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THE
Ramayana
OF
- - - **Valmeeki**
RENDERED INTO ENGLISH
WITH EXHAUSTIVE NOTES

BY

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PREFACE

The Ramayana of Valmeeki is a most unique work.

The Aryans are the oldest race on earth and the most advanced ; and the Ramayana is their first and grandest epic.

The Eddas of Scandinavia, the Niebelungen Lied of Germany, the Iliad of Homer, the Enead of Virgil, the Inferno, the Purgatorio, and the Paradiso of Dante, the Paradise Lost of Milton, the Lusiad of Camoens, the Shah Nama of Firdausi are Epics—and *no more* ; the Ramayana of Valmeeki is an Epic—and *much more*.

If any work can claim to be the Bible of the Hindus, it is the Ramayana of Valmeeki.

Professor MacDonell, the latest writer on Samskritha Literature, says :—

“ The Epic contains the following verse foretelling its everlasting fame :—

*As long as mountain ranges stand
And rivers flow upon the earth,
So long will this Ramayana
Survive upon the lips of men.*

This prophecy has been perhaps even more abundantly fulfilled than the well-known prediction of Horace. No product of Sanskrit Literature has enjoyed a greater popularity in India down to the present day than the *Ramayana*. Its story furnishes the subject of many other Sanskrit poems as well as plays and still delights, from the lips of reciters, the hearts of the myriads of the Indian people, as at the

great annual Rama-festival held at Benares. It has been translated into many Indian vernaculars. Above all, it inspired the greatest poet of medieval Hindustan, Tulasi Das, to compose in Hindi his version of the epic entitled *Ram Charit Manas*, which, with its ideal standard of virtue and purity, is a kind of Bible to a hundred millions of the people of Northern India."—*Sanskrit Literature*, p. 317. So much for the *version*.

It is a fact within the personal observation of the elders of our country, that witnesses swear upon a copy of the *Ramayana* in the law-courts. Any one called upon to pay an unjust debt contents himself with saying, "I will place the money upon the *Ramayana*, let him take it if he dares." In private life, the expression, "I swear by the *Ramayana*," is an inviolable oath I know instances where sums of money were lent upon no other security than a palm leaf manuscript of the *Ramayana*—too precious a Talisman to lose When a man yearns for a son to continue his line on earth and raise him to the Mansions of the Blessed, the Elders advise him to read the *Ramayana* or hear it recited,—or at least the *Sundarakanda*. When a man has some great issue at stake that will either mend or mar his life, he reads the *Sundarakanda* or hears it expounded. When a man is very ill, past medical help, the old people about him say with one voice, "Read the *Sundarakanda* in the house and Maruthi will bring him back to life and health" When an evil spirit troubles sore a man or a woman, the grey-beards wag their wise heads and oracularly exclaim, "Ah! the *Sundarakanda* never fails" When any one desires to know the result of a contemplated project, he desires a child to open a page of the *Sundarakanda* and decides by the nature of the subject dealt with therein. (Here is a case in point. A year or two ago, I was asked by a young man to advise him whether he should marry or lead a life

of single blessedness. I promised to give him an answer a day or two later. When I was alone, I took up my Ramayana and asked my child to open it. And lo ! the first line that met my eye was

*Kumbhakarna-siro bhathi
Kundala-lamkritam mahath.*

"The severed head of Kumbhakarna shone high and huge in the heavens, its splendour heightened by the ear-rings he wore."

I had not the heart to communicate the result to the poor man. His people had made everything ready for his marriage. I could plainly see that his inclinations too lay that way. I could urge nothing against it—his health was good, and his worldly position and prospects high and bright. Ah me ! I was myself half-sceptical So, quite against my better self, I managed to avoid giving him an answer. And he, taking my silence for consent, got himself married Alas ! *within a year* his place in his house was vacant , his short meteoric life was over , his health shattered, his public life a failure, his mind darkened and gloomy by the vision of his future, Death was a welcome deliverer to him , and an old mother and a child-wife are left to mourn his untimely end.

The Karma-kanda of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Smrithis, the Mahabharatha, the Puranas, nay, no other work in the vast range of Samskritha literature is regarded by the Hindus in the same light as the Ramayana The Karma-kanda is accessible only to a very few, an infinitesimal minority of the Brahmanas—the Purohiths who are making a living out of it , and they too know not its meaning, but recite it parrot-like. The Upanishads are not for the men of the world , they are for hard-headed logicians or calm-minded philosophers. The Smrithis are

but Rules of daily life. The Bharatha is not a very auspicious work ; no devout Hindu would allow it to be read in in his house, for it brings on strife, dissensions and misfortune ; the temple of the Gods, the Mathas of Sanyasins, the river-ghauts, and the rest-houses for the travellers are chosen for the purpose. The Bhagavad-geetha enjoys a unique unpopularity ; for, he who reads or studies it is weaned away from wife and child, house and home, friends and kin, wealth and power and seeks the Path of Renunciation. The Puranas are but world-records, religious histories.

But, for a work that gives a man everything he holds dear and valuable in this world and leads him to the Feet of the Almighty Father, give me the Ramayana of Valmeeki.

The Lord of Mercy has come down among men time and oft ; and the Puranas contain incidental records of it short or long. But, the Ramayana of Valmeeki is the *only biography* we have of the Supreme One.

“ Nothing that relates to any of the actors in that great world-drama shall escape thy all-seeing eye—Rama, Lakshmana, Seetha, men and monkeys, gods and Rakshasas, their acts, their words, nay, their very thoughts, known or secret. Nothing that comes out of your mouth, consciously or otherwise, shall prove other than true.” Such was the power of clear vision and clear speech conferred on the poet by the Demiurge, the Ancient of Days.

“ What nobler subject for your poem than Sree Rama-chandra, the Divine Hero, the soul of righteousness, the perfect embodiment of all that is good and great and the Director of men’s thoughts, words and deeds in the light of their Karma ? ” And this Ideal Man is the *Hero of the Epic.*

“ The cloud-capped mountains, the swift-coursing rivers and all created things shall pass a way and be as

nought. But, your noble song shall outlive them and never fade from the hearts of men." This is the boon of immortality the *poem* shall enjoy.

"And as long as the record of Rama's life holds sway over the hearts of men, so long shall you sit by me in my highest heaven." This is the eternity of fame that comes to *the singer* as his guerdon

The Hero, the Epic, and the Poet are the most perfect any one can conceive.

It was composed when the Hero was yet upon earth, when his deeds and fame were fresh in the hearts of men. It was sung before himself. "And the poem they recite, how wonderful in its suggestiveness ! Listen we to it"—such was *his* estimate of the lay.

It was not written, but sung to sweet music Who were they that conveyed the message to the hearts of men ? The *very sons* of the Divine Hero. "Mark you the radiant glory that plays around them ? Like gods than men ! Behold these young ascetics, of kingly form and mien. Rare singers are they and of mighty spiritual energy withal"—and this encomium was from him who is Incarnate Wisdom.

What audience did they sing to ? "Large concourses of Brahmanas and warriors, sages and saints Through many a land they travelled and sang to many an audience.

Thus many a time and oft did these boys recite it in crowded halls and broad streets, in sacred groves and sacrificial grounds. And Rama invited to the assembly the *literati*, the theologians, the expounders of sacred histories, grammarians, Brahmanas grown grey in knowledge and experience, phonologists, musical experts, poets, rhetoricians, logicians, ritualists, philosophers, astronomers, astrologers, geographers, linguists, statesmen politicians, professors of music and dancing, painters

sculptors, minstrels, physiognomists, kings, merchants, farmers, saints, sages, hermits, ascetics”

What was the effect produced on the hearers?

“And such the perfectness of expression and delicacy of execution, that the hearers followed them with their hearts and ears, and such the marvellous power of their song, that an indescribable sense of bliss gradually stole over them and pervaded their frame and every sense and faculty of theirs—strange, overpowering and almost painful in its intensity.”

What was the critical estimate of the audience?

“What charming music! what sweetness and melody of verse! And then, the vividness of narration! We seem to live and move among old times and scenes long gone by.. .

A rare and noble epic this, the Ramayana of honeyed verses and faultless diction, beautifully adapted to music, vocal or instrumental and charming to hear, begun and finished according to the best canons of the art, the most exacting critic cannot praise it too highly, the first of its kind and an unapproachable ideal for all time to come, the best model for all future poets, the thrice-distilled Essence of the Holy Scriptures, the surest giver of health and happiness, length of years and prosperity, to all who read or listen to it. And, proficients as ye are in every style of music, marvellously have ye sung it.”

But what raises Ramayana from the sphere of literary works into “a mighty repository of the priceless wisdom enshrined in the Vedas?” The sacred monosyllable, the Pranava, is the mystic symbol of the Absolute, the Gayathri is an exposition of the Pranava, the Vedas are the paraphrase of the Gayathri, and the Ramayana is but the amplification of the Vedic mysteries and furnishes the key thereto. Each letter of the Gayathri begins a thousand of its stanzas.

The poem is based upon the hymns of the Rig-veda aught to the author by Narada. For, it is not a record of incidents that occurred during a certain cycle; it is a symbolical account of cosmic events that come about in every cycle with but slight modifications, Rama, Seetha, Ravana and the other characters in the Epic are *archetypes and real characters*—a mystery within a mystery. The numerous “Inner Meanings” of the Ramavana (vide *Introduction*) amply bear out the above remarks.

There is not one relation of life, private or public, but is beautifully and perfectly illustrated in the words and deeds of the Ramavana characters (vide *Introduction* ‘The Aims of Life’).

It is not a poem of any one world-asset, it must find a place in every country, in every town, in every village and in every house.

The Ter

(a). *The Bengal recension*. Charles Sardinia, helped Gorresio to bring of it in 1867.

(b) *The Benares recension*. Between 1805—1810, Carey and Marshman, the philanthropic missionaries of Serampore, published the text of the first two kandas and a half. In 1846, Schlegel brought out an edition of the text of the first two kandas. In 1859, the complete text was lithographed at Bombay, and in 1860, a printed edition of the same appeared at Calcutta.

(c) *The South Indian recension*—While the first two recensions are in Devanagari, this exists in the Grantha characters or in the Telugu. This was unknown to the west and to the other parts of India until 1905, when Mr. T. R. Krishnacharya of Kumbakonam, Madras Presidency,

conferred a great boon upon the literary world by publishing a fine edition of it in Devanagari (1905). The earliest Grantha edition was published in Madras in 1891 by Mr. K. Subramanya Sastry, with the commentaries of Govindaraja, Mahesa-theertha, Ramanuja, Teeka-siromani and Peria-vachchan-Pillai. Mr. Raja Sastry of Madras has almost finished another edition of the same (1907), supplementing the above commentaries with that of Thilaka (till now accessible only in Devanagari). It shows a considerable improvement in the matter of paper, type, printing and get-up. Meanwhile, Mr Krishnacharya has begun another beautiful edition of his text (1911) with the commentary of Govindaraja and extracts from Thilaka, Theertheeya, Ramanujeeya, Sathyadharma-theertheeya, Thanisloki, Siromani, Vishamapada-vivriti, Kathaka, Munibhavaprakasika etc. It will, when completed, place before the world many a rare and priceless information inaccessible till now.

Commentators

1. *Govindaraja*. He names his work the *Ramayana-Bhooshana* "an ornament to the Ramayana," ; and each kanda furnishes a variety of it — the anklets, the silk-cloth, the girdle, the pearl necklace, the beauty-mark between the eye-brows, the tiara and the crest-gem. He is of the Kausikas and the disciple of Sathakopa. The Lord Venkatesa appeared to him in a dream one night while he lay asleep in front of His shrine on the Serpent Mount and commanded him to write a commentary on the Ramayana ; and in devout obedience to the Divine call, he undertook the task and right manfully has he performed it. It is the most comprehensive, the most scholarly and the most authoritative commentary on the Sacred Epic, albeit his zealous Vaishnavite spirit surges up now and then in a hiatus Siya and the Saivites. Priceless gems of traditional interest

pretations and oral instructions are embedded in his monumental work.

2. *Mahesa-theertha*. He declares himself to be the pupil of Narayana-theertha and has named his work *Ramayana-thathva-deepika*. "I have but written down the opinions of various great men and have nothing of my own to give, except where I have tried to explain the inner meaning of the remarks made by Viradha, Khara, Vali and Ravana". In fact, he copies out the commentary of Govindaraja bodily. He quotes Teeka-siromani and is criticised by Rama-panditha in his *Thulaka*.

3. *Rama-panditha*. His commentary, the *Ramayana-thilaka*, was the only one accessible to the world (outside of southern India), being printed in Devanagari characters at Calcutta and Bombay. He quotes from and criticises the *Ramayana-thathvadeepika* and the *Kathaka*, but makes no reference to Govindaraja. It may be that work of the latter, being in the Grantha characters, was not available to him in Northern India; and Theertha might have studied it in the South and written his commentary in the Devanagari. Rama-panditha is a thorough-going, uncompromising Adwaithin, and jeers mercilessly at Theertha's esoteric interpretations. In the Grantha edition of the Ramayana, the Uthtnarakanda is commented upon only by Govindaraja and Theertha ; but, the Devanagari edition with the commentary of Rama-panditha, contains word for word, without a single alteration, the gloss of Mahesatheertha " I have tried in vain to explain or reconcile this enigma. But, the Adwaithic tenor of the arguments and the frequent criticisms of Kathaka, savor more of Rama-panditha than of Theertha.

4. *Kathaka*. I have not been able to find out the author of the commentary so named, which exists only in the extracts quoted in the *Thulaka*.

5. *Ramanuja.* He confines himself mainly to a discussion of the various readings of the text. What commentary he chances to write now and then, is not very valuable. He is not to be confounded with the famous Founder of the Visishtadwaita School of Philosophy.

6. *Thanisloki.* Krishna-Samahvaya or as he is more popularly known by his Tamil cognomen, Peria-vachchan Pillay, is the author of it. It is not a regular commentary upon the Ramayana. He selects certain oft-quoted stanzas and writes short essays upon them, which are much admired by the people of the South, and form the cram-book of the professional expounder of the Ramayana. It is written in Manipravala—a curious combination of Samskritha and Tamil, with quaint idioms and curious twists of language. Many of the explanations are far-fetched and wire-drawn and reveal a spirit of Vaishnavite sectarianism.

7. *Abhaya-pradana-sara.* Sree Vedantha-desika, the most prominent personage after Sree Ramanuja, is the author of this treatise. It selects the incident of Vibheeshana seeking refuge with Rama (Vibheeshana-saranagathi) as a typical illustration of the key-note of the Ramayana—the doctrine of Surrender to the Lord, and deals with the subject exhaustively. It is written in the Manipravala, as most of his Tamil works are.

Translations

Gorresio published an Italian rendering of the work in 1870. It was followed by the French translation of Hippolyte Fauche's. In the year 1846, Schlegel gave to the world a Latin version of the first Kanda and a part of the second. The Serampore Missionaries were the first to give the Ramayana an English garb ; but they proceeded no further than two Kandas and a half. Mr. Griffith, Principal of the Benares College, was the first to translate the

Ramayana into English verse (1870—74). But, the latest translation of Valmeeki's immortal epic into English prose is that of Manmathanath Dutt, M. A., Calcutta (1894).

"Then why go over the same ground and inflict upon the public another translation of the Ramayana in English prose?"

1. Mr. Dutt has translated but the text of Valmeeki and that almost too literally ; he has not placed before the readers the priceless gems of information contained in the commentaries.

2. The text that, I think, he has used is the one published with the commentary of Rama-panditha, which differs widely from the South Indian Grantha text in readings and in the number of stanzas and chapters.

3. More often than once, his rendering is completely wide of the mark. (It is neither useful nor graceful to make a list of all such instances. A careful comparison of his rendering with mine is all I request of any impartial scholar of Samskritha).

4. I venture to think that his translation conveys not to a Westerner the beauty, the spirit, the swing, the force and the grandeur of the original.

5. Even supposing that it is a faultless rendering of a faultless text, it is not all that is required.

6. As is explained in the Introduction, the greatness of the Ramayana lies in its profound suggestiveness ; and no literal word-for-word rendering will do the barest justice to it.

7. Many incidents, customs, manners, usages and traditions of the time of Rama are hinted at or left to be inferred, being within the knowledge of the persons to whom the poem was sung ; but to the modern world they are a sealed book.

8. Even such of the above as have lived down to our times are so utterly changed, altered, modified and over-laid by the accretions of ages as to be almost unrecognisable.

9. The same incident is variously related in various places.

Every one of the eighteen Puranas, as also the Mahabharatha, the Adhyathma Ramayana and the Ananda Ramayana, relates the coming down of the Lord as Sree Rama, but with great divergences of detail ; while the Padmapurana narrates the life and doings of Sree Rama in a former Kalpa, which differs very much in the main from the Ramayana of Valmeeki. The Adbhutha Ramayana and the Vasishtha Ramayana deal at great length with certain incidents in the life of Rama as are not touched upon by Valmeeki ; while the Ananda Ramayana devotes eight Kandas to the history of Rama after he was crowned at Ayodhya. Innumerable poems and plays founded upon Valmeeki's epic modify its incidents greatly, but base themselves on some Purana or other authoritative work.

10. Many a story that we have heard from the lips of our elders when we lay around roaring fires during long wintry nights and which we have come to regard as part and parcel of the life and doings of Rama, finds no place in Valmeeki's poem.

11. The poem was to be recited, not read, and to an ever-changing audience. Only twenty chapters were allowed to be sung a day, neither more nor less. Hence the innumerable repetitions, recapitulations and other literary rapids through which it is not very easy to steer our frail translation craft. The whole range of Samskritha literature, religious and secular, has to be laid under contribution to bring home to the minds of the readers a fair and adequate idea of the message that was conveyed to humanity by Valmeeki.

12. A bare translation of the text of the Ramayana is thus of no use—nay, more mischievous than useful, in that it gives an incomplete and in many places a distorted

view of the subject. It is to the commentaries that we have to turn for explanation, interpretation, amplification, reconciliation and rounding off. And of these, the most important, that of Govindaraja, is practically inaccessible except to the Tamil-speaking races of India. The saints of the Dravida country, the Alwars from Sree Sathakopa downwards, have taken up the study of the Ramayana of Valmeeki as a special branch of the Vedantha and have left behind them a large literature on the subject, original and explanatory. The Divya-prabandhas and their numerous commentaries are all in the quaint archaic Tamil style known as Manipravala, and are entirely unknown to the non-Tamil-speaking world. With those teachers the Ramayana was not an ordinary epic, not even an Ithihasa. It was something higher, grander and more sacred. It was an Upadesa-Grantha—a *Book of Initiation*, and no true Vaishnava may read it unless he has been initiated by his Guru into its mysteries. It is to him what the Bible was to the Catholic world of the Medieval Ages ; only the Initiated, the clergy as it were, could read and expound it. Over and above all this, there are many priceless teachings about the Inner Mysteries of the Ramayana which find no place in written books. They form part of the instructions that the Guru gives to the Disciple by word of mouth.

13. Then again, there is the never-ending discussion about the method of translation to be followed. Max-Muller, the Grand Old Man of the Orientalist School opines thus :—"When I was enabled to collate copies which came from the south of India, the opinion which I have often expressed of the great value of Southern MSS. received fresh confirmation. The study of Grantha and other southern MSS. will inaugurate, I believe, a new period in the critical treatment of Sanskrit texts. The rule which I have followed myself, and which I have asked my fellow-translators

to follow, has been adhered to in this new volume also, *viz.* whenever a choice has to be made between what is not quite faithful and what is not quite English, to surrender, without hesitation, the idiom rather than the accuracy of the translation. I know that all true scholars have approved of this, and if some of our critics have been offended by certain unidiomatic expressions occurring in our translations, all I can say is, that we shall always be most grateful if they would suggest translations which are not only faithful, but also idiomatic. For the purpose we have in view, a rugged but faithful translation seems to us more useful than a smooth but misleading one.

However, we have laid ourselves open to another kind of censure also, namely, of having occasionally not been literal enough. It is impossible to argue these questions in general, but every translator knows that in many cases a literal translation may convey an entirely wrong meaning."—Introduction to his Translation of the Upanishads. Part II, p. 13

"It is difficult to explain to those who have not themselves worked at the Veda, how it is that, though we may understand almost every word, yet we find it so difficult to lay hold of a whole chain of connected thought and to discover expressions that will not throw a wrong shade on the original features of the ancient words of the Veda. We have, on the one hand, to avoid giving to our translations too modern a character or paraphrasing instead of translating; while on the other, we cannot retain expressions which, if literally rendered in English or any modern tongue, would have an air of quaintness or absurdity totally foreign to the intention of the ancient poets.

While in my translation of the Veda in the remarks that I have to make in the course of my commentary, I shall frequently differ from other scholars, who have done

their best and who have done what they have done in a truly scholarlike, that is in a humble spirit, it would be unpleasant, even were it possible within the limits assigned, to criticise every opinion that has been put forward on the meaning of certain words or on the construction of certain verses of the Veda. I prefer as much as possible to vindicate my own translation, instead of examining the translations of other scholars, whether Indian or European."— From the Preface to his translation of the *Rig-veda Samhitha*.

In his letter to me of the 26th of January 1892, referring to my proposal to translate the *Markandeya Purana* as one of the Sacred Books of the East, he writes —

"I shall place your letter before the Chancellor and Delegates of the Press, and I hope they may accept your proposal. If you would send me a specimen of your translation, clearly written, I shall be glad to examine it, and compare it with the text in the *Bibliotheca Indica*. I have a MSS. of the *Markandeya-purana*. Possibly the palm leaf MSS. in Grantha letters would supply you with a better text than that printed in the *Bibliotheca Indica*."

But, Mrs. Besant, in her Introduction to 'The Laws of Manu, in the Light of Theosophy. By Bhagavan Das, M. A.,' takes a different view —

"One explanatory statement should be made as to the method of conveying to the modern reader the thought of the ancient writer. The European Orientalist, with admirable scrupulosity and tireless patience, works away laboriously with dictionary and grammar to give an "accurate and scholarly translation" of the foreign language which he is striving to interpret. What else can he do? But the result, as compared with the Original, is like the dead pressed 'specimen' of the botanist beside the breathing living flower of the garden. Even I, with my poor knowledge of Samskrit, know the joy of contacting the pulsing

virile scriptures in their own tongue, and the inexpressible dulness and dreariness of their scholarly renderings into English. But our lecturer is a Hindu, who from childhood upwards has lived in the atmosphere of the elder days ; he heard the old stories before he could read, sung by grand-mother, aunt, and *pandit* ; when he is tired now, he finds his recreation in chanting over the well-loved stanzas of an Ancient Purana, crooning them softly as a lullaby to a wearied mind ; to him the ‘well-constructed language’ (*Samskrīt*) is the mother-tongue, not a foreign language ; he knows its shades of meaning, its wide connotations, its traditional glosses clustering round words and sentences, its content as drawn out by great commentators. Hence, when he wishes to share its treasures with those whose birthright they are not, he pours out these meanings in their richness of content, gives them as they speak to the heart of the Hindu, not to the brain of the European. His close and accurate knowledge of *Samskrīt* would make it child’s play for him to give “an accurate and scholarly translation” of every quotation; he has preferred to give the living flowers rather the dried specimens. Orientalists, in the pride of their mastery of ‘dead’ language, will very likely scoff at the rendering of one to whom it is a living and familiar tongue, who has not mastered *Samskrīt* as a man, but has lived in it from an infant. For these, the originals are given. But for those who want to touch the throbbing body—rather than learn the names of the bones of the skeleton—of India’s Ancient wisdom, for those these free and full renderings are given. And I believe that they will be welcomed and enjoyed.”

The best test of a translation is that it must not at all appear to be a translation. Some hold that a translation must be a guide to the text, a ‘crib’ as it were, and should enable any one ignorant of the original language

to master it easily and sooner. I believe that a translation is meant to convey to a foreigner the thoughts, the ideas and the *heart* of the writer ; it is not to be a dictionary and grammar combined. A faithful translation and a literal are contradictory terms ; no word-for-word, wooden rendering can be any other thing than faithless ; and no good translation can be literal. No two races think alike; the same thought, the same fact requires to be clothed in different words, in different expressions to reach the mind of the hearer. A translation should be faithful not to the words, not to the constructions, not to the grammar of the original, so much as to the *Kavī-hṛidaya*, 'the heart of the poet.' Curious notions of literary accuracy have rendered the translations of the Orientalists perfectly useless. Useless to those ignorant of Samskrīta, in that it places before them strange thoughts and foreign modes of life and speech in an English garb, but not as they speak it, not as they understand it ; useless to the people to whose literature they belong, in that the translators are foreigners.

They have no sympathy with the writer, or with the subject or with the people whose thoughts they attempt to place before the world. They bring to the work a prejudiced heart, a cold hyper-critical intellect, and an iconoclastic pen. Everything that they cannot understand, everything that they cannot reconcile with their preconceived notions of men and things, of God and the Universe, they throw overboard, without a glance at it, without a pang, just as the grave-digger cast aside the skull of Yorick the jester. They fix the correct readings ; they sit in dread judgment over the commentators who were born in and breathed the very atmosphere of the poet and of his nation ; they give the right meaning of words ; they formulate the canons of interpretation ; they judge of the stage of

progress the people might have attained in the march of material civilisation. They fit every event in the life of a non-christian nation to their Procrustean bed of Biblical chronology ; there was no civilisation superior to *their* own ; there was nothing good or noble, spoken or done, before *their* chosen people, the Lord's Elect, came into the world ; nothing is historical to them except *their* own made-up, lame accounts of the last 2,000 years. That is *their* Time ; that is *their* Eternity. They are very wise men—the Orientalists ; they are psychometrical adepts. Place any thing before them, a rag, a thigh-bone, a tooth, a coin, or a piece of stone and they will spin you an interminable yarn of the man, of the beast or of the people—their history physical, mental, moral, political, literary, economic, industrial, religious—as if they were the very Maker of the objects they operate upon. They would search for history in a Book of Sacrificial hymns like the Rig-veda, in Ritualistic Manuals like the Yajur-veda, in a Book of Psalmody like the Sama-veda, in a book of Rimes and Charms, like the Atharva-veda. They would seek for ‘historic finds’ in moral text-books like the Smrithis, in sacred epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha ; nay, they profess to give you the life and thoughts of a nation from its grammar like the Maha-bhashya, from its philosophical works like the Vedantha literature, from its medical books like Vagbhata, Susrutha and Charaka ; and wonderful to relate ! they find history in treatises upon logic like Tarkasangraha, in *mathematical* works like the Leelavathi and the Beejaganitha !! Nothing is too trivial, too humble, too insignificant for them ; their historical appetite is omnivorous.

I would give anything to know what *they* might feel like, if an orthodox Brahmana or a Charvaka Atheist were to

place before the English Christian reading world an English version of the Hebrew Bible ; if he should have the additional advantage of only a nodding acquaintance with the language ; if he should never have set his eye on the people whose revealed Scriptures he professes to further reveal ; if he should never have come across the real Sacred Books of the East ; if he should have come into contact only with the lowest strata of the nation or with unprincipled renegades to the faith of their fathers , if he should not even dream of access to the higher classes, their homes, their life, their words, their acts, their joys, their sorrows, their virtues, their vices, their faith, and their sceptism ; if he should be imbued with a supremely high notion of his omniscience, of his unerring keenness, of his literary infallibility ; if he should take it for granted that *his* race is the chosen one, that *his* religion is the only true one and that the others are false, that *his* people are destined to march for ever in the forefront of civilisation, prosperity and power. Now what would the orthodox English Christian or the devout Bishops and Archbishops think of such a version of the Holy Bible, embellished to boot, with original commentaries, remarks, reconciliations and judgments *ex-cathedra*, based mostly upon the unhealthy fumes of his imagination and prejudices ? How would the English nation like to have *its* history written, say, 5000 years hence, from stray coins, from mouldering skeletons, from moss-covered pieces of stone and architecture, from its 'Book of Common Prayer,' from its 'Book of Psalmody', from the 'Paradise Lost' of Milton, from the 'Holy Living' of Taylor, from Abbott's Shakespearian Grammar, from Jevon's Logic, from Masson's British Philosophy, from Barnard Smith's Arithmetic, from Todhunter's Algebra and Geometry, from Webster's Dictionary, from its scientific, medical, industrial, and

mechanical treatises, and the other decaying rubbish of a forgotten nation buried under the mounds of the Past?

That is exactly how the true Arya feels when he reads translations like that of Max-Muller, Griffith and their ilk or original critical estimates like those of Weber & Co., the Orientalist Iconoclasts. Western historians depict in glowing colors and sneering language how Mahommad of Ghazni destroyed the idol of Somanatha ; but Weber & Co. essay to shatter to pieces *the faith of millions*, their guide here and there hope hereafter. *Well, as he soweth so shall he reap.* My opinion of the whole class and of their Indian parasites is the same as what I expressed in the Preface to my "Life and Teachings of Sree Ramanuja;" and I quote it for the benefit of those who have not come across that book.

"What care I about your coins and inscriptions, your pillars, and mounds, the dry bones of History ? To me it is of far more importance how a man lived and worked among his fellows, than when and where he was born and died, where he was at a particular date, when he wrote such and such a book, whether he was tall or short, dark or fair, single or married, a flesh-eater or a vegetarian, a teetotaller or no, what particular dress he affected, and so on. And yet more important still it is to me what a man thought and wrote, than how he lived and died. Your Orientalists ! Heaven save me from the brood. Mischief enough they have done, those human ghouls that haunt the charnel houses of Antiquity, where rot the bones of men and events of the Dead Past. They have played sad havoc with the fair traditions of our forefathers, that placed ideas before facts and theories, and the development of a nation's heart before 'historical finds' or 'valuable discoveries'. Many a young man of promise they have turned away to

paths uncongenial, where his bray betrays the animal within the skin. You will find no such antiquarian twaddle in my book."

Well do they fit in with the lines of Tennyson.

" Those monstrous males that carve the living hound,
And cram him with the fragments of the grave,
Or in the dark dissolving human heart,
And holy secrets of this microcosm,
Dabbling a shameless hand with shameful jest,
Encarnalize their spirits , " *The Princess*

Gladly would I exchange shiploads of them for one Sir Edwin Arnold.

One more extract, this time from 'The Zanoni' of Lytton and I have done.

" The conduct of the individual can affect but a small circle beyond himself ; the permanent good or evil that he works to others lies rather in the sentiments he can diffuse. His acts are limited and momentary , his sentiments may pervade the universe, and inspire generations till the day of doom. All our virtues, all our laws, are drawn from books and maxims, which are sentiments, not from deeds. In conduct, Julian had the virtues of a Christian, and Constantine, the vices of a Pagan. The sentiments of Julian reconverted thousands to Paganism , those of Constantine helped, under Heaven's will, to bow to Christianity the nations on the earth. In conduct, the humblest fisherman on yonder sea, who believes in the miracles of San Genaro, may be a better man than Luther. To the sentiments of Luther the mind of Modern Europe is indebted for the noblest revolution it has known. Our opinions, young Englishman, are the angel part of us ; our acts, the earthly". *Book I, Chapter 5.*

Alas ! The History of India by the Reverend Dr. Sinclair, is at present more authoritative in the eyes of the school boys than the Ramayana of Valmiki or the Puranas of Vyasa. The History of Samskritha Literature by Messrs.

Max Muller, Weber, Monier Williams, MacDonell, etc., is the last word upon the writings of the Aryans, religious or secular. *Translations* are quoted and the *originals* are decried or are unknown. Verily, we are in the Iron Age, in the everdownward cycle of the Kaliyuga.

I hold that any History of India worth reading ought to be written by a true-hearted Hindu; I hold that the sacred books of the Hindus ought to be translated by a Hindu, by a Brahmana; by one that has faith in the virtues and manhood of his people, in the wisdom and philanthropy of his fore-fathers; by one that combines in himself a deep and comprehensive knowledge of the literature and traditions of his country, and of that to which he means to convey his message—but never one of alien faith, nor a follower of Christianity without Christ, nor an apostate seeking to curry favour with the ruling race and the leaders of Western thought. Now, in the case of the Ramayana of Valmeeki, it is all the more imperative that the Translator should possess the additional qualification of a thorough knowledge of the Tamil religious literature of the Dravidian School of Vaishnavism, that he should have been brought up in and saturated with the atmosphere of those amongst whom the Ramayana is recited and listened to with profound faith and devotion and to whom it is not a bare literary work but a living reality, a sacred Book, one that can mould their life here and hereafter.

As to the cobwebs of Western speculation about the historical value of the Ramayana, its date, the contemporary mention of it, the critical biography of the poet, its posteriority or otherwise to the Mahabharatha, its being a Zodiacial allegory or an account of the spread of the conquering Aryans into the South of India, about Rama being the type of the husbandman and Seetha being a symbol of agriculture and such-like Orientalist twaddle run riot, I have my

own opinion, certainly not creditable to them or to their authors. It is an open secret how History is written. The Boer war is within the memory of most of us; but, I have seen three diametrically different versions of it. The most important elements of a man's life or of a nation's are their thoughts. And History, to deserve its reputation of being "Philosophy teaching by example", should record *them* alone and not dry facts and dates. The history of western nations do not run back, honestly speaking, farther than 2,000 years ; and huge libraries are already filled to overflowing with the records of that small period. The Aryans, who have, as we believe, existed as a separate race on this planet for over 5 millions of years, can but afford to preserve *their highest and most valuable thoughts*. *That forms their History* and is inextricably woven into their religion, morality and philosophy *That* is "Philosophy teaching by example," and *no other*.

Is the Ramayana historically true ? Is it a record of events that actually took place ? The best answer I could make is in the words of the lecturer on the Bhagavad Geetha, Mrs. Besant. Her remarks apply equally well to the Ramayana or to any other Hindu Purana

"Now, in the Bhagavad-Geetha there are two quite obvious meanings, distinct and yet closely connected the one with the other, and the method of the connexion it is well to understand. First, the historical. Now, specially in modern days when western thought is so much swaying and coloring the eastern mind, Indians as well as Europeans are apt to shrink from the idea of historical truths being conveyed in much of the sacred literature ; those enormous periods, those long reigns of kings, those huge and bloody battles, surely they are all simple allegory, they are not history. But what is history and what is allegory ? History is the working out of the plan of the *Logos*, His plan, His

scheme for evolving humanity ; and history is also the story of the evolution of a *World Logos*, who will rule over some world-system of the future. That is history, the life-story of an evolving *Logos* in the working out of the plan of the ruling *Logos*. And when we say *allegory*, we only mean a smaller history, a lesser history, the salient points of which, reflexions of the larger history, are repeated in the life-story of each individual Jivatma, each individual embodied spirit. History, seen from the true standpoint, is the plan of the ruling *Logos* for the evolution of a future *Logos*, manifested in all planes and visible on the physical, and therefore full of profoundest interest and full of profoundest meaning. The inner meaning, as it is sometimes called that which comes home to the hearts of you and me, that which is called the allegory, is the perennial meaning, repeated over and over again in each individual, and is really the same in miniature. In the one, Iswara lives in His world, with the future *Logos* and the world for his body, in the other, He lives in the individual man, with the Jeevatma and its vehicles for His body. But, in both are the one life and the one lord, and he who understands either, understands the twain. None, save the wise, can read the page of history with eyes that see; none, save the wise, can trace in their own unfolding the mighty unfolding of the system in which a future *Logos* Himself is the Jeevatma and that ruling *Logos* is the Supreme Self; and inasmuch as the lesser is the reflection of the greater, inasmuch as the history of the evolving individual is but a poor faint copy of the evolving of the future *Logos*, therefore in the scriptures there is even what we call a double meaning—that history which shows a greater self-evolving, and the inner allegorical meaning that tells of the unfolding of the lesser Selves. We cannot afford to lose either meaning, for something of the richness of the

treasure will thus escape us ; and you must have steadily and clearly in mind that it is no superstition of the ancients, no dream of the forefathers, no fancy of the ignorant generations of far-off antiquity, that saw in the little lives of men reflections of the great Life that has the Universe for its expression. Nor should you wonder, nor be perplexed when you catch, now and again, in that unfolding picture, glimpses of things that, on a smaller scale, are familiar in your own evolving ; and instead of thinking that a myth is a cloudy something which grows out of the history of a far-off individual, exaggerated and enlarged, as is the modern fancy, learn that what *you* call myth is the truth, the reality, the mighty unfolding of the supreme Life which causes the shaping of a Universe ; and that what *you* call history, the story, the story of individuals, is only a poor faint copy of that unfolding. When you see the likeness, learn that it is not the great that is moulded by the small ; it is the minute that is the reflexion of the mighty. And so, in reading the Bhagavad-Geetha, you can take it as history ; and then it is the great Unveiling, that makes you understand the meaning and the purpose of human history, and thus enables you to scan, with eyes that see, the panorama of the great unfolding of events in nation after nation, and in race after race. He who thus reads the Geetha in human history can stand unshaken amid the crash of breaking worlds. And you can also read it for your own individual helping and encouraging and enlightening, as an allegory, the story of the unfolding spirit within yourselves. And I have purposed this morning, to take these two meanings as our special study, and to show how the Geetha as history is the Great Unveiling, the drawing away of the veil that covers the real scheme which history works out on the physical plane ; for it was that which removed the delusion of Arjuna and made him able to do his

duty at Kurukshetra. And then, turning from that vaster plane, to seek its meaning as it touches the individual unfolding of the spirit, we shall see what that has of teaching for us, what that means for us of individual illumination; for just as history is true, so is allegory true. As the history, as we shall see, was the preparation for the India of the present, and the preparation for the India of the future, so also is that true which is elsewhere written in the Mahabharatha . “ I am the Teacher and the Mind is my pupil.” From that standpoint we shall see Sree Krishna as the Jagath-guru, the world-Guru, and Arjuna as the Mind, the Lower Manas, taught by the Teacher. And thus we may learn to understand its meaning for ourselves in our own little cycle of human growth.

Now, an Avathara is the Iswara, the *Logos* of a world-system, appearing in some physical form at some great crisis of evolution. The Avathara decends—unveils Himself would be a truer phrase; ‘decends’ is when we think of the Supreme as though far-off, when truly He is the all-pervasive Life in which we live ; to the outer eye only is it a coming down and descending—and such an Avathara is Sree Krishna. He comes as the *Logos* of the system, veiling Himself in human form, so that He may, as man, outwardly shape the course of history with mighty power, as no lesser force might avail to shape it. But the Avathara is also the Iswara of the human Spirit, the *Logos* of the spirit, the Supreme Self, the self of whom the individual spirit is a portion—an *amsa*. Avathara then is the Iswara of our system; the Avathara also, is the Iswara of the human spirit ; and as we see him in these two presentations, the light shines out and we begin to understand.

Let us take the historical drama, the setting of the great teaching. India had passed through a long cycle of great-

ness, of prosperity. Sree Ramachandra has ruled over the land as the model of the Divine Kingship that guides, shapes, and teaches an infant civilisation. That day had passed. Others had come, feebler to rule and guide, and many a conflict had taken place. The great Kshathriya caste had been cut down almost to the root by the Avathara, Parasu Rama, Rama of the axe; it had again grown up strong and vigorous. Into that India the new manifestation came.

In that part of her story, this first offshoot of the great Aryan Race had settled in the northern parts of India. It had there served as the model, the world-model, for a nation. That was its function. A religion, embracing the heights and depths of human thought, able to reach the ryot in his field, able to teach the philosopher and the metaphysician in his secluded study, a world-embracing religion, had been proclaimed through the lips of the Rishis of this first offshoot of the Race. Not only a religion, but also a polity, an economic and social order, planned by the wisdom of a Manu, ruled at first by that Manu himself. Not only a religion and a polity, but also the shaping of the individual life on the wisest lines—the successive Varnas, the successive Asramas, the stages of life, in the long life of the individual, were marked in the castes, and each caste-life of the embodied Jeevathma reproduced in its main principles, in the individual life, the Asramas through which a man passed between birth and death. Thus perfectly thought out, thus marvellously planned, this infant civilisation was given to the race as a world-model, to show what might be done where Wisdom ruled and Love inspired.

The word spoken out by that ancient model was the word Dharma—Duty, Fitness, Right Order.—*Hints on the Study of Bhagavad-Geetha*, pp. 6—12.

The Ramayana of Valmeeki "is a romance and it is not a romance. It is a truth for those who can comprehend it, and an extravagance for those who cannot."

Out of the vast mass of events in the history of the world, the Guardians of Humanity select only such as are best suited to their purpose and weave around them narratives that stand as eternal symbols of cosmic processes.

To the man of facts and dates, coins and inscriptions, I would recommend the advice given by Tennyson's Ancient Sage to the rationalistic young man.

"The days and hours are ever glancing by,
And seem to flicker past thro' sun and shade,
Or short, or long, as Pleasure leads, or Pain,
But with the Nameless is nor Day nor Hour,
Tho'we, thin minds, who creep from thought to thought,
Break into 'Thens' and 'Whens' the Eternal Now
This double seeming of the single world!—"

To the sceptic, cased in the impenetrable armour of doubt and disbelief, owning no world outside the perception of his unerring senses, who wants to prove everything by the touchstone of his reason before he would deign to allow it a place in his Hall of Knowledge, I say with the Sage that .—

"Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,
Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in,
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one
Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no
Nor yet that thou art mortal—nay, my son,
Thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,
Am not thyself in converse with thyself,
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven, wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith I
She reels not in the storm of wavering words,
She brightens at the clash of 'Yes' and 'No,'
She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,
She feels the Sun is hid but for a night

She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
 • She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
 She hears the lark within the songless egg,
 She finds the fountain where they wail'd 'Mirage' ! "

But, to him who would pierce thro' the exoteric narrative down to the bed-rock of Truth, out of which bubbles ever the Waters of Immortality and Omniscience, to him who would feel the heart-throb of Valmeeki, to him who would understand the mystery of the Divine Incarnation and its sublime purpose, I say :—

" If thou wouldest hear the Nameless, and will dive
 Into the Temple-cave of thine own self,
 There brooding by the central altar, thou
 Mayst haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,
 By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise,
 As if thou knewest, tho' thou canst not know ,
 For Knowledge is the swallow on the lake
 That sees and stirs the surface--shadow there,
 But never yet hath dipt into the abyss,
 The Abyss of all Abysses, beneath, within
 The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,
 And in the million millionth of a grain
 Which cleft and cleft again for ever more,
 And ever vanishing, never vanishes,
 To me, my son, more mystic than myself,
 Or even than the Nameless is to me
 And when thou sendest thy free soul thro' heaven,
 Nor understandest bound nor boundlessness,
 Thou seest the Nameless of the hundred names. "

For, saith the Lord. "He who thus knoweth my divine birth and action in its essence, having abandoned the body. cometh not into birth again, but cometh unto me, O, Arjuna! "—*Geetha IV, 9.*

I have tried my best to be faithful to the original in word and in sentiment wherever it was possible. I have tried to place before his readers the thought that underlay the words of the poet. I have tried to preserve, as far as I could, the force, the beauty and the spirit of the Ramayana, that it may arouse in the hearts of the readers the same sentiments, passions and feelings that well up in the hearts of a

Hindu audience, when it listens to its recital. I have incorporated into the translation of the text, wherever it was necessary, the explanations and the comments of Govindaraja and the other authoritative commentators ; but, where they differed or supplemented one another, I have given the essence of their opinions in the form of Notes. I have drawn from all available sources of information, the Hindi version of Thulasi Das, the Prakrit of Hemachandracharya, the Vedas, the Smrithis, the Puranas, the Darsanas, in fact, the whole range of Samskritha and other literature, as far as was accessible to me. I know that any one who undertakes the translation into English of such colossal works as the Ramayana or the Mahabharatha must have at his disposal a large and well-represented library; I know also that I have neither the means nor the influence to possess it. But, I take this opportunity to render my heart-felt thanks, full and over-flowing, to all such as have helped me by placing their books at my disposal, more especially to the Brahma Vidya Lodge, T.S. Kumbakonam. I know that this enterprise requires a large initial outlay of capital and that I have it not Babu Pratap Chandra Roy, the brave translator of the Mahabharatha, appealed and with success to the various Governments of India, Europe, and America ; Mr. Manmath Nath Dutt, the first translator of the Ramayana into English prose, was favoured with the royal support of His Highness the Maha-raja of Travancore, to whom he dedicated his work.

But my mainstay and support is Sree Ramachandra, whose greatness and glory I humbly endeavour to bring home to the hearts of the millions in the East and in the West. To Him I dedicate, in all humility and reverence, my unworthy production—to Him, to Seetha, to Lakshmana, to Bharatha, to Sathrugnha and last, not least, to Maruthi, the Ideal Rama-bhaktha. In their never-failing grace do

I place my trust to enable me to carry on this work to its completion.

I know, better than others, the shortcomings of my work and of the numerous disqualifications I labour under to do my duty towards it ; and I humbly crave the indulgence of my readers, their sympathy, their support, their advice and their good thoughts.

C. R. SRINIVASA AIYANGAR, B.A.,
TRICHINOPOLY

INTRODUCTION

I :—“*The Ramayana.*”

“The record of the life and adventures of Sri Rama.”

This expression is naturally applicable to all works that treat of Sri Rama , but custom and tradition have limited it to the grand epic of Valmiki.

Words are of three kinds :—*Rudhi*, used in a conventional sense ; *Yaugika*, derivative, retaining that significance which belongs to it by its etymology ; and *Yaugika Rudha*, having both an etymological and special meaning.

Such names as *Krishna* belong to the first class ; *Dasarathu*, the son of Dasaratha, is a type of the second ; *Pankaja*, the lotus, represent the third. The last word, etymologically understood, means “born in the mud ;” but other flowers such as the water-lily are not so called. It is confined by convention to the lotus alone. Even so the expression ‘Ramayana’ Many have sung ‘the Life of Rama,’ but convention restricts it by pre-eminence to the immortal epic of Valmiki alone. The Gita, the Brahma Sutras, The Maha Bhashya and Rama, are by conventional usage and tradition understood to mean respectively, The Bhagavad Gita, The Brahma Sutras of Vedavyasa, the Maha Bhashya of Patanjali and Rama the son of Dasaratha.

II.—‘*The Original.*’

Brahma, the Ancient of Days, sent down Narada to instruct Valmiki in the mysteries of Divine wisdom. Vedic Hymns was the form in which the teaching was imparted. Later on, the Four-faced One came down even unto where Valmiki abode and endowed him with the Open Eye of the Seer. The sage saw with clear vision into the past, the present, and the future, and the record thereof was given to the world in the form of a grand poem of 100 crores of stanzas—*A. R. Manohara Kanda I; A. R. Yatra Kanda I, Adb. R., I.*

Brahma sung the life of Rama in a poem of 100 crores of stanzas and taught it to Narada and the other Rishis of this world—*G. R., Bala Kanda, G in his preface to his ‘Notes on Bala Kanda’*

It contains 9 lakhs of cantos, 900 lakhs of chapters and 100 crores of stanzas—*A. R. Manohara Kanda 17.*

In course of time, the holy sages received the inestimable gift and continued to recite the epic in their hermitages. Countless bands of the Shining Ones gathered overhead in their bright aerial cars and listened entranced to the heart-compelling strains, showers of heavenly flowers rained on the heads of the blessed singers; and shouts of joy and acclamation rent the skies. Then began a mighty struggle among the denizens of the other worlds as to who should have exclusive possession of the sacred epic. The Devas (Angels of Light) would have it in their bright homes on high; the Daityas (the Lords of Darkness) and the Nagas (Dragons of wisdom) would not rest until their nether worlds resounded with the holy chant; but the Sages and Kings of the earth would have parted with their lives sooner. Hot was the discussion between the excited claimants; Brahma the Creator, Siva the Destroyer tried in vain

to arbitrate ; in the end, they and the ambitious aspirants along with them proceeded by common consent to where the Lord Vishnu lay reclined on the folds of the Serpent of Eternity, gently lulled by the throbbing waves of the Ocean of milk. They laid the case before him and besought a way out of the difficulty. Vishnu cut the Gordian knot by dividing the huge work equally and impartially among the three claimants, who, they averred, were all entitled to it.

33 crores, 33 lakhs, 33 thousands, 33 stanzas and 10 letters formed the portion of each. Maha Lakshmi, the Consort of Vishnu, Sesha, the Serpent of Eternity, and Garuda, the divine Bird were initiated by the Lord into the three mighty Mantras (Spells) built up of the last 10 letters above mentioned. Lakshmi shared her knowledge with the Angels on high. Sesha instructed the Dragons and the Asuras in the Nether worlds. From Garuda came the knowledge of the mighty Mantra to the mortals of this Earth. What these mantras are and how they are to be utilised can best be learnt from the Science that treats of them (*The Mantra Sastra*). Thus proceeding, two letters remained undivided and indivisible. Siva requested that they might be his portion. The Holy Name that they expressed, *Rama*, was reverently received by the Lord of the Kailasa ; and for all time he abides at the holy Kasi (Benares), to whisper it into the right ear of those who exchange their mortal tenements for the Robe of Glory ; and it takes them over safely through the tossing waves of material existence on to the shores of the Regions of Light.

Thereafter, the portion of the Earth was further divided among the seven spheres thereof—Pushkara, Saka, Plaksha, Kusa, Krouncha, Salmali and Jambu. Each secured to itself 47,619,047 stanzas ; but 4 remained indivisible. Whereupon. Brahma the Creator begged hard of his father

to be allowed to receive it. Later on, Narada learnt them from him.

"I was before this Universe began and no other. Being and Not-Being are the Kosmic Ultimates ; but beyond them and behind them *I remain*. All else shall pass away and change—all Name and Form ; but, *I remain*. That which presents itself not as Truth, that which manifests itself not as the Self, verily that is Maya, the great Illusion cast upon the Supreme One like a mist, like a pall of darkness. The Great Elements permeate all Name and Form like warp and woof ; but the Manifested and the Unmanifested live in Me and move and have their being. The Supreme is the Life and Light of the Universe ; but for It, it is not. Know thou the above and you know Me". These are the Great Truths.

The inhabitants of the Pushkara Dweepa divided equally their share between the two Varshas (continents) that compose it ; but the nine Varshas of our Jambu Dweepa received 5,291,005 stanzas each and a seven-lettered mantra.—Kuru, Hiranmaya, Ramyaka, Ketumala, Ilavrita, Bhadraswa, Hari, Kimpurusha and Bharata. But the letter 'Sri' that remained, was held in common by the nine Varshas.

Later on, the Lord took form as Veda-Vyasa; the Kaliyuga will see the Brahmanas dull of intellect and short-lived; so, he divided the one eternal Veda (Divine Wisdom) into many branches (Sakhas) to suit their varied capacities. Hence his name Veda-Vyasa, 'He that adjusts or arranges the Vedas'. Further, he took what fell to the Bharata Varsha as its share of the Original Ramayana and based upon it the 17 Puranas, the Upapuranas, and the Maha Bharata. But, his soul knew not peace nor serenity. He sat with an aching heart on the banks of the swift-flowing Sarasvatī

when Narada came unto him and instructed him in the mysteries of the Self as contained in the four stanzas that constituted the Heart of all Wisdom. Veda-Vyasa assimilated it and embodied it in his famous Sri Bhagavatha, the child of his mature wisdom and fullness of peace.

The great sages, that later on gave to the world the various standard works on the Science of words, Astronomy, Astrology, Phonetics, Prosody, the Rules of Ritual and the Vedic glossaries, drew their materials from the Original Ramayana; and there is not an episode, that embodies any truth, moral, social, religious or philosophical, but owes its origin to the same.—*A. R. Yatra Kanda II.*

The Mahabharata has a similar mystery of its own. Vyasa sung it of yore in 60 lakhs of stanzas, 30 of which he Angels kept to themselves ; the Fathers appropriated 15 ; the Rakshasas and the Yakshas had to content themselves with 14 ; while we on this mortal earth were blessed but with the remaining lakh. Vaisampayana has preserved it for us. 24,000 stanzas make up the work, the numerous episodes excluded. But, there exists a compendium of the same in 150 stanzas and it is called the Anukramanika.
—*M. B., I. 1.*

III.—'The Singer.'

Maharshi Valmeeki is held to be the composer of the epic. The name means 'He who sprang out of the ant-hill.' Said Brahma, the Fashioner of the worlds, 'Know this mighty sage as Valmeeki, in as much he has come out of the Valmeeka (the ant-hill),'—*Brahma Kawartha Purana.*

i. "I am the tenth son of Varuna, the Lord of the Waters (or the 10th in descent)"—*V. R. VII. 96,19* ; "Thus was sung the Ramayana by the mighty son of Varuna ; and Brahma signified his glad approval thereof"—*V. R., VII. 10.*

All through the countless years, trees and shrubs sprang around him, while an immense ant-hill arose on all sides, completely concealing him from view. Later on, Varuna, the Lord of the Waters, sent down heavy rains, which dissolved the strange tenement ; coming out of it, the Gods hailed him as the son of Varuna, as Valmeeki.—*Go. on V. R.—I, 1.*

ii. He came of the line of Bhrigu, the son of Varuna. *V. R., VII., 94.*

Riksha of the line of Bhrigu, was later on known as Valmeeki. He held the office of Veda-Vyasa in the 24th Chatur Yuga—*V. P. III, 3.*

iii. He is the son of Varuna and brother of Bhrigu—*Bh., IV. 1.*

iv. He is the same as Riksha, the son of Prachetas of the line of Bhrigu—*V. R. I. 1 (Go.)* He abides in the world of Indra. *V. R. VII. 71—11. ; M. B. II. 7.*

v. Once upon a time, there lived on the shores of lake Pampa, a Brahmana, Sankha by name. Journeying through the pathless woods that covered the banks of the Godavari, a fierce-eyed hunter sprang at him and was not long in transferring to himself the clothes, the ornaments, the water pot and even the leathern sandals of the unfortunate Brahmana. It was mid-summer and the sun was high in the heavens. His pitiless rays beat down upon the head of poor Sankha ; the red-hot sand burnt his tender feet to the very bone. He folded the rags that the cruel mercies of the hunter left him and stood upon them while the forest solitudes resounded with his screams of agony. The iron heart of the hunter grew soft towards him. “ I did right” said he to himself “in depriving the poor fellow of what he had. It is but in the exercise of my duty and hereditary calling; but let me lay

by some small merit by giving him my old sandals." Sankha was profuse in his gratitude " May all good go with you ! Verily, it is some good karma of a past life that put into your head the idea of making a present of a pair of sandals to a poor wayfarer and that, when he is in most need of it." The hunter was curiously affected with the prophetic words of the Brahmana. " Good sir ! May I know what merit I have laid by in a former birth ? " " Alas ! replied Sankha, " the fierce sun almost melts my poor brains. My tongue cleaves to my mouth from dire thirst. Is this a place to dilate upon old-world stories ? Take me to some cool shady spot where I may rest my poor limbs."

A ray of pity illuminated the dark recesses of the hunter's heart. Gently he led Sankha to the cool waters of a lake hard by; and the Brahmana plunged into its welcome depths, performed his midday prayers, offered due worship to the Gods, the Fathers and the Sages. Meanwhile, the hunter busied himself in providing his late victim with sweet fruits and roots ; Sankha partook of them, and quenched his thirst at the limpid lake ; then sought the leafy shade of a hospitable tree where the hunter followed him. " Now will I reveal unto you some glimpses of your chequered past" said Sankha.

" There lived of old a Brahmana, by name Stambha, of the clan of Sri Vatsa. In Sala town he abode and with him his beautiful wife Kantimayee, a model of wifely virtues and whole-hearted devotion ; but, the wayward heart of the man turned away from her ; and he so forgot himself, his manhood and the duty he owed to a lady and his wife, that he installed in his home a harlot, in whose witching smiles he lived. Outraged in everything that a woman holds dear and sacred, Kantimayee yet remained loyal to her unworthy husband ; she was most assiduous in attending to the comforts of the man and

his paramour ; she anticipated their least wishes, supremely content if she could thereby win back her husband's love.

Years passed away thus ; and the wretch suffered the torments of Hell even before he reached it, in the shape of a cruel disease that made his days and nights one long agony. The woman who owned him body and soul, quietly robbed him of what wealth he had and sought another and more congenial companion of her pleasures. He came to know it and in his bitterness of his heart called down the deadliest curses upon the head of the betrayer and upon himself that so basely abused his wife's loyalty and love. "I stand alone in the world and helpless I have wilfully destroyed every chance of deserving any help from you or sympathy. My treatment of you was simply abominable. I placed the harlot in the sacred seat of the wedded wife ; I rejoiced to see the pure hands of my life's partner serve all meekly, the unclean animal I had taken to my heart. Cruel were my words to you and crueler my behaviour. The Holy Books tell us, that the husband who wrings the heart of his loyal wife is doomed to the miserable lot of a eunuch for ten lives and seven ; the finger of scorn will ever point at him. Now, the reed on which I lent has broken and pierced my heart." But Kantimayee lifted hands of appeal to him and cried, "Lord of my heart ! Your handmaiden is ever at your service. She is yours to command—now and ever. You shall not lack for any sympathy or service that my poor self can render. Strange it is that you should feel shame-faced to ask it of me. Never did the slightest shadow of resentment darken my heart against you. As for what you say of my cheerless life, do I not know that I only pay back what I owed in my former birth ? I made my bed and I must lie upon it. And when was a dutiful wife known to be otherwise than loyal and loving to her lord?"

Forthwith she sped to her parents and got from them the wherewithal to provide for his wants and necessities.

One hot day in June, Devala the sage crossed the threshhold of the humble pair and requested hospitality. Kantimayee turned to her husband and said 'This holy man is a master physician. I am sure that he will relieve you of your cruel disease, if he is so-minded'. Thus she played upon his intense selfishness and unconsciously persuaded him to welcome the sage. She washed his scorched feet with cool water, placed a seat for him, fanned his weary limbs ; and when he had rested a while, entertained him with the very best her humble abode afforded. The water that washed his feet she took to her husband and said "This is a very potent medicine and fails not" ; whereat, he eagerly drained it at a gulp.

At last, the disease ate into his vitals and he became delirious with pain she procured some medicine and was trying to force it into his mouth, when the man was seized with terrible convulsions and expired biting off finger of poor Kantimayee. She sold her ornaments and jewellery, bought fragrant wood with it, placed her unworthy husband upon it, set fire to the same and lay by his side in sweet content and supreme peace of heart. She took her place in the House of Glory.

But the dominating tendency of his life asserted itself at the last moment and of the harlot was his last thought. The wheel of Karma has turned and he is now a hunter—the natural foe of the birds of the air and the beasts of the forests. You are no other than that renegade Brahmana. Your partner in iniquity is now born among the hunters and is your wife. Since you consented, unconsciously though, to welcome and entertain the Rishi Devala, a ray of pity, a flash of something noble crossed your dark heart and induced you to relieve my

sufferings and make a gift to me of your old shoes. The holy water that washed the feet of the sage has purified your unclean spirit ; and you have been privileged to hear from me the details of your former life. In your last moments you bit off the finger of your faithful wife; now you live upon the flesh of slain beasts. You died in your bed ; and now the hard earth is your only bed. Nay, I will reveal to you what will befall you hereafter." He opened the eyes of the hunter to his next birth, instructed him in the right way of spending the holy month of Vaisakha. The hunter, now supremely repentant, gave back to his benefactor the articles of which he had dispossessed him and saw him safely out of the dark woods. The unexpected turn thus given to his life was productive of very favourable results.

Krinu, the sage, spent long years of severe austerities on the banks of a beautiful lake. When it was over, his life essence streamed through his eyes ; a serpent swallowed it and the quondam hunter took birth in its womb. A Brahmana by birth, he was brought up by the rude hunters and took to their ways of living. He mated with a woman of the lower classes and had many children through her. He organized a gang of foot-pads, waylaid the travellers and lived upon his ill-gotten gains.

One day, the Seven Sages chanced to pass through the forest. Our Brahmana hunter promptly held them up. "Reverend Sirs! None pass this way without paying me toll. Nay, it is but duty that I owe my wife and my young ones. So I request you to make a transfer of everything valuable you have." The Holy Ones smiled in pity and said, "My good man, please yourself. But do us a slight favour. Go home and put to your wife and children the following question —' You share with me the gains of my calling, do you not ? Well ; doubtless you will take a share of the retribution natural to such a

life of lawlessness and cruelty as I lead.' Fear not, but we will remain here, even until you come back with their answer ; " and they bound themselves thereto by the most solemn oaths. The hunter could not clearly explain to himself what they were after. But such a simple request did not deserve to be refused. So he went home and put the question to his wife and children. But they laughed in his face and cried, "Are you gone mad? Who can deny that we have a right to a share of your earnings? But, as to a share of the results of your crimes, why, the very idea is supremely absurd."

The hunter was dazed with surprise at this outburst of frank selfishness. The holy presence of the Sages purified his nature and brought out its nobler instincts. So, back he sped to where his strange visitors were. Tears of repentance and grief streamed down his rugged face as he clasped their feet and exclaimed in despair, " Lords of Compassion ! blind have I been till now ; a life of cruelty and iniquity did I lead, and went back upon the noble traditions of the Brahmanas, to whom I belong by birth. I have run through the entire gamut of crime. And now I take my refuge in your mercy. Extend the shadow of your protection over me." No other helper have I.

Then they took council among themselves. "Our poor friend is a Brahmana ; but he has chosen to degrade himself and lead a hunter's life. Yet, he seeks refuge of us ; and it behoves us to do something for him. Let us try upon him the effect of the all-potent Name of Sri Rama. He can have no better weapon to fight his past evil." They called him unto them and said, "My good man ! We instruct you in the mystery of a very powerful mantra. But, as you have a long course of purification to go through, you cannot receive it as it is; we shall reverse it for you. Meditate upon it with your heart and soul, day and night, till we come back."

They then whispered into his ears the syllables *Mara* and vanished from his sight.

The hunter planted his staff where they stood a moment ago and sat down there in all earnestness, in all sincerity, to meditate upon the mighty spell. Many thousands of years passed over his head. The world and all it held slipped away from his consciousness. His various bodies were gradually purified of everything gross and material and shone in their splendour and radiance. But there rose around him where he sat, a large ant-hill, that in course of time concealed him from view. The Sages were as good as their word. They came back to where their hunter-disciple sat, lost in profound meditation. "Come out into the living world" called they ; and he came out from the ant-hill. The Sages laid their hands on his head in sweet blessing and said, "Holy One ! The Name of the Lord has consumed your past sins. You have stood face to face with the Great Mystery. You are our equal. A second time were you born when you came out of yonder ant-hill. The world shall know you hence as Valmeeki (Son of the Ant-Hill). "

Thus did Valmeeki narrate the events of his former birth to Him whose life he sung.—*A. R. Rajya Kanda.* 14; *Ad. R. II. 6 ; Bhav. P. III. 10.*

Bhrigu and Valmeeki were the sons of Charshani and Varuna—*Bh. VI. 10.*

IV.—The Number of Stanzas.

The 7 cantos are divided into 500 chapters and 24,000 stanzas. (*V. R. VII. 94*). Govindaraja's commentary extends only to so many ; But, the actual number is 24,253. The commentator explains it thus :—

1. It is many thousands of years since the poem was sung. Innumerable versions of it would naturally have

arisen ; the carelessness of the later copyists might have also contributed to this irregularity.

2. It may be that Valmeeki set himself to sing the epic in 24,000 stanzas ; but, he was obliged to exceed the limit, more especially as it was sung and not written.

3. We ought to take it that 24,000 is the lowest limit. The work would not fall short of it.

4. The Day of Brahma comprises 1,000 Mahayugas. A Manvantara is $1/14$ of it; but Amara Simha, in his Lexicon has it that it comprises 71 Mahayugas, ignoring the fractional portion. Even so, 24 is the nearest total number in thousands, the odd stanzas being ignored. But, as it stands, the South Indian edition in Grantha characters commented upon by Govindaraja contains:

Cantos.		Chapters.	Stanzas.
Balakanda	...	77	2,255
Ayodhyakanda	...	119	4,415
Aranyakanda	...	75	2,732
Kishkindhakanda	...	67	2,620
Sundarakanda	...	68	3,006
Yuddhakanda	...	131	5,990
Uttarakanda	...	110	3,234
		647	24,253

V — When was it sung ?

Valmeeki composed this epic before Sri Rama celebrated his horse-sacrifice. Ravana and his brood had been wiped out.—V. R. I. 4.

Satrughna went to Mathura, killed Lavana in fair fight and ruled for over twelve years in his town. Returning to Ayodhya, he spent a night at the hermitage of Valmeeki ;

when he heard the grand epic sung by Kusa and Lava.—*V. R.* VII. 71.

"Whom shall I give it to" thought Valmeeki ; and it so chanced that the royal twins Kusa and Lava touched his feet and begged to be taught the sacred song.—*V. R.* I. 4.

So Valmeeki must have composed it when Rama held sway at Ayodhya and had put Sita away from himself.

"When the Tretayuga draws to its close and its successor the Dwapara takes its place, in that Twilight of Ages, I come down on earth as Sri Rama, son to Dasaratha, and lift the load of sin and sorrow from her shoulders."—*M. B. Santi Parva* III. 39

VI.—The Epic.

"*This* we should do ; *that* we should not. *This* secures to us happiness here and hereafter ; *that* plunges us in misery now and for ever. *This* is good for us ; *that* is not so." Now, no one denies that such discriminative knowledge is extremely desirable and useful to all that make the journey of life. The Holy Writ (Vedas), the World-histories (Puranas), and the sacred Epics (Kavyas) give us such knowledge, if we but get at their Heart-Doctrine. Every one of these go to develop in us the same faculty of Right Discrimination ; but, there is a difference in the process.

Now, the Holy Writ is almost kingly in its authority. There is no questioning it, no altering it. It must be taken as it is and must be obeyed to the very letter. You may not take out the word *Agni* in a Mantra and replace it by its synonym, say—*Vanh*. Why ? The results predicated would not come about ; nay, evil, and that of no light kind will come out of it. "If a Mantra be not rendered aright in rhythm, intonation or accent, if the letters are misplaced or omitted, the results fail to appear ; and the fool would

have drawn down death upon himself. Behold ! Thwashta sought to create one who *could slay* Indra. But, a slight change of accent and intonation made it to bring into existence one who *was killed* by Indra."—*Sruti*. We may not at present understand the results of each and every commandment ; but we dare not disobey them ; for it will bring forth evil. No one sits down to argue the orders of a general on the battle field or of a king on his throne ; he does not analyse it, examine its legality, morality or philosophic fitness. Even so, study the Holy Writ with care , learn from it what to do and what to avoid. Follow the Right and keep away from the Path of Unrighteousness But, all this is primarily based on an unreasoned desire for happiness and fear of evil.

Now, the World-histories adopt a milder tone. They command not, but offer friendly advice. " This one did right and lived in happiness here and hereafter. This another chose the path of wickedness and came to grief and misery now and beyond." Thus we are led to conclude that Rama should be our ideal and not Ravana. This is the more pleasant way of learning the Rules of Life.

The Epic deals with the question in a different way. It is not the nature of women to wear their hearts on their lips ; but, none the less, they obtain what they want—and very often more. Even so, the epics carry a meaning on their surface ; but, there runs an under current of deep thought and instruction. Lovers of literature seek to pierce through the veil of words into that which lies beneath—the heart of the poet; and once found, it is a perennial source of joy. Hence, the epic is the best teacher of the three.

A perfect Epic is flawless in every way ; it abounds in all excellences ; it has a beauty all its own. Rightly has it been named "The child of the poet's heart."

There are three varieties of it. The Gadya Kavya (narrative prose) of which Kadambā is the type; the Padya Kavya (narrative poetry), represented by Raghuvamsa ; the Chāmpu (narrative prose and poetry), like the Bhojachāmpu.

Man has to hand countless materials that go to build up his Palace of Happiness; even so the Epic. The words and their connotations, these form its body ; the Heart Doctrine is its breath of life ; Metaphor, Simile, Hyperbole and the other Figures of Speech serve to adorn it gaily ; puns, innuendos and the other inferred hints make up its list of personal excellences, bravery, fortitude, valour and the like. Vaidarbhi and the other varieties of diction are its generic attributes and ennable it. Kaisiki and the other modes of style are its graceful motions. The harmonious arrangement of words is known as the Sayya, the soft bed on which it reclines at ease. Fire brings out the sweetness of objects and distil for us their essences ; even so the Pakas, the various Modes of composition. These are the ingredients that heighten the beauty of the Epic.

Words fall into three classes :—

Vachaka, Lakshaka and Vyanjaka; likewise their meanings. The Vachya represents the connotation as laid down in authoritative lexicons. The philosophers hold that the primal words were assigned their respective significance by the Divine Being. The Lakshya seeks an allied and derivative signification where the first fails to be appropriate. The Vyāngya comes to light when the words have been arranged in their grammatical order and have expressed their natural meaning ; it is apart from the above and renders it more graceful and charming. Dhvani is another name for it.

There are numerous Figures of Speech, chief amongst which are a hundred. These do not belie the name given them of Alāmkara (ornamentation). From 'Slesha (the

pun), to Gathi (the way), there are 24 Gunas (attributes) that go to make up the character of the Epic. These are to be found in the arrangement of the words themselves.

Reeti (Diction):—this excellent choice of words is divided into,

Vaidarbhi—difficult word-joinings, harsh letters and long compounds, find no place in it.

Gaudi—long and tedious compounds characterise it and harsh letter.s

Panchali—a happy combination of the above.

Vritti (Style):—the words and the sense aptly render the varying emotions. This is of four kinds.—

Kaisiki—reflecting the higher emotions of Love and Pathos.

Arabhati—painting the Wonderful, the Humourous and the Serene

Satvati—picturing to us the Heroic and the Dreadful.

Bharati—wherein the Terrible and the Repulsive find a voice.

Sayya —the words must be so arranged that their relations might not be far-fetched.

Paka:—unripe fruits are wrapped up in straw or otherwise subjected to the influence of heat to make them soft and mellow.

The nobility and grandeur of composition gives a beauty and charm to the emotions of the heart.

Draksha Paka (the Grape). The grape requires not much effort to make it yield its sweet juice ; so, the piece charms us with its manifold graces even while we read it.

Nalikera Paka (the Cocoanut) You have to painfully remove its hard rind, break through the shell, get at the nut and even then, you have to chew it soft before you enjoy its refreshing juice. Even so, the Epic does not

easily surrender itself to you in all its beauty, but puts you through the veritable Labours of Hercules before it rewards you.

The *grape* melts in your mouth ; the *cocoanut* is hard to crack. Between these are found the *Madhu* (the Honey) the *Ksheera* (the Milk), the *Kadali* (the Plantain), and the like.

The Epic Inferior has no Dhvani to boast of, but the superficial graces of words and their natural meanings. 'Chitra' is another name for it.

The Epic Middling —the natural meaning preponderates while the Dhvani peeps in now and then.

The Epic Superior —the Dhvani is essentially conspicuous and graces the words and their natural significance. Towns, the ocean, mountains, seasons, moonlight, sunrise, pleasant recreations in charming groves, aquatic sports, carousals, love-making, pangs of separation, wedding, birth of a son, councils of state, gambling, military expeditions, battles and the happy times of the hero have each a chapter or more devoted to them. Various feelings and emotions that sway the human heart find perfect expression. The chapters are not long and tedious. The metres used in them are sweet to the ear. Each chapter varies the metre at its close.

This is the Epic Perfect ; and the Ramayana of Valmeeki is its best exponent.

Such a work is a source of joy to us in this world and in the other. "An Epic brings us fame, wealth and worldly wisdom ; it keeps our feet from the Path of Evil ; it needs but be studied to charm ; it ever counsels us aright like a true love."—*Kavya Prakasa*.

"Who will say that the study of noble Epics destroys not the dark brood of sin and evil in us ? Whom does it not

charm ? Whom does it not save from the wiles of wrong?"—
King Bhoja.

The Maha Kavya, the Grand Epic.

The Hero ennobles the Epic. His very name drives away from us the Things of Darkness, and gathers round us the sweet Angels of good. Such a one must be sung of by it.—*Bhamahacharya*

"The Mount Meru towers aloft in greatness and grandeur ; but the Tree of Plenty (Kalpaka) makes it more charming and graceful Figures of Speech, Style, Diction, and Modes do beautify the Epic. But the perfect Hero is its crest-jewel."—*Udbhatacharya*

"An Epic owes its life and fame to its noble Hero."—
Rudra Bhatta.

"The Hero's noble attributes hold together the poet's word-gems that shine for all time around the necks of the lovers of literature."—*Sahitya Meemamsa.*

The poet may be modest of speech and his attainments of no very high order ; but his choice of a Hero compels the attention of the most fastidious—*King Bhoja.*

Else, the wise pay no great heed to them.

The Maha Bharata lives for ever in the hearts of men, only because the Lord Sree Krishna forms its central figure and hero.

The Science of Reasoning finds a place in the life of the Great One, since it affords analogical evidence and inference that the Lord is the instrumental and material cause of the universe.

The Science of Ritual is also useful in this way. One should learn the Holy Writ first and then alone proceed to inquire into the nature of the various Rules of Life laid down therein ; so begins the teaching. It sets itself to bring home to our hearts the Divine attributes and excellencies. It is the hand-maiden of the Royal Science of Self,

The Vedanta, the Science of the Absolute, leads us to the feet of the Supreme One by holding up for our veneration and ideal His countless perfections.

Q. The Monists hold that the Absolute has no attributes. How then can the Science deal with the same? How then can Vedanta profess to expound to us the nature and attributes of Brahman?

A. Though some passages deny any attributes to It, we can yet postulate that the absence of imperfection is perfection. Or, we predicate attributes of It in Its conditioned and manifested aspect. Hence, Sciences and World-histories find a place in the estimation of the Wise and attain deathless fame, in so far as they contribute to unfold to human minds the glory of the Great One.

The Ramayana of Valmeeki is the oldest Epic in the world; and it bids fair to rule the hearts of men to the very end of Time.

He who sung it is throned aloft in the Temple of Fame. And why? Sree Rama, the Supreme One, is the Hero of his immortal poem. He is the noblest of the noble. His Name dispels the Things of Gloom and Darkness and Evil. All excellences find their perfect expression in him. "He who hath not drunk of the beauty of Rama's presence, he upon whom the benign glances of Rama have not rested, even for a while, the world throws him out as a thing peculiarly vile; nay, his very self scorns him."—*V. R. II. 17.*

Of a truth, it is but a waste of time and labour to study poems that come not up to the above level.

The Hero

Fame and valour are his; the Aims of Life lie next his heart; round him centre the chief events; in him shine forth all heroic qualities; and he alone enjoys the supreme good that the poem holds out.

• The Hero must exemplify in himself the following :—

1. High birth (*V. R.* II. 1).
2. His natural beauty, though unadorned, should captivate the hearts of the beholders, even as though it was adorned to perfection.
3. He must hold his head higher than any other ruler of men and should bow to no other.
4. His munificence and generosity must quite overwhelm those that seek him.
5. The grandeur of his presence must illuminate the world, even like the noon-day sun.
6. A right adaptation of means to ends, a marvellous perception, almost intuitive, of the when, the where, and the how, of human actions.
7. A heart ever wedded to the Great Law (*V.R.II.* 2).
8. Divine origin (*V. R.* II. 1).
9. A perfect knowledge and mastery of all the knowledge of his time (*V. R.* II. 2).
10. Supreme simplicity and unassumingness.

The *Hero* is of four kinds —

1. *Dhurodatta*. Joy and sorrow, anger and grief have power to move him not. Deep is his heart beyond ken, even when overwhelming emotions would lay bare its profundity. He would not see any one, man or beast, in pain or grief, but would at once devote himself to relieve it. He is remarkable by the almost utter absence of self. He sees through the Eye of Wisdom and listens through the Ear of Experience. The Heroic emotions dominate in him.

(2) *Dhuroddhata*. Proud and jealous, he is a man of impulses. Of fierce deeds, he boasts of them and of himself, whenever the mood is on him. His knowledge of things enable him to make others see and hear and feel

what he likes. Quick to feel and ready to revenge, the Terrible characterises him.

(3) *Dhira Santa*, Of infinite patience, all griefs touch him and vanish. He has ever a smile and a gentle word for all. The Serene finds its expression in him ; and he is a Brahmana as a rule.

(4) *Dhira Lalita*. He leaves the cares of state and its control to his sons or his ministers. The gentler and finer arts of life occupy his time and attention. A happy life and a quiet is what he aims after. The emotion of Love is the key-stone of his character.

The Rasas (Emotions).

A modification of mental consciousness brought into existence through

(1) *Vibhava* —Youth, beauty, intelligence, the moon-light, the southern zephyr, the spring, the flowers, the joyous notes of birds and the like (*V. R. IV. 1.*)

(2) *Anubhava* —The witching glances of women, the play of their eye-brows, and the like.

(3) *Satvika* —Utter sympathy with others, even to the extent of experiencing in himself their joys and sorrows; and

(4) *Sanchari* :—The minor emotions, 32 in number, from Dispassion to Anxiety.

Nine are the *Rasas*, the flashes that play over the dark waters of the human heart—Love, Humour, Pathos, the Terrible, the Heroic, Fear, the Repulsive, Wonder and Serenity. Man and woman are moved strangely by each other ; and this is known as *Sthayi Bhava*, varying with everyone of the above emotions. But, till it develops into any one of these, the others should not dominate it ; the modifying causes, mentioned above, *Vibhava* and the like, should nourish it and give it an independent existence as a *Rasa*. Man loses himself in the experience of

it. (The above is a very superficial mention of the chief varieties ; but, the reader may profitably consult Dasa Rupaka and other works on Rhetoric).

Love, Valour, the Terrible, the Wonderful and the Serene ought to find a place in any narration of the life of the Hero.

If the above are in any way unsuited to the Hero-type selected ; or if the Hero and the Heroine are wanting in mutual and perfect love ; or if the love of the Heroine stands higher than that of the Hero , or if animals, birds and savages form the subject of narration or description, it is a Perversion of Emotion.

In the Ramayana, Love and the other Emotions find apt and perfect expression. Rama takes Seeta to wife and lives happily with her in his father's capital for many years. The course of true love runs smooth here. Ravana kidnaps her, and then we have a fine description of the miseries of separated lovers. The episode of Surpanakha is a fine touch of humour. Dasaratha pines away of sorrow, having lost, through his own folly, the son of his heart, Pathos, supreme and touching, characterises the entire scene. Lakshmana's deeds of valour illustrate the Heroic in man. Ravana and his impious brood, with their cruelties, their savage grandeur and their unbounded might, voice forth the Terrible. The incident of Mareecha and his kin is a fine picture of the Fearful. Kabandha, Viradha and their fellow-monsters, appropriate to themselves the Repulsive. Wonderful past belief are the deeds of battle and might of Ravana, Indrajit, Kumbhakarna and the like ; and Sabari, the woman-saint, embodies the Serene in her noble life. But, Love in its myriad aspects dominates the epic throughout ; the other emotions are but auxiliary. Some hold that the epic is titled ' The Fall of Ravana ' and that the Heroic is the master-emotion, while the others are but secondary. Others contend

that Valmeeki named his grand-work the *Seetacharitra* and Grief forms the key-note of the whole, while the others are its complements.

The Heroine.

She partakes to a very great extent of the excellent characteristics of the Hero, in so far as they are applicable to women. Her very name must be a Word of Power to keep away evil and attract the Angels of Light. (For a fuller description of the heroine and her innumerable varieties, *Dasa Rupaka* and other standard works on the Poetics may be consulted).

VI.—The Aims of Life.

"An Ithihasa should take as its subject some famous episode of the Past ; it should lead us to the realisation of Virtue, Wealth, Love and Beatitude" says the *Sabdasthoma*. The only World-records that come up to the mark are the *Ramayana* of Valmeeki, the *Mahabharata* of *Veda-vyasa* and the *Samhita* of *Gargacharya*.

Valmeeki divides his grand epic into the *Purvakanda*, narrating the life and adventures of Sree Rama, the Divine Incarnation ; and the *Uttarakanda*, where Vasishtha initiates Sree Rama into the Science of Brahman. The former inculcates virtue, wealth and love , the latter forms the Light on the Path of Perfection.

Virtue consists in the proper discharge of duties that are consonant to the Holy Books, that do not militate against the Right, and that mark the stage of Evolution the Jeeva has reached.

Wealth is the acquisition and the enjoyment of the goods of this world, power, place, fame, authority, influence and the like.

Love is the master-passion that draws man and woman to one another.

Now, Valmeeki has utilised the various incidents in his epic to exemplify the workings of the above. A father's word is a law to the son; to discharge it to his very best is his duty ; right or wrong, pregnant with weal or woe, he may not stop to consider ; and Rama renounced, with a glad heart, the mighty empire that was his by right and exiled himself to the lonely woods.

Brotherly love, almost ideal, and the attitude of the youngers towards the eldest, no where finds more touching expression than in the relations of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrughna to one another.

A wife's place is ever by the side of her husband. Sunshine or rain, joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, she should ever share it with him; and Seeta is the ideal wife for all time.

Sages, hermits, and holy men form the life and soul of a people ; and a king's highest duty consists in seeing that they want for nothing and are protected against everything that might interfere with the proper discharge of their noble trust. Rama passed his word to the saints of Dandaka and laid low Viradha, Kabandha, Ravana and the other workers of evil.

Kings and Emperors in the pride of their power and might, are as nothing before the spiritual glory of a Brahmana; the superhuman efforts of Visvamithra and the humble reverence paid by Sree Rama, the Divine king, to the pure and the holy Ones are a lesson for all mankind.

Strength and power, wealth and valour far above the human, and fierce embattled hosts countless as the sands of the ocean, are as nothing, if the possessor thereof turns away from the Path of Right to work evil upon the good and the wise and uproot the foundations of Law and Justice ; and the dreadful fate that overtook Ravana and the millions that owned his sway, is a warning not to be despised.

Virtue ever outweighs wealth in the estimation of the good ; Rama gave up, with a joyful heart, the kingdom of the Ikshvakus and the wealth of the earth.

Any service rendered to us, be it the slightest, should ever bear fruit in us, even like the seed of the spreading banyan. Jatayu, the Vulture-King, defended Seeta with his life; and Rama, the incarnation of the Divine, rendered unto him the last offices and passed him on to the Worlds of Light.

Sugreeva offered him his friendship, consolation and help, when Rama wandered, heavy of heart and sore of foot, in the frightful solitudes of Dandaka ; he preserved for him the ornaments that Seeta threw down to him when she was spirited away by Ravana , in return, Rama gave him back his wife and a kingdom along with her.

Vibheeshana, sore afflicted and pierced to the heart by the cruel words of his brother, sought refuge with Rama ; length of life beyond that of mortals and unbounded sway over the Rakshasas of the world were his reward.

Love should be ever in consonance with Virtue and Law ; else, it is sweet poison. Dasaratha laid his manhood at the feet of the imperious Kaikeyi, exiled his noble son to the dreadful forests even in the prime of his youth ; and—the slave of Love paid for it with his life. Rama yielded to the importunities of Seeta to chase the golden deer and—lost her. Vali deprived his brother of his wife, all unjustly and in hasty wrath, and—his life was the forfeit. Ravana laid violent hands on Seeta and—doomed himself to destruction, root and branch.

True it is there are only some episodes in it that place our feet on the Path of Liberation ; but, the mystery of Man, the Universe and the Absolute, the various Paths that lead to It do not find a prominent place in it. The Uttarakanda or as it is better known, the Vasishtha Ramayana, deals with it in its entirety. The Poorvakanda was taught to the royal

youths Kusa and Lava ; and the Science of Self may not be properly expounded therein. It is divided into six cantos of 24,000 stanzas; the sixth is further divided into the Poorva (Yuddha) and the Uttarakandas. The spiritual teachings in the Ramayana are given by Valmeeki to Bharadwaja. It is a monumental work by itself. It is arranged into six Kandas of 32,000 stanzas, the last canto being divided into the Poorva and the Uttara. It is more popularly known as Gnana Vasishtha Ramayana and the Yoga Vasishtha Ramayana. There are no grounds to class this among the minor Puranas, as some have done.

VII. *Its divine origin.*

The Almighty Father sat on His Throne of Glory in the highest heavens. His consorts—Sree, Boomi and Neela (Divine Energies)—graced His side. The Angels of Light and the Emancipated Souls thronged the Divine Presence, singing His glories. But, the Lord's look was far away, to where His children groped in darkness on this mortal earth. "Ah me, the pity of it! they are as well entitled to be in my presence as any of these , but, they will not. As the grains of gold in the ball of wax, they are swirled among the waves of Matter and are lost." And out of the depths of His infinite compassion towards those poor souls ever bound to the Wheel of Time, He provided vehicles of manifestation to them, that might dedicate them to His service and thereby reach His feet. Yet, they *would* not be saved. A poor wretch was wringing his hands in despair on the banks of a torrent roaring in its flood. A kind soul took pity on him and gave him a boat well-furnished, saying, " My good man ! weep not. Take this boat of mine, and cross over to yonder bank swiftly and in safety." The poor wretch was profuse in his thanks ; he jumped into the boat and set her head against the current. But, alas ! when he was on the safe

side of the stream, his evil genius put it into his head to go along with the current, to where the river shattered itself to pieces over a sheer wall of rock and lost itself in the abyss below. Even so, the children for whom His heart bled misused the means of salvation so mercifully furnished them and were engulfed in the Quicksands of Pleasure. Then the Lord said to Himself, "Poor things ! they have no means of following the Right and keeping away from the Wrong"; and He gave them His commandments—*The Vedas*.

Yet, his children *would* not be saved. They failed to construe the Holy Books aright ; they misunderstood it ; they perverted its purpose. Then, like a king who sets out to reclaim his rebellious subjects by the might of his presence, He chose to come down from his Worlds of Light down to this dark dull Earth and resolved to take birth as Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrughna; for, Example is better than Precept. The king sets the pace and his subjects do but follow him. Meanwhile, Brahma and the bright Gods had sought his protection from the terrible Rakshasas that hung like a pall of darkness over the worlds. Dasaratha had gone through untold austerities to have the privilege of being His earthly father. Further, has he not promised to all beings, "I come down among you in every cycle to lay low the wicked, exalt the righteous and to restore the Great Law." As Rama, he rid the worlds of Ravana and was a type of filial duty. As Lakshmana, he killed Indra jit and lived out a life of sweet service to the Lord. As Bharata, he destroyed the wicked Gandharvas and made his life a touching lesson of supreme surrender to the Lord; and as Satrughna, he rid the earth of Lavana and illustrated in his life the noble doctrine of absolute service to the Lord's Elect.

Brahma, the Fashioner of the Worlds, ever intent upon the welfare of all beings, thought it a duty and a privilege to preserve for all time the grand Truths so taught

and so lived. He sung the Life of Sree Rama, in 100 crores of stanzas ; Narada and the other sages of the Brahmaloka learnt it from him. Meanwhile, Brahma cast about for some pure and devoted soul through whom the message could be conveyed to the sons of men. Valmeeki, purified by centuries of devout meditation upon Sree Rama, and of recitation of his Holy Name, shone brightest among the mortals. And to him so nobly qualified for the task, he sent his son Narada. "Valmeeki received from Narada the life of Rama sung at great length by Brahma." (*Matsya Purana*). It dispelled for ever the doubts and questionings under which Valmeeki's soul had been labouring. The veil was lifted from the face of the Great Mystery. Brahma gave him the Open Eye of the Seer ; and the result was the grandest and the best epic poem in the world—even Ramayana, that forms the key to the heart-doctrine of the Vedas (*Go.'s Preface* to his commentary upon the Ramayana).

VIII.—*It is an Exposition of the Gayathri.*

Parabrahman the Absolute, is the Alpha and the Omega. The Pranava or the Word of Power, tries to convey to the universe the Triple Mystery, the Three in One and the One in Three. The Gayathri is an amplification, though faint, of the Word. It is the quintessence of the Vedas, the germ out of which they evolved. Of the 7 crores of Words of Power, it is the mightiest. The twice-born Brahmanas, Kshathriyas and Vaisyas meditate upon its countless mysteries when the Sun, the symbol of Life and Light, rises, when he stands high in the heavens and when he kisses his bride on the threshold of the west. It is the only means to secure the Aims of Life.

Now, wonderful to behold ! every thousand stanzas in

the Ramayana begin with one of the letters of the Gayathri. Hence, the Ramayana is something more than an epic poem ; something higher than a work of art.

Cantos	Chapters	Stanzas	Thousands
Bala	1	1	1,000
"	30	17	2,000
"	63	3	3,000
Ayodhya	14	37	4,000
"	44	5	5,000
"	71	33	6,000
"	99	25	7,000
Aranya	12	4	8,000
"	47	10	9,000
Kishkindha	4	3	10,000
"	31	1	11,000
"	67	50	12,000
Sundara	27	14	13,000
"	46	9	14,000
"	68	29	15,000
Yuddha	28	26	16,000
"	50	40	17,000
"	68	1	18,000
"	80	43	19,000
"	112	26	20,000
"	131	20	21,000
Uttara	22	8	22,000
"	40	29	23,000
"	77	27	24,000

IX.—‘The Inner Meaning.’

“The Puranas and the Ithihasas unlock the mysteries of the Vedas” say the wise. Ramayana should, in consequence, deal with the problems of Life and Being.

“From whom does this universe derive its existence ? In whom does it live and have its being ? To whom does it

go back when its purpose has been served ? It it Parabrahman " (Taiththareeya Upanishad). " But what is Is to us, Brahma, the Ancient of Days ? Vishnu, the Presever ? Rudra, the Destroyer ? " Valmeeki's opening lines voice forth the same query. " Who is he that embodies in himself all these manifold excellences ? " " Sree Rama " replies Narada. And at the end of the Poem, Brahma reiterates the same Truth. " In the beginning Thou wert ; later on I was begotten of Thee. The whole universe was latent in Thee. Over the Great Waters Thou didst brood. The lotus came out of Thy navel ; and on it I was. Thou didst ordain me as the Fashioner of Forms.—V. R. VII. 104.

The poet touches upon this point more than once in the course of the poem. " Meanwhile Maha Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe, manifested himself unto them, in His supreme glory. The Conch, the Wheel and the Mace graced His hands. The graceful folds of His vesture flashed as lightning through a storm-cloud"— do. I. 15. He is the Refuge of all, " Lord of Might, Terror of Foes ! Thou art our sole Refuge"—do.

All creation lifts its voice on high, in praise of Him and Him alone ; " Then the Gods, the Sages, the Rudras, the Gandharvas and the Apsarasas sang high the praises of the Lord in strains of noble melody."—do.

He is the Great One. Tapas alone can open our eye to His glory ; " I know the mystery of Rama, the Great One, whose will is omnipotent. Vasishtha and the other sages here know it too, for, illimitable is their knowledge and power." (I. 19). " This Great Being shines resplendent beyond Darkness" (*Purusha Sooktha*). " The Brahmanas know Him through the teachings of the Vedas, through renunciation, through immortal Tapas." (Sruthi).

He is the Causeless Cause ; " Brahma, the Fashioner," came out of the Unmanifested." (I. 70).

He is higher than the highest : " Then the Gods and the Sages knew that He was the mightier." (I. 75).

He is Time and Boundless Duration ; " The Gods prayed to Him for deliverance from Ravana, whose hand lay heavy upon the worlds ; and the Lord of Time, Maha Vishnu, came down unto the Earth " (II. 1).

He is the Eternal Light and pervades all ; " From the Unmanifested came Brahma, Eternal, all-knowing and all-powerful. (II. 110).

Inconceivable is His might; " No limit do I see to the power of Him, whom Seetha, the child of Janaka, owns as her Lord." (III. 38).

All excellences attain their perfect expression in Him.—Being, Consciousness and Bliss. " Thou art the goal of the good; Thou art the sole refuge of the miserable ; Thou art the balm that healeth the wounds of sorrow ; Thou art fame ; Thou knowest all things great and small ; Thou art the model of filial duty ; Thou art the Unknowable, the Unattainable ; Thou dost transcend the senses ; Thou teachest by example the highest Law ; Thy Name is engraved on the face of Eternity ; Thou art the head and foundation of knowledge and wisdom ; Thou art gentle and patient, even as Mother Earth ; Thy eyes are lovely as the fresh-blown petals of the red-lotus." (IV. 15-22).

He is the Great Destroyer. " The self-born One, the Ancient of Days, the four-faced Brahma ; the Destroyer of the Asuras of the Three Cities, the three-eyed Rudra ; and the lord of the Celestials, Indra, dare not come between Rama and the object of his righteous wrath. (V. 51).

The source of Form and Name, countless are His manifestations ; " I have heard it say that Maha Vishnu is higher than the highest, is the One, the Unmanifested,

endless and beyond thought and speech. Has He taken form as this monkey and come down among us to work our destruction?" (V. 54).

Q. "In the beginning was Hiranyagarbha" ; "Darkness was not, nor day, nor night ; Being was not, nor Non-being. It alone was." "Indra took countless forms through his power of illusion." Such Vedic texts lead us to conclude that Brahma, Rudra, Indra and such like may well be the cause of the universe.

A. "This great Yogi (Adept) is the Supreme Self, eternal, without beginning, middle or end. He is beyond Darkness, beyond the Mahat (the Great Element). There is none higher than He. He is the stay of the universe and its support. The divine weapons grace His hands. On His broad breast shines Sreevathsā, the mole. Mahalakshmi is his inseparable partner. He is invincible, immortal and eternal."

The above passage teaches us that He is the Supreme and no other. Be-ness, Self and similar expressions do but denote Him ; and Brahma, Siva, Indra and every other name is His. He is the highest Self. He is the Lord of matter and wisdom. He is Narayana ; "Thou art Narayana ; Thou art the eternal consort of the Divine Mother ; Thou art omnipresent ; Thou art the Great Boar with a single horn ; Thou art the slayer of the wicked, past, present and future." (VI. 120).

Q. "The Gods regarded Vishnu as the higher." But we need not take that it was his natural position ; but one acquired by Thapas from Siva.

A. Then, Rudra had no reason to be angry ; but, we read that he was consumed with wrath when he handed over his bow. Besides, we read that he had no place of worship in Agasthya's House of Gods ; nor was he regarded

as an object of worship. " Brahma, Vishnu, Agni, Indra, Soorya, Chandra, Baga, Kubera and others had their altars of worship." (III. 13).

Q. Why not take it that the above Beings came down to render worship to him ? Rudra, as the highest, does not naturally find mention along with them ; for, we read " Here do Gods, Gandharvas, Siddhas and Sages repair to offer their respects to Agasthya." (do. 11.)

A. Not so ; the passage refers to the Celestials of the heavenly world, and not to Brahma or Vishnu. Besides, we erect places of worship to enshrine the Gods we bow to ; not that the Gods come down there to pay reverence to us. Moreover, Paramasiva was not invited to partake of the offerings during the sacrifice of Daksha. He is not an object of worship to be placed on the same level as the Lord Vishnu ; else, he would have found a place in Agasthya's temple. Salvation is in the hands of the Supreme One ; and who is it but Sree Rama, whose grace lifted Jata-yu to the Worlds of Light ? Hence, the Ramayana teaches us that Maha Vishnu is the supreme Brahman, whom we perceive through his Holy Writ. " Listen to me, while I speak to the thousands assembled here. This poem that sings of your life and deeds, is the best and the grandest of all. This epic that unfolds your countless excellences to the hearts of all, is the first of its kind. None do I know that better deserves to be the hero of any epic, now and for ever ; for, you are the rest and support of all " (do. VII. 98.) That is how Brahma speaks of the Lord ; and he stands nearest to Him. It is but a waste of time and labour to apply the Ramayana and its incidents to Rudra.

Q. If Rama be the Supreme One, how is it that we hear of his worshipping the sun to strengthen himself against Ravana ?

•A. "When you are in Rome do as the Romans do." He was in the world of men, and should behave as such. This explains his discipleship under Visvamithra.

So, the Balakanda teaches us that the Lord Vishnu is the Cause of the universe ; in the Ayodhyakanda, He appears as the Protector ; in the Aranyakanda, He leads his children unto his House ; in the Kishkindhakanda, His manifold excellences are brought home to us ; in the Sundarakanda, He appears in his irresistible might ; and in the Yuddhakanda, He is declared to be the goal of all knowledge, human and divine.

Q. This Supreme One. how is he realised ?

A. "He who brought into manifestation Brahma before the rest, He who imparted unto him the beginning and the end of all wisdom, He who illuminates our intellect and our soul, as supreme Deity thereof, Him do I take refuge in, desirous of Liberation." This Vedic text is the key-note of Valmeeki's poem. Supreme surrender to the Lord is the best means to accomplish our desires.

(a) "Meanwhile, the Lord of the Worlds, Maha Vishnu manifested himself unto them in his infinite glory. The Divine Weapons graced his hands, while his bright garments flashed as lightning from the heart of storm-clouds"—(VR. I. 15). The Supreme Lord was anxiously awaiting the moment when the Gods would appeal to him for help and protection. His glory was heightened as it were by the joy that the time had come for him to do good to them. He was ever armed and ever ready. "Smite Ravana sore ; burn him up" cried the Gods one and all. This is the first example we have of Surrender.

(b) The episodes of Sunashepa and Thrisanku teach that the highest duty lies in protecting those that seek

refuge with us. Ever seek the feet of Him who is able and willing, out of the mercy of his heart, to save you ; and you will not have asked in vain.

(c) " Lakshmana clasped the feet of his brother and took refuge with him, praying Seetha to intercede for him. (II. 31). So, an efficient Intercessor is a necessary element in Surrender.

" Until Rama grants my prayer, I quit not this hermitage, but shall ever call upon him in fasting and penance (II. 111).

Bharatha took refuge with Rama, as he desired to bring about his restoration to the throne of Ayodhya. But, the Lord had come out of it to fulfil his promise to the Devas ; so, he entrusted to Bharatha his sandals. He annihilated Ravana and his brood, redeemed his promise to the Gods, and later on, fulfilled the object which Bharatha sought at his hands. So, Surrender is never in vain.

(d) The holy hermits of Dandaka took refuge with Rama saying, " We live within your dominions and are entitled to your care and protection. We care not whether you are a crowned king at Ayodhya or a religious recluse in these lonely forests. You are our king everywhere and for ever." (III. 1). Residence within the dominions of the Lord forms a claim upon his mercy and amounts to seeking refuge with him.

(e) " The Crow of black heart sought shelter with his father, the king of the Gods, with the Celestials and with the Sages. But, they turned him away. The three worlds held none that dared to take him in. Back he came to where Rama sat and threw himself at his feet. The Lord of Compassion, the refuge of all, looked down in pity at the suppliant. His offence deserved cruel death and worse ; yet, the Lord spared him." (V. 38). This is another mode of taking refuge—clasping the feet of the deliverer,

(f) " You have offended Sree Rama ; I see no other means of saving yourself ; lift your hands to Lakshmana and appeal to his mercy." (V. R. IV. 32) This advice of Thara reveals to us yet another mode of it—clasping our hands in humility and reverence.

(g) " Ravana ! Have you a mind to live in peace and prosperity ? Would you save yourself from a terrible death ? Then, make a friend of Sree Rama, the Ideal man ; for, know you not that he embodies in himself the Law ? They that seek refuge of him, for ever leave behind sorrow and pain, fear and grief " (Ib. V. 21). So said Seetha. Verily, the turning of the heart to the Lord amounts to taking refuge in him.

(h) " Ravana treated me as a vile slave and put me to shame before all. His sharp words pierced my heart through and through. So, I have cast behind me wife and child, wealth and luxury, and sought refuge with Rama." (Ib. VI. 17). Vibheeshana, who spoke the above, teaches us that we should rid ourselves of such obstacles as would stand in the way of our seeking refuge with Him. Further on, we read that " Rama spread the sacred grass on the sands of the ocean and lay upon them with folded hands and face turned towards the East (Ib. id. 22).

Q. But, his efforts were in vain ?

A. Our would-be saviour must have the heart and the arm to free us from our sorrow and fear ; but, the Ruler of the Waters was not one such.

(i) " A terrible doom hangs over the heads of the Rakshasas and through Rama. So, let us lift our hands in humble entreaty to Seetha to intercede for us." (Ib. V. 27). Thus spoke Thrijata; and the other Rakshasi-guards signified their assent thereto by their silence. Later on, this bore wonderful fruit, in that Seetha saved them from the vengeance of Hanuman. So, it appears that one can take refuge and extend the benefits to others.

(j) Vibheeshana sought shelter of Rama ; but, the four ministers that accompanied him were saved along with him. So, the Lord's protection extends even to those that accompany the suppliant.

Enough has been said to prove that Valmeeki regards the Doctrine of Refuge as the sole path that leads to Liberation, and realises for us our utmost wishes here and hereafter.

iii

Service to the Lord is the first fruits of our efforts in this direction ; and then, the delight of His presence. This is another Truth underlying the epic.

(a) The Gods sought refuge with the Lord from the cruelties of Ravana. But, they took birth of Yakshas, Gandharvas, Apsarasas and Sages to render homage and sweet service to Him ; the death of Ravana came later on.

(b) " Brother mine ! waking or sleeping, day or night, your humble servant am I, in the lordly capital or in the lonely woods." (*Ib* II. 31). Lakshmana spoke so in the height of his joy. Rendering humble service to the Lord and our best, at all times, in all places, in all conditions of life is the supreme reward of Surrender.

(c) Bharatha prayed that Rama should come back to Ayodhya as its king, only that he may be allowed to render him service. But, he was made to offer them to the sandals of Rama before he realised his wishes.

(d) The saints and sages that abode in the forest of Dandaka claimed the protection of Rama from the cruel Rakshasas. But, they were rewarded first by his sweet presence and sweeter speech. He dawned upon their vision like the radiant moon, and they poured out their hearts in fervent blessings.

(e) " Sugreeva, the child of the Sun, gave this signal proof of his valour and humbled the pride of Ravana ; after

which, he flew back to the side of Rama." (*Ib.* VI. 40). Said Vibheeshana "I have put behind me Lanka, my friends in it and my wealth. My life, my kingdom, my friends, my all is centred in you." (*Ib. id.* 19) Both looked upon the humble service that they offered to Rama as the prime reward of seeking his protection.

(f) The Crow besought him to spare his life ; and it was done. His cry was not in vain. But, he must be taught to turn his feet for ever from the way of the wicked ; and his eye was the forfeit.

(g) Rama of the Axe came with a heart tall with pride ; and Sree Rama drew his shaft to his ear to destroy for ever the hopes of the proud warrior. But, when the scales fell from the eyes of Parasurama, he recognised His Lord and Master ; and prayed that the shaft may destroy what stood in the way of his attaining Emancipation.

(h) The Ruler of the Waters heeded not the command of Rama ; but, when he found that Rama's shaft was consuming him, he prayed to be saved. Rama, out of his infinite compassion, spared him ; nay, the shaft was directed against the wicked Asuras that harassed the ocean-king.

He who seeks refuge must be conscious of his utter inability to save himself. He should be denied shelter by every one. Now, Rama possessed not these essentials. Further, the Saviour must be omniscient, must be omnipotent, which the ocean-king was not. But, Vibheeshana, proud in the fulfilment of *his* prayers, requested Sree Rama to imitate him. But Sree Rama was not Vibheeshana ; nor the ocean-king Sree Rama.

There are no stringent conditions about this Doctrine of Refuge—time, place, qualifications and the like.

Hence, the Rainayana is an Exposition of the Doctrine of Surrender (*Saranagathi Grantha*).

The Lord's might and his wisdom were made manifest

in his breaking of the bow of Rudra ; in the humbling of Parasurama; in the piercing of the seven Sala trees ; and in the bridge that he cast over the rebellious ocean. His behaviour when he was separated from Seetha, brings out the supreme compassion of his heart and its pathos. His friendship towards Guha, Sabari and Sugreeva reflects his goodness. He protected Visvamithra's sacrifice from the Rakshasas that threatened to destroy it. He saved the sages of the Dandakaranya from the night-rangers that afflicted them sore. He gave refuge to the Devas who groaned under the iron heel of Ravana, Indrajith, Kumbhakarna and their followers. Those that had the good fortune to be born in his kingdom enjoyed the delight of his presence, and were privileged to have before their eyes a living ideal of everything good and great. And when He went back to his abode on high, he took them along with him and gave them a place near his throne. These are proofs enough of the Lord's protective power. We can best realize our heart's fondest hopes only by taking refuge in the Lord, who shows forth in perfection such excellences as power, compassion and goodness. But yet, service to the Lord comes before the attainment of a place near his Throne of Glory. That is our chief reward ; the others are but incidental, and by the way.

IV

The Glorious life of Seetha is how Valmeeki has named his great work. Thrice was she separated from her lord and husband ; supreme compassion is the key-note of her character ; she is after the Lord's own heart. Now these attributes are essential to the One who is to be our, Intercessor when we take refuge in the Lord.

(a) The black-hearted crow owed his life to *Seetha's* intercession. Ravana had it not and lost his life.

• (b) Vibheeshana took refuge with Rama through an Intercessor. "The world knows me as Vibheeshana. I take my refuge in Rama. Let him know it" (*Ib.* VI. 17.) Likewise, Rama accepted the suppliant through Sugreeva, the Intercessor and said, "Lord of the Monkeys ! Bring him unto me." (*Ib. id.* 18.)

(c) Sugreeva himself sought refuge with Rama through Hanuman, who interceded for him.

The above teaches us to know that we should seek the Lord's mercy only through an Intercessor ; or, we lose the benefit of it.

We are the servants of the Lord. Lakshmana exemplified this grand truth throughout his long life of devotion. "We are the sons of Dasarathha; and I come next to Rama. His excellences drew me on to serve him" ; (*Ib.* IV. 4). "Accept me as your humble servitor. It is perfectly consonant with Law and Justice. Service rendered to you will realize for me the utmost hopes of *my* heart and it will go far to aid *your* work among men." (*Ib.* II. 31), said he, to emphasize the relations between himself and Rama.

Bharatha could not contain himself and wept aloud before the assembled audience. He condemned Vasishtha for giving such pernicious advice. "I and this kingdom do belong to Rama. I pray you to advise me what is just and proper in this contingency." (*Ib. id.* 82). "Lakshmana would not hear of it, and Rama but wasted his words upon him. So he was obliged to install Bharatha as heir-apparent". (*Ib.* VI. 131). The above illustrates the truth that Bharatha, of all, regarded himself as the property of the Lord, body and soul, to do as he liked.

Bharatha started from Ayodhya to pay a visit to his mother's brother and took with him Sathrughna, the faultless. The insidious foes that work our ruin—Love and Hate and their kin—were kept by him under his foot ; and joyfully did he follow his master. (*Ib.* II. 1). He was the living exponent of the sublime Truth, that the best that a man can do is to be at the absolute disposal of the Lord's Elect.

The Supreme, the Individual Self, the Means, the Goal and the Barriers—these are the five Basic Truths of Divine Wisdom. The Ramayana is an authoritative exposition of these, in that the deeds of Rama illuminate the nature of Brahman. The life of Lakshmana typifies the ideal Jeevathma (Individual Self). The various instances of the Doctrine of Surrender illustrate the nature of the Means. The episodes of Bharatha, Vibheeshana and others bring out in definiteness the Goal as embodied in the service rendered to the Lord. And Ravana and his kin represent the Barriers

(a) The very Gods are no good to save us. Ravana secured marvellous boons and powers from Brahma and Siva ; but, they failed him against Rama.

(b) He that gives us birth can lift no hand to save us from grief. Dasarathha had to be an impotent spectator of his son's misfortunes.

(c) The crow insulted Seetha past forgiveness ; and neither its parents, the king and the queen of the Immortals, nor its kith and kin could stand between it and its fate.

(d) Sons and brothers cannot ward off the danger or the difficulty that overhangs us ; else, Vibheeshana and

Kumbhakarna could have saved Ravana, their brother, from the wrath of Rama ; or for the matter of that, Indrajith, his son, mightier than all.

So, it is brought home to us that *the Lord is our only refuge.*

Hanuman and his doings in the capital of the Rakshasas is a hint to us, that we should seek to know of the nature of the Lord only through the Teacher.

xi

"Rama, the terror of his foes, will shatter this town to pieces with his fiery arrows, and lead me forth hence in triumph ; no other course befits his greatness and valour" said Seetha (*Ib. V. 68.*) Even when one is qualified to receive the Lord's Grace, he should patiently wait until the hour strikes for him to throw off his mortal coil, and stand before the Lord. For, Lanka, the capital of Ravana, is but the group of vehicles that the Self uses. Ravana, is the sense of I and Kumbhakarna is the sense of Mine. Indrajith and all the fierce-hearted Rakshasas do but typify Desire, Anger, Greed, etc. Vibheeshana, the bright exception, personifies Discriminative Knowledge. Seetha, the Individual Self, is confined by past Karma within the material vehicles. Hanuman, the Teacher, opens its eye to the mysteries of the Lord. It rests with Him to dissolve this fleshly tabernacle and lead out the imprisoned self into the light of Liberation.

xii

Such noble Beings as Rama are to be our ideals of conduct now and for ever ; while Ravana and the like, are the rocks upon which we would wreck and which we should avoid,

From the account of the inhabitants of the thrice-blessed Kosala, we learn that we should ever seek to dwell only where the Lord deigns to be.

The Ramayana must of necessity form the subject of daily study and meditation, in that it expounds the mysteries underlying the Two Truths.

The Balakanda treats of the marriage of Rama with Seetha; in other words, it describes the Absolute, of which Matter and Consciousness are the two poles. This unmanifested aspect of Father—Mother, Purusha—Prakrithi or Parabrahman—Moolaprakrithi is expressed by the syllable *Sreemath*.

The Ayodhyakanda narrates at great length, the perfections of Rama, and his ideal observance of all duties. It represents for us the Supreme one as Narayana, in his manifested aspect, 'He who broods over the waters.' This is the connotation of the next word *Narayanasya*.

The Aranyakanda gives us a vivid and entrancing picture of the Lord's divine form and beauty. This is how He shines forth in his Garment of the universe.

" In the roaring loom of Time I play,
And weave for God the garment thou seest Him by"—*Goethe*.

This is the inner sense of the next word *Charanam*.

The Kishkindha and Sundara kandas are object-lessons of the doctrine of Supreme Surrender to the Lord. This is the next and the natural step that one should take, when he has grasped, through his mind and spirit, by intense thought and meditation, the mystery of the Absolute, the Unmanifested and the Manifested. The next syllable *Saranam* expresses for us the quintessence of this teaching.

The Yuddhakanda tells us how Vibheeshana, born and brought up in the most adverse surroundings, yet, turned

away from the path of the ungodly, took refuge in the Lord and received his reward. The next syllable *Prapadye* lays down the how of it, the actual Process, the practical realization of it.

So far the Poorvakandas of the Ramayana. The Uttarakanda gives us the key to the apparent contradictions in the nature of Ravana, his intense piety, his wide, knowledge, his deep erudition and his terrible acts ; the ultimate motive of his life is laid bare for us—why he abducted Seetha. Those that rendered humble service to the Lord,—those that were labourers in His vine-gard—Hanuman, Vibheeshana, Jambavan, Sugreeva and his monkey hosts—and the happy dwellers in the dominions of Rama, were taken by him even unto where he abode in his Worlds of Light, while some of them remained on earth, faithfully to discharge the trust placed in them by the Lord and work for the regeneration of that great orphan—Humanity. The other part of the Manthra or the Second Truth, voices forth the supreme mystery of Mukthi—Liberation, Emancipation, Beatitude, Consummation, Nirvana, call it what you like.

xv

What Manthra shall we meditate upon all through our life? What is the Word of Power, that will make us Lords of Time and Wisdom ? The Gayathri ; and the Ramayana is but its exoteric exposition. The Lord Almighty, the Veda Purusha, is the Causeless Cause of the Universe. This is the basic truth that underlies the Balakanda. His countless perfections and excellences form the theme of the Ayodhya and the Kishkindhakandas. The divine form, the Robes of Splendour in which He manifests himself, is described to us in the Aranyakanda, as the ravishing beauty of Rama, that attracted unto him the sages, the saints, the ascetics

and the hermits of the wild woods of Dandaka, men of stern self-control and iron discipline. The glory of the Lord, in so far as it shines through his Garments of Matter, the Universe, is symbolised in the episodes that form the subject of the Sundarakanda, *The Beautiful*,—aptly so named.

The Yuddhakanda imparts to us the means of reaching His Feet. The Uttarakanda takes us to the Goal—Mukthi. Now, the six parts of the Gayathri mantra set themselves to teach the same Truths.

XVI

Shun those that would seek to destroy your faith and devotion to the Lord.

Turn thy heart away from the atheist, the materialist, the ungodly, who would have no god but himself and no law but his will. The arguments put into the mouths of Jabalı (*V. R.* II. 109) and Lakshmana (*V. R.* VI. 83.) are refuted most effectively and conclusively by Rama. It is a warning to all right-thinking men to keep away from the teachings of the Charvakas (Materialists), the Madhyamikas (Buddhist Nihilists) and the like.

XVII

Great men are often beset with troubles and difficulties. So, we should gradually wean ourselves away from the joys and sorrows of worldly life and centre ourselves in the Eternal. Rama and Lakshmana were bound by the divine weapons, the Nagasthra and the Brahmasthra. The Divine One had to renounce his kingdom, power, friends and relation, and exile himself to the frightful solitudes of Dandaka. The wife of his heart was taken away from him by force by a Rakshasa. Hence, we are exhorted not to place our trust on things transient and vain. *Govindarajeya*,

The Inner Meaning. II

Mahavishnu, who is Beness (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Chith*), and Bliss (*Ananda*), is the shoreless ocean. The desire that sprang in Him to relieve the Earth of her burden of woe and misery, is the first wave in the still calm waters of it. The Individual Self is the first spray thrown out of it. The city of Ayodhya is the Akasa within the heart. Dasaraththa, its ruler, is the pure Anthah-karana (Composed of *Manas* Mind, *Buddhi* Reason, *Chiththa* Feeling and *Ahamkara* Egoism) dominated by the quality of *Sathva*, Harmony. His queen Kausalya is *Buddhi* Reason in its *Sathvika* aspect. Rama, the son born to them, is the Self in its *Thureeya* state (beyond Jagrath, waking consciousness, Swapna, dreaming consciousness and Sushupthi consciousness in dreamless slumber). Lakshmana is the same Self in the Jagrath, Bharatha in the Swapna, and Sathrugnha in the Sushupthi. These are the various manifestations of the Self. Rama followed Visvamithra from Ayodhya to guard his sacrificial rite; the Thureeya Athma is attracted by the mind. Rama slays Thataka the Rakshasee ; the Self destroys the evil tendencies of the mind. He broke the bow of Siva ; the Self curbs the fleeting course of the mind. He marries Seetha ; the Self is enveloped in Maya. Rama puts down Rama of the Axe ; the Self obtains mastery over the Karmic Vasanas (affinities generated in previous births). He exiles himself to the forests of Dandaka at the word of Kaikeyee ; Buddhi in its Thamasic (dark) aspect, leads the Self into Samsara (material existence). He kills the monster Viradha—the rooting out of Pride. Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha reside in a lowly cottage at Panchavati ; the Self descends at last into the house of flesh, built up of the five elements and rests there after his long journey. Soorpanakha assails him, and loses her nose and ears ; Desire is deprived of its sting. Khara, Dooshana and Thrisiras fall in battle with

Rama ; Lust, Anger and Greed are destroyed. Mareecha lures Rama from his abode, and is laid low ; the Self shakes itself off from the trammels of Delusion. He is parted from Seetha ; the Self is freed from the bonds of Maya in its pure aspect. Ravana carries her off ; Egoism overpowers Maya. Kabandha, the deformed, falls beneath the sword of Rama ; Grief and Sorrow are annihilated. He comes across Hanuman ; the Self has an overflow of pure devotion. He seeks the friendship of Sugreeva ; the Self is endowed with Right Discrimination. Vali is shot down by him ; the Self destroys Ignorance. Later on, he secures the aid and alliance of Vibheeshana ; the Self develops its will so as to render itself invincible. He causes a bridge to be thrown over the wide ocean ; the Self finds a means to cross the waves of Nescience. Lanka on the top of Thrikoota, is the Linga Deha (the subtle body), characterised by the three Gunas (Rhythm, Mobility, and Inertia). Rama slays in battle dire Kumbhakarna, Indrajith and Ravana ; the Self triumphs over Conceit, Envy and Egoism. Seetha passes through fire to vindicate her purity ; Maya, rendered impure through its association with Egoism, passes through the fire of Purification. They leave Lanka and travel back to Ayodhya ; from the consciousness in the subtle body back to the Akasa in the heart. Rama is crowned king over the dominions of his ancestors ; the Self experiences Supreme Bliss. Sometime after, Seetha is sent away to the hermitage of Valmeeki ; the Self parts with Maya. He takes her back to himself ; Maya in its Sathvika aspect is eternally wedded to the Self. At last, Rama descends into the waters of Sarayu ; the Akasa in the heart is unified with the Boundless Akasa. And this is the realization of the Self as Beness, Consciousness and Bliss. This is Mukthi, the Consummation—
A. R. Vilasakanda III.

, *The Inner Meaning. III*

The sea that separated Lanka from the mainland, 100 Yojanas across, is the shoreless sea of Samsara, characterised by the consciousness of I and Mine. Lanka is but the Upadhi or Vehicle of the Jeevathma. Everything but the Supreme Self is dependent upon it—like a woman. Nescience (*Avidya*) is the Asoka garden. The pure Buddhic aspect of the consciousness of the Jeevathma is Hanuman. Kumbhakarna, Ravana and Vibheeshana stand for the three Gunas, Sathva (Rhythm), Rajas (Mobility), and Thamas (Inertia). Hanuman gives Seetha the ring of her Lord as a token, initiates Buddhi the Individual Self, in the Tharaka Manthra (the word of liberation). The Jeeva must do away with the notion that he is dependent upon any other thing but the Lord ; Hanuman sets Lanka on fire. The griefs and tribulations of the Jeeva are laid before the Lord by the compassionate Buddhi (Pure Reason) ; Hanuman takes back to Rama the news of Seetha's miserable state. Rama crosses over to Lanka in the might of his power ; the Jeeva within the Upadhi is blessed with a vision of the Lord. The fall of the Rakshasa brothers is but the annihilation of the Rajasic and Thamasic Gunas. The ministers and followers of Ravana are the modifications of the Rajasic and Thamasic Consciousness. Vibheeshana is installed as monarch of Lanka ; the pure Sathvic guna is enthroned in the Upadhis. Rama causes Seetha to be brought unto him ; the Jeeva realises the Higher Consciousness. She passes through fire, the Self bathes in the cleansing waters of the Viraja and casts off the Karmic affinities latent in the Sookshma Sareera. The God of Fire renders back Janaki to Rama ; Self puts on its Robes of Light, in which it can stand before the Throne. Seetha travels back to Ayodhya with Rama in the aerial car Pushpaka; the Individual

Self sits by the right hand of the Lord. Sree Rama is enthroned at the capital of the Ikshvakus and Seetha by his side ; the Jeevathma becomes one with the Brahman. Sugreeva, Angada, and the leaders of the monkey host stand for Manas (Mind), Chitta (Feeling), and the other Emotions. The monkeys themselves are the mental functions. Hanuman and his fellows break down the honey-grove, the royal preserves of Sugreeva ; the various modifications of the Mind are controlled and stilled Rama and his forces cross the Ocean of Egoistic consciousness—(*Anonymous*).

The Inner Meaning. IV

The Pranava, the Word, is the Beginning and the End of every thing. From its first letter A, arose Lakshmana, the Visva; he is the Jeeva in his Sthoola Sareera (Gross body). From the second letter U, arose Sathrughna, the Thaijasa ; he is the Jeeva in the Sookshma Sareera (Subtle body). From the third letter M, arose Bharatha, the Pragna , he is the Jeeva in the Karana Sareera (the Causal body) The Ardhamathra (the prolongation of the sound), is Sree Rama, the Supreme Brahman. Seetha is the Moolaprakriti (Primal Matter). Through the force of the presence of Sree Rama, she carries on the functions of Evolution, Preservation and Involution of the Kosmos. As Pranava, she is also styled Prakriti.

Yagnavalkya, the great yogin, approached Athri, the mind-born son of Brahma, and said, “ Mahadeva meditated for countless ages upon the holy name of Sree Rama and sought after him with a devout heart. The Lord manifested himself unto him and said ‘ Brother ! Ask what thou wilt ; and it is thine.’ Mahadeva spake unto Sree Rama, the Supreme One, ‘ Lord ! Grant thou this boon, that the souls that quit their fleshly vehicles on the

banks of the Ganga and especially at Manikarnika, so dear to me, may be freed for ever from the trammels of material existence.' And unto him replied the Lord, 'Brother! Those that quit their mortal coil in the spot sanctified by thy presence, be they men, be they beasts of the field, be they birds of the air, be they the worms that painfully crawl on the earth, all without exception, shall verily come unto me. And as a visible guarantee of the promise I make to you, I do abide for all time in the Holy Kasi. Those that meditate upon me and my Name of Power in that holy spot, are freed from all their sins, even the deadliest ; and this I do solemnly declare unto you. Those that receive from thee and from Brahma my Six-lettered Manthra, are invested with every power that they may desire ; they cross the ocean of Samsara (material existence), and come unto me. They in whose right ears thou whisperest my Manthra when they depart from this life, do sit by me for ever."

Yagnavalkya called unto him Bharadwaja, and said, "The first letter of the mantra of Rama connotes Sree Rama himself, who is Absolute Consciousness, Unbounded Glory and Supreme Splendour. The very Gods ever meditate upon him to secure Emancipation. He who daily recites this holy Manthra is washed pure of all sins. He lays in the accumulated merit of countless sacrificial rites ; the merit of having recited a hundred thousand times, the whole body of the Ithihasas, the Puranas and the Rudra ; the merit of reciting the sacred Gayathri a hundred thousand times ; and the merit of reciting the Pranava millions of times. He exalts ten generations that go before him and ten that come after him. He purifies those whom he comes across. He is a great soul. He realises Beatitude "

The following texts from the far-off Past do reveal the same Truths. " Many are the mantras associated with such

Beings are Ganapathi, Mahadeva, Sakthi, Soorya, Viṣṇu, and the like; but the manthra of Sree Rama is their Crown. Alone it has power—this Six-lettered Manthra—to confer upon us the highest good—and that most easily. There are no sins it cannot destroy. Hence, the wise know it as ‘the *Royal Manthra*.’ As a spark of fire in a mountain of cotton, it consumes to nothing all sins, conscious or unconscious, that one may commit during the year, during the month, during the fortnight, during the day. The five Deadly Sins and the millions of lesser ones vanish before the might of this Manthra. Bhoothas, Prethas, Pisachas, Koosmandas, Rakshasas and other Beings that inhabit the Bhuvarloka (the Middle world), dare not approach where the holy Manthra is recited. Happiness here, the delights of the world of Gods, and final Emancipation are the meed of him who clings to it. The slaughter of animals wild and tame; the sins of our accumulated past lives; the sins of tasting what is forbidden; the sin of robbing a holy Brahmana of his gold or gems; the sin of slaying a Brahmana, a Kshathriya or a Vaisya; the sin of foul incest or adultery; the sin of associating with the wicked, of eating with them, of sleeping with them; the sin of parricide, matricide and regicide; the sin of wantonly defiling our vows and observances; the sins that we consciously commit, waking, sleeping or in dreamless slumber; the sins consciously committed in such holy places as Kurukshethra, Kasi, and the like; the sins that countless pilgrimages to the sacred spots of the earth cannot wash away; the sins that the hardest penances and the severest mortifications cannot wipe off; the sins that a gift of one’s own weight in gold cannot condone—all these and much more does the holy Manthra annihilate.

Those lands in which Sree Rama is revered, worshipped and meditated upon, know not famine, plague, pestilence

or sorrow. It has not its equal. It is the easiest passport to the grace of Sree Rama. The Lord grants his devotee length of years and happiness here ; and at the end of his life, He takes him even unto Himself; yea, even unto Himself—" *Ramathañini Upanishad*.

The Inner Meaning. V.

Once upon a time, Sanaka and the other Eternal Virgins approached Hanuman and requested to be initiated in the mysteries of the holy Rama Manthra. And unto them said Hanuman, " Sree Rama is the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Truth, the Path of Emancipation. The Lord Mahadeva, and he alone, knows in its entirety the grand mystery of the Holy Manthra ; for, it forms the subject of his deep meditation ever. The eight-lettered Narayana Manthra, and the five-lettered Siva Manthra are the highest in their line. But, the most potent letters of either, the very heart of them, are drawn out and go to make up the Holy Name. The former, devoid of the single letter, means 'Not towards the securing of the highest heavens,' ; and the latter, shorn of its letter of power, means 'Not towards the realisation of Absolute Goodness.' Hence, the Rama Manthra combines in itself, the essence of all the Mantras dedicated to Siva or Vishnu.

The first letter *R* is the Germ of Fire ; it denotes the Supreme Self, the Sachchidananda, the Self-radiant. The same consonant without the vowel, denotes the Brahman beyond all limitations. The next letter *A* stands for Maya. The union of the two making *Ra*, signifies the descent of the Self-radiant One into Matter. The next letter *Ma* is the Germ of Eternity, and Immortality and denotes Supreme Bliss and Goodness.

As in a tiny seed of the banyan is contained the wide-spreading tree, so in the germ of the Rama Manthra is

contained the whole Universe, animate and inanimate, as the Effect in the Cause. The Supreme Brahman is beyond Maya. The letter *Ra* corresponds to the syllable *That* in the Mahavakya (the Great Sentence); *Ma* stands for *Thwam*; the *union* between the two is rendered by *Asi*. But, the Mahavakya is capable of conferring only Emancipation, while the Rama Manthra secures to us Happiness here and Emancipation hereafter. Besides, it is not allowed to all to recite or to meditate upon the Mahavakya; while the Rama Manthra is the common property of all. As the expression of Pranava, the aspirant for Emancipation or the man of dispassion, or he that has renounced the world to work for it, may with profit to meditate upon it. Hence, it is higher than the Mahavakya and more practically useful. He who grasps and assimilates the manifold mysteries embodied in this Sree Rama Manthra, attains Emancipation even here. Doubt it not, yea, doubt it not."

—*Ramarahasyopanishad*.

The Inner Meaning. VI.

From the letter *A* arose Brahma, known on earth as Jambavan. From the letter *U* arose Upendra, known on earth as Sugreeva. From the letter *M* arose Siva, known on earth as Hanuman. From the Bindu arose the Discus of the Lord, known on earth as Sathrughna. From the Nada arose the Conch, known on earth as Bharatha. From the Kala rose Sesha, known on earth as Lakshmana. The Chit (Consciousness) beyond it, is Seetha. And beyond all, is the Supreme One, Sree Rama. He is Eternal, Pure, Consciousness, Truth, Immortality, Absolute, Perfect—the Supreme Brahman—*Tharasaropanishad*.

The Inner Meaning. VII.

Seetha is Moolaprakriti. The letters forming her name connote Maya. Unmanifested by nature, she sometimes

manifests herself. During the chant of the Holy Writ, she is sensed as the Sabda Brahman (the Logos, the Word); this is her first manifestation. King Janaka found her at the point of his plough while he was furrowing the sacrificial ground, and made her his daughter, known on earth as Seetha; this is her second manifestation. Her third is the primal Unmanifested form.

Though she is dependent upon the Lord, yet she sheds her light on the universe, through the might of his presence. She is the energy that lies behind Evolution, Preservation and Involution. Seetha in her eight-fold manifestation of power is Moolaprakrīthi.

As Pranava is her visible symbol, she is also titled Prakrīthi—*Saunakeeyā*.

She is Prakrīthi ; She is the Vedas ; She is the Divine Hierarchy ; She is Fame ; She is the Universe ; She is all ; she is the Law; she is the Cause and the Effect. She exists apart from Mahavishnu ; and She is identical with him. As the animate and the inanimate; as gods, sages, men, Asuras, (fallen Angels), Rakshasas (giants), Bhoothas (Elementals) Prethas (shades), and Pisachas (Nature spirits), through infinite modifications of attributes and actions ; as the five Elements, the senses, the mind, the Prana (Vital current), She underlies all the manifested universe.

Ichcha Sakthi, *Kriyasakthi* and *Sakshath Sakthi* (Will, Activity and Wisdom) are her prime aspects.

Ichcha Sakthi is again varied as Sree Devi, Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi.

Sree Devi manifests herself as the energy that lies behind Goodness, Power, the Moon, the Sun and the Fire.

Through the Moon she presides force over plants and herbs of occult virtues. As the Kalpa tree, as flowers and fruits, creepers, herbs, medicinal leaves and the Waters of Immortality, she nourishes the Gods.

Through the Sun she supports the Shining Ones by ever increasing the Food ; the cattle, by ever producing grass and fodder ; and all beings, by shedding light and life upon them. She is Time, from its minutest point to the life-period of Brahma—seconds, minutes, hours, day, night, weeks, fortnights, months, seasons, half-years, years, Yugas, manvantaras, kalpas and parardhas. She turns the Wheel of Time.

Through the Fire she makes herself felt as hunger and thirst in all Beings , she is the face of the Gods into which are thrown the sacrificial offerings to them. She is heat and cold in the plants and the trees of the forest ; she is the fire latent in the wood and transitory on its surface. Thus, Sree Devi works out the Lord's will and comes forth as Sree and Lakshmi to sustain the universe.

Bhoo Devi is the stay and the support of the fourteen spheres, including the seven islands and the seven oceans around them. She is the Pranava, the symbol visible of the Invisible Presence.

Neela Devi is visible in the thousand and one forces that go to sustain all beings, animate and inanimate—the wind, the air, the fire, the water and the like. She is the Great Waters upon which all worlds rest. She is the Frog, one of her mystic symbols.

From the mouth of Mahavishnu arises Nada (Sound). From Nada arises Bindu (the Point). From Bindu comes forth the Pranava. From the Pranava springs forth the Tree of Knowledge (the Vedas), with its branches of Action and Wisdom.

Brahman, whose nature they illuminate, is *Kriya Sakthi*.

Sakshath Sakthi (the Direct Energy) of the Lord is inseparable from him. It lies behind Evolution,

Preservation, Disintegration and Involution, and the other world-processes. It brings about the infinite variety of Form. It is the Differentiated and the Undifferentiated. It is Self-radiance. It is the Power that showers good. It is the inexorable Law that rights Wrong. It is the spiritual splendour of men, of sages and of Gods. It is the heart of Serenity.

The dark mole on the left breast of Mahavishnu, known as Sree Vathsā, symbolises the Ichcha Sakthi as it rests in Him during Pralaya (Involution). It is also known as *Yoga Sakthi* (spiritual powers). The Kalpa tree, the Cow of Plenty, Chinthamani, Sankha, Padma and the other treasures of the Lord of Wealth, nine in number, are the visible results of *Bhoga Sakthi* (psychic powers). This is extremely useful to those that seek the Lord interestedly or out of unalloyed devotion ; and also to those that render service unto him in the shape of raising temples and enshrining his images therein, so that the devout might meditate upon him through the eight-fold path of Yoga.

Veera Sakthi, the Goddess of Valour, is described thus. Under the spreading fragrance of the Kalpaka tree shines the gem-encrusted throne. The Lotus spreads its graceful petals over it ; and on it sits enthroned the four-armed Goddess of Valour. On all sides stand elephants, bathing her with the Waters of Immortality from the gemmed vessels in their tusks. The eight Yoga-Siddhis (occult powers), Anima, and the rest, are ranged on either side of her. Jaya and her sister Apsarasas wait upon her. The Sun and the Moon illuminate the Hall of Audience. The full moon, the new moon and the half moon hold snow-white umbrellas over her head. Hladini and Maya fan her with chamaras (chowries). Swaha, that nourishes the Gods, and Swadha, that feeds the Fathers, wave fans on either side. In front of her stand the Gods, the Vedas and

the Sciences. And from her seat of power She rules the universe.—*Seethopanishad*.

The Inner meaning. VIII.

The Gayathri Mantra is the seed of the Tree of Rama-yana; the Rama Raksha is the sprout ; the Vedas are the roots ; and Emancipation is the fruit of it.

Gayathri, the mother of the Vedas, is the root of all. It has three Padas (feet). They that strive after Liberation should meditate upon the Germ, from which the Tree of the Universe sprang, as the material cause of the universe in his Matter aspect, and as the instrumental cause of the same in his Brahman aspect. This is, in brief, the Truth that underlies the first foot. The universe, as the effect, is superimposed by Nescience upon the Supreme Self ; He is the Cause. Hence, we are asked to banish His matter aspect and try to realise His ultimate Brahman aspect alone.

The Vedic text “The Golden Person who is visible in the heart of the Solar Orb,” denotes the Primal Being, Narayana. We should meditate upon the Supreme Self in this aspect of Unbounded Light ; this is His Mayaviroopa (Form of Illusion). “I meditate upon the Ineffable Glory whom men know as Rama and Krishna ; who came down on Earth, time and oft, for the uplifting of the world.” This is what the second foot conveys to us. This is his second manifestation, in which man might more easily meditate upon him. This is the Means to reach the Brahman, whom the first Foot sets out to describe.

“He that directs and controls our Self and its energies”—is what the third foot teaches. He can, out of his grace, curb the fleeting mind and turn it inward towards his feet. This the epitome of the Path of Action, longer and more tortuous.

The three feet of the Gayathri Manthra are the germs out of which springs the Tree of Knowledge with its branches of Wisdom, Meditation and Action.—*Maithrayana Sruthi*

RAMA RAKSHA.

The syllables of the Ramaraksha express the same truths as the Gayathri Manthra; and in them are condensed the incidents of the Ramayana.

1. *May Raghava protect my head.* He who presides over the universe, He who presides over the Annamayakosa (Food-Sheath), may He protect my head that symbolises the universe.

2. *May the son of Dasaratha protect my forehead.* The Pranamayakosa (Prana-Sheath) is drawn by ten horses (organs of sense and action) and is the effect of the Manomayakosa (Mind-Sheath). May he, who presides over it, protect my forehead, the tablet upon which writes my destiny Brahma, who was evolved after the universe. (The Self, as manifested in each of the above sheaths, has a wider consciousness and powers than in the preceding one).

3. *May the son of Kausalya protect my eyes.* He who presides in the Vignanamayakosa (Intuition-Sheath) is endowed with the faculty of cognising all impressions. May he protect my eyes, the channel of all knowledge and wisdom.

4. *May he who is dear to Visvamithra protect my ears.* The Self as manifested in the Anandamayakosa (Bliss Sheath) is filled with infinite compassion towards the universe—innate, unselfish and disinterested. It is he that in the state of Sushupthi does away with all grief and sorrow. He is the embodiment of Bliss and Consciousness. May he protect my ears through which I reach him.

[The first three Mantras superimpose the universe upon Sree Rama, the Parabrahman and the next three help to

remove the illusion. Thus far the nature of the Supreme Brahman, the Absolute, that forms the subject of the first foot of the Gayathri].

5. *May he who protected the sacrifice of Visvamithra guard my nose.* The delights of the heavenly world form the reward of sacrifices. May he, that brings about the result of sacrifices, protect my organs of smell and taste, where-with divine fragrance and taste are experienced.

6. *My he whose heart goes out to the son of Sumithra protect my face.* The Lord's heart goes out towards Hiranyakarabha, that evolved from Himself and is the best friend of the Jeeva. Those that attain Emancipation in the ordinary way reach the world of Brahma ; there they are initiated into the mysteries of the Absolute; and when Brahma goes back to the Lord, they go along with him.

7. *May he who is the fountain of all knowledge protect my organ of speech.* Knowledge is the only means of reaching him. May he protect my organ of speech through which I acquire knowledge.

8. *May he whom Bharatha reverences protect my neck.* Those that follow the Path of Action worship him with sacrificial rites. "The Brahmanas seek to know It by sacrifices"—Sruthi. Manthras, Sthothras and Sasthras form the component parts of sacrificial rites. They should ever find a place in the throat, the channel through which they pass from the heart. Hence, the prayer to protect that portion of the body. The Jeeva lays by much merit by such holy acts as sacrifices ; that directs him to the Path of Meditation ; whereby reaches the Soothrathma (He on whom the worlds are strung).

9. *May be who wields the Divine Weapons protect my shoulders.* In his divine incarnation, the Bow, the Sword and the other weapons, symbolising Power, Time and

the like attributes, graced his arms. May he protect the corresponding portions of my body.

10. *May he who broke the Bow of Siva protect my arms.* When he walked on earth as a man among men, with the might of his arms he broke the bow of Siva that was no other than the mount Meru (the Axis of the world). Plainly, this places him above Siva. "When Mahadeva went against the Asuras of the Three Cities, the Earth was his car, Brahma his driver, mount Meru his bow, and Mahavishnu the point of his arrow."--*Sruthi*.

11. *May the Lord of Seetha protect my hands.* These two Manthras show us that Bala, one of the two Vidyas (occult sciences) imparted to him by Visvamithra, gave him unlimited physical strength.

12. *May he who put down Parasurama protect my heart.* Parasurama stored in himself the spiritual splendour of the Brahmana and of the Lord Vishnu. Rama put him down and destroyed the worlds won by his Thapas. This evidences what a mighty heart he had. Here is manifest the power of Athibala, the other Vida, in that Rama was able to accomplish superhuman acts at once. (Manthras 9, 10, 11, and 12 teach that the third manifestation of the Lord is higher than Brahma, Vishnu and Siva).

13. *May he who slew Khara protect my trunk.* Khara and the other Rakshasas constantly meditated upon the Lord, though as their mortal enemy; hence, they stand higher than many who have never bestowed a thought upon him. The Lord fails not to reward each as he deserves. He slew Khara and his Rakshasas; and that was a blessing in disguise gave them a place in his world.

14. *May he, upon whom Jambavan leant as his stay and support, protect my navel.* Jambavan sought the feet of the Lord to save himself from his dire distress; his attitude

was one of love, and not of enmity. Hence, he stands on a higher level than Khara.

15. *May the Lord of Sugreeva protect my loins.* ‘One good turn deserves another’. Sugreeva’s relations with Rama savoured more of barter than of genuine disinterested friendship. Rama served his ends first ; and Sugreeva and his monkey hosts were of use to Rama long after. Hence, he does not come up to Jambavan’s altitude.

16. *May Hanuman’s master protect my thighs.* Hanuman’s devotion to Rama was unselfish to the extreme ; humble service to his master and to the best of his might, was the only thing he prayed for. He stood nearest to the Lord’s heart. As his favourite child, he sat upon his lap. He is the ideal Bhaktha (devotee). [The last four Manthras depict the four types of those that seek the Lord during his divine incarnations].

17. *May he, who threw the bridge over the sea, protect my knees.* The Lord is the shores of the ocean of Samsara (material existence), in that he keeps back its rolling waves and is the haven of those who toil in it. May he guard my knees that form, as it were, the feet of children when they crawl about. (This teaches us that the Lord is beyond the material vehicles. He who meditates upon him thus, is freed for ever from his vehicles).

18. *May he who destroyed the ten-headed Ravana guard my ankles.* The Lord is beyond the Sookshmasareera that works through the ten organs of sense and action. To the grown-up child the ankles form the chief help in locomotion; may He guard them. (He who thus meditates upon the lord is freed for ever from the Sookshmasareera and rests in the bosom of Prakriti).

19. *May he who conferred all good and prosperity upon Vibheesana protect my feet.* He opens the gates of Joy to him who escapes the jaws of Avidya

(Nescience). May He guard my feet, the instruments of rapid locomotion. "This is the highest good. This is the highest wealth"—*Sruthu*. (This is the state of Emancipation, wherein all evil is annihilated and where supreme bliss is experienced).

20. *May Rama protect all my body.* The Lord, as the Almighty Ruler, is the monarch that shines on his Throne of Glory in the Audience Hall of the Universe. I earnestly seek to stand in his presence. May he purify my three vehicles. May he remove all obstacles and dangers on the eight-fold Path. May he, out of his grace, qualify me to find a place among the Elect.

The expression, 'Raghava,' in the first Manthra, symbolises the Universe as superimposed by Ignorance upon Brahman. The later Manthras remove this misconception. His collective and individual form is then described for purpose of meditation and Mantras 13, 18 lay down the process ; while Mantras 19 and 20 describe the destruction of evil and the realization of supreme bliss.

Hence, the Gayathri forms the germ of the Ramayana. Its 24 letters begin the 24,000 stanzas of the poem.

The Vedas form the basis of the Ramayana. Valmeeki's epic is but an amplification of the Truths taught in the Vedas ; and like the Vedas, it blesseth him that reads and him that listens to it. "The Supreme One whom the Vedas try to reach, came down on earth as Sree Rama, the son of Dasaratha ; so, the Vedas came down to where he was, as Ramayana, the child of Valmeeki's heart. So, my beloved, Ramayana is the Veda ; doubt it not, Parvathi."—*Agasthya Samhitha*.

"Valmeeki, the sage, chose the two royal youths Kusa and Lava out of many ; they were endowed with considerable

intelligence, had studied the Vedas, and their mysteries ; Ramayana, the record of Seetha's life, their mother, could not have a fitter exponent"—*V. R. I. 4.*

So, the Ramayana and the Vedic passages which it amplifies have a double aspect. The exoteric narrates the incidents in the life of Rama and Seetha. The esoteric unfolds the mystery of the Self. Let the intuitive student ponder over it. The Vedic Mantras are the deep pool, full to the brim with the Waters of Immortality. They flow through the channels of episodes on to the broad fields of Vidya, the Science of Self ; they that walk along the Path of Action, also drink of it by the way.

Now, let us take, for example, the following Mantra, to be recited in that sacrificial rite where the two Aswins are invoked. "As a dead man leaves behind him the wealth he accumulated in his life, King Thugra cast his son into the roaring deep. But, you were there, Aswins ! ; and with numerous boats saved him and his troops." This is how the man of action would like to have it interpreted. "All the Gods and all the hymns of the Rigveda are in Him, the Supreme Self, who shines by his own light and who ever remains. He, who cannot pierce to him through these garments of sound, has very little to do with them, even in their exoteric dead letter aspect." The above vedic text affirms that the Mantras do but seek to lift somewhat of the veil that is thrown over the Nameless, whose manifestations come down to us as the presiding deities of the senses. He that has no eye for the deeper meaning has no call to study the Holy Writ. Hence, it is but just that the above Mantra should have an inner meaning. "The Self, on whom bear the burden of the past, is thrown into the ocean of Samsara (embodied existence) by the Personality that clings to material objects. Inner Ruler ! Soothrathman (Thread-Soul) ! You extend your

grace unto it ; and in the guise of the Teacher save it through the Great Sentences (Mahavakyas), that sail through the Akasa in the heart and dispel the clouds of Ignorance.

Q. It seems that the Aswinee Devas are praised in the above Manthra. Transitory objects are spoken of and as such, give no colour to the view, that the Vedas in which they are found are not composed by man.

A. Grain and the other cereals are regarded as eternal, not individually but in the type ; so, every Kalpa (life-period of Brahma), sees the divine incarnation of Rama; and as a type symbolising a kosmic event, it is eternal ; the Devathadhikarana takes this view of it. The Chamasadhikarana holds that such Mantras, though narrating past episodes, do really aim at teaching the Science of Brahman. Take the Mantra—"Aja who is red, white, and black"; here, if we give the words their natural meaning, the passage simply expresses facts of previous knowledge and forms no evidence of superphysical truths. Hence, the Teachers understand that *Aja* denotes Prakriti (differentiated matter) to whom are given such names as Splendour, the Waters and Food. Similar instances would naturally suggest themselves, of Mantras with an esoteric narrative aspect and an esoteric spiritual one underlying.

The Vedic text—"All names do but point to him. All Vedas do but describe the Supreme State" makes it plain that Sree Ramachandra is the subject of all knowledge, Vedic or otherwise. Indra and like expressions are but His names ; in fact, all words do but express His infinite qualities. But, the passages yield a narrative meaning too, as suited to the context.

Q. How can we understand expressions that denote

other gods as pointing to Rama ? If the aforesaid interpretation is made to serve our purpose, the words have no meaning of their own.

A. The various lines or dots that stand for the numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, are similar in form ; but, a difference of place makes them denote a unit or tens or hundreds or thousands. Similarly, a word or a sentence can, by association with others or by difference of context, yield many meanings. The word *Amritha* denotes naturally the Waters of Immortality obtained during the churning of the ocean. But, in the following Vedic texts—‘When this mortal man has his mind washed pure of all desire, even the least, then he becomes *Amritha* ; he attains Brahman even here ;’ “ May we drink of Soma ; May we become *Amritha* ;” “ That is man’s *Amritha* ; That is yours.” It stands for Emancipation, Godship, and offspring respectively. Or, take the text, “The Devas worship Yagna with Yagna.” Here, Yagna, the object of worship is the Supreme One ; the Jeeva is to be viewed by us as the Supreme Brahman. But, in the passage “They sprinkle the Yagna,” it means Indra, Agni and the other Devas. Again, the word denotes the sacrificial fire when it occurs in a passage about the churning of the fire. The Adhyathmika, the Adhi-Daivika and the Adhi-Bhouthika meanings stand in the relative order of their importance. The word *Indra* means literally “One who is endowed with superhuman powers” Usage too lends its support to this interpretation. But, the passage that treats of the replacing of the Garhapatya fire uses the very same expression to denote the Garhapatya fire. Again, the expression *Akasa* can but denote naturally the material Akasa ; but in the passage “Whatever is seen springs from the Akasa”—it denotes the Supreme One; the natural meaning is subservient to the conventional. So, we

conclude that narratives do often yield a spiritual meaning, and expressions denoting other deities do really stand for the Supreme Soul.

Q. There is a show of justice in interpreting such Mantras as do not lay down rules of sacrifice, to mean the Supreme Self, that they may not stand useless. But, what of the other Mantras that are connected with sacrificial rites? Do you contend that they too point to Rama?

A. Even so. Since the entire Vedas are devoted to that purpose alone, we have no right to except any portion of it.

Q. It is not reasonable to give such an interpretation to Mantras that are not found in sections treating of the Science of Self. Then, the passages about chopping off the branches of trees must also be interpreted to denote the Supreme Self. Then, the Karmakanda loses its value in the eyes of those who tread the Path of Action.

A. Not so. The same fact is understood variously by various grades of intelligence. A rope lying on the road is taken for a serpent by one, for a stick by another and for a rope by a third. Brahma gave out that "The person who is seen in the eye is the Athman, is Fearlessness, is Brahman." Now, Virochana, one of his auditors, understood it that the embodied self was characterised by immortality and the other attributes; but, Indra, another of them, took it that the Self transcending the vehicles was meant. Difference of intelligence sometimes accounts for difference of interpretations. Now, we read in the Maha Bharatha that Indra slew Vrithra in the body with the invisible weapon Vajra (Aswamedha Parva). "When the universe was enveloped in ignorance, the Jeeva dispelled it by Divine Knowledge that transcends the senses"—this is how the most advanced will interpret it. The Vedic text describing the Wheel of Time is interpreted as follows, to suit the intellects of a low

order. The women mentioned there stand for the deities Dhatha and Vidydhatha ; the black and white threads mean day and night ; the fortnight, the month, the seasons, and the year are similarly interpreted. Now, the more advanced would see that the six seasons stand for the six senses. Each of these is made up of two months ; each sense has Desire and Aversion as its poles. A month is made up of two fortnights ; Desire and Aversion have a double aspect, according as they are directed in the direction of Dharma (the Law) or against it. Each fortnight is made up of fifteen days through the movements of the Sun and the Moon. The sun is the Self ; the moon is Manas with her sixteen rays (Prana, Sraddha, Akasa, Vayu, Agni, Water, Earth, Senses, Mind, Food, Energy, Thapas, Manthra, Karma, Worlds and Name). During sleep, the mind withdraws into itself all the rays except the last, and is absorbed in the Self. It is Avidya (Nescience), whose very nature is absolute Thamas (Inertia). The New-moon day, on which the sun and the moon are in conjunction, symbolises this truth. Later on, the rays emerge from the Self, one after another, through the agency of Viveka (Discrimination) ; this is the waxing of the Moon of Wisdom. The Self and the mind are opposite to one another, when wisdom has dawned ; the full moon typifies the disjunction of the sun and the moon. This is the Wheel of Time, the result of Action. Thus, the Mantras yield a spiritual meaning to the wise, and but the traditional one to the less advanced.

Q. If such an interpretation is the right one, how is it that Sayana and the other commentators on the Vedas have never revealed it ? Further, the incidents of the Ramayana are nowhere mentioned in the Vedic texts, like the episode of the death of Vrithra. It is hard to believe that the Ramayana is based upon the Vedas, and that all Mantras have a spiritual significance,

A. But, it is even so. The Vedic commentators set themselves to interpret the texts that bear upon the Path of Action and that sing forth the praises of the gods, in such a way as to draw the hearts of the less advanced to Action, fully aware that in course of time it will lead them on to Wisdom. The deeper meaning is not called for, and finds no place. Now, it is simply unreasonable to declare that the Ramayana incidents find no mention in the Vedas. If a blind man knocks himself against a post, is it the fault of the latter ? If you care not to delve deep into the hidden mines of Vedic lore, how is Ramayana to blame for it ? It is not in vain that the Maha Bharatha exclaims, "The Ithihosas and the Puranas amplify the Vedas ; they reveal the inner mysteries thereof. The Vedas shun the man of little wisdom, and cry out 'Lo ! this one may more likely misrepresent me.' " A room and its furniture are reflected in each mirror in it ; even so, the Universe with all its ruling Powers are reflected in each God. Everyone of them forms the cause of the world ; every one of them is the effect of the others. Worship of them is worship of Rama. The Vedic commentator interprets the texts to suit the purposes desired. But, it does not prevent us from reading into them the episodes of the Ramayana, by the force of context and by other traditional methods. We cannot accept the exoteric interpretations as ultimate, since they but plunge one deeper into the mire of Ignorance. So, we can well conclude that the Manthras bear only the traditional meaning to the uninitiated, while the initiated see in them a direct reference to Sree Rama and the mysteries connected with him.

Q. The Manthras found in connexion with religious acts do but mention the Gods, the materials, the method, the objects, and the results. How then, can you twist them to yield an interpretation in support of the Ramayana ?

A. The Manthras are even so ; but, in addition, they are invariably based upon spiritual truths. Let us take the Manthra—"You entered the great trees in the form of Krishna. Hence, I gather you in two ways." Now, this reveals the fact that the Brahman evolved the Universe and pervaded it ; and the sacrificial fuel is to be regarded as one of Its manifestations. This episode we find in the Brahmanas and is but repeated in the above text. "You, as Krishna the Supreme Brahman, evolve the universe, animate and inanimate ; and later on, pervade it through and through. You are one with it ; hence, you are even this sacrificial fuel. I now gather you thrice seven times." Again the Manthra—" We gather the earth thrown up by him, who dived into the Waters after this Earth, that lay hidden therein." The incarnation of the Lord as the Boar is referred to , the Earth that he dug up is very sacred and should be gathered by us. Again the Manthra—" For the essence of Food and Strength,"—is used when we chop the branches of trees. The Initiate understand it to mean—"Lord of the universe ! you shine forth even in this branch you have made. I chop you off to attain supreme bliss and the level of Virat —Brahman as pervading the universe ; and I have attained to you." Texts that relate to inanimate objects should be similarly interpreted; for, *food* symbolises *Virat*, and the *Essence of food* denotes the Supreme One. ("Verily he is the Rasa, the Essence; having attained that essence, one enjoys bliss."—*Sruthi*). Besides, such vedic texts as "All this is Purusha;" "All this is the form of Brahman;" "That state which is hinted at by all the Vedas;" "That whom all these attain;" "The hymns of the Rigveda in the splendour of the changeless " are our authorities for so interpreting the Vedas. And this is possible only in the case of a careful student of the Itihosas and the Puranas, who has

mastered their inner meaning; while the less advanced sees no other meaning than the praise accorded to the gathering of the material earth and the sacrificial fuel. He who worships the physical Boar is not very spiritual nor bright; but, he who sees Sree Krishna through the veil and tries to reach him is the Initiate. However, the Vedic commentator has given an exoteric interpretation to the passage as referring to the physical food and its essence ; *that* is meant to attract those whose temperament fits them for the Path of Action. But, nothing prevents the Initiate from understanding it according to his own light.

Q. We should explain the Manthras in consonance with the religious rites in which they are to be used. But, if that meaning does not fit in with the particular act, is it not better to abandon it ?

A. No. The Mantra—" Mahavishnu crossed the three worlds in three paces"—is used in the silent recitation laid down as a penance for breaking the vow of silence, as also in the oblation of ghee as a general penance. The greatness of the Lord is the only meaning we can see here ; but, nothing authorises us to interpret it in consonance with the subject in hand. He who does not acquaint himself with the Boar and the Dwarf incarnations of Vishnu cannot explain the texts solely by their context and use. Since the Vedic commentaries aim only at attracting to the Path of Action men whose temperament lies that way, we cannot expect the episodes of the Ramayana to find a place therein. But, there is not the least shadow of doubt that the epic of Valmeeki is based upon the Vedas, since it but amplifies the truths taught in them. Men of little knowledge may find it difficult to pierce through the veil , but to the Open Eye of the Initiate it is transparent. The Ramayana and its original, the hymns of the Rigveda, narrate the incidents in the life of Sree

Rama ; but, there runs an under-current of spiritual meaning all through. Each Manthra should be explained in relation to the sacrificial rite, to the incidents in the Ramayana and to the Science of Self. (*Manthra Ramayana*).

XII.—How to read the Ramayana ?

There is current a quaint saying of the wise. "You cannot spend the day better than by studying the records of the gamblers in the forenoon; the stories of women and their doings form a fit theme to while away the afternoon ; and the early hours of the night form a lovely background to the adventures of the thief." Now, no one takes the above literally ; but, understands it to mean that the Bharatha, that narrates the gambling of the eldest of the Pandavas and the evils that resulted therefrom, should occupy the forenoon. The Ramayana of Valmeeki, whose theme is Seetha, the ideal woman, and her sorrows, is to be recited and listened to when the day draws to a close ; while, the Bhagavatha, that records in symbols the incarnation of the Supreme Purusha, Sree Krishna,—the thief who steals away our hearts—and his work among men is the best prelude one could desire to a peaceful and calm dream-life.

