

neither slaves, chariot, brother, nor friend was left him; but thou art surrounded by heroes, brothers, and friends, and oughtest not to grieve." Thereupon Yudhishtira begs him to relate the story at length. Accordingly, to console the king, and to show him that there is hope of regaining his kingdom, just as Nala regained his, Brihadaçwa begins as in the extract given in the Reader (1³).

§ 11. CHAPTER 1. Nala was a prince of Nishadha. Damayanti was the lovely daughter of Bhīma, the king of Vidarbha. By the miraculous interposition of swans, the prince and princess become mutually enamored.

§ 12. CHAP. 2. Bhīma accordingly holds a swayamvara ('self-choice') for her. The neighboring kings are invited, and she is permitted to choose for herself her husband from them. The chief gods hear of it and determine to go also. On their way, they meet Nala, who is bound on the same errand.

§ 13. CHAP. 3. The gods request Nala to sue for them. Reluctantly consenting, he enters the chamber of the princess and tells how the gods desire her hand.

§ 14. CHAP. 4. Damayanti refuses to listen to the arguments in favor of the gods. She desires that the swayamvara be held in the usual form, and that the gods be present, and informs Nala that she intends to show openly her preference for him. All this Nala reports to the gods.

§ 15. CHAP. 5. The gods and kings assemble. The four chief gods assume the appearance of Nala. Unable to distinguish the real Nala, the princess, distressed, prays to the gods, and they, in answer, resume their proper forms and peculiar attributes (see 14¹² N.). Thereupon she chooses Nala. The kings express their sorrow, and the gods their delight. The gods give Nala the magic power of having fire and water whenever he wishes, and a wonderful skill in cookery. The wedding-feast is celebrated. Nala returns to Nishadha with his bride. They live happily, and have a son and daughter. — Here the extract in the Reader ends.

§ 16. CHAPTERS 6–26. These tell of Nala's misfortunes, and their final happy issue. He loses everything, even his kingdom, by gambling, and wanders, hungry and half naked, in the forest. He is transformed into a dwarf, and becomes charioteer of Rituparna, king of Oudh. Damayanti, at her father's in Kundina, is led by certain tidings to suspect that Nala is at Oudh. By way of stratagem, she holds out hopes of her hand to Rituparna, if he will drive from Oudh to Kundina, some five hundred miles, in a single day, knowing well that only Nala's skill in horsemanship (see 1⁴) is equal to this task. Rituparna gets Nala to drive him thither through the air. Nala receives as reward perfect skill in dicing. His wife recognizes him by his magical command of fire and water, and by his cooking. He resumes his true form, plays again, and wins back all he had lost, and lives happy ever after.*

§ 17. When Brihadaçwa had finished the story of Nala, Yudhishtira, pleased, asked him for perfect skill in dicing; and the hermit, granting him his prayer, departed.

§ 18. This story is unquestionably one of the oldest and most beautiful episodes of the Mahā-bhārata. It was extremely popular in India; and to this is due the fact that it escaped the bad influence of Vishnuism, whose adherents have worked over the vast epic, changing and interpolating, and always for the worse.

* The student may read the entire story in any of the numerous translations — by Milman, Bopp, Rückert, and others. The most easily obtained is the very spirited English rendering of Edwin Arnold, in his *Indian Idylls*, Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1883, §1.00.