

# The Adventures of Two Thieves and of Their Sons

By the Rev. Lal Behari Day

## PART I

Once on a time there lived two thieves in a village who earned their livelihood by stealing. As they were well-known thieves, every act of theft in the village was ascribed to them whether they committed it or not; they therefore left the village, and, being resolved to support themselves by honest labour, went to a neighbouring town for service. Both of them were engaged by a householder the one had to tend a cow, and the other to water a *champaka* plant. The elder thief began watering the plant early in the morning, and as he had been told to go on pouring water till some of it collected itself round the foot of the plant he went on pouring bucketful after bucketful: but to no purpose. No sooner was the water poured on the foot of the plant than it was forthwith sucked up by the thirsty earth; and it was late in the afternoon when the thief, tired with drawing water, laid himself down on the ground, and fell asleep. The younger thief fared no better. The cow which he had to tend was the most vicious in the whole country. When taken out of the village for pasturage it galloped away to a great distance with its tail erect; it ran from one paddy-field to another, and ate the corn and trod upon it; it entered into sugar-cane plantations and destroyed the sweet cane;—for all which damage and acts of trespass the neatherd was soundly rated by the owners of the fields. What with running after the cow from field to field, from pool to pool what with the abusive language poured not only upon him, but upon his forefathers up to the fourteenth generation, by the owners of the fields in which the corn had been destroyed,—the younger thief had a miserable day of it. After a world of trouble he succeeded about sunset in catching hold of the cow, which he brought back to the house of his master. The elder thief had just roused himself from sleep when he saw the younger one bringing in the cow. Then the elder said to the younger—“Brother, why are you so late in coming from the fields?”

*Younger.* What shall I say, brother? I took the cow to that part of the meadow where there is a tank, near which there is a large tree. I let the cow loose, and it began to graze about without giving the least trouble. I spread my *gamchha*<sup>1</sup> upon the grass under the tree; and there was such a delicious breeze that I soon fell asleep, and I did not wake till after sunset; and when I awoke I saw my good cow grazing contentedly at the distance of a few paces. But how did you fare, brother?

*Elder.* Oh, as for me, I had a jolly time of it. I had poured only one bucketful of water on the plant, when a large quantity rested round it. So my work was done, and I had the whole day to myself. I laid myself down on the ground; I meditated on the joys of this new mode of life; I whistled; I sang; and at last fell asleep. And I am up only this moment.

When this talk was ended, the elder thief, believing that what the younger thief had said was true, thought that tending the cow was more comfortable than watering the plant; and

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<sup>1</sup> A towel used in bathing.

the younger thief, for the same reason, thought that watering the plant was more comfortable than tending the cow each therefore resolved to exchange his own work for that of the other.

*Elder.* Well, brother, I have a wish to tend the cow. Suppose to-morrow you take my work, and I yours. Have you any objection?

*Younger.* Not the slightest, brother. I shall be glad to take up your work, and you are quite welcome to take up mine. Only let me give you a bit of advice. I felt it rather uncomfortable to sleep nearly the whole of the day on the bare ground. If you take a *charpoy*<sup>2</sup> with you, you will have a merry time of it.

Early the following morning the elder thief went out with the cow to the fields, not forgetting to take with him a *charpoy* for his ease and comfort; and the younger thief began watering the plant. The latter had thought that one bucketful, or at the outside two bucketfuls, of water would be enough. But what was his surprise when he found that even a hundred bucketfuls were not sufficient to saturate the ground around the roots of the plant. He was dead tired with drawing water. The sun was almost going down, and yet his work was not over. At last he gave it up through sheer weariness.

The elder thief in the fields was in no better case. He took the cow beside the tank which the younger thief had spoken of, put his *charpoy* under the large tree hard by, and then let the cow loose. As soon as the cow was let loose it went scampering about in the meadow, jumping over hedges and ditches, running through paddy-fields, and injuring sugar-cane plantations. The elder thief was not a little put about. He had to run about the whole day, and to be insulted by the people whose fields had been trespassed upon. But the worst of it was, that our thief had to run about the meadow with the *charpoy* on his head, for he could not put it anywhere for fear it should be taken away. When the other neatherds who were in the meadow saw the elder thief running about in breathless haste after the cow with the *charpoy* on his head, they clapped their hands and raised shouts of derision. The poor fellow, hungry and angry, bitterly repented of the exchange he had made. After infinite trouble, and with the help of the other neatherds, he at last caught hold of the precious cow, and brought it home long after the village lamps had been lit.

