

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_210022

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. *22302/1104⁹* Accession No. *20586*

Author *Houseman Laurence*

Title *Cook and their Maker*

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below. *and others.*

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TALES

A FARM IN FAIRYLAND
THE HOUSE OF JOY
THE FIELD OF CLOVER
ALL-FELLOWS
THE BLUE MOON
THE CLOAK OF FRIENDSHIP

NOVELS

A MODERN ANTAEUS
SABRINA WARHAM
JOHN OF JINGALO
THE ROYAL RUNAWAY
THE SHEEPFOLD

PLAYS

BETHLEHEM
PRUNELLA (with H. G. BARKER)
THE CHINESE LANTERN
PAINS AND PENALTIES
THE WHEEL

GODS AND THEIR
MAKERS AND OTHER
STORIES *By* LAURENCE HOUSMAN



LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

First published in 1897
Re-issued • • 1920

Copyright, 1897
(All rights reserved)

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. GODS AND THEIR MAKERS	
CHAPTER	
I. PEETI HAS A VISION OF HIS GOD	-9
II. KATCHYWALLAH'S DEBUT . . . . .	..18
III. A TUSSELE WITH THE HIGH-PRIEST . . . . .	.. 25
IV. AYSTAH MAKES "HOOSH" . . . . .	..33
V. "LET KATCHYWALLAH AND HOOSH HAVE A BATTLE" . . . . .	..38
VI. A Pious FRAUD ; AND THE SUDDEN DISAPPEAR- ANCE OF HOOSH . . . . .	....46
VII. HOOSH TAKES VENGEANCE UPON PEETI	52
VIII. PEETI, GLU-GLU, AND THE Cow . . . . .	..59
IX. AYSTAH TAKES VENGEANCE UPON KATCHYWALLAH .67	
X. SACRILEGE : PEETI AND AYSTAH ARE FOUND GUILTY . . . . .	..74
XI. THE SEA ROAD . . . . .	..81: 81
XII. "OUR HEARTS ARE BREAKING FOR A LITTLE LOVE" . . . . .	..90
XIII. THE SUBJUGATION OF THE GODS . . . . .	..99
XIV. PEETI BECOMES THE LAW-GIVER . . . . .	.106
XV. THE ARRIVAL AND WRATH OF GLU-GLU . . . . .	.III
XVI. GLU-GLU GIVBS BATTLE AND is VANQUISHED . . .119	

6 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVII. AYSTAH HAS NEWS OF HOOSH . . . . .	..126
XVIII. "MY NAME IS CHAM-PUM. IN ME GODS DIE DAILY" . . . . .	.133
XIX. CHAM-PUM'S APPETITE . . . . .	..140
XX. EXEUNT PEETI AND AYSTAH ; CHAM-PUM REMAINS . . . . .	.146
APPENDIX . . . . .	.152
II. LET US MAKE GODS. . . . .	....167
III. LITTLE SAINT OOGH. . . . .	....175
IV. THE MIRACLE-WORKER . . . . .	..195
V. THE BLIND GOD . . . . .	..209

I

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

CHAPTER I

PEETI HAS A VISION OF HIS GOD

INTO Peeti's soul had come the vision of his god. In the midst of the night-watches, with eyes straining at the shuffling darkness, he had beheld it; and as his mental appetite took its bite of the unknown, the divine form grew in clearness and definition. With' feet planted within the borders of the invisible world, it seemed to be stamping the shape of its godhead on the threshold of the material, apparent already, in the stirring of the child's brain, as a manifest reality. The shadows shut and opened like the swaying to and fro of a curtain, deeps darkly departing, closing again in a greyness more opaque, on the surface of which the form of the god seemed to move. Shiplike the thing drifted over the face of his dreams.

Light of the over-dawn and full awaking came to eye and brain, and Peeti rose carrying with him! a consecrated memory of how one, Katchywallah of articulated

10 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

name, had stood over against his bed in the long hours and the darkness, and chattered to him concerning the construction of its own godhead, saying: "Let me be made of a gourd, and let my countenance be fierce, and for food give me the shedding of men's teeth!" And Peeti, answering by that form of asseveration which among savage races is the most solemn sign of abject and devoted service, had said: "Thou shalt be made of a gourd; and thy countenance shall be fierce; and for food I will give thee the shedding of men's teeth."

Conscience and tradition were at strife in Peeti's bosom, as he shook himself up from the continuing slumbers of his tribe at the call of his new-found deity. Conscience said, "My god is my own god, and he shall be made by me." Orthodoxy said, "Up and take your dream to the priests, that they may interpret, fulfil, per-adventure dock and curtail this rough vision of a divinity." Peeti, with' the eyes of an advancing mind, had beheld orthodoxy from its hinder parts; presently in the shove and jostle of contending thoughts it knocked knees hopelessly, and lay elbowed to the wall.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 11

For here was Peeti's god comb to him, minutely defined, the name and the nature of it, and the method of its manufacture. Peeti went over it all bit by bit, till he had it firmly in his vision, and chewed his fists for joy. He planned how a fat gourd could be scooped for a belly, a mouth carved out of wood and coloured a ravenous red, and then he joined to these such a shedding of men's teeth as never was till now.

Was ever possession like to this? Surely his very own should his own god be! As a modern seer has said since, "My mountains are my own, and I will keep them to myself," so was Peeti; minded to say, as, to his god, the yet unfashioned and invisible, he made consecrate his first vow against the priestly tradition and observance of his tribe. He bowed himself to the coming incarnation and said, '- No hand shall make thee, Katchywallah, but mine alone. Surely, this day thine eyes shall look upon thine own belly which thy servant's hands shall have prepared for thee! "

In the tribe of which Peeti was a singular off-scouring, each person had his or her own particular and personal god, to

12 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

whom alone of all gods worship was due to be rendered. And in this connection the priests taught (and practice proved the truth of their teaching) that at the fitting period of every man's life his god became manifested to him., and made request of a material form, a tabernacle, wherein to be worshipped.

When such a revelation had been given—as had now been given to Peeti—the priestly requirement was that a report of it should be made by the recipient to the heads of the sacred college, in order that they, out of their consecrated stores, might supply the fabrics and wherewithal for the god's making. It was not whispered—for in those days there was no whispering on so risky a subject—that the priests ever modified a too aspiring realization, or prompted an intelligence too dull to devise a god of its own; but it may have remained a 'silent fact, nevertheless; and certainly there did lie somewhere in Peeti's mind a memory of how, one day, peeping through the rails of the sacred enclosure, he had seen some priest superintending, if not taking upon himself, the construction of a god for a half-witted lad, who was considered too old to have been vouch-

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 18

safed no heavenly vision, and was suspected of wickedly concealing it.

Against profanation of this sort Peeti would at all costs guard his god; and neither should his aspirations be baulked by priestly etiquette, nor his fair spontaneity confounded with the extraneous and laboured conceits of orthodoxy.

The horrible high-priest, though ceremonial thrashings might take payment for the omission, should neither make nor mar his god; and let Katchywallah once accomplish his incarnation, not even the chief of the priests dared lay hands on him, to make him other than he was.

Unmothered since his seventh year, Peeti had made it the pursuit of his life in the years following to elude the dual control with which priesthood and parentage strove to coerce him; the occasional cuffs of his father, together with the more pre-concerted whippings of the high-priest, were influences which gave a cordial rouse to the latent genius of rebellion which was in him.

It seems difficult, without being ungracious to the holiest memories within us, to say that Peeti was favoured in that he had no mother; and yet it is a connection

14 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

in which this must be said—this much of mothers—that they most of all, and most innocently of all, are the aiders and abettors of the cruel spinners of priestcraft. They undo our swaddling bands only to render us up into a deeper bondage, and wash off the dew of our birth by a chrism which is one of shame and denial.

Peeti was by favouring chance saved from that trap set in the affections, and left with free feet to enter *on* the road to which his rebel genius pointed him.

His father, a dull-witted keeper of cows, paid small heed to the wayward output of the boy's mind, not discerning its clear issue; but the high-priest, of mean yet wary intellect, kept upon him a watch¹ of uneasy distrust, took stolen views on his privacy, and, when opportunity arose, struck; effectually ridding Peeti's heart of all love whatever toward the institutions of priesthood.

Thus in Peeti's short life hatred' and fear of the high-priest had alternately stimulated and stricken the active flight of an intellect by no means ordinary. But now at length the sense of a god's patronage overbore former fears and scruples. Katchy-wallah, his own good, was come at last to

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 15

enfranchise and to rescue; and Peeti made firm resolve that the fashioning of his god should be all in his own hands.

He sprang from the litter of dried grasses which formed his bed, and went grubbing and burrowing in one corner of the cabin; and as he did so, already his wonder 'grew into admiration of a deity who had, by divine foreknowledge, caused him to lay up this store of his own shed teeth which he now unearthed.

There was yet chillness in the air, and on the level lands no sunlight, so, early was it when Peeti, provided with a flint-knife and his handful of teeth, slipped out at the rear of the hut in scanty native attire. Off he went, lancing his long shanks through grey watery grasses, making for the sheer hill-side that soared thickly wooded toward the upland above. So sheer was it that the pines seemed to be toppling down from their high roost, as they strained perilously upon the great claw-like fibres of their roots. On their crests they wore the gleams of the rising sun; but the lowlands still lay in shadow.

The quiet caution of the boy's Jialf-sliding motion changed into reckless leaping when he found himself on the

16 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

farther side of the gourd-fields, which lay back from the village against the lower slopes of the hill and within cover of the high hanging woods.

Carrying along a large gourd which he had filched in passing, he sprang fearlessly upward. Scant brown blades and patches of bare hill-soil glowed tawny in the level morning light; over them streaked the deep bloomy shadows of the pine-boles, warped sinuously to left and right by interlacing roots that weaved ridges and hollows into the soil.

Over the steep climbing ground Peeti followed his flying shadow on an ascent that became ever more precipitous. The higher he went, having cleared the belt of the woods, the more distinct grew the sound of things distant—the fainter of things in the underlying valley; for the height bore him up within hearing of what was afar, while it made more effectual the division between him and the cabins which clung round the hill's base, and were yet so close, that, but for the woods muffling the ground between, he could from where he stood have cast a stone into the midst of them.

Now he heard from distant cups and

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 17

hollows of ground the bleating of sheep and the mellow lowing of cattle, and from beyond far-off headlands, over long reaches of sand, the roar of the ascending sea.

And now the wind came, filling his ears, letting no sound be heard save its own; and now lulled, letting such! silence be round him that he heard far below in the woods a new gust panting up the ascent; another moment, and again it came whirling past him, lifting him on.

At length he had attained the height of his goal and stopped in lofty seclusion. From his knees spent with running he slid off in a long sprawl over the hard-baked and grassless soil of the table-land.

He cast down beside him the gourd and flint-knife; and carefully depositing his treasured handful of teeth, set himself to devise a tabernacle for that Being told of in the vision, which had brought to him a soul, and to his soul its god,

And since he has chosen solitude, let solitude watch over him! Let us not pry with our analytic minds into these ante-natal mysteries ! Peeti and his god we shall meet again in the world of men. Till then, leave him alone at his (devotions on the wind-blown table-land 1

CHAPTER II

KATCHYWALLAH'S DÉBUT

PEETI came down from the mountain, his god in hand, terrible to behold. Looking upon this creation which he had fashioned, he could not but pronounce it very good. There, set a-crest of the gourd, glared a fierce countenance, such as the god had demanded ; while within lay not merely the sheddings of teeth which he had treasured, and dug that morning from the corner of his cabin, but three more torn forth in sacrifice upon that hill-altar where but an hour back his god had lain a-making. And beyond all this, the mere punctual fulfilment of a divine behest, Peeti had cast into the features a look of such concentrated sharkishness, and, in the caressing attitude of the hands linked on the belly, such small gluttonish approval of past banquets, that the god must indeed be hard to please who could not take naturally to such a home, and feel godly satisfaction in the devotion of his young worshipper.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 19

And Peeti was radiant; he had secured to himself a god beyond all conception marvellous, new, and great, and abounding in those instincts which cried aloud in, himself for the flesh of priests when rage and resentment had dominion over his heart. Beholding that visage, he saw, as in a mirror, his own eager passions for battle and for vengeance; and felt that here he had one in stern affinity 'on whom to lavish the tribute of his rebellious love ; felt also this further tribute drawn from him, and bowed his head as he gave it—the tribute of superstitious reverence and holy fear.

Down out of that seventh heaven wherein he had held hours of strange communing, wherefrom he had drawn such draught of inspiration ; down from that hill-altar whereon the sun blazed ever fiercer in its fires towards noon, called back to earth by hunger, came Peeti, god-bearing.

The pines buried him in pleasant gloom as he descended towards his home. The sounds of life down below began to come noisily upon his ears—that confused unquiet clamour never to be separated from the daily routine of life in a savage community. He could hear the neighbourly yells of the women quarrelling¹ across their

20 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

doorways; the babble of children; and now and then loud lamentation from one in trouble, or, as might chance, a sudden explosion of squeaks and squeals from the pig-droves that strayed, rooting for garbage, through purlieus of the village. Then, above all, came suddenly the dull bumbling of a tom-tom beaten within the holy enclosure, calling the hour for prayer. It came to him with new meaning now ; he addressed himself adoringly to his deity, and went through the prescribed ritual with vigorous devotion. Nine times he bumped his head on the ground at his god's feet; then paused, and out of the abundance of his heterodoxy gave three more bumps. "Because it is your birthday, King Katchy," he said in explanation, "and because there's not another god like you in all the world." Then he kissed the brindled belly, and, taking his god up, went softly on.

⁴⁴ Where is that Aystah, I wonder?" he said to himself, as he carried out into the open space below the pine-wood, and cast his eye over the gourd-ground to the group of mud-cabins beyond. Aystah must come and see Katchy, and scream and bury away her eyes; so Peeti, proud of hope,

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 21

made hardly a doubt. When carried, Katchywallah had a pleasant little rattling noise in his inside; but when shaken, he chattered his teeth most gruesomely. Now he should chatter them at Aystah—and then—why, of course Aystah must give him a tooth for a peace-offering, and after that she should be allowed a corner of Katchywallah's friendliness.

Aystah was the dear victim of all his joys; she should have first peep, and offer the first squeal prelude to the subjugation of the rest of the community. So, laying the little horror reverently down under a thorn-bush, he went in search of his familiar.

He found her careering about like an ass of the desert, ridden by her small brother Daz, the whole of whose horsemanship consisted in such vigorous flogging that, had she not clipped him tight, he must have lost his balance and fallen to the stroke of her heels.

"Aystah, you sow," said Peeti, "put pig Daz down, and come with me!"

"Daz may come too?"

"No, not! he would die the loud death, and Peeti would catch whackirigs for that."

22 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Aystah paused to consider. Will she die too of it? "

" She is to come and see ! " said Peeti oracularly. " I have seen, and I have not died."

To hear, with Aystah, was to obey, where Peeti was concerned: her whole nature was spent in submission to him';, in the light of his looks, and in obedience to his lead, her days were turned to adventure, a thorny road to glory. Her meek body had borne many stripes, mainly, if not all, for this cause—loyalty to her mad leader. Now too, though for no better object that she knew than to go and give herself to loud death, the spirit of her lord rested upon her, and she girded herself up and ran behind him.

They came to the entrance of the thicket; there Peeti stopped and crouched down, making a motion for Aystah to keep away.

" Take care ! he may bite," he said; and Aystah squirmed it to a bough, and hung dangling. " She shall not see it **till** she comes ! " Aystah dropped. Then Peeti, drawing forth his little monster, reared it and set it rattling. Aystah sent out a little cry of fear, but not so loud or long as Peeti had hoped; nor did she

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 23

turn tail and run away, so as to give him the fierce joy of pursuit, with the rattle of his god's inwards springing at her ears. After her first cry, she took another look, gave a little grunt, and rolled stomach to grass.

" Whatever is it—that thing of Peeti? " she said.

" It is Katchywallah, his god."

" Bah ! bah ! what a beast of a one ! like himself, so ! "

" If she says it, he bites her ! " cried Peeti, launching the god towards her, so that the rattle sprang again. Then Aystah did scream' in a complete and female manner, rolling over on her face in the grass, and throwing up her legs so that no evil thing might come near her.

"She gives him a tooth," said Peeti, " and Katchywallah forgives her ! "

After a good deal of explanation on his part, and remonstrance on hers, Aystah was got to sit up and feel round her mouth to see if she had not a tooth which by something kinder than brute force might be extracted. She had such an one, ripe for dropping, one that wriggled and swung as she touched it; for Peeti there was long coaxing to be done, patiently

24 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

and with threats, before she mustered courage sufficient for the uprooting.

Sundry little pulls made to look like tugs were given, and then a piteous grimace. " It's so tight in ! Peeti does not know how tight! "

" Let him feel," said Peeti; and then his wicked hand went in at the large mouth held guilelessly open and took tender hold. The next moment it came out, driven before the wind of a loud cry ; but with it the tooth came captive; and after the first cry, wrung from her by horror of his treachery, Aystah began to forget the importance of her pain as she watched the feeding deity.

She heard her tooth go " clink " as it joined itself to Peeti's ivories within Katchywallah's interior. 'And then Peeti gave her her reward, biting her, patting her back, and naming her " Shadow of Peet." Nay, had another of her teeth been at all comfortably loose, she would have let him filch it for a repetition of like praise, and did a thing much more brave, and in greater merit of kisses, when, to please him, she touched with her lips the brindled paunch, and said, following Peeti's dictation, " Great I oh, great is King Katchy, greater than most I "

CHAPTER III

A TUSSLE WITH THE HIGH-PRIEST

PEETI, having won for his god the homage he most sought, was now desirous for him to make his entry into the village with all the pomp and publicity available at short notice. Aystah was sent before as herald, to announce the auspicious tidings to the women and children of the community. The men were out in the fields, for the most part, and the rest either hunting or fishing ; only the high-priest was left, and he was buried in the seclusion of the sacred college deep in his studies of theology ; him Aystah did not think it necessary to disturb.

So, before the wondering eyes of women and children, Peeti made triumphal entry, bearing his god aloft. He was followed by a numerous rabble to his father's door; and here, the cravings of hunger asserting themselves over the love of pomp, he fell upon the larder and left it void. Then, having partially stilled his appetite, he returned to the door-shed and sat down

26 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

with Katchywallah between his knees. There was a general opinion, volubly spoken, that his god was something very much out of the ordinary way. The children were all beautifully scared, and hid between their mothers' knees for protection ; but there was one strange exception among them, and that one was Daz, Aystah's small brother.

He came sprawling and waddling, thrusting forward his great domed head between the knees of the gathered crowd; gazed for a while, and listened ; and then slowly advanced quite near, and looked full into Katchywallah's face.

Peeti gave the gourd a rattle ; the child listened intelligently, laying his ear against the god's body.

" He bite?" he said at last.

" Yes. He bites safe enough," said Peeti. " Now you hear him grind his teeth ! "

Daz tarried the grinding, then gave in his assent :

" He gwind him teef; he plenty teef. He bite Chumpa-jumb? "

Peeti went *off* on a shout of laughter. Chunta-jumbra was the high-priest's god, an ugly brute, most foul to look upon, ten times the size of Katchywallah. Yet Peeti

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 27

caught at the idea and shouted it out like a battle-cry.

"Bite? Yes! Let Chunta-jumbra come if he wants to get bitten 1 Katchywallah' is small, but he has more teeth' than Chunta-jumbra ; he will bite Chunta-jumbra into ten pieces, and fight every piece of him ! "

But at that Aystah ran in upon him, drowning his voice with the clamour of her cries :

" Oh, big stupid Peeti, hush ! They will go and tell. Don't you know they will tell? Don't speak it so loud. There! Hush, hush ! See them now ! "

Already there were changed faces among the crowd : even these women-folk with their dull wits knew that he had spoken blasphemy against a priest's god ; knew that if this reached the priest's ears there would be trouble for him, and for them also, should they lend a favourable hearing to such heresy.

" Bah ! Pccti does not care," said the boy sullenly. " I say nothing wrong ; I say if Chunta-jumbra comes here, Katchywallah will fight him ;, and so he will ! Chunta has his own place ; let him stick there ! "

The crowd had drawn away ; the women were scolding their children into the doors

28 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

of their respective homes. Aystah's mother was calling for her also, and for Daz. She hoisted Daz in her arm's, gave Peeti a parting' grunt of affection, and trotted back weightily to her own home, where at the door-shed her mother stood waiting to slap her into the house.

Only a short time and the news carried ; some one, willing to win favour, had babbled it to the high-priest's ear; and even now full grimly he came stepping forth, threading his way through the cabins to the one where Peeti dwelt.

Peeti was sitting in rapt admiration before his god, when the priest's shadow darkening the doorway caused him to look up.

Then he found himself face to face with the arch-enemy.

"Where is this fine god thou hast taken upon thee to make?" said the priest, his face wrinkled with malice—"this god which is to eat Chunta-jumbra?"

"This is my god!" said Peeti, holding up Katchywallah to view. "But he won't eat Chunta-jutnbra unless Chunta-jumbra interferes with him!"

"No?" said the priest, as he scrutinized Katchywallah's comely proportions with

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 29

hostile admiration. " But thou speakest foolishly when thou sayest such things as these. This *god* that thou hast thought to make is of suitable size, and well begun ; bring him therefore to the priests to, the sacred place, and there finish him."

Then Peeti stood up to do battle for his god, guessing too well what a docking of his fair glory this finishing would be, if the priests were left with a free hand. " Katchywallah is finished," he said stoutly.

The very name, meaning, as near as can be translated, " Touch-me-who-dare ! " was distasteful to the high-priest. Yet though he greatly desired to divest this god of some of his formidable qualities, he had a superstitious dread lest he should be playing with edged tools. Seeing rebellion threatening, he tried more subtle methods to gain his end.

" Thou knowest not, then, how greatly it is debated in our sacred orders whether a god will at all enter his tabernacle until it has been approved of and hallowed by the priests. Thou art therefore bound for thine own sake to submit thus far to our wisdom, lest there be something so much amiss in the fashioning¹ of thy *god* that until the offence be removed thy god will

30 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

not consent to come under the roof of the abode thou hast built for him. Until, therefore, we have determined whether Katchywallah be thy god's name or no, and whether thou hast devised for him the body he desires, this remains but a false image and semblance of him, and is, to put it truly, no god."

"No god!" Peeti threw up his head, and repeated the words furiously. "No god! no god! You say Katchywallah is no god!" Then springing forward, "At him!" he cried: "bite him! bite him!" and dashed his god full in the priest's face—so forcibly, indeed, that it cut him across the jaw and the blood flowed down. Thereupon, in an access of terror, unable to stand against the superstitious dread that assailed him, the high-priest turned him about and fled, leaving Peeti master of the situation.

