

The RAMAYAN of VALMIKI

*Translated into English Verse
by
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Edited and compiled by Rhonda L. Kelley, with Griffith's footnotes.



Figure 1 Raja Ravi Varma, Jatáyus wars with Ravana, 19th c.¹

¹ All images are from Wikimedia Commons

The Ramayana (“Journey of Rama”), one of the classics of ancient Indian literature, is a Sanskrit epic poem consisting of 7 Books dating as far back as to the 5th c. BCE with additions as late as the 2nd c. BCE. Its authorship is attributed to the Hindu sage Valmiki who appears in the epic as the hermit who gives Sita shelter after Rama banishes her. *The Ramayana* is the allegorical tale of the birth, childhood, and adult adventures of the eponymous Rama, who is an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu and, along with his wife Sita, the embodiment of human virtue. *The Ramayan of Valmiki* is the 1870 verse translation by the 19th c. British scholar Ralph Griffith.

RLK

Book I: Bala Kanda (“The Book of the Childhood”): Summary²

The origins and childhood of Rama. Sita’s birth, betrothal, and marriage to Rama.

Dasharatha, king of Ayodhya, had three wives Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra. Having been childless for a long time and anxious to produce an heir, he performs a fire sacrifice. As a consequence, Rama is born to Kausalya, Bharata is born to Kaikeyi, and the twins Lakshmana and Satrugna are born to Sumitra. These sons are endowed, to various degrees, with the essence of the Supreme God Vishnu; Vishnu had opted to be born into mortality to combat the demon Ravana, who was oppressing the gods, and who could only be destroyed by a mortal. During their upbringing the princes receive instructions from the Vedas (scriptures) and in warfare. When Rama is 16 years old, the sage Vishwamitra comes to the court of Dasharatha in search of help against demons who were disturbing sacrificial rites. He chooses Rama, who is followed by Lakshmana, his constant companion throughout the story. Rama and Lakshmana receive instructions and supernatural weapons from the sage and destroy the demons.

Janaka was the king of Mithila. One day, the king found a female child in the field in a deep furrow dug by his plough. King Janaka adopted the girl and named her Sita, the Sanskrit word for “furrow”. Sita grew up to be a girl of unparalleled beauty and charm. When Sita was of marriageable age, the king decided to have a swayamvara³ which included a contest. The king was in possession of an immensely heavy bow, presented to him by the Destroyer God Shiva: whoever could wield the bow could marry Sita. The sage Vishwamitra attends the swayamvara with Rama and Lakshmana. Only Rama is able to wield the bow and, when he draws the string, it breaks. Marriages are arranged between the sons of Dasharatha and daughters of Janaka. Rama marries Sita, and his brothers marry other brides from among the people of Mithila.



Figure 2 Artist unknown, The birth of the four divine sons of King Dasharatha, 1712.

² All summaries (with some editing for grammar, spelling, and clarity) are from the [Wikipedia page on The Ramayana](#).

³ The swayamvara is the process in which a young woman chooses a husband from a list of eligible suitors. Typically the swayamvara includes the analysis of the groom’s natal chart. (RLK)

Book II: Ayodhya Kanda (“The Book of Ayodhya”): Selections

The preparations for Rama’s coronation in the city of Ayodhya, his exile into the forest, and the regency of Bharata.

After Rama and Sita have been married for twelve years, an elderly Dasharatha expresses his desire to crown Rama king, to which the assembly and his subjects express their support. On the eve of the coronation, Dasharatha’s wife Kaikeyi—her jealousy aroused by Manthara, a wicked maidservant—claims two boons that Dasharatha had long ago granted her. Kaikeyi demands Rama to be exiled into the wilderness for fourteen years and that the succession pass to her son Bharata. The heartbroken king, constrained by his rigid devotion to his oath, accedes to Kaikeyi’s demands. Rama accepts his father’s reluctant decree with absolute submission and calm self-control, two of the virtues that characterize him throughout the story. Sita and his half-brother Lakshmana join him in his exile. After Rama’s departure, King Dasharatha, unable to bear the grief, passes away.

Meanwhile, Bharata, who was visiting his maternal uncle, learns about the events in Ajodhya. Bharata refuses to profit from his mother’s wicked scheming and visits Rama in the forest. Rama, determined to carry out his father’s orders to the letter, refuses to return before the fourteen years are over. Bharata refuses to be king, instead styling himself “Regent” and keeping Rama’s sandals on the throne as symbolic of Rama’s status as the rightful king of Ayodhya.



Figure 3 Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana at the Hermitage of Bharadvaja: Page from a dispersed Ramayana (Story of King Rama), ca. 1780⁴

⁴ “Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana at the Hermitage of Bharadvaja: Page from a dispersed Ramayana (Story of King Rama) [India (Punjab Hills, Kangra)]” (1976.15) In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History . New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1976.15>. (October 2006)

In the selections for this chapter, Cantos XVII-XIX pick up the story as Rama approaches the throne for his coronation. In Cantos XXVI-XXXI, Rama has already accepted his exile and informs Sita he is leaving. Sita and Lakshmana request and are granted permission to go with him.

Canto XVII. Rama's Approach.

As Rama, rendering blithe and gay
His loving friends, pursued his way,
He saw on either hand a press
Of mingled people numberless.
The royal street he traversed, where
Incense of aloe filled the air,
Where rose high palaces, that vied
With paly clouds, on either side;
With flowers of myriad colours graced.
And food for every varied taste,
Bright as the glowing path o'erhead
Which feet of Gods celestial tread,
Loud benedictions, sweet to hear,
From countless voices soothed his ear.
While he to each gave due salute
His place and dignity to suit:
"Be thou," the joyful people cried,
"Be thou our guardian, lord and guide.
Throned and anointed king to-day,
Thy feet set forth upon the way
Wherein, each honoured as a God,
Thy fathers and forefathers trod.
Thy sire and his have graced the throne,
And loving care to us have shown:
Thus blest shall we and ours remain,
Yea still more blest in Rama's reign.
No more of dainty fare we need,
And but one cherished object heed,
That we may see our prince today
Invested with imperial sway."

Such were the words and pleasant speech
That Rama heard, unmoved, from each
Of the dear friends around him spread,
As onward through the street he sped,
For none could turn his eye or thought
From the dear form his glances sought,
With fruitless ardour forward cast
Even when Raghu's son⁵ had past.
And he who saw not Rama nigh,
Nor caught a look from Rama's eye,
A mark for scorn and general blame,
Reproached himself in bitter shame.
For to each class his equal mind

⁵ Raghu was one of the most celebrated ancestors of Rama whose commonest appellation is, therefore, Raghava or descendant of Raghu.

With sympathy and love inclined
Most fully of the princely four,
So greatest love to him they bore.

His circling course the hero bent
Round shrine and altar, reverent,
Round homes of Gods, where cross-roads met,
Where many a sacred tree was set.
Near to his father's house he drew
Like Indra's⁶ beautiful to view,
And with the light his glory gave
Within the royal palace drive.
Through three broad courts, where bowmen kept
Their watch and ward, his coursers swept,
Then through the two remaining went
On foot the prince preeminent.
Through all the courts the hero passed,
And gained the ladies' bower at last;
Then through the door alone withdrew,
And left without his retinue.
When thus the monarch's noble boy
Had gone his sire to meet,
The multitude, elate with joy,
Stood watching in the street,
And his return with eager eyes
Expected at the gates,
As for his darling moon to rise
The King of Rivers⁷ waits.

Canto XVIII. The Sentence.

With hopeless eye and pallid mien
There sat the monarch with the queen.
His father's feet with reverence due
He clasped, and touched Kaikeyi's⁸ too.
The king, with eyes still brimming o'er,
Cried "Rama!" and could do no more.
His voice was choked, his eye was dim,
He could not speak or look on him.
Then sudden fear made Rama shake
As though his foot had roused a snake,
Soon as his eyes had seen the change
So mournful, terrible, and strange.
For there his reason well-nigh fled,
Sighing, with soul disquieted,
To torturing pangs a prey,
Dismayed, despairing, and distraught,
In a fierce whirl of wildering thought
The hapless monarch lay,

⁶ Chief of the Hindu gods; God of Thunder.

⁷The sea.

⁸ The youngest of the three queens; mother of Bharat; at this point she has already demanded Rama's banishment, but he is unaware (RLK).

Like Ocean wave-engarlanded
 Storm-driven from his tranquil bed,
 The Sun-God in eclipse,
 Or like a holy seer, heart-stirred
 With anguish, when a lying word
 Has passed his heedless lips.
 The sight of his dear father, pained
 With woe and misery unexplained
 Filled Rama with unrest,
 As Ocean's pulses rise and swell
 When the great moon he loves so well
 Shines full upon his breast.
 So grieving for his father's sake,
 To his own heart the hero spake:
 "Why will the king my sire to-day
 No kindly word of greeting say?
 At other times, though wroth he be,
 His eyes grow calm that look on me.
 Then why does anguish wring his brow
 To see his well-beloved now?"
 Sick and perplexed, distraught with woe,
 To Queen Kaikeyi bowing low,
 While pallor o'er his bright cheek spread,
 With humble reverence he said:
 "What have I done, unknown, amiss
 To make my father wroth like this?
 Declare it, O dear Queen, and win
 His pardon for my heedless sin.
 Why is the sire I ever find
 Filled with all love to-day unkind?
 With eyes cast down and pallid cheek
 This day alone he will not speak.
 Or lies he prostrate neath the blow
 Of fierce disease or sudden woe?
 For all our bliss is dashed with pain,
 And joy unmixt is hard to gain.
 Does stroke of evil fortune smite
 Dear Bharat, charming to the sight,
 Or on the brave Satrugna⁹ fall,
 Or consorts, for he loves them all?
 Against his words when I rebel,
 Or fail to please the monarch well,
 When deeds of mine his soul offend,
 That hour I pray my life may end.
 How should a man to him who gave
 His being and his life behave?
 The sire to whom he owes his birth
 Should be his deity on earth.
 Hast thou, by pride and folly moved,
 With bitter taunt the king reproved?

⁹ Bharat and Shatrughna are Rama's half-brothers who are out of town (RLK).

Has scorn of thine or cruel jest
To passion stirred his gentle breast?
Speak truly, Queen, that I may know
What cause has changed the monarch so.”

Thus by the high-souled prince addressed,
Of Raghu’s sons the chief and best,
She cast all ruth¹⁰ and shame aside,
And bold with greedy words replied:
“Not wrath, O Rama, stirs the king,
Nor misery stabs with sudden sting;
One thought that fills his soul has he,
But dares not speak for fear of thee.
Thou art so dear, his lips refrain
From words that might his darling pain.
But thou, as duty bids, must still
The promise of thy sire fulfil.
He who to me in days gone by
Vouchsafed a boon with honours high,
Dares now, a king, his word regret,
And caitiff-like¹¹ disowns the debt.
The lord of men his promise gave
To grant the boon that I might crave,
And now a bridge would idly throw
When the dried stream has ceased to flow.
His faith the monarch must not break
In wrath, or e’en for thy dear sake.
From faith, as well the righteous know,
Our virtue and our merits flow.
Now, be they good or be they ill,
Do thou thy father’s words fulfil:
Swear that his promise shall not fail,
And I will tell thee all the tale.
Yes, Rama, when I hear that thou
Hast bound thee by thy father’s vow,
Then, not till then, my lips shall speak,
Nor will he tell what boon I seek.”

He heard, and with a troubled breast
This answer to the queen addressed:
“Ah me, dear lady, canst thou deem
That words like these thy lips beseem?
I, at the bidding of my sire,
Would cast my body to the fire,
A deadly draught of poison drink,
Or in the waves of ocean sink:
If he command, it shall be done,—
My father and my king in one.
Then speak and let me know the thing

¹⁰ pity (RLK)

¹¹ cowardly (RLK)

So longed for by my lord the king.
It shall be done: let this suffice;
Rama ne'er makes a promise twice."

He ended. To the princely youth
Who loved the right and spoke the truth,
Cruel, abominable came
The answer of the ruthless dame:
"When Gods and Titans fought of yore,
Transfixed with darts and bathed in gore
Two boons to me thy father gave
For the dear life 'twas mine to save.
Of him I claim the ancient debt,
That Bharat on the throne be set,
And thou, O Rama, go this day
To Dandak forest far away.
Now, Rama, if thou wilt maintain
Thy father's faith without a stain,
And thine own truth and honour clear,
Then, best of men, my bidding hear.
Do thou thy father's word obey,
Nor from the pledge he gave me stray.
Thy life in Dandak forest spend
Till nine long years and five shall end.
Upon my Bharat's princely head
Let consecrating drops be shed,
With all the royal pomp for thee
Made ready by the king's decree.
Seek Dandak forest and resign
Rites that would make the empire thine,
For twice seven years of exile wear
The coat of bark and matted hair.
Then in thy stead let Bharat reign
Lord of his royal sire's domain,
Rich in the fairest gems that shine,
Cars, elephants, and steeds, and kine¹².
The monarch mourns thy altered fate
And vails his brow compassionate:
Bowed down by bitter grief he lies
And dares not lift to thine his eyes.
Obey his word: be firm and brave,
And with great truth the monarch save."
While thus with cruel words she spoke,
No grief the noble youth betrayed;
But forth the father's anguish broke,
At his dear Rama's lot dismayed.

Canto XIX. Rama's Promise.

Calm and unmoved by threatened woe

¹² Cows (RLK).

The noble conqueror of the foe
Answered the cruel words she spoke,
Nor quailed beneath the murderous stroke:
“Yea, for my father’s promise sake
I to the wood my way will take,
And dwell a lonely exile there
In hermit dress with matted hair.
One thing alone I fain would learn,
Why is the king this day so stern?
Why is the scourge of foes so cold,
Nor gives me greeting as of old?
Now let not anger flush thy cheek:
Before thy face the truth I speak,
In hermit’s coat with matted hair
To the wild wood will I repair.
How can I fail his will to do,
Friend, master, grateful sovereign too?
One only pang consumes my breast:
That his own lips have not expressed
His will, nor made his longing known
That Bharat should ascend the throne.
To Bharat I would yield my wife,
My realm and wealth, mine own dear life,
Unasked I fain would yield them all:
More gladly at my father’s call,
More gladly when the gift may free
His honour and bring joy to thee.
Thus, lady, his sad heart release
From the sore shame, and give him peace.
But tell me, O, I pray thee, why
The lord of men, with downcast eye,
Lies prostrate thus, and one by one
Down his pale cheek the tear-drops run.
Let couriers to thy father speed
On horses of the swiftest breed,
And, by the mandate of the king,
Thy Bharat to his presence bring.
My father’s words I will not stay
To question, but this very day
To Dandak’s pathless wild will fare,
For twice seven years an exile there.”

When Rama thus had made reply
Kaikeyi’s heart with joy beat high.
She, trusting to the pledge she held,
The youth’s departure thus impelled:
“‘Tis well. Be messengers despatched
On coursers ne’er for fleetness matched,
To seek my father’s home and lead
My Bharat back with all their speed.
And, Rama, as I ween that thou
Wilt scarce endure to linger now,

So surely it were wise and good
This hour to journey to the wood.
And if, with shame cast down and weak,
No word to thee the king can speak,
Forgive, and from thy mind dismiss
A trifle in an hour like this.
But till thy feet in rapid haste
Have left the city for the waste,
And to the distant forest fled,
He will not bathe nor call for bread.”

“Woe! woe!” from the sad monarch burst,
In surging floods of grief immersed;
Then swooning, with his wits astray,
Upon the gold-wrought couch he lay,
And Rama raised the aged king:
But the stern queen, unpitying,
Checked not her needless words, nor spared
The hero for all speed prepared,
But urged him with her bitter tongue,
Like a good horse with lashes stung,
She spoke her shameful speech. Serene
He heard the fury of the queen,
And to her words so vile and dread
Gently, unmoved in mind, he said:
“I would not in this world remain
A grovelling thrall to paltry gain,
But duty’s path would fain pursue,
True as the saints themselves are true.
From death itself I would not fly
My father’s wish to gratify,
What deed soe’er his loving son
May do to please him, think it done.
Amid all duties, Queen, I count
This duty first and paramount,
That sons, obedient, aye fulfil
Their honoured fathers’ word and will.
Without his word, if thou decree,
Forth to the forest will I flee,
And there shall fourteen years be spent
Mid lonely wilds in banishment.
Methinks thou couldst not hope to find
One spark of virtue in my mind,
If thou, whose wish is still my lord,
Hast for this grace the king implored.
This day I go, but, ere we part,
Must cheer my Sita’s tender heart,
To my dear mother bid farewell;
Then to the woods, a while to dwell.
With thee, O Queen, the care must rest
That Bharat hear his sire’s behest,
And guard the land with righteous sway,

For such the law that lives for aye.”

In speechless woe the father heard,
Wept with loud cries, but spoke no word.
Then Rama touched his senseless feet,
And hers, for honour most unmeet;
Round both his circling steps he bent,
Then from the bower the hero went.
Soon as he reached the gate he found
His dear companions gathered round.
Behind him came Sumitra's child¹³
With weeping eyes so sad and wild.
Then saw he all that rich array
Of vases for the glorious day.
Round them with reverent stops he paced,
Nor veiled his eye, nor moved in haste.
The loss of empire could not dim
The glory that encompassed him.
So will the Lord of Cooling Rays¹⁴
On whom the world delights to gaze,
Through the great love of all retain
Sweet splendour in the time of wane.
Now to the exile's lot resigned
He left the rule of earth behind:
As though all worldly cares he spurned
No trouble was in him discerned.
The chouries¹⁵ that for kings are used,
And white umbrella, he refused,
Dismissed his chariot and his men,
And every friend and citizen.
He ruled his senses, nor betrayed
The grief that on his bosom weighed,
And thus his mother's mansion sought
To tell the mournful news he brought.
Nor could the gay-clad people there
Who flocked round Rama true and fair,
One sign of altered fortune trace
Upon the splendid hero's face.
Nor had the chieftain, mighty-armed,
Lost the bright look all hearts that charmed,
As e'en from autumn moons is thrown
A splendour which is all their own.
With his sweet voice the hero spoke
Saluting all the gathered folk,
Then righteous-souled and great in fame
Close to his mother's house he came.
Lakshman the brave, his brother's peer
In princely virtues, followed near,
Sore troubled, but resolved to show

¹³ Lakshmana (RLK)

¹⁴ The moon.

¹⁵ Fans (RLK)

No token of his secret woe.
Thus to the palace Rama went
Where all were gay with hope and joy;
But well he knew the dire event
That hope would mar, that bliss destroy.
So to his grief he would not yield
Lest the sad change their hearts might rend,
And, the dread tiding unrevealed,
Spared from the blow each faithful friend.

[Cantos XX-XXV: Rama bids farewell to his father and mother]

Canto XXVI. Alone With Sita.

So Rama, to his purpose true,
To Queen Kausalya¹⁶ bade adieu,
Received the benison she gave,
And to the path of duty clave.
As through the crowded street he passed,
A radiance on the way he cast,
And each fair grace, by all approved,
The bosoms of the people moved.

Now of the woeful change no word
The fair Videhan¹⁷ bride had heard;
The thought of that imperial rite
Still filled her bosom with delight.
With grateful heart and joyful thought
The Gods in worship she had sought,
And, well in royal duties learned,
Sat longing till her lord returned,
Not all unmarked by grief and shame
Within his sumptuous home he came,
And hurried through the happy crowd
With eye dejected, gloomy-browed.
Up Sita sprang, and every limb
Trembled with fear at sight of him.
She marked that cheek where anguish fed,
Those senses care-disquieted.
For, when he looked on her, no more
Could his heart hide the load it bore,
Nor could the pious chief control
The paleness o'er his cheek that stole.
His altered cheer, his brow bedewed
With clammy drops, his grief she viewed,
And cried, consumed with fires of woe,
“What, O my lord, has changed thee so?
Vrihaspati¹⁸ looks down benign,
And the moon rests in Pushya's sign,¹⁹

¹⁶ Rama's mother (RLK).

¹⁷ Sita. Videha was the country of which Mithila was the capital.

¹⁸ The Lord of Speech and preceptor of the Gods.

As Brahmans²⁰ sage this day declare:
Then whence, my lord, this grief and care?
Why does no canopy, like foam
For its white beauty, shade thee home,
Its hundred ribs spread wide to throw
Splendour on thy fair head below?
Where are the royal fans, to grace
The lotus beauty of thy face,
Fair as the moon or wild-swan's wing,
And waving round the new-made king?
Why do no sweet-toned bards rejoice
To hail thee with triumphant voice?
No tuneful heralds love to raise
Loud music in their monarch's praise?
Why do no Brahmans, Scripture-read,
Pour curds and honey on thy head,
Anointed, as the laws ordain,
With holy rites, supreme to reign?
Where are the chiefs of every guild?
Where are the myriads should have filled
The streets, and followed home their king
With merry noise and triumphing?
Why does no gold-wrought chariot lead
With four brave horses, best for speed?
No elephant precede the crowd
Like a huge hill or thunder cloud,
Marked from his birth for happy fate,
Whom signs auspicious decorate?
Why does no henchman, young and fair,
Precede thee, and delight to bear
Entrusted to his reverent hold
The burthen of thy throne of gold?
Why, if the consecrating rite
Be ready, why this mournful plight?
Why do I see this sudden change,
This altered mien so sad and strange?"

To her, as thus she weeping cried,
Raghu's illustrious son replied:
"Sita, my honoured sire's decree
Commands me to the woods to flee.
O high-born lady, nobly bred
In the good paths thy footsteps tread,
Hear, Janak's²¹ daughter, while I tell
The story as it all befell.
Of old my father true and brave
Two boons to Queen Kaikeyi gave.
Through these the preparations made
For me to-day by her are stayed,

¹⁹ Pisces (RLK).

²⁰ The highest caste, the priesthood (RLK).

²¹ Janak (Janaka) is Sita's father; he is King of Mithila.

For he is bound to disallow
This promise by that earlier vow.
In Dandak forest wild and vast
Must fourteen years by me be passed.
My father's will makes Bharat heir,
The kingdom and the throne to share.
Now, ere the lonely wild I seek,
I come once more with thee to speak.
In Bharat's presence, O my dame,
Ne'er speak with pride of Rama's name:
Another's eulogy to hear
Is hateful to a monarch's ear.
Thou must with love his rule obey
To whom my father yields the sway.
With love and sweet observance learn
His grace, and more the king's, to earn.
Now, that my father may not break
The words of promise that he spake,
To the drear wood my steps are bent:
Be firm, good Sita, and content.
Through all that time, my blameless spouse,
Keep well thy fasts and holy vows.
Rise from thy bed at break of day,
And to the Gods due worship pay.
With meek and lowly love revere
The lord of men, my father dear,
And reverence to Kausalya show,
My mother, worn with eld²² and woe:
By duty's law, O best of dames,
High worship from thy love she claims,
Nor to the other queens refuse
Observance, rendering each her dues:
By love and fond attention shown
They are my mothers like mine own.
Let Bharat and Satrughna bear
In thy sweet love a special share:
Dear as my life, O let them be
Like brother and like son to thee.
In every word and deed refrain
From aught that Bharat's soul may pain:
He is Ayodhya's king and mine,
The head and lord of all our line.
For those who serve and love them much
With weariless endeavour, touch
And win the gracious hearts of kings.
While wrath from disobedience springs.
Great monarchs from their presence send
Their lawful sons who still offend,
And welcome to the vacant place
Good children of an alien race.

