

Search.

By H. C. ASTHANA.

I wandered and wandered in the jungle of Brindāban.

The trees whispered to me, 'Where art thou going ?'

The wind pursued me, questioning persistently: 'Where art thou going ?'

The birds spoke to me inquisitively, 'Wanderer, where art thou going ?'

The animals asked me eagerly but silently 'Wanderer, what art thou seeking ?'

I had only one reply: 'Friends, I wander in search of one I know not.'

'The forest is very thick and extends to infinity and you have no companion.'

'Loneliness is my companion.'

'You have no conveyance.'

'Hope is my conveyance.'

'And you have no guard.'

'Yes, friend, I have. Faith is my guard.'

'Then go ye, wanderer, meet ye with success in thy pursuit.'

With the blessings of my kind friends I wandered in that thick forest where my heart directed and my legs took me.

Long and weary was my wandering. I sat down beneath a charitable tree. There was a hollow in the trunk of the tree. I saw something peeping out of it. It had a beautiful mouth, narrow and small, yet wide open. I approached it hesitatingly. Oh, she was the consort of the Lord. She was the most envied consort of the Lord. With great delicacy I brought her out and lay her comfortably on my lap. I broke the

silence. 'How are you here, the dear one of the Lord ?' She smiled and said, 'The jealousy of the Lord's faithfuls.' 'Ah !' I gasped, 'How cruel !'

'Oh, no !' she replied, 'It is hide-and-peek.'

'You love the Lord, eh !' I asked her.

'Yes,' she nodded.

'And the Lord loves you ?'

'I know not,' she replied. 'I love Him. I cling to Him. I know not whether I embrace the Lord or the Lord embraces me. Oh dear ! how pleasant ! I lose myself at the slightest touch of the Lord; who is, then, to know who loves whom ?' Speaking thus, she went into ecstasy.

I murmured, 'Oh Lord ! how cruel you are, careless and forgetful.' Suddenly she winked, and cried out 'Hush, speak not thus. Accuse Him not of cruelty. He is Love, Love and all Love.'

I, however, could not tolerate her agony of separation any further and reprimanded her for her mad love. She spoke not, but seemed to enjoy my comment. A few seconds later, she again opened her mouth and said, 'But, dear, He keeps me close to His lips.' 'What ! And he casts you aside also.' I jeered.

'Yes, He does, when I am filled with the pride that I am All, the Whole, forgetful of the loving power behind; when I begin to feel that Gopis dance for me, not knowing that the Lord has identified Himself with me. He does, true, when the Gopis forget Him and know me alone.'

'How jealous !' The words involuntarily escaped my lips.

'Oh ! I pray, do not speak bitter words. You do not know Him. He is the lover and beloved both. He is the master and servant both. He has the sober affection of the father, the anxious loving care of the mother and the inspiring seriousness of a teacher. Many a time He taught me to surrender all. I did so. The Lord, pleased, clasped me to His lips. The pride came back to me. I re-acquired the spirit of I-ness, and began to think my Self as my self and the voice of the Lord as my voice. The Lord then set me aside from His lips. The Gopis hid me here because I obstructed their vision of the Lord, because I diverted their devotion to their Nandlal. So, dear one, it is His kind teaching to the devoted and faithful.'

Bluntly I put to her 'What have you surrendered ? What renunciation have you made ? And pray tell me what offer you had to make to the Lord.'

'Wanderer, I had nothing to offer to the Lord—no riches I had. The Lord does not want riches. I am born of poor origin, lying in a cluster of bamboos, where there was neither food nor enough water, neither shade nor foliage, neither fruit nor flower; what could I offer ? Friend, my Kṛṣṇa does not want these things either. He simply wants the surrender of your 'will', renunciation of your 'desire', and the offer of your 'attachment' to the fruits of your actions. Rich and poor, all can do it; I did the same and the Lord accepted me.'

'The price is heavy,' I muttered.

'May be, but how simple ! Nothing to borrow or beg for, nothing to search outside. Everything within you to be given away—quite simple, isn't it ?'

'Yes', I nodded, not knowing what force made me do so. I, however, felt

the waves of doubt subsiding, which so long surged high in my mind.

