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No. 41

MINE OWN PEOPLE

BY RUDYARD KIPLING

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MINE OWN PEOPLE

BY

RUDYARD KIPLING

AUTHOR OF

"PLAIN TALES FROM THE HILLS," &c.



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HEINEMANN AND BALESTIER

LIMITED, LONDON

1891

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PREFACE

IN Northern India stood a monastery called The Chubára of Dhunni Bhagat. No one remembered who or what Dhunni Bhagat had been. He had lived his life, made a little money and spent it all, as every good Hindu should do, on a work of piety—the Chubára. That was full of brick cells, gaily painted with the figures of Gods and kings and elephants, where worn-out priests could sit and meditate on the latter end of things: the paths were brick paved, and the naked feet of thousands had worn them into gutters. Clumps of mangoes sprouted from between the bricks; great pipal trees overhung the well-windlass that whined all day; and hosts of parrots tore through the trees. Crows and squirrels were tame in that place, for they knew that never a priest would touch them.

The wandering mendicants, charm-sellers, and holy vagabonds for a hundred miles round used to make the Chubára their place of call and rest. Mahomedan, Sikh, and Hindu mixed equally under the trees. They

were old men, and when man has come to the turnstiles of Night all the creeds in the world seem to him wonderfully alike and colourless.

Gobind the one-eyed told me this. He was a holy man who lived on an island in the middle of a river and fed the fishes with little bread pellets twice a day. In flood-time, when swollen corpses stranded themselves at the foot of the island, Gobind would cause them to be piously burned, for the sake of the honour of mankind, and having regard to his own account with God hereafter. But when two-thirds of the island was torn away in a spate, Gobind came across the river to Dhunni Bhagat's Chubára, he and his brass drinking vessel with the well-cord round the neck, his short arm-rest crutch studded the brass nails, his roll of bedding, his big pipe, his umbrella, and his tall sugar-loaf hat with the nodding peacock feathers in it. He wrapped himself up in his patched quilt made of every colour and material in the world, sat down in a sunny corner of the very quiet Chubára, and, resting his arm on his short-handled crutch, waited for death. The people brought him food and little clumps of marigold flowers, and he gave his blessing in return. He was nearly blind, and his face was seamed and lined and wrinkled beyond belief, for he had lived in his time which was before the English came within five hundred miles of Dhunni Bhagat's Chubára.