²² old age (RLK)

Then, best of women, rest thou here,
And Bharat's will with love revere.
Obedient to thy king remain,
And still thy vows of truth maintain.
To the wide wood my steps I bend:
Make thou thy dwelling here;
See that thy conduct ne'er offend,
And keep my words, my dear."

Canto XXVII. Sita's Speech.

His sweetly-speaking bride, who best
Deserved her lord, he thus addressed.
Then tender love bade passion wake,
And thus the fair Videhan spake:
"What words are these that thou hast said?
Contempt of me the thought has bred.
O best of heroes, I dismiss
With bitter scorn a speech like this:

Unworthy of a warrior's fame
It taints a monarch's son with shame,
Ne'er to be heard from those who know
The science of the sword and bow.
My lord, the mother, sire, and son
Receive their lots by merit won;
The brother and the daughter find
The portions to their deeds assigned.
The wife alone, whate'er await,
Must share on earth her husband's fate.
So now the king's command which sends
Thee to the wild, to me extends.
The wife can find no refuge, none,
In father, mother, self, or son:
Both here, and when they vanish hence,
Her husband is her sole defence.
If, Raghu's son, thy steps are led
Where Dandak's pathless wilds are spread,
My foot before thine own shall pass
Through tangled thorn and matted grass.
Dismiss thine anger and thy doubt:
Like refuse water cast them out,
And lead me, O my hero, hence—
I know not sin—with confidence.
Whate'er his lot, 'tis far more sweet
To follow still a husband's feet
Than in rich palaces to lie,
Or roam at pleasure through the sky.
My mother and my sire have taught
What duty bids, and trained each thought,
Nor have I now mine ear to turn
The duties of a wife to learn.
I'll seek with thee the woodland dell

And pathless wild where no men dwell,
Where tribes of silvan²³ creatures roam,
And many a tiger makes his home.
My life shall pass as pleasant there
As in my father's palace fair.
The worlds shall wake no care in me;
My only care be truth to thee.
There while thy wish I still obey,
True to my vows with thee I'll stray,
And there shall blissful hours be spent
In woods with honey redolent.
In forest shades thy mighty arm
Would keep a stranger's life from harm,
And how shall Sita think of fear
When thou, O glorious lord, art near?
Heir of high bliss, my choice is made,
Nor can I from my will be stayed.
Doubt not; the earth will yield me roots,
These will I eat, and woodland fruits;
And as with thee I wander there
I will not bring thee grief or care.
I long, when thou, wise lord, art nigh,
All fearless, with delighted eye
To gaze upon the rocky hill,
The lake, the fountain, and the rill;
To sport with thee, my limbs to cool,
In some pure lily-covered pool,
While the white swan's and mallard's wings
Are plashing in the water-springs.
So would a thousand seasons flee
Like one sweet day, if spent with thee.
Without my lord I would not prize
A home with Gods above the skies:
Without my lord, my life to bless,
Where could be heaven or happiness?
Forbid me not: with thee I go
The tangled wood to tread.
There will I live with thee, as though
This roof were o'er my head.
My will for thine shall be resigned;
Thy feet my steps shall guide.
Thou, only thou, art in my mind:
I heed not all beside.
Thy heart shall ne'er by me be grieved;
Do not my prayer deny:
Take me, dear lord; of thee bereaved
Thy Sita swears to die."
These words the duteous lady spake,
Nor would he yet consent
His faithful wife with him to take

²³ of or related to the woods (RLK)

To share his banishment.
He soothed her with his gentle speech;
To change her will he strove;
And much he said the woes to teach
Of those in wilds who rove.

Canto XXVIII. The Dangers Of The Wood.

Thus Sita spake, and he who knew
His duty, to its orders true,
Was still reluctant as the woes
Of forest life before him rose.
He sought to soothe her grief, to dry
The torrent from each brimming eye,
And then, her firm resolve to shake,
These words the pious hero spake:

“O daughter of a noble line,
Whose steps from virtue ne’er decline,
Remain, thy duties here pursue,
As my fond heart would have thee do.
Now hear me, Sita, fair and weak,
And do the words that I shall speak.
Attend and hear while I explain
Each danger in the wood, each pain.
Thy lips have spoken: I condemn
The foolish words that fell from them.
This senseless plan, this wish of thine
To live a forest life, resign.
The names of trouble and distress
Suit well the tangled wilderness.
In the wild wood no joy I know,
A forest life is nought but woe.
The lion in his mountain cave
Answers the torrents as they rave,
And forth his voice of terror throws:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.

There mighty monsters fearless play,
And in their maddened onset slay
The hapless wretch who near them goes:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
‘Tis hard to ford each treacherous flood,
So thick with crocodiles and mud,
Where the wild elephants repose:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
Or far from streams the wanderer strays
Through thorns and creeper-tangled ways,
While round him many a wild-cock crows:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
On the cold ground upon a heap
Of gathered leaves condemned to sleep,
Toil-wearied, will his eyelids close:

The wood, my love, is full of woes.
Long days and nights must he content
His soul with scanty aliment,
What fruit the wind from branches blows:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
O Sita, while his strength may last,
The ascetic in the wood must fast,
Coil on his head his matted hair,
And bark must be his only wear.
To Gods and spirits day by day
The ordered worship he must pay,
And honour with respectful care
Each wandering guest who meets him there.
The bathing rites he ne'er must shun
At dawn, at noon, at set of sun,
Obedient to the law he knows:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
To grace the altar must be brought
The gift of flowers his hands have sought—
The debt each pious hermit owes:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
The devotee must be content
To live, severely abstinent,
On what the chance of fortune shows:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
Hunger afflicts him evermore:
The nights are black, the wild winds roar;
And there are dangers worse than those:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
There creeping things in every form
Infest the earth, the serpents swarm,
And each proud eye with fury glows:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
The snakes that by the rives hide
In sinuous course like rivers glide,
And line the path with deadly foes:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
Scorpions, and grasshoppers, and flies
Disturb the wanderer as he lies,
And wake him from his troubled doze:
The wood, my love, is full of woes.
Trees, thorny bushes, intertwined,
Their branched ends together bind,
And dense with grass the thicket grows:
The wood, my dear, is full of woes,
With many ills the flesh is tried,
When these and countless fears beside
Vex those who in the wood remain:
The wilds are naught but grief and pain.
Hope, anger must be cast aside,
To penance every thought applied:
No fear must be of things to fear:

Hence is the wood forever drear.
Enough, my love: thy purpose quit:
For forest life thou art not fit.
As thus I think on all, I see
The wild wood is no place for thee.”

Canto XXIX. Sita's Appeal.

Thus Rama spake. Her lord's address
The lady heard with deep distress,
And, as the tear bedimmed her eye,
In soft low accents made reply:
“The perils of the wood, and all
The woes thou countest to appal,
Led by my love I deem not pain;
Each woe a charm, each loss a gain.
Tiger, and elephant, and deer,
Bull, lion, buffalo, in fear,
Soon as thy matchless form they see,
With every silvan beast will flee.
With thee, O Rama, I must go:
My sire's command ordains it so.
Bereft of thee, my lonely heart
Must break, and life and I must part.
While thou, O mighty lord, art nigh,
Not even He who rules the sky,
Though He is strongest of the strong,
With all his might can do me wrong.
Nor can a lonely woman left
By her dear husband live bereft.
In my great love, my lord, I ween,
The truth of this thou mayst have seen.
In my sire's palace long ago
I heard the chief of those who know,
The truth-declaring Brahmans, tell
My fortune, in the wood to dwell.
I heard their promise who divine
The future by each mark and sign,
And from that hour have longed to lead
The forest life their lips decreed.
Now, mighty Rama, I must share
Thy father's doom which sends thee there;
In this I will not be denied,
But follow, love, where thou shalt guide.
O husband, I will go with thee,
Obedient to that high decree.
Now let the Brahmans' words be true,
For this the time they had in view.
I know full well the wood has woes;
But they disturb the lives of those
Who in the forest dwell, nor hold
Their rebel senses well controlled.
In my sire's halls, ere I was wed,

I heard a dame who begged her bread
Before my mother's face relate
What griefs a forest life await.
And many a time in sport I prayed
To seek with thee the greenwood shade,
For O, my heart on this is set,
To follow thee, dear anchoret.
May blessings on thy life attend:
I long with thee my steps to bend,
For with such hero as thou art
This pilgrimage enchants my heart.
Still close, my lord, to thy dear side
My spirit will be purified:
Love from all sin my soul will free:
My husband is a God to me.
So, love, with thee shall I have bliss
And share the life that follows this.
I heard a Brahman, dear to fame,
This ancient Scripture text proclaim:
"The woman whom on earth below
Her parents on a man bestow,
And lawfully their hands unite
With water and each holy rite,
She in this world shall be his wife,
His also in the afterlife."
Then tell me, O beloved, why
Thou wilt this earnest prayer deny,
Nor take me with thee to the wood,
Thine own dear wife so true and good.
But if thou wilt not take me there
Thus grieving in my wild despair,
To fire or water I will fly,
Or to the poisoned draught, and die."

So thus to share his exile, she
Besought him with each earnest plea,
Nor could she yet her lord persuade
To take her to the lonely shade.
The answer of the strong-armed chief
Smote the Videhan's soul with grief,
And from her eyes the torrents came
bathing the bosom of the dame.

Canto XXX. The Triumph Of Love.

The daughter of Videha's king,
While Rama strove to soothe the sting
Of her deep anguish, thus began
Once more in furtherance of her plan:
And with her spirit sorely tried
By fear and anger, love and pride,
With keenly taunting words addressed
Her hero of the stately breast:

“Why did the king my sire, who reigns
O’er fair Videha’s wide domains,
Hail Rama son with joy unwise,
A woman in a man’s disguise?
Now falsely would the people say,
By idle fancies led astray,
That Rama’s own are power and might,
As glorious as the Lord of Light.
Why sinkest thou in such dismay?
What fears upon thy spirit weigh,
That thou, O Rama, fain wouldst flee
From her who thinks of naught but thee?
To thy dear will am I resigned
In heart and body, soul and mind,
As Savitri²⁴ gave all to one,
Satyavan, Dyumatsena’s son.
Not e’en in fancy can I brook
To any guard save thee to look:
Let meaner wives their houses shame,
To go with thee is all my claim.
Like some low actor, deemst thou fit
Thy wife to others to commit—
Thine own, espoused in maiden youth,
Thy wife so long, unblamed for truth?
Do thou, my lord, his will obey
For whom thou lovest royal sway,
To whom thou wouldst thy wife confide—
Not me, but thee, his wish may guide.
Thou must not here thy wife forsake,
And to the wood thy journey make,
Whether stern penance, grief, and care,
Or rule or heaven await thee there.
Nor shall fatigue my limbs distress
When wandering in the wilderness:
Each path which near to thee I tread
Shall seem a soft luxurious bed.
The reeds, the bushes where I pass,
The thorny trees, the tangled grass
Shall feel, if only thou be near,
Soft to my touch as skins of deer.
When the rude wind in fury blows,
And scattered dust upon me throws,
That dust, beloved lord, to me
Shall as the precious sandal be.
And what shall be more blest than I,
When gazing on the wood I lie
In some green glade upon a bed
With sacred grass beneath us spread?
The root, the leaf, the fruit which thou
Shalt give me from the earth or bough,

²⁴ consort of Brahma (RLK).

Scanty or plentiful, to eat,
 Shall taste to me as Amrit sweet.
 As there I live on flowers and roots
 And every season's kindly fruits,
 I will not for my mother grieve,
 My sire, my home, or all I leave.
 My presence, love, shall never add
 One pain to make the heart more sad;
 I will not cause thee grief or care,
 Nor be a burden hard to bear.
 With thee is heaven, where'er the spot;
 Each place is hell where thou art not.
 Then go with me, O Rama; this
 Is all my hope and all my bliss.
 If thou wilt leave thy wife who still
 Entreats thee with undaunted will,
 This very day shall poison close
 The life that spurns the rule of foes.
 How, after, can my soul sustain
 The bitter life of endless pain,
 When thy dear face, my lord, I miss?
 No, death is better far than this.
 Not for an hour could I endure
 The deadly grief that knows not cure,
 Far less a woe I could not shun
 For ten long years, and three, and one."

While fires of woe consumed her, such
 Her sad appeal, lamenting much;
 Then with a wild cry, anguish-wrung,
 About her husband's neck she clung.
 Like some she-elephant who bleeds
 Struck by the hunter's venomous reeds,
 So in her quivering heart she felt
 The many wounds his speeches dealt.
 Then, as the spark from wood is gained,²⁵
 Down rolled the tear so long restrained:
 The crystal moisture, sprung from woe,
 From her sweet eyes began to flow,
 As runs the water from a pair
 Of lotuses divinely fair.
 And Sita's face with long dark eyes,
 Pure as the moon of autumn skies,
 Faded with weeping, as the buds
 Of lotuses when sink the floods.
 Around his wife his arms he strained,
 Who senseless from her woe remained,
 And with sweet words, that bade her wake
 To life again, the hero spake:
 "I would not with thy woe, my Queen,

²⁵ Fire for sacrificial purposes is produced by the attrition of two pieces of wood.

Buy heaven and all its blissful sheen.
Void of all fear am I as He,
The self-existent God, can be.
I knew not all thy heart till now,
Dear lady of the lovely brow,
So wished not thee in woods to dwell;
Yet there mine arm can guard thee well.
Now surely thou, dear love, wast made
To dwell with me in green wood shade.
And, as a high saint's tender mind
Clings to its love for all mankind,
So I to thee will ever cling,
Sweet daughter of Videha's king.
The good, of old, O soft of frame,
Honoured this duty's sovereign claim,
And I its guidance will not shun,
True as light's Queen is to the Sun.
I cannot, pride of Janak's line,
This journey to the wood decline:
My sire's behest, the oath he sware,
The claims of truth, all lead me there.
One duty, dear the same for aye,
Is sire and mother to obey:
Should I their orders once transgress
My very life were weariness.
If glad obedience be denied
To father, mother, holy guide,
What rites, what service can be done
That stern Fate's favour may be won?
These three the triple world comprise,
O darling of the lovely eyes.
Earth has no holy thing like these
Whom with all love men seek to please.
Not truth, or gift, or bended knee,
Not honour, worship, lordly fee,
Storms heaven and wins a blessing thence
Like sonly love and reverence.
Heaven, riches, grain, and varied lore,
With sons and many a blessing more,
All these are made their own with ease
By those their elders' souls who please.
The mighty-souled, who ne'er forget,
Devoted sons, their filial debt,
Win worlds where Gods and minstrels are,
And Brahma's sphere more glorious far.
Now as the orders of my sire,
Who keeps the way of truth, require,
So will I do, for such the way
Of duty that endures for aye:
To take thee, love, to Dandak's wild
My heart at length is reconciled,
For thee such earnest thoughts impel

To follow, and with me to dwell.
O faultless form from feet to brows,
Come with me, as my will allows,
And duty there with me pursue,
Trembler, whose bright eyes thrill me through.
In all thy days, come good come ill,
Preserve unchanged such noble will,
And thou, dear love, wilt ever be
The glory of thy house and me.
Now, beauteous-armed, begin the tasks
The woodland life of hermits asks.
For me the joys of heaven above
Have charms no more without thee, love.
And now, dear Sita, be not slow:
Food on good mendicants bestow,
And for the holy Brahmans bring
Thy treasures and each precious thing.
Thy best attire and gems collect,
The jewels which thy beauty decked,
And every ornament and toy
Prepared for hours of sport and joy:
The beds, the cars wherein I ride,
Among our followers, next, divide.”

She conscious that her lord approved
Her going, with great rapture moved,
Hastened within, without delay,
Prepared to give their wealth away.

Canto XXXI. Lakshman's Prayer.

When Lakshman, who had joined them there,
Had heard the converse of the pair,
His mien was changed, his eyes o'erflowed,
His breast no more could bear its load.
The son of Raghu, sore distressed,
His brother's feet with fervour pressed,
While thus to Sita he complained,
And him by lofty vows enchained:
“If thou wilt make the woods thy home,
Where elephant and roebuck roam,
I too this day will take my bow
And in the path before thee go.
Our way will lie through forest ground
Where countless birds and beasts are found,
I heed not homes of Gods on high,
I heed not life that cannot die,
Nor would I wish, with thee away,
O'er the three worlds to stretch my sway.”

Thus Lakshman spake, with earnest prayer
His brother's woodland life to share.
As Rama still his prayer denied

With soothing words, again he cried:
“When leave at first thou didst accord,
Why dost thou stay me now, my lord?
Thou art my refuge: O, be kind,
Leave me not, dear my lord, behind.
Thou canst not, brother, if thou choose
That I still live, my wish refuse.”

The glorious chief his speech renewed
To faithful Lakshman as he sued,
And on the eyes of Rama gazed
Longing to lead, with hands upraised:
“Thou art a hero just and dear,
Whose steps to virtue’s path adhere,
Loved as my life till life shall end,
My faithful brother and my friend.
If to the woods thou take thy way
With Sita and with me to-day,
Who for Kauśalya will provide,
And guard the good Sumitra’s side?
The lord of earth, of mighty power,
Who sends good things in plenteous shower,
As Indra pours the grateful rain,
A captive lies in passion’s chain.
The power imperial for her son
Has Aśvapati’s daughter²⁶ won,
And she, proud queen, will little heed
Her miserable rivals’ need.
So Bharat, ruler of the land,
By Queen Kaikeyi’s side will stand,
Nor of those two will ever think,
While grieving in despair they sink.
Now, Lakshman, as thy love decrees,
Or else the monarch’s heart to please,
Follow this counsel and protect
My honoured mother from neglect.
So thou, while not to me alone
Thy great affection will be shown,
To highest duty wilt adhere
By serving those thou shouldst revere.
Now, son of Raghu, for my sake
Obey this one request I make,
Or, of her darling son bereft,
Kauśalya has no comfort left.”

The faithful Lakshman, thus addressed
In gentle words which love expressed,
To him in lore of language learned,
His answer, eloquent, returned:

²⁶ Kaikeyi.

“Nay, through thy might each queen will share
Attentive Bharat’s love and care,
Should Bharat, raised as king to sway
This noblest realm, his trust betray,
Nor for their safety well provide,
Seduced by ill-suggesting pride,
Doubt not my vengeful hand shall kill
The cruel wretch who counsels ill—
Kill him and all who lend him aid,
And the three worlds in league arrayed.
And good Kauśalya well can fee
A thousand champions like to me.
A thousand hamlets rich in grain
The station of that queen maintain.
She may, and my dear mother too,
Live on the ample revenue.
Then let me follow thee: herein:
Is naught that may resemble sin.
So shall I in my wish succeed,
And aid, perhaps, my brother’s need.
My bow and quiver well supplied
With arrows hanging at my side,
My hands shall spade and basket bear,
And for thy feet the way prepare.
I’ll bring thee roots and berries sweet.
And woodland fare which hermits eat.
Thou shall with thy Videhan spouse
Recline upon the mountain’s brows;
Be mine the toil, be mine to keep
Watch o’er thee waking or asleep.”

Filled by his speech with joy and pride,
Rama to Lakshman thus replied:
“Go then, my brother, bid adieu
To all thy friends and retinue.
And those two bows of fearful might,
Celestial, which, at that famed rite,
Lord Varun gave to Janak, king
Of fair Vedeha with thee bring,
With heavenly coats of sword-proof mail,
Quivers, whose arrows never fail,
And golden-hilted swords so keen,
The rivals of the sun in sheen.
Tended with care these arms are all
Preserved in my preceptor’s hall.
With speed, O Lakshman, go, produce,
And bring them hither for our use.”
So on a woodland life intent,
To see his faithful friends he went,
And brought the heavenly arms which lay
By Rama’s teacher stored away.
And Raghu’s son to Rama showed

Those wondrous arms which gleamed and glowed,
Well kept, adorned with many a wreath
Of flowers on case, and hilt, and sheath.
The prudent Rama at the sight
Addressed his brother with delight:
“Well art thou come, my brother dear,
For much I longed to see thee here.
For with thine aid, before I go,
I would my gold and wealth bestow
Upon the Brahmans sage, who school
Their lives by stern devotion’s rule.
And for all those who ever dwell
Within my house and serve me well,
Devoted servants, true and good,
Will I provide a livelihood.
Quick, go and summon to this place
The good Vaśishṭha’s son,
Suyajñā, of the Brahman race
The first and holiest one.
To all the Brahmans wise and good
Will I due reverence pay,
Then to the solitary wood
With thee will take my way.”

Book III: Aranya Kanda (“The Book of the Forest”): Selections

The forest exile of Rama with Sita and Lakshmana. The kidnapping of Sita by the demon king Ravana.

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana journey southward along the banks of river Godavari, where they build cottages and live off the land. At the Panchavati Forest, the she-demon Surpanakha attempts to seduce the brothers, fails, and then tries to kill Sita. Lakshmana saves Sita by cutting off Surpanakha’s nose and ears. Hearing about Surpanakha’s mutilation, her brother, Khara, organizes an attack against the princes. Rama annihilates Khara and his demon minions.

When news of these events reaches Ravana, brother to Surpanakha and Khara, he resolves to destroy Rama by capturing Sita with the aid of another demon, Mārīcha, who assuming the form of a golden deer, captivates Sita’s attention. Entranced by the beauty of the deer, Sita pleads with Rama to capture it. Rama, aware that this is a ploy of the demons, cannot dissuade Sita from her desire and chases the deer into the forest, leaving Sita under Lakshmana’s guard. After some time, Sita hears Rama calling out to her; afraid for his life, she insists that Lakshmana rush to his aid. Lakshmana tries to assure her that Rama is invincible and that it is best if he continues to follow Rama’s orders to protect her. On the verge of hysterics, Sita insists that it is not she but Rama who needs Lakshmana’s help. He obeys her wish but stipulates that she is not to leave the cottage or entertain any strangers. He draws a line in chalk around the cottage and casts a spell on it that prevents anyone from entering the boundary but allows people to exit. With the coast finally clear, Ravana appears in the guise of an ascetic requesting Sita’s hospitality. Thus Ravana tricks Sita into leaving the protection of the cottage and forcibly carries her away.

Jatáyus, a vulture, tries to rescue Sita but fails. At Lanka, demons keep Sita under heavy guard. Ravana demands that Sita marry him, but Sita, eternally devoted to Rama, refuses. Rama and Lakshmana learn about Sita’s abduction from the fatally wounded Jatáyus and immediately set out to save her. During their search, they meet the demon Kabandha and the ascetic Shabari, who direct them towards Sugriva and Hanuman of the Monkey Kingdom.



Figure 4 Artist unknown, “Episodes in the Panchavati Forest,” Folio from a Ramayana, 1775-1800.

In the selections for this chapter, Cantos XLII-LVII cover the kidnapping of Sita and her imprisonment in Lanka.

Canto XLII. Mārīcha Transformed.