A few minutes later, I again enquired 'Have you still a desire to live stripped of all your possessions ?'

'I have neither desire nor no-desire. But you are wrong, quite wrong, friend. I now possess everything; so far I had nothing. Everything now is mine and I am for everything. I have no moment to think of my form, I know Him alone. I see Him in everything, and everything in Him. My earnest friend, know Him and you know all. Well, I act for the pleasure and service of others. I live to echo the voice of my Gopāla.' She repeated 'Gopāla' slowly and went into ecstasy. I thought my talk was embarrassing, so I kept quiet.

I sat brooding over the whole thing. Suddenly I heard a jingling sound, then a voice, which gradually became distinct and more distinct. 'Rādhey, O Rādhey, My *bansari*—give Me My *bansari*.' Then followed a sonorous laugh. Rādhey was running and the Lord following Her. Gently I took the *bansari* up in my hand and cried out, 'My Lord, it is here.' With the speed of lightning Rādhā snatched it away from me. I stood aghast. And Rādhā stood aside with a smile on Her face and the *bansari* in Her hand. The Lord beseechingly uttered 'Rādhey'. That was enough. Rādhā, with the *bansari* in Her extended hand, lovingly and laughingly said, 'My offer to Govinda.' The Lord clasped Her and kissed the long parted *bansari*. They laughed joyously. My heart laughed, too. A melodious musical note issued from that hollow piece of wood, the whole forest resounded with the tune. I could distinctly hear the voice of the *bansari* that lay in my lap so long: 'Friend wanderer, see how the Lord seeketh the devotee.'

Attracted by an irresistible charm, I ran after them. My forehead struck

against a thick bough of a tree and I fell down senseless. A voice whispered into my ears: 'Ignorant friend, where art thou running? Seek Him in thyself. Your heart is yet too full of many things to accommodate the Lord. Come, I will show you how dirty it is.' He caught my hand and he and 'I' dived into the heart together. 'See here this mound of 'desire' germs, there see how much filthy accumulation of 'attachment'! Oh look! what a fire of knowledge burning there in that corner! Where will the Lord come, then? 'And, oh fool!' he said reproachingly, pointing to the central spot in the heart, 'Your spring of devotion is yet closed, it is simply trickling.' I was taken aback and looked into his face. 'You see,' he said, 'had your spring of devotion force enough to break through the blockade, it would have washed away everything and cleansed the whole heart; but it has not. So you let the fire of knowledge spread, it will burn away everything, the block over the spring, too, and then the spring of devotion will flow freely. Let it overflow the heart and wash away everything, the fire of knowledge even. This delicate apartment will be cleansed to welcome the Lord. The Lord will come.' My friend went out and left me alone to do his bidding. I took a burning stick from the fire of knowledge and burnt the blockade of desire and attachment standing against

the spring of devotion. The spring outburst and overflowed the whole heart. It became perfectly clean. Then 'I' also emerged out of it. I saw the Lord coming towards it. He did come and with Him came Rādhā, too. He went in and lo! the spring also dried up. In blissful ecstasy I cried out 'Rādhey, look, the Lord has come. He is in here,' and opened wide my heart before Her. Rādhā smiled, opened Her heart to me and said, 'Yes, brother. And here, too.' I looked. The Lord was there, too, with *bansari* in His hand. I again looked into my heart to see if the Lord had not shifted. No, He was there, too! I looked at Rādhā. The Lord smiled and said, 'Entertain no doubt; I am here and there both and, in fact, everywhere.' Immediately the *bansari* sang out 'Lord seeketh the devotee.'

The train pulled with a great jerk. A rude shock woke me up. I rubbed my eyes and opened my mouth with the words 'The Lord found His *bansari* and I found the Lord.' on my lips. My friend on the adjacent berth enquired surprisingly 'What did you say, Prem?' I said, 'Nothing.' Many voices rang out 'Agra, Agra.' I packed my bedding, got down, and again launched into the hustle and bustle of so-called life.

I lost the glimpse of Bliss, though with an eternal trace and yearning left on me. Adieu!