Valmeeki has enjoined the royal youths, Kusa and Lava, to recite just twenty chapters a day, neither more nor less. (V. R. VII. 93). It gives extreme pleasure to the Fathers to hear it recited, when the anniversary rites are performed in their name. Gifts of cloths cattle and gold should be made to him that reads it (*Ib. id. III*). The Coming of the Lord, the marriage of Seetha, the Installation of the Sandals, the coronation of Sugreeva, the Surrender of Vibheeshana and the coronation of Sree Rama are fitting occasions when the reciter and the expounder should be honored with liberal gifts.

XIII.—How does it benefit us ?

“This record of Rama’s life purifies the heart of men, destroys their sins, and confers supreme merit. Hence the wise hold it in equal reverence with the Holy Writ ; and he who reads it with a devout heart, is freed from sin of every kind. A long and happy life is his portion in the world of men ; and when he goes away from it, he is a welcome guest in the world of Gods and is held in high honour among them, yea, his kith and kin.

Should a Brahmana read it, gift of speech is his meed, and wisdom equalled by none. Should one of the warrior race read it, the wide Earth and all it contains owns his sway. Should a Vaisya read it, merchant princes pay homage to him , nay, should a Soodra happen to hear it read, he shall win honor and glory among his kind.”
(V. R. I. 1).

Later on, we find (*Ib. id. 2*) that Brahma conferred upon Valmeeki the Open Eye of the Seer and said, “ Nothing that relates to any of the actors in that great world-drama shall escape thy all-seeing eye—Rama, Lakshmana, Seetha, men and monkeys, Gods and Rakshasas, their acts, their words, nay, their very thoughts, known or secret. Nothing that comes out of your mouth, consciously or otherwise, shall prove other than true. Sing you a poem that shall charm away the hearts of men, perfect in its rhythm and melodious in its flow. The cloud-cappel mountains, the swift-coursing rivers, and all created things shall pass away and be has naught But, your noble song shall outlive them and never fade from the hearts of men And as long as the record of Rama’s life holds sway over the hearts of men, so long shall you sit by me in my highest heaven.”

“A rare and noble epic this, the Ramayana of honeyed verses and faultless diction, beautifully adapted

to music, vocal or instrumental and charming to hear ; begun and finished according to the best canons of the art, the most exacting critic cannot praise it too highly; the first of its kind and an unapproachable ideal for all time to come ; the best model for all future poets ; the thrice-distilled essence of the Holy Scriptures ; the surest giver of health and happiness, length of years and prosperity, to all who read or listen to it." (*Ib. id.* 4.)

"This epic confers on kings long life, fame, victory and every other blessing desired. Do you desire offspring from your loins? You fail not to get it. Is wealth your object ? You have it as much as you wish. The king triumphs over his enemies and rules the lord of the Earth. The woman that listen to this holy narrative with a heart full of devotion, rejoices in her length of days and wealth of children and grand-children, even to the seventh remove, like unto the queens of Dasaratha, who saw the Lord himself come down unto the earth as children of their loins and rejoiced in everything that this world can give and the next. Anger and her sister passions find not a place in the heart of him who listens to the words of Valmiki. He puts away all misery behind him for ever. The wanderer in strange lands is restored to the bosom of those that love him. Sree Rama is ever ready to gratify his requests. The Shining Ones are delighted beyond measure. The evil Powers that may infest his house become his very friends and benefactors. Young women do bring forth excellent sons to gladden their hearts. Those of the royal race that listen to it with a devout heart from some good Brahmana, are ever blessed with wealth unbounded and offspring numerous. In short, an evergrowing circle of kinsmen, abundance of wealth and corn, faithful and devoted wives, perfect health, long life, fame and upright heart, spiritual splendour, good brothers and every thing that the human heart can wish for—all this

and much more form the meed of him who studies, with a pure heart and devout, the noble epic of Valmeeki."—(Ib. VI. 131).

"The sages that frequent the world of Brahma requested permission of him to go back to the audience-hall of Rama and listen to the remaining chapters of the Ramayana."—(Ib. VII, 98).

"The Omnipresent Lord and his glory form the subject of the Ramayana. Hence, the Gods, the Gandharvas, the Siddhas and the Sages ever listen to it with hearts overflowing with joy. A single chapter of the poem confers the merit accumulated by thousands of Aswamedhas, Vajapeyas and other holy sacrifices. Pilgrimages to Prayaga, Naimisa, Kurushethra and other holy spots, Ganga and the other sacred rivers—all the merit accumulated thereby is his, who listens whole-hearted to the recital of the Ramayana. The gift of untold wealth to deserving Brahmanas at Kurushethra during sacrifices confers no greater merit. The Divine Hero fails not to lift his devotee even unto his world, nay, he becomes one with the Lord."—(Ib. id. 111).

XIV.—Other Ramayanas

We have reason to believe that the life of Rama was sung by many others besides Valmeeki, even during the life time of the Divine One. "Chyavana, the sage, sang the Life of Rama. But, Valmeeki, who came after him, obtained immortal fame" (*Aswaghosha's Buddha Charithra* VII. 48.) The Ramayanas of Bodhayana, Bharadwaja and many other Rishis are not now extant.

Ananda Ramayana

The Lord Mahadeva narrated the life of Rama unto his beloved, Parvathi. It forms a portion of the Original Ramayana in 100 crores of stanzas. It is divided into 9

cantos of 109 chapters and 12,252 stanzas. The Sarakanda goes over the same ground as the Ramayana of Valmeeki. The Yathrakanda gives an account of the pilgrimage undertaken by Rama. The Yagakanda describes the horse sacrifice conducted by Rama, as also his 108 sacred names.

The Vilasakanda depicts Rama's government, the prayer known as Ramasthavaraja and the Deha Ramayana (the inner meaning of it). The Janmakanda tells us about the putting away of Seetha, the birth of Kusa and Lava, their fight with the army of Rama and the coming back of Seetha to her lord; as also the Ramaraksha. The Vivahakanda is an account of the marriages of the scions of the house of Ikshvakhu. The Rajyakanda recounts the 1000 holy names of Rama, the bringing down of the trees from the heaven of Indra, the destruction of the Asura Moolaka, the conquest of the seven Dweepas and the past births of Valmeeki. The Manoharakanda contains the Laghu Ramayana (the Summary given to Valmeeki by Narada) and the Kavachas (protective mantras) of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, Sathrughnna, Seetha and Hanuman. The Poornakanda relates the genealogy of the Lunar Race, the battle between the kings of the Soorya and Chandravamsas and the Passing of Rama.

Adhyathma Ramayana

It is generally held that this forms a part of the Brahmanda Purana and the printed editions confirm it. But, internal evidence shows that it was related by Visvamithra. Bhavishya Purana (III, 19) tells us that "The Lord Sankara, having thus gratified the wishes of Ramananda, vanished from the place. Later on, the holy man sought out Sree Krishna Chaitanya and served him faithfully for twelve years, subsisting solely upon milk. The Master enjoined him to compose the work known later on as the Adhyathma

Ramayana". Hence, neither Valmeeki nor Vyasa can be claimed to be its author.

As usual, Mahadeva recounts it to Parvathi. The incidents of the life of Rama are described at length, with many ethical and spiritual episodes illuminating the exoteric events.

Adbhutha Ramayana

Valmeeki narrates it to his disciple Bharadwaja. It is in 27 chapters and forms a portion of the Original Ramayana. The greatness of Seetha, the events that brought about the human incarnations of Rama and Seetha, and the episode of the thousand-headed Ravana are described at great length.

Agnivesya Ramayana

I have come across only some stanzas giving the chronology of the incidents of the Ramayana.

Sangraha Ramayana

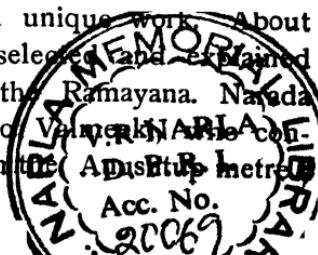
A modern work by Narayana Panditha, a follower of Sree Madhwacharya.

Yogavasishtha Ramayana

Valmeeki narrates to Bharadwaja what took place in the audience-hall of King Dasaratha when Vasishtha initiated Rama into the Science of Brahman. The teachings lean more towards the Adwaitha philosophy of Sree Sankaracharya.

Manthra Ramayana

By Lakshmanarya—a rare and unique work. About 156 hymns of the Rigveda are selected and explained as the basis of the incidents of the Ramayana. Narada taught these very same texts to Venkateswara who converted them later on into stanzas in the Adustup metre.



it is a summary of the epic, and forms its first chapter—the Samkshepa Ramayana. The author interprets each Manthra narratively and spiritually, while he refers the reader to Sayana, the standard commentator, for the current explanation.

The Puranas

Every one of them narrates at some length the incidents in the life of Rama ; while the Padmapurana gives a comparative account of the same in a previous kalpa.

Raghuvamsa

By the famous poet Kalidasa. In 19 chapters he relates the prominent incidents in the lives of the Solar Kings from Dileepa down to Agnivarna

Bhatti Kavya

By the poet Bhatti, who lived about the time of King Dharasena, of ruler Balabhi. Every one of the 22 Chapters of the work is built of words which illustrate some one important peculiarity in Sanskrit grammar.

Kamba Ramayana

By Kamban, the inspired Tamil poet. Night after night he listened to the various Ramayanas and the Puranas expounded by the ablest men of his time ; and the next day he sang them in melodious stanzas. He is the Milton of Tamil literature and his Ramayana is the Indian Paradise Lost.

Ramacharithramanasa

By Tulasidas, the famous saint of Northern India. He was the son of Athma Rama, and was born at Delhi, in 1575 A. D. He was warmly patronised by Shah Jahan, the Magnificent, and spent his life at Benares. In 1624 A. D. he went back unto Sree Rama, whose Life he

sang. He divides his work into 7 cantos like the Ramayana of Valmeeki, but the Balakanda is the longest of them. The Uttarakanda deals at length with the episode of the Crow-sage Bhusunda, and of Devotion in its manifold aspect.

It was thus the Ramacharithra came down to him. In a former kalpa, in a dark age of it, there lived a Soodra in the kingdom of Kosala. He was a bigoted worshipper of Siva and a bitter hater of other sects. A cruel famine drove him from his place to Ujjain, where a philanthropic Saivite took him in, relieved his wants and revealed to him the inner nature of Saivaism and the fundamental unity of all religions. But, the past karma of the unfortunate man drove him on with irresistible force to the deeper depths of intolerant bigotry. Blinded with fanaticism, he came to regard his broad-hearted teacher as a heretic, and thought it his bounden duty to hold him up to criticism and ridicule. One day his master chanced to come into the temple where the misguided man was seated in devout meditation upon his God. Big with conceit, he rose not to salute him ; but, sat on with a look of pity and contempt upon his face. His teacher minded it not, so great was his heart and so full of pity for the erring one. But, the Lord Mahadeva could not pass over the open insult to his servant. "A serpent thou shall become" said he "and of unwieldy bulk." The Teacher, pained to the heart at this unlooked-for doom of dread, besought of the Lord to mitigate the severity of the sentence. "Nay" replied Siva "it can't be undone. But, your intercession shall preserve him from the blinding force of births and deaths. His course shall be unimpeded on earth, and he shall remember his past." Thus, the fanatic Saivite became an ardent devotee of Sree Rama ; and many were the houses of flesh he abode in. In one of them he was a Brahmana; and sought the lonely retreats of Mount Meru,

where he came upon the Rishi Lomasa. Our friend clasped his feet in reverence and prayed to be instructed in the Science of Brahman. Lomasa tried to draw his heart towards the Absolute, beyond all attributes, beyond all Name and Form. But, he felt himself out his death in it and prayed oft to be initiated into the worship of Sree Rama. Again and again he crossed the sage, who, out of patience with him, cried out, "A croaking crow thou shalt become." (We should not jump to the conclusion that Lomasa, the sage of restrained self, could not keep his temper. Far from it. He was but the mouthpiece of the karma of the man, that came to a head at that moment). But, the Brahmana had now a clearer intellect and a calmer heart. He accepted with gladness the apparent curse as one more debt paid, as one more stone removed from the Path of Progress. Lomasa thereupon instructed him in the mysteries connected with Sree Rama and narrated unto him the Life-record of the Divine One, known as Ramacharithra Manasa. The crow passed beyond the portals of Death ; Time had no power over him. His vision was unclouded and saw far into the heart of things. Rama had not a more ardent devotee. He was the great Yogi, *Bhusunda*.

When Rama was bound by the magic weapons of Indrajith, Narada despatched Garuda, the Divine Bird, to destroy them. Now, the messenger was seized with a cruel doubt—"If Rama be the Supreme Brahman, how could Indrajith or any other prevail over him ?" He prayed Narada to enlighten him on the point. Narada sent him to his Father Brahma who passed him on to Mahadeva, the supreme hierophant of the mysteries connected with Rama. But, Sankara transferred him to Bhusunda, the latest addition to the fold; and Garuda heard from the crow the Ramacharithramanasa, as also the deeper truths connected with the Lord's Illusion and doings.

One day Mahadeva happened to visit Agasthya ; and Parvathi went along with him. There they had the pleasure of listening to the life and adventures of Sree Rama as narrated by the sage. Mahadeva, struck with his extreme devotion to Rama, instructed Agasthya in the deeper mysteries of the Divine Incarnation. In the course of time, Mahavishnu came down on earth as Raghava, exiled himself to Dandaka, lost Seetha, and went in search of her with a breaking heart and woe-begone countenance. Sankara failed to meet him then, try as he would. Later on, his wishes were gratified. Bhavani, who was with him, could not refrain from exclaiming to herself, "And so this is Sree Rama—who bewails the loss of his wife like any countryman ? And this is what Sankara would persist in regarding as the supreme Brahman and the object of his worship ? Verily, Agasthya was a little too enthusiastic over his hero." Sankara warned her of her grievous mistake, and let her into the truth about Rama's incarnation. "How is it, my dear, you fail to see that all this is his delightful illusion ? He is a man now and a forlorn lover ; he cannot but play the part to perfection." But, Parvathi would not yield her point. Then, Sankara advised her to go by herself and subject Rama to any test she liked ; for, that is the only means of convincing an obstinate sceptic. Accordingly, Rudrani repaired to where Rama was and stood before him as Seetha. Lakshmana could not pierce through the illusion ; but, Rama quietly called out, "Greeting to you, sister mine ! Where have you left Sankara and what would you in these frightful solitudes ?" Parvathi was dumb-founded. Wonder, a smarting sense of defeat, shame at being found out and fear for the consequences overcame her. She went back to Paramasiva ; and Rama took the opportunity to mystify her still more. Wherever she turned, there she saw

Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha, adored by countless hosts of Gods, sages and Thrimoorthis (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva). But, when she looked back, lo ! it vanished. Sankara asked her with a smile, " Well, I hope you are satisfied. I am curious to know how you tested him." But, her evil hour was upon her still and she blurted out, " Nay, I thought better of it and tested him not. Your arguments were enough to convince me." Now, Mahadeva's heart was heavy with grief ; Parvathi could not withstand the illusion cast upon her by Rama ; and she could not keep her lips from a lie. Then, he bethought himself that she had, though for a time, assumed the guise of Seetha the Divine Mother. " No more in this incarnation shall I regard this woman as my wife ; she is a mother to me and sacred." The Gods sang his praises high, who testified his devotion to Rama by such a terrible vow. Sometime after, Parvathi came to know of it and prayed hard to be forgiven ; but Siva was in deep meditation and could not reply ; and she dragged on a miserable existence in that body of hers for about 87,000 years. At last Sankara arose from his Samadhi and the first thing he did was to recite the holy Names of Sree Rama.

Daksha's sacrificial rite, his insult to Siva, Parvathi's abandonment of her body, her re-birth as the daughter of Himavan, her prolonged austerites to become the wife of Sankara, her marriage to him, the blasting of Manmatha, and the birth of Karthikeya followed in due course. One day Parvathi reverted to the old topic and begged her husband to clear her doubt. And Sankara, out of the supreme compassion of his heart, narrated to her the Ramacharitramanasa, even as Bhusunda gave it to Garuda. The sage Yagnavalkya got it from the crow, Bharadwaja from Yagnavalkya and Thulasidas from one of his pupils.

The Jaina Ramayana

This forms the tenth chapter of the VIIth canto of the work, *Thrishashti-elakapurusha-charitra*, a work written in the Prakrith dialect by Hemachandracharya, the Jaina. There is very little in common between the Rāmayana of Valmeeki and the Jaina Ramayana. And that is excuse enough for my giving the readers a brief summary of it.

Bharathakhanda forms one of the nine portions of Jamboodweepa, the first of the seven globes that go to make up this Earth-chain. And at Vineetha, a lovely town in it, held sway King Sagara, of the royal line of Ikshvaku. Hunting was a passion with him, to which he sacrificed his kingdom and its cares. One day he chased a deer far, far into the woods, when his horse got out of hand and took him into a strange wood that he had never before been in. Suddenly it fell dead from exhaustion ; and Sagara, faint with hunger and fatigue, trudged on wearily for a long time, until he came upon a lovely lake hidden within a thick grove. He threw himself down on its banks to rest, too tired to quench his burning thirst at the cool waters that lay to his hand. Soon he was conscious of some other presence near him, and casting his eyes in that direction, a vision of beauty dawned upon him.

A young maiden, in the prime of youth and loveliness, stood at a distance, gazing with curious eyes of fear and shyness upon the strange visitor. The grace that pervaded her form and her every movement, the dazzling radiance that enveloped her like a halo, and the stamp of nobility about her deprived him of every bit of self-control he claimed to possess ; and there he stood staring at her, like any greenhorn fresh from his fields. But, the maiden was as much at a loss to account for the strange emotions that played over

her heart and rooted her feet to the spot, perforce to gaze upon the intruder with wonder-waiting eyes. It was a case of mutual love at first sight. All at once, a call from some one near broke into the lovely dream and like a flash, the girl vanished back into the grove. Sagara, who by that time had fairly lost all consciousness of where he was, or what he was doing, was rudely awakened to a sense of reality and closed his eyes to see if he was not the victim of some strange optic illusion. When he opened his eyes, there stood before him an aged man who wore the livery of a king upon him. He bowed to Sagara with the deepest reverence and said, "Lord ! I am entrusted with a message to you which I beg to lay at your feet. It might not be unknown to you that Sulochana, of the race, ruled at Gaganavallabha, hard by the Vidyadhara Mount Vaithathy. He had two children, a boy Sahasranethra and a girl Sukes. Poornamegha, of the same race and lord of Rathnapura, was a suitor for the hand of the princess ; and as Sulochana would not favour his suit, the lover made war upon him, slew him in battle and annexed his kingdom. But, the God Chakrapani saved the lives of the children, and led them on to this forest, where they have lived ever since in disguise. It seems that Sukes, the princess, saw you here. Her heart has gone out to you and she would give you her hand in marriage. Her brother (to whom you are not unknown by fame) looks upon it with supreme satisfaction and has sent me here to request you to repair to their lowly abode."

Sagara was overjoyed at this unexpected turn of events that promised to gratify the wildest hopes of his heart, and gladly followed his guide. He married Sukes, and lost no time in leading an army against the usurper, whom he defeated with dreadful loss. Sahasranethra ruled over his father's dominions, and the lands of his foe.

Some time after, the friends made a pilgrimage to a famous shrine of Lord Jina, in a grove near the town of Saketha. As Fate would have it, Sahasranethra came upon Poornamegha, the murderer of his father and his son Ghanavahana. Blind with rage, he slew the father out of hand and was at the point of sending the son after him, when Lord Jina stayed his arm. Then, Sagara prayed of the Lord to lift the veil from the past. "What causes brought about such a deadly hatred between Poornamegha and Sulochana, between Ghanavahana and Sahasranethra ? Why should myself and Sahasranethra be drawn towards each other by feelings of strongest affection ?" Then, the Lord opened their eyes to the past, and said :—" There dwelt, of yore, at Adithyapura, a merchant by name Bhavana. He was away in other lands trading for a long time ; when, he was seized with a fit of home sickness, and travelled back as fast as he could. He left his friends and fellow-travellers far behind, and came back to his home some time after midnight. In the anxiety of his heart, he knocked loud and vehemently for admittance. But, wonderful are the ways of Fate. His son Haridas, thus rudely roused from his deep slumbers, mistook his father for some daring dacoit, least expecting his parent's arrival at that time. He rushed out in anger, and alas! struck him dead, his poor father at his own threshold, when his heart was beating high with the anticipated delight of meeting, after so long a period of separation, those whom he loved most. But, inexorable karma could not be stayed in its course; and they were born later on as Poornamegha and Sulochana, with the old fierce animosity still ablaze in their hearts.

"A devout ascetic you were in your last birth ; and two disciples you had, Sasi and Avali. One day, they chanced to quarrel over something, and Sasi killed his friend in a fit of fury. They are no other than Ghanavahana and

Sahasranethra ; and their last thoughts still dominate their hearts. Avali was your favourite and is now your friend and kinsman."

This marvellous story, this page from the past, was listened to with deep wonder and surprise by every one present. But, none drank in the words of the Lord with greater avidity than Bheema, one of the door-keepers and a Rakshasa by descent. All at once he rushed from his place to where Ghanavahana stood, fell upon his neck with tears of joy, and cried, "In my last birth I was Vidyuthnethra, the king of Kanchanapura, and you were Rathivallabha, the son of my heart. The great gods have restored you to my arms after so long a time. But, full well do I know that my days are over, and I must quit this body. So, receive from me this diamond necklace and the arts of illusion of which I am a master. I crown you king of Lanka in the Rakshasadweepa, as also of the Pathala Lanka, six Yojanas deep below the Earth. May you live long and happily to perpetuate on earth the line of Rakshasas."

Accordingly, Ghanavahana became the ruler of the Rakshasadweepa. His son was Maharakshasa, who begat Devarakshasa. His son Keerthidhavala took to wife Devi, the daughter of Sreekantha, who ruled over Vaithathya. Thatithkesa succeeded him in the sovereignty of the Rakshasadweepa.

Meanwhile, Pushpoththara of the Vidyadhara race, and ruler of Rathanapura, had long contemplated an alliance between Devi and his son Padmoththara; but, as her father would not hear of it, he resolved to revenge himself upon him. Now, Padma his daughter, had long loved in secret Sreekantha ; who, coming to know of it, carried her away in his aerial car. Pushpoththara was beside himself with rage and was at the heels of his foe,

vowing dire vengeance upon him. But, Keerthidhavala interferred, and reconciled them ; whereafter, they became fast friends. Pushpoththara installed Sreekantha as the ruler of Vanaradweepa, where the latter made Kishkindha his capital. His son was Vajrakantha, who begat Dadhiratha.

Once, Sreechandra the wife of Thatithkesa, requested her husband to take her out for a pleasure trip in the aerial car. They went to Vanaradweepa, and had a very pleasant time of it ; when, a monkey tore at Sreechandra with his claws. Thatithkesa was so much enraged that he struck him dead on the spot. A devout follower of Jineswara the Lord of Compassion, he felt supreme remorse for having taken the life of a living thing. An ascetic happened to pass by, and the king questioned him as to his unwitting crime. The holy man's exhortations were so powerful as to arouse in his heart supreme indifference to the things of the world. He installed his son Sukesa on the throne and donned the orange-robes of the Sanyasi. Dadhiratha, the ruler of Vanaradweepa, had a similar turn of mind and entrusting his kingdom to his son Kishkindha, renounced the world.

Meanwhile, a great Swayamvara was announced at Adithyapura, ruled over by Manthramali. On that occasion, his daughter Sreemala threw the garland of flowers around the neck of Kishkindha of the Vanaradweepa and thereby choose him out as her partner in life. Asanivega of Rathanapura resented it as an insult to himself, fought with the successful lover and drove him out of his kingdom. Sometime after, Sukesa underwent a similar fate at his hands, when the two companions in misfortune retired to Pathalalanka with their followers, and lived a happy life there and fearless. There Indrani, the wife of Sukesa, gave birth to Malı, Sumalı and Malyavan ; while Sreemala begat Adithyarajas and Riksharajas.

Mali somehow came to know that his ancestral Lanka was in the hands of the ruler of Rathanapura ; he repaired thither, drove him out of his new conquests and regained his kingdom. Later on, he marched upon Rathanapura and its ruler. Indra was then the king. His mother Chithrasundari was possessed of an evil spirit, that filled her with a strong passion for Indra, the Lord of the Celestials. Her husband came to know of it, and gladdened her heart by assuming the form of the object of her love. A son was born unto her, whom she named Indra. But, the boy did not stop there; he imitated his great name-sake in his weapons, retinue, vehicles and other signs of royalty and ruled long and well. Mali, the Rakshasa, fell in battle with him. Thereupon, the conqueror made over Lanka to Vaisravana, the son of Visravas and his wife Samseka. Then Sumali and Malyavan hid themselves in the Pathalalanka and led the life of ascetics. But, Sumali never despaired of restoring the fortunes of his house; so, he took to wife Kekasi, the daughter of Vyomabindu, by whom he had three sons Rathnasravas Bhanukarna (Kumbhakarna), Vibheeshana and a daughter Soorpanakha. The boys were endowed with extraordinary strength and might and stood over sixteen and a half bows-length in height. Rathnasravas, the eldest, one day came upon a necklace of gems that belonged to his father and lightly placed it round his shoulders. Now, its might was such that none could so much as move it an inch ; thousand deadly serpents guarded it day and night. Sumali watched that wonderful feat of his son and, struck with the reflection of the face of the boy in the nine gems, named him Dasamukha (ten-headed).

Sometime after, the young man came to hear from his mother how their house had been rulers of Lanka and the Rakshasadweepa, how they were dispossessed of it, and were leading a hole-and-corner existence down there

as sanyasins. The spirit of his ancestors was upon him ; and he retired to the depths of Bheemaranya, from which he returned master of a thousand magical arts. He married Mandodari, the daughter of Maya of the Vidyadhara race, and had by her a son Indrajith. Six thousand Gandharva women became his wives later on. He attacked Vaisravana, drove him out of Lanka and held sway over the Rakshasadweepa with great pomp. One day, he came to know through Pavanavega that the sons of Kishkindha, the old friend of his house, was thrown into hell by Yama, a descendant of Indra of Rathanapura. He proceeded to where they were, relieved them from their misery, drove Indra from his kingdom and made Adithyayarajas the ruler of Kishkindha's dominions, while Riksharajas was placed over Rikshapura in the Vanaradweepa. Adithyayarajas took to wife Indumathi, by whom he had two sons Vali and Sugreeva. Riksharajas married Hari-kantha, who bore him Nala and Neela.

Reports of the mighty strength and prowess of Vali reached Dasamukha's ears ; and he proceeded forthwith to Kishkindha and his army with him. But, Vali could not understand this unprovoked attack ; so, he simply caught up the Rakshasa and placed him in durance vile. Dasamukha had ample time for reflection and repentance ; he frankly confessed to Vali that he had miscalculated and had caught a Tartar ; he prayed hard to be set free, and vowed deathless friendship and gratitude. Vali, for all his strength and valour, seems to be a good soul and soft-hearted ; and he allowed Rayana to go back in peace. Some time after, Vali installed his brother Sugreeva in his place and retired to the charming solitudes of Mount Meru to lead a life of quiet meditation. Sugreeva gave his daughter Sreeprabha in marriage to Dasamukha and celebrated it with extraordinary pomp and splendour.

Long afterwards, the Rakshasa monarch fell in love with Rathnavali, a goddess of Nithyaloka and went thither in his aerial car. All at once its course was checked; and looking down, he saw that it was Mount Meru and Vali seated there plunged in profound meditation. Fired with wrath at this insult to his majesty, he attempted to root out the mountain and Vali along with it. The monkey smiled in pity and, not disposed to be too hard upon the fool, pressed down the mount ever so much with his toe. Dasamukha could not free his hands from between the mountain and the earth. Long did he howl in his agony ; and heart-rending were his prayers and protestations to Vali, who, tired of it all, let him go. This incident gave the Rakshasa a fresh epithet—the Howler (Ravana).

Sometime after, he won the grace of Jineswara and was allowed to obtain from Dharna, the serpent, the magical art known as Sakthi. Now, the ambition to rule over the broad earth and the kings on it caught him in its grip ; and, with Sugreeva to aid him, he started on a campaign of conquest. On his way, he broke his journey at the banks of the river Narmada to bathe and rest a while. He was engaged in devout worship of Jineswara on the pleasant sands of the river, when Sahasramsa, king of Mahishmathi, kicked away the dam that kept back its waters. The rolling torrent came upon Ravana all too soon and washed away his image and the articles of worship. Ravana, beside himself with rage, attacked Sahasramsa and took him prisoner ; but, set him free at the earnest request of his father Sathabahu. Sahasramsa never recovered from the blow ; he made over his kingdom to his friend Anaranya, and took holy orders. But, the contagion spread to the new ruler, who placed his son Dasaratharaya on the throne and became a sanyasin.

During his travels, Ravana came upon king Maruththaraya, who was engaged in a grand sacrifice. Countless sheep and cattle were tied to the sacrificial posts, patiently awaiting the hour of their death and deliverance. Ravana, as a true follower of Jineswara, could not bear to see this wanton cruelty, this hecatomb of innocent animals, with no words to voice their misery but a cry. In a fit of fury, he made sad havoc of the sacrifice. Narada, who set on Ravana to this act of mercy, came there, praised the Rakshasa and his piety, and said to the assembled crowd, "There lived of yore a great teacher by name Ksheerakadamba. His son Parvathaka, the prince Vasuraya, son of Abhichandra of Sukthimathi and myself the third, were disciples under the holy man. One day, he gave us each a bird made of flour and told us to kill it where there were none present. We took different directions. The others came back after a time and described how they killed their birds and where ; but, I came back to the teacher and said, 'Reverend Sir ! Try as I would, I failed to find a place where there is none ; and further, I hold that harmlessness to all sentient beings is the highest virtue. The master was mightily pleased with me and condemned the others to long periods of life in hell. But, Parvathaka his son, wanted to know the why of it and argued the point with me. 'The Vedas enjoin on us the sacrifice of *Aja*. Now, the word has no other meaning in good honest Sanskrit than a sheep or a goat.' 'But' cried I 'the same word has been understood to denote that which is not born. Now, what can it mean, in the name of common sense, but grain that has been kept over three years ; for, then, it is useless as seed. The Vedas, ever intent upon putting down every tendency to harm any sentient being, declare that all sacrifice should be made with such grain ; that is how *Aja* should be interpreted.'

Grain having the power of reproduction in it is, in a way, a sentient being ; and it must not receive harm at our hands. How absurd to apply the passages to authorise sacrifice of animals, so much higher in the scale of evolution than grain!" But, Parvathaka was hard to convince ; so, I referred the matter to Vasuraya as the umpire. He too decided it in favour of my opponent. But, the Gods, who are ever by us, were incensed at his unjust decision and condemned him to hell." The assembled multitude were loud in their praises of Narada for the masterly and lucid manner in which he had solved a very vexed question and let light upon it. Maruththaraya paid no heed to the ruin of his sacrifice ; he placed to heart the words of Narada and bestowed his daughter Kanakaprabha in marriage upon Ravana.

The Rakshasa king next proceeded to Mathura and was the guest of Madhu, who was the envied possessor of a trident given him by God Chamarendra. A warm friendship grew up between the two, and Ravana cemented it by giving his daughter Manorama as a wife to Madhu. News reached him through his spies that Nalacoobara was ruling his subjects with a rod of iron ; and Ravana proceeded there in all haste to punish the tyrant as he deserved. But, his wife Uparambha, a good woman and virtuous, interceded for him and promised that he would turn over a new leaf ; whereupon, Ravana left him in peace and turned his arms against Indra of Rathanaipura. Now, Indra had for long years kept his name untarnished, and had jealously guarded his title of 'the Invincible.' But Fate fought against him in the shape of Ravana ; and he drank of the bitter cup of defeat. Nirvanasangama, his teacher, reminded him of a past evil deed of his, when he insulted Ahalya, the wife of a holy man Anandamali ; his defeat might be, in a way, an expiation of the sin, Indra was consoled somewhat.

Thus, Ravana ranged over the earth, now winning hard victories over some and anon suffering shameful defeat at the hands of others. On his way back to Lanka, he was met by Ananthaveerya, the sage, who said to him, "Dassamukha, my son ! you have incurred much sin by violating the wives of others. A heavy punishment is in store for you through the Lord Vasudeva. You will lay violent hands on his wife, and he will be your Fate." Now, Ravana's heart sank within him, at these words of evil omen. "Well" he said to himself, "let the dead past bury itself. No use of crying over spilt milk. Henceforth at least, I shall keep my heart away from those who place not their affections on me."

There was a king, by name Mahendra, who held sway at Mahendrapura, near mount Vaithathy. He had a wife Hridayasundari and a daughter Anjanasundari. Countless were the princes that sought her hand in marriage, and sent their horoscopes and portraits to her father. Mahendra consulted with his ministers, and chose Vidyuthprabha and Pavananjaya as the best of the lot. Now, Vidyuthprabha was the master of unbounded wealth, was extremely proficient in all the arts and sciences of the time, and was gifted with marvellous beauty; but, the stars promised him a very short life. Pavananjaya, the son of Prahladaraya, who reigned at Adithyapura, was not endowed with such excellences as his rival ; but, the astrologers guaranteed him a very long life.

Naturally, the father chose the latter as a meet husband for his girl, fixed the day of marriage and sent word to his friends and kin that he would celebrate it at a town near the holy spot Manasatheerththa. Well, they assembled there in due course, and the preliminary rites were conducted with magnificent pomp. Pavananjaya was no fool. He knew very well that the choice fell upon him not because he was

a more eligible party than his rival, but because his life was an unusually long one. He could not repress the natural curiosity to know how his affianced took it, how the king and his people viewed it. He managed to conceal himself in the apartments of the princess, with a view to hear for himself what they thought of the match. Anjanasundari and her two friends touched upon various current topics for a time; when, one of the girls turned to the other and said, "I cannot, for the life of me, make out why our master should pass over Vidyuthprabha, the most beautiful and wealthy of all the princes we know, and pitch upon Pavananjaya as a husband for our princess. May be you are in the secret." "Nay, nay" replied the other "there is nothing in it to make a secret of. Vidyuthprabha has but a short life before him ; and Pavananjaya has an unusually long one. At least that is what the astrologers give out. That is all." "What a pity !" rejoined the first "Better a short life and sweet than a long one and dreary. A cup of nectar and—death the next moment, is what I would prefer to unending draughts of poison and—a lease of life, longer if possible than that of Father Time."

But, Anjanasundari quietly listened to it as became a dutiful daughter. Her face was as inscrutable as a sphinx ; nor did she chide her maids for taking that extraordinary liberty with her and the object of her father's choice. Pavananjaya unfortunately jumped to the conclusion that the princess accepted him not for his own sake ; his only recommendation was that the astrologers guaranteed him a very long life. He was the last man to make a scene. His friends, his kin and the guests shall never come to know the great sacrifice he made for their sake. He would go through the affair as if he were the most ardent of lovers; but, Anjanasundari must be a stranger to him for the rest of his life. Well, the marriage came off as grandly as any one could wish.

Pavananjaya took his bride home to his capital, gave her a splendid suite of apartments, numerous retinue and every comfort that heart could desire ; but, he never set his eyes upon her.

Ravana the Rakshasa, sustained shameful defeat at the hands of Varuna and sent word to his friend Prahladaraya to come and lead his troops against the foe. Pavananjaya caught at the opportunity to escape from a cheerless home. His parents and wife did their very best to detain him ; but he heeded them not. He travelled far during the day and encamped at night on the shores of Lake Manasarovara. It was insufferably hot and sultry. Nature seemed to hold her breath in pain. Pavananjaya rolled on an uneasy bed, listless and too tired to sleep. A swan sent up from somewhere near a doleful wail, calling upon her mate that came not. It aroused in the prince a train of thought, that unconsciously led him to reflect upon the life of happy couples, of love-matches, and of the course of true love that did run smooth. His mind had been under a cloud, and his heart warped and unnaturally perverted. What a brute he had been! And what an angel of goodness and patience his wife had proved herself! His unbounded self-conceit had certainly misconstrued her maiden modesty and silence, into a loveless heart and utter apathy. Well, he was glad that he had found out his mistake before it was too late. Not a moment should be lost in making ample reparation, even to the fullest. So, he took horse at once, and, before midnight, was at the gates of his palace unknown to any. He sought the presence of his wife ; and, to her great surprise and bewilderment, confessed everything frankly and honestly, and besought her to pardon him and forget the past if possible. They had a very happy time of it that night ; and in the small hours of the morning

Pavananjaya took leave of his wife, promising to be back as early as possible. As a sign of his visit to her that night, and to silence any scandal in case she conceived and bore him a child, he gave her his signet ring and rode back in all speed to the camp.

Anjanasundari did conceive and it came to the ears of the king and queen. They would not listen to any explanations. They would not bestow a glance at the signet ring she produced. They would not heed the advice of their prudent minister to take no action until their son should come home. The unfortunate girl was made to leave the capital the very next day. Her parents were, if possible, more stupid and pig-headed. "You do not want us to believe that they are fools enough to punish an innocent girl. *Herc* is no place for you."

Now, the princess had a very dear friend of hers, by name Vasanthathilaka. She sought her out and requested shelter and help from her when her hour of pain and misery should come upon her. For once, the tie of friendship was stronger than the tie of blood. A loving heart saw more clearly than Age and crabbed Prejudice. She consoled the heart-broken girl and assured her that she would see her through at any cost. They left the abodes of men far behind and repaired to the wild woods, travelling by easy stages, and subsisting on the kindly charity of those they came across. At last they reached Hanupura, a sort of oasis in the midst of a dense forest, and put up for themselves a sort of cottage near the hermitage of Amithagathi, a holy man. One morning Vasanthathilaka approached him and asked, "Holy sir! What will become of my poor friend? The child in her womb—has it happy days before it?" And to her replied the sage, "In her last birth this lady was Lakshmeevathi, one of the two queens of Kanakaratha. She

hated her rival, and in sheer spite, stole the image of Jineswara that she worshipped, and threw it on a heap of rubbish. But, repentence came upon her soon. She brought back the image and prayed to the Lord to pardon her sacrilege. That is why she was hounded out by her kith and kin. Her timely repentance will bear ample fruit, in that a son would be born unto her ; and great will be his fame in all the worlds. The cloud that now darkens her fair name will soon pass away and she will be taken back with joy and honor by the very people who have discarded her."

Shortly after, Anjanasundari gave birth to a son. It was a Sunday in the month of Chaithra and the constellation Sravana ruled the day. *Hanumantha* they called him, from Hanupura, where he was born. Mighty were his feats and marvellous his deeds even as a child ; and the fame of his strength and prowess flew far and fast. One morning he saw the rising Sun and mistaking it for a nice plaything, sprang into the air to bring it down. But, he found out his mistake and alighted on mount Sreesaila, which was shattered to pieces through the shock.

Meanwhile, his father Pavananjaya made war upon Varuna, routed his army and delivered from captivity Khara and Dooshana, the brothers of Ravana. Thereafter, he returned to his kingdom, covered with glory and loaded with honors and presents by the Rakshasa king. A terrible shock awaited him at home. His wife, his new-found love, was mercilessly driven from the town by his own parents, who ought to have known better—and all because she had born in her womb the happy pledge of their reunion after long years of desolate misery. They might have at least waited for him to come back ; he had a voice in the affair ; he had more vital interests at stake. He called the people together and related to them how he had cruelly misunderstood his innocent wife, how happy Fate

brought them together, how he provided against that very contingency and how his parents were obstinately blind to the truth and had perpetrated an unheard-of cruelty. His house was left unto him desolate. His heart was far away and with his wife. He had no call to remain where the persecutors of his wife abode. He would go out into the world and search even to the remotest corners of it, even if the search should end with his life. Long did he wander and far did he roam, until at last one happy day he came upon them at the outskirts of Hanupura, living all humbly. He clasped his dear wife and dearer child to his breast. Vasanthathilaka, a mother to the poor girl when her own flesh and blood cast her out with scorn—he could not thank her enough nor think of any return of gratitude, except humbly praying her to live with him all her days and continue to be a mother to himself and his wife. They came back to his kingdom and lived there long and happily.

Hanumantha rendered signal service to Ravana the Rakshasa, who, out of a heart full of gratitude and delight, gave him to wife his daughter Sathyavathi. His sister Soorpanakha was not less grateful and bestowed her daughter Ananthakusuma upon him. On his way back, Sugreeva and Nala invited him to stay with them, and coming to know of the great service rendered by him to their old friend Ravana, gave him their daughters Padmaraga and Harimalini to wife.

King Vijaya ruled at Ayodhya. Himachooda was his wife and he had two sons Vajrabhahu and Purandara. The elder took Manorama to wife ; but, after a time, they entered the order of the monks. The younger came to the throne, and after him, father and son, Keerthiratha, Kosala, Hiranyagarbha, Nahusha, Saudana, Simharatha, Brahmaratha, Chathurmukha, Hemaratha,

Satharatha, Vathayapritha, Varidhara, Indudhara, Adithyarththa, Mandhatha, Veerasena, Prathimanya, Prathibandhu, Ravimanyu, Vasanthalethaka, Kuberadaththa Kumku, Sarabha, Dwiratha, Simhadasava, Hiranyakasipu, Punjabstala, Kakuthstha, Raghuraya and Anaranya. His son Dasaratha reigned at Ayodhya long and happily. King Janaka of Mithila was his contemporary and faithful friend.

One day Ravana met Narada, and asked him in a spirit of banter, "Now, tell me when I am to die and by whom?" To whom Narada replied, "The son of Dasaratha, King of Ayodhya and the daughter of Janaka of Mithila are your Fate." Ravana was dumb-founded at this unexpected turn of the conversation. Narada had taken him all too seriously and had spoken out a very unpleasant prophesy. But, he would cheat Destiny and give the lie to Narada; he would make it utterly impossible for Dasaratha and Janaka to have any children at all; he would lay them out as corpses and there was an end of it. So, he sent his brother Vibheeshana to make away with them; but, they had word of it before hand and were far away by the time their enemy was upon their city. Vibheeshana executed the orders of Ravana upon the life-like images that the kings had left on their throne and reported to his brother that the objects of his apprehension were no more.

Meanwhile, Dasaratha travelled a long way and settled in the Magadha country with his wives Aparajitha, Sumithra, Kaikeyee and Suprabha. In a battle with an enemy who attacked him wantonly, Kaikeyee rendered him signal service and in return got from the king two boons, which she reserved for some future occasion to ask. Dasaratha had four sons. One night Aparajitha, his eldest wife, saw in her dreams a lion, an elephant, the sun and the moon. The astrologers interpreted it that she would give birth to a son whose fame would

spread over the whole world. Shortly after, a son was born to her, as beautiful as the Goddess Lakshmi who dwells in Brahmaloka. He was an incarnation of one of the gods. They named him Padma, from the lotus on which Lakshmi sits; Rama was another of his names. The second wife likewise dreamt of a lion, an elephant, the sun, the moon, the fire, the ocean God and Lakshmi. A son was born to her, blue in hue, overshadowed by Mahavishnu. They called him Narayana and also Lakshmana. The third wife, Kaikeyee, begat Bharatha, and Suprabha was the mother of Sathrugnha. About the same time, Janaka married Vaidehi and had a daughter, Seetha by name.

Later on, Atharangama, the Mlechcha king over Mayuramala, the capital of Barbaradesa, north of mount Kailas, attacked Janaka, who requested his friend to assist him. Rama obtained permission to go instead of his father and defeated the enemy. This induced Janaka to give him his daughter Seetha to wife. Now, Narada came to hear of the extraordinary beauty of the princess and repaired to the house of Janaka to have a sight of her. But, Seetha was horribly frightened at his monstrous ugliness and would not come forth. Stung to the quick, Narada induced King Bhamandala to abduct Seetha. But, his father Chandragathi stopped it and sent word to Janaka to give Seetha in marriage to his son. "What a pity!" exclaimed Janaka "I have already promised her hand to Rama." But, Chandragathi would not drop the matter there. 'Such a gem of a woman shall never be the prize of pure luck ; worth, merit and valour must have a voice in it too I will send you a famous bow, Vajravartha. Should Rama succeed in so much as bending it, Seetha shall be his.' Janaka acceded to the proposal and invited Rama to fulfil the conditions. It was but child's play for the hero ; and Seetha became his wife,

Lakshmana married eighteen maidens of the Vidyadhara race ; and Bharatha married the daughter of Janaka's brother.

Thereafter, Dasaratha was enabled to regain, through the grace of Jineswara, his lost kingdom of Ayodhya. But, the snows of age chilled his heart and he resolved to install Rama in his place. It was then that Kaikayee came forward and requested him to fulfil his promise unto her. "With the greatest pleasure" replied Dasaratha "Then," said Kaikayee " send away Rama to the distant forests and place my son Bharatha on the throne." Dasaratha, whose heart knew no deceit, whose lips were never soiled by an untruth, bowed his head in sorrow and consented to condemn to long exile the darling of his heart. Bharatha went on his knees to Rama and besought him to remain at Ayodhya and accept the throne as his lawful right. But, Rama took an example from his father and was bent upon going away from the kingdom. The old monarch had, without a moment's hesitation, sacrificed his life and every thing that it could offer him on the altar of Truth and Duty. Would he, the son of such a noble father, tarnish by his weakness for power the bright fame of his ancestors that shone far far into the illimitable past ? His father's promise, of which the price was his life, should be kept in full.

Rama, Seetha and Lakshmana travelled long and far, and at last entered the dense forests of Pariyathra. They passed by mount Chitrakoota and many days' journey from it, came upon a town where they found no living soul. Rama called unto him a hunter that stood by, and asked him the reason of it "Lord!" said the man "this is or this was the famous town of Dasanga. Vajrakarni, a petty ruler, governed here with great fame and justice. He was a devout follower of Jineswara; he cut his image on his signet and vowed

that he would never bow his head to any other, god or man. This reached the ears of Simhadasa, his lord and master, who came down upon him with a large army, drove him and his subjects from the town and reduced it to the state you now see it in." Rama was extremely pained to hear it. He directed Lakshmana to punish Simhadasa for his wanton injustice and brought about a better understanding between him and Vajrakarni. This enabled the latter to devote himself heart and soul to the worship of Lord Jina.

Thereafter, they dived deeper and deeper into the dark woods and one day came upon a lovely princess wandering about in man's attire. They consoled her and came to know that her father king Valakhilya was defeated and kept in prison by Kaka, a hunter-king. Rama sent Lakshmana to slay Kaka and free Valakhilya from bondage

Another day, they travelled far and suffered much from heat, hunger and fatigue. A large banyan offered them a welcome refuge under its pillared shade. A Yaksha, who had made the tree his home, came down and offered reverent worship to Rama and through his magic, a beautiful town arose on the spot, where the exiles lived for a time.

One day, Rama reached the town of Vijayapura and was sauntering through the lovely gardens on the outskirts, when he saw a beautiful girl about to put an end to her life. He ran to her and succeeded in thwarting her purpose. " My good sister ! How could you ever think of going into the presence of your Maker unbid and before your time ?" " Lord ! " replied the maiden, in accents of bitter despair, " doubtless you rejoice in having saved my life and regard it as a great benefit done to me ; but, if you knew what misery I was trying to escape from, you would have been the first to kill me out of sheer pity " ; and she burst into a flood of tears. Rama

blamed himself for having caused her useless grief and resolved to lighten her load of sorrow, if that were in his power. "Grieve not, my child ! Tell me what your heart yearns after ; and you *shall* have it." Then she took heart and said, "He who stands by your side, your brother Lakshmana, is the cause of all my woe. Mine is a hopeless love unreturned. Better dark death than a life of dire misery, a living hell. Now, see you not that your promise is beautifully fulfilled?" and she laughed out of very bitterness. Rama turned to Lakshmana and said, "My dear, you see that this lady is endowed with no ordinary attractions of mind and body ; she has set her heart upon you ; and I have passed my word to see her happy—which you never knew me to break. So, it would give me infinite pleasure to see you take this worthy maiden to wife." Lakshmana, to whom his brother's word was law, raised the poor girl from the depths of hopeless despondency to the highest pinnacle of joy and delight. She was to remain with her parents until they came back to take her to Ayodhya.

On their way, they came to know that Athiveerya, king of Nandavartha, was working up a conspiracy against his master and over-lord Bharatha ; and Rama punished him as he deserved.

Another time, they stayed at a town named Kshemanjali, where Lakshmana married princess Jithapadma. Two Brahmanas that lived in the mountain valleys sought his feet and were raised by him to the highest heavens.

Then, they came to the Dandakaranya, so named after Danda, the king, who took birth there as a bird to expiate his sins. Rama took pity on the poor creature and transformed him into Jatayus, a sacred bird.

Sambooka, the son of Khara and Soorpanakha, was undergoing severe austerities in a bamboo grove on the banks of

the Krounchapa. The famous sword Chandrahasa, of magical powers, was what he wanted to get. Lakshmana decided that his success would considerably endanger the safety of the world, and slew him with the very sword he was trying to get. Soorpanakha was inexpressibly pained to hear of it and complained to Rama in no mild terms. She came more than once on that errand. Rama's divine beauty enslaved her heart and she overcame a woman's sense of modesty to beseech him to marry her. But, Rama spurned her away from him as a loathsome thing, whereupon, she set her husband upon Rama and Lakshmana, who she swore had offered her deadly insult. Khara, blind with jealous rage, came upon them with a large army. Lakshmana asked Rama to take care of Seetha while he went forth to fight the Rakshasa hosts. Then, Ravana took the opportunity to do his sister Soorpanakha a favour. He concealed himself behind the hermitage of Rama, and called upon him in the voice of Lakshmana to save him from death at the hands of his enemies. Seetha at once concluded that Lakshmana was in deadly peril. She lost not a moment in sending Rama to his assistance. Finding her alone and unprotected, the Rakshasa king pounced upon her and carried her to his island home in Lanka, where he placed her in the Asoka grove under the guard of fierce-visaged Rakshasis. He tried all his arts of persuasion ; he threatened her with horrible tortures and a lingering death too painful to conceive; he offered her his untold wealth and unbounded power; his wife Mandodari was induced to plead for him with all a woman's logic. But, Seetha grew more and more bitter towards Ravana and openly scoffed at him, his barbarous splendour, his wild ways, and his unbounded wickedness. Vibheeshana tried his utmost to save her from his persecutions. But, Ravana turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances and well-meant advice.

Rama and Lakshmana annihilated Khara and his forces and returned to their hermitage, intending to have a good laugh at Seetha for her wild fears for the safety of Lakshmana. But, they found their home desolate ; search as they would, they came not upon Seetha, nor could anybody thereabouts give them the least news about her.

King Viratha complained to Rama and Lakshmana of the cruel treatment he had endured from Khara and Dooshana ; Lakshmana freed him for ever from his tormentors and gave him the kingdom of Pathala Lanka to rule. He, out of the great gratitude of his heart, sent messengers faithful and cunning, north and south, east and west to bring him news of Seetha—but all in vain.

Sugreeva, king of the Vanaradweepa, had a wife, Thara by name, of matchless beauty and intelligence. Sahajathi fell in love with her and taking advantage of the absence of her husband, assumed his shape and proceeded to her apartments. But, as Fate would have it, the real Sugreeva came upon the scene all too unexpectedly. There was a terrible fight between Sugreerwa and his counterfeit, in which the latter had the best of it. Sugreeva took refuge with Rama and laid before him his tale of wrong and suffering. Rama divined the truth in a moment, slew out of hand the pretender and restored Sugreeva to his kingdom and to his wife. The grateful king vowed never to rest, until he had discovered the whereabouts of Seetha.

Viratha and Bhamandala sent word to their friend Rama, that the wife of his heart was kept in durance vile at Lanka by the infamous Ravana. Sugreeva sent his monkey hosts to Lankadweepa to search it through and through. Hanumantha was entrusted with Rama's signet to watch over Seetha in her hour of peril ; and the ring was to be his credentials.

The valiant Hanumantha crossed over to Lanka, interviewed Vibheeshana and through his help, managed to penetrate into the garden Devaramana, where Seetha was kept in close confinement. She was there, seated under an Asoka tree, her heart sore with grief and her thoughts full of Rama, whom she expected every moment to come to her. Hanumantha declared himself unto her as a trusted messenger from her lord, produced the signet and acquainted her with the whereabouts of Rama and what he passed through on her account. Joy illuminated the heart of the poor forlorn wife. She kissed over and over the priceless ring that was to her an embodiment of her beloved; blessed Hanumantha as her deliverer from a fate worse than a thousand deaths ; and gave him in return her own crest-jewel to be taken back to Rama, with an oft-repeated prayer to come on the wings of speed to Lanka and free her from the clutches of the vile Rakshasa.

Now, Hanuman would not go back without giving Ravana some tangible proof of his having been at Lanka, something to remember him by ; he managed to destroy a large section of the royal army and finished up with sending Aksha, the favourite son of Ravana and a very famous general, to where his forefathers had gone before him. But, something remained to be done. He must meet the woman-stealer face to face, and have it out with him after his own way. So, he allowed himself to be bound by the magical serpent-bonds, and was taken before the king. There he brake them as so many wisps of straw ; roundly rated Ravana for his evil life and his countless iniquities ; and in the end, shattered to pieces the diadem of the proud monarch. He sprang away over the heads of those that stood around him, destroyed many of the fortifications of the town and was back to the mainland, leaving Ravana

and his Rakshasas utterly dazed with fear and confusion. He laid before Rama a harrowing tale of Seetha's woe, of her fortitude, of her brave defiance of Ravana and his might, of her oft-repeated prayer to be freed from that den of crime ; and produced Seetha's crest-jewel to confirm his statements.

Rama, Lakshmana, Sugreeva, Hanumantha, Bhamandala and the monkey hosts marched upon Lanka in hot haste. Samudra and Sethu, two friends of Ravana, barred their way, whom Nala and Neela put to rout. Suvela and Hamsadhaba met with no better fate when they tried to oppose their march. At last they approached Lanka and besieged it. Meanwhile, Vibheeshana after one more hopeless attempt to turn Ravana's feet from the path of wickedness, went over to Rama with his army and promised signal assistance during the coming battle. Then, the two armies closed in deadly fight. Ravana sent forth his magical serpent-weapons to bind the monkey host, and render Rama utterly powerless. But, Lakshmana thought of his conveyance, the bird Garuda, who speedily appeared upon the scene, and made short work of the serpents. Rama caused a dreadful carnage among the Rakshasa hosts, and victory was almost within his reach. Now, Ravana came upon the battlefield, and recognising that Lakshmana was the most powerful of his foes, hurled upon him a magical weapon, Sakthi by name, that he had reserved against his dread enemy. Lakshmana respected the convention that the Sakthi ought not to be fought against ; he quietly allowed himself to be bound and lay as one dead. But, Bhamandala divined his purpose ; and in a flash, he was off to mount Drona, from where he brought the Waters of Life. Rama dashed it over his brother, who rose as from a deep sleep. Then, Lakshmana, who had all along been waiting for the moment

that would end the life of Ravana, mentally called unto himself his Discus. It came, and severed the head of the Rakshasa king from his body. Vibheeshana begged hard of Lakshmana to accept the sovereignty of the Lankadweepa; but, in return, he himself was crowned king of it by his noble benefactor. Kumbhakarna, brother to Ravana, and Indrajith, his eldest born, were made rulers of other kingdoms.

Sixteen days they stayed at Lanka, most hospitably entertained by Vibheeshana, whose joy and gratitude knew no bounds. Thereafter, they travelled back to Ayodhya in the famous aerial car Pushpaka. Bharatha and Sathrugna met them some way from the capital; and a touching sight it was to see the brothers meet again after so many years of separation, danger and trouble. Bharatha formally and with a full heart made over the kingdom to Rama, its lawful ruler, of whom he was, as he declared, but the faithful Viceroy. "He had had enough of worldly life" he said and passed away into the silent woods, there to hold communion with the Supreme. Kaikeyee, who had ample time for reflection and repentance, was heartily ashamed of her meanness and followed her son to his calm retreat. Rama was duly installed on the throne of Ayodhya. He placed Sathrugna over Madhurapuri; gave the Rahshasadweepa to Vibheeshana; Sugreeva was to rule over the Vanaradweepa; Hanumantha held sway at Sreepura, Viratha was rewarded for his faithful service with the vast dominions of Pathalalanka; Hanupura, where Hanuman was born, was placed in charge of Neela; Vaithadya and Rathana pura fell to the lot of Bhamandala, the true friend. Thus, Rama remembered those that had befriended him in his adversity and stood by him through peril and danger. They were loaded with honors and presents, and went back to their respective kingdoms in great joy.

Rama ruled over Ayodhya long and well; and Seetha, Prabhavathi, Rathinibha and Sreedama were his queens. Lakshmana divested himself of all cares of state, and lived a peaceful life of domestic felicity in the company of his wives Visalya, Rupavathi, Vanamala, Kalyanamalika, Rathnamalika, Jithapadma and Manorama and the two hundred and fifty children born unto them.

Dasaratha Jathaka.

It forms one of the Birth-stories of Lord Buddha and is written in Pali prose. It confines itself to the first part of Rama's adventures, and his wanderings in the forest and ends with his marriage to Seetha. But, the most curious thing about it is that Rama is represented as the brother of Seetha. A verse from chapter 128 of the Yuddhakanda is found in it.

OTHER WORKS ON THE SUBJECT

POEMS

1. *Sethu-bandha* —A poem written in the Prakritha dialect by Pravarasena. Dandi refers to it in his Kavyadarsa, I, 34.

The central episode is Rama's laying a bridge across the sea that separates Lanka from the mainland.

2. *Champu Ramayana* :—in five cantos by Bhoja Raja. It is a prose work interspersed with beautiful poetry.

3. *Raghava-bhyudaya*

4. *Raghava-pandareeyya*.—by Kavi Raja. It is so worded that it may apply equally well to the adventures of Rama or the Pandavas, being in fact an epitome of the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha.

5. *Raghava-vilasa* :—by Visvanatha, the author of Sahithyadarpana.

6. *Rama-vilasa*:—by Ramacharana.

7. *Ramavilasa*:—by Harinatha. It is written on the model of the Geetha Govinda of Jayadeva,

8. *Ramachandra-charithra-sara* :—by Agnivesa.
9. *Raghunatha-blyudaya*.
10. *Raghava-naishadheeya* —by Hara-daththa-soori.
11. *Ramayana-manjari* —by Kshemendra.
12. *Ravanarjuneeya* —by Bhatta Bheema.

DRAMAS

1. *Mahavera-charithra* and *Uttara Rama-charithra*—by Bhavabhoothi, dealing respectively with the incidents in the Poorvakanda and the Uttarakanda of the Ramayana.

2. *Hanuman-nataka* or *Moha-nataka*.—It is said to have been composed by Hanuman, who wrote it on rocks. Later on, Valmeeki sung his marvellous poem ; and lest it should be thrown into the shade, the faithful devotee of Rama cast his stanzas into the sea. Long long after, in the reign of Bhoja Raja, some portions of them were recovered and arranged by Damodara-misra. It is written in fourteen acts, and some of the stanzas are veritable gems of Sanskrit literature.

3. *Anargha-raghava* —in seven acts by Murari.
4. *Prasanna-raghava*.—by Jayadeva.
5. *Ablurama-mani* —in seven acts by Sundara-misra.
6. *Bala-ramayana* —by Rajasekhara.
7. *Udaththa-raghava*.
8. *Unmaththa-raghava* —by Bhaskara kavi
9. *Chalitha-rama*.
10. *Doothangada* —by Subhata.
11. *Fanakee-charana-chamara*:—by Sreenivasacharya.
12. *Fanakee-parinaya* :—by Ramabhadra Deekshitha.

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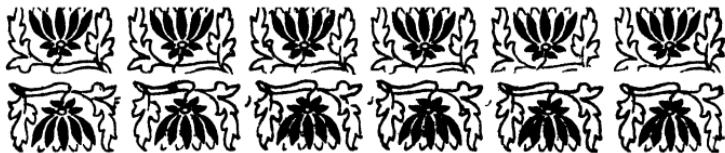
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BĀLA KĀNDĀ

CHAPTER I

VALMĪKI AND NĀRADA

LONG, long ago, when the world was yet young, and the Trētā yuga was nearing its end, there lived a sage, by name Vālmiki. His knowledge of the Vēdas and the Vēdāngas was deep and profound. He had trod the Fourfold Path that leads to Liberation and discharged the duties of his place in life to their utmost. He had the fleeting senses under perfect control and the mind, their wayward Monarch. And unto him, in his holy hermitage, came Nārada, one fine morning, Nārada, the divine sage, Nārada, the best and foremost of the mind-born sons of Brahma. His long life had been spent in unselfish prayer and devout meditation ; the bonds of Karma and material existence were to him a thing of the past ; he knew no other joy than to contemplate the countless perfections of the Lord of All and the deeper mysteries of the Holy Writ ; and from his Viñā, Mahati, he drew forth such strains, as held enthralled the hearts of all, gods and men, to the accompaniment of which he sang the praises and the glory of the Great Father, as embodied in the hymns of the Sāma Vēda. Very few equals had he in the art of speech ; so clever and so convincing was he.

And to him who came there, impelled by the Searcher of Hearts, Vālmiki respectfully submitted the following questions :—

“ Lives there among men, one who is crowned with every excellent quality ? ”

“ Who has mastered the science of weapons, human and divine, and out of the might engendered thereby, is able to scatter his foes before him ?

“ Who is versed in the mysteries of Dharma, as revealed in the Vēdas and the Smritis ?

“ Who is it that bears not in mind the grievous wrongs done him by others, but magnifies any single act of kindness on their part ?

“ Who is it whose thoughts, words, and deeds are ever in perfect harmony ?

“ Who never strays from his Dharma, even in the face of direst peril and distress ?

“ Whose life is pure and spotless ?

“ Who ever seeks the highest good of Humanity and of himself, here and hereafter ?

“ Whose eyes see clearly and unerringly between the Real and the Unreal ?

“ Who has a profound knowledge of men and things and twines himself round the hearts of all ?

“ Who is a perennial source of delight to all that approach him ?

“ Who, like a skilful driver, has his mind and senses under perfect control ?

“ Who is it that allows not his temper to get the upper-hand of him ?

“ Who is it, of presence so charming, that men can never have enough of beholding him ?

“ Whose heart knows not envy, spite, and calumny ?

“ Who is it that men and gods dare not face, when the fierce joy of battle is on him ?

“ Verily, it is almost hopeless to find all these noble elements combined in one single individual. But, if there be such a one, *you* would know it of all men ; for, Reverend Sir, there is nothing, either in the heavens above, or in the worlds below, that escapes your all-seeing eye. And nothing would gladden my heart so much as to hear it from your lips, if *you* but deem me worthy of the honor.”

He paused for a reply ; and Nārada, rejoiced at having at last got an opportunity of giving out to the world what had all along lain next his heart and had been the subject of his thoughts, waking or sleeping. Lo ! here was a disciple after his own heart, who thirsted for the very knowledge he was seeking to impart. What more could he desire. And then, the questions ! How clear and how comprehensive ! So, with a glad heart, he spoke back :—

“ Well hast thou questioned and skilfully. Of a truth, it is not easy to find one in whom all these diverse excellences are united ; but, with a little thought, I believe I can find you a person answering to your description. Verily, no one has a better right to know it, for, your keen and clear intellect is equalled but by your powerful memory. And now, listen with your heart and soul.

“ There now rules the earth a king, by name Rāma, of the godly line of Ikshwāku ; and in him will you find your expectations fall very short of the reality.

“ He has his self under perfect control. His prowess is unequalled. The splendour of his presence baffles description. He is serene alike in weal and woe. His intellect is strong, keen, and comprehensive. There is very little that he does not know about king-craft. His sweet speech charms away the hearts of men. You can never have enough of looking at him, so lovely a sight is he to see. Enemies he has none, either in the world or in himself.

“ Broad are his shoulders and mighty ; his arms are stout and strong ; his neck is poised on his shoulders with perfect grace and the three lines around it make it charming to behold. His massive jaws are but an index to the iron will of the man. His broad chest and deep flanks bespeak a strength that could lightly take up a bow and string it, that others would never dream of approaching. His joints are strong and supple and embedded deep in muscle. His friends and followers may well bid defiance to their foes, be they ever so mighty. His hands

are long and powerful and reach down below his knees. His head is exquisitely modelled and his forehead beautifully arched like a crescent. Graceful and majestic is his gait, even as that of the lion or the elephant or the tiger.

" Neither too short nor too tall, his stature becomes him marvellously. His limbs are clean made and beautifully proportioned and his rich complexion speaks of the perfect health of the man. It requires but a simple effort of his will to destroy his enemies root and branch. His eyes are large and lustrous, even as the petals of the lovely lotus. Rich in all the things of the world that make a man happy, he is, in short, the beau-ideal of a man.

" The weak and the oppressed find in him a ready and fearless champion. He never makes a resolve but it is accomplished to the utmost. He is ever intent upon the highest good of all beings. Bright is his fame as the refuge of the stricken and the terror of his foes, even as the sun in his noon-day splendour. Ever engaged in meditation on the Supreme Brahman, he has realised his oneness with IT. Untouched by Desire and by Hate, with his system purified by the regulation of the Vital Currents and other yogic practices, and with a body, which, though real and substantial to all purposes, is but an illusion, and is formed out of a film of inconceivably subtle matter, he is ever pure of body, pure of heart, and pure of spirit. He is always obedient and dutiful unto his parents, to his teachers, and to the Gods; but, he forgets not, even for a moment, *who he is and why he has come down here*.

" He looks after the welfare of his subjects, even as the Great Patriarch, Brahma. Of every kind of wealth he has enough and to spare. ' In him the worlds live and move and have their being.' Unlike other rulers of men, he reads into the hearts of his subjects and realises for them their unspoken wishes, even beyond their wildest expectations. He has a watchful eye on the rights and duties of all grades of society and sees that they are carefully preserved and properly discharged. To himself he

is the strictest of taskmasters ; and his daily life is but a silent example and an unspoken lesson to the world in its perfect discharge of the manifold and complicated round of duties. Ever the spear and the shield of his friends and followers, his heart seeks their highest good here and hereafter. The Heart-Doctrine of the *Védas* and the *Védângas*, lies open before his unclouded vision. He is a past master in the science and art of warfare and in the use and mastery of weapons, human and divine.

“ No arts nor sciences, lay or otherwise, have any secrets for him. His memory is something marvellous ; in argument he is ever clear and convincing, keen and thorough in his grasp of a subject, quick and ready in his replies, anticipating the slightest objections and difficulties of his opponents. One has but to come within the range of his benign glance, nay, to seek him in earnest thought, to have his heart wishes realised to their utmost, in this world or in the next. His manners are sweet and refined. The waves of adversity beat against him, but to roll back, baffled and broken. He is ever wise and skilful in his relations with the world, lay or religious.

“ As the rivers of the world, large and small, ever flow back to their heart and source, the mighty Ocean, and take rest and refuge in it, so the wisest and the best of the land, are ever attracted to him by similarity of tastes and pursuits and by an irresistible charm of manner. He embodies in himself whatever is highest and noblest in the Aryan race and nation. He is just and impartial in his dealings with all, friends and foes ; and his heart is like the calm waters of the mountain-lake, unruffled by the least breath of joy or sorrow. You may look at him ever so often, but every time you find in him something that surprises you, a new beauty, a new charm.

“ Said I not that Râma, the pride and joy of his mother Kausalyâ, unites in himself every conceivable perfection ?

“ Deep and unfathomable of purpose, like the vast and mighty Ocean whose unknown waters hide from human

eyes many a marvel and many a secret ; strong in his resolve and unshaken, even as the mighty Himalayas, the Monarch of Mountains, whose roots run into the very heart of the Earth and whose proud head pierces the blue vaults of the Empyrean ; of valor and prowess like unto the Almighty ; of sweet presence and charming, even as the Queen of Night, the dispeller of darkness ; terrible in his wrath and all-consuming, not unlike the Fire that destroys the worlds at the close of the Great Day, but withal patient and enduring, even as Mother Earth ; a great Giver, even as Kubēra, the Lord of Wealth ; he is Truth and Justice, in human mould as it were.

“ And Dasaratha, the Lord of men, yielding to the oft-repeated prayers of his subjects, set his heart upon making over his kingdom to Rāma, and along with it the cares of state—Rāma, the living example of every virtue, Rāma, of irresistible might, Rāma, the firstborn of his sons, Rāma, fitted by nature and education to be the best and brightest ornament to a throne, Rāma, in whose heart the welfare and happiness of his subjects occupies the foremost place.

“ Now, Kaikēyi, the best beloved of his wives, viewed with a troubled heart and envious eye, the gorgeous preparations that were on foot towards the installation of Rāma. Long, long ago, during a fierce battle with the Asuras, she had saved the king’s life at the peril of her own ; and he, in a transport of gratitude, had allowed her to ask of him any boon she would. Now was her time ; and she said to the fond king ‘ Exile Rāma to the forest and crown Bharata in his place.’

“ Dasaratha never went back upon his word ; for, was he not the proud descendant of the mighty monarchs of the Solar Race, who cheerfully sacrificed at the altar of Truth wife and child, wealth and kingdom, life and limb, nay, their very hopes here and hereafter, and deemed themselves happy in being allowed to do so ? He sent Rāma away to the wild forests and with him his own life

and happiness ; for, Rāma was the joy of his old age and the pride of his heart.

“ But Rāma, the brightest example of filial reverence, whom, alone and unaided, the world’s hosts embattled dare not face, cheerfully gave up the crown that was his by right and betook himself to the forests, out of deference to his father’s wishes and out of a desire to gladden the heart of his mother Kaikēyī ; had they not his word for it ?

“ And Lakshmaṇa, the favourite brother of Rāma, cheerfully accompanied him to the woods, setting to all the world a rare example of fraternal affection ; he was ever a source of joy to his worthy mother, Sumitrā, who sent him after Rāma, with the memorable words, ‘ Henceforth, Rāma is unto you a father and Sītā your loving mother ; the pathless woods are your royal home in Ayodhyā ; and may all good go with you.’

“ As the star Rōhini ever follows her Lord, the Moon, even so did Sītā accompany her husband to the wild woods. Of Janaka’s royal race she came, and was the fairest and best of the daughters of the earth. Dearer unto her lord than his very life, she lived in him and but for him. For, was she not his own energy, the Great Illusion, come down on earth to aid him in his great work ?

“ The sad king and his sadder subjects followed him a long way. At Śringavēra, on the banks of the Ganga, Rāma came upon a dear friend of his, Guha, the king of the wild foresters, and bade his charioteer Sumantra go back to his father.

“ Then, guided by him, they travelled over many a trackless forest, and forded many a foaming torrent, until they halted at the hermitage of the saintly Bharadvāja, who directed them further on to Chitrakūta’s hill. There the brothers built for themselves a charming cottage and led a calm and peaceful life in the pleasant woods, happy even as are the gods and the Gandharvas.

"Meanwhile the unhappy father, stricken even unto death at being parted from the son of his heart, passed away in an agony of grief, calling upon his darling Rāma, and took his place in the Mansions of the Blessed. Thereupon Vasishtha and the other counsellors of Dasaratha tried their very best to induce Bharata to accept the vacant throne. But he, mighty of his arms and with his heart ever devoted to Rāma, would not even hear of it. He was on his way to the Royal exile to beg him to come back and rule over his people.

"Soon he came upon the high-souled One in his forest home; and to him of irresistible valor, thus spoke Bharata in all humility and reverence. 'Now that our father is no more, yours is the crown, yours the kingdom; and who knows, better than yourself, that a younger brother has no claim to the throne before his elder, best fitted to adorn it? Come back and be king over us.'

Thus spake he; but all in vain, for the other felt happier among his woods and streams, and chose the path his fathers trod before him, the path of honor and fame. The kingdom was his by right and by might; but he had given his word to his royal sire, and was he the man to go back upon it? Gently, but firmly, he persuaded Bharata to go back to Ayodhyā, but, at his earnest prayer, gave him his sandals, thrice holy with the touch of his feet—visible representatives of the rightful king and the invisible source of Bharata's wise government and the welfare of his kingdom. Had not the world a glimpse of their greatness in the matter of Ahalyā? 'Twice seven years hence will I meet you here. Doubt not,' were the words that fell upon the ears of the disappointed Bharata as he wended his sorrowful way back—not to Ayodhyā—to Nandigrāma, from where, as Regent of the Royal Sandals, he looked after the affairs of the kingdom, living the life of a hermit, his heart with Rāma and his eyes ever turned along the road that should bring his brother back to him.

“ Then, it occurred to Râma, that at Chitrakûta he was easily accessible to his friends and subjects ; so he resolved to penetrate into the heart of the wild Dandaka forest. True, it was a rough life and utterly unmeet for such as were brought up in the lap of royal luxury and ease. But what was it to him ? Was not his word gone forth ? Were not his mind and senses under perfect control ? He never lacked anything, in his royal palace at Ayôdhyâ, or in the rough ways of the forest.

“ So, with his faculties all on the alert, he plunged into the depths of the interminable woods and his eyes acquired a new light and charm at the prospect of approaching battle with the dread Râkshasas.

“ First and foremost of those that fell by his hand was the fierce Râkshasa, Virâdha.

“ Thereupon, the World-honored paid his lowly respects to Sarabhanga, Sutikshna, Agastya, and his brother, and from Agastya he received, with a glad heart, the mighty bow left with him by Indra, a goodly sword and two quivers that bore an inexhaustible supply of arrows.

“ And unto Râma, who passed his days in the sweet company of the holy sages, came countless ascetics that had made Dandaka their home. Of fiery energy were they and radiant in their spiritual glory, but withal they prayed him to free them from the terrors and persecutions of the fierce Râkshasas and the lawless Asuras that infested the dark depths of Dandaka. Thereupon, Râma gave them his plighted word to root out the wicked ones slowly, but surely, whenever a favourable chance should offer itself.

“ And it so came to pass, that a Râkshasa, Surpanaka by name, came upon him in his lowly abode and went away mutilated and disgraced. Janashana was her home and she could, by her powers of illusion, take any form she chose. Fired thereto by the sight of their sister, thus disfigured and insulted and more so by her sharp taunts, her brothers, Khara and Dushana and Trishira along with

them, rushed at Râma and hemmed him round with their fierce hosts ; but, of the fourteen thousand terrible Râkshasas that marched forth to battle that woeful day, not one survived to tell the tale. One and all, they lay low on the field of Death, despatched to the Mansions of the Blessed by the fiery arrows of the solitary warrior.

"It was not long before the news reached Râvana, who, beside himself with rage at the total annihilation of his kinsmen and at the insult put upon him, besought the assistance of Mâricha in aiding him to accomplish his fiendish scheme of revenge. Long and earnestly did Mâricha seek to dissuade him from his fell purpose. 'Knowest thou not thou art but a grain of dust before the Great One ? Draw not, my Lord, upon thy head, the wrath of such as he.' But Râvana, driven thereto by resistless Fate, spurned aside the well-meant advice of his friend, and forced Mâricha, on pain of death, to accompany him to the hermitage of the royal exiles.

"There Râvana used his friend to decoy the brothers far, far off from their cottage and in their absence, made away with the spouse of Râma, and conveyed herto his island-home in Lanka, wounding unto death, Jatâyu, the Vulture-king, who defended her with the last drop of his blood.

"The brothers came back soon enough and found that 'their house was left unto them desolate' ; for Sîta was not there. After a while, they came upon Jatâyu, who would not yield up his life before he had acquainted Râma with the cruel outrage done him. Then, mighty grief overcame Râma, and like unto one who had taken leave of his senses, he filled the woods around with heart-rending cries and piteous lamentations. But, mastering himself with a supreme effort, he consigned to the flames the mortal remains of the valiant Jatâyu, faithful unto death, and plunged into the deep woods in search of Sîta.

"By and by, they fell in with a fierce Râkshasa, Kâbandha by name, hideously deformed, and frightful to

behold. Him, Rāma slew and his vast bulk threw into the fire ; and the demon, purified of his sins by the touch of the Holy One, resumed his place among the Gandharvas. But, ere his departure, he informed Rāma of a woman-ascetic that lived not far off, Sabari by name, well versed in the mysteries of Dharma and a worthy exponent thereof. ‘ Go unto her, my Lord ’ prayed Kabandha ; and unto her hermitage Rāma took his weary way. He had come down on Earth to destroy the evil forces that barred the path of his devotees to his feet and radiant looked he in the pride of his youth and might. Warm welcome did Sabari extend unto Rāma ; and directed by her, he reached the shores of Lake Pampā.

“ There he fell in with Hanumān, a monkey, who introduced him to his master Sugrīva. And Rāma related unto him all his griefs and all his misfortunes ; whereat, Sugrīva’s heart was glad, in that heaven sent him a companion in misery, whose valor and prowess seemed irresistible. The two swore eternal friendship and faithful, while the God of Fire bore witness to it.

“ ‘ How did this come about ? ’ asked Rāma of his newly-made friend ‘ the blood-feud between you and your brother ? ’ ; and Sugrīva acquainted him with the sad story. ‘ Now, will I slay you that brother of thine, even Vāli,’ cried out Rāma ; and he swore it by a mighty oath. Then Sugrīva spoke to him of the unequalled strength of Vali and his fierce valor, the terror of gods and men, Asuras and Rakshasas ; and half in jest, he cast his eyes upon a huge skeleton that lay hard by and said, ‘ This was once Dundubhi, the Asura ; and Vāli kicked it here from Kishkindha, where he slew the braggart ’ A curious smile played over the features of Rāma—a smile of pity at Sugrīva’s distrust of his might and at the trivial task set upon him to test it ; and he gave it a light kick with his toe that sent it flying twenty leagues off. Then, to make assurance doubly sure, he loosened a shaft from his bow, that cleft seven towering Sāla trees, pierced

through a mighty mountain beyond, and stayed not its course until it ran through the seven regions beneath the Earth and came back to its master.

“ Sugriva doubted no more ; his eyes were opened and his spirits rose ; and with a light heart and joyful mien, he took his way to the Kishkindha cave, and the princes along with him. Stationing himself before it, he gave forth from his broad and tawny chest a leonine roar that shook the hills around. Thereat, Vâli rushed out in mad fury, but was stayed by his wife Târâ, whose fears he managed to allay. And in the fierce fight that ensued, Râma’s shaft cleft his mighty heart in twain. Thus did Râma fulfil his promise to Sugriva, and seat the weary exile on his brother’s throne.

“ In hot haste did Sugriva send for all the monkeys under the Sun and for their chiefs, and despatched them North and South, East and West, in search of Sîta.

“ Of those that proceeded South, was Hanumân, the pride and glory of his race. He heard from Sampâti, the Vulture, that Sîta was in Lanka, held there in durance vile by the infamous Râvana ; and with a tremendous leap, he vaulted sheer over the two hundred leagues of roaring waters that lay between.

“ Landing on the sea-girt isle where the dread Râvana held his royal sway, he came upon Sîta in the Asôka grove, her heart far away over the wide waters and with her lord. With her he had speech, and showed unto her his credentials, the ring given him by her lord. He related unto her all that befell Râma meanwhile. ‘ Grieve not, noble lady,’ he exclaimed, ‘ your lord spares no pains to come to you ; soon, sooner than you think, will you see him here.’ And half in sport, he shattered to pieces the huge ornamental gateway of that vast pleasure-garden.

“ Thereat, came against him, five mighty captains of hosts, and close upon their heels, seven sons of counsellors, whom he made short work of ; then, Aksha, the valiant

son of Rávána, whom he reduced to a shapeless mass ; and in the end, allowed himself to be bound by the Brah-mástra of Indrajit. Thanks to the boon conferred on him by the Lotus-born One, he freed himself therefrom ; but, desirous to see Rávána face to face and have speech with him, he chose to appear as if still in bonds, and calmly put up with the insults of his captors, who dragged him in triumph before their lord. His ruse was successful ; he had the pleasure of bearding the lion in his den and failed not to give him a piece of his mind and that freely. He then burnt the town with hostile flame, all except where Sítá sat and flew back on the wings of speed to carry the welcome tidings to the expectant ears of his master. Soon stood he before the high-souled One, went round him reverently and cried out, ‘ Found ! These eyes were erstwhile blessed with the sight of my mother, Sítá.’

“ The princes lost no time in reaching the shores of the dark Ocean and along with them Sugriva and his countless hosts. Rámá called upon the Lord of Waters to come unto him, but he came not ; whereat he was wroth and with his shafts, bright and fierce as the noonday Sun, he shook the mighty Ocean to its very depths. Then the heart of the Monarch of the Deep quaked within him , he laid his head at the feet of Rámá and implored pardon. And at his advice, Rámá caused the monkey chief, Nala, to lay a bridge across the fathomless waters. Over it they crossed to the island-home of Rávána and him did Rámá slay in dire battle.

Now was Sítá once more his own. But, sad was his heart and cruel shame held him back ; for, had she not dwelt with the Rákshasa, ever so many months ? Would not the cruel world point its finger of scorn at him and cry, ‘ Lo ! he has taken her back unto him ; and the vile Rávána laid his unclean hands on her and had her with him long enough.’ So, he spoke to her bitter words and sharp, in the hearing of the assembled hosts. And, cut

to the heart, Sītā, chaste as Chastity and pure as driven snow, brooked it not, but consigned her fair body unto the affrighted flames. The God of Fire bore her back in hot haste and swore her spotless and unsullied, by all he held sacred. Gladness filled the heart of Rāma and his face shone bright ; the three worlds rejoiced thereat, animate and inanimate, men and gods, saints and sages, and lauded to the skies the glorious deed of Rāma. Vibhishāna, the brother of Rāvana, was crowned king of Lanka in his place ; and, his stupendous work accomplished, Rāma's heart was relieved of a load of anxiety and danced with joy. The Gods, one and all, showered their choicest boons upon him, through which he raised to life his faithful monkeys that fell in battle.

“ Then, with his friends and followers, did he turn his face towards Ayodhyā, and was conveyed thereto in the swift-coursing Pushpaka, the magic air-car of Kubēra. Making a halt at the hermitage of the holy Bharadvāja, he sent Hanumān before him to announce his return to his brother Bharata. After a while, he resumed his journey and beguiling the way by recounting his adventures in the wild woods, soon reached Nandigrāma.”

“ There the brothers put away the matted locks and lowly habiliments of recluses ; and Rāma, pure and stainless, welcomed Sītā to his heart and took his place upon his father's throne.

“ Under his benign rule, the people are rich in flocks and herds. Their homes resound with the joyous laughter of happy children. Famine and disease are strangers to the land. Each order of society goes through its round of duties cheerfully and lacks not the means to do it. Their lives know no calamity, public or private. No one suffers the pangs of hunger nor eats his heart out with grief. His subjects are rich in all the joys that boundless wealth can give and are blessed with perfect health and sweet content. No father is doomed to see his son die before his eyes. Wives never outlive their

husbands nor suffer the cruel shame of widowhood, but pass their days in loving service to their lords. His subjects are immune from all perils through wind or wave, fire or fever. Thieves and robbers, hunger and want, are things unknown during the rule of Râma. Town and hamlet, village and city, are amply rich in corn and wealth. And all are as happy and content as in the Krita yuga, the Golden Age of the world.

“ Horse-sacrifices without number will he perform, at which he will give away to Brâhmaṇas vast quantities of gold and geins and countless heads of cattle. Hundreds and thousands of royal houses will he found, such as Kâmarûpa, Kânyakubja, and others too numerous to mention. He will see that the four orders of society are secured in their rights and privileges and discharge their duties to their very best. The years of Râma’s reign on earth are ten thousand and hundreds ten. And then, in the fulness of time, will he go back to his seat in the highest Heavens.

This record of Râma’s life purifies the heart of men, destroys their sins and confers supreme merit. Hence the wise hold it in equal reverence with the Holy Writ ; and he who reads it with a devout heart, is freed from sin of every kind. A long and happy life is his portion in the world of men ; and when he goes away from it, he is a welcome guest in the World of Gods and is held in high honor among them, yea, his kith and kin.

“ Should a Brâhmaṇa read it, gift of speech is his meed, and wisdom equalled by none. Should one of the Warrior race read it, the wide Earth and all it contains owns his sway. Should a Vaisya read it, merchant-princes pay homage to him , nay, should a Sûdra happen to hear it read, he shall win honor and glory among his kind.”

CHAPTER II

HOW VÂLMÎKI CAME TO COMPOSE THE RÂMÂYANA.

He ceased ; and Vâlmîki, the soul of righteousness, listened in awe and reverence ; himself a speaker of no mean ability, he spoke to Nârada out of a full heart. "O ! thou of inscrutable might ! well hast thou spoken and marvellously ;" and his disciples were not behind him in their glowing praises of the Divine Sage.

Later on, when Nârada rose to go, Vâlmîki offered unto him reverent worship.

" Have I your leave to go ?" said Nârada.

" As my lord willeth," replied the grateful host , and the wise One resumed his aerial course towards the Heavenly Spheres.

Vâlmîki spent an hour or two in his cottage, after his guest left it, his thoughts absorbed in the eventful conversation of the morn. All at once he found that it was high time for the midday bath and started for the lovely Tamasâ, not far remote from the Gangâ.

The crystal waters of the murmuring brook caught his heart and turning to the faithful disciple that waited upon him, he exclaimed, " Seest thou yon stream, Bharadvâja, the pebbly beach carpeted with soft sand right up to the water's edge, with pleasant fords and neat ? The smooth pellucid waters remind me of the hearts of good men, calm and unruffled. This is a pure spot and holy ; put down thy water jar here and hand me my bathing-dress of bark, for, here will I bathe. True, the sacred Gangâ is not far off ; but Tamasâ is so charming to-day, and I fear we are already behind time for the midday prayers."

The disciple bowed in reverent assent and with a ready hand offered unto his master his dress of bark; for, he regarded himself as supremely blessed in being allowed to serve the Holy One. Vālmīki took it from him and with his senses under restraint, penetrated into the dark woods around, seeking for a suitable spot to bathe and meditate upon the Lord of All.

Not far from him, a pair of curlews, cock and hen, were disporting themselves merrily, in the best of health and spirits, singing sweetly the while; when, all at once, a fowler, the relentless foe of every innocent bird and beast, sent his arrow right into the heart of the cock, all ignoring the presence of the Holy One who was looking on. Down fell the fated bird, at the feet, as it were, of the horrified Vālmīki and wallowed in its life-blood. With crest of golden hue and wings outspread, it was taken all unawares, mad with love and in the very act of enjoying itself with its mate. And at the sight of her lord and love, now rolling in the dust in the agonies of death, the wretched hen, shrieked a long and bitter cry, rendered all the more so, in that the flames of her love were as yet unquenched.

Vālmīki, the soul of boundless compassion and justice, was filled with indescribable pity towards the poor hen, now hopelessly disconsolate. "A cruel act this and unnatural," cried he, "even for a hardened hunter. How could one have the heart to strike to death a poor bird, and that in the sweet embraces of love, with the fervent kisses of its mate still warm on its lips?"

The poor victim before his eyes roused the self-contained sage to ungovernable wrath and from his unconscious lips shot forth a mighty curse.

"Hapless wretch! may'st thou, for long years to come, never find a spot in this wide world to rest thy weary head. Didst thou not slay a lovely and harmless curlew, that was blind with passion and in the very arms of his love."

He spoke and paused ; a dire misgiving came over his heart and he said to himself. “ Passing strange ! How came I, of subdued passions and serene heart, to speak words of such dread import, that rob me of my hard-earned spiritual might ? ”

But, even as he brooded over it, a light broke upon his mind and he exclaimed to Bharadvāja. “ My heart was now wrung with pity and grief at the miserable fate that overtook the poor bird, when, these wild words of doom broke out from my unconscious lips ; but lo ! they are arranged in equal lines of even feet, perfect and flawless, admirably adapted to be sung or played. Well, this shall confer undying fame on me and never shall it prove otherwise.”

Bharadvāja listened to him in awe and wonder—the Holy One, whose powers for good or evil were almost boundless—and softly repeated the words to himself, whereat his master was mightily pleased.

Then Vālmīki had his long delayed bath and went through his prayers. All slowly he wended his way back to the hermitage, his thoughts still engrossed with his prophetic words,—the marvellous verse that rose unbidden to his lips and bore a terrible curse in its bosom. Bharadvāja, profoundly learned, yet lowly of heart, followed him at an humble distance with the water-jar on his shoulders, the pitcher brimming over with the pure fresh waters of the rill. Soon they reached the hermitage and the master discoursed to his disciples awhile on themes high and holy ; but his thoughts were far away and with his utterance of the morning.

Then there came unto him in his calm retreat, the Four-faced One, Brahma, Father of the Earth and the Skies, the Supreme Ruler and Fashioner of countless systems. True, he could, from his seat on high, cause the holy record of Rāmā’s deeds to reach the ears and the hearts of men ; but, for certain reasons of his own, he chose the

fortunate Vālmīki as a fitting instrument of that grand service to Humanity.

Up sprang Vālmīki in wondering awe to welcome his Divine Guest of radiant presence ; laid his head at his feet and duly offered unto him the rites of hospitality in all humility and reverence.

The Omniscient One accepted the seat of honor offered him, made kind enquiries about the welfare of his host and bade him sit nigh, which he did. But his thoughts ever ran upon the strange events of the day.

“ Alas ! ” said he to himself, “ how did the wretch bring himself to harm the innocent things, so sweet of voice and so entirely absorbed in their love as to be oblivious to everything around ? He shrank not from the cruel deed and had caused me to lose my temper and commit an act of folly that had robbed me of my hard-won merit.”

And he went on unconsciously repeating to himself the strange words that escaped his lips that eventful morn.

A curious smile lit the features of the Lotus-born One,— a smile of kindly pity in that the sage had not as yet divined the source of his inspiration.

“ Know you not ” said he, in accents of liquid melody “ that it was at my direction that Sarasvatī, the Goddess of Speech, uttered through your lips the seeming curse ? The words that cause your innocent heart a world of anxiety shall bring unto you boundless fame. Doubt no more, but give unto the world the story of Rāma, even as you have heard it from my son Nārada. What nobler subject for your poem than Sri Rāmachandra, the Divine hero, the soul of righteousness, the perfect embodiment of all that is good and great and the director of men’s thoughts, words, deeds in the light of their Karma ?

“ Nothing that relates to any of the actors in that great world-drama shall escape thy all-seeing eye—Rāma, Lakshmana, Sītā, men and monkeys, gods and Rākshasas,

their acts, their words, nay their very thoughts known or secret. Nothing that comes out of your mouth, consciously or otherwise, shall prove other than true. Sing thou a poem that shall charm away the hearts of men, perfect in its rhythm and melodious in its flow. The cloud-capped mountains, the swift-coursing rivers, and all created things shall pass away and be as naught. But your noble song shall outlive them and never fade from the hearts of men. And as long as the record of Rāma's life holds sway over the hearts of men, so long shall you sit by me in my highest heaven." He spoke and was seen no more among them.

And the sage sat still in hushed awe and silent amaze, and his disciples along with him, then all at once they broke forth into melodious song, reciting again and again the sweet verse '*Mānishāda*,' perfect in rhythm and faultless in metre; and so sung and recited by those disciples of his, grown grey in sacred lore, its fame grew apace in the world of men.

"Now" said Vālmīki "shall I sing the Life of Rāma, yea, the whole of it, in such verses as these."

Long and deeply did he ponder over it and gave to a grateful world the Grand Epic. Sung in diverse measures; of even feet and accents, grand in its style and chaste and polished in its diction; simple, yet profoundly suggestive, the mighty genius of the immortal Vālmīki has preserved for all Eternity the glorious deeds of the Divine Man, Sri Rāmachandra, in countless verses as beautiful and perfect as the one that was spoken through his lips by the Goddess of Speech. Listen ye to the noble poem '*The Fall of Ravana*,' sung by the holy sage who gave unto posterity the Life of the noblest of men, Rāghava. No defect of style or idiom, grammar or diction mars its perfect beauty. Sweet and melodious of flow, the sound is a perfect echo to the sense.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE RÂMÂYANA WAS COMPOSED.

Valmîki, the soul of righteousness, had from Nârada but a bare outline of the life and deeds of Sri Râmachandra of mighty intellect—a wonderful narrative, truly, in that it realises the Purushârthas for those that hear it recited. But he did not stop there; he would know it more fully, in all its details and applied himself to the task.

Duly purifying himself by sipping consecrated water, he took his seat on the sacred grass spread with their ends towards the East. He reverenced in spirit his Divine Teacher and began his work, aided therein by the superhuman powers conferred on him by Brahma.

Then there unfolded themselves before his inner eye, picture after picture of old times and events—Râma, Lakshmana and Sîtâ, Dasaratha, his queens and his subjects, as they lived and moved, laughed or cried; their joys and griefs; their friendships and enmities, whatever befell Râma, Lakshmana and Sîtâ, while they sojourned in the wild woods and later on; all these and much more did he see, plain and clear, perfect down to the minutest details, even as a fruit within his finger's clasp. Everything was even as Nârada had related it to him. His face and form shone bright as he lost himself in the delightful contemplation of the divine perfections of Sri Râma, with the scenes of his life before his eyes, he set himself to compose the Grand Epic, the Râmâyana. The shores of the Ocean are strewed with shells, seaweed and such like trifles thrown up from its bosom; but in its mighty depths lie concealed from human view priceless treasures and rare. Even so, of the four aims of life, Pleasure and Wealth lie on its surface, while Dharma and Môksha rest at the

bottom. The music of the verses arrests the ear, while the sense charms the heart; and it proclaims for all time, to the devout soul, the countless glories of the Supreme One, the end and aim of all World-scriptures.

In the first six books of his immortal Epic, Vālmīki describes the coming down into our mortal world of the Lord Vishnu, in merciful response to the earnest prayers of the Shining Ones; his heroic worth; his wonderful strength and fortitude, his kindness to every living being, his unequalled popularity; his sweet patience that nothing can ruffle; his gentleness and his constant truth, many a tale and legend old from the lips of Visvāmitra, when the princes sojourned with him; how at Janaka's royal hall Rāma broke to pieces the mighty bow of Mahādēva, that none could bend; the marriage of the sons of Dasaratha; the high talk between Sri Rāma and Rāma of the Axe.

The rare excellences of Rāma that eminently fitted him for the office of Prince-Regent; the gorgeous preparations made by Dasaratha for his coronation; how the black-hearted Kaikēyi frustrated it and caused Rāma to be exiled to the forest; the poignant grief of Dasaratha and his death in consequence; the heart-rending scene when Rāma took leave of the people; how he went away unperceived from among those that followed him a long way; how he met Guha on the bank of Gangā and persuaded his charioteer Sumantra to return to Ayodhyā; how they crossed the river and sought Bharadvāja in his forest abode; how, through his directions, Rāma had a lovely cottage built on the sides of Chitrakūta and spent happy days, how Bharata came upon him there and earnestly prayed him to come back unto his own; how he received the sad news of his father's death and offered libations of water unto his manes; how he gave his sandals unto Bharata and prevailed upon him to go back; how Bharata had them crowned and ruled in their name at Nandigrāma.

How Râma penetrated thereafter into the dark depths of Dandaka and slew Virâdha ; how they came unto the hermitage of Anasûyâ, who presented Sîtâ with a sandal paste and unguents of rare virtue ; how Râma, paid his respects to Sarabhanga, Agastya, Sutikshna and Jatayu and took up his abode at Pachhavati ; how the Râkshasi Sûrpanakhâ came upon them there and how Lakshmana mutilated her of her nose and ears ; how he slew, in fierce fight, Khara, Dushana and Trisiras that came to avenge her, how Râvana came over from Lankâ at the news, decoyed Râma and Lakshmana through the wily Mâricha and carried away Sîtâ, how Râma slew Mâricha and raved at the loss of his wife ; the death of Jatayus ; how the brothers came upon Kabandha who directed them unto Sabari, how they reached the shores of the Lake Pampâ and from there proceeded to the hill of Rishyamûka, where they made the acquaintance of Sugriva ; how Râma sware friendship with him and convinced him of his might ; how Sugriva fought his brother Vâli ; how Râma slew the latter during the combat ; the wild laments of Târâ ; the installation of Sugriva ; Râma's sojourn at the Prasravana hill during the rains ; how his wrath blazed forth against Sugriva, who thereupon hastened to gather his countless hosts and despatched them to all quarters of the Earth, with minute description of every part of the same ; how Râma entrusted Hanumân with his Signet Ring ; how the monkeys lost their way into the cave of Riksha, how they resolved to starve themselves to death ; their meeting with Sampati, the vulture, upon whose information, Hanumân took a leap across the sea, from the Mahêndra mountains ; how he met Mainaka on his way and slew Simhikâ ; how he landed at nightfall on Mount Malaya, in Lankâ, and took counsel with himself, how he came upon Râvana sleeping in his aerial car, Pushpaka, and upon his wives in the drinking-saloon ; how he sought out Sîtâ in the Asôka grove and gave her Râma's token ; how Râvana persecuted her with his love ;

how the Rākshasi women threatened Sītā; how Trijatā related unto her the dream she had; how Hanumān received from Sītā her crest-jewel and destroyed the grove; how the affrighted women-guards took up the news to Rāvana; how Hanumān slew the hosts sent against him and became a willing captive to the Brahmāstra of Indrajit; how he set the city on fire and roared for very joy; how he rejoined his companions and destroyed the honey-grove; how he gave his lady's token to Rāma and consoled him; how Rāma proceeded with his forces to the shores of the ocean; how he promised refuge unto Vibhishana; how he caused Nala, the monkey, to throw a bridge across the mighty deep and led his hosts over it to Lankā's isle; how he laid siege to it at night and aided therein by the counsels of Vibhishana, laid low in fierce battle Indrajit, Kumbakarna, Rāvana and the other Rākshasa heroes; how he took back Sītā and had Vibhishana crowned as king of Lankā; how he went back to Ayodhyā in the magic car, Pushpaka, and met his brother Bharata on the way; and how he was crowned king and sent back to their homes his countless friends and allies that came to the capital to be present on the happy occasion.

And in the Uttarakānda has the poet described the coming years of Rāma; his golden rule; how he cast away his queen to avoid popular censure, and everything that was to befall him in the unknown future.

CHAPTER IV.

KUSA AND LAVA SING THE RÂMÂYANA BEFORE RÂMA.

Vâlmîki, the prince of poets, composed the Life of Râma, when he was reigning at Ayôdhyâ, after his terrible wars with Râvana; and the Seer's eye bestowed on him by the Lotus-born One, aided him in that grand work of flawless diction.

The seven cantos are divided into 500 chapters, and contain 24,000 verses, (the Uttarakânda included). The Holy One, out of his matchless wisdom, included in it every thing that befell Râma in the distant past or was to in the remote future.

Having brought the tale to an end, he cast about for some one who would commit it to memory and carry it to the ears of men. As he thus mused and prayed to the Giver of all good to send him one who would accomplish his purpose, there came unto him two disciples, Kusa and Lava by name, clad in the garb of hermits, but princes by birth, and reverently touched his feet.

The twins had been brought up under his watchful care and were dear unto his heart; of sweet voice and melodious, they were gifted with a marvellous faculty of retentiveness, thorough masters of the Holy Writ and its branches, they were skilled in every art and science, lay or clerical, steadfast in righteousness and strong of heart, they were chosen by Vâlmîki as fit instruments of his noble purpose and unto these he taught his Great Epic, which he named 'Râmâyana' or 'Sîtâ Charitra' or 'Paulastya Vadha.'—a mighty repository of the priceless wisdom enshrined in the Vâdas. Sweet to recite and sweeter to sing, it gives perfect expression to every sentiment that moves the human breast—love, heroism, disgust, terror, pathos, wonder, mirth, calm, and fear.

They stored it within their hearts and in obedience to the dictates of their master, sang it to large concourses of Brâhmaṇas and warriors, sages and saints, in the three kinds of measure and to the sweet accompaniment of musical instruments. Divinely skilled in the science and art of song, golden-throated, equally adept at every musical instrument, they were thoroughly conversant with the origin and nature of notes, scales and pitches, and with the complex science of expression. Of surpassing loveliness, faultless in form and feature, they were the living counterparts of Sri Râmachandra himself.

Through many a land they travelled and sang to many an audience; and on one occasion, before the sages that were enjoying their well-earned rest during the intervals of the Horse-sacrifice celebrated by Râma. With streaming eyes and ravished hearts did the Holy Ones listen to the recital and roused to the highest pitch of admiration, applauded them to the echo. Strangers to guile and envy, the simple souls praised in no mean terms the noble poem, the gifted author and the incomparable singers.

“ What charming music ! what sweetness and melody of verse ! And then, the vividness of narration ! We seem to live and move among old times and scenes long gone by.”

The brothers themselves seemed to feel the sacred thirst of fame and excelling their previous efforts, they took their highest pitch and sang away the hearts of the listeners ; for, the sound was an echo to the sense. And one among them rose up and made the singers a present of his waterpot ; and another, no mean connoisseur of the noble art of poetry and music, gave them his hermit dress of bark.

Thus, many a time and oft, did these boys recite it in crowded halls and broad streets, in sacred groves and sacrificial grounds .

“ A rare and noble epic this, the Râmâyana ” cried the hearers “ of honeyed verses and faultless diction,

beautifully adapted to music, vocal or instrumental and charming to hear, begun and finished according to the best canons of the art, the most exacting critic cannot praise it too highly; the first of its kind and an unapproachable ideal for all time to come; the best model for all future poets, the thrice-distilled Essence of the Holy Scriptures, the surest giver of health and happiness, length of years and prosperity, to all who read or listen to it. And proficients as ye are in every style of music, marvellously have ye sung it."

It chanced one day that Bharata, the brother of Râma, heard them recite and failed not to inform the king of it. Râghava, the mightiest of men, invited the noble twins to the palace and showed unto them due respect; seated on the gem-encrusted throne of gold brought down by his sire from the high heaven of Indra and surrounded by his loving brothers and faithful ministers, he gazed long and fondly on the boys who were the exact images of himself and exclaimed to his wondering brothers. "Mark you the radiant glory that plays around them? Like Gods than men! And the poem they recite, how wonderful in its suggestiveness! Listen we to it!"

And putting away all cares from his heart, he prepared himself to listen and directed the boys to commence. With voices of perfect accord and entrancing sweetness, faultless in note and measure, the brothers sang in melodious strains the following poem; and such the perfectness of expression and delicacy of execution, that the hearers followed them with their hearts and ears, and such the marvellous power of their song, that an indescribable sense of bliss gradually stole over them and pervaded their frame and every sense and faculty of theirs—strange, overpowering and almost painful in its intensity.

Then Râma addressed himself to those around him and said "Behold these young ascetics, of kingly form and mien! Rare singers they are and of mighty spiritual

energy withal. And the noble poem they recite, how sweet and solacing to my wounded heart, reft of my beloved ! Fail not to accord it attention meet."

The boy-hermits, thus directed by the World-honored, set about to sing the Epic, in the Mârgî style of music ; the soul-entrancing strains failed not to draw Râma from his lofty throne, to take his seat among the audience that he might better hear the gifted twins. Soon was he lost to everything around him and lived and moved but in the no distant past.

CHAPTER V.

AYÔDHYÂ.

From the far-off times of Manu, the Divine Ruler, the mighty kings of the line of Ikshwâku held victorious and undisputed sway over the broad Earth and the seven islands that guard it around.

Of their race came king Sagara, at whose high command was dug the Ocean, dark and deep, by his sixty thousand sons that thronged around him as he marched along.

And this grand Epic, the Râmâyana, of immortal fame, sings the lives and deeds of those mighty men of old. The devout reader thereof secures the four Aims of Life — Righteousness, Wealth, Happiness and Liberation. So give ear unto it with hearts free from Envy's taint.

The broad realms of Kôsala extend far away on either banks of the Sarayû. Rich in the wealth of flocks and herds, fertile fields and broad pastures, it forms the happy home of countless millions

And of that kingdom is Ayôdhyâ the capital, famed of old through all the worlds, and fashioned in ages past by the royal hand of the Divine Manu.

Built on a level stretch of ground, well-watered and fertile, lovely groves adorn it and broad fields, where waves the golden corn.

Excellent roads, lined with branching trees, connect it with every part of the world. Her lofty walls measure twelve leagues from end to end and three from side to side. High are her ramparts and massive and lined with, numerous guns and every death-dealing engine ever invented by man's fertile brain, and all around them, moats wide and deep. The city gates are large and strong and of exquisite workmanship ; and the impregnable fortifications justify its name, Ayôdhyâ.

The high roads, planned perfectly straight unto the very gates of the city, are ever kept clean and well watered, and strewed with fragrant flowers. Laid out in even squares like a chess board, the broad and well kept roads branch out from the royal homes that grace the centre of the town.

Long lines of palatial shops adorn the merchant quarters, stored with the rarest works of nature and of art.

Charming villas and pleasure-grounds peep out from every lovely hill and eminence. Splendid mansions, flashing with gold and gems, rise in goodly row and meet the eye at every turn. Numerous flags and banners gaily wave over the roofs of the towering houses built on lofty platforms and gives one the idea of the radiant aerial cars of the happy ones who have won the abodes of the gods by the force of their religious merit.

Rich is it in horses and elephants, sheep and oxen, mules and camels. From every street are wafted to the ear the sweet sounds of lute or flute, drum or tabret, fife or clarion, Vīna or Sitār. It is the happy home of bards and minstrels, poets and genealogists, sculptors and architects ; and in the streets you are jostled at every step by the teachers of the art of dance and song, by the envoys of foreign kings and tributary princes and by princely merchants from far off lands, that come there to buy and sell. No art nor science, lay or otherwise, but finds there its best and brightest exponent and highest authority.

And Brāhmaṇas, straight of speech and pure of heart, bless the city with their presence and form the living stones in the Guardian Wall of Humanity. Profoundly versed in all the sacred lore, they ever tend the Fires and keep the observances ; and in self-restraint and holy fervor, rank with the saintly Vasishtha and the like.

Great Car-warriors and god-like heroes, skilled in every art of war and chase, keep the city from the foe. With sharp weapons, but more often with their strong hands,

they rid the woods of many a wild beast, lion and tiger, boar and bear. Masters of every weapon, human and divine, they never strike the solitary foeman or the flying one ; they never attack any one from behind nor harm the only scion of his race.

And, over this best and fairest of cities reigned Dasa-ratha, even as the Great Indra holds high sway over the Regions of the Gods.

CHAPTER VI.

DASARATHA.

And from this city, did king Dasaratha reign over his people, wisely and well, even as Manu, the Divine Ruler of men.

Wonderfully strong and hardy, he combined in himself the utmost grace and beauty of form. With his senses under perfect restraint and of subdued self, his innate glory was but thinly veiled by his vesture of flesh.

He was one of the noblest kings that ever reigned, an Atiratha among those that came of the mighty line of Ikshvâku. He was the terror of his foes and the joy of his friends and subjects, and his name and fame was a household word in all the worlds, high and low.

They that seek a saint laud him for holiness of life and spiritual fervor, and in his untold wealth of corn and grain, gold and gems, silk and wool, he rivalled Indra, the Monarch of the Gods or Kubêra, the Lord of Riches.

Profoundly conversant with every art and science of his age, lay or clerical, his joy lived in the weal of his kingdom. By liberal gifts, he attracted to himself the best and brightest of the land in the arts of war or peace, ever on the watch for an opportunity to extend his dominions, enlarge his armaments and increase the strength of his fortresses and garrisons, he was a past master of kingcraft and his schemes always read into the far future and anticipated the results.

Numerous sacrifices did he celebrate; and he never tired of providing for the welfare and comfort of his subjects, by countless works of public utility or recreation. Straight of heart and truthful of speech, he ever pursued the four Aims of Life at the right time and without clash. In a word, Indra the Mighty, ruled not over his Heavenly Realm with greater glory or ability.

And they to whom it was given to reside in that best of cities, were ever just and happy, generous and broad-hearted, truth-speaking and contented and well versed in every traditional lore and legend. You may search the city from end to end and never come across any one of limited means, poor in his stores of grain and corn, horses and cattle, for, poverty was a thing unknown among them. Nor can you see any one but was dressed in garments bright and clean and was adorned with ear-rings and necklaces, wreath and garland, perfumes and flowers, chain and bracelet. An atheist or an unlettered man or one of cruel instincts or a sensualist, or an Egoist was a sight unknown in that fair capital of Dasaratha. There was none who put his love of lucre before self and duty, father and mother, wife and child, brother and friend. All were godly in spirit, self-controlled, of clean lives and generous impulses and like unto the sages of yore in the utter purity of their lives. Nor could you lay your finger upon any one who was hunger-worn or low-spirited or gloomy of soul or mean of nature. Nor could your eye rest upon any one who cast longing looks on his neighbour's goods or goodly wife. Nor was the place defiled by a thief or a liar or an envious man, or a deformed person or ugly. Nor did the walls shelter any who was not the soul of loyalty, nor any one who knew not the means to secure his happiness here and hereafter, nor any one who sacrificed not to the Gods and to the Holy Fires.

The Brâhmaṇas there, embodied in themselves the loftiest ideals of the nation and in their rigid discharge of their complicated round of duties, led the way for the other classes to follow, studying and teaching, giving and receiving, undefiled by any sin that attaches thereunto. They counted among them none who did not tend the Holy Fires nor keep the observances ; nor any one who had not mastered the Vêdas and its six branches.

The other orders of society were ever brave, truthful and righteous, kind and hospitable to the wayworn and the homeless, devout and reverential unto the Beings on high ; ever grateful for kindnesses done and received, their days were long and happy, in the midst of their friends and relations, wives and children, sons and grandsons, even unto the furthest remove.

The warrior caste was ever fain to render due obedience to the counsel and behest of the Brāhmaṇas ; the Vaisyas were proud to honor and obey the ruling class ; and the Śūdras, the tillers of the soil, never swerved from their rule of life, but ever offered humble and cheerful service to their superiors.

Brave men and true ever kept watch and ward over the place ; frank and open as a child, yet of terrible might ; quick to feel and swift to retaliate , adepts in the use of every weapon and grown grey in the art of war, they were 'the heroes of a hundred fights.' And even as a lofty mountain-cave guarded by fierce lions, was this fair city rendered unassailable through the lion-hearted veterans, who fought and won, or lay with faces grim, turned still in death towards the despised foe. Such his troops.

Horses had he, millions of them, of noblest breed, drawn from the mountain fastnesses of Bāhlīka, Kāmbhōja or Vanāyu or from the sandy wastes of Sindh. Matchless they stood for grace and speed, even as the Ucchaisravas, the horse that Indra bestrides.

The forests of the Vindhya and the heights of the Himalaya supplied him with rare elephants. Of the stock of Airāvata they came, of Mahāpadma, of Anjana and of Vāmana. Of vast bulk and height, they were ever in rut, like hills in motion. Bhadra, Mandra, Mrīga ; Bhadra Mandra, Bhadra Mrīga, and Mrīga Mandra, every species was represented in his stables.

The terror of his well-appointed army allowed no enemy to approach within leagues of his capital and made it worthy of the name she bore—"The Impregnable."

And like unto Indra in might and glory, or even as the silvery Moon among the distant stars, did Dasaratha, the unconquered, rule over that fair Maiden City, strong in its fortifications and garrisons, and bright with its noble buildings and nobler men.

CHAPTER VII.

DASARATHA'S MINISTERS.

Ministers, eight in number, assisted the wise and war-like monarch in the government of his vast empire—Dhrishti, Jayanta, Vijaya, Siddhârtha, Arthasâdhaka, Asôka, Mantrapâla and Sumantra, Vasishtha and Vâmanadêva were his spiritual guides, while Jâbâli and the rest took their place among his counsellors.

They were excellent readers of character, faithful and true, their thoughts, words and deeds ever in perfect accord; of subdued senses, of large private means, gifted with extraordinary intelligence, sweet-spoken, of honest fame and true to their promises even unto death, of unsurpassed valor and fortitude, they ever had their eye on everything that tended to the best interests of their master and was dear to his heart. Their time, their talents and their energies were devoted to the affairs of the state and they discharged their trust thoroughly and efficiently. Well-versed in the intricate science and art of polity, they would sooner die than stoop to a mean action or an unjust one. Famed for their never-failing patience and spiritual insight, they would not utter an untruth from motives of anger or love or gain. Of considerable tact and knowledge of the world, they acquainted themselves through their spies with everything that took place in their country or abroad—past, present or in contemplation. Of well-tried friendship, they dealt out justice swift and meet, be it son or stranger, friend or foe.

Ever law-abiding, they safe-guarded the interests of the good and the righteous; their hand was ever heavy on the wicked and the impious, but was never lifted against the innocent, be he their worst enemy. Ever successful against the foes of the state and clever in foiling their deep-laid plans, they never let slip any occasion

of increasing the armaments of the kingdom and enriching its coffers, but withal, by fair and honest means, oppressing not the pious Brāhmaṇas and the valiant Kṣatṛiyas. Every offender was punished and fined according to the magnitude of his offence and with due regard to his age and means, time and place.

Under the watchful eye of these faithful ministers who worked in perfect harmony, neither the capital nor the country was ever disgraced by a liar or a rogue or a goer after other women or an unrighteous man or a wicked one.

These excellent counsellors were ever tastefully dressed and adorned. With a constant eye to the best points of a man's character, they were renowned for their clear insight into the present and the future. While religiously guarding the secrets of the State, they were calm and cool in judgment and well conversant with the proper occasions of the four means of overcoming an enemy.

Through his gifted ministers, Dasaratha won over the hearts of his people and was ever informed of everything that took place at home or abroad. Of faultless character, his feet were ever set on the path of virtue and his heart ever turned away from the path of unrighteousness. No one sought his presence with a prayer and went away disappointed. His friends were numerous and true and his tributaries many; he bowed to none and acknowledged the yoke of none, and he met not any foe-man worthy of his steel. His promises always fell short of the performance, and the rising Orb of Day shone not with greater glory in his golden halo of radiance, than did this king of men, with his noble ministers around him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHILDLESS KING.

Of unbounded fame and peerless virtue, king Dasaratha saw the chill winter of age mantling him in its white folds, without any offspring from his loins to cheer his last days.

' His manhood passing, left him lone,
' A childless lord, for this he grieved, for this
' Heavy observances he underwent,
' Subduing needs of flesh and oftentimes
' Making high sacrifice to the Gods,
' Where, all for food, at each sixth watch he took
' A little measured dole.'

He had tried every means that the Holy Books recommend, to free himself of this terrible curse of childlessness but in vain. In sheer desperation did he fling his arm on high and cry—

" Oh, ye just-gods ! Is there no way from this living death ? "; and, as if in answer to his heart-cry, there flashed upon him a suggestion, " May be some unwitting sin of mine in the far past stands unwiped. Anyhow, let me celebrate the Horse-sacrifice that washes a man white of all sin and I may yet feel the flower-soft hands of innocent children clasp my aged neck around."

He took counsel of his queens—what greater joy to their barren hearts ? Then, turning to Sumantra who ever stood by, like his good angel, he said, " Let my teacher and priestly guides know that I await their presence here." And when they were all before him—Vasishtha, the mighty, Suyagña, Vāmadēva, Jābāli, Kāsyapa, and other Brahmanas grown old in wisdom and sacred lore—the aged monarch honored them duly and spoke, " Sore am I of heart, from having no son to grace my name. My royal state and its hollow joys are as dust and ashes in my mouth. May be a Horse-sacrifice can remove the unknown obstacle that bars the way to the desire of my heart. What might be your view, reverend sirs ? "

The Brahmanas listened to his sweet words, so extremely consonant with the Aims of Life and warmly applauded his resolve : " Since your Majesty's heart is inclined to this virtuous and righteous course, this sacrifice cannot fail to accomplish your object.

' Thy piety, thy purity, thy fasts,
 ' The largesse of thy hands, thy heart's wide love,
 ' Thy strength of faith, have pleased us.'

Let the necessary arrangements be made for it and the consecrated horse be let loose."

Joy unspeakable spread over the sad heart of the old king and his face shone with a new light ; he turned to his ministers and cried, " Place yourselves under the directions of the wise Vasishtha and get everything ready for the sacrifice. Start the consecrated horse on its holy round ; let brave warriors go with it and saintly priests Raise the sacrificial grounds on the northern banks of the swift-coursing Sarayû. Have the necessary rites performed that the Kalpa Sûtras lay down to ward off obstacles from foes seen and unseen. The spiteful Brabmarâkshassas are ever on the lookout to detect the slightest slip and spoil such holy rites ; and a badly performed sacrifice bringeth evil unto the performer. But for such dangers and difficulties, every king would be only too glad to do it. Hence, be it on your heads that the sacrifice gets through without any hitch and as laid down in the Book of Ordinances. I entrust you with the task, for I know none more competent." " To hear is to obey" they replied.

The Brahmanas gave him their blessings and withdrew from the council chamber. Dasaratha reiterated his directions to his ministers and dismissed them. He sought his beloved queens and said to them, " Preparations are on foot towards the sacrifice ; consecrate yourselves accordingly." A joyful task was it to them and the faces of the lovely ones shone even as golden lotuses after a long and severe spell of frosty winter.

CHAPTER IX.

RISHYASRINGA—THE INNOCENT.

Then Suniantra, the charioteer of the king and one of his confidential ministers, sought his privacy and said, “Lord, it was given me to be present at an assembly of the Holy Ones, when Sanatkumāra, the Divine Celibate, spoke on the very subject alluded to by the learned Brāhmaṇas not long ago.

The divine Kāsyapa has a son, of unrivalled fame, by name Vibhāndaka, and to him will be born a child, Rishyasringa so called. Spending all his days in the lonely forest, his life's sphere will for some years be confined to cheerful service upon his renowned father and reverential tending of the Sacred Fires, and then, his Bramhacharya will receive a violent shock.

It will come to pass that a famous king, Rōmapāda, will rule over Anga. Some neglect of his kingly duties will inflict a drought in his dominions, entailing much misery on all beings therein, men and beasts. His heart bleeding at the sight of the suffering millions, he will send for Brāhmaṇas grown grey with age and wisdom and say ‘Reverend sirs ! you have sounded the depths of knowledge, lay and clerical and have a profound acquaintance with the world and its ways. Advise me some rite whereby this crime of mine may be expiated and the land be freed of this curse that sits upon it.’ Then the Brāhmaṇas, conversant with the Holy Books, will reply ‘Your Majesty ! manage any way to get down here Rishyasringa, the son of Vibhāndaka and give him your daughter Sānta for a wife, and you will have rain.’

‘How shall I compass it ?’ the king will say to himself ‘well, the Brāhmaṇas alone know best how to bring down one of their class’ and will beseech his chaplain and his ministers to go bring him the young ascetic.

With faces blanched with fear, they will cry out, ' Not so. Your Majesty will pardon us this unseemly refusal ; but we dare not go. Vibhāndaka's curse is too terrible to think of. But we will suggest to you another plan whereby you can bring his son down here without affecting his Brahmacharya and have rain.'

The king will follow their advice and get him down through courtesans and give him his daughter Sānta for a wife. So said Sanatkumāra, and Rishyasringa, your son-in-law as well, will take the requisite measures to procure you an offspring."

Dasaratha drank in with eager ears the glad news and asked, " Well, Sumantra, how was it that Rāmapāda induced Rishyasringa to leave his forest-home and visit his dominions? "

CHAPTER X.

RISHYASRINGA—THE INNOCENT—(*continued*)

Questioned thus, Sumantra went on, “The priests spoke to the king through his ministers, ‘Follow our advice and you will have your wish. That ascetic has never been outside his native forests. The faithful discharge of his duties and the study of the Scriptures take up all his time. The face of woman is a new sight to him ; much less knows he her nature, her ways and her wiles, nor the liquid fire that her looks send along a man’s veins. We will cloud his senses by sweet music, fine perfumes, delicious food, flowery soft touch and sights that captivate the eye and we are sure to bring him over here. Make up your mind to follow our plan. Send lovely courtesans on this business ; bribe them well by rich presents of silk and clothes, ornaments and money and they can never fail to have him at their heels.’ ‘Do as seems to you best’ said the king to them ; and deeming it unseemly that they should hold any conversation with courtesans, they directed the ministers to give them the necessary instructions.

Accordingly the girls went to the forest and hung about the cottage of Vibhāndaka, lying in wait for a chance to meet his son alone—the wise young man who rarely left his hermitage, so engrossed was he in attendance upon his father.

‘In the woods he dwelled
‘That sinless saint, pious and mild and pure,
‘Sad-minded, solitary, for his eyes
‘Had never lighted on a human face
‘Except his sire, Vibhāndaka’s, and thus,
‘Always young Rishyasringa’s heart was set
‘On sanctities.’

As fortune or misfortune would have it, that day he came out of his abode and to the very place where these

damsels had set a snare to entrap his unwary self. They joyfully approached him with bright looks of welcome and cooed to him with alluring smiles. ‘Holy one, who art thou ? And how is it that you have chosen to make this dark and dreary forest your home ?’

‘Take you joy to dwell
‘All lonely in this hermitage ?’

Their very forms and features were new to him and he obligingly replied, ‘Lovely beings ! I am the son of the holy Vibhāndaka ; and Rishyasringa he calls me. I have laid up no inconsiderable merit by my religious austerities. Yonder is my cottage and I would be extremely delighted to receive you there and give you the best welcome in my power.’

The girls smiled their assent and went with him. There he offered them water to wash and drink, and delicious fruits and roots to eat. They received them with joyful thanks and desirous to leave the place before the terrible Vibhāndaka returned, said to him, ‘Fair Sir ! you will not refuse to taste of the fruits we have brought for you.’ They offered him every variety of sweet and toothsome delicacies, which he partook of with unfeigned delight and wonder, for never before had he seen such sweet and lovely fruits .

‘And at the last
‘Danced to his side, and for a moment set
‘Palm to his palm, and limb to limb, and lip
‘To trembling lip, and breast to beating breast.’

The girls then took leave of him saying ‘Holy Sir ! allow us to depart to our homes ; for we are close upon the hour of prayer and worship.’

And the young ascetic, his senses all in a whirl at the sight of their divinely beautiful forms, by the delicious sweetness of the fruits they gave him, by the subtle fragrance that their persons and dress exhaled, by the heart ravishing strains of their music and the dreamy languor of their looks and not the least by their passion-

ate kisses and embraces, that sent a stream of molten lava through his veins, found his life miserable away from them, and yearned for the moment when he would meet them again

'He stood

'As one some dream of glory leaves distraught,

'Spiritless, then within his lonely cell

'Sate, with his face fixed through many silent hours,

'Their beauties meditating.'

After a time the restlessness that took possession of him drove him to the spot where he came upon them the day before and with eager eyes he scanned the road they took.

They failed him not and having made sure that they had lured him into their man-trap, said to him laughingly 'Light of our eyes' you do us a great injustice in that you do not return our visit to you. Come and see us where we live. You will find there nicer fruits than those we gave you yesterday. And you can be sure of a warmer welcome at our hermitage.'

He took their words for gospel truth and only too glad was he to go with them The moment his feet touched the soil of Anga,

'Great Indra's wrath was gone and the rain

'Burst over the land and drenched the thirsty fields.'

And the people rejoiced thereat. The king met his welcome visitor that brought with him the much-prayed-for rains and reverentially touching his feet with his head, said with joined palms, 'Holy One! May an unworthy servant of thine sue for pardon for having induced thee by an unworthy ruse to visit my kingdom? May he pray of thee to save him from the terrible wrath of thy saintly sire?' Rishyasringa did not disappoint him, and Rōmapāda took him to his palace and joyfully gave him his daughter, Sāntā, for a wife. The sage abode with him thereafter, his least wishes anticipated and every desire of his heart gratified.

CHAPTER XI.

DASARATHA AND RISHYASRINGA

' Of the illustrious line of Ikshwâku will spring a righteous monarch, by name Dasaratha, who aye kept his plighted word. Rômapâda, the lord of Anga, and a very dear friend of Dasaratha, will be blessed with a daughter, Sântâ so named, whose loveliness will be matched only by her virtue. And to him will the ruler of Ayôdhyâ go and say, ' Oh, my dear friend ! my heart danceth not to the happy music of boyish prattle and innocent laughter. Speak thou to Rishyasringa for me and request him to go out to my capital to devise some rite whereby

' I may have

Fair babes, continuers of my royal line

And Rômapâda, taking counsel but with his own generous heart, will persuade Rishyasringa and Sântâ to go over with his friend, assured beyond a doubt that his son-in-law will not fail to gladden the old king's heart by realising his long-cherished wishes. Whereupon Dasaratha will, in all humility, pray to the sage to take the necessary steps to free him of his curse of childlessness and secure him a place in the Regions of the Blessed. Rishyasringa will not fail him and four sons of immeasurable might and boundless fame will call the happy Dasaratha their sire and continue his line on earth for long ages to come.'

Thus spoke the Divine One, even Sanatkumâra, for whom the past, the present, and the future have no secrets; and it was in the last Kritayuga. Now I suggest that your Majesty will do well to go to the sage in person, you and your friends, kinsmen, armies and attendants; offer him your humblest respects and entreat him to go over with you."

So spake the favoured one; whereat Dasaratha took thoughtful counsel with Vasishtha and set out for the

dominions of Rōmapāda. They had a long and pleasant journey through happy villages and laughing fields, over high hills and dark valleys, through trackless woods and across roaring waters and arrived at the capital of the king, who gave a hearty welcome to his old friend, his queens and his ministers.

With pride and joy, he lost no time in acquainting Rishyasringa with the warm friendship that existed between him and Dasaratha and with the relation Sāntā occupied to him. The sage honoured him duly as the father of his dear wife; and the ruler of Ayodhyā could not take his wondering eyes off the young Rishi, whose spiritual lustre blazed even as the smokeless flame.

A week or so of happy hospitality and the childless king sought the privacy of Rōmapāda and said "My old friend and true! I would like that you allow me to take away Sāntā and her husband to Ayodhyā. They would serve a great purpose of mine."

"Glad am I" exclaimed Rōmapāda, "in that you have at last found something that I can do for you"; and taking his son-in-law aside, he said to him, "My valued friend Dasaratha, my other self, wants you and your wife to stay with him awhile at his place; and it will gladden my heart ever so much if you could do so." "Nothing would give me greater pleasure," was the answer of the sage, accompanied with an enigmatic smile.

And the lord of Ayodhyā, now all haste to go back to his capital, embraced Rōmapāda warmly and took reluctant leave of him, with a promise to meet at no long time. He set his face towards Ayodhyā and calling unto his presence swift messengers, "Go ye," said he, "in advance and see to it that the city puts on her brightest look. Let the roads be swept clean and the dust laid. Let the streets and houses be gaily decked with flags, streamers, banners, and garlands. Let arches welcome us at every turn and sweet perfumes sail along the soft breeze."

And Dasaratha entered Ayodhyā to the sweet sounds of martial music and the joyful shouts of the people, dressed in their brightest and their best, who gave a hearty welcome to their beloved monarch and his honoured friend. The royal host offered unto his reverend guest the highest honours of his house and led him to the inner apartments, while his old heart danced with joy, as if its long-deferred hopes were already realized to the utmost. His ladies were overjoyed to have Sānta once more among them after so long an absence, while she, happy in the unfeigned love of her friends and kinsfolk and of her royal father, abode with him for a while, ever devotedly ministering to the comforts of her saintly husband

CHAPTER XII.

THE HORSE-SACRIFICE RESOLVED UPON.

Spring came on, never too soon, the brightest jewel that ever shines in the crown of the Lord of Months. And upon Dasaratha came the desire to perform the sacrifice, in whose womb lay his future, his joys, his hopes, his peace here and hereafter. He concluded to go through the horse-sacrifice as a necessary preliminary and purificatory rite and with folded palms prayed Rishyasringa of golden lustre, to accept the office of Brahma during the preparatory Sangrahanī "Be it so," replied the sage, "make the necessary arrangements and let the sacrificial horse go his round over the earth."

Dasaratha turned to Sumantra and said "Reverently invite to the holy rite Suyagnā, Vāinadēva, Jābāli, Kāsyapa, Vasishtha, our royal chaplain and other Brāhmaṇas skilled in the mysteries of the sacrifices and convey them here on suitable vehicles,;" which he did. The king honored them as they deserved and spake "Reverend Sirs! Sore is my spirit, in that my old age is not blessed with a child to climb upon my knees. I shall perform a horse-sacrifice to expiate this sin of mine, conscious or otherwise, that frustrates for me my dearest hopes and wishes." Vasishtha and his friends applauded the righteous resolve and replied "Since thy heart is righteously inclined towards this rite, thou shalt, of a surety, be blessed with four sons of mighty arms and matchless fame. So, lose no time in making the necessary arrangements therefor."

Dasaratha turned to his ministers and said "See that the directions of my teacher are carried out to the very letter. Let everything be in readiness to begin the rite and loose the sacrificial horse to go his round, with skilled priests and a strong army to accompany it. Lay out the sacrificial grounds on the northern bank of the Sarayū

and have the necessary protective rites performed. If these sacrifices could be conducted easily and without any mishap, every king would but too gladly lay claim to the honour. But, cunning Brahma-râkshasas are ever on the watch to detect any slight flaw in these rites and it is not an easy thing to baffle their vigilance, skilled as they are in the sacrificial mysteries. I pray you, than whom I know none more competent, to enable me to perform this sacrifice of mine without a hitch and in conformity with the rules laid down for the same."

"On our heads and eyes be it," they made low reply

The Sangrahani was over, the horse let loose; and the assembled Brâhmaṇas were loud in their praises of the good king, whose heart was ever set on Dharma. They then took leave of the happy Dasaratha, who reiterated his orders to his ministers and retired to his apartments.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HORSE-SACRIFICE BEGUN.

A year passed by and Spring gladdened again the hearts of men ; and on the full moon day, Dasa-ratha went to the sacrificial grounds to begin the Horse-sacrifice. He bowed himself low before Vasishtha, even unto the ground and said to him in all reverence, " Holy One ! thou art my guide, philosopher and friend. Thy words are a lamp unto my feet and a light upon my path. I pray thee to perform for me this sacrifice duly and without the least flaw. No room should be given to the evil-minded Rakshasas to interfere with it, the materials, the rites or the deities. On thee rests the responsibility of this grand rite." " Well, it shall be even as you desire," rejoined Vasishtha.

He then sent for Brâhmanas, skilled in the performance of every kind of sacrifice, for the officers of the king and for the servants placed at his disposal to collect the materials therefor, for the makers of the sacrificial bricks and altars ; for the carpenters, who prepare sacrificial posts, ladles, spoons, pots and other implements ; for the diggers of tanks and wells ; for skilled accountants , for painters, sculptors and architects , for professors in the art of dancing and pantomime , and for priests deep in the mysteries of sacrificial art, learned and of pure lives ; and said to them, " Oh priests, watch ye every detail of the sacrifice and see that nothing goes amiss. Bricklayers ! get ready hundreds and thousands of sacrificial bricks. Servants ! erect mansions to receive and accommodate the royal guests, broad and high, proof against wind and rain ; and charming residences for the Brâhmanas, for our towns-men and for those that come from the various parts of our vast kingdom. Look to it that these are amply stored with provisions of every kind, sweet and wholesome, and with every other requirement.

And you, officers of the king ! take good heed that you receive every one kindly and honor him duly with garlands and sweet perfumes. Forget not the masons, the sculptors, the architects, the servants and those that are set to supervise these arrangements. Never show them the slightest sign of disrespect or neglect, but extend unto every one your heartiest welcome. Entertain them right royally and let them have everything they want, food, clothing and money. Keep your eye on every class of men and let it be upon your heads that they go away mightily satisfied. Beware, I say, of offending any one, be he the lowest of the low, through anger, enmity, familiarity or avarice. Ever keep before your minds the love you bear to me and to your king and deserve the same at our hands, by discharging your respective duties to your utmost, and without the slightest room for complaint or remark."

And they all replied with one voice, " Holiest of sages ! Upon our heads be your orders ; we shall carry them out to the very letter."

Vasishtha then turned himself towards Sumantra and said, " Send out respectful invitations to every righteous king on the face of the Earth and to the men of note in all grades of society. Do thou request in person the gracious presence of the valiant Janaka, the lord of Mithila, bound to our king by ties of relationship, and deep in the knowledge of the Vēdas and the Sāstras ; of the sweet spoken Lord of Kāsi, also a dear friend of Dasaratha ; of the ruler of Kēkaya, our king's father-in-law and a paragon of virtue, and his son , and last, but not the least, of the thrice fortunate Rōmapāda, the glorious king of Anga, one of the dearest friends of our master ; and send thou to invite hither the kings of Sindhu, Sauvīra, Saurāshtra and of the numerous kingdoms in the south, east and west and every other royal friend of our monarch."

And Sumantra did so.

Then, the officers and servants deputed by Vasishtha to look after the various details of the sacrifice, reported unto

him that they had done their work skilfully and thoroughly. Vasishtha dismissed them with this last piece of advice and—warning. “Whatever you give, give it with a cheerful heart and a pleasant smile. An ungracious gift brings evil upon the giver—our king. Remember and fail not.”

In a short time the kings of the Earth came to the capital of Dasaratha with valuable presents of costly gems and articles rare. Then Vasishtha addressed himself to the king and said, “Noble king! the rulers of the Earth are come unto your sacrifice, every one of them, and I have received them right royally. Your officers have made every necessary arrangement for the rite. The sacrificial grounds are ready to receive your Majesty and resemble the happiest creations of celestial architects. May it please your Majesty to come and have a look at them?”

And, at an auspicious moment, Dasaratha set out for the sacrificial grounds along with Vasishtha and Vāmadēva. Then began the great Horse-sacrifice, under the watchful eye of Vasishtha, Rishyasringa and the other sages, who saw that nothing went amiss.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HORSE-SACRIFICE (*Concluded*)

The horse, that was sent to make the round of the earth, came back safe and victorious. And on the sacrificial grounds erected on the banks of the Sarayû, priests, who had sounded the depths of the Vêdas, went through the rites of Pravargya, Upasada, and other incidental offerings, as laid down in the Mîmâmsa and the Srauta Sûtras. They adored the Gods that preside over the various details of the sacrifice; during the morning Savana, they invited Indra to partake of his portion of the offering and hymned high the sin destroying Sôma; and the two other Savanas were properly gone through in their turn.

Every part of the great sacrifice was performed without any defect or interruption; the priests omitted nothing, they altered nothing, the Mantras were chanted without any fault of measure or intonation.

And all the days the sacrifice went on, you could come upon none who was afflicted with fatigue, hunger or thirst, nor an unlettered man; nor one but had a hundred disciples. The Brâhmaṇas, the sages, the sky-clad, the old, the infirm, the sick, the boys and the women were ever seen feeding heartily. The viands were so sweet and delicious that, no sooner you rose full from a meal than the desire came upon you to sit down to it again, and you regretted the limited capacity of your stomach. The king was feeding countless millions, but he was never satisfied and ever blamed himself for his inability to give more. So, he gave directions to the superintendents that in every part of the vast grounds food and clothing should be distributed, without stint, to those that might ask for it. In the numerous kitchens the cooks piled up day after day huge hills of food of every kind; they were marvels of the culinary art and very

soon disappeared down the joyful throats of the untold millions that came from the various quarters of the earth to view that famous rite. And Brāhmaṇas, neatly dressed and gaily decked, served the guests, while many others assisted them. They rose from the meal all too reluctantly and praised in no measured terms the excellence of the feast and the well appointed service. "Our delight and joy knows no bounds, your majesty!" cried they, "may every happiness be thine." And the words were sweet unto his ears.

During the intervals of the sacrifice, Brāhmaṇas of great learning and high powers of speech, entered into various polemical discussions with one another, with a view to win laurels on that memorable occasion.

On each day of the sacrifice, during the three Savanas, Brāhmaṇas skilled in the spreading of the sacred grass, conducted the rites presided over by UMa and the other deities. Among those that took part in the sacrifice, there was none who was not a master of the Vēdas and the Vēdāngas, nor any who had not kept the Chāndrāyana and the other vows; nor one who had not a profound and varied acquaintance with the Sāstras; nor could your eye rest in the king's audience on any Brāhmaṇa who was not an able disputant.

And when they came to that part of the sacrifice where the sacrificial posts were planted, they drove into the ground twenty one posts at arm's length from one another, near the altar place of Agni. A post of Śleshmātaka, with another of Dēvadāru to the north and south of it; again, three Bilva posts north and south of the first three; and again three mahogany posts north and south of these fifteen. They were made of tough flawless wood, each five hundred and four inches long and octagonal in shape. They were smoothly planed; and Brāhmaṇas well versed in the theory and the art of sacrifice, decked them with bands of gold, flowers, perfumes and rich cloths. Planted in rows of seven, they looked not unlike the constellation of the Great Bear.

Before they were planted, skilled Brāhmaṇas laid out the fire-altar of bricks specially prepared according to the Sūtras ; it was eighteen stones high and shaped like the Garuda, facing the East, with spread tail and wings adorned with golden plates.

To the posts were bound, as enjoined in the rules of sacrifice, serpents and birds dedicated to Indra and to the other deities. And on the occasion of the offering up of the animals, the consecrated horse and about three hundred other animals were tied to the posts—land-living and aquatic, tame and wild, beasts of the wood and fowls of the air.

On the spot known as Sānitṛa, (slaughtering-ground) the queens of Dasaṛatha sprinkled the dead horse with consecrated water, reciting the appropriate Mantras, went round it right and left, and with a gold needle marked on its stomach the three places for the priests to cut at. Then, Kausalyā, with a view to lay up great merit, abode for a night with the horse and felt no repugnance at touching the carcass.

The chief priests Brahīna, Hotā, Adhwaryu and Udgāṭa took by the hand the Mahishi, Vāvāṭa, Pālakali, and Parivritti, given them as presents by the king and handed them back to him, receiving rich gifts in exchange.

Thereafter, the Adhwaryu cut out that part of the horse known as Tējini, that corresponds to the Vapa of other animals and offered it to the God of Fire on plaited water-reeds. The king smelt of the smoke and his sins were washed away ; and after him, the eleven other priests offered into the fire with appropriate rites the various parts of the horse.

The horse-sacrifice extends over many days and includes several complicated rituals, of which three are the most important. On the first day, the Agnishtōma, with four Stōmas ; on the second, the Ukthya ; on the third, the Atirāṭra ; and the remaining days were given up to Jyotiṣhtōma, Āyushtōma, the two Atirāṭras, Abhi-

jit, Visvajit and Aptōryama ; and every one of them, in strict conformity with the rules laid down for it and with heart-felt good will to the performer.

Thus did Dasaratha perform this grand sacrifice, revealed to the world by Brahma, successfully and without omitting the least detail ; and with a glad heart did he present the Hōtā, the Adhwaryu, the Brahma and the Udgata with his dominions on the East, West, South and North respectively. They accepted them joyfully and said to the king, “Your Majesty ! religious observances, the study of the Holy Writ and the teaching thereof come easier to us and are more congenial than the government of kingdoms. What shall we do with them? You are fitted for the task and God has specially placed you in the world therefor. So, take these back and give us in return gold and gems, horses and cattle.” And Dasaratha gave to every one of them ten lacs of kine, ten crores of gold coins, and four of silver, which they took to Rishyasringa and Vasishtha to equitably divide among them. They received their shares gladly and said to the king, “We are more than satisfied.”

Dasaratha distributed untold wealth among the poor ; and a Brahmana, who made bold to approach him with a request for something more, was rewarded with the diamond bracelet on his arm. With tears of joy coursing down his aged cheeks, the monarch reverently touched the ground with his forehead before the assembled multitudes, whose contentment and joy knew no bounds, while the priests and the Brahmanas spoke their heart-felt blessings in the grand and majestic chants of the Vēdic hymns.

The heart of the old king danced with joy in that he had successfully performed the famous horse-sacrifice, so difficult for ordinary monarchs. It burnt away the sins that stood in the way of his being blessed with an offspring and opened to him wide the gates of heaven. He then approached Rishyasringa and prayed to him

with joined palms, "Holy Sir! deign to point out to me the means whereby I could have a child to cheer my old age."

"Let not thy noble heart be cast down," replied the sage. "Four sons will be born unto you, whose eternal glory will illumine your noble line. And mine be the care to bring about the happy event."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GODS TAKE REFUGE WITH THE LORD.

Then, Rishyasringa, whose mind was capacious enough to receive and retain the numerous Sâkhâs of the Vâdas and who was a thorough master of the mysteries connected therewith, after long and earnest thought, hit upon the most effective method of realising the king's wishes. With a glad face he turned to him and said, "Now shall I perform for you an Ishti consecrated by the Atharvana Mantras, that will not fail to get you a son." And in the course of the rite, he made an offering in the fire, accompanied by powerful Vedic Mantras.

Meanwhile, the various Angelic Presences that came down to the horse-sacrifice to receive their portions of the offerings, approached their chief, the Lotus-born One, and said, "Lord! A Râkshasa, Râvana by name, has won your favour by his wonderful austerities and has been blessed with many mighty boons in consequence, and we, poor souls, have to pay for it. Bound by our respect for the giver of those boons, we have to put up, without a murmur, with his unheard-of cruelties. The three worlds tremble at his name; he will, in no time, drive away from their thrones Indra and the other Regents of the spheres and occupy them himself. Strong in the strength of his boons, he bids defiance to every one, sages and Brahmanas, Yakshas and Gandharvas, Dêvas and Asuras and grinds them low. The Sun draws in his heat when he shines on the Demon and adjusts his warmth to his taste; the Wind-God is afraid to blow hard through his gardens, lest the flowers therein should fall off the trees and creepers and anger Râvana when he is disporting himself there; the roaring Ocean with his mutinous waves, stands tongue-tied with fear at his approach; his fierce looks strike dire terror into our hearts and we drag on lives of misery and fear. Seek thou some means to relieve us from this living terror."

"Shining Ones!" replied Brahma, "the wicked wretch prayed of me immortality from the Dêvas, the Gandharvas and the Rakshasas and *that I* granted him. But, fortunately for you, he has omitted to ask it from men, as being too far beneath his fear and notice. *There* is his weak point and he should be made to meet his death at the hands of man."

The hearts of the sages and the gods danced for very joy at this glad news, and they rejoiced as if the hour of their deliverance was already at hand.

Then there appeared before their delighted eyes the Lord Vishnu, the ruler of the Universe and the living God in the hearts of all beings. In His supreme effulgence stood He, His face resplendent with the thought that the time had come for Him to destroy the wicked and bring peace and comfort to the hearts of the good and the righteous. He ever bears in His hands the conch and the discus, to extend His protection to those that take refuge in Him. Brahma advanced to reverence Him, his mind actively engaged with the prayer he meant to place before Him. Then the Sons of Light hymned Him high and with bent heads and joined palms cried, "We pray Thee that Thou deign to be born as four sons unto Dasaratha, of righteous heart and saintly life—the Lord of Ayodhya, from whom none ever ask in vain. Do Thou take human form through his three queens, who are even as the mortal embodiments of Hrt, Sri and Krti, and destroy the impious One, even Ravana. He is the scourge and the terror of all beings and is not to meet his death at the hands of any but man. Proud of his might and prouder still of the boons he had won of Brahma, he tramples on all of us, gods and sages, Yakshas and Gandharvas, Kinnaras and men alike. The lovely Apsarasas that disport themselves in the charming groves of our Nandana are the special objects of his persecutions. We, the denizens of the three worlds, pray his death at Thy hands and take our refuge in Thee. Thou art our only stay and support, and

we pray that Thou wilt be pleased to come down on Earth to destroy the wicked wights, Rāvana, Indrajit, Lavana and certain wicked Gandharvas."

Then, unto the expectant Brahma and the attendant celestial host, spake the World-honoured One, Vishnu, the Lord of Lords, "Fear not, my children. All good betide you. I shall come down among men as the son of Dasaratha and shall slay in dreadful battle Rāvana, that terror of yours and of every devout and virtuous soul; nay, his sons, grandsons, friends, and kinsmen even unto the last remove. And mortal years 11000 shall I reign over the Earth, restoring Law and Order."

He promised them safety from their enemy and a speedy deliverance to their miseries; and resolved to manifest Himself as the sons of Dasaratha, whose saintly virtues attracted Him to take birth in his family. Far, far above the mortal changes known as birth and death, Himself the Goal and the End of all desires and efforts, human and divine, yet He made up His mind to limit His illimitable essence and come down into this dark and sinful world of ours, that the 'wicked might cease from troubling and the weary be at rest.'

Then, the Shining Ones, the Gandharvas, the Rudras and the Apsarasas, sang his divine glory and repeated their prayer, "Soul of Compassion! Lord of infinite Mercy! save us from the wrath and oppression of the terrible Rāvana, slay him in battle dire, him and his kin, him and his countless hosts. Naturally endowed with no inconsiderable degree of pride and might, he has become insufferably so, through the boons conferred on him by Brahma. The good and the righteous cry out against him and raise tear-dimmed eyes and trembling hands in mute appeal to Thee for deliverance and protection. Thy work accomplished, come Thou back, light of heart, unto Thy radiant seat on high, far beyond the utmost dreams of poor we, unto Vaikuntha, the eternal world where desire is not nor hatred."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DIVINE PÂYASA.

To which the Lord Nârâyana replied in feigned ignorance (what is it He knows not !) " Well, my children, I shall do even as you wish. But I do not see clearly the easiest and most effective method of bringing about his death. You have thought over it long and deeply, and may be you can suggest the best course."

The Dêvas bowed low before the Eternal One and rejoined, " Lord ! the sinful wretch contrived to win the favour of Brahma, the foremost and the best of us all ; who, pleased by his terrible austerities, granted him immunity from death at the hands of every one in all the worlds, above and below. But, he has, in the height of his contempt, omitted men from his list. Safe, through his boons, from every object in the universe, as he fondly thinks, his pride is equalled but by his cruelties. The groans of the insulted Dêvas and the shrieks of the ravished damsels cry out against him and the bleached skeletons of holy sages, whom he had murdered in cold blood. *Man and man alone* is his fate ; and from *him* he meets his death. Do Thou take human form and slay him in battle dire."

Then said the Lord Vishnu, " I shall come down among men, as the son of Dasaratha, who is even now performing a holy rite to get a boy in his old age." He ended and having given leave to the assembled celestial hosts to depart, vanished then and there, lauded by the rejoicing Dêvas.

Soon after, Rishyasringa, in the course of the rite he was conducting, made an offering unto the Fire Âhavaniya, when there rose out of it a radiant Presence of vast proportions. Like a towering peak he stood ; and the blazing Fire or the noonday sun was as nothing before the blinding glory of that mighty One. His face was fiery red

and the hair upon it was of the hue of molten gold, even as the tawny mane of the monarch of the forest. Clad in robes of reddish black, his beautifully proportioned limbs were adorned with lovely ornaments. Of inconceivable might and power, even as the royal tiger in the flush of his strength and fierceness, his voice sounded as the great war drums that fill the warrior's heart with fire and energy. His hands were closed around a golden vessel of exquisite workmanship, silver-covered, as lovingly as ever a lover's arms were twined round the neck of his beloved ; and this was full of divine Pāyasa. He turned to the king and said, "I am a man sent to you by the Four-faced One, Brahma "

Dasaratha replied with folded hands, "Lord ! Hast thy journey hither been a pleasant one ? What does my lord want with his servant ?"

"Only this," said the Radiant One, "the gods are pleased with thee and thy Horse-sacrifice and Putrēshти and have sent thee this Pāyasa. It confers glory and weal and, more than anything else, the son you so much yearn for. Accept it ; let your queens partake of it and sons four shall be thine. This is what you have toiled for, ever so long, through horse-sacrifice and vows innumerable."

"Thy commands shall be obeyed," replied the king, in awe and reverence ; and receiving the Pāyasa sent him by the Dēvas, he bowed low unto the Divine Messenger and went round him in respect ; and his heart leaped for very joy, even as that of a beggar that has come upon a precious treasure. And the mighty Being, having accomplished his mission, disappeared into the fire from which he sprang.

Thereafter, the king concluded the rite, and retiring to his apartments, said to his queens, "This divine Pāyasa, the gift of the celestials, will bear you sons. Do you partake of it." And their faces shone thereat, even as the sky illuminated by the rays of the autumn moon.

He then distributed it among them thus:—One-half to Kausalyâ, one-fourth to Sumîtra and one-eighth to Kaikêyi. But, to give the remaining one-eighth to her would be to place her on a level with Sumîtra, her elder, and that should never be; so he divided it equally between the two. The queens were highly satisfied with his distribution of the Pâyasa and deemed themselves blessed in being allowed to partake of it. They ate of it and shone brighter throughout the period of pregnancy than the smokeless fire or the brilliant sun. And the old king, saw it; his heart was lifted of its weight of sorrow and he rejoiced even as the great Indra, honoured in heaven by the Siddhas and the Sages.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMING DOWN OF THE GODS.

When the Lord Vish*nū* had taken the preliminary steps to come down as the son of Dasaratha, the Lotus-born One, from whom the future is not hid, said to the Devas, “The Lord goes down among men in pursuance of His promise to us and for our good. Send ye down, from your essences, sons to assist Him in His fight with Rāvana; choose ye fit vehicles among the Apsarasas and Gandharvas and beget sons ape-like in form. Capable of assuming any shape at will they shall be masters of the arts of illusion, like unto the Wind-God in speed and unto the Supreme Vish*nū* in might, invulnerable and unconquerable, with the strength of fierce lions in them and endued with the terrible energy of all the Astras, immortal, even as the celestials who have drunk of Ambrosia, intelligent, conversant with every rule of morality and skilful in adopting the means to the ends.

“Once, when I indulged in a deep yawn, I brought forth a mighty bear, Jambavān by name, of course with an eye to future contingencies.”

And in cheerful obedience to his commands, the sages, the Siddhas, the Vidyādharas, the Uragas, the Chāraṇas and the other celestial orders, brought forth sons of their own essence, monkeys that roamed the woods. The great Indra gave birth to Vali, the monarch of the monkeys, of vast proportions even as the Mount Mahēndra. The Sun-God begat Sugrīva; Brihaspati begat Tāra, the wisest and the foremost of the monkey host; Kubēra begat Gandhamādhana, like unto him in wealth; Viśvakarma begat Nala; Agni begat Nila, radiant even as his sire and excelling the other monkeys by his glory, splendour and valor; the handsome Aświns begat Mainda and Dwivida, no less beautiful than their sires; Varuṇa begat Sushēna; Parjanya, the God of Rain, begat Sarabha, of vast strength;

Vāyu begat Hanumān, like unto Garuda in speed and of adamantine body, impervious even to the Vajra.

Thus, countless myriads of apes, baboons, monkeys and bears came down on Earth to assist the Lord in exterminating Rāvana and his wicked brood. Their strength was immeasurable ; they could take any form they liked ; of vast bulk like unto Mēru or Mandara, resembling their sires in shape and height, some were born of monkey mothers, some of bears, some of Apsarasas, some of Vidyādhara maidens and some of Nāgas and Gandharvas ; some were born of celestial fathers, some of sages, some of Gandharvas, some of Garuda and the feathered race, some of Yakshas, some of Vāsuki and the others of Nāgas ; some of Siddhas, some of Vidyādhara and some of Uragas.

Proud in their strength even as lions and tigers, fighting with rocks, trees, teeth and claws, they could shatter the strongest tree and uproot the hugest mountain, their speed was such that the mighty Lord of the Rivers, was shaken to his very bottom ; with a blow of their feet they could rend the solid Earth in twain ; they could lightly leap across the vast oceans, course along the sky and catch by the hair the fleet-footed clouds ; they could fly away in sport with huge elephants that range the forests in the pride of their strength ; their roars could cause the most powerful birds to drop down dead from their dizzy home among the clouds.

These mighty beings ranged the earth and the sky, and their seed grew and grew by hundreds and by thousands and covered the face of the globe. Some of them lived along the sides of Rikshavān and other mountains, in dark forests and lonely woods, on the banks of charming lakes and swift-coursing rivers, on the high hills and in the low vales.

All of them recognised as their monarchs, the brothers Vāli and Sugrīva, the king and the heir-apparent, born of Indra and Sūrya ; their leaders were Nala, Nila, Hanumān

and other mighty monkeys. Valī extended his powerful arm over them and under its shadow lived, in peace and prosperity, the high-minded and valiant apes and monkeys, bears and baboons. And these mighty beings, of various shapes and features, and of vast and fearful bulk, like unto huge mountain peaks or cloud-banks, came down into the world to help the Lord in His noble task and darkened the broad bosom of the Earth, and its numerous mountains and valleys, hills and dales, forests and woodlands.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COMING OF THE LORD

The various celestial hosts that came down to receive their offerings during the Horse-sacrifice departed to their respective worlds after the Ishti was over.

The king and his queens freed themselves from the consecratory vow; and he sent away, with all honors, the many kings that had graced him with their presence. They saluted Vasishtha and the other sages and left for their respective kingdoms, their troops flashing with gold and gems and gay apparel, the royal gift of their noble host.

Dasaratha returned to his capital, in the company of Vasishtha and his brother sages, his queens, his armies and his servants following him in their countless conveyances. Then Rishyasringa and his wife took leave of Dasaratha and along with them Rāmapāda. Having dismissed his guests, the king abode in his capital, his hopes realised and his thoughts ever intent on the approaching birth of his sons.

Twice six months had rolled away since the great sacrifice was over and, in the first month of the New Year, on the ninth day of the bright fortnight, the Lord of the worlds chose to take human form and sent down half of His essence as the son of Kausalyā (thenceforth to be known as Rāma), the world-honored One, the crowning glory of the grand line of Ikshwāku, and the sum of all perfections. The constellation Punarvasu, of which Aditi was the regent, was chosen to preside at his birth. The Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn were in ascension in their respective houses. Aries, Capricornus, Cancer, Pisces and the Libra, Jupiter and the Moon were in conjunction; the rising sign was Cancer. And Kausalyā shone with unparalleled effulgence, even as Aditi

when she gave birth to Indra, the lord of the Shining Ones, the Vajra-wielder.

Bharata was born of Kaikēyī, under the constellation Pushya, when Pisces was the rising sign. He had in him one-eighth of the Divine Essence, and was the embodiment of every excellence, and of never-failing prowess.

Under the asterism Aslēsha, when Cancer was the rising sign, were born unto Sumitra two sons, Lakshmana, and Satrughna, valiant and well-skilled in the science of arms, human and divine. They were twins; Lakshmana had in him one-fourth and Satrughna one-eighth of the Divine Essence. Resembling in lustre the two asterisms Pūrvā and Uttara Bhādrapada, they were beautifully matched.