When the two thieves met in the house of their master, they merely laughed at each other without speaking a word. Their dinner over, they laid themselves to rest, when there took place the following conversation

*Younger.* Well, how did you fare, brother?

*Elder.* Just as you fared, and perhaps some degrees better.

*Younger.* I am of opinion that our former trade of thieving was infinitely preferable to this sort of honest labour, as people call it.

*Elder.* What doubt is there of that? But, by the gods, I have never seen a cow which can be compared to this. It has no second in the world in point of viciousness.

*Younger.* A vicious cow is not a rare thing. I have seen some cows as vicious. But have you ever seen a plant like this *champaka* plant which you were told to water? I wonder what becomes of all the water that is poured round about it. Is there a tank below its roots?

*Elder.* I have a good mind to dig round it and see what is beneath it.

*Younger.* We had better do so this night when the good man of the house and his wife are asleep.

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<sup>2</sup> A sort of bed made of rope, supported by posts of wood.

At about midnight the two thieves took spades and shovels and began digging round the plant. After digging a good deal the younger thief lighted upon some hard thing against which the shovel struck. The curiosity of both was excited. The younger thief saw that it was a large jar; he thrust his hand into it and found that it was full of gold mohurs. But he said to the elder thief— “Oh, it is nothing; it is only a large stone.” The elder thief, however, suspected that it was something else; but he took care not to give vent to his suspicion. Both agreed to give up digging as they had found nothing; and they went to sleep. An hour or two after, when the elder thief saw that the younger thief was asleep, he quietly got up and went to the spot which had been digged. He saw the jar filled with gold mohurs. Digging a little near it, he found another jar also filled with gold mohurs. Overjoyed to find the treasure, he resolved to secure it. He took up both the jars, went to the tank which was near, and from which water used to be drawn for the plant, and buried them in the mud of its bank. He then returned to the house, and quietly laid himself down beside the younger thief, who was then fast asleep. The younger thief, who had first found the jar of gold mohurs, now woke, and softly stealing out of bed, went to secure the treasure he had seen. On going to the spot he did not see any jar; he therefore naturally thought that his companion the elder thief had secreted it somewhere. He went to his sleeping partner, with a view to discover if possible by any marks on his body the place where the treasure had been hidden. He examined the person of his friend with the eye of a detective, and saw mud on his feet and near the ankles. He immediately concluded the treasure must have been concealed somewhere in the tank. But in what part of the tank? on which bank? His ingenuity did not forsake him here. He walked round all the four banks of the tank. When he walked round three sides, the frogs on them jumped into the water; but no frogs jumped from the fourth bank. He therefore concluded that the treasure must have been buried on the fourth bank. In a little he found the two jars filled with gold mohurs; he took them up, and going into the cow-house brought out the vicious cow he had tended, and put the two jars on its back. He left the house and started for his native village.

When the elder thief at crow-cawing got up from sleep, he was surprised not to find his companion beside him. He hastened to the tank and found that the jars were not there. He went to the cow-house, and did not see the vicious cow. He immediately concluded the younger thief must have run away with the treasure on the back of the cow. And where could he think of going? He must be going to his native village. No sooner did this process of reasoning pass through his mind than he resolved forthwith to set out and overtake the younger thief. As he passed through the town, he invested all the money he had in a costly pair of shoes covered with gold lace. He walked very fast, avoiding the public road and making short cuts. He descried the younger thief trudging on slowly with his cow. He went before him in the highway about a distance of 200 yards, and threw down on the road one shoe. He walked on another 200 yards and threw the other shoe at a place near which was a large tree; amid the thick leaves of that tree he hid himself. The younger thief coming along the public road saw the first shoe and said to himself—“What a beautiful shoe that is! It is of gold lace. It would have suited me in my present circumstances now that I have got rich. But what shall I do with one shoe?” So he passed on. In a short time he came to the place where the other shoe was lying. The younger thief said within himself—“Ah, here is the other shoe! What a fool I was, that I did not pick up the one I first saw! However it is not too late. I’ll tie the cow to yonder tree and