"Oh, my Katchy, you have bitten him, you have bitten him!" cried Peeti, in an ecstasy; and he hugged the little god reverently to his breast.

After this he reckoned, what indeed was the fact, that Katchywallah, having sufficiently demonstrated his godhead, had thenceforth nothing to fear at the high-priest's hands.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 31

Nevertheless, the next day there was great weeping and wailing over the sequel to this fine business.

Peeti, caught at an unwary moment, had been taken to the sacred enclosure and there tied to the whipping-post, and most dexterously treated by two of the lower priests, armed with thin wands ; while over against them sat the high-priest, liberally measuring out the punishment.

From Peeti himself came no sound at all; it was Aystah, who rolled, a oaiseiablp cloubled-up heap, and beat and bit at the rails of the enclosure, squealing like a small stuck pig over this bumping about of her heart's apple—it was Aystah whose weeping and wailing were gteat; Aystah, who, grunting her grief, received the poor drooping form from the grim janitor at the gates, and covered his wounds with healing unguents and medicinal leaves moistened by the abundance of her own warm tears; also it was Aystah who, strong in his service, hoisted her stricken hero with desperate arms, and, staggering and falling upon the way, so bore him to his own home and laid him down in his small dark cabin at his god's feet.

So in his own body Peeti suffered

32 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

punishment for the assault made by his injurious deity on the sacred person of a high-priest. The high-priest went scowling about, with sticking-plaster on his cheek and the memory of the bite rankling in his heart; yet that same bite convinced him that Katchywallah was "all there," a god quite sufficiently pugnacious in temperament to need' no further completion whatsoever.

So Katchywallah was allowed to take his place among all the other Eares and Penates of Peeti's home, and had pleasure in receiving from time to time tribute of tooth-offerings from Aystah and from others. Peeti, having come to the end' of his own removable stock, found a congenial occupation in collecting, by threat, bribery and corruption, the teeth which were in process of falling from the gums of other children of his tribe.

" Sho I how fat he will be ! " said Aystah, as the feeding to repletion went on.

" Bah, no ! All that," answered Peeti, rattling the contents of Katchy's paunch, " it's not fatness, it's only appetite to keep his mouth watering."

CHAPTER IV

AYSTAH MAKES "HOOSH"

OFTEN small are the events which go to make up a year of human life, and wearisome to recount in detail. Yet a year's end may show a being different seemingly to the one known in its beginning; and this is so, even when it may be hard to know where the events came in which so altered the face and directed the faculties as to make new character the result.

Small, then, and unworthy of chronicle must be the events in the next year of Peeti's existence, which leave him and Aystah practically as when first met, with only such ripening of body and limb as a year's (growth brings, and such closer knitting of fellowship as comes about when two unshackled spirits are by days of interdependence moulded slowly the one upon the other,

Peeti stood to the level of a man's shoulder now—head and body both shot aloft by the importunate growth of his

34 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

crane-like legs. Aystah had fallen behind in the skyward race, and even now the bosom's rise had scarcely begun to give trace of her sex, though in uncivilized peoples such development comes early.

Yet according to the custom of her tribe, mere child though she were, the years drew nigh in which she would be spoken for in marriage; and priestly etiquette demanded that she should have by her some deity to take charge of the pre-nuptial years and render her in all things desirable to man and fit for fruit-bearing.

So the intimation was solemnly conveyed to her that with prayer and penance and watching she should strive to discern what spirit beckoned to her its hand out of that great deep wherein dwelt things unseeable.

And, with all her heart intending orthodoxy, she set herself to see some god guiding her spirit; and praying, fasted and watched, or, flesh being weak, failed in the vigil, and, sleeping, dreamed; and ever over the floor of her dreams came Peeti, and Peeti's face lording it over her, Peeti's feet ascending to her lips to be kissed, or Peeti's feet waiting **till** she fell down, surrendering herself wholly to their leading.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 35

Peeti was her god; though the priests importuned and dictated, she saw none other; **till**, at last, being pestered and driven, she made and took to her heart an insignificant negative for a symbol of worship—a small limp roll of soft fibrous materials, with blunt bullet-head a-top, dreamy-eyed, and of a snuffing expression.

"What does he feed on?" asked Peeti, inquisitively interested as he watched the making process. "And where does he feed *through*"—for Aystah had left no opening for 'the satisfying of her good's greed.

Aystah considered a little.

"He feeds on smells," she said at last; "he likes to lie by the fire when the stew is cooking, or pig hanging to roast; and he feeds himself on the smells."

Aystah herself was fond of doing in like manner, making up in this way for the meagre share that often fell to her at the family board.

"Bah! -He's a dull sort," said Peeti; "but I suppose he suits you, and he won't be in any one's way."

"I love him very much!" said Aystah earnestly; and three days afterwards this was true; he became Her foundling, and

86 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

she mothered him with overflowing tenderness. So helpless he seemed, so needy a waif from the great spirit-world fallen upon her tender mercies. How glad she was that it became her sole duty to care for him, and lay him within smell of the roasts and the stews, and put him to bed, and croon to him, and find for him a soft soothing name to go by, as she sang her hush-a-bies over him. All this was very sweet to the growing woman within her.

The name she found for him was Hoosh, and he fitted to it quite wonderfully, becoming well reported of as an accommodating and inoffensive deity, who took life easily, and whatever homage you chose to give him unconcernedly, and spent his days in sleeping well up to his reputation.

And again a little while goes by, and no great change comes in the fortunes or circumstances of those whose lives come here to be set forth in black and white.

The close fellowship which these two had mutually toddled to find in each other's society, while yet they were small brats, had grown with their growth, and only made them each day more incorrigibly inseparable.

b

wa

ha

in do

beginng

to great

anon.

co

Mice
Daz
in the
their com-
juo great objection
ould carry him; so with'
the rear he was caught up and
on behind; and by slow and faint
stages the ascent was made.

High up under the pines they found a breeze rising to them' from the sea, and that, with the shade of the trees combined, made the tropical heat just bearable.

In listless fashion the children let the hours drag over them; Aystah fondled the sleeping Hoosh, whom, as was her wont when she went definitely anywhere,

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 39

she had brought along with her. Peeti also had on this occasion as a mark of special attention asked Katchywallah to be of their company, there being particular reasons to-day why his god should be coaxed to a humour yielding of favours.

The fact of the matter was that Peeti had in his mind a something special to ask of his father ; and through his god he hoped to influence paternal judgment into accordance with his own views. But somehow it seemed to him that Katchywallah was by no means in a good mood : his teeth gave the wrong sort of rattle ; his eyes were full of malign meaning, giving to Peeti cold glances, disdaining altogether to recognize his intention to please, and through all the elaborate ritual with which Peeti strove to make propitiation, seeming to impute motives against him.

Peeti grew despairing, and for a time gave up the struggle ; but without occupation for his mind, his body grew restless, and he became a very comfortless companion to Aystah, stretched contentedly at ease, and to Daz, greatly given over to big thoughts concerning the small wood-insects that crawled over him. Yet, so long as the sun was high, even teasing did

40 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

little to relieve the ennui which climatic influences pressed upon him; and the dragging of the tardy hours seemed to have as evil an effect upon his *god* Katchywallah as upon himself.

At length, when the day put off its weariness and cool winds came to assuage the heat, Peeti and Aystah rose and went drifting lazily down the hill-side, drawn by the wind-wafted savour of the green pastures.

Peeti had hoisted the little one to his shoulder, leaving him to cling on as he would, for his own hands and thoughts were full of his god, who lay looking up at him with a disdainful aspect, rattling peevishly as they jogged along.

Soon, clearing the wood-ways, they brushed out through tall grasses into the murmuring lowlands crossed by the level sunlight. Before them burned and shimmered the broad plain, green, fertile, and flowery, with its kine-pastures dotted over by chewing herds. Yonder was the high-grassed, in-railed compound, where fodder grew in reserve for the cold season; in whose depth, not to be seen, wended light tinkling waters.

Towards this enclosure, coasting the bitten pasture, the children bent their

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 41

steps, and climbing the fence, dropped at once waist-deep into a plentitude of feather-grass and clover. Peeti undid the small throttling hands that hung upon his throat, and shook the child off into a bed of long grasses. There Daz let himself lie in perfect content, pulling petals from the flowers which the wind swayed down to him, and watching the flight of large beetles which went booming overhead.

Aystah lay sunward, stretched at full length in a long grass furrow, and there dozed with the rosy curtains of her eyelids tempering her bedazzlement. Hoosh lay in the folds of her kirtle, utterly at rest. Hoosh, Aystah, and Daz, all these had rest within and around them; not so Peeti. He sat, dull-eyed and anxious, in conference with his god. Katchywallah sprawled on his lap, looking obstinate and cantankerous; his eyes imputing motives against all the pious solicitude of his worshipper.

Here was sadness! On this day of all days Peeti lay under the cloud of Katchywallah's disapprobation. He put his hand into his mouth, and felt along for teeth; they were all tough! and stubborn to the touch. Here and there he gave a desperate

42 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

tug, but nothing came of it; his own sheddings were all over; he had not the wherewithal for sacrifice.

He glanced at Katchywallah; Katchywallah eyed him back, sullen and sarcastic, imputing motives.

He turned round to Aystah, where she lay, wooed by a sunbeam. "Aystah!" he cried peevishly.

She opened her eyes dreamily, and, shading them with her hand, looked at him.

"Well?"

"Has the sow another tooth loose yet?"

She made a pretence of feeling her mouth.

"No," she said, shutting it and her eyes also. Once more she was the picture of drowsy indifference.

"She hasn't felt!" exclaimed Peeti indignantly. "She didn't half tug!"

"It's not a day for tugging," she retorted with closed face.

"It is, if Katchywallah wants one."

"If he wants one, it's Peeti's turn to give it him!" she answered; "he has had all Aystah's."

Peeti looked once more to Katchywallah, and there lay Katchywallah, wide-eyed, imputing motives.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 43

Peeti reared him at her, and set his rattle going ; but Aystah paid no heed, only lay stroking Hoosh to her side.

Peeti contemplated her and his position in grave perplexity. Katchywallah he judged to be on the verge of exasperation. After a time once more his voice stirred her.

" Well?" she sighed, out of her languor.

He was cooing persuasively under her dark hair; the young voice of precocious passion, waking the woman that was to be to curious life. Her eyes opened fully, but she did not move.

" Let Katchywallah and Hoosh have a battle ! "

Was it all for this, then ? The woman's soul retired again ; the child adjusted herself to slumber.

" No ! " she vouchsafed him.

" But Katchywallah wants it ! "

" But Hoosh doesn't"

⁴⁴ But if he's challenged, he must ! "

" No, he mustn't ! He's asleep."

Bah ! He does nothing but sleep ! " said Peeti, with' contempt.

⁴⁴ He is a god. Let him, if he likes it ! "

" What use is a god who does nothing? Why not leave him 'at home under the bed, or *in* the bed, if he's asleep? "

44 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

" He likes to watch* the cows," said Aystah.

" When he's asleep ! "

" He likes to smell them."

" Bah ! he has a pig's taste ! " sniffed Peeti, and flounced back into the grass, resigning himself to defeat.

Soon he heard soft breathing and a chumping sound; one of the cows was straying near. He looked up; it was " White-smut," his father's milcher. The balm of her udder flowed strongly across his senses ; he affected distaste, and turned to Aystah.

" Your pig god of smells likes that?"

But Aystah replied not; her face lay placid in sleep.

Peeti leaned across her, and drew Hoosh from under the slackened hand. The battle *should* be, after all ! He laid Hoosh, lank, limp, and invertebrate, against one knee, propping him ; then he roused Katchywallah, and sprang his rattle.

Hoosh waggled feebly and fell into the grass. Aystah had spoken the truth ; he did not want to fight.

" Bite him ; bite him ! " Peeti pounced Katchywallah down, burying his jowl in the folds of Hoosh's raiment. But Katchy-

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 45

wallah came away with a satiated expression; there was no fun in worrying that limp morsel, who loved sleep and the smell of a cow's udder.

White-smut came roaming along the pales, thrusting her nose through for the sweet forbidden fodder of the enclosure. But many before her had done the like; there was scant harvest within, reach' to be gathered.

An inspiration threw its spark into Feed's soul: he took a great wisp of grass, and therein wrapped the soft Hoosh; then he crept to the fence, and stretched it, an offering to the meek beast.

"Go and smell your cow's udder—you!" (this to Hoosh). "'- Coop, coop, coom coop I" (this to the cow).

The rough, lithe tongue coiled about the savoury morsel; guilelessly the mouth engulfed and swallowed down the wisp with its sacred inwards.

Peeti returned to Katchywallah. "We will tell her you've eaten him, O my Katchy! and then she will believe how great you are." And to Peeti's eyes it seemed that his god winked at him¹ in approval.

CHAPTER VI

A PIOUS FRAUD; AND THE SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF HOOSH

LONGER and longer fell the shadows ; and Aystah did not wake. And now as, after that moment of impulse, he sat communing with himself, Peeti began to find difficulties in the building up of his fiction. Some touch was wanting to give verisimilitude to the story, and to gain such credence of Aystah as should glorify his god in her eyes and in the eyes of all others, and keep Katchywallah's approval whole to him. How would she receive his word that her god had gone down to his doom under the mauling of a rival deity, with no cry for sustenance, or blow dealt in defence ? There was a clear difficulty: the sounds of a strife would have roused her; so, over her sleep, he mummered it.

Into Aystah's slumbers there flitted a wee, weird chirping of distress, dominated by the fierce grating of teeth she knew of old as the voice of Katchywallah in the

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 47

times when he went forth to war. Daz heard it also, and turned his childish attention ; but Aystah sprang, startled, and beheld Peeti, with guilt in his looks, jerking Katchywallah up and down in the air as though in the performance of a war-dance.

Then fear seized her, as, with instinctive clutch of hand, she came upon emptiness where should have lain Hoosh in his divinity.

" Where is Hoosh?" cried Aystah; and her poor feeble cry, as it came choking, was answered in terms of finality : " He is nowhere now. He has been swallowed up."

And there to behold was Peeti, kowtowing to Katchywallah, bumping his head on the ground at the god's feet, and crying, " Great, oh, great is King Katchy, devourer of them that resist him ! "

" Hoosh, Hoosh, O my Hoosh, come out of him " A vain summons many times repeated, till the broad-cast shadows of the hills had flooded out the light from all that fair plain. From entreaty she turned to passionate interrogation and reproach ; and as her voice ascended the scale of wrath', Peeti's became more restrained

48 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

and sphinx-like in its answers; while behind these two who fought and lied and pleaded, in the long grasses lay Daz, over whose eyes was beginning to dawn the vision of a new god.

Reeti was didactic—that a god's ways were not to be questioned; that who was she to plead cause against his deity; that *where* a god dwelt mattered nothing, and that she could go on worshipping her god just as well in the inside of another god; that he was quite sure Katchywallah would allow it in recognition of past tooth-tribute and hope of more to follow. At which last argument there was great wringing of hands and wailing, "To think moaned Aystah, "that he should be using my own little teeth to eat up my own little god with 1 Oh, what will Hoosh think of me? Oh, Hoosh, Hoosh, my blessed one, come out of him I "

Peeti bore the call confidently, so far as Katchywallah was concerned: he knew there was small chance of Hoosh coming out of *him*; but he glanced not without apprehension across the field to where White-smut went grazing.

The grazing did not cease; Hoosh was having his fill of the odour his soul loved.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 49

Once more Peeti was didactic—why should not two gods join heads into one body, and become, to all intents and purposes, one god? Three stars came shimmering overhead, gemming like drops of dew the ever-deepening bloom of heaven; he drew on their glance and shine for larger inspiration. "Why not three?" he said; And Daz heard him, and caught his breath for the vision.

But Aystah would find no comfort in such subtleties of doctrine. Her loss weighed dismally upon her; nor could she with the eye of faith discern through the supreme egoism of Katchywallah's outward appearance any grounds for hope that so equitable a process as a joint partnership was likely to be taking place between him and Hoosh. Hoosh, it seemed to her, was wholly absorbed, was reduced to a mere ingredient, within the stronger personality of this rival deity; and now, for all she knew, he lay most grievously bitten and maimed in the inner darkness of a grizzly torture-chamber, becoming every moment that he lay there more bitten, and more maimed, by the digestive working of Katchywallah's inner man. And once more, while Peeti laboured

50 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

at his periods, she felt with fresh horror the piteousness of the tragedy, the thought not to be borne with, that *her* teeth were being now used as instruments for the torture of her own god. She seemed to see them at work under the malign direction of their present possessor, now grinding, now chewing, now gnashing, now fraying, making mere pulp of her poor reft pledge of immortality.

She bent her head forward, and laid her ear against Katchywallah's belly.

" Listen ! " she said.

There was no sound, not the slightest: Peeti treasured his fable far too well to risk detection with any fresh counterfeit now.

" Perhaps he is dead/" he flung out by way of suggestion.

Aystah shook her head, " No, not dead: gods cannot die."

She glanced up, white and dreadful. Suddenly her two hands flashed out like claws and 'grabbed hold of Katchywallah.

For one brief instant, while she grasped and tore, the teeth within jarred hideously. Then, Peeti, panting and frantic, snatched victory and leaped back, rearing Katchywallah high over his tumbling curls.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 51

" Oh, you blasphemer ! " he cried, bright with anger. And Aystah crouched passioning in the coming dews and glared, thwarted and haggard, ready to spring.

" Oh !" he menaced, shaking the god over her, and then at one bound cleared the fence, and, skirting the straggling herd, ran fast homewards, with the bright after-glow failing round him.

And Aystah, spent with foiled passion, dragged herself up, and bade Daz come. Hoisting him to the top-rail of the enclosure, she herself clambered across, and took the heavy young weight in her arms, kissing him, with tears between, and went, skirting the herd, in Peeti's foot-track, most god-forsaken of all her tribe: more god-forsaken than the little one in her arms, for in his brain new-born lay the vision of his god.

But, to herself, Aystah' seemed to have been reft at one blow of the godhead to which she clung, of the godhead which clung to her : of Peeti's comradeship and Hoosh's mild trust. In all the world there seemed no happiness left for her ; the narrow horizon of her young life was overclouded with this double woe.

CHAPTER VII

HOOSH TAKES VENGEANCE UPON PEETI

PEETI slipped to his small hutch in the rear of the house and set, Katchywallah down, kissing the brindled belly to which he had striven by all the lies in his power to bring fame and homage. He awaited his father's return in confidence now: Katchywallah would see that his desire should be satisfied; Katchywallah's eye no longer imputed evil motives; there was no question but that the god was abundantly satisfied with his servant's devotion to his divine interests.

It grew late, and Peeti became hungry; he had not eaten except a few raw roots since daybreak; and when the milk pitcher and the black bread-cakes stood warm upon the board he would bless the head of his father.

He wanted something to do, to fill up the time of enforced waiting, and his thoughts naturally flew to his play-fellow, whose god he had ravished from her keeping, and whom he had left in anger.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 53

What was sow Aystah doing now; had she gone home? He was beginning to be sorry for her in his morsel of a soul; to-morrow there should be fine makings of a brand-new Hoosh, so like the old one that the Grand Inquisitor himself should not spy a difference. Nay! his compunction should not wait **till** to-morrow, he would run and tell her now.

He laid Katchywallah down on his bed, and went out to find if Aystah were anywhere on the road. Not seeing her in the track leading up from the pasture, he ran to her home, only a dozen steps from his own. Her mother was squatting in the doorway, peeling roots for the family supper.

"Is Aystah home?" he asked. The woman jerked her head towards the interior; there was no one in the living-room he could see; so he ran round to the back **till** he stood under the small hole which was window to the inner cabin. He caught hold of the sill and drew himself up. His eyes could just catch a glimpse of Aystah spread out with her face in the bed-mat.

"Aystah, you fat sow!" he whispered; and a movement showed that she heard.

54 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

" I will make you a new Hoosh to-morrow; Peeti will make him." He saw¹ her shake her head quickly, rejecting altogether his proffer; she did not turn her face to him or speak a word.

A sound rang on the stillness. He listened a moment, then loosed hold of the window-sill and let himself down.

There were tom-toms and ululations of mourning: a dead man was being borne into the village ; he knew that sound from of old ; with a boy's instinct for horrors, he clapped on speed and flew to meet it.

Other boys were running too, and the women were clustering in the open before their doors ; for every one knew that signal of mourning, frequent enough in a tribe so precariously governed, bound daily to struggle for existence in perilous places.

The fisheries brought many a death to the community, but few bodies : the sharks took those. The chase added its quota; and human strife and passion gave many a swift ending to the wild lives that strove for maintenance, one against the other, on the barren waste lands and for possession of the fertile.

A herdsman had run in to the priests' quarters from one of the outlying pastures,

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 55

and, at his news, several of the priests had hurried out, with death-drums slung on, and were gone forth to meet and escort the dead body into the village.

The messenger had hardly stayed to get breath before reaping the reward he had run so hard to obtain—that of babbling the first news of the calamity to the doorway gossips.

The whole place was agog, and¹ the historian quickly besieged with clamour. But he had barely started on his narration before the first beat of the tom-toms struck up from a distance, telling that the priests had already met with the bearers of the dead.

An unexplained sight of blood was better to the gayer spirits than a narration ; and at once a dozen boys feet slapped and pattered over the beaten ground, as away flew the whole covey of them to the feast of seeing, which was believing.

Peeti came at full launch, fleeter of foot, but behindhand of the rest. He passed the more staid gossipers who swarmed about the holy precincts without any pause for inquiry. As he went bounding by, he was seen, and an exclamation followed him, bidding him stop. One, a woman, flung

56 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

herself in pursuit of him, but gave up, and, screaming with all her lungs, sent the news after him.

He heard a shrill voice naming "White-smut" his father's milcher; and his heart gave a great thump and sickened: was White-smut dead, slain inwardly by the outraged Hoosh?

The loss, the probable destitution of his father, was, after the momentary thrill of superstitious terror, the consideration which gave the first smart to Peeti's remorse. But soon fear of discovery and of peril to his very life gathered over him in mastering horror. Superstition had a very secondary hold over his mind compared with his fear of the priests, in whose hands, far more than in the gods', lay for him the real keys of life and death.

Hearing the cry, he sprang short and stopped, his knees failing him. His run had taken him a good half-way towards the advancing priests bumbling at their tom-toms. Behind him the woman came swaying an arm, a zigzag figure of entreaty, imploring him to stop.