Sweetly sang the Gandharvas, and gaily danced the Apsarasas, the celestial drums beat merrily and the flowers of Heaven rained on Earth when the Divine Four came down upon it. The capital and the kingdom was one scene of mirth and jollity, and it was a happy day. The high roads were crowded with bright citizens, dancers and dancing masters, the streets echoed to gay songs and sweet musical instruments, and the loud plaudits of bards, genealogists and heralds. The old king, beside himself with joy, gave away untold wealth and kine to Brāhmaṇas and rich presents to the bards and minstrels.

On the thirteenth day of their birth the holy Vasishtha joyfully gave them names. The son of Kausalyā he called Rāma; Kaikēyī's son answered to Bharata; and the twins from the womb of Sumitra, he named the elder Lakshmana, and the younger Satrughna. On that occasion the king caused numerous Brāhmaṇas to be fed, both in his capital and in his kingdom and gave away costly gems and rich gifts.

In due time, the boys passed through the sacraments laid down for the twice-born, Annaprāṣāna, Choula and Upanayana.

Of them, Rāma the eldest, who towered above the rest, was a perennial source of delight to his sire and even as the Lotus-born One, the darling of all beings. Very soon they mastered the *Vēdas* and the *Vedāngas*; brave and wise, endowed with every virtue, they were ever intent upon doing good to others. Among them, Rāma was the brightest and shone radiant. Of unfailing powers, a source of delight unto the world, even as the charming Queen of Night, the most expert in training horses and elephants and in chariot races, master of the Science of the Bow, he was withal ever assiduous in attending upon his parents and ministering to their least comforts.

Lakshmana, blessed with every perfection and excellence, was ever devoted to his brother Rāma, the beloved of men, the whole current of his thoughts, words and deeds set towards Rāma, and *that* even from his very infancy. Sleep visited not the eyes of Rāma, the best of men, if Lakshmana were not by, he relished not his food, be it ever so delicious, if Lakshmana was not there to share it with him. His right hand and his visible life currents he regarded Lakshmana. When Rāma rode out to hunt, Lakshmana ever accompanied him, bow in hand, to shield him from any harm. Satrughna was unto Bharata what Lakshmana was unto Rāma.

Dasaīatha, surrounded by his four beloved and fortunate sons, shone even as the Four-faced Brahma among the Regents of the Spheres. His heart waxed glad to see them grow in wisdom, derived from the study of the arts and sciences; to see them adorned with every perfection, to mark their keen sense of shame, when, from heedlessness, their thoughts happened to go astray, to see them proficient in every worldly affair; to hear of their growing fame among men as prodigies of intellect; and to observe their wonderful faculty of seeing before them into the future and act accordingly. The sons were not slow to note the love of their sire towards them; they became more assiduous, if possible, in their studies of the science

of Ethics and sacred legendary lore and in the mastery of the bow, and ever served their sire joyfully.

Now, Dasaratha one day took deep counsel with his High Priest and his kinsmen about the approaching marriage of his boys, when, unto him among his ministers, came all unexpected the great sage Viśvāmitra, of high spiritual lustre and said to the Wardens of the Gate, "Let the king know that Viśvamittra, the son Gādhi is here to see him." In great fear and trepidation they ran in and informed the king that Viśvāmitra waited for an audience, whereat, the king made haste to welcome the sage very carefully and humbly, even as Indra welcomes Brahma. His face shone with gladness at the sight of Viśvāmitra of stern austerities, and through Vasishtha he extended unto him all the rites of hospitality. Viśvamittra graciously accepted the king's kindness and inquired after his welfare. "Art thou ever intent on gathering rare and valuable objects and increasing the collection? Are thy kin and friends happy and the subjects in thy capital and kingdom? Is thy treasury growing? Are thy subject princes obedient and loyal to thee? Art thou regular in thy sacrifice to the gods and other religious observances? Dost thou duly acquit thyself of thy duties as a man and as a king? Do thy guests receive hospitable entertainment at thy hands? Dost thou make right use of the various methods of kingcraft?" He then proceeded to enquire after the health and welfare of Vasishtha, Vāmadēva and the other sages. Pleased with his attentions to them, they proceeded to the audience chamber and took their usual seats.

Then Dasaratha, the great giver, approached the sage and with his hair standing on end through joy, exclaimed, "Holy One! this kind visit of thine, which I never dared to dream of, gladdens my old heart more than if a mortal came by the Waters of Immortality; more than welcome rains to parched deserts; more than a son born to one in his old age, of his lawful wife; more than

recovered treasure to the loser ; more than the marriages of their children to fond parents. Has thy journey hither been a pleasant one ? What shall I do to gratify thy wishes ? Blessed am I, in that Heaven has sent me one than whom I can desire no fitter recipient. Fair is the day that brought thee here. It is now that my birth has borne fruit and this my long life here. As a royal sage, there was no wish of thine that thou didst not gratify ; then, by dreadful austerities, thou becamest a Brahmarshi and thy heart knows no desire. Every way thou art an object of reverence and honor unto me. Thy visit here has washed away my sins and it is a wonder to me indeed, when I come to think of it A sight of thy holy face has translated me to the regions of the Blessed. Allow me to perform thy behests and deserve thy grace. Art thou not a god unto me, a household deity ? Thou hast come unto me only for my greatest good and thy visit has increased my religious merit. Hesitate not to acquaint me with the object of thy journey hither , *be it small or great I give you my royal word to accomplish it unto the least detail.*"

So in all humility and from a full heart, spoke Dasaratha, born of ancestors who reckoned among them such famous men as Trisanku. The words fell sweet upon the ears of the noble sage and his heart was glad thereat.

CHAPTER XIX

VISVÂMITRA SEEKS RÂMA OF DÂSARATHA

To which, the saintly One, his heart dancing at the words of the great-souled king, replied, " Best of monarchs that thou art it becomes thee well, and no other in this world. It does great credit to the high ancestry to which thou belongest and to the holy sage Vasishtha, who is thy Guru. Promise to carry out what I have in mind , and when thou hast once promised, see you fail not at any cost to accomplish it to the utmost. At present, I am engaged in a holy rite with a special purpose , and two Râkshasas, able to assume any shape at will, are bent upon spoiling it. When I am about to close my rite, these two, Mârichâ and Subâhu, powerful and skilful, pour down showers of flesh and blood on the sacrificial altar and pollute it for ever. Thus annoyed and my purpose baffled, I came away weary and almost despairing. I cannot bring myself to direct my anger against them, and inflict a curse, for, the nature of the vow forbids it , so, I request thee to give me thy eldest son Râma, beautiful, valiant, and of resistless prowess. Protected by me, and by the force his innate energy as well, he is able to destroy these Râkshasas that afflict me. I will see that this enterprise brings him incalculable good and great glory, such as will be held in high esteem in the three worlds. The Râkshasas cannot stand before him even for a moment, and no one but Râma can destroy them. Full of extreme conceit at their valour, these wicked ones are no match for Râma ; lo ! the shadow of death is creeping upon them. Never allow the great love thou hast for thy sons to interfere with this momentous work. I swear to thee that the Râkshasas cannot escape him. I know the real Râma, the great-souled One of invincible might. Vasishtha, of high spiritual eminence, knows it too, and these

holy sages that pass their time in stern austerities. If thou desirest to secure supreme renown in this world and unbounded righteousness in the next, send Râma along with me. If thy ministers give their consent to it, as also Vasishtha and the other saintly ones, send Râma along with me. I want him for ten days and no longer ; for, by that time I will have finished my sacrifice. So, send along with me the handsome Râma, whom I so earnestly pray for To speak the truth, he has no attachment to anything down here See to it that the time for the performance of the sacrifice is not past. Arrange accordingly and allow no grief to take possession of thy heart."

Thus spake Visvâmitra, the great sage, *to whom nothing was impossible.* With a heavy heart Dasaratha listened to the request of the sage, which, though it conferred good on his son and was righteous in its nature, unnerved him completely Pierced to the heart, the strong-minded king was overpowered with grief and tottered upon his throne

CHAPTER XX

DASARATHA'S REPLY

The words of Visvamitra stunned him quite. For a long while he remained like one demented, then, mastering himself with a mighty effort, in faltering accents he managed to reply. "Rāma, the darling of my heart, Rāma, with eyes lovely as the fresh-blown lotus leaves, is yet in his early teens. I dare not even dream of his being able to stand in battle against the mighty night-rangers. Countless millions of war-worn veterans call me their lord and master, each a host in himself. My warriors are valiant, covered with fame and versed in the use of every kind of weapon, human and divine. I shall put myself at their head and wipe out these Rākshasas. They are more competent to fight these demons, but ask me not Rāma. Here am I, ready to march against them, bow in hand, millions of tried soldiers at my back and fight for thee to my last breath. I promise thee I will myself go over there and see that thou accomplish thy vow safe and without any interruption, but, I pray thee, ask not Rāma of me. He is yet a child. He has not yet finished his training. He knows not the strength and weakness of himself and of his enemies. He has never been yet in battle and his is not the might derived from the possession of celestial weapons. Knowest thou not that Rāma is entirely unfit to fight against these Rākshasas? They never fight straight, but always take refuge in their arts of illusion. Take Rāma away from me and thou takest my very life. Nay, if thou art bent upon taking Rāma with thee, take me too and my numerous army, well appointed. This, my son, has gladdened my heart after sixty thousand years of disappointed hopes and fruitless grief. How canst thou have the heart to take away Rāma from me, the light of my eyes and the prop of my old age? Knowest thou not that, of my four

sons, Râma lies next to my heart ? Need I tell thee that he is my first-born and the most steadfast in virtue ? So, take not Râma away from me. These, thy Râkshasas, who are they ? Whose sons are they ? What is their might ? Wherein lies their strength ? Under whose protection are they ? How dost thou want Râma to fight them ? Tell me, for I will do it, how to render useless all their illusions , for thou hast me and my countless hosts to do thy bidding. Instruct me how I can withstand these Râkshasas, proud of their valour.”

Then replied Visvâmitra, “ May be, thou hast heard of a Râkshasa, Râvana by name, descended of the hoary Pu-lastyâ. The sage Visravâs is his father , he is own brother to Vaisravana, and monarch of all the Râkshasas on earth , immeasurable is his strength and matchless his might , gifted with wonderful boons from Brahma and with countless hosts of Râkshasas at his back, he grinds the three worlds beneath his heels When he does not himself descend to spoil the sacrifices, these, his creatures, Mâricha and Subâhu, take his place and excel him in cruelty and wantonness.”

Then said Dasaratha, with a faint heart “ Powerless am I to cope with that wicked one. Have pity on my child of tender years, oh, righteous Lord ! Unfortunate that I am, thou art my Guru and my God The Devas, the Dânavas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Nâgas and the Pannagas, cannot bear to look upon Râvana, terrible in battle , why speak of puny mortals such as we ? Râvana absorbs, as it were, the strength and might of those that face him in battle ; I dare not even dream of opposing him or his hosts, either alone or with my armies or with my sons. But, on no account will I part with my darling Râma, beautiful as a god and a child in years, in experience, and in warfare. Mâricha and Subâhu those sons of Sunda and Upasunda, are mighty and extremely skilled in fight. Born to a Yaksha woman, and best and foremost of the Daityas, they

are terrible in battle, even as the God of Death. They are set upon ruining thy sacrifice and never shall I send my son against them to certain destruction as it were. However, if thou so desirest it, I will call my friends around me and fight with any others but the two."

These words of Dasaratha, the ravings of a sorrow-laden heart, roused to fury the smouldering wrath of the descendant of Kusika, and it blazed forth even as the sacrificial fire glows with steady flame, when huge libations of ghee are poured into it

CHAPTER XXI

VASISHTHA ADVISES DASARATHA TO SEND RÂMA

But, he kept back his rising anger as well as he might and replied to the incoherent words of love uttered by the fond father. "Thy word once gone forth, thou now seekest to go back upon it. Verily this is unworthy of thy race, glorified by such men as Raghu and contrary to the traditions of thy ancestors. Well, well, if thou thinkest that thou have acted right in this matter I will even go back as I came. *Worthy descendant of Kâkutstha! reign thou in peace of heart and in happiness, having kept thy plighted faith so well.*"

At these fiery words of the terrible Visvânîtra, winged with wrath, the solid earth shook to the foundations and the very Gods trembled in dismay. Then, Vasishtha, of mighty vows, intelligent and saintly, knowing that the whole universe stood overpowered with fear at the anger of the sage, addressed himself to Dasaratha. "Born as thou art in the line of Ikshwâku and thyself the incarnation of justice and virtue; firm in thy vows and of fortitude unspeakable; endowed with every kind of worldly happiness, thou shouldst not seek now to swerve from the Path of Right trod by thy ancestors of happy memory. Right well hast thou upheld in the world till now the glory of the line of Raghu, as the ideal Monarch, the Great Giver. Shrink not from the duty laid on thee and let not thy heart be drawn away to the Path of Unrighteousness. You have said, 'I will accomplish thy object, and if thou now seekest to prove unfaithful, thou but destroyest the hard-won merit of every righteous act of thy long life; so is it that I advise thee to send Râma along with the sage. Endowed with the might of celestial weapons or without them, the Rakshasas are but straw before his

fiery energy, protected as he is by the strong arm of Visvāmitra, even as the ambrosia of the Gods by the blazing fire. Knowest thou the mystery that shrouds him whom it is given thee to call thy son ? He is the Great Law. He is the Supreme One, the head and source of valor, wisdom and spiritual might. Mortal eyes, clouded by ignorance, cannot pierce the veil that hides his glory, nay, not the highest Gods.

“ Visvāmitra here is Dharma embodied ; he is the foremost of mighty warriors. None can cope with him in knowledge and wisdom ; he is the highest example of Tapas and its exponent. He knows best the secret of every kind of magical weapon and none but he,—none, in all the worlds above or below, not even the Gods, the Rishis, the Asuras, Rākshasas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Kinnaras and the Uragas. When he sat of old on the throne of his forefathers and held sway over the earth, these, the mighty sons of Bṛhaspita, were given unto him, every one of them. These grandsons of the Prajāpati Daksha are countless, brilliant in their lustre, all-consuming and of unspeakable might. Daksha had two charming daughters, Jayā and Suprabhā, who were the mothers of countless weapons, human and divine, of unbearable effulgence. Five hundred did Jayā bring forth for the destruction of the Asura hosts, inconceivably powerful and changing forms at will, and to Suprabhā were born another five hundred, in no way behind their brothers. Visvāmitra here knows everything worth knowing about them ; nay, such is his insight that he can, without any effort, create new ones, if necessary. Believe me when I tell thee that his vision extends clear into the remotest future. Neither in fame nor in virtue nor in holiness has he his equal. Hence I say unto thee, entertain no doubts about sending Rāma along with him. To destroy these impious wretches is child’s play to the sage ; for the glory of your son and for no other reason does he seek thee out even in thy house and pray thee to give him Rāma.”

The old heart of Dasaratha was filled with joy and his face shone bright at the calm and convincing words of Vasishtha. Gladly he gave his consent to Visvamitra taking along with him, Râma, the son of his heart ; and it was to the undying glory of himself and to the welfare of the worlds.

CHAPTER XXII

RÂMA AND LAKSHMANA GO WITH VISVÂMITRA

Then he called unto him Râma and Lakshmana, his inseparable companion, and with his face beaming with joy, caused protective rites to be performed on behalf of the brothers, consecrated with holy mantras. Vasishtha, the High-priest, himself conducted them; and Kausalyâ with a mother's love, recited powerful and holy mantras over her child's head to guard him from every danger. Thereafter, the king clasped his favourite to his breast, smelt his head, gave him his choicest blessings and with a full heart and cheerful, he made him over unto Visvâmitra, for, Vasishtha opened his eyes to the real nature of Râma and his grand mission. When the Holy One took leave of the king and started to go, and Râma of God-like presence along with him, a cool and refreshing breeze blew, free of dust. Flowers rained from the heavens, celestial drums, conches and other martial music were heard on high, and the gods rejoiced, in that the hour of their deliverance drew nigh.

Visvâmitra led the way. Râma followed behind, with bow on his back, his fair curls blown about his face by the gentle breeze; and Lakshmana came last, the shadow of Râma. Even as three-hooded serpents or as the Asvins reverently following in the wake of the great Grand-sire, did the brothers of matchless prowess follow the holy Visvâmitra, the beautiful peacock feathers waving over their thick coils of hair. It added, as it were, to the unbearable splendour of the sage to see the brothers Râma and Lakshmana walk after him brightening the bright space around. Lovely of form and radiant in their lustre, they were a charming sight to see, these boys armed with sword and bow, with leatheren gauntlets

braced on their hands ; and it forcibly reminded one of the Fire-born sons Skanda and Visâkha, walking behind Mahâdêva, the Lord of the worlds.

They had passed not more than a mile along the southern banks of Sarayû, when Visvâmitra turned back and said in sweet accents, "Lose no time, Râma, but purify yourself with water and receive from me the mantras Bala and Atibala. Hunger nor thirst, nor fatigue nor fever, nor weakness of limbs shall come upon you. The night-rangers shall not come near you, awake or asleep, careless or on your guard. None shall stand before you in the worlds above or below. In strength of arm or in valor, in fortune or in skill, in wisdom or in knowledge, in readiness of speech or quickness of reply you will not find your equal. In every respect you will be far and above any one, man or God ; for, these two mantras secure to the possessor every kind of knowledge and are the source of all wisdom. Recite these on your way and you will want for nothing. Unequalled fame too shall be yours, for, these sciences are the sons of Brahma, of unspeakable glory ; and search as I may, I cannot find any one more fitted to receive them than yourself. For, know I not that you are the head and fount of all knowledge, human and divine ? These, the offspring of mighty tapas, and multiformed, shall confer upon you incalculable good."

So spoke Visvâmitra ; for, who knew better than he that the boys were never before accustomed to travel on foot in the pathless woods, and put up with the chances of hunger and thirst, heat and cold, fatigue and sleeplessness ?

Râma purified himself accordingly and with a glad heart and bright face received them at the hands of the Holy One. Thereat his energy and splendor were immeasurably enhanced, even as that of the thousand-rayed Lord of the Day in a cloudless autumn sky. The princes

rendered reverence meet to the Holy sage, their Teacher and the three spent the night on the banks of the Sarayū. And the dark hours passed away all too soon, beguiled by the pleasant discourse of the saintly ascetic, as the boy princes lay on their grass beds, all unaccustomed and strange after the princely luxury of the Royal Palace of their father.

CHAPTER XXIII

KÂMÂSRAMA

At daybreak, Visvâmitra came to rouse the princes lying asleep on their couch of grass.

The golden halo of radiance that crowned the face of Râma caught his eye strongly and half to himself, he said, “What is there that I will not give to know how the thrice-fortunate Kausalyâ managed to find favour in the eyes of the Lord of Glory and won the envied privilege of calling the Great Father, her dear son.” Then, aloud to the object of his thoughts “Râma, thou priceless gem that lay enshrined in the holy waters of Kausalyâ’s happy womb! the rosy dawn begins to creep over the slumbering Earth. Yonder Sun chases before him the fleeting Spirit of Darkness; awaken thou to *thy* glorious task and put to rout the impious Sons of Darkness.

“The shades of night roll back from the face of the globe; and with it the veil of ignorance that erstwhile hid from my eyes the mystery that circles round thee. To me it was given to set my eyes on thy sleeping glory, yet I long to see thee awakening to the light of day. Discharge thou the rites and observances that thou hast laid down for the children of the Earth: for thou art their ideal and example. Awake, for a stern taskmaster must he be to himself, who seeks to lead others along the rough ways of duty.”

Thereat the royal pair sprang from their rude couch, had their bath in the holy river and went through their daily round of duties, nor forgot to recite the rare mantras taught them. Then, they reverently saluted their master, the holiest of sages and, with a glad heart, prepared to follow him.

They travelled a long way and saw before them the holy Ganga of celestial origin, and further on, where it

mixes its waters with the Sarayū; and in that holy spot they came upon the dwellings of saintly ascetics of stern austerities, who pursued their life of self-denial and altruism for thousands of years. The princes were possessed with curiosity to hear from Visvāmitra every thing about it and turned to him with "Holy Sir! to whom does this hermitage belong? Who abides in it at present? Great is our desire to know this, and we see no one who could speak upon it with better knowledge."

Lightly laughed the sage at the seeming ignorance of Rāma and at his assumed curiosity. "With great pleasure," said he, "if you will give me your attention for a while."

"In the far past, Mahādēva chose this spot to carry on a course of austerities, he had taken Pārvatī to wife and was once on his way to get her down to attend upon himself during the while. At that time the Lord of Love took human shape and the Wise Ones called him Kāma. In an evil hour he took it into his head to approach the Great God and draw him away from his holy meditations, by rousing in him thoughts of love towards the Daughter of the Mountain-king; and the Maruts secretly urged him on. When, lo! the Lord of Ascetics opened upon him his Third Eye; 'Hum,' cried the Great One and there shot out from his eye a tongue of flame that reduced to a heap of ashes what was once Kāma, the ideal of beauty and grace in the worlds above or below. Thus did the wrath of Siva render the God of Love bodiless; and hence his name thereafter, Ananga, the Bodiless. The spot where he met his sad fate is known as the Angadēsa.

"This is the holy hermitage of Siva and these sages are his disciples, ever devoted to virtue; they know not sin. Rest we here for the night, between these holy rivers which we shall cross to-morrow. Now let us finish the evening rites and proceed to their holy abode."

Meanwhile, those saints of pure lives, saw through their spiritual eye the coming of the holy sage and

his princely disciples and the object of their journey, and came forward to welcome them to their forest home even while the latter were speaking about them. They offered glad rites of hospitality unto Visvâmitra, and extended a hearty welcome to Râma and Lakshmana. And in their sweet company, the quick hours glided away unperceived, so kind were they and loving and so sweet was their discourse ; till the shades of night grew on them, which perceiving, they proceeded with concentrated minds to offer their evening prayers to the Goddess of Twilight. So, in that hermitage associated with the evil-fated Kâîna, did these pass the night in the company of many other ascetics whom their hosts invited there to share their pleasant time ; while Visvâmitra, of boundless wisdom and steadfast virtue, entertained the princes with pleasant narratives of old times and men and beguiled the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER XXIV

TĀTAKĀ'S LAIR

The world awoke to a new day and the valiant princes, rising with the dawn, discharged their morning duties and followed their preceptor to the banks of the mighty river. Meanwhile, their saintly hosts had prepared a beautiful boat to take them across; and reverentially addressing themselves to Viśvāmitra, said to him, "May it please you to get into this along with your worthy disciples. We have delayed you enough, now a happy journey to you all the way and every good go with you." Viśvāmitra saluted them and took reluctant leave of the kind-hearted ones and crossed over the sacred stream, he and his pupils. When they were in the middle of the current, Rāma and his brother heard a mighty sound proceeding from the confluence of swift-coursing waters and turning to their teacher, requested to know the source of the noise as of clashing ocean-waves. To which, Viśvāmitra replied *all willingly* :

"*On the heights of the far-famed Kailāsa there exists a lake of supreme sanctity, brought into existence by an act of will of the four-faced One, and hence its name Mānasa Lake. A stream issuing from that holy spot, comes down the heights and falls into the Gangā, passing by the capital of your father, even Ayodhyā, and hence its name Sarayū. The sound, so wonderful to your young ears, proceeds from the meeting of its holy waters with the rapid current of the divine Gangā, and you will do well to offer your reverent salutations unto it.*"

The princes obeyed him accordingly, and crossing over to the farther banks without more loss of time, soon they came upon a frightful forest, devoid of the presence of Brahmanas; at the sight of which, Rāma, curious to

know everything about it, addressed himself to Visvāmitra and said, "Lord! this wood fills me with curiosity; it resounds with the hoarse cries of terrible beasts of prey, rendered all the more fearful by the screams of wild birds and numerous flying insects. Lions, tigers, boars, and elephants, not to speak of numerous winged creatures, lend the aid of their dreadful presence to heighten the horror of the scene. Yet, this forest, so dreadful and uninviting, is pleasant to look at, beautified as it is with countless trees of graceful foliage and lovely blossoms, Dhava, Asvakarna, Kakubha, Bilva, Tinduka, Pātala and Badarī and many others of unknown origin and properties."

And Visvānitra hastened to reply, "Rāma dear, listen to me while I narrate to you a story of the far past as to whom this frightful forest belongs. Long years ago, these tracts known as Malada and Karūsa were large kingdoms teeming with countless millions, prosperous, happy and fair, even as the fancy creations of the gods. Once upon a time, it befell that Indra slew the Asura Vritra; the sin took shape and entered into him along with hunger and uncleanness, overpowering his divine form and nature. Then the gods and the sages had him purified with the waters of holy rivers, consecrated with powerful Mantras; and here it was that his foul uncleanness fell away from him. Having consigned to this place the uncleanness and the hunger that afflicted him, the hearts of the gods were glad. And Indra, overjoyed at finding himself free from his troubles, and pure once more, in a transport of gratitude, did he confer a boon on this place. "These two populous provinces have helped to receive the foulness of my body; and they shall be celebrated on earth, as Malada and Karūsa." The Devas applauded his act and his sense of reverence to the place that gave him back his pristine purity. And for long years thereafter, these places were the homes of happy millions, living in plenty, and blessed with everything that man could get from Nature.

Then there came on earth a Yaksha woman, who had the strength of a thousand elephants and could take any form at will. She was the wife of Sunda; and Tātaka (for so was she named) bore him a son, Māricha, who equalled Indra himself in prowess. Huge of bulk and strong of arm, that Rākshasa held the people of these kingdoms in abject terror, by his matchless might and frightful countenance and form; while Tātaka amused herself with destroying the innocent inhabitants hereabouts, by hundreds and by thousands. Yonder has she taken up her abode, about half a yojana from here; and hence people steer clear of these parts as the own preserves of Tātaka. Slay her of your strong arm and rid these fair lands of a great pest; for I command you thereunto. I tell you again, that none dare to enter these regions, through which the dreadful Yakṣṇī ranges free and unhindered. And now you know, as well as I, how these once fair and populous lands have been laid waste, beyond all hope of recovery.”

CHAPTER XXV

TÂTAKÂ

To which pregnant words of the sage of no mean might, Râma, the flower of valor, returned sweet answer, "I have been given to understand that the Yakshas are not very formidable, how is it that one of them, and that a woman, is gifted with the wonderful strength of a thousand elephants ?"

"Know then" said Visvâmitra "that this weak and fragile woman is endowed with abnormal strength by virtue of a boon. Long ago there was a Yaksha, Suketu by name, a man of righteous deeds and great prowess. Unblest with any child, he had recourse to Brahma to get one; long did he pray and earnestly, until the Great Architect of the worlds was pleased with his tapas, and gave him a lovely daughter Tâtakâ, with the strength of a thousand elephants in her, but no son. And when she came of age to marry, he gave her a dream of beauty and grace as wife to Sunda the son of Jarjha. In good time, Mârscha was born unto them, who later on was shorn of his great glory by being cursed to become a Râkshasa. When Sunda met his fate at the hands of Agastya, she and her son sprang upon the Holy One with terrible roars, meaning to eat him up; whereat of the mighty sage blazed forth wrath in and he cursed the pair "Wretches ! Quit these fair forms and take up those of Râkshasas, terrible to behold and monstrous, and roam the earth feeding on human flesh."

Maddened with the curse, she takes revenge by laying waste, in her fury, what were once the favorite haunts of Agastya. And, Râma ! I would that in the interests of the cows and the Brâhmaṇas, you slay out of hand, this wicked Yakshini of cruel deeds, this fiend, who uses her

terrible strength to such evil purpose. And the more so, because, except your valiant self, no one in the worlds above or below can bring down this wretch, who glories in the might of her boon. Let no misplaced sense of pity stay your arm from wreaking this long delayed vengeance upon this cruel monster. For, you are of the line of kings and the welfare of defenceless millions demands it at your hands. A king ought to discharge his duties cruel or otherwise, sinful or meritorious, if he would protect those whose destinies lie in his hands. This is the Path of Right trod by the kings of old, whose broad backs bore the heavy responsibility of empire. Slay this unrighteous one, for, no law, human or divine, restrains her actions. Know you not that Indra slew Mântharâ, the daughter of Virôchana, who sought to plunge the whole world in ruin ? Know you not that Vishnu mercilessly destroyed the wife of Bhrigu and mother of Sukra, who calmly set about to wipe out Indra. Instances out of count can I quote to show that kings have always deemed it their duty to rid the earth of such wicked monsters in human form. So, Râma ! upon your head and eyes be it that thou cleave the heart of this woman, stealing *your* heart against tender emotions."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FALL OF TÂTAKÂ

Then, to the soul-stirring words of his preceptor, Râma, steadfast in his principles of conduct, gave meet reply, with joined palms the while : “ My father’s commands and more than that, my respect for thee, impel me to follow without hesitation or doubting the orders given by Visvâmitra. For, have I not been enjoined to that purpose by my sire Dasaratha, in the royal presence and before the holy sages ? And shall I falsify his words ? Never. So, out of respect to my father and out of respect to the Holy One of boundless wisdom whom I have the happiness to call my Guru, I shall verily bring about the destruction of Tâtaka and no doubt of that. Here I am, ready to carry out your orders, that aim at the welfare of cows and Brâhmaṇas and the happiness of these once prosperous lands.”

So saying, he grasped his mighty bow by the middle, strung it in a moment and drew it to his ear ; and the sound thereof was terrible to hear, and echoed far and near. Birds and beasts and the numerous creatures that made the dreadful forest their home, trembled in affright. Tâtaka was at first confused ; but, rage unbounded mastered her and she rushed towards the spot whence the sound came. Seeing her advance towards them with open mouth, huge as a mountain, and deformed, Râma turned to Lakshmana and said, “ Lo ! my brother ! Yonder Yakshini is really no pleasant sight to behold. Timid ones will die of terror were they to look at her. But, endowed as she is with unlimited powers of illusion and be she formidable to stand against, my arrows shall compel her to retire as fast as she came, but a nose and ears less. Anyhow, I cannot bring myself to slay her,

for, her womanhood stays my arm; I shall even content myself with depriving her of her energy and power of motion."

He had not finished, when Tatāka espied him afar and rushed at him with a howl of rage. Visvāmitra stayed her with the word "Hum" and prayed that the brothers may come out safe and victorious. She raised a huge cloud of dust that shut out the princes from view for a time; and resorting to her powers of illusion, showered rocks and stones on the pair. Then Rāma's ire was up; and scattering the rocks by a flight of arrows, he cut off her hands as she sprang at him. Yet she stayed not but roared frightfully, albeit tired and without her hands when, Lakshmaṇa operated upon her and chopped off her ears and nose. The next moment she assumed a thousand shapes and was here, there and everywhere; then, all at once she vanished from view, leaving them bewildered by her illusion. Yet, a ceaseless downpour of rocks indicated her activity and made her terrible presence felt, at which, Visvāmitra grew impatient and exclaimed to Rāma with some warmth, "A truce to your misplaced tenderness; are you not yet convinced that she is a she-devil who has destroyed the sacrifices of many an unoffending sage? Twilight is drawing apace and then these foul things of darkness are most powerful, nay almost invincible. See, how her energy increases as the day wane and the night draws near. Slay her outright and delay not."

Strong in her powers of illusion, she remained invisible; but Rāma's shafts sought her out even there and stayed her rocky downpour. Then, in sheer despair, did she rush at the princes with terrible roars of baffled rage; when, the boy-hero shot at her a Fiery Shaft. Fierce as a thunderbolt and almost irresistible, it struck her full on the chest; down she fell and gave up her bloody life.

At once there arose a glad shout of unspeakable relief from the anxiously watching Indra and his host of cele-

tials. "Bravo! bravo!, well done!" cried they with one voice and lauded Rāma to the skies. They then addressed themselves to Visvāmitra and said, "Holy One! all hail to you; you have laid every one of us, under a deep obligation. Give yet another proof of your great love to Rāma by imparting unto him the Science of the divine weapons, the sons of the Prajāpati, Bhrisāsva. Of never-failing might, brought into existence by long and terrible Tapas, you cannot find for them a fitter recipient than Rāma, so devoted is he to your service, and so necessary it is towards accomplishing a great end we have in view. So delay no more." They ended; and with loving salutations to the Holy One and hearty blessings on the boy-heroes, departed to their respective abodes.

Meanwhile, the shades of night were falling fast, and Visvāmitra, well pleased with Rāma, smelt him lovingly on the head and said, "Rest we here for the night and reach my hermitage to-morrow." So they passed the night in the once-dreaded haunts of Tātakā, but now freed from its unhappy curse and once again a smiling and happy land, beautiful even as Chaitraratha. Rāma, having thus rid the earth of the terrible daughter of a Yaksha, gods and sages vied with one another in singing his praises; a deep sleep and sweet descended upon the tired eyes of Rāma and he lay locked in the soft arms of slumber, till he was roused at early dawn by the holy sage.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GIFT OF VISVÂMITRA

Next morning, Visvâmitra, of mighty renown, turned to the young hero with a pleasant smile and addressed him in accents sweet and mild, " Well pleased am I with you ; and out of the joy that fills my heart, shall I impart unto you the mysteries connected with warlike weapons of every kind ; master of which, neither Gods nor Asuras, Gandharvas nor Uragas, can stand against you in battle and not come under your influence and be worsted. Such mighty weapons shall I give you, divine in their essence.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <u>Dandachakra</u> | 30. <u>Nandana</u> , the favorite |
| 2. <u>Dharmachakra</u> | <u>Astra</u> of the <u>Vidyâ-dharas</u> (sword-like in shape) |
| 3. <u>Kalachakra</u> | 31. <u>Mânava</u> |
| 4. <u>Vishnuchakra</u> | 32. <u>Prasvâpana</u> |
| 5. <u>Aindrâstra</u> | 33. <u>Prasamana</u> |
| 6. <u>Vajrâstra</u> | 34. <u>Sûryâstra</u> |
| 7. <u>Sivâ's Trident</u> | 35. <u>Darpana</u> |
| 8. <u>Brahmasîras</u> | 36. <u>Sôshana</u> |
| 9. <u>Aishikâstra</u> | 37. <u>Santâpana</u> |
| 10. <u>Brahmâstra</u> | 38. <u>Vilâpana</u> |
| 11. The clubs, <u>Môdakî</u> and <u>Sikhari</u> | 39. <u>Madana</u> |
| 12. <u>Dharmapâsa</u> | 40. <u>Mohanâstra</u> (used by the <u>Pisâchas</u>) |
| 13. <u>Kâlapâsa</u> | 41. <u>Tâmasâstra</u> |
| 14. <u>Varunapâsa</u> | 42. <u>Saumanâstra</u> |
| 15. <u>Varunâstra</u> | 43. <u>Samvartâ</u> |
| 16. Two thunderbolts, the moist and the dry. | 44. <u>Mausalâstra</u> |
| 17. <u>Pinâkâstra</u> | 45. <u>Satyâstra</u> |
| 18. <u>Nârâyânâstra</u> | |
| 19. <u>Agneyâstra</u> (named <u>Sikhara</u>) | |

20. Vâyavyâstra	(named Prâthana)	46. Mâyâdhara
21. Hayasîras		47. Têjas Prabhâ
22. Kraunchâstra		48. Sisirâstra (used by the God Sôma)
23. Vishnusakti		49. Sudamana
24. Rudrasakti		50. Sitêshu (the weapon of Bhaga)
25. Kankâla		51. Mânavâstra
26. Musala	} used by the Asuras	
27. Ghôra		
28. Kapâla		
29. Kankana		

All these and many more do thou receive from me. They are of no ordinary might ; they can take any form at will and can be depended upon in any emergency."

Then Visvâmitra duly purified himself and taking his seat facing the East, initiated Râma into the mysteries of those magical weapons ; and well pleased was he thereat. So mighty were they that the very Gods could not receive and retain them in their entirety.

As the sage uttered the words of power, they assumed visible form and stood about Râma. With joined palms they addressed their new master and said, "Here we are, Lord Râma, thy servants to command. Ever gracious unto thee, we stand ready to anticipate thy least wishes."

Râma accepted their service and touching each one of them in token of mastership, replied to them with a pleased heart, "Come unto me when I think of you." He next turned to his Guru and offered him reverent salutations ; after which they resumed their journey.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MYSTERY OF THE WITHDRAWAL

'They walked for a while in silence, when Rāma turned to Visvamītra and said with a bow, "You have been pleased to initiate me into the mysteries of these magical weapons and have rendered me almost invulnerable to Gods and Asuras. But, may I request to know how these are withdrawn?"'

And all too glad, did the sage of mighty vows and terrible energy instruct him therein.

“1. Satyavān	23. Vimala
2. Satyakīrti	24. Yogandhara
3. Dhṛishṭha	25. Haridra (to destroy the Daityas).
4. Rabhasa	26. Sāchirmālti
5. Pratiḥāratara	27. Dhritirnālti
6. Parāngmukha	28. Vrittimān
7. Avāngmukha	29. Ruchira
8. Lakshāksha	30. Piṭrisauamanasa
9. Vishama	31. Viḍhūta
10. Dridhanabha	32. Makara
11. Sunābhaka	33. Karavirakara
12. Dasāksha	34. Dhana
13. Satavaktra	35. Dhānya
14. Dasasīrsha	36. Kāmarūpa
15. Satodara	37. Kāmaruchi
16. Padmanabha	38. Moha
17. Mahānabha	39. Āvaraṇa
18. Dundunabha	40. Jrimbhaka
19. Sunābhaka	41. Sarvanabha
20. Jyotisha	42. Santāna
21. Krisāna	43. Varāṇa
22. Nairāṣya	

Receive from me these sons of Bhrisāswa, capable of taking any shapes at will and of unbearable splendor. For, no better recipient do I see than thee."

"As my Lord willeth" replied Râma with a glad heart and did so. With joined palms they ranged themselves around Râma in human shapes of exceeding effulgence, and there was nothing that he could not command whom they owned as their master. Some were like glowing coals, some like smoke and others radiant like the sun and the moon. All of them reverently saluted their new master and said, "Here are we, thou flower of valor ! awaiting thy orders." "Dwell ye in my memory" replied Râma, "and assist me when the time comes. I give you leave to go." "We obey" replied they and taking respectful leave of him, vanished from view. With the permission of his Guru, he instructed Lakshmana in the mysteries of the magical weapons and their withdrawal.

They then resumed their journey until they came to a beautiful grove of trees, at the sight of which, Râma turned to his master and said in charming accents, "What may be that tall grove yonder, hard by that mountain before us ? It looks more like a bank of clouds piled up, so lofty it is and so dark. A pleasant sight to see the happy birds and beasts sporting there fearlessly with joyful cries. The lovely aspect of the country hereabouts impels me to think that we are well out of the dark and dreary forest of the she-demon, Tâtakâ. Who is it that resides in that charming locality ? Verily, great is my desire to know everything about it. Are we come to where range those wicked wretches of fierce deeds, who revel in slaying Brâhmaṇas and destroying the sacrifices of innocent sages ? Where do you conduct your sacrifice ? Where should I take my stand to destroy the Râkshasas and protect your rite ? Prithee satisfy my unbounded curiosity on this head—you from whom time and space have no secrets!"

CHAPTER XXIX

VÂMANA AND BALI

And to him who desired to acquaint himself with the story of that grove, as if he were no wiser than any one of us, replied Vîsvâmîtra of boundless spiritual might, "Here it was that Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe abode invisible for ages untold, engaged in long and difficult Tapas, for the good of the worlds; and as Vâmana, He sanctified it with His Divine Presence. Siddhâsrama is it called, for, even here the Blessed One accomplished the object of His Tapas.

"It was about that time, Bali, the son of Virôchana, routed the celestial hosts and held undisputed sway over the three worlds. He commenced a grand sacrificial rite, when, Agni and the other Gods came to Vishnu here and said, "Bali, the son of Virôchana, is even now performing a grand sacrifice; and before it is over, you should see that we accomplished our object. He makes it a point to refuse nothing to any one who may ask him for it, it matters not who or what. For our sake call in thy inscrutable Power of Illusion to thy aid; assume the form of a dwarf, seek the sovereignty of the three worlds at his hands as a gift, and bring peace and happiness to the tortured hearts of us all."

It chanced that about the same time, Kâsyapa, the Patriarch, and his wife Aditi carried on a long and severe course of austerities and won the grace of the Lord. Even as the noon-day sun or like the blazing fire shone he in his spiritual glory. Vishnu came down to where he was and spoke to him in sweet and kindly accents, "Son, mightily pleased am I with your Tapas. Ask of me what thou wilt and it is yours."

With noble hymns did Kâsyapa praise the Giver of all good, "Supreme One! My long and difficult vow has

indeed borne fruit in that I have been blessed with a sight of Thy Blessed Presence. Thou art Tapas in Thy essence ; Thou art the embodiment of Tapas ; Thou art the sun total of all Tapas ; and Thou art the innermost soul of every kind of Tapas. The whole universe do I see in Thy resplendent form. Thou hast no beginning and Thy nature is beyond the ken of any, man or god. Lord ! I take my refuge in Thee and Thy boundless mercy."

And to him replied the Lord, " Again do I say unto you that you have won my grace. You are pure as Purity itself and I can refuse you nothing."

Then the son of Marichi submitted unto him a prayer in all humility, " Great One ! grant Thou this boon unto Aditi and unto the gods who pray it of Thee. Deign Thou to be born as our son and let the world know Thee as the younger brother of Indra, whom Thou hast placed over the gods. Render Thou a signal service thereby to the distressed Dêvas. And this holy spot shall, through Thy grace, deserve the name of Siddhâsrama, for, Thou goest forth from this spot when Thy object has been accomplished. '

" Be it so," rejoined the Lord and was born of Aditi as Vâmana. Intent upon the good of the worlds, did He approach Bali as a dwarf and say, " Great Giver ! grant me this prayer of mine, *three short feet of earth*," and He got it. Thrice did He put forth His mighty foot and the three worlds were covered with it. Bali was shorn of his overwhelming pride and might and Vâmana gave back the sovereignty of the worlds to Indra.

This hermitage is ever associated with the presence of the Lord and ever my heart turns to it with unbounded devotion to Him. Here do the Râkshasas resort, the untiring enemies of the peaceful sages and their sacrifices ; and here it is you should lay them low, the evil ones. This day shall we reach it, the holy Siddhâsrama and it is yours as much as it is mine."

Very soon they were within its sacred precincts and then it was that Visvāmitra shone in all his glory, even as the cloudless moon resplendent in the constellation of Purnarvasu. There he was welcomed by the numerous ascetics of saintly life that made Siddhāsrama their home; right reverently did they accord unto him due worship and no less hearty was the welcome they extended to the princely pair. The brothers rested themselves for a while and approaching their master, said, "Lord! if thou so wilt, thou mayest take upon thyself the sacrificial vow even to-day. Rightly has this place been named Siddhāsrama, for, thy object shall, of a truth, be realized here." "May your words prove true," replied Visvāmitra, and with restrained senses and concentrated mind, did he take upon himself the initiatory vows. In that peaceful hermitage the princes passed the night in the sweet company of the holy sages. At the dawn of day they were up and offering their prayers to the Goddess of Twilight. Their religious observances for the morning over and the mystical recitations of the Mantras, they touched the feet of their Teacher, who, having finished the offerings unto the Fire-god, was seated in calm repose.

CHAPTER XXX

VISVÂMITRA'S SACRIFICE

The valiant princes were no mean judges of time and place : they knew when to speak and where ; and in words respectful and apt, did they address Visvamitra : "Lord ! kindly acquaint us with the precise time when we should be on our guard against the wicked Rakshasas ; for, we do not wish to be taken unawares and be late."

The assembled sages there were loud in their praises of the heroic brothers and the martial ardour that characterised their words and actions. "Six days and nights from this, do ye keep strict watch against the cruel ones. The Holy One has taken the sacrificial vow and will observe silence." And for six days and nights did the youths of boundless energy keep watch and ward over the hermitage. They put their heroic souls into the arduous task and were wholly absorbed in it; and Visvāmitra, safe under their protection, went on with his sacrificial rite uninterrupted.

On the sixth day, Rāma turned to his brother and said "Lakshmana, be on the alert and keep a sharp look out." And even as he spake and prepared himself for action, did the sacrificial altar begin to glow all on a sudden. Lovely flowers were scattered over it and the utensils of sacrifice—spoons, ladles, pots, pans, fuel-sticks and the sacred grass. Visvāmitra was conducting the ~~sacrifice~~, ^{ritual} and silent, while the Adhvaryus and the priests assisted him therein. And to the deep intonation of the holy Mantras to drive away the black demons, did the sacrifice proceed according to the rules laid down for it. All at once the fire leaped up; and close upon it was heard a dreadful roar proceeding from the sky. The dreadful Rakshasas were upon them, shrouded

clouds that darkened the earth, even as during the heavy rains—the effects of their powers of illusion. Māricha and Subāhu and their followers ranged themselves in the sky and kept up a continual shower of blood on the fire-altar. The fire blazed up again, higher than before, as if in angry protest against this foul desecration ; and answering fires flashed forth from the eyes of Rāma as if reflecting the blood-stained altar. He rushed to the spot and looking upwards, saw the foul demons ranged aloft in terrible array, darkening the darkened sky. All at once did the two foremost, Māricha and Subāhu, swoop down upon him, even as unclean birds of prey ; when, Rāma turned to his brother and said “ Lakshmana, lo ! there they come, the wicked wretches, the destroyers of numberless holy rites. Unsightly cannibals these, the dread foes of the celestials, yet tough and unassailable even as thunderbolts. I cannot somehow bring myself to slay such like chaff, small game for me ; yet shall I drive them away, even as fleet-footed clouds before a gale.”

With that, he sent forth a Mānavāstra, flaming and terrible in its energy and it that struck Māricha full on the chest. Back he flew with resistless speed, hundred yojanas and more, until he fell senseless and tottering into the depths of the tossing ocean.

Amused at the sight, Rāma turned to Lakshmana “ Wonderful indeed is the Cold Arrow, the mighty Mānavāstra and just in its punishment. See, it has struck him senseless, but keeps yet the spark of life in him, as if it divined my secret resolve to spare him against a future occasion, when I have use for him. And as for these, his friends and followers, I shall even destroy the wretched crew, merciless, of foul lives, delighting in deep draughts of human blood, the foes to every holy rite and sacrifice.”

So saying, and as if to display his quickness of hand, he let fly an Agnēyāstra at Subāhu, which struck him square on his heart and hurled him down, a shapeless corpse. And ere the eye had time to wink, he let fly a

Vâyavyastra that despatched the rest to "where the wicked cease from troubling," to the immense delight of the sages, who were anxiously watching this strange fight, between a delicate slip of a boy and the fierce-visaged Râkshasas of vast bulk and might. They could scarcely bring themselves to believe what they saw—it was over so soon ; but, when they realized the wonderful truth, they broke forth in unstinted applause and hearty blessings and eyed Râma with strange awe and reverence, even as the Gods regarded Indra when he caine back victor from his terrible battle with the Asuras.

The sacrifice neared its happy end ; the earth and the sky were clear and happy once again, when Visvâmitra turned to Râma and said, " Now my heart knows peace, in that my object has been accomplished. Well hast thou discharged the bidding that thy Guru laid on thee. And rightly has this hermitage been named Siddhâsrama ; you have but confirmed the fact and conferred greater glory on it."

Thanking thus the boy-hero in words sweet and noble, the sage proceeded to his evening prayers, accompanied by the gratified princes.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TRIP TO METHELÂ

There they stayed for the night, the heroic youths and it was a happy night to them ; in that they had succeeded in their mission. Next morning they were up at day-break and having finished their daily observances, went over to where Visvâmitra and the other ascetics sat. Reverently they saluted their Guru, who blazed forth in his splendour even as the smokeless flame and said to him in sweet accents and noble “ Here we are, thy servants to command ; what are our orders for the day ? Nay, far be it from your noble heart the thought that you are working us too much, royal youths delicately nurtured and daintily brought up. There was a king whom gaunt Famine drove to sell his only son to a low-born hind ; would the boor work the boy less for being a prince ? We are yours, body and soul , for, our sire has made us over to you , and here is our place at your feet, until you have no more use for us.” *Even so does the Lord seek out His children and render them sweet service and lowly.*

Visvâmitra replied for the other sages and said, “ Jana-ka, the righteous ruler of Mîthilâ, is even now celebrating a grand sacrifice ; and if it is not inconveniencing you greatly, we very much like you to come with us. Besides, there is for you a sight to see—a gem of a bow, wonderful, of inconceivable strength, blazing in its energy. It was given by the Gods to a former ruler of the land during a great sacrifice. Neither the Gods nor the Gandharvas, nor the Asuras nor the Râkshasas, can so much as string it ; why speak of puny mortals ? Nay, not that there were wanting countless princes of mighty arm who essayed that impossible feat desiring to gauge the power of the weapon. So, there are two things to attract you

thither—the holy sacrifice and the wonderful bow. It was, as I told you, got by a king of old, as the reward of a great sacrifice he performed in honor of the Gods ; who, pleased therewith, gave him the excellent weapon. It forms the chief object of adoration in Janaka's palace and he offers reverent worship to it every day with bright flowers and sweet perfumes and incense."

He ended and prepared to set out along with the expectant princes and the holy ascetics. Taking affectionate leave of the Wood-Gods that had sheltered him so long in their midst he said, " May all good be yours. Long have I sojourned under your kind shades and to-day I take reluctant leave of you, the object of my stay among you joyfully accomplished. I go forth hence to the Himâlayan heights, over across the Gangâ." Reverently he went round the hospitable abode and set his face towards the north.

And him followed a hundred conveyances of Brahmanavâdins ; and wonderful to behold ! the birds and the beasts that dwelt about the holy hermitage went after the mighty sage of righteous vows, until he pressed them to return.

They travelled a long distance, until the sun hung low in the heavens, when the company encamped on the banks of Sonâ. They took their evening bath in the sacred stream and having made offerings unto the Fire-God, sat down before Visvâmitra ; the princes approached the group and with low reverence to the elders, took their seats in front of their Guru. Râma it was, that started the conversation by a question to Visvâmitra. " May I pray you to satisfy my great curiosity about this region where we are ? Thickly wooded and well-watered, to whom does it belong ?" And the sage, who loved nothing more than to converse upon things good and holy, spoke as follows, induced thereto by Râma, while the sages of stern austerities drank in the tale with eager ears.

CHAPTER XXXII

KUSANÂBHA

There was once a righteous king, Kusa by name, one of the mind-born sons of Brahma—the wisest and the most valiant. Unlike Nârada and the Kuñâras he chose the Path of Action; and leaving his bright home on high, he took upon himself the onerous duties of a Ruler of men; hence his name Kusa. Ever respectful unto the good, he was ever intent upon the discharge of the duties of his high office and acquired immense spiritual merit by his hard austerities.

He took unto wife a princess of Vidarbha, who was, in every way, a meet wife for such a holy king, and she bore unto him four sons, all like unto their sire in character and might—Kusâmba, Kusânâbha, Adhûrtarajas, and Vasu. The old king was extremely pleased with his worthy sons of truthful speech, righteous lives, bright presence and boundless energy: and following the traditions of the kings of old, he spoke to them, “Reign ye over the earth and acquire inestimable merit thereby.”

And, in obedience to their father’s commands, did the four princes found four excellent capitals—Kausâmbî, Mahôdaya, Dharmâranya and Girivraja, respectively. These are the dominions of Vasu, the last of the brothers. See you yon hills, five in number, that guard the country like giant sentinels? And there is the lovely stream, Sôna, of great sanctity, that runs like a silver garland among the hills and waters the land of Magadha ruled by Vasu. It is a lovely spot, fertile, well-watered and healthy, the site of ancient kingdoms now no more.

Kusânâbha, the royal sage, had by the Apsaras, Ghritachi, a hundred graceful daughters. One day, these girls, young and lovely, took it into their heads to enjoy a walk in the royal gardens about the city. They were a

charming sight to see, these young and lovely maidens, in their gems and gemmed robes, even as clear pools of crystal waters in the rains. They had a happy time of it among the arbours and bowers, dancing and singing and leaping and frisking.

And it so chanced that Vāyu, the Lord of Air, beheld them in the gardens, in all their ravishing loveliness, in the pride of their youth and charms. Like bright stars between murky clouds shone they ; and Vāyu was stirred even unto the utmost depths of his fickle heart. " My heart goes out unto you, every one, ye lovely ones ! Be mine and crown my days with sweet happiness. Cast off aside that mortal nature of yours and enjoy immortal life in my company. A pitiable sight that youth of mortals even as a streak of lightning in a dark sky ; a blinding flash and lo ! it is gone. But I shall endow you with the deathless youth and beauty of the Immortals themselves."

Long laughed they and loud at these presumptuous words of the Wind-God, whose might none can resist and live. " Thou coursest ever in the bodies of beings, high and low, and no one is unacquainted with what you are and what you can do. Verily it becomes you not to insult us thus with your proposal. Know you not that we are the daughters of Kusānābha and that it is but child's play to us to hurl yon Indra from his seat of power ? But we waste not our energy on trifles. May that time never come about, when, out of a perverted heart, we will presume to insult our parent of truthful speech and ourselves choose our husbands. Our sire is our master and our God ; and *they* are our lords whom *he* gives us to."

Enraged at the bold and defiant words of the girls, Vāyu's heart was shaken with wrath ; and putting forth his might, did he distort their graceful limbs out of all recognition.

In great grief and shame, they rushed into their father's presence and fell at his feet with sobs and tears. The sight of his dear daughters, once so lovely and happy, but

now so crooked and deformed, and out of their wits with shame and grief, stirred his placid nature to its very depths, and he exclaimed “ What is this, my dears ! Who has dared to insult the Great Law of Right thus flagrantly ? Who has made you crooked and distorted ? What ! all silent ! and weeping ! ”

In fierce rage he hissed forth his questions, like a hooded snake about to strike ; but, mastering himself with a mighty effort, he sent forth his clear spiritual eye before which nothing was hidden.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Brahmadatta

Thereupon the hundred daughters of Kusanabha laid their heads at his feet and spake "Vayu, Pervader of all, would even compel us to his wishes ; and forgetful of all sense of right and duty, had he recourse to evil ways. ' We are under our reverend sire' we pleaded ' and are not our own masters. Ask thou our sire, if he would give us to thee as wives.' He would not listen to us ; but with a heart bent on evil, made us what you see, even while we were earnestly pleading with him."

Then the King, a rare model of patience and virtue, replied to his afflicted daughters in accents mild and grave. " Well have you done and gloriously. Forgiveness should characterise the life of every one laying any claims to self-restraint and serenity ; and you have borne patiently a deadly insult. I cannot enough praise your harmony of spirit and action, in that you have all acted alike and kept before your eyes the traditions of our race , for, forgiveness is the brightest jewel in the crown of a woman ; nay, for the matter of that, man as well. Hard task for a girl to brave a man's wiles and seductions harder to have a giant's strength and not use it like a giant, in the face of deadly insult , harder still not to burn one's wings at the baleful fires of celestial beauty , harder still to keep back our thunderbolts when we have the right to launch them against the mighty gods and the chance ; and lo ! hardest of all, wonder of wonders !! the wayward hearts of a hundred maidens, (whose name is traitry) beating all one stroke and acting in perfect unison. Endowed with Forgiveness, a man need not go seek for any other virtue—Charity, Truth, Sacrifice, Fame, or Righteousness ; for, Forgiveness rules the world and holds it up."

Mightier than the very Gods, yet he sent them away, and consulted with his wise ministers as to the marriage of his daughters, the time, the place, and the parties.

It was about that time, a great sage, Chuli by name, practised the Brahma Tapas, with pure life and chaste vows ; and all along, a Gandharva, Somada by name, the daughter of Urmila, attended upon him devotedly, with restrained senses and righteous heart. Gratified with her service, the Holy One saw into the record of Time and spoke “ Fair Lady ! well hast thou served me and won my favour. Is there anything I can do for thee ? ”

She marked that he was in a mood to give ; and in sweet words and apt, did she pray the Blessed One, who was no mean speaker himself. “ Lord ! I make no difference between thee and the supreme Brahman, so great thy Tapas and so mighty the Brahmic splendour that crowns thee. I would even have a son, endowed with Brahma Tapas. No husband do I take, nor does any claim me as his wife. Give me a son, in that I approach thee according to the Brahma mode of marriage.”

Pleased with her purity of heart and nobility of purpose, Chuli gave her a mind-born son, named Brahmadatta. Kampilya made he his capital and held sway there as splendidly as India over his heavenly realm.

And Kusanabha made up his mind to bestow his hundred daughters on Brahmadatta. Respectfully did he invite him to his city and pray him to accept his girls in marriage. And lo ! the moment Brahmadatta took them by the hand, their deformity and grief dropped away from them like a dark cloak and they shone, if possible, with greater loveliness and grace than ever ; whereat the father’s heart knew no bounds to its joy to see them freed from the evil spell cast upon them by Vayu. Later on, he sent them

away with their husband to his capital, with splendour becoming their rank and his sense of joy.

Somada, the fond-mother, rejoiced most at the glorious choice her son did make. She could not fondle her daughters-in-law enough nor praise their noble father.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Visvamitra's Ancestry

His daughters gone away from him, the childless father set about to perform a rite to get a son to continue his line on Earth. When he was busy about it, Kusa, his father and the mind-born son of Brahma, came down unto him and said, "Son! verily you shall be blessed with a boy, a righteous one after your own heart. Gadhi, you shall call him; and he shall hold up your name to unparalleled renown in the worlds for all time time to come." He spoke and went back to the high world of Brahma, even as he came.

And in good time did KusanaNha see a son born unto him and Gadhi was his name—a marvel of virtue and holiness. Him am I proud to call my sire, Gadhi the saint, I am a Kausika and a descendant of the godlike Kusa. I have a sister too, Satyavati, born before me, who is given in marriage to Richika; ever devoted to her husband, she followed him to Swarga in her mortal body. But soon she came down on Earth, as the holy stream Kausiki, heavenly in her origin, charming and crystal-like in her purity, my sister has devoted herself to the good of humanity. And out of the great love I bear to my dear one, do I like to abide at her side, on the slopes of the Himalaya, whence she flows. Ever steadfast in truth and righteous, my sister Satyavati,

the paragon of wives, stays in her mountain home ; while I, in pursuance of the vow I have bound myself by, have come down here, even to Siddhasrama, far far from my beloved sister ; and deep is the debt of obligation I am under to your godlike valor, in that you have enabled me to accomplish my desires.

Well, it is now past midnight; and I have been keeping you all from sweet sleep, by my accounts of my own ancestry and of the country where we are now, as you desired to know of me. And now, seek ye the arms of repose ; else will our journey to-morrow be delayed. Not a breath of air stirs the leaf of yon trees ; beasts and birds have sought, ere long, their silent abodes ; and Night has spread her black pall over the earth and every part thereof. The shades of twilight are gradually fading away ; and dark Night keeps watch over the sleeping earth and flashes forth bright glances from many a starry eye and constellation. And wonder comes the Queen of Night, the silvery Moon, chasing the darkness from off the Earth with her cool and clear rays and infusing joy and gladness into the hearts of all beings. Behold the Rangers of the night, beings that love the shades of darkness, hosts of Yakshas, Rakshasas, and terrible monsters that batten on human flesh."

He ended, the auditors shook of the spell that lay deep upon them and with one voice cried, " Well, hast thou spoken, Holy One" and rendered him thanks meet and unstinted praise. " Noble is the race of the Kausikas and ever intent upon Right and Virtue ; and the kings that adorn that line, mighty souls, even as the Great Father Himself. And not the least, your Holy Self, that has acquired everlasting renown ; nor is your sister Kausiki a whit behind these, the best of streams and the bright gem in the crown royal race of Kusa."

And to the sound of their sweet praise, did Visvamitra sink into the lap of sleep, even as the resplendent Orb of Day retires to rest behind the Evening Hill. The Royal brothers were no less warm in their heart-felt praises of their master and with minds filled with awe and wonder, sought their rude couches and courted calm repose.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Ganga and Uma.

Visvamitra and the sages with him rested there for the night on the banks of Sona. At day-break, he roused the sleeping princes and said "The day dawns and the morning twilight comes on apace. Quit thy slumbers, dear Rama, and prepare to start."

They went through the morning prayers and were about to set out, when Rama addressed himself to the sage and said "Master, this Sona runs shallow, her clear crystal water dotted with small sandy hillocks. Which way shall we cross it?"

To which the sage replied, "Our friends even now are taking the route I advised them to." They crossed to the further bank and proceeded on their journey, feasting their eyes on the beau'tul scenery of hill and dale, forest and stream, mountain and valley. At noon, they broke their journey (for they had covered a long way since morning) on the banks of the sacred Ganga, the delightful resort of saintly ascetics. The sight filled the brothers and the sages with supreme joy, the broad waters forming the home of many a swim and other gay aquatic bird sporting fearlessly. There they pitched their quarters and having bathed in the holy river, they offered libations

of water to the manes of the departed. Then devout worship to the sacred Fire and a hearty meal of the sweet so desired thereunto. Once again they met and sat round Visvamitra, of wondrous wisdom, when Rama took upon himself to draw out the sage and started the conversation.

"Master mine, great is my desire to know how the Ganga, abiding in the high heavens, came down to the dark Earth and flowing through the three worlds entered the Lord of Waters"

Questioned thus, Visvamitra proceeded to recount the origin and the history of Ganga. "Himavan—the monarch of mountains and the storehouse of everything rich and valuable—had by his wife Manorama, the graceful daughter of Meru, two daughters of charming beauty. Ganga was the elder and Uma the younger. The Devas prayed Himavan to grant them the presence of Ganga to accomplish certain ends of theirs. With a philanthropic heart did he allow them to take her away, the holy river whose water purifies everything it touches. Glad beyond all description at the ready affability of the father, the Devas invited her to their world, ever intent upon doing good to all beings. But Uma the younger, steadfast in virtue and purity, entered upon a long and difficult course of Tapas, at the end of which, her parent gave her as wife to Rudra, a meet bride-groom for the world-honored maiden of mighty spiritual energy. And now, Rama, have I related unto you, as well as I can, the origin of Ganga and Uma, the daughters of Himavan and the honored objects of the World's worship; as also how Ganga of Three Courses went to the region of the Shining Ones. The holy stream before you is none other than she, who from her mountain home in the Himalaya, carried her sin-cleansing waters to the high heavens of the Immortals.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Uma's Curse.

The brothers listened to the recital with pleasure and respect and when the Master had ended, Rama questioned him again. "Wonderful indeed is what you have related and holy ; and now deign to enlighten us on the history of the elder daughter of the *Māmra* ^{or} Mountains. Tell us in detail, for thou knowest best, her birth in Heaven and Earth. How did she come to take three different courses and purify the three worlds ? Narrate her adventures therein and how she came to bear her name Tripathaga."

Thus addressed, the sage of immeasurable spiritual lustre, descended at length on the wonderful narrative to the assembled ascetics. "O, yore, Mahadeva, the Black-throated, of boundless energy, took Uma unto wife, and overpowered with desire, began to disport himself with her. Hundreds of years passed away and Mahadeva knew it not. But there was no issue born of them ; whereat, Brahma and the Devas began to tremble for the consequences. If a son should chance to be born unto these, who could bear him ? So they approached the Divine One and prayed unto him in trembling accents, " Supreme Lord ! Thou art ever intent upon the welfare of the worlds. Turn a merciful ear to the prayers of Thy children, the Angels of Light. The worlds are unable to bear the fiery energy of Thine. Engage Thyself with the Great Mother in Brahma Tapas. Have pity on the worlds , restrain Thy energy in Thy own body. Protect Thou all beings , it behoves Thee not to annihilate them."

" Be it so" replied Mahadeva. " I and Uma shall retain our respective energies within our own bodies. Let the worlds rest in peace and your hearts too. But, my energy

has moved out of its receptacle and must break out ; whom then have you among yourselves to receive it?"

" The earth, O Lord, will take unto her Thy energy that might happen to escape Thee."

Then Mahadeva let out his energy on the earth and enveloped her entirely with her mountains and forests. Thereafter, the Gods spoke to Agni " Enter thou the energy of Siva, terrible to approach and let Vayu assist thee therein."

Permeated by Agni, it was transformed into a white mountain and in course of time, a clump of holy reeds sprang thereupon, brilliant as the Sun or the Fire. And from it was born Kartikeya, of great energy, the son of Agni.

Threat Gods and sages praised high Siva and Uma, their hearts filled with joy at the great danger being averted. But Uma, the daughter of the mountain-king, spoke bitter words and sharp to the assembled Gods. "Reap ye the fruit of your crooked ways. Ye have caused me grief and disappointment ; and for your pains take this my curse upon you." Forthwith she took up water and, her whole frame glowing with rage and her eyes red with the fire of wrath, launched a terrible doom at the trembling Gods. "Ye that have dared to interfere with my pleasures, ye that have dared to come between me and the dearest object of my desires—son to gladden my heart, ye shall never have sons born unto ye of your own wives. From this moment, your wives shall be childless."

Next she returned to the affrighted Earth and her anger shot out against her. "Vile creature, many shall be thy forms and many thy lords. Evil-minded One, thou envied me a son and succeeded in depriving me of one ; but my wrath has power to deny thy heart any comfort arising from a child born unto thy loins."

Rudra glanced an eye of pity at the Devas, who, like guilty things, hung down their heads in shame; and proceeding to the North-west, engaged himself in stern Tapas in the dark woods that clothe the charming slopes of the Himalaya.

Thus have you heard from me, the narrative of Uma the daughter of the mountain. Now shall I relate unto you, the origin of Ganga, the elder sister."

CHAPTER 37.

The Birth of Kartikeya.

Meanwhile, the Devas wanted a general to lead them against the Asuras and they approached the Grand-Sire and prayed unto him for one. "Lord, he whom you gave unto us to lead our armies, is ever engaged in Tapas along with his consort Uma. Advise us what to do next. Do we not look unto you for help, guidance and support? The welfare of the worlds is dearer unto you ; do you point out the course of action best for us."

The four-faced One calmed the fears of the Shining Ones and spoke to them encouragingly. "The words of the Great Mother shall prove true and you shall not have children born unto you of your own wives ; never shall it be otherwise. Now, Agni shall bring forth a son of Ganga, who is even now purifying your worlds. He shall be the General of the Gods and the terror of his foes. Uma, her sister, shall take the child unto her heart and he shall be to her even as the child of her womb.

These words rejoiced the hearts of the Gods ; they took reverent leave of their Leader and went back even as

they came. Proceeding to the Kailasa, rich in metals, gold and gems, they directed Agni to bring forth a son to accomplish their ends. "Oh, thou ! the Leader of the Gods and the Light of the world ! help us in our need and bring us good. Of great splendour thou, direct thy energy towards Ganga, the daughter of the Monarch of mountains."

"It shall be even as you desire" replied the Lord of the Fire and approaching Ganga, said to her, "The gods desire that thou bear in thy womb my unfailing energy and bring forth a son to serve their purpose." "With great pleasure" replied she and assumed a divine form, whereat he marvelled greatly ; and discharging his fiery energy on all sides, he permeated her in all her limbs with his fierce might. And Ganga was penetrated through and through, even unto the utmost ends of her body. But it was too much even for her, the all purifying One ; and she cried out unto the Priest of the Gods in utter helplessness. "Lord, I feel powerless to bear within me thy terrible energy that is even now consuming me." Even as she spake, the flames grew and grew until the agony became too intense for her.

Thereupon, Agni, out of the great pity that wrung his heart, said unto her, "If so, Ganga, let out that which is in thy womb at the foot of Himavan ; may be it will relieve thee of your pain and misery." The holy river gladly hastened to obey him and the resplendent Embryo was directed through the various streams that had their origin in her. And what came forth from her womb was of the hue of the molten gold and was known in the world from that day as Gold, pure and shining. From the pungent element thereof were produced copper and black iron, while the impure parts of it were converted into brass and lead. Thus were the diverse metals brought forth into existence and grew apace. The mighty mountain turned of the colour of gold and the forests around it were filled with the unbearably

bright energy of that which proceeded from Ganga's womb. Thenceforth that gold was known among men by the name Jatarupa, radiant even as fire. The trees, the grass, the creepers and everything therein was converted into gold, Kanchana, so called.

Indra and the other gods arranged that the Krittikas should nurse the boy. They took him as their child and upon a promise thereunto from the Devas, suckled him. "This boy," said they, "nourished by you from the milk of your breasts, shall take your name and the world shall know him as Kartikeya. Unparalleled shall be his renown in the worlds." The Krittikas washed him free and pure of the faetal impurities that adhered to his body, when he dropped from the womb of Ganga at the foot of the Himalaya. "Skanda he shall be called" exclaimed the Devas, "as he was dropped from the womb;" and Kartikeya was known by that name also.

The Divine boy shone in his supreme radiance even as the smokeless flame. Milk streamed forth from the breasts of the Krittikas and wonderful to behold! the child put forth six heads and six mouths to draw his sustenance from his six foster mothers. In the short space of a day, he grew unto his full height and strength. Of matchless grace and beauty, it was but child's play to him to put to rout the assembled hosts of the Daityas. The Celestial hosts gathered round him with peans of joy and with common consent crowned him as their Lord and Leader and installed him in his proud post.

Thus have I narrated unto you, Rama, the wonderful episode of Ganga and the birth of Kartikeya from her. Supremely holy is this and he whose heart is drawn in devotion and reverence, towards the Divine Child, his days shall never grow less on earth; and blessed with sons and grand-

sons without end, he shall, when he quits that body, be taken unto the highest heavens, even where Kartikeya resides."

CHAPTER 38.

Sagara.

Here ended his tale and Visvamitra took up another narrative. "Rama, my son, there lived an ancestor of thine by name Sagara, a righteous ruler and a great hero ; and Ayodhya was his capital. His heart yearned for a son, but in vain. Kesini, the eldest daughter of the ruler of Vidarbha, was his first wife, truthful of speech and righteous minded ; and Sumati, the fairest of the daughters of the earth, was his second wife, the child of Arishtanemi. He retired to the Bhrigu Prasravana among the Himalayas, and along with his wives performed stern Tapas. A hundred years passed over his resolute head, when Bhrigu, the best of those that speak truth, was pleased by his Tapas, conferred upon him a boon. "A mighty race shall spring out of thy loins, and thy glory shall be unparalleled on the earth and undying. One son shalt thou have, through whom thy race shall continue on earth ; and thy other wife shall give thee 60,000 sons." Thereupon the queens approached him reverently with joined hands and glad hearts. "Thy words shall ever come to pass ; but which of us shall have one son and which many ? Deign thou to enlighten us on this vital point." "It is for you to choose," replied the righteous Bhrigu, "one son who will continue your line or many sons, I am us valiant and energetic beyond conception. Suit yourselves."

Then Kesini chose before the king a single son to propagate the race ; and Sumati, the niece of Garuda, chose

60,000 sons famous and mighty. His purpose served, the king and his queens returned to their kingdom.

In course of time, Kesini, the elder, brought forth a son who was named Asamanjas, while Sumati conceived a lump of flesh. They broke it and forth issued 60,000 sons. The nurses brought them up in vessels of clarified butter, until they arrived to years of maturity.

The eldest son, Asamanjas, amused himself with throwing the children of the townsmen into the dark waters of the Sarayu and laughed at their dying agonies ; so, yielding to the prayers of his subjects and to his own unerring sense of justice and duty, Sagara banished that wicked son of his, a terror to his people and an eyesore to the good. But Amsuman, his valiant son, endeared himself to all, high and low and was the idol of their hearts.

Long years after, the thought came to Sagara that he would celebrate a sacrifice. He consulted his priests and chaplains well versed in the Vedas and set about the holy rite."

CHAPTER 39.

Sagara's Horse-Sacrifice.

When the narrative came to an end, Rama said to Visvamitra with a pleased heart " Hail to thee, thou Holy One ! Great is my desire to hear the story in all its details of how my ancestor celebrated that sacrifice ?" Greatly amused at the eagerness displayed by Rama, Visvamitra replied with a smile. " Nothing would give me greater pleasure. See you yon abode of Snow and Ice, the sky-topped Himalaya. He is the father-in-law of the Black Throated One and faces

proudly the far famed Vindhya ; and between them lies a broad and similing land. Regard it as one of the holiest spots on the earth, for, countless have been the sacrifices performed therein ; and your ancestor of honored memory, the righteous Sagara, celebrated his Aswamedha there. Amsuman, the favourite grandson of the monarch, was directed to go along with the consecrated horse and guard it. A mighty warrior was he, King Sagara and a famous general ; and while he was duly conducting the sacrifice, Indra assumed the shape of a Rakshasa and spirited away the consecrated horse. Thereat, the sacrificial priests cried out to the king " The consecrated horse has been taken away on this all important day. Slay the robber and bring back the horse. Such a defect as this is fraught with danger to all of us. So, see to it that the sacrifice comes to a safe and speedy end."

Thereupon, the mighty monarch turned to his sons (there were 60,000 of them) and addressed them in the pride of his power and glory. " No room see I for any Rakshasa to interfere with this sacrifice of mine, conducted as it is by such able priests as these, with souls purified by powerful Mantras. So, heed ye these words of mine ; go forth, my sons and search this sea-girt earth through and through, every inch of it if ye come not upon them. And I shall stay here, consecrated, with my grandson and the priests, till the horse come back."

Ordered thus by their honored sire, the valiant sons of Sagara issued forth with on their fearless quest with cheerful hearts. They searched the surface of the earth from end to end, but found not the horse nor the thief. Then they began to delve into the earth, a yojana every one of them, with their adamantine nails, with tridents hard as thunderbolts, and with terrible ploughshares. Whereupon, the patient Earth, thus pierced in her vitals, began to emit loud cries of distress, rendered all the more terrible by the fearful shrieks of the

dying Nagas, Asuras, Rakshasas and other mighty creatures, whom, in their wantonness, the infuriated sons of Sagara slaughtered by thousands. Yet they dug into the bowels of the earth for 60,000 yojanas and ranged far and wide through the mountainous Jambudwipa. Thereupon the gods, the Gandhravas, the Asuras and the Pannagas, sought out the Great Ancient and addressed him with affrighted and woe-begone countenances. "Lord ! behold these wicked sons of Sagara piercing into the very bowels of the earth and slaying the creatures therein by hundreds and by thousands. Hear them shouting. 'Lo ! there goes the thief ! there is the daring wretch who has laid his impious hands ' on the sacred horse and spoiled the precious sacrifice! and countless myriads go down before their blind fury.'"

CHAPTER 40.

The Wrath of Kapila.

The Father of all beings listened to these words of the trembling Celestials who were out of their wits through fear of destruction. "This earth" said he "and everything it contains belongs to the Lord Vasudeva, who, as Kapila, supports it for all time ; and these wicked princes shall, of a truth, be consumed by the fire of His wrath. The delving of the earth and the destruction of the short-lived sons of Sagara have been fore-ordained."

The celestials departed to their abodes with a glad heart. And great was the uproar caused by the valiant sons of Sagara delving into the bowels of the earth. Having thus sought above and below, they came back to their sire and said to him reverently. "We have searched the entire earth through and through and put to death powerful and mighty beings, Gods, Danavas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Uragas, and

Kinnaras, by hundreds ; but we have not set our eyes upon the horse nor the daring robber. Hail ! mighty monarch ! we await thy further orders."

Thereat Sagara was exceedingly wroth and cried out "Delve further and yet further, even unto the innermost limits. Find me out the robber and come back with the horse at any cost."

Thus ordered thereto, the 60,000 sons of Sagara dug even unto the Rasatala, until they came upon the huge elephant Virupaksha, supporting on his head mountain-like, the entire globe with its mountains, hills, forests, rivers, towns and hamlets. When the Mighty One shakes his weary head during the Parva days to ease himself, then men have what they call an earthquake. They went round him and paid him due worship, whereafter they pursued their undeviating course. Having pierced through the Rasatala in the east, they turned to the south and lighted upon another elephant of vast proportions, Mahapadma, likewise supporting the entire globe on his head—a sight that filled them with amazement. They went round him too and piercing through the west, observed another elephant, Saumanasa, who bore the earth in that quarter. Him too they reverenced and made kind enquiries of, after which they set about to pierce towards the North, when there came to view the snow-white Bhadra, of immense proportions, upon whose broad head rested but lightly the entire mass of the globe in that quarter. Having paid unto him due reverence, they took leave of him and pierced yet deeper into the earth ; coming to the North-east they dug deeper yet, furious with disappointment, that endowed them with superhuman strength and fierce speed.

When, lo ! there appeared before their startled eyes Kapila, the incarnation of the Eternal Vasudeva ; and hard by, the long-sought-for horse, grazing quietly, the innocent

cause of all their trouble and misfortune. Almost besides themselves with joy at their success, they rushed forth with eager hearts ; but, the sight of the Holy One, whom they concluded to be the robber of the horse, roused them to insensate fury ; and with eyes inflamed with wrath, they flew at the sage, armed with spades and swords, shovels ploughshares and mattocks. "Stop thief ! stop thief !" not one of them was mute. " You are the wicked wretch that spirited away the sacrificial horse and right dearly shall you pay for it. Know you who have come for you ? Even the sons of Sagara, the terrible." Hardly were those impious words out of the mouth of the doomed sons of Sagara, than the wrath of the mighty sage blazed forth. 'Hum,' he cried ; the eye had scarcely time to wink, when the 60,000 sons of Sagara vanished from sight ; a heap of ashes marked the place where they had stood a moment ago, in their proud strength and fiery manhood.

CHAPTER 41.

Amsuman's Quest.

Finding his sons had been away an unconscionable long time, Sagara turned to his grandson who was resplendent in his own energy, " Brave you are and well educated ; you are not behind your forefathers in prowess or energy. Bring me news of your parents and of him who has made away with the horse. The beings that inhabit the interior of the Earth are of terrible might and power ; arm yourself against them with your bow and sword. Offer reverence to those that deserve it and spare not those that might seek to hinder you ; come back unto me with news of success and enable me to complete this sacrifice."

Thus directed by his noble grandsire, Amsuman set out in hot haste on his quest, armed with sword and bow. Following his grandsire's direction, he soon came upon the path dug into the bowels of the earth by his valiant fore-fathers. He took that away and came upon the Dig-gaja honored by the Daityas, Danavas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Pannagas, and Uragas. He went round it, inquired after its welfare and respectfully asked for news of his parents, as also of the horse-thief; to which the Elephant replied "Son of Asamanjas! soon shalt thou come back with success and the horse with you." The other Elephants, whom he came upon, confirmed the glad tidings. "Soon shall we see you come back honored and with the long-lost horse." Extremely intelligent and no mean speakers themselves, they encouraged him with the fresh hopes by their prophetic assertions. On he hastened to where his ill-starred fathers lay, a heap of ashes. His heart burst with grief at the miserable sight and in a loud voice he bewailed the untimely and shameful fate of his uncles. And there was the sacrificial horse grazing all innocently near by, as if *it* was not their evil destiny.

He desired to offer libations of water into their manes, but, search as he would, not a drop of water could he find any where. Casting his eyes around, he espied the uncle of his uncles, even Garuda, the Lord of Birds, shining with the brilliance of the Lord of Fire. And to him spake the valiant Garuda "Grieve not, noble son; they deserved their death. They perished even in their pride, burnt to ashes by the inscrutable might of Kapila's glances; and to these, libations of earthly water would do no good. Nothing but the sacred waters of Ganga, the eldest daughter of Himavan, the all purifying stream, should wash these ungodly ones reduced to a heap of ashes, *then and then alone* shalt thou be able to raise these 60,000 victims of foolish temerity to

the Abode of the Blessed. Take thou the horse back with thee and enable thy grandfather to complete the sacrifice."

And the valiant Amsuman obeyed him with a heavy heart. Soon he stood before his grandsire and acquainted him with the details of his quest, the unhappy fate of his sires and of the advice of Garuda. Sagara listened to the terrible news with a breaking heart and hastened to complete the rite according to the rules. He returned to his capital, but, he could not decide unto himself what course to adopt in the matter of bringing down Ganga to the terrestrial regions ; and thus, in doubt and anxiety, in aimless thought and ceaseless remorse, did he pass away to the Regions of the Immortals. And his reign on earth was 32,000 years.

CHAPTER 42.

Bhagiratha's Penance.

When Sagara was gathered unto his forefathers, his subjects decided that his righteous grandson Amsuman should reign over them. He was a mighty monarch, Amsuman and bore a son by name Dilipa, of peerless fame. And resigning the kingdom unto his hands, did Amsuman seek the Holy Heights to perform fearful austerities. Years 32,000 passed away and unto him in his forest hermitage came the call to Heaven, to which he departed, crowned with undying glory. And Dilipa, coming to know of the destruction of this grandfathers, was overwhelmed with grief and at a loss how to act. " How shall I bring down Ganga ? How shall I offer them libations of holy water ? How shall I deliver them from their miserable plight ? " This sorrow ate into his heart, day and night. And unto him endowed with Divine Wisdom through his steadfast adherence to

Right, was born a son, Bhagiratha, who, in saintliness of character, excelled his father, if that were possible. Many a sacrifice did Dilipa celebrate ; and for 32,000 years the people rejoiced under his benign rule. But, unable to come to any definite conclusion as to how to raise his fore-fathers to heaven, he died of a broken heart, having lived, as he thought, an aimless life. He installed his son in his place and won the Heaven of Indra by his peerless merit.

Bhagiratha, the royal sage, had everything he could wish for—righteousness, spiritual might ; but he yearned in vain for a son to continue his line on the earth. So, entrusting his kingdom to his able ministers, he resolved to bring down Ganga and he took himself to the sacred Gokarna, where he spent long years, thousands of them, in performing terrible austerities. Placing himself in the midst of five fires, he withdrew his senses into his heart ; with his arms raised high above his head, he bent all his powerful will to accomplish his purpose, taking but a slight sustenance once a month. Then unto him thus engaged in his holy task, there came Brahma, the Lord of beings, the Grand-sire, and in his wake, the Angels of Light and spoke thus to the high-souled One, “ Bhagiratha ! Lord of men ! pleased am I with you and the unparalleled Tapas you have gone through. Ask of me what you wilt and you shall have it.” And unto the Great Father the noble-hearted king replied with reverently clasped hands, “ Lord ! If I have found favour with Thee, if my Tapas is to bear any fruit ; even this I would have at Thy hands. May the sons of Sagara, every one of them, receive libations water at my hands. May the holy waters of celestial Ganga flow over their ashes. May the Great Ones rejoice in heaven for ever. And let me have a son to gladden my heart. And more than any other thing, this boon would I crave of Thee. May the race of Iskhwaku ever remain upon Earth.”

To him spake back, in words sweet and glorious, the Four-faced One, the great Fashioner of Men and Worlds, " Mighty hero thou, Bhagiratha, it is a royal request and shall be even as thou desirest. The royal race of Ikshwaku shall owe its undying fame to thee. Ganga, the first-born of the lofty Himavan, shall obey thy behests ; but the Earth cannot stand the force of the Celestial River as it comes down from the regions on high. I see no one that could bear it safely, unless it be the Wielder of the Trident, even Mahadeva. Hence, do thou seek to engage him in that mighty task." Having thus advised the king and having directed Ganga herself as to what she should do, he went back to his Radiant World, accompanied by the celestial hosts.

CHAPTER 43. Descent of Ganga.

So spake Brahma and went away , and Bhagiratha went through another year of hard austerities. With arms lifted high over his head, straight as a pine, motionless as a rock, he supported himself solely on his toes. Thus he remained day and night, the air his only food, self-controlled and calm.

When the dreadful year came to an end, Maheswara, the Spouse of the golden-hued Uma, stood before the royal sage ; and the World-honored spake, in accents sweet and grand, " You have won my favor and I shall do your pleasure. I shall even bear upon my head the Daughter of the Mountain."

Thereupon the noble river Ganga, honored of all beings, increased her size and force unbearable and from the lofty

heavens, fell upon the peaceful head of Siva. "For," thought she, of irresistible might, "I will carry away Sankara along with me, and enter the nether regions." The Three-eyed Hara was highly wroth at this overweening pride of Ganga and resolved to hide her from all sight. So, when the Holy Stream fell on the sacred head of Siva, even like unto Himavan, she could never come down on earth, though she tried her best, entangled as she was in the maze of Mahadeva's lofty coils of matted hair. And her senses giddy with aimless wandering through the pathless labyrinths, for countless years she found not her way out. Seeing which, Bhagiratha again set himself to please Siva through austerities stern.

Siva's heart grew soft towards him and he let her down gently to the earth, even where the Lake Bindu stood, Ganga came down from his coils in seven streams, of which Hladini, Plavini and Nalini carried their pure and holy waters to the east, Suchakshu, Sita and Sindhu flowed through the happy kingdoms of the west; and the last followed in the wake of the royal sage Bhagiratha, who, shining in his lustre, went before in his beautiful car. From the high heavens she fell on the head of Siva and from thence to the earth; and her waters rushed fast and furious with a mighty sound, rendered the more terrible by the countless fish, tortoises, porpoises, and other aquatic creatures, ceaselessly falling from on high. And hosts of the Celestials came there, blazing in their effulgence, to behold that wonderful Descent of Ganga into the regions of the Earth—Devas, Rishis, Gandharvas, Yakshas, and Siddhas; all seated on their countless swift-coursing cars huge as cities, on horses and noble elephants they stationed themselves along the firmament, which, without the slightest suspicion of a cloud, shone as it with the splendor of myriads of suns, thrown back from the bands of Celestials and their brilliant ornaments. The porpoises and the fish falling down the

waters flashed like lightnings along the welkin ; and the thousand white sprays thrown up by the waves on all sides reminded one of the autumn clouds with crowds of swans flying athwart them. Now swift, now slow ; now straight like an arrow, now crooked like a miser's heart ; now with a sudden fall, now shooting upwards ; now mighty waves striking against one another and rising high in the air, anon fall upon the earth with a sound of thunder. Descending upon the head of Siva and from there to the earth, the waters became purer and holier. The gods, the sages and the Gandharvas that came down to the earth, touched the Holy Waters, rendered unmeasurably so by having come into contact with the body of Siva. They that had fallen down on earth through curses dire, washed themselves pure of their sins in its sacred waters and regained their lost homes in the heavens ; the whole world rejoiced thereat and their souls were white as driven snow.

The royal sage Bhagiratha went before on his splendid car ; and Ganga, obedient to his least wish, followed in his footsteps. Gods, Sages, Daityas Danavas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakasas, Kinnaras, Uragas, and the Apsarasas followed joyfully the Holy River, that, teeming with countless aquatic creatures, coursed after the car of Bhagiratha. Wherever the king went, there was the Holy Ganga, the first and the best of streams, the destroyer of all sins. On its way, she took it into her wilful heart to flow through the sacrificial grounds of the holy sage, Jahnu, and swept away everything therein. Such pride and audacity worked up the mighty sage to an uncontrollable pitch of anger and he drew into himself the waters of Ganga. Verily it was wonderful to be hold. The gods, the sages, and the Gandharvas were struck with amazement and sought to soothe the wounded dignity of the great sage by every mark of honor and respect. " This Ganga " said they " shall be

henceforth known as the Daughter of Jahnu." Then the sage of immeasurable energy was somewhat mollified and let out the waters through his ears ; and hence she earned the names "The Daughter of Jahnu" and "Jahnava." Again she resumed her course behind the car of Bhagiratha, until she reached the vast ocean ; and thence proceeded towards the Rasatala for the accomplishment of his purpose.

The royal sage, having, after unheard--of difficulties, taken Ganga along with him to the nether regions, cast his eyes, with a sinking heart, upon his ancestors reduced to a heap of ashes. The holy waters of the Ganga bathed the pile and the owners thereof, purified of their sins, ascended to the High Heavens.

CHAPTER 44. The End of the Quest.

Accompanied by Ganga, the king reached the ocean and came to that place below the Earth where his ancestors lay reduced to ashes.

When they had been washed by the holy waters, Brahma, the Lord of the worlds, came to the place and said, "The 60,000 sons of the noble Sagara have been freed from their evil fate and raised by you to heaven, even like unto the gods themselves ; and *as long as the waters of the ocean shall endure on earth* even so long shall these enjoy the bliss of Swarga along with the Immortal Dwellers thereof. This Ganga shall be to you as a first-born daughter and shall be celebrated in the world under the names you gave her—Ganga, Tripathaga, Divya, and Bhagirathi. She flows through the three worlds and hence her name Tripathaga. Offer libations of water unto the manes

of your grandfathers, every one of them and accomplish your vow. They that went before you were unable to accomplish their object, highly famous and born of righteous ancestry though they were. Amsuman of unequalled energy, desired to bring down Ganga and succeeded not. The royal sage, your sire Dilipa, of noble attributes and like unto the great sages in Spiritual Energy, wrought hard to bring down Ganga, but the rays of success dispelled not the gloom of his heart, albeit he was unswerving in the discharge of his kingly duties and equal to me in ascetic merit. But, you have been able to accomplish your high resolve ; and, best of men that you are, you have earned the highest glory ever given unto mortals to possess and ever approved of by the best; you have reached the loftiest pinnacle of righteousness, in that you have brought down the holy Ganga. Bathe in the sacred waters and rise pure and endowed with high religious merit. Forget not to offer libations of water unto the manes of your ancestors. I shall go back unto my world and give you leave to do the same." Thus spoke the Grand-sire of all beings, the great Brahma and departed to his seat in the highest heaven, even as he came.

Thereupon, the royal sage Bhagiratha discharged his duties by his fore-fathers, even as the holy books lay it down ; his vow accomplished, he returned to his capital with enhanced lustre and glory and ruled his kingdom well and wisely. The world rejoiced when the king came back again among them and men knew not sorrow nor anxiety under him, but lived in happy content, every desire of theirs gratified.

Thus have I narrated unto you, at great length, Rama, the episode of Ganga. All hail to you ! thou noble one and may every good go with you. Let us disperse, for the time of the evening prayers is close at hand. This narrative is of extraordinary virtue ; it realises for you all your wishes—fame, length of years, offspring, and the highest heavens. And

you have no better way of pleasing the Pitrîs and the Devas than by reciting this before the regenerate ones. He who listens to this with whole—souled attention and a devout heart, never desires in vain ; his sins fall away from him and his days increase on earth and his glory.”

CHAPTER 45.

The Churning of the Ocean.

He ended in the midst of profound silence ; for, in awe-struck silence his hearers drank in his words with their ears and hearts. Rama was the first to break the spell and speak. “ Reverend Master ! these episodes of the coming down of Ganga and the digging of the ocean by the sons of Sagara, how wonderful and strange !”

The audience took respectful leave of the sage to seek repose ; but, the princes lay awake, pondering over the marvellous recital, until the small hours of the dawn stole upon them. They rose betimes and having gone through the morning observances, approached Visvamitra and said, “ Holy One ! the night passed away all too soon, revolving over the wonderful stories narrated by you. A boat, specially furnished for such holy ascetics as you, awaits your pleasure. Shall we cross this sacred stream over to the other bank ?

“ So be it ” replied Visvamitra, and very soon they were on the other side of the river. They rested there awhile and from where they sat the towers of the renowned Visala rose into view. Soon they resumed their journey and were on their way towards the capital that vied in magnificence with the very abode of the Immortals. Rama took the opportunity to question the Master about the city. “ May I request to know which royal race rules here at present ?”

Visvamitra caught the hint and proceeded to recount the past history of Visala. "In the last Krita Yuga, the sons of Diti were very powerful ; while the sons of Aditi were mighty and walked in the way of Good, 'How shall we escape the decrepitude of age and the horrors of death?' So thought they, the Devas and the Asuras. At length, they hit upon a plan and resolved to churn the Milky Ocean and partake of the Ambrosia that would spring therefrom. That would ensure them Immortality. Well, they set to work in dead earnest ; the Milky Ocean was the churning pot and the Mount Mandara, the churn ; Vasuki, the king of serpents, was the rope, and they churned with unabated energy for thousands of years. Then, Vasuki, their rope, gave out, and vomited deadly poison from his many mouths ; while, in the height of his agony, he crunched to atoms the hard granite of the rocks.

First rose the fiery venom Halahala, and began to consume the affrighted worlds and everything therein—men and gods, birds and beasts. The Lords of Light sought the presence of Mahadeva, in his Home of Ice and Snow and lifted up their hearts and hands to him in humble prayer. "Lord of Beings ! Rudra of terrible energy ! Giver of all Good ! we take our refuge in Thee and seek the shadow of Thy feet. Save us, Oh Lord ! from this cruel Fate. Thou art our stay and support."

And to them thus engaged in heart-whole prayer and humble entreaty, there came the Lord Vishnu, his broad shoulders graced with the mighty Conch and Discus. And to the Wielder of the Trident spake he in accents of persuasive melody. "These gods here, churn the Milky Ocean and have come to offer you the first fruits of their hard labor. For," said he with a charming smile. "You, brother mine, are the first-born among them and it behoves you to accept this Halahala as your portion and save them from destruction."

He disappeared then and there, even while the sound of his sweet voice was still in the ears of his hearers. And the Moon-Crested One, moved thereunto by the abject fear of the gods and the request of Vishnu, repaired unto the Ocean of Milk and swallowed the dread Halahala, even as though it were a delicious draught of Ambrosia. His mission of mercy accomplished, he returned to his mountain-home and left the gods to resume their arduous work.

But, a fresh misfortune was in store for them—the Mount Mandara, their churn, sank from view, deep deep into the abysmal regions of Patala. Once again the Angels of Heaven, raised their voices in earnest supplication to the Guardian of the Worlds, even the Lord Vishnu. “All creation lives and moves in Thee and has its being ; but we are proud to claim a place in the warmest corner of Thy heart. Lead us out of this mishap and find a way to keep the mountain firm, while we churn the sea.”

And Hari, the Soul of Mercy, laid himself in the deep waters as a mighty Tortoise and bare the mountain on his back, while his extended hands grasped it at the top and steadied the whirling mass ; and wonderful to behold ! he stood among the gods and churned as assiduously as any.

A thousand years of hard toil and there arose from amidst the seething waters, Dhanvantari, the God of Health, with staff and water-pot. Next the lovely Apsarasas, sixty thousand in number (their attendants, Rama dear, are past count). They were so called (Apsarasas) since the Charming Ones formed the essence (Rasa) that sprang from the churning of the mighty waters (apas.) The gods would have none of them, nor the Asuras ; hence they came to be common women, free to all. *

Next came forth Varuni, the daughter of Varuna, the Lord of Waters, and looked about for some one who

would take her to wife. But the sons of Diti turned away from her in haughtiness and pride ; whereat, the gods took that stainless beauty unto themselves with a glad heart. Hence the name ‘Asuras’ that the sons of Diti went by (those that accepted not Sura or Varuni); while the gods rejoiced in the appellation of Suras (the Lords of Sura).

Next Uchchaisravas, the Prince of horses ; then Kaustubha, the Gem of divine lustre ; and last, the Amrita, the Waters of Immortality.

It was the apple of discord thrown in the midst of the celestials and they fought for it tooth and nail. Terrible was the battle that ensued between the sons of Aditi on the one hand and the Asuras, and the Rakshasas on the other ; and the hearts of all beings quaked in wild dismay thereat. Fearful was the carnage among the Asuras, and they were about exterminated. When the ungodly sons of Diti were thus laid low, the Lord Vishnu, of unthinkable might, appeared among the combatants as a fascinating siren (a dream of beauty to lure away the hearts of the unrighteous ones, verily an illusion cast by the Master of Illusions), and bare away the hard-won Amrita ; and they that tried to bar his way, the unfortunate Asuras, fell no more to rise. For was he not the ruler of the Universe, the Supreme One, who waxes not nor wanes ? Thus were the impious brood of Diti overwhelmed by the Angels of Peace, the servants of the Lord ; and Indra, their king and leader, regained his empire over the worlds, gods and mortals, saints and sages and ruled wisely and well.

CHAPTER 46.

The birth of the Maruts.

When Diti saw that her numerous sons, the Asuras, were destroyed by the Devas, her heart was heavy with

grief ; approaching her husband Kasyapa, she prayed to him in all humility, " My children have been done to death, every one of them, by the powerful Devas, sprung of thee. I pray thee extend thy grace unto me and enable me to go through a course of austeries, whereby I might beget a son who would be the death of Indra."

Kasyapa, of boundless might, heard her out and his heart was wrung with pity at the mother's grief " Be it as you desire. Observe for a thousand years a strict vow and holy, pure in body and heart ; and you shall have of me a son who will lord it over the three worlds." He passed his hands over her body, gave her his blessings and departed to resume his Tapas.

With a glad heart, Diti betook herself to the holy Kusaplavana and took upon herself to observe a long and difficult vow. And upon her thus employed, did Indra wait upon with humble reverence all the time He supplied her with the sacred grass, firesticks, water, fruits, roots and fire and every other article that she might require ; he pressed her limbs when she was tired, fanned her when she was hot, and was ever her right hand and shadow.

Years 9990 passed away in this wise, when one day, Diti turned with a bright face to Indra (he was ever at her side anticipating her least wish) and said, " My dear, your father Kasyapa was kind enough to accord me a boon, that I would get an excellent son, if I observed a course of religious practices he instructed me in. Only ten short years of this severe ordeal and you will have the pleasure of beholding your younger brother. True it is I resolved upon bringing forth a son who would put you down ; but, my heart has been won over to you by your sweet kindness and watchful service. It shall be my care to bring about

perfect harmony between you both, so that the three worlds shall rest in peace and happiness."

And upon them so speaking, the heat of noon came on apace ; and Diti, worn out with her fasts and penances, chanced, (inexorable Fate impelling her thereto) to fall asleep in a careless posture, the hair of her head brushing her feet. Indra, ever on the watch for the slightest slip, saw that she was impure and laughed in joy and derision. " Fool that you are ! you fondly imagine you have successfully accomplished your long course of Tapas and pride yourself on being about to attain the result of your severe efforts." Then the dauntless Lord of the Angels made his entrance into her body and with his weapon, the sharp-pointed Vajra, hacked the embryo into seven pieces ; whereat, it began to set up a loud and pitiful wail.

" Cry not, cry not," replied Indra ; but all the same he went on with his dreadful task.

Diti awoke ; and from the depths of her agonised heart broke out the words, 'Slay not, slay not.'

Indra desisted at the commands of his mother ; coming out of her body, he stood before her with reverently clasped hands and said, " Mother mine ! you happened to fall asleep during the day and that with the hair of your head touching your feet ; you had rendered yourself impure and I but took advantage of the favourable opportunity to rid myself of a rival who was growing to be my Fate. It behoves you to pardon me this offence of mine."

CHAPTER 47.

The birth of the Maruts.

Overwhelmed with sorrow and disappointment, Diti turned to the invincible Indra and said, " Oh thou, the

destroyer of the Asura Vala ! verily it was through *my* fault that this embryo of mine has been cut to pieces and rendered useless. No blame is yours, for, you but did your duty and the hand of Fate directed you. However, it would give me great pleasure if you would grant me a request of mine. These seven pieces shall, gifted with forms of Light, rule over the various air-currents as their Informing Deities. Gagana in the world of Brahma, Sparsa in yours, Vayu in the Bhuvan Loka and Anila, Prana, Pranesvara and Jiva in the four quarters of the world of mortals. These shall range the various regions in peace and happiness and take the name of 'Maruts' that you have given them. It behoves you to do them this favor at least ; and I doubt not that it will redound to your own glory and power."

So prayed the much-stricken mother, in accents sweet and persuasive ; and Indra bowed reverently over his folded palms and replied, "Mother mine! on my head and eyes be thy commands. Thy sons, these seven brothers of mine, shall course through all the regions, illuminating them with glorious forms of divine lustre". Thus did Indra and his mother Diti make a covenant, which he faithfully observed ever after. And, mutually pleased, they departed to the worlds of the Immortals. And, Rama ! *this* is the very spot where Diti was waited upon by Indra during her long and severe course of austerities.

The royal Ikshvaku begat from Alambusa, a son by name Visala, who was the founder of the city that goes by his name. And Hemachandra, Suchandra, Dhumrasva, Srinjaya, Sahadeva, Kusasva, Somadatta of great lustre and renown, and Kakutstha, succeeded one another, father and son. And Sumati, like unto the Gods in radiance, rules at present over the happy Visala and is verily invincible. Through the blessings of their founder Ikshvaku.

his descendants by Visala are gifted with length of years, steadfastness in virtue and unparalleled prowess. Rest we here for the night and to-morrow you will have the pleasure of being welcomed by the royal Janaka."

Meanwhile, Sumati, the righteous and holy, was informed of the approach of the great Visvamitra ; and with his priests and kinsmen, hastened to offer him welcome. He extended unto his honored guest the highest rites of hospitality and with folded palms, reverently inquired after his welfare. " First and best of sages ! thrice-blessed am I, in that you have, of your own accord, been pleased to honor my humble abode with your sacred presence. Surely, great is the favor I have found in your eyes and you have made me the envy of the three worlds."

CHAPTER 48.

Ahalya.

After mutual enquiries of welfare, Sumati addressed himself to the Holy One and said " Hail to thee ! these youths, who are they ? God-like in their might and of lordly gait, even as the proud monarch of the forests or the majestic elephant or the tiger or the bull ; with large and lustrous eyes, like unto the rosy petals of the blown lotus ; combining in themselves the graces of the boy and the youth. Lo ! how they shine in their martial attire, bow in hand, the sword by their sides and the well-filled quivers peeping from behind. More like those heavenly Twins, the ideals of divine grace and beauty, the Aswins. Be these the gods themselves, come down of their sweet will to this dull earth of ours, from their bright home on high ? How chances it they have deigned to come all the way here and on foot ? What seek they ? Whom are they here for ? The Twin Lords of the Day and the Night grace not

~~The sky~~ more than these princes this fortunate land. Face, features, gestures, gait, speech, the keenest eye cannot distinguish the one from the other. These warlike youths, these lords of men, why have they trod this wild path and dreadful ? May I know the truth that lies behind this ? ”

And to his wondering ears did the sage relate the details of their journey—their stay at the Siddhasrama, and the destruction of the Rakshasas at their hands. Mightily pleased was Sumati to have as his guests the noble sons of the ruler of Ayodhya and right royally did he entertain the valiant princes who deserved it so richly. They spent there a happy night and at day-break left for Mithila.

The charming capital of Janaka filled the sages with wonder and delight, and they could not praise it enough.

On their way, Rama noticed a lonely hermitage at the outskirts of the city, old, dilapidated and untenanted. At once he turned to his Master and said “ This holy place reminds one of the spot that was graced by your angust self, but for the fact that no ascetics bless it with their presence. Who dwelt here last, Master, if I may be allowed to inquire ? ”

It required but very little inducement to make Visvamitra hold eloquent discourse on the antecedents of the spot. “ Listen to me while I narrate to you the wonderful train of events that culminated in the curse of this lonely hermitage by the great-souled Gautama. One of the fairest spots on earth this was, when he dwelt herein and with his wife, Ahalya, engaged in a long and severe course of Tapas. Why, the very gods frequented it for its rare beauty and almost envied Gautama the possession of it.

The Lord of the celestials loved the fair Ahalya and was ever on his watch for an opportunity to accomplish his wishes ; and one day he got it when the sage was away from

his cottage. Approaching Ahalya in the guise of the holy Gautama, the Holder of Vajra exclaimed, "Oh thou ! the fairest form that ever graced the Earth below or the Worlds above, a merciless tyrant is Love ; and no rules nor restrictions that man can make, have power to stay his will. I am not master of myself. Full well do I know it is not your season, but what would you have me do ? Fold me in your flower soft arms and let me lose myself in an endless dream of bliss".

She knew it was the Ruler of the Celestials that spake those words of delicious love, and not her husband, the sage of restrained passions ; but, deep in her heart lurked a tender feeling for the powerful Lord of the Immortals. She lent an ear to the tempter and --was lost. Her long-deferred hopes realized, she spoke to him out of a glad heart.

"Well pleased am I, Lord . and now leave thou this place ere it is too late. One word before we part. Let no fancied sense of security blind thee to the perils of our position. Take good care of thyself and stand between me and the dread consequence of my act of folly".

But Indra laughed away her fears and replied " Fair one ! Never can I thank you enough for your sweet condescension to my unworthy self ; and now, have I your leave to go ?"

He spoke and hastened out of the cottage, all afraid of Gautama, whom his fluttering heart saw everywhere.

And lo ! there advanced towards him the subject of his thoughts and fears, the holy Gautama, about to enter his hermitage. Gods and Asuras stood in hushed awe of him, such was his inconceivable might, engendered of severe austerities. Fresh from his bath in the sin cleansing waters, he drew near, the sacred grass in his hand and the

bundle of firesticks. The steady flame of the smokeless Fire shone not with more lustre nor was more terrible in its all-consuming energy. The mighty Lord of the Shining Ones quailed in abject terror before the calm glance of Gautama that pierced into his very soul and read into the inmost depths thereof. His face grew ghastly pale, and to him, there standing false-hearted and unclean be ore the soul of the spotless purity, to him, in the borrowed feathers of the one in whose guise he came to perpetrate his foul deed of shame and iniquity, spoke the irate sage, scarcely able to control his fierce wrath.

"Impious wretch ! that host dared to soil my pure abode with this nameless act of wickedness and that in *my* name and in *my* form ! It is but insufficient punishment to thee that thou be deprived of what served you to carry out your nefarious purpose. A man be thou to all appearance, but in reality, the mockery of one—a pitiful eunuch." No sooner were the words out of the lips of the angry Gautama, than the scrota of Indra withered and fell away from his body.

Next, he turned himself to Ahalya, Indra's partner in guilt. "Lie thou here for thousands of years, long and weary, ever hungry, thy food the impalpable air and the grey ashes and dust thy cloak. No mortal eye shall see thee ; but an unquenchable fire shall ever consume thee. At a future age, there shall come across these wastes one Rama, the son of Dasaratha of unapproachable might. *Then* and then alone shall this dread fate fall away from thee; and honoring your Divine guest, thou shalt shake thyself off for ever from these bonds of foul desire and foolish vanity ; *then* shall thy heart know peace and joy ; and *then* shalt thou take thy place by my side in all thy fatal beauty."

He took his bright presence away from the ill-fated One and left this holy place for the pleasant peaks of the

Himalaya, where the Angels of Light ever love to dwell ; and there, in that calm retreat, did he take up his old course of life and its stern duties.

CHAPTER 49. Ahalya and Rama.

Deprived of his vital organs, Indra sought out the gods, and the sages and cried out to them, with his senses all in a whirl through fear. " It was for *you* that I undertook this dangerous work. *You* wanted me to somehow or other spoil his Tapas by rousing his anger. And now you perceive the consequences that have followed—myself deprived of virile power and my partner in guilt put away from her husband in anger. But, I have caused him to utter a curse, which has considerably lessened his might and energy acquired by long Tapas. Hence it is but fair and just that you do your duty by me, the instrument of your work and restore to me what I have lost through you."

Then the assembled Devas, the Sages, and the Charanas approached the Fathers and unto them spake Agni, as their spokesman. " Our Lord and Master has imprudently and blinded by passion, ravished the wife of the sage Gautama ; and in return, has been cursed for his pains, which has rendered him an object of pity and scorn, in that he has lost his virile power. Justly does he blame us for it, who set him on this task. You will do well to transfer the scrota of the goat to him ; accept it hereafter as a grateful offering and grant to your votaries the desire of their heart and endless merit besides." The Fathers approved of the suggestion of Agni ; they took counsel among themselves and transferred to Indra the scrota of the goat.

.. Thenceforth the Fathers have gladly accepted the offering of the goat without its scrota and conferred on the

sacrificers the benefits they had enjoyed hitherto. From that day Indra goes about with the scrota of the goat upon him, thanks to the terrible might of Gautama accruing through stern Tapas. Let us now, Rama dear, approach the sacred precincts of the holy hermitage. To you it is given to release from a living death, as existence of nameless horror, the noble Ahalya, the best and fairest in all the worlds, of gods or men."

Ever obedient to the commands of his master, Rama followed Visvamitra into the hermitage ; and Lakshmana after him. There they beheld the high-souled dame, her natural brilliance but heightened by the long life of penance and meditation through thousands of years. The Gods and Asuras, nay, the denizens of the worlds above and below, could not bear to gaze at the fiery radiance that surrounded her like a halo. The Demiurge had fashioned her the fairest of the daughters of heaven or earth ; and it cost him no little thought and pains ! More like some fair creation of a divine artist in the golden hours of his imagination more like the radiant Queen of Night, her glory but dimly veiled by the dewy clouds ; more like the blinding effulgence of the noon-day sun perceived through the watery vapours. There she had stood invisible to the eyes of Mortals and Immortals alike, through the curse launched against her by Gautama ; but now the hour hast struck for her release from her dire fate and lo ! she burst upon the wondering eyes of her visitors like some sweet vision.

The royal youths hastened to touch her feet in all reverence ; while she, bearing in mind the parting directions of her lord, offered unto them the highest rites of hospitality, which they accepted with a pleased heart. Flowers of divine fragrance fell from on high ; the Gandharvas and the assembled Apsarasas discoursed sweet music, while the heavenly drums and other martial music thundered over

head. "Bravo" cried the celestial hosts "well and nobly done" and paid high worship to the spouse of Gautama, who shone in all her pristine beauty and glory, purified of all stain by long years of stern Tapas.

Then there came unto them from his far-off retreat in the Himalayas the holy Gautama and the happy pair offered unto Sri Rama divine worship and reverence. Thereafter Gautama resumed his life of calm meditation and holy vows in the company of his wife, now restored to him after countless years of separation and suffering. On his part, the noble Deliverer, honored by the glorious reception accorded to him, took up his march to Mithila in the wake of the Holy One.

CHAPTER 50.

At Mithila.

They proceeded north east and shortly found themselves near the sacrificial grounds of Janaka. "Reverend Sir" said the princes to Visvamitra "splendid indeed are the arrangements that the great-souled Janaka has made for his sacrifice ; far as the eye can view, lovely cottages to house the sages dot the country, each with its ring-fence of wains. Methinks the Brahmanas from the far corners of the land, masters of the Vedas and its mysteries, have graced the occasion by hundreds and by thousands. Point out to us some convenient spot wherein we too may encamp" And accordingly did Visvamitra pitch their quarters in a place well-watered, calm and removed from noise and bustle.

Janaka was at once informed of their arrival and in humble reverence advanced to welcome them. The Holy Satananda of spotless sanctity led the way, while the

other priests followed the Royal Chaplain with the materials of worship. High reverence and meet did they offer unto the honored guest, who deserved it so well ; Visvamitra accepted it with a pleased heart and enquired of the king his health and of the progress of his sacrificial rite. Janaka rendered proper reply to his holy guest and failed not to assure himself of their welfare and their pleasant journey thither. He then turned to Visvamitra and said to him with joined palms. " May it please your Reverence and your holy brethren to honor me by occupying these seats"; which they did accordingly ; and after them Satananda, the other priests, the King and his ministers.

Having seen to it that all were comfortably seated, Janaka turned to Visvamitra and said. " This day, verily, have the gods been pleased to crown the preparations I have made for this sacrifice. To-day it is that I have realised the object of my holy toil in that I have set my eyes on you. Thrice blessed am I and honored above compare in as much as your Reverence has deigned to grace my sacrificial ground with your saintly presence and not less these ascetics of pure vows. Twelve days more—so say the wise ones—and you will see the Gods come down here to accept their shares of the offerings."

He paused and resumed, his face lit up with the joy within. " Hail to thee ? These youths, who are they ? God-like in their might ; of lordly gait even as the proud monarch of the forests or the majestic elephant or the tiger or the bull ; with large and lustrous eyes, like unto the rosy petals of the blown lotus combining in themselves the graces of the boy and the youth. Lo ! how they shine in their martial attire, bow in hand, the sword by their sides and the well-filled quivers peeping from behind. More like those heavenly Twins, the ideals of divine grace and beauty, the Aswins. Are these the Gods

themselves, come down of their sweet will to this dull Earth of ours, from their bright home on high ? How chances is it they have deigned to come all the way here on foot ! What seek they ? Whom are they here for ? The Twin Lords of the Day and the Night grace not the sky more than these princes this fortunate land. Face, features, gestures, gait, speech, the keenest eye cannot distinguish the one from the other. These warlike youths, whose sons are they ? These lords of men, why have they trod this wild path and dreadful ? May I know the truth that lies behind this, the visit of these fair-haired boys to my place."

And to him thus inquiring, did Visvamitra relate the visit of the royal sons of Dasaratha to Siddhasrama, the utter destruction of the Rakshasas at their hands, their stay at Visala on the way, the release of Ahalya from her dreadful fate, their meeting with the holy Gautama, and last, their eager desire to have a sight of the rare bow in his keeping, that led them to fair Mithila. Thus did he recount to the wondering Janaka the details of their remarkable journey and paused.

CHAPTER 51.

Visvamitra's visit to Vasishtha.

The words of Visvamitra filled Satananda, the eldest son of Gautama, with supreme delight—the sainted One who shone in the splendour born of long austerities. And great was the wonder with which he gazed at Rama, the boy-hero. He turned his eyes from the princely pair seated there in calm repose and addressed himself to the happy Visvamitra.

" Mighty One ! you have my thanks unbounded for kindly enabling my mother, of great renown, to bless herself with a sight of Sri Rama, for which long years of penances

and rites severe have prepared her. I have no doubt she offered due hospitality and meet worship to him whom all beings are blessed in honouring. It is a pity that she had nothing better to entertain him with, but the meagre products of the wild woods. I am sure Rama was made acquainted with the details of the unfortunate incident of yore in her life, that cruel Fate had in store for her. Verily, she has been restored to her lord and my sire, in that she has been cleansed of the foul stain that clung to her, thanks to the all-purifying presence of Sri Rama. I hope Rama here was fitly entertained by my sire and rendered back unto him due respect, with a calm heart and restrained self."

To whom replied Visvamitra, waxing eloquent over his favourite theme. "Nothing was slack, nothing went amiss ; it was my care to see that everything ran smooth and to a happy conclusion. Set your heart at rest, holy sir, for, Renuka was not more happily reconciled to Jamadagni, than was Ahalya to your sainted sire."

Satananda drank in the words of the sage with delighted ears and addressing himself to Rama, spoke as follows. "Hail to thee, thou Lord of men, and glad welcome. Fortunate it was that you have been allowed to accompany the holy Visvamitra of invincible might. Wondrous deeds has he wrought through his unparalleled Tapas. Matchless he stands in glory and no mean place holds he among the Brahmanishis. Know him as the last and surest refuge from every ill. Blessed you are in all the worlds, for, it has been given to no other to be watched over and protected by the saintly One who stands conspicuously alone by his stern austerities. Listen to me for a space, while I try to give you a faint idea of the wondrous deeds and might of this scion of the royal race of Kausika.

The Four-faced One had a son by name Kusa . and from him were descended father and son, Kusanabha, Gadhi

and Visvamitra who stands now before us. He was a king, great and powerful and ruled over his vast empire well and wisely for thousands of years. Steadfast was he in virtue and master of all the knowledge of his time ; his heart was ever wedded to the well-being of the countless millions entrusted to his keeping.

One day he took it into his head to make a tour through his vast dominions and the lands around. At the head of his numerous and well-disciplined army, did he pass through flourishing kingdoms and stately towns, across noble rivers and over high mountains, halting at every holy spot and hermitage, until he came to where the saintly Vasishtha abode.

A lovely spot it was, a heaven on earth, Brahma's own celestial seat. Tall trees and stately spread their grateful shade around, under which grazed or played or reposed many a beast of the forest, tame and wild ; meek-eyed fawns ranged about, their natural shyness overcome by the sweet and peaceful ways of the calm-souled ascetics. Siddhas and Charanas, Devas and Danavas, Gandharvas and Kinnaras, frequented the lovely spot, while Brahmarishis, Devarishis and saintly Brahmanas made it their home. There were to be seen bands of hermits of fiery lustre who had perfected themselves in holy Tapas. Some fed on water, some on air, some lived on withered leaves, some on roots and fruits ; but all of restrained senses, of sweet manners. Valakhilyas, too, thronged the place, intent on mystic recitation and devout sacrifices , while Vaikhanasas made the holy retreat holier still

Such was the hermitage of Vasishtha and such the sight that met the wondering eyes of the mighty king.

CHAPTER 52.-

Vasishtha welcomes Visvamitra.

Right glad was Visvamitra to see the best and foremost of saints, the holy Vasishtha and low bent he at his feet. "Ever welcome" exclaimed Vasishtha and desired him to take his seat. Cheerfully did he entertain his royal guest with roots and fruits and such woodland fare: which accepting, the pleased monarch made respectful enquiries. All was well with himself, his sacred fires, his disciples and his hermitage. And to the royal Visvamitra who sat at his ease, did Vasishtha address himself—the son of Brahma and the foremost of those that lead a life of holy vows and devout meditation.

"How fares it with thee, mighty lord of men? Dost thou rule over thy subjects as becomes a worthy descendant of noble kings and win their hearts with the flawless discharge of thy high duties? Seest thou that thy servants want for nothing? Do they yield ready and willing obedience unto thy commands? Do thy enemies acknowledge thy might and pay thee low homage? Is it all well with thy armies, thy revenues, thy friends, thy kith and kin?"

"Yea, Holy One, fortune favours me still" modestly replied the royal guest. The hours chased one another with winged feet, as these two, the king and the sage, discoursed on themes high and holy, with mutual delight ever increasing. The discourse came to an end all too-soon, when the reverend host with a pleased smile addressed his noble guest, "Great is my desire to offer unto thy troops and no less unto thy valiant self, the rites of hospitality, as befits thy rank and might. I pray thee to accept it of my hands and deny me not. For, art thou not my liege, my favoured guest, whom I cannot honor enough?

“ That have you already done” replied Visvamitra “ by your gracious speech, by the offer of such articles as your holy hermitage affords, sweet fruits, roots of the wild and crystal water to wash and drink ; and last, but not the least, thy presence, all-purifying. Honored have I been above my deserts, by the world-honored One. And now, give me kind leave to touch thy feet and depart. May I ever find favour in thy sight and a warm place in thy heart ? ”

But the noble Vasishtha pressed him again and again to stay and he could not ungraciously refuse. “ I obey ” replied the proud son of Gadhi “ I bow to thy sweet pleasure, thou Holy One ”.

Then did Vasishtha, the sage of matchless might, call unto him the spotted calf Nandini and say, “ Haste thee hither, my sweet one and heed well, Sabala, to what I say. I have it at heart to entertain this pious king and his troops and *that* right royally. Do thou see to it that they have princely fare and sumptuous. None should desire in vain for anything ; be it meat or drink, food or viands of every kind and variety imaginable; sweet, bitter, or acrid, to taste, to sip, to quaff or to eat. No small store, mind thee, but rich abundance and over-flowing; for, man nor god cannot crave for or dream of anything, but thou can’st, in a moment, shower it upon him. This thou wilt do for my sake ; and again I say unto thee, tarry not ”.

CHAPTER 53.

“Give me the Cow of Plenty.”

So directed by Vasishtha, Sabala, the Cow of Plenty, supplied every one with what his heart might desire, juice of the sugarcane, honey, fried rice, Maireya and such like costly liquors, delicious drinks, various kinds of cakes, heaps of hot

cooked rice, curious varieties of deliciously prepared food, soups, Dadhikulyas (rice prepared with milk) and countless plates of silver heaped up with various sweet extracts and pies of six different tastes.

The well-fed troops of Visvamitra, were, if possible, rendered more happy, and cheerful than before—such was the grand repast to which they were treated by Vasishtha. On his part, the royal sage, Visvamitra, was mightily pleased with the magnificent entertainment he received at the hands of his saintly host ; and he spoke to him out of a full heart, that well appreciated the kind attentions shown to himself, his women, his officers, his counsellors, his priests, the Brahmanas in his suite and his numerous retainers.

"Reverend Sir, right royally have I been entertained by you, the World-honored. Allow me, then, learned One, to prefer an humble request of mine. I shall consider myself highly obliged if you will give unto me this Sabala of yours and receive a hundred thousand cows in exchange. She is a gem, the best of her kind; and I need not say that with me is her lawful place ; for, know you not that the best and the rarest products of the Earth belong to the king, of right ? So give her, prithee, unto me".

To whom, his saintly host and righteous gave calm reply, "Hundreds of thousands of kine, nay, hundreds of crores of them, nor heaps of silver, shall ever induce me to part with my Sabala. Mighty monarch! She *cannot* be removed from my side; as dear fair to the high-souled man, Sabala is eternally and inseparably wedded unto me. My offerings unto the Gods and the Fathers, to the sacred Fires, morning and evening, to the various orders of Beings, visible and invisible, my oblations during the full and the new moons, my sacrifices, nay, my duly sustenance, depend solely upon her ; the milk that she gives purifies the heart

and the intellect and goes to nourish the vital currents; it endows me with perfect health and serenity and enables me to master the various arts and sciences. Doubt it not; she is all in all to me; my sole source of delight is she and perennial. These and many other reasons besides, stand in the way of my not being able to comply with your request”.

This emphatic refusal of Vasishta heightened but all the more the over-mastering desire of Visvamitra to possess himself anyhow of the coveted Sabala. He waxed eloquent in his offers. “Fourteen thousands of lordly elephants with golden chains, necklets and goads; eight hundred chariots of gold, with sweet-chiming golden bells, drawn by four milk-white steeds; a thousand and ten high-bred steeds from thef ar-famed regions of Kambhoja and Bahlika, that trace their pedigree right up to Uchchaisravas and the Gandharvas; one crore of kine, young, healthy and of diverse colours; wilt thou take this and give Sabala unto me? Thou will not? Then, ask of me besides, gold and gems as much as will satisfy thy great heart, even to the utmost and it is thine. Wilt give me Sabala now?”

But Vasishtha spake stern and said “Oh, thou of matchless wisdom! know once for all that Sabala shall never be thine. She is my gems; she is my wealth ; she is everything unto me; she is my very life; the new and the full moon offerings, grand sacrifices with untold gifts of wealth, nay every rite lay or religions, all these is she unto me; for, it is to her that these owe their very existence. Doubtest thou? Nay, thou hast my last word upon it—never shall I give unto thee this Granter of Desires. Everything thou offeredest me nor can dream of, can I have of her by a simple wish of mine; why, then, I must be insane to wish to part with her to thee.”

CHAPTER 54.

Sabala fights.

When Visvamitra found that Vasishtha, would on no account part with the 'Cow of Plenty,' he began to drag her away by main force. Whereat, Sabala, sad at heart and burning with grief, said to herself, "What? Has the noble Vasishtha forsaken me quite? Has he delivered me over, sorrow-stricken and afflicted, to the king's attendants to be dragged away? Never have I offended the lofty-minded sage, in thought, in word or indeed; why, then, does he cast me off, innocent, faithful and dear to him—and he the soul of virtue and justice?"

So she thought, while deep sighs shook her frame. All at once she made up her mind and shaking off the menial crowd that laid violent hands on her, as if they were but feathers light, she rushed past them, swifter than wind, on to where her master stood. With sobs and moans, grievous to hear, did she appeal to the saintly Vasishtha; and in tones loud and majestic as of rolling clouds or war-drums huge, spake she forth her tale of woe. "Child of Brahma? Lord! the king's servants drag me away by main force from your side. Is it that you have cast me off?"

To which the saintly One gave sad reply. Convulsed with grief, she stood before him and his own heart was wrung with pity to see her suffering so, dearer to him than a sister. "Know you not, Sabala, that I can never bear to have you away from me even in thought? Know you not that you can never give me any offence, nay, the slightest? I deliver you over into the hands of strangers! Nay, it is but yon king that takes you from me, by main force, against my will. A mighty monarch is he and immeasurably proud of his might. I am no match for him, for, is he not a great warrior, a mighty king? He traces his line through ances-

tors famed for strength of arm and valor of heart ; and above all, he is lord and master of wide lands—with untold millions to do his behests. Lo ! yonder stands his dread hosts, embattled in fierce array and countless as the sands of the ocean—chariots, horses, elephants and infantry,—beneath proud banners and pennons gay. Now, see you not that he is mightier than I ?”

Sabala heard him out and in all humility rendered answer to the wise One. “Lord ! It needs no saying from me that a warrior’s strength and might is as nought before the radiant energy of a Brahmana ; for, it is not of the earth ; divine in its nature, it has its source from on high. Again I say unto you, a Kshatrya is as chaff before a strong gale, when he pits himself against a Brahmana. Know I not your potent might, that it is utterly immeasurable, inconceivable ? Visvamitra is a warrior bold, it is true but, what is he before your awful might, before your all-consuming energy. O thou of radiant glory ! speak the word and I, in whom is stored up that terrible Brahmic energy of thine, will, before the eye has time to wink, reduce to ashes yonder vast host that feeds his overweening pride.”

“ Be it so. Bring forth, of thy might, armies that shall scatter to the winds the proud hosts of the king.”

No sooner did his words go forth, than Sabala uttered an awful “Humph”; and close upon it came into view vast hordes of Paplavas, hundreds and thousands of them, and spread dire ruin and confusion among the ranks of the enemy, right before the eyes of the wondering Visvamitra.

But, soon he recovered himself ; and roused to fury at the sight of his splendid army thus cruelly wrecked, he rushed forth upon them in his chariot of gold and with bloodshot eyes of anger, rained arrows and weapons, great and small, upon the opposing Paplavas, till they were laid low, every one of them.

Sabala, observing the sad plight of her warrior brood, brought forth in her wrath, fierce Sakas, Yavanas and Kambhojas. Of superhuman strength and valour and fair as the lovely petals of the bright Champaka, they marched forth in dread array against the foe, while their long swords and gold attire gave back a thousandfold the rays of the sun. They hid the earth from view, so numerous were they; and whereverver they fell, the all consuming fire was not crueler. Which perceiving, Visvamitra, in sore straits, hurled upon them his weapons of magical might, until the Yavanas, the Kambhojas, the Paplavas and the Sakas were scattered to the winds.

CHAPTER 55.

Vasishtha and Visvamitra.

Hard pressed by the Astras of Visvamitra, the warriors brought into existence by the magic might of Sabala stood in sore dismay. Whereat Vasishtha turned to the Cow of Plenty and cried, "O thou of infinite potency to create ! bring forth fresh troops through thy Yogic power inherent". At his word Sabala gave forth a mighty grunt and lo ! there stood before her, hosts of Kambhojas radiant as the sun ; from her udders sprang forth Paplavas,—ready armed for fray. Yavanas from her organs of generation ; Sakas from her organs of excretion , and from every pore on her body rushed forth countless hordes of Mlechchas, Haritas, Kiratas ; and soon, nought remained of the vast armies of Visvamitra, horses, nor chariots, elephants nor soldiers.

The sight stung to fury the hundred sons of the ruler of men and they fell, in a body, upon the solitary Vasishtha, that master of dread spells. "Hum" cried he and there they lay, a heap of ashes, before one can say lo ! They who stood forth a moment ago in the pride of power and the prime o

strength, girt by countless bands of warriors, cavalry and chariots. Thus perished the fated sons of the monarch.

And he, their father, a prey to impotent rage, gnawing shame and sore grief of heart. The mighty ocean stilled of its mountain waves by some potent word of power ; a serpent huge, of her deadly fangs bereft ; the resplendent Orb of Day in the merciless grasp of the eclipse, her blinding lustre suddenly quenched ; or a swift coursing bird shorn of its wings, was not more miserable than Visvamitra, the king, his pride broken, his energy lost and overwhelming grief heavy at his heart, his dear sons and proud army done to destruction before his very eyes and *he* powerless to lift a finger in their defence. But, he resolved to live, if it be to wreak vengeance dire upon his proud foe ; and placing a son of his on the throne, he bade him rule well and wisely, laying to his heart the traditions of his famed ancestors and took his way to the dark slopes of the Himalayas, where Kinnaras fair and Uragas ever love to dwell. By dread austerities and stern vows he sought to propitiate Mahadeva. Long years passed over his head, till one happy day the Lord of Kailasa stood before him on his mighty Bull, gracious of mood and most bountiful.

"These penances severe, why, Lord of men ? Speak thou thy wish and thou shalt have it ; for I am the Giver of Boons and thou hast found favour with me. Speak and hesitate not." Visvamitra bowed himself low in humble reverence before the Radiant Presence and prayed in accents meek. "If it be true that my Lord is pleased with his servant, I crave to be initiated in the science of war in all its branches, down to the minutest details. Reveal unto me its innermost secrets, its potent spells unknown to others. Grant Thou unto me perfect mastery over the magic weapons of the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, and the Rakshasas, sages mighty and heroes brave, in the worlds

above or the regions below. All these and more through Thy illimitable grace be mine, whatever I desire." "So be it" assented Mahadeva and vanished from view. And the proud Visvamitra of matchless valour, happy in the possession of mighty weapons human and divine, grew prouder yet scarce could he contain his swelling energy that grew and grew even as the billowy deep under the stimulating rays of the full moon. The feeble Vasishtha was to him already dead and destroyed or so he thought.

Straight upon the calm solitudes of the peaceful hermitage did he advance and let loose the fires of his wrathful vengeance in weapons of dire might, until a lonely waste was all that remained of the once lovely spot. Its saintly dwellers fled away in affright when the irate king levelled his magic shafts at their calm retreat. Hundreds and thousands of them scattered themselves all over the land, glad to escape the general destruction ; and after them, their numerous disciples—nay, the very beasts of the forest and the fowls of the air followed them in hot haste. A moment ago it was a lovely scene of peace, innocence, gaiety, and calm meditation ; but now—a lonely waste, over which the silence of death hung black and oppressive.

But, Vasishtha, shaken at last out of his philosophical indifference, cried out time and oft, " Fear not, my friends ; him will I annihilate all to nothing, this proud son of Gadhi, even as the morning sun dispels the filmy dews of the night." Then that Master of magic potent, turned to the proud Visvamitra and hissed forth these dread words like winged flame. " Wretched fool ! that laid waste this fair hermitage of mine, the shelter and refuge of many an innocent thing, of many a noble sage, thy cup of iniquity is full and overflowing. Thy hour has come."

He spake and scarce unable to contain his rising wrath, held aloft his magic wand, terrible as the smokeless Fire of Dissolution or as the fearful Rod of Death.

CHAPTER 56.

Brahmana versus Kshatriya.

It required but a spark to kindle the smouldering ire of Visvamitra and madly did he rush at his saintly host. "Stay, stay, thou braggart ! Darest thou to beard the lion in his den and Visvamitra among his troops ? And hopest thou hence unscathed to flee ? ". And he hurled at him the flaming weapon of the God of Fire.

But, Vasishtha, now roused to a pitch of fury at this unwonted return of gratitude, raised aloft his Brahmana staff not unlike the Rod of Death and cried, "Vile wretch of a Kshatriya ! I flee not. Here do I stay to give you a chance to parade your strength, your might and your brand-new weapons. Son of Gadhi ! mark my words. Your haughty spirit shall I quell and not lightly ; and your supreme conceit in the magical weapons you have come by. Pah ! your warrior energy ! It is as the morning mist before the burning rays of the Brahmana might. Fie upon you ! you standing disgrace to thy noble ancestors ! you *will* show off your child's toys before me, will you ? Well, you shall have a taste of my Brahmana might, divine in its nature, mind you".

He spoke and lo ! the rushing Weapon of the Fire God, terrible to behold, was quenched out of existence, even as a stream of cold water puts out a blazing fire.

Speechless with rage and grief, Visvamitra sped against Vasishtha, that mighty Master of Spells, a continuous stream of magic weapons—the dread darts of Varuna, Rudra, Indra and Pasupati ; the Aishika, the Manava, the Mohana, the Gandharva, the Swapana, the Jrimbhana, the Madana, the Santapana, the Vilapana, the Soshana, Darana ; the invincible Vajra ; the noose of Brahma, of Yama and of Varuna ; the

Pinakastra, dear to Siva ; two bolts, the wet and the dry ; the Dandastra, the Paisachastra, and the Kraunchastra ; the Dharmachakra, Kalachakra Vishnuchakra ; Vayavyastra, Mathanastra, Hayasiras ; two Saktis ; Kankala, Musala, Vidyadharastras, Kalastra, Trisula, Kapala, Kankana. All these and many more did he send forth against the serene Vasishtha ; and indeed it was wonderful to behold, the saintly son of Brahma swallowing them one after another, with but his dread Rod.

Thereafter, when his newly stocked armoury of magic weapons was exhausted, did the royal Visvamitra hold aloft the terrible Brahmastra and hurl it at his invincible foe. The God of Fire and his Fellows, the divine sages, the Gandharvas, the Uragas, and nay, the three worlds, trembled in sore affright and confusion, when they beheld the terrible Brahmastra speeding on its course towards Vasishtha. But he, the sage of restrained self and stern vows, stirred not, nor lifted a finger to ward it off ; for, his mighty Brahmana Staff, charged with the immeasurable energy engendered of untold ages of meditation on the Supreme, absorbed it quite into itself and nought was left of it. Terrible to see was Vasishtha, the mighty One, when he drew into himself that most powerful of weapons ; and all creation stood in dismay thereat. Fearful to conceive was the supernatural brilliance of his form as the intaken energy poured itself out in flashing streams of blinding light, even as tiny sparks from a blazing fire. And his staff was enveloped in sheets of flame, like unto the smokeless Fire of Destruction or the Rod of Time.

Then, the sages on high bent over their clasped hands and prayed in tones of humble entreaty. "Dread Master of Enchantments ! incenseivable is thy might and invincible ; quench thou his all-consuming fire by thy supreme energy. Visvamitra, of mighty Tapas though, has

been humbled by thee, and no mistake. Be gracious unto us, thou Master of Magic Potent and give peace and rest unto the trembling worlds."

But, Visvamitra, sore stricken, sighed in impotent rage and baffled might, as if his heart would break. "Fie upon the puny warrior might! The Brahman energy, ah!, that is something to pray for and toil after. What! all my hard-won arms of terrible power baffled by that single staff in the hand of a Brahmana! Now that I have convincing proof enough, I shall uproot love and anger from my heart and with a calm self and serene, set myself upon the path that leads to the coveted eminence of a Brahmana."

CHAPTER 57.

Trisanku.

Visvamitra, out of the great conceit that filled his heart, sought enmity with the all-powerful Vasishtha and fastened a quarrel upon him; and he was amply rewarded for his pains. The memory of his defeat was burnt into his heart in letters of fire and hot sighs broke from it, as fierce flames from the bowels of the earth.

He betook himself to the south and his wife along with him and there, in the dark solitudes of the forest, did he carry on a course of stern Tapas, wild roots and fruits his only food and his rebellious senses well under restraint. And to him were born sons of righteous lives and straight speech, Havishyanda, Madhushyanda, Dridhanetra and others.

A thousand years passed over his head and at the end of it, Brahma, the Grandsire of the Worlds, stood before him and in accents sweet and mild, addressed the royal ascetic, "Son of Gadhi! thy Tapas has won for thee the

bright regions of the Rajarshis : for, now thou holdest the proud rank of a Rajarshi." He spoke and went back to his glorious seat on high and the attendant Gods along with him.

But, Visvamitra hung his head in sore grief and shame : "A noble return" said he to himself in tones of bitter despondence, "for the dread austerities and stern discipline I passed through. A Rajarshi am I, is it ? So said the Great One and the Gods and the sages confirmed it. I have toiled hard and to no purpose." So, with an undaunted heart and never-flagging energy, did he resume his efforts.

It was about this time there ruled at Ayodhya, a king, by name Trisanku, of the royal line of Ikshwaku. A man of truthful speech was he and self-controlled to a degree : and to him there came a desire to sacrifice to the bright Gods and win a seat in the mansions of the Blessed : and that in the very body he had when on earth. He called unto him Vasishtha, the high-priest of the Ikshwakus and humbly submitted his prayer to him.

"Impossible," cried the Holy One, "not that I am unable to conduct such a rite ; nor that such a thing is impossible ; for, do not the Holy Scriptures say, 'He attains the bright Worlds of the Gods, and, that in his body of flesh ' ; but I have looked into the records of your past lives and see I there nothing to ensure the probability of success. Desist from the rash resolve, I lay my orders upon you."

Foiled in the dearest wish of his heart, Trisanku took his way to the south, even where the numerous sons of Vasishtha were engaged in holy Tapas. A glorious sight they presented to the king in their radiant forms of mighty energy latent. The royal petitioner approached them in humble guise, the far-famed sages and laid his proud head

at their holy feet : he stood up before them and bending low over his joined palms, addressed them in pitiful accents, albeit a sense of insulted majesty unconsciously stooped his haughty head. " I take my refuge in you, noble ones ; you are the last and the sole refuge of the helpless. The high-souled Vasishtha has refused me, though I prayed ever so humbly. All glory be unto you. Great is my longing that you perform for me a sacrifice which shall unable me to ascend to the bright Swarga in this present body of mine. Behold I lay my head at your feet in humble entreaty and pray you all, the sons of my Guru, to enable me to realise the desire of my heart. And not less you, holy Brahmanas ! whose whole life is one long prayer and meditation. Bless me out of your noble hearts and assist at this sacrifice on which rest my hopes here and hereafter. Sternly refused by Vasishtha, I see no haven of safety but in the sons of my reverend Master. For, know I not that to the Ikshwakus their high-priest is their God, their surest stay and support ? It has ever been a sacred truth that the high-priest, the Fountain of Power and Wisdom is the shield and the spear of the Kings. And after them, stand you, holy Brahmana as my guardian Angels."

CHAPTER 58. The Royal Chandala.

To which lowly request of the royal Trisanku the sons of Vasishtha gave quick reply, winged with wrath. " Evil-minded man ! rejected hast thou been by our Lord Vasishtha, who speaks true ; and darest thou seek any other, passing by so lightly the dread son of Brahma ? The royal Ikshwakus, every one of them, know no other master than their High-priest. And his word once gone forth, the Truth-speaker, they dare not say it nay. The sacrifice he has pronounced

impossible in your case, dare we dream of it? A boy thou art, nay, but a child, though many winters have passed over thy head and blind fortune has made thee king. Seek thou thy home, even as thou came. The Lord Vasishtha alone has the right and the might to conduct any sacrifice, be it to gain the bright spheres above or the dull globes below. And who are we to dare insult his majesty by offering to set about a thing he has once declared impossible?"

But, the king, nothing daunted by the words of winged flame from the lips of his master's sons, spoke in humbler accents still, "Denied have I been by my master Vasishtha and no better treatment have I received at the hands of his sons; what how remains for me but to seek another protector, since you would drive me to it? All good be yours, wealthy beyond count in your holy meditations."

The sons of Vasishtha could not believe their senses. What! a member of the house of Ikshwaku cutting himself ay the spiritual ties that bound him, strong as the bands Fate, to his High-priest, the Lord Vasishtha, the mind-
rn son of Brahma, eternally wedded unto the royal house, her and son! and seeking the feet of another, even in
ought! What madness thus to lay the axe at the root of his
ouse! How utterly black and horrible should be the
heart of such a monster! In a fit of uncontrollable fury, they cursed him in words of withering flame. "Wretch! Quit thou that form of Kshatriya and take thou the degraded shape of a Chandala". They spoke and entered their holy abodes, as if to avoid the foul sight of the traitor.

The rosy fingers of Morn drew aside with a deft touch the dark curtains around the bed of the sleeping world as Trisanku, the king of radiant presence, found himself transformed into a vile Chandala. Not a semblance of one, in heart or in nature, but the *very* thing itself. For, each

grade of society is based on the rigid and unswerving discharge of the duties eternally attached thereunto ; and once that a member fails in it, nay, in the slightest, he becomes what he has made himself, consciously and voluntarily. His bright robes flashing with gold and gems, were changed to the dirty black rags of the outcast. The stately form of golden hue, now took on a hideous tint, dark as guilt and more repulsive. His once shining locks, now a tangled mass of wool, short and coarse. Of for-bidding aspect, his shoulders were graced with garlands of flowers that erstwhile lay on the corpses in the crematorium. The ashes of the dead covered his limbs and took the place of the delicate-scented sandal paste and the rare perfumes. An unsightly strip of leather, lay on the broad and massive chest, where once gleamed the Sacred Thread of gold, the badge of the Twice-born. And curious ornaments of black iron but added to the horror of the degradation. His ministers and councillors fled away in affright from him, the outcast Chandala ; and the loyal citizens followed at their heels. But, he, the proud monarch a day before, wended his weary way all alone. The cruel talons of Shame and Anger dug at the root of his heart but Titan-like, undaunted yet he stood and unconquerable. Visvamitra was the man he approached ; Visvamitra, the deadliest foe of Vasishtha, who had said him nay, whose sons had launched their terrible curse upon him ; even Visvamitra of fiery will and terrible energy.

Visvamitra cast his eyes on the proud scion of the royal race of Ikshwaku, whose hopes here and hereafter were shattered to nothing by his mortal enemy Vasishtha and his sons. Grief-stricken pity filled his heart to see the Ruler of men approaching him in the despised guise of a Chandala ; and out of that great pity did the righteous sage of dazzling lustre address the Lord of Ayodhya, now no gentle sight. "Hail to thee ! and all good. What brings thee here ? The

son of a king thou, of invincible might, hast thou fallen on evil days? Ruler of the stately Ayodhya! How hast thou come to be cursed to become a Chandala."

To which kind enquiry of his brother monarch, did Trisanku, Chandala against his will, render meek reply. "Spurned have I been" cried he over his folded palms, "by my Guru Vasishtha and his sons. What I sought them for I have not got; but, what I never bargained for, what I could never deserve, nay, what I would flee away from, that, have I received at their hands and in no small measure. Strong is the desire of my heart to ascend to the homes of the Shining Ones, in this mortal frame of mine. Sacrifices innumerable have I performed, but I am no whit nearer the realization of my hopes. Nor have I given utterance to an untruth, nor will hereafter. So, I cannot, for a moment, believe that any breach of truth on my part has nullified the effects of my sacrifices. I am now in the coils of Adversity; but I swear to you on the honour of a Kshatriya that I speak the bare truth. Never have I failed in the regular and conscientious discharge of my daily duties—sacrifices to the Gods, to the Fathers, and to the various orders of Beings; just and wise government of my people; humble service to my spiritual guides and other high-souled Ones, meet and acceptable. Ever do I seek to walk in the straight and narrow path of Right and Duty: but my teachers look not with favour upon me when I prayed them to conduct for me a rite to gain me a seat among the Gods. Verily do I think that Fate has the last word in our affairs and free will and individual effort are but as light grains of dust before it. Fate rules supreme over everything. Fate is the sole and last Arbitrator of joy and sorrow, good and bad. It behoves you to stretch out to me the hand of help, a wretch whom the Wheel of Fortune has flung lower than the lowest and whose turn

he awaits with an eager heart. May your glory never grow less. Cruel Fate inexorable has pierced my shield, shattered my spear and beat me down to my very knees. I have reached the end of my resources ; I throw myself on your limitless compassion and pray to sit under the shadow of your might. No other Protector shall I seek, for Protector have I none. To your holy feet do I cling and will not quit them even though the mighty Vasishtha should pray it of me to go back unto him. Utmost confidence have I, nay, it is a certainty with me that you and you alone can, if you will, lightly set aside strong Fate and make it powerless."

CHAPTER 59.

Visvamitra Champions Trisanku.

Whereupon, unto the noble king, condemned by a frightful doom to drag out his miserable existence as a vile outcast, Visvamitra replied in words of liquid melody that welled from a heart overflowing with pity. "Welcome, proud member of a noble race ! you are not, my son, unknown to me as an exceedingly righteous king and pious. Fear not, noble lord ! for from this moment you sit under the shadow of my shield and my sword is at the breast of your enemies. I will lose no time in sending for such as can help me in this sacrifice of mine, wise sages and saintly ascetics. And one they are here, you will, with a heart relieved of care, be enabled to begin it. Born Chandala you are not . were it so, this curse, pronounced by your Guru, would be hard for the Self-born One to set aside. So, shall you in this body of thine ascend to the bright heavens, and all through the power of my Tapas. I see the gates of heaven open wide to welcome their honoured guest: methinks I see you take your proud seat among the Gods; for have you not

asked for and obtained refuge with Visvamitra, son of Gadhi, the Champion of the Weak and the Oppressed?"

He spake, the proud sage of matchless glory and directed his sons righteous and wise, to get everything ready towards the sacrifice. Next he sent for his disciples and said to them, "Speed ye far and near and invite hither the Wise Ones of the Earth, their pupils, their friends, as also the sacrificial priests and those who have drunk deep of the words of Wisdom. If any but breathe a word of dissent, nay, so much as dare slight me, saying, 'Lo! here is a Kshatriya has taken it upon himself to sacrifice for a Chandala, you will not omit to bring it to my ears.'

They heard and obeyed his behests. On the wings of speed they flew and brought him back word of what transpired. "Lord of dazzling lustre!" cried the students of the Sacred Lore, "the wise sages of the earth, everyone of them, have heard thy message and are even now on their way here, all except Mahodaya and the sons of Vasishtha. Nay, dread Lord, the latter had the matchless impudence to say in tones of concentrated wrath, 'Strange days are come over us and strange things happen. Wonder of wonders! A Kshatriya has the audacity to assume the sacred functions of a sacrificial priest and *that* for a degraded Chandala! Have the noble Brahmanas become so scarce that a warrior should pose himself as such? Have the Twice-born disappeared, from the bosom of the earth, that a Chandala should dare to allow a sacrifice to be conducted for his benefit? A nice pair this, a fighting priest, and the outcast sacrificer! A strange sight will it be to see the holy sages and the radiant Gods sit down in the hall, to partake of the offerings! And the high-souled Brahmanas, how do they hope to ascend to the mansions of the Shining Ones, defiled beyond hope by having partaken of food at the hands of the Chandala? And the

sages of the holy vows, how dare they have assisted at the celebration of such a sacrilegeous rite, though they have the mighty Visvamitra to back them'. Such were the words of wanton insult uttered by Mahodaya and the numerous sons of Vasishtha, their eyes flashing fire."

Visvamitra heard them and fierce flames shot out of his eyes ; while the burning wrath in his heart found vent in words of doom. " And so, the impious wretches dared to say this about me, pure and spotless, engaged in dread austerities. Well, they may decry me, for they know not that nothing can stand before the all-consuming energy of my Tapas, nay, not even the so-called sacrilege of sacrificing for a Chandala. Well, here is the reward for their pains. Nothing shall remain of them but a heap of ashes. Fell Time shall cast his noose over their necks and hale them even to the gates of the Lord of Death ; and that this very moment. Nay, more is yet to come ; for, my anger shall pursue them even beyond the portals of Life and Death. For lives seven hundred, shall they drag on a miserable existence, soul eaters of the decaying corpse and dogs' meat. Pitiless of heart, they shall go under the name of Mushtikas and shall range the worlds, uncouth of form, speech and habits. As for Mahodaya, who, in his mad folly reviled me, the stainless, he shall, of a truth, be a degraded Nishada. Ever intent upon murder and violence, with a heart knowing no shadow of pity, he shall, for ages untold, suffer a life of misery and my anger shall chain him thereto."

So spake Visvamitra, the sage of stern vows, while calm-souled ascetics heard him with well-concealed expressions of sorrow and disapproval.

CHAPTER 60.

The Triumph of Visvamitra.

Having thus annihilated, by the might of his Tapas, Mahodaya and the sons of Vasishtha, Visvamitra turned to the assembled sages and said "Behold this scion of the royal race of Ikshwaku, known to men as Trisanku. Firm are his feet on the path of Righteousness and he is a great Giver of gifts ; above all, he has sought refuge with me. For, great is his desire to ascend to the worlds of the Gods in his body of flesh. You and I will so conduct a sacrifice for him that he may go away from amongst us, his heart yearnings gratified to the full."

The sages heard him out and took council among themselves. "This our host, the sage Visvamitra, the proud descendant of the Kusikas, is a very Fountain of Wrath. We must do even as he says else he will verily consume us with his curses. Far be it from us, then, to do anything that might draw his lightning upon us. Now, let us lose no time in commencing the sacrifice, which shall, thanks to the immeasurable might of Visvamitra, raise Trisanku aloft to the seat of the Gods, even in his earthly body. Betake we each to our respective duties."

And so the long-delayed sacrifice commenced, under no very favourable auspices, Visvamitra assuming himself the responsible post of the Adhwaryu, while his brother sages went about their duties without a fault, without a hitch, as ordained by the Book of Rules.

Then, in due course, did Visvamitra of dread puissance, call upon the Shining Ones to come down to the sacrifice and receive their shares of the offerings—Once, twice, thrice. But, the Lords of Light came not, though invoked time and oft. "What sacrifice is this, in which a *Kshatriya*, all

unqualified, sacrifices for a wretch, cursed by the Lord Vasishtha to be a foul Chandala : and shall we, even respond to the unholy call and defile ourselves for all time, by partaking of the offerings therein ?"

A storm of wrath shook the proud frame of Visvamitra ; and raising aloft the sacrificial ladle, did he cry in a terrible voice, "Trisanku ! my son, let be this rite on which you rest your hopes. Behold what my hard-earned Tapas can do. I shall, out of my innate energy, raise you to the skies, even where the haughty Gods have their abode, and that in this very body you now wear. No easy task for others, see you. There yet remains to me unexpended some of the might which I have acquired by long austerities, stern and holy ; and by the force of *that*, ascend, Trisanku, to the bright homes of the Angels of Light in this very body of yours."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than the sages assembled beheld a wonderful sight, nay a miracle, and Trisanku rose aloft from this dull Earth right up towards the radiant worlds of the Celestials, in the dark and degraded form of the Chandala.

But, Indra, the Lord of the Immortals, saw him, the unworthy one, advancing to take his place among them ; and voicing the unspoken resolve of the Gods, " Back, back, Trisanku," cried he " sooner than you came. You have no place here among us. Fool that you are ! see you not the black curse of your Guru dragging you down ? Fall thou headlong upon the patient bosom of Mother Earth, who groans beneath the weight of your sin." And Trisanku, hurled head downwards from the High Heavens, cried out in heart-rending tones of agonised entreaty, " Save me, Oh save me, my Lord Visvamitra, my only saviour."

The cry pierced him to the heart and roused him to a pitch of ungovernable fury. " Stay where thou art ; stay,

I command thee " cried he. And Trisanku stood in mid-air as if petrified.

Then, seated as he was in the midst of his fellow-sages, did he, like another Brahma, proceed to evolve a new creation. "Lo ! my Trisanku shall be the Pole-star of my new system. Another constellation of the Seven Rishis (*Ursa Major*), shall revolve around him : and beyond these, another circle of lunar asterisms." He spoke ; and in the south, there rose a grand system of worlds, the counterpart of that in the north. But his rage would not stop there and he continued. "My new world, it shall have another Indra over it : but, stay, methinks it were better without one (the very name is hateful to me). Why, Trisanku, my son, shall be its Lord,—and shall outshine that wretch of an Indra who dared to stand against my will." And forthwith, he set about to fashion another creation of the various Celestial Hierarchies.

Then, mighty fear seized the hearts of the Gods, the Asuras, and the sages at this undreamt of and awful display of power, almost divine · and with humble entreaties and low, they approached the irate sage, at their wits' end almost, how to accomplish the hopeless task of charming his wounded pride with words. "Mighty One ! This king, your protege, is not entitled to a place among us. Our bright worlds are for such of the Twice-born as are unsullied and pure : whereas, Trisanku, holy as he is, lives under the inexorable curse of his Guru, the all-powerful Vasishtha. And who knows it better than you ?"

Now, Visvamitra's heart was glad and his anger pacified some-what . for, were not the proud Gods at his feet, who, a little while ago, had the temerity to brave his anger and would not come when called ? But, his iron will would not yield, nay, not so much as a hair-breadth. " Peace be unto you !" cried he, (and this was the only sign he gave of any reconciliation towards his haughty foes,) "my word has passed to Trisanku

the king here, that he *shall*, in this body of his ascend to your worlds ; and it shall never prove otherwise. Since you *will* not receive him of your own accord, I have no other god than make my word good anyhow, by methods not very pleasant to you. Where Trisanku now is, there shall be a world of the Gods : and the stars and constellations-created by me, as also the orders of Heavenly Powers, shall continue to exist, to the day of the Great Dissolution. May I hope that you will accord, out of your pleasure, your consent to this arrangement, to which perforce I am driven by dire necessity ?"

What could they do, the Gods, foiled by the terrible might of Visvamitra ? They made the best of a bad bargain and gave in with a good grace. "It shall be even as you desire. Your stars, your constellations and the various orders of Celestial Beings, shall endure for ever, even as the existing solar system, but outside the Vaisvanara path (the Zodiac). These shall ever revolve round the fortunate Trisanku, radiant as the Gods and as happy as they—but he shall hang head downwards, as a living reminder of the awful sacrilege of setting aside the words of the spiritual teacher. In other respects his fame shall illuminate all the worlds, as falls to the lot of no mortal."

"Be it so," Visvamitra gave glad assent, while the Gods and the sages assembled, lauded to the skies the righteous sage of superhuman power.

The sacrifice was completed ; (Visvamitra placed another person in Trisanku's stead ;—and *this time*, the Gods failed not to come down and partake of the offerings) ; the Shining Ones and the sages of high spiritual fervour departed to their respective abodes, well-pleased.

CHAPTER 61.

Ambarisha.

Visvamitra saw them depart, the holy sages and addressed himself to the dwellers of that forest. "The southern quarter where now we are is not favourable to our purpose ; let us proceed to the west and continue our Tapas there ; for, a mighty check has been placed upon us here. The forests of Pushkara will, I am sure, prove more congenial to our quest ; for, as a holy spot it has no equal." So he repaired to the groves of Pushkara and resumed his severe austerities, supporting himself solely upon fruits and roots.

It was about this time that Ambarisha, the ruler of Ayodhya, set about to perform a grand sacrificial rite, during which Indra made away with the consecrated horse. The high priest turned to the king and said. "Lost is the consecrated animal and all through your carelessness. Heedless acts such as these never fail to bring ruin on the head of the ruler who fails to protect his charge. But, the mistake can be repaired if you can bring back the animal or a man to take its place. Delay not, but see that you do it before the sacrifice is over."