Mārīcha thus in wild unrest
With bitter words the king²⁷ addressed.
Then to his giant lord in dread,

²⁷ Ravana (also Ravan), the Demon King of Lanka. (RLK)

“Arise, and let us go,” he said.
“Ah, I have met that mighty lord²⁸
Armed with his shafts and bow and sword,
And if again that bow he bend
Our lives that very hour will end.
For none that warrior can provoke
And think to fly his deadly stroke.
Like Yáma²⁹ with his staff is he,
And his dread hand will slaughter thee.
What can I more? My words can find
No passage to thy stubborn mind.
I go, great King, thy task to share,
And may success attend thee there.”

With that reply and bold consent
The giant king was well content.
He strained Márícha to his breast
And thus with joyful words addressed:
“There spoke a hero dauntless still,
Obedient to his master’s will,³⁰
Márícha’s proper self once more:
Some other took thy shape before.
Come, mount my jewelled car that flies.
Will-governed, through the yielding skies.
These asses, goblin-faced, shall bear
Us quickly through the fields of air.
Attract the lady³¹ with thy shape,
Then through the wood, at will, escape.
And I, when she has no defence,
Will seize the dame and bear her thence.”

Again Márícha made reply,
Consent and will to signify.
With rapid speed the giants two
From the calm hermit dwelling flew,
Borne in that wondrous chariot, meet
For some great God’s celestial seat.
They from their airy path looked down
On many a wood and many a town,
On lake and river, brook and rill,
City and realm and towering hill.
Soon he whom giant hosts obeyed,
Márícha by his side, surveyed
The dark expanse of Dandak wood
Where Rama’s hermit cottage stood.
They left the flying car, whereon
The wealth of gold and jewels shone,
And thus the giant king addressed

²⁸ Márícha is referring to Rama. (RLK)

²⁹ Yáma (also Jam) is the God of Death. (RLK)

³⁰ Márícha was reluctant to help Ravana attack Rama. (RLK)

³¹ Sita. (RLK)

Márícha as his hand he pressed:

“Márícha , look! before our eyes
Round Rama’s home the plantains rise.
His hermitage is now in view:
Quick to the work we came to do!”

Thus Ravan spoke, Márícha heard
Obedient to his master’s word,
Threw off his giant shape and near
The cottage strayed a beauteous deer.
With magic power, by rapid change,
His borrowed form was fair and strange.
A sapphire tipped each horn with light;
His face was black relieved with white.
The turkis³² and the ruby shed
A glory from his ears and head.
His arching neck was proudly raised,
And lazulites³³ beneath it blazed.
With roseate bloom his flanks were dyed,
And lotus tints adorned his hide.
His shape was fair, compact, and slight;

His hoofs were carven lazulite.
His tail with every changing glow
Displayed the hues of Indra’s bow.³⁴
With glossy skin so strangely flecked,
With tints of every gem bedecked.
A light o’er Rama’s home he sent,
And through the wood, where’er he went.
The giant clad in that strange dress
That took the soul with loveliness,
To charm the fair Videhan’s eyes³⁵
With mingled wealth of mineral dyes,
Moved onward, cropping in his way,
The grass and grain and tender spray.
His coat with drops of silver bright,
A form to gaze on with delight,
He raised his fair neck as he went
To browse on bud and filament.
Now in the Cassia grove he strayed,
Now by the cot in plantains’ shade.
Slowly and slowly on he came
To catch the glances of the dame,
And the tall deer of splendid hue
Shone full at length in Sita’s view.
He roamed where’er his fancy chose
Where Rama’s leafy cottage rose.

³² turquoise. (RLK)

³³ a glassy, blue gemstone. (RLK)

³⁴ The Bow of Indra (chief of the Hindu gods and God of Thunder) is the rainbow. (RLK)

³⁵ the fair Videhan is Sita. (RLK)

Now near, now far, in careless ease,
He came and went among the trees.
Now with light feet he turned to fly,
Now, reassured, again drew nigh:
Now gambolled close with leap and bound,
Now lay upon the grassy ground:
Now sought the door, devoid of fear,
And mingled with the troop of deer;
Led them a little way, and thence
Again returned with confidence.
Now flying far, now turning back
Emboldened on his former track,
Seeking to win the lady's glance
He wandered through the green expanse.
Then thronging round, the woodland deer
Gazed on his form with wondering fear;
A while they followed where he led,
Then snuffed the tainted gale³⁶ and fled.
The giant, though he longed to slay
The startled quarry, spared the prey,
And mindful of the shape he wore
To veil his nature, still forbore.
Then Sita of the glorious eye,
Returning from her task drew nigh;
For she had sought the wood to bring
Each loveliest flower of early spring.
Now would the bright-eyed lady choose
Some gorgeous bud with blending hues,
Now plucked the mango's spray, and now
The bloom from an Aśoka bough.
She with her beauteous form, unmeet
For woodland life and lone retreat,
That wondrous dappled deer beheld
Gemmed with rich pearls, unparalleled,
His silver hair the lady saw,
His radiant teeth and lips and jaw,
And gazed with rapture as her eyes
Expanded in their glad surprise.
And when the false deer's glances fell
On her whom Rama loved so well,
He wandered here and there, and cast
A luminous beauty as he passed;
And Janak's child with strange delight
Kept gazing on the unwonted sight.

Canto XLIII. The Wondrous Deer.

She stooped, her hands with flowers to fill,
But gazed upon the marvel still:
Gazed on its back and sparkling side
Where silver hues with golden vied.

³⁶ the gale is tainted by the evil of the demon/giant Márícha. (RLK)

Joyous was she of faultless mould,
With glossy skin like polished gold.
And loudly to her husband cried
And bow-armed Lakshman by his side:
Again, again she called in glee:
“O come this glorious creature see;
Quick, quick, my lord, this deer to view.
And bring thy brother Lakshman too.”
As through the wood her clear tones rang,
Swift to her side the brothers sprang.
With eager eyes the grove they scanned,
And saw the deer before them stand.
But doubt was strong in Lakshman’s breast,
Who thus his thought and fear expressed:

“Stay, for the wondrous deer we see
The fiend Márícha’s self may be.
Ere now have kings who sought this place
To take their pastime in the chase,
Met from his wicked art defeat,
And fallen slain by like deceit.
He wears, well trained in magic guile,
The figure of a deer a while,
Bright as the very sun, or place
Where dwell the gay Gandharva race.³⁷
No deer, O Rama, e’er was seen
Thus decked with gold and jewels’ sheen.
‘Tis magic, for the world has ne’er,
Lord of the world, shown aught so fair.”

But Sita of the lovely smile,
A captive to the giant’s wile,
Turned Lakshman’s prudent speech aside
And thus with eager words replied:
“My honoured lord, this deer I see
With beauty rare enraptures me.
Go, chief of mighty arm, and bring
For my delight this precious thing.
Fair creatures of the woodland roam
Untroubled near our hermit home.
The forest cow and stag are there,
The fawn, the monkey, and the bear,
Where spotted deer delight to play,
And strong and beauteous Kinnars³⁸ stray.
But never, as they wandered by,
Has such a beauty charmed mine eye
As this with limbs so fair and slight,
So gentle, beautiful and bright.
O see, how fair it is to view

³⁷ low-ranking Hindu deities skilled in music. (RLK)

³⁸ a heavenly race of winged human-horse hybrids; famed lovers and musicians. (RLK)

With jewels of each varied hue:
Bright as the rising moon it glows,
Lighting the wood where'er it goes.
Ah me, what form and grace are there!
Its limbs how fine, its hues how fair!
Transcending all that words express,
It takes my soul with loveliness.
O, if thou would, to please me, strive
To take the beauteous thing alive,
How thou wouldst gaze with wondering eyes
Delighted on the lovely prize!
And when our woodland life is o'er,
And we enjoy our realm once more,
The wondrous animal will grace
The chambers of my dwelling-place,
And a dear treasure will it be
To Bharat and the queens and me,
And all with rapture and amaze
Upon its heavenly form will gaze.
But if the beauteous deer, pursued,
Thine arts to take it still elude,
Strike it, O chieftain, and the skin
Will be a treasure, laid within.
O, how I long my time to pass
Sitting upon the tender grass,
With that soft fell beneath me spread
Bright with its hair of golden thread!
This strong desire, this eager will,
Befits a gentle lady ill:
But when I first beheld, its look
My breast with fascination took.
See, golden hair its flank adorns,
And sapphires tip its branching horns.
Resplendent as the lunar way,
Or the first blush of opening day,
With graceful form and radiant hue
It charmed thy heart, O chieftain, too."

He heard her speech with willing ear,
He looked again upon the deer.
Its lovely shape his breast beguiled
Moved by the prayer of Janak's child,
And yielding for her pleasure's sake,
To Lakshman Rama turned and spake:

"Mark, Lakshman, mark how Sita's breast
With eager longing is possessed.
To-day this deer of wondrous breed
Must for his passing beauty bleed,
Brighter than e'er in Nandan³⁹ strayed,

³⁹ Indra's pleasure-ground or elysium.

Or Chaitraratha's⁴⁰ heavenly shade.
How should the groves of earth possess
Such all-surpassing loveliness!
The hair lies smooth and bright and fine,
Or waves upon each curving line,
And drops of living gold bedeck
The beauty of his side and neck.
O look, his crimson tongue between
His teeth like flaming fire is seen,
Flashing, whene'er his lips he parts,
As from a cloud the lightning darts.
O see his sunlike forehead shine
With emerald tints and almandine,
While pearly light and roseate glow
Of shells adorn his neck below.
No eye on such a deer can rest
But soft enchantment takes the breast:
No man so fair a thing behold
Ablaze with light of radiant gold,
Celestial, bright with jewels' sheen,
Nor marvel when his eyes have seen.
A king equipped with bow and shaft
Delights in gentle forest craft,
And as in boundless woods he strays
The quarry for the venison slays.
There as he wanders with his train
A store of wealth he oft may gain.
He claims by right the precious ore,
He claims the jewels' sparkling store.
Such gains are dearer in his eyes
Than wealth that in his chamber lies,
The dearest things his spirit knows,
Dear as the bliss which Śukra⁴¹ chose.
But oft the rich expected gain
Which heedless men pursue in vain,
The sage, who prudent counsels know,
Explain and in a moment show.
This best of deer, this gem of all,
To yield his precious spoils must fall,
And tender Sita by my side
Shall sit upon the golden hide.
Ne'er could I find so rich a coat
On spotted deer or sheep or goat.
No buck or antelope has such,
So bright to view, so soft to touch.
This radiant deer and one on high
That moves in glory through the sky,
Alike in heavenly beauty are,
One on the earth and one a star.

⁴⁰ The garden of Kuvera, the God of Riches.

⁴¹ Śukra is the regent of the planet Venus.

But, brother, if thy fears be true,
 And this bright creature that we view
 Be fierce Márícha in disguise,
 Then by this hand he surely dies.
 For that dire fiend who spurns control
 With bloody hand and cruel soul,
 Has roamed this forest and dismayed
 The holiest saints who haunt the shade.
 Great archers, sprung of royal race,
 Pursuing in the wood the chase,
 Have fallen by his wicked art,
 And now my shaft shall strike his heart.
 Vatapi,⁴² by his magic power
 Made heedless saints his flesh devour,
 Then, from within their frames he rent
 Forth bursting from imprisonment.
 But once his art in senseless pride
 Upon the mightiest saint he tried,
 Agastya's self, and caused him taste
 The baited meal before him placed.
 Vatapi, when the rite was o'er,
 Would take the giant form he wore,
 But Saint Agastya knew his wile
 And checked the giant with smile.
 "Vatapi, thou with cruel spite
 Hast conquered many an anchorite
 The noblest of the Brahman caste,—
 And now thy ruin comes at last."
 Now if my power he thus defies,
 This giant, like Vatapi dies,
 Daring to scorn a man like me,
 A self-subduing devotee.
 Yea, as Agastya slew the foe,
 My hand shall lay Márícha low
 Clad in thine arms thy bow in hand,
 To guard the Maithil⁴³ lady stand,
 With watchful eye and thoughtful breast
 Keeping each word of my behest
 I go, and hunting through the brake
 This wondrous deer will bring or take.
 Yea surely I will bring the spoil
 Returning from my hunter's toil
 See, Lakshman how my consort's eyes
 Are longing for the lovely prize.
 This day it falls, that I may win
 The treasure of so fair a skin.
 Do thou and Sita watch with care
 Lest danger seize you unaware.
 Swift from my bow one shaft will fly;

⁴² another demon (rakshasa). (RLK)

⁴³ Maithil lady (or Maithil dame) is an epithet for Sita; Maithil is the language spoken by the people of the Maithila region, Sita's birthplace. (RLK)

The stricken deer will fall and die
Then quickly will I strip the game
And bring the trophy to my dame.
 Jatáyus,⁴⁴ guardian good and wise,
 Our old and faithful friend,
The best and strongest bird that flies,
 His willing aid will lend
The Maithil lady well protect,
 For every chance provide,
And in thy tender care suspect
 A foe on every side.”

Canto XLIV. Márícha's Death.

Thus having warned his brother bold
He grasped his sword with haft of gold,
And bow with triple flexure bent,
His own delight and ornament;
Then bound two quivers to his side,
And hurried forth with eager stride.
Soon as the antlered monarch saw
The lord of monarchs near him draw,
A while with trembling heart he fled,
Then turned and showed his stately head.
With sword and bow the chief pursued
Where'er the fleeing deer he viewed
Sending from dell and lone recess
The splendour of his loveliness.
Now full in view the creature stood
Now vanished in the depth of wood;
Now running with a languid flight,
Now like a meteor lost to sight.
With trembling limbs away he sped;
Then like the moon with clouds o'erspread
Gleamed for a moment bright between
The trees, and was again unseen.
Thus in the magic deer's disguise
Márícha lured him to the prize,
And seen a while, then lost to view,
Far from his cot the hero drew.
Still by the flying game deceived
The hunter's heart was wroth and grieved,
And wearied with the fruitless chase
He stayed him in a shady place.
Again the rover of the night
Enraged the chieftain, full in sight,
Slow moving in the coppice near,
Surrounded by the woodland deer.
Again the hunter sought the game
That seemed a while to court his aim:
But seized again with sudden dread,

⁴⁴ an heroic vulture and friend of Rama. (RLK)

Beyond his sight the creature fled.
Again the hero left the shade,
Again the deer before him strayed.
With surer hope and stronger will
The hunter longed his prey to kill.
Then as his soul impatient grew,
An arrow from his side he drew,
Resplendent at the sunbeam's glow,
The crusher of the smitten foe.
With skillful heed the mighty lord
Fixed well shaft and strained the cord.
Upon the deer his eyes he bent,
And like a fiery serpent went
The arrow Brahma's self had framed,
Alive with sparks that hissed and flamed,
Like Indra's flashing levin,⁴⁵ true
To the false deer the missile flew
Cleaving his flesh that wonderous dart
Stood quivering in Márícha's heart.
Scarce from the ground one foot he sprang,
Then stricken fell with deadly pang.
Half lifeless, as he pressed the ground,
He gave a roar of awful sound
And ere the wounded giant died
He threw his borrowed form aside
Remembering still his lord's behest
He pondered in his heart how best
Sita might send her guard away,
And Ravan seize the helpless prey.
The monster knew the time was nigh,
And called aloud with eager cry,
"Ho, Sita, Lakshman" and the tone
He borrowed was like Rama's own.

So by that matchless arrow cleft,
The deer's bright form Márícha left,
Resumed his giant shape and size
And closed in death his languid eyes.
When Rama saw his awful foe
Gasp, smeared with blood, in deadly throes,
His anxious thoughts to Sita sped,
And the wise words that Lakshman said,
That this was false Márícha's art,
Returned again upon his heart.
He knew the foe he triumphed o'er
The name of great Márícha bore.
"The fiend," he pondered, 'ere he died,
"Ho, Lakshman! ho, my Sita!" cried
Ah, if that cry has reached her ear,
How dire must be my darling's fear!

⁴⁵ a bolt of lightning. (RLK)

And Lakshman of the mighty arm,
What thinks he in his wild alarm?
As thus he thought in sad surmise,
Each startled hair began to rise,
And when he saw the giant slain
And thought upon that cry again,
His spirit sank and terror pressed
Full sorely on the hero's breast.
Another deer he chased and struck,
He bore away the fallen buck,
To Janasthán⁴⁶ then turned his face
And hastened to his dwelling place.

Canto XLV. Lakshman's Departure.

But Sita hearing as she thought,
Her husband's cry with anguish fraught,
Called to her guardian, "Lakshman, run
And in the wood seek Raghu's son.
Scarce can my heart retain its throne,
Scarce can my life be called mine own,
As all my powers and senses fail
At that long, loud and bitter wail.
Haste to the wood with all thy speed
And save thy brother in his need.
Go, save him in the distant glade
Where loud he calls, for timely aid.
He falls beneath some giant foe—
A bull whom lions overthrow."

Deaf to her prayer, no step he stirred
Obedient to his mother's word,
Then Janak's child, with ire inflamed,
In words of bitter scorn exclaimed

"Sumitra's son, a friend in show,
Thou art in truth thy brother's foe,
Who canst at such any hour deny
Thy succour and neglect his cry.
Yes, Lakshman, smit with love of me
Thy brother's death thou fain wouldst see.
This guilty love thy heart has swayed
And makes thy feet so loth to aid.
Thou hast no love for Rama, no:
Thy joy is vice, thy thoughts are low
Hence thus unmoved thou yet canst stay
While my dear lord is far away.
If aught of ill my lord betide
Who led thee here, thy chief and guide,
Ah, what will be my hapless fate
Left in the wild wood desolate!"

⁴⁶ A part of the great Daṇḍak forest.

Thus spoke the lady sad with fear,
With many a sigh and many a tear,
Still trembling like a captured doe:
And Lakshman spoke to calm her woe:

“Videhan Queen, be sure of this,—
And at the thought thy fear dismiss,—
Thy husband’s mightier power defies
All Gods and angels of the skies,
Gandharvas, and the sons of light,
Serpents, and rovers of the night.
I tell thee, of the sons of earth,
Of Gods who boast celestial birth,
Of beasts and birds and giant hosts,
Of demigods, Gandharvas, ghosts,
Of awful fiends, O thou most fair,
There lives not one whose heart would dare
To meet thy Rama in the fight,
Like Indra’s self unmatched in might.
Such idle words thou must not say
Thy Rama lives whom none may slay.
I will not, cannot leave thee here
In the wild wood till he be near.
The mightiest strength can ne’er withstand
His eager force, his vigorous hand.
No, not the triple world allied
With all the immortal Gods beside.
Dismiss thy fear, again take heart,
Let all thy doubt and woe depart.
Thy lord, be sure, will soon be here
And bring thee back that best of deer.
Not his, not his that mournful cry,
Nor haply came it from the sky.
Some giant’s art was busy there
And framed a castle based on air.
A precious pledge art thou, consigned
To me by him of noblest mind,
Nor can I fairest dame, forsake
The pledge which Rama bade me take.
Upon our heads, O Queen, we drew
The giants’ hate when Rama slew
Their chieftain Khara, and the shade
Of Janasthán in ruin laid.
Through all this mighty wood they rove
With varied cries from grove to grove
On rapine bent they wander here:
But O, dismiss thy causeless fear.”

Bright flashed her eye as Lakshman spoke
And forth her words of fury broke
Upon her truthful guardian, flung

With bitter taunts that pierced and stung:
“Shame on such false compassion, base
Defiler of thy glorious race!
‘Twere joyous sight I ween to thee
My lord in direst strait to see.
Thou knowest Rama sore bested,
Or word like this thou ne’er hadst said.
No marvel if we find such sin
In rivals false to kith and kin.
Wretches like thee of evil kind,
Concealing crime with crafty mind.
Thou, wretch, thine aid wilt still deny,
And leave my lord alone to die.
Has love of me unnerved thy hand,
Or Bharat’s art this ruin planned?
But be the treachery his or thine,
In vain, in vain the base design.
For how shall I, the chosen bride
Of dark-hued Rama, lotus-eyed,
The queen who once called Rama mine,
To love of other men decline?
Believe me, Lakshman, Rama’s wife
Before thine eyes will quit this life,
And not a moment will she stay
If her dear lord have passed away.”

The lady’s bitter speech, that stirred
Each hair upon his frame, he heard.
With lifted hands together laid,
His calm reply he gently made:

“No words have I to answer now:
My deity, O Queen, art thou.
But ‘tis no marvel, dame, to find
Such lack of sense in womankind.
Throughout this world, O Maithil dame,
Weak women’s hearts are still the same.
Inconstant, urged by envious spite,
They sever friends and hate the right.
I cannot brook, Videhan Queen,
Thy words intolerably keen.
Mine ears thy fierce reproaches pain
As boiling water seethes the brain.
And now to bear me witness all
The dwellers in the wood I call,
That, when with words of truth I plead,
This harsh reply is all my meed.
Ah, woe is thee! Ah, grief, that still
Eager to do my brother’s will,
Mourning thy woman’s nature, I
Must see thee doubt my truth and die.
I fly to Rama’s side, and Oh,

May bliss attend thee while I go!
May all attendant wood-gods screen
Thy head from harm, O large-eyed Queen!
And though dire omens meet my sight
And fill my soul with wild affright,
May I return in peace and see
The son of Raghu safe with thee!”

The child of Janak heard him speak,
And the hot tear-drops down her cheek,
Increasing to a torrent, ran,
As thus once more the dame began:
“O Lakshman, if I widowed be
Godavari’s flood shall cover me,
Or I will die by cord, or leap,
Life weary, from yon rocky steep;
Or deadly poison will I drink,
Or ‘neath the kindled flames will sink,
But never, reft of Rama, can
Consent to touch a meaner man.”

The Maithil dame with many sighs,
And torrents pouring from her eyes,
The faithful Lakshman thus addressed,
And smote her hands upon her breast.
Sumitra’s son, o’erwhelmed by fears,
Looked on the large-eyed queen:
He saw that flood of burning tears,
He saw that piteous mien.
He yearned sweet comfort to afford,
He strove to soothe her pain;
But to the brother of her lord
She spoke no word again.
His reverent hands once more he raised,
His head he slightly bent,
Upon her face he sadly gazed,
And then toward Rama went.

Canto XLVI. The Guest.

The angry Lakshman scarce could brook
Her bitter words, her furious look.
With dark forebodings in his breast
To Rama’s side he quickly pressed.

Then ten-necked Ravan saw the time
Propitious for his purposed crime.
A mendicant⁴⁷ in guise he came
And stood before the Maithil dame.
His garb was red, with tufted hair
And sandalled feet a shade he bare,

⁴⁷ a monk

And from the fiend's left shoulder slung
 A staff and water-vessel hung.
 Near to the lovely dame he drew,
 While both the chiefs were far from view,
 As darkness takes the evening air
 When neither sun nor moon is there.
 He bent his eye upon the dame,
 A princess fair, of spotless fame:
 So might some baleful planet be
 Near Moon-forsaken Rohini.⁴⁸
 As the fierce tyrant nearer drew,
 The trees in Janasthán that grew
 Waved not a leaf for fear and woe,
 And the hushed wind forbore to blow.
 Godavari's waters as they fled,
 Saw his fierce eye-balls flashing red,
 And from each swiftly-gliding wave
 A melancholy murmur gave.
 Then Ravan, when his eager eye
 Beheld the longed-for moment nigh,
 In mendicant's apparel dressed
 Near to the Maithil lady pressed.
 In holy guise, a fiend abhorred,
 He found her mourning for her lord.
 Thus threatening draws Śaniśchar⁴⁹ nigh
 To Chitra⁵⁰ in the evening sky;
 Thus the deep well by grass concealed
 Yawns treacherous in the verdant field.
 He stood and looked upon the dame
 Of Rama, queen of spotless fame
 With her bright teeth and each fair limb
 Like the full moon she seemed to him,
 Sitting within her leafy cot,
 Weeping for woe that left her not.
 Thus, while with joy his pulses beat,
 He saw her in her lone retreat,
 Eyed like the lotus, fair to view
 In silken robes of amber hue.
 Pierced to the core by Kama's dart
 He murmured texts with lying art,
 And questioned with a soft address
 The lady in her loneliness.
 The fiend essayed with gentle speech
 The heart of that fair dame to reach,
 Pride of the worlds, like Beauty's Queen
 Without her darling lotus seen:

"O thou whose silken robes enfold
 A form more fair than finest gold,

⁴⁸ The favourite wife of the Moon.