go for the other shoe.” He tied the cow to the tree, and taking up the second shoe went for the first, lying at a distance of about 200 yards. In the meantime the elder thief got down from the tree, loosened the cow, and drove it towards his native village, avoiding the king’s highway. The younger thief on returning to the tree found that the cow was gone. He of course concluded that it could have been done only by the elder thief. He walked as fast as his legs could carry him, and reached his native village long before the elder thief with the cow. He hid himself near the door of the elder thief’s house. The moment the elder thief arrived with the cow, the younger thief accosted him, saying—“So you are come safe, brother. Let us go in and divide the money.” To this proposal the elder thief readily agreed. In the inner yard of the house the two jars were taken down from the back of the cow; they went to a room, bolted the door, and began dividing. Two mohurs were taken up by the hand, one was put in one place, and the other in another; and they went on doing that till the jars became empty. But last of all one gold mohur remained. The question was—Who was to take it? Both agreed that it should be changed the next morning, and the silver cash equally divided. But with whom was the single mohur to remain? There was not a little wrangling about the matter. After a great deal of yea and nay, it was settled that it should remain with the elder thief, and that next morning it should be changed and equally divided.

At night the elder thief said to his wife and the other women of the house, “Look here, ladies, the younger thief will come to-morrow morning to demand the share of the remaining gold mohur; but I don’t mean to give it to him. You do one thing to-morrow. Spread a cloth on the ground in the yard. I will lay myself on the cloth pretending to be dead; and to convince people that I am dead, put a *tulasi*<sup>3</sup> plant near my head. And when you see the younger thief coming to the door, you set up a loud cry and lamentation. Then he will of course go away, and I shall not have to pay his share of the gold mohur.” To this proposal the women readily agreed. Accordingly the next day, about noon, the elder thief laid himself down in the yard like a corpse with the sacred basil near his head. When the younger thief was seen coming near the house, the women set up a loud cry, and when he came nearer and nearer, wondering what it all meant, they said, “Oh, where did you both go? What did you bring? What did you do to him? Look, he is dead!” So saying they rent the air with their cries. The younger thief, seeing through the whole, said, “Well, I am sorry my friend and brother is gone. I must now attend to his funeral. You all go away from this place, you are but women. I’ll see to it that the remains are well burnt.” He brought a quantity of straw and twisted it into a rope, which he fastened to the legs of the deceased man, and began tugging him, saying that he was going to take him to the place of burning. While the elder thief was being dragged through the streets, his body was getting dreadfully scratched and bruised, but he held his peace, being resolved to act his part out, and thus escape giving the share of the gold mohur. The sun had gone down when the younger thief with the corpse reached the place of burning. But as he was making preparations for a funeral pile, he remembered that he had not brought fire with him. If he went for fire leaving the elder thief behind, he would undoubtedly run away. What then was to be done? At last he tied the straw rope to the branch of a tree, and kept the pretended corpse hanging in the air, and he himself climbed into the tree and sat on that branch, keeping tight hold of the rope lest it should break, and the elder thief run away. While they were in this state, a gang of robbers passed by. On seeing the

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<sup>3</sup> The sacred basil.