With a heavy heart did Ambarisha seek far and wide and offered thousands of kine to any one who would give him a man to sacrifice. Towns and cities, hamlets and groves, forests and peaceful hermitages and distant lands, he omitted none. But vain was his quest, until at last he came to Bhrgutunda, where lived, in his calm retreat, R̄ichika, with his wife and sons. Him the royal sage approached, of boundless glory and reverence paid, proffered his request to the pleased Maharishi, radiant in the might of his Tapas. "Hail to thee, Holy One ! is it well with thee and thy peaceful round of religious duties ? Come

hither have I, to beg of you one of your sons for a sacrificial offering ; thousands of kine shall be thine if thou but fulfil my purpose and bring peace to my tortured heart. Far have I roamed and humbly sought for anyone who would consent to furnish me with a sacrificial victim, and my last hope rests in thee. Take whatever price thou wilt, but give me one of thy sons." And to him replied the sage of radiant presence, " Never shall I part with my first-born, no, not for any consideration."

Then spoke to the king the mother of the boys. " My lord of the line of Bhrigu has passed his word that the eldest son of his loins shall never be sold to another ; but, ruler of countless millions ! dearer unto me is my youngest, Sunaka so named. Him shall I never consent to give away, for, know you not that a father's hopes are ever centered in his eldest boy, while the youngest born twines himself round the heart of her that gave him birth ? Now, do you blame me for standing between death and him whom I have best ?"

Sunassepha, the mid-most of the three, listened to the words of his parents and with a firm heart said to the king, " He that came unto the world before me is dear unto my saintly father ; he who saw the light after me is no less so unto my mother. Sold they shall not be, my parents would have it so. Then, it goes without saying that, he who remains is welcome to be taken by thee. Lead me, O, king ! where thou wilt."

Sunassepha, of matchless wisdom having thus sold himself unto the king, Ambarisha, his heart dancing with joy, loaded the sage with rich gifts and costly, silver and gold, gems and precious stones of countless value and hundreds of thousands of cattle. He took respectfully leave of the saintly pair and placing the hard-won Sunassepha

on his royal car, wended his way back to where stands the lordly Ayodhya.

CHAPTER 62.

VISVAMITRA SAVES SUNASSEPHA.

It was the height of noon when the monarch unyoked his weary steeds to take a short rest on the banks of lake Pushkara.

But, Sunassepha, wandering aimlessly over the place with a heavy heart, chanced to come upon Visvamitra, his mother's brother, engaged with many a hermit in stern austerities. Faint with toil and thirst, he ran up with a woeful countenance to where sat Visvamitra and falling upon his breast, cried to him in pitious accents.

"Father have I none, nor fondling mother nor kith nor kin. Thou art my refuge and stay and thee do I call upon in the name of sweet compassion to save me from this dreadful fate. Thou art ever the champion of the oppressed : thou art ever a shield between the wretched and their misery. Find thou a way by which the king shall achieve his object and myself spend long years of holy austerities on this earth and win the abode of the Gods at the end. Protect me, for protector have I none, out of thy tender heart and sweet pity ; be thou a father unto me and chase away this horrible danger that hangs over my head".

Visvamitra, of boundless might, calmed the wild grief of the boy and infused hope into his despairing heart. Turning to his sons, "Now is the time come" said he "for you to show that a father brings forth from his loins sons like unto himself, to secure him good on earth and lead him to the bright regions on high. This boy whom you see here, the

son of a hermit, clasps my feet in humble appeal for protection. Save his life and bring joy and peace unto his broken heart. Everyone of you has kept the observances, not one of you that has ever swerved from the path of Right and Duty. Take you his place at the sacrifice of Ambarisha and may the bright God of Fire find in you a sweet offering. Sunasepha shall be saved from death ; the sacrifice shall come to a happy end : the gods shall depart well pleased ; and my word to the orphan-boy shall have been well kept."

Loud laughed they in scorn, his sons, Madhusyanda and the rest ; and spoke back unto their father out of a proud heart and haughty spirit. "A fine father it is, that puts a stranger's brat before his own flesh and blood. The very idea is repulsive to us, even as dog's meat for dinner."

Fire flashed from the eyes of the angry father and in a terrible voice he cried out. "Dare ye speak to me such words as these, heartless, blood-curdling; shameless. Dare ye set my commands at defiance and outrage Duty and Justice. Wanderers over the earth shall ye be, everyone, for a thousand years, your only food the dog's meat you so abhorred, even as the sons of my hated rival Vasishtha." So cursed he in mighty wrath his sons rebellious ; and turning himself to the despairing Sunasepha, he performed certain protective rites to ensure his safety at the dreadful moment. "Fair son, when to the sacrificial stake of Vishnu bound, a helpless victim you stand, fail not to call upon the bright God of Fire in that hour of heed. Two spells I give you, of potent might, with which you shall win the grace of Indra and Vishnu. When the bands of holy grass are tight around you, the red sandal paste on your limbs and the blood red garland round your doomed neck, chant you these hymns of unspeakable power in the sacrificial hall of the royal Ambarisha and you will come by no harm."

Sunassepha humbly received the potent charms and with a joyful heart hastened to his royal master and said, "Mighty king, we have tarried too long on the way. Proceed we to the place of sacrifice and delay not to take upon yourself the initiatory vow."

Soon they were at Ayodhya; and Ambarisha, now all joy, caused Sunassepha, the voluntary victim, to be bound to the sacrificial stake; the withes of the sacred Kusa encircled his graceful limbs; and his garments of fiery red but enhanced the horror of the scene. The holy priests directed him therein and saw that nothing went amiss. The supreme moment came that was to decide his fate; when, lo! there rung forth, from the helpless victim bound, words of wondrous might, praising high the great Indra and his greater brother Vishnu; and it was even as his wise master had taught him. The thousand-eyed Lord was surprised and pleased; for, the mysterious words of praise were known to no sons of earth. Long years of happy life were the meed of him that won the heart of the Lord of the Angels. Ambarisha too came in for his share of the hard-won grace of the mighty One, in that the high merit of the holy rite was his, a thousandfold increased thereby.

All the while, Visvamitra, the Heaven-sent protector of the orphan-boy, went on with his stern Tapas at the holy Pushkara and mortal years twice five hundred did he count.

CHAPTER 63.

Visvamitra and the Siren.

It was over, the long and severe Tapas, and unto Visvamitra, fresh from his bath, came the Immortals, every one of them, desirous that he should reap the fruits of his long and arduous labours. Then spake the Four faced One, his

divine glory brightening the bright space around, "Hail to thee!" so rang the accents sweet, "A Rishi art thou and right well dost thou deserve the rank thy holy Tapas has gained for thee"; and with that he went back to his bright world. But Visvamitra's heart was heavy yet and he resumed his untiring labours.

The long years passed over his patient head and one fine day an Apsaras, Menaka by name, came to the rolling waters of Pushkara to lave her shapely limbs in its cool depths. Her he saw, the ascetic of stern vows, blazing in his energy; she was a dream of beauty, even as the lambent lightning playing through dark clouds surcharged with rain. The bright god of Love, that mischievous boy, was at hand and from his magic bow shot forth his straightest shaft and mightiest, right at the heart of the sage of iron will; and, as if in response, there burst forth, all unknown to himself, the heart-cry of burning passion, fierce, consuming and not to be denied.

"Welcome, thrice welcome, thou fairest maid in heaven or earth! Dwell thou with me and be my love. Faint am I with passion and of my wits reft; let me but look into the dark depths of thine eyes and lose myself in a dream of bliss."

"As my lord willeth" replied the bashful one; and dwelt with him in that peaceful retreat, a fatal check to his mighty Tapas.

Bright summers five and five flew over the heads of the happy pair, in a sweet dream of blissful love; and Visvamitra woke up from it one woeful day, pitiful shame in his looks and dull grief gnawing at his heart. All at once a light broke upon his brain and he cried out in anguish, "Fool that I was, not to see that this was a snare set to entrap my unwary feet, by those relentless foes of mine, the

Devas. What !! twice five years by mortal count and to my blinded eyes it seemed but a day and a night ! I have to thank myself and my blind passion for this cursed obstacle that has nipped my hopes in the bud."

Burning sighs broke from his noble heart and cruel repentance dug its brazen claws therein. Looking up, he saw her before him, the unwilling partner of his ruin, the golden-hued Menaka, trembling in affright, her flower-soft hands raised to him in mute appeal for pardon. The sight filled his heart with sweet pity with gentle words and sad, he sent away the witching siren, all too glad to escape so lightly.

Then he set his face to the north and took his weary way to the great mountains, even where the bright Kausiki gladdens the earth ; and having made a mighty resolve to win or die in the attempt, he engaged himself in a long course of stern observances.

A thousand years went by and the bright gods quaked in awe to see him there, grim and stern, his heart still set on his mighty quest. Swift coursed they and the holy sages along with them, to the Heavens of Brahma. "Let this terrible man be pacified" they implored "with the gift of the high rank of a Maharshi."

" Be it so ", rejoined the great Father and he took himself to where sat that Tapas incarnate. " Fair son," so came forth the accents sweet, " All hail ! a Maharshi thou ! Well pleased am I with thy intense Tapas and willingly do I confer on thee the highest rank among the sages of the earth."

But, Visvamitra, his calm heart in no way ruffled with grief or joy, returned answer meet to the Omnipotent One. " Then am I " cried he, with hands of joined prayer the while, " beyond all doubt, the proud controller of the rebellious senses, in as much my lord has deigned to speak

of me as having won, by holy deeds all mine own, the high pre-eminence of a *Maharshi*."

"Not yet" broke in Brahma "not yet thine, the undisputed sway over the fleeting senses. Long lies the road before thee and steep, ere thou attain that dizzy eminence. Toil on, brave one". And forthwith he went back to his seat of bliss.

Visvamitra saw them depart, the gods hard to please, and began anew, with unflagging zeal, his Tapas sterner far and fiercer. With arms raised above his head on high, stood he there without a prop, the viewless air his only food. The burning heat of summer played on his devoted head, while fierce fires, four in number, blazed around his wasted frame. The dark clouds, heavy-charged, poured on his de'enceless head their ceaseless stream of arrows straight. The chill months, day and night, found him there, deep immersed in freezing waters ; and so during those long years of weary toil.

Mighty fear took relentless hold of Indra and his celestial host, as they viewed with awe and wonder the royal sage pursuing his end with grim tenacity and a dauntless heart. Then summoned Indra unto his presence, Rambha, the fairest of the daughters of Heaven and the wildest ; and in council full, unfolded unto her a plan, their ends to achieve and foil the determined efforts of the dread Aspirer.

CHAPTER 64.

Visvamitra and Rambha.

"Rambha ! you are to render the celestials a great service ; beguile Visvamitra and inspire desire and delusion of heart in him."

So said Indra of mighty intellect ; and Rambha, joining her palms, replied to him shyly, " Lord of the Shining Ones ! this great sage Visvamitra is a terrible man to approach ; of a certainty he will let loose his wrath upon me, frightful to bear. That is why I am afraid to go ; and you will take pity on my poor self and excuse me from the task."

Indra calmed the trembling one, who raised her hands and eyes to him in sweet appeal. " Fear not, Rambha ; perform my behests and you shall come to no harm. I will stay with you ; and the koil with heart-ravishing notes, the spring in the pride of his bloom and luxuriance and not the least, the God of Love himself shall be your assistants in your difficult task. Assume a dazzling form in which all your charms shall be displayed and lure away his heart from his austerities."

And following his directions, Rambha, the loveliest of the lovely Apsarasas, excelled herself, if possible and with radiant smiles and alluring glances, set about to shake the equanimity of the fiery ascetic.

The sweet strains of the Koil fell on his ears and raising his eyes, he saw, with a pleased heart, the witching Siren. The delicious music of her voice, the no less sweet notes of the Koil, and her all-compelling beauty roused strange feelings in his heart, inexpressible joy, but with a dash of suspicion in it. He was not long in finding out that it was a ruse of Indra to shake his high resolve (Indra, his relentless enemy, was at his old dirty tricks again). His anger blazed forth and a terrible curse shot out from his lips.

" Thou wicked wench ! seekest thou to draw me away from my pious meditations, who have set his heart on subduing desire and hate ? Twice five thousand winters shall thou drag a miserable existence, a block of stone, a living

corpse. And so shalt thou remain, a fitting victim of my just wrath, until a Brahmana of high spiritual might and radiant presence shall raise thee from the depths of misery."

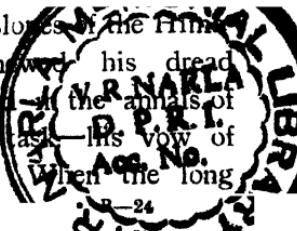
So spake the great sage and paused; for his heart was sad and sore and he had not yet learned to hold in check his rising anger. But the dire curse came upon Rambha then and there and turned her divine beauty into shapeless stone. Her affrighted helpers, Love and Spring, vanished into thin air at the first blast of the tempestuous wrath.

His terrible outburst of temper robbed him of his hard-earned spiritual power and he ate his heart away at having failed to curb his passions. He raised his hands aloft and uttered a mighty vow. "Never again shall I give way unto this accursed wrath; never again shall word of mine pass these lips; nay, I will hold in my breath, even if it be for hundreds and thousands of years. I will trample down my rebellious senses and dry up this withered body until I attain through the force of my austerities, the coveted rank of a Brahmana. I will remain without any sustenance and with suppressed breath for endless years and my life-currents shall not waste away when I am absorbed in Tapas." With an undaunted spirit, did he set himself to carry out this terrible vow, unheard of before among men, and entered upon his dreadful task.

CHAPTER 65.

Visvamitra, the Brahmarsi.

Thereafter the great sage left the slopes of the Himalaya for its western parts and reviewed his dread Tapas. Of a truth, it was unparalleled in the annals of men and seemed almost an impossible task—his vow of absolute silence for a thousand years. When the long



period drew to a close, Visvamitra had become as impervious to external sensations as any block of wood or stone. Countless were the obstacles thrown in his path by the ever watchful gods, but Anger failed to find a way into his heart. Terrible was the vow he made and right manfully did he keep it.

The thousand years are past and the man of iron will sits down to break his long fast ; when, Indra comes unto him as a Brahmana and asks to be fed. At once the sage of mighty vows offers him the ready food with all reverence . and true to his vow of silence, he speaks not a word to the Brahmana, who ate what Visvamitra was about to sit down to after long years of fasting.

Another thousand years did he carry on his Tapas, more terrible, if possible, in that he breathed not. His life breaths restrained within his frame, thick clouds of smoke began to issue from the crown of his head and lighted up the three worlds, stupefying the beings therein. Distracted through the overpowering energy of the sage, deprived of their natural brilliance by his awful Tapas and rendered dull and heavy, Gods and Asuras, Gandharvas Pannagas and Rakshasas sought the presence of the Lotus-born One and lifted unto him hands of despair and woe-begone countenances.

“ We are at our wit's end, having exhausted all our arts to beguile the terrible Visvamitra or to rouse him to anger ; but, alas ! our anxious labors do but render the progress of his Tapas the more rapid. Search as we would, we could not find the least flaw in him , nay, not the slightest, not the subtlest. Deny him the desire of his heart and be will, through the worlds, send dire ruin and destroy every object of creation therein The quarters, behold ! are dull and dark · the ocean waves toss their rebellious crests on high ; the mighty hills are rent in twain ; the earth trembles in affright and the wind blows in sullen gusts. Lord on high !

our eyes see not beyond the present ; men turn scoffers of the Almighty and of His Law of Right. The worlds stand in dull despair, relieved by fits of anxious care. The bright sun is but a dark cloud before the fiery radiance of the sage. Hasten thou to soften the heart of Visvamitra, ere he sets his mind upon reducing the whole creation to nothing through the fire of his Tapas. Grant him anything he asks, be it the empire of the Gods on high."

Brahma placed himself at the head of the low-spirited Gods and proceeding to where the great-souled Visvamitra was engaged in his stern Tapas, addressed him in accents sweet and soothing. "Hail ! Brahmarsi ! is it all well with thee ? Thy austere Tapas has won our grace and has placed thee in the forefront of the twice-born ones. Take thou from me the happy boon of long life, which the assembled Gods are only too glad to confirm. All good be thine, thou holy One ! Free thou art, to turn thy steps wherever it may list thee."

The words of the Self-born One and the attendant gods fell sweet on the hungry ears of the sage of terrible vows ; and with a glad heart and joined palms, did he hasten to reply, "If granted I am the proud status of a Brahmana and length of years beyond mortals, let Omkara, Vashat-kara and the Vedas be fruitful in me even as they are among the regenerate ones. Let Vasishtha, the mind-born son of Brahma, recognise me as such, for he stands peerless among those who are proficient in the Vedas that regulate the lives of the Brahmanas and Kshatrias. Let the bright Immortals here give their assent thereunto. Accomplish this, the dearest wish of my heart and go where you like."

Thereat, the Shining Ones approached Vasishtha and besought the Brahmarsi to make friends with his brother sage.

"Be it even so" replied he, and acknowledged Visvamitra as his equal. "A Brahmarshi art thou and no doubt of it. ~~Everything~~ shalt thou achieve as promised by the divine Ones." And the delighted Gods went back unto their abodes.

Thereupon, Visvamitra, having achieved the goal of his long and severe efforts and raised himself to the rank of a Brahmana, rendered affectionate reverence unto Vasishtha of mighty spells. And ever afterwards, he wandered over the Earth, engaged in holy Tapas.

It was thus, Rama dear, that the high-souled One won the rank of a Brahmana, impossible to attain. And here he stands, the best and foremost of sages. In him you see Tapas incarnate. Ever wedded is he unto Right. He is the highest ideal of human valour and prowess" So spake Satananda, of radiant presence, while Janaka and the princely youths drank in the tale with eager ears.

Then the monarch turned to the mighty descendant of Kusika and spoke overjoined palms of reverence. "High shines my star and thrice blessed am I, in that thy august self has deigned to be present at this my sacrifice along with the royal youths of the line of Ikshwaku. Best of saints ! Envyed of men ! all pure is my soul and free of stain, for I have set my eyes on thee to-day ; nay, I stand enriched by many an undreamt grace of heart and mind thereby. Fortunate am I and Rama too, of noble heart, in that it was given us to listen to the holy recital of thy high ascetic deeds. Now is it that we have some idea, though a faint one, of thy rare excellences and great worth. Thy Tapas is something inconceivable, thy might and thy graces of the head and the heart. Why, an easier task were it to seek to fathom the thure and greatness of the Self born One or of the Lord frig e Mountain Queen. Never can I hear enough of thy

marvellous deeds ; but, lo ! the envious sun hangs low in the West and calls us to the evening prayers. May I pray thee to honour me with thy sacred presence here, the earliest hour to-morrow ? All glory be thine, thou best of ascetics! I hope I have thy leave to withdraw."

To which the holy One returned meet answer, praising high the noble king, and gladly gave him leave to retire. Thereupon, Janaka and his kin reverently went round the World-honoured One, Satyana leading them on. Visvamitra then left for his quarters, while the assembled sages rose to do him glad reverence ; and Rama and his brother followed in his wake.

CHAPTER 66.

The Coming of Sita.

Brightly smiled the morn, when, his daily worship over, Janaka requested the presence of Visvamitra and his princely disciples. Having offered unto them due welcome and respect, even as the Holy Books lay it down, he addressed himself to Visvamitra and said " Your Reverence ! what behest of thine shall I hasten to obey ? For, ever thine humble servant am I, to dispose of me as thou wilt."

And to him the eloquent sage made meek reply. "These royal youths, of wide-spread fame, are the bright sons of Dasaratha, Lord of Ayodhya ; they desire to have a sight of the bow that is in thy keeping. Place it before them and let them depart hence, the desire of their hearts gratified."

" Be pleased, wise One !" rejoined Janaka, " to listen to me, while I narrate to you how that wonderful bow came to stay with me. My ancestor, Devarata, sixth in descent from Nimi, the founder of our line, was given it to keep in safe custody.

Long ages ago, Daksha, the Patriarch, celebrated a grand sacrifice, in the course of which the assembled gods reserved not a portion of the offerings for the absent Mahadeva. Whereupon, the Wielder of the Trident waxed mighty wroth. He strode up to them with blazing eyes and cried, "This terrible bow of mine shall I never lay down, till every proud head before me rolls in the dust." The affrighted ones clasped his feet with humble prayers and with sweet words and repentant, chased away his awful ire. And the Moon-crested One, mollified therewith, handed over to them his redoubtable bow ; and they again entrusted it to the safe keeping of my ancestor.

Once upon a time, I was ploughing a piece of ground to celebrate a sacrifice thereon, when, lo ! there rose from the furrow, this gem of a girl, whom I took unto my heart. The curious circumstances under which she came to me gave her the name Sita and she grew apace, the Daughter of the Earth, life of my life, my other self.

Her I have made the prize of Valor, to be won of the strongest arm, and the boldest heart. The best and proudest of the Earth sought her hand in marriage, the marvellous child, that came not of human womb ; but one and all of them I sent away with the reply "None but the brave deserve the fair." Then the suitors all came to Mithila to try their chance and win the prize : but none of them, not one, succeeded in bending the redoubtable bow. Why, they failed to raise it from where it lay! Assured beyond doubt of their puny might, I dismissed them in no happy frame of mind. And, in the rage that filled their hearts, they joined their forces and besieged the fair Mithila, for ten long months and two. They knew that my forces were few and my coffers low ; and the shame of defeat goaded them to work grievous ruin upon my lovely capital. At the end of the year my resources were exhausted and blank

despair stared me in the face. But, I roused myself and won over the mighty Gods to grant me powerful armies : with which, I put to rout that evil crew, their ministers and their forces and scattered them to the winds.

And that famous bow, the apple of discord, blazing in its energy, am I but too glad to show unto these royal youths. If it so come about that Rama should string it, then will I, all willing, bestow on that son of Dasaratha, the daughter of my heart, Sita, who comes not of mortal parents.

CHAPTER 67.

The Broken Bow.

"Well have you spoken" said Visvamitra "and now let Rama have a sight of the famous bow."

Janaka turned to his officers and said "Convey here the celestial bow and render it due worship, of sweet incense and fragrant wreaths."

"On our heads be it" replied they and proceeding to the Royal palace, bore thence the bow divine. Full five hundred men, strong and stalwart, laboured hard to drag thither the black case of solid iron, eight-wheeled, in whose depths lay the mighty bow. The ministers placed it before their king and said "Here is the famous bow that the princes of the Earth hold in such high honour and that you wanted these princes to see."

Thereupon, Janaka respectfully addressed himself to the sage and the princely pair "Here have I placed before you the peerless bow, held in high worship by the monarchs of my house. The best and bravest of the Earth have failed to essay the impossible task of stringing it. The very Gods, Asuras, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kin-

nara., Uragas, nay, none of them, succeeded in using it, or stringing it, or raising it or handling it or even moving it from where it lay ; why, then, speak of puny mortals ? I have obeyed thy behests and have caused it to be brought here ; the princes are welcome to examine it."

Visvamitra heard him out and turned himself to Raghava. "Rama, dear, behold the bow."

At his word, Rama advanced to where it lay in its iron case, heaved up the lid, cast his eyes over it and said. "Master mine, have I your permission to handle the bow ? May be I would try to hit it or to bend it."

"Be it so" exclaimed the king and the sage

Then Sri Rama grasped the weapon by the middle and held it aloft as if it were a feather, while the assembled thousand gazed in hushed amaze. Anon, he strung it and drew it even to his ear, when lo ! the mighty bow snapped in twain right at the middle. Awful was the crash, as when the bolts of heaven are loosened on the earth by the mighty arm of their Master. The earthquaked to her very foundations, as when mighty mountains are rent in twain. Every one there was struck senseless by the tremendous shock, and none save the king the great sage and the princes could stand it.

When the spectators struggled back to their senses, Janaka, his heart relieved of a load of anxiety, approached Visvamitra and said to him in deep respect, "Witnessed have I to-day the might and valour of the worthy son of Dasaratha, wonderful, inconceivable, and undreamt of by me. And Sita, the child of my heart, will now be the happy wife of Rama and shed a brighter glory on the royal House of Janaka. Fortunate am I, in that I have kept my word that my daughter shall be the bride of the strongest arm and the bravest heart. and her do I give, dearer to

me than life itself, in marriage to Rama. With thy permission, let ministers of mine hasten to Ayodhya on fleet cars, to entreat the royal Dasaratha to grace my humble abode. They shall acquaint him with the happy news of the prize that his valiant son has won here, my peerless daughter. Let them also tell him that his darling sons are safe in my capital and happy under the mighty protection of Visvamitra."

So spake Janaka, most eloquent ; and the holy One signifying his assent thereto, the king despatched his trusted ministers to Ayodhya with precise orders to inform Dasaratha of what transpired at Mithila and request the favour of his presence there.

CHAPTER 68.

Dasaratha invited to Mithila.

Janaka's messengers spent three days on the road and with tired steeds, reached the lordly Ayodhya on the fourth.

Approaching the royal palace, they spake unto the wardens, " Haste ye and inform your lord and master that the envys of Janaka await his pleasure."

Dasaratha was informed of this at once and back they conveyed his commands to the messengers, " Ye are welcome to enter the royal palace, glorious in its magnificence."

They did so and soon stood in the presence of the Lord of Kosala, the aged Dasaratha, like unto the Angels of Light. With folded palms and restrained selves, the messengers humbly addressed the king in sweet words and calm. " Our master Janaka, the Ruler of Mithila, makes anxious enquiries through us again and again, in sweet and friendly terms, of thy well-being and peace of heart. Is it well with thee and with thy kinsmen? Is thy heart

ever engaged in the welfare of thy subjects ? Do the household Fires receive due worship at thy hands ? Thy priests and teachers, is it all well with them ? Does the current of their lives flow on smoothly and are they ever intent upon the search for Truth and upon the proper discharge of the duties of their high office ? Are thy people happy and contented as ever ? Next, with the permission of the great Viswamitra, he ventures to place before thee this request. 'It is not unknown to thee that I have instituted a trial of valour and skill among the various princes of the Earth and mighty warriors ; my daughter Sita, of divine beauty, is the prize of him who wins over the heads of the competitors. Great kings and famous warriors sought her hand and essayed the test I have set for them , but they were as nothing before thy valiant son who chanced to come here in the wake of the sage Viswamitra. Thy god-like boy distanced them unspeakably and carried away the prize of valour from among the midst of countless champions, older in years, renowned kings of the Earth and veterans worn with fight and grown grey in war In a vast conourse of the assembled multitudes of the Earth, princes and peasants, warriors and citizens, saints and sages, thy son, Sri Rama, of divine presence, broke in twain the wonderful bow entrusted to me by the Lord Mahadeva And so I should, as promised, give my daughter Sita in marriage to him as the prize of Valour. I entreat thy consent to my request and pray thee to enable me keep my word Deign thou to bless my humble abode with thy presence along with thy saintly priests and teachers. Tarry not, for thou shouldst, of a truth, behold thy lordly sons even now. It behoves thee to gladden a friend's heart and I doubt not that thou wilt give inexpressible pleasure to thy dear sons.' Thus does our lord and master, King Janaka of Mithila, speak to thee, in accents sweet and wise. Viswamitra sanctions his request and graciously thinks

with him.' They delivered themselves thus and paused, restrained by the lordly presence of the ruler of Ayodhya.

Dasaratha heard the message of his friend and brother king ; it sank deep into his heart and gladdened it beyond words. He turned himself to his spiritual guides, Vasishtha and Vamadeva and to his other councillors and said, "Kausalya's Delight and my heart's joy, resides at present at the capital of the Videhas, led thereunto by the mighty Visvamitra, who extends over them his envied protection. Janaka, the great-souled One, has had an opportunity of acquainting himself in person with the might and prowess of Rama ; and now he desires to give his daughter in marriage unto Raghava. If his proposal seems good and fitting in your eyes, (and Janaka is not unknown to you as a royal sage), we should make haste to proceed to his capital, for it becomes us not to delay."

The sages assembled and the ministers, whose hearts were ever turned towards the interest of their master, expressed their joyful assent and approval. Then, Dasaratha gave it out to his ministers that he intended starting the next day. Meanwhile, the envoys of Janaka were invited to pass the night there and with right royal welcome and cheerful talk, the hours passed away.

CHAPTER 69.

Janaka and Dasaratha.

The next morning Dasaratha repaired to the council-chamber where he his kinsmen and priests awaited his presence. He called unto him Sumantra the Faithful and said "Let those in charge of the Royal Treasury start to day in advance and take with them large stores of gold and gems. The armies of our kingdom shall be ready

to march as soon as I give word, elephant, horse, foot and, chariot ; the conveyances relays and baggage-vans shall company them. Kindly request the holy sages Vasishtha, Vamadeva, Jabali, Kasyapa, and Markandeya the long-lived, to honour me by going in advance ; and have my chariot ready as soon as you can. Janaka's envoys are hurrying us and we have already delayed too long".

It was done, and in no time were they on the road, the sages in advance, the king next, and the army following behind. They marched by easy stages and on the fifth day sighted the realms of Janaka, who, duly informed of their approach, welcomed them right royally.

Soon he met the aged monarch and his heart rejoiced thereat. "Had your majesty a pleasant journey hither and safe ?" inquired he affectionately of his royal guest. "Honoured am I beyond words by your gracious visit to my humble place. Soon shall your heart rejoice to see the laurels your noble boy has won from many an older rival. And may I hope that the holy One there, even Vasishtha, has had a pleasant journey and the countless Brahmanas that have blessed my fortunate country by coming along with him. Verily do I seem to behold again the Ruler of the Immortals, Indra, girt by his band of Shining Ones. Sure am I that my dark days are over and my race stands high in the esteem of the worlds, in that I have been fortunate to secure an alliance with the high-souled Raghус, that mighty line of warriors. The morning Sun rises on the last day of my sacrificial rite and at its close I wish the wedding to be celebrated. The sages approve of it and I add my own request if it would be of any use."

To which, the aged Dasaratha replied in apt and skilful words (and he was no novice at that). "Friend of my heart !" said he, with a meaning glance at the sages around "have I heard right that the receiver of a gift

awaits the pleasure and the convenience of the giver ? You are to us the ideal of all virtues and we are ever glad to abide by your directions."

Janaka of Videha was struck with amaze at this reply of the saintly Dasaratha of straight speech, so thoroughly consonant as it was with righteousness and so highly redounding to his praise. They parted for the night and it was a pleasant time for the sages, who enjoyed unfeigned delight in the company of their brothers in wisdom, old friends and mates.

While, to the aged Dasaratha, it was the happiest day of his life. He could never gaze enough at his dear boys and his eyes were never off their lovely faces for a moment. What with the joy at being restored to his loved ones and what with the princely and hearty welcome of Janaka, the night wore away all too soon.

On his part, Janaka brought the sacrificial rite to a happy conclusion. Great was the glory of his spirit, for he was the wisest of his age and his eye saw into the Heart of things ; and in the sweet company of his daughters did the winged Hours pass in swift flight, in peace of heart and joyful anticipation.

CHAPTER 70.

The Race of the Sun.

The next morning, Janaka, having finished his daily round of religious observances, turned to his chaplain Sata-nanda, even as he sat in the midst of the sages, and said, " It is not unknown to you that Kusadhvaja, my younger brother, of great energy, resides in the blessed Sankasya ; magnificent, even as the Pushpaka, the aerial car, it is

situated on the banks of Ikshumati, whose furthest limits extend unto the sharp stakes let into the bed of the rapid river. Him do I desire to see, for he is the protector of my sacrifice ; and he should, of a truth, share this joy with me."

He spoke and soon there stood before him messengers, quick of grasp, skilful of speech and fleet of foot ; and at the command of the king, they were away, on swift horses, to bring the royal Kusadhvaja ; even so do the messengers of Indra haste for the Lord Vishnu. They were at Sankasya in no time and communicated unto its ruler the pleasure of his royal brother. He lost no time in complying with it and very soon had the pleasure of touching the feet of the godlike Janaka and his high priest Satananda. Janaka directed him to take his seat ; then sent for the prime minister, Sudaman, and said to him, " Seek thou audience of the Ruler of Ayodhya, and request his presence here with his sons and ministers."

Sudaman bowed low to his master and proceeded straight to the royal quarters of Dasaratha, to whom he respectfully conveyed the message of his lord. " Monarch of Ayodhya ! my master would know if it would please you to go over to his residence, with your sons, priests, chaplain and others."

" We follow you " replied Dasaratha and very soon he was at the royal palace of Janaka, accompanied by his kinsmen, the holy sages and his countless retinue. " Your Majesty !" said he " the holy Vasishtha here is the patron saint of the line of Ikshvaku ; he is our spokesman on every important occasion and you know it. With the permission of Visvamitra and the other sages here, he will now proclaim our royal lineage to all who may list."

He spoke and ceased ; and Vasishtha, turning to Janaka and the assembled kings, spoke thus. " From the Unmanifested One issued Brahma ; and from the Four-faced One,

eternal, ancient and unchanging, was born Marichi ; Marichi begat Kasyapa ; Kasyapa begat Vivaswan ; Vivaswan begat Manu, known as the Vaivaswata, the first Lord of Men ; Manu begat Ikshvaku, the first king of Ayodhya ; Ikshvaku begat Kukshi ; Kukshi begat Vikukshi ; Vikukshi begat Bana ; Bana begat Anaranya ; Anaranya begat Prithu ; Prithu begat Trisanku ; Trisanku begat Dundhumara ; Dundhumara begat Yuvanaswa ; Yuvanaswa begat Mandhata ; Mandhata begat Susandhi ; Susandhi begat Dhruvasandhi and Prasenajit ; Dhruvasandhi begat Bharata ; Bharata begat Asita.

And him did his foes, the Haihayas, the Talajanghas and the Sasabindus, confront in battle ; his forces defeated and dispersed, the weak and spiritless Asita fled from his kingdom, and took refuge in the solitary depths of Bhrigu Prasravana and with him his ministers. Two wives had he, big with child at that time. One of them bore a bitter hatred towards the other and managed to poison her food. At that time, Chyavana, of the line of Bhrigu, a sage of mighty powers, lived thereabouts ; and him did one of the queens wait upon to be blessed with a fair boy. Kalindi (as she was called) the fair-eyed, (it was she who was poisoned by her rival) approached the Holy One and prayed to have a son born unto her. "In thy womb" replied he "there lies a son of immeasurable strength, great lustre and unfathomable energy.. But, poison, terrible in its effects, permeates his frame. Grieve not, noble lady ! for he will come to no mishap through that." She bowed and retired ; and unto her, devoted to her lord and heavy of heart at his misfortune, there was born, through the grace of Chyavana, a son, who came out of the womb even with the poison upon him administered unto his mother by her rival. Hence the world knew him as Sagara.

Sagara begat Asamanjas ; Asamanjas begat Amsuman ; Amsuman begat Dilipa ; Dilipa begat Bhagiratha ;

Bhagiratha begat Kakutstha ; Kakutstha begat Raghu ; Raghu begat Pravridha, the Man-eater, otherwise known as Kalmashapada ; Pravridha begat Sankhana ; Sankhana begat Sudarsana ; Sudarsana begat Agnivarna ; Agnivarna begat Sighraga ; Sighraga begat Maru ; Maru begat Prasusruka ; Prasusruka begat Ambarisha ; Ambarisha begat Nahusha ; Nahusha begat Yayati ; Yayati begat Nabhagha ; Nabhagha begat Aja ; Aja begat Dasaratha ; Dasaratha begat Rama and his brother Lakshmana.

And on behalf of the brothers, the worthy descendants of Ikshvaku, whose royal race is characterised by spotless purity, devotion to virtue, valor and straight speech, even unto the utmost, I ask of you your daughters in marriage. Happy will be the alliance and approved of by all, since the parties are so highly worthy of each other.”

CHAPTER 71

The line of Janaka.

And to him thus speaking, replied Janaka, in all reverence, “Hail to thee ! great sage ! it behoves one who gives away his child in marriage to proclaim his ancestry, if he come of a high and pure race. So, do me the favor to listen to me while I go through the line o’ my forefathers of happy memory.

There lived, of yore, a king, by name Nimi, a pattern of everything good and holy. The first and best of men, he won for himself immortal renown in all the worlds by his mighty deeds. Mithi was his son and he gave his name unto Mithila, of which he was the founder. He was the first who bore the name of Janaka ; and after him Udayavasu, Nandivardhana, Suketu, Devarata, Brihadratha, Mahavira, Sudhriti of great fortitude and prowess, Dhrishtaketu,

Haryaśva, Maru, Praṭīndhaka, Kīrtirāṭha, Dēvamīḍha, Vibudha, Mahīḍhraka, Kīrtirāṭha, Mahāroma, Swarṇaroma, and Hrisvaroma ruled in succession, father and son.

And to the last, of noble soul, who knew better than many others the Mysteries of the Great Law, were born two sons, myself and next to me, the valiant Kuṣadhwaja.

After a long and happy reign, my father placed me in his seat and sought the quiet solitudes of the forest, committing to my charge the kingdom and my brother. And when my father departed for the bright abodes of the Blessed, I ruled over the land, following in the path of Justice trod by my ancestors of old, and with a brother's fond love cherished Kuṣadhwaja, the apple of my eye.

Sometime after, Sudhanva, the powerful ruler of Sankāsyā, besieged Mithilā and sent me this insulting message, "Fail not to send me the bow of Śiva that thou hast in thy keeping and thy lotus-eyed daughter Sītā along with it". Of course I could not put up with such an ungracious demand ; and in consequence, went forth to meet him in battle and laid him low. And to Kuṣadhwaja, whose valour gained me the day, I made over the kingdom of Sudhanva. I am the first born of my father and he comes next to me. Verily shall I give my daughters in marriage unto your sons of mighty renown, Sītā of godlike beauty to Rāma, who bore her off as the prize of valour; and Ürmilā, her sister, to Lakshmana. Doubt me not ; you have my hand and word upon it, once, twice and thrice. It is with a glad heart that I keep my plighted troth; it is a pleasure to me and an honor to give my girls into your house. So, lose no time in going through the preliminary rites of marriage—Samāvartana and Nāndī Srāddhas. The constellation Magha rules over this day ; and on the third from this, shalt we perform the marriage under Uttara Phalguni. For, I shall, of a truth, give my girls in marriage to your sons Rāma and Lakshmana.

CHAPTER 72

THE GODĀNA

THEN answered him Viśvāmitra, while Vasishtha signified his assent thereto; "The royal houses of Ikshwâku and Viḍêha, inconceivable is their glory and immeasurable. Search as you may, you come not across any that stand beside these. Râma and Lakshmana, Sîtâ and Ûrmilâ stand beautifully matched, in beauty of form and righteousness of heart. But one more word I beseech you. Kuṣadhwaja here, your worthy brother, is the father of two maidens of peerless beauty ; and them I would even ask of you in marriage unto the great-souled princes, Bharata and Saṭrughna. Sons of the royal Daśaratha, the beautiful youths, of god-like prowess, yield not the palm to the great Deities themselves that rule the spheres. Grant my request, and knit in bonds indissoluble the royal houses of Ikshwâku and Janaka."

This proposal of the sage of holy vows, fell honey-sweet on the ears of the Lord of Mîhilâ ; and doubly so, in that they were warmly supported by Vasishtha ; and he hastened to reply in all reverence.

"Thrice blessed indeed is my house, inasmuch as your holy selves are pleased to pronounce the alliance a well-matched one. Hail ! saintly ones ! Be it so ; let Bharata and Saṭrughna take the daughters of Kuṣadhwaja to wife. A beautiful sight it would be to see the four maidens wedded to the four royal sons of Daśaratha on the same day. The wise astrologers hold that the most auspicious day for marriage is that on which the moon is in conjunction with the asterism Uttara Phalguni ; for, Bhaga, the Lord of Generation, is ruler thereof,"

He stood up and approaching the holy pair, resumed, "Your humble pupil am I, to whom you have deigned to show high favor. May you be pleased to grace these excellent seats. Daśaratha lords these wide domains of mine and he grants me no less lordship over Ayôdhyâ. Hesitate not to exercise your authority here and do what you will with your own."

Then replied unto him the Lord of Ayôdhyâ "You and your worthy brother here, are famed over the earth for your manifold graces of heart and mind. Right royally have you entertained the sages and the numerous kings here. All good be yours. Give me leave to retire to my quarters, for I have to perform the preliminary Srâddhas."

And with the permission of Janaka, Daśaratha repaired unto his palace, and Viśvâmitra and Vasishthâ along with him. The Srâddhas were duly conducted and the next morning, the king set about to perform the Gift of Kîne. Hundreds of thousands did he give away to pious Brâhmaṇas, to secure the welfare of his sons. A hundred thousand cows, full-yielding, he gave away in the name of each one of his sons,—their horns plated with gold, each with its calf and milking vessel of bronze. And in honor of that glorious occasion of the Gift of Kîne, did he make the virtuous Brâhmaṇas royal presents of untold wealth. The rites over, the aged Monarch sat there in the midst of his four sons and looked as grand and glorious as the Self-born One, surrounded by the Guardians of the Worlds on high.

CHAPTER 73

THE WEDDING

THAT selfsame day did Yudhâjît, son of the Kêkaya king and uncle to Bharata on his mother's side, reach Mithilâ. Daśaratha welcomed him warmly ; and after mutual enquiries of welfare, did the visitor address the Lord of Kôsala. "The Ruler of Kêkaya makes anxious inquiries after your well-being and desires me to tell you that those in whose welfare you are interested, enjoy peace and happiness. His heart yearns for a sight of my sister's boy and I am here to take him back. They told me at Ayôdhyâ, that you had come over here with your sons to celebrate their marriage ; and all eager to see my nephew, did I hasten here on the wings of speed."

A welcome guest was he to Daśaratha, who entertained the worthy prince right royally. A happy night they passed ; and next morning Daśaratha finished his religious observances and followed the sages on to the sacrificial grounds. At the auspicious moment, Vijaya, Râma and his brothers, having completed the preliminary rites, came to the place in the wake of Vasishtha and the other sages of holy vows and sat by their royal sire.

Then rose up Vasishtha and spoke to Janaka. "Daśaratha, the Lord of Ayôdhyâ and his sons have come here ready for the consummation of the marriage, and await the pleasure of the Giver. Eternal blessings crown the heads of him that gives and him that takes. Perform this marriage and act up to your traditions."

At which words of the holy Vasishtha, Janaka, broad of heart and profound in his knowledge of Righteousness, cried out "Who stands warden at my gate and yet

awaits my orders to inform me of the arrival of my royal guests ? This kingdom is yours to command and curious is your hesitation to make yourself at home in it. My daughters, behold them seated near the altar, like lambent tongues of flame ; they have gone through the preliminary rites and I but await your arrival. Why not my royal brother proceed straight hither, but tarries ? ”

Dasaratha accepted the kind invitation and hastened to enter the hall and the princes and the sages along with him.

Janaka then turned to Vasishtha and prayed, “ Holy one ! Thou and thy saintly brethren here, conduct the marriage rites of Râma, the Worlds’ Delight.”

“ So be it ” replied the sage, and proceeding to the altar along with Viśvâmîtra and Satânanda, laid out the fire-place therein and decorated it with sweet perfumes and bright flowers. Fresh shoots peeped out from many a vessel of gold, from many a branching vase, from many a jewelled bowl, ranged upon it in neat procession, while countless censers wafted sweet perfumes over the hall. Shells, spoons, ladles, salvers, ready prepared to welcome the honored guest, fried corn and colored rice unbroken in gemmed goblets, stood there in magnificent array. With solemn rites they spread the sacred grass thereon and lighted the holy fire, while Vasishtha made offerings to the Radiant God. Janaka then led forward Sîtâ gaily attired for the occasion and placed her before the Fire, in front of Râma, and spoke these words of solemn import.

“ Sîtâ here, my daughter, shares with thee the duties of life. Accept her from me in sign of holy wedlock. May all good be thine.

A faithful wife she will prove to thee, my noble girl, and will ever be with thee, even as thy own shadow.’

He paused and poured over Râma’s hands the consecrated water. Shouts of applause and approval from sages

and gods shook the hall and rang along the welkin ; celestial music played on high and flowers of heavenly fragrance rained on the happy couple.

Sítâ thus given in marriage with due rites, Janaka next turned to Lakshmaṇa and with a joyful heart exclaimed, “ Come unto me, Lakshmaṇa, and receive from me my daughter Úrmilâ, whom I bestow upon you. Be quick about it and all good be yours.”

Bharata’s turn came next and to him said Janaka, “ Noble scion of the race of Raghu! Take thou Mândavî unto thee for wife” ; and last came Saṭrughna, to whom Janaka made over Śrutakîrtî with the words “ Join ye your hands in holy bands of matrimony. Every one of you is blessed with all desirable graces of body and mind and have kept your observances ; and it is but meet that you take upon yourselves the duties of a householder’s life.”

Whereupon, the four royal youths clasped the hands of the four maidens, directed thereunto by the holy Vasishtha. The princes then went round the Sacred Fire, the altar, Janaka and the sages assembled ; and the after-marriage rites were duly gone through as enjoined by the Holy Books. And no sooner did the bridal pairs join hands than the delighted gods showered upon their happy heads the flowers of heaven. Music gay and martial, blended with the sweet strains of the golden-throated Gandharvas, while the lovely Apsarasas danced in joyous throng thereto. Such was the wonderful sight witnessed on the wedding day of those illustrious descendants of Raghu. And with the joyful notes still in their ears, did the valiant youths pace the Sacred Fires around, once, twice and thrice and lead their happy brides homeward ; while, girt by his kinsfolk, did Janaka follow near, fondly gazing.

CHAPTER 74

RÂMA OF THE AXE

WHEN the shades of Night melted away before the golden shafts of the Orb of Day, Viśvâmitra took kind leave of the kings and departed for his distant home in the north, leaving behind him his mighty blessings, that hovered around the princes even as ministering angels. And close upon that came the departure of king Daśaratha for his capital, to which his brother-king gave reluctant leave.

Loth to part, Janaka followed him a long way ; and right royal was the dowry he bestowed on his girls. Herds of kine past count ; rare and costly carpets ; cloths of lovely texture and priceless value ; untold wealth in gold and gems, coral and pearl, slaves and servants, horses and elephants, chariots and troops, magnificently attired and gaily caparisoned; these and many other gifts evidenced his loving heart and royal munificence. It was with much ado that Daśaratha could persuade the happy king to turn back to his capital.

Well, it was over, the painful parting ; and the Ruler of Ayôdhyâ, set his face towards his capital and journeyed thither by easy stages, in the sweet company of his noble sons and the saintly hermits.

And him thus proceeding, there met the frightful cries of birds, ill-omened and harsh ; while the beasts of the earth passed from right to left, signs of good, strangely contradicting the former. His heart in a quiver with fatherly anxiety and his senses all in a whirl, Daśaratha turned questioning eyes of fear to Vasishtha and cried,

“ Lo ! these signs ! Hoarse are the cries of the birds at large, and bode no good. The beasts of the forest pass

from right to left and that presages safety. I feel a dire sinking of the heart and a mist rises before my eyes. What may it be, your Reverence?"

And to him the sage returned sweet answer, "The birds warn us of the near approach of some fearful danger, while the beasts allay it. Let not this trouble thy royal heart."

And upon them thus conversing, there rushed a mighty wind at which the solid earth trembled in affright, and the giant trees of the forest strewed the ground with their shattered limbs. A pall of darkness swept across the bright luminary ; the quarters of the earth were confused, North and South, East and West and could scarce be discerned. Next, a shower of ashes rained down and reft them of what little reason they had. Alone, Vasishtha and the other sages, Daśaratha and his sons, appeared to be aware of what was taking place around them.

And in that fearful darkness in which the armies of the king were dimly visible even as so many statues of ashes, they saw a terrible Being approach, with massive coils of matted hair crowning his lofty head. Râma of the Axe was he, the son of Jamadagnî, of the royal race of Bhrigu,—even the dread One who laid low, time and oft, the proudest heads of the earth. Strong and unassailable even as the mighty Kailâsa, unapproachable even as the Fire of Dissolution, blazed forth his lustre, from which the eyes of ordinary men shrank away blinded. On his lofty shoulders rested the terrible Axe and a huge bow ready strung ; his hand grasped a mighty dart, even as the Lord Mahâdêva when he went forth against the Demons of the Three Cities.

Great was the anxiety that filled the heart of Vasishtha and the other sages of pure vows and strict observances ; and they spake to one another, "Is it possible that the cruel

fate of his sire still rankles in his heart and he has once again lifted his terrible axe against the royal race on earth ? Dire was the vengeance he took and ample ; he put away his anger and with it his desire for vengeance. It behoves him not to lay his axe once again at the root of the Solar Race ".

They hastened to offer him respect due and sought to pacify the fiery spirit with sweet words of welcome. He of the Axe accepted it of the sages ; and as if heeding them not, haughtily turned towards Râma the son of Dasaratha and cried out.

CHAPTER 75

RÂMA AND RÂMA

“**R**ÂMA ! thou son of Daśaratha, Râma, the voice of fame speaks in no measured tones of thy marvellous might. Thy breaking of the bow of Mahâdeva at Janaka's hall, I know it all. That was a wonderful feat and one would hardly think thee capable of it. Close on the heels of the report I hastened hither with this bow. String thou this weapon of my honoured sire—no light task for thy boyish hands—and fit this shaft to it. Then shall thou convince me of thy boasted might ; and then shall I be pleased to offer thee the coveted honour of battle with me for, thy valour would then entitle thee to be so distinguished.”

At which words of terrible import, the aged king turned towards him of the Axe a face blanched with terror and pitiable with grief and hands of humble entreaty and said “A Brâhamâna thou and of cloudless fame, thou hadst, long ere this, laid aside thy relentless vengeance against the race of kings. With raised hands I implore thee to harm not my innocent ones. Of the race of Bhrigu thou comest, men renowned for saintly wisdom and chaste vows. Thy word thou passed unto the Lord of the Celestials and laid aside thy weapon of wrath. Thou betookest thyself to the paths of peace and righteousness, made over the earth that was thine by conquest unto Kâsyapa, and sought the quiet solitudes of Mahêndra. And lo! here hast thou come to send us all along the path of destruction ; for, doubt not that we will outlive Râma, our life and soul, if any harm should light on his fair head.”

But Paraśurâma seemed to ignore him and his words

and addressed himself again to Râma. "Of yore, Viśvakarman, the Architect of the Gods, fashioned two bows, strong, firm and of celestial might, famed through all the worlds. One of them the Gods gave to Śiva when he marched forth to destroy the fierce Asuras of the Three Cities ; and *that* was the one you happened to break. The other that I have here, was given to the Lord Vishṇu, equal in strength to the one handled by Rudra and no easy thing to essay.

Lo ! how it blazes forth in its divine lustre !

Well, the gods sought out Brahma and questioned him about the respective mights of the Lords Vishṇu and Mahâdêva. The Self-born One read into their hearts and set the one against the other. Great was the fight that ensued between the two and frightful to behold ; for, each strove his best to get the better of the other.

Then Vishṇu sent forth a mighty shout. 'Hum' he cried and the terrible bow of Mahâdêva gave way, and he himself was stupefied thereby. Then, Angels and Gods, sages and saints, approached and implored them to lay aside their wrath. When they beheld the bow of Śiva break before the might of Vishṇu, the shadow of doubt that lurked in the hearts of the Gods vanished and Vishṇu stood the mightier of the two. Having paid high reverence unto Him, they took respectful leave of Rudra and left for their respective regions and Brahma and Indra along with them.

The Lord Mahâdêva, his heart still sore with the sense of defeat, gave his bow and shafts to king Dévarâta of the Vîdêhas : while Vishṇu handed over his mighty bow and arrows unto Rîchîka of the line of Bhrigu.

My sire Jamadagni, of unrivalled prowess, got it from him. Later on he engaged himself in severe austerities and unspeakable was the might that accrued to him there-

by: and he laid aside his weapons of war, useless to him and never to be resumed. But, King Arjuna, base of heart, slew in cold blood the unoffending sage. The cruel death of my innocent sire burnt into my heart like molten lead and cried out for vengeance, dire and swift. And I laid my axe at the root of the race of kings, times out of count, as fast as they grew. I wiped them off the face of the earth, which I subdued by the might of my arms. And at a grand sacrifice, I offered it as a gift to the great Kāsyapa, the Holy One. Thereafter I repaired to Mount Mahēndra and engaged myself in severe austeries. There do I yet remain, in that happy resort of Gods and Angels.

But, to-day I happened to hear the Gods speak to one another in the high heavens of thy wonderful feat, in tones of admiration and awe. They said that thou, out of thy marvellous energy, broke asunder the divine bow of Siva; and all at once I hastened thither to assure myself of the truth of the report.

Take thou this bow, used of yore by the Lord Vishṇu. Walk in the path of thy forefathers of stainless fame. Fit thou this shaft of fiery energy unto the string. Well, if thou but succeed in doing that, I shall then be glad to offer thee a chance to measure thyself with me."

CHAPTER 76

THE BITER BIT

RÂMA heard him out ; his father's presence kept back the hot words that rose to his lips ; yet, he managed to reply in cool and even accents of icy disdain.

" Worthy descendant of Bhrigu ! Not unknown to me your fierce deeds, which I excuse in consideration of the debt of vengeance you owe your honored sire. But you seem to regard me as a low specimen of the warrior class, weak and despicable, fallen from the high traditions of his forefathers. Well, this day shall you have a chance of knowing me better ; and shall convince yourself of my energy and valour."

A storm of suppressed wrath shook his powerful frame as he, with a quick motion and grace, took the bow and arrow from the hands of the dread son of Jamadagni. Playfully he strung it and laid the arrow on the string ; then turned himself to Râma of the Axe and cried in words winged with angry flame,

" This divine shaft, used by the Lord Vishnu, strikes down the mighty and shrivels up the energy and pride of him against whom it is discharged. None can shoot it in vain. But you are a Brâhmaṇa and an object of reverence unto me ; and doubly so, in that you claim kinship with my venerable Master, Viśvâmitra. That alone keeps back the shaft, which, else, would have drunk your heart's blood ere this.

Now, which do you choose ? Shall I deprive you of the high regions you have won by the force of your Tapas; or of your unimpeded power of motion through the worlds above and below ?".

Meanwhile, Gandharvas and Apsarasas, Siddhas and Chāraṇas, Kinnaras and Yakshas, Rākshasas and Nāgas, sages and gods, flocked to the spot to behold that wonderful sight, and at their head, the Ancient of Days, Brahma. They saw the son of Dasaratha as he stood there, his hand grasping the mighty bow of Vishṇu and the dread shaft drawn to his ear and ready to take its flight. The beings of the Earth stood dazed and listless; while the haughty son of Jamadagni felt himself drained of his valour and fiery might and gazed powerlessly on the hero. The superior energy of Rāma absorbed his proud strength and sunk him in torpor quite.

Then, lifting eyes of lack-lustre hue to the bright-eyed boy before him, he spoke in accents slow and painful.

"Of yore, I made a gift of this broad earth to Kāsyapa. 'A moment ago' said he, 'you were lord of the world, but now it is mine. And you shall not stay in my dominions.' The words of the great One are a law unto me; and I make it a point never to pass the night here. I have given my word unto Kāsyapa that the Earth shall be his. So I would even request you take not from me my power of free motion through the worlds. Quicker than a flash of thought, shall I speed back to whence I came, the beautiful Mount Mahēndra. Worlds of surpassing glory have I won by my hard Tapas; this powerful dart shall destroy them for me. Delay not. Your wonderful mastery of this divine weapon has opened my eyes to the great truth. Know I not that Thou art the Changeless One, the Destroyer of Madhu, whom the Lords of Light are proud to call their God and Ruler. All glory be thine, Thou scourge of the wicked! Behold the Shining Ones ranged along the sky, gazing with never satisfied eyes on Thee, of unparalleled fame, and of unapproachable energy in battle. No sense of disgrace do I feel at being discomfited by Thee, the Lord

of the Universe. Let loose the shaft, I pray Thee and soon
shalt Thou see me taking my way to Mahêndra."

Then Srî Râma discharged the arrow of divine might ;
and the son of Jamadagni lost the bright regions that he
had made his own by his long and severe Tapas. Râma
of the Axe went round in meek reverence Râma, the
son of Dasaratha and sang his praises high. The bright
gods ranged along the firmament took up the strain and
made the welkin ring with their shouts of joy. Back sped
Paraśurâma to Mount Mahêndra ; and the Earth and the
sky were bright again and clear and the quarters thereof.

CHAPTER 77

BACK TO AYODHYÂ

WHEN Râma of the Axe had taken his departure, the victor handed over the bow and arrows to Varuna of unspeakable might, who stood by invisible to the rest. He then saluted Vasishtha and the other sages with profound reverence, and turning to his sire found him still dazed with grief and fear.

“Jamadagni’s fiery son,” cried he “is far away by this time, and will not return in a hurry. Give orders to your forces and retinue to resume their march towards Ayôdhyâ, delayed by this trifling annoyance. See you not they wait for it impatiently ?”

“Gone is Jamadagni’s son”—these words fell like sweet music on the ears of the afflicted Daśarâtha and brought him round. He strained his darling to his breast, smelt him on the head, felt him all over to see whether he was safe and said to himself, “Verily, this day have I passed through the dread portals of Death and come back among the living—I and my dear son.” And with a bright face he directed his troops to proceed to his capital.

Right royal and hearty was the welcome his happy citizens accorded to their beloved monarch, of untarnished glory, come back among them with his sons of mighty arms. They advanced to meet him, even when he was far away from the city and lined the roads leading thereto. And Daśarâtha entered his capital amidst the hearty blessings of the Brâhmaṇas and the jubilant shouts of welcome of his loyal subjects. Gaily they decked it for the occasion ; the roads were swept clean and well-watered and strewed thick with sweet flowers of rare perfume ;

pennons and flags, banners and streamers, festoons and garlands, triumphal arches and inscriptions met him on every side ; sweet strains of music, vocal and instrumental, gay and solemn, martial and melodious greeted his pleased ears wherever he turned. And thus he and his sons of mighty fame passed on to his royal home, that towered aloft even as the lofty Home of Ice and Snow and as gay and grand. Joy unspeakable filled his aged heart ; for were not his desires fulfilled, even beyond his wildest hopes ?

Meanwhile, Kausalyâ and Sumîtra, Kaikêyi and the other queens of Dasarañha, were busily happy with welcoming to their royal home the wives of their sons, as became their rank and station—Sitâ, and Ûrmilâ, Mândavî and Sruñakîrtî. The princesses were next taken to the temples of the gods to offer reverent worship and humble thanksgiving—(dressed in gay robes and flashing with gems and gold), while bards and minstrels, poets and eulogists called down every blessing on their fair heads. Next, they paid their respects to every one that deserved it and repaired unto their mansions, that put to blush the lordly home of the Guardian of Riches. They made large gifts to Brâhmañas, of kine, gold and corn, and passed their lives in the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure, in the sweet company of their lords.

And the royal sons of the Lord of Ayôdhyâ, those great-souled Ones, of unequalled fame on earth, ever waited on their noble sire with sweet solicitude, anticipating his least wishes. The hearts of their elders they won by their bright virtues and rare tact ; and they were not the ones to let any chance go by. Their days were one long dream of unalloyed bliss ; for, wherein did they lack ? Married to the loves of their hearts, perfect in every art of warfare, with the wealth of the worlds at their disposal, and

surrounded by friends who lived in them and for them alone, how could their happiness be otherwise than ideal ?

Sometime after, his father called Bharata unto him and said, " Bharata dear, Yudhâjît, your uncle and son of the ruler of Kekaya, waits here to take you with him unto his kingdom. Him have I promised thereunto at Mithilâ, in the presence of the saintly ascetics. It behoves you to go with him and gladden his heart."

" Nothing would please me better" replied Bharata. He saluted his sire and Râma, lovingly embraced Lakshmana, ; and taking kind leave of his mothers and of his mighty brother Râma, the sweet friend of all beings, he took his departure, accompanied, of course, by the inseparable Safrughna.

Râma and Lakshmana, thus left behind, waited upon their godly sire of unparalleled renown. Under the advice and guidance of his father, Râma, the soul of virtue, looked after the interests and welfare of the citizens ; but, withal, the duties to his parents and elders were his first care and lay next his heart. Even thus did he endear himself to all by his sweet ways and saintly life, father and mother, Brâhmaṇas grown grey in sacred lore, and the loyal citizens, happy under the benign rule of his father. His unfailing might, and ideal virtues outran his growing fame ; and all looked up to him in love and reverence, even as the created beings regard their Lord and Maker, the Self-Born One.

And the happy years chased one another with light feet as they tripped over the heads of Râma and the love of his heart, Sîtâ, the fairest of the daughters of the Earth, as centred in each other, they grew more and more into each other's soul and being. Dear was Sîtâ unto Râma, as the wife of his sire's choice ; and dearer yet did she make

herself unto him, through her divine loveliness and rare excellences. And Sítâ loved her lord with a love passing speech, passing belief. He was the life of her life, the soul of her soul. And heart spoke to heart plainer and more powerfully than feeble words, poor expressions of the myriad-hued human thought. Râma's heart went out to her, as it did to no one else, to this daughter of Janaka, the royal sage of Mithilâ, fair as a goddess, even as the Divine Mother come down among mortals. Nay, the Almighty Parents, Višṇu and Lakshmî, had not a brighter home and a happier than Râma in the sweet company of his princess of ravishing beauty, whose love towards that worthy son of the royal sage was boundless as Eternity, stronger than Fate.



THE
RAMAYANA
OF
VALMEEKI

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH PROSE
WITH EXHAUSTIVE NOTES

BY

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AYODHYAKANDAM

FOREWORD

The passage in Balakanda, chapter XVI, "Then there appeared, etc," indicates that "the Lord is He from whom this universe comes into being; it lives in Him ; and it enters into His bosom at the end." (*Taitt-up. Brahnavalli*). The attributes of the Supreme Person enumerated in the Purusha-sookta "I know this great Being, radiant as the sun, beyond the confines of Darkness," find an echo in the passage in chapter XIX.—"I know the real Rama, the great-souled One of invincible might." Kasyapa sings His glory (ch. XXIX) in terms that make it clear that He is the Supreme One of inconceivable greatness. All other gods stand far below Him, as "the shadow of doubt that lurked in the hearts of the gods vanished and Vishnu stood the mightier of the two." (ch. LXV). Valmeeki begins this kanda to bring out the truth that He is endowed with infinite perfections and excellences.

Or, we may take it that the Balakanda narrates in detail that the prominent characters of the poem, are distinguished by high lineage ; that they are instructed in the mysteries of the science and the art of war by Visvamitra, the great Teacher ; that, even so early, they show forth their might and valour by their easy victories over Tataka,

Subahu, Mareecha and the other Rakshasas ; that Rama breaks to pieces the bow of Siva ; that he takes back unto himself the bow of Vishnu ; and that he is united to Seeta (Mahalakshmi). All this is in perfect consonance with the doings of the Lord as related in the succeeding kandas. The Ayodhyakanda illustrates his perfect obedience to the behests of his father and his vigilant observance of other ordinary duties of life. We are also taught duties of a higher order. Lakshmana exemplifies the life of one entirely devoted to the service of the Lord ; Bharata is the ideal of supreme self-surrender to the Lord ; and Satrughna lives only in the service of the Lord's Elect.

Or, it may be that the Balakanda describes the union of the Lord with the goddess Sree; while the Ayodhyakanda describes his union with the goddess Bhoomi.

Or, the Balakanda emphasises the supreme and absolute aspect of the Lord, while the Ayodhyakanda brings into prominence his accessibility (Soulabhyam).

Or, the Balakanda describes the nature of the Goal—the Lord as united to Lakshmi, while the Ayodhyakanda describes the nature and attributes of the Jeeva (Monad). The life of Satrughna illustrates the duty of devoting ourselves to the service of the Lord's Elect—the simplest means, the most secret and the most necessary.



CHAPTER 1

DASARATHA RESOLVES TO CROWN RAMA KING

SATRUGHNA, the faultless, Satrughna, the proud victor over our sleepless foes, Desire and Hate, Greed and Envy, Pride and Ignorance, was affectionately invited by Bharata to be his companion during his visit to his uncle, Yudhajit. The lord of the Kekayas loved his nephew even as his own son ; and entertained him with presents of noble steeds, ornaments, dresses and banquets ; yet, Bharata stayed there only because his beloved Satrughna was with him. Their life was a happy one at the court of king Asvapati, with everything that the heart could desire ; but, their reverend sire was ever in the thoughts of the valiant princes. “The snows of sixty thousand winters crown our father’s head, even as the lofty Himalaya. It is preposterous for any one to expect that he could continue to bear on his mighty shoulders the huge burden of government. The gods grant that he crown our Rama king. Our place is at his feet, to serve him in all affection and reverence ; we but waste the precious moments here”

All along, the aged Dasaratha, whose fame and splendour grew and grew in that he was the thrice-fortunate parent of the noble princes, yearned for their bright presence. “It is grievous enough to be parted from my Bharata and Satrughna, who are attached to one another even as Indra and Varuna. All my riches, all my power, all my splendour are to me as naught, when the children of my heart are not where my aged eyes can fondly rest upon them.” He looked upon his sons as four arms sprung from his body. In his loving heart they found an equal place. But, even as the great Demiurge, Brahma, among the count-

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less myriads who adore him, Rama drew Dasaratha towards him by the might of his countless perfections. For, was he not Vishnu, the Lord of Eternity, come down on earth as
 35 Rama in response to the prayers of the Gods, who desired at his hands the destruction of Ravana whose pride and haughtiness knew no bounds ? Aditi, the happy mother of Indra, shone not with brighter radiance than Kausalya, the thrice blessed mother of Rama, the Lord of Boundless
 40 Light. To none other on earth, or in the heavens, was it given to be the mother of such a son.

He was a dream of beauty, the soul of valour, from envy free and like unto his father in character, conduct and tastes. Soft and gentle was ever his speech, the true index
 45 of a serene heart ; no one was known to speak to him harshly ; and, even if it was so, Rama never spake back, nor was provoked to taunts. The lightest act of service from any was indelibly graven upon his heart, which magnified it beyond count and rejoiced beyond measure ; neither
 50 the lapse of time, nor the question of motive affected him in the least. But, the evil that others did him, though past all count, never left the slightest trace on his memory ; for, was he not the Soul of the universe, the Lord of matter and its illusions ?

55 He ever sought the company and conversation of good men, grown grey in years, wisdom and virtue, even in the intervals snatched from martial exercises. His thoughts were ever engaged in the solution of the problem of conferring the highest happiness possible on humanity. Pleasant
 60 of speech, he was ever the first to address others, however low they may be in the social scale. Of boundless might to destroy the foes that threatened his friends and dependents, yet his heart was ever lowly and meek. He would never soil his lips with an untruth, even with a harmless
 65 tale. He ever advanced to meet the elders and reverenced

them duly. Every one of his subjects was the object of his especial care and affection and they returned his love with a full measure and overflowing. His heart ever went out in pity and compassion to all alike, and the sight of other's misery was too much for him to bear. Anger was sternly kept under control by him. Men of profound wisdom and saintly lives were ever sure of his respect and veneration. The needy and the afflicted found a warm corner in his heart. He knew the mysteries of Law and Duty in general and in detail. He ever set before himself as a law of his life to offer refuge to all beings that should need it. He never coveted for the possessions of others. He held it as an article of faith that mercy, compassion, protection to those that seek it, and stern repression of the wicked and the evil-minded, were the prime duties of his order. It was the surest way to win bright fame on earth and the brighter worlds of the gods hereafter. Master of every art and science, yet he never wasted the precious moments of his life in idle games or pastimes. His soul turned away with disgust from all idle and coarse talk that lure men into the paths of evil. Like unto Brīhaspati, the priest and counsellor of Indra, he was unrivalled in weighty speech and quick reply. Rejoicing in the possession of perfect health and peace of heart, he was a lovely youth, strong and hardy. Men hung on the honeyed words that flowed from his lips. He well knew the right time and place and conditions for the study of the Sacred Law. He read at a glance into the innermost depths of the hearts of others, their strength, their weakness, their merits and their faults. Evil or offence to him, treachery or spite but evoked from his heart mightier currents of compassion and sympathy.

Prince Rama, dowered with every excellence and perfection, was dearer to his subjects than the very breath of their nostrils.

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100 He sat at the feet of the best and ablest masters and reverently learned from them the secrets of every art and science. He kept the prescribed vows and observances, and duly obtained permission from his teachers to close the student's career and take upon himself the heavier responsibilities of a householder. He was well-versed in vedic lore, exoteric and esoteric. He excelled his famed father in his proficiency in the arts of war and bowmanship. He gloried in his proud and spotless lineage. He was the centre of everything good and beneficent, faultlessly perfect, and of firm and earnest faith in the Higher Wisdom. Of unruffled heart and unclouded intellect, he was ever true of speech even under the most trying circumstances. He was straight of heart, speech and act. Saintly Brahmanas, grown grey in years and wisdom, guided his early steps 110 on the narrow path of Right and Duty. The pursuit of Duty, Gain and Pleasure had its claims and bounds well-defined with him. With a phenomenal keenness of memory, he possessed infinite resource and tact and was expert in the discharge of civil business. Respectful to all, he was yet 115 unfathomable of purpose. His face or acts betrayed not in the least the counsel of his heart. His councillors were the cleverest of the age. Neither his wrath nor his favour went for nothing. He knew full well when to give profusely and when to acquire wealth by just means. His heart went 120 out in adoration to the Gods and to the teachers. His knowledge of the Eternal Verities was clear and profound. He kept away from the company of the foolish and the ways of the evil-hearted. Softly slow and deliberate of speech, he was ever diligent in the pursuit of knowledge and keen to 125 pierce to the heart of the sciences. No one was more aware of his faults and failings or of the weakness of his kingdom and of his enemies. The Vedas, the Vedangas, the thirty-two sciences, and the sixty-four arts were mastered by him in 130

detail. He was intimate with the final truths and conclusions on all subjects of human interest. He read at a glance 135 the fine and delicate distinctions between man and man. He was ever assiduous in attracting to himself friends, refugees and good men, as also in fulfilling the fondest wishes of their heart, in consonance with the laws of kingly polity. He knew with wonderful precision when to lay the heavy 140 hand of punishment upon a man and where. The busy bees extract not sweet honey from blossoming flowers more delicately and without disturbing them, than he filled the royal coffers with the wealth ungrudgingly offered by his loving subjects. He followed the traditions of royalty in 145 spending a quarter or a half or three-quarters of his income, but never more. He was far and away the most learned in religious lore and likewise in the lay literature of his age, in Sanskrit, Prakrit and the other dialects. Pleasure found in him a warm follower, but with strict regard to the demands 150 of Duty and Gain. He put his heart into everything that he did. He was proficient in painting, vocal and instrumental music, sculpture, poetry and the other departments of the fine arts. Works of charity, and measures that would enhance his fame had the first claim upon his wealth ; his friends, 155 relations and dependents came next ; a third portion was set apart as reproductive capital ; and what remained, he spent upon himself. None excelled him in the art of training and guiding horses, elephants and camels. He knew to perfection the innermost mysteries of the Science of the 160 Bow. The foremost warriors of his time (Atirathas) looked upon him as their master. He placed himself at the head of his troops, advanced fearlessly upon the embattled ranks of the enemy, pierced into their intricate impenetrable vyuhas (arrays) and scattered them like chaff before the 165 wind, all the while warding off danger and disaster from his own men. He was expert in marshalling soldiers into various

and wonderful arrays. Men nor gods nor asuras ever dreamt of standing up to him even in their wildest moments
 170 of fury. He put away from himself envy, ill-temper, pride and calumny. It was foreign to his nature to be unkind or haughty to the meanest object in creation. The wheel of Time that rolls on ceaselessly with its flashing spokes of the three gunas, rhythm, action and inertia, never reflected
 175 its varying motions in his heart, which ever remained calm, serene and pure. Meek and patient even as Mother Earth, Rama was the dearest object to the three worlds, so bright shone he in his excellences. Profoundly wise as Brihaspati, valiant as Indra, he drew to himself the hearts
 180 of his people and of king Dasaratha from whose loins he sprung. The glory of his perfections illumined the utmost corners of the world, even as the countless rays of the noon-day sun. Steadfast in his resolve to protect those that took refuge in him, of unfailing might and valour, happy in the
 185 possession of every thing that the heart could desire, he occupied the foremost place in the thoughts of the people, who eagerly looked forward to the day when he would reign over them.

Dasaratha, the terror of his foes, looked with a fond
 190 eye on the darling of his heart, and said to himself, "Long beyond mortal count have been my days upon earth, and I have drunk the cup of life even to the lees. What should I desire now more than to see my beloved Rama, of matchless excellence, reign in my stead ? May the winged hours
 195 haste forward the day when I would see the brows of my Rama encircled with the crown of the Ikshvakus. For, he is ever intent upon making the rich men of my kingdom richer ; he is ready to help and upraise those whom the "slings and arrows of outrageous" Fortune have struck low.
 200 My people love him more than myself, even as the welcome clouds that pour their cool waters over the parched lips of

the burning earth. Like unto Yama, the god of Death and Indra, the ruler of the Shining Ones in might ; like unto Brihaspati in knowledge and wisdom ; strong of heart and unshaken even as the Himalaya, it is but meet that he stands 205 high above myself in worth and in the people's esteem. It behoves me to close my long life by giving myself the pleasure to see my son crowned as king ; and then I might, with a contented heart, take my place in the Mansions of the Blessed." 210

He next took counsel with his ministers and advisers, who were loud in their praises of Rama as the living embodiment of countless excellences rare in other kings ; and he decided to resign his kingdom in favour of his eldest son. He urged upon his counsellors the necessity of hastening 215 the happy day. The snows of age weighed very heavy upon him, and ominous portents in the heavens, in the middle world and on earth warned him of coming calamity and mishap. His subjects, and himself more than they, lived in the light of Rama's presence and forgot their griefs and sorrows 220 therein; verily the moment was approaching when the world was to enter upon a new era of peace and prosperity ; all the more reason why he should be quick in bringing it about. Fleet messengers were dispatched in hot haste to invite the kings under him, the leaders of men in town 225 and village, his friends near and far, as well as those who ever had his welfare at heart. No word did he send to the king of the Kekayas or to Janaka ; they lived far away and might as well hear the happy news later on. They readily responded to his invitation and were right royally entertained as became their rank and worth. Like Brahma, the Ancient, in his high world, king Dasaratha sat on his royal throne in all his pomp and splendour and gave audience 230 to those who waited to pay him their respects. They entered the vast hall and ranged themselves therein 235

according to the rules of precedence. All eyes were respectfully turned upon Dasaratha—kings, citizens, provincials and friends, who stood high in the love and esteem of the aged monarch and now encircled him as
240 the high gods press round their king Indra.

CHAPTER II.

VOX POPULI.

GHEN king Dasaratha addressed himself to his expectant audience, riveted their attention upon himself and
5 spoke to them, in accents clear, of that which conduced to their welfare and joy. His sonorous voice filled the spacious hall even as the war-drum or the thunderclouds and was given back in mighty echoes ; it was inimitably sweet to the ear and richly redolent with kingly graciousness. “ Kings,
10 friends, my people ! None know better than yourselves how Ikshwaku, Raghu and other ancestors of mine, of glorious memory, watched over this empire of Kosala even as it were the darling of their hearts. Unworthy descendant of such a brilliant line, it is in my heart
15 to confer upon my people and kingdom yet greater happiness and prosperity; for, none deserve it more. May I be allowed to believe that I have tried my level best to discharge my duty towards you, treading upon the intricate paths of kingly polity with unsleeping care and with a
20 strict eye to the traditions of my race. But, years past count lie heavy upon me and I am now grown grey, even as yon snow-white royal umbrella under the shade of which I have been watching over your welfare. Unlike king Yayati, I have put away from me all hankering after the
25 pleasures of happy youth and active life. It is but meet

and just that I give a little rest to this body of mine that has served me so faithfully and so well for sixty thousand years, ere I lay it down. My broad shoulders have borne for unnumbered centuries this mighty burden of state and cannot but be wearied beyond words. For, it is no light task, even for the young and temperate, who are richly dowered with energy, valor and tact; it is beyond the dreams of such as are not stern masters of their senses and allow them to lead their steps astray; it requires varied kinds of accomplishments and means. For a very long time I have borne this huge orb of state and its attendant cares of guiding aright the feet of the millions under me upon the narrow path of Dharma and I must be allowed a respite. If the saintly Brahmanas here, my friends and my people give their unqualified assent to my proposal, I mean to place my son in charge of the kingdom and enjoy a short period of quiet. Rama, my first-born, whom I have fixed upon to take my place as heir-apparent, has the valor of Indra and his skill, and before him fall, like ripened head of corn, the foemen's cities and their pride. He takes after me in all goodly graces and excellences ; he is the foremost champion of Right ; he is the prince of men for power and might. Radiant beyond compare, even as the full-orbed moon in his glorious mansion of the constellation Pushya, I have set my heart upon crowning him as heir-apparent on the auspicious day when the moon is in conjunction with Pushya. Of boundless glory, Rama, the elder brother of Lakshmana, is, I ween, a worthy lord of this my kingdom, and of you my faithful subjects. The three worlds will rejoice in peace and prosperity under the shadow of his mighty arm. Grant me to make him your ruler ; grant me to make over to him this weighty crown and its attendant responsibilities ; it will be the dawn of a happy era for the earth and my heart will grow young with joy indescribable. I pray you

60 give your well-thought consent to it only if it seems to you that I have formed this plan after mature deliberation, only if the act would be crowned with happy success. But, should it seem to you otherwise, pray advise me the wiser course. It may be that this seems right in my eyes ; but, I am sure
 65 that greater good will come of it if I take counsel with you, who are moved solely by considerations of the common weal." The princes assembled heard him out in wrapt attention and answered back in glad acclaim, as the gay peacocks rejoice at the welcome sound of surcharged clouds. The vast crowd lifted its voice in mighty applause, the echoes of which shook the huge dome of the audience hall to its very base.

Then, Maharshi Vasishtha and the holy Brahmanas, the invited kings and princes, citizens and provincials
 75 took deep counsel each with himself, and then together ; a keen observation of the time, the place, the face and the features of the king convinced them that he regarded it as an act of duty to nominate the heir-apparent in his life-time. And with one accord they gave answer to
 80 Dasaratha, " Lord of men ! Long years have you reigned over us in glory and have grown grey in years in consequence. So, we pray that you instal your eldest son Rama as the heir apparent. Doubt not that we are well aware of your care and solicitude for the welfare of this
 85 kingdom, even when long centuries have rolled over you. But, our eyes yearn to be blessed with the sight of Rama riding along in royal pomp on the huge state-elephant, while the royal white umbrella comes, all enviously, now and then between us and the glory of his countenance. We
 90 can but pray to you and it rests with you make it fruitful."

Dasaratha feigned not to catch the drift of their appeal and said " Kings and people ! I do not really see how you can desire to have Rama as your lord and ruler, when you

yourself bear grateful testimony to my able and watchful care over you. I pray you tell me the truth of it."

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Then, the people all made ready reply, prince and peasant, high and low. "Blame us not in that we find in Rama, your son, rare and matchless perfections Hear us expiate, though all unworthy, upon the countless graces of body and mind of Rama, the idol of our hearts, like unto 100 the high gods, and trained in the ways of righteousness by eminent men. Joy unspeakable and affectionate love well up in the hearts of those that speak of it, of those that listen to it, of those that contemplate it In him valiant might is ever fruitful ; the lord of the Celestials claims not higher 105 attributes; he towers aloft over the kings of the royal line of Ikshvaku ; that best of men is ever intent on Truth and Law. From him flow unasked Dharma and Wealth, the fruit thereof Of happy presence, the bright lord of Night delights not your subjects more ; of sweet patience even as 110 Mother Earth, he vies with Brihaspati in keen intellect and with Mahendra, the lord of Sachi. in valor ; he has sounded the depths of Duty, general and particular ; of unfailing resolve, yet his greatness offers no bar to sincere and intimate converse with lower grades of intellect ; he has put away 115 from himself envy, that causelessly sees in other faults that are not. The defects of those that seek refuge in him have no power to ruffle his forbearing spirit ; he ever labours to conciliate the anger and soothe the grief of those that chance to offend him Gentle and kind of speech, he 120 ever magnifies the paltry benefits conferred upon him by others; innocent of the ways of the wicked, his heart can never bear to be away from those that depend upon him; dire adversity and distress have no power to prevent the fulfilment of his promises to others ; ever at the disposal of his 125 friends and dependents, the arrows of envy fall away from him blunt and broken. He has ever a sweet word and kind

to all, but keeps within the strict bounds of truth. The Brahmanas grown grey in years, wisdom and saintliness, are
 130 the objects of his veneration ; hence, unbounded generosity, valor and irresistible might do but widen immeasurably his full-orbed fame. He is an adept in the mysteries of all the weapons and astras known to men, gods and asuras. He has sat at the feet of his revered Guru to study the Vedas
 135 and the Vedanta, has kept the prescribed vows and has gone through the closing rite of Samavartana. He is an expert musician, in that it assists him in the chanting of Samans. Pure and stainless is his high ancestry and he outshines it in his own purity. The wheel of Time has nothing to bring up
 140 that could shake his iron fortitude ; hence his intellect and genius are of a very rare order. Wise Brahmanas have had the charge of guiding his steps on the intricate paths of Duty and Right, teachers famed for spotless lineage, profound learning, lowliness of heart, and marvellous power of
 145 expounding the Soul-doctrine of the Law. He never returns from his frequent expeditions against the foemen's armies, towns or citadels, but is aye crowned with victory, he and his shadow Lakshmana. His military duties over, he comes back to the capital on horse or elephant, chariot or palanquin and fails not to make paternal enquiries about the welfare of the citizens, deep and searching. 'Dear sirs, ! Is it all well with you, your wives, your children and pupils ? Are the Holy Fires receiving due attention and worship ? Your servants and pupils are, I believe, regular and assiduous
 150 in their services to you.' None among his people, rich or poor, high or low, is touched with any grief or sorrow, but our Rama is by his side to help or soothe him. He never forgives himself for it nor forgets ; 'for,' says he 'mine the blame, mine the fault, since they are my charge.' Alike, he
 155 rejoices in the joy of his people, sincere and whole-hearted even as their very father.

The darkest hours of adversity have never been able to dim the spotless mirror of his truthful soul. The foremost Bowman of any age, past or present, he is ever the humble servant of the Elders, with restrained 165 senses and smiling speech. The fierce waves of misfortune do but play about his feet firmly planted on the Rock of Duty. He enters with heart and soul into everything he desires for the people's welfare. He is ever known to turn away from the light talk and social inanities that good men 170 condemn heartily. Brihaspati has not such a wealth of ready wit and quick repartee. His beautifully arched brows do but heighten by contrast the loveliness of his large star-like eyes. We take him more as Maha Vishnu come down in mortal guise among His dear children. 175 Death has no terrors for him, not the slightest calm and self-possessed, he causes his foes to flee before him, mad Terror at their heels ; his fiery energy and valor finds him ever the first to pierce into the intricate battle-arrays of his foes and to scatter them before him like chaff, be they the 180 foremost of gods or asuras. None knows better than he the deep mysteries of kingly polity and the surest way to compass the happiness and weal of his subjects. The joys of sensual life have never any attraction for him. The governance of the three worlds would but barely occupy a portion 185 of his time and attention ; why speak of this paltry globe ?

His wrath or favor was never known to be fruitless, The guilty ever found his hand heavy upon them ; but the innocent never came in for a share of his displeasure. One has but to find favor in his eyes, to have his heart's wishes 190 fulfilled to the uttermost. Unruffled patience and other countless excellences that claim the applause and love of the people, shed a halo of glory round him, even as the noon day Sun crowned with his fiery rays. Nay, dear lord, we are convinced that he is sent down on earth by the Giver 195

of good to be your son and confer upon you untold happiness, even as the Almighty deigned to bless Mareechi with his boy Kasyapa. Gods and Asuras, Gandharvas and Uragas, kings and sages, citizens and provincials, your people and 200 strangers, ever lift their hands and hearts in devout prayer to the Causeless Cause that Rama's days on earth might never grow less and that fame and goodly life, health and strength, might ever wait upon him. Stately matrons, light hearted girls, and dames staggering under the burden of their 205 years, ever offer devout and careful worship to every god, high and low, morn, noon and dewy eve, that their darling Rama may be crowned as heir-apparent. Lord of us all ! it behoves you to fulfil the dearest wishes of their hearts, to grant the earnest prayer of their souls. Our eyes do hunger 210 for the hour when they can feast upon the sight of Rama enthroned as king in your place—Rama the best and brightest of your sons, Rama of dark hue, even as the petals of the blue Utpala, Rama, the terror of his foes. None have been known to seek you in vain ; hence our 215 earnest prayer that you crown your long and glorious reign with an act of supreme grace to us, by placing over this realm Rama, like unto the Lord of the universe, ever intent on the common weal and the centre of all that is good and great. And let not envious Time come between us and the realisation of our hopes.”

CHAPTER III.

KINGLY PRECEPTS

ASARATHA heard them out joyfully, as they prayed to him with joined palms above their heads. He 5 honor'd them duly with a look or a word or a smile and said,

" My children ! It gives me boundless delight to hear your unanimous wish to see my eldest son Rama crowned as heir-apparent. My greatness and glory have been enhanced thereby." His sweet and thoughtful reply filled their hearts with the wildest joy. He next turned to Vasishtha and Vamadeva and said " This month of Chitra is the first and best of its kind. All trees put on their gayest and happiest garb now. The month in which Rama saw the light is come round, by happy coincidence, to witness his installation. Hence, I pray you to see to the necessary arrangements."

Now that the assembled multitude were sure of their long-cherished hopes being amply realized and speedily, shouts of joy rent the welkin and calmed down after a time. Then, Vasishtha the wise, proud of the glorious task entrusted to him, addressed himself to Sumantra and his colleagues who stood before him in respectful salutation, and said " Gold, gems, grain, pulse, medicinal plants, garlands of white flowers, fried grain, honey, clarified butter, new cloths, chariot, weapons of all kinds, our troops, men, horse, elephants and chariots, elephants with auspicious marks, a white chamara, flags, a snow-white umbrella, a hundred vessels of gold bright as blazing fire, a bull with gold-tipped horns, a tigerskin all whole, sandal paste, flowers and other necessaries should be ready stored by dawn in the royal sacrificial chamber. See that thousands of saintly Brahmanas are then given with all respect and reverence, food, milk, curds, condiments, ghee, fried grain and ample presents of coin. Remind the Brahmanas deputed to the work that they should begin to chant the benedictive hymns and let them be provided with suitable seats. See that the houses look gay with flags ; let the royal roads be well-watered. Let dancers in bright array be stationed in the second block

- 40 of the palace and with them their instructors and skilled musicians. Appoint Brahmanas to be present at the holy fanes and cross-roads to pay heedful worship to the gods with food, sweets and garlands ; let chosen warriors in war-like, guise range themselves in the coronation hall with
 45 their long bright swords girt bravely on their thighs." The sages twain directed them further to enlist the necessary servants and retainers and completed the arrangements for the auspicious ceremony. They came to the king in joyful mood and said, "Your Majesty's orders have been executed."

50 Then, Dasaratha, of bright presence, called Sumantra to him and said, "Go, bring me on the wings of speed, Rama, my darling boy of spotless virtue ;" and the aged minister hastened upon his happy mission.

- 55 Kings of realms, north and south, east and west, chiefs of the non-Aryan races, dwellers of the dark forests and lofty mountains ranged themselves round the old monarch, even as the radiant Gods press round their glorious leader. The mighty emperor, girt by them, as Indra by the hierarchy of Maruts, glanced down at the royal road and saw his boy coming up on his chariot. His eyes would never have enough of feasting themselves upon the lovely vision. Supremely handsome, even as the king of the Gandharvas, yet was Rama the very ideal of valor ; with long and sinewy
 60 arms, his exquisitely modelled frame masked an immensity of strength ; of lordly gait even as the maddened elephant in rut, his face was sweet to look at and charmed the hearts of the beholders, even as the full-orbed Queen of night ; and people felt that they could gaze their lives away.
 65 His beauty, large-heartedness, and other noble attributes enslaved the looks and the hearts of even the members of his sex. Creatures, whose bodies and brains have been parched and broiled by the merciless rays of the summer
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sun, cannot gaze too often at the black clouds that lead to them the welcome showers ; even so did Dasaratha 75
gaze and yet gaze on the dream of loveliness that grew upon his vision. Meanwhile the prince's chariot stopped at the royal gates, and Sumantra offered his arm to Rama as he got down, and followed him with folded palms in all reverence, as he took his way to where his 80
royal sire awaited him. He ascended the steps leading to the lofty hall above, that reminded one of the Kailasa peak, approached the king with joined hands of reverence and offered him due salutation, announcing his own name and lineage. Dasaratha drew, with loving haste, his god-like 85
son towards himself, embraced him warmly, and saw him seated high on a gemmed throne by his side. The splendour of his presence irradiated the vast hall, even as the golden mount Meru crowned with the bright rays of the rising sun, even as the star-bespangled firmament with the 90
pure cool rays of the autumn moon. The heart of the aged king knew no bounds to its joy as he fondly gazed at his son, even as at the reflection of his own stately person in a burnished mirror.

Dasaratha, the happiest of fathers, turned to his boy 95
with a smile and said, " Rama, my darling son ! Your rare excellences constitute you the brightest ornament of our race. You are born to me of a lady in every way worthy of myself. My subjects are supremely pleased with your noble qualities and I intend to make you the ruler of this realm to- 100
morrow, when the moon is in auspicious conjunction with the asterism Pushya. You are richly dowered by nature with countless perfections of body, mind and heart. You ever reverence the good and the great. Yet, a fond father's heart would seek to give you further counsel. I would 105
have you yet more humble and modest, yet more self-restrained. Put away from you the seven kinds of royal

faults that spring of Desire and Hate. Govern your ministers and officials directly and the others through them ;
 110 fail not to give audience every day and possess yourself of everything that you can gather from direct observation, even as you are every moment aware of the doings of your foes through your eyes and ears—your spies and residents. Increase ever your stores of coin, gold and
 115 silver, gems, grain, warlike appliances and weapons, until your people come to place implicit and entire confidence in you and exclaim out of a full heart 'Blessed are we above compare in that we have such a king over us', even as the shining Ones rejoiced at the sight of
 120 the Waters of Immortality. So keep your senses and mind under perfect control and act as I would have you."

Thus spake Dasaratha, with the authority of years and experience, even as the Patriarch Kasyapa advises the Ruler of the Heavens. Friends and companions of Rama strove
 125 who should be the first to take the glad tidings to Kausalya, the happy mother. And the noble queen loaded the welcome messengers with gifts of gold and gems, kine and horses. Rama bowed low in reverent obeisance to his sire, who accorded him reluctant permission to depart and rode back
 130 to his splendid palace through the dense crowds that strove to do him honor.

The vast concourse of citizens that filled the hall felt their hearts bound with joy, as if their long-cherished hopes were unexpectedly realized ; they took respectful leave of
 135 their monarch and hied back to their houses and were busy offering devout prayers to their favorite deities that the coronation of their beloved Rama should come off without a hitch."

CHAPTER IV

—
KAUSALYA'S JOY
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KHE conscientious monarch again took deep counsel with his ministers and friends and finally decided to crown lotus-eyed Rama as heir-apparent, the next day 5 when the moon should ride in conjunction with Pushya. He returned to his apartments and said to Sumantra "Go, bring unto me once again Rama, my heart's delight."

The aged minister was at the gates of Rama's palace in no time. The wardens apprised the prince of his arrival, 10 who was troubled with a doubt. "How now? Has any thing come between my sire and his resolve?" Yet he called Sumantra to him and said "Pray let me know clearly what brings you here again." And to him spake Sumantra "Rama! your father desires to see you again. I 15 am but the humble mouth-piece of his Majesty and you know best how to act." The words of the minister but hastened Rama's steps towards his father's palace, which he entered with an expectant heart.

The wardens ran to announce him to the king, who ordered the prince to be brought to him at once, that he might communicate to him excellent and pleasant tidings. Rama entered and saluted the monarch with deep respect, even when at a distance. Dasaratha sprang to meet him with open arms, gave him a magnificent seat and said 20 "Rama! excuse my telling you that I am grown very old in years and experience. I have drained the cup of life to the full. Countless sacrifices have I performed and stinted not in food or coin, kine or gems, even as the Books lay it down. I have had the pleasure of giving away untold 25 wealth to my kith and kin, friends and dependents. I have tasted of the sterner joys of a warrior's life in all their 30

varieties; I am clear of my debts to the Gods, to the Rishis, to
 the Pitrîs, to the Brahmanas and to myself through countless
 35 sacrificial rites, religious studies, begetting of offspring, costly
 gifts and enjoyment of the pleasures of life respectively. I
 have now a worthy son unto me and unequalled in the three
 worlds. My last duty to myself and to my expectant subjects
 40 is but the pleasant one of handing over the charge of this
 kingdom to you. So, pay good heed to what I say and
 having heard, obey. Again, all my subjects pray to me that
 Rama should be lord over them ; that is another reason
 why I should crown you king. Further, my sleep is troubled
 45 with ominous dreams of coming evil ; terrific meteors fall
 from the cloudless skies accompanied by destructive thunder
 bolts. The sun, Mars, Rahu and other maleficient planets
 do aspect my natal star, so say the wise in starry lore. It
 is evident that these are the forerunners of the death of
 kings or of parallel disasters ; that again is an additional
 50 reason for my crowning you with all despatch. Moreover,
 men's minds do change ever; and before mine comes under
 the seductive influence of my other queens, I wish to place
 the crown on your head. The moon stays today with the
 star Punarvasu and leaves it to-morrow for Pushya, which
 55 astrological experts declare to be most auspicious for a
 king's coronation ; hence my desire to lose no time. I am
 resolved to carry out my plan to-morrow at any cost.
 It is meet that you and Seeta spend this night in fast and
 devout prayer on a couch of sacred grass. It is in the order
 60 of things that numerous obstacles would start in the path
 of such good resolves ; so, take good care that your friends
 and well-wishers guard you against any harm or evil, within
 or without. Bharata, your brother, is a paragon of goodly con-
 duct; your word is a law unto him; his iron will and chasten-
 65 ed spirit keeps his senses under perfect control; he is the soul
 of compassion ; but, it is a long time since he left this place

for his uncle's country. None can call himself so righteous or good or firm of resolve but Persuasion's guileful tongue can lure him away. So, it behoves us to accomplish our purpose ere Bharata comes back here." Having thus opened his heart to his son in the privacy of his apartments, he gave him permission to return to his palace.

Rama lost not a moment in repairing to the mansion of his mother Kausalya to acquaint her with the glad news.

He found her in the hall of worship, dressed in white silk, pure, silent and restrained of breath ; the news of

Rama's coronation the next day filled her with wild joy, and she was earnestly praying with introspective eyes to Maha

Vishnu, her favorite deity, that Rama should succeed his father on the throne. Sumitra, Lakshmana and Seeta had

been sent for before and were with her. Rama saluted his mother with all humility and said, "It would give you

pleasure to know that my father has intimated to me his pleasure to crown me to-morrow as the heir-apparent and

place me over the people. The priests and the chaplains heard him direct me and Seeta here to spend this night in

fast and prayer. I pray you to instruct us as to the vows we should keep towards my consecration to-morrow."

The words fell sweetly on the long-expectant ears of Kausalya ; tears of joy shook her voice as she replied,

"Darling Rama ! May your days upon earth continue ever, May confusion dire wait on your foes. Rule over us and re-

joice the hearts of the kith and kin of myself and of my sister Sumitra here. It was a wondrous moment when you saw

the light ; for, are you not the joy of your father's heart through your good gifts ? Long did I pray and earnestly to

Mahavishnu ; and my prayers, my vows, my fasts and mortifications have borne ample fruit, in that the bright crown of the Ikshwakus rests on your fair brows. Glad am I beyond

expression."

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Rama turned to his brother at his side and said to him who raised folded palms of reverence to his head, "Lakshmana! Brother mine! This kingdom, its pomp and power are more for you, my other self. You will have a very busy time of it, I ween, in ruling over the countless myriads of our subjects. Sumitra's happy son ! I hope to see you gladden your mother's heart and taste the sweets of regal power, gold and gems, dress and jewels, pomp and dignity. Need I assure you that this empire and everything it can give, nay, 105 my very life, is dear to me and welcome but for your sake ?"

110 Thereafter, Rama and Seeta took reverent leave of their elders and received permission to retire to their abode.

CHAPTER V

RAMA'S FAST

DASARATHA next sought saint Vasishtha and said to him with a bow, "May it please your Reverence to 5 go to Rama and see that he and his wife observe the fasts and vows that might ensure him wealth, health and a happy reign."

"I go, your majesty" replied Vasishtha and the sage, than whom stood none higher in the knowledge of 10 vows, fasts, penances and potent spells, betook himself to Rama's palace upon a stately chariot. His priestly car he drove through three vast blocks of the mansion, even as dazzling lightning flashes through pale clouds. Rama heard him coming and approached him in all reverent haste, 15 He lent his arm to aid Vasishtha to descend from his chariot, and touched his holy feet with his head. Vasishtha enquired after him kindly and said, "Rama ! you have found high favour in your father's eyes and in consequence, he intends to place you over this realm to-morrow, even as Nahu-

sha installed Yayati, his son. Hence, it behoves you and your wife to spend the night in fast and meditation." He next ordained the fast and prayer by rule and text and took leave of the prince, with courteous honors gratified.

Rama remained yet a while in sweet converse with his friends who ever had a pleasant word for him ; then he bade them good-bye and retired to his apartments. He found them gay and bright with men and maids happily busy with the preparations for the morrow, even as some beautiful lotus lake studded with flowers that open their hearts to the rays of the rising sun, while gem-like birds of varied plume light above them with unsteady gait, maddened with frequent draughts of honey.

Meanwhile Vasishtha rode out from Rama's palace through the royal streets teeming with happy crowds in busy converse. The gentle breeze wafted the welcome sound to distant ears even as the muffled roar of the ocean-wave falling on drowsy ears. The town wore a gay look that night ; streets and by-ways were swept and cleaned and watered. The houses were decked with flags and banners that nodded, as it were, gentle welcome to one another. The gates were hid beneath clusters of plantains, mango leaves and palm fruits. Men, women and boys, rich and poor, high and low, waited expectant for the happy dawn that was to bring round the hour when they would rejoice in the sight of their beloved Rama crowned as king. Vasishtha took his way leisurely through the gay crowds, even as a mighty lord of the deep cleaving his way amid mountain billows. He passed up the stairs to where sat the expectant monarch, even as a bright denizen of the skies in his cloud-chariot. The whole audience rose as one man to accord reverend welcome to the saint, even as gods and angels lift their hands and hearts in awe and reverence to Brihaspati, the divine priest and counsellor. " Has Rama

55 been duly instructed in his holy task for the night" queried the fond king ; to which the sage made reply, " Yea, my leige, even as you desired."

60 The king craved permission of his chaplain to retire for the night; he dismissed his audience and sought the privacy of his apartments, even as the monarch of the forest seeks his rocky lair. His presence illumined the happy halls, more splendid by far than the abode of the Lord of the Heavens and flashing bright with gemmed robes and gem-like eyes, even as the star-lit firmament suffused with the rising splendours of the Queen of night.

CHAPTER VI

GAY AYODHYA

5 **R**AMA followed the instructions of the saint to the letter. With a pure body and a purer mind, the happy pair offered lowly worship unto the Lord of Eternity. Rama raised the vessel of consecrated food and clarified butter high above his head ; offered it unto the blazing Lord of Fire with holy mantras ; partook of what remained, chanting an inward prayer for happiness and peace ; washed 10 his lips with holy water ; and with tranquil mind and restrained senses, sought repose and Seeta with him, on the bed of sacred grass spread in the presence of the Deity of his heart.

15 He awoke in the last watch of the night and directed the decorations of his house against the morrow's solemn ceremony, while glad strains of joy and praise were borne to his ears from the bards and panegyrists gathered to wake him to the day's duties. He took his bath and offered devout prayer to the Goddess of the morning twilight and 20 recited the sacred Gayatri with concentrated faculties. He

clad himself in robes of pure white and bowed low in reverence to the Lord of all, while Brahmanas raised their voices in mighty benediction. The holy strains announced the auspicious day of coronation to the assembled myriads over the capital, while gay and festive music kept sweet accompaniment thereto.

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The people rejoiced to hear that Rama and Seeta spent the night in fast and devotion to prepare them for the rite of consecration on the morrow. The dawn saw them busy with the decorations of the happy town. Gay flags and lofty pennons rose high above the stately fanes of the Gods, towering aloft like fleecy clouds ; over the domes that adorned the cross-ways ; over the shrines of Buddha ; over the turrets that crowned the impregnable fortifications ; over the merchants' shops, rich with products of nature and art ; over the wealthy mansions of the nobles ; over public halls and lofty trees. Professors of the art of song and dance grouped themselves everywhere, discoursing sweet music that enthralled the senses of the listeners. As the hour drew near for the solemn function, men and women gathered in the houses, the streets and the squares to exchange news of the happy event. Bands of bright children would talk of nothing else as they played with careless glee before their houses. The royal roads were strewn with gay flowers and redolent with rich perfumes and sweet odours. The streets were covered with costly hangings of silk and gold, from which descended many a cluster of palm and areca. Lofty posts were erected at regular intervals to bear the lights that would dispel the growing gloom within. Thus, nature and art combined to make the city as gay and bright as possible. The assembled myriads waited expectant in houses and squares saying, "Dasaratha, of the line of Ikshwaku, has wisely realized his growing infirmities and has decided, in time, to crown his

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55 son Rama in his place. The great Gods are merciful to us in that we are to have Rama as our ruler. He has an intimate knowledge of the varying grades of life, high and low ; ever humble, wise and righteous, he lives but for his brothers ; and we anchor our hopes therein that he will
 60 watch over our welfare with more than brotherly interest, for unnumbered years to come. Long live king Dasaratha and happy, in that his righteous resolve has enabled us to be the glad witnesses of the coronation of Rama." Thus they lauded high the aged monarch ; and the sound of their voices rose above the town like the roar of the angry sea when the moon calls out to her at night. Nay, Ayodhya, fair as the lordly capital of Indra, *was* the sea ; the countless millions that thronged therein from all quarters of the globe to witness Rama's installation were the denizens of the
 70 deep ; and it was their voice and of the waves that rose on the night-air.

CHAPTER VII

MANTHARA, THE PLOTTER

5 **N**ONE knew where she came from, nor of whom ; she came along with the queen Kaikeyi when she rode into happy Ayodhya as the fond bride of the aged Dasaratha. She stood like a bird of evil omen in the balcony of the moon-white mansion of Kaikeyi and cast an idle glance on the busy town below her. The roads were neatly swept, well-watered and gaily decked. Bright flags and proud
 10 bannerets crowned the houses. The city walls had been pierced with fresh gates for the easy passage of the joyful crowds that would throng the town to partake of the festivities. The people were fresh from their bath, clean-looking and cheerful. Rama's palace gates were crowded

with Brahmanas chanting holy hymns, with their humble tribute of garlands and sweets to their well-beloved prince. Strains of sweet music rose from every quarter. Groups of happy men and women filled the streets with their bright presence and brighter talk ; even the horses and elephants, cows and bulls rejoined loudly in expectation of the happy event. The lofty gates of holy shrines glittered white in the soft moonlight. And Manthara, of dark heart, marvelled much at the sight.

She turned to a girl that stood near clad in spotless white, gazing with open-eyed amaze and pleasure at the lovely scenes that presented themselves to her view. "Friend ! can you tell me why Kausalya is so free and lavish with her gold ? She was ever known to be close-fisted and greedy of wealth. What mean these gay and happy crowds ? What wonderful pageant, what new surprise, has our king for us ?" The maid was glad to get some one with whom she could share her overwhelming joy and replied " King Dasaratha has decided to seat our darling Rama on the royal throne and that even to-morrow, when the star Pushya rules the day ; and it is no wonder that the people are beside themselves with joy ; for none deserve it more than Rama of sweet patience and spotless purity, whom the mighty Gods have crowned with rare perfections." The words roused black envy in the heart of the hunchback ; and down from the terrace, lofty as Kailasa's peak, she sped on the wings of haste to where Kailkeyi slept. Wicked thoughts seethed in her brain while her heart was aflame with wrath. "Sleep you, foolish one ! Awake, arise, for, dread Peril draws near you. Why see you not the dark clouds of misfortune right over your head ? You brag of your rare beauty and good fortune that have made you the heart's delight of your royal husband. But, too well I know that *you* have no place in his affections. His favour and your happy

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50 days are even now drawing to an end, like a mountain torrent drained by Summer's fierce heat."

55 These cruel words from the enraged heart of her hand-maid, whose fond interest masked her wicked wiles, cut to the heart the lovely queen. She gazed at Manthara in curious amaze and said "What ? This from you ! I fear some unseen evil has clouded your heart and brain. Your wan face argues a suffering heart. Speak free and it will go hard with me if I do not bring joy and solace back to you."

60 But, the kindly words of Kaikeyi added fuel to the flame of wrath that burnt in the heart of the scheming Manthara. Her mistress cared not even to acquaint herself with the news of Rama's coronation, with which the capital was ringing from end to end. Most eloquent for evil, she addressed herself to her diabolical task , she would make the very name of Rama hateful in the eyes of Kaikeyi ;
 65 she would wring her heart with grief for her son, despoiled of his lawful crown ; she would see that she had no safer watcher of her interests. "Lady ! Know you not as yet that the foolish king will crown Rama as the ruler of this vast empire and that a few hours hence. I know not what
 70 greater evil can befall you ; and it is hopeless to prevent it. You are the idol of my heart , my soul is plunged in the lowest depths of black sorrow ; I suffer the tortures of the damned, a prey to consuming flames. I flew to you on the wings of speed to save you from your fate, if possible. I live
 75 or die with you. My hopes and fears are bound up with yours. Daughter of a mighty king, wedded to a mightier monarch, yet how blind to the cruel laws that guide the acts of kings ! You are a sweet and gentle dove ensnared by a cruel and cunning vulture. Your husband is 'a rogue in grain,
 80 veneered with sanctimonious hypocrisy.' His honeyed words conceal a cruel and remorseless heart. You see not that he has taken base advantage of your pure and guileless heart.

He has cozened you with sweet talk of undying love and eternal fidelity, while his soul has been all the while busy plotting your ruin ; and now he has thrown off the mask and showers wealth and honor on his favorite queen Kausalya and her son. Ah, my queen! whose eyes fond love and foolish trust have blinded to the coming evil ! Am I to believe that you see not even now the black perfidy of yon smooth-tongued deceiver ? He has cunningly managed to keep your son Bharata far away and means to profit by his absence to give the crown to Rama ere the coming day draws to a close. Well can he do that and safely, in that there is none to stay him or say nay. Your husband but in name ; truth would call him your most relentless foe. Avoid him, now at least, as you would the Bringer of death. A heedless girl thou and all innocent, who clasps the glittering snake to her fond breast and fondles its cruel fangs, seeing not in it the fleet messenger of death. So have you placed your confiding soul in the keeping of your mortal enemy, who, to you, is the kindest and best of husbands But, even you will be convinced ere long that Dasaratha will work cruel woe unto you and your son, deadlier by far than serpent's tooth enraged, more pitiless than your insulted foe. Ah, gentle heart, that was made for a life of happiness and pleasure ! Dasaratha, the hoary sinner, has deluded you with soft and smooth phrases of love and devotion, only to crown Rama as king over this fair realm and send you, your son, your kith and kin to eternal perdition. Beware ere it is too late ; wake to your peril, now at least ; repose not in fancied security, but, put forth the might of your wondrous beauty and womanly wiles to enslave the heart of the foul deceiver ; and save from the brink of ruin your Bharata, yourself and me." Kaikeyi, who lay stretched at her ease, heard her out with a smile of amused pity ; but, the news of Rama's coronation thrilled her with unbounded joy ; her face reflected her

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heart, even as the beauteous autumn moon; she rose in joyous haste and glad surprise, for, her earnest prayers and long-cherished hopes had borne fruit; she could not dream
 120 of a greater good fortune to herself and Bharata. She threw a priceless necklace of flashing gems round the hunchback's neck as an earnest of her delight for the glad tidings she brought and said "None can rejoice more at Rama's coronation than I, his mother; for, Rama and Bharata
 125 are the twin blossoms that grow from my heart. These are the sweetest words I have ever heard till now and I cannot reward you enough, the welcome bringer thereof. Ask what you will of me, for, it is yours."

Kaikeyi's innocent happiness and ready welcome but
 130 made the wicked Manthara more determined in her purpose of evil; the Goddess of speech, Sarasvati, possessed her heart at the prayer of the Gods and swayed her to her will.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TEMPTER

SHE flung aside with an air of contempt the costly present of her mistress; she really came to believe
 5 that a great danger threatened Kaikeyi, and was wroth with her for being so obstinately insensible to her well-meant advice. "Dull-witted! How is it you know not that the waves of calamity are even now closing over your head? I cannot for the very life of me appreciate your ill-timed raptures. The news of Rama's coronation is a death-blow to all our hopes; and you rejoice where you should lament. But, I suffer with grief on your account. Nay,
 10 I am inclined to laugh every time I set my eyes on such an insane mistress. Rama is the son of your rival, is he

not ? Then he is your Fate. The most stupid person would never derive any pleasure from hearing of the progress and prosperity of his deadliest enemy. I am deeply grieved to see your heart so perverted.

Perhaps, you have no idea of the grave consequences in store for you. This crown belongs of right as much to Bharata as to Rama ; hence, your son is an object of fear and suspicion to him. The very thought fills me with despair. 'How can Rama's fear affect Bharata any way ?' Well, ferocious animals and venomous snakes suspect a man in anticipation and seek to kill him to save themselves from fancied danger Even so, Rama would naturally seek to ruin Bharata, to save himself from future danger through him. 'But, this kingdom belongs to Lakshman and Satrughna too ?' Yes ; but Lakshmana, though mighty, is entirely devoted to Rama, body and soul ; and Rama fears him not. Similarly, Bharata has nothing to fear from Satrughna. 'But, the younger princes, though devoted to their brothers would like to reign in their turn as well ?' Well, Rama was born under the star Punarvasu ; he gets the crown first. Next comes Bharata born under Pushya ; next Lakshmana and last Satrughna. So, Rama will seek to make away with Bharata, who stands next to him. 'Rama is sure of coming to the throne first and need not entertain any doubt of Bharata's claims as a rival ?' Well, Rama is a deep one ; an expert in kingly polity ; knows when to act and how ; while your son Bharata is blissfully innocent of any such advantages. I tremble to think what he may suffer at the hands of Rama.

Kausalya is at the zenith of her glory and power. The holy Brahmanas will seat him on the royal throne to-morrow, when the bright star Pushya rains down its radiant influence. Kausalya too will be crowned with wealth and fame and set her foot on the necks of her enemies ; and you, your

son Bharata, your kith and kin and we, your dependents
 50 should wait upon queen Kaikeyi in suppliant guise. It is
 Kausalya you should fear most. Bharata will take his place
 as the bond-man of Rama, the emperor. He will drag down
 along with him into the depths of sorrow and misery all
 that are near and dear to him ; while Rama's people, men
 55 and women, will rejoice in proportion."

The lofty nobility of Kaikeyi was proof against the insidious poison of Manthara's arguments ; she thought to disarm the hunchback's malice towards Rama by dwelling at length on his manifold excellences. "You are right if
 60 Rama be all that you say ; but, I know well that not one of your aspersions lies at his door. Dharma has no mysteries for the open eye of Rama ; great men and good have had him under training. He is an ideal for all sons to follow ; and above all, he is Dasaratha's first-born ; and who more
 65 deserving of the crown than he ?

Now let me show you how baseless your apprehensions are. It is no sound argument that this kingdom is the common property of Rama and his brothers.

Again, Rama (may his shadow never grow less) is a fond
 70 father to his brothers and dependents. It is madness pure to dream of evil to Bharata at the hands of Rama. I wonder why you are so much enraged and afflicted at the very news of Rama's coronation.

Bharata will have his day and sit on the throne of his
 75 fathers when Rama has reigned over the happy Kosalas for full five score years. So, Bharata he is sure to instal as heir-apparent, even now. It is but as it should be. Bharata will come in for his own. Now, all in good time I see no earthly reason why you should be so much afflicted.

80 I heard you say that Rama's installation will work evil unto me. But, he is the darling of my heart ; and he waits

upon me ever with love and reverence even greater than what he shows to Kausalya that bore him.

It matters little even if Bharata does not take his place on the throne after Rama has adorned it for a hundred years. It makes no difference whether Bharata gets the crown or Rama ; for, the virtuous prince looks upon his brothers as his very self "

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Kaikeyi's noble defence of Rama filled Manthara's soul with wilder fears and deeper sorrow. She sighed long and hot and replied, "Oh, jaundiced eye that sees good in evil! Your feeble intellect stands in the way of your realizing the deep and shoreless ocean of misery wherein you are sunk. Bharata cheated of his lawful rights and exiled from fair Kosala, alas, what a pitiful sight ! What wiseacre assured you that Bharata will succeed to the crown when Rama has worn it for a hundred years ? The rising sun will see Rama seated on the throne of the Ikshwakus and his son will succeed him by right. So, Bharata need never dream of the royal crown. You are quick enough to defend Rama and work yourself up into unseasonable wrath when a poor creature like myself tries honestly to open your eyes to the truth. Not all the sons of a king sit upon the father's throne ; if so, wild anarchy and tumult will wreck the kingdom. It is the eldest or the most deserving that is entrusted with the responsibilities of government. It is bad enough that Bharata is deprived of the crown ; but worse is in store for him. He will be eternally shut out from any chance of government. Fond mother ! your son will be driven from the kingdom ; he will be hopelessly deprived of the power and the joys that are his by right of birth; he will wander over the earth like the meanest and most helpless of men. Perhaps Rama, the first boan, is an insuperable barrier in the way of Bharata's getting the throne now. But, would you hear of a way of circumvent-

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ing the evil ? Why, I am here for that very purpose and alas! you see it not. The unprecedented good fortune of your rival fills your heart with overwhelming joy and seeks to reward me with costly presents in token thereof. Rama but
 120 waits to get the throne untroubled by rival claims, to exile Bharata to distant lands; or he may send him out of this world. And you have nicely and loyally assisted him in the good work by sending Bharata to the distant home of his uncle! Trees, plants and such like senseless objects do twine
 125 themselves round what stand near them. Even so would Dasaratha be drawn towards Bharata and Satrughna, were they with him; and it is you that took effectual measures to prevent it. Lakshmana ever shadows Rama ; nay, if Satrughna, the favourite of Bharata, were here at least, there is a chance
 130 that the old king may be reminded of his absent son ; and you have denied yourself that slender hope too. I have heard people say that some woodmen would fell a likely tree for fuel; but drew back at the sight of the thorny undergrowth that encircled it. So, Rama would shield Lakshmana and he
 135 in his turn would stand between Rama and danger. The celestial twins, the Aswinis, are not more attached to each other than they; and who knows it not? Lakshmana would never dream of evil to Rama; and Rama will ever seek the death of Bharata. Hence, it is better that your son flees to
 140 the distant forests from his uncle's country. For, Fate waits for him here. This seems to me good and for you too. Need I repeat that you and yours may enjoy wealth, power, fame and all delights that life can give, only if Bharata's brows are encircled with the royal crown ? Forget not
 145 that he is the son of Kaikeyi, the hated rival of Kausalya ! Born to inherit the highest place in the world and enjoy the sweetest comforts, how could the guileless boy hope to live, shorn of the crown that is his by every right and in the relentless grip of Rama in the flush of his wildest hopes

fulfilled? The lordly elephant, hunted by the dread monarch 150 of the forest and at last under his merciless fangs, is a happier object. Now is your chance, if you would save your son from the clutches of his inexorable foe.

In the pride of your beauty and of your unbounded sway over the old monarch's heart, you have put slights in- 155 numerable upon Kausalya. You have trampled upon her heart; you have lacerated her feelings ; and who but a fool will wonder if she wreaks dire vengeance upon you and yours, now that her son is resistless ruler over countless millions? I have spoken enough. The shouts of a nation's 160 joy that crown Rama as the happy monarch of this broad and fair earth, its towns, its mountains, its forests and the seas that gird it round, those very shouts are the death-knell of your joys and hopes, pride and power ; and your son falls with you. The sun that rises to see Rama seated 165 on Dasaratha's throne rises also on the last day of Bharata's life on earth. Devise some means whereby you could seat your Bharata on his father's throne and immure your mortal enemy Rama in the dark depths of distant forests "

CHAPTER IX

THE FALL OF KAIKEYI

NO one knew better the peerless qualities that adorned 5 Rama ; yet the high Gods, ever mindful of their interests, cast a veil over her eyes and she drank the words of the hunchback with greedy ears. Fire flashed from her eyes at the thought of her proud self reduced to be the bond-maid of Kausalya. Long and hot she sighed and exclaimed "This moment will I drive Rama away from the haunts of men and place the crown on the head of Bharata 10 Man-thara ! I know that your brain is keen and subtle ; my son

must win the thrown and that now ; Rama should be eternally shut out from the succession to the throne ; and I count upon you to find me a way to the accomplishment of my object."

15 Manthara had set her heart upon the ruin of Rama. Joy unspeakable filled her to find that she had won over Kaikeyi to her views.

20 "Here I have a plan ready to set Bharata on the throne. But I wonder you seek it of me. Have you forgot, or remembering well, do you pretend ignorance ? Perhaps, you prefer to hear of the welcome news from me. Well, hear it, since you wish it ; and having heard, give your best thoughts to it."

25 Kaikeyi precipitately rose from her bed and cried out "Bharata should get the throne by any means, fair or foul. Rama must never dream of it ; unfold a plan thereto."

30 "There took place of yore", said Manthara "Then a great war between the gods and the asuras. The gods had the worst of it and prayed your husband Dasaratha to assist them. The king marched south with his friends, and you with him, to the impenetrable forests of Dandaka where Sambara, the dolphin-bannered asura, ruled from his city Vaijayanta. A mighty master of illusion was he, 35 invincible of the gods. Time and oft he fought with Indra and in the darkness of night, his asuras despatched to hell those of the enemies who lay wounded during the day. Dasaratha fought with him long and fiercely ; and was sore wounded by the terrible weapons of the asuras. He lay in a 40 deep swoon and helpless in his chariot, when you drove him to another part of the field and sought to bring him back to life and consciousness. But, the asuras pursued him even there and pierced him with their remorseless shafts again and yet again. And you took him from their midst to another 45 place of safety. Dasaratha could not be enough grateful to

you for having rescued him twice from the jaws of death. He exclaimed in a transport of gratitude "Saviour of my life ! I grant you two boons. Ask what you will have". You accepted it with joy and replied " Nay", your gifts I reserve for season due ;" and he assented thereto. Now, it was you that told me of this. Else what know I ? My love for you has treasured it in the depths of my memory.

Make your husband put a stop to the hateful preparations that are afoot towards the coronation of Rama ; put him in mind of the two boons you have of him ; and use them to seat Bharata on the throne of the Kosalas and exile Rama to the woods for twice seven years. Why ? Fourteen years are more than enough for Bharata to root himself in the affections of his subjects.

Hear me yet, while I direct you how to proceed. Daughter of Aswapati ! Take yourself hence to the Chamber of wrath as if your heart was aflame against Dasaratha ; wrap your shapely limbs in coarse robes, mean and soiled ; lie there in dust and dirt ; the moment he steps in sob as if your heart would break ; raise not your eyes to his face ; speak not to him ; and our hopes are to be sure to be crowned with success. I know, for a truth, that you stand nearest his heart. For you he will jump into the blazing fire. For you he will gladly sacrifice his life · but he dare not say you nay ; he dare not rouse your anger ; he dare not look at your wrathful face. Sluggard ! Gauge full well the full force and might of your marvellous beauty. Gold, gems, pearls and costly trifles he will lay at your feet ; but, never, for a moment, turn your eyes to them. Recall to him the two boons he granted you during the dread battle. He is not a man to go back upon his word, and in *that* lies our hope. Let him clasp you to his breast and cry over and again 'I give you the two boons' ; even then, rest not until he swears it by an oath he will not break ; and then ask him to

80 exile Rama to the woods for fourteen years and to crown Bharata as ruler of Ayodhya. Rama absent from the kingdom for fourteen years, Bharata will grow in power and fame, win over the troops, the people and the treasure to himself and reign long and happily. At least wring
 85 from him a promise to banish Rama and the rest of our plan naturally succeeds. Out of sight, out of mind. The fickle people will very soon learn to forget their idol for the time. He will have none to befriend him. Your son, Bharata, would have suppressed his enemies and hold uninterrupted sway. By the time that Rama returns from the forest, the keen-witted Bharata would have won the hearts of his subjects ; surrounded by his friends and well-wishers, he would stand alone, firm-rooted. Now is the time to accomplish our purpose or never. Summon thy courage
 90 and skill to entrap the uxorious king and see that the preparations now afoot towards Rama's coronation are converted to the use of Bharata."

Kaikeyi religiously believed that the evil counsels of Manthara were the surest means of good to her and exclaimed with wild joy, even as a young colt unbroken,
 100 "Manthara ! Hunchbacks are naturally keen-witted ; but you are, far and away, the first among them. Strange that I have been blind to your superior excellences till now! Millions call me their queen and vow eternal fidelity
 105 and devotion ; but, you and you alone are the sleepless watcher over my interests. You live but for my happiness. Dasaratha's black heart was till now to me a sealed book. Let be. I have set my eyes upon countless hunchbacks, mean, crooked and repulsive of appearance ;
 110 but your fair body is, by a freak of nature, deformed a little, I see not how it can take away anything from your natural beauty. A lovely lotus is none the less charming to the eye if the wayward gust bent it a little. Your chest and

shoulders are broad and deep ; your stomach, with its tiny
whirl of a navel, hides itself from sight, out of very shame as 115
it were ; round and firm are your breasts and thighs ; your
face is radiant even as the spotless moon ; the little bells
from your costly girdle chime most musically ; your knees
are firm and well-set, while your feet are somewhat
unnecessarily long ; your long and shapely thighs shine 120
through the white silk that veils them. Like a she-swan
you walk proudly before me. In that witching hump of yours
lie in teeming confusion, wonderful foresight, strange plots,
plans and schemes of evil, intricate wiles of kingly polity and
arts of illusion, which even the dread Sambara would give 125
his life to possess. Manthara ! here let me hang this gold
necklet round your shoulders. Wait till Rama is exiled to the
dark forests and my Bharata is placed on the throne ; wait
till my purpose is accomplished and my heart is content ;
and I shall case yon precious hump in beaten gold. The 130
most fragrant sandal paste, prepared with the purest gold,
shall be spread over your arms and breast. A rare and
costly jewel, set with brilliants of divers hue shall hang on
your brows. Gaily adorned and richly dressed, you shall
move before me like a nymph of the skies. Lovely beyond 135
compare, your face shall shame the radiant moon ; you will
quell the pride and might of those that wish us ill and bring
them to your feet. Countless hunchbacks blazing with gold
and gems, shall wait upon you in turn."

Thus the mistress lauded to the skies Manthara, her 140
bond-maid, who turned to Kaikeyi even as she lay reclined
on the snow-white bed, like a blazing fire on the
sacrificial altar, and exclaimed "Would you raise the
dam when the swollen waters have emptied themselves to
nothing ? Arise and bend yourself to the task before you. 145
Away to the chamber of anger and await the foolish king."

The royal dupe swallowed the bait all greedily and

repaired to the sulkery, and her temptress with her. She was unspeakably proud of her unrivalled beauty ; she flung 150 away from her costly necklaces, rare jewels and precious pearls and, like a golden statue, she threw herself on the bare earth with wide eyes of anticipated triumph. Manthara's spells lay heavy upon her and under their influence she cried, "Go, tell my royal father the happy tidings. 'Rama 155 is exiled far away to the dreary woods. Our Bharata sits on the Ikshwaku throne. Or, Your daughter Kaikeyi journeyed to the dread halls of Yama even from the anger chamber. What care I for gold, gems and ornaments ? I draw my last breath when I see the hated Rama on the throne."

160 Manthara had not a particle of doubt now that her pupil was dead set on her nefarious purpose ; but, to make assurance doubly sure, she sent, as it were, a parting shot at Rama, cruel beyond expression and deadly. "If you allow Rama the least chance to get the throne, you condemn 165 yourself and your son to countless years of woe and disgrace. Fair one ! stick at nothing to gain your object."

Kaikeyi was pierced through and through with the keen poisoned shafts of the hunchback's malice. She pressed her hands to her heart to calm the tumultuous surprise that 170 arose in it when she thought "And he had the audacity to do a thing which he knew I would not approve of !" She was furiously angry with him for having taken it upon himself to arrange for the coronation of Rama without asking her leave. "Go, tell my father 'Rama is doomed to 175 wear out years of misery in the dark woods ; my Bharata rejoices in his royal power and glory' ; or 'Your daughter Kaikeyi hastened straight from the anger chamber to the mansions of Yama, the God of death.' If Rama is not to be banished from the kingdom, what care I for gold, gems, 180 garlands, dresses, costly viands or perfumes ? My life were an intolerable burden to me."

So spake she, the cruel-hearted ; she flung away from her gay wraps and priceless gems and lay on the bare cold earth, like some lovely bird shot through the heart. Dark anger, ever widening, clouded her fair face ; stripped of 185 of her gay attire, her necklets and diamonds, she lay, a prey to unreasoning grief, even as the starry sky over which the shadow of night draws apace, darkening the world.

CHAPTER X

THE UXORIOUS MONARCH

 The wicked Manthara did her work but too well.

Kaikeyi, an apt disciple, was now busy revolving the plot hatched by her maid. She saw her way to success in all its detail. "Manthara ! you speak well ; and I shall do even as you will have me." Heaving hot sighs of wrath, she sank upon the ground like a fallen Naga damsel of the nether regions, or like a gay-plumed bird transfixed with the venomous dart of the hunter. Anon, the shadow of a doubt crossed her heart. "Do I win or lose ?" She knit her fair brows in deep thought for a while ; and then saw her path to gain and glory clear to the very end. Manthara, her maid, was devoted to her interests and even more obstinately bent upon her purpose ; Kaikeyi's resolve filled her with wild joy ; and she saw Bharata seated on the throne of his father. Meanwhile, the daughter of Aswapati said to herself for the last time, "I win or die." Her face was black as a thunder-cloud with suppressed anger : wrapped in a single cloth, mean and soiled, she flung herself on the dust with her long hair in a single braid, even as it were the old serpent whispering into her willing ears unholy counsels. Like some sweet-

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throated songs! er of the feathered tribe bereft of life, she lay
 25 in that dark chamber, strewed with her priceless ornaments
 that gleamed bright in the growing gloom, as if they were
 the glowing sparks thrown off from her blazing anger ; or
 like a bright star-lit night when the full-faced moon has
 retired behind her fleecy curtains of ever-fleeting clouds.

30 Now, Dasaratha, with thoughtful care, gave his last
 directions to his ministers about the solemn function of the
 morrow and, dismissing his audience, he withdrew to the
 apartments of Kaikeyi. " Rama's coronation was but sudden-
 ly resolved upon. My darling Kaikeyi cannot have been
 35 informed of it. I will be the first to bear the happy news to
 her." And, like the radiant moon plunging into a bank of
 grey clouds in a sky over which the cruel Rahu had begun
 to cast his dark shadow, he entered the fatal pile.

Parrots, peacocks, herons, swans and other birds, sweet
 40 to the eye or to the ear, roamed free over the place. Veena
 and lute, mridanga and flute, played soft music. Dwarfs and
 hunchbacks hurried hither and thither ; bowers thick
 with Champaka and Asoka, dotted the spacious gardens and
 curiously fashioned grottos ; seats and couches of
 45 wondrous workmanship lay around, with gold, silver
 and ivory inlaid. The trees bore fruit and flower through
 all the year, thanks to the gardener's skill and science. Now,
 you came upon tiny lakes hid beneath a bed of bright
 lotuses or lilies ; now, you lighted upon pleasant nooks
 50 and snug corners provided with every tasteful delicacy.
 Visions of heavenly loveliness flashed here and there in
 costly attire, lending to the place the air of the radiant halls
 of the Lord of the Shining Ones.

And through that spacious palace, rich with every thing
 55 that man can desire, Dasaratha passed on, like a mighty
 lion into his lair. He proceeded to where Kaikeyi used to
 await his arrival, but found her not there. The hour, the

music, the birds, the perfumes awoke in him hot desires and made him all the more eager to clasp Kaikeyi to his breast. His eye glanced rapidly over the vacant seat and turned to the chamberlain who stood by and flashed a question. "Where is Kaikeyi?" And, ere he could receive a reply, he abandoned himself to gloom and despair. "Never had my darling failed me thus. She knew the hour of my visit to her and would advance to meet me with a radiant smile, gaily attired. Never had I any occasion till now to come here to her rooms and miss her." 65
"Alas! He knew not that the devil has poisoned her innocent mind with wicked counsel and that she lay in wait for him resolved to carry out her cruel purpose at all costs. So, 70 he asked again "Where has she gone, my Kaikeyi?" The officer trembled with fear and, with folded palms upon his head, managed to blurt out "Your Majesty! It is sometime since I saw the queen proceed in the direction of the anger chamber, the fire of wrath in her eyes." "Kaikeyi angry! Kaikeyi gone to the anger-chamber!" The words drove him remorselessly to the utter depths of despair; and his senses well nigh failed him.

He flew to the dark cell of Mourning and there beheld his heart's delight roll in the dust as one demented. Lovely beyond words, as some delicate creeper cut down to the earth; a sight to fill the beholders' hearts with amazement, even as some bright God hurled headlong from His Abode of Light on his merit's wane; enough to wring the hardest heart, even as some fair Kinnara nymph cruelly tortured by her 85 enemies; gifted with indescribable charm and grace, as some Apsaras banished from heaven; with clouded looks, as some potent Illusion sent down on earth to lure the souls of men; motionless, as some doe caught in the strong meshes of the hunter, she lay writhing in her consuming grief, as a lordly she-elephant struck to the heart with a venomous dart.

The petted child of the ruler of the Kekayas, the favourite queen of King Dasaratha of Ayodhya, it was all unmeet for her to lie there thus, as some broken waif. The
 95 snows of sixty thousand winters lay heavy on Dasaratha ; Kaikeyi was in the bright summer of her youth and loveliness. Dasaratha was the soul of righteousness ; Kaikeyi had staked her all on the accomplishment of her devilish plot. Dasaratha was the dread lord of countless
 100 millions whose lives hung upon his breath ; in his heart was gathered the experience and wisdom of sixty milleniums ; but, his love for Kaikeyi blinded him to every thing and he could not bear to see her suffer so. Frank and guileless, her beauty clouded his clear intellect and he could not see that
 105 she was the rival that supplanted Kausalya, and was hence her bitterest foe. She was not fool enough to sit tamely and see Rama succeed to the throne of his father, when she had a goodly son and knew she could wind the old man round her little finger. Why seek for any deeper reason for her
 110 present outburst of grief and rage ?

As some bull elephant soothes with soft trunk his mate whom the cruel hunter has shot down with poisoned shafts, Dasaratha fondly stroked his darling, saying to himself "What would she have ? Is her fair frame racked by any fleeting
 115 pain ? Or is it that she is displeased with me ? I wish I knew what she would do". With trembling heart he looked upon the lotus-eyed siren and the fires of love and passion flamed in him anew. "Light of my eyes !" he cried "I know not any reason why I should fall under your displeasure. Is
 120 any fool weary of his life and slight you ? Does any one seek the shortest path to the house of Death and puts an insult upon you ? Here stand I innocent of any offence to you, your devoted slave ; and you roll before me in the dust like one possessed of an evil spirit and bereft of her
 125 senses. It breaks my heart to see you suffer thus.

"Say, are you ill ? I have here in Ayodhya and elsewhere, countless doctors of medicine, the foremost of their craft, who are devoted to me body and soul, through favours received and honors conferred. Is it your wish that I send for them now ? They will, in a trice, keep away pain 130 and suffering from you. But, if you are really angry, tell me the name of the miserable wretch who has dared to offend you. He shall suffer the tortures of the damned. Or, is it that some one has done you a service and you grieve that you have not repaid him ? I shall reward him beyond your 135 expectations. Weep not. Let not senseless grief rack your fair limbs. What innocent man would you have me doom to death? What condemned wretch shall I set free? What beggar shall I make a prince ? What lord of riches shall I hurl into the gutter ? Be it anything that your heart may be set upon, 140 know you not that I and mine are yours to command ? Can I bear to say you nay ? I hold my life of worth but to serve you and anticipate your least wish. It is a wonder to me that you can even harbour a doubt about my readiness to carry out your behests, knowing, as you do, my boundless 145 love to you. You know better than others the extent of my power, energy, strength and wealth ; and yet I see you doubt my sincerity and ability to give you whatever you may wish for. This broad earth is mine to command, as far as the chariot of the sun courses. Gold, silver, pearls, 150 gems, kine, corn, horses, elephants, shawls, wraps from Sindhu, Sauveera, Saurashtra, Vanga, Anga, Magadha, Matsya, Kasi and Kosala, east and south, what will you have ? Nay, give full reins to your desires Alas, that you should so soil your shapely limbs, rolling in the dust and 155 dirt ! What do you fear ? Tell me truly. I will not fail to remove it even as the rising sun burns up the morning dew ; and I swear it on the merit I have laid by till now."

Consoled somewhat by his promises, Kaikeyi resolved to pierce his loving heart with cruel words and set about to bind him by dreadful oaths.

CHAPTER. XI

THE FATAL BOONS

KAIKEYI bore in mind but too well the words of Manthara, 'Bind your husband by dreadful oaths and then make him grant the two boons'. She saw that the old king was under the influence of love and a slave to his passion ; he was ready to do anything for her. Surely it is but child's play for him to grant her wish and he, the supreme ruler of the broad earth and all it contains. "I am in the best of health," she replied "No one has put upon me any affront. Your numerous gifts and rare, I desire not. I have a certain purpose at heart which you, with your irresistible might to make or mar, alone could accomplish for me. If you are so minded, swear it so as I would have you ; and I speak to you the wish of my heart."

And Dasaratha wondered much. "Here am I to obey her least behest ; yet she asks me to swear. It is a very trifling thing for me to give her what she wants. Well, I thank the Gods that my apprehensions about her health or peace of mind are baseless." With a pleased smile, he raised her from the ground and laid her fair head on his lap, yearning to feast his eyes upon her loveliness. The madness of his love rose to a delirium ; he stopped not to consider what he said. His fingers aimlessly played with her silken tresses and he said "Fairest of all flesh on earth and justly proud of it ! My soul's one delight ! Know you any among women that are nearer my heart ? Who more welcome to my eyes than Rama, the best of men ? Would

you have me swear upon the peerless prince, invincible, noblest, best, the life of my life ? What shall I do for you ? 30
 I swear to accomplish your purpose and that on my Rama, whom if I see not for an hour, I die. I deem it a privilege and honor to be called upon to sacrifice my body, my life, Bharata and the other sons of mine, my dearest kin and what rest I have ; but I cannot live away from Rama. And 35 by him I swear to fulfil your wish. I would sooner seek the dark realms of death than fail to do your bidding. Ponder well and you will see that my thoughts and words are in perfect unison ; speak out your wish and save me from grief and anxiety. I have said my say and leave you to act as seems best. You know the mighty spell your 40 beauty has cast upon me ; you know my power to make or mar ; and think you it is charitable to suspect my good faith ? Once again I swear by every good and holy act I have done till now that I will accomplish your purpose at any 45 cost."

Kaikeyi never forgot for a moment Manthara's counsel to anyhow secure the exile of Rama and the installation of Bharata. Her joy knew no bounds to see that her beloved son was sure to get the throne ; for, Dasaratha had sworn even as she would have him. He was in her toils. Her doting husband would not fail to see her wish realized at whatever cost and he had sworn it upon his darling Rama. So, she resolved to tell him of her cruel purpose ; even his bitterest foe would not have had the heart to wound him so ; but, she was but the God of Death in disguise that came to bereave him of his life. Then a doubt cast its shadow over her heart and she held herself back. "True, that the old dotard has sworn it strongly. But, my boon is no ordinary one. He may hear me out and, aghast at the utter cruelty and wickedness of my wish, may foreswear himself and say 'It is not in me to do as you will,' 50 55 60

Then my heart's hopes would be shattered." She resolved to bind him more securely to his word and exclaimed " Righteous king ! You have sworn by Rama and by your good acts that you will grant me the boons I may ask of you. If you speak true, I call upon the eternal witnesses to men's thoughts, words and deeds. Listen, ye gods, thirty-three crores in number ! Listen, the sun, the moon, the Akasa, the nine planetary Rulers, the night, the day, the quarters, the heavens, the earth, the Gandharvas, the Rakshasas, the creatures of the night, the household gods and all living beings! Here king Dasaratha^{swears} to grant my wish ; and he is a speaker of truth, a warrior of immeasurable might, an adept in the mysteries of dharma. Lend me your ears carefully and witness his promise." She cast her powerful spells over Dasaratha of undimmed valor ; she bound him helpless in the toils of dharma ; and firmly convinced that, blinded by love and passion, he was ready to please her at any cost, she fixed the feeble-minded king with her eyes and said " My lord ! Let me recall to your memory an incident of the far past. During that terrible battle at night with Sambara the Asura, he wounded you sore and you fainted right away. Then, I kept my head and perilled my life to drive you safe to a distant part of the field. I spent the livelong night by your side and brought you back to life and light. I hope you have not forgotten it. You were pleased to grant me two boons ; but I kept them with you until some likely season. Lord of the measureless expanse of the earth ! Soul of truth ! I pray you grant me the two boons. But, having once passed your righteous word to grant me the boons, if now you go back upon it, rest sure I will not survive that indignity. I will even tear my heart by the roots."

It needed not all these solemn asseverations and

preliminary vows. Like the foolish deer of the forest that is charmed by the sweet music of the hunter and is hopelessly caught in the fatal net, Kaikeyi's words had already enslaved him quite. And in his eagerness to convince her of 100 his boundless love, he cried "Enough ! Have you not my word that I grant your two boons whatever they might be ? And why hesitate ?"

Alas ! He was little aware of the great misery that lay in store for him ; he saw not the shadow of death creep 105 upon him slowly but surely. Kaikeyi observed him keenly and was convinced, beyond a doubt, that he was hopelessly intoxicated with her beauty and was wound up to the right pitch when he would do anything for her. She fixed him again with her eyes, and said in cold and cruel tones "I am 110 about to ask you to grant me the two boons you promised of yore. Hear me with the utmost attention. My son Bharata shall be crowned as the heir-apparent to the throne with the very things prepared towards Rama's coronation. Mighty monarch ! Now is my time to ask you 115 to grant me the second of the two boons I had of you on the night of the dreadful battle between the gods and the asuras. Rama shall be banished to the dark forests of Dandaka for twice seven years and shall live the life of a recluse with matted hair and clad in deer-skin and the 120 bark of trees. Look sharp. This very moment, my Bharata shall begin his rule as heir-apparent in undisturbed peace. This is the wish of my heart and you have sworn inviolably to realize it. I but ask you to perform what you promised of old and nothing new. Do I press upon you any 125 unreasonable claim ? Nay, I but ask because you are sworn to it. True, it is not every creditor that receives a welcome reception at the hands of him who owes him money; but, it is no blame of his. This very day I shall see Rama turn his back upon Ayodhya and take his way to Dandaka. King 130

of kings ! Keep your word and let me not call you a traitor to truth. Act so that you will save from eternal disgrace, the line of the mighty Ikshvakus in which you are born, the bright traditions of your forefathers from the beginnings of

- 135 Time and last, not least, your duty as a king, in whose crown shines the brightest jewel of Truth. I have heard wise and holy men speak of Truth as the surest road and the best to the bright mansions of the Blessed hereafter".

CHAPTER XII

IN THE TOILS

KAIKEYI'S words fell like a thunder-bolt on Dasaratha's ears. He was bereft of consciousness and plunged in the depths of grief. "It is not in my Kaikeyi, of guileless heart, to oppose Rama's coronation and wound my heart so cruelly She was never known to talk thus. So, I cannot take it as a fact. Is it some horrid dream ? Nay, I sleep not, but am broad awake. Am I gone mad ? No, I see nothing tending thereto. Is it some flash of memory from far off births ? It cannot be. I see no reason why such a dread calamity should have befallen me even then. Or is it some insidious malady that has unhinged my brain ?" He thought long and earnestly over it, but was no nearer the solution.

15 By a great effort, he shook off the numbness that was creeping over him. Pierced with the cruel shafts of Kaikeyi's words, his senses were confused, even as those of a fawn suddenly face to face with a tiger. He heaved hot sighs even as some venomous serpent whom the charmer had deprived of energy and motion. He sat there on the bare earth, a pitiable sight to see. "Fie ! Fie upon this miserable existence of mine !" cried he and fainted away from grief.

It was a long time before he came back to himself. Wild

fury possessed him to tear Kaikeyi limb from limb. An all-consuming fire flashed forth from his eyes as he turned to her and cried in a terrible voice, "Merciless wretch ! Black-hearted ! Savage destroyer of my fair line ! Incarnate sin ! What wrong have I or Rama done to you or to yours ? What foul fiend set you up to compass this great evil to Rama, who loves and reverences you even as he does his mother ? Well, I am a fool to blame *you* ; for, did I not invite this fate upon myself ? This broad earth holds none so foolish as to nourish in his bosom a glittering serpent of deadly venom ; but I mistook you for a virtuous daughter of a goodly house and took you to my heart ; and therein doomed myself to death and disgrace.

"The whole world proclaims, with one voice, the countless excellences of Rama. What fault, what crime shall I impute to him to justify his banishment ? Kausalya, Sumitra, my wealth, my power, nay, my very life are not so very dear to me but I can put them away without a paug. But, the very idea of sending away Rama from my presence is utterly improbable—and he loves me above everything.

"The more I feast my eyes upon his fair face and godly beauty the more my senses reel with exquisite joy. I cannot dream of being away from him for a moment and live. The worlds may yet roll on sunless ; corn may yet grow to golden fruition unblessed by water ; but Dasaratha lives not without Rama, be he far or near.

"It is plain you have staked your life on this sinful venture. Enough ; stay your hand ere it is too late. Free yourself from the loathsome coils of this obstinacy. Look here. I entreat it with my head upon your feet. Have I not humbled myself enough ? Have pity now at least ; abandon your fell purpose. I wonder how you had the heart to plot this dreadful iniquity !

"May be you spoke thus to test my love and affection to

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Bharata? Then you must but have asked the throne for your boy. Your prayer for the exile of Rama is utterly at variance
 60 with what you spoke of him time and oft ere now. 'Rama is older in righteousness and virtue than the sons of men ; hence I count him as my first-born. Bharata comes but next'. Said you not so? You then meant it to flatter my credulous vanity, or, moved for the time by Rama's devotion
 65 to you. You are in the grip of grief and fear ever since you heard of the approaching coronation of Rama;you have lent yourself to be played upon by evil hearted schemers ; you have sought the dark solitude of this anger chamber ; you wring my heart even unto death by your cruel obstinacy ;
 70 well, I see it all clearly that your fair words were no test of my feelings towards your Bharata.

"They say it prophesies the downfall of a noble line when some well-conducted member of it turns out all unexpectedly perverse and wicked. You were known even till
 75 now to love right and fear wrong ? But this sudden moral twist foretells some dire calamity to the line of Ikshvaku.

"I carry my memory as far back as I can, but cannot recall any occasion when your conduct towards me was any other but seemly and loving. Hence my perplexity and unwillingness to take your words in earnest. Girl ! Said you not over and again to me 'My Bharata is great in mind and heart; but Rama is his peer, nay, his master?' Your words stand witness to your thoughts. So, I cannot, I will not believe you now.

85 "How had you the heart to condemn, for twice seven dreary years to the lonely forests, Rama on whom virtue and fame shed their undimmed lustre ? I see in him no fault, not the slightest, that could justify his banishment from the kingdom. Brought up in the lap of luxury and happiness, flower-soft of limb, what hardened your heart to pray for his banishment to the forests ? I knew
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you as one of righteous soul, shrinking from the least breath of sin. Where has that wholesome fear flown to ? You pray for Rama to be immured in the far off woods. Well, grant that I consent. But Rama is the darling of every object in creation ; and would they stand by and see him torn from them ?

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“ Rama was never known to fail, the slightest, in his devotion and service to you. Your Bharata stands far below him in that respect. Then, what do you see in your son to set him up over Rama ? You know too well that there is none other than Rama who will wait upon you with love and reverence and obey your lightest word. How had you the audacity to ask for his exile to the forests ?

“ There are millions of women in my kingdom, old and young. Do I hear any one of them complain that Rama has soiled himself with some unworthy act or that his fair fame is dimmed thereby ? Again, there are thousands of men and women in this realm who work hard to earn their living. Do you hear any one of them traduce Rama or speak of him any baseless calumny ? With a pure soul, Rama conciliates all creatures by his sweet thoughts, words and acts ; he draws their hearts to him by realizing for them their utmost wishes. His mind is ever centred in their welfare and has thereby won for him the Worlds of Light, even the highest. He is idolized by the poor and the needy, whose wants he relieves with a lavish hand. The great and the wise he wins to give him pious counsel by unparalleled devotion to them. Nay, he makes his bitterest foes traitor to themselves and fast friends of his by the mere flourish of his redoubtable bow. He is a hero unmatched in sweet sympathy, profuse charity, profound wisdom and resistless valour. Rare virtues vie with one another to crown him—truth, charity that secures a bright hereafter, stern restrain of the organs of sense and action, large gifts that win the 120

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hearts of people, unwavering friendliness, purity of thought, word and deed, adaptability, an open eye that sees into the mysteries of Being, and reverent service towards the elders and the teachers of Law. What madness possessed you
 130 with senseless hate to pray for his exile from the kingdom, and he godly in his attributes, radiant as a Maharshi and dearer to every object in creation than its very self ?

“ He is ever known to be sweet spoken and gentle to every creature, man or beast ; and I, of all, should never
 135 dream of his speaking any thing that would cause me the slightest annoyance. What a miserable return do I make him for all his love and kindness to me ! I should earn your love at the cost of hopelessly wounding the heart of Rama, dearer to me than the light of my eyes. Whom have I to
 140 call upon to stand between me and evil but my Rama, adorned with patience, self-control, charity, truth, righteousness, gratitude, gentleness and a thousand other graces of mind and heart ? And *him* you would have me put away from myself !

145 ‘ Kaikeyi ! I have lived long, too long on this earth ; Death opens its doors to me even now ; my age and misery will melt a heart of stone. A drivelling dotard, I but say my few words over and over. I can only pray you to have pity upon me. I swear to make you mistress of everything
 150 that this sea-girt earth boasts of ; I but entreat you to spare me Rama. Kaikeyi ! You are young, very young, nay, a girl ; yet, see me fold my trembling hands to you in supplication ; see me lay my hoary head at your feet in pitiful entreaty. Let Rama find in you a sure haven of refuge. Make
 155 me not an instrument of evil, a tool of wickedness. Let me not go upon my plighted word to Rama, to my friends and to my people.”

Thus he raved on, consumed with grief and fainted quite ; recovered himself after a time ; staggered like one

suddenly hit ; remembered that the hour was drawing nigh 160 when he would have to part from Rama, and overwhelmed with sorrow, he entreated her again to rescue him from a shameful death. But Kaikeyi's anger blazed forth all the more violently and she exclaimed in more pitiless accents if possible, " Oh, monarch ! Were you present in an assembly of 165 kingly sages like yourself and some one were to ask you casually ' Dasaratha ! How did you discharge to Kaikeyi the heavy debt of gratitude for your life saved ? ', would you, well-conversant with the mysteries of duty, reply with a bold confidence ? Would you be able to prove to them 170 that you have kept your word to me ? Or, would you rather say ' I owe my life to her, who risked hers to save mine. I granted her some boons in the transports of my gratitude; but, only to please a woman's heart. Of course, I made light of it when the poor fool took it all seriously and asked me to grant them I laughed in her face and sent her about her business ? Well, a nice figure you would cut among them ! King of kings ! How dare you grant me boons in the past and seek to perjure yourself now ? 175

" Now, the members of a class do not stand alone , the 180 good or evil that one does raises or drags down the others along with him. The world judges of the class by the individual. The kings of the world are eternally shamed in you

" May be you have heard that, once before, a dove 185 threw itself on the protection of your ancestor Sibi to save it from a cruel vulture and the noble-hearted king offered his own flesh to the vulture to feed upon ? Again, Alarka, the royal sage, promised a holy Brahmana to grant him his wishes ; and the blind suppliant wanted the king to give him his goodly eyes. And Alarka gave them all joyfully 190 and won the bright worlds of the gods. Once upon a time, the gods prayed to the Regent of the Waters, ' Ocean-lord !

We would that you keep yourself within limits'; and the
 195 ocean has faithfully kept its word ever since. Thus have
 your noble ancestors lived out their ideals of duty. Would
 you seek to forget it? Would you foreswear yourself?

"Black-hearted deceiver! I am no dupe of yours.
 Know I not that you have set your heart upon crowning
 200 Rama all unjustly, that you might disport yourself with that
 hag Kausalya, day and night? Well, I care not to discuss
 with you whether the boons I ask are righteous or otherwise,
 true or false; I will hold you to your promise and compel
 you to perform it to the very letter. If Rama should sit on the
 205 throne of the Ikshwakus, I will, before they face, drink deadly
 poison and kill myself at your feet. Death has no terrors
 for me, but is a welcome friend, if I should ever see my
 hated rival Kausalya receive the homage of the people, be
 it for a day. For, dare you deny that I am an infinitely
 210 greater source of joy and happiness to you than that horror?
 Once more I swear a dreadful oath by myself and by my
 darling Bharata. My heart knows not peace nor content
 unless I see Rama driven to the forests." She wrapped
 herself in cold contemptuous silence and turned a deaf ear
 215 to Dasaratha and his passionate entreaties.

The words "Rama should be exiled to the forests;
 Bharata should be crowned as king" fell upon the wounded
 heart of the poor king like drops of molten lead. For a
 while he sat with dazed senses, stupidly silent. Anon, he
 220 stared bewildered at his wife, whose love and affection till
 then were strangely transformed into merciless hate and cold
 heartlessness. Her words pierced his heart like the sharp
 Vajra of Indra and left him a prey to cruel grief and sorrow.
 He recalled her fierce obstinacy of purpose and the dread-
 225 ful oaths she had bound him by; and with a heartrending
 cry "Oh, Rama!" he fell to the ground like a monarch of
 the forests struck by lightning. He seemed like a person

of unsettled mind ; or one struck with sudden madness ; or like one whose very nature has undergone a thorough change under the influence of some fell disease ; or like a 230 strong man in the cruel grip of an unknown malady ; or like some mighty serpent drained of its power and energy by potent spells.

Next, he turned to Kaikeyi in abject humility and said " Girl ! Let me know at least who implanted in your 235 innocent heart this wicked thought that flatters your hopes of self-interest. Has some malignant demon taken possession of your soul that you speak to me all shamelessly ? You were but a slip of a girl when I married you ; and how could I see through your fair face into the black heart be- 240 hind ? Now that you have grown in years, your nature asserts itself. Whom do you fear that you guard yourself so carefully by these boons ? If you have the least desire to do that which would gladden the heart of myself, your lord and husband, of every object in creation, nay, even of your 245 darling son Bharata, put away from you this unholy resolve. Your mean heart is doubtless a legacy of the great sins perpetrated in past lives. Hence, I wonder not that you are resolved to work this evil to Rama and exile him from the kingdom. I am a fool to expect your dark soul to be illumin- 250 ed by the faintest ray of pity or sympathy. But, search as you may, you can never bring up anything against me or against Rama to justify your grief or displeasure.

My only consolation is that you will never see your heart's hopes fulfilled. All your labour and trouble, this 255 mighty load of sin that you so sedulously accumulate, the wrath, the hate and the curses of god, man and beast will be your faithful companions for ever and you will have nothing to show in return. Fool ! Know you not that Bharata remains in Ayodhya only if Rama graces it ; Bharata will 260 find it a hell if Rama is not there. Surely, Bharata is not a

wit behind Rama in his knowledge or observance of duty. So, I will divide this kingdom equally among my children; or I shall give it to Bharata. All that I entreat of you in return is
 265 that Rama may be allowed to cheer my last hours on earth. But should you deny me this reasonable request, rest assured that your hopes will turn to ashes in your mouth. And you would have gained nothing except the doubtful pleasure of having tortured me to death.

270 "The cruel words 'Betake thyself to the gloomy forests' would fall upon the ears of Rama and dim the lustre of his fair face even as the moon in the grip of Rahu ; and shall I look upon it and yet live ? I have made this resolve to crown Rama, not out of any sudden freak or individual
 275 caprice or predilection, but have taken deep and earnest counsel with my ministers, friends, subjects, brother-kings, Brahmanas and sages. I have discussed the question in all its bearings. I would rather look on while my foes slaughtered my soldiers than stand by and allow your obstinacy
 280 to ruin my well-concerted plan. What would they think of me, my guests, the kings whom I have invited from the four quarters of the earth ? I should not be surprised if they exclaim 'This Dasaratha is but an idiot. Sixty thousand years have passed over his head without
 285 his being any the better for it. It is but blind chance has kept him on the throne till now.'

"What do you expect me to reply to the numerous men, women, children and persons hoary in years, knowledge and experience, when they ask me a few hours
 290 hence 'What has become of Rama ? Why does not his coronation come off ? Shall I face them with a virtuous look and say 'I had promised Kaikeyi two boons in the past and in consequence, have fulfilled them by banishing Rama to the forest and crowning Bharata instead ?' But any one of
 295 them would naturally turn back upon me and say 'How

about your promise to *the world* that you would instal Rama to day as the heir-apparent ?

