

call in painting the back ground of the picture. The beauty of the neat little village is set off by the hills bounding the distant horizon.

L. K. B.

PRIZE ESSAY
FOLK-TALES OF BENGAL,

TIT FOR TAT.

OR

A CLEVER BRAHMAN AND HIS CLEVER SERVANT.

Once upon a time there lived a Brahman with his little family which consisted of his mother, his wife and a son. The Brahman was very poor and could not afford to have a servant. At the same time he did not like to see his mother and his wife working like domestic drudges.

He devised a plan of having a servant with no pay and very little food. Accordingly he issued the following proclamation—Wanted a servant—to serve a Brahman. No pay allowed. The servant will have what he wants to eat and drink. He shall have his meals as often as he likes with this proviso that he must drink a dishful of the ric-gruel before taking his meals. There was a further stipulation that the servant should have his ears cropped if he resigned and the Brahman his ears cropped if he dismissed the servant.

A starving wretch conscious of the risk he was running applied for the post. He was forthwith appointed. On the first day of his service, he was given a very large dish in which he was to eat boiled rice and drink rice-gruel. As the

latter was sufficient to fill the stomach of the servant, he could not even taste a grain of boiled rice.

Time rolled on and the servant grew more and more poorly in health. Yet he was compelled to continue working on the same terms. At last thinking life more valuable than his ears, famished and worn out as he was, he threw up the job. Of course the Brahman did not take pity upon him but got the ears of the servant cropped and kept them in his chest, as he would have kept a lump of gold.

The earless man made for his home where he was received with tears of commiseration by his friends and relatives who had concluded that starvation had put an end to his life. But they felt bitterly the loss of his ears and when they came to hear of the foul trick the Brahman had played upon him, they burned with indignation. At last one of their number, a robust young man, the poor fellow's brother, volunteered to go to the Brahman, offer his services to him and crop off his ears in retaliation. A strong note of remonstrance arose from every quarter but the man remained fixed in his resolve. At once he left his native home with but one companion and that was an iron nail. He went to the Brahman and was employed under the same conditions as his brother. Food was served out to him in the self-same dish which was used by his brother. With the help of the nail he made a big hole at the bottom of the dish. He strewed the ground with sand, placed his plate there and asked for rice. At first a dishful of rice-gruel was given him. This trickled down the hole and the sand soaked it up. Then the servant asked for costly viands and he was provided with them as often as he demanded, for those were the terms agreed upon.

Now the Brahman incurred a heavy debt for giving luxurious and costly food to his new servant. He could not help it, for he valued his ears more than money. Thus the servant grew stronger and stronger and the Brahman more and more involved in debt. But the Brahman determined to have recourse to some means by which to

make the servant pay off his debts. Accordingly he asked the servant to make ropes out of the jute that he possessed. The Bengali expression for the making of such ropes is "to cut ropes." Next day the servant took a whetted cutting-tool and thus reduced the jute to shreds. Now the Brahman came and saw the mischief done. But there was no help for it. He rebuked the servant who by way of palliating his guilt said, "you asked me to cut the jute and I have promptly executed your orders." Then the Brahman determined to give him another task. He ordered him to go to his orchard and cut down a few of the trees and bring wood which would be used as fuel. The servant took an axe, went to the garden, cut down the most precious of the trees, gathered a big bundle of wood and carried it home. He came home, stood in the yard and shouted out, "Mother (for that was the term by which he addressed the Brahman's wife), where am I to place the wood?" She was busy and being in a passion replied: "Place them upon my head."* Her orders were promptly carried into effect and she was suffocated to death.

The Brahman felt bitterly the loss of his wife, but still he did not dismiss the servant, for he valued his ears. On another occasion the servant had to accompany the old mother and the little child of the Brahman to the Ganges for bathing. There he drowned them both. He returned home and the Brahman very easily understood how the rogue had disposed of them. Without a word of remonstrance he dismissed the servant who forthwith cut off the ears of the Brahman and left him. The servant went to his native land and there to the joy of all his relations and neighbours presented them with the bloody ears of the Brahman. Let us conclude the story with the Brahman lamenting his singular lot and the servant telling the joyful tale of his lucky adventure.

NALININATH GHOSH,
Second year class.

* A reply indicating great irritation.