"What?" he cried.

She pointed ahead of him to the procession now cresting the ascent.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 57

" It's your own father they're bringing in, Peeti! His milcher went mad all in a moment, and had him on her horns and knocked him down and trampled him. He was dead before another could get between."

The tom-toms bumped and burred under the hands of the priestly dancers, quite close now, drowning what else she had to say. The troop came, clouded in dust, right on to where Peeti stood rooted; the sacred dance ringed him in and bore him on. In dust and noise and bitter abandonment of grief, he just knew that he had looked on the battered body which once was his own father, and had measured within his desolate heart something of the horror of Hoosh's vengeance; and then knew hardly anything, until he saw them laying the body on its own mat-bed, under guardianship of its own deity, the unlovable, squat-bellied Glu-glu.

Then the priests set to arranging the chamber of death, making preparation to leave it vacan for the dead to take farewell of its god. They set watchers in the thatched porch, and the last meal in the doorway, for the spirit to partake of as it passed forth: these and other elaborate

58 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

doings after the traditions of their tribe, which Peeti cared not to stay regarding. Lifting the pampas curtain, he crept shivering to the back cabin, and for the first time since the befalling of so much misery had leisure granted him to commune with his own heart concerning this tragedy of a god's vengeance.

CHAPTER VIII

PEETI, GLU-GLU, AND THE COW

ON the bed lay Katchywallah. Peeti put him sadly aside, and laid himself down ; his god was no stay or comfort to him now. He bowed his face between his knees, and abandoned himself utterly to the desolation that enclosed him.

In a way solitude was a help to him; it gave room for thought, and time to probe down into the full depths of the horrible secret with which he had become burdened.

Hoosh had slain his father, not the less really because through White-smut's agency. Nay! had he not unknowingly spoken truth? Might not two forms amalgamate and become one god; might not Hoosh have possessed himself of the cow's body whereby to work out a dire vengeance ; might not White-smut have become Hoosh reincarnated?

A horrible distress took hold of him : what might not Hoosh do next; whom choose for second victim? Himself per-

60 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

haps—perhaps Aystah! Alas! what unbearable calamities now hung threatening, except Hoosh were appeased or his power taken from him. Outside in the darkness of the night perchance Hoosh roamed at large, cruel-hearted as a destroying demon,

Oh, Aystah, my sow Aystah!" groaned Peeti, and fear for her life impelled him to take action.

Then, even as he moaned out his sorrow over her name, warm¹ arms fell about him, and his head was taken to her breast. Aystah was come, full of pity and desire to comfort him in his grief.

With her there safe at his side, the darkness seemed less big with coming danger. Though Hoosh was abroad, Aystah was here safe-sheltered; and with desperate courage he told himself that much might yet be done, and should be done by him (some god aiding) ere the hours brought the morrow and its evil.

Aystah, pouring out comfort upon him, unwitting of her own peril, made him ready to dare all things. But now, encouraged by his acceptance of her pity, Aystah was putting forth her own plea, impossible to grant, begging at his hands merciful restoration of her god Hoosh; and Peeti

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 61

must appear cold-hearted and seem to refuse even this, preferring so to incur any charge of ingratitude rather than to blast her with his perilous secret.

And, oh, how soft and womanly and tender the pleading went; and save in stony silence he had no way of meeting her, and could give her nothing—nothing of what she asked.

Heavy and hard it was !

He turned away his eyes from the small quivering face—a face so full of pleading for what he had not power to grant; turned away, holding his ugly secret tight to his own aching heart, which might not ease itself with confession. He seemed only to be listening to the stumbling dissonance of the tom-toms, which the mourners were thumping in the open before the house. He knew then that the chamber of death was empty, and that he might enter unobserved. Without a word he got up and slipped past Aystah, and, lifting the pampas screen that hung over the doorway, went softly to the room where his father lay dead.

The body was covered with a red cloth all but the head and feet; and squatting close beside was the dead man's god.

62 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

This loathly god, the oily and repulsive creation of the paternal mind, seemed now to Peeti his only possible help through the coming ordeal. From Katchywallah he had striven to get help; but Katchywally had declared for peace; his teeth were unmistakably off the war-path. But his father's god had presented itself to Peeti's mind in the character of an avenging spirit, swift to demand redress for the shed blood of his ' worshipper. Might not he and Peeti take vengeance together on mere mortal cow, even though in that cow reposed the malign forces of an outraged deity? " Who would have thought," gnashed Peeti, in his distress, "that that sleepy rag of a Hoosh could have turned demon-god all at once like this?"

Now, somehow, this thing—cow or god—must be slain before sunrise; the imprisoned, the erst-so-manageable Hoosh extracted and restored to its maker; and in all this only Glu-glu could help him: Glu-glu and one sharp knife.

He stood looking at Glu-glu in overflowing distaste. The leathern splay-bellied god returned him look for look out of its cold, squinting eyes. Peeti smelled at it—how rancid and rotten! He thought

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 63

in contrast of Katchywallah's shrill irritability and cleanly appetite ; and something akin to love for his own god entered his soul as he did so.

With all his flesh in revolt, he put forth a hand and shook the god from his precarious balance. The creature fell into his arms with a soft squash, spread its pulpy weight over him, and leaned in, oily anguish against his cheek.

Peeti staggered to his feet, lifting the great leathery bulk in his arms, and went. Its long stagnant oils oozed over him, a cold slime, a treacherous odour, till his heart within him sickened and died for loathing.

The beating of the tom-toms in the front had not ceased. Escaping by the slit which served for window and back entrance, he slipped out unperceived, soon shielded by tall canes and grasses from any fear of detection.

And now he faced the night in all its silence and loneliness, with this thing for his sole companion, this thing clamming his cheek with its toad-kiss, weighting his young! arm's with' its oozing store of oil.

Against the trembling that took him, he set his love for Aystah, his fierce anger

64 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

for his father's death; and for the greasy dread that was on him¹ found an assuaging delight in the harsh edges of grass which cut and trammelled his feet. All under-foot lay drenched with' dew, but there was in it a deep refreshment thrilling his blood with desolate comfort.

Ah, the long slow way it was to the feeding-ground—till his ear came within sound of the soft breathing of kine and the swish-swish of their feet in the high clover.

Then among the dark moving forms he sought for his foe, the white-smutted one; but she was nowhere—not down in the shadow of the wood-bank, not by the wattle-ringed drinking-piace, nor up the far slope against the hurdles. Counting, he found her missing, and stood stricken, weltering in the dews, and in his heart bearing one more pang. He fired at his greasy incubus one mouthful of rage, as it lay abiding helplessly in his arms :

" God without gumption ! why did you bring me here? "

He shook it: it gurgled back at him its own name, " Glu-glu," then hushed.

Peeti looked round; the night lay very hard upon him now, as he trailed back

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 05

hopelessly towards home and the dead that lay unavenged, and pale, passionate Aystah, demanding her god back of him and Katchywallah.

He did not heed detection now ; he had failed; all had failed. He went back by the road which led to the huts, not, as before, creeping through covert by-ways.

Just as he was entering the village, upon his right something stirred within the sacred enclosure, and he heard the peculiar sound of a cow's tongue, coiling itself round a swathe of grass. Then suddenly it flashed into his mind—White-smut was there awaiting sacrifice, in accordance with a superstitious practice of his tribe which offered up to the spirit of a murdered man the body of his murderer.

In a -moment he had scaled the fence, and found White-smut tethered. She faced him as he came ; her poor meek hide had smarted to many blows in the past few hours, and the mild beast had been rendered morose and savage.

Peeti leaped at her exultingly, carrying Glu-glu before him, and brandishing his knife for the fatal thrust.

Then over the still night air there went a sudden angry low : White-smut dipped

66 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

her horns, and out of Glu-glu's paunch flew a -ripping sound, as with one full squirt upon Peeti the god discharged his liquors.

Then over Peeti's limbs fell an ague of terror, and out of his mouth rang a cry of agony, and he fell senseless, swallowed by a horror of darkness.

CHAPTER IX

AYSTAH TAKES VENGEANCE UPON KATCHYWALLAH

Too much sorrow had gone over Peeti's head in those few last hours for him to have given even a backward thought to the meaning of Aystah's attempt upon Katchywallah in that one brief moment of rage and hate when she had grappled with his god, demanding of him¹ her rights. Pity for his grief had changed her; the prayer she had come in to offer was soft and pleading; and to his poor preoccupied heart there had arisen no thought of danger when he left Katchywallah alone on the bed and went upon his awful quest.

He had gone leaving Aystah alone with his *god*; and she for awhile sat watching the door and weeping softly. But, as time passed and he did not return, she crept and peeped—only to find the death-chamber empty and Peeti departed. Then, when returning to seat herself once more upon

68 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

the bed and await his reappearance, the figure of Katchywallah lying upturned with his toes in the air flashed into her an apprehension of hope. She addressed herself to cajolery and entreaty, falling low on her knees before the terrible little god, and finding that she had indeed a tooth to offer him now, would he but restore Hoosh to her arms.

She held the ivory offering before his covetous eyes ; that, and more should be his, would he but disgorge.

She offered him endearment and worship in sad witless words, low-voiced for fear of the watchers without : " Oh, Katchywallah, greater than most, let poor Hoosh go ! She will give you all the teeth she has, if you will let Hoosh go ; and Daz will have plenty of teeth loose soon ; you shall have all Daz's teeth, all the big ones that grow in the back of his mouth, if you will let poor Hoosh go.

" Hoosh loves you, and Aystah loves you, but we will love you ever so much more, if you will let Hoosh go,"

But Katchywallah vouchsafed no sign of yielding; then, as vain prayer and long waiting drove patience out of her poor dispirited heart, and wrath in, she touched¹

him. He rolled softly to one side, grinding his teeth as he did so—grinding them into the fibres of her beloved Hoosh, her thought was; and then once more, as in the field, she gripped him savagely. And none was by to stay her hand.

She deliberately held the god upside-down and gave his gullet a squeeze; but no Hoosh came of it.

Then she shook him ; and out dropped a tooth.

" Well, give Hoosh to her, and she will put it back ! " He ground his teeth in empty reply; then Aystah set to work shaking. She shook and she shook; and as she shook, out came the teeth in drib-lets. Here and there among them she believed she saw bloody and cheered herself on to the dreadful task by passionate thoughts of her poor god's plight, till more than a score of teeth lay strewn on the floor.

Out rattled the last lot, and Katchywallah stood divested of power. Still Hoosh would not come, shake how she might. She cast her eyes round for a wherewithal, wishing to probe Katchywallah's vitals therewith, and caught sight of a long skewer-like splint of wood lying by the

70 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

door. Her whole body quivered like a cat's ready to pounce, as she struck the splint through the open jaws of the horrible and perverse little god. She stirred round and round, but could feel nothing whatever; the bend of the throat got in the way. For a while she was appalled at the idea of so desperate a measure as decapitation, and tried prayer: prayer did nothing. She shut her eyes and wrung out the gullet, which formed as it were a stopper to the body of the gourd. As she did so, far away out in the darkness a voice rang terribly: it was Peeti's lifted in a cry of agony.

Up sprang Aystah: no thought left in her but to go where Peeti was, to save, succour, or to die by his side. She threw down Katchywallah's toothless trunk and flew to the door.

One of the porch-watchers, coming hurriedly into the chamber of death, bulked large before her at the doorway.

"Girl I what doest thou here?"

The archaic form of the speech warned her what foe to recognize—it was the high-priest.

She slid up the wall, crying and trying to get past. "Let me by I" she pleaded.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 71

" Oh ! do let me by ! That is Peeti, I tell you : did you not hear him ? Oh, I must ! I must !—you must let me go ! "

Suddenly she felt her wrist seized and dragged up to the light ; there, tight clasped in her hand, was Katchywallah's head.

" Ah, that I see now ! " she cried, voluble at discovery. " That can be put on again. Katchywallah was sick ; he spat so that it came off—yes, and all the teeth after it ; it was an accident. Oh, *do* let me go ! Let me find Peeti first : do anything—beat me afterwards ! "

The high-priest in grim silence pushed her back into Peeti's small cabin. Light was beginning to streak across the east ; and he saw the trunk lying and the teeth scattered.

" An accident ! " he grunted, scrutinizing the scared face of the unhappy child ; then he opened her palm and taking the god's head set it on the body again, with signs and words full of mystery. Then he turned upon Aystah : " Atrocious and witch-fostered daughter of perdition, thou hast brought shame upon thy father and destruction to the mother that bore thee ! Thou hast done a deed unheard of in any land ; thou art cut off from thy people ! "

72 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Be thou cursed! Be thou cursed! Be thy name a curse! Be the thing whereon thy shadow resteth cursed for thy sake!" He had pronounced over her the terrible curse of excommunication; after it no man might dare to touch her. He took' off his girdle and passed it, in noose fashion, round her neck, taking all the time the most extraordinary precautions against ever coming in contact with her. Then he gathered up Katchywallah and all his fragtaents and put them together in his pouch; and having done so, took hold of the extreme end of his girdle, and led Aystah solemnly forth in the direction of the sacred enclosure.

Aystah followed meekly, trembling from head to foot, not forgetting even in her trouble the awful cry she had heard. She peered ahead for some sign of her loved Peeti, who had uttered that piteous, heart-rending call for aid.

There were many people gathered round the enclosure-gates, in loud-voiced exclamations of rage and horror. As the high-priest and his victim drew near, the crowd broke, and out came two priests dragging Peeti; round his neck also a noose was drawn tightly, and on each side

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 73

the people shrank away as he passed, none willing to touch him. Like Aystah, he was being led, accursed of gods and men—was it to death?

The temple-janitor opened the gates; they were led into the precincts.

Away from the main building stood a small sort of stone box ; it was the prison of the Inquisition, a dark beastly hole without light or air. The entrance was unbarred; Aystah and Peeti were driven in like sheep. No man spoke to them; no man touched them. The door clapped to again, and all was dark as death.

CHAPTER X

SACRILEGE: PEETI AND AYSTAH ARE FOUND GUILTY

FOR one moment Aystah remained stunned by the terror of recent events; then a short sob quivered through her breath; the next moment oily arms were thrown round her and an oily face rubbed against hers; and Peeti, gripped by remorse, forgot all his own sorrows, in the impulse to protect and comfort the one bit of anatomy left to him in the world. And she, to get all sweetness out of this sudden respite from isolating grief, bowed her head on his breast and broke into loud wailings. There Peeti held her clutched in an angry hugging caress, and would not let her go.

"Aystah, sow Aystah I" he cried, "speak I I tell you, you are not angry with me now! What have they brought you here for? What have you done? It was I who did it—no, it was Whitesmut who did it; but they think I helped her. But you——?"

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 75

"I? OK, Peeti, I——"

"Yes, you——?"

"I wanted to get Hoosh back ; and I——"

"Yes, and I."

"And I shook all Katchywallah's teeth out of him and stirred the inside round with a stick."

Peeti's heart tripped him: he trembled at her hardihood; this was the thing he would not have dared himself.

"And still he wouldn't give Hoosh up ; and so I—let Peeti eat me up for it !—I pulled his head off, meaning to put it on again ; and the high-priest came and found me with his head in my hand ; and he cursed me, and put the head on again, and said I was cut off ' "

Once more Aystah fell to wailing, and clung.

"He said I was 'cut off.' cut off'!"

"They said it of me too, of me, Peeti : not one would touch me. They said I was 'cut off' for ever."

"Oh, Peeti, will they **kill** you?" At worship she forgot to say "us."

"No; now they will never touch us: they will only let us die."

Peeti sat down on the ground and drew Aystah after him. He would not let her

76 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

sit on the hard ground herself, but took her into his lap.

"Aystah, you sweet beast,' he said, "you are very little, but you are brave. Peeti has taught you ! "

" I am his sow," said Aystah, whose second nature was obedience to Peeti in deed, and word, and thought.

"Well, I know what they will do; they will leave us here to starve."

Aystah shivered.

" But you, Aystah, shan't starve ! I will tear myself to pieces for you ! "

But at that Aystali cried out on him, " No ! "

" Well, Aystah, you shall not suffer ! Look here ! When you are asleep I will do so "; he put his hands gently round her throat. "You will not feel it; then I will do the same."

Aystah rubbed herself against him ; loving him kept her happy.

To us, it may seem strange that a child could speak so of death ; but these children came of a race where savage things were done with small thought or scruple. Life was very cheap, and not much to be esteemed; and death was but a great final darkness, swallowing all.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 77

Aystah's next words were very feminine ; she had left cuddling, and was now dubiously sniffing him.

" *Why*, Peeti, how you smell ! you are all over oil; what *have* you done to yourself? "

Then Peeti made confession from the very beginning; and at last Aystah knew all.

" It was me, all me ! " said Peeti wretchedly. " Aystah can curse Peeti ! "

The other hugged closer, but said nothing. She did not mind the oil now; Peeti was so brave, for all his wickedness, and, then, so good to her, and so clear—ah, how dear !

Peeti fell into one of his rare brown studies, and there was silence for a time ; then he said :

" *I*, Peeti, was a bad beast to poor little Hoosh ; I had no business to use him so ; but Katchywallah—what a goat not to have done better ! "

" Done better? " said Aystah wonderingly.

" Yes! he could have stopped you pulling him to pieces like that; he could have told you the real truth, or knocked you down, or killed you, or flown at you and bitten you."

78 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

" Well, he didn't ! " said Aystah, very decidedly, her old jealousy for her own god reasserting itself; " Hoosh did ever so much more : he killed your——"

Then she put her arms round Peeti and kissed him, and lay quiet, grieving for what she had said.

After a while, they heard a crowd gathering itself without, an excited babbling of voices, and the banging of a big drum calling the people to solemn assembly. Then they heard cymbals, and a procession of priests go by, and soon afterwards the petitional form of sacrifice.

"It is White-Smut," whispered Peeti. Soon afterwards was heard a dull sickening thud and the moan of a brute in pain; and the two prisoners knew that White-smut was paying¹ her part of the penalty for the eating of the indigestible Hoosh. Then there followed the quartering and dividing up of the victim the good portions would go to the priests ; the entrails, heart, and lungs would be burned in sacrifice to the gods.

Suddenly there came a shout, a cry of horror: the mangled remains of Hoosh had been found : one more atrocity to be laid to the charge of the two frail pieces of

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 79

humanity awaiting their fate in the prison of the Inquisition.

" Poor, poor Hoosh!" murmured Aystah ; " I hope he knows how sorry we are for him."

Perhaps Peeti was not so sorry as Aystah ; at all events, there was no longer the chance of Hoosh careering revengefully about the world in the form of a cow ; and for that, as being likely to concern Daz and a few others, he felt bound to be glad.

Outside a louder discussion began, whose import neither Aystah nor Peeti could gather ; but they guessed well enough that their own fate was there weighing in the balance.

" I wonder," said Peeti, as they sat waiting, " whether they will put Hoosh and Glu-glu and Katchywallah together again, and send them, when we are dead, to the Island of the Secret Mysteries."

His question had reference to an immemorial custom of his tribe—the sending of the gods after the death of their owners to a sacred island some twenty miles distant, never trodden by the foot of man, whose shores, guarded by reefs, no boat had ever approached.

Thither the gods went, when death took

80 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

from them their worshippers ; from thence they were supposed to ascend once more to the unseen world from which they had come.

While Peeti and Aystah discussed this absorbing topic,, as concerning their own personal deities, decision had been made with respect to themselves which led afterwards to some strange and important results, and (what we are most immediately interested in) brought it to pass that Aystah and Peeti did not end their days in the prison of the Inquisition by strangulation or otherwise.

Hardly two hours had passed when the door of their cell was thrown open, and the two criminals were led cautiously forth into the full assembly of their tribe.

CHAPTER XI

THE SEA - ROAD

ONCE more, in the glare of day and under the scowl of many eyes, Peeti and Aystah heard the curse pronounced against them: their doom they did not hear; but there was no mercy in the faces of their accusers : they had nothing! to, look for but death.

Round them, but ever at a distance from them, a solemn procession was formed—the high-priest leading, with his god borne on an ark behind him. After him¹ came a rabble of priests and servers; then the Inquisitor, holding a long cord to which were fastened Aystah and Peeti—the cord going noose-wise about the neck of each. Thus they went, two poor unbruised bodies, shivering forth in terror from the only human midst in which they had learned of life and life's criticism. Encompassing them round, diversely devilish and uniformly horrible, rose in dense array the gods of the community; they, soaring aloft on staves, or pendent like flagged

82 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

emblems in a procession, hemmed out the sweet land and the last glimpse of home, saddening the daylight around them, and quickening in the children's hearts their apprehensive dread of the death that lay before.

The procession set out upon its route ; turning away from the hills, it bore down towards the greedy white-snouted sea. Not till the great note of the sea swelled in over the tumultuous clamour of men did Peeti guess to what this was leading; then he clutched Aystah's hand, striving by dumb sympathy to sustain her courage in the coming ordeal; for at the sound his fear had shaped itself—they were to be cast to the sharks.

But upon the shore the priests halted a space, while some of their number dragged down to the water's edge a roughly contrived raft, small yet seaworthy, similar to those which were used for conveying the gods to the Island of Sacred Mysteries. The shore where they now stood was never used by fishermen ; their landing-place was round to the south side of the island. From this spot only the rafts went bearing the gods back to their unknown land; now from this spot were Peeti and Aystah

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 83

to go forth to the doom' which the gods alone could award.

So it had been decreed against these the greatest criminals who had ever passed under the yoke of priestcraft; and the priests, loosing their hands from a task past their ingenuity of contriving—the task of devising a death-penalty sufficiently awful—delivered their victims over for such subtleties of torment as only the congregated skill of the gods could provide.

Round the shore's edge a mighty current swelled and revelled, outbearing through rock and reef towards the faintly discerned Island of Mystery; the stream's name declared its use—it was "the gods' sea-road/' By it the gods were wont to make dismissal of themselves to the ever secret island-stair of their Paradise; by it Peeti and Aystah were now to be driven forth to meet a doom more terrible than man could conceive or name.

The Inquisitor tightened the cord and drew Peeti and Aystah to take their stand upon the raft; then with long poles men thrust it down into the warm, rippling brine. The high-priest threw ashes of accusation and curse-water on to the bright childish curls; the Inquisitor cast off the rope;

84 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

and amid railing and curses the raft divided from the land and, drifting, swung more and more into the will and whirl of the galloping sea-current.