" When I have sent away Rama to the woods, Kausalya his mother, would very naturally ask me 'Lord! May I know wherein my son hath offended you ? What reply do you expect me to give her after the cruel wrong I have done her ? What a noble woman that ! She waits upon me as any humble bond-maid, sweetly unconscious of her high estate as the queen of this realm. Now, she is the best and pleasantest of friends during my hours of recreation. Again, she is an ideal wife when discharging with me some moral or religious duty, putting away from her the pride and haughtiness of a queen. Should I take myself other wives, she does not feel jealous or aggrieved in the least, but treats them with more than sisterly affection. No mother watches over her favorite child with more anxious solicitude than Kausalya, where my bodily comforts were concerned. She is ever intent on anticipating my slightest wish, and even Rama occupies but a secondary place in her heart. Ever soft and gentle of speech, she, my first love and my eldest queen, is disgracefully neglected by me and all because I am coward enough fear to to displease you. The love I have showered upon you has produced but bitter hate towards me ; my favours, my gifts and my benefits have turned into so many scorpions for you to lash me with. Now that you have thrown off the mask and stand in your naked wickedness, my folly comes back to roost ; and I suffer even as an invalid who gratifies his palate with forbidden and unhealthy delicacies. A quenchless fire rages in my heart when I come to think of my owlish stupidity.

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" Sumitra, on whom I have never bestowed a thought of love or concern, will rightly be terrified at this atrocious act of mine and ever after shun me as a plague ; for, her turn may come at any moment to suffer at my hands.

330 "Alas ! The word 'Dasaratha is dead ; Rama is banished to the forests' would fall upon the ears of Seeta simultaneously like a bolt from the blue. Deprived of her husband and myself, she will seek swift refuge in death, even as a faithful Kinnara lady of the Himalayas, torn from the
 335 arms of her mate. And do you expect me to survive the shock of Rama's banishment and Seeta's hopeless despair ? Rama and myself will begin our journey at the same moment, he to the gloomy forest and I to the halls of Death. You would look well in your widow's weeds, holding undisputed
 340 sway over this happy realm. What an absurdity to even dream that I could see Rama leave my side and yet live ! As a glutton who deceived by its golden glitter quaffs with zest the poisoned cup, and writhes in agony later on, I took you to wife, deceived by your fatal beauty into the belief
 345 that you were a model of virtue and wifely devotion. And now that a chance has offered itself, you have boldly thrown off the disguise and shown yourself in your native wickedness of heart and faithlessness of purpose. Your insidious flattery enslaved my heart and made me over to
 350 you, bound hand and foot. I know that it will not be long before you sacrifice my life to your dark ambition, even as the cruel hunter who snares the unwary feet of the deer by his fatal music. A saintly Brahmana who has suddenly taken to drink would not be a greater object of abhorrence
 355 to men than Dasaratha, who sold his eldest son into bondage to please a woman's caprice ; every righteous man in this kingdom would point the finger of scorn at me and that all justly. My name will be a byword of reproach and shame in town and village. Never have I experienced such a misery
 360 in this sixty thousand years of my existence. As the thoughts, words and deeds of a man shadow him faithfully from birth to birth, even so have the two boons I granted you in the far-off past found me out now and to my cost.

" Ah ! woe unspeakable ! A wretched sinner, I have clasped to my bosom through these live-long years, all ignorantly, a very fiend in human shape. I knew not that I had taken Death into my house. I preserved with pious care the rope that is to be my halter now. Far and near did I seek for my Fate; I invited it, an honor'd guest, to my house; I lavished all my love and affection upon it; I had no eye for 370 any other; no honor was too high for it, no service too low for me; and the end is near, when my guest will reddens my hearth with my heart's blood. Alas ! I have passed countless years by your side in innocent playfulness, all unaware that you were but sharpening the dagger that would one day 375 be sheathed in my heart. As a babe that caresses the terrible fangs of a cobra, I have been fondling you all along. Well do I deserve that every object in creation should spit at me in scorn and cry out, 'Dasaratha is in his second child hood. He is an impotent slave to his ill-placed love. Who 380 but that dotard would exile to the forests his eldest son and best, dowered with all graces of body, mind and heart, and all this to win a smile of a faithless woman?' My noble heart-ed son is driven away from the kin dom like the meanest orphan.

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" I mortified myself by keeping the Kanda vratas, by strict observance of the vows of Brahmacharya and by rendering humble service to my teacher; I exercised a stern and sleepless control over my senses and mind. Yet, when I entered the life of a householder, a woman's beauty shattered 390 all that I had built up and brought shame and misery upon me.

" I have but to say 'Rama! Take yourself away from this kingdom to the dark forests,' and he will gladly reply 'Even so, my liege.' Not a word of expostulation, not a murmur 395 of complaint. Would that he obeyed me not! It may seem all undutiful ; but nothing would please me better. But, alas !

I know he will never do it. He is the soul of candour and but sees his reflection in mine. He will take my order of
 400 banishment in dead earnest and obey it to the very letter.

" Man, bird and beast will shrink from me with abhorrence and disgust when I send Rama upon his sad journey.

' Fie upon the fool ! Fie upon the hoary dotard ! Fie upon the sanctimonious villain ! ' would be the universal cry.

405 Ah, how can I live it through ? Hell and its horrors wait for me on the other side. Well, you have tasted blood ; and what new devilry are you hatching against others near and dear to me, now that you have driven Rama away from here ? Rama's departure to the forests will be followed by

410 Kausalya's death ; Lakshmana goes with Rama ; Satrughna is ever with Bharata ; and Sumitra deprived of Kausalya, myself, Rama and her sons, will die of a broken heart. So, live on long years of power and joy with the pleasant consciousness of having plunged into the deepest and darkest hell

415 of sorrow and grief, Kausalya, myself, Sumitra, and your step-sons I have but to turn my back on this life and Rama on this city, and this glorious line of Ikshvaku will fall amidst wild confusion—invincible till now, graced with fame, glory and virtue and rooted in the far past.

420 " If Bharata's heart be inclined in the least towards this hellish scheme of exiling Rama, I leave my curse to him and he shall not render me the last offices with his hands steeped in innocent and noble blood Base of heart ! Sworn enemy ! Does your heart rejoice ? Have your hopes borne

425 fruit ? Foul murderer of your confiding husband ! Place the ban of exile upon Rama and lord it over this kingdom in widowed pomp, you and your precious son Bharata. You are a cruel devil in woman's guise ; unparalleled infamy will be my portion through you ; the meanest object that crawls the earth will shrink from me with unutterable loathing ; my very sight would be an insult to every

pure-hearted person ; but, you, the living incarnation of sin, crime and infamy, rule in my place. Rama, my darling boy, has been accustomed to stately horses, elephants, chariots and other royal conveyances. How 435 could he trudge with weary feet through the thorny wilds ? Culinary experts, graced with ear-rings, would compete with one another to prepare daintiest delicacies for Rama and serve him with zealous care. And how is he to subsist on wild roots, berries and tasteless wood-land fare ? 440 Costly beds of softest swan-down, hid beneath thick layers of delicate flowers of sweet fragrance, would invite him to deep repose and happy dreams; dressed in gorgeous robes of rare texture, he would recline thereon, while bards, minstrels, singers and story-tellers vie with one another to amuse or 445 lull him to sleep. How shall he, clad in deer-skin and bark of trees, rest his weary limbs on the bare earth, rough with thorns and pebbles, while the night-ranging creatures of the forest roar and howl in their savage ferocity ?

"I wonder whose wicked heart hatched this scheme 450 to crown Bharata and send Rama a homeless wanderer on earth ? This hellish plot, undreamt of by any till now, must have proceeded from a brain of more than diabolical ingenuity. Shame upon womanhood ! Alas ! Fool am I to revile them indiscriminately. Bharata's mother, demon in- 455 carnate, alone deserves the reproach. Black-hearted snake with a glittering skin ! Ever bent on having your own way, careless of what hearts you trample upon ! Marvellous heart that no ray of pity illuminates ! You find most exquisite delight in watching my frenzied agony under your devilish tortures. Tell me once again what crime or fault you charge myself with or Rama, who ever seeks your highest good and happiness. Alas ! My Rama in the grip of misfortune and calamity is a sight potent enough to unhinge the brain and the heart of every object in creation. 460 465

Parents will readily desert their children ; wives will cut the throats of the husbands who love them as their very life ; and all creatures will fall upon you in uncontrolled fury. A Deva of the heaven-world is not more graceful and
 470 handsome than my Rama in his unadorned beauty. Robes, gems and decorations but heighten its effect. Let me console myself by imagining his exit from this Ayodhya with the lordly gait of an elephant in rut. Alas ! It is not given me to behold it with these eyes Ah ! Would
 475 I not then cast away from me This heavy burden of sixty thousand years and rejoice again in youth, strength and beauty ?

“It is no wonder if my life-breaths follow Rama to the forest. There might be life and motion on a sunless
 480 earth ; plants and trees may grow and flourish without the life-giving showers of Indra ; but, it is utterly impossible to keep away death from those who witness Rama’s departure to the forest (friends or strangers).

“You pray for my death; you wish me no good ; you are
 485 my relentless foe ; you are my Fate ; long and fondly did I cherish you ; I gave the warmth of my bosom to this venomous Death, all deluded, and it has fastened its deadly fangs into my heart. You and your precious Bharata do well to reddens your hands in the blood of me and mine.
 490 Rejoice in the prosperity of my foes and hold sway over this town and kingdom, widowed of me, of Rama and of Lakshmana.

“Cruel fiend that pierces a broken heart ! You have dared to speak to me thus, all unmindful of the wifely reverence you owe me ! What keeps your wicked tongue from shrivelling up ? Why do not your cruel fangs fall out of your head, split in a thousand pieces ? Rama never knows what it is to speak a cruel word or unkind to any. He has a pleasant word for everybody ; there is not one but sings his

praise high ; and you alone enjoy the unenvied notoriety 500
of seeing a blemish in his spotless character.

“Foul smircher of the fair fame of Kekaya’s house! I care not if black Despair swallows you ; I defie your puny wrath; seek not to frighten me with your death ; shiver to atoms and be sucked into the patient Earth ; I refuse to be 505 your dupe and give my sanction to this suicidal plot. Sharp and merciless as a razor ! Base flatterer ! Your wickedness is something unspeakable ; you are born to ruin your fair house ; you have fastened your brazen talons in my heart’s roots. I crave no greater boon than your sudden 510 death ; and alas ! God denies me that.

“I see Death beckons me yonder. What joy in life when you have torn me from the side of Rama ? And should I live, what have I for you but unutterable hate ? No, spare me your refined cruelties yet a while. See, I lay my 515 proud head at your feet and entreat you all humbly. “Cast an eye of pity on me ”. Poor Dasaratha was, to all the world, a proud Emperor ; yet he was the abject slave of his wife. His boundless love for her had bound him and delivered him over into her hands. Like a masterless man, 520 he raved all plaintively. It ill became one of his years and rank to say “I pray for your death ; I entreat you with my head at your feet Hast no pity on me ? ” He bent down and groped aimlessly to clasp her feet, as she stretched them in utter shamelessness. But his tortured limbs would bear 525 him no further ; and like an uprooted tree, he fell at her cruel feet, striving hard to reach them.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE TOILS—(*continued*)

WHAT had Dasaratha done to deserve such a fate ? Stretched on the bare earth he lay, even as the

- 5 emperor Yayati, whom the inexorable gods hurled down to the earth, when his waning merit gave him no place in Heaven. But, Kaikeyi, Sin incarnate, was furious at the delay ; she snapped her fingers at her husband and at the world, and devised fresh forments to make him work her will.
- 10 " Ideal monarch ! Loud you brag of your strict adherence to truth; you never go back upon your word; but you would be my debtor for the two boons granted of yore."

It took some time for the poor king to recover from the shock ; he turned upon her with wild fury and cried

15 " Mean wretch ! Tireless foe ! Drink my heart's blood ; drive my godly Rama to live with savage beasts ; reach the goal of your hopes and rejoice therein. Should the bright gods ask me on high ' Dasartha ! You bent yourself to a foolish woman's whim ; you bartered away for her

20 fickle smile your eldest son, whose rare virtues you have buried in the dark woods. What put you up to perpetrate such wickedness ', where shall I hide my disgraced self ? Shall I say ' I banished Rama from the kingdom to fulfil my promise to Kaikeyi ?'. That would be the truth of it.

25 But, would they not reply ' What of your plighted word to the world and to Rama ?' Alas ! I have broken it, all basely. Woe and misery in this world and eternal infamy in the other, is all I have gained by condemning Rama to a cruel exile.

- 30 " Sixty thousand years did I moan and wail for an heir to rule after me. Vows, penances, mortifications, offerings, charity, sacrifices did I perform and observe past count and

held myself fortunate in being blessed with the heroic Rama as my son. And him, my darling, you want me to doom to a life of misery ! How could I harden my heart to do it !

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"Rama is the bravest of the brave ; there is not a science nor an art he has not mastered ; he has put away wrath and shames the very Earth by his sweet patience. How shall I give my consent to drive him away from the haunts of men to consort with wild beasts, my lotus-eyed Rama ? Dark-hued, even as the tender lily ; long-armed, iron-jointed, supple-sinewed, of immense strength, he is the idol of all creatures. And may my tongue blister if I speak to my darling child the words 'Bury yourself in dark Dandaka.' My eyes shall rot ere they behold my Rama of peerless intellect undergo pain and misery ; for, who more deserving of joy and comfort than he ? No greater happiness do I crave for at the hands of the Gods than to die before I stain my soul with this iniquity. Oh thou, crueler than a fiend let loose from hell ! Oh thou, whose heart revels in wrecking the joy and happiness of others ! Why do you desire to bring this calamity upon Rama, this exile to the woods, trampling upon the feelings of the whole world ? Is his unfailing valour nothing in your eyes nor my boundless affection for him ? Alas ! infamy and disgrace will dog my name to the end of all time."

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The sun set upon the pitiable sight of a weak old man, the lord of the earth, yet raving as one demented. Merciful Night cast her dark pall over it. The moon, as she rode in the heavens during three watches of the night, was an eyesore to Dasaratha ; the winged Hours seemed to his sorrowful heart leaden-footed. He contrived to pass through the agelong night like one stricken with an incurable malady, heaving deep sighs and hot. He fixed his tearful eyes on the sky and called out to it in heart-rending lamentations. "Star bedecked Queen of night ! Have pity on me and continue

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ever ; nay. I ask it of you with joined palms of prayer. Why ! Not so ; I am powerless to flee from the presence of this hated Kaikeyi. But, if it dawns, my subjects will seek
 70 me out and I will be relieved of the sight of my mortal enemy. Hence, merciful night ! Haste thee on the wings of thought and usher in the welcome dawn. I would give anything to be saved the cruel torment of being forced to look upon the author of my woe."

75 Anon, his thoughts wandered to another point and he stood before Kaikeyi with clasped hands of entreaty, seeking to turn her from her purpose.

"Girl ! The world knows me till now as god-fearing and right-principled ; I am on the confines of life and may pass
 80 beyond at any moment ; I am wounded to the heart ; you are my only hope. Besides, am I not your lord and king, to whom you owe reverence and allegiance ? I have made you what you are, the favorite queen of the ruler of Kosala. Let these things weigh with you in granting me my prayer.

85 "None were with us when I gave you the two boons You may drop them now and not incur the displeasure or ridicule of any. But my promise to Rama is far otherwise. In full audience have I passed my word to the kings from the four quarters of the globe, to saintly Rishis and holy
 90 Brahmanas and to the millions of my subjects. 'I crown Rama king on the morrow.' If I break my pledge to them, how would I stand in their esteem ? You are but a girl and some intriguer may have put you up to this obstinacy. Let be ; I pass it over. But grant me my prayer. The earth holds
 95 none so dear to me as your lovely self of witching eyes. I crave your pity for Rama. True, the kingdom is yours by right of boon granted—to rule or give away. But, pray make a gift of it to Rama, at least out of compassion for a poor old beggar like myself. May Rama live long to rule over this
 100 realm and bless the fair donor every moment of his life.

Thus you will earn undying fame in the world of men and high merit among gods. O lady of shapely thighs and charming looks ! It is but a trifle for you to do. But, you win my life-long gratitude ; you confer a great happiness on Rama ; the whole world will acclaim your praises, 105 while great and good men will hold you in high esteem. ' But, it will so disappoint my Bharata ? Is it what holds you back ? Nay, he is the soul of nobility and justice ; he sets no bounds to his love for Rama ; and nothing will gladden his heart more.' 110

Thus he tried many an argument and appealed to every possible weakness of hers. Alas ! His heart was open as the day ; her heart was blacker than hell. His eyes were red and weary with grief and sleeplessness ; her eyes were redder, if possible, through rage and grief at being disappointed. Tears rolled down his aged cheeks every time he thought of the moment that was to part him from Rama ; she wept hot tears of grief to think that her beauty and wiles had not enslaved him sooner. He stormed, he raged, he entreated hard enough to melt the heart of an iron statue and moved heaven and earth to loosen her cruel grip ; she brought into play every art, every wile, every stratagem that a cunning woman's brain could devise ; she cooed, she froze, she preached, she philosophised, she cut and thrust to bend him to her will. And she turned a deaf ear to all his entreaties, expostulations, prayers and tears ; for, the high gods had hardened her heart and sharpened her cruel nature. Dasaratha fainted beneath the shock and came back to himself after a time. " Is this she on whom my heart's affections have been centred ? Is it that self-same Kaikeyi, the faithful wife, the guileless heart ? Nay, this utter callousness to my prayers and entreaties, this inhuman obstinacy, this cruel cutting speech can never be she " ; and he gazed at her long and earnestly, as at some frightful

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135 wonder. All at once, his thoughts turned towards the moment that was even then on him, when he would have to part with his darling son, and condemn him to a living death ; and he fainted right away. Thus the noble-hearted king passed the live-long night, heaving hot sighs of impotent rage and unavailing grief.

140 "And when the pale and bloodless East began
To quicken to the sun" Conch, veena, tabor, bards, minstrels, heralds, and pursuivants recalled their mighty lord in sweet strains and sweeter
145 words to the duties of the new day ; but Dasaratha curtly bade them cease.

CHAPTER XIV

KAIKEYI'S TRIUMPH

140 HE pitiful sight of her lord and husband beside himself with poignant grief at being torn away with violent hands from the side of his son and writhing in the dust and dirt, made not the slightest impression on her sinful heart. It was nothing to her that he was a puissant emperor of the glorious house of Ikshvaku. She never wavered from her fell purpose, but struck at him again and again.
15 "A fine king truly ! He is profuse in his promises and grants any boon I may desire ; and now he holds back, a pitiful sinner to truth and virtue. I cannot, for my life, conceive what makes him roll there on the ground as if he were called upon to make a great and sudden sacrifice. Here sir !
15 Bear you in mind that you have to keep your promise to the very letter. Truth is the highest dharma, thus say those who have sounded its depths. I do but ask you to act consistently with dharma in its noblest form of fulfilled faith. King Sibi, your noble ancestor, once passed his word to a

vulture and gave his flesh for it to feed upon and won the 20
 Worlds of Light. Alarka, the royal sage, promised a learned
 Brahmana to grant him anything he might ask for. 'Give
 me sight ; give me your eyes' said the strange petitioner.
 And Alarka gladly deprived himself of his eyes to keep his 25
 plighted word. The lord of the ocean will find it no difficult task to break his bounds ; yet, he never dreams of it,
 bound by a promise he had made to the suppliant gods.
 The supreme Brahman, the goal of all aspirations and
 efforts, finds no higher manifestation than Truth. Dharma
 flourishes in the rich soil of Truth. The eternal wisdom of 30
 the Vedas teaches nothing higher than Truth. It is the
 surest means to realize our farthest hopes. And if there
 glows in you any spark of a desire to lead a life of dharma,
 hold fast to Truth. Do you not rank yourself among the
 good and the great of the world ? Is it not your 35
 proud boast that none sought your presence in vain ?
 Then, let not my boons go to waste. Banish Rama
 to the woods and earn a more righteous fame. Grant the
 earnest prayer of one whom you hold next your heart.
 Once, twice and thrice do I warn you. If you heed it not 40
 and put insult and slight upon me, my blood be upon your
 head."

Thus did Kaikeyi goad him on, every moment surer
 of her triumph, while the poor king vainly strove to free
 himself from the bonds of his plighted word, even as Bali,
 the Asura, struggled impotently to cast off the noose thrown
 round him by the Lord Vishnu when he came down on 45
 earth as Upendra. Helpless and confused as a bull
 imprisoned between the yoke and the wheels, with woe-begone
 face and lack-lustre eyes, he groped and staggered awhile
 as one bereft of sight. But, his pride as a warrior-king of
 the line of Ikshvaku and his keen natural intelligence came 50
 to his rescue. With a mighty effort, he calmed himself and

put on a bold front. "Sinful wretch!" cried he, "Here do I fling away from me that cursed hand which I grasped in holy wedlock when the priests chanted the sacred texts over us and the bright god of Fire bore witness to the solemn rite. Here do I put away from me once for all the wicked offspring of that marriage. The pale shades of Night flee in wild tumult before the fiery arrows of the lord of Day. The sages and the Brahmanas are even now at my doors, whipping up my laggard spirit to hasten the coronation of Rama. Well, it is a very congenial piece of work to do, quite in your line; you can utilise the very materials brought together for Rama's coronation to perform my funeral obsequies. If you raise a barrier between my people and their wishes, neither you nor your precious son shall offer with your sinful hands any libations of water to my manes. My eyes are grown accustomed to see the countenances of my people blossom with the anticipated joy of Rama's coronation; how shall I bring myself to behold the very same people with downcast looks and gloomy faces?"

The moon and the stars paled in sorrow to hear the old king's lament and despairing, as it were, of doing him any good, left him far behind and passed on. A happy night it was in a way, and holy in that the forlorn father, albeit grievously wounded to the heart, was ever kept in remembrance of Rama. Kaikeyi viewed the glad morn with envious eyes; of infinite suppleness and adaptability, she changed her tactics and turned upon the stricken king with redoubled fury. "Your words cause me unendurable agony, even as some dire malady poison-bred. This moment you shall send for Rama. Wound not my feelings deeper. Place my son on the throne; banish Rama to the woods; see me clear through all opposition; and keep your sworn faith to me."

Even as some lordly elephant struck deep with the

sharp goad, Dasaratha writhed beneath the cruel words of winged venom and cried "Woe is me ! The bonds of Dharma crush my heart and I must even keep my word to this she-devil. Alas ! My senses desert me and I know not what to do. Yet, I would see my Rama once again ere he quits his unnatural father." 90

Day broke; the Sun beamed on his children; the auspicious hour fixed for Rama's coronation drew near. The saintly Vasishtha, the mirror of all perfections, human and divine, entered the city and his disciples in his wake, with everything ready for the solemn rite. The roads were neatly swept, well watered and strewn thick with fragrant flowers. Bright flags and lofty bannerets waved from every 100 house. Garlands and gay arches spanned the streets at close intervals. The stores and shops were invitingly open, rich with rare products of nature and art. Groups of happy men and women were scattered over the roads and squares, eagerly discussing the all-absorbing subject. Rare and costly 105 perfumes rolled in heavy waves in the morning breeze. The sage had his bath in the holy Sarayu ; his prayers said, he now took his way to the royal palace through the fair city that cast into shade the capital of Indra. Brahmanas, citizens, provincials and experts in sacrificial lore that had an honored seat before the king, all awaited the presence of Dasaratha. He left them behind and reached the seraglio, when he espied Sumantra, the charioteer, coming out of it. Vasishtha stopped the king's confidential adviser and said " I leave it to your keen intelligence to announce my presence 110 here to his Majesty. Vessels of gold filled from the bosom of the ocean and from Ganga's sin-cleansing wave, a beautifully-carved seat of Udumbara wood, every kind of seed, perfumes, gems, honey, curds, clarified butter, fried rice, holy grass, flowers, milk, eight winsome damsels, an ele- 115 phant in rut, a chariot and four, a magnificient sword, a

bow, palanquins, a moon-white umbrella, fleecy chowries, a gold vase inlaid with precious stones, a bull of spotless white graced with garlands of gold, a noble lion with four
 125 fangs, a horse of immense strength and energy, a throne spread with a tiger-skin, sacrificial fire, instrumental music, courtesans, priests, Brahmanas, cows, sacred animals and birds—all are ready against Rama's coronation. Citizens, provincials, heads of clans, the crafts and guilds with their
 130 Masters, royal visitors and the common folk call down sweet blessings on the head of Rama and look forward to the happy moment of his coronation. The day has begun; the auspicious star and moment draw apace; and Rama is to be consecrated to his high office even then. Go, hasten
 135 his Majesty."

Sumantra returned to the seraglio, singing aloud the praises of the king. He was a very dear friend to Dasaratha; old in years and virtue, he had free access to the women's apartments; and the wardens there passed him through them unquestioned. He was utterly ignorant of the wretched plight in which his royal master was; he drew near the curtains and with joined palms of reverence, began all innocently to sing the praises of his lord and master, in apt and well-chosen terms.

145 "The Lord of Waters overflows with joy when he sees his radiant friends, the Sun and the Moon, rise on the horizon. Rise thou on our horizon and gladden our hearts. It was at this moment that Matali, the charioteer of Indra, lauded high his celestial master and inspired him with joy
 150 and energy to triumph over the Danavas; even so do I, your charioteer, venture to sing your praises no less high and rouse you to joy and victory. The Vedas, the Vedangas, Sciences and Arts rouse Brahma, the Demiurge, to his duties, and I announce to your Majesty the dawn of a new day and
 155 its attendant duties. The Sun and the Moon gently break

upon the slumbers of the tired Earth ; even so do I seek to call you back from the realms of sweet sleep. May it please your Majesty to come forth. Dressed in the gorgeous robes of state as befits the day of Rama's coronation, sail into our horizon in all your glory and splendour, like the Sun 160 on the golden mount Meru. May the Sun, the Moon, Siva, Kubera, Varuna, Agni, Indra and the other Lords of the Shining Ones crown your arms with success. The happy night has drawn to an end and has ushered in the happier day when all beings will rejoice to see Rama's brows adorned 165 with the crown of the Ikshvakus. Your commands have been joyfully carried out to the very letter and it behoves your Majesty to brighten us with your presence and direct us further. Every thing is ready towards the coronation rite. Citizens, provincials, merchants, Brahmanas and many 170 others await your Majesty's arrival and I came to announce the saintly Vasishtha I pray you give immediate commands to begin the happy function of the day. Your subjects yearn for the sight of your royal countenance, even as the herd without their leader, the armies without their general, 175 the night without its queen, or the cows without their bull."

So sang Sumantra, eager to please his monarch and congratulate him on the happiness that was in store for him ; but, his words fell like so many drops of molten lead on the bleeding heart of Dasaratha. The righteous king, in the 180 midst of his splendour and power, was a pitiable sight, with swollen eyes, red with weeping. He sent back a plaintive reply. "Sumantra ! You words do but lacerate a heart already tortured beyond words."

Sumantra stood aghast and bending his looks at the 185 wan face of his friend and master, he bowed with low reverence over his joined palms, and withdrew in silence. But Kaikeyi, ever watchful of her interests, as became the daughter of a king, was furious with Dasaratha for not having

190 ordered Rama into his presence. She called back Sumantra and said, "Friend Sumantra ! His Majesty has passed a sleepless night talking over the happy event afoot to-day. He was sleeping even as you came in. Speed to Rama's palace and bring him here as quickly as you can. Delay not,
 195 but look sharp about it". But Sumantra replied respectfully " I may not go from hence until the king orders it". Then Dasaratha spoke to him and said "Sumantra ! I would see Rama of bright presence as soon as I can. Fetch him hither." The aged minister rejoiced within himself at being
 200 the fortunate messenger of some supreme good to Rama. His guileless soul read the words of Kaikeyi as the commands of his lord and he hurried on towards the mansion of the prince. He emerged from the palace of Dasaratha as from the depths of the ocean and found himself in the midst
 205 of numerous groups of kings of various countries and the leading nobles of the city, bearing rare and costly presents to their monarch.

CHAPTER XV

RAMA SENT FOR

HEN, Brahmans deeply read in the holy scriptures, court-chaplains, ministers, generals, and civic authorities gathered in the audience hall of the king, their hearts aglow with joy at the prospect of the approaching coronation. Vivasvan, the sun-god, looked down in all his splendour at the assembled crowds and the happy preparations afoot towards the coronation of Rama, the flower of his line.
 5 Pushya, the star of the day, shone bright as it abode with Cancer, the natal sign of Rama. The holy waters were gathered in vessels of burnished gold for the consecration bath. Sacred confluences like the Prayaga ; the Godavari,
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the Cauvery and the other rivers that mingled with the eastern seas ; the Gandaki, the Sona, the Bhadra and the other streams that flow from south to north ; Brahnavarta and Rudravarta in the Naimisa forest and other springs held in high veneration ; lakes, wells, pools and rivulets of hoary sanctity; the oceans and the seas; all contributed their quota. A splendid throne richly wrought ; a chariot spread with tiger-skins ; vessels of gold and silver, curious-shaped, in which floated fried rice, lotus leaves and the milky juice of the Aswattha and the Udumbara tree; honey, curds, clarified butter, fried rice, holy grass, flowers and milk ; well-bred courtesans gaily adorned ; chowries with shafts of gold encrusted with gems, from which rayed out, moonlike, the silky fleece; the umbrella of state spread over head in moon-white lustre ; a lordly bull and horse of spotless white ; an elephant in rut, as bore kings and monarchs ; eight damsels of auspicious features, blazing with gold and gems ; the four kinds of musical instruments, bards, minstrels, panegyrists and heralds ; and other articles used in the coronation-rite of the Ikshvaku princes were kept in readiness by the officers of the king. They assembled at the palace-gates and discussed the unwonted delay of their master. "Whom shall we commission to report our arrival to His Majesty ? He comes not forth ; the sun ascends the steps to his golden throne and brings us nearer to the auspicious moment fixed for Rama's installation."

As thus they spoke, Sumantra addressed himself to the rulers and princes and said " I go hence at the king's command to bring Rama to his presence. The emperor, and Rama, more than he, holds you all in high esteem. Hence, I will even go back to my royal master and make respectful enquiries of him in your name. I will not fail to ascertain why he delays so long in giving audience to his good friends and loving subjects."

And the aged minister, versed in the hoary traditions of the royal houses on earth, retraced his steps towards the women's apartments. He placed himself before the barriers of silk and gold and in well-chosen terms invoked the blessings of the gods on his master's head. " May the Sun and the Moon, Siva, Kubera, Varuna, Agni, Indra and the other Shining Ones ride with you to victory. Night has given place to Day ; everything is ready even as you willed it and we but await your commands Brahmanas, generals and town-prefects eagerly expect your coming. May it please your Majesty to rise."

Dasaratha recognised the voice of his friend and said "Sumantra ! You were commissioned by Kaikeyi to bring Rama here. Why tarry at it ? I sleep not. Away and be back with the prince."

Sumantra bowed in low obeisance ; and happy in the thought of some great good to befall Rama, he left the harem far behind him and took his way through the broad streets, gay with flags and pennons. Groups of people held joyous talk in the roads and squares, all about the grand event towards which the winged Hours were bearing them fast. Anon, Rama's palace rose in view. Large gates of curious workmanship adorned it. Tiny kiosks dotted the extensive grounds, where statues of gold gleamed through garlands of gems and pearls. It burst upon the eye in dazzling splendour and beauty even as the bank of autumnal clouds or a vast cavern in the Mount Meru or a lofty peak of the Dardara ; gems and pearls, scents, and perfumes and all things rare and lovely, were laid under contribution to make it what it was. The cries of swans, peacocks, herons and parrots were borne to the ears along the melodious breeze. Rare paintings covered the walls, while quaint animals pranced or sprung from many an angle and column. Its brightness dazed the senses and the eye. More

like the abode of the Lords of Day and Night it seemed or like the mansion of the Lord of Riches, or like the palace of the Lord of the Immortals or like a cloud-capped summit of the Meru. Strange birds and stranger beasts chirped and moved behind bars of steel and gold. Visitors from foreign lands thronged the grounds in joyful expectation, bearing costly gifts and rare to their beloved prince. Hunchbacks and dwarfs of the Kirata class, moved about short and slim, like black oases in a bank of fleecy clouds. Sumantra steered his way through the happy throngs to the interior. There he came upon a large band of men who had devoted their lives to the service of Rama and watched over him in sleepless vigilance ; they too were eagerly discussing the one topic of the day. Many a hall did the charioteer cross, many a square, and many a court before he drew near the women's apartments. Groups of men waited there before the gates with costly presents and welcome tribute ; there was Satrunjaya, the favorite elephant of Rama, in full rut, like a mountain crowned with clouds, heaving high his huge head and shoulders, all unmindful of the sharp goad that bit into its flesh. Rama's favorite ministers in brave attire were there on elephants, horses and chariots. They made respectful way for him and he passed on unimpeded, like a mighty whale through the jewelled deep, to the inner apartments—a miniature city graced with stately buildings, that resembled the huge clouds that rest on mountain peaks or the swift coursing cars of the gods.

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CHAPTER XVI

RAMA GOES TO HIS FATHER

SUMANTRA, the living chronicle of the dead past, left behind him the gates of the seraglio crowded with expectant people and entered another suite of apartments comparatively quiet. There he found many armed youths richly attired, watching over the safety of Rama with whole-souled devotion. There were wardens of the women's

10 apartments, venerable old men past the age of ninety-five. The whole world reposed in security under the shadow of Rama's bow ; and Rama slept secure under the shadow of the light wands held in the trembling hands of these ancients. They were clothed in gems and gold, and all to please

15 Rama. They loved him more than his own father Dasa-ratha ; every time the prince returned from the royal palace after his dinner or supper there, they fondly placed him on their laps, embraced him warmly, smelt his head and would not part with him till they were assured of his

20 happiness of mind and body. The scents, the perfumes that adorned the lovely form of Rama left evident marks upon the bodies of these elders. Verily, it was a more pleasing sight and rare than that of Rama and Sita in their gay attire. They knew that Sumantra was a favorite with Rama and

25 rose in respectful haste to welcome him. The charioteer went round them in reverence and spoke to them humbly, " May I request you to inform Rama that Sumantra, his servant, waits upon his pleasure." Rama was engaged in sweet converse with Sita when the news was brought to him.

30 He knew the aged counsellor as the most intimate friend of his father ; and to win his sire's favour the more, ordered him to be brought to his presence at once,

Sumantra advanced to where Rama sat and beheld the Lord of the universe. Rama was the master of boundless wealth even as Kubera. The Guardian of the North bestowed gold, gems, horses, kine and everything that his followers might pray for ; Sree Rama conferred upon those who had won the right to be near him, the envied privilege of beholding the supreme beauty of his form. He was absorbed in profound meditation upon Narayana, and Seeta with him. His palms were joined in humble reverence, while graceful garlands adorned his broad shoulders. Sumantra, the lowest of the low, beheld Sree Rama, Higher than the Highest. Ah ! What merit did he lay up in past lives ! The golden seat was chased with gems and blazed with lovely statues and rare articles of *vertu*. Priceless rugs covered it and shawls, flower-soft even as the delicate limbs of that prince of men, who reclined thereon as some dark-blue cloud on a golden mountain. The charioteer was blessed to behold the Lord even as He is described under the mystic symbology of Paryanka Vidya in the Kaushitaki Upanishad—a sight deserved more of the Liberated Ones and the Angels before the Throne. Does the Lord say “Thus far I am gracious to my children and no father” ? Sandal paste, red as hog’s blood and prepared with saffron paint, adorned his shapely hands and breast. Seeta had touched it and communicated to it, all unconsciously, a brighter lustre, a more delicious coolness, a sweeter fragrance. It is again the Lord’s will that wards off from us the obstacles that lie in the way of our beholding his supernal beauty. Seeta stood by, fanning him softly with the moon-white chamara, even as the Moon by the side of the star Chitra on the full moon day in the month of the name. Sumantra beheld him and was rewarded with clearer vision. The Supreme Person shone resplendent even as a sun of limitless radiance ; the Lord of the Worlds

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conferred on his devotees the envied privilege of enjoying the bliss of His presence. Sumantra prostrated himself before the Deity of his heart and was rewarded with a brighter and purer body. He folded his palms on his head and made respectful enquiries of his welfare at all times and in all places and said "Fair fruit of Kausalya's glorious past ! Your sire desires your presence and so does Kaikeyi ; you are expected there very soon."

75 Rama expressed the very great pleasure the news gave him by bestowing handsome presents on the messenger and said to his wife "Seeta ! I think that my father and mother have thought of some new development or modification in connection with my installation. The king considers that it would not be prudent or wise to wait for Bharata's return, and pleads his weight of years and infirmities ; Kaikeyi's sharp intellect could not have failed to grasp the motive and, desirous of doing what would give me pleasure, she urges the king to hurry on the arrangements for my investiture. She would do much to advance the peoples' welfare and happiness. My interests and advancement are ever nearest her heart ; and she has no other will but her lord's. Hence I am sure that my consecration will be put forward considerably. And it is better still that my dear father and mother chose Sumantra as their messenger to me, as if they wanted to select one who would sacrifice his here and hereafter, if he could further my interests, ever so little. The attendants in the women's apartments are not more solicitous about my good fortune than this emissary from my royal father. He will crown me heir-apparent of this glorious realm and that ere the day grows older. So I go hence to hear my sire's commands. Rest here in comfort and amuse yourself with your friends and people." He cast 100 round her shoulders a rare necklace of priceless pearls,

touched her feet in sweet entreaty and persuaded her to reconcile herself to his absence.

She stood upon a higher level than Rama ; unlike him, she never spent long and dreary months of darkness and torture in that toothless womb of a mother ; she rose to 105 view at the end of a ploughshare, when Janaka of the open Eye prepared the ground for a holy sacrificial rite. Hence it was not amiss that Raghava should lose his heart to her and respect her so. The pearl necklace round Rama's shoulders soon made way for another, rarer and more priceless—the 110 love-laden looks from the dark and unfathomable depths of her eyes. Her home was ever in the heart of Rama and she naturally followed him as far as etiquette allowed, calling down upon his beloved head every blessing she could think of. "I pray that no evil eye rest upon all this boundless beauty 115 and loveliness. May the bright Gods keep away from my lord every harm and evil. May His Majesty place you up- on the throne of your glorious ancestors of happy memory and crown you later on, in all pomp and ceremony, during the holy Rajasooya, even as the Demiurge placed the crown 120 of the three worlds on the brows of Indra. I long to see you in sacrificial attire, your initiatory vow taken, pure, intent upon the observance of vows, holy butter on your limbs, a deerskin around your shoulders and a deerhorn in your hands. If Vasishtha ever ordained for you any vow or 125 observance, you used to say to yourself " My Guru has lightened this over much, assuming I have been reared delicately and unused to hardships" and mortify yourself fourfold. Should your teacher tell you 'You should not allow a woman to touch you when you are observing a vow. Of course, 130 this does not apply to your wedded wife, Seeta, you followed him not, but bathed even if you had a suspicion of my skirt brushing yours so lightly. Not that I do not welcome your present accession to power. May Indra watch over

135 you in the East, Yama in the South, Varuna in the West, and Kubera in the North."

Rama took leave of Seeta, completed the happy preliminaries to his coronation and came out of his seraglio with Sumantra, even as a noble lion from his rocky lair. Lakshmana awaited them at the gates. Anon, in the central hall he came upon his friends and those that waited to see him and gave them kind looks and fair greetings. Then, on to the lofty chariot of silver, bright as blazing fire ; very commodious it was, and richly wrought 140 with gem and gold, that blinded the eye like the noonday sun. Rare tiger-skins covered the seats ; horses of the purest breed were yoked to it, more like elephant calves ; and the noise of the rolling wheels was like the rumbling of clouds. Raghava sprang upon it and drove fast to his father's 145 mansion, even as Indra in his celestial car drawn by the green horses. As the rolling of distant thunder among the hills or as the Lord of Night springing from the Rising mountain, Rama proceeded on his way, while his other self, Lakshmana, guarded his back, the umbrella of state held aloft in 150 one hand and the moon-white Chamara in the other. The assembled thousands raised a shout of joy at the sight of him that rent the very skies. Crowds followed him upon fleet horses, camels, elephants and chariots. Bands of chosen veterans, flashing bright with steel and gold, marched 155 before him, his welfare and safety their only care. The sweet strains of martial music, the plaudits of bards and heralds, and the war-cries of veteran chiefs all rose upon the air in pleasant confusion, as he marched along the royal road. Countless ladies in faultless attire scattered fragrant flowers 160 before their beloved prince and extolled him high in the joy of their hearts. " Enhancer of Kausalya's delight ! Proceed to take upon yourself the government of this fortunate Kosala, handed down by your ancestors of illustrious memory.

Your mother's heart will surely swell to see you seated on the throne of the Ikshvakus and hold sway over the fortunate millions. Again, there is none that fortune holds so dear as our Seeta. Marvellous, indeed, must have been the merit she has laid up in her past lives to raise her to the envied rank of your favorite wife and faithful, even as the star Rohini, ever inseparable from the Moon." So spoke many a 175 dame and matron, and Rama loved them all the more for their sweet sympathy and whole-souled devotion.

"Rama that goes yonder is the gem of his glorious line and richly deserves the love and esteem of Dasartha, who means to invest him with unbounded sway; and that means 180 the realisation of our dearest hopes. It is the greatest good that can ever befall us, for, when Rama becomes the guardian of our interests, none of us will ever know what it is to want or grieve." So ran the words from the assembled crowds in glad acclaim. Rama heard them all and resolved to deserve 185 better their love and confidence. Through huge squares and spacious he drove, dense with bull, elephants and cows, horses and cars, along long lines of palatial stores filled with the rarest products of nature and art, past bands of bards, minstrels, heralds, penegyrists and pursuivants. Sweet 190 strains of festive music mingled with the joyful neighs of horses and trumpetings of elephants and the solemn benedictive chants of Brahmanas. And so he drove along the royal road, even as the Guardian of Riches, on to where his father's palace stood. 195

CHAPTER XVII

RAMA GOES TO HIS FATHER—(*Continued*)

AY flags and proud pennons rose to the sky from every part of the city. Sandal, aloes, frankincense

5 and many other rare perfumes spread sweet fragrance every where. The mansions of the nobility gleamed white like a bank of fleecy clouds. The royal road was lined with shops, booths, stalls, stores, emporiums full of rare and priceless silks, cloths, wraps and unbored pearls, crystals and every
 10 delicacy and scarce had room for the huge crowds that poured in every moment. And Rama drove along, letting his eyes rest on the familiar and loved scenes that recalled the bright roadway of the Gods on high. The crossings were gay with curds, grains of colored rice, parched grain,
 15 sandal, aloes, incense, garlands and offerings of food. His numerous friends and well-wishers gave him their blessings as he passed on. "May your fair brows wear the crown of Kosala. Walk in the traditions of your fathers and extend the shadow of your protecting arm over us, even as Dasaratha
 20 and his predecessors used to do. Your accession to the throne spells a long period of peace and prosperity for us. We desire nothing more than to see you ride back to your palace fresh from the consecration bath. What care we for the material pleasures this earth can give us or vows,
 25 chants, sacrifices and gifts that can secure to us a happy hereafter ? Once again we proclaim that our hearts hold no other wish than to see you monarch of this fair realm."

Such praises and plaudits elated not the heart of Rama : they left his humbler and more solicitous to
 30 deserve such unbounded love and confidence. He passed along, rewarding them with a glance, a look, a nod, a word, a bow, a slight raising of the brows or a reverent clasp of the hands as became their rank and station. Those who looked at him but once, stood rooted to the spot, gazing intently at where he flashed upon their sight. Their looks followed their hearts which they had lost to Rama. They saw him in every object ; they heard him in every sound. Just conceive what it would have been like *in his presence* !

It is not given to all to be so blessed as to speak to Rama, to pour our hearts to him in eloquent praise, to offer him our poor welcome and homage. The very sight of his supernal beauty raises us to the loftiest heights of ineffable bliss. But it is not beyond the bounds of possibility for one to have a sight of his glorious presence ; or more fortunate still, to come within the range of his compassionate glance. But, should there be a man who neither saw Rama nor was seen by him, the meanest object in creation will rise up against him in scorn and contempt. Now, the whole world may shun a man ; yet, he can never fail to have the approbation of his conscience to console him ; while this miserable wretch is utterly denied even that poor comfort. The small still voice in him will spurn him away. Rama is the same to all, high or low, peasant or philosopher, man or beast ; he fulfils in them their utmost deserts and withholds from them nothing—not even the bliss of Emancipation. Hence, it is no wonder that they love him so and lose their hearts to him.

Crossings, fanes, holy trees, halls, he passed along, going round them in reverence, and approached the palace of his sire that, with its Vardhamana houses flashing with gems, gave one the idea of the mansion of Indra come down on earth. Lofty towers hid the sky from view, like cloud-banks or Kailasa peaks or the snow-white Vimanas (aerial-cars) of gods. He drove through three blocks guarded by archers, and walked through a couple more until he was at the gates of the seraglio. He left his friends and retinue there and entered that paradise on earth. The vast crowd waited outside in joyous anticipation, even as the shoreless ocean awaits the rising of the moon and said to themselves "Some marvellous good fortune welcomes our Rama yonder; he will be back among us in no time and give us the pleasure of beholding his coronation."

CHAPTER XVIII

KAIKEYI'S TRIUMPH

RAMA entered and saw his father lying on the bed, with hopeless eye and pallid mien and Kaikeyi standing by. He clasped his father's feet with humble reverence and next touched those of Kaikeyi. Dasaratha managed to force a cry "Rama" and then speech failed him ; cruel tears blinded his eyes and he saw not Rama. The prince had never seen his father in such a fearful state.

10 Sudden terror gripped him fast, even as though he had set his foot on a cobra's hood, all heedlessly. No danger or misfortune, calamity or peril had any power to ruffle the serenity of his heart. But his fear was great that he might somehow or other be the unconscious cause of the present misery of Dasaratha.

15 His father was sighing hot and furiously, like a wounded snake ; pale and emaciated with grief, bewildered and dazed, he lay there in strange despair, like the unfathomable monarch of the waters disturbed to the very depths ; or like the Lord of Day in the jaws of the dread Rahu ; or like a Rishi

20 shorn of his spiritual lustre by polluting himself with a lie. Rama's heart boiled within his breast like an enraged sea to think that his might have been the hand that had, all innocently, dealt the blow. The king's interests ever lay nearest his soul and he said to himself " Wondrous strange ! My

25 lord's countenance is not bright, as usual, with joy at beholding me ! It matters not that something might have roused his displeasure against me during my absence ; the moment I went into his presence, he would clean forget it and turn upon me a face wreathed in smiles. And my dear sire's

30 heart is torn with grief the moment he sets his eyes on me !" With a heavy heart and wan face he addressed himself to Kaikeyi and said " Mother mine ! Is my sire displeased with me for any unwitting fault of mine ? I pray you enlighten

me. If it were so, whom have I to intercede for me but your good self ? Unvarying in his love and affection for me, nay, almost verging upon partiality, how is it I find him careworn, miserable and ominously silent to me ? This tabernacle of ours is meant to go through every kind of experience, good and evil, happy and wretched ; and no one's life is a bright summer all along. So, it is quite in the order of things that he should be subject to infirmities and maladies. Or has he some great grief weighing heavy on his heart ? Or is it anything untoward that has befallen Bharata, who brings joy to the hearts of the beholders, or Satrughna the unshaken or my dear mothers? He is my lord and king ; my duty ever waits upon his pleasure. He is my fond father ; the highest merit I could ever hope to lay by is to obey his lightest behests. I take no pleasure in life unless it were devoted to his service ; but now, when his heart is turned away from me, in anger, all the more it is an imperious command. A little thought would convince us that we derive from our father the bodies we use. So, he is the only god we see and feel. Beyond a doubt, our highest aspirations are fulfilled and our greatest good secured by carrying out his commands. Or, is it that you have, through anger or love, spoken to him harshly and clouded his spirits ? Mother ! I pray to know the truth of it. What is it that has brought about this sudden and strange revolution in the nature and thoughts of our lord ? "

Kaikeyi knew as well as any that she had no fault to find with Rama ; but, her solicitude for the interests of herself and Bharata blinded her to every other consideration ; and she felt no fear nor shame that she was about to speak to Rama, words unholy, unrighteous, that were to be the prolific mother of countless woes and calamities. " Rama ! The king is not offended with you ; nor is he afflicted with any other grief. He desires to speak to you

somewhat ; but hesitates out of a natural fear that you may not carry out his wishes. You know how much he loves you ; 70 and his very love stands in the way of his speaking to you anything that might pain your heart. He has made a promise to me long ago, and it rests with *you* to fulfil it. He forced his boons upon me and repents of it when I hold him to his promise, like any low-born churl. Is it not supremely foolish in him, to 75 grant me two boons of my choice and grieve when I demand its fulfilment, like one that shuts the stable when the horse is stolen ? Dharma is the root of this universe, so say the wise. And it is *your* plain duty to see that he does not prove a traitor to Truth through his unseasonable anger towards me. If you give your word to me that you will anyhow fulfil his promise to me, just or unjust, I will even speak on his behalf, as his extreme love to you ever stands in the way of his telling it to you himself."

80 Unutterable grief filled the heart of Rama on hearing this. "Alas ! What a fate ! Has it come to this that my own mother should suspect me of unwillingness or hesitation to obey the behests of Dasaratha, my father, my king and my teacher ?" He turned to Kaikeyi and exclaimed in 85 the hearing of his sire "Fie, fie ! Would that I were stricken dead and sucked into the dark depths of oblivion than hear from your lips the cruel words 'if' and *that* in connection with my father ! Is he not my lord and ruler, my father, my master, the guardian of my interests ? A word from him 90 and I leap into the flames or quaff the poison-cup or plunge into the depths of the ocean. So I pray you speak to me what my lord has at heart. I swear most solemnly to fulfil it whatever it might be. Need I tell you that it is utterly unnecessary and ridiculous for me to promise or to swear.

95 100 *Rama speaks not twice.*"

Then, Kaikeyi, the most hardened of sinners, addressed

herself to Rama, the soul of truth and candor and said " In the long past there was a great battle between the gods and the asuras in which your father fought for the gods. The asuras wounded him grievously so that he was at death's 105 door. I brought him back to life and safety and he was pleased to give me two boons. I demand them of him now. If you have any care that the promises made by yourself and by your father should hold good, pay heed to my words. Bharata, my son, should be crowned as the 110 heir-apparent to-day and with the very articles prepared towards your coronation. You should cancel all the arrangements made for your installation and live for fourteen years in the forest of Dandaka like a recluse, with matted hair, deer-skin and bark of trees. My Bharata should reign 115 from this Ayodhya over the broad earth with all its treasures of gold and silver, horses and elephants. The king is torn between the conflicting emotions of love, compassion and grief ; wan, emaciated and bewildered, he will not even allow you to see him. Bright scion of the Raghus, 120 who never went back upon their plighted faith ! Fulfil the promise made by your sire. Walk in the path of Truth and save him from the jaws of hell."

The cruel words fell on the wounded heart of Dasaratha and he writhed in impotent agony. " Alas ! What have 125 I done to be doomed to this torture, to listen, all powerless to such dreadful words from this fiend in- human shape ? Why was I chosen the instrument of inflicting this cruel injury upon Rama, dearer to me than life itself, a shameful act which even his worst enemies would shrink from polluting 130 their hands with ?" But Rama's heart was, if possible, more serene and joyful in that there was offered him a chance of placing before the world an example of , filial duty. His face was a faithful index of his heart, and showed not the least sign of grief, anger or disappointment. Never for a 135

moment did the thought cross his mind "What grievous injustice ? What a dreadful irony of fate ! This crown is mine by right of birth. My father promised it to me before the world. And now, at the last moment, I am to lose it, to give my consent, without a pang, to see the son of my step-mother seated on the throne, to renounce with a smiling face the comforts, the luxuries, the wealth, pomp and power of what I was taught to expect as legitimately mine and doom myself to a living death in the dreadful forests for fourteen livelong years." Verily, no one would speak in the same breath of misery or unhappiness and the supreme Lord, one of the gems in whose radiant crown is infinite Bliss.

CHAPTER XIX

"I PROMISE"

RAMA lent a joyful ear to the words of Kaikeyi that ruined his brightest hopes and blotted out 5 for ever the happy future that was opening out to him. He clasped his hands in profound reverence to his mother and said "My queen ! On my eyes and ears be it. I take myself to the dark forests and live the life of a hermit, with matted hair, deer skin and bark of trees. Is it not my bounden duty to fulfil my father's promise ? But, the king knows 10 me better than myself ; no misfortune or calamity has the least power to shake his iron will ; the flower of valor and heroism, I wonder that he evinces not his usual joy and delight at beholding me. I am all anxious to know why. 15 But, I pray you entertain not the least suspicion about my willingness to keep my word. I swear it before you once again most solemnly. *I go to the dark forests to lead the life of a hermit, with matted hair, clad in deer-skin and bark of trees.* His Majesty is the most watchful guardian of my

interests. I have sat at his feet and learned the truth of life and being. He is the lord and ruler over us. Ingratitude was never associated with his name, much less towards you. Is it not my most joyful duty to obey his behests without question, without hesitation, at any cost? But, one thought rankles in my heart. Why did I not receive the order for Bharata's coronation from the lips of his Majesty? Was he anxious to spare me any probable pain of disappointment? If so, he forgets that Bharata is my brother. Knows he of any one who loves Bharata more? When I broke the bow of Siva in the hall of Janaka and won Seetha as the price of valor, would I not have most joyfully resigned my claims to her in his favour, if Bharata had but expressed a wish? This mighty kingdom, this wealth, nay, my life itself, I hold but valuable only so far as they are of service to him. Then, my father and lord has himself laid his commands on me that I should see the crown placed on the brows of Bharata. It is a most sacred duty with me to fulfil his promises to you; your inclination too runs that way. Are not these reasons enough? Alas! My heart bleeds to see His Majesty hang his stately head in sorrow and grief, dropping scalding tears on the affrighted earth. I pray you to anyhow soothe away his grief. Let countless messengers ride fast on fleet coursers to the capital of the lord of the Kekayas to bring back Bharata as his majesty has ordered. I go straight from here to the forests of Dandaka and live there for ten years and four. Would I think twice about obeying my father's commands?"

Kaikeyi knew full well that Rama never went back upon his word; he was as good as gone to Dandaka. Her heart rejoiced greatly and she did her best to hurry him on. "You are ever right. Let messengers hasten on fleet coursers even now to bring back Bharata from his uncle's

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capital. It does not befit you to delay here, and you so eager to go to the forests. So, you do well to hasten your departure to Dandaka. It is but the sense of shame that prevents His Majesty from ordering you himself. Let it not lie heavy upon your heart. I know full well that he bathes not nor breaks his fast unless he sees you depart for the woods".

Dasaratha was shocked beyond conception at these cruel words and crying "Alas ! what horrible iniquity ? What have I done that my ears should be polluted with such foul accusations?", he fell in a dead faint on his bed of gold. Rama sprang to his side and caught him in his arms, while the cruel words of Kaikeyi lashed him, like a spirited steed, to hasten his departure to the forests. But, the slightest shadow of grief never dimmed the bright serenity of his soul. "My queen ! You do me but ill justice to think that my heart hankers after wealth, pomp and power. Far be it from my thoughts to remain here, to win the love and affection of the people and rule over them. Methinks you to read my stay here to mean— If I manage to stay here till Bharata comes, who knows that he may renounce the crown in my favor out of his love and devotion to me? My acts, my words, my thoughts centre round one desire and only one—to fulfil my dharma. I pray you to lay to your heart well that the hollow joys of life have no power over me and that I am as dispassionate as the sages that abide in the holy forests. I pray you remember carefully that I hold my life of value only so far as it serves to fulfil His Majesty's pleasure. Know I of any higher dharma than to wait on the pleasure of my father and serve him in thought, word and deed? It needs not the commands of his majesty ; a word from your good self, a hint is more than enough to make the forests a joyful home for me during twice seven years. No one has a

more unquestioned right than yourself to dispose of me in every way ; I pride myself on being the chosen and privileged servant of Your Majesty ; yet I find that you have thought it fit to ask this trifle of my father ; I am tempted to think that you allow not the possibility of my possessing such noble qualities as magnanimity and truth. Bear with me a while till I take leave of my mother and console Seeta. I pray you look to the necessary arrangements about Bharata's succession to the crown and the due discharge of his filial duties to our lord. For, it is the dharma sanctified by the immemorial usage of my ancestors of happy memory "

These gentle words, so noble, so generous and so utterly unselfish were too much for poor old Dasaratha; a tempest of grief shook his whole being to its very foundations. And, he sobbed aloud, while burning tears coursed down his aged cheeks. Then Rama touched, all reverently, the feet of his sire utterly senseless with grief and of the diabolical Kaikeyi, went round them in low humility and walked out of the women's apartments No shadow of grief or anger or disappointment or annoyance dimmed the brightness of his looks , he took his way to his palace while his friends followed him in awed silence At his heels went Lakshmana in terrible wrath, hissing like a wounded cobra and powerless to keep back his fast flowing tears. One should go round in reverence, rare articles, auspicious objects, fanes of gods, and crossings, even as the Books lay it down ; hence, Rama went round the materials ready stored against his coronation. He would not so much as glance at them ; but passed on slowly, praying hard all the while that they might be better utilized in the coming coronation of Bharata. The dark night has no power to dim the beauty of the moon, ever the bright bringer of joy to all ; even so, the loss of a crown and the unrighteous banishment from his kingdom had no power

to dim the glory of the Lord of the worlds, of whom eternal and boundless Bliss is one of his attributes. His heart put away from itself a proffered throne and sway over the broad
 125 earth and elected to live a life of dreary exile in the trackless forests ; verily, the souls of the great sages and saints were not more serene, dispassionate and unshaken. He gently refused the umbrella of state, the chamaras and the other insignia of royalty and proceeded on foot to the
 130 mansion of his mother to inform her of the sad news. He dismissed, with a smile, his friends and loving citizens and kept his senses under stern restraint ; he grieved to see others grieve for him, but would not allow the least sign of it to escape him. Those around him were unable to detect any
 135 change in his face or looks or words or demeanour ; he was, as ever, the lord of Sree and the flawless champion of truth. He lost nothing of his innate cheerfulness of heart, even as the autumn moon whose brightness wanes not. Undisturbed by joy or sorrow, unparalleled in fame, Rama was still the
 140 giver of boundless pleasure and happiness to all beings and spoke sweet words and kind to all around him. And so, he passed on to his mother's palace.

Lakshmana, his heroic brother and his peer in noble excellences, followed him there, exercising an iron control
 145 over his rebellious grief. Rama beheld there groups of men and women rejoicing in the anticipated happiness of his coronation and said to himself with a sigh "Alas ! that I should be the messenger of grief and many other calamities to these my friends who are now so happy ! I should exercise the utmost vigilance and control lest I betray the least sign of grief in my features or behaviour, and these good souls die of a broken heart" And so saying, he entered the apartments of the queen with a cheerful smile.

CHAPTER XX

" YOU SHALL NOT GO "

RAMA left the apartments of Kaikeyi with bowed head and clasped hands while doleful cries and heart-rending lamentations followed him from the assembled women therein. "Alas ! Rama needed not the word of his father to attend, to the veriest detail, to the comfort and happiness of every one of us here. Rama is to be driven to the gloomy forests to-day and he, the Goal of the aspirations of all beings and the surest Means thereto He waits upon our pleasure with greater diligence, devotion and respect than he ever accords to Kausalya, the mother that gave him birth. Harsh speech provokes him not to reply; nor do his acts or words provoke anger in others ; nay, his sweet and gentle accents soothe and calm the hearts of such as give way to senseless wrath. Our king has clean taken leave of his senses. Has he not set his hand to the glorious work of universal ruin and destruction by banishing to the woods Rama, in whom all things live and move and have their being?" And they lifted their voices aloud, gentle and simple, queen and maiden and cried 'Fie' and 'Shame' upon the monarch. The frightful clamour from the apartments of the women fell upon the ears of Dasaratha ; his feeble heart, stricken till then with the grief of his son banished to a grievous doom, broke down quite, and he fainted away where he sat, from grief and shame. The pitiful wail fell upon the ears of Rama as he passed out ; it grieved his heart sore, but as he saw no means of assuaging their griefs, he put on a cheerful front, that he might not, at least, intensify them. Heaving hot and profound sighs, like a wounded elephant, he never lost his presence of mind, but quickened his steps to his mother's palace followed by Lakshmana.

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The chief of the wardens there was a very old gentleman ; he sat there in his place of office, wand in hand, while countless subordinates stood round in deep reverence. They sprang up in joy to welcome Rama and shouted ' Victory ! Ever victory to thee'. He passed on into the second block filled with brahmanas profoundly versed in the sacred scriptures, whom Dasaratha delighted to honor. Rama saluted
 35 those aged repositories of saintliness and wisdom and passed on to the third block guarded by elderly dames and damsels. They gave him their sincere and joyful blessings and announced his approach to Kausalya.

The queen spent the long night in fast and meditation
 40 to secure peace and prosperity to her darling son. At day-break she engaged herself in reverent worship of the lord Vishnu. Ever occupied with vows, fasts, penances, mortifications and meditation, she was in the sacrificial hall, where Rama found her clad in garments of white silk, directing the
 45 brahmanas in making offerings of auspicious things into the fire with appropriate chanting of the mantras. Curds, colored unbroken rice, ghee, sweets, cooked food, parched grain, white garlands, sweet drinks, food prepared with sesamum seed, sacred twigs for fuel, a water jar and the other necessary materials stood in readiness for divine service. She was offering libations of water to the gods to ensure welfare and happiness to her son, and was wholly absorbed in the details thereof. Her frame was wasted through constant observance of vows and fasts, but bright was the halo of
 50 glory that surrounded her, even as a goddess. She was overjoyed to see her son in her rooms, a rare visitor there and sprang to meet him, even as a mare her fond foal. Rama went round his mother in reverence, bowed low and touched her feet. Kausalya embraced him fondly, smelt the crown of his head and her supreme love and affection for him found expression in hearty and sincere prayers for his
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good. " May length of days, boundless fame and the proper observance of the royal traditions crown you ever, even as your ancestors of glorious memory, righteous, noble and grey in the experience of years. Your father was never 70 known to break his word. This day he will instal you as the heir-apparent, even as he promised it to you. For, is he not deeply versed in the knowledge and practice of the mysteries of dharma ? She offered him a seat and invited him to dine there.

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Modest and unassuming by nature, Rama's extreme devotion to his mother would not allow him to take his seat before her. He touched it instead and replied to her with folded hands and with the least tinge of shame-facedness in his voice. " Mother ! A great fear has befallen us 80 that will cause no small grief and anxiety to you, to Seeta and to Lakshmana. The king has given orders to stop my coronation and instal Bharata in my place. I am ordered to live for fourteen years in the forests of Dandaka I go straight from here and *that now*. I have come to take 85 leave of you. I have resolved to dwell in the uninhabited wilds, feeding upon honey, roots and fruits, even as the hermits and abstaining from the flesh of animals. What have I to do with these seats curiously wrought with priceless diamonds? The Vishtara is more meet for one of my order."

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The cruel words fell like a thunder-bolt on Kausalya and she fainted away from excess of grief, even as a huge Sala tree in the forest cut down by the axes of woodmen, or even as a Shining One hurled down to the earth from the Mansions of Light. Rama sprang towards her and raising her all gently in his arms, chafed her wasted limbs, as she lay like an uprooted plantain tree or like a mare who rolls in the dust to shake off the fatigue that comes of being over burned. Soon she regained consciousness ; a stranger to such calamities, fitted in every way to enjoy the utmost joy 100

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and happiness that life can give, and brought up in the very lap of wealth, luxury and power, she bitterly complained of her fate. "Darling ! I am sure that all this grief would not have befallen me were you not born to me as my son.

- 105 A barren women has no other sorrow than that of childlessness. I sink under the heavy load of manifold misfortunes. I have a son, but I have him not. I spent over him years of care and solicitude, but I live to see the work of my hands undone before my eyes. I counted upon your
 110 devoted service to me in my last days ; I fondly hoped that your hands will close mine eyes before they take leave of the light of the sun ; but I live to see you violently torn away from me in my helpless old age. The curse of childlessness has practically come back upon me to dog my
 115 dying days. Alas ! A barren wife has only the disease of her heart to grapple with ; but heart, mind, senses, body, all are hopelessly consumed by my grief.

"To the world I am the queen consort of Dasaratha of Ayodhya, the lord of the earth ; but, devoid of the wealth,
 120 the power and the pomp that make it a reality. My husband's heart is turned away from me. Your birth gave me a new lease of life and instilled fresh hope in my heart that I might get back a husband's love and queenly power through his supreme affection to you. That has been
 125 the main spring of my life. Alas ! Grief more intense, greater than I have experienced till now, is my portion till death. Denied of the joy and comfort that is mine by right, I have to endure the cruel words and wanton indignities from the other wives of my husband Favorites of
 130 fickle fortune, a king's fancy or whim has raised them to where they stand now, co-wives with me and rivals for my husband's love. They have poisoned my lord's heart and shut me out from the light of his affection. Well. Did they keep it back till now ? They but hinted, suggested ; but hereafter

they would thrust their insolence upon my face and cry in 125
scorn and fury ‘Get away. Darken not the presence of
my lord’. Or they may adopt a tone of ridicule and say
‘Surely, a barren woman is, by nature, fitted to be the centre
of feasts and pageants?’ Or, when the monarch chances to be
my guest, they will burst on us with envy and drag him away 140
thence by force crying ‘What do you do *here*? Know you
not that your place is in *my rooms*? Their birth, their status
and their talents do not in the least give them courage to
speak such words to me, were it not for the cruel blow dealt
by Fortune to my honor and happiness. Women do not 145
survive such shocks. Before me stretches a whole eternity
of grief and tears, unparalleled, unutterable. Behold!
they whelm me quite and you are by my side—the
flower of valor, my first-born and the next in the order of
succession to the throne of the Earth. Just imagine what 150
it would be like *when you are away*. Death, natural or
violent, would be a merciful boon. Every day finds my hus-
band colder to me. Destined by birth and by fortune to
lord it over the earth and its countless millions, here am I
placed, by sufferance, in the same level as the waiting 155
women of Kaikeyi. Nay, not so; for, they at least come
in for a share of her favour.

“If there chance to be any well-meaning soul who was
devoted to me and spoke to me words of hope and cheer, he
will avoid me like a pestilence, lest Kaikeyi’s son might 160
punish him cruelly for it. Kaikeyi has never a kind look or
a word for me; cruel taunts and cutting sarcasms were
ever known to fall from her lips where I was concerned;
and now this last and cruellest stroke of misfortune delivers
me over to her, body and soul. Have I the heart to brave 165
her frowns? It is seventeen years since I saw your sweet face
and derived marvellous patience to bear my cross. My Rama
will grow to be a youth; he will take his place on the throne

of his father ; and then my sorrow sets for ever. But,
 170 alas ! my hopes are nipped in the bud ; the gibes and the
 jeers of my rivals would pierce my wound heart ; and
 how long can this poor wasted frame bear those refined
 torments ? And it is a night that knows no morn.

“ Youth, health and beauty have passed away from me.
 175 I can be nothing but an eye-sore to the king. I am sure
 that it is not in me to live this dog's life of misery and
 disgrace without the light of your sweet presence to relieve
 the awful gloom.

“ Verily, this is a dark mystery, that the countless fasts,
 180 vows, observances, and prayers, all directed to one end, your
 happiness and prosperity, have borne no fruit. My sweet
 hopes have turned to dust and ashes in my mouth ; the glori-
 ous future that dawned on my expectant sight has suddenly
 darkened into a gloom ominous and terrible. Well, I
 185 must even reap what I sowed. I made the bed and must
 perforce lie upon it. My heart breaks not under the stress
 and strain of this mighty calamity that comes upon me all
 on a sudden, even as a roaring flood that rushes down
 during the rains along the bed of some broad river, while
 190 the solid banks crumble into powder. Is it imperishable ?
 Is this attenuated frame of mine really made of the heart
 of the adamant that it is grief-proof ? It is then true that
 death comes not upon a man a second sooner or later than
 its time. Or has death forgotten me ? Or is the world of
 195 Yama full to overflowing and there is no room for me ?
 Would that the dread lord of Death bear me away hence
 this very moment, even as the king of the beasts carries
 away a weeping fawn or doe. If there is the least chance
 of our being blessed with death and oblivion before our
 200 time, I would go straight from here to the mansions of
 Yama, than live on miserably down here, even as a cow
 violently deprived of her one calf.

"Alas ! A cry in the wilderness, a seed sown on rocks has been all my worship, meditation, charity and penance to secure lasting happiness and power to my darling boy. 205 This is the most unkindest cut of all."

"My place is not here when you are in the woods and I will even follow you where you go. A weak and aged cow can never be parted from the side of the calf on which its hopes and joys rest." Thus moaned and wailed Kausalya 210 in the utter agony of her grief. Then it came back to her that she might have to part from Rama at any time; her rivals will wreak upon her the hoarded vengeance of the long past; Rama was bound by the bonds of truth and was absolutely powerless to stretch forth a helping hand; she 215 raised her voice and wept aloud, even as a she-kinnari who sees her young ones struggling in the toils of the fowler

CHAPTER XXI

"YOU SHALL NOT GO"—(*continued*)

HEN Lakshmana turned to Kausalya, who was lamenting her miserable fate, and spoke to her as became the occasion. "Mother ! It seems to me extremely unjust and improper that Rama should renounce the crown that is his by lawful right and go to the forest and all at the bidding of a woman. He may say 'It is not Kaikeyi's order that sends me into exile, but his majesty's. Well, his majesty is tottering under the weight of years and hence is beset with fancies unsuited to his age ; the pleasures of the senses enslave him quite. He may say 'A pure heart can set at naught the senses and all their wiles'; but his reason is completely unhinged by love and passion ; besides, there is that evil-hearted woman

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- 15 Kaikeyi ever at his elbow, hounding him on to fresh iniquities. Invested with boundless power and wealth, what would not the monarch do to win a smile of that siren ?
- “ If you object that Rama might have deserved the punishment by any fault or crime of his, I joyfully challenge
- 20 any one in all the worlds to charge Rama with treason or treachery or any heinous sin. I see none, not even his worst enemy, not even the most abandoned wretch that was ever justly punished by him, who would ever raise his voice in complaint against Rama, even behind his back.
- 25 Then, what chance for any to accuse him to his face ? (I have made up my mind to rid this earth of the unworthy ruler of Ayodhya. I care not if he is my father, or my king, or hoary with age). An ideal father, truly ! He does well to banish Rama to the dreadful forests. For, it is a plain fact that
- 30 needs no support of inference that Rama excels the very gods in purity at heart. His thoughts, words and acts are ever set unswervingly on the Path of Right. The happiness of his people is ever the goal of his ambition ; good men and great have had the training of him; he has under
- 35 stern control his senses and their ever-fleeting ruler, the mind ; he has endeared himself even to Kaikeyi and his other enemies ; he is the embodiment of duty and justice ; nay, his lawful right to the throne as the eldest son needs no other ally. And would any right-minded person banish
- 40 him from the kingdom for no reason whatever, on the eve of his coronation, towards which he had plighted his faith ? I care not for his grey hairs, for the sixty-thousand years that have passed over his head. They disgrace him all the more ; a slave to lust and passion, abandoned to all sense
- 45 of shame and decency, this hoary libertine is a blot upon good society ; and I am rendering a very great service to the cause of morality and justice, if I send him out of the world which he befools with his presence.

" Let that be. Stranger still it is to see our prince, deeply versed in the traditions of royalty, render absolute obedience to the word of the king in his second childhood, a very dilapidated Don Juan ! Brother ! Make yourself master of this kingdom before others come to know of this. With me at your back, I defy any one in all the worlds to approach you. It were easier task to put to flight the dread god of Death in the lawful discharge of his duty. Let the millions here in Ayodhya come against us, old and young, Brahmana and Kshatriya ; it is child's play for me to reduce this fair city to a howling wilderness in the twinkling of an eye. It matters not if Bharata stands before us with his friends, his allies, and his well-wishers to support him. My keen shafts shall send them straight to the realms of death. The gentle and the meek are ever insulted and trampled upon ; merit is never recognized unless it strongly asserts itself.

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" I see no injustice, no sin in taking the life of that wicked man, our unnatural father, who, at the instigation of Kaikeyi, allies himself with our foes and works evil to us. Or I would temper justice with mercy and immure him in the depths of a dungeon where he may drag on his miserable days, and repent if he can. The Books lay it down that our teacher or our father deserves summary chastisement at our hands if he is intoxicated with boundless pride and is lost to the sense of right and wrong.

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" How dared he promise this kingdom to Kaikeyi when it is yours by every right, human and divine, when he knows that he has no right to alienate it ? Did he count upon his valour and that of his armies to chase you from here ? Or, is he resolved to fulfil his word to Kaikeyi at any cost ? Let him know that it is utterly and absolutely impossible, now and for ever. What a mighty hero he is to hope to defeat Rama and his devoted servant Lakshmana and place

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Bharata on the throne of the Kosalas ! Mother ! Rama is my brother ; he is the object of my reverence and sincere love ; and here I solemnly swear on the truth that I hold dear, on the bow that I wield, on the gifts I have bestowed in charity, on the worship I have offered to the bright gods, that it matters not whether Rama betakes himself to the dark woods or leaps into the heart of the raging fire, but you will find me there before him. Mother ! It shall be my care to place my valour and prowess at your service and put away grief and anxiety from you. This day, my brother and yourself will behold the might of my arm."

Kausalya heard him out with renewed hope and joy and, with a troubled heart and faltering voice, said "Rama, my darling ! Heard you the words that fell from the lips of your brother Lakshmana ? They need no comment and I leave it to your good sense to act as seems best. You may say 'A father's words are a law to his son.' But, is this your father's command ? Nay, it is but the insidious instigation of Kaikeyi, my rival and the evil genius of our king. Besides, it is all opposed to reason, to right and to justice. Is it kind of you, is it dutiful, to abandon me to my enemies, helpless, alone and stricken with grief and misfortune ?

"Law and duty have no mysteries for you. You have set your heart upon fulfilling the dharma of carrying out your father's commands. But know you not that there is a higher dharma than that ? The Books teach us that the mother is the highest and most reverent object that a man can have in this world. So, stay with me and devote yourself to my service. I can assure you that there is no higher dharma, none more imperative. Kasyapa of yore, stayed with his mother and rendered her faithful service and loving, with restrained self ; his noble tapas was rewarded with the high regions of light and he took his place among the Patriarchs (Prajapatis). As your father is to you, so am I.

He is worthy of your love and reverence, and so am I. His word is law unto you, and so is mine. Now, I like not your banishing yourself to the forests of Dandaka; you can never have my consent to it. What joy have I in 120 life apart from you? Life itself is a curse to me unless I spend it by your side. I count it a privilege and pleasure to be with you though I feed upon grass. If you ever leave my side when I am assailed by misfortune and calamity, I will starve myself to death. The Ruler of the Waters once 125 had the misfortune to grieve the heart of his mother and expiated that lapse of filial duty by bitter experience of the hells that are reserved for the slayers of brahmanas; and eternal misery shall be *your* lot here on earth."

The heart-rending laments of his mother had no power 130 to seduce Rama away from the Path of Duty and he replied all gently "On me lies the duty of obeying the commands of my sire; my fealty to you weighs with me no less. But it is impossible for me to do it simultaneously. Besides, my father's orders have the advantage 135 of priority and demand my immediate attention; I dare not set them aside. So I go to the forest and pray you, with my head at your feet, give me your leave and your blessings. Do I seem to pierce your wounded heart? Maharsi Kandu, of yore, slew a sacred cow at the commands 140 of his father; and was he unacquainted with the intricacies of Dharma? Was he not an ascetic of stern vows? I take another instance nearer and more pertinent. King Sagara of our line, once laid his orders on his sixty thousand sons to tear up this broad and fair earth. They obeyed his behests 145 to the very letter and recked not that they were consumed to ashes in the execution of their duty. My father demands of me no such sacrifice of my life, though it is his to dispose of as he wills; he but requires me to spend a trifling period of fourteen years in the forests of Dandaka. And shall 150

I, all cravenly, cry upon it as a great hardship ? Jamadagni ordered his son to lop off the head of the mother that bore him ; and did Parasurama waver or flinch ? Shall I prove a traitorous and unworthy son to my sire, lest I should 155 cause you grief of heart for a while ? Have we not instances of many a god-like son who carried out his father's behests at any cost ? Is it sinful of *me* to try to walk in their path ? Am I the solitary pilgrim on it ? Have I not their example, their countenance and their sanction to cheer me on ? It is 160 no new hobby of my invention. It is the law of man and it is no rare merit in me if I fulfil it. I will sacrifice any thing to spare you the slightest pang ; but since I can not, consistent with the discharge of my duty, I console myself with the hope that no one has come to grief till now, who happened 165 ed to cause some grief to his mother, in carrying out his father's commands."

Unrivalled in persuasive eloquence as in valor, he next addressed himself to Lakshmana and said " Brother mine ! You do me but scant justice to think I know not your boundless love and devotion to me, your prowess, your fortitude, and your all-consuming energy. My mother grieves sorely, all forgetful of the inner mysteries of truth and peace. Surely, it ill becomes you to speak thus and *you* deeply versed in the secrets of Dharma ! Truth is deeply implanted in 170 Dharma ; hence it is the most coveted of the Purusharthas (Aims of Life). I secure it best by obeying my father's behests in preference to those of my mother. No one can set out to walk on the Way of Right and fail to fulfil his promise to his father or to mother or to the saintly Brahmanas. 175 Kaikeyi but passed me on the order of my father that I should dwell in the forests ; and who am I to say nay ? So, put away far from you the cruel instincts of a fanatic Kshatriya, that puts you up to say ' Let us slay this old man, our father, and rule over his kingdom.' You are no blind atheist to

take kingly polity as the guide of your life, even when it leads 185 away from the Path of Dharma. Nor are you fool enough to follow Dharma, when it leads you away from the Path of Compassion and Love. You never knew me to lead you astray."

So spoke he out of deep love for his brother ; anon, he 190 bowed to Kausalya over joined palms of respect and said "Mother ! Is it not immemorial Dharmia that you, I, Seeta, Lakshmana and Sumitra abide by the commands of my father ? His orders demand my immediate attention ; and I will dwell for twice seven years in the pleasant woods. 195 Next come your behests; and I will thereafter wait upon you, ever rendering true service and joyful. A brief spell of hard-ship and rough life for me ; and my word to my father kept, I fly here on the wings of speed to touch your feet, even as King Yayati, who was banished but for a while from his 200 bright abode in the god-world to this dark and dull earth of ours. Hence, I pray you master your grief and give me leave to go. Direct the auspicious rites that would secure us a safe journey and happy and bring me back to your side. I entreat it upon my very life. Order the preparations towards 205 my coronation to proceed no further ; put away your grief and sorrow from the eyes of the world ; and let me have your leave to speed to the forest that Dharma might find in me a loyal servant."

Rama's eloquent pleading, so consonant with virtue 210 and duty, so respectfully firm, so utterly devoid of any selfish grief or disappointment, proved too much for Kausalya and she fainted under the shock. Regaining her senses after a while, she looked Rama in the eye and cried "Child ! Do I not deserve at least as much love and 215 obedience at your hands as you owe your father ? Flesh of my flesh you are. I bore you in my womb and watched you grow from infancy to youth. Does it not count any-

thing ? You see my unspeakable misery and yet you will
 220 leave me here, alone and helpless, to the tender mercies of
 my relentless foes. Do you expect me to give my consent
 to it ? What is life to me in this world if you are not by my
 side ? What care I to dwell in the radiant worlds of joy
 or of the Fathers or of the gods ? An hour with you is
 225 worth eternities in those spheres. ”

Elephant-hunters take their stand during dark nights
 across its paths and seek to drive it back towards the
 treacherous pits, by threatening it with blazing torches, only
 to enrage it afresh, without turning it from the track it had
 230 marked out for itself. Even so the pitiable laments of his
 mother but roused him to fresh energy and firmness, in that
 she would not yet desist from dragging his feet from the Path
 of Dharma. He saw his beloved mother senseless with
 grief ; he saw his brother Lakshmana writhe under the tor-
 235 ments of impotent anger and valor; yet, his heart never wavered,
 not for a second, in its loyal allegiance to Dharma ; and
 his words to Kausalya were in perfect consonance therewith.
 Duty, equally imperative and just, but conflicting, hemmed
 him on every side ; and he hesitated not for a moment to
 240 choose the best and follow it with unshaken resolve. And
 the countless worlds cannot furnish another who could
 take his place by the side of Rama, the beloved of all beings.
 Such words fall fitly and gracefully from his lips, and from
 no other. “ Lakshmana ! You force me to remind you that
 245 I know and appreciate best your whole-souled devotion to
 me and your matchless valor. But you force me also to say
 that you and my dear mother cause me fruitless annoyance
 and trouble by your wilful blindness to my inner motives.
 Hear me place before you at some length what I hinted to
 250 you just now. A wife secures to her husband Dharma, if
 she acts in consonance with the laws of his life ; she secures
 to him Love, if she deserves to find a place in his

heart ; she secures to him wealth, if she is the mother of an exemplary son ; thus one and the same woman helps a man to achieve three Aims of Life. These are said to be the surest means to attain the happiness that accrues of Dharma. Or, in other words, do your Duty to the best of your lights and you are master of the above means. Take my word for it that this is utter truth and beyond the shadow of a doubt. None should waste his time and energy over anything that leads him not straight to the Three Purusharthas. Engage yourself in the conscientious performance of that which will secure you Dharma as its result. The world hates him who seeks wealth at any cost; nor is it seemly devote ourselves solely to the pursuit of pleasure ; so, let us decide where my line of duty lies at present. The king is my Guru, in that I sat at his feet to learn the mysteries of the art of War and the science of Polity ; he is my monarch under the shadow of whose protecting arm I live in peace and happiness ; he is my father who brought me into the world ; his great age and ripe experience deserve my utmost respect ; if such a one commands me any thing, be it out of love or anger or self-interest, would any one, who knows the inner mysteries of Dharma that a plighted word should always be followed by the fulfilment thereof, go back upon his promise, unless a cruel heart goes before crueler deeds ? I have no talents that way ; I seek to carry out, to my best, the promise made by my sire.

" He is our lord and of my mother too; he is the highest goal of her aspirations ; he is the surest guide to lead her to the worlds of the Blessed. He is ruling over this vast realm for many thousands of years more justly, more righteously, than his glorious predecessors ; is it seemly, is it decent for my mother to come away with me, as if she were any ordinary woman, helpless, friendless, as if she were a wife

widowed of her lord and protector? Mother, I go to the forest; pray give me leave. Engage yourself in such auspicious rites as will ensure us a safe return to your side.

- 290 King Yayati was banished from heaven, but was restored to it through his unshaken allegiance to Truth; even so I shall come back to you safe and happy at the end of fourteen years. It is not in me to sacrifice unparalleled fame to kingly rule and power, won of unrighteousness. Our
 295 life here on earth is but a lightning flash in the dark cloud of Eternity; and far be it from me the desire to be the lord of the earth and stain my hands with this crime."

So the ruler of men consoled his weeping mother and resolved to start at once to the forests of Dandaka in obedience to the words of Kaikeyi; he explained to Lakshmana the motives that lay behind the course of action adopted by him and prepared himself to go round his mother in reverent salutation and have her leave to depart.

CHAPTER XXII

LAKSHMANA CALMED

RAMA was the absolute master of his thoughts and emotions; omnipotent Lord of the worlds, his iron will never allowed the least sign of it to escape him. None lay nearer to his heart than Lakshmana; he was never very remarkable for patience under restraint; angry fires shot from his eyes, as from the red mouth of a volcano; he hissed forth burning sighs, even as an infuriated lord of serpents. Yet Rama forgave him all, forgot all; was he not his brother, his friend and companion, the darling of his heart and sore-stricken with grief? So he turned to him and said "Lakshmana! What has become of your wondrous self-control and marvellous fortitude? Your indignation at the

king's conduct and your poignant grief on my account, bury them deep, fathoms deep in your heart. Say not, 'What ! on the eve of your coronation, when every thing is ready towards it and the joyful millions on the tip-toe of expectation ! Unspeakable shame it were if the installation does not come off '. It is not due to any fault of ours, to any want of courage or valor on our part. Rather should we rejoice greatly that we are chosen to fulfil our father's promise and win for him the seats of the righteous. So, stay the preparations that are afoot towards my consecration and busy yourself with such things as will enable me to carry out our father's behests. Let me see you as enthusiastic and active in making the necessary arrangements for my departure to the forest, as you are now in bringing about my coronation. My mother grieves overmuch that I am prevented from sitting on the throne of the Ikshvakus ; she doubts my safe return after fourteen years. Assure her that it is but a light task for Rama to fulfil his promise to his father and return from the forest in no time ; she need not vex herself for such a trifle. Wipe away her tears and bring peace and consolation to her pained heart ; for I cannot bear to see her doubt and suffer.

I never knew till now what it is to cause the slightest grief or worry to my father or my mothers. Our father ever speaks truth ; he never goes back upon his promise ; endowed with a might and valor that never fails its purpose, he might be induced to doubt whether the high worlds of the gods are open to him if his plighted word is not kept ; and is it not our sacred duty to keep away from him even the faintest suspicion of it ? If my coronation be not cancelled, my heart may be pained to think that his sworn word to Kaikeyi goes for nothing; and it will wring *my* heart most cruelly. So I wish to stop the preparations towards my consecration and start to the woods this very moment.

Let the daughter of the Kekaya monarch see her hopes realised and seat her son Bharata on the throne of the Ikshvakus. It will do her heart good to see me take my
 50 way to the forest, clad in deer skin and the bark of trees, with my matted hair coiled on my head. Nothing can shake my resolve to renounce the throne and seek the dark depths of Dandaka. Pain me not further. I assure you I put this town behind me and set my face towards the abode
 55 of the saintly rishis. Look sharp.

Till now, I assigned Dharma as the sole motive of my actions ; but there is a greater and nobler one. It is not Kaikeyi that deprives me of this kingdom nor restores it to me at the end of fourteen years, but the Lord. We but
 60 waste our breath in cursing her. The Lord put such a notion into her head ; else why should she seek to harm me, all wantonly as you think ? Know you not that I make no difference among my mothers ? Each one of them is as much entitled to my love and reverence as she that bore
 65 me. Even so, Kaikeyi makes no difference between me and Bharata ; yet, she could speak harsh words and cruel, to stop my coronation and banish me to the wild woods. Need I seek for any other likelier reason than that the Lord has chosen, for some inscrutable purpose of His, to
 70 change her very nature ? Gifted with many a natural grace of mind and heart ; with the blood of noble and mighty monarchs in her veins ; adorned with compassion, generosity and other excellences that become one of her rank ; why should Kaikeyi behave like the meanest of her sex,
 75 low-bred, wicked and cruel ? It matters not if she speaks so to any other ; but to her lord and husband ! It matters not if she sends word through a maid or a slave of hers ; but herself and to his very face ! Would she ever dream of giving utterance to words pregnant with countless woes to
 80 me, upon whom the king and herself have lavished their

love and care till now, even to the very verge of partiality ? Does she suggest it or hint it ? No ; she does not mince matters ; she never tires of repeating it. Is it so very difficult to see the finger of the Lord in this ? None dare set himself up against His will, whose ways are mysterious past understanding. I owe it to Him that this crown slips from my hands when they are about to grasp it ; I owe it to Him that her heart is turned against me quite. Say not 'What is Destiny or Fate when pitted against the might of our will' ? We see it not ; we but trace its course through its works. There is no armour against Fate. None care to throw themselves before the resistless wheels of its car. It underlies all such inscrutable mysteries as joy and sorrow, serenity and anger, gain and loss, birth and death. Mighty sages, such as Visvamitra, bent their dauntless hearts and iron wills to stern *tapas*, agelong and unparalleled. They counted without Fate, became the slaves of their passions, lost their serenity and peace of heart and ended by falling headlong from the glorious spiritual heights they had scaled through milleniums of travail and effort. It is but Destiny that raises before our efforts an impassable barrier and saying 'Thus far thou shalt go and no further', directs our energies to some other purpose we never dreamt of. Full of this conviction, I never allow my peace of heart to be ruffled by the gusts of joy or sorrow ; and this coronation, if it is cancelled, affects me not in the least.

" Do likewise ; put away grief and anger from you; see that the preparations towards my installation are stopped. Let the sacred waters brought from all over the world for my consecration bath now serve me for the preparatory rites and baths towards my departure to the forests. Nay, not so ; perhaps Kaikeyi may come to misconstrue it as a ruse on my part to consecrate myself secretly as the ruler of this realm. So, I will have nothing to do with these holy waters

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that are, of a truth, the property of the king, hence of Bharata.

“ Lakshmana ! Vex not your mind in the least that we
 120 have let this kingdom and its wealth slip through our fingers. It is all one to me if I am monarch of the earth or an humble recluse of Dandaka. On better thoughts, a forest life is absolutely free from the cares, the misfortunes and the sins that beset a ruler's path ; the rarest object of
 125 God's creation meet our eyes there on every side. Hence I prefer a life in the green woods to an uneasy throne.

“ Lakshmana ! I tell you what. No one knows better the boundless might of Destiny. It sits at the heart of Kaikeyi and prompts her to speak harsh and cruel words
 130 to us. Now, is it charitable of us to think that she had a hand in stopping my coronation ? ”

CHAPTER XXIII

LAKSHMANA'S REPLY

LAKSHMANA never raised his eyes from the ground, a sure sign that Rama's skillful arguments failed
 5 to make any impression upon him. He was divided between the conflicting emotions of joy that his brother was firm as a rock in his adherence to dharama and grief that he had to renounce the throne. His feelings never found expression in words ; and the next moment banished even
 10 such thoughts from his mind. His brow was knotted and wrinkled in ominous frowns like an infuriated lion ; he hissed forth burning sighs like a dread serpent in his narrow prison ; he moved his head up and down, as if following the rising waves of his wrath ; his fingers twined and
 15 untwined themselves aimlessly like the trunk of a mighty

elephant ; he shot a glance from beneath his dark brows at Rama and said "It is all unseemly of you to exhibit such excitement and manifest pleasure in your exile to the woods. I understand you to say 'If I fulfil not my father's word to Kaikeyi, it is a crime against dharma. The people will naturally doubt my readiness and willingness to protect them when I make light of my father's commands.' Weaklings, cowards, lunatics and the scum of the Kshatriya race lay themselves down before Destiny to be trampled upon and kicked about. But, you are the flower of valor and royalty ; you need no extraneous help to set aside the might of Destiny ; your head is ever cool and your heart ever calm ; then, is it just of you to laud overmuch this puny Desfiny and call it omnipotent, unassailable, invincible ? Well said Brihaspati 'Destiny is the last refuge of a coward, nay, their bread-giver'. So, it is justly the god of the impotent. Man's will alone is omnipotent and Destiny flees before it. What a worthy theme of praise !

"You apprehend treason against dharma if you fulfil not your father's command. But I wonder why you fail to harbour any suspicion of these sinful creatures, Dasaratha and Kaikeyi, that seek your ruin and destruction. I will not have you say 'Are they not loyal servants of dharma ?' The world is full of such scoundrels who are adepts in the art of hiding their cruelty and wickedness under the cloak of loyalty to dharma. Your pure and innocent heart never suspects them, but sees in them its own reflection. Why do you not understand that it is a preconcerted scheme of theirs to prevent your coronation ? If they had not set about it long ago, why should Kaikeyi put off so unconsciously long the two boons granted to her thousands of years ago ? Let me sketch you their plot. Says Dasaratha to his fellow conspirator 'Rama is, by a cruel misfortune, my first-born ; and as such, has a lawful claim to this kingdom. But you

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50 know that my heart is set upon placing your son on the throne. Alas ! the obstinate people would not sit quiet and see a younger brother crowned over the head of the elder. Well, let us seek to achieve our ends another way. I will solemnly promise before the assembled millions, high and low, to place Rama on the throne. Next you come into the game and imperiously and relentlessly demand the two boons I granted you of yore. I fume and I rage, I rave and I swear, I weep and I entreat, I curse and I scream; but I give in after a well-stimulated fight. Rama will be 55 banished to the wild woods for long years and Bharata will rule over the earth.' Find me any one on earth who supports the succession of a younger brother to the throne over the head of the elder. I do not care to sit patiently under 60 this injustice. I would have you excuse me.

65 " You are endowed with the greatest and the keenest intellect; but in this affair you are under a misapprehension ; a distorted conception of the practice of Dharma makes you say 'I will not have this coronation; I will go to the forests; else I lay myself open to a heinous sin'. That Dharma of 70 yours is the object of my special hatred. Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya, is set up by the artful Kaikeyi and speaks such words as are inimical to Dharma, and utterly condemned by all people; and you, of inconceivable might and invincible valor, bow your head in submission and resolve 75 to obey his unjust behests. What an impossible chance ! Pray pardon me if I attribute this attitude of yours to a slight, though temporary, aberration of your noble intellect. It cuts me to the heart to think that you are their dupe and take it as gospel their plots and wiles to prevent your coro- 80 nation. Find me any one among the millions of this world who take your view of the discharge of duty. They are our parents ; but to the world, they are, in fact, our bitterest and most relentless enemies ; they are sheep under wolf's

clothing. Slaves to passion and lust, they seek ever our ruin and destruction ; and no sane person would ever dream of obeying their commands.

"I heard you say 'Kaikeyi is not to blame, but Destiny that put this evil counsel into her heart'; it is a lame argument at best and is supremely ridiculous in my eyes. I tell you once again that none but cowards and weaklings bend themselves before Destiny. It is utterly powerless before such heroes and men of iron will as ever have their feet on its neck ; it interferes not with their concerns. Bear with me yet a while and you will see an object lesson of the comparative merits of Free-will and Destiny. Man's will shall triumph over Fate and the world will learn a profitable lesson that it has wanted for a long time. You hold, and many others with you, that your coronation has been prevented by Destiny. This day you will see that Destiny flee powerless before my will. Destiny is an elephant in rut that snaps its chains like cobwebs, and, all mindless of the sharp goad, lords it over all ; and my intellect is the fatal noose that will throw it down and drag it powerless and cowed to my feet. The countless myriads in the three worlds, with their lords and regents, are utterly impotent to prevent your coronation ; why speak of this puny sire of ours ? 'It is but good sport to hoist the engineer on his own petard' ; and they who plotted in secret to prevent your coronation and banish you to the gloomy forests, shall, at my word, themselves taste of the pleasures of a forest life for fourteen years. This day shall I nip in the bud their hopes of preventing your installation and placing the crown on the head of their son Bharata. One can afford to brave Destiny and live ; but has any one heard of a person brave my anger and yet survive to tell it ?

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"You would go to the forest ? Well, you shall go, but all in good time; not now, nor for this reason. It is an honor-

ed tradition among the Ikshvakus that the royal sages rule long and happily over their subjects ; when age lays its hand 120 heavy on them, they decide to lead the life of a hermit and make over the kingdom and its cares to their sons, enjoining them to watch over the welfare of the people with paternal solicitude. Even so will you reign over us long and happily for thousands of years and seek the solitudes of 125 the forests, when your sons shall inherit the kingdom.

“ Do you renounce the crown because our father is a creature of impulses, and the kingdom will change hands with his moods ? I take it upon myself to protect this realm, even as the shores keep the ocean billows within bounds. 130 Nay, I swear it by every thing I hold most sacred. Let the Halls of the Heroes be closed to me in the Heaven-world if I fail in my promise. *

“ I pray you turn your thoughts upon crowning yourself with the materials gathered thereunto. Alone and unaided, 135 I am more than a match for any kings that may approach us with hostile intent. These long arms of mine, are they for show ? The bow in my hands, the sword upon my thigh, the quiver at my back, are they toys, or gaudy baubles or bravado ? They are meant to exterminate our foes, root and 140 branch. My heart knows no peace, my arm knows no rest, if any one should dare rank himself among my foes and live. My sword shall, like chain lightning, strike him down and drink his life-blood. I will treat your eyes this day to a rare feast. My good sword shall lop off the heads, the hands 145 and the legs of men, horses and elephants until the earth is a trackless forest therewith. It shall flash and wave over the fast-falling elephants like a blazing mountain or rain clouds dark and heavy, relieved by lambent lightning. Is there any one among the countless millions that crowd this 150 earth, who dare call himself a man and a hero if I but stand against him on the field of battle, bow in hand? Would

they not hide their diminished heads in shame and fear, as if they were so many timid women ? Now I will pierce a foe with countless arrows in rapid succession ; now I will transfix many a foe with a single shaft. I will sheathe my darts in the vital parts of warriors, horses and elephants. So let no shadow of a doubt cross your mind about my annihilating my foes alone and unaided. This day the world shall see the might and splendour of the divine weapons into whose mysteries I have been initiated. I will even pluck the crown from off the unworthy brows of Dasaratha and lay it at your feet. These two arms[§] of mine had till now no heavier task than to be smeared with perfumed sandal-paste, deck themselves with gold and gems, give away rich gifts and costly and shield my friends and dependants from harm. Today they shall be engaged in the more glorious and congenial task of exterminating those that stand in the way of your coronation. What foe of yours shall I deprive of life and fame, friends and retainers ? Your humble servitor am I, ever awaiting your commands ; what shall I do to bring this broad earth under your sway ? "

And to him replied Rama, the glory of the Ikshvaku race, " Child ! The Books lay it down that a person deserves the name of a son (putra) in that his parent's word is a law unto him while they are on earth ; he feeds countless men and women on the anniversary of their departure to the seats of the Blessed ; and he makes offerings of food to their manes at the holy Gaya. So I will not transgress the commands of our sire ; I will fulfil them at any cost. Take my word for it that this is the path trod by the good and great in this world."

Thus did he explain, but more succinctly, his course of action and the duty that lay before him ; he wiped away the fast-falling tears of Lakshmana and brought solace and consolation to his grieved heart.

CHAPTER XXIV

KAUSALYA CONSENTS

KAUSALYA was convinced, beyond a doubt, that Rama was indissolubly wedded to his Dharma ; he would carry out the behests of his father to the letter. She kept back her tears, as ill-omened and said " You are the darling boy sent to cheer and illumine our old age, myself and your sire ; you are a stranger to sorrow and misery ; the soul of virtue and justice, you have ever a kind word and a smile for every one. How would you manage to subsist on the niggardly grains of corn scattered far between ? Your servants and slaves lead happy lives and feed upon the costly food and dainty; how could their lord and master drag on his miserable existence in the wild woods with no better fare than fruits, roots and leaves ? ' Rama is the first-born of Dasaratha ; his parent's hopes and aspirations are centred in him ; he is crowned with every grace of body and mind ; yet his father banished him from the kingdom.' Now, is it not past belief, more a fairy tale ! Even if any one did believe, boundless terror would come over him to think that his turn might come at any time. Every object in creation derives its life, light and joy from you ; you are driven into exile and deprived of your birthright; now, can you find a more convincing argument to prove that Destiny is supreme, and dispenses joy and sorrow to all beings ? The grief of separation from you consumes me quite even as a forest conflagration in autumn. My wasted frame is the forest ; your absence from my side is the gale that drives it on ; my wailings and laments are the fuel that feed it ; my ever-flowing tears are the offerings thrown into it ; the burning fever of grief in my veins is the smoke that rises

form it ; the efforts that bring together all these are my sighs ; and *you* are the cataract that quenches it. Deprived of the welcome waters, this cursed fire grows apace and will in no time consume me to ashes. It is no wonder that a cow follows its calf. Where you go, I follow."

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But Rama stopped her firmly, yet respectfully and said " Nay ; do you not see that my father, already duped and humiliated by Kaikeyi, will not long survive if I go to the forests and you too abandon him ? It is unspeakable cruelty in ordinary women to quit the side of their husbands ; but you, the model of every wifely and womanly virtue, should never even dream of it. Your place is by my father's side as long as he abides on earth. This is the dharma of our race, sanctified by immemorial usage."

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What could Kausalya reply but "Even so be it," and she the soul of virtue and duty? Then Rama set about to assuage the grief of her heart and give her strength to tread the hard path of Duty and Right. "Need I remind you that I and your good self are bound to obey the behests of our monarch ? We live under his rule; we owe our life and its comforts to his protecting arm; we learn our lessons of virtue and duty from him ; he is our ideal of every manly excellence ; his age, his valor, his wisdom and his experience demand our utmost respect and reverence. These ten years and four shall I pass away in the pleasant woods as if they were but a second, and come back to serve at your feet for ever."

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Kausalya consented all reluctantly to Rama's departure to the woods and to her stay at Ayodhya; but the recollection of her overmastering love for Rama and the perversity and wickedness of her co-wives came upon her with a mighty force and she cried amidst a torrent of scalding tears " Rama ! I cannot, I dare not live in the midst of these cruel rivals of mine. Let me go with you and live the happy life of the beasts of the forests. I shall be no

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drag upon you, no burden. If you are bent upon taking yourself to the forests in obedience to the commands of your father, take me along with you wherever you go."

The sight of others' grief and misery was too much for
 70 Rama to bear. But, his iron fortitude repressed all signs of it, as he feared it might interfere with the discharge of his dharma of perfect obedience to his father's commands. But, now that his mother had given her consent to his departure to the forests, he desired to soothe her grief
 75 somewhat ; he betrayed the sorrow of his heart by his hot tears and said "Women know no other god during their life on earth but their husbands, no other lord. Now, his majesty is your lord and mine. So long as his protecting arm is stretched over us, we have no reason to doubt or to
 80 complain that we are helpless. Further, I see no reason to apprehend any harm or annoyance from your co-wives. Bharata, that takes my place as the ruler of this realm, is the very soul of virtue and righteousness. His greatest delight is to embody his ideals in his life ; he has
 85 ever a kind word or a look for every one. And it is no wonder that he will devote himself to your service with an ever-increasing reverence and love. I charge you to see that the king feels not, in the least, the grief of separation from me. The snows of age lie heavy on his head ; and I
 90 look to you to save him from this fatal grief. Women may lay by incalculable merit through vows, penances, fasts and mortifications ; but the dark hells of sinners are their portion, if they are found wanting in devoted and loving service to their husbands. Worship of the gods, service to the
 95 elders, observances and fasts, they might afford to dispense with and yet enter the worlds of light through faithful service rendered to their husbands. The Holy Scriptures and the Books teach us that a woman knows no higher dharma than service to her husband; and our ancestors have trod this path.

"I am sure that you will fall a prey to cruel grief if you 100
 keep your thoughts idle and unengaged. So, arrange that
 saintly Brahmanas conduct auspicious rites to secure me
 peace and happiness when abroad and a safe and speedy
 return to you ; offer reverent worship to the gods and the
 Brahmanas with sandal, flowers, and betel. Keep your- 105
 self always occupied with baths, recitations, chants and other
 pious exercises ; live upon pure and innocent diet ; set your
 watchful heart on your lord's service ; and look forward,
 with joyful anticipation, to the day when I shall be with
 you again. Then, you will have the happiness of seeing 110
 that model of virtue and duty, my reverend sire, alive and
 hearty and my humble self come back to your loving arms,
 crowned with honor and glory."

Tears of grief coursed down the aged cheeks of Kausala-
 ya at the idea of inevitable separation from her darling son
 and she sobbed "You have made up your mind to exile your-
 self to the gloomy forests. Oh ! the marvellous might of Des-
 tinity ! My heart's delight ! I wish you a safe journey and hap-
 py return. May every good go with you. May you triumph
 over your foes. My mother's heart knows no peace, no
 rest, no joy till you are again by my side I live only when
 you come back to me, your plighted word to your sire
 well kept, your heart's hopes realised, and your sweet self
 covered with fame and glory. Inscrutable are the ways of
 Destiny that has hardened your heart to set aside 125
 my commands, my pleadings and my entreaties and
 to betake yourself to the dreary forest solitudes !
 Flower of valor ! A safe journey to you and a happy
 one. Come back to me very soon and gladden my heart
 with your honeyed words. Alas ! I cannot endure to take 130
 my eyes from you for even a moment. Would that this
 passing minute see your glorious return from the forest in
 hermit guise !" She was at last convinced that she was

powerless to turn him from his stern purpose of exiling him-
 135 self to the dreary forest ; and with all a mother's love, she set about to perform the auspicious rites that would ensure him safety and happiness during his journey.

CHAPTER XXV

A MOTHER'S BLESSINGS

KAUSALYA kept down the heavy sorrow that threatened to overmaster her, sipped holy water to put away from her the impurity caused by her tears and lifted her heart and voice in a mighty blessing. "Foremost of the royal line of Raghu and the best ! Powerless am I to prevent your exile to the forest ; even go if you must. Come back to me at the end of fourteen years and seat yourself on the throne of your forefathers in conformity with immemorial usage. May that Dharma watch over you with sleepless eye, to the absolute and dutiful service of which you have joyfully devoted your life. I place your innocent self in the forest under the protection of the gods and the sages to whom you offer devout worship in the crossings and the fanes. May the presiding deities of the divine weapons you learnt of Maharshi Visvamitra ever guard your noble self. May your devoted service to your parents and to the God of Truth whom you reverence, shield you and lengthen your days on earth. I invoke for you the protection of the sacred fuel, the holy grass, the sacrificial halls, fanes, hillocks, trees, creepers, stunted trees, pools, birds, serpents and lions. Let the Sadhyas, the Visvedevas, the Maruts, the Maharshis, Dhata and Vidhata, Pooshan, Bhagha, Aryama and the other eleven Adityas, the deities of the seasons, the fortnights, the months, the years, the

night, the day and the muhoorthas prosper you ever. May meditation, Yoga and Dharma enjoined in the holy Books guard you on all sides. May Sanatkumara, Soma, Brihaspati, the seven Rishis and Narada keep away harm and evil from you. May the mountains on the sea-shore, the ocean, Kubera, Varuna, the heaven world, the firmament, the earth, the rivers, the stars, the planets, the planetary Rulers, the Lords of day and night, and the goddesses of twilight take you under their protection. May the Rulers of the seasons, the months, the years, the minutes and the seconds bring you peace and happiness. May the Adityas and the Daityas make your forest life a happy one. May evil never approach you from the Rakshasas, the Pisachas, the wicked and every carnivorous creature. May monkeys, scorpions, wild flees, gnats, reptiles and worms do no harm to you. May you be safe from huge elephants, lions, tigers, bears, boars, bulls, and frightful bisons. May my worship and offerings go to satisfy other man-eating creatures and guard you from their clutches. May peace and happiness walk before you. Your valor shall not fail its purpose, but shall achieve it to the full. May you never want for any comfort while you are in the woods. May every inimical power on earth or in the sky bend their energies to compass your good. May Brihaspati, Soma, Soorya, Kubera, Agni, Vayu, the curling smoke from holy fires, and the potent spells you learnt of the Rishis, stand guard over you when you bathe in the forests. May Brahma, the ruler of the worlds, Narayana, the protector of the universe and other Rishis, protect you during your sojourn in the forests." She chanted appropriate hymns and offered due worship to the respective gods with garlands and perfumes.

Then, she lighted up the sacred fire through a saintly Brahmana and offered into it ghee, white garlands, sacred fuel and white mustard, to secure peace and prosperity to

Rama. The priest made other offerings to secure perfect health and immunity from every illness, and placed balls of food outside the sacrificial altar in honour of the Regents of the worlds. Kausalya gave away large quantities
 65 of honey, ghee, curds and unbroken rice to Brahmanas ; caused the holy texts to be recited to guard him from harm when in the woods; made ample presents in coin and kind to the officiating priest and said to Rama,
 70 " Peace and happiness be unto you that attended the lord of the Devas when he stood victor over the asura Vritra and received the homage of the assembled gods. Peace and happiness be unto you that Vinata prayed for her son Garuda, when he went forth to bring down the Waters of Immortality. Peace and prosperity be unto you that Aditi
 75 blessed Indra with to aid him in his work of destruction of the Daityas during the churning of the Milky Ocean for Amrita Peace be unto you and happiness that waited upon the Lord Vishnu of boundless radiance when He set about to measure the worlds in three steps. Supreme peace and
 80 happiness be unto you through the tireless efforts of the seasons, the seas, the Vedas and the quarters." She sprinkled unbroken rice over the head of Rama, covered his shapely limbs with a rare sandal paste, tied round his arm a potent talisman of the famous plant Visalyakarani and
 85 recited appropriate spells over it.

She hid a burning heart under a face wreathed in smiles; called Rama to her side in broken accents, smelt his head, clasped him to her breast and cried " Child ! Go forth to accomplish your utmost ends. Your ends achieved, come back to Ayodhya in perfect peace of body and mind and tread in the righteous path of our ancestors; and I, Kausalya, shall live to see the happy day. I have no more apprehensions of what might befall you in the forests. I shall live to bless my eyes with a sight of your lovely face, bright as the

moon in her full, and my face will bloom with joy to see you again. I shall yet see you come back from the forests, your promise to your father well kept, and yourself ruling over the happy millions of the earth from the throne of your forefathers. Speed back from the dark forests and, adorned with the emblems and insignia of royalty as becomes the lord of the earth, gratify to the utmost the heart hopes of myself and of Seeta. The heirarchies of gods worshipped by me, the Trimurtis, the Maharsjis, the elementals, the Asuras, the Uragas and the quarters will secure to you every comfort and convenience while in the woods." Rebellious tears started to her eyes while she invoked powerful blessings on his head ; she went round him as a protective spell and clasped him to her heart again and again in a transport of love.

Nothing could add to the halo of glory and spiritual radiance that surrounded Rama ; yet it was intensified, if possible, by a mother's sincere blessings and protective rites. The glorious champion of Dharma that wavered not for a moment in his allegiance to it even in direst distress, laid his head again and again at the feet of his mother and directed his steps to the mansion of his wife to acquaint her with the unwelcome news.

CHAPTER XXVI

"SEETA ! I GO TO THE FOREST"

AMA received the hearty blessings of his mother, saluted her in all reverence and took his way to the woods, treading the path of dharma. His noble perfections won the hearts of the people as he proceeded along the royal road, blazing in his splendour. Meanwhile, Seeta had finished the fasts and vows connected with the approach-

ing coronation of her husband and sat in joyful expectation,¹⁰ absolutely innocent of the cruel circumstances that prevented it. She doubted not that the happy function would come off in a few hours. Her worship offered to the beneficent gods, she awaited, with a joyful heart, the arrival of Rama amidst the royal paraphernalia of the chamaras,
¹⁵ the umbrella of state, the throne, auspicious music, elephants, horses, chariots, infantry and retinue. For, she was mindful of the royal usage that the queens of consecrated kings should offer worship at the feet of their lords with flowers and perfumes.

²⁰ Rama entered his palace and sought her presence. He bent his head a little, bowed down with shame at the sight of his servants so busily happy with the gay decorations towards his coronation. Seeta's loving eye noticed, even at a distance, the wan face and disturbed ²⁵ heart of her lord; she sprang from her seat in vague apprehension and trembled like a leaf to think "What has happened to my lord and husband that he comes not to me cheerful and happy but is bowed down with grief?" Sorrow and misery was a thing unknown to Rama till then.
³⁰ He grieved past bearing to think of the grief his news would cause Seeta. His courage deserted him quite as he said to himself "What will become of Seeta, all innocent of sorrow and misery, when I go away from here to the forest? Time will hang very heavy on her hands." He became a prey to ³⁵ anxiety and his face was shorn of its lustre. Drops of perspiration rolled down his body when he thought "How shall I have the heart to tell her that the crown, almost within my grasp, has slipped through my fingers and that I am condemned to a long exile?"

⁴⁰ Seeta watched him while he battled manfully with his grief and said "Light of my life! How is it I see you cast down with anxiety on an occasion of un-

precedented joy ? Have not the saintly Brahmanas declared that the Moon dwells to-day with the star Pushya ruled over by Brihaspati ; that success and fortune crown any enterprise undertaken during the auspicious period and that the same has been chosen for your consecration ? Then, why grieve when you should rejoice ? Your countenance gleams not forth from under umbrella of state, white as driven foam and spread over a hundred golden ribs ? Where are the Chamaras, bright as the full moon or the stately swan, that should grace on either side your lotus-eyed countenance ? Why hear I not the sweet strains of bards, minstrels, heralds and panegyrists chaunting your glories in noble terms ? I see no signs of your consecrated head having been sprinkled by learned and holy Brahmanas with sacred water mixed with honey and curds, to the majestic chant of benedictive hymns ! Where is your retinue of ministers of state, royal officials, heads of guilds, citizens and provincials in brave attire ? The chariot of state precedes you not, drawn by four noble steeds flashing with gold and gems ! Where is the royal elephant endowed with every auspicious mark, that should majestically walk in front of you like a huge mountain afoot, crowned with dark rain-charged clouds ? Why do they not carry before you the gem-encrust-ed Bhadrasana that should precede the hero ? I am sure that the preparations towards your installation are all completed. How is it that a cloud of sorrow dims the dazzling radiance of your countenance ? I do not read therein the least sign of the joy that should ever reign in your heart". And thus she weeping cried, when Rama raised his reluctant eyes to her face and said all gently " Seeta ! My father, who is a god unto me, has sent me to the forest." But a terrible fear came over him as he thought " Alas ! Fool that I am to break upon her with this grievous news ! God knows what will become of her ;" and he set about to

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soothe and encourage her. "Seeta ! Daughter of King Janaka, the wise, from whom no mystery is hid ! Peerless woman, to whom the dharma of kings, of castes and orders
 80 is an open book, sure and certain ! Unparalleled in the perfect practice of the highest dharma ! It came about thus. My sire had arranged everything to instal me as heir-apparent this day, when my mother Kaikeyi reminded him of the two boons he granted her of yore and prayed their
 85 fulfilment. He plighted his faith to her and she desired that I should abide in the forests for twice seven years and that her son Bharata should rule in my place. My sire, the soul of truth and a loyal servant of dharma, acceded to her request. I regard it has my highest duty and most impera-
 90 tive to see my father's promise fulfilled ; I go hence to dwell in the forests for ten years and four. I come here to inform you of this and bid you farewell.

" Persons in exalted positions and in the enjoyment of boundless wealth and power find it hateful to hear another
 95 praised in their presence. Have a care that you are not betrayed into eulogising me when Bharata comes to you to pay his respects. You will do well not to expect higher respect and consideration than what is accorded to the wives of Lakshmana and Satrughana. Nor should you show your-
 100 self behindhand with our kinsmen in your affection and solicitude for his welfare. The king has invested Bharata with the powers of the heir-apparent ; he is ruler over us and it is meet that we should seek to deserve his pleasure and approbation.

105 " I go to the dark forests and abide there for fourteen years to keep my father's plighted word. Brave heart ! Need I pray you be firm and constant in your love to me ? You will spend your time in pious exercises, fasts and penances while I abide in the woods
 110 among the maharshis. Begin the day with offering devout

worship and due to the bright gods ; lay your head in humble reverence at the feet of my sire and monarch. My mother Kausalya is very very old ; it is no wonder that she will suffer terribly the pangs of separation from me ; if you desire to practise the highest and the noblest dharma that 115 could ever fall to the lot of one, devote yourself to her service. Not that you should in any way lessen your love and friendship towards my other mothers ; you should, all the more, ward off harm and evil from their side. I have, till now, received from them such rare affection and consideration ; I make no difference between them and Kausalya, the mother that bore me. Bharata is to you an elder brother and Satrughna your son. Know you not that they are dearer to me than life ?

"Never do any thing that Bharata does not approve of. 125 He is your king, none higher than he ; he is the absolute lord and master of this realm ; he is the head of the Ikshvaku line. If we bestir ourselves to consult the wishes of our kings and adapt ourselves to their likes and dislikes, we are sure of their love and confidence ; else, we incur their 130 wrath and suspicion. They put away from them the very sons of their loins if they apprehend evil through them. Good men and faithful are ever sure of their welcome and favour whether they be of their kith or no. So, centre your heart upon dharma ; busy yourself in the practice of fruitful 135 vows and observances ; stay here seeking to win the love and trust of Bharata. Life of my life ! I go to the forest ; I pray you abide here. I request you once more to practise the few precepts I drew your attention to, taking care not to cause harm or grief to any one." So spake Rama, as 140 if he desired to place before her the dharma of a model wife in the absence of her husband, but in reality to know her heart and rouse her wrath and opposition. !

CHAPTER XXVII

SEETA'S REPLY

ONE was ever known to speak to Seeta but lovingly, even when she spoke to him, if ever, in anger or 5 harshness. So, it needs no saying that she was ever gentle of speech to others and kind. The cruel words of Rama and her boundless love for him roused her to quick anger and she cried "Rama ! Would that your pure lips were never soiled today by such light words ! I am but a girl ; yet, for 10 the very life of me, I cannot control my laughter. This is a new experience for me and one not very welcome. The first-born of the flower of the Kshatriya race, it is strange to hear you give utterance to words quite at variance with your love to me.

15 "Lord ! A husband's father, mother, brothers, sons, daughters-in-law and kin, reap the results of their past lives and do good or evil accordingly. But a wife alone is the half of his very self and rises or falls with him. So, the order of exile to the forest includes me as well. Hear the 20 Holy Writ, ' This wife is, verily, half of his self'. What refuge safer and happier in this world or in the next for good women ? Father, mother, soul, body, friends ? Nay, none of these. It is the husband and no other. Hence, I have a legitimate claim to one half of every thing yours, joy or 25 sorrow ; you are my only hope and refuge ; if your feet are set towards the frightful wilds, I go before you, treading soft the sharp grass. Be not impatient with me and say ' She will come with me and enjoy rare happiness'; or ' A foolish woman this, how dare she maintain obstinately that she will 30 follow me to the forest, when I say nay ? Be not wroth with me and say ' I advise her to stay here and lead a happy life ;

yet, she will go with me at any cost. She makes light of my wishes. She persists in preferring fruits, roots and other woodland fare to the royal comforts and luxury of Ayodhya'. Put away from you impatience and anger, even as you cast away polluted water and forbidden.

" Do you want me believe that you hesitate to burden your single self in the wild woods with the safety and happiness of a woman ? How can you convince me that you are anything but the very flower of valor, the god of heroes ? So, you may take me with you and not feel anxious.

" Am I such a miserable sinner as to deserve to survive your departure to the forest ? Nor is my soul dark with such a sin that I should expiate by being left here behind you. Take me with you to the forest and you will be the happier for it ; but never will you regret the favor done me. Travellers across sandy deserts drink from their water-skins and carefully preserve what is left against a future necessity. They never throw it away and are the happier for it. Even so stake me with you.

" Ask me not ' Why do you prefer a rough life in the woods to power and pomp, comforts and luxury of royalty ? A good woman knows no higher duty than to regard her husband as her god and devote herself to his service, body and soul, be he prince or peasant, philosopher or fool. She cares not to reside in the palaces of emperors or in the ærial cars of the Shining Ones ; nor can you entice her with offers of supernatural yogic powers of coursing at will through the myriad worlds.

" My parents have taught me, time and oft, my duty to my lord and husband. I have a good knowledge of the means to be pursued to secure the highest good by persons in the various castes and orders of life. So I pray you spare yourself the trouble of teaching them to me afresh.

65 “ A happy life it must be to me in the pathless woods, the teeming home of elephants, tigers and bears, where man is not. I am sure I will abide there as cheerfully as in my father's palace, my thoughts ever centred upon affectionate service to you and caring a straw for the wealth and pleasure the worlds can give. It will be a long spell of joy to me ; engaged in the vows and observances of the hermits, with restrained senses, I shall roam by your side through dark groves of honey-dropping trees, while objects rare and wonderful meet the eye on every side. An utter stranger to
 70 you has but to take refuge with you to secure your protection. Do I ask of you too much to protect *me* who know no other lord and protector ? I go with you today ; and when I have once made up my mind to go, heaven and earth cannot prevent me. I will thrive well upon sweet roots and juicy fruits
 80 and save you all worry on my account. Ever fearless and safe by your side, I long to behold hills and dales, mountains and valleys, forests and groves and charming lakes and pools, where swans, herons and other aquatic birds sport joyfully and to listen to your descriptions of their
 85 manifold beauties. I shall bathe with you in the holy waters and pass my days happily in the strict observance of vows and penances. Thousands of years in the forests with you will seem to me but as a moment ; the bright worlds of Light are to me but a dark and noisome dungeon if you
 90 are not with me. I will follow you to the frightful wilds where foot man has never trod, where monkeys, deer and elephants roam in savage freedom. I will keep my senses under strict restraint and your holy feet shall be my only refuge. My heart is your shrine and it has no place for any other. My hopes, my joys, my affections, are all centred in
 95 you. You but condemn me to instant death if you leave me behind. So, I would that you grant my earnest prayers and take me with you. Surely, I am no drag upon you ”,

But Rama, ever wedded to dharma, would not hear of it ; the very thought of exposing Seeta to the wild and dangerous life of the forest was an insufferable torture to him. So he began to describe to her, at some length, the dangers and difficulties of a wild life in the woods and tried to turn her heart away from it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ROUGHING IT

DHARMA had no mysteries for Rama ; his whole life was devoted to its loyal service ; but he brought before his mind the hardships of a forest life and shrank from taking Seeta with him. He saw her weeping piteously and sought to dissuade her from her imprudent resolve “Seeta ! you come of a noble line , your heart is ever wedded to the practice of dharma ; hence, stay here and discharge the duty of your race and rank. It is not good for you to follow the bent of your inclinations. Believe me, I advise you for the best. A delicate girl, what know you of the countless miseries and dangers that infest a dweller in the forests ? Let me give you a faint idea of it.

“First and foremost, a forest is a pathless tract untrod by the foot of man, where danger and harm await us on every side from sharp stones and sharper thorns, from cruel beasts and crueler birds. So, put away from you the thought of following me there. Take it not that I say this to save myself an additional responsibility and trouble; it is but your welfare and happiness that I have at heart. Sorrow and misery, hardship and privation ever haunt the depths of the forest ; happiness and comfort are utter strangers to it.

“The terrible roars of the lions in their rocky lairs are made more hideous when borne on our ears along with

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the thunder of the falling cataracts. Huge beasts of prey, the lion and the tiger, range fearless in the uninhabited jungles ; the sight of man is all strange to them and they will spring at our throats as soon as they set their eyes upon
 30 us. The mountain torrents are infested with frightful crocodiles ; of immense depth and miry, they are unfordable and fatal even for maddened elephants. The forest tracts are festooned with strong creepers that trip us at every step, while cruel thorns lacerate our flesh ; water is
 35 scarce to drink ; and it is no easy task to journey through them. The screams of the wild hens are unbearably sharp and ear-piercing ; and to strangers they are doubly frightful.

“ The luxury of beds is unknown in the forest ; the
 40 hard uneven ground is the very best you can have that way. Soft beds of swan-down or cotton are represented there by the dry leaves that fall from trees. You have scarcely time during the day to provide yourself with the necessities of life ; hence, it goes without saying that you have
 45 no leisure to take rest. We should even conform to the habits of the dwellers therein and stretch ourselves at nights on the bare earth. We should keep our senses under stern control, and content ourselves morning and evening with the fruits that fall from the trees. We should fast
 50 every now and then as long as we can ; wear our hair in matted coils ; dress ourselves in the barks of trees ; offer due worship every day to the gods, the Fathers and the guests ; bathe in the morning, at noon and again in the evening ; and we should omit none of the numerous vows
 55 and penances observed by the hermits therein. So the wild forest life is all unmeet for your delicate self.

Every day we should gather flowers and offer them at the altar according to the rules prescribed by the Rishis ; hence, girl that you are, a forest life is but misery for you.

We should observe the strict diet laid down in the Books for hermits and rest content with what we can get there. Fierce gales and terrible storms occur every now and then. The nights are pitch-dark. Hunger there is something to remember. Huge boas and pythons stretch themselves lazily across our paths, as also water-snakes with the undulatory motion of a river Moths, scorpions, worms, wild fleas and gnats torment us day and night. Sharp grass, reeds and thorny trees abound along our paths and cause us insufferable pain and trouble. Bodily fatigue and fear in diverse forms are the lot of those who make the forest their home. Anger, lust and greed should be sternly put aside and the mind centred in tapas and meditation. We should not give way to fear even at the sight of most frightful objects ; hence a forest life is unbearable hardship for you. Enough of your following me to the woods. You cannot live through a day of it. I could detail to you a thousand other reasons why you should keep clear of the forests and its perils."

Seeta saw that Rama was all unwilling to take her with him to the forest ; heavy grief weighed down her heart; she would have none of his arguments, but replied to him in firm though respectful words.

CHAPTER XXIX

SEETA'S REPLY (*Continued*)

WITH tear-stained eyes and a broken voice, Seeta turned herself to Rama and said " You were so kind as to describe at great length the numerous perils and troubles inseparable from a life in the forest and concluded that I could not live through it. But, if I were by your side, the life of my life, the very same dangers and horrors

would be transformed into the gentle notes of the koil, or the
 10 fragrant sandal or the soft zephyr and give me unbounded
 pleasure and joy. Lions and tigers, elephants and sarabhas
 (an eight-legged monster, the mortal foe of the fierce lion),
 deer, birds and the other innumerable fierce denizens of the
 15 forest will, of a truth, flee your presence. They have never
 set their eyes on such a curious object ; and who would
 not be filled with fear at the sight of a frightful object ?

" I have put it to you that your father and mother have
 laid their commands upon me to follow you to the woods.
 Need I remind you that my life-breaths follow you to the
 20 forest if you deny that privilege and pleasure to their fleshly
 tabernacle ? Again, allow me to recall to your memory
 the words of my honoured sire as he placed my hands
 in yours on the marriage day before the bright God
 25 of fire. ' Seeta here will follow faithfully your foot-
 steps on the narrow and difficult path of dharma. She
 will be ever with you, inseparable as your shadow.'
 Now, it is nothing but reasonable and just that I should
 follow your footsteps in living the difficult dharma of a
 30 recluse in the forest. I am content to be left behind when
 you cast off your shadow from you. The monarch of the
 Shining Ones dare not, for his very life, lift his eyes to me
 when you are by my side. Again, have you not exhorted me
 time and oft that a wife has no life apart from her husband ?

" Let that be. One day, in my father's house, long
 35 before I married you, some brahmanas for whom the science
 of the stars has no secret, said, if I remember aright ' The
 horoscope of this girl prophesies for her a temporary sojourn
 in the forest.' Besides, I heard the same confirmed by brah-
 manas skilled in the science of palmistry and have been eager-
 40 ly awaiting the chance. You see plainly that the forest life
 they predicted for me from scientific considerations is but
 the result of my past karma ; and Prarabdha is inevitable. I

go to the forest—but with you and not alone. Now, I have the words of the truthful brahmanas for it ; the likeliest chance has offered itself now ; I go with you ; is it not a sin to falsify the predictions of the saintly brahmanas ? Again, as to your laboured description of the dangers and perils of the forest, I know somewhat ; but they are not for us. Do they not refer rather to those who are not masters of their senses and mind ? Further, when I was a maid in my father's house, a holy woman came to my mother one day and said 'Your daughter will have to spend, I fear, some years in the forest.' No ordinary woman, mind you, but one endowed with marvellous psychic and spiritual powers.

" Let that be. Have I not ere now entreated you times out of count that I long to go with you to the banks of the Ganga and visit the hermitages of the holy Rishis there ? And, had I not your gracious reply ' Be it so. I but wait for a fitting occasion ? ' I am looking forward to that happy contingency every moment of my life Prince of heroes ! May all good be thine. Have you gauged the depth of my desire to spend with you happy days in the forest and offer you every devoted service with my hands ?

" Ideal man who knows not envy, anger and the other frailties of the earth ! If I abide with you during your stay in the forest with a heart overflowing with love for you, I will be washed pure of all sins. You may say ' Will you not attain the same end by remaining here and offering devout worship to the god of your fathers ? ' Well, when has a good wife known any other deity but her wedded lord ? I hold nothing more desirable and beneficent to me than to be by your side here and hereafter. (A woman is brought up by her father during childhood; the husband protects her youth; her children take care of her old age ; verily she has no independent life of her own). I have heard wise brahmanas quote a passage in the holy Scriptures to the effect that ' If a

woman is given to a man in marriage by her parents, in conformity with the rules and regulations of her order and the traditions of her family, if she is utterly faithful and devoted

80 to her lord during her stay in this world, she wins a place by him in the worlds of Light through all eternity.' I hope you do not take it that I teach it to you as if you knew it not ; I but humbly submit that I have the sanction of the Scriptures to back my request to follow you to the forest.

85 "Are you still bent upon not taking me with you ? Am I not your wedded wife ? Have you been able to detect any flaw in my conduct or character till now ? Are you not my only refuge and support, the single deity that rules my heart ? Know you of any one, a more enthusiastic worshipper of
 90 yours ? Have you ever seen me intoxicated with joy or prostrated with sorrow ? Am I not entitled to a fair half of your happiness and misery ? Are your eyes blind to the torments and agony I suffer ? Why will you not see that it is but bare justice to me to be allowed to accompany you ?
 95 The very thought of being away from you fills me with indescribable pain ; and if you are still heartless enough to leave me behind you, I will drain the poison cup or leap into the blazing fire or seek the dark depths of the waters to end my misery."

100 Thus did Seeta pray and entreat, adducing many a plausible reason, many a convincing argument. But Rama was all loath to take her with him ; the very idea was something horrible to him of exposing his heart's love, brought up in the lap of luxury and comfort, to the dangers and
 105 privations of the frightful woods which knew not man. Seeta was filled with unutterable despair ; she watered the earth about her feet with her hot tears and stood as one dazed. But she would not yield to Rama in the least, for all his well meant efforts to dissuade and console her.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

OHEN Seeta spoke to Rama bitter and taunting words, for she cared not to be lured into consenting to his leaving her behind him ; she was resolved to secure her end anyhow. He was a paragon of valor and heroism ; but he was also her own dear lord, the object of her all-absorbing love ; and she was stung to the quick that he ever entertained the idea of parting her from him and at his obstinate refusal to grant her earnest and repeated prayers. “ Have you any idea of what a sorry figure you will cut in the eyes of my father, should he come to hear that you had gone to the forest and left me behind you ? Your supernal beauty is your sole refuge, your only weapon, your only asset, with which you steal away the hearts of us, poor women. Kindly tell me whether you have anything else about you worth noticing. Janaka, my father, is very much inclined to the Path of Action, as is plain from the saying, ‘ Great men, like Janaka, have won the supreme Goal solely by treading the Path of Action ’; hence, he will not entertain the idea of a householder living apart from his wife even for a moment. Besides, he is not, like you, a novice in the art of government, a stranger to the joys and sorrows of others ; but he is the ideal ruler over many countries and the watchful father to the countless millions that dwell in them. Should it come to his ears that you left me behind you, all out of impotence to protect a weak woman, he would most naturally exclaim ‘ Alas ! Fool that I was to be so duped ! My eyes were blinded to the truth. I have unwittingly ruined the life of my darling girl by giving her in marriage to one whom I conceived to be a man. The scales have fallen from my eyes. *He is but a*

35 *woman under the miserable garb of a man.'* Would he have ever given me to you for wife, if he had the least suspicion of the truth ?

“ Alas ! What blind dupes the people are ! I hear them say on every side ‘ Unparalleled glory and valor adorn Rama, even as light and life abide in the sun, crowned with his thousand rays.’ It is a naked lie ; it is the child of crass ignorance. I see nothing extraordinary or wonderful in Rama ; if truth must be spoken, he stands far down in the scale of ordinary men.

40 “ Manu enjoins the head of a family to maintain it in comfort and ease even though he has to incur countless sins therein. I do not see that you have burdened yourself with any such responsibility ; have the kindness to inform me what grievous sin you have committed for my sake and repent so keenly. You are my sole stay and support, my only refuge ; I never look to any other for advice, guidance 50 or protection. I cannot construe your unwillingness to take me with you in any other way than that you are mortally afraid of some one who is sure to cause you grievous harm if I follow you to the woods. But, who knows better than I that the fire of your wrath consumes everything that 55 stands before it, even like the Fire of Dissolution ? I am curious to know who those wonderful persons are that cause you so much fear and apprehension.

60 “ I request you to remember that I am your loyal and faithful servant ; your lightest word is a law unto me ; and I follow you where you go, even as Savitri, the faithful wife, followed her lord Satyavan into the dread regions of Death. Rank me not with the common lot of women who are born to ruin a noble house. My heart has, and will have, no place for any other god than your noble self. That is by 65 itself reason enough for me to claim to come with you. I try to live the life of a faithful wife ; times out of count have I

sworn to you, by everything that I hold sacred, that you are my love, my lord, my god, my everything. Yet you advise me all seriously about my deportment and attitude to Bharata. Verily I begin to suspect you of an inhuman and base conspiracy to make me over to Bharata, even as an infamous pander or professional pimp, who makes a wretched living by hiring out to others the young confiding wife whom he inveigled into a marriage and had allowed to live with him through long years, all unsuspectingly. 75 Rama ! I freely and ungrudgingly allow you the monopoly of the favour and service of him whom you flatter, of him to whom you would make me over. I do not enter into the lists with you as a rival ; I have not fallen so low ; I have not been reduced to such abject destitution and misery. You shall not go to the forest unless I go with you. Bury yourself in the dark woods ; enter the order of ascetics or recluses ; ascend to the bright seats of the Immortals ; I am ever with you. I care not to argue further; I care not to hear more. ‘I have no other but a woman’s reason. I think it so because I think it so’ 80 85

"Fear not that I would feel fatigued in the least when I travel with you, as I used to do during my walks in the pleasure-gardens here. Sharp grass, reeds and thorny trees are to me but soft cotton or the finely tanned skin of the antelope, if you are by my side. The fine dust blown upon me by fierce gusts and gales will be to me as excellent sandal paste. What pleasure have I here, reclining on delicately woven rugs or carpets or cunningly fashioned couches ~~sofas~~^{MEMOR} or lounges, more than the delight and comfort ~~in~~^{V.R. NARL} I feel when reposing on the soft emerald grass ~~in~~^{P.R. 1.} the woods? The fruits and roots and leaves gathered ~~by~~^{for} you for will taste as sweet as ambrosia, be they enough ~~or~~^{scanty}. The flowers and the fruits of the varying seasons ~~are~~^{AC. NO.} mine to enjoy; no shadow of a memory ~~of~~^{has come or}

parents will ever cross my mind. I assure you I will cause you no trouble, not the slightest, when I live with you in the forests. You will have not the least difficulty in taking care of me there. My heaven is where you are ; apart from
 105 you I am in the darkest of hells. You cannot but take me with you if you have the least idea of the extent of my love to you. The very word fear is unknown to me when I go with you to the forests. If you still persist in your inhuman and obstinate resolve to leave me here, I will kiss the
 110 poison cup rather than be handed over to the tender mercies of Bharata or any other enemy of mine. Sure am I of a natural death here after your departure to the woods ; it is decidedly better for me to cast aside this unworthy body when you are by. Alas! Powerless am I to endure this
 115 sharp-toothed grief, even for a second ; ten years, then three years, then one year and, all counted, *fourteen* years of dreary darkness unrelieved by a ray of your radiant presence! Ah! What a hell ! Never can I live through it." And with senses adrift, and a heart shaken to its very depths, she
 120 fell upon her husband's neck and wept aloud, a sight to melt a statue of adamant. The words of Rama pierced deep into her soul, even as a cow-elephant in the forest stricken to the heart with poisoned shafts. Her long-restrained tears flowed in torrents, like fierce flames from the attrition of
 125 fire-sticks. The crystal drops fell from her eyes in rapid succession, even as the pearly dew drops from the blossoming petals of the lotus. (Her charming face that put to shame the spotless moon with its large and lustrous eyes, faded at the touch of the hot scalding tears, even as a tender lotus
 130 plant violently torn from its cool, watery bed).

Rama clasped to his breast his grief-stricken wife in a transport of love and chased away from her sorrow and despair by his sweet and consoling words. " Seeta ! And you really believe that it matters anything to me if I had



a place in the highest heaven while you lie weeping here ? 135
As to fear, I laugh at Narayana, the self-existent One. I
have no life apart from you. Afraid of taking you with me !
Nay, I but seemed to refuse, since I was in the dark about
your real views on the subject. You need not go to seek for
any other reason. I tell you that *you are made to live with me in the forest* ; 140
a man of undaunted heart and unclouded
intellect will spurn the idea of renouncing his bright fame.
I will not, and the truth of it is, I cannot, give you up.

" My ancestors, the royal sages, dwelt in the forests as
hermits and their wives lived with them. It is but the 145
dharma of my line that I follow and no new-fangled notion
of mine. So, come with me, even as the lady Suvarchala
accompanies her lord the Sun-god.

" My sire has made a promise to Kaikeyi and has
ordered me to see to its fulfilment ; so, I cannot but go^r to 150
the forest ; go I must. Our highest dharma consists in
obeying our parents and carrying out their behests. Life to
me has no meaning except as its loyal and whole-souled
practice. You may suggest that we may remain here and
secure the highest heaven by devout worship offered to the 155
Deity. But, unfortunately, that deity is omnipotent, in-
dependent and not amenable to the influence of those that
worship him ; besides, it never expresses its commands or
desires to us in person. Our parents and guru are amenable
to the prayers of those that serve them ; besides, they com- 160
mand us in person. There is no reason in putting them
away and preferring the deity as the object of our worship.
The three worlds are open to one who devotes his life to the
service of his mother, father and guru ; he knows nothing
purer ; so, we should ever reverence and respect them in 165
preference to others. Right speech, charity, hospitality
and the numerous rites and sacrifices conducted with ample
gifts pale before filial service in conferring good upon us.

There is not the least shadow of a doubt that loyal service to
 170 our parents and guru ensures for us a happy stay in the heaven
 worlds, wealth, knowledge, offspring and the joys of life. The
 great Ones, who bend all the powers of their mightily selves to
 the faithful service of their parents and regard it as the be-
 all and-end all, can have for the mere asking of it, the heaven
 175 of the gods or of the gandharvas or the Go-loka or the
 Brahma-loka itself. My father is the loyal servant of truth ;
 his feet never stray from the path of dharma. His lightest
 word is god's decree unto me ; and it is even the dharma
 followed by our ancestors.

180 "I was against taking you to the forest with me as I
 was unaware of your true inclination in the affair ; but now
 that I know of your unshaken resolve to share the dangers
 of exile with me, I am ready and willing to take you with
 me. It is written in the book of Fate, in the beginning of
 185 time that you are to live with me in the forest; so, come
 along and assist me in the discharge of my dharma. I can-
 not praise too high your noble efforts to accompany your
 husb ; it does honor to me and to my race. So, make
 the necessary preparations for our departure from Ayodhya.
 190 The happiest heavens is but bitter poison to me without
 you ; give away gold and gems to the brahmanas, and let the
 poor of the city have free excess to the entire disposal of
 our stores and provisions. Delay not, but look sharp. Let
 195 the brahmanas come first and receive from you priceless
 ornaments, rare cloths, curiously wrought statues and toys
 of gold and silver, beds and conveyances ; and their con-
 sent taken, let our servants, dependents and retainers have
 the rest."

Seeta was delirious with joy that her husband was
 200 gracious to her and was pleased to take her with him to the
 forest ; so, she set about to arrange for their departure to
 Dandaka. Her liberality was something inconceivable,

boundless ; besides, her husband had given her *carte blanche* to distribute their vast wealth among those that might ask for it. So she began to give away profusely and 205 without stint, gold, silver, coin, gems, corn, clothes, beds and conveyances to righteous brahmanas.

CHAPTER XXXI

LAKSHMANA'S APPEAL.

LAKSHMANA had followed Rama from the palace of Kausalya and was a silent listener to the conversation between his brother and Seeta. "Alas !" said he to himself, oppressed with grief past bearing, "What a superhuman task had Seeta to obtain her husband's consent to accompany him to the forest, and she the better half of her lord, flesh of his flesh ! Verily, my chances are shadowy enough"; and the thought opened the flood-gates of his sorrow-laden heart. He had no other aim or object in life than to follow where his brother led ; he prayed no higher boon. He saw no other means to secure that coveted end. He was sure that there was no question of putting him away where the Lord of Universe, his brother, was concerned ; and that gave him courage to take refuge in the mercy of Rama. He had sedulously cultivated the necessary qualifications to entitle him to seek refuge with the Lord and had long ago put away from him every probable and possible obstacle thereto. As a first step, he prayed to Seeta, the Mother of Mercy, the Interceder of all ; through her, he clasped the feet of the Lord with boundless love and devotion—even of him who proclaimed to the world "Never shall I abandon one who sought me out as his friend. He shall know no fear from any object in creation. This is the beacon-light by 25

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which I steer my course through life"; and prayed all humbly to be allowed to serve his lord and master as the reward of his supreme and absolute surrender to his will.

" My heart is set against your exiling yourself to the forest ; but if you have made up your mind to go, may I go with you. Bow in hand and senses keenly on the alert, I shall walk before you through the trackless woods where roam the savage beasts of prey. You may travel in safety and comfort through the wood-world where diverse birds and 35 beasts have their haunts I pray you command me to render devoted service to you in all places, at all times and under all circumstances With thee away, I care not to dwell in the supreme heaven which the Sruti calls Ayodhya, the city of the gods ; I care not for Kaivalya, the life that cannot die ; 40 I care not to stretch my sway over this Brahmanda with its fourteen worlds ; nay, what care I for any stage of existence high, higher or highest, when the very State of Liberation is beneath my contempt, if I had no chance of offering you my devoted service there ?"

45 Rama tried variously to persuade and dissuade Lakshmana who earnestly prayed to share his wood-land life with him ; but, the son of Sumitra would have none of it and entreated in piteous accents "I heard you say ' Stop the arrangements that are afoot towards my coronation and get 50 everything ready for my departure to the woods ; again ' Put away grief and anger from you even as I do. Let the installation go no further ' ; ' Seeta ! Dearer to me than life itself are Bharata and Satrughna ; so, it behoves you to treat them with special care and affection, for they stand to you as 55 elder brother and son'. I was glad to observe that you included me not therein. Hence, I take it that you have commanded me to follow you to Dandaka. Why should you forget that and stop me now ? You accorded me leave at first and I, in all confidence and joy, was all afire to go ; now you,

change your mind and would have me stay here. A 60 suspicion gains strength every moment in my mind that I have somehow offended you ; else, how could you find it in your heart to stay me who rejoice in the high privilege of being your dearest companion from birth, who cleave to you like your very shadow ? I pray you solve me this." 65

The glorious Rama turned his eyes on the faithful Lakshmana who sued with hands upraised to be allowed to accompany him, longing to lead. " Lakshmana ! you are the dearest friend I have ; your steps stray not from the path of the righteous. You are a hero unmatched ; your heart and soul are ever centred in Dharma ; you most nobly deserve my love and affection ; I love you as my life till life shall end ; you are devoted to me in every way ; you are my brother ; you are the friend of my earliest days ; so, in no one are combined all the noble qualities requisite to accomplish 70 my ends. If you accompany me and Seeta to-day to the woods, who will provide for Kausalya and Sumitra ? I assure you this is my sole reason for denying you now. My seeming consent to you some time ago was but a temporary measure demanded by the occasion.

" Say not ' Is there not king Dasaratha, their legitimate lord and protector ' ? Our sire of unbounded fame and glory fulfils the heart-desires of the millions of this kingdom, even as the clouds pour down the welcome rains ; yet he lies a helpless captive in the bonds of passion and has no will of his own. If Kaikeyi, the daughter of Aswapati, wins for her son imperial power, she will never heed to attend to the comforts and needs of her rivals who are stricken to the heart. 85

" Say not ' Is Bharata so utterly abandoned to reason and justice as to be neglectful of his duty to our mothers ?' Proud Kaikeyi has him under her thumb ; he is powerless to move hand or foot. He will have to remain an impotent

witness of the torments inflicted by his infamous mother
 95 upon her rivals ; so, it would in no way help Kausalya and Sumitra to tide over their misery, even if Bharata should be proclaimed lord of this realm.

“ Say not ‘ What power have I to protect them ? ’ Watch over Kausalya as well as you can, with the sanction of our
 100 monarch or failing it, by your rare valour and energy. Follow this council and oppose it not.”

“ Argue not ‘ Your service is everything to me. What have I to do with such as these ? ’ Your great love to me is best shown by your faithful and perfect service to our
 105 elders and mothers. Deeply learned in the mysteries of Dharma ! The most noble and unparalleled Dharma is ensured to you if you serve those you should revere. This is the first request I make of you and I would have you obey it for my sake. What comfort on earth have the mothers
 110 that bore us, bereft of you, me and Seeta ? ”

Rama was the peer of Brihaspati himself in skilful and unassailable logic ; yet Lakshmana won his heart by his keen wit and quick repartee. So in sweet words and gentle, he began to answer the objections of his loving
 115 brother.

“ Bharata is sure to respect and reverence our mothers, at least out of mortal fear that Kausalya is the mother of Rama of inconceivable might and valour ; he knows but too well that his life and safety depend on the love and
 120 attention he betows on our mothers. I doubt it not in the least. Should Bharata, raised to power and sway over this vast realm, be lured with evil-tempting pride and betray his trust or fail in the lightest detail in his devoted attention and reverence to our mothers, doubt not that I
 125 will wreak cruel vengeance on the head of that insensate fool ; nay, and all that egg him on, be they the three worlds in league arrayed. Queen Kausalya, the noble, can easily

afford to maintain a thousand such as myself. Know we not that she has made ample and liberal endowments of hundreds and hundreds of villages to her dependants and 130 retainers ? It is nothing to her to provide for the comforts of herself, myself and my sweet mother.

" I am your most devoted servant ; I but pray to be allowed to render the service that goes with it. I believe I have in me the necessary qualifications of a servitor ; it is 135 utter presumption for me to suggest that in you shine the perfections that wait upon the Lord of the universe ; so, my following you to the forest solitudes does in no way militate against the relation of lord and servant. You will have no difficulty in providing yourself with fruits, roots and other 140 woodland fare. I too succeed in attaining the goal of my hopes—Service to you. With bow on my back and well-filled quiver, I walk before you through the forest tracks, with spade and basket. Every day I shall procure for you the simple fare of the hermits, wild fruits, roots, berries, corn and 145 honey. You may take your pleasure with Seeta on the mountain brows. Your humble servant prays for the privilege of rendering you, the Lord of all and your noble spouse, every kind of service, at all times and in all places."

His words filled Rama with joy and pleasure. " Be it 150 so " replied he " Go, bid adieu to your kin and friends and keep yourself in readiness to start for the woods. Bring me those two bows of fearful might, presented to us in person by Varuna, the Lord of the waters, at that famed rite of Janaka, the divine coats of mail weapon-proof, the quivers 155 with their never-failing supply of shafts and the gold-chased swords bright as the noon day sun. They are preserved in the hall of the Guru of our race, maharshi Vasishtha, tended with extreme care and worship there ; bring them hither for our use." Lakshmana flew on the wings of speed to take 160 leave of his friends and kinsmen ; full of the joyful

thoughts of following Rama to the forest glades, he repaired to the mansion of maharshi Vasishtha and fetched the resplendent arms kept there, adorned with many a wreath and
165 garland, sandal paste, perfume and incense.

Rama was delighted at the sight of them and exclaimed "Lakshmana! You come in time to help me, distribute my wealth and gold to the brahmanas and hermits. There are countless men, good and true, who have devoted
170 themselves to the service of the old and the wise. For them and for all who dwell with me and serve me well, shall I make ample provision, more liberal beyond their dreams. Go hence to Suyagna, the son of Vasishtha, and request in our name the presence of the saintly brahmana here. I would
175 take reverent leave of all the brahmanas of this town before I turn my face towards the forests."

CHAPTER XXXII

PILGRIM GIFTS

LAKSHMANA could not contain himself for joy when he heard that Rama was about to bestow his vast
5 wealth upon the brahmanas ; besides, his wildest hopes were realized in that Rama consented to take him along. He sought Suyagna in his home and found him in the hall of fire. Bending himself in low reverence before him, he said "Friend ! come with me to the house of my brother Rama ;
10 and you will have a chance of beholding him perform an act that none in the worlds will ever dare to dream of." Suyagna finished his morning rites and offerings to the fire and followed Lakshmana in haste to Rama's palace, rich with the wealth of the worlds.

15 Rama and Seeta came forward with excited pleasure to meet the wise One ; with joined hands they went round

him in reverence and bowed low, even as to the sacrificial fire that gives light and life. Armlets of gold, gems strung on gold cords, earrings, bracelets, wristlets, and many a rare stone and gem did Rama lay at the feet of Vasishtha's son.

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Then Seeta whispered to her husband, who raised his eyes to the sage and said "Friend ! Seeta desires to make a present to your worthy lady of this garland of gold, this chain curiously wrought and this gem-encrusted zone ; I pray you accept this trifle. Besides, she would request your lady to accept these bracelets and armlets of curious and marvellous workmanship, on the occasion of her departure to live in the woods. This bed, rich with gold and gems, with its costly canopy, she would add to the other gifts. Be it mine to pray your acceptance of Satrunjaya, the gem of elephants, sent me as a present by my uncle and a thousand others to keep it company." Suyagna signified his gracious consent and invoked heaven's highest blessings on the head of the noble pair.

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Then as the Ancient of Days, Brahma, lays his commands on the Lord of the celestials, Rama turned to his brother with a loving heart and said "Maharshi Agastya's son and Visvamitra's, entreat their presence here ; beg their acceptance of countless gold, silver, gems and kine as much as they would have, even as thrifty husbandmen water the sprouting corn with fostering floods.

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"A saintly brahmana, the chief of those that study the Taittireeya Sakha of the Yajur Veda, goes over every day to my mother's palace and respectfully invokes the blessing of heaven upon her. He is deeply versed in sacred lore and in the inner mysteries thereof. Present him with conveyances, servants, maids, silks and shawls until he is satisfied. Again, there is Chitraratha, our counsellor and charioteer, who has been connected with our house for countless years; give him corn, vine, gems and robes until he cries 'No more.'

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Again, there are many celibates under my protection who have devoted themselves to the study of the Katha and the Kalapa portions of the Veda ; they are too busy to trouble themselves with providing for their earthly wants ; they are by nature slow and love dainty fare ; yet they have won the approbation of the elders by their exemplary conduct. Set apart for them eighty carriages, filled with precious stones and ornaments, a thousand bulls to carry the corn, two hundred oxen to plough their land and a thousand kine to supply them with milk, curds and ghee. A numerous band of celibates who wear sacred girdles wait upon my mother Kausalya in hopes of getting married through her bounty ; give them every one a thousand kine to rejoice my mother's heart." And Lakshmana dispensed with own his hands the numerous gifts of wealth and corn, gold and gems, kine and horses, as liberally as the Lord of riches.

Then Rama addressed himself to the crowd of dependants and retainers who stood by and wept aloud and made ample provision for every one of them to live happily. "Look to you to take care of the mansions wherein I and Lakshmana have dwelt, till I come again." He called to him his treasure-keeper and ordered him to have his wealth and treasure brought out. The servants placed it before him in huge heaps. Rama and Lakshmana bestowed them upon brahmana lads, old men and the needy until they had enough.

Then, there approached Rama, a brahmana of the clan of Rishi Garga and he was named Trijata. All tawny was his body through want and poverty ; he toiled in the woods with axe and spade, hoe and reaping hook in hand and maintained himself, his wife and his numerous progeny by gleanings the ears of corn that lay in the field after the reapers had left. His young wife pointed to their numerous offspring and said to the old man " My dear lord ! How long,

oh ! how long, are we to be ground down under the iron heel
 poverty ? Throw aside your axe, your plough and your spade
 and listen to my counsel. Let us betake ourselves to Rama's
 presence. If it be our lot to be blessed with a little wealth,
 there is no wiser course than to pray of his kindness, who is
 dharma incarnate ". It seemed to him good advice ; and
 arranging his rags about him as well as he could, he and
 his family came to Rama's palace. No one stayed the
 Brahmana till the fifth block of apartments; for, his spiritual
 lustre resembled that of the patriarchs Bhrigu and Angiras.
 He approached Rama and said " Prince ! your bright fame
 illumines the ends of the earth. I have a large family to
 feed and scant living in the woods is all I can provide for
 them. I glean the ears of corn left in the fields by the
 reapers and feed these babes. Cast an eye of pity on me." 95

Said Rama to himself " This brahmana is the sport of 100
 poverty ; verily he has numerous offspring : I would have
 an idea of his desire for wealth ;" and half in jest, he replied
 to him with a smile " Reverend sir ! Not even the first
 thousand of my countless kine has been bestowed in chari-
 ty. I pray you throw the staff in your hand with all your 105
 strength and the kine from here to the spot where it falls
 are yours."

At once the brahmana, in eager haste, wound his cloth
 around his loins, whirled the staff over his head and threw
 it with all his might. It fell in the midst of the herds of 110
 kine grazing peacefully on the farther banks of the Sarayu.
 Then Rama fondly embraced the brahmana and ordered the
 countless heads of kine to be driven safe to the abode of
 Trijata and said, " Holy sir ! I crave your pardon. Let
 not your noble heart be offended. I but desired to have 115
 some idea of your matchless strength and energy and pro-
 posed to you this curious test of it. It was meant in jest and
 I pray you take it as such. Command me further if I can

be of any use to you. Nay, speak freely, for, I have acquired
 120 this wealth of mine solely in trust for the brahmanas. If it should find favour in the eyes of the great Ones and be deemed fit for use by them, I am richer by boundless fame and joy." Trijata and his wife accepted the gift of kine and with a full heart and overflowing, called down the blessings of heaven upon Rama and prayed for his fame, strength, 125 happiness and compassion to wax ever.

