KARMA.

FROM THE FRENCH OF LEON TOLSTOI.*

I.

PANDOU, a rich jeweller of the Brahmanistic caste, accompanied by his domestic, set out on a journey to Benares. On the way he met a monk of venerable aspect, going on foot in the same direction, and invited him to take a seat in his vehicle.

"I thank you for your goodness," said the monk, "for I am indeed very much fatigued. However, as I possess nothing and can pay you nothing in return, I will offer you, in case you should need them, some spiritual treasures which I have acquired in following the precepts of Sakya-Muni, the Blessed Buddha, Grand Master of Humanity!"

They therefore journeyed together, and Pandou listened with pleasure to the wise words of Narada the Monk. An hour thus went by, and, arrived at a point where the road was overflowed with water, they perceived a wagon belonging to a peasant, which a broken wheel had caused to turn on its side, thus completely obstructing the passage-way.

Devala, the proprietor of the *charrette* was *en route* to Benares to sell a load of rice, and he had hurried on in order to arrive there before day-dawn. Should he be retarded a day the buyers would have made their purchases and have departed.

The jeweller, seeing that he could not continue his voyage if the obstacle was not removed, became angry and ordered his slave Madagouta to remove the wagon. The peasant resisted because it was so near the ditch that he feared the attempt would cause it to topple over. But the Brahmin would not listen, and ordered Madagouta to execute his commands. The slave, who was possessed of Herculean strength, and besides found pleasure in molesting the weak, threw the wagon into the ditch before the monk had time to interfere. When Pandou had passed the point, and was about to continue his journey, the monk quietly left the vehicle and said:

"Excuse me, sir, for leaving you; I thank you for having been so good as to permit me to travel in your company during the last hour. I was greatly fatigued, but at present, thanks to your courtesy, I am rested. Besides, having recognized in this peasant the incarnation of one of your ancestors, I cannot better recompense you for your kindness than by succoring him in his misfortune."

The Brahmin looked with astonishment at the monk. "You say that this peasant is the incarnation of one of my ancestors? It is impossible!" "You do not know," said the monk, "the many ties which unite us to the destiny of this peasant. One cannot expect, it is true, a blind man to see; therefore, I pity you only because in inflicting these wounds you harm yourself, and I will try to prevent you from so doing."

Notwithstanding the great kindness with which the monk spoke, the rich merchant felt the reproach, and because he was not accustomed to be addressed in this manner, he ordered the driver to continue his journey without further parley.

The monk approached Devala, saluted him, and commenced to aid him to repair the wagon and gather up the rice. The work advanced so rapidly that Devala could

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not help thinking thus: "This monk must be a saint; I should say that invisible spirits are aiding in this. What if I should ask him why the proud Brahmin treated me in such a rude manner?"

"My good sir," said he, "can you tell me why I have been submitted to such an injustice on the part of a man to whom I have never done any wrong?"

"Dear friend," replied the monk, "you have not submitted to any injustice; this is but a return to you, in your present existence of that which you did to this Brahmin in your past life. And I do not deceive myself in saying that to-day you would do to the Brahmin that which he has done to you, if you were in his place, and if you had a slave as strong as his."

The rice was soon collected and placed in the wagon, and the monk and the peasant went on their way to Benares. They were not far from the city when the horse shied.

"A serpent! a serpent!" cried out the peasant. The monk looked attentively at the object which had frightened the horse, left the wagon and picked up a purse filled with gold. "This purse can only have been lost by the rich jeweller," thought he, and he gave it to the peasant, saying:

"Take this purse, and when you have come to Benares, go to the hotel which I will show you, and give him his money. Pandou will beg you to excuse the rude action which he committed against you, and you will say to him that you have pardoned him, and that you wish him success in all his enterprises; for, believe me, the greater his success, the better it will be for you. Your destiny depends in many ways upon his."

Meanwhile Pandou arrived at Benares and met the rich banker, Malmek, with whom he had business relations. "I am lost," said Malmek to him, "if I cannot purchase a wagon-load of the best rice for the royal *cuisine*. There is at Benares a banker, my implacable enemy, who, having learned that I had made a contract to deliver this morning to the royal major-domo a wagon-load of rice, purchased all there was of the article in the market. The major-domo will not free me from my engagement, and I am lost if Krichna does not send me an angel from heaven to my aid."

Whilst Malmek was recounting his misfortune, Pandou perceived that he had lost his purse. After having searched the vehicle in vain in quest of it, he decided that his slave Madagouta had taken it. He called the police and charged the slave with the theft. Thereupon Madagouta was seized, bound, and tortured, in order to extract from him a confession.

"I am not guilty, let me go," cried the poor slave. "I cannot support such torture! I am innocent, and suffer for the crime of others. Oh! if I could obtain the pardon of the peasant upon whom I inflicted so much trouble in order to please my master! This is indeed the just punishment of my cruelty." The police continued to beat the slave, and meanwhile Devala, the peasant, approached the hotel, and to the great astonishment of all handed the lost purse to Pandou.