⁴⁹ The planet Saturn.

⁵⁰ Another favourite of the Moon; one of the lunar mansions.

With lotus garland on thy head,
 Like a sweet spring with bloom o'erspread,
 Who art thou, fair one, what thy name,
 Beauty, or Honour, Fortune, Fame,
 Spirit, or nymph, or Queen of love
 Descended from thy home above?
 Bright as the dazzling jasmine shine
 Thy small square teeth in level line.
 Like two black stars aglow with light
 Thine eyes are large and pure and bright.
 Thy charms of smile and teeth and hair
 And winning eyes, O thou most fair,
 Steal all my spirit, as the flow
 Of rivers mines the bank below.
 How bright, how fine each flowing tress!
 How firm those orbs beneath thy dress!
 That dainty waist with ease were spanned,
 Sweet lady, by a lover's hand.
 Mine eyes, O beauty, ne'er have seen
 Goddess or nymph so fair of mien,
 Or bright Gandharva's heavenly dame,
 Or woman of so perfect frame.
 In youth's soft prime thy years are few,
 And earth has naught so fair to view.
 I marvel one like thee in face
 Should make the woods her dwelling-place.
 Leave, lady, leave this lone retreat
 In forest wilds for thee unmeet,
 Where giants fierce and strong assume
 All shapes and wander in the gloom.
 These dainty feet were formed to tread
 Some palace floor with carpets spread,
 Or wander in trim gardens where
 Each opening bud perfumes the air.
 The richest robe thy form should deck,
 The rarest gems adorn thy neck,
 The sweetest wreath should bind thy hair,
 The noblest lord thy bed should share.
 Art thou akin, O fair of form,
 To Rudras,⁵¹ or the Gods of storm,⁵²
 Or to the glorious Vasus⁵³? How
 Can less than these be bright as thou?
 But never nymph or heavenly maid
 Or Goddess haunts this gloomy shade.
 Here giants roam, a savage race;
 What led thee to so dire a place?
 Here monkeys leap from tree to tree,
 And bears and tigers wander free;
 Here ravening lions prowl, and fell

⁵¹ The Rudras, agents in creation, are eight in number; they sprang from the forehead of Brahma.

⁵² Maruts, the attendants of Indra.

⁵³ Radiant demi-gods.

Hyenas in the thickets yell,
And elephants infuriate roam,
Mighty and fierce, their woodland home.
Dost thou not dread, so soft and fair,
Tiger and lion, wolf and bear?
Hast thou, O beauteous dame, no fear
In the wild wood so lone and drear?
Whose and who art thou? whence and why
Sweet lady, with no guardian nigh,
Dost thou this awful forest tread
By giant bands inhabited?"

The praise the high-souled Ravan spoke
No doubt within her bosom woke.
His saintly look and Brahman guise
Deceived the lady's trusting eyes.
With due attention on the guest
Her hospitable rites she pressed.
She bade the stranger to a seat,
And gave him water for his feet.
The bowl and water-pot he bare,
And garb which wandering Brahmans wear
 Forbade a doubt to rise.
Won by his holy look she deemed
The stranger even as he seemed
 To her deluded eyes.
Intent on hospitable care,
She brought her best of woodland fare,
 And showed her guest a seat.
She bade the saintly stranger lave
His feet in water which she gave,
 And sit and rest and eat.
He kept his eager glances bent
On her so kindly eloquent,
Wife of the noblest king;
And longed in heart to steal her thence,
Preparing by the dire offence,
Death on his head to bring.
The lady watched with anxious face
For Rama coming from the chase
 With Lakshman by his side:
But nothing met her wandering glance
Save the wild forest's green expanse
 Extending far and wide.

Canto XLVII. Ravan's Wooing.

As, clad in mendicant's disguise,
He questioned thus his destined prize,
She to the seeming saintly man
The story of her life began.
"My guest is he," she thought, "and I,
To 'scape his curse, must needs reply:"

[Sita tells the story of Rama's banishment]

“But come, refresh thy soul, and rest
Here for a while an honoured guest,
For he, my lord, will soon be here
With fresh supply of woodland cheer,
Large store of venison of the buck,
Or some great boar his hand has struck.
Meanwhile, O stranger, grant my prayer:
Thy name, thy race, thy birth declare,
And why with no companion thou
Roamest in Dandak forest now.”

Thus questioned Sita, Rama's dame.
Then fierce the stranger's answer came:
“Lord of the giant legions, he
From whom celestial armies flee,—
The dread of hell and earth and sky,
Ravan the Rakshas⁵⁴ king am I.
Now when thy gold-like form I view
Arrayed in silks of amber hue,
My love, O thou of perfect mould,
For all my dames is dead and cold.
A thousand fairest women, torn
From many a land my home adorn.
But come, loveliest lady, be
The queen of every dame and me.
My city Lanka, glorious town,
Looks from a mountain's forehead down
Where ocean with his flash and foam
Beats madly on mine island home.
With me, O Sita, shalt thou rove
Delighted through each shady grove,
Nor shall thy happy breast retain
Fond memory of this life of pain.
In gay attire, a glittering band,
Five thousand maids shall round thee stand,
And serve thee at thy beck and sign,
If thou, fair Sita, wilt be mine.”

Then forth her noble passion broke
As thus in turn the lady spoke:
“Me, me the wife of Rama, him
The lion lord with lion's limb,
Strong as the sea, firm as the rock,
Like Indra in the battle shock.
The lord of each auspicious sign,
The glory of his princely line,
Like some fair Bodh tree strong and tall,
The noblest and the best of all,

⁵⁴ Demon.

Rama, the heir of happy fate
 Who keeps his word inviolate,
 Lord of the lion gait, possessed
 Of mighty arm and ample chest,
 Rama the lion-warrior, him
 Whose moon bright face no fear can dim,
 Rama, his bridled passions' lord,
 The darling whom his sire adored,—
 Me, me the true and loving dame
 Of Rama, prince of deathless fame—
 Me wouldst thou vainly woo and press?
 A jackal woo a lioness!
 Steal from the sun his glory! such
 Thy hope Lord Rama's wife to touch.
 Ha! Thou hast seen the trees of gold,
 The sign which dying eyes behold,
 Thus seeking, weary of thy life,
 To win the love of Rama's wife.
 Fool! wilt thou dare to rend away
 The famished lion's bleeding prey,
 Or from the threatening jaws to take
 The fang of some envenomed snake?
 What, wouldst thou shake with puny hand
 Mount Mandar,⁵⁵ towering o'er the land,
 Put poison to thy lips and think
 The deadly cup a harmless drink?
 With pointed needle touch thine eye,
 A razor to thy tongue apply,
 Who wouldst pollute with impious touch
 The wife whom Rama loves so much?
 Be round thy neck a millstone tied,
 And swim the sea from side to side;
 Or raising both thy hands on high
 Pluck sun and moon from yonder sky;
 Or let the kindled flame be pressed,
 Wrapt in thy garment, to thy breast;
 More wild the thought that seeks to win
 Rama's dear wife who knows not sin.
 The fool who thinks with idle aim
 To gain the love of Rama's dame,
 With dark and desperate footing makes
 His way o'er points of iron stakes.
 As Ocean to a bubbling spring,
 The lion to a fox, the king
 Of all the birds that ply the wing
 To an ignoble crow
 As gold to lead of little price,
 As to the drainings of the rice
 The drink they quaff in Paradise,
 The Amrit's heavenly flow,

⁵⁵ The mountain which was used by the Gods as a churning stick at the Churning of the Ocean.

As sandal dust with perfume sweet
Is to the mire that soils our feet,
 A tiger to a cat,
As the white swan is to the owl,
The peacock to the waterfowl,
 An eagle to a bat,
Such is my lord compared with thee;
And when with bow and arrows he,
Mighty as Indra's self shall see
 His foeman, armed to slay,
Thou, death-doomed like the fly that sips
The oil that on the altar drips,
Shalt cast the morsel from thy lips
 And lose thy half-won prey.”
Thus in high scorn the lady flung
The biting arrows of her tongue
In bitter words that pierced and stung
 The rover of the night.
She ceased. Her gentle cheek grew pale,
Her loosened limbs began to fail,
And like a plantain in the gale
 She trembled with affright.
He terrible as Death stood nigh,
And watched with fierce exulting eye
 The fear that shook her frame.
To terrify the lady more,
He counted all his triumphs o'er,
Proclaimed the titles that he bore,
 His pedigree and name.

Canto XLVIII. Ravan's Speech.

With knitted brow and furious eye
The stranger made his fierce reply:
“In me O fairest dame, behold
The brother of the King of Gold.
The Lord of Ten Necks my title, named
Ravan, for might and valour famed.
Gods and Gandharva hosts I scare;
Snakes, spirits, birds that roam the air
Fly from my coming, wild with fear,
Trembling like men when Death is near.
Vaiśravan once, my brother, wrought
To ire, encountered me and fought,

But yielding to superior might
Fled from his home in sore affright.
Lord of the man-drawn chariot, still
He dwells on famed Kailasa's hill.
I made the vanquished king resign
The glorious car which now is mine,—
Pushpak, the far-renowned, that flies
Will-guided through the buxom skies.

Celestial hosts by Indra led
Flee from my face disquieted,
And where my dreaded feet appear
The wind is hushed or breathless is fear.
Where'er I stand, where'er I go
The troubled waters cease to flow,
Each spell-bound wave is mute and still
And the fierce sun himself is chill.
Beyond the sea my Lanka stands
Filled with fierce forms and giant bands,
A glorious city fair to see
As Indra's Amaravati.
A towering height of solid wall,
Flashing afar, surrounds it all,
Its golden courts enchant the sight,
And gates aglow with lazulite.
Steeds, elephants, and cars are there,
And drums' loud music fills the air,
Fair trees in lovely gardens grow
Whose boughs with varied fruitage glow.
Thou, beauteous Queen, with me shalt dwell
In halls that suit a princess well,
Thy former fellows shall forget
Nor think of women with regret,
No earthly joy thy soul shall miss,
And take its fill of heavenly bliss.
Of mortal Rama think no more,
Whose terms of days will soon be o'er.
King Daśaratha looked in scorn
On Rama though the eldest born,
Sent to the woods the weakling fool,
And set his darling son to rule.
What, O thou large-eyed dame, hast thou
To do with fallen Rama now,
From home and kingdom forced to fly,
A wretched hermit soon to die?
Accept thy lover, nor refuse
The giant king who fondly woos.
O listen, nor reject in scorn
A heart by Kama's arrows torn.
If thou refuse to hear my prayer,
Of grief and coming woe beware;
For the sad fate will fall on thee
Which came on hapless Urvaśi,
When with her foot she chanced to touch
Purúravas, and sorrowed much.
My little finger raised in fight
Were more than match for Rama's might.
O fairest, blithe and happy be
With him whom fortune sends to thee."

Such were the words the giant said,

And Sita's angry eyes were red.
She answered in that lonely place
The monarch of the giant race:

“Art thou the brother of the Lord
Of Gold by all the world adored,
And sprung of that illustrious seed
Wouldst now attempt this evil deed?
I tell thee, impious Monarch, all
The giants by thy sin will fall,
Whose reckless lord and king thou art,
With foolish mind and lawless heart.
Yea, one may hope to steal the wife
Of Indra and escape with life.
But he who Rama's dame would tear
From his loved side must needs despair.
Yea, one may steal fair Śachi,⁵⁶ dame
Of Him who shoots the thunder flame,
May live successful in his aim
And length of day may see;
But hope, O giant King, in vain,
Though cups of Amrit⁵⁷ thou may drain,
To shun the penalty and pain
Of wronging one like me.”

Canto XLIX. The Kidnapping Of Sita.

The Rakshas monarch, thus addressed,
His hands a while together pressed,
And straight before her startled eyes
Stood monstrous in his giant size.
Then to the lady, with the lore
Of eloquence, he spoke once more:
“Thou scarce,” he cried, “hast heard aright
The glories of my power and might.
I borne sublime in air can stand
And with these arms upheave the land,
Drink the deep flood of Ocean dry
And Death with conquering force defy,
Pierce the great sun with furious dart
And to her depths cleave earth apart.
See, thou whom love and beauty blind,
I wear each form as wills my mind.”

As thus he spake in burning ire
His glowing eyes were red with fire.
His gentle garb aside was thrown
And all his native shape was shown.
Terrific, monstrous, wild, and dread

⁵⁶ Śachi is the loved and lovely wife of Indra, and she is taken as the type of a woman protected by a jealous and all-powerful husband.

⁵⁷ nectar of the gods. (RLK)

As the dark God who rules the dead,
His fiery eyes in fury rolled,
His limbs were decked with glittering gold.
Like some dark cloud the monster showed,
And his fierce breast with fury glowed.
The ten-faced rover of the night,
With twenty arms exposed to sight,
His saintly guise aside had laid
And all his giant height displayed.
Attired in robes of crimson dye
He stood and watched with angry eye
The lady in her bright array
Resplendent as the dawn of day
When from the east the sunbeams break,
And to the dark-haired lady spake:
“If thou would call that lord thine own
Whose fame in every world is known,
Look kindly on my love, and be
Bride of a consort meet for thee.
With me let blissful years be spent,
For ne’er thy choice shalt thou repent.
No deed of mine shall e’er displease
My darling as she lives at ease.
Thy love for mortal man resign,
And to a worthier lord incline.
Ah foolish lady, seeming wise
In thine own weak and partial eyes,
By what fair graces art thou held
To Rama from his realm expelled?
Misfortunes all his life attend,
And his brief days are near their end.
Unworthy prince, infirm of mind!
A woman spoke and he resigned
His home and kingdom and withdrew
From troops of friends and retinue.
And sought this forest dark and dread
By savage beasts inhabited.”

Thus Ravan urged the lady meet
For love, whose words were soft and sweet.
Near and more near the giant pressed
As love’s hot fire inflamed his breast.
The leader of the giant crew
His arm around the lady threw:
Thus Budha⁵⁸ with ill-omened might
Steals Rohini’s⁵⁹ delicious light.
One hand her glorious tresses grasped,
One with its ruthless pressure clasped
The body of his lovely prize,

⁵⁸ Mercury: to be carefully distinguished from Buddha.

⁵⁹ the Moon’s wife. (RLK)

The Maithil dame with lotus eyes.
The sylvan Gods in wild alarm
Marked his huge teeth and ponderous arm,
And from that Death-like presence fled,
Of mountain size and towering head.
Then seen was Ravan's magic car
Aglow with gold which blazed afar,—
The mighty car which asses drew
Thundering as it onward flew.
He spared not harsh rebuke to chide
The lady as she moaned and cried,
Then with his arm about her waist
His captive in the car he placed.
In vain he threatened: long and shrill
Rang out her lamentation still,
O Rama! which no fear could stay:
But her dear lord was far away.
Then rose the fiend, and toward the skies
Bore his poor helpless struggling prize:
Hurrying through the air above
The dame who loathed his proffered love.
So might a soaring eagle bear
A serpent's consort through the air.
As on he bore her through the sky
She shrieked aloud her bitter cry.
As when some wretch's lips complain
In agony of maddening pain;
"O Lakshman, thou whose joy is still
To do thine elder brother's will,
This fiend, who all disguises wears,
From Rama's side his darling tears.
Thou who couldst leave bliss, fortune, all,
Yea life itself at duty's call,
Dost thou not see this outrage done
To hapless me, O Raghu's son?
'Tis thine, O victor of the foe,
To bring the haughtiest spirit low,
How canst thou such an outrage see
And let the guilty fiend go free?
Ah, seldom in a moment's time
Comes bitter fruit of sin and crime,
But in the day of harvest pain
Comes like the ripening of the grain.
So thou whom fate and folly lead
To ruin for this guilty deed,
Shalt die by Rama's arm ere long
A dreadful death for hideous wrong.
Ah, too successful in their ends
Are Queen Kaikeyi and her friends,
When virtuous Rama, dear to fame,
Is mourning for his ravished dame.
Ah me, ah me! a long farewell

To lawn and glade and forest dell
In Janasthán's wild region, where
The Cassia trees are bright and fair
With all your tongues to Rama say
That Ravan bears his wife away.
Farewell, a long farewell to thee,
O pleasant stream Godavari,
Whose rippling waves are ever stirred
By many a glad wild water-bird!
All ye to Rama's ear relate
The giant's deed and Sita's fate.
O all ye Gods who love this ground
Where trees of every leaf abound,
Tell Rama I am stolen hence,
I pray you all with reverence.
On all the living things beside
That these dark boughs and coverts hide,
Ye flocks of birds, ye troops of deer,
I call on you my prayer to hear.
All ye to Rama's ear proclaim
That Ravan tears away his dame
With forceful arms,—his darling wife,
Dearer to Rama than his life.
O, if he knew I dwelt in hell,
My mighty lord, I know full well,
Would bring me, conqueror, back to-day,
Though Yáma's self-reclaimed his prey."

Thus from the air the lady sent
With piteous voice her last lament,
And as she wept she chanced to see
The vulture on a lofty tree.
As Ravan bore her swiftly by,
On the dear bird she bent her eye,
And with a voice which woe made faint
Renewed to him her wild complaint:

"O see, the king who rules the race
Of giants, cruel, fierce and base,
Ravan the spoiler bears me hence
The helpless prey of violence.
This fiend who roves in midnight shade
By thee, dear bird, can ne'er be stayed,
For he is armed and fierce and strong
Triumphant in the power to wrong.
For thee remains one only task,
To do, kind friend, the thing I ask.
To Rama's ear by thee be borne
How Sita from her home is torn,
And to the valiant Lakshman tell
The giant's deed and what befell."

Canto L. Jatáyus.

The vulture from his slumber woke
And heard the words which Sita spoke
He raised his eye and looked on her,
Looked on her giant ravisher.
That noblest bird with pointed beak,
Majestic as a mountain peak,
High on the tree addressed the king
Of giants, wisely counselling:
“O Ten-necked lord, I firmly hold
To faith and laws ordained of old,
And thou, my brother, shouldst refrain
From guilty deeds that shame and stain.
The vulture king supreme in air,
Jatáyus is the name I bear.
Thy captive, known by Sita’s name,
Is the dear consort and the dame
Of Rama, Daśaratha’s heir
Who makes the good of all his care.
Lord of the world in might he vies
With the great Gods of seas and skies.
The law he boasts to keep allows
No king to touch another’s spouse,
And, more than all, a prince’s dame
High honour and respect may claim.
Back to the earth thy way incline,
Nor think of one who is not thine.
Heroic souls should hold it shame
To stoop to deeds which others blame,
And all respect by them is shown
To dames of others as their own.
Not every case of bliss and gain
The Scripture’s holy texts explain,
And subjects, when that light is dim,
Look to their prince and follow him.
The king is bliss and profit, he
Is store of treasures fair to see,
And all the people’s fortunes spring,
Their joy and misery, from the king.
If, lord of giant race, thy mind
Be fickle, false, to sin inclined,
How wilt thou kingly place retain?
High thrones in heaven no sinners gain.
The soul which gentle passions sway
Ne’er throws its nobler part away,
Nor will the mansion of the base
Long be the good man’s dwelling-place.
Prince Rama, chief of high renown,
Has wronged thee not in field or town.
Ne’er has he sinned against thee: how
Canst thou resolve to harm him now?

If moved by Śúrpanakha's prayer
The giant Khara sought him there,
And fighting fell with baffled aim,
His and not Rama's is the blame.
Say, mighty lord of giants, say
What fault on Rama canst thou lay?
What has the world's great master done
That thou should steal his precious one?
Quick, quick the Maithil dame release;
Let Rama's consort go in peace,
Lest scorched by his terrific eye
Beneath his wrath thou fall and die
Like Vritra when Lord Indra threw
The lightning flame that smote and slew.
Ah fool, with blinded eyes to take
Home to thy heart a venomed snake!
Ah foolish eyes, too blind to see
That Death's dire coils entangle thee!
The prudent man his strength will spare,
Nor lift a load too great to bear.
Content is he with wholesome food
Which gives him life and strength renewed,
But who would dare the guilty deed
That brings no fame or glorious meed,
Where merit there is none to win
And vengeance soon o'ertakes the sin?
My course of life, Pulastya's son,
For sixty thousand years has run.
Lord of my kind I still maintain
Mine old hereditary reign.
I, worn by years, am older far
Than thou, young lord of bow and car,
In coat of glittering mail encased
And armed with arrows at thy waist,
But not unchallenged shalt thou go,
Or steal the dame without a blow.
Thou canst not, King, before mine eyes
Bear off unchecked thy lovely prize,
Safe as the truth of Scripture bent
By no close logic's argument.
Stay if thy courage let thee, stay
And meet me in the battle fray,
And thou shalt stain the earth with gore
Falling as Khara fell before.
Soon Rama, clothed in bark, shall smite
Thee, his proud foe, in deadly fight,—
Rama, from whom have oft times fled
The Daitya hosts discomfited.
No power have I to kill or slay:
The princely youths are far away,
But soon shalt thou with fearful eye
Struck down beneath their arrows lie.

But while I yet have life and sense,
Thou shalt not, tyrant, carry hence
Fair Sita, Rama's honoured queen,
With lotus eyes and lovely mien.
Whate'er the pain, whate'er the cost,
Though in the struggle life be lost,
The will of Raghu's noblest son
And Daśaratha must be done.
Stay for a while, O Ravan, stay,
One hour thy flying car delay,
And from that glorious chariot thou
Shalt fall like fruit from shaken bough,
For I to thee, while yet I live,
The welcome of a foe will give."

Canto LI. The Combat.

Ravan's red eyes in fury rolled:
Bright with his armlets' flashing gold,
In high disdain, by passion stirred
He rushed against the sovereign bird.
With clash and din and furious blows
Of murderous battle met the foes:
Thus urged by winds two clouds on high
Meet warring in the stormy sky.
Then fierce the dreadful combat raged
As fiend and bird in war engaged,
As if two winged mountains sped
To dire encounter overhead.
Keen pointed arrows thick and fast,
In never ceasing fury cast,
Rained hurtling on the vulture king
And smote him on the breast and wing.
But still that noblest bird sustained
The cloud of shafts which Ravan rained,
And with strong beak and talons bent
The body of his foeman rent.
Then wild with rage the ten-necked king
Laid ten swift arrows on his string,—
Dread as the staff of Death were they,
So terrible and keen to slay.
Straight to his ear the string he drew,
Straight to the mark the arrows flew,
And pierced by every iron head
The vulture's mangled body bled.
One glance upon the car he bent
Where Sita wept with shrill lament,
Then heedless of his wounds and pain
Rushed at the giant king again.
Then the brave vulture with the stroke
Of his resistless talons broke
The giant's shafts and bow whereon
The fairest pearls and jewels shone.