Next, he distributed his righteously earned wealth among his friends and dependants with every mark of respect and affection. There was none among the crowds 130 gathered there, brahmanas, or, friends who were not brahmanas, or, servants who were neither brahmanas nor friends, or, the needy poor who were none of these, but were rewarded with presents to the limit of their deserts and desires,

CHAPTER XXXIII

"OUR PLACE IS WITH RAMA"

RAMA, Lakshmana and Seeta bestowed their vast wealth upon the brahmanas out of a full heart and proceeded to take leave of the king. Their bows, arrows, 5 swords and other weapons had a glorious look, adorned with the garlands and sandal paste by Seeta's fair hands. As they passed along the royal road, the citizens gazed at Rama with tear-stained faces and a heavy heart from storied house, mansion, palace, tower, balcony and portico. The streets were densely packed with the mournful throng. Their beloved was proceeding on foot like any common hind, bereft of umbrella, chamara, chariots, retinue or other insignia of royalty. It was not in human nature to behold it and live. They broke forth in loud la- 10 15

ments, dreadful groans and muttered curses. "Alas ! Countless hosts as ocean sand, man, horse, foot, chariot and elephant were wont to follow Rama in glittering array. And to day none other than Lakshmana and Seeta to go with him ! Rama laid up untold wealth ; out of a liberal heart he gave it away to the poor, the needy and the deserving ; he ever fulfilled the hopes and wishes of those that clung to him ; and holding it as his rule of life to serve with utter faithfulness the parents that bore him and carry out their behests, aye the lightest, he would not dream of falsifying the promise made by his father. The denizens of the sky had scarce any glimpse of Seeta's soft and fair form ; the very winds of heaven would not visit her face too roughly ; and she walks along the rough road, unsheltered, open to the gaze of the passer-by. Rain, hail, dew, frost, sun and wind, what sad havoc would they not play with her gently nurtured body, artistically adorned and tinted with saffron, lac (alakta) and red sandal paste ? When they go to bid farewell to Dasaratha, the good genius of the old king will doubtless assert its sway and make him say, ' You shall not go into exile.' He would not have the heart to banish Rama to the woods the dearest of his four sons. There is no man so utterly and hopelessly wicked as to drive away from his hearth and home, the son of his loins, be he the owner of one virtue linked to a thousand crimes. Then it is impossible even to conceive of any one proposing to Rama to bury himself in the forest depths, the ideal prince who steals away the hearts of every object in creation by his graces of mind and heart. Harmlessness to all, compassion, self-restraint, self-reverence, profound learning and perfect practice, these six excellences deem themselves honoured in being allowed to associate with him.

"The burning summer sun scorches and shrivels the poor things to whom water is life ; even so, the faint cloud

50 that ruffles the calm heart of Rama or the slightest shadow of grief or misery that darkness his bright soul, reacts on the people in unspeakable calamity and ruin. As a state-
 55 ly monarch of the forest-world dries up and fades with its fruits and flowers if its roots are cruelly severed, the whole universe is afflicted with the affliction of Rama. For, the radiant and righteous prince is the root of all beings ; and they form the fruits, the flowers, the leaves of the Tree of Being. Like the faithful Lakshmana, we will follow Rama wherever he leads us, we, our wives, children, kith and
 60 kin. House and field, garden and cottage we shall leave and follow Rama of perfect equanimity in joy and sorrow. We will take away with us our buried wealth, corn, ornaments, horse and kine. The ruined courts, the broken doors and the mouldering walls will form a fit background to the bare seats thick with dust, the ant-hills and the haunts of the mischievous rat and the cobra of fatal beauty. Hall and court, chamber and shrine, portico and terrace will serve as the busy promenade of the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air. Not a hand to lay the dust or sweep the floor ;
 70 chant or charm, offering or incense, bright lamps or tuneful bells will no more grace our hapless tenements. The household gods will flee the spot. As when plague or famine stalks through the land, marking its path with ruined cities and decaying corpses, town and hamlet are abandoned in haste
 75 by the affrighted people, this fair Ayodhya will be a howling wilderness strewed with broken vessels and whitening skeletons. And Kaikeyi of infamous memory will hold sway over her capital in all its funeral pomp and glory. *Our* Ayodhya goes with Rama ; and *our* forest extends over
 80 where he is not. Birds and beasts from forest depths and mountain lair, the cruel tiger, the timid hare, the lion, and the elephant will quit their ancient haunts ; they will yield the pathless wilds to us to range and take this god-forsaken

city in exchange. The carnivorous tiger, the busy crow that feeds on fruit and offal, the spotted deer, the bleeting lamb and the lowing kine that know no guiltier food than emerald grass, will walk fearlessly through the deserted squares, the crumbling halls and the shattered terraces. And Kaikeyi with her precious son is welcome to rule in state and glory over the dying town. Ours be the happy lot to range the green woods in peace and comfort." 85
90

Rama heard them all, but without the least suspicion of annoyance or sorrow. With a lordly gait as of some maddened elephant, he walked on to the palace of his father that rose to the sky like the Kailas peak. He took his way through the veteran guards at every gate and came upon Sumantra sunk in the depths of hopeless despair and grief. Rama, the fountain of ineffable bliss, said to him with a smile "Friend Sumantra ! May I request you to announce my presence here to his majesty." 95
100

Resolved to exile himself to the dark forests that his father's promise might be well-kept, he stood there and with him Seeta and Lakshmana to take leave of his father.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FATHER ! GIVE ME LEAVE TO GO"

HE eternal and changeless One come down in mortal guise, strangely beautiful even as a rain-charged cloud, laid his commands upon Sumantra ; he roused himself with a strong effort and sought the king in his harem. Dasaratha, in the relentless grip of a mighty grief, was sighing hot and furiously ; with a bleeding heart and a confused brain. his thoughts ever ran upon Rama. Sumantra had few equals in tact, intelligence, adaptability 5
10

or keen perception ; but the calamity that fell upon Rama prostrated him quite. With senses adrift, he clasped his hands in loyal devotion and exclaimed " Hail ! All hail to your majesty !"; but the thought ' Who knows what the
 15 king might say or do in the madness of his sorrow?' kept him back. After a long pause, he ventured in broken accents to say "Lord ! Rama, the darling of your heart, stands outside and craves leave to wait upon your majesty. That paragon of every virtue, human and divine, has bestowed his vast
 20 wealth on the brahmanas and his dependants ; he has bade adieu to his weeping friends ; and prays to see you before he starts to the forest I pray you admit him to your presence. The hero, crowned with each princely virtue, even as the noon-day sun girt with blazing rays, means to seek the wilds.
 25 It behoves you to see him first."

Dasaratha was by nature the soul of Dharma; no one fathomed the depths of his heart, profound as the shoreless ocean ; stainless as the akasa that pervades all, pure and impure, he appeared to be immersed in the joys and
 30 sorrows of the world, but was in reality supremely unattached and dispassionate. His duty at the moment lay in keeping his promise to Kaikeyi ; and he called out to Sumantra and said " Go, bid my wives here come to me on the wings of speed. With them I would even behold the
 35 face of my darling, whose heart is ever loyal to Dharma."

Sumantra sped to the inner rooms and said to the wives of the king " His majesty commands your immediate presence before him". And the three hundred and fifty wives of Dasaratha, preceded by Kausalya, wended their sorrowful way to their husband's presence, with wan faces and lack-lustre eyes. Dasaratha saw them approach and bade Sumantra bring in his son. Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana were accordingly led into the presence of the monarch.
 40 The king saw his darling child approach him with folded

palmis and bowed head of reverence when yet far off and 45
sprang to clasp him in his arms. His wives ran after him
with hollow looks of grief. The cruel tears blinded his eyes
and the unhappy father could not see his way to where his
son stood, but fell to the ground and fainted a few paces
off. But, quicker than thought, Rama and Lakshmana 50
caught him in their strong arms. The royal ladies were
sore affrighted at the sight of their senseless lord and wailed
“Ah ! alas !” ; they beat their heads and breasts in a trans-
port of grief. Their wild laments made discordant music
and hateful, blended with the melodious tinkling of their 55
ornaments. Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta gently bore the
king to his bed and did everything in their power to bring
him back to his senses.

Restored to life and feeling after a while, the unfortu-
nate monarch, battling in despair with the mighty waves of 60
grief that threatened to overwhelm him, observed Rama
standing before him with reverently folded palms. Then
the prince addressed himself to the mighty ruler of Kosala
and said “ Your majesty is our lord, our guard ; I start for
Dandaka even now and crave leave of you and your power-
ful blessings I tried my best to dissuade Seeta and 65
Lakshmana from following me to the woods. My truthful
pleas were of no avail and they are obstinately bent upon
seeking the forest depths with me I pray you cast this
sorrow from your heart and give me leave to go.” 70

Then Dasaratha lifted eyes of shame to the bright and
cheerful face of Rama, who eagerly sought leave of him to
speed to the dreary forests, and said in faltering accents
“Rama, I granted, in an evil moment, some boons to Kaikeyi
and have been grievously duped in return. All my acts are 75
unjust and unreasonable. I am no more master of myself.
Set me aside and rule over this Ayodhya in my place.”

What profound thoughts and deep motives lay back

of this apparently incoherent wail of Dasaratha of profound intellect ! But Rama stood peerless in his knowledge and practice of the innermost mysteries of Dharma. Would he fail ? Would he be a prey to lure and delusion ? He clasped his hands in low reverence and replied "Lord ! May you live long and reign over this happy earth for thousands of years.

95 I go to reside in the woods. It shall never be said that you fell away from truth for the sake of my unworthy self. Nine years, then five, will pass away in the twinkling of an eye, a happy trip. My word kept, I hope to be blessed enough to lay my head at your feet and serve you ever."

90 Bound by the mighty though invisible chains of Dharma in the guise of his plighted word ; goaded without rest by the tireless Kaikeyi, who ever hissed into his ear, " This day Rama shall sleep in the woods. He shall not lay his head in the haunts of men"; anon struck to the heart, past bearing,
 95 with the grief of parting from his darling child, dearer to him than life itself, he cried with streaming eyes and broken accents " Rama ! go if you will. May you win hereby the highest good and happiness in this world and the next. May every good walk before you during your stay in the
 100 woods. May no harm come to you nor fear, from the beasts, the birds and the insects of the forests. So, go in peace and safety and come back to me in a trice. Your righteous soul never knows what it is to prove disloyal to truth ; your heart is ever centred in the practice of the highest Dharma ; and
 105 would any one seek to shake your resolve, deliberately and consciously made ? But, I will not hear of your leaving us to-night, nay, not in the least. Spend the night with us ; bless our aged eyes with the sight of your bright and lovely self. Let every comfort and luxury be yours ; and
 110 you may take your departure, if you must, by break of day. Let us at least have the pleasure of being with you, be it for one short night. Darling ! My hair stands on end with

amaze and fear when I contemplate, from any standpoint, the course of action you have sternly chosen to adopt. You had the heart and courage to put away from you every 115 comfort and luxury in life, that is yours by right and had dared to betake yourself to the howling wilderness untrod by man. I swear most solemnly upon Truth that this is not of my doing ; my heart countenances not this act of cruelty and shame. Cast your eyes on this Karkeyi that stands 120 at my elbow, like a smouldering fire under its white robe of ashes. Her brain can hatch schemes and plots of diabolical cruelty ; her heart knows not virtue or compassion ; she has basely taken advantage of the boons I granted her of yore ; she has played upon my loyalty to Truth and my 125 infatuation for her to wring my reluctant consent to this act of shame. She came among us to foul the fair name of our race and uproot the righteous traditions of our forefathers. The boons she has cozened out of me have been her weapons to seat her Bharata on the throne and 130 send you to the dreary woods. You would even obey to the utmost the unholy commands of this wretch. Ah ! What magnanimity of soul ! What unapproachable nobility of heart ! Nay, I am denied even the pleasure of thinking so. You are my first-born and your hands should lead me across the 135 dark realms of death to the bright worlds of light. On you rests the heavy responsibility. It is no wonder that you should see to it that your father breaks not his plighted word, does not stain his soul with a lie. And no one has a stronger claim to it than you."

140

Rama and Lakshmana heard their sire entreat them in heart-rending accents to stay there for a night at least ; they grieved unspeakably to think that they were not fortunate enough to rejoice in the company of their parents yet one more night. Then Rama replied to Dasaratha 145 and said "Lord ! If I indulge myself this night here in

comfort and luxury, pleasure and pomp, where shall I look for them tomorrow in the woods ? I prefer to depart to the woods than taste of the sweets of royalty for a few hours.

150 Here do I renounce this broad earth, the countries on it and the people, corn and wealth ; give it to Bharata. I have made up my mind to abide in the woods and my resolve is unshaken. You are known all over the worlds as one, whom none seeks in vain. Pleased with Kaikeyi and rightly so, you have granted her some boons; keep them to the very letter. Let your fair fame be undimmed that your word was ever well-kept. I will reside for ten years and four among the hermits, trying to fulfil your promise to Kaikeyi.

" Woe is me that I should live to hear from your lips such cruel words as ' Set me aside and rule in my place ! ' What atrocious sin ! This very moment Bharata should be invested with the lordship of this earth without the slightest delay or hesitation. Never should your heart harbour the faintest suspicion of any desire on my part to rule over this kingdom, to taste of its pleasures. Would I gain thereby the merit and the happiness that accrue of carrying out your majesty's behests ? Why should you grieve at all ? Why shed tears ? The Lord of the rivers, the Ocean god, is he ever known to be disturbed, unsettled ? This realm, its luxuries, this power, this pomp do stink in my nostrils ; I want them not. Nay, my Seeta or the bright world of the gods, or dear life itself have no charms for me ; I am alive to one thing, and one only—your plighted word shall never go for naught. You are my lord, my living god. I swear before you on the merit I have laid up till now, on the truth I speak. It is not in me to stay here a moment more than is absolutely necessary. It is not seemly that you shouid grieve over this ; my resolve to live in the woods is unshaken."

Besides, I go to the woods not solely to carry out 180 your commands. Have I not passed my word to Kaikeyi

that I would go to the forest ? Should I not keep it ? You need not grieve in the slightest at the imaginary difficulties and dangers of our forest life. Our days will pass away all merrily in the wood-world teaming with beasts and birds of infinite variety. A father is the god 185 of gods. So, I regard you as my highest deity and desire to obey your behests. You are sure to see me here at the end of fourteen years. So, it is extremely untoward that you should grieve over me now. The whole world looks up to you in supreme confidence to 190 wipe away its tears and infuse courage into its heart to bear up under woes and calamities ; and whom shall it turn to, if *you* give way to sorrow and despair ? This town, this fair Ayodhya do I renounce ; give it to Bharata. This broad realm, this Kosala do I renounce ; 195 let it be Bharata's. This earth and all it contains do I renounce ; let Bharata hold sway over it. This very moment I depart hence for the woods to lead there a happy life and keep your plighted word ever true. You will not see me here until that promise is redeemed. 200 This earth with its mountains, rivers, corn, wealth and people ; let Bharata rule happily over it. There is not in my heart even the suspicion of any hankering for it. I should see that your word to the queen Kaikeyi is well kept. My heart turns away from selfish com- 205 fort, or unparalleled power and pomp. It ever yearns to discharge the dharma so highly lauded by the great—fulfilment of a father's promise. Hence, it is absolutely unreasonable for you to grieve on my account. What shall it profit me, this kingdom, its power 210 and pleasures or Sita or my life itself, if, through me, your plighted word is kept not ? Well, your promise shall ever be accomplished. You need not even dream that my life in the forest will know any sorrow or privation.

215 Sweet fruits and roots will be my diet; mountains, rivers and lakes will delight me untiringly and enable me to pass days of joy in the variegated forests."

Thus did Rama seek to console the broken heart of his father, who essayed to clasp his darling son to his 220 heart and fainted away from sheer grief. His wives were horrified at the sight and lifted their voices aloud in wailings and lamentations. Even Sumantra, the old and the staid, wept aloud and fainted away, so mighty was that wave of sorrow. The whole place resounded 225 with groans, moans, wails and laments; but Kaikeyi's iron heart was never touched and her face lost nothing of its increasing brightness and joy.

CHAPTER XXXV

SUMANTRA REPROACHES KAIKEYI.

IGHING hot and fierce, Sumantra shook his head in quick impatience; he dashed his palms together in wild wrath; he gnashed his teeth; his eyes shot fire; and unspeakable grief banished the colour from his face. Well he knew that Kaikeyi had lost the love of Dasaratha, every atom of it; he shot his fiery shafts of censure and reproach at her heart and laid bare 10 her wickedness and wiles. "Cruel woman and heart less! His majesty Dasaratha here is the lord of this broad earth and its countless millions. Your lord is he and besides, the husband that clasped your hand in holy wedlock. Him have you slighted and deserted; there is no 15 saying what atrocity you will not commit. You have foully murdered your husband; and it goes without saying that it is only a question of time with you to do to death every member of your doomed race. His majesty,

Dasaratha, is no ordinary mortal, no common king. Easier to vanquish Indra, the lord of the celestials ; 20 a lighter task to shake the Himalayas to its roots ; a more hopeful enterprise to disturb the mighty ocean to its very depths. Yet, your fiendish arts, your cruel words and crueller deeds wring the heart of that peerless emperor, Dasaratha. Nay, this reason alone is 25 more than enough. He is the brightest jewel in the diadem of the Ikshwaku line. He is a hero of heroes. He is your lord and protector ; your atrocious boons, he has granted them without a murmur, without a pang of regret.

30

"Let be ; is he not the husband that grasped your hand in solemn promise in the presence of the God of fire ? Your sins and your virtues lie on him and he is accountable for them all. Seek not to slight such a one, for, it will exterminate you, root and branch. A good 35 wife and true may put away her sons ; but, it is a heinous sin to stray from the footsteps of her husband on the path of dharma. Verily, millions of sons count for nothing with a woman before her husband.

"It is a tradition in the royal line of Ikshwaku that 40 the eldest son sits on the throne of his father. But, you seek to violate that royal usage and custom, even during the life of his majesty. Well, let your son rule over this broad realm ; let him please himself with the semblance and power of a king ; and we will follow Rama wherever 45 he goes. It is a very fair and charitable inference from your rapid and successful progress on the path of wickedness that no brahmanas, no good men or great will ever darken your kingdom even for a moment. It is an inconceivable wonder to me that this too patient earth 50 does not cleave in twain and whelm you in the lowest depths of the nether worlds, you the foul perpetrator

of many an unspeakable horror. It passes my comprehension to think that Vasishtha and the other
 55 Brahmaṛhis of boundless might do not consume you to ashes with their words of power, more fatal than the blazing rod of Death. Your hellish obstinacy to drive Rama to the dreary forests deserves that and far more, What a marvel of intelligence must he be, who uproots
 60 the fragrant mango tree bowed down with luscious fruits and grows with infinite care and trouble, the bitter margosa tree, enriching it with rare manure and watering it with sweet milk ! What a marvel of intelligence and wisdom is our monarch Dasaratha, who exiles
 65 to the dreary forests, all unjustly, Ramabhadra, his eldest son, the fountain of every virtue and excellence and takes infinite pains to win a smile from your wicked self!

"A fool I am to accuse you ; as well expect a margosa
 70 to drop honey. The daughter takes after the mother. You but inherit what your mother had and no more—her doubtful virtues, her confirmed vices. It is an open secret that she that bore you is a monster of wickedness. In the old days, a Gandharva instructed your
 75 father in the knowledge of the language of birds, beasts and insects. Their hearts were an open book to him. One night he was reclining on his couch and happened to listen to the talk of the ants that were marching on the floor below. It was so funny that he
 80 laughed loud and long. Your mother, who was by his side, took it that he was laughing at her expense and turned upon him in fury. "Sir! What provoked you to laugh now? Let me have the bare truth and nothing else." "It will give me great pleasure to oblige you"
 85 replied the king, "but, unfortunately, I will be a corpse the next moment. I hold the secret on that condition."

"I care a straw" rejoined your mother "for you. Die or live, it is all one to me; but you shall tell me what provoked you to laugh at me." The Kekaya king was in a fix; he hastened to the Gandharva that taught him the secret and asked his advice on the matter. "You are an ass" said his friend "to concern yourself for her. Let her die or drown or burn or blow herself to atoms. Never yield to her obstinacy and draw down evil and misfortune upon yourself." Then a heavy weight was lifted from his heart; he gave your mother such a chastisement as she would never forget and drove her away from his kingdom; and his life since has been one of unalloyed peace and happiness. You but tread in the footsteps of your wicked and infamous mother and hound on your poor husband and king to stain his hands with heinous crimes. What says the man of wisdom? 'The girl takes after the mother and the boy after the father.' You are but one more proof of the truth of the saying. Cast away your pig-headed obstinacy; heed well the commands of your lord and husband. Allow the coronation of Rama to proceed; let your heart go out in sweet compassion to the whole created universe, animate and inanimate; save them from danger and death. Shut your ears against the whispered counsels of black-hearted wretches; do not drive your husband to violate the fair traditions of the noble line of Ikshwaku and place the crown on the head of the younger while the elder and the lawful heir is unjustly put away. Say not 'Well and what of my hard-won boons?' King Dasaratha is the soul of virtue; he is the lord of boundless wealth and riches; he is the flower of valour and heroism; he holds sway over this broad earth and all it contains; if at all he has a weakness, it is but his extreme compassion; and would he

plight his word to you and fail to fulfil it? See, he is willing and ready to give you in its place as much as you will have of gold, silver, gems, ornaments, corn, countries, servants, retainers, and conveyances. Pray,

125 give leave to place the crown on the brows of Rama even now. He is the first born of our emperor; he stands unrivalled in knowledge and skill in the affairs of state; his character and conduct is faultlessly pure; he practises the dharma of the Kshatriyas—to overthrow 130 the wicked and exalt the saintly; his watchful care protects all beings even as himself and sees that discomfort danger come not near them; he is an ideal hero; let him receive this kingdom at your hands as a gift of love.

135 "Know you not that dire shame and disgrace will dog your steps for all time, if, through, you, Rama be torn away from the side of his aged sire and condemned to a dreary exile in the woods? Would the subjects of this realm have over them any other ruler 140 but Rama? If you seek to force their allegiance, you will depopulate the kingdom in a moment. So, let not your heart be afflicted with vain longings. Let Rama and no other be our king. If you will have him crowned, Dasaratha will retire to the forests even as his 145 forefathers did before him."

Thus did Sumantra speak to Kaikeyi in her husband's presence, now gently, now in harsh and cutting words; he tried every art of persuasion, of eloquence, of censure, of menace to turn her from her fell purpose. 150 But his exhortations, his taunts, his entreaties were utterly powerless to bring the slightest repentance to her heart. Fierce anger convulsed her features all the more; her obstinacy was made more obstinate, if possible.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SIDDHARTHA REBUKES KAIKEYI.

FINDING that Kaikeyi paid not the slightest heed to the well-meant advice of Sumantra, the king was overcome with grief at the thought of his unwitting boons to Kaikeyi and their terrible consequences ; he turned to his faithful minister amidst a storm of sighs and tears and cried “ Order our armies, chariot, elephant, horse and foot, to accompany Rama wherever he goes. Let such high-bred courtesans go 10 with the troops as steal away the hearts of men by their beauty, words and acts ; as also merchant princes, the masters of millions. Send along with the troops such as depend on Rama ; also those with whom he spends his leisure in testing their prowess and skill, 15 with every convenience and comfort their heart could desire. Let diverse weapons and countless wains with oil, ghee and other household goods filled, follow him to the woods, while foresters and hunters, famed for woodland skill, clear the path. He shall hunt lion and 20 elephant, tiger and boar ; drink the fast-flowing honey, bathe in many a holy stream and rivulet, and put away from his mind this kingdom and its concerns. Let my wealth of gold and corn be despatched to where goes Rama. Alas ! How could my darling boy, delicately 25 nurtured, fare in the wild forests untrod by the foot of man ? He shall have a happy life of it there in the company of saintly sages and holy hermits, and perform countless yagas in each pure spot, with ample largess given. Bharata, the thrice-fortunate, shall reign 30 over Ayodhya in pomp and glory ; and my darling boy Rama shall depart to the woods in royal style.”

Kaikeyi heard this and mighty fear held her heart in its relentless grip; terror tied her trembling tongue; 35 her face lost its colour and freshness. With a heavy heart and bloodless cheeks, she turned to Dasaratha and cried, "Ideal king! And so, Bharata is to receive from you an empty realm, while the people, the troops, the wealth and corn, the treasure and all that goes to 40 make life worth living goes with Rama, even as one who tastes the light foam and life of a heavenly drink and hands over to his best friend the lees and dregs, all dull and dead. Good sir! Kindly save yourself the trouble; the noble gift had better be with the nobler 45 giver;" and she spat her venom at him, while the cruel words hissed forth from between her set teeth.

Untouched by shame, abandoned to all finer and nobler feelings, she pierced the heart of her too-confiding husband with her barbed tongue. But, the poor 50 old king could but wring his hands in despair and wail plaintively, "Crueller than the venomous fangs of the deadly cobra! I sink under the crushing load of grief and misery; and you, tiger-hearted, spur and goad me to death! Goodly boons I gave you and got in return 55 the curses of every object in creation, by consenting to exile Rama to the woods and crown Bharata instead. Wretch! See you not that I am fulfilling your diabolical purpose to the very letter? Why torture me further?"

Then, Kaikeyi turned upon him with withering 60 contempt and said with a cruel smile: "Pray enlighten my ignorance; I see not how I pain you or cause you the least discomfort. Look here; I but pray you fulfil me the promises made by you of yore all voluntarily, out of a grateful heart; do I ask any favour of you? 65 Speak the truth righteous king!"

"Base-minded wretch!" cried Dasaratha "you ought to have anticipated all this and secured your boons accordingly. Why did you not ask me definitely not to send away from the kingdom its people and its wealth. You but want this realm for your precious 70 son. Take it and stop at that. Your were stupid enough not to perceive the turn the affair would take ; and now, not all your howlings, your tears and your curses could divert the consequences."

The unwonted wrath of the weak and uxorious 75 king roused the slumbering fury of Kaikeyi. "Man ! This to me ! You do well, noble monarch, to boast of your high lineage and spotless fame to *me*. Know I not the worthy traditions of your line ? Your ancestor Sagara, of happy memory, drove his first-born Asama- 80 njas out of his kingdom, alone and unpitied. Rama deserves nothing better at your hands. Nay, it is so beautifully consistent with the royal traditions of the progeny of Ikshwaku. I should have defined the terms of my boons, is it ? I believe it is open to me to do so 85 now or at any time. Know you of any limitation thereto ? "

Dasaratha could but stare at her in fear and wonder. "Alas !" said he to himself, "Is this a woman I see before me or some cruel fiend broken loose from hell ? 90 Baseily did she dupe me to grant her boons and swear it by the most solemn oaths. She made me soil my hands with the most frightful and hideous crimes ; and not content with that, she would wring from me now conditions never dreamt of before." A storm of anger shook him 95 to his very depths and he cried, "Fie, fie ! Silence ! Enough !" Every one there hung his head in shame and sorrow ; but Kaikeyi, bold and wicked, heeded it not in the least.

100 Then Siddhartha, a wise and faithful counsellor of Dasaratha, was inflamed with ire at the shameless words and fiendish wickedness of the favourite queen of the monarch. The snows of age lay heavy upon his head, replete with the hoarded wisdom of ages ; Dasaratha held himself proud to honor him highly, for his utter candour and straight speech won the heart of the king. The cruel taunt flung at Rama was too much for him and he cried, " Asamanjas, the cruel, laid his hands on the children as they played in the streets, flung them

105 into the foaming flood of Sarayu and clapped his hands in glee as he watched their frantic struggles for life. The citizens one and all were furiously incensed against him, and said to Sagara " Lord ! If you have the welfare of this realm at your heart, choose well. Drive forth

110 your son Asamanjas from your dominions ; or witness our departure to other countries." And to them replied Sagara " Well, what is the matter with you ? What fear you ? " The people said, " Your first born Asamanjas is afflicted with a homicidal mania. He lays his hands on

115 our children as they play in the streets, casts them in the roaring waters of the Sarayu and laughs at their death-throes and the bubbles that rise up as they sink." Sagara bowed to their wish and banished his son Asamanjas, his wife and his people from his kingdom

120 for ever. Asamanjas atoned for his heinous sin by leading a homeless life in the forests and the mountains with spade and basket, hoe and axe. [It is still reported in Belgaum that Appay Deasy was wont to amuse himself " by making several young and beauti-

125 ful woman stand side by side on a narrow balcony, without a parapet, overhanging the deep reservoir at the new place in Nipani. He used then to pass along the line of trembling creatures, and suddenly thrusting

one of them headlong into the water below, he used to watch her drowning, and derive pleasure from her dying 135 agonies—History of the Belgaum District by H. J. Stokes M.S.C.] Now what crime, what sin do you impute to Rama? Why would you banish him to the woods? The furthest reaches of our memory show not any fault, any blot, any stain with which we could connect his name. Easier task it were to discover foul blot or dark stain in the resplendant Queen of Night. Let be. Rama might be guilty of some secret sin or dark vice. We know it not; perhaps your keen eye might have pierced to the depths of his heart and brought it 140 to light. If so, let us know; Rama shall be driven out of the kingdom this very moment and you will have won our profound gratitude for all time. But if one walks upon the path of the righteous and carefully refrains from causing harm or evil to his fellow-beings, it is but 145 suicide to abandon him basely; it is a wanton and un-holy defiance of the great Dharma. Be he gifted with the strength, the valor and the splendour of the Lord of the shining Ones, he would be but a heap of ashes should he lend himself to such fiendish cruelty. So 150 place no bar in the way of Rama's coronation. Would you lay yourself open to eternal infamy and have the world point its finger of scorn at you?" And so, he tried by many a skilful argument; by many a persuasive appeal to her pride, vanity and self-interest to dissuade 155 her from her fell purpose.

Dasaratha was convinced beyond any doubt that she would never heed the good counsel of the wise man; overwhelming grief choked his voice as he cried: "Sinful wretch! Siddhartha's golden words find no favour 160 with you and grate on your ears. Alas! you see not what would conduce to the ultimate good and happiness

of your husband who confided in you too well ! Let be. Know you what tends to your good ? Base counsel and 170 baser act come easy to you. You have nothing in common with the good and the great in thought, word or deed. I put away from me this kingdom, its wealth, its pomp and luxury and go with Rama. May Emperor Bharata rule over this realm long and happily, with 175 you to share his power and confidence."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VASISHTHA REBUKES KAIKEYI.

BUT Rama would not have any one come between him and his duty ; he would not have it said "Rama was only too eager to obey Kaikeyi's behests, because, he knew full well that there were others who would argue with or entreat, or beg, or bribe or coerce or cozen Kaikeyi into freeing him from his promise." So, he turned to his sire all meekly and said, 10 "Lord ! I have put behind me power and pomp, comfort and luxury ; my heart seeks them not. My home is in the forests ; what have I to do with troops or treasure ? It is only a fool who makes another a present of a lordly elephant and refuses to part with its heel-ropes. Verily 15 the rope would be no greater strain on the resources of one who could afford to give away an elephant. Every thing that you intend to give me or send with me to the woods I have already made over to Bharata. Let my attendants bring me the dress of bark I should put on. 20 Twice seven years should I dwell in the merry woods. Let baskets, spades and axes be brought too."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than Kaikeyi, all untouched by shame, handed him the bark

and said, "Here it is. Let me see you put it on." Rama received them all respectfully from her, put away 25 his gorgeous robes and donned the dress of bark that lowly hermits affect. Lakshmana was no whit behindhand. Dasaratha, their king and father, gazed at the scene with eyes from which all light and reason had fled. Then Seeta cast her eyes on the uncouth 30 garb that was given her and, used as she was to gemmed robes of priceless worth, trembled even as a lonely fawn at the sight of the hunter's net; she knew not how to put them on and looked upon them in surprise and confusion. But a true wife and loyal, she would 35 faithfully walk in the footsteps of her saintly husband; she turned her tear-dimmed eyes to Rama, who shone in his divine beauty even as the king of the Gandharvas and said, "Lord! I am ashamed to confess my ignorance. I would give any thing to know how the holy 40 hermits in the forests adjust these coats of bark." She tried, all awkwardly, to fit a strip round her neck and blushed in shame at her failure. At once Rama took it for her and fitted it upon the dress of white silk she wore.

45

Rama, the first-born and the heir-apparent of Dasaratha, the mighty Emperor of Kosala, adjusted with his own hand the dress of bark that hermits wear, round the shoulders of Seeta, the daughter of king Janaka. That dreadful sight was too much for the 50 royal ladies, and they raised their voices and cried "Alas! what horrible sin have we to expiate, that we are made to witness such unheard of atrocity? Rama! your father laid not his commands upon Seeta to be take herself to the woods; nor, did that devil in human 55 shape ask it of him. So, grant our request that she remain with us till you come back from the forest in

fulfilment of your word to your father. Let Lakshmana go with you if he must. Is she fitted in any way to 60 lead the rough life of the forests which knows not man, even like the hermits and the anchorites that seek it of their own choice? You are cruel enough to us in not deigning to bless our eyes and heart with a sight of your fair self here: temper your cruelty with mercy 65 by leaving Seeta with us. We entreat you to grant our prayer anyhow." But Seeta was sore afraid that Rama would snatch at this excuse to leave her behind; so, she made haste to importune him to fit on her the dress of bark. And Rama did so.

70 Then Maharshi Vasishtha, the venerable guru of the royal line of Ikshwaku, grew wroth when he saw Seeta's fair form enfolded in the rough coat of bark and exclaimed, "Kaikeyi! Lost to all sense of duty! Evil hearted! Evil fate to the race that bore you and to the 75 race that took you in! Is it not enough that you cheated vilely your lord the king? You would give free reins to your dark schemes and wicked desires, an utter stranger to every thing good and noble. Seeta shall not go to the forest, but shall rule this realm from 80 the throne that is Rama's by every right. The Holy Writ declares that the wife is one half of the husband; and it is but right and just that she be the lord of this kingdom in the absence of Rama; but, if she would have it not, and would follow Rama to the woods, let 85 us all go with her. Let the officers of the Government and the common people follow Raghava wherever he goes and take with them their wives, children, wealth, kine, horses, servants and conveyances. Bharata and Satrughna will, I am sure, follow their brother in his 90 exile and render him dutiful service, clad in bark mantles, hermitwise. Then this broad realm will be untrod by

human feet. 'You will be the proud monarch of all you survey. The stately trees, the beasts and birds will keep you sweet company. None shall dispute your right. From here right to the confines, you will be the 95 lord of the fowl and the brute.' You are wickedness incarnate. You have come among the people here as the dread messenger of death. It is no kingdom where Rama is not. Ayodhya goes with him.

"If Bharata were the son born from the loins of 100 Dasaratha, he will not fail to take after his father in principle and practice. Would he consent to rule over this kingdom that is wrung from his father, from his brother and from the countless millions all unwillingly ? Would he have the heart to call you his mother ? Would he 105 dare to live by your side, the foul murderer of his father and your husband ? Would he take the kingdom from your hands when he knows full well the royal tradition that the younger brother does not take precedence of the elder on the throne of their race ? It is even 110 possible that you take a flying leap from here to the highest point of the sky and alight safely ; but it is utterly impossible that Bharata will ever swerve, even a hair-breadth, from the strict line of dharma. You pile sin upon sin, crime upon crime only secure to your 115 precious son the utmost of power and wealth. Lo ! The scales will fall from your eyes and you will see that you have wrought him but destruction and woe. Would Rama depart for the woods and any object in creation lag behind ? Behold, Kaikeyi ! The very beasts, birds 120 and trees will gaze fondly on Rama as he passes by them on his way to the forest. This day shall you behold the miracle with your eyes. So, snatch the ugly dress of bark from the fair hands of Seeta and give your daughter-in-law priceless robes and ornaments. 125

Why should she bind on the mantle of the woodland folk? Dark-hearted daughter of the goodly king of Kekaya! your boon but compasses the exile of Rama and of no other. So, Seeta shall, if she so desires, accompany Rama to the woods surrounded by her usual comforts and luxury. Her retainers and conveyances, her costly robes and priceless ornaments shall go with her and every thing she might desire."

So spake Vasishtha of immeasurable greatness and 135 might; yet, Seeta would not be turned aside from her resolve to adopt the life and habit of her husband. Her heart was bent upon living in the forest in hermit-guise like her lord and husband.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DASARATHA REBUKES KAIKEYI.

SEETA, the beloved wife of Rama, the lord of the universe, stood there clad in the rude dress of bark like any waif or outcast. Every one there, man and woman, rich and poor, gentle and simple turned to Dasaratha and cried, "Fie, fie ! shame upon you, king ! Right noble is your act and all worthy of your line and state." Sixty thousand years had he reigned over them 5 as an ideal king, fulfilling the dearest wishes of their heart. His ears had been accustomed to hear nothing but unqualified praise of himself from their lips. The unwonted censure and condemnation from those nearest and dearest to his heart was more than he could bear. 10 15 "What have I to do with life or fame or dharma hereafter ? I care not what befalls me or others, now that the world has cast me out as branded with such infamy !" He heaved hot sighs and cried out, "Kaikeyi !

wickedest wretch ! Seeta shall not proceed to the forest in the garments of a devotee. Of tender youth, 20 gently nurtured, brought up in the lap of luxury and comfort, it is but true what the holy Vasishtha said that she is all unmeet to share the hardships of a forest life. Of utter purity, she knows no other observance, no other vow than to follow in the footsteps of her lord 25 and husband. A stranger to all guile, whom has she harmed in thought, word or deed ? The favourite child of the royal Janaka, how has she sinned that she should wander in the frightful forest, clad in the rough garb of hermits ? Let her fling away far from 30 her the uncouth raiment you have so kindly presented to her. Dare you assert that my boon to you included this ? If she is inclined to follow Rama, let her go in all the splendour and luxury of her high rank, with such robes and ornaments as she might fancy. Grim Death calls 35 out to me ; else I would not have sworn to you to fulfil your wishes, whatever they might be. And it has ended thus, fatally for me and all atrociously unjust to Rama. Is it not enough ? Blinded by ambition and envy, you seek to make me your instrument to banish Seeta too 40 to the woods. But, know you the awful consequences that await such an act of fiendish cruelty ? The aged bamboo brings forth fair blossoms, but expires the very moment ; even so, my heinous sin would annihilate me.

Base plotter ! Grant that Rama is your foe ; grant 45 that he has wronged you woefully ; grant that he stands in the way of your son's securing the throne. But cast your cruel eye at Seeta, whose glances, soft and full, shame the frightened fawn that roams the forest. Has she anything to do with guile or deceit ? She trembles at 50 the very mention of harm or treachery to others ; her heart knows no other deity but her lord and husband.

Dharma has for her no other meaning than that of devout and faithful service to him. Such a one could, on
 55 no occasion, have dreamt of doing you the slightest evil. Sin incarnate! Is it not enough, the one dark sin you have committed of driving Rama to the woods, to secure for you an eternity of woe and suffering in the deepest and darkest hell? What mean you further by heaping
 60 sin upon sin, crime upon crime, by tearing Laksmana and Seeta from their happy home and sending them after Rama to share his misery? I would give anything to know the dire fate that awaits you on the other side of death. It is no ordinary ingenuity or
 65 cleverness that could guess the kind of hell reserved for you. In the name of common justice, recall the promise I made you. Did you not send for Rama on the eve of his coronation and tell him in my presence,
 "Put away from you all thoughts of being consecrated
 70 as the heir-apparent to the throne and betake yourself for twice seven years to the forests, clad in the garb of hermits; did I, the impotent listener to that shameful proposal, consent to the banishment of any other but Rama? What foul fiend put it into your head to demand
 75 that Seeta too should accompany her husband to the forest, clad as a homeless hermit! You overstep the bounds of my boon to you and invite untold eons of misery in hell". So raved he, the forlorn monarch, steeped in hopeless woe; the billows of grief, caused by being
 80 torn apart from the darling of his heart, closed over his head and he fainted right away.

He came to himself after a while and sat with drooping head and shame-faced look; when Rama, ready to start on his momentous journey, addressed him
 85 reverentially and said: "Mighty Emperor! Soul of

righteousness! Yon, Kausalya, my mother, is held in high estimate by all who know her; the winters of age have dowered her with all womanly virtues of head and heart; convinced beyond a doubt that the highest dharma lies in keeping a promise, she allows not the least sign of 90 her measureless grief to betray itself; she bears you no grudge; she blames you not. The world knows you as the liberal bestower of gifts and boons to whomsoever may beg them of you; none was ever known to go back, but he was richer for having come to you. Hence, I too 95 am emboldened to beg of you a boon; I pray that I might find favour in your eyes. My mother, bereft of her only son, is all powerless to stem the torrent of grief of separation, poor soul! This is her first and worst experience. High favour have you shown her and 100 unique consideration, in that she is the queen of your heart and realm. Yet I would that you, in response to my prayers, accord her a kinder and more considerate treatment. I entreat you to watch over her that she sink not under the heavy burden of sorrow and misery, 105 engendered of constant thought of myself, far away from her. She is as ignorant of the ways of the world and its wiles even as a babe unborn. Your Majesty is her only stay and support. May I hope that you will not leave her to the tender mercies of her rivals and enemies. 110 Your love and respect are the only hold she has on life till she sees me again. Pardon me if, once again, I proffer my prayers to you. She can not bear to be away from me for an hour. Mighty Lord! More puissant than Mahendra! I trust you to see that she quits 115 not, during my absence, that care-worn tenement of hers, wrapt in constant thought of her darling boy far away in the dreary woods. I trust you to avoid me the dire necessity of seeking for my mother in the dread

120 haunts of the Lord of Death, on my return here from my sojourn in the woods."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE IDEAL WIFE.

SO spake Rama in pitiful and suppliant accents, as he stood before all in his humble hermit garb ; 5 his sire and the royal ladies were convulsed with woe and could scarcely keep their senses. Burning tears shut his eyes to the bright presence of Rama, while heavy grief choked his utterance. For a while he sat senseless and still, a prey to despair ; then 10 memory came back to him and with it his incoherent ravings about the child of his heart : " Alas ! woe is me ! A dreadful sinner I should have been in my past births and torn apart countless cows from their forlorn calves. Or, may be I tortured innocent and defenceless 15 creatures with fiendish cruelty. Else this unparalleled misfortune would not have befallen me. The hour of my deliverance from this body strikes not a moment before its time ; it should exhaust the karma for which it was intended. Ah ! sweeter by far is death and more 20 welcome than this cruel and pitiless torture, never-ceasing, at the hands of Kaikeyi. But, the life-breaths quit not the body the sooner for me or for any other helpless victim of misery. I live to see, with these aged eyes of mine, my darling son Rama, resplendent as smoke-less flame, put away his robes of state and swathe his shapely limbs in the rude dress of bark that hermits affect ; yet Death flees me. It is to me a wonderful mystery that a weak woman could be so dead-set upon securing her interests, and millions upon millions should,

in consequence, writhe in the pitiless grip of sorrow 30 and misery." Blinded with tears, speechless with woe, he but cried out "Rama" and fainted away. All too soon he came back out of it and took up the burden of his woe. Said he to Sumantra, amidst a torrent of tears, "Bring me here in a moment the royal chariot 35 yoked with noble coursers. Take away from this god-forsaken city and its hapless people Rama, the genius of its good fortune and glory, on his fateful journey to the southern forests. Of saintly life and holy ways as a maharshi, mighty and valiant, Rama is driven away 40 from the kingdom that is his by right, all mercilessly, by the parents that brought him into the world; and it is but the most natural inference from it that the graces of head and heart do but engender such bitter grief and misery. It goes without saying that it is but honest 45 endeavour thrown away to desire to possess excellent qualities and toil mightily to acquire them."

Meanwhile Sumantra had ready at the palace gates the royal chariot with fleet coursers to draw it and said, "Lord! everything is ready towards your journey to 50 the woods." Then Dasaratha called in haste the officer in charge of his treasury and said, "Count well and carefully the years that fair Seeta has to spend in the forest and bring me here costly robes and priceless gems for her use the while." The official was 55 extremely conversant with time and place; his name was a guarantee of utter purity of thought and deed. There was nothing he knew not about the royal treasury, the countless articles in it, rare and priceless and their excellences and defects. So, he obeyed his 60 master's behests and placed before him the things ordered for. Unlike others of her sex, Seeta was not born of mortal parents; she was a model of symmetry,

loveliness and grace, even as the Books would have it :
 65 her surpassing beauty was enhanced a thousandfold
 when she decked herself with the robes and gems presented
 to her by her fond father-in-law, and she threw over
 the vast hall a glory that rivalled the rising sun in all
 his splendour.

70 Then, queen Kausalya cast loving arms round her,
 pressed lingering kisses on her head and said, " Child !
 you have set your foot on the path of the highest
 dharma. It is the nature of the ordinary run of women
 down here in this faithless world, to receive, all indiffe-
 75 rently, even as if it was their due, the love, the respect
 and the riches that the husband bestows upon them with
 a lavish hand, in the height of his wealth and power ;
 but when dark misfortune falls upon him and adversity,
 when he can no longer serve as the tool and instrument
 80 of their whims and fancies, they clean forget him and all
 he did for them. There is no saying how far they will
 go in the way of slighting and insulting him. Years of
 splendid luxury and happiness count for nothing against
 some trifling discomfort or disappointment ; and it is
 85 quite natural for the bad lot to rail and fume at their
 husbands and avoid him like a plague. For the matter
 of that, young wives are prone to be light of speech,
 fickle, unfathomable of purpose, eager to taste of sinful
 and forbidden pleasures and flash with lightning ra-
 90 pidity from frenzied love to deathless hate. They are
 no models to follow, no ideals to reach. Fair lineage,
 knowledge profound, holy rites with the fire-god to wit-
 ness, dresses and ornaments till they cry no more,
 favour conferred or peril warded off—not one of these
 95 nor all, can bind in silken bonds of love the light in-
 constant heart of such a one. Gold is their god and to
 him they are wedded for ever. Frail and fickle by nature,

it comes to them easy to work evil and woe upon their husbands and lay down their hearts, their lives, and their all at the feet of their faithless lovers. But to the 100 good and the true, to those models of wifely devotion and love, the countless myriads of worlds hold nothing holy and good that vies with a beloved husband. Their feet never stray from the path of Right ; they are ever faithful to the traditions of their race and line ; good 105 and great men have guided their feet on the path of Virtue ; desire and hate are strangers to their heart. Now, Rama, my boy had, till now shone in the forefront of humanity and has been put away from the realm by the mysterious hand of Fate. *That* I hope is no reason 110 for you to slight him. Prince or pauper, I would have you hold him as your lord, yea, as your god."

Seeta bent herself towards the queen over folded palms of reverence and to her who sought so earnestly and so kindly to teach her duty and virtue, she rendered 115 meet reply. "Mother ! It shall be my care to do as you enjoin, forgetting nought. I have been instructed right well in the duty, the love and the respect I should render my lord and husband. My parents have taken care of it even when I was a girl. I pray you include 120 me not among the faithless multitude. The moon shall sooner lose its light and splendour than my heart cease to cleave to the traditions of good wives and faithful. The stringless veena gives forth no melody and the wheel-less chariot serves not a man in his need. A hundred 125 sons, a thousand, are but a curse and a burden to a wife, if she takes not her place by the side of her lord and husband. Father, mother and sons do give us happiness only in this mortal world. *That* is of no great account. But, no other than the husband can secure us 130 happiness here and hereafter. What more natural for

a wife than to reverence him? My soul is firm bent on treading the path of good wives and faithful, Ideal women like my mother have explained to me in general
 135 and in detail that noble duty. So, I pray you not to pain my ears with any mention of a wife failing, in the least, in the reverence due to her husband, I could never dream of it even. A woman knows no other god but her husband." Kausalya was charmed to hear such
 140 loyalty and devotion from Seeta's lips. She was tossed amidst the conflicting emotions of unspeakable grief at the thought of her darling boy lost to her for fourteen years, immured in the dreary forests, and unspeakable joy at the thought of her unparalleled good fortune in
 145 being blessed with a daughter-in-law so virtuous and so loyal to her husband. Her words charmed the ear and were in consonance with dharma; they betrayed no mean intellect, no ordinary soul. Hence, the rival emotions united to engender a ceaseless torrent of tears
 150 from Kausalya.

Then Rama went round his saintly mother, laid his head at her feet and said, "Mother! grieve not; I look to you to safeguard the life and happiness of my father. The fourteen years of my stay in the woods
 155 will pass away as lightly as fourteen seconds; and you will remember it only as faintly as the light dreams of a healthy sleeper. I will fulfil the promise of his Majesty to Kaikeyi and her heart's inclinations also; and hope to lay my head at your feet again, in the
 160 company of my friends and well-wishers." He next turned to the three hundred and fifty wives of Dasaratha, whose heart was wrung with the grief that overwhelmed Kausalya and said, "Ladies! I do but follow the eternal dharma in craving your leave to depart to the forest.
 165 I am but a boy and with all his failings. I have

received from you, ever since I came into this world, the same love and care as is due to the child of your loins. Long familiarity and the ignorance of childhood and youth ought not to excuse in me dereliction of duty. I pray you pardon me if I have offended you in the least 170 or failed in my respect or reverence to any one of you. My heart knows not peace till I receive the assurance of your forgiveness. Have I your leave to depart to the forest?" His lowly hermit garb and mean plight were too much for Dasaratha's wives to bear and they wailed 175 long and loud, even as Krouncha birds wounded grievously. The halls that, till then, gave back the sweet* and auspicious sounds of drum and tabor, veena and guitar, were now filled with groans, cries, wails, laments and other sounds of woe and ill-omened grief. 180

CHAPTER XL.

RAMA'S DEPARTURE.

THEN, Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta reverenced his Majesty king Dasaratha with folded hands, touched his feet with their heads and took leave of him. 5 They next saluted queen Kausalya, dazed with grief. Lakshmana prostrated himself before his mother Sumitra and touched her feet with his head.

The noble lady could not restrain her tears; but she was ever intent on the peace and happiness of her son, and hence, she kissed him on the head and said, "Child! It comes to you so naturally to love your friends with no common love. Queen Kausalya brought forth a son to save the worlds; even so, I gave birth to you to serve Rama in every way, at all times, 15

in all places, in the city, in the forest. So, when you follow Rama in the woods as he roams through them in the happy company of Seeta, gazing at each strange and curious object, forget yourself not in the sweet contemplation of his supernal beauty, lordly gait, loving looks and honeyed words ; never be thrown off your guard in the matter of looking after his safety. Prince or pauper, Rama is your lord, your god, your everything. It is the law of the world that the younger should ever obey the elder and serve him in every way. This is the dharma lived by the good and the great ; this is the dharma lived from time immemorial by the scions of the Ikshwaku race. It is the duty of a Kshatriya to give away in unstinted charity, to engage himself in sacrifices to the gods and to cheerfully give his life at the call of his country. Hence, you will defend Rama from harm and evil, even at the cost of your life. Delay not a moment ; start at once. Henceforth your father is Rama ; Seeta is your mother ; the pathless wilds are Ayodhya, the capital of your kingdom ; your highest happiness consists in obeying the behests of Rama. Go in peace " Thus did Sumitra send forth her son to share the exile of Rama.

Then, as Matali, the charioteer of Indra, announces to his master that his conveyance is ready, even so Sumantra spoke to Rama over folded palms of respect, " Mighty prince of peerless fame ! May all good be thine. The chariot waits for you to take you wherever you may list. This is the first day of the fourteen years you are to spend in the woods, in pursuance of the orders of Kaikeyi. You remember that she urged your departure from here this very day."

Seeta put on her dress and ornaments and got in to the chariot first, all cheerfully, shining like the sun

or the smokeless fire ; Rama and Lakshmana ascended 50 next. The attendants arranged in it the robes and ornaments given to Seeta by Dasaratha to last during the period of exile, as also the weapons, armour, leather-covered baskets, spades and axes. Then Sumantra urged the noble steeds fleeter than the wind. 55

As Rama left the city to live long years of privation in the woods, every one, men, women, children, elephants, horses and kine were struck senseless with grief. The people wandered about as if demented and afflicted with a nameless woe. Elephants in rut grew. 60 madder with grief. Horses ran here and there, as if some evil spirit possessed them. The harsh jangle of their ornaments pained the ear everywhere. As creatures parched with summer's heat run towards the cool waters, even so did men and women, old and young, 65 in Ayodhya run after Rama. They hemmed in the chariot on all sides, before and behind, right and left and with streaming eyes and burning sighs, they raised their voices in a piteous wail, as if their very life was being torn out of their bodies. "Sumantra ! pray rein 70 the restive steeds. Oblige us by driving slow. Grant us to behold the face of our darling Rama even for a while. Who knows whether this may not be the last time we are so blessed ? Is it made of adamant, the heart of her that bore Rama in her womb ? Her godlike 75 son is driven to the forest and yet it breaks not ! There is no child more favoured of fortune than Seeta. As the light of the sun quits not for a moment the mount Meru, so she walks in the footsteps of the ideal wife, and follows him, even as his shadow. Lakshmana ! Life 80 holds for you nothing worth desiring, nothing worth achieving. You are the envy of the worlds and that for all time, since you are privileged to render every

service to your brother, radiant as a god and sweet
 85 spoken to all. Speech cannot measure the merit and
 happiness that lie in store for you through this. You
 but walk the straight path to the highest heavens,
 when you accompany Rama to his hermit home."

Then Dasaratha and his wives, loth to lose sight
 90 of Rama , rushed out from the harem crying, "Shall
 we not look once again upon the fair face of our
 darling Rama?" As when the leader of the herd, the
 bull-elephant, is captured by the cunning hunters, the
 cows trumpet forth their grief most piteously ; even so
 95 did the woman of the city cry and wail over the dire
 misfortune that befell them. Dasaratha heard it. The
 father of Rama, the monarch of countless millions, the
 proud scion of the race of Ikshwahu, rich in everything
 that the world could give, he saw himself sinking under
 100 the heavy curse that plunged himself and his people in
 the dark gulf of unspeakable woe ; and as when the
 Queen of night, in her full-orbed radiance, is dragged
 imperceptibly into the dark and hideous maw of Rahu,
 the serpent of the eclipse, even so, all brightness, all
 105 splendour, all lustre fled from his face. Ramachandra,
 of unfathomable fortitude, perceived his father running
 after him and cried "Faster. Sumantra!" What could
 poor Sumantra do ? Lend an ear to Rama who cried
 "Faster, yet faster"? Or comply with the prayers and
 110 the entreaties of the townsmen who cried in despair
 "Stop, Stop"? He stood confused, utterly unable to obey
 them both.

The dust clouds raised by the flying chariot wheels
 were laid by the tears that streamed from the eyes of
 115 the weeping multitudes. On every side rose groans,
 cries, wails, laments, sobs. Now you came upon groups
 of men and women who stood gazing straight before

them, lost to everything else ; now you passed others who writhed in the grip of a speechless woe that was yet merciful enough to allow a passage for tears. As in 120 a lotus pool the busy fish dart here and there and the pearly drops of the morning dew rain from the petals of the flowers shaken by them, even so the women of the city wept their eyes out, unable to bear the pangs of separation from Rama. As with one heart, with one brain, 125 with one body, the millions of Ayodhya bore their cross. Dasaratha, the professed guardian of their happiness here and hereafter, felt himself a despicable traitor to his duty by them and fellhead long in a dead faint. The populace cried out in horror and pity at the sight ; and they that 130 followed Rama cried out in great fear. Some exclaimed "Ha ! Rama." and others "Ha ! Queen Kausalya." Not a single voice was silent, not a single eye was dry among those that came from the harem. Rama's ears were pierced with the screams and the pitiable cries, 135 and he turned, only to see Dasaratha and Kausalya run after his chariot, staggering with unsteady gait like mad. He saw them following him, out of the corner of his eyes, even as the foal, bound tight beyond the possibility of escape, gazes pitifully at its dam. Accustomed 140 all their lives to be conveyed in gorgeous chariots, they ran afoot ; surrounded with every luxury and comfort, strangers to misery and privation, they shook with grief ; and Rama, an impotent spectator, could but order Sumantra to drive the fleet horses yet faster. Of un- 145 shaken fortitude, yet he found it hard to bear, even as a lordly elephant pierced deep with the cruel goad. Kausalya neared the chariot, even as a cow rushes at the place where her calf lies helplessly bound. Again and again he saw Kausalya tottering after the chariot with 150 streaming eyes, crying out "Ha, Rama! Ha, Lakshmana!

Ha, Seeta!" "Stop, stop the chariot" ordered Dasaratha; "Drive, drive faster" ordered Rama. Like a man caught between the wheels of a chariot, Sumantra struggled with his overwhelming grief. Rama saw it and cried "Sumantra, listen to me. Drive on quicker. When you meet his Majesty again and he blames your disobedience for not listening to his orders to stop the chariot, tell him that his commands did not reach your ears. 'It is not true', you say; but I assure you I cannot keep my patience any longer. My promise made to my father will have to go for nought."

Sumantra bent his head in obedience to Rama, made him take leave of the people that followed him and urged the noble coursers to yet greater speed. Then, the citizens and the people of the harem realized the hopelessness of their pursuit, went round Rama and turned away from him. But, it was their bodies that went back; their hearts followed Rama and their tears poured forth never-ceasingly. Then, the councillors of the king, conversant with all usages, customs and traditions, respectfully submitted to Dasaratha that, the wise have laid down it is not good to accompany far on his way one, whose safe return we have at heart. Dasaratha reluctantly yielded to their advice and, with his wives and attendants, stood there for a long time, with wearied limbs and broken heart, gazing pitifully at Rama, who was fast disappearing in the distance. [Thirty centuries have passed since He began this memorable journey. Every step of it is known and is annually traversed by thousands; hero-worship is not extinct. What can Faith do! How strong are the ties of religion when entwined with the legends of a country!. How many a cart creeps creaking and weary along the road from Ayodhya to Chitrakuta! It is this that gives the

Ramayana a strange interest; the story still lives.'
Calcutta Review Vol. XXIII.]

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CITIZENS' LAMENT.

AS Rama, the Lord of the universe, took respectful leave of his parents and left fair Ayodhya behind him, the womenfolk lifted their voices in pitiable wail and lament. "Alas ! Raghunatha abandons us—he, who watched over us and ministered to our slightest wish till now, to us, the forlorn and the friendless ! What shall we do ! Whom shall we take refuge in ! Who shall extend the shadow of his protection over us ! His heart knows not anger, even when others cursed him all unjustly. He put away from him every thing that could provoke anger ; nay, he calmed the most infuriate by his gentle smile and gentler words. Where goes he, the great One, whose heart knows no change in joy and sorrow ? Where goes he, the great One, who makes no difference between us and Kausalya, the mother that bore him ? Where goes he, the protector of the worlds, Rama, whom the king drives to the forests, unable to resist the pressure of Kaikeyi ? How foolish and senseless is our king, who exiles to the woods Rama, the darling of all creatures, the true and the righteous." Thus did they lament, unable to contain their grief, like a cow torn from the side of its only calf. The sounds of woe fell on the ears of Dasaratha already staggering under the cruel blows of separation from his darling boy, and prostrated him quite.

That day, the holy Fires in Ayodhya were tended not. Rama was the soul of all beings ; and all beings

30 animate and inanimate, suffered exquisite agony to see him in the grief of misfortune. The God of Fire withdrew his bright presence from his worshippers, who lay bereft of their senses. The householders cared not to go through their daily round of duties, the Aupasana
 35 and the Panchayagna. The citizens cared not to turn their hands and hearts to their daily avocations and wandered about as if possessed. The sun hid himself from sight, shorn of his glory. Elephants refused their feed. Cows would yield no milk to their calves. The
 40 fond mother, barren through long years, felt not the slightest joy at being blessed with a son on that woeful day. The moon trembled under the maleficent aspects of Mars, Jupiter, Mercury and Trisanku, the ancestor of the Raghus [Fours stars of the sixteenth lunar asterism.] The stars moved-rayless. The planets glowed with a dull light. Visakha, the ruling star of the Ikshwaku line was faintly visible in the sky as if through dense smoke. Huge clouds spread through the sky, driven on by fierce gales, like a storm tossed sea. The
 45 50 city quaked and trembled when Rama strode away from it, as if the shock was too much to bear. The quarters were hung with the pall of darkness, as if they hid their faces and sobbed in the abandonment of their grief. The sacred planets, Aswini and the other asterisms, the
 55 great constellation of the Sapta Rishis and the polestar Dhruva vanished from view. The citizens of Ayodhya, every one of them, were suddenly caught in the grip of an indescribable grief and despair. Not a soul, man or beast, had a thought of food or other concerns of
 60 life. Man and woman, young and old, were tossed on the roaring billows of endless woe and ever sighed hot and deep at being parted from Rama. The crowds that thronged the royal roads watered them with their tears.

Each face was sick and sad and was an utter stranger to peace or joy. A huge cloud of hopeless grief, dark and heavy, enwrapped the town in its deadly folds. The gentle breeze no more blew cool ; the moon failed to bring joy to the hearts of the beholders ; the resplendent sun gave forth no light ; the whole world, animate and inanimate, was deluged with woe.

70

Every son in Ayodhya avoided the sight of his mother ; "for" said he "Kausalya was bound to prevent Rama at any cost from proceeding to the forest. She failed to do so ; it is a sure lesson to us that we should put no faith even in the mother that bore us." Every 75 mother in Ayodhya steeled her heart against her son ; "for" said she "Rama heeded not the tears and the prayers of his mother Kausalya, but obstinately carried out his purpose of betaking himself to the forest. What son would lend an ear to the words of his mother here- 80 after, when Rama, the ideal man, has chosen to set the rule ?" The husband no longer turned towards his fond wife ; "for" said he, "we do well to place not any faith in woman; we simply invite our fate thereby. Dasaratha, our king, centred all his thoughts, hopes and affection on 85 Kaikeyi ; her lightest word was a law unto him ; yet she tortured him like a fiend and brought him to his death ". The faithful wife plucked out from her heart her love and reverence for her lord and husband ; "for" said she, "it is only sorry treatment we will get at the hands of those 90 who swore before the sacred fire to love and cherish us ; nothing retrains them, sin or virtue, heaven or hell. Who could sound the depths of Dasaratha's cruel and malignant heart who dared to humble himself before the imperious and wicked Kaikeyi's will and spurned 95 aside Kausalya, his first love, his queen consort and the mother that bore in her womb Rama, the lord of the

universe, whom he condemned to dreary exile in the forests ?" Brothers kept apart from one another and
 100 their hearts grew black with hate at the thought of Bharata, whose hand snatched, all rudely, the crown from the brows of his elder brother Rama and immured him in the dark depths of the wild forests. No one had any faith or trust in kith or kin and said to themselves
 105 "Our friends, our kin, our home are centred in Rama. What have we to do with any one else in the world ?"

Rama requested permission to depart to the woods ; and the emperor gave it : Kausalya gave her reluctant consent after all and sent her blessings along with her
 110 son. But, his friends were of a different stamp. He had no secrets from them ; *they* had his confidence more than the parents that bore him. His friends would not allow the winds of heaven to visit Rama's face too roughly and considered themselves supremely honoured
 115 if they could lay down their lives in his cause. There was none who fainted away when the fatal wards "Rama is exiled to the woods " fell on his ears and came back to life and its sorrow-laden joys. Grief crushed them down, even as a huge mountain ; and how could they
 120 throw it off ? So, they lay there in utter torpor. Else, would they not have prevented Rama, perforce if other means failed, from quitting the fair city of Ayodhya ?

As the earth quivers in affright, when Indra, the lord of the three worlds, extends over her his watchful care no more, so did Ayodhya tremble all over, out of fear and grief, when her lord and protector, Rama, turned his back upon her and through the mouths of her elephants, horses and troops cried aloud in the bitterness of her heart.

CHAPTER XLII.

DASARATHA'S LAMENT.

THE wretched monarch gazed after his banished son as long as the dust raised by the chariot wheels was seen afar. Curiously enough, the insensate 5 dust-cloud grew and grew, as if it said to itself in deep pity, "Let me do what I can to enable the poor king to gaze after the darling of his heart, yet awhile." And when it vanished from view, Dasaratha heaved a deep sigh, as if his soul was rushing after Rama and fell, like 10 a log, where he stood. Kausalya sprang forward and raised him by his right arm; Kaikeyi, whose hopes and fears were bound up in Bharata, stood at his left, but never put herself out to support the poor husband whom she had lured to his doom. In his relations with every 15 one, high or low, Dasaratha was, by nature, the soul of politeness and respect; his heart was ever set upon dharma and he followed in the footsteps of the righteous and the just. Yet his unbounded hate towards Kaikeyi maddened him quite and he cursed her loud 20 and deep. "Avant, foul fiend! Touch me not. Take your hateful presence away from my sight. You are nothing to me, no wife, no kin. I have no art nor part with those that depend upon you. I am no longer their master, nor they my servants. Here do I renounce, 25 once for all, every comfort and benefit I might derive through you, though, I may have, in a most unfortunate hour of my life, taken you to wife before the God of Fire. If Bharata should ever sit in my place and his heart rejoice thereat, my deepest curse shall dog him 30 ever and the funeral obsequies he performs for me shall not reach me."

Then Kausalya supported her lord and husband (was he not the father of her darling Rama ?), all covered
 35 with dust and dirt and slowly they dragged their weary feet to the forsaken palace. As one who foully slays a holy Brahmana for his money, as one who clasps to his breast a blazing fire, so did the righteous Dasaratha writhe in supreme agony, at the thought of Rama, the life
 40 and light of his sear, withered old age, now wending his way to the forest, clad in the garb of homeless hermits. Every now and then he stopped and turned his lack-lustre eyes on the traces of the envious chariot that bore his son away from his sight; and like the Lord
 45 of night looked he, in the fell grip of Rahu. He recollect ed that his son would, by then, have gone out of the city, and raised a cry: "Here do I see the traces of the car that bears my child away to the lonely wilds; but the great-souled One I see not. His fair body spread
 50 with richly-prepared sandal-paste, his proud limbs reclined on flower-soft cushions, he used to sink into the arms of welcome sleep, while sweet visions of beauty fanned him gently. And he, my darling, would fling his wearied limbs to-night heaven knows were, under
 55 a tree or a shrub, with a log of wood or a rough slab for a pillow! As a lordly elephant after his slumbers on the mountain side, my Rama would heave piteous sighs and arise from his dusty couch, all unmeet for him. The dwellers of the forest will behold
 60 the sad spectacle of the Lord of the earth, now wandering about the forest, homeless and destitute. Janaki, the beloved daughter of Janaka, would undergo nameless torture as she walks along the thorny forest path. Born to lead a life of perfect happiness and comfort, she is utterly
 65 unmeet to be named in the same breath with privation or misery. Never have her eyes been accustomed

to the rough forest sights and she would naturally tremble in affright at the howls and roars of the denizens thereof, that are enough to raise one's hairs off his head. Kaikeyi ! Unparalleled sinner ! I cannot live on even 70 for a moment torn from my Rama's side. Slay me outright and reign long and happily over this realm, in widowed pomp, your hopes realized and your wishes gratified." So wailed the forlorn king. And as men who turn their sad steps homeward after they have 75 consigned to the cruel flames one near and dear to them, Dasaratha and those with him entered the gloomy and ill-omened Ayodhoya.

From time immemorial, the citizens, old and young, used to throng the streets and the squares to catch a glimpse 80 of their Emperor as he passed along. But now it was a veritable City of the Dead. Stores and stalls, halls and fanes were all closed. All had gone after Rama, every one who could drag his limbs along. There lay along the high roads only such as had fainted away from grief 85 or felt themselves at the portals of death through being deprived of the sight of Rama. But for these, the city was utterly abandoned. Dasaratha, himself pierced to the heart with hopeless grief, was doomed to gaze on men and women, birds and beasts, sink under a crushing 90 sorrow, their hearts away with Rama as he was rapidly nearing the dark forest ; and so he passed through the portals of his palace, like the wintry sun engulfed in a bank of dark clouds. As some wide pool and deep, teeming with fierce serpents and shunned with terror by 95 all, is invaded by Garuda, the mighty bird, who frees it of its deadly denizens and renders it a safe resort to one and all ; even so, Ayodhya, the impregnable, which the foes never dreamt of approaching (was there not Rama to guard it ?), was now free of access to any and every 100

one, now that Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta had turned their backs upon it.

Then Dasaratha,in faint and indistinct words,moaned;

"Take me hence, as quickly as you can, to the palace of

105 Kausalya, the fortunate mother that bore Rama in her womb. Grief and remorse would tear at my heart in any other place." His attendants respectfully guided him to the apartments of Kausalya and stood guard over them. The king flung himself on the flower-soft

110 cushions, but could find no relief to his tortured limbs.

A rayless gloom hung over the palace like a moonless sky, now that Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta were not there to brighten it with their presence. Dasaratha gazed about him; mighty of heart though he was, he

115 flung his arms above his head and cried, "Ha, Rama! you had the heart to leave me here a prey to grief and misery. Thrice happy are they to whom it is given to clasp you in fond embrace when you come back from your grievous exile." Meanwhile, dark night came on

120 apace, terrible even as the Night of Dissolution.

The billows of grief rose mountain-high and engulfed the poor old king, who turned a despairing eye to Kausalya that was nigh and said, "My dear! The light has departed from my eyes and I see not where you

125 stand. Pray touch me well with your hands. My eyes have gone after Rama and have not yet returned. They have been wont to gaze in rapturous bliss, never satisfied, upon my darling child begot after sixty-thousand years of fasts and vows; his beauty has ensnared them.

130 They have gone after him, never to return. Though denied the privilege of beholding him now, it was yet possible for them to look upon you, his fortunate mother. But alas! they have deprived me even of this joy. I should, of a truth, look upon the fair face of

Rama to wash myself of the dark sin of having looked 135 at Kaikeyi. But, since it is now denied to me beyond hope, I trusted to see your face at least. Ah ! miserable wretch that I am ! even that cup of hope is dashed from my lips. The presence of our senses is attested by their contacting objects of perception. Surely, I have lost 140 the power of sight, now that I cannot see you. And I wish to make sure whether my sense of touch is not lost to me likewise. Kindly feel me with your hands and I will judge whether I possess that faculty or no. Further, my parched frame would find, I am sure, instant 145 relief if soothed by your hands that fondled and nourished Rama, whose absence is the cause of all my woe. Rama I may not see ; but equal joy will be mine if I see you, if I touch you if I talk to you, whom Rama calls his mother. Let no dark suspicion cloud your 150 heart and whisper 'He held secret counsel with Kaikeyi once before and it ended in exiling my son Rama to the dreary woods. To-day he pretends, all on a sudden, to love me as he never did before ; I fear some greater evil is on its way to me'. Pray extend your forgiveness to 155 me as one deluded by folly and cupidity, and touch me with your hands."

Kausalya then approached the stricken king, took her seat by him and wailed grievously, her burning sights punctuating, as it were, her piteous accents. 160

CHAPTER XLIII.

KAUSALYA'S LAMENT.

" **A**S the black cobra, just rid of its slough, relieves itself of its cruel venom by planting its fangs in the doomed body of some one and seeks whom 5

it may next attack, even so, Kaikeyi, the cruel serpent in human form, bit Rama with her venomous fangs of deceit, drove him to the woods and roams abroad, seeking whom next she might ruin. A serpent gets into a house and
 10 strikes terror into the hearts of those within and without; even so, Kaikeyi has done with Rama and would even practise her fiendish cruelties upon me.

"Noble king! If it is the desire of your heart that Bharata should sit on the throne of the Ikshwakus and
 15 not Rama, please yourself by all means. But, how does it necessitate your exiling Rama to the forests? Are you afraid that he may plot some evil against Bharata? Rama shall be the slave, the humble bondsman of the young king. Would it be a heavy burden to Bharata
 20 to feed him? Well, I will spare him even that trouble. My Rama shall live upon the generosity of the charitable souls of Ayodhya. Anyhow I want him to be with me. The Agnihotrins offer, on the new and the full moon days, cakes of rice to the Gods and the Fathers,
 25 but set apart the husks, saying, 'I give this to the Rakshasas; to them it belongs and not to me'; even so you have, all deceitfully, driven away Rama from the kingdom that is his by every right and have cast him aside as the portion of the Rakshasas. My hero of a boy is,
 30 even now, taking his way, with Lakshmana and Seeta at his back, to the gloomy forests, with the lordly gait of a noble elephant.

"My lord! How had you the heart to doom to a horrible forest life the children who were utter strangers to misery and want, pain and trouble and *that* at the bidding of the black-hearted Kaikeyi? Did you bestow a thought on their inevitable fate or on the countless dangers and difficulties that would beset their path? Rama and Seeta are in the flower of their youth. It

behooves them to pass the spring time of their life all 40 joyfully, with wealth, luxury, pomp, splendour, dresses, ornaments, seats, conveyances, attendants and what else the heart may desire. Now, behold the work of your hands. You have hunted them out of your kingdom into the frightful forests where man is not. Deprived of 45 every accustomed article of luxury, they feed, perforce, upon roots and fruits, like the wild animals or the wilder men that roam the woods. Clad in the rough skins of beasts, all uncouth, with their fair hair wound in matted coils about their head, they fling their weary 50 limbs on the rough ground at the foot of some merciful tree or rock, their hearts ever trembling at what may befall them at the hands of the cruel beasts or the crueler Rakshasas. High merit and holy did you lay up thereby !! Would that this day beheld the ceasing 55 of my sorrow and the return of Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta ! Ah ! Would I ever behold Rama and Lakshmana pass back through the portals of this world-renowned Ayodhya, as a strong man refreshed after his dreamless slumbers ? Would I ever behold the citizens, raising 60 aloft, with happy shouts, flags and banners, arches and columns and celebrate the joyful occasion with loud acclamations and deep, even as the Lord of the waters when the moon calls out to him ? When would my boy, the prince of heroes, enter this city on his lordly chariot, 65 with Seeta before him, like a shapely cow before her bull ? When would I see his million subjects stand along the high road and scatter fried grain and flowers along his path ? Would I ever see Rama and Lakshmana come back into Ayodhya, graced with beautiful ear- 70 rings and shining from afar like lofty peaks, with their weapons before them in the chariot ? When would I see the Brahmana maidens go round the city in

auspicious circuit, giving flowers and fruits to all they
 75 meet? When would my darling Rama, old in wisdom,
 but of sweet twenty-five, like unto the gods, come back
 to me and chase away grief and sorrow from my heart,
 even as the merciful heavens that pour down their wel-
 come showers thrice a month? Is it that I was guilty in
 80 my past births of the terrible sin of cruelly cutting off
 the udders of cows when their calves were eagerly
 springing forth to draw their sustenance? Else, how
 could I reconcile this awful visitation with the fact
 that I am the fortunate mother of such a hero? I
 85 suffer indescribable tortures, deprived of my only son by
 the cruel hands of Kaikeyi, even as a cow whose only
 calf is slain before her eyes by the cruel beast of
 prey. How can I bear to live away from my Rama,
 master of all arts and sciences, and endowed with every
 90 envied excellence of heart and head? Fate wills not
 that I live on earth, too ill-starred to behold my princely
 hero. The grief of separation from my heart's joy con-
 sumes me, even as the summer sun burns up the hapless
 earth with his thousand rays."

CHAPTER XLIV.

SUMITRA CONSOLES KAUSALYA.

AND to her, the mother of Rama, who thus bewailed
 5 her lot, spake Sumitra ever centred in the ob-
 servance of the highest dharma. "Noble lady! I
 wonder how you can bring yourself to weep thus, seeing
 that you have been so blessed by the gods as to be the
 mother of Rama, the Ideal Man, on whom every excel-
 lence of body, mind and heart, wait with humble devo-
 10 tion. It is all unmeet that you give way to your grief

thus violently. Is it not supremely absurd to think that danger or difficulty would ever cross the path of that Supreme One at any time or at any place ? Of inconceivable might is your son ; yet, he has chosen to put away from him the crown that is his by every right, to go to 15 the woods, a voluntary exile. Know you why ? Is it not that he might fulfil the dharma of obeying the behests of his sire, famed for his righteousness and truth ? Is it not the highest dharma ever practised by the good and the great ? Is it not a sure guide to boundless bliss 20 in the worlds on high ? Then why grieve over him ? My son, the soul of purity and utter compassion to all beings, my son Lakshmana practises, with an unfaltering resolve, the noble dharma of rendering joyful service to Rama and of evincing filial devotion to him. Incon- 25 ceivably great is the good that will accrue to him by it. And Janaki, born to lead a life of happiness, comfort and luxury, has chosen to follow your righteous son to the woods, knowing full well, by herself and from Rama, the dangers and hardships of a forest life. Your son will 30 raise aloft the banner of Fame in the eyes of the present and future. Righteousness, truth and constancy form his wealth. And to such a one what happiness is too high, what position too lofty ?

“ Rama’s greatness, nobility, might and utter pu- 35 rity of thought, word and deed are known best to the Lord of the sun ; and he dare not so much as touch Rama with his rays too roughly. Out of the merit laid up by me in my past births, I see, with the open eye of wisdom, that he who is known as Sree Rama, 40 your son among men, is no other than the Supreme Soul. I rendered humble service to Him in my past births and was rewarded with unclouded vision. ‘ The sun rises with fear of Him in his heart ’ say the Holy

45 Books ; and he is ever on the look out to render Him every humble service possible. Is it not supremely absurd to think that the Lord of the day, who goes about his work with fear and trembling in his heart, would cause the slightest pain or discomfort to his Lord
 50 and Master. Knows he not and the other Shining Ones with him, the glory and greatness of Rama, whom the vedas laud as ' Beyond all sin, Beyond all imperfection, Lord of all, the Inner Ruler of all, the Supreme Person ? ' The lord Vayu would ever seek to fan him gently,
 55 laden with the delicious and manifold scents and perfumes of the virgin forests ; for, says not the Sruti ' Vayu blows with fear of the Lord in his heart ? ' The Moon will seek to gladden your boy with her cool rays while he takes his rest under the forest trees, as fondly and
 60 lovingly as the fondest father. Brahma has, out of a - gratified heart, instructed Rama in many a divine weapon, when he went out to the forests of Dandaka, to besiege Vaijayanta, the capital of Asura Sambara and slew him in battle dire. That hero, protected by the
 65 might of his arm will, I am sure, range the woods as fearlessly happy as if he was in his palace at Ayodhya.

" You need not fear that Bharata will impregnably strengthen himself in power before the return of Rama, who will again lose, in consequence, his kingdom ;
 70 for, whoever heard of any one stand up to Rama in battle and live to tell it ? And such a one, you say, will find it a hard task to get back his kingdom. It is but the work of a moment for him to come into his own, at the expiry of his term of exile ; for, his all-compelling
 75 supernal beauty, his heroic valour before which his enemies bite the dust and his inconceivable might would, of themselves, do it for him. Rama is the supreme soul of all. As such, the sun, the giver of light and

life to the world, derives *his* life and light from him. He could consume to nothing the all-consuming God of fire. 80
He is the sovereign lord of Brahma, whose sway extends over the myriad worlds. Lakshmi, the giver of peace and prosperity to all, derives *her* power and might from him. Mother Earth, the support of all, yet rests upon him. Fame, whom all seek, yet seeks *him* in humble 85 reverence. The high gods who receive the worship and adoration of all, yet offer worship and addoration to *him*. He is the First and Best of all beings. To Rama, thus enowered with every conceivable virtue and excellence, I see not any danger or discomfort, in Ayodhya 90 or in the gloomy forests. That ideal man will, at no distant time, be crowned at Ayodhya, with his queens—Bhudevi (the earth), Seeta, and Vijayalakshmi (Victory). Seeta, who is but Lakshmi in mortal guise, has gone with Rama; and think you that the Goddess of 95 victory and power would seek any other? When the god-like prince, whose glory blinds his enemies on the battle-field, went away from this town, clad in the lowly garb of hermits, the citizens, one and all, wept their eyes blind and fainted away. But what lacks he, 100 with Seeta by his side, the bright Deity of power and prosperity? What lacks he when there goes before him Lakshmana in warlike guise, my heroic boy, the prince of warriors?

“Of a truth, you will live to see him return from his 105 exile. Grieve not for him. Cloud not your soul in dark ignorance where he is concerned. I speak but the veriest truth. You will live to see, at no distant date, your son dawning upon you, like the resplendent moon in the cloudless sky, and lay his head again at your feet in 110 reverence. You will live to see the tears of joy stream down your cheeks when he is crowned in all pomp

and glory, enhanced thousandfold by his victorious sojourn in the forests. Saw you any trace, nay, the
 115 slightest, of grief or sorrow or depression in him when he went away from us ? No. So, Rama, with Lakshmana and Seeta by his side, will come back to you safe and happy. Weep not ; let grief find no place in your heart. We all look to *you* for comfort and consolation ; and
 120 if you abandon yourself thus to uncontrolled grief, what would become of us ? It is an inexplicable wonder to me that you should ever give way to sorrow when Rama calls you his mother. The boundless universe holds not another higher and nobler than Rama,
 125 whose feet ever walk in the path of the great and the good. I assure you, time and oft, that your sorrow-laden eyes will stream with tears of joy, even as the dark clouds pour down the welcome showers in winter, when Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana come back from their self-
 130 imposed exile and lay their heads at your feet. I will live to see the happy day when your glorious son, to whom all the world looks to fulfil the dearest wishes of their hearts, comes back from the woods and with his strong and flower-soft hands clasp your feet in loving
 135 reverence. You will deluge his fair head with tears of joy, like the surcharged clouds on mountain peaks, when he and his friends humble themselves at your feet."

Sumitra was an adept in bringing comfort and solace to the hearts of others with apt and well-chosen
 140 words. Free from all taint or imperfection, she sought to chase away the dark grief that clouded the heart of Kausalya. Yet, she was a queen of Dasaratha even as Kausalya. She had sent forth her son Lakshmana to the forests, all unsolicited, even as Kausalya. Like her, she
 145 basked not in the favour and countenance of Dasaratha, their lord and husband. But, there the comparison

ends. Kausalya wept and wailed and did her very best to prevent Rama when he begged leave of her to go to the forest; while Sumitra grieved not when her son Lakshmana sought her presence to crave permission to accompany Rama; on the other hand, she gave him many a good counsel, consistent with duty and virtue, laid her commands on him to walk with all his might on the difficult and narrow path of Service to the Lord, that led to the goal of supreme Good and sent him forth with a glad heart. Kausalya was ever in mortal dread of the cruelty and hatred of Kaikeyi; Sumitra was an utter stranger to such apprehensions. Kausalya ate her heart out at being excluded from the love of Dasaratha whom Kaikeyi's fresh charms held in thrall; such thoughts never found their way into the heart of Sumitra, whose perfect wisdom viewed alike joy and sorrow, friend and foe, praise and blame. Kausalya was the thrice-blessed mother of Rama, the Supreme Self, and yet was denied any insight into his real nature and greatness; Sumitra, with unclouded vision, knew Rama for what he was and rendered humble and joyful service to him. Hence Sumitra's words gradually sank into the heart of Kausalya and chased away the grief that consumed her body and darkened her soul, even as the pale clouds in autumn which the light gale dissolves to nothing.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CITIZENS FOLLOW RAMA.

THE people of the harem, the ministers and Dasaratha himself returned to Ayodhya; but the citizens followed the chariot of Rama as it sped its way

towards the forests, out of their over-mastering love for him. They knew no danger, no difficulty where went Rama, the flower of valour. They knew no bounds to their joy when they beheld his glorious form—their
 10 prince of unparalleled fame and excellence, even as the world cannot contain its joy and delight at beholding the Queen of night in her full-orbed radiance. Time and oft they cried in entreaty “Rama! turn back”; but his face was ever set towards the dark woods that his
 15 father's word might be kept. Supreme duty called out to him and he was all powerless to return to Ayodhya as they would have him do. Their utterly unselfish love towards him evoked boundless compassion in his heart and affection; they were his children, as it were, and he
 20 turned again and again to fondly gaze at them. He would give them the very best advice under the circumstances and said, “I pray you to extend to Bharata the same kindness and respect that you have for me. Rest assured that nothing would give me greater pleasure.
 25 Say not ‘Bharata, the son of Kaikeyi! Sole heir to her unparalleled wickedness! Is that your reply to our prayers and entreaties, that you deliver us over, helplessly bound, into his cruel hands?’ For, Bharata is a model of virtue; utterly pure and flawless is his life; he
 30 will, of a truth, secure to you every means to unbounded happiness here and hereafter. Young in years, he is grey in wisdom; soft-spoken and gentle, yet he is a hero of irresistible valour. He will stand between you and danger or sorrow or grief. Every royal
 35 excellence vies with one another to adorn him. That is why the king has chosen him to be his heir-apparent. Lakshmana, Satrughna and myself regard our sire's lightest word as law. I look to you to so conduct yourselves that he grieves not for me while I am away in

the forests. That is the shortest and the surest way 40
to my heart."

As Rama went on expressing his firm resolve to carry out his father's commands at any risk, the desire grew and grew in the hearts of the citizens that none should rule over them but he; and again and again they 45 prayed "Rama! Know we not that Dasaratha deputed you and you alone, his eldest son, to rule over this kingdom and protect us? Is it not your plain duty to abide by that arrangement? That is your father's promise to the world and you keep it right well in acceding to our 50 prayer." As the hunter ensnares the beasts of the forest and drags them after him wherever he goes, Rama and Lakshmana enmeshed the citizens of Ayodhya with their noble excellences and compelled them to follow wherever they went, weeping piteously. 55

They were of three classes. Elders in years, elders in wisdom and elders in spiritual might. The first were unable to keep up with the fleet coursers and lagged behind, their hoary heads shaking with age and infirmity. "Noble steeds that bear away from us, cruelly 60 fast, our young prince, the light of our eyes! Turn back. Speed not toward the forest. We speak but in the interests of your master and ours." They stayed not, whereat the elders cried out, "Verily, the sense of hearing is common to all creatures; and your ears are larger 65 and more capacious. Our prayers cannot have failed to reach them and it behoves you not to proceed thereafter. Your lord is the soul of purity, the beau-ideal of valour and faithful to his word. If you seek to walk in the path of right and duty, you should turn back and 70 bear him to Ayodhya, not to the forest." The piteous accents of grief stirred the heart of Rama to its very depths. "It is atrocious for us to remain in the chariot

even after our ears have been pained with such words" 75 said he and got down in all haste and with him, Lakshmana and Seeta. It was against the dictates of his generous heart to go further without offering solace and comfort to the Brahmanas; so, he walked on slowly till they came up. A little while ago he took leave, 80 with folded palms, of the people of the harem, the ministers and his father, and persuaded them to stop; but, he did not come down from the chariot. It was quite another affair to stop the Brahmanas from following him. Boundless devotion to him filled his heart, 85 for, they knew, clearer than others, his divine nature and mission. He could not bear to look upon their grief and tears; it would be the greatest insult to stop them, seated as he was in the chariot; so, his natural affection for them and compassion induced him 90 to get down. But for all that, his face was turned away from Ayodhya, and he walked on towards the forest.

At once the Brahmanas concluded that Rama had turned a merciful ear to their prayers and was returning to Ayodhya and their joy knew no bounds. But, 95 when they saw that he descended from his chariot only to walk towards the forest, their hearts quaked with fear. "Our grief and tears are powerless to stop him. Let us hamper him with our resolve to go with him to the wilds, and of a surety, he cannot proceed further." 100 So they cried out "The holy mantras, the sacred rites, perfect wisdom, Yoga and all other observances characteristic of the Brahmanas, do follow you in the guise of this weeping crowd, you who, though a kshatriya, still deserves the reverence and worship of the 105 highest Brahmanas. The sacred Fires, to whom we make reverential offerings, lie enshrined in these fire-sticks and follow you on our shoulders. Behold the countless

umbrellas, white as driven-snow, that we have won by our Vajapeya rites ! They troop after you like the pale autumn clouds. The burning sun scorches your delicate limbs and our umbrellas will give you a cool and refreshing shade. Our intellects had, till now, been engaged in the study of the vedic mantras and in the unravelling of their heart-doctrine ; but nothing else occupies them at present but your grievous exile to the forest. The Vedas, the Sastras, meditation or study attract them not. May be you think we should not neglect the study of the Vedas that constitute our noblest wealth, nor abandon our wives and children that look to us for everything. The Vedas are ever enshrined in our heart of hearts and would lose nothing by being laid aside for a time. Our wives are best guarded by the utter purity of their hearts and faithful devotion to us. It would do you no good to exile yourself to the forest. You will do better to return with us. Is it not your dearest wish to obey the behests of your royal sire ? But how can we proceed about our duties if you are not with us ? It is all unjust of you to seek to practise *your dharma* when you deliberately set about to ruin ours. We are Brahmanas ; we are old in years, wisdom and spiritual fervour ; yet, we cannot tear ourselves away from your side.

" What ! you turn a deaf ear to our prayers and proceed all obstinately ! You pride yourself on your steadfast adherence to the practice of dharma. Behold ! we lay our hoary heads, white as swan-down in the dust and throw ourselves at your feet to pray you to return to Ayodhya. Many among us have begun yagas and yagnas relying upon your presence and help ; how could they perform them if you go away from us ? On you will fall the sin of having destroyed them.

“Never mind our prayers. Beasts and other inanimate objects too entreat you to come back. Can you not find it in your heart to grant their prayers, seeing
 145 that they love and reverence you so immensely. Behold these trees! ‘The citizens of Ayodhya’ they said to themselves ‘are supremely blessed in that they could go with Rama. Why should we be denied that honor and privilege?’ and tried to come with us. But, being
 150 firmly rooted to the earth, they were unable to move. The wind that blows through their leaves is their piteous wail—‘Alas! we are powerless to go with our Rama even as the citizens of Ayodhya.’ Rama! Are you not the Inner Ruler of all? Are you not the soul of mercy
 155 and compassion to all beings? When you are under the shadow of pain or affliction, is it a wonder that the whole universe, your body, should feel it too? Glance at the birds on yon tree. The food drops from their listless mouths; they fly not abroad; they do not care
 160 to hop down to the earth; there they sit torpid, as if their great grief had drained them of life and motion, sense and feeling.”

The Brahmanas walked on after Rama, moaning and praying, wailing and entreating, when the river Tamasa
 165 rose in their path as if to say “Rama! Slight not the request of the Brahmanas. Go back to Ayodhya.” Then Sumantra unyoked the tired horses, allowed them to have a roll on the ground and gave them a nice bath and drink in the cool river; he then fed them carefully
 170 and gently walked them for a while along the banks of the Tamasa.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RAMA ABANDONS THE CITIZENS.

THEY were sitting on the lovely banks of the Tamasa when Rama turned to Lakshmana and said, "This is the first night of our exile in the forest. 5 Do not vex yourself with the thought 'How could Seeta, so delicately brought up, walk all the way to the distant forests?' Behold these woods dull and colourless, as if there faces were clouded with a great sorrow. The birds, and beasts, seek their nightly homes and howl 10 and scream, chirp and twitter, as if it were the voice of the woods raised in grievous lament. Of a truth, the citizens of Ayodhya, men and women, would, poor souls ! eat their hearts out of grief at being parted from us. Their love towards our monarch is something in- 15 describable, as they find in him their ideal of every manly virtue and excellence ; none the less have we a share of their love—we the royal princes. Our parents will weep themselves blind to think of us far away from them. My heart grieves at the bare thought of it. 20 But Bharata is the soul of virtue ; and he will soothe the grief of our elders with apt and well-chosen expressions of comfort ; that is what gives me some relief. I know that he is the very opposite of the cruel Kaikeyi ; I have every confidence in his unbounded compassion 25 and sympathy for the weak and the suffering and I see no reason to grieve about our parents, over much seeing that they are in safe hands.

" When Seeta decided to come with me, I grieved to think that there was no one to keep her company. 30 Then you offered to come with us and have relieved me of that anxiety. This is the first day of our exile ;

besides, we stand on holy ground ; so, it is good that we fast to night, taking, if necessary, a little water. We can 35 procure here plenty of sweet fruits and succulent roots; but we can do without them." He turned to Sumantra and said "Look to the horses carefully."

The old charioteer tethered the noble steeds, fed them with sweet grass, and seeing that the sun was 40 passing through the portals of the West, offered his evening prayers to the Goddess of twilight. He next prepared a bed for Rama and Seeta, of soft leaves and grass on the banks of the Tamasa, while Lakshmana rendered joyful assistance. Then Rama and Seeta re-45 posed upon them, while Lakshmana and Sumantra stood guard over them the whole night, the aged minister listening with reverence to the other as he dilated upon his favourite theme, the divine excellences of Kausalya's darling.

50 Rama and with him the citizens of Ayodhya, lay in tired sleep that night on the banks of the Tamasa thickly studded with cattle ranches and cow-pens. Rama awoke in the small hours of the morning and beheld the citizens plunged in profound sleep. "Laksh-55 mana!" said he in low and gentle accents, "behold these, our good friends of Ayodhya, entirely oblivious of their hearths and homes, wives and children, out of their great love for us; it grieves my heart to see them lie on the bare ground and under the trees. They will 60 take us with them back to Ayodhya and would gladly give their lives for it; it is hopeless to shake them off. So, we will ride far and fast ere these awake. I cannot bear to see, once again, these, my subjects, dearer to me than my own self, lie on the earth and under the trees 65 in wild confusion. It is a ruler's bounden duty to stand between his subjects and sorrow; behold the ideal king

in me who would cause them unutterable misery!" To which Lakshmana replied "Your proposal sounds just and reasonable. Pray get into the chariot without delay." Then Rama ordered Sumantra to have the 70 chariot ready that they might quit the place at once. So they crossed the eddying Tamasa, silently got down from the chariot and walked on for a while, until they came upon a track where even the timid creatures of the forest can roam fearlessly. Rama resolved to throw 75 the citizens off the scent and said "Sumantra! just drive the chariot towards the north a little way, that the simple people might take it that I have gone back to Ayodhya; and manage to return so cunningly as to deceive them; it would go against my promise to the 80 king to come with you." It was done; they got into the chariot, faced it to the north for a while to ensure an auspicious journey and then drove very very fast towards the forests.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BEREAVED CITIZENS.

DAY broke as the citizens roused themselves from their heavy sleep and looked about with one accord to where Rama was or ought to have been; 5 but they found him not and stood dazed with grief and disappointment. With streaming eyes they ran hither and thither, but could not catch a glimpse even of the dust raised by his chariot wheels. At last they despaired of following him and cried, "Where did this 10 devilish sleep lie in wait for us? We have been nicely fooled and deprived of the glorious privilege of beholding that great One with long arms and mighty shoulders.

How had our Rama the heart to do it ? He has
 15 elected to cast us off and speed to the frightful forests,
 knowing, as he does, our boundless love and devotion to
 him. What have we to do with life and its hollow joys
 when we have lost him ? Let us starve ourselves to
 death on this accursed spot ; or walk towards the north,
 20 on and on until we fall dead ; or build a huge fire
 with the wood and the leaves here and leap into it, one
 and all, joyfully. For, what reply have we to give to
 those who will anxiously await our arrival ? 'We led to
 25 the place of his exile Rama the soul of water who
 knows not envy but as a sweet word for enemy one' ;
 would this be a meet reply ? If we dared to go back to
 Ayodhya without Rama, the women, the children and
 the aged will die of a broken heart. We left the capital
 in the company of the god-like Rama of restrained self;
 30 and with what face shall we enter it without him ? " And
 they lifted their hands and voices and cried piteously
 like a cow bereft of her calf. They followed his track
 for a while until it was lost on a grass plot ; the sight
 redoubled their grief and they turned back saying
 40 " What will become of us ? The very gods are banded
 against us ." And thus they dragged their steps back
 to sorrowing Ayodhya, with wan faces and heavy hearts.

Their tears flowed afresh at the sight of the desolate
 houses with none to keep them neat and bright. The
 45 forsaken city seemed to their eyes like a mighty river
 from whose deep pools Garuda had carried off the terrible
 serpents ; or like the broad firmament without the bright
 moon to illuminate it ; or like the shoreless ocean dried
 up by a mighty cataclysm. They reached their homes,
 55 filled with every comfort and luxury and stood there,
 gazing at vacancy, as though demented. They could not
 make out their kin or friends or their neighbours.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE WOMEN OF AYODHYA.

THEY that went with Rama and returned without him called upon death, who came to them not and wept as if in the grip of some unspeakable grief or strange disease. Their five pranas (vital currents) were eager to quit their bodies. Every one of them went to his house, stared at his wife and children and cried stupidly "We could not persuade Rama to come back with us; nor could we go with him". They met their dearest friends and knew no delight in their company ; rare objects and wonderful stirred not their curiosity or desire. The thrifty merchant ever intent on making money, even he forgot to attend his place of business. Their wives and children, who came to them in this life as the result of hard-won merit in former ones, pleased them not. There was no one who evinced the slightest joy, tho' he got back a priceless article lost long ago, or though he came upon an inexhaustible treasure. Even the woman that was blessed with a bright boy after years of barrenness, evinced not the slightest joy or gladness thereat.

The women in every house beheld their husbands return without Rama ; they wept aloud in utter grief and struck deep into their hearts with cruel words, as mahouts dig their sharp goads into the heads of refractory elephants. "To such god-forsaken sinners as you are, house and home, wife and child, corn and wealth, comfort and luxury are a mockery, a disgrace. The Lord has deigned to come down in mortal guise to uplift, out of his boundless mercy, all beings from the ocean of endless births and deaths; he has elected

to manifest himself even in the very country, the very town we are in; not for a day or two, but for long
 35 years has he chosen to live with us; yet, there are those who call themselves men, who could not, or would not lift their hearts in worship and devotion to the Lord of all and offer Him sweet service and utter obedience. These incarnations of sin would prefer to pass their
 40 wretched lives in the sweet company of their wives and children. Verily, they are wedded thro' all eternity to the mighty wheel of births and deaths. Who stands in the eyes of the whole world as the ideal servant of the Lord, the typical good man and great?
 45 Behold! it is Lakshmana and no other, who has elected to follow Rama and has been privileged to render him every service at all times and in all places; and Seeta is the most fortunate and the most honor'd of women-kind.

50 "Enough of that. Their good fortune is beyond all praise; but behold the wonderful merit laid up by the inanimate rivers and trees. Verily incalculable should be the merit achieved by the rivers, the lakes and the lotus-pools where Rama deigns to bathe. Interminable forests
 55 adorned with lovely groves, lofty mountains with their loftier peaks, broad rivers and limpid lakes will enhance his beauty as he chances to pass by them. Forest or mountain, it will not miss the golden opportunity of offering Rama every humble respect and reverence, for, he is the most favor'd guest they could ever hope to entertain. The trees would recognize Rama as the Supreme Self; the sweet hum of the bees as they flit about the fragrant flowers, is the holy mantras chanted in his praise; the boughs are their hands
 60 and with them they would offer bright flowers to him in supreme adoration. The huge mountains have but
 65

to catch a glimpse of Rama to overwhelm him with their attentions ; in season or out of it, they would not rest until they had shown him their wonderful cataracts and waterfalls, their starry flowers and delicious fruits 70 and their nectarine waters. The trees would spread at their feet soft beds of delicate flowers and shoots, send sweet zephyrs to invite him to the spot and relieve their noble guests of the fatigues of their journey.

" Fear or danger, want or defeat are things unknown 75 where Rama chooses to dwell. The flower of valour and heroism, you have but to say that he is the son of Dasaratha and you have said all. So, we shall even overtake him before he travels too far from us. To serve at his feet is the surest and the shortest way to 80 supreme bliss. He is our lord ; he is our refuge ; he is our stay and support and we have none else to whom our hearts can turn at any moment of joy or sorrow. Ours be the happy lot to render all humble service to Seeta, the sweet Mother of Mercy, while you monopo- 85 lise the service of the Lord Rama. Rama would fulfil the dearest wishes of your heart and keep away danger and sorrow from you, be he the king of Ayodhya or the exile of Dandaka. And Seeta will look after us with no less care and solicitude. 90

" This city is no place for good and holy men. Our ears will be eternally pained by the wails and lamentations of those whom Rama has left behind. It would not be long before we go mad under the torture. None of us will elect to dwell in this god-forsaken 95 Valley of Tears. This realm is fated to be the hot-bed of unrighteousness, since Kaikeyi has been pleased to take it under her sway. We can barely hope to keep body and soul together in such a place. Why speak of wives and children, corn and cattle, as long as that Kaikeyi 100

is alive—the fiend in human shape that abandoned to a cruel fate husband and son for power and riches ? It would be but placing our heads in the mouth of the lion to live in her domains ; all the gold of the world, above 105 and below, could not tempt us to such an act of folly. Yea, we swear it on the dear heads of our children. Who can ever hope for life and happiness, peace and plenty and look to Kaikeyi for them, the cruel-hearted devil who could drive our Rama to the dark forests, 110 our prince, our hero, our darling ? Who can ever hope to reach the Mansions of the Blessed and soil himself with wealth polluted by her ? This realm, from end to end, will, in no time, turn masterless and totter on the verge of destruction.

115 "The king would not survive Rama's exile to the woods ; and that means ruin and destruction all round. You have exhausted the results of your meritorious acts and have come into the enjoyment of the fruits of your unrighteousness. One can see it with half an eye 120 that you are the most wretched and unfortunate of men. Any one can predict as much when you have let slip through your fingers that priceless treasure Rama. So, repair in all haste to where Rama is ; or drink of the deadliest poison and take yourselves away from the 125 ranks of humanity whom you pollute ; or hide your miserable heads in shame where no one, man or beast, can find you out.

"But you may say 'Rama went to the woods to fulfil his father's word and gladden the heart of Kaikeyi, 130 his mother. We see nothing wrong in that'. See you not that she has basely deceived the old king and has brought about Rama's exile to the forest ? Dasaratha has nobly crowned the sixty-thousand years of his benign rule by leaving us to the tender mercies of Bharata,

even as one consigns a favourite cow to the charge of 135
a butcher. Ah! It is the dwellers of the forests that
are blessed, in that they could gaze their fill on Rama
and his sweet face radiant as the full orb'd moon, on
his dark lustre, like unto the surcharged clouds in
winter, on his mighty shoulders, on his strong arms that 140
descend below his knees, on his eyes sweet and soft as
the petals of the opening lotus and on his lordly gait,
majestic and proud as that of an elephant. He is
ever sweet-spoken; but his words are ever wedded to
truth and justice. He is ever the first to speak to others 145
and put them at their ease. He has ever a smile and
a kind word of welcome for every one. Like the bright
moon, he is ever a source of delight to those that behold
him. Is it given to us to behold his face once again,
the unparalleled hero."

150

Those good women of the town wailed and wept
aloud, unable to contain their grief, even as a man cries
out, heedless to all shame and ridicule, when face to
face with some deadly terror. The sun turned away
his face from the pitiable sight and entered the gates 155
of the West; and black Night enveloped it in her murky
folds. The gloom was relieved nowhere about the town
by the bright Fires, reverently tended by their worship-
pers. No chanting of the holy mantras or melodious
recitations of the Puranas broke the sorrowful silence. 160
Utter darkness, physical, mental and moral, seemed to
have swallowed Ayodhya and everything in it. The mer-
chants cared not to open their shops. Joy and pleasure
abandoned it to go after Rama. The fair city, till
then resting peacefully in the shadow of the mighty 165
arm of Rama, was now masterless and hideous to behold,
even like the dun sky unrelieved by the stars or the
moon. The women loved Rama with a love stronger

and deeper than what they had ever felt for the children
 170 born of their womb. Their hearts were torn with the
 grief they would have felt if their own children or
 brothers had been condemned to a hopeless and miser-
 able exile. Music, dance, festivities, all were dead ; grief,
 sorrow, tears, groans, utter desolation everywhere. Not
 175 a shop was open, not a booth not a stall ; a disgusting
 sight to behold, even as a dried up sea.

CHAPTER XLIX.

BEYOND KOSALA.

RAMA ever bore his father's commands at heart
 5 and put many a league between himself and Ayo-
 dhya ere the day dawned. They halted but to
 offer their morning prayers to the goddess of Twilight
 and reached the southern confines of Kosala passing
 by many a ploughed field, by many a happy village,
 by many a grove bright with flowers. Th inhabitants of
 10 the villages and hamlets on the way stood gazing at the
 strange sight of their beloved princes driving fast to-
 wards the forest and whispered to themselves loud
 enough to be overheard by Rama, "Our king is the
 biggest fool alive. He may search far and near and
 15 not come upon another like him, who in his dotage,
 plays the gallant and soils himself with the most hein-
 ous of sins to win a smile from the fickle lips of the
 siren Kaikeyi. Who ever knew what her cruel heart
 would stop at ? The most abandoned of sinners, ever
 20 intent upon wickedness and crime, harsh and cruel of
 speech, outraging all laws, human and divine, she could
 well drive to the forest her world-honor'd son, the soul
 of righteousness and compassion, our darling Rama of

boundless wisdom and stern self-control. She is a woman *par excellence*!! Seeta, the daughter of Janka, is the favourite of fortune ; made for a life of happiness and comfort, she has everything that life could offer in the shape of power and pomp, wealth and comfort, love and reverence ; how could such a one face pain and misery, privation and want, danger and trouble? How did he dare to banish Rama to the dreary woods ? Did he forget that he prayed and prayed for sixty thousand years to be blessed with such a son ? Did he forget that Rama is the life and soul of his countless subjects ? The fiercest beasts love their young ones more tenderly than he." Rama heard them in pained silence and passed on to the confines of Kosala.

They crossed the Vedasruti, a sacred stream, proceeded south for a long while, crossed again the Gomati that ever runs to the sea and saw its marshy sides covered with countless herds of kine. Another long drive and fast took them to the other side of the Syandika, half-hidden under the clouds of swans and peacocks. Rama turned to Seeta and said. "My dear! This is the boundary of the realm of Kosala. Manu Vaivasvata placed his son, the emperor Ikshwaku, in rule over the countries hereunto and the wealth of corn, kine and metals therein. Sumantra! would I once again roam with my parents through the flowery meads on the banks of the Sarayu and hunt in its forests? But, I pray you conclude not that I am inordinately fond of hunting. If one were addicted to that pastime in season and out of it, he would but ill-discharge his duty to his kingdom and his subjects. So, I hold it just that kings should hunt when the people are invaded by fierce beasts. Behold, it is utterly wicked and vicious to gamble; but it forms an integral

part of the holy sacrifice Rajasooya. Likewise, hunting
 is a pastime of the royal sages. Bow-men ever delight
 60 in hitting fast-moving targets. The chase that
 has helped to amuse the leisure of the royal sages, my
 ancestors, serves me likewise, now and then." Thus
 did he discourse sweetly on many a theme, and many a
 topic and helped his companions to while away the
 65 long hours of their journey.

CHAPTER L.

SRINGAVERAPURA.

RAMA, according to the traditions of his line, ought to have saluted the guardian deity of Ayodhya and taken leave of it when he departed from the city. But, intent on other things, he forgot to do so. So he stopped his chariot on the confines of South Kosala, reverently saluted the guardian deity of Ayodhya and prayed to her to crown with success his 10 attempt to dwell in the forest for fourteen years. "Ayodhya, best of cities! proud capital of the kings of the Ikshwaku line! I salute in all reverence the gods that have their abode in you and those that protect you; pray give me leave to proceed and let me 15 have your blessings to come back here at the end of fourteen years and behold you once again in the company of my parents." He turned aside to see large crowds that had come there to see him and stood with streaming eyes and wan faces. His heart was wrung 20 at the piteous sight and hot tears started from his eyes. He raised his hands aloft and cried, "None knows better than myself your respect and love towards me; but it would only enhance and deepen your

grief to see me under the rod of adversity. Go back, good people all, and seek to forget your sorrow in the 25 busy concerns of your life." They went round him in affectionate reverence and prepared to go back; but they could not take their eyes off him and, all unknowingly, followed him at a distance. They could never have enough of gazing at him and were bewailing their 30 miserable fate, when, like the sun hidden by the darkness of the night, Rama disappeared from view at a turn of the road.

The kingdom of Kosala is rich in wealth and corn. It is the favourite resort of the good and the 35 righteous. Fear is a thing unknown to those that live in it. A lovely sight at all times, it is dotted all over with sacrificial posts, indicating the scenes of former sacred rites. Every village and every hamlet is a miniature Ayodhya, with its groves and 40 gardens and flocks of cattle. Well-watered and rich of soil, disease and anxiety are strangers throughout that vast kingdom. The chants of the Holy Scriptures rise upon the air everywhere. Rama passed with lightning speed through his kingdom, full of happy 45 men, women and children, with everything that made life joyful to them. You cannot find any one on this broad earth that would not deem it the highest blessing that could fall to his share, to be the lord and ruler of Kosala ; yet Rama cast it away from him as if it were a 50 useless wisp of straw ; marvellous indeed and all unthinkable, the fortitude of Ramachandra, who could gladly exchange the horrid forests for such a bright and happy empire.

They travelled further south and reached the banks 55 of the Ganga, that courses through the heavens, the earth and the nether worlds. Its clear and sweet waters

wash away every sin and are ever resorted to by the holy sages. Numberless hermitages cover its banks. Its
 60 deep pools form the favourite resorts of lovely apsarosas, who come there to disport themselves in the cool waters. Devas and Danavas, Gandharvas and Kinnaras, male and female, are to be found at all times in the groves and hills on either side. The flowers that blossom on it are
 65 eagerly sought after in the swarga and the other worlds to worship the mighty gods with. The sound of its waters falling upon slabs of rock reminds one of a lovely woman clapping her hands in joyful laughter; the foam on its surface is her bright smile; the current
 70 running over the uneven ground is her dark braided locks; its slow eddies are the whirls of her navel. It runs through deep places with a grand sound as if of mridanga playing; it flows through sharp rocks with a noise fearful as that of thunder rolling. Bright with
 75 the brightness of the gods that bathe therein, it is hid here beneath a bank of blue lotuses; there, you come upon high ground for a long distance; here, bright patches of sand-gleam in the sun; there, the swans, ruddy geese and water-fowls cry in mad joy; here, the tall trees on its
 80 banks are reflected in the water, as if they cast garlands around her neck; here, full-blown lotuses, utpalas, kumudas and kalhara flowers hide the stream; here, the pollen from the flowers lie thick and red, as if the current is mad and intoxicated; there, it shines pure
 85 and pellucid as crystal, without the slightest suspicion of speck or dirt. In the forests on its banks roam the huge elephants that support the quarters of the earth, with others that bear the high gods in state, while other maddened members of the group trumpet forth
 90 in mad intoxication. Gleaming with fruits, flowers, shoots, thick over-growths of creepers and birds, the

Ganga resembles a high-bred beauty dressed with exquisite care and taste. In its waters lie porpoises, crocodiles and serpents; sprung from the thrice-holy feet of Mahavishnu, falling on the earth from the matted locks of Sankara, the beloved consort of the Lord of the ocean, the celestial river, utterly pure in herself, washes away every stain, every sin from those that bathed in her. And Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta proceeded to Srингaverapura on its banks.

100

Rama turned to Sumantra and said, "Stop the horses. Here we stay for the night at the foot of yon huge ingudi tree near the river, bowed beneath its precious load of berries, fruits, shoots, leaves and flowers. Let us pay our respects to this holy stream, lauded by 105 Devas, Danavas, Gandharvas, men, beasts and birds alike." Sumantra accordingly drove the chariot to that spot and when they had got down from it, unyoked the horses and stood with folded hands near Rama where he sat under the leafy shade.

110

Guha, the ruler of those parts, was a very dear friend of Rama; strong and mighty, he came of the race of the Nishadas. Made aware of Rama's arrival in his country, he hastened to pay him his humble respects and with him his aged ministers and kin. Rama 115 and Lakshmana observed him while afar and joyfully advanced to meet him. Guha's heart sank within him as his eyes fell on the lowly hermit garb of Rama; yet he embraced him warmly and said, "Rama! It is not for me to say that this country is as ~~well~~ MOR to command as Ayodhya. I and mine are your bounden slaves and await your behests." He offered him water to wash his hands and feet, placed before him various delicious fruits, roots and meat and said, "No. 'Mighty One! I hope you had a safe journey here. 11

This forest is your own domains. We are your happy slaves and you are our lord and protector. I pray you accept from us food, conveyances, seats, horses, elephants and other articles of necessity and luxury; 130 and resume your royal sway over this country which you have been pleased to delegate to me for a while."

The favorite Deity of Guha sought him out even where he was. Such an unexpected favour overwhelmed him with joy; he absolutely surrendered to Him 135 every thought of my and mine; he took refuge in His mercy for ever and for ever; and he but prayed to be allowed to reach the supreme goal of his aspirations—eternal and absolute service to the Lord of his heart.

Rama heard him out with unbounded pleasure, 140 clasped him to his heart with his strong arms, firm and stout as the trunk of an elephant and said, "There be some who ever carp and cavil at whatever you may do to respect and honor them. I am mightily pleased at your coming on foot so far to see me; your words 'This 145 wide forest is yours and we are your happy slaves' gladden my heart; thereby you have honored me above compare in every way. I hope I see you and your kin in good health and peace of heart. Is it all well with your kingdom? Are your friends happy and content? Is 150 your wealth ever increasing? The sight of you infuses joy and happiness into my heart. I accept with supreme content the noble hospitality you have rendered me. But it is against my vow to accept and use anything from the hands of others. I seek to fulfil the commands 155 of my honored sire and lead the life of a hermit, clad in deer-skin and bark of trees, feeding upon fruits, roots and other woodland fare. These coursers are my father's favourites, and they come in no less for a share of my love and care. Feed them well and you

have entertained us graciously with every hospitable 160 rite."

Accordingly Guha directed his servants to look after the horses that bore to him his honored guest. Then Rama wore his dress of bark over his shoulders, offered his prayers to the Goddess of evening twilight, 165 facing the west and partook of the pure water of the Ganga that Lakshmana brought him. He then composed himself to rest and Seeta by his side, while Lakshmana bathed their feet and took his stand under the tree. As Rama, an utter stranger all his life to privation 170 and discomfort, formed to enjoy every delight and happiness that the world can give, supremely wise, of unblemished fame, and mighty of heart, lay asleep with Seeta by his side, Guha conversed with Lakshmana and Sumantra through the long hours of the night 175 on the divine excellences of his royal friend and watched over them bow in hand.

CHAPTER LI.

LAKSHMANA LAMENTS.

GUHA observed that Lakshmana, out of his extreme love and devotion, kept awake to guard Rama and his heart was much pained thereat. "Child!" 5 said he "here is a bed ready for you, soft and comfortable. Rest your weary limbs on it for a while. It comes natural to me and easy, and to my fellow hunters too here, to keep awake all night and rough it in these woods; all my days have been spent here. You can trust 10 me to keep guard carefully over Rama and Seeta. You have been gently brought up and delicately; and this is no work for such as you. The worlds hold

no dearer object to me than Rama. I speak the veriest truth and, if you so desire, would swear it by the God of truth himself. I have placed all my hopes on him to secure unparalleled fame, virtue and wealth in this world, all thro' his grace. I and my kin will stand guard over Rama and Seeta, dearer to me than life, through the long hours of the night, with shaft on the string. What I know not about these forests is not worth knowing, for my life has been spent in it. I, my kin and my troops are more than a match for any enemies that might come against us in armed array."

25 "No talk of fear" replied Lakshmana "when *you* look after our safety; your soul is ever wedded to righteousness. Concern yourself not for me. How could you expect me to sleep when my lord and his gentle consort lie on the rough bare earth? I care not to waste a thought on my body, my life or its comforts. Gods and asuras may join hands and yet be swept away, like a withered leaf before a gale, by a poor shaft from the terrible bow of my brother. And that hero sleeps all comfortably on the bare ground, on rough grass and 35 Seeta with him; what a terrible sight that!"

"Long years did the king recite the Gayatri and the other mighty mantras to be blessed with Rama as his son; long and all faithfully did he keep with well-restrained senses, the vows and observances, kricchra 40 chandrayana and others too severe to think of. Times out of number did he celebrate yagas, yagnas and other rites, which the holy Books enjoin on a barren father. After much trouble and travail a noble boy was born to him, his other self as it were, after sixty thousand 45 years of heart-ache. And the fond father has at last driven his precious child to the dreary forests. Is it in human nature to survive the shock? I hope not. There

is not the slightest shadow of a doubt that the Goddess of earth is widowed of her lord and helpless. The ladies of the harem would, by now, have cried themselves hoarse over us and sleep the sleep of exhaustion and unconsciousness. Utter quiet, ominous and terrible, will keep watch over them.

“ Kausalya, my mother, the other royal ladies and my father would, ere now, have departed for the Mansions of the Blessed. At the worst, they would not survive this night. Perhaps my mother may hold on to life, to behold her favorite child Satrughna once again, But Kausalya, the mother of that prince of heroes, would *never* survive her son’s departure to the woods. The very thought tortures me past bearing. Every one at Ayodhya, the joy and pride of the world, every one, man, woman and child, was extremely devoted to king Dasaratha ; and if they were to hear that he had departed this life, wailing and moaning, they would not lose a moment in following him wherever he might be. Rama is the first born of our monarch. Every grace, every excellence vies with one another to find a place in him ; he lies nearer the heart of our father than any of us; the fond father cannot keep his life currents in his body, if he is away from Rama for a minute. It needs no saying that Kausalya, his faithful wife, would ever be by his side in this world or in the next. And you may be sure to find her friend Sumitra, my mother, ever in loving attendance upon her. ‘ I have been blessed with this priceless jewel of a boy after sixty thousand years of barrenness ; he has grown to youth and manhood, safe and happy ; he is mated to a lady in every way worthy of him ; I can safely lay the burden of the state on his shoulders and spend the evening of my life in ease and comfort ’—such golden dreams have

been rudely shattered and for him life contains nothing to hold him back from the welcome arms of death. Poor soul! He has not the consolation of at least hoping
 85 to see his son crowned after him at the end of fourteen years; cruel grief will not spare him so long. Happy are they who remain with him during his last moments and render him every attention, every service possible; alas! we are denied that blessing.

90 "Ah! does the broad earth hold another city as beautiful and resplendant as Ayodhya? Heavy grief weighs down my heart when I recall its well-laid crossings, straight and beautiful roads, the mansions of the rich, the palaces of the princes, its groves, gardens,
 95 conservatories and pleasaunces. High bred courtesans flash through its streets like visions of beauty; stately chariots, fleet coursers and huge elephants throng the ways; gay sounds and solemn, gentle lay or martial music rise upon the air on every side; troops of men
 100 and women, gaily attired, lend an additional charm to the city, strangers to disease and sorrow; the splendour and pomp of the festivals and the holy fanes; the scenes of gaiety and joy in private houses—supremely blessed are they to whom it is given to dwell in that fair city,
 105 the favorite abode of everything that goes to make life happy and content. Think you that Dasaratha would keep his hold on life till we return from our exile? Think you we would be fortunate enough to touch the feet of the great One? Think you that we will enter
 110 the portals of Ayodhya after our sojourn in the forest as my brother had vowed, safe and happy, our sire's promise well kept?"

And on him so lamenting dawned a new day. It pained Guha beyond expression to listen to the words
 115 of grief that wrung the heart of Lakshmana, faithful

and true to the monarch, the queens and Rama ; and like a noble elephant on whom terrible fever had laid its grip, he wept aloud with streaming eyes.

CHAPTER LII.

RAMA CROSSES THE GANGA.

AT daybreak Rama, the favorite of fame and valor, turned to Lakshmana and said "My dear boy! The Lord of day sends his messenger, the ruddy dawn, 5 to announce his approach ; the shades of night are fading fast. Lo ! yon black koil welcomes us with melodious song. Did you notice that the cry of the wild peacocks is more sonorous and piercing than that of the tame ones we have at Ayodhya ? The broad stream of 10 the Ganga and its strong current preclude any possibility of crossing it without a boat. Make the necessary arrangements." Lakshmana communicated Rama's orders to Guha and Sumantra. The forest king bent his head in low obeisance and ordered his ministers to 15 have in readiness a fine barge at the ferry, to cross the river safe and soon. They should carefully look to it that it is duly provided with good oars, rudder and sails. A skilful helmsman should be in attendance to take them over comfortably. 20

It was done and Guha approached Rama respectfully and said ; " Master ! The boat awaits you at yon landing place. I think you could cross the river in it safely enough. What are your orders ? I pray you get into it." 25

" You have done more than enough " replied Rama " See that our spades, baskets, clothes, ornaments and

weapons are arranged in it." Then Rama and Lakshmana donned their armour, girt their quivers and swords and 30 moved on to the landing place.

Sumantra noticing that Rama ordered not the chariot to follow, bowed in low reverence and said "Lord! What are my orders?" To which Rama replied, all gently, laying his hand upon his arm, "Sumantra! 35 See that you return on the wings of speed to the side of our monarch. His orders were that we should drive thus far. We proceed afoot to the forests from here. So, you need not trouble yourself further on our account." The aged minister understood that he was 40 ordered to return to Ayodhya; and with a face from which all joy, all peace had departed, he ventured to submit, "Do you, for a moment, think that any one in this wide world relishes your unfortunate lot to dwell for long years in these forests, like homeless wanderers, 45 and Lakshmana and Seeta with you? If your noble self be thus a target for the arrows of Adversity, it seems to me as clear as anything that there is no merit, not the slightest, in celibacy, study of the vedic lore, compassion, or righteousness. If it were otherwise, how is 50 it that they bear no fruit in you, whom all graces combine to adorn? You have chosen to dwell in the dark forests in the company of Lakshmana and Seeta and have ensured for yourself unparalleled fame as the lord of the three worlds, like unto Mahavishnu, who strode 55 over the universe in three paces. At first, our hearts rejoiced at the anticipated life of happiness and content, when you should sit on the throne of your fathers. But cruel Kaikeyi dashed the cup from our lips. Later on, you seemed as if you would allow as to accompany 60 you in your exile; but, you cast heavy sleep over us, and silently took yourself away from our midst. Therein

too have we been cruelly deceived by your good self; yet I entertained a last hope that you will be pleased to allow me at least, your old and faithful servant, to serve you; and now, you have put your foot down upon it, firmly 65 and irrevocably. You have disappointed me in this too. Whichever way we turn, we are confronted with the ruins of our hopes and aspirations. And as if this were not suffering enough, you have arranged to leave us to the tender mercies of that monstrous sinner Kaikeyi. 70 Eternal, hopeless woe and despair are our only portion." He despaired of seeing once again Rama, dearer to him than his very life and wept aloud long and ruefully, out of the bitterness of his heart.

He controlled himself somewhat, and sipped water 75 to purify himself, when Rama addressed him gently and said, "The kings of the Ikshwaku line never had a more faithful friend than yourself. I lay this duty upon you to see that the king grieves not on my account. The snows of age lie heavy on him; he has 80 been till now the absolute ruler of a vast empire; he has drained the cup of life to the full. But, his last years were doomed to see all his fair hopes blighted; terrible grief has befallen him in that the son of his heart is not by his side to gladden and comfort him; it is 85 why I lay so much stress and importance on your going back to him. We should obey and follow our elders and masters and it is all unmeet that we should seek to drag them down to our level. So, the king should be instantly obeyed to the utmost, whatever he might 90 order to delight the heart of the queen Kaikeyi. No one should gainsay kings, even if they act out of anger or misplaced affection; it is not for nothing that they are placed over us as our rulers. So behave that the king is not a prey to grief or disappointment. He is our 95

lord and ruler; hoary with age, of restrained senses, he is adorned with every noble virtue. He has been an utter stranger to anxiety or grief. Convey my humble respects to him with the prayer, ‘May not your noble heart grieve in the least at the fancied thought that I nor Lakshmana nor Seeta ever bewail our sojourn in the forest; or recall with regret the years we spent at Ayodhya. I look forward happily to lay my head at yur royal feet at the end of fourteen years, which will 100 pass away as fourteen seconds.’ Next, convey my respectful enquiries to my mother and her friends and last, not least, to lady Kaikeyi. Seeta, Lakshmana and myself clasp with humble reverence the feet of queen Kausalya. Take it from me to our monarch that it would 105 be for the best to bring down Bharata as soon as possible and have him crowned in all pomp and glory; for that is the surest antidote to the heart-ache engendered of my absence from the side of my father. And to Bharata, take this loving message, ‘I would have you 110 behave towards the royal ladies with as much respect and devotion as you would to the monarch himself. As Kaikeyi, your mother, is to you, so are Sumitra, the mother of Satrughna and Kausalya, my mother. Entrusted with the noble office of heir-apparent by our 115 120 gracious king, you have it in your power to win happiness and fame here and hereafter.’

This was a clear order for Sumantra to return; yet, his overwhelming grief and the close intimacy that had been his privilege to enjoy with Rama from his birth 130 emboldened him to say, “I crave permission to submit somewhat. It is no empty compliment or courtier’s flattery. Your humble servant am I; yet I have chosen to forget it and speak thus boldly. My supreme devotion to you and affection are my only excuse for it.

How can I bring myself to enter Ayodhya all alone, 135
which grieves even as a fond father, from whom cruel
death has taken away his only son, upon whom he
lavished all his love? Those that till now had beheld me
ever with you in this chariot, will, I am sure, die of
broken hearts, if they were to see my miserable self go 140
back with your place in it empty. They will cast
their eyes upon this stately vehicle unilluminated by
your presence and will faint with grief, even as a
mighty army scatters itself when they see the driver
sitting lone and forlorn in their general's chariot. 145
Time and distance is nothing to them, for they ever
enjoy your presence in their mind's eye. Food and
sleep distract not their thoughts, ever centred in your-
self. You had some idea of what they suffered when
yon drove out of the city. Their confusion of heart 150
and heaviness of spirits are simply beyond description.
Heard you not the mighty sound that arose from them
wailing when you started on your fateful journey?
Verily, I know not what would become of them, if I go
there alone and ill-omened, with black tidings for them. 155
What message shall I take to Kausalya? Shall I say,
'I drove your son to his uncle's capital; concern your-
self not about him'? Sweet words, but all untrue.
Or, shall I speak the truth and say, 'I took leave 160
of your son when the dark forests swallowed his bright
form?' Alas! The noble queen would die on the spot,
as if struck by chain-lightning. I know not what to do.
Well, it is best to be silent.

"I may steel my heart to go back, but these horses
will never have it so. They have borne, all joyfully, 165
Seeta, Lakshmana and your noble self, and they will
utterly refuse to draw the chariot if you are not in it.
Now, how can I go back to Ayodhya without you?

"Grant me, out of your boundless compassion, to
 170 share your forest home. If you still turn a deaf ear to
 my prayers and harden your heart, that very instant
 I will mount the chariot and throw myself along with
 it into the raging flames. I submit that I could, from
 the car, keep away everything, man or beast, that might
 175 interfere with your tapas. I have known it all along,
 ages ago, that you are to take human form in the line
 of Ikshwaku. So, I mastered this art of chariot-driving,
 looked down by gentlefolk and heeded not my state
 and dignity as a member of the monarch's council, only
 180 to secure a chance to serve you by driving your chariot.
 And you have been gracious enough to confer upon me
 that envied honor. I but ask to be continued in my
 service to you during your stay in the forest. Grant
 me the precious boon of ever being with you. These
 185 horses will secure happy states of existence hereafter
 by rendering you humble service in the forest. On my
 head and eyes be it to serve you in every possible way,
 day or night. Nor Ayodhya, nor the bright worlds of
 the gods, nor the serene peace of Liberation has any
 190 charms for me. Desperate sinners can never hope to
 enter paradise; how can I, blacker than any, enter
 Ayodhya without you? My heart longs to remain with
 you through your period of exile and drive you back to
 Ayodhya in this very chariot. The fourteen years will
 195 flash away even as fourteen winks of the eye, if I am
 with you; but, away from your delightful presence, every
 second is an eternity of torment to me. Was there
 ever a master that loved his servants so well as yourself?
 Is it not but bare justice that my place is ever with the
 200 son of my lord and master? I entreat you not to leave
 me behind. My mind is made up to be with you wher-
 ever you are."

Rama was, by nature, supremely compassionate to all beings; and to such as sought refuge with him and knew no other protector, to such servants of his, he 205 evinced boundless affection and sympathy. So he turned to Sumantra and said "I am yet to see another servant like yourself, faithful to the uttermost to his masters. No one knows better than I your love and devotion to me. Would I ask you to go back to 210 Ayodhya if I had not serious reasons for it? First and foremost, Kaikeyi will rest assured that I obeyed her commands and have repaired to the forest. She will be delighted thereat and regard the virtuous king as a man of his word. Bharata will get the throne and 215 realise, to the full, the heart-wishes of Kaikeyi. This is my first duty and must be looked to, at once. So, have the kindness to return to the city and convey my messages to the respective parties." And he consold the broken hearted Sumantra as best as he could. 220

He next addressed himself to Guha and said "You should not insist upon my taking up my abode here with you; it is too near the city. My father's orders require me to dwell in some holy hermitage and my resolve too lies that way. Again, Kaikeyi has said 'You 225 shall abide for fourteen years in the forests of Dandaka with matted hair and clad in deerskin and bark of trees', I mean to observe such vows and observances as will compel the wonder and admiration of the very hermits themselves and ensure unexampled bliss in the 230 other worlds, for myself, Seeta and Lakshmana. And now, dear friend, it is time that I matted my hair. Oblige me by sending for the milk of the banian."

It was done; Rama and Lakshmana matted their fair hair and took upon themselves the life and duties of 235 the hermits according to the Vaikhanasa mode. Rama

matted his hair—Rama with long arms that reached down to his knees like the trunk of an elephant, Rama adorned with every excellence of body, mind and heart.

240 Woe unspeakable ! Yet Rama and Lakshmana shone with boundless radiance, like maharshis even in that lowly garb. "Friend" said Rama to Guha "continue your watchful care over your kingdom, its fortresses, troops and treasure" and walked down to the landing place. The barge awaited him there. "Lakshmana!" said he "see to it carefully that the noble daughter of Janaka gets into the boat first and take your place in it." Lakshmana guessed his purpose and obeyed him accordingly. Rama got in last and recited the mantras prescribed for Brahmanas and Kshatriyas to ensure a safe passage across the rivers. They then sipped water from the holy stream and bowed in reverence to it. Rama then graciously dismissed Sumantra, Guha and his followers, took his seat and ordered the rowers to give 255 way.

They set themselves to the joyful task with a will and the barge was nearing the middle of the stream, when Seeta clasped reverent hands and prayed: "Mother Ganga! may my lord and master sojourn for ten years and 260 four in the forest, keeping well his promise to the king and return safe and happy to Ayodhya with Lakshmana and myself. Then will I render worship meet and adoration to you. You course through the heavens, the earth and the nether worlds; you begin to manifest 265 yourself in the world of Brahma; and the lord of the ocean is your happy spouse. Mother divine ! I bow my head to you in reverence and raise my voice in humble prayer. Grant me that my lord returns safe and happy and sits on the throne of his fathers; and I will give 270 away to holy Brahmanas, countless kine, clothes and

sweet food. On my return to Ayodhya, my first care shall be to worship you, the other deities here, Manikarnika and the other sacred bathing places, Kasi and the other sanctified spots, with offerings of varied meats and thousands of honey-pots. I pray you fulfil the 275 dearest wish of my heart that the righteous brothers should live their period of exile in peace and happiness, and return to Ayodhya in safety." Meanwhile the barge touched the other bank and they got down from it.

Then Rama turned to Lakshmana and said "Henceforth we are to live by ourselves in these forests where man lives not. So, I enjoin you to look after the safety of Seeta and give your best attention to it. Lead the way; Seeta comes after you; and I walk in the rear, guarding you as it were. Henceforth, we must watch 285 over one another. There had been no occasion till now to call forth our endurance and fortitude. Seeta will, this day, have a taste of what the rough forest life is like. She is to enter the forest proper, untenanted by man, with no villages or hamlets to relieve the vast 290 loneliness, and cut up by rough uneven paths interspersed with deep chasms".

Accordingly Lakshmana took his place in the front; Seeta followed next and Rama came last. Sumantra gazed long and steadily at Rama as he crossed the 295 Ganga and proceeded beyond. Then, distance gradually blurred the fair vision and he raised his voice and wept in the bitterness of his heart. Rama resembles in might the Lords of the planets; he has it in him to accomplish to the utmost, the wishes of those that 300 depend upon him; still, as became a great One, he bound himself to obey the commands of his elders and underwent many a trouble. They crossed the Ganga, and entered the kingdom of the Matsyas, rich in wealth and

305 corn and teeming with its happy millions. The brothers killed the wild boar, the white-footed antelope, the spotted antelope and Maharuru (a species of deer) and other pure animals, cooked their flesh and at sunset, sought the foot of a large tree to take their first forest
 310 meal.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SEARCHER OF HEARTS.

WHEN they had offered their evening prayers and had finished their supper, Rama turned to Lakshmana and said "This is the first night we spend outside our kingdom all alone. Sumantra is not with us ; grieve not thereat. Henceforth, we should keep watch at nights ; for, we are responsible for the safety of Seeta. Let us gather the grass and the leaves 10 hereabouts to make us a bed and pass the night anyhow." And Rama, accustomed all his life to take his repose on soft and rich beds, reclined his limbs on the leaves and bare ground. Said he to Lakshmana "My dear boy ! Now the king suffers unusual grief and prays for 15 sleep that will never come. But Kaikeyi is in the seventh heaven of joy, her heart's wishes realised to the utmost. She may even dare to make away with our father that the kingdom might vest in Bharata permanently. All helpless is he and sinking under the 20 infirmities of old age ; I am not by to wait on him ; slave to his passions, he is a helpless victim in the toils of Kaikeyi. Alas ! What will become of him ! When I ponder upon the misfortunes that have befallen me and on our righteous father, enthroning love and passion in his heart, and utterly oblivious to other pursuits, virtue and wealth, I am almost inclined to hold that 25

Pleasure holds a higher place in the Aims of life than Virtue or Wealth. Lo, our wise parent! Utmost folly cannot debase a man so much as to incite him to banish his dutiful and only son to the frightful forests, and all 30 to win the fickle smile of a woman. Bharata will rule happily without a rival over the broad realm of Kosala, rich in wealth and corn, surrounded by his wife and children, kith and kin. Dasaratha, our aged sire, has one foot in the grave; I am put out of the way; and now, 35 Bharata is the undisputed monarch of these boundless domains. He who devotes himself solely to the pursuit of pleasure and neglects virtue and wealth, will, like our father, suffer grievously. It seems to me that Kaikeyi came in our family but to torture Dasaratha to death, 40 to drive me to the forest and to secure the kingdom for her son Bharata.

“In the intoxication of her new-gotten power and wealth, Kaikeyi will spare Kausalya and Sumitra no tortures, for the crime of being related to me. There 45 is a show of justice in Kausalya’s case, as she is my mother. But, it is gross injustice and extremely atrocious that Sumitra should come in for a share of it. So, I advise you to lose no time. Go back to Ayodhya at day-break. We have not come far. Seeta and I will 50 proceed to the forests of Dandaka. The helpless Kausalya will surely find comfort and courage in your presence. Kaikeyi is up to anything. It is nothing to her if the world pours its hatred and contempt upon her; nothing is too mean for her, nothing too atrocious. 55 I would that you place my mother in the charge of the virtuous Bharata.

“I believe that in her former births Kausalya ought to have torn mothers apart from their children; else, I see no reason why she should suffer nameless 60

torments, torn from the side of her favourite child. She went through fire and water, as it were, to call me her son; she took a world of trouble in bringing me up to man's estate.' Mother beget children and tend them fondly and with care, only that they, in their turn, should form the prop and stay of their old age. Now, Kausalya has laboured in vain, and has been cruelly deprived of the fruit thereof. Fie upon me! My life is barren of its purpose. I pray that no mother beget such a 65 ungrateful son as myself. Lakshmana! The only return I make to my mother for all the trouble and care she has bestowed on me, is the measureless grief and despair I have caused her. Better I were not born. Brother! You remember a linnet that Kausalya used 70 to rear so fondly. It would often turn to the parrot, its neighbour, and cry, 'Tear at the fee of yon cat, the relentless foe of your race.' Kausalya used to take great delight in those words of the bird. I am powerless to give her even that pleasure which the senseless bird is 75 80 grateful enough to cause her.

"The hapless Kausalya, consumed with grief, is barren, though the world calls her the fortunate mother of Kosala's heir. But how have I benefited her in the least? I have plunged her in an ocean of grief, shoreless and unfathomable. My anger is powerful enough 85 to wrest this Kosala, nay, this broad earth, from the hands of man, god or Asura; my shafts will do it for me. But, my Dharma will suffer in observance, if I put forth my might, forgetful of all other considerations. My 90 hands are tied by my fear of the world's scorn that will point its finger at me and cry 'Lo! Rama has put behind him Dharma and has elected to walk in the path of the unrighteous, of the ungodly;' I fear too that I might be denied a place in the bright worlds on high. Else, this

very moment I can seat myself on the throne of the 95 Ikshvakus." And he bewailed his lot and his powerlessness to avoid it; burning tears of grief coursed down his cheeks and a fit of gloomy silence came over him.

When he had ended, like a fire that had burnt itself 100 out or like the broad ocean after a storm, Lakshmana sought to console him and said "Brother mine! Best and foremost of heroes! It needs no saying that Ayo-dhya will be shorn of its lustre, like a moonless night, when you have denied it your bright presence. Ideal 105 prince! It is not meet that you grieve thus. You but wring the heart of Seeta and myself. You bear a name that is significant of the perennial joy and delight that flows from you to all the worlds; does it become you to make others grieve? You but deprive the fish of its 110 life when you deprive it of the element where nature has placed it; even so, you but deprive us of our lives the moment you deny us your sweet presence. This is my only reply to your commands to me to return to Ayodhya at day-break. I care not in the least to enter 115 paradise or to see Dasaratha, Satrughna or Sumitra if you are not there with me."

They composed themselves to sleep and Rama was delighted to hear Lakshmana express himself so candidly and so lovingly; he decided to spend the fourteen 120 years in the forests with Lakshmana and lead the life of the hermits there. The mighty princes, though in the midst of cruel beasts that ranged the woods of nights, were entire strangers to fear or apprehension in those lonely regions.

CHAPTER LIV.

BHARADWAJA.

THEY rested for the night at the foot of the banyan tree and resumed their journey the next-morning. They entered the forest and proceeded to Prayaga, the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, feasting their eyes on many a lovely spot, many a rare and wonderful object, and hospitably entertained by the people they met, until the shades of night warned them to stop. Then Rama turned to Lakshmana and said "Behold the sky is black with smoke all around Prayaga to a very great distance. I guess it springs from the sacrificial fires of some maharshi hereabouts. Listen to the tremendous roar of two mighty streams dashing against one another. We are at the junction of the Ganga and the Yamuna. The woodlanders have laid up yonder piles of split wood outside the hermitage of maharshi Bharadwaja." They walked on for over an hour and at nightfall came to the hermitage of Bharadwaja, pleasantly situated at the confluence of the holy streams. The beasts and the birds thereabouts scampered off at the sight of the strangers. They wanted to pay their respects to the maharshi, but stood a little way off his abode until the evening offerings to the fire were over. Then one of the disciples of the sage came out of the asrama, through whom they announced their arrival to the maharshi; invited to enter, they beheld Bharadwaja in the midst of his disciples after their evening prayers.

They joined folded palms of reverence to the great One who had strictly observed the most severe vows and austerities; his heart was ever centred in

meditation upon the Lord ; and past, present and future held no secrets for him. "Lord!" said Rama, "We are the sons of Dasaratha king of Ayodhya. Rama am 35 I named and this, my brother, Lakshmana. This is my wife Seeta, the daughter of king Janaka of Mithila. She has been an ideal wife to me and has followed me with much entreaty and prayer to share my forest life. Lakshmana is devoted to me and asked to accompany 40 me in my wanderings when my father ordered me to reside in the forest ; and he has ever been a man of his word. We seek to fulfil the Dharma of carrying out the behests of our sire and make the forest our home, fruits and roots our only food." 45

Bharadwaja offered them suitable rights of hospitability and with great solicitude and care, comfortably arranged for their meals and repose. His high ascetic merit influenced even the birds and beasts thereabouts and they were extremely friendly and confiding towards 50 the residents of the holy abode. Bharadwaja and his pupils kindly enquired about their safe journey thither. "Thanks to the favor we are fortunate to find in the eyes of your Reverence" replied Raghava and took the seats offered them by the sage. Then the Blessed One 55 addressed Rama and said "Your image is enshrined in my heart of hearts all along, though the senses and the intellect reach you not. Supremely blessed am I in being able to behold you in this my retreat after so many years of waiting. Words fail me to describe my 60 good fortune. I had news of your being exiled to the forest by Dasaratha for no fault of yours. This spot, the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna, is extremely holy ; far away from the world's strife and bustle, it delights the eye and the heart; and you may fix your abode 65 some where here." To which Rama replied "Holy sir! I

submit that this is too near Ayodhya and easy of access. The people would go over here very often to see me, Lakshmana and Seeta. Hence I would seek a more
 70 distant spot. Pray direct me to another suitable hermitage where this Seeta, delicately nurtured, might live happily. Solitude and undisturbed privacy is what I look for."

"Ten krosas from here" replied Bharadwaja "is a
 75 hill called Chitrakoota. It reminds you of the Gandhamadana mountain; it is a very holy place, resorted to by the maharshis. It is lovely in every way and forms the favorite haunt of bears and monkeys. It has the peculiar merit of cleansing the hearts and intensifying
 80 the good tendencies of those that live within sight of its peaks. Numerous rishis have performed stern tapas on it and have gone to heaven in their tenements of flesh. I believe it is attractive and quiet enough. Or if you so desire, you may share my abode with me." The
 85 righteous Bharadwaja, whose love and affection for Rama knew no bounds, entertained them most nobly.

They passed the night in discoursing on themes high and holy and at day-break repaired to Bharadwaja and said "Your Reverence! We spent a very happy night
 90 in this hermitage, thanks to your kind care and consideration. Grant us leave to proceed to the spot you have chosen for our abode." And the sage took leave of them saying "I wish you a safe and pleasant journey to Chitrakoota where you will never want for fruit,
 95 roots, honey and other hermit fare. Lovely groves, peacocks, deer and elephants will delight your eyes at every step. I am sure your days will pass very pleasantly there, beholding the wonders of the mountain, the cataracts, the waterfalls, the valleys, the torrents, the koil,
 100 the magpie and other birds of charming plumage.

CHAPTER LV.

CHITRAKOUTA.

THEY reverently went round Bharadwaja, took leave of him and journeyed on to Chitrakoota. The sage, who loved them as his children, showered 5 his choicest blessings on them and would go with them a part of the way, giving his parting directions as it were. "Rama! Reach the confluence of Ganga and the Yamuna and travel on due west along the banks of the Kalindi until you come upon a likely place 10 to cross it. Later on, a huge banyan, named Syama, will meet your eye. It is the favourite resort of many a Siddha. Seeta will not fail to salute the guardian Spirit thereof and pray at its hands the fulfilment of her wishes. You may rest there awhile if you need it; 15 else, you may travel on straight a krosa further until you espy a dark forest thick with palasa, jujube and bamboo trees. There lies the way to Chitrakoota. Many a time have I travelled thither. It is a lovely path and carpeted with soft sand. You are perfectly 20 safe from any forest fires if you take that road;" and Bharadwaja, all reluctantly, turned towards his hermitage.

Rama and his party saluted him reverently, and promised to obey his directions; and after a while Rama addressed himself to Lakshmana and said "I would have you know that we owe Bharadwaja's unique favour towards us to our incalculable merit in former births." They reached the banks of the Kalindi but were at a loss to cross it, so strong was the current. Lakshmana 30 felled down some logs, tied bamboos athwart them with strong creepers and spread soft leaved branches of

the jambu and the vetasa on it for Seeta to sit on comfortably. Rama gave his arm to her as she got 35 upon the raft ; and the beautiful lady felt a little shy at her husband showing her this attention in the presence of another. The brothers placed near her, her cloths and ornaments, their weapons, baskets, spades and other implements, got into it and crossed the river. As the craft 40 neared the middle of the stream, Seeta clasped her hands in reverent prayer to the Goddess of the river and said. "Gracious lady ! Grant that every good may go with us ; grant that my lord fulfils his vow and returns to Ayodhya safe and happy, and I will gratify your 45 heart with offerings of countless kine and winepots." They reached the southern bank, prepared another raft and crossed the swift coursing Yamuna.

They walked on for a while and caught a glimpse of the huge banyan tree, Syama, dark with foliage, cool 50 and shady. Seeta addressed herself to the Spirit of the tree and said "Lord of the forest ! I salute you. May my husband fulfil his vow. May I be spared to behold Kausalya and Sumitra once again." She then went round the tree in humble reverence. Rama observed, with an amused smile, Seeta praying for his 55 safety and happiness so lovingly and said to Lakshmana "Boy ! Do you go to the front. I will come last and weapon in hand, guard you from the rear. Look to it that you bring her whatever she may fancy—fruit, flower or anything rare and lovely." Seeta walked on between them, even as a cow-elephant between two maddened bulls. It was her first visit to the virgin forests and she pointed to every tree, plant, creeper and flower and asked Rama its name, its qualities and its uses. 60 At once Lakshmana would bring her anything she may choose to ask for. Seeta was delighted at the brooks 65

and the rivulets where the crystal water ran shallow over the many-colored sand, while swans and other water-fowl disported themselves on it. They walked on for two krosas more and had a hearty meal on the flesh of some deer that roamed the woods on the banks of the Yamuna. They had a pleasant stroll in the delightful woods, the brothers calling Seeta's attention to the rare and wonderful trees, birds and beasts, until night fell, when they came back to the banks of the Jumna and prepared their beds for the night.

CHAPTER LVI.

THEIR FOREST ABODE.

PEXT morning Rama awoke Lakshmana and said, "Dear boy ! Listen to the melodious sounds of the denizens of this forest. It is time we were on our journey." Lakshmana shook off his fatigue and stiffness and they hastened through their morning bath, prayers and worship. Very soon they proceeded on the path pointed out by Bharadwaja. Rama now and then turned to Seeta and said "Behold, my love, these kimsuka trees, completely hidden under the flowering garments thrown over them by Spring ; at a distance they look like so many trees aflame. The Bhallataka trees bend under their heavy burden of fruits, flowers and foliage. It is a pity there are none to enjoy their beauties. I could spend long years of happiness here, feasting my eyes on these lovely sights. From each tree hangs a respectably big comb of honey, gathered with great care and industry by the ever busy bees. Lakshmana ! Listen to the lapwing as it calls out sweetly from the lovely bowers furnished with soft

beds of fallen flowers. The peacock replies to it. There the lofty peaks of the Chitrakoota come into view. Countless heads of elephants range over it, while the mountain itself is hid under the clouds of birds. We will roam pleasantly through the dense woods that cover the valleys at its foot." And so, they approached the mountain, teeming with beasts, birds, crystal water, fruits and roots. Rama turned to Lakshmana and said

30 "Verily, Chitrakoota improves upon acquaintance. I am sure you will have a plentiful supply of water, fruits and roots; you can trust to come upon many a hermitage of the maharshis hereabouts; and we will do well to stay here for a while." [We have often looked on that

35 green hill; it is the holiest spot of that sect of the Hindu faith who devote themselves to this incarnation of Vishnu. The whole neighbourhood is Rama's country. Every head-land has some legend, every cavern is connected with his name; some of the wild fruits are

40 still called *Seetaphala*, being the reputed food of the exiles. Thousands and thousands annually visit the spot, and round the hill is a raised foot-path, on which the devotee, with naked feet, treads full of pious awe.—*Calcutta Review Vol. XXIII*].

45 They then proceeded to where the holy Valmeeki abode and saluted him reverently. He showed his royal guests every hospitality he could and kindly enquired after their safe journey thither. Rama replied "May it please your holiness! I am Rama, the son of Dasara-

50 tha, king of Ayodhya; this is my brother Lakshmana and that Seeta my wife. We have come here to stay for fourteen years as our father has commanded us to do."

He turned to Lakshmana and said "Cut down some

55 strong jambu trees and build a log-house for us to

dwell in. I would stay here a while." Lakshmana lost no time in erecting a snug cottage ; it was comfortably provided against wind and weather, with strong walls, charming rooms and thick mats in place of doors. All alone he worked at it and it was lovely thing to see. 60 He eagerly awaited next any fresh commands that Rama might have for him, which observing, Raghava smiled and said " We should make offerings of deer's meat to the Gods of the quarters that protect this cottage. If we desire a long and happy life, we should duly perform 65 the rites enjoined by the sastras on the occasion of taking possession of a newly built house and propitiate the bhootas, the pretas and the pisachas that haunt the spot. So, we avoid fear, disease or loss of those near and dear to us and enjoy a long life and happy even as 70 the Immortals in heaven. You need not apprehend any sin from taking away the lives of sensient creatures. The animals offered in the Yagnas rise to the bright worlds of bliss."

Lakshmana obeyed his orders, whereupon Rama 75 said " Have this flesh well-cooked. This day augurs permanency of our stay here; and the asterism, the day of the fortnight and the muhoorta are similarly inclined. Long shall we stay here and joyfully." When the flesh had been nicely cooked to a turn and the blood 80 dried off, Lakshmana turned to his brother and said " You see that the flesh of this black-spotted antelope is well-cooked. Your god-like self is well conversant with the rules of sacrifice and may proceed to perform the rites to propitiate the gods." Rama purified himself 85 by a bath and went through the necessary rites on the occasion of taking possession of a newly-built house, omitting no detail. Profoundly versed in the holy mantras, himself the very embodiment of those mantras,

90 what was it about them he was ignorant of? He propitiated Agni, Varuna and the forty-five deities presiding over a house, with offerings, sacrifices, worship and flowers; he purified himself again and entered the cottage. With a cheerful heart, he made the several
 95 Vaisvadeva offerings and performed the Yagas in honor of Vishnu and Rudra. Next followed the Punyahavachana, the Grihasanti and the recitations of the sacred texts to ward off any evil that might befall them during their residence in the cottage. He purified himself and
 100 the materials once again with water from the taint consequent on his having performed the Rudrayaga and proceeded to lay out offerings to all the elementals, with special reference to the malevolent and cruel beings that wander about day and night, seeking whom they
 105 may harm. Altars as adorn the hermitages of holy ascetics, shrines for the worship of Vishnu and the other mighty Presences, were laid out according to the Books and the respective gods were installed there to the chant of the holy mantras. The Spirits of the
 110 elements were duly propitiated with offerings of flowers, fruits, cooked meats, libations, holy grass, sacred fuel and vedic recitations; in an auspicious moment Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta entered the cottage, so skillfully built by Lakshmana of boughs, leaves and creepers and
 115 abode there happily, even as the shining Ones enter their resplendent hall of Sudharma.

With restrained senses and mind, they led a happy life in that forest, teeming with various beasts, birds, flowers and fruits and echoing to the sounds of serpents, elephants, tigers, bears, deer and other animals of the forest. They played about in the cool crystal waters of the pools, lakes and rivers; they gathered the flowers of the seasons and missed not a single joy or delight of the

forest life. On the sides of that pleasant mountain Chitrakoota, on the banks of the sacred Malyavati 125 Rama spent his days as a hermit, free from cankering care or anxiety and never regretted his exile from Ayodhya.

CHAPTER LVII.

SUMANTRA RETURNS TO AYODHYA.

GUHA, with a breaking heart, watched along with Sumantra until Rama and his party were lost in the distance ; he could not enough enlarge upon 5 the superhuman excellences of his friend ; for all that, he had to return sad and disappointed to his quarters. Later on, he informed Sumantra of the news brought him by his messengers, of Rama's movements, their visit to the hermitage of Bharadwaja, their stay with him 10 at Prayaga and their journey towards the Chitrakoota. Sumantra then had nothing left for him to do but to take leave of Guha. He yoked his reluctant horses to the chariot and sorrowfully wended his way back to Ayodhya. Fragrant woods, lovely rivers and lakes, 15 happy hamlets and towns greeted his eye, but he saw them not ; and at the evening of the third day, he entered "the joyless capital. No stir of human life ; all silent like a ruined city of the past. It threw a chill on his spirits and he said to himself " Has this Ayodhya been 20 consumed to ashes by the burning grief of separation from Rama, the gorgeous city teeming with elephants, horses, people, princes and kings ? " He urged his jaded horses and neared the gates of the city.

But there were crowds and crowds of men, women 25 and children who saw him from afar and hemmed him

on all sides crying, "Our Rama ! what has become of him ?" And Sumantra replied to them " My good people ! That great One allowed me to proceed with him
 30 only as far as the Ganga ; and his orders were upon me to return to Ayodhya." The tears of the people stream-ed afresh at these terrible news and they sighed heavily as they cried " Wonderful ! Incredible ! verily our sins are beyond count and unspeakably heinous, to re-
 35 turn for us this dreadful harvest of grief. Fie upon our lives ! Rama ! How had you the heart to go away from us, knowing full well that despair and grief would be our only portion ?" They gathered in knots everywhere and exclaimed, " A curse on our miserable lives, who
 40 erstwhile beheld this very same chariot adorned with Rama and Seeta and are not ashamed to behold it now dark and hideous, unilluminated by their glorious presence. Rama was the life and soul of us all. You are sure to find him wherever any one of us gives away in
 45 charity ; he would watch carefully whether the gift is made at the right time and place and to a deserving object. You cannot miss him from any yaga or yagna ; he would ascertain whether the wealth used therein was fairly acquired ; he would be ever at hand to clear any
 50 doubts as the procedure or the ritual ; you can rely upon him to remind you of any lapse or mistake ere it is too late. You will find him at weddings, making anxious enquiries about the parity of the parties in birth, character and wealth and whether the match was a suit-
 55 able one from all points of view. If considerations of wealth threaten to break off such an alliance, his generosity would ever remove the obstacle. He would not allow the slightest detail of the religious rites to be omitted. Yagas, yagnas, feasts, festivals, there was no public
 60 activity at Ayodhya but he was there to see that

thing went off well. Ah ! is it given to us to behold that noble One again ? The protector of us all, who eagerly and untiringly sought out everything that could conduce to our pleasure, benefit our well-being and fulfil our heart's wishes to the utmost—he has gone away 65 from our midst, he who watched over us with paternal care ; and alas ! we live to see that evil day." And so, wailed and grieved the women of Ayodhya, from the lofty mansions and stores that lined the royal road while Sumantra took his way to the King's palace, his 70 heart heavy with a grief that he could share with none and his ears and eyes pained with sights and sounds which he was impotent to relieve.

He feared that his iron fortitude might break under the strain ; he covered his face and drove on fast to 75 where Dasaratha abode, and passed through seven courts. The people stood at the palace gates in dense crowds, their hearts full of dark forebodings at Dasaratha's long absence and desperate plight. The women of the palace, who eagerly looked forward to see Sumantra return with Rama, received a terrible shock when they beheld the aged minister driving back in the lonely chariot and cried " Alas ! Alas !" in the bitterness of their grief. They stared at one another in blank amaze like a parcel of lunatics. The royal ladies saw 85 him arrive and trooped into the apartments of Kausalya in eager expectation of the news that Sumantra had brought. They talked to one another in low whispers, as Dasaratha was near. " He that went out of the city with Rama in his chariot has even come back into it 90 without him ! We would hear what he would say to Kausalya, who is tortured with indescribable grief. Marvellous indeed is her fortitude or her hold on life even after her darling son Rama had been exiled to

95 the forest. She and she alone is equal to the terrible task." Sumantra heard it but too distinctly; dare he say nay? His sorrow grew upon him every moment. He entered the eighth court and the last, only to find it dull and gloomy, and Dasaratha lying senseless with
 100 the grief of separation from his son. He drew near, bowed low over joined palms and delivered the message of Rama. Dasaratha listened to it in silence and fell on the ground in a dead faint, his grief overpowering his iron will. Every one cried "Ha! Ha!" while Kausalya
 105 and Sumitra sprang forward to raise him up and lead him back to his bed.