corpse hanging, the head of the gang said, "This raid of ours has begun very auspiciously. Brahmans and Pandits say that if on starting on a journey one sees a corpse, it is a good omen. Well, we have seen a corpse, it is therefore likely that we shall meet with success this night. If we do, I propose one thing: on our return let us first burn this dead body and then return home." All the robbers agreed to this proposal. The robbers then entered into the house of a rich man in the village, put its inmates to the sword, robbed it of all its treasures, and withal managed it so cleverly that not a mouse stirred in the village. As they were successful beyond measure, they resolved on their return to burn the dead body they had seen. When they came to the place of burning they found the corpse hanging as before, for the elder thief had not yet opened his mouth lest he should be obliged to give half of the gold mohur. The thieves dug a hollow in the ground, brought fuel, and laid it upon the hollow. They took down the corpse from the tree, and laid it upon the pile; and as they were going to set it on fire, the corpse gave out an unearthly scream and jumped up. That very moment the younger thief jumped down from the tree with a similar scream. The robbers were frightened beyond measure. They thought that a *Dana* (evil spirit) had possessed the corpse, and that a ghost jumped down from the tree. They ran away in great fear, leaving behind them the money and the jewels which they had obtained by robbery. The two thieves laughed heartily, took up all the riches of the robbers, went home, and lived merrily for a long time.

## PART II

The elder thief and the younger thief had one son each. As they had been so far successful in life by practising the art ~of thieving, they resolved to train up their sons to the same profession. There was in the village a Professor of the Science of Roguery, who took pupils, and gave them lessons in that difficult science. The two thieves put their sons under this renowned Professor. The son of the elder thief distinguished himself very much, and bade fair to surpass his father in the art of stealing. The lad's cleverness was tested in the following manner. Not far from the Professor's house there lived a poor man in a hut, upon the thatch of which climbed a creeper of the gourd kind. In the middle of the thatch, which was also its topmost part, there was a splendid gourd, which the man and his wife watched day and night. They certainly slept at night, but then the thatch was so old and rickety that if even a mouse went up to it bits of straw and particles of earth used to fall inside the hut, and the man and his wife slept right below the spot where the gourd was; so that it was next to impossible to steal the gourd without the knowledge of its owners. The Professor said to his pupils—for he had many—that any one who stole the gourd without being caught would be pronounced the dux of the school. Our elder thief's son at once accepted the offer. He said he would steal away the gourd if he were allowed the use of three things, namely, a string, a cat, and a knife. The Professor allowed him the use of these three things. Two or three hours after nightfall, the lad, furnished with the three things mentioned above, sat behind the thatch under the eaves, listening to the conversation carried on by the man and his wife lying in bed inside the hut. In a short time the conversation ceased. The lad then concluded that they must both have fallen asleep. He waited half an hour longer, and hearing no sound inside, gently climbed up on the thatch. Chips of straw and particles of earth fell upon the couple sleeping inside. The woman woke up, and rousing her husband said, "Look there, some one is stealing the

gourd!” That moment the lad squeezed the throat of the cat, and puss immediately gave out her usual “Mew! mew! mew!” The husband said, “Don’t you hear the cat mewing? There is no thief; it is only a cat.” The lad in the meantime cut the gourd from the plant with his knife, and tied the string which he had with him to its stalk. But how was he to get down without being discovered and caught, especially as the man and the woman were now awake? The woman was not convinced that it was only a cat; the shaking of the thatch, and the constant falling of bits of straw and particles of dust, made her think that it was a human being that was upon the thatch. She was telling her husband to go out and see whether a man was not there; but he maintained that it was only a cat. While the man and woman were thus disputing with each other, the lad with great force threw down the cat upon the ground, on which the poor animal purred most vociferously; and the man said aloud to his wife, “There it is; you are now convinced that it was only a cat.” In the meantime, during the confusion created by the clamour of the cat and the loud talk of the man, the lad quietly came down from the thatch with the gourd tied to the string. Next morning the lad produced the gourd before his teacher, and described to him and to his admiring comrades the manner in which he had committed the theft. The Professor was in ecstasy, and remarked, “The worthy son of a worthy father.” But the elder thief, the father of our hopeful genius, was by no means satisfied that his son was as yet fit to enter the world. He wanted to prove him still further. Addressing his son he said, “My son, if you can do what I tell you, I’ll think you fit to enter the world. If you can steal the gold chain of the queen of this country from her neck, and bring it to me, I’ll think you fit to enter the world.” The gifted son readily agreed to do the daring deed.

