

"WE CROWN THEE KING"

Pramathanath was a Bachelor of Arts and in addition was gifted with common sense. But he held no high official position; he had no handsome salary; nor did he exert any influence with his pen. There was no one in power to lend him a helping hand, because he desired to keep away from the Englishmen as much as they desired to keep away from him. So it happened that he shone only within the sphere of his family and friends, and excited no admiration beyond it.

Yet this Pramathanath had once [earlier] sojourned in England for some three years. The kindly treatment he received during his stay there overpowered him so much that he forgot the sorrow and humiliation of his own country, and came back dressed in European clothes. This rather grieved his brothers and his sisters at first, but after a few days they began to think that European clothes suited nobody better, and gradually they came to share his pride and dignity.

On his return to England, Pramathanath resolved that he would show the world how to associate with Anglo-Indians (English living in India) on terms of equality. Those of our countrymen who think that no such association is possible, unless we bend our knees to them, show their utter lack of self-respect, and were also unjust to the English – so thought Pramathanath.

He brought with him letters of introduction from many distinguished Englishmen at home, and these gave him some recognition in Anglo-Indian society. He and his wife occasionally enjoyed English hospitality at tea, dinner, sports and other entertainments. Such good luck intoxicated him, and began to produce a tingling sensation in every vein in his body.

About this time, at the opening of a new railway line, many of the town, proud recipients of official favor, were invited by the Lieutenant-Governor to take the first trip. Pramathanath was among them. On the return journey, a European Sergeant of the police expelled some Indian gentlemen from the railway carriage with great insolence. Pramathanath, dressed in his European clothes, was there. He, too, was getting out, when the Sergeant said, "You needn't move, sir. Keep your seat please."

At first Pramathanath felt flattered at the special respect shown to him. When, however the train went on, the dull rays of the setting sun, at the west of the fields, now ploughed up and stripped of green, seemed in his eyes to spread a glow of shame over the whole country. Sitting near the window of his lonely compartment, he seemed to catch a glimpse of the downcast eyes of his Motherland, hidden behind the trees. As Pramathanath sat there, lost in reverie, burning tears flowed down his cheeks, and his heart burst with indignation.

He now remembered the story of a donkey who was drawing the chariot of an idol along the street. The wayfarers bowed down to the idol, and touched the dusty ground with their foreheads. The foolish donkey imagined that all this reverence was being shown to him. "The only difference" said Pramathanath to himself, "between the donkey and myself is this: I understand today the respect I receive is not given to me, but to the burden on my back."

Upon arriving home, Pramathanath called together his children, and lighting a huge bonfire, threw all his European clothes into it one by one. The children danced round and round it, and the higher the flames shot up the greater was their merriment. After that, Pramathanath gave up his sips of tea and bits of toast in Anglo-Indian houses, and once again sat inaccessible within his ... house.

How did Pramathanath change when he went to Europe? Was this a positive or negative change? Explain.

What did Pramathanath experience on the train? How does this experience change him?

What do the "fields... ploughed-up and stripped of green" symbolize? Why would this make Pramathanath cry?

Why does Pramathanath burn his clothing? What does this action symbolize?