Then, she that bore Rama raised her voice and cried in her grief "Magnanimous king! Here stands the messenger sent by my son from his forest abode—my son
 110 who has chosen to walk upon a path that none else would dare to tread. Speak to him. Why silent? It came to you smooth and easy enough to grant Kaikeyi whatever boons she might ask and glad was your heart then. Rama betook himself to the forest in consequence;
 115 marvellous indeed it is to see you betray shame and grief thereat. I would like to know what stood in the way of your calculating all these chances before. Get up, please. What have you to do with the grief or sorrow or the broken hearts of others? You have the proud
 120 consolation of having kept your word to your favourite queen and you have laid up especial merit thereby. That is more than enough. But my wretched self am powerless to share my grief with others. All alone and unaided I must bear my cross. Think you to console
 125 me by pretending to grieve overmuch? That were a waste of a rare commodity with you, for I see through your wiles: I have torn the mask off your face and see your true self behind it. Perhaps you cry and rave to

keep up appearances and stand well with the world, which will point a finger of scorn at you and exclaim 130 'Lo! The unnatural father'. You may spare yourself that anxiety, for the world is but too well acquainted with the esteem you hold your poor Rama in. May be you do not like to ask Sumantra of any news from Rama, afraid of Kaikeyi's accusing eye. Fear not; 135 Kaikeyi is nowhere to be found here; take heart and speak out." Tears choked her utterance and she fell down like an uprooted tree and fainted away.

Kausalya's lamentations, her dead faint, Dasaratha staring stupidly before him—such strange and dreadful 140 sights were too much for the royal ladies there and they raised their voices and cried plaintively. The attendants took it up; the crowds that stood outside prolonged it, until the palace of the king, its precincts, nay, Ayodhya far and near, resounded with cries, wails, lamentations, groans and moans. The city seemed like a storm-tossed ocean stirred to its very depths, even as it was 145 when Rama went away from it.

CHAPTER LVIII.

RAMA'S MESSAGE.

DASARATHA came back to himself after a while; burning with anxiety to know the message his darling boy had sent him, he called out to Sumantra who stood before him with humble reverence. Bowed beneath the weight of sixty-thousand years, restless even as a beast just caged from the forest, sighing like an elephant stricken with some strange disease, Dasaratha, whose thoughts were ever with Rama, turned 10

to Sumantra whose hot tears cut themselves channels thro' the dust and dirt that bore witness to his fast and furious driving, and said "Sumantra! My Rama, the soul of virtue, where does he rest, under what tree?

15 Brought up in the lap of luxury and comfort, what dainty fare could he hope for in the wild forests? All unfit to meet the slightest discomfort or privation, how could my son, who is, of right, the master of this broad earth and all it contains, stretch his wearied limbs on the hard ground

20 like a waif stranded on the rocks of adversity? Ever attended by his guards and regiments, how could he bring himself to pass long years of weary loneliness in the forest solitudes? How could Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta reconcile themselves to roam through the trackless forests infested with pythons, black cobras, tigers and other fierce creatures? I could never believe that my boys walked through the thorny jungles and rough woodland paths and with them the daughter of Janaka, whose face even the winds of heaven were not allowed

25 to visit too roughly. Sumantra! I take it that you saw with your own eyes my children enter the dark forests, even as the bright Aswins enter the caves in the mount Mandara. I envy your good fortune. What said Rama? And Lakshmana, what word did he send to us here?

30 Had Seeta any message for us? Tell us all, and take care that you omit not the slightest detail—where Rama sat, ate or slept, what he did and what he said. Once upon a time the emperor Yayati was hurled from heaven and prayed Indra that he might fall in the midst

35 of good men. He landed where Sibi and the other great Ones were assembled; they lightened his sorrow and nest him back to heaven. Even so, I will keep back my fleeting life-breaths by drinking in your descriptions of his divine excellences."

Sumantra could not speak for his tears ; yet he 45 managed to blurt out. "Your majesty ! Ramachandra, with his eye ever set on the utter observance of the traditions of his line, joins humble palms of reverence and salutes you. Said he to me 'Good friend ! convey it to my sire that I lay my head at his feet and salute 50 the wise one, whom, all beings honor themselves, in honoring. Convey my salutations and kind enquiries to every one in the royal palace, as beseems their rank and station.

" 'Tell my mother Kausalya that I salute her respectfully and make affectionate enquiries after her health and peace of heart. Deliver the following message to her, carefully omitting nothing. 'Mother mine ! I pray that your heart be ever centred in the due observance of Dharma. Fail not to tend the Holy 60 Fires. You should ever wait at the feet of his majesty, as if he were a mighty god. Behave towards the other royal ladies with kindness and affiability, putting away from you every notion of your high birth, the pride and haughtiness consequent on your being the 65 queen consort of the mightiest emperor on earth. Make no difference in your attitude towards his majesty and lady Kaikeyi. Look upon Bharata as the ruling emperor and render him due respect. Bear in mind the maxim of kingly polity 'Kings count their age not by 70 days and years, but by their wealth and power'; Bharata is younger than you and a son ; but none the less should you treat him with every mark of reverence and obedience.'

" 'Convey my affectionate enquiries to Bharata and 75 tell him from me 'I would have you make no difference, not the slightest, in your treatment of the royal ladies. Keep our sire in the kingdom even after you are crowned

and continue to render him all honor and respect as
 80 before, omitting not the least detail. Long years has
 he lived in this world before us; it behoves you to
 take his advice in everything and gainsay him not.
 Enjoy with moderation and prudence the unbounded
 power and wealth that have been entrusted to you.'

85 Rama next bethought himself with tears of his mother,
 exposed to the taunts and insults of others and of his
 miserable lot, that denied him the pleasure and privi-
 lege of being by her side and rendering her affectionate
 service. So, he added 'You will oblige me by making
 90 no difference between your mother and mine, see-
 ing that Kausalya lives only in me and for me.' Hot
 tears rained down his cheeks; his eyes were red with
 weeping and he remained silent for a while lost in pain-
 ful thought. And this is all the message that Rama
 95 sent thro' me.

"Unlike Rama, Lakshmana is not a good hand at
 concealing the workings of his heart. So he sighed fast
 and furiously and cried 'What fault, what crime did
 Dasaratha bring home to Rama that he has condemned
 100 him to a cruel exile? I would just like to know it. On
 his head and eyes were the commands of the despicable
 Kaikeyi; in obedience to which he perpetrated this
 horrible injustice and doomed us all to unknown misery
 and trouble. I care not whether he did so out of a desire
 105 to secure the crown to Bharata; take it any way you
 like, I assert that it is injustice, rank injustice and want-
 on. Why, he never specified to Kaikeyi what boons he
 would grant her; there was no mention, not the slightest,
 of Rama's exile to the forest or Bharata's being crowned
 110 instead. Common sense would have him remember
 that he had promised Rama before the assembled multi-
 tudes to crown him king, and might have refused

Kaikeyi when she asked him subsequently to crown her son king and send Rama out of the kingdom. The Smritis proclaim in no doubtful voice that one should 115 not exile his eldest son to the forest ; one should not set aside his eldest son ; one should not disinherit his only son. I racked my memory as well as I could but failed to find even the shadow of an excuse to banish Rama to the forest. If he has done anything to deserve such 120 a punishment, it is well and agreeable to the Sastras ; but you cannot, by any stretch of imagination, come upon it. So Dasaratha must have been guided solely by his whims and caprices ; or he must have defied the holy Books and ordinances, blinded thro' omnipotent 125 Fate. I would like to know how it is to be reconciled with his present grief and repentence. 'Tis verily because he has allowed his reason to go astray and has done this without deep counsel that his heart is torn with contrition. Do you blame me for thus speaking 130 ill of him that bore me ? The Sastras stand thus : 'Punishment stern and inexorable is the portion of him who is intoxicated with pride and strays from the path of justice and right, be he your father or your guru.' So I no longer regard his majesty Dasaratha as 135 my sire ; Rama is my brother ; Rama is my protector ; Rama is my kith and kin ; Rama is my father. Question me not why I renounce my natural father and adopt another whose claims are not so strong and binding. Rama is dear to the hearts of all beings ; Rama 140 ever seeks the utmost good and happiness of all beings. And Dasaratha, inasmuch he banished Rama to the frightful forests, has rendered himself hateful to all beings ; he has unconsciously sought their destruction. Who could ever love him or approve of his acts except 145 such despicable and black-hearted creatures as Kaikeyi

and her precious son Bharata? Dasaratha had the heart and the audacity to condemn to a cruel exile Rama, the soul of virtue and the source of joy and comfort to all his subjects. He has thereby courted the enmity of all beings; how then can he hope to deserve the name of a king, which connotes 'one who brings happiness and delight to the hearts of his subjects'? And this is what your son Lakshmana wanted me to 155 convey to you.

"He was unable to put up with the misery that had befallen Rama, and spoke out bluntly and manfully the thoughts that rankled in his heart. But Seeta acted not so. The daughter of Janaka is far-famed for her 160 excellent qualities of head and heart and no less for her practice of all domestic and social virtues. Of unfathomable purpose and resolve, her deep sights were the only index of her grief; and she stood gazing at vacancy, as if possessed. A stranger to anything in the shape of 165 grief or want, the sight of her lord and husband, in the grip of adversity opened the flood-gates of her heart. And she had no news for me. With a wan and pinched face, she looked at Rama through fast-falling tears and at me who was preparing to return to Ayodhya, no 170 doubt saying to herself 'Alas! How could my lord manage to walk through these thorny jungles deprived of his conveyance'. My last recollections of them were Rama standing with folded palms, trying his best manfully to keep back the rebellious tears; Lakshmana 175 attending upon him with fond solicitude; and Seeta weeping piteously and casting furtive glances at myself and the chariot."

CHAPTER LIX.

REPENTANCE OF DASARATHA.

“ HEN I turned my chariot towards Ayodhya, the horses yoked thereto shed tears of unutterable grief and said to themselves ‘We congratulated 5 ourselves too fondly that we had secured, through the merit laid up in former births, the opportunity to serve the Lord—far beyond the reach of Brahma and the other high gods. Alas! envious Fate has dashed the cup from our lips. Life holds for us nothing pleasant 10 or desirable. Vain, utterly vain has been this life of ours!’ And thus a prey to consuming sorrow, they would not consent to come away from Rama, even though I, the stony-hearted wretch, could bring myself to perpetrate that horror. I had a very hard time of it 15 dragging them to Ayodhya every moment against their will. I survived that stroke of misfortune, took reverent leave of Rama and Lakshmana and turned my face towards this city. But I had a sneaking hope and desire that Rama might relent and perhaps send for me 20 again. In that hope I stayed with Guha, the dear friend of Rama, for three days; and my grief bit me not so deep.

“ Your all-mastering desire to please Kaikeyi and the heedless act you were led into in consequence have 25 plunged the whole world in grief and misery. Rama is, as you well know, the soul and Inner Ruler, as it were of all beings in the universe; naturally trees, plants, creepers, flowers, fruits, leaves and shoots have dried up and withered by the scorching fire of grief that con- 30 sumes them; for have they not their life in Rama? The cool pellucid waters of the rivers, lakes and pools

is now scalding to the touch. The hardy forest trees
that look not to man's kind efforts to water them, dry up
35 and wither as readily as the delicate trees and plants
so carefully nurtured in groves and gardens by the fos-
tering care of man. Birds and beasts sit dazed and move
not. The fierce animals of prey, ever restless, are now
sunk in hopeless torpor. The forest haunts wear a still-
40 ness of death and the millions that inhabit it are speech-
less with woe. The petals of the lotus shrink and
drown themselves beneath the waters. Pure streams
and water-courses run muddy and discoloured. The
flowers in the lotus-pools are scorched and shrivelled.
45 The fish below and the fowl above lie motionless with
grief. The flowers that grow on land and water are dull
of color and devoid of perfume. Sweet fruits turn
insipid and repulsive. Gardens, walks and pleasaunces
are now deserted and still; birds lie in their nests in
50 dead faint. Groves and gardens have lost their cheer-
ful attractive look. No one evinces any joy or delight
when I enter Ayodhya. They find Rama's place in
my chariot empty and heave hot sighs and frequent
like a furnace. Tears course down their cheeks ever
55 and they stir not from the royal abodes and public
walks. From storied palaces and turreted mansions,
noble ladies observe me driving back the royal chariot
empty of Rama, start in affright, cry 'Ha! Alas,! ' gaze
at one another blankly and burst into tears. Your friends
60 at Ayodhya are in no way distinguished from strangers
or enemies; I see no difference in the measure of their
grief of separation from Rama. A people melancholy
and joyless, elephants and horses weak and faint from
grief and misery, wails, laments, groans, sobs and sighs
65 paining your ears at every turn—this fated Ayodhya,
that quivers with the agony of her unendurable torment,

resembles in many respects lady Kausalya here, on whom lies heavy the misery and misfortune of having been deprived her world-honoured son." And as Sumantra, through a storm of tears and sobs, proceeded to describe the harrowing fate of all beings, Dasaratha, impelled by his guilty conscience, said to himself "Verily, this Sumantra has answered my queries but too well. I have got more than I wanted, more than I bargained for. One could see with half an eye how he points out to me as the author of all this ruin and evil." He silently acquiesced in it and replied "Sumantra! Kaikeyi basely deceived me, got me to promise her boons, and when I least expected it, put the screw upon me to fulfil them. What could I do? She is an adept in wickedness and comes of a race grown grey in sin. So it was that I, in utter folly, took no counsel with friends, ministers or citizens and, on the spur of the moment, perpetrated this horrible iniquity, driven to it by the wiles of a woman, and to win a smile of her fickle false lips. This great grief has befallen, without any apparent reason, this fair line of Ikshwaku; and I naturally infer from it that the time is near when it will be extinguished under the weight of the accumulated sins of its past. Sumantra! if you remember any kindness I have shown you in the long past, prove your gratefulness by taking me as quickly as you can to where Rama is at present. My life-breaths threaten to escape this tortured frame that hardly holds them back. Sunk as I am in the depths of woe, my rule and power is yet undiminished; and I lay on you my commands to start at once and bring back Rama to my side. For I feel I cannot live without him even for a muhoorta. If my boy has travelled far by this time, take me to where he is and let me draw life and light from

100

his countenance. Alas ! What have I, on whom already fall the shadows of death, what have I in common with the noble hero, whose even row of beautiful teeth shame the buds of the Kunda ? A desperate sinner I, what
 105 hope for me to be so blessed as to catch a sight of him ? Let me but look once again at Rama and Seeta and I am sure to bid defiance to death. I am hurried, all unwillingly, into the jaws of the monster and can keep my self back only by having a sight of the fair face of Rama,
 110 lighted up by his beautiful eyes and lovely ears adorned with costly gems. What greater misery for me than to depart from this life without being able to see Rama, the glory of the line of Ikshwaku ! Ha ! Rama ! Lakshmana ! Janaki ! What dire misery have I brought
 115 upon you ! I have you all, but have lost you all practically, in that you see me not, torn from this life by the fangs of the poignant grief at being separated from you." And like wax in the midst of a hot furnace, his grief melted his heart and drowned him in the depths of woe.
 120 "A vast ocean it is for me to be torn from the side of Rama ; its shores are my last look of Seeta ; the deep sighs that tear at my heart are its fathomless eddies ; my fast-falling tears are the foam on its waves ; my tossing to and fro in restlessness and pain are the huge
 125 fish that cleave its waters ; the unceasing wails and laments on all sides are the thunder of its billow ; my aged locks that lie dishevelled in dirt and dust are the moss and fungus on its surface ; Kaikeyi, the fiend, is the quenchless fire Badava ; my tears are the inex-
 130 haustible source wherefrom it flows unceasingly ; the insidious counsels of the black-hearted Manthara are the huge monsters of the deep ; the boons that Kaikeyi got out of me are the waves that threaten to reach the heavens ; my heartless exile of the god-like Rama

aptly represents the extent of it. Whelmed in this fathom-less gulf of sorrow, how can I hope to cross it safe without Rama? I implore and entreat to be allowed to see Rama and Lakshmana, but ah me! I am fated to die with the cry upon my lips. Need I any worse omens of the fate that awaits me?" So raved he in may a wise and toppled from his seat in a dead faint. Kausalya observed that he wept and raved more piteously than ever and her heart was filled with a mighty fear of what terrible fate might befall her husband, even as her mother's heart was tortured to think what cruel dangers lay in wait for Rama in the dark forests.

CHAPTER LX.

SUMANTRA CONSOLES KAUSALYA.

LIKE one possessed of an evil spirit, Kausalya sat on the bare ground, trembling all over, faint and pale as one whose life-breaths were escaping. All at once she turned to Sumantra and cried "Turn the heads of the horses towards the forests and take me on the wings of speed to where Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta abide. I cannot, do what I may, live away from them for a moment. Lead me, I pray you, to the dark wilds of Dandaka. If I see them not, I am sure to make the journey to the realms of Death." She broke off, choked with tears. Then the aged councillor, bent towards her all respectfully and said. "Lady! Cast away from you every thought of grief at being parted from Rama. Far be it from you to entertain any anxiety about how Rama would fare, what miseries he might undergo. Let not your sorrow waste away your life and limbs. It is all unmeet for you to lament so when your

20 god-like son is a hundred times more happy in his forest home than you ever saw him at Ayodhya ; regret and repentance, sorrow or grief are utter strangers to his heart. Lakshmana is well conversant with the inner mysteries of Dharma; hence he serves at the feet of Rama
 25 with restrained senses, at all times and in all places ; and verily his reward is something beyond the power of speech or thought. It is but a dreary forest where Seeta dwells, devoid of any human habitation ; yet she abides there as happily and fearlessly as in her
 30 palace at Ayodhya ; her thoughts, her words, her acts, her life itself are centred ever in Rama. The rough forest life causes her no shade of anxiety ; any one would swear that the forest was her only home and that she was born and made to live in it. She roams as fear-
 35 lessly among the haunts of cruel and fierce beasts as she used to do at Ayodhyā in the pleasant gardens thereabouts. Her whole self is centred in her lord and husband ; and her face, fair as the moon in her full, is never darkened by any cloud of care or sorrow. Her
 40 heart is ever absorbed in Rama ; her life-breaths rooted deep in Rama ; devoid of Rama, the fair Ayodhya is a howling wilderness to her ; with him, the trackless wastes are fairer and more happy than Ayodhya. On their way she ever and anon stops to inquire of Rama
 45 and Lakshmana about the hamlets, villages, towns, trees, rivers and their currents. Forest life seems to her as happy as a holiday in the gardens near Ayodhya. The child made a very wonderful remark in connexion with Kaikeyi." He suddenly checked himself." What an
 50 old fool I am ! Were I to give out the very severe words that Seeta used about Kaikeyi when the party left Ayodhya behind them, it would delight the heart of Kausalya. So thought I in my stupidity. But, this

aged king and his wife would, of a truth, give up their ghosts if they were to hear it. I will manage to change 55 the subject anyhow." He pretended to recollect hard some very important thing that eluded him as cleverly. "It is a very curious remark. Stay, let me compel my treacherous memory to restore it. What a pity ! This cursed old age has taken advantage of the sight of your 60 grief to rob my memory clean of it." He changed the subject and discoursed of such things as would soothe and console Kausalya. "Believe me when I say that Seeta's beauty and radiance is but heightened by her long walks, by her free exposure to wind and weather 65 and by the sight of the wild beasts and birds of the forest. Like a full-blown lotus or the lovely moon in her golden orb, her face loses not in the least its natural grace or lustre. And then, the sweet honeyed speech of hers ! Her shapely feet that erstwhile were adorned 70 with the juice of red cotton, are none the worse for it ; they are of a lovelier shade of colour even like the tiny lotus-buds, from constant trudging over hill and dale. You never see her without her ornaments, so great is her love for them. It is a real treat to watch her graceful 75 walk along the rough thorny ways, her golden anklets chiming melodiously as she glides along. She clasps her hand in that of Rama and never shows the least fear at the sight of a lion or a tiger or an elephant. So, there is not the slightest reason to grieve on their 80 account. The story of how Rama carried out the behests of his sire will live among men as long as the sun, the moon and the stars course on their paths. Without the slightest trace of regret or sorrow or repentance, they walk in the path of the hermit and anchorite ; 85 they feast delightfully on rare and curious fruits, roots and other woodland fare ; their hearts, their

90 souls are ever centred in carrying out the commands of his majesty as best as the could." Sumantra, with his wisdom and experience of ages, tried his best to console Kausalya and change the sorrowful current of her thoughts, but she would not be comforted and ceased not her cry 'Ha, Rama! darling of my heart! Ha, flower of the line of Raghu !'

CHAPTER LXI.

KAUSALYA REBUKES DASARATHA.

5 **W**HEN she was assured beyond a doubt that Rama, the soul of righteousness and the giver of delight to all beings, had really betaken himself to the dreadful forests, Kausalya could scarce keep back her sorrow and anger. She turned upon poor Dasaratha and cried "Lord of men! The three worlds resound with your praise as 'the soul of compassion. He has 10 ever a smile and a pleasant word for all, high or low'. Well, how do you reconcile it with the horrible suffering you have wantonly and in cold blood inflicted upon your sons and Seeta, now dragging their weary limbs along the rough and thorny forest ways? What pos- 15 sessed you to perpetrate this act of eternal infamy ?

" I care not if the three worlds acclaim you as the stern votary of truth, who kept his plighted word and shrank not from the dreadful sacrifice of having to banish to the frightful woods the son of his heart, that was 20 vouchsafed to him in his old age, after countless years of vows, fasts, penances, sacrifices and stern austerities, and *that* at the moment of his coronation as heir-apparent. My Rama is a very fountain of mercy, the soul of compassion; never word crossed his lips that

would cause any the slightest pain to another. I care 25
not if the world sings high his praise as having sacri-
ficed the crown so readily at your lightest word, lacking
the courage to say 'I have no idea of renouncing the
crown after you have promised it to me before the
countless millions of your subjects'. What is that to 30
me ? How does it stay my grief ? What balm does it
spread over my lacerated heart ? How does it fill the
dread void in myself, from whose arms you have torn
all mercilessly the only child of my old age ? Now,
Seeta has but just entered the period of her youth ; 35
brought up in the lap of luxury and ease, made for a
life of comfort and happiness, how could she stand the
sun and rain, wind and weather, hail and snow of the
rude forests ? Accustomed to be served with curious and
delicate dainties of food, comfits, and meats by cele- 40
brated *chefs*, how could the high-born princess feed upon
forest grain and such rude woodland fare ? Ever roused
from her slumbers by delicious strains of vocal and
instrumental music, how could she bring herself to
sleep, her ears pained and horrified by the terrible roars, 45
cries and howls of lions, tigers, elephants and other
cruel beasts of the forests ? Alas ! I know not where
my Rama has flung his weary limbs with his shapely
arms for a pillow—Rama as stately and graceful as the
rainbow, Rama, the flower of valour, with long arms 50
that reach below his knees, hard and strong as iron
bolts. Bright as the lotus, rendered brighter yet with
his eyes that put to shame the delicate petals of the
lotus, redolent with the fragrance of his breath sweeter
than that of the lotus, his dark curls half-revealing his 55
broad and noble forehead—is it given to me to behold
his fair face but once again? I see him not ; yet my life-
breaths course in my body ; my heart shatters itself not

into a thousand pieces. It needs no prophet to assure
 60 me that it is made of the hardest adamant. What
 crueler act, what more fiendish scheme can any one
 devise than your systematic and ceaseless persecution
 and exile of every one that is in the least related
 to me ?

65 " Fear not that Bharata might lose his kingdom
 when Rama comes back to Ayodhya at the end of fourteen years. Rama is not so base as to accept at his
 hands the kingdom that had been Bharata's for so many
 70 years. We see in ordinary life people who set about
 to perform the Sraddha rites in honor of the departed
 ancestors, carefully avoid Brahmanas grown grey
 with age, wisdom and virtue, though they are to
 be had for the mere asking, and choose their own kins-
 men or dependents that they might benefit by the fees
 75 and presents accruing therefrom. Later on, after the
 Sraddha is over, they invite the good and worthy
 Brahmanas to dine with them. Do you think they
 would ever dream of going there, even if the food placed
 before them was the amrita of the Gods ? Say not ' It
 80 is not food polluted by Soodras, but the remains of what
 has fed holy Brahmanas'. The deliberate insult offered
 them cannot be wiped out by any such honor or show
 of it. A noble bull and high bred, would it stoop to eat
 of the grass that has fed another ? Rama is enti-
 85 tled to sit on your throne after you as the first-born
 of your loins and as uncontestedly superior in all
 human and royal excellences ; now, Bharata, younger
 in years and in merit, has it ; and would Rama take it
 back from him after fourteen years of unbounded rule
 90 and power ? You have been the emperor and ruler of
 this broad earth for ever so many thousands of years.
 Know you not the right and wrong of it ? Have you

ever seen a tiger even wasting a glance at the flesh that wolves and jackals have eaten of ? Would Rama ever dream of this your kingdom after another had his 95 fill of it ? Offerings cooked or burnt, the sacred grass Kusa and the sacrificial posts are useless for any religious purpose after they have been once used. No one cares to drink of a cup where another has left for him but the lees. No one cares to accept the doubtful 100 merits of a yaga from another who had drunk of the soma juice offered in it. Even so, Rama would not even care to listen to any talk of this your kingdom that you have given to Bharata to enjoy. A royal tiger suffers not another of his species even to smell the tip of 105 its tail ; even so Rama would be the last person to sit quietly under this insult.

" Shelter not yourself under the excuse ' What can I do ? Rama has chosen to be deprived of what was his by right. He is a coward and a weakling. His 110 very impotence has driven him to seek safety and shelter in the forest. He banished himself, not I ". Nay, not so ; the banded might of the fourteen worlds above and below are powerless to gaze at him when the spirit of war is upon him. Do you want to know 115 why he has elected to efface himself ? He always seeks to make others walk in the path of right and duty by example and precept. He would not go back upon his plighted word and seek to possess himself of this kingdom by violence. Of unfathomable strength 120 and valour, should he choose to shoot his gold-bound arrows at the world, it is but child's play to him to consume to nothing the seven oceans, the lordly mountains and the majestic rivers, even as the Spirit of time reduces to nothing the great elements when the long 125 Age of Brahma comes to a close. Strong with the

strength of maddened lions, with eyes large and lustrous as those of a bull, the first and best of men, his might and valour are utterly beyond speech and thought.

130 "We see fish prey upon its spawn; and you have chosen to imitate it by sending to a sure death, your first-born and best. No one would say you nay, if your exile of your righteous son is the Dharma lived by the brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaisyas, if it is in
 135 accordance with the dictates of the sastras, if it is sanctified by age and wisdom. But stretch my intellect and imagination as far as I may, I see not that it comes under any class or kind of Dharma.

"Manu lays it down that a woman knows no other
 140 refuge, no other shelter but her wedded lord; in his absence, the son is her sole refuge; if it is not to be had, her duty devolves upon her parents and kin; she should look for help and protection to no other. Now, the father watches over her welfare and happiness dur-
 145 ing her childhood, the husband during her youth, and the son in her old age; hence a woman is never left to herself. Here you are under the thumb of Kaikeyi, my co-wife and rival; you are as good as lost to me. My only son has been buried by you in the forest; he is
 150 as good as lost to me. My kith and kin are far away; I might not go to them when my husband is alive. So, you have ruined me on every side beyond hope of remedy. I care not if I am the only person involved; but you have ruined this fair realm of Kosala; you have ruined
 155 the countries where rule those in any way connected with you; you have ruined myself and my child; you have ruined this Ayodhya and the people that live in it; you have ruined your ministers and well-wishers; and last, you have ruined yourself. Now, what have you to
 160 show in return for this heavy load of sin you have

heaped upon yourself ? Whom have you pleased thereby ? I hope that at least your dear wife Kaikeyi and Bharata the darling of your heart are satisfied. Is it not enough if their hearts are gladdened ? What care you how the world goes ? What care you whose hearts 165 break ? After me the deluge.” Thus did Kausalya strike with cruel and venomous words at the bleeding heart of Dasaratha, who fainted away, unable to bear the shock. And with darkening consciousness, he said to himself ‘What sin, what heinous sin have I committed in my 170 past, to draw upon myself such a terrible retribution?’

CHAPTER LXII.

“LORD ! I AM LOST.”

KAUSALYA, the mother of Rama, spoke out of an angry and sorrow-laden heart. Her harsh speech offended not Dasaratha who said to himself, “It is but truth she speaks. I lent weak ears to the fiendish Kaikeyi and wrought a sin unparalleled in the history of Creation. I am damned beyond all hope.” He lost his hold over his senses and mind ; and after a long interval of blank stupor, he was dragged back to 10 life and its sufferings. Kausalya stood by him ; his thoughts turned upon her and he said to himself “The Books tell us that our acts, good or evil, put forth their fruit even in this life, if the driving force behind them be but intense enough ; and so, my darling son is torn from 15 me and I suffer indescribable tortures thereby. Let me try to remember any crime or iniquity in my past births that I now expiate so horribly.” Then there flashed across his brain the memory of a dark sin he had been guilty of in the far past, when, all innocently, he 20

slew the fair son of a hermit by the shaft known as Sabdavedhi ; the painful recollections gave the finishing blow to the poor old man who was already staggering under the shock of separation from Rama.

25 He fainted away once more ; anon he sat up trembling all over with a new-born fear and with bowed head and clasped hands of humility he turned to Kausalya and said "Behold, I entreat you in all repentance. Pray grant me your forgiveness. I know you of old as
 30 returning the wrongs and hate of others with kindness and love a thousand-fold; I have heard it said that to the faithful wife and true, her husband is a living god, be he angelic in disposition or otherwise. Your heart is ever wedded to Dharma. It is not unknown to you the
 35 ups and downs of life, the play of circumstances and surroundings that make all the difference between man and man. No one can deny that you are crushed under the load of that greatest grief that could ever befall a human being. But, see you not that I am almost
 40 demented with a like grief ? Does it become *you* to speak to me these words, so cruel of import ?" And the mighty emperor, in whose smile or frown lay the life and death of countless millions, entreated her as any meanest suppliant in accents of contrition and humility that
 45 would melt a heart of adamant. It was too much for Kausalya ; the flood-gates of her heart were opened and the tears rained from her eyes as the water-courses during the heavy winter rains.

She seized the joined palms of Dasaratha, placed
 50 them reverently on her head and cried "Alas ! To what dreadful sin has my anger driven me !" Mighty fear gripped her heart and shaking all over like a withered leaf, she exclaimed: "Lord ! I throw myself at your feet, a miserable sinner and pray you to forgive

me and extend your sweet compassion unto me. I am 55 lost, I am damned beyond all hope, the very moment when you entreated me with joined palms; and why seek to pierce a dead heart with these terrible words? A woman but invites her utter annihilation here and hereafter, whose husband, wise and famous, entreats her 60 with clasped hands. I am not so utterly lost to all sense of right and justice. Know I not that Dharma has no mysteries for you, that Truth was ever your beacon in life? Pardon me the ravings of a woman driven to madness by the loss of her son. Grief robs us 65 of our fortitude; grief makes short work of what we have learnt and heard; grief is the sure destroyer of everything we hold dear and precious; grief is our most relentless foe. We can stand the shock of a sudden attack from our visible enemy; but we are all powerless 70 under the stroke of grief, be it ever so light. It is five days to-day since Rama left me here to go to the forests, left me a prey to cruel grief; and it seems to me five milleniums. My grief grows upon what it feeds. Have you not seen the cruel ocean roar all the more fearfully, 75 for the rivers of the world pouring into it their volumes of water?" And upon Kausalya repenting thus fell the shades of night. Dasaratha was somewhat consoled by her words and sank into a deep slumber, overpowered by various and conflicting emotions. 80

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE CRIME OF DASARATHA.

HEN a muhoorta later, Dasaratha awoke and was straightway caught by his sleepless foe—Grief. It absorbed him quite, like the bright sun slowly 5

sucked in by the maws of the evil-faced Rahu, ever since the fatal moment when he drove the god-like Rama and Lakshmana to dread exile. It was the sixth day of his bereavement; and black Night was fast coursing towards the confines of her realm to hand over her sceptre to her bright successor. Dasaratha dragged forth into light from the dark closets of his memory, the dread crime he had committed in the years that were dead and addressing Kausalya all gently, said, "Dear ! I take
 10 it that your anger against me has abated somewhat of its fury. Hence, I make bold to tell you this. Every one in this mortal world reaps what he sows, good or evil, inexorably, unerringly. It is a fool that stops not to inquire before he begins anything, if the
 15 results thereof be light or heavy, if the chances are in his favour or against. It is a fool who sacrifices much to gain a little; his brother is he who sets his hand to that from which no good accrues. It is the mark of a wise man to sacrifice a little and gain much ;
 20 he savours of prudence who sets his hand only to that which brings him good. I dyed my soul black with the heinous sin of exiling Rama to the woods to gain a worthless trifle—to bring a smile to the lips of Kaikeyi.
 25 The wide world holds not another fool to stand by my side.

" There was once a lovely garden and in it a palasa tree in the midst of a grove of sweet mango. Nature bethought herself one fine day to put on her flowered robe; and the palasa was almost invisible behind its bright
 30 garment of blood-red flowers. The mangoes put on *their* holiday garb, but it was dull and unlovely. The gardener came in and glanced at his trees. A wise man he was in truth, for, long experience had made him sage ! ' My palasa ' said he ' gives bright promise of a brighter

future; flowers so lovely are but the pioneers of lovelier 40 fruits. Lo! yon mangoes with their sombre peasant garb do but index faithfully the dull insipid fruit they are to bear. Now, who but a fool would waste his time and labour on these mangoes that are a sorry foil to the fair palasa? He, in his sapience, uprooted the mangoes, one 45 and all and devoted his time and labour to the rearing of his favourite palasa. Another day Nature choose to put on her garb of ripe luscious fruit. The man of wisdom went forth into his garden, where stood his palasa with ugly ungainly fruit; its gaudy tinsel garb of 50 flowers had been stripped off its back by the inexorable seasons. He glanced at his neighbour's garden, whom he scarce deigned to remember as a fool and idiot. It was barely visible for the mango trees that studded it, bending low with the weight of their golden fruits, 55 and the swarms of bees that clustered about them to drink of the honey-sweet juice that flowed therefrom. Verily, none would like to change places with the fool in his disappointment and sorrow. Hence, I say to you that he who sets his hand to anything without deep 60 enquiry into the possibilities thereof, would have to gather in a harvest of sorrow and disappointment, like the ninny that reared up with infinite care his favourite palasa. I am that double-distilled idiot who uprooted the precious mangoes and gave myself up to the rearing 65 of the palasa. I watched with infinite care and solicitude over Rama's infancy, childhood and manhood, but when the moment came for my efforts to bear fruit, I drove him away from the kingdom. There can be no surer sign of my folly than my useless grieving when it 70 is too late. I could scarce believe that it was this very same Dasaratha who deemed it a trifle to solemnly promise to crown Rama as heir-apparent and forswear

himself before the day was dead, who steeled his
 75 father's heart against love or pity, the better to consign
 his first-born and best to the cruel forests. And all this
 for what?—to win the love of fickle false-hearted Kaikeyi
 who loved him not.

“ In the bright morn of my life, when I was perfecting myself in the arts and accomplishments that become the future ruler of a kingdom, I was considered to be the master of Sabdavedhana (a mystery of the science of the Bow, which consists in shooting down birds and beasts beyond ken, guiding oneself solely by 85 the sounds they make). Pride and conceit filled my heart to the brim ; and blinded thereby, I perpetrated a deadly sin. Like a child that, in its innocence, drinks off the poisoned cup and writhes in agony, I am doomed to pay with my life the folly of my youth. As a rule, 90 one's crop of karma, good or bad, is gathered in future births or other worlds ; but my sin was unspeakably horrible. The driving force behind it made it bear fruit in this very life. Like the fool who, deceived by the bright beauty of the palasa flowers, revels in imagination in a future harvest of golden nectarine fruits to 95 match, I mastered the mystery of Sabdavedhana and was blinded by the praise and fame lavished upon me thereby ; but I heeded not the sin and the sorrow, the infamy and grief that lay in wait for me all pitilessly.

100 “ Long before I sought your hand in marriage, when I was the heir-apparent, the changing year brought round the winter rains. Men's blood begins then to course in hot lava streams through their veins, love and passion fanning them to a white heat. The sun drinks 105 up the essence of the earth, scorches the world with his rays and wanders off towards the south. Then, heat takes to itself a holiday and disappears. Clouds dark

as night come out of their caves, and gladden the hearts of frogs, chatakas and peacocks. Drenched with the showers and pelted with the arrowy drops, birds 110 grope their way to the tops of trees heavy-laden with rain. The lofty mountains haunted by elephants in rut are entirely hidden beneath the ceaseless downpour and present the appearance of a waveless ocean. The mountain torrents flow pure and 115 unstained for some distance from their source ; later on they turn red as they run through the earth rich in ore of varied hue, like speckled serpents running through the ashes of a forest conflagration. At that time I went out a hunting in my chariot along the banks of the 120 Sarayu. I lay concealed a long while with senses on the alert, hoping by night to kill some buffalo, elephant or tiger that came to drink at the river's brink. In the stillness of the night, a sound fell upon my ears as of an elephant drawing water up his trunk. It 125 was pitch-dark, so that you cannot see your hand a foot off ; in truth, it was the sound of some one immersing a pitcher in the water. My heart beat with joy at the thought of bagging, at the outset, a mighty elephant ; and I sped a sharp and cruel arrow, like the hooded messenger of death, to where the sound proceeded from. The new day was fast approaching. All at once, a cry pierced my ears, the cry of a hermit who, struck to the heart by my shaft, fell down exclaiming 'Ah me ! I am done for'. My victim continued to moan and wail in his 130 agony 'Alas ! I am a poor innocent hermit. Never have I harmed any creature. I have no enemy in the world, not one. I came to this lonely spot to draw water, confident that no man or beast would frequent it. Who has shot this deadly shaft ? I do not recall any wrong I have done 135 to others. I am a nameless anchorite who had long

ago left behind me any harm or injury to others, in thought, word or deed. I but feed upon fruits and roots and other woodland fare that I could get here and
 145 observe stern austerities. What have I done to die such a miserable death! What will my slayer gain by my death, a poor thing clad in bark and skins? Again, I ask myself whom I have offended. Verily, who would praise this cruel deed that bears no fruit but
 150 an evil one? As well applaud the impious wretch who dares to violate his Guru's wife. Not that I grieve to quit this frail body; but my poor parents, old, blind and helpless—alas! what would become of them! Long years have I tended them, an only son. They would
 155 not survive me. What devil in human shape thus conspired to kill us all, father, mother and son by a single shaft? Yet he is no better than a veritable fool and the slave of his passions, that has perpetrated this foul iniquity.'

160 "Stern allegiance to Dharma was ever the key-note of my life. When those heart-rending words smote my ears, my bow and arrows dropped from my hand. Grief and fear, dark and terrible, enveloped my senses and mind, and crushed them in their deadly grip. My
 165 feet were unconsciously drawn to the place whence these sounds proceeded, my heart sinking low at every step. A cruel sight met me there. A young hermit lay on the ground writhing in mortal agony, his heart pierced with my shaft, his matted hair tossing hither
 170 and thither, while he flung his pitcher away from him and sought to escape from the dreadful pain that racked his limbs. His wasted frame was covered with blood and dust. After a while his eyes fell upon me shaking with terror and staring at him blankly like one posses-
 175 sed; he darted a glance of fire that might have reduced

me to ashes on the spot and cried in a terrible voice " Protector of men ! A poor hermit I, a solitary ranger of the woods, what harm had you at my hands that you should pierce me with your venomous shafts ? Why have you struck me down, who but came here to draw water 180 for my aged parents ? May be it is sport to you to bring me down with a single arrow ; but, know you that you have sent to their death my father and mother too, hoary with age, blind and helpless. They are expecting me every moment, poor souls ! I know not how long they would 185 bear the pangs of cruel thirst. How have they stood me in good stead, my wide and profound study of the holy Books, my ceaseless and stern austerities. Alas ! My father is not aware of my lying low here, done to death by you cruel king. Vain hope ! Feeble, tottering with 190 age, what can he do, knowing ? A proud tree, riven to pieces by the merciless strokes of a storm, what succour can it expect from its life-long neighbor ? Dasaratha ! Be it your penance to take this terrible news to my father ; else he will send you to perdition, as surely 195 as a forest conflagration consumes the dry and withered trees it feeds on. His hermitage is hard by. Take refuge in his mercy that he may not launch his curses at you. This sharp-toothed barb has sheathed itself in my heart and causes me intolerable agony, even as an angry 200 current that brings down the sandy hillocks that bar its way. Do me a favor by drawing it out, ere you go."

He marked my hesitation ; for, to disobey him was to prolong his torment ; to obey him would wrench his life out of his body ; and his death would at once invest 205 me with the hideous cloak of Brahmanicide. He saw Death beckoning to him and turned himself to me with a painful effort. " Dasaratha, do not give way to purposeless grief ; call up your fortitude to your help. You

300 need not apprehend the cruel fate that awaits the slayer of a Brahmana. My father is a Vaisya and my mother a Soodra.' And with his senses all unhinged, he writhed on the ground in fearful agony. Then I plucked out the fatal shaft. He stared at me with dumb terror
 305 in his eyes and quitted this life. There he lay, drenched with gore and water, his heart yet palpitating with the frightful torment he passed through; and I wept aloud in nameless grief.

CHAPTER LXIV.

DASARATHA PASSES AWAY.

AY dark sin, begot of ignorance, gripped my soul and sent my senses adrift. To inform the miserable parents or not was the supreme question of the moment. Everything urged me to face the situation boldly. I filled the pitcher and took my way to the hermitage as directed by my victim. There sat the bereaved parents, aged, infirm, helpless
 10 and all unable to move about, like birds shorn of their wings. They were talking of their son and wondered at his long absence. They eagerly expected him every moment, but they knew not I had blasted their hopes for ever. Fear and grief choked my utterance and I
 15 stood there like one dazed.

The father was quick to catch the sound of my footsteps and cried "Darling! Why delay? Hand us the water. May be you were playing on the river banks; your mother is dying with anxiety; come
 20 in. I am sure you will not bear in mind anything that we might have done to offend you, consciously or otherwise. Know you not that you are a hermit, all

stern and inexorable to himself, but soft and compassionate to others ? We are blind, but we see thro' you. Our life-breaths are faint, but we live thro' you. Why 25 so silent ? " Terror choked my reply ; but I mastered it with a mighty effort ; my stern self-control and discipline as a scion of warrior-kings served me well and I replied " I am a kshatriya, Dasaratha by name. It is not given to me to call myself the son of such great- 30 souled ones. A dark sin of my far-off past bore fruit now and guided my hand to commit a horrible crime, condemned by the good. I came to hunt on the banks of the Sarayu and lay concealed to shoot the beasts that came to drink of its waters at night. A sound, as of an 35 elephant drawing up water through his trunk, reached my ears and I let fly a shaft, guiding myself by the direction of the sound. All at once an agonised cry pierced my ears and I flew to the spot but to find a hermit youth transfixated with my arrow and writhing in the 40 grip of death. I aimed my arrow at what I took to be an elephant, but I brought death to your son. I went up to him and drew out the fatal barb, whereupon his life-breaths quitted the body. He rose to the Mansions 45 of the Blessed exclaiming ' Alas ! My poor old parents ! What will become of them, blind and helpless, now that I am taken from them ? ' His last thoughts and words clung to you. This is what I have done ; I slew your son, but all unknowingly. I throw myself upon your mercy.

50

" The old hermit and his wife almost fainted away from uncontrollable grief. My cruel words pierced their hearts, deep, very deep. He turned his eyes upon me where I stood before him palm upon palm and cried " Had you done this dark deed of shame and sin and yet refrained 55 from being the messenger of your own crime, your .

head had split in a thousand pieces thro' my dread curse.
 A warrior born, that spills all wantonly a hermit's blood,
 is sure to be hurled down from his high estate, be he
 60 the king of the celestials. He whose shaft strikes a
 knower of Brahman absorbed in meditation, has his
 head split in seven. But your brain planned not the
 crime your hand has committed. Repentance dire and
 full has begun your punishment already. It is no light
 65 thing for you to muster up courage to bear the dread
 news of your own guilt; that explains how you live to
 tell it; else your glorious line, at whose head stands
 the mighty Ikshwaku, would, by this time, have been
 engulfed in the water of oblivion. Why speak of you?
 70 Lead us to the spot, for we would even behold our dar-
 ling son who lies, I ween, stark and cold, drenched
 with gore."

"I led them there, the unhappy parents. They gently
 stroked him, their only son, and all at once fell upon
 75 him, crushed by overwhelming grief. Their cries and
 laments were piteous to hear. 'Child! Have you no
 word for us, no reverent greeting? Why do you affect
 the cold, dank earth? How have we angered you, darling!
 Know you not that I am dear to you beyond count?
 80 Behold your mother. Turn your eyes upon her; clasp
 us in fond embrace and let us drink in your words of
 ambrosial sweetness. Ah! shall I hear in the small
 hours of the morning your gentle voice chanting the
 Vedas and the Sastras? The prayers to the Goddess of
 85 of evening twilight duly offered, the sacred fires tended,
 you came to where I sat, lonely and with the shadows
 of separation from you drawing near, and sought to
 cheer me by many a word, by many an act. When shall
 I see another such? I am too weak to go the round of
 90 my daily duties; too weak to procure the means of

sustenance for myself and your mother. I have none else in this wide world to look after me ; none else even to guide me with my staff. You knew it all and gave me no occasion to remember it, so kindly and so watchfully did you serve me, as if I were an honoured guest, 95 for whom fruits, roots and other woodland fare were all too insufficient. Lo, your mother ! tottering with age and infirmity, blind, doting upon you ! Grief has deprived her of what little mastery she had over her senses. How shall I maintain her through the long years, 100 myself utterly helpless? My darling ! Stay, go not to the dread halls of Death. Wait a while for your old father and mother ; to-morrow and we will all journey together. What will become of us in this forest without you or any one else to take care of us ? Haste not, 105 we are even now coming with you. We will go up to the throne of Lord Yama and I will look him in the face and say 'King of justice ! Pray excuse our son for not presenting himself before you as soon as he received your orders. We have none else to protect us, to take 110 care of us and we pray him back of you.' I am sure the Regent of the South will grant me my wish, lone and helpless.

"Nothing can lead me to conclude that this your untimely death is in expiation of some dark sin in the 115 far past. This wicked wretch has laid you low, a meek white-souled saint. Rise up to the bright worlds on high where abide noble warriors that died for their king, for their God and for their country, with laughing faces turned towards the foe, and all thro' the might of the 120 merit you have laid up, thro' the might of Truth to which I have dedicated myself. Rise up to the Spheres of light where sit in brighter glory such heroic emperors as Sagara, Saibya, Dileepa, Janamejaya, Nahusha and

125 Dundhumara. Take your place by the side of those wise and great Ones who devote themselves to the study and practice of the Holy Writ ; of those who give away, in glad gift, houses, hamlets, villages, countries and kingdoms; of those who unceasingly tend the holy
 130 fires; of those whose hearts cleave to their wedded wives, gentle and faithful; of those who give away countless heads of kine on auspicious conjunctions. May you join the ranks of such as ever wait with reverent solicitude on the good and the great. Sit with those
 135 who make a resolve to reach the high worlds of glory thro' the observance of such stern vows as the Maha-prasthana and cast off their frail bodies where the Ganga and the Yamuna meet in joyful acclaim or in [the holy fire. My long line of stern self-controlled tapasvins
 140 counts none who had not a seat in the resplendent halls of light. You are the son of my heart. Your slayer shall drink to the last drop of the cup of misery and torment". They then busied themselves with the funeral obsequies of their son torn from their sides, all
 145 untimely, who rose from the funeral pyre in his glorious body of light thro' the merit of hard-won tapas. The Lord of the celestials, came down to the spot and led him away in his vimana to grace the halls of Swarga. The youth turned to his parents before he
 150 left the earth, saluted them with reverent affection, and consoled them in many a wise. He then rose from the earth and proceeded thro' the regions of the sky, honored by the denizens thereof. 'All this and more do I owe to the might accruing of my humble and rever-
 155 ent service to you. I will not be long separated from you in my abode on high', were the last words that reached the grief-stricken parents.

"The aged father rendered his son the last offices

and turning to me, who stood trembling by with clasped hands of fear, said "Protector of men ! slay me too. 160 Death has no terrors for me, now that you have taken away my only son from me. You deserve to be consumed to ashes for having brought to his death my darling child, pure and stainless ; but your heart guided not your hand, and I curse you lightly when I say you will 165 suffer a similar terrible bereavement. You will lose your son before your eyes and your life-breaths will go with him. You, a Kshatriya, spilt the blood of one who had dedicated himself to the service of God and Man ; but, all unknowingly you did it and are hence saved from a 170 deadly sin. A gift to a holy Brahmana comes back to the giver in the shape of untold merit; even so, the grief that consumes me shall dog your steps and speed you to the dark realms of Death." Lamenting in this wise, he built a blazing fire, entered it with his aged partner 175 in life and passed on to where his darling son sat on his throne of glory.

"I was racking my brains to find out the cause why this great grief befell me, engendered by the separation from my son; and it flashed upon me, the memory of the 180 great sin I had been guilty of in my youth by shooting the shaft known as Sabdavedhi. An invalid, suffering from a dangerous illness, feeds upon what nourishes his ailments and hastens his death : even so, my dark sin has sought me out. The words of the great One have 185 borne fruit and I go to-day to meet my death. Kausalya ! my eyes have lost the power to see you; so have the kindness to touch me ; let me feel the pressure of your flower-soft hands." He sobbed aloud, in the grip of a mortal fear. "What can it be, but the marvellous 190 efficacy of the hermit's curse—my banishing Rama to the woods, all innocent in thought, word or deed; and

more wonderful still, his cheerful acceptance of the unjust and atrocious punishment I inflicted upon him,
 195 urged on to it by the venomous words of cruel Kaikeyi. Else how could I reconcile the even righteous tenor of my life, whose heart was ever wedded to Dharma, with the unholy and iniquitous plot, so basely hatched by myself and my partner in guilt? Again, why should
 200 the unparalleled, nay, the partial affection that Kaikeyi had for Rama till now, turn all at once into bitter hatred and malice? Most wonderful of all, why should the noble heart of Rama be utterly free of anger or ill-will towards me, who wronged him so
 205 grievously? No sensible person will immure his son in the dark and dreary forests, be he a devil incarnate; and if he did, no angelic son would view it with any other feeling than that of righteous indignation. Oh that Rama touched me once, but once, with
 210 his flower-soft hands! Nay, enough if his noble face dawns upon my fading consciousness but once; and I defy death and all his host. They who journey to the halls of Yama, take their last looks of those near and dear to them. Alas! Kausalya, I see you not; my
 215 memory reels. The messengers of Death bid me haste. Woe is me that my darkening eyes are not fixed on the divine beauty of my Rama! A more miserable lot can never be mine. The grief of my being denied the company of my darling dries up the springs of life, even as
 220 the summer sun drinks up the shallow puddles. Verily, they are gods immortal, not men, to whom it is given to behold the fair face of Rama, fifteen years from this day, radiant as the orb of Night in her golden fulness, the priceless ear-drops heightening, if possible, the
 225 sheeny splendour. Eyes lovely as the petals of a full blown lotus; eyebrows darkly pencilled and exquisitely

arched like the bow of Cupid ; the even row of his pearly teeth ; the finely chiselled nose, that puts to shame the jasmine buds ; the noble proportions of his countenance, that lend a charm, by comparison, to 230 the full autumn moon or the blowing lotuses ; wafting sweet and delicious fragrance—how blessed are they who would gaze on it, when he returns to Ayodhya from his self-imposed exile, like the Regent of Venus re-entering his sphere ! Kausalya ! 235 my heart breaks under the crue strokes of grief. My senses contact not the accustomed objects. The rays of the lamp flare up into darkness when the nourishing oil dries up : even so my senses are extinguished, one by one, when my mind reels on its tottering 240 throne. This grief hacks at the threads of my life, poor wretch, half dead ! even as a raging flood brings down the undermined banks. Raghava ! my prince of heroes ! dispeller of my grief ! most loving ! my refuge ! my darling ! where are you ? Kausalya ! life is no more 245 for me. Sumitra ! what an awful grief falls on you ! Kaikeyi ! the dark Fate of Ikshwaku's glorious line ! cruel demon ! my murderer, who borrowed the shape, of Yama for the while ! " Soraved on the dying king, while there stood by him the noble mothers of Rama 250 and Lakshmana. Heart-rending were his laments for the son of his heart whom he was lured to banish to Dandaka. And at the dread hour of midnight, when the dying day brought forth, in pain and travail, her bright-eyed heir to light, the foaming billows of grief 255 bore Dasaratha, the Emperor, on their breasts, on, on towards the dark and gloomy portals of Death ; yet, lo ! his eyes wore a look of holy calm and joy, as if surprised and awed by the sudden presence of some mighty Being.

CHAPTER LXV.

HIS WIVES' LAMENT.

AT day-dawn, panegyrists skilled in the science of words, and the minstrels with the chronicles of time stored in their capacious memories, gathered without the sleeping apartments of the king and with them musicians expert in auspicious song, and set about to chaunt the praises of Dasaratha. The 10 grand and sonorous sounds echoed through hall and court. There were some among them who could express the complicate evolutions of time with their palms and these sang his glorious deeds to the accompaniment thereof, keeping beautiful time. Thereat, the 15 feathered songsters, free and caged, awoke and discoursed their sweet woodland melody. There were others of the choral band who sang the names of the Almighty, "Hari, Narayana". Some sang the praises of the holy Ones, the sacred places and waters. Some played 20 skilled music on the veena and the other instruments. Some recited benedictory stanzas. Some declaimed poems and epics composed in honour of his majesty. The palace of the monarch echoed these grand and auspicious sounds.

25 Then entered to the royal bedchamber such women, eunuchs and other attendants as were skilled in the etiquette of awaking kings. Others there were, experts in the mysteries of the bath, who kept ready in golden ewers, crystal water stained with heavenly sandal and 30 other fragrant substances, as the time and the season would have it and as the sastras have laid it down. Many a servant-maid there was, pure, young and fair, that bore auspicious unguents and essences; the cow and

such other sacred objects to touch ; powdered mixtures of cocoanut, sesamum and cumin-seed, to gargle after 35 the teeth had been cleaned, to make the breath fragrant and sweet ; roots and herbs of mystic potency ; the sacred waters of the Ganga and the other sacred streams ; holy Tulasi leaves and water that were offered at at the feet of Sri Ranganatha, the household deity of 40 the Ikshwaku line of kings, to clease the soul of every sin and infuse might and right to engage in all good and pious works ; mirrors, clothes, ornaments, flowers, garlands and other toilet gear. Every one of the articles kept there for the monarch's use when he 45 awoke to the duties of a new day, was the fairest and the best of its kind. The assembled crowds waited in the antechamber to pay their respects to the king before the sun should rise. But when they saw that his majesty came forth not even after sunrise, vague sus- 50 picions crossed their hearts as to what might have befallen their lord.

The royal ladies that slept near the king roused him gently and respectfully with appropriate words and expressions ; they touched him ; they shook him ; but 55 they failed to detect any breath, motion or heat as betokens a sleeping man. They knew very well the usual signs of sleep, light, heavy and profound—the movements of the limbs, the beating of the heart and the deep and regular breathing. They observed him 60 variously and minutely, but could discover none of the above signs of life. Mighty fear then took hold of them ; they trembled at the horrible suspicion that forced itself upon their minds that their lord had gone forth from their midst, never to return. They shivered and 65 shook like the slender water-plants that lie in the path of a roaring torrent. Then, the truth was forced upon

now that you have cleared your path of foe or rival. My
 25 only son Rama has elected to lead a forest life and has
 left me behind him to bewail my lot; my husband, my
 sole refuge, has returned to his seat on high, forgetting
 that my place is ever by his side. A band of travellers
 passing thro' a dark forest infested with cruel beasts of
 * 30 prey, leave behind them one of their number. One
 could very easily prophesy the fate of that unfortunate
 in the dark and pathless wilds. Even so, I have not
 long to live. No good wife likes to be away from
 her lord and husband; but you have nothing in com-
 * 35 mon with such—you, that have deliberately turned
 your back on every obligation of Dharma. One, who is
 possessed by the demon of gold and eats of the fruit
 kakamarda, has he any idea of the dangers that lie in
 wait for him? You are a living monument of virtue,
 40 compassion and altruism—you who, at the whispered
 counsel of a hunch-back, steeled your heart to lay
 the axe at the Ikshwaku race, root and branch. Noble
 woman! you got some undefined boons from his
 majesty in the far past; when it suited your purpose,
 45 you bound him to it by a dreadful and solemn oath;
 you had not the slightest hesitation to sacrifice Rama
 and Seeta and consign them to a living death to secure
 your ends. Were king Janaka to hear of this, would
 not his father's heart quiver with agony as mine does?
 50 My son, they say, is among the living; yet he is dead
 to me, for I shall see him no more. That noble-minded
 youth knows not that I am baited by my foes, sonless,
 widowed, helpless and abandoned by god and man.
 Alas! how my child Seeta would tremble with fear in
 55 the dark woods infested with beasts of prey—she, the
 beloved daughter of the ruler of Mithila, all unmeet to
 face the rough winds of privation and adversity, but

now become an object of pity to all. The hideous roars, howls and cries of the night-ranging beasts and birds will drive her, affrighted and trembling, closer to the 60 side of Rama. She was everything to her father, son and daughter all in one. Age has chilled his heart ; and the miserable fate that has befallen his darling child would eat into his soul and bring his grey hairs to an early death. A faithful wife and noble has no joy or 65 sorrow apart from her mate ; when he happens to be away from her in other lands, other countries, she drags on a miserable existence, hating the very sight of dresses and ornaments ; and she does not allow her husband to precede her even by a moment on the path to 70 the seats of glory. My place in life or death is by the side of my lord. I follow him through fire and water and share his home in earth or heaven." Thereupon the attendants of the palace tore her away, all unwilling, from the body of Dasaratha, she wailing all the 75 while most piteously.

Then Vasishtha directed the ministers and the other officers of the palace to preserve the body in a cauldron of oil and proceed with the funeral rites. But the servitors, conversant with the royal usages, traditions 80 and customs, made respectful reply that it was not seemly to render the last offices to a father in the absence of his sons. No impurity can attach to the body from the crematory rites being delayed, its contact with oil being an effective safeguard ; and they 85 would take all care of the late tenement of Dasaratha till his sons should arrive to assume charge of it.

His queens stood round the cauldron with streaming eyes and cried with raised hands: "Maharaja! you knew full well that Rama is not here to watch over us— 90 Rama whose feet never stray from the path of Truth,

who has ever a pleasant word and look for every one of us. Yet you had the heart to abandon us thus to the tender mercies of Chance and Adversity! You wretch
 95 of a Kaikeyi tore Rama from our side ; and now she has added one more to her victims and deprived us of our husband. How could we dare to live in the vicinity of that incarnation of sin and treachery ? Rama was ever our shield and sword ; Rama was ever devoted
 100 in his attentions to you ; of unshaken fortitude, he put away from him, with a smile, Power to whom he was about to be wedded and chose to betake himself to the forest in the company of Mahalakshmi. Kaikeyi, invested with brand-new power and wealth, would grow
 105 intoxicated and insult and torment us. Without your noble self or that hero to take refuge in, how shall we manage to live, the billows of misery threatening to whelm us every moment? It is nothing for her to seek the ruin of her wedded husband, of Rama, Lakshmana
 110 or Seeta ; and it is but a step further to send us on the same path."

Dark and gloomy was Ayodhya that day, like a moonless night or a widowed wife. The tears of men flowed unceasingly ; noble dames cried aloud in their
 115 grief ; squares, and public altars at the cross-roads and the private houses of residents had an empty, inauspicious look, slovenly, ill-kept. The Lord of men was driven by grief of separation from his son to tread the road to the other world ; his wives were laid low by the cruel
 120 stroke of sorrow and sought relief in the arms of unconsciousness. The Lord of day was deeply grieved at the death of his glorious descendant and with a wan face, sought the privacy and solitude of his chambers in the west. The afflicted Earth found refuge in the dark em-
 125 braces of Night.

Some of the royal kinsmen suggested that the cremation should proceed forthwith; "for" said they "Dasaratha has four heroic sons; but it is the hand of Fate that keeps them away from his side, one and all. So, we do ill to delay." But the ministers and coun- 130 cillors would not have it so; they would not take it upon themselves to conduct the funeral obsequies without the presence of at least one of his sons.

Dasaratha, the princes and Seeta away from Ayodhya, it presented a repulsive sight like a sunless 135 firmament or a moonless night and starless, while groups of sad-faced men and women filled its streets and squares, weeping with silent grief. Kaikeyi was the subject of their talk, Kaikeyi the best hated person at that moment in the whole creation. Not a face was 140 relieved by any gleam of comfort or consolation; not a heart but was surcharged with misery.

CHAPTER LXVII.

KINGLESS AYODHYA.

HE age-long night drew to a close and its horrors were heightened by the waves of misery and grief that rolled over the inhabitants of Ayodhya. 5

The God of day took his seat on his throne of light; and it was a sign for the officers of the state and brahmanas to meet in the hall of audience for high debate. Markandeya, Maudgalya, Vamaadeva, Kasyapa, Katayana, Gautama, Jabali the far-famed and other 10 saintly brahmanas and ministers addressed themselves to Vasishtha, the high-priest and said: "The night has passed and it seemed to us would never end. Could it be otherwise when our king has preferred death to

15 separation from his son ? Well, the Maharaja has gone back to his seat on high; Rama roams afar in the wild woods ; the glorious Lakshmana never quits his side ; Bharata and Satrughna spend happy days at Rajagriha, the home of their grandsire, and the capital of the
 20 Kekaya realm. It is imperative that some one of the princes should sit on the throne of Ikshwaku ; we betray our trust by abandoning this kingdom to anarchy and destruction.

“Varuna and Indra turn away from a kingless land
 25 and send not the welcome showers to cool the burning plains ; or at best, hail and snow. No one troubles himself to till the fruitful soil. The son pays no heed to the words of the father ; the wife seeks to rule the husband. No one dares to keep with him, things precious or valuable, for fear of thieves or robbers. No one can, at any moment, call his wife his own, for, she might be torn from him by a lawless and mightier kinsman. This is only an earnest of many other horrors and terrors that march towards a kingless land. Trade and commerce, sale
 30 and barter, import and export, borrowings and lendings are ever conspicuous by the absence of fair dealing and honesty. Fear of life and property throttles every one's energies and kills in him any desire for united action and counsel for public good. In a land
 35 where might is right and violence the order of the day, no one is fool enough to plant gardens or open alms-houses, rest-houses or monasteries. A calm and self restrained brahmana, ruler of his senses, regular in his observances and vows and conducting the prescribed
 40 rites and ceremonies that tend towards public and private weal, such a one is a *rara avis*, nay, a myth. Possessors of untold wealth are never inclined to celebrate yagas and yagnas on a large scale

with bounteous sacrificial fees and gifts. For, who would attract by his wealth or the appearance of it, the 50 robbers or the royal officers who are no better? Masters of song and dance never conduct the temple festivals. The sacred spots and waters are powerless to attract huge crown of pilgrims; for, both conduce to the material and spiritual welfare of the 55 state. No merchant thrives in his trade. Bards and minstrels, teachers and expounders of the sacred lore never gladden and elevate the hearts and intellects of the people; for, where could you gather an audience who would be so free from care and anxiety 60 as to be inclined to listen to such themes? No profound scholars or *literati* would meet one another in the halls of learning and hold subtle disputes; for, who will arrange such peaceful and profitable meetings? Who has the time or the means to reward them as they deserve? 65 You do not come across young maidens in the public gardens, in gay attire, gathering the star-like flowers or disporting themselves in the cool waters; for the thief is ever present. No happy parties coursing fast in their graceful conveyances to the woods; for, robbers 70 and lawless men infest every road and path. Men grown rich thro' farming or agriculture never enjoy the watchful care and protection of the king and sink into the arms of sleep with doors that know no bolts nor fastenings. There go not along the royal 75 road elephants sixty years old, ever in rut, with gleaming tusks and melodiously sounding bells. No more falls upon the ear, the martial twang of the bow and the whirr of the flying shafts, as the young warriors take the degrees in the science of archery. No caravans 80 of merchants journey to far countries with the wealth of a kingdom in their packs. No recluse, no

hermit, an anchorite, no man of god that, with controlled self, keeps away from the madding crowd's
 85 ignoble strife and moves all alone, with the glorious image of the Lord, ever enshrined in his heart of hearts, finding a happy home wherever night chances to overtake him; for, where is he who would feed such a one? No acquiring of fresh wealth and goods, nor peaceful
 90 possession of what was earned with labour and toil. No armies that cheerfully march to battle and either return with victory or die where they stand with grim faces turned towards the foe. No well-dressed citizens move about the town on business or
 95 pleasure, in palanquins or chariots, or on horses or elephants. Experts in the sastras never hold converse on high themes in the asramas of the rishis or in the gardens about the town. You come upon no devout and pious crowds of men and women hastening
 100 to the fanes of the gods to worship them with reverent offerings of garlands, cakes, fruits or money. No bands of youthful princes adorned with sandal, aloe, or other perfumes, like stately trees over whom spring has thrown her flowered robes. Like a dried up water-
 105 course, or a grassless meadow or a masterless herd, a kingless land comes to no good. A banner is the living sign of a chariot; smoke proclaims the presence of fire; and our majesty, who was our living representative and sign, has chosen to quite this world for that of the gods.
 110 In a kingless land none dares to call anything his own. Like fish in the ocean, the great feed upon the small and they upon the smaller and so on *ad infinitum*. Those that were severely punished by the king for falling away from the duties of their rank and order,
 115 those who proclaim and live a godless life, this is their day of power and glory. They wreak their hoarded

vengeance upon the good and the innocent; and the world will laud them to the skies as great men and holy.

"The eye ever seeks the good of the body and keeps off evil; even so a king stands between his subjects and evil; he is the horn of Plenty thro' which showers on them every comfort and luxury. Truth and Dharma have their springs in him; nay he is Truth; he is Dharma. He makes every provision for high-born men to discharge the duties of their order unimpeded. He is the father of his subjects; he is their well-wisher and benefactor.

"The God of death is entrusted but with the adjustment of the karmic results. Kubera is charged but with the dispensing of wealth to those that deserve it; the three worlds look forward to Indra but to protect them; it devolves upon Varuna but to hold all beings to the laws of life; and, these Regents of the quarters rule but over a portion of the population of the earth. But the king combines in himself the functions of all the Four; he is the sole protector and ruler of all the quarters: hence the Regents stand infinitely below him.

"Alas! If there be no king in a country to enquire into right and wrong, this world and all it contains would grow dark with ignorance and sin, as when the Night of dissolution wraps it in its deadly folds.

"The mighty ocean does not overstep its confines; even so, your word was Gospel to us when his majesty was alive. And now, it is doubly sacred. Wisest and best of Brahmanas! Revolve well in your mind our pitiable condition that roam like a masterless herd. Cast your eyes on this fair realm, now no better than a howling wilderness; and place over us any deserving son of Dasaratha as our king."

150

CHAPTER LXVIII.

BHARATA SUMMONED.

SO spake Sumantra and the other ministers, supported by Markandeya and the other brahmanas.

5 Vasishtha gave meet reply: "Bharata resides at present, and Satrughna with him, at Rajagriha, the capital of his uncle. Let fleet coursers bear our envoys to bring him back on the wings of speed. His majesty has elected Bharata to take his place on the throne; 10 and we do ill to delay. I see my proposal is acceptable to you. Siddhartha! Vijaya! Jayanta! Asokanandana! Draw near and pay heed while I instruct you in detail as to what you should do. Find fleet horses to convey you to Rajagriha, as soon as you can; betray not in the 15 least any signs of the sad calamity that has befallen us; salute the princes respectfully and say to Bharata 'Lord! Vasishtha, your chaplain and the other ministers make kind enquiries of you. They send word through me that you come back at once in connexion 20 with a very important affair.' No word nor hint should escape you of the unhappy exile of Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta to the woods or of the demise of our monarch. Take with you fine dresses and precious ornaments as presents to the king of Kekaya. Delay not." He pro- 25 vided them amply with funds for the journey.

They went home, took leave of their people, made careful preparations for the long journey and soon left Ayodhya behind them on steeds fleet as the wind. They rode west and turned north through the mounts Aparatala and Pralamba, following the course of the Malini. 30 North of Pralamba, they again resumed their westerly course, crossed the Ganga near Hastinapura and

travelled into the Panchala country thro' the Kurujan-gala dominions, feasting their eyes on many a beautiful lake and flooded stream. On, they rode still west ; they 35 crossed the lovely Saradanda ; on its western bank there stood the mighty tree named Satyapayachana, to the Spirit of which they offered due adoration and worship. They passed by the city of Kulinga, and crossed the mount Bodhibhavana. The hamlet Abhikala was 40 soon left behind and the Ikshumati came into view, the ancient boundary of the Ikshawaku kings for genera-tions past count. Brahmanas profoundly learned in the Vedas, drank of its waters with their hollowed palms. Thro' Bahleeka they passed, on towards the mount 45 Sudama. They paid due reverence to the impress of the holy feet of Vishnu on it and passing by the Vipasa and the Salmali, they covered leagues and leagues of hill and dale, river and rivulet, lake and pool, while fierce lions, tigers and bears stared at them as they tore 50 through the forests like a hurricane. "If we bring back Bharata as soon as we can, the funeral rites of Dasaratha will be performed forthwith and he will ascend to the worlds of happiness. If we take back Bharata as soon as we can, Kosala will have a king and the mas- 55 terless millions, a protector. Further, Bharata will be mightily pleased at being chosen to render his royal father the last offices in death." These thoughts spurred them on to greater speed. And so, they entered the city of Girivraja on jaded horses after sunset. 60

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CHAPTER LXIX.

BHARATA'S DREAM.

THE day broke sadly for Bharata; he dreamt a dream in the last watches of the night and was grieved to think that it would prove too true. His friends noticed his gloom and sought to chase it away. Some played on the veena and other musical instruments; some sought to engross him in the silken toils of dance and song; some declaimed plays in Samskrita, Prakrita, Paischasa, Magadha and other dialects; some drew him into light and humorous talk; others related droll stories and tales. A dear friend of his noticed that his thoughts were far away and were engrossed with some sad subject, and said, "Friend! your face is not as bright and cheerful as usual. Some great grief weighs on your soul. Will you not allow us to share it with you?"

To which Bharata: "Would you like to know the cause of my unwonted darkness of spirits? Last night I had a dream, when I saw my father with dishevelled hair and dirty limbs leap off a lofty mountain into a deep pool filled with liquid cowdung and swim there in high glee. Ever and anon he drank oil from his hollowed palms and laughed uproariously. His body dripped with oil. He ate ravenously of food prepared with sesamum and took a header into a deep pool of oil. The ocean dried up revealing its sandy bottom. The moon fell from the sky. A great darkness blotted out the world. The tusks of the state elephant shivered to atoms. Blazing fires went out all on a sudden. Earthquakes split the solid globe; trees withered and shrivelled; mountains emitted black fumes. His majest-

was seated on a throne of black iron, dressed in black robes, while women of black and yellow hue stood round and clapped their hands in maniac laughter. 35 Next, he decked himself with red sandal paste and red garlands, took his seat on a chariot drawn by asses and drove south in deadly haste. A Rakshasi clad in red, dragged him along, her hideous face distorted with unholy mirth. These sights of ill-omen troubled my 40 dreams last night. One of us, his majesty or Rama or myself is sure to die.

"If you dream of driving in a chariot drawn by asses, you are sure to see ere long the smoke rising up from your prye. Now, you have the key to my 45 heavy heart and apparent indifference to all you so kindly do to cheer it. My throat is parched; my mind undergoes some nameless torment; I see nothing that could cause me fear, but I have not the slightest doubt that I am in its grip. My words, voice and tones have 50 lost their wonted dignity and force. I am shorn of my brightness and lustre. I hate myself; but, I cannot lay my finger on that which lies behind all these manifestations. Never had I any dream like this. I am convinced beyond a doubt that it will be fulfilled. My 55 heart is invaded with a growing fear when I associate this ill-omened dream with my sire of superhuman excellences."

CHAPTER LXX.

BHARATA RETURNS TO AYODHYA.

HE was yet speaking when the envoys from Ayodhya entered the impregnable Rajagriha upon horses trembling with fatigue and exhaustion, 5

born of fast and furious riding. They paid their respects to the king of Kekaya, and placed before Yudhajit, the heir-apparent, the presents they had brought with them.

When he had duly rewarded them, they turned to

- 10 Bharata, touched his feet and said, "Lord ! The high-priest, Maharshi Vasishtha and the other councillors make kind and respectful enquiries of you. They directed us to say to you, 'Come back to Ayodhya without a moment's delay, as an important affair requires your
 15 presence here. Select what you approve of the dresses and ornaments we send you and hand over twenty crores worth to your grand sire and ten crores worth to your uncle.' "

Bharata did so and entertained the messengers

- 20 with extreme kindness and hospitality ; then he asked them " My sire, is it all well with him ? Is it all well with the great Ones, Rama and Lakshmana ? I hope queen Kausalya does well, the happy mother of Rama the soul of wisdom. She is the deserving object of my
 25 respect in every way ; blind to the defects of others, she is as keenly appreciative of everything good in them. Well conversant with the mysteries of Dharma, she practises them to the best of her ability. Is it all well with queen Sumitra, she that bore Laksh-
 30 mana and Satrughna ? And is it all well with my mother Kaikeyi, ever selfish, cruel-eyed, liable to sudden fits of anger and supremely self-conceited ? What message bore you from her to her people here ? " The messengers saw that Bharata had some faint conception
 35 of the real state of things at Ayodhya and hastened to disabuse him by their prompt reply, " Lord ! It is all well with those whose welfare you ever have at heart. Everything good and auspicious awaits you there. It is time for us to start." They gave him a general assurance

of the welfare of his people, afraid to awake his 40 suspicions by a detailed news of his friends and kin. It was with a purpose that they used the words 'good and auspicious,' for they wished to ward off all evil and ill-omen from him, and give him a faint hint of his approaching greatness; but they succeeded in keeping back 45 from him any mention of the doings at Ayodhya.

Then Bharata sought his grandsire and said, "The messengers from Ayodhya would have me start at once. Pray give me leave; I will be with you whenever you may desire my presence here." The lord of Ke- 50 kaya embraced him warmly, kissed him on the head and said, "Darling! I wish you a happy journey. Fortunate is Kaikeyi that bore you. Convey my kind enquiries to her, to Dasaratha, to Maharshi Vasishtha, to the other saintly brahmanas and last, not least, to the 55 heroic princes Rama and Lakshmana." He spoke his high appreciation of Bharata's manifold excellences, presented him with elephants of noble breed, shawls of rare workmanship, curiously prepared deer skins, two thousand nishkas to grace the breast and one thousand 60 six hundred steeds. He called to him faithful council-lors and noble and said, "Go with Bharata and see that these things reach Ayodhya safe." Yudhajit, his uncle, presented him with numerous elephants from mounts Iravat and Indrasiras; mules, skillfully trained and 55 fleet as the wind or thought; and, besides, many noble hounds. Carefully bred and trained in the royal appartments, of immense strength and endurance, they were fiercer than tigers. Armed with formidable spear-like fangs, their exquisite symmetry of form and develop- 70 ment masked their huge chests and limbs. But Bharata, absorbed with the thought of being back at Ayo-dhya as soon as possible, delighted not in the rich and

curious presents. The unusual haste and solicitude
 75 that marked the action of the messengers, deepened
 the gloom and anxiety bred of his evil dream.

He took hasty leave of his grandsire and uncle,
 and with Satrughna by his side, soon left the city far
 behind. His attendants followed him in chariots drawn
 80 by camels, bullocks, horses and mules. Like bands of
 devas marching forth from the capital of Indra, Bharata
 and Satrughna journeyed on towards Ayodhya, surrounded
 by the armies of Kekaya.

CHAPTER LXXI.

BHARATA RETURNS TO AYODHYA (*continued*)

THEY turned their faces eastwards, crossed the
 Sudama and Hladini and at Eladana, famous
 5 for its cardamoms, the Satadru flowing west. They
 stayed a while to rest at the village Aparaparpata and
 crossed the Silavaha that mysteriously draws to itself
 blocks of granite. They passed through the town
 Salyakartana that lies to the south-east of it and Bharata
 10 relieved the people there of a great fear. They then
 travelled over high and inaccessible mountains to have
 a view of the beautiful forests Chaitraratha. The
 Sarasvati and the Sindhu, a tributary of the Ganga,
 were duly crossed and the party entered the forest of
 15 Bharunda, north of the dominions of Veeramatsya.
 The rapid Kulinga, enclosed by mountains and rocks,
 crossed their path near the Yumana; and on its further
 banks they camped during the hot noon-day sun. Some
 time was allowed to them to rest after their rapid and
 20 arduous journey. The horses enjoyed the cool
 shade and later on had a delightful bath in the river.

They had their dinner and stored water enough to last them during their march thro' the desert that lay before them. Like the Lord of air whom lofty mountains stay not, Bharata crossed the terrible desert on elephants of 25 the Bhadra breed, specially made, as it were, to journey through those waterless wastes. It was difficult to cross the Ganga near the city of Amsudana ; so, they chose Pragvata instead. Crossing the river Kutikoshtika, they came to the village of Dharmavardana. They passed 30 west of the village of Torana and reached Varoodha, passing by the village of Jambuprasta. They spent the night in the forest hard by and starting again at day-break, they travelled on east until they camped in a grove of madhooka trees near the town of Ujjihana. 35 Beyond lay the realms of Kosala. So Bharata ordered his troops to proceed leisurely and travelled fast, putting to his chariot fleet coursers. He stopped for a night at the village of Sarvateertha and easily crossed Uttanika and other rivers by means of horses born and 40 bred in the mountains. He rode through the river Kutika near the village of Hastiprishta and journeyed on, crossing the rivers Kapeevati, Sthanumati, and Gomati near the towns of Lauhitya, Ekasala and Vinata. He rested for a while in a grove near the town of Ka- 45 linga, traversed the forest during the night and day dawned upon him as he entered Ayodhya.

Seven days and seven nights was he on the road and on the morning of the eighth, he drove into the capital of his kingdom and said to his driver, " This 50 Ayodhya, famed thro' the three worlds and encircled by sacred groves, appears to-day to have been shorn of its glory and happiness. The walls are white and have not been smeared with cowdung for some days. The brahmanas that make this city their home, are masters 55

of the vedas and the vedanta; self-restraint, self-control and other attendant virtues crown them with glory. Under the watchful care and rule of Dasaratha, the saintly king, they spend their vast wealth in the performance of yagas and yagnas. How is it that there reach not our ears the sounds of men and women joyfully moving about? Why do we not see happy couples enjoy themselves the whole night in the lovely gardens about the town and depart to their abodes at day-break? Stateliness and beauty have gone away from Ayodhya and it seems to be weeping in solitary grief. Is it the fair capital of Dasaratha I see before me, or its ruins? The notables of the town do not drive fast on elephants horses and other conveyances, happily busy. The pleasure-gardens wear a joyless and dilapidated look, formerly so gay with parrots, cuckoos and bees maddened on the lucious fruits, roots and honey; the rare exotics carefully manured, watered and preserved; the flowery bowers, pools and artificial mountains skillfully arranged to afford every comfort and luxury to the countless couples that frequent them. Trees shed their leaves like fast-falling tears. It is sunrise and yet no beasts or birds go about to seek their prey with happy and joyful cries. The cool wind wafts not, as of yore, the delicious perfumes of sandal, aloe and incense. The ear is not delighted with the sweet sounds of veena, drum or tabor rising forth on every side. But many omens of cruel import meet the eye on every side. Some great calamity is speeding towards us. Would that I were assured of the safety and happiness of my kinsmen and friends. My heart is heavy and faint." Tortured with vague doubts, oppressed with a nameless woe, he drove, as one demented, thro' the Vaijayanta gate fast and furiously towards the royal palace,

the guards saluting him with cries of "Hail! All hail 90
to thee!" He returned their salute, stopped them at the
palace gates and with a mind teeming with a thousand
conjectures, said to his charioteer, "Why am I sent for
in such hot haste with no apparent reason? I suspect
some great calamity; for, my heart is faint, I see 95
around me all the signs of a kingdom widowed of its
lord and ruler. Behold the houses of respectable cit-
izens unswept, uncleaned, unadorned, with open doors
and a deserted look. No sweet incense rises up from
them, nor any smoke from the holy fires, reverently 100
tended. The inmates sit dazed and listless, bestowing
no care on themselves or on their belongings. The fanes
of the holy gods are vacant of bright garlands or chap-
lets; dust and dirt offend the eye everywhere; the
priests and the attendants have abandoned them. Each 105
holy shrine is utterly neglected and the gods receive
not due worship. The merchants sit in blank dismay
with no eye to business. The birds in the sacred pre-
cincts and holy trees droop with glassy looks and folded
wings. Groups of men and women stand along the 110
streets in stupid amaze, their never-ceasing tears
making channels thro' their faces and bodies caked
with dirt and dust." And so, he rode on to the
palace, viewing the dire signs of woe and grief along the
way. The squares and the royal roads that led from the 115
palace, he found lonely and silent. The gates were
thickly coated with dust and presented a repulsive sight,
for, there was none to trouble himself to clean them.
Ayodhya was in ruins, once so bright and resplendent
with wealth and pomp, even as the capital of Indra. 120
Those strange portents and eye-offending views deepen-
ed his gloom and bowed his head as he entered the
palace of Dasaratha.

CHAPTER LXXII.

BHARATA'S GRIEF.

BE found not the king in his apartments and sought him in those of his mother Kaikeyi. She could not contain her joy and sprang forward to meet her son after his long absence abroad. He entered the dismal palace and saluted his mother by touching her feet with his head. She clasped him to her breast, her darling son, smelt his head, and seated him on her lap, crying

10 "How long is it since you started from your grandsire's city ? Poor child, you are almost fainting from fatigue, from fast and furious driving. Is it all well with my father and my brother ? I wish to hear every detail concerning you, since you left this place. But, had you a
15 safe and pleasant journey here ? "

And Bharata made reply "Mother, it is seven days since I left Rajagriha. Your father and my uncle Yudhajit are doing well. They would load me with presents and my people could not travel fast in consequence;

20 so I drove in advance, leaving them to follow leisurely. What means this extreme haste to fetch me back ? How is it that this golden bed and seat are adorned not by their usual occupant ? Does he not keep good health ? Has he anything on his mind ? He spends his spare
25 moments with you and so I came here to pay him my respects. Where can I find him ? Is he perchance staying with Lady Kausalya ? I must see him this instant."

Her heart was wrapped with her unholy ambition to secure the crown for her son ; hence she fondly imagined that her terrible news would be most gratifying to him. So she turned to Bharata and said to him as he stood there all ignorant of the lamentable fate of his sire

"The glorious king, so noble, so righteous, has even gone the way of all beings." The shock was too much for Bharata whose pure white soul inherited the virtues of a long race of saintly kings. "Ha! I am lost" cried he; and stern warrior as he was and of undaunted fortitude, he fell down in a dead faint. But grief rudely dragged him back to life and to its torments.

"Like the Queen of Night in her perfect pomp and splendour as she rides through the clear skies, yon golden seat shone with the king reclining on it; and how hateful and repulsive it looks, in even as a moonless sky or the dried-up ocean." A storm of tears choked his words and he covered his face and wept aloud. 45

In dire dismay, Kaikeyi saw her son writhe on the ground in the grip of sorrow, like the Lords of day and night hurled down to the earth or a maddened elephant in the deadly toils of the hunters or like the state-ly monarch of the forest felled down by the axe of the woodsman. She raised him up lovingly and said "Arise, arise, lord of kings. Arise, chosen favourite of fame, Why roll your shapely limbs in dirt and dust? It befits you not, this grief. The world praises you as a mine of excellences. Your intellect finds its right work in sacrificial rites and profuse gifts, as the result of faithfully followings the behests of the Holy Writ and its loving exponents. The sun's rays will sooner desert him than your mighty heart be shaken by grief or misfortune." She strove to console him many a wise; but Bharata rose not from where he lay, nor ceased his piteous wails nor recovered from the cruel wounds caused by his mother's terrible words.

"Alas! I went away from here firmly assured that his majesty will crown Rama as heir-apparent and will conduct countless sacrifices. My fond hopes have

turned to dust and ashes. My heart breaks when I do not behold his majesty who was ever absorbed in the welfare of beings. What is the fell disease that rendered me
 70 fatherless and I far away ? Supremely blessed are Rama and Lakshmana to be with him during his last moments and render him every service and attention. May be my father knows not I am here ; else, he would clasp me fondly to his heart, smell my head and shed tears of
 75 joy. Words fail me to describe my feelings when he would wipe the dust off my body with his own hands. Somebody hasten to Rama's palace and respectfully submit that I await his pleasure to touch the feet of him who is to me brother, father, king and lord, all in
 80 one. To one who walks in the way of Dharma, the elder brother is a father. If his majesty has chosen to depart for the Mansions of the Blessed, whom shall I take refuge in but Rama ? My father lives in him and should I not hasten to pay him my respects ? My sire
 85 of blessed memory, was profoundly versed in the mysteries of Dharma. He never swerved from his allegiance to Truth. Principle and practice went hand in hand with him; unexampled valor was only one of the countless excellences that adorned him. What was his
 90 last message to me, his last advice, his last commands ? I long to hear it."

Kaikeyi was quick with her reply. " You were not in his thoughts when he laid aside his body of flesh. ' Ha Rama ! Ha Lakshmana ! Ha Seeta ! ' were the last
 95 words upon his lips. Like a mighty elephant writhing in his strong toils, your sire gazed at me at the moment of death and cried ' Ha ! blessed are they to whom it is given to behold Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta as they enter Ayodhya after their period of exile '." Bharata
 100 was sore stricken at the news of Dasaratha's death ;

deeper, yet deeper, did the iron enter his soul at the woeful news of the infamous exile of Rama and Lakshmana. "Where is he, the soul of righteousness, the darling son of Kausalya ? Why do I not see Lakshmana and Seeta ?" The foolish Kaikeyi knew not that her 105 news would be all hateful and repulsive to Bharata ; she fondly expected that it would be the happiest day of his life when he should hear that she had secured for him the throne of the Ikshwakus, over the head of the rightful claimant, Rama. "To the forest of Dandaka have 110 they betaken themselves, in the guise of lovely hermits, Rama and Lakshmana with Seeta for a companion."

Bharata knew right well that the scions of the Ikshwaku race were ever wedded to the Path of right ; a mighty fear came over him, born of the suspicion 115 that Rama might have been so exiled for some dark crime or offence. With faltering accents he ventured to ask "What brahmana has Rama deprived of house, land or gold ? What poor wight all innocent did he persecute ? Whose wife or woman did he cast adulterous 120 looks upon ? Why have they driven him to the forest of Dandaka, as if he were the foul slayer of a brahmana that walked in the path of the Holy Writ ?"

As is the way of womankind, Kaikeyi's heart beat high with the joy of her glorious achievement and she 125 was all afire to boast of what she had done and what she meant to do. She was the crowned queen of fools; yet her-self-conceit and haughty pride passed all thought. " Darling ! No brahmana was ever the poorer for Rama's presence in Ayodhya. No poor innocent received any but the 130 kindest treatment at his hands. Know you not that his eyes are never raised to the faces of other's women? I came to understand that the king meant to seat him the throne and quite naturally demanded of your father

135 on that you should succeed to the crown and that Rama should be banished to the woods. He promised me accordingly and I had no little difficulty in holding him to it. Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta cheerfully obeyed the commands of the monarch and departed to the woods.

140 Rama was near and dear to Dasaratha; grief at being separated from him was too much for the poor aged monarch and he pined to death in consequence. Arise and reign as the royal traditions would have you. All this I planned and wrought for you; and it is but an

145 earnest of what I mean to do for you. Grieve not; cast aside sorrow and pain of heart; pluck up courage. This fair kingdom is yours to rule, teeming with wealth and corn, abundance and plenty. This Ayodhya salutes you as its lord. Quickly pay the funeral dues to your father,

150 as Vasishtha and other religious experts guide you. Let my fond mother's heart be gladdened with the sight of my darling son seated on the throne of the Ikshwakus, ruler of this broad earth and all it contains."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE WAGES OF SIN.

WITH a darkening heart did Bharata listen to the glowing description of his father's pitiable death, 5 of his brother's unjust doom. Uncontrollable grief filled his heart and found vent in winged words of flame. "What have I to do with this vast empire, a luckless wretch, with the heavy sin on my soul of the murder of my father and the consigning to a living 10 death of my brothers? Your cruel hand cuts deeper and yet deeper into the wound you have caused and lays

salt and fire upon the gashes. Is it not enough for one man to bear, the foul murder of my sire ? Would not your wretched soul rest until it had immured Rama in the depths of the dark forests ? Like the Night of Dis- 15 solution that blots out the whole universe and all it contains, where did you lie in wait all the while to bring disgrace and destruction upon the fair line of Ikshwaku ? Alas ! his majesty took you into his household, all unawares, even as one clasps to his bosom coals of 20 living fire. His death lies heavy upon your soul ; I see your hand slay him. Shame on your house ! Was it for this that you were brought up in luxury and comfort, in pomp and splendour, by your father and your husband ? My sire never knew what it was 25 to go back upon his word ; his bright fame illumined the worlds ; yet he took you to himself as wife and lost every thing—happiness, honour, fame and life. What set you on to seek the death of his majesty whose heart ever turned to Dharma as the guiding star of 30 his life ? What sought you to achieve by banishing Rama to the woods ? Even if it so chances that Kausalya and Sumitra survive the shock of separation from their beloved sons, I am sure your merciless heart will not allow them to live long.

35

“Dare you say that Rama, the paragon of virtue, waited not upon you as dutifully and reverently as he did upon Kausalya that bore him ? Dharma has no mysteries for him. Kausalya, the far-sighted, was ever a dear sister to you, the fondest you can ever have ; 40 deny it if you can. And is not Rama, the first-born of that righteous lady who deservedly takes her place on the throne by the side of the lord of Kosala ? I marvel that your dark soul knows not sorrow nor contrition, not the slightest, even when you have driven the noble 45

One to the dreary forests, to live the lowly life of homeless hermits.

" Let be. Just tell me what your ambition, dark and ominous, aims at, now that you have driven away from
 50 this kingdom my pure and heroic brother of undimmed fame ? My poor intellect compasses it not. Your greed, your lust for wealth and power has blinded you so that you see not the boundless reverence and love my heart bears to Rama : for, if you had but an inkling of the
 55 truth, you will never dare to perpetrate this monstrous crime to secure for me this pitiable inheritance. What did you count upon to enable me to rule ever this vast empire, with Rama and Lakshmana far away in the distant wilds ? The golden Meru rejoices in the strength
 60 and protection of the woods that adorn its sides, to guard every approach to it ; even so Dasaratha, virtuous and mighty as he was, trusted most in Rama's valour and strength. A tender calf I, what chance to draw the load that would strain to the utmost the full-grown
 65 strength of a bull ? I am a boy in years and intellect ; what put it into your head that I had it in me to wield the sceptre that Dasaratha's mighty hand held over this boundless empire for twice thirty thousand years ?
 Grant that I, as the son of the famous Emperor,
 70 could manage to keep myself on the throne, more by might of intellect and strength of policy ; yet lay this to your heart right well—never, never will I see you rejoice in the fulfilment of your miserable schemes, you who wrought all this nameless havoc and destruction but to secure wealth and power to you son.
 75

" Were it not that my hands are bound by the love and the reverence that Rama bears towards you as his mother, this very instant will see you hunted out of the kingdom, far, far beyond human habitation. Who put

you up to ask of his majesty that the crown should go 80
to a younger son, in utter defiance of the claims of the
elder ? Has it any precedent in the records of my
famous house ? What a fool I am to speak in the same
breath of yourself and the ways of the good and the righ-
teous ! I cannot, for my life, contain my wonder when 85
I think how your foolish woman's heart was egged on
to this daring act. It is a world-wide tradition of the
line of Ikshwaku that the crown always descends
to the eldest son ; his brothers always obey and reve-
rence him as a father. Nay, this is characteristic 90
of every royal house from the beginnings of time ; and
all the more binding on the line of Ikshwaku. But
what have you, a fiend incarnate, in common with
kingly tradition or the eternal duty that lies on the lords
of men ? My ancestors, of glorious memory, bore the 95
palm among those that guarded, with sleepless vigilance,
Dharma and unstained honor ; and now nature has,
after infinite and patient labour, produced a paragon
of virtue in you, to lay your axe at the roots of the
fair tree of honour and fame that my forefathers have 100
reared with so much care and toil. Stay, the kings of
Kekaya, to whose house you say you belong, are noble
souls and reverently follow this traditional policy.
Then, what foul fiend twisted and warped your heart
and brains to contrive and execute this monstrous 105
atrocity ?

“ Come what may, I will not lend myself to gratify
your dark ambition. Do I not see that your ravening
lust of power seeks to rule thro' me, a miserable puppet
on the throne ? Wait a while and you will see me bring 110
back from the woods Rama, the beloved of all creation ;
I shall crown him in pomp and splendour right before
your eyes ; my life will be one long day of happiness,

rendering him every service and attention. I will not
 115 rest content unless grief and disappointment kill you by
 inches ; your miserable heart shall crumble to dust
 under the shock of shattered hopes." Thus did Bharata
 rebuke Kaikeyi with cruel words and seek to give vent
 to the surging sorrow that threatened to burst his heart.
 120 But it was too little for him, what he had done ; and like
 the noble king of the beasts thundering from his moun-
 tain lair at the sight of his foe, did he wax in his rage
 and thunder out his reproaches and taunts.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE WAGES OF SIN (CONTD)

BHARATA felt that he had but dealt lightly, very
 lightly with the woman who called herself his
 mother. The more he dwelt in imagination upon
 her unspeakable crime and its dreadful results, furious
 indignation mastered him quite, and he pierced her
 heart with sharp and cruel words. "Monster of cruelty !
 Perfection of wickedness ! take yourself away from
 10 this kingdom, from the sight of man, even as my grand-
 sire hunted your mother out of the country for her
 heartlessness and crimes. Do you expect me to survive
 the death of my sire and the banishment of my bro-
 thers and all at your hands ? Count me as dead ; and
 15 wail and gnash you teeth as long as your sinful life
 retains its hold upon the body, for the foul sin of having
 compassed the deaths of your husband, of your sons
 Rama and Lakshmana, of Seeta and of the countless
 millions that inhabit this city. My sire or Rama, how
 20 did they cross your path ? Can you show another such
 devoted servant of virtue and duty as my brother ? What

wrong what injustice did you suffer at their hands that you should in one and the same moment, slay the one and banish the other? You have destroyed this fair line of Ikshwaku and have thereby burdened your soul with 25 the sin of having murdered a brahmana for whom the Holy Writ has no mysteries. The deepest and the darkest hells call out to you to tenant them for all time; for, not for you the bright worlds where your husband sits on his throne of glory. My heart trembles in aff- 30 right at the recollection of your hideous sin, I, the son born of your loins; for, what devilish brain could ever conceive and compass the murder of your lord and husband and the exile of Rama, the beloved of all beings? It was your hand, I say, that plunged the dagger into 35 the heart of my father; it was your hand that drove from this fair realm, by lawful right theirs, my brothers and Seeta. Boundless and eternal sway over the kingdom of infamy and disgrace is what you have secured for me, your glorious heritage; and right well have you 40 crowned your efforts by bespeaking for me the miserable fate that awaits the foulest sinners. Fool, possessed of the demon of ambition! Is it a woman I see before me or a fierce blood-thirsty tiger of the jungles? Are you not my most relentless foe that has taken my mo- 45 ther's form to work evil and misery upon me all the more easily? Famous beyond compare in the annals of sin! Foul muderress of your fond devoted husband! soil not my ears with your hated speech. Lo! Kausalya, Sumitra and the other royal ladies are drowned in grief, 50 all through your vile machinations. Bright fame and incomparable have you secured to the house that gave you birth, to the house that took you in! King Asvapati is famed for his generous and noble instincts; age and wisdom sit gracefully upon him; hence, no reason could 55

ever reconcile one to call you his daughter. It is nearer truth to say that some malignant demon has chosen this form to bring destruction upon this house. Hear me once again ; you have buried in the depths of the
 60 dark forests Sree Ramachandra, the living embodiment of duty and truth ; you have directed the grief engendered thereof to bring about the death of our lord and king ; what object in creation, be it the meanest and the most wicked, would ever regard you with affection or
 65 sympathy, you that has rendered me fatherless and brotherless at one stroke ? Can you ever expect pity or compassion at the hand of others ? What bright worlds on high do you hope to enter after having torn her only son from the arms of Kausalya, whose heart knows no
 70 stain and whose old age you have rendered helpless and unbearable ? Annihilation, utter and certain, stares you in the face ; my mind can grasp at no other milder fate that awaits you. Rama is the son of Kausalya, your co-wife ; but what blinded you to the fact that he is the
 75 source of life and light to his kith and kin : that he is entitled in every way to stand by the side of Dasaratha and that the untold millions in this empire would quit their hold on life if he is taken away from them ? It is utterly inconceivable that any one could entertain the
 80 faintest shadow of a doubt upon this.

“ The Books tell us that the son is but the father born again ; he springs from the father's heart, where the jeeva sits enthroned ; that which passes from the father is but the energy, the essence of the face, neck,
 85 chest, stomach, hand, feet, eyes, nose, fingers and the other parts of the body. A mother is drawn more towards the child born to her, the flesh of her flesh, than towards the mother that bore her, the brothers and the sisters that came into the world with her or the kin

that claim with her the common tie of blood. Then, 90
how did you expect Kausalya to stand the shock of a
life-long separation from such a son ?

“Once in the far past, Kamadhenu, the Cow of Plenty, who saw with clear vision into the mysteries of Dharma, turned its eyes to the earth and observed a farmer 95 ploughing a large field with two oxen yoked to the pole. Poor beasts ! They had laboured from morn right to the hour when the sun reaches the highest point in his course ; and naturally they dropped with fatigue and exhaustion. The tie of blood brought tears to the eyes 100 of Surabhi and she wept aloud at the sight of the misery that befell the beasts that came of her line. The Lord of the celestials chanced to pass that way on some business of his and the tear-drops fell upon him with divine fragrance. He looked up and beheld Kamadhenu weeping 105 in the bitterness of her grief. All reverently did he question her with joined palms ; ‘Mother, why grieve so ? Had you any insult or injustice at the hands of me or mine ? Ever intent upon the welfare of all creation, whence comes this woe upon you ? I see no reason why 110 fear from any one should disturb your rest ?’ And to him replied the Cow of Plenty, ‘I fear none. Behold these pair of oxen born of my race, yoked by yon farmer to the plough and made to work from dewy morn to noon-day sun ; they have fainted away from 115 fatigue. Lean, emaciated, too weak to get up ; yet the heartless hind tears at the roots of my heart when he goads them on to fresh work ; my frame quivers with their agony. Blood is thicker than water ; and a son is the dearest object that the world can give a 120 mother.’

“Now, for all that, they were not born from the loins of Kamadhenu ; countless millions has she of such

children. She is perfect in the theory and practice
 125 of Dharma ; the head and fountain of all prosperity,
 wealth, graces of head and heart, she is ever engaged
 in the propagation of the species by the union of the
 male and the female. Millions call her their mother ;
 yet she shed bitters tears at the sight of the misery
 130 that befell two nameless oxen. Look here, Rama was
 born of the womb of Kausalya ; he is her only son, born
 after milleniums of cold barrerness ; all virtues, all
 excellences strive with one another to crown him.
 Kausalya is a woman ; age has dimmed her beauty ; she
 135 is no longer the favorite wife of the king ; she looks to
 her son for every thing ; and do you hope to go scot free,
 having torn her darling child from her arms ? Cease-
 less woe and eternal infamy are your portion here on
 earth ; and utter annihilation awaits you on the thres-
 140 hold of death.

“ I will conduct the funeral rites of my sire ; I will
 entreat Rama to return to Ayodhya and sit on the
 throne of his fathers ; I will wipe this foul blot on my
 name and win everlasting fame. Then I will take it
 145 upon myself to lead the life of a recluse in the forests
 of Dandaka. I cannot bear to look upon the citizens
 of this fair city weep and bewail their miserable lot ;
 nor will I put up patiently with the dark sin you have
 perpetrated. Throw yourself into the blazing fire ;
 150 bury yourself in the darkest depths of Dandaka, far
 from the sight of man ; or hang yourself by the neck
 until you are dead. In no other way can you expiate
 your crime ; no other course is open to you. My heart
 will know no peace unless Rama comes back from the
 155 woods and rules over his people. Then alone can I hope
 that the world will pardon somewhat my driving him
 into cruel exile.” And as a lordly elephant in rut,

ranging free the forest glades is borne to the ground under the showers of spears, goads, harpoons, lances and other missiles, heaving furious sighs; or as the 160 lofty Indradhwaja thrown on the earth at the close of Indra's festival, even so did Bharata fall at her feet in a dead faint, his eyes red with weeping, his dress and ornaments all in wild disorder.

CHAPTER LXXV.

BHARATA'S ABJURATION.

MEANWHILE Sumantra and the other ministers sought him out there, informed of his arrival.

He came back to his senses and saw the trusted councillors of his sire around him. The desire came upon him to clear himself in their eyes of all blame or complicity. He pointed to Kaikeyi where she stood, a living corpse, her fond hopes blasted and her foul sin recoiling upon herself. “Friends of mine! Never, for a single moment, did my heart hanker after this kingdom; nor did I, at my time, seek her infernal advice towards it. I was all ignorant, in the far-off capital of my grand-sire, of my father's resolve to crown me as heir apparent or that he banished Rama in consequence or that Laksh- 15 mana and Seeta accompanied him.”

Kausalya heard him lamenting piteously and said to herself, “So, Bharata has come, the hopeful son of the cruel demon yclept Kaikeyi; but I cannot bring myself to think that he has anything to do with her 20 unholy plots. It behoves me to see him.” She dragged her wasted body and feeble limbs to where he was, pale with grief, demented, while the faithful Sumitra held her up; and it so chanced that Bharata and Satrughna

25 were going to her rooms to pay their respects to her. They met her half-way; her pitiable plight wrung their hearts so much that they fell on her neck and cried aloud. She recovered her senses after a while and the woman in her overcame the nobler instincts of
 30 magnanimity and forgiveness and put a sharper edge to her grief-laden words. "Long did your soul yearn towards the kingship of Kosala. Your heartless mother has secured it to you anyhow; you need not and you will not stop to cast your eyes over the bloody path she
 35 has carved for herself and for you. No rival contests your claims, no rebels causes you a moment of uneasiness or anxiety. Now you may rest awhile after your arduous toil and reap the golden harvest thereof, even to your heart's content. But, may I know what mighty result she
 40 achieved when she drove my poor boy to the woods, with matted hair and dress of bark? Absolute master of this realm, she could have easily gratified your wishes without so cruelly punishing your innocent brother. I would count it a mighty boon if you send me to the
 45 lonely forest where my son is. The king is not here to prevent it, nor Rama. You have no small part in the sin of Kaikeyi and are debarred from performing his funeral rites; further, his majesty has laid his ban upon you. His eldest wife is entitled to a share of his Agni-
 50 hothra; so I will pass thro' that fire and take my place by the side of my husband and Sumitra with me. It behoves you to lead me to where my Rama leads his hermit life. For, your worthy mother has toiled hard to secure for you this broad realm teaming with corn and
 55 gold, elephants and horses, cattle and kine."

As thus, with cruel taunts, she spoke to him as a stranger and an enemy, Bharata suffered acute agony, as if a red-hot needle was driven to its head in a

grievous sore. Utterly distraught, he fell at her feet and sobbed and raved long and wildly. Then, he stood before her trembling like an aspen leaf, before Kausalya, who moaned and wailed like one in the cruel grip of madness, and spoke humbly and reverently. "No blame is mine. I know naught. Is it kind, is it just of you to speak to me so, knowing full well as you do, my unbounded love and devotion to Rama? If my heart hankered in the least after this wretched kingdom and turned traitor to Rama, may it prove barren, utterly barren, the Vedas, the Sastras, the Sciences, the arts and all knowledge and wisdom I had sat at the feet of my revered guru to learn. May I go the way of him who lends himself as a tool to the wicked; of him who excretes urine and ordure against the sun; of the wretch who strikes at a sleeping cow with his foot; of the monster who sweats his workmen and cheats them of their lawful wages; of him who deals treacherously with the king who walks in the path of right and justice and watches over his people like his sons; of him who takes as king a sixth of all and proves neglectful of his trust; of him who promises sacrificial fees to holy men during the rite and then denies it with overbearing haughtiness; and of him who turns his back upon the foe and flees when dread battle rages high. May my soul be vacant of that esoteric knowledge and wisdom that was imparted to me by my guru to secure for me the high worlds of glory. May I be denied the honour and privilege of beholding the return of Rama and his coronation at Ayodhya, in all his supernal beauty and splendour. May I go the way of him who feeds upon food prepared with sesamum, sweet food or mutton without offering it to the Devas, the Pitrис and the guests; of the insolent wretch who slights the elders

without going forward to meet them ; of him who reviles his guru ; of the false and faithless friend ; of him who 95 betrays the confidence placed in him ; of the ingrate who renders not back the kindness done him ; of the suicide ; of him who has been avoided by the good and the virtuous ; of him who is dead to all sense of shame and decency ; and of the selfish wretch who fills his stomach 100 with good cheer, without a thought of his wife, children and servants who stand by. May I be denied faithful wives and devoted and may I be disqualified from the performance of such Vedic rites as the Agnihotra. May I suffer the torments of those upon whom the curse of 105 barrenness has fallen. May I be dogged by the foul sin of those who slay the royal ladies, children and old men ; of those who have abandoned their servants and retainers to a miserable and cruel fate, when they have the power to avert it ; of those who feed their dependents 110 by the proceeds of the sale of such articles as red cotton, honey, meat and iron ; and of them who pursue and slay the faint-hearted soldier who flees the battle-field when grim slaughter has begun its work. May I be doomed to wander over the earth like a madman, clad in a single 115 piece of cloth, begging from door to door, and with no other vessel to eat from but my hands. May I be the cringing slave to my passions and be drowned in sensual enjoyments and be wedded to wine, women and dice. May my heart avoid the path of Dharma ; may it never 120 stray from the path of a Dharma. May my gifts ever be showered upon the unworthy ; may my immense wealth, hard-earned, go to enrich thieves and robbers ; may my soul writhe in the grip of the sin of sleeping in the twilights, of setting fire to habited houses and of 125 defiling the bed of my guru. May I be precluded from discharging my debts to the Devas by Agnihotra and

offerings of ghee and cakes of rice to the Pithris by Sraddhas and libations of water on the anniversary of their deaths, on the days of the eclipse and on the new-moon day and to my parents by rendering them 130 every service possible when they are alive. May I be shut out from the worlds reached by the good and the virtuous. May I be denied the happiness and joy so highly praised by the good. May I be denied the right to discharge the Dharmas affected by the good. May 135 I be disqualified from rendering kind offices and service to my mother, which is not denied even to the most abandoned of sinners. May my heart be filled with zeal and perseverance in walking along the path of unrighteousness. May I be cursed with dire poverty, a numerous 140 family, chronic illness and a constant melancholy. May my portion be the heinous sin of him who grievously disappoints the hopes of the good men who earnestly look to him to free them from the pangs of miserable poverty and praise him in diverse ways thereunto. 145 May I find a place by the side of him whose speech is ever harsh and unpleasant, whose unclean heart is ever wedded to evil, who, in mortal dread of the king's justice, earns his living by the contemptible profession of a spy and an informer. May I share the dreadful hells inhabi- 150 ted by those who put away from them their faithful wives and pure that seek them to beget a lawful son, in the due season after their courses; of the fools whose hearts are divorced from their wives whom they have sworn before the holy Fires to love and cherish and run 155 after the wives of others; of him who causes the deaths of his wife and children by starving them gradually and systematically; of him who adulterates drinks or poisons them; of him who spoils the worship and adoration rendered to brahmanas; of him who milks the cow dry, 160

with the expectant calf by its side ; of him who promises a drink to another but cheats him of it when he is able to do so ; and of him who, chosen as an umpire between two disputants, secretly instructs one of them in the
 165 means of overcoming his enemy, out of his love towards him." Thus did Bharata seek to exculpate himself in the eyes of Kausalya and soothe her wounded spirit, who had lost at one stroke a husband and a son ; but the effort was too much for him and he fell senseless on the
 170 ground.

Then, Kausalya sprang forward to raise him up crying, " My darling ! Enough of these terrible vows and abjurations which bind you hard and cause you intolerable pain. I see not the slightest necessity for it. You
 175 but rend my heart with blows ever keener. I know very well that your soul is filled with utter devotion to Rama and never swerves from the path of virtue trod by your forefathers of glorious memory. You are true to your word ; no one knows you to go back upon it ;
 180 hence, you will gain the mansions reserved for the good and the righteous ; doubt it not." She placed him on her lap, clasped him to her breast, smelt the crown of his head and sobbed aloud as her tears outwelled.
 (Bharata, his heart torn with various griefs and conflict-
 185 ting emotions, his senses distraught, fainted away and spent the live-long hours of the night in sighs and woeful lament.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

DASARATHA'S FUNERAL.

THEN Vasishtha of wise words, addressed himself to Bharata, who was sinking under the repeated strokes of grief, confusion and weariness of heart,
 5

and said, "Prince, whose fame illuminates the worlds! Enough of grief. Delay not to conduct the funeral ceremonies that ensure the worlds of light to our lord and master." Bharata took heart somewhat, calmed his grief with a strong effort and busied himself with 10 the preparations for the monarch's funeral.

They took the mortal remains of the king of Kosala from the cauldron of oil where it lay and placed it on the ground that the liquid might evaporate. His face had an yellowish hue, but his limbs were in a state of 15 excellent preservation as one in sound sleep. After a time, they transferred it to a costly bed wrought with gold and gems. Bharata sought his father's side and cried "Mighty king! Satrughna and I were far away at my uncle's capital. What dire necessity induced you 20 to send away from your kingdom, Rama, the soul of righteousness and Lakshmana, the prince of heroes and betake yourself to the homes of the gods, even before we came back? Was it just or kind of you to abandon your subjects in their darkest hour of trial and sorrow, when 25 Rama was torn away from them, Rama, the giver of good and happiness to all beings? Whom did you count upon to guard the people well and secure them in safety and comfort, when you have sought the skies and Rama had been forced to hide himself in the dark forests? This 30 earth and all it contains is hideous to look at in widow's weeds and no more fair to see. This Ayodhya is dark and lustreless without you, even as a moonless night."

The holy Vasishtha interrupted him as he lamented grievously and said, "We look to you to pay the last 35 remaining duties to your king and father. Restraine your grief and bend yourself to the task at once."

Bharata acquiesced reverently and summoned the priests and chaplains forthwith. The Garhapatya and

40 the other sacrificial fires that were duly tended by Dasaratha in the fire-chamber had already been removed outside before the moment of pollution. The priests and their assistants bore them to the cremation ground in order due. Next came the royal attendants, who,

45 with streaming eyes and silent grief, carried the mortal clay of the emperor on a priceless palanquin. Others walked before them scattering along the road various coloured garments and flowers of silver and gold. Others fed the golden censers with essences of sandal,

50 aloe, pine and other perfumes; others raised the pyre with sandal, peadmaka, cedar and other fragrant woods; the royal ladies and their aged retainers around them followed on litters and other conveyances. Then, the priests deposited the royal corpse in the centre of the

55 pile and Bharata headed the procession of the wives of Dasaratha as they walked round the mortal remains of their master, from right to left and from left to right. Bharata lighted the pile with the Agnihotra fire tended so reverently by the departed dead, while

60 the priests conducted the solemn funeral rites, the Hota, the Udgata, and the Adhvaryu chaunting the holy Veda mantras. Experts in the Sama veda sang melodiously the funeral riks enjoined during the service. The laments and shrieks that rose from a thousand women's throats

65 like screaming curlews smote the ear far and wide. Then they moved on to the banks of the Sarayu, where libitations of water were only offered to the names of the dead. The prince returned to Ayodhya with the royal ladies, the councillors and the chaplains, watering

70 the dust with their never-ceasing tears. The royal kinsmen slept on the ground singly during the ten days of the period of pollution.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

DASARATHA'S FUNERAL (CONTD.)

THE ten days passed away; on the eleventh were performed the Punyahavachana, the Navasraddha and other purificatory ceremonies; and on the twelfth the Shodasasraddha, the Masika and the Sapindeekarana. Bharata gave away to the assembled brahmanas, untold wealth in gems, gold, garments, cattle, servant-men, servant-maids and houses. On the morning of the thirteenth day, the prince wept aloud in his sorrow, and proceeded to the crematorium to gather the bones of the dead. He stood at the foot of the pyre and thus spoke to his royal father "Maharajah! You left me in charge of Rama and he has gone to the forest. You too have chosen to go back to the worlds of the gods. Rama, the sole stay and support of Kausalya's old age has been banished by you to the forest. Was it just of you to abandon her to misery and sorrow?" With a mighty cry he fainted away at the sight of the bones and the reddish ashes that were all that was left to him of his beloved father. His kinsmen raised him up even as people draw up the Indradhwaja by strong ropes; and like king Yayati looked he as he lay on the ground hurled from heaven in the midst of holy sages. It was too much for Satrughna who fell where he stood like an uprooted oak. They recovered after a while and lamented their fate most piteously. Loving memory brought back to them the boundless kindness and solicitude their father had lavished upon them, the countless benefits and the priceless gifts they had received at his hand on every occasion. "The ocean of sorrow yclept the granting of boons that originated in the dark heart of Manthara

was haunted by the huge sea-monster Kaikeyi and has sucked us down into its fathomless depths. Where
 35 have you gone leaving Bharata here to wail miserably, him whom you loved and cherished so much ? You used to place before us rich dishes, drinks, garments and ornaments and force us to select what we would of them. Who will love and cherish us so hereafter ? Meseems
 40 this earth is invulnerable even during the final Dissolution, since it crumbles not to powder when it is widowed of you, its righteous lord and husband. How shall we drag on our miserable existence here, when you have gone back to Swarga and Rama has buried himself in
 45 the woods ? So, I will come to you though I have to pass thro' fire to do it. I can never bring myself to enter Ayodhya, the capital of the Ikshwakus, vacant of the glorious presence of my father and brother. Verily, my place is by the side of Rama in the forest depths."
 50 The royal servants burst into tears and sobs at the view of the sad brothers thus lamenting in their bereavement. The princes threw themselves on the ground and writhed in their agony like bulls with broken horns, faint, pallid and wan.

55 Then Vasishtha, the guru and priest of the Ikshwakus, raised Bharata and spoke to him, out of his boundless wisdom (lofty and noble was his spirit, as becomes a knower of Brahman). " Child ! It is thirteen days since the envious flames took unto themselves our
 60 lord and king. Why delay to perform the Sanchayana and the other remaining funeral rites ? Man cannot shun the close embraces of hunger and thirst, grief delusion, old age and death.. It behoves you not to grieve so when they contact you."

65 Sumantra raised up Satrughna and calmed his grief by speaking to him on the origin and dissolution of all

things. Like Indradhwajas looked they, the princes, battered by sun and rain. They wiped their tears and with red eyes of grief followed the kinsmen as they hurried them on, to render the remaining last offices to 70 the king.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE PLOTTER'S REWARD.

5 10 15 20 25

THEY returned to the royal palace, when the funeral obsequies of Dasaratha had come to an end; and Bharata started to go to where Rama was. Then Satrughna said to him "Brother mine! All beings naturally turn to Rama for shelter and support when grief assails them. It goes without saying, that we have a greater claim on his kindness. I wonder most, why Rama of immeasurable might and the sole refuge of the oppressed and the miserable, allowed himself to be driven to the forest by a weak woman. May I venture to suggest that Rama acted not right in this respect. Perhaps he might have accepted his punishment, afraid of the world's clamour that he set aside his father's word under the stress of ambition. But, what has become of Lakshmana who prides himself upon his strength and valour? What does he fear? He knew right well that Dasaratha perpetrated a foul injustice; what prevented him from quietly ignoring the old king and preventing Rama from being banished to the woods? This is more wonderful than the other. Why did he not punish the wicked king as he deserved, the moment it was plain that he had strayed from the path of virtue and had become a slave to Kaikeyi's infernal charms?" While they were thus conversing,

Majesty, our guide and ruler, has preferred his heavenly mansions to Ayodhya. Rama, his first born and Lakshmana, the prince of mighty arms, have been sent into exile at the instigation of Kaikeyi. One should first seek out a king and then a wife and wealth. Well say the wise, 'The king is our truest benefactor and protector, more than father or mother'. Though bereft of its ruler, the hand of providence keeps away misconduct and sedition from this realm. So, you are our lawful king. You are the first born of His Majesty and stand next in the order of succession. Famous in every way, your people idolise you ; everything is ready towards your installation—the prescribed articles, counsellors, merchants and the royal servants. We pray you seat yourself on the glorious throne of your ancestors. Wear the crown nobly and give us peace and prosperity."

But Bharata, ever loyal to Dharma, reverently went round the materials got ready for his coronation, and said to the expectant people, "It is a holy tradition in our race that the eldest son takes the crown. It does not become your loyalty and good sense to speak to me otherwise. Rama came into the world before me and deserves the crown better. Let the army prepare to march forth, for I have decided to make the wild woods my home for twice seven years. I will not rest until I bring back my brother from Dandaka. With these self-same articles of coronation shall I instal him as our king, even in the wild glades of Dandaka where he abides ; I will see him brought back to Ayodhya, the great-souled one, even as the priests bring the three fires in holy procession from the sacrificial hall. But never shall I realise the dark hopes of the woman who calls me her son. Rama will rule over your all ; the dreary forests are my home henceforth. See to it that

the engineers lay good roads from the capital to the 40 banks of the Ganga ; let the guards go with us to assist us in passing over dangerous spots." And as these world fell from his lips, tending to the glory and happiness of Rama, the assembled multitudes cried in joyous ac-claim, "The crown is yours to wear by the promise of 45 His Majesty ; yet you are dead set on making it over to Rama, the first born of the king ; may you be the favorite of the goddess of Fortune for ever."

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE ROAD TO GANGA.

THERE marched in advance experts in the nature of soils, sinkers of wells, diggers of canals, dykes and ditches, miners, builders of boats, canoes, 5 and rafts, navvies, armed convoys, stone-cutters, royal officials, makers of mechanical appliances, carpenters, hewers of wood, sappers and levellers, preparers of lime and brick, gipsies, and woodsmen. These decided to go through their duties as soon as possible, 10 for it would shorten the distance between them and Rama ; and marched on to the banks of the Ganga, like the rolling sea when the moon draws her with a mighty force. They travelled in companies and guilds, with spade, axe, crowbar or saw and made a road though the 15 tangled woods, removing the trees, stumps, branches, creepers, saplings and stones from the path. Some planted trees where there were none ; some felled down the larger trees with axe, chisel and scythe ; some burnt out the deep-rooted useeras ; some levelled the 20 rough uneven ground ; some filled the ruined wells and deep crevices with earth ; some laid bridges over

ravines ; some cut channels to drain away the water-logged spots ; some pounded fine the stony ground ;
25 some transformed shallow pools into lovely tanks adorned with flights of steps ; some dug wells and lakes of delicious water where there was before but dry parched earth, with broad steps down which might descend elephants, horses and men to slake their
30 thirst, while shady platforms hard by invited them to rest their wearied limbs. The road by which the army was to travel was strongly built of stone and mortar while lovely trees, heavy with flower and fruit, lined the sides, from whose branches many an intoxicated
35 bird sent forth its sweet melody. It was charming to look at, like the pathway of the gods. Then, in an auspicious star and hour selected by experts in the mysteries of architecture, those that had been deputed to the work pitched the royal tents, at a lovely spot,
40 shady and well-watered and adorned them gaily. Girt round with many a platform of smooth fine sand, they resembled mountains inlaid with precious gems. Temples, royal mansions and broad courts grew under their skilled hands, while spacious roads ran among them.
45 Gay flags and proud banners towered aloft. Stately mansions rose to the sky proudly and lent to the encampment the air and grandeur of Amaravati, the metropolis of the Devas or the cars of light that glide softly through the blue empyrean. The royal road, carried by skilled
50 artisans through the dark forests that lined the banks of the Ganga, whose clear waters form the home of countless fish, shone like the clear cloudless sky at night, illuminated with the Moon and the constellations.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

THE saintly Vasishtha saw to it that the Nandi and other auspicious rites preparatory to a king's installation were gone through that night. At 5 daybreak, bards and minstrels, heralds and pursuivants, panegyrists and chroniclers gathered in the king's ante-chamber, discoursed sweet music, vocal and instrumental and offered sweet praise and deft to Bharata, their future king. The huge drum that announced the watches of 10 the night thundered out its deafening notes under the skilful and vigorous strokes of the golden sticks, Merrily blew the conches and other instruments, high and low, giving forth the various notes of the octaves. The mingled sounds spread far and wide and dealt another 15 wound to the tortured heart of Bharata. He started from his bed and cried out, "These are meet for His Majesty; mistake me not for him, all unworthy as I am. Stop". He turned Satrughna and said "Child! See you the extent of the evil and injustice wrought by 20 Kaikeyi ? Law and order have already begun to fail in this kingdom. His Majesty sits happy in his mansion on high, leaving me to bear the varied burden of misery all alone. The goddess of fortune and victory that watches over the destinies of the line of Ikswaku had 25 till now a smooth and happy time of it, when the king on the throne installed his eldest son as heir apparent during his life-time ; now, the fair tradition has been violated and she wanders in doubt and distress like a vessel in the heart of the storm with no pilot nor rudder 30 to control it. Rama, our lord, our master and our protector, has been banished the kingdom contrary to the

recognised traditions of our race. And the guardian-deity of this realm roams masterless, seeking for a mate
 35 to attach herself to." As the prince thus gave voice to his bitter grief like one demented, the royal ladies and their women took it up and filled the palace with their piteous wails.

Then saint Vasishtha, versed in all that pertains a
 40 king and his kingdom, entered the hall of audience that shone like Sudharma, the council chamber of Indra and his troop of disciples with him. The maharshi of boundless wisdom, in whose profound heart the Vedas and their mysteries found a fitting abode, took his seat on a
 45 resplendent golden throne covered with rich brocade and said to the attendants: "An important affair of the state is afoot. Go forth and gather here Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, captains, councillors, the trusted servants of his Majesty, Bharata, Satrughna, Vijaya,
 50 Sumantra and others that ever are intent on the welfare of Bharata."

Anon, the vast hall resounded to the tumult of chariots, horses, elephants and palanquins that conveyed thither the hurrying crowds. Bharata made his entrance therein and all rose to receive him as they did in the time of Dasaratha, more like the celestials welcoming their lord and master. The spacious hall gleamed like a large lake on the ocean side; saint Vasishtha was the deep waters that ran smooth therein; Bharata and
 55 Satrughna were the whales and mighty elephants that disported themselves fearlessly in its depths; the ministers and the generals were the genii and the shells and the sand hills that lined its floor; in short, it recalled the glorious times of Dasaratha.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE MARCH TO THE WOODS.

THE holy sage cast his eye over the vast assembly that were seated as became their rank and station, dressed in robes rich and costly, all 5 eagerly looking forward to the coronation of Bharata. The place blazed as it were with radiance as a clear autumn sky at night inlaid with stars. He called them to order, the officials of the state and the citizens and said to Bharata, " Prince ! Dasaratha ruled over 10 this kingdom well and wisely, and had been in consequence raised to the skies where he sits enthroned with the gods. His dying words invested you with the sovereignty of this broad realm, rich in wealth and corn. Rama, whose soul cleaves to the duty of fulfilling the 15 commands of his sire, even as the glory of the sun is ever inseparable from it, has abode by Truth and walked in the steps of the wise; he departed for the woods leaving the kingdom to your care. Gratify the hearts of your subjects by accepting the crown and rule over 20 this kingdom, safe and happy, so willingly bestowed upon you by your father and your brother. Let me see your vassal princes from the east, the south, the west, the north and the islands pour their tribute of gems and gold at your feet." 25

But, Bharata knew full well that a younger brother violated the traditions of kings if he took the crown while the elder was alive. He would not be the first to tread that path of treason and infamy ; so, he transported himself in thought to Rama's feet and entreated 30 him to come back. The memory filled his eyes with

tears and choked his utterance. Possessed of youth, wealth and power that place within one's reach every joy that life could give, the great-souled prince put them away from him and said to himself, "Wonderful past belief! If one wants to persuade another to do something peculiarly atrocious and wicked, he generally does it in secret. But saint Vasishtha, whose words and counsels direct the footsteps of millions on the path of life, has deemed me so low and abandoned that he does not hesitate to advise me towards this cruel and infamous act in the presence of the millions that inhabit this realm. I shall even take a leaf from his book and, forgetting the reverence and respect due to him, shall upbraid him in the presence of the very same people." He faced the vast audience and cried, "You know full well that I have no other stay, no other support here and hereafter than Rama, in whom I take my refuge. It is supremely virtuous and kindly on your part not to allow me that much privilege and comfort, but to assemble and set your united strength to ruin me. Is this Ayodhya or a howling wilderness infested with thieves and robbers? Is it the loyal and virtuous subjects of Dasaratha, that I see before me, or bands of brigands and highwaymen that have gathered here to rob me in open daylight and in the presence of all men, of that which I hold dearer than life?"

"Yon Vasishtha was selected as the high-priest of the race of Ikshwaku that he may bring fame and prosperity to it. His clear vision sees through the past, the present and the future. Doubtless he has the utmost welfare of my line at his heart when he advises me so earnestly to adopt this course of action. Behold! with such a holy and virtuous personage for my spiritual adviser and following carefully his well-considered

advice, do you doubt that I and others of my line would secure to themselves speedily and with ease every good here and hereafter ?

“ Rama has duly abode with his teachers and sat at their feet to learn the wisdom of the ages ; he has devoted much thought to the unveiling of their inner mysteries ; he has exemplified in his life everything great and good. Do you give your consent to my usurping the crown that belongs to him by right, I who am guided by the same rules of right and wrong ? Dasaratha quitted his hold on life the very moment when Rama took himself out of his presence ; and I, who have his blood in my veins, shall I dare to rob Rama of his kingdom ?

“ Why ! A little thought as to my nature and status will convince you that I am utterly unfit to rule this empire. It belongs to Rama as much as I belong to him. How can one item of his goods pretend to rule another ? If it were possible, this kingdom may as well rule me. There be some in this world who set aside their parents and usurp the throne ; but, never for a moment class me with them. It may occur to you to say ‘A gem and the casket that holds it are both the property of the owner ; but, the casket guards the gem’. Here you forget that the casket has been enjoined to guard the gem by the possessor and has been provided with a lock and key to enable it to do so. Rama has not commanded me to look after this kingdom till he should return. A jewel that we wear is placed by us in a case when we have no use for it; so, if Rama, who should, in all reason, rule over this kingdom himself, does not accede to our earnest prayers and arguments, but entrusts it to me saying ‘I have something more important to attend to. Have charge of it till I am free’, then, by the might and power he would impart to me, I will watch over this kingdom

100 as his servant, occupying the position of the box that
enshrines the gem.

"So, it behoves us all to exert our utmost to bring
him back here. First, let us go to him and disabuse
him of the idea that this kingdom is mine, by right of
105 the boons granted to Kaikeyi by His Majesty. The first-
born of the late king, superior in every way to all others,
the soul of righteousness, the first and best of the mon-
archs of the race of the sun or the moon, Rama and no
other, deserves to sit on the throne of Dasaratha. If I
110 should stoop to this terrible sin favoured by the mean
and the wicked, that shuts upon me for ever the gates
of paradise, I would earn eternal infamy for the mon-
archs of the Ikshwaku line that had held sway over
this empire without a stain, without a blot, from the
115 days of Manu Vaivasvata. I have no art nor part in
the crime of Kaikeyi; I wash my hands of it; my whole
nature abhors it. In expiation, I clasp my palms in
reverence to Rama who roams in the distant forests. I
am resolved to bring him back wherever he might be.
120 I challenge any one to show another as worthy to be
the ruler of the three worlds".

His noble words, consonant with justice and truth,
sank deep into the hearts of the assembled multitude
and drew them with irresistible force to the feet of
125 Rama, while tears of joy coursed down their cheeks.
Bharata continued: "If I find it impossible to persuade
Rama to turn his steps back to Ayodhya, I will abide
in the woods with the noble Lakshmana whose heart
never fails in respect and reverence towards his elders.
130 I desire that all here should go with me. In your pre-
sence, I will bring him back by any means, even though
I should have to resort to strong measures. I have sent
before me to clear the path, hired labourers and others

from the villages who work by turns without wages. I follow them forthwith". He turned to Sumantra and 135 said "Let the army prepare to march".

It was done; and the ministers and captains rejoiced to hear that it was decided to journey to the woods to bring back Rama. The wives of the military officers hurried their husbands to start with as little delay as 140 possible. The captains looked to the transport of the troops on horses, chariots and other conveyances. Bharata observed that the army was ready for the march ; he took respectful leave of Vasishtha and directed Sumantra, to bring round his chariot, which was done. 145

"Sumantra !" said he " It shall be my care to see that Rama is soon back among us if my entreaties could effect it. The whole world shall rejoice in peace and prosperity when I restore Rama to Ayodhya. Let it be known to the captains and the troops that they march 150 with me to the woods."

The trusted counsellor gladly communicated the orders of Bharata to the officials of the state, the captains and the friends of the king ; and palace and mansion presented a busy sight thro' the hours of the night 155 while Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras bustled about to get ready everything towards the long journey—noble elephants, horses, camels, mules, chariots, with every comfort and luxury.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

TO THE BANKS OF THE GANGA.

BHARATA woke before the break of day and, all in haste to see Rama, travelled fast in his chariot drawn by fleet coursers. The ministers and the 5 priests preceded him in cars resplendent as the rising

sun. The troops followed behind on nine thousand elephants, sixty thousand chariots and a hundred thousand horses, gaily caparisoned. Kaikeyi, Sumitra and Kau-
 10 salya went with them in litters, overjoyed at the thought of bringing back Rama. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas joined the cavalcade embracing one another in their joy and exclaiming "The creatures parched by the summer's heat could never tear themselves away from
 15 the welcome clouds, though they are far away from them; the very sight relieves them of all pain, of all misery; even so, those whose hearts are drawn towards Rama would never bear to be away from his presence though they saw him not before. The very sight of him
 20 chases away all ills of body, mind or spirit. Of mighty arms reaching down below his knees, strong and muscular as the trunk of an elephant, he grants to his devoted followers the supreme privilege of beholding his divine beauty; his heart is ever the same towards them even
 25 when they turn against him. He is never known to fail in his promise of protection to those that seek shelter of him, though there stand in the way his nearest and dearest friends. We have but to bless our eyes with a sight of his fair face to forget for ever the misery and
 30 the suffering that the cruel words of Kaikeyi has caused us. How is it possible for sorrow to be still with us, when we have gained the presence of him, who puts away sorrow and sin from all beings? He need not take the trouble of telling us in so many words 'Grieve
 35 not'; he need not smile upon us with ineffable kindness; no need for him to speak to us words of affection and love, with looks of sweet compassion. There is nothing left for us to do. The moment we behold him from a distance, our sorrows will vanish as surely as
 40 the rising sun dispels the darkness of the world."

Further, of the citizens of Ayodhya, there went with that army, the dependants of Rama, merchants, gem-cutters, potters, weavers, forgers of weapons, makers of fans and umbrellas with peacock's feathers, sawyers, planers of walls and platforms covered with ivory, 45 borers of wood and gems, fashioners of statues, seats, palanquins and other articles out of ivory, plasterers, perfumers, goldsmiths, carpet-cleaners, attendants at bath, shampooers, fumigators, distillers of liquors and essences, washermen, tailors, heads of villages and 50 ranches, professors of song and dance with their women, pupils, and fishermen.

Brahmanas skilled in the exposition of the Vedas and Yogis followed the army in chariots drawn by stately bulls. All clad in gorgeous robes and decked 55 with lovely ornaments, their limbs shining with fragrant pastes and perfumes, they journeyed after Bharata, rejoiced to take part in the glorious return of Rama to Ayodhya.

Far, far they travelled until they drew near Sringi- 60 berapura, on the banks of the Ganga. It was there that Guha, the dear friend of Rama, rules over the Nishadas well and wisely. He is ever on the watch to prevent any that might harbour evil designs of Rama. Bharata reached the banks of the Ganga on whose broad bosom 65 disport the chakravakas and said to his ministers, "Let the army camp where it suits them. We shall rest here to-day and resume our journey to-morrow. I would offer libations of water in this holy river to my lamented father in heaven." The ministers and generals looked 70 to it that the army pitched their tents in the most convenient places as became their rank, station, caste and habits. And Bharata abode there for the night, all intent upon bringing back Rama.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

BHARATA AND GUHA.

THE mighty host of Kosala's king encamped far and wide on the banks of the Ganga, caught the attention of Guha who turned to his kinsmen and said, "This army is approaching Srngiberapura, countless as the sands of the ocean and irresistible as its billows. There I see a huge chariot from which towers aloft the Kovidara (ebony) flag. So, it must be Bharata the sinful wretch, who, not content with having banished Rama into cruel exile, has followed him to work some deeper woe. He may plan our capture or death; or it may be that he is after Rama with the boundless hatred of a wicked brother and a rival, saying to himself, 'If it should betide that Rama comes back after fourteen years, my throne will be endangered. So, it is safer and easier to slay him when he is in the forests, alone and defenceless'. Why, is he not the son of Kaikeyi? Doubtless he has come to rob my Rama of everything—wealth, power, dignity and life, of Rama than whom none other deserves to lord it over the worlds. Well, he will not find it so easy as he thinks. Rama is my king, my master, my protector, the friend of my heart; and I enjoin it upon you to watch in arms arrayed on the banks of Ganga, to see that no harm befalls Rama. Our hunters shall keep watch over the fords in boats filled with our troops, amply provisioned with meat, fruits and roots. Let a hundred fishers man every one of our five hundred boats, young, strong and skilled in arms, and spread themselves along the river. If Bharata goes to Rama in all kindness and reverence, free from guilty thought, allow his army to cross the Ganga

unmolested ; if it be otherwise, not one of them shall cross the never or go back to Ayodhya." He next proceeded to where Bharata was, while his attendants 35 bore a varied tribute of fish, meat, dresses of bark and fruits.

Sumantra saw him approach and submitted to Bharata "Here comes Guha the king of the Nishadas. His long life has been spent in the pathless wild of 40 Dandaka and every foot of it is as familiar to him as the palm of his hand. He is one of the best friends of your brother ; and he comes to pay you his respects and his kinsmen with him. He knows best where Rama and Lakshmana abide ; so you will do well to see him." 45 Bharata was overjoyed to hear it and ordered him to be admitted at once.

Guha and his people approached Bharata, saluted him respectfully and said : "These regions be the gardens of your palace. I knew that a road was laid as 50 far as the Ganga ; but as I had no orders from you about your journey here, I was not prepared for it and I am sorry I cannot welcome you as I would. We are yours to command, and you can make yourself at home here. My men have brought you fruits, roots, fresh 55 meat, dried flesh and other woodland produce. I humbly submit that you accept them and stay here to-night with your troops, resuming your journey by daybreak."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

GUHA'S DOUBTS DISPELLED.

AND Bharata gave meet reply, "Dear friend of Sree Rama, my master and guru ! My troops are very numerous and you have no one to assist you. 5

Yet, you would entertain them hospitably. Well, I take the will for the deed and am as pleased." His noble heart rejoiced at having met Guha and at the very kind welcome he offered him ; he almost imagined his heart-
 10 hopes fulfilled. " Let be," he cried, " show me the way to the hermitage of Maharshi Bharadvaja. I take it that travelling through the swamps and marshes along the banks of the Ganga is no child's play."

But Guha, who was born and bred in those woods, 15 hastened to assure him. " I and my hunters go with you armed; so you need not waste a thought on the difficulties of the road you have to travel along. But, the sight of this vast army fills me with dread and suspicion. Do you call yourself a friend to Rama or an
 20 enemy ? No one fears him ; then, why this countless army ? " He clasped earnest hands of appeal to emphasise his humble request. But there was not the slightest necessity for Guha to suspect Bharata. The pure Akasa is not defiled in the least by the dirt we
 25 may throw at it; we but soil our hands thereby. Even so, Bharata, whose pure soul was filled with utmost devotion to Rama, felt not a shadow of anger at Guha who doubted him, all causelessly. " Grant me," said he, " the favor that the time may never come for your
 30 suspicions about me to be realised. You do but ill to doubt me. Rama is my elder brother ; he is as a father to me. I go to take him back to Ayodhya where his crown and his countless millions await his arrival. Mistake me not. I speak the truth".

35 Guha's face shone with joy as he exclaimed : " Lord ! so you have decided to forego the crown that came to you unasked and without any effort on your part. You stand alone in the world and unparalleled for altruism and magnanimity. Perfect you are, any way I take you,

Eternal fame is yours, in all the worlds, if you succeed 40
in persuading Rama to take the crown back." And
upon them thus conversing the sun went down.

They camped there that night ; and a woeful night
it was for Bharata. Born in the lap of luxury and com-
fort, a stranger to sorrow and suffering, utterly unmeet 45
to experience either, he was all guiltless of anything
that might entail upon him such misery. Filled with
boundless devotion to Rama, and possessed of a courage
and fortitude that no danger nor adversity could weaken,
yet he was in the mighty grip of some affliction that 50
defied speech and thought. Rama occupied his mind,
his heart ; and his soul and his whole being blazed with
a quenchless fire when he dwelt upon the injustice and
harm that his brother had at his hands, even as a forest
tree glows at its heart with an invisible fire. Perspira- 55
tion ran from his body scorched with grief, even as the
burning rays of the sun melt the Himalayan snow
into roaring torrents. Separation from the side of
Rama was like unto a lofty mountain ; the ceaseless
flow of thought about him formed the rocks that made 60
it up ; the varied sighs are the veins of gold and silver
that ran through it ; the paralysed senses are the in-
animate trees that covered it ; grief and weariness were
its peaks ; the frequent fits of unconsciousness were the
cruel beasts that roamed through its forests ; its fiery 65
energy was the dense bamboo groves that lined its sides.
And as an elephant separated from his herd, Bharata
suffered in speechless agony, his sorrow-laden heart
heaving grievous sighs, fainting oft and more than once
on the brink of death. 70

Then, he naturally repaired with his attendants to
where Guha lay, who, grieved to see him grieve, set
about to console him.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

GUHA'S NARRATIVE.

Row that Guha had probed Bharata's faultless heart to its very depths, he took a real pleasure in descanting on the unique devotion of Lakshmana to Rama, on the service he was rendering him and on his manifold excellences. Numerous beyond count were the virtues of Rama, the hero of Guha's discourse ; one might as well hope to stem the oceans with his palms.

10 Bharata, the listener, was well qualified to be the master of such as Guha. The narrator was one whose long life was spent in the trackless forests that knew not civilised man and his graces. So, he spoke on the Lord and His infinite perfections as well as his

15 intellect and speech could compass. Who can dare hope to exhaust them ? There is no grade nor distinction of the old and the new, of the Nestor and the novice in describing the glories of the Lord. It is but the Great Teachers that are qualified to initiate us into the mysteries of the Unknowable ; it is but those of earnest soul and eager heart that are permitted to pass beyond the veil and sit at their holy feet. But, Guha desired, if possible, to deepen Bharata's love and devotion to Rama ; and he began to expatiate on the goodly virtues of

20 Lakshmana as a fitting example.

25

" I observed that Lakshmana, out of his extreme love and devotion, kept awake to guard Rama and my heart was much pained thereat. ' Child ! ' said I ' here is a bed ready for you, soft and comfortable. Rest your weary limbs on it for a while. It comes natural to me and easy, and to my fellow-hunters too here, to keep awake all night and rough it in these woods ; all my

days have been spent here. You can trust me to keep guard over Rama and Seeta. You have been gently brought up and delicately ; and this is no work for such 35 as you. The worlds hold no dearer object to me than Rama. I speak the veriest truth and, if you so desire, would swear it by the God of truth himself. I have placed all my hopes on him to secure unparalleled fame, virtue and wealth in this world, all thro' his grace. I, 40 and my kin will stand guard over Rama and Seeta, dearer to me than life, through the long hours of the night, with shaft on the string. What I know not about these forests is not worth knowing, for my life has been spent in it. I, my kin and my troops are more than a 45 match for any enemies that might come against us in armed array.'

" 'No talk of fear' replied Lakshmana 'when *you* look after our safety ; your soul is ever wedded to righteousness. Concern yourself not for me. How could you 50 expect me to sleep when my lord and his gentle consort lie on the rough bare earth ? I care not to waste a thought on my body, my life or its comforts. Gods and asuras may join hands and yet be swept away, like a withered leaf before a gale, by a poor shaft from the 55 terrible bow of my brother. And that hero sleeps all comfortably on the bare ground, on rough grass and Seeta with him ; what a terrible sight that !

" 'Long years did the king recite the Gayatri and other mighty mantras to be blessed with Rama as 60 his son ; long and all faithfully did he keep, with well-restrained senses, the vows and observances, kricchra, chandrayana and others too severe to think of. Times out of number did he celebrate yagnas, yagas and other rites, which the Holy Books enjoin on a barren father. 65 After much trouble and travail, a noble boy was born to

him, his other self as it were, after sixty thousand years of heart-ache. And the fond father has at last driven his precious child away to the dreary forests. Is it in
 70 human nature to survive the shock ? I hope not. There is not the slightest shadow of a doubt that the Goddess of earth is widowed of her lord and helpless. The ladies of the harem would, by now, have cried themselves hoarse over us and sleep the sleep of exhaustion
 75 and unconsciousness. Utter quiet, ominous and terrible, keeps watch over them.

“ ‘ Kausalya, my mother, the other royal ladies and my father would, ere now, have departed for the mansions of the Blessed. At the worst, they would not
 80 survive this night. Perhaps my mother may hold on to life, to behold her favorite child Satrughna once again. But Kausalya, the mother of that prince of heroes, would *never* survive her son’s departure to the woods. The very thought tortures me past bearing. Every one
 85 at Ayodhya, the joy and pride of the world, every one, man, woman and child, was extremely devoted to king Dasaratha ; and if they were to hear that he had departed this life, wailing and moaning, they would not lose a moment in following him wherever he might be.
 90 Rama is the first born of our monarch. All graces and excellences vie with one another to find a place in him ; he lies nearer the heart of our father than any of us ; the fond father cannot keep his life currents in his body if he is away from Rama for a minute. It needs no
 95 saying that Kausalya, his faithful wife, would ever be by his side in this world or in the next. And you may be sure to find her friend Sumitra, my mother, ever in loving attendance upon her. ‘ I have been blessed with this priceless jewel of a boy after sixty thousand
 100 years of barrenness ; he has grown to youth and

manhood, safe and happy ; he is mated to a lady in every way worthy of him ; I can safely lay the burden of the state on his shoulders and spend the evening of my life in ease and comfort—such golden dreams have been rudely shattered and for him life contains 105 nothing to hold him back from the welcome arms of death. Poor soul ! He has not the consolation of at least hoping to see his son crowned after him at the end of fourteen years ; cruel grief will not spare him so long. Happy are they who remain with 110 him during his last moments and render him every attention, every service possible ; alas ! we are denied that blessing.

“ Ah ! does the broad earth hold another city as beautiful and resplendent as Ayodhya ? Heavy grief 115 weighs down my heart when I recall the well-laid crossings, the straight and beautiful roads, the mansions of the rich, the palaces of the princes and the groves, gardens, conservatories and pleasaunces. High bred courtesans flash through its streets like visions of beauty ; stately 120 chariots, fleet coursers and huge elephants throng the ways ; gay sounds and solemn, gentle lay or martial music, rise upon the air on every side ; troops of men and women, strangers to disease and sorrow and gaily attired, lend an additional charm to the city ; the splendour 125 and pomp of the festivals and the holy fanes ; the scenes of gaiety and joy in private houses—supremely blessed are they to whom it is given to dwell in that fair city, the favorite abode of everything that goes to make life happy and content. Think you that Dasaratha would 130 keep his hold on life till we return from our exile ? Think you we would be fortunate enough to touch the feet of the Great One ? Think you that we would enter the portals of Ayodhya after our sojourn in the forest

135 as my brother has vowed, safe and happy, our sire's promise well kept?"

"And on him so lamenting dawned a new day. Then Rama and Lakshmana matted their hair as became the hermits of the forest. My people saw to it that they 140 crossed the Ganga safely on a very comfortable large; and I watched them pass on towards the woods, armed and alert, their keen looks taking in every detail on their way."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

GUHA'S NARRATIVE (CONTD.)

THE moving account overcame Bharata quite and he sank where he sat, in a fit of hopeless despondency. Brought up in the utmost luxury and comfort, endowed by nature with measureless strength, with mighty chest and shoulders, like those of the monarch of the forests, with long and powerful arms that reach below his knees, with large and 10 lustrous eyes, like the petals of a fresh-blown lotus, in the prime of youth and health, adorned with every grace of form and feature, he was the very last man one would associate with such a fate. He consoled himself somewhat; but the memory of Rama and his pitiable 15 plight came back to him stronger than ever, and he fell down even as a lordly elephant pierced to the heart by the sharp goad. Satrughna sprang forward, raised him up tenderly and sobbed aloud, unable to bear the heart-rending sight. The cry drew to the spot the royal ladies 20 who beheld Bharata, lean and emaciated with fasting and distress, lying on the ground with his brother tending him affectionately; what could they do but

gather round him and raise their voices in deep lamentation ? Kausalya, bereft of her husband and her only son, ran towards him with outwelling tenderness, even 25 as a cow rushes towards its favourite calf, clasped Bharata to her breast, while the floodgates of her heavy sorrow burst uncontrolled, and cried, " Poor child ! I see your body consumed with the fierce flames of grief consequent on being separated from Rama. Verily, 30 Rama would ill-deserve his name if the sight of your suffering moves him not to return to Ayodhya at once. But should he ever hear that you have quitted your hold on life, little chance have we of seeing him again. I look upon your face and keep my life within me after 35 my Rama had exiled himself to the woods and Lakshmana with him. May be you have heard some untoward news of Lakshmana. Or, am I destined to be tortured yet further with the dreadful news of some dire misfortune that has befallen my only son Rama, who 40 abandoned me, feeble and helpless, and betook himself to the forests with his wife ?"

It was now Bharata's turn to comfort the queen ; he turned to Guha and cried through his blinding tears, " My brother, where slept he that night ? Where reclined 45 Seeta ? Where did Lakshmana make his bed ? What rough make-shifts served them for a couch ? What stayed their hunger ?" Guha was glad to be given a chance to speak of his idol, Rama ; he proceeded to describe how Rama came to where he was and received 50 the warmest of welcomes. " Dainty food prepared variously, cakes, meats, fruits and roots were got ready for him. But he would have none of them. ' Nay ' said he ' I come of the race of Kshatriyas who give but never take. Your kindness and solicitude has pleased me 55 more than I could express. You will oblige me by taking

these away.' He drank of the pure water of the Ganga that Lakshmana fetched for him and went through his evening orisons in silence. The noble couple took their
 60 seats on a bed of sacred kusa grass that the faithful son of Sumitra had spread for them, who then washed their feet and retired. Here, under this Ingudi tree, slept they ; and here are the remains of their lowly bed of grass. Lakshmana kept armed watch the live-long
 65 night, going his rounds as regularly and fearlessly as the most seasoned soldier on duty. But my love of Rama made me suspect the movements of the devoted prince. For, one of his brothers, as I said to myself, drove him to the wild woods ; and another that followed him,
 70 who can say what he might do to Rama as he lay sleeping the sleep of peace and exhaustion ? So I and my kinsmen, armed to the teeth, followed Lakshmana wherever he went, apparently to keep the wild beasts away from the sleeping pair. But we did him the cruel-
 75 lest injustice to doubt his loyalty and might have spared ourselves the trouble of watching. Why, who is there, in all the worlds, that dare raise his eyes to Rama in treachery or evil, mighty and puissant as the Ruler of the Immortals ?"

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

BHARATA'S LAMENT.

BHARATA and his ministers listened to him with eager attention and proceeding to the foot of the
 5 Ingudi tree, beheld the rude beds on which Rama and Lakshmana spent the night. Bharata turned to the royal ladies and said, "The great-souled Rama slept that night even here. Lo ! the marks

where his limbs have pressed down the grass. The world boasts not of a purer and nobler lineage than that 10 to which Dasaratha belonged ; he towered aloft over all others in intellect, wealth and power. Who would ever predict such a miserable fate for the son of that mighty emperor ? How did he bring himself to stretch his limbs on the bare ground, he who has been accustomed all his 15 life to recline on couches and divans splendidly upholstered ? The walls and floors of his rooms, built on high terraces in summer and under the ground in winter, are inlaid with gold and silver ; carpets and rugs of rare and exquisite workmanship cover the ground. 20 Costly exotics and rare flowers carefully grown, meet us at every turn. The air is heavy with the perfumes of sandal, aloes, and other fragrant substances. Birds of varied hue and lovely plumage sing sweetly all the while. Experts in dance and song ever await his pleasure. From a distance they look very like the peaks of mount Meru or a fleet of air-ships or a bank of white clouds. Cool in summer, warm and snug in winter, the the sleeping apartments of Rama leave nothing to desire. The sweet strains from the golden-throated 25 singers and the ordered music of Veena, drum, or tabor fall softly on the waking ears, while the eyes of the sleeper open upon lovely visions of apsaras—like girls dancing in mazy evolutions. Women flit here and there like glimpses of paradise, filling the rooms with the 30 sweet chimes of the gold and silver bells attached to their anklets, girdles or bracelets. Bards and minstrels, heralds and panegyrists awaken Rama with apt and ingenious praise. Some proclaim his lofty titles ; some call the people to order and attention ; some describe 35 in noble stanzas the wonderful deeds and famous exploits of the kings of the Ikshwaku race. And Rama

used all his life to be called back to the work-a-day-world and its cares by the sweet concord of sounds, did
 45 he really sleep here on the bare earth, rough and rugged with stone and thorn, exposed to wind and rain, cold and snow, while the howls and cries of the beasts of the forest pierced the ear in wild clamour ?

" Let be. Could any one believe, though he had the
 50 evidence of his senses for it, that Seeta slept here on the flinty earth, and she, the daughter of king Janaka, the daughter-in-law to the emperor Dasaratha and the wife of Sree Rama, dearer to him than his very life ? My wits are dull and clouded ; or is it all a hideous
 55 dream ? Verily Time is mightier than Providence ; if not, would such things ever come to happen ? Of a truth, this is the bed slept in by my revered brother ; I see where it has been disturbed by him as he rolled on his sleep thro' fatigue and exhaustion. The kusa grass is
 60 pressed down in those places more heavily towards the hard ground. It seems that Seeta has slept without taking off her ornaments, may be, overcome with the weariness of the journey. See the minute grains of gold that have fallen off them. She must have spread her
 65 upper garment here ; the kusa grass has detached some silken threads from it. I think her husband's bed is ever the softest and the most luxurious to a faithful wife. Behold the daughter of king Janaka, yet in her teens, born in comfort and luxury, a stranger to
 70 sorrow and suffering, has slept most soundly on this rude couch. Alas ! the worlds harbour no greater monster than I, utterly callous and cruel-hearted. Was it not my hand that drove them to sleep on the bare earth like miserable outcasts ? Born to the emperor
 75 Dasaratha whose commands are upon the heads and eyes of kings, adored and worshipped by every one

under the sun, dearer than life to every being, with lovely eyes of dark-red, even like the kalhara flower, more beautiful by far than the God of love, he was accustomed to pomp and power, wealth and luxury and 80 knew not, even in his dreams, what pain and affliction was ; yet, has it not been his untoward fate to renounce his broad realm and its countless joys and pleasures, to walk the woods and seek repose on the bare rugged earth?

“Blessed above compare is Lakshmana to be allowed 85 to be with Rama and Seeta and render them every service, when such misfortunes overtook them. But, who can gauge what merit Janaki has laid by in former births, to fight successfully for the privilege of accompanying Rama to the gloomy forests and share his dangers and 90 difficulties with him ?

“I do not think for a moment that we could achieve our aims of life without that great One to guide us. Dasaratha has gone back to heaven ; Rama roams the forests ; the wide world looks dull and empty without 95 these heroes. Though Rama abide in the woods, this kingdom is protected by his prowess and fame. Why, no enemy ever dreams of raising his eyes to Kosala even when it is without a king to rule over it. Walls, towers and battlements there are none ; elephants and horses 100 wander aimlessly about, since their grooms have sunk in stupid torpor ; the gates of the town are ever open ; there is no one, no provision to prevent the foe from entering it ; the army is broken-hearted and utterly unconscious of their duty to watch over the 105 safety of Ayodhya ; there are no patrols, no outposts to announce the approach of the enemy ; yet, it is most wonderful that none dare approach it with hostile intent but carefully shun it in its deplorable helpless condition, like poisoned cakes.