Aystah crouched shivering; but Peeti stood stock-sullen, regarding the imprecating throng as it grew away into distance. A bright band of the blue sea rose like the building of a wall between them and him. The shouts lessened and mellowed in the soft sea air; the forms dwindled and the rage of them was no longer to be discerned; the very gods in their festal panoply grew insignificant, as over them rose dominant bright field and glossy woodland and full-bosomed hill-country; and all the sweet unchangeable landmarks, lifting their heads, came at last, irrespective of cruel-hearted creeds, to beckon a parting phrase of love to the much-exiled ones.

And at the recognition Peeti's heart took life defiantly; he threw out a hand waving responsive greeting, brushing, as he did so, the cord slung at his neck. He caught at it, with mind grown attentive to new inroads of thought. Then turning to Aystah, he lifted the noose from her shoulders, afterwards from his own;

whereat from the shore swelled higher imprecation, thenceforth to grow unheard of these twain. For life made division—the sea's life lapped amply about them; the gulls; scream and plume-rattle rang pauselessly; and under them the great current galloped, gabbling ventriloquisms.

Then amid all the wild, kind comfort of the open, Peeti turned to the one uncomforted thing by his side, the timorous remnant of severed days—Aystah, his boon-love, the erstwhile so sunbright.

Twining, his young arms came warm about Aystah's cowering body. Kind wight, how he kissed her!

"Aystah, you are not going to die! No, no! Aystah, you shall not die!" And out of the airy glory that shrined them about, and out of youth's reckless persuasion of life's abundance, Peeti preached hope into her she-heart and certainty into his own: "No, no! Peeti speaks: you shall not die!"

Before two hours were passed, they had come, current-borne, almost halfway from island to isle; each lay blue, a mound of beryl above a flashing plain of sea-sapphire. Round and about in the raft's vicinity, Peeti had begun to mark

86 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

great fins; in circuit;, and now and then a pale edge of hidden bulk filmed through a shallowing wave. It was the first thing which seemed to ally itself with the life just left behind—this malign power of the sea, sinisterly strong, on the prowl for prey.

Peeti watched the great wretch growing bolder as it narrowed its circling beat. AystaK lay close wound in his arm; now and then her lips kissed the flesh of her boy-lover; she did not turn her eyes seaward, and Peeti kept her ignorant of the shark's nearness.

Presently the shark came shouldering through the light lapping waves, clean to the raft's side, brushed by, and swept round; once more, and this time it jerked its tough snout sheer into the frail-lashed frame. Peeti, who had gathered the rope threefold in his hand, with the two noose-knots at the length's end, struck sharp, more in wrath than fear, bringing the rope forward with all his force on the shark's head—a mere feather-stroke to the tough-skinned monster, but enough to startle it off, cowed.

"Katchywallah!" he jeered after it. AystaK had started up as the raft shivered,

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 87

in time to see the stroke and understand somewhat of the deep heterodoxy of Peeti's exclamation. He caught her glance, questioning and apprehensive. " Yes I " he cried as if to a contradiction, " just Katchywallah's sort—curse such ! "

Then he stormed of the gods to her. The gods ! he would have none such more. The gods ! his fiery heart came fresh from the indignation of its spiritual trappings, its fury, and its loathing. Glu-glu he mocked at, torn by a common cow ; Katchywallah, submissive to female dentistry ; Hoosh, cow-eaten ; and the spirit in them, if they lived, mere devilry !

" Hoosh was no devil I " protested Aystah.

" Hoosh I " Peeti laughed back, " Hoosh was you—the worst of you ; Katchywallah was *my* worst. Aystah ! " cried the young prophet, rapping shrewd knuckles at the gates of light, " our gods are ourselves—the greedy parts of us, the lust, the cruelty, the love of evil ! Oh, curse such ! curse such ! "

Aystah put her fingers to her ears, frightened by so much vehemence. The terror of sharks, the lurching of the raft, made death still seem very near and very

88 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

bitter to her ; why was Peeti terrifying her thus, railing against the gods? She shut her eyes, but opened them again when she found Peeti kissing them, contented that he said no more.

The raft swung round in the current ; they looked ahead and saw the Island of Secret Mysteries rapidly growing near. Its hills still lay blue, high up in the sunny haze of heaven ; but over their base lay a tint of green verdure, and one foreland, the nearest point, flashed white against the sun.

" Aystah," said Peeti again, "you shall not die ; you shall live ! Yonder there are trees. See !"—he lifted her on his arm—" are not those cocoa-palms and banyans?"¹

The raft was tearing along in a tremendous current, so that at tinges the sea washed foot-deep over it. Peeti redoubled his assurances to rouse hope in Aystah, laughed as though all anxiety were set at rest, and, swilling his hands in the water, " Now," said he, " I will wash," and suited the action to the words.

Aystah watched him industriously rubbing and scrubbing; he smiled at her over his shoulder—" Help me wash off Glu-glu ! "

She came mechanically and rubbed his dear brown shoulders, but did not smile.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 89

"Peeti," she said at last, "do you think where we are going to, and what thing it is waits us over there?" She pointed.

Peeti looked interrogation.

"Death!" she answered. "The gods; they are there, the gods are."

"Oh, the gods!" Peeti tossed up his head. "What does sow Aystah think? She killed one, and White-smut two. Need we trouble our heads about them?"

Aystah looked sorrowfully at him, unconvinced.

Peeti turned to watch the approaching island; suddenly he sprang to his feet, straining his eyes, and crying:

"Aystah, look! There are crowds of people all about; look, you look!"

She looked. More and more clearly she saw little dark specks moving over the shore, crowding down to the sea's edge.

Nearer; and then her eyes, sharpened by fear, saw first what Peeti's remained ignorant of.

"It is the gods!" she said under set teeth.

CHAPTER XII

" OUR HEARTS ARE BREAKING FOR A LITTLE LOVE "

MOST of us have our preconceived notions about a world beyond, sticking tight to a point of view we will not have altered; generally we are far more stiff in our assertions concerning it than we are in other matters where we have larger ground for knowledge.

Circumstances are to us irresistibly misleading ; country, class, education, fortune, or calamity, all these warp our true perception and power to gauge how much we may truly be said to know.

Peeti, in his fresh scorn of the gods, was unprepared to admit that there had been any potency in them at all ; far less to conceive that they could live and move independently of man's will or man's knowledge, in a place apart from the working of man's spirit. The doctrine of a great sect, that graven images of things which live will after death demand souls from their makers,

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 91

had not been dreamed of in the philosophy of his people.

Nay! the enlightened reader himself may find this a hard philosophy to confront and swallow, and may altogether refuse to be landed on a shore where such a fantasy asserts itself for real truth. In which he has freer choice than was left to Peeti or Aystah—the great sea current bearing them on. These two were bound to go on whither they would not.

"It is the gods!" Aystah had cried.

Yes. For a moment Peeti was ready to laugh her down; but, in another, conviction seized him. Yes! without doubt it was the gods, waiting in their thousands, vindictive, bloodthirsty, without pity.

He turned gently to Aystah. The raft bore them on, wave over wave. Once more his fingers closed round the soft warm throat of the life he loved., "Let me, Aystah! This will be best."

"But you?" it was Aystah who spoke now; "what will you do?"

"Oh! I"—he glanced at the clustering forms, swarming like ants on the shore—"I shall let shark Katchy take me: that will be best."

"Kiss me!" she said; and he kissed her.

92 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

" My own good little sow ! "

She took his hands and set them round her neck. " You may now," she said, and cuddled to him with eyes clinched.

But short moments bring to pass great changes ; and while these two spoke and kissed and clung, with words and kisses, all too short, as it seemed to them, the mighty current had swept them through a break in the reefs, within the enclosure of a small bay formed by a two-headed promontory.

Under the farther headland lay a great natural arch of rock, through which the current foamed and churned, breaking away once more for the open sea.

But even while Peeti and Aystah held each other in a frightened embrace, the shadow of the first headland fell upon the raft, covering it at one and the same time in coolness and gloom.

Peeti felt the change and glanced up ; but at once his eye was caught by the sight ahead, clearly seen now. There in the scoop of the small bay clustered innumerable gods of all shapes and sizes—some with heads and some with none, centipedes some, triple-jointed some, legless, armless, bat-winged, fish-tailed and

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 93

finny, lizard-like, wooden, leathery, feathery, indecent, grotesque—a tribe without common species, a community without kinship save in competitive ugliness. There, at a stone's throw, stood the whole assembly of the gods, watching the arrival of their prey.

Down from the rocks, hand over hand, came other gods scrambling like monkeys, and from¹ the interior more and more were making head at full speed for the shore.

There was time for nothing to be done ; the current went sweeping the bay, washing in upon the strand, casting up wreck and driftwood as it came. A piece of broken bamboo came floating beside the raft; Peeti seized it, and bent his whole strength to keeping the raft from shore.

The current swept them round, Aystah crouching with covered eyes, Peeti plunging his pole into seaweed and surf. Thanks to the boy's power of arm, the stream; carried the raft a few yards from! the shore's edge, right under the noses of the terrible mob of onlooking gods.

They set up a shrill twittering clamour of impatience and anger : some danced in a perfect tantrum of rage and grief as the raft seemed slipping clear; some went scampering alongside, gesticulating and'

94 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

biting those who came in their way; a few adventurous ones, fish-tailed and finny, dashed out into the sea and swam after, seizing the raft in their teeth and trying to climb on board. A clout from Peeti's pole made them let go; but still they followed on, while the rocks shrilled back their ceaseless outcry, more loud and piercing than the screams of sea-gulls.

Suddenly there was a crash : the raft had struck on the inner wall of the rocky archway ; from shock and capsize Peeti and Aystah went overboard.

At first Peeti, swimmer as he was, struck out instinctively, casting about for Aystah ; but the next moment he thought better, and ceased from the search, giving himself up to the will of the roaring water. " Let us drown ! " he had said to himself. " That is best."

He felt himself sink, felt sense failing and death closing over him; and then, he had consciousness that, drawn up out of the surf on to land, he was lying upon warm shingles.

Soon his faculties returned to him; he stumbled to his feet and looked round, still dizzy and confused.

Round him he saw the innumerable

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 95

swarm of gods, squeaking, whistling, stammering, tumbling over and stamping on each other in their haste to get at him. Down at his feet Aystah lay stretched, white and still; dead, he thought, and was almost glad of it.

Three, fish-tailed and finny, had got close round him, and began chattering all together :

/ saved you ! / saved you ! Worship me for it 1 It was I I It was I ! "

" Cha ! Cha ! Cha ! Shut your jaw I "

" I kept his legs from drowning ! "

" I did it ! I did it ! Worship me I "

" No, me ! "

" Me ! me ! me ! "

" Cha ! Cha ! Cha ! Shut your jaw ! I did it, I tell you. I, I, I, I ! "

" Sweet boy, sweet boy ! Look at me ! Look at me 1 "

" Sweet, sweet ! "

" Sweet, come and kiss me ! Come and kowtow to me ! "

" Cha ! Cha ! Cha ! Shut your jaw ! "

Then came biting and scratching between god and god ; and whole shoals of little and big lay grovelling at Peeti's feet, with this one piteous plea to be kowtowed to and worshipped.

96 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

What could it all mean? Was he living or was he dead? Were these gods the dreaded gods of his country? Hark to them!

One came wobbling, and clambered to him over the backs of the others, getting its toes grievously bitten on the way.

"I am the god of your grandfather," it cried, "your dear dead grandfather. Give me some worship for the love of him!"

"No, me! I was made first!" said another.

"No, me! I was made twice over. I came to pieces once."

"No, no, no! Cha! Cha! Cha! Shut your jaw!"

Was all this delusion or dream? Was there to be no end to such babbling? Peeti began to despair of ever getting to the meaning of it. Presently he noticed that in their struggles to get to him they were trampling upon Aystah, in whom he now discerned some sign of life.

"Get off there!" he cried, beating the gods back with a sudden display of energy, forgetting, in his haste, to have any fear of them.

In an instant, a marvel: they all

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 97

obeyed. Peeti knelt clown and lifted her in his arms.

" Aystah ! " he cried.

The babble and shriek went on ; he saw her lips move, but could hear no word that she uttered.

" Hush ! " he cried ; and dead silence fell, as the word was passed from mouth to mouth.

Then he chafed her hands and breast; and two little deities crept up, and, after watching him, began chafing her feet with clumsy efforts, now and again peering up into his face for approval as they did so.

Aystah with slow grunts was beginning to come to ; Peeti bent down tenderly over her.

" You are safe, my sow ! Don't look anywhere ! Keep your eyes fast shut ! You are safe, quite safe ; you are not going to die."

In spite of his words, he saw her instinctively beginning to open her eyes. Laying his hand gently over them, he said again, " Peeti says, don't look ! You are quite safe ; the gods do not mean to do us any harm."

When he was quite sure she understood him, he added, " Look up, now, if you like ; only be sure how ugly they all are ! "

98 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

She glanced first at him, then around, and shrank shuddering ; but Peeti gathered her up, and made her stand by Jiis side.

" Do you not think we are safe?" he said ;" listen, and see for yourself ! "

Then he cried aloud to the assembled gods, " I will kowtow to the first one who brings me a coconut."

In a minute the shore was cleared as by magic ; thousands of gods were swarming up the rocks, or racing madly away inland. Not one remained.

" The raft, the raft ! " cried Aystah. " Quick, let us go ! "

" The raft is broken," said Peeti; " we cannot. No, no, Aystah; we shall be safer if we stay here." And then he told, as well as he knew how, the marvellous riddle of the manner in which the gods, at his first landing, had welcomed him. :

CHAPTER XIII

THE SUBJUGATION OF THE GODS

BY a breach in the rocks Peeti and Aystah could see a dark scurrying mass that heaped and spread itself in a confused bolt for a clump of palms standing within a mile of the shore. Even at that distance was to be seen how fiercely went the struggle to be first. The volleying echoes redoubled as the whole herd dipped under shadow of the grove, leaving only a trailing remnant of themselves to drag a maimed course along the rear. Then a shudder took hold of the trees, and a noise like the call of a rookery broke from the tops of them.

Suddenly from the giddiest height a dot detached itself, caught feet to life, and ran. The lcry became one of pursuit. The pack, yelping and multiplying, cast itself out of the grove and came heading violently for shore. Leader went a hairy ape-like god with a large coconut tucked into one armpit; his heels dappled the air with' flight; strife followed after—envious

100 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

tramlings, duckings, and grabbings under the flail-like motion of his paws. Nearing the rocks, he caught some vantage of the rest, and swung himself single in triumph. But now two of the fish-tailed and finny, which had languished earlier in the race, rose up and ranged themselves fearful and gasping before him. The ape-god threw a feint to right and to left, then plunged. Success brushed their eyelashes ; they sprawled impotently and .gravitated—a stumbling-block and a foolishness to the feet of the pursuing swarm.

The ape-god was gloriously ahead. Down the rocks they all came on a mad scramble, till, committing their ways to fortune, they fell, biting, clutching, and screaming into mid-air, and lay like fallen leaves over the shingle. The winner snatched himself and his prize from the broken fragments of the chase, and laid the offering at Peeti's feet.

All the time that Peeti was piercing the nut and giving the milky contents to Aystah, the god lay, patient and supine, amorous of the coming reward.

At last the boy turned to dole out charity to the opportune deity. The jhairy, wretch reared itself on its haunches with

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 101

fervent slobberings and small ravenous squeals; its teeth chattered in a slaver of its jaws; its forehead ran into stiff wrinkles while it sat horribly expectant. Peeti set himself honourably to a task that repulsed him; lifting his hands in the traditional attitude of worship, "To thee," he said, "swift runner, nut-providing deity, I kowtow, I bow myself down, I lick the dust. For this be thy name greater than all other gods' names until sundown."

He stopped; and the god sat fluttering) its intoxicated eyelids, drinking in the sweetness of the sounds which renewed for it the meaning of its godhead.

As the full pause of speech affirmed itself, its mouth shortened to a round grimace in the midst of its features—a look like a castaway's on a raft searching the dead level of an horizon.

"iMore, more," it beseeched, "a little more! One more kowtow! This is no more than a pull out of bed by the feet to my great hunger which has slept so."

Peeti was for dropping his reverential attitude and fetching the ape a swipe over the tail, but the poor puny thing's grief and its tragic aspect put kindness into his scorn. "If you want more," he said,, "let these feed

102 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

you till sundown. Till then I declare you to be the alone worshipped and true god."

The creature fell rapturously into the suggestion, and no god had spirit to resist that mandate. With feet planted among the bowed necks of deities, it stood and hooted to the now sinking sun a pressing invitation to stay his course that the fleeting hour of its pleasure might be prolonged.

Then it was pitiful to watch with what malign ingenuity it invested with appetising charm the moments of its short-lived triumph, and explored the delightful novelty of feeling itself exalted above its peers. Rebellion lifted not a full eye in that camp of would-be-worshipped ones. Long famine had ploughed their pride and bowed their godhead to the dust. They came and went meekly and perseveringly at the bidding of one who had been so proudly replenished in the sight of all.

Peeti had lifted Aystah and taken her quietly from Wie scene. The awaking of her animal wants put courage into her sickened heart; and Peeti chattered and laughed and clapped hands in her face. Night was near; they left the babbling multitude and climbed the cliffs which hung steep above the shore. When they had

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 103

gained the top their eyes could take in at a sweep the whole formation of the island.

It lay somewhat in the form of a hand* mirror: a mainland oval in character, with one long promontory precipitously walled running almost clear of the reefs into the full surge of the ocean. Over every part of the island vegetation pricked up a green head; down in the valleys flowers and fruit grew rankly together, an amorous interlacement out of which hybrids freakishly sprang. The land's whole area was but to the extent of a few square miles; but the naturally trained eye of the savage told Peeti that within these narrow limits could be found shelter and food sufficient and even abundant for their wants.

Over the sea the day drooped and withered; out of the clear air clouds were forming in rose clusters or parting like fallen petals, here all filmy with sunlight, there rayed and shredded to the wind. But in cup-like valleys of the little sea-braced land came the heavy bloom of twilight, and down into it the birds flocked for roost.

Peeti and Aystah, standing together on the high range of rocks which dominated alike inland and shore, felt as a soft hugging caress the gracious sense of nest-like

104 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

seclusion which the formation of the island afforded. Security was theirs twice over against the eye of that outer world which had buffeted and shunned them : not only in the low swooning valleys, which held out to them a lap where the head might rest under the bosoming shelter of wooded hills, but also to seaward in the long lines of reefs which wrapped themselves about like the coils of a great sea-serpent, seen thrusting here and there brown spine or fin ; elsewhere known only by the blue, bluer where it roofed the shoals, or by low lightening and chafe of foam.

"If it were not for the gods ! " Aystah took heart to say.

" The gods," Peeti hurled back, " shall learn to leave us alone ! Come, let us get clear of them now ! Run, Aystah, run ! "

And away they raced, like a pair of young rabbits, skipping and leaping over the uncertain ground with the surefootedness of their tribe. The wind welled out to meet them and clashed cool against their naked bodies, and cooler as they plunged down toward the bed of the island, where the day-long shadows had stood, wet with a moon of dews.

Emulation of the race stirred Aystah's

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 105

blood ; with the blithe whoop of old days, she took a grasp of Peeti's hair., then, using it for a lever, gave herself the leap past and scurried, shrilling¹ at him a challenge to pursue. And, even as she shrilled, she felt the sharp finish—such as ever came when she set her speed against his—and sank vanquished, protesting and panting, beating him off, and wordy to the last.

So these two found themselves betrayed back again by their young blood into the same fair fooling as had been before heavy things had befallen. Thenceforth Aystah was no longer cowed ; the shadow of man's hand was lifted from her ; and even w'hen it came about later on that wild things were to be done, Pecti found in her two hands help equal to what lay in one of his own.

And now, as they stood alone in the thickening twilight, freed for a blessed breathing space of pestering deities, they presently began to search out a nest for the night and a little fodder to stay the cravings of hunger.

Both wants soon found satisfaction in those fallow fields of providence, and when after the munching of nuts the sound of the grinders grew low, one pile of sun-dried grasses bore two tired young bodies to a snug shore of dreams.

CHAPTER XIV

PEETI BECOMES THE LAW-GIVER

LIGHT crept under the eyelids of Peeti and Aystah; consciousness followed by degrees. The sleepers were led up to it through a series of mews and moans and stretchings and long yawns ; but at last full sense came to them, and they sat up.

Pestering deities, sure enough ! Some three or four were sitting mutely by, waiting **till** the children should awake.

As soon as their eyes opened, the clamour began :

" Lost, you were lost; and we found you, we found you. Worship us ! "

" Quite lost you were, and we searched for you, all night we cried and searched for you ; hundreds of us, thousands of us; but we found you. Worship us ! "

But one of them crept nearer, and, laying a water-melon at Peeti's feet for a peace-offering, said :

" Worship *me* ! "

Then Peeti, taking the fruit, gave the foreseeing one the reward for which he

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 107

so hungered; and the tedious day began of clamouring crowds that pestered and would not be stilled, save momentarily into whimpering quiescence. Until by threat or cajolery he might evolve order from such chaos, Peeti foresaw that peace could not be.

So all day he laboured to frame and establish a tyranny. The gods he classed according to their kind—bird, beast, or reptile—and ranked according to size, and appeased with promise of worship. All the government was upon his shoulders; and all that he ordained the gods took meekly, in their great hunger for worship and their abasement in the low estate to which -lack of worship had brought them.

So, trading upon their piteous weakness, Peeti was enabled to devise some sort of security for himself and Aystali. Few indeed and far between must be the acts of worship he could offer to any individual god out of all those thousands; but they took his proposals for the most part in a subdued and domesticated spirit; and if here or there a rebellious head raised itself, Aystah went forth courageously and cuffed it down into silence: therefore it seemed to Peeti upon his judgment-seat that his law-giving prospered. The method

108 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

of government he devised was somewhat on this manner. Day by day in turn a section of the gods was to present itself for service ; and each individual god in that section was to receive from him in the course of the day the kowtow direct, and the right to an hour's homage from his fellows afterwards.

At this point one of the gods had thrust up his head and demanded why Peeti should not devote himself the whole of his days to continuous worship. It was a critical question ; and if it were allowed to stand unrebuked might involve Peeti and Aystah in a terrible subjugation, mental as well as physical. But before Peeti had time to consider his answer, Aystah had risen equal to the occasion ; she had run forward and taken hold of the flabbergasted god, and then and there cuffed him before them all, **till** there was? no more spirit left in him; and by the time she had gone back to her place at Peeti's side, the law-giver had got his answer ready, and was delivering it in magisterial tones :

" Because," said he, " I don't choose : Peeti speaks i " and the gods were silent as mice when a cat goes abroad. Then he went on to the next point, and the next; until by the day's end his law-giving was complete.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 109

He appointed the section which was to enter office on the next day, and, standing up, gave his final word to the assembly :

" The sections must be punctual in their attendance, and I will worship none who comes behind time. And those who are not required for service or worship are to keep their ugly heads out of our sight ! " which said, with a final flourish of disgust, he waved the members} of his new constitution away from him.

