

SELECTION I.

THE STORY OF NALA AND DAMAYANTĪ.

§ 1. The trend of Aryan migration in India has been from the extreme north-west to the south-east, across the region drained by the Indus and its affluents, and called the Panjāb or Land of the Five Rivers; and again south-east, down the valleys of the Jumna and Ganges. One prominent group of Aryan immigrant tribes was that of the Kosalas, Videhas, and Magadhas, who settled in the *lower* valley of the Ganges, *east* of its confluence with the Jumna, in the districts now named Oudh and Behar, the Palestine of Buddhism.

§ 2. Another group of tribes had their home on the upper Indus, in the north-west of the Panjāb. Theirs was the religion and civilization of which the Vedas are the monument. Later we find them advancing south-eastward, and establishing themselves on the *upper* course of the Jumna and Ganges, in Madhya-deśa, The Mid-Land. Foremost among them are the tribes of the Bhāratas, the Kurus, and the Panchālas. Here arose the system of Brahmanism; here the simple nature-religion of the Vedas developed into a religion of priests and sacrifices; here the Bhāratas attained a kind of religious primacy and the lustre of a great name, although gradually merging their tribal individuality with that of kindred tribes; here were fought the battles of the Bhāratas; and here, to ever-ready listeners, in school or forest-hermitage, at a sacrifice or a burial, were told the tales of these battles and their heroes. These are the tales that form the nucleus of the Great-Bhārata-Story (*mahā-bhārata-ākhyāna*, or, more briefly), the Mahā-bhārata.

§ 3. These tales were probably first circulated in prose, until some more clever teller put them into simple and easily-remembered metrical form. The date of these first simple epics we do not know. They may well have existed several centuries before our era; but neither their language nor the notices of the Greeks afford any satisfactorily direct evidence upon the subject. Around this nucleus have been grouped additions,—historical, mythological, and didactic,—until the Great-Bhārata, as we now have it, contains over one hundred thousand distichs, or about eight times as much as the Iliad and Odyssey together.

§ 4. Only about one-fifth of the whole poem is occupied with the principal story. This, in the briefest possible summary, is as follows. The two brothers, Dhritarāshtra and Pāndu (*dhr̥ta-rāṣṭra*, *pāṇḍu*), were brought up in their royal home of Hastinā-pura, about sixty miles north-east of modern Delhi. Dhritarāshtra, the elder, was blind, and so Pāndu became king, and had a glorious reign. He had five sons, chief of whom were Yudhishtira, Bhīma, and Arjuna. They are called Pāndavas, and are the types of honor and heroism. Dhritarāshtra's hundred sons, Duryodhana and the rest, are usually called the Kuru princes, and are represented as in every way bad. After Pāndu's death, his sons are brought up with their