The monster paused, by rage unmanned:
A second bow soon armed his hand,
Whence pointed arrows swift and true
In hundreds, yea in thousands, flew.
The monarch of the vultures, plied
With ceaseless darts on every side,
Showed like a bird that turns to rest
Close covered by the branch-built nest.
He shook his pinions to repel
The storm of arrows as it fell;
Then with his talons snapped in two
The mighty bow which Ravan drew.
Next with terrific wing he smote
So fiercely on the giant's coat,
The harness, glittering with the glow
Of fire, gave way beneath the blow.
With storm of murderous strokes he beat
The harnessed asses strong and fleet,—
Each with a goblin's monstrous face
And plates of gold his neck to grace.
Then on the car he turned his ire,—
The will-moved car that shone like fire,
And broke the glorious chariot, broke
The golden steps and pole and yoke.
The chouris and the silken shade
Like the full moon to view displayed,
Together with the guards who held
Those emblems, to the ground he felled.
The royal vulture hovered o'er
The driver's head, and pierced and tore
With his strong beak and dreaded claws
His mangled brow and cheek and jaws.
With broken car and sundered bow,
His charioteer and team laid low,
One arm about the lady wound,
Sprang the fierce giant to the ground.
Spectators of the combat, all
The spirits viewed the monster's fall:
Lauding the vulture every one
Cried with glad voice, Well done! well done!
But weak with length of days, at last
The vulture's strength was failing fast.
The fiend again assayed to bear
The lady through the fields of air.
But when the vulture saw him rise
Triumphant with his trembling prize,
Bearing the sword that still was left
When other arms were lost or cleft,
Once more, impatient of repose,
Swift from the earth her champion rose,
Hung in the way the fiend would take,
And thus addressing Ravan spake:

“Thou, King of giants, rash and blind,
Wilt be the ruin of thy kind,
Stealing the wife of Rama, him
With lightning scars on chest and limb.
A mighty host obeys his will
And troops of slaves his palace fill;
His lords of state are wise and true,
Kinsmen has he and retinue.
As thirsty travellers drain the cup,
Thou drinkest deadly poison up.
The rash and careless fool who heeds
No coming fruit of guilty deeds,
A few short years of life shall see,
And perish doomed to death like thee.
Say whither wilt thou fly to loose
Thy neck from Death’s entangling noose,
Caught like the fish that finds too late
The hook beneath the treacherous bait?
Never, O King—of this be sure—
Will Raghu’s fiery sons endure,
Terrific in their vengeful rage,
This insult to their hermitage.
Thy guilty hands this day have done
A deed which all reprove and shun,
Unworthy of a noble chief,
The pillage loved by coward thief.
Stay, if thy heart allow thee, stay
And meet me in the deadly fray.
Soon shall thou stain the earth with gore,
And fall as Khara fell before.
The fruits of former deeds o’erpower
The sinner in his dying hour:
And such a fate on thee, O King,
Thy tyranny and madness bring.
Not e’en the Self-existent Lord,
Who reigns by all the worlds adored,
Would dare attempt a guilty deed
Which the dire fruits of crime succeed.”

Thus brave Jaṭayus, best of birds,
Addressed the fiend with moving words,
Then ready for the swift attack
Swooped down upon the giant’s back.
Down to the bone the talons went;
With many a wound the flesh was rent:
Such blows infuriate drivers deal
Their elephants with pointed steel.
Fixed in his back the strong beak lay,
The talons stripped the flesh away.
He fought with claws and beak and wing,
And tore the long hair of the king.
Still as the royal vulture beat

The giant with his wings and feet,
Swelled the fiend's lips, his body shook
With furious rage too great to brook.
About the Maithil dame he cast
One huge left arm and held her fast.
In furious rage to frenzy fanned
He struck the vulture with his hand.
Jatáyus mocked the vain assay,
And rent his ten left arms away.
Down dropped the severed limbs: anew
Ten others from his body grew:
Thus bright with pearly radiance glide
Dread serpents from the hillock side,
Again in wrath the giant pressed
The lady closer to his breast,
And foot and fist sent blow on blow
In ceaseless fury at the foe.
So fierce and dire the battle, waged
Between those mighty champions, raged:
Here was the lord of giants, there
The noblest of the birds of air.
Thus, as his love of Rama taught,
The faithful vulture strove and fought.
But Ravan seized his sword and smote
His wings and side and feet and throat.
At mangled side and wing he bled;
He fell, and life was almost fled.
The lady saw her champion lie,
His plumes distained with gory dye,
And hastened to the vulture's side
Grieving as though a kinsman died.

 The lord of Lanka's island viewed
 The vulture as he lay:
 Whose back like some dark cloud was hued,
 His breast a paly grey,
 Like ashes, when by none renewed,
 The flame has died away.
 The lady saw with mournful eye,
 Her champion press the plain,—
 The royal bird, her true ally
 Whom Ravan's might had slain.
 Her soft arms locked in strict embrace
 Around his neck she kept,
 And lovely with her moon-bright face
 Bent o'er her friend and wept.

Canto LII. Ravan's Flight.

Fair as the lord of silvery rays
Whom every star in heaven obeys,
The Maithil dame her plaint renewed
O'er him by Ravan's might subdued:
"Dreams, omens, auguries foreshow

Our coming lot of weal and woe:
But thou, my Rama, couldst not see
The grievous blow which falls on thee.
The birds and deer desert the brakes
And show the path my captor takes,
And thus e'en now this royal bird
Flew to mine aid by pity stirred.
Slain for my sake in death he lies,
The broad-winged rover of the skies.
O Rama, haste, thine aid I crave:
O Lakshman, why delay to save?
Brave sons of old Ikshvaku, hear
And rescue in this hour of fear."

Her flowery wreath was torn and rent,
Crushed was each sparkling ornament.
She with weak arms and trembling knees
Clung like a creeper to the trees,
And like some poor deserted thing
With wild shrieks made the forest ring.
But swift the giant reached her side,
As loud on Rama's name she cried.
Fierce as grim Death one hand he laid
Upon her tresses' lovely braid.
"That touch, thou impious King, shall be
The ruin of thy race and thee."
The universal world in awe
That outrage on the lady saw,
All nature shook convulsed with dread,
And darkness o'er the land was spread.
The Lord of Day grew dark and chill,
And every breath of air was still.
The Eternal Father of the sky
Beheld the crime with heavenly eye,
And spake with solemn voice, "The deed,
The deed is done, of old decreed."
Sad were the saints within the grove,
But triumph with their sorrow strove.
They wept to see the Maithil dame
Endure the outrage, scorn, and shame:
They joyed because his life should pay
The penalty incurred that day.
Then Ravan raised her up, and bare
His captive through the fields of air,
Calling with accents loud and shrill
On Rama and on Lakshman still.
With sparkling gems on arm and breast,
In silk of paly amber dressed,
High in the air the Maithil dame
Gleamed like the lightning's flashing flame.
The giant, as the breezes blew
Upon her robes of amber hue,

And round him twined that gay attire,
Showed like a mountain girt with fire.
The lady, fairest of the fair,
Had wreathed a garland round her hair;
Its lotus petals bright and sweet
Rained down about the giant's feet.
Her vesture, bright as burning gold,
Gave to the wind each glittering fold,
Fair as a gilded cloud that gleams
Touched by the Day-God's tempered beams.
Yet struggling in the fiend's embrace,
The lady with her sweet pure face,
Far from her lord, no longer wore
The light of joy that shone before.
Like some sad lily by the side
Of waters which the sun has dried;
Like the pale moon uprising through
An autumn cloud of darkest hue,
So was her perfect face between
The arms of giant Ravan seen:
Fair with the charm of braided tress
And forehead's finished loveliness;
Fair with the ivory teeth that shed
White lustre through the lips' fine red,
Fair as the lotus when the bud
Is rising from the parent flood.
With faultless lip and nose and eye,
Dear as the moon that floods the sky
With gentle light, of perfect mould,
She seemed a thing of burnished gold,
Though on her cheek the traces lay
Of tears her hand had brushed away.
But as the moon-beams swiftly fade
Ere the great Day-God shines displayed,
So in that form of perfect grace
Still trembling in the fiend's embrace,
From her beloved Rama reft,
No light of pride or joy was left.
The lady with her golden hue
O'er the swart fiend a lustre threw,
As when embroidered girths enfold
An elephant with gleams of gold.
Fair as the lily's bending stem,—
Her arms adorned with many a gem,
A lustre to the fiend she lent
Gleaming from every ornament,
As when the cloud-shot flashes light
The shadows of a mountain height.
Whene'er the breezes earthward bore
The tinkling of the zone she wore,
He seemed a cloud of darkness hue
Sending forth murmurs as it flew.

As on her way the dame was sped
 From her sweet neck fair flowers were shed,
 The swift wind caught the flowery rain
 And poured it o'er the fiend again.
 The wind-stirred blossoms, sweet to smell,
 On the dark brows of Ravan fell,
 Like lunar constellations set
 On Meru for a coronet.
 From her small foot an anklet fair
 With jewels slipped, and through the air,
 Like a bright circlet of the flame
 Of thunder, to the valley came.
 The Maithil lady, fair to see
 As the young leaflet of a tree
 Clad in the tender hues of spring,
 Flashed glory on the giant king,
 As when a gold-embroidered zone
 Around an elephant is thrown.
 While, bearing far the lady, through
 The realms of sky the giant flew,
 She like a gleaming meteor cast
 A glory round her as she passed.
 Then from each limb in swift descent
 Dropped many a sparkling ornament:
 On earth they rested dim and pale
 Like fallen stars when virtues fail.⁶⁰
 Around her neck a garland lay
 Bright as the Star-God's silvery ray:
 It fell and flashed like Ganga sent
 From heaven above the firmament.⁶¹
 The birds of every wing had flocked
 To stately trees by breezes rocked:
 These bowed their wind-swept heads and said:
 "My lady sweet, be comforted."
 With faded blooms each brook within
 Whose waters moved no gleamy fin,
 Stole sadly through the forest dell
 Mourning the dame it loved so well.
 From every woodland region near
 Came lions, tigers, birds, and deer,
 And followed, each with furious look,
 The way her flying shadow took.
 For Sita's loss each lofty hill
 Whose tears were waterfall, and rill,
 Lifting on high each arm-like steep,
 Seemed in the general woe to weep.
 When the great sun, the lord of day,
 Saw Ravan tear the dame away,
 His glorious light began to fail

⁶⁰ The spirits of the good dwell in heaven until their store of accumulated merit is exhausted. Then they redescend to earth in the form of falling stars.

⁶¹ See The Descent of Ganga, [Book I Canto XLIV](#).

And all his disk grew cold and pale.
“If Ravan from the forest flies
With Rama’s Sita as his prize,
Justice and truth have vanished hence,
Honour and right and innocence.”
Thus rose the cry of wild despair
From spirits as they gathered there.
In trembling troops in open lawns
Wept, wild with woe, the startled fawns,
And a strange terror changed the eyes
They lifted to the distant skies.
On silvan Gods who love the dell
A sudden fear and trembling fell,
As in the deepest woe they viewed
The lady by the fiend subdued.
Still in loud shrieks was heard afar
That voice whose sweetness naught could mar,
While eager looks of fear and woe
She bent upon the earth below.
The lady of each winning wile
With pearly teeth and lovely smile,
Seized by the lord of Lanka’s isle,
Looked down for friends in vain.
She saw no friend to aid her, none,
Not Rama nor the younger son
Of Daśaratha, and undone
She swooned with fear and pain.

Canto LIII. Sita’s Threats.

Soon as the Maithil lady knew
That high through air the giant flew,
Distressed with grief and sore afraid
Her troubled spirit sank dismayed.
Then, as anew the waters welled
From those red eyes which sorrow swelled,
Forth in keen words her passion broke,
And to the fierce-eyed fiend she spoke:
“Canst thou attempt a deed so base,
Untroubled by the deep disgrace,—
To steal me from my home and fly,
When friend or guardian none was nigh?
Thy craven soul that longed to steal,
Fearing the blows that warriors deal,
Upon a magic deer relied
To lure my husband from my side,
Friend of his sire, the vulture king
Lies low on earth with mangled wing,
Who gave his aged life for me
And died for her he sought to free.
Ah, glorious strength indeed is thine,
Thou meanest of thy giant line,
Whose courage dared to tell thy name

And conquer in the fight a dame.
Does the vile deed that thou hast done
Cause thee no shame, thou wicked one—
A woman from her home to rend
When none was near his aid to lend?
Through all the worlds, O giant King,
The tidings of this deed will ring,
This deed in law and honour's spite
By one who claims a hero's might.
Shame on thy boasted valour, shame!
Thy prowess is an empty name.
Shame, giant, on this cursed deed
For which thy race is doomed to bleed!
Thou fliest swifter than the gale,
For what can strength like thine avail?
Stay for one hour, O Ravan, stay;
Thou shalt not flee with life away.
Soon as the royal chieftains' sight
Falls on the thief who roams by night,
Thou wilt not, tyrant, live one hour
Though backed by all thy legions' power.
Ne'er can thy puny strength sustain
The tempest of their arrowy rain:
Have e'er the trembling birds withstood
The wild flames raging in the wood?
Hear me, O Ravan, let me go,
And save thy soul from coming woe.
Or if thou wilt not set me free,
Wroth for this insult done to me.
With his brave brother's aid my lord
Against thy life will raise his sword.
A guilty hope inflames thy breast
His wife from Rama's home to wrest.
Ah fool, the hope thou hast is vain;
Thy dreams of bliss shall end in pain.
If torn from all I love by thee
My godlike lord no more I see,
Soon will I die and end my woes,
Nor live the captive of my foes.
Ah fool, with blinded eyes to choose
The evil and the good refuse!
So the sick wretch with stubborn will
Turns fondly to the cates that kill,
And madly draws his lips away
From medicine that would check decay.
About thy neck securely wound

The deadly coil of Fate is bound,
And thou, O Ravan, dost not fear
Although the hour of death is near.
With death-doomed sight thine eyes behold
The gleaming of the trees of gold,—

See dread Vaitarani, the flood
That rolls a stream of foamy blood,—
See the dark wood by all abhorred—
Its every leaf a threatening sword.
The tangled thickets thou shall tread
Where thorns with iron points are spread.
For never can thy days be long,
Base plotter of this shame and wrong
To Rama of the lofty soul:
He dies who drinks the poisoned bowl.
The coils of death around thee lie:
They hold thee and thou canst not fly.
Ah whither, tyrant, wouldst thou run
The vengeance of my lord to shun?
By his unaided arm alone
Were twice seven thousand fiends o'erthrown:
Yes, in the twinkling of an eye
He forced thy mightiest fiends to die.
And shall that lord of lion heart,
Skilled in the bow and spear and dart,
Spare thee, O fiend, in battle strife,
The robber of his darling wife?"

These were her words, and more beside,
By wrath and bitter hate supplied.
Then by her woe and fear o'erthrown
She wept again and made her moan.
As long she wept in grief and dread,
Scarce conscious of the words she said,
The wicked giant onward fled
 And bore her through the air.
As firm he held the Maithil dame,
Still wildly struggling, o'er her frame
With grief and bitter misery came
 The trembling of despair.

Canto LIV. Lanka.

He bore her on in rapid flight,
And not a friend appeared in sight.
But on a hill that o'er the wood
Raised its high top five monkeys stood.
From her fair neck her scarf she drew,
And down the glittering vesture flew.
With earring, necklet, chain, and gem,
Descending in the midst of them:
"For these," she thought, "my path may show,
And tell my lord the way I go."
Nor did the fiend, in wild alarm,
Mark when she drew from neck and arm
And foot the gems and gold, and sent
To earth each gleaming ornament.
The monkeys raised their tawny eyes

That closed not in their first surprise,
And saw the dark-eyed lady, where
She shrieked above them in the air.
High o'er their heads the giant passed
Holding the weeping lady fast.
O'er Pampa's flashing flood he sped
And on to Lanka's city fled.
He bore away in senseless joy
The prize that should his life destroy,
Like the rash fool who hugs beneath
His robe a snake with venomous teeth.
Swift as an arrow from a bow,
Speeding o'er lands that lay below,
Sublime in air his course he took
O'er wood and rock and lake and brook.
He passed at length the sounding sea
Where monstrous creatures wander free,—
Seat of Lord Varun's ancient reign,
Controller of the eternal main.
The angry waves were raised and tossed
As Ravan with the lady crossed,
And fish and snake in wild unrest
Showed flashing fin and gleaming crest.
Then from the blessed troops who dwell
In air celestial voices fell:
"O ten-necked King," they cried, "attend:
This guilty deed will bring thine end."

Then Ravan speeding like the storm,
Bearing his death in human form,
The struggling Sita, lighted down
In royal Lanka's glorious town;
A city bright and rich, that showed
Well-ordered street and noble road;
Arranged with just division, fair
With multitudes in court and square.
Thus, all his journey done, he passed
Within his royal home at last.
There in a queenly bower he placed
The black-eyed dame with dainty waist:
Thus in her chamber Maya laid
The lovely Maya, demon maid.
Then Ravan gave command to all
The dread she-fiends who filled the hall:
"This captive lady watch and guard
From sight of man and woman barred.
But all the fair one asks beside
Be with unsparing hand supplied:
As though 'twere I that asked, withhold
No pearls or dress or gems or gold.
And she among you that shall dare
Of purpose or through want of care

One word to vex her soul to say,
Throws her unvalued life away.”

Thus spake the monarch of their race
To those she-fiends who thronged the place,
And pondering on the course to take
Went from the chamber as he spake.
He saw eight giants, strong and dread,
On flesh of bleeding victims fed,
Proud in the boon which Brahma gave,
And trusting in its power to save.
He thus the mighty chiefs addressed
Of glorious power and strength possessed:
“Arm, warriors, with the spear and bow;
With all your speed from Lanka go,
For Janasthán, our own no more,
Is now defiled with giants’ gore;
The seat of Khara’s royal state
Is left unto us desolate.
In your brave hearts and might confide,
And cast ignoble fear aside.
Go, in that desert region dwell
Where the fierce giants fought and fell.
A glorious host that region held,
For power and might unparalleled,
By Dúshan and brave Khara led,—
All, slain by Rama’s arrows, bled.
Hence boundless wrath that spurns control
Reigns paramount within my soul,
And naught but Rama’s death can sate
The fury of my vengeful hate.
I will not close my slumbering eyes
Till by this hand my foeman dies.
And when mine arm has slain the foe
Who laid those giant princes low,
Long will I triumph in the deed,
Like one enriched in utmost need.
Now go; that I this end may gain,
In Janasthán, O chiefs, remain.
Watch Rama there with keenest eye,
And all his deeds and movements spy.
Go forth, no helping art neglect,
Be brave and prompt and circumspect,
And be your one endeavour still
To aid mine arm this foe to kill.
Oft have I seen your warrior might
Proved in the forehead of the fight,
And sure of strength I know so well
Send you in Janasthán to dwell.”

The giants heard with prompt assent

The pleasant words he said,
And each before his master bent

For meet salute, his head.
Then as he bade, without delay,
From Lanka's gate they passed,
And hurried forward on their way
Invisible and fast.

Canto LV. Sita In Prison.

Thus Ravan his commandment gave
To those eight giants strong and brave,
So thinking in his foolish pride
Against all dangers to provide.
Then with his wounded heart aflame
With love he thought upon the dame,
And took with hasty steps the way
To the fair chamber where she lay.
He saw the gentle lady there
Weighed down by woe too great to bear,
Amid the throng of fiends who kept
Their watch around her as she wept:
A pinnace sinking neath the wave
When mighty winds around her rave:
A lonely herd-forsaken deer,
When hungry dogs are pressing near.
Within the bower the giant passed:
Her mournful looks were downward cast.
As there she lay with streaming eyes
The giant bade the lady rise,
And to the shrinking captive showed
The glories of his rich abode,
Where thousand women spent their days
In palaces with gold ablaze;
Where wandered birds of every sort,
And jewels flashed in hall and court.
Where noble pillars charmed the sight
With diamond and lazulite,
And others glorious to behold
With ivory, crystal, silver, gold.
There swelled on high the tambour's sound,
And burnished ore was bright around
He led the mournful lady where
Resplendent gold adorned the stair,
And showed each lattice fair to see
With silver work and ivory:
Showed his bright chambers, line on line,
Adorned with nets of golden twine.
Beyond he showed the Maithil dame
His gardens bright as lightning's flame,
And many a pool and lake he showed
Where blooms of gayest colour glowed.
Through all his home from view to view
The lady sunk in grief he drew.
Then trusting in her heart to wake

Desire of all she saw, he spake:
“Three hundred million giants, all
Obedient to their master’s call,
Not counting young and weak and old,
Serve me with spirits fierce and bold.
A thousand culled from all of these
Wait on the lord they long to please.
This glorious power, this pomp and sway,
Dear lady, at thy feet I lay:
Yea, with my life I give the whole,
O dearer than my life and soul.
A thousand beauties fill my hall:
Be thou my wife and rule them all.
O hear my supplication! why
This reasonable prayer deny?
Some pity to thy suitor show,
For love’s hot flames within me glow.
This isle a hundred leagues in length,
Encompassed by the ocean’s strength,
Would all the Gods and fiends defy
Though led by Him who rules the sky.
No God in heaven, no sage on earth,
No minstrel of celestial birth,
No spirit in the worlds I see
A match in power and might for me.
What wilt thou do with Rama, him
Whose days are short, whose light is dim,
Expelled from home and royal sway,
Who treads on foot his weary way?
Leave the poor mortal to his fate,
And wed thee with a worthier mate.
My timid love, enjoy with me
The prime of youth before it flee.
Do not one hour the hope retain
To look on Rama’s face again.
For whom would wildest thought beguile
To seek thee in the giants’ isle?
Say who is he has power to bind
In toils of net the rushing wind.
Whose is the mighty hand will tame
And hold the glory of the flame?
In all the worlds above, below,
Not one, O fair of form, I know
Who from this isle in fight could rend
The lady whom these arms defend.
Fair Queen, o’er Lanka’s island reign,
Sole mistress of the wide domain.
Gods, rovers of the night like me,
And all the world thy slaves will be.
O’er thy fair brows and queenly head
Let consecrating balm be shed,
And sorrow banished from thy breast,

Enjoy my love and take thy rest.
Here never more thy soul shall know
The memory of thy former woe,
And here shall thou enjoy the meed
Deserved by every virtuous deed.
Here garlands glow of flowery twine,
With gorgeous hues and scent divine.
Take gold and gems and rich attire:
Enjoy with me thy heart's desire.
There stand, of chariots far the best,
The car my brother once possessed.
Which, victor in the stricken field,
I forced the Lord of Gold to yield.
'Tis wide and high and nobly wrought,
Bright as the sun and swift as thought.
Therein O Sita, shalt thou ride
Delighted by thy lover's side.
But sorrow mars with lingering trace
The splendour of thy lotus face.
A cloud of woe is o'er it spread,
And all the light of joy is fled."

