

King Bhoja's Head-ache.

The myths that have clustered round the personality of the Ancient Hindu King, Bhoja, might only be paralleled in the West by those of King Arthur or Emperor Charlemagne. A great mass of clumsy fugitive stories for whose inception no more adequate reason could be given than the wanton activity of human fancy, were, time out of mind, tacked on to kings and chiefs of no authentic existence. The same miraculous adventures were now and again attributed to individuals of totally different generations, or, as was more frequently the case, legendary occurrences of a contradictory nature become the whole-sale property of a single shadowy king. Thus of Bhoja many stories are told by the old gossips of the Indian village tree, which are equally believed to apply to the Ujjain Monarch, Vikramaditya. Again, a series of miraculous legends, of practically the same import, though divergent in the form or texture of narration, were attributed to the self-same king. And of this typical nature is the varying versions of King Bhoja's headache. A unique mode of its cure resulting in the liberation of a phlegmatic amphibian from cranial immurement was sketched for us in a recent issue of the "Madras Mail." We will not take up for treatment a different version of the headache and its cure, interesting alike for the splendid romance and the exquisite folly.

King Bhoja was, like Emperor Julian, an austere man given to the cultivation of stern virtues. Never was there the least swerving from the path of duty and moral rectitude in the days of his golden rule; so much so, he was believed to be helped by the very Devas in his administrative tactics. As in Tradition holds to be models of regal piety and philanthropy, he was wont to spend six months of every year in his urban head quarters looking to his kingly office, and the remainder, in sylvan retreats meditating on the eternal spiritual verities, uncontaminated by the breath of any other man. Thus, he ruled, looked upon by his reverent subjects as a king and, philosopher, as a legislator and an ascetic.

One day he returned home from his busy Hall of Justice late in the evening, and lay on his cozy, velvety quilt, quite fagged, fanned by the fair maidens of his harem. He went to sleep apparently fatigued with the day's hard work. When he rose at night for his meal after the short slumber, his head was heavy, and Lo! a fit of migraine had seized him. The pain increased hour after hour, till at last, he smarted under the agonies, and by the next morning he could not even taste his food. In an instant the king's serious indisposition was noised abroad throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom, and the loyal subjects came flocking to the palace-door, sorrowing and moaning. The king's dormitory was crowded with physicians of first-rate abilities, and none of the thousand and one remedies which they prescribed was able to relieve the God-protected Monarch from the fell complaint. So far from the pain subsiding from the administration of medicines, it was rising by leaps and bounds in intensity. By noon, it reached its climax, the king swooned in the presence of the *kabirajs*, and lay torpid and motionless on his downy bed. As could be expected, the inmates of the palace were panic-stricken to see this unprecedented event and as a last remedy a number of Brahmin were ordered to invoke the gods by means of loud prayers for blessing the king with a ready cure. The Brahmins, to show their last act of duty to the dying king, congregated inside the city-temple to pharisaic pomp

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and standing knee-deep in the tank water hard by, chanted the sonorous Vedic hymns. The rich volume of sound issuing from the prayer-offering Brahmins throats went up piercing the sky. The grand Vedic antiphonal assonance pleased the gods, and they heard the Brahmins supplicating in dismal despair. The gods were at once moved by the Brahminic devotion, and they, in turn, requested their chief, Indra himself, to descend to the earth and save the king Bhoja.

Indra mounted in the twinkling of an eye his golden car drawn by horses of cerulean sheen, and with the silver-bells of the vehicle chiming delicate notes, dashed athwart the blue vault of the sky. When he neared the earth, he assumed, by an effort of celestial magic the appearance of a Brahmin mendicant, with matted looks, flowing beard and care-worn pinched-up face. Thus impersonating himself, Indra entered the sick-room of the king. In the meantime the physicians in the palace had given the king up for lost, and they were ever watching with sullen discomfiture and bated breath the last moments of a saintly monarch. So, when Indra entered the sick-room, the obdurate attendants there took him for a fanatical wiseacre and stoutly objected to his doing anything that might disturb the king's peace. Withal, he managed by cringing and coaxing to be allowed to treat the king. And yet, there was one more difficulty in his way. The anchorite demanded that none else should be allowed into the sick apartment when he treated the king. And after a good deal of remonstrance on his part, and dogged discussion on the part of the physicians and inmates of the palace, the disguised Indra gained his point and was let into the king's chamber alone. He locked the doors of the room fast behind him before he sat by the bedstead of the patient.

In a few minutes the king regained his consciousness, and sat up on his bed, completely cured of his head-ache, while opposite to him stood the mute celestial *Yogi* beaming with superhuman effulgence. A thrill ran through the king's body to see the holy apparition pointing its hand to a fat dead fish lying on the floor. When the king questioned Indra as to how the fish chanced to come there, the sage laughed a good-humored laugh, and related to him the entire history of his complaint ending with an account of the manner in which the fish was extracted out of the king's brain-box. The sage added that the fish had grown for sometime too big for the capacity of the king's cranium, and with the increase of proportions in the size of the piscine parasite the head ache became intense. The king then shrewdly requested the pseudo-hermit to tell him the method that was employed to remove the pate for getting at the fish. The sage began "There is no need of medicament or operation *for the Devas* in such cases, but, *as for mortals*" When, reflecting suddenly that his inadvertent words had betrayed his genuine nature, vanished out of sight in a haze, leaving the king solitary in the room. Bhoja concluded from the amazing disappearance of the hermit, that his physician was no other than a divine messenger sent by the Devas in their overflowing sympathy for him, and rising from the bed ran up to the door-way in eagerness, which he found shut and fastened securely. Unlatching the bolt, he opened the doors ajar and found himself in the open hall, where, his subjects, quite astonished at this miracle of the king's resurrection shouted uproariously with the chorus "May the King Live Long."

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