distance to demand for the king his master, Asela's brow was heavy with sadness.

"Alas!" he replied to her question, "I must sit here no longer, or I betray my trust. I have to ask you of your father for another, and that other is my sovereign!"

At this the light-hearted princess laughed, and bade him be of good cheer, for never would she leave her father's palace unless—and she hesitated—unless it pleased her particularly well to do so.

How long they sat and conversed, and how often they met in the garden and held communion, the story as it came down to the present time does not relate; but it tells how Asela, full of remorse for neglect of his

sovereign's commands, sought a private audience of King Rohana, and unbosomed himself of all that had occurred, from his dream by the rivulet to that day, and ended by casting himself on the monarch's clemency and forgiveness.

At that moment the sound of Maie's voice, soft and silvery, came floating in with many a note of song such as her father loved to hear.

For a time the king's heart was touched; but again a dread of his neighbour's hostility outweighed all other feelings, and he dismissed the offending Asela for a time, until resolve was taken how to act.

Calling to his counsel his Chief Adigar, or Prime Minister, the king, acting on his opinion, determined to preserve the friendship of his northern neighbour, a powerful sovereign, by sacrificing the Ambassador, who had dared to play traitor to his master, and thus, whilst finding an excuse for avoiding a favourable answer to the northern king, he should succeed in retaining his much-loved daughter.

The order went forth—execution was to take place that evening, by the culprit being cast down from the loftiest pinnacle of the palace into the surging sea below, where boiling eddies and violent currents would sweep his body to destruction.

It was in vain the princess pleaded with her father, in vain she sent forth her sweetest, most touching songs. The monarch was inexorable, and preparations were hastened for the execution to take place in presence of the assembled chiefs, the priests, and troops drawn up before the palace.

Sunset was the time fixed, and great was the concourse, though a sad and gloomy one, that gathered in the palace grounds and on the soft sea-beach, to witness the punishment of one whom many pitied, whom few condemned.

Asela was led to the topmost tower of King Rohana's palace, and there, standing on the summit, stretched forth his hands towards the garden and the fountain where he had seen and held converse with Maie, who walked there no longer. He turned him to the north, and looked into the distance, beyond which was the home he should see no more, and waving a last farewell, he sprang from the lofty battlement, himself his executioner.

A deep, low groan went up from the gazing multitude below as his form flew downwards; but ere it met the waters of the sea, another was with him—the princess had sprung from a low window of her chamber, and joined her fate with his! But the gods, who loved them both so well, whose chief and best attribute is mercy, had compassion on them, and as the lovers touched the water they were transformed to fish, whose notes of softest music are still heard from the depths below, along the eastern shores, on still, calm, moonlight nights.*

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* "They [the musical fish] were said to be heard at night, and more distinctly when the moon was nearest the full, and the sounds were described as resembling the faint sweet notes of an Æolian harp. I sent for some of the fishermen, who said they were perfectly aware of the fact, and that their fathers had always known of the existence of the musical sounds."—*Sir J. E. Tennent.*