" From this day, I put on the garb of hermits ; I clad myself in deerskin and dress of bark ; I mat my hair and stretch myself on the bare earth, fruits and roots my only fare. It is but meet penance to expiate my sin,
 115 who was the head and front of all this evil. Dasaratha's word shall not be falsified. I will abide in the woods for fourteen years in the place of Rama ; he shall rule over Kosala in my place. Is it not enough if someone of his sons should fulfil the promise of Dasaratha ?
 120 It matters not whether Rama does it or I for him. Satrughna shall accompany me in my happy exile ; Lakshmana shall wait on Rama at Ayodhya. Ye powers on high ! grant me this prayer of mine that the brahmanas crown Rama at Ayodhya. I will throw myself at the feet of my brother and entreat him diversely. If, in spite of all I can do, he chooses to stay in the woods, why, my place is by him. I am his brother, his disciple, his slave ; let me see whether he has the heart to cast me forth from him."

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

BHARATA CROSSES THE GANGA.

THEY spent that night on the banks of the Ganga. Bharata awoke before day-dawn and called out to Satrughna that lay near. " Still asleep ? Arise, awake. Bring Guha to me as soon as you can. Our army should cross the noble river." To which Satrughna, " Brother ! sleep for me ! I but keep awake, my thoughts centred on that Great One, who is
 10 never away from your heart." And to them thus conversing came Guha and said with low reverence, " Lord ! I hope you had a sound sleep and happy dreams last

night. Is it all well with Your Majesties and the troops?" Bharata, the foremost of those devoted to Rama, hastened to reply to the affectionate enquiries 15 of Guha and said, "Thanks to your kindness and consideration, we and our troops spent a happy night here. Now, it is time we crossed the river. May I hope that you and your servants will see to the necessary arrangements."

20

Guha repaired to his city and called to his kinsmen, "Awake, bestir yourselves to bring here the boats and the barges. The king's troops cross the river." They made ready, in a trice, five hundred boats. Small they were; but there were others named Swastika from their 25 being built like the ansated cross. They were made up of two ordinary boats joined together; large bells were hung at the corners; they were gay with flags and bright with gold; lovely windows in the wooden walls gave plenty of air and light. They were rain and storm proof 30 and allowed as much breeze and light as was pleasant and enough. Made to accommodate and convey royalty, they were firmly joined by nails and clamps. Guha chose the best of them for Bharata and his people to cross the river. Costly rugs and carpets, white as snow 35 and soft as down, covered the floor. Tiny bells were skillfully hung all over, chiming sweet melody as the barge moved.

Bharata, Satrughna, Kausalya, Sumitra and the royal ladies got in, preceeded by the priests, the chaplains and other brahmanas. Next followed the transport 40 of conveyances and provisions. It is a custom with the troops to set fire to their camps when striking them, in the belief that it would bring them good. The fords were filled with men who fought for the first chance to 45 cross the river. It was one vast clamour and confusion

all around. "This is my trunk; this is my bed; this is my luggage; these are my vessels" rose on every side. The deafening noise rose high as the officers hurried
 50 them on. The sails were set in the boats to catch the favourable breeze. The servants of Guha had a busy time of it, transporting the huge army across the river. Some of the boats were reserved for women, some for horses, some for conveyances, others for the cattle. On
 55 their return, the boatmen showed their skill by executing many wonderful evolutions with their empty craft. The many-decked boats resembled huge elephants with howdahs on them or walking mountains waving with flags. Many crossed the river on canoes, rafts, pots or
 60 by swimming.

The countless hosts were transported in an incredibly short time and marched on towards the woods of Prayaga at the auspicious muhoorta Maitra. Bharata, as became a wise and skilful king, whose heart is
 65 ever concerned about the welfare of his subject, forgot his sorrow and fatigue, went among the troops and made kind and earnest enquiries, saying, "You had a long and weary march this day, I fear." He encamped them in a pleasant spot and comfortable and proceeded on
 70 foot to pay his respects to Maharshi Bharadvaja, old in years, wisdom and tapas, while Vasishtha and the priests led the way. Soon they drew near the asrama of that holy Brahmana, the preceptor of the Devas and deeply skilled in the inner mysteries of the Vedas and
 75 beheld a lovely cottage peeping from among the groves that almost hid it from view.

CHAPTER XC.

BHARATA AND BHARADVAJA.

BE stopped his attendants when he was about two miles from it, divested himself of his court dress and weapons and took his way to the saint's abode with his councillors, Vasishtha leading the way. When they came within sight, the prince stopped his suite and walked on with his guru, for he was carefully trained in the traditions of the line of Raghu. Bharadvaja arose at the sight of Vasishtha and directed his 5 disciples to fetch the Arghya. The two rishis were atmost of the same age and, as such, they simply welcomed each other without prostrations. Bharata went round the sage in deep reverence and touched his feet. He followed Vasishtha and hence was a scion of the race of Ikshwaku and a son of Dasaratha. The usual hospitality offered and accepted—water to clean the hands and feet, fruits and roots—the host made kindly enquiries about the people of Ayodhya, the army, the treasure, the friends and the ministers of the king. He 10 was aware of the demise of Dasaratha and omitted all reference to it. Then Vasishtha and Bharata enquired in return of his health, the holy Fires, the disciples and the birds, beasts and trees in his asrama. Bharadvaja made suitable reply and, impelled by his love to 15 Rama, said to Bharata "I understood that you are now ruling at Ayodhya. Your presence here causes me a grave doubt. Lady Kausalya was the happy mother of a son of mighty arms, the joy of all the worlds; and him did Dasaratha consign to a gloomy exile in the woods for fourteen years, all at the word of a woman. Rama cheerfully obeyed the mandates of his sire; Seeta 20

and Lakshmana elected to accompany him. Are you come here to work any evil to poor innocent Lakshmana,
 35 spurred by your ambition to enjoy, without a rival, the crown that belongs to Rama by every right, human and divine?"

Tears welled from his eyes and choked his utterance as Bharata cried, "Alas ! I am lost. What hope
 40 for my wretched self, if I should be condemned out of the mouth of your holy self, for whom Time holds no secrets, past, present and future ? No one shall be any the worse for me. I pray you will not speak of me in this wise. But you might say, 'It is all one whether
 45 your are guilty or your mother'. I should not be held responsible for what my mother said or did in my absence ; it pleases me not ; it has not my sanction or approval. I am come here to anyhow entreat Rama to return to Ayodhya, and earn the privilege of serving
 50 him ever. I pray your reverence take pity on me and inform me of the present whereabouts of His Majesty Ramachandra".

His request was warmly backed by Vasishtha and many others, whereupon Bharadvaja said to the noble
 55 prince, "A scion of the line of Raghu, you do well to follow the traditions of the great, to wean your heart away from the pleasures and joys of a royal life, to keep your rebellious senses under stern control and to abide by the commands of the Holy Ones. My open vision
 60 reads your character and thoughts aright ; but I spoke to you thus, to deepen your devotion to Rama and enhance your fame as one who loves him best. Your noble brother resides hard by at mount Chitrakoota and with him Seeta and Lakshmana. You will see him
 65 to-morrow. Rest here to-day, you and your ministers. Generous-hearted prince, from whom none went away

disappointed! gratify my wish". Bharata accepted the kind invitation and made the necessary arrangements for himself, his retinue and his troops to stay at the hermitage of the saint.

70

CHAPTER XCI.

BHARADVAJA'S FEAST.

WHEN Bharata had signified his consent to accept his hospitality, the sage said to him, "Child ! I would have you and your people dine with me ". 5 And to him Bharata, " Holy Sir ! I am delighted, beyond measure, more than if I were royally entertained by you, by your kind hospitality to me with whatever your hermitage can afford." Bharadvaja smiled gently as he said to himself " Bharata thinks that it is cruel to 10 trouble me, a poor hermit living in the forests. He knows not what I can do." "Full well do I know," said he aloud " your devotion to me and the pleasure you derive from my poor hospitality. Kindly understand that I desire to give a feast to your retinue and troops. It 15 behaves you to accept kindly what I offer in all love. Why have you kept your troops far away ?" " I know " replied Bharata " that a king or a prince does ill to approach with his retinue and troops the hermitages of the holy rishis. It might interfere with their devout 20 meditations. I came here all alone, fearing to displease your reverence. Maddened elephants, horses, chariots, infantry and camp-followers spread through the woods in countless numbers. Incalculable damage might ensue to the fords, the cottages and to the trees, birds and 25 beasts that are attached to the holy spots. So I but did right to leave them at a distance ". " Nay, nay " said

the sage "Let it not concern you any way. Lead them all here." Then Bharata sent for his ministers and
 30 bade them bring his attendants and troops to the asrama of Bharadvaja. Thereafter the Maharsi entered the fire-chamber where the gods had their places; he sipped water thrice, wiped his face twice, touched his head, eye, nose, ears and the heart and called upon Visvakarma to help him give a feast to Bharata and his hosts. "I call upon Visvakarman and Maya, the architects of the gods and asuras. I would give a feast to prince Bharata and the troops that have come with him. Make the necessary arrangements towards it. I call
 40 upon Indra, Yama, Varuna, and Kubera, the regents of the worlds, as also Agni and the other Shinnig Ones, to assist me in offering due hospitality to Bharata. Let the Naiads in all the worlds come here, the guardian spirits of the rivers flowing east and of those flowing west; let
 45 some of the streams run with the drink Maireya; let some run with wine; let others run with cool water sweet as the juice of sugar-cane. I call down here Haha, Huhu, Visvavasu and the other gandharvas; the apsaratas that claim descent from the gods and the
 50 gandharvas; Ghritachi, Visvachi, Misrakesi, Alambusa, Nagadanta, Hema and Swayamprabha whose home is in the mansion built for her by Maya in the cave of Mount Mahendra; Rambha, Urvasi, Menaka and the other nymphs that wait upon Indra; the apsaratas that
 55 abide in the heaven of Brahma; and Tumburu their master of music and dancing, with all the necessary accompaniments. I invoke Kubera, the Guardian of the north, to send me here the forest of Chaitraratha in the land of Uttarakuru, with its leaves of robes and ornaments such as the celestials affect its and fruits of celestial nymphs. Let Chandra, the presiding deity over the
 60

plants and herbs of mystic virtue, prepare enough of dainty food and varied dishes, sour, pungent, astringent, sweet, saline and bitter ; wreaths of diverse shades and perfumes just dropped from trees ; and infinite variety of 65 meats and drinks ". And Bharadvaja of boundless yogic might, wisdom and spiritual lustre, recited the mantras that invoke the respective Powers, with due rythm and rites.

He faced the east with clasped hands and sent forth 70 his thought, when, lo ! the mighty Presences were there, one by one. A cool breeze and pleasant blew over the place, laden with the fragrance of the mounts Malaya and Mandara, the home of the sandalwood. It chased away heat, sweat and languor from the body and left behind 75 it an indescribable sense of bliss. Flowers of heaven rained thick upon the place ; the celestial orchestra thundered overhead ; the choristers of Indra's court discoursed sweet music, vocal and instrumental ; apsarasas glided about in mazy evolutions of dance. 80 These strains, in perfect pitch and time, sent streams of exquisite joy though the ears and hearts of all beings in the three worlds. When the sounds died away, the troops of Bharata witnessed the marvellous might of Visvakarman. For a distance of five yojanas 85 the ground was levelled smooth and carpeted with soft green grass, as if inlaid with gems of varied hue. Mango jack, pine-apple, wood-apple, amalaka (myrabolam) and other trees sprang up in ordered confusion. From the Uttarakuru there came down the garden 90 Chaitraratha with heavenly delights. Countless rivers and streams were present, lined with beautiful trees. Royal quarters, palaces, mansions, pleasure-houses, kiosks, storied buildings splendidly fitted, spacious courts enclosed by lofty corridors, stables for elephants, horses, 95

mules and cattle, and garages for every kind of conveyance, rose on every side. The palace designed for Bharata was tastefully adorned with arches, garlands, flags, couches, divans, and seats upholstered in silk and brocade, while priceless rugs and carpets covered the floor. Gorgeous robes, meats, drinks, confections, essences, extracts, preserves, perfumes and rare and costly articles of *vertu* met the eye in every side. With the gracious permission of the Maharshi, Bharata 105 made his entry into the palace, flashing with gems and gold. His ministers, priests and attendants entered with him and were struck dumb with surprise and awe at the sights that dawned upon them. They passed on into the hall of audience and beheld a marvellous throne placed 110 in the centre of it, fashioned like the royal seat of the Lord of the celestials, while there stood hard by the snow-white umbrella and chowries with golden handles, gem-studded. Bharata installed on it, in reverent thought, Rama the idol of his heart, went round it at the head of 115 his ministers and bowed himself to the earth over joined palms. He worshipped him mentally and made it plain to all that he was but the humble servant of Ramachandra, by occupying a seat below it reserved for the ministers of state, and waving aloft the royal chowrie. 120 Councillors and ecclesiastical dignitaries seated themselves as became their rank and station. The commander-in-chief, his generals and captains seated themselves behind them. Then there approached Bharata, in obedience to the orders of Bharadwaja, streams thick 125 with payasa (a preparation of rice with milk and sugar), while the banks were lined with mansions of various styles of architecture, wonderfully plastered.

Next there appeared on the scene twenty thousand apsarasas sent by Brahma, gaily adorned; another

twenty thousand arrived later, resplendent with gold and 130
gems, pearl and coral, the contingent sent by Kubera.
The Holy Scriptures declare that any one who falls into
their hands goes clean daft ; a third troop succeeded
them, twenty thousand in number, from Nandana, the 135
gandharva kings of blinding glory, made their appear-
ance. Alambusa, Misrakesi, Pundarika, Vamana and
other nymphs danced before Bharata, commanded there-
to by Bharadvaja. All that is rare and lovely in
Chaitraratha and in the heaven-world, transported them- 140
selves to Prayaga by his yogic might. The Bilva
played on the mridanga while the Tani kept accurate
time ; the Pippala danced gaily while the Sarala, Tala,
Tilaka, and Naktamalaka moved here and there as
dwarfs and hunchbacks. The Simsupsa, Amalaki, Jambu 145
and other forest trees, the Malati, Mallika, Jaji and other
woodland creepers turned themselves into lovely damsels
and said to the assembled multitudes, "We are here for
you to enjoy us as much as you like. Votaries of the
wine cup ! just have a taste of these rare liqueurs. 150
Hungry men ! have your fill of our payasa and pure
meats." Every man of them was taken in charge by
seven or eight ladies, who anointed him with rare
essences and oils, gave him a fine bath, dressed him
in gay apparel and ornaments, massaged his limbs and 155
made him drink on the sly. Elephants, horses, camels,
mules and bulls were sumptuously fed with sugar-
canes, fried rice mixed with honey and other favorite
delicacies by those whom the maharshi deputed to
take care of them. The keepers and grooms that 160
followed the army lay in a supremely blissful state of
inebriation, and knew nor cared what became of their
chargers. The countless hosts of Bharata had enough

and more of enjoying the dainty viands, drinks, garments, ornaments, pastes, perfumes, wreaths and what else their hearts craved ; apsarasas like lambent lighting among the clouds loaded them with attentions and favors ; they lost all self-control and exclaimed in the abandonment of their joy "May all good go with Bharata !

170 Hail Rama ! We will not go back to Ayodhya, nor forward to Dandaka. Let our masters please themselves." Foot-soldiers, keepers and grooms clean forgot they had any one over them and roared in wild chorus, transported with what they saw, heard and enjoyed.

175 Some called out "Here, my friends ! This is swarga ; these are the mansions of the Blessed " ; some laughed uproariously all the while, without any visible reason therefor ; some sang fitfully ; some danced and capered about ; some ran hither and thither, decked with wreaths

180 and garlands. They ate until they could eat no more ; but their mouth watered when they looked again at the delicious viands, drinks and confections. Servants, retainers, soldiers' wives and camp-followers rejoiced beyond measure at the new and gorgeous garments they

185 were dressed in. Elephants, mules, camels, horses and other birds and beasts brought by the troops for sport knew no bounds to their joy and were so full, thanks to the splendid hospitality of Bharadvaja, that they turned away with satiety and disgust at the very mention of

190 food. There was no one in that vast multitude, hungry or faint, or dusty or unadorned with garments of spotless white. Great was the wonder of every one at the sight of those white hills of boiled rice decorated with numberless wreaths, mutton, pork, bacon, high-class condiments, fruits preserved in sugar and honey, curious preparations of boiled pulse of various kinds, fragrant extracts and juices. Numerous wells flanked the forest

brimming with payasa. The cows that ranged therein streamed with milk; the trees rained honey. Pools of maireya were surrounded by hillocks of curiously prepared meat of deer, peacock, fowl, geese and other creatures, served steaming hot in huge pots. The ground was covered with innumerable article of dinner-service, all of beaten gold. Millions of goblets, jars, casks, and jugs were filled to overflowing with curds. Large lakes ran over with rasala, some with curds, some with payasa, some with churned whey. Sweet cakes were piled near them, as condiments, to give point to the drinks. Pastes, powders, decoctions, oils, hot water in huge cauldrons invited the passers-by to bathe at the river-fords. Medicated tooth-brushes, pots of sandal, ointments to be used after the bath, bright mirrors, costly robes, ivory clogs, shoes, boots, tiny boxes of collyrium, combs for the hair, the beard, the whiskers and the moustaches, flashing weapons such as are affected by warriors, bows, armour, beds and seats lay neatly arranged in boundless profusion. Spacious tanks full to the brim with sweet crystal water for the elephants, horses and other animals to drink from, when they are fed, were constructed in various places, with broad and comfortable fords leading down to the water. There were other sheets of water clear as the sky and sweet as nectar that tempted the beholders to bathe and disport themselves amidst the lotuses and lilies that carpeted them. Verdant lawns were there, waving with soft and sweet grass for the cattle to graze.

All wondered mightily when they beheld the yogic power of Bharadvaja bring down on earth, in a moment, the rare and numerous elements that contributed to entertain Bharata and his army—marvellous as dream-pictures, baffling all words, all thought and so beautifully

adapted to every one's wants and desires. Like the celestials amusing themselves in Nandana, the garden of heaven, Bharata's retinue and troops spent the night
 235 in the maharshi's asrama in a long spell of delight. At last the heavenly caterers took respectful leave of the sage—gandharvas, apsarasas, and naiads. But this grand entertainment did not vanish into airy nothing like the magician's glamour. The guests con-
 240 tinued to experience, even after the feast, the same sensations of pleasure and delight that they felt during it—the full-fed epicures, the determined heroes that never turned their backs upon Bacchus as long as there was a spark of intelligence in them, the peripatetic
 245 repositories of fragrant pastes and rare perfumes, and the living trees hid beneath sweet-scented wreaths and garlands. The earth was strewed far and near with flowers.

CHAPTER XCII.

BHARATA JOURNEYS TO CHITRAKOUTA.

BHARADVAJA enabled prince Bharata and his people
 5 to pass a happy night, thanks to his considerate courtesy and noble hospitality. Next morning Bharata was up and moving before the dawn, and proceeded to the sage's abode to gain information as to the present quarters of Rama. Meanwhile, the maharshi had finished his matin devotions and started to the
 10 royal camp, desirous to pay a visit to the ladies of Dasa-ratha. The prince saluted him with clasped palms and stood waiting to be spoken to. Bharadvaja saw into his soul and found it filled with utter purity and love to Rama; it was not affected in the least by the gorgeous

hospitality of the night. Rama and Rama alone occupied 15 it, waking or sleeping. So the sage said to him out of a pleased heart, "Child! Had you and yours a pleasant time of it last night at my asrama? I am but a poor hermit, after all; I hope you will take the will for the deed and forget anything that might have been amiss 20 or defective."

Whereat, Bharata rendered reverent reply: "Holy One! I and mine have been honored, I fear, far more than we deserve. Our wildest wishes have been anticipated to their utmost. Lodged in mansions that put to 25 shame the palaces of the gods, we tasted of such entertainment and delights as rarely fall to the lot of the heaven-dwellers; languor and fatigue, care and anxiety are things of the past with us; we are only conscious of a supreme, ineffable content. We crave leave to proceed to where Rama abides. I pray your holiness to extend to me your kindness and compassion. Whereabouts is the asrama of Rama? How far is it from here? Which is the way that takes us to it?"

It spoke highly of the devotion of Bharata and his 35 supreme faith in the tapas and omniscience of Bharadwaja that he requested the information of the sage, while Guha and many others could as well furnish it. "Child!" replied the saint "a yojana and half from here, there is a mount by name Chitrakoota and around it a 40 large forest uninhabited by man. The Mandakini flows north of it, its banks covered with thick woods bright with flowers. Rama's asrama lies between the river and Chitrakoota. I see it with my eye of spirit. Follow for a while the path that leads from here due 45 south; branch off another that leads south-west from it and after a time you will come upon the hermitage of Rama".

When Bharata was ready for the march, the ladies
 50 of Dasaratha got down from their litters and surrounded
 Bharadvaja, the knower of Brahman. Kausalya and
 Sumitra laid themselves at the feet of the sage ; he
 noticed that they were wan and emaciated with grief
 55 at being separated from Rama and shook with age and
 awe at finding themselves in the presence of the holy
 One. Then Kaikeyi, bowed down with grief at being the
 cause of infinite woe and misery to Rama and through
 him to all the world, her heart-hopes frustrated, an
 60 object of universal scorn and contempt, made a hurried
 salutation to the maharshi and sheltered herself behind
 Bharata, all ashamed to stand in the holy presence like
 others. Though he was aware of everything that took
 place, Bharadvaja wanted to teach a lesson to Kaikeyi
 65 and asked the prince to point out to him the wives of
 Dasaratha. Bharata grasped the purpose of the sage,
 who desired the world to know the nature and charac-
 ter of the queens through the mouth of their son ; ever
 loyal to truth, he turned towards his host with clasped
 hands and said : "Holy Sir ! This lady who, though lean
 70 with fasts and grief, gives one the idea of the god of
 Dharma come down on earth, is Kausalya, the first and
 foremost of the wives of my father. She is the thrice-
 happy mother of that Ideal Man, Rama, with the lordly
 gait of a maddened lion, even as Aditi gave birth to
 75 Maha Vishnu. The other lady who supports her on her
 right and has been the play-ground of many a sorrow,
 is Sumitra, the second of my father's wives ; there she
 stands like a stately Karnikara tree, when the summer
 heat had drained its flowers of all life and brightness.
 80 Lakshmana and Satrughna are her sons, handsome as
 the two aswins, and heroes of unfailing prowess. And
 this woman by my side is the infamous Kaikeyi ;

she drove Rama and Lakshmana to the forests of Dandaka haunted by the Rakshasas, and exposed them to danger and death ; she it is that foully slew Dasaratha 85 with the keen poignant grief at having lost his son. Liable to sudden outbursts of insensate fury, her heart and intellect have not been purified by the study of the Holy Books or by association with the virtuous. Of boundless pride and self-conceit, she sees not in the 90 whole world any one that approaches her in beauty and loveliness. She hides the heart of a demon of wickedness under the face of an angel of perfection. Ever wedded to the lust of wealth and power, her soul knows no pity nor shrinks from the darkest crime. She is the 95 source and fountain of all my misery. I sum up every evil and sin I perpetrated in all my past lives when I call her my mother." Blinding tears choked his speech ; fire flashed from his eyes ; and he sighed hot and fiercely like an infuriated elephant.

100

But, Bharadvaja calmed him gently and said : " Child ! You do ill in laying the blame on Kaikeyi. It is but Providence that put such thoughts into her heart. I take it that Rama is exiled to the forests for the greatest good of the gods, the danavas, the rishis and 105 holy brahmanas. So, there is no reason why you should grieve or revile Kaikeyi."

Then Bharata went round the sage, saluted him, received the affectionate blessings and ordered the army to march. Some drove in chariots bright with gold, to 110 which fleet horses were yoked. Some rode on elephants, bull and calf, that moved majestically like huge clouds covering the sky at the end of summer, while chains, garlands and sweet-chiming bells decorated their vast bulk ; others travelled in litters, palanquins and 115 other conveyances. The infantry marched on foot.

Kausalya and the other royal ladies travelled fast, eager to catch a glimpse of the dear face of Rama. Bharata had Vasishtha's permission to ride in a palanquin resplendent as the sun and the moon. The mighty host journeyed south, crossed the woods, the mountains and the rivers that lay south of the Ganga and drew near the wood where Rama abode, disturbing and frightening the men, the beasts and the birds on their way, like a huge cloud in the sky that gathers volume as it proceeds.

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE SEARCH FOR RAMA'S ASRAMA.

HE beasts and the birds on their way fled to other forests, guided on by their respective leaders.

5 Bears, deer, and antelopes appeared in troops on mountains, river banks and wooded hills. Like a storm-tossed ocean, or the winter clouds, Bharata's army hid the earth with its elephants, horses, chariots, foot-soldiers and conveyances. Bharata travelled far 10 in his eagerness and stayed not until his attention was drawn to it by the fatigue and exhaustion of the animals. He turned to Vasishtha and said: "Holy Sir ! It seems we are nearing the goal of our journey and are come to the place mentioned by maharshi Bharad-15 vaja. Yonder is mount Chitrakoota ; hard by flows the Mandakini ; there we see the lovely forest at a distance, black as a storm-cloud. Our elephant-corps march gaily up the slopes of the mountain, like huge black rocks. The Vakula trees, shaken by the troops, 20 rain their flowers on the earth, like winter-clouds. Deers and antelopes frisk and gambol everywhere along the

hill sides, like sharks that disport themselves on the bosom of the sea. Satrughna! this is the favorite haunt of the kinnaras. Deer flee before our troops like pale autumn clouds before a strong gale. Behold 25 our men dressing their hair in fanciful styles like cloud-banks and decorating it with clusters of fragrant flowers, after the fashion of the southerners. This forest, till now frightfully lonely and silent, bids fair to rival Ayodhya in splendor and pomp. The dust 30 raised by the beasts hides the sky; but the wind clears it away at once, saying to itself, as it were, in pity and sympathy: 'This Bharata has taken incalculable pains to find out the asrama of Rama and has travelled far to see it. It is but just that I render him every 35 assistance in my power'. Our charioteers drive their vehicles, fast and furious, through this trackless forest, their fleet coursers seconding their efforts with a will. Frightened thereat, the peacocks spread their gay plumage and seek the shelter of mountain caves. This 40 holy spot, fit for devout ascetics to reside in, is charming to the eye and the heart, even as the heaven of the gods. Behold yon antelopes, male and female, coursing through the woods, gaily decked with flowers. Let our troops search these forests far and wide until 45 they come upon the Great Ones, Rama and Lakshmana.' Countless warriors set forth in armd bands in all directions; one of them found a spot from which rose the blue smoke of human habitation. They came to Bharata and said, "Smoke betokens the presence of 50 man; perhaps Rama and Lakshmana reside here or some other recluses, who may direct us 'aright.' Bharata turned joyfully to his attendants and cried "Let the troops stay here, until I order them to proceed. Maharsi Vasishtha, and Sumantra go in advance and 55

I follow them." He walked on towards the spot whence the smoke issued, while the troops turned their looks on it and rejoiced to think that their prince was very soon to come upon Rama, whose sweet and noble presence would chase away all their sorrows.

CHAPTER XCIV.

MOUNT CHITRAKOUTA.

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MEANWHILE Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta had a happy month of it on the mount Chitrakoota.
5 One day Rama pointed out to the wife of his heart the beauties and peculiarities of the hill, that she might rejoice thereat; and he was amply rewarded by rejoicing in her joy. They had abode there for many days; yet it caused them as much surprise and delight
10 as though it was their first visit to the place. Rama, the god of the Shining Ones, had nothing to fear wherever he might be. He roamed with Seeta among the hills and dales and expatiated upon the joys and pleasures of a life in the virgin forests. "Seeta! I do not, for a moment,
15 regret, ever since I came here, that I left a crown behind me or that I am denied the company of my kin and friends. Darling! Observe the beauty of this Chitrakoota. Clouds of birds hide it from view, while its lofty peaks pierce the sky. Untold wealth lies in
20 the numerous veins of gold, silver and other metals that run through it. Here it shows a silvery sheen, there a blood-red hue. Here you come upon patches colored like emerald, sapphire, topaz, crystal or mercury; there upon a mosaic of white and black. Tigers, leopards,
25 bears and other fierce beasts of prey, various species of deer and birds put away from themselves their

cruel nature and habits and dwell in peace and harmony, thanks to the presence of the holy sages. The mango, jambu, asana, lodhra, priyala, panasa, dhava, ankola, bhavya, tinisa, bilva, tinduka, bamboo, kasme~~ori~~, arishta, 30 varuna, madhuka, tilaka, jujube, amalaka, neepa, cane, dhanvana, jeevaka and other varieties of forest trees cover the hill slopes, their deep shades heavy with the fragrance of the fruits and flowers that crown them. A stream of joy courses through my veins to see the kin- 35 naras, male and female, enjoy themselves on the slopes of the hill. In yonder playgrounds of the vidyadharas there hang from the trees men's weapons and women's apparel. This mount, whose sides are washed by springs and torrents, resembles a huge elephant in rut. Whose 40 heart rejoices not at the breeze blowing from the vast caves laden with the perfume of a thousand flowers? I may dwell here for years out of count with you and Lakshmana and know neither care nor sorrow. This mount improves upon acquaintance, hidden as it is 45 beneath flowers, fruits, beasts, birds, trees and creepers. This forest life helps me in two ways. My heart is filled with strange delight; I am glad to have fulfilled my sire's behests; and Bharata is rendered the happier for it. Seeta! Are you content to live with me on this mount, 50 keeping strict control over your thoughts, words and acts? Does your innocent soul take delight in the gentle zephyr, the koil's notes, the hum of bees and the blowing of fragrant flowers? The hermit life we strive to lead gives us happy days and nights in this life; and 55 I have it from the royal sages of the line of Ikshwaku that it is a sure pathway to heaven-life and Liberation as well. This hill is dotted with large slabs of all shades of color, black, white and yellow. Plants and herbs of mystic virtue grow here and proclaim their 60

presence far and wide at nights by the flaming radiance that streams from them. Here you come upon large caves that are curiously fashioned like mansions ; there you enter spacious gardens dense with trees and creepers ; and anon you tread hard bare rock for a long way. This mount seems to break through the earth and shoot right up to the sky. You can see it miles away all round. Completely hidden beneath the thick foliage of kushta, punnaga, sthagara and bhoorjapatra trees, it is provided with soft, luxurious couches of lotus leaves. The happy couples that enjoyed themselves hereabout have left behind them traces of scattered wreaths and fruits. The lordly capital of Indra nor the heavenly lake Manasa comes within a day's march of this in point of charm and beauty. If it were given me to abide in this wood, like the royal saints my forefathers, keeping high vows and observances, with yourself and Lakshmana to keep me company, I would feel as happy and content as if I ruled this broad earth from my royal 80 throne at Ayodhya".

CHAPTER XCV.

THE MANDAKINI.

THEY descended the hill and Rama pointed out to Seeta the holy stream Mandakini flowing with sweet pellucid water. Her face glowed like a blown lotus with the joy of beholding lofty mountains, forests, trees, beasts birds and other strange objects of woodland life. "My love," said he "see you yon Mandakini ? How curiously fashioned 10 those sandy hillocks are ! Swans and other aquatic birds dart here and there among the lotuses in mad joy. They

are a charming sight to see, even as your sweet self in all the beauty of your slender waist, swelling hips, tapering thighs, lovely hands and feet adorned with melodious ornaments, and fair face radiant with pleasure. 15 Numerous trees line the banks heavy with flowers and fruits and put to shame the pools in which Kubera disports himself with his women. This water invites me to bathe in it ; troops of wild beasts drink at this spot and the turbid stream wears a garment of lovely red in 20 consequence. Behold yon ascetics that come to bathe at stated times in the sacred river, in all the majesty of matted hair and deerskin robes. There stand others who pray to the Lord of light with lifted hands and stern observances. The trees that crown the lofty 25 peaks are tossed by strong gales and strew the waters far and wide with flowers and leaves, like skilful dancers who toss their arms to and fro and scatter flowers around them. Here the water is clear as crystal ; there small mounts of sand lift their heads above the 30 surface ; anon the siddhas play in the cool waves in high glee. Does it not remind you of a doting husband clasping in passionate embrace the love of his heart, her fine dress of shimmering white more revealing than veiling the beauty of her tapering thighs, faultless in their 35 symmetry. Clusters of flowers are driven ashore by the strong breeze in some places ; in others other the bunches are gaily borne along the current. It looks as if the lover had torn half a piece from the garment of his lady love. Look at the chakravakas that sit thereon and 40 melodiously invite their mates to play with them.

“Guileless heart ! Is it not more delightful to make our home on Chitrakoota than in the crowded town of Ayodhya ? A town life is nowhere by the side of this retired quiet abode where we can enjoy ourselves 45

undisturbed by others. Yon Mandakini is a dearer sight to me than your sweet self. Here come to bathe every day pure-souled siddhas who engage themselves in severe tapas, with restrained senses and thoughts. This is an
 50 extremely sanctified spot, thanks to their presence here. Come, let us bathe and swim in the cool waters of the Mandakini ; everything is ready towards it. Put away fear and timidity from you and enjoy yourself with me as you would in the company of your playmates. The
 55 wavelets caused by the motion of your breast and thighs will submerge the the thick carpet of red and white lotuses that cover the waters. Transfer your affections and solicitious care from the people of Ayodhya to the poor beasts that dwell hereabouts. Take it that Chi-
 60 trakoota is your Ayodhya and the Mandakini your Sarayu.

“The righteous Lakshmana respects my least wishes; you are a wife after my heart ; man wants but little here below except a faithful brother and a loving wife.
 65 Bathing in the holy waters in the morning, midday, and evening, honey, fruits and roots my only food, your sweet self my companion in my roamings through the woods, I clean forget Ayodhya and the concerns of the state. The beasts of the forest wander in herds along
 70 the banks of the Mandakini ; elephants, lions and monkeys put away from them their inborn hate and ferocity and drink at the same ford, thanks to the yogic might of the maharshis ; who would not forget all care and anxiety and rejoice as he wanders through the woods
 75 that line its banks, bending low under their tribute of flowers and fruits?” Thus did Rama describe to her the beauties of the Mandakini and roam with Seeta in the dark forests that cover the sides of Chitrakoota.

CHAPTER XCVI.

LAKSHMANA'S ANGER.

LAVING taken Seeta through the loveliest prospects around the Mandakini, Rama sat himself down on the hill-slope and said "Seeta ! There is pure meat for you and wholesome. This is sweet, this has been cooked to a nice turn." He tasted them first and passed them on to his love. 5

And while they were dining, the army of Bharata drew near. The dust raised by them rose into the sky 10 along with the deafening din ; the beasts of the forests trembled in affright and fled away in troops in all directions. Rama heard it too and saw the animals scamper off in wild fear. He turned to the valiant Lakshmana who stood by and said, "Listen to the grand 15 volume of sound borne on us, like the roar of dark clouds; frightful, is it not ? Elephants and buffaloes that make the dark depths of the forests their home, are chased by the lions and scatter themselves in all directions. Is it a stampede caused by the fierce beasts of prey or by a 20 king or one as powerful, who has come here a-hunting ? Even the very birds have deserted this hill. Go, bring me full news of this strange happening."

And Lakshmana climbed a lofty sala tree, flower-laden and looked around him. A vast army was approaching the wood from the north. At once 25 out to Rama, "Brother ! put out the fires; track us by the smoke. Lead Seeta into the cave and arm yourself quick."

"Boy !" asked Rama "Can you guess whom they follow?" Baleful fires darted from the eyes of Lakshmana and threatened to consume the advancing troops as he

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exclaimed: "It is Bharata, the son of the infamous Kaikeyi. She has her wish, now that he is placed on the
35 throne. But, he is never free from danger so long as we are alive, the lawful claimants. I believe he comes
our wild retreat to slay us and rule over Kosala free from care and anxiety. Behold the spreading kovidara flag
that waves over his chariot. Countless bands proceed
40 here gaily, on fleet horses and huge elephants ; shall we fight them from the top of the mountain, or await their arrival here in arms ? That kovidara flag shall be ours in to-day's battle. At last, I have set my eyes on that wicked wretch Bharata who has worked all this woe to
45 you, to Seeta, to myself and to the whole world. Yonder comes our mortal enemy for whom you have been driven from the kingdom that is yours by every right. He shall not escape death to-day at my hands. We owe him a heavy debt of vengeance and it is but just
50 we should discharge it in full. It is no sin to kill him, no cruelty. Nay, the whole world will come under your happy sway if you slay this miserable sinner, that has so wantonly outraged Dharma. Was it not Kaikeyi that wrought all this wickedness, only to secure the crown
55 to her precious son ? Well, I shall wring her heart and slay her son before her very eyes, even as a maddened elephant breaks down a stately forest tree. Nay, there is yet more to come ; I shall wipe them off the face of the earth, Kaikeyi, her kin, Manthara and other
60 dependants of hers. I shall rid the world of this incarnate sin. I had much ado to smother down my anger and distrust. I shall let loose the fire of my pent-up wrath on the armies of Bharata in the shape of mighty shafts, even as a forest conflagration consumes vast
65 stretches of dry withered grass. My arrows shall pierce the hearts of the foes and these forest glades shall run

with roaring torrents of blood. The wild beasts hereabouts shall feast their fill on the mutilated bodies of elephants, horses and men. I pray you not to disappoint my vengeance and lower me in my eyes. Ample 70 testimony you had, till now, of my valour and prowess. Have you ever known me to return from a battle except as a victor ? Was I ever a debtor to my bow and arrows ? Did I fail to gratify them with holocausts of my enemies ? And shall I act otherwise on this most momentous day ? Say but the word ; Bharata and his countless hosts are things of the past".

CHAPTER XCVII

RAMA CALMS LAKSHMANA.

H—— E was beside himself with fury and all eager to begin the fray ; Rama saw it was high time to check his vengeful spirit and said : "Supremely wise and intelligent is Bharata and a hero of heroes. When he has come to fight us in his own person, discarding any substitutes, what purpose shall our weapons serve us ? Do I crave for the world's censure which waits to proclaim 'Dasaratha, out of his boundless 10 affection, bestowed the crown on Bharata. Rama slew him out of spite and disappointment and usurped the throne.' Have I not given my plighted word to fulfil my sire's promise to Kaikeyi and keep his name and fame unsullied by an untruth ? If I kill Bharata in 15 battle, what shall I do with the kingdom ? Fie upon the wealth and power bought with the blood of my kinsmen and friends ! Would any cast a look upon poisoned sweetmeats ? I seek pleasure, wealth and righteousness, nay, the sovereignty of this earth but for my brothers. 20

It is the veriest truth. If I ever harbour any desire for the crown of Kosala, it is more that you should enjoy the sweets of royal power and boundless luxury. I swear it upon my weapons. It is a trifle for me to make myself the master of this world; but the throne of Indra is abhorrent to me if I have to ascend it upon the steps of unrighteousness. If my heart ever prove traitor to my brothers and seek any joy or pleasure for itself, may heaven's curse blast it into nothing.

30 "Let be. Why should we misunderstand Bharata's motive in coming here? He came back from his uncle's place to Ayodhya and was duly informed of what happened in his absence. Sumitra might have told him that we abide in this forest. Boundless is his love and 35 affection to me; and I hold him as something dearer than my life. He knows very well that in our house the eldest son inherits the throne. His heart would bleed to hear that I undergo any hardship or privation in the wild woods. So, it is plain to me that he comes 40 here to take me back to Ayodhya and with no hostile intent. He has let loose his fiery wrath upon poor Kaikeyi and has pierced her heart with his cruel words. He has somehow persuaded our sire to place me upon the throne and has come here to pray my acceptance of it.

45 "It is but meet that Bharata should come to see us now. Never, in his wildest dreams, has the shadow of any evil to us crossed his heart. Why do you suspect Bharata? Had you any harm or injury at his hands till now? Or did he at any time give expression to words 50 that have aroused such misgivings in you? Speak not of Bharata thus cruelly and scornfully. You revile me when you revile him. Some time ago you were all afire to slay our sire; now Bharata's turn is come; and much evil will ensue if I let things run thus. Master

this cruel revengeful spirit anyhow. Would any one 55
contemplate the death of his father, though the direst
dangers and difficulties tempt his soul to it? Would
any one point his sword at the heart of him who came
into the world along with him, who is flesh of his flesh
and bone of his bone?

60

"Is your heart set upon the crown that you speak so?
Wait till Bharata comes here; I shall get it from him.
If I but say in jest, 'Bharata! Lakshmana would wear the
crown; give it to him,' he will take me at my word and
never bestow a thought upon the throne ever after." Thus 65
in many a wise did Rama seek to calm his raging spirit.

The gentle and loving accents of Rama made Laksh-
mana shrink within himself with shame. Yet it was
not self-interest that made him speak so; rather Rama's
welfare and the earnest desire to ward off harm and 70
sorrow from him. He feared and suspected Bharata,
though he had no reason to do so. When our word goes
for nothing, we try to change the topic; so Lakshmana,
now thoroughly ashamed of himself, said to Rama, "It
may as well be our father come to take us back to 75
Ayodhya". Quick to observe and to adapt himself to
the changing circumstances, Rama allowed him time to
wear away his shamfacedness and seemed to accept
his suggestion. "Yes. It is extremely probable that His
Majesty has deigned to pay us a visit in our lowly abode. 80
Or he may come to take us back to the capital, thinking
upon the dangers and difficulties that might befall us
in the woods and saying to himself quite naturally 'My
children have been brought up in luxury and comfort
and are not made to rough it in the wild woods'. Or he 85
may have repented of having allowed Seeta to accom-
pany us here and have come down to had her back; for
she has no call to expose herself to the discomforts

and perils of long years in the Dandaka, an utter
 90 stranger from her very birth to anything but affluence
 and happiness. Yonder come the two coursers, fleet as
 wind, that are always yoked to His Majesty's chariot.
 There I see the state elephant, Satrunjaya, marching in
 advance of the army, like a mountain in motion, tossing
 95 about his limbs in mad rut. But one thing causes me
 sore misgiving ; I perceive not the snow-white umbrella
 that is held aloft over our universally respected sire.
 Come down from your lofty perch ; and behave towards
 Bharata as I advised you ". And Lakshmana stood at
 100 his side the next moment, his palms clasped in humble
 reverence.

Meanwhile Bharata ordered his troops to halt at
 the distance of half a yojana on either side of Chitra-
 koota, that they might not cause any annoyance or dis-
 105 turbance to the asrama of his brother. Obedient to the
 orders of that wise and prudence prince, the army put
 away pride and unruliness from their hearts and stayed
 near Chitrakoota, anxious to win the esteem and appro-
 bation of Raghava.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE SEARCH FOR THE ASRAMA.

HAVING assigned suitable quarters for the troops
 Bharata proceeded on foot, all athirst to catch
 a glimpse of Rama. He turned to Satrughna
 and said, 'Take these hunters and our retinue and
 carefully search every inch of this forest. Let Guha and
 his kin arm themselves and rest not until they come
 upon the asrama of Rama. I shall engage myself in
 10 the same task, assisted by my ministers, priests,

Brahmanas and citizens. My soul knows no peace until I behold Rama, his heroic brother Lakhmana and the thrice-fortunate Seeta. My heart knows no joy until I bless my eyes with a sight of my brother's face, lovely as the moon in her full orb and of his eyes large and lustrous as lotus-leaves. Grief will be my companion until I lay my head at my brother's feet adorned with the dhwaja (flag), the vajra (the favorite weapon of Indra) the lotus, the elephant-goad, the vase holding the Amrita and other signs of royalty. Sorrow will dog my steps 15 until my brother is seated on a splendid throne worthy of his rank and worth, the diadem of the emperor son his brows and crown me with his holy feet that become me most. My heart will bleed until I see my brother bathed with holy waters on the glorious throne that has 20 come down to us through countless eons of time. How blessed is Lakshmana to be able to behold the face of my Rama, resplendent as the full-orbed moon and lighted up with star-like eyes! How fortunate is Seeta to be privileged to follow Rama the lord of the worlds! 25 Holy, thrice holy, is mount Chitrakoota to offer a dwelling to prince Rama when he is wandering through the pathless forests, an exile and stranger! Mount Himalaya is no where beside it. These wild woods that know no man, but form the home and haunt of fierce 30 beasts, have laid up untold merit in past ages; else what chance for Rama to dwell here and he the Light of lights and the lord of wealth?" And Bharata, all unused to trudge afoot, threaded the mazes of the lofty forest trees, lending an additional charm to the hill slopes by 35 their graceful burden of fruits and flowers.

He revolved in his mind what he should say to Rama and what telling arguments he should adduce. He reached the foot of a stately sala tree that crowned

45 the summit of Chitrakoota with its lovely flowers and foliage and espied a column of smoke rising from the asrama of Rama. The people thereabouts informed him and his followers that Rama dwelt hard by. He fainted with joy like storm-tossed mariners at the sight
 50 of land. Then the troops halted there, while Bharata and Guha proceeded towards the asrama of Rama, their attendants following them at a distance.

CHAPTER XCIX.

BHARATA MEETS RAMA.



HAVING assigned suitable quarters to the troops, Bharata, impelled by his desire to see Rama, said to Vasishtha, "Holy sir! pray direct the queens to follow us". He walked on very fast and called the attention of Satrughna to the numerous signs that betokened the approach of the asrama of Rama. Sumantra came after them, no less eager so
 10 have a sight of his dear prince. They had not gone far when they caught a glimpse of the abode of Rama surrounded by the cottages of the hermits. There were two rooms, one for the sacred Fires and the other to receive visitors. Piles of split wood lay around for
 15 lighting fires at night. Flowers were gathered and kept ready for the worship of the gods. Along the paths that led to the river fords, the trees bore strange devices of bark and kusa grass to intimate the presence of the princes to each other. Dried dung of deer and ox lay in
 20 heaps to build warming fires in winter.

Bharata's face wore a bright look when he beheld them; his heart danced with joy. He said to Satrughna and the ministers, "I believe we are almost at the

locality indicated by maharshi Bharadvaja. The Mandakini must be somewhere here. Lakshmana has tied 25 strips of bark high up the trees to guide him when he goes abroad at nights for fruits, roots or water. Our course lies this way and this is also used by the maddened elephants when they tear about, wildly trumpeting, along the base of the mount. Behold the thick smoke 30 that rises from the Garhapatya fire tended so carefully by the hermits morning and evening. It is no culinary fire; for there should be no smoke, but only flames. It is no sacrificial fire; for we should see cinders, but no dense smoke. I am about to stand in the presence of 35 the Supreme Person, Rama, who led my steps into the adytum of Wisdom; from him I received my sacraments. Like unto a maharishi, he is crowned with every excellence of head and heart". They were at the foot of the mount by that time and on the banks of the Mandakini 40 Bharata said to those about him, "The supremely effulgent Lord of the worlds has renounced the joys and comforts of life and roams the dreary forests, all through me. That Ideal King is seated on the bare earth in this uninhabited spot. Well do I deserve the scorn and 45 contempt of the world. It makes no difference whether I am living or dead. So I shall clasp the feet of Rama and persuade him anyhow to return to Ayodhya. If Lakshmana charges me with the perfidy of Kaikeyi and says 'Brother! You but waste your compassion on 50 him', I shall even throw myself at his feet though he be younger in years; for, mighty is the issue that depends on it. If I fail to win him over to gentleness and sympathy, I shall lay my head at the feet of Seeta, the Mother of Mercy, and entreat her to intercede for me 55 with her lord". Thus raving on incoherently, he drew near the lovely cottage of Rama.

It was very spacious and was thatched with the leaves of sala, tala and other trees. Soft kusa grass 60 was spread on the floor as on an altar in the sacrificial hall. The place was bright with the sheen of bows inlaid with gold, the mighty messengers of sure death to those against whom they are bent and capable of working impossibilities, even like the vajra of Indra; 65 terrible arrows peeped from the quivers with blazing mouths like the rays of the morning sun or the great serpents that range Bhogavati, the capital of the Nagas; swords exquisite of temper and curiously wrought, gleamed from scabbards of fine gold, like lambent lightnings darting through golden clouds; broad shields hung aloft, wondrously chased with gold; and there were finger-guards of iguana-skin decorated with gold. Foes dared not raise their eyes to the lowly cottage, as deer shun the lair of a lordly lion. To the north-east 70 of it there was a low platform with an altar upon it where glowed the sacred Fires. On closer observation, they beheld a Great One seated within the hut; he was clad in the garb of hermits, in deer skin and dress of bark and wore his hair in matted coils: like a flaming 75 fire looked he, crowned with the a halo of blinding glory and Bharata made him out by it to be his brother Sree Ramachandra. With long and mighty arms reaching below his knees, with powerful chest and shoulders like those of a lion, with large and lustrous eyes resembling 80 the petals of a lotus, Raghava the lord of the world, was seated on the bare earth spread with kusa grass, Seeta and Lakshmana a little in the rear, like the eternal Brahma. Overcome with grief and sorrow, Bharata rushed towards him. All unmanned, the blinding tears 85 almost choked him as he cried, "Alas! that I should live to see the wild beasts of the forest paying court 90

to my brother, whose feet the citizens of Ayodhya contended to have the hour of touching in the hall of audience. Woe is me, when the lord of wealth, clad in priceless garments, covers his limbs with deerskin at 95 the call of Dharma ! Ah me, that the lovely locks, ever crowned with bright and fragrant flowers, should be coiled in dust and dirt ! Instead of laying up merit by yagas and yagnas as the Books enjoin, he is driven to mortify himself and observe fasts and penances at a 100 period of life least fitted for it. What terrible sin have I committed that my eyes should behold dirt and dust cake his limbs, which erstwhile were smeared with rare and priceless sandal paste ? Ramachandra, formed to enjoy every luxury and comfort, has been forced to 105 undergo all this trouble and misery. Fie upon this wretched life of mine that the meanest in the world regards as below contempt ! Far better that I were dead and forgot."

So sobbing and wailing out of a broken heart, he 110 rushed forward to grasp the feet of Rama ; but blinded by his tears, he groped wildly and fell down in a faint. He was just able to cry out "Brother!" and no more. Satrughna, more master of himself, clasped the feet of Rama, voicing forth the grief that tore at his heart. 115 Ramachandra raised them up, clasped them to his heart and, for all his iron fortitude, was unable to keep back the burning tears. The meeting of Rama and Lakshmana with Sumantra and Guha resembled the conjunction of the Sun and the Moon with Venus and Jupiter. The 120 sight of the noble princes, like unto lordly elephants; meeting one another in that lonely forest and sorrowing piteously was too much even for the rough dwellers thereof, who could not restrain their tears.

CHAPTER C.

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KINGCRAFT.

THE moment he saw Bharata, Rama inferred that his brother had assumed the functions of royalty; and 5 he instructed him in the science of government, under the guise of making kindly enquires. For, he would have no chance to teach him his duty when he should come to know that Dasaratha was dead and that Bharata had renounced the throne, electing to live the 10 life of a recluse.

He said to himself, in wonder "Our father used to exclaim at the sight of fragrant wreaths and flowers 'These would look well on the hair of my darling Bharata'; and *that* Bharata comes to me now with matted 15 locks! If fine robes or garments were brought to him, he would at once exclaim 'It would look well if Bharata wore these'; and *that* Bharata is now clad in deerskin and strips of bark! It is almost impossible for my father to make Bharata accept any present from him; and *that* 20 Bharata is now obliged to entreat from others, with clasped hands, what he wants for himself! No bed of flowers was soft enough for Bharata, but my sire would always seat his darling on his lap; and *that* Bharata rolls on the ground before me!" No one there could contain his 25 grief to see Bharata in his miserable plight lie in the dust, shorn of his dazzling lustre, like the glorious Lord of light at the end of the Day of Brahma. Worn out to a shadow, pale and haggard, his very mother could not make him out. Rama raised him up, embraced him 30 warmly, smelt the crown of his head and kept back his rebellious grief to console him who came into the world along with him. "Darling!" said he "how is it I see

you here in this dreary forest ? Does it not lie upon *you* to wait upon our sire and render him every service ? Where has he gone ? He could never miss you for a 35 moment. There is no chance of your coming to these woods if he is alive. Your long journey from the Kekaya country fills me with surprise. How is it I see you emaciated, pale, a ghost of your bright self ? What brought you here to these frightful wastes ? His Ma- 40 jesty, is he among the living ? If so, you have his permission to come to me here. He cannot live away from you ; then, has he fallen a prey to overwhelming grief ? Have powerful foes taken base advantage of your misfortune and youth and wrested the crown from your 45 hands ? Or have your subjects taken to heart my exile at the orders of Kaikeyi and driven away their unpopular ruler ? This kingdom has belonged to us from the very beginnings of time. Or have you wearied of service at the feet at our father of unparalleled valor 50 and come here to seek ease and independence ?

Is it all well with the emperor Dasaratha, high-born, truthful, righteous and crowned with hundreds of Aswamedhas and Rajasooyas ? Are you here the bearer of the tidings of some serious illness of his, brought on 55 by the sight of the untold evil wrought through the promise made to Kaikeyi ? Kausalya, my mother, whom endless grief has marked for its own, fares she well ? I hope Sumitra has nothing to vex her, who gave to the world those nobles heroes, Lakshmana and Satrughna ? 60 And Kaikeyi, your mother, who deserves my devotion and love more than they, does her heart rejoice, now that her hopes have been amply realised ?

Does maharshi Vasishtha, the guru of our race, continue to receive at your hands the worship and 65 reverence offered to him by the kings of the line of

Ikshwaku ? A knower of Brahman is he, and master of all sciences and arts; his wisdom is equalled by his holiness and the spiritual lustre engendered of it. Do
 70 you render due respect and veneration to your chaplain, who assists Vasishtha ? An utter stranger to pride and envy, nobly born, a well of wisdom, he is known to be totally selfless ; he is a proficient in the mysteries of yagas and yagnas, from the Agnihotra to the Aswame-
 75 dha ; he tends the holy Fires ever watchfully ; of mighty intellect, he practises the dharma of this world and the next with equal zeal and sincerity. Does he keep you in mind, at stated times, of the offerings to the Fires, past and future ? Do you gratify the gods by sacrifices,
 80 your parents by cheerful obedience and affectionate service, your gurus by reverence meet and faithful devotion, your kinsmen by loading them with favors, your elders in age, wisdom and holiness by humble salutation and the Brahmanas and *literati* by liberal gifts ? Do you
 85 honor as he deserves, Sudhanva, our master in the science of war and government ? Are your councillors intelligent, nobly born, versed in statecraft, adepts at reading the hearts of others and faithful even as yourself ? Counsels of state, matured by the deliberations of
 90 expert politicians and religiously guarded, conduce to the success of the king's projects.

Do you carefully regulate your hours of work and sleep ? Are your waking thoughts in the mornings devoted to the improvement of the resources of your
 95 kingdom ? Taking counsel of none and taking counsel of all are equally to be avoided. Our own judgments are far from impartial in the matter of carefully weighing the pros and cons of affairs ; bias and prejudice are more likely to warp our hearts. Unity of judgment and
 100 secrecy are hopeless in a council of many. I hope your

projects do not leak out ere they are accomplished. Slow to decide but quick to act, do the forces that you employ bring in a golden harvest, thousand-fold ? Time takes to itself the results of dilatory actions. Your plans and schemes should announce themselves to your 105 subject-kings only when they have borne fruit but never at the early or the middle stages. Do you guard your state secrets so carefully that others despair of getting at them through guess or inference or observation ?

Do you pass over thousands of numbskulls to select 110 one man of intellect and talents, who goes about his work calmly, carefully and thoroughly ? Such a one is invaluable in national crises and deadlocks ; for you can rely upon him to bring you out of the difficulty with enhanced fame and prestige. Thousands and crores 115 of thick-witted pig-headed counsellors are but a broken reed for the king to lean upon when a kingdom's existence hangs on their wise and prompt action. A good and able minister will secure boundless glory to his king and the subject princes ; he should be firm and unshaken of 120 purpose, careful and deliberate in his actions, expert in the mysteries of kingcraft and aware of the projects and plans of his enemies as soon as they are formed.

I hope your superior servants are employed in preparing and serving your meals and such like responsible occupations ; the middle class should be used to look after the sleeping accommodation, seats and conveyances ; and the lower ranks should be engaged in cleaning the feet, pressing them and taking charge of your slippers. These distinctions should be carefully 130 observed ; else you will sow a plentiful crop of jealousy and spite.

Kings use to test the loyalty and attachment of their ministers and counsellors by sending them, through

135 secret channels, fine robes, ornaments, conveyances and other valuable articles, purporting to be presents from the royal ladies or from other monarchs, and carefully watching them the while. I hope your ministers have passed through such tests successfully ; of course
 140 they have served your house for generations ; they are pure and unsullied in thought, word and deed and are employed only in very important affairs,

Son of Kaikeyi ! I hope you do not cruelly punish your subjects and drive them to carry their complaints
 145 to your ministers who restrain you in consequence. Sacrificial priests scorn a man who desires to engage their services in a rite to be financed by the proceeds of his iniquitous profession (he has made his wealth by accepting gifts that are condemned by the Books) ; good
 150 women loathe him who would force their love ; even so your people will shun and execrate you if you punish the innocent and fill your coffers with wealth extorted from them by cruel torture.

There is a class of men—arch-fiend to be nearer
 155 truth—who are adepts in the use of the Four Means (conciliation, bribery, dissension and force) ; they are experts in the theory and practice of self-aggrandisement and exploitation of others, taught by Ranaka Chanakya and other luminaries of that school. They
 160 lie in wait for chances to blacken the characters of the trusted servants of the king and tamper with their fidelity. Fear is a thing unknown to them in their nefarious task of wringing the heart of the monarch ; and they are ever intent on making themselves masters of
 165 his wealth and power in course of time. If you come upon any of the species, kill him at once and surely ; else he is sure to take your life or your kingdom. I hope you have not harboured any such demon unawares.

I trust you have not dismissed our commander-in-chief and appointed another in his place. He is ever 170 supremely content and magnifies the kindness and consideration of his master. He is the terror of his foes ; his subtle mind is ever occupied with arraying his phalanxes to suit the enemy's tactics, breaking through their serried ranks and leading his men to glorious vict- 175 ory. No danger takes him unawares. The soul of loyalty and devotion, pure of heart and deed, of high lineage, his capacity for work is something marvellous. Do you carefully inquire into the antecedents and test the courage of your chief warriors and attach them to your- 180 self by honors and presents ? I hope they are remarkable for their strength, veterans in every branch of warfare, of exceptional valor and prowess, and endowed with noble virtues. Do you pay your troops regularly and provide them with rations, suited to their work ? Else, 185 the paid servants turn against their master and prove faithless, which leads to great evils. Is every member of the warrior caste devoted to you, heart and soul, and ready to lay down their lives for you ? Your ambassadors, plenipotentiaries, representatives and consuls are, 190 I hope, your countrymen, trained to read the hearts of others and deal with every contingency successfully ; quick and apt in reply, they should be able to deliver your message and the answer to the letter ; they should ever keep their master's directions in mind and secure his 195 interests though speaking on many a topic to throw the other party off the scent ; they should be endowed with extraordinary powers of discrimination and analysis.

Eighteen persons there are whom a king should put to the severest tests possible—the prime-minister, the 200 high-priest, the heir-apparent, the commander-in chief, the captain of the wardens of the gate, the superintendent

of the harem ; the inspector-general of prisons, the president of the board of revenue, the proclaimer of the
 205 king's commands to the people, the judges, the advocate-general and his staff, the paymaster of forces, the captain of the might watch whose duty it is to go about the town in disguise and guard the gates, the walls and the fortifications ; the paymaster of the hired servants ; the
 210 master of ceremonies and major domo ; the head of those who decorate the audience-hall every day, arrange the seats in the order of precedence, receive and lead to their places the members of the audience, keep out those as have not the right of entry, preserve order and silence
 215 and watch over the safety of the hall ; the head of those who execute the king's decrees of punishment on criminals ; the general-in-chief of the troops that garrison the fortresses ; and the commander of the frontier forts and troops. Of these, the first three are ever near the
 220 king, and need not be put to the test as he can observe them for himself. The others on his side and the whole eighteen on the enemy's side should every one of them, be under the constant observation of three spies cleverly disguised, unknown to one another, to see whether
 225 they discharge their duties aright.

I hope, you do not neglect, as weak and powerless, the foes that have been exiled from your dominions and have returned after the period. Surely, they would not have come back without having secured some strong
 230 support. Keep careful watch over them.

Do you carefully avoid the company of the Baud-dhas, the Charvakas and other atheistical brahmanas ; they are proficient in instilling heretical principles into the minds of the unwary ; ever the enemies of true
 235 wisdom, their self-conceit is equalled only by their ignorance ; their intellects ever run contrary to the tener

of the Holy Scriptures. They would not set aside the *tamasa smritis* and *puranas* and interpret according to the traditional canons of our great men, those composed by the maharshis and recognised as authoritative by the good; they bring bare dry logic to prove that these are useless to secure our ends here and hereafter.

Ayodhya, our capital, is the home of renowned warriors; our house holds sway over it from the very dawn of time. The people there, of all castes and orders, perform their duties conscientiously and to their level best; of restrained senses and boundless energy, they are endowed with noble excellences. Further, that city is the favourite resort of the highest exponents of every science and art; the citizens lead lives of happy content; gifted with every natural and artificial advantages, its fortifications are the despair of the enemy. Adorned with noble fanes, palaces and mansions of the nobles, teeming with splendid elephants, horses, camels and other animals, it well deserves the name *Unassailable*. Do you bestow every care in guarding our fair capital? Our dominions are thickly dotted with sacrificial grounds, the scene of many an *aswamedha*, *chayana* and other holy rites. The people are devotedly attached to their country and would not exchange it for any other on earth; they have over them a ruler after their own heart and a land almost perfect in every way. Beautiful temples, and good roads lined with pools, tanks, public water-booths and reservoirs used for purposes of irrigation abound everywhere. Very little of the land lies uncultivated; countless herds of cattle roam the pastures; it is free from such pests as drought, excessive rainfall, rats, locusts, birds and proximity to the abodes of kings. The soil is not dry and arid, depending

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solely upon timely rains ; but the country is covered with a network of rivers, canals and other appliances of irrigation. Green fields, gardens and groves delight the eye at every turn. Robbers, highwaymen, brigands
 275 and thieves are conspicuous by their absence, equally with the wild beasts of the forests. Honey-combed with mines of gold, silver and diamonds, it is no place for sinners ; the men and women in it spend long years of happiness and comfort. In the woods that line the
 280 banks of the rivers and lakes, fairs are held on fixed days where merchants gather and a brisk trade is carried on. I hope every part of our vast kingdom enjoys peace and plenty.

Are the farmers and herdsmen in your empire growing in wealth and comfort ; and do they lift their hearts to you in love and homage ? Do trade and commerce flourish in your dominions ? Are your exports and imports, sale and barter, steadily increasing ? A king should govern all classes and grades justly and wisely ;
 290 do you see to it that they enjoy every comfort and convenience and are sedulously guarded from sorrow or danger ?

Do you treat your women with kindness and sympathy ? Do you take watchful care that they do not hold private interviews or talks with other men ? You will do well not to place too much confidence in them ; for, they are by nature fickle and weak-willed and cannot keep secrets. So, keep your counsels to yourself.

Do you keep your forests, where elephants are raised, carefully concealed from others ? Else they fall into the hands of your enemies. The breed of she-elephants that are used in catching the males—is it visibly increasing ? I hope you are steadily adding to your studs of horses, and elephants, male and female.

Do you give audience to your subjects every morning, dressed in your royal robes ? Else, they begin to suspect that you are ill, or, that something untoward has befallen you. 305

Do not make yourself too easily accessible to your servants ; for they grow tall with pride and slight you. Nor, deny yourself to them absolutely ; for, they have no chance to speak their hearts to you ; they turn away from your presence ; and it seriously interferes with the affairs of state. So, always adopt the golden mean. 310
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Are your forts amply provided with money, corn, weapons, archers, engineers, a never failing supply of water and other warlike gear ?

Does your expenditure fall much below your income ? I trust you do not scatter your wealth among such unworthy objects as pimps, panders, singers and dancers. Brahmanas, gods, warriors, friends and the poor are fitter recipients thereof. 320

I believe there is no one in your kingdom of exemplary purity and truthfulness, upon whom is sprung a sudden charge of theft or peculation and who is put to death for his wealth, without due and careful inquiry being made by experts in law and sastra. I am sure that no thief or robber is caught red-handed and, after fair trial, escapes punishment in consequence of an arrangement he makes with the officers of justice that he will give over to them the stolen articles. Are your judges conscientious and brave enough to decide on the side of right in a suit between a rich man and a poor one, without being swayed by considerations of self-interest ? If a ruler puts his self before every other thing and is blind to the good and the evil, the justice and the injustice, the rights and wrongs 325
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among his subjects, the tears of the innocent, who are
 340 punished through careless inquiry, work ruin and destruction to himself, his wives and children.

Do you attach to yourself the elders, the youths and renowned medical experts by gifts, friendship and sweet talk? Do you salute brahmanas, guests, gods,
 345 ascetics, elders, teachers, holy men whose hearts are turned away from the joys of this world and the stately trees in the crossings that form the abode of higher Beings?

Do you take care to pursue the three Aims of life,
 350 each in their proper time—dharma in the forenoon, wealth in the afternoon and pleasure in the night?

The brahmanas versed in every science and art, the citizens and provincials—do they ever raise their voices in prayer to the Almighty that you reign over them
 355 long and happily? Denial of the existence of a future state and untruth; flying into a rage at our parents, teachers, brahmanas and weaklings when they happen to make a mistake or offend us; carelessness and idleness; omitting to pay our respects to the holy men that
 360 are the source and fount of all greatness; half-hearted discharge of our duties, giving a free-hand to our senses, taking no counsel with the ministers on the affairs of state and seeking the advice of those who are ever prone to put false and wrong interpretations on things; careless
 365 omission to perform such auspicious acts as to begin the day by beholding mirrors, pearls, black monkeys and wild elephants; rising to receive each and every one that visits you—these fourteen evils should be carefully avoided by the king; I hope you do so. The ten evil habits—
 370 hunting, gambling, sleeping during the day, scandal, the company of women, drink, wasting our time with singers, musicians and dancers and aimless roaming; the

five defences—moats, mountains, forests, deserts and troops ; the four means of success against an enemy—conciliation, bribery, dissensions and force ; the seven elements of a state—king, minister, kingdom, citadel, treasury, army and friends ; the eight sources of national wealth—farming, commerce, forts, dams, elephant-catching, mining, collection of tribute, bringing waste lands under cultivation and erection of buildings ; the three Aims of life—dharma, wealth and pleasure ; the three sciences—*trayee, varta* and *dandaneeti* ; the various means to control our senses ; the six political expedients—alliance, war, expedition, halt, seeking shelter and duplicity ; the five natural visitations—fire, water, disease, famine and death ; the five artificial visitations—officials, robbers, enemies, king's favorites and the king's greed ; watching for an opportunity to estrange our enemy's friends from his side, by gratifying their wishes when they have been slighted by him or threatened or angered ; the twenty persons to be avoided—boys, old men, invalids, outcasts, cowards, leaders with craven followers, greedy men, leaders with greedy followers, people that are disgusted with the world, sensualists, followers of various counsels, contemners of gods and brahmanas, objects of Divine wrath, idlers that look to God for everything, the famine-stricken, leaders of dis-organised troops, absentee rulers, the objects of universal enmity and hatred, persons in the grip of maleficent planetary conjunctions and those who override all truth and Dharma ; the five constituents of state—minister, kingdom, fortresses, treasury and army ; the *mandala* composed of the twelve kings—centra monarch or *viji-geeshu*, the five kings whose dominions are in the front and the four in the rear of his kingdom, the *madhyama* or intermediate, and *udaseena* or indifferent king ;

warfare composed of expedition, array, march and halt; peace secured by sowing dissensions among the enemy or by seeking the help of stronger powers—have you
 410 carefully and thoroughly examined every one of the above categories, rejected the undesirable and retained the useful ?

Do you take counsel with a cabinet of four or three ministers of the type approved by the sastras and, later
 415 on, with every one of them singly ?

Does your study of the Holy Scriptures bear fruit in your reverent adoration of the Fires ? Does your wealth serve its purpose by contributing to the wants of others and to your own enjoyment ? Are your
 420 wives faithful and fruitful ? Is your life pure and good, in consequence of your having sat at the feet of the great and the learned ?

The line of policy I have been trying to explain to you is calculated to secure you length of days, fame and
 425 the Aims of life. Is your heart inclined that way ? Our sire adopts it as consonant with the principles of virtue and as having the sanction and approval of the great. Do you practise it too ?

I trust you partake of sweet and delicious viands
 430 with others and not alone, like a glutton. Do you extend help and protection to the friends that expect it of you ? If you lay the above precepts to heart, deal your punishments moderately and govern your subjects wisely and justly, treading in the steps of our ancestors, you will,
 435 in this life, bring the broad earth under yours sway and when the hour strikes for you to quit this body, your wisdom and holiness will raise you to the Worlds of light ". And in this wise did Rama instruct Bharata in the mysteries of a king's duties.

CHAPTER CI.

BHARATA'S TIDINGS.

BHARATA replied to him sadly: "Lord ! I have been denied the noble privilege of serving you. I have nothing to do with the kingdom that forms the centre of the royal policy so ably taught by you. Then, how does it serve me, the noble course of life you traced for me ? It is a tradition of our house that a junior cannot ascend the throne over the head of the senior. So I entreat you to go back with us to Ayodhya the home of wealth and happiness, instal yourself on the throne of our fathers and confer eternal fame and glory on us and on the line of Ikshwaku. It is only the fool that says 'The king is but a man like any one of us'. But when we perceive that he performs superhuman acts and manages to pursue the Aims of life at the same time we do not hesitate to pronounce him as the Deity incarnate. His Majesty, whom every virtue and excellence rejoiced to adorn and who won the esteem and regard of the good and the great by his zealous performance of yagas and yagnas, has gone back to his seat in heaven when I was on a visit to the king of the Kekayas. Then you were on your way to these forests. Think not that he survived for many days the shock of separation from you. You had barely passed out of Ayodhya accompanied by Seeta and Lakshmana, when grief and sorrow hurried him away from the world of mortals. Foremost of men ! it behoves you not to grieve over much. Arise and busy yourself with the funeral rites of our father. We have discharged that duty to him, I and Satrughna. But, it is not enough ; for our elders say that 'the funeral offerings of a favorite son

secure to the dear departed undying bliss in the world of the pitris.' It is no secret that His Majesty's love
 35 was given to you most. His last words were about you ; his soul yearned to behold your fair face ; he could not call back his heart that had gone after you ; deprived of your sweet presence, too weak to stand the shock of separation from you, he quitted this life, his thoughts
 40 full of you."

CHAPTER CII.

FUNERAL RITES.

HE dreadful tidings of his father's death that Bharata brought him, pierced his heart like the vajra of Indra and Rama fell on the earth like a mighty tree of the forest when the woodman's axe lays low its noble head crowned with leaves, flowers and fruits. There he lay, the lord of the world, like a stately elephant that sleeps the sleep of fatigue, when it had
 5 enough of playing in the depths of the river and butting down its banks. Seeta, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna sprang forth with hoarse cries to raise him and dashed water on his face. Raghava returned to life and consciousness and with streaming eyes, lifted his
 10 voice in piteous lamentation. "Emperor Dasaratha, the foremost and best of kings, has bowed his head to the rod of Time and departed this life ; what have I to do with Ayodhya ? Who will rule over it hereafter ? What did he get in return for all his anxious efforts to
 15 call me his son ? I was the cause of his grief and I brought him to his death. I was denied the privilege of being at his side during his last moments and rendering him every service that lay in my power ; nor was I

in time to perform the funeral rites after his death. Bharata and Satrughna are more fortunate in that respect. I will not go back to Ayodhya, even after my forest life is over, to the luckless capital widowed of its lord and in the hands of the hydra-headed people. Should I go, who is there to guide my steps on the narrow and perilous path of Right ? If I ever happened to do any good or noble act, my sire used to signify his delight and praise me in words of sweet encouragement. When shall I hear such again ? Never".

He next turned aside to Seeta and said " My sire had no girl and he lavished all his love and fondness upon you, more than your own parents ; that father-in-law of yours is now with the gods. You ever sought his side, if I happened to chide you or if there was any thing you wanted me to do for you ; that Dasaratha is now no more, who regarded you as the apple of his eye. No need to ask you whether your grief whelms mine. Whom will you look up to hereafter ? Lakshmana ! mother you have and brothers, elder and younger, but cruel Fate has rendered you a fatherless orphan. And Bharata is the bearer of the dreadful tidings to us ". He sobbed aloud, unable to say more ; and every one there wept and wailed piteously.

Then his brothers consoled Rama, the stay of the worlds. " Brother ! arise, for we should offer libations of water to the manes of our departed sire ". The woeful news of her father-in-law's death opened the floodgates of Seeta's sorrow and she could scarce see Rama through her blinding tears. He calmed her grief and said " Lakshmana ! I go to offer libations to our noble father. Keep in readiness our dress of bark, oil-cakes of *ingudi* and other necessary articles. Let Seeta lead the way and you follow her ; I come last. This is the order

prescribed for this sad procession." There went with the princes, Sumantra, who had served countless generations of the Ikshwakus ; of mighty intellect, possessed of stern self-control, his heart was filled with unshaken devotion to Raghunatha, for he was endowed with the Eye of spirit. He led the way to the river, administering comfort and consolation all the while.

65 They reached the Mandakini flowing fast through flower-laden forests, bathed in a clear, sandy ford and poured libations of water exclaiming "Father ! may this water reach you and go to gratify your noble self." Rama sobbed aloud and said "Best and mightiest of 70 monarchs ! may this pure and holy water that I offer you with low devotion reach you in the world of the Pitrис and give you deathless content." The brothers then sought another spot and Rama performed the Sapindeekarana sraddha in honour of his sire. He 75 placed oil-cakes of *ingudi* and *badari* upon the *kusa* grass and exclaimed through his sobs "I pray you to accept and derive content from this offering of food that is sweet to us. Gods and Pitrис feed with pleasure upon what goes to sustain the mortal that offers worship and 80 adoration to them." They returned to Chitrakoota along the same path and when they stood at the door of the cottage, Rama caught the hands of Seeta and his brothers and filled the air with lamentations, like lions roaring at nights, until the mountain gave back the 85 doleful sounds a hundred fold.

Bharata's troops heard it and a great fear took hold of them. "It seems" cried they "that our prince Bharata has met Ramachandra ; this is the sound of their bewailing the death of our late Majesty." They cast 90 aside their weapons and garments and ran towards the place whence the sounds proceeded, all impelled by a

common desire. The higher class rode on horses, elephants or chariots, while others ran afoot. It seemed an age to them since they saw Rama, though it was only a matter of a few days. All eager to behold him, 95 they jostled one another in frantic haste to be present at the meeting of the brothers. The earth gave back the sounds of countless elephants, horses and chariots tearing over it, as if cloud banks clashed against one another in the sky. Elephants, male and female, were 100 frightened thereat and sought refuge in the neighbouring forests, the air heavy with the pungent odour of their rut. Boars, bisons, wolves, panthers, monkeys, tigers, various species of deer and huge snakes fled away in mad terror. Herons, starks, cranes, swans, koils, 105 curlews and water-fowls darkened the air in their flight; the hosts of Bharata darkened the earth.

Then they beheld Sree Rama, the lord of men, of boundless valour and fame, seated on the bare earth and the tears coursed down their cheeks as they reviled and condemned, in no measured terms, Kaikeyi and Manthara. Rama welcomed them as they deserved, with bows, salutations, embraces, blessings, smiles, kind glances and respectful enquiries. Like huge drums beaten incessantly, their clamorous lamentations rose 110 on the air and were given back by the earth, the sky, the mountain caves and the quarters.

CHAPTER CIII.

RAMA AND THE CITIZENS.

MEANWHILE, Vasishtha led the royal ladies to where their sons were. They passed by the Mandakini and beheld the spot where the 5

princes bathed in the river. Kausalya turned a wan face and streaming eyes to Sumitra and the other women and cried piteously : " This is verily the ford frequented by my darlings who have been driven from
 10 the kingdom and have taken refuge here, like homeless outcasts. Sumitra ! This is the ford where your son comes to fetch water for my boy on whom he waits assiduously. Humble as the service may appear and lowly, I do not think that it, in any way, lowers your
 15 son. The elder brother stands on the same level as the father and all service rendered to him is but so much filial duty discharged, and hence meritorious. This day Bharata will meet Rama and take him back to Ayodhya. This day will see the last of the mean and
 20 arduous duties self-imposed upon your gently-nurtured son ' Her eyes rested on the balls of the *ingudi* oil-cakes, placed by Rama with a heavy heart on the *kusa* grass spread towards the south, to propitiate the shades of Dasaratha. " Alas !" cried she, " behold the offering
 25 duly placed by Rama to our lord, the great-souled king of the Ikshwaku line. Mighty as the gods, undisputed ruler over the broad earth, fitted to enjoy every comfort and luxury, has it come to this that he gets no better food ? He, whose aid was invoked by the Lord of the
 30 celestials, he, whose rule was acknowledged by the sea-girt world, how could he bring himself to partake of this *ingudi* oil-cake, an utter stranger to him when he lived ? What greater reproach than to hear the world remark that Rama, the heir to unbounded power and luxury,
 35 offered to the manes of his father *ingudi* oil-cake as food ? What prevents my heart from shivering to atoms even after I behold this terrible sight ? It is true, after all, that the gods find it pleasant what goes to feed their worshippers ". Her friends and companions consoled her

and they resumed their course towards the *asrama* of 40 Rama.

They saw him at a distance seated on the bare earth, like a fallen god, having renounced all luxury and comfort; grief overcame them and found vent in scalding tears and piteous wails. Their ever-dutiful 45 son rose on their approach, advanced to meet them and reverently laid his head at their feet. They brushed away the dust and earth on his back with their flower-soft fingers. Lakshmana came next and, with a heavy heart, saluted them every one and announced himself; 50 they made no difference between Rama and his brother Lakshmana dowered with all graces. Lastly came Seeta, who touched the feet of her mothers-in-law and stood before them with bowed head and tear-stained eyes. 55

Kausalya embraced her with a fond mother's love and observing her worn out and sad, cried "The only child of the Videha king, the daughter-in-law of the emperor Dasaratha and the dear wife of Ramachandra, I can not explain to myself why you are doomed to 60 face the dangers and difficulties of a dreary forest life. A lotus flower scorched by the summer heat, a faded lily, a statue of gold caked with dust, the moon behind a cloudy wall—these are nothing beside your woe-begone countenance; the grievous sight consumes my heart 65 like a raging fire".

Meanwhile, Rama laid his head at the feet of Vasishtha of blazing spiritual radiance, like Indra reverencing Brihaspati and was asked to take his seat. Ministers, generals, municipal officials and other noble-minded persons seated themselves as became their rank and position. Bharata sat with reverently clasped hands before his brother, whose resplendent glory was but

heightened by the lowly hermit garb, even as Indra in
 75 the presence of Brahma. All eyes were turned upon the
 brothers and all ears were strained to hear the argu-
 ments that Bharata would adduce to turn Rama from
 his purpose. There they sat in the midst of their friends
 —Rama the soul of truth and dharma, the great-souled
 80 Lakshmana and Bharata the perfect embodiment of
 duty and virtue—like the three Fires in the sacrificial
 hall, surrounded by the priests and attendants.

CHAPTER CIV.

BHARATA TAKES REFUGE IN RAMA.

RAMA knew, beyond a doubt, that Bharata, out of
 5 his supreme devotion, had put away the crown
 that was secured to him and had come to the
 forests in lowly hermit garb. He glanced at Lakshmana
 and said "Bharata! may I know why you are here clad
 in deerskin and dress of bark?" Receiving no reply, he
 asked again "Why have you renounced the throne that
 10 was within your grasp and have betaken yourself here in
 hermit garb?" He paused in vain for an answer; then
 he drew Bharata to himself, clasped the prince to his
 breast and said "Dear boy! why have you sought me
 out here, in this sad plight, and your friends and retain-
 15 ers? How is it I see you wan, faded and broken in
 spirit? I will not be denied".

Thus urged, Bharata spoke back in accents of hu-
 mility: "Brother! our sire leant his ears to the evil
 counsel of Kaikeyi and banished you, his eldest born
 20 and the best of men, to the forest wastes; he gave me,
 a younger son, the crown that should descend to you of
 right. He essayed to do a task that no other even

dreams of doing ; and the shock of separation from a beloved son deprived him of his life. Impelled by my mother, he laboured hard to lay up this store of sin that 25 killed his fair fame for ever. The temptress Kaikeyi, that infamous woman, was denied the consolation of getting for me the kingdom upon which she had set her heart. Foul murderer of her husband, she is now a despicable widow. Her hopes shattered, she is consumed by an undying grief that here she reaps but a harvest of sin and infamy ; frightful hells yawn to receive her hereafter. I came out of the womb of Kaikeyi and am entitled to a share of the scorn and shame that crown her. That sinful wretch brought me into the world only 35 to ruin me in every way. I snatched the crown from the brows of my brother to whom it belongs of right ; I drove him to the dreary woods ; the world censures me as having plotted all along to get the throne ; and it is my hand that slew my father. You are my only stay and 40 refuge. I cast myself on your mercy. I have none else to stand between me and evil. I entreat you to go back with us to Ayodhya ; bring to a happy conclusion the coronation ceremonies that have been so rudely interrupted ; seat yourself on the throne of your fathers like 45 the king of the devas in his capital of Amaravati and rule over us long and happily ; you will thereby secure my salvation also. These citizens and these royal ladies that are rendered masterless and miserable by the loss of their husband, are here to add their prayers to mine ; 50 deign to gratify their wishes. This is the dharma observed by our house till now. You are qualified in every way to protect us. Pray accept the crown and fulfil our long cherished hopes that ever pray for your welfare. Let the earth be rid of her curse of widowhood 55 and shine as the moon in the clear autumn sky. I said

to myself 'Your heart cannot brook to see me shed a tear. Would you behold millions of your subjects, friends, kin and elders weep in sorrow and despair?' and
 60 came down here with the army of our kingdom as if on an expedition. You may set aside my prayers. But these ministers and counsellors are grown grey in years, wisdom and dharma; they ever seek your welfare; they have served our house for generations; they
 65 have guided our kingdom through great crises; and it becomes you not to slight *their* prayers. I have but to show myself to get from you anything I may desire; I entreated it of you; would I fail? I know that your noble heart will be wrung with remorse and sorrow when
 70 you think that you refused to grant my request even after I laid my head at your feet and begged it of you. Till now you used to importune me to express my wishes and grant them as soon; behold! I have myself come to prefer my request to you. Did I not come into the
 75 world along with you; and shall I be reduced to the necessity of entreating you? I call myself your brother; but, is it to claim a share of your kingdom? Am I not your disciple, whom you have initiated into the sacred mantras? Nay, not so; a disciple cannot be brought
 80 and sold; so, I am your slave. I am sure that my arguments are irresistible. Hence, extend your kindness unto me and grant a favourable ear to my suit. Have you the heart to reject the piteous appeals of these ministers, governors, heads of departments and other
 85 citizens?" He laid his head at the feet of Rama and bathed them with his tears.

There he lay on the ground sighing hard as a maddened elephant; but Rama raised him fondly, clasped him to his breast and replied "You are the scion of the
 90 noblest house on earth; endowed with every virtue and

excellence, radiant, a strict observer of vows and penances, no one would for a moment dream of associating you with treachery to your brother or unworthy ambition to possess his crown. I see no fault in you, no stain upon your fame and valor. You do ill when you 95 revile and blame, out of ignorance, the lady that bore you. Our elders extend their love and affection to such of their wives and children as find a place in their heart; and it were vain task to prevent it. The wise hold that sons and disciples are as much amenable to the autho- 100 rity of their parents and teachers as their wives; you cannot deny it. Our sire has as much power to command me to enjoy the comforts and luxuries of a royal life as to dwell in the forests, clad in the garb of hermits. Our devotion and respect are due to our 105 mother equally well as to our father. How can I transgress the orders of my righteous father and mother to dwell in the woods? The emperor has, before all the world, laid his commands upon us that you should wear the crown and rule at Ayodhya and that I should spend 110 fourteen years in the forests, leading the life of hermits. He has now departed to the heaven-world; yet that virtuous king is a law unto you; he is the monarch under whose protection we live in happiness; he is your spiritual guide as of all the world. Hence, it is but just 115 you receive the share he has allotted to you and enjoy it at Ayodhya; it devolves upon me to receive my share and enjoy it in the forests of Dandaka for fourteen years. Honored by all, rivalling Indra in might and power, Dasaratha, our father, has in no doubtful terms intimated 120 to me his pleasure; and I sincerley believe that it will conduce to my highest good here and hereafter. I desire not the sovereignty of all the worlds ever created, if I have not my father's commands thereto".

CHAPTER CV.

BHARATA'S DHARMA.

WHILE those noble princes were thus conversing, the night passed away and ushered in a new day.

5 They repaired to the Mandakini to perform their matin prayers and assembled again before Rama. When every one had seated himself, Bharata rose and said : " Brother ! You may argue that you cannot interfere with the orders of the emperor, who made a gift of this 10 kingdom to Kaikeyi on my account. I was not forgetful of this ; I knew that my object could not be achieved if I did not secure the consent of Kaikeyi ; so, I persuaded her, and not lightly, to forego her claims. Say not ' It is wrong of you to divert the gift of your father to 15 other uses than he contemplated. But am I not your slave ? Do not the sastras proclaim that ' a slave owns no property ' ? The kingdom bequeathed to your slave goes to you. So, accept your own and reign over us long and happily. Say not, ' You may do it as well ' . 20 As the winter-floods bring down the strong banks of rivers and lakes, it is hopeless for any other to rule over this kingdom in your absence. What a world of difference between a horse fleet as the wind and a slow donkey ! The mighty Garuda and a linnet—what have 25 they in common ? Blessed are they who form the stay and support of others ; miserable is the life of him who ever looks up to others for everything in life.

" There was a gardener who planted a seed in a fertile soil and devoted all his time and care to the 30 rearing of it. In good time, the seed sprouted ; it became a plant ; it grew into a mighty tree that hid the earth and the sky with its dense foliage. No dwarf or

weakling or coward dare go up among its branches. It was almost invisible beneath its mantle of flowers. But if it bore no fruit, not a single one, just imagine the cold misery of him who planted it and reared it so carefully, all expectant to enjoy the fruit of his labours. Brother! this illustration applies to you. It will be an insult to your intellect, if I offer an interpretation of it.

" You are our lord, our master, our protector ; do you 40 not fail in your duty if you do not watch over our safety ? Grant our citizens and their leaders the pleasure and privilege of beholding you crowned in all glory and installed on the throne of the Ikshwakus, resplendent as the myriad-rayed Lord of the day. Let 45 maddened elephants follow in your wake trumpeting wildly. Let the royal ladies and their women welcome you with joy." And the countless citizens gathered there expressed their approval of what he said and praised him high.

50

Rama, of supreme self-control over his thoughts and emotions, observed the noble Bharata lament his fate and said to himself " My brother is grieved over-much that I do not accede to his request. He blames himself as the cause of my exile to the forest and of the 55 sad death of the emperor. I should console him in any way and disabuse him." Then aloud: " Dear boy ! you seem to have concluded that our sire drove me to the woods at the instance of Kaikeyi. Neither you nor she are in any way the cause of it ; it is all the work of 60 Destiny. No one is absolutely free to do as he likes. Here and in other worlds, Destiny binds the impotent ego and leads him where it wills. A little thought upon the nature of things will convince us that it is vain to stay the course of nature ; so, it does not become us to 65 bewail the death of our father. You may accumulate

wealth without limits ; yet, it disappears at some time or other, thanks to the vigilant efforts of thieves, women and kings. Brahma, Indra and others, occupying exalted positions in the government of the universe, are dethroned at the end of their day of power. Our union with wife, son and friend is simply the precursor of our separation from them after a time. The most fortunate life should sometime end in death. Our sire bowed to the law of the world and departed this life. It is utterly useless to bewail it. Did I not tell you that it was the hand of Fate that sent me to the woods and my father to heaven ? We but waste our time in grieving over either. Fruits ripen but to drop to the ground ; man is born but do die ; there is no greater danger, no greater fear. A noble mansion with foundations let deep into the earth, with strong walls and pillars that seem to defy the hand of Time, serves its purpose for long years and gradually falls to ruin ; even so, men are gradually undermined by disease, age and care and are swept away by the torrent of death ; yesternight comes not back. The roaring flood of the Yamuna falls into the sea ; can you call it back ? Day succeeds day, and night follows night, and each midnight sees another uncared-for—but nevertheless tangible—portion of our life cast aside into the dust-bin of Eternity ; yet it fails to strike us that we have missed anything. Our short span of years imperceptibly vanishes, even as the fierce rays of the summer sun scorch up shallow pools of water. Idle or busy, active or passive, running or sleeping, we cannot stay the march of time. Why grieve for others, when our hands are full with our own griefs ? There is no armour against Fate. Death walks by our side : Death sits with us ; Death accompanies us on all our journeys. The snows of

age lie heavy upon our heads; our blood runs slow; our skin in one huge network of wrinkles; our hair whitens as if it was the bleached skeleton of Youth; Age kills us by inches. What shall we do to escape these unnumbered miseries? The rising sun fills us 105 with joy at the prospect of taking up our hunt for riches where we left it yesterday. The setting sun fills us with joy at the prospect of taking up our pursuit of pleasure where we left it yesterday. But we see not that one day has gone from our short span of life, as 110 the water in a leaky vessel diminishes imperceptibly. So it behoves us to perfect ourselves in the science of Self even in our youth; but Ignorance leads our steps astray. Our life is utterly barren of everything that could secure a blissful state to us hereafter. Every 115 season bears a message to us of its joys and pleasures, but no whisper or hint of our life being the shorter for it. Men come together only to part; it is the inevitable order of things and it is utterly just. The waves bear towards each other two pieces of drift-wood from the 120 ends of the earth; they float together for a time; and the same waves bear them away from one another, never again to meet. Even so, it is but natural that wife and son, friend and wealth are brought into contact with us for a time only to be taken away from us. They are 125 bound to perish. No one can have his own way in this world with any of the above objects. Hence, your wild grief stays not the hand of Death. A large caravan is proceeding on its journey and picks up a lonely traveller on the way; even so we go the way of our fathers, grand- 130 fathers and their ancestors. We *cannot* fall out of it; then why waste grief over it? Drop by drop, the waters of the river vanish into the ocean depths; even so every moment takes us nearer the hall of Death; too well do

135 we know that the Past is irrevocable ; then what shall we do ? Why, lay up the dharma that enables us to reap a golden harvest of eternal and unparalleled happiness and peace ; and we know that the people's hearts are always drawn thereto.

140 "The emperor, our father, was the soul of dharma ; there is no yaga nor yagna that he failed to perform, with ample fees and presents ; hence he has put away his sins from him and glories in his seat on high. Sure refuge of his servants and retainers, he governed his subjects

145 according to his best lights and took but lawful tribute of them ; so he richly deserves his elevation to the heaven-world. His acts had the approval of himself and of his people ; roads, reservoirs, temples and gardens beyond count, entitle him to take his place among the

150 gods. He stayed in this world long, long beyond the years of mortal men ; he ran through the whole gamut of a happy and noble life ; and it is but right that Paradise should be the next scene of his activities. He left no desires behind him to gratify ; he bowed his proud head

155 to none lower than Time, the omnipotent. It is utterly unreasonable, nay, absurd, to grieve for him. He has cast aside this vile body of corruption and revels in the bliss of a glorious body, angelic might, wisdom and radiance. No man of sense would ever waste his tears

160 over such a one, and it is all the more unbecoming of you, supremely intelligent, profoundly versed in the lore of your age and with the noblest minds of the earth for your teachers. It is quite inconsistent with your powerful intellect to grieve and lament about our sire's

165 demise and my exile to Dandaka. Banish care and anxiety ; go back to Ayodhya ; discharge your duty to your subjects. You are a skilful master of the art of persuasive eloquence and can marshal many an

argument to back your views ; but this much I know— it is your bounden duty to carry out the behests of our 170 father. Never harbor, for a moment, the base unworthy suggestion that ignorance or weak-mindedness prompted him to act so. I, on my part, will do my very best to fulfil the commands of that virtuous king. He is our nearest of kin ; he is the father who begot us ; 175 he is the guru who opened our eyes to God and Truth ; is it just that I should slight his express commands ? I came to this forest in obedience to the mandates of that pious king. Do you seek to attain angelic beatitude hereafter ; do you seek to walk here in the way of the 180 great ; do you seek to lay up dharma ; do you seek to gather all created beings to your compassionate heart ? Then, I can solemnly assert that this is the *only* path to it. Study carefully the life of our father ; ponder deeply on his commands ; and rule wisely and well 185 over the kingdom he has entrusted to your charge". Thus did Rama, in words pregnant with many a meaning, instruct Bharata in the dharma of honoring a father's word ; he impressed upon him the necessity of carrying it out in practice, and kept silent for a muhoo- 190 rta, to allow time for his words to sink deep into the heart of his brother and bear golden fruit there.

CHAPTER CVI.

BHARATA RENEWS HIS PRAYERS.

AND to him replied Bharata : "The countless worlds hold no one that could take his stand by your side, prince of heroes that you are. Adversity is never known to affect you in the least ; nor, prosperity has any chance to elate your spirit. The good and the

great are eloquent in your praise as omniscient; yet, every now and then you appeal to them to solve your
 10 doubts. Love and hate cease with death; it is wise to have nothing to do with them even in life. You cannot desire or shun a myth, a non-existing thing; it is well to preserve the same attitude towards existing things too; for, pleasure and pain affect him not. You ask
 15 'Why grieve so when you know it'? My heart spoke out, unable to witness your plight. These reverses have no power to shake the soul of one who has gauged the mysteries of the Individual and the Supreme Self. I know that you are such a one; but, when I come think upon
 20 your exile from the kingdom, your lowly abode in the forest and the loss of your presence to me, my heart is filled with boundless sorrow. Mighty as the Lord of the celestials, great-souled, of perfectly attuned nature, you secure the welfare of those that seek you, here and
 25 hereafter, with your wise instruction and guidance. Of unshaken fortitude, ever known to keep your word, your unclouded vision ranges through the past, the present and the future. Of unrivalled intellect and perfect in every science and art, the beginning and the end of all beings
 30 have no mysteries for you. And it is supremely unjust, nay, atrocious, that such noble excellences should bear such a terrible fruit. My mother sinned grievously on my account when I was away and bequeathed to me an inheritance of woe and evil. I pray you, out of your
 35 sweet compassion, to pardon it. The bonds of dharma bind me tight; else, my hand would have, ere now, slain that sinful cruel mother of mine who so richly deserves it. I am the son of Dasaratha, who is born of a pure lineage and knows not what sin is; I have dived into
 40 the depths of the mysteries of dharma; shall I soil my hands with a crime condemned by every being?

"Dasaratha deserves our respect; virtuous, hoary with age, he is our king, our father, a god unto us; it is utterly unjust to speak evil of the dead. But, to think that any person with a thorough knowledge of dharma 45 and adharma could perpetrate this frightful sin prompted by lust, all to win a smile of a woman! 'Heaven confounds the hearts of those whom it would destroy' say the wise; and the last act of Dasaratha but confirms our faith in it. Our father lent himself to this act of 50 injustice through fear of Kaikeyi's anger or enslaved by his mad love for her, or powerless before her obstinacy. We look to you for some remedy that the whole world might benefit and rejoice. A son deserves his name when he brings the footsteps of his father back to the 55 path of Right whence they have strayed. We pray you to be such a son. It is not right that you look upon with unconcern, while our father commits a sin that runs against the world, dharma and the esteem of the wise. We look to you to protect us—Kaikeyi, 60 myself, our father, friends, kin and subjects. What has a forest life to do with the duty of a king? What have they in common, a hermit's matted hair and a monarch's crown? It is not right that you undertake to do a thing that has no precedent at any time or 65 anywhere. You may say that 'Kings have ere now adopted the life of recluses'. But the first duty of a king is to rule over his subjects; and towards that he should get himself crowned. You would fain neglect the dharma of a king that is plain, tangible, the source 70 all happiness and power here and endless good hereafter, to follow the dharma of a hermit that is foreign to your nature and position. Besides, a slight mistake, a little slip in it, is enough to deprive you of the fruits of your labours; even if you carry it out perfectly, it is all 75

uncertain' when you will reap the reward. Nor is there any authority to enjoin it as the first duty of a kshatriya. You are probably the only exponent of this school. Difficult, very difficult is the task you have set
 80 yourself. You might as well utilise that energy in watching over the interests and welfare of the four castes. Experts in the mysteries of dharma hold that a householder's life is the best of the four orders. What you do not know about dharma is not worth knowing.
 85 Then, why should you deliberately turn your back upon the householder's life ?

"I came into the world after you ; you stand above me in age, in knowledge and, according to the dharma of the kshatriyas, in the right to wear the crown. Is it
 90 consonant with reason and justice that I rule this world during your life ? Is it possible ? Well, can I survive you ? It is supremely audacious of me to seek to argue it with you. This vast empire, till now ruled over by our father, is blessed with peace and prosperity ; rule
 95 over it and bring happiness and comfort to the hearts of your kinsmen and citizens. Vasishtha and the other maharshis, the officers of the state and the people pray with one voice that you should be crowned here. Let these forests be the scene of your installation ; return
 100 with us to Ayodhya to rule over your children, like Indra returning to his capital with his Maruts from a tour of victory through the worlds. Discharge the three obligations to the gods, to the fathers and the sages ; annihilate your foes ; gratify every wish, every desire of
 105 your friends ; reign over us to the end of time. Let your friends rejoice to behold your brows crowned with the diadem of the Ikshwakus ; let your enemies' hearts be filled with dismay at the tidings and drive them to hide their diminished heads in the dark forests. Cause

the world to forget the outrageous sin of my mother and 110
 wash the soul of our father pure of any stain. Like
 unto Mahavishnu, extend your mercy to me, to our kin
 and to all beings. But, if you put my words away and
 resolve to continue your hermit's life, why, you will find
 me ever at your side". Thus did Bharata seek to turn 115
 Rama from his resolve; but, a father's word was all
 sacred in the eyes of Raghava and he had no thought
 of going back to Ayodhya. This wonderful loyalty to
 his word saddened the hearts of his subjects, for,
 Ayodhya was not to know him for ten years and four; 120
 but, equally great was their joy that his plighted word
 was so faithfully kept. The priests, the heads of clans
 and the royal ladies cheered Bharata and, with tear-
 stained eyes and bleeding hearts, entreated Rama to go
 back with them.

125

CHAPTER CVII.

RAMA'S REPLY.

BHARATA'S arguments, entreaties, praises and grief moved not Rama who said, "It speaks well of you to say so, son of the virtuous king Dasa-ratha and Kaikeyi. You do him mighty wrong to censure our father that he set his hand to this injustice, out of a blind passion for Kaikeyi. It seems that he was not led astray in this by any unworthy motive. Of yore, when he took Kaikeyi to wife, he promised her 10
 father that 'he would place the crown on the head of the son that she would give him.' Lateron, during the battle between the gods and the asuras, he gave her two boons in gratitude for a great help she rendered him. She bound him by a promise to that effect and prayed 15
 t you might get the crown and that I might be sent

to the forests. Accordingly, his majesty ordered me to spend fourteen years in the forest. So, you find me, Lakshmana and Seeta in this lovely Dandaka in
20 obedience to the behests of the king.

“ You but waste your time in seeking to prevent me. Rather go back to Ayodhya and crown yourself ; you would please our father better and obey him. You should discharge, for my sake at least, the debt that the
25 emperor owes to Kaikeyi. You gain thereby the merit and glory of having gratified the hearts of your parents. Let me repeat to you the words of the emperor Gaya on filial duties when he was conducting a yaga at Gaya. ‘ A son is called *putra* since he saves (*trayati*),
30 his father from the hell *put*. Swarga and the worlds of light are gained by offering gifts in his name. Let us pray that we get many virtuous sons and wise. For, some one of them might make offerings to us at the sacred Gaya.’

35 “ The royal sages, our ancestors, held the same view so save our father from hell. Go back to Ayodhya with Satrughna and the other brahmanas and govern our subjects wisely and well. I and mine will take our way to the woods of Dandaka. King of *men* you shall be;
40 king of the *forest world* I am. Return to *Ayodhya* with a cheerful heart ; I proceed to *Dandaka* as cheerfully. The snow-white *umbrella* of state will shut out the sun’s rays from your head and give you a cool and refreshing shade ; the hospitable *trees* hereabouts will
45 protect me from the heat of the sun. The keen-witted Satrughna will manfully aid you in your work of government ; Lakshmana will watch over me during my term of self-effacement. Thus shall we, the four sons of our father, enable him to keep his word pure.
50 Grieve not.”

CHAPTER CVIII.

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JABALI THE MATERIALIST.

BHARATA remained silent; then, maharshi Jabali, one of the priests of Dasaratha, spoke to Rama as an advocate of the creed of the *charvakas*, albeit his heart was ever centred upon the prince's highest good. "Rama! noble of heart, mighty of intellect, it become you not to speak aimlessly like one of the common herd. What are our kith and kin? What has one man to profit by another? Clear thought 10 would answer us No. Alone we come into the world and alone we go out of it. It is but a fool that clings to another as his father, mother or they that bore him. How does one man stead another? We start for a neighbouring village, halt for the night at another, and 15 resume our journey on the morrow; even so, father, mother, home and wealth are but halting places on the great journey through eternity. The wise are never lured by these. A traveller taking his rest for a while in a caravanserai on the way, only to leave it a few hours 20 later, has no concern about it; even so, our parents should occupy our thoughts only during their contact with us; it is a waste of useful thought-power to concern ourselves for them even after they have left us. Who would trouble himself to please them? You 25 inherit your father's kingdom. You spurn it away and adopt a hermit's life unsuited to your youth, pregnant with many a danger and unsanctioned by the sastras. A faithful wife finds no pleasure during her husband's absence in dresses, jewels and perfumes; she 30 appears sad and miserable; even so, Ayodhya, the home of wealth and comfort, is racked by unspeakable woe and eagerly awaits your arrival. Hence, go back to

5

Ayodhya as soon as you can and ascend the throne of
 35 your fathers. Reign over the broad realms of Kosala
 in all pomp and power, like Indra in the heaven world.
 What is Dasaratha to you ? Nay, what are you to him?
 Why should you call him your father ? You have
 nothing in common with him. Take my advice. It is
 40 but an idle tale that the father begets the son ;
 rather the sperm and the germ that come together from
 the bodies of the man and the woman when they are
 in season. The form known as Dasaratha has played
 the part assigned to it and has been dissolved into its
 45 original elements. Such is the fate of all. It is but
 ignorance that makes you vainly grieve for Dasaratha
 with whom you claim a relation.

" It pains my heart to see persons labour to accumulate wealth, or, lay up dharma to secure a happy here-
 50 after, instead of directing their energies to the attainment of a happy life here. Hard is their lot and miserable in this life; equally hard is their fate in the others. Take this as an illustration of the futility of labouring to acquire merit. Is it not a sheer waste of
 55 good material, the food used in the Ashtaka and the Samvatsara sraddhas ? Has any one seen the dear departed come down to feed of it ? If what one eats could find its way into the body of another and satisfy his hunger, we would find it very easy to keep our
 60 friends abroad in food and drink by distributing them to persons around us, in their name. It is the crafty-knaves that framed such rules as ' Perform yagas and yagnas ; give away in charity ; lead a life of control and restraint ; worship the gods ; let no desires bind
 65 you to wife and child, wealth and corn.' Some sharp-witted fellows set such snares to trap fools and ease them of their wealth.

" It surprises me to see such a bold and clear intellect as yours believe in a future state. There is no such thing as a hereafter ; it is a pure myth. If you carry 70 out the behests of your father in this world, how does it stand to reason that a happy life awaits you both in the other ? There is no truth, no reality except what we gain through perception ; hold on to it. This kingdom and the power, the wealth and the luxury that it brings 75 are perceptible, are real, are substantial ; make them yours. My counsel will be acceptable to every one in this world ; accept it too, grant the prayers of Bharata and sit on the throne of your fathers."

CHAPTER CIX.

THE REFUTATION.

RAMA was the first and foremost of the champions of truth ; ever zealous in the discharge of his religious duties, his heart was not upset in the 5 least by the plausible speech of Jabali.

" I confess " replied he " that you spoke these words that I might enjoy what I hold most dear. But, there are really unsound and dangerous to me, albeit they wear the mask of justice and a deep concern about 10 my welfare. Your teachings are subversive of the vedic truths ; you walk in the way of sin ; you are a law unto yourself ; you are beyond the pale of the regard of the good and the great ; but, you are sure of the scorn and censure of all beings. His conduct towards others is 15 the best index of a man's high lineage, valor, purity or otherwise. Should I parade myself as a pure man and a good, endowed with every excellence and virtue ; should I assume the garb of holiness, philanthropy and

20 altruism ; should I turn my back upon the dharma taught by the vedas that is the source and fount of every good ; should I advocate promiscuity and confound the castes and the orders of life ; should I practise dharma as you teach it, but which is only adharma
 25 graced by no vedic rites or vedic injunctions ; what man of discrimination or intellect would hold me in esteem ? Would I not deserve their censure as a wicked wretch, who has dedicated himself to the task of ruining the world ?

30 " Let this be. What hope have I of a happy hereafter, if I follow your creed and falsify my word to lead a forest life ? A fine teacher I would make ! What steps shall lead me to the glorious worlds on high ? Your system would surely deprive every one in this world
 35 of all hopes of a future. Like master, like man. If I enthrone Pleasure as the aim of life and worship it all devoutly, I but set the pace for my countless subjects. Freed from all restraint, the whole world will go to rack and ruin.

40 " The immemorial dharma of kings is characterised by truth and compassion ; this world of ours is based upon Truth ; sages and gods hold truth to be the most precious thing. He who never turns his back upon Truth rises to the highest state ; a liar is shunned and
 45 feared as though he were the deadliest serpent. Truth is the highest dharma ; heaven is rooted in Truth ; God is but Truth ; every thing good and great follows Truth ; nay, Truth is the substratum of all. There is nothing higher than Truth ; gifts, yagas, fire-offerings,
 50 tapas and the vedas depend upon Truth. Hence, we should follow Truth. He who walks in the way of Truth rules this world and lives in heavenly bliss hereafter. He who strays from the path of Truth feeds

but his wife and children ; frightful hells welcome him hereafter.

55

I am a follower of Truth ; I have given my word to Kaikeyi to renounce the kingdom and dwell in the woods ; why should I not carry out my father's commands ? I will not go back upon my word through ambition or ignorance or sophistry or meanness. I 60 have been taught that the fickle-minded fool who eschews Truth worships the Gods and the Fathers but in vain. I know from experience that Truth is the most natural attribute of our self. The life of a hermit has the sanction of usage by the good and holy ; 65 it is dear to me as the surest means to secure the same noble ends. I approve not of this kingly dharma that is in reality adharma with a thin varnish of dharma. I leave it to mean, sinful, cruel and ambitious men. An untruth has behind it our thoughts, words and acts. We 70 ponder deeply, we give expression to it in words and we crystalise it in action. Power, fame, esteem and wealth wait upon the loyal adherent of Truth ; they follow in his wake who has raised himself by Truth to heaven. Hence, it is all imperative to hold fast to Truth. 75

"The wise and the great look with no favourable eye upon the dharma that you took so much pains to teach me, saying 'This is the noblest path ; this is a sure giver of good ; set your feet on it.' I have pledged myself to my father to make my home in the forest ; 80 with what face shall I repudiate it and take back the kingdom at the request of Bharata ? Would her heart have rejoiced if Kaikeyi was not assured of my loyalty to my word ? Right joyfully shall I live in these wilds, pure and strictly observant of the rules and 85 duties enjoined upon an anchorite ; I shall gratify the Gods and the Fathers with offerings of fruits, roots,

flowers and other woodland wealth ; I shall keep my senses far away from sin. Right discrimination, 90 thorough earnestness and candour shall characterise my life here.

“ Agni, Vayu, Soma and other gods were once denizens of this mortal world like ourselves ; their tapas and merit have raised them to the glorious positions 95 they now occupy. A hundred yagas is the price of his place, the glorious Being who now occupies the throne of heaven. Maharshis have won the Worlds of light through stern austerities. Truth, dharma, fortitude, compassion, sweet speech and reverence to brahmanas, 100 gods and guests pave the way to the Worlds of bliss—so say the Great Ones of our land. The brahmanas have realized the inner mysteries of this doctrine : with one voice, with one heart, they observe the duties of their castes and orders all carefully ; and look forward 105 confidently to a hereafter in swarga and other angelic spheres.

“ Your heart, your intellect, is antagonistic to the path of dharma taught by the vedas ; you seek to teach your soul-destroying materialism wherever you can. 110 You are a heretic *charvaka* in the garb of an orthodox *vaidika*. It grieves my heart to think that my father thought fit to engage you for his priest, may be all unawares of your being the greatest danger to his state in every way. Know that from this moment I have 115 deprived you of all your religious functions. I will allow no one in my kingdom who is a crass materialist owning no other god but Perception. A Bauddha is synonymous with a robber ; I see no difference between a Bauddha and an atheist. I hold that a wise man should 120 part company with one, the moment he suspects him of disloyalty to the dharma of the vedas.

The lives of the Great Ones are the best evidence to us that dharma ensures our highest good here and hereafter. Sons of wisdom, too numerous to count, have walked in the way of dharma in the past; 125 wealth and power, honor and fame, nay, every thing that the heart could desire was theirs to command in the world of men; and they have been raised to the lofty positions of Lords of planets and solar systems. Right action is the surest means to secure us every- 130 thing we would have in this world and in the next; hence, brahmanas zealously perform yagas, yagnas, tapas, charity and other auspicious acts; hence it is we find that the rishis are wedded to dharma; they seek the company of the good; bright, stainless, 135 worthy of all respect and eschewing all evil, they are crowned with such enviable excellences as self-sacrifice, compassion and godliness". Ramachandra, who came down among men to restore the dharma of the vedas, could not suffer himself to listen to the heretical 140 words of Jabali, that subverted the Holy Scriptures; he answered with wrath—an unusual thing with him. Then Jabali conciliated him and explained his apparent materialistic attitude. "When dharmic crises come about, a student of all creeds should adopt any one of 145 them and remove the danger. I have but acted upon this time-honored dictum. Now this kingdom is on the brink of a grave danger through anarchy; and it is best avoided by persuading you anyhow to accept the crown. That is why I posed myself as a materialist; 150 but I am not one; it is not my mission to preach their nefarious doctrines. I am not one that denies a future state. When I argue with materialists who take refuge in sophistries, I meet them on their own ground and prove that their system is hollow and soul-killing. 155

If occasion demands it, I put on the mantle of the most rabid and fanatical member of their sect. This is such an occasion; so, I spoke as an ardent atheist. Besides, it is now imperative that I should convince the world
 160 that your heart is deeply rooted in the vaidika dharma. Again, you grieved to see your dear Bharata grieve; and I owe it to him to cheer him a bit. Hence this most unlikely *role* for one of the most loyal adherents to the dharma of the Aryas.

CHAPTER CX.

THE RACE OF THE SUN.

VASISHTHA hastened to pacify Rama and said, "Jabali
 5 is no materialist; he believes, because he knows directly, that there is a rebirth and a future state for all beings. He spoke thus to persuade you to return to Ayodhya. Lord of worlds! It would be insulting your omniscience if I crave your patient hearing of the origin and the evolution of this system of worlds down
 10 to our present time.

"In the beginning there were but the Waters of Space; and from it evolved Prithvi. Next Brahma the self-born, appeared and the devatas (rulers). Later on, Narayana brought up this earth from the Waters, as
 15 suming the form of a boar; and from him and his progeny evolved the whole creation. The four-faced Brahma came from Brahman, otherwise named Akasa. He is *eternal* in his official capacity, as devata after devata succeeds to the place without a break. He is longer-lived than the other egos and hence relatively *permanent*.
 20 He is on the next step to Liberation and hence *immortal*. From him descend father and son—Mareechi, Vivaswan,

and Vaivasvata Manu the founder of the line called by the name of his son Ikshwaku. The latter was the first monarch of the solar race and received the sovereignty 25 of the earth from the Manu. He was the first of those that ruled at Ayodhya. Then Vikukshi, Bana, Anaranya (in whose time famines and robbers were things unknown as also droughts), Prithu, Trisanku (who was raised to heaven through his loyalty to truth), Dundhu- 30 mara, Yuvanasva, Mandhata, Susandhi, Dhruvasandhi and his brother Prasenajit, Bharata (the son of the former) and Asita. The Haihayas, Talajanghas and Sasibindus defeated him in battle and drove him from his kingdom. He retired to the solitudes of the forests 35 and performed tapas there waited upon by his two wives who were *enceinte* at the time. One of them poisoned the food of the other to put her out of the way. Kalindi, the innocent victim, rendered reverent service to Chhyavana, the son of Bhrigu, who was engaged 40 in a course of tapas on the hill. The sage read the wish of her heart to be the mother of a noble prince and said, "Child! at no distant date you will be the mother of a boy, virtuous, great-souled, valiant and pure, who will continue your line on earth." She touched the feet of 45 the saint and took her leave. After a time she gave birth to a beautiful boy of dazzling lustre. As he was born into the world along with the poison administered to him in the womb, he was named Sagara, *poisoned*. He it was that caused the ocean to be dug that rises 50 with dreadful clamour of waves when the moon calls out to her. His son was Asamanjas who was exiled by his father for his wickedness. From him descended in order Amsuman, Dileepa, Bhageeratha, Kakutstha (whence the name Kakutsthas), Raghu (whence the 55 name Raghavas), Pravridha (who was also named

Kalmashapada and Saudasa, cursed to be a cannibal for a time), Sankhana, (who was destroyed along with his army by his father when the latter was a rakshasa 60 under the curse), Sudarsana, Agnivarna, Seeghraga, Maru, Prasusruka, Ambareesha, Nahusha, Nabhaga, Aja and Suvrita (brother); Dasaratha son of Aja ; and yourself his eldest born, whom men know as Rama.

" So, accept the crown that is yours by right and 65 rule over your subjects. The eldest born inherits the throne in the house of Ikshwaku ; and the junior has no claim to it during the life of his brother. This is the royal tradition of the Raghavas. You do ill to be the first to violate it. No one but yourself can hold 70 sway over this broad earth, the mother of numerous empires teeming with wealth, corn, gems and other excellent products. You are our king after Dasaratha ".

CHAPTER CXI.

THE LAST WORD UPON IT.

RAMA preserved a dignified silence when Vasishtha laid before him the dharma of his house; for, 5 he said to himself " My father's word is more imperative ". The sage read his heart and replied " Three gurus has every man—the teacher, the father and the mother. The latter give him his body of flesh; the *acharya* builds for him his body of wisdom and hence 10 stands higher than the parents. I was the *acharya* of your ancestors; I am your *acharya*. Follow my counsel and you will not swerve from the path of the good. Rule justly and wisely over these brahmanas, kshatriyas, citizens and your other subjects and you will conform 15 to the traditions of your forefathers. ' The mother

stands infinitely higher than the father', say the Books; hence, you do ill not to wait upon your aged and virtuous mother. You follow in the footsteps of the great and the good when you reverence her word. Again, Bharata who entreats you with his head at your feet—is he 20 not dear to you as your own life? Would you reject his earnest prayers? Is it not the brightest gem in your crown that you never abandon those that seek your shelter? You say that you have promised to yourself not to go back upon truth and dharma; but, 25 have you forgot your other promise, equally sacred, that you do not refuse your mercy and protection to those that seek it of you?" Thus did the holy Vasishtha place before him the duty of kings.

Rama was prompt with his reply. "The righteous 30 man walks in the way of righteousness as long as his body serves him faithfully. The father gives us that body; he loads us with countless benefits even after we are come to years of mature wisdom. I hold, in consequence, that his word weighs with us more than that 35 of the guru; its binding force is greater. The Scriptures say 'Your mother is a god unto you; your father is a god unto you; your acharya is a god unto you'. They place the acharya *after* the parents. These perform countless fasts, penances, pilgrimages and propitiatory 40 rites to the gods to be blessed with a son; they feed and clothe him; they watch over him with infinite patience during his infancy, childhood, boyhood and youth; they lavish all their love and care upon him; and no one can hope to discharge his debt to them though he devote 45 countless lives to the task.

"Now, the emperor is my father; he gave me this body; his commands come first and my promise to him; my mothers's behests and Bharata's entreaty but came

50 after. Now, shall I allow my father's word to go for nothing?"

Bharata's heart was sore to think it was to no purpose that he begged the crown from Kaikeyi for Rama. So he turned to Sumantra that sat near and said

55 "Look sharp and spread the kusa grass here; I will fast till my brother grants my prayer. The creditor fasts, with covered head, at the door of the recalcitrant debtor; even so I stretch myself across the threshold of my brother's cottage till he returns with me to Ayodhya."

60 Sumantra cast a hesitating glance at Rama to take his order from the prince; which observing, Bharata spread the grass himself and lay on them.

This displeased Rama who cried "My dear Bharata! how have I wronged you that you seek to coerce 65 me with such terrible measures? It is enjoined on the brahmanas to lie on one side all the time and force the obstinate debtor to pay him his dues; the kshatriyas are denied that remedy. Best of men! give up this horrible penance and go back to Ayodhya as soon as you can."

70 But Bharata sat up and asked the people "Why do you not add your prayers to mine?" And they replied "We know full well that Rama never goes back upon his word. He speaks reason. He would abide by the commands of his father and carry them out; and it is

75 impossible to make him act otherwise". Rama took it up and said, "Take counsel of these who hearts are ever wedded to dharma and to your welfare. Add to it my own advice and come out of that bed of grass. Cleanse yourself of the stain of taking upon yourself a duty

80 that belongs to a higher order by sipping pure water and touching me. Why *me* in preference to such saints as Vasishtha? You take an oath upon me not to do repeat your folly."

Bharata did so and addressed the assembled multitude : " Brahmanas, ministers, civic heads and citizens ! 85 lend me your ears. I never hankered after this crown even in my dreams ; nor did I at any time advise Kaikeyi to this course. I never uttered a wish that Rama, my revered and virtuous brother, should be exiled to the woods. If it is agreed on all hands that 90 His Majesty's commands are to be obeyed and that by leading a life in the forests, I undertake to do so for fourteen years in place of Rama and let him take my place on the throne at Ayodhya. Both of us would have well kept our father's commands ". 95

The reply took Rama by surprise and he said " I nor Bharata has any power to cancel, repudiate or modify any arrangements His Majesty makes—sale, purchase or mortgage. He bought of me the kingdom that was mine of right and paid me the price of it in the shape 100 of forest life. Have we any power to alter it ? It were eternal infamy if I led a forest life by proxy. Purification by mantras is allowed only when the man is too ill to bathe in cold water. I should rightly look out for a substitute when I am disabled ; else my father's 105 words go for nothing. Kaikeyi spoke right and the emperor acted right. None knows it better than Bharata. He is a model of patience and loyal service to elders. Straight of speech and noble of heart, he ever sets the highest good of all as the goal of his actions. The good 110 Lakshmana is here to assist me during my residence in Dandaka ; you may depend upon me to return to Ayodhya at the end of the period and receive the crown. Kaikeyi requested His Majesty to grant her the boons and I try my best to keep my promise to her. Follow 115 my advice and save our sire from the sin of an untruth."

CHAPTER CXII.

RAMA'S SANDALS.

HE maharshis present were filled with surprise and joy to hear the brothers of unrivalled lustre speak 5 to one another so fondly and lovingly. The royal saints, divine sages, siddhas and gandharvas that stood around, all unseen, said to the princes "Thrice-blessed is he who calls himself the father of these virtuous and valiant princes. We never tire of listening to their discourse."

10 The rishis took counsel together and resolved to hasten the day when Ravana and his rakshasas would be no more. They said to Bharata "Dear prince, whom high lineage, wisdom, purity and fame vie in crowning ! if you desire to secure the highest good to your father, 15 follow the counsel of Rama. Dasaratha discharged his debts to Kaikeyi and earned long eons of heaven-life. We would even have Rama quit of all debts to Dasa- ratha ". It gladdened the heart of Raghunatha to hear them say so ; and they departed to their abodes, duly 20 honored of him.

Bharata was well-nigh broken-hearted at the failure of his earnest prayers ; trembling like a leaf, he clasped hands of appeal and cried, "Brother! I pray you accede to my entreaty, bearing well in mind the heavy 25 responsibility of a kingdom and the traditions of our house. I *cannot* rule over this vast empire all alone, unaided ; nor can I hope to gladden the hearts of our subjects that have gone after you. Our kinsmen, friends and troops pray for you as farmers pray for the welcome 30 rains. Guide the storm-tossed vessel of state into the haven of safety. It is nothing to you to rule over this broad earth".

Every means, every expedient, every *ruse* that he knew—argument, prayer, entreaty—proved in vain and Bharata was driven to the last resort of taking refuge 35 with Rama ; he fell at his feet and prayed. Was it ever known to go for nothing ? But, Rama had to slay Ravana in consequence of the prayer of the devatas ; here was ready to hand the fourteen years in the Dandaka as his father had commanded him—the like- 40 liest means to bring him nearer to the purpose of his incarnation. Bharata's prayer would be granted next in order ; but, it was not in him to wait so long. So, Rama drew him on to his lap to reconcile him to his disappointment. No sooner did he come into contact with the 45 divine body of Rama than Bharata clean forgot his grief, his sorrow and his cares. Dark of hue like a rain-charged cloud, with eyes like lotus-leaves, he spoke in the tones of a maddened swan : “Boy ! you are by nature right-minded and have strengthened it by sitting 50 at the feet of the wise. So, it is in you to hold sway over this earth. Take heedful counsel with your ministers, governors, friends and experts.” Then he bethought himself that “Bharata had not even now abandoned his idea of taking me to Ayodhya in spite of his being 55 exhorted by me and the devarshis. It behoves me to destroy in him the slightest hope.” He continued, “The moon may be shorn of its lustre ; the Himalaya may lose its crown of snow ; the ocean may overflow its shores ; but I will never go back upon my promise to my father. 60 Your mother has done this, may be out of her great love to you, or out of ambition to rule through you. Do not take it to heart too much, but render her your heartiest and most devoted service.”

Who ever heard of turning Rama from his purpose, 65 more radiant than the sun ? Bharata, who knew better

than others that Rama was the fittest to rule the kingdom wisely and that he deserved best the respect and worship of all beings whose hearts he gladdened as the
 70 full moon, followed the advice of maharshi Vasishtha who ever compassed the welfare of himself and Rama and said "Brother! I pray you place your holy feet on these sandals inlaid with gold. They have power to secure every good to all the worlds." Rama granted
 75 Bharata's prayer and kept his own promise by doing so. His brother went round them in reverence and raising his hands above his head, took a terrible vow: "Ten years and four shall I stay outside the city gates, clad in the garb of hermits and sustaining my life on woodland
 80 fare, my eyes ever on the road that brings you back to Ayodhya. I shall duly report myself to your sandals every day as to how I discharge my duties to the subjects. If, on the first day of the fifteenth year I see you not here, I enter the blazing pyre." "Be it so"
 85 replied Rama and clasped Bharata and Satrughna to his breast. "Bharata!" cried he, "watch over your mother carefully and serve her humbly. Banish from your heart all anger where she is concerned. Swear it by me and by Seeta." He gave them leave to depart, his
 90 eyes brimming with tears.

Bharata decorated the sandals as well as he could, worshipped them duly and placed them on the state elephant. Meanwhile, Rama, whose steadfast devotion to dharma might well be the despair of the Himalaya,
 95 took leave of the rishis, brahmanas, ministers, governors, citizens and princes, according to them due respect and kindness. The royal ladies were choked by their blinding tears and could not give him their parting blessings. Raghunatha saluted them all and entered
 100 his cottage in tears, all unmanned.

CHAPTER CXIII.

BHARATA RETURNS TO AYODHYA.

BHARATA placed the sandals on his head with deep devotion and got into his chariot with Satru-
ghna, his face beaming with joy. Vasishtha, 5 Vamadeva, Jabali and other chief ministers travelled before him. They went round the sacred Mandakini and Chitrakoota, hallowed by the presence of Rama and Seeta, and travelled due east along the base of the mountain until they were at the asrama of 10 Bharadwaja.

Bharata descended from his chariot and laid his head at the feet of the maharshi. The sage blessed him and said, "Dear boy! saw you Rama? How did your mission fare?" And Bharata replied "Holy sir! I 15 entreated him in diverse ways and saint Vasishtha was good enough to back me strongly. But he would not be turned from his purpose. He would not break his word to his father. He would abide by it and live in the woods for fourteen years. Then Vasishtha, the wise One, 20 said to him 'Bestow your hearty blessings on these sandals of yours and give them to Bharata. They will materially assist him to govern the kingdom during your absence.' My brother and the maharshi were adepts in the art of speech; so, Rama agreed to it. 25 Facing the east, he placed his feet on these sandals, impregnated them with the power to assist me in governing the kingdom, and handed them to me. His commands are upon me that I should return to Ayodhya with them." Bharadwaja was rejoiced to hear it and 30 exclaimed. "Best of men! Most pure of heart and deed! it is no wonder that water always seeks the lowest

level. It is no wonder that there dwells in you the dharma of following in the footsteps of the great and
 35 abiding by their commands. It is wrong to say that the emperor Dasaratha is dead and is no more when he has a son whose knowledge of the mysteries of dharma is equalled but by his practice of it. The Books speak that 'The father lives for ever through his noble
 40 sons;' hence, it is right to say that Dasaratha is immortal." Bharata touched his feet in deep reverence, went round him and took leave of him to proceed to Ayodhya.

They crossed the Yamuna in good time and reached
 45 Srngiberapura. From there they travelled on until Ayodhya came in sight. Bharata was filled with unspeakable misery to behold the capital of Kosala widowed of his father and brethren and said to Sumantra "Lo! it seems almost that the town is deserted and in
 50 ruins; shorn of its glory and lustre, it gives no sign of life, human or otherwise."

CHAPTER CXIV.

A KINGLESS CAPITAL.

THUS conversing, they entered the city to the thunder of the chariot wheels. Bats and owls darted here and there. Men and elephants lay in a stupor of grief. Like a murky moonless night during the dark half of the month: like Rohini, the bright and favourite spouse of the moon, in the grip of a maleficient planet; like a dried up
 10 mountain torrent, its fish and crocodiles faint and dying, and the birds on its banks scorched by the merciless heat; like the sacrificial fire, burning at first

with a smokeless golden flame and gradually dying out under the weight of curds, milk and food offered into it; like a huge army routed by the foe, with its elephants, horses and warriors wounded to death, their armour broken and the war-chariots shivered to atoms; like the roaring ocean with its mountains and valleys of foam-crested billows that had sobbed itself to sleep the sleep of silent exhaustion; like the fire-chamber in a hall of sacrifice, when, after the Soma has been drunk, the priests and the audience leave it with the sacred vessels, to be tenanted but by silence and solitude; like a cow in a herd whose heart has gone after its beloved bull and who turns away with disgust from the fresh sweet-smelling grass laid before it; like a necklace of pearls from which have been removed the gems that lent their lustre thereto; like a star whose merit is on the wane and falls down on the dull earth from its radiant seat among its peers; like a creeper of the woods black with the bees that are attracted by its fragrant spring robes, now in the heart of the cruel forest fires; like the moon and the stars behind the prison-bars of black clouds; like a drinking saloon, roofless, dirty, strewn with shattered bottles and cups, the corpses of its customers lying here and there in horrible postures, the floor cracked and the wines trickling among them; like a water-trough, broken, dilapidated and slowly ebbing away its life-giving waters, with none to slake his thirst thereat; like the string of a mighty bow cut to pieces by the arrows of the enemy; like a fleet war-horse, bestrode by a famous warrior, that lies on the ground hacked to death by the weapons of the enemy, its gay trappings and accoutrements scattered around; like a lovely pool, where large fish and turtles disport themselves, now dried up and shallow, its walls broken and the flowers faded and dying; like

the sun whose bright radiance is hid behind the dark winter-clouds, appeared Ayodya with its silent deserted streets and closed shops.

- 50 Bharata drew his charioteer's attention to it and exclaimed, "How is it I hear not the strains of music and song wafted gaily along the breeze ? Alas ! the air is no longer heavy with the fragrance of rare wines and drinks, aloes, sandal and other perfumes !
- 55 Horses, chariots and maddened elephants no longer thunder along the roads of Ayodhya ever since Rama went out of its gates ! Young people of both sexes do not deck themselves gaily with scents and garlands but are whelmed with grief ! They do not walk about
- 60 the streets and squares in joyful content ! What has become of the numerous festivals, processions and pleasure parties ? Is this city in mourning for Rama ? Its beauty and glory have departed with my brother. Dark and gloomy it looks, like a night in the bright half
- 65 of the month when the rain lashes the earth. Would he come again among us, my brother, like a dear thing of joy, and gladden our hearts even as summer clouds that delight all beings ? When shall we behold again our young men walk about the streets proudly in
- 70 gay attire like lordly elephants ? " So lamenting, he entered the portals of Dasaratha's palace.

It was repulsive to look at, now that Dasaratha was no more, like unto a large mountain lair when the lion is dead that thundered in it. Once upon a time,

75 the asuras defeated the devas in battle. Rahu absorbed the sun. Day and night were wiped out. Then, Brahma deputed Atri, the maharshi, to illumine the world for seven days ; which he did. The mansion was deserted and frightful to look at even as the dark and dull

80 world when the sun was away from it ; Bharata of iron

fortitude could not stem the tide of his sorrow and his tears streamed afresh.

CHAPTER CXV.

INSTALLATION OF THE SANDALS.

HE left the royal ladies at Ayodhya and, all faithful to his promise, turned to his priests and said sadly, "This day I go to Nandigrama. Pray 5 give me leave. This place serves to heighten my grief. I will take myself away from these scenes and try my best to bear it. His Majesty has gone back to swarga ; Rama has buried himself in the woods. My brother of boundless fame is best fitted to rule over this 10 vast kingdom. I will eagerly await his return among us from my outpost without the city".

And to him replied Vasishtha and the other rishis " You speak well and like one who is devoted body and soul to his brother. Your kin find in you a noble and 15 affectionate guardian of their interests. Your brothers are dearer to you. Your virtuous sentiments meet with unanimous approval".

Bharata saluted the royal ladies and set out with Satrughna, while Vasishtha and the other maharshis, 20 brahmanas and priests led the way. Ministers and officers of state followed him as also the troops and the citizens of Ayodhya. They travelled east towards Nandigrama ; and when they were there, Bharata got down from his chariot with Rama's sandals reverently placed 25 on his head, and said to those around, " Far from me be the world's censure that ' Kaikeyi conspired to get him the crown under the guise of demanding her boons from Dasaratha. The king consented thereto and Bharata

30 quietly stepped into his place'. My brother has placed me in charge of this kingdom and I should render it back to him safe and undiminished. I have neither the power, nor the right to govern it. Yon sandals have been impressed with his sacred feet and are endowed with the
 35 power to govern and prosper this kingdom more than any other thing". He saluted, with humble reverence, the representative of Rama, entrusted them with the responsibility of government and said to his ministers and citizens, "These be the holy feet of Rama whom
 40 the worlds obey and reverence. He is present here. Pay him all reverence, all royal honors, the umbrella of the state and the chauries. These sandals impregnated with the might and greatness of Raghava, my guru, will secure to dharma a more glorious reign. Out of his
 45 love to me, he has entrusted me with this kingdom and sent these sandals to represent him. So, I will guard them till his return, even as my life. Fear not; very soon we will see him again. I will place these under his feet and rejoice at the glorious sight. I will trans-
 50 fer the burden of state to him ; I will seat him on his throne ; I will ever wait at his side and render glad service to him in every way. Then, my sins will fall away from me, every one of them. I will behold the millions of his subjects beside themselves with joy during the
 55 coronation of Rama and it will give me infinitely greater pleasure and fame than I could ever hope to get by possessing myself of this empire of Kosala". Thus lamenting, he abode at Nandigrama along with his ministers and occupied himself with the cares of government,
 60 heavy of heart.

Clad as a hermit in matted hair, deerskin and dress of bark, he bore in mind the commands of Rama, and installed his sandals with reverence, eagerly expectant

of the day of his return. Supremely devoted to Rama, utterly faithful to his word, he rendered humble report 65 to them of the day's proceedings. Every plan, every scheme and every proposal was first submitted to them. Everything that was given him, rare and precious, was first offered to them. And so did he govern the vast empire, that noble soul, the happy slave of Rama's 70 sandals which gave him power and capacity to discharge his duty.

CHAPTER CXVI.

THE EXODUS OF THE RISHIS

THE hermits in the *asramas* about Chitrakoota led till then a happy life, free from care and anxiety, since Rama was with them. When Bharata 5 had departed for Ayodhya, Rama inferred from their casual remarks and signs that they were apprehensive of some danger and were anxious to seek some other resort. They spoke among themselves in secret, pointing out to Rama with side-long glances and raised 10 eyebrows. They entertained some doubts about him. Rama could not explain it to himself. He sought out the Kulapati or the head and said to him over folded palms, "I beg to submit to your reverence that the hermits hereabouts behave to me rather strangely. May 15 I know why? Did they notice any change in my attitude towards them; or, was Lakshmana guilty of any careless breach of duty; or, was Seeta so much absorbed in her attendance upon me as to omit paying you due attention and respect?" 20

The head of the colony was a very very old man, lean and emaciated with age and severe tapas. His

limbs shook from weakness. He addressed himself to Rama, whose heart went out in compassion to all creatures, and replied, "It is inborn in her to do good, the highest good to others. Seeta delights in it immensely. The daughter of Janaka, it is absurd to imagine her ever swerving the least from the path of the good; all the more careful would she safeguard herself in the case of holy hermits. My people here apprehend danger through you from the rakshasas and it forms the subject of their anxious thoughts and talk. Not far from here is the city of Janasthana, the capital of Khara the rakshasa. He is the brother of Ravana; his numerous victories have heightened his natural pride and arrogance; a cruel cannibal, the sinful wretch hates you beyond all words. The rakshasas will continue to harass and persecute the hermits, so long as you stay among them. Their hideous forms and looks strike terror into the hearts of the poor recluses and truly, it is a repulsive and horrible sight to see them. They pelt our people with impure and unclean objects. They pounce upon others unawares and drink their life-blood. Sometimes they conceal themselves in the *asramas* and slay the inmates thereof. They scatter the holy vessels of sacrifice when the Fires are reverently worshipped; they put them out with huge streams of water; they shatter to pieces the vessels filled with magnetised water. My people press me to leave these haunts of wickedness and danger and seek safer spots; and it behoves me to lead them away before the wretches work them some greater evil. I know of a pleasant *asrama* hereabouts and we remove to it very shortly. It is abundantly provided with every convenience the hermits could desire—fruits, roots, and water. If you will, we will be glad to take you with us before Khara singles

you out for persecution. Gentle you are and valiant ; but you have come here with your wife and should look out for danger at all times. It seems to me you will not have a pleasant life of it here". Rama tried in vain 60 to persuade him to stay and said, "Why should you fear, when I am with you ? I will see to it that you come to no harm". He was not to be convinced ; he took affectionate leave of Rama and departed from the place and his people with him.

65

Rama followed them far on their way. They advised him as to future contingencies and gave him leave to return, which he did. The holy people were loath to part with him, far, they had benefited much by associating with that prince of saintly life and wisdom. So, 70 the place where they lived was very dear to him even after they had left it ; and he would not exchange it for any other.

CHAPTER CXVII.

MAHARSHI ATRI.

BUT, later on, he took calm counsel with himself and saw many a reason why he should not stay there. "My heart will be pained at the memory 5 of the visit paid me here by Bharata, the royal ladies and the citizens. Again, this place has been rendered foul and unclean by the stay of the huge army of Bharata ; countless horses, elephants, camels, bulls and cows camped here and these woods are very much the worse 10 for it. A change is necessary and welcome." So, to the *asrama* of maharshi Atri he repaired with Lakshmana and Seeta ; and reverently laid his head at the feet of the sage. The saint looked upon them as his

- 15 own children and extended to them the heartiest welcome. Anasooya, the ideal wife, chanced to come in and her husband said to her " I commend our girl Janaki to your care." Then addressing himself to Rama : " She is ever intent upon practising the highest dharma. Her
- 20 yogic might is something inconceivable. Once in the far past, there was a terrible drought for eleven years ; plant and herb, flower and leaf, creeper and tree faded and withered; yet she created them out of her *tapas* and caused a full current of water to flow in the Ganga.
- 25 On another occasion, to serve the purposes of the gods, she converted eleven days into one night. Thousands of years have passed over her head while she sat in stern *tapas*, keeping the vows and observances ; dangers and perils, obstacles and trials have shattered themselves
- 30 against her iron will. Reverence her as the mother that bore you. She deserves the worship and adoration of all beings ; her fame is equalled but by her years ; anger and wrath are not to be spoken of in the same breath with her. For the good of the worlds she has practised
- 35 stern *tapas* impossible for any other ; she has no peer in watchful service and loyal devotion to her husband ; hence her greatness is the despair of Envy. Rightly has she been named *Anasooya* (above Envy). Seeta remains with her."
- 40 " Be it so " replied Raghava and said " Seeta, daughter of Janaka the Lord of Wisdom ! marked you what the maharshi advised us to secure unparalleled good to us ? Hasten to the side of the noble lady." Loyal to the least wish of Rama who ever sought her welfare and
- 45 happiness, she touched the feet of Anasooya in deep reverence and announced herself.

Old beyond the memory of man, she was lean, wrinkled and weak; her sparse locks were white as snow;

and her limbs shook as a plantain tree before a fierce wind. Seeta made respectful enquiries of her health 50 and observances; the aged dame embraced her warmly, smelt the crown of her head and exclaimed " My darling! do you walk in the ways of good and faithful wives ? You have renounced kith and kin, riches and comfort, vanity and selfishness and have elected to 55 follow your husband to the woods and share his fourteen years of exile. Sinner or saint, in the palace or in the forest, a wife's place is ever at the side of her husband ; the Worlds of glory are ever open to her who renders faithful and true service to her lord. He is 60 her god, be he bad, sensual or poor. She has no dearer kin than the husband who protects her under all conditions. You can best liken him to tapas that secures imperishable merit. But, bad and foolish women have no discrimination of excellences and defects. 65 To gratify their wishes is their sole look-out ; they render no obedience to any man ; it is rather the other way—*they* lord it over their husbands. Other men occupy their thoughts ever. Their feet can never be turned from the path of wickedness ; they have left the 70 path of dharma far behind them and labor hard to win the crown of deathless infamy. But, such noble women as you are well acquainted with the ups and downs, the changing conditions of life ; adorned with noble excellences, they sit in glory in the Worlds of the good and 75 the holy. Walk carefully in the footsteps of good and virtuous wives ; make your husband's life and work your own. Undying fame and the world's regard are your mead here and supreme bliss hereafter." And in this wise did Anasooya unfold the duty of a faithful wife 80 and true.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

SEETA'S ANTECEDENTS.

SEETA, whose heart knew not envy in the least, listened to the words of Anasooya and replied,

5 “Mother! I take your advice in the spirit in which it is given. It does not surprise me; full well I know the dharma of women that their husband is their guru. I should serve and reverence my husband, be he devoid of all virtues. Now, Rama is Perfection itself; of 10 boundless compassion and self-restraint, his heart knows no change; ever wedded to dharma, he loves me more than my mother and seeks my highest good even as my father; need I any hint or reminder of my duty to him? He makes no difference between his mother 15 Kausalya and the other royal ladies. It is enough if a woman is regarded with love by his father, be it but once; Rama loves him so fondly and is so beautifully trained in the duties of life that he puts away pride and self-love and respects her more than his mother. I have 20 not forgotten the good counsel given me by lady Kausalya on the eve of my departure to the woods, as also my mother's well-meant advice before the holy Fires on the occasion of my marriage. You have confirmed me in my faith and allegiance thereto. I know 25 of no greater tapas that a woman can do than to render loyal service to her lord. It was thus that lady Savitri won the high worlds of bliss. Yourself are the brightest example thereof. That ideal wife Rohini has been raised to the skies in consequence and quits not the side of her 30 lord for a moment. Many a faithful and devoted wife has elevated themselves to heights which the world dreams not of lifting its eyes to.”

It gladdened the heart of Anasooya to hear it. 35
 " My darling ! " said she, smelling the crown of her head
 the while " inconceivable is my might and power, the
 result of long and severe tapas. I would deem it a plea-
 sure to grant you such boons as you may desire. Your
 words are sweet and apt; my heart rejoices thereat; 40
 what shall I do for you ? " Seeta wondered at the kind-
 ness and nobility of her hostess and replied with a
 smile " Your presence, your company and your favour
 have left nothing for me to wish." The humility and
 devotion revealed in these words filled the soul of 45
 Anasooya with a deeper gladness and the virtuous dame
 exclaimed, " Nay, my pleasure shall not be barren.
 Behold, these wreaths, garments, ornaments and per-
 fumed sandal paste all meet for you. These will enhance
 your beauty and loveliness inconceivably. Their bright- 50
 ness, fragrance or beauty never grow less. In fact, you
 will but add to the brilliance and glory of your husband
 hereby, even as Mahalakshmi heightens the loveliness
 and effulgence of her consort Narayana by her own ".
 Janaki received them as gladly and took her seat by 55
 the side of Atri's wife. The old lady desired to hear
 from Seeta something that would give her inestimable
 delight and said, " I have heard tell that Raghava won
 you as his wife in a *swayamvara*. I would get you
 to narrate the incident to me in all its details." 60

" Janaka, the rajarshi " began Seeta " holds righteous
 rule over the broad realms of Videha. Of inconceivable
 might and virtue, he governs his subjects wisely and
 well, as becomes a monarch of men. Once, he was
 ploughing the sacrificial ground and I came out of 65
 earth at the end of his plough. The Great One was
 the weeding out the ground as the Books direct and
 wondered to see me there, clothed in dust and dirt.

Supremely compassionate to all beings, the childless
 70 king took me on his lap and cried 'This is my daughter',
 prompted by the love that welled up from his heart.
 Then, a voice from the sky cried out 'King ! this is your
 daughter before god and man.' Janaka was overjoyed
 75 at it even as he came upon untold wealth and placed
 me in the hands of his favourite queen. They brought
 me up with infinite care and love, more than I could
 have from those that gave me birth,

"As a poor man grieves over the hopeless loss of
 even what little he had, my father was filled with anxious
 80 thought when I came of an age to marry. A man may
 be as mighty and great as the Lord of the celestials ;
 but, if he keeps his daughter unmarried even after her
 age qualifies her for it, his equals and inferiors have a
 perfect right to despise him. Such a fate was hovering
 85 over the King and he was overwhelmed with a bound-
 less grief, like a ship-wrecked passenger in the middle
 of the ocean. The difficulty was that I was not born of
 a woman's womb like others ; it was nigh impossible to
 come upon a husband in every way suited to me. At
 90 last a bright idea came to him. Long ago, Lord Varuna
 was mightily pleased with him at a great yagna and
 made a present to him of a rare bow and an inexhaustible
 quiver of arrows. Men tried in vain to move it; the
 kings of the earth could never even dream of stringing
 95 it. My truthful father invited them and said 'Friends !
 My daughter is the wife of him who strings this bow.
 You have my word for it.' The assembled monarchs
 gazed in wonder and awe at the terrible bow, huge as a
 mountain and, despairing of moving it even a little,
 100 they saluted the bow and took their leave.

"Long after, my father was engaged in a yaga, when
 this Raghava of boundless lustre came to our place in

the company of Lakshmana and Visvamitra. After due hospitality paid and accepted, maharshi Visvamitra said to my father 'These are the sons of the emperor 105 Dasaratha. Rama and Lakshmana are they named and are come to have a sight of your famous bow. Let Rama behold the gift of the gods to you.' My father had it brought to the audience hall; the heroic prince took it, bent it, strung it and drew it to his ear, when, 110 lo! it gave way in the middle with a deafening thunder. My father carried out his promise and was about to pour water over Rama's hands and give me to him as his wife. But, the prince would not accept it before he intimated his father at Ayodhya thereof and had his 115 permission. Janaka conveyed the glad news to his brother monarch, who came all gladly. My father gave me in marriage to Rama, the Lord of wisdom. My sister Oormila was taken to wife by Lakshmana. Thus, did I become the prize of Rama on the occasion of that 120 swayamvara. That princes of heroes is the object of my ever increasing love and respect."

CHAPTER CXIX.

RAMA ENTERS THE DANDAKA.

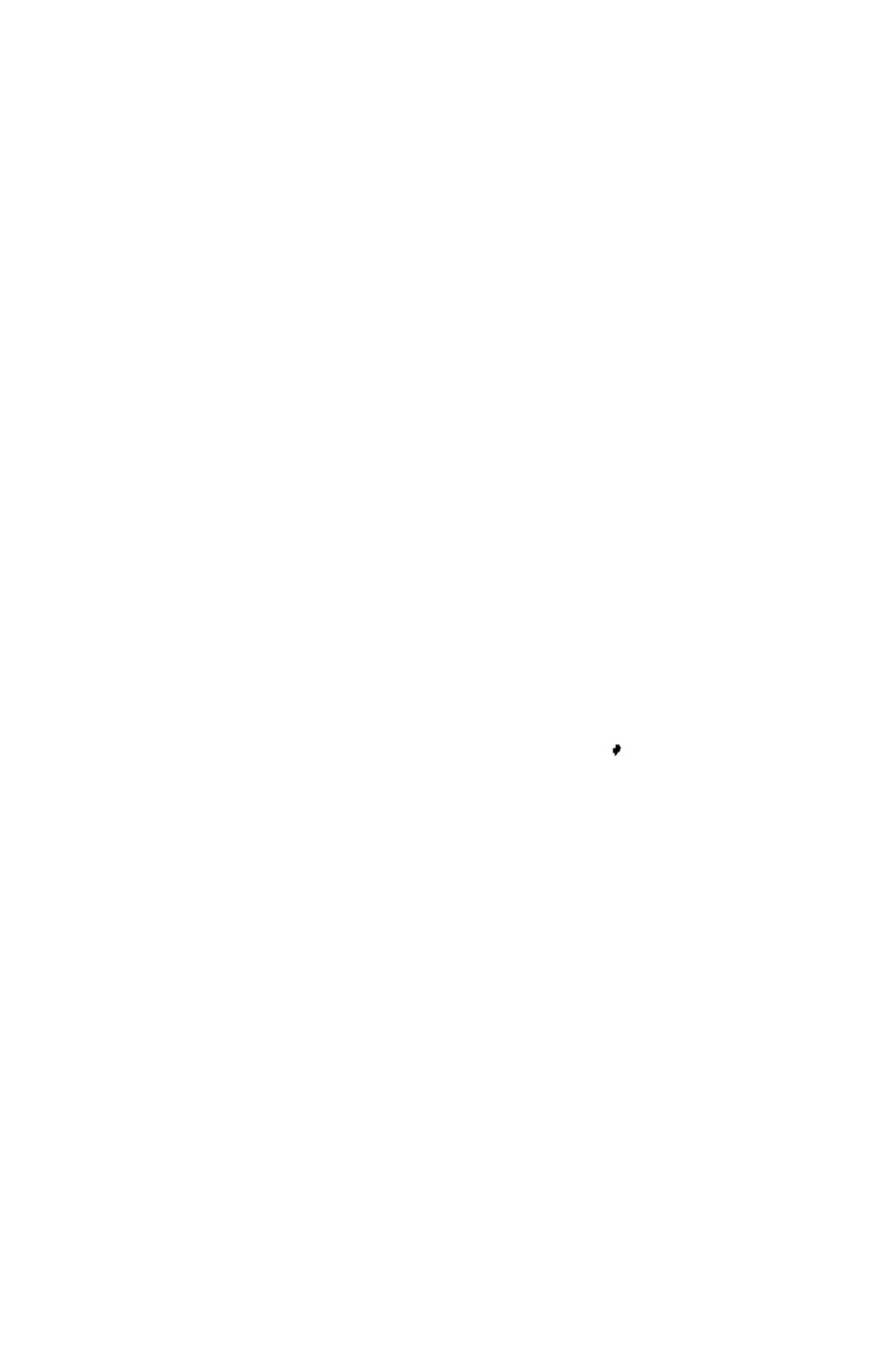
ANASOOYA, for whom dharma had no mysteries, listened with boundless delight to Seeta's narrative; she smelt her on the head and clasped 5 her to her breast saying, "I have heard ere this of your swayamvara that you described so graphically and pleasantly; but, it gives me a new pleasure to hear it from your lips. It is now sunset. He has left his kingdom in the charge of Night. Listen to the sounds 10 of the birds that are about to retire to sleep in their

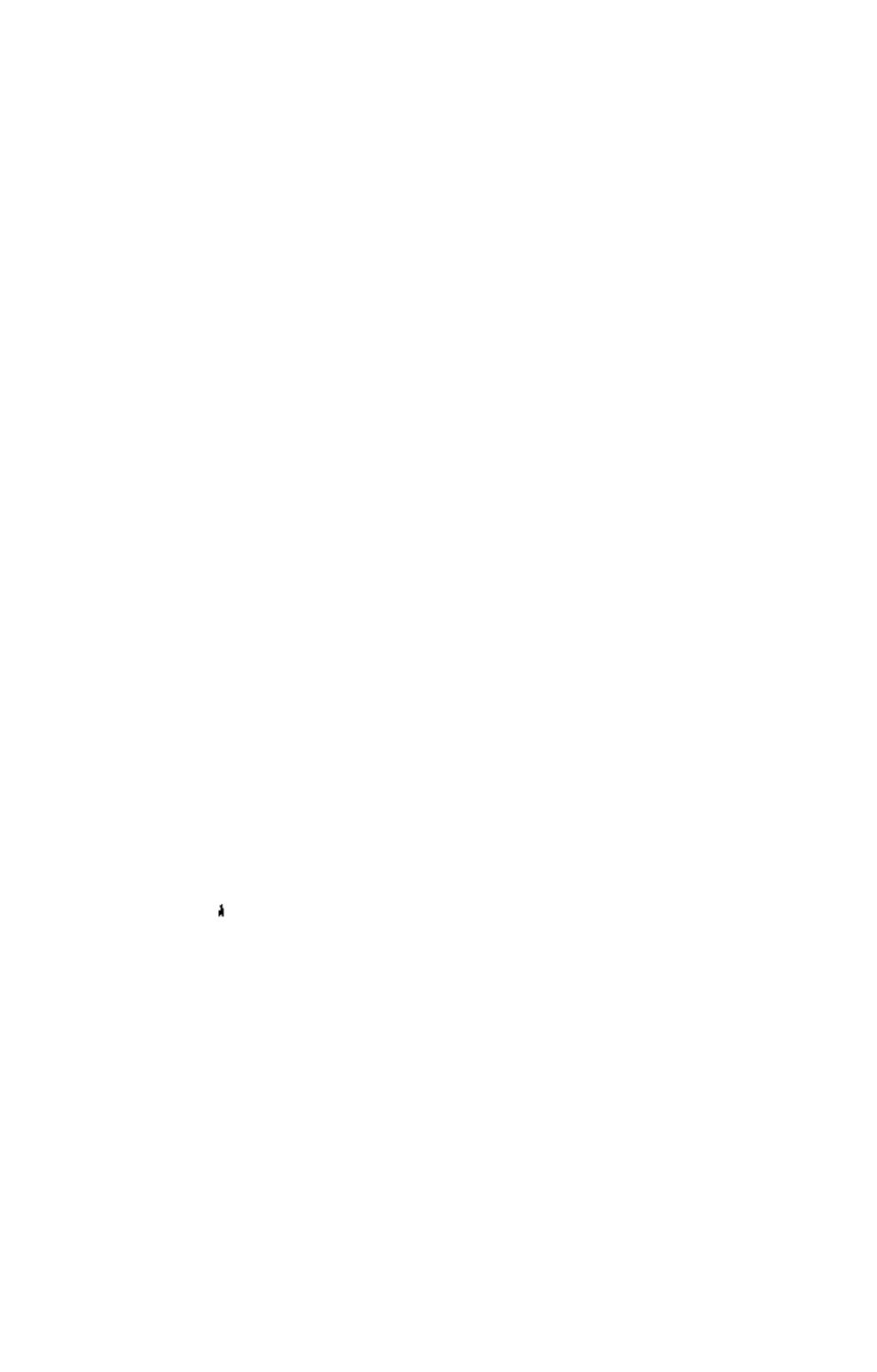
nests, having been out all the day in search of food. Behold these rishis that return from the river-fords after their evening bath with brimming jars in their
 15 shoulders, their dress of bark dripping all the way. Behold these others engaged at their Agnihotra from whose fire the pigeon-coloured smoke is blown away by the wind. Darkness descends on the earth and hides every thing from view; the distant trees with their
 20 sparse leaves show no gaps between them. The night-ranging beasts are coming out of their lairs. The deer and other tame animals in the asramas repose on the sacrificial platforms. Night draws near, bright with her starry ornaments. The moon walks up the sky
 25 robed in white moonlight. It is time for you to be with Rama. It gave me great delight to listen to your pleasant narrative. Let me have the pleasure of seeing you put on the things I gave you ". Seeta obeyed her and reverently took her leave.

30 Rama beheld with joy the approach of his darling even when she was at a distance, decked with the affectionate presents of Anasoolya, the holy lady. Janaki drew near and showed him the garments, the wreath and the ornaments. The brothers were delighted to
 35 behold those rare articles impossible for man to hope to get. They spent the night in the asrama of maharshi Atri and the next morning they approached the rishis after their matin prayers and requested leave to depart. The holy Ones said to him "We find it
 40 perilous to go out to gather fruits, roots and other necessaries of life. The rakshasas roam these forests. The cruel cannibals change their shapes at will. Other ferocious wild beasts there are that cause equal fear. The rakshasas pounce upon such of our people as
 45 are careless or impure. We pray you to drive them

from here. There is the path we have made in the forests to go in search of woodland fare. Follow it and you will be very soon in the dark and pathless Dandaka". They gave the princes and Seeta their heartiest blessings and sent them on their journey. 50 And Rama, Lakshmana and Janaki entered the heart of that dark forest, like the Lord of light entering a bank of clouds.







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