So began a new life upon the island, and even if the constitution was not a perfect one, at least it gave them breathing space in which to look round them.

The gods came with ferocious punctuality to claim the homage as it became due to them ; and though Peeti's soul sickened hourly against the indignity, he refrained from speech and clave loyally to his word.

To the gods in sections, according to their days of service, he allotted tasks of such things as he could not do for the supplying of his needs unaided. They collected for him pieces of wrecked rafts which strewed the shore, boughs of trees broken by wind, slabs of rock, and mud ; and out of all these materials Peeti was able to build a hut, that might be also of the nature of a stronghold, for himself and Aystah.

110 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Very clumsy, he found, were the efforts of his deities to serve him ; they were weak in their joints, badly articulated, unable to grasp with any strength. Not one among them had a hand dexterous to make a knot; they were in fact as their makers had made them, elementary in all essentials, and savagely constructed.

Yet they took a queer delight in pottering about at his bidding, imagining themselves thereby to be incurring his precious gratitude, to be paid off at a future time in the shape of worship.

Those who had been on service might be heard at the day's end chattering and boasting to the other gods of what they had done :

"\Ve have builded our servant a house."

"We have digged our servant a well."

" We have planted our servant a hedge."

"We have gathered our servant fruit-stores for the winter.*"

" We have collected wood for our servant to spit fire into and get himself warmth," etc., etc.

From which it may be gathered that by process of time their servant was making himself much¹ at home by help of his masters ; but as yet Peeti and Aystah have been but a few days on the island.

CHAPTER XV

THE ARRIVAL AND WRATH OF GLU-GLU

DOWN to the shore there went a cry and a scurry of feet, as the entire population of the island went tearing seaward. Peeti saw thousands swarming over the cliffs and crowding to the water's edge, making vehement gesticulations towards some point on the horizon.

A sudden fear took hold of his heart : might not a boat be coming from the other island to get tidings of him and Aystah, as to whether the gods had truly wrought out the vengeance deputed to them? Then was the Island of the Sacred Mysteries no longer to preserve its precious inviolability, in which he had trusted for security.

Straining his eyes over the shining water, Peeti did see a dark speck moving along the track of the great sea-current. He cried to Aystah, who came and watched where he pointed, and then sprang with him down towards the shore of the bay.

There the gods were jostling and fight -
in

112 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

ing for vantage, nibbling their way into the front places, and making an astounding clatter on the shingle. And ever the excitement grew greater; the speck enlarged and became a raft; the raft swung in under the head of the promontory. Yet still Peeti could not see what burden it carried.

Suddenly Aystah was gripping him and crying:

"Glu-glu!"

Straining his eyes afresh, Peeti saw that much, and more.

"It is Katchywallah, too," he said; and his heart sank, for when it came to the point, Katchywallah he still feared. Katchywallah was his own god, the mint of his own brain—different from all other gods before or after him; and how would he, Katchywallah, submit to be bullied and subjected? Peeti forgot how Aystah' had dared turn this god topsy-turvy and shake the teeth out of him; he only remembered that here was the god he had at once feared and loved, coming perhaps to avenge insult and outrage, to rouse certain insurrection among the other gods by the revelation of the tale of crime of which Peeti and Aystah had stood guilty.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 113

Even now the raft came drifting and grating towards shore ; on it sat Glu-glu, wobbling and wagging his flappers up and down ; but Katchywallah stared without sign or motion. The assembled gods clamoured and chattered and laughed, drawing the raft high and dry on to the beach ; and straightway Glu-glu stepped off it; but Katchywallah still sat motionless.

Pecti waited fascinated. "When he sees me, he will spring at me, he will tear me," he thought ; and hardly knew whether in return he should smite or fly. But there was something else lying on the raft half hidden behind Katchywallah ; he was screwing his head to see. what it was, when Aystah sprang forward \with a welcoming cry, " Iloosh, Hoosh ! O my Hoosh ! " And she caught up and cuddled the acquiescing god.

Acquiescing-yes ! lie too was a thing without motion or force—not as all these others, who on this island of reassumption had taken to themselves all the activities and attributes of life.

She mouthed over him the prettiest words in her vocabulary; and, "Oh! he is asleep!" she said.

" Is Katchywallah asleep too!?" said

114 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Peeti, in slow perplexity. He stooped cautiously and grabbed his god under the arms, fully expecting a tussle and an attempted bite.

But Katchywallah never turned a hair.

Peeti lifted him, with a chuckle of tragic laughter. "You killed him, Aystah, you killed him, when you wrung off his neck and tumbled his teeth out! He is dead! And Hoosh is dead; White-smut killed him."

But Aystah shook her head, and pointed to where Glu-glu stood, conversing with the other gods, certainly not killed for all that White-smut had done to him.

The obese brute, stitched and plastered, and replenished with fresh oils, had just caught sight of Peeti from afar off, and came waddling and foaming with rage towards him. Its powers of speed proved to be amazing, as it sent the sand flying beneath its flappers; its great strung-up mouth, distorted by rage, looked loathsome and perilous as the sucker of an octopus. It came on, with oily foam exuding from its body; its cry was terrible, tragic, and blood-curdling.

"You! you!" it shrieked. "Why have the gods not avenged me? Ripper-up-of-my-bowels, you shall die, die, die!"

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 115

"Get out!" cried Peeti, and lashed his foot at the paunch of his assailant. For a moment it recoiled, then made a bound, and was on him. The blood flowed out of Feed's face as the creature's mouth came squab against it: the terror of that awful night within the holy enclosure came fresh back upon him; his arms beat the air wildly for a moment, then he fell. The sucker fastened upon him; together he and the' god rolled in the sand.

Then Aystah, casting Hoosh to the winds, fell madly upon Glu-glu. Her blows rained on him thick as hail; but the bladder only gurgled and bumbled under the thud of her fists; nor could her hands meet to throttle the bull-necked beast from his prey.

In her despair, she shrieked on the gods for succour; but the gods cast a cautious eye over the conflict, and preferred to await the issue in a slow and neutral attitude.

Help came to her hand by hazard: she seized on a jagged flint, and smote twice, thrice, on the leathery hide.

The last blow struck home: oil jetted out of the wound: she lent her weight, and the bladder's bulk yielded under her.

116 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

A shudder coursed through the god's frame; he rolled over on his side, faint and gasping.

Peeti was free ; faint, too, and gasping, but without hurt, save that upon his cheek, where the sucker had fastened, lay a livid bruise, from which started a few drops of blood. Through strong fits of shuddering he revived, and rose to his feet. Down upon the sand before him lay his late formidable adversary, slowly oozing to death.

"He will die," said Peeti. "Come, let us go ; let us leave him ! "

Aystah ran back to fetch Hoosh; led to follow her action, half mechanically Peeti stooped to pick up Katchywallah. Regarding him attentively, he shook him, and the teeth rattled.

" He is full of teeth again, Aystah ! " he said ; and then quite tranquilly he drew off head from gullet.

" Poor beast Katchy ! " he said ; and the teeth went trickling off into the sand.

" Poor beast Katchy ! " he said again. " Only the other day he was the god Peeti loved and feared. Now——"

He threw body and head into the sea, " Go along, and ask the sharks to> give

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 117

you their teeth ! Peeti has done with you.
Good-bye/'

Aystah stood by, scandalized at such doings; Peeti, pointing to Iloosh, put a question to her :

" What are you going to do with that? "

" With Hoosh? Why, keep him, of course ! "

Peeti laughed out at her.

" Oh, you silly she-pig ! Keep him ! Keep him? Till when? "

" He is asleep," said Aystah ; " he will wake."

" Let him sleep well, then ! " said Peeti. " If he wakes, I'll wring his neck ! " And the boy went sternly ahead, too young, as yet, to know to what set purpose his power to look at life was carrying him; for the present the budding strength of his intellect chiefly showed itself in gloom of mood.

Aystah, following, felt the chill of his threat ; her heart could not all at once give up its love for Hoosh ; and if Hoosh woke, was he to have his neck wrung?

As she climbed the rock, she came upon a long narrow crevice, offering close shelter to anything which might lodge therein ; it held out to her the very thing

118 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

she was in search of—a safe hiding-place for her god. She reached out an arm and laid Hoosh within it, covering the mouth with a stone, and taking careful note of the spot.

¹¹ "Sleep well," she whispered, " **till** I come again! Oh, I will come, my own, own Hoosh!"

Then she followed Peeti up the rocks.

CHAPTER XVI

GLU-GLU GIVES BATTLE AND IS VANQUISHED

GLU-GLU lay given over to death; but Glu-glu did not die.

Timid fish-tailed and finny ones, who had watched the conflict from afar, and admired him for his prowess, came to maul over the last moments of the dying gladiator, and stayed to mend him.

They plastered his wound with the skins of eels, and gave him oil of the livers of cods to drink, and so, renovating and replenishing him, set him up once more upon his hind-flappers, alive and hearty.

Then, finding him no more dead than themselves, the gods gathered round in a dense swarm and hearkened to his tale.

How great was their shuddering over the fearful things he had to recite needs not to be related; but their shudderings were shudderings of fear rather than of anger, and their poor broken spirits harboured no thought of rebellion, nor desire to avenge.

120 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Yet Glu-glu toiled on indefatigably to rouse the old godlike valour within them; Glu-glu, fresh-fattened, and inflated by the commiserating worship of a whole tribe of priests—what did he know of the dearth of worshippers or the dullness it brings to the spirit? A dozen times he toiled, like Sisyphus at his stone, to drag them up to the sticking-point; a dozen times they felled him with their timorous recantations, and implored him to let them lie where they were, contented to be abased.

But Glu-glu, though he directed them to a point from which they recoiled in trepidation, was yet the stronger spirit, and would in time have prevailed—had Fate been kind to him.

But Fate was not kind; uphill work took time; and in the meanwhile Peeti began to have suspicions, for the gods had not come to exact that hourly homage which was their due according to the tenure of the bond between them.

Like another legislator of modern times, he smelt a rat, and (by a glance over the cliffs) saw it brewing in the air. There, far below, sat the re-risen god with the other gods in close conclave. Debate was

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 121

growing hot; an ominous growl went through the host. Glu-glu waxed warm, working his flappers with great energy and conviction; the dull lump he laboured at touched—or all but touched—sticking-point. Would kind Fate give him less than an hour more?

Quickly, desperately, Peeti took counsel with Aystah. Their own hut they had made of sufficient strength to defy the intrusion of the gods; as a refuge for themselves, except **till** they should be starved out, it was useless; as a prison for Glu-glu, with themselves as guardians of the portal, it might serve.

"Gods when they come first must be shut up in quarantine **till** insubordination is knocked out of them," said Peeti, as he armed himself with a formidable stake, and the rope which had come ashore with them, recast into a noose. Then he took the favour of the coming darkness and stole down the cliff.

Aystah stayed above. "I shall be able to help you, Peeti, better here than there," she said; and Peeti, never doubting her courage, was glad to go on his perilous mission alone.

The gods still sat in conclave as he

122 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

crept down in the shadow, of the rocks and stole upon his foe. Their eyes, all centred upon Glu-glu, never marked him' in the gathering darkness; their multitudinous chatter covered the sound of his footsteps till his deft hand threw the noose and jerked it tight about the throat of the arch-conspirator. Glu-glu turned upon him with ready fury; but Peeti never waited for attack: he turned, still dragging the rope, and ran; and Glu-glu sprang foaming after him. The one straining away, the other straining in pursuit, they had quickly put themselves at some distance from the assembly of gods before these latter had recovered from¹ the first shock of surprise. Peeti had so planned it; and now Glu-glu, perceiving it, began to resist, calling on his followers to rally round him.

Peeti dragged with all his force, but Glu-glu dragged with all his, and Glu-glu was very strong. Peeti went hand over hand up the rope, in order that he might bring his stake into operation; but meantime the gods began to come on in threatening array.

All at once from overhead came a perfect avalanche of stones—stones of a very formidable size and aimed with force

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 128

and a directness which in civilized womanhood is a lost art. Along the brow of the cliff ran Aystah, braying a loud battle-cry. Every stone and flint and crag was laconic in its directness and draconic in its severity; and matters, as far as the gods' heads and limbs were concerned, became very much minced.

Conviction that their cause was a lost one spread speedily through cracked heads and battered bodies; the bravest fell back; the timorous ones turned and fled.

Then Peeti was left alone with Glu-glu, who, though seeing himself deserted, speedily prepared for a fresh¹ bout of hostility. But against the thrusts and the prods with which Peeti assaulted his poor vulnerable carcass he could make no stand; having whirled himself round a few times on his flappers, endeavouring to blind his opponent with sand, but finding the pricks of the stake become ever more incessant and grievous, he allowed himself to be coerced into forward motion, and went, cruelly goaded, up the rocks and inland to the place of durance vile.

For his sake that night Peeti and Aystah lay without shelter, guarding in alternate watches the door of the cabin. But the

124 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

next day Peeti constructed for him, and for any which should come after, a less commodious home on the sea-shore—a hutch of stakes strongly driven into the ground, roofed in with shale, and made impregnable with rock. Into which place of penance Glu-glu was before another nightfall compelled to enter, there to await the pleasure of his captors or languish to death under their very eyes.

Suffice it to say that after many days Glu-glu learned to plead for release and to know that death which hunger for worship brings to the spirit, and, having been judged sufficiently abased, was one day allowed to creep forth—a god whose past history was not without romance of a sort; whose past deeds had not been without valour of a sort, but whose fighting days were over. Rancid he grew and rancid he stayed, and stood lowest and humblest on the list for worship.

And time went on; and Peeti the law-giver gained wisdom and foresight in experience. His greatest anxiety ever was on the score of newly arriving deities. None looked for those dark specks on the sea's surface more keenly than did he; none went fleeter of foot to welcome them

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 125

down by the shore. It was in those times of stress and anxiety that his greatest power of discipline had to be exercised, in the forbidding of the other gods to approach the shore. Alone he would meet the arriving deity, and with many blandishments, or, if need were, with threat and compulsion, bring it within that strong place of quarantine, calling it a temple which he had built upon the beach.

There the newcomers stayed to grow mild, like port wine, in season. Often, poor things, they were mild enough, but at times a possible source of danger, requiring dexterous compulsion of staff and cord.

It was dirty work, and Peeti's fine soul sickened under it; but the struggle for existence pressed him, since Fate had cast his lot in dark places and cruel habitations.

CHAPTER XVII

AYSTAH HAS NEWS OF HOOSH

A YEAR went to its end; another came and was going likewise—two years in all since these two had come to the shores of the island, assured of nothing but death's bitterness, and had found instead life and love's sweetness in abundance, and had devised for themselves a precarious sovereignty amid the strange materials that lay to hand.

For two years and upwards the routine of worship offered twelve times daily had gone on, little indeed when divided among! so many, but sufficient that every one might take a little. Any charm which its ludicrousness had given to the daily performance had been long buried by the monotony; and there only remained in it for Peeti the hard indignity of an unworthy expediency. Yet though at times his thoughts grew stormy and his soul at war within him, he had his hours of joy. He had joy in watching the dawning light

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 127

in Aystah; her kind nature, opening like a rose, petal on petal, to the sun, sent all its colour and sweetness to him; and amid all the degrading surroundings of the life they lived, Peeti's love and presence seemed to shield her utterly, so that she took no harm. Tenderly, even to the sacrifice of himself, he kept her from the defilement of contact with the reptiles he bowed down to worship, and saw that indeed her life was one of joy and 'growing wonder. And the wonder grew apparent in eye and lip, until one day it closed in a look of Peeti's, and Aystah's sun-warmed body sprang close and was locked in Peeti's arms.

So love grew perfect between them without a thought of ill, and the only cloud which lay upon their sun of life was the shadow of man's hand, in the thing named his god.

And in some sort the closer union of their hearts, through nearer interchange, brought sorrow; for into Aystah's soul came waifs of shadow, and sadness that discerned a sadness kept from her, and vague unrest; and "Hoosh still sleeps," she said to herself if she crept to her crevice to listen.

128 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Hoosh was her one secret, her love of him still making his name sweet to, her soul; unnamed in their speech with each other, and by Peeti forgotten. And here was the difference between these two—Peeti's religion was denial, positive and strenuous; Aystah's a mystic belief in Hoosh's one day awakening. One side of her nature found itself abundantly satisfied in Peeti—him she worshipped; but Hoosh, who had lain tenderly on her arm and needed the protection and love she gave him—him¹ she did not worship; and yet she needed him, and so looked wistfully, for his awaking.

One morning Aystah awoke to find Peeti already gone from her side. For a while she lay placid, wooing sleep back into her eyes; but suddenly instead she grew wide awake, full of strange expectation, she knew not whence or wherefore. Yet sure enough there was coming upon her, unknown, unguessed as yet, a call that should kindle her blood.

So comes the rain, and we hear it a great way off in heaven, and the tree-tops are taken with the sound of it, and at last it drops upon our face.

Aystaft was swift to divine a meaning;

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 129

and with that pretty, impulsive gesture which comes to some, when the hand flies to the lips to be kissed for the sweetness of the thought, soi hers leaped up to the smiles at play. "Hoosh is awake!" she said, and stole out into the sunshine. "Oh, Hoosh, my own Hoosh! Awake at last!" and away, she ran with bounding heart to be under the cliffs by the cleft of Hoosh's hiding-place.

She stooped to look in; the space was somewhat dark, and there was accumulation of rubbish to be swept aside;,, but within and beyond (without doubt of it) Hoosh waited.

It was but in more primitive sort the tale of a child, who, peering through reeds for a swan's nest, found desolation and decay. There, indeed, lay Hoosh, a poor clotted, dusty object falling away at the touch; with no sign *of* life or motion in him. Hoosh was not asleep merely—Hoosh was dead.

And yet, and yet, somehow, somewhere, Hoosh stirred within her life. That thing which she had fondled and called her god, and laid at her bosom all night in the old childish days, and cherished softly, clothing it with love and anoint-

130 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

ing it with kisses, even that same seemed now to be crying out to her in response to her unslackened desire, of that second coming, which she had allowed herself to dream of, when Hoosh would look up into her eyes with words and understanding, a full realization of her ideal, surpassing hope.

Yet though the sense of this still clung, the sudden chill of grief which fell about her at the discovery of her dead Hoosh for a time overbore her spirit utterly. Peeti found her weeping and full of desolation, in no way to be comforted; perplexing him with her reiterated cry, "-Hoosh, 'Hoosh, oh, where, where is my Hoosh?"

It was in vain that with wise counsels Peeti strove to put away from her the childish remembrance; for once her spirit was beyond his power, and would brook no removal of its sorrow.

Quietly he dropped speech of it, and left Nature to heal the wound; only caring to let her feel his guardianship more constant and near, and in every word and touch a double tenderness.

A little time went of days and weeks, and at last Aystah looked up into his face wistful but without trouble. She

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 131

drew his hands into her breast, and unveiled the sweet fable: " / have Hoosh," she said, and leaned to be taken in his arms.

Her ears drank in the exultation and laughter with which he gathered the truth; and all that day she sang and smiled without a thought of care.

But upon Peeti's spirit, whenever he was free from her eyes, fell sternness and gloom; and his voice, as it doled out hourly praise to the gods who came as his creditors, had in it more of menace than of worship. To his clean spirit it became abhorrent that here should be the heritage of his race, in a land polluted by a brood so hideous and so base as these gods of his forefathers.

He bent his mind earnestly to the task of devising an escape—how profitless else were his revolt against the bondage in which his own god had held him ! how piteous the fate of those who should come after, if their lot were to lie here for ever amid these vile incarnations of all that was evil in the spirits of past generations !

So Peeti planned other ways for his own future, for Aystah's, and for their children's,

132 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

not knowing how: soon was to come that which should drive them in distress and horror from the shore which had sheltered them, and make distant severance between them and all the works of men's hands and¹ the possessions of men's spirits. Then the work which they had begun should find an accomplishment so horrible that even they could not abide the day of its appearing.

CHAPTER XVIII

"MY NAME IS CHAM-PUM. IN ME GODS DIE DAILY"

AYSTAH, as her time drew near, was taken with strange whims and fancies., and soul-troubles that women wot well of: little hidden yearnings and remembrances would enlarge themselves, and grow imperative within her, and Peeti was often sorely tasked how to help or to cheer her.

What help or hope could he give, finding her one morningi looking out over the sparkling sea to the blue hills of what once had been home, crying and stretching out arms for Daz—Daz, the small child who on their last day of old freedom had lain with them in the sunshine and the long grasses, and had been borne home at dusk for the last time by the weeping Aystah? How unreasonable seemed this sudden grief; how unavailing were words at all to assuage it! There Aystah sat wringing her hands for Daz; and, by her side, Peeti, devising words of comfort,

184 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

till the worship of the *gods* compelled him away from her.

Yet could eyes have seen—as doubtless spirit saw darkly—over the blue seawaters to the shore of that larger land, they would have found reason enough why some chord of love should on that day be jarred by memory and grief for the child-brother, between whom and them time and place had made long division.

For to-day, as on that other day which has been told of, there was gathering of priests and people down by the shore, and rage, and bitter cursing, and accusation not without fear; and underneath all, strange piteous prayer and supplication, heard but unanswered.

The centre of it all was a mere child; but power sat on the brow, scorn hardening to defiance lurked in the lips; and he went unbound, with his hand upon his god, whom not without a measure of gloomy pomp and reverent awe men drew down to shore in a wheeled litter.

And for these two, they launched out a raft—not upon the sea-road of the gods, lest so they should be sending destruction to the whole hierarchy of Heaven, but on the open southern coast, from

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 135

whence for many miles sea and no land lay, naught save wastes of water level across many horizons.

And when the raft lay ready to cast off, three priests, bereft of their gods, came and knelt, imploring restoration of the same from the deity standing embarked: nay, cried to those gods, bidding them break their bonds, and come forth from the belly which entombed them. But from none came any answer; only Daz stood looking hate.

And the high-priest came, borne upon a litter, and dying¹, and cast upon him' ashes of accusation. And the boy gathered them again, and cast them back (so that they fell upon the high-priest's hair and beard), and went seaward, bitterly cursed.

So was that land rid of him, and the mighty dilemma to which he had brought the 'guardians of its mysteries face to face. And, being rid of him, having shifted the apparent doom from their sight, the priests, blind and without understanding, thought to have kept the faith and to have saved themselves alive.