The lady, by her woe distressed,
One corner of her raiment pressed
To her sad cheek like moonlight clear,
And wiped away a falling tear.
The rover of the night renewed
His eager pleading as he viewed
The lady stand like one distraught,
Striving to fix her wandering thought:

"Think not, sweet lady, of the shame
Of broken vows, nor fear the blame.
The saints approve with favouring eyes
This union knit with marriage ties.
O beauty, at thy radiant feet
I lay my heads, and thus entreat.
One word of grace, one look I crave:
Have pity on thy prostrate slave.
These idle words I speak are vain,
Wrung forth by love's consuming pain,
And ne'er of Ravan be it said
He wooed a dame with prostrate head."
Thus to the Maithil lady sued
The monarch of the giant brood,
And "She is now mine own," he thought,
In Death's dire coils already caught.

Canto LVI. Sita's Disdain.

His words the Maithil lady heard
Oppressed by woe but undeterred.
Fear of the fiend she cast aside,

And thus in noble scorn replied:
 "His word of honour never stained
 King Daśaratha nobly reigned,
 The bridge of right, the friend of truth.
 His eldest son, a noble youth,
 Is Rama, virtue's faithful friend,
 Whose glories through the worlds extend.
 Long arms and large full eyes has he,
 My husband, yea a God to me.
 With shoulders like the forest king's,
 From old Ikshvaku's line he springs.
 He with his brother Lakshman's aid
 Will smite thee with the vengeful blade.
 Hadst thou but dared before his eyes
 To lay thine hand upon the prize,
 Thou stretched before his feet hadst lain
 In Janasthán like Khara slain.
 Thy boasted rovers of the night
 With hideous shapes and giant might,—
 Like serpents when the feathered king
 Swoops down with his tremendous wing,—
 Will find their useless venom fail
 When Rama's mighty arms assail.
 The rapid arrows bright with gold,
 Shot from the bow he loves to hold,
 Will rend thy frame from flank to flank
 As Ganga's waves erode the bank.
 Though neither God nor fiend have power
 To slay thee in the battle hour,
 Yet from his hand shall come thy fate,
 Struck down before his vengeful hate.
 That mighty lord will strike and end
 The days of life thou hast to spend.
 Thy days are doomed, thy life is sped
 Like victims to the pillar led.
 Yea, if the glance of Rama bright
 With fury on thy form should light,
 Thou scorched this day wouldst fall and die
 Like Kama slain by Rudra's eye.⁶²
 He who from heaven the moon could throw,
 Or bid its bright rays cease to glow,—
 He who could drain the mighty sea
 Will set his darling Sita free.
 Fled is thy life, thy glory, fled
 Thy strength and power: each sense is dead.
 Soon Lanka widowed by thy guilt
 Will see the blood of giants spilt.
 This wicked deed, O cruel King,
 No triumph, no delight will bring.
 Thou with outrageous might and scorn

⁶² See [Book I Canto XXV](#).

A woman from her lord hast torn.
My glorious husband far away,
Making heroic strength his stay,
Dwells with his brother, void of fear,
In Dandak forest lone and drear.
No more in force of arms confide:
That haughty strength, that power and pride
My hero with his arrowy rain
From all thy bleeding limbs will drain.
When urged by fate's dire mandate, nigh
Comes the fixt hour for men to die.
Caught in Death's toils their eyes are blind,
And folly takes each wandering mind.
So for the outrage thou hast done
The fate is near thou canst not shun,—
The fate that on thyself and all
Thy giants and thy town shall fall.
I spurn thee: can the altar dight
With vessels for the sacred rite,
O'er which the priest his prayer has said,
Be sullied by an outcaste's tread?
So me, the consort dear and true
Of him who clings to virtue too,
Thy hated touch shall ne'er defile,
Base tyrant lord of Lanka's isle.
Can the white swan who floats in pride
Through lilies by her consort's side,
Look for one moment, as they pass,
On the poor diver in the grass?
This senseless body waits thy will,
To torture, chain, to wound or kill.
I will not, King of giants, strive
To keep this fleeting soul alive
But never shall they join the name
Of Sita with reproach and shame.”

Thus as her breast with fury burned
Her bitter speech the dame returned.
Such words of rage and scorn, the last
She uttered, at the fiend she cast.
Her taunting speech the giant heard,
And every hair with anger stirred.
Then thus with fury in his eye
He made in threats his fierce reply:
“Hear Maithil lady, hear my speech:
List to my words and ponder each.
If o'er thy head twelve months shall fly
And thou thy love wilt still deny,
My cooks shall mince thy flesh with steel
And serve it for my morning meal.”
Thus with terrific threats to her
Spake Ravan, cruel ravener.

Mad with the rage her answer woke
He called the fiendish train and spoke:
“Take her, ye Rakshas dames, who fright
With hideous form and mien the sight,
Who make the flesh of men your food,—
And let her pride be soon subdued.”
He spoke, and at his word the band
Of fiendish monsters raised each hand
In reverence to the giant king,
And pressed round Sita in a ring.
Ravan once more with stern behest
To those she-fiends his speech addressed:
Shaking the earth beneath his tread,
He stamped his furious foot and said:
“To the Ásoka garden bear
The dame, and guard her safely there
Until her stubborn pride be bent
By mingled threat and blandishment.
See that ye watch her well, and tame,
Like some she-elephant, the dame.”

They led her to that garden where
The sweetest flowers perfumed the air,
Where bright trees bore each rarest fruit,
And birds, enamoured, ne’er were mute.
Bowed down with terror and distress,
Watched by each cruel giantess,—
Like a poor solitary deer
When ravening tigresses are near,—
The hapless lady lay distraught
Like some wild thing but newly caught,
And found no solace, no relief
From agonizing fear and grief;
Not for one moment could forget
Each terrifying word and threat,
Or the fierce eyes upon her set
 By those who watched around.
She thought of Rama far away,
She mourned for Lakshman as she lay
In grief and terror and dismay
 Half fainting on the ground.

Canto LVII. Sita Comforted.

Soon as the fiend had set her down
Within his home in Lanka’s town
Triumph and joy filled Indra’s breast,
Whom thus the Eternal Sire addressed:

“This deed will free the worlds from woe
And cause the giants’ overthrow.
The fiend has borne to Lanka’s isle
The lady of the lovely smile,

True consort born to happy fate
With features fair and delicate.
She looks and longs for Rama's face,
But sees a crowd of demon race,
And guarded by the giant's train
Pines for her lord and weeps in vain.
But Lanka founded on a steep
Is girdled by the mighty deep,
And how will Rama know his fair
And blameless wife is prisoned there?
She on her woe will sadly brood
And pine away in solitude,
And heedless of herself, will cease
To live, despairing of release.
Yes, pondering on her fate, I see
Her gentle life in jeopardy.
Go, Indra, swiftly seek the place,
And look upon her lovely face.
Within the city make thy way:
Let heavenly food her spirit stay."

Thus Brahma spake: and He who slew
The cruel demon Paka, flew
Where Lanka's royal city lay,
And Sleep went with him on his way.
"Sleep," cried the heavenly Monarch, "close
Each giant's eye in deep repose."
Thus Indra spoke, and Sleep fulfilled
With joy his mandate, as he willed,
To aid the plan the Gods proposed,
The demons' eyes in sleep she closed.
Then Śachi's lord, the Thousand-eyed,
To the Aśoka garden hied.
He came and stood where Sita lay,
And gently thus began to say:
"Lord of the Gods who hold the sky,
Dame of the lovely smile, am I.
Weep no more, lady, weep no more;
Thy days of woe will soon be o'er.
I come, O Janak's child, to be
The helper of thy lord and thee.
He through my grace, with hosts to aid,
This sea-girt land will soon invade.
'Tis by my art that slumbers close
The eyelids of thy giant foes.
Now I, with Sleep, this place have sought,
Videhan lady, and have brought
A gift of heaven's ambrosial food
To stay thee in thy solitude.
Receive it from my hand, and taste,
O lady of the dainty waist:
For countless ages thou shall be

From pangs of thirst and hunger free.”

But doubt within her bosom woke
As to the Lord of Gods she spoke:
“How may I know for truth that thou
Whose form I see before me now
Art verily the King adored
By heavenly Gods, and Śachi’s lord?
With Raghu’s sons I learnt to know
The certain signs which Godhead show.
These marks before mine eyes display
If o’er the Gods thou bear the sway.”

The heavenly lord of Śachi heard,
And did according to her word.
Above the ground his feet were raised;
With eyelids motionless he gazed.
No dust upon his raiment lay,
And his bright wreath was fresh and gay.
Nor was the lady’s glad heart slow
The Monarch of the Gods to know,
And while the tears unceasing ran
From her sweet eyes she thus began:
“My lord has gained a friend in thee,
And I this day thy presence see
Shown clearly to mine eyes, as when
Rama and Lakshman, lords of men,
Beheld it, and their sire the king,
And Janak too from whom I spring.
Now I, O Monarch of the Blest,
Will eat this food at thy behest,
Which thou hast brought me, of thy grace,
To aid and strengthen Raghu’s race.”

She spoke, and by his words relieved,
The food from Indra’s hand received,
Yet ere she ate the balm he brought,
On Lakshman and her lord she thought.
“If my brave lord be still alive,
If valiant Lakshman yet survive,
May this my taste of heavenly food
Bring health to them and bliss renewed!”

She ate, and that celestial food
Stayed hunger, thirst, and lassitude,
And all her strength restored.
Great joy her hopeful spirit stirred
At the glad tidings newly heard
Of Lakshman and her lord.
And Indra’s heart was joyful too:
He bade the Maithil dame adieu,
His saving errand done.
With Sleep beside him parting thence

He sought his heavenly residence
To prosper Raghu's son.

Book IV: Kishkindha Kanda (“The Book of the Monkey Kingdom”): Summary

Rama and Hanuman in Kishkindha.

The kishkindha kanda is set in the monkey citadel Kishkindha. Rama and Lakshmana meet Hanuman , the greatest of monkey heroes and an adherent of Sugriva, the banished pretender to the throne of kishkindha. Rama befriends Sugriva and helps him by killing his elder brother Vali thus regaining the kingdom of Kishkindha, in exchange for a promise to help Rama recover Sita. However Sugriva soon forgets his promise and spends his time in debauchery. The clever monkey queen Tara, second wife of Sugriva (and former wife of Vali), calmly intervenes to prevent an enraged Lakshmana from destroying the monkey citadel. She then eloquently convinces Sugriva to honor his pledge. Sugriva sends search parties to the four corners of the earth, only to return without success from north, east, and west. The southern search party under the leadership of Angad and Hanuman learns from a vulture named Sampati, who is the elder brother of Jatáyus, that Sita was taken to Lanka.



Figure 5 Unknown artist, Rama and the Monkey Chiefs, 19th c.

BOOK V: Sundara Kanda (“The Book of Beauty”): Selections

Detailed account of Hanuman’s adventures, including his meeting with Sita.

The *sundara kanda* is traditionally read first when reading the *Ramayana* and derives its name from the nickname given to Hanuman by his mother. Book V forms the heart of Valmiki’s *Ramayana* and consists of a detailed, vivid account of Hanuman’s adventures, which were briefly alluded to in Book IV.

After learning about Sita, Hanuman assumes a gargantuan form and makes a colossal leap across the ocean to Lanka where Hanuman explores the demon city and spies on Ravana. He locates Sita in the ashoka grove, where Ravana and his demons alternately woo and threaten her. Hanuman reassures Sita, giving her Rama’s signet ring as a sign of good faith. He offers to carry Sita back to Rama; however, she refuses, reluctant to allow any male other than her husband to touch her. She says that Rama himself must come and avenge the insult of her abduction.

Hanuman then wreaks havoc in Lanka by destroying trees and buildings, and killing Ravana’s warriors. He allows himself to be captured and presented to Ravana and gives a bold speech demanding Sita’s release. Hanuman’s tail is set on fire, but he escapes his bonds and, leaping from roof to roof, uses his tail to set fire to Ravana’s citadel. Finally, he makes the giant leap back to the mainland. The joyous search party returns to Kishkindha with the news.



Figure 6 Unknown artist, "Hanuman in Lanka," 16th c.

In the selections for this chapter, Canto I is the story of the Hanuman’s leap to Lanka. Cantos XV-XXIV tell the story of Hanuman finding Sita and offering to rescue her and includes Sita’s refusal to leave.

Canto I. Hanuman’s Leap.

Thus Ravana’s foe resolved to trace
The captive to her hiding-place
Through airy pathways overhead
Which heavenly minstrels visited.
With straining nerve and eager brows,
Like some strong husband of the cows,
In ready might he stood prepared
For the bold task his soul has dared.
O’er gem-like grass that flashed and glowed

The Vanar like a lion strode.
Roused by the thunder of his tread,
The beasts to shady coverts fled.
Tall trees he crushed or hurled aside,
And every bird was terrified.
Around him loveliest lilies grew,
Pale pink, and red, and white, and blue,
And tints of many a metal lent
The light of varied ornament.
Gandharvas, changing forms at will,
And Yakshas roamed the lovely hill,
And countless Serpent-Gods were seen
Where flowers and grass were fresh and green.
As some resplendent serpent takes
His pastime in the best of lakes,
So on the mountain's woody height
The Vanar wandered with delight.
Then, standing on the flowery sod,
He paid his vows to saint and God.
Svayambhu⁶³ and the Sun he prayed,
And the swift Wind to lend him aid,
And Indra, sovereign of the skies,
To bless his hardy enterprise.
Then once again the chief addressed
The Vanars from the mountain crest:
"Swift as a shaft from Rama's bow
To Ravan's city will I go,
And if she be not there will fly
And seek the lady in the sky;
Or, if in heaven she be not found,
Will hither bring the giant bound."

He ceased; and mustering his might
Sprang downward from the mountain height,
While, shattered by each mighty limb,
The trees unrooted followed him.
The shadow on the ocean cast
By his vast form, as on he passed,
Flew like a ship before the gale
When the strong breeze has filled the sail,
And where his course the Vanar held
The sea beneath him raged and swelled.
Then Gods and all the heavenly train
Poured flowerets down in gentle rain;
Their voices glad Gandharvas raised,
And saints in heaven the Vanar praised.
Fain would the Sea his succour lend
And Raghu's noble son befriend.
He, moved by zeal for Rama's sake,
The hill Mainaka⁶⁴ thus bespake:

⁶³ Brahma the Self-Existent.

“O strong Mainaka, heaven’s decree
In days of old appointed thee
To be the Asurs bar, and keep
The rebels in the lowest deep.
Thou guardest those whom heaven has cursed
Lest from their prison-house they burst,
And standest by the gates of hell
Their limitary sentinel.
To thee is given the power to spread
Or spring above thy watery bed.
Now, best of noble mountains, rise
And do the thing that I advise.
E’en now above thy buried crest
Flies mighty Hanuman, the best
Of Vanars, moved for Rama’s sake
A wonderous deed to undertake.
Lift up thy head that he may stay
And rest him on his weary way.”

He heard, and from his watery shroud,
As bursts the sun from autumn cloud,
Rose swift, crowned with plant and tree,
And stood above the foamy sea.
There with his lofty peaks upraised
Bright as a hundred suns he blazed,
And crest and crag of burnished gold
Flashed on the flood that round him rolled.
The Vanar thought the mountain rose
A hostile bar to interpose,
And, like a wind-swept cloud, o’erthrew
The glittering mountain as he flew.
Then from the falling hill rang out
A warning voice and joyful shout.
Again he raised him high in air
To meet the flying Vanar there,
And standing on his topmost peak
In human form began to speak:⁶⁵
“Best of the Vanars’ noblest line,
A mighty task, O chief, is thine.
Here for a while, I pray thee, light
And rest upon the breezy height.
A prince of Raghu’s line was he
Who gave his glory to the Sea,⁶⁶
Who now to Rama’s envoy shows
High honour for the debt he owes.
He bade me lift my buried head
Uprising from my watery bed,
And woo the Vanar chief to rest

⁶⁴ Mainaka was the son of Himalaya and Mena or Menaka.

⁶⁵ The spirit of the mountain is separable from the mountain. Himalaya has also been represented as standing in human form on one of his own peaks.

⁶⁶ Sagar or the Sea is said to have derived its name from Sagar. The story is fully told in Book I, Cantos [XLII](#), [XLIII](#), and [XLIV](#).

A moment on my glittering crest.
 Refresh thy weary limbs, and eat
 My mountain fruits for they are sweet.
 I too, O chieftain, know thee well;
 Three worlds thy famous virtues tell;
 And none, I ween, with thee may vie
 Who spring impetuous through the sky.
 To every guest, though mean and low.
 The wise respect and honour show;
 And how shall I neglect thee, how
 Slight the great guest so near me now?
 Son of the Wind, 'tis thine to share
 The might of him who shakes the air;
 And,—for he loves his offspring,—he
 Is honoured when I honour thee.
 Of yore, when Krita's age⁶⁷ was new,
 The little hills and mountains flew
 Where'er they listed, borne on wings
 More rapid than the feathered king's.⁶⁸
 But mighty terror came on all
 The Gods and saints who feared their fall.
 And Indra in his anger rent
 Their pinions with the bolts he sent.
 When in his ruthless fury he
 Levelled his flashing bolt at me,
 The great-souled Wind inclined to save,
 And laid me neath the ocean's wave.
 Thus by the favour of the sire
 I kept my cherished wings entire;
 And for this deed of kindness done
 I honour thee his noble son.
 O come, thy weary limbs relieve,
 And honour due from me receive."
 "I may not rest," the Vanar cried;
 "I must not stay or turn aside.
 Yet pleased am I, thou noblest hill,
 And as the deed accept thy will."

Thus as he spoke he lightly pressed
 With his broad hand the mountain's crest,
 Then bounded upward to the height
 Of heaven, rejoicing in his might,
 And through the fields of boundless blue,
 The pathway of his father, flew.
 Gods, saints, and heavenly bards beheld
 That flight that none had paralleled,
 Then to the Nagas' mother⁶⁹ came

⁶⁷ Krita is the first of the four ages of the world, the golden age, also called Satya.

⁶⁸ *Parvata* means a mountain and in the Vedas a cloud. Hence in later mythology the mountains have taken the place of the clouds as the objects of the attacks of Indra the Sun-God. The feathered king is Garuḍa.

⁶⁹ "The children of Surasa were a thousand mighty many-headed serpents, traversing the sky." WILSON'S *Vishnu Purana*, Vol. II. p.

And thus addressed the sun-bright dame:
“See, Hanuman with venturous leap
Would spring across the mighty deep,—
A Vanar prince, the Wind-God’s seed:
Come, Surasa, his course impede.
In Rakshas form thy shape disguise,
Terrific, like a hill in size:
Let thy red eyes with fury glow,
And high as heaven thy body grow.
With fearful tusks the chief defy,
That we his power and strength may try.
He will with guile thy hold elude,
Or own thy might, by thee subdued.”

Pleased with the grateful honours paid,
The godlike dame their words obeyed,
Clad in a shape of terror she
Sprang from the middle of the sea,
And, with fierce accents that appalled
All creatures, to the Vanar called:
“Come, prince of Vanars, doomed to be
My food this day by heaven’s decree.
Such boon from ages long ago
To Brahma’s favouring will I owe.”

She ceased, and Hanuman replied,
By shape and threat unterrified:
“Brave Rama with his Maithil spouse
Lodged in the shade of Dandak’s boughs,
Thence Ravan king of giants stole
Sita the joy of Rama’s soul.
By Rama’s high behest to her
I go a willing messenger;
And never shouldst them hinder one
Who toils for Daśaratha’s son.
First captive Sita will I see,
And him who sent and waits for me,
Then come and to thy will submit,
Yea, by my truth I promise it.”
“Nay, hope not thus thy life to save;
Not such the boon that Brahma gave.
Enter my mouth,” was her reply,
“Then forward on thy journey hie!”⁷⁰

“Stretch, wider stretch thy jaws,” exclaimed
The Vanar chief, to ire inflamed;
And, as the Rakshas near him drew,
Ten leagues in height his stature grew.
Then straight, her threatening jaws between,
A gulf of twenty leagues was seen.

⁷⁰ She means “pursue thy journey if thou can.”

To fifty leagues he waxed, and still
 Her mouth grew wider at her will.
 Then smaller than a thumb became,
 Shrunk by his power, the Vanar's frame.⁷¹
 He leaped within, and turning round
 Sprang through the portal at a bound.
 Then hung in air a moment, while
 He thus addressed her with a smile:
 "O Daksha's child,⁷² farewell at last!
 For I within thy mouth have passed.
 Thou hast the gift of Brahma's grace:
 I go, the Maithil queen to trace."
 Then, to her former shape restored,
 She thus addressed the Vanar lord:
 "Then forward to the task, and may
 Success and joy attend thy way!
 Go, and the rescued lady bring
 In triumph to her lord and king."

Then hosts of spirits as they gazed
 The daring of the Vanar praised.
 Through the broad fields of ether, fast
 Garud's royal self, he passed,
 The region of the cloud and rain,
 Loved by the gay Gandharva train,
 Where mid the birds that came and went
 Shone Indra's glorious bow unbent,
 And like a host of wandering stars
 Flashed the high Gods' celestial cars.
 Fierce Sinhika⁷³ who joyed in ill
 And changed her form to work her will,
 Descried him on his airy way
 And marked the Vanar for her prey.
 "This day at length," the demon cried,
 "My hunger shall be satisfied,"
 And at his passing shadow caught
 Delighted with the cheering thought.
 The Vanar felt the power that stayed
 And held him as she grasped his shade,
 Like some tall ship upon the main
 That struggles with the wind in vain.
 Below, above, his eye he bent
 And scanned the sea and firmament.
 High from the briny deep upreared
 The monster's hideous form appeared,
 "Sugriva's tale," he cried, "is true:

⁷¹ If Milton's (*Paradise Lost*) spirits are allowed the power of infinite self-extension and compression the same must be conceded to Valmiki's supernatural beings. Given the power, as in Milton, the result in Valmiki is perfectly consistent.

⁷² "Daksha is the son of Brahma and one of the Prajapatis or divine progenitors. He had sixty daughters, twenty-seven of whom married to Kaśyapa produced, according to one of the Indian cosmogonies, all mundane beings. Does the epithet, Descendant of Daksha, given to Surasa, mean that she is one of those daughters? I think not. This epithet is perhaps an appellation common to all created beings as having sprung from Daksha." GORRESSIO.

⁷³ Sinhika is the mother of Rahu the dragon's head or ascending node, the chief agent in eclipses.

This is the demon dire to view
 Of whom the Vanar monarch told,
 Whose grasp a passing shade can hold.”
 Then, as a cloud in rain-time grows
 His form, dilating, swelled and rose.
 Wide as the space from heaven to hell
 Her jaws she opened with a yell,
 And rushed upon her fancied prey
 With cloud-like roar to seize and slay.
 The Vanar swift as thought compressed
 His borrowed bulk of limb and chest,
 And stood with one quick bound inside
 The monstrous mouth she opened wide.
 Hid like the moon when Rahu draws
 The orb within his ravening jaws.
 Within that ample cavern pent
 The demon’s form he tore and rent,
 And, from the mangled carcass freed,
 Came forth again with thought-like speed.⁷⁴
 Thus with his skill the fiend he slew,
 Then to his wonted stature grew.
 The spirits saw the demon die
 And hailed the Vanar from the sky:
 “Well hast thou fought a wondrous fight
 Nor spared the fiend’s terrific might,
 On, on! perform the blameless deed,
 And in thine every wish succeed.
 Ne’er can they fail in whom combine
 Such valour, thought, and skill as thine.”