The slave was quickly delivered from the hands of his executioners, but, angered against his master, he fled to the mountains and joined a band of brigands.

Malmek, learning in turn that the peasant could sell him rice, and of the best quality, hastened to purchase the entire wagon-load, paying him a triple price; and Pandou, happy to have found his money, hastened to the convent to demand of the monk the explanation promised him.

Narada the Monk said to him: "I would have given you the explanation which you desired, but knowing that you are incapable of comprehending the truth, I prefer to say nothing to you except to give this counsel: Treat every man whom you meet as you would be treated yourself; serve him as you would wish to be served; thus you will sow the seed of good actions and the harvest will profit you, also." "O monk; give me the explanation," said Pandou, "and it will be more easy to follow your counsel."

"Very well, then listen," replied the

monk. "I will give you the key to the mystery; if you cannot penetrate it, believe that which I tell you. To consider one's self an isolated being is an illusion, and he who directs all his thoughts to accomplish the will of that isolated being follows a false route which will conduct him into the abyss of sin. If we consider ourselves as isolated beings, it is because the veil of Maya blinds our eyes, preventing us from seeing the indissoluble ties which bind us to our neighbors, and from finding our communion with the souls of other beings. Few men know this truth. May the following maxims be your talisman: 'He who harms others, harms himself.' 'He who aids others, does good to himself.' 'Cease to consider yourself an isolated being, and you will find the road to the truth.' For him whose sight is obscured by the veil of Maya the world seems divided into innumerable individualities, and such a man cannot understand the extent of universal love for every living creature."

Pandou replied: "Your words have a profound signification, and I will remember them. I have extended a little courtesy, which cost me nothing, to a poor monk during his journey to Benares, and behold the blessed results which have come to me. I owe you much, for without you, not only should I have lost my purse, but it would have been impossible to negotiate at Benares the affairs which have notably increased my fortune. Besides, it is due to you that the wagon of rice arrived in time to save my friend Malmek. If all men understood the truth of your precepts, how much better would be our world! how much evil actions would be diminished and universal happiness promoted! I would that the truths of Buddha might be understood by all; for this reason, I wish to found a convent in my country of Kolshambi, and I pray you to aid me in establishing there a retreat for the fraternity of the disciples of Buddha."

II.

Years have passed. The convent of Kolshambi, founded by Pandou, the jeweller, has become a point where sages meet, and is celebrated as the important centre of science and scientific studies.

One day the king of an adjacent country, having heard of the perfection of the jewelry fabricated by Pandou, sent to him his treasurer to order a crown of massive gold, enriched with the most costly stones of India.

When Pandou had achieved the task, he set out for the capital of the king, and in the hope of securing further business, he took with him a great quantity of gold. The caravan which bore these riches was accompanied by armed men. Nevertheless, when it arrived in the mountainous region, a band of brigands under Madagouta, their chief, attacked the caravan, massacred the escort, and took possession of the treasures. Pandou himself escaped only by the merest chance.

This loss made an enormous breach in the fortune of the jeweller. He was much affected thereby, but supported his misfortune with resignation. "I have merited this trial," he thought, "by the sins of my past life. In my youth I was hard upon the people, and I should not complain at reaping to-day the fruit of my bad actions." Now Pandou had become more kindly disposed towards his fellow-creatures, and his misfortunes only accomplished the purification of his heart.

Years again went by, and it came to pass that Pantaka, a young monk—a disciple of Narada—while traveling in the mountains of Kolshambi, fell into the hands of brigands. As he possessed nothing, the chief of the brigands released him after having caused him to be beaten.

The following morning, Pantaka, in passing through the forest heard the noise of a conflict. He went in the direction of the combatants and beheld a large number of brigands, who were madly attacking their chief, Madagouta. As a lion surrounded by dogs, the latter held his own, and had already killed several. But they were too numerous, and finally Madagouta was vanquished and fell covered with wounds.

As soon as the brigands had gone, the young monk approached the wounded men, in order to give them aid; but all were dead.

Madagouta alone showed signs of life. The monk ran quickly to a little stream which ran by, filled his *cruche* with water, and carried it to the dying man. Madagouta opened his eyes and said, whilst gritting his teeth: "Where are the ungrateful dogs whom I have led so many times to the chase? Without me they will soon be lost like jackals tracked by hunters."

"Think no more of your companions, the accomplices of your criminal life," said Pantaka. "Think rather of your last hour, of the salvation of your soul. Drink this water, and let me dress your wounds; perhaps I may still save your life."

"It is useless," replied Madagouta, "I am lost—the miserable wretches have wounded me unto death. Oh! the cowards! Oh! the ungrateful dogs! They have stricken me down with the blows which I myself have taught them."

"You reap that which you have sown. Had you taught the good to your companions, good you would have received. You taught them to murder, and thus you have been killed by their hands."

"You are right," replied the brigand chief. "I have merited my fate, but it must be terrible, if it is necessary to reap in the life to come the fruit of all my bad actions! Teach me then, O holy man, that which I should do in order to lighten the weight of sins which oppress my breast like unto a rock."