Poor panic-stricken ostriches, let them hide their heads and cloud their wits, and

136 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

have comfort for a while! They had indeed been through a terrible day of trial; they had indeed been tossed tempestuously to and fro, dividing their counsels; but now, at length, it was over—the fear, the strife, and the trial—and they judged themselves to have been in no wise wanting.

It is worth a glance back to see what was the nature of the fiery trial through which they had come.

Daz, who had ever been an object for suspicion among the priests, by reason of his close kinship to Aystah the heretic, had verified and surpassed their worst doubts concerning him. His growth for the past two years had been watched with increasing mislike by the high-priest and the whole of the sacred college. So dangerous a spirit as his, it was felt, could not be left to develop its own deity; and so it was agreed that the time had fully come for him to receive the manifestation of his god.

The priests set to work; cautiously they coaxed and urged him to find the revelation which awaited him. But Daz could not be brought to declare himself. In solitude he hid his days, time after time

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 137

baffling the watch that was set upon him, till at last the high-priest took him in hand, and began to devise for him a suitable, a harmless, an insignificant deity—one on whom no free thought could build itself. But this said god, so "fair and fit and simple and sufficient," while in process of completion, one day became missing, like the raven from the ark, and returned not again. Closely following on that, two of the priests found *their* deities also missing; and on a day following, a third went and did likewise.

Then began great searchings of heart, and other searchings as great, that availed as little for the recovery of the lost, strayed, or stolen godlekins.

But when finally the high-priest had for a few moments left his god—his Chunta-jumbra—unguarded, and had returned to find him gone, then while scent was hot a great chase had ensued, and Daz was discovered, creeping through covered ways with stolen booty.

Deep, deep into the woods they tracked him, and saw him lift a curtain of creepers and disappear, as though into the bowels of the earth.

Then they pounced and caught him

138 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

most red-handed. -His god stood before them revealed, a mighty and ferocious conception, so that men trembled at the sight of it; and lo ! on his knees before it, Daz, offering to it for demolition Chunta-jumbra, the high-priest's god. Over the ponderous brow of the terrible Thing these words were graven :

" MY NAME is CHAM-PUM. IN ME GODS
DIE DAILY."

In that moment, before that sight of horror—his own god held up for sacrifice—came fear and frenzy into the brain of the high-priest; all the strength seemed wrung out of his soul; the pains of death took hold of him¹; the shadow of the tomb fell about him : he knew himself that his days were numbered. He had but just sense enough to see Chunta-jumbra rescued from hideous death ere he swooned to, earth.

It boots not to tell of the trial and the condemnation that followed. Daz was doomed; but his god—whither should he go? To the Island of Reassumption they dared not send a, scourge; so terrible; yet neither dared they destroy it, for godhead was in it; neither dared they

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 139

force it to disgorge those it had already devoured, for this was a god of more might than any that had come before it.

At length devious counsels prevailed, and Daz and his god were sent adrift out into the broad ocean. Thus they brought it to pass that without disrespect to the god they parted with their fear; and as to the other, let his god save him if he would have him.

So Daz went his way to death, yet having wrought a work which should not die.

CHAPTER XIX

CHAM-PUM'S APPETITE

SOME days after that on which he had found Aystah crying out for Daz, Peeti heard the shoreward scurrying of feet, which gave token of the approach of another dweller to the island. Sure enough, there went his precious godlekins racing for the sea by hundreds.

Calling on Aystah to follow, he snatched up staff and rope and swung out after them.

When he had reached the shore, it took him some little time to drive the inquisitive godlekins away. Their resentment against this aspect of his tyranny knew no bound save those which their craven spirits had not courage to exceed ; and for a time Peeti had to face an incessant, petulant cackling, till through threat and coercion, on his part, the shore was clear of them.

Then he went and opened the door of the house of detention, and stood with Aystah to await the coming god.

As it came near, Aystah ran and armed herself with a heavy stake, which was laid

handy. "It is a great monster, Peeti!" she cried. "It will fight us!" So they stood braced.

The raft came coasting along the bay; the god sat majestic, terrible, a true monster, such as had never before been seen. At his feet, washed over by the waves, some other thing lay without motion.

Peeti threw out his rope, caught the raft, and drew it in to land. As it grated against the shingle the god rose and set solemn foot on shore.

Then Peeti and Aystah saw that the other was no god—was simply a dead body, terribly m'arred by sufferings of hunger and scorched by the fierceness of the sun. The hands held a broken piece of wood, which had been torn from¹ the raft and used for an oar.

Peeti turned the bowed face towards him, and saw the calm high brow unflawed by the suffering which had marred the lips to that last stage when pain finishes in repose.

Aystah saw also, and, quicker than Peeti, knew. She threw¹ herself upon the dead with a heart-wrung cry: "Oh! Daz, Daz, it's you! Oh! my little Daz; and why are you dead, now that you have come to me? Oh! Daz, don't die, don't

142 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

die 1 Wake up! Look at me! Daz! Daz!" And though to Peeti, at first, the thing was unbelievable, it nevertheless even to him proved itself true—that this was Daz; and that Daz was dead.

For a long time these two heard nothing, saw nothing, but this grievous thing which lay loved and dead at their feet: a terrible unexplained woe sent to them over sea from a cruel-hearted home, their home never more.

Out of the waves in the bay, thinking that prohibition must now be over, slipped two fish-tailed and finny ones, and went paddling up the shingle to interview the new arrival.

A moment afterwards Peeti sprang to his feet; for a scream of anguish came shrilling under the cliffs, curdling the blood in his heart. And there went one, fish-tailed and finny, pursued by the new deity, in whose jaws writhed with gesticulating tail the other unfortunate victim.

The poor little god, paddling along for dear life, was no match in speed to the monster who sped after; there was not time to find safety in the sea. It fled for refuge into the place of quarantine; and the big one bowled in after. Peeti rushed behind, slammed to and barred the door; the terrible beast was caged.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 143

Through the bars Peeti watched horror-struck, and saw him devour first number one, then number two, till both fish-tails were gone. Then for the first time realizing its confinement, it thundered to be out. After a while, finding the stakes beyond its strength to break down, it sat stock-sullen, grimly indifferent to all that went on around it.

Peeti, relieved of his fear lest it should beat down the walls of its prison, returned with Aystah to pay a last token of love to their dear dead Daz. With many tears they buried him, in a shallow grave by the seashore, wondering sadly of the why and wherefore of his fate ; only dimly discerning that, over-strong against himself by his vision of a igod, he had wrought his own destruction.

Before they had ceased from! their toil over the resting-place of their dead, night had come; so, with a last sad farewell they left him and went their way, not understanding as yet that, hard by, caged up under the darkness, was the spirit which Daz's genius had evoked—now that he was dead the instrument (as it jhad before been the symbol) of the destruction to which he had doomed ,the theology of his tribe.

That night Peeti vowed to Aystah that

144 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

he would bear her away from a place so god-trodden and accursed; , choosing rather to trust in the sea to, bring them through whatever perils to some better haven of rest.

Sadly enough* he imparted to her the fruits of his philosophy. '- Our gods/' he said, "are but the evil that is in us. We die and they take our life ; as it goes from us, so it comes to them. We die, and they become, alive, what we conceived of them ere they had life. Katchywallah did not live, nor Hoosh, when he came here; that was because we are not yet dead. But Glu-glu, think of it !—Glu-glu took life from' my father, and used it in striving to **kill** me ! Are we all devils that our gods have nothing but hatred and cruelty in their dwelling's? Ah! it was our priests ! they taught us to embody our first imagination of evil, our lust, our passion for cruelty, and to set that up, and all our lives long to worship it."

Aystali shuddered. "Then Daz was cruel: his -god is terrible mbre than all others; would he eat up all the other gods if we let him out?;"

Would he? Peeti started up half-glad for the hope it gave him, but as the thought opened in all its horrors he re-

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 145

coiled; he could not bear to look on and see all that massacre.

"Daz must have been very great" he said gravely, "with a terrible hatred towards all the gods. They killed him for that; I can see it all now. And yet I do not know if it is cruel to wish to kill all the gods. Daz was great, and he had such thoughts; but we cannot see as he saw, we cannot dare what he dared. No! Aystah, let us go and leave his terrible god in its cage. I have no god now; I cannot make his god my god.

*"To-night I will get things ready, and to-morrow, when the gods are not by, we will take the big raft that Daz came on, and be quit for ever of the gods."

"I have Hoosh" said Aystah, and smiled.

Peeti laughed back, "Call it Hoosh if you will! Hoosh did no harm. There is no evil in you, Aystah,"

So that night they made provision and giot ready, and the next day looked their last upon the island which for upwards of three years had been their home, so feir-seeming to the outward view, so possessed and overrun by such unclean spirits.

Daz, henceforth, was to be the presiding genius of that shore.

CHAPTER XX

EXEUNT PEETI AND AYSTAH ; CHAM-PUM REMAINS

BUT even while the dawn still hung and trembled below the horizon of the sea, and while Peeti and Aystah were making ready to be launched and away ere any of the gods were astir, a dark speck came riding the sea-current, and swept along the farther curve of the bay.

" Let be ! " cried Peeti, as the raft came round. " Pay no heed ! The tide will carry it past; pay no heed ! Let us go ! "

Even as he spoke the raft was close, hardly three yards from shore. He had not before given it any heed; now he looked up. A sight met his eyes that staggered him. It was the high-priest's god Chunta-jumbra, formidable in death, most formidable in life.

As the god's eyes lighted upon him, the old antagonism seemed to rekindle like ja flame; the beast gathered itself for a leap over the intervening space of water, and

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 147

sprang, venomed with' rage, right upon Peeti. Its long arms wound about him; its sharp nails dug into his flesh and tore as though they would rend him to shreds.

An awful fight began; here and there they bore up and down, struggling across the beach, crashing against crags of rocks, dashing each other down upon the shingle. Aystah had to forbear any help; the antagonists whirled so fast she dared make no stroke with the stake she had snatched. She saw blood, and knew that it was Peeti's, his strength ebbing away, his valour staying. In such extremity whence could she fetch help? No god that might succour was within call, save one. The sight of Peeti's blood maddened her; she cared not what she did—did not think, did not know. With wild hands she unslid the bars of the gates of the prison-house; and throwing all on the hazard, cried aloud on Daz, and bade his god to come forth to the succour of them both.

No bidding was needed: out burst Champurri with a roar that made the very cliffs tremble. For a moment he stood bristling, till sight of the conflict inflamed his rage, then a terrible power took possession of his limbs.

148 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

In one moment he had stood bristling; in the next he had taken the fight, as it were, between his teeth, and—killed it.

Aystah strained an agonizing gaze in dread of what she had done. She saw Peeti, whirled out of the struggling mass, fall prone; then saw, in one hideous second, death and destruction have dominion over the high-priest's god.

It takes too long to tell the tale—flash of lightning—crash of thunder—so, it is said, have gods wrought doom of old. In such space of time, and in such sort, was doom now fallen.

Chunta-jumbra we shall not meet again : if we seek his monument we must look at Cham-pum.

The sound of the fray had brought many gods running; hand over hand they came scrambling down the cliffs.

The big god went for them¹ with splendid avidity; and about , his feet travelled thunder.

thunder..Yelling, they turned and fled upwards, and in panic disappeared over the cliff-top ; and Cham-pum, that mighty Being, went bounding after.

Aystah was by Peeti's side, striving to lift him. "To the raft! Oh, Aystah,

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 149

to the raft ! " he cried; for the air rang with a horror of sound. He dragged himself to his feet, and hung dizzily upon her.

Toiling, toiling, dragging him, and dragging the raft, Aystah made all things ready at the water's edge.

Every moment Peeti gathered up strength ; and the rising tide favoured their efforts to launch.

When the raft was afloat, they cast thereon food and drink for the journey ; and wading waist-deep, took hold of the timbers, cautiously letting themselves drift along the shore **till** they reached the rocky arch which spanned the outgoing current.

Then, commending themselves to the kindest influence they knew, even the wild spirit of the sea, they cast themselves on board, let the raft swing out into the full push of the current, and clung on for dear life.

The waters roared and swirled about them, dashed them on, in and under, and through; then abated their force, and lo—ocean and free sky !

Peeti and Aystah beheld liberty at last. All the sea lay broad and bright before therri; and ahead they saw how the current

150 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

bore away, away, they knew not whither, through what rocks or shoals. The future for them might be dark and imminent as night: or, like the sea, fathomless, but bright and broad.

Whatever Fate had in store for them, life or death, they prepared willingly to take it; having so little to hazard, they hazarded all.

Yet one piteous remnant of the land they left still clung to them, not wishing to be cast away. In their wake there, shrilled a plaintive and a feeble cry : " Take me too ! Take me too ! "

A poor little fishy god came and put up his gaping mouth and goggle eyes against the side of the raft, and paddled industriously with flapper and fin.

" Oh, let me take him ! " said Aystah, touched with compassion. " Just this one ! "

" Oh ! take me too ! Oh ! take me too ! " cried the little god.

But Peeti shook his head resolutely. " Keep in the sea, my friend, " he said, " when you go back ! The devil is loose in yonder isle ;, and he eats fish. "

" Take me too ! Take me too ! " said the little god disconsolately.

He swam for another mile, falling little

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 151

by little to the rear—another mile, and they could only tell by a faint far-off ripple that he still followed them. Over the waters came an attenuated cry, " Oh ! take me too, me too, me too ! "

Far away stood the island, blue between the two blues of sky and sea. Fair, very fair, it seemed, with its trees waving away into mist; but in the heart of it went the Devourer, already, if not yet its sole inhabitant, rapidly approaching the consummation of his aim to become so.

Oh ! fish-tailed and finny, go thou, and wait with obsequious cry upon each raft that brings a new god to those shores; point to the land and say, " Yonder is One made in the likeness of a Man, not of a god which perisheth. He hath found out the secret of man's strength, and doeth accordingly. Keep out of his way: he is not good for us ! "

But Peeti and Aystali sail on the great sea-current.

APPENDIX

THE following verses appeared as chapter-headings and final poem to the original edition of GODS AND THEIR MAKERS. Having very little to do with the story, they are only reprinted here in order to deprive readers of nothing that they might legitimately expect in a re-issue.

Heart to the heart of the god
Timed, as his heart-beats taught me ;
Hands obeying his hands
On chords that crashed at his nod :
Thus was the measure divine
Wrung forth, and the full fire caught me :
And my blood, to his lips, grew wine,
And my bones, to the burning, brands.
The School of Music.

For the love of a woman they care not a jot.
They grow their god in a kettle or pot:
They hymn him with Schumann, Mozart, and what
not;
With cautious albumen they feed him, or hot
Red hair from the human. The name he has got
Is Gorgonal Gnumann.

They say he descended to them from the skies
With a difficult alias on for disguise ;
And him they befriended, and fathered with lies, -
And carefully mended : made taffeta eyes
Where no eyes were intended ; then, deeming it wise,
There they ended.

The Nondescripts.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 153

Quoth Jock, the great Jehoshaphat,
" What rumpus shall I next be at ?—
Something to bring me fame enough
Now I have tamed the Waggy-Pough.
Why, here's the thing to do, of course,—
I'll curb the slonky Radish-Horse/

The Agony Column stood at gaze
While Jock Jehoshaphat went his ways ;
Over his head across the blue
The gaudy Pennialiner flew,
And, like a grasshopper elate,
He heard the slater-cricket slate.

But, like pale tombstones thro' the trees,
Obituary notices
Gnashed their white teeth at him, and cried,
" O Jock Jehoshaphat, turn aside,
Or else the Radish-Horse, no doubt,
Will shortly turn you inside out! "

The Horse Tamer.

He said : " Thou shalt come to the spaces
Where the dewdrops render their shine ;
And the fall of my feet shall make places
Prepared in the grass for thine :
And Love shall make thee divine,
When between shadowing faces
We taste from one cup the wine."

She said: "I **will** come to the spaces
Where dewdrops render their shine :
The fall of thy feet shall show places
Like stars in the grass for mine.
And thou shalt make me divine
When amid shadowing faces
We drain from one cup the wine."

The Rendezvous.

154 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Oh, that high-day in June, what a party we were,
Like water we ran with our heels in the air ;
There was Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and me,
And alone on one leg came the Chimmy-magree.

We combed out the miles with invincible feet,
Or, tired, used the Chimmy-magree for a seat,
Or, going 'cross country, and wanting a wedge,
Put the Chimmy-magree to explode in the hedge.

A Day in the Country.

Cast me off, call me,
Salve me, or gall me,
Set me to tasks without meaning or mirth !
Wish me not, will me
Any deed to do in the quicksands of earth ;
Kiss me, then **kill** me !

Deny me, receive me,
Doubt me, or believe me !
Honour ? Wilt thou honour me when all's well done ?
" Get thee behind me !
Little use I find thee !"
So, at the end of the race which is run,
Blot me out, blind me !

The Supplicant.

Lost, a flea answering to the name of Charlie.
Daily Paper advt.

" ' Henceforth,' he said, ' O soul,
Build thee new barns, and store
The good thou dost control!
Yea, toil not, live at ease,
And taste life to the lees ! '
' Thou fool, thou fool ! ' said God ;
' This night of thee I do require thy soul. "

The Householder.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 155

O lips that have closed to life's red wine,
Could I open you now, and endue with mine,
The whole long draught of it, honey and gall;
I would give you it all!

If to your eyes, betrayed of the light,
I could surrender my own poor sight,
I would say as I let the dear thing be,
" At last he looks at the world thro' me."

You would behold, with a start of surprise,
Old things made new by a dead love's eyes :
Seeing as I saw then, that day,
Not a year away.

The Well-wisher.

Face to face, now, how can I express you—
Bidding your soul leap forth at the word ?—
Catch the meaning of the eyes, of the lips, and confess
you,
Bare as a new-made soul in the hands of its
Lord :
Nay, then ; if I bless you ?

Ah, you, you, if I clasp you a little with sorrow,
Moan to you, offer you service alone,
Pleading my grief, and my desperate need for
you,
Wonder at, worship, and battle and bleed for you,
Teach me the secret of strength I may borrow,
Me, your slave **till** the life-spark's quelled !
" Ah," you mock me, " shall Samson to-morrow
Cry ' Held ! ' ? "

The New Delilah.

156 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

" You should take all
The kisses I've got,
If kisses could fail
Dear Life," quoth I.
" If Life failed not
In the night's dark fall
To avail!"

" You should have the whole
Whatever the end :
(Ere the Fates that live
Wrung friend from friend),
Though fierce Love stole,
While the years cried, ' Give ! '
You should take the whole ! "

But the giving stops
That we strive about :
Though Love aches out
Upon wild fresh wing ;
Life droops, Life drops,
And how is Love king
If the giving stops ?

Mad Lovers.

Oh, ye of mightier current, ye who flow
Triumphing to the billows, and ride on,
Warmth-giving gulf-streams! may no freset
creep
Softly between your arms, and take the deep
Borne on your bosom under stars and wan
Mid-ocean moonrises to which ye go ?

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 157

And with much buffeting, led on by you,
Flow near, and touch some legendary land,
Around whose shores vibrate Orphean strings,
Where with calm throat out-passioned Sappho
sings,
And Homer's eyes guide an unerring hand
Over a Troy built up and sung anew !

Song-River.

Life is pain ; but the breath
Life draws is bliss,
And the sorrow of life is death,
Where no pain is.
And we hunger and thirst for a pain
That may bring no gain ;
And we shudder and shrink from the guest
Who shall give life rest.

For the bliss, though death bring ease,
Is surrendered then,
And dearer than this are these,
The desires of men—
To fight, and to strive, and to strain,
Through sorrow to gain
Bare knowledge ; and sink at last,
With its fruit held fast.

The Desire of Life.

By a kind of theft
Your feet shine
On a path which fortune left
Clear for mine.

Thus, 'tis often thus:
At a turn
Lies the road. It is for us.
" Ours! " we yearn—

158 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Halt a little while,
Boot and brace.
There now ! Down the road a mile
Others race.

The-Early Bird.

I have cherries, rotten and ripe.
(Here you run to the piper's pipe !)
Stand in a row, my children wise :
Open your mouths, and shut your eyes!

Now I bob to you—promise you naught
If you miss the minute to munch.—Well caught!
" Mere stones ! " you stammer in mad surprise ;
But—you opened your mouth and you shut your
eyes.

Fruit of knowledge is fit for food ;
You risk the rubbish to get the good,
And guess, " Tis God ! " (though in Devil's
disguise)
As you open your mouths and shut your eyes.

Am I a devil, or am I a god ?
Pig in a poke, or peas in pod,
Or possible poison ?—I promise no prize :
You open your mouths and you shut your eyes.

And now, when stalks are tough to the taste,
You curse the giver, you guessed in haste
To be God, of a gift which your act decries,
If you open your mouths and shut your eyes.

Blind Mouths.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 159

The Buttercup Bees and the short-horned Devons
Went into the bath-room and bathed by sevens.
With the Devons a-top, those daughters of Heth,
It was vanity, as the Preacher saith.
But as soon as the Buttercup Bees got breath,
They milked the short-horned Devons to death,
Till some gave in, and some gave out ;
And of those that were left there isn't a doubt
That they didn't get home **till** morning.

The Bath-room Ballad.

For the gift of the gods is a strife
Twixt the want and the wasting of breath ;
And to die is the fortune of life,
And to live is the fortune of death.

Turn, turn, therefore, O Fortune,
Turn thine indifferent wheel!
Look not upon us, nor love us,
Smile not, shine not above us !
Trample us under thy heel,
We importune !

Fortune's Fool.

How, with unsure caress,
We recognize the eternal Fate whereto,
Even at the birth of suns and stars, we drew
Out of Infiniteness !

Yet now, being met, I trust
We may endure the severance of each sense;
Blind, deaf, mute, and insensate, part we hence;
Are we not housed in dust ?

160 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Dust: which we take to be
The instrument wherethrough grows manifest,
By tone and touch, a soul—else unexpressed—
Its mastering deity.

Bond-servants.

" Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel ? wherefore
sodden
Is thy whole skirt's hem,
As a treader's in the wine-fat ? " "I have trodden,
I have trodden
All the wine-press for them :
And of all my people was there none.
I have trodden the wine-press alone.

" / will break them in mine anger, in the fury of my
loathing
I will trample on them :
Their blood shall be sprinkled on the borders of my
clothing;
I will stain my skirt's hem !
For the day of vengeance fills my soul,
Now the time of my awaiting is made whole."
The Wine-harvest.

Crowned with the pale nine moons of birth,
Unknown, yet prayed of all men's breath,
For them thou earnest down to earth,
In death.

