

PRIZÉ ESSAY.

Folk-tales of Bengal.

V.—THE THREE WISHES.

There lived a poor beggar and he had a wife. The wife was very selfish and always rebuked her husband for not being able to support her. He tried his best to support her. From door to door he went a-begging but so lacking were the villagers in charity and so great was the number of beggars in the village that he and his wife were left from time to time without a morsel of food to mitigate the sufferings of hunger. One day so much incensed was he at the merciless reproaches of his wife for not being able to procure her food that he determined to commit suicide. Accordingly he left his home and came to the sea-side. There the rushing waves beating against the shore and then scattering, brought before his "mind's eye" the whole image of the Creation of God. For a long time he stood silent and then threw himself into the sea, crying "the big waves have their destruction and so shall I" What happened to him? Did he disappear in the bottomless sea? No, before he reached the waters of the sea, he found himself in the arms of a supernatural being in a human form. He seemed to be an old man with his head silvered with age. His flesh did not shrink though he was so old. He tenderly forbade the beggar to kill himself.

"Take this rod, my child" he said, giving him a shining rod "and ask it to do any three things for you. It will do them—good or bad." Instantly the angelic being vanished before the beggar had time to express his thanks to him for the unexpected kindness he had shown to him. His next act was return home and tell his wife of what had befallen him. She thanked her husband very heartily and he began to give himself airs for his cleverness. Not a word of thanks was uttered to God. And later on they had to pay bitterly for not having sung the praise of God. The day died away and night came. And that day and night were the happiest period of the life of the couple.

The day dawned and the beggar forgetting what had be-

fallen him went out to beg. Habit is second nature and the beggar could not forget his habit of begging.

When the consort of the beggar saw that she was safely out of the reach of her husband, she took out the wand and asked it to make her the most beautiful lady the world had ever produced, decorated with all possible ornaments of gold and jewels. Instantly she saw that her desire was fulfilled. She was now no longer an old woman. She was now a paragon of beauty—beauty itself—with all the charms of youth and covered *cap-a-pie* with various valuable ornaments and set with jewels, gold and precious stones. She sat down on a mat and saw her image again and again in the mirror. Her eyes refused to be withdrawn from her own beauty and the shining lustre of her ornaments.

Just at this time another lady of the village came to her house for the purpose of taking fire in a cow-dung cake. She came in and saw the wonder of wonders. She could hardly believe her eyes—but facts were facts. Forgetting her own mission she went away and told the next person she met with, of the wonder she had seen. The wonderful tale spread with the rapidity of electricity till at length it reached the ears of the Nawab of Bengal. At once he ordered the lady to be brought to his harem and his orders were promptly executed.

By this time the beggar had returned home and heard from his neighbours of the sad fate of his wife. He at once brought the potent rod and ordered it to convert his wife into a boar.

At this time his wife was in a palanquin and there she was converted into a big boar. The palanquin came in front of the august Nawab who ordered its doors to be thrown open. The doors were opened and out came a big boar. They say that the boar killed the Nawab and thus rid the earth of one of her most terrible burdens and made for the forest. The beggar's last command to the rod was to restore her original shape to his wife. Thus they became what they had been and their misery continued till death came to their relief.

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