"Pluck from your heart your desires of vengeance; stifle your wicked passions, and fill your soul with love of all your fellowmen."

"I have done much evil and no good. How may I escape this net of woe which I have woven for myself, of my own wicked instincts? My *Karma* will conduct me to hell, for I can never find the way of salvation."

"Yes, it is true," said the monk. "Your *Karma* will gather in your future incarnation the fruit of the grains which you have sown. He who has committed bad actions cannot avoid the consequences. But do not despair; every man can be saved upon condition that he make the sacrifice of his own individuality. For example, I will recount to you the story of a celebrated brigand, Kandata, who died impenitent, and who was born again a demon in hell, where he endured the most horrible sufferings. He had been there for many years, unable to escape from his unhappy fate, when Buddha appeared upon the earth. At that memorable period, a ray of light penetrated as far as hell, and created hope in the breast of all the demons. 'O blessed Buddha, have pity upon me!' cried the brigand Kandata. 'I suffer horribly, and though I have committed evil I desire to walk now in the path of justice. But I cannot deliver myself from the net of pain which holds me. Aid me, Master, have pity upon me!' The law of *Karma* reads that bad actions lead to destruction. When Buddha heard the prayer of the demon suffering in hell he sent to him a spider upon his web, and the spider said to him: 'Take hold of my web and come out of hell.' When the spider had disappeared, Kandata seized the thread and commenced to climb. The thread was solid and did not break, so that the demon climbed higher and higher. Suddenly he felt the thread commence to tremble and swing. It was because other wretched demons were climbing behind him. Kandata was much frightened. He saw how thin was the thread, and he perceived that it grew still thinner by reason of the increased weight. However, Kandata held on. Up to that time he had only looked upwards; now he looked below and saw an innumerable crowd of the inhabitants of hell, who followed him. 'How may a thread so thin support the weight of all these people?' thought he, and frightened he cried out, 'Let go the thread, it is *mine!*'

"Suddenly the thread broke and Kandata fell backwards into hell. The erroneous sentiment of individuality was still alive in him. He did not know what marvellous force a sincere tendency has to mount upwards and to walk in the way of justice. That tendency is as light as a spider's thread, but it can hold up millions of men; and the more it holds, the lighter it will appear. But just as soon as there

is born in the heart of man the thought that the thread *is his own*, that the blessing of justice belongs to *him alone*, and that no one may share it *with him*, the thread breaks, and man falls backward into his former position of isolated individuality. Now, isolation is a malediction and union is a benediction. What is hell? It is nothing else than the love of self, whilst *Nirvana* is life in common."

"Cause me then to seize the spider's thread," said the dying Madagouta, when the monk had finished his recital.

Madagouta remained some moments in silence as if to collect his thoughts, and then said: "Listen to me attentively. I wish to avow everything. I was the slave of Pandou, jeweller of Kolshambi. But after he had unjustly tortured me, I fled, and became the chief of brigands. Some time ago I learned by my scouts that he would cross the mountains. I surprised him and took from him the greater part of his fortune. Go and tell him that I forgive him, with all my heart, the evil which he has unjustly done me, and that I beg him to forgive me for having robbed him. When I was in his service his heart was as hard as stone, and it was from him I learned to think only of self. I have heard that he has become a better man and that he is now cited as a model of goodness and of justice. I do not wish to remain his debtor; therefore I pray you to say to him that I have preserved buried in a subterranean hiding-place the crown of gold which he made for the king; also all of his treasure. Only two brigands knew of this hiding place and the two were killed to-day. Let Pandou accompanied by armed men come and take possession of the goods which I have taken from him."

And Madagouta died in the arms of Pantaka, after having indicated to him where he could find the hidden treasure. The young monk then hastened to Kolshambi, where he found the jeweller and told him of what had taken place in the forest.

Pandou discovered the hiding-place and recovered all the riches which the chief of the brigands had hidden there.

He caused Madagouta and the slain brigands to be buried; and Pantaka, commentating over their graves upon the words of Buddha, said: "Individuality causes evil, and it is individuality which suffers." "Individuality avoids evil and individuality purifies itself." "Purity and impurity belong to individuality; no one can purify another. Man himself should make the effort; the Buddhas are only the educators."

Pandou took back to Kolshambi all his riches; and in the enjoyment, with moderation, of his recovered fortune he passed the rest of his life in calmness and happiness. When, at an advanced age, he was about to die, he collected around him his children and grand-children, and said to them:

"My dear children, do not accuse others of your want of success; seek the cause of your misfortunes in yourselves, and if you are not blinded by vanity, you will find it, and you will learn thus to avoid the evil. The remedy of your misfortunes is in yourselves. Never let the regard of your conscience be veiled by the veil of Maya. Remember the words which were the talisman of my life: 'He who causes his neighbor to suffer works ill to himself.' 'He who aids others, aids himself.' 'Let the error of individuality disappear, and you will then walk in the path of justice.'"