Thy feet were cold, for all their love;
Thy lips had done with smile or speech ;
Thine eyes lay stilled in looks above
Their reach :

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 161

Lit with the sorrow of the stars,
Kissed into life by some dead sun,
Death-wounded where the immortal wars
Were won.

They kissed the lips that never spake,
They wept the eyes that could not see :
O, Love unmade, what can man make
Of thee ?

The Unknown God.

Out of what music wast thou builded, God,
Lord God most high ? Amid what swooning strings
Rose each great glimmering buttress, and crowned
tower
And battlemented breast to make thee whole,
Palatial, for God's dwelling ? Yea, but these
Fall and are lost : dragged out of their sweet
heaven,
All their bright glory gone ; their throne in thee
Is dust, and ashes, and hot cinderous waste,
Where red worms crawl from spark to spark, and
die :
And all grows darkness round a god-head gone,
And earth a bed leaf-strewn with withered dreams,
Which once were men.

Lo, therefore, he that grew
A too great fire, most unendurable
For my pale writhen body any more,
Fuel for his fire now takes from them, now
feeds
With slow, great drops of sweat and agony
His life from theirs.

The Waxen Man.

162 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Under the daybreak of days,
At the opening of earth's eyes,
All flesh stood patient at gaze
On the lips of the wise:
" Speak, ye have knowledge to show us,
Ye have watched the stars and the skies,
And the waters above and below us,
And the waste where it lies! "

Therefore the lips of the wise
Were opened and said :
" We have watched, and divided the skies
Of the quick and the dead.
The dead are a mighty nation,
They seek and they render naught;
They beseech not with long supplication.
Nor travail with thought.

" They, to the feastings of earth,
They, to the life-giving breath.
Answer, ' Behold, we are dearth;
' Behold, we are death !'
They toil not, they plough not, they sow not;
They are wet nor with rain nor dew;
Our searchings of heart they know not,
Nor the answer thereto.

" Beyond where they dwell we discern
A Shadow that sits on a throne:
Hard is His Visage to learn,
Or His Thought to be known.
He is the cause of creation,
Though man bear the burden thereof:
Man, the voice of a vain supplication,
He holdeth in scoff.

GODS AND THEIR MAKERS 168

" He closeth our brain with a spell;
He turneth for answer about;
He saith to man's soul, ' Is it well ?
Thou canst see. Dost thou doubt ? '
O, eyes we have, yet are blind :
Have death at our doors, yet live :
Have feet, yet no path can we find :
Have gifts, yet we cannot give I

" Doubtless our Father art Thou,
Though we be ignorant of Thee.
Thou, that art High, Thou canst bow ;
Thou hast eyes, and canst see.
Lo, the search, though it fail, we present thee,
The lives, while they wither, we give !
Let the will, not the giving, content Thee
By whom all things live ! "

.

In the day of the ending of days
Rose the Earth like a ghost from her tomb ;
And man stood patient at gaze
For the Word of his doom.
" Speak, who has purged us with suffering,
Since thy judgments are over, O Thou,
Let Thy Word be spread forth as a covering
To our griefs, and speak now !

" Why hast Thou plagued us so long,
And bent us with bridle and bit ?
We were the doers of wrong,
But Thou wast the Shaper of it.
Our graves were dumb mouths set asunder,
Our dead were dumb mouths shut fast:
O Thou, whose yoke we were under,
Give answer at last I "

164 GODS AND THEIR MAKERS

Infinite shadowing of veils
Fell from before the Throne ;
Failed, as the day's light fails
Its sheddings of light, till alone,
Apocrypt Lord of Creation,
Bare-faced on the throne did sit—
God, the birth of a vain supplication
From man, the maker of it.

Laughed the usurper, and said :
" Though ye were ignorant of me,
Gotten of the quick on the dead,
Doubtless my fathers were ye.
A blight from the night of your morrow
Through each new heaven and new earth,
I stand in the gates of your sorrow,
At the door of your birth."

II

LET US MAKE GODS

LET US MAKE GODS

THERE! was once upon a time a god who, at the beginning of things, merely existed and had nothing to do. He hung on emptiness and looked out on space, and, except those parts of himself that he could see, nothing ever moved in his whole horizon, and nothing ever came into sight. He was a worm-like deity, and his (movements were quite methodical and regular, a mere pendulum-like swing of the tail to and fro : it never occurred to him to do anything else ; he did not, in fact, know that he was doing it.

One day, however, something happened—something wonderful and astonishing—which had never happened to him before. Inside his tail, which he had never" before known to have an inside, he felt a pain, and with a sharp twitch, in order to avoid and get away from it, he swung it up and round and hit him'self sharply in the mouth. And the evening and morning—if one may speak in parables of things that did not exist—were **the** first day.

When I say that he hit himself in the mouth, I merely mean that he hit two parts of himself together that had never come together before, and had not had a notion that they could come together or even that they existed. It was only on contact that they began to realize themselves, and to wish, in a vague sort of way, for a repetition of the experience—to get back on each other, so to speak, though so high and exalted an idea as revenge or retribution had not yet occurred to them. So from that time on, for a few centuries, or aeons, or whatever the time was under conditions where time could not be measured, the god continued to dislocate his tail with vague plungings in the direction whither he wished it to go, much as a child plunges its spoon toward the mouth" which it cannot yet find. And very gradually, as a result of these plunges, his tail became, not wiser or more experienced, but more muscular. And so every now and again, by a sheer fluke, mouth and tail came together again ; and every time that his tail smacked his mouth, the god smacked his lips. Life was becoming sweet to him.

And then one day—if day it may be called—the great thing happened; just as the god's tail struck, the mouth, responsive,

made a sudden grab" at it, caught hold of it, and clung. And there they were: the god had joined them together, and marriage in heaven had begun.

Slowly, softly but firmly, the god began chewing his own tail, and the evening and morning were the second day.

At first the tail liked it, and then it didn't; and the more it disliked it, the more it wriggled to escape. So there was war in heaven: but the mouth still held its own. Peacefully, from its own point of view—if a matter of taste may be so called—it determined to investigate, to its own satisfaction, what its tail really was, or what it was capable of becoming. And so it chewed and chewed.

The tail was now in great pain, and was beginning to communicate its feelings to the brain. But the brain did not understand, or did not know how to deal with the matter; and so when it told the tail to pull it told the mouth to pull also, and the suction and the pain increased greatly; and the triouth, believing that it was enjoying itself greatly, continued to absorb the tail.

In course of time—for at last time was really beginning to shape itself—there came results. The god began to find nourish-

ment in the eating of his own tail; and liis body began to put out queer little fins, with feelers and suckers attached to them—some taking after the head and some taking after the tail, as is the way with all things born of double parentage; and the strife, or mutual benefit scheme, according as we view it, which had started between the primordial pair of opposites, was taken up and reproduced all over the god's body by a thousand flattering imitators. And whatever the evening and the morning were at this precise stage of affairs, nobody could say that the god was not now alive.

Presently the creative eruption which had broken out over the god's body extended in the direction of his head; and round the great; parent mouth **small** and very, animated heads and tails—fins, feelers and suckers, or whatever you like to call them—sprang up and began disputing in their own way which should be first. Now and then, turning from each other, they made excited grabs at the parental orifice, disturbing its adjustment, and distracting its attention from its own solid and immemorial feed on the now disappearing tail. " Making themselves to be as one of us I ruminated the slow-mouthing deity; and, turning from his

own proper employ to take a snap at them, he loosed hold of the tail of things, and, letting it slip away, recovered it no more.

The tail was now master of the situation; though bruised, flayed and corrupted by the digestive processes, it at last found ground to go upon; and, conceiving the altogether fallacious notion that by mere retrogression it could recover its primitive form, it began to drag its body backwards, and, if ever the head m'ade any sign of resistance or of thinking otherwise, to bash it violently against the obstacles which lay in its path.

Following upon this came a change in the composition of the deity. The synthetic process of creation or self-realization having come to an end, disintegration took its place: gradually all the fins, feelers and suckers began to separate and fall away from the parent body and start life on their own account. They passed out of view; the deity lost cognizance of them; what became of them he did not know.

Presently, deprived of these excrescences born of earlier conflict, he settled back into peace: head and tail contended no more; pace slackened and became imperceptible; finally it ceased.

The pendulum swing was not tesum'ed;

172 LET US MAKE GODS

in the course of his changes the deity had found ground; bedrock was under him. Very slowly and slidingly he curled himself round in many coils, close and comfortable; head rested on tail, he dozed. As he did so, merely from old habit and absence of mind, he took his tail once more into his mouth and began chewing it. The tail resisted no more ; it seemed unaware of the process which was going on. Gradually it coalesced and was absorbed; the coils of its spiral became fewer; the rate of absorption diminished, but never entirely ceased ; back from tail to head it chewed its way ; and, unity achieved, rested from its labour, closed eyes, and slept fast. When, many aeons later, those separated entities, having found for themselves other forms, came upon him lying asleep, they did not recognize him as a god at all; but they came and hung about his sides, climbed on him, fattened on him, and told stories to them'selves of an altogether" different god—one whom they themselves had made.

III

LITTLE SAINT OOGH

LITTLE SAINT OOGH

ONE day the Devil, upon his morning's walk, was arrested by a savour of extraordinary sweetness. It came from the upper window of an old ramshackle mill which rose sheer over the waters of a weed-grown pond. Far too fine was that savour for ordinary nostrils to detect, but the Devil had a nose which gave him wind of it.

"Piff, piff ! Whatever virtue can this be?" he cried, all amazed. And the more he nosed at it, the quicker grew his sense of disrelish. Peering upward with weak eyes toward the sky, he saw that the window stood open. "By Saint Anthony," said he, "I must look into this at once ! " And, digging in with" tooth and claw, and by the aid of his tail, he ascended two stories of wall, hooked his chin over the window-sill, and took a quiet view of the interior.

There inside, with his back to the window,

The English language provides no phonetic spelling for this saint's name. It should be pronounced like the word "who" with the aspirate dropped

176 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

sat little Saint Oogh. You may never have heard of him before, and that is well, for happy is the saint who has no history. Little Saint Oogh, at that moment, was supremely happy : he was sitting a-straddle on the hearthrug counting! his own toes; and the cat sat watching him.

He had counted as far as six, and was at a loss to get farther, for at that time, be it understood, he was only three years old.

" My word I " cried the Devil, " what succulence I " For he perceived at once a virgin soul, one which had as yet committed no sin save that of originality or unspontaneous generation, which comes of earthly parentage. He opened his mouth so wide in astonishment that his chin slipped and he fell plumb down into the pond below.

Two minutes later little Saint Oogh' heard a knock at the door. " Turn in ! " he cried. And the Devil entered.

" May I come here and dry myself ? " inquired the fiend, taking advantage of his recent mishap, as his way always is, for furthering his own ends. And the charitable urchin at once made room for him on tKe rug by his side.

TKe Devil sat and stretched his toes to

the blaze, contemplating them; little Saint Oogh did the same. "How many has 'oo got?" he inquired presently, supposing from the Devil's fixed stare that the same problem of numbers occupied them both.

"Heh? What?" inquired the fiend, for, being little in the habit of troubling himself personally with the workings of so young a mind, he found a difficulty in following it. Saint Oogh's absorbed gaze, however, quickly directed him.

"How many? Oh, numbers don't count! So many one day, so many another. You might as well say, How many irons have you in the fire? It isn't so much how many you have in, as what you do with them when you take them' out. Now, can you make your toenails grow—like that?"

The Devil spread his toes for demonstration, and slowly thrust out his claws—thrust them out to their very ends—and then wagged them. This may puzzle those who have hitherto believed the Devil's footgear to be hoofs; but they should know that he, the greatest of all opportunists, forms himself entirely on the tastes of those whom he visits—is, in fact, a toady of the first water. If he appears to you with hoofs, you may guess at once to, what tribe he thinks you

178 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

belong: he puts the hoofs on over the claws, and a lot of other things over those, too, if necessary—open-worked silk stockings, for instance, and high-heeled shoes that strain his ankles and pinch his toes. For the Devil was the first martyr—never forget that I—and will also be the last.

On this occasion he had claws. This was because just now he had seen Saint Oogh stroking the cat; and any Italian who is a religious will tell you that to stroke a cat is a danger to morals. With claws, therefore, the Devil hoped to work his way into little Saint Gogh's soul. He stretched them¹ out till they shone pink and translucent in the firelight; and the saintly innocent watched them, fascinated. He was almost envious, but he had a patient heart in his small body. " 'Es," he said, " I s'all do like dat too, when I'se gwown up."

" But don't you wish they were like that *now?*" inquired the fiend coaxingly.

Little Saint Oogh shook his head. " No," he said sadly, " if dey was like dat now, muvver would turn and tut dem; and I's not like having my toenails tutted ! "

" Don't let her ! "

" But my muvver knows best." (The Devil almost flew out of window to escape

from the piety of that remark.) " And my muwer she vewy much bigger than me." (The Devil saw hope : saintly submission and wisdom¹ are not quite the same thing.)

Saint Oogh returned contentedly to the counting of his toes. The Devil contemplated his wished-for prey in some perplexity.

Do you like games ? " he said at last. Saint Oogh's eyes sparkled. " Then," said the Devil, shall we set fire to the cat's tail ? "

" P'waps wouldn't it hurt her ? " inquired the saintling, with an air of doubt.

" Oh no ! " said the fiend, with assurance.

" 'Ou quite sure ? "

"Yes, quite."

Saint Oogh gathered his small wits together and spoke : " Put yo'n into the fire first, then ve s'all see,"

The Devil, that meekest of martyrs, lent himself heroically to the experiment. The fire hurt horribly, but he sat and smiled through it all, while his tail, kindling to a lively red in the hot embers, sent forth rank fumes, like a church heating apparatus on a cold morning—for in his native element the stink of the Devil comes out beyond all disguising. The air grew thick with brimstone.

180 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

Before the experiment was over, Saint Oogh's interest in it had faded. " Let's play anuvver game now ! " he demanded.

"What?" cried the Devil, " not burn dear pussy's tail? "

" No," said Saint Oogh, " dat make too bad a smell, and I fink it did hurt 'ou. 'Ou was vevy good not to kwy."

In his vexation the fiend plucked off one of his bushy eyebrows; then, bethinking himself, he put it on his chin, whence, like a hairy red caterpillar, it wriggled its way home again.

" Do dat again ! " cried Saint Oogh', highly delighted.

The Devil did it simultaneously with both eyebrows ; they made a race of it, came in a dead heat, and, back into place, sat bristling and arching at each other like cats on a garden wall.

Saint Oogh' clapped his hands.

" Wouldn't you like to do that with' yours?" queried the fiend.

Little Saint *Oagti* felt doubtfully across the smooth' of his forehead for the down which had yet to come. " Haven't dot any," he said.

" But you wish' you had, don't you? " inquired the fiend quickly, anxious to awaken covetousness in the small saint's breast.

" 'Ou yend me yours ! " said Saint Oogh, stretching out his hands.

Nothing could please the Devil better. Plucking himself once more of those hirsute adornments, he leaned over and planted them in that garden of innocence, the open face of happy childhood. There they sat and bristled, like a pair of hedgehogs over a bowl of cream, waiting the word.

The Devil twitched a signalling finger. " Ow wow ! " cried the child, as the eyebrows started to climb, " dey's tickling, dey's prickling, dey's hurting me ! " In a paroxysm of disgust he plucked them¹ away, and as they still clung to the finger that spurned them, he shook them off violently.

They fell into the fire.

" Oh, I's so sorry ! " cried Saint Oogh, sober from his panic, and greatly concerned at what he had done.

The Devil, who was really proud of his eyebrows and not at all willing to be at such a loss, scrabbled hurriedly for them in the fire, burning his fingers badly in the process. He fetched them forth red-hot, but quite unharmed; and, trimming them once more into position, sat glowering at Saint Oogh with an illuminated frown.

182 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

Oh, I *is* sorry!" said the urchin once more, in sympathetic contrition.

"I've a very great mind to give you a whipping for that!" remarked the fiend, much put out.

Saint Oogh shook his head with friendly confidence. "'Ou tant; I's sittin' on it," was all he said.

"What?" cried the fiend, whisking himself up with his tail and subsiding again.

Saint Oogh repeated his statement, and, sitting tight, gave his nethers a rub to ground to show how firm he felt their position to be.

The Devil saw no use in pursuing the matter further; he did not want to make the other dislike him; so he said very sweetly, "If I forgive you, will you say you are sorry?"

Saint Oogh, being not only a Christian but a gentleman in his small way, was quite ready to oblige. "If you were to kiss the place you might make it well," suggested the fiend, seeking for opportunity to instil a little of his own warmth into so temperate a mind; and Saint Oogh, getting up from his place, toddled across and gave a smudge to each injured spot with all the good will in the world.

So fragrant was the child's breath with the sweet milk of human kindness that the Devil was well-nigh choked by it. He staggered to the window for fresh air, and, leaning out with his mind's eye still intent on evil, he saw below him a swim of ducks contentedly gathering garbage on the mill-pond. "Wouldn't it be very nice," he queried, when he had sufficiently recovered himself, "to sit up here in the window and throw stones at those ducks?"

Saint Oogh, with the healthy instincts of boyhood dawning strong, came and peeped over the sill at the fair temptation that presented itself; then he remembered and sighed.

"Muvver say I mustn't."

"She wouldn't know."

"Oh, 'es, she know I My muvver done to! de big drake, he turn and tell her—me done anyt'ing yike dat when she gone tata."

"Oh, your mother told you that, did she? Have you ever tried?"

Saint Oogh shook his head solemnly.

"Would you like to try?" inquired the fiend, in coaxing tones.

The child became dubious. "Do 'ou do it I" he said at last; "me tan't not fwow so far." And he sighed.

184 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

But the Devil does not at all like doing the smaller wrongs in his own person. Being sin incarnate, to lower himself to mean particulars is a mere waste of breath, a letting of good blood. Thus gratuitously to let sin go out of him without usury weakens his system and lowers his credit. His part, rather, is that of a great capitalist in crime, who lends to needy sinners the inspiration which they themselves lack ; so to be seen peddling on his own account he considers the poorest of poor form.

No, the Devil was not going to 'throw stones at the ducks ; but he saw Saint Oogh looking at them, and he knew that somewhere in that direction the guileless one might be entrapped. So, after thinking awhile, he said : " Shall I go down and fetch up the old drake to have a talk with you?"

Saint Oogh's eyes sparkled with delight, and the Devil's hope grew high. " If I do," said he, " will you put your arms round me and say you love me?" And forthwith the babe's arm's went wide ; for a talk with the old tell-tale drake he was ready to give all the wartoth of his affection.

The Devil held his breath and gritted his teeth, for contact with the pure innocence

of childhood was to him as contact with slime and filth is to us if we be clean-livers. With a girding stomach he fell to the embrace so readily accorded.

Saint Oogh started on his protestation ; he had got to the word " love " when suddenly he stopped. " What is 'ou's name? " he inquired, wishing to be at the right address.

" My name is Devil—dear Devil," answered the fiend. While so saying he let go a breath he had held too long, and Saint Oogh got a whiff of his true inner nature. " Oh! what has 'ou been eating?" he asked, and drew back, his springing fondness withering in distaste.

" What does that matter to you?" retorted the fiend. " Kiss me and say you love me ! I'll tell you what I eat, then ! "

then ! " Saint Oogh shook his head. 'Ou dot to do and wash 'ouself," he remarked. " Do and mak 'ouself nice tleen Devil, and den turn and be tised ! " Thus he quoted the maternal teaching in all amity, nor was the other to forget to bring the drake back with him on his return.

The Devil saw the bad impression he had made. Humbling himself to gain his end

186 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

by compliance, he climbed out on to the window-ledge, and, gathering! himself together, went down into the pond like a skimming dish.

At that sudden plunge of a body into their midst, the ducks, with loud squawking, scattered to right and left. The king-drake himself took a sharp somersault and dived, only to reappear at the far end of the pond. Then began a fierce chase, the bird leading, the Devil following. Never before had the fiend, in pursuit of any end, either low or high, undergone such a ducking and a diving as this into which the derisive curly tail of the drake now led him. Through green scum above and smooth stalks below, the drake shot like a shuttle through the loom; and the Devil, coming after, tearing through warp and woof, became more and more immeshed in one vast entanglement of green weeds. Hither and thither in criss-cross flight the drake led him indefatigably; they had not been together in the pond many minutes before from its bed and surface every weed was either uprooted or shorn; the Devil, acting as a dredge, did the work thoroughly; and up above, on tip-toe, little Saint Oogh stood at the window and crowed.

And now the drake, with no cover left wherein to escape, headed for the dark hatch down which the water flowed to the wheel; and there, just on the plunging verge, the Devil caught him by the tail and held him fast. To back-water was no longer possible; into the black vortex beneath captor and captive went down together, but not to fare alike. Huge of limb and cumbered by weedy entanglements, the Devil found no means whereby to dodge punishment; even as he fell the trouncing paddles had hold of him, got him down, rolled him under, pulped him, pummelled him, caught him up again by the scruff, pitched him aloft once more to the heaving shoulder of the wheel, and round and down again to a second poundin'g.

" Though," as a popular poet has remarked, " the mill of God grinds slowly, yet it igrinds exceeding small"; and when Providence had done with him, the Devil was not much to look at. But to his credit be¹ it said that through all that braying! and buffeting he held fast to his purpose, and emerged finally, as must from the feet of the wine-treader, bearing the captive drake safe and sound in his arms.

188 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

The bird, seeming now to recognize in him a preserver, showed a mild acceptance of the situation, and sat where made to sit between the arms of its captor, preening its plumes with' an air of great complaisancy.

The Devil regarded his hardy antagonist with considerable astonishment, but admiring the staunchness of the creature, he let go on him a word of hearty commendation. " Never since my contest with Michael," he cried, " when beating him in the Mosaic argument I drove him to seek the assistance of his Betters—never from then to this have I met with anyone so near a match for me as thou ! "

The drake, paying small outward attention to the compliment, yet with a sidelong eye, continued to preen ; and the Devil, having recovered a part of his spent energies, bore him up to the chamber where little Saint Oogh was awaiting them. Setting! the bird down upon the hearth, he turned to take his reward, already apparent in the chucklings and Growings with which the urchin greeted his reappearance.

But oh, wonder of wonders, what was this? No sooner did the drake's webbed feet touch' ground, free from the Devil's succouring embrace, than suddenly he rose

in stature, changed form and complexion, and, growing in lustre and beauty of aspect, spread wings of divine benevolence over the head of Saint Oogh.