The young thief—for so we shall now call the son of the elder thief—made a reconnaissance of the palace in which the king and queen lived. He reconnoitred all the four gates, and all the outer and inner walls as far as he could; and gathered incidentally a good deal of information, from people living in the neighbourhood, regarding the habits of the king and queen, in what part of the palace they slept, what guards there were near the bedchamber, and who, if any, slept in the antechamber. Armed with all this knowledge the young thief fixed upon one dark night for doing the daring deed. He took with him a sword, a hammer and some large nails, and put on very dark clothes. Thus accoutred he went prowling about the Lion gate of the palace. Before the zenana<sup>4</sup> could be got at, four doors, including the Lion gate, had to be passed; and each of these doors had a guard of sixteen stalwart men. The same men, however, did not remain all night at their post. As the king had an infinite number of soldiers at his command, the guards at the doors were relieved every hour; so that once every hour at each door there were thirty-two men present, consisting of the relieving party and of the relieved. The young thief chose that particular moment of time for entering each of the four doors. At the time of relief when he saw the Lion gate crowded with thirty-two men, he joined the crowd without being taken notice of; he then spent the hour preceding the next relief in the large open space and garden between two doors; and he could not be taken notice of, as the night as well as his clothes was pitch dark. In a similar manner he passed the second door, the third door, and the fourth door. And now the queen’s bedchamber stared him in the face. It was in the third loft; there was a bright light in it; and a low voice was heard as that of a woman saying something in a humdrum manner. The young thief thought that

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<sup>4</sup> Zenana is not the name of a province in India, as the good people of Scotland the other day took it to be, but the innermost department of a Hindu or Mohammedan house which the women occupy.

the voice must be the voice of a maid-servant reciting a story, as he had learnt was the custom in the palace every night, for composing the king and queen to sleep. But how to get up into the third loft? The inner doors were all closed, and there were guards everywhere. But the young thief had with him nails and a hammer: why not drive the nails into the wall and climb up by them? True; but the driving of nails into the wall would make a great noise which would rouse the guards, and possibly the king and queen,—at any rate the maid-servant reciting stories would give the alarm. Our erratic genius had considered that matter well before engaging in the work. There is a water-clock in the palace which shows the hours; and at the end of every hour a very large Chinese gong is struck, the sound of which is so loud that it is not only heard all over the palace, but over most part of the city; and the peculiarity of the gong, as of every Chinese gong, was that nearly one minute must elapse after the first stroke before the second stroke could be made, to allow the gong to give out the whole of its sound. The thief fixed upon the minutes when the gong was struck at the end of every hour for driving nails into the wall. At ten o'clock when the gong was struck ten times, the thief found it easy to drive ten nails into the wall. When the gong stopped, the thief also stopped, and either sat or stood quiet on the ninth nail catching hold of the tenth which was above the other. At eleven o'clock he drove into the wall in a similar manner eleven nails, and got a little higher than the second story; and by twelve o'clock he was in the loft where the royal bedchamber was. Peeping in he saw a drowsy maid-servant drowsily reciting a story, and the king and queen apparently asleep. He went stealthily behind the story-telling maid-servant and took his seat. The queen was lying down on a richly furnished bedstead of gold beside the king. The massive chain of gold round the neck of the queen was gleaming in candle-light. The thief quietly listened to the story of the drowsy maid-servant. She was becoming more and more sleepy. She stopped for a second, nodded her head, and again resumed the story. It was plain she was under the influence of sleep. In a moment the thief cut off the head of the maidservant with his sword, and himself went on reciting for some minutes the story which the woman was telling. The king and queen were unconscious of any change as to the person of the story-teller, for they were both in deep sleep. He stripped the murdered woman of her clothes, put them on himself, tied up his own clothes in a bundle, and walking softly, gently took off the chain from the neck of the queen. He then went through the rooms down stairs, ordered the inner guard to open the door, as she was obliged to go out of the palace for purposes of necessity. The guards, seeing that it was the queen's maidservant, readily allowed her to go out. In the same manner, and with the same pretext, he got through the other doors, and at last out into the street. That very night, or rather morning, the young thief put into his father's hand the gold chain of the queen. The elder thief could scarcely believe his own eyes. It was so like a dream. His joy knew no bounds. Addressing his son he said— "Well done, my son; you are not only as clever as your father, but you have beaten me hollow. The gods give you long life, my son.