Pleased with their praises as they sang,
 Again through fields of air he sprang,
 And now, his travail wellnigh done,
 The distant shore was almost won.
 Before him on the margent stood
 In long dark line a waving wood,
 And the fair island, bright and green
 With flowers and trees, was clearly seen,
 And every babbling brook that gave
 Her lord the sea a tribute wave.
 He lighted down on Lamba’s peak
 Which tinted metals stain and streak,
 And looked where Lanka’s splendid town
 Shone on the mountain like a crown.

Canto XV. Sita.

⁷⁴ According to De Gubernatis, the author of the very learned, ingenious, and interesting though too fanciful *Zoological Mythology*. Hanuman here represents the sun entering into and escaping from a cloud. The biblical Jonah, according to him, typifies the same phenomenon. Sa'di, speaking of sunset, says *Yûnas andar-i-dihan-imahi shud*: Jonas was within the fish's mouth.

Fair as Kailasa white with snow
He saw a palace flash and glow,
A crystal pavement gem-inlaid,
And coral steps and colonnade,
And glittering towers that kissed the skies,
Whose dazzling splendour charmed his eyes.
There pallid, with neglected dress,
Watched close by fiend and giantess,
Her sweet face thin with constant flow
Of tears, with fasting and with woe;
Pale as the young moon's crescent when
The first faint light returns to men:
Dim as the flame when clouds of smoke
The latent glory hide and choke;
Like Rohini the queen of stars
Oppressed by the red planet Mars;
From her dear friends and husband torn,
Amid the cruel fiends, forlorn,
Who fierce-eyed watch around her kept,
A tender woman sat and wept.
Her sobs, her sighs, her mournful mien,
Her glorious eyes, proclaimed the queen.
"This, this is she," the Vanar cried,
"Fair as the moon and lotus-eyed,
I saw the giant Ravan bear
A captive through the fields of air.
Such was the beauty of the dame;
Her form, her lips, her eyes the same.
This peerless queen whom I behold
Is Rama's wife with limbs of gold.
Best of the sons of men is he,
And worthy of her lord is she."

Canto XVI. Hanuman's Lament.

Then, all his thoughts on Sita bent,
The Vanar chieftain made lament:
"The queen to Rama's soul endeared,
By Lakshman's pious heart revered,
Lies here,—for none may strive with Fate,
A captive, sad and desolate.
The brothers' might full well she knows,
And bravely bears the storm of woes,
As swelling Ganga in the rains
The rush of every flood sustains.
Her lord, for her, fierce Bali slew,
Viradha's monstrous might o'erthrew,
For her the fourteen thousand slain
In Janasthán bedewed the plain.
And if for her Ikshvaku's son
Destroyed the world 'twere nobly done.
This, this is she, so far renowned,

Who sprang from out the furrowed ground,⁷⁵
Child of the high-souled king whose sway
The men of Mithila obey:
The glorious lady wooed and won
By Daśaratha's noblest son;
And now these sad eyes look on her
Mid hostile fiends a prisoner.
From home and every bliss she fled
By wifely love and duty led,
And heedless of a wanderer's woes,
A life in lonely forests chose.
This, this is she so fair of mould.
Whose limbs are bright as burnished gold.
Whose voice was ever soft and mild,
Who sweetly spoke and sweetly smiled.
O, what is Rama's misery! how
He longs to see his darling now!
Pining for one of her fond looks
As one athirst for water brooks.
Absorbed in woe the lady sees
No Rakshas guard, no blooming trees.
Her eyes are with her thoughts, and they
Are fixed on Rama far away."

Canto XVII. Sita's Guard.

His pitying eyes with tears bedewed,
The weeping queen again he viewed,
And saw around the prisoner stand
Her demon guard, a fearful band.
Some earless, some with ears that hung
Low as their feet and loosely swung:
Some fierce with single ears and eyes,
Some dwarfish, some of monstrous size:
Some with their dark necks long and thin
With hair upon the knotty skin:
Some with wild locks, some bald and bare,
Some covered o'er with bristly hair:
Some tall and straight, some bowed and bent
With every foul disfigurement:
All black and fierce with eyes of fire,
Ruthless and stern and swift to ire:
Some with the jackal's jaw and nose,
Some faced like boars and buffaloes:
Some with the heads of goats and kine,⁷⁶
Of elephants, and dogs, and swine:
With lions' lips and horses' brows,
They walked with feet of mules and cows:
Swords, maces, clubs, and spears they bore

⁷⁵ Sita "not of woman born," was found by King Janak as he was turning up the ground in preparation for a sacrifice. See [Book II, Canto CXVIII](#).

⁷⁶ Cows (RLK).

In hideous hands that reeked with gore,
And, never sated, turned afresh
To bowls of wine and piles of flesh.
Such were the awful guards who stood
Round Sita in that lovely wood,
While in her lonely sorrow she
Wept sadly neath a spreading tree.
He watched the spouse of Rama there
Regardless of her tangled hair,
Her jewels stripped from neck and limb,
Decked only with her love of him.

Canto XVIII. Ravan.

While from his shelter in the boughs
The Vanar looked on Rama's spouse
He heard the gathered giants raise
The solemn hymn of prayer and praise.—
Priests skilled in rite and ritual, who
The Vedas and their branches⁷⁷ knew.
Then, as loud strains of music broke
His sleep, the giant monarch woke.
Swift to his heart the thought returned
Of the fair queen for whom he burned;
Nor could the amorous fiend control
The passion that absorbed his soul.
In all his brightest garb arrayed
He hastened to that lovely shade,
Where glowed each choicest flower and fruit,
And the sweet birds were never mute,
And tall deer bent their heads to drink
On the fair streamlet's grassy brink.
Near that Aśoka grove he drew,—
A hundred dames his retinue.
Like Indra with the thousand eyes
Girt with the beauties of the skies.
Some walked beside their lord to hold
The chouries, fans, and lamps of gold.
And others purest water bore
In golden urns, and paced before.
Some carried, piled on golden plates,
Delicious food of dainty cates;
Some wine in massive bowls whereon
The fairest gems resplendent shone.
Some by the monarch's side displayed,
Wrought like a swan, a silken shade:
Another beauty walked behind,
The sceptre to her care assigned.
Around the monarch gleamed the crowd

⁷⁷ The six *Angas* or subordinate branches of the Vedas are 1. *Siksha*, the science of proper articulation and pronunciation: 2. *Chhandas*, metre: 3. *Vyakarana*, linguistic analysis or grammar: 4. *Nirukta*, explanation of difficult Vedic words: 5. *Jyotishom*, Astronomy, or rather the Vedic Calendar: 6. *Kalpa*, ceremonial.

As lightnings flash about a cloud,
 And each made music as she went
 With zone and tinkling ornament.
 Attended thus in royal state
 The monarch reached the garden gate,
 While gold and silver torches, fed
 With scented oil a soft light shed.⁷⁸
 He, while the flame of fierce desire
 Burnt in his eyes like kindled fire,
 Seemed Love incarnate in his pride,
 His bow and arrows laid aside.⁷⁹
 His robe, from spot and blemish free
 Like Amrit foamy from the sea,⁸⁰
 Hung down in many a loosened fold
 Inwrought with flowers and bright with gold.
 The Vanar from his station viewed,
 Amazed, the wondrous multitude,
 Where, in the centre of that ring
 Of noblest women, stood the king,
 As stands the full moon fair to view,
 Girt by his starry retinue.

Canto XIX. Sita's Fear.

Then o'er the lady's soul and frame
 A sudden fear and trembling came,
 When, glowing in his youthful pride,
 She saw the monarch by her side.
 Silent she sat, her eyes depressed,
 Her soft arms folded o'er her breast,
 And,—all she could,—her beauties screened
 From the bold gazes of the fiend.
 There where the wild she-demons kept
 Their watch around, she sighed and wept.
 Then, like a severed bough, she lay
 Prone on the bare earth in dismay.
 The while her thoughts on love's fleet wings
 Flew to her lord the best of kings.
 She fell upon the ground, and there
 Lay struggling with her wild despair,
 Sad as a lady born again
 To misery and woe and pain,
 Now doomed to grief and low estate,
 Once noble fair and delicate:
 Like faded light of holy lore,
 Like Hope when all her dreams are o'er;
 Like ruined power and rank debased,

⁷⁸ There appears to be some confusion of time here. It was already morning when Hanuman entered the grove, and the torches would be needless.

⁷⁹ Ravan is one of those beings who can "climb them as they will," and can of course assume the loveliest form to please human eyes as well as the terrific shape that suits the king of the Rakshases.

⁸⁰ White and lovely as the Arant or nectar recovered from the depths of the Milky Sea when churned by the assembled Gods.
 See [Book I, Canto XLV](#).

Like majesty of kings disgraced:
Like worship foiled by erring slips,
The moon that labours in eclipse;
A pool with all her lilies dead,
An army when its king has fled:
So sad and helpless wan and worn,
She lay among the fiends forlorn.

Canto XX. Ravan's Wooing.

With amorous look and soft address
The fiend began his suit to press:
"Why wouldst thou, lady lotus-eyed,
From my fond glance those beauties hide?
Mine eager suit no more repel:
But love me, for I love thee well.
Dismiss, sweet dame, dismiss thy fear;
No giant and no man is near.
Ours is the right by force to seize
What dames soe'er our fancy please.⁸¹
But I with rude hands will not touch
A lady whom I love so much.
Fear not, dear queen: no fear is nigh:
Come, on thy lover's love rely,
Some little sign of favor show,
Nor lie enamoured of thy woe.
Those limbs upon that cold earth laid,
Those tresses twined in single braid,⁸²
The fast and woe that wear thy frame,
Beseem not thee, O beauteous dame.
For thee the fairest wreaths were meant,
The sandal and the aloe's scent,
Rich ornaments and pearls of price,
And vesture meet for Paradise.
With dainty cates shouldst thou be fed,
And rest upon a sumptuous bed.
And festive joys to thee belong,
The music, and the dance and song.
Rise, pearl of women, rise and deck
With gems and chains thine arms and neck.
Shall not the dame I love be seen
In vesture worthy of a queen?
Methinks when thy sweet form was made
His hand the wise Creator stayed;
For never more did he design
A beauty meet to rival thine.
Come, let us love while yet we may,
For youth will fly and charms decay,
Come cast thy grief and fear aside,

⁸¹ Ravan in his magic car carrying off the most beautiful women reminds us of the magician in *Orlando Furioso*, possessor of the flying horse.

⁸² Indian women twisted their long hair in a single braid as a sign of mourning for their absent husbands.

And be my love, my chosen bride.
 The gems and jewels that my hand
 Has reft from every plundered land,—
 To thee I give them all this day,
 And at thy feet my kingdom lay.
 The broad rich earth will I o'errun,
 And leave no town unconquered, none;
 Then of the whole an offering make
 To Janak,⁸³ dear, for thy sweet sake.
 In all the world no power I see
 Of God or man can strive with me.
 Of old the Gods and Asurs set
 In terrible array I met:
 Their scattered hosts to earth I beat,
 And trod their flags beneath my feet.
 Come, taste of bliss and drink thy fill,
 And rule the slave who serves thy will.
 Think not of wretched Rama: he
 Is less than nothing now to thee.
 Stript of his glory, poor, dethroned,
 A wanderer by his friends disowned,
 On the cold earth he lays his head,
 Or is with toil and misery dead.
 And if perchance he lingers yet,
 His eyes on thee shall ne'er be set.
 Could he, that mighty monarch, who
 Was named Hiranyakaśipu,
 Could he who wore the garb of gold
 Win Glory back from Indra's hold?⁸⁴
 O lady of the lovely smile,
 Whose eyes the sternest heart beguile,
 In all thy radiant beauty dressed
 My heart and soul thou ravishest.
 What though thy robe is soiled and worn,
 And no bright gems thy limbs adorn,
 Thou unadorned art dearer far
 Than all my loveliest consorts are.
 My royal home is bright and fair;
 A thousand beauties meet me there,
 But come, my glorious love, and be
 The queen of all those dames and me.”

Canto XXI. Sita's Scorn.

She thought upon her lord and sighed,
 And thus in gentle tones replied:
 “Beseems thee not, O King, to woo
 A matron, to her husband true.
 Thus vainly one might hope by sin

⁸³ Janak, king of Mithila, was Sita's father.

⁸⁴ Hiranyakaśipu was a king of the Daityas (a race of giants) celebrated for his blasphemous impieties. When his pious son Prahlada praised Vishnu the Daitya tried to kill him, when the God appeared in the incarnation of the man-lion and tore the tyrant to pieces.

And evil deeds success to win.
Shall I, so highly born, disgrace
My husband's house, my royal race?
Shall I, a true and loyal dame,
Defile my soul with deed of shame?"

Then on the king her back she turned,
And answered thus the prayer she spurned:
"Turn, Ravan, turn thee from thy sin;
Seek virtue's paths and walk therein.
To others dames be honour shown;
Protect them as thou wouldst thine own.
Taught by thyself, from wrong abstain
Which, wrought on thee, thy heart would pain.⁸⁵
Beware: this lawless love of thine
Will ruin thee and all thy line;
And for thy sin, thy sin alone,
Will Lanka perish overthrown.
Dream not that wealth and power can sway
My heart from duty's path to stray.
Linked like the Day-God and his shine,
I am my lord's and he is mine.
Repent thee of thine impious deed;
To Rama's side his consort lead.
Be wise; the hero's friendship gain,
Nor perish in his fury slain.
Go, ask the God of Death to spare,
Or red bolt flashing through the air,
But look in vain for spell or charm
To stay my Rama's vengeful arm.
Thou, when the hero bends his bow,
Shalt hear the clang that heralds woe,
Loud as the clash when clouds are rent
And Indra's bolt to earth is sent.
Then shall his furious shafts be sped,
Each like a snake with fiery head,
And in their flight shall hiss and flame
Marked with the mighty archer's name.⁸⁶
Then in the fiery deluge all
Thy giants round their king shall fall."

Canto XXII. Ravan's Threat.

Then anger swelled in Ravan's breast,
Who fiercely thus the dame addressed:
"Tis ever thus: in vain we sue

⁸⁵ Do unto others as thou wouldst they should do unto thee, is a precept frequently occurring in the old Indian poems. This charity is to embrace not human beings only, but bird and beast as well: "He prayeth best who loveth best all things both great and small."

⁸⁶ It was the custom of Indian warriors to mark their arrows with their ciphers or names, and it seems to have been regarded as a point of honour to give an enemy the satisfaction of knowing who had shot at him. This passage however contains, if my memory serves me well, the first mention in the poem of this practice, and as arrows have been so frequently mentioned and described with almost every conceivable epithet, its occurrence here seems suspicious. No mention of, or allusion to writing has hitherto occurred in the poem.

To woman, and her favour woo.
 A lover's humble words impel
 Her wayward spirit to rebel.
 The love of thee that fills my soul
 Still keeps my anger in control,
 As charioteers with bit and rein
 The swerving of the steed restrain.
 The love that rules me bids me spare
 Thy forfeit life, O thou most fair.
 For this, O Sita, have I borne
 The keen reproach, the bitter scorn,
 And the fond love thou boastest yet
 For that poor wandering anchoret;
 Else had the words which thou hast said
 Brought death upon thy guilty head.
 Two months, fair dame, I grant thee still
 To bend thee to thy lover's will.
 If when that respite time is fled
 Thou still refuse to share my bed,
 My cooks shall mince thy limbs with steel
 And serve thee for my morning meal."⁸⁷

The minstrel daughters of the skies
 Looked on her woe with pitying eyes,
 And sun-bright children of the Gods⁸⁸
 Consoled the queen with smiles and nods.
 She saw, and with her heart at ease,
 Addressed the fiend in words like these;
 "Hast thou no friend to love thee, none
 In all this isle to bid thee shun
 The ruin which thy crime will bring
 On thee and thine, O impious King?
 Who in all worlds save thee could woo
 Me, Rama's consort pure and true,
 As though he tempted with his love
 Queen Śachi⁸⁹ on her throne above?
 How canst thou hope, vile wretch, to fly
 The vengeance that e'en now is nigh,
 When thou hast dared, untouched by shame,
 To press thy suit on Rama's dame?
 Where woods are thick and grass is high
 A lion and a hare may lie;
 My Rama is the lion, thou
 Art the poor hare beneath the bough.
 Thou railest at the lord of men,
 But wilt not stand within his ken.
 What! is that eye unstricken yet
 Whose impious glance on me was set?
 Still moves that tongue that would not spare

⁸⁷ This threat in the same words occurs in [Book III, Canto LVI](#).

⁸⁸ Ravan carried off and kept in his palace not only earthly princesses but the daughters of Gods and Gandharvas.

⁸⁹ The wife of Indra.

The wife of Daśaratha's heir?"

Then, hissing like a furious snake,
The fiend again to Sita spake:
"Deaf to all prayers and threats art thou,
Devoted to thy senseless vow.
No longer respite will I give,
And thou this day shalt cease to live;
For I, as sunlight kills the morn,
Will slay thee for thy scathe and scorn."

The Rakshas guard was summoned: all
The monstrous crew obeyed the call,
And hastened to the king to take
The orders which he fiercely spake:
"See that ye guard her well, and tame,
Like some wild thing, the stubborn dame,
Until her haughty soul be bent
By mingled threat and blandishment."⁹⁰

The monsters heard: away he strode,
And passed within his queens' abode.

Canto XXIII. The Demons' Threats.

Then round the helpless Sita drew
With fiery eyes the hideous crew,
And thus assailed her, all and each,
With insult, taunt, and threatening speech:
"What! can it be thou prizest not
This happy chance, this glorious lot,
To be the chosen wife of one
So strong and great, Pulastya's son?
Pulastya—thus have sages told—
Is mid the Lords of Life⁹¹ enrolled.
Lord Brahma's mind-born son was he,
Fourth of that glorious company.
Viśravas from Pulastya sprang,—
Through all the worlds his glory rang.
And of Viśravas, large-eyed dame!
Our king the mighty Ravan came.
His happy consort thou mayst be:
Scorn not the words we say to thee."

One awful demon, fiery-eyed,
Stood by the Maithil queen and cried:
'Come and be his, if thou art wise,
Who smote the sovereign of the skies,
And made the thirty Gods and three,⁹²

⁹⁰ These four lines have occurred before. [Book III, Canto LVI](#).

⁹¹ Prajapatis are the ten lords of created beings first created by Brahma; somewhat like the Demiurgi of the Gnostics.

⁹² "This is the number of the Vedic divinities mentioned in the Rig-veda. In Aṣṭaka I. Sūkta XXXIV, the Rishi Hiranyastūpa invoking the Aśvins says: Á Nasatya tribhirekadaśairiha devebniryatam: 'O Nasatyas (Aśvins) come hither with the thrice eleven

O'ercome in furious battle, flee.
Thy lover turns away with scorn
From wives whom grace and youth adorn.
Thou art his chosen consort, thou
Shall be his pride and darling now."

Another, Vikata by name,
In words like these addressed the dame:
"The king whose blows, in fury dealt,
The Nagas⁹³ and Gandharvas⁹⁴ felt,
In battle's fiercest brunt subdued,
Has stood by thee and humbly wooed.
And wilt thou in thy folly miss
The glory of a love like this?
Scared by his eye the sun grows chill,
The wanderer wind is hushed and still.
The rains at his command descend,
And trees with new-blown blossoms bend.
His word the hosts of demons fear,
And wilt thou, dame, refuse to hear?
Be counselled; with his will comply,
Or, lady, thou shalt surely die."

Canto XXIV. Sita's Reply.

Still with reproaches rough and rude
Those fiends the gentle queen pursued:
"What! can so fair a life displease,
To dwell with him in joyous ease?
Dwell in his bowers a happy queen
In silk and gold and jewels' sheen?
Still must thy woman fancy cling
To Rama and reject our king?
Die in thy folly, or forget
That wretched wandering anchoret.
Come, Sita, in luxurious bowers
Spend with our lord thy happy hours;
The mighty lord who makes his own
The treasures of the worlds o'erthrown."

Then, as a tear bedewed her eye,
The hapless lady made reply:
"I loathe, with heart and soul detest
The shameful life your words suggest.

Gods.' And in Sūkta XLV, the Rishi Praskanva addressing his hymn to Agni (ignis, fire), thus invokes him: 'Lord of the red steeds, propitiated by our prayers lead hither the thirty-three Gods.' This number must certainly have been the actual number in the early days of the Vedic religion: although it appears probable enough that the thirty-three Vedic divinities could not then be found co-ordinated in so systematic a way as they were arranged more recently by the authors of the Upanishads. In the later ages of Bramanism the number went on increasing without measure by successive mythical and religious creations which peopled the Indian Olympus with abstract beings of every kind. But through lasting veneration of the word of the Veda the custom regained of giving the name of 'the thirty-three Gods' to the immense phalanx of the multiplied deities." GORRESIO.

⁹³ Serpent-Gods who dwell in the regions under the earth.

⁹⁴ In the mythology of the epics the Gandharvas are the heavenly singers or musicians who form the orchestra at the banquets of the Gods, and they belong to the heaven of India in whose battles they share.

Eat, if you will, this mortal frame:
My soul rejects the sin and shame.
A homeless wanderer though he be,
In him my lord, my life I see,
And, till my earthly days be done,
Will cling to great Ikshvaku's son."

Then with fierce eyes on Sita set
They cried again with taunt and threat:
Each licking with her fiery tongue
The lip that to her bosom hung,
And menacing the lady's life
With axe, or spear or murderous knife:
"Hear, Sita, and our words obey,
Or perish by our hands to-day.
Thy love for Raghu's son forsake,
And Ravan for thy husband take,
Or we will rend thy limbs apart
And banquet on thy quivering heart.
Now from her body strike the head,
And tell the king the dame is dead.
Then by our lord's commandment she
A banquet for our band shall be.
Come, let the wine be quickly brought
That frees each heart from saddening thought.
Then to the western gate repair,
And we will dance and revel there."

Book VI: Yuddha Kanda ("The Book of War"): Selections

The battle in Lanka between Rama and Ravana. Sita's fire ordeal. Rama's return to Ayodhya to reign over the ideal state.

Yuddha kānda describes the battle between Rama and Ravana. Having received Hanuman's report on Sita, Rama and Lakshmana proceed with their monkey allies towards the shore of the southern sea. There Ravana's renegade brother Vibhishana joins them. The monkeys named Nala and Nila construct a floating bridge (known as Rama Setu) across the ocean, and the princes and their army cross over to Lanka. A lengthy battle ensues, and Rama kills Ravana. Rama then installs Vibhishana on the throne of Lanka.

On meeting Sita, Rama asks her to undergo an "agni pariksha" (fire ordeal) to prove her purity, as he wants to dispel the rumors regarding her. When Sita plunges into the sacrificial fire, the fire god Agni raises her, unharmed, attesting to her purity. Finally, Rama assumes the throne of Ayodhya.



Figure 7 Sita undergoing the ordeal by fire watched by Rama, Lakshmana, and Hanuman . 1820.