The Devil recognized the brew from¹ of old: here, with a decoy, had he been trapped again. The wings that had been preened on his breast were now spread against him in flaunting derision; the quarry he had pursued at such pains and protected with such vigilance from the battering of the mill-wheel, vicariously suffering in its stead, was now proved an emissary of his arch-foe, an instrument for his own discomfiture.

The guardian presence smiled on him with an air of conscious superiority; it was evident that inwardly the preening process still went on.

" All the same, I caught you ! " remarked the fiend, eager to score at least one point in the game.

" And many besides," answered the other. " That race of ours was contagious, and the game of ducks and drakes was played twice over. All those weeds, deep-rooted in filth and slime, were the souls of men bound in sin, which, at Saint Gogh's bidding! and instigation, you have set free. Doubt not

190 LITTLE SAINT OOGH

it shall be imputed unto him for righteousness."

"You baited your trap well," said the Devil, "but see the him in his mother's milk and he shall yet taste differently." And so saying, seeing' that any further time spent there would be wasted, he departed.

A while later, when Saint Oogh's mother returned from her shoppings, she found in the room a strong smell of burning; the hearth-rug showed a charred line as though a red-hot poker had been laid on it, and round about water was sprinkled. "You've been setting the place on fire!" she cried, and asked no further question.

Saint Oogh endeavoured to explain how the Devil had heated his own tail and then laid it down before it was properly cool again; also, how the big tell-tale drake had come up wet out of the pond and turned into a fire-balloon: but his mother would hear none of these things, and the tongue of a babe cannot wag fast enough to explain what elders will not listen to. There and then Saint Oogh underwent his first martyrdom; and his guardian angel, who had already gone up aloft to report matters, heard his wailing from below, and returned in haste to see what it could all mean.

LITTLE SAINT OOGH 191

Unjust judgment had then delivered its last blow, and little Saint Oogh, troubled and tearful, kneeled up from the lap across which he had just lain, and, throwing his arms about his mother's neck, gave her a kiss of unexplained forgiveness.

IV
THE MIRACLE-WORKER

THE MIRACLE-WORKER

EVEN in the flesh, before his canonization, San Giovanni of Padua was a holy soul. When he attended mass, his elevation of spirit was so great that at the consecration of the elements he went up to the ceiling and stuck there like a fly, unable to descend again to earth till " Ite, missa est " had been sung.

This celestial habit prevented him from saying mass himself. For no sooner did he begin to utter the words of consecration than up he went to the roof, and thus separated from the altar his priestly ministrations could not go on.

This was a great deprivation, and after enduring it for some years, famished by enforced separation from his priestly functions, he died in all the odour of sanctity, and was buried in the very chapel where his happy upward flights had caused so many cracks to appear in the frescoed vaulting that its state had at last come to be reckoned dangerous.

196 THE MIRACLE-WORKER

Then, as new decorations were evidently required, Rome made haste to canonize him. Correggio, or another, came and painted him in wonderful foreshortening, legs downward, amid the central space of the dome, with an admiring congregation of angels looking on ; and the consistory had him up from the floor, and, enclosing him in a vast marble casket, looked round for some famous sculptor to come and decorate it.

At that time Luigi and Beppo—not to give them the incorrect nicknames by which they have since become famous in the history of art—were rivals. In the popular mind Luigi was the more highly esteemed for his treatment of form and drapery; Beppo for his ornament and his vivid powers of portraiture. Each artist held for his own part that in this matter the popular mind was mistaken ; at no point would the one admit inferiority to the other. Great was their chagrin, therefore, when it was decided by the ecclesiastical authorities that they should do the work together: Luigi, the draped figure of the saint levitating in glory; Beppo, the ecstatic face and the surrounding ornament.

At first they both flatly refused to undertake the work on any such terms, but when

threat of excommunication descended on them' from Rome they thought better of it, and set to work with daily bickerings to do all possible credit, under such adverse circumstances, to themselves and to the saint, now only awaiting- the completion of his shrine for the performance of many miracles.

Now it so happened that Beppo drank. So did L'uigi; but Beppo drank m'ore, and had a head that could stand it less. And when Beppo and Luigi were thus more or less drunk, according to their respective habits, they quarrelled most horribly. They got in each other's way, they wanted to be on the same spot at the same time each for his own purpose; and when thus at loggerheads they cast reflections on each other's art.

One day Beppo was carving away at the face, rather happy and pleased with himself; and as Luigi insisted on working too near, chips from above kept hitting him in the eye.

He drew off to a safe distance, contemplated Beppo's results, and, blowing a coarse breath of derision, remarked: " San Giovanni never got to heaven with a face like that ! "

" What do you know about it, draper ? "

198 THE MIRACLE-WORKER

retorted Beppo. "Keep to your own department."

"It's not like him I" persisted Luigi. "Never with that nose!"

"It's like him when he was dead—I saw him, you didn't."

"He never had that nose—nothing like it I" declared Luigi.

"Yes, he had!"

Luigi tapped the sarcophagus. "Well, he's in there. Take a look at him¹!"

Beppo shook his head. "No need to; besides—how long has he been dead?"

"Oh!" said Luigi, he's incorruptible. At least, they embalmed him, which comes to the same thing. But you are quite right not to want to look at him. That nose I Oh, good Lord!"

"Then I will," said Beppo.

They had the chapel all to themselves. Others seldom came into it. And just then, in the church below, mass had begun.

Beppo got hold of an iron crowbar and prised up the stone lid which shut in the saint's remains. At that very moment, from the church beneath came the first bell of the consecration. Up shot the saint's body, and being now more spiritual in its nature,

disappeared through the roof, leaving no trace of its exit.

" Now you've done it ! " said Luigi, in a tone of great satisfaction.

This so infuriated Beppo that, lifting the crowbar, he bashed Luigi over the head with it, with such complete and wholesome results that thereafter the sculptor of form and draperies never stirred again.

For a moment or so Beppo was sorry, being at his wits end what to do ; but there the tomb lay open and the body of the saint was gone. He picked up Luigi, put him¹ in the saint's place, shut the lid down, covered the blood-marks on the floor with powdered marble, and went on with his work.

Later in the day, when the Father Canons came to see how things were getting on, they asked what had become of Luigi.

Beppo said that he had felt it his duty to pass criticism on what Luigi had been doing, and that Luigi had gone away in a rage—taken a day off, in fact.

This explanation seemed so reasonable that it was accepted without demur. Every one knew that the two sculptors were not on the best of terms.

Luigi never came back so Luigi was excommunicated, while Beppo, in the beauty

200 THE MIRACLE-WORKER

of holiness, went on and finished the work all by himself, greatly to his own satisfaction. He claimed credit for the whole of it, and never had he done anything better. It was an acknowledged masterpiece.

No sooner was it open to the public than miracles began. Before twenty years were over it became the richest and the most famous and sought-after shrine in the whole of North Italy.

Then, as the world began to extend—America had been discovered, and Christendom had spread to parts so distantly divided that new shrines might arise there without any fear of rivalry for the old—as the world thus began to extend, a more liberal policy was started among those churches, previously so exclusive and jealous, which had custody of famous relics. Fragments of the most efficacious of miracle-working saints began to be sold at a high price to the young Catholic communities populating the New World.

Thus it came about that, within half a century of his death, pieces of Luigi the sculptor were carried over with great pomp to Peru, Mexico and other places where Christians were then coining gold from the torture and destruction of the heathen, and

in every case succeeded in performing a great number of satisfactory miracles.

Beppo, full of years and honour, lived long enough to hear of the success which everywhere attended the bones of his dead rival. And when finally he died, fortified by the rites of Holy Church, it was with a quiet conscience, having done a few hundred years in Purgatory, that he approached the celestial portal and demanded admittance.

"Who are you?" inquired Saint Peter.

Beppo gave in his name.

Peter turned over the files. Presently he stopped.

"Who is your patron saint?" he asked.

"San Giovanni of Padua," replied Beppo. "I did his tomb for him."

"He has a bad mark against you," said Saint Peter, examining the page—"a very bad mark."

"I wonder why?" said Beppo innocently.

"We had better send for him and inquire," said Saint Peter.

A plump and active cherub skimmed off on eager wing with a message for San Giovanni. And presently the saint appeared, with L'uigi in reflected glory following behind him.

No sooner did the saint set eyes on

202 THE MIRACLE-WORKER

Beppo, than he frowned on him black as thunder ; and in his own small way Luigi did the same, and stuck out a tongue.

" Well, what are you making faces for?" inquired Beppo, addressing the lesser personage.

" You here ! " cried the saint. " How have you the face ! "

" San Giovanni," said Beppo, " it was I who made your tomb for you."

' It was you who emptied it," corrected the saint.

" I assisted you in your resurrection, San Giovanni, that is true."

" You murdered your companion and then sacrilegiously put his body in place of mine."

' San Giovanni," said Beppo, " he has been a very successful understudy. His miracles have been quite wonderful."

" They were not his miracles," cried the saint in wrath.

" No," said Beppo." Of course, strictly speaking, they were mine."

" Yours ! "

"Well, you got the credit of them—and the merit too, I suppose. But it paid me."

" You ! " cried the saint again.

" Well, naturally you wouldn't have had

so many miracles if I hadn't made you that shrine," explained Beppo." It's the shrine that people come to see—it's the shrine they look at when they pray. It's the shrine which exalts them and makes them understand how great and powerful is the saint lying inside it. Of course, in your case, San Giovanni, it wasn't you at all—it was Luigi. Where, actually, were you?"

"I was here," said the saint.

"Then you ought to be very grateful. I let you out. You and Enoch and Elijah are, I suppose, the only three who are actually here in the flesh. And I am sure if you ever asked Elijah how his affair came about, you would find there was a close resemblance in the circumstances."

"What do you mean?" inquired San Giovanni.

"Isn't it obvious that Elisha murdered him? Put the case to any jury—with Elisha telling that story, could they come to any other conclusion? Yet I suppose Elisha is here too?"

"Elisha is here," said the saint.

"And so am I," said Beppo.

"You won't be here very long."

"Well," said Beppo, "if I have to go down any lower I shall tell them all about

204 THE MIRACLE-WORKER

it. And then all Purgatory will be laughing, you see ! They won't be praying to you any longer then. They will be praying to Luigi; and, judging from the effect Luigi's bones have had on earth, his intercessions will be just as effective up here as yours." Suddenly Beppo broke off, astonished. " Why, however was it that Luigi got here?" he cried. " If any man ever died in mortal sin, it was he."

" Luigi's body was in my place," said the saint, " and I could not permit. . . . My supplications saved him."

" My doing again ! " exclaimed Beppo. " I saved Luigi's soul for him. For it was I who put him there. By killing Luigi I sent him to Heaven. Had he had the killing of himself he would have gone elsewhere. You can't damn me for that. What else have you got to damn me for?"

Saint Peter said : " San Giovanni, is this the only bad mark you have against him? "

" Isn't it enough?" cried the saint, in injured tone.

" Oh, quite enough, I admit," said Saint Peter. " Still, it would be very awkward if it got about. You don't want people to know that those relics are not yours, I suppose? "

THE MIRACLE-WORKER 205

" No, I don't." said San Giovanni.

" Well, a lot of relics are having their authenticity disputed nowadays, and in consequence miracles are diminishing sadly. You don't want your miracles to diminish? "

" No, I don't," said San Giovanni again.

" Then," said Saint Peter, " you had better let well alone. There are a number of busybodies down on earth just now (a certain Jesuit named Father Thurston among them) who would be very glad to get hold of Beppo's story. And if they did, your miracles would cease for lack of authenticity."

"There, didn't I tell you?" demanded Beppo.

" Oh ! go to the devil ! " cried San Giovanni angrily, as he turned on his heel.

But Saint Peter is wise, so he did not take the remark literally. Behind the saint's back he winked his eye at Beppo.

And that is how it came about that Beppo remained in Heaven and that the miracles of San Giovanni of Padua still go on.

V

THE BLIND GOD

THE BLIND GOD

THE Blind God sat paddling on the banks of a stream; and as he did so he was thinking, or at least he was trying to think. Very slowly, very gradually, he had begun to realize that this cool and liquid sensation affecting him locally was not, as he had so long believed, an accompaniment to the processes within, but was truly something outside of himself, different, apart and independent. And the new thought interested him—gave him, in fact, for the first time, a sense of himself.

Hitherto he had experienced no needs, no motives, no desires; he had just let things slide, without knowing that they did slide, remaining himself all the while self-contained and immovable. Now in his egg of a brain something tapped, asking for investigation; something that seemed to require either to be assimilated or controlled.

He reached down his hand to find out what it was, and in doing so discovered, in a vague, indefinite way, what he had not

known before—that he had a hand, something, that is to say, with which he could reach and touch outwardness. He let down the hollow of his palm till it came in contact with" the stream ; but when he raised it, all the contents were spilled again: it brought nothing back to him: This happened many times, and still he remained interested; though' his hand brought him nothing, it was giving to thing's a new relationship—inwardness and outwardness ; the falling drops made a sound new and pleasant to his ears, and after a while he perceived that it came in response to his own action—something, not himself, making for righteousness, applauding him for what he was doing.

This called for further investigation. Groping deeper, he grasped and drew up a handful of mud, smooth and yielding to the touch, less elusive than water, presenting itself to his handling as something pliant and adaptable, something which it was possible to keep intact and to control. It did not run away as he lifted it. With a germinating sense of possession he clasped it more tightly, and as he did so moisture oozed out of it, trickling between his fingers and separating itself with the same pleasant

sound of running water, a fresh* offering of applause from the something which was not himself.

Gradually (for all his movements were deliberate) his small handful of mud coagulated, hardened, and took form. This way and that he turned it, plying it into fresh shapes, then, as its stiffness increased, moulded it into a ball, and, setting it to roll from palm to palm, found in the even regularity of its motion a new and unexpected diversion.

Before long, from; its continuous revolutions, the ball assumed a polished and uniform surface, while at the same time the constant manipulation and contact of the Blind God had begun to cause certain chemical changes and fermentations of a minute but profoundly important character. Here and there he dented it with finger-marks, personal impressions made for future reference and verification; and having thus sealed it with his sign manual, he continued to let it roll.

And it rolled, and it rolled, and it rolled. To the god himself the whole interest of this process, so apparently monotonous, lay in his own gradual acquirement of the thing which we call skill. This little mud ball

was giving, him a new idea about himself ; sleight of hand was communicating fresh life to his brain ; he felt himself becoming an expert in rolling. It never entered into his head that the little mud ball which he had merely taken up for a plaything was also becoming an expert in being rolled. But though he knew little about it, it interested him. Enclosing it in the warmth of his palms, infecting it unconsciously with emanations from his own being, he had begun to evolve for himself a new idea, the idea of expansion by possession. Here he had got hold at last of something to think-about that he would not *willingly* let go. He did not *know* what it was, and he had no use for it; but it was something for hand and brain to catch hold of, and so—find themselves. Slowly and precariously his mind worked toward a digestive adaptation of this new fact, **till**, tired with the unwonted exertion, he fell fast asleep.

A god sleeps and wakes without any idea of time; such' a thing as " a forty winks sleep " forms no part of his composition, especially if in his winkless and waking-state he happens to be blind. Time, in fact, has no concern for one who leads a life without motives, desires or interests. But

by the time the Blind God woke up again it had had a good deal to do with the little ball of earth on which his interests were now beginning to be so blindly centred. As he sat holding it enlapped on the banks of the stream, sheltering its spinings between curved palms, instilling into it by subtle expenditure the currents of his own divinely untroubled life, wonderful things had happened to it. It had begun to teem with minute forms of existence, very busy, very urgent about their own concerns, paying no attention to him whatsoever—no, none ; not conscious of him any more than he was conscious of them, and so wasting no time in asking, as we mortals do nowadays, " Where do we come from? " or " How did we get here? " or " Where are we going to next? " None of those superfluous and parenthetic inquiries disturbed or deflected the quick courses of its blood from the immediate business in hand—not to begin with, at all events.

The Blind God had no such thoughts about himself, and in that matter these small emanating life-atoms which he held in the hollow of his hand took after him¹. But in other respects they were infinitely his inferiors : they had lost all sense of repose.

Gripping life in a feverish' and fractious clutch", they had rendered it fragmentary. They were tremendously busy and worried about things which did no good to anybody else and only hartri to themselves—they were, that is to say, extraordinarily intent on living at each' other's expense ; and they did so by a continual process of **killing** and being killed, eating and being eaten, with long bad bouts of indigestion as the result.

The Blind God sat holding in his hands all those innumerable and continuously struggling issues of life and death ; and he knew no more of the one than of the other. And yet, all unintentionally, he had made them, fashioned them out of clay, infected and warmed them into life, setting them there in his own likeness to make other lives on their own account—lives which would succeed or fail without any direct help or sustenance from him. Here within the hollow of his hand they ran, up and down, to and fro, **killing** each other, eating each other, loving and hating each other, but caring nothing about him,- and he caring nothing about them—though they were all made by him and without him was not anything made that was taade.

Just in the same way, if you think of it,

does the sun, where once the creative process has been started, breed life upon our own earth, and open sweetly within us those light-given gifts of the five senses ; yet all the while it knows nothing about us and remains itself unconquerably blind, deaf, mute and intractable, rejoicing at nothing, sorrowing at nothing, caring nothing for all the love and hatred and hunger and satiety which have been bred in us out of its own superabundant heats. So it was with this little ball of mud which a blind god's hands had fashioned, and into which, without knowing it, he had put so much life.

And so time went on—time measured monotonously by the revolutions of a little ball of mud in a blind god's hands, and the monotonous but responsive revolutions of the god's brain. The main thing was that though everything appeared to stand still around them, they two had set up between them a new relationship—the relationship of motion. It was so huge an advance in comparison with the nothingness that went before, that the Blind God, even though it seemed to lead nowhere, could not divest himself of the acquirement. Waking or sleeping, he continued to let the

216 THE BLIND GOD

ball roll within the hollow of his hands. And it rolled and it rolled.

But after a time some of the life-atoms, taking after their maker, began to have an idea that this ball of mud upon which they lived was not everything, that there was something outside, not themselves, which they could not account for, but which could perhaps account for them. And presently one or two of them who happened to be very far-sighted detected the dim form of the divinity stretching immeasurably above and beyond them. At once they began pointing, directing the attention of those more short-sighted than themselves. " See, see I " they cried, " up there, and out yonder! There lies He—the object of our search, the key to all wisdom,"

Immediately all the other life-atoms came running to look, and, not seeing so clearly, they built tall towers, and ran up to the top of them in order to look again ; and then taller towers, and taller, **till** every one of them either saw or said he saw—for having built a tower and climbed up to the top of it, no one was willing to admit that he was so blind or such a fool that he could not see anything. So the little ball of mud became full of towers with people standing

on the top of them, gazing. " Look," they said, " He is watching us. We must be careful how we behave ! "

But those life-atoms were so tiny and their towers so small that the Blind God's touch passed over them, discovering nothing; and their little voices were too thin and weak to raise question or answer to his ears. For him the mud ball remained as smooth as it had ever been, and though he continued to roll it this way and that, he never detected the swarms of life that were on it or knew that he had at his beck a clamorously worshipping community. Very faithfully he attached himself to that one aspect of life which he had discovered, the keeping in motion of a small mud ball which he had picked up for himself and dried and moulded. Dimly, behind that, other ideas of life were preparing to follow.

Meantime, though he remained thus unconscious of their existence, the little life-atoms had begun to study him more and more. And the whole root of their philosophy about him was that he, having made them, saw and knew all that they were doing, and that if they themselves could only see as they were seen and know as

they were known, life would have for them no further mystery. At the top of their towers some of them had begun to fix magnifying glasses so as to get a better view of him, but others said that magnifying glasses were a wicked device impiously invented, and that to look at a god through any such artificial aids was a negation to faith, a danger to hope, and a hindrance to charity. So they came and broke the magnifying glasses and killed those who looked through them, and pulled down their towers, till at last those who looked through the magnifying glasses began to retaliate, killing them in turn and pulling down their towers, and building bigger and stronger ones of their own. And in the end the people with the magnifying glasses won.

And so, as their glasses got bigger and stronger, they began to find out more about the things outside of them, and about that great still form of divinity that lay beyond and seemed, without motion, to be watching them. And at last one of them, on the top of the biggest tower of all and with the biggest magnifying glass of all, made a great discovery. He discovered that the god was blind!

This discovery filled him, apparently, with

joy; it seemed to him to explain away everything in the most satisfactory manner possible; and he called out for all the other little life-atoms to come and hear what he had discovered and bow to the logic of his conclusions. And the plain unanswerable fact of the discovery so dazzled them' that they did so. "This gad of ours," he said, "is blind; he knows nothing about us, has no conception of us whatever. And if he has no conception, then he does not exist, and he is not really there. What you thought was a form is only space, and where you saw eyes is only emptiness".

When the other little life-atoms heard that what they had believed to be eyes was only emptiness, and that what they had conceived to be form and design were only side issues from space and chance, many of them were glad, but some were very sorry and out of heart. And they sat and rnooped at the foot of their ruined towers, and, cursing the eye-glasses which had told them so much more than they wished to know, declared that life was no longer worth living. "What is the use?" they cried. "If He is not watching how we behave, what reason have we for behaving at all?"

And all the while the Blind God sat rolling his little mud ball from palm to palm and loving it—loving it, and wishing that he could make more of it, and find in it the self-expression and the companionship which his heart had begun to crave. For the little mud ball had taught him to think and to feel and to wish, and to let his thoughts go outside of himself in directions he had never tried. And because of the little mud ball he now found that time hung heavy on his hands, and his feet were weary of the chill waters that flowed around them, and his body was weary of its rest. He wanted to have things outside of himself, like himself, with which he might exchange the ideas of life which were beginning to formulate within him—all the product of this little ball of mud which he had taken into his hands and fathered with blind warmth. But though he wanted all those things he had no way of getting them, for he was a blind god, and he did not know.

But down below him, on his little mud world, the life-atoms had found out all about *him*—so they thought. They had found out that he was blind, that he knew nothing about them, and therefore—knowing nothing about them—did not really exist.

But though' they had discovered his infirmities and his limitations, they had not got at his heart. About that they knew nothing—nor did he; the little mud ball could not teach him everything—not all at once.

But after a long time it taught him to feel very tired; and all at once he sighed a deep sigh that passed in a soft shudder through his whole being. And as he so sighed the little mud ball slipped through his fingers and fell into the stream and was drowned.

The Blind God did not sorrow for it much; he only felt a little vexed with himself. "I must be more careful next time," he thought. And, stooping down, he gathered up a fresh handful of mud and moulded it into form, and once more started rolling it.

Printed in Great Britain by

UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED

WOKING AND LONDON