Next morning when the king and queen got up from bed, they were shocked to see the maidservant lying in a pool of blood. The queen also found that her gold chain was not round her neck. They could not make out how all this could have taken place. How could any thief manage to elude the vigilance of so many guards? How could he get into the queen's bedchamber? And how could he again escape? The king found from the reports of the guards that a person calling herself the royal maid-servant had gone out of the

palace some hours before dawn. All sorts of inquiries were made, but in vain. Proclamation was made in the city; a large reward was offered to any one who would give information tending to the apprehension of the thief and murderer. But no one responded to the call. At last the king ordered a camel to be brought to him. On the back of the animal was placed two large bags filled with gold mohurs. The man taking charge of the bags upon the camel was ordered to go through every part of the city making the following challenge:—"As the thief was daring enough to steal away a gold chain from the neck of the queen, let him further show his daring by stealing the gold mohurs from the back of this camel." Two days and nights the camel paraded through the city, but nothing happened. On the third night as the camel-driver was going his rounds he was accosted by a *sannyasi*,<sup>5</sup> who sat on a tiger's skin before a fire, and near whom was a monstrous pair of tongs. This *sannyasi* was no other than the young thief in disguise. The *sannyasi* said to the camel-driver—"Brother, why are you going through the city in this manner? Who is there so daring as to steal from the back of the king's camel? Come down, friend, and smoke with me." The camel-driver alighted, tied the camel to a tree on the spot, and began smoking. The mendicant supplied him not only with tobacco, but with *ganja* and other intoxicating drugs, so that in a short time the camel-driver became quite intoxicated and fell asleep. The young thief led away the camel with the treasure on its back in the dead of night, through narrow lanes and bye-paths to his own house. That very night the camel was killed, and its carcass buried in deep pits in the earth, and the thing was so managed that no one could discover any trace of it.

The next morning when the king heard that the camel-driver was lying drunk in the street, and that the camel had been made away with together with the treasure, he was almost beside himself with anger. Proclamation was made in the city to the effect that whoever caught the thief would get the reward of a lakh of rupees. The son of the younger thief—who, by the way, was in the same school of roguery with the son of the elder thief, though he did not distinguish himself so much—now came to the front and said that he would apprehend the thief. He of course suspected that the son of the elder thief must have done it—for who so daring and clever as he? In the evening of the following day the son of the younger thief disguised himself as a woman, and coming to that part of the town where the young thief lived, began to weep very much, and went from door to door saying—"O sirs, can any of you give me a bit of camel's flesh, for my son is dying, and the doctors say nothing but eating camel's meat can save his life. O for pity's sake, do give me a bit of camel's flesh." At last he went to the house of the young thief, and begged of the wife—for the young thief himself was out—to tell him where he could get hold of camel's flesh, as his son would assuredly perish if it could not be got. Saying this he rent the air with his cries, and fell down at the feet of the young thief's wife. Woman as she was, though the wife of a thief, she felt pity for the supposed woman, and said—"Wait, and I will try and get some camel's flesh for your son." So saying, she secretly went to the spot where the dead camel had been buried, brought a small quantity of flesh, and gave it to the party. The son of the younger thief was now entranced with joy. He went and told the king that he had succeeded in tracing the thief, and would be ready to deliver him up at night if the king would send some constables with him. At night the elder thief and his son were captured, the body of the camel dug out, and all the treasures in the house seized. The following morning the king sat in

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<sup>5</sup> A religious mendicant.



judgment. The son of the elder thief confessed that he had stolen the queen's gold chain, and killed the maid-servant, and had taken away the camel; but he added that the person who had detected him and his father—the younger thief— were also thieves and murderers, of which fact he gave undoubted proofs. As the king had promised to give a lakh of rupees to the detective, that sum was placed before the son of the younger thief. But soon after he ordered four pits to be dug in the earth in which were buried alive, with all sorts of thorns and thistles, the elder thief and the younger thief, and their two sons.

*Here my story endeth,  
The Natiya-thorn withereth, etc.*