In the selections for this chapter, Cantos CXV-CXX recount the reunion of Sita and Rama and Sita's subsequent fire ordeal. Canto XXX depicts Rama's ascension to the throne.

Canto CXV. Sita's Joy.

The Vanar chieftain⁹⁵ bowed his head,
Within the walls of Lanka sped,
Leave from the new-made king obtained,
And Sita's lovely garden gained.
Beneath a tree the queen he found,
Where Rakshas warders watched around.

⁹⁵ Hanuman. (RLK)

Her pallid cheek, her tangled hair,
Her raiment showed her deep despair,
Near and more near the envoy came
And gently hailed the weeping dame.
She started up in sweet surprise,
And sudden joy illumed her eyes.
For well the Vanar's voice she knew,
And hope reviving sprang and grew.

"Fair Queen," he said, "our task is done:
The foe is slain and Lanka won.
Triumphant mid triumphant friends
Kind words of greeting Rama sends.
'Blest for thy sake, O spouse most true,
My deadly foe I met and slew.
Mine eyes are strangers yet to sleep:
I built a bridge athwart the deep
And crossed the sea to Lanka's shore
To keep the mighty oath I swore.
Now, gentle love, thy cares dispel,
And weep no more, for all is well.
Fear not in Ravan's house to stay
For good Vibhishan now bears sway,
For constant truth and friendship known
Regard his palace as thine own.'
He greets thee thus thy heart to cheer,
And urged by love will soon be here."

Then flushed with joy the lady's cheek.
Her eyes o'erflowed, her voice was weak;
But struggling with her sobs she broke
Her silence thus, and faintly spoke:
"So fast the flood of rapture came,
My trembling tongue no words could frame.
Ne'er have I heard in days of bliss
A tale that gave such joy as this.
More precious far than gems and gold
The message which thy lips have told."

His reverent hands the Vanar raised
And thus the lady's answer praised:
"Sweet are the words, O Queen, which thou
True to thy lord, hast spoken now,
Better than gems and pearls of price,
Yea, or the throne of Paradise.
But, lady, ere I leave this place,
Grant me, I pray, a single grace.
Permit me, and this vengeful hand
Shall slay thy guards, this Rakshas band,
Whose cruel insult threat and scorn
Thy gentle soul too long has borne."

Thus, stern of mood, Hanúman cried:
The Maithil lady thus replied:
“Nay, be not wroth with servants: they,
When monarchs bid must needs obey.
And, vassals of their lords, fulfil
Each fancy of their sovereign will.
To mine own sins the blame impute,
For as we sow we reap the fruit.
The tyrant’s will these dames obeyed
When their fierce threats my soul dismayed.”

She ceased: with admiration moved
The Vanar chief her words approved:
“Thy speech,” he cried, “is worthy one
Whom love has linked to Raghu’s son.
Now speak, O Queen, that I may know
Thy pleasure, for to him I go.”
The Vanar ceased: then Janak’s child
Made answer as she sweetly smiled:
“My first, my only wish can be,
O chief, my loving lord to see.”
Again the Vanar envoy spoke,
And with his words new rapture woke:
“Queen, ere this sun shall cease to shine
Thy Rama’s eyes shall look in thine.
Again the lord of Raghu’s race
Shall turn to thee his moon-bright face.
His faithful brother shall thou see
And every friend who fought for thee,
And greet once more thy king restored
Like Śachi⁹⁶ to her heavenly lord.”
To Raghu’s son his steps he bent
And told the message that she sent.

Canto CXVI. The Meeting.

He looked upon that archer chief
Whose full eye mocked the lotus leaf,
And thus the noble Vanar spake:
“Now meet the queen for whose dear sake
Thy mighty task was first begun,
And now the glorious fruit is won.
O’erwhelmed with woe thy lady lies,
The hot tears streaming from her eyes.
And still the queen must long and pine
Until those eyes be turned to thine.”

But Rama stood in pensive mood,
And gathering tears his eyes bedewed.
His sad looks sought the ground: he sighed
And thus to King Vibhishan cried:

⁹⁶ The consort of Indra.

“Let Sita bathe and tire her head
And hither to my sight be led
In raiment sweet with precious scent,
And gay with golden ornament.”

The Rakshas king his palace sought,
And Sita from her bower was brought.
Then Rakshas bearers tall and strong,
Selected from the menial throng,
Through Lanka’s gate the queen, arrayed
In glorious robes and gems, conveyed.
Concealed behind the silken screen,
Swift to the plain they bore the queen,
While Vanars, close on every side,
With eager looks the litter eyed.
The warders at Vibhishan’s hest
The onward rushing throng repressed,
While like the roar of ocean loud
Rose the wild murmur of the crowd.
The son of Raghu saw and moved
With anger thus the king reproved:
“Why vex with hasty blow and threat
The Vanars, and my rights forget?
Repress this zeal, untimely shown:
I count this people as mine own.
A woman’s guard is not her bower,
The lofty wall, the fenced tower:
Her conduct is her best defence,
And not a king’s magnificence.
At holy rites, in war and woe,
Her face unveiled a dame may show;
When at the Maiden’s Choice⁹⁷ they meet,
When marriage troops parade the street.
And she, my queen, who long has lain
In prison racked with care and pain,
May cease a while her face to hide,
For is not Rama by her side?
Lay down the litter: on her feet
Let Sita come her lord to meet.
And let the hosts of woodland race
Look near upon the lady’s face.”

Then Lakshman and each Vanar chief
Who heard his words were filled with grief.
The lady’s gentle spirit sank,
And from each eye in fear she shrank,
As, her sweet eyelids veiled for shame,
Slowly before her lord she came.
While rapture battled with surprise

⁹⁷ The Swayamvara, Self-choice or election of a husband by a princess or daughter of a Kshatriya at a public assembly of suitors held for the purpose.

She raised to his her wistful eyes.
Then with her doubt and fear she strove,
And from her breast all sorrow drove.
Regardless of the gathering crowd,
Bright as the moon without a cloud,
She bent her eyes, no longer dim,
In joy and trusting love on him.

Canto CXVII. Sita's Disgrace.

He saw her trembling by his side,
And looked upon her face and cried:
“Lady, at length my task is done,
And thou, the prize of war, art won,
This arm my glory has retrieved,
And all that man might do achieved;
The insulting foe in battle slain
And cleared mine honour from its stain.
This day has made my name renowned
And with success my labour crowned.
Lord of myself, the oath I swore
Is binding on my soul no more.
If from my home my queen was reft,
This arm has well avenged the theft,
And in the field has wiped away
The blot that on mine honour lay.
The bridge that spans the foaming flood,
The city red with giants’ blood;
The hosts by King Sugriva led
Who wisely counselled, fought and bled;
Vibhishan’s love, our guide and stay—
All these are crowned with fruit to-day.
But, lady, ‘twas not love for thee
That led mine army o’er the sea.
‘Twas not for thee our blood was shed,
Or Lanka filled with giant dead.
No fond affection for my wife
Inspired me in the hour of strife.
I battled to avenge the cause
Of honour and insulted laws.
My love is fled, for on thy fame
Lies the dark blot of sin and shame;
And thou art hateful as the light
That flashes on the injured sight.
The world is all before thee: flee:
Go where thou wilt, but not with me.
How should my home receive again
A mistress soiled with deathless stain?
How should I brook the foul disgrace,
Scorned by my friends and all my race?
For Ravan bore thee through the sky,
And fixed on thine his evil eye.
About thy waist his arms he threw,

Close to his breast his captive drew,
And kept thee, vassal of his power,
An inmate of his ladies' bower."

Canto CXVIII. Sita's Reply.

Struck down with overwhelming shame
She shrank within her trembling frame.
Each word of Rama's like a dart
Had pierced the lady to the heart;
And from her sweet eyes unrestrained
The torrent of her sorrows, rained.
Her weeping eyes at length she dried,
And thus mid choking sobs replied:
"Canst thou, a high-born prince, dismiss
A high-born dame with speech like this?
Such words befit the meanest hind,
Not princely birth and generous mind,
By all my virtuous life I swear
I am not what thy words declare.
If some are faithless, wilt thou find
No love and truth in womankind?
Doubt others if thou wilt, but own
The truth which all my life has shown.
If, when the giant seized his prey,
Within his hated arms I lay,
And felt the grasp I dreaded, blame
Fate and the robber, not thy dame.
What could a helpless woman do?
My heart was mine and still was true,
Why when Hanúman sent by thee
Sought Lanka's town across the sea,
Couldst thou not give, O lord of men,
Thy sentence of rejection then?
Then in the presence of the chief
Death, ready death, had brought relief,
Nor had I nursed in woe and pain
This lingering life, alas in vain.
Then hadst thou shunned the fruitless strife
Nor jeopardied thy noble life,
But spared thy friends and bold allies
Their vain and weary enterprise.
Is all forgotten, all? my birth,
Named Janak's child, from fostering earth?
That day of triumph when a maid
My trembling hand in thine I laid?
My meek obedience to thy will,
My faithful love through joy and ill,
That never failed at duty's call—
O King, is all forgotten, all?"

To Lakshman then she turned and spoke
While sobs and sighs her utterance broke:

“Sumitra’s son, a pile prepare,
My refuge in my dark despair.
I will not live to bear this weight
Of shame, forlorn and desolate.
The kindled fire my woes shall end
And be my best and surest friend.”

His mournful eyes the hero raised
And wistfully on Rama gazed,
In whose stern look no ruth was seen,
No mercy for the weeping queen.
No chieftain dared to meet those eyes,
To pray, to question or advise.

The word was passed, the wood was piled
And fain to die stood Janak’s child.
She slowly paced around her lord,
The Gods with reverent act adored,
Then raising suppliant hands the dame
Prayed humbly to the Lord of Flame:
“As this fond heart by virtue swayed
From Raghu’s son has never strayed,
So, universal witness, Fire
Protect my body on the pyre,
As Raghu’s son has idly laid
This charge on Sita, hear and aid.”

She ceased: and fearless to the last
Within the flame’s wild fury passed.
Then rose a piercing cry from all
Dames, children, men, who saw her fall
Adorned with gems and gay attire
Beneath the fury of the fire.

Canto CXIX. Glory To Vishnu.

The shrill cry pierced through Rama’s ears
And his sad eyes o’erflowed with tears,
When lo, transported through the sky
A glorious band of Gods was nigh.
Ancestral shades,⁹⁸ by men revered,
In venerable state appeared,
And he from whom all riches flow,⁹⁹
And Yáma Lord who reigns below:
King Indra, thousand-eyed, and he
Who wields the sceptre of the sea.¹⁰⁰
The God who shows the blazoned bull,¹⁰¹
And Brahma Lord most bountiful
By whose command the worlds were made

⁹⁸ The spirits of the dead.

⁹⁹ Kuvera, the God of Wealth.

¹⁰⁰ Varun, God of the sea.

¹⁰¹ Mahadeva or Śiva whose ensign is a bull.

All these on radiant cars conveyed,
Brighter than sun-beams, sought the place
Where stood the prince of Raghu's race,
And from their glittering seats the best
Of blessed Gods the chief addressed:

“Couldst thou, the Lord of all, couldst thou,
Creator of the worlds, allow
Thy queen, thy spouse to brave the fire
And give her body to the pyre?
Dost thou not yet, supremely wise,
Thy heavenly nature recognize?”
They ceased: and Rama thus began:
“I deem myself a mortal man.
Of old Ikshvaku's line, I spring
From Daśaratha Kośal's king.”
He ceased: and Brahma's self replied:
“O cast the idle thought aside.
Thou art the Lord Narayan, thou
The God to whom all creatures bow.
Thou art the saviour God who wore
Of old the semblance of a boar;
Thou he whose discus overthrows
All present, past and future foes;
Thou Brahma, That whose days extend
Without beginning, growth or end;
The God, who, bears the bow of horn,
Whom four majestic arms adorn;
Thou art the God who rules the sense
And sways with gentle influence;
Thou all-pervading Vishnu Lord
Who wears the ever-conquering sword;
Thou art the Guide who leads aright,
Thou Krishna of unequalled might.
Thy hand, O Lord, the hills and plains,
And earth with all her life sustains;
Thou wilt appear in serpent form
When sinks the earth in fire and storm.
Queen Sita of the lovely brows
Is Lakshmi thy celestial spouse.
To free the worlds from Ravan thou
Wouldst take the form thou wearest now.
Rejoice: the mighty task is done:
Rejoice, thou great and glorious one.
The tyrant, slain, thy labours end:
Triumphant now to heaven ascend.
High bliss awaits the devotee
Who clings in loving faith to thee,
Who celebrates with solemn praise
The Lord of ne'er beginning days.
On earth below, in heaven above
Great joy shall crown his faith and love.

And he who loves the tale divine
Which tells each glorious deed of thine
Through life's fair course shall never know
The fierce assault of pain and woe."¹⁰²

Canto CXX. Sita Restored.

Thus spoke the Self-existent Sire:
Then swiftly from the blazing pyre
The circling flames were backward rolled,
And, raising in his gentle hold
Alive unharmed the Maithil dame,
The Lord of Fire embodied came.
Fair as the morning was her sheen,
And gold and gems adorned the queen.
Her form in crimson robes arrayed,
Her hair was bound in glossy braid.
Her wreath was fresh and sweet of scent,
Undimmed was every ornament.
Then, standing close to Rama's side,
The universal witness cried:
"From every blot and blemish free
Thy faithful queen returns to thee.
In word or deed, in look or mind
Her heart from thee has ne'er declined.
By force the giant bore away
From thy lone cot his helpless prey;
And in his bowers securely kept
She still has longed for thee and wept.
With soft temptation, bribe and threat,
He bade the dame her love forget:
But, nobly faithful to her lord,
Her soul the giant's suit abhorred.
Receive, O King, thy queen again,
Pure, ever pure from spot and stain."

Still stood the king in thoughtful mood
And tears of joy his eyes bedewed.
Then to the best of Gods the best
Of warrior chiefs his mind expressed:

"'Twas meet that mid the thousands here
The searching fire my queen should clear;
For long within the giant's bower
She dwelt the vassal of his power.
For else had many a slanderous tongue
Reproaches on mine honour flung,
And scorned the king who, love-impelled,
His consort from the proof withheld.
No doubt had I, but surely knew

¹⁰² The Address to Rama, both text and commentary, will be found literally translated in the Additional Notes. A paraphrase of a portion is all that I have attempted here.

That Janak's child was pure and true,
That, come what might, in good and ill
Her faithful heart was with me still.
I knew that Ravan could not wrong
My queen whom virtue made so strong.
I knew his heart would sink and fail,
Nor dare her honour to assail,
As Ocean, when he raves and roars,
Fears to o'erleap his bounding shores.
Now to the worlds her truth is shown,
And Sita is again mine own.
Thus proved before unnumbered eyes,
On her pure fame no shadow lies.
As heroes to their glory cleave,
Mine own dear spouse I ne'er will leave."
He ceased: and clasped in fond embrace
On his dear breast she hid her face.

Canto CXXX. The Consecration.

Then, reverent hand to hand applied,
Thus Bharat to his brother cried:
"Thy realm, O King, is now restored,
Uninjured to the rightful lord.
This feeble arm with toil and pain,
The weighty charge could scarce sustain.
And the great burthen wellnigh broke
The neck untrained to bear the yoke.
The royal swan outspeeds the crow:
The steed is swift, the mule is slow,
Nor can my feeble feet be led
O'er the rough ways where thine should tread.
Now grant what all thy subjects ask:
Begin, O King, thy royal task.
Now let our longing eyes behold
The glorious rite ordained of old,
And on the new-found monarch's head
Let consecrating drops be shed."

He ceased; victorious Rama bent
His head in token of assent.
He sat, and tongs trimmed with care
His tangles of neglected hair
Then, duly bathed, the hero shone
With all his splendid raiment on.
And Sita with the matrons' aid
Her limbs in shining robes arrayed,
Sumantra then, the charioteer,
Drew, ordered by Satrugna near,
And stayed within the hermit grove
The chariot and the steeds he drove.
Therein Sugriva's consorts, graced

With gems, and Rama's queen were placed,
All fain Ayodhya to behold:
And swift away the chariot rolled.
Like Indra Lord of Thousand Eyes,
Drawn by fleet lions through the skies.
Thus radiant in his glory showed
King Rama as he homeward rode,
In power and might unparalleled.
The reins the hand of Bharat held.
Above the peerless victor's head
The snow-white shade Satrughna spread,
And Lakshman's ever-ready hand
His forehead with a chourie fanned.
Vibhishan close to Lakshman's side
Sharing his task a chourie plied.
Sugriva on Śatrunjay came,
An elephant of hugest frame:
Nine thousand others bore, behind,
The chieftains of the Vanar kind
All gay, in forms of human mould,
With rich attire and gems and gold.
Thus borne along in royal state
King Rama reached Ayodhya's gate
With merry noise of shells and drums
And joyful shouts, He comes, he comes,
A Brahman host with solemn tread,
And kine the long procession led,
And happy maids in ordered bands
Threw grain and gold with liberal hands.
Neath gorgeous flags that waved in rows
On towers and roofs and porticoes.
Mid merry crowds who sang and cheered
The palace of the king they neared.
Then Raghu's son to Bharat, best
Of duty's slaves, these words addressed:
"Pass onward to the monarch's hall.
The high-souled Vanars with thee call,
And let the chieftains, as is meet,
The widows of our father greet.
And to the Vanar king assign
Those chambers, best of all, which shine
With lazulite and pearl inlaid,
And pleasant grounds with flowers and shade."

He ceased: and Bharat bent his head;
Sugriva by the hand he led
And passed within the palace where
Stood couches which Satrughna's care,
With robes and hangings richly dyed,
And burning lamps, had seen supplied.
Then Bharat spake: "I pray thee, friend,
Thy speedy messengers to send,

Each sacred requisite to bring
That we may consecrate our king.”
Sugriva raised four urns of gold,
The water for the rite to hold,
And bade four swiftest Vanars flee
And fill them from each distant sea.
Then east and west and south and north
The Vanar envoys hastened forth.
Each in swift flight an ocean sought
And back through air his treasure brought,
And full five hundred floods beside
Pure water for the king supplied.
Then girt by many a Brahman sage,
Vaśishṭha, chief for reverend age,
High on a throne with jewels graced
King Rama and his Sita placed.
There by Jabali, far revered,
Vijay and Kaśyap’s son appeared;
By Gautam’s side Katvayan stood,
And Vamadeva wise and good,
Whose holy hands in order shed
The pure sweet drops on Rama’s head.
Then priests and maids and warriors, all
Approaching at Vaśishṭha’s call,
With sacred drops bedewed their king,
The centre of a joyous ring,
The guardians of the worlds, on high,
And all the children of the sky
From herbs wherewith their hands were filled
Rare juices on his brow distilled.
His brows were bound with glistening gold
Which Manu’s self had worn of old,
Bright with the flash of many a gem
His sire’s ancestral diadem.
Satrughna lent his willing aid
And o’er him held the regal shade:
The monarchs whom his arm had saved
The chouries round his forehead waved.
A golden chain, that flashed and glowed
With gems the God of Wind bestowed:
Mahendra gave a glorious string
Of fairest pearls to deck the king,
The skies with acclamation rang,
The gay nymphs danced, the minstrels sang.
On that blest day the joyful plain
Was clothed anew with golden grain.
The trees the witching influence knew,
And bent with fruits of loveliest hue,
And Rama’s consecration lent
New sweetness to each flowret’s scent.
The monarch, joy of Raghu’s line,
Gave largess to the Brahmans, kine

And steeds unnumbered, wealth untold
 Of robes and pearls and gems and gold.
 A jewelled chain, whose lustre passed
 The glory of the sun, he cast
 About his friend Sugriva's neck;
 And, Angad Bali's son to deck,
 He gave a pair of armlets bright
 With diamond and lazulite.
 A string of pearls of matchless hue
 Which gleams like tender moonlight threw
 Adorned with gems of brightest sheen,
 He gave to grace his darling queen.
 The offering from his hand received
 A moment on her bosom heaved;
 Then from her neck the chain she drew,
 A glance on all the Vanars threw,
 And wistful eyes on Rama bent
 As still she held the ornament.
 Her wish he knew, and made reply
 To that mute question of her eye:
 "Yea, love; the chain on him bestow
 Whose wisdom truth and might we know,
 The firm ally, the faithful friend
 Through toil and peril to the end."

Then on Hanúman's bosom hung
 The chain which Sita's hand had flung:
 So may a cloud, when winds are still
 With moon-lit silver gird a hill.

To every Vanar Rama gave
 Rich treasures from the mine and wave.
 And with their honours well content
 Homeward their steps the chieftains bent.
 Ten thousand years Ayodhya, blest
 With Rama's rule, had peace and rest,
 No widow mourned her murdered mate,
 No house was ever desolate.
 The happy land no murrain knew,
 The flocks and herds increased and grew.
 The earth her kindly fruits supplied,
 No harvest failed, no children died.
 Unknown were want, disease, and crime:
 So calm, so happy was the time.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Here follows in the original an enumeration of the chief blessings which will attend the man or woman who reads or hears read this tale of Rama. These blessings are briefly mentioned at the end of the first Canto of the first book, and it appears unnecessary to repeat them here in their amplified form. The Bengal recension (Gorresio's edition) gives them more concisely as follows: "This is the great first poem blessed and glorious, which gives long life to men and victory to kings, the poem which Valmiki made. He who listens to this wondrous tale of Rama unwearied in action shall be absolved from all his sins. By listening to the deeds of Rama he who wishes for sons shall obtain his heart's desire, and to him who longs for riches shall riches be given. The virgin who asks for a husband shall obtain a husband suited to her mind, and shall meet again her dear kinsfolk who are far away. They who hear this poem which Valmiki made shall obtain all their desires and all their prayers shall be fulfilled."

Book VII: Uttara Kanda (Last book)

Sita's banishment. Lava and Kusha. Rama's dharma fulfilled.

The Uttara Kanda is a later addition to the original story by Valmiki and concerns the final years of Rama, Sita, and Rama's brothers. After being crowned king, Rama passes many years pleasantly with Sita. However, despite the agni pariksha (fire ordeal) of Sita, rumors about her purity persist. Rama yields to public opinion and reluctantly banishes Sita to the forest, where the sage Valmiki provides shelter in his ashRama (hermitage). Here she gives birth to twin boys, Lava and Kusha, who become pupils of Valmiki and are brought up in ignorance of their identity.

Valmiki composes the *Ramayana* and teaches Lava and Kusha to sing it. Later, Rama holds a ceremony during Ashwamedha yagna, which the sage Valmiki, with Lava and Kusha, attends. Lava and Kusha sing the *Ramayana* in the presence of Rama. When Lava and Kusha recite the portion about Sita's exile, Rama becomes grief-stricken, and Valmiki produces Sita. Sita calls upon the earth, her mother, to receive her and as the ground opens, she vanishes into it. Rama then learns that Lava and Kusha are his children. Later a messenger from the gods appears and informs Rama that his mission as an avatar is complete, and Rama returns to his celestial home.



Figure 8 Ravi Varma, Rama's coronation, 1910.

Rama with Sita on the throne, with their children Lava and Kusha on their laps. Behind the throne, Lakshmana, Bharat, and Satrugna stand. Hanuman bows to Rama before the throne. Valmiki is to the left.